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Author: Robert PALMER, M.A.

A CONCISE BIOGRAPHY OF:

MAJOR GENERAL C. M. MALTBY

A concise biography of Major General Christopher Michael MALTBY, C.B., M.C, *p.s.c.*, an officer in the British Indian Army between 1915 and 1948. He was notable as the General Officer Commanding British Troops in China at the time of the invasion of Hong Kong in 1941.
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A Concise Biography of Major General C. M. MALTBY

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Author: Robert PALMER, M.A. (copyright held by author)
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Major General Christopher Michael MALTBY, C.B., M.C.

p.s.c.

Major General Christopher Michael MALTBY, C.B., M.C., *p.s.c.*, was an officer in the British Indian Army during the Second World War. He has the distinction of being the General Officer Commanding, British Troops in China, at the time of the Japanese invasion of Hong Kong in December 1941.

He conducted the defence of the British colony against great odds, isolated, and unlikely to be reinforced, or evacuated. The colony surrendered on Christmas Day, 1941, and MALTBY and the other survivors then had to endure nearly four years in Japanese captivity. The experience of captivity lived with MALTBY for the rest of his life, and after the war, with his career ended, he retired to live in Somerset.

Early Life

Born on 13 January 1891, MALTBY was the elder son of Christopher James MALTBY from Felmersham in Bedfordshire. Probably because he shared the same name as his father, he used the forename Michael throughout his life. Michael was one of five children of Christopher and his wife Jessie. All five were born in India where their father was a tea planter. They were:

- Mary Dorothy – born in June 1886 in Permude, Madras,
- Maud Gladys Michael – born on 31 October 1888 in Trichinopoly, Madras,
- Christopher Michael – born on 13 January 1891,
- Paul Copeland – born on 5 August 1892 in Alleppey, Madras,
- Audrey Newcombe – born on 4 May 1894 in Travancore.

Michael was educated at King's School, Canterbury in Kent, from which he moved to Bedford School closer to home. At Bedford School, he passed the examinations for entrance to the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. He entered the Royal Military College, Sandhurst as a Gentleman Cadet in 1908 for two years, being commissioned onto the Unattached List for the Indian Army on Saturday, 3 September 1910.

After twelve months serving with a British Army unit in India, he was admitted into the Indian Army on 12 December 1911, joining the 95th Russell's Infantry as a Second Lieutenant. Promotion to the rank of Lieutenant came with effect from 3 December 1912. His first period of service was in the Persian Gulf in 1913 and 1914, where he was engaged in naval operations protecting the oilfields in the region gaining the campaign medal and clasp.

Service during the Great War

With effect from 6 November 1914, the 95th Russell's Infantry were involved in military hostilities against the Turkish Army. German agents were active in the Persian Gulf, with one of their roles to ferment non-compliance and even hostility to British interests in the region. The Islamic authorities in Turkey declared a Jihad or Holy War against the United Kingdom, which was to cause the British problems in maintaining their rule and influence over the region.

One such location where problems arose was Muscat and Oman. In November 1914, there were in practice two separate states ruled by local leaders. Sultan TAIMUR, who succeeded to the head of state in 1913, ruled Muscat. The United Kingdom had a treaty with both Oman and Muscat, but it did not exercise control over the governance of the countries. Muscati traders had links across the Persian Gulf and to British India making the harbour at Muscat an important strategic facility, so a small British garrison and a Political Agent were based there.

Sultan TAIMUR maintained a small army of loyal tribesmen, with their key base being a fort called Bait Al Falaj which lay in a valley leading from the hinterland down to the coast and the town of Muttrah and Muscat. To support the Sultan's army, a detachment of the 102nd King Edwards's Own Grenadiers from the Indian Army was stationed at this fort. The commanding officer of the Grenadiers was Lieutenant Colonel S. M. EDWARDES, D.S.O.. In October 1914, dissident tribesmen made two attacks on the picquet line near the fort. Intelligence indicated a more determined attack was planned on the fort and then Muscat itself, so Lieutenant Colonel EDWARDES requested immediate reinforcements. The six companies of the 95th Russell's Infantry (Lieutenant Colonel F. F. MAJOR) were ordered to Muscat, with Lieutenant C. A. MALTBY as one of their company officers. These reinforcements gave the British garrison a strength of about one-thousand men, with two machine guns.

