

Brown, Thomas Alfred
Corporal
Royal Winnipeg Rifles Regiment
Royal Canadian Infantry Corps
M/8594



Thomas Alfred Brown was born 20 November 1924 in Altario, Alberta. His parents Alice and George Stuart Brown had both emigrated from England and settled in Kirriemuir, a tiny hamlet next to Altario along the Canadian Pacific Railway line in east central Alberta near the Saskatchewan border. Little is known of Thomas's Anglican parents or whether he had any siblings, other than his birthing was likely at the recently established Altario Red Cross Hospital.



Red Cross Hospital - Altario, Alberta 1921

Thomas, who was called Tom, completed grade 6 at the one room school in Altario and then went to work in mixed farming operations. He had been working for Mr. A. Fedick around Monitor for a couple of months when he joined the Canadian Army.



Thomas enlisted at Calgary 6 November 1943 age 19 years old, listing his mother Alice Brown as next of kin. His medical examination recorded him at 5'10" tall and 157 lbs, noting a large scald mark on the surface of his left wrist. He did his basic training at the Canadian Army Training Centre in Wetaskiwin, Alberta.



Canadian Army Basic Training – Wetaskiwin, Alberta

Thomas was back in Calgary for advanced infantry training in February 1944. He was given embarkation leave in May and disembarked in the U.K. 2 June 1944, just prior to the Allied D-Day Normandy invasion. Thomas's mother had remarried by then, and her name was changed to Alice Walker on his service records, including his short form will. Thomas remained in the U.K. with the Canadian Infantry Reinforcement Unit for a month before being shipped across the English Channel and taken on strength with the Royal Winnipeg Rifles (RWR) 5 July 1944 and designated as a Rifleman.

The RWR, also known as the Little Black Devils, along with the other 7th Brigade battalions (Regina Rifles and Canadian Scottish) of 3rd Canadian Division were among the first Commonwealth infantry units to land at Juno Beach (Courseulles-sur-Mer) and suffered heavy D-Day losses. The next few days were even worse for them, experiencing another 300 casualties at the small village of Putot-en-Bessin, almost half of the battalion's combat strength. After a few weeks rebuilding with reinforcements, the RWR rejoined the battle for Normandy and fought at Carpiquet where they lost another 132 men, including 40 killed. The RWR and 7th Brigade were in a support role when Thomas joined the regiment near Caen, France.

The Winnipeg Rifles and 7th Brigade helped clear the Channel ports and played a key role in the liberation of Calais in late September, resulting in the capture of many German prisoners of war. They moved on to Belgium and participated in the battle at Leopold Canal 6-13 October 1944 along the Dutch border. Much of the Scheldt areas of Belgium and Holland had been flooded by the Germans, making it very difficult terrain to fight in. The 7th Brigade led the attack without armour support and at the end of seven days of heavy fighting suffered a combined 553 casualties. Thomas Brown was made Lance Corporal a week after the battle ended 20 October 1944.

The Little Black Devils were at rest in Belgium during early November when their Regimental commander Lieutenant-Colonel Lockhart Fulton was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) by Field-Marshal Montgomery for his actions in Normandy when he was a Company commander. They were then assigned to static operations near Nijmegen, Netherlands 11 November where they remained for almost three months. Thomas was promoted to acting Corporal while there 13 January 1945.

Lt.-Col. Lockie Fulton receiving DSO award Belgium 1944



The Little Black Devils were on the move with their 3rd Infantry Division in February 1945 as part of First Canadian Army to break out of their winter positions in the Nijmegen-Groesbeek area under Operation VERITABLE. This was a new role for them, changing from being liberators to invaders, pushing the Germans deeper into their homeland.

Infantrymen of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles in a Buffalo amphibious vehicle taking part in Operation VERITABLE en route from Niel to Keeken, Germany, 9 February 1945.

Initial progress was impeded due to severe flooding through a combination of a sudden thaw, heavy rains, failed dams and dykes blown by the retreating Germans. This required 7th Brigade and other Canadian formations to use tracked amphibious carriers called Buffaloes to advance. Cleve was the first major German city to be taken by the Canadian Army. By the time they got there, Allied aircraft had left it in ruins.

