



THE WAR GRAVES PHOTOGRAPHIC PROJECT



In Association
with the CWGC



News from the Front line - Steve Rogers

April 2015

This month we commemorate 100 years since the landings at Gallipoli. This will probably be the biggest commemoration for the ANZACs over the whole four year WWI anniversary. Invites for the official commemorative events on Gallipoli itself have been very limited and highly sought after but a lucky few have contacted us saying how pleased they are to have the opportunity to attend. Having stayed on the peninsula it beats me where everyone can stay as accommodation is very limited.

Paul Cootes, who has been lucky to get a place, says "I was previously there as a backpacker in 1978. To accept the ballot offer you had to have booked on a tour and booked air flights and insurance before sending the acceptance offer. Security is tight, no buses will be allowed in, therefore you have to walk in the night of the 24th and then walk out on the 25th after the service at ANZAC Cove and Lone Pine Cemetery. There were 8000 Australians offered tickets and 2000 New Zealanders.

I am not aware of any tickets being available here in UK for relatives of those lost in the campaign but there will be three commemorative events in London on the 25th April : a Dawn Service at Hyde Park Corner, a service at The Cenotaph and a service at Westminster Abbey. There will be another event here in Portsmouth Naval Base on August 6th which I will try and get tickets for.



It seems to be conveniently lost in the mists of time the actual involvement of other nations in the Gallipoli campaign so to reiterate here are a few approximate statistics (sources vary):

Australia: 19441 wounded and missing - 8709 killed.

New Zealand : 4752 wounded and missing - 2721 killed.

British Empire (excl. Anzac) : 78520 wounded and missing - 34072 killed.

France : 17371 wounded and missing - 9798 killed.

Ottoman Empire (Turkey) : 107007 wounded and missing - 56643 killed.

Furthermore 1358 Indians died in Gallipoli, plus an unknown number of Germans, Newfoundlanders and Senegalese.

It is probably not common knowledge that many Australians who died of wounds at sea, whilst being transported back to Australia, are commemorated on Villers Brettoneux Memorial on the Somme.

We have an example of Private William Castles who died of illness whilst being transported back to Australia on HMAT 'SUEVIC' and was buried at sea on 8th November 1917 off Cape Town in South Africa.

Philippa Scarlett has been researching Australia's Indigenous Histories which can be found on her blog <http://indigenoushistories.com/>



William Castles came from Rooty Hill in the Parramatta district of New South Wales and was the great, great grandson of Yarramundi, chief of the Boorooberongal clan of the Darug. His mother was Ada Locke and his father Thomas Castles.

He first volunteered for the AIF in December 1914 but was discharged a month later when he refused inoculation. He must have overcome his fears by May 1916 when he volunteered a second time. The existence of his two attestations shows an interesting difference in physical description. While his complexion is initially given the general and not uncommon description 'dark' this becomes complexion 'brown' in his second attestation. Despite this more specific reference to his Aboriginality he was accepted into the AIF.

William Castles' served in France in 1916 and 1917 from Fromelles to the Hindenburg line and became a casualty on 21st May 1917 when he was wounded in both legs, his left hand and his arm. After spending three months in hospital, suffering also from a kidney condition, he was discharged on 27 September but died at sea on 23 October 1917. He was 21. His death triggered a series of letters from his family seeking custody of his medals which in the end were given to his brother Edward George Castles.

Rabaul Recast

The Office of Australian War Graves has been busy in Rabaul, Papua New Guinea as they have completely recast all of the plaques in the war cemetery of Bitapaka situated there.

Between 1884 and 1914, New Britain was known as New Pomerania and part of German New Guinea. On the 11th September 1914, in one of Australia's first actions of the 1914-18 war, its troops seized the German wireless station at Bitapaka near Rabaul. After the war, the island became part of the Territory of New Guinea, which was an Australian mandated territory. The site of the wireless station later became the War Cemetery.

In January 1942, after three weeks of air bombardment, Rabaul was attacked by the Japanese from the sea, and overwhelming odds soon broke the defence. It is estimated that against the original garrison of 1,400 the Japanese landed 17,000 men in the immediate vicinity of Rabaul.

The defenders split into small groups and while some 400 managed to escape by sea a great number were killed or captured. Of the latter, some 160 were murdered by the Japanese near Tol in February, whilst most of the remainder, plus some 200 civilians, were drowned when the ship, the Montevideo Maru, was torpedoed and sunk whilst moving them to the Philippines. Nevertheless, a number of the original garrison ran the gauntlet of the Japanese patrol and reached Australian territory in small vessels, overlooked when the Japanese commander sent destroyers steaming up and down the coast smashing all the boats to be found.



New Plaques at Rabaul

Small forces on New Ireland, which lies near and north-north-east of New Britain, had been attacked and overwhelmed on January 21st, 1942. It was not until November 1944 that New Britain was again the scene of fighting, when the 5th Australian Division landed at Jacquinot Bay, and the 11th Division at Wide Bay. The two Divisions cleared the north and south coasts and bottled up the enemy in the Gazelle Peninsula. Here the Japanese were contained until the final surrender in August 1945, when the number of their troops was found to be nearly 90,000. Rabaul was practically destroyed by Allied bombing and was never actually re-captured from the Japanese, but fell into our hands when they surrendered.

RABAUL (BITA PAKA) WAR CEMETERY was established by the Army Graves Service in 1945 and was taken over by the Commission in October 1947. It contains the graves of those who lost their lives during the operations in New Britain and New Ireland, or who died in the area while prisoners of war, which were brought into the cemetery from isolated sites, from temporary military cemeteries and from camp burial grounds. It appears to have been the Japanese plan to remove Europeans taken prisoner on these islands to areas from which it would have been harder to escape and to replace them by labour forces of Indian and other Asiatic troops captured in Malaya and elsewhere. This explains the large number of Indian remains recovered by the Australians during the 1945 campaign in New Britain and New Ireland, and the preponderance of Indian Army casualties buried here.

