



## HARRINGTON, BERNARD HARRY

Nationality: United Kingdom

Rank: Gunner

Regiment: Royal Artillery 67 (Suffolk) Medium Regiment with the 8th Army

This was a Territorial Army Unit

Age: 22

Date of Death: 14/11/1942

Service No: 968776

He was born at Brook Hall Farm & lived in Fingringhoe. Son of Harry and Muriel Harrington. At the time of his death, his mother was a widow living at the Bungalow, South Green, Fingringhoe. He had been called up into the Royal Artillery at the age of 20. He had joined the Army in 1940 and was transferred to the Middle East in 1941.

He had been educated at Fingringhoe and then Rowhedge. Bernard had been employed pre-war at Hitchcock's Mill, Fingringhoe. He left a widowed mother, a brother and a married sister, Mrs Winnie Cook.

The 67th Medium Regiment was in the UK in 1940, as part of 4 Corps Troops. They moved to the Western Desert 1941-2 serving as part of GHQ Troops. In 1942 they were still serving as part of the 8th Army. In June 1942 the Regiment was captured at Tobruk.

Bernard was part of the British/ South African garrison of Tobruk, which became surrounded by the Afrika Korps as Rommel advanced. The British general, Ritchie ordered that a defensive perimeter was to be put around Tobruk which extended out to 30 kms from the city. 'Fortress Tobruk' was placed under the command of Major-General H Klopper, commander of the 2nd South African Division. Klopper had at his disposal about 35,000 men and a total of 2,000 military vehicles of various types. Supplies of all sorts were designed to last for 3 months. However, Klopper also faced a number of serious problems. The Desert Air Force had moved to bases that were too far away from Tobruk to give it any form of air cover when the attack was to come from Rommel. Secondly, he had no modern anti-tank weapons at his disposal as he was primarily equipped with

about 40 outclassed 2-pounders against Rommel's tank force. His third serious problem was that there were very large gaps in the mine fields that surrounded Tobruk.

At 08.00 on June 20th in 1942, Rommel attacked Tobruk. By 10.00, the Afrika Korps had penetrated nearly 3 kms into the 30 kms perimeter put around Tobruk. Defensive positions crumpled and by 19.00 the XXI Panzers were actually in Tobruk. The capture of Tobruk had taken less than one day. Klopper formally surrendered to Rommel on the morning of June 21st and all fighting had ended by the end of that day.

Bernard was captured at Tobruk at this time and was being transported to Italy, as a POW by the Italian ship 'SS SCILLIN' (1903, 1579 BRT) some 10 miles north of Cape Milazzo from on the voyage from Tripoli to Sicily when they were sunk by the British Submarine HMS SAHIB on the 14 November 1942 (Lt John Bromage). There were 815 Commonwealth prisoners of war aboard. Only 26 British P.O.Ws. and one South African were rescued + 35 members of the Italian crew, by HMS SAHIB.

The following is an excerpt from a book "Copper Wire" by a RAF pilot Robert Harding taken prisoner by the Italians, which gives an account of the sinking of the SS Scillin :-

*"The Italians were not fussy about how they transported prisoners from Libya to Italy. Often tramp steamers, which transported coal, munitions and war materials to Tripoli, were used to take live cargoes on the return trip. On these occasions, little regard was shown for the comfort or safety of the Prisoners of War, who were treated little better than animals. So it was with both those on The Scillin and, later, those of us on the final convoy to leave Tripoli. How very, very, fortunate I was not to have remained with the main body of prisoners who, on the 15th November, 1942, were taken to the Spanish Mole at Tripoli Harbour... On arrival they saw several ships at berth by the quay. One of these was a small coal-burning steamer of only 1,600 tons. This was the SS Scillin. After being kept standing on the quay for several hours, the prisoners were ordered to board the Scillin. Once on the deck, they were directed to the main hold from where two ladders led down into the dark. The hold was really only large enough to take about 300 men, if they were to be allowed to lie down during the three days of travel. But this did not deter the Italians. Although Captain Gilbert protested, more and more men were sent down the ladders. When 810 prisoners had been loaded, a halt was called. The men were then so tightly packed that no one could lie down..."*

