



THE WAR GRAVES PHOTOGRAPHIC PROJECT



In Association
with the CWGC



News from the Front line

Spring 2009

Welcome to the Spring edition of TWGPP Newsletter. We have decided to go out quarterly now as bi-monthly felt like we had just completed one and then the next was due for editing - so a constant cycle.

On February 1st 2009 we passed our first anniversary with site hits going up monthly as the word has got around that we are on the net. As an example in February we had 311000 'hits'. At the time of writing this we are over the 1.1 million mark for images with a steady input not only from volunteers around the world but also from CWGC archives. Recent submissions from CWGC include the whole of Thanbyuzayat War Cemetery in Burma where the plaques have recently been cleaned and all sites in Canada. Having said that the Canadian ones are the 'Before' pictures so we are still after volunteers in the country to revisit and get the 'After' pictures once the gravestones have been repositioned or, in some cases, refurbished.

Our recent big event was to attend the 'Who Do You Think You Are' exhibition at Olympia at the end of February, having been invited to accompany the CWGC on their stand. This was a high profile exercise for us which you can read more about later on.

The tour planned for the Arras area in May is now fully booked with a couple in reserve. It is hoped to do some 'mopping up' as well as complete some of the larger cemeteries that are easier to complete with a coach load of volunteers or as Pauline often says 'Friends reunited'.

In the background, work has been going on by Derek auditing UK counties to check that what we have in archive is up to date and, where not, volunteers are getting out and about capturing the missing ones.

As you plan your holidays for this year don't forget there may be locations around the world yet to be done, often in some quite exotic places like the Seychelles! If you are inclined to take a day off the sun bed then get in touch before you go.

You may have heard in the media over the last few weeks about Red Cross documents found by Peter Barton in Geneva whilst researching names of those Australians found in Fromelles. This may eventually have an impact on our numbers but don't start polishing your camera lenses just yet expecting a whole new set of gravestones to photograph!

Many thanks for your continued support which is much appreciated by not only us at the project but the recipients of the photographs as can be seen in the selection of thank you notes later in the newsletter.

Steve Rogers



One of the 3627 images taken by The Mon in Thanbyuzayat. Each plaque has a poppy placed in the corner

The loss of Lancaster LL797

As Jean and I have friends in the Lorraine region of France and visit it often, Derek asked us to cover some of the smaller cemeteries in the area, some thirteen in total, amongst them being Marsal Churchyard. At the time this meant virtually nothing to us: from the spreadsheet eight graves dating from 1944, obviously just another bomber crew shot down over France. To an extent, this is correct. The RAF lost several thousand Lancaster bombers to various causes over enemy held Europe.



Lancaster LL 797 took part in Operations over Berlin on the night of 15/16th February 1944 and over Leipzig on the night 19/20th February. When lost flying on the Schweinfurt raid 24/25th Feb it had only had a total of 21 hours flying time. It took off at 18:10 from Wickenby for the final sortie of their first tour of operations and was carrying a second pilot for operational experience. It crashed at Marsal (Moselle), 10 km SE of Chateau-Salins, France with all crew killed.

Flying Officer J. P. Hutchinson
Pilot Officer L. E. Goodkey
Flying Officer P. H. W. Young
Warrant Officer H. F. Binder

Sergeant Pilot B. Bowditch
Sergeant R. Edgeworth
Sergeant A Hodgson
Flight Sergeant K. J. Macey

On the grass opposite the gate to the churchyard there is the boulder – eight or nine tons of boulder – with a bronze plaque from the Commune of Marsal commemorating the deaths of the crew of this aircraft, and that the widow of WO Binder is also buried here (on a later visit we tried, but failed, to find her grave).

A couple of months after Derek added these photos to the web-site we got an e-mail out of the blue from an Adrian Lee asking if we had taken these photos. After some correspondence, it turned out that his parents and the parents of Peter Young, the Air Bomber, had been neighbours and friends and that to the day of her death, Mrs. Young persisted in the belief that her son was merely 'Missing' and would come home. The photos on the TWGPP web-site was the first evidence Adrian had come across that there was a known grave for the son of his family's friends.



The joint grave at Marsal churchyard

Since these first few e-mails a considerable amount of information has come to light about the fate of these eight men – where they were from, what they were doing and, to a high degree of probability, who shot them down and now, thanks to the personal assistance of the Mayor's Secretary, we have been shown the crash site.

