

Fact File: Redvers Strathcona MITCHELL

Profile

Surname: MITCHELL

First names: Redvers Strathcona

Service No: 6852990

Rank: Lance Corporal

Regiment/Service: 1st Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps (KRRC)

Date of Death: Killed in action on 21 November 1941, during the Battle of Sidi Rezegh, Libya, North Africa.

His body was never found.

Memorial: ALAMEIN MEMORIAL; Redvers' name is inscribed on Column 66 of the memorial. The memorial forms the entrance to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission 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.



The Alamein Cemetery, 130 kilometres west of Alexandria in Egypt, with the memorial wall at the back on which Redvers' name is inscribed

Operation Crusader

The Battle for Sidi Rezegh: November - December 1941

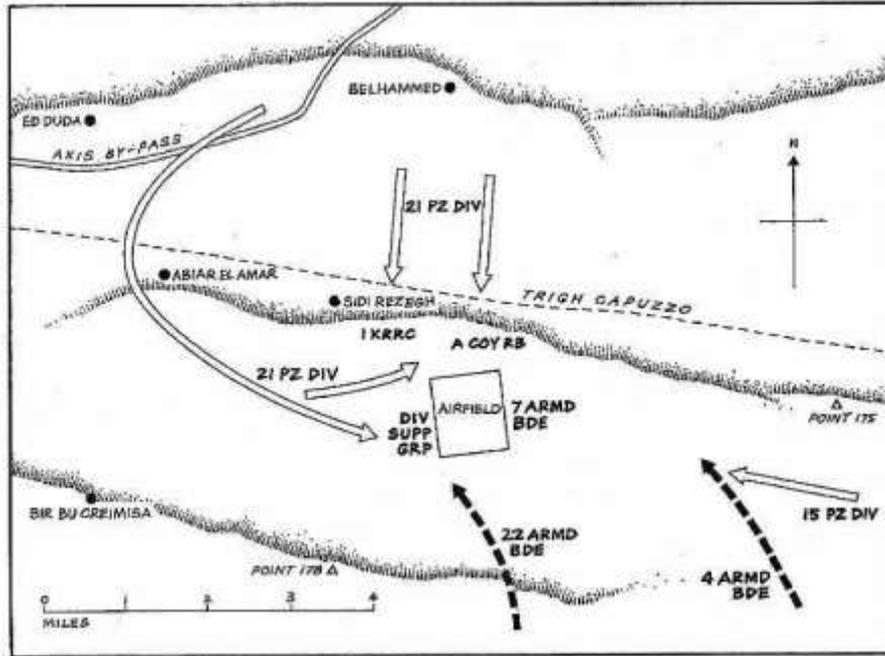
During the North Africa campaign, the largest group of Rhodesians, consisting of four officers and one hundred and twenty-three other ranks, went to the 1st Battalion The King's Royal Rifle Corps. **Redvers Mitchell** was one. Of this number, one officer and seventy-four other ranks had been intended for the Queen's Westminsters, and should have proceeded to England to join their regiment there. This instruction was, however, cancelled, and they too, after spending some time in the barracks at the Citadel in Cairo, were absorbed by the KRRC. **The 1st KRRC fought almost to the last at Sidi Rezegh, only fifty-five all ranks escaped in the battle where the Regiment's 23rd Victoria Cross was won.**



King's Royal Rifle Corps badge

The King's Royal Rifle Corps, with its Rhodesian platoons, had moved up before dawn on the morning of 20 November to relieve the 7th Armoured Brigade on the Sidi Rezegh landing-ground. On the way they encountered a troop of the South African Reconnaissance Regiment, who brought the timely but disturbing news that, during the preceding night, a continuous column of heavy enemy tanks, on the march from the south, had passed close to where the South Africans were concealed. By 0900 the Battalion had occupied a position to the south of the landing-ground where, supported by the guns of the field batteries, they proceeded to dig weapon pits as best they could on the rocky slopes. Continuous fire from hostile batteries was experienced, and large bodies of enemy infantry could be seen to the west and north.

Except for patrol activity, the night passed quietly, but at 0200 on 21 November, officers were summoned to attend a conference at which verbal orders were issued. The Battalion was to launch an attack that morning by means of which it was hoped to seize the steep escarpment north of Sidi Rezegh landing-ground.



The Battle of Sidi Rezegh, which clearly shows the 1st KRRC totally surrounded by the German 21 Panzer Division

The escarpment commanded the chief Axis line of communication from east to west – the Trigh Capuzzo – the disruption of which would be a serious blow to the enemy.

The attack, which of necessity had to be a frontal assault across the landing-ground, was to be preceded by concentrations of artillery fire on the enemy positions followed immediately by a carrier assault. Companies were to form up south of the landing-ground at a quarter to eight and cross the start-line at eight-thirty.

The attack ended in complete success. In spite of heavy enfilade fire from German small arms and anti-tank guns, which caused severe casualties among the carriers and advancing companies, all objectives were in the hands of the Battalion by twelve noon, and over seven hundred prisoners taken.

During that afternoon, every effort was made to strengthen the captured position against the expected counter-attack. The night was undisturbed, although in the distance could be heard the heavy, sinister rumble of enemy tanks on the march. Then, as a cold rainy night drew to an end in a drearier dawn, the slopes to the north of Trigh Capuzzo were seen to be covered with Axis vehicles, including eighty tanks.

A steady shelling of the Battalion's position began and increased as the morning passed. To the south could be heard the sound of heavy firing growing ever closer, as the few surviving tanks of the 7th Armoured Brigade, led by the undaunted Brigadier Campbell in his staff car, endeavoured to hold the superior Axis forces.

At 1330, the German armour to the north began to move with purposeful speed. Supported by an intense barrage it swept in massed formation round the left flank of the Battalion, swung back and hurled itself, an avalanche of armour, on the unprotected infantry. With only anti-tank rifles, incapable of even denting the turrets of the massive Mark IVs, and a few two-pounders, the infantry were helpless.



Allied troops at Sidi Rezegh

In spite of all possible resistance on the part of the riflemen in a hopeless struggle, the Battalion positions were overrun. Five officers and fifty other ranks, joined later by roughly another hundred, were all who escaped.

Almost the entire personnel of three companies were missing.

That evening such transport as could be found was collected, and the survivors of the Battalion hastily organised. Then, through a night of wild confusion, lit on every side by the red, green and white flares of the enemy and the sinister, ruby glow of shattered, smouldering tanks, the withdrawal was begun.

Of the Rhodesians serving with the KRRC and present at the Battle of Sidi Rezegh, twenty-two were taken prisoner, two were killed, Rifleman G.R. Ault and **Rifleman R.S. Mitchell**, and of the eleven wounded, three died, Corporal H. B. Mitchell, Corporal W. D. Pyman and Rifleman C. Priestley. For his notable bravery and initiative in these operations, Rhodesian Lieutenant O.H. Newton received an immediate award of the Military Cross.

Gerry van Tonder
09 April 2015