The cemetery contains 1,120 Commonwealth burials of the Second World War, 500 of them unidentified. This cemetery also contains First World War graves brought in from Rabaul Cemetery in 1950 and from Kokopo Old German Cemetery in 1961. Special memorials commemorate three casualties who were buried in Rabaul Old Civil Cemetery, but whose graves could not be traced following damage to the cemetery during the Japanese occupation. In all, 32 First World War servicemen are now buried or commemorated in the cemetery.

The RABAUL MEMORIAL, which stands within the cemetery, commemorates more than 1,200 members of the Royal Australian Army (including personnel of the New Guinea and Papuan local forces and constabulary) and Royal Australian Air Force who lost their lives in the area in January and February 1942 and from November 1944 to August 1945, and who have no known grave.

A DVD of all the new plaques were sent to TWGPP in January and can now be found on our site.

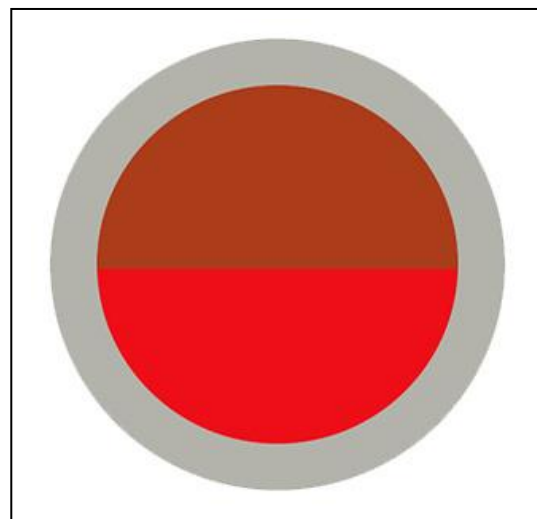
The Worst Aviation Related Disaster In Australian History: - Matt Sloan

Keeping on the subject of ANZAC casualties, Matt Sloan, who maintains the website www.LiberatorCrash.com, has allowed us to reproduce an article about a little known disaster that occurred on Papua New Guinea which involved the USAAF B-24D 42-40682 "Pride of the Cornhuskers" Liberator Bomber and the 2/33rd Battalion AIF. Matt offered us the images of the Australian graves which are to be found at Port Moresby cemetery but we already had them. However, we were able to help Matt with some of ours.

At 4.15 in the morning on 7th September 1943, a convoy of men from 2/33rd Infantry Battalion AIF would soon mount up and commence the 17 mile journey to Durand Airstrip to be airlifted to Nadzab in preparation for the assault upon Lae. The Japanese that held the territory had already proved to be a tough and tenacious foe. It was the first time an entire Australian Division, around 10,000 men were to be airlifted into a war zone. This would be a day to remember and be a morning they would struggle to forget.

At Jackson's airfield, the Pratt & Whitney engines of an American Liberator bomber turned over in the pre-dawn darkness. Flight Officer Howard J. Wood, an experienced pilot with 628 hours under his belt, busily worked through his pre- take off checks.

Hailing from Nebraska U.S.A, Wood's mount was christened "Pride of the Cornhuskers" in honour of his home state. At a cost of \$297,627.00 to the U.S. taxpayer , it was a huge responsibility for a young man of 21 years.



'Mud and Blood – The badge of the 2/33rd Battalion AIF

Not to mention the lives of his ten crew members who went about preparing themselves for today's mission; an armed reconnaissance flight to Rabaul.

The Liberator could carry a bomb load of 12 x 500 lb bombs when not fitted with supplementary bomb bay fuel tanks. However on this day, the aircraft would be loaded up with just 4 x 500 pounders. On a reconnaissance mission such as this and with a reduced bomb load, the aircraft could manage the return trip utilising her standard internal tanks with a full fuel capacity of 2,800 gallons.

Beyond the end of the runway, the ground was relatively flat and clear for a distance of approximately 1000 yards. A low ridge, peppered with trees ran perpendicular to the runway. On the reverse side of this tree line, the ground dropped steadily away to form a small valley through which a creek ambled lazily. The undulating ground then rose gently to form a second ridge, much lower than the first. In fact, this second ridge was later determined to be 25 feet lower than runway elevation. Capable of housing a large number of vehicles, this rise was designated the marshalling area for troop transport vehicles bound for Durand Airstrip. Situated within the 7 Australian Division Marshalling area; this holding point lay approximately half a mile from the eastern end of 7 mile drome. When this site was chosen, nobody could have envisaged that troops mustered in this low lying ground would be in harm's way. On the next ridge to the Durand marshalling area was Wards marshalling area; with the Jackson marshalling area being furthest from the airfield. The topography consisted of a series of small hills and re-entrants which could comfortably accommodate the embussing of an AIF battalion. As such there were 18 trucks at the Durand marshalling area containing men from A, C and D companies of the 2/33rd Infantry Battalion. The lead truck for 'D' Company (known as Don Company) contained Captain John Boyd Ferguson. A popular officer, he served with this unit in Syria until he was injured. Having recovered from his wounds, this would be his first action against the Japanese. Ferguson sat on the passenger seat in the small, cramped cabin of the 3 ton Chevy with the driver seated to his right.

