

George Chivers. 6457700 1RF

DCM, 39-45*, AFRICA*, DEF, WAR. Hornchurch (the soldier's place of residence)

Civil Registration.

Birth registered September Qr. 1915, West Ham, Essex

Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

6457700 Sgt. George Robert Chivers, D.C.M., of the 1st Battalion Royal Fusiliers, was Killed in Action on 16 March 1941, aged 26. He was the son of Edward and Ada Florence of Chase Cross, Romford. He is buried in Keren War Cemetery, Eritrea.

Army Roll of Honour 1939 - 1945.

George R. Chivers, D.C.M., was Killed in Action on 16 March 1941 in the Middle East Theatre. Born: London E. Residence: Essex.

Regimental History, 'Always a Fusilier', Northcote-Parkinson.

Throughout January 1941 the 4th Indian Division was gradually arriving in the Southern Sudan. The 1st Battalion had a few weeks to get used to the heat and the bush country where they now found themselves before taking part in a divisional attack on Kassala due to be launched early in February. But the Italians became suspicious and withdrew unexpectedly on 18th January. They were hotly pursued by those units of the 4th Division whose transport had arrived, for 120 miles through Biscia to Argodat, where they turned and stood in strongly prepared positions.

Meanwhile the Fusiliers had been following up on foot and in what transport could be spared, and on 27th January they eventually bivouacked within sound of the guns again. The 11th Indian Brigade, who were leading, had discovered that the dominating fort Laquetat was too strong to be worth attacking and they were trying to outflank the position by capturing Mount Cochen. After three days of shunting round Argodat, the battalion was in a reserve position due south of the town. From here they were ordered to send forward two fighting patrols to find out more about the enemy defences across the plain between Laquetat and Mount Cochen. At 09.30 hours both patrols disappeared into the dried river beds, and for six anxious hours the Commanding Officer waited while a small battle raged in no man's land. Eventually both patrols emerged without casualties, and Second Lieutenant Robin Adams had accurately located the well concealed enemy positions, an action which earned him an M.C.

Based on his report, the Divisional Commander decided that the enemy defences must be breached at this their strongest point; he could make best use of the tanks here. So the Fusiliers were warned for a dawn attack over ground which only two officers had seen. Breakfast 03.00 hours; moving off at 04.00 hours on an inky-black night, the companies struggled through thick bush to the open ground where the Intelligence Officer, Second Lieutenant Blake, had laid out the starting tape. The attack was to be on a three company front with 'A' Company on the right, directed by Second Lieutenant Adams; 'C' Company in the centre with four heavy tanks, and 'B' Company on the left, but it was just like an exercise and accidents happen to both sides. Owing to the dense clouds, it was still dark and the tanks had not joined 'C' Company by the time they were meant to cross the starting line. 'A' Company, under Captain Legge, not realising this, advanced according to plan, followed by 'D' Company, the reserve Company, which had been led astray by part of Headquarters Company in the dark. 'A' Company, with the regimental police, the pioneer platoon and some

others had joined them by mistake, fought magnificently, and in spite of fierce resistance by Eritrean troops led by Italian officers they were on their objective soon after daylight. Meanwhile the Commanding Officer, Colonel Edwards, unaware of the hold up to 'C' and 'B' Companies, was searching for them almost in the enemy lines, unenthusiastically escorted by the Adjutant. However in due course 'C' and 'B' Companies swept forward, and with the powerful support of the four heavy tanks they were soon on their objective., 'A' Company's advance having removed a number of posts whose flanking fire would otherwise have been most upsetting.

