Japanese Forces In The Kaladan Valley Dec 43 to May 44
‘Kubo-Butai’ (‘Kubo Force’)

(a) 1/213 had been in the Kaladan Valley for nearly a year since it had ejected the outposts of the Tripura Rifles. It was known to be understrength when 81 Division opened its campaign in the Kaladan and seems to have been suffering from a morale problem (if the testimony of two Japanese soldiers who surrendered in the early days of the campaign is to be believed). However, it was strong enough to resist the assault by 4th Nigeria Regiment on Kanwa. After Kanwa, the battalion was withdrawn to take part in Operation ‘Ha-Go’. Its place was taken in the Kaladan by 55th Cavalry Regiment in early February 1944.

(b) The Arakan Defence Force was part of the local auxiliary forces raised by the Japanese known as the ‘Burma National Army’ or ‘Burma Independence Army’ (otherwise known to Allied forces as the ‘BTA’ or ‘Burma Traitor Army’). Their training, organisation and motivation was virtually non-existent and they only seem to have put up a fight when bolstered by large numbers of Japanese. They were undoubtedly a useful intelligence-gathering tool however, and a counter to Allied covert reconnaissance units such as V-Force. ADF weapons were exclusively British, captured in vast quantities in 1942. Dress was a mixture of civilian dress and captured British/Indian Khaki Drill (‘KD’) tropical uniforms. 1st Gambia Regiment even managed to capture a British 2-inch mortar from the Burmese with sufficient ammunition to keep it in action for the duration of the campaign! It was to be a further six months before the Africans received an issue of 2-inch mortars from official sources!
Japanese Forces In The Kaladan Valley Dec 43 to May 44
55th Cavalry Regiment

(a) 55th Cavalry ‘Regiment’ (actually a battalion-sized force) was garrisoning Akyab Island at the start of 1944, when it received orders at the end of January to replace 1/213 Infantry Regiment in the Kaladan Valley, to allow 1/213 to participate in the forthcoming Operation ‘Ha-Go’. However, 55th Cavalry was a weak formation, consisting only of two large squadrons of dismounted cavalry and some heavy weapons. The rest of the regiment (including all the regiment’s light tanks) had been sent to bolster the defences of Guam in the Pacific. Nevertheless, 55th Cavalry proved themselves to be highly proficient soldiers, giving the 1st Sierra Leone Regiment a bloody nose at Kaladan village on 12th February 1944 and continuing to be a painful thorn in the side of 81st West African Division throughout 1944. The 55th Division records that the regiment was rejuvenated with the arrival of the aggressive Colonel Sugimoto on 28th March. Sugimoto also took command of the new ‘Kaladan-Butai’, when Koba’s 111th Infantry Regiment was withdrawn from the Kaladan on 5th May.
Japanese Forces In The Kaladan Valley Dec 43 to May 44
‘Koba-Butai’ (‘Koba Force’)

(BG-JAK03)

‘Koba-Butai’
(111th Infantry Regimental Group, 54th Infantry Division)
Colonel Hiroshi Koba (a)

Command
x1 Commander JA-19
x9 Riflemen JA-17

BATTLEGROUPS
BG-JAK02
55th Cavalry Regiment, 55th Infantry Division
Colonel Kawashima
Colonel Sugimoto (from 28 Mar 44)

BG-JAK05
2nd Battalion, 143rd Infantry Regiment, 55th Infantry Division
Major Matsuo

BG-JAK06
‘March Battalion’, 144th Infantry Regiment, 55th Infantry Division
Captain Honjo

BG-JAK07
1st Battalion, 1st ‘Subhas Bose’ Brigade, Indian National Army

ATTACHED BATTLEGROUPS
BG-JAK04
3rd Battalion, 111th Infantry Regiment
Major Kobayashi

BG-JAK07
2nd Battalion, 111th Infantry Regiment
(Detached – remained at Akyab)

BG-JAK06
1st Battalion, 1st ‘Subhas Bose’ Brigade, Indian National Army

MANOEUVRE ELEMENTS
Manoeuvre/Fire Support Element/Attachments
x1 Mixed Regimental Infantry/AT Gun Company

Command
x1 Commander JA-19

Direct Fire Support
x1 Type 41 75mm Rentai-Ho JA-12
x1 Type 94 37mm Antitank Gun JA-13

