



# THE WAR GRAVES PHOTOGRAPHIC PROJECT



In Association  
with the CWGC



## News from the Front line

January 2012

Well that's another year under the (ever increasing) belt. Getting that little bit more mature comes to us all and even I am now getting what I call 'Brain fade' and managed to forget to add pages 8 to 10 to the last newsletter. No one will have noticed but as the topics are not seasonal I have included them in this edition.

Many thanks to those of you that gave the project some publicity in the run up to Remembrance Day this year. Magazines like Family Tree included us in their 'Tweets' <http://family-tree.co.uk/2011/10/the-war-graves-photographic-project>. and Family History Monthly ensured we got a bit more publicity in an article on transcribing gravestones. I must admit I have yet to delve into 'Tweeting or Blogging' but a number of you mentioned the project, via this media, during this period which is appreciated.

As usual it was a busy time for requests, which lasted until the end of November, with the archive being able to supply all but a couple of requests in areas difficult to get to. These were subsequently obtained by the out of area offices of the CWGC and forwarded to those that requested them.

I hope that you all had a wonderful Christmas and New Year. I normally turn the PC off on Christmas Eve for a couple of days but noticed that a few of you also found not much (worth watching) on TV over the period so I did have a quick check on the 25<sup>th</sup> to find 3 requests outstanding from overnight. Obviously the families were thinking of these chaps on this special day so they were fulfilled before anyone else got up at 'Chez Rogers'. They were my 'three wise men..' for the day.

### Christmas Kiss? – Anne Edwards

Les was at our parents grave on Sunday at Lodge Hill municipal cemetery in Birmingham (and wouldn't you know it was one of the few days I have not been there) when a couple stopped their car to ask if he knew where the war graves were. He pointed them out but they said they had tried there but needed WW1 so he redirected them. They were surprised that he was so well informed so he told them about the Project. Whereupon the lady got out and kissed him! She had been searching for her grandfather and had no luck until she came across the TWGPP website. She asked him to pass on her grateful thanks to everyone involved.



'The Great Escape' was re-enacted at Alsop Le Dale

## Steve Hollier - In Memoriam

It is with sadness that I have to announce the untimely death of one of our volunteers in Azerbaijan. Steve Hollier died whilst at home with his partner Sandra in Baku on October 27<sup>th</sup>. Steve was an international travel photojournalist who touched a lot of lives and wrote and photographed with beautiful and very cultured insight.. He had helped the project by photographing the Azeri war graves in Baku along with many other memorials throughout his travels. An example of his personal work can be found at this link.

<http://stevhollier.wordpress.com/2010/10/22/moscow-dogs-forwarded-by-sandra>



## First Love still Remembered – Paul Ten Broeke



Paul Ten Broeke who is assisting the project in The Netherlands was moved to find a recent poppy cross on a grave along with a card which said the following:-

*“Mum. You died 3 years ago and your wish was to be with Bert Stebbings, your first love. They met when they were 11 year old and married at 17. He then lost his life at 24. Mum, Eileen Corbett, was 84 and for the last 30 years she visited the grave every year. I will now take on that role”*

This had been laid by Berts’ grave by her daughter Christine Brown of Barnet, England.

Paul is happy to assist in any such visits by ‘Christine’ so if anyone, on the off chance, knows her let Steve know and he can pass details on.

## Some kind hand place a flower for me

RAF Sergeant Bob Kinnell’s grave at Sola in Norway has the inscription *“Sleep on Dear Bob your grave I cannot see but some kind hand may place a flower for me”*.

After the snow had thawed Marie and Hans-Jørgen who took the original pictures went back in the spring to lay the flowers but it was especially good to be able to supply the images to a friend of the family who recently who requested them.

Margaret Stevens responded: *“When I was young I lived with my parents in Cowdenbeath and our next door neighbour was Mrs Joan Thomson, mother of Sgt Kinnell. My parents knew “Bobby” as he was known and indeed he was in the Air Force with one of my uncles. Mr and Mrs Thomson were wonderful kindly neighbours and when, in recent years, a new War Memorial was erected in our town to remember those who died in the Second World War, it was a privilege to ensure that the name of their son was inscribed thereon.”*





## An Environmental War Grave Journey into the Outback, South Australia Tony and Sue Wege

In late August 2011, Susan and I undertook a four day, 1600 kilometre (1000 miles in British terms) return driving journey through the northern grain belt and into the north eastern arid rangelands of the state of South Australia. We had seven quite remote, small and largely forgotten cemeteries on our list to search up there and as well, we decided to have a good look at the landscape that we had not seen for some time. Specifically however, we were looking for memorials on headstones of family members who had a son lost in a war overseas and capture them digitally for TWGPP. These seven cemeteries were spread over a large area beginning two hundred kilometres north of our home. It took a bit of travel to get up there and then find them over another 250 kilometres on rough bush tracks and on dusty, dirt roads running far and wide across land very sparsely populated with people but running many thousands of sheep and cattle.



The northern semi arid and desertic parts of South Australia received huge rains last summer, breaking a decade long drought. The effects of both could be easily seen in the landscape during our trip. The photo of Susan trying to uncover a buried headstone is in the tiny and neglected cemetery of the all but deserted town of Cradock (current population about five). She is actually standing on the grave but at the level of the top of its surrounding iron rails. They are all but buried in red drift sand, just the tips of the wrought iron uprights showing. This is testimony to the long drought that ravaged this land over the past ten years. Sand storms in past years have almost buried many of the other graves here including this one. She had to dig down from the cross on the top of this headstone, remove the sand as best able to see if the buried headstone's inscription was a family memorial for TWGPP. It wasn't but that's how it goes.

But as also can be seen, there is now a plethora of vegetation around the grave and elsewhere throughout the cemetery - the natural response of nature to last summer's massive drought breaking rains.