Those of you who are going on the Arras trip in May will be told on your visit to the Carrière Wellington, that the tunnels were used as air raid shelters during WW11 – " The Germans bombed us in 1940, and you bombed us in 1943 and 1944 ".

These eight men have not been forgotten, nor have the thousands like them who were killed over France. We are continually amazed at the respect and regard they are held in by the French population generally, especially considering the casualties and damage inflicted on the French populace by the RAF and USAAF before and after D-Day.

The good news from this end is that despite the earlier inclement weather Jim has finally completed Birmingham (Yardley) Cemetery. This has been ongoing for him over the past two years or more; it's a very large area and much of the older part is overgrown and the graves in a parlous state. Needless to say it was some of the family memorials that eluded him time and again; the staff in the administration office got quite used to his requests (maybe pleas is more appropriate) for help. He struck gold on his last visit though when two members of the CWGC staff turned up for work and just happened to have a site map handy! Thanks lads.



Diary Date: Make a note of **Saturday, 5th September**. This is when we'll be holding our annual Get-Together and the earlier-than-usual date is to allow for the venue, which is mainly outdoors. We shall be meeting at the **National Memorial Arboretum**, Alrewas, Staffordshire. The site itself consists of 150 acres of trees and memorials devoted to the concept of remembrance; the Armed Forces Memorial – recording those lost in conflict since the end of WWII - is striking. The NMA is within easy distance of the city of Lichfield with its magnificent cathedral for anyone thinking of making a weekend of it. Details of the day's itinerary and a booking form will appear later in the year but meanwhile you can check out the NMA on www.thenma.org.uk

Happy Easter everyone.

'Zonnebeke Five' – John Sutherland

I was asked by Derek to photograph the grave of a Private Storey in Buttes New British Cemetery. I had great difficulty in finding the grave as neither the CWGC site nor the cemetery register gave a grave reference number. So there was nothing for it but to look at every grave until we found it, which we eventually did, and as 'sods law' would have it, the grave was in the corner opposite to where we started looking.

The reason that there was no grave reference number is quite simple; Private Storey was buried in September of last year along with four other Australians who have become known locally as the Zonnebeke Five.



The local electricity company were cutting a trench across a road on the outskirts of Zonnebeke when they discovered the remains of five Australians in what was obviously a battlefield burial. Two of the remains were quickly identified; one of them was wrapped in a groundsheet and was well preserved. He had been wrapped, and buried by [alongside] his brother, and all five were buried last September with full Military Honours. Shortly after the burial, Private Storey was identified through DNA and later in the year there was another ceremony at which members of his family were in attendance, to change his headstone.

A Special Grave – Asher Thompson



The gravestone on the left (courtesy Jim Pedersen) looks like the standard CWGC stone and, of course, it is. First though it has a Star of David. That hardly makes it unique, as Jewish participation in the war effort to defeat the scourge of Nazism was, of course, out of all proportion to the size of Britain's Jewish population at the time.

Back to our grave under discussion, in the CWGC cemetery in Pornic, near St Nazaire, France. We see that the person buried here is a Jewish girl, 25 years old at the time of her death.

What makes this grave unique though is the following. During the Second World War the Special Operations Executive dropped male and female operatives into occupied Europe in order to aid the resistance movements. Many are familiar with the names Violette Szabo, Noor Inayat Khan, Odette Sansom (all of whom won GC's) and the names of Nancy Wake and Vera Leigh.

Out of 39 women dropped into France, fifteen were captured, only three of these survived.

The twelve who were murdered by the Nazis, whether in Dachau, Natzweiler or Ravensbruck obviously have no grave, just a plaque on a wall and a handful of ashes mixed with those of tens of thousands others.

The grave of Muriel Byck exists because, while she died on active service in occupied France, she did not fall prisoner, but died as complications of meningitis. Her story is told on the web-site http://www.64-baker-street.org/agents/agent_fany_muriel_byck_yael.html and also at <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/ww2/sugar2.html>

The inscription at the foot of her stone reads "Here rests in peace Muriel Tamara Byck, our only child and beloved daughter"

Note, the Hebrew letters inside the Star of David are the initials TNZBH which in English means "May her soul be bound in the bond of the living". The custom of placing a pebble on the grave (as in the picture) probably serves as a reminder of the family's presence. Also, it may hark back to biblical days when the grave was a heap of stones. Often the elements or roving vandals dispersed them and so visitors placed other additional stones to assure that the grave was marked.

