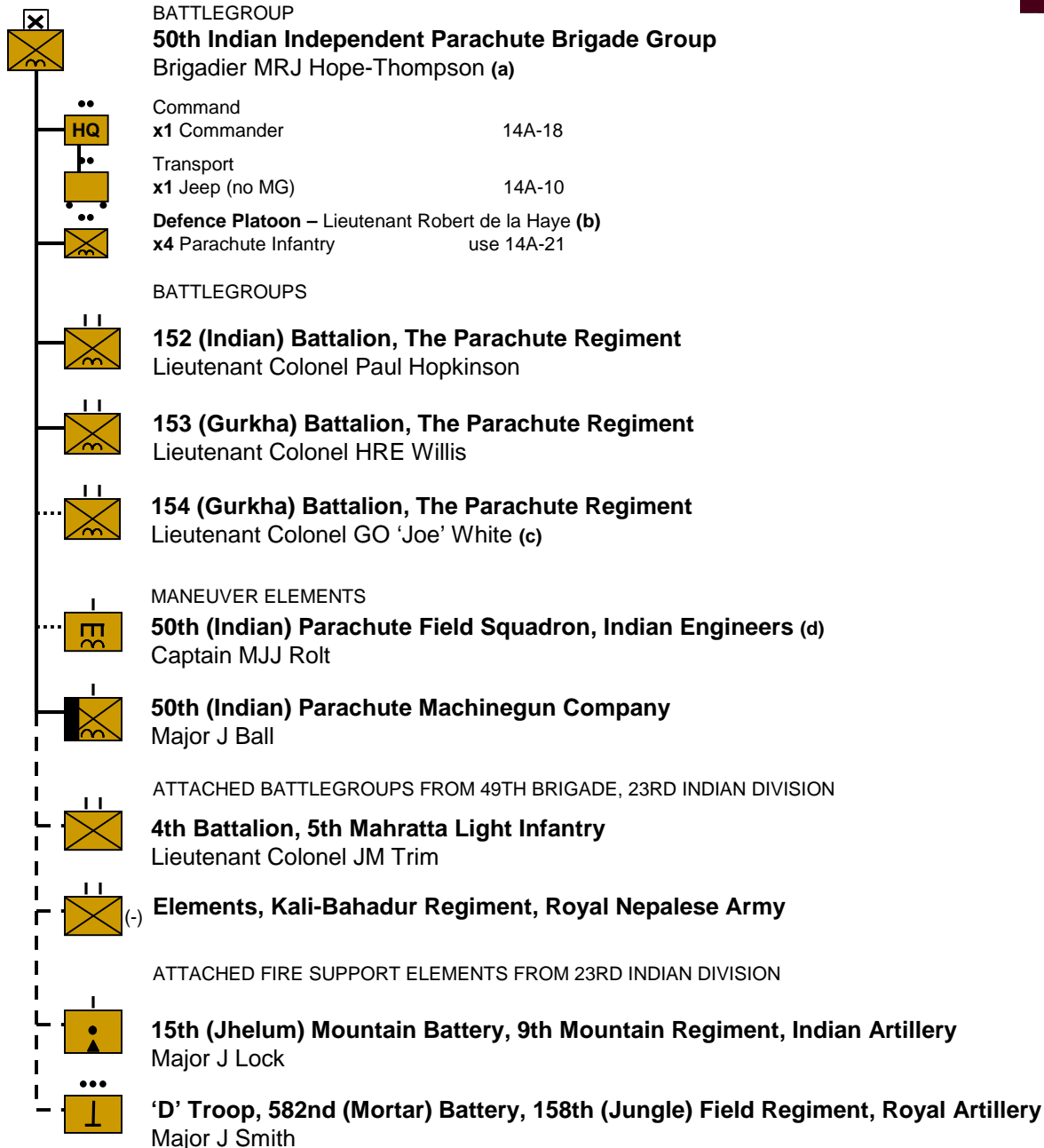


50th Indian Parachute Brigade

The Battle of Sangshak

22-26 March 1944



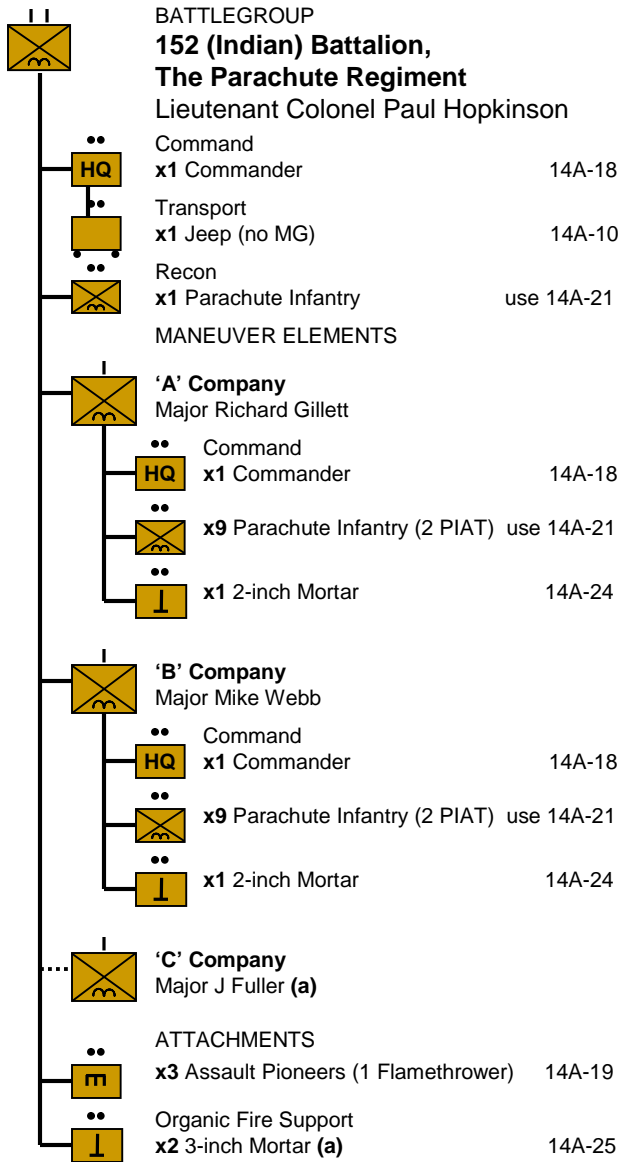
(a) 50th Indian Parachute Brigade Group was formed in 1943 from a British, an Indian and a Gurkha Battalion of the Parachute Regiment (151 to 153 Parachute Battalions respectively). However, 151 Para was soon transferred to the British 1st Airborne Division in the UK (renumbered as 156 Para), the gap being filled by the creation of 154 (Gurkha) Parachute Battalion. However, while 154 Para was still undergoing parachute training in India, the brigade was deployed to the Assam-Burma frontier near Kohima for front-line assimilation training with 23rd Indian Division (IV Corps). However, the brigade was soon to find itself