POOLE, Eric George



Gunner, 1092634,
Royal Artillery
Place of Birth: Haverhill
Lost at Sea: Saturday, 14th November 1942
Commemorated: Alamein Memorial
Aged: 27 years

Eric George Poole was born in the autumn of 1915 at 15 Recreation Road, Haverhill, the only child of parents Frank Poole and Edith, formerly Webb. Both families were of long standing in the town, with Eric's three times great grandparents, Thomas Poole and Mary Farrant marrying at St Mary's church in 1773.

Grandparents were living close by in the Chauntry Croft area: George Poole, then a widower, was living at 17 Chainey Pieces and working as a cloth warehouseman at Gurteens, whilst George and Ada Webb, were living at 62 Mill Road, with George a baker. His father also worked at Gurteens as a cutter on the band knife machine, an important job.

Eric attended the Cangle School and also the Old Independent Church where he was a member of the Boys Brigade (pictured far right).



He was also a keen cyclist and a member of Haverhill Wheelers.

Eric worked at Hayward's Garage, in Queen Street, and drove the Post Office van to either Halstead or Colchester.

His daughter Ann recalls from reading a letter "*On one occasion dad was to go to court about his driving but someone put in a word and it was dropped"*.



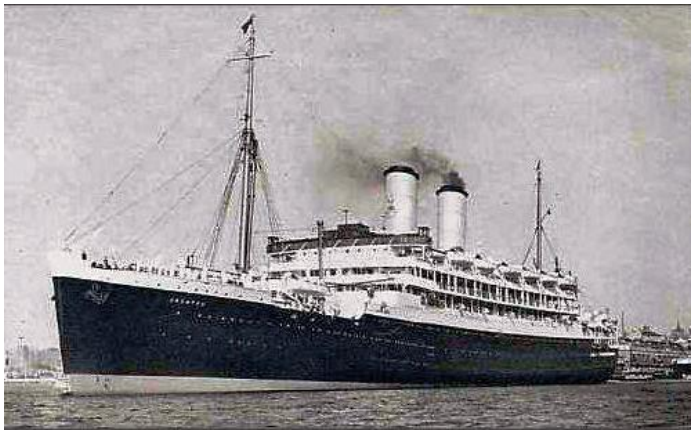
Eric met Dorothy Ruth Smith, always known as Ruth, daughter of George and Beatrice, formerly Hughes. They were married at Hundon church on 28th October 1938, with Ruth's sisters Mona & Doreen as bridesmaids, the reception was held in the Hundon Church School Room.



They set up home at 52 Mill Road, Haverhill, where Ann was born and lived, until she married Alex Chapman of Castle Camps. Ann was a tailoress, adding "we all worked at Gurteens, I was there for 41 years".

Ann (pictured above with her father) recalls: *"Dad was supposed to be in the Suffolks, but caught scarlet fever and went into the Isolation Hospital up Clements Lane. He eventually joined the Kent Yeomanry".*

The Kent Yeomanry, aka 97th Field Regiment of the Royal Artillery, saw action in France before withdrawing to Dunkirk in May 1940.



Back home they were on defensive duties in Wales before moving to Essex in early 1941. In August they embarked at Glasgow on board *SS Orontes* their destination unknown.



They spent 64 days at sea, covering some 12,000 miles, via Cape Town & Bombay, before disembarking at Basra in Iraq where they formed part of the 10th Indian Division to defend the oil fields from possible attacks by the Turkish army. Christmas 1942 was spent near Baghdad, which must have been a strange experience for Eric, who was an army lorry driver (pictured 2nd right).

By May there was a greater threat from the Axis forces in Egypt so Eric and the Kent Yeomanry were sent there, via Palestine and the pyramids at Cairo.

On 6th June after 10 days and some 1600 miles they occupied defensive positions on two small hills near Tobruk, just across the border in Libya. The sound of enemy guns could already be heard. Several days of heavy fighting soon followed and with their positions over-run Eric and his colleagues became Italian prisoners of war at camp 154.



It was from here that Eric sent postcards home, the last on 26th Oct 1942 (pictured).

At Tripoli, Eric along with 814 other Commonwealth POWs boarded the Italian cargo vessel S.S. Scillin en-route to Sicily.

On the night of 13th November, it headed straight into the Sicily Invasion area and a line of protective submarines. It carried no flag or marker to indicate it was carrying Prisoners of War. The SS Scillen was spotted by a British submarine, HMS Sahib, which surfaced and ordered it to stop. When it did not do so the submarine fired a single torpedo and the SS Scillen sank within a minute. Only 26 men survived.

Letters to his wife Ruth followed from the Officer-in-Charge, Royal Artillery Records and on 27th August 1943 one read:

> *A further report has been received from a reliable source to the effect that your Husband was believed to have been on an Italian Ship transporting*

Prisoners of War from North Africa to Italy when the vessel was sunk in the Mediterranean. ….. it is regretted that there is no alternative but to revert him to the "Missing at Sea" category ….. until definite news is received.

Ann can remember her mum reading a letter and crying. In the following January, Ruth received the official notification of Eric's death.



Eric was awarded four medals:
1939-45 Star (Battle of Britain), Africa Star, War Medal 1939-45, Defence Medal.

He is commemorated on the Alamein Memorial, Egypt, on a memorial plaque in the Old Independent Church, Haverhill and in a regimental memorial book at All Saints Church, Maidstone.





He is further remembered on his parents' gravestone in Haverhill Cemetery.