Amazing Grace – Mike Steele

Volunteer Mike Steele sent us some delightful photos to illustrate how he became interested in TWGPP. He said "We toured many cemeteries with the Pipe Band. Here's my son Justin with some Canadian War Vets that the people from Holland flew over for parades in Holland. At Tyne Cot my son climbed up on the monument and played Amazing Grace for the fallen soldiers. The moment he started playing everyone came running with their cameras. There was hardly a dry eye when he was done. War cemeteries are so emotional!"



WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

In order to build on our working relationship with the CWGC this year, TWGPP were invited to attend the 'Who Do You Think You Are' (WDYTYA) Exhibition at London Olympia over the weekend of 27th Feb to 1st March 2009 and jointly man the CWGC stand to see if the service we provide is useful to those researching their family history.

"Thank you very much for the pictures. They are brilliant. Your help on Saturday was invaluable. We are going to visit the cemetery this year. I feel inspired to continue the search for our relatives. Once again - thank you very much.
Regards Barbara Dobson"

WDYTYA is a popular genealogical TV programme whose new series was shown in January through to March. On many occasions the, dare I say, 'Celebrity' finds a relative who fought and maybe died in WWI or WWII and gets to visit the grave in what can be a quite emotional trip.

With TWGPP welcoming the opportunity to accompany CWGC on the stand, Nigel Haines and Ian Small of the Publicity Department of CWGC arranged for our artwork to be produced into very impressive hoardings to match those of the CWGC and organised internet connections so that we could access the archive.

"Thank you so much for the four photographs. They are excellent, exactly what I want. I am most grateful to you and your colleagues for all your help yesterday and wish you every success with this massive project. Regards Patricia"



Joint Operations



Volunteers in the form of David Milborrow, Bob Taylor, Jim and Pauline Pedersen and Sandra Rogers offered to journey into London on a daily basis to promote what we do and offer advice, and sometimes tissues, to those utilising the facility.

Queues outside prior to opening were huge, indicating a significant interest in researching family history. From the moment the doors opened the line of researchers started to form at both CWGC and TWGPP laptops and we quickly got underway, working in unison, providing cemetery details and then as a bonus a picture of the actual grave or memorial if we held it.

The most common terms on seeing these were "Oh, Wow!", "Oh, my God", "Unbelievable", in some cases followed by nervous laughter and even tears. If we do a similar event in the future we will take a box of tissues!

"Thank you for the photographs of my great grandfather and great, great grandfather's memorials. Both myself and my uncle found this extremely emotional to see yesterday, and I admit when I got home a number of tears were shed. Thank you for the work you are doing. We are now planning to go to Loos once the weather has broken. Yours, Marlene Martin"

Time flew by with the combined team answering all manner of questions about casualties, where they were buried and also why perhaps they were not recorded on CWGC records but noted on local war memorials. There appears to be great interest now in researching these local memorials and producing books and leaflets on these. One of the colleges at Cambridge has asked us to supply images for a memorial book and we can fulfil all but one in Iraq.

Any chance of a lunch break was out of the question and the only lull in action seemed to be after 4pm so time then for a coffee break. We all then consolidated our position to a more leisurely pace. The CWGC had got through the majority of their leaflets and our 'flyers' had gone like hot cakes.



The Stand was packed for all three days

For us the publicity generated was as we had hoped. It was obvious that many of the public attending had never heard of TWGPP so to be working alongside CWGC on the same stand gave us credence. Many of those using our facility to obtain images went on to 'workshops' being held at the event and we had reports that many were raising their hands at question time to point out that we were at the event and could supply images. This meant a rush of feet to the stand on conclusion so we always knew when a session had ended. Paul Reed, a well known military historian, had visited the stand earlier in the day and said that he would mention us in his talks about researching military ancestors.

"Thank you so much for the photographs of the grave and the church of my ancestor E. Flewitt. It certainly is quite emotive to be able to view these photographs for the first time and they will indeed be treasured by our family. Thank you for the prompt response to my enquiry on Saturday and I very much appreciate your speedy reply this morning. Thanks again. Regards Ruth Meehan"

By the end of the three day event word must have got around as other stands were pointing people our way; we have been asked to write articles for The National Archives magazine 'Ancestors' along with the Western Front Association 'Stand To' (and a request to do a presentation), The National Army Museum, and the possibility to attend a similar event at the RAF Museum at Hendon in October.