dispersed on training and patrol tasks, without warning or orders, directly in the path of the Japanese 33rd Division; one of the elite spearhead divisions for Operation *Ha-Go*.

(b) As an independent Parachute Brigade, there should also have been a Pathfinder Platoon attached to the Brigade Headquarters. However, I have been unable to find evidence of one and if there was, it definitely did not fight at Sangshak. It is also worth noting that the Headquarters Company was not deployed forward to Sangshak – it remained to the rear with the Brigade administrative echelons and the Engineer Field Squadron.

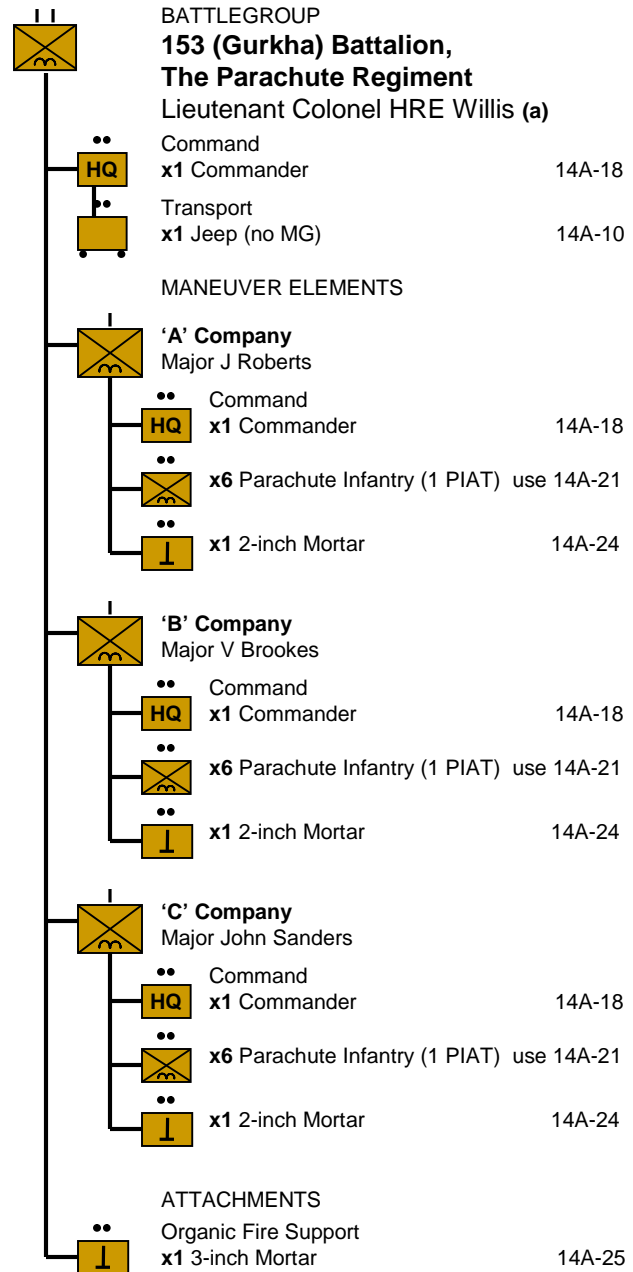
(c) As mentioned above, 154 Para was still undergoing parachute training in India when the brigade fought its battle at Sangshak.