In January 1915, intelligence made it clear that a force of considerable strength was forming up to attack the British and Muscati positions. Many of these men were armed with modern rifles, although others were armed with swords and shields. On 10 January, several enemy tribesmen advanced close to the outlying picquet positions, manned by Muscati and Indian sepoy. That night, the tribesmen attacked with volleys of rifle fire. Number 1 Picquet was captured and the enemy tribesmen established themselves along the ridge.

At dawn, Lieutenant Colonel EDWARDES decided to launch a counter-attack to clear the tribesmen from the ridge. At the same time, another counter-attack came from the Bait Al Falaj fort also aimed at driving the tribesmen back. The two machine guns from the 95th were deployed to support these attacks. The two attacks commenced, being led by Captain S. B. COATES, and Major A. C. EDWARDES, respectively. The ground was open, and the tribesmen defended well, but they began to suffer a large number of casualties. Eventually, after losing about three-hundred men killed or wounded, the Iman leading the tribesmen ordered a withdrawal and the tribesmen pulled back into the hills.

This ended the German and Turkish inspired rebellion, with some of the tribes seeking peace with the British. Five officers, one Subadar, two Havildars and three Sepoys from the Grenadiers were Mentioned in Dispatches for this operation; with two officers from the 95th Russell's Infantry (including Lieutenant C. M. MALTBY), one Jamadar, one Havildar, a Lance Naik and three Sepoys also being commended for their conduct during this incident.

With the threat to Muscat diminished, the 95th Russell's Infantry moved back across the Straits of Hormuz to Persia. The regiment was located at Jask and Chahbar, where on the night of 2 to 3 May 1915, Lieutenant MALTBY commanded the defence of the post at Chahbar so effectively he was awarded the Military Cross. His award of the Military Cross was published in the London Gazette on 26 June 1916, although dated on 3 June 1916.

In January 1916, the MALTBY's regiment left the Middle East to return to India. Back in India, he was promoted to the rank of Temporary Captain on 3 September 1916. Later, on 6 April 1917, this was amended to a substantive promotion to the rank of Captain ante-dated to 1 September 1915, although he was not eligible for the increased pay and allowances until 1 September 1916.

The 95th Russell's Infantry deployed to take part in operations against the Mohmands. The Mohmands, together with the Bunerwals and Swatis were Pathan tribes that live on the border between British India and Afghanistan. In early 1915, the Mohmands raided the Shabkadr Fort in the Peshawar District. In April 1915, a large number of tribesmen attacked locations held by troops of the 1st (Peshawar) Division. Hostilities continued between the tribesmen and the British Indian authorities through into 1916. The 95th Russell's Infantry deployed in this operation in October 1916. The major engagement of the campaign was on 15 November 1916 at Hafiz Kor, resulting in a decisive defeat for the Mohmands. Although problems continued into 1917, the Mohmands submitted to the colonial administration and hostilities ceased.

MALTBY remained with his regiment on the North West Frontier when it was deployed to South Waziristan between 6 June and 10 August 1917. During this period, he was engaged in the operations against the Mahsud in this region bordering Afghanistan. MALTBY returned to Iraq with his regiment on 212 September 1917, from where the regiment moved to the Balkans on 23 October 1918 where it saw out the rest of the war. He was promoted to the rank of Acting Major between 13 April and 15 October 1918.

