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**A CONCISE BIOGRAPHY OF:**

# **LIEUTENANT GENERAL SIR MAURICE F. GROVE-WHITE**

A concise biography of Lieutenant General Sir Maurice Fitzgibbon GROVE-WHITE, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., *p.s.c.*, an officer in the British Army between 1907 and 1945. During the Second World War, he commanded anti-aircraft formations and was influential in post-hostilities planning.  
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**A Concise Biography of Lieutenant General Sir MAURICE F. GROVE-WHITE**

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**Lieutenant General Sir Maurice Fitzgibbon GROVE-WHITE,  
K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., *p.s.c.***



*Above – Portrait of Lieutenant General Sir Maurice GROVE-WHITE.  
Courtesy of: The National Portrait Gallery (on licence)*

## Introduction

Lieutenant General Sir Maurice Fitzgibbon GROVE-WHITE, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., *p.s.c.* was an officer in the British Army between 1907 and 1945. He was commissioned in the Royal Engineers and saw active service in the First World War, being decorated for his gallantry.

Between the wars, his career was one of steady progression during this period, when the British Army was moribund. Prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, GROVE-WHITE spent an influential time at the War Office, and then just before the outbreak of hostilities, he took command of an anti-aircraft division.

During the Second World War, he rose to command an anti-aircraft corps, but then with the rundown of this arm of the British Army, his command was abolished. He then became involved in planning for the post hostilities period and was one of the delegates at the conference that set in motion the formation of the United Nations.

## Family Background, Education & Early Career

Maurice Fitzgibbon GROVE-WHITE was born on 7 December 1887 in Otway Cottage, Bushey Heath, Hertfordshire, the third child and second son of Colonel James GROVE-WHITE, C.M.G., J.P., D.L. James GROVE-WHITE was born on 21 October 1852 aboard H.M.S. Vulcan in Melbourne Harbour, Australia. He was sent to live with his grandparents on the island of Guernsey in the Channel Islands. James married Constance FITZGIBBON (1855 – 1926) on 1 July 1880 at Great Stanmore, Middlesex, hence the use of the family name in Maurice's forenames. She was born in Montreal, Canada. They had the following children:

- Constance Geraldine GROVE-WHITE – born 10 April 1881 in Hendon, Middlesex – died 1973,
- Pierce GROVE-WHITE – born 13 October 1882 in Stanmore, Middlesex – died 1953,
- Maurice Fitzgibbon GROVE-WHITE – born 7 December 1887 in Bushey Heath,
- Eric GROVE-WHITE – born 11 April 1892 in Bushey Heath,
- Terence GROVE-WHITE – born 5 July 1901 in Cork, Ireland.

In 1881, Constance was living with her parents at a property called 'The Rookery' at Stanmore, Middlesex. None of her children were living with her at that address, as it was probably just before her daughter Constance was born. It appears that Maurice also had a brother or half-brother called Maria G. GROVE-WHITE, who was born in 1888 in Bushey Heath, Hertfordshire. In the 1891 Census, he is shown living with Isabella FITZGIBBON, his grandmother, and his mother at Harrow-in-the-Weald, Middlesex.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The name Maria is usually associated with a female, but this child is shown as the Grandson of Isabella and is listed on the Census as a Male.

Constance Fitzgibbon GROVE-WHITE died on 20 January 1926 in Cork, when Maurice was aged thirty-eight years. Colonel James GROVE-WHITE died on 1 November 1938 in Killbyrne, Galway Ireland, aged eighty-six years.

Maurice attended Danesbury Preparatory School in Hertford, where he is shown as a Boarder in the 1901 Census, aged thirteen years. He also attended St. Andrew's College, Grahamstown in South Africa, and then Wellington College in Berkshire. This institution catered specifically for the sons of officers of the Armed Forces and groomed them for entry to the British Army. This was the path followed by Maurice GROVE-WHITE, who was successful in gaining a place at the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich on completing his time at Wellington College. Maurice GROVE-WHITE was commissioned in the Royal Engineers on 18 December 1907, shortly after his twentieth birthday. He held the rank of Second Lieutenant with his service number being 4186. On completing his two-year probation, he was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant on 2 May 1910.

