



LORD ASHCROFT'S
"HERO OF
THE MONTH"

Lieutenant Thomas Fasti Dinesen

VC

AGGRESSION

BOLDNESS • INITIATIVE
LEADERSHIP • SACRIFICE
SKILL • ENDURANCE

The many Victoria Crosses and George Crosses in the Lord Ashcroft Gallery at the Imperial War Museum in London are displayed under one of seven different qualities of bravery. Lieutenant Thomas Dinesen's VC medal group is part of the collection and Lord Ashcroft feels that it falls within the category of aggression:

"For many actions killing is the means to the end. To prevail, maximum force has to be applied. Aggression is invariably fast and adrenalin fuelled. It epitomises the idea of 'hot courage', acting quickly in the mayhem of battle."



ABOVE RIGHT
Canadian
journalists talking
to men of the
42nd Battalion
CEF (Royal
Highlanders of
Canada) in the
reserve trenches
in July 1918, prior
to the start of the
Battle of Amiens,
which, marking
the opening of
the Hundred Days
Offensive, began
on 8 August 1918.

RIGHT
A portrait of Lt
Thomas Fasti
Dinesen VC, who
was serving in
the 42nd Battalion
CEF (Royal
Highlanders of
Canada) at
the time of
his VC action.
(LORD ASHCROFT
COLLECTION)

THOMAS FASTI Dinesen was born in Rungsted, near Copenhagen, Denmark, on 9 August 1892. He was the son of Captain Adolph Dinesen and his wife Ingeborg (née Westenholz). Thomas Dinesen came from a wealthy, aristocratic, military family and his grandfather, as well as his father, served as an officer in the Danish Army. His sister was Isak Dinesen (later Baroness Karen Blixen), the author of *Out of Africa* (in the film of the same name she is played by Meryl Streep) and other works.

Thomas Dinesen was educated at Rungsted State School and the Polytechnical School, Copenhagen. Before the war, he worked as an engineer and in 1914 he became a member of the Academic Rifle Corps, in which he established himself as a first-class shot. After the outbreak of the Great War in August 1914, he tried to join the French and British armies, but they would only accept their own nationals. In his book about his wartime experiences, *Merry Hell! A Dane with the Canadians*, Dinesen wrote: "But from the very first day of August [1914] I knew that, sooner or later, I should have to

leave everything and go in search of the real war. There was – in my set, anyhow – a firm conviction [that] the future of humanity, the continuance of civilisation, the salvation of the world, depended on the subjugation of Germany."

In April 1917, with Denmark still neutral and Dinesen desperate to fight the Germans, he sailed to America where once again he was unable to enlist into the US forces. He finally succeeded in being accepted for military service when he went to the New York recruiting office of the Canadian Army in June 1917.

PATH TO WAR

Dinesen enlisted as a private into the Royal Highlanders of Canada and was posted to Guy Street Barracks, Montreal. Three months later he was sent to the UK, where he underwent training at Bramshott and Aldershot in Hampshire. In March 1918, Dinesen travelled to France with his battalion where he



VICTORIA CROSS HEROES II

Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC is a businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. His sixth book on gallantry, *Victoria Cross Heroes Volume II* was published in hardback in 2016 and is now available in paperback.

For more information, please visit: www.victoriacrossheroes2.com
Lord Ashcroft's VC and GC collection is on public display at Imperial War Museum, London. For more information visit: www.iwm.org.uk/heroes. For details about his VC collection, visit: www.lordashcroftmedals.com
For more information on Lord Ashcroft's work, visit: www.lordashcroft.com. Follow him on Twitter: @LordAshcroft



volunteered for numerous trench raids, though he initially took part in no major battles. During their early days on the front line, Dinesen and his comrades were subjected to both gas and shell attacks.

In *Merry Hell!* he wrote: "Hizzz-Crash!! The shells are bursting both in front and behind our hiding-place; the very ground is trembling and we too tremble. Our hair is standing on end – but – are we scared? Are we down-hearted? No!!"

In May 1918, during a spell behind the front line, Dinesen was chosen to take part in a Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) training course, which took up most of June until he returned to the front line in early July. At times he bemoaned his lowly rank, writing: "I wish I were an officer and could get a chance to follow events! A private soldier is moved about like a tethered cow."

