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**A CONCISE BIOGRAPHY OF:**

# **LIEUTENANT GENERAL SIR ERNEST E. DOWN**

A concise biography of Lieutenant General Sir Ernest Edward DOWN, K.B.E., C.B., who served with British Army between 1923 and 1955. He played a key role in the development of airborne forces within the British Army during the Second World War.

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## **A Concise Biography of Lieutenant General Sir Ernest E. DOWN**

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# Lieutenant General Sir Ernest Edward DOWN, K.B.E., C.B., (s.c.)

## Introduction

The Parachute Regiment has a special place in the annals of the British Army. It is the youngest regiment of the British Army in terms of historical lineage, only being formed in September 1941. One of the key men involved in the development of airborne forces in the United Kingdom and later in India was Lieutenant General Sir Ernest Edward DOWN, K.B.E., C.B., (s.c.). Throughout his career, DOWN was known as 'Eric'.

Despite being involved in the development of airborne forces from July 1941 until 1946, DOWN was destined to become somewhat side-lined. Apart from commanding the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division briefly in Italy in September 1943, he never commanded an airborne formation in any of the major operations of the Second World War. He did rise eventually to high rank in the British Army.

## Early Life and Career

Ernest Edward DOWN was born in Calstock, Cornwall, on the 10 February 1902. His father was Henry DOWN, who was aged fifty years when his son was born and was a retired builder. He lived in a house called 'Wellfield' in the village of Calstock on the banks of the River Tamar. His mother was Mary Martha DOWN, who came from Calstock, was thirty-four years old when Ernest was born. Ernest was baptized in Calstock on 14 March 1902.

He was educated at Plymouth College and then Kelly College, Tavistock. Whilst at school, DOWN had aspirations to become an economist, but instead, he decided to apply for entry to the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. Both Plymouth College and Kelly College had detachments of the Officers' Training Corps, so this may have been an influence on the young DOWN. He was also a developing rugby union player, which no doubt both schools fostered and encouraged.

Whilst at Sandhurst, DOWN acquired the nickname of 'Eric', which was to stay with him throughout his career. At Sandhurst, DOWN was the captain of the College Rugby XV. On successful completion of his training at Sandhurst, DOWN was commissioned in the Dorsetshire Regiment on 1 February 1923 in the rank of Second Lieutenant (service number 23809). He joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of his regiment, which at the time was serving in Malta. In 1924, the battalion moved to the Sudan for two years before returning to Malta.

On 1 February 1925, DOWN was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant. He was frustrated by the restrictions of peacetime military service, and although he had just been promoted, DOWN applied for a secondment to the Royal West African Frontier Force.

His application was approved, so on 26 May 1926 he was seconded to the Colonial Office and commenced his service in West Africa. DOWN served in West Africa for six years; leaving on 13 May 1932 to return to the Dorsetshire Regiment. He now had nine years military service and was thirty years of age, but he was still a subaltern in the rank of Lieutenant. In order to further his career, DOWN transferred to the King's Shropshire Light Infantry with effect from 16 May 1935 and was granted the rank of Captain. He joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, which was then stationed in Lichfield. In the following year, it moved to Pembroke Dock in West Wales. In December 1936, thirty-four-year-old DOWN married Edith PERRY at Honiton, Devon. She was four years his junior, and she was born and brought up in the East Devon town.

Although not having attended the Staff College, DOWN was selected to become the Brigade Major of the 160<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade starting on 16 January 1937. This was a Territorial Army brigade and part of the 53<sup>rd</sup> (Welsh) Division. The headquarters of the brigade were based at Maindy Barracks in Cardiff, with four battalions under command, three were from The Welch Regiment, but the fourth was the Territorial Army battalion of his own regiment, the 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. The King's Shropshire Light Infantry. He left the role as Brigade Major on 9 January 1939 to return to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of his regiment, which was leaving the U.K. bound for Jamaica in the West Indies.

