

MAJOR THOMAS JAMES JACKSON LIELL MC TD (1920-27)

He was born on 13 August 1911 and is the brother of **Leonard Mark Liell (1919-27)** and uncle to **Peter Mark Liell (S52-58)** and **James Robert Barnes Liell (S53-60)**.

Peter Liell has provided a copy of the following article, which appeared in the *West Essex Gazette* on Saturday 21st July 1945.



Carried Wounded Officer 400 Yards Uphill Under Fire

MAJOR T. J. LIELL AWARDED M.C.

IT is announced that the Military Cross has been awarded to Major Thomas James Jackson Liell, Royal Artillery, for services in Italy.

The Major is the son of Mr. Leonard W. Liell, of "Wendens," Wintry Park, Epping, who for many years lived at Loughton and is also widely known as a solicitor, being senior partner of the firm of Attwater & Liell, of Loughton, and New Broad-street.

Rescued Brother Officer Under Fire

The citation of the award to Major Liell relates a story of "typical bravery." It states:

"On 26th August, 1944, at Acqualagna, Major Liell's battery was supporting 2/11 Sikhs, who were ordered to take over the village of Acqualagna from the San Marco battalion of the Italian Corps. The Germans were in position on the hills overlooking the village at close range, and the leading elements of Sikhs were heavily engaged as they approached. Major Liell then accompanied the two leading company commanders on a forward reconnaissance, over a spur which overlooked the village on the west. After a few minutes the three officers were engaged by a heavy mortar and small arms concentration. One of the company commanders was killed immediately and the other seriously wounded in the leg. Major Liell applied first-aid, and then picked up the wounded officer and carried him on his back to safety. This involved a journey of about 400 yards uphill, and during the whole of the time the enemy engaged them with mortar and small arms fire, but failed to hit either of them. Major Liell refused to leave the wounded officer behind, although if he had done so he would have been much more likely to have saved himself.

Infantry Praise For Battery

"Major Liell has commanded his battery of mountain artillery since it was converted from a forward battery in October, 1943. He has led it in action for many months including the

whole of the Gothic Line battles. His rescue under fire of the wounded officer at Acqualagna is typical of the bravery and cool acceptance of risks which he has always shown in action. "His efficient handling of this battery has evoked the warmest thanks and praise from the infantry whom he has supported and his efficiency and powers of leadership have produced a battery whose performance in action has invariably been of the highest order."

Fellow Officer's Tribute

A fellow officer, upon hearing of the award to Major Liell wrote of "long overdue medal which he deserved on so many occasions." Continuing, this officer writes: It was originated by the infantry for his great work on the very first day of the Gothic Line push, when he played a magnificent part in rescuing an infantry officer with a broken knee, after his Company Commanding Officer had been killed. I may be wrong. It may be for other occasions—when he always showed such great calmness and pluck; when at the sharpest end of the battle it was always extremely comforting to know that he was there and would make the right decisions. I know that every Officer and N.C.O. in the Battery accepted his decisions without the slightest thought of query knowing it would automatically be the right answer, and having complete confidence."

Rugby Player And Golfer

Major Jackson Liell was educated at Framlingham College. He is a director of Lush & Cook Ltd.

He was given a commission in the Royal Artillery shortly before war was declared. He acted as Adjutant of his Regiment for two years, and then was appointed to the Command of his Battery. His Regiment served in Irak, Iran, and Palestine, and then having been converted into a "Mountain Regiment" proceeded to Italy and took part in the attack upon the Gothic Line.

Before the war Major Liell was vice-captain of the Woodford Rugby Football Club, a member of the Theydon Bois Golf Club and was seen, occasionally, in amateur theatricals at Loughton. He is unmarried.

Reprinted from: *West Essex Gazette*, Saturday, July 21st, 1945

Sarah Evans, the youngest of his 3 daughters, has kindly provided the following photo of her father :-



I am indebted to Cameron Woodrow who contacted the Society to say that his father had served in the same regiment. Camerons' description of the above photo is as follows :-

"In the background of the photo stand two of the Basuto muleteers who did not join the regiment until it was de-mechanised in Syria in November 1943. Judging from the scenery, I assume that the photo must have been taken somewhere during the period March 1944 -June 1945, after the regiment arrived in Italy.

The countryside does not look like southern Italy where they landed. So I guess that it may have been taken further north. I also note the carefree nature of the picture – they are obviously not in a combat zone. This all suggests that it might be possible to date the photo more precisely to the end of the war.