We also gained new volunteers who found what we are doing incredible considering the numbers involved (1.7 million) and want to be a part of this massive project.

"I can't thank you and the CWGC enough for the photo; my Dad is going to be thrilled. I once went to Changi to see if I could find him but obviously I was in the wrong country! Just to have found him at last, as no-one has ever known where he was, is fantastic but to get a photo, well you really won't know what it will mean to my Dad. So a huge thank you once again, Gail".

It was a good experience for all of us to get involved with the CWGC at such an auspicious event and I personally felt that we complemented each other tremendously. Meeting those that we correspond with regularly and put faces to names was an added bonus. Hopefully we will be able to conduct further 'Joint Operations' at future events.



And a final word from Bob Taylor, one of our helpers - As it was the first time for me to be at the customer end of this project, I have to say I got a tremendous buzz out of being able to help all these people in their research efforts. I was k*****d on Sunday night when I got home, but I loved every minute of it and I look forward to being invited to anything similar in the future. I also felt comfortable working alongside the CWGC, they had integrated us in so well into their stand, and the team made us most welcome.



Harry Patch commemorative stone

A memorial stone, paid for and laid by Harry Patch, has been erected at the point where he crossed the Steenbeeke on the 16th August 1917. Harry Patch is the last surviving veteran to have served in the trenches of the Western Front and was recently made an Officer of the French Legion of Honour.

TWGPP Shirts

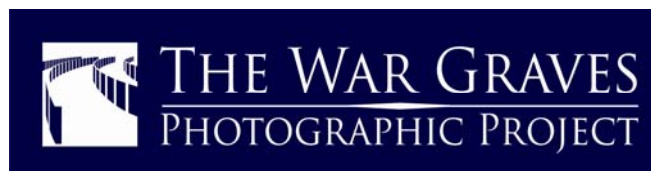
With Summer just around the corner and the battlefields ready for photographers of TWGPP to descend upon them, now might be the time to invest in a Project Polo Shirt.

These heavy duty shirts are now available to order complete with embroidered TWGPP Logo.

Produced in S,M,L,XL, XXL for the price of £15 including P&P these are available for ordering now.

Please contact Sandra on sandra@twgpp.org for information on ordering.

Long sleeved Rugby shirts are still available if required at the cost of £25 inc P&P



The Last Operation - Pete Smith

It is not often we get a first hand account of the action in which one of the men lying in a war grave we have photographed had been killed so it is with added poignancy we reproduce part of an article sent in by Pete Smith where his father 'Tommy' Smith, a mosquito pilot, recounts how he lost his mate Flight Officer 'Cockie' Cockayne, now lying in Becklinghen War Cemetery, Germany

My own father was a pilot in 23 Sqdn in 1944. He died in 2006 after a long illness but gratefully after 61 more years, he felt he had 'cheated' death. I however was devastated - I had thought he had more time. He had survived everything else, including being the first person to have a cornea graft in the UK, and a McIndoe Guinea pig, where he met my mother, a theatre sister.



'Tommy' Smith

The preparation and briefing were the same as the night before, another patrol in RS507. The location was Stendhal fighter airfield near Berlin. 'At the briefing 'Cockie' and I were told to be on our toes as we were coming to the end of our 'tour of operations'. We did our pre-flight checks, spoke little and departed from Little Snoring in timely fashion, as we had done so many times before. We headed over the North Sea and, turning in and over Holland, saw familiar 'landmarks' that we both knew so well. As we crossed the coast two things happened. Firstly, Cockie's watch stopped, which meant I had had to remove my left glove and was now reading the navigation times 'off' my watch, and repeating them to Cockie. Secondly the bad weather 'rolled' in.

It had turned into a 'dirty' night-thick as a bag up to 16,000 ft. The 'trip' to Stendhal was uneventful, even given my obvious frustration over Cockie and his watch stopping. I used a square search system for nearly an hour, but could pick up nothing - as far as we could tell the airfield was lifeless so we turned and headed for home.

The Last Operation continued



About halfway back we were at the point where we should have been over the Steinhuder Lake and what should we see? A fully 'lit' airfield, with runway lights on and planes 'taxiing' with their navigation lights clearly visible. Without another thought, I shouted to Cockie, 'Buckle up chum, we're going in'. Turning to port, and diving, I went in to have a bash. There was a plane sitting at the taxi point as I approached, I opened up and saw a good cluster of cannon strikes on the aircraft, and was about to break away when I saw the exhaust flames of another aircraft half way up the runway so, instead of breaking off, I closed in and opened up. He crashed at the end of the runway.

