



# THE WAR GRAVES PHOTOGRAPHIC PROJECT



In Association  
with the CWGC



## News from the Front line

October 2013

Good to see that the Summer is still with us even on October 5<sup>th</sup> as I write this. Where we live on the south coast it's been termed as an 'Indian' Summer but why we call it 'Indian' I do not know as much of the world is pretty warm right now. The term 'Indian' has been raising it's head quite a lot in the last couple of weeks in the form of complaints to the site. I am sure that CWGC must get similar but we state the 'Nationality' of casualties as the force in which they fought and subsequently died. To that end any 'British' national fighting in the 'Indian' Army is termed as 'Indian'. I had another today insisting it should read 'Scottish' in this particular instance. Perhaps one day the nationality field will revert to place of birth?

Updating cemetery name changes is ongoing and Terry Denham's 'In from the Cold' project is finding lots of additional casualties. Many of these are currently being commemorated on 'Paper' until additional memorials are erected in Europe. Along with the cemetery name changes comes another development which will no doubt take us a bit of time to process and that is the change of cemetery locations in UK. The original CWGC data was in the older, pre 1974, county boundaries. For example, Middlesex was always in Middlesex! This data is now being changed to reflect the new administrative areas set up within UK since 1974. Therefore, Middlesex is still there but many of the cemeteries within the county are now located in places such as Harrow (Greater London), Hounslow (Greater London), Enfield (Greater London) etc. and a number of cemeteries once in Middlesex are now in Surrey! In TWGPP we do not have the facility to search the data by 'County' but once a casualty has been found it does give county information in the 'area' field. I'll make a judgement call on this change depending on the number of complaints I get when people e mail me to say "your site says Middlesex when he is actually buried in Barnet (Greater London) as in the case of St. Pancras cemetery!

Some of the more obscure and difficult cemeteries to access and photograph have been coming in over the last couple of months. This one, at **Pemba** in Mozambique, makes quite an interesting photograph as the trees look like upside down skeletal roots. This was photographed by Kevin Patience who was out there on a diving contract and took the opportunity to drive to the location for TWGPP. Another exotic location completed. Anyone for Somalia?





I had one of those hand wringing experiences at work recently which made me wonder how useful archives like ours will be to future generations.

I was talking to a new 'Uni' graduate who had joined my team at work for an introductory session. I always ask people where they are from and this chap mentioned Scampton in Lincolnshire. Back in the early 80's I was drafted to RAF Scampton for a couple of weeks where today's Red Arrows were based ( I think still are?). A Naval chap living in an RAF base was unusual but I was impressed with the Silver Service waitress facility in the mess and flowers in the rose bowl at breakfast. Nothing like I was used to at sea, a non slip vinyl mat on a formica table and fish tasting bacon with eggs like 'dockyard oysters'. I digress!



As this young chap lived locally I assumed he would have known what RAF Scampton was famous for. So I mentioned 'Niggers' grave being there to which I got the reply "Who was Nigger?", I replied "Guy Gibsons dog" – "Who is Guy Gibson?" – "You know, he of Dam Busters fame" – " What are the Dam Busters?" At this point I got that knotted feeling in my stomach. I realised that in this 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the dam raids someone in his 20's, and coming from Scampton, was not aware of his local, let alone world event, history. I did not dare say "you know the Second World War raid" in case I got the answer "What was the Second World War?"

The project has been running a few years now and as we get older the time goes by quicker, or so it seems. Therefore, by my reckoning this chap, in 10 years time, would be in his 30's and could have a family of his own. I am not saying it is his fault that he is blissfully unaware of what I consider recent history but without the remembrance that we all try to achieve then we could have an adult population in 10 years who may find our site and think 'What's that all about?'. They may wonder why on earth there is a website full of headstones. Afghanistan and Iraq, at a push, may ring a bell to some by then but WW1 and WW2?

The majority of our requests come in from amateur genealogists researching their family history. More recently we have had communities making enquiries, because of the anniversary of WW1 starting in 2014, wanting to commemorate 'their' men. However, most of these groups, as youngsters, went through education studying history or experienced WW2 through, books, films, and TV if not actually living through the war. I still remember Albert Steptoe going on about the trenches in black and white. Having been born in '58' I was not there but still go out into the garden if I hear a Merlin engine and look up and get 'goose bumps' seeing a low flying Lancaster or Spitfire.

I think where I am coming from here is the fact that the two world wars, one of which we start commemorating next year, could definitely be a 'thing of the past', literally, within the next decade. I hope I am wrong.