## First World War

At the time of the outbreak of the Great War in August 1914, GROVE-WHITE was still a Lieutenant but now aged twenty-six years and with just short of seven years' service. On 30 October 1914, he was promoted to the rank of Captain



Royal Engineers in the First World War

Captain GROVE-WHITE was posted to France, arriving in that country on 14 May 1915, where he joined the 54<sup>th</sup> Field Company, Royal Engineers. The company was under command of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division, and had seen action in 1914 at Ypres, and earlier in 1915 at Neuve Chappelle.



At the end of March 1915, the 54<sup>th</sup> Field Company lost its second officer commanding, with the death on 28 March of Major Edward HINGSTON. He was aged forty-four years and was a Regular Army officer of the Royal Engineers. His company was engaged on raising parapets, and maintaining communication trenches during this period, but there is no explanation as to his cause of death.<sup>2</sup> It is presumed he fell victim to a sniper or shellfire. Major HINGSTON is buried in Grave II. H. 8., of the Estaires Communal Cemetery. He was the son of the late Richard HINGSTON from Cornwall, and the husband of A. HINGSTON of Poolmerick, Cobham, Kent. Major G. F. B. GOLDNEY assumed command of the 54<sup>th</sup> Field Company the same day.

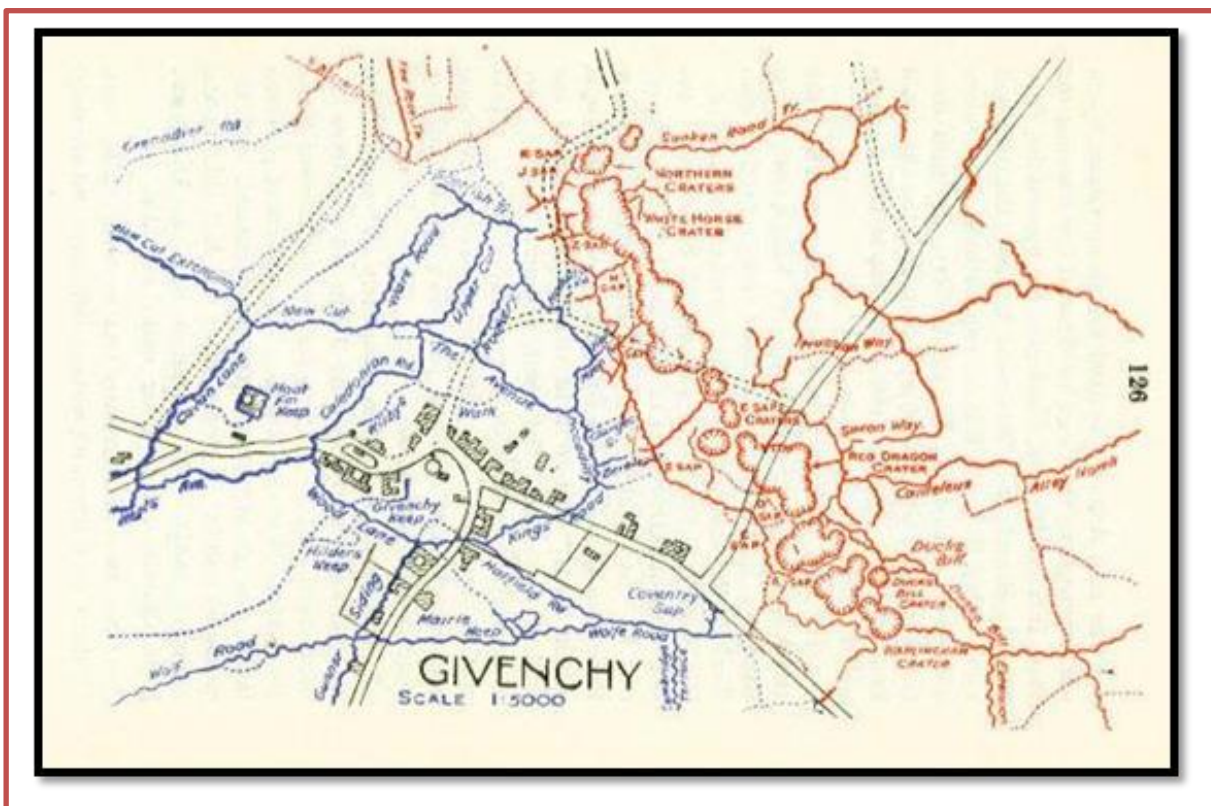
In April, groups of officers and men from a Territorial Army division were attached to the 7<sup>th</sup> Division to gain familiarity with the conditions on the Western Front. As preparations were made for a British offensive, on 22 April, the Germans launched their major assault on Ypres, including the use of mustard gas. This caused a major breach in the Allied lines, and the 7<sup>th</sup> Division was ordered to have two infantry brigades, two field companies, and any artillery that could be spared ready to move at two hours' notice to Ypres. The orders to move came through on 28 April, and they marched from Neuve Chappelle to Ypres.