(d) This unit is also known by its original title: 411 Field Squadron, Royal Bombay Sappers & Miners. As mentioned above, it stayed to the rear with the Brigade Headquarters Company and consequently did not fight at Sangshak.

The Parachute Battalions



(a) Fuller's 'C' Company was wiped out on 20th March, following a heroic stand at Point 7378, which gave the rest of the brigade priceless time to concentrate and form the defensive position at Sangshak. His company was reinforced by a section from the battalion's Mortar Platoon, as well as a section from 50th Parachute Machinegun Company. Consequently these elements were lost with Fuller. However, the official history of the 4/5th Mahrattas does record that twenty men from C Coy, 152 Para survived the battle at Point 7378, so x2 Para Infantry units could potentially be added to the strength of 152 Para at Sangshak.

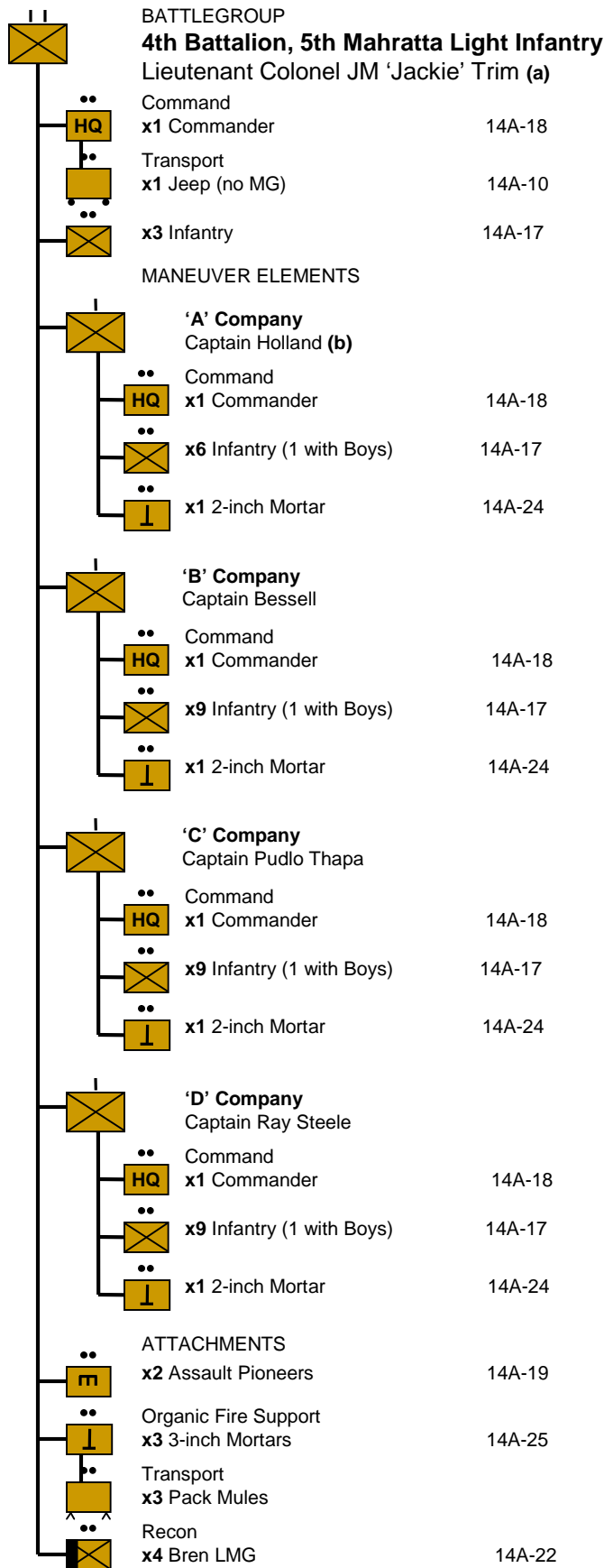


(a) 153 Para was some 60 miles distant from the rest of the brigade and was completely devoid of transport when orders were received to concentrate at Sangshak! By various unorthodox means, Lt Col Willis managed to secure twenty Dodge 1-ton trucks for his battalion and managed to squeeze roughly 60% of his men into them (though very few of their heavy weapons). Consequently the Gurkhas would be severely depleted even before meeting the Japanese at Sangshak.

Elements, 49th Brigade, 23rd Indian Division

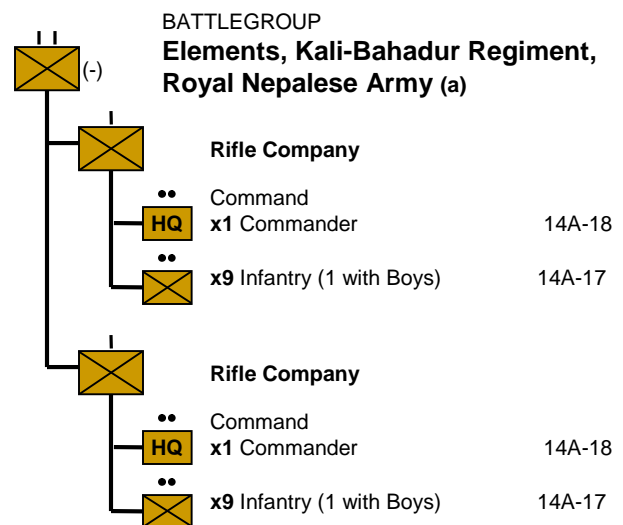


23rd INDIAN DIVISION