### A new cemetery in Poland?

There will soon be another new cemetery to capture in Poland. The cemetery has always been there but the 39 Commonwealth forces, who died as Prisoners of War, that lie in Lidzbark Warminski War Cemetery were, up until now, commemorated on Malbork Memorial in Poland. It is intended to erect CWGC headstones on these graves in 2014. So, when possible, we will obtain the photographs for the site and remove the names currently commemorated at Malbork.



Thomas Charles Richmond BAKER joined the A.I.F (9470). on the 29<sup>th</sup> July 1915. At the time of his enlistment he was described as a Clerk of Smithfield, South Australia, born 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1897. He had previous service in the Senior Cadets prior to enlistment. At 5 feet 11 and a quarter inches he was much taller than the average height of men who served in WW1 with the AIF. He was of medium complexion with blue eyes and brown hair. Church of England was his stated denomination. His next of kin were his mother and father Annie and Richmond Baker. His father had died on the 4<sup>th</sup> November 1908 and is buried in West Terrace Cemetery, Adelaide.

On enlisting Thomas was allocated to the 6<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> Reinforcement, with the rank of Gunner. The Australian War Memorial records detail the circumstances of his first Military Medal award which he was awarded on 19<sup>th</sup> February 1917.

*“As telephonist to F.O.O. showed great gallantry on the 11<sup>th</sup> December [1916]. The O.P. was in a forward slope in our front line system and under observation and constant attention of enemy snipers. Baker when endeavouring to maintain communications went four times through enemy barrage, which ultimately destroyed the O.P. trench, and repaired the line in thirty places while under heavy fire. During the last 6 weeks Baker has on several occasions rendered equally good service and shown great devotion to duty.”*

This was followed soon after by a ‘Bar’ to the MM being awarded on 21<sup>st</sup> August 1917.

*“On the afternoon of the 21<sup>st</sup> June 1917 at Messines, the 16<sup>th</sup> Battery was heavily shelled and all ranks were ordered to leave the gun pits and seek cover, five casualties having previously occurred. At 3.30pm the camouflage on No.1 pit caught fire and burnt fiercely endangering about 300 rounds of shrapnel and H.E. stored in the pit alongside the gun. B.S.M. Crieke called for volunteers to assist him to put out the fire. No.7976 Bdr Brown J.G., No.7980 Driver Bishop R.C., No.8003 A/Cpl McSweeney J, and 9470 Gunner Baker T.C.R. immediately volunteered and these other ranks at great personal risk to themselves succeeded in putting the fire out by throwing buckets of water over it, the water being obtained from shell holes and a well nearby. The whole of the camouflage was destroyed and many sand bags set alight and a few rounds of ammunition were charred. All of the above took place under very heavy shellfire from the enemy 5.9s.”*



On the 29<sup>th</sup> September 1917 Gunner Baker transferred to the Australian Flying Corps. He was train as a pilot and was promoted to Flying Officer in March 1918, which was his equivalent rank in the A.I.F. His initial training record was with the No. 5 Training Squadron and then he proceeded to No. 2 School of Aerial Fighting and Gunnery at Turnberry. Entry on his service record dated 2/8/18 ‘to be Lieutenant’.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> October 1918 he proceeded overseas to France as a Pilot of ‘Sopwith Camels’ but in a very short space of time he must have impressed his Commanding Officer because on the 29<sup>th</sup> October 1918 he was promoted to Temporary Flight Commander and Temporary Captain.

His service record entry: 7/11/18 indicates Missing in Action 4/11/18 whilst on Field offensive.

Service record entry: Previously reported Missing on 4/11/18 now reported K.I.A. on 4/11/18 by Court of Enquiry held at Cologne, Germany on 14/2/1919.



Australian Red Cross Records report that “..on November 4, 1918, Captain Baker was leading his flight in a Squadron Escort provided for the bombing machines of a neighbouring squadron. The bombs were successfully dropped on an enemy aerodrome near Ath (Belgium). On the return journey large numbers of hostile scouts were encountered at varying heights to the east of Tournai (Belgium). From the dog fight which followed, three of our machines failed to return. One of our machines (supposed to have been piloted by Capt. Baker) was seen to land and turn over on its back close to the River Escant about 10 miles north of Tournai. At this time (Nov 4<sup>th</sup>) the enemy were retreating in Belgium and the exact positions of his front line were not known to the Squadron. Later in the same day a car went out from the Squadron to endeavour to locate the crashed machine but could not reach it owing to the enemy line being slightly West of the River Escant at this point. No subsequent information regarding this officer has come to hand either from repatriated pilots or through enemy channels.”

There were various reports made concerning Captain Baker and his fate on the 4<sup>th</sup> November. One sighting claimed as above his aircraft was seen to be partly damaged and there was hope he was unharmed and perhaps a Prisoner of War. Another eye witness report claimed his aircraft was shot down in flames.