For the drivers of the 158 General Transport Company it was just another routine day in the heat and dust of Port Moresby. Their passengers had already been delayed by 24 hours as a result of bad weather over the Owen Stanley Range. However today's conditions looked promising. Fully loaded up with rifle or machine carbine ammunition and grenades, the diggers could expect to be in action within a day or so of landing on the other side of the mountains. Some carried 2" mortars, others stowed spare magazines in their webbing for the Bren guns. As such, they were fully prepared for what lay ahead. Or so they thought. USAAF C-47 aircraft at Durand Airstrip awaited their arrival. Previously known as Waigani, Durand Airfield was named in honour of P-39 pilot Edward D. Durand who went missing in action on April 30, 1942



**5th USAAF Badge -
WWII**

The official history of the 2/33rd Battalion by Bill Crooks titled "The Foot Soldiers" records the reaction to the departure of the first aircraft on that fateful morning. Noting the 'deep-throated blast' and roar of aero engines at 4.20am, aircraft lights were seen through the trees on the far ridge. A Liberator passed overhead at an estimated height of 100 feet causing one soldier to remark "Christ! He was close. I hope we don't stay here too long". Well away from the Durand marshalling area, Flight Officer Wood lined up on the western end of the southernmost runway. Evidence suggests this southernmost runway was classified as the 'fighter' strip. Regardless, it was deemed to be of sufficient length for B-24's to safely complete their take off run. 'Pride of the Cornhuskers' would be the second aircraft to depart this morning. The take off was witnessed by Corporal Angus O'BRIEN of the 3rd Australian Divisional Provost Company at the eastern end of the runway.

He gave the following evidence during the official inquiry:- " On the morning of 7 September 1943, I was on convoy duty. At approximately 0430 hours, convoy was halted at the top end of Jackson's drome facing the drome. I was at the head of the convoy which consisted of 18 vehicles. I heard the roar of the motors of a plane coming up the strip. I looked down the strip but could not at first see any plane. After a few seconds I noticed a fire which outlined the plane engine coming towards me. The fire appeared to be in the cowling of the engine. I glanced back along the convoy and when I looked again the plane was passing overhead. I noticed that it was a Liberator and that the fire was in an engine on the port side of the plane. I estimate that the height of the plane was approximately 30 feet. The breeze from the plane blew the hats off some of the men in the truck. The convoy started to move off and had travelled about 50 yards when I heard the sound of two almost simultaneous explosions come from the direction of the marshalling area. I looked back and noticed a glow in the sky."

This report of explosions and a 'glow in the sky' heralded the worst aviation related disaster in Australian history. For reasons unknown, the Liberator failed to gain sufficient height and hurtled towards the men on the ground. Witnesses yelled of the impending danger but there was no time to take evasive action. The port wing was sheared off when it struck a tree on the downward slope, across the other side of the creek. Like a wounded bird, the huge bomber came crashing down onto the hillside near the Durand marshalling area - spewing forward a wave of burning aviation fuel.

Five lorries were hit by flying wreckage and engulfed in the resulting fire which turned night into day. The lorry occupied by Captain Ferguson appeared to take the full shock of the explosion, causing it to overturn. There were no seatbelts fitted to this vehicle. The lorry rolled onto the passenger side and the body weight of the driver undoubtedly pinned Captain Ferguson inside the cabin. Both men were incinerated. A three bladed prop from one of the engines spun wildly through the air and slammed into the third lorry in the line of Don Company vehicles. The propeller hub complete with twisted blades, lodged partially on the cabin – coming to rest in the rear tray of the lorry which had been full of men.



Propeller blade in the cab of a truck

Neville Edgar LEWIS, a 22 year old Regimental Signaller from H.Q. Company, was on loan to Don Company with two other signallers, Bill ALEXANDER and Alan FURNANCE. He said "I was in the No. 1 truck that Captain Ferguson was in there were 21 of us in there.

I did not know Captain Ferguson very well as I was normally in H.Q. Company. I was sitting in the back of the truck on a 108 wireless set and just dozing when I heard the noise. I looked out and remember seeing the shape of a plane and then the nose hit the truck and I was flung out and knocked unconscious. I was taken to the hospital and was burned on my legs, arms, back & a head injury. And they took a slice to the second bottom part of my spine. I spent 9 weeks in hospital due to my injuries. There were 15 killed out of the 21 in the first truck”.

The small valleys and re-entrants became rivulets of burning aviation fuel. Screams of pain and despair were drowned out by explosions as the flames reached the ammunition in the vehicles. Human torches ran in panic or rolled around on the ground. Veteran Bill Crooks wrote that diggers would suddenly “disappear as either the grenades or 2 inch mortar bombs they were carrying in their clothes or equipment exploded”.

It is evident that two of the 500 lb bombs had exploded immediately following the impact. A third bomb exploded a short time later. The fourth bomb failed to explode and lodged underneath a lorry occupied by men of ‘C’ Company. When Lieutenant Ray Whitfield jumped from the vehicle and tripped over an object, he looked down and saw the tail fins of the 500 pounder lodged behind the front wheels. He said loudly “Christ, please don’t go off”. Ray was the last to leave that vehicle.

The U.S.A.A.F. conducted an investigation into the crash; as did the 7th Australian Division. The official U.S. report considered that factors attributing to the crash were the result of 90% pilot error and 10% weather. Interestingly, the Australian court of inquiry was of the opinion the cause of the crash will always remain a mystery. They indicated there was no evidence of neglect on the part of the pilot.

This accident took place in the pre-dawn darkness. Whilst there was a slight mist along the creek line due to the moisture, witnesses on the higher ground near the end of the airfield gave evidence that the weather was clear. In accordance with the darkness before sun rise, Flight Officer WOOD carried out the take-off under instrument conditions. The U.S. report states that he failed to climb to a sufficient altitude before lowering the nose of the aircraft to increase his airspeed. The report goes on to claim, “Going directly from contact to instrument flying in B-24 aircraft, immediately after take-off is trying on the best of pilots, for flight instruments can very easily give erratic readings at the moment the aircraft becomes airborne”. Lieutenant Colonel Harry J. HAWTHORNE, U.S. Army Air Corps stated that under ordinary circumstances, an aircraft should have no difficulty in making the necessary height with the length of runway available. Prior to the aircraft colliding with trees, a number of witnesses (as evidenced by Corporal Angus O’BRIEN) reported seeing flames emitting from a port side engine. Lieutenant Colonel HAWTHORNE made comment regarding this report; indicating that in normal circumstances, flames frequently emerge from the supercharger of an engine. Subsequently he discounted engine failure.

