

## David J Harris, Rifle Brigade – 25<sup>th</sup> October 1942 (Age 23).

### 6914860 – Corporal David John Harris - 9th (1st Bn. The Tower Hamlets Rifles) Bn., Rifle Brigade

David was born in late 1918 to Philip (b.1879) and Elsie Nora Harris, nee Evans (b. 30/01/1886) who lived at Garth Place, Rudry. David's Father was originally from Rhydyfelin and worked as a furnaceman at Waterloo Tin Works. He married Elsie, who was from Porth, in 1903.

David had an older brother, Horace Rhys (b. 28/06/1903) who married Kathleen Hurley from Cardiff (b.29/06/1908) in 1931 and by 1939 was living at 16 Waterloo Terrace and working as a tinsplate roller. Horace died in 1980 and Kathleen in 1987.

He also had an older sister Cecilia (b.16/05/1905).

On 6th June 1922, David's younger brother Thomas Wyndham Harris was born. He died in Merthyr Tydfil district in 1978.

David's Father Philip died in 1932 and in 1939 Elsie was listed [as widowed] at Berllan-gollen, along with Cecilia and Thomas, and was noted as working in the canteen at the tinsplate works. Thomas was noted as a Greyhound racing dog attendant.

Cecilia went on to marry Henry Wookey Sharland (AKA Harry - b.28/03/1910) from the Griffin Inn in 1942 (his Father Thomas John Sharland being the licensee and Wookey being his Mother Louisa's maiden name). We believe Henry was previously married [in 1933] to Ivy Alice [Russell] who died in 1941. Cecilia died in 1965. It appears that Henry then married for a third time in 1966 (aged 56) to Kathleen Mary Baker (aged 57). Both Henry and Kathleen died in 1979.

We don't know when David joined but it would have been at the onset of war if not earlier considering his rank of corporal.

The 1st Battalion Tower Hamlets Rifles took part in the 1940 campaign in France before being evacuated to England in 1940. They later served in North Africa as part of the 8th Army and were redesignated in 1941 as

'9th Battalion, The Rifle Brigade (Prince Consort's Own) (Tower Hamlet Rifles)'



We know the Battalion was defending the oasis of Bir Hacheim at the end of May 1942 and David certainly was recorded as 'wounded' on 15th July 1942. However, the date of David's death on 25th October 1942 when he was listed as 'killed in action', suggests it was during the Second Battle of El Alamein which was fought from 23rd October to 11th November 1942.

In August 1942, Lt-General Bernard Law Montgomery commanded over 190,000 men from across the British Empire, Greece, Poland and France. They were equipped with over 1,000 tanks, 900 artillery pieces and 1,400 anti-tank guns. Montgomery unleashed his offensive on the night of 23rd October 1942 with a spectacular artillery barrage.

25 pounders firing at El Alamein on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1942



In the early hours of 24<sup>th</sup> October British infantry and engineers began Operation Lightfoot, a painstaking and hazardous process of creating two channels in the minefields, through which the armoured forces were to advance.



**Soldiers advancing at El Alamein, 1942**

**A mine explodes close to a British artillery tractor as it advances through enemy minefields at El Alamein, 1942**



**British tanks advance to engage German armour after infantry had opened gaps in the Axis minefield at El Alamein, 24 October 1942**

The British then established a forward line from where the Axis forces would be engaged and worn down. This battle of attrition, euphemistically termed 'crumbling' by Montgomery, involved brutal close quarter fighting in which the soldiers were tested in a maelstrom of heat, noise and horror.

At some point on the second day of this battle , David was killed and is buried at El Alamein War Cemetery (IX.E.17) along with 7,367 other fallen.

