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A CONCISE BIOGRAPHY OF:

BRIGADIER

K. B. S. CRAWFORD

A concise biography of Brigadier Kenneth Bredin Shakespear CRAWFORD, an officer in the Royal Engineers of the British Army from 1911 until his retirement in 1946. He had the distinction of being held as a prisoner of war in both World Wars, having served in Malaya in 1941 and 1942. Copyright ©www.BritishMilitaryHistory.co.uk (2021)

A Concise Biography of Brigadier Kenneth Bredin Shakespear CRAWFORD

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Brigadier Kenneth Bredin Shakespear CRAWFORD

Brigadier Kenneth CRAWFORD was an officer in the British Army from 1911 until his retirement in 1946. He was commissioned in the Royal Engineers and served in the Great War. During the Second World War, he was the Chief Engineer of III Indian Corps in Malaya during the campaign from 8 December 1941 until 15 February 1942. CRAWFORD was taken prisoner, and in consequence, he had to endure three and half years in captivity. This was the second time that CRAWFORD had been a prisoner of war, as he was held by the Ottoman Turks during the First World War.

Kenneth Bredin Shakespear CRAWFORD was born on 23 May 1892, in Madras, British India. He was the first child and eldest son of Frederick James CRAWFORD (1864 – ?) and his wife Henrietta Rosaline MURRAY (1871 – 1952). They had four children, namely:

- Kenneth Bredin Shakespear CRAWFORD (1892 – 1973)
- Pera Rosaline Cecilia CRAWFORD (1893 – 1981)
- John Murray Lalor CRAWFORD (1901 – 1969)
- Frank Wyndham Sim CRAWFORD (1903 – 1950)

Kenneth and Pera were both born in Madras, while John was born in Colchester, Essex. The fourth child, Frank, was also born in Madras. Frederick was a Doctor, and he was a member of the Indian Medical Service (I.M.S.), which provided medical support to both the British Indian Army and the civilian population in British India. In 1901, the family were living at 112, Maldon Road, Colchester, Essex, presumably while Frederick was based in the U.K., possibly on a course or for training.

Kenneth CRAWFORD was living in Madras when, as an eighteen-year-old, he attended the Royal Military Academy (R.M.A.), Woolwich, London, which was known as 'The Shop'. He is recorded in the 1911 Census as a Gentleman Cadet at the R.M.A., Woolwich. On the successful completion of his initial training, he was commissioned in the Royal Engineers as a Second Lieutenant on 23 November 1911 (service number 4801). He was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant on 15 July 1914. With his Indian roots, CRAWFORD returned to India to join a Sappers and Miners unit.¹

The Great War broke out in August 1914, and CRAWFORD was sent to Mesopotamia where he served from 6 November 1914 until 29 April 1916. He was promoted to the rank of Acting Major between 3 and 19 December 1915 whilst commanding a field company of Sappers and Miners within the 6th (Poona) Division. He was wounded in April 1916 and Mentioned in Despatches on 5 April 1916. Kut-al-Almara was besieged by the Turkish Army from December 1915, until it finally fell on 29 April 1916. Lieutenant CRAWFORD was taken into captivity by the Turks (Ottomans), and he spent the rest of the war as prisoner of war in Afion Kara Hissar.

¹ The Sappers and Miners were the engineers in the Indian Army, and comprised three corps, the King George V's Own Bengal Sappers and Miners, Queen Victoria's Own Madras Sappers and Miners and Royal Bombay Sappers and Miners. The officers in the three corps of Sappers and Miners were Royal Engineers seconded to one of the corps.

While in captivity, CRAWFORD was promoted to the rank of Captain on 26 June 1917. For his war service, he was awarded the 1914-15 Star and Clasp, British War Medal, and the Victory Medal.

After the war, CRAWFORD was promoted to the rank of Acting Major between 1 August 1919 and 7 September 1920, while he commanded the 2nd Field Company, Royal Engineers. During this period, the company was stationed in Egypt, Palestine, and back to Egypt. He was appointed an Adjutant of a Regular Army unit on 20 July 1923. He held this post for less than two months, leaving that role on 18 September, and in November of that year, he became the Officer Commanding 55th Field Company. This company was based in Catterick, Yorkshire. He relinquished command of this company in March 1924. His next appointment was more settled. He travelled to the United Kingdom where he was appointed the Adjutant of the 52nd (Lowland) Divisional Engineers, a Territorial Army unit based in the Drill Hall, Queen Street, Rutherglen, just to the south-east of Glasgow city centre. He assumed this role on 29 March 1924 and was in post for exactly three years. In March 1927, Captain CRAWFORD was posted to 33 Field Company, Royal Engineers, as the Officer Commanding. This company was based at Fort Camden, in Queenstown, in Southern Ireland. Although Ireland was now an independent state, the British Army retained a presence at Queenstown, which is now known as Cobh, for coastal defence of the port and harbour at Cork. Captain CRAWFORD left this appointment in February 1928.

