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A CONCISE HISTORY OF:

IV CORPS (HISTORY & PERSONNEL)

A concise history of IV Corps, a higher formation in the British Army between 1940 and 1945. It served in the United Kingdom, Norway, Iraq, India and Burma. Also included are the details of the personnel who are known to have held key appointments with IV Corps during this period.

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A Concise History of IV Corps (History & Personnel)

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IV Corps

The IV Corps was formed in Alresford, Hampshire, in the United Kingdom in February 1940. The first commanding officer of the corps was Lieutenant General Claude AUCHINLECK. Elements of the corps headquarters were deployed to Norway in April 1940. With the end of the campaign in Norway, the corps was reconstituted in the United Kingdom in July 1940.

September 1940 found IV Corps situated in Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire, with the 43rd (Wessex) Infantry Division under command. The role of the corps was as a strategic reserve.

The corps headquarters left the United Kingdom on being deployed to Iraq. It opened in Iraq on the 13th January 1942, however, it only stayed in Iraq for about a month before closing there. It moved to India, reopening at Imphal in April 1942.

On arrival in India, the Corps Headquarters was sent to the Eastern Frontier of India to assume responsibility for the defence of Assam. At this time, the Japanese forces were advancing through Burma towards Assam.

The Burma Army was falling back into India. The first formation to move into the area and come under command of IV Corps was the 1st Indian Infantry Brigade; itself part of the 23rd Indian Infantry Division.

On entering India, Burma Corps was dissolved and the 17th Indian Infantry Division and 1st Burma Infantry Division passed to the command of IV Corps. The 1st Burma Infantry Division was practically reduced to no operational value; and although the 17th Indian Infantry Division was badly depleted, it was required to remain in Assam to protect against a possible invasion.

By late summer 1942, IV Corps comprised two under-equipped divisions, namely:

- 17th Indian Infantry Division;
- 23rd Indian Infantry Division.

The 17th Indian Division had one brigade deployed forward in the Fort White area near Tiddim, with the rest of the division resting at Shillong. The 23rd Indian Division covered the approaches to Kohima and Imphal. The Corps also had under command 'V' Force, a force comprising local hillmen and levies and charged with collecting information and harrying lines of communication.

In early 1943, the Corps was tasked with limited patrolling and operations in the Assam region linked to the construction of the road into China. The 23rd Indian Division was located at Shenam, Imphal and Palel. One brigade of the 17th Indian Division was stationed at Kohima.

The Corps was then additionally tasked with assisting the forthcoming operation by the Long Range Penetration (L.R.P.) brigade (otherwise known as the Chindits). Limited raids were conducted in support on the Chindits in March and April 1943. The survivors of the first Chindit expedition returned in April 1943 and the 23rd Indian Division withdrew to the Imphal plain for the monsoon.

In May 1943, IV Corps undertook operational activity in the region of the Tiddim road from Imphal. The 17th Indian Division (by now re-equipped) pressed on steadily down the road. The 20th Indian Infantry Division was moved to Imphal and joined IV Corps, giving it three divisions.

In February 1944, increased military activity was seen in the Chin Hills, in the main in the area of Kennedy Peak and Tiddim localities. The 20th Indian Division based in the Tamu area beyond Shenam and close to the Chindwin River, also saw increased Japanese activity.

On the 7th March 1944, General GIFFARD approved the withdrawal of IV Corps units from Tamu and Tiddim and sent instructions to Lieutenant General SLIM at 14th Army stating:

- The impending Japanese offensive would probably be on a larger scale than anything they had yet attempted in Burma;
- The Allied lines of communication were parallel to the front and were a source of weakness;
- The Imphal plain was of immense strategic importance and its loss would be disastrous – Its security was therefore the primary task of IV Corps;

The first indications of the beginning of the major Japanese offensive became known on the 8th March 1944. At this time, the headquarters of IV Corps was based in Imphal. The 17th Indian Division was deployed to the south of the Imphal plain as far as Tiddim. The 20th Indian Division was deployed to the east as far as Tamu, with the 23rd Indian Division covering the northern side of the Imphal plain towards Kohima along the only supply route from the main base at Dimapur.

