

# Fighting for Red Hill or Maibam Lotpa Hill

## A Decisive Episode of the Battle of Imphal, May 1944

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*This study examines the nine-day engagement at Maibam-Lotpa Hill (Red Hill) from 20 May to 29 May 1944, analysing its strategic significance and broader implications within the Imphal campaign. In addition to assessing the operational and tactical developments of the battle, this article explores the experiences of local communities in Maibam, Oinam, Irengbam and Nambol, who were directly impacted by the fighting. Drawing on a combination of soldiers' memoirs, survivor testimonies and secondary sources, the study reconstructs the course of the engagement and its local consequences. Furthermore, it seeks to address historiographical inaccuracies, particularly the mis-identification of the British 17th Indian Division's headquarters during the critical phase of its confrontation in the Bishnupur sector. By engaging with these dimensions, this study aims to underscore the enduring historical importance of the engagement and its role in shaping the outcome of the Battle of Imphal in World War II.*

**Keywords:** *Maibam-Lotpa; Red Hill; Battle of Imphal; 17th Division; World War II*

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## INTRODUCTION

Nestled within the verdant landscapes of Manipur, Red Hill—locally known as Maibam Lotpa Hill—occupies a pivotal place in the history of World War II (WWII), particularly in the Battle of Imphal in 1944. This strategically significant hillock, situated approximately 18 kms south of Imphal city along the Tiddim Road (NH-150), became the stage for an intense nine-day engagement from 20 May to 29 May 1944. The fighting proved crucial in halting the Japanese 33<sup>rd</sup> Division's advance towards Imphal.

The Battle of Imphal, widely regarded as one of the turning points of the Burma Campaign, was marked by gruelling combat across mountainous, jungle-clad terrain, with minimal ground available for the effective deployment of mechanised troops. Best described as a 'battle of endurance', both opposing forces were forced to contend not only with each other but also with the relentless challenges posed by nature. Red Hill emerged as a focal point of both strategic and symbolic significance, showcasing the resilience and tenacity of the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) even as it suffered successive blows from the British-Indian forces.

The engagement at *Red Hill* constituted a crucial episode within the broader conflict in the *Bishnupur* sector, where the British 17<sup>th</sup> Indian Division (ID—*Black Cat*) confronted the 33<sup>rd</sup> Division (*Yumi-Bow*) of the IJA. The Japanese employed flanking manoeuvres—tactics that the British referred to as the '*hammer and anvil*'—with the strategic objective of severing British logistical arteries while their main force concentrated on annihilating the British positions in the *Bishnupur* area. Furthermore, the fiercest combat of the Battle of Imphal unfolded along the *Tiddim Road* and the *Silchar–Bishnupur* track, underscoring the critical significance of this sector in the broader operational landscape.<sup>1</sup>

## BEFORE THE CONFRONTATION AT THE BISHNUPUR SECTOR

When the Allied forces realised the IJA movement towards Imphal was imminent, its high command decided it would be wise to put up a defensive stance at the Imphal Valley rather than at the Tiddim area (now Tedim-Burma). Under such a decision, the code word 'Moccasin'—a signal to start the withdrawal of the 17<sup>th</sup> ID from their position in Tiddim—was ordered at 2040 hrs (8:40 p.m.) on 13 March 1944.<sup>2</sup> However, their way out was not a smooth one for they had to force and fight their way out of roadblocks and barricades put up by the IJA. The situation is best described by the

words of John Hudson, ‘the enemy planned to dismantle and destroy the 17<sup>th</sup> Indian Division’s column piece by piece, like a garden worm, under the spade’.<sup>3</sup>

Despite immense difficulties, the British-Indian forces reached Imphal Valley on 5 April 1944, approximately 23 days after the initiation of Code Moccasin. In the course of their withdrawal, they left behind two brigades: the 37<sup>th</sup> and 49<sup>th</sup> of the 23<sup>rd</sup> ID, which had initially been deployed as reinforcements to support the withdrawal of the 17<sup>th</sup> ID. These brigades were positioned around Milestones Forty and Fifty on the Tiddim Road to check the Japanese advance towards Imphal.<sup>4</sup>

However, the two brigades ultimately established their defensive positions around Milestone Thirty, astride the Tiddim Road, between Terakhongsangbi and Kwakta. And they later adopted a defensive posture at Torbung and Moirang. At midnight, on the 7–8 April, an enemy company unexpectedly encountered the British defensive screen, resulting in a skirmish during which a wounded soldier from the 6<sup>th</sup> Company/215<sup>th</sup> Regiment was captured. By mid-day, the 37<sup>th</sup> Brigade was withdrawn to the corps reserve in Imphal, leaving the 49<sup>th</sup> Brigade to hold the road. With this repositioning, the battle for the Bishnupur sector was about to begin.<sup>5</sup>

On the IJA side, upon reaching Maulkawi and Singgel, the 33<sup>rd</sup> Division replenished its ammunition before resuming its advance. By this time, its armoured units, along with field and medium artillery, had reinforced the column. Determined to provide his infantry with adequate support in future offensives, Lieutenant General Yanagida, the division’s commander, sought to rectify the shortcomings of the campaign’s earlier phase.<sup>6</sup> Previously, his units had launched their assault in haste, lacking proper coordination between the armour and artillery. This miscalculation had enabled the encircled Allied forces to escape during their withdrawal, inflicting heavy casualties and losses on his division—an error he was unwilling to repeat.

Before the 33<sup>rd</sup> Division departed from Singgel, Lt Gen Yanagida ordered Colonel Sasahara, commander of the 215<sup>th</sup> Regiment, to dispatch a raiding party to destroy the suspension bridge on the Silchar track, known locally as Tongjei-Maril, located at Milestone Fifty-One from Imphal (34 miles from Bishnupur).<sup>7</sup> The IJA believed this track could serve as an alternative supply route for the Allied forces once the Imphal–Dimapur road was severed. To carry out the operation, a raiding party consisting of six infantrymen, four sappers and 17 troops from the Indian National Army (INA, known to the British forces as Jiff), led by 2/Lieutenant Abe Toshio, set off across the hills on 25 March 1944.<sup>8</sup>

On 8 April, Lt Gen Yanagida arrived at Churachandpur, where he and Colonel Tanaka formulated plans for their offensive. The 215<sup>th</sup> Regiment, having broken through the British defensive positions at Torbung and Moirang, was to dispatch the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion/213<sup>th</sup> Regiment (minus two companies) up the Tiddim Road, accompanied by the 4<sup>th</sup> Independent Engineer Regiment and an anti-tank gun detachment. These units, placed under the command of Colonel Taguchi, the commander of the Engineer Regiment, were ordered to advance towards Bishnupur.

Meanwhile, the 215<sup>th</sup> Regiment was to leave the main road at Moirang and proceed through the hills along the Laimanai path to establish a roadblock on the Silchar track between Bishnupur and Tairenpokpi. Simultaneously, the 214<sup>th</sup> Regiment (White Tiger) would depart from Churachandpur, advancing through the hills via Mollou and Laimanai, following a day behind the 215<sup>th</sup> Regiment. From there, it was to move towards Nunggang and prepare for a subsequent advance on Imphal. The headquarters of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Division was to be established at Laimanai.<sup>9</sup>

Lt Gen Mutaguchi Renya, commander of the XV Army, had clarified that he expected Imphal to be captured by 29 April, in time for Emperor Hirohito's birthday.<sup>10</sup> The II Battalion/214<sup>th</sup> Regiment is the focus of this article, as its movements and engagements played a critical role in the unfolding battle.

