# SGT John (Jack) Harrison D.C.M

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 11, 1936.—7.

# The Story of Sergeant John (Jack) Harrison D.C.M

Starting from his early life and expanding on his military service from 1930 to 1945 and including copy's of original documents and letters

## KEY STORIES CONTAINED WITHIN

**SERVICE WITH THE 11TH HUSSARS IN PALESTINE.**
Find a detailed account of his time in the middle east during the Arab uprising while enforcing the League of Nations mandate.

*Continued on Page 3*

**CHARGING THE GUNS**
Follow his foot steps in France as they try to stop the German advance. It is here that he wins his DCM in an against the odds attack on the French village of Huppy-Sur-Somme .

*Continued on Page 5*

**CAPTURE AT ACROMA IN LIBYA**
Learn of the events that lead to the his capture in North Africa and imprisonment at the hands of first the Italians and then the Germans.

*Continued on Page 14*

*A13 Cruiser Tank like the one driven by L/Cpl. J. Harrison at Huppy-sur-Somme*

*J. Harrison in Palestine with overturned A/C*

*Trooper J.Harrison 1930*

All information has been checked and verified with official War Diaries and personal documents.

# SGT J. HARRISON(JACK)

Jack and Annie's wedding day

**Wymeswold.**

HARRISON—BROWN.

On Saturday, at St. Mary's Church, the wedding took place of Miss Annie Brown, youngest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Brown, of Fore-street, and Mr. John Harrison, of the 11th Hussars, second son of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Harrison, of Rempstone. The bride was given away by her father and was attired in an ankle-length dress of beige coloured georgette and lace with beige hat, and carried a bonnet of crimson tulips and white heather. The two sisters of the bridegroom, the Misses Emma and Ruthie Harrison, attended the bride and wore dresses of pale green with hats to—— and carried sprays of daffodils. The bridegroom's brother, Mr. G. Harrison, Royal Artillery, fulfilled the duties of best man. The service was taken by the vicar. Afterwards a reception was held at the home of the bride's parents.

George Harrison Royal Horse Artillery

## THE EARLY YEARS

John Harrison (Jack) was born 16th January 1910 at Cropwell Butler in Nottinghamshire to Joseph and Hannah Harrison at Shepard's Cottages he joined sibling's George (1906) and Emma (1908) and then later by Gladys (1916), Joseph (1921) and then Ruth (1925). Its Ruth I have to thank for much information in this book and she told me that Joseph Jack's Farther had a disagreement with the land owner he worked for over him joining a farm workers union.

Little good it did him as he was sacked, this was a massive upheaval for the family as he had a good job as farm manager which came with a cottage this men't the family was now homeless and had to move.

They moved to Old Dalby where Joseph found work as a Farm labour and then eventually settling in Rempstone.

## MILITARY PATH

Work was very scarce in the late 20's and early 30's and many young men found great difficultly finding suitable work.

George the oldest of Children was First to enlist joining the Royal Horse Artillery in 1926.

While Jack I know worked at Farms in the next village of Wymeswold for a sort time he must have look on his older brother as his inspiration for he to enlisted in the 11th Hussars PWO in April 1930.

They both must have developed a love of horses growing up on farms to join the regiments they did.

Jack's time with Horses was to be sort lived he had joined at a time when the 11th Hussars had already began to be mechanized.

However he did take part in the Tidworth Tattoo in 1932, Jack rode in The Musical Ride and Great credit was due to the members, many men had never ridden a horse before and practiced diligently in the riding school for three months in their spare time.

The men of the ride all wore 1914 uniforms, sixty-four men took part, sixteen for each of the regiments in the Brigade.

It was said at the time this was one of the best Musical Rides ever produced at a Tattoo.

Jack while serving with the 11th had started a relationship with a local girl from Wymeswold, Annie Brown they were very much in love, true sweet hearts.

They were married at Wymeswold St Mary's Church in 1932 George, Jack's older brother George would for fill the duties of best man.

*Jack's time with Horses was to be sort lived he had joined at a time when the 11th Hussars had already began to be mechanized.*

George Harrison in John's Uniform
My great great Grandad

# Life at Tidworth 1930-1934

## KEEN ATHLETE

1931-1932 proved a very busy time for Jack based at Tidworth barracks he got to the final of the Featherweights Regimental Boxing Championship losing to Bnds Dipper who went on to be Army and Southern Command light weight Champion in 1934.

In 1931 Jack's shooting team won the Young Soldiers Championship and in 1932 The Regimental Cross Country Team won the Tidworth Garrison Cross-country Challenge Cup moreover "B" Squadron were winners of the Inter-Squadron Cross-country cup.

"B" SQUADRON, WINNERS OF THE INTER-SQUADRON CROSS-COUNTRY CUP, 1932.

WINNERS OF THE YOUNG SOLDIERS' CHALLENGE CUP

THE REGIMENTAL CROSS-COUNTRY TEAM
Winners of the Tidworth Garrison Cross-Country Challenge Cup, 1932.

Jack continued his boxing and Running until the Regiments orders to sail to Helmieh, Cairo, Egypt on the H.M.T "Neuralia" 15th November 1934.

# 11th Hussars Prince Albert's own

**"Treu und Fest" "Faithful and Strong"**

The 11th return to England after serving in India from 1921 to 1926 so Jack would have spent his time serving in UK until 1934.

It was During this time at home the regiment undertook the greatest change in there history, they became mechanized

The 11th and the 12th Lancers were the first two cavalry regiments to swap their horses for armored vehicles. This was a massive upheaval considering they had been a Mounted regiment for 213 years before.

Operation of the new tanks and armored cars was carried out by the Royal Tank Corps, and it was felt the age of the horse in modern combat was at an end.

Its was time for the cavalry to have a more up to date modus operandi and there was much to be done.

Training, maintenance, weapons, wireless and tactics all had to be mastered so just as well there was a long delay before the first vehicles had arrived.

## ROLLS ROYCES ARRIVE

Rolls Royces came in January 1929 followed by a new Lanchester in June 1929.

By the end of that year the regiment was equipped with 16 two seater Austin 7's, 30 Triumph motorcycles and some Crossley and Leyland six wheelers altogether some 117 vehicles

The regiment had now been in England from 1926 to 1934 and very busy time indeed converting to armored cars.

On the 15th of November 1934 they sailed from Southampton to Alexandria in Egypt.

They where to spend the next four years alternating between Egypt and Palestine. These years had acclimatized the regiment to the hot conditions, little did anyone realize how useful this would prove to be in the years to come.

There base was at Helmieh near Cairo under the command of Lt-Col John Galbraith.

## ABYSSINIAN CRISIS

Mussolini's North African empire included Cyrenaica (part of modern Libya) which bordered on Egypt. The Italians had built a 6ft high and 30ft across wire border which ran for 150 miles South of the Mediterranean, In 1935 Mussolini moved Libyan troops to the wire border which alarmed the British.

A mobile force was sent to defend the Western desert but it got bogged down in the Mersa Matruh area. This rendered them immobile lucky the treat of war receded but the crisis had pointed out deficiencies in the Army intelligence and this gave the 11th a sense of urgency.

As the reconnaissance regiment of 7th armored Division they created a confidential color coded map of the desert pointing to area's best suited for vehicles.

*Lanchester AFC as used in Palestine*

John would have spent his time serving in the UK until 1934

## PALESTINE 1936

An Arab rebellion had erupted in April 1935 as a result of the rise of Jewish immigration not helped by Hitler and Stalin's purges. Another factor was the population was growing dissatisfied with British rule and after seeing the debacle of the Abyssinian crisis Britain looked weak and easy to pick a fight with.

*1931 Trooper Harrison 11th Hussars*

*Continued on page 4*

# The Arab Rebellion

PALESTINE 1936

By the time the 11th arrived in July the situation had reached the stage of guerrilla warfare. The 11th at first where based in Nablus from there they provided military escorts through bandit country in the central hill massif. This type of work gave great responsibility to Troop units acting on their own, negotiating minefields and under. The RAF were responsible over all for military security and they covered the South.

The 11th were spread out in the North C squadron operated in the Galilean Hills, A squadron (Jack's) at Nablus and operated down to Deir Sharaf and B squadron based at the hornets nest of Jenin covered Deir Sharaf to Affula.

*X = Mount Abel, camp and guard tent Nablus*

There was a big engagement on September 3rd 1936 on the Nablus-Tulkarm Road near 'Windy Corner.' It went on all day and involved the shooting down of an RAF plane, the deaths of 3 members of the infantry and wounding of 8. Sergeant Harry Petch was in command of 2 armoured cars escorting an ambulance to Nablus. It was night and he spotted a tripwire in his headlights a few inches above the road surface. He got out under a hail of bullets and managed to disarm the lethal booby-trap device and bring it back to base. He continued with his escort duty and was awarded the DCM. He ended World War 2 as a major and Squadron leader with a MC.

