



Arthur James Nicholls

Private 5437989 5th Battalion Dorsetshire Regiment

Died July 30th 1944, aged 27

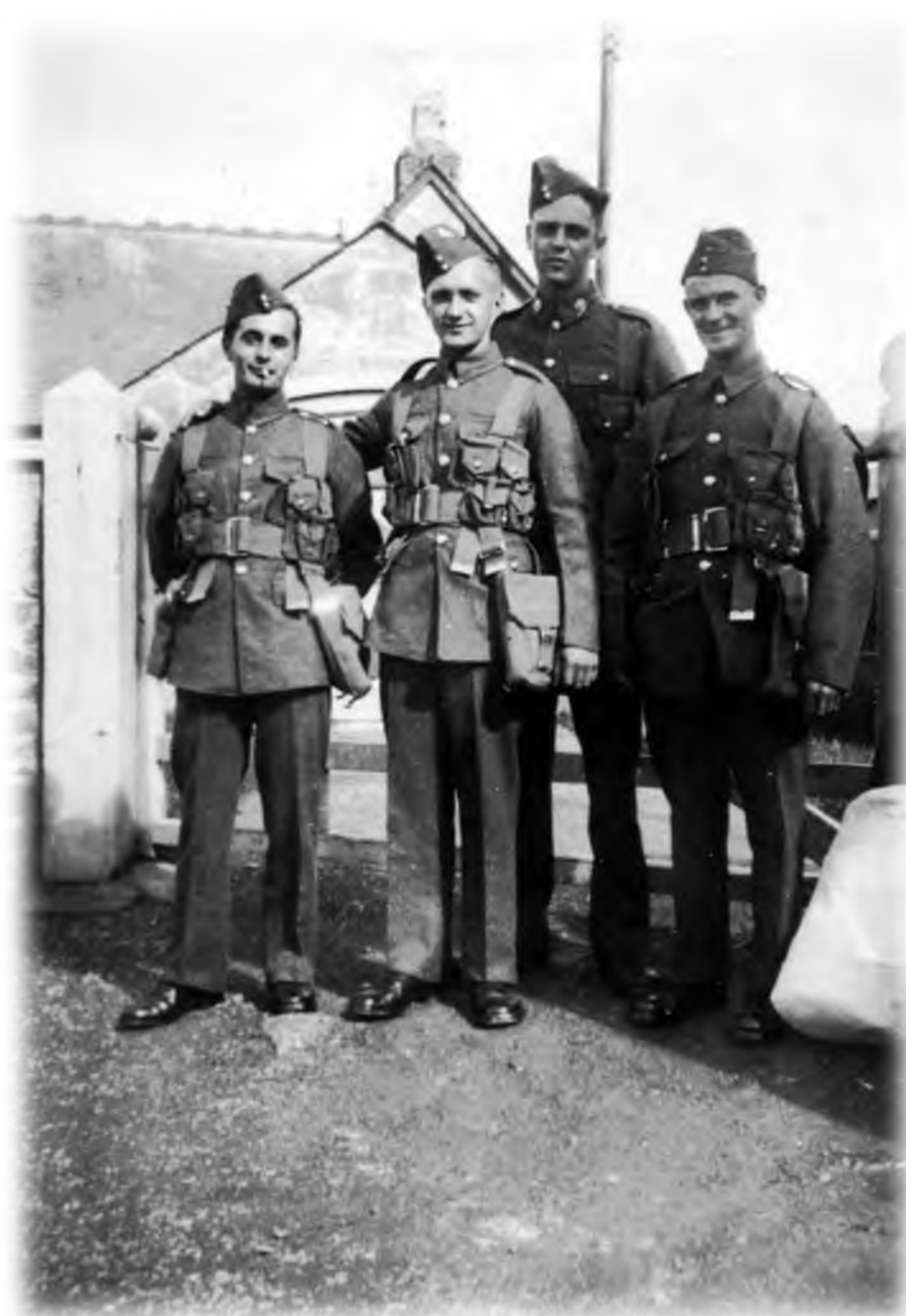
Commemorated Hottot-Les-Bagues War Cemetery

Son of James Arthur and Florence May Nicholls;

husband of Irene Nicholls, of Corfe Castle, Dorsetshire



Private Arthur James Nicholls



Jack Honey, Arthur Nicholls, Robert (Bob) Nancekivell and Clifford Slogget waiting for Charlie Lobb's taxi

Arthur James Nicholls was born in 1916 to James Arthur and Florence May (nee Trenberth) Nicholls. In 1939 he married Irene Provis and in 1941 they had a boy. Arthur Nicholls is the father of Bryan Nicholls.

Arthur Nicholls was in the 5th Battalion Dorsetshire Regiment, which was part of 130th Infantry Brigade of 43rd (Wessex) Infantry Division. He was a soldier on a Bren-Gun Carrier. This was a light armoured tracked vehicle built by Vickers-Armstrong, and known as the Universal Carrier. They were used throughout the Second World War primarily for transporting personnel and equipment, or as machine gun platforms. It is the most produced armoured fighting vehicle in history. Its main armament was a Bren Gun, a mainstay of the British Army right up to 1992, and still manufactured in India today. The carrier had a crew of three.



