



# frontline.

The newsletter of the MK WFA, July 2023.



## 'Britannia's unruly stepchildren', Americans in the British Armed Forces- Michael O'Brien

This talk is not about America's entry into the Great War in 1917, but instead looks at the lives and experiences of a variety of American citizens, who took matters into their own hands well before America joined the war, and crossed the Atlantic to join the British armed services. Just as many American citizens joined the RAF or the Canadian forces in WW2 before Pearl Harbour forced America into the conflict, Michael O'Brien will reveal how the same thing had happened previously during the Great War.

Michael is a retired history teacher and published author whose major research project was a study of American citizens who served under British colours in World War One. He is an expert in this field, and his fascinating talk is not one to miss!

## Milton Keynes WFA Seminar



14<sup>th</sup> October 2023 - Bletchley Masonic Centre  
9.30am - 4.30pm

Renowned expert speakers covering an exciting variety of aspects of the Great War, including Alexandra Churchill: 'The Hejaz Railway', Peter Hart and Gary Bain: 'Laugh or Cry: Life or Death in the Trenches', Major Charlie Barrett: 'Q-Ships', Helen Frost: 'The Women's Land Army in WW1'

Buffet lunch included plus tea, coffee and biscuits throughout the day. Book stall, militaria and branch displays. Tickets available online from Eventbrite - £30:  
<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/milton-keynes-wfa-seminar-2023-tickets-641303294417>



July



**Private Fred Johnson, Leicestershire Regiment killed in action 14<sup>th</sup> July 1916. Kevin's maternal Grandmother's first husband.**

Joined Leicestershire Regiment, 9th Battalion as a private in 1915, service number 15047.

Killed at the Somme, 14th July 1916. No known grave and is listed on the Thiepval Monument. His picture is shown in the locket above.

**Private Fred Barker, Leicestershire Regiment, killed in action 14th July 1916. Kevin's Great Uncle.**

Joined the Leicestershire Regiment, 9th Battalion as a Private in 1915, service number 15045. Killed at Trones Wood, 14th July 1916 and is buried in Serre Road No 2 Cemetery.

**Corporal Thomas Richard Fewell, Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, Killed in action 28<sup>th</sup> July 1916. Sue Macfarlan's great uncle.**

Thomas had enlisted at Chelmsford and served in the 1st Battalion of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, a regular army infantry unit which was in Ireland at the outbreak of the war, and was

initially part of 14th Brigade, then the 95th Brigade, in the 5th Division. As part of the regular army Thomas landed in France on 21st August 1914, within three weeks of the outbreak of war.

He married Sarah Anne Rusk in Falmouth in 1915, presumably while home on leave.

His battalion participated in the Battle of the Somme in France - on 14th July 1916 it marched from Ivergny to Candas. The following day it moved to Toutencourte, then Bresle arriving to the south of Becordel-Becourt on 17th July 1916. Two days later the battalion was located at forward positions in a sunken road leading to High Wood near Longueval, having arrived via Fricourt, Mametz and Montauban. Six days later the battalion went on the offensive but was forced to retire to Pont Street by counter attacks. The battalion was relieved and moved to Happy Valley. On 28th July 1916 Thomas' battalion moved to Longueval and it was on that day that he was killed in action while serving as Corporal 8970. He was aged 25. Thomas has no known grave and is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial.



**Private Fred Taylor (Border Regiment) Killed in Action 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916 aged 21 (Anne McIntyre's grandfather's cousin)**

Fred enlisted with The Border Regiment in December 1915. He arrived at the Somme battlefield in March 1916 near to Beaumont Hamel. At 7:20 am on the first day of the Battle of the Somme an underground mine at Hawthorn Ridge, exploded. The force of 40,000 lbs. of explosives sent dirt and debris high into the air. Ten minutes later, at 7:30am the bombardment of German positions ceased. These alerted the Germans that an attack was soon to take place. The British had forfeited the advantage of surprise and the Germans immediately commenced their own artillery barrage over British lines and No Man's Land. Many of the British troops were cut down before they got

anywhere near the German Front Line. Over 19,000 men lost their lives that day - Fred Taylor was just one of them.







## Mentioned in Despatches



The first tank,  
Little Willie -  
NOT named  
after the Kaiser  
- see below

My article on the Battle of Cambrai contained an error that Eric puts right in his email -

'Dear Stuart,

*Frontline* goes from strength to strength! A small correction regards tanks: 'Little Willie' was not the Kaiser but his eldest son and putative heir: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilhelm,\\_German\\_Crown\\_Prince](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilhelm,_German_Crown_Prince).

