JAPANESE IN BATTLE

PART I

ENEMY METHODS

GENERAL HEADQUARTERS, INDIA

MILITARY INTELLIGENCE DIRECTORATE

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FOREWORD.

The Japanese are an island race who have mastered the art of war, not through any mysterious or indefinable quality inherited from their Emperor, their islands, or their ancestors—during your grandfather’s time they were still in the bow-and-arrow stage—but through serious study of ancient and modern methods, and by intensive training. If we analyse their tactics, reducing them to fundamentals, all that they practise is to be found in our own training manuals, or in the military histories of ancient campaigns; not even the snipers in the trees are new—the jungle tribes of Africa and Brazil have employed them since time immemorial.

In their long history the peoples of our Empire have shown the world that they possess more than an average share of courage and tenacity, and today we must add to these advantages our undoubted superiority in arms and equipment. Any success which the Japanese have had against us was due to intensive training, carefully rehearsed plans and normal guts. Whatever the task in hand—be it the digging of a single fox-hole or the preparation of a large-scale invasion—their work is done with meticulous care, and by intensive and sustained training alone can we hope to outmanoeuvre them.

This pamphlet is largely the work of soldiers and airmen fighting in Burma and the South West Pacific who, in notes, sketches and photographs, have recorded their observations of the Japanese in Battle.

Special acknowledgement is due to the American Marine Liaison Officer of the Pacific Ocean Areas whose appreciation of Japanese characteristics and methods has been quoted in Chapter I, Section 2. Acknowledgement is also due to our Allies for the drawings reproduced as Examples 13 and 15 in Section 4 of the Chapter on Defence.

Part II, which is devoted to the important subject of counter measures, is being prepared by the Military Training Directorate, G.H.Q., India Command.
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### NOTE

Part II of this book, which is being prepared and published by the Military Training Directorate, is devoted to counter measures.
CHAPTER I.—GENERAL.

1. Morale.

"When I received my mobilization orders, I had already sacrificed my life for my country... you must not expect me to return alive"

1. This sentence is quoted from a letter found on the body of a dead conscript. It is by no means exceptional and indicates a fanatical conception of service which finds expression in a disregard for personal safety and a readiness to fight to the last man and the last round. The morale from which such feelings of self-sacrifice spring, is based on an attitude of mind assiduously cultivated from a very early age.

Japanese moral training instils a strong religious belief; "Comrades who have fallen!" reads what is almost the last entry in a soldier's diary, "Soon we shall be fighting our last fight to avenge you, and all of us together, singing a battle song, will march to Kudan". (Kudan is a shrine near Tokyo dedicated to the war dead). The last blood-smeared page of a diary captured in Burma has "Three cheers for the Emperor" scrawled across it. The Army belongs to the Emperor and its mission is his divine will. Finally the Japanese believe they are a chosen people, a superior race. Such is the basis of a morale to which is closely allied a high state of individual and collective battle discipline.

All this does not mean that the Japanese are immune from fear and defeat. By a different process they have reached that stage of fanatical self-confidence which the Nazis reached in 1939. "We are a superior race with a divine mission. We are invincible". These are the foundations of sand upon which Germans and Japanese alike have built their morale, and the initial military successes which both these countries achieved against their ill-prepared enemies gave ample credence to the lie of invincibility. But the Nazi no longer goes into the attack making the Hitler salute or with "Heil Hitler" on his lips, and his arrogant self-confidence, subjected to the growing armed might of the United Nations, is crumbling. And so with the Japanese; faced with the example of Germany and the just retribution which will most assuredly overtake them, they cannot hope to maintain a morale which is based on the fallacy of invincibility and a divine mission. Even now (May 1943) when our main effort is still confined to Europe and North Africa and the situation is more favourable to the Japanese than it can ever be again, we find that the desire for self preservation can at times be stronger than the desire to stay and fight it out. To quote from a recent situation report—

"After a fairly quiet night the enemy attacked the 1 Punjab posns from the North. No ground was given, but the feature known as the Pimple, not previously occupied by us was occupied by the enemy... a counter attack was put in by a coy of 1 Punjab and a pl of 15 Punjab with the bayonet. It was completely successful and drove the enemy off the Pimple and out of the... village. The enemy retreated across the open country NE where they were caught by our arty.