The men of the 54<sup>th</sup> and 55<sup>th</sup> Field Companies were more fortunate, as they were conveyed by train to Ypres. As soon as they disembarked, they were moved forward, the 54<sup>th</sup> Field Company going to Wieltje, to construct new defences. They spent a week building these defences, only to be withdrawn on 4 May to return south. In the end, however, the work of the two field companies was not in vain, as the British troops pulled back to this new line shortly afterwards. General PLUMER, General Officer Commanding V Corps, sent a special message of thanks to the 54<sup>th</sup> and 55<sup>th</sup> Field Companies for the good work that had been done by the Engineers.

The offensive at Neuve Chappelle had started on 9 May 1915, but the attack quickly stalled. Determined to renew the offensive, Sir John FRENCH ordered that I Corps should attack in a different direction, so the 7<sup>th</sup> Division was attached to I Corps for this reason. The men 'went over the top' at about 03.15 hours on 16 May, just two days after Captain GROVE-WHITE joined them.

<sup>2</sup> The War Diary WO 95/1645 1 simply states: 'Major E. HINGSTON, R.E. killed'.

There was fierce fighting in the German trench lines, and the enemy launched their usual counter-attacks, leaving the men of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division clinging on to the ground they had gained. During the night, the men of the 54<sup>th</sup> Field Company went forward to help their brigade, the 22<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, with wiring their positions, building strong points, and digging communication trenches. The Germans had suffered heavy losses and were unable to mount a serious counter-attack, so at 10.30 hours on 17 May, the British renewed their assault. They made some gains, and spent the next day grimly holding on. Some relief for the 7<sup>th</sup> Division arrived, and the 22<sup>nd</sup> Brigade moved back into billets in the Bethune area. This action became known as the Battle of Festubert, and although not a failure, was hardly a great success. The 7<sup>th</sup> Division incurred losses of 170 officers, and 3,833 men. Five battalion commanding officers had died, four of whom had been wounded at Ypres, and had just returned to active service.



Withdrawn from the front line on 20 May, the 7<sup>th</sup> Division was back in action again on 31 May. They returned to the front line at Givenchy, in an area held by the 47<sup>th</sup> Division. The ground was in poor condition, as was the trench system. The Germans launched regular counter attacks, so the engineers were frequently repairing and strengthening positions. The 22<sup>nd</sup> Brigade had a disturbed period of ten days in the trenches, with constant shelling, bombing and sniping to endure. Once again, the 7<sup>th</sup> Division was called upon to make an assault on German lines. There was little success forthcoming on 15 June, with the 22<sup>nd</sup> Brigade relieving the 21<sup>st</sup> Brigade on the night of 17/18 June. Again, the typical day involved sniping, shelling, hand grenades, and patrolling. There were some changes in personnel and units in the division in July, and August 1915, as new battalions became available for deployment. The 55<sup>th</sup> Field Company transferred to the new Guards Division.



The next offensive was scheduled for the Loos area, and the 7<sup>th</sup> Division was to be involved. The division had its right flank on the Vermelles to Hulluch road, extending to the left through a formidable trench system, which was well constructed and maintained. The 22<sup>nd</sup> Brigade had a sector where long grass obstructed the view of the enemy's defence system. At 03.30 hours on 25 September, following a period of torrential rain, the brigade concentrated ready for the attack. The guns opened up at 05.50 hours, the British used gas and smoke, and then battalions from the Gordon Highlanders and the Devonshire Regiment stormed the German trenches. The front line and support trenches were taken, and troops reached the Lens to La Bassee road. By this point, the assaulting battalions were reduced to just a few men, and they were being fired on from their flanks. By noon, the two attacking brigades had achieved much, but were now spent forces.

