



# The Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry

## The BATTLE of GEILENKIRCHEN

18<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1944

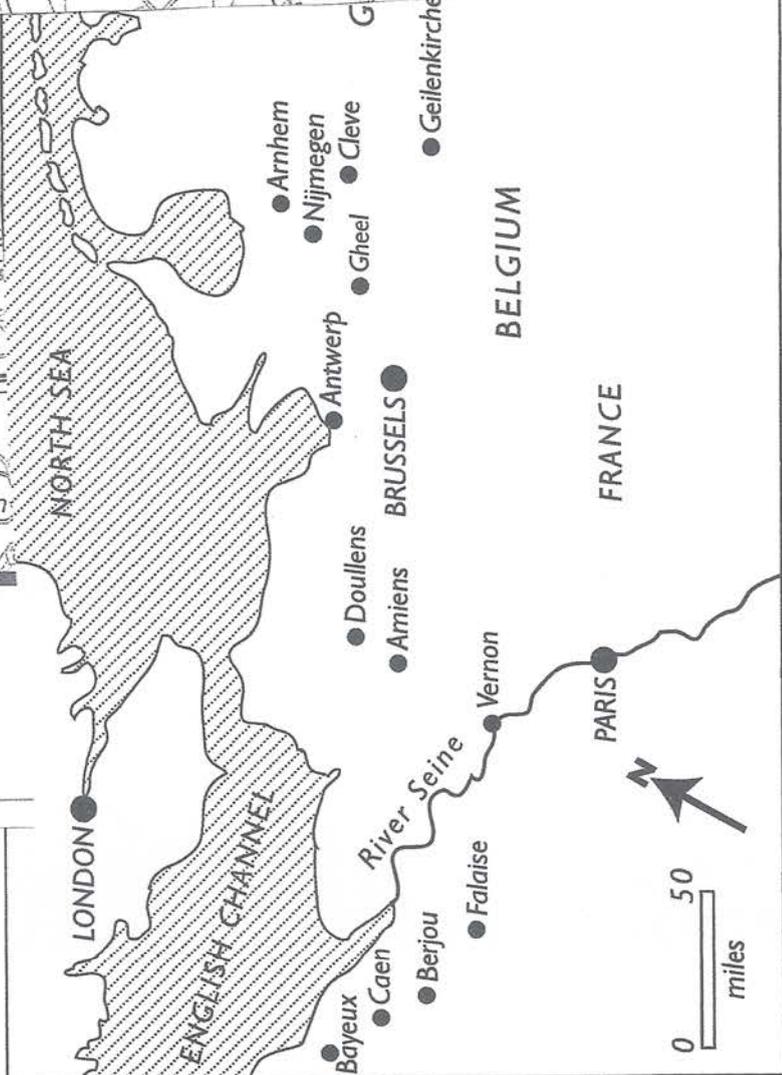
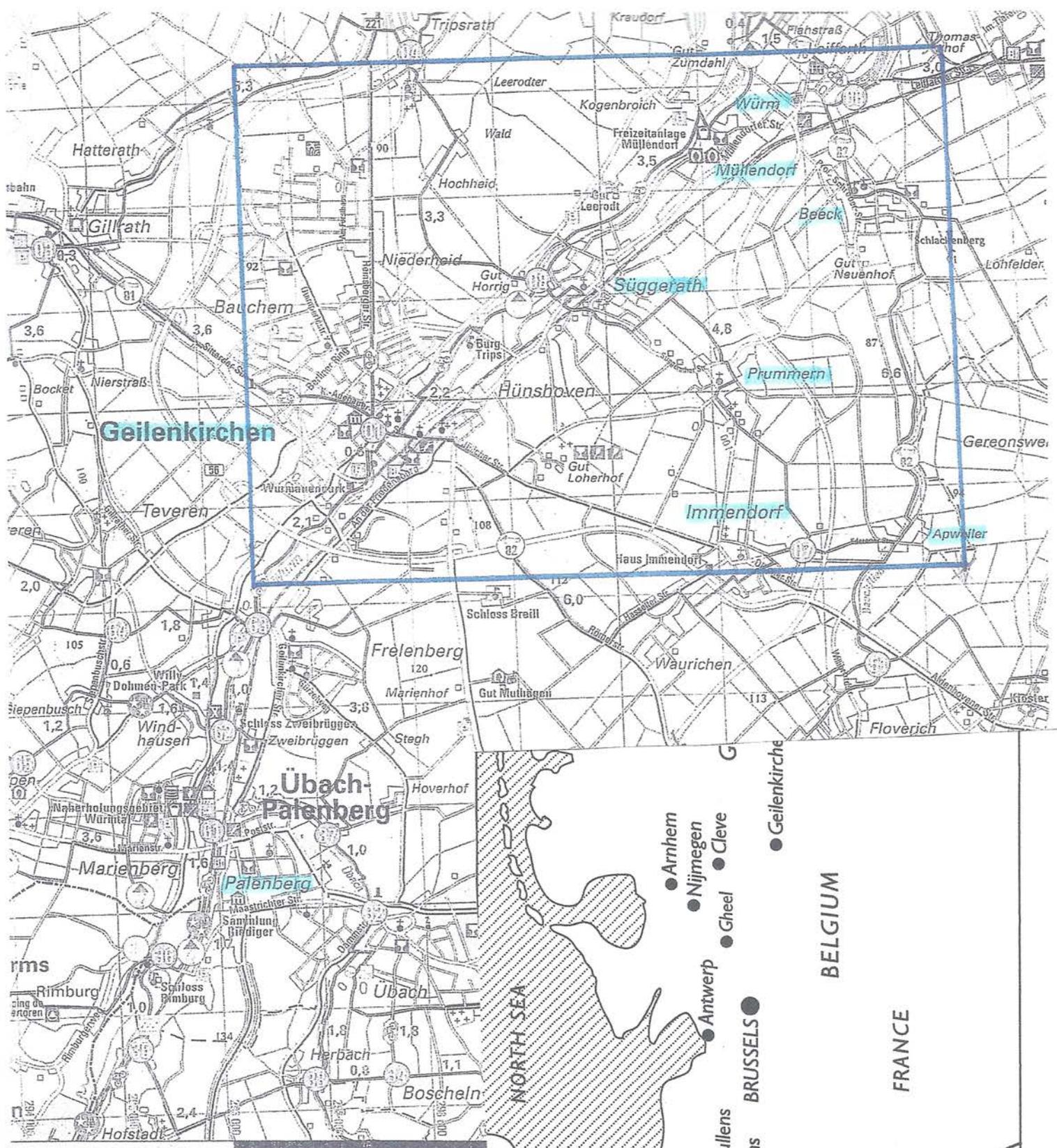
# THE BATTLE OF

## SEILKIRCHEN

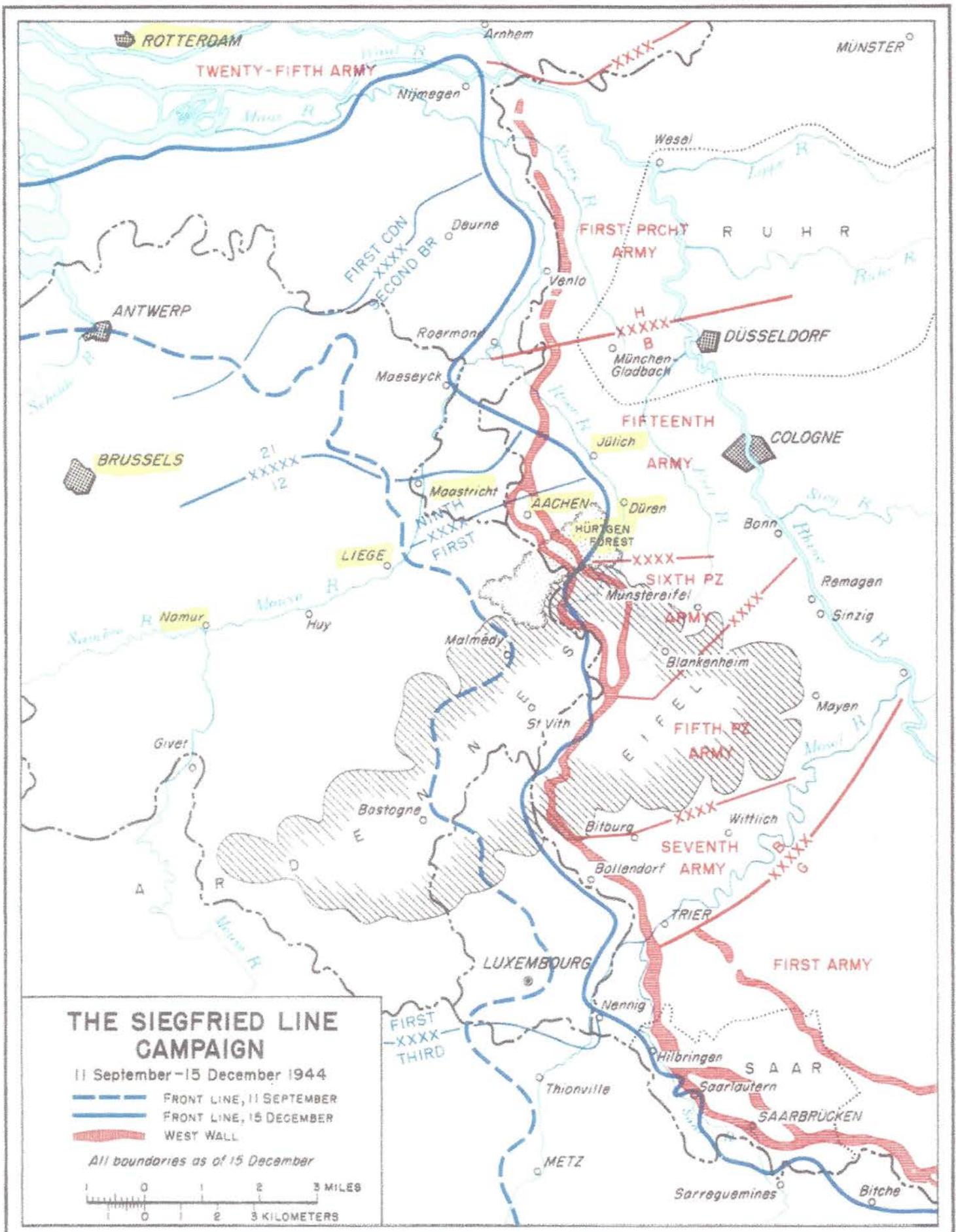
18th to 22nd NOVEMBER 1944

- KEY:-
- BOUNDARIES 333 338A  
334 340S
  - ROADS
  - LWAYS
  - RIVERS
  - TREAMS
  - TOWNS
  - ILLAGES
  - HIGH GROUND
  - TART LINE A+B
  - SCALE: 1/2 mile
  - LINE FIELDS
  - BRICKED LANE
  - EST. WALL
  - MINING ALL BOXES





