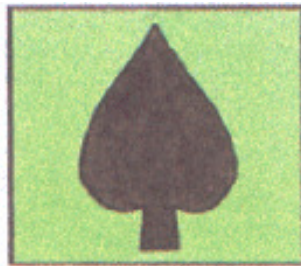


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[25TH INDIAN INFANTRY DIVISION]

A short history of the 25th Indian Infantry Division during the Second World War between 1941 and 1947.

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THE BACKGROUND

The entry of Japan into the Second World War in December 1941 changed the atmosphere in South East Asia, with the swift gains made by Japanese troops in Malaya and Burma making India itself vulnerable to invasion. In particular, it was felt there was a specific threat by Japanese forces to invade southern India. By the end of February 1942, the 4th, 5th, 6th, 8th and 10th Indian Infantry Divisions and the 31st Indian Armoured Division were serving in the Middle East. The 9th and 11th Indian Infantry Divisions had been both lost in Malaya in February 1942. The 7th Indian Infantry Division was a training division based in India. The 14th Indian Infantry Division was based around Comilla in the Eastern Army area, (but was short of personnel and equipment), the 17th Indian Infantry Division was in retreat from Burma, the 19th Indian Infantry Division was still forming in the Southern Army area, and the 23rd Indian Infantry Division had just been formed and was moving to Assam as the Japanese advanced towards India. There were no British or other Commonwealth divisions in the theatre at the time. The 18th Infantry Division which had been sent from the United Kingdom to Burma was diverted to Singapore where it was lost with the surrender of the fortress on the 15th February 1942.

It was decided, therefore, to raise additional divisions from within the Indian Army. The formations raised at this time were the 20th, 25th, and 26th Indian Infantry Divisions. All were formed between March and August 1942. The 25th Indian Infantry Division was formed in southern India at the beginning of August 1942. The headquarters of the division began forming on the 1st August 1942 in Bangalore and then moved to the Attur and Salem area in the Madras District. The division remained in southern India, initially under the command of Southern Army, then transferring to the newly formed XXXIII Indian Corps, which had been formed in August 1942 under Lieutenant General Philip CHRISTISON, C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C. for the defence of southern India.

The divisional commander was Major General Henry Lowrie DAVIES, C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C.. Known as 'Taffy' DAVIES, he was born on the 25th January 1898, and commissioned into the 18th Royal Garhwal Rifles in 1916. He was awarded the M.C. for his service in The Great War, and had been awarded the D.S.O. in 1934. He became Brigadier General Staff to General HUTTON who was G.O.C. Burma Army in 1941, and was in that post during the 1942 Japanese invasion. He continued as Chief of Staff to General ALEXANDER when he assumed command of the army in Burma. DAVIES was promoted to the rank of Major General in August 1942 to assume command of the new division.

THE BRIGADES OF THE DIVISION

The division comprised three brigades, the senior being the 51st Indian Infantry Brigade. The brigade had commenced forming in the Punjab during December 1941 and in April 1942, it moved to Secunderabad to come under the command of the 20th Indian Infantry Division. It transferred to the 25th Indian

Division on its formation, and went with the division to Bangalore for intensive training.

By late 1942, the three battalions in the brigade had become settled. The 8th Battalion, The York and Lancaster Regiment, was a war service battalion raised in November 1940. After service in the U.K., the battalion arrived in India on the 9th August 1942 under the command of Lieutenant Colonel A. W. EDWARDS, M.C., and immediately joined 51st Indian Infantry Brigade at Bangalore. The 17th Battalion, 5th Mahratta Light Infantry was a war service battalion, raised at the Regimental Centre at Belgaum on 15th October 1941. It was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel A. O. KERSEY, M.C.. The 16th Battalion, 10th Baluch Regiment was another war raised service battalion. It had been raised at Karachi, the Regimental Centre, on the 15th October 1941 and had then served at Rawalpindi until joining the brigade. The commanding officer was Lieutenant Colonel J. E. FAIRLIE.

The commanding officer of the brigade was Brigadier Tom Hardy ANGUS, D.S.O.. He was born on the 22nd May 1899, and commissioned into the 3rd Battalion, 11th Sikh Regiment in 1918. From 1918 to 1932, ANGUS was engaged on regimental duties, before attending the Indian Staff College at Quetta for a year. In 1935, he attended the R.A.F. Staff College for a year, then becoming the Brigade Major of the 1st Indian Infantry Brigade at Abbottabad.

Whilst serving with the 1st Indian Brigade, ANGUS was awarded the Distinguished Service Order for his leadership in Waziristan. In 1940, he was seconded as an instructor (G.S.O. 2) at the Indian Staff College. He returned to his regiment, and in 1942 was promoted and appointed to the post of Brigadier General Staff, Ceylon. He was appointed to the command of the 51st Indian Infantry Brigade on the 7th April 1942 on its formation.

The next brigade was the 53rd Indian Infantry Brigade. It had been raised in March 1942 and came under command of the 20th Indian Division. The 53rd Brigade was transferred to join the 25th Indian Division on its formation in August 1942. Its first commanding officer was Brigadier Stephen Fenemore IRWIN followed by James Gordon ELLIOTT then George Anson Probyn COLDSTREAM, D.S.O.. An Indian Army officer, Brigadier COLDSTREAM was born in 1899.

Again, by late 1943, the constituent battalions in the brigade had become settled. The 9th Battalion, The York and Lancaster Regiment was a war raised battalion, like its sister battalion in 51st Brigade. It had arrived in India on the 1st September 1942, and immediately joined 53rd Brigade then based at Trichinopoly. The 2nd Battalion, 2nd Punjab Regiment was a pre-war regular Indian Army unit, which at the outbreak of war had been based in Manzai under command of the Wana Brigade in the Waziristan District. It had served on the North West Frontier with the Peshawar Brigade, and then the Landi Kotal Brigade between January to March 1942 before returning to the Peshawar Brigade. It transferred to the 53rd Brigade in July 1942. The 4th

Battalion, 18th Royal Garhwal Rifles was raised at Lansdowne, the Regimental Centre for the Garhwalis, in June 1940.

The 74th Indian Infantry Brigade was the junior brigade. It was raised in August 1942 under the command of this division. On formation, it comprised the 6th Battalion, The Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, the 14th Bn. 10th Baluch Regiment and the 8th Bn. 19th Hyderabad Regiment. The brigade was commanded by Brigadier Joseph Edward HIRST, D.S.O.. HIRST was born in 1896, which made him either 45 or 46 years of age when he assumed command.

The 6th Bn. Oxs and Bucks Light Infantry was a war raised battalion, which had arrived in India on the 9th August 1942. It came under command of this brigade three days later. The 14th Battalion, 10th Baluch Regiment was also a war raised battalion, formed at the Regimental Centre at Karachi on 1st February 1941. Its commanding officer was Lieutenant Colonel W. W. BRINDLEY, M.B.E.. The 8th Bn. 19th Hyderabad Regiment was raised on the 14th August 1941 at Agra. In December that year, it came under command of the 51st Indian Infantry Brigade and transferred to the 74th Brigade on its formation. In September 1943, this battalion was designated the divisional battalion, and left the 74th Brigade.

It was replaced by the 3rd Battalion, 2nd King Edward VII's Own Gurkha Rifles (The Sirmoor Rifles). The 3rd/2nd Goorkhas (the regiment continued semi officially to use the term 'Goorkha' after it was officially suspended in 1891) had been formed on the 1st October 1940 at Dehra Dun. After a period on the North West Frontier, the battalion had been selected to join the 77th Indian Infantry Brigade, which it joined in June 1942. This brigade formed the first Chindit expedition, during which the battalion was badly depleted. On its return, the battalion was in a poor state, so a former officer of the regiment, Brigadier Reginald Antony HUTTON asked to revert to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in order to assume command of the battalion. This was agreed and HUTTON set about rebuilding the battalion.

THE SUPPORTING ARMS AND SERVICES

The divisional artillery was under the command of Brigadier Anthony Gerald O'Carrol SCOTT¹. Born in 1899, SCOTT was commissioned into The Royal Artillery. In 1938, he became an instructor at the Indian Army Staff College at Quetta. In 1941, he was a G.S.O. 1, and in 1942 was promoted Brigadier General Staff, XV Indian Corps. He became the Commander Royal Artillery for the division on the 2nd June 1943, replacing Brigadier G. H. JOHNSTONE, D.S.O. who had been the Commander Royal Artillery of the division since its formation.

¹ Brigadier SCOTT's surname is sometimes shown hyphenated as O'CARROL-SCOTT, which is incorrect. Source London Gazette.

Brigadier SCOTT had command of the 8th Field Regiment, 27th Field Regiment, 5th Indian Field Regiment and the 7th Indian Light Anti-Aircraft/Anti-Tank Regiment.

The 8th Field Regiment was a British regular army unit, which had commenced the war stationed in India as part of the 6th (Lucknow) Infantry Brigade. The regiment moved to Egypt in September 1940 and fought in the Western Desert campaigns of 1941. In February 1942, the regiment joined the 70th Division, and returned to India with that division in March 1942. When the 70th Division was converted to the long range penetration role, the regiment left that division and joined the 25th Indian Division on 11th November 1943. The regiment had reorganised as a jungle field regiment on 11th March 1943. This meant that two batteries were equipped with eight 3.7" howitzers, and the third battery had sixteen 3" mortars. Lieutenant Colonel J. C. H. MEAD was in command.

The 27th Field Regiment was another regular British army unit, but had commenced the war in the United Kingdom. It went to France and Belgium in September 1939, and fought in the 1940 campaign. Withdrawn through Dunkirk, the regiment re-equipped and sailed out from the U.K. in May 1942. On its arrival in India in July 1942, the regiment joined the 25th Indian Division. It too was equipped as a jungle field regiment, with the 24th Battery being equipped with the sixteen 3" mortars, and 21st and 37th/47th Batteries having eight 3.7" howitzers. The commanding officer of the regiment was Lieutenant Colonel C. L. CORSER.

The division was allocated two Indian Artillery units. The 5th Indian Field Regiment and the 7th Indian Anti-Tank Regiment. The 5th Indian Field Regiment was raised on the 15th February 1942 under command of Lieutenant Colonel R. A. COOK, Indian Artillery. It comprised the 11th, 12th and 13th Field Batteries. It had joined this division by October 1943.

The 7th Indian Anti-Tank Regiment was raised on the 1st May 1942, under command of Lieutenant Colonel P. G. P. BRADSHAW, Indian Artillery. It comprised the 25th, 26th, 27th and 39th Anti-Tank Batteries. It had joined this division by October 1943.

The Commander Royal Engineers was Lieutenant Colonel G. R. RICHARDS. He had command of the 63rd Field Company, 425th Field Company and 325th Field Park Company from the Queen Victoria's Own Madras Sappers and Miners and the 93rd Field Company from the Royal Bombay Sappers and Miners.

EARLY DAYS

The 25th Division was based around Bangalore, and commenced specialist training in amphibious operations. It then spent time in the Salem, Trichinopoly and Kolar Gold Field area for training in jungle warfare. In January 1943, the division was assessed as being recently completed to full equipment and was in the process of training with it. The following March, the

division participated in Exercise 'Trump' testing the cooperation between the infantry and tanks.