Fierce fighting began in the Tiddim area as the withdrawal of the 17th Indian Division was delayed, and in effect the division had to fight its way back to the Imphal plain. The 20th Indian Division withdrew back to the Shenam saddle, a natural feature in the hills next to the Imphal plain.

The 50th Indian Parachute Brigade was placed under command of the 23rd Indian Division, being deployed around Shangshak. As the Japanese attacked, the outlying companies were destroyed and a 'box' was formed in the village of Shangshak by the remainder of the brigade.

The attack on the Shangshak 'box' commenced on the night of the 22nd/23rd March 1944. After four days of intense fighting, the survivors from the brigade evacuated the 'box' at 22.30 hours on the 26th March; and in small groups the soldiers made their way back to Imphal. This proved to have been a crucial battle as it delayed the Japanese by six days in their thrust on Imphal and Kohima.

At the end of March 1944, the 9th and 123rd Indian Infantry Brigades from the 5th Indian Division were flown into Imphal from the Arakan to provide much needed reinforcement. The 161st Indian Infantry Brigade made for Kohima by road from Dimapur. The headquarters of the 5th Indian Division opened at Imphal on the 21st March 1944. The road between Kohima and Imphal was cut by Japanese troops on the 30th March 1944.

With Imphal now cut off, and the Japanese advancing on Kohima in strength, IV Corps lost command of the Kohima area. The Kohima and Dimapur area came under the 202nd Lines of Communication Area on the 29th March 1944. XXXIII Indian Corps assumed command of the Dimapur and Kohima areas on the 3rd April 1944.

The 20th Indian Division stoutly defended the Shenam Pass from the 5th April until the 22nd June 1944 against robust Japanese assaults. The 17th and 23rd Indian Divisions defended the Imphal plain from the south, and the 5th Indian Division (with the addition of the 89th Indian Infantry Brigade from the 7th Indian Division) fought its way northwards to reopen the Kohima road.

By the third week in June 1944, the siege of Imphal was over. The road between Kohima and Imphal was reopened on the 22nd June, and by the evening of the same day, the first convoy had travelled its length.

The value of the air support for IV Corps during the siege of Imphal can be seen by the fact that over 22,000 tons of supplies were flown in during that period, as were about 20,000 troops. Over 10,000 casualties and 35,000 non-combatant soldiers were flown out. Without this air support, it is unlikely that IV Corps would have been able to fight on and defeat the Japanese.

On the 8th July 1944, the 23rd Indian Division transferred from IV Corps to XXXIII Indian Corps so it assumed responsibility for all operations east of the Manipur River.

On the 1st August 1944, Headquarters IV Corps left Imphal for Ranchi for a period of rest and training for mobile operations. The Corps returned to Imphal in late October 1944, officially reopening on the 1st November with under command:

- IV Corps (SCOONES);
 - 7th Indian Infantry Division (MESSERVY);
 - 19th Indian Infantry Division (REES);
 - 23rd Indian Infantry Division (ROBERTS)

Of these, the 23rd Indian Division due for a period of rest and recuperation. The Corps concentrated in the Imphal area with the task of supporting the advance by XXXIII Indian Corps. This was the first period of action for the 19th Indian Division, which was well trained but not experienced in action yet.

On the 11th November, the 268th Indian Infantry Brigade was transferred to the command of IV Corps. It had crossed the Chindwin River and was operating on active patrolling in the Wetkawk and Napan areas.

On the 18th November 1944, the 62nd Indian Infantry Brigade from the 19th Indian Division began crossing the Chindwin River. The 98th and 64th Indian Infantry Brigades also crossed within the next days. With the division across the river, the brigades pushed on towards the Irrawaddy River.