**MAP 16: North West Europe**



D. Holmes, Jr

## **Battlefield Tour of Geilenkirchen**

*18<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1944*

### ***Operation CLIPPER***

It is now claimed that the battle of Geilenkirchen was the first battle to be fought by British troops on German soil since the Battle of Minden in 1759 a battle in which the British fought with the Germans. The Sherwood Rangers during Geilenkirchen became the first British troops to break through the Siegfried and thus the first British troops to fight on German soil since Minden.

### **Map of North West Europe**

The rapid advance by the five large armies commanded by Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF), under the command of General Dwight D. Eisenhower out of Normandy into the Low Countries had been halted in September 1944 by the failure of Operation Market Garden to take the bridge over the Rhine at Arnhem, 'the bridge too far'. Eisenhower's next decision therefore, was to close up to the Rhine along his whole front, preparatory to forcing crossings over it.

### **Map 1: Siegfried Line Campaign and the Rhine**

Although the distances to the Rhine were not great, other problems were significant; in the absence of the capture intact of a major port, particularly the approaches to Antwerp, supply lines were now dangerously over-extended since they still stretched back to the Normandy beaches where every single thing continued being landed, either from the one surviving Mulberry Harbour or straight onto the sand. In addition the Americans had created a major additional congestion in their re-supply chain by seizing up the railway lines around Paris, forcing the implementation of a road-bound re-supply system, the 'red ball express'.

This was the world of one of the Sherwood Rangers' extra regimentally employed officers namely Lieutenant Colonel John Sandars. He was AQMG (M) at HQ Second Army throughout the campaign with one of his key responsibilities being road movement. There had scarcely been a time when this did not present a complicated problem as few major battles had not been preceded by extensive re-grouping, entailing moves of great complexity. Manipulation of the French and Belgian railway system was also key. Sandars was said to have disposed of these problems with conspicuous success, a talent not often associated with an officer in the Yeomanry. He was appointed OBE; he already held the MBE.

The November rains, when they came, were the heaviest for many years. Finally there was the Siegfried Line to be overcome, and an enemy which, as the British in the north had discovered, had now thoroughly recovered its fighting qualities and was holding fast.

Accordingly a general push was ordered across the entire front. Because of Operation MARKET GARDEN, 21 British Army Group in the north was significantly closer to the Rhine than the US armies in the south, so the main effort was concentrated farther south. Another reason for making this the main thrust was to gain control of the dams at the head of the River Roer and thus pre-empt the flooding of the Low Countries.

Eisenhower set his sights on the occupation of the Ruhr, Germany's industrial heartland. General Patton's Third Army was given the task of occupying the French region of Lorraine, while General Courtney Hodges's First US Army was ordered to break through the front near Aachen. Hodges had initially hoped to bypass the city itself, believing it to be held only by a small garrison, which would presumably surrender once isolated.

As mentioned the Siegfried Line, which protected the whole front including the Aachen sector. It was a major obstacle consisting of several belts of inter-connected pillboxes, forts, and bunkers





protected by extensive minefields, "dragon's teeth" anti-tank obstacles, and barbed wire entanglements. In several areas; German defenses were over 10 miles (16 km) deep. It was, in the words of historian Stephen Ambrose, "undoubtedly the most formidable man-made defense ever contrived. Learning from their experiences on the Eastern Front, the Germans ran their main line of resistance down the center of towns located in the defensive wall, taking advantage of narrow streets to limit the mobility of enemy armour. Despite the low quality of many of the troops manning them, the fortifications protecting Aachen and the Ruhr were as stated formidable obstacle to the progress of American forces, who saw a breakthrough in this sector as crucial, as the terrain behind Aachen was generally flat, and therefore highly favorable to the motorized Allied armies.

### MAP 2 The Aachen Front

Fighting around Aachen began as early as the second week of September, in a period known to the Germans as the "First Battle of Aachen". The Battle cost both the Americans and Germans dearly; the former suffered over 5,000 casualties, while the Germans lost over 10,000 casualties and 8,600 taken prisoner, from the fighting in and around Aachen itself. German resistance in Aachen upset Allied plans to continue their eastward advance.

Following the end of fighting in Aachen, the Western Allies' First Army was tasked with the capture of a series of dams behind the Hurtgen Forest which was huge and impenetrable and lay south of Aachen. These dams could be used by the Germans to flood the valleys which opened the road to Berlin. This task would lead to the Battle of Hurtgen Forest, which lasted throughout most of October and by the end had proved more difficult than had the Battle for Aachen and just as indecisive.

### MAP 3 Geilenkirchen

A third operation was clearly needed and it was decided to launch an

Right

Higher Command Structure

Left

First US Army

Ninth US Army

21st Army Group

XXX Br Corps

2<sup>nd</sup> US Amd. Div.

84<sup>th</sup> US Inf. Div.

43<sup>rd</sup> Wessex Div.

(The Rail Splitters)

8 Amd. Bgde

(Minus SRY)

334 US Regiment

Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry

333 US Regiment

Right US Bn.

Left US Bn.

A Sqn SRY

B Sqn SRY

C Sqn SRY

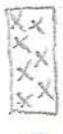
2 Tps A Sqn SRY

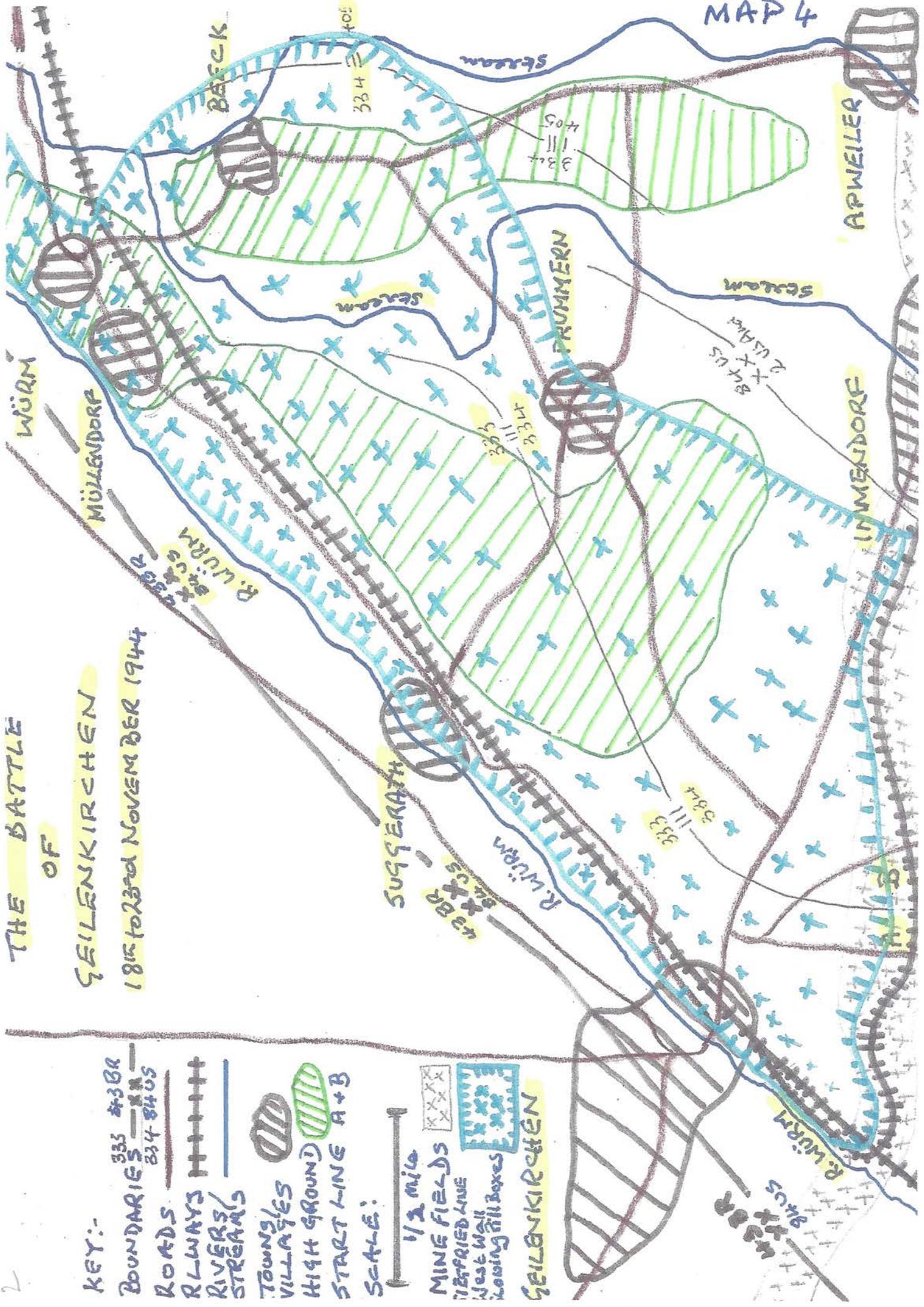
(Minus)

(Reserve)

# THE BATTLE OF SEILNKIRCHEN

18th to 23rd NOVEMBER 1944

- KEY:-
- BOUNDARIES ——— 333 #3BR
  - 334 84US
  - ROADS ———
  - RAILWAYS ———
  - RIVERS ———
  - STREAMS ———
  - TOWNS/VILLAGES 
  - HIGH GROUND 
  - START LINE A+B ———
  - SCALE:  1/2 mile
  - MINE FIELDS 
  - TIEFRIED LINE 
  - West Wall 
  - Leaving fill boxes 



attack north from Aachen to take Geilenkirchen and then role up the Siegfried Line in the area of Jülich and Duren, on the inter-army boundary between Montgomery's 21 Army Group and the newly-arrived, newly-deployed, and largely-inexperienced Ninth US Army. This formation had been inserted between the British and First US Army. For this operation XXX Corps, including 8 Armoured Brigade, was to be placed under command of Ninth US Army with the Sherwood Rangers detached from 8 Armoured and under command of 84th US Infantry Division, which would become XXX Corps' right-hand formation.

