



THE WAR GRAVES

PHOTOGRAPHIC PROJECT

Winter 2016 Newsletter

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It's that time of year again for a quick round up of news and to send you and your families 'Season's Greetings.'

2017 will bring us into our 10th anniversary year of the inauguration of TWGPP as a project. Where that time has gone I do not know but it has flown by.

2016 should really have been perhaps the biggest commemorative year of WWI with the centennial events of The Battle of The Somme which started on the 1st July and has recently closed on 18th November. I find it quite sad that now we have commemorated this event the battle, that has dominated recent news, will now be overtaken by other anniversaries and confined to history. We were having a meal with friends recently and discussed this and the fact that for some of us there will still be the 'pull' of those battlefields and not just to 'revisit' a cemetery to update the archive but a genuine need to walk the ground over again. I am sure Sandra and I will be out there again next year and will hopefully see a good few 'British plates' on the roads keeping up the pilgrimages.

Perhaps there may be another influx of visitors after a 'Celeb' appearance of 'Cheryl' out there at Pozieres in the forthcoming episode of 'Who Do You Think You Are' currently programmed to be on our screens next week!

Requests for Somme casualties, and WWI in general, have reduced except where perhaps villages are commemorating their war dead and researching the men on their local memorials. I conducted a presentation recently for a local Woman's Institute (WI) and, as I always do, I did a bit of research on the local memorial beforehand. I always like to include one or two men within the presentations to show how far we have covered the world cemeteries photographing the headstones. As usual I found a number of men recorded as having next of kin in the village '*son of*', '*husband of*' and yet not on the memorial. I know it must have been difficult in the days when these memorials were being erected to find those

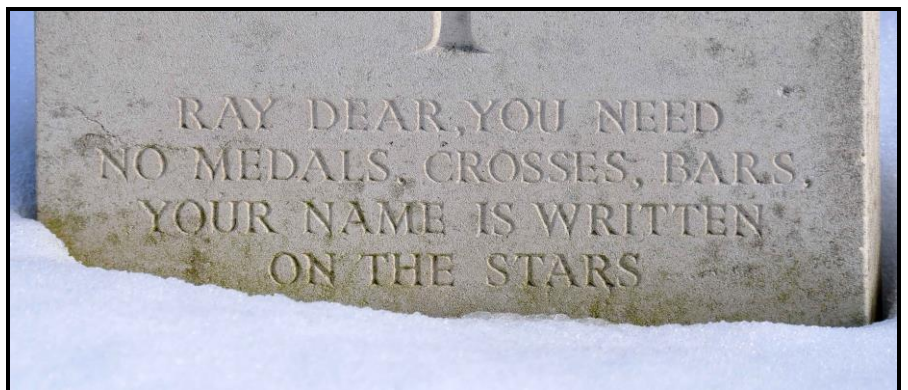
eligible to be on it but it does seem odd how some obvious contenders are missing and yet others with a tangible link to a village are there. Some communities are trying to address these shortcomings so it is good to see the effort being made to commemorate the missing village folk. I have sent a list of my findings to the chap in the village who is compiling a new list.

I always start presentations with a question 'Who has ever heard of TWGPP?'. The answer always tends to be similar with just one or maybe two hands going up, even in audiences of over 50. Come the end of the presentations I always get people saying how amazed they are at what we have achieved having photographed over 1.8 million war dead. At the end of this presentation I was asked if I had ever auditioned for the WI 'Book'. Apparently there is a book held by WI HQ with recommended presenters but to get in it you have to be auditioned. Although I have been asked to present the project to all my local WI's I have never been 'auditioned' so will now see if this can be arranged in order to promote the project in Hampshire at least. Hopefully it will be nothing like 'X' factor as Sandra always moans at my singing as being in a monotone voice. However, the downside of WI meets is the amount of cake one gets offered at the end. I find it rude to turn it down so I always come away stuffed!

At this particular WI meeting an elderly lady brought along a photo album compiled by her mother and father who were a doctor and nurse at Dunkirk during WWI. The album had many photos of staff and patients and could have easily been used for 'stills' in the TV drama 'Roses of No Man's land'. In most photos, the subjects were seen smiling but one can only wonder at the horrors these doctors and nurses must have been seeing on a daily basis. What will happen to this priceless album within a few years who knows but there are probably many in family archives that will just be thrown out when no one has an interest. I have recently started scanning all my early naval photos so that they are labelled and catalogued. For no one in particular but if they are done then one day a great grandchild might say 'why has that old bloke always got a glass of beer in his hand?'

