



## King's College London Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives

### Survey of the Papers of Senior UK Defence Personnel, 1900-1975

**Name**

DOBSON, Anthony Henry George (1911-1987), Major General

**Service biography**

Joined Royal Engineers 1931; seconded to RAF for survey duties, Iraq 1938-1939; World War II 1939-1945; Egypt, Turkey and Iraq 1939-1942; POW, Italy 1942-1943; interned in Switzerland after escape 1944; Netherlands and Germany 1945; Manpower Planning Department, War Office 1950-1953; Commander, Engineer Regt, Hong Kong 1953-1956; Engineering branch, War Office 1956-1959; Chief Engineer, Headquarters Eastern Command, UK 1959-1962; Deputy Quartermaster General, Headquarters, British Army of the Rhine (BAOR) 1962-1964; Chief Engineer, Headquarters Northern Army Group, British Army of the Rhine (BAOR) 1964-1967; retired 1967; Col Commandant Royal Engineers Corps 1969-1973

**Papers**

IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM: Department of Sound Records holds a recorded interview; PRIVATE POSSESSION: Family retains correspondence relating to World War II and correspondence with Lt W H Johnstone, VC

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**Last updated:**

## MAJOR GENERAL A H G DOBSON CB OBE MC BA

*Born 15 December 1911, died on 12 March 1987*

ANTHONY HENRY GEORGE DOBSON, who died on 12 March 1987, was born into a family of strong Sapper traditions. The only son of Colonel A C Dobson (late RE), his grandfather Lt A E Dobson RE had died in the Afghan campaign in 1879, and his godfather was Major W H Johnston VC RE, who died in action in 1915. His great grandfather had been Principal of Cheltenham College, where he himself became a scholar, and whence he took first place in the Army Entrance Exam in 1929, entering The Shop in January 1930. He passed out head of his term, winning the Pollock Medal, and was commissioned in the Royal Engineers in 1931.



YO training at Chatham was followed by two carefree years at Clare College, Cambridge during which Tony Dobson joined other Sapper undergraduates from various colleges, in lodgings which became known as "Toc RE". During this happy time, Dobson and other YOs, inspired by Jim

Gavin's enthusiasm, learnt to ski in Austria during the Christmas and Easter vacations.

After graduating in 1934 Dobson was posted to 12 Field Company at Aldershot, whence he returned to Chatham as a party officer in the Training Battalion. After a spell as Assistant-Adjutant he volunteered for the appointment of OC Desert Survey Party with the RAF in Iraq, and went to Habbaniya in the spring of 1938.

During this period in Iraq, and after the outbreak of war as OC Topographic Section of 512 Army Field Survey Company in Egypt, he travelled extensively in the Near East, including a spell in Kuwait and a mission to the Turkish Government Survey Department in Ankara. Life in the Section in an austere camp at Abbassia was varied pleasantly by training exercises in the Western Desert and the flesh-pots of Cairo.

Dobson was next selected for a war-time staff course at the Middle East Staff College, which earned him the qualification "psc". From Haifa he was posted as GS02 on the staff of the Chief Engineer, GHQ Middle East in Cairo, where he was able to make use of his considerable knowledge of the area. Amongst other duties he was sent to Iraq to advise the Indian Expeditionary Force on the problems of denying the oil-fields to the enemy, and visited the New Zealand Engineers building roads in the Kladi Rum, near Aqaba.

In early 1942, Dobson was selected for the appointment of Brigade Major, 150 Infantry Brigade of 50 (Northumberland) Division, then holding an area in the Western Desert forward of Tobruk. In Rommel's offensive of June 1942, the brigade was overrun, and Dobson taken prisoner. Later he was awarded the MC for his part in the operations before the disaster, in addition to the two Mentions in Despatches he had received in 1941 and 1942.

After fifteen months in a POW camp in Northern Italy, the Italian Armistice in September 1943 enabled him to escape, and after nearly three months on the run, being cared for by Italian peasants, he made his way to neutral Switzerland. For political reasons, few of the many escaped prisoners-of-war in that country were able to return home until autumn 1944. Dobson passed the time assisting with the administration of his fellow POWs, and re-learning the art of skiing. One day he met

in a ski-lift a Swiss girl, Noni Homberger, whom he was subsequently to marry as soon as the war was over.

He returned to the UK in October 1944, and after leave and a spell at the wartime SME at Ripon, Dobson was appointed Brigade Major 235 Brigade, in a training role in Yorkshire.

In March 1945, he was posted as GSO 1 (SD) at HQ Second Army, then just about to force the Rhine Crossing, and remained with that HQ for the rest of the campaign until its disbandment in Germany, when he was given a similar post in HQ 21 Army Group. He remained in Germany until 1950, serving in various staff and works appointments and in command of 4 Field Squadron in 7th Armoured Division, until going to the Joint Services Staff College. On leaving Latimer he became AAG, in the Manpower Directorate of the War Office, then coping with the manpower bill for the Korean war, being made OBE in 1953 for his work at this time. In the same year Dobson was selected to command 24 Field Engineer Regiment in Hong Kong. His former Adjutant writes of him at that time: "It was an honour and a pleasure to be his Adjutant. He had a firm but light touch on the Regiment and he was happy to leave his staff and squadron commanders to get on with their jobs without interference, but he was always ready with advice when asked, no matter how small the problem. He was constant in his policies and decisions which made working for him easy."

