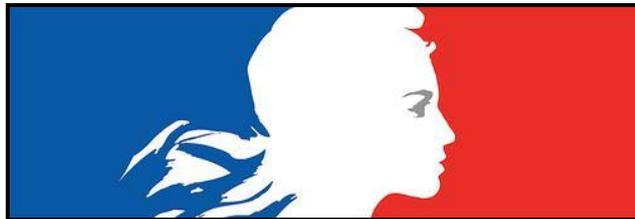




# THE WAR GRAVES PHOTOGRAPHIC PROJECT



In Association  
with the CWGC



## News from the Front line

November 2015

I represented TWGPP during a meeting at the Imperial War Museum in London on the 10<sup>th</sup> November, as we are signed up as a partner within the IWM First World War Centenary organisation. It was good to meet up with other delegates of various organisations and hear of their plans for the period 2016-18.

I was surprised to learn about the diversity of groups involved and how subject matter can be adapted to include an element of WWI interest. However, thinking on it afterwards, the effect WWI would have had on the population as a whole would have influenced all walks of life.

We had a brief from one chap who ran a Punch and Judy show on Brighton seafront but then he opened an exhibition about music hall favourites which were popular with troops on leave. Transport museums adapted displays to include trams or railway rolling stock, of the time, to get the link to WWI.

A brief by the Governments Cultural, Media & Sport Department indicated that their programme of events for 2016 would soon be promulgated and would concentrate on 'The Home Front' and how the events of the Battle of Jutland and The Somme affected those at home.

The Heritage Lottery team were there to answer queries about funding so many of the questions raised were based on applications and the amount of rejections organisations were getting when submitting applications. They emphasised that 'local heritage', new projects and volunteer involvement were the key issues for successful applications.



TWGPP have no problem with the volunteer aspect but since we cover global casualties and the website is already in existence we would not qualify. I was not aware that the Arts Council were providing funding for WWI based projects but try as I might I could not think how we could adapt the project to procure funds that way. I might qualify in 'blowing my own trumpet' but squeezing into a khaki tutu would not be practical!

### JUTLAND

With the centenary of the Battle of Jutland due on May 31<sup>st</sup> next year this is a big occasion for the Royal Navy to commemorate. The main event will be based in the Orkneys adjacent Scapa Flow and around Lyness cemetery on the island of Hoy. I chatted with the Lt. Col. (RM) who conducted the presentation and he did say that there would be smaller events in the ship base ports of Portsmouth, Chatham and Devonport but these have yet to be promulgated.

## SOMME

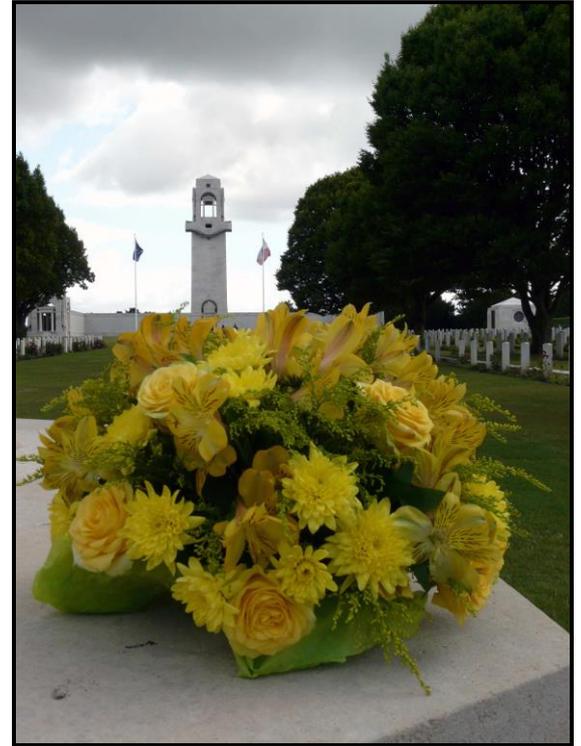
The Somme will be the big event of the year in July and the BBC are preparing a number of documentaries to cover this event. There has been a lottery for tickets to an event at Thiepval in July so lucky recipients should soon learn if they have been successful in their bid. Then there will be the mad rush for accommodation which will be extremely limited nearby.

With the planned BBC coverage this will raise public interest and the number of requests to TWGPP which is good for us. As I have mentioned before, in the Summer newsletter, I have felt that interest in WWI has diminished considerably since 2014. Apart from the ANZAC Day commemorations in April this year, which was televised across the world, there does not appear to be a lot of public engagement when viewing TWGPP site statistics.