The first 'burst' on the 'taxiing' aircraft had alerted the German gunners to the presence of an 'intruder' on the airfield - the second attack meant they were 'ready' and let go with all they had. Unwittingly Tommy had flown between the flak towers at the end of the runway. The two German 40mm Quad batteries could see nothing, but had the cannon flashes from the mosquito to aim at. They said Tommy and Cockie were hit coming in over the airfield perimeter at a height of 200ft in a dive.

'Flak set my right engine on fire, and I feathered the prop while pressing the extinguisher button. My mind was racing on the daunting prospect of flying home on one engine when the other engine suddenly stopped. The first engine was by now blazing merrily. The aircraft was done for. I yelled at Cockie, 'That's it! Bail out!' 'If you're staying, so am I.' Came the reply. 'I'm the pilot, get going, NOW!' I shouted. It's not easy trying to get out of a mosquito and Cockie was having trouble jettisoning the door. I had seen a small white patch amongst all the 'black' and knew it was a snow covered field amongst all the trees of the black forest and was making a beeline for it. Time and height were running out very, very fast. I grabbed at Cockie shouting, 'we're too low', and had to take my hand off the back of his flying suit to switch the landing lights on. The treetops showed up below. I shouted 'Knock it off. Do your harness up'. Cockie didn't answer. I looked over to him, but he was gone-a burst of flame lit up the opening left by the jettisoned hatch. He had bailed out.

I found out later he was found several hundred yards from the aircraft with a broken neck-his parachute had not opened fully.

The trees came up to meet me while I was preparing to stuff the nose in while I still had flying speed. I could feel the 'whiffle', which indicated the approach of a stall. I stuffed it in at about 200mph with a terrific 'bang' in the snow-covered field. In no time at all I was reaching the end of the field, heading for more trees-I thought 'this is it', but as I struck the trees it was only a windbreak, a line, not the wood I had thought it was. The first two trees I hit ripped off the outer wing sections with the drop tanks on board. Simultaneously the fuselage hit something else, a tree stump maybe. Missing me, it ripped through the fuselage and in an instant the throttle control disappeared from my left hand with a huge thump. Then I was out of the trees again and into a snow covered field where the aircraft came to a grinding stop.

A feeling of relief came over me. All I could think of was 'A forced landing in the dark! What fantastic luck to be alive'.

Tommy then had some 'Grim moments' stuck in the cockpit with a raging bonfire all around and fought to rip the goggles off his face as they melted in the flames. With Oxygen venting from tanks into the cockpit it turned into an inferno his right leg being 'roasted' in the flames. He eventually broke free and although initially stuck again with his parachute preventing access through a hole in the side of the aircraft he eventually fell into the snow to cool his burnt hands and face. On trying to stand and get away he discovered that he had broken his leg. Two German soldiers hiding nearby then carried him to a nearby barn. Tommy's war was over. (*Abridged from original submitted by Pete Smith - copyright*)

Its 'Goodbye' from Sue

Sue Woolhouse is just about to retire from her office at CWGC HQ in Maidenhead where she has spent a number of years working in co-ordination with CWGC staff around the world. Sue has been particularly helpful to TWGPP in obtaining requests that we cannot fulfill in the more obscure places so we would like to take this opportunity to thank Sue for her help and wish her a very happy and fulfilling retirement.

Points from the Post

A heartfelt THANK YOU for the photograph of my Mum's brother's headstone in Taukkyan. Just last Monday I spent a very pleasant day with my Mum, showing her the pictures which I had printed off and she is now keeping them in her special folder to remember her brother. I can't begin to put into words how much the pictures mean to her - after over 60 years she now feels that she has a connection to the place Gordon was laid to rest. Thank you from the bottom of my socks, and please pass on my thanks to all those involved in getting the pictures. All power to your wonderful work, it changes lives. God bless. Catriona Ogilvie

Its 3am at the moment in AUST.(Best email I have received)I have just received your email, and from all my family I cannot thank you enough....With Kindest Regards Nacole Strobel and Family.

I would like to thank you from the bottom of my heart, for finding a photo of my late uncle's gravestone. My mother and her last remaining brother, who are in their late 70s now are ecstatically overjoyed at seeing the photo as well. Once again, thank you so much. Kind regards.....Kevin.