## The Second World War

At the outbreak of the Second World War, Eric DOWN was serving as a Captain with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn. The King's Shropshire Light Infantry stationed on Jamaica in the West Indies. As some consolation, he was promoted to the rank of Major on 1 February 1940. He came back to the United Kingdom in early 1940 to attend the Junior War Staff College Course, which was only of three months duration instead of the previous two years. This allowed him to place the letters (*s.c.*) after his entry in the Army List. Following this, he held several staff jobs in the United Kingdom, which he did not enjoy.

The major change in DOWN's career came when he volunteered for the new parachute forces being developed in the United Kingdom. On 11 July 1941, he was promoted to the rank of Acting Lieutenant Colonel and assumed command of the Number 11 Special Air Service Battalion. He took over from Lieutenant Colonel C. I. A. JACKSON, who had formed the original No 2 Commando.

## The Special Air Service Battalion

Before taking command, DOWN felt that he should be a qualified parachutist. He did not have enough time prior to joining the battalion to attend the full parachute course, so he found an instructor who gave him one-to-one training. Within a couple of hours, he had completed five jumps from an aircraft. Feeling satisfied that he was competent to lead the battalion, he arrived at his new command.

In September 1941, No. 11 S.A.S. Battalion was redesignated as the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn. The Parachute Regiment. On 11 October 1941, having held the acting rank for the required three months, DOWN was promoted to the rank of Temporary Lieutenant Colonel. He is described as a man of 'utmost energy', and he set about the battalion to bring it to standard. The first members of the parachute forces were all volunteers, but they had joined for a variety of reasons. There were many good soldiers, but there were others of dubious character, and the battalion contained several mavericks.

Eric DOWN began to weed out those he considered not suitable for his battalion. He was seen as being very focused on what he wanted to achieve and uncompromising in outlook. At first, his men, somewhat shocked by the new regime, called him 'Dracula', but after a period of about six months, he became known as 'Charlie Orange', derived from the abbreviations of Commanding Officer. This change came about as the men began to stop hating and fearing him to admiring and respecting him. A member of the battalion at the time, Doug CHARLTON recalled:

*The new commanding officer was introduced to the men in the Jail Square. A tall balding man with a face like a well-kept grave viewed his audience with grim conviction to say, 'Gentleman the good times are over.' This was greeted by hissing and booing which moved him not one jot.*

Although his stern expression and determination had earned him the nickname 'Dracula', his men acquired a standard of discipline and fitness equal to the highest in the army under DOWN's supervision and development. As Maurice NEWNHAM recorded, it took a long time for the men to realise that 'his stern and often uncompromising manner concealed a stout heart and a generous character'.<sup>1</sup> DOWN led by example and would not expect any of his men to do anything he could not do himself. He prided himself on being better than them and worked hard to achieve that. He was seen as being ruthless and although he could be sympathetic, he never showed sympathy himself. A colleague, Major Victor DOVER said of him:

*Of all the British World War II Sky Generals, 'Eric' DOWN was probably the toughest – in every sense of that word. He was both physically and mentally tough, and possessed a sharp tongue; but behind this seemingly steel-like exterior there resided a deep affection for the men he commanded.*

DOWN started his period in command by taking the battalion from Knutsford in Cheshire to Bury in Lancashire for weapons training. They were there for two arduous months of intense training. At the conclusion, DOWN marched the men from Bury, through Manchester back to Knutsford. Back at their base, the training continued apace, with tactical exercises and several jumps from balloons to get the men to a peak of physical fitness and combat effectiveness.

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<sup>1</sup> See Paradata at: <http://www.paradata.org.uk/people/ernest-down>

On 15 September 1941, the battalion became the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, The Parachute Regiment. It moved from Knutsford in Cheshire to Hardwick near Chesterfield in Derbyshire. Here the battalion joined the embryonic 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Brigade under Brigadier Richard GALE, which was forming in the area. The brigade began preparing for deployment to North Africa as part of Operation 'Torch'. Before the battalion left for Tunisia, Eric DOWN was promoted away.

