

OBITUARY

Lt-Colonel Robert Donald Thain Alexander, DSO, OBE, TD,

who was born on 29 September, 1878, died on 20 February, 1969.

Educated at Linton House School, Holland Park, and Dulwich College, he studied engineering from 1896–1900 at King's College, London.

After 18 months' practical training with the Westinghouse Electric and Manufacturing Company in Pittsburgh, USA, he joined the British company of the same name at Trafford Park, Manchester, on the

construction of their dynamo testing department. Here from 1902–04 he was in charge of the testing of railway motors and electrical machinery, including rotary converters and turbo-alternators.

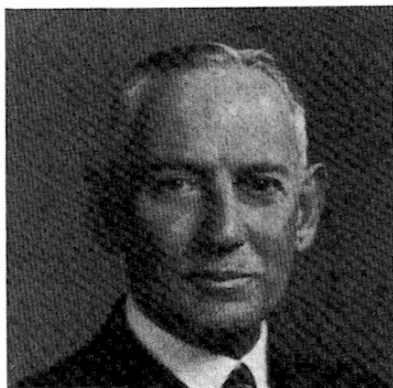
In 1904 he sailed for India, where he was to make his name as an outstanding engineer.

Joining the Indian Public Works Department as Assistant Engineer, he was assigned to the Railway Branch on the survey and preparation of the Nagda–Muttra Railway, under J. Willcocks (M). For the next two years he was in charge of the construction of a section of this line, which involved building the 16-span Chambal Bridge, Kotah Junction Yard and the workshops which supplied the whole 340-mile project, under Captain A. Brough, R.E., and J. Willcocks. From 1906–07 he was responsible for the preparation of plans for electric railways for the Southern Shan States, Burma, and two Frontier railways, under A. L. Lilley and F. D. Couchman (FF).

There followed two years as personal assistant to the Engineer-in-Chief of the Nagda–Muttra State Railway, and in 1909 he became Executive Engineer in charge of a projected railway bridge across the Irrawaddy at Sagaing, under G. Mills (F). Later in the same year he was appointed Executive Engineer (Power) on the Lower Ganges Bridge, where until 1915 he was responsible for the design, construction and running of two power-plants, two workshops, maintenance of the fleet and rolling stock, etc. In this period he returned three times to England to ensure as far as humanly possible the smooth supply of plant and materials for the work in hand.

During World War I Alexander saw service from 1915–19, when he was in Mesopotamia with the Royal Engineers as Assistant Director of Inland Water Transport. As from April 1917 he held the rank of Lt-Colonel, in charge of the design of the dockyard at Basra, ten repair workshops, 23 bridges at Amara and Baghdad and oil fuel installations for rail and river transport, costing in all some £2 million. Four times mentioned in dispatches, he was awarded the DSO in 1917, the OBE (Military Division) in 1919 and the TD the same year.

On the conclusion of operations in Kurdistan in 1919, he served in the



Mahsud campaign (Waziristan) the following year, before becoming Assistant Secretary to the Railway Board (India). In 1921 his services as Chief Engineer were lent by the Indian Government to the Bengal-Nagpur Railway, where ten years later he became Acting Agent (General Manager), responsible for over 3000 track miles and employing over 74 000 officers and men. New works under his control until his retirement in 1932 cost over £11 million.

Lt-Colonel Alexander's passion was for the Army and he was from 1904-33 an Officer in the London Scottish. In World War II, with the rank of Lt-Colonel, he was employed by the Royal Engineers at Aldershot in supervising the building of pillboxes and anti-tank ditches over a wide area, and was also Weapon Training Officer for the Home Guard.

A keen shot, he was Captain of the Rifle Team at King's College in 1900 and later represented the colleges of London in a match versus Cambridge University. For many years he was Captain of the Rifle Team representing India at Bisley and several times shot for Scotland and for India in international matches. He was for some time on the Council of the National Rifle Association and after his retirement undertook a good deal of experimental work on rifles.

He was made a Fellow of King's College in 1938, and was a member of the Institute of Engineers, India. With Lt-Col. A. Martin-Leake, he wrote a book on wild animals in India, 'Some Signposts to Shikar', published in 1932. Almost to the time of his death at the age of 90, he was working on his reminiscences.

Alexander represented India on the Council from 1925-28. He became a Member in 1904 and was transferred to the senior grade in 1920: thus he was for 65 years on the Roll of the Institution.

He is survived by his widow: his two sons predeceased him—one killed in action in 1940, the other in an air-crash in 1967.