Our counter attack cost the enemy about 103 killed, of which 73 have been checked over not counting those killed and wounded by our arty..."

A prisoner of war describing the action said—"The fire fight developed in earnest at about thirty yards range and then the bayonet charge which followed completely overran our position. I was wounded twice in the chest and before losing consciousness saw my comrades beat a hasty retreat".

In conclusion a statement made by a Japanese recently captured in the Arakan is worthy of note. He volunteered the information that our shelling and bombing had caused, besides shell shock, several cases of nervous prostration.
2. Tactical Characteristics.

2. To quote from an American appreciation: “Japanese tactics in general are based on deception and rapid manoeuvre. They will go to extremes to create false impressions. Sheer weight of numbers and steam-roller tactics are apparently distasteful to them, as they lack finesse, though such would probably be used if required. One gets the impression that the perfect solution to a tactical problem is a neatly performed stratagem, followed by an encirclement or a flanking attack driven home with the bayonet. This allows of the commanders to demonstrate their ability and the men to show their courage and ferocity in hand to hand fighting. Their plans are a mixture of military artistry and vain-glorious audacity”.

“Deception, stratagems and ruses must be expected at all times. Bull-dog tenacity in carrying out a mission, even to annihilation, will very frequently give a most erroneous impression of the Japanese strength and will often result in small forces overcoming larger ones, as their units are not rendered ineffective until they are nearly all casualties”.

“This capacity for driving on despite losses is not only displayed by officers. Training for the Japanese has been so thorough that every man will keep plugging until his own part of the main mission is completed. Long experience has taught even the privates what must be done before a mission is completed, and discipline, lack of imagination, and fatalism, drives them on despite losses.

“To the Japanese leader, tactics is an art, with decisions gained by skill, not by sheer power. Their policy for the use of manoeuvre may appear to lead towards complicated evolutions. Training and the delegation to subordinates of the initiative for independent action are most probably the factors that make such tactics simple”.

3. The Principles of War.

3. In the second edition of Japanese Military Forces it was stated that the principles of Surprise and Mobility characterized all Japanese land operations. To these must undoubtedly be added the principle of Offensive Action.

4. Surprise is achieved in both strategy and tactics and ruses are extensively employed. Approaches through country regarded as impassable and the conduct of operations during foul weather are means by which troops more sensitive to ground and climate have been placed at a disadvantage. The fifth column has been freely employed, and with their aid it has been possible greatly to increase the methods by which the enemy can be taken by surprise.

Ruses include the use of disguises, calling out in the language of the troops opposing them and feigning panic and disorganised withdrawal. This last ruse may be accompanied by strewing the line of withdrawal with stores and equipment—all carefully covered by concealed machine guns.

5. Mobility, which is achieved in a number of ways, has been one of the most important factors in obtaining surprise. The ability to exploit to the full the exceptional marching powers of the troops—they are capable of covering thirty or more miles per day—is closely allied with the ability to feed them. They may, by choosing a circuitous path through difficult country, attempt to overtake and cut the line of retreat of a force withdrawing along a road, but mobility does not end there; if the chances of living on the country are small troops may carry as much as seven days rations with them thus freeing themselves during this period from the encumbrance of an administrative tail. Impressed local inhabitants, with carts if the country is suitable, supplement their carrying powers, whilst opportunities to seize local supplies are never neglected.
The Japanese soldier has been trained to carry up to 58 lbs., which is what Napoleon's troops carried when they marched to Moscow—but their total load included 15 days rations! Lest either of these loads should be thought exceptional we should not forget the British troops in the Peninsular who carried about 60 lbs. and those at Mons in 1914 who carried only a few pounds less.

It should on no account be construed from this paragraph that the Japanese habitually carries a heavy load of rations and equipment, for like us he prefers to fight as lightly equipped as possible, but the pointworthy of note is that if several days' mobility can be achieved only at the price of carrying a load of rations on his back, he is prepared to carry it.