## Brigade Commander

As the airborne forces grew, DOWN was a natural choice to command the newly raised 2<sup>nd</sup> Parachute Brigade, so on 17 July 1942 he was promoted to the rank of Acting Brigadier (and Acting Colonel) to form the brigade. He formally assumed command of the brigade on 30 July 1942. His new command comprised the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion and 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Parachute Regiment. The 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been raised by Lieutenant Colonel HOPE-THOMPSON of the Royal Scots Fusiliers, which had been under command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Brigade prior to transferring to this brigade. The 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Battalions were newly raised, the former from the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion, The Cameron Highlanders, and the latter from the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion, The Royal Welch Fusiliers. The Parachute Regiment formally came into being on 1 August 1942, so that all parachute infantry battalions were to be part of one regiment. Promotion to the rank of Temporary Brigadier, Temporary Colonel and War Substantive Lieutenant Colonel was effective from 17 January 1943. In His Majesty's Birthday Honours List published on 2 June 1943, he was made a Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (C.B.E.).<sup>2</sup>

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Parachute Brigade was not ready for operations in Tunisia, but it joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Brigade around Sousse as part of the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. The division commenced planning and preparation for forthcoming operations in Sicily. In the end, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Parachute Brigade was not deployed to Sicily, although the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Brigade and 1<sup>st</sup> Airlanding Brigade did fight in the campaign. The brigade was warned for an assault on Augusta, but this did not take place. From Sicily, the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division was tasked with landing at Taranto in the 'heel' of Italy in conjunction with the landings at Salerno and in the toe of the Italian mainland. Elements of the 4<sup>th</sup> Parachute Brigade and 2<sup>nd</sup> Parachute Brigade sailed for Italy to secure the port and nearby airfields. The first landings took place on 9 September, but as H.M.S. Abdiel entered Taranto harbour with on board the Battalion Headquarters, 'B' Company and 'C' Company of the 6<sup>th</sup> (Royal Welch) Battalion of DOWN's brigade, the ship struck a mine. This detonated some mines aboard H.M.S. Abdiel, so she soon split in two and sank within two minutes. The consequences of the sinking of H.M.S. Abdiel on the 6<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Parachute Regiment was severe. The commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel 39452 John Abingdon GOODWIN died with the sinking, as did one Major, two Captains, three Lieutenants, the Regimental Serjeant Major and fifty Other Ranks. Four officers and about one-hundred and fifty men were seriously injured and required treatment at hospital. The battalion, which DOWN had nurtured with his new brigade was decimated before it even saw action.

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<sup>2</sup> The citation for this award is not available at the National Archives.

The General Officer Commanding the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, Major General George Frederick HOPKINSON landed with his advanced headquarters. Keen to lead from the front, on 11 September 1943 he went forward to witness the action by the 10<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Parachute Regiment against Castellaneta. Brigadier HACKETT, commanding the 4<sup>th</sup> Parachute Brigade, advised HOPKINSON about the presence of snipers, and he warned him to keep his head down. As he was observing the action, he stuck his head over a protecting wall, was hit in the head by a bullet and seriously injured. HOPKINSON was carried back a field hospital, unconscious and gravely ill. He died the next day and is now buried in Grave X. B. 33. of the Bari War Cemetery, alongside those bodies of the men of the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion recovered from the waters of Taranto harbour

Of the four brigade commanders, LATHBURY (1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Brigade), DOWN (2<sup>nd</sup> Parachute Brigade), HACKETT (4<sup>th</sup> Parachute Brigade) and HICKS (1<sup>st</sup> Airlanding Brigade), Eric DOWN was the logical choice to replace HOPKINSON being the most senior and experienced airborne commander of the three. As Commander-in-Chief of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, General MONTGOMERY was consulted and agreed to DOWN becoming the replacement divisional commander.