(a) The 4/5th Mahrattas, with the various artillery elements and the two Nepalese companies listed below, came under the command of 50th Parachute Brigade simply because the rapidly-developing and confused situation threw them together. The Japanese very quickly cut all lines of communication, forcing these units to join 50th Parachute Brigade's 'Box' at Sangshak.

(b) Holland's 'A' Company suffered thirty casualties on the 20th, during the unsuccessful attempt to relieve Fuller's 'C' Company, 152 Para from encirclement at Point 7378.

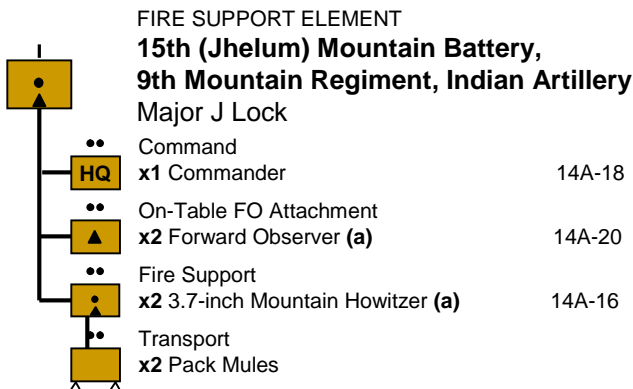


(a) I have been unable to discover the exact composition of Royal Nepalese units. It is generally recorded that like the regiments raised by the Indian princely states, they were trained, uniformed equipped as for the rest of 14th Army. This makes a great deal of sense, given the precarious lines of communication in the rear of 14th Army – it was better than everything was standardised. However, the two companies at Sangshak are recorded as being 'garrison troops and indifferently officered' and an anonymous officer's diary described them as 'only partly trained'. They are known to have been lacking in heavy weapons and behaved badly at Sangshak, despite their reputation as being among the élite of the Royal Nepalese Army, being uniquely recruited from the *Gurung* warrior caste.

Artillery Elements, 23rd Indian Division

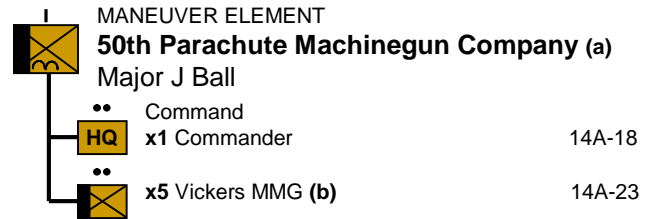


(a) Jungle Mortar Batteries are VERY large – this is only a troop, or half-battery, which is the smallest tactical division of Commonwealth artillery. Therefore the fire of the troop may not be split unless each mortar is self-observing. However, the mortars of the Para and Infantry Battalions were all massed under the command of 'D' Troop so can also be added to the fire missions.



