



‘Ananse Goes To War’

4th Battalion, The Nigeria Regiment At Kanwa The Kaladan Valley, Burma 25th January 1944



*A ‘Battlefront: WWII’ Scenario
By R Mark Davies*

‘As the [81st West African] Division’s badge, General Woolner chose a black spider, head down on a yellow ground. This spider represented Ananse, a well-known figure in Ashanti mythology, who can change into a great many guises and perform seemingly impossible feats, overcoming his enemies by guile rather than by force.’

-From ‘War Bush’ by John A L Hamilton

Scenario Overview

In January 1944, the newly-created British 14th Army, under the command of its charismatic and inspirational leader, Lieutenant-General ‘Uncle Bill’ Slim, was going back onto the offensive. Slim’s old command, XV Indian Corps (now commanded by Lieutenant General Christison), was taking the war back to the Japanese, with two excellent Indian divisions – the 5th and the 7th – spearheading the advance into the old Kingdom of Arakan.

This was to be no easy task. The First Arakan Campaign of 1943 had ended disastrously for the Allies, with bull-headed, direct attacks on fortified positions, first being held and then surrounded and destroyed by the Japanese. It was only due to Slim’s last-minute intervention in the campaign that the corps was not completely destroyed in the Arakan.

So it was with some trepidation that the Allies renewed the offensive at the end of December 1943. However, this time things would be different. Having been re-organised and re-trained by Slim, the divisions would now exploit the indirect, rather than the direct approach to Japanese positions. Armour, artillery and air power were to be used in decisive masses rather than penny-packets. When the inevitable Japanese flanking counter-attack came, the divisions would form defensive ‘boxes’ and would hold out while being totally supplied by air, while reserves moved up to crush the Japanese – in these battles of the ‘boxes’, the besieger would become the besieged.

There would be another card up Slim’s sleeve... A division moved into India with utmost secrecy... A light division that moved fast over impossible terrain, almost entirely using human transport... A division relying entirely upon air power for resupply and casualty evacuation, carving airstrips out of the jungle as it went... A division that could penetrate into the Kaladan Valley, which both sides had previously thought impassable to modern armies, and ‘outflank the outflankers’... A division of Africans who wore the spider badge on their sleeves... The 81st (West African) Division.

The West Africans moved into the Kaladan during early January 1944. Preparations had been made prior to their arrival – an Indian battalion, the 5/9th Jats had built a ‘firm base’ at Mowdok on the Burmese/Indian frontier and had pushed Japanese patrols right back down into the Kaladan, while amassing every *khisti* (the Arakanese native dugout boat, which came in a variety of sizes, with or without engines) they could get their hands on, in preparation to move troops and supplies down the many waterways of the Arakan. The West African engineers also created a remarkable feat of engineering, the ‘West African Way’, which was already fifty miles long and just sufficient to get a handful of Jeeps, 15cwt trucks and the division’s twelve 3.7-inch Mountain Howitzers into the Kaladan Valley. The West African Way would continue to grow as the division advanced – reaching over 120 miles in length by mid-March 1944!

As the division’s two brigade groups (5 and 6 West African) advanced south down the Kaladan River, numerous small skirmishes and chance encounters broke out with isolated patrols and village garrisons belonging either to the BTA (‘Burma Traitor Army’) or 1st Battalion, 213th Infantry Regiment of the Imperial Japanese Army (I/213). The main river-port town of Paletwa was taken by 4th Battalion, The Nigeria Regiment (4 NR) on 24th January without opposition. However, attempts to patrol further downriver to the village of Kanwa ran into fierce resistance. It seemed that I/213 was about to make its stand...

Briefing For Lieutenant Colonel R A Baillie, Commanding 4th Battalion, The Nigeria Regiment, 6 West African Brigade

Situation – Dawn, 25th January 1944

The Japanese position at Kanwa must be eradicated. The division intends to use the Kaladan and Pi Chaung rivers to transport supplies and troops and from Kanwa the enemy will be able to dominate the Kaladan River. The Brigadier has therefore tasked you with eliminating the Japanese garrison at Kanwa.

