

117219 Capt EM Stevens HAC. 17/8/1919 - 5/9/1944



Edwin's war 1938 - 1944

A snapshot of Edwin's war, taken from his many letters home.

1939/05/15. Volunteered for Officer Training at the HAC, Finsbury Park, after work at Moyses Stevens.

1939/09. Attended and completed 121 Officer Training Course in Aldershot. Passing out as a 2Lt.

1940/01. Joined D Bty, 11 RHA Regt (HAC).

1940. Most of the year was spent in training at multiple UK camps.

1942-43. North African campaign in 1 British Armoured Division of the Eighth Army. [**BATTLES HERE**](#)

1942/07/15. Departed by troopship [**SS Oronsay**](#) in a convoy from Liverpool to Capetown & Durban.

1942/09/05. Arrived Egypt. He wrote ten letters home explaining his conditions & troop training duties, including live firing, fitness & entertainment [**- HERE**](#):

1942/09. Posted to A Bty 11th RHA (HAC) in Cairo for training then fighting westwards towards Tunis.

1942/11/09. During the Second Battle of Alamein his personal 'George Truck' was hit by a 105mm shell. The men sitting on each side of him were killed. Shocked & briefly knocked out, he continued in command.

1942/12/20. Met Duncan Simonds (his future brother-in-law and my father) amongst 4 RHA officers at a Christmas function. The letters are [**- HERE**](#)

1943/01. Flew by [**Hudson**](#) with Maj Gen Galloway from Martuba in Libya to Cairo on the BDRA OP. He attended a course at the Base Depot Royal Artillery for Forward Observation Officers. Then leave.

1943/01. Hospitalised with dysentery.

1943/05. Appointed Technical Adjutant, RHQ 11 RHA (HAC) in Constantine, Algeria. Responsible for re-equipping his unit and waterproofing all their vehicles for the landings in Sicily.

1943/07. Edwin was not in the first wave of the invasion of Sicily. His story is [**- HERE**](#):

Edwin's war 1938 - 1944

1943/08/09. Hospitalised in Syracuse with malaria & rejoined his exhausted unit on 08/21 when they moved to the coast near Catania for rest after their Sicilian campaign victory.

1943-09/15. Appointed Troop Commander in A Bty 11 RHA (HAC) - shipped from Syracuse to Tunis for rest.

1943/10/03. To hospital in Bizerte with jaundice then flown to Algiers, Cairo & Alexandria for leave until 30/11.

1944/02/24. Appointed ADC to Maj Gen Galloway GOC 1 British Armd Div in Sidi Moussa, Algiers.

1944/03/07. Flew from Algiers to Naples with Maj Gen Galloway for four weeks, where Maj Gen Galloway took temporary command of 4th Indian Division assault on Monte Cassino. Letters are – [HERE](#):

1944/03/15. He witnessed 500 Allied bombers dropping heavy bombs on Monte Cassino.

1944/05/05. Flew to Cairo in an '[Avro York](#)' for training in aerial photography for Forward Observation Officers, then leave. He sent home loads of images – [HERE](#)

1944/05. The hand-coloured photo that illustrates the front page of this story was sent home from Cairo.

1944/06/10. Posted to HQ RA in 1 British Armd Div as Chief Liaison Officer and later Intelligence Officer.

1944/07/10. He was flown in secret from Algiers via Cairo, Tobruk & Malta to Naples. To manage loading of Allied invasion forces onto ships for the invasion of southern France in Op DRAGOON on August 15th.

1944/08/04. Maj Gen Galloway was ill, flown home & left 1 British Armd Div.

1944/08/14. Edwin rejoined 1 British Armd Div HQ RA, now moving north towards Rimini.

1944/09/05. During the attack on the San Savino-Passano Ridge he was fatally wounded near Cevolabiate, close to the junction of via Garibaldi and via Vicinale Ca' Ronchi. He died later that day.

From joining up in 1939, Edwin wrote about 500 letters home. His last letters are – [HERE](#).

