John Carbutt





Rank: - Gunner

Number: - 1439376

Regiment: - Royal Artillery, 56 Lt. A.A./Anti-Tank Regt.

Died: - Killed in Action, Burma 31 October 1944

Cemetery: - Imphal War Cemetery, India 9.F.F

Batley News, 25 Nov 1944 (photo)

Robert was born in 1921 the son of Robert and Louisa Carbutt nee Turton who had married at St. Peters Church, Birstall on 25 October 1898. Horace was born in1901 followed by Ronald 1904-1905, Mary Annie 1905-1905, Annie 1909, Luke 1911, Wilfred 1916 and John. The family lived at 43, Brookroyd Lane, Batley.

John attended Birstall Council School and was later employed at Thomas Burnley and Sons, Gomersal. He was a member of Birstall Liberal Club and played with the Physical Culture F.C.

John joined the forces in 1939 and was at Dunkirk in 1940. The 56th had a wonderful record as a fighting unit; firstly, in Flanders during the 1940 campaign, after which it was evacuated at Dunkirk. Then, after a period at home on Beach Defence and Anti-Invasion roles, it went to the Far East.

On 7 December 1941, the Japanese attacked the US naval base at Pearl Harbour and later declared war on Britain and the United States. In the days and weeks that followed the Japanese invaded European colonies across East Asia, including the British territories of Hong Kong, Malaya, Singapore and Burma. They hoped to create a fortified perimeter around a self-sufficient Japan, which could be defended until the Allies tired of the war. The British had long thought a Japanese land invasion of Burma unlikely, so its defences had been neglected. When the attack began in January 1942, the British position quickly deteriorated. By March, the capital Rangoon and its vital port had been lost. As the Japanese pushed northwards, the surviving Allied troops carried out a five-month fighting retreat to India across 1,000miles (1,600km) of difficult terrain.

The fighting in the Burma camp 1942–3, Fourteenth Army adopted a new policy with the formation of composite Light Anti-Aircraft/Anti-Tank regiments, each containing two LAA and two A/T batteries. This format was intended to help divisions distribute sub-units with balanced firepower and mutual support in close jungle fighting where battle groups often had to move independently 56th A/T Regiment was one of those selected for conversion, transferring 203 and 290 Btys to 55th (Devon) LAA Rgt (thus retaining the two original King's Own batteries), and receiving 163 and 164 LAA Btys in exchange in July and August 1943. These were equipped with the Bofors 0mm gun. The regiment was in training with XV Corps in September 1943, before joining 5th Indian Infantry Division in Burma in October.

The 5th Indian Division was facing the Japanese 55th Division on the coastal flank of the Arakan front. The defeat of the Japanese 55th Division, to which a large share of the credit must go to the Indian 5th Division, was the first decisive victory against the Japanese since they had invaded Burma two years previously. From the victory in the Arakan sector, the 5th Indian Infantry Division was air-lifted to the central front. 161 Brigade joined XXX111 Corps, which was beginning to arrive at Dimapur, and fought in the Battle of Kohima while the remainder of the division reinforced 1V Corps, whose land victory at Kohima and

Imphal, in which the Division played an important part, proved to be the turning-point of the Burma Campaign. Except for one period of rest and reorganization, the Indian 5th Division continued to fight and to advance throughout the rest of the war, and took part in the final thrust by IV Corps down to Rangoon.

The Burma campaign in 1944 was among the most severe in the South-East Asian Theatre of World War II. It took place along the borders between Burma and India, and Burma and China, and involved the British Commonwealth, Chinese and United States forces, against the forces of Imperial Japan and the Indian National Army. The attempted invasion of India was the largest defeat to that date in Japanese history. They had suffered 55,000 casualties, including 13,500 dead. Most of these losses were the result of disease, malnutrition and exhaustion. The Allies suffered 17,500 casualties. From August to November, Fourteenth Army pursued the Japanese to the Chindwin River despite heavy monsoon rains.

Robert was awarded the 1939-45 Star; 1939-1945 War Medal

He is remembered with Honour on Batley and Birstall War Memorials Addenda 1998



Researched by members of
Batley History Group