Subsequently his grave was located, post war, near the site of his crashed aircraft by the War Graves Investigation Unit and re-interred in the Escanaffles Communal Cemetery, Belgium.

For his actions on this day, Captain Walker was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) as recorded in the London Gazette 8<sup>th</sup> February 1919

*Captain Baker has rendered most valuable services in connection with aerial offensive operations since joining No. 4 Australian Flying Corps. The number of occasions on which this Officer has shown exceptional determination and courage are too numerous to be included in this report, but whether flying alone or as part of a small formation engaged in low flying attacks at ground targets under heavy anti-aircraft fire and machine gun fire, or whether leading larger formations against overwhelming forces of enemy machines, he has always shown great qualities of initiative and dash, and has never shrunk, in face of danger, from causing maximum amount of damage and loss to the enemy. He has carried out upward of 40 low flying raids on hostile troops, aerodromes, transport, has destroyed 8 hostile machines, and his record shows that in addition to a large number of offensive patrols during which nothing unusual occurred, he has also carried out 56 flights all of which include incidents of a notable character. On the 28<sup>th</sup> October 1918 in the course of 2 flights he completely destroyed 2 hostile aircraft and drove a 3<sup>rd</sup> down out of control. On the 29<sup>th</sup> October 1918 he destroyed another hostile machine. On both of these occasions the Flight which he was leading accounted for a large number of hostile aircraft a result which must be attributed to the clever tactics adopted by him, by means of which he outmanoeuvred the hostile patrol before attacking.”*

### My Aunt Joan – Colin Finch

Our Aunt Joan died in January 2013 aged 96. Her husband John McGeorge died a POW in 1944 but she remained a widow all her life – even living in the same house in which she grew up in Luton that her parents bought in 1911 (more of that later).

Whilst growing up, I was aware that John had died in the war, although my concept of the circumstances were patchy. I knew that he was a Prisoner of War having been captured in Greece and that he had in fact died in his camp. How and why I was never told as Joan really didn't like to dwell on such things. However, throughout her life she was very stoical about the hand fate had dealt her.

A few years previously we suggested to her that the family may take her ashes to his grave in Austria, an idea she was very touched by – so this was the plan. Little were we to know how problematic this would become.



Back to John. The internet is a wonderful thing – less than 5 minutes after searching for his records I had not only found out the town in which his cemetery was located but also there, staring me in the face, was a photo of his grave. It gave an instant and moving reality to the situation. It is to the credit of the people that catalogue such things that we were able to find the information so quickly.

Further investigation showed that John had (as we had suspected) been killed by a bungled American bombing raid in December 1944 - mistaking the camp and its guard towers / machine gun posts for something else – what that ‘something else’ was we’ll never know !

I did find out though a bit about his last moments. John was a compere at the camp and had a flair for show business – we know that a fellow prisoner had, seconds before a bomb hit, popped in to borrow some jokes for a stand-up routine he was performing that night – he was probably the last person to see John alive – that man’s name ? Clive Dunn! (who sadly passed away last year.) John’s body was the first pulled out of the rubble. Clive actually said that John would have had a great career in show business had he lived.



Anyway, getting the ashes to the cemetery was becoming a nightmare in red tape and ‘local’ regulations – we anticipated the ‘issue’ would be a well known airline that originated in Ireland. Not so. In fact this carrier couldn’t have been more helpful (though you try and get a bag through that is 2cm too wide!)

‘Human Remains’ we were now told were not allowed to be brought in by ‘individuals’ to Germany or Austria. Furthermore, Klagenfurt airport (5 miles from the cemetery) didn’t even allow official Funeral Directors to bring in remains (that was after I’d spent a few hours chasing this option about).

The ‘option’ (I use the term loosely) was to fly her remains to Vienna (250 miles away) and have them collected (officially) and sent to Klagenfurt – the bill for this ? We got to about £2000 and stopped counting! PLAN B !

**Colin and his Mum at the gravesite**

Without incriminating myself let me just say that we transported her remains for about £30 using subterfuge I think John and his pals would have been proud of – and I can tell you now that our Aunt’s ashes along with a personal memento of their wedding photo are with John. The cemetery there is a wonderful tribute to the people that gave their lives. Beautifully and respectfully kept. John’s grave hadn’t been visited since Joan went there in 1953 (she drove there with his parents, and we have a wonderful scrapbook documenting the trip) yet it was like it had only been days before so pristine was the grave.