With the threat from the IJA mounting, the 17<sup>th</sup> ID—excluding its 48<sup>th</sup> and 63<sup>rd</sup> Brigades—was ordered on 10 April to relieve the 49<sup>th</sup> Brigade and assume control of the Tiddim Road's defence, with the 32<sup>nd</sup> Brigade (20<sup>th</sup> Division) placed under its command. Assessing the defensive viability of their position in the Torbung-Moirang area, Brigadier Mackenzie, commander of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, deemed it unfavourable and requested permission from Major General Punch Cowan, commander of the 17<sup>th</sup> ID, to withdraw to the more defensible Bishnupur position. His request was duly approved, and on 15 April, the British forces established their defensive line at the Bishnupur sector. Meanwhile, as these developments unfolded, raiding troops dispatched by Col Sasahara from Singgel accomplished their mission at 0300 hrs (3:00 a.m.) on 15 April. Their objective—the destruction of the suspension bridge—was achieved.<sup>11</sup>

### **214<sup>th</sup> Regiment Towards Their Objective**

Until 17 April, Col Sakuma Takanobu's 214<sup>th</sup> Regiment had not yet crossed the Silchar track and remained positioned between Laimanai-Kungpi, Wooded Hill and Wireless Hill. On that day, Col Murata, Chief of Staff of

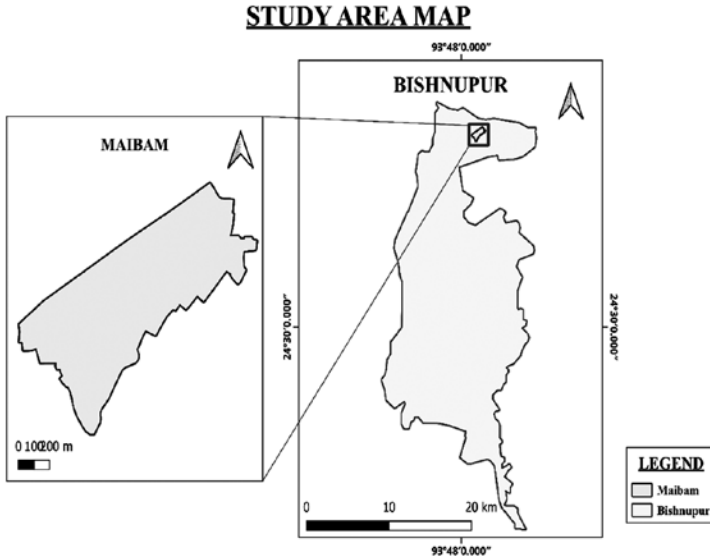
the 33<sup>rd</sup> Division, sent an urgent message questioning the delay, emphasising that Sakuma's inaction had prevented the 215<sup>th</sup> Regiment from launching its planned attack on Bishnupur from the west.<sup>12</sup> A back-and-forth exchange likely followed between the two officers. Col Sakuma argued that fierce resistance and the difficulty of accurately assessing the Allied forces' strength had contributed to his slow advance and inability to proceed. He remarked that the Allied forces stretched across his path 'like a steel wall'.<sup>13</sup> However, Sakuma's reasoning seems more like an attempt to justify his reluctance to throw his men into reckless assaults.

Much like Lt Gen Yanagida, Col Sakuma appeared to be a pragmatic officer who valued strategic considerations over blind adherence to fanatic courage and unwavering loyalty. A key example of this was his refusal to advance towards Imphal after the initial clash with the 17<sup>th</sup> ID in the Tedit area, insisting that his men receive rice rations before continuing.<sup>14</sup> It is plausible that, like Yanagida, he also recognised that the 33<sup>rd</sup> Division had lost momentum following the intense engagements in the Tiddim sector in March 1944. By April, this momentum had been completely exhausted, even though the division had reached the Imphal Valley.<sup>15</sup> This realisation may have influenced his cautious and measured approach during the Battle of Imphal.

However, despite his prudence, it seems Col Sakuma could no longer defer action in the face of mounting operational pressures. By 20 April, he initiated movement, ordering the I Battalion (excluding the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Companies) westward around Point 5846—the most dominant peak overlooking the Silchar track—and established a position in the Khoirok-Nunggang area to execute their primary objective. Meanwhile, the II Battalion (Seuda) was positioned south of the Silchar track, ensuring that the consequences would not be catastrophic in the event of an operational failure. This decision aligns with the subsequent events of 14 May, when Col Sakuma was ordered to relinquish his position and proceed to Nunggang. Departing from the regimental headquarters at Ingourek at 1700 hrs (5:00 p.m.), he and his forces reached Nunggang two days later, i.e., on 16 May.<sup>16</sup>

Between the arrival of the I Battalion and the establishment of the 214<sup>th</sup> Regiment Headquarters at Nunggang, reconnaissance parties were deployed to survey the settlements of Irengbam, Oinam, Nambol and Maibam. Approximately three weeks before the clash at Maibam (Map 1), the residents of Irengbam witnessed the IJA troops fortifying a camp at Samu-Manbi Hill (a *hill that resembles an elephant*), from which soldiers frequently descended to scour their village.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, the inhabitants of neighbouring settlements

also encountered these reconnaissance units, which advanced as far as Phoijing, where the 17<sup>th</sup> ID's HQ had been established.



**Map I** Showing Bishnupur-Maibam.

Source: Author.

Khundongbam Loma recalled one particularly cheerful afternoon when, as he played with his friends in the courtyard of his home, his father, Khelendro, and his uncle, Tombi, sat nearby, leisurely smoking tobacco. Seemingly out of thin air, two Japanese soldiers emerged and, to everyone's surprise, approached the men and politely asked if they could join them in their smoke. Though taken aback, Loma's father and uncle, perhaps out of curiosity or an instinctive sense of hospitality, allowed the soldiers to sit with them. The two Japanese soldiers, appearing relaxed, shared the moment before later requesting to stay the night at their house. They were given shelter in the area where the family had piled straw for cattle fodder. However, as night fell, the soldiers' demeanour shifted. Without warning, they began firing continuously, sending bursts of firepower into the darkness. Alarmed and uncertain of their intentions, the family quickly retreated into a trench dug specifically to shelter during bombardments and air raids. By dawn, the soldiers had vanished without a trace. No one knew what had become of them, and their sudden disappearance remained an enigma.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, Sagolsem Samungou recounted an incident in which an IJA soldier was captured at the northern outskirts of Mongjing before the engagement at Maibam.<sup>19</sup> Given the circumstances, assuming he was part of a reconnaissance mission is reasonable. Further adding to these accounts, Toarem Gouramahon narrated that two days before 20 May, two Japanese soldiers, disguised as members of the Khongjai tribe, infiltrated the village of Oinam, particularly the area around Ushak-Khangdabi Lane, to gather intelligence.<sup>20</sup> These events underscore the extent of Japanese reconnaissance operations in the days leading up to the battle.

The question remains: Why did the II Battalion choose Point 2926, or Red Hill, to obstruct the logistics of the 17<sup>th</sup> ID? The answer will be explored in a subsequent analysis. For now, we shall leave this question aside and return to it later.

### HEADQUARTERS OF THE 17<sup>th</sup> INDIAN DIVISION

The literature on the Battle of Imphal has consistently mis-identified the location of the 17<sup>th</sup> ID's headquarters during its engagement with the 33<sup>rd</sup> Division of the IJA in the Bishnupur sector. Numerous accounts erroneously place the division's HQ at Chingfu Hill at the peak of the confrontation. While this misplacement does not alter the broader strategic decisions made during the battle, it is imperative to rectify the historical record and accurately establish the division's actual position during this critical phase of the campaign.