Winnipeg Rifles advance at Cleve 13 February 1945

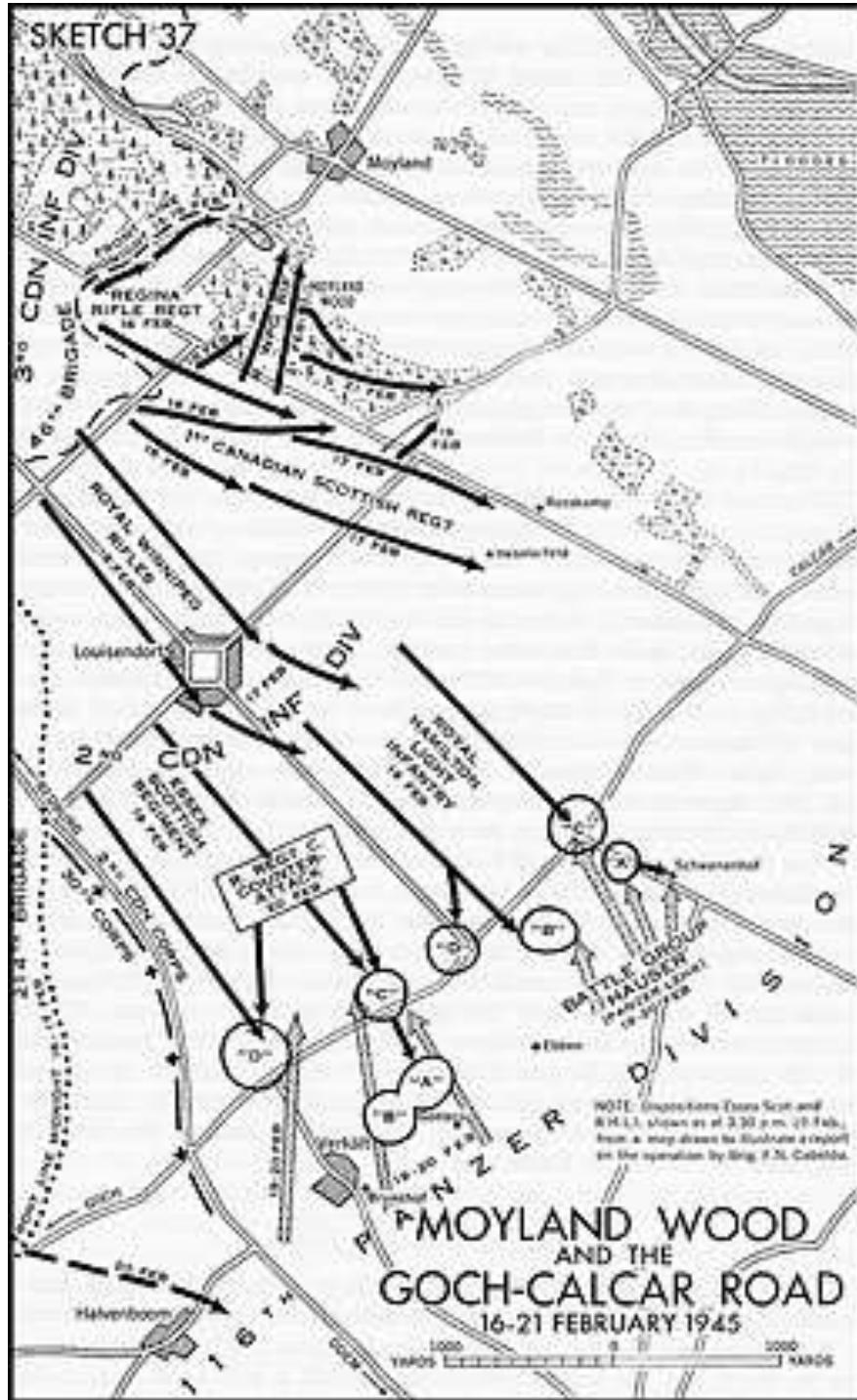


New equipment and tactics were employed in 1945. For the first time in the war the Little Black Devils attacked mounted in Kangaroo armoured personnel carriers, supported by 1st Canadian Armoured Personnel Carrier Regiment. On 16 February at 0730 hours, the RWR were picked up in their concentration

area near Cleve by the Kangaroos and moved several miles forward to the forming up place for their part in the pending attack.

7th Brigade's orders were to move eastward from Cleve to Udem, running parallel with the British advance to the Rhine through an area that was only wide enough to use one brigade at a time. They were tasked with the capture of Moyland Wood and the ground to the immediate south, opening the way to Calcar. The Little Black Devils supported by tanks from a Guards Armoured Brigade assaulted the village of Louisendorf to the southeast at 1200 hours. German artillery and rocket fire was extremely heavy, but both the speed and protection afforded by the Kangaroo's armour meant that casualties in the approach to the village were light.

Louisendorf was held by a battalion of Germans, and casualties were heavy in the ensuing fighting. However, the village was captured and approximately 240 prisoners were taken in what was a successful operation compared to the near disaster that befell the Regina Rifles at Moyland Wood.



The Royal Winnipeg Rifles suffered heavy casualties that first day of battle. Intense shelling by the Germans, described in the RWR war diary as "the heaviest shelling the Battalion has ever been subjected to", commenced at 0900 hours the next morning and continued throughout the day. Thomas Brown was killed in action 17 February 1945 during that bombardment.

Corporal Thomas Alfred Brown was temporarily buried around Calcar, Germany and later relocated to Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery near Nijmegen, Netherlands, grave reference **XXV. D. 9.**



Thomas Alfred (Tom) Brown



Photo courtesy lestweforget1945.org



Biography by Jim Little, Research Team Faces to Graves.

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Ancestry public trees

Altario Red Cross Hospital picture and area map <http://www.prairie-towns.com/altario-images.html>

Wetaskiwin Army Training picture
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Moyland Wood map
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* If you have a photo of this soldier or additional information please contact info@facestograves.nl