Thought for Christmas

When the kids or grandchildren are happily singing the Christmas Carol 'We Three Kings of Orient are' and they get to the second verse which reads:



"O Star of wonder, star of night, Star with royal beauty bright, Westward leading, still proceeding, Guide us to thy Perfect Light", tell them that the star is for Ray!

Rays' family may no longer think of him being buried in Norway but at the time they knew his name was written in the Stars. Wouldn't it be great if just one kid at school said to their teacher after singing the song? 'That star is for 'Ray'. Even as an adult you can look up into the night sky this Christmas and think of Ray.

May I take this opportunity to wish you and your families a Very Happy Christmas and a Peaceful New Year. – **Steve Rogers**

Norman has recently 'revisited' Arlington for TWGPP and provided this report along with the images - Steve

Arlington National Cemetery, just a few minutes ride from the White House and Capitol Hill on the Metro Blue Line across the Potomac into Virginia, may not be the largest US military cemetery (that is Calverton Cemetery in Long Island), but it is undoubtedly the best well known and most prestigious. Here lie two Presidents, Taft and Kennedy, and Supreme Court Judges alongside 420,000 military casualties, veterans and their immediate families. These range from the American-Spanish War of 1898 right up to today's losses, a number which grows by 25-30 funerals each day. So great is the demand that a completely new Millennium area is being created.

Also at Arlington is the "Tomb of the Unknowns" – actually three unknown casualties: one each from the First and Second World Wars and Korea. There had been an "unknown" from Vietnam but following a pressure campaign, he was identified and reburied elsewhere under his own name.



The Tomb of the Unknowns has a 24-hour military guard who perform a very formalised routine of marching and arms drill (march 21 seconds, stand 21 seconds) and there is a changing of the guard every hour (half an hour in summer daylight hours). Very full details of the Honor Guard can be found elsewhere but suffice it to say the whole ceremony is treated with great solemnity and reverence;

The spectators are commanded to stand and remain silent and it has been known for transgressors to be escorted firmly to the gate by armed sentries.

For the newly deceased, every individual burial takes place with great dignity: the coffin is carried on a horse-drawn gun carriage with army escort (Arlington remains an "active" army base) but at the grave-side is a party from the deceased's particular service and throughout the day volleys of rifle fire can be heard at the moment of internment.

For a relative or somebody seeking an individual grave, the Arlington web-site is excellent (www.arlingtoncemetery.mil). The data-base contains a comprehensive list of every casualty, with a photograph (of varying quality it must be said) but the "piece de resistance" is an interactive aerial view which can be focused down to the specific grave (in 420,000!) and the system will then generate a walking route from where you are, for use on mobile devices. The author was able to find nearly all the CWGC casualties there very simply – essential as the numbering system, especially in the older sections, can best be described as idiosyncratic (and the locations given for specific graves on the CWGC web-site are no longer used or recognised by the Arlington staff).

An added bonus, given the vast size of Arlington, is that dedicated buses are offered to those wanting to visit a specific grave. Just ask at the travel desk and get a ticket, then the driver will happily take you there and, if you phone him, pick you up again.

As well as being a place of solemn contemplation, Arlington is also a major tourist attraction and the facilities on offer have to deal with both. There is a “hop on, hop off” land-train which runs around the cemetery with live commentary, stopping at the most popular sites.

A few words of advice/caution to visitors: do not under-estimate the size and climate. It really is vast and the weather can be hot and humid in summer; toilets and water fountains are adequate but there are no catering outlets yet picnicking is prohibited. And beware of man-eating mosquitoes!

Cemetery Updates

We have continued to get updates from UK and around the world but not as many as we did years ago due to the fact that much of the world is complete now. However, I am pleased that this year has seen the completion of Lebanon by Caroline Isaac-Hamdan and Ruth Moucharafieh which was a country that we had always had difficulty in finding volunteers. Gaza still eludes us as do the Iraq cemeteries.

Further afield, Catherine Chatham and Karen Pickles have recently completed Trincomalee in Sri Lanka where Catherine’s father served in WW2 and Steve Flynn is currently in Kenya completing Kisuma for us.

Bob Taylor, Roger Lawrence and Keith Harrison have been doggedly renaming and making up spreadsheets for over 77000 Germans buried at Saint –Laurent Blagny and Neuville-St. Vaast .



These are just two very large cemeteries on the outskirts of Arras. To show how meticulous these guys have been when recording the details of the headstone it has been found that at least one chap – Gustav Neumann , a Grenadier who died on 14th July 1915, has been buried in two different plots as his details appear on two different crosses. Another, Peter Muller, died on 11th June **1615** as detailed on his cross. It is most likely that these erroneous details have never been recorded since the crosses were placed.

