

KASER Robert



Private Essex Regiment 1/4th Battalion.

Age: 22

Date of Death: 17/07/1944

Service No: 6014311

Additional information: Son of Arthur and Ellen Marian Kaser, of Tolleshunt Major, Essex. The 1st/4th Battalion was a Territorial Unit.

From April 1942 the 1/4 Essex Regiment were part of the 5th Indian Infantry Brigade, 4th Indian Division. At this time the 5th Brigade was sent to Syria. 5th Brigade was rushed to the desert in June 1942 - after escaping from Mersa Matruh, the brigade held the vital Ruweisat Ridge at Alamein in the fighting of July-August 1942.

Shortly before the second battle of Alamein in October 1942 the 4th Indian Division was back together again with the 7th Brigade returning from Cyprus and 161st Brigade attached (until December 1942) to fill the gap of the over-run 11th Brigade. The Division had a relatively subsidiary role in the battle, holding in stiff fighting, as a diversionary tactic, the Ruweisat Ridge which was at the centre of the Allied front whilst the breakthrough was planned further North.

By December 1942 the Division was once again dispersed but strong representations by its GOC, Francis Tucker, (including his asking to be relieved of command) resulted in the Division being brought together as a fighting entity in March 1943 and it fought with distinction through to the fall of Tunis in May 1943 gaining a particular reputation for its prowess in mountainous country. The Division had the honour of capturing General von Arnim in Tunisia, bringing an end to the North African campaign. Its major battles in North Africa were Benghazi, Tobruk, Wadi Akarit, Enfidaville and Tunis

Italy The division then moved in January 1944 to Italy, where it took part in the Italian Campaign. It took a major role (sustaining very heavy casualties) in the second battle for Monte Cassino.:-

"On the night following the bombing, a company of the 1st battalion Royal Sussex Regiment (one of the British elements in 4th Indian Division) attacked the key point 593 from their position 70 yards (64 m) away on Snakeshead Ridge. The assault failed, with the company sustaining 50% casualties.

The following night the Sussex Regiment was ordered to attack in battalion strength. There was a calamitous start. Artillery could not be used in direct support targeting point 593

because of the proximity and risk of shelling friendly troops. It was planned therefore to shell point 575 which had been providing supporting fire to the defenders of point 593. The topography of the land meant that shells fired at 575 had to pass very low over Snakeshead ridge, and in the event some fell among the gathering assault companies. After reorganising, the attack went in at midnight. The fighting was brutal and often hand to hand, but the determined defence held and the Sussex battalion was beaten off, once again sustaining over 50% casualties. Over the two nights, the Sussex Regiment lost 12 out of 15 officers and 162 out of 313 men who took part in the attack.



On the night of February 17 the main assault took place. The 4/6 Rajputana Rifles would take on the assault of point 593 with the depleted Sussex Regiment held in reserve to pass through them to attack point 444 once 593 had been taken. In the meantime, the 1/2 Gurkha Rifles and 1/9 Gurkha Rifles were to sweep

across the slopes and ravines in a direct assault on the monastery. This latter was across appalling terrain, but it was hoped that the Gurkhas, from the Himalayas and so expert in mountain terrain, would succeed. This proved a faint hope. Once again the fighting was brutal, but no progress was made and casualties heavy. The Rajputanas lost 196 officers and men, the 1/9 Gurkhas 149 and the 1/2 Gurkhas 96. It became clear that the attack had failed, and on February 18 Brigadier Dimoline and Freyberg called off the attacks on Monastery Hill.



1st/4th Battalion Essex at Monte Cassino

In the other half of the main assault the two companies from 28th (Maori) Battalion from the New Zealand Division forced a crossing of the Rapido and attempted to gain the railroad station in Cassino town; they succeeded but crucially were unable to throw a bridge across the final gap in the railway causeway before daylight so were without armoured support. With the help of a constant smoke-screen laid down by Allied artillery to hide their positions from the German artillery on Monastery Hill

they were able to hold their position for much of the day. However their isolation and lack of armoured support and anti-tank guns when the armoured counter-attack came in the afternoon of February 18 made their position hopeless. They were ordered to pull back to the river when it became clear to headquarters that both the attempts to break through (in the mountains and along the causeway) would not succeed. It had been very close. The Germans had been very alarmed by the capture of the station and, from a conversation on record between Kesselring and 10th Army commander von Vietinghoff, had not expected their counterattack to succeed."



1939-1945 STAR; AFRICA STAR; ITALY STAR ; 1939-1945 WAR MEDAL; DEFENCE MEDAL

Casualty Type: Commonwealth War Dead Grave/Memorial Reference: IV. D. 1. Cemetery: AREZZO WAR CEMETERY



On 3 September 1943 the Allies invaded the Italian mainland, the invasion coinciding with an armistice made with the Italians who then re-entered the war on the Allied side. Progress through southern Italy was rapid despite stiff resistance, but the advance was checked for some months at the German winter defensive position known as the Gustav Line. The line eventually fell in May 1944 and as the Germans withdrew, Rome was taken by the

Allies on 3 June. The Germans made a stand in front of Arezzo early in July 1944 and there was fierce fighting before the town was taken on 16 July by the 6th Armoured Division with the aid of the 2nd New Zealand Division. The site for this cemetery was selected in November 1944, and graves were brought into it from the surrounding area. Both the 4th and the 8th Indian Divisions were involved in the fighting in this region, and Plots VII-IX in the cemetery contain Indian graves. Arezzo War Cemetery contains 1,266 Commonwealth burials of the Second World War. No. of Identified Casualties: 1230



TOLLESHUNT MAJOR