



SUPPLEMENT TO

The London Gazette

of Friday, 16th February 1968

Published by Authority

Registered as a Newspaper

TUESDAY, 20TH FEBRUARY 1968

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

CENTRAL CHANCERY OF
THE ORDERS OF KNIGHTHOOD

St. James's Palace, London S.W.1.
20th February 1968.

The QUEEN has been graciously pleased to give orders for the following appointments to the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire:

To be Additional Members of Military Division of the said Most Excellent Order, for Gallantry:

Major Henry John MITCHELL (403622), Royal Army Ordnance Corps.
22954554 Warrant Officer Class II Henry Albert VAUGHAN, Royal Army Ordnance Corps.

Major Mitchell and Warrant Officer Vaughan undertook a reconnaissance of Hell's Point and the Henderson Airfield Extension Area on Guadalcanal during the period 10th June to 6th July 1967, to assess the problems involved in the clearance of World War II ammunition in these areas.

Hell's Point is the site of an American ammunition depot in which, during 1948 and again in 1953, there were series of explosions lasting several days. On these occasions several people were killed and a large quantity of ammunition was scattered around the area. The Henderson Airfield Extension Area was an American defensive position, on which there are still the remnants of gun sites and ammunition dumps.

The ammunition remaining in these two areas is scattered, often concealed by dense undergrowth and sometimes just below the surface. Ammunition of all types was found in varying stages of deterioration, including large quantities of fused high explosive shell, mortar bombs, grenades, Bangalor torpedoes; some filled with white phosphorus and some Naval shells and Aircraft bombs. Much of the ammunition was still in a potentially dangerous state. Some fuse had almost disintegrated leaving strikers poised over magazines without the protection of the safety devices; other fuses were exuding dangerous and extremely sensitive explosive compositions. Additionally, some shells and bombs were unstable, having been involved in previous detonations. Some grenade strikers were held back only by rust, whilst certain shells filled with white phosphorus burst into flame on moving. Detonations are commonplace and are an accepted part of the life of the inhabitants. Major Mitchell and Warrant Officer Vaughan were thus well aware of the likelihood of further explosions and these did occur during their work.

Major Mitchell took charge of the situation and with Warrant Officer Vaughan, proceeded coolly and

with great fortitude to do a detailed reconnaissance of Hell's Point, estimating that approximately 5,000 tons of ammunition still remained there to be cleared.

At Henderson Airfield, Major Mitchell, in order to avoid the possibility of injury to civilians and danger to property, decided to extend the team's stay and clear this area of ammunition. This was achieved in three weeks but only by working very long hours under extremely adverse and exacting conditions. In all, 12,000 shells, bombs, grenades, and mines were removed from this area and dumped in the sea by Major Mitchell and Warrant Officer Vaughan. However, forty-seven projectiles, including "blinds", were destroyed *in situ* because they were too dangerous to move. Much of the ammunition had to be moved by hand, holding it centrally in the horizontal position in order to prevent any contact of fuse strikers with the sensitive explosives and to minimise the effects of any sudden movement. This was hazardous work carried out without regard to their own safety. Local inhabitants, provided to assist, were only allowed to handle ammunition which was entirely safe.

Throughout this operation, Major Mitchell, remote from any superior authority or source of advice and never knowing the extent of the danger embodied in any one projectile, took difficult decisions and assumed heavy responsibilities, thereby demonstrating exceptional initiative, resourcefulness and prowess. He was supported throughout and without hesitation by Warrant Officer Vaughan.

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

Major Gordon Chisholm BROWNLEE (355433)
Royal Army Ordnance Corps.

Major Brownlee was employed as Senior Ammunition Technical Officer, Middle East Command. In this appointment he was responsible for provision, inspection and safety of all the ammunition issued to the security forces in the Theatre. His duties also included the destruction or dismantling of terrorist mines, booby traps and explosive devices.

Since September 1966, he personally answered over 170 calls from the civil authorities to deal with explosive or suspected explosive devices.