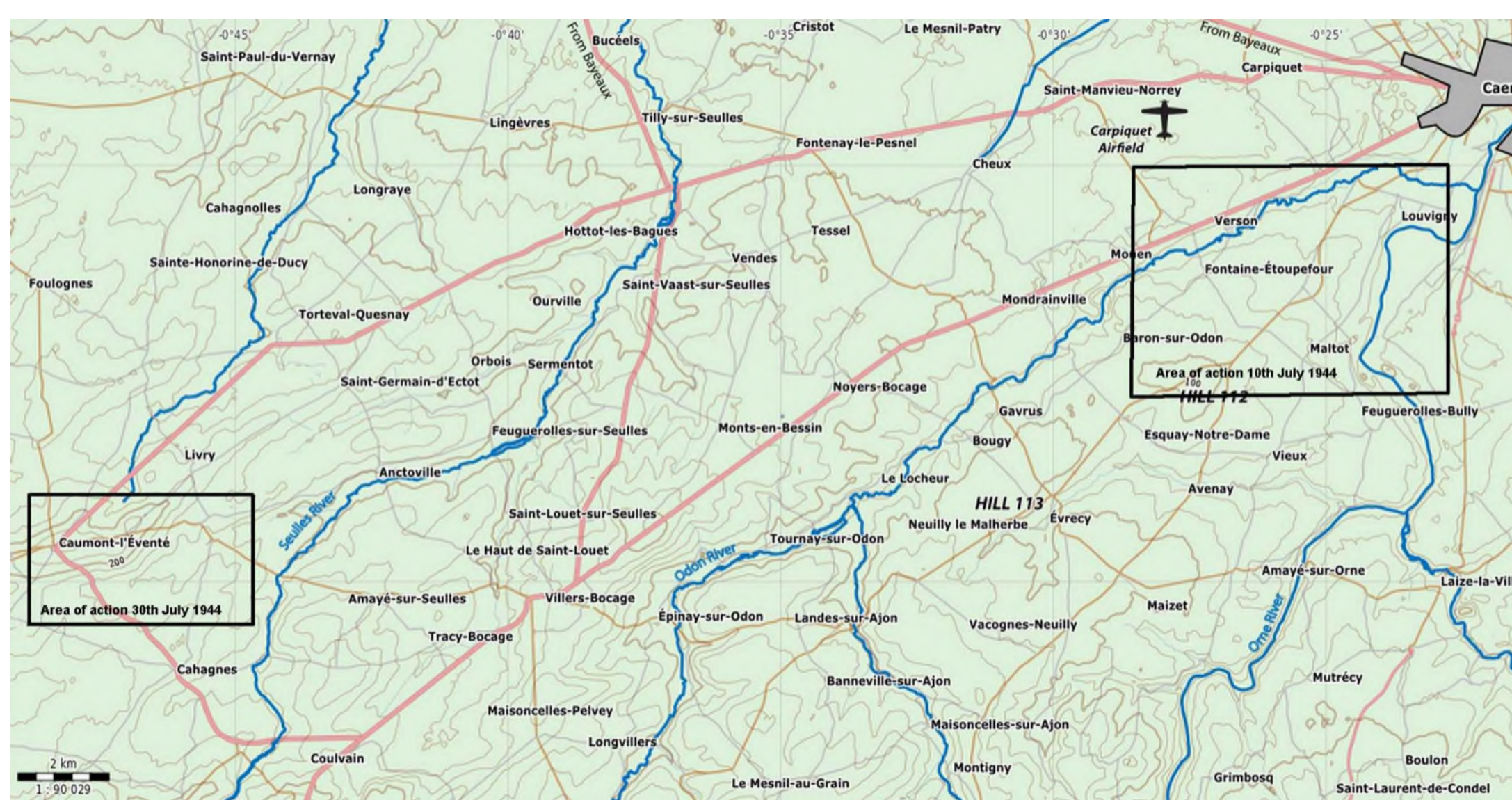
Bren Gun Carrier in action in Normandy

A week after D-Day, the 5th Battalion received orders to depart for Normandy, with the wheeled and tracked vehicles like Arthur's Bren Gun Carrier, going to Victoria Dock, London where they had their first experience of flying bombs whilst waiting to be loaded. They embarked on the recently built SS Pampas, arriving in Normandy on June 23rd 1944 to join the rest of 43rd (Wessex) Infantry Division. The 43rd served with distinction on the Western front from D-Day to the end of the war, suffering horrendous casualties but gaining an excellent reputation. They were held in great respect by their German Wermacht and Waffen SS opponents, who knew the 43rd as the 'Fighting Yellow Devils' after their distinctive golden Wyvern badge. By the end of the war the 43rd had suffered more than 12,500 casualties, with over 3,000 killed in action.