Finally, there’s a twist to the tale – our Aunt’s house was finally sold two weeks ago after being on the market for nearly 6 months....the buyers name ? A Clive Dunn ! – I spoke to him about the co-incidence – he’s spent his whole life fending off the inevitable, and now he was buying a house off a lady the husband of whom was friends with the other Clive Dunn and who was the last person John saw before he died.

### **Revisit to the NMA update – Pauline and Jim Pedersen**

Thank you to those that have expressed an interest in visiting the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire as advertised in the last Newsletter. The event is now confirmed as being on Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> July 2014. So far 34 people have confirmed attendance so there is room for more. Anyone requiring further details should contact Pauline and Jim Pedersen on [pauline@twgpp.org](mailto:pauline@twgpp.org)



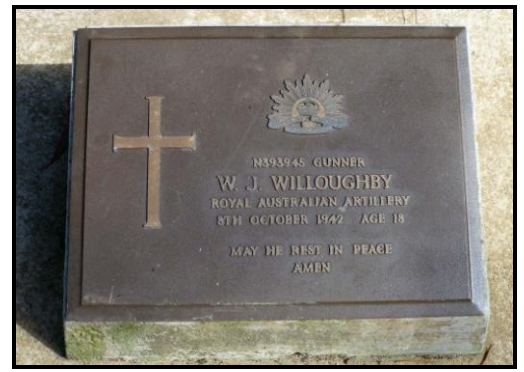
## Literally 'out in the sticks' – Peter Beckett

We all know that Australia is a massive land mass and the few volunteers we have out there think nothing of travelling hundreds of miles to capture the one lone grave. Some of these distances we would baulk at here in UK as it would be like driving to John O' Groats from Portsmouth to photograph one grave. One such grave has been tracked down by Peter Beckett at Windellama Roman Catholic Cemetery some 900 Km from where he lives.

Gunner WJ Willoughby died on 8<sup>th</sup> October 1942 aged 18 and is buried in the abandoned churchyard at Windellama. The remains of the church are in overgrown woodland which, Peter says, is larger than and more overgrown than High Wood on the Somme. To find the actual location, after two years research, Peter met up with Rex Hockey, the local Fire Brigade Captain, who took him in his 4 wheel drive to a farm where Peter met up with farmer Mark Williams. Mark then escorted Peter and Rex, utilising his Quad bike, as the road to the church had long since disappeared. They then made their way through the dense undergrowth to find the grave.

Perhaps we should issue 'tracker' badges like the Scouts for such ventures into the back of beyond? [Steve]

### The lone grave of Gunner Willoughby



## Wargraves Cycle Touring – Richard Newhouse

For the past 5 years I have been living in North Holland, about 40km north of Amsterdam and close to the IJsselmeer (former Zuider Zee). To my initial surprise this area and Friesland on the other side of the IJsselmeer is dotted with dozens of Commonwealth War Graves. Not the large battlefield variety of Normandy or Flanders, these are instead mainly small groups of WW2 aircrew. As a keen cyclist TWGPP has provided a great reason to explore new places and routes which many of my Dutch friends have never seen. Sometimes I have been on a single-target mission, such as to see the lonely Wing Commander at Callantsoog in the North Sea dunes.



Other times I have planned tours of 5-10 cemeteries across a wide area, which makes the cycling into lots of quite short intervals. Trips to Friesland have sometimes entailed taking the bike on the 90-minute boat trip across and later trying to estimate if there is enough time to reach that distant cemetery and still get the last boat home (not usually!). Many of the graves are beautifully maintained, with well-tended flowers in a neat border in front of the headstones. Several times, in a quiet village, I have run into local people keen to tell me how proud they are of the war graves. I visited the village of Winkel ("shop" in Dutch...) with some friends as it lay on the route of our local 4 day cycling festival. We were there on 5 May, Dutch Liberation Day which follows Remembrance Day, so the large 'local' (non-CWGC standard) headstone for the aircrew there was highly decorated with Dutch flags and wreaths.



Many, though not all, of the graves are in clusters of 7. That was the crew size of a number of bomber types, most notably (and numerous) the Lancaster. A large number of such bombers on missions to Germany - or sometimes somewhere called Czechoslovakia – fell prey to night-fighters. These Messerschmitt-110s, with their upward-firing guns, were based at Leeuwarden; still a military aerodrome. One particularly unfortunate crew – largely Australian – from a Halifax shot down in 1942 is buried by the small church at Jelsum, about 500 metres from the end of the runway.

I have often thought about the German airmen who were, after all, fighting for their country quite heroically. Thanks to the internet I learned that 'my local' Lancaster crew in Wognum was victory number 19 for 24-year old Oberfeldwebel Karl-Heinz Scherfling, who had found 3 in one night earlier that week in June 1943. I find the Christmas-dated gravestones especially sad; H Scherfling scored two Lancasters that Christmas Eve and a Halifax on Christmas Day, himself being shot down the following July after victory 33.