The end of the Great War saw MALTBY and his regiment serving in Russia from November 1918 until 1 July 1920. The United Kingdom Government decided to send the 27th Division to Macedonia in order to secure Constantinople and the Bosphorous straits with the turmoil resulting from the breakup of the Ottoman Empire. From there, some units moved along the coast of the Black Sea and into the Caucasus. The Indian Army provided some units as garrison troops for this operation, including the 95th Russell's Infantry. The 95th arrived in the Balkans on 24 October 1918, moving into South Russia on 12 November. It left South Russia on 1 July 1920 to return to India.

He was promoted again to Acting Major again on 15 April 1919 whilst second-in-command of a company. He relinquished this role and the rank on 8 December 1920. MALTBY was wounded during the war, and he was Mentioned in Dispatches on 4 July 1916, 21 February 1919, and 11 January 1921.

Between the Wars

On 13 March 1921, with the reorganisation of the Indian Army, MALTBY transferred to the 9th Jat Regiment. The 95th Russell's Infantry became the 10th (Training) Battalion of the 19th Hyderabad Regiment, so his transfer was probably linked with him remaining with an operational battalion.

In 1923 and 1924, MALTBY attended the Staff College at Quetta, India. This was the key to advancement in the British and British Indian Army, as the two years long course educated officers in the intricacies of staff work within the army. Entry was by a competitive examination and recommendation by senior officers. On completion of that course, with effect from 6 April 1925, he was appointed General Staff Officer Grade 2 at Army Headquarters, Delhi. He already held the rank of Brevet Major, gaining the substantive rank on 3 September 1927.

He completed his appointment as G.S.O. 2 on 18 September 1927, and sailed for the United Kingdom, where he attended the R.A.F. Staff College at Andover. He returned to India in 1928 to regimental duties with the 3rd Bn. 9th Jat Regiment. MALTBY was appointed a Deputy Assistant Adjutant General at G.H.Q. India on 30 July 1930 to commence the usual four year posting to a staff role on completion of the Staff Course. Promotion to Brevet Lieutenant Colonel was effective from 1 January 1934, shortly prior to a return to regimental duties on 3 February.

Due to seniority issues affecting his promotion, MALTBY transferred to the 4th Bn. 9th Rajput Regiment on 3 September 1934. Promotion to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel came on 15 April 1936, with MALTBY assuming command of this battalion. He returned to his former regiment to command the 3rd Bn. 9th Jat Regiment on 1 February 1937. He replaced Lieutenant Colonel W. L. HAILES, M.C., who had completed the normal four-year period in command.

In 1936, tensions increased on the North West Frontier due to the actions of the Fakir of Ipi. Sections of the Tori Khel of the Wazirs, assisted by the Mahsud and a large number of tribesmen from Afghanistan started to attack British interests in the area. This resulted in the Indian Government deciding to raise an expeditionary force to regain control of this area of Waziristan. It was on 5 March 1937 that the 3rd Bn. 9th Jat Regiment was to join this force, and it concentrated at Mir Ali under command of the 3rd Jhelum Infantry Brigade. After initially securing some villages on the Sharatala Plain, the battalion prepared for deployment.

The 1937 campaign fell into three phases. The first phase involved the 1st Indian Division, with the 2nd and 3rd Indian Infantry Brigades under command, advancing into the Khaisora valley. As this phase commenced, the brigade commander fell ill, so Lieutenant Colonel MALTBY became the officiating commanding officer of the 3rd Brigade with effect from 22 April 1937. MALTBY remained in command of the brigade until 25 July 1937.¹

The 3rd Brigade advanced into the tribal heartlands along the line of the River Tochi. A camp was formed about three miles beyond the river. The ground was secured, villages searched with some destroyed by the British troops. The brigade then drew back to Mir Ali. The brigade then moved to Damdil in preparation for the second phase of the operation. This phase was intended to be a march into the headquarters of the Fakir of Ipi at Arsal Kot.