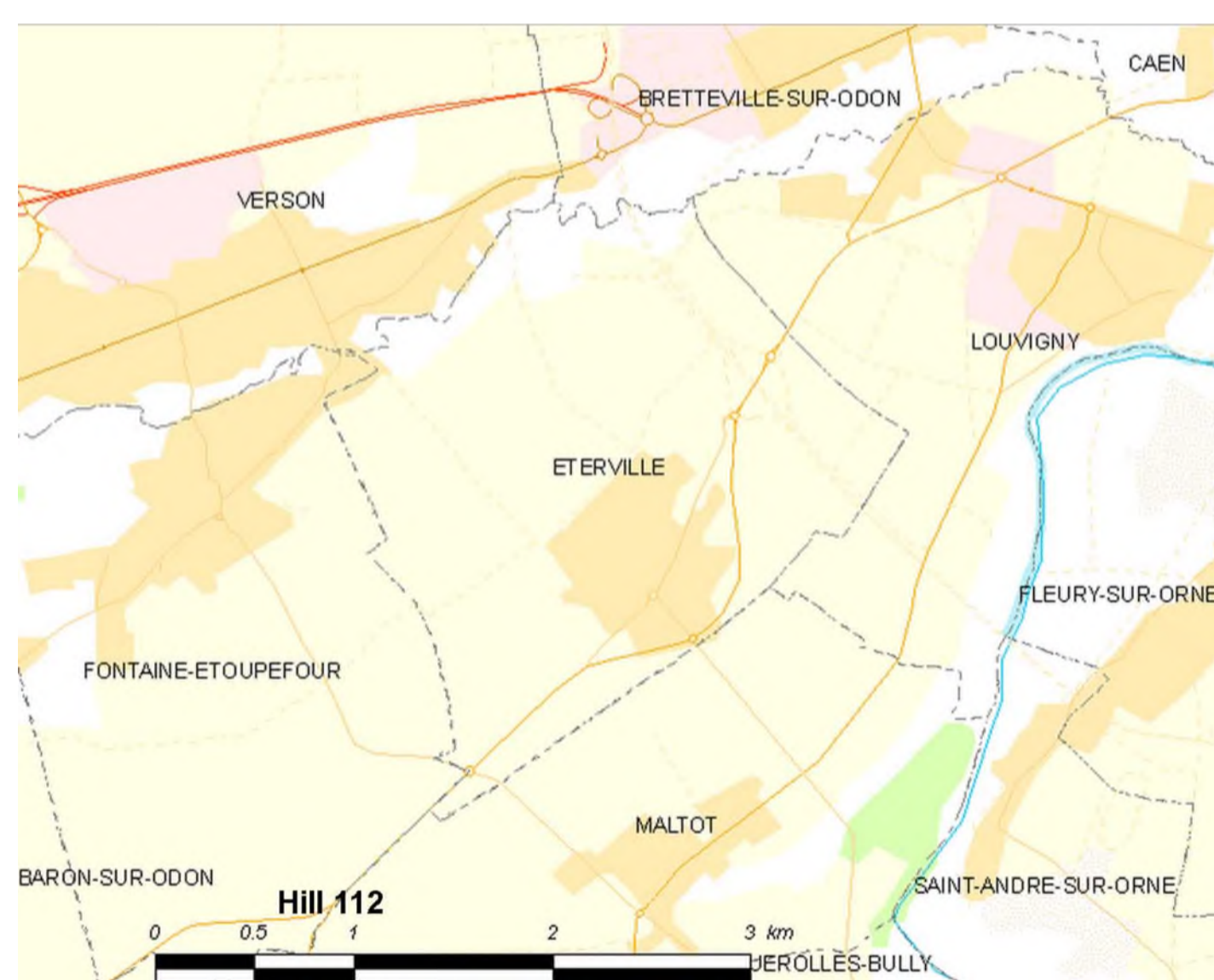


The Bren Gun

The first major operation for 43rd Wessex was Operation Epsom between June 26th and 30th to seize the town of Caen. Caen had originally been a D-day objective, but owing to congestion on the beachhead and fierce resistance by 21st Panzer Division on the outskirts of the town, the attempt failed. Subsequent attempts met stiffer resistance. The main role in Operation Epsom was given to VIII Corps, with over 60,000 men. 43rd Wessex was in the third phase of the battle, to move forward to relieve the Scottish infantry north of the Odon River around Cheux and St Manvieu, west of Caen, who would then proceed to cross the river to form a bridgehead. When they arrived around Cheux they found the Scottish Infantry had already moved on and their positions had been re-occupied by 12th SS Panzer, with fierce fighting to retake the positions. The entire front was a mass of small engagements, and between June 27th and July 2nd the Dorsetshire Regiment lost 28 men killed in the Odon Valley.



The area south west of Caen showing two main areas of action of 5th Battalion



Inset of area around Hill 112

On July 10th, as the first phase of Operation Jupiter, the 130th Infantry Brigade and the 9th Royal Tank Regiment were tasked to occupy a German Salient around les Duanes and capture the Chateau de Fontaine, whilst 129th Brigade and 7th Royal tanks attacked Hill 112 held by 10th SS-Panzer Division Frundsberg. In the second phase, 129th Brigade would form a defensive flank along the northern slope of Hill 112 as the 130th Brigade and 9th Royal Tanks attacked Eterville and Maltot to the north east of Hill 112.

