

JOHN HODGES

Wendy Burrows



1943

John volunteered for the Royal Armoured Corps in June 1941, aged 19. After six weeks training at 57th Training Regiment he joined the Royal Armoured Corps at Warminster, where he was promoted to Lance-Corporal. He was one of four who went to Sandhurst in February 1942, was commissioned into the East Riding Yeomanry, and underwent further training at Newmarket, Bovington Camp and then East Lulworth, Dorset, a holding camp, before being sent to Egypt. He was given command of 30 men, all available for posting to active service. About 4,000 men left Liverpool, taking three months to arrive at Twefik, Egypt, via Bahia Blanca, South America, and Durban, South Africa.

He was installed at RAC Base Camp at Abassia Barracks, near Cairo. After an interview he was accepted into the 3rd King's Own Hussars, which were then recovering from taking part in the Battle of Alamein in October 1942, and were now re-forming at Aleppo, 300 miles north of Cairo and a three-day train journey away. He was sent on a series of courses back at Cairo in tank management and gunnery. On the train journey back to Cairo, the train in which John was travelling was hit head-on by a train heading in the opposite direction on the single track. The carriages were telescoped and many men were killed.

John, near death, woke up in the wreckage and called for help. A rescuer eventually found him and he was taken back to Aleppo, badly injured with a crushed chest and broken leg. He somehow pulled through and spent six months in the British Hospital at Sidon.

In September he rejoined the regiment which was now fully trained and waited to go to Italy. He was sent in an advance party of 20 men to Italy, landing at Taranto. He was given command of a troop of three tanks and started the trek up through Italy. The Germans were employed in defending, so it was all-out fierce fighting for

200 miles all the way up past Monte Cassino to the Northern Line close to Arezzo. Many men were killed, including Germans. John was the only officer in the squadron of 12 tanks who had not been wounded or killed. In July 1944 he was awarded the Military Cross for his actions.

From September to the end of 1944 he was non-operational and the regiment was withdrawn from Italy in January 1945 (some men had completed four years service) and sent to Palestine. John was sent to Syria on patrols in Homs, a town where local Arabs were engaging the French. He then returned to Palestine. In November 1945 his patrol car, on duty late at night in teeming rain during a riot in Tel Aviv, hit a concrete road block. John was in the back of the vehicle and was thrown violently forward, but his right foot was caught and he suffered such a severe ankle dislocation that his foot was facing backwards. This terrible injury caused him to be invalided out of the army and he was eventually treated at Cardiff Hospital, near his home at Abergavenny.

John came to live in Deddington in July 2006 having been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. His son, Christopher, had lived at Aynho for many years and wanted him to be nearby. John previously lived in Yorkshire and, prior to that, he was Deputy Head of King Edward's School, Birmingham.

Editors' note:

John has recently written a book *An Account of the Wartime Experiences of John Henderson Hodges*, which has been privately published with the assistance of Wendy Burrows and is now available from Deddington Library.