Edwin's war 1938 - 1944

Here are two letters home from the Egyptian desert in late 1942 after the Second Battle of El Alamein, that demonstrate the extremes of his wartime life:

11th H.A.C. 1st RHA concerning Ray. Well
Dec 20. Here Christmas is nearing
and all our energies
are being exerted towards
the organisation of a
thundering good Christmas.
We are getting an P.N.S.A
show including, lovely list
from CAIRO, plus tons
of food. Turkey ham.
I was so pleased
to-day to hear from a
letter of guidance that
Raymond has returned
to the flock how nice
for you to have him
at home! I hope you
have all had a really
and aged, jolly, dated and
happy Christmas. How does oranges, infact a nice 'little
be look' how is his leg! Speed your parcels so
will it eventually receive! gratefully received
how long is it likely to I had a bath to day
take! I am eagerly
awaiting all news
and used some of our
special soap I smell simply
lovely now! The magazines

were really marvellous and
all my brother officers
are indebted to pop for his
trouble in despatching them
as holding a desert cocktail
party on Tuesday, tons
of officers coming from units
based at the 2. RHA, the
Bays, the Yorks, Dragoon
and the 4 RHA, including
Hugh Ballantyne, Alister Baillie
Duncan Simonds, infact this
week our social calendar
is booked up fully. Plenty
of parties amongst a grand
lot of chaps, plenty of rest
still early night lot of books
reading, and easy work. All lots



November 10th.
To his brother
Raymond following
the Second battle
of El Alamein,
Egypt. When he
survived a direct hit
on his truck from a
105mm gun that
killed those sitting
on each side of
him.

December 20th.
To his parents, on
meeting his future
brother-in-law, Capt
Duncan Simonds, 4th
RHA, at a Christmas
function in the desert.

[\[letters here\]](#)

11th H.A.C. Regiment
RHA
Nov. 10
In the Blue

My dear Raymond.
Well how are you getting
along old boy! I do hope that you
are getting the use of you completely
back and that they are keeping you
occupied one way or another.
Well this is certainly some
show as you may have gathered and
I am pleased to say we were in the
desert that eventually broke through
the German lines, it was pretty hot going
for ten days and then they broke and
then we ourselves (my troop) destroyed by
open sights (all right) 2 m3 and 2 probables
at 1000'. We are now having a little rest
before carrying on with the route!
I do not know if I told you before
but Alan Watt was made my Troop Commander
as our Major went up on a mule to see Capt
Captains because our 1st and my 2nd Commander
because they Captains. I am sorry to say
first how up in action as 1st Commander

in his honor, he was Troop Commander for 1 day, a
very decent chap, as I think you will
agree with me.
I have been extremely lucky
myself, having during action received a
direct hit on my George Track from a 105
mm. Killing my signaller who was on my
left and one of us was on my right, totally
destroying the vehicle it and that I was knocked
out for a couple of minutes, why I was not
killed God only knows, I suffered for several
days for shell and blast but was able
to carry on in action, I am glad to say
I am now one again 100%. I hope to get
a bath this afternoon, not quite a big village!
Well Ray old boy, when and where am
I going to see you next man, many
happy returns for your birthday, I should
have liked to have sent you a wire
but it was right in the middle of a very
busy time!
Any way I have got a
very little present for you for your
birthday, a nice little bit of German lost!
It is specially reserved for you until I
see you again!

3.
I am afraid at times I have had a
terrible courage amongst firing stuff, but
my barrel usually will not hold another
spade.
Well Ray I received your
letter addressed to the B.D.R.S.
and two wires from you
Thank you, keep smiling
All love Pro