As to the Sopwith Camel: how many of us, I wonder, still recall Morecambe and Wise and in particular a sketch where the two are cast as WW1 airmen, marooned by a sandstorm somewhere in the desert?

After a certain amount of chitchat, the storm abating a little:

Ernie: 'I'm just going out to service the Camel'

Eric: 'There's no answer to that!'

It was about the nearest to a blue joke they ever came!!'

Thanks Eric, and yes, I remember that sketch. Brilliant!

We had our second piece of bad luck in a row, when our talk by Dr Daniel Weinbren entitled 'Now the War is Over' had to be cancelled at short notice (i.e., during the Albert French



Commemoration at the Rose the evening before!) owing to the fact that Dr Weinbren had covid. I had deployed my 'emergency talk' the previous session, so no back-up. Fortunately, Kevin was there and immediately volunteered to give a talk on DORA, the Defence of the Realm Act, and a very good talk it turned out to be. (Ian has rebooked Dr Weinbren for next year.)

### **Talk Report - DORA, the Defence of the Realm Act, by Kevin Varty.**

The Defence of the Realm Act came about because the Government was worried about protecting railways, harbours, communications etc from spies and sabotage. The public were asked to be vigilant for anyone or anything suspicious. The aims of the Act were to prevent communication with the enemy, banning the use of binoculars for example, to secure safety of shipping, communications, ports and railways, and to prevent rumours and false information spreading. Their concern was for the safety and the security of the country, and the morale of the people. To achieve this, the powers of the Government needed definition. One of their first moves was the introduction of censorship. The Government wanted to limit what people knew about the war. In August 1914 the War Press Office was established. Only limited reports of fighting and losses were to be reported. No reports were allowed from the front and letters home from the troops were censored. Newspaper reports were also restricted, as were photographs and newsreels. The argument was that news of losses could help the enemy, and damage morale, so there was often a difference between reports and reality.



Only photos of German casualties appeared in the British press, never the Allies.

The supply of munitions and supplies was also a major factor for the Government and DORA. The 1915 munitions shortage came about because: manufacturing companies were too small and there was a massive shortage of materials such as metal and chemicals. So the Government set up new factories and controlled the supply of materials, and also took over other factories, which explains why there were munitions factories in the middle of housing areas and next door to schools etc. 1917 the Government took control of the coal industry as well.

Even Pubs were not safe from Dora. Opening times were shortened from 13 hours (excluding Sunday) before WW1 to 5½ hours in 1916. Pubs closed at 9pm and there was no Sunday opening. There were special restrictions near munitions factories, after all, nobody wanted someone under the influence to be handling explosives! Beer was diluted and the buying of rounds was banned.



In the Highlands the aim was to give people the chance to grow food on land that wasn't used for war production. The Government were worried that food was in short supply. There had been land disputes in the highlands, but DORA gave crofters the chance to farm on private land and then after the war it would return to the owner. Some refused to give the land back after the war!

Kevin explained that it wasn't all plain sailing for the Government, there was a lot of opposition to DORA. Some people argued that DORA was petty e.g. needing a permit to keep homing pigeons for example. After all, a homing pigeon would have to live in Germany before you could send a message to the enemy! It was also said that it interfered with Britain's liberal traditions. Some felt there was too much interference in their lives and that genuine anti-war debate was being stifled. The Government could stop publication of criticism and imprison without trial. The military was given the right to put civilians through a court martial. Anti-war demonstrations were suppressed, they were usually from left wing socialist groups. Govt defence was that their actions were for the war effort. People who spoke out were classed as unpatriotic. ILP and Socialists were the main critics of DORA.



**John Maclean** (24 August 1879 - 30 November 1923) was a Scottish schoolteacher and revolutionary socialist of the Red Clydeside era. He was notable for his outspoken opposition to the war, which caused his arrest under the Defence of the Realm Act and the subsequent loss of his teaching post. After this he became a full-time Marxist lecturer and organiser. In April 1918 he was arrested for sedition and his 75-minute speech from the dock became a celebrated text for Scottish left-wingers. He was sentenced to five years in prison but was released after the Armistice.

Maclean argued against conscription. Conscription increased criticism of DORA as it was seen as more state control - Richard Lambert MP also spoke out passionately against it. Conscripted workers were also under military authority and discipline. They had no right to strike. Workers in jobs considered by the Government to be 'none - essential' could be transferred to other employment without warning or appeal.