If so, the war diary says that in June 1945 "the Regiment summered in pleasant parts, mainly at Pesaro on the Adriatic coast south of Rimini, and disbandment started." If that is an arable area where grain is likely to have been harvested at that time, we probably have an answer."

He has provided much of the following information, including the further photo below.

During WW2 he commanded 461 Field Battery, 85th Field Regiment. The battery was formed officially in January 1941. He assumed command of the battery sometime during the period November 1941-July 1942; at the same time, command of the regiment was assumed by Lt. Col. WT Delamain. Cameron Woodrow's father was posted to the battery in September 1942.

From November 1942 the regiment was in the Middle East (principally Iraq, en route to Persia, as part of PAIFORCE), equipped as mechanised field artillery (25 pounder field guns hauled by Morris Quad tractors and 8cwt Humber trucks).

The picture below shows the officers of 461 Field Battery at a staging camp called Baquba, en route from Baghdad to Suleiman Beg, probably taken sometime during the period 20th-27th February 1943. The picture has been annotated by Cameron's father to identify the officers that he knew. Major Thomas Liell is the man with the moustache and pipe, second from right.



It was re-equipped in October 1944 as mountain artillery (3.7 inch howitzers hauled on the backs of mules) for the Italian campaign. It was then that Cameron's father left the unit because he was reclassified as unfit for combat as a result of injuries sustained on an officer training course.

There was plainly no love lost between battery commander and 1460885 Gunner Woodrow! Cameron's father wrote the following on the inside front cover of his copy of the unit history: -

"There is a serious omission in this history. When we got to Kermanshah in Persia, I was detailed along with Harry Paynting to take a 3 tonner into the desert and bring back to RHQ a load of brick-size stones. This took place on 23/24 July. We laid out these stones around all of the HQ tents in neat lines. Believe it or not, we were then ordered to draw whitewash powder from store then the pair of us were told to whitewash the stones. When I joyously left this lot in November, in Syria, Liell, the battery commander told me that I was a thoroughly bad soldier....."

During the campaign in Italy, Major Liell was awarded the Military Cross. The citation dated 2 February 1945 reads as follows :-

88868 WS/Capt. T/Major LIELL, Thomas James Jackson.

Eighth Army, Royal Artillery (85 Mountain Regiment)

On 26th August 1944, at ACQUALAGNA, Major Liell's Battery was supporting 2/11 Sikhs, who were ordered to take over the village of Acqualagna from the San Marco Marine Battalion of the Italian Corps. The Germans were in position on the hills overlooking the village at close range and the leading elements of the Sikhs were heavily engaged as they approached. Major Liell then accompanied the two leading Company Commanders on a forward recce over a spur which overlooked the village on the west, and, after a few minutes, the three officers were engaged by a heavy mortar and small arms concentration. One of the Company Commanders was killed immediately and the other seriously wounded in the leg. Major Liell applied first aid and then picked up the wounded officer and carried him on his back to safety. This involved a journey of about 400 yards uphill, during the whole of which the enemy engaged them with mortar and small arms fire, but failed to hit either of them. Major Liell refused to leave the wounded Officer behind, although if he had done so he would have been much more likely to have saved himself.

Major Liell has commanded his Battery of Mountain Artillery since it was converted from a Field Battery in October 1943. He has led it in action for many months, including the whole of the GOTHIC LINE battles. His rescue under fire of the wounded Officer at Acqualagna is typical of the bravery and cool acceptance of risks which he has always shown in action.