*A and RHQ car en route for Nablus 18.7.1936 x marks J.Harrison vehicle and the man in the road is Lt T. Payne Galwoay their Adj.*

The regiment returned to Egypt in October to carry on with reconnaissance work and building on the connection they had formed with the RAF (208 Army Cooperation Squadron). RAF personnel travelled in 11th Hussar vehicles while Hussars flew in RAF Lysanders for a better view of their areas. Due to a resurgence of the Arab troubles, the regiment moved back and forth between Egypt and Palestine until 1939.

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# Charging the guns

## THE ABBEVILLE BRIDGEHEAD

At 18:00 hours they where ready to start North from Breval passing though Veron and stopping at Gisors at 22:00 hours.

Order were received to move North Jack left at 03:00 hours arriving at Aumount about 7 miles South of the Somme at 10:00 hours.

On passing Aumale which had been bombed they caught sight of a dead Woman and Child lying in the road where they had been machine gunned by the Germans.

This must have served as good motivation to the men.

The 10th harbored in a large wood near Aumale and were bombed without suffering any hits.

In the morning they moved East to Molliens Vidame spotting a large number of German Bombers but they dropped their deadly cargo more than a mile away.

May 26th 1940 the tanks left at 02:00 hours for Ramburelles arriving safely and stopped to rest and preform maintenance. Later that evening a dispatch rider sent from brigade with orders for a conference was killed on the way, so the 10th's Commanding officer was late to receive his summons, he rushed to brigade HQ arriving when it was almost over. He received separate orders for attack on the following day. The orders were issued at 22:00 hours and the tanks left at 23:00 hours.

The attack was due to take place at 05:00 hours and French Artillery and Infantry support was promised.

French intelligence had reported that Huppy-sur-Somme was defended by inferior troops with little or no anti tank weapons.

Due to wireless communication problem the 10th were not unable to communicate with brigade and were not told that the attack would be delayed for 1 hour due to the French still moving the Artillery with horses. A dispatch rider bringing the order was killed or went astray so they attacked alone.

Even if such support been forthcoming it would been a desperate enough plan attacking a prepared position with light tanks, but it would prove disastrous.the 10th attacked at the agreed time straight into the rising sun, which made observation almost impossible. They were heavily engaged with anti tank guns in slit trenches in a very strong positions.

News started to filter trough that the attack had been delayed by an hour but it was to late the 10th had already lost almost all it light tanks so they continued the fight alone.

*Two Mk VI's of the 10th hussars (unit code 6) disabled between Saint-Maxent and Huppy-sur-Somme*

Continued on page 8

# Heavy price for poor communication and Intelligence

## RACE FOR BREST BEGINS

Many gallant action were fought. 2nd Lt Milbanke had two tanks destroyed under him and was attempting in a third to find a weak spot in the defenses when ordered to withdraw.

Squadron Sergeant Major Canning finding his guns would not depress sufficiently to fire into the slit trenches around him was seen to dismount and fire his revolver at the occupants, and calmly digging out a jammed case with his penknife. Another member of a tank crew in similar circumstances was seen to set about the enemy with a heavy crowbar off his tank.

Jack to found his own tank in peril when they came to the end of a wood he came face to face with an anti tank gun and machine gun. His tank commander was engaging another anti tank gun on the flank so Jack opened his flack shield and killed the crew with his revolver and then drove his tank over the position. He most certainly saved the life of the tank commander, for this prompt action he was later awarded the D.C.M .

French Intelligence had completely underestimated the strength and quality of the Germans

Knocked out A13 like the on driven by Jack

Webley Revolver like the one's issued to tank crew

*Continued on page 8*

# The long drive for home

## ESCAPE AND FIGHT ANOTHER DAY

Although the attack had penetrated about six hundred yards and pressed home with the reserve squadron the enemy was just to strong and at such strength that it was impossible to overcome them or even outflank them.

What was left of the tanks were withdrawn to Hodeng-au-Bosc with now only 10 left of the original 30 tanks.

The Bays had also suffered badly and the German Bridgehead remain intact.

The next day the 51st Highland Division arrived in the area and 1st Armoured Division was placed under their command, although 2nd Armoured brigade could now only muster a composite regiment mainly of 9th Lancers with mixed squadron of 10th Hussars and Bays. On May 31st the remainder of the regiment left for Les Hogues, arriving on June 1st and organizing themselves as lorried infantry.

Meanwhile the evacuation of Dunkirk was taking place and it seemed as if the 51st Highland Division and the 1st Armoured Division were the only British troops left in France.

On the June 7th the 2nd Armoured Brigade was ordered to withdraw South of the Seine and was Carried out with some difficulty on the roads crammed with refugees.

Detachments of the 10th were sent to blow bridges behind the brigade and carry out patrols with the French during which some losses were incurred.

The retreat continued westwards, bypassing Le Manns. By June 15th the French were on the point of collapse and the 10th received orders to move to Brest immediately. They drove 250 miles through Brittany in seventeen hours being cheered in almost all the villages through which they passed.

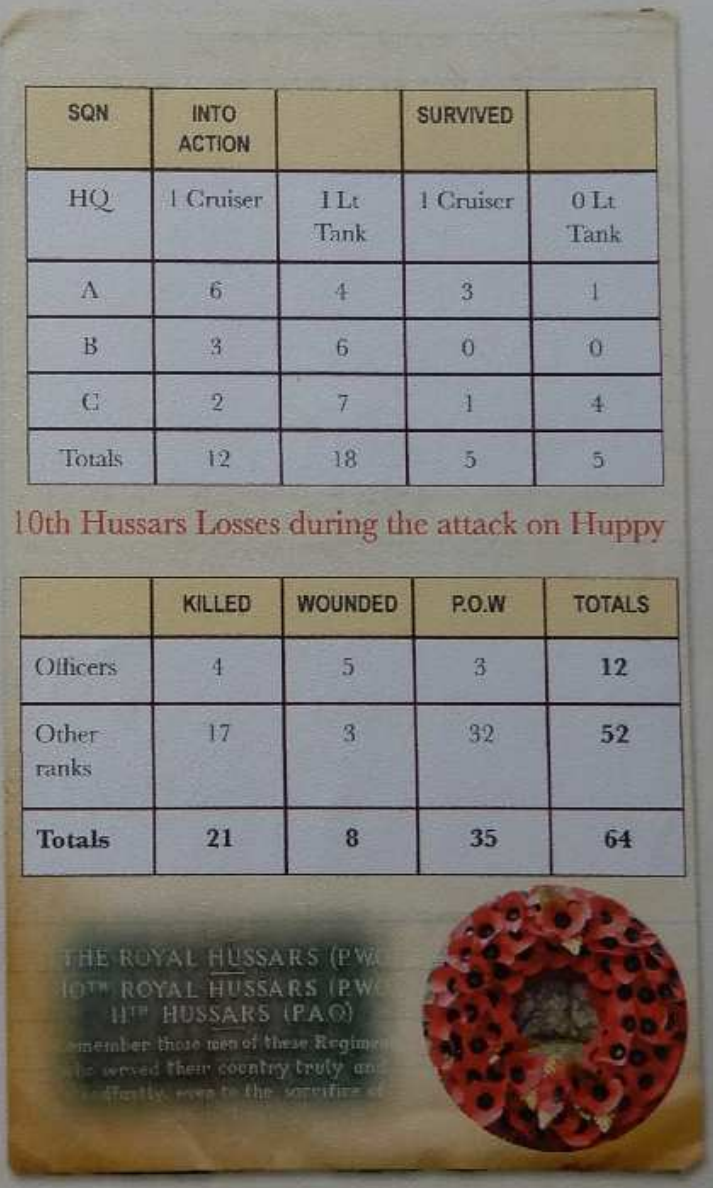
That night was spent in a wood about 15 miles from the port of brest and the following day they were ordered to go to the docks at 10 pm the remaining vehicles were now destroyed and on the 16th of June 1940 they departed on the Manx-maid.

