



**Name:** John Roberts

**Position:** Private

**DOB-DOD:** 1913- 8 July 1944

John was working as a clerical officer in Birmingham Telephone Hse before joining the British army and eventually the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion.

The 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1/7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Battalions were part of the BEF in France and Belgium, and like other units they had to fight their way back to the beaches of Dunkirk when the German army launched Blitzkrieg.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion were tasked with keeping the main Allied supply route to Dunkirk open. This included setting up defensive positions around the town of Wormhoudt. By 27 May 1940 there were fears that they would be cut off.

In a nearby Hamlet, Esquelbecq, was a German stronghold which included three battalions of the SS Hitler Regiment. The SS attacked the allied troops at 07:30 and by 16:00 had overrun their position. About 70 men from the Royal Artillery, 2<sup>nd</sup> Warwickshire and 4<sup>th</sup> Cheshire regiments were stripped and herded into a nearby milking shed. The SS troops threw in grenade and open fire with machine guns, killing over half of the men.

The survivors of the massacre were taken prisoner for a few days by the German army. The dead were buried in Esquelbecq war cemetery. Many of the culprits have never been brought to trial nor identified.

In 1944 the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion landed on Queen beach, a sub-division of Sword, on 6 June 1944. The 1/7<sup>th</sup> Battalion joined them on 8 July to capture the village of St. Contest, fighting against the first-rate 25<sup>th</sup> SS Panzer Grenadiers.

By 18:30, St. Contest was captured by the Allies, with the loss of 26 men, including Private John Roberts, and 96 wounded. By August the Allies had secured Normandy.

The 1/7<sup>th</sup> battalion were disbanded on 31 August 1944 and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion remained in North West Europe until September 1944 when they were moved to Holland. They helped with the eastward advance around Venraai so that in March 1945 the Allies crossed the Rhine.

John was remembered by his parents Edward Harry and Emily Roberts and his wife Lillian Roberts, of Birmingham . He is buried in La Deliverande War Cemetery in Douvres the Calvados region of France.

His name is also recorded on a memorial in Birmingham Telephone Hse. His family provided a very touching and deeply moving inscription in memory of their son "FOR EVERYONE HE DID HIS BEST GOD GRANT HIM



Troops of the 2nd Battalion, Royal Warwickshire Regiment dug in with a Bren gun along a hedge near Venray, the Netherlands, 17 October 1944.