My favourite story that Kevin recounted was this one. There were plenty of restrictions for vehicle owners, just like in WW2. If you owned a vehicle, it had to be immobilised when not in use. Even bicycles had to have their tyre valves removed. Also banned were searchlight type lamps, which were fitted to early cars so drivers could illuminate road signs etc. At Stony Stratford Petty Sessions on Friday July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1915, Harry Palmer and Charles McGill were accused of contravention of the Defence of the Realm Act by being in charge of a searchlight fitted to a motor car. Two cars were being delivered to their new owners, and the ferry drivers had stopped for a break and were parked outside the Cock Hotel. One, a 9hp Morris Oxford, was fitted with a searchlight that could be operated from the driver's seat. The men said that they were taking the cars from London to Stockport. The men were discharged but the Morris Oxford was confiscated for the use of the Chief Constable. (The Sweeny - eat your heart out!) The arresting officer, P C Adams, was highly commended by the Chief Constable. (I bet he was).

Also down to the Government and DORA was a whole host of innovations and restrictions calculated to help win the war; the introduction of British Summer Time, the withdrawal of sovereigns to restrict ownership of gold by the general public, the banning of feeding of wild animals, Alien registration and eventually Alien internment. Many of these put a huge workload on local police and officialdom.

However, despite all these restrictions, generally the public supported the government.

Many thanks to Kevin for stepping into the breach, and to Jane and Roy, who presented a slideshow on the reuniting of John and Dorothy Mann (see last 'Frontline'). All in all, another excellent evening.

### Albert French Commemoration at MK Rose. 2023.





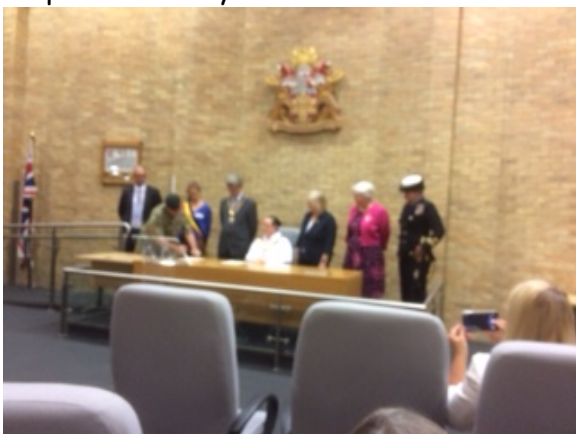
The event, organised by us this year, started at 6.45 with a welcome from the Mayor of Milton Keynes (Councillor Mick Legg) followed by an introduction about Albert French by me. Then followed a reading of a selection of the letters of Albert French by myself and Paul Salver, interspersed with the chorus from the song 'Only Remembered', and ending with 'The Devon Brigade' by Tony Kempster (singer/guitarist). Many thanks to Tony and Paul for creating a very fitting and moving tribute to young Albert. I then continued with my address and finished with a reading of the poem 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' by Wilfred Owen (which I repeated on the Sunday at Wolverton Town Square).

This was followed by a moving speech by John Moffoot, MBE, Deputy Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire and the Exhortation by Sarah Fennessey of New Bradwell British Legion, supported by her standard Bearers and other Legion members. Heidi played the Last Post and the Reveille after the Two Minute Silence. Wreaths were then laid at the base of Albert's pillar.



The Commemoration over, I then thanked all the participants, see below - 'That concludes our commemoration ceremony for Albert French. It is said we all die twice, once on our actual death, and again when no-one remembers us. May I thank the Mayors of Wolverton and Milton Keynes, Roger Kitchen, the Friends of MK Rose, the New Bradwell branch of the Royal British Legion, the Sea Cadets, The Parks Trust, Heidi from Wolverton Town Band, Paul and Tony, the MK Western Front Association and all of you who have gathered here today to remember. Thank you all for coming.'

A special thank you from me to all our members who attended, and Anne for the photos.



Signing the Armed Forces Covenant.



Welcoming the Belgians at MK Museum.

## Twining Trip.

The Twining visit from the Belgians took place on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> July 2023. This was a whistlestop tour for them as they returned home on Sunday afternoon, but they obviously had a great time. They attended the Covenant signing at MK Civic Offices where they were officially welcomed. They then went on a tour of Bletchley Park before heading to their hotel. A hog roast meal for them had been planned on the Saturday evening at the MK Museum where the Wolverton Town Band together with the Belgian Town Band performed. The MK WFA members who went on the twining trip last year also received an invitation to this event

## Civic Service for Albert French/Twining, Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2023



The civic service was on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> July at 10.00am on The Square, Wolverton where there was a short, well attended service to pay respect to those that have fallen. The Belgian band could be heard marching and playing from the town hall at 9.45am down to the Square, where they joined the Wolverton Band for the service. Afterwards were cream teas and cake at Foundation House on The Square before the Belgians prepared to head home.



