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CENTRAL CHANCERY OF THE ORDERS OF KNIGHTHOOD

St. James's Palace, London S.W.1.

1st February 1966.

The QUEEN has been graciously pleased to approve the award of the George Medal to the under-mentioned:

Major Charles William SMITH (382835), Royal Army Ordnance Corps.

On the evening of Friday, 25th June 1965, a Belgian ammunition train caught fire in a cutting near Minden. The train had been stopped and four of the wagons uncoupled but the fire increased and two of the wagons exploded scattering shells over a wide area. Major C. W. Smith, who was at the time Senior Ammunition Technical Officer, No. 3 Detachment, No. 1 Ammunition Inspectorate, was telephoned as he was the ammunition adviser nearest to the scene, although still some 80 miles away. He immediately went to the accident with his second in command, Captain P. W. E. Istead.

On arrival at the scene they found two of the wagons devastated and burning fiercely, whilst the adjoining wooden end of a third wagon was smouldering. The surrounding area was covered with burning propellant, exploded ammunition and a number of dangerously hot 90 millimetre shells, which might have exploded at any minute. The girders of the burning wagons were red hot in places and there were still a number of unexploded rounds in the wreckage.

There was a large civilian house with a thatched roof within two hundred yards of the accident and despite the efforts of German Police a number of curious civilians were infiltrating into the area. A Royal Military Police Non-Commissioned Officer, Lance Corporal Moodie was trying to move a fire tender so that water could be played on the flames, but apart from this nothing had been done to prevent further explosions and the local fire brigade were reluctant to approach.

Major Smith at once took charge of the situation. He first persuaded the fire brigade to move a tender to the top of the cutting overlooking the scene and play water on the burning end of the third wagon. Then with complete disregard for his own safety, helped by Captain Istead, he broke into the third wagon and was just in time to move the ammunition boxes away from the burning end before they too caught fire and precipitated a further explosion. Major Smith assisted by Captain Istead and Lance Corporal Moodie then uncoupled the third and fourth wagons each containing about 10 tons of 90 millimetre ammunition and moved them about 60 yards further down the track.

Having thus prevented a further major explosion, Major Smith set about dealing with the other ammunition which lay in and around the burning wagons. In most cases the projectiles were separated from the cases but a number of complete rounds were still in smouldering cardboard cylinders. Some of the projectiles were marked "Practice" but most of them had had all their markings burnt off, and were too hot to pick up with the naked hand. They all had to be treated as suspect and it was considered that in view of the likelihood of further explosions and the difficulty of discovering whether the shells were high explosive or not, the ammunition would have to be cooled with water before clearance could commence. In order not to expose the local firemen to undue hazard Major Smith and Captain Istead handled the branch hose for the first 30 minutes of this operation. Subsequently with the aid of a fatigue party all the ammunition was unloaded and removed.

The whole operation took twelve hours to complete, from about nine in the evening when the officers arrived on the scene, until about nine thirty next morning when all the ammunition had been cleared. Throughout this period, although he was well aware of the continuous danger of further explosions, Major Smith acted with utter disregard for his own safety, and in the highest tradition of the British Army.

Captain Peter Walter Ernest ISTEAD (434900), Royal Army Ordnance Corps.

On the evening of Friday, 25th June 1965, an ammunition train caught fire near Minden. The train had been stopped and four of the wagons uncoupled but the fire increased and two of the wagons exploded scattering shells over a wide area. Captain P. W. E. Istead who was at the time Second in Command at No. 3 Detachment, No. 1 Ammunition Inspectorate, was instructed by his Officer Commanding to accompany the latter to the scene of the accident although that was still some 80 miles away.

On arrival at the scene they found two of the wagons devastated and burning fiercely whilst the adjoining wagon was also burning. The surrounding area was covered with burning propellant, exploded ammunition and a number of dangerously hot 90 millimetre shells which might have exploded at any minute. The girders of the burning wagons were red hot in places and there were still a number of unexploded rounds in the wreckage. There was a large civilian house with a thatched roof within 200 yards of the accident and despite the efforts of German Police a number of curious civilians were infiltrating into the area. A Royal Military Police Non-Commissioned Officer, Lance Corporal Moodie, was trying to move a fire tender so that water could be played on the flames but apart from this nothing