In accordance with the Australian findings, we will never learn the true cause of the accident. Tasked with transporting an entire Australian division and considering the urgency of the time, the 5th Air Force faced a huge work load during late 1943. Japanese strongholds drove the necessity to continue with air strikes against Rabaul and northern New Guinea to ensure success of this current operation. In light of this, it can be said that air force authorities could not, and did not allocate sufficient time and resources into investigating the cause of the crash. Certainly there was not the elaborate Air Crash Investigation and Forensic resources available in 1943, as there is now. However with the luxury of time and sufficient manpower, a more comprehensive conclusion may have been reached in this modern era.

Despite the uncertainty of what caused the accident, what can be proven is the moral fibre of the men who performed their duties during the aftermath of this tragic crash. The courage of the U.S. fire fighters on a rescue mission, clad in asbestos suits that walked directly into the flames is without question. And the bravery of diggers who thought of their mates, before themselves is reflected by a quote from the official 7th Division Inquiry:- “At the time of the crash there was not the slightest degree of panic and everyone who was able to do so, did what they could to assist the injured. Considerable presence of mind and initiative on the part of members present, no doubt contributed largely to minimising injuries and saving lives.” The men received no honours or awards, because despite the fact they awaiting to emplane to fly into battle, they were not already in battle. The strict censorship at the time of the crash also prevented any honours or awards for the heroic actions of these men.

Sixty infantrymen of the 2/33rd Battalion and two drivers of the 158 General Transport Company lost their lives as a result of the crash. The eleven crew in “Pride of the Cornhuskers” also suffered a terrifying death. A total of 73 men died, with over 90 subjected to horrific burns.

One of a few to be repatriated – Janice Harris



Janice Harris, in New Zealand, has recently requested an image from us of her relations headstone situated in Mombasa (Mbaraki) Cemetery, Kenya. This was a private memorial commemorating the death of Ordinary Seaman David Vigiland who died of illness aged 20 whilst serving on HMS CHITRAL. He was buried in the military cemetery section in 1946 but erected above his grave is the huge private (family) memorial and not the standard CWGC headstone that Janice was expecting. Having checked our archive, he is officially commemorated in City of London Cemetery here in UK and yet this grave in Mombasa is very well maintained along with the other war graves.

After David's death, his father John Vigiland started the fight to have David's body returned to England. He succeeded and it was sent back to Britain and reinterred in London cemetery on December 9 1952. Another huge sculptured monument was then commissioned made of marble and which was finished and dedicated in 1955.

The guided book for this cemetery describes it thus:

Today's visit ended fittingly at the Vigiland memorial – a single piece of white marble weighing in at over 20 tonnes, it was shipped over from Italy to commemorate the death of the 20-year old seaman David John Vigiland, whose family fought with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission for 10 years to allow them to repatriate his remains from Mombasa where he had serving as a seaman in the Royal Navy at the time of his death. Based on Raphael's painting, 'The Deposition', it is absolutely breath taking, and one can only imagine how much it cost. The back of the monument presents a rather more sobering aspect however – a set of small cameos are set in the stone which depict David and his loving parents...

Janice has found out, through further research, that David was the only child of her grandma's sister, Lucy. David's parents were not rich people, his father being a hairdresser in the London docks area. And yet where did the money come from for the two memorials to their son David? Her task is to find out more but it is proving a challenge!



Living with an unusual name

In the process of getting the images up to site we physically have to line up each named photograph to the line of data on our spreadsheet for a particular cemetery so that the image shown on site reflects the data displayed with it. This can be extremely time consuming especially in the larger cemeteries but it does highlight discrepancies in the data and the wording engraved on the headstone. More often than not what we would call 'Typo's but in this case it is predominantly through scanning errors when the CWGC scanned the originals ledgers to make up the digital database.



An actual comparison of the headstone name against the data must rarely be done as we are finding these regularly but one interesting factor is the fact that some of the names are quite unusual and you sometimes think the parents must have had a sense of humour at the time of naming their son.

One example is the headstone for Lance Corporal *S.H.A.R.P SHARP* who is buried at Bonnay Communal Cemetery. His parents must have pondered for ages how to get the forename initials to match those of his surname but decided on Septimus, Harry, Archibald, Richard, Percy.



Another chap who was obviously named in memory of a fallen member of the family had to live with the forenames 'Vimy Ridge' until his death during WWII in Eritrea. Gunner *Vimy Ridge Payne* now lies in Keren War Cemetery having died on 13th January 1941.

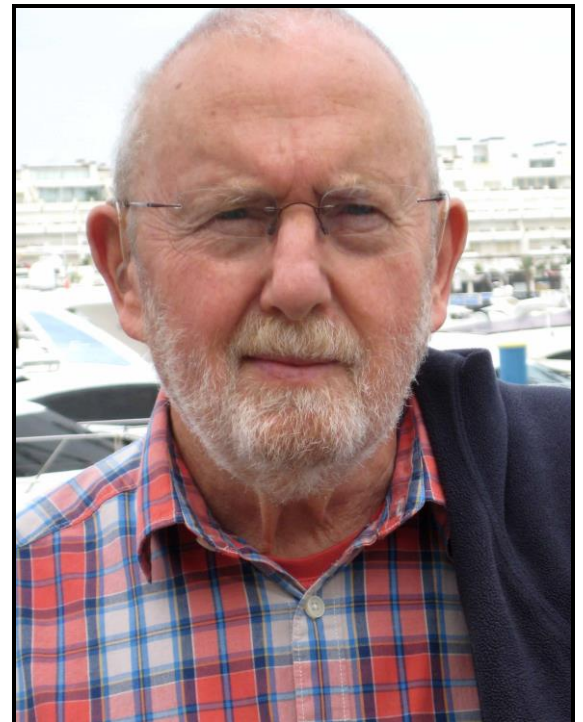
Geoff Thorndike – In Memoriam

We were saddened to hear the news of the death of Geoff Thorndike back in February.

Geoff was born in Leeds in 1937 and completed National Service with the Royal Air Force in the late 1950's.

