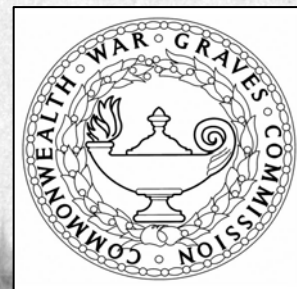


The War Graves Photographic Project

In association with
The CWGC
www.twgpp.org



News from the Front line

March 2008

Steve Rogers, Project Co-ordinator

It's just a month since the website went live so this newsletter gives me the opportunity to give a quick 'Sitrep' on how things are going.

Thank you for the very positive comments that we have received with regard to site design and ease of use. This has been achieved by a constant flow of e mails between us and the designers and this work will be on going to improve the facility over time. We are aware of some 'Gliches' that need to be ironed out and these are being actioned.

I must emphasise though that we are not trying to take over the remit of the CWGC and change names and other information which may have been supplied to us by the CWGC. Lists are constantly being updated to reflect these alterations but much of the text on family memorials is also down to the transcription by the volunteer so historical accuracy is not guaranteed. A number of personnel appear to have been 'promoted' at death!

We were planning to have on site the majority of names that we hold by the end of February but we have decided to upload actual images in a number of areas, which also takes up precious time, so the upload to full numbers will be ongoing. Please remember that there are only two of us actually doing this in our spare time as well as answering the plethora of mail that has been coming in.

Now that we are prominently linked to the CWGC website new volunteers are coming on board who are happy with the alliance. Later in this newsletter there are extracts of 'thank you' letters to emphasise that the work of the volunteers is valued.

The volunteer page went live on 22nd February. If you wish to update your details, add a short 'bio' or even submit a photograph of yourself that we can add, please forward.

With Spring upon us it is time to clean the lenses and think of those locations that remain unvisited as there is always the chance of finding that family memorial that has not been recorded.

Thank you for your continued support which is very much appreciated.



Plan your visits !!

Most people who go on holiday take a camera to record those faraway places they have visited. It was no different when we went to South Africa but I went home with more photos than I bargained for and helped make a wish come true at the same time.

While there my mother-in-law, who was also on holiday, told us about a man she had met in her home town of Thurso. My mother-in-law had mentioned to him that she had known his father. Sandy was pleased to hear this because his father had died before he was born during WWII and he knew very little about him. His father was buried in Durban but he had never seen his grave.

Curiosity made me look up the details at <http://www.cwgc.org> and I checked my emails at the same time. Steve Rogers had sent a receipt confirmation for the photo CD I had just sent. I replied that I was on holiday in South Africa and should have checked to see if there were any war graves in East London where we were staying.



Never make flippant remarks to the Project Coordinator! By return email I had a spreadsheet with 150 war graves in four cemeteries in East London. Well, I can never resist a challenge so forget about the giraffes and elephants, I had to get a few war graves at least.

Husband Harry was given the job of grave spotter and minder and soon we had photographed most of the war graves on the list. An added bonus was that we very quickly knew our way round East London, even better than our family who live there.

We arrived back home in England and the CD of photos was sent to Steve. I mentioned the story of the war grave in Durban and Steve contacted Ricky Nortje, the National Coordinator of the South African War Graves Project. It was just possible that he had already taken a photo of Alexander Macleod's grave. Lo and behold I received an email with a photo. After a few phone calls to track down Sandy I was able to pass the photo on. Needless to say Sandy was over the moon.

With the help of a few like-minded people we had managed to make a wish come true. Makes you realise that it is a very worthwhile project.

If you are going on holiday it might be an idea to get in touch with Steve before you go. Taking war grave photos adds an interesting and unexpected dimension to your holiday and, speaking personally, I'm hooked.

Why I am a volunteer – Marian Bushby

On 15 January 1940 my Dad put his call-up papers in his pocket and was waved off on the Pontefract bus by his friend Les Greasby. Les worked underground at the pit and was exempt but for some obscure reason went in that day and handed his notice in. Of course he was called up shortly afterwards.