Unsung Hero in Cardiff Cathays cemetery – Peter Butt

Among the hundreds of graves in a Welsh cemetery is one of WWII's unsung spies whose first mission began on 6 August, 75 years ago.

Major Jacques de Guélis was an agent of the highly secretive Special Operations Executive (SOE). The unit was set up on the order of the then Prime Minister Winston Churchill to create a sabotage organisation which would "set Europe ablaze". De Guélis went behind the lines in Nazi Europe a nerve-shredding three times. He also organised contacts for Virginia Hall, a one-legged spy who would defy the odds to become the Gestapo's most wanted agent in the whole of France.



His bravery earned him a chest full of medals - including three Croix de Guerre from the French government - but his story has been largely forgotten. Jacques Theodore Paul Marie Vaillant de Guélis was born on 6 April, 1907, in Cardiff to a French-born coal exporter, Raoul, and his wife, Marie.

When WWII began, he was sent to France as part of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) as he spoke fluent French. Evacuated from Dunkirk at the beginning of June 1940, he was asked to return to France a few days later to liaise with units which were still fighting or trying to escape. On 22 June, the French signed an Armistice with Hitler and de Guélis fled south to live in hiding in Marseilles. Determined to get back to Britain, he climbed across the Pyrenees and into neutral Spain. On 15 April, 1941, he was interviewed in London for a role in SOE by Lewis Gielgud, the brother of actor John Gielgud, who was impressed by de Guélis's faultless French and his knowledge of life in occupied France.

De Guélis became a central figure in SOE so there was reluctance, for security reasons, to use him as an agent. However, he was to be a special case. A secret SOE memorandum noted that "[it was] felt that de Guélis's special qualifications and the unusual circumstances of the present case made it a suitable instance for exception". The unusual circumstances were that SOE needed an exceptional man for a complex mission.

Its aims were threefold. Firstly, de Guélis had to search the area around the Rhône in south-eastern France to find suitable landing fields for RAF aircraft delivering agents and supplies to the French Resistance. Secondly, he had to recruit potential agents and couriers. This was especially difficult, as approaching people would leave him open to betrayal. Finally, he was to prepare the way for an American-born agent, Virginia Hall.

Jacques de Guélis parachuted into France on 6 August, 1941, and immediately began work to recruit agents, couriers and contacts. Miss Hall then arrived in France on 23 August. SOE could not drop her by parachute as she had lost the lower part of her left leg in a pre-war shooting accident, so she sailed from Spain to the south coast of France on a fishing boat.

Despite the fact she wore an aluminium false leg - which she nicknamed "Cuthbert" - Miss Hall was to become a dynamic agent. The German secret police, the Gestapo, made the capture of what it called the "Limping Lady" a priority but it never caught up with her.

On 4 September, 1941, with his first mission complete, de Guélis was due to leave France for England, having arranged a pick-up on a remote field by a small Lysander aircraft. But he was delayed by a check of identity papers by the local gendarmerie and was running very late.

SOE historian MRD Foot wrote: "He could already hear the aircraft when he got near the ground. Jumping off his bicycle and through the nearest gate, he laid the [reception] lights out quickly - on the wrong field. [The pilot] put his aircraft down without trouble, but fouled an electric cable on taking off, and returned to Tangmere with several feet of copper wire round his undercarriage."

The success of Jacques de Guélis's first mission was brought to the attention of Britain's Minister of Economic Warfare, Hugh Dalton, who oversaw the SOE.

A month after D-Day, de Guélis parachuted into France to work with the underground forces of the Corrèze. He led local resistance groups in ambushes of German forces. They were then joined by a team of French SAS who helped in the area's liberation. As Nazi Germany surrendered in May 1945, de Guélis arrived in Germany on an urgent mission to find captured agents and make sure they were not subjected to any last minute vengeance. His investigations centred on a number of concentration camps, including Flossenburg in Bavaria. SOE agent Jack Agazarian and leading members of the German resistance to the Nazis - including Wilhelm Canaris, the head of German military intelligence - had been executed there only weeks earlier. On 16 May, de Guélis's car was struck by a vehicle being driven by a German soldier who had worked at Flossenburg. De Guélis was badly hurt. He was transported home to Britain but died in hospital at Lichfield on 7 August, 1945, four years and a day after his first heroic mission to France.



