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A CONCISE HISTORY OF:

XXXIII INDIAN CORPS (HISTORY & PERSONNEL)

A short history of XXXIII Indian Corps, a higher level formation of the British Army in existence from 19. In addition, known details of the key appointments held between 1939 and 1950 are included.

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Concise History of XXXIII Indian Corps (History & Personnel)

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XXXIII Indian Corps

XXXIII (Thirty-Third) Indian Corps was formed in Southern India in November 1942, and on its formation, it comprised the:

- 19th Indian Infantry Division,
- 25th Indian Infantry Division.

It had been formed in response to the threat of invasion of southern India by Japanese forces. The corps took time to reach operational effectiveness. In January 1943, it was assessed as having incompletely trained corps units. Later, the 251st Indian Tank Brigade came under command of the corps. In November 1943, the Corps was still deployed in Southern India, and was assigned as the strategic reserve for South East Asia Command. At this time it comprised the:

- 2nd Infantry Division,
- 19th Indian Infantry Division,
- 36th Indian Infantry Division,
- 50th Indian Tank Brigade,
- 3rd Special Service Brigade.

The corps was now intended to become the amphibious expeditionary force in South East Asia, with the task of preparing for operations against the Andaman Islands, in the Arakan and in the capture of Rangoon. The corps badge comprised a trident to represent the Royal Navy, a sword to represent the Army, and two wings for the Royal Air Force. The sword and trident were crossed, superimposed over the two wings.

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 29 March 1944. XXXIII Indian Corps assumed command of the Dimapur and Kohima areas on 3 April 1944. At this time, the Corps only had under command the newly formed Lushai Brigade, and the 161st Indian Infantry Brigade. The 161st Indian Infantry Brigade had arrived at Dimapur by air from the Arakan on 26 March 1944. Straight away, it started out for Kohima. The 2nd Infantry Division was sent to Dimapur from southern India, by air, rail, road, and boat. The 5th Infantry Division arrived on 4 April, with the 4th and 6th Infantry Brigades arriving in the second week in April.

The Japanese troops drove back the outlying units deployed forward of Kohima in the Jessami and Kharasom area between 26 March and 1 April 1944. In particular, the 1st Bn. The Assam Regiment fought several sharp actions that delayed the Japanese advance and gave the defenders of Kohima time to prepare themselves. The Japanese reached the outskirts of Kohima on 4 April 1944. The Japanese began their assault on Kohima on 6 April, and the siege of Kohima began. On 7 April, the Japanese drove British and Indian troops from the hospital area; and on 8 April they took part of the Field Supply Depot.

The next day, the focus was on the District Commissioner's bungalow. On 10 April, the D.I.S. locality was evacuated. By 15 April, the garrison had been forced into a small, defended location based on Garrison Hill and Kuki Piquet. The latter position was taken by the Japanese in the early hours of 18 April, and the situation of the defenders was now desperate.

Meanwhile, the rest of the 161st Indian Infantry Brigade was fighting its way into Kohima, and the three brigades of the 2nd Infantry Division was also closing in on Kohima on three fronts. The siege was lifted on the morning of 18 April 1944, and the survivors evacuated to be replaced by troops from the 2nd Infantry Division and 161st Indian Infantry Brigade. The lifting of the siege was not by any account the end of the intense and bloody fighting in and around Kohima. The 2nd Infantry Division drove the 6th Infantry Brigade in the centre, with the 4th Brigade on the right flank and the 5th Brigade on the left flank. The road between Kohima and Dimapur reopened on 24 April.

The main assault to clear the Japanese from the Kohima area commenced on 4 May 1944. Supported by tanks from the 149th Regiment, Royal Armoured Corps, the British moved forward but found the Japanese deeply entrenched and defending stubbornly. The first phase of the attack ended on 15 May. The second phase commenced the next day with vigorous patrolling and dealing with Japanese counter attacks.