Of the ten marked graves that could be found and read to some extent here in the all but buried Cradock cemetery, one was in fact a family memorial to a 43<sup>rd</sup> Battalion AIF soldier, Private James Richard Ramsay, killed in action in July 1918 at Hamel, France. How many people in the last nine decades since his death in action in France have made this trip way out to this forlorn, degraded and all but buried bush cemetery, made the effort to read the inscription on his mother's partially buried headstone and pause to remember her 18 year old young son who left from South Australia to fight for King and country on the other side of the globe and never returned? Now at least his family memorial at Cradock is preserved forever by TWGPP.

Further up and now into the southern end of the arid lands of the north east of the state, our environmental phase of the trip, we stopped and searched the small cemetery at Farina with its few lonely scattered headstones (photo right). It is situated on a vast, flat, stony plain near the crumbled nineteenth century town of Farina that its people have long since abandoned, victims of drought and the harshness of trying to make a living off thin and unyielding stony soils in a very arid area. Unfortunately, once again we found nothing for TWGPP but again, that is what happens sometimes to us who do work for TWGPP.



About 60 men from Farina served in the armed forces of Australia in two world wars according to a newly established local war memorial near the cemetery of the now abandoned town. Some 15 of them died in their country's service. Unfortunately there was no reference to any of them on the few remaining headstones we examined at lonely Farina cemetery.



We then drove a further 500 kilometres north and deep into the desert, our “environmental” section of the trip. By contrast to the surrounding sand dunes of the southern end of the Tirari Desert, we had to cross a wide and flowing creek called Cooper Creek via a very small (one vehicle at a time) and temporary ferry. Susan did the job of driving off in our Subaru Forester. This creek has been bone dry in this region for the last 35 years.

But now, following vast summer rains last year in Queensland, it is now a river 150 metres wide here at a narrow point. Elsewhere in the area, it can be up to four kilometres wide!

This water has taken six months to meander down 2000 kilometres from central Queensland and heading for the gigantic inland sump called Lake Eyre some 100 kilometres to the west of where we crossed. The crossing complete, it was back south to find a couple more cemeteries on our list to search and so complete our TWGPP work for this excursion.

Taken overall, our journey to find the seven cemeteries yielded 18 headstones in only three of the cemeteries that we could file for TWGPP. It took a lot of driving to do it. But there is great satisfaction in those family memorial headstones now digitally preserved. They include Private Humphrey O’Leary, 32<sup>nd</sup> Battalion AIF. He was killed at the Battle of Fromelles on 20<sup>th</sup> July 1916. He has no known grave. We found his family memorial on his grandparents’ grave at Orroroo, a small town at the extreme northern end of the vast South Australian grain growing belt.

But our trip had other compensations besides our war graves work. The vivid ochre red sunrises and sunsets near the one million acres of Etadunna cattle station; laying back in a camp chair and casting our eyes up and across the uninterrupted dome of the night sky with its thousands of bright, twinkling stars stretching from right above us down to every horizon all around; lolling about in a bubbling pool of 42 degree (Celsius) artesian water coming up from hundreds of metres below the earth’s surface after a hot day’s driving and photography; seeing the thousands of migratory birds now making their homes along the newly created wetlands of the Cooper; watching



the exploding population of native animals now scampering around everywhere in the desert - kangaroos, emus, lizards, goannas, native rats and several large and very deadly king brown snakes.

Although this trip was long and went across hundreds of kilometres of rough, outback dirt roads and tracks as well as long sections of sealed road, the compensations were many, not the least that we captured a handful of long forgotten and neglected family memorials for TWGPP – and that in itself is reward enough.



## Throw a stone in a pond and watch the ripples spread – David Ayling

Whilst I am photographing in the various cemeteries and churchyards it is of importance and interest to keep in mind that we in TWGPP are “in touch” with the servicemen and women whose graves and memorials we find. I guess that sometimes it is very easy to switch off and just look at a grave or memorial as a piece of stone and a patch of earth, another one photographed and ticked off on a spreadsheet. These thoughts are always chased from my mind when reading the inscriptions, especially on the family memorials, of someone’s husband, son or other loved relation leaving behind that void, that gap, that memory.



However, every now and then one's chances upon a memorial that seems even more poignant and painful.

Whilst re-shooting at Willesden New Cemetery in north-west London I found this stone containing the names of four brothers all killed in the First World War.

They are the brothers Kearey: Alfred, Frederick, Walter and Sidney, killed in December 1917, August 1918, November 1915 and September 1917. Most probably the sons of Alfred and Martha Kearey of Kilburn, NW London. The CWGC website gives only patchy details for them, but three have graves in France whilst one is commemorated on the Menin Gate.

The brothers were in their 20s and 30s so if one presumes that they were married then the human cost to their families leaving wives and children fatherless not to mention the parents is enormous. Throw a stone in a pond and watch the ripples spread, such is the grief and consequence of these and the many other deaths.

## Murmansk Allied War Graves now on Cruise line itinerary - Peter Butt

In June 2011 we went on a small ship cruise from Edinburgh, around Norway, and into the White Sea in north-western Russia and at least two other cruise lines are scheduled to go there in 2012. The major ports in that area are Murmansk and Archangelsk, (Archangel), in fact it was these two names that first caught our attention, for we had not previously heard of a ‘White Sea’! Later those names became more personal when a friend quietly said that her uncle had been on the Russian convoys and so would have been to both.

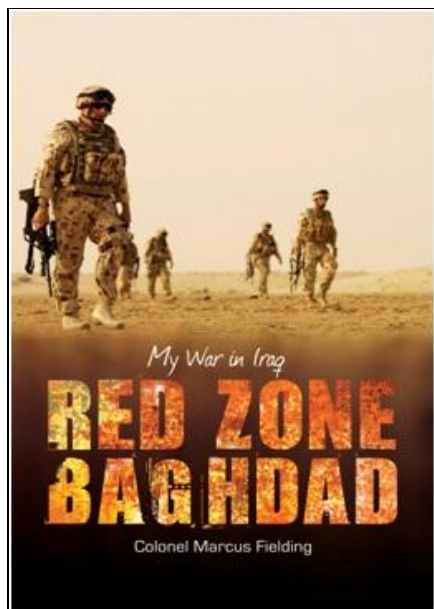
The two cities are different in character, Murmansk founded in 1916, appears ‘dour’ whilst Archangelsk, founded in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, is having investment put into its infrastructure. Our half day guided tour of Murmansk was to two small museums, the Soviet war memorial that dominates the city’s sky-line, a small church complex and to the Allied Forces War Graves area in what otherwise is an large overgrown city cemetery, [picture]. During our full day tour of Archangelsk, our local Russian guide volunteered that they also have a small War Graves cemetery but that we did not have time to visit it. We were assured that every two years a British official did come to inspect the graves.