Was the crash a deliberate attempt to silence an investigation which would have fed information into the prosecution file for the Nuremberg trials? It is possible. Any evidence appears to have been lost in the chaos of post-war Germany. The head of SOE, Brigadier Colin Gubbins, said de Guélis was an agent whose "ardour and efficiency" were "equalled by [his] personal courage". De Guélis's wife, Beryl, had his body returned to his hometown of Cardiff for burial. It lies in the shade of a tree in a quiet corner of Cathays Cemetery. A peaceful, unassuming resting place seems a fitting spot for a man whose most heroic deeds were carried out in the shadows of the secret war against Hitler.

A long overdue service for four missing men – Erik Munk

At a quarter to eight in the evening on the 3rd of April, 1943, sixteen Halifax bombers trundled down the runway at RAF Lissett, East Yorkshire. The 158th Squadron was airborne. Its destination was the German town of Essen. Only on their second mission this night was the seven strong crew of Halifax II serial DT795, coded NP-N. Before the night was out, they would all be dead, as theirs was one of two 158 Squadron Halifax's that failed to return that day.

For the residents of the small town of Wapenveld (The Netherlands), just before midnight on April 3rd, 1943, it seemed like night had turned into day. Its residents had been getting used to hearing bombers pass over high above, on their way to Germany and back. This was different. A burning Halifax bomber approached from the east, over the IJssel river, in a dive getting steeper by the second.

On its tail was a German night fighter.



Crash recovery site alongside Apeldoorn Canal

A hundred metres high, just north of the village, the bomber exploded, lighting up the night sky and showering sections and parts of the aircraft over the houses in the area. The main wreckage impacted the bank of the Apeldoorn's Canal, blocking shipping traffic. The cockpit section fell not far away in the miller's garden, with an engine blocking the front door of his house. The tail fell across the canal. At first light the villagers and arriving German military staff were able to see for themselves there was nothing left of the aircraft. That morning, German forces recovered three crew members from the cockpit and tail section. They were:

- Pilot W/O Frederick Henry Blake (26). Blake was a Canadian-born American, who grew up in Tennessee, Texas and Louisiana. He and his two brothers joined the RAF through the Royal Canadian Air Force as volunteers in late 1940, as they still held a Canadian passport. The US at the time was still neutral. Both of his brothers survived the war.
- Mid-upper gunner W/O Rodney Webber (21). Webber was born in Missoula, Montana. His mother was probably Canadian, which would explain why he looked to the RCAF for his future when he found himself living unemployed in Bellingham, Washington in 1940.
- Tail gunner Sgt. Thomas Victor Trollope (22). A Londoner from the Hackney District, he joined the RAF in 1941.

These three crew members were laid to rest in Oud-Leusden general cemetery near Amersfoort on April 7th. In the weeks following the crash, German forces cleared the canal and hauled off the aircraft wreck. When they did, additional remains were found, which remained unidentified. These were buried in a local communal grave in Wapenveld, on April 23rd, 1943.

Despite post-war efforts, the Wapenveld grave remained nameless. A further recovery effort in the late 1940s by the Dutch navy also proved inconclusive. Large amounts of wreckage were trawled from the canal, but no human remains were found. The remaining four crew members were listed as missing, presumed killed in action, with no known grave. They were:

- Navigator Sgt. William David Hawkins, 23 years old. Walters was a Gloucester native, with a knack for engineering. He was a draftsman for Gloster Aircraft when he volunteered for the RAF. He was put through flight training in Canada, but became a navigator instead.
- Bomb aimer Sgt. Jack Ceredig Jones, who was expecting to celebrate his 31st birthday later that April. Jones was a Welsh pharmacist when he volunteered in 1941 after witnessing the early devastating air raids on London.
- Wireless Operator Sgt. Philip Henry Eldridge, 29. He was a lithographic printer in King Langley, England, and was married to Joyce Monica Green on February 18th, 1939. He too, volunteered to join the RAF in 1941.
- Flight Engineer Sgt. Gerald Stanley Walters, age 22. He hailed from Stratford, England.

Fast forward to September 2014. After more than 30 years of effort, research, looking for funds and aligning local, regional and national government agencies, the impossible happened, a third and final recovery effort. The Dutch army's Recovery and Identification Unit, together with a specialist UXB team carried out a very thorough clearing of the site. In several weeks, the canal was dammed and partially drained. The dyke the aircraft hit was dug out to 6 metres deep then replaced. A large area of fields behind it near the old mill was dug down to undisturbed soil. The recovery efforts paid off: human remains were found, along with another 1.5 tonnes of aircraft debris. It took a little over a year to positively identify three of the four missing crewmembers from these remains, and to conclusively match – from archival evidence – the remains in the unnamed Wapenveld grave to the fourth, Sgt. Eldridge. All four missing crewmembers had been accounted for.



