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A CONCISE BIOGRAPHY OF:

LIEUTENANT GENERAL SIR WILLIAM H. G. BAKER

A concise biography of Lieutenant General Sir William Henry Goldney BAKER, K.C.I.E., C.B., D.S.O., O.B.E., *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.*, who served in the British Indian Army from 1909 until 1944. His most notable role was as Adjutant-General in the Indian Army from 1941 until 1944.
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A Concise Biography of Lieutenant General Sir William H. G. BAKER

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Lieutenant General Sir William Henry Goldney BAKER, K.C.I.E., C.B., D.S.O., O.B.E., *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.*

Lieutenant General Sir William BAKER was an officer in the British Indian Army, who had a distinguished career during the Great War and between the wars. In the Second World War he held key administrative roles within the Indian Army during the period of its massive expansion between 1940 and 1943.

Early Life and Career

Born on 7 December 1888, William Henry Goldney BAKER was the eldest son of Henry Goldney BAKER, who was at that time a farmer in New Zealand. William's father originated from Axminster in Devon, where his father (also called Henry Goldney BAKER) was a solicitor. Henry junior had travelled to New Zealand after graduating from Exeter College, Oxford. In New Zealand, he married Edith Julia LUKE on 4 January 1888, and William was born in Christchurch. William's parents returned to Devon, England, in 1906, when his father became a curate in the parish of Bovey Tracey. On retirement in 1924, Henry and Edith BAKER moved to Budleigh Salterton in East Devon where they both died.

William decided on a career in the Army, and after passing out from the Royal Military College at Sandhurst, was commissioned on the Unattached List for the Indian Army on 20 January 1909. He joined a British Army regiment for his probation in the rank of Second Lieutenant. On 29 March 1910, he was admitted to the Indian Army, and he joined the 31st Duke of Connaught's Own Lancers, an Indian Army Cavalry regiment. BAKER was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant on 20 April 1911, upon successful completion of the first two years of his Army service.

The Great War

With the outbreak of the Great War in August 1914, BAKER's regiment was ordered to France, where it arrived on 13 March 1915. He served in France and Belgium with his regiment until it was recalled to India, leaving France on 16 August 1917. During his service in France and Belgium, BAKER was promoted to the rank of Captain on 1 September 1915. The loss of so many officers in the infantry battalions serving in France during the early stages of the war led to various measures to rectify this. One initiative was to 'milk' other regiments that had not suffered many casualties, transferring selected officers to under-strength units. BAKER was one of these officers, being attached to the Cheshire Regiment with effect from 15 May 1916 with the rank of Temporary Major.¹

¹ To date, I have not been able to establish which battalion he was attached to. The 1st, 1st/5th, 1st/6th, 9th, 10th, 11th, 13th and 16th Battalions all served in France and Belgium during this period, although on Wikipedia it suggests that he commanded the 1st Bn. The Cheshire Regiment, albeit I have not been able to confirm this myself.

BAKER was promoted to the rank of Acting Lieutenant Colonel on 22 August 1916, on assuming command of the battalion of the Cheshire Regiment he was attached to. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (D.S.O.) on 4 June 1917 while serving as an Acting Lieutenant Colonel with the Cheshire Regiment.² On 3 July 1917, BAKER relinquished command of his battalion and returned to the 31st Lancers. His regiment left France on 16 August 1917 to return to India.

On 1 January 1918, BAKER was promoted to the rank of Brevet Major; he was also Mentioned in Dispatches on 4 January 1917, and again on 28 December 1917. On return to India, the 31st Lancers were deployed in the Marri Campaign in the Punjab. This was an internal security operation in the Punjab between 18 February and 8 April 1918; the purpose of which was to subjugate the Marri Tribe in the region.

Between the Wars

Afghanistan had remained neutral throughout the First World War, but immediately after the war, the ruler of the country AMIR HABIBULLA sought to gain full independence from British India. With the ending of the Second Afghan War in September 1880, the agreement ending hostilities gave British India authority to determine the foreign policy of Afghanistan, in return for which, British India guaranteed Afghanistan protection from foreign aggression. British India also established a British Residency in Kabul. AMIR HABIBULLA wished to change this, and by doing so, he hoped to strengthen his authority in the country.