The reserve formation, the 21<sup>st</sup> Brigade, came up to continue the advance, but although capturing some of the German trenches, they came to a standstill. After dark, the 21<sup>st</sup> Brigade was pulled back to concentrate before making another attack in a different direction. The Germans counter attacked, in particular, hitting the 22<sup>nd</sup> Brigade north of a location called the Quarries. Casualties were heavy, and the men exhausted, but fortunately the men of the 54<sup>th</sup> Field Company had succeeded in putting up some barbed wire in front of the positions of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Brigade. Confused fighting took place and the Germans worked their way in behind some British positions. It did not help matters when British artillery fired on positions that their infantry had just taken, and eventually the Quarries had to be given up.

Fresh troops recovered the Quarries on 26 September, and the 7<sup>th</sup> Division had to hold on to what they had gained and consolidate their positions. As the battle flowed back and forth around the Quarries, the divisional commander, Major General CAPPER, was wounded while standing alongside a platoon commander on the front line. He was taken back to a Casualty Clearing Station but died early the next morning. Fifty-one-year-old Major General Sir Thompson CAPPER, K.C.M.G., C.B., D.S.O. is buried in front of Grave II.A., of the Lillers Communal Cemetery.

The action on the front of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division became quieter, as the fighting focused on the Hohenzollern Redoubt and around Loos itself. Action continued over the next few days, and into October, making a total of five days continuously in action, in very cold and wet weather. Rations were in short supply, and casualties heavy. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division came forward to relieve the men of the 7<sup>th</sup> and hold the modest gains the British had made. The 20<sup>th</sup> Brigade suffered about 2,100 casualties, nearly 1,500 in the 21<sup>st</sup> Brigade, and 1,700 in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Brigade. The Royal Engineers suffered one officer and seven men killed, six officers and forty-three men wounded, and one officer, and four men missing.



The 54<sup>th</sup> Field Company lost Lieutenant John BATHO, killed on 30 September 1915. Aged twenty-two years, he had previously been Mentioned in Despatches, and is buried in Grave I. F. 1 of the Chocques Military Cemetery. He was a son of Richard William and Beatrice BATHO, of 15, Luxembourg Gardens, Brook Green, London, and was educated at St. Paul's School, Hammersmith, and Royal Military Academy, Woolwich. Three Sappers died around this time, Sapper Walter STRACHAN (from Leven, Fife) on 2 October, Sapper D. McWHINNEY on 5 October, and Sapper John Martin BROMILOW (from Preston) on 9 October. Sapper STRACHAN is commemorated on the Loos Memorial, while the other two lie in the Chocques Military Cemetery.

The aftermath of the battle gave little respite for the men of the 54<sup>th</sup> Field Company. It was only out of the line for a few days, being relieved on 17 October, only to return to the line on 19 October. The rain had damaged many of the trenches, and flooding was a regular problem. Parapets were falling in, the trenches were in places waist deep in water and mud, and some positions were islands in a waterlogged landscape. The Royal Engineers set to constructing a new breastwork line along the entire front. They consumed in one month 5,500 cubic feet of timber, 472 sheets of corrugated iron, and 106,000 sandbags.

In December 1915, the 7<sup>th</sup> Division was withdrawn from the front line, and sent to a rest area around Busnes. Three days later, it left by train for the Somme area, with the divisional headquarters setting up at Cavillon. The 22<sup>nd</sup> Brigade occupied billets near Molliens. The end of a fateful year, 1915, came with a proper rest period.

After a period of service in the field, Captain GROVE-WHITE was appointed a General Staff Officer 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade (G.S.O. 3) with XIII Army Corps France on 30 January 1916. On 4 February 1917, he was promoted to the rank of Temporary Major on being appointed a General Staff Officer 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade (G.S.O. 2), at General Headquarters, British Armies in France. He remained in this post until 4 April 1919. He was promoted to the rank of Brevet Major with effect from 1 January 1918.

During the war, GROVE-WHITE was made a Companion of the Distinguished Service Order (D.S.O.) on 4 June 1917.<sup>3</sup> In addition, he was awarded the degree of Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (O.B.E.) and the Legion of Honour 5<sup>th</sup> Class from the French government.