Several historians and authors have referenced the 17<sup>th</sup> Division's headquarters as being located at Chingfu. Geoffrey Evans and Antony Brett-James, in *Imphal: A Flower on Lofty Heights* (1962), wrote:

To be in closer touch when 48<sup>th</sup> and 63<sup>rd</sup> Brigades set off on their respective missions to the south, Cowan had moved his headquarters to the small village of Chingfu under the lee of a prominent and isolated hill beside the road linking Imphal and Bishnupur.

Similarly, Louis Allen, in *Burma: The Longest War 1941–1945* (1984), stated:

The impetus of Sakuma's attack brought his men almost on top of Cowan's headquarters at the village of Chingfu.

David Rooney, in *Burma Victory: Imphal, Kohima and the Chindits—March 1944 to May 1945* (1992), reiterated this placement, stating:

After three days of torrential rain, they [Sakuma and his men] reached Nunggang and prepared to cut the Bishnupur-Imphal road and establish a strong point at the tiny village of Chingfu. Unbeknownst to Sakuma, General Cowan had moved the HQ of the 17<sup>th</sup> Division to this very spot.

Maj Gen Ian Lyall Grant, in *Burma: The Turning Point* (1993), provided further details on the division's movements, writing:

In preparation for the coming offensive, Headquarters 17<sup>th</sup> Division had moved from Imphal on the 6<sup>th</sup> of May to the village of Chingphu at MS 10 on the Tiddim Road.

Likewise, Robert Lyman, in *Japan's Last Bid for Victory: The Invasion of India 1944* (2011), one of the most comprehensive studies of the Battle of Imphal, observed:

[O]n 19<sup>th</sup> May, 33<sup>rd</sup> Division made a further attempt to break through the 17<sup>th</sup> Division defenses, by inserting a block (400 men of II Battalion/214<sup>th</sup> Regiment) on the road at Maibam, north of Bishnupur, and perilously close (although they did not know it) to Cowan's HQ.

More recently, Hemant Katoch, in *The Battlefields of Imphal: The Second World War and North East India* (2016), reinforced this claim, stating:

Unbeknownst to the Japanese, however, the hill (Maibam Lotpa Ching) had gained considerable importance since early May 1944 when the 17<sup>th</sup> Indian Division's headquarters had moved to Chingfu, a village to its immediate north.

One important point to keep in mind is that Chingfu is not a village but rather a small hillock, rising to an elevation of 2,952 ft (approx. 900 m), located within the village of Ishok, approx. 23 kms south of Imphal and about 4 kms from Maibam. Contrary to what is stated in the existing literature, this hillock lies to the east of Maibam Lotpa Hill, not to its north. Oral accounts from residents firmly dispute the claim that any military activities or encampments were established at the Chingfu Hill during the Battle of Imphal, referred to locally as *Japan Laan* (Japan War). Instead, they

consistently recall that a significant military camp was set up at Khoriphaba Hill, the sacred hill of Lord Khoriphaba, located at Phoiijing.<sup>21</sup>

Maj Gen Cowan's withdrawal order of 'Operation Ayo'—a flanking manoeuvre executed by the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade under Brigadier Cameron to establish a roadblock at Torbung—further confirms the location of the 17<sup>th</sup> Division HQ. The order reads:

Owing [to the] serious situation in Divisional Box at Milestone 10, and [to] 63<sup>rd</sup> Brigade being unable to advance due to [the] enemy's large infiltration to their north, 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade will be prepared to withdraw ... on 24<sup>th</sup> May or before if [the] situation makes it necessary.<sup>22</sup>

This 'Milestone 10' approximately corresponds to the present-day Nambol–Phoiijing region, situated about 15 kms south of Imphal. Among contemporary residents, it is widely acknowledged that a substantial military encampment was established at Khoriphaba Hill during WWII.

Sagolsem Samungou, a local elder, vividly recalled that allied soldiers stationed at Khoriphaba Hill were amicable towards children, often engaging in playful interactions. He recounted how the soldiers would share biscuits, dried fruits, tinned fish and other food items with them. He also remembered an artillery gun positioned at the western foothill of Khoriphaba, in an area then known as *Heikru-Makhong* (The vicinity of the Indian Gooseberry tree). Furthermore, an observation post (OP) for detecting fighter aircraft was also installed at the eastern foothill of Khoriphaba Hill, corresponding to the present location of Nambol Hospital or the Community Health Centre (CHC).<sup>23</sup>

Another elder, Khundongbam Loma, recalled that an anti-aircraft gun (AA-Gun) manned by a three-member crew was deployed at the summit of the hill. These testimonies describing the military infrastructure at Khoriphaba Hill strongly suggest that this was not merely an outpost but a significant operational base. Based on all these accounts, it is reasonable to conclude that the headquarters of the 17<sup>th</sup> ID was indeed located at Khoriphaba Hill rather than at Chingfu.

The question then arises: What truly transpired at Chingfu Hill, given that records mention Chingfu rather than Khoriphaba Hill? It is possible that a small outpost was established there to monitor the movements of the IJA. However, given its inland position relative to the Tiddim Road, its strategic significance appears questionable. Given that the distance from Imphal and the direction from Maibam of the 17<sup>th</sup> ID HQ were accurately recorded,

the only apparent discrepancy was the name. Taking all these factors into account, the answer to the discrepancy likely lies somewhere between a misunderstanding and a mistranslation of the location's name by local sources and British-Indian troops at that time.

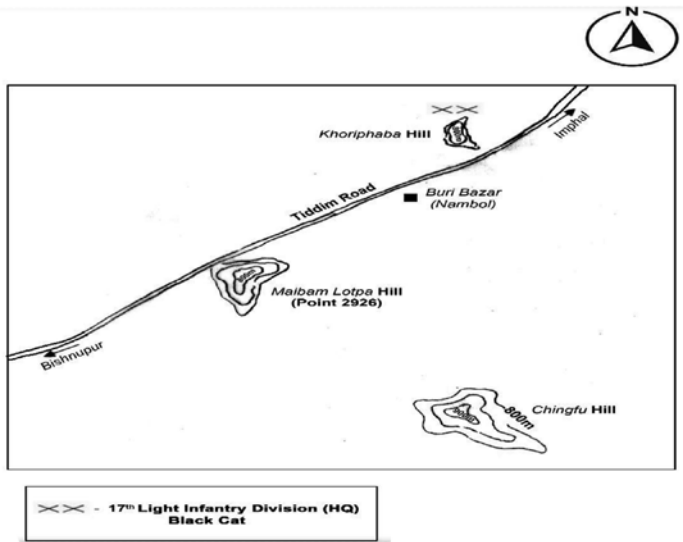
Furthermore, the earlier account of a Japanese soldier being captured at Mongjing before the clash at Maibam, along with Khundongbam Loma's testimony of two Japanese soldiers appearing at Phoijing Chingning, also challenges the prevailing historiography that the IJA was unaware of the 17<sup>th</sup> ID's headquarters at the Khoriphaba Hill before the clash. Both incidents occurred near the headquarters, with Mongjing approximately 500–600 m away and Phoijing-Chingning, barely a kilometre away. Given this distance, it is highly plausible that these reconnaissance parties had a clear view of the hill, observed British-Indian troop movements and recognised it as a critical military position. While there is no definitive proof that they explicitly identified it as the divisional headquarters, the likelihood remains strong that they gathered enough intelligence to suspect its strategic significance.

Then, this raises serious doubts about the long-held claim that the IJA was entirely unaware of its location. And, it would not be unreasonable to speculate that the Japanese had indeed identified the Khoriphaba Hill as the site of the 17<sup>th</sup> ID's headquarters.