## Late stocking fillers – or perhaps Book token exchange

In the last newsletter Colonel Marcus Fielding wrote an article about the Submarine AE2 and some of the casualties being interred in Baghdad war cemetery. Marcus has now published a book about his time in Iraq under the title **'Red Zone Baghdad'**.

*"When Colonel Marcus Fielding returned home from his tour of duty in Baghdad, a taxi driver asked him what it was like being a soldier there. Marcus, an experienced veteran, found himself speechless – how could he properly explain to a civilian the nature of his work and his life during his tour? He mouthed a few platitudes but felt frustrated: he had not done justice to his experience or to his fellow soldiers still in Iraq.*



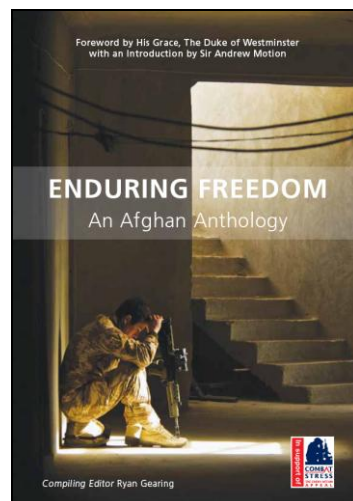
*This book is the result of that frustration, and it provides fascinating insights into the conditions on the ground in a theatre of war that more than 20,000 Australian men and women have served. Marcus was deployed as an 'embed' in the final days of the Australian presence. By this time, the violence had subsided somewhat from the carnage of the first few years of Operation Iraqi Freedom, but with several crucial elections being held, sectarian terror nonetheless reared its frightening head on many occasions*

*From his 'office' in Saddam's former al-Faw Palace, Marcus finds himself more involved with nation-building than killing 'bad guys'. His tour is not so much about combat, guts and glory as it is about dealing with the vital issues associated with the elections and the Coalition troop draw-down. But he also paints a vivid picture of everyday life set against a backdrop of violence: the heat and dust, attending meetings in the Red Zone, the camaraderie of the cigar club, visits to orphanages and the morale-raising visits of US personalities'.*

*There are few Australian books written about the contentious war in Iraq. Red Zone Baghdad presents a rare glimpse into the reality of an officer's war in our time.*

Ryan Gearing of Tommies Guides has compiled a new anthology of poetry to commemorate the last 10 years of conflict in Afghanistan.

**ENDURING FREEDOM** has been brought together from submissions from serving members of the armed forces, veterans and families and a proportion of the profits from the book are to be donated to the charity Combat Stress.



## A Request fulfilled for a Canadian Family



We are often asked if we can complete requests for images not held although many of these can be found on site depending on the search criteria used. This is a common problem through all search engines where unless the exact details are used a 'none found' can be the resulting answer. It is more unusual for a request like the one we had earlier in the year from Canada. We already held the grave of Private DA Thompson of the 78<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry but Pauline Thompson, his Great Niece wanted to be able to lay his picture by his grave along with a Canadian Flag and have a phial of soil from the grave sent back to Canada. We had to wait until we found someone going to Le Quesnel but Colin Ellender and his team of Battlefield visitors took up the challenge and provided a sterling service to the great pleasure of Pauline.



## Brothers in Arms – Twins at Medemblik



It is not unusual to find brothers serving with each other but more unusual to find twins. Robert and Richard Tod from St. Vitla in Manitoba joined the the Royal Canadian Air force on the same day and were flying on a mission together in a Stirling bomber on a raid to bomb Malheim in Germany. On the return leg their aircraft was shot down and crashed into the IJsselmer (Netherlands). Not all the crew were recovered at the time and other members can be found in cemeteries in the Netherlands but the brothers were laid to rest together at Medemblik



## Young soldiers tragic end

Ken Clark has been helping TWGPP in Tasmania and came across an impressive memorial to Private Jack Eugene Riva at Carr Villa. It transpires that the story is a tragic one, Riva having returned safely from overseas and whilst held up in Victoria because of a shipping strike died in a fire at his cousins boarding house. A local newspaper reports:-

*YOUNG SOLDIER'S TRAGIC END TASMANIAN-BURNED TO DEATH. PTE. JACK RIVA, OF LAUNCESTON. With terribly distressing suddenness, sorrow, and trial yesterday came to the family of Mr. J. Riva, of Patterson-street. Safely through a period of 2½ years' service with the expeditionary force, and awaiting in Melbourne an opportunity to embark for home, Pte. Jack Riva early yesterday morning met his death under most tragic circumstances. The report of the occurrence, as telegraphed from our Melbourne correspondent, indicated that a fire occurred about 2 o'clock in the morning at Spotswood, in a boarding house kept by Mrs. Stuckey, the widow of a soldier. Pte. Jack Riva, aged 20 years and 3 months, a native of Tasmania, was burned to death. There was evidence that the young fellow had attempted to escape. When found he was lying face downwards, with his head resting on his left arm. The rear portion of the house, which contains several rooms, was badly damaged. Pte. Riva, recently returned from the front on the City of Poona, was held up in Melbourne waiting for an opportunity to return to Tasmania. Very general sympathy will be felt with Mr. and Mrs. Riva whose only son the deceased soldier was and for whose welcome home complete preparations had been made. It is a distressing feature of the sad affair that, but for the isolation of Tasmania, consequent on the shipping strike, the young soldier would have reached home some days ago.*