I have had reports from Australia already that the build up in publicity towards the big Australian events that should be recognised like Pozieres and Fromelles is pretty much non-existent! Hopefully this will change in the coming months.

### The Colours of Australia

**Remembrance week** for TWGPP was not great as the server on which the site sits had, what was described as, a 'critical failure'. This meant that it was not available for most of the week nor, to that end, was our e mail facility as that rode alongside the site on the same server.



I took the day off work to drive to the offices of the web hoster in London as I am of the nature that needs to get things sorted yesterday and not tomorrow. It was a waste of time as the office was shut and a receptionists phone call to the 'occupier' revealed he did not want to speak to me. I drove home again!

I must admit I was pretty stressed out over the whole affair as the site had to be recovered and moved to another server before it could go live again. When it went live it was found that the 'script' in which the site was written back in 2007 was not compatible with the new server so it effectively has to be re written to get it fully operational. In my day a carbon copy was a carbon copy but in these digital times technology moves on very quickly. By the time you read this I'm hoping it will be ok but at the time of writing the site is still in a degraded mode of operation. For those submitting new images I am afraid we cannot upload these to site until we are at 100% capability which may take a couple of weeks yet.

I did have the choice of getting the original site totally revamped at the cost of £5k but the cost was prohibitive and we could not face the prospect of uploading about 1.5 million images again. The intention now is to move the site to our own server, once the script issues are sorted, and therefore reduce rental, storage, bandwidth and subsequently VAT costs. I'll update as and when I can.

Thank you to those that responded to my last newsletter with regard to funding options. Some ideas would perhaps make small amounts of funds but not enough to maintain the site. Outlay for TWGPP goods to sell may prove a loss maker as we found with Logo'd shirts a few years back. Bought loads, sold few!

Over the last few weeks I have had a few e mail queries with regards to the current location of the archive as a result of a questionnaire some of you may have filled in for the CWGC. I too am in receipt of CWGC newsletters and in the last one I obliged by filling in the questionnaire. At least two raised eyebrows in 'Chez Rogers' One asked if I would be *'interested in how the fallen were taken back to their homelands'* so I ticked 'yes' for that one. Until now I had always assumed that no bodies were repatriated?

Another asked 'If an e-commerce facility providing digital photos and archives of the war graves/cemeteries were available, how likely would you be to purchase something on there?' A few of you had seen this one as well and had put two and two together to make five assuming that our archive of over 1.8 million images might now be sitting on an 'E commerce' site! It's not! I am looking forward to seeing the results of the survey in due course.



Revisits have been ongoing but it is good to mention now that Beirut has, at last, been completed by Caroline Isaac-Hamdan and Ruth Moucharafieh. They are now concentrating on Tripoli and Sidon which will complete Lebanon.



In South Africa, **Simonstown (Dido valley)** was completed by Steve Biggs, a work colleague of mine here in Portsmouth. Over 50% of those at Dido were illegible with the wording eroded from the Southern Ocean storms. Olive Bendon is roaming Indonesia and completed a revisit on Jakarta war Cemetery so now we have excellent high resolution images from there. Olive is also hoping to visit Ambon and Lae in the future to obtain those outstanding sites for the project. We have had to abandon Baghdad North Gate due to the continuing security situation. Although we had someone there, the personal risk of being seen with a camera and taking photographs in a British Cemetery was too high.

Michael White in Australia trekked some distance to Tatura German War Cemetery and captured all of those there, some 275 mostly internees during WWI. An incredible number considering they were in an internment camp not in a war zone.

Enjoy the rest of the Newsletter – **Steve Rogers**

## **WATERLOO CASUALTIES - Frank Buckley**

After my article in the Summer Newsletter with regard to the lack of individual memorials to those who died at Waterloo, Frank Buckley, based in Belgium, pointed out that there were actual graves of Waterloo casualties in Brussels at Evre General Cemetery. In all there are the remains of 19 men who were originally buried in the vicinity of the Waterloo battlefield but were re-interred in Brussels in the late 1800's. Their memorial is really impressive, designed and cast by the Belgian Sculptor Jacques De Lalainge it was unveiled in August 1890.



The remains of those now interred within the edifice were transferred from the battlefield between 1890 and 1894.

## Polish Submarine Orzeł - Grzegorz Swiatek

Grzegorz Swiatek, who administers the Polish website [www.santiodnalezcorla.pl](http://www.santiodnalezcorla.pl) was recently in contact with TWGPP to obtain photographs of three British Naval personnel who died when the Polish Submarine ORP Orzeł was lost with all hands in 1940.