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<sup>3</sup> The citation has not been located.

He was Mentioned in Despatches on 4 January 1917, 18 May 1917, 11 December 1917 and on 5 July 1919. Lastly, he received the British War Medal and Victory Medal. He was now thirty-one years' of age and had eleven years' service in the British Army.

## Between the Wars

With the end of the Great War, GROVE-WHITE was appointed to the War Office on 16 May 1919, as a G.S.O. 2. He continued to hold the rank of Temporary Major. On 31 March 1921, he left the War Office to attend the Staff Course at the Staff College in Camberley, Surrey. Although GROVE-WHITE had held staff posts already, it was necessary for him to attend the Staff College to be able to continue to further his career. On successful completion of the two-year course, he passed and was able to add the letters *p.s.c.* to his entry in the Army List.

Having now qualified as a staff officer, GROVE-WHITE returned to the War Office on 21 January 1924 to take up a position as a G.S.O. 3. While serving at the War Office, he was promoted to the rank of Major on 7 November 1924, at the age of thirty-six years. GROVE-WHITE left the War Office on 4 December 1925 on being appointed the Staff Officer, Local Forces in the Straits Settlements and Federated Malay States.

His new role meant travelling out to Singapore by ship, which usually took a couple of months to complete. On arrival, he worked advising and organising the local recruited military and para-military forces based in the British colony. He remained in this post until leaving on 13 July 1929, when he returned to the United Kingdom. Prior to his departure, GROVE-WHITE was promoted to the rank of Brevet Lieutenant Colonel with effect from 1 July 1928. Back in the United Kingdom, Major (Brevet Lieutenant Colonel) GROVE-WHITE was appointed Officer Commanding 38<sup>th</sup> Field Company, which was based at Aldershot as part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. He had been appointed to this unit in September 1928, although he did not take up the role until July 1929. In 1932, he handed over command to Major H. M. CADELL, and was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel with effect from 29 June 1932. He completed the usual four-year term in Regimental command, but he was then placed on the half pay list with effect from 29 June 1936. On the same day, he was promoted to the rank of Colonel, his seniority dating from 1 July 1931. He was now aged forty-four years and had twenty-four years' service.

GROVE-WHITE was on half pay, otherwise known as the unemployed list, for under a month, as on 13 July 1936 he was appointed to the War Office as a General Staff Officer 1<sup>st</sup> Grade. He went to work in the Directorate of Military Training, which for a period during his service there, was headed by Major General Alan BROOKE, later to be the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. In November 1937, BROOKE was replaced by Major General Percy HOBART, one of the main exponents of armoured warfare in the period. By all accounts, GROVE-WHITE got on well with Alan BROOKE. Pre-war, the British Army was not a large organisation, so personal relationships were an important part of an officer's career progression.

## Anti-Aircraft Command and the Second World War

Colonel GROVE-WHITE was promoted to the rank of Major General on being appointed the General Officer Commanding, 2<sup>nd</sup> Anti-Aircraft Division with effect from 30 May 1939. This formation had been raised on 1 September 1936 by the conversion of the 46<sup>th</sup> (North Midland) Infantry Division. Under Major General J. M. R. HARRISON, the new headquarters were located at R.A.F. Hucknall in Nottinghamshire. On its formation, the division was responsible for the anti-aircraft defences in the East Midlands, northern East Anglia, parts of Yorkshire and the Humber estuary. In this period, anti-aircraft defences were a joint Royal Artillery and Royal Engineers responsibility, hence the reason why a Royal Engineer officer could be appointed to command an anti-aircraft division. In September 1939, Major General GROVE-WHITE was living at the Sevar Hotel, 3 Church Street, Mansfield, not far from his headquarters.

On replacing HARRISON, GROVE-WHITE oversaw the rearmament of the anti-aircraft units within his division. By the outbreak of the Second World War, the division was one of seven anti-aircraft formations in the United Kingdom. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Anti-Aircraft Division was now responsible for the East Midlands and parts of East Anglia. Under command were the:

- 32<sup>nd</sup> (Midland) Anti-Aircraft Brigade stationed in the East Midlands,
- 40<sup>th</sup> Anti-Aircraft Brigade covering North London and East Anglia,
- 41<sup>st</sup> Anti-Aircraft Brigade covering North London.