If this were the case, it naturally begs the question: Why, despite this awareness, did the II/214<sup>th</sup> Regiment choose to attack Maibam instead of launching a direct assault on the HQ itself? Wouldn't a direct assault on the HQ have dealt a severe blow to British-Indian morale, potentially giving the Japanese a strategic advantage? Several theories could be proposed, but one likely reason was the shortage of manpower. By this time, the 33<sup>rd</sup> Division was already struggling to allocate troops across multiple sectors, making it difficult to divert sufficient forces for a direct assault on such a critical position. Moreover, the headquarters at Khoriphaba Hill was not only well-fortified but also heavily guarded; attacking it was a much riskier endeavour. Additionally, launching an assault on the HQ would have required careful coordination and extensive firepower, resources the Japanese lacked at this particular stage of the battle.

Another crucial factor might be the judgement of Col Sakuma, who deemed it too risky to infiltrate deeper into British-controlled territory. Advancing beyond Maibam and directly assaulting the headquarters would have placed his forces in an extremely vulnerable position, increasing the likelihood of complete encirclement by the British-Indian troops. Given the dwindling strength of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Division and the precarious supply situation,

a deeper push could have resulted in heavy casualties with little strategic gain. Instead, establishing a stronghold at Maibam allowed the Japanese to disrupt enemy logistics while avoiding the catastrophic risk of being cut-off and annihilated. Thus, the decision to focus on Maibam rather than the headquarters was a calculated move based on both tactical feasibility and the harsh realities of the battlefield (Map 2).



**Map 2** 17<sup>th</sup> Division's HQ

Source: Author.

### CHRONOLOGICAL EVENTS OF THE NINE-DAY CLASH

From their outpost at Samu-Manbi Hill, the soldiers of the 214<sup>th</sup> Regiment closely surveyed the Nambol-Maibam region, meticulously planning their next move. Their objective was clear, to infiltrate deep into British lines and establish a strategic roadblock to disrupt the logistics of the 17<sup>th</sup> ID.

Now, let us revisit the earlier question: Why did the II/214<sup>th</sup> Regiment choose Point 2926, or Red Hill? The answer is straightforward. The hillock possessed the ideal terrain for an effective blockade, situated directly adjacent to the Tiddim Road, an essential supply route for the British-Indian troops. At Maibam, the Tiddim Road runs between two hillocks: Maibam Lotpa Hill to the east and a smaller one to the west. Utilising the hill's natural cover and defensive advantages, the II/214<sup>th</sup> Regiment could establish a formidable stronghold, thereby ensuring the success of its mission.

Before the clash had erupted at Maibam, 20 sepoy from the 7/10<sup>th</sup> Baluch (an understrength platoon) had already occupied and reinforced the hill.<sup>24</sup> Though small, the defensive position was strengthened by three well-fortified trenches, secured with concertina wire and outfitted with empty bottles and cans as an early warning system, significantly enhancing its resilience.<sup>25</sup>

On 18 May, two days before the clash at Maibam, a radio wire was laid along the embankment of the Irengbam Khujairok stream, linking Samu-Manbi Hill, Wainem and Irengbam. That same day, many IJA troops descended from the hills into the village, preparing for the impending confrontation. They set up camp in the compound of Ngangom Bubon in Irengbam Mamang Leikai, on the eastern side of the village, where an artillery piece was also positioned, turning the household into both a refuge and a war machine. This very gun would later prove to be a nuisance to the British armour when the fighting at Maibam commenced. Upon reaching Irengbam, a cow was slaughtered at the Ngangom's house, providing the soldiers with a much-needed meal for the day ahead.<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps, as dusk settled over the village, the flickering glow of makeshift fires danced against the walls, casting ghostly silhouettes of men on the brink of war. The scent of fresh blood may have mingled with the aroma of roasting meat, a silent offering to both the hunger in their bellies and the fate that awaited them. The night air might have carried the low murmur of weary voices, the rhythmic sharpening of bayonets and the rustling wind whispering through the trees foretelling the violence yet to come. Maybe, for a fleeting moment, there was laughter, a hollow attempt to grasp at normalcy before war swallowed them whole. But whatever the mood that night, one thing was certain: they stood on the edge of unleashing the storm.

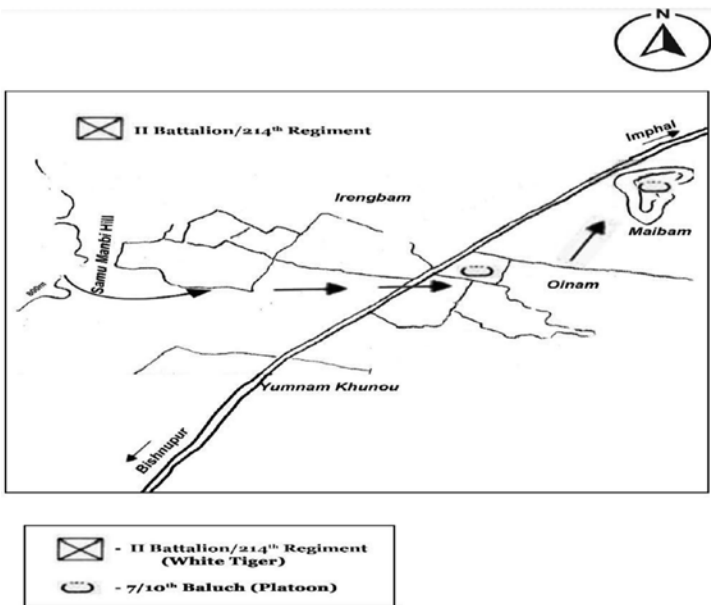
On the night of 20 May, the II/214<sup>th</sup> Regiment started their advance from Irengbam to Oinam under the cover of darkness. In the very heart of the village, at the junction of Ushak-Khangdabi Lane and the main village road, stood a British-Indian outpost likely manned by a platoon of troops. Without warning, the Japanese forces descended upon it with swift and ruthless aggression. The defenders, caught off guard, fought desperately, but the outpost was soon overwhelmed. Those who survived the onslaught fled, leaving behind only smouldering ruins and the echoes of battle.<sup>27</sup>

And before their advance towards Maibam—or possibly contemporaneous with the assault on the *Oinam* outpost—the Japanese destroyed two small bridges: one at *Oinam* itself and another situated between *Oinam* and

*Yumnam Khunou*, both located along the Tiddim Road. Furthermore, mines were strategically laid to render the road impassable to British forces, thereby effectively disrupting their logistical operations.<sup>28</sup>

Amid the chaos, flares streaked skyward, their ghostly glow illuminating the battlefield for fleeting moments before fading into the dark. From their position on the Maibam Lotpa Hill, barely a kilometre away, the 7/10<sup>th</sup> Baluch's men would have seen those fiery signals, a desperate cry from their beleaguered comrades, a warning of a storm now heading their way. The night air carried the sharp crack of gunfire and the distant shouts of men locked in combat. For those on the hill, there could be no doubt, a danger had come knocking at their door. With hearts pounding and rifles clenched, they must have steeled themselves, knowing that the next flare to light up the night sky might signal their fight for survival.

Around 2200 hrs (10:00 p.m.), the men of the II/214<sup>th</sup> Regiment had reached Maibam and prepared to launch their assault on the British-Indian troops stationed atop the hill (Map 3). An artillery piece, manned by 4–5 soldiers, which was positioned within the compound of the Nameirakpam family at the western side of the village, was later to provide fire during the fighting.<sup>29</sup>



**Map 3** II Battalion advancing towards Maibam

Source: Author.

In the village, the sudden movement of troops and the palpable tension in the air unsettled the animals, dogs began barking furiously, their frantic howls piercing the silence of the night. Then, the assault commenced. Gunfire erupted, and explosions tore through the darkness. Amid the chaos, the British forces fired signal flares into the sky in succession, first green, then warm white, and finally red. Each burst of light momentarily illuminated the battlefield, casting ghostly shadows over the chaotic struggle, while the echoes of war reverberated across the land.<sup>30</sup>

Thus began the savage nine-day confrontation on the night of 20 May 1944, a relentless storm of fire and fury that would bring the men of the IJA to the doorstep of the 17<sup>th</sup> ID's HQ, located just 3 kms shy to the north of Maibam.