Another officer of the regiment writes: "To my dying day I shall not forget the strength of purpose, the quiet determination, the warmth and sense of understanding which Tony Dobson personified. These qualities, plus his professional skill brought the General to eminence in his profession, but it was the manner in which he exercised these skills for which he should be remembered. For me the light will continue to shine".

Returning to the UK, he became Colonel (E) in the Engineer-in-Chief's office in the War Office, where one of his former staff recalls him as "a wonderfully educative boss, particularly in teaching me how to manipulate the MOD machine. My everlasting impression is of his ability to think on his feet with great speed and accuracy in a crisis. The main joy of working for him was that he always let one into his feelings about the people he was dealing with; he found it hard to tolerate gladly the fools senior to him, but was always patient and helpful to the fools working for him".

In 1959 Dobson was promoted to brigadier as Chief Engineer, Eastern Command, until in 1962 he was selected for the appointment of DQMG at HQ BAOR. He served in this post for nearly three busy years, engaged in the complete revision of administrative plans for war resulting from the NATO decision to adopt a forward strategy, together with the immense works programme required to house the regular (and much married) Army in Germany. In 1964 he was promoted major-general remaining in Rheindahlen in the dual appointment of Chief Engineer of the NATO Northern Army Group, and of BAOR. In these years his strongly pro-European ideas, extrovert character and gift for languages were a tremendous asset in an international headquarters, and not only as a Sapper.

Dobson retired from the Army in November 1967, and was made CB in the New Year Honours of 1968. He was appointed a Colonel Commandant RE on 15 April 1969, and served until April 1974, being the Representative Colonel Commandant in 1973.

In retirement he joined the Department of the Environment as an Inspector in the Planning and Housing Directorate, where he served from 1968 to 1979, holding many planning enquiries.

During his later years Dobson's chief sporting interests were skiing and gliding. During his internment in Switzerland he had become a very good skier, and was able to contribute a great deal to the organisation and training of British Army skiers besides reaching the top level himself. He founded the BAOR ski team in 1945, and was a member of it from 1946 to 1950, being given special training for the British Olympic trials in 1949. In 1953 he was awarded a "golden K" by the Kandahar Ski

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Club for his services to British skiing. He was Vice-Chairman of the RAF Gliding and Sailplane Association from 1963 to 1967, and an active participant, besides being ex-officio Commodore of the British Kiel Yacht Club during his time as CE BAOR. In retirement he was active in the Lions Club International.

To sum up, Tony Dobson was to his contemporaries effortlessly brilliant and a perfectionist without being a slave-driver, an excellent linguist whose great sense of humour, ready wit and modesty made him immensely popular both in the Corps and in much wider circles. He is survived by Noni and their four children, to whom our deep sympathy goes in their great loss.

*MWB, CLR, GWD, RWTB, JHSB, AJL, RF*

### MAJOR GENERAL S H M BATTYE CB MA FRSA

*Born 21 June 1907, died 17 April 1987*

STUART HEADLEY MOLESWORTH BATTYE was born at Meshed, Iran in 1907 where his father, an IMS Surgeon, was on the staff of the distinguished Consul General, Brigadier General Sir Perry Sykes. His grandfather Richmond was one of the celebrated ten Battye brothers whose exploits with the Corps of Guides and Gurkhas became legendary in India during the second half of the last century. The family had been closely connected with India since the 18th Century and it was small wonder that Stuart was also dedicated to service with the Indian Army.

Stuart was educated at Marlborough, RMA Woolwich and Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge. He was commissioned in 1927 and was posted to the Bengal Sappers and Miners in 1930 with whom he served continuously until 1944. He was soon engaged in frontier operations, serving with 3 Field Company against the Afridis on the Khajuri Plain in 1930 and 1931. Much of his subsequent service with the Bengal Sappers was with one or other of their two field troops, still in those days having half the troop mounted. As a keen polo player he could hardly have asked for better; but in fact, during a short posting to the Training Battalion, he did get something better, namely inclusion in a visiting party of inspection to the fort at Gyantze in Thibet. A special dispensation had to be obtained for this visit to a country then normally closed to Europeans. This long trek gave him a lasting interest in things Thibetan.

After a course at the Quetta Staff College in 1940, he took over command of 1 Field Company which, as Corps Troops in Iraq, was involved in bridging the River Tigris, a project in which he nearly lost his life. In January 1943 he returned to Roorkee and became CRE 39 Indian Division in the following year.

In 1944 he had to say goodbye to his beloved Indians and to the opportunities for *shikar* and fishing which India had to offer and returned to the UK as AQMG Control Commission in London, later going to Germany as AQMG 21 Army Group (QAE). From 1947 to 1949 he was back in the UK as AA and QMG HQ Northern Ireland before going to Marchwood to take command of 17 Port Training Regiment. DMRE writes: "The impact of his arrival on one young officer in the Regiment was profound. Firm but fair with a marvellous sense of humour, Stuart had that rare knack of being