## MK WFA Seminar

Our seminar is moving on apace and we are now concentrating on advertising the event. We are hoping that WFA members who perhaps live too far away or are unable to make our Friday meetings will make a special effort to attend the Seminar. There are over eighty on our 'books' and it would be brilliant to meet you all! Tickets are £30 and are available via Eventbrite, <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/milton-keynes-wfa-seminar-2023-tickets-641303294417>

Please click on the above link to get your tickets, and spread the word amongst family and friends. If anyone can print a poster off and display it, that would be brilliant.



**Forthcoming Herts police tour.** A trip is being organised by the Herts Police Great War Society on 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> September, covering the German advance in the Somme in March 1918. Several of our members have already booked, so if you are interested in this tour, please contact [hertsgreatwar@virginmedia.com](mailto:hertsgreatwar@virginmedia.com) to see if places are still available.

**Gary's proposed Somme Tour for MK WFA.**

Gary is willing to research a possible battlefield tour of our own so he would be very grateful if members would register an interest so that we know if it is worth proceeding with the planning. We can then confirm destination, cost and all the other details. Please email Gary at [garyshort70@gmail.com](mailto:garyshort70@gmail.com) to register an interest only, (not a commitment!).

**Romani Day Walking Tour.**

Anne has already sent this round, but here is a reminder that Stuart Hadaway is leading a guided walk around some of the relevant war memorials in London on Sunday, 6 August 2023. and is hoping some of us might join him. At each memorial there will be a short talk on the unit/contingent, the laying of a small wreath, and a moment's silence. If anyone would like to know more, he would be delighted to hear from them at the email address on the poster

*Romani Day Walking Tour*

*Sunday, 6 August 2023, 2pm*

*Meet at Animals in War Memorial, Hyde Park*



A walking tour (approx. 2.5 miles) through central London, taking in 8 war memorials associated with the EEF on the anniversary of the Battle of Romani, August 1916.

£10 per person.

Email: [eefinww1@gmail.com](mailto:eefinww1@gmail.com) for more details or to book your place!



## 'Spads and Spandaus' - Biggles, W. E. Johns - Cultural Legacy and the Air War on the Western Front 1914-1918, Part 3.- Paul Salver.

Balloons were widely used for reconnaissance by both sides on the Western Front. Observation balloons, nicknamed 'gas bags' or 'sausages,' were tethered to the ground, allowing for a stable platform from which to observe the battlefield. They were manned by a crew of two or three and equipped with wireless radios to transmit information back to headquarters.