They never saw one another again because Les was killed in 1945.

I've been to his grave in Northern Italy but I can honestly say if I can give just one person one tenth the feeling I've experienced seeing him on the new website then it's definitely a job well done.

LABUAN – The Pearl of Borneo or “An Englishman’s Experience of the Perils of Borneo”

Charles Struther – Kuala Lumpur



Labuan is a remote, small tropical island off of the coast of Borneo. Now a centre for offshore banking and known as a “hardship posting” for oilmen, with cheap sea food and duty free drink it has never lost its peaceful, slow charm. But it was not always like this. Having a deep water anchorage, it was captured by the Japanese in the last war and renamed “Maida Island” in honour of a Japanese general who had been killed in nearby Sarawak.

This was also the place where the Japanese surrendered after being driven from Borneo in 1945. After the war the allied dead from the fighting in Borneo and POW’s, who had died in captivity, having been worked or walked to death by their captors, were buried in a designated cemetery. The tale of the POW’s is told in an excellent book “Sandakan –The last March ” by Don Wall. I was to become familiar with the names and graves of many of the men who were personalities in this book and who had been killed just before and, seemingly, after the war had ended.

Of the 3000 graves in Labuan War Cemetery 1800 are named. The names of over 4200 others, whose graves are lost, are commemorated on plaques in a colonnaded gateway at the entrance to the cemetery. The cemetery is a peaceful and very well maintained reminder of the horrors of war, different from those of Northern Europe that often mark the effects of anonymous mechanized murder, Far Eastern cemeteries such as Labuan mark the cruelty of individuals against individuals, or personal heroism of the type that I read of in 1950’s boys’ books.

The cemetery is the last resting place of two Australian VC’s, who died in action, and one GC who earned his medal in captivity.

I used to visit the cemetery in the 1980’s and, as my work brought me back there in 2005, I offered to photograph it for The War Graves Photographic Project.

Looking at ‘Google Earth’ made me realize that the cemetery was bigger than my mind’s eye had remembered so I was going to have to plan the task to save me walking miles in the heat to retrace the inevitable missed and botched photos. The graves had been laid out in eighty grave plots so the planning was going to be easy and the work mechanical.

Seeing the cemetery in real life it looked even bigger than Google had shown, lying on a pronounced slope, well spaced, under a tropical sun. My heart quailed. “Don’t abandon the plan Charlie - into action!” It looked long, but easy: brass plates on white plinths, inscription just slightly off the horizontal, so no bending down. Mechanical maybe, but easy. Foolish boy!

The July sun feels quite pleasant in Labuan at 8am but at 9am it starts to burn, liberating the moisture from the ground, increasing the humidity and searing the back of the neck of a unpracticed war grave photographer. Then, ahhh, relief, a black cloud masks the sun, the relief ending as the black cloud deposits a wall of water over the cemetery, temporarily flooding some areas. The sun comes out, so back to work. But I had forgotten other inhabitants of the cemetery and, as I focused my camera on the second plinth, I became aware of a black vein creeping up the side of the concrete plinth to the higher ground of the name plaque. I was totally unaware of the similar vein forming inside and outside of my trouser leg as the black ant population of the cemetery moved to my higher ground to avoid the flooding. High speed retreat to the colonnades where, fortunately, no spectators saw a panicking, dancing middle aged European stripping down to his underpants.

“An Englishman’s Experience of the Perils of Borneo” - Continued

When the batteries went flat in my trusty but old Konica digital I switched to my new all singing Olympus. No view-finder, just a screen on the back, big enough to be seen by ageing eyes. Handy, unless you are taking pictures of near horizontal inscriptions under a tropical sun and a bright blue sky. Couldn't see the screen for reflections, not a damn thing!