You have now concentrated all your battalion at Paletwa on the west bank of the river and have been reinforced by a company from 1st Battalion, The Gambia Regiment. Brigade has also promised to provide supporting fire from the east bank when your assault goes in, though the three divisional batteries of 3.7-inch howitzers are still struggling down the 'West African Way'.

You have split your command into two. The main body, consisting of three rifle companies, your Battalion Headquarters and the Defence/AA Platoon, will march by night to the west, via Thantewa and over the 1961 foot-high peak to the west of Kanwa to Leingson. The rest of the force, consisting of one of your rifle companies, the Gambian company and the Mortar Platoon will be commanded by your second-in-command, Major Walwyn. Walwyn will launch an attack down the riverbank from the north while your force comes in from the high ground to the west and south.

Mission

You are to assault and destroy the Japanese garrison in Kanwa, with the intention of opening the route south for river traffic.

Execution

Your forces are listed in detail below. 6 WA Brigade will support you with the Mortar Troop from 3 WA Light Battery, who have sent FOOs to accompany your forces. The massed Mortar Platoons of 1st Battalion, The Gambia Regiment and 1st Battalion, The Sierra Leone Regiment will also fire in concert with 3 Light Battery's mortars. 1st Battalion, The Sierra Leone Regiment will also mass all their Brens on the eastern bank to pour suppressing fire onto the Japanese positions as you attack. Vickers guns would be better, but the Corps Commander still hasn't provided any, so we'll just have to do what we can with what we've got!

Enemy forces are known to consist of the 1st Battalion, 213th Infantry Regiment, commanded by one Major Kubo. Believe it or not, we actually took two prisoners from their 2nd Company yesterday and they have been remarkably talkative (it seems that the Japanese do not train their men to resist interrogation, as they presume that no Japanese soldier would allow himself to be taken prisoner!). 1/213 has been in the Kaladan ever since the invasion of 1942 – the poor sods think that they have simply been forgotten about and left to rot in this hell-hole and are understrength due to natural wastage. So we seem to have morale on our side. However, they are well dug-in and are well equipped. Their four rifle companies are also backed up by a force of BTA (Burma Traitor Army).

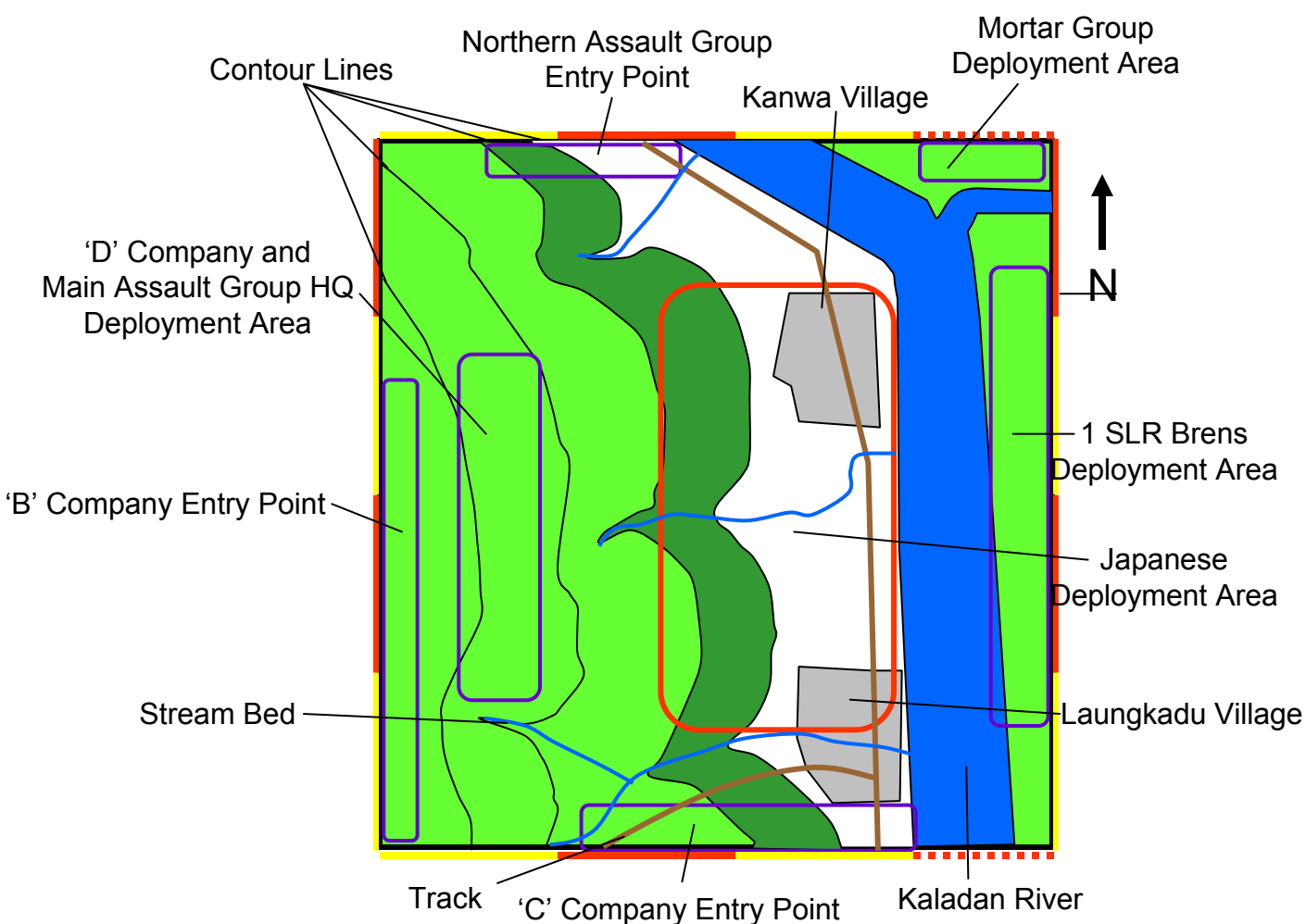
As far as we can make out, 1/213 is the only major Japanese formation between here and Myohaung, which is a pleasant surprise. If you can make short work of them, we may well be able to take Myohaung 'on the bounce'. This will threaten the entire Japanese position in the Arakan, as Myohaung is a major supply hub for them. This will undoubtedly make XV Corps' life easier on the main Arakan front.