In addition, the 50<sup>th</sup> Light Anti-Aircraft Brigade was just forming with effect from 24 August 1939 at Hucknall. In August 1939, the division had just ninety-seven heavy anti-aircraft guns operational, plus six 3" and twelve 40 mm Bofors L.A.A. guns and eighty-eight light machine guns. These were deployed to cover the cities and towns of Nottingham, Derby, Sheffield, Leighton Buzzard, aerodromes, and other vital points.

It was only on 1 October 1940, that radar was used for the first time to control the fire of anti-aircraft guns. Radar sets had been first received at the end of 1939, but they were ineffective because they could not give an indication of the height the enemy planes were flying. Teams set to work to rectify this problem, with General PILE, the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of Anti-Aircraft Command praising the work of Major General GROVE-WHITE for his 'untiring and valuable help' in overcoming this issue. Although it was not until 1941 that significant improvements were made in fire control, much of the credit for the initial development lies with the early divisional commanders such as GROVE-WHITE. With the increase in the number of anti-aircraft divisions in the United Kingdom to twelve in November 1940, three new corps headquarters were formed to command the divisional formations. Major General GROVE-WHITE was promoted to the rank of Acting Lieutenant General on 11 November 1940 on assuming command of the II Anti-Aircraft Corps.

The II Anti-Aircraft Corps assumed command of the:

- 2<sup>nd</sup> Anti-Aircraft Division – East Midlands,
- 4<sup>th</sup> Anti-Aircraft Division – North-West England,
- 10<sup>th</sup> Anti-Aircraft Division – Yorkshire,
- 11<sup>th</sup> Anti-Aircraft Division – West Midlands and North Wales.

The area covered by II Anti-Aircraft Corps corresponded with that covered by 9 Group and 12 Group of the Royal Air Force. The headquarters of the new corps was established at R.A.F. Hucknall, meaning that GROVE-WHITE did not have to move when setting up the new formation.

Within the period from 7 September 1940 until 16 May 1941, there were eight night attacks on Liverpool and Birmingham, during which nearly two-thousand tons of bombs were dropped on these cities. Hull and Manchester suffered three major raids in the period, with Coventry being the victim of two very destructive air attacks. Sheffield, Nottingham, and Newcastle had one attack each in this period.

In the New Year's Honours List published on 1 January 1941, Lieutenant General GROVE-WHITE was made a Companion of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath (C.B.). Later that year, twelve months after being promoted on an acting basis, on 11 November he was promoted to the rank of Temporary Lieutenant General. On 30 September 1942, Anti-Aircraft Command reorganised. The corps and divisional headquarters were disbanded, to be replaced by Groups in line with the Groups of Fighter Command within Air Defence Great Britain. II Anti-Aircraft Corps disbanded leaving GROVE-WHITE without a job. In addition, he lost his rank of Temporary Lieutenant General, reverting to his substantive rank of Major General.

His former links with the now Chief of the Defence Staff, Field Marshal Sir Alan BROOKE, paid dividends with his appointment as Major General responsible for Post Hostilities Planning at the War Office. The Washington Conversations on International Peace and Security Organisations took place between 21 August and 7 October 1944. More commonly known as the Dumbarton Oaks Conference, these meetings laid the framework for the eventual creation of the United Nations. GROVE-WHITE was appointed as a member of the British delegation on 8 May 1944, travelling out to the United States with the other members of the delegation. At the same time, he relinquished his role as Major General, Post Hostilities Planning. Delegations attended from the United States, United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, and the Republic of China. The Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Sir Alexander CADOGAN headed the British delegation. He was replaced by Lord HALIFAX when CADOGAN had to return to the U.K..

On 7 December 1944, GROVE-WHITE reached his fifty-seventh birthday, meaning he had reached the age limit for retirement. As his work on post hostilities planning was continuing, he was retained on the Active List, supernumerary to the Establishment. Major General GROVE-WHITE retired from the British Army on 31 March 1945, being granted the honorary rank of Lieutenant General.

GROVE-WHITE was knighted on 10 April 1945 on being created a Knight Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (K.B.E.) in recognition of meritorious services. This award was usually given to officers of the British Army who had reached the rank of Lieutenant General, but he was probably also given in recognition of his work in respect of post-hostilities planning.