Hill 112 was tactically important with its commanding views over the area south west of Caen. The battle for Hill 112 was extremely fierce over its 13 days. On July 10th alone, Dorsetshire Regiment lost 107 killed around Hill 112, and between July 11th and 22nd a further 75 Dorsetshire men were killed. The German defenders survived naval bombardment, air attack and artillery fire but never gave up the hill, which was left as a sort of no-man's-land with the two sides dug in on opposite sides. It was not until August 1944 that the Germans withdrew from Hill 112 during Operation Cobra, when the 53rd Welsh division occupied it with barely a fight.

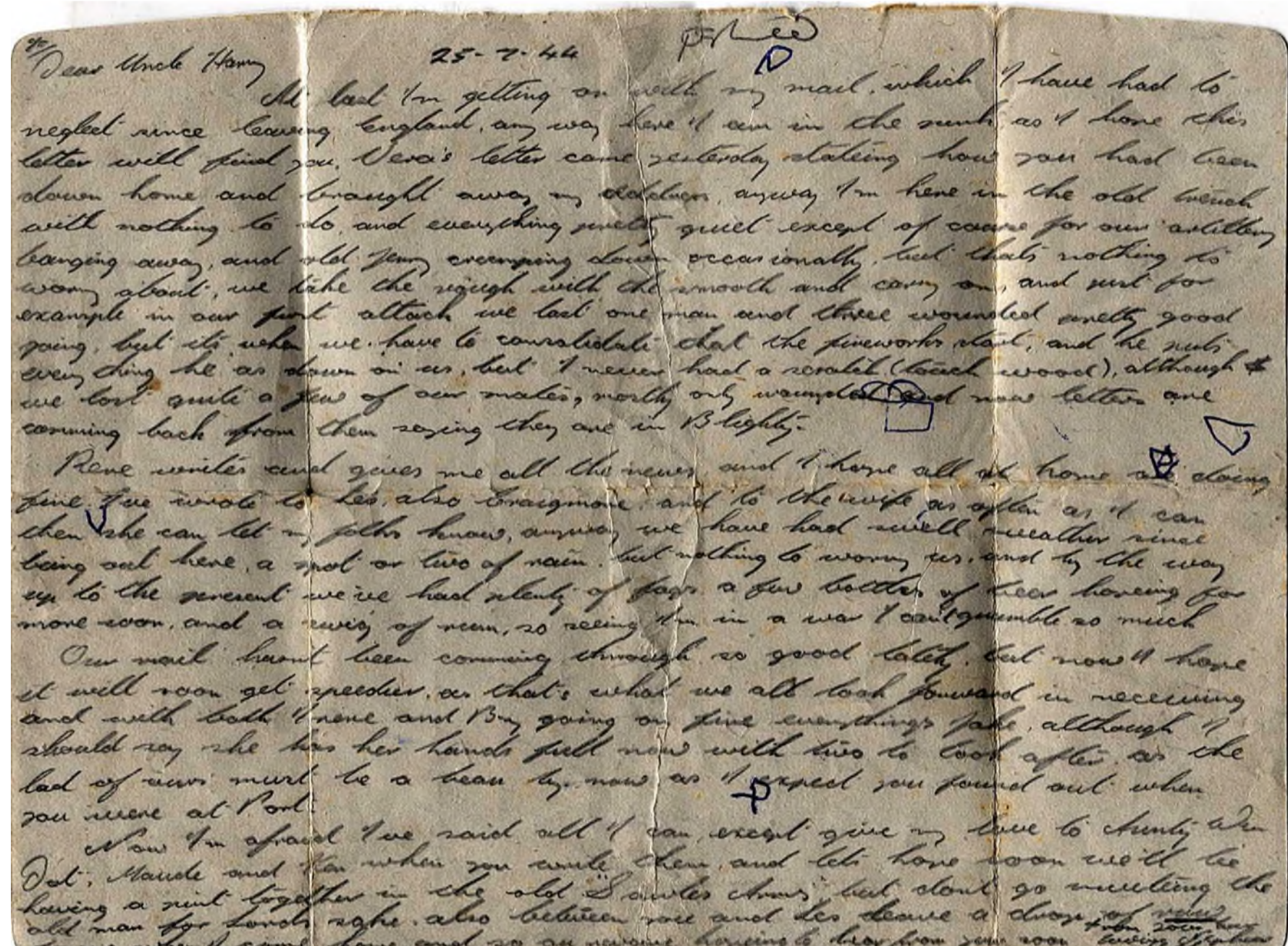


The Monument on Hill 112 to the 43rd Wessex Regiment men who lost their lives

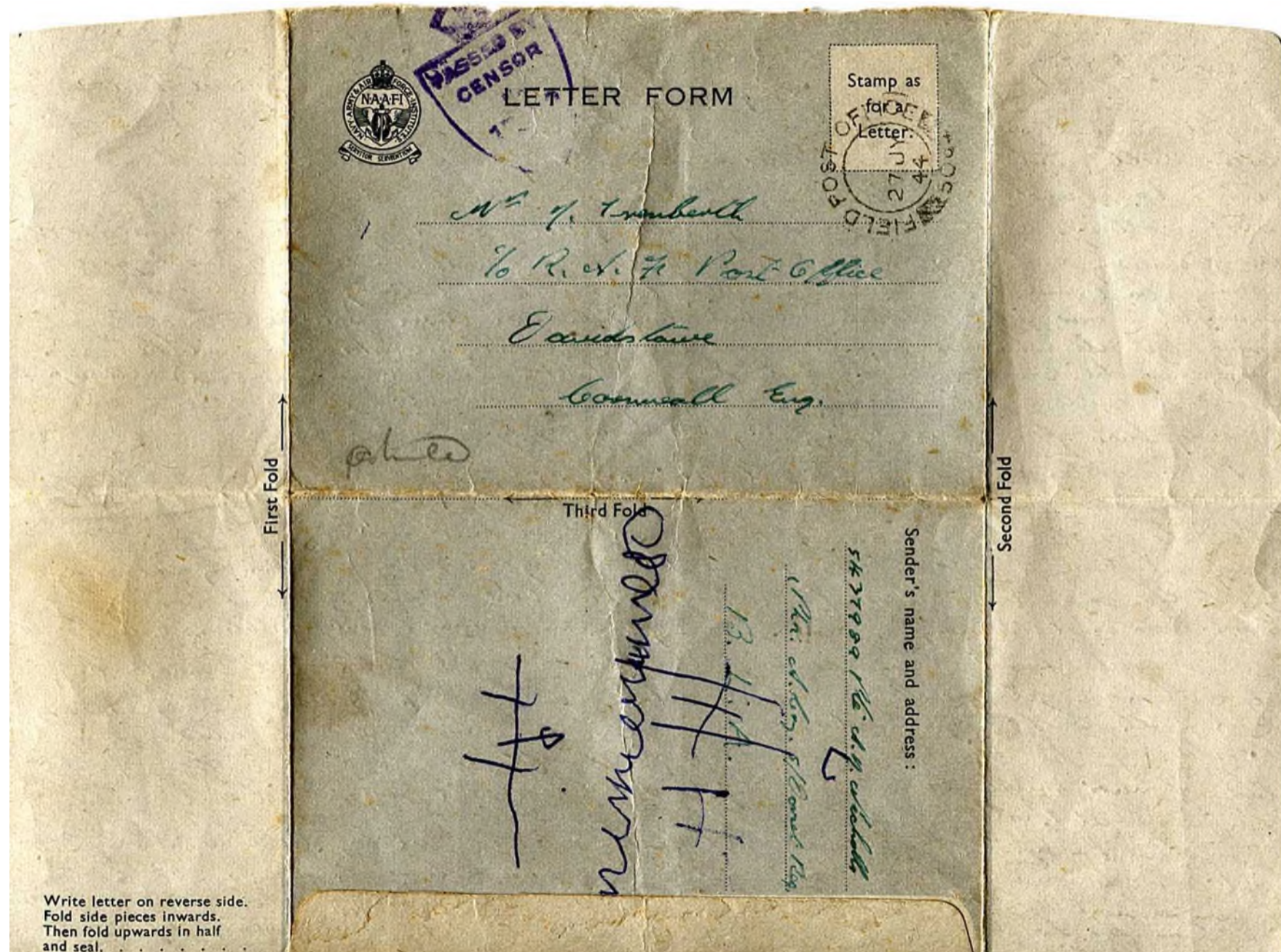
Arthur James Nicholls



After the battles around Hill 112, Dorsetshire Regiment had just two casualties from 23rd to 29th July. At this relatively quiet time, Arthur was able to send this letter home to his Uncle Harry at RAF Davidstow.



Arthur's last letter home on NAAFI paper, complete with the Censor's stamp (doodles courtesy of Master Nicholls)



Operation Bluecoat began on July 30th, and was to support the US breakout further to the west called Operation Cobra, by keeping the German forces in this area held down. Pride of place in the operation was given to the experienced 43rd Wessex, who were to advance from Briquessard east of Caumont l'Evente, through Cahagnes and on to St Pierre-du-Fresne to reach its objective on the top of the Bois de Homme. This detail of 5th Dorsetshire Battalion's part in the action on July 30th is from their regimental history –

The task of the Battalion was to form a tight bridgehead over the stream which ran through the village of Le Mesnil Levreau and to take the village of Le Quesnay. It was apparent during that night that the enemy had anticipated an attack and the Battalion area was subjected to enemy bombing, but fortunately casualties were light due to the excellence of the American-built dug-outs which had been taken over.