Deployment

'D' Company, the Battalion HQ and Defence/AA Platoon may be deployed on-table within the area marked on the map.

'B' Company, 'C' Company and the Northern Group may enter the table during the African Maneuver Phase of Turn 1 (or any later turn) from the table edges marked on the map.

The supporting mortars and machineguns from the East Bank Group start deployed within the areas marked on the map.



Terrain Notes:

The table is 4 feet high by x 3.75 feet wide. Solid divisions along the side are 1', dotted are 9".

Kaladan River – Deep, wide, tidal and impassable to all troops. The river should be five to seven inches wide.

Stream Beds – These are largely dry. Class as 'Shallow Gully' as per the main rule book.

Track – Class as 'Open Terrain' where it crosses the paddy, but as 'Sparse Concealment' where it traverses forest and bamboo. It is also mounted on a 'Low Embankment' where it crosses the paddy, though is crossed by 'Shallow Gullies' where it fords the streams.

Light Green Areas – Forest – Class as 'Woods With Underbrush' as per the main rulebook.

Dark Green Areas – Bamboo – Class as 'Woods With Underbrush', but add half-speed restriction to troops, plus bog-down check.

White Areas – Dry Paddy – Class as 'Open' terrain, though criss-crossed with occasional 'Low Embankments' as per the main rulebook.

Grey Areas – Village – These consist of rough groups of 'bashas', which are relatively flimsy bamboo-wicker huts on stilts. They provide no additional cover and very little concealment. Therefore simply class them as Sparse Area Concealment with no cover benefit or movement penalty.

Contour Lines – These each represent FIVE height elevations! The difference in height from the western edge of the map to the river is 1,000 feet! There is no need to represent this dramatic terrain on the table though (it would probably be impossible for most people). Simply state that any unit in the western forest area may directly observe units in the paddy and village areas (with the +1 for higher elevation). Units in the paddy and village areas may likewise observe units in the western forest as though they are on the edge of dense concealment. Observation to or from units in the bamboo conforms to the normal spotting rules. Note that the East Bank Support Group are also on higher terrain and may therefore claim the +1 spotting modifier when observing the village and paddy areas.

