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**A CONCISE BIOGRAPHY OF:**

# **LIEUTENANT GENERAL SIR ERNEST WOOD**

A short biography of Lieutenant General Sir Ernest WOOD, K.B.E., C.B., C.I.E., M.C., *p.s.c.*, who served in the British Army from 1914 until 1918, and the British Indian Army from 1918 until 1948. He held various complex administrative roles within India, with his last appointment as Quarter-Master-General of the Army in India.

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## **A Concise Biography of Lieutenant General Sir Ernest WOOD**

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## Lieutenant General Sir Ernest WOOD, K.B.E., C.B., C.I.E., M.C., p.s.c.

Lieutenant General Sir Ernest WOOD was an officer in the British Indian Army, who rose to high rank and notoriety based upon his skills and ability as an administrator. He did not hold any operational role during the Second World War, but he retired in the rank of Lieutenant General in 1948 having served as Quarter-Master-General in India.

### Family Background

Ernest WOOD was born on 9 May 1894, in Chadderton, Lancashire, then a village just to the north-west of the town of Oldham. In 1911, Ernest was a sixteen-year lad who was an apprentice fitter in a textile machine works in Oldham. He was by then lodging at the home of an Ellen BRADBURY at 36, Oxford Street, Werneth, Oldham. Ellen was a widow and there were two others lodging at the address at the time. His family comprised his father Tim WOOD, who in 1911 was aged forty-seven years, and his mother Ellen Wild WOOD who was also forty-seven years old. By 1911, the family had moved from Chadderton to another area of Oldham, and were living at 165, Denton Lane.

Ernest had four brothers and one sister:

- John (aged twenty-three years in 1911)
- William (aged twenty-one years in 1911)
- Norris (aged sixteen-years in 1911)
- Frank aged eleven years
- Eunice who was aged only six years at the time of the 1911 census.

At the time of the census, Frank and Eunice were attending school, with the rest of the family working in the cotton mills in and around Oldham. The father, Tim, was a fitter of spinning mules as used in the cotton industry, (the mother does not appear to be working); John was a cotton spinner; William a coppersmith; and Norris an apprentice spinning mule fitter.

### The Great War

Ernest WOOD was twenty years old when the Great War broke out in August 1914, and he enlisted in the Army straight away. On 10 December 1914, he was granted an Emergency Commission in the Manchester Regiment in the rank of Temporary Second Lieutenant. WOOD received a commission in the 24<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalion (Oldham), The Manchester Regiment (known as the 'Oldham Comrades').<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It was also known as the Oldham Pals

The Mayor and town of Oldham in Lancashire raised this battalion on 24 October 1914. Even with the enthusiasm in joining the Army at this period of the Great War, the battalion took time to reach its target establishment of one-thousand, one-hundred and fifty men.

The first camp the battalion occupied was at Chadderton Hall farm, just outside Oldham and commenced their basic training. The battalion moved to Llanfairfechan in Wales in March 1915, and then in following month it moved to Grantham in Lincolnshire. On arrival at Grantham, the battalion came under command of the 91<sup>st</sup> Brigade, 30<sup>th</sup> Division. In September 1915, the brigade moved to Larkhill Camp on Salisbury Plain on pre-deployment training.

Second Lieutenant WOOD was posted to France and Flanders on 4 November 1915, to serve in that theatre of war until 10 October 1917. The battalion landed at Le Havre, and it travelled by train to the front. Here they undertook further training in the Albert and Arras sectors of the front line. The battalion transferred to the 22<sup>nd</sup> Brigade of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division during this period. Before the battalion saw action, it was given a new role as divisional pioneers. On 22 May 1916, the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion became the pioneer battalion of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division. In this role, the battalion moved up to Aumont near Amiens and into the front line proper. It later moved to Morlancourt near Albert where the battalion suffered its first casualties of the war.

WOOD was promoted to the rank of Temporary Lieutenant on 2 June 1916, just prior to the battalion entering battle. During the Battle of the Somme, the battalion undertook the job of converting captured German trenches into strongpoints and assisting in consolidating the gains made by the 7<sup>th</sup> Division. Being a pioneer battalion, it suffered fewer casualties than others in the division however, on 14 July the battalion suffered fifty-two casualties when following up an advance on Bazention le Petit. On 30 August, the 7<sup>th</sup> Division attacked Guinchy. The battalion was employed on building support trenches needed for the attack. This cost them another thirty-eight casualties.

In September 1916, the battalion was relieved from the front line and moved to Armentieres. Some members of the battalion were attached to a tunnelling company; with others used on other construction projects. In June 1917, the 7<sup>th</sup> Division moved back up to the front line at Ypres. By now, Ernest WOOD was now a Temporary Captain, having been promoted on 17 March 1917. The battalion moved again to Hazelbrouck, and onwards to Wizernes and Ouderdoom. In the third battle of Ypres, the battalion was employed on works in the Sanctuary Wood area. They worked under shell-fire preparing access for the assaulting troops, and they provided guides for them.

