

CAPTAIN THOMAS VICTOR SOMERVILLE OBE DSO MC WITH BAR (1896-1904)

He was born on 18 March 1887 in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and after leaving the College went to the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and got his MRCVS. He then went to the London Hospital and achieved both his MRCS and LRCP.



During WW1 and immediately following, the details of his service are as follows :-

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT</u>
10 August 1914	Commissioned into the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) as Temporary Lieutenant
19 August 1914	France No 6 Casualty Clearing Hospital
?? 1914	32 nd Brigade RFA 4 th Division
By 15 October 1915	Promoted Temporary Captain
1 January 1916	Mentioned in dispatches in London Gazette for action on 5 October 1915
14 January 1916	Awarded Military Cross "For distinguished service in the field" near Ypres
2 December 1916	Returned to UK, sick
1 February 1917	To France – 13 th General Hospital
20 March 1917	2 nd Bn Highland Light Infantry, 2 nd Division
9 July 1917	Returns to UK
1 November 1917	To France – 129 th Field Ambulance
24 November 1917	6 th Field Ambulance
26 July 1918	Awarded bar to Military Cross for action on 24 March 1918 "For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. When his battalion was about to withdraw and the wounded could not be brought to his aid post in time, he went up to the firing line and stayed there attending to the wounded till all the troops had withdrawn. His gallant conduct saved many lives."
August 1918	Wounded in action at Bapaume (south of Arras, France)
1 March 1919	Served in North Russia
12 October 1919	Returned to the UK
28 October 1919	Demobilised
By 11 November 1919	Promoted Acting Major
3 February 1920	Mentioned in dispatches in London Gazette for action on 11 November 1919
3 February 1920	Awarded OBE for services rendered in North Russia

He then became a civilian surgeon in Baghdad, followed by a medical practice in Monkseaton, Northumberland, followed in 1927 with another practice in Bournemouth.

During WW2, the details of his service are as follows :-

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT</u>
18 October 1939	Granted emergency commission as Lt RAMC. Army Number 106130
18 October 1939	Joined 3 rd Bn The Kings Own Hussars
15 March 1940	Promoted Acting Captain
19 August 1940	Embarked for service in Middle East
Nov 1940 - 1941	Served with 3 rd Kings Own Hussars, 7 th Armoured Brigade, 7 th Armoured Division
9 May 1941	Mentioned in Dispatches
9 May 1941	Awarded DSO for actions on 11 December 1940. The recommendation from his Brigadier was that he be awarded the Victoria Cross, but this was changed by General Wavell to a DSO. The London Gazette states the DSO was awarded "In recognition of gallant and distinguished services in the Middle East", but see below for details of the original recommendation and Wavell's decision.
?? 1941	Posted to Crete
June 1941	Reported missing
23 November 1941	Subsequently reported to have died on this date at Agia Paraskevi Amariou Rethimno, Crete.

He was also awarded the 1914 Star, 1914-18 War Medal, 1914-18 Victory Medal, 1939-45 Star, Africa Star (8th Army clasp) and the 1939-45 War Medal.

He is buried in Suda Bay War Cemetery in Crete and you can see a picture of the grave here
<http://www.thewargravesproject.org.uk/information.php?id=996186>

For some account of his exploits see "With Pennants Flying. The Immortal Deeds of the Royal Armoured Corps" by David Masters.



Also the book "The Fortress Crete, 1941-44" by George Harokopos includes mention of Somerville and includes a picture of his funeral (see below). This book tells the story of the secret war in Crete, between the Intelligence service and the secret organisations on the side of the Allies and the German counter-espionage on the other side.

I'm indebted to **Peter Gasgoyne-Lockwood (R57-64)** for most of the above detailed information and for providing copies of the following documents supporting the above.

This is a copy of the original recommendation for the Victoria Cross, subsequently changed to a DSO :-

Wt. 42823/126. 300m. 2/40. W.S. Ltd. 51-6138. Forms/W.3121/6.

Army Form W. 3121.

7th Armoured Brigade. Division. W. Desert Corps

Schedule No. (to be left blank). R.A.M.C. attached to Unit 3rd The K.O. Hussars.

Army No. and Rank. Captain.

Name Thomas Victor Somerville, O.B.E., M.C.