The 268th Indian Infantry Brigade also came under command shortly afterwards. These formations were tasked with advancing to and crossing the River Chindwin. At 07.00 hours on the 26th December 1944, the 19th Indian Division and 268th Indian Brigade transferred to the command of XXXIII Indian Corps. This left IV Corps with the following formations:

- 7th Indian Infantry Division (MESSERVY);
- 17th Indian Infantry Division (COWAN);
- Lushai Brigade (MARINDIN);
- 28th (East Africa) Infantry Brigade;
- 255th Indian Tank Brigade Group.

In late December 1944, Lieutenant General SLIM commanding the 14th Army decided to switch IV Corps from the left flank of 14th Army to the right flank, ie, from one side of XXXIII Corps to the other. This allowed the corps to advance in secret to Pakokku and then cross the Irrawaddy River to strike for Meiktila.

The corps commander decided to get the 28th (East Africa) Infantry Brigade to lead the advance to make it appear that the 11th (East Africa) Infantry Division was still in the locality (it had been withdrawn to India).

The 7th Indian Division followed behind the East Africans in order to cross the river. On reaching the river, it was decided the main crossing point was to be at Nyaungu, with a subsidiary crossing at Pakokku.

On the 26th January 1945, Pauk was captured and the units began concentrating and preparing to cross the Irrawaddy River. The actual crossing took place on the 14th February 1945. Deception crossings were made to deceive the Japanese. The 17th Indian Division and 255th Indian Tank Brigade started crossing behind the 7th Indian Division on the 18th February and started the thrust towards Meiktila.

By the 1st March, units had reached Meiktila and surrounded the town. They then started to attack the Japanese garrison. Bitter fighting took place, but the British and Indian troops made inroads into Meiktila. With the capture of the air-strip at Thabutkon, the 99th Indian Infantry Brigade of the 17th Indian Division is flown into the airfield on the 27th February.

The fly-in had been completed by the 2nd March and the air-strip was abandoned. The 7th Indian Division, and the 28th (East Africa) Infantry Brigade were involved in a fierce fight to maintain and secure the bridgehead against Japanese counter attacks.

Meiktila was a vital nodal point for the Japanese lines of communication, and they made desperate attempts to retake the town. The 5th Indian Division was flown and brought into Meiktila, and a policy of aggressive defence was followed by the Indian divisions with a series of armoured thrusts. Fighting continued throughout the month of March.

On the 1st April 1945, the corps commenced the pursuit of the retreating Japanese forces. It was ordered to drive down the main road as quickly as possible to capture Rangoon prior to the monsoon season. For this reason, the corps was reorganised as a mechanised formation, with under command the:

- 5th Indian Infantry Division;
- 17th Indian Infantry Division.

The corps initially met fierce resistance from the Japanese 33rd Army north of Pyawbwe, but this was overcome and the advance continued. On the 6th May 1945, units from IV Corps met units from the 26th Indian Division from XV Indian Corps north-east of Rangoon.

On the 7th May, MESSERVY issued his new operational orders. At this time, the corps were disposed along the Rangoon – Meiktila road. The 17th Indian Division was in the Hlegu area (except for the 99th Indian Brigade which was at Pyu), the 5th Indian Division was between Payagyi and Pegu, and the 19th Indian Division was holding Toungoo and operating eastwards.

The other formation of the corps, the 255th Indian Tank Brigade was concentrating at Pegu. The corps was redeployed, with the 5th Indian Division in the south, the 17th Indian Division in the middle, and the 19th Indian Division in the north of the corps area. The battle of the Sittang Bend opened on the 10th May, with attacks by the 9th Indian Brigade, 5th Indian Division.

The Japanese forces ceased fighting on the 15th August 1945. The Headquarters IV Corps closed on the 1st November 1945.

Corps Commander

1st February 1940 – 30th May 1940

Lieutenant General Claude John Eyre AUCHINLECK, C.B., C.S.I., D.S.O., O.B.E.

31st May 1940 – 4th December 1941

Lieutenant General (Acting) Francis Poitier NOSWORTHY, C.B., D.S.O.*, M.C.*, *i.d.c.*,
p.s.c.