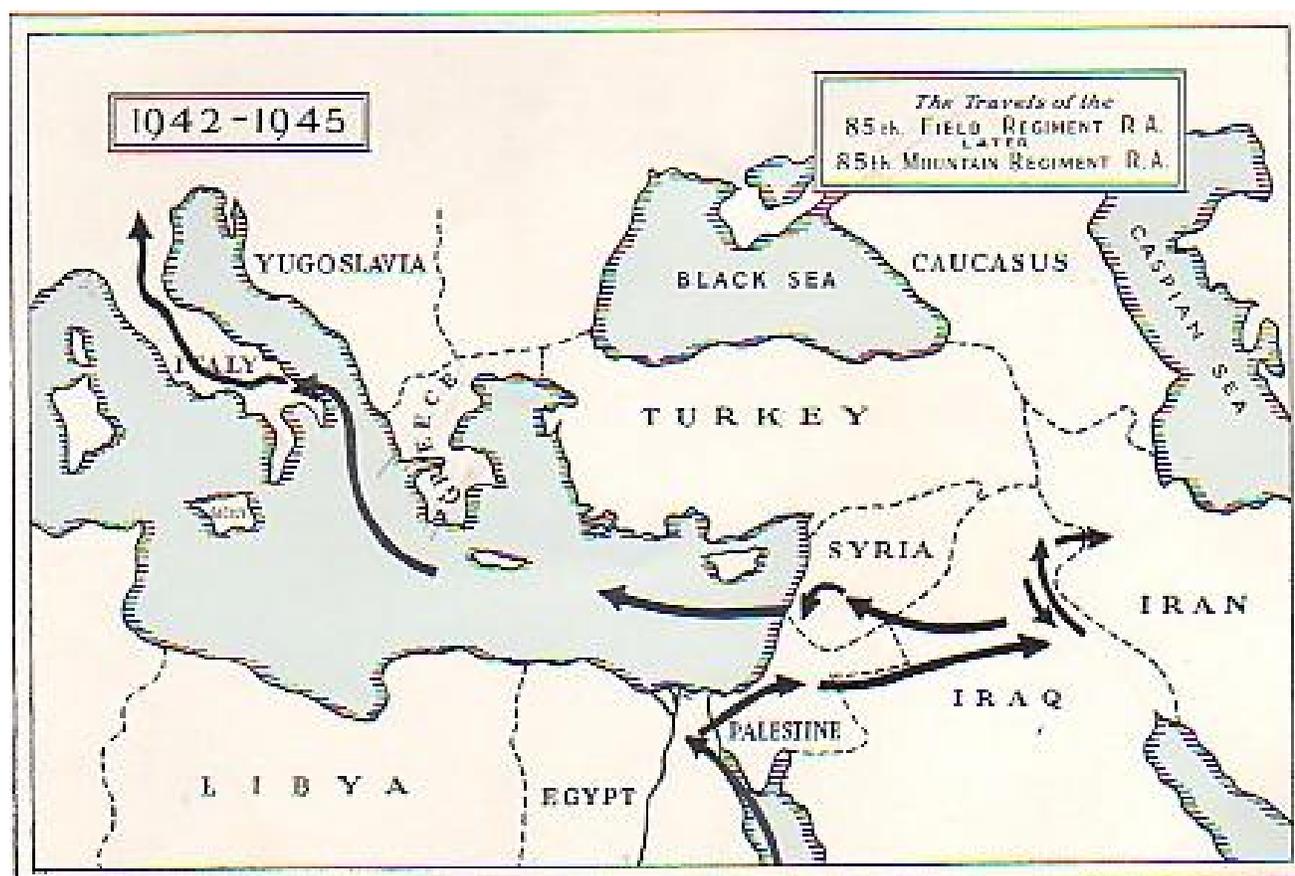
His efficient handling of his Battery has evoked the warmest of thanks and praise from the Infantry whom he has supported and his efficiency and powers of leadership have produced a Battery whose performance in action has invariably been of the highest order.

Award : M.C. (periodic)

This incident occurred during the early phase of the assault on the Gothic Line in central Italy. Acqualagna is around 40km southwest of Pesaro in Italy.

The London Gazette for 26 June 1945 records the awarding of the MC to "**Major (temporary) Thomas James Jackson LIELL (88868), Royal Regiment of Artillery (Epping)**".

The Regiment stayed in Italy until June 1945, when it was disbanded. See below for a map of the travels of the Regiment from 1942 to 1945.



After the war he became a company director of a dyer and cleaner and lived in Kent.

He died in 1988.

I have found his medals up for auction on 21 February 2007, with the following description :-

Military Cross group, comprising MC, with '1945' engraved to rev., 1939-45 group of five, inc. Stars for Africa and Italy and EII Efficiency Decoration with Territorial bar, with '1953' engraved to rev., some wear to gilt on latter and edge knock to War Medal, otherwise very fine or better, on brooch mount, with original box for MC, entitlement slip marked 'S/1 88868' and postal box addressed to 'Capt. T. J. Liell, MC'



I'm delighted to say that since publishing the above information on his medals being up for auction, I was contacted by his daughter Clare (Delpech) who had been trying to track them down following a burglary. After a couple of years there was a very happy ending to the story when Clare got in touch in November 2011 to say "I just wanted you to know that my dad's medals have arrived at my home today. We were able to buy them back from the man who bought them at auction in 2007. This person lives in Switzerland and to this day I do not know his address but the Kent Police very kindly contacted him twice on our behalf to encourage him to contact us which he finally did. We (my family and my sister's family) are so delighted to have the medals back in our family where they will be treasured. I cannot thank you enough for all your help and assistance with this matter. Without your help we would never have been able to trace or rescue dad's medals. It is particularly poignant that the medals have arrived back just days before Remembrance Sunday."