Mines had been dropped at the entrance of the harbor but the Captain of a cargo boat had taken a Bering on them as they fell with a volunteer crew led the way out safely. Arriving in Plymouth without further event at 8:30pm on June 17th 1940 the last troops to leave France.

| SQN | INTO ACTION | | SURVIVED | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| HQ | 1 Cruiser | 1 Lt Tank | 1 Cruiser | 0 Lt Tank |
| A | 6 | 4 | 3 | 1 |
| B | 3 | 6 | 0 | 0 |
| C | 2 | 7 | 1 | 4 |
| Totals | 12 | 18 | 5 | 5 |

10th Hussars Losses during the attack on Huppy

| | KILLED | WOUNDED | P.O.W | TOTALS |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Officers | 4 | 5 | 3 | **12** |
| Other ranks | 17 | 3 | 32 | **52** |
| **Totals** | **21** | **8** | **35** | **64** |



# Huppy-sur-Somme from the German perspective

## HUBERT BRINKFORTH SCORES 11

The Antitank company of Hubert Brinkforth, the 14 Panzerjager Infaterie Regiment, was emplaced in the South end of the village of Huppy-sur-Somme to the south of Abbeville. The town only had one approach route. The Germans knew this and the spear of the XXXVIII AK in the bridgehead on the left margin of the Somme were hastily organized in position. Brinkforth had skillfully camouflaged his antitank piece in the outskirts of an orchard.

It was at dawn shortly after 05:00 hours the noise of the enemy armor approaching was heard.

Alarm! And brinkforth and the other hunters occupied their positions behind the antitank arms. At 5:30 hours the first tanks were spotted advancing on the German positions. The message sent to the German battalion HQ was "the enemy attacks with tanks!".

The antitank position had selected its targets and at 5:42 hours Brinkforth saw the first tank, his loader prepared an antitank grenade. Brinkforth continued to count the enemy tanks, about fifteen tanks, then the order came from the gun leader, Uffz Krohn: "open fire!".

The grenade fired by Brinkforth hit the first British tank at about 150 meters away at first there was no effect, then the tank slowly came to a halt and then sudden explosion and the tank flew through the air.

Minutes after a second tank was on fire right in front of the German position. Now Brinkforth targeted the command tank it had a blue and white pennant in the turret, it was a very large tank of 30 tons and it was unlikely that the pak 37 mm could penetrate its armor, but with multiple hits Brinkforth was able to knock out this tank too.

Now the British tanks were beginning to target Brinkforth's position he needed to relocate his antitank piece and fast.

Now back in the fight Brinkforth's gun repeatedly sought to inflict hits on the British tanks.

Then by accident a tank rolled over to Brinkforth's position and were only 40 feet away when Brinkforth's gun crew detected them and turned their weapons and beat them with multiple hits. Out of the 30 enemy tanks, Brinkforth and his crew had accounted for 11; demoralized and battered the remaining British tanks withdrew from the battlefield.

All this had been achieved in just 20 minutes from 05:42 until 06:02 the report of the German Army dated May 28th 1940 read: "Yesterday from the first hours, the enemy carries out strong attacks against our bridgeheads in Abbeville and Amiens. In spite of the tank support the enemy has not been

Brinkforth receiving the Knights Cross from Hitler for his actions at Huppy-Sur-Somme

Continued on page 10.

# Huppy-sur-Somme from the German perspective

## HUBERT BRINKFORTH SCORES 11

Hubert Brinkforth was a hero in Germany the First Gefreiter (Corporal) to win The Knights Cross of the Iron Cross equal to the American Medal of Honor.
Sadly Hubert didn't survive the War he was killed in action 5th June 1942 aged 26 by Soviet artillery near Pogostje Russia.

...nur 20 Minuten...
...r Richtschütze Hu-
...rt Brinkforth
...l britische
...anzer ab.
...n Ruhm aber
...onnte er nur
...ei Monate lang
genießen

Die größte, die einmalige, die nicht wiederholbare Stunde im Leben des 24jährigen Hubert Brinkforth dauerte nur 20 Minuten. Der Panzerjäger Brinkforth, ein Bauernsohn aus Marl in Westfalen, Bäcker von Beruf, begegnete dem Ruhm in der Nähe des flandrischen Dorfes Huppy, das bis dahin so unbekannt gewesen war wie Brinkforth selbst. Aber jene winzige Zeitspanne von 5.40 Uhr bis 6 Uhr am 27. Mai 1940 reichte aus, um beide für immer in die martialischen Kapitel der Kriegsgeschichte einzurei-

Der Preis: Nur zwei Jahre nach der Panzerschlacht v... Abbeville bei Brinkforth ...

# BUCKINGHAM PALACE

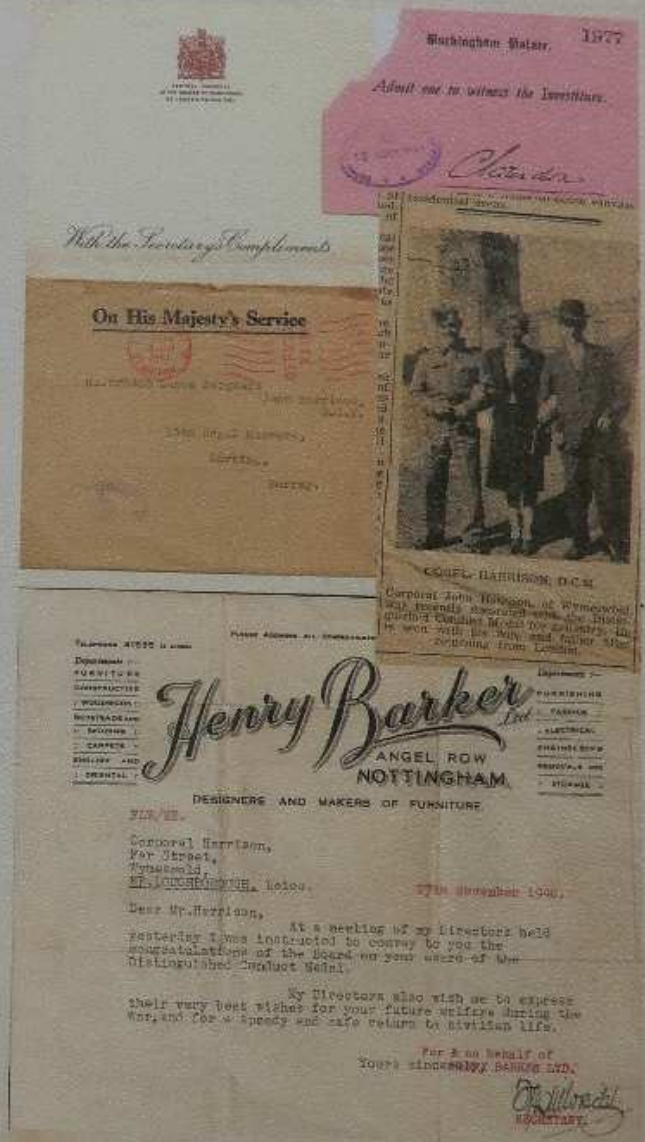
## INVESTITURE AT BUCKINGHAM PALACE

Leaving Plymouth by train for Warminster and arriving at 17:30 hours they were bused to a new camp at Longbridge Deverill that was barley ready for them. Everybody was glad to be back on home soil at all, so all the deficiencies were temporarily forgotten. Now began a long period of rebuilding and training.

On the 31st of October 1940 the following Honors and Awards for gallantry on Active Service in France to officers and NCOs were published in the London Gazette:

| NAME | AWARDED |
|---|---|
| Capt RM. Milbank | MC |
| 2Lt SCTW. Moorhouse | MC |
| | |
| SSM O. Canning | DCM |
| Sgt. E. Maile | DCM |
| Cpl. J. Harrison | DCM |
| Tpr S. Powell | DCM |
| | |
| Tpr R. McHugh | MM |

On 8th October 1940 the 10th moved camps to Headley more intensive training and exercises.
The 10th were visited by the Prime Minister Winston Churchill on the 14th February 1941 and he watched a demonstration of some 23 tanks of various vintages and types.
13th of March 1941 Jack now promoted to lance Sergeant attended an Investiture at Buckingham Palace with the following men SSM O. Canning, Sgt. Maile, Cpl. S. Powell. He was also accompanied by Joseph Harrison his farther who didn't own a suit and had to borrow one.


