

Doncaster Teacher awarded Military Cross in WW2

By Ken Cooke a former pupil of Ron Cockroft

Tank Commander awarded the Military Cross for his bravery under fire in France

Teacher of PE & Games at Adwick-le-Street, Doncaster, from 1949 to 1978



Army lieutenant 1944



Churchill tanks 107th Regiment Aug 1944



Reunion Sept 2009

Wm Ronald F Cockroft - 'Ron' – was born in 1918 and grew up in Barrow-in-Furness (Lancashire, at that time) and attended the local grammar school. At the outbreak of WW2 he signed up for military service and served until 1946. He was commissioned in June 1940 as an officer in the Royal Armoured Corps (The Kings Own), 107th Regiment, and was promoted to captain on the battlefield.

Following the Normandy landing and heavy fighting in northern France, his unit of Churchill tanks advanced through Belgium and the Netherlands. After the Battle of Reichswald (on the Siegfried Line, Feb 1945) they crossed the northern Rhine near Kleves on 7th April 1945. On the 4th May 1945 his tank unit formed part of the guard at the signing of the German Surrender on Lüneburg Heath, presided over by Field Marshal Montgomery. During this duty his unit was strafed by a rogue Luftwaffe pilot but there were no casualties.

For strategic actions and bravery under fire in France he was awarded the Military Cross in August 1944. The citation concluded '... an inspiration to all ranks.' He was demobbed in April 1946 in the rank of major.

After the war Ron was always extremely reluctant to discuss his war service and his award and he forbade people addressing him as 'Major'. He trained as a PE teacher at Carnegie College, Leeds and he married Connie, a teacher and later head teacher for many years in South Elmsall. In September 1949 he embarked on his career job as boys' PE & Games teacher at the Percy Jackson Grammar School and subsequently the Adwick School in Adwick-le-Street, Doncaster, retiring in 1978.

As a teacher, he was known for his discipline - not always appreciated at the time! - but he was scrupulously fair and a 'builder of character'.

Ron died on 13 July 2018, just three months before his 100th birthday.

=====

Citation: Supplement to London Gazette 4 November 1944

Capt. W. R. F. Cockroft.

"During 7/8 Aug. 107 R. A. C. were in support of the infantry of 59 infantry division in the bridgehead across the R. ORNE (9551). On the late evening of 7 Aug. when communications had broken down Capt. Cockroft accompanied his Squadron Leader through enemy positions, passing through heavy light machine gun and mortar fire, to regain contact with "C" Squadron tanks on the left of the bridgehead.

Later, and still under enemy fire, he rescued a wounded trooper from a knocked out tank and evacuated him across the river.

At 0500 hrs 8 Aug. when reinforcement tanks ran onto a minefield, Capt. Cockroft went forward, and, ignoring enemy mortar fire and sniping, assisted his Squadron Leader in locating and lifting the mines, thereby permitting the tanks to move up in close support of the infantry.

Later on the morning he was slightly wounded in the leg by a mortar splinter but he refused to be evacuated.

By contacting "C" Squadron night 7 Aug. and lifting the enemy mines on 8 Aug. Capt. Cockroft did much to co-ordinate and strengthen resistance to enemy armour; throughout the action this courageous officer showed a tireless devotion to duty and a calm disregard for personal safety that was an inspiration to all ranks".

Capt'd



Capt Cockroft near Eindhoven, January 1945



Military Cross

Sources

- 1) Personal conversations with Ron during his last 15 years.
- 2) History of the 107th Regiment, Royal Armoured Corps, The King's Own.
<http://www.kingsownmuseum.com/ww2-107ko.htm>
- 3) Supplement to the London Gazette 4 Nov 1944 (Citations).