## Divisional Commander

DOWN was called forward immediately to the advanced divisional headquarters to take over. On 12 September 1943, DOWN was promoted to the rank of Acting Major General and assumed command formally of the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. Lieutenant Colonel C. H. V. PRITCHARD was promoted to the rank of Acting Brigadier to assume command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Parachute Brigade. The appointment of DOWN was not without controversy. In particular, Brigadiers HACKETT and LATHBURY had concerns about his appointment. He was seen as a competent and experienced parachute commander; however, the perceived problem was his personality. DOWN had a reputation of being one of the most abrasive officers in the British Army. This reputation had grown within the airborne community where DOWN was one of the leading personalities.

The Major General Commanding Airborne Forces, Major General F. A. M. BROWNING signalled the Eighth Army and War Office suggesting that he should assume command instead of DOWN, but for the time being this was not taken up.<sup>3</sup> Under DOWN's command, the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division quickly seized the important airfields in the Bari area of south-east Italy. This allowed the R.A.F. to deploy squadrons to Italy to gain air superiority and support the ground troops.

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<sup>3</sup> See MEAD - General BOY The Life of Lieutenant General Sir Frederick BROWNING, page 94. Care should be taken to drawing definitive conclusions from this. BROWNING can be seen as an ambitious commander who at the time occupied a non-operational role, so it may have been to his advantage to highlight negative aspects of DOWN's personality in order to gain command of the division instead of him. However, it is clear that DOWN had a forceful style that may have caused conflict with other senior officers.



Meanwhile, BROWNING had been promoted to the rank of Lieutenant General and appointed General Officer Commanding I Airborne Corps.<sup>4</sup> He held his first corps commander's conference at Brigmerston House, near Bulford in Wiltshire. DOWN attended in his capacity as G.O.C. 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, together with Major General GALE who was G.O.C. 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division, Brigadier Edwin FLAVELL (Commander Airborne Establishments), Brigadier WALCH (Brigadier General Staff I Airborne Corps) and Brigadier BOWER (Deputy Adjutant and Quarter-Master-General I Airborne Corps). This was the only airborne conference that DOWN attended, as on 7 January 1944, he was relieved of command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division.<sup>5</sup>

It is not clear why DOWN was replaced as G.O.C. of the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. It is true that he was appointed Airborne Adviser to the Supreme Allied Commander South-East Asia Command and was tasked with raising a new airborne division in India, but whether DOWN saw it this way is unclear. It does appear that DOWN's tenure in command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division was brief at just over three months and there is a suggestion that BROWNING dismissed him because he was seen to be difficult to work with and unpopular amongst his peers.

The officer chosen to replace DOWN was Brigadier Roy URQUHART, the commanding officer of the 231<sup>st</sup> Infantry Brigade. Apparently, he was not the first choice. The preferred candidate was Brigadier 'Swiftly' HOWLETT, the commanding officer of the 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade. He was notified of his forthcoming promotion, but he was killed the following day by shellfire on the River Sangro.<sup>6</sup> Whatever the reasons, DOWN left the U.K. for India, and lost his opportunity to command the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division in later operations. The handover took place at a meeting between DOWN and URQUHART at the Naval and Military Club in Piccadilly, London. URQUHART is quoted as saying in 1979 that, *'It was a bit of a rush and I do not think that 'Eric' Down was best pleased on having to leave the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division.'*

## India and the Poles

On arrival in India, DOWN set about trying to raise the new airborne division. His arrival coincided with the final planning for Operation 'Thursday', the insertion of Special Force behind the Japanese lines around Indaw and the along the Railway Corridor. Being experienced in airborne operations, Eric DOWN advised Major General WINGATE on matters relevant to the deployment of the Chindits by glider into Burma. A skeleton headquarters for the new airborne division was formed at Secunderabad in India in November 1943, with the title of the 9<sup>th</sup> Indian Airborne Division. At this time, the division had no brigades under command. The only parachute formation in India, the 50<sup>th</sup> Indian Parachute Brigade was acting as an independent brigade under the command of IV Corps at Imphal in North-East India.