The advance started overnight 11 and 12 May 1937, with the 3rd Brigade playing a subsidiary role in this phase. On 14 June, the brigade concentrated at Gharion camp, which is situated at the southern end of the Sham plain. The brigade formed a secure area from which operations in and around the area could be conducted safely.² On completion of his period in command of the brigade, he was granted ten days leave and then rejoined the battalion on 6 August 1937. The following period was quiet and dull. The battalion was used on road protection and construction work. Various routine operations continued in Waziristan into October. On 5 October, the battalion moved to Bannu and then onwards to the Khyber Pass, ending the third and final phase of the operation.

MALTBY was selected for promotion to Colonel, which was effective from 28 June 1938 on his appointment as one of two senior instructors at the Staff College, Quetta rated as General Staff Officer Grade 1. The commandant of the Staff College held the rank of Major General, with two colonels on the staff as the senior instructors. The commandant at the time was Major General A. B. HAIG; with Colonel H. B. D. WILLCOX as the other senior instructor.

There were eight other instructors at the college in the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. All the instructors were charged with teaching the students on the annual Junior and Senior courses preparing aspiring officers to undertake staff duties within the British and Indian Armies. He left the college after only six months and became the General Staff Officer Grade 1 Baluchistan District, India on 1 January 1939. This was a 1st Class District, which also formed the headquarters of the 2nd Indian Division. The headquarters of the district were located at Quetta, which may explain why MALTBY moved from the Staff College so quickly.

The district had under command two brigades, namely the:

- 4th (Quetta) Infantry Brigade,
- 5th (Quetta) Infantry Brigade.

¹ This period excluded 27 and 28 April, and from 10 to 17 June.

² This tactic was later modified and used by the 14th Army in Burma, i.e., the siege of the Admin Box in February 1944.

The function of the district was to maintain internal security within the North West Frontier Province in India. The district also oversaw training and routine administrative functions of a peacetime army.

The Second World War

The next promotion for MALTBY was on 24 September 1939 when he was appointed to command the 3rd (Jhelum) Brigade in India, becoming a Temporary Brigadier. This brigade was part of the Rawalpindi District, which was also the embryonic 1st Indian Division, and one of the static formations on the North West Frontier of India. MALTBY later assumed command of the Calcutta Brigade, and in October 1940, he raised the 19th Indian Infantry Brigade.³

On 28 April 1941, at fifty years of age and with thirty-one years' service, MALTBY was promoted to Acting Major General, and appointed as a District Commander.⁴ He was not in that post for long, as he was appointed the General Officer Commanding British Troops in China on 19 July 1941 to replace Major General GRASSETT.

By this date, British troops had withdrawn from Shanghai and Tientsin, so only Hong Kong remained garrisoned by British forces, and MALTBY's headquarters were based there. His force comprised two British, two Indian and two Canadian infantry battalions, with limited artillery and engineer support organised into two brigades, one on the mainland and the other on Hong Kong Island. There were few aircraft and naval units based in the colony, and Hong Kong was isolated from any form of reinforcement from Singapore.

The Japanese 38th Division invaded the Colony on 8 December 1941. The defenders tried to hold the Japanese advance, but despite some local success, they were quickly forced back onto Hong Kong Island. Japanese troops crossed onto the island on 18 December 1941, and they gained a bridgehead. With the garrison trapped and the water supply under Japanese control, the Governor Sir Mark YOUNG surrendered the colony on 25 December 1941.

MALTBY became a prisoner of war, initially being held on Hong Kong at the Shamshuipo Camp. Later he was moved to the Argyle Street Officers' Camp in Hong Kong, from where the Japanese transferred him to Formosa. He was held at the Shirakawa Camp on Formosa (now Taiwan), where he met up with other British, Australian, and Dutch senior officers captured at Singapore and on Java. These prisoners of war included his brother, now Air Vice-Marshal Paul MALTBY, and the Air Officer Commanding R.A.F. in Java. He had arrived on the island of Java on the 14th February 1942 to establish his headquarters. The Japanese soon overwhelmed the few R.A.F. squadrons on Java and Sumatra, with Java surrendering on 12 March 1942.