About our own mobility the Japanese have stated "Although the English Army has some mechanical mobility, in general it does not have much maneuverability."

6. **Offensive Action** is described in one of our training pamphlets as a principle which gives moral superiority and, tends to confer the initiative and, with it, liberty of action. A famous British general recently simplified it thus "The object of every soldier will be to kill Germans", and this is very near to the Japanese interpretation for the latter applies the principle of offensive action not only to his attacks but also situations in which his defeat is a foregone conclusion. Whatever the situation his object is to kill the enemy. "If only I can die killing six or seven of the enemy instead of by his first onslaught" writes a diarist just before the last attack is made by a small party.

In August 1942 American marines raided an island held by about 90 Japanese. The raid was a complete success and most of the garrison were annihilated. The remnant, however, estimated at about a dozen, attacked the raiding party as it was leaving the island and thus suffered further casualties. It is an interesting example of offensive action in desperate circumstances.
4. An Example of strategic mobility.

An outstanding example of strategic mobility on the part of the Japanese was their advance through the Shan States from Karenni in the South to Myitkyina in the North, a distance of some 450 miles, covered in three weeks. This feat is even more remarkable when it is realised that during their advance the Japanese fought three not inconsiderable engagements and were hindered by numerous delaying actions.

In early April 1942 the Japanese forces, consisting of the 56th Division, advanced northwards between the Salween and Sittang Rivers and occupied the town of Mawchi. Facing this advance the Chinese disposed four battalions in depth along the road Mawchi-Loikaw.

On April 17th, the Japanese, having made unsuccessful frontal attacks against the Chinese, by-passed the position and cut the road between Bawlake and Namphe, reaching the town of Namphe on the following day. Here, there was heavy fighting but the enemy overcame all opposition and pushed on another 20 miles, reaching Ngwedaung on the morning of the 19th.

Two days later, on the evening of April 21st, the Japanese had occupied Taunggyi, having carried out a large scale encirclement of the Chinese positions. Loilem, a town some 40 miles away, was their next objective, and this they captured on April 23rd after by-passing the Chinese, who had taken up defensive positions along the Taunggyi-Loilem road.

In the next four days the Japanese force pushed on another 120 miles, reaching Na-mon on April 27th. Two days' heavy fighting ensued, but the enemy succeeded in maintaining their advance and pushing the Chinese from Lashio, to positions at Kutkai some 40 miles northward. Once having succeeded in ejecting the Chinese from this position, and having surprised the force holding the bridge over the Shweli River at Man Wing, no further organised resistance was offered to the Japanese advance. As a result Bhamo was entered on May 4th and Myitkyina was occupied four days later, on May 8th.

DISCUSSION.

The maintenance of a daily average advance of some 21 miles despite delaying actions and despite having to fight battles speaks for itself as an example of strategic mobility.

In considering how this advance was achieved the following points are outstanding:—

Firstly, the skill of the Japanese in the choice, direction and execution of their encircling movements which, probably more than any other single factor, accounted for the speed and great distance of withdrawals the Chinese were compelled to undertake.

Secondly, the refusal on the part of the Japanese to be deterred from their primary objective by threats to flank or rear.

Finally, there is the ability of the Japanese to move without a cumbersome administrative tail.

5. Orders.

7. Japanese operation orders are often extremely brief. The general absence of detail suggests that battle has, where possible, been reduced to a drill. In the large number of captured orders available for examination little reference is made to frontages, dividing lines, or supporting fire; this is because Japanese units are generally given clearly defined features as objectives while artillery is placed under the command of units or even sub-units and may fire by observation at targets of opportunity.

In Chapter XII of the second edition of Japanese Military Forces examples were given of an order for the advance to contact and an attack order. Below are three orders for the defence, the first two, which are more in the nature of instructions, are extremely brief, the third is in some detail and it was accompanied by a sketch; the sketch has not been reproduced.

Example 1.

