

ORIGINS & PURPOSE OF THIS LEAFLET

The Battle of Kohima was fought between Japanese and British/Indian forces from April 4 to June 10, 1944. This leaflet is designed as a reference for residents of Kohima as a guide to present and future visitors and a memento to past visitors. It is not a history of the battle, but an aid to those who seek to trace it on the actual ground where it was fought. Recognised by historians as one of the turning points of World War II, it was an epic encounter between two well-matched enemies, a devastating event visited upon the town of Kohima, then a small hill station, by the chances of war. Almost every inch was fought over. The map and the legend in this leaflet identify the places which played crucial parts in the battle.

The purpose of the leaflet is to help maintain the memory of a moment in history which changed Kohima forever."



THE KOHIMA EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY

The Kohima Educational Society was founded in Kohima in 2006, by a group of Kohima citizens united by their devotion to educational causes in Nagaland. Its counterpart in the UK, the Kohima Educational Trust, was founded by the British survivors of the battle on the occasion of their final reunion in 2004. Both bodies are registered charities. This leaflet, designed to help maintain in public memory the events of 1944, is one of many joint projects of the Society and the Trust. Others include a central reference library for schools in Kohima; scholarships for needy and deserving pupils; help with nursing education; sponsorship of seminars on teaching; exchange visits of young people between Nagaland and the UK.

The work of the Society and the Trust is done entirely by honorary Trustees and is funded by voluntary contributions. Support for the UK Trust has come from veterans, their widows and families, who see the Trust as fulfilment of a debt of honour to the Naga people, from the contemporary British Army and other public and private sources. Those wishing to support the Trust and the Society are invited to send contributions to either of the following addresses:

The Treasurer
The Kohima Educational Society
Baptist High • Kohima 797003
Nagaland • India

The Treasurer
The Kohima Educational Trust
5 Beechwood Drive
Marlow • SL72DH • UK
(Registered Charity No 1102045)

FURTHER INFORMATION

The Kohima Educational Society maintains a list of books about the battle. A complete library about the Burma Campaign 1941 - 1945 in English and Japanese can be consulted at SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies), Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London, WC1H 0XG.

www.kohimaeducationaltrust.org

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KOHIMA



A GUIDE TO THE BATTLEFIELDS OF 1944

WITH MAP SHOWING:
Battle Sites • Memorials • Landmarks

THE MAP

The Battle of Kohima began on April 4 1944, when large numbers of Japanese attacked a series of defensive positions west of the Imphal road and south of the Dimapur road, known as **"The Ridge"** (see inset at top left hand corner of map). Whoever controlled The Ridge effectively controlled Kohima. The Japanese far outnumbered the defenders. They had travelled the roadless mountains and jungles from the Chindwin River, one hundred miles to the east, faster and in greater force than the 14th Army Command had anticipated. The defenders of The Ridge on April 4 consisted only of a battalion of the Assam Regiment which had conducted a fighting retreat as the Japanese advanced and the Royal West Kents, a battalion of the 161st Brigade which had been flown from Arakan to Dimapur in the third week of March. This small force had established defensive positions on the features which dominate The Ridge – **DIS (Deputy Issue Store) (10)**, **FSD (Field Supply Depot) (9)**, **Kuki Picket (8)**, **Garrison Hill (7)**, and **the DC's bungalow (13)** in the grounds of which lies the tennis court which became legendary in the ensuing close-quarters battle. Its outline is preserved in the cemetery.

Over the next ten days, the British/Indian force was beaten back to a small perimeter in the vicinity of Garrison Hill and the DC's bungalow. Supported by its artillery in Jotsoma (also under Japanese attack), and by air supply, the besieged garrison was able to hold off determined Japanese attacks for thirteen days.

Meanwhile, the Japanese forces had bypassed Kohima and had advanced down the Dimapur road and had established positions blocking the road at Zubza near the 32nd Milestone, eight miles from Kohima. Here they encountered the advancing troops of the British 2nd Division (2 Div), rushed from its bases in Western India, which had arrived in Dimapur about the same time as the Japanese arrived in Kohima. The Japanese suffered their first defeat at Zubza on April 14, and by April 18 2 Div was able to relieve the garrison by advancing up **Hospital Hill (6)**.