(Christian names must be stated)

Date recommendation passed forward	
Received	Passed
Brigade	23.12.40
Division	24.12.40
Corps	10.2.41
Army	18.2.41

Action for which commended
(Date and place of action must be stated)
AT PAS EL SAIDA

On Dec 11th 1940, when 'A' Sqd tanks were bogged within 400 yds. of a strong enemy position and under heavy and accurate fire from more than 20 guns and many machine guns at that range, Capt. Somerville went out among the tanks attending to the wounded regardless of the heavy fire and with no consideration for his personal safety. He continued to attend to and bring in the wounded until all were under cover from the main enemy position, and thereafter he dressed them in a position where they were still unavoidably under fire from snipers. His cool gallantry was an inspiration to others who assisted him, and the means of saving many lives. (I consider that in view of the shattering fire of the enemy Capt. Somerville has earned the highest decoration for valour.)

Award of DSO approved A.P. Wavell General 26/2/41 437
Commanding 7th Armoured Brigade

H. H. Wavell
Brigadier,
Commanding 7th Armoured Brigade.

DSO

26
2
41

437

This is a copy of the document officially confirming his death on 23 November 1941 :-

CAPT. THOMAS, VICTOR SOMERVILLE

ROYAL ARMY MEDICAL CORPS.

BORN 1887.

DIED 1941.

DIED AT ASIA PARASKEVI, AMAROU.
BETHIMMO, CRETE.

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 23RD. 1941.

This is to certify that Capt. Thomas Victor Somerville
S.D.S.O. Royal Army Medical Corps. M.M. 3rd Hussars,
died at Agia Paraskevi, Amariou,
Rethimno, Crete.

Sunday November 23rd. 1941.

Signed.

54401. 8th M. H. Hussars.

3rd the S.O. Hussars.

Presented at time of death.

18/11/42. W. J. Pack. Sgt.
2/2nd Field Regt. A. I. C.

John
W. J. Pack
Sgt.
2/2nd Field Regt. A. I. C.

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The following is a letter sent to Somerville's wife at the time of his death and funeral in Crete :-

Dear Mrs. Somerville,

Your husband, Victor Thomas, who was looked after in the house of Zacharias Tzenakis by the Directors of the local branch of the Cretan Revolutionary Organisation, (Consisting of Kyriakos Pattakos, Emmanuel Tzenakis, Michael Pattakos, Idomeneas Karakakis and Nikolaos M. Maliaros, who live at Aghia Paraskeve in Amario, Crete), and was treated by Dr. Katsandonis of Ano Meros and Dr. Georgios Papadakis of Melambes, died in our village at 2.30 p.m. on Sunday November 23rd. We knew him only a short time, but we greatly respected him. He was a man of splendid character and a man of distinction. You should be proud of him.

We made every effort that lay in our power to avert his death, but nothing could prevail against the will of the Almighty. From the moment he entered our small but hospitable community, we treated him with all the care with which we would treat a brother, in the home at Yerakari of Alexandros Kokonas, the schoolmaster of Ano Meros and Aghia Paraskeve. We tried by every means to lessen the bitterness of his exile and to give him some consolation for being far from you and his children. His thoughts were always turned towards you up to his last moments. All who knew him were deeply moved at the news of his death, and all the priests, Greek officers, men of learning, workmen and farmers of the neighbourhood gathered at Aghia Paraskeve. He was given a public funeral, which was attended by all the inhabitants. The funeral service was conducted by His Grace the Bishop and Abbot of Preveli Monastery, Agathangelos Logovardos, by the priest of Ano Meros, Kyriakakis Katsandonis and by the priest of Nithavrea, Athanarios Ponlakakis, the son of Stephanos; he was laid out by the Cretan Revolutionary Organisation and carried to the grave by the local Revolutionary Committee of the neighbourhood of Aghia Paraskeve. The grave was covered with flowers carried by the girls and women of Crete, who shed tears over the friend of Greece, who died for us. Our gratitude to him, Madam, was expressed in appropriate words by the Bishop, Agathangelos Logovardos, by the lawyer Kyriakakis Leonidis, who lives at Neo Amario, on behalf of the Cretan Revolutionary Organisation, by Elias Kostakos, the Greek Army and by many others. Our gratitude to your late

never die. Their memory will live forever, and we shall preserve our gratitude and love for ever. The splendid conduct of your husband's servant, Frederick Marlow, deserves special praise. He followed him everywhere and treated more lovingly than a mother. Also Helen Tzenakis of Aghia Paraskeva never left his bedside for a one moment during his stay here until his last rest.

Yours respectfully,

The members of the Cretan and Local

revolutionary organisation,

Logourdos (Bishop)

Katsandonis and Pontakis (Priests).

This is a copy of an article that appeared in "The Services" shortly after Somerville died. The reference to the BBC reporter is fascinating :-

The Services

A Supplement to the *London Gazette* dated February 24, 1942, announces that the King has approved the appointment of H.M. The Queen to be Colonel-in-Chief of the Royal Army Medical Corps.