The following illustrates the key elements of the initial order of battle of Ninth US Army for the offensive:

### Ninth US Army ORBAT for Operation CLIPPER

To link up, XXX Corps now moved back down the old MARKET GARDEN centre line to Eindhoven and then south to Geilenkirchen. The regiment, loaded onto tank transporters at very short notice, moved to the coalmining town of Palenberg [see MAP 3](#); RHQ set up in Schinnen nearby.

### MAP 4 the Battlefield

Let us look at the ground over which the regiment was to fight. The River Wurm ran broadly in a north-easterly direction passing immediately to the south-east of Geilenkirchen. Immediately to the south-east of the river, and parallel to it, ran a railway line. Just south of Geilenkirchen a branch line left the mainline and ran at right angles in an easterly direction. Both the main line and the branch line sometimes ran through cuttings and sometimes along embankments. When they did either, they formed a tank obstacle and were defended throughout by concrete pillboxes. These two features, the railway line and the pillboxes, together, at this point, formed the Siegfried Line. The concrete pillboxes had walls up to five-feet thick, were positioned to provide interlocking arcs of fire and mutual support, and impenetrable to anything the regiment possessed. Many had inter-

connecting subterranean passages which would also need to be cleared. Each pillbox held about twenty Germans and there were trenches and wire around them which were filled with Germans too.

The low-lying ground was saturated with the heavy rain that had been falling for the past month, and continued to fall. The top surface, described as 'a sea of mud', consisted of a foot or more of sticky clay, and had been thickly sown with mines, making any movement by armour off the roads treacherous at best. The roads themselves were little better than country lanes, not designed to take heavy armour and were also mined. Finally, because the enemy had had ample time to prepare, they had built extra defences opposite the Allies' probable points of attack by heavily mining the railway, which at that point ran through a cutting and the ground immediately either side of it, thereby rendering the whole an anti-tank and anti-personnel obstacle. Not an appealing prospect, but just in case there was anyone left in the regiment with an optimistic view of the next few days, Brigade chose this moment to tell them that all leave was to be cancelled until the end of the winter.

Ninth Army's attack was to be made from the south, with three divisions up: 43rd (Wessex), with 8 Armoured Brigade minus the regiment, to the west/left, was to attack north west of Geilenkirchen, north-easterly up the west bank of the Wurm towards the high ground north-west of Geilenkirchen. In the centre, 84th US Division, supported by the regiment, was to take Geilenkirchen itself and break through the Siegfried Line at the point just described. The plan was to bypass Geilenkirchen to its east, break through the Siegfried Line, and take a northerly axis up the east bank of the Wurm along the line of the railway.

By this envelopment of Geilenkirchen, 84th Division hoped that the town would fall without costly street-fighting. Their objective was to take the high ground north-east of Geilenkirchen, and then the village of Prummen, a short way to the east of the railway itself, and due east of Geilenkirchen.

Under command of Ninth Army was 2nd US Armored Division on the east/right which was to attack the Siegfried Line farther east of Geilenkirchen. In the next phase XXX Corps was to exploit north-west and north-east to more high ground on either side of the Wurm, commanded by the villages of Wurm and Beek.

Like the rest of Ninth Army, 84th Division, known as the 'Rail Splitters', had never been in action before. Notwithstanding, or even because of this, the regiment found them imbued with 'zest and good spirits'. The regiment had been selected by Horrocks to support 84th Division 'because of its previous experience of working with US formations'. (See [84 US Divisions ORBAT diagram](#)).

The division's plan was to attack two regiments up (the equivalent of brigades): 333rd Regiment, with two troops of A Squadron in support, was to be the left, with Geilenkirchen as its initial objective; 334th Regiment, with the remainder of the regiment, was to be the right regiment on an axis requiring them to break through the Siegfried Line east of Geilenkirchen, and then advance north-east. Stanley Christopherson commented on the initial tie up with 334th Regiment which:

was commanded by Colonel Rossmund ... . After the first conference which had lasted an hour, nothing had been decided. When I remarked on this he said 'I like the Boys to have their say because the Boys have to do the job!' I managed tactfully to persuade him that it would save much time if he and I could decide on a plan, orders for which could be given out ... after which he could ask for comments ... . I decided to live at his headquarters and detailed each squadron leader to take up residence at [their] battalion headquarters ... .

Ninth Army was opposed by 10th SS and 15th Panzer Grenadier Divisions. Both had been patched up, having been in action previously. Tenth SS had been hard fought in Normandy, whilst 15th Panzer Grenadier had fought in Italy, taking heavy casualties, before

being withdrawn to North-West Europe, but was probably in better shape than 10th SS.

Ninth Army's detailed plan was for 2nd Armored Division to attack on 17 November on the right, twenty-four hours before the rest. They would be followed by 84th Infantry Division, including the regiment, which would cross its start line at 0700 next day, in the dark, using a searchlight battery to provide 'artificial moonlight'. The Rail Splitters' attack was to be preceded, at 0600, by carefully assembled and rehearsed gapping teams to clear the initial obstacles across the branch line. On the right, 334th Regiment had two such teams, each detailed to gap and bridge the railway feature (See Map 4: Roads crossing the branch line at A and B). One such gap was for use by each of 334th's two leading battalions and their respective supporting arms, including the regiment.

Each gapping team was led by a troop of flails of 1st Lothians and Border Yeomanry, tasked to clear a path through the minefields either side of the railway obstacle. They were followed by Churchill ARK tanks to lay bridges over the railway and Petard AVREs to destroy pillboxes by throwing 'Flying Dustbin' mortar bombs at them, and laying charges against them. Other AVREs carried fascines to bridge smaller anti-tank ditches. Both bridge-layers and AVREs were manned by Royal Engineers. The division was also supported by Churchill Crocodile flame-throwing tanks to help take out the pillboxes. Each gapping team was covered by a troop from the regiment and an infantry platoon.

On the night of 17 November 2nd Armored duly attacked, securing their initial objectives and 84th Division's attack went in at 0600 on the 18th, in the inevitable rain, as the whole area was suddenly lit by the promised 'artificial moonlight'. The attack was on time, notwithstanding the fact that the rehearsal of this complex plan, which had also taken place on the 17th, had become bogged down, leaving much recovery work to re-assemble units. The attack was preceded by a 'terrific' artillery barrage, which had opened up at 0330.

A Squadron, minus the two troops supporting 333rd Regiment, and a third providing close support to 334th's gapping teams, was initially supporting 334th's right front battalion, whose objective was the village of Prummen. B Squadron was initially supporting 334th's left front battalion, whose initial objective was the high ground slightly farther to the north-east of Prummen. This meant that, having crossed the railway and broken through the Siegfried Line, B Squadron would advance north-east, with the railway as its left boundary. It would then roll up the Siegfried Line, between where they had broken through and the high ground just beyond Prummen that was its initial objective. Once A Squadron had crossed, it would, likewise, roll up the Siegfried Line farther to the right, until it was able to attack and take Prummen. C Squadron was in reserve.

**Move onto the ground at Position 1 Gap B on track to north of road**

18<sup>th</sup> November 1944

See Map 5

The attack started on time, and the gap on A Squadron's front was cleared as planned but not before the flail breaching the minefield in front of the squadron became bogged two-thirds of the way through. This left John Semken, still in command of the squadron, with no choice but to lead his squadron through the remainder of the uncleared minefield. His luck held till the far edge had been reached when, in what could arguably be some sort of record, his tank detonated four mines simultaneously, an event which irrefutably blew the suspension clean off on both sides, the third tank that John Semken had had knocked out under him during the war. He was awarded the US Silver Star for gallantry, effectively a second MC.

Things did not go as 'smoothly' on B Squadron's front, where there was considerable delay, as the engineers manning the bridge-layers encountered problems establishing the correct pitching of the bridges across the railway. This gave the enemy time to recover from their initial surprise and inflict casualties on the waiting troops. Therefore, B Squadron switched two troops and SHQ to follow A Squadron over their gap where they found the going had become desperate. Nevertheless, they were able to press on towards the pillboxes to the north, leaving their infantry, who were having their own problems crossing the obstacle, to catch up. One by one the pillboxes were reduced. The system used was to force the enemy to close the embrasures in the pillboxes, by firing on them, which permitted the infantry, which had rejoined the armour, to force them to surrender. Intensive use was also made of the Crocodiles which were all too effective.