The whole of 1943 was spent in southern India, and it was not until February 1944 that it was ordered to move to Burma for active service.

THE DIVISION MOVES TO THE ARAKAN

The 25th Indian Division began to move up and relieve the 5th Indian Division in the middle of March 1944. The 5th Indian Division had been withdrawn to the Imphal plain by the end of the month. The 25th Division had been intended to move to Ranchi in February 1944 to act as Army reserve, but the events of the beginning of 1944 had changed all that. At this time, the 7th Division was leaving the Arakan for Assam, and the 5th Division was in the Maungdaw area, and due to be relieved next. The 26th Division was in Taung Bazaar and moving forward to relieve the 7th Division, and the 36th Division was located down the spine of the Mayu range of hills.

The first brigade to move into the line was the 51st Brigade, commanded by Brigadier T. H. ANGUS, D.S.O. It moved south from Chiringa on 18th March and relieved 123rd Brigade in the foothills north of the Tunnels road. As the 5th Division was ordered to Assam at all speed, the 51st Brigade was relieved by the 36th Division and moved south onto the Maungdaw to Buthidaung road. The relief of the 5th Indian Division was difficult, as the units to be relieved were scattered and many were in regular contact with Japanese troops. The 16th/10th Baluch was given a large area to cover, relieving the 3rd/17th Dogras on the 18th March 1944. The next day, the battalion was engaged by the Japanese. At this time, it was dispersed and unprepared, so the Japanese inflicted several casualties on the battalion. They were subjected to regular harassing attacks, and once surrounded the battalion's headquarters. The troops, however, stood their ground and slowly turned the tide against the Japanese. The battalion concentrate on Hill 109 and carried out company sized attacks and regular, aggressive patrolling. The 8th Bn. The York and Lancaster Regiment (now under the command of Lieutenant Colonel C. A. WIGHAM) was kept in brigade reserve. 'D' Company of the Yorks and Lancs, under command of Captain R. H. CHAPMAN, were used on the 24th March to drive a force on Japanese off a hill where they were threatening the supply route to the Baluch battalion.

Meanwhile, 74th Brigade under the command of Brigadier HIRST had landed at Chittagong and made its way forward in haste. The divisional commander, Major General DAVIES then assumed command of his two forward brigades from the 5th Division. His headquarters was located at Maungdaw.

At the beginning of April, the 53rd Brigade arrived under the command of Brigadier G. A. P. COLDSTREAM, D.S.O.. During the night of the 24th and 25th March, a force of approximately one Japanese battalion moved through the foothills east of the Kalapanzin river, appearing near the eastern exit of the Ngakyedauk Pass. The Indian troops in that locality began operations to

liquidate that incursion, and within the next two days, had killed over 100 of the Japanese troops. The rest were forced to disperse.

The 25th Division was ordered to hold a firm line with a mobile reserve in the Maungdaw – Razabil area; to take over and hold successively positions captured by the 26th and 36th Divisions on the spine of the Mayu peninsula; and to assist the actions of the other two divisions by vigorous patrolling and offensive action in the foothills south of the Tunnels area. The Corps plan indicated that the capture of Hill 1433 was highly desirable for the security of the monsoon defence line. Basically each one of the three tasks was allocated to each of the three Brigades. Holding the Maungdaw – Razabil line fell to the 74th Brigade, 53rd Brigade took over the Tunnels area, and 51st Brigade became responsible for the offensive action. The 17th/5th Mahratta Light Infantry from 51st Brigade took over positions on two features near the main ridge. One of these features was known as Point 904. The Mahratta's were supported by the 27th Field Regiment, with Captains AFFLECK, CLARKE, HARRIS, and WHITEHEAD, all staffing Forward Observations Posts with the battalion.

On Wednesday 5th April, the Japanese attacked these features held by the Mahrattas. The Japanese had dominated these locations from Hill 1433 and Hill 1440 nearby, so could see the Mahratta's positions. A Mahratta company was driven from Point 904 by a surprise attack in the middle of the day. In leading a counter attack on the same day, the battalion's second in command, Major AI/760 Nigel Kenneth Beaton DODGE was killed at close quarters with the enemy. He is commemorated on Face 33 of the Rangoon Memorial. Fighting continued throughout two days of fierce attack by the Japanese and counter attack by the Mahrattas. In the end, as a result of sustaining severe casualties, the Mahrattas were driven from tops to the slopes of the features.

One Mahratta company on another feature called 'Bird' held firm for some time, but eventually was also forced off. To support the Mahrattas, the divisional commander committed the divisional headquarters battalion, the 8th/19th Hyderabad Regiment. A company from the Hyderabad Regiment occupied a new position to the north end of the 'Bird' feature, with Captain P. SHERSTON-BAKER as F.O.O.. Again the Japanese attacked, and the Hyderabads were forced to leave this position.

Fighting still continued in the area. The 8th/19th Hyderabad Regiment recaptured the 'Bird' feature by a night attack on the 11th April, supported by artillery fire. This position was, however, overlooked by Japanese artillery and the feature became littered with dead Japanese and Indian troops. The stench became so bad that the battalion was withdrawn from the feature. Both the 17th/5th Mahrattas and 8th/19th Hyderabads were then withdrawn from the locality to recuperate.

A measure of the severity of the fighting is shown in that following its withdrawal, 'B' Company of the 17th/5th Mahrattas could muster no more than twenty-six fit men, but it still had possession of eight of its nine Bren guns and

all its 2" mortars. For their gallantry and leadership during these two days of fighting, Major R. B. TEAL and Subadar Mohammed UMAR from the Mahrattas were both awarded the Military Cross. Due to the casualties suffered by the Mahrattas and to allow the battalion to rest and refit, the 17th Bn. 5th Mahratta Light Infantry relieved the 8th/19th Hyderabad Regiment as the divisional headquarters battalion, with the 8th/19th Hyderabad Regiment joining 51st Brigade.

Meanwhile, on the 9th April, the Japanese launched fresh attacks on the 16th/10th Baluch Regiment on Hill 109. They employed a fresh battalion newly arrived from Akyab. Surprisingly, the Japanese battalion was very noisy when forming up, which allowed the mortar battery from 27th Field Regiment and the battalion's own mortars to concentrate devastating fire on the Japanese troops. This caused the Japanese heavy casualties but they still attacked. They gained an intermediate objective, but failed to get any further and were forced to withdraw. The 16th/10th Baluch had two killed and four wounded in this action, and felt they had avenged their rough handling when they first went into the line. They were the first battalion in the division to gain a Japanese officer's sword as a trophy.

Whilst these operations were underway, the 36th Brigade had been gaining ground in the Tunnels area. The 53rd Brigade came into the line and relieved the brigade from the 26th Division, which went to rest and refit. By the middle of April 1944, the Tunnels area had largely been cleared of Japanese troops, except for Hill 1433, which remained a Japanese stronghold. The 14th Bn. 10th Baluch were chosen to assault the feature. What caused the battalion's commanding officer the problem was that there was a series of smaller features between them and the main position. The battalion overran an outpost but, could not take the main position; being met with a hail of grenades and machine gun fire every time they reached the crest. It became clear that the cost in men could not be justified so the position was left alone.

A considerable amount of patrolling was carried out by the division, with varying results. On the 21st April, a platoon from 'C' Company, 8th Bn. Yorks and Lancs, under command of Lieutenant D. C. HOOTON carried out a daring and successful raid on a Japanese held village. Although the platoon lost four men killed, one taken prisoner and four wounded, they inflicted several casualties on the Japanese. Lieutenant HOOTON was subsequently awarded the Military Cross for his leadership and gallantry.

The 26th Indian Division was ordered to attack Point 551, with the 25th Division being tasked with supporting their sister formation. The 14th/10th Baluch were ordered to operate in the thick jungle to the south of Point 551. The intention was to threaten the Japanese lines of communication, a task which the Baluch battalion carried out with great vigour and success. The 25th Division took over the positions on Point 551, with the 2nd/2nd Punjab Regiment relieving the Rajput Regiment. The Japanese had regrouped and re-established themselves on the southern crest of Hill 551. The 2nd/2nd Punjab had an uncomfortable time being frequently shelled. Then, in the early hours of the 20th May, the

Japanese launched a major counter attack. It coincided, unfortunately with an inter-company relief and the Japanese managed to force the Punjabis back to the northern end of the ridge. Soon after daybreak the Punjabis fought back and drove the Japanese off the top of the ridge.

This assault on Point 551 was part of a concerted attempt by the Japanese to retake the west tunnel. The 4th/18th Garhwal Rifles broke up the northern attack, whilst the 14th/10th Baluch made short work of the southern attack, driving the Japanese back at the point of a bayonet.

The 51st Indian Brigade was taking up a mainly defensive role while this battle for Hill 551 was underway. To prevent the Japanese cutting the line of communication with 53rd Brigade, it was vital that the village of Kanbyin was held. This fell to the 8th/19th Hyderabad Regiment with two companies of the 17th/5th Mahrattas under command. The Japanese regularly shelled the village and, when this led to the battalion commander being wounded, Major K. S. THIMAYYA was appointed to command the battalion, the first Indian officer to command a battalion in the 25th Division.

The 8th Bn 19th Hyderabad Regiment also had problems with a feature known as 'Green Tree Hill', which was outside their area, but from which the Japanese used as a base for snipers. It could not be occupied permanently, as this would have placed an undue burden on the division, so instead, the Hyderabad Regiment sent patrols regularly to clear the feature. On the 7th May, this operation developed into a set piece attack, with the support of the 8th Bn. The York and Lancaster Regiment. 'A' Company (Captain J. R. PATTISON) of the Yorks and Lancs moved forward to take 'Green Tree Hill', but met heavy fire from a neighbouring hill called 'Burnt Tree Hill'. 'B' Company from the same regiment, under command of Major E. V. WILLIAMS, was ordered to capture 'Burnt Tree Hill', which they achieved successfully. Then 'B' Company and 'D' Company (Captain R. H. CHAPMAN) assaulted 'Green Tree Hill', but drew back after meeting significant opposition. The battalion had suffered three men killed, and three officers and nineteen men wounded. A couple of days later, after an artillery barrage, the battalion successfully took the hill.

The 74th Brigade had been held in divisional reserve during this period, except for the 14th/10th Baluch Regiment. South of the division's main positions, commandos had been operating. When they were withdrawn, the Japanese reoccupied the villages in the area. They took their revenge with a series of brutal executions. To counter this and to support the villagers, the 6th Bn. Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry and the 3rd/2nd Gurkhas launched a raid in strength into the area. This proved effective and relieved the attacks on the villages.

By now the monsoon rains were due, so preparations were made for the season ahead. The 25th Division was to occupy a bridgehead into enemy territory in effect whilst the other divisions withdrew into monsoon positions. In April the 7th Division was withdrawn for a rest before moving to Assam, the 36th Division followed a few weeks later, whilst the 81st West Africa Division

marched straight through Japanese lines withdrawing from the Kaladan valley along the banks of the Kalapanzin River back to Chiringa. Finally at the end of May 1944, with its job done the 26th Division withdrew to monsoon quarters at Taung Bazaar.