That same night, the platoon of the 7/10<sup>th</sup> Baluch, led by Subedar Ghulam Yasin, received reinforcements from headquarters under the command of GSO3 Captain J. A. Cummings. A fierce battle ensued as the Japanese forces launched a determined assault, managing to seize most of the southern half of Point 2926. However, they failed to capture the highest and most strategically vital knoll. Amid the chaos, Captain Cummings was killed in action. Despite this setback, the men of the 7/10<sup>th</sup> Baluch held their ground against the relentless Japanese onslaught, tenaciously defending their position through the night until reinforcements arrived the following day.<sup>31</sup>

On 21 May, a troop of four medium tanks was dispatched from Bishnupur, advancing towards Maibam. However, two of these tanks were knocked out at Oinam under uncertain circumstances. Maj Gen Ian Grant does not provide a definitive account of their destruction; were they disabled by mines laid along the route, or struck by the artillery or an anti-tank gun positioned at Irengbam?

Eyewitness accounts add further complexity to the event. Irengbam Samungou recalled seeing a tank disabled near the junction of Irengbam Main Road and Tiddim Road (known to the locals as *Kaebat*), reportedly struck by an artillery fire from Irengbam. Similarly, Toarem Gouramahon also recounts a tank being hit on its tracks by an artillery piece stationed at the Nameirakpam compound, leaving it inoperable near the junction of Maibam Main Road and Tiddim Road.

This raises a critical question: Were all four tanks ultimately lost that day, unable to fulfil their objective? Or do these testimonies recount the fate of the same two tanks mentioned by Maj Gen Grant, or perhaps one of the remaining two? While uncertainty shrouds the full extent of the losses, one thing is clear, i.e., at least one tank managed to push through the relentless

opposition, reaching Maibam. Yet, its journey ended in vain, a lone steel behemoth left crippled, unable to aid its stranded comrades.

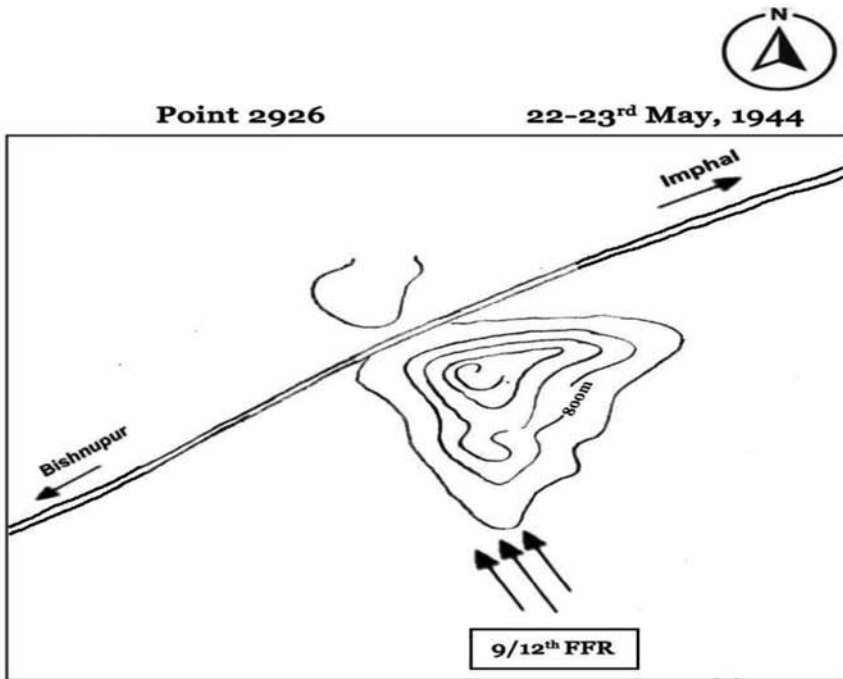
On that fateful day, the people of Maibam, gripped by fear, hastily gathered whatever belongings they could carry and fled their homes, seeking refuge wherever they could find safety from the storm of chaos. Panic and sorrow shadowed their hurried exodus as the echoes of war drew ever closer. Likewise, the people of Irengbam, Oinam and Nambol also abandoned their settlements, leaving behind their homes and livelihoods, vanishing into the uncertainty of safer grounds as the relentless tide of battle threatened to consume all in its path.

Meanwhile, on the military front, IV Corps committed its sole reserve from north of Imphal, a formidable force dispatched to bolster the embattled sector. This reinforcement comprised two troops of light tanks from the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, elements of the 9/12<sup>th</sup> Frontier Force Regiment (20<sup>th</sup> ID) though two companies short, yet reinforced to full strength with two companies from the 6/5<sup>th</sup> Mahratta Light Infantry (23<sup>rd</sup> ID) and a battery of 25-pounder field guns from the 20<sup>th</sup> Division.<sup>32</sup> In total, nearly 1,000 seasoned soldiers moved to the front, their presence a steely promise of resistance against the Japanese advance.

Yet, despite these strategic manoeuvres and tactical repositioning, the battlefield remained eerily still on 21 May. Both sides, like two great predators poised in the darkness, watched and waited—gathering their strength—measuring their next move, as the tension in the air thickened like the oppressive monsoon clouds before a violent storm.

On the afternoon of 22 May, the composite force launched an assault on Maibam from the southeast (paddy fields). Before the attack, artillery batteries positioned in Bishnupur unleashed a relentless bombardment upon Maibam and Irengbam, their thunderous volleys shaking the earth as they sought to weaken the enemy's fortifications.<sup>33</sup> However, as the dust settled and British-Indian troops advanced, they encountered fierce resistance from the steadfast troops of the II/214<sup>th</sup> Regiment. Every gain was hard-fought, with each step forward exacting a heavy toll in blood. The fighting devolved into brutal close-quarters combat, where the two leading companies of the opposing forces engaged in intense hand-to-hand fighting, punctuated by the relentless exchange of grenades and bursts of machine-gun fire.<sup>34</sup>

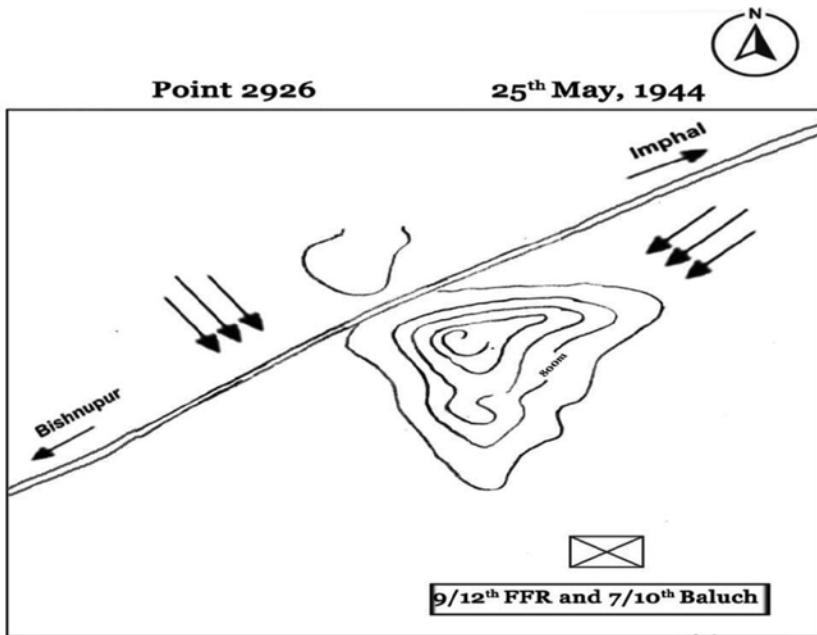
Similarly, the next day, on 23 May, the attack was renewed but the result was the same, and it became apparent that more troops were needed to bash the Japanese position (Map 4).<sup>35</sup>



**Map 4** Engagement on 22–23 May  
Source: Author.

On 25 May, the headquarters of the 17<sup>th</sup> ID was reinforced by the remaining elements of the 7/10<sup>th</sup> Baluch (Map 5). With these additional troops, Maj Gen Cowan devised a new offensive plan targeting Maibam from the north and west.<sup>36</sup> This decision suggests that he intended a three-pronged assault—advancing from the north, west and southeast—forcing the Japanese to spread their defences thin and, in doing so, exposing the chink in their armour.