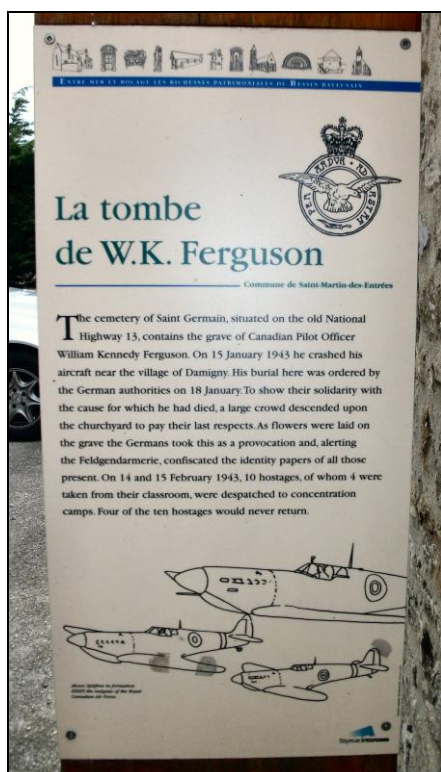




## William Kennedy Ferguson – Anne Edwards

Visiting Normandy over a number of years we have heard, along with the better documented stories, many less well known tales of courage and bravery in war time.

For example there were the three girls in Trevieres who dressed in red, white and blue clothes to link arms and stroll past the occupying troops each day.



My 'team' (hubby, brother and me) were not prepared though for the story of W K Ferguson. St Germain cemetery at St Martin Des Entrees is at the end of a service road tucked off the N13 and like many in the area contains just one Commonwealth war grave. Without the Project we would not have known of its existence. The inscription on a plaque at the entrance came as a shock.

*"The cemetery of Saint Germain, situated on the old National Highway 13, contains the grave of Canadian Pilot Officer William Kennedy Ferguson. On 15 January 1943 he crashed his aircraft near the village of Damigny. His burial here was ordered by the German authorities on 18 January. To show their solidarity with the cause for which he had died, a large crowd descended upon the churchyard to pay their last respects. As flowers were laid on the grave the Germans took this as a provocation and, alerting the Feldgendarmarie, confiscated the identity papers of all those present. On 14 and 15 February 1943, 10 hostages, of whom 4 were taken from their classroom, were dispatched to concentration camps. Four of the ten hostages would never return."*

They paid the highest price and we gave silent thanks not only to Pilot Officer Ferguson but also to the brave locals.

## Held in Highest Esteem

Darren Wheatley recently requested the headstone of Bombardier Esau Cockhead of the Royal Artillery who was buried in Dehli (Nicholson) cemetery, India in 1895. One of the earlier images captured by David Milborrow during his 'Indian Idyll' earlier in the year.

Esau had been born in 1865 at Bishopstone near Swindon in Wiltshire the son of Charles Cockhead and Sarah Lambourne. Darren's research into this family has revealed tentative links to Esau's great uncle who was a Pall Bearer at Napoleons Funeral! He had joined the Royal Artillery in 1877, was posted to India in November 1888 and spent 6 years there before dying of Pneumonia in 1895

Darren was pleased to be able to get a copy of such an early headstone and was even more intrigued by the fact that Bombardier Cockhead's stone was erected by his fellow officers and men of the company as a mark of his esteem.

His service records indicate that he had been charged at least six times for being drunk, fighting, making a nuisance of himself and absent from Tattoo amongst other minor charges.

*I bet his mates thought he had 'hollow legs' as we used to say in the RN!!*





## Trooper Arthur William Kendall – Dennis and Ngaire Boggs



Trooper Kendall was one of the very few Maori who volunteered to go to the South African war of 1899 – 1902. He left New Zealand with the 5th contingent, 11 Company on 31st of March 1900 and served with the N.Z. Rhodesia Field Force Artillery and 5<sup>th</sup> N.Z. Mounted Rifles. He was awarded the Queen's South Africa Medal with Cape Colony, Rhodesia, Transvaal, and South Africa 1901 clasps, and returned to New Zealand aboard the S.S. Tagus. Sadly he didn't quite make it as he contracted typhoid fever on board ship and died on July 10th, 1901, just off the Otago headland enclosing Dunedin harbour which was the first N.Z. port of call for the ship's homecoming. Arthur was just 21 years old.

The Army planned to bury Arthur with full military honours in Dunedin, the opposite end of New Zealand to his birthplace and, on hearing this, his family pleaded with the authorities to bring him all the way home to Mitimiti in the far North which, in time, they did. Arthur was given a full military funeral procession in Auckland, New Zealand's largest city, prior to being taken to his home in Mitimiti for his funeral and burial.

So it was that on the 1st of July this year, just a few days short of the 110th anniversary of Arthur's death, that Ngaire and I drove from our east coast home to the west coast location of what is possibly the most remote war grave from the scene of the action in South Africa. It is at the very end of a long winding gravel road in the tiny settlement of Mitimiti, just a couple of hundred meters from the surf of the wild western shoreline of the Tasman Sea.

Because Trooper Kendall's is one of only two South African war graves in our schedule, and is in the remote location to which we had never been, we had downloaded his service file from N.Z. Military archives, which contained not only the usual records, but also all the hand written correspondence between Arthur's father and the Military regarding the repatriation of Arthur's body to Mitimiti. The file is about 5mm. thick and makes fascinating, if emotional, reading.

We found the cemetery easily enough as it is in the usual location of Maori cemeteries, on top of a hill and where possible, overlooking the sea, as in this case. After taking the required TWGPP photos we set out to find if any of the Kendall family still lived in the area. We were directed to Andrew and Diane Kendall who made us most welcome and we exchanged our respective information regarding Arthur. Andrew told us he is descended from Arthur's sister.

Arthur's father George had come to New Zealand from South Africa and had married the daughter of Atama Paparangi, a Maori high chief, at Mitimiti in the Hokianga region of New Zealand's far north. Presumably George's connection with South Africa provided the incentive for Arthur to volunteer for the New Zealand contingent. On his lounge wall Andrew has an excellent copy of a C.F. Goldie portrait of his Great, Great, Great Grandfather Atama Paparangi, a fine looking man with full moko (facial tattoo) and very clearly possessed of the stamp of authority. The lineage is of obvious pride to the present day Kendall family.