Geoff and his wife Marsha had been a couple of our earliest volunteers before TWGPP was even in operation. They had covered much of Yorkshire in our early days then joined us on larger photographic trips like those we arranged in France, Belgium and Holland.

He was one of the first to introduce us to the camera with the rotating viewfinder so he was often seen in front of a headstone looking directly down into the viewfinder to get the best shot. A picture of him has always been in our front page header whilst photographing the graves at Arnhem.



In 2008 Geoff and Marsha joined the TWGPP team in Gallipoli to help complete the whole of the peninsula and since then he had been revisiting many cemeteries in Yorkshire to update the archive or teaming up with Jim and Pauline Pedersen for further photographic trips to France.

Geoff and Marsha promoted the Project whenever they could by giving illustrated talks to various organisations where they lived and were recently interviewed for an article in 'Peoples Friend' magazine about TWGPP and explained what satisfaction they got from helping the project.

Marsha says "We so enjoyed our involvement with the Project and I am so glad that we had the chance to do something so worthwhile, visit some fabulous places and meet new friends".

Our thoughts are with Marsha at this time and all that knew Geoff will sorely miss him.

Black Thursday - 16th / 17th December 1943

Back on the 8th of January, on what would have been the 100th birthday of Flight Lieutenant William Alfred Colson DFM, Mrs Wyn Harrison requested the photo of his gravestone at Willesden New Cemetery. He is one of hundreds of RAF casualties spread around UK in small and large cemeteries which many people pass by without knowing the circumstances of their death.

Given the fact that Germany and Britain have recently commemorated the 70th Anniversary of the bombing of Dresden, with little mention of the sacrifice of the Allied Aircrew who had to fly on these extremely dangerous missions night after night, it might be a good time to highlight just one of these men.



William 'Billy' Colson was Wyn's mother's cousin. He was killed on 17th December 1943 aged 28 on a date which was to become known as 'Black Thursday' whilst returning to his base in Cambridgeshire. The night of 16th / 17th December 1943, saw the loss of twenty-five Bomber Command Lancaster's during a raid on Berlin. However, a further thirty-one aircraft were lost due to the fog over England. Most of these crashed or were abandoned when their crews bailed out, or in the case of two unfortunate crews collided over Lincolnshire. Other aircraft —Stirlings, Halifaxes and Lysanders, on training or Special Duties flights — also crashed due to the fog.

The Lancaster JB119-OF-F, F-Freddy in which 'Billy' was flying crashed at 00:45 on the morning of 17th December, due to the fog, on the edge of Bourn airfield in Cambridgeshire and at once caught fire. Along with Billy, two others of the crew were killed. Squadron Leader Donald Forbes Mackenzie, Flight Engineer: P/O John Towler Pratt,

William Alfred 'Billy' Colson

Billy Colson was standing in for Ivor Glynn Stephens, the crew's usual bomb aimer, who was not flying on 'Black Thursday' and thus escaped death or serious injury.

Wynn sent us his photograph saying " I am attaching his photograph as I thought you might like to see how young and handsome he was. He was much loved." - *Something to remember when you next walk past an RAF casualty in UK.*

Others who did not make it home

Continuing on the theme of allied aircrew, during a recent weekend break to Munich we took the opportunity to conduct a revisit to the war cemetery at Durnbach close to the Austrian border. Prior to the visit we had received a request from a Mr Lyndsay Terreau in Canada asking if we had got a photo of his father's grave in our archive.

Flying officer Jean Paul Herbert Terreau was flying on a bombing raid to Munich in a Lancaster aircraft, Serial number JB661, from Wickenby as a member of 626 Squadron. It was one of two Lancaster's that crashed during this raid with all crew killed and these men now lie in Durnbach War Cemetery.

We had said to Lyndsay that we could place a message at his grave which we did but decided to read it out at Jeans gravesite and leave it for others to see. We also took plenty of photographs which Lyndsay appreciated.



Dear Dad,

Oh , if only we could sit and talk

However, after mom passed away in 1976, her memory box of treasures was given to me and facts that I never knew came to light. In 1987 I was able to visit your grave, deep in Germany, but beautifully maintained even today as I write this note. From your log book I could follow your tracks through Wales and into England where you Squadron flew out of Wickenby and in 2003 my wife and I attended one of the last 626 Squadron reunions in Lincoln.

Through a person we met at the reunion I was able to make contact with a chap in Australia who had filled in for you when you were side lined for a few weeks with an ear infection. I only heard about the reason for the lapse in your log book because of two unopened letters from France that uncle Marcel had sent to you, which I found in his memory box after he passed away in 1996.

These letters were written to you in January 1945 and were returned to him. He had kept them all this time and it fell to me , almost 50 years later to the day, to open and read them, I hope you don't mind. All these papers, photos and letters have been carefully preserved in a book for future generations to keep.

In speaking of future generations, in a few days I will be turning seventy (where has the time gone?) but I am proud to tell you that you have a grandson, Owen, who will be forty next year and that he has a son, Christopher, who is four... therefore your legacy and name live on.

The latest coincidence in this ongoing story is a note I received from a lady in the War Graves Photographic Project who is visiting Durnbach. She has offered to take this note to your final resting place and bring back a more recent photograph... how obliging is that? Your Squadron motto was: "To Strive and not to yield" and I wanted you to know that we are still striving but not yielding!

Until we meet

Love from your son Lyndsay – September 16th 2014



New cemeteries for the project in Africa

Joseph Kigotho and his team based in Kenya, Africa have been visiting some of the cemeteries within their domain to maintain as part of the Commissions Africa & Asia Department.

Joseph had been in contact some months back and suggested that his team photograph any outstanding sites in Africa during these visits so we were pleased to receive a number of CD's in February with the completed sites of Keren War Cemetery in Eritrea and Mangochi Town Cemetery in Malawi. These were very much appreciated as it was very unlikely we will find anyone to help in these countries.

I was working on HMS RICHMOND as she prepared for an 8 month deployment starting in March and found out that she was also visiting some countries in Africa where we have some outstanding sites.