Capt EM Stevens HAC. Sept 4-5 1944

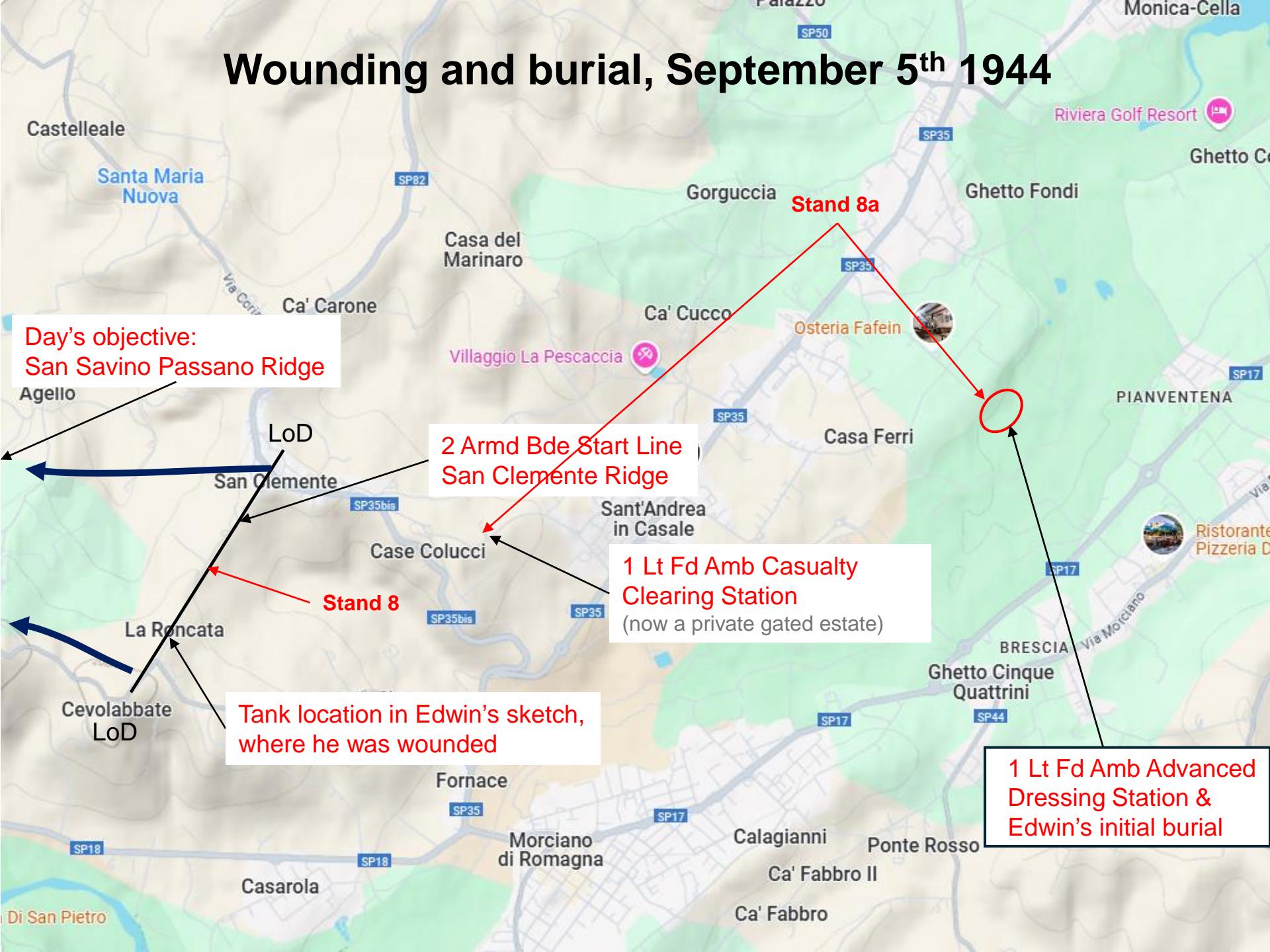
4 Indian Division and 46 Infantry Division were leading the V (BR) Corps assault on the Gothic Line in late Aug-early Sep 44. Both Divisions were tasked with breaking into the German defensive line and opening a 'hole' for 1 Armoured Division to pass through and then exploit to the River Marano.

46 Infantry Division believed that they had created such a hole in the German line on 4 September 1944 and so V (BR) Corps ordered 1 Armoured Division to advance from their reserve position 100 miles away overnight on 4-5 September 1944. This was an enormous undertaking across mountainous terrain prior to an attack next morning. The 'hole' was believed to be beyond the San Savino-Passano Ridge, so this ridge was established as the Line of Departure (LoD) for the 5 Sep 44 attack by 2 Armoured Brigade.

It turned out that no such 'hole' had been created, so that when 2 Armoured Brigade arrived at San Clemente, still on their way to the LoD on the San Savino-Passano Ridge, they discovered that the Germans still held that ridge and that they were in full view of the massed German anti-tank guns. As 2 Armoured Brigade advanced as ordered, they were systematically destroyed by the German anti-tank guns and forced to retreat with heavy losses of life and equipment.

Edwin was near Cevolabbate – just to the south of San Clemente, close to the junction of via Garibaldi & via Vicinale Ca' Ronchi, briefing Brigadier EPN Jones Commander Royal Artillery HQ 1 Armoured Division on the day's plan, when they were spotted & he was fatally wounded by German artillery fire.