With this underway, the grouping of units within the division was reorganised. The 51st Brigade evacuated positions south of the tunnels road and covered the northern flank at Waybin. The 74th Brigade was given the Maungdaw, with the 14th/10th Baluch reverting to its proper brigade and covering the southern flank. In the 53rd Brigade, the 2nd/2nd Punjab had experienced a difficult time in holding Point 551, so it was withdrawn to become the divisional headquarters battalion. It was replaced in 53rd Brigade by the 17th/5th Mahrattas. The 5th Indian Field Regiment was deployed with the 74th Brigade, with the 27th Field Regiment being withdrawn for a rest and to re-equip. The Japanese withdrew from the area altogether leaving the 25th Division in control of the area.

THE 1944 MONSOON PERIOD

The monsoon set in about the middle of June 1944. The 2nd/2nd Punjab reverted to 53rd Brigade, with the 17th/5th Mahrattas became the divisional headquarters battalion. The division was the most forward formation of XV Corps and was able to conduct patrolling as it wanted. It was not known at this stage, but the Japanese 55th Division was withdrawing back to southern Burma to allow the 2nd Division to move to Assam. A detached force of about three battalions in strength was left behind to make it appear that the 55th Division was still in the Arakan.

Despite the monsoon, operations were continued if possible. At the end of June, reports were received that the Japanese were again threatening villages and committing atrocities if they did not get what they wanted. A platoon from the 3rd/2nd Gurkhas was sent to the aid of the villagers. This patrol was such a success that the divisional commander decided to maintain a permanent patrol in the vicinity. The patrols were provided by the 6th Oxs and Bucks as well as the 3rd/2nd Gurkhas. This was known as 'Bolster Force' and it enjoyed much success in keeping the area free of Japanese. In turn, the units in the force were replaced by a company from the 8th Bn. The York and Lancaster Regiment and 8th/19th Hyderabad Regiment. They were told to continue to patrol vigorously.

On the 5th August 1944, Brigadier Averell John DANIELL, D.S.O., M.B.E. joined the division as the Commander Royal Artillery. Born in 1903, Brigadier DANIELL had commanded the 158th Field Regiment, Royal Artillery, which was part of the 23rd Indian Infantry Division. In September 1944, the 5th Indian Field Regiment left the division to come under command of 14th Army Troops.

As the monsoon slackened off in September 1944, the divisional commander made plans to seize locations before the Japanese could re-occupy them. This included positions on the spine between the Ngakyedauk Pass and the tunnels,

as well as Hill 1433. The 16th/10th Baluch managed the first task without incident, but the story of Hill 1433 was different. The Japanese had maintained a force on this hill, known to the allies as 'Lion', and a secondary feature called 'Tiger'. To deceive the Japanese, Bolster Force was ordered to simulate a brigade group in the area. 3rd/2nd Gurkhas were warned to prepare for the capture of Hill 1433 and were brought together for this purpose. The lessons from the previous attempts were not forgotten and the decision was taken to take the feature from the east of the feature.

By the 5th September, the 3rd/2nd Gurkhas had been concentrated in the locality of Point 1267. The battalion was given support of artillery and engineers for the operation. The attack was put in before dawn on the 8th September 1944. It was raining and the hill tops were covered in low cloud. At 02.00 hours, 'A' Company moved off, followed at 02.30 hours by 'C' Company. At 05.00 hours the divisional artillery opened up on targets to the west of the objective and, at the same time, 'B' Company assaulted Tiger from the east whilst 'C' Company attacked Lion from the south with 'A' Company attacking the same feature from the south east.

A platoon from 'B' Company managed to enter the Tiger fortifications but found them held in far greater strength than expected. The assault platoons suffered heavy casualties and the attack ground to a halt. The two leading platoons of 'C' Company reached the crest of the spine without incident and from there assaulted Hill 1433. They overcame some bunker positions but were eventually pinned down by heavy machine gun fire. The company commander was killed as he reconnoitered towards Tiger. Within a few hours, 'C' Company had lost all its officers killed or wounded. It was assumed that 'C' Company had reached the crest, so 'D' Company went forward and located the company and relieved it. 'A' Company reached its assault positions at about 04.30 hours and half an hour later attacked Hill 1433 from the south. It overran the forward Japanese positions but was then held up by heavy machine gun and grenades only about 50 yards from the summit.

This meant that the Japanese were almost encircled on Hill 1433. The 93rd and 425th Field Companies were put to work building a porter track up the hill in order for mules to carry supplies to the forward troops. At first light on the 8th September 1944, the Japanese still held Hill 1433 and Tiger but, were under pressure from the Gurkhas with 'B' company in the Horse area pressing towards Tiger, 'C' and 'D' Companies just to the north of Hill 1433 and 'A' Company just to the south. The base area was held by battalion details, with one company from the 17th/5th Mahrattas holding the area to the south east of the base. A company from the 14th/10th Baluch was brought up to stiffen the defences, as was another company from the 17th/5th Mahrattas. The commanding officer of the 3rd/2nd Gurkhas assumed command of all the troops in the vicinity, which were named 'Bison Force'. He decided against any further frontal attacks and, went for a policy of encirclement and siege.

On the morning of 12th September, elements from 'B' Company launched some probing attacks at about 05.00 hours. Later at 09.00 hours, patrols from the

Baluch Regiment found the top of Hill 1433 unoccupied and immediately starting consolidating the position. Other patrols were sent out to find that the remaining Japanese were very weak. Some Japanese were seen retreating and, by the end of the day both Tiger and Hill 1433 were safely in Allied hands. A valuable feature had been wrested from the Japanese. Nearby, Hill 904 was also found empty and fell into Indian hands.

The Japanese attacked Bolster Force at a village called Ponra on the 13th September but were driven off. At the same time, 74th Brigade were pushing southwards towards the next objective Point 109. The 6th Oxs and Bucks were detailed to take the location, which they achieved by the 16th September against minor resistance. Intelligence was now being received to the effect that the Japanese 55th Division was withdrawing from the northern Arakan. Therefore, the Corps Commander ordered a comprehensive patrol programme to ascertain the truth or otherwise in the intelligence. The 16th/10th Baluch and 9th York and Lancasters conducted sweeps down to the Kalapanzin River and Buthidaung respectively. These patrols showed that at least one battalion from each of the three regiments of 55th Division were still in the area.

THE POST MONSOON OFFENSIVE

In the post monsoon offensive, it was planned for the 25th Division to clear the Mayu peninsula with the objective of seizing Foul Point. At this time, the 25th Division suffered from the loss of its commander. Major General Davies, C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C., had taken the division from its beginning, trained it and led it in battle. His health was failing however, and it was decided that he should be replaced. On the 14th October 1944, Major General G. N. WOOD, O.B.E., M.C., arrived in Maungdaw and assumed command of the division.

After a period of leave, Major General DAVIES served as Assistant Chief of the General Staff at G.H.Q. in Delhi. The award of the Companion of the Order of the Bath (C.B.) was made to Davies in 1945. He then served as the Commandant of the Indian Army Staff College at Quetta. On partition of India, DAVIES became the Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the new Pakistan Army. He retired in 1948, and died on the 6th July 1975, aged seventy-seven years.

Major General George Neville WOOD was born in 1898, and like his predecessor was commissioned in 1916. Wood entered the British Army joining the Dorsetshire Regiment. He saw regimental service in France, Russia and Turkey, being awarded the D.S.O. and M.C.. 1940 saw WOOD as a G.S.O. 1, after which he became the commanding officer of the 12th Battalion, The West Yorkshire Regiment. He quickly transferred to the command of the 2nd Battalion, The Dorsetshire Regiment. This battalion was part of the 5th Infantry Brigade in the 2nd Infantry Division. The division was sent to India. On the 30th July 1942, WOOD was promoted Brigadier to assume command of the 5th Infantry Brigade. Some six months later, on the 16th January 1943, he assumed the post as Brigadier General Staff, Ceylon Command. Later in the same year, WOOD again transferred to become the Brigadier General Staff,

XXXIII Indian Corps. He was promoted Acting Major General on the 14th October on assuming command.

The new commander decided to regroup his formation. The 53rd Brigade had borne the brunt of the patrolling, so it was replaced by the 51st Brigade on the 22nd October to take a well earned rest. The 51st Brigade at this time had all three battalions commanded by an Indian officer. Lieutenant Colonel S. P. P. THORAT was commanding the 2nd/2nd Punjab, which had just relieved the 8th Bn. York and Lancaster Regiment; Lieutenant Colonel L. P. SEN commanded the 16th/10th Baluch, and Lieutenant Colonel Kodandera Subayya THIMAYYA commanding the 8th/19th Hyderabad Regiment.

Brigadier ANGUS relinquished command of the brigade on the 6th November 1944. In 1945, he was appointed Deputy Director of Military Training at G.H.Q., India. In 1946, he was made Director of Air, again at G.H.Q., India. He retired from military service in 1948, as an Honorary Brigadier. He died on the 20th February 1984.

The new brigade commander was Brigadier Reginald Anthony HUTTON, D.S.O., O.B.E.. Born in 1899, he was commissioned into The Indian Army. In 1940, he was serving as a G.S.O. 1, in East Africa. In 1941, he became the Deputy Director of Military Intelligence for East Africa Command, leaving that post in 1942. He had asked to revert to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel to assume command of the 3rd/2nd Goorkhas, which had served in the First Chindit Expedition and was being reconstituted as an operational infantry battalion. He commanded this battalion until his appointment to the command of the 51st Brigade, being promoted Acting Brigadier on the 6th November 1944.

There were also changes in the units within the division. The 8th Bn. The York and Lancaster Regiment was becoming severely depleted in strength due to casualties from fighting and disease. The supply of British reinforcements to units in Burma was becoming problematic as the units in North West Europe had precedence. The York and Lancaster Regiment had four battalions in Burma, so it was very difficult to keep the 8th Battalion operation. It left the 51st Indian Infantry Brigade to transfer to Calcutta, arriving on the 1st November 1944 when the battalion came under the command of 352 Lines of Communication Sub-Area. On the 11th February 1945, the battalion moved to Ranchi and came under the command of the 101 L o C Sub-Area. On the 1st May 1945, the battalion joined the 52nd Infantry Brigade, responsible for training newly arrived personnel in jungle warfare.

The divisional commander decided to send one brigade down the coast, being supplied by sea and, another brigade down the Kalapanzin river. The forces opposing the division were under the command of Major General Sakurai, commander of the 55th Division Infantry Group. Following the battles around Hill 1433 and Goppe Bazaar, it was thought that this force only numbered about 1,800 personnel. The 74th Brigade (Brigadier J. E. HIRST, D.S.O.), with the 6th Oxs and Bucks, 14th/10th Baluch and 3rd/2nd Gurkhas, plus one company of the 7th/16th Punjab Regiment, 8th Field Regiment, 93rd Field Company and

61st Field Ambulance were to advance down the coastal sector. In addition, two destroyers HMAS Napier and HMAS Nepal were offered for bombardment support. The 53rd Brigade (Brigadier A. G. O'C SCOTT, O.B.E.) with the 9th York and Lancaster Regiment, 17th/5th Mahrattas and 4th/18th Royal Garhwal Rifles, plus one company of the 7th/16th Punjab Regiment, 34th Indian Mountain Regiment, 425th Field Company and 58th Field Ambulance, were to advance down the Kalapanzin River. Lastly, the 51st Brigade (2nd/2nd Punjab, 16th/10th Baluch and 8th/19th Hyderabad Regiment), plus one company of the 7th/16th Punjab Regiment, 7th Indian Anti-Tank Regiment, 63rd Field Company and 56th Field Ambulance, were to protect the base and then follow up 74th Brigade as necessary.