Transport
x2 Pack Mule

On-Table Attachment
x1 Forward Observer JA-20

(a) ‘Koba-Butai’ was formed at Myohaung at the end of February 1944 from the RHQ and 3rd Battalion (less 9th company) of 111th Infantry Regiment, plus 55th Cavalry, which was already fighting in the Kaladan, and a number of other battlegroups (listed above). The Regimental Gun Company of the 111th, escorted by 9th Company, left Akyab by boat on 12th March, travelling upriver and joining Koba on the 15th. For a time the RHQ operated with 12th Company, as a separate battlegroup from the remainder of 3/111th which operated with 10th & 11th Companies (the MMGs and Battalion Guns were split). The 111th seems to have conformed to the ‘Strengthened Modified’ regimental organisation. The 111th was withdrawn from the Kaladan on 5th May 1944, with the remaining battlegroups being handed over to Colonel Sugimoto of the 55th Cavalry as ‘Kaladan-Butai’. 
Japanese Forces In The Kaladan Valley Dec 43 to May 44
3/111th Infantry Regiment

3rd Battalion, 111th Infantry Regiment, 54th Infantry Division
Major Kobayashi

Command
x1 Commander                                     JA-19

MANOEUVRE ELEMENTS

Manoeuvre Element
9th Company (a)

Command
x1 Commander                                     JA-19

** x12 Riflemen                                   JA-17
** x3 50mm Grenade Discharger                   JA-25

Manoeuvre Element
10th Company

Command
x1 Commander                                     JA-19

** x12 Riflemen                                   JA-17
** x3 50mm Grenade Discharger                   JA-25

Manoeuvre Element
11th Company

Command
x1 Commander                                     JA-19

** x12 Riflemen                                   JA-17
** x3 50mm Grenade Discharger                   JA-25

Manoeuvre Element
12th Company (b)

Command
x1 Commander                                     JA-19

** x12 Riflemen                                   JA-17
** x3 50mm Grenade Discharger                   JA-25

Machine Gun Company

Command
x1 Commander                                     JA-19

** x6 Type 92 Heavy Machine Gun                   JA-21

Battalion Infantry Gun Company

Command
x1 Commander                                     JA-19

** Organic Fire Support                          JA-10
** x2 Type 92 70mm Daitai-Ho                     JA-10
** Transport                                      JA-22
** x2 Pack Mules                                  JA-22
** x4 Type 97 20mm Antitank Rifle                 JA-23

(a) 9th Company started the campaign detached from the rest of the battalion while it served as escort for the Regimental Gun Company. It rejoined the battalion on 15th March 1944.

(b) 12th Company formed a battlegroup with the RHQ for a time, taking with it one of the Battalion Gun sections and a section of MMGs.
Japanese Forces In The Kaladan Valley Dec 43 to May 44
2/143rd Infantry Regiment

2nd Battalion, 143rd Infantry Regiment, 55th Infantry Division (a)
Major Matsuo (a)
Command
x1 Commander JA-19

MANOEUVRE ELEMENTS

5th Company
** Command
HQ x1 Commander JA-19
** x9 Riflemen JA-17
** x3 50mm Grenade Discharger JA-25

6th Company
** Command
HQ x1 Commander JA-19
** x9 Riflemen JA-17
** x3 50mm Grenade Discharger JA-25

7th Company
** Command
HQ x1 Commander JA-19
** x9 Riflemen JA-17
** x3 50mm Grenade Discharger JA-25

8th Company
** Command
HQ x1 Commander JA-19
** x9 Riflemen JA-17
** x3 50mm Grenade Discharger JA-25

Machine Gun Company
** Command
HQ x1 Commander JA-19
** x4 Type 92 Heavy Machine Gun JA-21

ATTACHMENTS
Organic Fire Support
x1 Type 92 70mm Daitai-Ho JA-10
Transport
x1 Pack Mules

DIVISIONAL ATTACHMENTS

Direct Fire Support Element
Artillery Battery, 55th Artillery Regiment
** Command
HQ x1 Commander JA-19
** Direct Fire Support
x1 150mm Howitzer no card
** Transport
x1 Horse Limber JA-28
** On-Table Attachment
x1 Forward Observer JA-20

Detachment, Arakan Defence Force, Burma National Army (b)
** Command/Recce
HQ x1 Commander use 14A-18
** Recce
x9 Infantry use 14A-17
** Recce
x1 2-inch Mortar use 14A-24

