

**Captain Edwin Mackenzie Stevens**  
**Born 17<sup>th</sup> August 1919. Died 05 September 1944 Rimini, Italy.**  
**Remembered on the memorial in St Peter's Church, Seaview and by his family.**



Edwin volunteered for army service upon the outbreak of war in 1939. He joined the 11th (HAC) Regiment RHA in September and was sent to 138th officers training unit, Salisbury Plain, joining 359 Battery R.A. together with his brother Raymond

On passing out, he was posted to Major Greenaway at 272/120 Field Regiment R.A. in Bedford, awaiting embarkation. On arrival in the Egyptian desert his Company became "A" Battery 11th (Honourable Artillery Co.) Regiment Royal Horse Artillery Central Mediterranean, 1st British Armoured Division.

In January 1940 he was promoted Lieutenant.

Notably he fought at Alamein during September 1942 and carried on to Tunis in 1943, where he lost 4 stone from contracting dysentery and malaria.

Nonetheless he went on to take part in the invasion of Italy, starting in Sicily in September 1943 and on to the terrible battle for the monastery, on a hill at Monte Casino. Here he became ADC to Major General Galloway CBE, DSO, MC. in the 1st British Armoured Division. After much waste of life and gallantry, Casino Fell. His regiment had only 5 survivors and they were due to hand over at Rimini and return to U.K. on leave.

This was during the advance from Ancona to Rimini, which broke the German's heavily defended Gothic Line, which was taken by the Allies on 21 September 1944.

Over 1,200,000 men participated in the battle and Rimini had 1.5m rounds fired at it by allied land forces leaving just 2% of the town undamaged when the German forces left. According to Lieutenant-General Sir Oliver Leese, commander of the Eighth Army, "The battle of Rimini was one of the hardest battles of Eighth Army".

In North Africa up to the Battle of Knightsbridge the 11th (HAC) Regiments of the Royal Horse Artillery fought with 25 pounder guns. After that they were equipped with the American M7 Priest self-propelled gun for the second and decisive battle of El Alamein. In the first M7 models, (photos below) the ammunition set included 57 armour penetrating shells. In subsequent models, the ammunition was increased to 69 rounds. Within an hour, the gun could fire up to 100 rounds. The maximum firing range was about 10 km.



British Priest Italy in late June 1944



El Alamein was an enormous and ultimately decisive battle which the allies won. Churchill said of it, "Before Alamein we never had a victory and after Alamein we never had a defeat". Over 230,000 German and Italian troops were taken as prisoners of war, including most of the German army in Africa.

On the other side of the Simonds – Stevens family, Duncan and his brother Kenneth also fought in that battle, so we are in an unusual group of people who had three great uncles who fought in that battle.

Both Edwin Stevens and Duncan Simonds then took part in the Allied invasion of Sicily and the Italian Campaign, as did Duncan's first cousin, Captain John Mellor Simonds, son of **Viscount Gavin Simonds**, who also took part in the invasion of Sicily in July 1943 and was rescued from the sea when his glider was released short of the land. (His story is also on this post) So three of our family were also part of the Sicily invasion.

On 5 September 1944 he joined General E. M. Jones and the new General out from U.K. at a vantage point to explain the lie of the land for 'Operation Olive' (also known as the 'Battle of Rimini'). They were observed and shells landed killing General Jones and Edwin, who took a piece of shell through his lung, aged just 25.

The Gradara War Cemetery where Edwin is buried is situated in the Commune of Gradara in the Province of Pesaro, about 150 miles South of Venice. The cemetery contains the graves of some of the casualties incurred during the advance from Ancona to Rimini, which broke the German's heavily defended Gothic Line, and from the heavy fighting around Rimini, which was taken by the Allies on 21 September 1944.

Service Number 117219

11th (Honourable Artillery Coy.) Regt. Royal Horse Artillery

Son of Capt. Arthur Harold Stevens, M.C., and Clarinda Napier Stevens.

Brother of Captain Raymond Stevens and of Helen and Monica Stevens (Later Holbrook and Simonds).

#### **INSCRIPTION ON HIS GRAVE**

**IN UNDYING AND DEVOTED MEMORY OF OUR DEAR SON.**

**HE DIED THAT WE MIGHT LIVE**