Other reinforcements were found by detaching the 23rd Infantry Brigade (L.R.P.) from Special Force and allocating it to XXXIII Indian Corps. The 268th Indian Infantry Brigade was also sent to the area arriving at Dimapur by 8 May, later to be incorporated into an ad-hoc formation designated the 21st Indian Infantry Division. By 20 May, the headquarters of the 7th Indian Division arrived at Dimapur from the Arakan, and on 24 May, the headquarters opened in Kohima with the 33rd and 161st Indian Infantry Brigades under command. Lieutenant General SLIM assigned Lieutenant General STOPFORD three tasks for XXXIII Indian Corps. These were:

- To prevent Japanese infiltration into the Brahmaputra and Surma valleys, or through the Lushai Hills,
- To keep the main road open between Dimapur – Kohima – Imphal,
- To assist IV Corps to destroy the Japanese troops west of the Chindwin River.

The reconquest of Kohima was completed on 5 June 1944, as the final Japanese defenders melted away, marking the end of two months of long and arduous siege and battle of Kohima. The same day, Lieutenant General STOPFORD gave orders to the divisional commanders of the 2nd Infantry Division (GROVER) and 7th Indian Infantry Division (MESSERVY) to move southwards and reopen the road to Imphal. The 2nd Division forced its way down the road itself, whilst the 7th Indian Division moved out into the countryside to the east towards the Chindwin River. On 22 June, units from the 2nd Infantry Division met with elements of the 5th Indian Infantry Division near Milestone 109 and the road was reopened throughout from Dimapur – Kohima – Imphal.

On 22 June 1944, the Corps had under command the:

- 2nd Infantry Division,
- 7th Indian Infantry Division,
- 23rd Infantry Brigade (L.R.P.),
- 268th Indian (Lorried) Brigade.

The Corps assumed responsibility for all operations east of the Manipur River, with the 23rd Indian Division transferred from IV Corps on 8 July 1944. Tamu was retaken on 4 August 1944. With Tamu retaken, the opportunity was taken to reorganise Allied forces in Burma. The 23rd Indian Division was replaced by the 11th (East African) Infantry Division. It assumed responsibility for operations on 7 August 1944. XXXIII Indian Corps assumed full responsibility for all operations in the Imphal area on 31 July 1944 to allow IV Corps to be relieved and fly back to India. This meant the corps took command of the 5th Indian Division and the 17th Indian Division. The 5th Indian Division drove the Japanese back along the Tiddim road, whilst the 11th (East African) Division advanced down the difficult Kabaw valley. Tiddim fell on 17 October 1944 to the two-pronged assault, and Falam was taken by the Lushai Brigade on the same day.

On 1 October 1944, XXXIII Indian Corps was ordered to cross the Chindwin River in the Kalewa area and make for Ye-U and Shwebo. The 5th Indian Division was still pushing on towards Kalemyo which fell on 13 November. At this stage, the 5th Indian Division was flown back to Imphal for a rest and recuperation, having been in continuous action for over one year. The 11th (East Africa) Infantry Division kept moving southwards towards Kalewa. The division crossed one brigade to the east bank, and then on the night of 3/4 December, the rest of the division crossed at Kalewa. Significant resistance was encountered, but by the 16th December the area had been cleared. The 20th Indian Division began crossing the Chindwin River to the north of Mawlaik on 8 December and pushed on into central Burma.

With the decision taken to develop Operation Extended Capital in late December 1944, XXXIII Indian Corps was reorganised. It now comprised:

- 2nd Infantry Division,
- 19th Indian Infantry Division,
- 20th Indian Infantry Division,
- 268th Indian Infantry Brigade,
- 254th Indian Tank Brigade.

The corps was tasked with crossing the Irrawaddy River north of Mandalay to draw the Japanese forces northwards to meet them. The 2nd Infantry Division advanced into the Shwebo plain, whilst the 19th Indian Division had made significant progress and linked up with the 36th Infantry Division at Indaw. The 20th Indian Division concentrated in the Kabaw valley. Shewbo was entered by troops from the 2nd Infantry Division and 19th Indian Division on 8 January 1945.

The latter formation had marched over four-hundred miles from the Chindwin River at Sittaung. Without much pause, the 19th Indian Division commenced crossing the Irrawaddy River on 12 January 1945. The 98th Indian Infantry Brigade crossed opposite Thabeikkyin to the north, with the 62nd and 64th Brigades crossing at Ngapyin-In and Singu to the south. The 20th Indian Division crossed the Irrawaddy River in the vicinity of Satpangon overnight 12/13 February 1945. Both the 100th and 32nd Indian Infantry Brigades established bridgeheads over the river. The 2nd Infantry Division crossed overnight 24/25 February at Ngazun, and soon three brigades and their armoured support were established safely across the river. The 19th Indian Division steadily advanced towards Mandalay from the north. On 9 March, troops reached the top of Mandalay Hill. Meanwhile the 62nd Indian Infantry Brigade captured Maymyo.