I can't thank you enough for these photos. I am amazed at the speed with which people from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website respond. All the information and the photos I now have mean the world to my mother, and therefore to me. It is the 1st time in 91 years that anyone in the family has been able to find information on my great uncle's death and memorial. His mother (my great grandmother) went several times after WWI searching for his grave & never found it. After that, I think the family gave up. Long live the work you do. Best wishes and many thanks again, Anna

Thank you so much. Although I obviously never knew William, and am not directly related, seeing his grave brings out very deep emotions within me, it's as if he knows someone remembers him. This is a great service you perform, keep up the good work, and thank you again. Rikk Atree.

Just quick word to thank yourself and the other members of your organization for the quick response to my request for photos. My thanks also to the photographers. The headstones are of the four airmen recovered from ED603 OL-L. My mothers brother CFJ Sprack was also on this aircraft, although his body has not, as yet, been recovered. These photos however, go some way in 'putting the crew back together' for my mother, who's years are now few. Many, many thanks. Regards David Dunn

Just a note to say thank you for the photographs of my Fathers grave - Kenneth Stephenson; I have just picked them up from the Post Office, I promised myself I wouldn't cry when I saw them, but of course I did. I can't thank you enough for all your work and the fabulous task you have undertaken; I am sure there are thousands of us like myself who left England a long time ago and have wondered how their loved ones grave was faring as time went on. I saw my Father's grave in Sweden when I was 3; but thought the 'little white crosses' would be long gone by now, and had wondered time and again was there anything to honour my Father; then I found your site. What a shock it was to see the picture of the grave in front of me I cried and cried; and a pleasure to see how him and his comrades are honoured; I have never felt as proud of my Dad as I do now. I was always resentful that he had gone to war and I didn't know him. Now I feel close to the man I never knew (I was 6 months old when he died; an only child). I have photos of taken from the plane when they were bombing and when he was in Canada training and Norfolk; but this has meant more to me than anything I could ever have. All the very best to the TWGPP Volunteers and thank you again. Elizabeth Lodge (Australia)

Thanks for the pictures. Gives me goose bumps to see my great uncles name on that magnificent monument. Gone - never known but not forgotten. Sincerely, Eileen

Thank you so much. I am very grateful for the efforts of all concerned in the project. Living here in Canada, and being past the age when travelling is comfortable, this is my only chance of seeing my grandfather's burial place.Thank you again, Anne

Many thanks; you made an old lady very happy. Janet

It is with great sadness that we have to announce the death of one of our volunteers in Australia. **Grahame Chamberlen** passed away in the early hours of Tuesday 10th March after battling for a long time with Acute Myloid Leukaemia. Grahame had been co-ordinating the Project's efforts in Queensland for which we are extremely grateful and although we knew of his illness he maintained his role through to the end. He got his last wish and died at home rather than going into hospital for palliative care. Condolences were sent on behalf of the project to his wife Virginia.



An Australian of German Background on the Western Front – Tony & Sue Wege



Tony and Sue Wege are Australian volunteers who on their last 'jaunt' covered over 1000 Km in order to take pictures in 8 cemeteries of just 9 graves. As you can guess the cemeteries in Australia are spread some distance from each other! It was on one of these trips that they came across a family memorial that may be of interest to other readers.

World War One saw over 300,000 Australian men volunteer to fight for Australia, Britain and the Empire. 60,000 of them died. One of them was Private Johanis Ernst Warnest of the South Australian raised 10th Battalion, Australian Imperial Force. He died in northern France on 24th April 1918 and was buried at Meteren, France. He is also commemorated upon his sister's grave's headstone in the St John's Lutheran church in the district of Ebeneza, Barossa Valley, South Australia.

So what is especially interesting about that?

J Ernst Warnest was Australian born but his parents and ethnicity was German: – Silesian German to be exact. The headstone upon which he is commemorated in South Australia is written in Gothic script, German language. That fact is really significant. Let me explain.

