

Major Colin  
Ogden-Smith



# HERO *of the* MONTH

By Lord Ashcroft

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**I**t was only recently that I discovered that a French village in the heart of Brittany holds a ceremony every other year in memory of a British major and two other brave men.

I found it deeply touching that this ceremony has been held for the best part of 80 years because those living in and close to Querrien are determined that the courage of Major Colin Ogden-Smith is never forgotten: in a wonderful act of self-sacrifice, he gave his life to help rid France of its Nazi occupiers.

Ogden-Smith was born on August 30, 1910, the middle of three brothers. The sons of a fishing-tackle manufacturer, they were brought up in a prosperous area of East Croydon on the London outskirts. All attended Whitgift School in Croydon, were sporty, and fine shots. All three brothers, too, became territorial soldiers serving in the Infantry Battalion of the Honourable Artillery Company.

Colin Ogden-Smith worked as a factory manager and director of the family business in the 1930s, but obtained a commission in

the Regular Army as a second lieutenant in the Royal Artillery before the outbreak of World War Two. In September 1939, he had just turned 29 and had been married for a year to Wendy, née Moore. The couple lived in Balcombe, West Sussex.

Shortly after the so-called "Phoney War" in 1940, Ogden-Smith had been among the first to volunteer for the newly formed Commandos, seeing action in North Africa and Crete. In 1942, he transferred to the Special Operations Executive (SOE) and joined No.62 Commando, the Small Scale Raiding Force, which operated under the SOE to carry out raids across the English Channel.

Next, he volunteered for a clandestine group known as the Jedburghs who were soon being trained to parachute into German-occupied France in the aftermath of D-Day to link up with the French Resistance – or Maquis. These typically three-man teams of SOE or OSS (SOE's American counterpart) personnel comprised two officers and an NCO, one was usually a British or American

operative, another a local man from the area in which they were to be inserted. Once on the ground, they would deliver cash to resisters and remain to shape their operations and ensure each aligned with the overall Allied plan.

### Into Brittany

On June 6, 1944, the D-Day landings took place along 60 miles of Normandy coast. Nearby Brittany, with its deep-water ports, was seen as strategically important and so British Special Forces units were inserted into the region.

In the first week of July, Ogden-Smith learnt it was time for his three-man team to go into action. At that time, he was a 33-year-old major and the father of a six-month-old daughter.

The plan was for his team to hide in the southeastern corner of the Finistère département. Ogden-Smith intended to contact all the various Maquis groups in the area, assess their manpower and firepower and, where necessary, arrange arms drops for them.

*"The ultimate aim, of course, was to help drive out the German occupiers as the Allied forces advanced through France"*

JEDBURGHs IN FRONT OF  
A B-24 PRIOR TO THEIR  
INSERTION INTO EUROPE,  
HARRINGTON AIRDROME,  
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE,  
C.1944 NARA





The ultimate aim, of course, was to help drive out the German occupiers as the Allied forces advanced through France.

Shortly after 10.30pm on the evening of July 9, fresh from their final briefing, the three-man team took off from RAF Harrington, Northamptonshire, in a modified Liberator bomber.

Ogden-Smith was the leader of Team Francis, one of six Jedburgh teams dropped in Brittany at that time. The local Maquis were expecting them and had been given a 'DZ' (Drop Zone), a small, remote field on the edge of the departement. As the aircraft approached shortly after 2am, three bonfires were lit to mark the DZ for the pilot, who flew down to only 600ft.

Ogden-Smith, the last of the three to jump, was soon in difficulty, landing not in a field but instead in dense woodland a considerable distance from the DZ, having overshot his target.

It meant he, unlike his two comrades, missed his Maquis 'reception committee' and would eventually have to meet his comrades, Frenchman Guy Le Borgne, 24, and fellow Briton Arthur Dallow, 20, at one of two pre-agreed rendezvous.

After hiding out for three nights, Ogden-Smith, who was in uniform and armed with a rifle and a pistol, encountered a farmer on the morning of July 12 and made his presence felt. Fortunately, the man was trustworthy and helped him link up with the Maquis and his two Team Francis comrades.

On July 14, they had arranged an arms drop but the Germans were waiting and, in a huge firefight near the commune of Scaër, 24 patriots were killed and most of the arms supply lost. For the next two weeks, Team Francis played a dangerous game of hide-and-seek with security forces, never staying more than 48 hours in the same place, while also working with the Maquis.