June 28th, 2016 was a memorable date for the people involved in and touched by the wartime crash. In a moving service, Sgts. Walters, Jones, Hawkins and Eldridge were laid to rest in a communal grave in Wapenveld. The old marker, erected by local people from the village just after the war, was retained. Next to it are four new headstones. In a circle around them this day were their relatives, from around the world and local people. Some of them had spent decades of volunteer work to make this happen whilst others had witnessed the crash in 1943.

Even the last known surviving RAF veteran who actually flew on that very same mission was present. There were school children, passers-by who stopped to pay their respects, a full complement of RAF cadets and the entire team of UXB-specialists and identification staff of the army. As WWII bomber slowly passed over in a fitting salute, a very long overdue funeral of four brave crew members started with full military honours.

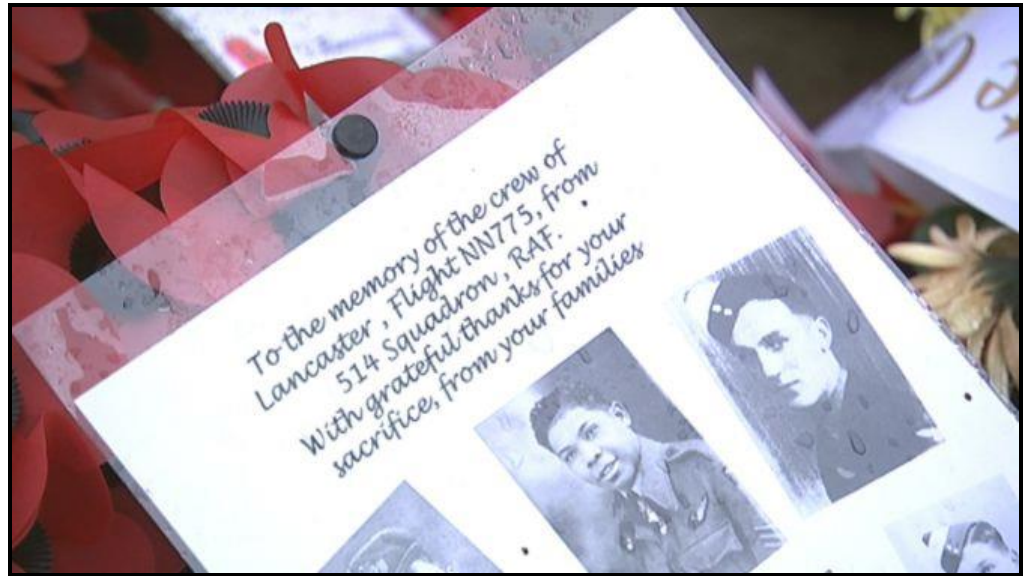
“Some of our men are no longer missing.”

Another Air Crew found in Belgium – Rudy Van Kerkhoven

Rudy Van Kerkhoven has sent us news in November that excavations are also taking place in Belgium to recover the remains of air crew.

The excavation of the English bomber 'Lancaster NN775' got underway in Glabbeek. The remains of one person have been recovered so far; he has been identified as the 20-year-old British Sergeant Christopher Hogg from Birmingham. The excavation works were attended by the Australian and British ambassadors to Belgium and by family members of 3 victims still believed to be inside the wreckage.

The plane crashed in Bunsbeek on 5 March 1945 and was gobbled up by the local wetlands. Research was done at the site at the Pamelenstraat on two occasions earlier this year to prepare the excavation, by using scanning devices to determine its exact position and the presence of possible bombs.



Now, the actual excavation is taking place. It started on Friday and has now entered its third day. Yesterday, the remains of Christopher Hogg were unearthed. The then 20-year-old sergeant was sitting in the back of the plane, which made it easier to determine his identity.



The remains were carefully collected and put in a coffin which was bearing the Union Jack. Ceremonial guards of the British Commonwealth held a small ceremony on the spot.

Diggers have now reached a depth of 3 metres. Several parts of the plane wreckage have been unearthed, including 3 motors, the landing gear, the propellers and several parts of the wings and body.

The plane crashed in 1945 after returning from a mission to Gelsenkirchen, where it had bombed a petrol refinery.

It hit the ground at a speed of approximately 600 kilometres per hour and vanished in the local swamps. The aircraft is believed to have had 7 crew members on board, but only 2 bodies could be recovered before this weekend. These two victims received a final resting place at a cemetery in Heverlee.