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<sup>4</sup> At this time, the official designation was Headquarters Airborne Troops (21<sup>st</sup> Army Group), but BROWNING quickly styled himself as corps commander and the formation as the Airborne Corps or I Airborne Corps.

<sup>5</sup> JOSLEN has Brigadier URQUHART as being appointed as the new G.O.C. on 10 December 1943.

<sup>6</sup> See MEAD page 96 and 97, and page 152 and 153.

On 15 April 1944, the headquarters was enhanced with the addition of personnel from the disbanded 44<sup>th</sup> Indian Armoured Division, so the division was redesignated as the 44<sup>th</sup> Indian Airborne Division. Then, with the Japanese invasion of North-East India underway, the work underway on raising the new airborne division was suspended, with a number of personnel from the divisional headquarters transferred to Assam to form an ad-hoc formation called the 21<sup>st</sup> Indian Division.

During the period whilst work on raising the new division was suspended, Eric DOWN returned to the U.K. He arrived back in April 1944 and worked with the headquarters of I Airborne Corps under BROWNING. On 24 June 1944, a conference was held at DOWN attended to discuss the operational effectiveness of the Polish Parachute Brigade. BROWNING clashed with Major General SOSABOWSKI about the preparedness of the Polish Parachute Brigade, so during this conference, Eric DOWN was ordered to assist the Poles with their organisation and training to ensure they were battle ready by 1 August. DOWN arrived at Leven in Scotland where the brigade was based on 29 June, and he and SOSABOWSKI worked well together. SOSABOWSKI relates, *'He was tremendous: no one could have helped more than he.'* The brigade moved down to Stamford in Lincolnshire on 3 July to begin a strict training programme. New equipment arrived which was assimilated into the brigade during company training. On 12 July, the units of the brigade commenced six days of battalion exercises, leading to a full-scale brigade exercise that started on 30 July. During this exercise, with the key days being 2 and 3 August 1944, the Poles proved themselves battle worthy. BROWNING was so impressed with the Poles that he declared the brigade fully operational on 8 August and two days later, placed them under command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. SOSABOWSKI says of DOWN, *'I cannot speak too highly of General Down; he tackled a difficult job with great enthusiasm and tact, and we became firm friends.'*<sup>7</sup>

It was not until July 1944, with the Japanese offensive defeated, that work continued to raise the new airborne division with the return of the personnel from Assam. The process was slow, and no doubt frustrating for Eric DOWN. The 50<sup>th</sup> Indian Parachute Brigade had fought valiantly at Sangshak, where it despite being surrounded it fought off repeated Japanese attacks for three days, thereby slowing down the advance towards Kohima. The brigade had suffered heavy casualties, so required rebuilding back in India. It concentrated at Secunderabad in September 1944 to commence training, but it did not come under formal command of the division until 5 February 1945. The 14<sup>th</sup> Airlanding Brigade came under command of the division with effect from 1 November 1944. This brigade was reconstituted from the British 14<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade that had fought in Burma as part of Special Force in early 1944. The last brigade to join the division was the 77<sup>th</sup> Indian Parachute Brigade, which came under command on 1 March 1945. This brigade was reconstituted from the 77<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Brigade, which was the original 'Chindit' brigade that had also served with Special Force.

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<sup>7</sup> SOSABOWSKI, Major General Stanislaw *Freely I Served* (London, William Kimber & Co. Ltd., 1960). p.134 – 135.