Relief of the siege inaugurated the beginning of the second phase of the battle, which lasted from April 18 until June 10. Some in the Japanese command believed that, instead of concentrating their attacks on the Kohima garrison, they should make a dash for Dimapur, where they could have captured supplies they badly needed and deprived the 14th Army of a major supply base. They decided to capture Kohima first. As a result, the besiegers became the besieged.

The Commander of 2 Div decided to make a three-pronged assault: from the north where the Japanese had occupied Kohima (Naga) Village, and Meriama without resistance; in the centre, to recapture The Ridge; and, from the south-west a circling move along the slopes of Mount Puliebadze.

The Japanese had lost thousands of men in frontal attacks on The Ridge. On the defensive against the assaults of 2 Div, supported by artillery and air bombardment, they proved to be extraordinarily tenacious. But they began to suffer, not only from casualties, but shortage of supplies and disease.

By the middle of May, the Japanese had been driven from parts of The Ridge, and found themselves under attack from the southern encircling force, which had made a very difficult march along the slopes of Mount Puliebadze. This force mounted a resolute attack on Japanese positions on **Norfolk Ridge (4)** named after the regiment which led the attack. The Japanese were progressively ousted from **GPT (General Purposes Transport) Ridge (4)**, **Congress Hill (3)** and a feature called **The Pimple (2)**, north of where the Japfu Hotel now stands. **Jail Hill (1)** – now the Police Headquarters - was recaptured by troops of the 268th Indian Infantry Brigade, who had been flown in to reinforce 2 Div.

The 2 Div attack from the direction of Meriama culminated in a night infiltration of Naga Village, which initially penetrated as far as **Hunter's Hill (25)** but was driven back to the western brow of the highest point, called **Hill 5120 (24)** and **Church Knoll (23)**. In the last week of May the Japanese defenders were defeated by an encircling attack from the south via **Gun Spur (26)**.

On May 31, the Japanese commander ordered his troops to begin to withdraw. The final engagements in the vicinity of Kohima were attacks on **Big Tree Hill** and its neighbours at the lower end of the Aradura Spur. Much hard fighting lay ahead before the road to Imphal was opened, but from June 10 Kohima was no longer a combat area. The most prominent and poignant memorial of the battle is **the Cemetery (12)** which lies at the northern end of The Ridge where it tapers down to the junction of the roads to Dimapur and Imphal. Here, engraved on stone and bronze, are the names of the 2,338 British and Indian troops who died in the battle. Many more Japanese died. They have no graves, but those who search the hillside above Jotsoma, the furthest point of the Japanese advance, can find a memorial to the courage of their troops.

The memorial to the troops of 2 Div below the cemetery has become famous for its inscription exhorting the survivors to tell those at home that "for your tomorrow we gave our today". Past the cemetery on the Imphal Road stands **"The Tank" (11)**, marking the furthest advance of British Armour during the battle on The Ridge. Scattered through the town are the memorials to the dead of individual regiments such as **The Durham Light Infantry (15)**, **The Royal Scots (22)**, **The Norfolks (21)**, **The Cameron Highlanders (18)**, **The Punjab Regiment (17)** and **the original garrison defenders (16)**. Midway between The Ridge and Naga Village can be found a war memorial to **Brigadier Warren (19)**, who commanded the 161st Brigade and who was subsequently killed in an air crash.

There have been many pilgrimages to the Kohima battlefield - by those who fought there, by the children of those who fought and died there, by historians, and by contemporary soldiers, successors to those who participated in "that great bitter battle", as a Japanese general called it. British and Japanese missions have journeyed to Kohima to honour their dead. Sometimes British and Japanese veterans have stood together, proclaiming a message of reconciliation on the spot where they and their dead comrades engaged in a mortal combat not of their own choosing. They and the inhabitants of Kohima were the sudden victims of history. Present and future generations visiting the memorials to that now distant battle have the opportunity to give a thought, and perhaps a tear, to the folly and the heroism of war.