Wounding and burial, September 5th 1944



Hand drawn plan of action for September 5th 1944



117219 Edwin Stevens was a Captain Staff Officer serving in HQ Royal Artillery 1 British Armoured Division. Promoted 11/1/1944 from 11 (HAC) RHA to Divisional HQ under Maj Gen Galloway.

On September 5th Edwin was serving under the new Commander Royal Artillery, Brig EPN Jones, who operated from a tank, converted into a command post. Early that morning they went forward to review the day's plan of action. Stopping on the reverse slope out of sight, they were scoping the German positions from across the road, when they were spotted & shelled.

See image, where Brig Jones later marked the fateful spot. Original drawing likely to have been sketched by Edwin.

What3words location:
[///hostels.swipes.peelers](https://what3words.com/hostels.swipes.peelers)

Capt Edwin Mackenzie Stevens - DOW September 5th 1944

Hit in the chest by a shell splinter, Edwin was evacuated to the Casualty Clearing Post operated by 1 Lt Fd Amb RAMC. Here he was assessed, given First Aid and moved back to the 1 Lt Fd Amb RAMC Advanced Dress Station

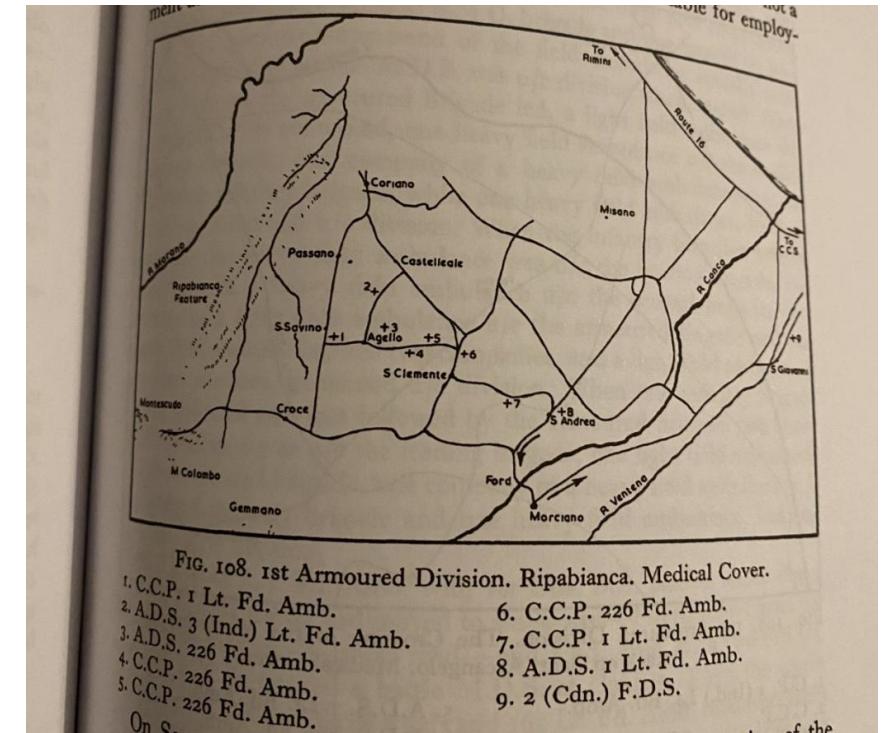


24th September 2025.
His nephews Raymond & Colin Simonds, visiting the spot where he died and was initially buried.