49 Source <https://airandspace.si.edu/multimedia-gallery/wwi-german-observation-balloonq54447.jpg>

50 Source: A German observation balloon fitted with a long-distance camera. 1916.

<https://rarehistoricalphotos.com/aerial-warfare-of-first-world-war/>

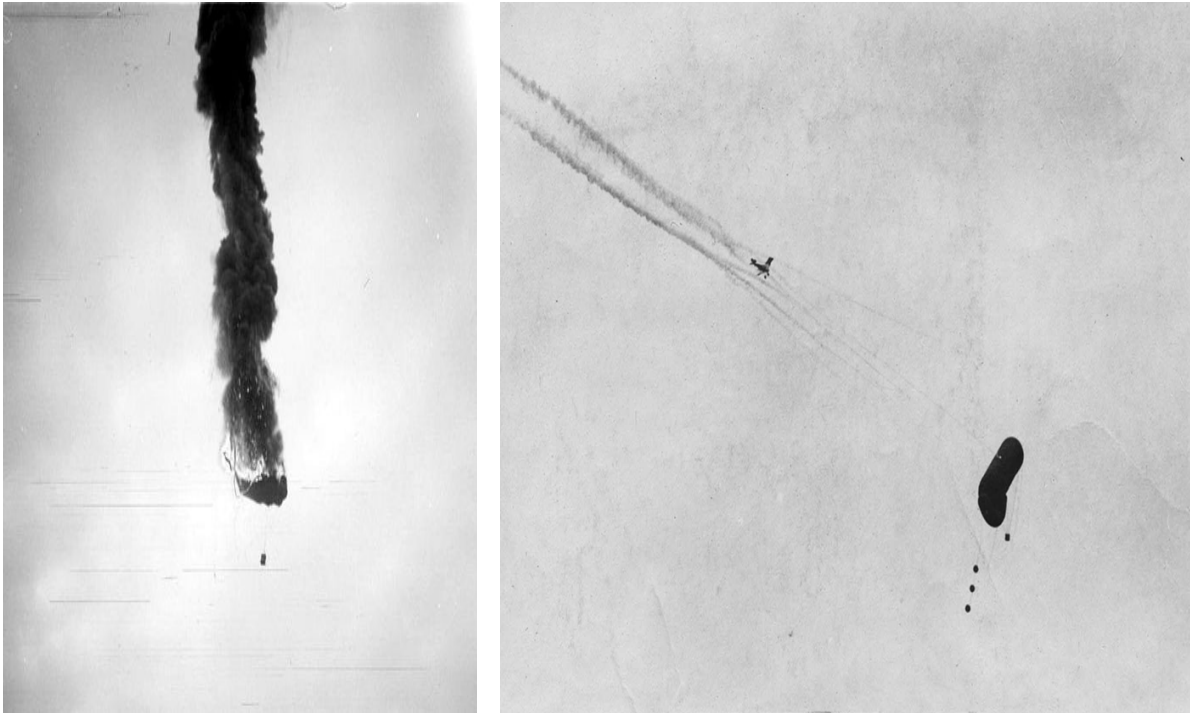


51 source Balloonatics - Library and Archives Canada Photo,

The crew were nicknamed Balloonatics by the British soldiers because it was so dangerous. Christine Pittsley, the project manager for the Remembering World War One: Sharing History/Preserving Memories project at the Connecticut State Library stated, "You'd have to be a lunatic to do that."<sup>52</sup>

Source : <https://ctinworldwar1.org/balloonatics-photographed-war-from-above>

Aircraft were used to shoot down observation balloons, a very dangerous mission. The most successful were known as balloon busters. For protection the balloons were ringed by Archie and had fighters to engage the enemy planes. Balloon crews were equipped with parachutes, allowing them to escape in case of an attack. Despite this crews were killed or injured when the balloon was destroyed.  
54



53 Source <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/463237511650628346/>

54 Source <https://rarehistoricalphotos.com/aerial-warfare-of-first-world-war/>

In his stories Johns gives the reader an historically accurate feel of an attack on enemy balloons:

"Dunville is an important observation post for the Boche..... to strafe the ..... Balloon; these orders permitted him to carry Buckingham (incendiary) bullets, forbidden on pain of death for any other purpose by the rules of war. Rules were seldom observed during the great struggle, but the order would, at least, protect him from trouble at the hands of the enemy' <sup>55</sup> W E Johns The Balloonatics : Short story -The Camels are coming.

He continues with an exciting and tense description of the attack:

" flame and a cloud of black smoke appeared in front of him, but he did not alter his course. He was flying through a hail of archie and machine gun bullets now, every nerve taut, eyes on the blurred mass of the balloon. Five hundred feet —three hundred —one hundred, the distance closed between them: 'At least I won't be out for a duck,' he muttered as he pressed his triggers. He had a fleeting vision of the observers' parachutes opening as they sprang from the basket, a great burst of flame, and then he was twisting upwards in a wild zoom in the direction of the line." <sup>56</sup> IBI

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57 Aces: Major Edward Mannock (right), pictured with Major James McCudden, clocked up 74 'kills' during WW1, making him Britain's top pilot and among the highest scorers in the war

Source: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1226826/Amazing-RAF-service-records-First-World-War-fighter-pilots-online.html>



58 Source <https://www.historynet.com>



59 Pilots relaxing - having fun. Source <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-37261175.amp>

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Most of the photographs of pilots are official portraits of Aces for the newspapers, and crews posing in front of their machines. A few show pilots relaxing. However, all conceal a horrible truth about the stress, trauma and horrific casualty rates of air combat. Photographs of dead and injured pilots were censored in the war.