I finished photographing the graves (for this trip) after a battery recharge. When downloading them I realized that the light reflecting from the white plinths had fooled my camera, leaving the inscriptions unreadably dark when the sun shone and contrastless and wan when cloudy. So, more retakes.

The plaques for the missing in the colonnaded area looked easy, 33 narrow plaques mounted on columns in a covered walkway. No problems with the sun, just photograph them in a tiled pattern. Easy. How wrong can you be! Tall narrow plaques, back lit by outside sunlight, with a gap of about five feet between faces, are incredibly difficult to photograph when you haven't got a bar stool or step ladder to stand on and your new camera refuses to tell you that it is not really focused when it is showing you on the screen that it is. (In spite of three attempts to take these, they remain my main failure.)

Comparing the thousands of photos, of various qualities, against the CWGC listing that had been given to me, I found that I had missed one grave. That upset and obsessed me more than all my botches, “Joseph Hyde, Driver, Royal Army Service Corps,” had somehow eluded me. How could that happen to me, an obsessive perfectionist? But it had and, on a return visit, I found him and made up with several photos.

I visited Labuan three times in all to retake poor photos and to reattempt the plaques. Perhaps I will get them right one day.

Editorial Pauline Pedersen

It doesn't pay to be too complacent in case things go wrong but at the moment we are pleased to report that 27 happy snappers have signed up for Operation Tribute Market Garden, Holland, in May and 19 for Gallipoli in September. That's a full house for the latter. But we will still welcome anyone wanting to join us in May and the booking form is attached to this Newsletter. So far, there are four newcomers, otherwise it's reminiscent of Friends Reunited.

For his recent birthday Jim received a copy of *Remembered* The History of the Commonwealth War Graves. It is a large book and we've had to rearrange the bookshelves to accommodate it but that's the only downside for it is a truly stunning publication, both in style and content.



It surprised us how many times we were able to say 'Been there!' as we turned the pages but, of course, there were far more places featured which we will never reach.

The Preface to *Remembered* is written by HRH The Duke of Kent, President of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. He concludes it by saying ...*In giving thanks to the Commission and its staff for the work they do, I stand with them, to build on the achievements of our forebears and to meet the challenges of the next ninety years.*

It is a pleasing thought that The War Graves Photographic Project also now stands with the Commission to add to the work they do.

The Bradley Brothers Peter Magnall

In 1998 I retired and my late wife and I had planned a round-the-world tour taking in, amongst other places, Singapore. Whilst there we hoped we would be able to visit Kranji Cemetery.

Two of my cousins, Harry and Bernard Bradley, joined the Royal Artillery before WWII. They were part of the BEF to be evacuated at Dunkirk and after a short period in UK, when they visited my family, they left for Singapore. They were both taken POW on the Japanese invasion and held in Changi POW camp. Coincidentally, a cousin of my father was also a POW in Changi and he survived the war.



Lance Bombardier Bernard Bradley died from beri-beri on 31 July 1945. Harry survived, stayed in the Army and rose to RSM before retiring. We knew that Bernard was buried at Kranji and we managed to pay a visit on 25th March 1998, the first members of our family to do so.

In September 2006 I visited the National Memorial Arboretum and the Children of Far East Prisoners of War Memorial Building. I found the displays there to be very moving, as were the details of Bernard, included in the record. As a result of my visit I arranged for a tree to be planted at the NMA in memory of Bernard.

Harry and Bernard were the sons of William & Kathleen (nee Scott) Bradley. Kathleen was the eldest sister of my mother, Mona Magnall (nee Scott).