**Move to Position 2: B squadron's centre line on Grass verge by wood**

Back with A Squadron, John Semken was in no condition to continue in command and fight the coming battle, so Captain John Gauntley assumed command of the squadron, consisting, at this stage, of only

2

# ACTION ON 18th November 1944

- KEY:-**
- BOUNDARIES 335 43BR ——— 334 84US
  - ROADS ———
  - RLWAYS ———
  - RIVERS/STREAMS ———
  - TOWNS/VILLAGES
  - HIGH GROUND
  - START LINE A+B

**SCALE:**



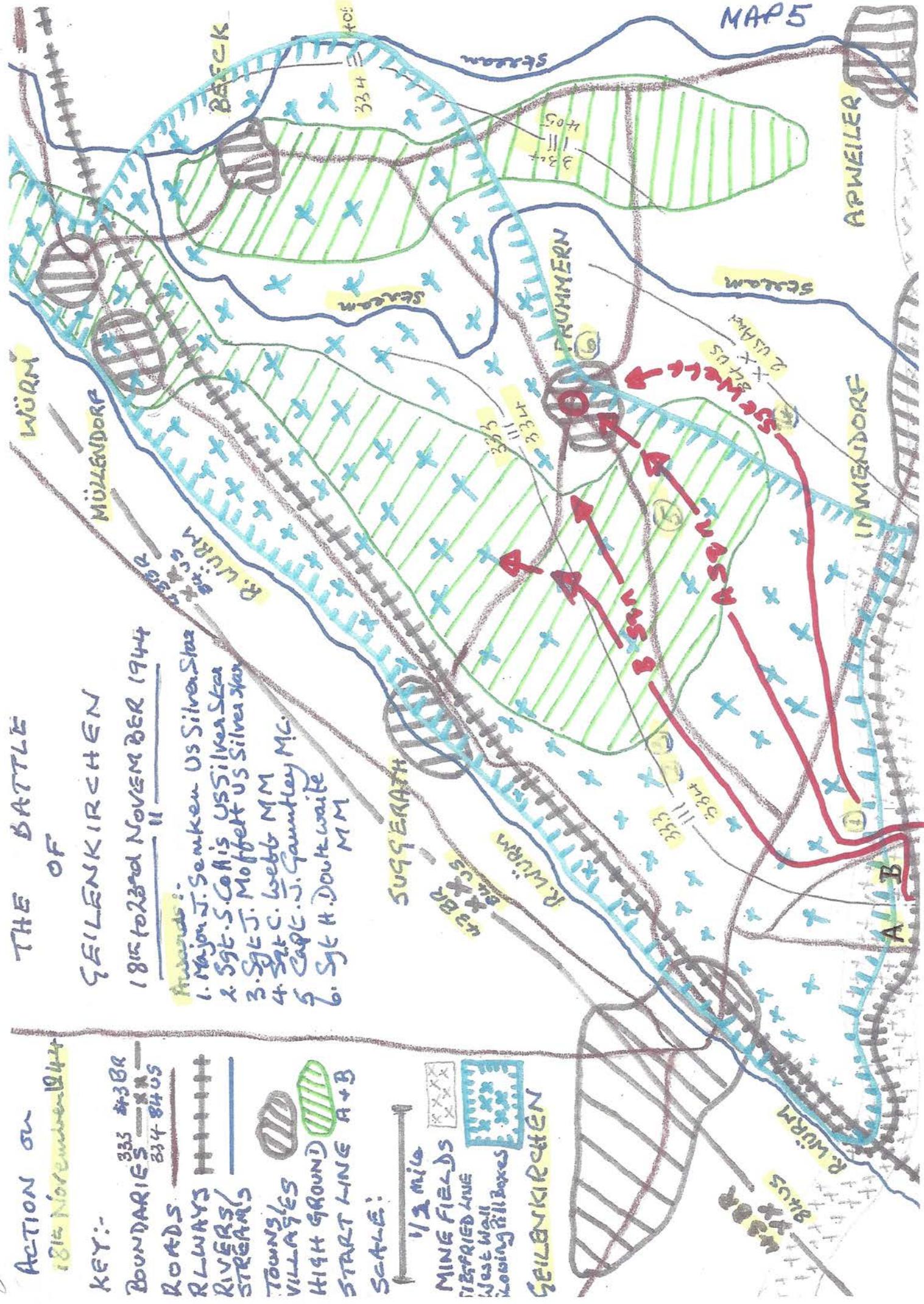
- MINE FIELDS
- DEFERRED LINE
- West Wall
- Lowing Pill Boxes

## SEILENKIRCHEN

18th to 23rd NOVEMBER 1944

**Command:**

1. Major J. Semken US Silver Star
2. Sgt. S. Collins US Silver Star
3. Sgt. J. Moffett US Silver Star
4. Sgt. C. Webb MM
5. Capt. J. Gaultley MC
6. Sgt. H. Doukwaite MM



two troops. Immediately after passing through the gap, the squadron ran into an un-located minefield, and at the same time was engaged by enemy anti-tank guns and pillboxes from its right flank. The squadron suffered tank casualties, including David Render's tank on a mine which had survived since he had joined the regiment before EPSOM, but immediately re-organized and assaulted the pillboxes which were now holding up their infantry, the right battalion of 334th. As a result, the guns in the pillboxes were put out of action and the battalion was able to come up, destroy the pillboxes, capture the German defenders and continue the advance on Prummen.

Before reaching its initial objective, B Squadron bumped another line of pillboxes and put them out of action. Next, the squadron knocked out the anti-tank guns covering the pillboxes, and then killed all the infantry in the slit trenches surrounding the position, enabling the left battalion of 334th to come up and destroy the pillboxes.

One of the key contributors in this action was Sergeant Sidney Collis, who was instrumental in eliminating several pillboxes which dominated the high ground. He was something of a legend, having commanded one of the first tanks to land on D Day and continued to command a tank in every battle in which the regiment had been involved through Normandy, Belgium, Holland and now Germany, fighting his tank with great skill. On four occasions during the fighting in North-West Europe, his tank had been knocked out by anti-tank guns, but this had never deterred him, once recovered, from volunteering to take command of another and continue fighting. For his contribution at Geilenkirchen, and throughout the campaign, he was awarded a US Silver Star. Another key contributor was Sergeant J. Moffett who assumed command when his troop leader was wounded. His troop was one of the first through the gap made by the gapping party and, despite being faced by heavy enemy fire, including rocket launchers, he advanced against enemy-held pillboxes which were delaying the infantry. He was awarded the US Silver Star.

**Move to Position 3 Webb's dead ground south of Prummen**



## See Map 5

Meanwhile, Sergeant Charles Webb of A Squadron, whose troop had been providing the minefield breaching parties with close support, had been released to rejoin the squadron. Despite being without infantry support, he attacked a nest of pillboxes and accounted for one of them, securing thirty prisoners. He then attacked the pillboxes guarding the approaches to Prummen, accounting for another. John Gauntley then gave him the task of guarding the right flank of the village while A Squadron and its battalion attacked, but Webb attacked right round the right flank of the village and knocked out a 75mm anti-tank gun without loss. Still without infantry assistance, he attacked the village, knowing it concealed German tanks. The crossfire thus produced, provided covering fire for 334th's right battalion's assault, which took the village. John Gauntley was awarded an immediate MC and Sergeant Webb an immediate MM.

By the end of the day A and B Squadrons had taken their initial objectives, together with between 200 and 300 prisoners, and the regiment had become the first British unit through the Siegfried Line. However, by nightfall, Prummen had only been partially secured. The state of the ground was bad and 334th's right battalion was suffering extremely heavy shelling and had not been able to bring up its anti-tank guns and consolidate; the enemy still controlled half the village.

## Move to Position 4 Centre of Prummen Douthwaite's Crossroads Prummen is narrow; pre recce

## See Map 6

C Squadron took over from A Squadron to continue to support 344th's right battalion in Prummen. The squadron had deployed Sergeant Henry Douthwaite's troop to give the battalion close support through the night. He positioned himself in the centre of the village within 200 yards of the enemy infantry and three tanks. With only one other tank left, he had to guard four roads leading into the village centre; the battalion could only muster a handful of infantry at this

point. During the night, his tank was twice attacked by German bazooka teams, but each time he drove them off by dismounted action. He next heard an enemy tank approaching, and placed some German mines in the centre of the road; these detonated under the track of the German tank, immobilizing it. Douthwaite then manoeuvred around to the rear of it and set it on fire.

Twice during the night the Germans tried to counter-attack the handful of 344th's men in the village, but on both occasions were frustrated by Sergeant Douthwaite. In the words of the CO of 344th, 'The village would never have been held during that night if it had not been for the initiative and offensive action on the part of Sgt Douthwaite, who in spite of constant enemy shelling and snipers, showed the greatest courage and utter disregard for his own personal safety'. Sergeant Douthwaite was awarded an immediate MM.

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19<sup>th</sup> November 1944:

Move to Position 5: N out of village and turn back south round the roundabout on the village bypass and back past Douthwaite's crossroads. The stretch of road between the roundabout and D's X road is the road depicted in Pictures B1 and B2 taken the next day.

See Map 7

However, the Sherwood Rangers had suffered significant casualties, a number of tanks having been destroyed or disabled by mines and John Semken was missing but was found eventually by the Padre, 'bomb happy', late in the afternoon of the 18th, reading poetry in a captured pillbox. Once he had recovered properly, he was back in command of the squadron. The regiment's rule was that commanders who had been knocked out should stand down for twenty-fours because it induced a state of euphoria for a time which affected judgement.