## Retirement and Family Life

In his retirement, he was appointed a Colonel Commandant of the Royal Engineers on 20 March 1946, holding this role until 31 December 1953. In addition, he held the appointment of Honorary Colonel of the 571<sup>st</sup> (Middlesex) Searchlight Regiment, Royal Artillery, a Territorial Army unit. He relinquished this responsibility on 4 September 1950. He reached the age limit for liability for recall and ceased to belong to the Reserve of Officers.

Maurice GROVE-WHITE married Bernice Agnes PARLANE (1892 – 1979) on 3 July 1919 at St. George's Church, in Hanover Square, London. They had two sons, their first son, Ion Duncan GROVE-WHITE being born on 23 May 1919 in Chelsea, London, i.e., before his parents were married. In 1939, the family were living in a flat at 61 Cadogan Square, London S.W. 1. During the war, Bernice GROVE-WHITE joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service (A.T.S.), serving with Anti-Aircraft Command where she became the Command Welfare Officer. In that capacity, she was made a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire on 4 January 1943. She relinquished her commission on 25 October 1947 while holding the rank of Junior Commander.

Lieutenant General Sir Maurice Fitzgibbon GROVE-WHITE, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., *p.s.c.* died in Southampton, Hampshire, on 3 April 1965, aged seventy-seven years.

## Second Lieutenant Ion Duncan GROVE-WHITE

The eldest son of Maurice and Bernice GROVE-WHITE, Ion Duncan GROVE-WHITE, was born in Chelsea, London, on 23 May 1919. He successfully applied for entry to the Royal Military College at Sandhurst and was undertaking his training when war was declared on 3 September 1939. The College moved onto a war footing, and it became the 164<sup>th</sup> Officer Cadet Training Unit. On 14 January 1940, Ion and five other Gentlemen Cadets passed out, with Ion and John TATHAM being commissioned in the Middlesex Regiment in the rank of Second Lieutenant. Ion's service number was 115016. He was posted to the 1<sup>st</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Middlesex Regiment and joined 'D' Company.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion was one of the two, pre-war, Territorial Army battalions in the Middlesex Regiment. The Battalion, now enlarged to nearly twice its normal size by the decision to double the Territorial Army made at the beginning of 1939, mobilized at Hounslow on 1 September 1939. The end of the forty-eight-hour ultimatum to Germany came at 11.00 hours on 3 September, and with it the change for the Battalion from peace to war footing. Orders for the Battalion to split into 1/8<sup>th</sup> and 2/8<sup>th</sup> were received on 4 September, the 1/8<sup>th</sup> remaining under command of Lieutenant Colonel E. W. FANE de SALIS, the 2/8<sup>th</sup> being commanded by Lieutenant Colonel SHERBROOKE-WALKER. At the same time the 1/8<sup>th</sup> moved its headquarters to Ealing and the 2/8<sup>th</sup> to Northolt. For the first four weeks of the war the Battalion was employed on police duties in aid of the civil power, any spare time being devoted to routine duties and training. These duties were relinquished on 1 October, and on the sixth, the Battalion joined the 6<sup>th</sup> London Brigade, coming under the 2<sup>nd</sup> London Division on eighteenth. Routine training was carried out in the battalion area until 28 November, when a move was made to Malvern Link, where the Battalion came under the 50<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Here it was brought up to full war establishment by drafts from the various Infantry Training Centres.

Early in the New Year the Battalion was warned for duty in France and the speed of training was quickened. There was an inspection by His Majesty The King on 17 January, and a month later, on 16 February, the Battalion entrained for Southampton, crossing to Le Havre in the early morning of the seventeenth. It was a rough crossing, and a violent snowstorm during the passage heralded an uncomfortable few days in the Battalion's first experience of France.

The roads were covered in about a foot of snow as the Battalion landed and moved to St. Arnault and Villequier, arriving there in darkness and finding only barns and cattle stalls as accommodation. By the eighteenth, it had started to thaw, and the snow-covered countryside became little more than a vast bog. The planned move forward to Armentières had to be delayed for a week until the roads, knee deep in mud, dried out, and it was not until 28 February that the Battalion was able to leave St. Arnault. A two-day journey brought it to Perenchies, in the Armentières area. Conditions there were little better than at St. Arnault, and the billets provided also left much to be desired. On arrival the Battalion came under command of the 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.

