

Your Majesty, you're Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen

I am, very honored, proud and thankful, to represent the family today and take part in the unveiling of the bust of our grandfather Thomas Dinesen, in connection with the commemoration of the centenary of the end of the Great war.

Our grandfather Thomas Dinesen, was an exceptional man in many ways. As a soldier, sailor, hunter, resistance fighter, author, adventurer, public figure, brother, husband, and patriac.

Today however, we are focusing on his role as cofounder and later Chairman of The Danish War Veterans of the Allies. And of course as a private soldier in the 42 Battalion, Royal Highlanders of Canada– The Black Watch, during the 1st World War, where he was awarded the Victoria Cross “for valour”.

Denmark was neutral during the war. As a consequence, the knowledge and understanding of the historic events between 1914 and 1918, is for Denmark that of a bystander.

In the same way understanding the uniqueness, of the Victoria Cross and how it`s recipients are perceived in Great Britain and the Commonwealth, are somewhat lost on most Danes.

Personally I have a different perspective, maybe quite naturally from being brought up with the stories of Grandfather`s deeds, both from himself and other family members, but also from having gone to School in England. I have a brother who lives and is married in England, I have been in the Danish army and am a member of the Special Forces club, based in London. So I have often been exposed, to how the British view this very special decoration rewarded, for courage in the face of the enemy.

It is made of melted bronze from the captured cannons from Balaclava, during the Crimean war, a quite unpretentious medal, eligible to all ranks, often awarded post humously. A way to honor the courageous, inspire us and act as a role model, something to aspire to.

This summer my wife and I had the opportunity to visit the Imperial War Museum in London and see the actual medal again, now as part of the “Lord Ashcroft Gallery”. In very distinguished company ranging in time from 1857 to the present day, Grandfather`s row of medals is displayed together with the official citation for the Victoria Cross.

Two things struck me as we went through this fascinating exhibition, firstly the simultaneous audio interviews with living recipients and family, on the subject of what courage really is. In my interpretation it is doing what you think is right, no matter the consequence. Not something you can plan or prepare, but something you either do or do not do, when you are suddenly confronted with a situation that you know is dangerous and from which you may not come out whole or alive.

I guess we all hope that we can and will do the right thing when time comes, but we don`t know.

Thomas Dinesen did what he thought was the right thing, at Parvillers on the 12th of August 1918

I will let the citation speak for it self;

” For most conspicuous and continuous bravery displayed during ten hours of hand-to-hand fighting, which resulted in 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 twelve 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."

Secondly it struck me, that grandfather`s row of medals were different to the others. The Victoria Cross is placed as number 2 from the left. Every other Victoria Cross in the exhibition is placed first and closest to the heart. In front of my grandfather`s Victoria Cross is the Danish decoration, Ridderkorset. To grandfather, being Danish, this obviously had to come first. This oddity, was remarked upon by Her Majesty Queen Elisabeth II, when grandfather participated at a memorial service for Victoria and George Cross recipients.

- As number 3 lies the Croix de Guerre!

What to us Danes should be remarkable, is that of the mere handful of non-commonwealth recipients of the Victoria Cross, we stand today in front of two, and they are both Danish.

Thomas Dinesen joined the war on the allied side to do what he thought was right. This unusual action for a citizen of a neutral country was due to a number of reasons. His father, my great grandfather, Vilhelm Dinesen, who had also fought the Germans, had died when Thomas was only three. Certainly he wanted to do his bit, but he also longed for the adventure and "the great things in life" and partly he came from an old family of soldiers, on both his father`s and mother`s side. Maybe, living with five women and his younger brother triggered that he needed to break away from a quiet life in Denmark.

I guess we all have dreams and visions, especially when we are young, driven by ideals, inspired by heroes and nurtured by literature, friends and family. We may think they are decided by ourselves and a result of mature thought, but when I proudly presented my grandmother with my own commission in to the The Royal Life Guards, she just smiled and nodded and said; " Very well my boy, that is the 5th generation of officers in the family".