I have left a letter with the Public Relations Officer on board in the hope that some of her Ships Company may be able to assist. When I was serving in the Royal Navy I'd often visit the war cemeteries which started my interest in recording war graves. I got a bit of a reputation as a 'Grave Spotter' but I looked at it more as a 'Culture Vulture'.

On another occasion, whilst walking through Portsmouth Dockyard recently, I got talking to a chap who is preparing to visit Simons Town near Cape Town, South Africa in June this year. He had never heard of TWGPP but mentioned that he had always wanted to see his relations war grave in Nova Scotia. Within 24 hours he had the photographs so is now keen to help in Dido Valley cemetery, Simons Town when he gets there. It's good to talk!

'Networking' always helps as his work colleague is in touch on a daily basis with HMS SEVERN currently deployed in the Caribbean. She is visiting a number of Islands so a list has gone that way of our 'wants'.

You may see a future article about sailors in the sun helping us!

Shippers- who's RAS'd me Bats?

Just a Minor Crisis!

We hear of small businesses going under quite frequently in the news but always consider the fallout will affect others and not us as individuals. You can imagine my shock / horror when I had an e mail from the Director of the website company stating that they have now gone bust and no longer operating!

Things were not looking good as the implications were that the site could disappear from the web. Up until now I had had no access to it apart from minor changes as I had left all the maintenance and bigger updates down to the company.

I decided to visit the office as soon as I could (the following Friday afternoon) only to find it empty and the security guards stating that everyone had come in one morning during the week, picked up their belongings and gone!

I then spent a good few hours phoning around and eventually got through to a new website hosting company who has bought out our server. Fortunately, the chap I spoke to seemed to know what he was up to and mentioned that other web sites had been in touch due to the collapse. There were a number of worried people out there.

Things have settled a bit now so the site is ok and operating on another server but I am arranging for some training so that I can do some of the updates in future.

The thing that bugs me most is the fact that there was no notice of the collapse until it had occurred, so no one got the chance to prepare for it with alternative solutions.

British West Indies Regiment in Jerusalem – Anna Habibt

In a cemetery of uniform graves, one stood out. In a space almost twice as wide as the other graves were two headstones, set so close they were almost touching each other and identical except for the details of the men buried under them: 1778 Private JH Scott, who was 22, and 1713 Private T Martin, 24.

I was intrigued. For a start, I'd never seen a double grave before, so I wondered why the men had been buried together – were they relatives, or very close friends? Had one died trying to save the other? Had I discovered one of the great untold stories of World War I?

Secondly, these men were members of the British West Indies Regiment (BWIR); what were West Indians doing being buried in the Jerusalem War Cemetery in East Jerusalem? I mean, I've seen Indian – as in South Asian – veterans of World War II in Remembrance Day commemorations, but it had never occurred to me that men from elsewhere in the Commonwealth (or as it was then, Empire) other than Australia, New Zealand and Canada had even fought in WWI, let alone served in this part of the world.

So, back in England, I contacted the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. They had no more information on JH Scott other than he, like Martin, was in the BWIR's 2nd Battalion and was from Jamaica. "T Martin", though, was Thomas, the son of William and Charlotte Matilda Martin, of Ocho Rios, Jamaica. Double graves, I was told, are not uncommon – they were usually used when the bodies in the grave couldn't be formally identified.

Even though that looked like the likely explanation here – Martin and Scott had been blown up together, perhaps? – I felt I should try to find out more. Yes, war cemeteries all over the world have mass graves containing the remains of more than just two, and some personnel were so obliterated there was no trace of them to be found, let alone put in a grave, but, still, I felt Martin and Scott had somehow been robbed of their identities, and I owed it to them to return them in some way, maybe by finding out more about them and how they died.



However, it seems that there are hardly any records relating to the BWIR in WWI in this country. Almost all the few that had existed were, ironically, destroyed in an air-raid in WWII. The best place to look for clues, it seemed, was the Imperial War Museum. A librarian there produced a copy of "Jamaica's Part in the Great War" by Frank Cundall. The book was published in 1925 by the West India Commission in London to commemorate West Indians' contribution to the war effort, in Europe and elsewhere. Of course, what I was interested in was the part relating to the War in the Middle East, and most of this was based on "A Brief Record of the Advance of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force" by General Allenby, the commander of the British forces in the Palestine campaign.

According to Cundall, about 15,000 men from throughout the West Indies signed up. They ranged in age from 15 to 48, and were of all occupations, from labourers to printers. A Conscription Law was passed but it was never enforced, as so many men had enlisted; as Cundall put it: "Every man who went to the front was a volunteer." It looked likely that Scott and Martin were in the contingent that landed in Egypt between January and March 1916 and joined Australian and New Zealander troops in the EEF, which, basically fought south to north from Egypt to Turkey.

The book had very little information about the 2nd Battalion, but quite a lot about the 1st. I couldn't see any reason why the two battalions wouldn't have been fighting close to each other, and while the diary described heavy fighting in the Jordan Valley in mid-to-late September 1918, by the end of the month, it had moved to around Damascus. If the EEF was fighting south to north, how come Scott and Martin were killed around 100 miles south of Damascus in the middle of October?

Cundall had added to the mystery, not solved it. What he did do, though, is include a Roll of Honour of BWIR casualties, including, of course, Martin and Scott – and Scott's first name, James.



Seeing those names on the yellowing paper was, for some reason, really moving, and I had to bend my head really low over the page to hide the tears in my eyes. Sentiment fest over, though, I had to continue my quest; but where?