Perhaps the most serious loss was that of Sergeant George Dring who received a bad wound in the hand whilst on one of his famous foot recces. He was stalking a tank, which appeared to be abandoned,

(B)

20th November 1944 C Squadron exiting Prummen northwards



B2

20 November 1944 C Squadron North of  
Pauhanen



# Action on 19th November 1944

## KEY:-

BOUNDARIES 335 #3BR 334 84US

ROADS H H H H H

RIVERS/STREAMS ———

TOWNS/VILLAGES 

HIGH GROUND 

START LINE A+B

SCALE: 1/2 mile

MINE FIELDS 

TIEPFLIED LINE West Wall

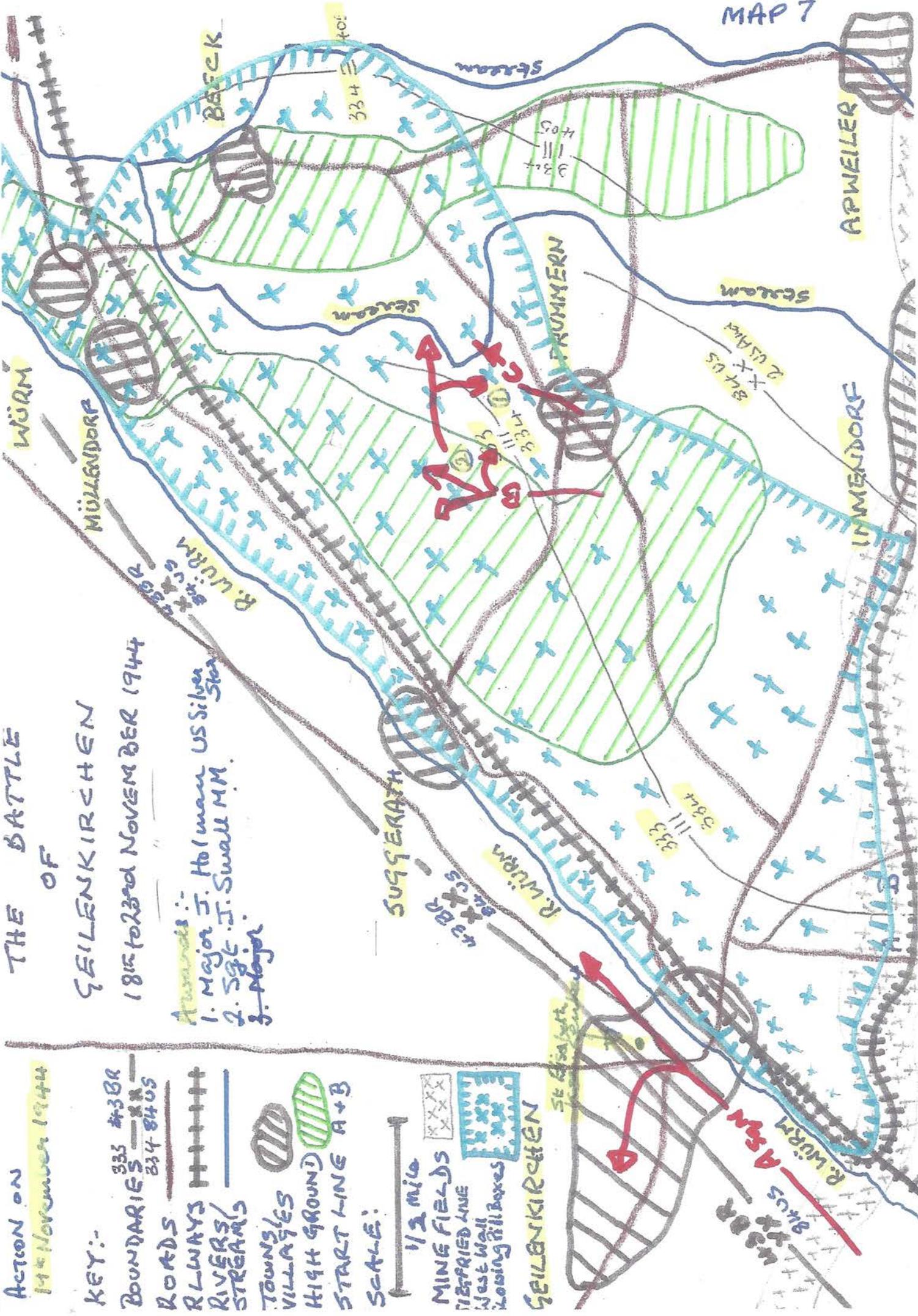
Flowing hills boxes 

## SEILENKIRCHEN

# THE BATTLE OF SEILENKIRCHEN 18th to 22nd November 1944

## Attacks:-

1. Major J. Holman US Silver Star
2. SGT. J. Small MM.
3. Major



when it suddenly opened up. He did not recover from this wound in time to rejoin the regiment before the end of the war, and so became one of the few of its tank commanders to have survived from the beginning. There is an iconic photograph of himself and his crew, taken in Normandy, posed on his tank *Akilla* (his crew youthfully languid, himself all hardened pugnaciousness) and which when he died in his 80s of old age, appeared with his rare obituary in the *Daily Telegraph* (rare in the sense that few military obituaries appear there below officer level).

See Map 7

Still on the 19th, as it continued to rain, on the eastern or right bank of the Wurm, B Squadron was still with the left battalion of 334th who had consolidated overnight on the high ground which had been their initial objective. At first light, they commenced the second phase, bypassing Prummen left-flanking to close with their new objective, on the high ground farther to the north-east, of the village. Although constantly under artillery fire, the battle-group reached the north-west corner of Prummen with relatively little trouble. However, they then found the ground they had to cross completely open and covered by anti-tank guns and concealed pillboxes, with inter-connecting arcs of fire. B Squadron debouched into the open from the partial cover of the orchard fringing Prummen and came under withering fire, suffering several casualties, including the squadron leader, Major Peter Seleri, wounded for the second time in the campaign, when his tank was knocked out. They also suffered badly in the going with a number of tanks bogging.

Meanwhile, as mentioned, C Squadron had taken over from A Squadron on the right. It had been assigned to clear the north-eastern end of Prummen and, in doing so, had destroyed four tanks that morning, and by the afternoon was firm in the north-eastern corner of the village, but not without casualties. Major Jack Holman was awarded the US Silver Star for his handling of C Squadron on 19 November.

B Squadron now received orders to join C Squadron, to support C Squadron's battalion in an attack towards Beek later that afternoon. However, it proved impossible to extricate the majority of the squadron from its present position where, if a tank was not already knocked out it was likely to be, since it was both bogged and under fire. As for the remainder, all of four tanks, they found all possible routes to the RV impassable due to saturated ground or roads blocked by knocked-out enemy tanks. The attack, therefore, was postponed until next day. That day B Squadron had suffered heavy casualties and three brewed tanks, and were down to two officers. This was one of their worst days.

See Map 7

Lieutenant David Alderson's troop, one of the two troops of A Squadron detached under command 333rd US Regiment, supported the American infantry when they took Geilenkirchen, as planned, with relatively little fighting.

Move to Position 6 via level crossing in Geilenkirchen , the main road north to Wurm and the bypass back to the roundabout north of Prummen and north on to the high ground looking at Beeck

Map 7

Map 8 and Photograph A Elisabeth- Krankenhaus point out the hospital

Read the following whilst on the move:

The regiment's casualties on 18 and 19 November were three officers and eight ORs killed, four officers and twenty-four ORs wounded, with twenty of the casualties sustained by B Squadron whose travails were not over; they endured an endless night on the 19th/20th, as Sergeant James Small from the squadron's fitters, supported by others, recovered, one by one, the bogged tanks and their crews. This was done, literally, from under the guns of the enemy's positions all

around them.

These night-time recoveries were taking place throughout the regiment and went on until the end of the battle. The ground got so bad that, increasingly, tanks had to be abandoned because they could not be moved. Codes, weapons and maps were removed as part of that process. Every night Sergeant Small was out on foot checking tanks and recovering crews where tanks could not be moved and earned a fine immediate MM in the process. All of this was taking place against the background of continuous rain while, every day, the regiment had to be out of laager long before first light, and did not replenish until long after dark, leaving little time for sleep, let alone to get dry or warm. This was a shattering routine for everyone.

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20<sup>th</sup> November 1944

Point out the stream as an explanation for the cause of so much bogging

Point out where pictures B1 and B2 were taken as you round the roundabout

At Position 6:

Map 9

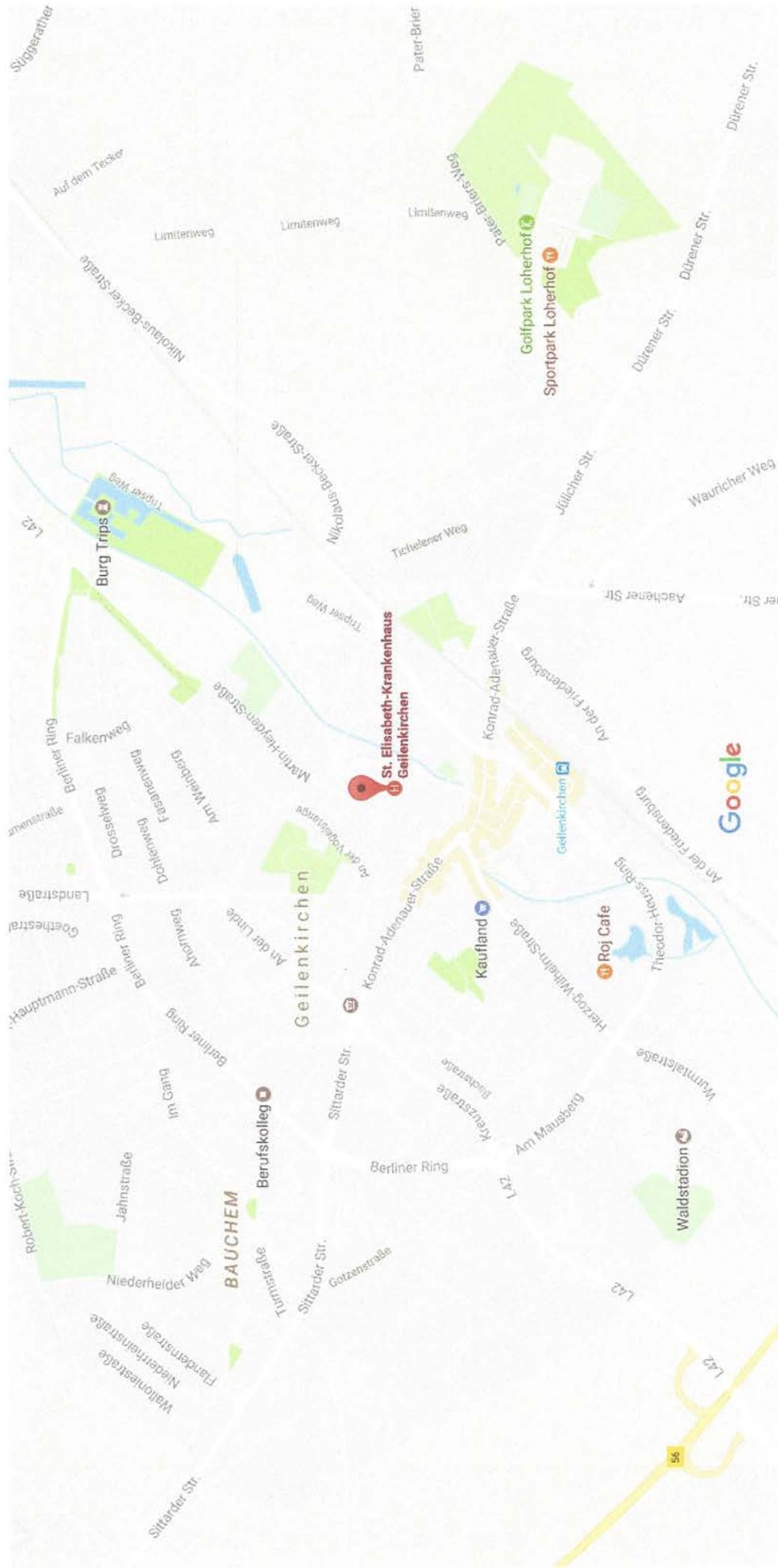
By the 20th Prummen had been cleared fully. A Squadron, now complete, was supporting 333rd. They moved to clear the high ground north-west of Geilenkirchen but encountered huge difficulties from defensive fire from the direction of Beek. C Squadron, still supporting the right battalion of 344th, also sought to cross the open ground and take Beek. However, there were significant numbers of enemy tanks to their front.

B Squadron was still in support of the left battalion of 344th on the north-western side of Prummen. All day both battalion and squadron were pinned down and unable to move forward because the ground

20<sup>th</sup> November 1944  
C Squadron.



# Google Maps St. Elisabeth-Krankenhaus Geilenkirchen



Map data ©2017 GeoBasis-DE/BKG (©2009), Google

200 m

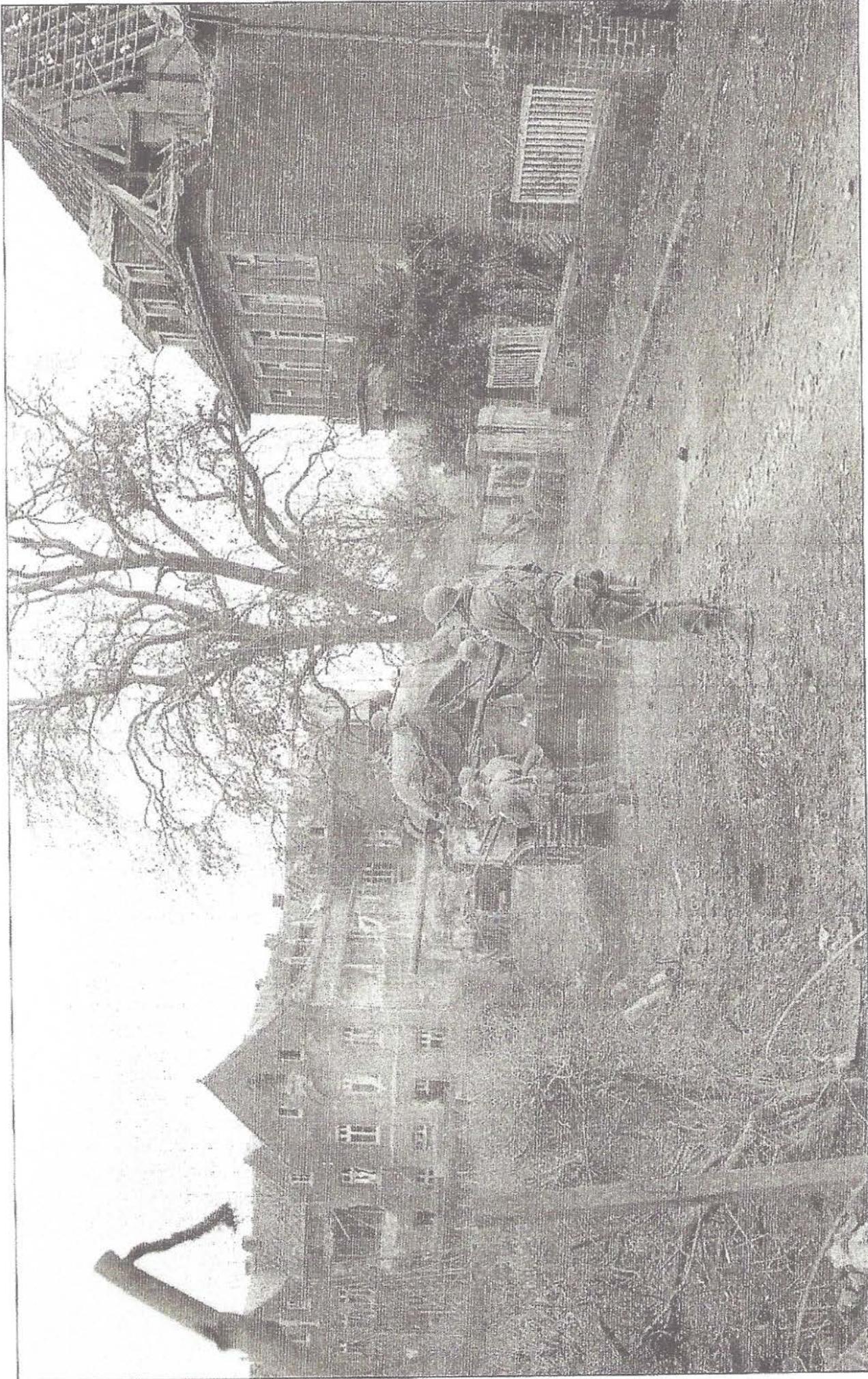
MAP 8



1944 November 1944 A Squadron.

(A)

VNSU



A hundred yards or so further on, the street widens to give an open view of the town hospital, the St-Elisabeth-Krankenhaus. Private Anderson pictured infantrymen of Company A and Sherwood Rangers tanks combining their fire to drive a German sniper out of a building some distance away to the left.

Note that the tanks have already blown a big hole in the hospital's façade, either to eliminate enemy firing from within or just in order to take no chances. The damage to the villa on the right was caused by pre-attack Allied shelling and fighter-bombers.



was so exposed. Nor could they find a route round on the left flank, due to the railway embankment.

21st November 1944

Map 9

The 21st found rain still falling, and the regiment increasingly paralyzed by the impossible ground, which included sunken roads and the embanked railway. It continued to take steady casualties. An attack on Beek failed.

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21st November 1944

Map 9

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Move to Position 7

Map 10

On the 22nd, as the rain continued, B and C Squadrons were so reduced that they had to form a composite squadron under Major Jack Holman to combine with an American tank battalion. They were to support a fresh battalion of 84th Division, 2nd/405th Regiment, in another attack on Beek, which was still held by tanks and anti-tank guns. This attack, from the direction of Apweiler, was preceded by a barrage and covered by a smokescreen, primarily to protect the infantry's advance. To reach Beek it was necessary to advance over 1,500 yards of open country, completely dominated by high ground, from which the enemy had perfect observation. The tanks led the attack, followed by the infantry and, in spite of intensive fire from pillboxes and anti-tank guns,

Position 8

Map 11

Captain Geoffrey Coleman's troop was first to reach the orchard in front of Beek, where four Tigers had been reported. Despite the fact that his troop was not supported by infantry, who were held up by two pillboxes in the corner of the orchard, Coleman called for more smoke