The 53rd Brigade commenced training for the next phase of operations. 51st Brigade was holding the base area, in order for the 82nd West Africa Division to concentrate and move off towards its objectives. The 74th Brigade also required training but, this was more difficult due to its operational commitments. The 3rd Commando Brigade was deployed under the command of the division to relieve 74th Brigade of some of its commitments. The commandos were well received, managing to capture the first Japanese prisoner of war that fell to the formation. The 53rd Brigade had to learn boat craft, which was new to most officers and men in the brigade. A series of offensive patrols was commenced to maintain pressure on the Japanese and to gain intelligence on their dispositions.

The 51st Brigade was then given a series of four operations to secure identifications of Japanese defences. The 8th/19th Hyderabad were given Operation A to reconnoiter a location called 'Poland', the 9th York and Lancaster Regiment from 53rd Brigade were given Operation B to ascertain the strength of troops between Buthidaung and Baguna, 16th/10th Baluch were given Operation C to ascertain and if possible destroy the garrison on a feature called Office and, 2nd/2nd Punjab were given Operation D to reconnoiter the area west of Kanthe. Each operation was supported by artillery, signals and engineers.

On 21st November 1944, the 8th/19th Hyderabad established themselves on a feature called Adam. By the end of the day, they had also secured another location called Ticker and, 'B' and 'C' Companies had secured Eve. At 09.35 hours the next day, the battalion mortars and artillery put down a concentration on Poland and within twenty minutes of the attack going in, 'C' and 'D' Companies had secured Poland. Due to its tactical importance, Poland was consolidated and held. The 16th/10th Baluch set out on their tasks and encountered heavy opposition in capturing Office. The hill feature about a mile east of Hill 1267 was subjected to a heavy artillery bombardment, then a company from the battalion under the command of Major M Usman made a brilliant dash to capture the hill.

The 25 year old, Sepoy Bhandari RAM earned the Victoria Cross for his gallantry in this action. Bhandari RAM was a Hindu from the Simla Hills. He was born in the village of Serunia in 1919 and enlisted in the 10th Baluch Regiment shortly before the outbreak of war. He had served with the 16th

Battalion of the regiment since it had joined the division, fighting in the early battles in the Arakan.

His citation records how, on the 22nd November 1944, during a company attack on a strongly held Japanese bunker position he was in the leading section of one of the attacking platoons. To reach the objective, it was necessary to climb a steep slope via a narrow sheer sided ridge. Fifty yards from the crest, the leading section came under accurate enemy fire which wounded three men, including Bhandari RAM, who was hit in the shoulder and leg. His platoon was then pinned down by machine gun fire and the whole attack stalled. Bhandari RAM crawled forward 15 yards towards the enemy intending to attack with grenades. Before he could do so, the enemy hurled grenades at him, wounding him in the face and chest. Now in extreme pain, he resumed his crawl forward and got to within five yards before throwing a grenade which exploded in the enemy post killing the machine gunner and two other Japanese soldiers. This inspired his platoon to rush and capture the location. Only then did Bhandari Ram allow his wounds to be dressed. Only then did he have his wounds dressed and he was removed to the Regimental Aid Post. The citation sums up his actions as follows: "By his outstanding gallantry, determination to destroy the enemy at all cost and entire disregard for his personal safety, this young Sepoy enabled his platoon to capture what he knew to be the key to the whole enemy position".

The information gained by the other two operations also proved vital to the forthcoming operations. The dispositions of the Japanese was established and reported in. It was found that the Japanese had intended to make a stand in a line from Office – Kagyebet Chaung – Kyaukhlabyin. On the 27th November, 'V' Force reported a thinning out of the Japanese in the area. There were seen to be making their way to the east bank of the Mayu River. Patrols found several dead Japanese but little else to report.

On the 28th November, the headquarters of the 25th Division opened at Razabil, with the headquarters of the 82nd West Africa Division opening up nearby the next day. On the 1st December, the Commando Brigade was relieved by the 74th Brigade and, the 50th Tank Brigade arrived in the area. It was now established that the Japanese held village of Inbauk was in the path of the intended advance and needed to be cleared. On the 3rd December, the 9th York and Lancaster Regiment successfully carried out the task of capturing this village. At this stage, the 7th Indian Anti-Tank Regiment returned, having been left behind in India when the division had moved to the Arakan.

On the 11th December 1944, a reshuffle in the brigade commanders took place. The commander of the 53rd Brigade, Brigadier SCOTT had fallen ill. His place was taken by Brigadier HUTTON from 51st Brigade and, Lieutenant Colonel THIMAYYA was promoted to take command of 51st Brigade.

Brigadier SCOTT returned to the United Kingdom, being awarded the O.B.E. for his services in Burma. He became Brigadier General Staff, Eastern Command in 1945. In 1946, he was awarded the C.B.E.. He assumed command of the

Sussex Anti-Aircraft Brigade in 1948. Promoted to Major General in 1950, he moved to Germany to assume command of the Hamburg District. The following year, Major General SCOTT was awarded the C.B., and returned to the Far East to become the District Officer Commanding, Singapore Base District. He retired in 1954, and died in 1980.

It was also on this day that the main offensive began, three days earlier than planned. 74th Brigade, led by the 6th Oxs and Bucks took the village of Udaung without meeting any resistance. The brigade met some light opposition, advancing in bounds with each battalion leap frogging each other. The brigade reached Indin safely and, then the brigade commander decided to exploit the light opposition and sent the 6th Oxs and Bucks down to secure Donbaik. On the morning of the 22nd December, following a night's march the battalion reached its objective. Thus fell the village so fiercely fought for the previous year. It became clear that the Japanese were not intending to fight for the Mayu peninsula, the brigade managing to seize Foul Point on the 29th December, nineteen days earlier than planned.

The 82nd West Africa Division began its advance and secured Buthidaung. This allowed the 425th Field Company to build jetties and traffic circuits in the vicinity. This immense task meant transporting and launching some 700 boats for the 53rd Brigade. The 53rd Brigade then began its advance. By 18th December, the 4th/18th Royal Garhwal Rifles had secured Seinyinbya unopposed. The brigade concentrated here with the 9th York and Lancaster taking tow islands in the river, which were christened 'York' and 'Lancaster'. The battalion came under artillery fire from the Japanese that caused some casualties.

As the 82nd West Africa Division advanced down to the Kalapanzin River, the 53rd Brigade continued to advance down the line of the river. The 4th/18th Royal Garhwal Rifles were probing the Japanese defences, but they were clinging to them tenaciously. At the same time, the 9th York and Lancaster Regiment occupied Kwazon and made successful progress down the east bank of the river. The Japanese still held the hills and, it was reported that elements of the Japanese 143rd Regiment had arrived to reinforce the defences. The village of Hparabyin was taken by the 4th/18th Royal Garhwal Rifles after a long march through the foothills on 29th December. The 17th/5th Mahrattas moved down the river in boats and seized Prinshe. They sent patrols across the river to find that Hzitwe was unoccupied. These patrols exploited towards Rathedaung, to find this location also unoccupied. The Japanese resistance in the Mayu valley was now fading away, with their troops withdrawing east to Kanzauk.

The end of the year saw the 25th Division having secured its objectives about a fortnight ahead of schedule, with both sides of the Mayu spine clear of Japanese. However, the mopping up operations still had to be completed, particularly in the hills.

Whilst the two brigades were moving down either side of the Mayu spine, the 51st Brigade was still entangled in the Tunnels area. On the 17th December 1944, the 22nd East Africa Brigade began to take over from the 51st Brigade, which allowed the latter to mop up the remaining Japanese in the locality. The advance of the other two brigades of the division had left some bewildered Japanese garrisons in strongholds at various locations, particularly along the spine itself. One of these was on Hill 1440, a long jungle covered feature on which there were believed to be two platoons of Japanese soldiers. The feature was subject of heavy bombing and artillery fire, as a result of which the Japanese decided to retire. Therefore, on the 19th December, the 8th/19th Hyderabad Regiment destroyed the remaining defences. On 22nd December, 2nd/2nd Punjab began to spread southwards down the coastal plain. It was not until the 25th December that they located any Japanese soldiers. One of the patrols found a strongpoint on Hill 1296. The patrol withdrew and, the feature shelled heavily. Again this forced the Japanese to retreat. On the 30th December, a patrol from the 16th/10th Baluch met the 17th/5th Mahrattas near Atet Nanra, and the Mayu peninsula was secured. During this period, the 8th/19th Hyderabad and 7th/16th Punjab were sent to Foul point to be able to take part in the landings on Akyab.

Akyab Island was an important location for the Allies. It is a low lying and flat with a natural harbour. The island is about nine miles long and ten miles wide at its furthest extremes. The town of Akyab was the political centre for this area of the Arakan and, it had a well established air field. The plan was for an amphibious assault to be carried out by the 26th Division and the 3rd Commando Brigade. D-Day was fixed for the 18th February 1945. A Naval Bombardment Force was to support the operation, as well as the air support. The main landing was to be made on the east coast by 71st Brigade, with a subsidiary landing by the 3rd Commando Brigade on the Fakir Point defences. In the light of the speed in which Romulus had been achieved by the 25th Division, the date of the invasion was brought forward to the 20th January 1945. Elements of the Japanese garrison on Akyab, 3rd Battalion of the 11th Regiment, had been encountered in the Kaladan valley, so it was not certain what troops were still holding the island. The 1st and 2nd Battalions from the same Japanese regiment had still not been located, so it was thought possible that they were on the island. As the 25th Division had reached Foul Point opposite Akyab in a good state, it was decided to change the plan and, to use the 3rd Commando Brigade and the 53rd Brigade from the 25th Division.

The 53rd Brigade was to cross the two mile wide mouth of the Kwede River, whilst the 74th Brigade was to be ferried across the four mile wide mouth of the Mayu River. As speed was essential to keep the Japanese on the back foot, D-Day was revised to be the 3rd January 1945. On the 1st January 1945, reconnaissance aircraft reported that civilians were to be seen working on Akyab airfield and appeared unconcerned about the presence of Allied aircraft. On the 2nd January, messages in Urdu and Burmese were dropped on the island, with a signal for the locals to indicate whether or not the Japanese were present on the island. The signal on the locals standing with their hands above their heads was given (if the Japanese were present they were told to sit

down) and a pilot of an air Observation plane found a airstrip apparently prepared for him and so landed. On being told that the Japanese had left the island, he flew back to Corps headquarters. By this time, the assaulting troops were at sea and, it could not be confirmed that there would be no opposition whatsoever, so the plan went ahead, but with the bombardment would be held back unless required.

On the morning of the 3rd January 1945, the 8th/19th Hyderabad Regiment landed unopposed on the north west beach of the island. They then marched inland to secure the area. By nightfall, the entire 74th Brigade was ashore, together with supporting vehicles and equipment. In fact the first troops ashore on the island were some men of the 4th/18th Royal Garhwal Rifles who landed near Padali before dawn to intercept any Japanese who might withdraw through this village. Early on the morning of the 4th January, the 74th Brigade formed up behind the commandos, and passed through them to enter Akyab town and harbour. The locals gave a rousing reception to the Allies and civil administration was immediately resumed. However, the harbour was unusable as were many of the airfield facilities. But, a squadron of Spitfires was able to fly from the airfield on the island on the 7th January to deal with the first Japanese air raid on the island.