When we presented Andrew with Arthur's service file his response was what makes our role in TWGPP feel so worthwhile. The file will be copied and shared around the family.



**Andrew & Diane Kendall flanked on either side by Ngaire and Dennis Boggs.**

## Tragedy at a social event – The ATS at Heverlee

The Auxiliary Territorial Service, often shortened to the acronym ATS, was the women's branch of the British Army during World War 2. Formed on 9 September 1938 as a women's voluntary service, it remained in existence until February 1949 when it was merged into the WRAC's or Women's Royal Army Corps.

The first recruits joined as Cooks, Clerks and Storekeepers but by 1941, as the war progressed, over 65000 had joined the service and were operating in all theatres of war except on the battle front. However many supported front line forces as Radar Operators and manning anti aircraft guns. In WW2 over 700 women serving in the ATS lost their lives.

At least 6 of these died tragically in Belgium in January 1945. As members of 483 Heavy Anti Aircraft Battery, Royal Artillery the six women were off-duty and were in a troop-carrying truck (probably an AEC Matador) which was (apparently) taking them to a dance organised by the Coldstream Guards. The vehicle crashed into a train on a level crossing south of Louvain where some were killed outright and other succumbed to injuries days after. Others were treated in Belgium and, when able to be repatriated, were sent back to UK for further treatment.

Six of the casualties now lie in Heverlee cemetery in Belgium. We often think of the individuals when taking pictures and wonder what the circumstances of their death were, especially when grouped together like these ladies. Through continuing research such tragic examples come to light thus ensuring these sacrifices are not forgotten.



Heverlee Cemetery, Belgium



## A dog by any other name!



Now that we are conducting a number of revisits to sites throughout UK I was asked recently if we have completed Lincolnshire yet on a second round. Having spent a few days at RAF Scampton back in the 80's (*unusual I know for the Senior Service to be land locked like that*) I remembered having seen the grave of Guy Gibson's dog 'Nigger'. Nigger, for those that have not seen the film, was killed by a car whilst his owner was dropping the bouncing bombs on the dams in Germany and was buried just outside the wardroom. I sort of mentioned that he was the only one we had outstanding and within a day the grave was e mailed through by Nick Ridout.

*I wonder if I will shed a tear at the remake - Steve*



## Are the British WW2 Merchant Navy Graves in Timbuctoo the Remotest on Earth?

Bernard de Neumann

The attached photograph shows the two lone British war graves in the European Cemetery at Timbuctoo. They are the graves of Chief Engineer William Soutter (died 28 May 1942 age 60) and AB John Turnbull Graham (died 2 May 1942 age 23). Both of the SS *Allende* (Cardiff). *Allende* was sunk 17<sup>th</sup> March 1942 off the South coast of West Africa, by U68. How do they come to be there? What is the story behind these wartime graves of British Merchant seamen who died in the legendary city so far from the sea?



The story really emanates from the fate of the ship's company of the SS *Criton*, a Vichy French vessel arrested by the RN for carrying contraband and escorted into Freetown. In Freetown she was manned by a scratch British Prize crew of recently released prisoners, other DBS, and native firemen from Sierra Leone. Her Master was Captain Dobeson, ex *Wray Castle*, and the remainder of the officers and crew came from various sunken ships; she also carried a token RN officer, and a stowaway.

*Criton* sailed in convoy SL78 on 19<sup>th</sup> June 1941 carrying a cargo of iron ore, but kept breaking down, and could not keep up with the convoy – she had been extensively sabotaged by her former Vichy French crew. *Criton* was ordered back to Freetown alone by the escort AMC H.M.S. *Esperance Bay* at noon on the 20<sup>th</sup>. She was spotted off Conakry on the morning of the 21<sup>st</sup> and intercepted by two Vichy French sloops, one of which fired a shell over the *Criton* from the port quarter. Although ordered to stop, *Criton* refused so one of the sloops (*Air France IV*), after two-and-a-half-hours of arguing through megaphones, swept the decks with machine gun fire from a range of about fifty yards. *Criton's* firemen panicked and rushed the starboard boat and Dobeson ordered “abandon ship”. The starboard boat was launched under the orders of de Neumann (Second Officer) and the port boat under the orders of Chalmers (Chief Officer). The port boat cleared the *Criton* smartly but with the firemen's panic, it was difficult to launch and clear away the starboard boat. Before the starboard boat had completed launching the sloop opened up with her main armament and shells went right through the *Criton* narrowly missing the starboard boat on the far side. On leaving his ship Dobeson fell into the starboard boat and injured himself, leaving de Neumann to get the boat clear. The crew in the two boats were picked up by the sloop after she had wrecked *Criton* with 46 salvos and escorted under guard to Conakry. They were then thrown into a special section of a camp in the jungle containing other merchant seamen, but *Criton's* crew was separated off by barbed wire, and everyone was warned that they would be shot if they tried to talk to the others. The climatic conditions that then prevailed, typically 51” of rain in July, a humidity of over 95%, and temperatures of about 28°C, meant the camp was continuously awash with rainwater and sewage, with the rain pouring through the roofs of the native mud-huts they occupied. Many of the crew became very ill and were treated in hospital in Conakry, according to criticality, in the eight beds available. These beds were in permanent occupation by various of the crew, such was the demand. However they never lost hope and made several forays outside the camp in an effort to steal a fishing boat and sail it to Sierra Leone and freedom. During this time there was a French Naval court-martial to investigate the circumstances of the sinking: Capt. Dobeson would not comply with the Vichy French demand that he declare that he had had the *Criton* scuttled.