The other Arms and Services for the new division were also difficult to source from within India Command. The Commander Royal Artillery, Brigadier R. J. KIRTON assumed his role on 6 November 1944, but his first artillery unit, the 23<sup>rd</sup> Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment had joined the division on 4 April 1944. It was in the process of reequipping and training as a Parachute Light Anti-Aircraft and Anti-Tank Regiment, to which it formally converted on 19 February 1945. The next unit, the 159<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, Royal Artillery, did not come under command until 18 December 1944. It then had to convert to a Parachute Light Regiment, being redesignated on 20 January 1945. The second unit, the 123<sup>rd</sup> Parachute Field Regiment came under command on 18 January 1945.

The Commander Royal Engineers was Lieutenant Colonel E. F. KYTE, M.B.E., R.E., had taken up his new role on 25 April 1944. The first two units to come under command were the 33<sup>rd</sup> Parachute Field Squadron, King George V's Own Bengal Sappers and Miners and 411<sup>th</sup> Parachute Field Squadron, Royal Bombay Sappers and Miners, both which join the division in November 1944.

Now having held the acting for a continuous period of twelve months, Eric DOWN was promoted to the rank of temporary Major General and War Substantive Colonel on 12 September 1944; his substantive rank still being Major. On 28 January 1946, DOWN was promoted to the substantive rank of Colonel, his seniority dating back to 12 September 1944 (the date of his promotion to the rank of War Substantive Colonel). On 31 March 1946, DOWN handed over command of the division to Major General C. H. BOUCHER. Despite having worked hard for over two and a half years to raise the new formation, he had never led it operationally. It had been earmarked for active operations during Operation 'Zipper', the invasion of Malaya in September 1945. However, with the cessation of hostilities against Japan, the division stood down as it was not yet deemed operational; not achieving that distinction until 20 February 1946.

## Greece

Eric DOWN returned to the United Kingdom, without any employment. He was due a period of leave having served abroad for over three years. He reverted to the rank of Colonel shortly after relinquishing command of the 44<sup>th</sup> Indian Airborne Division. DOWN next appointment was as General Officer Commanding 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, then stationed in Northern Greece. This formation had been sent to Greece in January 1945 to assist in putting down the Greek Civil War that had broken out between the Communists and Nationalists following the withdrawal of German forces in late 1944. Eric DOWN was regranted the rank of Temporary Major General with effect from 26 September 1946, and he assumed command from Major General C. B. CALLANDER, who had been posted to the War Office. At the time that DOWN assumed command of the division, it was already running down as stability returned to Greece and the post-war demobilisation programme gathered pace.

DOWN managed the drawdown of British forces as units departed. As the 13<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division stationed in Southern Greece disbanded on 14 November 1946, Major General DOWN assumed responsibility for the whole of Greece.

More of his units left just before Christmas 1946, with more leaving in February. The last units left in March 1947, so on 31 March 1947, the Headquarters 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division officially disbanded.

Major General DOWN was destined to remain in Greece even though his command had disappeared. A few British troops were to stay in Greece and there was a British Military Mission to Greece also based in the country. The General Officer Commanding Land Forces Greece was Lieutenant General K. N. CRAWFORD, C.B., M.C., *p.s.c.*, but as the number of British troops reduced, the requirement for a Lieutenant General to be in command disappeared. CRAWFORD relinquished command on 11 May 1947 to return to the United Kingdom, with DOWN assuming the role as General Officer Commanding Land Forces Greece, but in the rank of Major General. On 30 April 1948, the roles of General Officer Commanding British Troops in Greece and Head of the British Military Mission to Greece were merged in line with the reduced British military presence. The head of the British Military Mission, Major General S. B. RAWLINS, returned to the United Kingdom to take up an appointment in the Home Office, so Eric DOWN assumed responsibility as Head of the British Military Mission in Greece. During his tenure, he received further advancement, being promoted to the substantive rank of Major General on 30 October 1947 (his seniority dating from 2 March 1945). In consequence of his promotion to the rank of Major General, DOWN was made a Companion of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath (C.B.) in the New Year's Honours List of 1 January 1949; this award was commonly made to substantive Army officers of this rank.