Zero hour had been fixed for 0600 hrs. but was advanced to 0800 hrs., as the ground mist was unsuitable for our aircraft. The attack began as planned and the Metropolitan bombers were attacking Cahagnes as "B" Company (Major K. Mead) on the left, moved forward. They were halted at the main road by heavy machine-gun fire and were unable to advance. Severe casualties were sustained as the area was subjected to intense enemy shelling and one salvo knocked out all of company headquarters except the Company Commander. "A" Company (Captain P. Aspinall) in the centre, made some progress with one platoon under command of Lieut. P. Champion, but the remainder of the Company suffered considerable casualties from mines and were held up. "C" Company (Major B. K. Favelle) on the right, suffered a similar fate and soon found themselves in the centre of a dense enemy minefield some three hundred yards from the start line and were unable to move. The Company Commander and Lieut. Wetherbee were both wounded on mines. "D" Company (Major GR Hartwell) were still waiting to pass through to Le Quesnay.

About mid-day it was apparent that the attack could not continue as planned until a lane had been cleared through the mines. Owing to the very close nature of the country, enemy positions could not be easily located, and it was decided that the clearing of the minefield should be done at night. During the night, patrols were sent out, including R.E. reconnaissance parties, which located the minefields and some of the enemy positions, and took some prisoners.



Area east of Caumont-L'Evente where 5th Dorsetshire Battalion were in action July 30th 1944



The view today alongside the stream looking up the twisting hill to the houses of Le Quesnay 300 yards away. No doubt the lane was much narrower in wartime.

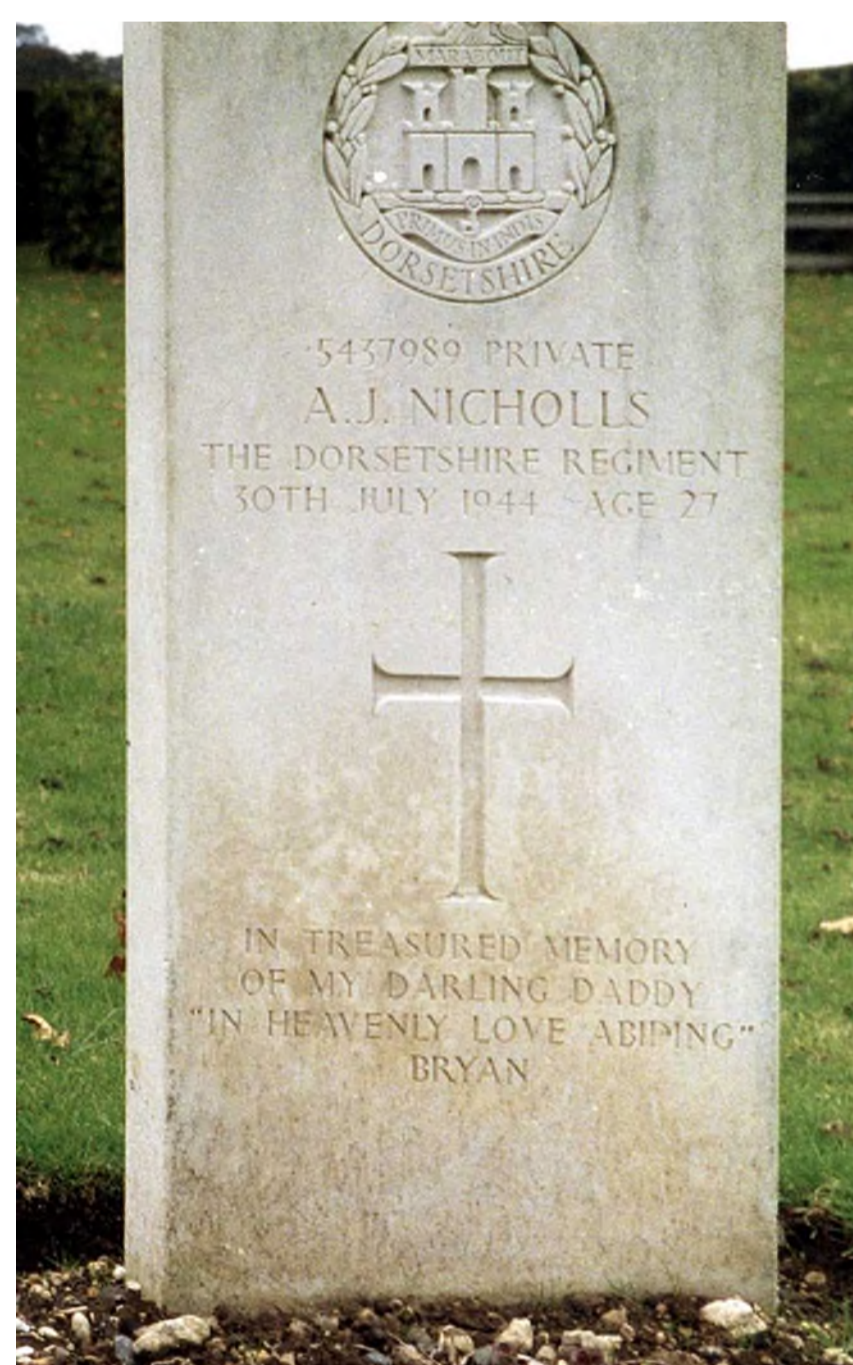
In July 1944 those fields were mined and enemy troops with machine guns or anti-tank 'Panzerfaust'[Tank Fist] weapons could lurk anywhere in the hedgerows.

