

John George Swift



Batley News, 19 Dec 1942 (photo)

John George Swift was born in Batley on 11 December 1919 with no father named on his birth certificate but was brought up as the son of Harry and Sarah Wood. They were probably related but cannot confirm how. He was educated at Ravensthorpe Church School and Park Road School, Batley and was a member of Batley Working Men's Club. The family lived at Park Road, Batley.

In March 1942 he joined the Army, leaving his employment at Messrs. Thomas Garforth's brickworks, Mirfield. In April 1942 he married Laura Webb, of 52, Willans Road, Dewsbury at Dewsbury Parish Church.

In 1939, the Staffordshire Yeomanry (Queen's Own Royal Regiment) was part of the 6th Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division. The 6th Cavalry Brigade deployed to Palestine in January 1940 and its role was mounted operations assisting the Civil Police to suppress disturbances between the Arab and Jewish populations. They then went on to serve in North Africa in the 8th Armoured Brigade. The

Regiment, during its time in North Africa, fought the Afrika Corps at the Battles of Alam Halfa and El Alamein.

The battle of Alam Halfa (31 August-7 September 1942) was Rommel's last offensive in Egypt, and Montgomery's first victory after taking command of the Eighth Army and was a British victory that removed the chance of Rommel reaching Alexandria or the Suez Canal.

At 21:40 (Egyptian Summer Time) on 23 October 1942 on a calm, clear evening under the bright sky of a full moon, Operation Lightfoot began with a 1,000-gun barrage. The fire plan had been arranged so that the first rounds from the 882 guns from the field and medium batteries would land along the 40 mi (64 km) front at the same time. After twenty minutes of general bombardment, the guns switched to precision targets in support of the advancing infantry. The shelling plan continued for five and a half hours, by the end of which each gun had fired about 600 rounds, about 529,000 shells.

The morning of Saturday 24 October brought disaster for the German headquarters. The Axis forces were stunned by Allied attack and their messages became confused and hysterical, with one Italian unit communicating to Germans that it had been wiped out by "drunken negroes with tanks"

Rommel flew to Rome early on 25 October to press the Comando Supremo for more fuel and ammunition and then on to North Africa to resume command that night of the Panzer Army Africa, which that day was renamed the German-Italian Panzer Army (*Deutsch-Italienische Panzerarmee*). The initial thrust had ended by Sunday. The Allies had advanced through the minefields in the west to make a 6 mi (9.7 km) wide and 5 mi (8.0 km) deep inroad. They now sat atop Miteirya Ridge in the south-east. Axis forces were firmly entrenched in most of their original battle positions and the battle was at a standstill.

By the 27 October, the main battle was concentrated around Tel el Aqqaqir and the Kidney feature at the end of 1st Armoured Division's path through the minefield. A mile north-west of the feature was Outpost Woodcock and roughly the same distance south-west lay Outpost Snipe. At Snipe, mortar and shellfire was constant all day long. At 16:00, Rommel launched his major attack. German and Italian tanks moved forward. Against them the Rifle Brigade had 13 6-pounder anti-tank guns along with six more from the supporting 239th Anti-Tank

Battery, RA. Although on the point of being overrun more than once they held their ground, destroying 22 German and 10 Italian tanks.

John George was one of the men killed on the 27th October 1942.

He was awarded the 1939-45 Star; 1939-1945 War Medal.

He is remembered with Honour at Batley Working Men's Club.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group