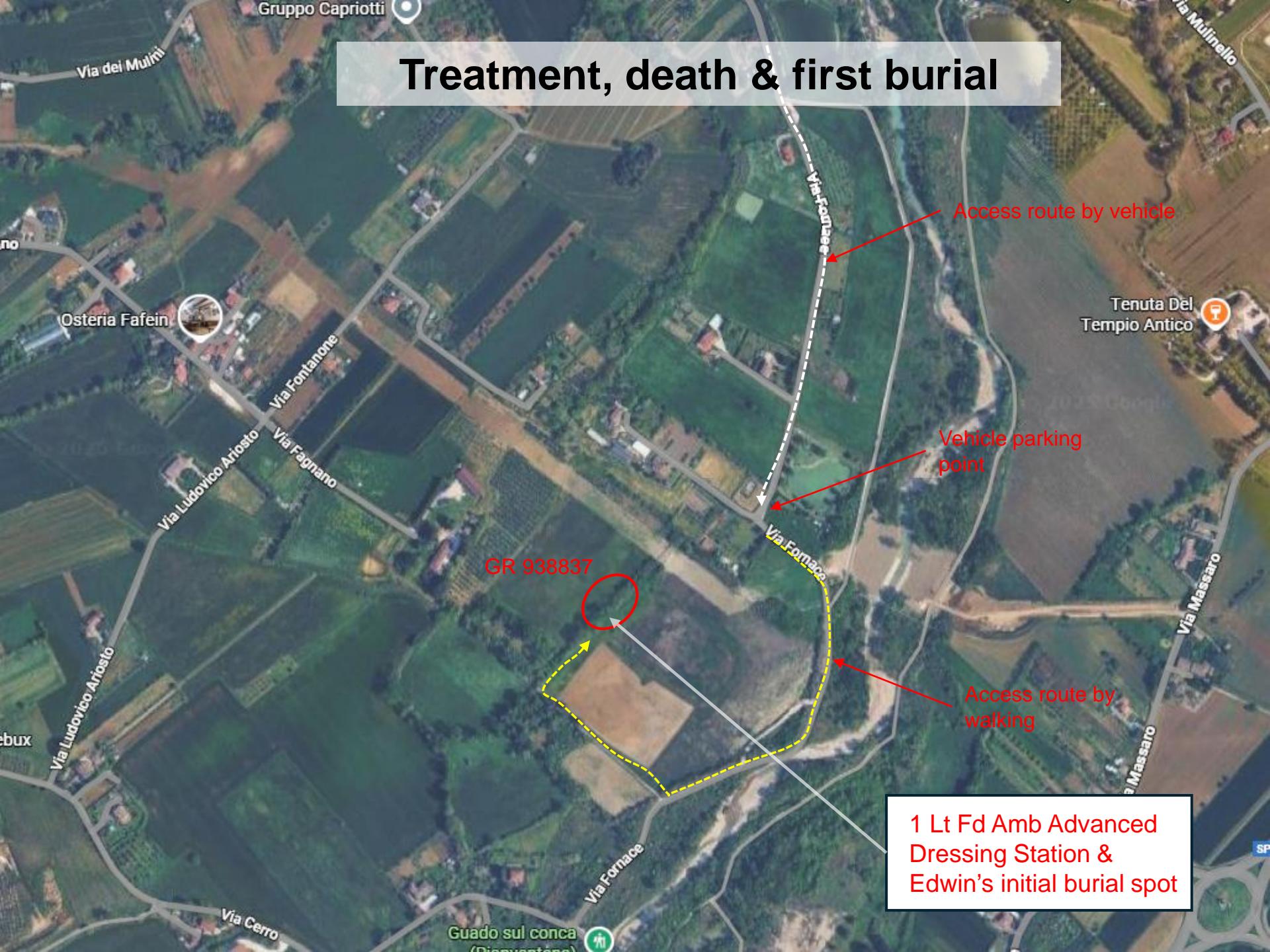
What3words location:
[///visits.brunch.beanpole](https://what3words.com/visits.brunch.beanpole)

1 Lt Fd Amb RAMC Advanced Dressing Station was at Grid Reference 938837. This is shown as +8 on the sketch opposite. Here he died and was immediately buried outside with his RA colleagues, in Row A Grave 5.

'In some corner of a foreign field'



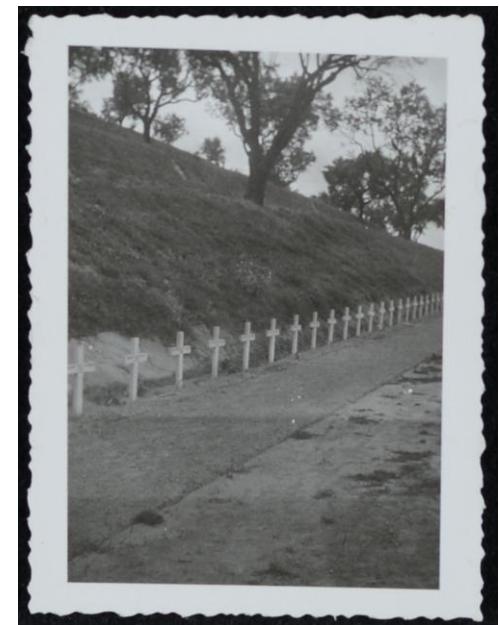
Treatment, death & first burial



Gradara Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery, Rimini



Edwin was reburied in Gradara Military Cemetery in Plot 1 Row B Grave 30, on 15th June 1945 by 19 Graves Registration Unit - initially with a plain white wooden cross. This was replaced in time for his parents to visit in January 1950 by the standard CWGC sandstone headstone design. His parent's own inscription was included at the base of the headstone.



