

Lieutenant Arthur Richard Burton McGILLYCUDDY

Service number 74898
Somerset Light Infantry
2nd Battalion

Killed in action on 17 September 1944, aged 27

Descended from a 2nd century king of Munster, Arthur's grandfather was 'The McGillicuddy of The Reeks'. Arthur's mother was a District Nurse in Wells until she married Major Richard McGillicuddy MC in 1916. After he died, she returned to Wells, and in 1921 married Dr A. C. Hincks, a Wells GP. Arthur was brought up in Wells. He served in North Africa from the Battle of El Alamein until the capture of Tunis when the Axis forces in North Africa surrendered. Arthur then took part in the Salerno Landings in Italy, and in the final battle for Monte Cassino. He died when the 8th Army broke through the German Gothic Line at Coriano.



Infantry of B Company 1/5th Queen's Royal Regiment practise using collapsible boats before the assault on the River Volturno.

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Arthur was born on 4 February 1917, to Major Richard Hugh McGillicuddy MC and Ethel Florence née Lukey at 40, Compton Road, Wimbledon. His father was a major in the Royal Army Medical Corps who later died from pneumonia on 21 October 1918 while on active service.

Arthur's grandfather was 'The McGillicuddy of The Reeks'. 'The McGillicuddy' is the hereditary Chief of the name of McGillicuddy, a family originating in County Kerry in Ireland. The McGillicuddy is a direct descendant of Mogh Nuaghad, King of Munster, who ruled around 125 AD.

Arthur's mother, who was from Dover, had been a District Nurse in Wells for two years when she married Arthur's father in St Cuthbert's Church on 3 February 1916. She resigned her post and left Wells at the end of May 1916.

After Arthur's father died, his mother moved back to Wells and lived at 2, Chamberlain Street, and Arthur's sister, Patricia, was born in Wells on 6 June 1919. On 25 January 1921, Arthur's mother married Arthur Hincks at Christ Church in New Malden, Surrey, where her sister Marian Spiers lived.

Dr Arthur Cecil Hincks, MC, MB ChB, had been in general practice in Wells since 1909, and would go on to become Medical Officer of Health for Wells, Police Surgeon, and Medical Officer for the Cottage Hospital. They lived first at 'Melbourne House' on Chamberlain Street, and then at 'Sunnymead', St Thomas Street. Arthur and Ethel had two boys of their own, Peter and Michael.

A summary of Arthur's life up to the start of the war was given in the *Wells Journal* of 6 October 1944:

He was educated at St. Dunstan's Preparatory School, Burnham-on-Sea, Fettes College, Edinburgh, and at Bristol University, where he studied medicine.

He joined the Territorial Army of the Somerset Light Infantry [Wells Platoon] in 1938, and at the outbreak of war he left Bristol University for active service.

While at Bristol University he joined the Officer Training Corps. On 2 April 1938 he was made a 2nd lieutenant in the 4th Battalion Somerset Light Infantry. On 2 October 1939 he became a lieutenant and on 1 July 1941 he became a temporary captain.

On 28 March 1942, in St John's Church Great Clacton, Arthur married Nesta Barbara 'Jimmy' Roper of Layer-de-la-Haye, Essex. Nesta was in the WAAF.

The *Wells Journal* of 6 October 1944 continues his story:

In July, 1942, he was drafted overseas, joining the Eighth Army, and served with the Queen's Royal Regiment throughout the Tunisian campaign. In April this year he joined a Battalion of his own Regiment and served in Italy.

The 131st (Queen's) Infantry Brigade was made up of the 1/5th, 1/6th, and 1/7th Battalions of the Queen's Royal Regiment (West Surrey) and was part of the 44th Infantry Division. In mid-1942 the division was sent to join the British 8th Army in Egypt. We do not know in which battalion Arthur served, but they have a common and distinguished history.

The 44th Division sailed from Gourock on the mouth of the Clyde on 25 May 1942. The 1/6th and 1/7th were on the SS Strathalan and the 1/5th was on the SS Cristobal. They sailed to Egypt via Sierra Leone, South Africa and Aden, and disembarked at Suez on 21 July 1942, joining the 8th Army on 14 August.

The 131st Brigade's desert war started with an attack on Deir El Munassib on 29 September. This was followed by the Battle of El Alamein in October/November. At El Alamein, the 131st Brigade was assigned to the 7th Armoured Division ("The Desert Rats") and would remain with them for the rest of the war.

The brigade took part in the pursuit to Tobruk, which was entered unopposed on 13 November, and then in the advance on Tripoli, which was captured on 23 January 1943. It next advanced to the Mareth Line, fought in the Battle of Medenine on 6 March 1943, and in May took part in the capture of Tunis, where the Germans and Italians fighting in North Africa finally surrendered.

After rest and training it moved to another theatre of war and landed at Salerno in Italy on 19 September and fought in the Battle for the Salerno beachhead. On 28 September it took part in the forcing of the River Sarno, and in October in the crossing of the River Volturno. In January 1944 the 131st Brigade, along with the rest of the 7th Armoured Division, left Italy for England and began training for the invasion of Europe.

In April 1944, Arthur joined the 2nd Battalion Somerset Light Infantry, which was part of the 28th Infantry Brigade, and had arrived in Italy in March 1944. The brigade served in the Italian Campaign as part of the 8th Army, and fought with distinction at the fourth and final Battle of Monte Cassino in May 1944.

In the autumn of 1944, the Coriano Ridge, which was part of the German Gothic Line, was the last important ridge blocking the Allied advance in the Adriatic sector. Its capture was the key to Rimini and eventually to the River Po. German forces, aided by bad weather, resisted all attacks on their positions between 4 and 12 September 1944. On the night of 12 September, the 8th Army reopened its attack on the Ridge. This attack was successful in taking the Ridge, but marked the beginning of a week of the heaviest fighting experienced by the 8th Army since Cassino in May.

Starting from the town of Coriano on 14 September, the 28th Brigade advanced to the River Marano at Cerasolo, which was finally taken on the 17th. The 2nd Battalion was not involved in the final attack but heavy German shelling continued during the day and Arthur was killed by a mortar splinter.

Arthur is buried in Italy in the Coriano Ridge War Cemetery in grave XX, A, 8. He is also remembered on the Fettes College War Memorial and on the Bristol University Roll of Honour at the Wills Memorial Building, and in Wells on the rolls of honour at Wells Town Hall and Wells Cemetery.

Arthur's wife, Nesta, got remarried in Chelsea on 26 April 1947, to Leslie Harmer.