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**A CONCISE HISTORY OF:**

# **MALAYA COMMAND (HISTORY & PERSONNEL)**

A concise history of Malaya Command between 1930 and 1942, including details of the senior officers who held appointments in the Command during this period.

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**A Concise History of Malaya Command (1930-42) (History & Personnel)**

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## Malaya Command

Malaya is a country in south-east Asia, although it was not a homogeneous state between the two world wars. It comprised four Straits Settlements, namely:

- Singapore;
- Malacca;
- Dinding;
- Penang.

These were territories of the United Kingdom, being established as such on 1 April 1867. There were also four Federated Malay States established by the British government in 1895:

- Selangor;
- Perak;
- Negeri Sembilan;
- Pahang.

The U.K. government was responsible for foreign affairs and defence of these four states. There were five unfederated states, namely:

- Perlis;
- Kedah;
- Kelantan;
- Terengganu;
- Jahore.

These unfederated states were nominally independent but part of the British protectorate of Malaya. The country was an important source of rubber and tin for the United Kingdom economy.

Malaya Command was a pre-war formation, with its headquarters at Singapore. It is believed to have been formed in 1929, reporting direct to the Colonial Office. The post of General Officer Commanding was a major general's appointment, usually an officer towards the end of their career. In 1930, there was one British and one Indian infantry battalion, plus supporting arms, stationed in Malaya.

The policy of the British government in terms of the defence of the Empire in South East Asia was to provide limited garrisons in its possessions, with the intention of reinforcing the Royal Navy presence there in the event of conflict. This influenced military thinking as a large naval base was constructed at Singapore, with its defences facing the sea. Some airfields were constructed in northern Malaya, but the R.A.F. presence in the country was small.

In 1938, the General Officer Commanding Malaya, Major General DOBBIE, ordered a review of the possible threats to Malaya, which was conducted by Colonel PERCIVAL. This showed that landings in Thailand or northern Malaya were possible, leading to an advance by an enemy down the peninsula to capture Singapore.

By 1937, the garrison had increased to three British infantry battalions based in Singapore, and one Indian infantry battalion which was stationed at Penang. The British forces slowly grew as the threat of Japanese aggression became greater. The first formation to arrive in the country was the 12<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Brigade, which arrived in August 1939. The next formations to arrive in Malaya were the 6<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Brigade and 8<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Brigade, which landed in Malaya in October and November 1940 respectively. They came under command of the 11<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Division that formed in Malaya in October 1940. In March and April 1941, another division was sent from India to Malaya, this formation being the 9<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Division. It comprised the 15<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Brigades. On arrival in Malaya, the brigades were redistributed between the two divisions.

With two divisions now stationed in Malaya, a corps, headquarters was required, so the III Indian Corps was formed in May 1941. The 28<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Brigade arrived in August 1941 to act as corps reserve. The first Australian brigade, the 22<sup>nd</sup> Australian Infantry Brigade had landed in Malaya in February 1941, followed by the 27<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Brigade in August. They both formed part of the 8<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Division.

No more units arrived before the Japanese invasion of Malaya and southern Thailand on 8 December 1941. The 9<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Division fought the Japanese on the Malayan beaches, before being forced to withdraw. The 11<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Division was caught by the indecision over whether to invade Thailand or defend northern Malaya (Operation Matador), and then then outflanked by the Japanese. The main battles were at:

- Jitra (8 – 12 December 1941);
- Kampar (30 December 1941 – 2 January 1942);
- Slim River (6 – 8 January 1942);
- Gemas and Muar River (14 – 22 January 1942).

During the latter battle, some of the recent reinforcements, namely the 44<sup>th</sup> and 45<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Brigades and elements of the British 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, which arrived during January 1942, were deployed straight into the conflict. Despite this, the British forces retreated onto Singapore Island. The colony was invaded on 7 February, leading to the final surrender of British forces on 15 February 1942.

**General Officer Commanding**

30<sup>th</sup> November 1929 – 16<sup>th</sup> February 1931

Major General H. L. PRITCHARD, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.

16<sup>th</sup> February 1931 – 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1934

Major General L. C. L. OLDFIELD, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.

10<sup>th</sup> January 1934 – 30<sup>th</sup> November 1935

Major General E. O. LEWIN, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.