Farrier commemorative Memorial

Rudy has also sent in details of a new memorial erected near the Langemark German Cemetery in Belgium.

In September an International Blacksmithing event took place in Ypres to complete a steel cenotaph that was transferred from the main square in Ypres and was erected near Langemark in November.

In the plate of the steel cenotaph is half a poppy meant to help remember those that died and those that lived, including civilians.

The structure depicts one of the props that held up frontline tunnels and underground shelters. It protrudes from a mound of artillery pounded earth covered in handmade metal poppies - 2016 of them, to mark the year of this cenotaph's creation.

Worth a visit if you are in the vicinity.



The Lark Ascending – Josh Court

I cannot remember “How” I found out about TWGGP, but find out I did.

In late 2003, at nearly fifty four years of age, and more through necessity than desire, I found myself in Skopje, Macedonia “starting” a new career, but that is another story. Skopje/Macedonia at that time had no direct flights to UK, and as part of “Ex-Yugoslavia”, and its (then) “recent troubles”, despite being a close neighbour (Only three hours flight, direct, from UK) was little visited by Brits. Even now, when we have direct flights, chances are, unless you are a Football Fan, you will not know where it is.

Skopje British and Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery is fairly small, as First World War Cemeteries go. “Only” 117 souls buried there, plus a Civilian Nurse, and a Commemorative Plaque to six (unnamed) soldiers, who were originally buried in The German Cemetery, but whose graves are now lost. Most lost their lives in 1918 through influenza rather than battle injuries.

How sad they had endured and survived four years of Hell only to fall to illness just days before Armistice. So, having checked no one had photographed the graves before, I borrowed “The Companies” digital camera (even twelve years ago, digital cameras were not “The Norm” and mobile phones were just for texting or speaking) and with my Language assistant/now friend (just in case I ran in to any “problems”, even now, taking photographs in this part of The World can cause problems!) I set about recording them all. Little did I know, or suspect, what positive experiences this would bring!

Never “slow” to make people aware of TWGPP, especially during The Annual Remembrance Sunday Service organised by The British Embassy here, I suddenly became known as (amongst other things) a “good starting point” for anyone interested in The Salonika Campaign of the First World War.

I am NO WAY an “expert”, in fact my interest being more in The Second World War, I knew little about it, I have researched a little as a result, and NOW know, despite being little known about, it probably was, certainly had, a very direct influence in The Allies winning The War. This is according to a number of REAL experts I now know, who can argue, with facts, the stance that, The Campaign was as significant as The Somme, and other great battles that everyone can name.



My best experience to date involves **Corporal George Henry Carter** M2/130656.

I will let his family tell the story through the blog (and photographs) his Great Grand Daughter wrote for The British Embassy (Skopje) web site as a result of bumping in to a friend of mine in UK and consequential Official invitation to attend The Remembrance Sunday here in Skopje:

Corporal George Henry Carter, M2/130656 of the 880th Motor Transport Convoy, Army Service Corps writes to his wife Minnie. His letter, written and indeed read with hope and optimism speaks of change. He confirms an Armistice had been reached with the Bulgarians; ‘...the Germans are about done too, So I am looking forward to being home before too long’.

Everyday topics of letter writing were included; asking how everyone was, the keen desire to soon be returning home - to be with his wife and baby, Minnie Georgina. Both were constant in his thoughts. He apologised for the bad handwriting for he was on the road whilst he wrote, and with the closing lines said ‘...Good Bye Dearest for now and God bless you and babe and may he bring me home to you safe...’

1st November 1918

Changes indeed came and God’s Will was not to take him home.

A letter to his wife confirms he died of Influenza on the 28th October at the 60th General Hospital, and buried at Vales, Serbia.

Two weeks short of that hoped Armistice of what we know as the 11th November 1918.

And I am left wondering, if the opening lines of his last letter, which hinted towards his health not being with him – were in fact written whilst he was travelling to the hospital. What I am sure of, is that his letter offered his wife deep love, courage and hope.

Summer 2016

There is in our home County of Hampshire, Sandham Chapel. The photo, in a guide book, instantly gave a pulling feeling and the prospect of seeing work of commissioned WWI war artist, was equally inviting: for I could not believe this was within my home county and I had yet to see it!

Upon visiting I discovered it was named 'The Holy Box' – a purpose built chapel to commemorate men of the Salonika Campaign.

When I opened the doors to the chapel it was indeed like opening a box. Before me, panels painted by Stanley Spencer (himself served as a medical orderly in Salonika) depicted scenes he recalled and in seconds, decades cascaded over me. I witnessed in his paintings, the suspension within eternity these men hung. Men who had served within the country's landscapes - men who had died of Malaria.

