

2020

www.BritishMilitaryHistory.co.uk

Author: Robert PALMER, M.A.



A CONCISE BIOGRAPHY OF:

MAJOR GENERAL P. H. MITCHENER

A short biography of Major General Philip Henry MITCHENER, who was a distinguished surgeon and also a member of the Territorial Army from 1914 until 1945, rising to the rank of Major General. He saw service in both World Wars.

Copyright ©www.BritishMilitaryHistory.co.uk (2020)

A Concise Biography of Major General P. H. MITCHENER

Version: 1_1
This edition dated: 5 May 2020
ISBN: Not yet allocated.

All rights reserved. No part of the publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means including; electronic, electrostatic, magnetic tape, mechanical, photocopying, scanning without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

Author: Robert PALMER, M.A. (copyright held by author)
Assisted by: Stephen HEAL
Published privately by: The Author – Publishing as:
www.BritishMilitaryHistory.co.uk

**Major General Philip Henry MITCHENER, C.B., C.B.E., T.D.,
M.D, M.S., F.R.C.S.**



Above – Major General MITCHINER in full uniform and displaying the symbol of his appointment as a King’s Honorary Surgeon below the rank badge of a Major General.

Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery (on licence)

Introduction.

There was and still is a close relationship between the Medical Profession and the British military, in particular the Army. Wartime was a period of significant developments in the field of medicine, and a cross-flow of new advances took place between the military and civilian doctors and surgeons. There was a large Territorial Army element of the Royal Army Medical Corps of men who worked in medicine in civilian life, but also committed to support the Army in times of crisis.

One of the foremost of these during the Second World War was Major General Philip Henry MITCHINER, who lived and worked in London throughout his career. He served in both World Wars, and rose to the rank of Major General in the British Army, an unusual distinction for an officer in the Territorial Army, for whom the rank of Colonel was the likely pinnacle of their career.

Early Life

Philip Henry MITCHENER was born in Croydon, Surrey, on 17 June 1888. He was the eldest son of Henry Morford MITCHINER (1862 – 1934) and his wife Blanche (1861 – 1939). Henry was a corn merchant, and the family lived at 31, Clarence Road, Croydon, and was able to employ a general domestic servant. He had two younger siblings, Hamel Lewis, who was one year younger, and James was five years his junior. In 1901, the family lived at 183, St. James's Road in Croydon.

At the age of ten years, Philip won a scholarship at Reigate School in Surrey to study at the school. In order to allow him to take up this scholarship, and to avoid boarding fees, the family moved to a house called 'Lulworth' at 58, Fengates Road, Redhill, Surrey. He then won a science scholarship to St. Thomas' Medical School in London. He graduated with the qualification as a Bachelor of Medicine (M.B.) and was awarded the Gold Medal in 1912, and in the following year, he passed his examination for entry into the Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons (F.R.C.S.). In 1914, MITCHENER graduated with a Master's degree in Surgery from London University.

At the age of sixteen years, he became a cadet in the 5th Queen's Volunteers. The Medical Unit of the London University Officers' Training Corps (O.T.C.) was formed in 1908 and MITCHINER transferred to that unit. They held their first parade on 8 January in a snowstorm. On 4 March 1914, he was commissioned from Quarter-Master Serjeant at the University of London Contingent, Senior Division of the O.T.C., to be a Lieutenant for service with the medical unit of that contingent. He was granted the service number of 2162.

First World War

War was declared with Germany on 4 August 1914, but this did not affect Philip MITCHENER too much as he continued to practice at St. Thomas' Hospital. On 9 November 1914, he was promoted to the rank of Temporary Captain.

On 1 June 1915, MITCHINER was seconded for duty at the Military Section of St. Thomas' Hospital in the rank of Captain. On 6 August 1915, he was appointed as a Captain on the strength of the permanent personnel in the 5th London General Hospital.