30<sup>th</sup> November 1935 – 1<sup>st</sup> August 1939

Major General William George Sheddon DOBBIE, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.

30<sup>th</sup> June 1939 – 16<sup>th</sup> May 1941

Major General Lionel Vivian BOND, C.B., *p.s.c.*<sup>1</sup>

29<sup>th</sup> April 1941 – 15<sup>th</sup> February 1942

Lieutenant General (Acting) Arthur Ernest PERCIVAL, C.B., D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C., *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.*

**General Staff Officer 1<sup>st</sup> Grade**

17<sup>th</sup> August 1939 – 25<sup>th</sup> November 1941

Colonel Kenneth Sanderson TORRANCE, O.B.E., M.C., *p.s.c.*

**Brigadier General Staff – (B.G.S.)**

26<sup>th</sup> November 1941 – 15<sup>th</sup> February 1942 (Prisoner of War)

Brigadier (Acting) Kenneth Sanderson TORRANCE, O.B.E., M.C., *p.s.c.*

**General Staff Officer 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade**

1<sup>st</sup> April 1937 – 5<sup>th</sup> March 1940

Major Frederick Hubert VINDEN, Suffolk R., *p.s.c.*

12<sup>th</sup> December 1938 – 30<sup>th</sup> September 1940

Major Victor Raymond Wallen CRAWFORD, M.C., R.A., *p.s.c.*

6<sup>th</sup> March 1940 – February 1942 (Escaped)

Major Augustus Klingner FERGUSSON, Leicester R.<sup>2</sup>

1<sup>st</sup> October 1940 – February 1942 (Escaped)

Major Harold Chetwode PHILLIPS, R.A., *p.s.c.*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> BOND was promoted to Acting Lieutenant General on 20 September 1940, and substantive Lieutenant General on 1 October 1940.

<sup>2</sup> Appointed G.S.O. 1 and promoted Acting Lieutenant Colonel on 23 May 1941, and Temporary Lieutenant Colonel on 23 August 1941. Escaped, and later reached the rank of Major General.

<sup>3</sup> Appointed as G.S.O. 1 and promoted Acting Lieutenant Colonel on 27 April 1941, and Temporary Lieutenant Colonel on 27 July 1941. Escaped and reverted to rank of Major on 18 May 1942.

**General Staff Officer 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade**

11<sup>th</sup> January 1939 – 19<sup>th</sup> February 1940

Major George Archibald PALMER, R.E., *p.s.c.*<sup>4</sup>

1<sup>st</sup> August 1939 – 9<sup>th</sup> November 1940 (Temporary)

Major William Howard GREEN, M.C., King's Own R. (Temporary)

26<sup>th</sup> April 1940 – 1941/2 (Died in Captivity)

Captain Frank Reginald Newnum COBLEY, Loyal R.<sup>5</sup>

16<sup>th</sup> October 1940 – 1941/2 (Escaped)

Captain (Temporary) William Richard WALLER, R.A.

**General Staff Officer 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade for Anti-Gas Training**

22<sup>nd</sup> April 1939 – 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1941

Captain Charles Parry Glyn de WINTON, S. Wales B.<sup>6</sup>

**Staff Captains**

30<sup>th</sup> April 1940 – 1941/2 (Died in Captivity)

Captain (Temporary) Anthony Frederick Leetham LOW, R.A.<sup>7</sup>

9<sup>th</sup> September 1940 – 1941/2 (Escaped)

Captain Angus John Campbell ROSE, A. & S. H.

15<sup>th</sup> December 1940 – 1941/2

Captain (Acting) C. G. SKINNER, A. & S. H.

**Chief Administration Officer –**

(also shown as Assistant Adjutant and Quarter-Master-General i/c of Administration).

12<sup>th</sup> August 1937 – 21<sup>st</sup> May 1940

Brigadier (Local) Malden Augustus STUDD, D.S.O., M.C., *p.s.c.*

22<sup>nd</sup> May 1940 – 15<sup>th</sup> February 1942 (Prisoner of War)

Brigadier (Acting) Hubert Francis LUCAS, O.B.E., R.E., *p.s.c.*

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<sup>4</sup> Later appointed Assistant Quarter-Master-General, Malaya Command.