“The war diaries in the National Archives?” suggested the IWM librarian helpfully. Before I made it to Kew, I managed to find out a bit about the BWIR. Men had all manner of reasons for signing up, from a desire for adventure to a sense of patriotism (encouraged, apparently, by the Empire authorities). For all their patriotism, though, there are claims that the black soldiers were subject to racism and discrimination, that, for example, the regiment was only formed after the authorities became “concerned” about the number of “native” troops in ordinary units. Black troops were barred from actual fighting at first, especially on the Western Front; they were given support tasks, such as digging ditches and carrying supplies, that were still dangerous and unpleasant. Some people maintain that the black troops were treated like servants, and that they didn’t fight in Europe because their British bosses didn’t want the Germans to think that they needed the help of ‘savages’ to win the war.



The Jamaica Defence Force – the modern Jamaican army and the heir to the BWIR – says others claimed that “putting guns in the hands of black men would be a mistake.” But then there are others, including veterans of the BWIR, who said they didn’t view their treatment as discriminatory or unfair, or their experiences as any ‘worse’ than those of white troops. However, later, at Kew, I was to read correspondence about War Pay only being extended to ‘native’ troops in February 1919 when it had been available to other (ie white) troops from September 1917.

But that correspondence was in the 1st Battalion’s war diary; the one for the 2nd Battalion was as disappointingly sparse as Cundall’s book. I leafed through the pages to 14-15 October. Nothing, but then:

“Ram-Allah, October 28

“The following men were killed and wounded by the explosion of Jericho-Jane dump at Shunet Nimrim on 15 October 1918:

“Killed, Sgt Edwards LR No 1619, ‘D’ Coy’ Pte Martin T No 1713, ‘D’ Coy & Pte Scott JH No 1778, ‘D’ Coy.”

In an entry a few weeks earlier I found a clue: most of the battalion had been sent north, but D Company had been left to guard an enemy ammunition dump at Shunet Nimrin. So much for my flights of fantasy about battlefield ‘bromances’ and so on – Scott and Martin had died in an explosion. But at least if their bodies couldn’t be told apart, they must have been killed instantly so wouldn’t have felt anything.

Later, thanks to the internet, I found this extract from “The New Zealanders in Sinai and Palestine”, by Lieut.-Colonel C. Guy Powles, an NZ officer:

“On these last days the enemy shelled the Division with his long range gun at Shunet Nimrin, known to our troops as “Nimrin Nelly”. This gun fired right across the Jordan valley bursting shrapnel at a range of 10 miles; and together with “Jericho Jane”, who sat upon the mountains north of Jerusalem, was fond of putting their great shells into Jericho causing many casualties among the inhabitants there.”

I’ll never know exactly what caused the explosion that killed Scott and Martin (and Sgt Edwards), or whether anything could have been done to prevent it, but at least I know now what happened. I might not have uncovered some great untold story, but I like to think I have gone some way towards returning the identities of the two young men who were killed. And I’ve definitely learned something about an aspect of the War that I had had no idea about before.

A full version of the above can be found in "A Year on Fire Mountain" by Anna Habibti

Sub Lieutenant Francis Henry James Startin – Royal Naval Division

Finally, as part of this Gallipoli commemoration and to highlight just one of thousands of the British contingent who fought and died in Gallipoli I thought I would include details of one of my 'local' lads whose family came from Hayling Island, here on the south coast of Hampshire.

Francis Startin was born on 3rd November 1891. The fact that his father was a Vice Admiral (later Admiral) Sir James Startin probably influenced a career in the Royal Navy. Francis was educated at the Britannia Royal Naval College at Dartmouth and commissioned as a Sub Lieutenant but was subsequently invalided out of the Royal Navy in 1913 due to poor eyesight having suffered from scarlet fever at a young age.

At the outbreak of war in August 1914 he joined the newly formed Nelson Battalion of the Royal Naval Division and sent to the Near East at end of February 1915 and proceeded in due course to Gallipoli. Obviously the poor eyesight was no longer a problem!

The 1st Royal Naval Brigade, to which Nelson Battalion were attached, landed at Anzac Cove on the 29th April 1915 and moved up Shrapnel valley to the forward defence line.

On 21st July 1915 General A. PARIS, C.B., Commanding the Royal Naval Division, Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, Dardanelles, sent a letter to Vice Admiral Startin referring to the action in which his son was reported wounded .

"On 12th July the 52nd Territorial Division attacked a portion of the Turkish line. This Division had relieved the Naval Division, which had come back for a " rest."

'The attack, at first successful, soon got into difficulties, and, by the afternoon of the 13th, the 52nd had lost most of the ground gained, and we were ordered to recapture the lost trenches. Five Battalions, the Nelson in the centre, carried this out in a most gallant manner.

The advance was necessarily hurried and confused, the casualties very severe. The Nelson and Portsmouth Battalions pushed on rather too far, and it must have been when beyond the furthest trench, that your boy was hit. He refused to be taken in to the trench until Volunteers had been obtained to bring in other wounded men out in front. A very gallant act and example. We heard he was severely wounded, but his death on board the 'Grantully Castle' was a great shock.

'Though our losses were severe, the gain is considerable, and what might have been a big disaster was turned into a success by the operations in which your son lost his life. Poor boy, he was doing so well.'

Further letters and telegrams to Vice Admiral Startin confirmed the fate of Francis.

Admiralty

9th August 1915

Sir,

I am commanded by My Lords commissioners of the Admiralty to forward herewith a copy of a telegram which has been received from Base at Alexandria relating the circumstances in which your son, Sub Lieutenant Francis HJ Startin RNVR , sustained the wounds in action in the Dardanelles from which he subsequently died on board the Hospital Ship "Grantully Castle"



In forwarding this report My Lords desire me to express to you their high appreciation of your son's fine courage and devotion to duty, as revealed in the contents of the telegram.

I am Sir,

Your obedient servant

O. Murray

FROM- Admiralty	TO- Third Echelon - Alexandria	DATE- 6 th August 1915 TIME- System -
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Your M.F.C 8063 – twenty first July to Roynadiv request report by wire giving particulars wounds and death Sub lieutenant Startin J.J.H Nelson Battalion, R,N Battalion.