At the beginning of the invasion of Poland, Orzeł had been deployed on patrol in the Baltic Sea. Due to the German invasion, Orzeł was unable to return to the Polish naval bases at Hel near the major port city of Gdynia so the crew decided to head to Tallinn, Estonia.

The Commanding officer Lieutenant-Commander Henryk Kłoczowski had been suffering from an unidentified illness since September 1939 so was able to leave the boat in Tallinn to undergo hospital treatment. Under the Hague Convention of 1907, "belligerent ships" could enter a neutral port but were forbidden from remaining there for "more than twenty-four hours." At the insistence of Germany, the Estonian military authorities boarded the ship, interned the crew, confiscated all the navigation aids and maps and commenced removing all her armaments. However, only fifteen of her twenty torpedoes were removed before the hoist cable parted; this was because it had been secretly sabotaged by her new commander, former chief officer, Lieutenant Jan Grudzinski.

The crew of Orzeł conspired together to carry out a daring escape. Around midnight on 18 September, the submarine's Estonian guards were overpowered, the mooring lines were cut, and Orzeł got under way. The alarm was raised, and her conning tower was peppered by machine-gun fire. Running half-submerged, Orzeł ran aground on a bar at the harbour mouth, where artillery fire damaged her wireless equipment. Grudzinski managed to get the boat off the bar by blowing her tanks, and she proceeded out of the Gulf of Finland, intending to sail for a British port, the crew having heard a radio report that the Polish submarine Wilk had been welcomed in Britain.



Orzeł escaped from Tallinn with two Estonian guards on board as hostages. The Estonian and German press covering the Orzeł incident declared the two captured guards missing at sea. Grudzinski set them ashore in Sweden, providing them with clothing, money, and food for their safe return to homeland. The Polish crew believed that those returning from the underworld "deserve to travel first class only".

Since Orzeł's navigational charts had all been removed by the Estonian authorities, Captain Grudzinski resolved to stop a German ship and take her charts. However, the only German vessels encountered were warships rather than merchantmen. The submarine's sole remaining navigational aid was a list of lighthouses, and using these as a reference, Orzeł followed a course along the Baltic coast, around Denmark, and out into the North Sea where she came under attack by British as well as German forces, since without her wireless equipment she had no means of identifying herself.

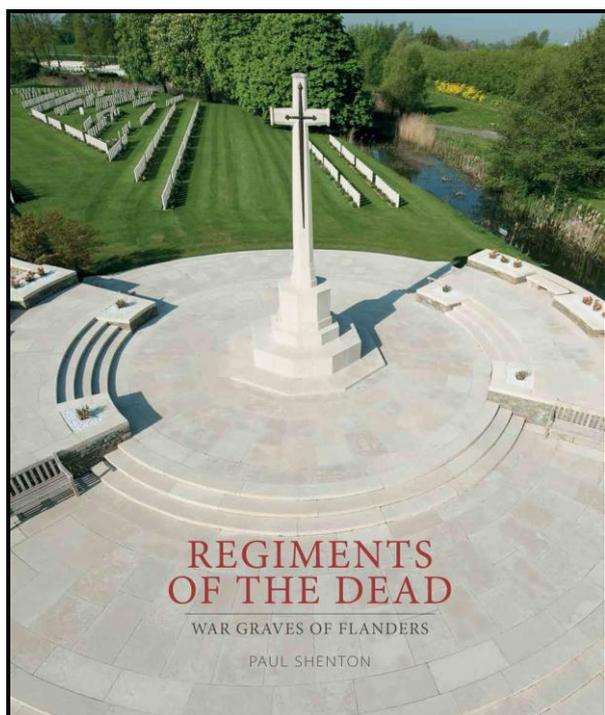
Forty days after she had originally sailed from Gdynia, Orzeł made landfall, off the east coast of Scotland. She lay on the bottom until emergency repairs were made to the radio, then surfaced to transmit a message in English. A Royal Navy destroyer then came out and escorted her into port, much to the surprise of the British who had thought her long since sunk.

After a refit in Scotland Orzeł was assigned to the Royal Navy's 2nd Submarine Flotilla, and was assigned to patrol missions. Shortly after noon on 8 April 1940 she sank the 5,261 ton clandestine German troop transport Rio de Janeiro off the small harbour village of Lillesand in southern Norway, killing hundreds of German troops intended for the invasion of Norway. Rio de Janeiro was heading to Bergen in order to take part in the initial landings of Operation Weserübung - the invasion of Norway and opening move of the Norwegian Campaign.