NAGAS REMEMBER

Rumours were rife and much confusion prevailed in the days/months preceding the arrival of the Japanese Imperial Army forces in Kohima. On the one hand, there were those from Burma, mostly Indian traders, fleeing westwards to Naga country and beyond to mainland India. On the other hand, the Labour Corps, consisting mostly of Nagas, were cutting vehicular roads, for the Allied Forces, towards Burma. With confusion, there was also apprehension and fear although most Nagas were resolute in their decision to cast in their lot with the British and Allied Forces. It did not falter when the War finally arrived and death and destruction rained on them.

Naga loyalty to the British is best summed up by a woman from Kohima Village, who was 13 years at the time, "One thing strikes me as I recall the War – the absolute loyalty of our people to the British Administration which tended to make them adopt a hostile attitude towards the Japanese at times. The Japanese were not our enemies but I was glad that our people remained steadfast and true when the hard times came".

Used as they were to wars and killings, the elderly Nagas, who knew the tragedies of war, stayed sombre. To some Nagas, who were keen for excitement, it was an opportunity and they were eager for war to reach them! Indeed, one such Naga at the time, now 75 years old, recalled on dog fight of Japanese and Allied planes, he witnessed over Kohima in these words: "It was the best part of the battle; we would watch mesmerised. It was like watching a movie live.

A Naga survivor of the Battle of Kohima recalled: "We stood upon a little hill in Meriama and wept as we saw black smoke over our beloved Kohima. The whole town was burning and we feared for our loved ones who had stayed on". After the war, Kohima lay in ruins.

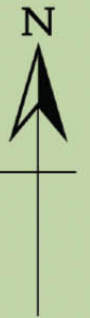
At least four Nagas were awarded the MBE (Member of the British Empire) because of assistance rendered through the Labour Corps. Various other individuals were recognised at different levels and these have started to emerge since the launching of the KET/KES initiative although few proper records seem available.

A well-known Naga lady author commented: "It was the War that was not ours. Our people were caught in a conflict between two foreign nations who fought on our lands. But our people were profoundly effected by it. The world of the Nagas was opened up to the wider world with a violence they could not have possibly imagined.

Indeed, if the Battle of Kohima was a major turning point in World War II, it also changed forever the slow and steady pace of naturally evolving Naga history and ensured that there was no turning back for the Nagas.

KOHIMA

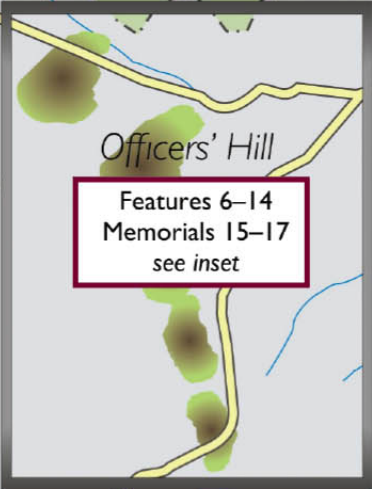
BATTLEFIELD LOCATIONS



- Features of note**
- 6 Hospital Hill
 - 7 Garrison Hill
 - 8 Kuki Picket
 - 9 FSD
 - 10 DIS
 - 11 The Tank
 - 12 Cemetery site of:
 - 13 DC's bungalow
 - 14 Tennis Court

- Memorials**
- 15 DLI
 - 16 Garrison's
 - 17 Punjab
 - 18 Cameron
 - 19 Brigadier Warren
 - 20 Assam Regiment
 - 21 Norfolk
 - 22 Royal Scots

- Features of note**
- 23 Church Knoll
 - 24 Hill 5120
 - 25 Hunters Hill
 - 26 Gun Spur



- Features of note**
- 1 Jail Hill
 - 2 The Pimple
 - 3 Congress Hill
 - 4 GPT Ridge (Norfolk Ridge)
 - 5 Aradura Spur