Following the court-martial where the crew were declared to be *Pirates*, in late September, all the officers, except the 4<sup>th</sup> Engineer, 3<sup>rd</sup> Radio Officer, others of the crew still hospitalised and the native firemen, were transported to Timbuctoo via the River Niger. The journey began with two days on a narrow-gauge railway steaming to Kankan. This was followed by two days in lorries journeying to Bamako, where they were rested for five days. Following the break they were again moved in lorries to Koulikoro, where they were then ordered into a barge strapped to the side of an ancient stern-wheeled paddle steamer.

The steamer towed four barges, two abreast on each side, and they were in the outer barge on the port side – their adjacent barge was stacked high with wood to fuel the steamer and the two starboard barges were stacked to capacity with ammunition. The journey on the Niger took five days, during which they were eaten alive by mosquitoes. At Kabara they were forced to march five miles through the desert to the prison camp. Those remaining made several escape attempts, which prompted the Vichy French to move them inland to KanKan. Those in Timbuctoo also made escape attempts, but white men in the Sahara were easily spotted.

In March 1942, the *Allende* was sunk, and all but five of her crew got away in the boats. They landed at Tabou on the Ivory Coast, and were later taken to Sassandre. From there they were taken in lorries for five days, followed by a day and a night in a train which brought them to Bobo-Dioulasso. From there they travelled for a further five days in lorries to Mopti. Then they were put into canoes for ten days for the journey down the Niger to Timbuctoo. They had a most uncomfortable journey from Mopti to Port Caron, lying in the bottom of canoes, drenched with water and just about eaten alive by mosquitoes. At night and for meals they had to tie up at some native village. There was not sufficient room in the original building used for the camp for the new contingent so the men of *Criton* and *Allende* were put into the new building and the officers of both ships into the old building. They were all glad to see new faces as conversation becomes very limited and things became somewhat dull when a few men are shut up together for a long time. Not long after their arrival at the end of April Graham and Soutter died - of sunstroke and typhoid respectively. After these men died the Vichy French moved to repatriate the remaining members of the *Allende's* crew at the end of June 1942, and in August moved the remainder of *Criton's* crew back to Kankan to join their shipmates. The crew of the *Criton* were released in December 1942, and arrived back in the UK in January 1943.

The crew of the *Criton* received far worse treatment than any other British prisoners of the Vichy French, and was imprisoned longer than other MN prisoners in West Africa. After the war the French government made an *ex gratia* payment to the British government in compensation, but did not apologise. To add insult to injury, the British Labour government of the day kept the money, and the exceedingly poor treatment of the crew of the *Criton* conveniently forgotten. Like the Japanese, the Vichy French withheld medicines, Red Cross parcels, clothing and footwear, leaving them rotting in the sun.

The two graves were attended and restored in 1999 on behalf of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission by Dr Tim Insoll of the Department of Art History and Archaeology, University of Manchester and have since had new stones erected.

## United Nations Memorial Cemetery in Korea



Without going through all the politics in history, the Korean war was fought between the Republic of Korea which was supported by the United Nations and the Democratic People Republic of Korea supported by China with material aid from the Soviet Union . It lasted between 25<sup>th</sup> June 1950 and 27<sup>th</sup> July 1953. The result was the forming of North and South Korea along the length of the latitude of the 35<sup>th</sup> Parallel. In total 178,569 UN personnel were killed with a further 28,611 classed as missing in action. 2300 of these are buried at the United Nations memorial Cemetery.

TWGPP Have been trying for some time to obtain images of these graves to be included with the Project but with very few people visiting Korea this has been difficult. However, this has now been achieved by Dave and Kay Lovell who managed to spend a couple of days in Busan and with the kind permission of Ms Eun-jung Park , Director of Public Relations, photographed all of the headstones which are now on site.



## Target for Tonight - Paul Hamilton

Not many of you will have heard of a documentary film from 1941 called "Target for Tonight". Its unlikely leading man was serving RAF officer Group Captain Percy Picard. The focus of the film revolved around the crew of a (fictitious) Wellington Bomber, F for Freddie and it's mission into Germany. The plot of the film involved the mission planning, crew briefing, the flight and bombing run and Freddie being hit by Flak. Then the long flight home over the sea with wounded, being the last aircraft home. It was stirring and realistic stuff for the time and went on to win an honorary Academy Award in 1942.

In real life, Group Captain Pickard was a highly decorated Pilot, being the first to be awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) with Two Bars. Today, he lies in St.Pierre Cemetery Amiens, not far from his Navigator and good friend, Flight Lieutenant John Alan Broadley.



On the 18th February 1944, both took part in the raid on Amiens Prison, Operation Jericho, one of the most ambitious day time precision bombing raids of the war. Intelligence had been received that a number of significant French Resistance personnel had been imprisoned there and were for summary execution within days. The plan was a low level bombing raid over the Channel to disable the prison guard towers breach the prison wall to enable the prisoners to escape. It was indeed a dangerous plan and it's outcome was not reported until many months later. It was considered a success at the time as the raid had indeed breached the prison walls, damaged the buildings and some prisoners had escaped.

Pickard and Broadley had been earlier posted as "missing" in February, but their deaths were not confirmed until September 1944.

The documentary in 1941 and the bombing raid in 1944 have now largely been forgotten. However a different version of events have begun to emerge as previously secret British papers have been available to the public from the Archives.



Paul Hamilton, our Project Researcher said " Having seen some of the archived information, there seems to be no clear authorisation in RAF Chain of Command for what became known as 'Operation Jericho' at all. The bombing of the Prison may have been part of a feint to convince the German High Command that this and later attacks were in the Pas de Calais as part of the softening up for a land invasion. Operation Fortitude set about to convince the Germans that the invasion would be in Northern France rather than Normandy."

Operation Jericho and it's success would clearly demonstrate the ability of the RAF to undertake such missions. Had Percy Pickard survived the war and pursued his alternate career he might now be remembered as an actor rather than a much decorated Pilot.