Orzeł departed on her seventh patrol on 23 May 1940, to the central North Sea. On 1 and 2 June a radio message was transmitted from Rosyth ordering her to alter her patrol area and proceed to the Skagerrak. No radio signals had been received from her since she had sailed, and on 5 June she was ordered to return to base. She never acknowledged reception, and never returned to base. 8 June 1940 was officially accepted as the day of her loss. Although various theories exist regarding her loss, and it is commonly believed that she ran onto a mine in the Skagerrak, the true cause of her loss remains unknown to this day. There is the possibility that Orzeł may have been sunk either by a British minefield or by an adjacent German minefield.

Amongst the losses on board were Lieutenant Keith D’Ombrain Nott from Taunton, Somerset, who is commemorated on Portsmouth Naval Memorial. Yeoman of Signals Walter Fordyce Green from Sheffield, commemorated on Chatham Naval Memorial and Petty Officer Leslie William Jones from Shrewsbury, commemorated on Plymouth Naval Memorial.

## Regiments of the Dead – Paul Shenton



The great military cemeteries found along the Messines Ridge and around the town of Ieper (Ypres) in Flanders, Belgium, are the last resting place of thousands of soldiers who died during the First World War and are now the subject of a photographic essay by Paul Shenton – *Regiments of the Dead*

A couple of years ago Paul sent in some photographs of cemeteries in Belgium. These had been taken using a 15 meter mast on top of which was a remotely operated camera. We now use some of these photos on our rolling banner which include a photo of Ramparts cemetery and a spectacular view of Menin Gate at night.

Paul has now produced a book of his images which he has taken over the last 5 years. The extraordinary photographs in this book of the rows of graves, when viewed from above, resemble soldiers on parade.

It is an excellent photographic journal which displays various cemeteries and memorials around Flanders photographed during the seasons of the year.

It would make an ideal gift for anyone with an interest in the battlefields of Flanders during WWI. Orders can be made direct to Paul via [paul.shenton@me.com](mailto:paul.shenton@me.com). The cost is £20 + £3.75 P&P.

It is hoped to have a follow up book displaying high level views of cemeteries on the Somme in due course.

## The British Cemetery Iraklion. Memorials to a forgotten intervention. Mick McTiernan

*Mick has recently submitted photos from Iraklion Cemetery in Crete from an earlier confrontation between local Christians and Muslims. He has provided additional information about this period which I dare say many visiting Crete are totally unaware of – I was not when I was there a few years back – Steve*

British troops were landed in Crete on 15th February 1897 as a part of a force sent by the European Powers, initially Britain, France, Italy, Germany, Austro-Hungary and Russia, to prevent inter-communal violence between Cretan Christians and Cretan Muslims and to counter a Cretan Christian rebellion which had resulted in the invasion of the island by Greek troops. The European fear was that annexation of the island by Greece would result in the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and a catastrophic war in the Balkans; a war which would inevitably drag in the European Powers.

Based for the most part in Candia, modern Iraklion, the British were to remain in Crete until the army pulled out on 26th July 1909 and the Royal Navy on 13th February 1913. During this period, 18 army battalions and innumerable Royal Navy ships were stationed on Crete and British forces suffered some 180 or so fatalities; the exact figure being difficult to ascertain because no central record appears to have been kept. Of these deaths, the vast majority died of disease; only 14 died as a result of 'enemy action', and these all in a riot on 6th September 1898.

Two memorials to the British personnel of this period remain on Crete. The better known is the Commonwealth War Graves Commission site at Suda Bay which contains 25 memorials of this intervention. The lesser known is the cemetery at Agios Konstantinos and Eleni, 42 Odos Knossou, Iraklion, containing a further 141 or so memorials: the number is uncertain because of possible duplication of names and differences between the memorial plaques erected in 1980 when the cemetery was revamped, and the original monuments.



**View of cemetery showing memorial wall.**

The Suda Bay memorials conform to the standard CWGC pattern, however, the Iraklion site is a small walled enclosure located in the grounds of a very large Greek Orthodox cemetery, a plaque on the gate proclaiming that the area has been '...given by the Municipality of Iraklion to commemorate British servicemen who died here when the freedom of Crete was being established.'

The memorials within the cemetery are laid out in a hollow rectangle; at the end furthest from the entrance gate is a modern memorial wall, erected in 1980, on which are situated five marble plaques; four containing the names of all the British personnel commemorated there. On both the long sides of the rectangle, forming a passage way to the memorial wall, are a series of obelisks and markers dating from the period of the British presence, dedicated either to named individuals or in some cases simply to the unnamed dead of a particular battalion.