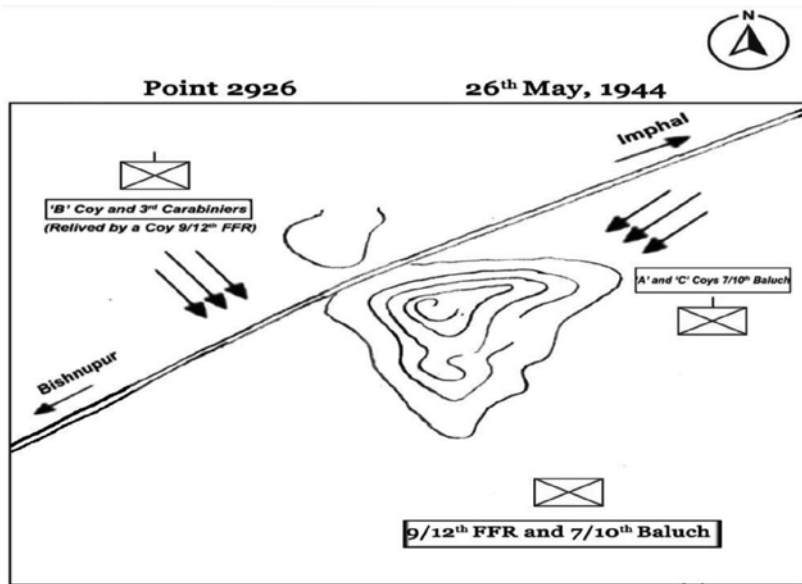
Then, on the night of 25–26 May, the heavens finally split open, and the monsoon descended in torrents, drenching the battlefield in darkness and fury. As the rain lashed the earth, filling trenches and turning the ground into a quagmire, both Japanese and British-Indian soldiers must have felt it deep in their bones—the true battle had begun. From then on, war would show no mercy and the struggle would only grow fiercer with each passing hour.



**Map 5** Engagement on 25 May

Source: Author.

In the early hours of 26 May, before the first light and amid the downpour, 'A' and 'C' Companies of the 7/10<sup>th</sup> Baluch launched an assault from the north, advancing down the ridge from Point 2926 (Map 6). However, their offensive was stalled by entrenched Japanese forces at 'First Pimple'. Meanwhile, Major Roderick Maclean, leading 'B' Company and supported by four medium tanks from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Carabiniers, attacked from the west, advancing across the paddy fields towards the village. 'B' Company managed to penetrate approximately 250 yards (228 m) into the settlement before being relieved by a company from the 9/12<sup>th</sup> FFR. The newly arrived troops successfully repelled a fierce Japanese counterattack but were forced to relinquish some of the ground initially secured by the 'B' Company of the Baluch. Both attacks came at a heavy cost, with British forces suffering 140 casualties during the assault.<sup>37</sup>



**Map 6** Engagement on 26 May

Source: Author.

Despite taking an offensive stance, with the onset of monsoon and success proving elusive, Maj Gen Cowan must have turned these thoughts over in his mind:

I cannot afford to fail here. The road to Bishnupur must be kept open. If this road remains blocked, the main force of the 17<sup>th</sup> Division will be in jeopardy. More men, more firepower—how do I break this stalemate?

Artillery has pounded the enemy's positions, and the men of Baluch and FFR have fought bitterly, yet the opposition still holds firm. We can't keep throwing men into this meat grinder without securing a decisive breakthrough.

Do I commit more troops? Risky, but waiting will only give them more time to fortify their defences. Time is against me. If I don't break through now, Bishnupur will be in danger. If the enemy launches a major attack there while I'm still bogged down here, my forces will be stretched too thin. There's no more room for hesitation. I have to hit them with everything, and I have to smash this roadblock before it's too late.

While these statements are assumptions rather than factual records, assessing the situation suggests they are likely close to the truth. British commanders recognised that since a battalion (9/12<sup>th</sup> FFR) could not make progress, both in the village, i.e., Maibam, and on the hill, the available troops were insufficient for the task. Consequently, they decided that a full brigade would be required to defeat the Japanese.<sup>38</sup> Acting on this decision, substantial reinforcements arrived to relieve the exhausted Baluch and FFR men and to renew the attack.

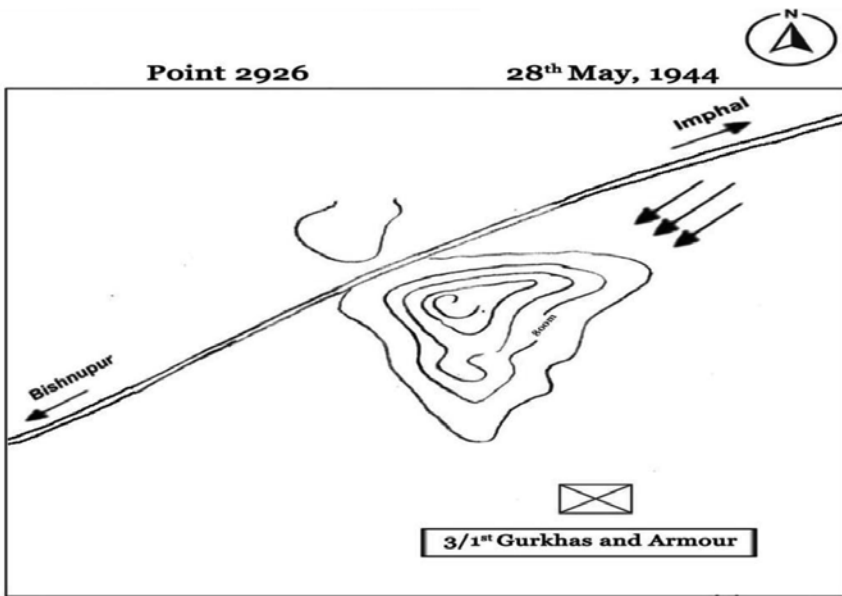
Thus, on 26 May, the 50<sup>th</sup> Indian Parachute Brigade, under the command of Brigadier E. G. Woods—referred to as ‘Woodforce’—assumed responsibility at Maibam. The following day, 27 May, additional reinforcements arrived, including the 3/1<sup>st</sup> Gurkha Rifles of the 20<sup>th</sup> ID and the 1/4<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Rifles.<sup>39</sup> Woodforce thus comprised 7/10<sup>th</sup> Baluch, 9/10<sup>th</sup> FFR, 1/4<sup>th</sup> Gurkhas, 3/1<sup>st</sup> Gurkhas, a half squadron of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Carabiniers, two troops 7<sup>th</sup> Light Cavalry and one battery 114<sup>th</sup> Jungle Field Regiment.<sup>40</sup> With these fresh troops, Maj Gen Cowan was no longer forced to orchestrate an offensive with a limited force. Now, with a strong brigade at his disposal, he could press forward with a renewed assault.