Buckingham Palace. 1877
Admit one to witness the Investiture.
With the Secretary's Compliments
On His Majesty's Service
Henry Barker Ltd
ANGEL ROW
NOTTINGHAM
DESIGNERS AND MAKERS OF FURNITURE
Corporal Harrison,
Dear Mr.Harrison,
Yours sincerely,

Lance Sergeant Jack Harrison the first Wymeswold solider Awarded a medal for gallantry

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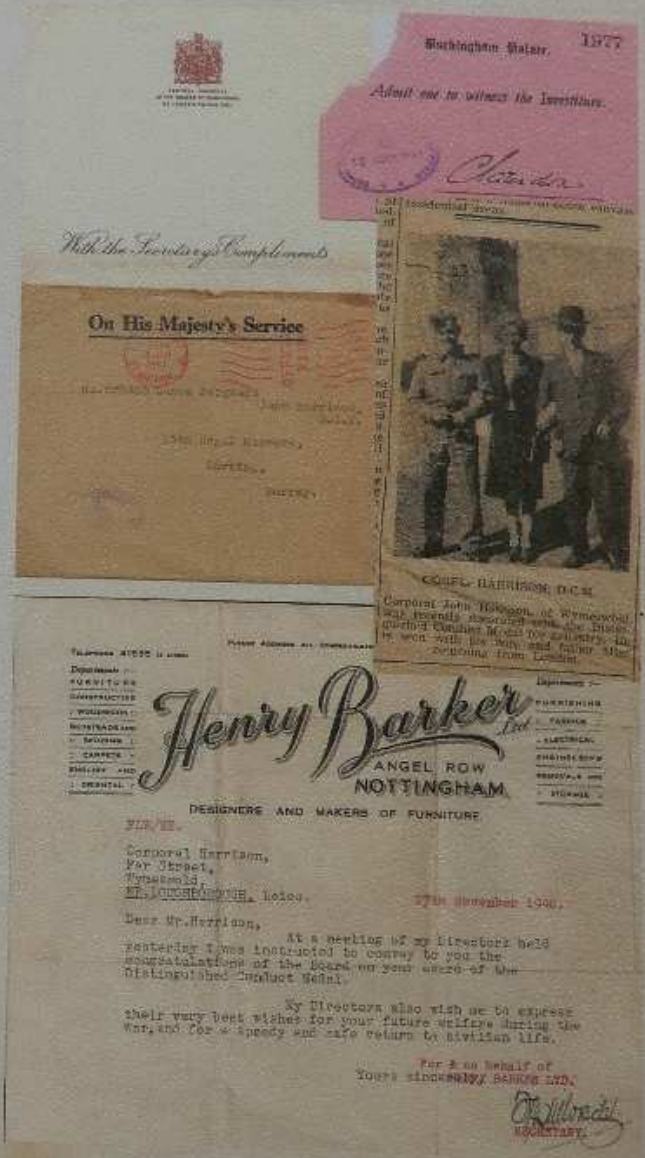
Buckingham Palace. 1937
Admit one to witness the Investiture.
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Henry Barker Ltd
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NOTTINGHAM
DESIGNERS AND MAKERS OF FURNITURE
Corporal Harrison,
Par Street,
Wymeswold,
Dear Mr.Harrison,
At a meeting of my Directors held
Distinguished Conduct Medal.
My Directors also wish me to express
their very best wishes for your future welfare during the
War, and for a speedy and safe return to civilian life.
Yours sincerely,
SECRETARY.

Lance Sergeant Jack Harrison the first Wymeswold solider Awarded a medal for gallantry

# Band of Brothers

## THREE BROTHERS ALL SERVING IN THE M.E.F

By now all three brothers were fighting in North Africa, George with the Royal Horse Artillery, Jack now with the 4th Hussars and Joseph with the Royal Artillery.

Jack and George would meet up and spend over two months together, in particular was a very drunken evening in George's sergeants mess playing what I believe is a drinking game called Sing, Say, or Shout. George describes it as not a game for the ladies in a letter to Annie dated 6th March 1942. In the letter George also enclosed the photo below taken on the previous Saturday to mark his winning the Military Medal.

Jack and older brother George together 1942 after he was awarded the M.M

Joe before his capture in Alexandria 1941

Also in the letter George mentions younger brother Joseph as being gone, its not clear but he must have be posted MIA. He was in fact a prisoner of war and now in Campo, PG 59 Servigliano Italy, later he would be transferred to Stalag Altengrabow after the Italians capitulated.

It would happen that this letter was very special indeed It would be his last to Annie at least, he say's "*whatever happens to us - do not forget it was for those we hold dear and our Country. Joe has gone - we may be next who can tell. But do not worry -Jack will be ok he has got his tank but me -I have Nothing*".

Campo PG 59 Servigliano Italy

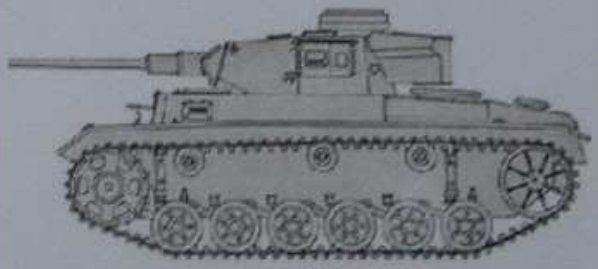
# Jack with the 4th Hussars

At the moment it is unclear to me the exact date of Jack's transfer to the 4th I do know for certain that he was in "B" Squadron 4th QO Hussars joining them in January 1942.
At this time Jack was feeling very low his brother had now moved away and other Brother Joseph was still a prisoner.
The 4th was transforming at this time building up personal and Vehicles. In April 1942 they received 20 Stuart and 19 Grants strength of the regiment was now 33 officers and 586 other ranks.

27th May 1942 the Regiment was warned to stand by to move to the Western Desert at six hours notice.

Jack far right in the desert

Jack Arrived at Cupuzzo 00:30 on the 2nd June 1942.
"B" Squadron was ordered to move out on the 8th June 1942 under the command of Major Knight they were to join 2nd Amd Bde and were attached to the Bays.
On the 12th June 1942 at 14:30 hours "B" Squadron was ordered to engage 8 Amd Cars and 9 M13's at Maduret el Ghesceuasc. Whilst engaging these, approximately 12 Mk III's and 8 Mk IV's, supported by 8 x 88 mm and a number of 50 mm guns appeared, from this action only one tank was able to escape.



Panzer Kw III (Mk III)

Italian M13 tank

88 mm Antitank gun

Stuart tanks of the 8th Hussars, like the one Jack commanded

Panzer Mk IV

# Prisoner Jack

## CAPTURED AND WOUNDED IN LIBYA

Jack now captured and wounded was sent to an unknown hospital in Italy, Jack wrote a letter home to Annie giving his address as simply In hospital.

In the letter dated 26 June 1942 not sure when Annie would have received it but Jack say's *"to cut a long story short I was captured on the 12th of this month and collected a piece of shrapnel right thorough my right leg just above the Knee"* his right hand and nose had also been burnt.

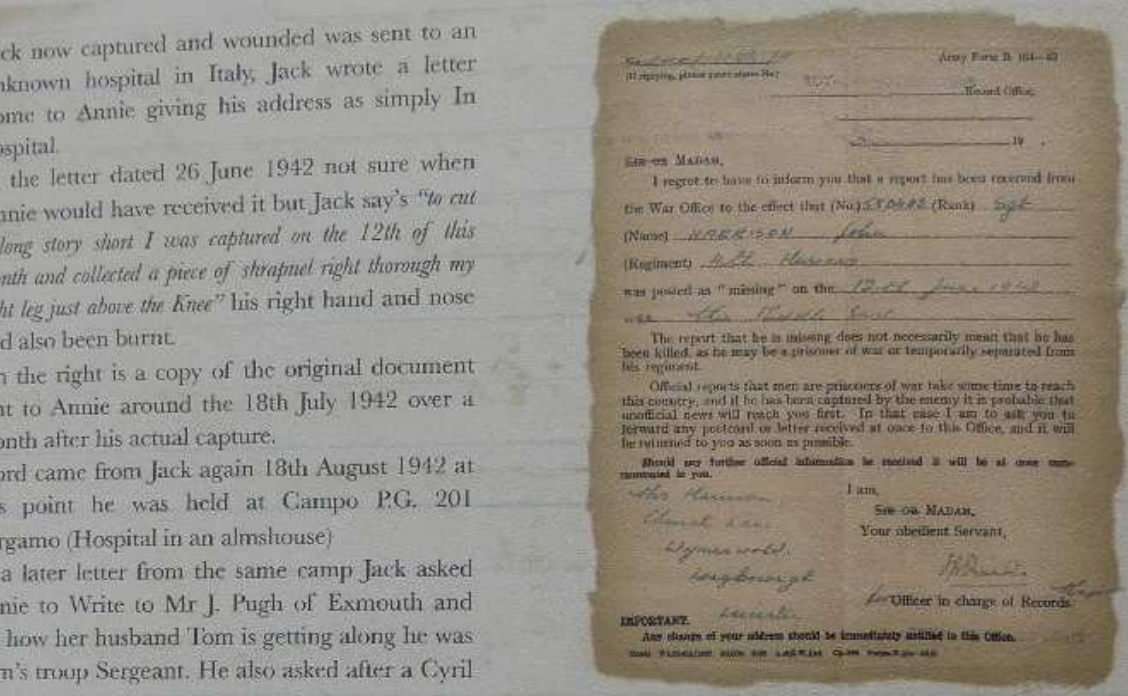
On the right is a copy of the original document sent to Annie around the 18th July 1942 over a month after his actual capture.