It became clear that the Japanese had left the island on the 31st December and, moved north to the west bank of the Kaladan River. The decision was taken to blockade the Japanese to the north of the island and to strike at their line of retreat. 53rd Brigade, now under the command of Brigadier B. C. H. GERTY D.S.O. started mopping up and blockading operations. The 9th York and Lancaster Regiment moved to Ponnagyun on the 6th January. The 4th/18th Royal Garhwal Rifles followed them shortly afterwards. The York and Lancaster battalion found that the Japanese were still holding Ponnagyun in strength. Therefore, the battalion decided to make a detour and head up the Kaladan River to a point off the north east tip of Akyab island. However, the 4th/18th Garhwalis landed near Ponnagyun and entered the town without any opposition. Once this became known, the York and Lancaster's came back to the town and to advance further to put a block on the Yo River.

During the night of the 6th – 7th January, the Japanese landed a strong force on the jetty at Ponnagyun. 'C' Company of the Garhwalis engaged them but could not prevent them landing. A fierce fight took place, which resulted in the Japanese being driven off the jetty area with heavy casualties.

On the 10th January, the York and Lancaster battalion established a block on the Yo River as ordered. On the night of the 11th – 12th January, the Japanese attempted to withdraw through the village of Yongon where the battalion was gathered. This proved costly to the Japanese, with at least 24 bodies being counted in the morning. On the 13th January, patrols from 'B' Company of the York and Lancaster Regiment made contact with the 81st West Africa Divisional Reconnaissance Regiment. By the 18th January, the battalion had been relieved by the 82nd West Africa Division, allowing it to return to Akyab Island.

The 7th/16th Punjab Regiment, the divisional headquarters (and reconnaissance) battalion had concentrated at Thanthama on the 4th January. On the 6th, it had come under the command of the 74th Brigade and has secured a bridgehead at Pauktaw. On the 12th January, the battalion was out under the command of the 53rd Brigade and, for the next two days, it carried out patrols in landing craft. Local people gave information to suggest that the Japanese 54th Division was pulling out but leaving strong rearguards in the Kaladan valley. During the course of its patrols, 'C' Company from the battalion tried to land at a village called Kyeyebyin. They were met with machine gun and rifle fire and, further upstream a landing craft was fired upon by a 37mm gun and badly damaged. On the 18th January, a platoon of 'D' Company was ordered to take up a permanent position in the village. This platoon took up position in the village having driven away the few Japanese defenders. At about 19.00 hours on the 19th January, about 50 Japanese soldiers approached the village from the north east and north west. As they closed in, they were met with a volley of mortar, machine gun, and grenade fire. Nevertheless, some Japanese managed to infiltrate the platoon's location. The company commander decided to take another platoon and restore the situation. This he managed to do, clearing the village and securing the flank of the first platoon.

THE DIVISION'S FIRST VICTORIA CROSS

At about 23.00 hours, the Japanese opened up on these two platoons with 75mm guns, mortars and machine gun fire. They attacked with about 150 soldiers, first from the north west, then the north east and, finally from the north. Each time the Punjabis fought valiantly, often in hand to hand combat to break up each attack. On the morning of the Friday 19th January 1945, it was discovered that the Japanese commander had been killed alongside his wireless set. Therefore the Japanese had received no orders to withdraw. The Indians opened up on the soldiers who were still nearby trying to escape towards Minbya. About one hundred dead Japanese were counted after the battle. The Indians suffered two killed and four wounded. One of those killed was twenty-seven year old Lance Naik 14922 Sher SHAH, who was awarded the Victoria Cross.

The citation in the London Gazette for 4th May, 1945, gives the following particulars: In Burma, on the night 19th/20th January, 1945, at Kyeyebin, Kaladan, Lance-Naik Sher SHAH was commanding the left forward section of his platoon, when a Japanese platoon attacked his post. He by himself stalked the enemy from their rear and broke up the attack by firing into their midst, killing the platoon commander and six others. Soon after midnight the Japanese, now reinforced, started to form up for another attack. Again he crawled forward alone, and finding a group of Japanese officers and men, fired until they broke up in disorder. On his way back he was hit by a mortar bomb, but made light of his wound; not till some time later did his comrades find out that his right leg was missing. A third time the Japanese troops started to form up for an attack, and for the third time Lance-Naik Sher SHAH, despite his wounds and loss of blood, crawled forward and broke up the enemy by

firing among them. This time he received a head wound which proved fatal. His initiative and indomitable courage throughout this very critical situation undoubtedly averted the overrunning of his platoon and was the deciding factor in defeating the Japanese attacks. Sher SHAH was the son of Barkhurdar and Makda; and husband of Mehr Bhari, of Chakrala, Mianwali, Pakistan. He is commemorated on Face 48 of the Rangoon Memorial.

By midday on the 19th January, the villagers brought information about Japanese concentrations of troops in the locality. Air strikes were called down on the locations concerned. The battalion kept up patrolling the area to find no signs of the Japanese. On the 22nd January, the battalion was relieved by the 4th/18th Royal Garhwal Rifles and, on the 26th January, the battalion left for Myebon.

Whilst this was going on, the 17th/5th Mahrattas were involved in considerable patrolling activity. It crossed to Akyab on the 6th January and, concentrated in Akyab on the 15th. From there it moved onto Ponnagyun on the 20th January. It was ordered to make for Minbya, going via Hinkaya, Pyinkala, and Kula. On the 26th January, the Headquarters Company and 'C' Company reached Mingan. Some Japanese vessels in the river were fired upon, with fire being returned from Minbya. After this, no more Japanese were seen, so the battalion was transported to Myebon in steamers on 2nd February 1945.

It now appeared that the Japanese 55th Division had withdrawn from the Mayu peninsula back towards central Burma. In the Minbya area was believed to be the 111th Regiment, with the 154th Regiment in the area of Myebon and Kangaw. This latter regiment had been reinforced by the 54th Reconnaissance Regiment. The headquarters of the 54th Division was known to be at Kolan, near An. This presented a golden opportunity for the Allies to cut off the Japanese troops in the Arakan by quickly establishing a block on their lines of communication to the south. The corps commander considered taking the Myebon peninsula, which was some thirteen miles to the south east of Akyab. It was originally intended for the 26th Division to undertake the assault on Myebon, but that division was at Cox's Bazaar. As events took shape, the 53rd Brigade was moving south towards Minbya, with the 7th/16th Punjab Regiment. It was decided to use the rest of the 25th Division, plus the 3rd Commando Brigade to carry out the assault. At the same time, it was decided to press on with the capture of Ramree Island with the help of the 26th Division.

The 53rd Brigade was transferred from the command of the division to the direct command of XV Indian Corps on the 12th January 1945. This was to allow the 25th Division to concentrate on the planning and execution of the assault on Myebon. The 25th Division was found to be fit and able to continue, with its morale high following the continuous series of successes it had achieved. The 26th Division had not taken part in any action since the before the monsoon and, it was training intensively for combined operations. The 81st West Africa Division was judged tired having been action for over a year, so it was withdrawn back to India as soon as the 82nd West Africa Division relieved it. Despite the long distances it had marched, the 82nd West Africa Division

was in good shape, having suffered few casualties. The 3rd Commando Brigade and the 22nd East Africa Brigade had not been committed to any great extent.

THE COMMANDO BRIGADE

The 3rd Commando Brigade had been formed in Dorchester, in England on the 1st September 1943 as the 3rd Special Service Brigade. The Headquarters Staff were formerly personnel from the 102nd Royal Marine Brigade, under the command of Brigadier Wilfred Ivan NONWEILER.

Brigadier NONWEILER was replaced by Brigadier Campbell Richard HARDY, Royal Marines on the 19th December 1944. Brigadier NONWEILER returned to the United Kingdom and in 1945 commanded the 117th (Royal Marine) Brigade in Germany. From 1950 to 1951, he was the Chief of Staff to the Commandant General, Royal Marines, retiring in the rank of major general.

Born in 1906, Brigadier HARDY was promoted from command of 46 (Royal Marine) Commando, having led that unit during the Normandy landings.

The brigade comprised two Army and two Royal Marine Commandos. Number 1 Commando was an Army Commando formed in the late autumn of 1940 from the Independent Companies that had been formed in 1940 and had served in Norway. The commando then took part in various cross channel operations and the invasion of Tunisia and Algeria. The commanding officer of the commando was Lieutenant Colonel Ken TREVOR. Number 5 Commando was the other Army Commando having been formed in mid-1940 with volunteers from several army units. It took part in the invasion of Madagascar before moving to India and joining the brigade. It was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel H. H. DALES. The two Royal Marines units were 42 (Royal Marine) Commando, whose commanding officer was Lieutenant Colonel G. H. STOCKLEY, R.M.; and 44 (Royal Marine) Commando commanded by Lieutenant Colonel C. J. B. POLLITT, M.C., R.M.

No. 1 (Army) Commando brigade were equipped with American Garand self-loading rifles that they had been equipped with during the invasion of Tunisia and Algeria. These had a bore of 3", and had a higher rate of fire than the British Lee-Enfield .303 rifles issued to most infantry units. They also had Bren guns, 3" mortars and Thompson sub-machine guns. Although issued with steel helmets, the personnel preferred to wear their distinctive green berets.

THE LANDINGS AT MYEBON

The operation was called 'Passport' and was designed to secure a base on the Myebon peninsula, from which the Japanese lines of communication could be cut. The peninsula lies between the Rivers Kyatsin and Myebon. The 3rd Commando Brigade, comprising Number 1 and 5 (Army) Commandos and, 42 and 44 (Royal Marine) Commandos was placed under the command of the 25th Division for this operation. The brigade commander, Brigadier C. R. HARDY, D.S.O., was made the assault commander for the operation. The only beach

found suitable was Charlie beach at the south east corner of the peninsula. This beach had an extensive mud flat off the beach, so the assault would have to be made at high tide. Wooden stakes were found to have been driven into the ground on the beach, these being removed by the application of delay charges due to go off just before the assault.

In order to deal with these stakes, a Royal Marine Combined Operations Pilotage Party (COPP) managed to go onto the beach early one morning and remove the stakes.

The assault was preceded by a heavy naval bombardment and air strikes, with Hurricanes laying down a smoke screen. Under this cover, the 3rd Commando Brigade touched down at 08.30 hours on the 12th January 1945, 42 Commando being in the lead. The bombardment had done its job, as most of the Japanese positions were not manned at the time of the assault. A captured British 2 Pounder and a 37mm gun were quickly overrun and captured. After the initial landing, resistance stiffened considerably, as did the problems caused by the mud as the tide receded. This beach was found to be unsuitable for the landing of tanks and guns, so the sappers had to blast an exit from an adjacent beach. This was carried out by 63rd Field Company, working through the night. This new beach was called 'Easy Beach'. The Commandos pushed on ahead, taking the village of Agnu and the Pagoda Hill feature. The Naval support vessels sailed close to the shore to provide artillery support. During the night of the 12th - 13th January, Allied motor launches patrolled the Myebon River, coming under considerable fire from the land.

