

EDWARD JOHN MAYHEW (34-40)

He was born on 14 August 1923 in Diss and died in action in Italy on 27 May 1944. He is remembered on the War Memorial in the College Chapel and on his mother's grave in Earl Soham Cemetery. He is buried in the Caserta War Cemetery in Italy.

I am indebted to Chris Pratt for recent research he has carried out for Earl Soham to mark the 90th anniversary of the ending of WW1. This is his detailed write up on Edward Mayhew :-



**2738421 Guardsman EDWARD JOHN MAYHEW
3rd Battalion Welsh Guards
Who was Killed in Action, aged 20, on 27th May 1944**

Obituaries in two local papers give us some background to Edward 'Ted' Mayhew's life. He was born in Diss and, as a child, moved to Saxtead Green and then to Earl Soham where he lived at Rose Cottage in The Street. He won a scholarship to Framlingham College, leaving in 1940. He then joined Lloyds Bank in Framlingham, as a clerk before transferring to a Cambridge branch. He was a member of the Village Preachers' Association and known for his oratory, often preaching from the pulpits of the Congregational Churches and the Baptist Chapel in Earl Soham. He was also a Sunday School teacher and a member of the Cherryhinton Road Church. Following his mother's death in 1940 he moved to Cambridge to live with his aunt.

The 3rd Battalion Welsh Guards was raised in 1941 and Guardsman Mayhew enlisted on 15th July 1942 at the Guards Depot, Caterham remaining there for three months before going to the Training Battalion. The 'photo of Guardsman Mayhew shows a half chevron on his lower left sleeve. The Welsh Guards Museum advise me that this shows that he was one of two or three men from his squad who would have been identified as 'Squad Leader' whose role it was to help the slower members of the squad achieve better results in order that the whole squad could pass out together. It would also mark the man out as first in line for promotion. Once he joined his battalion this stripe would have been removed so it pins down the date of the 'photo as between July 1942 and July 1943. Guardsman Mayhew was posted to 3rd Battalion on 17th July 1943 in Tunisia. As part of 1st (Guards) Brigade in 1st Division the Battalion fought through the arduous Tunisian and Italian campaigns.

In Tunisia, as part of the British 1st Army under Lt-Gen Kenneth Anderson, it fought at Fondouk between 7th and 11th April 1943, at El Kourzia between 22nd and 26th April 1943 and Tunis between 5th and 12th May 1943. Guardsman Mayhew would have arrived towards the end of the Tunisian campaign.

In 1942 and 1943 Tunisia was the scene of the first major operations by the Allied Forces (the British Commonwealth and the United States) against the Axis Powers (Italy and Germany) during World War II. The main body of the British army, advancing from their victory in Battle of El Alamein under the command of Field Marshal Montgomery, pushed into Tunisia from the south. The US and other allies, following their invasions of Algeria and Morocco in Operation Torch, invaded from the west.

On February 19th 1943, General Rommel launched an attack on the American forces in the Kasserine Pass region of Western Tunisia, hoping to inflict the kind of demoralizing and alliance-shattering defeat the Germans had dealt to Poland and France. The initial results were a disaster for the United States. However, the American forces were ultimately able to reverse their retreat and the Allies broke through the Mareth line on March 20th 1943. The allies subsequently linked up on April 8th and on May 2nd 1943 the German-Italian Army in Tunisia surrendered. Thus, the United States, United

**dom, Free French, and Polish (as well as other forces) were able to win a major battle as an
ed army.**

in "Together We Stand – North Africa 1942-1943: Turning the Tide in the West" by James
 and. During the battles at Fondouk, Djebel Rhorab *"was eventually taken at great cost by the
 sh Guards later that afternoon"*. Also from "Together We Stand":- *"Watching them from the high
 und facing the pass was Captain Nigel Nicholson (3rd Battalion, Grenadier Guards), who was
 ized to see them advance in long lines over open ground, crouching down as they ran forward
 the closing stages of the infantry attack, I suddenly observed fifty of the enemy rise from their
 nches, throw down their arms, and advance down the hill with their hands up, led by their
 cer"*

Following the invasion of Sicily on 10th July 1943 the Allied armies began the long hard slog up the Italian peninsula. In May 1944 3rd Welsh Guards, still in 1st (Guards) Brigade but now part of 6th Airborne Division in XIII Corps were at Monte Cassino ready to take part in the fourth battle. Operation Diadem, the Fourth Battle of Monte Cassino commenced on 11th May 1944 and lasted for ten days until, finally, on the morning of the 18th May a tattered white flag of surrender flew over the monastery. XIII Corps' role in the battle was to attack along the Liri valley to the west of Cassino and it was in these actions that Guardsman Mayhew was killed in action on 27th May 1944. He is buried in Caserta War Cemetery, Italy.



On 3rd May 1945 Lt .Col. C. Rose Pruitt, CO of 3rd Welsh Guards issued a Special Order of the Day in which he congratulated the Battalion on its achievements and went on to say *"Today we are 820 strong. Almost exactly 1,000 Guardsmen sailed from England on 5th February, 1943, and since then almost exactly 1,000 more have come to us. Of those who sailed that day, there are 389 with us now-but we are NOT all here, and we think of those in hospitals in this country and in England and of those most particularly to the number of 181 who gave all"* (Taken from BBC TV People's War).

Following 'Ted' Mayhew's death a plaque was added to his mother's grave in Earl Soham Churchyard.