As well as graves of the British and aforementioned Australians there are plenty of New Zealanders, Canadians and a fair few Polish airmen. The Canadian ones are very often decorated with small Maple Leaf flags. As always some headstones have no additional text, but others talk in moving words about how the young man will be missed.

Perhaps none was more missed than Flying Officer Noel Evans, who lies in Wieringerwaard; part of a huge polder only drained in the 1930s. He died in January 1945; the ashes of his wife were interred next to his in 2002 under a stone that reads "They were parted by war, now re-united in peace. Together forever."

A good number of cemeteries have plaques installed, sometimes quite recently, with maps, photos and text explaining how the remains came to be in that place. Skillaerd is an ancient but tiny Friesian hamlet, which no-one would happen upon by chance so the plaque there, next to the propeller of a Stirling bomber, is particularly poignant. The last paragraph reads:

"Those that lie here were young men, born far from here, and full of expectations for the future. Their future was a grave at the foot of the Skillaerder Tower..." It has been quite an honour to tour the country, remembering these men – as well as jolly good cycle training!



## VIOLETTE SZABO MUSEUM – Pauline & Jim Pedersen

It is probably reasonable to assume that the majority of us know the story of Secret Agent Violette Szabo, G.C., if only because of the 1950's film 'Carve Her Name with Pride', starring Virginia McKenna and Paul Scofield.

Probably less well known is that tucked away in a pretty part of Herefordshire is a small but significant museum devoted to the life and heroism of Violette, her fellow agents and Leo Marks, who was Code Master of the SOE and is understood to have written the poignant poem, specifically for Violette to be used as her cypher, which begins '*The life that I have is all that I have...*'



This unique museum was opened in June 2000 and owes its existence to the dedication of Miss Rosemary E. Rigby, MBE who has spent decades collecting the many artefacts, books and memoirs on display. The museum is housed in a small building at the rear of Miss Rigby's house 'Cartref': the contents are not in any ordered fashion but wherever you look there is something of interest which sparks yet another question! And there is scarcely any question which Miss Rigby cannot answer on the subject but equally she is keen to gather any information she can about the exploits of these brave people of the SOE. Jim said that he thought we [TWGPP] had photographed the headstone of agent Muriel Byck. Miss Rigby immediately produced a photograph of her, but then wanted to know all about TWGPP. We were asked to write about this in her 'special book'; that book contains some remarkable and interesting stories from visitors to the museum. Try to get a look at it!

The only question Miss Rigby would not be drawn on was what sparked her interest in Violette in the first place? She simply said that she felt drawn to her. She is not related in any way but a bit of sleuthing revealed that 'Cartref' was originally owned by Violette's Aunt and Uncle and she spent many happy holidays there.

Each year an Annual Memorial Gathering and picnic is held in the adjoining Millennium Field, donated by Miss Rigby. These events are often attended by Violette's daughter Tania, Virginia McKenna and others with connections to the SOE and its agents. Anyone is welcome to attend, however, and the date for the 2014 Gathering is Saturday, 28th June.

Visiting at other times is usually every Wednesday from April- October inclusive between 11.00am to 1pm and 2.00pm to 4.00pm but it is advisable to check by telephone with Miss Rigby beforehand: visitors may be admitted by prior appointment on other occasions. Telephone: 01981 540477. There are no admission charges but a donation would be appreciated. Car parking is free.

The museum is located in the village of Wormelow, Herefordshire.

### Calling relations of Sergeant Sydney Edward Owen MM

Rick Smallman, in Port Macquarie Australia, has made contact as he is trying to find any surviving relatives of Sergeant Sydney Edward Owen of the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Dragoons, Royal Armoured Corps. Sydney is buried in Bergen-Op-Zoom war cemetery in the Netherlands but Rick has been given several letters and photographs which appear to have been sent from Sydney to his family and would like to give them back to them.

<http://www.twgpp.org/information.php?id=2026614>

Unfortunately the letters only contain Sydney's military address but he refers to himself as 'Ted'. The only address linking him to anyone in UK is when the Imperial War Graves Commission contacts a Mrs Terry of 109 Purves Road, Kensal Rise, London informing her that Sydney had been exhumed and transferred from his original burial place of Gilze en Reijen to Bergen Op Zoom in 1950.

Should anyone have any contacts then they can be sent to TWGPP who will forward to Rick.



### Ever wondered if photographing FORNATS was useful?

When the project expanded its remit to cover what we call FORNATs or Foreign Nationals it was debatable if anyone would use that facility to search for other nationalities, apart from the Commonwealth Forces. Google has robotically extracted our information which I would normally be a bit 'miffed' at but this has proved popular with the public who just put a name in Google and if we have the casualty on site it comes up as a hit.



