

Personal Stories



from World War II



APM



Major Eric George Theophilus Assistant Provost Marshal Worcester Regiment

Eric was borne in 1913 in Tredegar, but at two years old moved to Kings Somborne where his father became the Rector, attending school in Romsey, Winchester and finally Oxford.

Having left school, he was accepted for Sandhurst, however, financial constraints meant he could not take up the opportunity for officer training. A period of various employments followed during which time he joined the Supplementary Reserve attached to the Worcester Regiment, attending two weeks training each year.

In 1935 he took his opportunity to be part of the first intake for the newly opened Metropolitan Police College at Hendon and in 1938 having established himself in the police force married Sheila Cox at that time resident in the Old Roche Court in Winterslow.

At the outbreak of war Eric joined the Worcestershire Regiment, being transferred to the Corps of Military Police, because of his background, and posted to France. Having had his first taste of action and relaying some of his experiences by letter to his family he was then caught up in the mass withdraw back to the Chanel coast, finally escaping back to England from Cherbourg in late May 1942. Whilst back in England he was given various postings, which at least meant that his wife Sheila and daughter Amanda, born in 1941, could travel with him.

Eric was then posted in 1942 to North Africa as an Assistant Provost Marshall, quickly establishing himself as an approachable, cool headed officer with an ability to make the right decisions when under pressure. It was not unknown for him to make sorties to the forward posts to check on the welfare of his men and act in support of his NCO's.

On Monday 25 January 1943 he spent the afternoon in Souk el Araba, eighty miles south west of Tunis chairing a conference. At around 5pm he left to carry out an inspection of a prison camp about 15 miles from Tunis. Eric, his driver and three accompanying policemen set off in their car and having travelled only a few miles an ME 109 was spotted followed by four other aircraft. The order was given to abandon the vehicle as the aircraft opened fire.

Eric had received a chest wound and his driver had suffered nine bullet wounds to his arms and legs. On arriving at the Casualty Clearing Station he was given a blood transfusion and appeared to be holding his own. That evening an operation commenced to remove the bullet, but it became clear that the situation was worse than anticipated and Eric failed to recover.

The following day Eric was conveyed by police car and then carried by serving police officer into the local cemetery draped in the Union Jack. Out of respect for Eric a cross of oak was mounted on his grave with the inscription -

Major E G Theophilus. Worcester Regiment. Assistant Provost Marshal. Died for his country

Acknowledgement Norman Thorne. Laurence Neal