Word came from Jack again 18th August 1942 at this point he was held at Campo P.G. 201 Bergamo (Hospital in an almshouse)

In a later letter from the same camp Jack asked Annie to Write to Mr J. Pugh of Exmouth and ask how her husband Tom is getting along he was Tom's troop Sergeant. He also asked after a Cyril Venn of Great Bar Birmingham who he had spent five weeks with in the first hospital in Italy.

By the 22nd of September 1942 official word had reached the War office that Jack was in Italian hands.

In a letter dated 6 October 1942 Jack had still not received any mail from home and was now quite desperate for news, however his leg is now much better. Jack still hope's to meet up with brother Joe at some point.



Army Form B. 104—82.

Record Office,

19

Sir or Madam,

I regret to have to inform you that a report has been received from the War Office to the effect that (No.) 5506493 (Rank) Sgt (Name) HARRISON John (Regiment) 4th Hussars was posted as "missing" on the 12th June 1942 in Libya North East

The report that he is missing does not necessarily mean that he has been killed, as he may be a prisoner of war or temporarily separated from his regiment.

Official reports that men are prisoners of war take some time to reach this country, and if he has been captured by the enemy it is probable that unofficial news will reach you first. In that case I am to ask you to forward any postcard or letter received at once to this Office, and it will be returned to you as soon as possible.

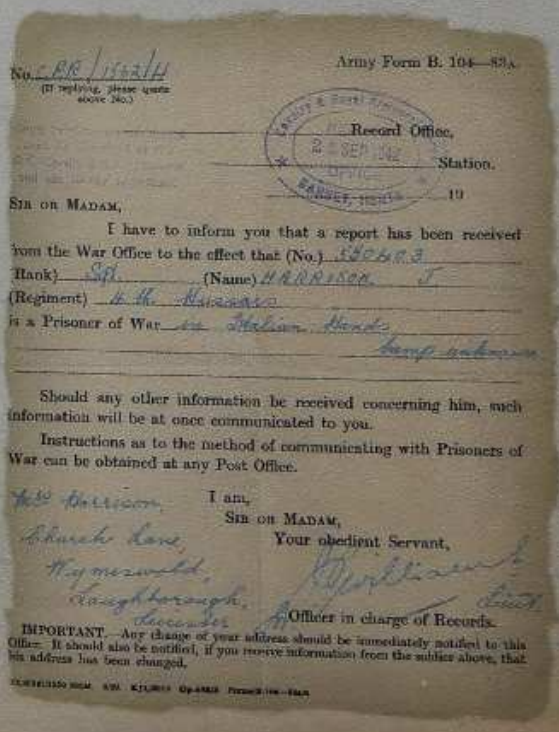
Should any further official information be received it will be at once communicated to you.

I am,
Sir or Madam,
Your obedient Servant,

Mrs Harrison
Church Lane
Wymeswold.
Loughborough
Leics.

Officer in charge of Records.

IMPORTANT.
Any change of your address should be immediately notified to this Office.



No. CAR/15622/H
(If replying, please quote above No.)

Army Form B. 104—82A.

Record Office,

Station.

19

Sir or Madam,

I have to inform you that a report has been received from the War Office to the effect that (No.) 5506493
Rank) Sgt. (Name) HARRISON J.
(Regiment) 4th Hussars
is a Prisoner of War in Italian Hands
Camp unknown

Should any other information be received concerning him, such information will be at once communicated to you.

Instructions as to the method of communicating with Prisoners of War can be obtained at any Post Office.

Mrs Harrison
Church Lane
Wymeswold,
Loughborough,
Leicester

I am,
Sir or Madam,
Your obedient Servant,

Officer in charge of Records.

IMPORTANT.—Any change of your address should be immediately notified to this Office. It should also be notified, if you receive information from the soldier above, that his address has been changed.

# 1st Regiment Royal Horse Artillery

## FIRST BATTLE OF EL ALAMEIN TANK V'S GUN BATTLE

Jack's Brother BSM George Harrison was preparing for the first Battle of El Alamian and had his unit had taken up battle positions on 1st of June 1942 seeing action on the 2nd of June when his unit destroyed 11 MKIII panzers. Its was the 3rd of July that was to prove a black day for the family as George paid the ultimate sacrifice for his King and Country.

Georges Battery were attacked in the late afternoon in a heavy attack from the South West the enemy deploying 15 tanks. The attack came on with great vigor, but the Battery in direct enemy axis of advance and although engaged by Armoured personnel carriers, machine guns and 105 mm guns, had a very effective tank action which broke up the enemy attack and forced them eventually to retire in disorder. The Germans suffered three hits and the tanks were eventually blown up by them selves.

Several other tanks were known to have been hit and damaged, the Battery had one gun disabled by enemy fire and the detachment either Killed or wounded. The tank v's gun battle lasted about three quarters of an hour and at its end George was no more there was no body or grave for George and the family his name is simply on the third column of the Alamein Memorial in Egypt.

Years later George's Dad Joseph found out from his widow Grace that there was no Grave to speak of and broke down saying " *I thought my lad had a grave* " Grace had been invited to go to the cemetery in Egypt to take part in a service commemorate all the service men lost their lives and have no marked Grave.

As far as I am aware nobody has ever visited the Cemetery from the Family.

British 25 pounder at El Alamein and large pile of spent shell cases

Burning MIII panzer

# BSM George Harrison M.M.

KILLED IN ACTION 3RD JULY 1942

1st Regiment Royal Horse Artillery

ALAMEIN MEMORIAL

Column 3

Held in honor as one who served King and Country in the world war of 1939-1945 and gave his life to save mankind from tyranny. May his sacrifice help to bring the peace and freedom for which he died.

# George's last letter

COPY OF THE ORIGINAL LETTER DATED 6TH MARCH 1942

1060574 B.S.M. Harrison G.
1. R.H.A. M.E.F.
6-3-42.

Dear Annie

Jack and I have spent a very pleasant evening together. We have been in my Sgts mess all the evening. We have played "Sing, Say, or Show." not a game for ladies. But what a game. My sides ache. We have been together for over two months now. Last Saturday we had our photo taken together. I promised him tonight I would send one to you. I have just sent him back to his camp. The time being 11.00 P.M. So I am writing this before going to bed. Tomorrow we meet, and go to the pictures. We had the photo taken last Saturday because I had just been awarded the M.M. Not such a good medal as Jacks. But a medal never-the-less. There is not much I can write about Annie. I seldom get any letters from anywhere. Have not heard from home for months.

# George's last letter continued

COPY OF THE ORIGINAL LETTER DATED 6TH MARCH 1942

Grace says she writes. but I never get them. God am I fed up. Shall I be glad when this is over? Shall we all? I'll say we shall.

There is nothing more I can say now Sister. So will say oh and say good night. Keep smiling and God Bless you all. Whatever happens to us - do not forget it was for those we hold dear and our country. Joe has gone - we may be next - who can tell. But do not worry. Jack will be OK. He has got his faith, just like us.

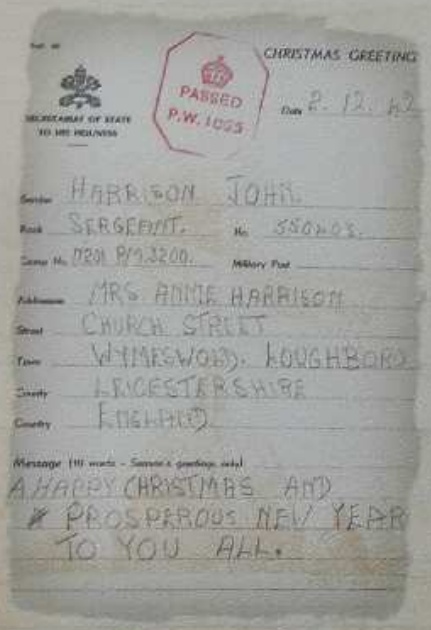
Once and again always remember what the French say "Courage" for your Effectionate brother

P.S. give my Love to your mother. Dear old Soul. and my love to the Children x x x x x x

# Letter's from Home

## AT LAST JACK RECEIVES LETTER FROM HOME

At last Jack finally gets letters from home and three come at once all from Annie. What a massive morale boost this must have been for Jack he say's in a letter dated 3rd November 1942 "*I must say that I am quite fit again now, and very happy at receiving news from you Darling,, so you see we really have nothing to worry about now, only just grin and long for our reunion which will surely come and before long I hope*" In a letter dated 10th November 1942 Jack receives word from Gladys that older brother George is missing to which Jacks say's he is not worried. He later learnt of his death and only ever referred to him in later letters as poor old G.