The arrival of these reinforcements also shifted the numerical balance in favour of the British-Indian forces. The Japanese force at Maibam consisted of about 620–640 men (maximum), representing an understrength battalion rather than a full-force deployment. In contrast, the British-Indian forces comprised a brigade and an additional battalion, though neither was likely at full strength. A typical brigade consisted of three battalions plus supporting units, and given the circumstances, an estimated 2,400 men from the brigade were engaged in the battle. The additional battalion would have contributed about 700 men, bringing the total British-Indian strength to around 3,100 troops. This created a numerical advantage of approximately 5:1 against the Japanese defenders.

On the night of 27–28 May, the Tehri Garhwal Sappers carved a tank track up the steep northern end of the hill (Map 7). At first light on 28 May, 1/Lieutenant Weir successfully manoeuvred his medium tank onto the ridge and eliminated the bunkers that had previously stalled the 7/10<sup>th</sup> Baluch’s assault. However, his tank was soon struck at point-blank range by a Japanese mountain gun, causing it to slide down the slope. Fortunately, Weir and his crew managed to bail out before disaster struck.<sup>41</sup>

With this armoured support, the 3/1<sup>st</sup> Gurkhas launched an assault down the southern slope of the hill, swiftly overrunning the first Japanese defensive position, ‘First Pimple’, before advancing to seize the next fortified position,

'Second Pimple'. However, the Japanese mounted a fierce counterattack and successfully recaptured both key positions. Amid the chaos, Lt Col Wingfield, the battalion commander, along with two company commanders and the adjutant, was killed. Despite these setbacks, the British-Indian forces managed to reclaim the lost ground. Nevertheless, it soon became evident that further progress was unattainable, leading to the decision to call off the assault. The 3/1<sup>st</sup> Gurkhas suffered significant casualties, with 19 killed and 55 wounded.<sup>42</sup>



**Map 7** Engagement on 28 May

Source: Author.

After eight days of relentless fighting, one can only imagine the thoughts weighing on the exhausted soldiers of the II/214<sup>th</sup> Regiment. Perhaps they realised that holding their ground any longer was futile, especially with the bulk of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Division failing to make significant gains at Bishnupur. With no reinforcements in sight and their position becoming increasingly untenable, they may have understood that continued resistance would lead only to total annihilation.

As night fell on the 28 May, they likely made the painful decision to withdraw. Under the cover of darkness and the looming monsoon clouds, they

might have moved quietly, slipping away from the blood-soaked battlefield. But their hasty withdrawal came at a cruel cost—they could not take everyone. Their wounded, too weak to move, were left behind, abandoned to fate. If this was their final choice, it was not made lightly but out of sheer necessity, a reluctant withdrawal from a battle that could no longer be won.

So, on 29 May, as the men of the 1/4<sup>th</sup> Gurkhas advanced to launch their attack, they encountered no resistance. They successfully captured three prisoners and discovered a significant quantity of abandoned equipment, including two 75 mm mountain artillery guns and a 70 mm gun that had been discarded into a nearby pond.<sup>43</sup> This pond, situated in the vicinity of Oinam, marked the site where the remnants of the Japanese force abandoned much of their cumbersome regimental artillery.<sup>44</sup> With the battle effectively concluded, the few surviving Japanese troops had retreated into the surrounding hills.

#### WITHDRAWAL OF THE II BATTALION

After their engagement at Maibam, the men of the II/214<sup>th</sup> Regiment withdrew to Irengbam. On 30 May, approximately 80 soldiers, supported by a few guns, were driven out of the settlement.<sup>45</sup> Meanwhile, tanks and concentrated artillery fire pounded the Samu-Manbi Hill and the surrounding ridges. Following this bombardment, British-Indian troops meticulously combed through the village in search of any remaining Japanese soldiers before advancing further, ultimately reaching the foothills. Likewise, on the same day, the villagers of Irengbam began returning to their homes.<sup>46</sup> Ultimately, most of the II/214<sup>th</sup> Regiment's remnants rejoined the main force via the same route they had initially taken. The clash for Maibam and Red Hill had utterly devastated the 214<sup>th</sup> Regiment, and its II Battalion had been annihilated.<sup>47</sup> Only 37 (fit to fight) out of 540 men remained.<sup>48</sup>

After the villagers had returned, they discovered that many of their homes had been partially destroyed by artillery shells, though some remained intact. The landscape was scarred with craters dug up by relentless shelling. At the house of Sanasam Bheigo, Irengbam Meipak (elder brother of Irengbam Samungou) and others came across a lifeless body of a Japanese soldier, slumped against a wall with his rifle resting against him. Later, the lifeless soldier was given a final resting place by the villagers in an area of Irengbam Maning Leikai.<sup>49</sup>

Was this lifeless Japanese soldier more than just a casualty of war? Does it tell a silent, profound story? Was he wounded and left behind, unable to retreat

with his comrades? Did he make a final stand, waiting for reinforcements that never came? Or was he simply exhausted, resting against the wall when death suddenly took him? The way he was found suggests he might have died not in the heat of battle but in a moment of solitude, perhaps succumbing to wounds, starvation, sheer exhaustion or even *seppuku/hara-kiri* (ritual act of self-sacrifice). His quiet end, shrouded in ambiguity, lingers like an echo of the countless untold stories that war leaves behind.

Similar to the fate of the lifeless soldier at Irengbam, the men of the XV Army suffered disastrously during their withdrawal from Imphal. Staff Sergeant Yasumasa Nishiji of the 20<sup>th</sup> Independent Engineering Regiment recounts the horror of the journey:

I saw many exhausted men unable to keep up with their units, and their comrades too weary to help them ... During the retreat, those who were unable to keep up with the main body and were left to look after themselves perished in tens of thousands. Those struggling along the road were almost all in their twenties, yet they stooped like old men. The sight was one of total misery. Nobody would have believed that these men had once possessed the strength to survive a series of intense battles ... Taking one's life seemed the only way out. Soldiers who had no chance of recovery were increasingly pressured to take this path ... It became a routine that a soldier who was emaciated and cripple, with no hope of recovery, was given a grenade and persuaded, without words, to sort himself out. One soldier was so outraged at being given a grenade that he put on his boots and puttees and crawled after his officer, screaming, 'you've lorded it over me; what have I got in return? I'll bloody kill you'.<sup>50</sup>

Every army is founded on a distinct mentality or an ideological framework. For the IJA, this foundation was built on the principles of 'honour' and unwavering 'loyalty'. However, the reality behind these ideals was far more tragic. In the end, what did the soldiers truly gain? Many met their fate through senseless death, while others were abandoned by their officers and comrades in their most desperate moments. The very ideals that were meant to define their strength ultimately became the source of their greatest suffering.

During his visit to the battleground (Maibam), although the precise timing remains unspecified, Lt Gen Slim observed, 'I was struck by the way in which several Japanese gun crews had obviously been shot and bayoneted while serving their pieces in the open at point-blank range'.<sup>51</sup>

### IMPACT ON CIVILIANS AND THE LANDSCAPE

The four villages—Irengbam, Maibam, Nambol and Oinam—situated around Khoriphaba Hill and Maibam Lotpa Hill, bore the brunt of the intense fighting. However, Nambol was relatively less affected, as its residents were not forced to abandon their homes in search of refuge. In contrast, following the arrival of the II/214<sup>th</sup> Regiment at Maibam on 21 May, the inhabitants of the other three villages hastily gathered whatever belongings they could and fled in search of safety, driven by the escalating confrontation.