On 4 January 1918, Captain MITCHINER was promoted to the rank of Acting Major while specially employed, and he served with the British Army in Salonika from 1916 until 1919. He commanded a surgical unit and operated on many Serbian as well as British soldiers. MITCHINER also did a lot of work in the field of hygiene and public health and learnt to speak Serbian. This came in useful when equipment including bed linen, towels and blankets disappeared, as he tracked down the individuals who had taken it and made them return it to the Army. He was awarded the Order of St. Sava, 4th Class, by the government of Serbia on 28 January 1918, the Order of St. Stanislaus from Russia, and was Mentioned in Despatches, but was apparently passed over for an award from the British Army. MITCHINER relinquished the rank of Acting Major on 8 January 1919 on ceasing to be specially employed and returned to the U.K..

Between the Wars

On 5 February 1919, MITCHINER was transferred from the General List, R.A.M.C., Territorial Force, to be a Captain for service with the Medical Unit of the University of London University Officers' Training Corps, and in that year he became a Resident Assistant Surgeon (R.A.S.) at St. Thomas' Hospital. On 16 January 1920, he was awarded the Gold Medal for Zealous Service by the King of Serbia. He returned to Serbia in 1919 for the Relief Fund Organisation for twelve months. When he returned to the U.K., he completed his appointment as a R.A.S. and became a surgeon at the Royal Northern Hospital. He returned to St. Thomas' Hospital as an Assistant Surgeon in 1926. On 3 May 1922, MITCHINER was promoted to the rank of Local Major and assumed command of a Medical Section of the University of London O.T.C.. He was promoted to the rank of Major with effect from 3 March 1923. MITCHINER had poor eyesight that precluded him from engaging in sport, and he was colour-blind, so he made the Territorial Army his out of work pastime.

During this period, he wrote a book titled 'Science and Practice of Surgery' with W. H. C. ROMANIS, which was seen as an important piece of work for the prestige of the authors and the hospital. It became a standard textbook for students studying for an examination in surgery. MITCHINER was a difficult surgeon to work for and he had many brushes with Miss Lloyd STILL, the matron and head of the Nightingale Training School, and he could be cutting in his remarks. He said to one student: *'I told the nurse to go to the devil and she went straight to the Matron's office'*. Miss STILL found him difficult, but she persisted and was as firm back to MITCHINER as he was to her. This was the only way to win over MITCHINER, and eventually they became firm friends. If handed the wrong instrument in surgery, MITCHINER would throw it across the room and make loud remarks for others in the Nightingale School to hear. It in this context he crossed a charge nurse, Miss Margaret PHILPOTT, who had nursed him when he was probationer. The two married in 1928 and were very happy together. They had no children.

On 4 February 1925, Philip MITCHINER was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the Territorial Army and was appointed to command the Medical Unit of the University of London, O.T.C.. He was awarded the Territorial Efficiency Medal (T.D.) on 11 May 1926. He set about rebuilding the unit into an efficient and going concern. They mounted Guards of Honour for the Royal Family to greet them when they attended St. Thomas'. Annual camps developed and became more successful under his leadership. During the General Strike of 1926, MITCHINER mustered the Medical Section and marched them around Lambeth, to frequent abuse from residents. On 4 February 1929, MITCHINER was promoted to the rank of Brevet Colonel, and he was appointed an Honorary Surgeon to the King (K.H.S.) on 16 February 1932. On 4 February 1933, he was promoted to the rank of Colonel, his seniority dating from 4 February 1929 (the date of his promotion to the Brevet rank), and on 11 February, he was awarded the Order of St. Sava, 3rd Class, by the state of Yugoslavia for his continuing work in the country. The entry in the London Gazette reads:

Whitehall, February 11, 1933. The KING has been pleased to give and grant unto Brevet Colonel Philip Henry Mitchiner, T.D., M.D., M.S., F.R.C.S., R.A.M.C. (T.A.), His Majesty's Royal licence and authority to wear the Insignia of the Third Class of the Order of St. Sava, which Decoration has been conferred upon him by His Majesty the King of Yugoslavia, in recognition of valuable services rendered by him.