(a) The battery consists of two troops, each of x1 3.7-inch Howitzer directed by one of the FOs. One FO may call the whole battery as Direct Fire Support, but will prevent the other FO calling for fire during that turn.

Other Elements, 50th Indian Parachute Brigade



(a) The company was split up as section attachments to the Infantry and Para Companies within the Sangshak Box.

(b) One MMG Section had been lost at Point 7378 on the 20th.

Suggested Unit Ratings

Trained

Kali-Bahadur Regiment, Royal Nepalese Army

Experienced

HQ & Defence Platoon, 50th Indian Parachute Brigade

152 (Indian) Battalion, The Parachute Regiment

153 (Gurkha) Battalion, The Parachute Regiment

50th (Indian) Parachute Machinegun Company

15th (Jhelum) Mountain Battery, 9th Mountain Regiment, Indian Artillery

Veteran

4th Battalion, 5th Mahratta Light Infantry

'D' Troop, 582nd (Mortar) Battery, 158th (Jungle) Field Regiment, Royal Artillery

Select Bibliography & References

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Khaki Drill & Jungle Green – Martin J Brayley & Richard Ingram

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The British Armies In World War Two. An Organisational History (Vols 1-4 & 1st Supplement) – David Hughes, James Broshot & David Ryan

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The Battle At Sangshak – Harry Seaman

The Fighting Cock – History of the 23rd Indian Division – AJF Doulton

The Battle of Sangshak – 4/5th Mahratta's Story – Anon

Valour to the Fore – The History of the 4th Battalion, 5th Mahratta Light Infantry 1800-2000 – Eustace D'Souza

Sangshak War Diary – Paul Hopkinson

Memories of an Indian Parachute Brigade – Anon

Uniforms & Modelling

In 15mm there is basically only one range of figures for the 14th Army – that is of course the superb range by Peter Pig. Any of these figures are ideal for the 23rd Indian Division troops listed above.

Uniform at this time was the 'Battledress, Jungle Green' (BDJG) which quickly faded in the field to a fairly light grey-green. Bush hats and the very similar Gurkha hat were made of felt and were khaki-brown in colour (the colour of European British Battledress is a good approximation) which was frequently wound around with a 'pugaree' in light khaki-drill or jungle green.

Indian and Gurkha Paratroops were issued with standard BDJG, the British Airborne helmet, the maroon British Airborne beret and Dennison smocks. However, it is recorded that all specifically-Airborne items and insignia were left at their Indian depot as a security measure when the brigade departed for Assam. Consequently, the Indian Paras looked like anyone else in the field and you can therefore simply use suitable XIVth Army figures to represent them.

It is recorded that 153 Para Bn and the Kali-Bahadurs wore the traditional felt Gurkha brimmed hat. The mountain artillery and Royal Artillery mortar crews meanwhile wore helmets with camouflage covers. The remainder wore a mixture of felt bush hats, 'cap comforters' (i.e. a folded stocking-cap) and the recently-issued floppy green jungle hat. Webbing is recorded as being dyed Jungle Green.

Eureka Miniatures produce Gurkha figures in Gurkha bush hat or steel helmet, some of whom are wielding the fearsome Gurkha *kukri* fighting knife. The hat-wearing figures are eminently suitable for 153 Para Bn and the Kali-Bahadurs.

Contrary to common belief, Indian troops did not routinely wear turbans unless they were of the Sikh religion, to whom the wearing of the turban is a core religious requirement (as is the wearing of a beard, as hair may not be cut). Observance of religious requirements was of very high importance to the Indian Army (particularly after the Great Mutiny of 1857) and consequently religious groups were massed together in their own platoons, companies and even battalions. However, there were no Sikh sub-units in the units listed above, so we may simply use 'British' figures in steel helmet and bush-hat. Luxurious military moustaches are de-rigueur among Indian (but not Gurkha) soldiers, so paint them on!

QRF produce a very nice little 3.7-inch Mountain Howitzer, though it is modelled with steel wheels and pneumatic tyres. Mountain Artillery Regiments would replace these wheels with lighter, spoked wooden wheels, so replace these with Napoleonic artillery wheels (or similar). You can use the supplied crew (painted Jungle Green) or use the Peter Pig 14th Army Crew pack.