

## COLONEL SIR EDWARD MALET

*Colonel Sir Edward St Lo Malet, OBE, 8th baronet, late 8th King's Royal Irish Hussars, died at Chargot, his Somerset home, on October 9 aged 81. He was born on November 27, 1908.*

KNOWN to his many friends as Ned, Edward Malet was adept in many aspects of desert warfare in a career of active service which took him from pre-war Palestine through the battles of North Africa to Normandy and then, after the war, to the Suez Canal Zone in Egypt. He was educated at Dover College and Christ Church, Oxford, and served as a regular soldier from 1932, when he was gazetted in his family regiment, the 8th King's Royal Irish Hussars.

He first saw active service in Palestine, and with the 8th Army in the Western Desert where, in the years before war broke out, he operated far into the Sahara, to test the feasibility of enemy attacks on dams in the Sudan. Subsequently he operated deep behind the Axis lines. As co-inventor of the sun compass, an instrument attached to the sides of jeeps and trucks for navigating in deep desert, he made a valuable contribution to the war, and to the success of the so-called "private armies", the Long Range Desert Group and the Special Air Service. Being over 6ft 8in tall, Ned Malet always found life inside a tank constricting, but in peace time, his great height proved invaluable for the sport of tent-pegging with lances. Though wounded by a shell splinter during the battles in North Africa, he kept going by binding his leg with an old puttee. He was eventually sent to a hospital in Cairo where he was able to exchange interesting reminiscences with the captured Italian general in the next bed who had fought opposite his regiment.

His next posting was to Turkey — then under threat of Axis invasion — to train Turkish armoured corps there. Frau von Papen, the German ambassador's wife, bowed to him at a reception, and said that she knew his family well (two Malets had been ambassadors to Germany) and hoped that they would meet in more auspicious circumstances. He was also acquainted with "Cicero", the plausible valet who betrayed the British ambassador, and turned out to be a German spy, later the subject of a book and a film.

Ned Malet landed in Normandy with the invasion on D+3, which he always claimed as a return match; his ancestor William Malet, a cousin and leading supporter of the Conqueror, had his horse killed under him on the Saxon shield wall at Hastings, and was later responsible for the burial of King Harold's body after the battle. Malet served with 21st Army Group throughout the liberation of France, Belgium and Holland. In the immediate aftermath of the war he was senior officer of the Brunswick district where

he showed his extraordinary objectivity and breadth of mind where treatment of the recent enemy was concerned. Learning that in the adjacent Russian zone many burgo-meisters and village officials who had committed no crime beyond being German were being summarily executed by the occupying Red Army and the NKVD (a forerunner of the KGB) he organised a kind of Scarlet Pimpernel escape route for them. This, in the rather fluid situation which obtained in the immediate aftermath of May 8, 1945, was more successful than he at first dared to hope and lorryloads of innocent people were brought safely into the British Zone.

Malet's greatest mark after the war was in diplomacy, as chief civil affairs officer in the Canal Zone in Egypt, where his humanity to the "enemy" was again in evidence. He was put in charge of ordering the surrender of a police post which had been harbouring numerous terrorists. When the post refused to surrender, Ned Malet brought up tanks and threatened to open fire. Questioned by a journalist as to whether he regarded the Egyptian commanding officer as an enemy, Malet replied that, on the contrary, he regarded him as "a very gallant gentleman." This remark hit the headlines of newspapers all around the world, with great benefit to Anglo-Egyptian relations even though there were some casualties from the shelling of



the police post. President Nasser returned the compliment by sending, every year after 1956, a personal Christmas card to Malet at Chargot.

In retirement Malet served as High Sheriff of Somerset and farmed his small estate at Chargot, seeking to avoid chemical sprays and phosphates where possible, which helped to preserve wildlife, but did not bring in substantial financial returns. He and his wife, Benedicta, an Austrian baroness, were always available to help others, and will long be remembered for their kind hospitality. She died in 1979 and he leaves a son, two daughters, and a grandson who has just been posted to Saudi Arabia with the family regiment, now the Royal Irish Hussars.