Victory Conditions

Casualties: **1VP** each enemy Gun KO or ME at $\geq 25\%$ casualties $< 50\%$, **2VP-ME** $\geq 50\%$ $< 75\%$, **3VP-ME** $\geq 75\%$

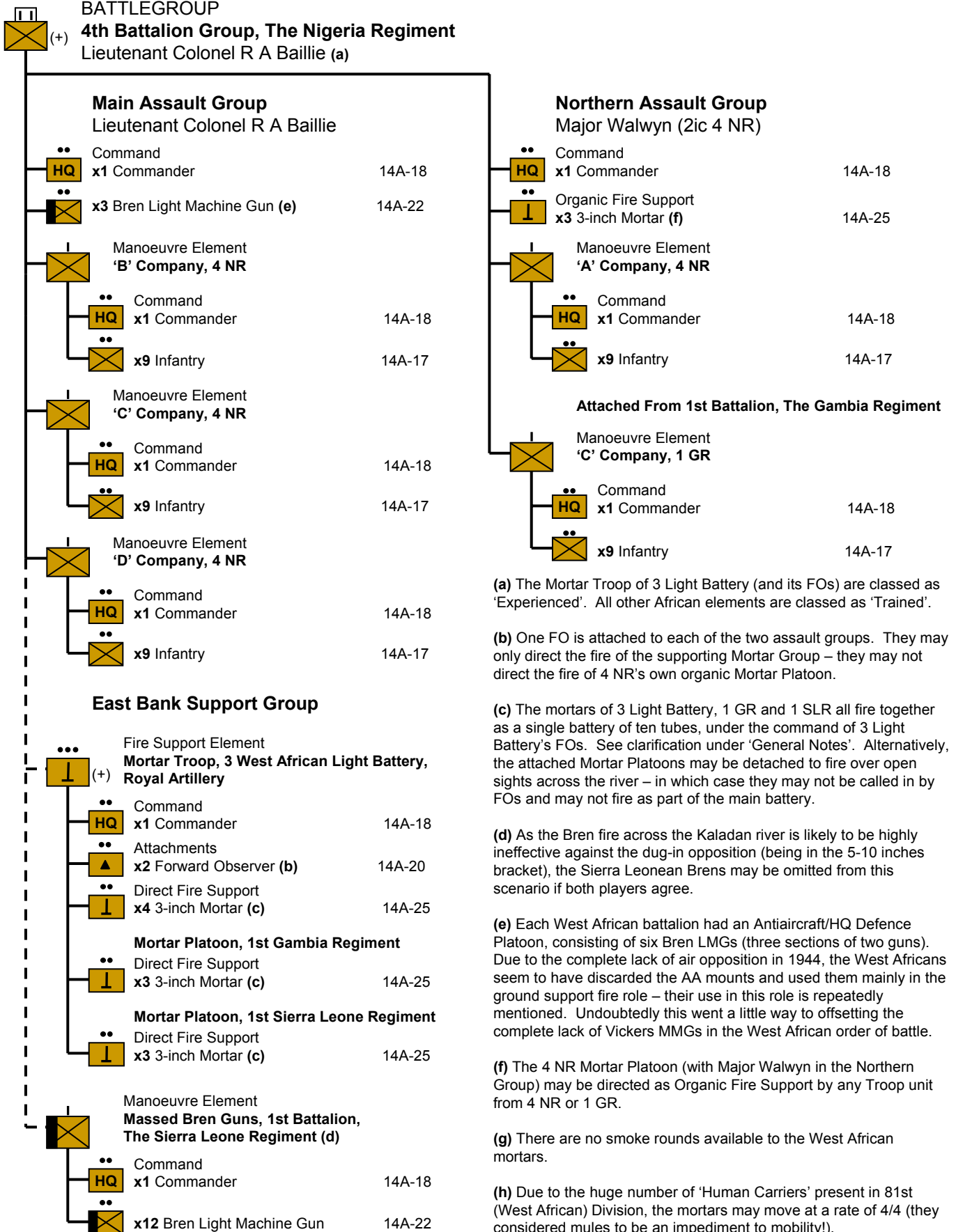
3 VPs are earned for occupying Kanwa, with no undisordered enemy forces within 5 inches of the village.