Although the main fighting in the Civil War took place in early 1945, it continued in the mountains of Macedonia for several years afterwards. DOWN gained the confidence of the Greek Army commanders. He would set out on foot to visit Greek units along the frontier, his visits providing much need encouragement for the Greek troops and their commanders. Even though the British Military Mission to Greece appears to have been a success, and DOWN provided the leadership and inspiration for the mission to achieve its outcomes, he received no recognition for doing so.

The British Military Mission to Greece was wound up with effect from 21 December 1949. DOWN returned to the United Kingdom and although unemployed, he was retained on full pay.

## **Return to the U.K., and Final Elements of Career**

Three months without an appointment ended on 23 March 1950 when DOWN assumed command of the Mid-West District within Western Command of the United Kingdom, and concurrently the role as General Officer Commanding 53<sup>rd</sup> (Welsh) Infantry Division. This was a Territorial Army (T.A.) formation with its headquarters based in Shrewsbury. Of the three brigades, the 158<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade comprised two T.A. battalions of the Cheshire Regiment and one from the Royal Welch Fusiliers. The 159<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade comprised one T.A. battalion from the Worcestershire Regiment and one from DOWN's own regiment, the King's Shropshire Light Infantry. The third battalion was the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn. The Herefordshire Light Infantry, a Territorial Army regiment and part of the King's Shropshire Light Infantry. The third brigade in the division was based in South Wales, with the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Battalions of The Welch Regiment and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn. The Monmouthshire Regiment.

The Shropshire Yeomanry were the divisional reconnaissance regiment and there were five artillery regiments, a divisional engineer regiment and the divisional signals, plus supporting services. This command resulted in significant travelling for Eric DOWN, requiring inspections across Wales and western parts of England. In addition, he and his small staff were responsible for organising the training programme for the division, including the annual camp that all members of the Territorial Army were required to attend.

After two and half years in the role as District Commander, Eric DOWN reached the pinnacle of his career when, on 1 August 1952, he was promoted to the rank of Temporary Lieutenant General on his appointment as General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of Southern Command in the U.K.. This command was based at Erskine Barracks near Salisbury, Wiltshire, and as its title suggests, it covered the whole of southern England from Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire to Cornwall. DOWN replaced General Sir Ouvry ROBERTS who was moving to become Quarter-Master-General to the Force at the War Office.

Shortly after assuming the new role, Eric DOWN was promoted to the substantive rank of Lieutenant General with effect from 8 September 1952. In common with most Army officers who reached this rank, Eric DOWN was knighted in the New Year's Honours List published on 1 January 1953, being created a Knight Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (K.B.E.). With just over three years in command, DOWN was advised that there was to be no further employment for him. On 1 November 1955, he handed over responsibility for Southern Command to General Sir George ERKSINE who was returning from command in East Africa.<sup>8</sup> With no further employment available to him, at the age of fifty-three years, DOWN retired from the British Army on 29 November 1955, but he was appointed to the Regular Army Reserve of Officers. Prior to his retirement, on 5 May 1955, DOWN had been appointed the Colonel of The King's Shropshire Light Infantry, a ceremonial role as the titular head of the regiment. For some reason, only two years into what was usually a ten-year term, DOWN resigned as Colonel with effect from 5 November 1957.

## Retirement and Death

Sir Edward and Lady DOWN retired to Hampshire, where they lived in an old house at Appleshaw, near Andover. He continued to campaign for the welfare of former members of the Army, succeeding in gaining an increase in their pensions. Eric DOWN died on 15 February 1980, aged seventy-eight years.

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<sup>8</sup> It is quite probable that DOWN was required to make way for ERKSINE, who was senior in rank and seniority to him. ERKSINE had been G.O.C.-in-C. of East Africa Command during the recent Mau-Mau uprising.

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