

BURMA DISPATCHES FROM THE KOHIMA AND IMPHAL FRONTS

Kohima Front, May 13, 1944.

Two day's after our troops had smashed the Japanese in the battle of Kohima ridge the enemy had not counter-attacked, writes a 14th Army Observer. The enemy is contenting himself with firing on his lost position with light machine-guns sited in isolated bunkers that are still holding out.

He is putting bullets where he cannot put troops and, as a result, our movements in that immediate area are restricted. Although we hold nearly the whole of Jail Hill the buildings on its crest are, for the moment, untenable because of fire from a bunker with a highly developed tunnel system. It may take a few days to dislodge the Japs from their underground warren.

Tanks, co-operating with infantry, were today engaged in liquidating bunkers with some success.

Enemy guns were more active. They shelled the ridge from sites south of Kohima in the grounds of the Deputy Commissioner's bungalow. The enemy's morale is at a low ebb and parties of the enemy have been observed evacuating their position.

In the Kohima fighting, as on the Imphal and the Arakan fronts, the Japanese system of bunker defence has undoubtedly achieved a certain amount of success in slowing down our advances. The bunker defensive measure peculiar to the Japanese reflects his war philosophy. The Jap lives in his bunker, fights in his bunker, and, if his defence is broken, dies in his bunker. Bunkers vary in size from the one-man foxhole with a lid, to the section bunker, which may accommodate from 6 to 26 men well provisioned with food and ammunition. Bunkers have sleeping bays, cooking quarters and facilities for personal hygiene.

An isolated bunker position may defy capture for a long period. Where possible, the Jap sites his bunkers on the cloud line of a hill top. They are always in a group, the number of bunkers depending of the size of the feature to be defended. A master fire-plan dictates along which line a gun team will fire. Mutual protection is the principle of defence and fire is placed to obtain all-round criss-crosses of fire so that the attacker, irrespective of his line of approach, will have to cross bullet swept ground to reach the position.

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A typical section of bunker is 25 feet long, 5 feet deep and 6 feet wide. Cut into the ground with the handle-less Japanese pick and shovel, it is heavily roofed with 10 inches of logs and can withstand the impact of a bursting shell.

Our solution to the bunker problem is tank artillery from point blank range. The Japanese bunker that can withstand the shock of a 75 mm high-explosive shell fired from close range has yet to be built.

On the Kohima front our tanks have destroyed over thirty bunker positions because of the rugged nature of the ground. However, they cannot always manoeuvre into fire positions.

Imphal Front, May 13.

Strong Japanese "jitter-parties", supported by artillery fire, were again active last night and early this morning around our wire in the Shenam Saddle area, writes a 14th Army observer. In this series of heights, close to the Niig road, to Tamu, and some 37 miles from Omphal, enemy troops early today occupied part of a small pimple between two of our positions. Their occupation was only temporary, for soon after dawn heavy artillery fire came down on them.

Twenty Japs were seen to run away, and the majority of them were shot down as they ran. Later our troops went in to eliminate the rest of the pocket.

In the dense jungle country north of Shenam and east of Palel, patrol clashes have been reported, with more losses to the enemy. Attempting to advance in the direction of Palel from the east, 22 Japs were killed in one encounter after they had tried to delay our advance with road blocks and machine-gun fire.

After being temporarily checked in the same area Indian troops attacked a Japanese held village on a 4,000 foot-hill and inflicted more casualties. The position was taken and mopping^{up}/is still going on.

In the Bishanpur area the major part of Potsangsam is now in our hands, although the enemy still has strong points astride the main axis and in the south east corner of the village. Consolidation of our positions is being carried out. Enemy casualties so far counted in the fight for Potsangsam amounted to 47 killed.

Apart from constant patrolling, there is still little news from the sector north of Imphal.

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SOUTH EAST ASIA COMMAND.