1 VP is earned for occupying Laungkadu, with no undisordered enemy forces within 5 inches of the village.

2 VPs are earned for KO'ing all Japanese HMGs.

West African Order Of Battle

(Elements, 6 West African Brigade Group, 81st (West African) Division)



Briefing For Major Kubo, **Commanding 1st Battalion, 213th Infantry Regiment, 33rd Division**

Situation – Dawn, 25th January 1944

The situation is very confused. Judging from scattered reports from your patrols and those of the Burmese auxiliary ADF (Arakan Defence Force), it would seem that a battalion- or even brigade-sized enemy force has crossed the Indian-Burmese frontier near Mowdok and has descended into the Kaladan Valley.

Following a number of skirmishes over the last few days, you have decided to concentrate your battalion in prepared positions at Kanwa. From there your machineguns can dominate a bend in the Kaladan River – you already know that the enemy is using the river to move troops and supplies (as you do). At the very least, you will be able to inflict considerable losses on the enemy in terms of time and men.

Mission

You are to defend your prepared position Kanwa, with the intention of delaying the enemy's movement south for as long as possible.

Execution

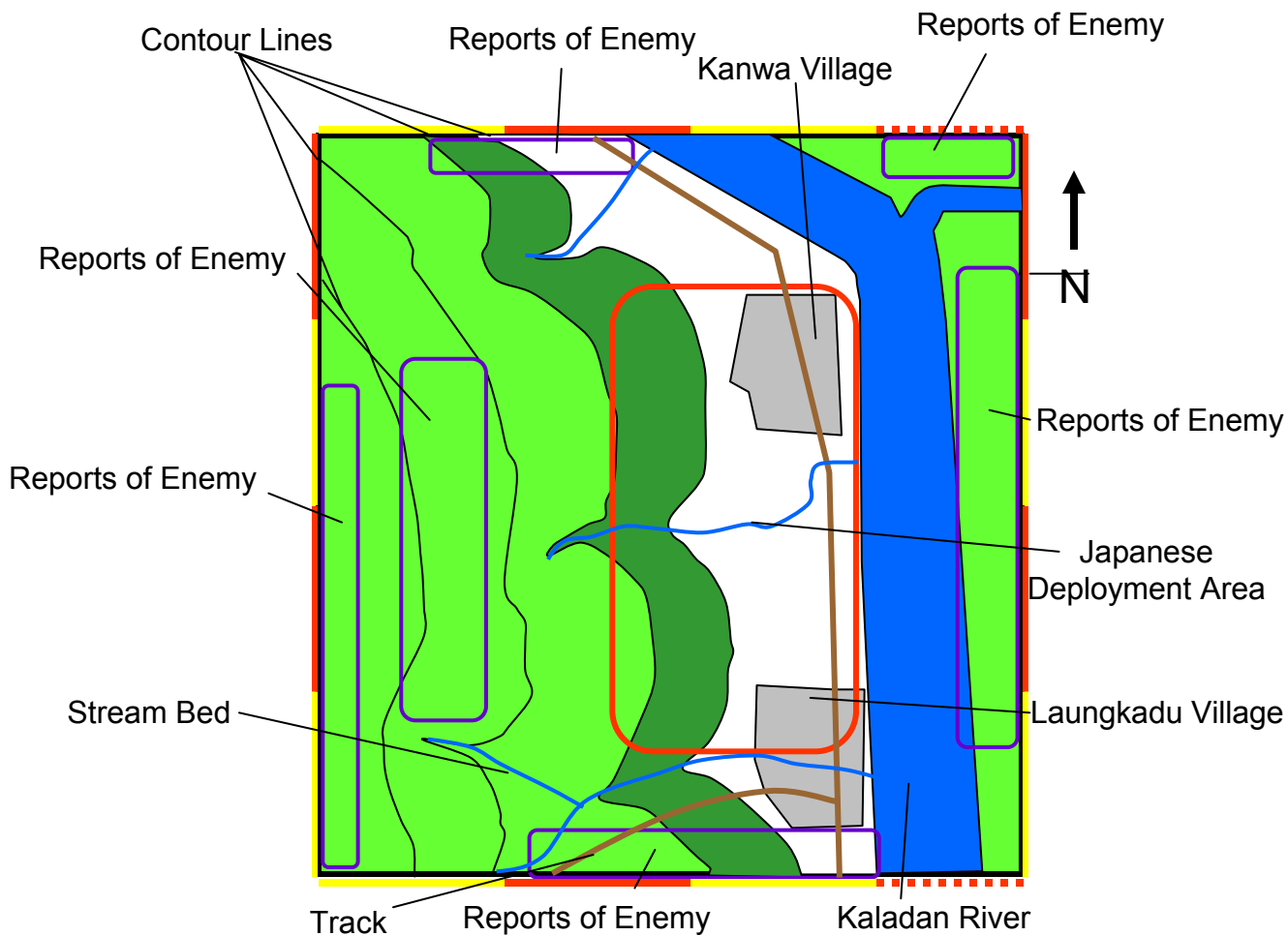
Your forces are listed in detail below. Essentially, you have four understrength rifle companies, plus a company of unreliable ADF, your battalion Gun Platoon and heavy machine guns. All are well dug-in around Kanwa and Laungkadu.