The British colony of South Australia (SA), underpinned by the British government, was initially settled entirely by free British settlers beginning in 1836. It is the only Australian colony that never had convicts as part of the settlement programme of Australia by the British government during the 19th century. No convicts were or ever have been transported to SA. The colony's ethos was right from the beginning that it was to be only for hard working settlers (primarily British) who in turn were free to practice their religion (by inference Christian although many Afghan Muslims came as well to provide a camel transportation system in the deserts far north of the colony) without fear. One significant group of free settlers to come here were Silesian German farmers who were of the (Christian) Lutheran faith. They first arrived in 1840 but by 1880 thousands had arrived and settled down extremely well. They had suffered religious persecution in their own land but were perfectly free to practice their own way of life here in SA – which they certainly did. They contributed greatly to the SA community over the next 70 years¹.

When WW1 broke out Australia immediately offered the British government an army corps. Hastily put together from the civilian population (the country had no regular army of any size at the time) they, together with their New Zealand cousins, formed the "Australian New Zealand Army Corps" – ANZAC. They first went into action at Gallipoli 25th April 1915.

All Australian soldiers were volunteers from their normal civilian life. No Australian was ever conscripted into the army in WW1. One such volunteer was J E Warnest (b. November 1881). That in itself is interesting.

Johannis Ernst Warnest was born in November 1881 at Stockwell, a small farming village five kilometres north east of Nuriootpa in the Barossa Valley of SA. His family church was a couple of kilometres away at St Johns Lutheran in the district of Ebeneza, right in the centre of an all but total ethnic German population of diligent and quite prosperous farmers. He described himself as a coach builder and living in Adelaide when he enlisted. At the time however (1916, 1917), he and the entire ethnic German population of SA was under enormous government and community pressure and overt discrimination.

The huge Australian losses in battle, primarily on the Somme in 1916 and in Flanders in 1917, meant that here in Australia there was a vast anti-German sentiment pervading. The very large and growing Silesian German population in SA, by now well over half native Australian born, were the innocent victims and target of the official government and community discrimination that surged throughout the state and nation. The centre of this official discrimination was SA because it was here that probably 80% of the Silesians immigrants had settled. Many Lutheran pastors, school teachers and even an elected member of the SA Parliament were interned by the government solely on the grounds that they were “German” and thus, somehow, a threat to the security of the nation. All Lutheran primary schools in SA (there were many) were immediately closed by government decree. Some 75 place names on the map of SA that had German names were expunged and replaced by British or French names in 1917. Some examples near to the Barossa of these changes are:

“North Rhine Creek” to “The Somme” creek
“South Rhine Creek” to “The Marne” creek
The village of “Langmeil” to “Bilyara” (an aboriginal name)
The village of “Hahndorf” to “Ambleside”

In an attempt to deflect the worst of this discrimination from their families many sons of the SA Silesian Germans volunteered to join the Australian Imperial Force in the middle of the war. I suspect that J E Warnest was one of them. He was nearly 36 when he joined up in August 1917, right in the very middle of this massive anti German sentiment sweeping the land. He had not volunteered prior to that date which is quite common in the history of enlistment in SA. These men kept their heads down early in the war in the hope it would end. But following the disasters in 1916 and 1917 and with official discrimination so overt, they began to volunteer in their hundreds in an attempt to deflect discrimination of families. There are a few interesting hints at Pvt. Warnest’s suspected attempts to hide his German background in his army record. It is my speculation only. I have no hard evidence in this case.



He described his religion on his enlistment form as “Methodist”. It would have been politically disastrous for him to describe his religion as “Lutheran” because that, in the community’s view, was synonymous with the hated Germans. He also wrote in full on his enlistment form his second name “Ernst” but Anglicized it as “Ernest”. “Ernst” was obviously German – “Ernest” was not. He signed his name as “E Warnest” and did not use his more Germanic first name “Johannis” in his official signature – not even the letter “J”.

After initial training and the voyage to England in October 1917, Private Warnest after even more training in and around Plymouth (including a dose of mumps), was sent to France as a reinforcement to the SA raised 10th Battalion of the AIF. As a South Australian, Pvt. Warnest was sent to help reinforce the by now greatly under strength 10th Battalion on the 13th April 1918. Remember, there was no Australian conscription in WW1. Volunteers by late 1917 were becoming few so Australian battalions were often greatly under strength this late in the war. He was killed in action only 11 days later on the 24th April 1918 at Meteren, France. He was eventually buried there.

His younger sister, Wanda, had died as a baby in 1884. On her headstone in their family church’s cemetery (St John’s Lutheran, Ebeneza SA) sometime after April 1918, the family must have put a new headstone on the grave and incorporated her late brother’s name, J Ernst Warnest, on it. But it is written in German and indeed in Gothic script. That style is quite common pre 1920 in these small Lutheran cemeteries (and there are many) in SA.