Casualties on this day were the highest since the actions of July 10th around Hill 112, with 33 men of the Dorsetshire Regiment killed, including Private Arthur James Nicholls. He is buried alongside 9 of his comrades at Hottot-Les-Bagues War Cemetery, about 7 miles north east from where he fell. These are the 5th Battalion Dorsetshire Regiment men in Hottot-Les-Bagues War Cemetery who died on July 30th 1944 -

- Private Oswald Edward **BALL** 5th Battalion, aged 21
- Private George **BLACKMAN** 5th Battalion, aged 30
- Private Dudley Arthur **BULL** 5th Battalion, aged 29
- Private George Edward **CASE** 5th Battalion, aged 27
- Private Peter Anthony **CONNOR** 5th Battalion, aged 20
- Private Arnold **HUDSON** 5th Battalion, aged 31
- Private Frederick Thomas **KNOTT** 5th Battalion, aged 19
- Private Arthur James **NICHOLLS** 5th Battalion, aged 27
- Private Arthur Edward **SEARS** 5th Battalion, aged 27
- Private Frederick Charles **WAITE** 5th Battalion, aged 28



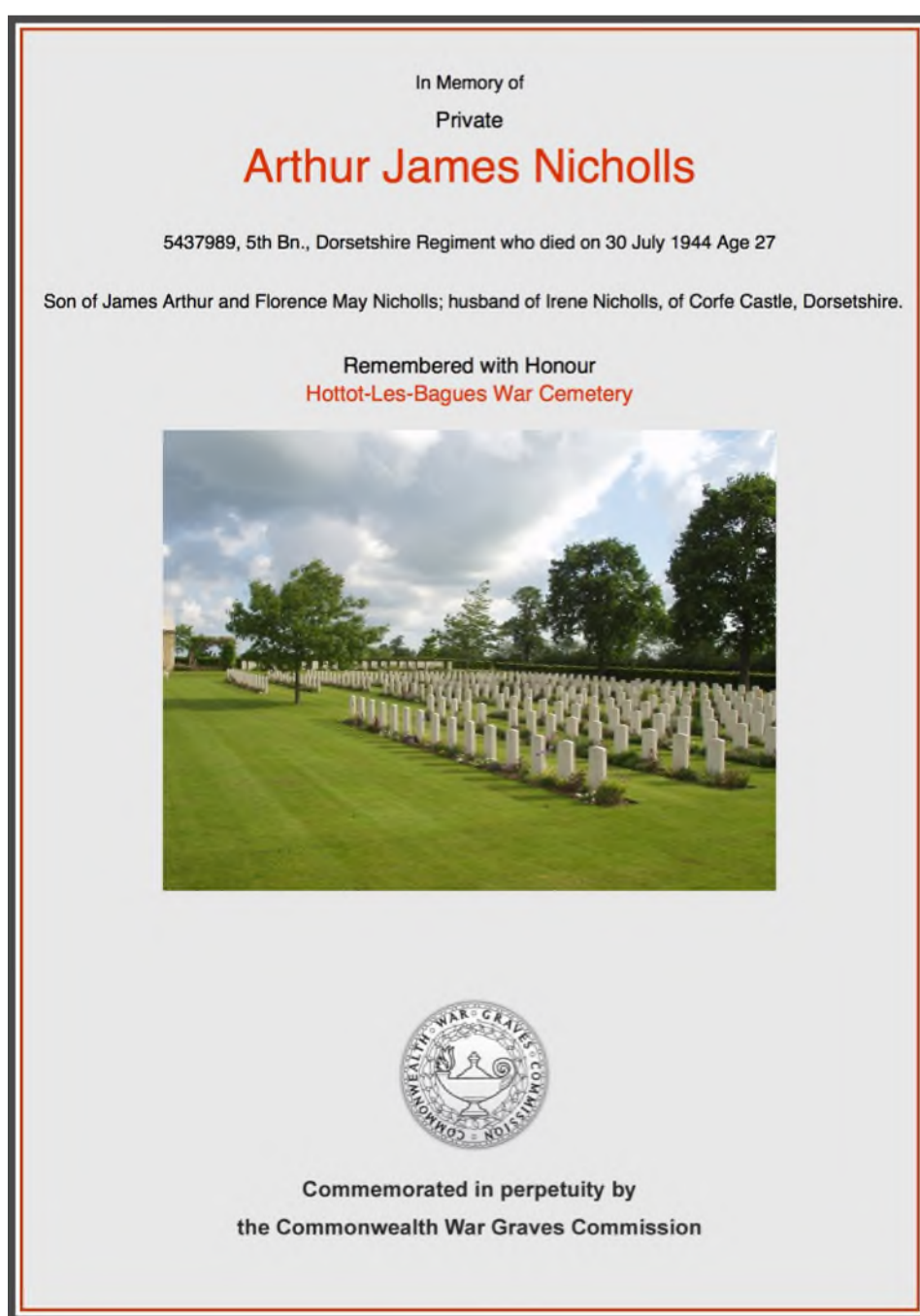
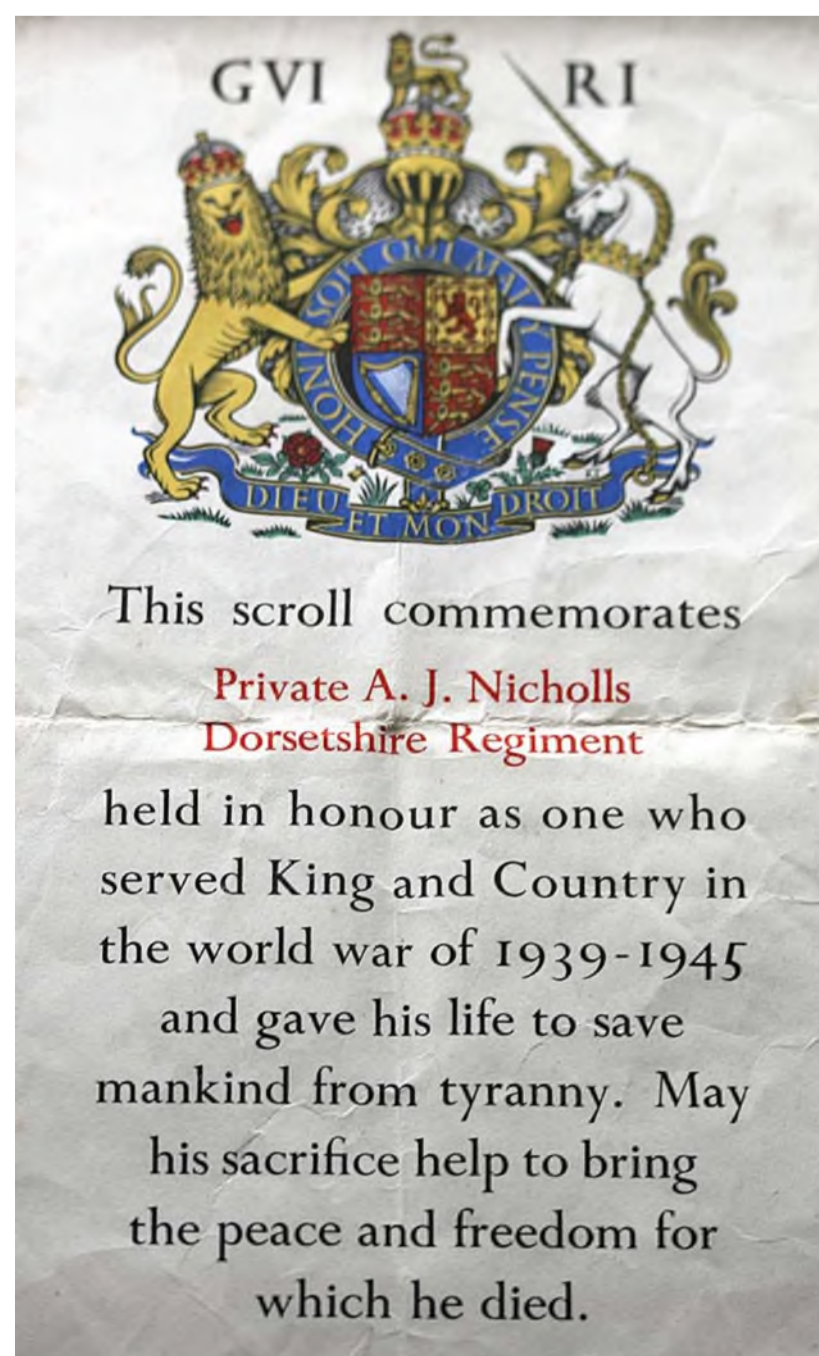
The original grave marker installed by No. 1 Cemetery Construction Unit