In February 1919, tensions escalated between British India and Afghanistan, but then AMIR HABIBULLA was assassinated. The new ruler was AMANULLAH KHAN. He saw an opportunity created by the demobilization of the Indian Army after the First World War, and by the unrest in the Punjab. Therefore, in early May 1919, he sent Afghan troops across the border into British India, to commence what is called the Third Afghan War.

BAKER's regiment was one of those units sent to Waziristan to counter this invasion. BAKER himself was promoted to the rank of Acting Major between 3 February and 11 August 1919 during the Third Afghan War. By the end of May, Indian troops had restored the situation and negotiations started on a peace treaty. The Treaty of Rawalpindi was signed on 3 June 1919; allowing Afghanistan to regain full control over its own foreign policy. Later in that year, BAKER moved to the Cavalry School at Saugor in India where he served as an instructor for a period of just over twelve months.

At the beginning of 1921, BAKER attended the Staff College at Quetta in India, with some colleagues who also achieved high rank including Generals Edward QUININ, Arthur HAIG and Mosley MAYNE. The Staff Course during this period lasted for eighteen months, and it was geared towards educating selected officers for the performance of staff duties within the army.

² I have not been able to locate a citation for this award.

During his course, the 31st Duke of Connaught's Own Lancers and the 32nd Lancers merged to form the 13th Duke of Connaught's Own Lancers

On the successful completion of his staff course, he was appointed as a General Staff Officer, 2nd Grade, in India. He commenced this appointment on 24 August 1922, and he remained in post until 22 December 1925. Between 25 October 1923 and 24 October 1925, he was employed with the Australian Military Forces. BAKER was promoted to the rank of Major on 20 January 1925, becoming a squadron commander on 1 November 1928.

On 1 November 1929, BAKER was appointed a General Staff Officer Grade 2 in the Directorate of Staff Duties at Army Headquarters in India. He was promoted to the rank of Brevet Lieutenant Colonel on 1 July 1930 in the half yearly award of Brevets to Indian Army Officers. He relinquished the post of G.S.O. 2 on 17 January 1933 to return to his regiment as second-in-command. In the following year, he attended the Senior Officers' School at Sheerness in Kent for a commanding officer's course.

In 1935, BAKER was selected to attend the Imperial Defence College as the representative of the Indian Army on this important course. The Imperial Defence College was based at 9, Buckingham Gate, London SW1. This was a tri-service college, which trained officers of the Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force for senior command positions in their respective organizations. There were usually eight Army officers on each course, who were Lieutenant Colonels or Colonels. The duration of the course was one year, during which the students studied military strategy home and abroad.

In 1934, BAKER transferred to Probyn's Horse (5th King Edward VII's Own Lancers). In the following year, he was promoted Lieutenant Colonel on 20 January 1935 on assuming command of the regiment, returning from the Imperial Defence College to assume command of his regiment on 1 November 1935. BAKER was given the temporary command of the Kohat Brigade on 15 May 1936, with the rank of Local Brigadier. He relinquished command of the Kohat Brigade on 19 October 1936, and then on 10 December 1936, he was given temporary command of the Tochi Column with the rank of Local Colonel. He gave up command of the Tochi Column on 17 January 1937. On 10 December 1937, BAKER was made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (O.B.E.) for services in Waziristan as a Lieutenant Colonel and officiating commander of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, and was also Mentioned in Dispatches.

Promotion for forty-nine-year-old BAKER came on 15 January 1938, when he was promoted to the substantive rank of Colonel (his seniority dating from 1 July 1933) and on the same day to the rank of Temporary Brigadier. This coincided with his appointment as commanding officer of the Delhi Brigade Area in India.

