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**A CONCISE BIOGRAPHY OF:**

# **LIEUTENANT GENERAL SIR EDMOND C. A. SCHREIBER**

A concise biography of Lieutenant General Sir Edmond Charles Acton SCHREIBER, an officer in the British Army between 1909 and 1947. He held some operational commands during the Second World War, but he is noted for his role as Governor-General of Malta.

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**A Concise Biography of Lieutenant General Sir Edmond C. A. SCHREIBER**

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**Lieutenant General Sir Edmond Charles Acton SCHREIBER,  
K.C.B., D.S.O., *p.s.c.***



## Introduction

Known throughout his career as 'Teddy', Lieutenant General Sir Edmond Charles Acton SCHREIBER, K.C.B., D.S.O., *p.s.c.*, was an officer in the British Army from 1909 until 1947. He was commissioned in the Royal Regiment of Artillery, and he served as a junior regimental officer during the early stages of the Great War, being wounded and awarded the Distinguished Service Order (D.S.O.). He later served as a staff officer and finished the war in the rank of Acting Lieutenant Colonel. Between the wars, his career progressed steadily, so by the outbreak of the Second World War, he was a Temporary Brigadier.

SCHREIBER served with the British Expeditionary Force in France and Belgium in 1939 and 1940, and then became a divisional commander in the United Kingdom. Chosen to raise the first Army level formation for operational deployment during the war, ill-health forced him to hand over command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army prior to the invasion of French North Africa.<sup>1</sup> Relegated to home commands, his final appointment in the Army was as the Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief of Malta.

## Early Life

Edmond Charles Acton SCHREIBER was born in South Kensington, London on 30 April 1890, the son of a senior Army officer, Brigadier-General Acton SCHREIBER, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O..<sup>2</sup> In 1891, the family lived at 1, The Crescent, Sandgate, Cheriton Kent, with Edmond shown as the only child at that time. The family employed three servants who lived in the house with them. In 1891, Acton SCHREIBER was a Lieutenant serving in the Royal Engineers. Edmond attended a preparatory school in Dursley, Gloucestershire, before moving on to Wellington College, Berkshire from 1903 to 1908. This was a school that was geared towards educating the sons of military officers for an eventual career in the military themselves. In 1908, he entered the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, from which he was commissioned into the Royal Field Artillery as a Second Lieutenant on 23 December 1909. He was promoted Lieutenant on 23 September 1912 having completed three years' service.

## The Great War

As a Regular Army officer, SCHREIBER saw service during the Great War. His unit was mobilised at the opening of hostilities, and it left for France. It arrived in France on 17 August 1914, and moved up the front line in Belgium. The early battles in Belgium were across open country, as the German Army advanced through Belgium. SCHREIBER was wounded, and left France on 30 September 1914.

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<sup>1</sup> The formation of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, 9<sup>th</sup> Army and 10<sup>th</sup> Army in the Middle East all pre-date the formation of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army, but the 1<sup>st</sup> Army was the first raised in the U.K. for offensive action overseas.

<sup>2</sup> [www.generals.dk](http://www.generals.dk) gives his name as Edmund Charles Anton, but Edmond Charles Acton is consistently shown in Who was Who, the Army list and London Gazette.

His gallantry was recognised by one of the earliest awards of the Distinguished Service Order (D.S.O.) in that war, the award being published in the London Gazette of 1 December 1914. His citation reads:

*Lieutenant Edmond Charles Acton Schreiber, Royal Field Artillery. Very gallant conduct on 14<sup>th</sup> September in saving horses which had become entangled in blocked road, and man-handling guns away from a position which had become untenable from a very heavy shell fire, continuing to work, although wounded.*

SCHREIBER was promoted to the rank of Acting Captain on 29 May 1915. He remained an Acting Captain until receiving promotion to the substantive rank of Captain on 23 December 1915. On 17 June 1916, he was appointed a Staff Captain, as the Staff Officer to the Major General, Royal Artillery, 1<sup>st</sup> Army, British Armies in France. He held this appointment until 2 November. Absent from France between 1 April and 7 July 1917, SCHREIBER returned to France and Belgium to be promoted to the rank of Acting Lieutenant Colonel on 26 August 1917. He held this rank for the rest of the duration of the war, and he was promoted to the rank of Brevet Major on 1 January 1918.

With the end of the Great War, SCHREIBER was awarded the 1914 Star and Clasp, the British War Medal and Victory Medal to add to his D.S.O. He was Mentioned in Despatches four times; on 17 February 1915, 18 May 1917, 14 December 1917, and 23 December 1918.

