

ERIC BRADSHAW – Private 6023849

Age 26

2nd Battalion Leicestershire Regiment

Killed in Action 15 March 1941

Buried at Keren War Cemetery, Eritrea, with the family inscription:

'Memories Are Our Dearest Treasures. Rest in Peace'

Also remembered on Harthill War Memorial



Eric Bradshaw was the youngest of four boys. He was born in late 1914 to John Willie Bradshaw, a coal miner, and his wife Marion Elizabeth. He was baptised at All Hallows Church, Harthill on 10 January 1915. After leaving school, he worked for his brother, Billy Bradshaw, in the family shop opposite the church, delivering groceries.

Eric enlisted in the Army, initially with the Essex Regiment and later transferred to the 2nd Battalion Leicestershire Regiment. The 2nd Battalion Leicestershire Regiment formed part of, 16th Infantry Brigade. In September 1940, the Battalion moved to the Western Desert and took part in the December "push" of Wavell's 30,000.

The Battalion then moved on to the attack on Keren, which was the last Italian stronghold in Eritrea, and the scene of the most decisive battle of the war in East Africa in February and March 1941.

Guarding the entrance from the western plains to the Eritrean plateau, the only road passing through a deep gorge with precipitous and well-fortified mountains on either side, Keren formed a perfect defensive position. On these heights, the Italians concentrated some 23,000 riflemen, together with a large number of well-sited guns and mortars.

A preliminary assault by British and Indian troops was repulsed after a week of bitter fighting, although they gained and held a valuable position on Cameron's Ridge, on the left of the road. On 15 March 1941, they commenced their third and decisive attack. It was on this day that Eric was killed.

After ten days of gruelling combat, the Commonwealth troops succeeded in forcing their way through the seemingly impregnable defences on the ridge, and through the 200-metre long roadblock, which the Italians had blasted at the narrowest point in the pass. Keren was taken on 27 March 1941.

The defeated Italian force retreated in some disarray to Asmara, which fell to Commonwealth forces on 1 April and the Italian's surrendered at the port of Massawa on 8 April 1941.

The Keren War Cemetery contains 440 Commonwealth burials of the Second World War, 35 of them unidentified. The Keren Cremation Memorial stands within the cemetery and commemorates 285 Sikh and Hindu soldiers from India and Pakistan killed on the Keren battlefield during the Second World War, whose remains were cremated in accordance with their faith. Three East African soldiers are also commemorated on the memorial.