COLONEL FREDERICK SMITH, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.

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Royal Army Medical College

FREDERICK SMITH (1858-1933)

ALTHOUGH the name of Fred Smith was well known to officers of an earlier generation—mainly on account of his “A Short History of the R.A.M.C.” (1929)—it is one quite unknown to-day. This is to be regretted as Smith was indeed a “lad o’ pairts” as he started his Army career as a Private in the Army Hospital Corps and obtained a medical degree whilst still an other rank and then a Commission as a Medical Officer—surely a quite unique achievement? It was to rescue him from his undeserved obscurity that the present biographical sketch was undertaken.

Smith was born at Horncastle, Lincolnshire on the 14th February 1858 and was one of several sons all of whom ran away from home because of a tyrannical father. All made names for themselves.

He was a pupil of the Burgh Middle School where he did well gaining a First Class Certificate of Education and also a First Class in Latin.

His Army career began when at the age of eighteen he joined the Army Hospital Corps as a Private in 1877 and served as an other rank for twelve and a half years. He saw considerable service taking part in the Zulu War of 1879 and the First Boer War of 1881.

In 1886 he had risen to Non-Commissioned rank, and was stationed in Dublin. There he registered as a Medical Student and attended medical classes.

The Royal Warrant for 27th November 1879 laid down that half the vacancies in the Army Medical Department might be filled by candidates recommended by the governing bodies of the medical schools in Great Britain. Colonel Smith was, we believe, the only officer ever appointed under these conditions(1).

In 1889 he obtained the licences of the Irish Colleges, these colleges recommending him for a Commission in the Army. The same year he received the Diploma of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons in Ireland.

The recommendation for a Commission was accepted and in 1890 Smith attended the Surgeons on Probation Course at Netley. When the results of this course were published we read " Fred Smith 1st Class Staff Sergeant Medical Staff Corps 2803 (Netley marks only) gained the Herbert Prize of £20 with the Montefiore second prize ". As the result of his excellent record he was appointed Surgeon Captain in the same year (1890). Much of his work as a Medical Officer was related to the Army Health field and the following is a brief outline of his Commissioned Service.

In 1891 he was posted to the Strait Settlements where he remained until 1896. From 1896 to 1898 he worked at Netley as assistant in the Bacteriological Laboratory. In 1897 he gained the D.P.H. Durham and the Parkes Memorial Medal. In Sierra Leone in 1898-99 he took part in the operations in the Mendi and Protectorate expeditions, receiving the Medal and Clasp.

During the South African War (1899-1901) he took part in the operations in the Orange Free State: the Orange River Colony and the Transvaal including action at Biddulphsbury, Bethlehem, Wittehergan and in Cape Colony. He was mentioned in despatches, receiving the D.S.O. and Queen's Medal with four Clasps.

In 1903 he gained the Alexander Prize Essay Gold Medal (again in 1906), and the Enno Saunder Gold Medal of the United States Army.

In 1907 he served on the North West Frontier of India as staff officer to the Principal Medical Officer during the Mohmand Expedition, receiving a Medal with Clasp.

In the 1914-18 War he was Officer Commanding, Trianon Palace Hospital and Senior Medical Officer, Paris area 1914; Assistant Director of Medical Services 27th Division 1915; and Deputy Director of Medical Services 16th Corps 1917-1918. He was appointed C.B. and C.M.G., receiving the 1914-1918 Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal.

During his many tours abroad Colonel Smith sent many specimens of plants, insects etc. to his friends and to institutions in England—Sir Ronald Ross, E. E. Austen, Kew Gardens, the British Museum and many other private collectors. *Anopheles smithii* was collected by him, and named after him.

His publications were many and covered a wide field. His book on "Modern Bullet Wounds" was translated into Chinese.

He retired after World War I but continued to take an active interest in medicine and in the Corps. It was during this period that he wrote his History.

When we consider the achievement his medical degree and commission represent, the success of his military career culminating as D.D.M.S. of a Corps, and his clinical work as evidenced by the biographical sketch which we publish can one doubt that he is one of our Corps who should be better known?

Much of the above information on which this sketch is based came from his son—the late Dr. Hector Smith—who presented in 1957, some of his father's papers to the R.A.M.C. Historical Museum.

Editorial Note

As we go to press we are glad to record that the Curator of the R.A.M.C. Historical Museum who "discovered" Smith independently of Mr. Davies informs us that Colonel Fred Smith and his unique career are being given a special display in the Museum.

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Central Midwives Board

Colonel H. S. Gavourin, M.B.E., M.B., F.R.C.O.G., has been appointed Examiner to the Central Midwives Board.