Enemy forces, strength and intentions are not very clear. You know that they are present in the Kaladan Valley at least battalion strength – probably stronger – and in the west a similar force is reported to be moving down the Pi Chaung, which runs roughly parallel to the Kaladan. You know that they are mostly Africans and are travelling light – they do not appear to have any motor transport and certainly no armour. They also seem to be light on artillery and air support.

In the last twenty-four hours, the enemy has taken the town of Paletwa, just to the north. African patrols along the river have also probed your defences at Kanwa. Your patrols have also encountered the enemy on the eastern bank of the Kaladan. Within the last few hours, reports have started coming in of unknown forces to your west and south – it seems they have you surrounded.

Deployment

You have had a reasonable amount of time to prepare a defence. All your forces are dug in and you have also built eight log bunkers [player note – these may each hold 1 Troop unit and may be sited anywhere within the deployment area. They are well camouflaged and are sighted as Troops].



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Victory Conditions

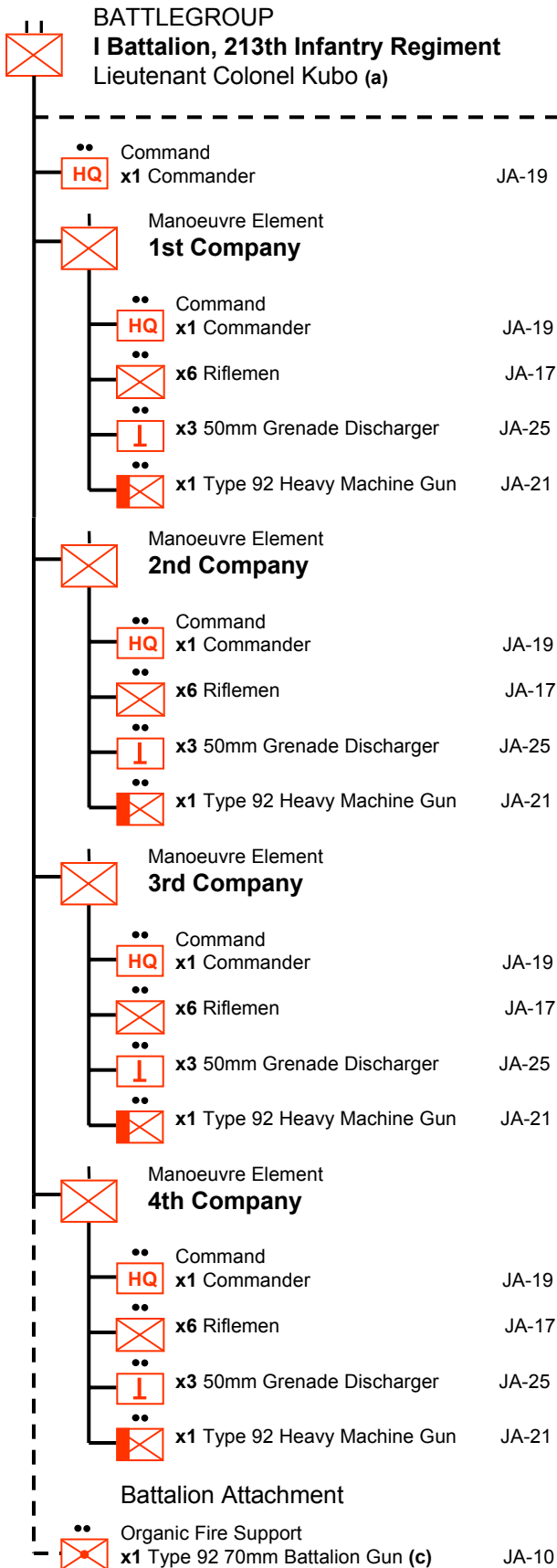
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Japanese Order Of Battle