HORI Order No. A-137  South Seas Detachment Order 6 Nov. 0900
ILIMOW
1. Since yesterday (5th) morning YAZAWA Unit (BUTAI) has been attacked
by approximately one enemy battalion which was repulsed. Since last evening, security unit (BUTAI) of KUWADA Battalion has been attacked by a small number of enemy, which were repulsed. The situation at the rear of the enemy line is not clear, but troops seem to be there.

2. The Detachment will consolidate the key point along the road to the south of ILIMOW.

3. One Coy. of the YAMAMOTO Regiment (less 1/3 2 M. G., ⅓ P, casualties collecting detachment unit, No. 3, portable wireless attached) shall depart from its present position immediately, followed by the main body, and proceed to BAIBARI and consolidate the key points in the vicinity of said place.

4. YAZAWA Regiment is to carry on its present duty.

5. I will be at ILIMOW.

Detachment Commander
HORI, Tomitaro

Method of distribution:—
Summon Lt. Colonel TSUKAMOTO and issue it verbally. After it has been sent to Colonel YAZAWA by telephone, it will be issued verbally, to be written down.

Example 2.

HORI Order No. A 316.

1. According to the reports from YAZAWA Unit (BUTAI), a portion of the enemy is now advancing toward the vicinity of KOKODA and ISURABA road south of FUKURAKUHI (T. N:—FUKURAKU-tombstone or monument. This may be the name of a place) A part of YAZAWA Unit (BUTAI) was attacked last evening, but repulsed the enemy.

2. A part of the detachment (SHITAI) will protect the rear of the left flank in the vicinity of ILIMOW.

3. The YAMAMOTO R (T. N:—Regiment) will occupy a position in the vicinity of BAIBARI, 6,000 kilometers south of ILIMOW, with its main strength (3rd. Bn.) in order to protect the Detachment’s left flank YAMASAKI Engineer platoon will assist.

4. YAZAWA R is to carry out its present duty. No. 88 Wire Company of HOZUNI unit H.Q. is released from the detail.

5. I will be here.

Method of distribution:—
After substance is sent to YAMAMOTO Unit (BUTAI) Commander by runner or radio, verbally issue to the order receivers for their notes.

SECRET

Order No. 5 for No. 3 Company of KURE No. 3 Special Landing Party—
August 17th 1942, at KAVIENG Company Headquarters. Commander of No. 3 Company, Kure No. 3 Special Landing party, MARUYAMA JUNTA.

Order for No. 3 Company.

1. Enemy situation.—The enemy appeared in the seas near the Solomon Islands with powerful operational units, and a large number of transport ships, opening an attack against position “X” at daybreak of August 7th.

2. Situation of our troops.—No. 1 Coy. has despatched sentry groups and is in the midst of constructing defensive positions on the plateau south of the pasture in the PANAPEI district, and on the seacoast of PANAPEI.

3. Company Commander’s Decision.—This Company, following the secret operational Order No. 17 of KURE No. 3 Special Landing Unit, will construct defensive positions along the coastline of the Seaplane Base south of NUAN and perfect the defensive preparations against the ocean front.

4. (1) No. 1 Platoon Commander will direct his own platoon, the H.Q. Platoon, and No. 2 Platoon (all members except those on duty), and must quickly construct defensive positions as designated.

(2) The HQ Platoon Commander, and the No. 2 Platoon Commander will place under the direction of No. 1 Platoon Commander the necessary number of men required during the construction of the positions.
5. Distribution (disposition) of troops on the ocean-front as per attached map No. 1.

(1) Nos. 1 and 2 Platoons (To each will be attached one quick-firing gun, one heavy machine gun, one light machine gun, one heavy grenade discharger) the first line. Positions No. 2, No. 1 Platoon, Position No. 1 and No. 2 Platoon. The Q Platoon, reserve unit.

(2) The HQ Platoon Commander must lay telephone lines between the 1st and 2nd positions. (In case there is more than 2 distribution of positions).

(3) The Front Line Platoon Commander will diligently strengthen defensive (defence) positions in the area under his charge, clearing the field of fire so as to give maximum fire power, and facilitate speedy movements of troops.