'Thank you' notes received

Thank you so much for the beautiful photographs and the opportunity to view them in this manner. It is a **wonderful** project and I am sure that your site will be very much appreciated. Heather Rouse

I just wanted to say what a brilliant website it is! Today is the first opportunity I've had to check it out and its brilliant to see the photos on there! All our photos from Cornwall aren't on there yet so its going to be really rewarding to be able to view the photos we took straightaway. I've just found my Great Uncle's war grave in Italy, an actual picture which I've been waiting so long to see. Thank you! Paula

I just can't tell you how happy I was when I got your message with the pictures (in such a perfect quality). It's just tremendous what you are doing and a lot of people must be grateful for this job. In fact the only thing my mother knew about her cousin was the story of the wrong name!! Roland Schumacher

I am amazed, I cannot thank you and your 'team' enough for this picture. On one my local war memorials it had been recorded as Pte Frank Whilde, nothing known. Frank is on the bottom right hand side of this panel so to be able to give him a proper mark of respect is something special. Again, very many thanks G.F. Clark

Thank you very much for the lovely photo of the headstone of my relative Alfred Beetles, I am very grateful. Sadly I only discovered Alfred last year whilst researching my family. Every year we go to France visiting all family graves and memorials, unfortunately this year we are unable to due my husbands disability. I do hope your project continues, especially for people with all sorts of reasons cannot get over to visit relatives graves. If it was not for people like you and your team, we'd be stuck. Thank you again. Frances Spong.

Thank you so much for these pictures. It is a wonderful thing that you all do. My husband and I were in Rome a couple of years ago but didn't know about the grave back then. Next time we go, it will be wonderful to stop in there. His family, oddly enough, is from Pachino, where the troops landed and his father and uncles remember the troops coming through the area and all of the boats just off shore. Thanks again for all that you and your organization do. Tammy

.. it is such a fitting tribute to now see his grave properly. I printed off the grave for my Aunt and as I thought, the tears came and she was so moved that she could see where he is buried. So, thank you again for all your help and I wish you all the best for the future.

Well done on doing such a great job and one so dear to us all. Marion Quilty, Australia

Seeking Private Brooks Sue Powis

A few years ago on holiday in Suffolk we went to Bungay for the day and came across an 'antiques and curios' shop. While the children were looking through the cases of fossils and stones etc I was free to search through boxes of maps and photos...my particular weakness! It was then that I came across the photo of Private Brooks complete with newspaper cutting and a black-edged service of remembrance card all stuck down on a yellowing piece of card. No way could I leave him there, so I paid my £1.50 and took Paul home.

The newspaper cutting stated that: *Since last we wrote, painfully sad news arrived. Our brother, Private Paul Samuel Brooks, was killed in action on September 15th, having been struck by a shell. His commanding officer testifies in a sympathetic letter to his uniformly brave demeanour and constant regard for duty. When Mr B Grimes resigned office at Easter, 1913, Mr Brooks was appointed sacristan, and right loyally he discharged his duties, for his heart was in his work. At the Memorial Service on October 8th, the Vicar's text was, 'There is but a step between me and death'. Mrs Brooks sincerely thanks her neighbours for the beautiful wreath placed in the Church in memory of her husband.'*

A hit on the CWGC site confirmed the above details and said that Private Brooks, 18222 9th Bn Norfolk Regiment, was commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial. My husband and I decided to go and pay our respects. While we were there a party of schoolchildren were 'doing the Somme' and I introduced some of them to Paul. It was with great solemnity that I read the words of 'Have you Forgotten Yet?' as husband, children and myself placed poppies as close to his name as we could (Paul's name is high up on the memorial).



I have to say that he has been an inspiration to countless Birmingham Primary schoolchildren. Paul Brooks, a forgotten soldier discarded in a junk shop, became the cornerstone of remembrance services. Private Brooks was our very own lost soldier.

My one grandfather was a trench surveyor in the Royal Engineers mainly in the Marne area and another grandfather in the Saxon regiment. Both my grandfathers were wounded: my Welsh granddad having succumbed to trench foot and my Saxon Opa having a lungful of shrapnel. Both were not so different from each other...

Guild of Battlefield Guides



It was with great pleasure that Steve was invited to the annual gathering of The Guild of Battlefield Guides www.battlefieldguides.co.uk at Southwick Park, Hampshire, in order to present TWGPP to this auspicious organisation.