(a) This battalion was reconstituted at Myohaung on 26th February 1944, having already been destroyed once that month at Sinzweya (the Battle of The ‘Admin Box’) in Operation ‘Ha-Go’. Major Matsuo was discharged from hospital to rebuild his old battalion, using a few survivors from the old 2/143rd, plus detachments from 144th Infantry Regiment. It also acquired a single 150mm howitzer (it’s tactical impact was decisive at Kyauktaw, so I think it justifies inclusion in this orbat) and a detachment of ADF along the way.
BG-JAK06

‘March’ Battalion, 144th Infantry Regiment, 55th Infantry Division (a)

Command

x1 Commander JA-19

MANOEUVRE ELEMENTS

Manoeuvre Element

1st Company

** Command

x1 Commander JA-19

** x24 Riflemen JA-17

** x3 50mm Grenade Discharger JA-25

(a) This battalion was created at Myohaung sometime around 20th February 1944 from a large reinforcement draft destined for 144th Regiment, which was fighting with 55th Division on the main Arakan Front. This force was at least 1,000 strong (possibly as high as 1,500), though it lacked sufficient officers and only one-quarter were initially armed. The arms problem was resolved by 28 (Arakan) Army, who flew in enough smallarms, but no battalion support weapons. It was placed under the command of one Captain Honjo, who previously commanded a small communications or administration unit in Myohaung and now found himself commanding a large garrison force. The battalion does not appear to have been used offensively against 81st (West African) Division and was almost certainly employed as the garrison of Myohaung. This organisation is entirely conjectural, but does reflect the large strength of the unit, added to its lack of leadership and battalion weapons.

Manoeuvre Element

2nd Company

** Command

x1 Commander JA-19

** x24 Riflemen JA-17

** x3 50mm Grenade Discharger JA-25

Manoeuvre Element

3rd Company

** Command

x1 Commander JA-19

** x24 Riflemen JA-17

** x3 50mm Grenade Discharger JA-25

Manoeuvre Element

4th Company

** Command

x1 Commander JA-19

** x24 Riflemen JA-17

** x3 50mm Grenade Discharger JA-25

Captain Honjo (a)

This battalion was created at Myohaung sometime around 20th February 1944 from a large reinforcement draft destined for 144th Regiment, which was fighting with 55th Division on the main Arakan Front. This force was at least 1,000 strong (possibly as high as 1,500), though it lacked sufficient officers and only one-quarter were initially armed. The arms problem was resolved by 28 (Arakan) Army, who flew in enough smallarms, but no battalion support weapons. It was placed under the command of one Captain Honjo, who previously commanded a small communications or administration unit in Myohaung and now found himself commanding a large garrison force. The battalion does not appear to have been used offensively against 81st (West African) Division and was almost certainly employed as the garrison of Myohaung. This organisation is entirely conjectural, but does reflect the large strength of the unit, added to its lack of leadership and battalion weapons.
Japanese Forces In The Kaladan Valley Dec 43 to May 44
1/1st ‘Subhas Bose’ Brigade, INA

BG-JAK07
1st Battalion, 1st ‘Subhas Bose’ Brigade, Indian National Army (a)

MANOEUVRE ELEMENTS

HQ

1st Company

** Command/Recce
   x1 Commander
   use 14A-18

** Command/Recce
   x9 Infantry
   use 14A-17

** Recce
   x1 2-inch Mortar
   use 14A-24

2nd Company

** Command/Recce
   x1 Commander
   use 14A-18

** Recce
   x9 Infantry
   use 14A-17

** Recce
   x1 2-inch Mortar
   use 14A-24

3rd Company

** Command/Recce
   x1 Commander
   use 14A-18

** Recce
   x9 Infantry
   use 14A-17

** Recce
   x1 2-inch Mortar
   use 14A-24

ATTACHMENTS (b)

x1 Vickers Medium Machine Gun
   use 14A-23

Transport
   x1 Pack Mules

Organic Fire Support
   x1 3-inch Mortar
   use 14A-25

Transport
   x1 Pack Mules

(a) This rather unusual unit represents the first time that the INA had put an full combat unit into the field. Previously their efforts had been purely propaganda-related and as ‘jitter-parties’ attached to Japanese units (which were already active on the main Arakan Front). However, their combat performance against 81st (West African) Division (and later against other units) was universally poor, with a great many ‘volunteers’ deserting to the Allies at the first opportunity. Despite their poor fighting record though, they did manage to gain a propaganda victory by planting their flag on Indian soil after the Battle of ‘Frontier Hill’ (Mowdok) in May 1944, when ‘Kaladan-Butai’ (including this battalion) forced ‘Hubforce’ (7/16th Punjab, 1st Gambia and 1st Tripura Rifles) to withdraw from their isolated border position. Like their Burmese equivalents, INA uniforms were ex-British/Indian Khaki Drill (‘KD’) tropical uniforms. Headgear was a forage cap or helmet, though as two of the companies listed here were Sikh, they would have worn the turban. Weapons were also British and organisation was along British lines. INA troops were usually referred to in Allied reports as ‘JIFs’ for ‘Japanese-Indian Forces’.