**1/Highland Light Infantry Monument.**

There is no set pattern to the memorials; they range from plain headstones containing brief details to ornately carved monuments with battalion badges and effusive dedications from comrades of the deceased. Five, dating from 1897/1898, can be identified as having been made by a stone mason in Malta, J. Camilleri; a company which continues as monumental masons to this day.

One further obelisk, listing the names of the dead of 2/Rifle Brigade, is located behind the memorial wall on the left hand side. This unfortunate battalion suffered by far the largest number of casualties while on Crete, all from disease; apart that is from one member, Acting Serjeant F.G. Austin, being murdered by a colleague, the unnamed murderer being described as dying from 'judicial execution.'

The final side of the rectangle is made up of three large gravestones, each dedicated to an officer.

Set into the left hand wall of the cemetery and extending nearly the whole of the length of the wall, are 26 small markers plaques. Seven of these are engraved with the names of individuals. All but one of the remainder are engraved with initials, a year and the letters RB, and commemorate members of the Rifle Brigade: The odd one out commemorates a Boy Soldier from the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry.

Of the 14 British military personnel killed in action on 6th September 1898, only the 10 soldiers killed, all members of the 1/Highland Light Infantry, are commemorated in Iraklion or on Crete; the four Royal Navy personnel who died that day do not appear to have any memorial on the island.

The cemetery also contains two civilian monuments. One, located on the right hand side behind the memorial wall, is to Mr William Russell Anderson: The Superintendent of the Eastern Telegraph Company, he was 'assassinated' in Iraklion in 1874. The other memorial, located by the wall opposite is to Richard Berry Seager, a native of Michigan, USA, who died in Candia in 1925.

Further information on the British Intervention in Crete can be found at:  
mickmctiernan.com/history

<https://britishinterventionincrete.wordpress.com/>

A detailed account of the initial stages of the intervention can be found at:

[https://www.academia.edu/10428584/A\\_Very\\_Bad\\_Place\\_Indeed\\_For\\_a\\_Soldier\\_The\\_British\\_involvement\\_in\\_the\\_early\\_stages\\_of\\_the\\_European\\_Intervention\\_in\\_Crete\\_1897\\_-\\_1898](https://www.academia.edu/10428584/A_Very_Bad_Place_Indeed_For_a_Soldier_The_British_involvement_in_the_early_stages_of_the_European_Intervention_in_Crete_1897_-_1898)

### Jeg Elsker Deg, Darling

You may remember in the Summer edition of the newsletter we had an article about Kate Lawrence who, now aged 92, had made contact with the family of Norwegian pilot Finn Bakke in Norway. Kate, who had fallen in love with Finn whilst she was based at Fighter Command Headquarters, had assumed that Finn crashed in the sea and had no known grave. Obviously it was very emotional for Kate to learn that he was buried in Reichswald War cemetery in Germany, after all this time, but she sent a card to our volunteer Brian Lewis, who lives nearby in Arnhem, and he arranged for flowers and the card to be laid at Finns graveside.

*Jeg Elsker Deg  
God bless you  
Darling  
X*



### A long way from the sea: Naval casualties in the cemetery at Klagenfurt, Austria - Craig Walker

Two years ago my wife and I toured Sweden, and while there we visited (or revisited) the eleven small CWGC sites in the country for the Project. This year I let slip to Steve Rogers that we would be visiting Italy and Austria. You can guess the result... no, not all of Italy, thankfully (since there would be 126 sites involved!) but at Assisi and Padua in Italy, and at Klagenfurt in Austria, the cemeteries have been refurbished in recent years and were overdue for revisits.

The CWGC cemeteries at Assisi and Padua form part of the well-known story of the Italian Campaign, with casualties from the many Commonwealth land and air forces involved - including (at Padua) four graves from the 2013 burial of the crew of an RAF Boston bomber recently discovered. Padua's main cemetery, on the other hand, contains a small, well-kept plot, with casualties from World War I. It is often forgotten that Commonwealth troops helped stabilise the Italian front after the disaster at Caporetto. Most of the casualties died from their wounds or sickness at the Clearing Station there, but some in Austrian air raids on Padua.

