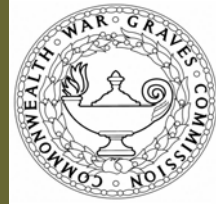




THE WAR GRAVES PHOTOGRAPHIC PROJECT



In Association
with the CWGC



News from the Front line

January 2009

I expect that by the time you will receive this newsletter you will have tired from Happy New Year greetings and may have even given up on the latest resolutions? My pre-New Year one was going to take a bit of a break and wind down a bit so with that in mind I purposely did not switch on the PC for two whole days, the downside being that the rest of the world is not necessarily of the same opinion; the e mail enquiries just mounted up in the meantime and still need to be addressed when downloaded so I had more than ever to contend with!

It was like this every evening throughout November with the build up to Remembrance Day, along with the added significance that it was the 90th Anniversary of the ending of World War 1. I have decided that next year I will take a week off work to deal with the number of enquiries. Maintaining the project and a day job can be quite exhausting as all the team are well aware.

Unusually, the image input has not subsided over the winter months as many have been submitted from abroad where Summer is at a peak (or should be according to our Australian Volunteers!).

Recent submissions from warmer climes include a complete Delhi War Cemetery and memorial in India by Catherine and Karen, Dely Ibrahim War Cemetery in Algeria from John & Jill and Taukkyan War Cemetery Myanmar (formerly Burma) from Julien Rohnay. Along with the pictures of the grave plaques he submitted this picture of young nuns in Taukkyan cemetery with Rangoon memorial in the background which I thought was such a good picture we will include it on all requests from this cemetery.

The projects next event is to prepare for the 'Who Do You Think You Are' exhibition at Olympia during the last weekend of February. The CWGC have kindly offered us space within their stand in the military section to promote our joint venture so we will be very much working as a team fielding enquiries and hopefully being able to display the images of the graves that we have been photographing at the same time. It should be quite an event as the new TV Series starts in January. If you can make it, please pop along and see us.



Steve Rogers

Project Co-ordinator

Well, of course, most of them continue to take their photos, sort their images into folders, print the better ones and make up slide and digital shows. In my club, 'Viewfinders of Romsey CC', we arrange a series of community shows to a number of mainly elderly peoples' homes within our area. I always seem to get the dates when 'The Saints' are playing at home; 2008 was no exception, maybe the way they are playing is saving me money! I usually show holiday snaps or landscapes, flowers etc.

However, as I was allocated a show to do on Monday 10th November I thought I would show three short films produced by the CWGC, you know the ones I'm sure: Debt of Honour, One Boy, and Some go Early. As a back up I also produced a slide show of a recent TWGPP Photographic Tour, just some of the images I had taken and a short talk about our work. Most of these shows are aimed at being 60-90 minutes long, any longer and the audience has fallen asleep! So, with Debt of Honour failing to run properly it was 'back up time'.



During the show a particular image made one lady start to cry. (No! the picture wasn't that bad.) My wife Janet went over and found out that the lady, Joan Ellman, had never been able to discover where her cousin, a Canadian, was buried.

My wife, bless her, made a promise that we would do our best to find out. The only information Joan had was his name **Harvey Lane** and that he died during the battle for Caen.

A quick email to our Canadian co-ordinator, Vernon Masterman, and an even quicker one back was the result we needed.

Coincidentally, the photo of the Lane headstone was one that had been taken when Steve Rogers, Vernon and I had made a flying visit to Bretteville-Sur-Laize for a day to clear up some of the local cemeteries around Caen. So I produced the photo along with one of the main Canadian monument at Bretteville and dropped them around to Joan; she has written a lovely thank you note to us and it would seem from a PS to her note that the cousins were due to marry in that year 1944.

Sponsors page on Site

During January we will be putting up a new page to the website which will include the names of any companies that are now sponsoring us. Sponsoring does not necessarily mean in financial terms but with assistance in publicising our work or helping us to carry on with it. **SHARP** have donated to us audio visual equipment to be utilised at display events. **Norfolk Line Ferries** have provided ferry tickets for journeys across the channel and as mentioned in the last Newsletter **Procter & Stevenson** of Bristol continue to help with display images. We, of course, appreciate all offers of help.