The low, heavy clouds which had made it so dark had also helped the battalion by masking the enemy observation posts on the mountain-tops. By 07.00 hours the clouds had lifted and the battalion was subjected to accurate shelling and was attacked by bombers and fighters. Luckily they had already learnt to dig in quickly. A number of local counter-attacks, combined with the shelling and sniping, made life very unpleasant for 'B' and 'C' Companies. Sections of the carrier platoon had been sent to their assistance on several occasions, and the support provided by the 1st Field Regiment was always as accurate as it was timely. At 10.15 hours the four heavy tanks escorted by the carriers of the Cameron Highlanders were passed through the gap in the enemy defences caused by 'A' Company, to cut the road between Argordat and Keren. They had only moved a few yards when they came on a force of Italian tanks and a battalion of infantry in close order preparing to counter-attack. In a matter of seconds they had destroyed six medium and five light tanks and scattered the infantry. This was really the turning point of the battle. The rest of the day was nasty but never dangerous again, and when the advance was resumed at 05.00 hours next morning it was found that the Italians had abandoned much of their heavy equipment and withdrawn to the north-east. In the words of the 4th Division historian, 'once again the splendid combination of tanks, artillery and matchless infantry had carried the day'. The speed and determination of the Fusiliers' attack had undoubtedly saved casualties, and although the battalion lost only eight killed and thirty-eight wounded they were good men who could ill be spared. In exchange they killed eighty-two enemy, captured thirty-two and were largely responsible for the evacuation of Argordat by 13,000 troops

Then followed a few days of clearing the battlefield; baths and some captured rations. The sun was bright and warm, but the campaign was only just beginning.

Meanwhile, mobile troops of the 4th Indian Division had pushed on, but after a few busy days the transport returned on 4th February 1941 to take the battalion on to Keren, a magnificent natural fortress sixty miles to the east, where the advanced had been checked. The only road from the Sudan to Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, led through Keren, and the Italians had blown a large slice of mountain across the road just to the west of the town. All approach to the block could be observed from six-thousand-foot-high Mount Sanchil and what came to be called Brig's Peak, both north of the road, and from a smaller range of hills on the other side.

The 11th Indian Brigade had already tried to capture these two peaks before the 5th Brigade arrived. They had failed, but the Cameron Highlanders had occupied positions about half a mile below the crests on what had already become known as Cameron Ridge. An ambitious plan was therefore conceived by which the 5th Brigade was to try and turn the enemy's flank, starting with a silent night attack by one of the Indian battalions, the 4/6th Rajputana Rifles, over the Acqua Col. The 1st Battalion was promised a most difficult and hazardous exploitation role if the attack was successful. However, as soon as the leading companies of the Rajputana Rifles contacted the enemy it was quickly obvious that he had be heavily reinforced.

The attack was called off, but, instead of withdrawing before dawn from the bottle-neck of 'Happy Valley', as intended, the whole brigade group remained there for five more days while other plans were tried. They were completely overlooked at short range and had their first experience of extremely effective Italian 81-mm mortars, besides some unpleasant bombardment from artillery and the air. Everyone was therefore only too glad to leave Happy Valley for what proved to be a very short reorganisation in the transport area before being sent up two days later to relieve the Camerons on Cameron Ridge.

Cameron Ridge was a most uncomfortable ridge from which several unsuccessful attacks had already been launched against Brig's Peak and Sanchil, which was resolutely held and now completely overlooked. In the forward companies all movement by day was quite impossible. There was a certain amount of enemy shelling and patrolling. Rations of water had to be carried up by men of the reserve company from the dump over a thousand feet below. Both food and water were therefore extremely short. By day it was very hot and there was no shade; by night it could be bitterly cold. The smell of the old battlefield and the flies made life almost unbearable, so it was not surprising that a number of men were evacuated with dysentery and by the end of the campaign almost every survivor was suffering from desert sores. With one short break for a rest in the transport area, these living conditions continued for the remaining six weeks of battle.

Eventually, on 15th March, the 5th Indian Division had completed its move forward and a combined attack by the two divisions was to start, with the 5th Division in the valleys on the right. As the attack started, the 1st Battalion was withdrawn into the 4th Division reserve.

The attacks by the other battalions against Brig's Peak and Sanchil led to their now customary gallant failure, but over-optimistic reports caused various companies of the 1st Battalion to be committed singly to reinforce the failures of other units. After an extremely unpleasant day of patchy fighting in which the battalion had suffered one hundred and thirty casualties, which included Sergeant Chivers, who was killed before his D.C.M. won at Argodat was published, battalion headquarters and the bulk of 'C' and 'D' Companies were located a very short distance from the most important posts on Sanchil. After dark a fighting patrol from 'C' Company, very resolutely led by Lieutenant Dexter, and strongly supported by 'D' Company under Major Stevens, failed to penetrate the defences and proved to any doubters that the enemy were still holding in very considerable strength.