With the defeat of the Japanese Burma Area Army in the battle of Meiktila and at Mandalay, XXXIII Indian Corps was directed to advance down the Irrawaddy river to capture Prome and cut off the Japanese forces retreating from the Arakan. The corps had under command the:

- 7th Indian Infantry Division,
- 20th Indian Infantry Division,
- 268th Indian Infantry Brigade.

The former cleared the Yenangyaung and Mount Popa area and then moved south. The latter moved swiftly and captured Prome on 3 May 1945. It then set up a cordon along the Prome – Rangoon road to prevent the withdrawal of the Japanese 54th Division from the Arakan.

On 2 May 1945, XXXIII Indian Corps was redesignated as 12th Army for the occupation of Burma, while 14th Army went on to liberate Malaya. The corps had travelled from Assam to Rangoon, a distance of 27,127 miles. It alone had liberated some 55,000 square miles of territory in Burma.

Corps Commander

12 November 1942 – 15 October 1943

Lieutenant General (Acting) Alexander Frank Philip CHRISTISON, M.C.*, *p.s.c.*¹

23rd November 1943 – 28th May 1945

Lieutenant General (Temporary) Montagu George North STOPFORD, C.B., D.S.O., M.C., *p.s.c.*

Brigadier General Staff – (B.G.S.)

27th December 1942 – 18th July 1943

Brigadier (Temporary) Thomas Wynford REES, C.I.E., D.S.O., M.C., Indian Army

1943 – 13th October 1944

Brigadier (Temporary) George Neville WOOD, M.C., Dorset.R., *p.s.c.*

14th October 1944 – 25th December 1944

Brigadier (Temporary) Charles James George DALTON, O.B.E., R.A., *p.s.c.*

26th December 1944 – 2nd May 1945

Brigadier (Acting) Francis Charles SCOTT, R.A., *p.s.c.*

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

November 1942 – March 1943²

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

18 March 1943 – 23 March 1945

Brigadier (Acting) Donald James WILSON-HAFFENDEN, O.B.E., 8 Punjab R.

3rd February 1945 – 27th May 1945

Brigadier (Temporary) Roderick Idrisyn JONES, O.B.E., R.I.A.S.C.

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

9th April 1943 – 27th May 1945

Brigadier (Temporary) Derek Jarrett STEEVENS, M.C., *p.s.c.*³

1945 – 1945

Brigadier (Temporary) William SWINTON, M.C.**

Chief Engineer – (Ch. Eng.)

12 July 1943 – 2nd May 1945

Brigadier (Acting) John Francis Dawes STEEDMAN, M.B.E., M.C.

¹ Created K.B.E. on 15 December 1944.

² An alternative date for the replacement of Brigadier WALSH by Brigadier WILSON-HAFFENDEN is 15 October 1943, when WALSH was appointed D.A & Q.M.G. of 11th Army Group. Until a visit to the British Library can be arranged, this issue remains unresolved.

³ Awarded the C.B.E. on 2 June 1943 (H.M.'s Birthday Honours List).

Chief Signal Officer – (C.R.Sigs)

Nov 1942 – 14 August 1944

Brigadier (Temporary) Henry Raywood FIRTH, R. Sigs

15 August 1944 – 2 May 1945

Brigadier (Acting) Charles Norton STAFFORD, T.D.

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

November 1942 – 1945

Colonel C. M. G. LUFF (from 2 Div)

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

1944 – 2nd May 1945

Brigadier (Temporary) George James Villiers CROSBY, T.D., M.D., R.A.M.C.⁴

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

John Douglas Fellowes FISHER

Corps Paymaster

⁴ Awarded the C.B.E. on the 13th September 1945.

Bibliography and Sources

Please contact the webmaster, or see: <https://www.librarything.com/catalog/RobPALMER>