

## **British Empire Forces Committed To Operation Olympic 1945**

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Most of the information is from [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)

There is no evidence the British looked upon participating in Operation Olympic, the invasion of the Japanese Home Islands, with any great enthusiasm, and it is difficult to blame them. By 1945 Britain was exhausted by the war – remember, it had been at war two years and three months longer than the US. And the US certainly did not need any help, given its vast resources. Nonetheless, the British put on their famous Stiff Upper Lip and committed token Empire forces.

### **Army**

HQ Commonwealth Corps

[GOC Lt. Gen. Sir Charles Keightley]

- 3<sup>rd</sup> Division
- 6<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division
- 10<sup>th</sup> Australian Division

The corps would have participated in Operation Coronet, the planned invasion of Honshu in March 1946.

The 10<sup>th</sup> Australian Division had been formed early in the war, but the country lacked the population to support it.<sup>1</sup> It was broken up to support other divisions. The new 10<sup>th</sup> would have taken experienced troops from other divisions.

6<sup>th</sup> Division<sup>2</sup> was originally formed for home defense in 1943 and a brigade participated in the 1943 Aleutians offensive. It was disbanded in January 1945 and would have been reformed.

British 3<sup>rd</sup> Division had participated in the Normandy landing and had suffered 16,000+ casualties by April 1945. 11,000+ were battle losses, the majority of which were suffered by the rifle companies.<sup>3</sup>

### The Matter of Indian Troops

A question needing answers is why no Indian divisions were included. The three Indian divisions with 8<sup>th</sup> Army – 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> – were commonly said to be among the finest in the empire. The author has heard said, long ago, from still-serving officers that the three divisions were slated for Japan and for the first wave.

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<sup>1</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australian\\_10th\\_Division](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australian_10th_Division) for some basic information.

<sup>2</sup> Details of the division's orbat and service dates can be found at <http://home.adelphia.net/~dryan67/orders/canada43.html>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.warchronicle.com/units/British/3rd/order\\_of\\_battle.htm](http://www.warchronicle.com/units/British/3rd/order_of_battle.htm)

Wikipedia says a single Indian division was earmarked but General Douglas McArthur vetoed the idea, presumably because of language issues. Its difficult to take this assertion seriously, as all Indian Army officers spoke English. The Indians were all educated with English as the medium of instruction from elementary school onwards. Race could not have played a role as Americans were perfectly used to working with the melting pot of the Empire's races, thanks to the Italian campaign.

We suspect it was the British who vetoed the idea. Naturally the British-Indian Army would want to be in the forefront, but there was the not so small matter of the Indian nationalist Subhash Chandra Bose and his Indian National Army. He had allied with the Japanese against the British, one of the stupidest ideas any Indian has had in history. Given the horrifyingly brutal manner in which the Japanese treated the Chinese, there cannot be doubt that had they succeeded in their invasion of India, the Indians would have fared as badly even while the Japanese kept Bose as a puppet.

Nonetheless, Bose had succeeded in turning some Indian POWs in Japanese custody against the Emperor, and together with some deserters had formed the Indian National Army, the goal of which was to expel the British from India. Simultaneously, by 1945 Indian nationalism was in full-flower and while it was unthinkable to many, others were preparing to see the British off. The British-Indian Army was an all-volunteer force and had seen six years of hard fighting on behalf of its Emperor. There is not the slightest doubt the Indian divisions would have performed with the superb professionalism and unquestioning devotion to orders that was its hallmark. Had an imperative need arisen, of course the Indian Army would have participated. But there was no need: with the American invasion force alone containing 40 very large divisions, the Commonwealth Corps or an Indian corps would have constituted the merest punctuation mark in the final offensive.

## Navy

The entire British Pacific Fleet was to be committed. In total it had:

- 17 CV, CVL, CVE
- 4 BB
- 10 CL
- 40 DD
- 31 frigates and sloops
- 29 SS
- 35 mine warfare

## Major warships

- Aircraft carriers
  - HMS *Colossus*
  - HMS *Formidable*
  - HMS *Glory*
  - HMS *Illustrious*

- HMS *Implacable*
- HMS *Indefatigable*
- HMS *Indomitable*
- HMS *Venerable*
- HMS *Vengeance*
- HMS *Victorious*
- Battleships
  - HMS *Howe*
  - HMS *King George V*
  - HMS *Duke of York*
- Cruisers
  - HMS *Swiftsure*
  - HMS *Newfoundland*
  - HMS *Euryalus*
  - HMS *Black Prince*
  - HMCS *Uganda*
  - HMNZS *Achilles*
  - HMNZS *Gambia*

## **Air Force**

Two major air commands were to participate: the 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Tactical Air Force, formed in October 1944 for the invasion of the Philippines, and RAF Bomber Command's Tiger Force, with two bomber groups, reduced from an original three. The reduction in terms of squadrons was more drastic: the original plan required 66 bomber squadrons but was cut to 22

### Tiger Force Wings

- No. 348 Wing RAF (later renamed 551 Wing)
- No. 349 Wing RAF (552 Wing)
- No. 350 Wing RAF (553 Wing)
- No. 351 Wing RAF (554 Wing)
- No. 555 Wing RAAF
- No. 661 Wing RCAF
- No. 662 Wing RCAF
- No. 663 Wing RCAF
- No. 664 Wing RCAF

### Squadrons

- No. 7 Squadron RAF
- No. 9 Squadron RAF
- No. 35 Squadron RAF
- No. 44 Squadron RAF (replaced by 49 Squadron)
- No. 49 Squadron RAF (replaced 44 Squadron)
- No. 75 Squadron RNZAF

- No. 207 Squadron RAF
- No. 405 Squadron RCAF
- No. 408 Squadron RCAF
- No. 419 Squadron RCAF
- No. 420 Squadron RCAF
- No. 425 Squadron RCAF
- No. 428 Squadron RCAF
- No. 431 Squadron RCAF
- No. 434 Squadron RCAF
- No. 460 Squadron RAAF
- No. 467 Squadron RAAF
- No. 617 Squadron RAF
- No. 627 Squadron RAF
- No. 635 Squadron RAF
- No. 692 Squadron RAF

### 1 Tactical Air Force

- No. 77 (Attack) Wing
  - No. 22 Squadron (Beaufighter)
  - No. 30 Squadron (Beaufighter)
  - No. 31 Squadron (Beaufighter)
- No. 78 (Fighter) Wing
  - No. 75 Squadron (P-40 Kittyhawk)
  - No. 78 Squadron (P-40 Kittyhawk)
  - No. 80 Squadron (P-40 Kittyhawk)
  - No. 452 Squadron (Spitfire)
- No. 81 (Fighter) Wing
  - No. 76 Squadron (P-40 Kittyhawk)
  - No. 77 Squadron (P-40 Kittyhawk)
  - No. 82 Squadron (P-40 Kittyhawk)
  - No. 457 Squadron (Spitfire)

The TAF included No. 61 and 62 Airfield Construction Wings with four construction squadrons.