On 28 July 1928, CRAWFORD was promoted to the rank of Major and two years later he served on the North-West Frontier.² He was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel on 11 March 1936. Lieutenant Colonel CRAWFORD was based in Aldershot for the three years he held this rank. He completed his period of three years in Regimental command on 11 March 1939 and was retained on the Active List on full pay. In September 1939, CRAWFORD was living at 30, Jevington Gardens, Eastbourne in Sussex. While he was serving at Aldershot, Lieutenant Colonel CRAWFORD obtained his Private Pilot's License on 11 April 1938 at Brooklands Flying Club.

CRAWFORD was promoted to the rank of Colonel on 28 November 1939, and on 23 December that year, he was appointed a Chief Engineer in India. The expansion of the Indian Army created opportunities for several officers, and CRAWFORD was one of these. The formation of III Indian Corps in Malaya on 27 April 1941 required a Chief Engineer, and CRAWFORD was appointed to that role on 5 May 1941. Now aged forty-nine years, he was promoted to the rank of Acting Brigadier on the same day as taking up the new role, and to the rank of Temporary Brigadier on the 5 November 1941.

The Headquarters III Indian Corps was located at Kuala Lumpur, under the command of Lieutenant General 'Piggy' HEATH.

² This is the date taken from the Army List. In the London Gazette 33412 dated 14 July 1928, his date of promotion to the rank of Major is shown as 12 August 1928.

CRAWFORD had under command three units, namely:

- 1st Artisan Works Company, Royal Bombay Sappers and Miners (Major J. H. HEEP)
- 45th Army Troops Company, Royal Bombay Sappers and Miners (Major J. R. DINWIDDIE)
- 46th Army Troops Company, Queen Victoria's Own Madras Sappers and Miners (Major J. R. S. W. ELKINGTON)

The Japanese attacked Malaya on 8 December 1941, with III Indian Corps taking the initial shock of the two-pronged attack. The Japanese outflanked the positions held by III Indian Corps, and the corps began to retreat down the Malayan peninsula. The main battles were at Jitra (8 – 12 December 1941), Kampar (30 December 1941 – 2 January 1942), Slim River (6 – 8 January 1942) and Gemas and Muar River (14 – 22 January 1942). During the latter battle, III Indian Corps played a minor role as it was in reserve having suffered serious losses in personnel and equipment. The British forces retreated onto Singapore Island with III Indian Corps taking responsibility for a sector of the island. The colony was invaded on 7 February with the final surrender of British forces on 15 February 1942.

CRAWFORD was unable to leave Singapore before it fell, and he was taken prisoner for the second time in his career. As a prisoner of war, CRAWFORD was held initially at Changi Camp on Singapore Island. He was later moved to Karenko Camp in Taiwan, then to Tamazato Camp, and later-on to the Shirakawa Camp, both in Taiwan. Finally, he was sent to Hoten Camp in Manchuria in China where he was freed by Soviet forces in August 1945.

It appears the three and half years in captivity had taken their toll, at the age of fifty-four years, CRAWFORD did not resume his Army career but retired on 4 June 1946. He was granted the rank of Honorary Brigadier, his substantive rank being Colonel. He was Mentioned in Despatches on 1 August 1946 for his gallant and distinguished service in Malaya in 1942.

Kenneth CRAWFORD married Angela Mary Elizabeth Henrietta HARMAN (1900 – 1991) in 1928 in Mallow, Ireland. His brother Frank died in 1950 in Surrey, and his mother died on 15 May 1952 in Guildford, Surrey. His other brother died in Natal, South Africa, on 10 June 1969. Brigadier CRAWFORD died on 7 October 1973, at Farnham in Surrey. He lived at Redesdale, Broom Corner, in Farnham. He left an estate of £16,743.

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