A Christmas Greeting from Campo P.G. 201 2nd December 1942.

A post card dated 9th January 1943 "*My Darling Anne, arrived here last night and may have to be here a considerable time so please use this ad. Do not know what to do about Joe now conditions here seem very favorable so might get him here. Cheerio love Jack*" xxxx

xxxx

xxxx

Jack had now transferred to Campo P.G.78 Sulmona were he was to stay until September 1943. As the Italian government neared collapse, rumors among the inmates that an evacuation of the camp was imminent. They woke to find the camp guards had deserted them. On the 14th of September German troops arrived to escort the prisoners north to captivity in Germany, but not before hundreds had escaped into the hills. I remember my dad telling of Jack trying to escape and being captured he must have been one of many heading to the hills I know that they where captured on mass after a tip off from people in Sulmona.

# Now in German hands

## JACK IS TRANSFERRED TO STALAG IV B. GERMANY

After Jack's capture by the Germans he wrote to Annie on the 7th October 1943 the original post card is on the right of this page.

It is unclear of the initial camp possibly a transit camp but Jack remarks of the drastic change of temperature to that of Italy.

From 1st November 1943 he was in Stalag IV B the largest prisoner of war camp in Germany.

Jack is however impressed by the Germans organization and tells of how in contrast to the Italians they were bathed, clothed, fumigated, inoculated and vaccinated in about an hour.

By 13th December Jack had settled into a routine of eat, drink and sleep the weather was very cold and Snow was on the ground but the red cross parcels were coming in, in large quantities. His health and spirits were good but he longed for news of Joe and mail from home.

Jack was now receiving regular mail from home and the camp officers had even clubbed together to buy all the men a beer for Christmas.

Word is received from Joe who is also in German hands at Stalag XI B on the 6th May 1944.

After a good start to camp life receiving many red cross parcels and letters the next few months would tell a different story of no parcels or mail coming for long periods and this wore down Jack's sprits somewhat.

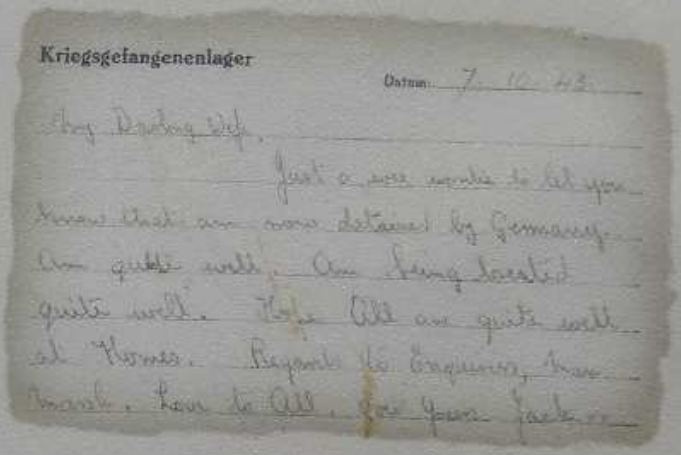
In October 1944 Jack received a letter from the Royal Armoured Corps Records, it was a request for information about a missing Trooper O. B. Betts 7933340.

He had been "Presumed Killed in Action" on the 12th June 1942.

Trooper Betts was in the tank commanded by Jack that took part in action in Bir Bellefaa about 12 miles south of Acroma (Libya).

Some wrecked tanks and bodies of several unknown soldiers had been found at this place.

On the next page I decided to but the original letter of response as a reminder of the brutality of war but also my Grandad Jack's attention to detail and his ability to recall this information over 2 years later.


Kriegsgefangenenlager

Datum: 7. 10. 43

Dear Darling Wife,

Just a few words to let you know that am now detained by Germany. Am quite well. Am being treated quite well. Hope All are quite well at Home. Regards to Enquirers, Love Mark. Love to All. For your Jack xxx

Jack in prison camp

Main Gates of Stalag IV B

Continued on page 21

# RE: 7933340 Trp BETTS, O.B.

JACK'S LETTER TO CAVALRY AND ROYAL ARMOURED CORPS RECORDS

..ief i/c Cavalry and Royal
Armoured Corps Records,
ENGLAND.

STALAG IV B.
GERMANY.
16th October, 1944.

AG/GG/VH

Dear Sir,

RE: 7933340 Tpr BETTS, O.B.

With reference to your enquiry CPR/C/ENQ respecting the above mentioned man, I would inform you that Tpr BETTS O.B. Army Number 7933340 was a member of the tank crew which I commanded and was in an action in the neighbourhood of the place you mention in your letter.

I am unable to guarantee that this was the actual place but the following order received by me, if checked with either Major R.Knight or Captain E.A.N. Johnson, M.C. may possibly help, and localise more accurately the engagement. This order read "Attack enemy tanks course 1 1/2 miles on bearing 160° change to 180° for another 1 1/2 miles". Position for bearing was taken from S.E. corner of the "box" held by the Brigade of Guards.

During this engagement our tank was hit and Trooper BETTS and the rest of the crew successfully evacuated the tank and from then onwards I lost touch with Tpr BETTS.

From information which I received later from Sergeant WEBB, a man resembling BETTS mounted his tank which was afterwards hit and put out of action in the course of which the man resembling BETTS lost his head, hands and feet. At the same time a man resembling Trooper OXBROW mounted the same tank and I believe was afterwards killed.

I regret that I cannot give you the serial number of the tanks used by our Squadron but these were issued to us from TDS at Capuzzo Junction on June 4/5 1942, Capuzzo. It was here that I signed for the tank issued and in which the action described above took place.

Of the men taking part in this action, the following are the only three whom I actually saw were killed :-

Corporal BURRY F. 7899417.
Trooper GARDNER J.G.M. 2987511.
Trooper MURPHY M. 7934151.

The only other information I can pass on is that received from Corporal HOPKER and Trooper PUGH, in that the following men were badly wounded and unlikely to have evacuated their tanks :-

Lance Sergeant NORMAN P. 7885444
Trooper STARLING G.A. 7926828.
Trooper ORMEROD J.S. 566038.
Trooper ANDREWS G.R. 7942162.
Trooper HUTCHISON Number and Initials unknown.

...../2

# RE: 7933340 Trp BETTS, O.B.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

.....sheet 2.

The last four mentioned men were all in the same tank Commanded by Corporal MURRAY which also took part in the same engagement.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

John Harrison

RANK. Sergt.

SER.No. 557403

# RED ARMY MOVES IN

## LIBERATION OF STALAG IV B

Jack spent in total two years and two hundred and Fifty days as a P.O.W in Italian and German hands. My Farther told me of his hate for the Italians, I don't think they looked after them as well as the Germans.
He certainly rated the Germans as being very efficient and organized.

There are also some incomplete stories of camp life that have been passed down, one involved an escape attempt by way of a tunnel. Unfortunately the Germans found it and filled it in with the mens own excreta which I always found amusing, I can just picture the German commandant saying "*Now crawl though zat*".

Jack was liberated by the Soviet Army on the 23rd April 1945.

The Russians were in no hurry to repatriate the British and American prisoners to their homelands, they were held for over another month and refused to release them until flags and a band were supplied.

Some Individual solders escaped and made it back to British or American lines.

The greatest day arrived on the 23rd of May when they were handed over to the Americans who conveyed them to Halle airport. For three days they were treated splendidly.

The Camp was later to be used by the Russians as a gulag for Nazi P.O.W and nearly seven thousand Germans died there between 1945 and 1948.

Now the site is covered in dense forest all that remains of the buildings is ironically the ruins of the latrine block (pictured opposite)

Ruins of the latrine building as it is today

# PRISONER RETURNS HOME

## WELCOME HOME

The Welcome home Flags were out in Wymeswold on the 8th June 1945 to honour Jack's home coming. Jack had arrived in England some 45 hour later was in his own home, showing much appreciation to Mr A Prince, for a free taxi service.

Jack stated how grateful he was for the kindness show to him and his family while he was away.

He also stated that he rather do a seven year stretch in England than go through his experiences again.

Jack worked for 20 years at the local Brush Works at Loughborough.

He was a keen gardener and reader and both Jack and Annie were standard bearers for the British Legion.