## Klagenfurt

There are two cemeteries at Klagenfurt. The main CWGC cemetery is there because the city was the British headquarters during the post-war occupation of Austria – the country was divided into four occupation zones, just like Germany, as was Vienna (just like Berlin). The British Zone encompassed Styria, Carinthia and East Tyrol in the south of the country, and lasted until the Austrian State Treaty established a neutral Austria in 1955.

(There is also a small separate CWGC plot in the main public cemetery of Klagenfurt, at Annabichl, containing 57 graves of British and Commonwealth non-war casualties, dating from the occupation period.)



The Klagenfurt CWGC cemetery also contains some post-war casualties, but the majority are soldiers, airmen and sailors who died in Austrian camps as Prisoners of War, and whose remains were eventually brought together on one spot. So this cemetery is very different from most CWGC cemeteries, and from Assisi and Padua, which developed as a result of casualties taken in the very heavy fighting nearby. As such it has a wider range of units depicted on the headstones than is usual.

My main interest is in British Naval history, and the headstones for the Royal Navy and Royal Marines servicemen buried there, seven in all, caught my eye. One died as the occupation started in 1945, and two were members of RM AA units, captured on land, I presume in Crete, in 1941.

The other four naval casualties provide links to some quite dramatic events at sea in the Mediterranean, which I thought might be of interest, given that the majority of casualties at the majority of CWGC sites are naturally of soldiers and airmen. Two are from the First World War, and two from the Second.



### Ordinary Seaman **John McCarthy**, SS Bronwen

John McCarthy, from Cork, was eighteen years old when the small steamer SS Bronwen was stopped and sunk by U-35 north of the Balearic Islands on 24th September 1916. The Bronwen had run into the path of one of the most celebrated and successful U-boat captains, Lothar von Arnaud de la Periere, on one of his most successful cruises. Eventually, de la Periere was responsible for the sinking of 193 ships, most of them by gunfire. He also damaged a further eight and sank two small warships. (He survived the war, coming out of retirement as an Admiral early in the Second World War, only to die in a plane crash.)

It seems that de la Periere was not unchivalrous – the record shows that of the four (!) ships he sank that day, the crews all survived, being allowed to take to the boats before the submarine opened fire; but he did take prisoner any servicemen aboard, and he took three from the Bronwen, including gunner McCarthy. McCarthy spent nearly two years as a prisoner, dying of illness just twelve short weeks before the Armistice.

## Engineman **Leonard Emmanuel Peek**, HM Drifter Girl Gracie

German and Austrian U-boats operated out of the Austro-Hungarian ports in the Adriatic, and to hinder them a barrage of nets and mines was put in place across the Straits of Otranto, modelled on the Dover Barrage and maintained by over 100 trawlers and drifters. But whereas, in the English Channel, British destroyers and cruisers were in constant attendance, in the Adriatic the Italian covering destroyers were mostly "on call" in harbour.

On 15th May 1917 the Austrians launched a night raid on the barrage, with three cruisers and other warships involved. The lightly-armed fishing vessels had little chance of resisting the attack, though a VC and several other medals were won by those attempting to inflict some damage on the enemy. Fourteen small craft were sunk before the destroyers arrived, including the Girl Gracie. The debacle caused the Royal Navy to reinforce the barrage with its own destroyers.

Once more, chivalry had come into play and the Austrians picked up many survivors before making good their escape. Peek, from Lowestoft, who had just turned twenty-eight, was a Royal Navy Reserve (Trawler Section) engineer – drafted along with his vessel. As such, he was imprisoned, to spend seventeen months incarcerated before dying of disease in September 1918 – just four weeks before the Armistice. He was married, and is also commemorated in St Margaret's Church in Lowestoft.



## Stoker 1st Class **William Holt**, HM Submarine Saracen

The submarine HMS Saracen was commissioned in February 1942, and initially was very successful, sinking U-335 in the North Sea and the Italian submarine Granito in the Mediterranean. She undertook eleven patrols in the Mediterranean, operating from Gibraltar, Malta and Algiers, with some more successes, including landing agents to aid the Resistance, but on the last of these was spotted off Bastia in Corsica by two Italian corvettes, depth-charged and forced to the surface, on 14th August 1943. Most of the crew survived, to be taken prisoner. Some of them were sent to Dachau, some were to escape, and some survived an attack on their train by Allied Air Forces – but William Holt was to die a prisoner in Austria in March 1944, leaving a widow in Stockport.

The wreck of HMS Saracen was found this year after a long search. It is a designated war grave.

## Marine **Noel Thomas James Haines**, HMS Gloucester

HMS Gloucester commissioned in January 1939, one of the Town class cruisers which were to see so much action in the Second World War. After suffering damage in a Malta convoy and taking part in the Battle of Matapan, she was heavily involved in the battle for Crete.