During an offensive, Dinesen noted in *Merry Hell!*: "The whole of the western horizon bursts into flame as if the earth had opened." In his book, Dinesen related how he had been told by an officer that the 42nd Battalion's



objective would be to take the town of Parvillers. Dinesen wrote modestly about his own part in the fighting and his VC action, but he did describe some of what happened: "I turn a corner quickly – two grey Germans stand straight in front of me ... Two red flashes straight into my face – done for already! – but they haven't hit me, so now it's my turn. A snap-

shot at one of the two, and the other disappears around a corner. The road is free! 'Come on boys, give them hell!'"

VICTORIA CROSS CITATION

Dinesen was awarded the VC for courage displayed during the Battle of Amiens on 12 August 1918, three days after his 26th birthday. >>>



ABOVE LEFT
Thomas Dinesen's
VC medal group.
To the left of the
Victoria Cross is
the Knight's Cross
of the Order of
Dannebrog, to
the right the
Croix de Guerre.
(LORD ASHCROFT
COLLECTION)

LEFT
The 42nd
Battalion CEF
was part of 3rd
Canadian Division
for the duration
of its service
on the Western
Front. This picture
shows Mk.V
tanks passing
soldiers of the 3rd
Canadian Division
as they advance
in the early part
of the Battle of
Amiens in August
1918. German
prisoners can
be seen heading
towards the rear.
(DEPARTMENT
OF NATIONAL
DEFENCE/LIBRARY
AND ARCHIVES
CANADA)

LEFT
Personnel of the
42nd Battalion
CEF (Royal
Highlanders of
Canada) moving
up to the front
during 1918.
(LIBRARY AND
ARCHIVES CANADA/
PA-003265)

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RIGHT

General Sir Douglas Haig, on horseback and accompanied by a standard bearer, congratulates Canadian troops following the Battle of Amiens. (DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENCE/ LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA)

His citation, announced in the *London Gazette* on 26 October 1918, read: "For most conspicuous and continuous bravery displayed during ten hours of hand-to-hand fighting which led to the capture of over a mile of strongly garrisoned and stubbornly defended enemy trenches.

"Five times in succession he rushed forward alone and single-handed put hostile machine guns out of action, accounting for 12 of the enemy with bomb and bayonet. His sustained valour and resourcefulness inspired his comrades at a very critical stage of the action, and were an example to all."



BELOW RIGHT

Battlefield salvage underway – a pile of German helmets recovered by Canadian units from the ground around Amiens, pictured in August 1918. (DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENCE/ LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA)

On 21 August 1918, during more heavy fighting, Dinesen displayed further bravery that led to the award of the French *Croix de Guerre*. His other decorations included the Knight's Cross of the Order of Dannebrog from the King of Denmark. Dinesen was promoted to acting corporal in August 1918 and then spent a month at an officers' school. On 5 November, he

was commissioned as a lieutenant and, six days later, when the war ended, he was based at Mons, Belgium.

Dinesen received his VC from King George V at an investiture at Buckingham Palace on 13 December 1918. He was demobbed in January 1919, still with the rank of lieutenant. Dinesen wrote: "We won the war ... I

got off without a scratch, with all my aspirations and dreams fulfilled. And they rewarded me, into the bargain!"

From 1920 to 1925, Dinesen lived in Kenya, working as a farmer and civil engineer. In the aftermath of the war, he helped his sister manage her coffee farm in the Ngong Hills, south-west of Nairobi. From 1925 onwards, and having returned to live in Denmark, Dinesen farmed an estate in Jutland.

He married Joanna Lindhardt, the daughter of the Lutheran Dean of Arhus, in Denmark, in April 1926 and the couple went on to have two daughters. Dinesen was also an enthusiastic author and penned several books, including a biography of his famous sister. He died in Leerbaek, Denmark, on 10 March 1979, aged 86, and is buried in the family plot at Hørsholm Cemetery, Rungsted.

I purchased the medal group of this colourful character privately in 2013 and I feel privileged to be the custodian of such a distinguished set of gallantry and service medals. ☺

BOTTOM

Men of the 42nd Battalion CEF (Royal Highlanders of Canada) stop to rest in the Grand Place in Mons on the morning of 11 November 1918. (DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENCE/ LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA)