R.N.V.R. OFFICERS' DECORATION

The King has approved the award of the R.N.V.R. Officers' Decoration to Surgeon Commanders Basil William Crowhurst Archer and Albert Stanley Bradlaw, and Acting Surgeon Commander Hugh Mason Willoughby, R.N.V.R.

ARMY AWARDS

The King has conferred the Efficiency Decoration of the Territorial Army on Colonel A. Mck. Reid, M.C., and on Lieut.-Colonel (Acting Colonel) A. MacG. Duff and Lieut.-Colonels A. Bremner, M.C., and W. J. McIntosh, R.A.M.C. (T.A.).

The King has awarded the M.C. to Captains Charles Douglas Anderson, Niels Pedersen, and John Stobo Pritchard, R.A.M.C., and Captain Gerald Francis Adye-Curran, I.M.S., in recognition of gallant and distinguished services in the Middle East.

CASUALTIES IN THE MEDICAL SERVICES

CAPTAIN T. V. SOMERVILLE, O.B.E., D.S.O., M.C. with Bar
Great regret will be felt at the death of Captain Thomas Victor Somerville, R.A.M.C., medical officer of the 3rd Hussars, while on active service in the Middle East. On June 1 last he was reported missing, though believed to be alive and well "in enemy territory"; this report was repeated in September. Now he is stated to have died on November 23. Somerville was 54. He was born of Scottish parents in Ceylon, where his father was a planter. His mother was a sister of the late Sir James Yuill. Somerville was sent home to be educated at Framlingham. Thereafter he trained and qualified M.R.C.V.S. Lond., proceeding immediately to study medicine at the London Hospital in order to obtain the double qualification—in medicine as well as in veterinary surgery—to prepare himself the better for future work abroad. He obtained the M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P. in 1914. After taking a course at the London School of Tropical Medicine, Somerville was appointed house-physician and house-surgeon at the Royal Sussex Hospital, Hastings. When there were rumours of war in 1914 he resigned his appointment and joined the Army—the day before the outbreak of war—proceeding to France with the Expeditionary Force. At first he was attached to the Field Artillery, being transferred later to the 2nd Battalion the Highland Light Infantry. After the armistice Somerville went to Russia with the 1918 Expeditionary Force, returning home with this Force after nine months' service there. In 1916 he was awarded the M.C. for an act of conspicuous gallantry near Ypres, and in 1918 a bar to the M.C. for many acts of courage and bravery while he stayed behind during the March retreat to tend the wounded. In November, 1919, he was awarded the O.B.E. (Military Division). For a year he held the appointment as civil surgeon at Baghdad, then came back to England, settling in general practice at Monkseaton, near Newcastle. About fifteen years ago he came to Bournemouth, continuing in general practice in the Winton area there. Soon after the outbreak of the present war Somerville, although over 50, volunteered again, and saw active service in Libya. On May 6 last he was gazetted as having been mentioned in dispatches for distinguished services in the Middle East. In the same number of the *London Gazette* (dated May 6) was the notification of the award to him of the D.S.O. "in recognition of gallant and distinguished services in the Middle East." In the *Listener* of May 1, 1941, is the record of a broadcast, which many will remember having heard, made by a B.B.C. observer in the



Middle East, in which he described incidents of astonishing bravery on the part of Captain Somerville. One of these narrates thus: "After Sidi Barrani, during the advance to Sollum, Somerville was to be seen driving about, under intense fire, sitting on the top of his 'dingo' with shells bursting round and machine-gun bullets whistling past. Why he was killed I don't know. Backwards and forwards he went tending his wounded men till all had been seen to. Thomas Somerville was of a quiet, retiring disposition, strong physically, and of gentle temperament; a man of few words; brave as a lion; there was none braver or more gallant. Much sympathy will be felt by a large circle of friends with his wife and married daughter, who, after waiting in dreadful suspense for so many months, have now to mourn his loss.

S.W.

War Substantive Captain GUTHRIE MORGAN WADSWORTH included as "Died" in an Army Council Casualty List published on February 21. He was born on December 17, 1889, and was educated at the University of Leeds, graduating in Ch.B. in 1923, and at University College, London, taking diplomas of M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P. in 1924. He had held the post of first house-physician at the General Infirmary at Leeds, and had practised in Durham, Merionethshire, Lincolnshire, Surrey and Kent, and at the outbreak of war was living at Blackheath, London. He entered the R.A.M.C. as temporary lieutenant in September, 1939, and was promoted captain a year later. He had been a member of the British Medical Association for fifteen years.