Procter and Stevenson Ltd.

Jim and I send you good wishes for a very Happy (and healthy) New Year. Whatever surprises 2009 has in store we hope some of them at least are nice ones.

TWGPP is off to a positive start in that our Photographic Tour to Arras in May is already fully booked and the usual busy programme is provisionally drawn up. A few volunteers who live within striking distance of Arras are hoping to meet up with the group so that will be a welcome opportunity to get to know each other.

In this Newsletter you will find the promised contributions from Roy Hemmington and Terry Denham, speakers at the meeting at Cosford last November. Thanks lads for turning it in without having to be reminded!

My thanks also to those volunteers who have sent material which has not yet appeared. It's on file and it will eventually! There is room in the file for more so I look forward to hearing from you during the coming months. I know you won't let me down...

CWGC Archive Project – Roy Hemmington

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission Records Section holds 3.5 million documents held in 3400 boxes on 437 metres of shelving. These records relate to:-

- Grave recovery (Grave Concentration records)
- Cemetery grave registration records
- Headstone inscription details
- Memorial panel lists
- Family correspondence



As the documents are in constant use by staff in the Records and Enquiries Department, the Commission decided in 2003 to have the collection digitised. This would ensure that the information was preserved for future generations and improve access to it by adding some additional indexes.

The project was put out to tender at the end of 2003 and in 2004 it was awarded to TSO (The Stationary Office). Scanning began in May 2004 and since then approximately two-thirds of the documents have been scanned - countries A (Albania) to I (Italy). Currently, the scanning phase is expected to finish at the end of 2009. A follow-up phase to index the names on the documents to the casualties on the Commission's Casualty Database is also due to start in 2009. This should take a few more years. Once this phase is complete, the Commission intends to look at ways of making all this information more accessible to the public.

It is an undoubted fact that there are a number of casualties from the world wars who are not included in CWGC's Debt of Honour database and therefore who are not receiving their due commemoration. The majority of these relate to the First World War when the numbers of servicemen and women involved were much greater and record keeping was not always as good as it should have been meaning that the names of these 'forgotten' men then never passed to CWGC for inclusion.

Just over a year ago the *In From the Cold Project* (IFCP) was inaugurated by Terry Denham and John Hartley to rectify in part this unacceptable situation. There are two large database records of those who died in the Great War apart from the official list maintained by CWGC. *Soldiers Died in the Great War* is a list of British army personnel who died in that conflict (though it is far from being a complete list) and the Index of Overseas Military and Naval Deaths held by the General Register Office. Both contain errors but they are the best sources of forgotten names available.

IFCP has set up a system by which both of these lists will be systematically searched by volunteers and the names compared to the CWGC database. This process is both tedious and time consuming but it is the only way to search out missed men and women. The Project has a dedicated band of about fifteen volunteers undertaking the basic searches and their results are then cross-checked several times. The remaining names are then regarded as possible Non-Coms (Non-Commemorated Casualties).

These names are checked for existing service records (usually with a negative result) and if a record is found, a case for commemoration is submitted to CWGC and the MoD as the final approving authority. For the majority of cases without such records, the death certificate has to be purchased (currently £7 each) and this provides additional evidence to enable us to find more names in the CWGC list or to provide the proof required by MoD of the casualty's qualification for commemoration. Here it is worth reminding readers that, for personnel of a Commonwealth force who died in-service, the only qualification for war grave status required is that they died between the qualifying dates for each world war (04.08.14 to 31.08.21 and 03.09.39 to 31.12.47 inclusive). The cause of death and location of death is immaterial to their qualifying for commemoration by CWGC.

The Project is now a year old and it is progressing well towards its completion date set tentatively at 2012! Funding options are being pursued to pay for the four thousand or so death certificates which will need to be obtained. Unsolicited donations have meant that many cases have already been through the system and have been accepted for commemoration. At the time of writing, 61 men have been accepted and are now commemorated by CWGC – men who were previously out in the cold. Several more cases are in the pipeline and over six hundred names are awaiting processing – and we have only reached names beginning with the letter 'G' in the alphabet!