In Loving
Remembrance
WANDA WARNEST
Born the 27 Jan 1884
Died the 1 Feb 1884

J ERNST WARNEST
Fallen in war at
Meteren in France
At 24 April 1918
At the age of 36 years

Here separation
There seeing again

Dedicated by parents
And siblings

It is interesting to speculate, considering the massive discrimination the family and their community must have experienced during the war, just why they had the headstone written this way and had not “Anglicized” it. Were they simply following the tradition in the cemetery or did they, in a silent protest, have it written in German despite the discrimination that they would have suffered? I do not know the answer. This grave headstone in an all but forgotten church cemetery in rural South Australia does, I think, hide a dark secret in the state’s past and engenders a degree of unease considering what is happening around the world today in these troubled times.

WW2 - The War Graves in Italy – Bernard Warden

Following the success of the Eight Army in North Africa and subsequent involvement of American forces in North Africa the next phase were the landings on Sicily and advance up the Italian “Leg”. American 5th Army moved up the Mediterranean coast with the Commonwealth 8th Army up the more difficult Adriatic coast.

With the Allies landing in the south of France and the opening of the second front in Normandy the Allies fighting in Italy became known as the “Forgotten Army” although the fighting was some of the hardest and costly of lives during WW2.

The cost of lives to the Commonwealth Forces, both British, Canadian, Australian New Zealand, South African and Indian can be illustrated by the number that were killed – 45,467 plus those that were injured and are not included in this total. Also the American casualties are not included because they were all returned to the USA.

The 45,467 fatalities are contained within 143 cemeteries which are maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission through the dedicated local Italian work force – they do an excellent job.

The task of recording each grave by photography is a major job and we have a small dedicated team of volunteers who mostly carry out their work during various holiday stays. There are still some major cemeteries to be covered; Cassino – 4271 graves; Anzio Beach Head & Cemetery 3,368 graves; Sangro River 2,616 graves; Bari 2,126 graves; I am working on the **Sangro cemetery** site as it is the nearest to where we have a holiday home. We all feel the same when visiting the war Cemeteries realising how young the service personnel were and how much they gave in fighting the aggressor in many European and other countries through out the world.

I was taking photographs in the Sangro cemetery the other week and came across 2 adjacent graves for the Willard Brothers, one was in the Royal Engineers aged 29 and killed on the 13th October 1943 and the other was in the Hampshire Regt. aged 25 and died on the 8th October 1944. To lose one member of a family is a tragedy but to lose 2 brothers of the same family is something which, no doubt, a family finds hard to come to terms with.

There is still a lot of work to be done in Italy so if anyone is planning to visit, holiday or otherwise, make contact via the website





TURKISH GRAVES – As part of our remit to include the war graves of all nationalities we are pleased to be able to report that over 1750 Turkish graves have been included on site from the Gallipoli Peninsula. The images were painstakingly renamed by Geoff Thorndike who also produced the spreadsheet to enable us to get them loaded up to site. Geoff now knows just about every variation of Ahmet, Ali and Abdullah that it is possible to get

MOZAMBIQUE – Catherine Chatham now finds herself in Mozambique and had just visited Maputo to find the three British personnel buried there but came across a large plot of Portuguese military graves. Ok the grass could do with a trim but she hopes her contract out there will last at least to the autumn (African) when the vegetation will be less rampant and so enable good pictures to be taken.



CANADA – Snow still stops play in Sudbury Civic Memorial Cemetery!

GAZA- At least 287 headstones were damaged, some shattered beyond repair, as the cemetery was hit by at least five shells during the recent conflict. It is believed at least one unexploded shell is still under the soil at the cemetery, meaning no visitors can be allowed until it has been dealt with.

The staff who tend the cemetery, normally an oasis of calm and well-maintained order in the otherwise chaotic Gaza Strip, had to flee for their lives.



"I sent all the others away because the shelling got too heavy," said Ibrahim Jerradeh, 71, who was made MBE after tending the grave since 1958. "Only when it got really close and started to hit the cemetery did I leave." - Any volunteers to complete the photography there?

Next issue due end of June 2009

Articles for the next edition would be appreciated by the beginning of June. If you have something of interest or personal experience that you would like to share with others in the Project please forward to Pauline on pauline@twgpp.org