

WW2 REMEMBERED

LIEUTENANT JOHN DARELL JEFFREYS

John was born on the 18th December 1919 in Chelsea, London, the elder son of Captain Robin Edmund Jeffreys RN and Marjorie Ellenwood, nee Hobbs. He was baptised at St Paul's, Knightsbridge on the 19th January 1920. His father had a distinguished record during WW1 and was promoted during the inter-war years serving in Portsmouth and later with the New Zealand Navy. As a consequence the family moved around both in Britain and abroad and John was a boarder at Eton College until 1937. It is likely that John went to Sandhurst to train as an Army officer when he was 18 years old.

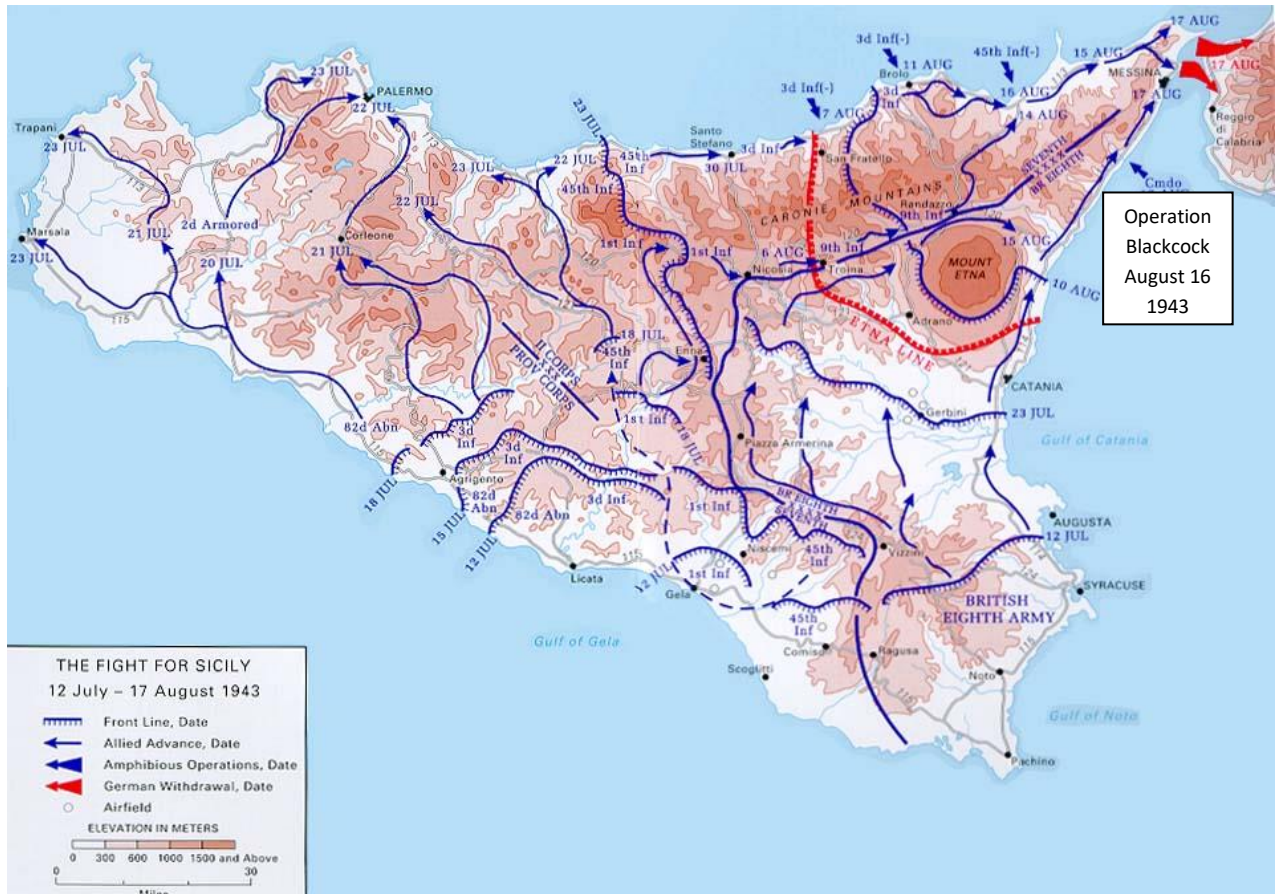
On the 1st July 1939 he was posted to the King's Own Scottish Borderers as a 2nd Lieutenant with service number 95227. Though we do not have a record of John's service with the KOSB, all its battalions were sent to France with the British Expeditionary Force and then evacuated either through Dunkirk (1st/2nd Battalions) or Cherbourg (4th/5th Battalions). John was promoted to Lieutenant on the 1st January 1941, which would be consistent with him having served in France. By the end of 1941 the 4th and 5th Territorial Battalions were training as mountain troops in Scotland and it is possible that John was serving in one of these battalions.



John volunteered to join the Commandos in 1942. The Commandos were raised in 1940 at Winston Churchill's order to form an all-volunteer elite striking force with highest standards of initiative, mental alertness and physical fitness, together with the maximum skill at arms. For example Commandos were required to be able to march and run 7 miles in one hour with all their weapons and engage the enemy upon arrival. John proved his capability at the Commandos own training establishment at Achnacarry in the Scottish Highlands.



He was posted to No.2 Commando, which was reforming after suffering significant losses in Operation Chariot, the historic raid on the St Nazaire docks on 28 March 1942. No. 2 Commando trained in Scotland throughout 1942 and embarked for Gibraltar around March 1943 en route for Sicily. It was a six week trip due to routes being changed to avoid submarines. After defeating German and Italian forces in North Africa, on 10 July 1943 allied forces numbering 160,000 invaded Sicily, opposed by a joint Italian and German defending force of 170,000, later reinforced to around 300,000. Over the next month of fierce fighting (mainly against the rapidly reinforced German troops) and heavy casualties the allied forces forced the enemy back towards the North-Eastern port of Messina.



No. 2 Commando didn't land in Sicily until 22 July and were not in action until 16 August, when they were detailed for Operation Blackcock, an amphibious landing behind enemy lines south of Messina to cut off enemy lines of retreat. The landing and initial advance went well, but German resistance stiffened and in house-to-house fighting in the village of Scaletta, John was killed later that day aged just 23 years.

He was initially buried at Scaletta, but on 26 January 1944 he was re-buried in the Catania War Cemetery with a headstone inscription "Being made perfect in a little while he fulfilled long years" (the Commonwealth War Graves Commission reburial report has an amendment suggesting he was a Temporary Captain).



CWGC and later probate records show John's address as Wilton, High Street, Great Chesterford. His mother was shown in the 1939 Register living there with her parents George and Gertrude Hobbs, while his father was on active service (as indeed he had been during WW1, when he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross).

After the war his parents had a St George flag, emblazoned with the Canterbury diocese arms, and flagstaff dedicated at St John the Baptist church Doddington, Kent, their family home, in memory of John Darell and his brother Edmund Henry, who both lost their lives in WW2.