He took particular pride in his job of Maintaining the churchyard recognized as one of the loveliest in the county, he worked long hours to keep it mown and tidy.

Wymeswold Church Grounds looked after by Jack and where his ashes lay

25 years after the welcome flag were put up aged 60 Jack died in 1970 a sad loss to the family as well as the village a man of character and courage who could have told many lively stories of his wartime adventures, but didn't talk not even to his wife Annie. He never spoke about events which lead to him winning the D.C.M.

This spurned me to find out the truth and these pages are the results of my research and I hope you have enjoyed reading them as much as I enjoyed finding out about my Grandad.

Jack and Annie on Left

# THE
# 10th ROYAL HUSSARS
# (PWO)

# AT THE BATTLE OF HUPPY
# MONDAY
# MAY 27 1940

Researched and Written by Wayne Price

## Introduction.

The 10th of May 1940 saw the end of the so called "phoney war" which had seen a vast French army preparing itself to defend its sacred lands against the Nazi German threat. Over the previous decade many European countries had fallen to Hitler, some without bloodshed, such as Austria and Czechoslovakia and others who had defended themselves, like Poland, but had been crushed under the relentless onslaught of the German Blitzkrieg with a huge loss of life on both sides.

Now it was the turn of Western Europe. The countries of Holland Luxembourg and Belgium hoped that their neutral status would protect them but history had shown that there was little hope to be gained in that direction as far as Germany was concerned. France was sure that an invasion was highly likely; history again had shown that France and Germany shared a bitter litany of wars and mutual hatred. The armistice signed after the First World War had seen the victorious allies impose crippling demands in terms of land, equipment and money on the defeated imperial Germany, France among all the allied nations was the most aggressive in seeking the harshest sanctions so that Germany could never again threaten her borders much less occupy sacred French land. Nazi Germany, (itself built on the perceived treachery of the politicians and Generals of the First World War), in its new resurgent state wanted to reverse these demands and exact their revenge, France knew all this, and France was worried. Now, with Poland defeated and a peace agreement with the Soviet Union, Hitler only had to look in one direction, the West to complete his conquest of Europe. Since September 1939 the French had been mobilising her reserves and her army now stood at around 3,000,000 men under arms, most of these engaged in a defensive role with the French relying heavily on its Maginot Line, a string of fortresses, mostly underground that stretched from the Swiss border to Luxembourg, but crucially did not extend as far as the Ardennes. The Ardennes was the area that the Germans decided to make their first thrust when on May 10 1940 they launched Fall Gelb [1] and invaded France and the Low Countries.

### The British Expeditionary Force (BEF)

After the failure of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's appeasement policy towards Nazi Germany, Britain had pledged to assist Poland in the event of her being invaded. When in September 1939 the Germans launched their Blitzkrieg against Poland, and whilst the government made every effort to get the Germans to stop, Britain mobilised and set herself on a war footing. When on the 3rd September Chamberlain announced to the nation that *"he had received no such assurances and that consequently this country is at war with Germany"*, the BEF was immediately despatched to France and Belgium to join her French allies. By May 1940 the BEF consisted of three Corps (I, II & III Corps). It was commanded by General the Lord Gort and constituted one tenth of the total forces employed against the German threat. The BEF's area of responsibility was a sector in Northern France right along the Belgian border. In the event of an invasion of Belgium the BEF was to advance into Belgium and establish a defensive line along the river Dyle[2].

When the Nazi assault did come on May 10th 1940 the BEF were successful in establishing the defensive line but were forced to withdraw due to German successes on their flanks. Despite the fighting spirit and numerous local victories over the German forces, the BEF were out numbered in men, and outclassed in crucial areas regarding vehicles. Soon the steady withdrawal became a rout and commanders started planning for an evacuation. On the 26th of May what became known as the miracle of Dunkirk, commenced and the BEF along with some of its allied soldiers began embarking from beaches and were evacuated back to Britain.

### The British 1st Armoured Division (1st Armd Div)

Two weeks into the German assault the situation on the continent was looking extremely bad for the allies and embryonic plans were being laid to withdraw the BEF back to England. Despite this the British Government continued to send reinforcements to France to try and shore up the situation. One of

---

[1] Fall Gelb (literally translated as Case Yellow) was the codeword given to the plan to invade France and the Low Countries.

[2] The BEF were unable to pre-empt the German invasion of Belgium out of respect for that countries neutrality.

these formations was the British 1st Armd Div, commanded by Major-General Roger Evans MC. The 10th Royal Hussars (XRH) was one of the Div's constituent Regiments, and arrived in France on the 21st May 1940; barely a week before the evacuation began, but more about that later.

The 1st Armd Div consisted of 257 tanks of questionable quality. The mainstay of the Div, the Vickers Mk VIB and the VIC tanks were already outdated and woefully outmatched by the German army. The new BESA machine guns had only recently arrived and in many cases had yet to be unpacked, let alone fitted to the tanks. Worse, the crews had yet to receive any training on these weapons. The other tank that the Division was equipped with (mainly in the 3rd Bde) was the A13 Cruiser which was described at the time as,

*"A fair cruiser for the time but had only just finished field trials and was only present in small numbers".*

There was also a lack of essential equipment within the division. Most of it having been stripped to bolster the divisions already in the BEF. They were *"still short of equipment such as wireless, telescopes, and armour piercing ammunition."*[3] Much later General Evans was to look back and admit that his Division was a *"travesty of an Armoured Division"*

**1st Armoured Division May 1940**[4]

**Divisional Commander:**

Major General R. Evans MC

**2nd (Light) Armoured Brigade:**

2nd Dragoon Guards (Queens Bays).

9th Queens Royal Lancers.

10th Royal Hussars (Prince of Wales Own)

**3rd (Heavy) Armoured Brigade:**

2nd Royal tank regiment

5th Royal tank Regiment

**30th (Lorried) Infantry Brigade:**

3rd Royal Tank Regiment

2nd Battalion the Kings Royal Rifle Corps

1st Battalion Rifle Brigade

1st Battalion, The Queen Victoria's Rifles (King's Royal Rifle Corps)

**1st Support Group:**

101st Light Anti aircraft and Anti Tank Regiment

**From Horses to Horse Power**

[3] Quote from Basil Liddell-Hart.

[4] The insignia chosen for the 1st Armd Div was the Rhinoceros. The characteristics of a tank are mobility, protection and firepower, the Rhino reflects these with its speed (mobility), Skin (protection) and firepower (horns).

Following the First World War it quickly became clear that the age of horsed cavalry was coming to an end. The advent of the tank had all but negated the need for horses and made the battle field a more dangerous place. The obvious thing to do was to re-train all cavalry Regiments onto these new-fangled armoured steeds, and mechanisation for the line cavalry Regiments began with the 9th Lancers and the 11th Hussars in 1928.

It was then, with great sadness when, in autumn 1936 the XRH left their horses behind in Lucknow and the men returned to the UK after eight years in Egypt and India. Despite this sadness the Regiment was determined that if they must become mechanised then they would do it with the same spirit and cavalry panache that had seen them through other trials in their long history up until now. It was at Aliwal Barracks in Tidworth that they began the process of mechanisation, but it was really in name only. The Regiment was appointed as the Divisional cavalry Regiment to the 3rd Division, but the XRH only had a few trucks with which to train the men in the intricacies of the internal combustion engine.

It was soon decided in the higher echelons that a completely mechanised division should be formed which as well as being made up of armoured Regiments would encompass mechanised artillery, engineers and infantry, this was the embryonic 1st Armoured Division. The state of tank building in the UK however was very poor. Despite being the innovators in terms of tank warfare during the First World War successive governments had allowed the industry to slip to an almost non-existent condition and the design capabilities of armour in the UK was equally as bad.

When the division was formed in 1937 the aspiration was to equip the two armoured brigades with new cruiser tanks which were just starting to be introduced. It was envisaged that the brigade would be fully equipped by the summer of 1940. Until then it was decide that the two brigades would remain equipped with the light tanks with just one Squadron per Regiment crewing the new cruisers. Thus at the time of the battle for Huppy the XRH were equipped with two types of tank seen below, the Mk VIC Light Tank (in some cases this was the Mk VIB), and the A13 Cruiser.

