Small Arms, Japanese

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in strength. Forbidden to withdraw by Slim, the 5th and 7th Indian Divisions found themselves isolated by the Japanese advance. Slim demanded that they stand fast, and he put into effect the aerial resupply operation he had promised. He also energetically launched relief operations that rescued the beleaguered troops and hammered the Japanese Fifteenth Army. Caught between the two forces, the Japanese were forced to withdraw in tatters through the jungle back into Burma. Slim’s success demonstrated the efficacy of his operational approach, silenced his critics, and greatly boosted troop morale.

However, these reverses led Japan to reinforce its forces in Burma, and it launched a renewed major invasion of India via Imphal and Kohima between March and July 1944 that again sorely tested Slim’s troops and their morale. In the face of superior strength, Slim’s forces were compelled to make a fighting withdrawal on Imphal, during which a lightning Japanese advance surrounded the 17th Indian Division. Slim had to do an about-face and rescue the division before it could withdraw into the defensive perimeter British and Indian forces established outside Imphal in early April. Aided by the arrival of much needed reinforcements from India, Slim’s troops brought the Japanese offensive to a grinding halt during May 1944 in a protracted battle of attrition.

After thwarting the Japanese offensive, in early 1945 Slim prepared to launch an ambitious counteroffensive aimed at recapturing Burma. During the summer of 1944, he exploited his success by capturing crossings over the Chindwin River at Sittang and Kalewa, despite atrocious monsoon conditions, to acquire jumping-off points for future offensive action. He then developed lines of supply via Tamu through the Kalew Valley to Kalewa to provide the logistic base for a renewal of offensive operations. During the late summer of 1944, Slim prepared to engage and destroy the enemy on the Shwebo Plain during the winter of 1944–1945 via an encirclement operation on Mandalay. But mounting signs of Japanese intentions to effect a general withdrawal behind the highly defensible barrier of the Irrawaddy River compelled Slim to scrap these plans.

Instead, he now planned to make a deep penetration into Burma to capture Meiktila, the key base and communications center of the Japanese Burma Area Command. Such a bold and deep advance through the jungle into the Japanese rear could only succeed if Slim managed to confuse the enemy as to his intentions. Using elaborate security and deception measures, he transferred the IV Corps from Tamu to Pokokku on the Irrawaddy, within striking distance of Meiktila, unseen by the enemy. At the same time, the XXXIII Corps frontally attacked across the Irrawaddy River toward Mandalay to draw Japanese reserves there. When the enemy had fully committed all its available reserves, IV Corps struck across the Irrawaddy and captured Meiktila on March 3, 1945. The Japanese were thrown off balance by this daring, lightning strike, and as a result, XXXIII Corps also captured Mandalay during late March.

The Japanese reacted violently to the British crossing of the Irrawaddy and launched numerous counterattacks to eliminate the British bridgehead but suffered crippling losses in the process. Slim’s forces then decisively defeated the Japanese at Meiktila during March 15–31, 1945. Making use of aerial resupply again, Slim kept his forces moving forward rapidly to storm Rangoon on May 2, 1945, as the first monsoon rains began to fall. The recapture of Rangoon brought to a conclusion one of the best-conceived and most boldly enacted British ground campaigns of World War II.

Slim took demoralized and badly beaten troops and restored them to a standard of proficiency unmatched in the British army of World War II. He also became the only Allied general of the war decisively to defeat the Japanese army on the Asian mainland and to prevail over the enemy with limited air support. His battlefield achievements showed him to be a great soldier of sharp intelligence and shrewd judgment. In the opinion of many authorities, Slim was the best commander produced by Great Britain during World War II.

FURTHER READINGS
Russell A. Hart

SEE ALSO Army, Japanese; China-Burma-India Theater of Operations

Small Arms, Japanese
Japanese army and naval-infantry forces relied on a standard assortment of small arms in World War II. These arms can be grouped into rifles and carbines, pistols, light machine guns, and submachine guns. Heavy machine guns, while not normally considered small arms, will also be covered under this topical heading. Japanese small-arms ammunition could be identified, in many instances, by the following colored bands: pink (ball), black (armor-piercing), and green (tracer).
The two basic rifle models in service by the Japanese were the 38 and the 99. The Model 38 (1905) 6.5-mm rifle, also known as the Arisaka, was based on the German Mauser bolt-action design and fitted to take the Model 30 (1897) bayonet. A carbine version of this rifle, the Model 38 (1905) carbine, which was shorter and lighter than the original model, was also manufactured. A carbine variant, the Model 44 (1911) carbine, was slightly longer than the Model 38 carbine and came with a folding spike bayonet. A sniper's version of the Model 38 rifle, the Model 91 (1931), was essentially the same as the original except for the inclusion of a telescopic sight. Some Italian-made 6.5-mm rifles were also used by the Japanese.

