

## **Pte G. Dixon – The Queen’s Royal Regiment (West Surrey)**

**George Samuel Dixon was born on 28<sup>th</sup> May 1918, the son of Henry and Sarah Dixon of St John’s Road, Westcott. The Dixon family for many years ran a delivery business from St John’s Road to keep the village supplied with fresh fruit and vegetables.**

**We do not know when George Dixon joined the Army, as service records for Other Ranks are not yet available to the public. George joined the 1<sup>st</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Bn Queen’s Royal Regiment (West Surrey), a Territorial Army battalion which was part of the 44<sup>th</sup> Division which served in the British Expeditionary Force in France before being evacuated from Dunkirk on 30<sup>th</sup> May 1940.**

**The Division then underwent training in the United Kingdom until May 1942 when it sailed to Egypt in convoy, disembarking at Port Suez on 21<sup>st</sup> July after an eight weeks’ voyage in convoy via Capetown. After a period of training in desert warfare, the Division joined the Eighth Army on 14<sup>th</sup> August, two days after General Sir Bernard Montgomery had taken command.**

**The North African campaigns had started in June 1940 when Italy declared war on Britain and invaded Egypt. A series of battles followed. By March 1941 the British were on the verge of victory but their position was weakened when troops and supplies had to be sent from Egypt in an unsuccessful attempt to stop the German invasion of Greece. Their difficulties increased further with the arrival in Libya of the German Afrika Corps under General Rommel. By August 1942 the situation was grave; the British had been forced back to a line 100 miles of Alexandria and the Suez Canal and Middle East oil fields were under threat.**

**After assessing the situation General Montgomery decided to stop the enemy advance on the Alam el Halfa ridge which was turned into a fortress, using tanks hull down in fixed positions as additional artillery. Although still under training the 44<sup>th</sup> Division had to be brought into the line to provide extra infantry support. The battle lasted from 30<sup>th</sup> August to 5<sup>th</sup> September and achieved its aim. The enemy attacks were broken; Rommel was forced to withdraw and dig in on the El Alamein line between the coast and the impassable Qattara depression in the south.**

After taking time to build up their resources, the British launched a massive offensive with the aim of making a decisive breakthrough. The plan was that the infantry would advance behind an artillery barrage through the enemy's minefields and give cover for engineer units to clear mines and create 'lanes' for the tanks to pass through. The plan also relied on deception - the enemy would be led to believe that the main attack would take place in the south, when it would actually be in the north. The southern thrust would hold the German armour until it was too late to re-deploy them against the main attack – responsibility for this was placed with XIII Corps which included the 44<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, part of which was 131 Brigade comprising the 1<sup>st</sup>/5<sup>th</sup>, 1<sup>st</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> Queen's.

The battle started on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1942. The task of the Queen's battalions was to form a bridgehead for the tanks beyond the minefields between Deir al Munassib and Himeimat. The 1<sup>st</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> suffered heavy casualties on the night of 23<sup>rd</sup> October but achieved their objectives to enable the 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Tank regiment to get through. The 1<sup>st</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> made a good start but took casualties as they advanced; they overran an enemy position, advanced a further 800 yards and then dug in. The Royal Engineers cleared the gaps for the armour, but this met heavy fire as it came through. The 4<sup>th</sup> City of London Yeomanry lost 26 tanks and, to conserve armour, the Divisional Commander stopped further attempts to get through.

This left the two Queen's battalions stranded 2000 yards in front of their nearest support and pinned down by enemy fire. During the day General Montgomery authorised XIII Corps to break off the attack. The Queen's were too exposed to be of value and withdrew back through the minefield. 1<sup>st</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Queen's lost 11 officers and men killed, 50 wounded and 56 missing; most of the missing were later found to have been killed or wounded.

George Dixon was among those who were lost that day. He is remembered on the Alamein Memorial which records the names of nearly 12,000 Commonwealth servicemen who fell in the campaigns in Egypt and Libya and other areas of the Middle East and Africa, and who have no known grave. George's younger brother, Ronald, was killed serving with the Queen's in Italy in 1943 and is also remembered on our memorial.

The Battle of El Alamein lasted from 23<sup>rd</sup> October to 11<sup>th</sup> November 1942. The breakthrough was achieved; it brought a decisive victory and was a turning point in the war. Today 'El Alamein' is one of the battle honours emblazoned on the colours of the Queen's Royal Regiment.