**Group Captains Pickard's grave at St Pierre Cemetery, Amiens**

## Habbaniya Cemetery's Australian connections – by Marcus Fielding

The Australian war graves here reflect the long struggles of Iraqi history

The casualties sustained by Australia's military contribution to the "coalition of the willing" in Iraq have been mercifully light. No Australians have been killed in combat at the time of writing. Yet three Australian airmen are buried in Iraq's western desert. They are among the 292 British and Commonwealth servicemen and civilians who lie in Habbaniya War Cemetery.

Habbaniya's history reflects Iraq's in many respects. Created in 1920 from three provinces of the old Ottoman Empire, Iraq was governed by Britain under a League of Nations mandate until it gained independence in 1932. But the Anglo-Iraqi treaty of 1930 allowed Britain to maintain two Royal Air Force (RAF) bases in Iraq which could be used as staging posts for flights between Egypt and India. One was at Shaibah, near Basra on the Persian Gulf.

The other, and the more important, was RAF Dhibban. Overlooked by a plateau on the west bank of the Euphrates 65 kilometres from Baghdad, the base opened on 19 October 1936 and was soon renamed RAF Habbaniya, from the Arabic word meaning "of the oleander", a flowering shrub common in the area. Protected by an RAF ground detachment and locally-raised Iraqi troops, it was the permanent headquarters of the RAF in Iraq and the home of No. 4 Flying Training School. In *Going Solo*, the author Roald Dahl has left us a vivid description of his training at RAF Habbaniya in 1940.



In March that year the anti-British nationalist, Rashid Ali, became Iraqi Prime Minister. Though Iraq had severed ties with Germany on the outbreak of war in 1939, Rashid sought German backing for his government and also refused to break off diplomatic relations with Italy when it entered the war on Germany's side in June 1940. But rigorous British economic sanctions and the rout of Italian forces in North Africa, in which the 6th Australian Division played a leading role, cost Rashid domestic support. He resigned on 31 January 1941, only to return as prime minister in early April following a coup d'état of which he was one of the instigators.

Wanting to secure Iraq's oil, Britain began moving the few troops it had immediately available to Iraq. Two Indian brigades and an artillery regiment, minus its guns, arrived at Basra during April, but the flooding of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers precluded their moving northward for some months. Several aircraft and about 300 men from the 1st Battalion, the King's Own Loyal Regiment, were also flown to Habbaniya. On 30 April Rashid forbade further troop arrivals, demanded the cessation of flying at Habbaniya, and occupied the plateau above it with several thousand troops and thirty guns. Britain regarded these measures, which contravened the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, as acts of war.



The RAF command at Habbaniya had anticipated hostilities. Even as British civilian evacuees from Baghdad were airlifted out of Iraq from the base, guns and bomb racks were being fitted to some 70 trainer aircraft, and courses in bomb aiming and air gunnery were hastily conducted. On 1 May London authorised whatever was needed to make the Iraqi besiegers withdraw. "If you have to strike, strike hard. Use all necessary force," Winston Churchill thundered.

At 5 am on 2 May, 33 trainers from Habbaniya, flown by student pilots and instructors, and eight modern Wellington medium bombers that had recently arrived at Shaibah, began a campaign of continuous bombing and strafing. On 3 May four Blenheim light bombers flew into Habbaniya to join the action. Each night the loyal Iraqi RAF levies who, with the King's Own and No. 1 RAF Armoured Car Company, made up Habbaniya's 2,200 strong ground forces, raided the emplacements on the plateau from which the base was being shelled. On 5 May, the ground forces took the offensive and cleared the plateau in a hard fight.

Meanwhile a British relieving force had been cobbled together in Palestine. Its leading column reached Habbaniya on 18 May. Together with Habbaniya's defenders, it crossed the Euphrates the next day and took Fallujah before pushing on to Baghdad, where a pro-British government assumed office on the signing of an armistice on 31 May.

What became known as the Rashid Ali Rebellion had cost the British some sixty dead. They were interred in special plots in the pre-war RAF cemetery at Habbaniya, which had been used until then for the burial of RAF personnel, their dependants, and civilians employed by the RAF. The cemetery was on the eastern side of the base, enclosed within a high brick wall.

Rashid Ali and his supporters fled to Germany and were recognised by Hitler as the Iraqi government in exile. The Germans had supported his rebellion by sending a *Luftwaffe* detachment of 25 aircraft to Mosul in northern Iraq. Arriving on 10 May and daubed in Iraqi markings, they had attacked Habbaniya daily. Though only one was lost, and that to friendly fire, a lack of spare parts and good quality fuel eventually grounded all of them except for one bomber, which was used to evacuate *Luftwaffe* personnel before the British regained control on 31 May. Inglorious though it may have been, the German intervention nonetheless had far-reaching consequences that directly affected the Australian forces in the Middle East.



On its way to Mosul, the *Luftwaffe* detachment had staged through airfields in Syria, a French protectorate ruled by the pro-German Vichy French government after the fall of France in June 1940. Britain had worried about the Germans taking over French military resources and strategically located territory ever since the French defeat. Reflecting this concern, the Royal Navy had sunk the French fleet at anchor off Oran, Algeria, in July 1940. The *Luftwaffe's* use of Syria during the Rashid Ali Rebellion set British alarm bells ringing at the prospect of the Germans using Syria as a base to threaten Britain's position in Palestine and the eastern Mediterranean.

In order to eliminate this possibility, Britain decided to occupy Syria and neighbouring Lebanon, which was also under Vichy control. The 34,000-strong invading force, with the 7th Australian Division as its mainstay, was met on 7 June 1941 by the 35,000 well-trained regulars of the Vichy defending force, who had more armour and aircraft. Contrary to expectation, they turned out to be very loyal to Vichy and it took six weeks of stiff action before they sought an armistice. The Australians had done most of the fighting and suffered 1,600 casualties, two-thirds of the overall losses.

In Iraq, RAF Habbaniya carried on as a major flying training school but expanded its role as a transit airfield, becoming an important stopover on the southern air route between Britain and Russia. (In late 1943, Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt staged through it on their way to Persia to meet Joseph Stalin in Tehran.) The three Australians who rest in the cemetery on the base were RAAF aircrew who died while en route to India with 216 Group. Flight Sergeants Percival Whittard, 27, Paul Clancy, 22, and the pilot, Sergeant Frank Harrison, 23, were all killed when their Wellington bomber crashed on landing at 11.21 pm on 21 July 1943.