One such 'hit' was experienced by Karima Ali Arroum whose family originated in Algeria which was a colony of France. Karima wrote:

*"I have been searching for years for my Great Uncle: Boukhalfa Ali Laroum. I tried the French authority and the Red Cross without much success... Today I typed his name on Google search and OMG I couldn't believe it I have finally found his grave!*

*I live in France and would like to visit his grave. Is that possible? I have enclosed the letter sent by the Red Cross in 27th August 1946 to my family in Algeria his date of death in the paper was on 16 May 1940. It is in French you will find all details regarding his grade in the French Army if you want to update his details on your website. If you need a translation please let me know as I can do it for you.*



*My family is originally from Algeria. 'indigenes' (sic) as they were called by the French or also French Muslim as you know a French colony. Many men were enrolled to serve in WWI and WWII. I can't wait to receive the photo to show it to my family and make the trip to see the grave!! Has his grave been restored? From the photo it doesn't look so old.....*

*Many, many thanks for taking the photo and for taking in consideration these French Muslim men. Do you have a list of these men who died the same day or month as my Great Uncle has I believe friends/relatives who were with him? Merci. Sorry for all my questions but you have no idea how happy I am.*

*I wish a similar organisation could exist in France.... Kindest Regards - Karima*

The role of the Algerian forces in WW2 can be seen portrayed in the film 'Days of Glory' (2006) and is well worth watching.

The film highlights ... *"The discrimination by the French authorities against these soldiers continued as successive French governments froze the war pensions of these indigenous veterans when their countries became independent. The closing credits of the film state that, despite the ruling that war pensions should be paid in full, successive French administrations since 2002 had not done so. It was only after the film's release that the government policy was changed to bring foreign combatant pensions into line with what French veterans are paid. But, as of 2010, no war pension in arrears (almost 40 years) have been considered."*

## Memorial restored in Scotland initiated in Australia

Greg Kirk from Victoria, Australia has forwarded us some information and pictures of a Memorial he has been involved in getting restored in the Lammermuir Hills of East Lothian.

Sergeant Anthony Dominica Cyril La Gruta of the Royal Australian Air Force is officially commemorated as one with no known grave on the Air Force Memorial at Runnymede.

The original memorial erected in 1951 marks the spot where Flight Sergeant La Gruta crashed in his Boulton Paul Defiant aircraft after taking off from East Fortune airfield on 29/08/41. Pieces of the wreckage are still lying around near the grave in this lonely spot at the head of the Earnscluch Water in the Lammermuir Hills.





Boulton Paul was a well known aircraft builder of the period. In the 1920s and early 1930s, this company had participated in the building of the R101 airship. (The subsequent enquiry into the loss of the R101 concluded that the airship had been well constructed, and that the loss was not due to any failure of the airframe.)

The Boulton Paul Defiant was equipped with a single engine and was armed with four machine guns, fitted in a hydraulically-powered dorsal turret. However, the Defiant had no forward-facing guns.

The aircraft was powered by a single Rolls-Royce Merlin III liquid-cooled V12 engine. It had a maximum speed of 504 km/h (313mph), and carried a crew of two (pilot and air-gunner). Although the first prototype flew in 11 August 1937, the Boulton Paul Defiant was not delivered to the RAF until December 1939.

Initially, over Dunkirk, the Defiant proved an effective fighter. Ultimately however, and due to poor manoeuvrability and the lack of forward-facing guns, it proved no match for the Messerschmitt Bf 109. Consequently, they were withdrawn from front-line operations. However, the Defiants became very effective in their new role as night-fighters.

The Defiant aircraft flown by La Gruta had been assigned to No. 60 Operational Training Unit (OTU) RAF, based at East Fortune Airfield (a support airfield in East Lothian for RAF Drem).

On 29 August 1941, Flt Sgt La Gruta, was sent out to conduct a series of 'homing tests' in a Defiant aircraft. It is thought he lost control of the aircraft whilst flying in cloud. The exact reason he lost control remains unclear. The aircraft struck the ground at high speed in a very steep dive. The bulk of the aircraft ended up buried nearly 5m (16ft) underground. The MoD decided the aircraft and pilot could not be recovered.



The original memorial was falling into disrepair and although visited by Kenneth Walker from Edinburgh, who helped clean and maintain it, it was decided that considering this young man died so far from home moves were made in Australia to get the memorial restored. Financial assistance was provided by the RSL based in Victoria and the memorial was finally restored in 2009.

