



remembrance ni

SAS men from Northern Ireland executed by the Gestapo

While the battle for Normandy was underway the 1st and 2nd SAS Regiments were operating behind German lines in France, carrying out acts of sabotage, disrupting communications and transport.

As part of "Operation Gain", on July 4th a group of 12 men led by Capt Pat Garstin MC left RAF Keevil in Wiltshire aboard a Stirling bomber to fly to France.

The Unit had been divided into two groups with all of the Northern Ireland soldiers being with Captain Garstin and Lance Corporal Vaculik who was Free French.



William Pearson Young from Randalstown was one of the five men from Northern Ireland executed. They parachuted behind enemy lines after the Normandy invasion

On the previous night of 3rd / 4th July a coded BBC radio message had been received by the French Resistance Fighters telling them of a parachute drop however on that occasion the flight was cancelled with insufficient time to inform the French.

The following night the Resistance again went to the same location having received another coded message via BBC Radio however on this occasion the first two Frenchmen to arrive were fired on and killed by Germans and all of the others, except one, returned home not knowing that the Germans knew the recognition letter for the drop which was "B for Bertie"

The Drop Zone was in the Fontainebleau area behind enemy lines near La Ferte-Alais to the south of Paris. At 01.53 the S.A.S. parachuted from the aircraft with most landing on the Drop Zone, which was a field of wheat, whilst the final five to jump had landed in a Wood. At the edge of the D.Z. was a group of men wearing civilian clothes who greeted Captain Garstin with the words "Vive la France", immediately after which the soldiers came under fire from automatic weapons.

There was a brief exchange of fire however it soon became obvious that the S.A.S. were surrounded and subsequently Vaculik was captured at 06.00 and Corporal Jones an hour later.



Paratrooper Wm. Pearson Young,
A Btn., S.A.S. Regt., eldest son of William and Mrs. Young, 14 Kemmil Hill Park, Randalstown, missing. Aged 23 years, he had four years' service. His father and four uncles served in the last war. A brother is in the R.A.F., and five cousins are also serving.



They soon learned that Captain Garstin, Lieutenant Wiehe, Trooper Thomas James "Tot" Barker (Previously of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and from Cookstown) and Lance Corporal Howard Lutton (Who had been Army Air Corps and from County Armagh) had also been captured after being wounded.

The nine were taken to Gestapo HQ in Paris. Here Lutton and Weihe were taken to hospital where Lutton died of his wounds. Weihe was operated on for spinal injuries three weeks later. Garstin and Barker had their wounds bandaged.

The other men were initially taken to a converted hotel near Champs de Mars in central Paris and then a Gestapo headquarters where they were kept and interrogated for three days before being returned to the converted hotel. A day or two later Garstin and

Barker were reunited with the other soldiers however Garstin was very weak.

On August 8th the 7 remaining captives were given civilian clothes and were told they were to be taken to Switzerland the following morning to be exchanged for German prisoners of the British.

At 01.00 the following morning (9th August) they were put on a truck and driven out of Paris, not to the Swiss border but to a wooded area near Beauvais, north of the city.



Photographs of Thomas Barker from Cookstown, one of the group executed. He is named on Cookstown War Memorial

At Beauvais the prisoners got off the truck and were marched into the forest, where they were lined up. Corporal Vaculik asked if they were to be shot and received a reply to that effect. He was informed that they were to be executed under the Commando *Befehl* issued by Hitler.



Facing the men were a number of Gestapo. Two Officers who were armed with Sten guns at the ready whilst another read out the Sentence. A Sergeant of the Gestapo who translated and a Gestapo Agent in civilian clothes were also present.

The Sentence was as follows :- “For having wished to work in collaboration with the French Terrorists and thus to endanger the German Army, you are condemned to



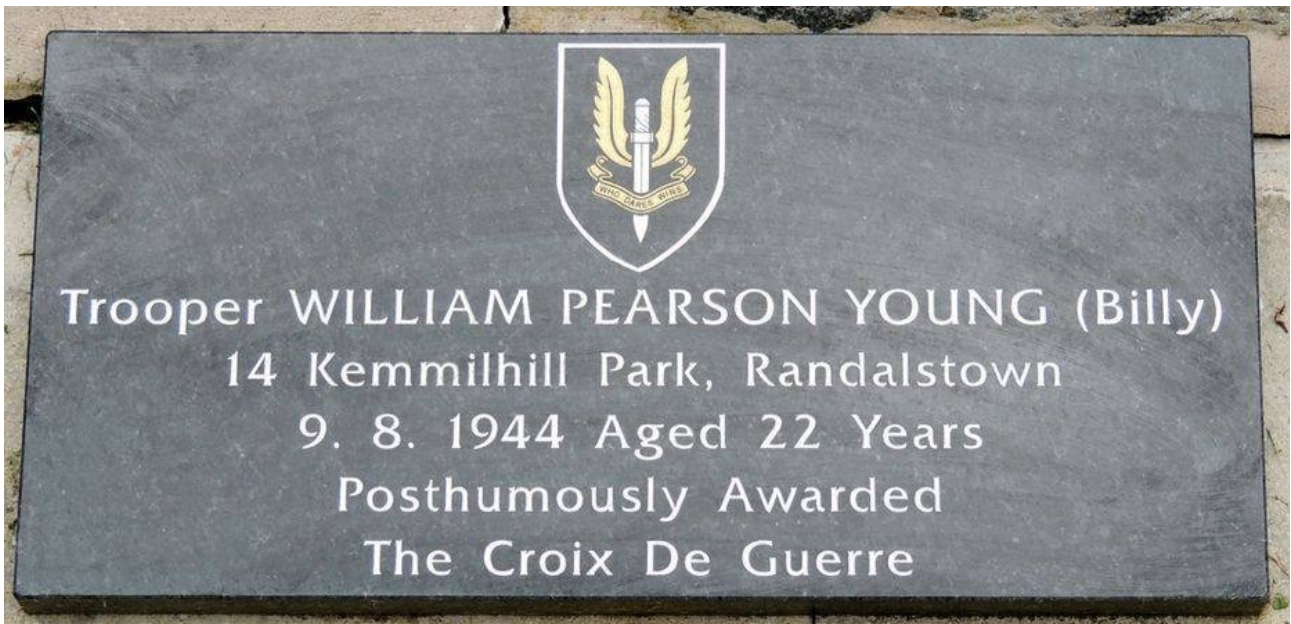
From left to right are the headstones of Patrick Garstin, Thomas Barker, Thomas Varey, Joseph Walker and William Young.