On 26 November 1917, WOOD was awarded the Military Cross for his duties as a pioneer. The citation, which was published on 5 April 1918, read:

*For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty in marking out and consolidating a forward track over the ground won by his brigade, under heavy shell fire.*

On 10 October 1917, WOOD and his battalion left the front line in France to move by train to Italy. The Italians were fighting with the Allies against the Central Powers (Austro/Hungary), and in need of reinforcements. The battalion arrived at Paderno on 19 December 1917, and it was employed soon after arrival on wiring and building defences. The final Allied offensive at the battle of Piave in October 1918 found the battalion again employed as guides to bring troops up to the crossing points. By this time, WOOD had left the battalion. The division crossed the River Piave and advanced quickly. Hostilities ceased on the Italian front on 4 November 1918. During the war, WOOD had been wounded, and he was also Mentioned in Dispatches on 4 January 1917.

## Between the Wars

Ernest WOOD transferred to the Indian Army on 19 August 1918. He joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> Rajput Light Infantry in the rank of Lieutenant. At the time, the battalion was part of the 60<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade and serving in the Middle East. He became a staff officer on 1 November 1918, and a Staff Captain on 1 December 1918. He served as a Staff Captain until 12 May 1919. On 30 August 1919, WOOD was promoted to the rank of Captain in the Indian Army.

In 1922, the Indian Army commenced a post-war reorganisation to reduce the size of the peacetime army. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Rajput Light Infantry became the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 7<sup>th</sup> Rajput Regiment, with WOOD continuing his career as a regimental officer. WOOD attended the Staff College at Quetta in 1929 and 1930, being in the same Senior Division as other future Lieutenant Generals, Eric GODDARD and Douglas GRACEY. This allowed him to use the letters *p.s.c.* after his name in the Army List, which was a sign of the likelihood for his career to progress.

On 1 April 1931, WOOD was appointed a Staff Captain, and on 8 July in the following year, he was promoted to the rank of Brevet Major. Promotion to the rank of Major came with effect from 30 August 1933 and to Brevet Lieutenant Colonel on 1 January 1935. This period included a posting as a Deputy Assistant Quarter-Master-General, which he relinquished on 1 April 1935. On 1 May 1936, WOOD was appointed the Deputy Secretary of the Defence Department, a post he held until 17 May 1938. WOOD was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel (Provisional) with effect from 18 June 1938, his seniority dating from 1 January 1935. He was appointed the commandant (otherwise known as commanding officer) of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion (Prince Albert Victor's), 7<sup>th</sup> Rajput Regiment.

## The Second World War

With the outbreak of the Second World War on 3 September 1939, WOOD was still serving as the Commandant of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn. 7<sup>th</sup> Rajput Regiment. The battalion was then serving with the Razmak Brigade, under the Waziristan District on the North-West Frontier. Within a short time of war being declared, India moved slowly onto a war footing. At this time, there was little direct threat to the country, but as during the First World War, India was required to mobilise troops to send to the Middle East.

The Government of India also set up the Department of Supply, to coordinate the work of business and industry in these war related areas. With his recent experience of working for the Government of India, WOOD was selected to become the Secretary in the Department of Supply in the Government of India. He took up this post on 8 September 1939.

WOOD was promoted to the substantive rank of Colonel on 7 May 1940 (his seniority dating from 1 January 1938). He became the Director-General of Supply, Department of Supply of the Government of India on 1 July 1940. His post enhanced as the Department of Supply grew, and he was promoted to the rank of Local Brigadier on 12 November 1940. There were two civilian Deputy Director-Generals in the Department: Donald Marshall PASSMORE Esq., who worked in the Directorate of Supply, and Allan Robert Elliott LOCKHART Esq., who worked in the Directorate of Munitions Production.<sup>2</sup> For his work with the Department of Supply, WOOD himself was made a Companion of the Most Eminent Order of the Indian Empire (C.I.E.) on 1 January 1941.

On 8 December 1941, Japan invaded Malaya, Hong Kong and later Burma. This changed the situation in India significantly, with a serious threat to the country itself now being present. The Japanese forces quickly advanced up through Burma, causing a mass exodus of civilians and armed forces into India. To cope with this problem, WOOD was promoted to the rank of Local Major General on 6 January 1942, and he was appointed as the Administrator-General, Eastern Frontier Communications. In this role, WOOD was responsible for the safe evacuation of civilians from Burma in the face of the invasion by the Japanese forces throughout the country. Many of these civilians had endured many weeks of walking several hundred miles with limited possessions, so reception camps were established in Assam to provide them with medical treatment, food, clothing, and shelter. The exact numbers involved is not clear, but it was hundreds of thousands of people. These were mainly people of British or Indian descent, who had settled in Burma before the war.

By July 1942, those civilians who were able to escape Burma had made it into India and the operation to receive them was scaled down. On 28 October 1942, WOOD was Mentioned in Dispatches for his services in Burma in the rank of Acting Major General. With the evacuation from Burma concluded by June 1942, WOOD returned to Delhi to become the Secretary of the Food Department of the Government of India.