His Majesty King George V inspects the guard of honour on the occasion of the laying of the foundation stone of the Nurses' Home and the Obstetric Hospital, University College Hospital, 31 May, 1923.

On 1 April 1934, Colonel MITCHINER relinquished his command of the Medical Unit of the University of London O.T.C., after nine years in command, and assumed the new appointment of Assistant Director of Medical Services for the 47th (2nd London) Division. On 15 December 1935, Colonel MITCHINER was transferred to become the Assistant Director of Medical Services of the 1st Anti-Aircraft Division, which had its headquarters based in London. His parents had retired to live in Boscastle in Cornwall, and bought a property called 'Corentin' in the village. His father died there on 11 December 1934. His mother remained living in Boscastle and died there on 6 February 1939.

On 12 February 1936, Colonel MITCHINER was awarded the Order of St. Sava, 2nd Class, by the King of Yugoslavia. On 18 June 1937, he was appointed an Officer in the Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem, and then on 9 June 1938, he was appointed a Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (C.B.E.).

With the growth in the anti-aircraft forces within the British Army, the 1st Anti-Aircraft Corps was formed under Lieutenant General Alan BROOKE in July 1938, and Colonel MITCHINER was appointed the Deputy Director of Medical Services (D.D.M.S.) of the Corps with effect from 4 February 1939 in the rank of Colonel. He was instrumental in building up the medical service for the anti-aircraft formations and units based in the U.K.. On 16 March 1939, MITCHINER was appointed a Deputy Lieutenant for the County of London, and on the date of his appointment, he was living at 50, Wimpole Street, London W1.

Second World War

On 1 February 1940, MITCHINER was promoted to the rank of Acting Brigadier on being appointed D.D.M.S. of IV Corps with the raising of that formation under Lieutenant General AUCHINLECK. This Corps Headquarters was used to form the headquarters of the North-West Expeditionary Force to command all the British, French, and Polish forces in the region of Narvik in Norway. On 16 June 1940, Brigadier MITCHINER was transferred to become the D.D.M.S. of V Corps in the U.K.. On 17 January 1941, after six months holding the acting rank of Brigadier, MITCHINER was made a Temporary Brigadier.

It is stated in his obituary that MITCHINER and AUCHINLECK '*did not hit it off together*', so it was possibly a sensible move when on 4 April 1941, Brigadier MITCHINER was posted to be the D.D.M.S. of Anti-Aircraft Command, under Lieutenant General 'Tim' PILE. He set to work to continue the work he had commenced when the formation was still a Corps, and he had the challenge of arranging suitable medical provision for many gun positions spread across the U.K., often in isolated locations. After the war, Lieutenant General PILE sent MITCHINER a copy of his official war report, on which he had endorsed: '*To Maj-Gen P. H. MITCHINER. The finest doctor, the greatest medical organiser and administrator, the most outspoken critic and my best friend. F. A. PILE, Jan 1948*'.

In the Despatch itself, PILE wrote:

Major-General P. H. Mitchiner, C.B., C.B.E., T.D., M.D., M.S., organized the Medical services in the Command. He was an administrator of a very high order as well as a first-class Medical Officer. He rendered great services to the State.

On 15 April 1942, MITCHINER was promoted to the rank of Acting Major General, which was unusual for an officer in the Territorial Army, on being appointed the Director of Medical Services for Northern Command, based in the City of York. MITCHINER was promoted to the rank of Temporary Major General on 15 April 1943 after twelve months holding the acting rank.