Gradara Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery

GRAVES CONCENTRATION REPORT FORM											CMF FORM 7		
Report No. ISGR/OC/0148			Sheet 1 of 3			Schedule No.							
Place of Burial British Empire Cemetery-Gradara						Map Reference Sheet I09 - 024843							
The following are buried here													
REGIMENT	ARMY NO.	NAME AND INITIALS		RANK	DATE OF DEATH	PREVIOUSLY BURIED AT	RE-BURIED AT	DATE OF RE-BURIAL	PLOT	ROW	GRAVE		
9.L. RAC	407278	HAYDEN J.A.		1	5.9.44	ICGR/	Cross & Disc	25.5.45	I	B	II	✓	
9.L. "	7945648	PIMM D.		2	TPR	"	MJG/	Cross	"	-I	B	20	
10.H. "	7901167	GOODALL H. S. ✓		3	SGT	4.9.44	2476	Cross & Disc	"	I	B	21	
BAYS "	7953796	PEACOCK J.S.		4	TPR	5.9.44	Sh. I09	Cross	"	I	B	25	
RA (RGA) (1000 P.M. DIV (PART)) R.A.C.	II7219	STEVENS E.M.		5	CAPT	" "	938837	"	"	I	B	30	
9.L. (RAC) (218 RD DIV SGT)	5890416	COWIE L.J.		6	CPL	" "		"	"	I	B	12	
R.A.C.	288825	BUTCHER J. W. D		7	LIEUT	" "		Cross & Disc	"	I	B	26	
FORRESTERS	4863691	READ S.		8	CPL	5.9.44		"	"	I	B	36	
10.H. RAC	237383	THOROLD A.W.		9	LIEUT	" "		Cross	"	I	B	22	
10.H. "	7903637	BROWN F.A.		10	SGT	" "		"	"	I	B	23	
10.H. "	203626	KERFOOT-ROBERTS S.		LIEUT	7.9.44			"	"	I	B	24	

I WAS PRESENT THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS OF EXHUMATION AND HAVE OBSERVED THE ORDER CONTAINED IN LETTER NO. 2/661/GR DATED 2 OCT. 43. RECOVERIES WERE MADE IN ACCORDANCE WITH ATTACHED LIST.

O.C. *Malins* Lieut. *Malins*
J.D. JULY 1945
19 Graves Registration Unit.

ISBN 0 222 0 4415 000

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission was founded by Fabian Ware who was horrified by the way bodies were disposed of during the early part of The Great War. Under his leadership, all bodies found were eventually collected from their temporary graves and moved to special cemeteries. He believed that all our war cemeteries should have consistent features that distinguished them from their civilian counterparts. So, they all have a sandstone headstone in similar style that allows for the different religions and a 'Cross of Sacrifice' near the entrance. They are maintained to a high standard by all the countries whose forces fought & died in that war.

The Stevens Archives at The Commonwealth War Graves Commission

When he left the UK in 1941 never to return, Edwin became a prolific writer, sometimes daily, to his family. Over 1,000 pages of his letters, aerogrammes & telegrams survive, in both hardcopy & digital format.

His letters, pictures and some wartime souvenirs, the letters of condolence received by his family, together with some of the personal effects recovered from his body, are all now preserved in the archives of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Where they are available to study.

The same applies to his elder brother 117204 Capt Raymond Stevens HAC RA. They volunteered to join the HAC in Finsbury Park, London on the same day, the 15th May 1939.

Raymond was killed at Oosterbeek near Arnhem on 24th September 1944.

Their poor parents lost their two sons in 1944, less than 3 weeks apart.

Compiled in 2025 by their nephew Raymond Simonds.

'LEST WE FORGET'