Philip Malins (1919–    ) MBE, MC: Prisoners of War and Reconciliation with Japan

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WAR SERVICE

PHILIP MALINS’ first encounter with Japan was in Burma during the Second World War. He arrived there in 1943, after evacuation from Dunkirk, having been the only survivor out of eight when a German bomb scored a direct hit on the truck in which he was travelling, which carried three tons of petrol. In India, before taking up command of the Infantry and Other Arms Animal Transport Course, he spent many months seriously ill with sprue, a tropical disease.

Once in Burma he had to oversee the crossing of the 600 yards wide Chindwin River by 1350 mules and help carry 32 Indian Infantry Brigade 250 miles to capture the key roadhead town of Budalin. Just south of the town at night, his muleteers ambushed a Japanese truck and Malins gave the order to open fire, killing twenty-two Japanese soldiers. The memory of this incident caused him lasting sadness,
as he knew that those young men were in no way responsible for the war. He never hated the enemy but saw them as fellow human beings, obeying orders on pain of death. He gave the ‘cease fire’ but one Japanese was not dead and fired at Malins from four yards, the round passing through his ammunition pouch without exploding the ammunition which would have killed him. The Japanese then killed himself with a hand grenade carried for the purpose. Malins received the Military MBE for his service in Burma.

After the surrender of Japan, Malins was sent as Supply and Transport Officer with 80 Indian Infantry Brigade to French Indo-China, where the Allies had responsibility for repatriating Allied prisoners of war and Japanese troops and keeping law and order. The Annamites at first welcomed the arrival of the Allies but soon turned against them when they realized that they were not being given their independence from the French. With then only 300 infantry of 80 Brigade to defend it, Saigon was besieged by the Annamites. With a scratch force of eighteen Gurkhas, twelve volunteer just-liberated Dutch prisoners of war and thirty Japanese infantry under a Japanese lieutenant colonel, Malins broke out of Saigon, to bring in thirteen truckloads of machine guns, rifles and ammunition from a Japanese arms dump twelve miles distant, at Laithieu. Nightfall forced them to stay the night at the Japanese defended arms dump, and Malins was able to obtain a further fifty Japanese infantry. At daybreak they fought their way out, facing repeated ambushes on their return journey, with tree trunks felled across the road being cleared by the Gurkhas and Japanese under fire. Casualties included five Gurkhas, six Dutch ex-prisoners of war and an unknown number of Japanese, with many more wounded. Malins always wondered if he had contravened the Geneva Convention in that the Japanese Surrendered Personnel (JSPs), over whom he had charge, had carried arms and fought. The arms were used to rearm the French and Saigon did not fall. Malins was awarded the Military Cross for his outstanding leadership.

In Saigon Malins was responsible for providing rations for some 6,700 Allied personnel, including newly released prisoners of war, and 69,000 JSPs, until the arrival of Divisional Headquarters staff, and supplies, by sea. With the main cities blockaded by the Annamites, he had to leave the Japanese temporarily responsible for their own rations and ensure food supplies for the civil population. He became head of the ad hoc Civil Food Control Organization, using British and French officers, French civil servants, and hundreds of Japanese trucks, ships and aircraft to collect and distribute supplies, until handing over to the French in December 1945.

On demobilization Malins spent six years in the family business, Malins (Engineers) Ltd., before becoming Midland Regional Manager