On 8 June 1944, Major General MITCHINER was created a Companion of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath (C.B.), a common award for Army officers once they had reached the rank of Major General. In late 1944, MITCHINER was appointed a Consulting Surgeon in Middle East Command, based in Cairo, and formally relinquished his appointment in Northern Command on 25 February 1945. His time in the Middle East was busy, as he travelled around every surgical unit in the command, meeting young surgeons, remembering names, examining patients, and occasionally criticising the treatment of patients by all and sundry. MITCHINER probably understood that he had reached the height of his professional and military career and was not afraid to call matters as he saw them. He was promoted to the substantive rank of Major General in the Territorial Army on 11 April 1945, and retired from the Territorial Army on account of reaching the age limit for an officer of the rank of Major General (fifty-seven years) on 17 June 1945.

Post Second World War

On 26 February 1945, MITCHINER was appointed the Honorary Colonel of the Royal Army Medical Corps unit in the London Division. On 3 November 1950, he was awarded the Territorial Efficiency Decoration with three clasps for his thirty-six years' service in the Territorial Army. Two years later, on 4 January 1952, he was appointed a Knight of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem. He devised new treatments for burns, involving the use of tannic acid, but this had mixed results. He also had specific views about the treatment of breast cancer, being reluctant to remove the breast with a radical amputation as was normal during this period. He would only perform an amputation when the glands were found to be infected.

As he became older, MITCHINER began to become aware of the effect his behaviour was having on others, particularly as his position in the profession grew and his audience became more distinguished. He learnt to moderate his sometimes appalling language and kept a much firmer hold on himself. He had become a Hunterian Professor at the Royal College of Surgeons in 1933, and following an address on the treatment of burns, he was elected to the Council in the College in 1943. He had been an examiner with the Council since 1936, and in 1950, he became the Vice-President.

Major General MITCHINER died on 15 October 1952, at the age of sixty-four years. He died at 9, Cavendish Square, London W.1, but was living at 6, Morpeth Mansions, London S.W.1. A memorial service was held for him at St. Margaret's Church in Westminster, and the church was full. He left an estate of £52,270 17s 4d to his wife. In his obituary, Mr. R. J. V. BATTLE describes how few surgeons could rival MITCHINER's academic record. He was a person to whom others turned to for advice, and he was generous with his time. A colleague, Sir Heneage OGILVIE said of MITCHINER that *'his courage, honesty and loyalty are qualities that come to mind at once. He had courage, physical and moral above most men. If he believed in a cause, he would fight for it.'* He was not ostentatious and would travel around London on foot and without a hat.

He was not seen by his peers as a great surgeon, but rather as a great teacher. MITCHINER himself said that he was a teacher of practical surgery, as opposed to a surgeon to the hospital. After the end of the war, he began to suffer from failing coronary circulation. He became breathless on exertion and was in a great deal of pain. He tried to carry on and overlook his health problems, but his wife and close friends became increasingly anxious. He went down with viral pneumonia, and although he recovered, he died of a massive thrombus or embolism.