13th January 1942 – 29th March 1942

Lieutenant General (Acting) Thomas William CORBETT, C.B., M.C.*, Indian Army,
p.s.c.

16th March 1942 – 29th July 1942

Lieutenant General (Acting) Noel Mackintosh Stuart IRWIN, C.B., D.S.O. M.C., *i.d.c.*,
p.s.c.

1st August 1942 – 12th December 1944 (or 8th December 1944)

Lieutenant General (Acting) Geoffry Allan Percival SCOONES, C.S.I., O.B.E., D.S.O.,
M.C., Indian Army, *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.*

12th December 1944 – 13th July 1945

Lieutenant General (Acting) Frank Walter MESSERVY, C.B., D.S.O., Indian Army, *p.s.c.*

14th July 1945 – 18th August 1945 (Temporary)

Lieutenant General (Acting) Francis Ivan Simms TUKER, C.B., D.S.O., O.B.E., Indian
Army, *p.s.c.*

18th August 1945 – 1st November 1945

Lieutenant General Sir Frank Walter MESSERVY, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., Indian Army,
p.s.c.

Brigadier General Staff – (B.G.S.)

7th February 1940 – April 1940

Brigadier (Temporary) James Andrew Harcourt GAMMELL, D.S.O., M.C., *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.*

31st May 1940 – 30th June 1941

Brigadier (Acting) William CARDEN-ROE, M.C., *p.s.c.*

22nd August 1941 – 24th January 1943

Brigadier (Acting) Edward Temple Leigh GURDON, M.C., Black Watch, *p.s.c.*

25th January 1943 – 9th August 1943

Brigadier (Temporary) Ouvry Lindfield ROBERTS, D.S.O., B.A., *p.s.c.*

23rd August 1943 – 14th February 1944

Brigadier Geoffrey Charles EVANS,

29th January 1944 – 15th December 1944

Brigadier (Acting) Kennett BAYLEY, Oxs & Bucks L.I., *p.s.c.*

16th December 1944 – 1st November 1945

Brigadier (Temporary) Edwyn Harland Wolstenholme COBB, R.E., *p.s.c.*

Deputy Adjutant and Quarter-Master-General – (D.A. & Q.M.G.)

16th November 1944 – 15th February 1945

Brigadier (Temporary) Francis James WALSH, O.B.E., R.I.A.S.C., *p.s.c.*

16th February 1945 – 15th May 1945

Brigadier (Acting) Leslie Rodway MIZEN, 12 F.F.R., *p.s.c.*

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

8th June 1940 – 9th July 1940

Brigadier Charles ALLFREY

18th July 1940 – 11th September 1942

Brigadier Robert Hallam STUDDERT

6th August 1944 – 1st November 1945

Brigadier (Temporary) Claud GOULDER, D.S.O., M.C., R.A.

Chief Engineer – (C.Eng.)

GRAND

1943 – 1944

Brigadier Harold WILLIAMS.

25th August 1944 – 1st November 1945

Brigadier (Acting) William Woodney BOGGS, B.A., R.E.¹

Chief Signal Officer – (C.S.O.)

15th September 1941 – 24th July 1943

Colonel (Acting) Gerald Joseph UNDERWOOD, T.D., R. Sigs (T.A.)

25th July 1943 – 1st November 1945

Colonel (Acting) Edward Victor McCORMACK, O.B.E., R. Sigs.

¹ Awarded the O.B.E. on the 8th February 1945 and C.B.E. on the 15th November 1945.

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

1939 – 1940/1

Colonel W. WARREN

12th December 1942 – 3rd August 1944

Brigadier (Acting) Louis Anthony LOUP, R.I.A.S.C., *p.s.c.*²

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

23rd September 1942 – June 1943

Brigadier (Acting) Gerald Esmond MacALEVEY, D.S.O., M.C., R.A.M.C.

7th August 1944 – 1945

Brigadier (Acting) David Forsyth PANTON, R.A.M.C.

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

Colonel/Brigadier

² Awarded the C.B.E. on the 16th December 1943.

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