One panel, of a captain on horseback caught my eye, for he held open a map of Macedonia. Within the map were towns Spencer had visited –and this made me wonder, if, just maybe my Great Grandfather visited them too. The map seemed an invitation and determined, I began my research.

However, it was a conversation I had in my local supermarket around this time which leads me on through fate...

It just so happened the lady on the checkout was from Skopje, Macedonia.



Despite telling her about my research of my Great Grandfather, and her telling me she knows someone who lives near the cemetery - I was perhaps too British and reserved in giving my contact details. But after trying to see her again, 3 weeks later I managed to do just that.

Within 24 hours, her friend 'Josh' emailed me a photo of my Great Grandfather's headstone.

The immense joy continued through the flurry of excited emails. Firstly, by Josh offering to place a poppy on our behalf; then the Embassy's invitation to join this year's Remembrance service. Suddenly several years' worth of mum and I saying 'we must research more and one-day visit Skopje' all happened within a week!

Josh's and The Embassy's acknowledgement, appreciation and respect to my Great Grandfather has presented mum and I with an opportunity that his mother and wife did not have – to visit his resting place. For him to feel fully at Peace. We cannot thank you all enough.

I can't help but feel that this year, God's Will has brought George H Carter's grand -daughter and great grand-daughter to be with him. As far as we know, his first relatives to visit, to let him know we have always remembered him and for me, that finally my Great Grandfather is 'The Lark Ascending'.

R.I.P Corporal Carter. Thank you for your sacrifice, and thank you for the friendship you have brought us.

Josh and Liljana Court

A Short but Eventful Life – Pauline Pedersen

After our privileged attendance at the Thiepval Commemoration on 1st July, Jim and I afterwards paid two special visits: firstly to the grave of his grandfather at Heilly Station Cemetery, Mericourt L'Abbe, who died there on 9th September 1916 and secondly to that of George Oakley, in Hill Side Cemetery, Le Quesnel. The story of his short but eventful life has been unfolding over the past forty years; much of it long before the advent of computerised records.

George Albert Oakley was the youngest of five children of George Oakley, a regular serving soldier in the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry and his wife Kate. In December 1896, when George was almost three years old, the children became orphaned when their parents both died within a twelve-month period. The two older boys, 11 and nine, were sent to the Duke of York's School and The Hibernian School respectively, their sister, the middle child, was placed at Lady Robartes Orphanage, Lanhydrock, Cornwall and the next boy was taken in by an uncle.



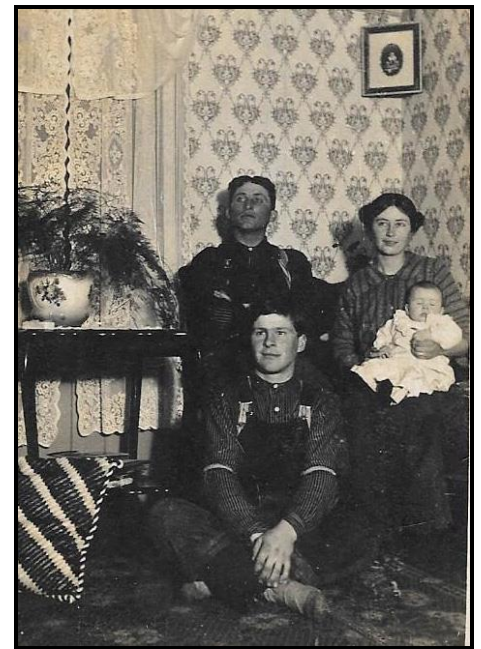
George Albert was placed with Dr Barnardo's and subsequently sent by them to Canada, at the age of 10. He joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force in 1916 and was killed in action in August 1918 whilst serving in France with the 75th Battalion (1st Central Ontario Regiment) Canadian Infantry. The only time **George and his sister, Ellen Eliza**, met again after their separation in 1896 was in November 1916 when he disembarked in England en route to France.

These few facts, a photograph taken at that reunion and a Canadian Army badge were as much as was known of George when the subject cropped up in conversation with Ellen Eliza in 1975, who was by then the only surviving member of the family. In the intervening years since 1918 none of the family had ever visited George's grave and it was a great source of regret to Ellen. I resolved to remedy that! Having ascertained from the doctor that she was fit enough to travel to France I enlisted the help of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission – who sent particulars of George's grave and its location accompanied by a map – and the Royal British Legion – who worked out a detailed itinerary with travel arrangements – and so she was able to realise her longed-for ambition to visit George's grave. Not an easy trip, given that she was then 86 years of age, but one that she cherished.