I'm also indebted to Emma Hunnisett, who's partner's father Austin "Les" Castell served in the Regiment, for some further background information on 85th Mountain Regiment :-

85th Field/ Mountain Regiment R.A. (T.A.)

Described as one of the most unusual Artillery Unit of the Second World War, 85th Mountain Regiment remains one of the least documented.

Originally raised in Essex as a Territorial Unit, 85th Mountain began its days as 85th Field Regiment and with the outbreak of war was under the command of 54th East Anglian Division.

As German forces began their assault on Norway, Britain amassed troops for landings on the Norwegian Coast in April 1940. Included were five Independent Companies, one of which was raised from 54th Division, composed entirely of volunteers, some of whom came from 85th Field, under the command of Major A. C. Newman (later Colonel Newman, who led the raid on St. Nazaire).

Like many Field Regiments, preparations were made for their involvement in the Allied Campaign in North Africa, with the regiment departing the UK in September 1942 aboard the Highland Monarch, bound for the Middle East.

However, with the unforeseen progress of the 8th Army in North Africa, the campaigns were almost over before 85th landed.

Concern was growing that German troops may attempt to move south through the Caucasus to gain control of Middle Eastern oil fields. Therefore 85th were deployed, with thousands of other troops, to Iraq as part of Paiforce (Persia and Iraq Forces) to guard against this threat.

After seven months in Iraq and Iran they moved to Lebanon to begin conversion to a Mountain Artillery Unit. Here they relinquished the 25 Pounder Field Gun, used in training, for the Screw Gun (3.7 Howitzer). Along with the new guns, mules with their Basuto drivers would be their means of transport to carry weapons, munitions and food to the front-line. Unusually, the regiment adopted a new battle-dress, which included a peaked cap not unlike that worn by the Germans, which was to later cause some cases of mistaken identity amongst Allied troops!

Their finest hour was yet to come and a move to Italy in 1944 saw 85th Mountain, now fully trained in Mountain Warfare, in great demand. Landing on the heel of Italy, they moved in support of the Allied Armies, being called upon for their accurate fire power. Walking hundreds of miles, through dangerous terrain, 85th's guns were called to support Lovat's Scouts, Popski's Private Army, 4th and 10th Indian Division and Polcorps, to name a few, in the long campaign which saw them move north, using their mule-carried pack-guns, in mountainous terrain and in terrible weather conditions, to the final battles in the Po Valley.

Letters within the Regimental Diaries portray the respect and admiration earned from those they supported,

'I wish to thank all your chaps for all the steady help you gave us throughout the advances made. You were frequently the only guns that could be got forward owing to the appalling weather and I always knew that the left flank of the Division would have your support.' (Maj. Gen. Reid, 10th Indian Division)

Following the cessation of hostilities on the 7th May 1945, the Regiment was put into a state of suspended animation in September, finally to disappear from history, like so many other units of the Second World War.

'That an East London Territorial Regiment should adapt itself in so short a time to the more exacting life of mountain warfare is, indeed, a credit to the men themselves' (Capt. J. I. Crockett, 85th Mountain Regiment R.A.)

*With thanks to John Brown and Ernest Usher for their shared memories.
Also the family of Austin (Les) Castell without whom I would never have started this quest. Emma Hunnisett*



Gunner/Signaller Austin (Les) Castell, 94417



Pals of 85th



Mountain training in Lebanon for some of 85th Mountain Regiment R.A. (T.A.)



Some members of 85th with their mules and Basuto Drivers



From left to right; George Higgins, John Brown and Ken Mundy, relaxing on Rimini Beach



'A' Troop, 337 Battery, 85th Field Regiment R.A. (T.A.) aboard the Highland Monarch en route to North Africa.



Gunner/Signaller Austin (Les) Castell, 944172

Emma Hunnisett would be interested to hear from anyone with connections to 85th and has an array of photographs which she would be happy to share. She is particularly interested in locating a regimental photograph. She can be contacted by e-mail on hunnies28@btopenworld.com