*Above, the MKVIC Light Tank. B and C Squadrons of the XRH were equipped with this tank.*

*The A13 Cruiser tank. "A" Squadron of the XRH was equipped with this tank.*

## The 10th Royal Hussars (PWO) mobilises and arrives in France

The XRH formed part of the 2nd (Light) Armoured Brigade (2nd Bde) which in turn was part of the 1st Armd Div. The Regiment at this time was commanded by Lt Col J D Hignett (seen top next page after the evacuation from France. Col Hignett is in the side cap with the binoculars on his chest[5]). On the outbreak of war the 1st Armrd Div was deemed not sufficiently prepared both in terms of equipment or training to travel to France with the remainder of the BEF. Instead, it was sent to East Anglia to provide defence there in the event of an invasion by the Germans.[6] In January 1940 the Div was released from its duties on the East Coast and was moved to a dispersed concentration area centred on Wimborne in Dorset[7]. During this

[5] Lt Col Hignett was forced to relinquish command for health reasons just before the Regiment deployed to North Africa. He later commanded the Special Forces Group called "Phantom Force".

[6] The Royal Horse Artilery that belonged to the Division was fully equipped and was taken from the Div and accompanied the BEF.

[7] A Sqn – Holt, B Sqn – Westmoors, C Sqn – Wimborne & RHQ at Colehill.

move, a redistribution of tanks took place within the Div and others were delivered, so that by the end of February that year the Div was much more balanced and the XRH had reduced their Squadrons from Five Troops to Four.

At the end of April (before the Nazi Invasion of France and the Low Countries) the Div was ordered to prepare to move to France and be in position, at a training area called Pacy-sur-Eure, south of the Seine by 13th May 1940 where it would undergo final training before it moved into the line with the BEF.

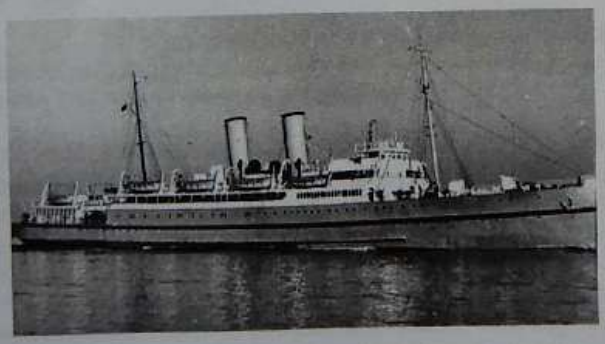
Events were to change everything. On the 10th May the German hammer blow fell and all became a little more chaotic. The first elements of the 1st Armd Div left Britain on May 16th, with the first elements of the XRH leaving Dorset on May 17th. The Regimental diary plays down the obvious difficulties of moving to and arriving in a war zone where all was not going well.

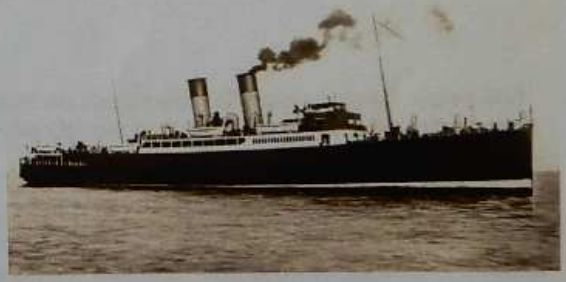
*"17th – 19th .....Advance party under Capt J W Malet[8] left for Southampton with wheeled and tracked vehicles, arriving at about 1600 hrs. They stayed in a rest camp just outside. Two cruiser tanks and two light tanks were out each night on an anti-parachute scare. Vehicles embark.*

*20th.....The main party under Lt Col J D Hignett left Wimborne for Southampton. They embarked on SS AMSTERDAM whilst the advance party were on SS VIENNA. We left at 1600 hrs and formed convoy in the Solent sailing at 2359.*

*21st.....We arrived safely at Cherbourg at 0500 hrs and after breakfast at a rest camp outside proceeded to unload the vehicles. B echelon under Major N D Charrington left about 1900 hrs for Montorgeuil in a torrential downpour arriving there at about 2245 hrs. That night at 1800 hrs all ranks that did not form Tank or B echelon personnel left by train for Breval".*

*Right, the SS AMSTERDAM built in 1938. This was the ship that carried the main body of the 10 RH to France in 1940. She later became a Hospital Ship and was sunk by a U-Boat in 1944.*[9]





*Left, the SS Vienna. This was the ship that transported the 10 RH advance party under Capt Malet to France. She too later became a Hospital ship and was scrapped in Holland in 1960.* [10]

Owing to the rapidly deteriorating situation in France, and at the request of the Commander-in-Chief, the Division was warned off for immediate action. The hoped for training at Pacy was cancelled and plans were drawn up for the Div to move to a concentration area around Arras. Yet again the situation changed, and yet again it was due to the rapid advance of the Germans, the Div was ordered to move to Bolbec in the Havre peninsular and once there to prepare to halt the German advance. Finally, just after the first elements of the Div were arriving in Bolbec it was decided that the Div should remain where it was and concentrate south of the Seine to await developments. Under orders the XRH crossed the Seine at 2000 hrs on 23 May and went into a harbour in a wood near the village of Gisors, here under the command of

[8] Capt Wyndham Malet was later killed during the action at Huppy.

[9] Picture courtesy of www.rollofhonour.com .

[10] Picture courtesy of www.kemglen.talktalk.net

three 2nd Lt's[11], one hundred and thirty men were sent to a base camp at Le Mans and left the Regiment at its fighting strength for the battles ahead.

The official history of the XRH says:

*Just as the Troops had settled down to sleep an urgent signal arrived from Major-General Evans which ordered the Regiment to continue its movement forthwith to follow Headquarters, 2nd Armd Bde, and the Bays. We immediately prepared to move off. All obvious items of identification were removed and if anyone cares to dig in ditches which surround the wood in which we rested, he will no doubt find about 500 pairs of brass shoulder titles bearing the letters X.R.H"*

The Regiment, now disturbed from its rest moved off at 0330 driving through the rest of the night and into what was a gloriously sunny day. On their route was the town of Aumale which had been bombed.

Troop Sergeant Major Dunk describes the move from the wood to a holding area just south of the river Somme.

*"On the approach march the weather was unusually hot for the time of year. The glare of the sun on the narrow long straight roads and the fine white dust stirred up by the tanks affected the eyes of many of the drivers and tank commanders leaving them painfully red and swollen. Our tanks were the Mk VIc's armed with the 15mm gun and 7.92 Besa. When the guns were zeroed it was found that the barrel of the 15mm when fired on automatic, had such a whip that it was inaccurate, but was excellent on single shot".*

Trooper C F Sheffield a driver of an A13 cruiser also recalls the journey.

*"....As we continued, our first encounter with war and death was a column of refugees who had been machine gunned horses etc. It was a grim sight.....One night we harboured in an orchard, during which the sky was lit with flares, making it nearly daylight. We wondered what was going to happen. I remember the mistletoe which was so plentiful on the branches of the apple trees. As we moved on my tank started giving trouble, the L/H steering clutch brake completely failed. We were ordered to take it into the Field workshops, myself and Cpl Tulley. On the way a track came off and jammed against the side of the tank and it was impossible to slacken it off".*

The Regimental War Diary records:

*"24th...On passing Aumale which had been previously bombed we caught sight of dead women, children and horses lying in the road where they had been machine gunned by the Germans. Nothing could have served a better purpose inspiring all ranks on at this stage".*

The overall situation in Northern France was now in crisis. The port of Dunkirk was being surrounded and "Operation *DYNAMO*", the evacuation of the BEF was underway. On the 21st of May the British 1 Armd Div was ordered to drive north and seize and hold the crossings on the Somme. The division moved at once to the river Bresle which was 15 miles from the Somme itself. At the dawn of May 23rd General Evans was still trying to organise his 2nd Bde in Normandy whilst most of the 3rd Bde was still crossing the channel and had yet to even arrive in France. Whilst he was trying to achieve some semblance of command the War Office ordered Evans to capture and secure four key bridgeheads across the Somme in and around the town of Abbeville and then to push north and link up with the BEF. Evans was to have the assistance of the 4th Border Regiment that were nearby[12]. The French refused to help considering the attacks an entirely British affair.

Elements of the 2nd Armd Bde went into action on 24th May when these ultimately unsuccessful attacks were launched by three company's of the 4th Border Regiment each supported by a Troop from the Queens Bays (2nd Armd Bde), at three Somme crossing sites located at Dreuil, Ailly and Piquigny. Despite two platoons of the Borderers crossing the river at Ailly, they had to withdraw immediately when the bridge was blown and the tanks could not cross. Neither of the other two attacks even made it to the River.

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[11] These Officers were 2nd Lt's J Hanson-Lawson, C V O'Reilly & C T Reeve.

[12] The 4th Border Regiment were a Territorial Army Lines of Communications Regiment and not a front line fighting Battalion.