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A CONCISE BIOGRAPHY OF:

MAJOR GENERAL SIR H. RALPH HONE

A concise biography of Major General Sir Herbert Ralph HONE, K.C.M.G., K.B.E., M.C., T.D., an officer in the British Army from 1914 until 1919, and again from 1941 until 1946. He was also a noted barrister and colonial administrator.

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A Concise Biography of Major General Sir H. Ralph HONE

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Major General Sir Herbert Ralph HONE, K.C.M.G., K.B.E., M.C., T.D.

Military service can be very varied, and an oft-neglected area of the British Army during the Second World War is the Political Branch. One of its leading personalities during the Second World War was Major General Sir Herbert Ralph HONE, K.C.M.G., K.B.E., M.C., T.D.; who was known by his second forename of Ralph.

An officer in the British Army between 1915 and 1920, HONE served with the Territorial Army Reserve of Officers. Having then qualified as a Barrister in Law, he served in the legal services of British Colonies and Dependencies between the wars, mainly in Africa. Recalled to Military Service in 1940, Ralph HONE served in the Political Branch of East Africa Command during the British campaign against the Italian territories in 1941 and into 1942. From there he served in the War Office until 1945 when he was posted to Malaya. He was the Governor and Commander-in-Chief of North Borneo between 1949 and 1954.

Early Life

Herbert Ralph HONE was born at 89, Sackville Road, Hove, Sussex on 3 May 1896. His father, Herbert HONE, was a local man and schoolmaster, who became the Mayor of Brighton on 1937. His mother, Miriam Grace (nee DRACOTT) sadly died while Ralph was in his teens.

His early years were spent living in suburban Hove, with Ralph showing early promise with his capacity for hard work and an engaging character. He was educated at Varndean Grammar School (then known as the Municipal Secondary School) in Brighton between 1905 and 1913. He was made a Senior Prefect during his time there.

First World War

With the outbreak of the Great War in August 1914, HONE was just over eighteen years of age and still studying. His intention was to become a civil servant, and he passed his first examination to qualify as such, but, as so many young men did at the time, he left his civilian life to fight for King and Country.

HONE joined the Inns of Court Officer Training Corps in the rank of Private and was commissioned into the 18th (County of London) Battalion, The London Regiment (London Irish Rifles) on 15 July 1915 in the rank of Second Lieutenant. This was a Territorial Force battalion of the Army.

On being commissioned, HONE was posted to France and saw active service with his regiment there. The battalion with which HONE served contained several footballers, so when it went into action during the Battle of Loos in autumn 1915, the soldiers kicked a rugby ball ahead of them. After the Battle for Loos, the battalion and HONE served in the Notre Dame de Lorette sector, and then at Vimy Ridge. The heavy and sustained rain made the trenches waterlogged, and the standing water became insanitary. As a result, he contracted acute trench fever and impetigo.

This period of illness brought on by the conditions in the trenches required him to be sent back to the United Kingdom to recuperate. He served on various Courts Martial and Courts of Enquiry, and also spent a period in the Record Office of the Rifle Depot at Winchester. HONE returned to France, being promoted Acting Captain whilst commanding a company on 14 January 1918. He was involved in the Battle of Vimy Ridge in March 1918, where he was wounded. The Germans opened their offensive on 21 March 1918 with a massive bombardment involving some six-thousand guns.

The company HONE commanded managed to check the first German assault on their trenches at Couillet Valley. They even took prisoner thirty-five German soldiers. As the fighting continued, HONE wisely anticipated several German attempts to infiltrate their positions, repulsing these attacks. During one attack, HONE took a Lewis gun and mounted it on the parapet to defeat the German assault. It was during this engagement that he was wounded in the arm, the wound being severe. He started to lose blood quickly, but had to walk several miles to the casualty clearing station for treatment. His arm was fractured, and the ulnar nerve severed. Again, he returned to England to recuperate. He was awarded the Military Cross on 13 September 1918 for his gallantry in that battle. His citation read:

Lt. Herbert Ralph Hone, Lond. R. – For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty when in command of a company. He led his men with skill and courage and drove out a party of the enemy who had penetrated into his trench. Later, he held the right flank of his battalion against a determined bombing attack, when he was severely wounded. By his action and example he undoubtedly saved the situation at a critical moment.

His wounds were serious enough for him to be repatriated to the United Kingdom, and he saw no further action in the war. He last posting was to the Ministry of Munitions as a Staff Captain.

Demobilisation and the Colonial Service

With the end of the Great War, HONE was released from military service on 12 June 1919, relinquishing the rank of Acting Captain. He remained in the Territorial Army, but on 21 October 1922, he was transferred from the Active List to the Territorial Army Reserve of Officers with the rank of Captain.