60 Source



^[www.documentingreality.com/forum/f226/war-hell-ww1](http://www.documentingreality.com/forum/f226/war-hell-ww1)



61 Injured pilot. Source <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205077065>

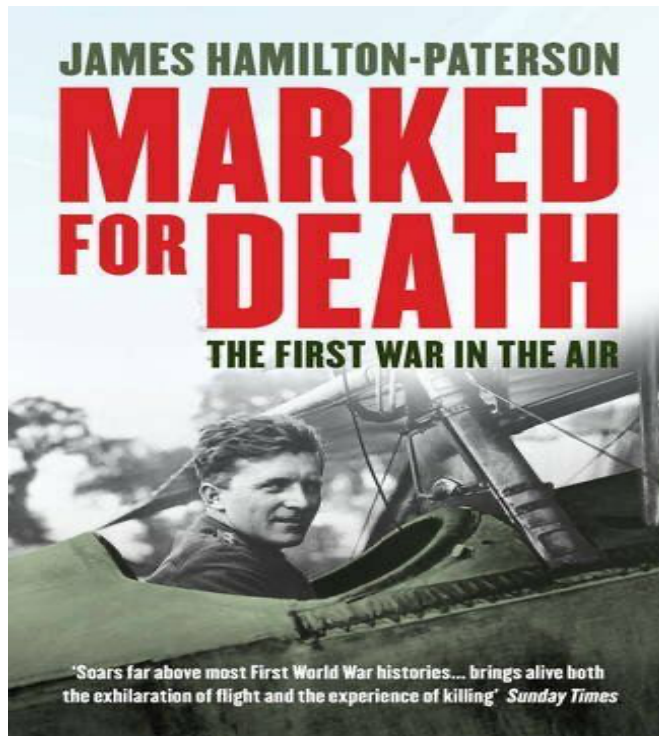
Historians record the casualty figures. Trevor Henshaw states: "In four years of war, almost eight thousand airmen from Britain, Australia, Canada and the United States were shot down and killed, taken prisoner, or wounded in action." 62 Source: Henshaw- *The Sky Their Battlefield*, London: Grub Street, 1995

Of these official RFC/RAF's casualty figure was 6 166 dead. To this can be added 8,000 in training- so the total is 14,166. The psychological trauma on pilots is difficult to quantify but it had a major effect. Eric Roberts was badly hit by anti-aircraft fire and his crash landing affected him badly: "I found it terribly difficult to sleep after this incident, getting hit like that. It certainly had a very marked effect because I found it very difficult to sleep at night, the shock of the thing and so on. I never went to see the doctor until I eventually blacked out at 6,000 feet with two 120lb bombs under

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me. I got such a fright. With an aeroplane, you were so sensitive to it that as soon as the nose dropped when I sort of dozed off - whatever it was, I don't know, I blacked out - the nose dropped a bit, and I came to. It put the wind up me so much that I thought, 'Heavens, as soon as I get back, I must go and see the doctor and report to him.' So, I did, and he took me off flying and that was the end of my First World War!"

63 Source War In The Air - Air Battles Of WW1 | Imperial War Museums (iwm.org.uk)



64 Source <https://www.abebooks.co.uk/>

In his book *Marked for Death* Hamilton Paterson describes the stress and horror of the air war. There was one way of dying that terrified them more than any other - burning to death. "At the beginning of the war all the planes were made of wood and powered by petrol, making them highly inflammable." He states. "To make matters worse the fuel tank was located right in front of the pilot. They could very easily get covered in petrol and burned alive." 65 Source James Hamilton Paterson interview

Biggles shows the fear of this awful reality:

"A little wisp of smoke was drifting sluggishly into the air from the engine, and he grew cold at the thought of what it portended. Fire! The smoke was petrol vapour, caused by petrol from the smashed tanks running over the hot cylinders of the engine. But the dreaded horror had not occurred when he reached the machine. The pilot was still strapped in his seat, in a crumpled position..." 66 Source Biggles Pioneer Air Fighter. Dean and Sons LTD. Hamilton Paterson writes about the way that pilots coped with combat stress with frequent drinking. "I suspect a lot of pilots who had done a long tour and had that thousand-yard stare wouldn't have got into the air without a good deal of whisky inside them. Often, they were completely smashed. I suspect many may also have taken drugs as cocaine and heroin were quite freely available during the First World War." 67 Source James Hamilton Paterson interview

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Hamilton Paterson argues the horrors that Johns saw took its toll and were an inspiration for his Biggles books. According to him, he states that Johns thought this new generation of boys in the 1930's ought to be taught the facts as he had experienced them. He says Johns "... worked like crazy and I think a lot of that was probably quite therapeutic. I suspect he came to terms with a lot of what he had seen through his writing." 68 Source James Hamilton Paterson interview

Certainly, Johns creates a realistic and historical accurate picture of combat stress and trauma in his descriptions of Biggles in the First World War books. This can be seen in the introduction of Biggles:

"Biggles, a slight, fair-haired, good-looking lad still in his teens, but an acting Flight-Commander.....His deep-set hazel eyes were never still and held a glint of yellow fire that somehow seemed out of place in a pale face upon which the strain of war, and sight of sudden death, had already graven little lines. His hands, small and delicate as a girl's, fidgeted continually with the tunic fastening at his throat. He had killed a man not six hours before. He had killed six men during the past month—or was it a year? —he had forgotten. Time had become curiously telescoped lately. What did it matter, anyway? He knew he had to die some time and had long ago ceased to worry about it. His careless attitude suggested complete indifference, but the irritating little falsetto laugh which continually punctuated his tale betrayed the frayed condition of his nerves."