The Guild was inaugurated in 2003 and since then has analysed, developed and raised the understanding and practice of Battlefield Guiding by providing an environment to meet fellow guides and share information, expertise and knowledge on a wide range of issues. They offer professional development, insights into new approaches and areas of interest, and through a validation programme, give guides a chance to prove they meet exacting standards. They can then pursue attaining the Guild Guide Badge which is recognized as a mark of esteem throughout the battlefield guiding environment. The War Graves Photographic Project presentation was part of a programme of events over the weekend and judging by the questions asked went down well with the audience.



Eye witness account of the crash of Sterling Mk IV from 620 Sqdn/6 MU. 28th November 1944 in Sande, Norway Kjell Nilsen (then aged 8)

My mother, father, younger brother and I (aged 8) were just finishing a late meal and it was bedtime approx. 10 pm. The night was bright due to the moonlight and the snow. It was late due to intense air activities. We did hear the sounds from a lot of air craft in the far distance. The sky was flashed by different types of lights from the planes, air fights, search lights, heavy artillery (German "flak"), flames, fires and explosions in the distance. It was more intense than a modern firework, but at that time we were very afraid and little shivering.

We were all on the alert, I remember. Later I read that more than 20 airplanes were dropping containers with weapons and other equipments to the resistance movement and 100-200 air planes were bombing several German military targets as well as other strategic targets. It started as a nice evening, cold and dark. However, it turned into an inferno some miles away (closest target was approx. more than 20 km away, a German submarine base).

I remember thinking about the next morning because it was important to start as early as possible in order to collect aluminium ribbons that the bombers dropped to confuse the German radars and artillery (of course, at that time we did not know why the ribbons were dropped). When it seemed to be a little calmer our parents were preparing for bed, when the sky was flashed by artillery, lights from airplanes and fires. Suddenly, the calm atmosphere was broken by machine gun and canon fires in the sky from the north east. We ran outside once more, maybe a reaction to seek shelter at a lower level? Looking up could see a huge airplane in flames, approx 100-200 metres up in the sky. The machine guns and canons were still firing, but we did not see the German fighters although the noise indicated several planes.

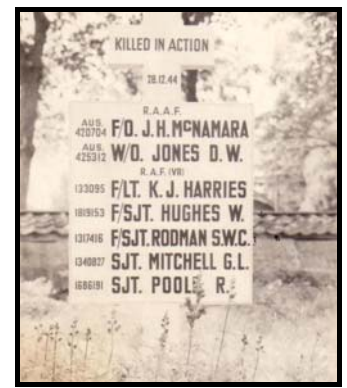
In few seconds we were stunned by a huge flame and explosion from a field nearby approximately 1.5 km from our house. The flames and smoke was visible in the town of Drammen, 18 km from Sande. It was a frightening experience and as it was illegal to stay outside, we turned in, shivering!

In the morning when we went outside, we could smell the fire, see the smoke. My parents did not allow us to go to the site of the crash. However, a little later the warning was forgotten and some of my friends and I went to visit the site and the wreck.

A lot of people were surrounding the place, an open field, 200 m from a farm. The fields surrounding the wreck were snow white. When going closer a lot of small fragments were to be seen, and evidence of casualties. German soldiers had searched the area and now later, at noon, soldiers were posted around. The plane crash had made three holes in a row in the frozen ground, a big one in front and two smaller ones. We did see parts of the fuselage and wings in these holes and other debris scattered all around. Small flames and smoke were still visible in the centre and the smell was memorable.

It was quiet as civilians were moving around and they were talking in whispers. The German soldiers had already removed the crew who had all died in the crash.

Even today when I see a house or a car on fire, my mind recalls everything, even the smell. I will never forget.



The War Graves Photographic Project is a voluntary organisation and can only achieve its aim of photographing all of the war graves around the world by voluntary action. If you feel that you would like to help us in this task, please contact us at:

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