It is also necessary to take strict precautionary measures in the flank and rear.

6. Distribution (disposition) of troops on the Land side, is to stand by at the Company Headquarters.

7. Orders for commencement of movements of various units will be given later.

Particulars of Commands.

1. Alarm Call.—(Landing Unit Assembly Call) by bugle call (Landing Unit Assembly Call) or by verbal orders (messengers).

2. Personnel.—All members except those on duty. (Even those who are unable to participate in the actual battle on account of illness, must arm and stand by at the Company Headquarters).

3. Assembly Point.—East side of the Company Headquarters.

4. Armaments, and ammunition carried by troops—As prescribed by the Landing Unit. (Reserve ammunition will be loaded in the trucks).

5. Vehicles.—Five trucks (for transporting units and moving men).

   One machine gun carrier (for use in commanding and liaison).

   One Passenger Car (for use in commanding and liaison).

6. Information, reconnaissance and patrols.

8. The Japanese advanced into Malaya and Burma using reproductions of British Ordnance Survey maps upon which Japanese translations had been super-imposed. The information which these maps provided was supplemented by a detailed study in peace time of the probable area of operations. This study involved the "planting" of commercial photographers in places of operational interest and other forms of "economic" penetration the primary task of which was espionage. Considerable success was also achieved in organizing the fifth column through which it was possible to continue the collection of information after photographers, barbers, tattoo artists and all the other Japanese who had found their way westward, had either left hastily or been interned. With fifth column assistance it was possible to obtain up-to-date information on dispositions and defences and during mobile operations to direct aircraft onto headquarters and other suitable targets.

9. During the early days of the war in the South West Pacific and Burma, the Japanese often subordinated reconnaissance to speed of advance; Frontal attacks were launched against imperfectly known positions and bold decisions were taken even where information was lacking. The initial offensive had succeeded and whatever the cost the momentum was to be maintained; the operations evolved themselves into one vast encounter battle in which the Japanese, having seized the initiative sought to maintain it. As resistance hardened, however, their attention to reconnaissance became once more evident and operations in Burma in particular show an intimate topographical knowledge which could only have been obtained by extensive patrolling and by the employment of local inhabitants as guides.

10. The use of small patrols in a purely reconnaissance role has often been reported. According to the nature of the country and the task involved these patrols may either remain in observation in one place or make a reconnaissance involving a march of several days during which they are entirely dependent on what they carry themselves. Patrols of this nature often consist of three to six other ranks commanded by an officer or N.C.O. They will often be in local civilian dress.

Reconnaissance reports are frequently accompanied by sketches the general standard of which is high.

If it is considered that the task involved does not warrant the employment of a patrol a couple of scouts may be used instead. Their tasks may be to lie in hiding near our positions and observe.
11. Fighting patrols vary in strength, but a platoon or less is commonly employed. In Burma the activities of these patrols have been confined almost entirely to the hours of darkness, the exception being when they have been sent out by day some distance to a flank—sometimes with the object of seizing local herdsmen for interrogation.

The tasks of troops patrolling at night vary from drawing fire in order to discover our positions, to determine raids in which attempts are made to overwhelm small posts. Drawing fire is, however, by far the most common activity.

12. Reports from New Guinea describe how once, strong patrols (30, 60 or 120, are the figures quoted) were employed by the Japanese whose “movements were similar to those of troops in an encounter.” It is clear from the account given, that these were small aggressive detachments which advanced along jungle tracks until they made contact with our troops; they then endeavoured to hold them frontally whilst sections or platoons tried to outflank them through the jungle. It is possible that such offensive action will be taken by patrols covering the occupation of a defensive position.

7. Training and rehearsals.

13. In peace the Japanese train for war. In war they train for important operations. The severity of their training is worthy of note, and the following extracts from reports by officers who were attached to the Japanese Army before the War give some indication of the thoroughness of their preparations:

“The autumn manoeuvres of the Guards Division took place in the first half of November in the mountainous region round the semi-active volcano Mount Asama about a hundred miles northwest of Tokyo.