On the morning of the 13th January, Japanese aircraft attempted to bomb the Allied shipping offshore. Meanwhile, the Commandos were clearing the defended hill features around Myebon village. Tanks were used in close support of the Commandos, with a tank officer on foot with the leading troops to direct fire as required. The follow up landings took place as planned, with the first artillery coming ashore by mid-day on the 19th January. Stiff resistance was met at Myebon village and from the Pagoda Hill, but both were overcome.

The first elements of 74th Brigade, namely the 6th Oxs and Bucks, landed on Easy Beach on the 13th January. They immediately took over beachhead positions from the Commandos. The 3rd/2nd Gurkhas and the 14th/10th Baluch were also landed after a little difficulty caused by the nature of the bed of the sea in the area. By the night of the 13th - 14th January, it had become apparent that the Japanese were trying to delay the advance beyond Myebon village to allow the maximum number of their troops to escape. By the 14th, all the units of the 74th Brigade had been successfully landed, with the 3rd/2nd Gurkhas having moved forward to support the Commandos. On the 15th January, a plan was devised where the Commandos would capture a hill feature, then the Gurkhas would push on to take a hill feature called Point 262.

The Commandos commenced their advance against very heavy opposition. They were supported by tanks from the 19th Lancers. The Commandos made

an assault on a feature called Point 200, which is about two and half miles north of Myebon village. They made progress but, were held up near the crest of the hill. A tank from the 19th Lancers climbed the hill to within 40 yards of the crest and knocked out a few bunkers and three light machine guns. It then toppled over because of the steepness of the slope. However, this was enough for the Commandos to secure Point 200. They pushed on and also secured Point 163, a feature lying two miles north of Myebon village.

Two days later on the 16th January, 3rd/2nd Gurkhas moved through the Commando troops and occupied the area. After a Naval bombardment had ceased, the 3rd/2nd Gurkhas dispatched a patrol to the village of Kantha. This place was found to be deserted so, 'D' Company crossed the chaung, occupied the village and set about reconnoitering Point 262. This point was found to be garrisoned by a company from the 54th Reconnaissance Regiment, with 90mm mortars and two 75mm guns. The Japanese had dug themselves in well around the brick remains of the Pagoda. The decision to capture this feature was taken on the 17th January. A very heavy supporting fire plan was arranged, using Naval guns, air strikes and artillery. Following this bombardment, the assault went in. It was strongly opposed but 'D' Company managed to secure a foothold on the southern edge of the hill. An outflanking movement was carried out, closely supported by tanks. One platoon managed to reach the Pagoda and captured the stump. The whole of the company then dug in to await the expected Japanese counter attack. The Japanese put in four counter attacks but, the 'D' Company perimeter was not penetrated. Over sixty Japanese dead were found, at the cost of one Gurkha killed and thirty wounded.

74th Brigade kept up the patrolling on the peninsula and, by the 21st January, the Myebon area was found to be clear of Japanese. With the whole of the peninsula now held by XV Indian Corps, the 14th/10th Baluch and 6th Oxs and Bucks exploited deeply to chase Japanese stragglers. The 74th Brigade was made responsible for the defence of the Myebon area, which allowed the 3rd Commando Brigade to be withdrawn for a well earned rest period. By the 18th January, divisional headquarters had been opened just outside Myebon. The corps commander decided that the opportunity existed to intercept the Japanese withdrawal and cut the main coast road. He chose the village of Kangaw to set up a block. This area was known to be strongly defended, therefore, surprise was important. It was decided to land troops using the chaungs that went up through the area.

THE BATTLE FOR KANGAW

Elements of the Japanese 54th Division, under Major General MYAZAKI, were believed to be concentrated around the small village of Kangaw. This comprised the 111th Infantry Group of about 5,000 men, and a detachment in reserve at Kaladan.

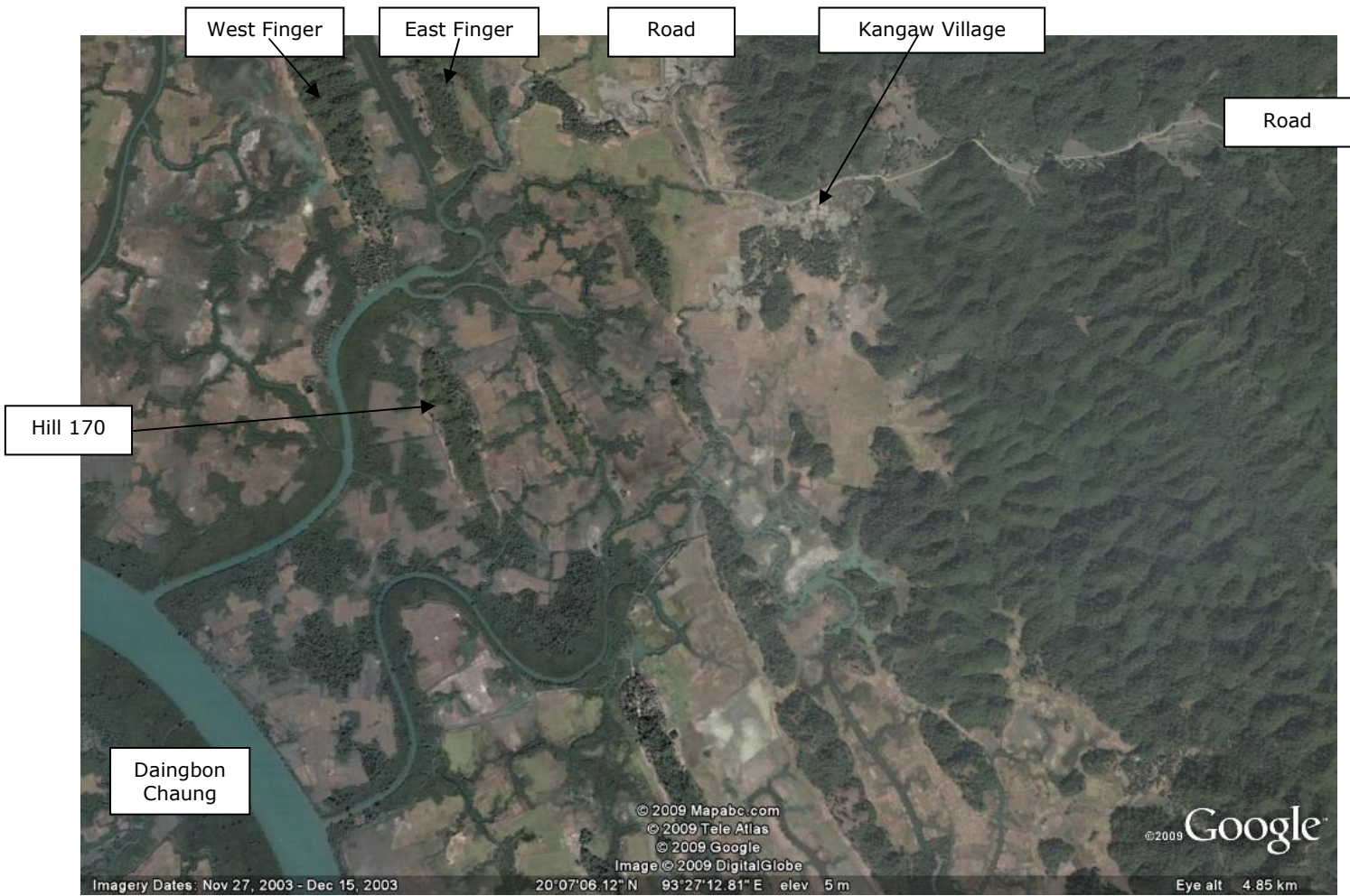
The plan agreed by the divisional command was for the 74th Indian Infantry Brigade, supported by the tanks of the 19th Lancers, to strike for Kangaw. At

the same time, 3 Commando Brigade were to land on the Daingbon Chaung, to try and penetrate the left flank of the Japanese positions. For the commandos, this meant a five mile approach up the chaung, which is about twenty-five to thirty-five yards wide at this point and flanked by overhanging mangrove trees on either side. Once ashore, the commandos were tasked with seizing and retaining a feature known as Hill 170, which was given the codename 'Brighton'. This hill was about eight-hundred to a thousand yards long, lying north to south, and about 160 feet high. It was covered in a wood, with steep sides and surrounded by paddy fields.

No. 1 (Army) Commando was tasked with leading the assault, capture and hold Hill 170; supported by 5 (Army) Commando. 42 (Royal Marine) Commando was to secure the banks of the chaung around the beachhead. On D-Day +1, 42 Commando were to advance and capture the village of Kangaw, while 44 (Royal Marine) Commando were to seize and hold another hill feature nearby, codenamed 'Pinner'. The 51st Indian Infantry Brigade were to land and follow up the advance made by 3 Commando Brigade. The commandos were supported by four 25 pounders from 18th Field Regiment operating from a landing craft, and by 5.5" medium guns firing from Myebon. Two sloops from the Royal Indian Navy, the Narbada and Jumna were also able to provide artillery support.

After only four days rest and, only nine days after the assault on the Myebon beaches, the 3rd Commando Brigade set sail for the landing beaches near Kangaw. The landing points had been selected by the Royal Marines COPP, who landed overnight of the 19th and 20th January to reconnoiter the beaches on the Daingbon Chaung. The beaches were dominated by Hill 170, so this was subjected to air strikes. The landings were made at 13.00 hours on the 22nd January 1945, on the flood tide. The Commandos quickly advanced inland, securing the southern side of Hill 170. As darkness was falling, they did not have time to shift the platoon of Japanese holding the northern side of the hill. This party of Japanese were driven off the following morning. 44 (Royal Marine) Commando went on to secure 'Pinner', which had a series of bunkers that all faced north, so were useless in this instance as the attack was from the south and west.

Figure 1 -Kangaw



The Japanese realised the seriousness of this move by XV Indian Corps. They made a series of determined and strong counter attacks against the Commando's positions. By 13.00 hours on the 23rd January, the 8th/19th Hyderabad Regiment had landed and took over the defence of the beaches. With much difficulty, a troop of Sherman tanks from the 19th Lancers were put ashore. On 24th January, 'D' Company of the Hyderabad Regiment moved forward and took over the defence of Pinner. 44 (Royal Marine) Commando had been heavily shelled and mortared, suffering about sixty-one casualties. It was withdrawn back to the southern end of Hill 170. On the 25th January, the 16th/10th Baluch Regiment had landed and moved forward to Pinner as well. The battalion was heavily shelled, losing two killed and twenty one wounded. Brigadier HUTTON had also landed to assume command of all the troops in the locality. Two positions called 'Perth' and 'Melrose' dominated the road and surrounding countryside. Five squadrons of Liberator bombers came over to attack these features. With the 2nd/2nd Punjab also now landed, the plan was put in place to capture Perth and Melrose and block the road. The 8th/19th Hyderabad were to take Perth; the 16th/10th Baluch, Melrose; with the 2nd/2nd Punjab in reserve. On the 27th January, No. 5 (Army) Commando came forward to provide some patrols in Kangaw village and to hold Pinner under the command of 51st Indian Brigade.

