



ROBERT HILL COX, II

1937

Robert Cox was the second of five brothers to come to St. Paul's. He won his S.P.S. in football and in hockey; he rowed in the second Shattuck crew. He was an editor of the *Horae*, a Supervisor and a member of the Council, a very good scholar and the best debater in the School. Into all he did he threw himself with a rare combination of physical and mental vigor, of seriousness and humor. He came a First Former in 1931 and when he left, in 1937, he was awarded the School Medal.

In 1942, he commanded a platoon of six-pounders at El Alamein. His battalion of the 60th—which he had joined on graduating from Harvard—formed the spearhead of the drive that broke through Rommel's lines and began the destruction of the Afrika Corps. "In the night battle," wrote Charles Bolté, another American in the 60th, "Cox got his gun portees entangled in a mine-field and a lot of wire ahead of me. He signalled me on with a wave and a shout, tracer streaming around him and shells banging nearby a blazing ammunition lorry; a few minutes later he was hit in the back by a machine gunner who let us pass and shot up our rear." "No," wrote Cox to his mother, "I was not running away."

Cox's wound, painful but not serious, became infected, and his recovery was further delayed by an attack of jaundice. At the end of January he was given "permission to rejoin his battalion in his own time," which meant that he had to arrange his own transport. By then the battalion was nearly in Tripoli, 1300 miles to the west of Cairo. Finding that the airforce could not fly him immediately, he managed to get a lift part way with an ambulance driver, then flew from an

airport "where there wasn't any red tape . . . hitch hiked to Brigade and from Brigade got a ride to Battalion. I have never seen anyone look so surprised as the Colonel when I drove up, for my letter took longer than I did and no one expected me back for quite a while."

The 60th, otherwise known as the King's Royal Rifle Corps, originated in America in 1755. Raised among the colonists, trained and equipped for wilderness fighting, it fought throughout the French and Indian War and took part in the storming of Quebec. Cox was proud of the regiment,—and of his battalion, nearly wiped out the year before he joined it, in the defense of Calais. There the battalion had formed part of a special force of 3,000 men, who, with most of their equipment gone, short of food and water and outnumbered six to one, had held up two German Panzer divisions for three days and so, though virtually annihilated themselves, had helped to make possible the evacuation from Dunkirk. How well Cox lived up to the standards and traditions of the 60th is shown in a letter written by Lieutenant George A. Lyon, one of his fellow officers: "Everybody liked him as a man, and everybody admired his great courage, modesty, uprightness, depth of character, and unfailing sense of humour."

On April 19, 1943, Cox's platoon was on the extreme left flank of the British Eighth Army, facing the German 164th Division in the mountains of Tunisia. In the morning, one of his fellow officers was ordered to go forward to locate an enemy gun which had been worrying them, and Cox volunteered to go with him. When they had advanced about 700 yards, they were fired on by a German sniper at about fifty yards range. Cox was hit three times in the shoulder and arm. The other officer was untouched. They managed to return to their own lines, and after field dressings had been put on, Cox was taken in a truck to the Advanced Dressing Station. Lieutenant Lyon wrote later: "When Bob arrived there, he was very weak, due to severe bleeding. He was perfectly coherent the whole time; he only complained of feeling very sleepy and tired. I am absolutely convinced he had no idea how seriously he had been wounded."

After receiving plasma and recovering a little strength, Cox was sent in an ambulance to the Main Dressing Station, but he died on the way.