ABOVE: 22-YEAR-OLD SERGEANT MAURICE MIODON, OF THE 4TH (FRENCH) SAS, WHO WAS KILLED FIGHTING ALONGSIDE COLIN OGDEN-SMITH

RIGHT: FARM OWNER LOUIS FICHE SNR WAS MURDERED BY GERMAN TROOPS DURING THE BATTLE OF KERBOZEC

*"He did not want to be captured alive... Raising his rifle and pistol, he advanced towards dozens of the enemy"*

On the night of July 28, Ogden-Smith rested with his team – which by now included two Resistance men – at Kerbozec farm and then stayed there the next day. The farm was owned by Louis Fiche, 71, and run with the help of his wife Marie-Jeanne, their son Louis and daughter Eliane, then just 16. Louis Jnr was an active member of the Maquis.

### Walls of fire

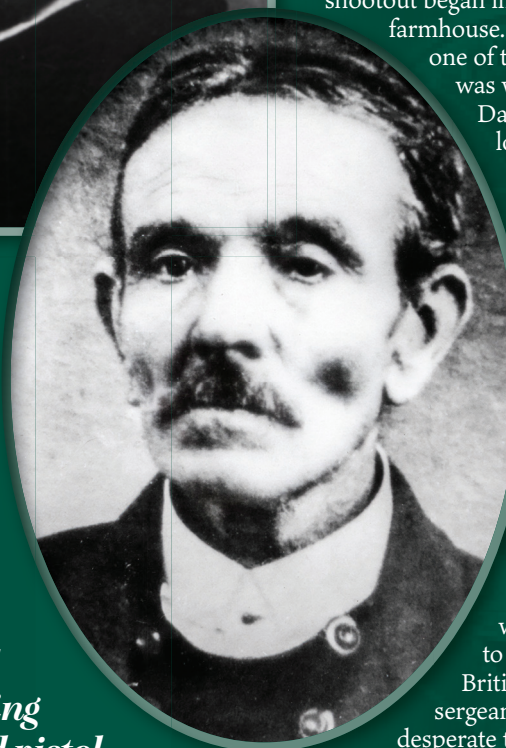
However, the Germans had been tipped off by a collaborator, and shortly after 8pm on July 29 almost 70 German troops and police descended on the farm. As they tried to surround the farm, a shootout began in the fields close to the farmhouse. Barthélémy Guyader, one of the Resistance fighters, was wounded, but he and Dallow managed to lay low in a ditch as the fighting escalated. Amid the impending chaos, Le Borgne surprised a German officer and shot him dead before making his own escape.

Ogden-Smith and Maurice Miodon, the second Resistance fighter, were not so lucky, having been spotted in a water-filled ditch close to their hideout. The British major and French sergeant began shooting, desperate to keep the Germans at bay. Eventually, Ogden-Smith broke cover, but before he could reach a hedge he was hit by a burst of fire from a machine gun. Badly wounded, he reached for his morphine and tried to bandage his heavily bleeding stomach.

Nearby, Miodon was also injured, having been hit by shrapnel from a grenade. However, Miodon did not want to be captured alive, knowing he would almost certainly be tortured. Raising his rifle and pistol, he advanced towards dozens of the enemy, firing until he ran out of ammunition. A wall of enemy fire hit him, leaving him far more seriously wounded than before.

Ogden-Smith died soon after, his rifle at his side. The 45-minute firefight was over.

Meanwhile, Louis Fiche Snr, who had been tending his cows more than 100 yards away, was confronted by the Germans. Hard of hearing, he had been confused by their questioning and their patience soon



A COMMEMORATIVE EVENT IS HELD EVERY TWO YEARS ON THE SITE OF THE FARM AT WHICH OGDEN-SMITH WAS KILLED





ran out. Fiche was murdered in cold blood, first bayoneted in the back and then shot in the chest. Miodon was still alive at this point, but not for long. A German soldier finished him off with two shots to his head as he lay on the ground. Before leaving, the soldiers set fire to the family's farmhouse.

The next morning, the three dead men were buried in shallow graves at the farm because the Germans refused to allow their bodies to be moved to the local cemetery. Louis Fiche's grieving widow made a wooden cross for each makeshift grave.