69 Source The white Fokker page 16 - 18 [ The Camels are coming.]

It is also referred to when his C.O. Major Mullen sends Biggles to rest on Home Establishment [ leave in England] in Pioneer Air Fighter: 'Now listen to me. I've been out here longer than you have. Know every move of the game; that's why I'm commanding 266. I know when a man's cracking up; I saw you start weeks ago: when Batson went west you were at breaking point'. 70 Biggles Pioneer Air Fighter page 129

Johns refers to Biggles drinking too much to cope with the stress. He is described as drinking half a bottle of whisky in a day. "Biggles is finished unless he takes a rest," says his worried commander. "He is drinking whisky for breakfast, and you know what that means he is going fast." 71 The Camels are Coming.

W E Johns best summarises attitude to the trauma of combat when he has Biggles say: "In war, there are no winners, only survivors. And sometimes, surviving is the hardest thing of all." 72 Source - Biggles Pioneer air fighter

The Biggles books by Captain W. E. Johns were widely read and enjoyed by young readers and adults alike, and the character of Biggles himself became something of a cultural icon. The Biggles books are still available and may be enjoyed by some readers, but they are not as widely read or well-known as they once were. However, to read the books is to get a real feel for development of the war in the air in the First World war. Though they are fiction, the books were based on Johns' knowledge and experience in the war and contain a great deal of historical accuracy that stand up well when cross referenced with historical documents, photographs, interviews, and research.

The popularity of the stories came from their authenticity - from the fact that they were written by a man who had himself fought as a serving officer in the Royal Flying Corps, and who was writing the stories from his personal knowledge of aviation and of the genuine conditions of wartime flying. To get a sense of sitting in the cockpit of a Sopwith fighter with the thrill, excitement, tension, fear and horror of the war in the air, one could do no better than pick a Biggles book!

Paul Salver.

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## War Graves 'The Good the Bad the Ugly' Gary Short.

War graves week is an opportunity to explore local history and visit cemeteries and graves that otherwise wouldn't normally be in the diary of historians, enthusiasts and the general public. The work that CWGC undertakes worldwide every day is extraordinary and keeps alive the memories of individuals and the loss that continents, countries, and families made for the freedom of others. Worldwide the CWGC care for 23,000 war memorials and cemeteries which commemorate 1.7 million Commonwealth casualties.

What does the future hold for those laid to rest? My thoughts are below.

### The Good

During war graves week the representatives from CWGC undertake tours and impart their knowledge on the individual graves that are tendered by themselves and their fellow volunteers. I took part in two tours: Bletchley and Cranfield, it was very surprising to see the number of war graves that are housed in each cemetery. The loss to what would have been a small village or town is hard to comprehend in a modern-day Bletchley / Milton Keynes. The graves in Bletchley are immaculate, with the cemetery grounds mown regularly, allowing easy access to memorials and headstones. It is clear to see the passion and care taken to by the volunteers to ensure all are remembered and their stories are not lost with time.



### The Bad

The tour of Cranfield highlighted the limits and parameters in which the CWGC work under. One grave in particular took the spotlight, and for me not for the right reason - the grave of Pilot Officer William Kinane. Below is William's tragic story:

The youngest of five siblings and the only boy, he was also a talented at surf lifesaving and football. He had started an engineering course at university when he decided to become a



pilot, attending military flying school where he was selected for the RAAF. He was 18 at the time, and as well as excelling at flying, he set a new record for the long jump at the training school.

Sent to England attached to the Royal Air Force's 218th Squadron as war was on the horizon, he was taking part in low-altitude training exercises when his single-engine Fairey Battle aircraft was struck by turbulence and clipped a high-tension cable and crashed.

Also aboard were Sgt Peter Aitkin Allen, 28, an observer, and wireless operator Ivor Roberts, 21, both from the UK.

Reports from the time say wreckage was scattered across two fields and the aircraft came to rest when it struck a tree, uprooting it. The plane had stopped only feet away from a farmhouse and the first on the scene was bailiff John Henry Bevington, who with his son rushed towards the wreckage to see what could be done.