At 03.00 hours on the 28th January, 'C' and 'D' Companies of the Hyderabad Regiment attacked a feature called 'Duns'. 'C' Company managed to capture the south of this feature, but 'D' Company was held up by bunker positions on the northern side. At first light, the Japanese began to reinforce their positions and bring down heavy artillery fire on the Hyderabad battalion. Casualties mounted, therefore 'B' Company was sent to assist. The position was overlooked by the Japanese who swept it with automatic fire. In the end, the brigade commander ordered the battalion to withdraw back to Pinner. Casualties amounted to nineteen killed and sixty-one wounded.

Meanwhile, the 16th/10th Baluch had made for Melrose. On 28th January, the attack went in as planned. Air strikes preceded the attack, with 'A' Company making for the Kangaw hills, 'D' Company's objective was north Melrose, 'B' Company south Melrose, with 'C' Company in reserve. 'A' Company met no opposition and dug in on the Kangaw hills. 'B' and 'D' Companies found their intermediate objective of Berwick unoccupied so they advanced on to the foot of Melrose. They met heavy fire, but pushed on taking two Japanese bunkers. The two companies over-ran some eight bunkers, killing some sixty Japanese soldiers. A substantial footing had been gained, despite the heavy casualties. 'C' Company was rushed up to consolidate the position. It arrived just in time to assist in driving off the first Japanese counter attack at 13.00 hours. The commanding officer of the battalion decided to withdraw 'A' Company to vacate Kangaw and hold Berwick. 'A' Company of 2nd/2nd Punjab was placed under the command of the Baluch battalion to support their attack on Melrose. During the night of the 28th - 29th January, the Japanese made eight counter attacks against the Baluch positions, all eight being successfully repulsed.

It was decided to postpone the attack on the high feature to allow it to be softened up by artillery fire. Throughout the day, more than eight-hundred Japanese artillery shells landed on the positions on Melrose making this one of the heaviest artillery duels of the entire Burma campaign. The divisional commander decided against any further attacks on Perth and, to concentrate instead on Melrose. Hence, at 10.30 hours on the 29th January, the 2nd/2nd Punjab Regiment were ordered to capture Melrose from the south. Under the cover of smoke, mortar and artillery fire, the 2nd/2nd Punjab Regiment formed up and commenced their assault. Despite the heavy return fire, they destroyed the foremost Japanese defences. The best way to describe the events is a mad charge up the slopes culminating in bitter hand-to-hand fighting. After a grim struggle, the Punjabis took Melrose by 14.00 hours. Over one hundred Japanese dead were counted, the Punjabi battalion suffering about eighty casualties, mostly wounded.

A little after midnight on the 29th - 30th January, the Japanese counter attacked. The first two attacks were relatively light but, the third was an all out affair designed to dislodge the Punjabis from the hill. After some fierce fighting all were beaten back. Between 05.20 hours and 07.00 hours, two more attacks were made. The position of the Punjabis was getting desperate as their ammunition was running low. Ammunition was rushed up to the leading companies, which enabled them to hang on. Daylight revealed some fifty Japanese bodies littering the ground, right up to the Punjabi positions.

At about 15.00 hours, a heavy Japanese bombardment of Melrose began but the feature was held. This proved to be the turning point in the battle. The next objective was the village of Kangaw itself. The 8th/19th Hyderabad Regiment was detailed to carry out this task. On 29th January, at 16.30 hours, the battalion moved off and secured Kangaw hill without a fight. From Pinner, a patrol from 'A' Company was sent to Kangaw village, to find it deserted. The 82nd West Africa Division was now driving south from Hpontha, pushing the Japanese against the block at Kangaw. The Japanese were determined to keep their escape route open, therefore Colonel MURAYAMA decided to attack Hill 170, in order to split the Allied forces. This would force 51st Brigade to release their grip on the road.

The Japanese started shelling Milford and Hill 170 (Brighton) at 04.30 hours on the 31st January 1945. Just before dawn, the Japanese moved forward and formed up in the deep belt of mangrove trees between the chaung and Hill 170. As the sun rose, the Japanese from a battalion of 154th Regiment, together with assault engineers launched what proved to be their most desperate counter attack of the whole campaign. By assaulting the northern defences by a silent approach, the Japanese achieved an element of surprise. They broke into the tank harbour, but the tank crews were inside their tanks and immediately fought back. One tank was set on fire, killing the entire crew; but the other two fought back aided by the platoon of Bombay Grenadiers, wiping out the assault engineers.

It was clear that the Japanese intended to install themselves on the hill at whatever cost. The target of over three-hundred Japanese soldiers in the mangrove swamps was hit by Allied artillery and mortars, preventing them from assisting the forward most troops.

At 05.45 hours, the Japanese shelled the commandos who found that about fifty Japanese soldiers had dug themselves in close to the hill. The Japanese threw grenades at the forward trenches of the commando units, and then, at 07.30 hours, they attacked on a one-hundred yard frontage. Japanese engineers using explosive devices at the end of bamboo poles managed to disable two British tanks. They climbed on board and then blew themselves up with the tanks.

The soldiers from No 1 (Army) Commando were unable to be reinforced because of the Japanese artillery fire and the open ground now swarming with Japanese. The Commandos suffered heavy losses but remained clinging to the hill. The main battle was in the north end of the hill, with some six-hundred Japanese soldiers on the hill. W Troop of 42 Commando, with No 3 Troop from No 1 Commando launched a counter attack, but it soon broke down in the face of severe opposition. Then X Troop from 42 Commando counter attacked with the support of the one remaining Sherman tank, but again heavy Japanese fire brought this to a halt.

The artillery Forward Observation Officer was badly wounded, but could not be evacuated because of the battle going on around him. The Regimental Sergeant Major made sure that all the reserve ammunition was brought up to the hill. At about 14.00 hours, 6 Troop from No 1 Commando counter attacked but lost about half its strength. No (Army) 5 Commando had been relieved on 'Pinner' by the 8th/19th Hyderabad Regiment at midday, and moved up to Hill 170. This consolidated the entire 3 Commando Brigade on Hill 170. Lieutenant Colonel POLLITT, the commanding officer of No 5 Commando was wounded as the unit came forward.

George Arthur KNOWLAND was a regular officer, a Lieutenant in the Royal Norfolk Regiment, attached to the Commandos. Aged twenty-two, he was in command of the forward platoon of the No 1 Commando. His platoon was subjected to heavy attacks throughout the whole day. In spite of the ferocity of these attacks, he moved about encouraging his men and throwing grenades at the Japanese, often from exposed positions. When the crew of one of his forward Bren guns were wounded, he manned the gun himself, standing on top of the trench firing to keep the Japanese at a distance until another crew could take over. Later, he took over a 2" mortar and in spite of heavy enemy fire, he stood in the open firing the mortar from the hip. When all the bombs had been expended, he continued to fight using a sub machine gun and rifle, stemming the assault and killing many Japanese. For about twelve hours, he kept fighting heroically until he was mortally wounded. Such was the inspiration of his deeds, although fourteen out of twenty-six of his platoon became casualties and six of his positions were overrun by the Japanese, his men held on through the twelve hours of continuous and fierce fighting until

reinforcements arrived. He left a widow, Ruby, and is buried today at the Taukkyan war cemetery in Grave 11.J.1. His valour was recognised by the posthumous award of the Victoria Cross.

The fire power of the commandos was increased by bringing up additional light machine guns, and the Sherman tank continued to support the commandos. By 16.00 hours, the 2nd/2nd Punjab Regiment had managed to work their way around the left flank of the hill. They later carried out a night attack, but failed to drive the Japanese off the hill. The Japanese attempted one further attack on No 5 Commando, but this was easily beaten off.

The 7th/16th Punjab Regiment was moved as soon as darkness fell forward onto Hill 170 and, passing through the commandos recaptured those northern sections of the hill that the Japanese had succeeded in taking. In the morning they swept through the mangrove swamps and cleared the Japanese away from the hill. It was a scene of a massacre. It is believed that over four-hundred and fifty Japanese soldiers perished in their vain attempts to take Hill 170.

Early on the morning of the 2nd February, No 5 Commando moved forward and found Hill 170 clear of Japanese soldiers. There were dead Japanese lying all over the hill, sometimes piled in heaps. In the battle for Hill 170, the commandos lost forty-five men killed and ninety wounded, 50% of which were members of No 1 Commando. In addition to the Victoria Cross awarded to George KNOWLAND, members of No 1 Commando were awarded one Distinguished Service Order (Lieutenant Colonel TREVOR), four Military Crosses, two Distinguished Conduct Medals, thirteen Military Medals, seven Mentions in Dispatches and two Certificate of Gallantry.

It was appreciated that although some local counter attacks could still be expected, the Japanese has lost the capacity to mount another major offensive. The divisional commander decided to withdraw the Commando Brigade and ordered the 74th Brigade to move forward from the Myebon peninsula northwards and harass the flank of the Japanese. Raiding parties from the 6th Oxs and Bucks and 14th/10th Baluch were sent out between the 1st and 7th February. Later, on the 11th February, the Baluch battalion established contact with the leading elements of the 82nd West Africa Division.

Meanwhile, back at Kangaw, the Japanese remained in some strength on the Finger and Perth features. It was decided to leave both features alone as the road was cut and to take them both would have been unduly costly. However, the Duns feature was assaulted by 'D' Company of the Hyderabad Regiment with tank support on the 11th February. The attack started at 07.30 hours and had succeeded in clearing the feature by 11.00 hours. The sappers then arrived to blow up all the remaining bunkers and then the company withdrew with their captured equipment.

The 53rd Brigade was now brought down from Minbya to concentrate at Myebon and returned to the command of the division. The 14th/10th Baluch

was ferried across the chaung to Kyauknwa to carry out patrols north of Kangaw. The crossing was made on the night of the 6th – 7th February without any opposition. But, later on the Japanese counter attacked although this was repulsed it caused a change in the plans. A feature called Fingers was to be cleared. Four days later, the 7th/16th Punjab Regiment managed to clear both the East and West Fingers without great resistance.

With the 1st and 4th Brigades from the 82nd (West Africa) Division nearing Kangaw, they were put under the command of the 25th Indian Division. The Japanese had built another footpath through the hills to aid their escape. As things had quietened down in the Kangaw area, it was decided to clear Perth of the Japanese still entrenched on the feature. On the 12th February at 13.00 hours, 'A' Company of the 8th/19th Hyderabad Regiment put in an attack and promptly cleared some eight bunkers. A minor counter attack was beaten off and the whole feature gradually cleared. It was not until the 17th February that the last three bunkers on the top of the hill were stormed and the last twenty-five Japanese soldiers killed.

This ended the decisive battle of Kangaw, which had lasted some twenty two days. It has been described as one of the most fiercely contested battles in the Burma campaign, ranking alongside Kohima and Imphal for its significance. The 25th Indian Division casualties were in total one-thousand, three-hundred and seventy four, of which three-hundred and seventeen had been killed. Included in the divisional total were the three-hundred and forty casualties sustained by 3 Commando Brigade, of which sixty-six were fatal. The Japanese had been hit in a vulnerable quarter, ending up losing some 2,000 men killed. 450 bodies of Japanese soldiers were found on and around Hill 170 alone. They had also lost most if not all their artillery in the northern Arakan, many pieces being thrown into the chaungs because they could not be removed from the area. The difficulties for the Allies included failing to find a safe drinking water supply in Kangaw, meaning that 4,000 gallons of water had to be brought from Myebon every day, a distance of eighteen miles.

THE LANDINGS AT RUYWA

The corps commander decided to establish a bridgehead at Ruywa near An. The 53rd Brigade from 25th Division was chosen to lead the assault. The commandos conducted several reconnaissance patrols and landings in the area in order to select suitable sites for the landings. With their work complete, they said goodbye to the 25th Division. The Commander Royal Artillery of the 25th Division, Brigadier DANIELL, D.S.O., M.B.E., devised a fire plan using naval, land and air bombardments. It was appreciated that the Japanese had elements of the 111th Regiment, where although the 1st and 3rd Battalions had suffered heavy casualties, the 2nd Battalion had not been engaged. The 154th Regiment was also in the area, where again the 1st and 3rd Battalions had suffered heavy losses but the 2nd Battalion was on detached duty in Mandalay. The third regiment of the 54th Division, the 121st had not been heavily engaged as was therefore relatively up to strength. The 54th Reconnaissance Regiment

was also present, minus its 2nd Squadron which had been wiped out at Myebon.

At 10.30 hours on the 16th February, the two leading battalions of the 53rd Brigade touched down on their selected beaches. The 9th York and Lancasters made an unopposed landing and quickly formed a beach head some two miles deep. The 17th/5th Mahrattas followed through and with great dash secured their objectives. On the 17th February, the rest of the Brigade Group were landed. The 4th/18th Royal Garhwal Rifles proceeded towards Ruywa. On the 18th February, a lorry containing a party of 12 Japanese soldiers drove at great speed into the Indian lines. It was fired at and halted by a combined Mahratta and Garhwali ambush. Two of the men inside were Captains from the 54th Artillery Regiment. One was killed but the other was captured and interrogated. This confirmed that the Allies had achieved complete surprise.

It took the Japanese three days to react against the landings. Two guns were brought down to shell Oboe Red beach, making further landings on this beach impossible. On the night of the 18th – 19th February, the Japanese launched a strong attack on the northern side of the beach head. This location called Alps was held by a company of the 17th/5th Mahrattas. After hand to hand fighting, the attackers were repulsed and broke contact, leaving their commander dead on the battlefield. The portion of the block held by 'A' Company was particularly subjected to determined Japanese shelling and fierce attacks. On one occasion, several Japanese penetrated the Mahratta's position before being killed. Sepoy Krishna Rathore, in the darkness and confusion, succeeded in hitting the Japanese Captain on the head with a shovel and, seizing the sword from his grasp, killed the officer with his own sword. The Sepoy was presented later officially with the sword as a souvenir of his exploits.

On the 20th February, because of the intense Japanese shell fire on Oboe Red beach, another beach was opened up called Roger Green. The 2nd West Africa Brigade was transported down from Kangaw and landed on the beaches between the 18th and 22nd February. The West Africans passed through 53rd Brigade and advanced some four miles east. Next, elements of the 74th Brigade were taken from Myebon where they had concentrated and also landed at Ruywa. The 14th/10th Baluch and 7th/16th Punjab Regiments were ferried direct from Kangaw to Ruywa. This placed a strain on the transport arrangements but they coped well to reinforce the landings.

On the 5th March 1945, the 3rd Bn. 2nd Gurkha Rifles were involved at a feature called Snowdon East. A section was pinned down by heavy machine gun fire, with a sniper also shooting at the section from a tree. Twenty-four year old Rifleman Bhanbhagta Gurung killed the sniper and later when the section was again attacked, he dashed forward under continuous fire to personally clear four enemy foxholes. He also silenced a light machine gun position. With the help of a Bren gunner and two riflemen, he then repelled an enemy counter attack on the captured bunker. His actions in clearing these positions was decisive in capturing the objective.

Rifleman Bhanbhagta Gurung was awarded the Victoria Cross for his gallantry on Snowdon East. His citation reads: *'On 5 March 1945 at Snowdon-East, near Tamandu, Burma, Gurung and his unit were approaching Snowdon-East. His company became pinned down by an enemy sniper and were suffering casualties. As this sniper was inflicting casualties on the section, Rifleman Bhanbhagta Gurung, being unable to fire from the lying position, stood up fully exposed to the heavy fire and calmly killed the enemy sniper with his rifle, thus saving his section from suffering further casualties.*

The section advanced again but came under heavy fire once again. Without waiting for orders, Gurung dashed out to attack the first enemy fox-hole. Throwing two grenades, he killed the two occupants and without any hesitation rushed on to the next enemy fox-hole and killed the Japanese in it with his bayonet. He cleared two further fox-holes with bayonet and grenade. During his single-handed attacks on these four enemy fox-holes, Rifleman Bhanbhagta Gurung was subjected to almost continuous and point-blank Light Machine Gun fire from a bunker on the North tip of the objective. For the fifth time, Gurung "went forward alone in the face of heavy enemy fire to knock out this position. He doubled forward and leapt on to the roof of the bunker from where, his hand grenades being finished, he flung two No. 77 smoke grenades into the bunker slit. Gurung killed two Japanese soldiers who ran out of the bunker with his kukri, and then advanced into the cramped bunker and killed the remaining Japanese soldier.

Gurung ordered three others to take up positions in the bunker. The enemy counter-attack followed soon after, but under Rifleman Bhanbhagta Gurung's command the small party inside the bunker repelled it with heavy loss to the enemy. Rifleman Bhanbhagta Gurung showed outstanding bravery and a complete disregard for his own safety. His courageous clearing of five enemy positions single-handed was in itself decisive in capturing the objective and his inspiring example to the rest of the Company contributed to the speedy consolidation of this success.

The 2nd Gurkha Rifles were awarded the battle honour of Tamandu as a result of this battle.

WITHDRAWAL FROM THE ARAKAN AND OPERATION ZIPPER

The division was withdrawn from the Arakan and returned to India. It was sent via Madras to concentrate in the Nilgiri Hills. Most of the personnel were granted one month's leave

On the 31st March 1945, having led the brigade in battle throughout the campaign in the Arakan, Brigadier HIRST relinquished command of the 74th Indian Infantry Brigade. He was replaced by Lieutenant Colonel J CARGILL, O.B.E., who was promoted Brigadier to assume command.

Brigadier DANIELL left the division on the 7th April 1945. He continued to serve until 1955 when he retired. He was replaced by Brigadier Nigel Prior Hanson TAPP, M.B.E., who assumed the role as Commander Royal Artillery on the same date.

Brigadier TAPP had been born in 1904, and was educated at Cheltenham College and the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich. He was commissioned into The Royal Artillery in 1924. He served with the Sudan Defence Force between 1932 and 1938. In 1939, he attended the Staff College at Camberley, from which he became a G.S.O. 3 with I Corps in France during 1940. He then served as a G.S.O. 2 on the War Office and in 1941 was appointed as a G.S.O. 1 at the Staff College. In 1942, he assumed command of the 7th Field Regiment, which was part of the 3rd Infantry Division. The regiment served in Normandy and North West Europe. He was awarded the D.S.O. in early 1945 for his leadership of the regiment during the campaign. He left Europe and came to South East Asia on promotion to Brigadier in early 1945.

The Division became part of XXXIV Corps, commanded by Lieutenant General O. L. ROBERTS, formerly the commander of the 20th Indian Division. The 25th Indian Division was given the task of assaulting the Morib beaches south of Port Swettenham, in order to secure the port and capture Kuala Lumpur. The division moved to Klang and sent patrols into Kuala Lumpur on the 12th September to restore law and order, in particular to prevent looting. With order restored, a full ceremonial entry into the capital took place the next day.

At the end of September 1945, the 23rd Indian Infantry Division left southern Malaya for Java because of the insurrection in the Dutch East Indies. As a consequence, the 25th Division extended its area of control across the whole of the southern part of Malaya to the northern boundary of Jahore. This period was before the communist uprising in the country, so the division had no further operational role to play. Dispersal commenced in February 1946, a process which was completed the following month when the 25th Indian Infantry Division formally disbanded and ceased to exist.

In February 1946, the 74th Indian Infantry Brigade transferred to the command of the 7th Indian Division in Malaya, finally disbanding in June 1946.

Major General WOOD left the division on the 24th February 1946. During his period of tenure in command, Major General WOOD had been awarded the C.B.E. and the D.S.O.. In 1946, he was awarded the Companion of the Order of the Bath, and was appointed President of Number 6 Regular Commissions Board. In 1947, he was given command of the Mid West District (Wales and the West Midlands), and was General Officer Commanding, 53rd Infantry Division. He left that appointment in 1950, and was then Director of Quartering at the War Office. He retired in 1952, but was appointed Colonel of the Dorsetshire Regiment on the 1st March 1952. On the merger of the Dorsetshire Regiment with the Devonshire Regiment on the 17th May 1958, he became the first Colonel of the new regiment. He relinquished the Colonelcy on the 26th February 1958. He died in 1982.

Brigadier TAPP left the division in March 1946 and became the District Officer Commanding Eritrea. In 1948, he became the Deputy Director of Air and Land Warfare at the War Office, a year later being appointed the Deputy Director of

Artillery. In 1950, he attended the Imperial Defence College and on completion of the course in 1951, he was appointed as Commander Corps Royal Artillery, I British Corps in Germany. In 1954, he became the General Officer Commanding 2nd Anti-Aircraft Group and in that year was awarded the C.B.E.. In 1955, he was appointed the Director of Military Training at the War Office. Two years later, he assumed command as the Commander in Chief, East Africa Command. He was created as Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1960, retiring in 1961. He died in 1991.

One of the Division's three Victoria Cross winners, Bhandari RAM continued to serve with the 10th Baluch Regiment after the war. When India partitioned in August 1947, the 10th Baluch Regiment was allocated to the new Pakistan Army. As a Hindu, Bhandari Ram transferred to The Dogra Regiment in the Indian Army, serving for a total of twenty-two years, retiring in the rank of Captain. He remained living in India, but often visited London for reunions of the Victoria Cross and George Cross Association. On one of these visits, he was interviewed for the BBC TimeWatch documentary 'The Forgotten Volunteers' in 1999. He last visited London in 2001, with his death being reported in The Times on the 23rd May 2002 at the age of 82 years.

Rifleman Bhanbhagta Gurung survived the war and later achieved the rank on Honorary Havildar.

Brigadier HARDY, who had commanded the 3rd Commando Brigade during the Arakan campaign, left the brigade on the 29th April 1946. He became the Chief Instructor at the School of Combined Operations in 1947, returning to command of 3 Commando Brigade in 1948. In 1951, he was awarded the C.B.E. and moved to become the Commanding Officer, Royal Marines Depot Deal. A year later, he was appointed Chief of Staff to the Commandant General Royal Marines, and in 1955 was himself promoted to the senior post in the Corps as Commandant General. He was awarded the C.B. in 1954, and in 1957 was created a K.C.B. and Knighted. He retired in 1959 as General Sir Campbell Richard HARDY, K.C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O.** and died in 1984.

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² Copy obtained from the British Library through my local library in 2001. It appears to be no longer available. Very rare now.

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³ This is THE book that started it all, purchased at Heathrow Airport to read on the long flight to Sri Lanka when we visited long standing Sinhalese friends in 2000. The rest is history.

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