## Between the World Wars

After the war, SCHREIBER relinquished the rank of Acting Lieutenant Colonel on 8 February 1919. On 7 June 1920, he was appointed a Brigade Major in India; a post he held until 12 January 1921. He was seconded as an Adjutant between 14 January 1921 and 16 December 1922. The key to advancement in the peacetime British Army was to attend the Staff College and then be eligible for staff appointments. The criteria for attendance were competitive, with applicants being required to pass an entrance examination. A successful applicant also required a positive assessment from his superior officers. SCHREIBER was clearly well-regarded, for he gained entry and started his two-year course on 22 January 1923.

Having successfully completed the Staff Course, SCHREIBER was able to add the letters *p.s.c.* in his entry in the Army List. He did not have to wait long for his first staff appointment, for he was appointed a Brigade Major in Southern Command on 8 April 1925. On 18 October 1926, he transferred to the R.A.F. School of Army Cooperation as a General Staff Officer 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade. During his secondment, he was promoted Major on 8 March 1927.

SCHREIBER's secondment to the R.A.F. School of Cooperation ended on 8 April 1929, on completion of the usual four-year term on the staff, and he returned to regimental duties. He was posted to the 4<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment in the U.K. He did not remain on regimental duties for long before he was appointed as an instructor at the Staff College, Camberley.

SCHREIBER was promoted to Local Lieutenant Colonel on taking up his appointment on 21 January 1930, but prior to this, he was promoted Brevet Lieutenant Colonel on 1 January 1930. He left the Staff College on 21 January 1933 to return to regimental duties. Just short of two years later, on 16 November 1934, he was seconded to the War Office as a General Staff Officer 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade. Now aged forty-six years, and with eighteen years' service, SCHREIBER was promoted Lieutenant Colonel on 1 January 1937, and left the War Office. He was given command of the X Field Brigade, which was stationed at Deepcut in Surrey.<sup>3</sup> This was a field regiment of artillery and comprised four batteries. It was based in Minden Barracks at Deepcut, which was a purpose-built artillery barracks, constructed in 1903. The barracks were sub-divided into Minden Barracks North and Minden Barracks South, each housing one field artillery unit.

After only a year in command, SCHREIBER was promoted to the rank of Colonel (seniority from 1 January 1933). He was appointed as an instructor at the Senior Officers' School at Sheerness in Kent. His promotion and appointment took effect on 8 January 1938. The role of the Senior Officers' School was to train Majors for the responsibilities of regimental or battalion command. The commandant held the rank of Temporary Brigadier, and there were five Army officers, all in the rank of Colonel, who were based there as instructors.

SCHREIBER left Sheerness after less than a year, being appointed as Brigadier Royal Artillery, Southern Command at Salisbury on 27 September 1938. He was promoted to the rank of Temporary Brigadier. This appointment was based at Salisbury, with SCHREIBER responsible for the administration and training of artillery units based within Southern Command.

## The Second World War

With the outbreak of war against Germany on 3 September 1939, the British Expeditionary Force (B.E.F.) was mobilised and moved to France. SCHREIBER was made Corps Commander Royal Artillery for II Corps, and it moved to France in September 1939. II Corps was formed at the outbreak of war on 3 September 1939. Its first commander was Lieutenant General Alan Francis BROOKE, who was appointed as General Officer Commanding on 1 September 1939.

The corps deployed to France with the following formations under command, namely the:

- 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division
- 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division arrived in France from Southern Command on 30 September 1939; with the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division arriving from Eastern Command on 1 October. This allowed II Corps to become operational.

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<sup>3</sup> At this period, regiments in the Royal Artillery were known as 'Brigades', and they were designated by the use of Roman numerals.

Prior to the German invasion of the Belgium and France, SCHREIBER returned to the United Kingdom to take command of the 61<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division. He replaced Major General CARTON De WIART who had left to go to Norway. SCHREIBER was promoted to Acting Major General on 26 April 1940 on assuming command of the division. With the end of the Norway campaign, CARTON De WIART returned, so SCHREIBER transferred to command the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division on 12 May 1940. There he replaced Major General Desmond ANDERSON. He was promoted to the substantive rank of Major General on 8 June 1940, and Mentioned in Despatches on 26 July 1940 for his services with the B.E.F.

SCHREIBER relinquished command of the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division on 25 April 1941, having been selected to replace Lieutenant General MONTGOMERY in command of V Corps. On 8 May 1941, now aged fifty-one years, SCHREIBER assumed command of V Corps in the United Kingdom, on promotion to the rank of Acting Lieutenant General. The corps was stationed in Dorset and Hampshire being responsible for coastal defence. On 1 January 1942, SCHREIBER was made a Companion of the Order of the Bath (C.B.) in the New Year's Honours List.