the Penalty of Death and will be Shot”

On hearing the word “Shot”, Garstin shouted to everyone to make a dash for it as the Germans opened fire. all of the men tried to escape into the woods.

Corporal Vaculik managed to get away while Corporal Jones tripped and fell. The Gestapo men ran past him thinking he was dead and when he got up again he saw four bodies lying where they had been shot but could not identify them before he tried to escape.

Two men escaped and the remaining five died. A grave had been dug in a wooded area about two miles from where the shooting had taken place and near a large chateau that is approximately one mile to the east of Noailles. They were buried there three days later by the Germans.



Memorial plaque in Randalstown

A Resistance fighter said that the Germans had a two day curfew in place following the shooting and were searching for the bodies of Jones and Vacluik.

This Incident was investigated by Captain Sadler and Major Poat of the S.A.S. who visited Noailles around 20th September and on speaking with the local Resistance Leader he showed them where he believed the murders had taken place and also where the bodies of the S.A.S. soldiers were buried.

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The Resistance fighter said that the Germans had a two day Curfew in place following the shooting and were searching for the bodies of Soldiers Jones and Vaculik.

The bodies of 5 murdered S.A.S. men lay at the scene for three days before finally being buried by a German Army Unit consisting of one Officer and approximately nine men who had been in the Chateau.

During the Investigation it was necessary to open the grave and on doing so a total of five bodies were found. All of them were dressed in civilian clothing and showed signs of having been handcuffed.

One of the bodies was identified as that of Captain Garstin.

After the war the bodies were re-interred in Marissel French National Cemetery in Beauvais. The Gestapo had tried to conceal their actions so the Investigation looked into the Germans who had occupied the Chateau who had buried the bodies.

A woman Collaborator, who had worked for the Germans in the Chateau and believed that they had been a Luftwaffe Signal Section, identified a number of the soldiers including Captain Hans Garling, Officer Hans Zool and Oberfeldwebel Gall.

Of the six the men who died five were Irish

**Capt Pat Garstin MC, Royal Ulster Rifles, from Dublin.
Thomas Barker, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, Cookstown
L/Cpl Lutton, Royal Ulster Rifles, Northern Ireland. DOW earlier
Billy Young, Royal Ulster Rifles, Randalstown
Sgt Thomas Varey the sixth man, was from York
Tpr Joe Walker, Royal Ulster Rifles, Moira**

ROLL OF HONOUR

BARKER, Thomas James

1 SAS (D Squadron). Trooper.6986237. Executed in a wood near Beauvais, France 06/07/1944. Prior to enlistment "Tot" worked with Messrs David Anderson & Son Grocers, Cookstown. At the age of 17 he joined the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. A month before his 18th birthday he transferred to the Royal Ulster Rifles. He later became a paratrooper with the 6th Airborne Division and finally joined the Special Air Service. Born 1924. Son of John and Florence Barker, Cookstown. Marissel French National Cemetery, Oise, France

LUTTON, Howard

1 SAS (D Squadron). Lance Corporal .7013186. Died of wounds 06/07/1944. Army Air Corps, formerly Royal Ulster Rifles. Clichy Northern Cemetery, Hauts-de-Seine, France Plot 16 Row 16 Grave 14



WALKER, Joe Walker

1 SAS (D Squadron). Trooper. 7019954. Executed in a wood near Beauvais, France 06/07/1944. Formerly Royal Ulster Rifles. He was one of three brothers who joined the armed services. His brother Isaac joined the Irish Guards and was 21 years old when he was killed in action in Tunisia, North Africa on 28/04/1943. Both are named on the war memorial in St John's C of I Church, Moira. Marissel French National Cemetery, Oise, France

YOUNG, William Pearson

1 SAS (D Squadron). Trooper. 7018947. Croix de Guerre (posthumous). POW 4.7.1944 - executed in a wood near Beauvais, France 06/07/1944. Age 22 years. A brother was serving in the RAF and five cousins were also serving. His father and four uncles served in WW1. Eldest of five sons of William and Elizabeth Young (both died 1959), Kemmill Hill, Randalstown. Marissel French National Cemetery, Oise, France

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The **remembrance ni** programme is overseen by Very Rev Dr Houston McKelvey OBE, QVRM, TD who served as Chaplain to 102 and 105 Regiments Royal Artillery (TA), as Hon. Chaplain to RNR and as Chaplain to the RBL NI area and the Burma Star Association NI. Dr McKelvey is a Past President of Queen's University Services Club. He may be contacted at houston.mckelvey@btinternet.com

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