The point of this exercise is to get as many forgotten men recognised as possible. IFCP is only searching for men who died in service and we cannot guarantee we will find them all but we are doing our best. The whole operation depends on its dedicated volunteers – just like The War Graves Photographic Project. In fact, the two projects dove-tail together neatly as TWGPP volunteers will eventually be out photographing the new names that IFCP gets added to CWGC's database. We wouldn't like to see TWGPP volunteers running out of places to visit!

Now that the dark evenings are here and photographic sorties are inevitably curtailed to some degree, perhaps you would like to fill your evenings by helping IFCP! If you would like to volunteer or just to know more, please email either Terry Denham (admin@infromthecold.org) or John Hartley (john1hartley@aol.com). All volunteers will be welcome.



" The one that started it all – Pte Henry Pattenden (served as Crundwell). Brought 'in from the cold' in 2001 by Terry Denham and buried in Maidstone Cemetery, Kent."

“You are going to die, but that is what you came to do.”

I'm sure most of us are usually looking for graves by site, even if sometimes it's a request which Steve has received that sends us there.

I recently found myself working in a different way and became driven by an event which, even more unusually, was a shipwreck.

A request to locate a single Australian in Hastings Cemetery led to Tony Wheeler asking me for a sole South African, **Jabez Nquza**, while I was there. I was surprised to read that he was from the SS Mendi – a shipwreck off the Isle of Wight. I knew that this had been a catastrophe – more than 600 of the black South Africans aboard had died. They were labourers heading for the Western Front, and on the final leg of their journey from Cape Town were drowned in a tragic accident. Finding any actual graves was unexpected.



Surfing the net had lead me from Wikipedia to an amazingly detailed report - 100 plus pages and photographs - on the tragedy, by Wessex Archaeology.

The 802 black servicemen on board the SS Mendi were apparently volunteers - their lives so awful and their needs so great in their homelands that they had volunteered for employment on the Western Front. That would surely have been bad enough – had they arrived in France; but their tragedy was even greater – after travelling thousands of miles 607 lives were wasted in the cold waters of the English Channel, just a short distance from their destination.

It was before dawn on the morning of 21st February 1917 that the SS Darro collided with the Mendi, which sunk within 20 minutes. It is possible that up to 140 men died trapped inside the hull, but most drowned or died of hypothermia in the cold waters of the English Channel. The survivors were taken onwards to their harsh destinations in France. The conditions under which they were to work and live makes grim reading.

Details of their cramped accommodation are reminiscent of another era when Africans were transported by ship, although then they were recognised as slaves. Questions about the watertight bulkheads, lifeboats present for less than half the passengers, lifeboats that were carried becoming stuck and unable to be launched and those that did launch capsizing, are similar to another better known tragedy. I calculated that while over 70% of the black Africans perished, less than half the officers and crew were lost that day. Nevertheless, all their names are recorded on the **Hollybrook Memorial at Southampton**.



The report from Wessex Archaeology had given me a wealth of background information and told me everything about the sinking, including the fact that there were two other UK cemeteries in Portsmouth and Littlehampton where the dead from this catastrophe were buried. Tony confirmed that we needed these and so I set off for a journey along the South Coast to take my pictures. At three other sites, in Holland and France, one can find further Mendi burials, but these will have to wait for another volunteer.

It was a privilege to track down the last resting places of these largely forgotten men who had heard their chaplain's exhortation "Let us die like brothers" - and they did just that.

An Afternoon in Picardy – Dale Heighway

One summer afternoon in Picardy, we strolled a country lane, hand-in-hand as lovers do, past fields of ripening grain.

A kindly sun with placid ease, a warming blanket spread a gentling for distant sounds, the far horizons blue-tinted.

A drowsy murmur all around, a peaceful land at peace a landscape of a thousand years, by nature and man, a masterpiece.

But – this place was never quite so calm, for all its merits and its worth. Just over four score years had passed, since this was hell on earth.

For this was the province of the Somme, a name forever written along with mud, wire, shell and death, in the annals of the Briton.

Within these fields men lived and died, in thousands, but no – in millions. Butchers and bakers and candlestick makers, not soldiers but uniformed civilians.

We had come to look for one of these men, who'd died from a sniper's shot. The line was calm said all the reports, but not for John Whitfield Stott.