<sup>5</sup> Captain 52989 Frank Reginald Newnum COBLEY was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, to assume command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn. The Loyal Regiment, which was stationed on Singapore Island. He became a prisoner of war with the fall of Singapore. Lieutenant Colonel COBLEY died on 5 July 1943, while incarcerated, and is buried in Grave 8. F. 21. of the Kanchanaburi War Cemetery, in Myanmar (Burma). He was thirty-three years' of age when he died, being the son of Reginald and Beatrice COBLEY of Bromley, Kent. He held a B.A. (Oxon) degree.

<sup>6</sup> Promoted Acting Lieutenant Colonel on 15 August 1941, and Temporary Lieutenant Colonel and W/S Major on 15 November 1941. Believed to have become prisoner-of-war.

<sup>7</sup> Major 67002 Anthony Frederick Leetham LOW became a prisoner-of-war with the fall of Singapore. He died between 13 and 14 February 1942, aged twenty-six years. He is buried in Collective Grave 14. C. 3 – 8., in the Kranji War Cemetery. He was the son of Major Frederick Stephen LOW, M.C., and Dora Gladys LOW, of Iver Heath, Buckinghamshire.

**Deputy Adjutant General**

5<sup>th</sup> December 1941 – 15<sup>th</sup> February 1942 (Prisoner of War)

Brigadier (Acting) Thomas Kennedy NEWBIGGING, M.C., K.O.S.B.

**Deputy Assistant Adjutant-General**

1<sup>st</sup> May 1939 – 19<sup>th</sup> February 1940

Major Robert Archibald Graham MURPHY, Gordons

12<sup>th</sup> November 1940 – 1941/2

Major Francis Arthur Herbert MAGEE, E. Surrey R.

**Assistant Quarter-Master-General**

9<sup>th</sup> September 1940 – February 1942

Lieutenant Colonel (Acting) George Archdale PALMER, R.E., *p.s.c.*<sup>8</sup>

**Deputy Assistant Quarter-Master-General**

1<sup>st</sup> May 1939 – 1940

Major Leslie Benskin GREEN, Wilts, *p.s.c.*

15<sup>th</sup> December 1940 – 1941/2

Major (Acting) William James DOUGLASS, Manch R.<sup>9</sup>

**Brigadier Royal Artillery – (B.R.A.)**

1<sup>st</sup> February 1942 – 15<sup>th</sup> February 1942 (Prisoner of War)

Brigadier (Temporary) Eric Whitlock GOODMAN, D.S.O., M.C.

**Commander Fixed Defences**

6<sup>th</sup> July 1939 – 15<sup>th</sup> February 1942 (Prisoner of War)

Brigadier (Temporary) Arthur Drury CURTIS, *g.*

**Brigade Major**

4<sup>th</sup> June 1938 – 30<sup>th</sup> September 1940

Major Harold Chetwode PHILLIPS, R.A., *p.s.c.*

1<sup>st</sup> October 1940 – 1941/2

Major Roger Vavasour HEBBLETHWAITE, M.C., R.A.

<sup>8</sup> Promoted Acting Lieutenant Colonel on 9 September 1940, and Temporary Lieutenant Colonel on 9 December 1940. Believed to have become a prisoner of war.

<sup>9</sup> Major 40663 William James DOUGLASS, served with the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn. The Manchester Regiment in Singapore. He died in captivity on 17 February 1943, aged thirty-three years. He is buried in Grave 17. A. 9., of the Kranji War Cemetery. He was the son of William Nicholas Gerald and Dorothy DOUGLASS, and husband of Jocelyn DOUGLASS, of Hale, Cheshire.

**Instructors in Gunnery**

22<sup>nd</sup> October 1937 – 25 April 1940

Major Arthur Edward TAWNEY, M.C., R.A., *g.*<sup>10</sup>

3<sup>rd</sup> December 1937 – 1940/41

Major Arthur Vincent BIRD, R.A., *g.*

1<sup>st</sup> July 1938 – 1940/41

Captain George Louis RYAN, R.A., *g.*

**Chief Engineer – (C. Eng)**

14<sup>th</sup> April 1938 – 21<sup>st</sup> October 1941

Colonel James Alexander Charles PENNYCUICK, D.S.O. \*, *p.s.c.*<sup>11</sup>

1<sup>st</sup> June 1941 – 15<sup>th</sup> February 1942 (Prisoner of War)

Brigadier (Acting) Ivan SIMSON, M.I.Mech.E.<sup>12</sup>

**Deputy Chief Engineer**

17<sup>th</sup> December 1939 – 15<sup>th</sup> February 1942 (Prisoner of War)

Colonel Hugh Alexander URQUART

13<sup>th</sup> August 1941 – 15<sup>th</sup> February 1942 (Prisoner of War)

Colonel (Acting) Brian Delorese PEAKE

**Staff Officers, Royal Engineers**

1940- 1941

Major Walter Hamilton WARING, R.E.

