

Major Ion Calvocoressi

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Major Ion Calvocoressi, MBE, MC, Scots Guards officer, was born on April 12, 1919. He died on July 7, 2007, aged 88

Commander whose anti-tank guns inflicted great losses on German armour in the Western Desert. A member of a former Greek family established in England from the mid-19th century, Ion Calvocoressi served with the Scots Guards in the Western Desert, winning the Military Cross. As a platoon commander of the 2nd Battalion's anti-tank company, he distinguished himself at Bir el Rigel on June 13, 1942, when the battalion was attacked by two columns of tanks of the 21st Panzer Division.

Without tank support, since the 2nd and 4th Armoured Brigades had been moved to the north, the battalion was dependent on its own six- pounder anti-tank guns and the 25-pounders of a supporting South African artillery battery. The guns of Calvocoressi's No 13 Platoon accounted for five German tanks before the last of them was silenced by the enemy's superior firepower.

He and the South African battery commander were taken prisoner but managed to escape to rejoin 2nd Scots Guards next morning. Reporting on their experience in enemy hands, both men remarked on how well they had been treated by the German soldiers.

Calvocoressi was wounded in July 1942 after rescuing the crew of one of the battalion's forward observation posts under fire. Later he became an ADC to Lieutenant-General Sir Oliver Leese, who commanded XXX Corps at the battle of El Alamein and succeeded Montgomery in command of the 8th Army in Italy. When Leese went to South-East Asia to become C-in-C Land Forces under Mountbatten, Calvocoressi accompanied him and was appointed MBE for his services. Later in life he strongly defended Leese when he was criticised for trying to remove General Sir William Slim from command of the 14th Army in Burma.

Subsequently he founded the 2nd Scots Guards "Desert Dinner" for his former comrades, running it from his home in Westerham, Kent, where he was active in many charities and took a leading role in the erection of Oscar Nemon's statue of Sir Winston Churchill to mark the former Prime Minister's long association with the town. He was High Sheriff of Kent 1978-79.

His wife, Katharine, sister of Sir Ludovic Kennedy, survives him with three sons, one of whom is director of the Henry Moore Foundation in Much Hadham, Hertfordshire, and a daughter.