My grandfather's brother, just twenty one, the third of a family of eight, He paid the high price that the seven might live, a martyr and an advocate.

January '16 was when he was killed, by an unseen, unknown foe, One more name on that terrible list, one more coffin to follow.

The cemetery stood to the left of the path, concealed by a fold in the ground. Neatly enclosed in stone-blocked walls, with trees and bushes around.

We found his grave almost straight away, it was placed just next to the gate, a memorial stone like all of the rest, his name, his rank and the date.

I stood alone, an Englishman, but not alone, for in grassy thrones A hundred others were there with me, beneath their ashen stones.

My Frenchwoman was lost in thought, of strangers dead in her land, They'd cursed and moaned then perished, no chance that they might understand.

For France had endured the slaughter as well, defending their land from the Hun, their battles re-echo down to this day, Argonne, the Marne and Verdun.

Monopolising the War Effort

Starting in 1941, an increasing number of British airmen found themselves as the involuntary guests (POW's) of the Third Reich and the Crown was casting-about for ways and means to facilitate their escape. Now obviously, one of the most helpful aids to that end is a useful and accurate map, one showing not only where-stuff-was, but also showing the locations of 'safe houses', where a POW on-the-run could go for food and shelter. Paper maps had some real drawbacks: they make a lot of noise when you open and fold them, they wear-out rapidly and if they get wet, they turn into mush.

Someone in MI-5 got the idea of printing escape maps on silk which is durable, can be scrunched-up into tiny wads and unfolded as many times as needed and makes no noise what so ever. At that time there was only one manufacturer in Great Britain that had perfected the technology of printing on silk and that was John Waddington, Ltd. of Leeds. When approached by the government the firm was only too happy to do its bit for the war effort.

By pure coincidence, Waddington was also the manufacturer of the popular English board game, Monopoly. As it happened, 'games and pastimes' was a category of item qualified for insertion into 'CARE packages' dispatched by the International Red Cross to prisoners of war. Under the strictest of secrecy, in a securely guarded and inaccessible old workshop on the grounds of Waddington's, a group of sworn-to-secrecy employees began mass-producing escape maps, keyed to each region of Germany or Italy where Allied POW camps were located. (Red Cross packages were delivered to prisoners in accordance with that same regional system)..... **Continued**

Cont.....When processed, these maps could be folded into such tiny dots that they would actually fit inside a Monopoly playing piece. As long as they were at it, the clever workmen at Waddington's also managed to add: A playing token, containing a small magnetic compass and a two-part metal file that could easily be screwed together.

Useful amounts of genuine high-denomination German, Italian and French currency were hidden within the piles of Monopoly money! Before taking off on their first mission British and American air-crews were advised how to identify a 'rigged' Monopoly set by means of a tiny red dot, cleverly rigged to look like an ordinary printing glitch, located in the corner of the Free Parking square!

Of the estimated 35,000 Allied POWS who successfully escaped, an estimated one-third were aided in their flight by these rigged Monopoly sets. Everyone who did so was sworn to secrecy indefinitely since the British Government might want to use this highly successful ruse in still another, future war. The story wasn't de-classified until 2007 when the surviving craftsmen from Waddington's, as well as the firm itself, were finally honoured in a public ceremony.

Remembrance Day clips



And finally

As we now move into a new year for planning purposes we would like those of you that have yet to submit images that were allocated over 6 months ago (before June 07) to confirm that you will be completing the allocations.

The project is a long term matter and there is no rush to complete. However, we do have a number of new volunteers asking to help in areas that are effectively allocated or complete. Some of these new volunteers (and long term ones!) are now conducting what we term as 'revisits' to cemeteries where previously some headstones may not have been found and therefore capture these but also where pictures within the joint archive may be improved upon. Digital cameras have developed considerably recently so to maintain an up-to-date archive we would like to take advantage of recent offers of help and the new technology.

Confirmation of allocations can be forwarded to any of the team mentioned on the 'Contact Us' page of the website.

If you have any interesting articles that you may wish to share with other volunteers within the newsletter please copy to pauline@twgpp.org. Thank you. Deadline for next issue 15th March 2009.