One British force decimated a German convoy of caiques heading for the island, and Gloucester (along with the Fiji and other warships) was to suffer the vengeance of the Luftwaffe. She was sent back to support the search for survivors from the destroyer Greyhound, even though she had already depleted her stock of AA ammunition. Under intense air attack on 22nd May 1941 the ship sank with the loss of all but 85 of its crew of 805. The loss of the Gloucester remains one of the most controversial events of the naval war in the Mediterranean.



Chivalry was in much shorter supply this time round – there were machine-gun attacks on the survivors in the water, and those who made it to land had to rely on food from Greek peasants as their captors refused to share what little they had.

Most of the survivors had to face a long train journey and an even longer march before they reached Thessaloniki, en route to imprisonment at Wolfsberg in Austria.

Marine Haines was among the survivors, but had ingested a great deal of fuel oil into his lungs. He and two other badly injured survivors were flown to Athens before joining the others at Wolfsberg. There was to be no happy ending. In October 1941 the Gloucester survivors were transported to another camp in northern Germany, to spend the next three and a half years as PoWs. Marine Haines died that month from his injuries.

## Home Run – Pauline & Jim Pedersen

During the summer we visited the National Memorial Arboretum, in Staffordshire, to see the memorial dedicated to the Chaplaincy in July. We were then attracted to an array of poppies nearby at the base of a substantial chunk of rock, affixed to which was a plaque which read:

*'HOME RUN - This memorial is dedicated to the Allied Escapers and evaders of WW2 and to their helpers of all nationalities and faiths who assisted them in returning to Great Britain to continue the Common Fight for Freedom'.*

It was placed there by the WW2 Escape Lines Memorial Society (ELMS) and adds:



*'This memorial rock was hewn from a quarry in the High Pyrenees, which is owned by the family of former mountain guides, and donated as a memorial to all who worked and travelled the escape lines of WW2.'*

These inscriptions immediately brought to mind a book which we can thoroughly recommend, **Cruel Crossing: Escaping Hitler across the Pyrenees**, by Edward Stourton, published 2013, to coincide with the twentieth anniversary of the first commemorative walk along the Le Chemin de la Liberté.

Le Chemin de la Liberté or Freedom Trail, France, is based on the town of Saint-Girons in the department of Ariège, 100 kilometres south of Toulouse. The trail retraces one of the hardest wartime escape routes over the central Pyrenees into Northern Spain. Quoting from the fly-leaf *...The mountain paths are as treacherous as they are steep – the more so in the dark and in winter. Even for the fit the journey is a formidable challenge. Hundreds of those who climbed through the Pyrenees during the Second World War were malnourished and exhausted after weeks on the run hiding in barns and attics. Many never even reached the Spanish border.*

*Today their bravery and endurance is commemorated each July by a trek along the Chemin de la Liberté – the toughest and most dangerous of wartime routes. From his fellow pilgrims Edward Stourton uncovers stories of midnight scrambles across rooftops and drops from speeding trains; burning Lancasters, doomed love affairs, horrific murder and astonishing heroism.*

Edward Stourton's vivid history of this little-known aspect of the Second World War is intensely moving and very readable. The book is indexed and includes maps, photographs and source notes.

## Epitaphs

TWGPP is often asked about the epitaphs that are engraved at the base of some headstones. The questions arrange from “*who chose them?*” “*Where do they come from?*” and quite often nowadays “*can an inscription be added even today?*”. These questions are normally from family members who have only just discovered they have a relation buried abroad in a military cemetery. I know a few of the ‘ground rules’ that were stipulated when families had the opportunity to submit some words they would like on the headstone

- 1) 66 letters maximum (spaces count as one letter)
- 2) No special alphabets such as Greek
- 3) Cost was three & a half pence per letter (old pence)

And the fact that in most cases where the epitaph was of a sensible length the cost was waived or made by voluntary contribution.

A recent submission from Hazebrouck Cemetery in Belgium for a Private Edward Rust of the Yorkshire Regiment had an epitaph which recounted how he was wounded then returned to the front line to be with his friends and was subsequently killed. The epitaph took up the whole of the headstone so much so that there was no room for the cross that would normally take up the centre ground. A few Bob’s worth of engraving there. I wonder if the cost of that was waived!