1940 – 1941

Captain Jocelyn James Douglas GROVES, B.A., R.E.

1941 – 1942

Lieutenant F. W. J. DAVIES, R.E.

**Command Signal Officer – (C.S.O.)**

1<sup>st</sup> September 1939 – 15<sup>th</sup> February 1942 (Prisoner of War)

Lieutenant Colonel Ronald Graham Lloyd GIBLIN, O.B.E., R. Signals<sup>13</sup>

**Chaplaincy Services**

1940 – 1941

Reverend H. W. TODD, M.C., M.A., Chaplain to the Forces 2<sup>nd</sup> Class

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<sup>10</sup> Promoted Acting Lieutenant Colonel on 141 May 1940, and Temporary Lieutenant Colonel on 14 August 1940.

<sup>11</sup> Promoted Acting Brigadier on 9 September 1940, and Temporary Brigadier on 9 March 1940.

<sup>12</sup> SIMSON was appointed on 1 June 1941 but arrived in Malaya on 5 August 1941.

<sup>13</sup> Promoted Acting Colonel on 26 November 1940, and Temporary Colonel on 26 May 1941.



**Officer Commanding Royal Army Service Corps**16<sup>th</sup> March 1940 – 25<sup>th</sup> November 1940Lieutenant Colonel Cyril Elliott DAVIS, R.A.S.C.<sup>14</sup>**Deputy Director of Supplies and Transport – (D.D.S.T.)**26<sup>th</sup> November 1940 – 26<sup>th</sup> January 1942Colonel (Temporary) Cyril Elliott DAVIS, R.A.S.C.<sup>15</sup>**Deputy Director of Transportation – (D.D.T.)**8<sup>th</sup> December 1941 – 15<sup>th</sup> February 1942 (Prisoner of War)Brigadier (Acting) Claud Willmott RICHARDS, R.A.S.C.<sup>16</sup>**Assistant Director of Medical Services – (A.D.M.S.)**1<sup>st</sup> May 1938 – 25<sup>th</sup> November 1940

Colonel Charles Henry STRINGER, D.S.O., O.B.E.

**Deputy Director of Medical Services – (D.D.M.S.)**26<sup>th</sup> November 1940 – 15<sup>th</sup> February 1942 (Prisoner of War)

Brigadier (Acting) Charles Herbert STRINGER, D.S.O., O.B.E.

**Consulting Surgeon**September 1941 – 15<sup>th</sup> February 1942

Brigadier (Acting) David Skene MIDDLETON, T.D., F.R.C.S.Edin.

**Consulting Surgeon**9<sup>th</sup> September 1941 – 15<sup>th</sup> February 1942 (Prisoner of War)

Colonel (Acting) Julian TAYLOR, O.B.E., M.S., F.C.R.S.

**Consulting Physician**10<sup>th</sup> July 1941 – 15<sup>th</sup> September 1942 (Prisoner of War)

Colonel (Acting) John BENNET, M.D., M.C.R.P., R.A.M.C.

**Deputy Assistant Director of Medical Services**1939 – 1941/2 (Escaped)

Major (Temporary) Cyril Wallace MAISEY, R.A.M.C.

21<sup>st</sup> October 1940 – 1941/2

Major Taquid Deen AHMAD, M.B., Indian Medical Service

<sup>14</sup> Promoted Acting Colonel on 27 April 1940, and Temporary Colonel on 27 October 1940.

<sup>15</sup> Promoted Acting Brigadier on 27 January 1941, and awarded the C.B.E. on 1 July 1941.

<sup>16</sup> With the departure of Brigadier DAVIS, RICHARDS became the D.D.S.T. for Malaya Command.

5<sup>th</sup> November 1940 – 1941/2

Major (Acting) William Muir STEWART, M.B., R.A.M.C.