Though the cause of the accident was never clearly determined, an investigation concluded that it probably resulted from the failure either of an engine or of the flying controls. Faulty workmanship or sabotage was suspected

In late 1947 the British military occupation of Iraq ended but Prime Minister Nuri al-Said, who had dominated Iraqi politics since Rashid's departure, maintained close ties with Britain, and Habbaniya remained in RAF hands. The cemetery was taken over by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and renamed Habbaniya War Cemetery; it eventually held 162 Commonwealth war dead, ten Poles and a Norwegian. Twenty-four soldiers killed in the crash of a Royal Jordanian Air Force plane in April 1957 joined the 117 non-wartime burials. A memorial to those whose graves in Iraq the Commission could not permanently maintain was also erected in the cemetery.

RAF Habbaniya's last commander was a distinguished Australian airman, Group Captain Hughie Edwards. Born in Fremantle in 1914, Edwards joined the RAAF aged twenty-one and transferred to the RAF. He won the Victoria Cross for his determination and gallantry while leading a Blenheim squadron in a suicidal daylight raid on the heavily defended port of Bremen on 4 July 1941. In February 1943, Edwards became station commander of RAF Binbrook, home of the most famous Australian bomber unit, No. 460 Squadron, one of whose Lancasters, "G for George", is displayed at the Australian War Memorial and features prominently in its *Striking by night* exhibit. Awarded the DSO, DFC and OBE as well as the VC, Edwards finished the war as the most highly decorated Australian to serve in it. Edwards had to call on his lengthy experience of leadership in difficult situations after the bloody coup d'état of 14 July 1958, in which the Iraqi military overthrew the monarch, Faisal II, and the Nuri al-Said government. Edwards stood up to the new regime and ensured that the Iraqi forces who occupied Habbaniya behaved correctly, earning the admiration of the base's RAF personnel. Edwards eventually left the RAF as an air vice marshal, was knighted and, in 1974, appointed governor of his native Western Australia. Ill-health forced him to retire in 1975 and he died, aged 68, in 1982.

The RAF had to leave Habbaniya in May 1959, after which it became an Iraqi Air Force base and was renamed Tammuz. Iraq continued to be politically turbulent, with Saddam Hussein eventually coming to power. Owing to the hostility of successive Iraqi ruling authorities, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission was unable to look after the Habbaniya War Cemetery or, for that matter, any of its other cemeteries and memorials in Iraq. Vandalised over the years, they fell into abject disrepair.

In Habbaniya's case, the aftermath of the Coalition invasion of Iraq brought better days. Known as Camp Habbaniya, the base was used by both United States forces and the new Iraqi Army between 2003 and 2009. In November 2005, the RAF Habbaniya Association asked one of the US Air Force (USAF) units at the camp to lay a poppy wreath at Habbaniya War Cemetery on Remembrance Day. It was the first such ceremony since the RAF left 47 years earlier.

USAF and other personnel at Camp Habbaniya began the restoration of the cemetery around the time of the first Remembrance Day ceremony and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission also hired local contractors for the job. Enough had been done to allow the cemetery's rededication by the British Ambassador to Iraq on Remembrance Day 2008, in the presence of senior coalition commanders and the commander of the 1st Iraqi Division. The two minutes' silence honoured the fallen of the present conflict as well as those from the past.

There is still a lot to do before Habbaniya War Cemetery returns to the pristine state it was in during the base's post-war RAF days. Camp Habbaniya was returned to the full control of the Iraqi military in January 2009. Sadly, this will make further Remembrance Day services less likely until the security situation in Iraq improves sufficiently to allow Westerners to visit without fear for their safety.



## In the frame

As part of our publicity campaign during the November Remembrance period Vernon Masterman (Co-ordinator for Canada and Scotland) was interviewed by his local newspaper, the Bournemouth Evening Echo. This took place in one of his local cemeteries where he was conducting a revisit and for a change, he was in the frame!

*(Vernon tells me he was recognised by someone who he went to school with during the war! – Steve)*



## Getting there - Steve

We have had quite a bit of correspondence about the locations of cemeteries around the world and the ability to find them given various forms of directions. Nick Hare has written at great length (at 6 pages too long to add to the newsletter) about the frustrations of towns and villages in France not actually having cemeteries as named on the CWGC website. With towns having by passes, new routes or roads and even in UK many cemeteries having name changes it is difficult to keep fully up to date.

The Sat Nav system 'Tom Tom' was proposed as the be all and end all and has apparently got a downloadable 'App' although it appears you have to have the software already downloaded on to a PC (Purchased Tom Tom?) to be able to use it but as Nick points out not everyone has got SATNAV and he is more concerned about the elderly family trying to find a site than one of our seasoned travelers who, from experience, know that directions are not always to be trusted.

As an example from Nick "**Noirmoutier en L'île Communal Cemetery** does not actually exist even if it says so on the CWGC website. The CWGC road directions have been long since superseded by new highways. In fact the road the cemetery is on is so old the road markings are in glazed tiles, not seen that for a long time. I eventually gave up and asked the tourist office. They told me of 2 'communal' cemeteries in the town, St. Michel and St. Filbert.



**St. Michel** was the cemetery, its tiled name above the entrance, in there you will find the CWGC War Graves – My point being: Not all cemeteries are known as 'communal'. I have had this a few times when lost in France and Belgium, with the local's reply being "which one do you want?"

At this point in time I feel there is no definitive answer which

will help those without SATNAV. If someone out there would like to write an article (no more than 2 pages) I'd be happy to print it. Until then I will do as the Policeman on 'Allo Allo' does and enquire in my best Franglais when 'Pi\*\*ing' through a French town and accept that is part of the charm!

**The next newsletter will be out in April 2012.**

Anyone wishing to contribute should contact Steve on [steve@twgpp.org](mailto:steve@twgpp.org)



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