Second World War

The Second World War began in September 1939 with BAKER still in command of the Delhi Brigade Area. On 1 April 1940, he was made an Aide-de-Camp to The King. BAKER's period in command of the Delhi Brigade ended on 15 June 1940. He was then promoted Acting Major General on 10 July 1940, on appointment as the Director of Organization and Deputy Adjutant-General at General Headquarters (G.H.Q.) of the Army in India.

The role of Deputy Adjutant-General and Director of Organization was a key post within the Army headquarters responsible for mobilisation, recruitment, and personnel matters. The British Indian Army was expanding rapidly to provide new formations for deployment to the Middle East in support of the war aims of the United Kingdom. The 4th Indian Infantry Division was already serving in Egypt, with the 5th Indian Infantry Division en-route to the Sudan. The Commander-in-Chief had given authority to raise the 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th Indian Infantry Divisions, with the 11th Indian Infantry Division forming in Malaya in October 1940. In October 1940, the Commander-in-Chief India, gave the order to raise one armoured and five additional infantry divisions. The new infantry divisions were to be numbered as the 14th, 17th, 18th (later renumbered as 19th), 20th and 34th Indian Infantry Divisions.

BAKER's substantive promotion to Major General came with effect from 26 October 1940; his seniority dating from 22 April 1940. On 1 January 1941, in the New Year's Honours List, BAKER was made a Companion of the Order of the Bath (C.B.); an award usually given to Army officers on reaching the substantive rank of Major General.

BAKER's last and most important role came on 24 October 1941 when he was promoted Acting Lieutenant General and appointed Adjutant-General at G.H.Q. India to replace General Sir Arthur B. HAIG, who was retiring from Army service.³ BAKER was fifty-two years' of age, and he assumed responsibility for administration, personnel, and organisational matters for the Indian Army. The Adjutant-General's Branch controlled recruitment to the army of its officers and men, and defined the policies covering pay, pensions, leave, discipline, and dismissal. At the outbreak of the Second World War, the branch had an establishment of forty-one officers and one-hundred and three clerks, but by 1945 it had grown to five-hundred and fifty-two officers and two-thousand clerks.

As Adjutant-General, BAKER's tenure covered the massive expansion of the Indian Army, yet he is credited with not losing the personal touch and understanding the needs of officer's and soldier's dependents. He implemented changes to improve the position of dependents and settled many cases of hardship and difficulty that arose due to the demands of the war. BAKER was also seen as having an extensive knowledge of the various races and classes that made up Indian society of the day, and in using that knowledge wisely and for the benefit of all Indian people.

³ His date of appointment is shown in www.ordersofbattle.com as 15 October 1941; the date of 24 October 1941 is taken from the London Gazette Number 35354 and is also the date shown in the Army List.

During this period, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army in India was General Sir Archibald WAVELL, with General AUCHINLECK succeeding him during BAKER's tenure. His Chief of Staff was Lieutenant General E. L. MORRIS, C.B., O.B.E., M.C., a British officer posted to India to take up this role. During this period, the other key roles at G.H.Q. India were held by:

- Quarter-Master-General – Lieutenant General W. G. H. VICKERS, C.B., O.B.E.
- Master General of the Ordnance – Lieutenant General Sir Clement A. BIRD, K.C.I.E., C.B., D.S.O.

BAKER was promoted to the substantive rank of Lieutenant General on 16 August 1942. He relinquished the appointment of Adjutant General on 10 March 1944 handing over to Lieutenant General DEEDES, and he retired from the Army on 6 June 1944 having completed thirty-five years' service. Two days later, on 8 June 1944, BAKER was knighted as a Knight Commander of the Most Eminent Order of the India Empire (K.C.I.E.) in recognition of his service with the Indian Army.

On retirement, he moved to the United Kingdom and lived at The Lodge, Thorverton in Devon. BAKER had married Dorothy M. LACE in 1924 in Burrowa, New South Wales in Australia. He died on 28 December 1964 at the Exe Vale Hospital at Exminster, aged seventy-six years. He left an estate of £5,226 to his widow, his son John Henry Goldney BAKER (a company director) and to a solicitor called David LYON-SMITH. BAKER and his wife also had one daughter.

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