I was indebted to the CWGC and the RBL for their help, given freely and with compassion. I still have their letters.

Not long after, Ellen became frail and was admitted to a nursing home. When sorting out her belongings I came across a photograph of a young lad in overalls sitting at the feet of a couple holding a baby. Written on the back was simply the word 'Canada'. Comparing the photograph with the one taken of George with Ellen in 1916 the lad in the overalls was almost certainly George but who were the couple with the baby? They looked kind, a happy couple; moreover, if it was George he seemed content and well looked after.

By now I was very curious about George so I wrote to Dr Barnardo's asking if they had any records on him. I felt it was a forlorn hope. How wrong I was! After an inevitable amount of form filling I eventually received a large envelope of paperwork and a photograph of George taken on his admission to the Home in 1896. The paperwork was a complete record of not only his family background on admission but dates and locations with detailed comments pertaining to these during his time in Canada. (Dr Barnardo's HQ in Canada was in Toronto.) They make for amazing reading but I'll confine this article to the last four entries:



April 1913 – Working for James Ellery Lester, Forest, Ontario...giving good satisfaction.

December 1913 – Working for Fred Thomas, Forest...giving splendid satisfaction.

October 1914 – Left for the West last March...no address...Barnardo's heard from George from Bracebridge, Ontario. He was enquiring about his family background...these were forwarded from London with his uncle's address in Swindon.

November 1923 - Former employer, Mr Lester, stated that he had heard rumour (unconfirmed) that George had been killed in action in the war.

George had indeed been killed in action, I had visited his grave but I had no knowledge of his service record so I wrote to the National Archives of Canada giving what scant information I had. Within weeks a Statement of Service in the Canadian Armed Forces and a copy of George's Attestation paper arrived; address on enlistment was given as Parry Sound, Ontario.



Seemingly George originally joined the 162nd Battalion 'Timber Wolves' (comprising the majority of the loggers in Parry Sound), which had a fairly short lifespan as it was broken up in England and its soldiers posted to other battalions. It was this cap badge which had been in Ellen's possession. George eventually ended up in the 75th Battalion (1st Central Ontario Regiment). In response to a letter to the Parry Sound Museum asking for more details about the 'loggers', they put me in touch with a journalist, a trustee of

the museum, whose own family had served in the war. Despite his large collection of memorabilia he had never come across a cap badge such as I had. And so it was that in 1993 I made my pilgrimage to Parry Sound, a wonderfully exciting time with a roller coaster of emotions. It was a strange feeling to see George's name listed on the plaque on the Royal British Legion building. I was able to visit some of the farms George had worked on (listed in the Barnardo's records) and spoke to a number of people who recalled the Barnardo's children.

At the end of my visit it gave me great pleasure to present George's army badge as an exhibit in the museum.

Sometime later I accessed the War Diary Summary, In the Field, for 19th August 1918 ...it reports 'heavy enemy shelling several times during the day. One man was killed and two wounded in 'B' Company.' It is reasonable to assume that the man killed was George.

Fast forward to May 2002 when I had a much extended article on the Oakley family published in the journal Ancestors. It was illustrated with extracts from various documents plus photographs, one of which was that of the family and lad in overalls. In early December 2003 I received a mysterious email from Canada telling me to expect a surprise Christmas present...that was an understatement! From Forest, Ontario, came a letter from a 90 year old lady who had the identical photograph in her home. The couple were her uncle Ellory and Aunt Miriam Lester, the baby Melford her cousin.



Ellory Lester was a farmer, a good employer 'well known, well respected and liked, with a great sense of humour'. It had taken me many years to piece together George's life but the wheel had finally come full circle. Thus subsequent visits to his grave have held far more meaning and poignancy than the first, which was essentially to fulfil a wish for his sister Ellen Eliza.

Next Newsletter

Thank you for submitting articles in order for me to compile this latest newsletter. I appreciate that not all have been included in this one but this is due to the final size of the newsletter and I am aware that some of you are limited on attachment size on e-mail. We will use the articles in a later edition. Anyone wishing to forward something to be added at a later date are more than welcome to submit.

In an effort to publicise our work I am going to link this edition to our Facebook page. If you are using this 'social media' it would be appreciated if you could 'share' the Newsletter. Hopefully that way we will have less people saying that they wish they had found us last week, month, year as their relation, who would have loved to have seen the grave, have recently passed on.

Enjoy the festive season. Diets start in January (allegedly!) – Regards **Steve Rogers**



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