**Private Edward Rust –  
Died 30<sup>th</sup> April 1918**

## Flight Lieutenant Raymond Escreet – Wynn Harrison



Raymond Frankish Escreet was 17 years old at the outbreak of World War II working in his father’s fruit and vegetable wholesale business in Withernsea, East Yorkshire. When Ray was 18 he joined the RAF, qualified as a wireless operator and was posted to Number 15 Squadron at Wyton, Huntingdonshire. At 20, in a Stirling over St Nazaire, he experienced his first bombing raid.

As a Flight Sergeant with 15 Squadron, in June 1943, Ray was awarded the DFM which he received at Buckingham Palace from King George VI.

Although a wireless operator/air gunner Ray, while stationed at Mildenhall, volunteered to pose as the navigator for Dame Laura Knight’s painting of “Take Off” showing four crew members in a Short Stirling preparing themselves for their mission. This picture hangs in the Imperial War Museum.

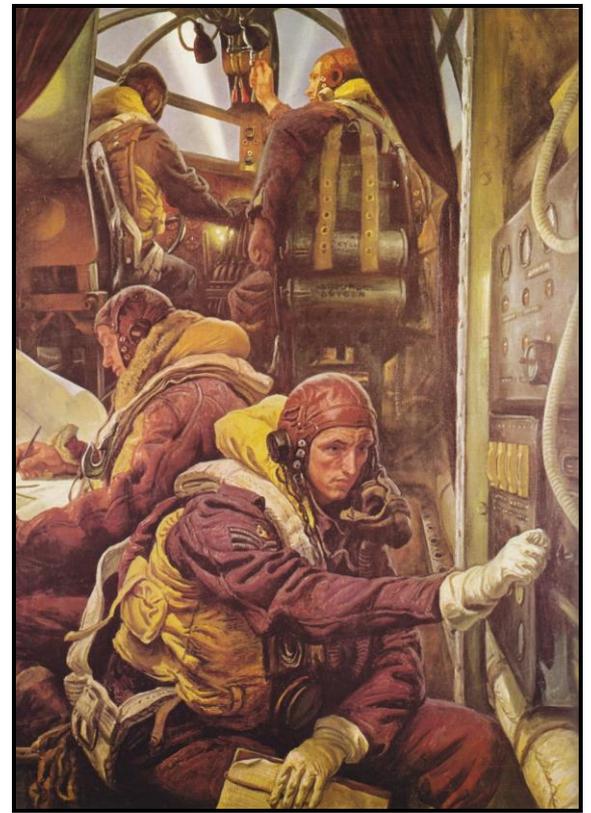
The artist wrote to Raymond on 12th December 1943 to say that the picture was finished and to thank him for his help and kindness to her.

On March 15th 1945 Raymond Escreet was promoted to Flight Lieutenant and had by then flown many missions with 161 RAF Squadron based at a secret airfield in Tempsford, Bedfordshire. He, with the crew in a Hudson Bomber, ‘N’ for Nan, dropped agents and supplies over occupied territory by parachute, but also landed in isolated locations to disembark and retrieve agents. The Tempsford airfield was disguised as a working farm and although the Germans knew of its existence it was never discovered.

Ray's parents were relieved that he was no longer engaged in bombing raids but had no idea of the top secret activities with which he was now involved. On 21st March 1945, Hudson aircraft N for Nan FK803 was attempting to drop three Belgian agents behind enemy lines in Operation Benedict, but was forced to turn back due to bad weather.

Aboard with Flt. Lt. Escreet W/op were his usual crew - pilot Flt Lt Terry Helfer, navigator F.O. Henry Scurr Johnson and gunner F.O. Forrest Harold (Tommy) Thompson DFM RNZAF - together with the three Belgian agents, - Lt G Corbisier, Lt J Morel, and Lt L De Winter. Their aircraft was shot down, it is believed, by an American interceptor and crashed in flames in Maulesmuhle, Luxembourg. The pilot was the only one able to bail out of the plane. Badly burned, he was sheltered by a priest and eventually reached safety, thus surviving the war. The bodies of the crew and the agents are buried on the hill above Maulesmuhle beside the wreckage of their aircraft which has been left at this isolated site at the request of the local community and the relatives.

Raymond Frankish Escreet was just 22 years old.



**And finally .....**

Well, that's about another year complete as we move into December. It just leaves me to pass on my best wishes to you and your families at this time of year and once again thank you for your support. It is not quite as wintery as Paul Ten Broeke's image of Ottersum cemetery in the Netherlands but who knows what is around the corner! Take care wherever you are in the world – *Steve Rogers*

*With best wishes for Christmas  
and the New year.  
from TWGPP*