**Deputy Assistant Director of Hygiene**

25<sup>th</sup> April 1941 – 5<sup>th</sup> February 1942

Major John Joseph O'DWYER, M.B., R.A.M.C.

**Deputy Assistant Director of Pathology**

1940 – 1941

Major Lennox Ross Selby MacFARLANE, M.B. R.A.M.C.<sup>17</sup>

**Assistant Director of Dental Services**

9<sup>th</sup> September 1939 – 1941/2

Lieutenant Colonel (Acting) Douglas James ISAAC, A.D.Corps

**Assistant Director of Ordnance Services**

1<sup>st</sup> July 1940 – 19<sup>th</sup> September 1941

Colonel (Acting) George Carter EVELEGH, R.A.O.C., *o.*<sup>18</sup>

**Deputy Director of Ordnance Services – (D.D.O.S.)**

20<sup>th</sup> September 1941 – 15<sup>th</sup> February 1942 (Prisoner of War)

Brigadier (Acting) George Carter EVELEGH, *o.*

**Deputy Assistant Director of Ordnance Services**

1<sup>st</sup> January 1940 – 1941/2

Captain Augustus Harry IVES, R.A.O.C.<sup>19</sup>

2<sup>nd</sup> January 1940 – 1941

Captain Charles Harold McVITTIE, R.A.O.C., *o.*

**Chief Ordnance Mechanical Engineer**

8<sup>th</sup> February 1938 – September 1941

Lieutenant Colonel James Porteous McLARE, M.Sc., M.I.E.E., R.A.O.C.

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<sup>17</sup> Promoted Acting Lieutenant Colonel on 1 March 1940, and Temporary Lieutenant Colonel on 1 June 1940. He reverted to the rank of Major on 8 September 1940, but was regranted the rank of Temporary Lieutenant Colonel with effect from 10 July 1941.

<sup>18</sup> On appointment, EVELEGH received promotion to the rank of Acting Colonel, with effect from 1 July 1940. On 1 January 1941, he was promoted to the rank of Temporary Colonel, and three days later, to the substantive rank of Colonel (Ordnance Officer 1<sup>st</sup> Class). The appointment was upgraded to that of Deputy Director of Ordnance Services in September 1941.

<sup>19</sup> IVES received promotion to the rank of Acting Major on 15 October 1940. Lieutenant Colonel 70684 Augustus Harry IVES, who commanded 10 Section, Royal Army Ordnance Corps in Singapore, died on 2 March 1942, and is commemorated on Panel 107 of the Singapore Memorial.

**Deputy Director of Ordnance Services (Mechanical Engineering)**

20<sup>th</sup> September 1941 – 15<sup>th</sup> February 1942 (Prisoner of War)

Colonel (Temporary) William Proctor Bell ASHTON, B.Sc., A.M.I.Mech.E., R.A.O.C.

**Deputy Director of Ordnance Supply, Lines of Communication**

3<sup>rd</sup> January 1942 – 15<sup>th</sup> February 1942 (Prisoner of War)

Colonel (Acting) Cecil HUNT, R.A.O.C.

**Command Paymaster**

14<sup>th</sup> November 1937 – 1941

Colonel Percival Llewellyn OLDHAM, R.A.P.C.

**Assistant Command Paymaster**

1940 – 1941/2

Major Hugh Preston PARK, R.A.P.C.

**Financial Adviser and Auditor**

28<sup>th</sup> August 1940 – 1941/2

Colonel (Acting) J. E. DOWTY, General List

**Assistant Financial Adviser and Assistant Auditor**

28<sup>th</sup> August 1940 – 1941/2

Lieutenant Colonel (Acting) C. D. GRAY, General List

**Command Education Officer (Class FF)**

14<sup>th</sup> August 1940 – 1941/2

Major B. St. J. STORRS, B.A., A.E.C.

**Cipher Officer**

8<sup>th</sup> July 1940 – 1941/2

Captain (Acting) F. H. FRANKCOM, B.A., A.E.C.<sup>20</sup>

**Garrison Adjutant**

14<sup>th</sup> June 1937 – 1940

Captain J. A. H. MITCHELL, R.A.

**Deputy Assistant Provost Marshal**

9<sup>th</sup> September 1939 – 1940

Lieutenant F. K. BEATTIE, Loyal R.

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<sup>20</sup> Promoted Temporary Captain with effect from 8 October 1940.

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