### Canadian Baseball Player in unmarked grave in Scotland



Kathy Stewart, who lives in Canada, requested an image from our archive which should have shown the inscription for her husband's grandfather, Donald Alexander Stewart of the Calgary Highlanders, who died on March 13<sup>th</sup> 1941 in Glasgow.

We had an image of a private memorial in the archive taken by Steve Palmer which he had found in the right plot location. On extraction the grave inscription did not mention Donald at all but only a mention of a Catherine Macrae who had died in 1922 so looked like it was probably the wrong grave.

Prior to joining up Don Stewart was a semi professional baseball player who had achieved trials in the Pacific coast league in Canada and aged 32 became a professional umpire in the sport in 1939.



He joined the Canadian Forces in 1940 and sailed for UK where the Calgary Highlanders were based near Glasgow as part of their training prior to leaving for the fighting in Europe. Fortunately for him some of his extended family lived in Glasgow where he was invited to visit one Spring afternoon on March 14<sup>th</sup> 1941. Later that evening Glasgow experienced a Luftwaffe air raid on its' shipbuilding industry helping in the allied war effort. Incendiaries and mines were dropped in the vicinity of Dudley Drive where he was staying which resulted in the death of Don Stewart and the Macrae family he was visiting.

His body was not recovered until two weeks later.

It is not certain why but he was buried in the Macrae plot but his name was never added to the private memorial that sits above this grave commemorating Catherine who died in 1922.

We contacted Iain Anderson, who is the CWGC Regional Supervisor from Scotland, as Iain has been forwarding new headstones to TWGPP as his team are erecting them. He confirmed that a new headstone is due to be erected.



Steve Palmer who took the original image is glad the matter has been resolved but does remember as a child driving through Dudley Drive with his parents and his dad pointing out the new building between the older tenement block. His dad explained that the new section had been bombed during WW2 and hence the new stonework. Little did Steve know then that as an adult he would be photographing the casualties of that raid and has been back this week to photograph the restored building. The new section is that behind the lamp post without the large bays as seen on the right of the picture

### Hudson crew still buried together – Rene Torsin



It is not unusual to visit a war cemetery and find the crew of an aircraft buried together, normally in what is termed a 'Collective' grave due to the unfortunate circumstances of their deaths. Rene Torsin who lives in Belgium sent in some early black and white photographs of such a 'collective' grave but this time not in a war cemetery but in the Forest of Maulusmühle in Luxembourg.

It appears that the aircraft was involved in an SOE Operation codenamed 'Benedict' and crashed in the forest on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1945 killing the three Belgian SOE Operatives and three RAF crew, the pilot managed to parachute free.

The bodies were never recovered but over a period of time the local authorities erected permanent headstones above the ground where the crash occurred around which is scattered the remains of the aircraft.

Dave and Kay Lovell took up the challenge to find the site which is described in some areas as difficult to find and found the route marked with Belgian Monument SRA signs so not too difficult.





The area of the graves is well maintained and the wreckage still in evidence in a fenced off area behind them.

It is not known if the three Belgian SOE Operatives are commemorated elsewhere but the three RAF crew FI/Lt Raymond Escreet, F/O Henry Johnson and F/O Harold Forrest Thompson are commemorated by 'Special Memorials' in Hotton war cemetery nearby.

I know which site I'd rather visit if I was 'family'. (steve)

## Visit to Amsterdam – Anthony Price

During a recent stay in Amsterdam, which saw me witness Ajax retain the Championship trophy in the Dutch Eredivisie, I took the time to visit Amsterdam New Eastern Cemetery and the CWGC graves contained within this cemetery.

Entering the main cemetery entrance from Kruislaan you will find the graves located in the north-eastern part of the cemetery. The plot itself contains 259 graves of servicemen from various countries around the world.

With the Liberation Day (Bevrijdingsdag) celebrations commencing over that weekend I arrived after wreath laying ceremonies had taken place at various locations within the cemetery itself. Whilst walking from grave to grave, taking the time to read names, I noticed one grave where a visitor had left a photograph on a previous visit. Being the curious type, I decided to investigate further and this article is the result of that research

F/S Timothy Clayton Blair was an Air Gunner on Lancaster R5632 of 207 Squadron, which crashed in the sea off the coast of Holland on 24<sup>th</sup> July 1942. The crew had taken off from R.A.F Bottesford on the Lincolnshire-Leicestershire border at 0048 Hrs to bomb Duisburg. The complete crew were /S William George Hawes RAAF, Sgt Percival James Hooper RNZAF Sgt Harold Frank Clarke, F/S Timothy Clayton Blair RCAF, Sgt Eric Cartwright, F/S John Charles Chiasson RCAF and Sgt William Robert Smith



Interestingly F/S Blair was the only crew member to be recovered from the sea. The rest of the airmen are commemorated on the Runnymede Memorial in Surrey, United Kingdom

F/S Blair was born in 1908 to Sidney & Elizabeth Blair of Drake, Sakatchewan in Canada. Before enlisting in the war he had studied agricultural engineering at the University of Saskatchewan, owned and ran Lanigan Hardware, plus a period of serving as a local councillor

His brother Major Gilbert Thompson Blair was killed whilst fighting with the Loyal Edmonton Regiment and he is buried in the Coriano Ridge War Cemetery, Italy.