The entry of Japan into the Second World War meant that the manufacturing capacity of the countries of South-East Asia, which had been coordinated by the Eastern Group Supply Council, was badly disrupted. The output of some countries, such as Malaya and Burma were lost to the Indian Government. The civilian markets were denuded suddenly of stock, shortages in some goods became apparent, and prices began to rise. One area of particular concern was the supply of foodstuffs. Burma was the major rice growing country in the world at the time of the invasion in January 1942, with much production going to India.

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<sup>2</sup> Both these men were awarded the C.I.E. on 2 June 1943.

The issue became one of making difficult decisions between supplying food for the rapidly expanding Indian Army and British troops stationed in the sub-continent, and the availability of food for the civilian population. In the autumn of 1942, the Government of India agreed to establish a separate Food Department to control the purchase, storage, and distribution of food for the military and civilian populations. Formed in December 1942, the Government of India's Food Department grew rapidly during the war to handle the increasingly complex job of ensuring sufficient foodstuffs were available to feed the civilian population and Armed Forces. However, India struggled to feed its own people, with the vagaries of the weather and inefficient agricultural practices in the countryside.

In 1943, there was a major famine in Bengal, resulting in the deaths of many thousands of people. The Bengal famine led to major changes in the Food Department, strengthening its links with public health. The growth in India's war production led to an increasing workload for the Supply Department of the Government of India. This department was formed at the outbreak of war in September 1939 as the secretariat of a War Supply Board, which was a committee of the secretaries of all the relevant departments in the government. The executive of the Supply Department was the Director-General of Supply, and under his responsibility lay those purchasing agencies and the ordnance factories across India. In early 1943, the increase in workload was such that a new directorate was created, entitled the Directorate of Munitions Production, based in Calcutta. It was to this post that WOOD was appointed as the Director-General of Munitions Production. This role was also part of the Department of Supply, and as its name suggests, WOOD was responsible for the development and implementation of strategy to produce munitions and to control heavy engineering in the Indian sub-continent. He continued to hold the rank of Local Major General.

For his services in India, WOOD was made a Companion of the Order of the Bath (C.B.) in the 1945 New Year's Honours List. He was promoted to the substantive rank of Major General on 17 March 1945. On 12 September 1945, WOOD was appointed to the role as Deputy Master-General of Ordnance at General Headquarters (G.H.Q.) of the Indian Army at Delhi.<sup>3</sup> WOOD had now gained experience of managing some complex and demanding issues within India and the Indian Army, and he appears to have been regarded well by his peers and superiors, as the Commander-in-Chief appointed him to the role as Quarter-Master-General at G.H.Q. India. This occurred on 17 December 1946, with WOOD being promoted to the rank of Acting Lieutenant General on the same date, meaning that WOOD had risen to one of the top positions in the British Indian Army. As Quarter-Master-General, WOOD was responsible for all the provision and supply issues for the British Indian Army and British Army in India.

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<sup>3</sup> WOOD is shown as assuming this post, and it is mentioned in his Who's Who entry, yet he does not appear in the Army Lists for this period at the Headquarters, The Army in India. It is presumed that with the end of the war, the Department of Supply was disbanded, but that WOOD continued in a similar role that was redesignated accordingly.



The Quarter-Master-General's Department had six directorates, which were:

- Directorate of Movements and Quartering – Major General
- Directorate of Supplies and Transport – Major General
- Directorate of Veterinary Services – Brigadier
- Directorate of Remounts – Brigadier
- Directorate of Farms – Colonel
- Directorate of Labour – Brigadier.

The Director of Movements and Quartering also acted as the Deputy Quarter-Master-General. At the beginning of the war, the strength of the Quarter-Master-General's Branch was thirty-four officers and one-hundred and seven clerks. In August 1945, the strength was three-hundred and thirty-eight officers, and one-thousand and eighty-four clerks. As usual for a Lieutenant General holding such an important post, in His Majesty's Birthday Honours List on 12 June 1947, WOOD was created a Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire (K.B.E.) and became Sir Ernest.

On 15 August 1947, the country of British India partitioned to form the independent countries of India and Pakistan, so WOOD became the Quarter-Master-General at the Headquarters, Supreme Commander of India and Pakistan. He was heavily involved in the division of the British Indian Army and the allocation of resources to the two new countries. This was not easy, with both countries keen to seize and hold onto scarce resources for their fledgling armies. The partition resulted in the dissolution of the former British Indian Army, so with his role now redundant, WOOD retired on 2 June 1948 at the age of fifty-four years. He was granted the honorary rank of Lieutenant General.

## Post Retirement

Following his retirement, WOOD settled in the United Kingdom. In 1948, he was made the Controller of Operations for the Colonial Development Board, which he held until 1951. In that year, he was appointed the Chief of Staff, Defence Production Board, for the newly formed North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (N.A.T.O.). He held this post for only one year. In 1955, he became the Director of Civil Defence for the Eastern Region, being based at Cambridge.

In his later years, WOOD lived at Foxton House, near Royston in Hertfordshire. He had married Grace GOODLIFFE and they had two daughters. WOOD died on 17 May 1971.

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