Lieut. RICHARD HUGH SMITH died at Enniskillen, Ireland, on February 18. He was educated at the University of Cambridge and St. Thomas's Hospital, and qualified M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P. in 1932. He held the post of casualty officer and house-surgeon at the Royal Berkshire Hospital, Reading, before settling in practice at Aldershot. In 1935 he moved to Poole, where he resided until he joined the R.A.M.C. as temporary lieutenant in December last year.

DEATHS IN THE SERVICES

SURGEON REAR-ADmiral F. L. SMITH, O.B.E., R.N.

The sudden death on February 18 at the age of 60 of Surgeon Rear-Admiral Frank Lewis Smith has come as a great loss to his many friends and acquaintances both in and outside the Services. His general disposition and cheery manner endeared him to many, while his extensive knowledge of medical matters and of affairs in general was always at the disposal of those who cared to ask; nothing was too much trouble for him and if he did not know the answer he could always suggest a way to find it. His organizing ability was of a high order and his energy in carrying out his duties was unremitting. He died on his way to work in "the Department" which he loved is probably what he himself would have wished. Both the Navy and the Medical Branch are the poorer.

Born in 1881, the son of Ralph Smith of Whitby, he was educated at Dulwich and underwent his medical training at Thomas's Hospital. He entered the Royal Navy in November 1909, and after service in China returned to England before the outbreak of the last war, and served in the Royal Naval Hospital and Dockyard at Pembroke Dock. Thence he joined H.M.S. *Caroline* in the Grand Fleet, and he was appointed to the Royal Naval Hospital, Chatham, where he served as specialist in x-rays. After further service as senior medical officer of the aircraft-carrier *Hermes* and *Furious*, he came to the Admiralty in 1926 as assistant Medical Director-General, and remained until promoted surgeon captain in 1931. After promotion he went as principal medical officer of the Royal Naval Barracks, Portsmouth, in 1934-8 was in medical charge of the Royal Marine Infirmary and Depot at Deal. In 1938 he was advanced to the rank of surgeon rear-admiral and placed on the retired list.

On the outbreak of war he was recalled to the Medical Department to take up his war appointment as principal medical transport officer for the Navy, a post for which his previous experience and organizing ability made him eminently suitable, and which he filled with such success that his place will be hard to fill. His liaison with the other fighting Services, as well as the Ministry of Health and various Admiralty Departments of the Navies of this country and the U.S.A., was invaluable. He also acted as the link between the

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The following piece is taken from the book "The Fortress Crete, 1941-44" by George Harokopos. Note the inaccuracy re his rank and name :-



An authentic photograph taken during the funeral of the British surgeon-colonel R. Somerville in the village of Agia Paraskevi, during the occupation. He died of his wounds and hardship in November 1941. From the left: The notary of Amari Stavros Pattakos, the heroic priest of Nithavri Athanassios Poulakakis, J. Papoutsoyiannis, the abbot Ag. Lagouvardos and lieutenant Costakos from Peloponnese. On the right: First is Mich. Pattakos and the priest of Ano-Meros, the heroic Kyriakos Katsantonis (slightly visible) and others surrounding the coffin. They were all leading members of the Resistance.

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FACING PAGE 81. CHAPTER 3. SECRET MISSION TO CRETE.

THE FORTRESS CRETE. 1941-1944.

GEORGE HAROKOPOS. © B. GIANNIKOST CO. 1993
11 KRIAFAS STREET, 10678 ATHENS.

ISBN - 960-7296-35-4.

ESPIONAGE AND COVERT-ESPIONAGE IN OCCUPIED CRETE.

DEDICATED TO THE 2,329 MEN WHO, ACCORDING TO THE OFFICIAL ARCHIVES
— THE MAIN ALLIED HEADQUARTERS, PARTICIPATED IN THE RESISTANCE

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In 2009 I was contacted by Patrick Donnelly who has written a small booklet featuring Captain Somerville and his batman Fred Marlow. It is titled "Three Good Great Men" and he has been good enough to allow up to publish this on our website – click this link to read his account, which is based partly on an interview with Fred Marlow

http://www.oldframlinghamian.com/gallery2/main.php?g2_view=core.DownloadItem&g2_itemId=6526&g2_GALLERYSID=6307112867f371526a54c9f563f03933

A copy of the original unabridged CD of the Fred Marlow interview is available. Please get in touch with Patrick if you are interested on e-mail address Thepdonnellys@aol.com