*The boat finally sailed on the evening of 15th November. (Another account says at 1pm on the 13th.) Either that night or shortly afterwards, the Scillin was attacked by a British submarine at about 20:30 hours. At that time Captain Gilbert was on deck treating some fifteen of the most seriously ill prisoners. Suddenly, out of the darkness, came a shell, which burst on the superstructure of the cargo boat. A second shell caused casualties. Then there was a violent explosion as a torpedo struck the Scillin in the hold carrying the prisoners. All on deck were thrown into the sea. Those below had no chance at all to escape. Captain Gilbert (the medical officer), Staff Sergeant Regester (a South African) and others were in the water for several minutes. The boat had sunk. Then the submarine, HMS Sahib or P212, came out of the darkness and began to pick up survivors. Reports from the submarine crew tell a little of what happened then. The captain, Lieutenant Bromage, and his men were astonished and deeply shocked to find so many men in the water.*

*One crew member is said to have shouted, "Any Englishmen in the water?" Back came the reply, "Nae, but there is a Scotsman!" The rescue went on for about half an hour before the Sahib was forced to retreat as an escort vessel approached. During that time 26 British and 35 Italians were rescued. Bromage and his crew were most upset by what had happened. However, the Scillin had been unmarked, in total darkness and had been carrying enemy materials. Later the Captain was absolved from all blame." reference*

<http://www.chessmail.com/copperwire/extract1.html>

### **HMS Sahib**

sunk on the 24 April 1943

Depth charged off Sicily by Italian CVT Euterpe

On 16th April 1943 HMS Sahib attacked and sank the merchant ship Galiolo, two miles off



Capa Milazzo. After firing, the Sahib almost broke the surface. This was noticed by an aircraft, which dropped a bomb but to no effect. The torpedo boat Climene almost immediately obtained contact with the submarine. At about 0545, Sahib came under heavy depth charge attack resulting in the pressure hull being holed at the aft ends. With no way of repairing the damage, the order to prepare to abandon ship was given. The submarine surfaced to be welcomed by a machine gun attack from the waiting aircraft. As the crew left the submarine, Sahib was scuttled.



1939-45 Star      Africa Star  
1939-45          War Medal



**Casualty Type: Commonwealth War Dead**

**Grave/Memorial Reference: Column 35.**

**Cemetery: ALAMEIN MEMORIAL**

© cwgc

The campaign in the Western Desert was fought between the Commonwealth forces (with, later, the addition of two brigades of Free French and one each of Polish and Greek troops) all based in Egypt, and the Axis forces (German and Italian) based in Libya. The battlefield, across which the fighting surged back and forth between 1940 and 1942, was the 1,000 kilometres of desert between Alexandria in Egypt and Benghazi in Libya. It was a campaign of manoeuvre and movement, the objectives being the control of the Mediterranean, the link with the east through the Suez Canal, the Middle East oil supplies and the supply route to Russia through Persia. The ALAMEIN MEMORIAL forms the entrance to Alamein War Cemetery. The Land Forces panels commemorate more than 8,500 soldiers of the Commonwealth who died in the campaigns in Egypt and Libya, and in the operations of the Eighth Army in Tunisia up to 19 February 1943, who have no known grave. It also commemorates those who served and died in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Persia. The Air Forces panels commemorate more than 3,000 airmen of the Commonwealth who died in the campaigns in Egypt, Libya, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Greece, Crete and the Aegean, Ethiopia, Eritrea and the Somalilands, the Sudan, East Africa, Aden and Madagascar, who have no known grave. Those who served with the Rhodesian and South African Air Training Scheme and have no known grave are also commemorated here. EL ALAMEIN WAR CEMETERY contains the graves of men who died at all stages of the Western Desert campaigns, brought in from a wide area, but especially those who died in the Battle of El Alamein at the end of October 1942 and in the period



immediately before that. The cemetery now contains 7,239 Commonwealth burials of the Second World War, of which 814 are unidentified. There are also 102 war graves of other nationalities. The ALAMEIN CREMATION MEMORIAL, which stands in the south-eastern part of El Alamein War Cemetery, commemorates more than 600 men whose remains were cremated in Egypt and Libya during the war, in accordance with their faith.



**St Andrew's Church Fingringhoe Memorial to Bernard**

references Essex County Standard & Internet



*THE UNITED BENEFICE OF ABBERTON, EAST DONYPOND, FINGRINGHOE, LANGENHOE*