FROM- Third Echelon - Alexandria	TO- Admiralty	DATE- 7 th August TIME- 6.50 pm System -
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M.F.C 9962 August 7th late Sub lieutenant Startin, following unofficial information reached records, seriously wounded in abdomen outside fire trenches when in charge of a party of men. Continued doing duty encouraging his men 36 hours. Stretcher bearers being unable to reach him during this time. Subsequently removed to field ambulance and died of wounds on board hospital ship Grantully Castle and buried Cape Helles. Chaplin close knows full details and asking him to write full particulars

In later correspondence Sub Lieutenant Hobbs, who had been serving alongside Francis when he was fatally wounded, wrote to Sir James and Lady Startin.

*Alexandria, EGYPT-
Feb.. 25th. 1916.*

I am proud to say I knew your Son, Sub. Lieut. Startin, I deeply sympathize with you in- your loss, he was a Son to be proud of; his fellow Officers and Men who served with him remember him with Pride and Reverence; in, those early days when the fighting was so severe, he proved himself to be, Cool Capable and Courageous.

In the month of June the Battalion made and occupied a trench a good part of which was within a biscuit toss of the enemy (the place was ever after called Nelson Avenue) the Battalion- held it against all attacks with bayonet and bombs for about 10 days, when they were relieved, still cheerful, but Oh so tired and weary. During this trying period, your Son was ever to the fore with a cherry word and a smile, right in the thick of it, throwing bombs or using his revolver as the occasion demanded, really a host in himself; His men admired him for his pluck, loved him for his cheeriness.

The attack on July 13th, in which your Son was wounded was very costly, both to the Nelson and the Portsmouth, who were on our immediate right; our orders were to go over three and into the fourth trench, my Company (B) was the extreme left of the advance your Son's (A) was the right Company of our Battalion, against the left of the -Portsmouth, there was a slight rise in the ground a little to my right; when we had advanced about 200 yards, this rising ground prevented me from seeing how things were going in the centre and on the right.

The left of the attack got to their objective, but the centre (which was the right of the Nelson and the left of the Portsmouth) advanced still further, as there was apparently no trench in line with the one which the left had taken, one of the few men who came back told me they must have gone 200 to 300 yards without finding a trench to get into; it was whilst out there that your Son was wounded.

The attack was launched somewhere between 4.40 and 5 p.m. It was dark when your Son reached our trench; he had crawled back to us to tell us there were some of our wounded out in front, he refused to come into the trench until he was assured that a party were on their way out to bring them in. We made him as comfortable as possible we had advanced a considerable distance, and all of our doctors were working at top speed in their regional aid posts, attending to the wounded as they came in) his wound was in the abdomen, the only thing possible was to dress the external part, and keep him lying down without food or water, from the time to time we moistened his lips, he was extremely plucky, and although he must have been in considerable pain, he never complained. About daylight of the 14th the fighting which had been fairly heavy eased up.

I moved along the trench to see him, he greeted me with a smile and handclasp, asked how things were going, and when he would be taken back. I told him it would be better for him to remain with us for a couple of days, he answered " Yes, I know, but you won't leave me here when the battalion is relieved , will you?". I told him we would take him with us if we were relieved, he would be sent down as soon as it was considered safe to move him, he was quite content, as the day wore on, he seemed to get a little stronger. I asked him how he felt, he said that his wound was much easier and he thought that he would be alright: the whole of the time he was there with us he has a cheery word or smile for anyone who came along to sit with him; we all thought that he was on the road to recovery and on the night of the 15th 16th he was carried back, with a smile on his face in spite of his wound. Whilst I was sitting with him in the 14th he said " Don't worry Hobbs I am quite prepared and ready, everything is in the hands of our maker".

Every officer and man in the battalion, were greatly grieved when we heard of his death, for in him we had lost a splendid Officer, also a clean living and god fearing man. In this war where one is continually face to face with death, one realizes the beautifulness' of such a life as your son lived.



Sub Lt. Startin now lies in Lancashire Landing Cemetery - Gallipoli

A few days ago, I was talking with a doctor through whose his hands he passed on his way to the clearing Hospital at W Beach. The doctor said " If ever there was a brick, it was young Startin" and I am jolly glad to see that he is mentioned in dispatches and I am sure that everyone who knew him says the same.

As this doctor had attended him on his way down, I asked him if anything could have been done for him, he said the only thing he can do for those wounds is to keep him quiet and without food for a couple of days, as we had done. Had we moved him it would have robbed him of his only chance of recovery.

I hope these few lines will convey to you a little of the esteem and admiration in which your son's name is held by all who served with him. Believe me I deeply sympathize with you in the loss of so noble a son.

Sincerely yours
Arthur Hobbs
Sub-Lt "Nelson"

Stalag XXA Funeral – Mark Burbidge

Mark Burbidge's father spent some during WWII as a Prisoner of War in Stalag XXA which was located at Toruń in Poland. The camp was based around 15 forts that surrounded the city that had been built in the 19th century to defend this western border of Prussia. Originally the camp held Polish prisoners after the surrender of Poland but in 1940 British prisoners captured in the allied campaign in Norway and then a further 4,500 arrived from Dunkirk. At the peak there were around 10,000 prisoners. Whilst imprisoned there he witnessed a number of funerals of personnel.



It would appear that prisoners were allowed to purchase 'proof' copies of the funerals which we would assume were sent back to the families. The funerals were not quite as 'make do' as I was expecting but amongst the photos that have been supplied to TWGPP there are at least three separate funerals but in each, the coffin is draped in a White Ensign of the Royal Navy and transported to the local cemetery by a horse drawn hearse. This is led by a German guard and flanked by other PoW's with a further cortège of other prisoners bringing up the rear.



Private Robert Park RAMC has a grave adorned with wreaths along with ribbons including the German Cross and Swastika emblems. He was later exhumed with other men buried in this local cemetery and reinterred in Malbork Cemetery, Poland

Articles for the next newsletter, due in July 2015,
should be sent via e mail to steve@twgpp.org



THE WAR GRAVES
PHOTOGRAPHIC PROJECT