**ACTION ON**

13th Nov 1944

**KEY:-**

BOUNDARIES 335 #3BR  
334 84US

ROADS

RLWAYS

RIVERS/STREAMS

TOWNS/VILLAGES

HIGH GROUND

START LINE A+B

**SCALE:**

1/2 mile

MINE FIELDS

DEFRIED LINE

West Wall

Lowing fill boxes

SEILANKIRCHEN

**THE BATTLE**

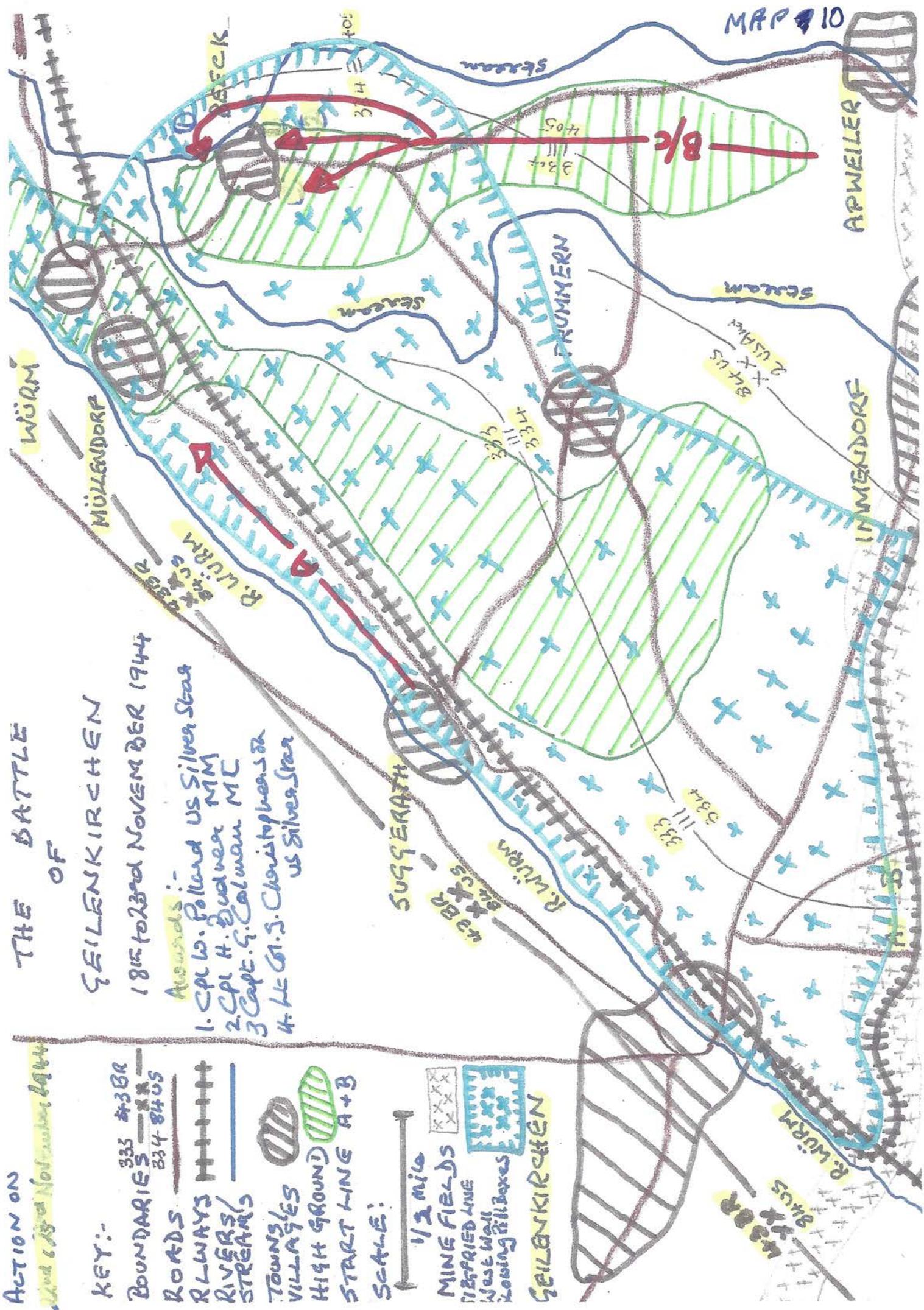
OF

**SEILANKIRCHEN**

18th to 22nd November 1944

**Awards:-**

1. CPL W. Pollard US Silver Star
2. CPL H. Duweier MM
3. Capt. G. Colman MC
4. Lt Col. S. Christopher's BA US Silver Star



and, when it came down, led his troop through the smokescreen into the orchard, continuing to advance until he was held up by a ditch which was an anti-tank obstacle. However, as he advanced, he knocked out one Tiger and killed many German infantry.

Corporal Harold Budner, his troop corporal, emerged from the smoke with him, and was heavily engaged by tanks, anti-tank guns and infantry. In reply, he covered the area in front of him with fire. Corporal Budner then made a dash for the road into the centre of the village and, owing to the smoke, his tank was not hit. On reaching the road, his luck ran out; his tank was knocked out by an anti-tank gun covering that approach to the village. Corporal William Pollard was also in the attack and, showing terrific determination, had pushed through Beek and got behind the enemy defensive line defending the village, and there accounted for two more of the Tigers at a range of 200 yards. He was awarded the US Silver Star for this action. The citation adds in respect of the battle generally:

He displayed courage and initiative of a high order throughout the entire period ... always being found where the fighting was fiercest. His aggressive, dauntless spirit and exemplary leadership reflected high credit on himself and the military service of his country.

From Ilkeston, he had been with the regiment since 1941 and had been wounded at Alamein.

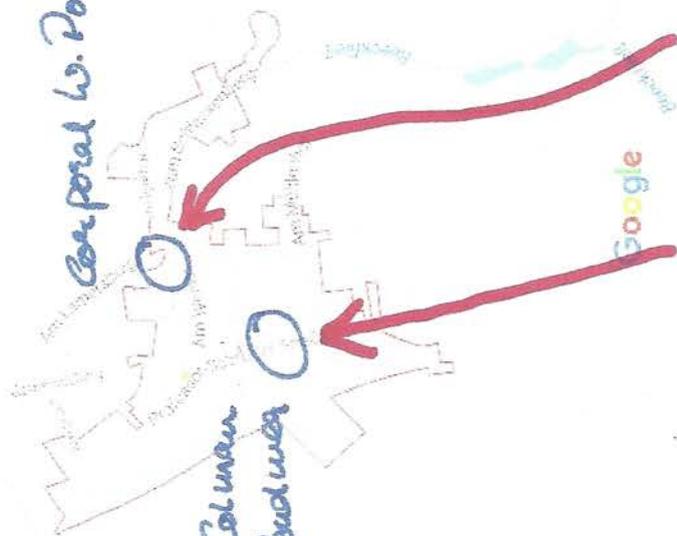
Meanwhile Corporal Budner, after his tank had been brewed up, collected some infantry, when they eventually arrived, and led the party, with a view to knocking out the anti-tank gun, but they were pinned down by fire and had to remain concealed until after dark. Unsupported, Captain Coleman also remained in position until dark, engaging any enemy tanks that moved, and German infantry that attempted to use a bazooka against his tank. Eventually his ammunition ran out, but he remained in the same position until after dark. He then collected Corporal Budner and those members of Budner's crew who had been unable to move in daylight, owing to

22nd November 1944

BECK.

Corporal W. Pollard

Captain G. Colman  
Corporal W. Budweiser



Google

machine-gun fire, bringing them all back to safety, but leaving Beek untaken. Captain Coleman was awarded an immediate MC which had been submitted as a DSO and Corporal Budner an immediate MM.

Meanwhile A Squadron was trying to get on towards Wurm, without much success.

### 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1944

The 23<sup>rd</sup> found the rain continuing and the composite B/C Squadron reduced to five tanks. An American tank squadron attacked Beek, but failed to take it while A Squadron, dealing with pillboxes, was heavily shelled. The regiment was counter-attacked by tanks in both sectors and further casualties were taken. At last, in the evening, the regiment was relieved by American armoured units. It had been a long and weary struggle. Everyone was exhausted and everything was drenched.

Between 20 and 23 November the casualties were four ORs killed, two officers and six ORs wounded. Overall casualties had been heavy – sixty-three, including three officers and twelve ORs killed, while ten tanks had been destroyed, five more damaged and another five bogged beyond recovery. If there is an armoured equivalent to trench warfare, this had surely been it.

However, the American infantry had impressed the regiment. It had been another ‘great and proud partnership’ which had broken the Siegfried Line and had taken Geilenkirchen and the high ground beyond in the most difficult of situations imaginable.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> the regiment returned the fifteen miles west from Geilenkirchen to Schinnen, receiving a warm welcome from their newly-made friends there, and a visit from Horrocks, who said that he had chosen the regiment for the task because it was ‘one of the most experienced regiments in the western European theatre’; he identified the battle for Geilenkirchen as possibly their finest achievement to date. Stanley Christoperson was awarded the Silver Star by the

Americans; this award covers the equivalent of both an MC and a DSO. His citation was such that it would have resulted in a DSO if submitted for one. In effect he had earned two DSOs in three months. Lieutenants R. G. Higgs and R. Longford were each awarded the US Bronze Star for meritorious service. Overall, during the battle, the regiment was awarded one DCM, two MCs, four MMs, six Silver Stars and two Bronze Stars.

## **Cast List**

### **1. Lt Colonel Stanley Christopherson DSO MC TD**

He served from the beginning of the war and commanded A Squadron at El Alamein being awarded an MC . A Sqn was equipped with the Medium Crusader Tank whereas the rest of the regiment was equipped with Heavy tanks, Shermans and Grants and so his Squadron led from Alamein to Tunis and so the regiment first knew when it was in action when an A Sqn tank was fired on. He won a second MC in Tunisia rescuing a wounded colleague under fire. He was OC A Sqn on D Day and took command aged 31 on 11<sup>th</sup> June after SRY had lost two COs in the early fighting in Normandy and he then commanded until the end of the war being awarded a DSO at Gheel in September where SRY lost eleven tanks securing the start line for Op Market Garden. SRY won 30 Battle Honours in WWII said to be more than any other armoured regiment and he was either the OC of the point Squadron or the CO of the Regiment for all of them.

### **2. Major John Semken MC**

Joined SRY before El Alamein and was a Troop Leader in that battle and throughout N Africa. He was Technical Adjutant in the UK in the prelude to D Day on which date SRY landed at HR on Gold Jig Geen in amphibian DD Tanks. He was 21. The role of the Tech Adj is to re-equip the whole regiment with all the right equipment with which to go to war and make sure all the equipment is serviceable, the regiment having returned to the UK from N Africa with their personal clothing only it was a huge task. He had to take on charge 60 tanks and a 100 other vehicles all the weapons and radios down to the last spanner. He took command of A Sqn on 11<sup>th</sup> June and within two weeks had been awarded an MC leading his squadron in a decisive tank v tank dual in Normandy at Rauray when SRY proved that the superior German tanks could be beaten. He used a desert tactic of attacking with the setting sun behind him which concealed his tanks from the enemy whilst illuminating the enemy tanks for his gunners.