The weather was extremely severe, the temperature well below freezing point in the daytime and considerably colder at night, with snow, rain and high wind.

“...According to the plan of the directing staff, a defensive position should have been occupied the following evening...but owing to the ice and snow the mountain roads had become dangerous for horses and vehicles so that part of the scheme was called off and the division marched on to the starting area for the next phase, whilst that part which was to form the skeleton enemy marched back over the Torii Pass to their billeting area, arriving at about six that evening surprisingly fresh considering they had marched some seventy miles in forty-eight hours under very trying conditions...”

Another report—

“The march to camp, a distance of twenty-six miles, was done under company arrangements, after the whole Regiment had left barracks together...On arrival at camp, after an average of eleven hours on the road, all companies carried out P. T. or rifle exercises before the evening meal. The companies of the battalion to which I was attached had breakfast at 4.30 A.M., lunch at 12.30 P.M. and supper at 5.30 P.M.

A third report—

“A full pack and three ammunition pouches were carried on all training...”

(This was in 1938. The full weight of equipment carried will have been approximately 58 lbs.)

14. When War comes this tempo is, if possible, intensified—

“August 25th 1942. Get up at 0300 hrs for landing practice. 0400 hrs landed and took up battle positions. 0600 hrs the first fight ended near swamps. Have breakfast. From about 0800 hrs do second attack and defence exercises and then some sea bathing. Return to ship. From 1500 hrs cleaning of arms and equipment. How busy we are bathing every day fully-equipped. Since formation of unit only 3 hours sleep per day.”

Before the attack on Malaya troops trained in French Indo-China carrying full equipment, i.e. 58 lbs. Subsequently they advanced down the peninsular carrying the absolute minimum. The practice of making the troops carry more in training than in actual operations is an old one dating back to the time of the Roman legions.

Operations may be carefully rehearsed; this does not mean that the Japanese train on a model of the position they will eventually attack, but rehearsals include intensive training under conditions closely approximating those under which they will be required to operate. For example Japanese troops have achieved surprise more than once by advancing through what has been regarded as more or less
impenetrable Mangrove swamp. Without careful training this would hardly be possible, and troops are practised in overcoming such obstacles for weeks before they are committed to the actual operation.

Finally an element of surprise is introduced into training as often as possible, and a unit resigned to several weeks routine may easily be woken up in the middle of the night and ordered to move fifty miles at once.

8. Road blocks.

15. The Japanese employ road blocks—
   to cut off a force retiring,
   to protect one or both flanks of an encircling movement,
   as part of a defensive system.

16. As far as possible road blocks are sited in positions where they effectively prevent all movement until attacked and cleared; this is particularly the case in defence when they are most likely to be encountered on defiles the possession of which is vital to an advancing force. The following sites have been chosen in the past—
   - area of a bridge upon which several routes converged,
   - single road with dense jungle on both sides,
   - centre of a town or village.

   The exact position may be just over the crest of a rise, or round the bend of a road—in fact anywhere where vehicles will be close upon the road block before drivers can stop or turn round.

17. Roads may be blocked with felled trees or vehicles. Some blocks have been formed simply by firing at point blank range at the first few vehicles to round a bend or clear a crest. Occasionally roads have been blocked by a series of three obstacles sited at approximately half-mile intervals.

18. A road block position may be covered by a force varying from a small party with a machine gun to a whole regiment. If not brought quickly to battle and destroyed small holding forces are often reinforced, until finally the block becomes a well organized position defended with the greatest determination.

Blocks are normally covered by an infantry gun sited about 50 yards from the block in a position from which it can fire straight down the road. If we are using tanks, the 37 mm. gun must also be expected. At the same time machine guns—light or medium—deny the road to unarmoured troops. Sites chosen invariably include cover on both sides of the road in which troops protecting the flanks of the road block conceal themselves.
1. Part of the Mayu River area, showing the flat plain with occasional nullahs and wooded hills.
2. Typical of very large areas in the Arakan and the deltas of all Burma's larger rivers, this picture, shows an area of tidal creeks, scrub mangrove and rice fields near Akyab.