Bibliography and Sources

Primary Sources

The London Gazette

14 December 1915	<u>The London Gazette, Issue 29402, Page 12460</u>
25 January 1918	<u>The London Gazette, Supplement 30498, Page 1377</u>
10 May 1918	<u>The London Gazette, Supplement 30679, Page 5677</u>
14 March 1919	<u>The London Gazette, Supplement 31237, Page 3615</u>
13 January 1920	<u>The London Gazette, Supplement 31736, Page 708</u>
13 December 1921	<u>The London Gazette, Supplement 32548, Page 10217</u>
2 May 1922	<u>The London Gazette, Supplement 32688, Page 3501</u>
2 May 1924	<u>The London Gazette, Issue 32932, Page 3524</u>
3 February 1925	<u>The London Gazette, Issue 33017, Page 781</u>
11 May 1926	<u>The London Gazette, Issue 33161, Page 3145</u>
2 April 1929	<u>The London Gazette, Supplement 33482, Page 2238</u>
14 February 1933	<u>The London Gazette, Issue 33911, Page 1015</u>
17 February 1933	<u>The London Gazette, Issue 33912, Page 1083</u>
24 April 1934	<u>The London Gazette, Issue 34044, Page 2628</u>
14 February 1936	<u>The London Gazette, Issue 34255, Page 973</u>
22 June 1937	<u>The London Gazette, Issue 34410, Page 4008</u>
10 November 1937	<u>The London Gazette, Supplement 34453, Page 7034</u>
10 November 1937	<u>The London Gazette, Supplement 34453, Page 7080</u>
25 March 1938	<u>The London Gazette, Issue 34496, Page 2062</u>
7 June 1938	<u>The London Gazette, Supplement 34518, Page 3692</u>
24 February 1939	<u>The London Gazette, Issue 34602, Page 1311</u>
21 March 1939	<u>The London Gazette, Issue 34609, Page 1934</u>
21 March 1941	<u>The London Gazette, Issue 35114, Page 1711</u>
17 April 1942	<u>The London Gazette, Supplement 35530, Page 1741</u>
26 March 1943	<u>The London Gazette, Issue 35956, Page 1453</u>
13 April 1943	<u>The London Gazette, Supplement 35980, Page 1735</u>
2 June 1944	<u>The London Gazette, Supplement 36544, Page 2567</u>
23 March 1945	<u>The London Gazette, Issue 36998, Page 1621</u>
23 March 1945	<u>The London Gazette, Supplement 36999, Page 1643</u>
7 August 1945	<u>The London Gazette, Supplement 37214, Page 4069</u>
22 March 1946	<u>The London Gazette, Issue 37509, Page 1508</u>
3 January 1947	<u>The London Gazette, Issue 37842, Page 122</u>
11 April 1947	<u>The London Gazette, Issue 37928, Page 1644</u>
16 December 1947	<u>The London Gazette, Issue 38149, Page 5993</u>
29 April 1949	<u>The London Gazette, Issue 38598, Page 2134</u>
28 April 1950	<u>The London Gazette, Issue 38898, Page 2144</u>
3 November 1950	<u>The London Gazette, Supplement 39058, Page 5484</u>
30 March 1951	<u>The London Gazette, Issue 39186, Page 1684</u>
8 May 1951	<u>The London Gazette, Issue 39223, Page 2609</u>
1 January 1952	<u>The London Gazette, Supplement 39433, Page 137</u>
1 May 1953	<u>The London Gazette, Supplement 39842, Page 2485</u>
2 June 1953	<u>The London Gazette, Supplement 39877, Page 3102</u>
London Gazette web-site: http://www.london-gazette.co.uk/	

[Accessed 7 May 2020]

Supplement to the London Gazette, Despatch – THE ANTI-AIRCRAFT DEFENCE OF THE UNITED KINGDOM FROM 28th JULY, 1939, TO 15th APRIL, 1945

16 December 1947 [The London Gazette, Issue 38149, Page 5973](#)

Secondary Sources

BATTLE, R. J. V.

Philip MITCHINER – His Life and Teaching (London, Journal Royal Army Medical Corps, 1 January 1969)

- COLLIER, Basil *History of the Second World War – The Defence of the United Kingdom* (London, His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1957)
- DOBINSON, Colin *AA Command – Britain's Anti-Aircraft Defences of the Second World War* (London, Methuen Publishing Ltd., 2001) [ISBN 0 413 76540 7]
- HUGHES, Major General B. P., *The History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery – Between the Wars 1919-39* (England, The Royal Artillery Institution 1992) [ISBN 0 08 040984 9]
- ROUTLEDGE, Brigadier N. W., *The History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery – Anti-Aircraft Artillery 1914 – 55* (London, Brassey's, 1994) [ISBN 1 85753 099 3]

King's College London – Archive Catalogue.

https://kingscollections.org/_assets/components/archiospdfbuilder/?docid=1967

MITCHINER, Major General Philip Henry (1888-1952)

Catalogue Reference:GB0100 TH/PP42

URL:<http://www.kingscollections.org/catalogues/kclca/collection/m/10mi80-1>

Title: MITCHINER, Major General Philip Henry (1888-1952)

Date(s):[1904-1952]

Level of description: Collection (fonds)

Extent and medium of the unit of description (quantity, bulk, or size):2 files and 11 notebooks.