On arriving they noticed some movement within, and despite the intense flames crawled in and pulled out Roberts. His first words to his rescuers were, 'Don't worry about me, there are two other men in there'. The fire was too fierce and minutes later the aircraft's fuel tank exploded. Both William and Sgt Allen were killed, and sadly Roberts died two days later in an RAF hospital in Cranfield.

His father, William Kinane Sr, learnt of his son's death when he opened his morning newspaper, *The Sunday Times*.

William Kinane was buried at the Church of Saint Peter and Saint Paul in Cranfield with "a volley of three shots and a bugler playing the Last Post"

Unfortunately, due to the date of Williams death, his grave and headstone don't fall into the criteria that allows the CWGC to replace the headstone. As can be seen in the images below, the stone has worn greatly over time, and with it the epitaph, and, if not addressed, so will William Kinane's name, and his story and sacrifice also be lost.

So, what happens to a grave like this? Who takes responsibility?



In the case of William Kinane, well that's for a future article!!

## The Ugly

With the passing of time, in some cases over a hundred years, memories, stories and families are lost. There are no connections to those who have laid down their lives and with it comes the loss of respect. Every year scores of war graves are vandalised - some being smashed, others desecrated or adorned with paint. In 2019 the Haifa War Cemetery in Israel was chosen for a particularly despicable act: Vandals defaced war graves of Commonwealth soldiers by painting red Nazi swastikas on them. More than 300 soldiers from the First and Second World Wars are buried there, including British personnel.



What drives somebody to do this?

On The Somme the 'Sword of Sacrifice' is being stolen from many cemeteries due to the value of the metal, subsequently meaning replacements are made from plastic. Closer to home, we have seen the theft of grave markers of the Old Contemptibles in Stony Stratford.

### In summary

The work that the *CWGC* undertakes is invaluable and priceless, ensuring the future of the graves under their control are secure. Those that fall outside of the remit of the *CWGC* are I believe in a precarious position, and it will fall on groups and individuals to pick up the challenge of upkeep and remembrance.

Every person who gave their life for others deserves to rest in peace.

Gary Short.





## Interested in WW1?



**We want you on the 14<sup>th</sup> October!**  
**at the Milton Keynes WFA Seminar. (9.30am - 4.30pm)**

Everyone is welcome to this special day where we have four fascinating talks from experts in their field

Alexandra Churchill: 'The Hejaz Railway'

Peter Hart, Gary Bain: 'Laugh or Cry: Life or Death in the Trenches'

Major Charlie Barrett: 'Q-Ships'

Helen Frost: 'The Women's Land Army'

Buffet lunch included, plus refreshments throughout the day.

Militaria and branch displays, plus second-hand book stall (cash please). Anyone interested in the First World War will find plenty to attract their attention.

Bletchley Masonic Centre 263 Queensway, Bletchley, MK2 2BZ

Tickets available online from Eventbrite - £30: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/milton-keynes-wfa-seminar-2023-tickets-641303294417> Enquiries: [wfa.miltonkeynes@gmail.com](mailto:wfa.miltonkeynes@gmail.com)





**No meeting in August. Have a great Summer Holiday everyone!**

**July 21<sup>st</sup>** - 'Britannia's unruly stepchildren', Americans in the British Armed Forces- Michael O'Brien  
**August** - Visit to Soldiers of Oxfordshire Museum - TBC

**September 15<sup>th</sup>** - 'Logistics of the East Africa Campaign' Dr Anne Samson  
**September 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>** - MK WFA at MK Museum Heritage event.

**October 14<sup>th</sup>** - MK WFA seminar. Bletchley Masonic Centre

**November 11<sup>th</sup>** - WFA ceremony at the Cenotaph.

**November 17<sup>th</sup>** - 'He Didn't Talk About It - Analysing Veterans' Silence' - Julian Walker

**Meetings are 7.30 - 9.30 at Wolverton Working Men's Social Club, 49 - 50, Stratford Road MK12 5LS**

**Committee members are...**

Stuart Macfarlan - Chairman (macfarlan87@gmail.com)

Anne McIntyre - Secretary/historical events co-ordinator (annefmmcintyre@gmail.com)

Ian Wright - Talks organiser

Caroline Wright - Treasurer

Jim Barrett - Seminar and visits co-ordinator

George Maby - Wolverton Town Council liaison (Twinning and Albert French commemoration)

Gary Short - Social Media co-ordinator.