My three brothers all joined the Danish army.

My grandfather however, struggled to be allowed to join the Allies and take part in the war and had to go via the French, British, American and finally the Canadian recruiting offices, before joining the Royal Highlanders of Canada, The Black Watch in June 1917.

To get a better insight in to that story and what happened up until November 1918 and understand the man, you should read Tom Buk Swienty`s book "Tommy and Tanne". And make sure you visit the upcoming exhibition at the Karen Blixen Museum, that Director Catherine Lefebvre and her team are curating, about Thomas Dinesen and the 1st World War. You can, of course also, read his own book "Merry Hell" or "No Man`s land" as it is titled in Danish.

One thing you may not know about him, but might have guessed, was that his courage was not a fleeting once in a lifetime thing. During the 2nd World War he harbored persecuted resistance fighters and weapons in his family home, on a regular basis. Luckily, other members of the resistance warned him, just after the famous or infamous raid on the Gestapo headquarters in Copenhagen. In the shattered building, they found plans of a raid on his home in Hillerød, that should have taken place the week after the bombing.

Neither did he abandon his love of adventure and at 70 joined the "Danish Adventurous club" on their anniversary celebration, where they toasted each other in Champagne on the top of the Ceops pyramid. Afterwards he joined a horseback ride through the desert and received a jolt in his back, when his horse

bucked. He had to pull himself together when the group arrived back, to be greeted by my grandmother. He had slipped 5 discs.

He was a loving father to his four children and passed on his values in many ways. Once when his youngest son, my uncle, was sick with polio, he laid a new shotgun on the bed and told him, that he would teach him to shoot when he got better, which he speedily did. My father, who sadly passed away last year and was looking forward to giving this speech today, have also filled our lives with stories of grandfather and how he had influenced my father`s life.

What I can add, being 13 years old when he died, is the perspective of one of ten grandchildren and the influence he had on me.

He was a fantastic grandfather, a very kind man, a good listener and a storyteller in his own right. Try to imagine having a grandfather, who had won a famous medal in a great war, hunted together with native Indians in America and tracked and shot a wounded water buffalo in the bush in Africa. Then try to imagine the stories he could tell.

He lived by his code and at his funeral was pronounced the most Christian man the priest had ever know, although he was a declared atheist. He passed two guiding lights on to us, "Everything worth doing, is worth doing well!" And "Practices makes perfect but trials makes a man". Not cheap or casual advice to pass on.

Never forcing us, he helped us along the journey of growing up, and gave us the ideal of what was expected of a healthy young boy. So we all knew, that on arrival for an always awaited holiday, we would have to show our latest scar for him and give the name of our current girlfriend for our grandmother, which resulted in self-inflicted wounds and invented romance.

He took us for walks on his estate in Jutland, told us stories from the Nordic Sagas, that he knew by heart and he taught us how to fish and respect nature and use carpenters tools in his little workshop in the basement. He could unscrew a screw with his thump, what a grandfather.

I never heard a harsh word spoken about him and have often wondered at the large and varied group of friends and acquaintances that surrounded him and my grandmother, not least on the 4th of May, to remember the liberation of Denmark, as the custom bids.

I realized early on what a large influence he had, shaping me in to a man, both while he was alive and up to this day. Values I have tried to pass on to my children, as best I could.

Therefore, I once again thank the The Danish war veterans of the Allied, for their generous initiative of erecting this bust. To me it stands to help us all remember what it means to do the right thing, even if we are frightened of the consequence and how we must support and join our allies against what can harm our country and us.

And that one day soon, I can take my grandson here and tell him stories of a great man, his great, great grandfather.

Speech delivered at the unveiling of my grandfather`s bust, Thomas Dinesen, VC, on the 12th of October 2018, in Copenhagen.

Thomas Dinesen, 1st Lieutenant – R, Danish Royal Life Guards.