Irengbam Samungou from Irengbam recalls that he and his family initially fled to *Yumnam Khunou*. In this neighbouring village, they stayed for two days before seeking refuge in *Yangoi* for the remainder of the conflict. Similarly, Thingbaijam Chouyaima from Irengbam remembers being carried in his father's arms as they escaped their home, making their way to the village outskirts, a place locally known as *Killa*. There, alongside several other families, they remained for a few days before ultimately relocating to *Kawakching*, near the *Nambol* area.

Oinam Tomba from Oinam recalls that his family first stayed at Naorem (a neighbouring village) for five days and later went to *Yangoi*. Toarem Gouramahom of Maibam vividly remembered that very morning, in the middle of the fighting, his father went to the community pond for a hasty bath, came home running, did the morning *pooja* and after eating the hastily prepared rice by Gouramahom, the family gathered what they could and left their house for Naorem, where his family stayed for few days and later went to *Yangoi*. He also recalls that very morning, his two uncles were taken prisoner by the Allied forces on the pretext of being a Japanese informant, where they were taken to a military jail at Langthaban.

One important detail to note is that *Yangoi* is the name of a river located to the east of all the aforementioned settlements. By the time these villagers arrived, the area was already overcrowded with refugees who had fled from the Bishnupur region.<sup>52</sup> With no other options, they too, settled along the riverbanks, constructing makeshift shelters and enduring the hardships of displacement amid the ongoing conflict.

Oral histories from the survivors suggest that when the fighting broke out, villagers had no time to gather their belongings and were forced to flee immediately in search of safety. In the chaos, they abandoned their homes with only what they could carry, prioritising the safety of their families over material possessions. However, once they reached relatively secure

locations, the urgent need for essential supplies, particularly rice, which was fundamental to their sustenance, became evident. As a result, many took great personal risks, returning to their homes despite the ongoing hostilities. Carefully navigating through active combat zones, they retrieved food and other necessities before retreating once more to safety. These highlight not only the precarious conditions in which the displaced villagers found themselves, but also the immense challenges of survival amid warfare, where securing even the most basic resources often required immense courage and calculated risk-taking.

Despite the ferocity of the fighting, the landscape remained largely unchanged. Once filled with gunfire, the ridges and fields stood undisturbed as nature reclaimed its quiet dominion. War consumed men, but the earth neither mourned nor remembered; it simply endured. So too did the people, as daily life gradually overshadowed memories of those harrowing days. Today, the Indian War Memorial, a museum at Maibam, and a memorial stone at Irengbam stand as the only tangible reminders of the fierce struggle that once unfolded there.

#### A NOTE ON SURVIVOR TESTIMONIES

Oral histories and survivor testimonies provide invaluable first-hand perspectives that significantly enrich our understanding of historical events. Nevertheless, such sources come with inherent limitations. Human memory is susceptible to the passage of time, selective recall and personal bias, all of which may introduce inconsistencies or omissions in the narrative. Even so, when carefully contextualised, such testimonies can yield powerful insights. With this in mind, this study draws on interviews conducted with individuals who were eyewitnesses to the events of 1944. At the time of the interviews, the participants were between 95 and 100 years old, except for Thingbaijam Chouyaima, who was ninety. This indicates that during the events of 1944, these witnesses were between 13 and 19 years of age. It is also important to recognise that a 13-year-old in the 1940s, shaped by the socio-cultural realities of the time, cannot be directly equated with a 13-year-old today; their maturity, responsibilities and perceptions were markedly different.

Moreover, the fact that these individuals grew up in what was, in many ways, a simple, almost medieval society—isolated from the modern world—makes their wartime experiences all the more striking. For a generation raised in such a setting, the sudden eruption of large-scale military conflict, foreign troops and technological warfare left a deep psychological imprint. Despite

the challenges associated with memory, it must be acknowledged that trauma, particularly the trauma of conflict, leaves an indelible mark on those who experience it. Such experiences are rarely forgotten over the course of a lifetime. In this light, the testimonies of these survivors carry considerable weight, as their recollections are not merely anecdotal but rooted in deeply etched lived experiences that have endured for over eight decades.

### CONCLUSION

The clash at Maibam-Lotpa Hill marked the beginning of the end for the 33<sup>rd</sup> Division in the Bishnupur sector, setting off a chain of disasters that would ultimately afflict the entire Japanese XV Army. The near-destruction of the 214<sup>th</sup> Regiment—one of the finest units within the 33<sup>rd</sup> Division—signalled a turning point, causing a rapid deterioration in the Japanese position. This crisis was further exacerbated by the onset of the monsoon, which compounded the army's logistical and operational challenges. The engagement was marked by intense close-quarters combat, with fierce hand-to-hand fighting as both sides struggled for dominance, a fact that corresponds with local oral traditions recounting the brutal nature of the engagement.<sup>53</sup>

Among the three divisions that participated in the invasion of India—the 15<sup>th</sup>, 31<sup>st</sup> and 33<sup>rd</sup>—the 33<sup>rd</sup> Division was regarded as the most formidable. As the primary assault force, it was expected to spearhead the advance and break through enemy defences. However, when its strongest formation began to falter, the weaker divisions, which relied on its momentum, quickly collapsed under the mounting pressure. In other words, the success of the entire offensive hinged on the 33<sup>rd</sup> Division's ability to push forward; any hesitation or failure on its part stalled the advance and exposed the other two divisions to significant risk.<sup>54</sup>

Despite the 214<sup>th</sup> Regiment's futile assaults, which resulted in the devastating losses of its II Battalion at Maibam and I Battalion at Bishnupur, Maj Gen Grant still acknowledged their tenacity. Reflecting on their efforts, he remarked, 'The White Tigers have served Mutaguchi well'.<sup>55</sup> His words underscored the troops' fierce determination and sacrifice, even in the face of overwhelming odds and inevitable defeat. Though their attack ultimately failed, their relentless spirit left a lasting impression on friends and foes alike.

Similarly, 2/Lieutenant (later Brigadier) John Randle of the 7/10<sup>th</sup> Baluch commended the fortitude and combat effectiveness of the II Battalion/214<sup>th</sup> Regiment, stating:

For a week they had dug in and held that position under constant artillery and mortar fire, with no reinforcements nor resupply of food or ammunition, and no succour for their wounded; they repelled three attacks, well mounted by seasoned battalions and bravely pressed, and inflicted heavy casualties on us.<sup>56</sup>

Lastly, this study corrects a key historiographical error regarding the 17<sup>th</sup> ID's headquarters, which was previously misidentified as being at Chingfu Hill but was located at Khoriphaba Hill.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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### NOTES

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5. Ian Lyall Grant, *Burma: The Turning Point*, n. 2, p. 117.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
7. The suspension bridge spanned a clear distance of 330 ft across a gorge approx. 80 ft deep and was sturdy enough to support light vehicles.
8. Ian Lyall Grant, *Burma: The Turning Point*, n. 2, pp. 120–21.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 123–24.
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16. Geoffrey Evans and Antony Brett-James, *Imphal*, n. 13, pp. 326–27.
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18. Interview with Khundongbam Loma by author, Phoijing-Chingning, 16 February 2025.
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21. Interview with Kangujam Kouba by author, Leimapokpam- Khunpham Mayai Leikai, 10 January 2025; Interview with Meisnam Ahngou by author, Leimapokpam-Khunpham Mayai Leikai, 10 January 2025.
22. Ian Lyall Grant, *Burma: The Turning Point*, n. 2, p. 149; WO 172/4413, The National Archives, Kew (Housed).
23. Sagolsem. The area formerly known as Heikru-Makhong corresponds to the present-day location of the Khajiri Rising Club & Library office, situated at the crossroads.
24. Louis Allen, *Burma, the Longest War*, n. 15, p. 279.
25. Toarem.
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29. Toarem.
30. Toarem.
31. Ian Lyall Grant, *Burma: The Turning Point*, n. 2, p. 174.
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33. *Ibid.*
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