(Elements, 33rd Infantry Division)



Local Attachments



(a) All Japanese elements are classed as 'Experienced', with the Burmese ADF/BTA Company classed as 'Raw'.

(b) The Japanese raised a local defence militia called the 'Arakan Defence Force' (ADF) from sympathetic locals. They were known as the 'Burma Traitor Army' (BTA) to British/Indian/African forces. Like Chandra Subhas Bose's 'Indian National Army' (INA), they were uniformed in captured British/Indian khaki drill uniforms and were very well equipped with British weapons, including Bren LMGs at section level and 2-inch Mortars at platoon level – items that were still sorely lacking in 14th Army! Indeed, 1st Gambia Regiment acquired their first 2-inch Mortar from the BTA during their first clash of the campaign in 1944 and it remained in good use throughout the rest of that year (with ammunition captured from Japanese and BTA dumps), as new mortars simply were not forthcoming from official sources! However, unlike the INA there was no intention to use the BTA offensively. The Japanese had a very poor opinion of them, and judging from African accounts, they simply would not even stand and fight defensively if there was not a substantial force of Japanese regulars to back them up.

(c) The Battalion Gun is netted-in to the battalion landline phone network. It may therefore be directed by any Japanese (not ADF) commander, provided it does not move from its starting position. If it does move, it may then only be directed by the battalion commander.

General Notes

- The game lasts for 15 turns.
- The Africans move first.
- Uniform notes – the West Africans started the campaign in khaki drill uniforms. Jungle Green battledress only began to arrive (by air) once the campaign was underway, sometime in February. The uniforms here should therefore be almost all khaki drill. Headgear in 81st WA was exclusively the slouch hat – steel helmets were left in India as unnecessary weight.
- The African Mortar Battery may fire using the following patterns:

+0	+0	+0	+0	+0
+0	+0	+0	+0	+0

Ten-Tube Shelling Mission

+1	+1	+1	+1
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or

+1	+1
+1	+1

Ten-Tube Concentration Mission
(one Troop of four tubes and two Platoons of three)

+2	+2
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Four-Tube Troop Concentration Mission,
thickened by two three-tube Platoons

Historical Outcome

The Japanese position at Kanwa was just too strong for the Africans to overcome and they were repulsed after repeated attacks from all directions. The Japanese then withdrew unmolested, under cover of darkness, by *khisti* down the Kaladan.

Shortly afterwards, Kubo's reinforced I/213th, redesignated 'Kubo-Butai' or 'Kubo-Force' was reassigned to form part of Operation 'Ha-Go' and was to cut the line of communication behind XV Corps advancing down the Arakan coast. Their place in the Kaladan was to be taken by 55th Divisional Cavalry Regiment (a grand title for what was effectively two companies of infantry and was to be the main thorn in 81 Division's side for almost the whole of 1944).

As for the West Africans; they advanced down the Kaladan for another month, fighting a number of minor actions and skirmishes until reaching the main river-port town of Kyauktaw. Along the way they were reinforced by the 11th East African Scout Battalion and by a troop of Bofors Guns flown in by Dakota. They were now in a position to threaten Myohaung.

However, they had drawn attention to themselves... A new Japanese force, 'Koba-Butai', led by 111th Infantry Regiment, swiftly moved up from Myohaung, routed the 11th EA Scouts and forced the Africans back up the Kaladan. Numerous major actions were fought throughout March, but the Africans were able to withdraw from the Kaladan in good order before the monsoon started in late April...

They would return to the Kaladan...