The Model 99 (1939) 7.7-mm rifle succeeded the Model 38 as the need arose during the war for a more powerful service rifle. It was basically the same as the Model 38 except it was shorter and had a larger caliber. A long variant of the Model 99, a sniper variant, and an experimental model reworked to use light-machine-gun magazines were also produced. Both the Model 38 and the Model 99 rifle could be fitted with spigot, rifled, and cup-type grenade launchers, which fired fragmentation, smoke, and high-explosive antipersonnel grenades. Toward the end of the war, a few Japanese 7.7-mm semi-automatic rifles, based on captured U.S. Garands, were also manufactured.

The standard Japanese pistol design was based on the Nambu (1914) 8-mm pistol. Modeled in appearance after the German Luger yet different in its internal functioning, this semiautomatic pistol is named after its Japanese inventor, Colonel Kijiro Nambu. A wooden combination shoulder-stock-holster was developed to turn this pistol into a carbine but was obsolete prior to the war in the Pacific. The Nambu was superseded by the Model 14 (1925) 8-mm pistol, a significantly modified version. The Model 14 was mass-produced and became the major Japanese pistol used in World War II. A rare 7-mm version, reserved solely for the use of staff officers, was also manufactured.

Two other Japanese pistols were also in service. The Model 94 (1934) 8-mm pistol was of poor design and initially produced for export, mostly to Japanese living in South America. It was supplied to aircraft crews and infantry forces during the war. The model 26 (1893) 9-mm revolver was based on a hinged-frame Smith & Wesson model. It was the only revolver ever produced in quantity by the Japanese. The Model 11 (1922) 6.5-mm light machine gun was based on the French Hotchkiss yet was hampered by its reliance on 5-round ammunition clips fed into a hopper instead of a more standard feed system. At one time standard to the Japanese infantry squad, this weapon was replaced by the Model 96 (1936) 6.5-mm light machine gun. Although the Model 96 externally resembled the British Bren gun, with its magazine feed and carrying handle, it was based on French and Czech internal designs. This light machine gun had a bipod mount and was fitted to take the Model 30 (1897) bayonet.

The Japanese also used other machine-gun models during World War II. The Model 99 (1939) 7.7-mm light machine gun was basically the same as the Model 96 except that it was based on a larger caliber. The BRNO, ZB (1925) 7.92-mm light machine gun also saw considerable service. Originally of Czech manufacture, it was purchased by the Japanese prior to the war, looted from the Chinese, and produced in their captured arsenals. Because of the large quantities of British ammunition seized by the Japanese, attempts were made to produce imitations of Allied weapons.

The Japanese used very few submachine guns in the war because they did not appreciate their value until well into the conflict. Those machine weapons that were encountered were mostly German Bergmanns, Swiss-made Solothurns, or captured Allied models. Still, three Japanese submachine-gun designs were manufactured either in small quantities or as prototypes. The Type 0 (1940) 8-mm submachine gun was used by Japanese naval infantry and by paratroopers at Leyte in 1944. The experimental 6.5-mm light machine gun was a cheap, easy-to-make weapon produced during the final Japanese emergency and is notable for its blowback operation. The experimental 8-mm machine gun, which was very compact and had a special rate-of-fire selector, was never placed in production.

The Model 92 (1932) 7.7-mm heavy machine gun represented the standard Japanese heavy machine gun. It was a modified Hotchkiss-type weapon and was mounted on a tripod for use against ground targets; however, an adapter allowed it to be used against aircraft. A Model 92 variant based on the Lewis-type machine gun, which was drum-fed rather than strip-fed, also existed. Another variant, known as the Type 0 heavy machine gun, was lighter than the standard Model 92 and simpler in design, making it one of the best heavy-machine-gun designs of the war.

The Model 93 (1933) 13-mm twin heavy machine gun, which was tripod-mounted and had a steel chair for the gunner, was used against both tanks and aircraft. Model 93 ammunition has a different colored-band system than standard small-arms ammunition: black (ball), white (armor-piercing), and red (tracer). A single-barreled version of this heavy machine gun was also produced.
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