Context Name of creator(s):Mitchener, Philip Henry, 1888-1952, medical student

Administrative / Biographical history: Philip Henry Mitchiner was born 17 June 1888, the son of the late Henry M Mitchiner and his wife Blanche. He was educated at Reigate. He was a student at St Thomas's Hospital Medical School, between 1904-1910. Mitchiner served with the Serbian Army at Salonika (Knight of St Sava, and gold medal for devoted service, Order of St Stanislaus, Russia, despatches); Territorial Decoration, 1926; Surgeon, Serbian Relief Fund under Serbian Government, 1920-1921; Surgeon, Out-patients, Royal Northern Hospital, 1921-1926. He held appointments as the Honorary Surgeon to the Queen, 1952; Consulting Surgeon, St Thomas's Hospital; Major General, Army Medical Service (Territorial Army), late Consulting Surgeon Middle East Force; Member of Senate, University of London (Deputy Vice-Chancellor, 1951-1953); Member of Council (Vice-President, 1950-1952), Royal Coll. Of Surgeons; DL Co. London, 1939. He was awarded CB 1944; CBE 1938. In 1928, he married 1928, Margaret Philpott. He died on 15 October 1952. Publications: *Science and Practice of Surgery* P H Mitchiner and W H C Romanis, J. & A. Churchill: London, 1927; *Surgical Emergencies in Practice*, P H Mitchiner and W H C Romanis, J. & A. Churchill 1931; *Modern Treatment of Burns and Scalds*, Bailliere & Co., London, 1935; *Surgery for Dental Students*, P H Mitchiner, C E Shattock, E G Slesinger and C P G Wakeley, Bailliere & Co.: London, 1936; *Medical Organisation and Surgical Practice in Air Raids*, P H Mitchiner and E M Cowell, J & A. Churchill: London, 1939; *Nursing in time of war*, Mitchiner and Emily Elvira MacManus, J. & A. Churchill: London, 1939; *A Pocket Surgery*, P H Mitchiner and A H Whyte, J & A Churchill: London, 1943; and articles to professional journals. Archival history: Acquired by St Thomas's Hospital Medical School Library. Immediate source of acquisition or transfer: Transferred from St Thomas's Hospital Medical School Library in 2002. Content & structure: Scope and content: Papers of Philip Henry Mitchiner comprising notebooks [1904-1910], notebook on fevers (undated); notebook on

Copyright 2019 King's College London. All rights reserved. Page 2

King's College London Archives : Catalogue (Summary) Ref : GB0100 TH/PP42 practical chemistry and physics and nervous diseases, 1904; on anatomy and diseases, with sketches, (2 vols) [1907]; notebook recording instruments for operations, preparations of ligatures, 1910; notebook on district(maternity) cases and pregnancy, [1908]; notebooks containing lecture notes on surgical pathology, 1909;surgery, 1909; diseases of stomach and intestines, 1909; medicine, lung and liver, 1910]; practical surgery and diseases of the breast, 1910; collection of typescript papers and articles by Mitchener on subjects including the problem of the acute abdomen, gas, swellings in the groin, organisation of surgery under war conditions, injuries of blood vessel, wounds of joints, diseases of the veins, techniques of intravenous transfusion and infusion, comparison of the results of conservative and radical surgical treatment in carcinoma of the breast, 1924-1933 (co-authored), etc; also contains a list of Mitchiner's published articles, 1915-1939; and printed photograph and obituary. System of arrangement: Arranged as outlined in the Scope and Content Conditions of access & use. Conditions governing access: Open, subject to signature of Reader's undertaking form, and appropriate provision of two forms of identification, to include one photographic ID. Conditions governing reproduction: Copies, subject to the condition of the original, may be supplied for research use only. Requests to publish original material should be submitted to the Director of Archive and Corporate Record Services. Language/scripts of material: