

2019

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A CONCISE HISTORY OF:

III INDIAN CORPS HISTORY & PERSONNEL

A concise history of III Indian Corps, a higher formation in the British Indian Army that saw service during the Malayan Campaign in late 1941 and early 1942. In addition, known details of the key appointments held between 1939 and 1945 are included.

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A Concise History of III Indian Corps (History & Personnel)

Version: 2_1
This edition dated: 21 May 2019
ISBN: Not yet allocated.

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Published privately by: The Author – Publishing as:
www.BritishMilitaryHistory.co.uk

III Indian Corps

III Indian Corps was formed on 27 April 1941 at Kuala Lumpur, Malaya. It had under command the:

- 9th Indian Infantry Divisions;
- 11th Indian Infantry Division;
- 28th Indian Infantry Brigade (Corps Reserve);
- Penang Fortress;
- Corps Troops.

Both divisions comprised two brigades and limited supporting arms and services and were located in northern Malaya. The Corps had been deployed close to the Thai border for two reasons; firstly, political so that the authorities were not seen to sacrifice parts of Malaya, and secondly, to protect the airfield which were largely in the north of the country.

III Indian Corps reported to Malaya Command. The 28th Indian Infantry Brigade arrived to act as Corps Reserve. All these formations comprised units that were under strength and contained many new recruits. The officers were mainly young men in their late teens or early twenties. Equipment was short, in particular a lack of radios and anti-tank weapons.

The Japanese invaded Malaya on 8 December 1941, and III Corps took the initial shock. The 9th Indian Division inflicted reverses against the Japanese landing from the sea on the north east coast but was steadily overwhelmed and forced to withdraw. The 11th Indian Division was required to both defend locations and advance into Thailand, being outflanked by the Japanese attacks.

The main battles were at:

- Jitra (8th – 12th December 1941);
- Kampar (30th December 1941 – 2nd January 1942);
- Slim River (6th – 8th January 1942);
- Gemas and Muar River (14th – 22nd January 1942).

During the latter battle, III Indian Corps played a minor role as it was in reserve having suffered serious losses in personnel and equipment. The British forces retreated onto Singapore Island. III Indian Corps formed the Northern Area with under command:

- 11th Indian Infantry Division;
- 18th Infantry Division.

The Japanese invaded the colony on 7 February landing in the Western Area of the island. They advanced east and south into the centre of the island, forcing III Indian Corps to withdraw to form a perimeter around Singapore City. British forces on Singapore surrendered on 15^h February 1942. The majority of personnel in III Indian Corps either died in the conflict or were taken prisoner to endure over four years of captivity. Many did not survive. Some of the personnel from III Corps Headquarters were evacuated by sea or tried to escape in the final chaotic days before surrender. Again, few of them survived and managed to reach Ceylon or India and safety.

Corps Commander

26th April 1941 – 15th February 1942 (Prisoner of War)

Lieutenant General (Acting) Lewis Macclesfield HEATH, C.B., C.I.E., D.S.O., M.C., Indian Army¹

Brigadier General Staff – (B.G.S.)

27th April 41 – 15th February 1942 (Died at Sea)

Brigadier (Acting) Walter Lindley FAWCETT, M.C., Indian Army, *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.*

Deputy Adjutant and Quartermaster General – (D.A. & Q.M.G.)

27th April 1941 – 15th February 1942 (Died on Active Service)

Brigadier (Acting) William AIRD-SMITH, 6 Raj Rif, *p.s.c.*

Corps Commander, Royal Artillery – (C.C.R.A.)²

Chief Engineer – (C.Eng.)

5th May 1941 – 15th February 1942 (Prisoner of War)

Brigadier (Acting) Kenneth Bredin Shakespear CRAWFORD

Chief Signal Officer – (C.S.O.)

22nd May 1941 – 15th February 1942 (Died at Sea)

Colonel (Acting) Richard Louis Mortimer ROSENBERG, R.Signals.

Deputy Director of Supplies and Transport – (D.D.S.T.)

27th April 1941 – 15th February 1942 (Escaped)

Colonel (Acting) Walter Donald CHURCHER, R.I.A.S.C.

Deputy Director of Medical Services – (D.D.M.S.)

27th April 1941 – 13th February 1942 (Escaped)

Brigadier (Acting) Charles Douglas Kingsley SEAVER

Deputy Director of Ordnance Services – (D.D.O.S.)

5th May 1941 – February 1942 (Escaped)

Colonel (Acting) William Walter LINNEY, I.A.O.C.

Deputy Director of Ordnance Services (Mechanical Engineering) – (D.D.O.S.)

April 1941 – 15th February 1942 (Prisoner of War)

Colonel (Acting) Robert Langdon ROPER, A.M.I.Mech.E.

Commanding Officer, Penang Fortress

May 1941 – 18th December 1941

Brigadier (Temporary) Cyril Arthur LYON, D.S.O., Reserve of Officers

¹ Promoted substantive Lieutenant General on 10 May 1941, created K.B.E. and knighted on 30 May 1941.

² No Corps Commander Royal Artillery was appointed.

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