(b) I don’t have any details on battalion support weapons, though being a combat unit, it seems likely that they would have had some heavy support. The battalion was not strong (500 men), so I have only listed a section each of 3-inch Mortars and Vickers MMGs, which had been captured in large quantities in 1942.
Kaladan-Butai was created on 5th May 1944, when Koba’s 111th Infantry Regimental Group was ordered to return to 55th Division. As the senior ranking officer, Colonel Sugimoto of 55th Cavalry Regiment was placed in overall command of all forces in the Kaladan Valley. 81st (West African) Division was by now marching west through the mountains to link up with the main body of XV Corps. However, a joint Indian-African force called ‘Hubforce’ (7/16th Punjab, 1st Gambia and 1st Tripura Rifles) were withdrawing north up the Kaladan Valley, so as to cover the head of the valley (and the India/Burma border) at Mowdok. Sugimoto was tasked with pursuing this force and if possible, to disrupt Allied lines of communication beyond the border (the INA battalion was particularly enthusiastic about this mission, hoping to spark a full-scale guerrilla war within India). Freshly reinforced by the strong 1/29th Infantry Regiment, the force fought a series of running battles up the Kaladan, before finally hitting the prepared positions at Frontier Hill (which straddled the border) on 10th May 1944. A Bitter two-week battle ensued (including a brief battle between the Sikh ‘B’ Company of 7/16th Punjab and the two Sikh companies of 1st ‘Subhas Bose’ Brigade) until eventually ‘Hubforce’ withdrew from the position on 26th May, leaving a few square miles of Indian soil in Japanese/INA hands for the duration of the monsoon.

Interestingly, in the later Kaladan battles and again at Frontier Hill, there seems to be a reasonably large amount of artillery used by the Japanese – they regularly hit recently-vacated Allied positions with heavy concentrations, which seems to suggest a unit rather more powerful than 70mm Battalion Guns. Maybe Koba left his Regimental Gun Company with Sugimoto? Or perhaps the newly-arrived 1/29th had brought some elements of its Regimental Gun Company or divisional artillery with it?
BG-JAK09
1st Battalion, 29th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division

Command
x1 Commander JA-19

MANOEUVRE ELEMENTS

Manoeuvre Element
1st Company
** Command
HQ x1 Commander JA-19
** x12 Riflemen JA-17
** x3 50mm Grenade Discharger JA-25

Manoeuvre Element
2nd Company
** Command
HQ x1 Commander JA-19
** x12 Riflemen JA-17
** x3 50mm Grenade Discharger JA-25

Manoeuvre Element
3rd Company
** Command
HQ x1 Commander JA-19
** x12 Riflemen JA-17
** x3 50mm Grenade Discharger JA-25

Manoeuvre Element
4th Company
** Command
HQ x1 Commander JA-19
** x12 Riflemen JA-17
** x3 50mm Grenade Discharger JA-25

Manoeuvre Element/Attachments
Machine Gun Company
** Command
HQ x1 Commander JA-19
** x6 Type 92 Heavy Machine Gun JA-21

Manoeuvre/Fire Support Element/Attachments
Battalion Infantry Gun Company
** Command
** Organic Fire Support
x2 Type 92 70mm Daitai-Ho JA-10
** Transport
x2 Pack Mules
** x4 Type 97 20mm Antitank Rifle JA-23

(a) This battalion seems to have followed the ‘Strengthened Modified’ organisation. It was certainly strong and was well-served by 70mm Battalion Guns.
Japanese Forces In The Kaladan Valley Dec 43 to May 44
Unit Quality Ratings

Veteran

111th Infantry Regiment
55th Cavalry Regiment
2/143rd Infantry Regiment
1/29th Infantry Regiment

Experienced

1/213rd Infantry Regiment

Trained

‘March’ Battalion, 144th Infantry Regiment

Raw

Arakan Defence Force
1/1st ‘Subhas Bose’ Brigade