F/S Blair's grave rests next to a Lancaster crew of 106 Squadron lost on 20<sup>th</sup> December 1942.



Another war grave that was of interest to me, was that of Sgt Robert James Couser . He was the Wireless Operator / Air Gunner on board Whitley N1521 GE – J of 58 Squadron and his aircraft, which had taken off from RAF Linton-on-Ouse at 17.55, was shot down by Oblt. Egmont Prinz zur Lippe Weissenfeld of 4/NJG1 and crashed near Den Helder on 15<sup>th</sup> January 1941.

His grave can be found at Plot 69, Row B, Grave 4. The rest of the crew are quite scattered. P/O Peers and Sgt R F J Duncan are with him in Amsterdam whilst Sgt Shipley is buried in Alkmaar General Cemetery and P/O Griffiths commemorated as one of the missing on Runnymede Memorial.

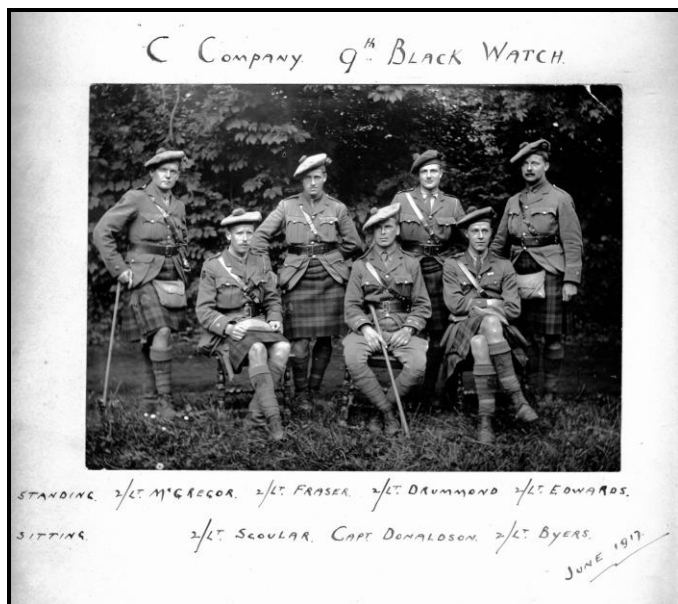
Sgt Couser and his crew had been on a raid to Wilhelmshaven and, according to the book *Bomber Command War Diaries (Middlebrook/Everitt)* pg 118, their aircraft appears to have been the only one lost on that raid.

Sgt Couser was the son of Adam and Alicia Couser, of Crowborough, Sussex. His Distinguished Flying Medal was gazetted on 11<sup>th</sup> February 1941, about a month after he had been killed. The same gazette lists two DFC awards (Sqd Ldr J A H Tuck, F/Lt L Crooks) along with four other awards of the DFM to airmen from 58 Squadron (Sgt A M Courbrough, Sgt C A Hughes, Sgt F H Parks, Sgt C H Stevens) and a DSM to P/O J L Mitchell.

I always make a point of visiting at least one CWGC cemetery when I'm abroad and my brief time in Amsterdam New Eastern Cemetery was a chance for me to reflect on the supreme sacrifice of those buried there. We Shall Remember Them.



### An album of lost souls – Dave Donatelli



Dave Donatelli, who lives in Canada, has been left a photo album full of images which include many members of the Black Watch who did not make it through WW1. The one on the left shows 'C' Company, 9th Battalion, Black Watch with Captain James Donaldson centre foreground dated June 1917. It is quite sobering to see the images in November of the same year referring to 'The late' Captain Donaldson who was subsequently killed in action on 23rd August 1917 aged 39. He was the son of Mr. and Mrs. Donaldson of Arncroach Fife; husband of Helen Donaldson of 7 Briarwood Terrace West Park Rd. Dundee.

Dave has supplied a number of images to TWGPP to add a face to the men who we remember on site.

Articles for the next newsletter, due in January 2014  
Should be sent via e mail to [steve@twgpp.org](mailto:steve@twgpp.org)



THE WAR GRAVES  
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