³ This is taken from a reference on www.kcl.ac.uk that suggests MALTBY also commanded the 19 Indian Infantry Brigade for a short period of time. This is not confirmed by other sources, and sadly his personal record is not available at the British Library.

⁴ London Gazette 35176 gives the date of his promotion as 28 April 1941 as a District Commander, but it does not specify which district he assumed command of. By a process of elimination, it is believed that it was the Deccan District that he commanded in this period.

On 10 June 1944, MALTBY was transferred by ship and train to Hoten Branch Camp No 1, at Zheng Village (now called Shuangliao), where they arrived on 12 November 1944. On 1 December 1944, thirty-four of the most senior Allied officers (American, Australian, British, and Dutch) transferred to Hoten Branch Camp No 2 in Xi'an County (now Liaoyuan), in Manchuria, China.

The end of the Second World War for MALTBY and the others incarcerated in Manchuria was a slight anti-climax. An American delegation and Soviet soldiers arrived at the camp within days of the cessation of hostilities on 15 August 1945. They were evacuated by the Americans, and eventually reached Singapore. From there MALTBY returned to the United Kingdom.⁵

MALTBY wrote the official dispatch on the events in Hong Kong. This dispatch was published in the London Gazette on Tuesday, 27 January 1948 having been submitted to the Secretary of State for War in the U.K. Government. It covered the operations in Hong Kong from 8 to 25 December 1941. In the dispatch, MALTBY explained how the defences of the Colony were on a limited scale. The object was to deny the harbour to an enemy rather than retaining the harbour for the use of the Royal Navy. This resulted in a plan to defend the island of Hong Kong only.

The arrival of two Canadian battalions on 16 November 1941 allowed MALTBY to change his plan by placing troops on the mainland to defend the so-called 'Gindrinks' Line'. This would also allow time to complete demolitions on the mainland of fuel stores, power houses, docks, wharves, etc.; to clear food stocks and vital necessities from the mainland to the island; to sink shipping and lighters, and to clear the harbour of thousands of junks and sampans. This drastic step could not be taken until it was known that war with Japan was inevitable.

MALTBY felt that war with Japan was inevitable before 8 December, so he deployed his forces in preparation for an attack, however, the civil authorities felt that they were not in a position to put into full force all the measures required during the preliminary or the precautionary period of the Civil Defence plan. MALTBY blamed three factors for this state of affairs:

- The general doubt that Japan would declare war against the Allied powers,
- The weakness of our intelligence system,
- The belief that Japan was bluffing and would continue to bluff to the last.

The rest of the dispatch goes on to detail the actions that took place after the Japanese invasion on 8 December.⁶ Having completed his dispatch, MALTBY then retired from the Indian Army on 10 June 1946. He was granted the rank of Honorary Major General; his substantive rank being Colonel. MALTBY received the honour of being made a Companion of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath on 13 June 1946. This was in recognition of his leadership of Hong Kong under difficult circumstances, and of his rank as a Major General.

⁵ Lieutenant General PERCIVAL, who was also incarcerated at the same camp, was flown back to the United Kingdom. It is not known whether MALTBY flew back with him or returned by ship.

⁶ The full Dispatch can be found at: <http://ibiblio.org/hyperwar/UN/UK/LondonGazette/38190.pdf>

Post Retirement

On his retirement, MALTBY went to live at Greenacre, Shoreditch near Taunton in Somerset. On 30 August 1953, he was appointed a Deputy Lord Lieutenant for the County of Somerset. In his entry in Who's Who, he lists his interest as shooting. MALTBY had married Helene Margaret NAPIER-CLAVERING in 1927. They had two daughters together. Helene died in 1974, and Michael lived out the rest of his years near Taunton. He died on 6 September 1980, aged eighty-nine years.

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Robert PALMER M.A.

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