### **3. Captain David Render**

He joined SRY after D Day to replace an early casualty and served as a Troop Leader in every action thereafter later writing a book on commanding a troop of tanks in battle with no previous experience when the troop consisted of desert veterans who just lost a respected Troop Leader. The book is now read at Sandhurst.

### **4. Padre Leslie Skinner**

He joined SRY before D Day and served until the end of the war. He had a major effect on SRYs morale by carrying out a personal commitment not to post anyone missing. He also insisted on clearing knocked out tanks of bodies personally and burying them alone.

## **5. Sergeant George Dring MM**

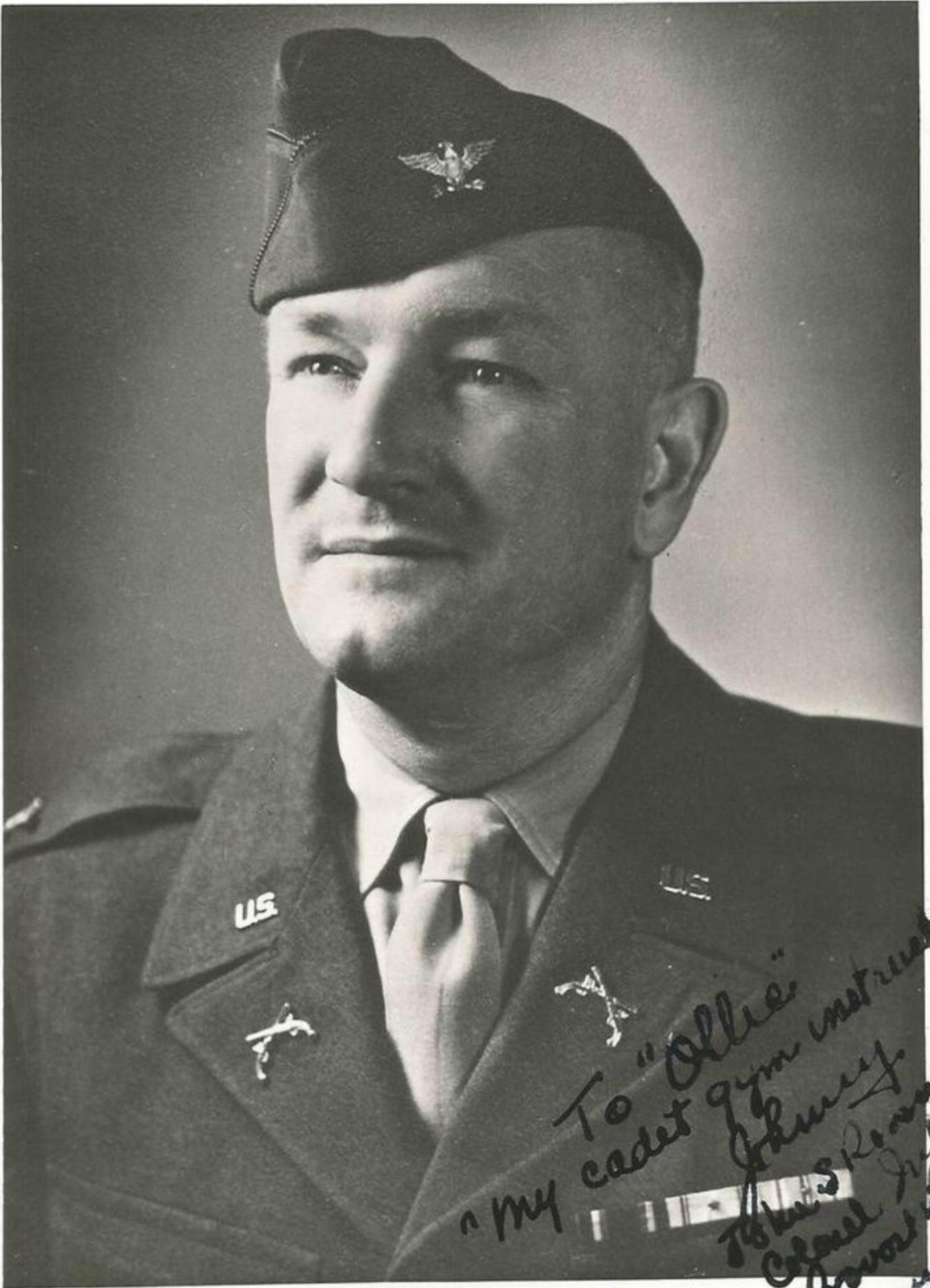
He was in every action until Geilenkirchen and was one of the true tank aces of the war accounting for more tanks than anyone else in SRY. In Normandy he stalked tanks on foot talking to his crew on the tele handset giving them fire orders to shoot at a tank they could not see concealed behind cover. He was awarded an MM in Tunisia and another at Rauray.

## **6. Corporal William Pollard**

He followed up his action at Geilenkirchen when he was awarded a US Silver Star in January 1945 when he knocked out two tanks engaging him with a left and right to win significant skirmish for which he was awarded a MM. Very few infantry or armoured soldiers are awarded two gallantry medals because their life expectancy makes it unlikely that they will get two opportunities



Lieut.-Col. J. E. Sandars, O.B.E., T.D., new High Sheriff of Lincolnshire, signing declaration of office, witnessed by Mr. J. R. Bergne-Coupland, J.P. On this occasion the seal used was the one used by the Colonel's father, Mr. J. D. Sandars, when taking office in 1902.

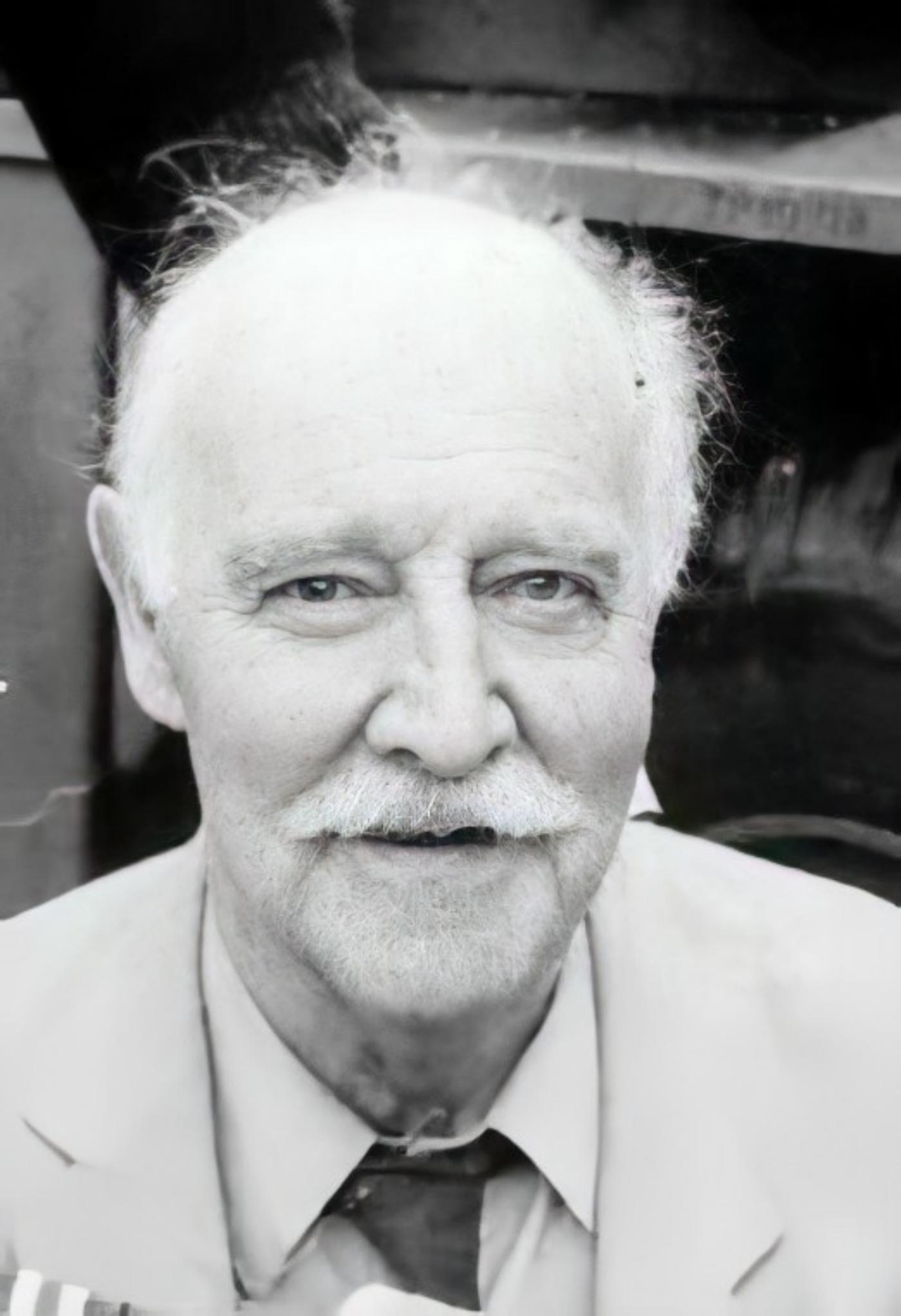


To "Ollie"  
my cadet gym instructor  
John  
Colonel  
Browns  
Marshall  
1955











R.A.C.H.D.

SHERWOOD  
RANGERS



T 146929

AKILLA



19

From the best Tank Regt I ever had  
under command

Bravo G. Honors H. J. Lee