In 1920, with the war over, HONE joined the Colonial Service and left the United Kingdom to move to Uganda where he started as an Assistant Treasurer. A family member encouraged to study law, which he did so while stationed in Africa. He graduated as a Bachelor of Law (LL.B.) from London University by external examination in 1924 and was admitted to the Middle Temple. He practised on the South Eastern Circuit in 1924 and 1925. He was appointed next as the Register of the High Court in Zanzibar, and then as Resident Magistrate. From Zanzibar, he moved to Tanganyika in 1932 and 1933 where he was the Counsel for the Crown. He left Africa in 1933 on being appointed the Assistant Legal Advisor to the Colonial and Dominions Office. He was appointed the Attorney-General of Gibraltar in the same year, serving there until 1936 when he returned to Africa. In 1937, HONE was appointed the Attorney-General of Uganda. In his role, he joined the Counsel of Uganda on 25 February 1938.

Second World War and the Political Branch

With the outbreak of the Second World War, HONE joined the King's African Rifles and in 1940, he was made the Commandant of the Uganda Defence Force in the rank of Acting Lieutenant Colonel. The Uganda Defence Force was a formation raised in the country in 1940 for home defence, similar to the Home Guard in the United Kingdom.

He was recalled to Active Service on 14 February 1941, being promoted to the rank of Acting Colonel. He was appointed the Chief Legal Adviser to the Political Branch of East Africa Command. On 14 August 1941, HONE was promoted to the rank of Temporary Colonel and War Substantive Lieutenant Colonel; then on 4 October 1941, HONE was promoted to the rank of Acting Brigadier. In January 1942, he was appointed the Chief Political Officer at General Headquarters, Middle East Command. On 4 April 1942, he was promoted to the rank of Temporary Brigadier having completed six months in the acting rank.

The British Army realised the requirement for a Civil Affairs and Military Government role at the outbreak of the Second World War. This became particularly relevant with the capture of former Italian colonies of Libya and Eritrea, plus the conquest of Ethiopia, which has been annexed by Italy before the war. The British built upon their extensive experience as a major colonial power. Many colonial officials were serving or had seen recent service in the countries under British rule. Many were granted Emergency Commissions in the British Army early in the Second World War in order to create a political unit to assume responsibility in occupied territories.

In 1940, Civil Affairs and Military Government was defined as:

All powers exercised and responsibilities assumed by the military commander in an occupied or liberated area with respect to the lands, properties, and inhabitants thereof, whether such administration be in enemy, allied, or domestic territory.

The British saw this responsibility as a military one, closely aligned to their experience of colonial governance. Later in the war, there was to be conflict with the United States government over the British paternalistic approach, as the Americans felt that civil affairs should be the responsibility of civilian agencies.

This came to the fore in the North African campaign of 1943, when the U.S. Army and British Army fought together for the first time in this war. The Supreme Allied Commander, General EISENHOWER complained about these agencies and their ineffectiveness, stating, *'I am having as much trouble with civilian forces behind aiding us as I am with the enemy in front of us.'* The experiences of the North African campaign persuaded the U.S. Army that use of the military was the most efficient way of exercising civil power until indigenous civilian agencies could be rebuilt and assume responsibility from the Allied forces.

This, however, was to be in the future. Brigadier HONE adopted the British approach to military government in relation to his work in the former Italian East Africa. His focus was to rebuild effective judicial processes in these countries. In his roles in East Africa and the Middle East, HONE received various forms of recognition. He was Mentioned in Dispatches on 30 June 1942 in recognition of gallant and distinguished services in the Middle East, and on 18 February 1943, he was awarded the honour as Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. On 6 July 1943, he was again Mentioned in Dispatches. His citation had been prepared by his boss, Major General MITCHELL, the Chief Political Officer on 27 May 1942. It read:

Brigadier HONE has been Chief Legal Adviser to my Headquarters since February 1941 until January 1942. It has fallen to him to prepare or supervise the preparation of a complete body of special military law to meet the circumstances of the occupation of the Italian Empire, including the production of what amounts to a new corpus of Criminal Law. He has also had to organise a new system of criminal courts and jurisdiction throughout these territories and to assist in the establishment of police forces in all of them. In addition, he has been charged with the direction of the custodians of Enemy Property in all the territories.

He has not only been my Chief Legal Adviser in respect of Italian territories but has played a leading part on developments in connection with Ethiopia and in the negotiations with the Emperor and has rendered in all these activities the most distinguished service.

Brigadier HONE occupied a position which is in fact equivalent to that of Legal Adviser or Attorney General in the largest Colonial dependency, but in circumstances much more complicated and difficult than such service could involve. I have no doubt that in the Colonial Service he would have been recommended for a knighthood. I do not do so because I believe by Army practice this would not be acceptable.

He acted for me during my absence in London from the middle of October until 10th November 1941.

HONE had been recommended by Major General MITCHELL, Chief Political Officer East Africa Command for the award of the C.B.E., but by time the recommendation had reached the Military Secretary, HONE had already received the C.B.E., hence the reason he was again Mentioned in Dispatches. He was promoted to the rank of Acting Major General on 1 July 1943, in order to exercise better control over the Brigadiers in the Political Branch. Only five days later, on 9 July 1943, HONE relinquished the rank of Acting Major General on being appointed the Chief Planner in the Directorate of Civil Affairs in the War Office in London. In his new role, he was granted the rank of Local Major General.

