

Mr Charles Freer

This is the story of Charles Freer & his WW2 "Victorian Cross".



153 (Leics Yeomanry) Field Regt. R.A.
Crossing NIJMEGEN BRIDGE
21st September 1944



Charles Freer. & FERNIE.

I served in the Leicestershire Yeomanry close support to the Guards Armored Division. My Regiment consisted of self propelled tank with a 25pounder field gun, The Commanding Officers were in Sherman Tanks which were armed with 75mm gun, these tanks were used as O/P's (Observation Posts). All of the tanks were named after the Leicestershire Hunts, our tank was named FERNIE.

It was march 1945, and a long way from Caen in Northern France. We had fought our way through France, Belgium and through a part of Holland. We had tried desperately to relieve the stricken Airborne Troops at Arnhem. We had stood firm as the Germans pushed through the Ardennes in their savage counter-attack. We had crossed the Maas River and now stood not 3 miles from the Rhine - our next objective.

We were part of Montgomery's Army and as Bdr. C Freer my job was Driver I/c of a Sherman Tank carrying the Officer Commanding the 153rd Regiment. We were firing across the river both H/E and Smoke shells, and a considerable smoke screen was being formed to confuse the enemy as we prepared to storm across the river. The ground we occupied had, of course, been the scene of previous heavy fighting and damaged tanks and lorries of both Armies littered the area.

In a "stand down" one day I did a "walk-about" among these wrecks, and came across a German Tiger Tank that had been hit in the turret by a "P.I.A.T." shell. The crew appeared to have escaped without mishap and I climbed into the driver's cockpit without hesitating, eager to compare the conditions experienced by the enemy. The dashboard with various dials and gauges was at a slope and I put my hand behind it more or less out of habit.

A dirty oily rag was there but inside the rag I found a dull metal object in the shape of a cross. On the reverse side was an inscription, "*To commemorate the sixty years of the reign of Queen Victoria*", and turning it over I saw that the front bore the head of that venerable lady, and the date 1897.

What was this medallion doing inside a German Tank? Had it been captured? By whom from whom? Why would a British soldier have been carrying an over 40 years old souvenir of the Royal Diamond Jubilee? why? Why?....Truly a mystery from that battlefield so long ago.

But today, that 101 years old bit of dull metal is still one of my most prized possessions - My Victorian Cross.



Front and Rear View

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