The current memorial of Private Arthur James Nicholls at Hottot-Les-Bagues War Cemetery



The summit of Rough Tor, east of Camelford, was given to the nation in memory of the men of 43rd (Wessex) Division who lost their lives in North West Europe 1944/5. In 1955 a memorial plaque was unveiled on the summit by General Sir Ivor Thomas KBE, DSO, MC, Commander 43rd Brigade.



ROUGH TOR ON WHICH THIS MEMORIAL IS PLACED HAS BEEN GIVEN TO THE NATION IN MEMORY OF THOSE WHO LOST THEIR LIVES WHILE SERVING IN THE 43RD (WESSEX) DIVISION IN THE NORTH-WEST EUROPEAN CAMPAIGN 1944/5

Sources
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 and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Allied_forces_in_the_Normandy_Campaign
 Bren Gun Carrier: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_Carrier
 Bren Gun: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bren_light_machine_gun
 Operation Epsom: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Epsom
 Operation Jupiter (Hill 112): [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Jupiter_\(1944\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Jupiter_(1944))
 Operation Bluecoat: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Bluecoat
 and 'Operation Bluecoat: Breakthrough to Normandy' by Ian Dalgluigh found here -<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=veqwBAAQBAJ&pg=PA26&lpg=PA26&dq=Bois+du+Homme+%28Point>
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