He remained in the War Office until 23 May 1945, when he was regranted the rank of Acting Major General on being appointed the Chief Civil Affairs Officer for Malaya Command. As the Chief Civil Affairs Officer, HONE oversaw the transition from military rule to civilian rule. HONE was present at the formal surrender of Japanese forces in South East Asia held at Singapore on 12 September 1945.

HONE was awarded the Territorial Army Efficiency Decoration (T.D.) on 31 January 1946, and was promoted to the rank of Temporary Major General and War Substantive Colonel on 14 May 1946. Further recognition came on 13 June 1946 when he was knighted on being created a Knight Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (K.B.E.) in His Majesty the King's Birthday Honours List.

Post Hostilities Career

On 10 April 1946, Military Administration ended in Malaya, with control returning to a civilian government. HONE was then appointed Secretary-General to the Governor-General of Malaya; later serving as the Deputy Commissioner General for South East Asia in 1948 and 1949. Ralph HONE had by this time divorced, so as such he was not eligible to be colonial governor. Lord MOUNTBATTEN was a keen supporter of HONE, and pressed for him to be appointed the Governor-General for Malaya. The Colonial Office in London would not sanction his appointment, much to MOUNTBATTEN's annoyance. Due to MOUNTBATTEN's insistence, and no doubt due also to his Royal connections, this rule was later abolished by King George VI.

The benefits of the relaxation of this rule allowed HONE his next appointment. It came on 13 June 1949 when HONE was posted to North Borneo as the Governor and Commander-in-Chief. When his appointment was announced, his old friend MOUNTBATTEN wrote to him saying that he was sure he would make a great success of the post, *'for it will help to establish the principle that the Governorship should be open to all suitable people, irrespective of old-fashioned rules'*.

The Colonial Office, however, did not bow out gracefully, and in their letter of congratulation on his appointment the deputed official said:

It may interest you to know that in this respect you are establishing a precedent and I have been asked to make it clear to you that your appointment will not automatically entitle you to receive an invitation to social entertainments, such as Garden Parties at Buckingham Palace, and this particular embargo is not, I am told, to be waived.

HONE was well regarded in his role as Governor of North Borneo, aided by his experience as both soldier and diplomat. This included visiting distant villages and making sure the people knew him and he could understand their needs. He aided the country's recovery from Japanese occupation, assisting to expand the trade in rubber, timber and copra from the land.

In 1954, HONE left North Borneo in to become the Head of the Legal Division of the Commonwealth Office. He was created a Knight Commander of the Order of St. Michael and St. George (K.C.M.G.) in His Majesty's Birthday Honours List on 7 June 1951. This award was usually given to people in recognition of their colonial or diplomatic service, and HONE by his service had qualified for this award.

On 5 May 1956, having exceeded the age limit he ceased to belong to the Territorial Army Reserve of Officers but was allowed to retain his rank of Honorary Major General. In that year, he started serving with the Commonwealth Relations Office, advising on and compiling reports on constitutional and legal issues.

Retirement and Family Life

In 1961, he left the Colonial Service and returned to the Middle Temple as a Barrister. He undertook legal work for the Kenyan government (December 1961 until January 1962); as a Legal Adviser to R. A. BUTLER with regards to central Africa from July to October 1962; to South Arabia (from October 1965 until January 1966); and finally in Bermuda and the Bahamas (July to November 1966). He was in addition an Appeal Commissioner under the Civil Aviation Licensing Act. HONE was an active Freemason in the Deo Fidemus Lodge; a Bailiff Grand Cross of the Order of St. John; and a Vice-President of the Royal Commonwealth Society. His success was attributed to hard work, meticulous attention to detail, and good-humoured leadership. He relaxed by playing tennis, and badminton; and was a committed philatelist. Ralph HONE first married Elizabeth Daisy MATTHEWS (the daughter of a master tailor from his home town of Brighton) on 12 November 1918, and they had one son and one daughter. They divorced in 1944.

One year later on 25 October 1945, he married Sybil Mary SIMOND, the widow of Wing Commander Geoffrey Frederick SIMOND. He had died on active service, aged thirty-five years, on 12 February 1942, while serving as the commanding officer of 144 Squadron, Royal Air Force. He is commemorated on Panel 64 of the Runnymede Memorial.

Ralph and Sybil had one son together. Major General Sir Ralph HONE died at his home at 56, Kenilworth Road, Lower Richmond Road, Putney, London, on 28 November 1992. He was aged of ninety-six years and died of pneumonia. A memorial service was held for Ralph HONE on the 8th February 1993 at the Grand Priory Church, St John's Square, Clerkenwell Road, London. He was described as a larger than life character, with a solid presence. He was big, affable and genial man. Despite leading such a varied and fulfilling life, he remained a devoted family man throughout.

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