### Le majeur Anglais

Le Borgne and Dallow, who had escaped unscathed, continued to work with the Resistance until the area was liberated by the Allies in early August. Once back in Britain, Le Borgne filed a report in which he recommended Ogden-Smith for a posthumous British gallantry award, but he was eventually only awarded a Mention in Despatches.

After the war, the bodies of the three heroes of the Battle of Kerbozec were exhumed and the remains of Ogden-Smith and Miodon today lie side-by-side at Guiscriff Communal Cemetery.

Many local French men and women wrote to Ogden-Smith's widow after the war and thanked her for her husband's gallantry and self-sacrifice. Even more significantly, three years after his death, on July 29, 1947, they held a service near Kerbozec farm to commemorate the bravery of the three men. Indeed, Ogden-Smith is still known affectionately by locals as "le majeur Anglais" – the English major.

Ogden-Smith's great-niece, Sam Gardner, told me that just over a decade ago, while living in Paris, she had been bored one day and decided to put her great uncle's name, Colin Ogden-Smith, into Google. There she found a message from a man called Peter Jacobs, who was asking for information on Ogden-Smith from relatives. Mrs Gardner contacted him,



THE MEDAL GROUP OF COLIN OGDEN-SMITH, COMPRISING HIS 1939-45 STAR, AFRICA STAR, FRANCE AND GERMANY STAR, DEFENCE MEDAL, WAR MEDAL 1939-45 (WITH OAK LEAF FOR HIS MID), AND HIS TERRITORIAL EFFICIENCY DECORATION LORD ASHCROFT MEDAL COLLECTION

learnt about the commemoration service and decided to attend in 2012 with her mother, Angela Weston, and Jacobs – who later wrote the book *Codename Dorset: The Wartime Exploits of Major Colin-Ogden-Smith Commando & SOE*.

Mrs Gardner said: "We attended the commemoration and it was so moving. We had expected it to be very low key, but there were war veterans with their medals, police and firemen in uniform, lots of flags and a big public address system. I gave a speech in French and my mother gave a speech in English, which I translated into French. It was so emotional, we had to fight to hold back tears."

No one has done more to champion the bravery of the three men than Marcel Moysan, who presided over around ten of the ceremonies as Mayor of Querrien between 1995-2014. Born in the village and now 72, he said of Ogden-Smith: "As the leader of the Jedburgh team, his courage made him a great hero to us all and we have admired what he did for nearly 80 years."

Yves Naour, then aged 13, and his father, Francois, were at their family mill close to the Kerbozec farm on the night of the attack and were detained and questioned. His father was taken at gunpoint to the

spot where Ogden-Smith lay and three times an officer demanded: "Did you know this terrorist?" Each time he said he did not and eventually the lives of the father and son were spared.

Naour, now 91, who always attends the dedication service, told me: "The events of that evening have stayed with me all my life because I was so frightened."

Colin's two brothers survived the war: his elder brother, Tony, was a POW for three years. His younger brother, Bruce, carried out courageous beach reconnaissance work prior to D-Day and, serving as a sergeant, was awarded the Military Medal and, later, the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

In 2006 I became the proud custodian of Bruce Ogden-Smith's medal group. Then, unexpectedly, this summer I was privately offered the chance to buy Colin Ogden-Smith's. I did so, thereby reuniting the medal groups of these two brave brothers. **BW**

### SPECIAL FORCES HEROES



Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC is a businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. His book *Special Forces Heroes* was published in 2008 and is available in hardback and paperback. For more

information, visit: [specialforcesheroes.com](http://specialforcesheroes.com)

Lord Ashcroft's VC and GC collection is on public display at the Imperial War

Museum, London. For more information, visit: [iwm.org.uk/heroes](http://iwm.org.uk/heroes) – details about his VC

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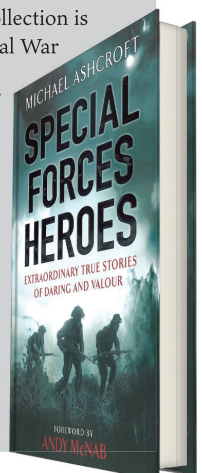
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FORMER MAYOR OF QUERRIEN, MARCEL MOYSAN, AT THE GRAVE OF OGDEN-SMITH – FOR YEARS HE HAS MARKED THE DEATH OF 'THE ENGLISH MAJOR'