In March 1942, preparations commenced for formation of an expeditionary force for deployment overseas, so SCHREIBER handed over command of the corps to Lieutenant General ALLFREY on 8 March 1942. On 7 April 1942, SCHREIBER assumed responsibility for Force 110. This Force (which was designated as the 1<sup>st</sup> Army on 6 July 1942) was formed at Largs in Scotland. SCHREIBER was promoted Temporary Lieutenant General on 8 May 1942.

The Second Washington Conference in June 1942 agreed to the invasion of the Vichy French colonies in North Africa, and Force 110 was designated for this operation ('Torch'). Before SCHREIBER was able to lead this formation into action, he was diagnosed with a kidney problem, and was pronounced unfit for service overseas. He handed over command of 1<sup>st</sup> Army on 11 August 1942 to Lieutenant General Kenneth ANDERSON. SCHREIBER then had a period of unemployment whilst he recuperated. He reverted to the rank of Major General on 11 August 1942. Having recovered sufficiently, SCHREIBER was appointed General Officer Commanding-in-Chief (G.O.C-in-C) Western Command, based at Chester. He took up this appointment on 7 September 1942; being regranted the rank of Temporary Lieutenant General.

SCHREIBER relieved Lieutenant General MARSHALL-CORNWALL, who had made his position untenable following a dispute with G.H.Q. Home Forces and the War Office over guard duties at Liverpool Docks. By the date SCHREIBER assume command, the home commands in the United Kingdom were relative backwaters, and as this command covered Wales and the North-West of England, it was particularly removed from operational issues.

On 19 March 1944, he was switched to the role of G.O.C.-in-C. South-Eastern Command, at Aldershot in Hampshire. Lieutenant General Daril Gerald WATSON arrived in Chester to assume responsibility for Western Command, allowing SCHREIBER to travel to Aldershot.

SCHREIBER assumed responsibility for South-Eastern Command from Lieutenant General John SWAYNE, who was bound for India to become Chief of the General Staff. South-Eastern Command was busier than Western Command, as the preparations for Operation 'Overlord', the invasion of Normandy, were well underway. D-Day was launched successfully on 6 June 1944, with follow-up formations flooding across to Normandy in the next few weeks and months.

On 8 June 1944, SCHREIBER was created a Knight Commander of the order of the Bath (K.C.B.) and was knighted, which was a usual honour awarded to Army officers of the rank of Lieutenant General. His promotion to the substantive rank of Lieutenant General was effective from 31 July 1944. By September 1944, the Allied forces had reached the Netherlands, and the German border with France. South-Eastern Command was being rundown with a planned reorganisation of the British Army in the United Kingdom taking place. On 24 September 1944, SCHREIBER handed over to Lieutenant General Eric MILES.

On relinquishing command, SCHREIBER travelled to Malta on being appointed Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief of the island. He replaced Lord GORT, who was increasing ill. This period was after the siege of the island, and the war had moved away from Malta, although a lot of rebuilding was required. SCHREIBER served on the island for two years, leaving on 10 July 1946. After an unbroken run since 1851 of the position of Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief of Malta being held by a senior Army officer, SCHREIBER was replaced by a Labour politician, Sir Francis DOUGLAS. SCHREIBER returned to the U.K., but he was not given another appointment. He retired on 3 January 1947, due to his disability, at fifty-seven years of age. SCHREIBER received no other awards, but he was appointed Colonel Commandant of the Royal Artillery on 18 April 1945 and Colonel Commandant of the Royal Malta Artillery on 5 December 1946.

## Post Retirement and Family

In retirement, he lived at Hayne House, Plymtree, Cullompton in Devon, and was made a Deputy Lieutenant of the County of Devon in 1948. He was President of the Old Contemptibles Association in 1960; he himself being one of the survivors of the Regular British Army deployed to France in August 1914, who became known as the 'Old Contemptibles'. SCHREIBER was also a member of the Red Cross, being made a Knight of the Venerable Order of St. John in 1944.

Teddy SCHREIBER married Phyllis BARCHARD on 24 October 1916 at St. Peter's, Cranley Gardens, Kensington and Chelsea they had two daughters. In 1919, the family were living at 3, Violet Terrace, Seaton, Devon. In his last years, SCHREIBER lived at the Devoncourt Hotel, Exmouth, Devon, and he died in Exmouth on 8 October 1972 aged eighty-two years. He is buried in St. John the Baptist churchyard, at Plymtree, near Cullompton, Devon.



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