The whole of March was spent by the Battalion in digging fixed defences, consisting of an anti-tank ditch and machine gun posts on the Franco-Belgian frontier. Each company in turn was detached for a few days to Dannes to carry out a field firing course, and as much training as possible in the new role of a machine-gun battalion was carried out. But although all worked hard and the progress was uniformly good, the Battalion was not really given the time to reach that state of excellence which was needed for the hard fighting that lay such a little way ahead.

That the war was opening out into a far more active phase became apparent during April when, on the ninth, the enemy invaded Denmark and Norway, overrunning both countries in a whirlwind attack. On 20 April, the Battalion left Perenchies and moved to Noeux les Mines, near Bethune, to become the support battalion to the 50<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. The days were spent in training, divisional exercises, and in preparations for putting into effect Plan "D," which was the move of the British Expeditionary Force (B.E.F.) forward into neutral Belgium in the event of any invasion of that country by the enemy.

Down in the Ardennes Forest, unknown to the British or French G.H.Q., the enemy was massing. A brief air-raid at 03.30 hours on 10 May gave some warning that the Germans were active, but it was not until the B.B.C. news was heard at Battalion Headquarters at 07.00 hours that it was known for certain that they had struck. At 09.25 hours the Battalion was placed under command of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and put on six hours' notice to carry out Plan 'D', but no order to move was received. It was not until 13 May that the Battalion left Noeux les Mines, moving to Turcoing, where it was billeted for the night in the Chamber of Commerce. From there it moved to Alost and Dries, the column being attacked from the air during the march, fortunately without casualties. After two days at Dries the advance into Belgium was continued, with orders, received on the seventeenth, to take up defensive positions on the outskirts of Brussels.

It was not difficult, on arrival at Brussels, to realize that events were not going as well as could have been hoped with the Allies. Streams of refugees, making their way westward, choked the road, and among them were a surprisingly large number of Belgian soldiers. Rumours spread rapidly that the Belgian Army had suffered a severe defeat and that the line of the Albert Canal, on which it had been hoped to hold the advancing enemy, was already lost. And on the night of the seventeenth, less than twelve hours after reaching the Brussels area, the rumours were confirmed by an order to the Battalion to withdraw and take up new defensive positions behind the River Dendre.

Two days later, at 04.00 hours on the nineteenth, further orders to withdraw were received, this time to the River Escaut. Here the Battalion found itself in company with the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1/7<sup>th</sup> Battalions of the Regiment, the three, under command of Lieutenant Colonel B. G. HORROCKS, protecting the left flank of the entire B.E.F., and with orders to hold the line as the infantry withdrew across the river. Farther to the left was the 1<sup>st</sup> Belgian Army. The line was held throughout the nineteenth, the Battalion taking up defensive positions on the main withdrawal route as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division withdrew. As soon as they were clear the Battalion itself received orders to withdraw, and that night, coming under the command of the 44<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, arrived at Knock.



'B' and 'C' Companies, attached to 132<sup>nd</sup> and 131<sup>st</sup> Infantry Brigades respectively, took up forward defensive positions on the morning of the twentieth, but the enemy was not yet in contact, although it was reported that he had crossed the Escaut river. On 21 May, there was a heavy bombardment by enemy artillery in which Second Lieutenant Ion GROVE-WHITE and three other ranks were wounded. Second Lieutenant GROVE-WHITE died shortly afterwards from his injuries, aged nineteen years. He is buried in Grave 2 of the Anzegem Communal Cemetery in Flanders, Belgium. His gravestone is endorsed with the inscription 'Most Dearly Loved', and there is no doubt that his loss was keenly felt by his family and friends. He left an estate of £93 3s 1d



*Left – Second Lieutenant Ion GROVE-WHITE in the uniform as an officer in the Middlesex Regiment.  
Courtesy of: The GROVE-WHITE family*



*Above and Right – The CWGC headstone of the grave of Second Lieutenant Ion GROVE-WHITE, in Flanders, Belgium.*

*Courtesy of: Jef BOGAERT*



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# GROVE-WHITE

## Lieutenant General Sir

### M. F.

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