

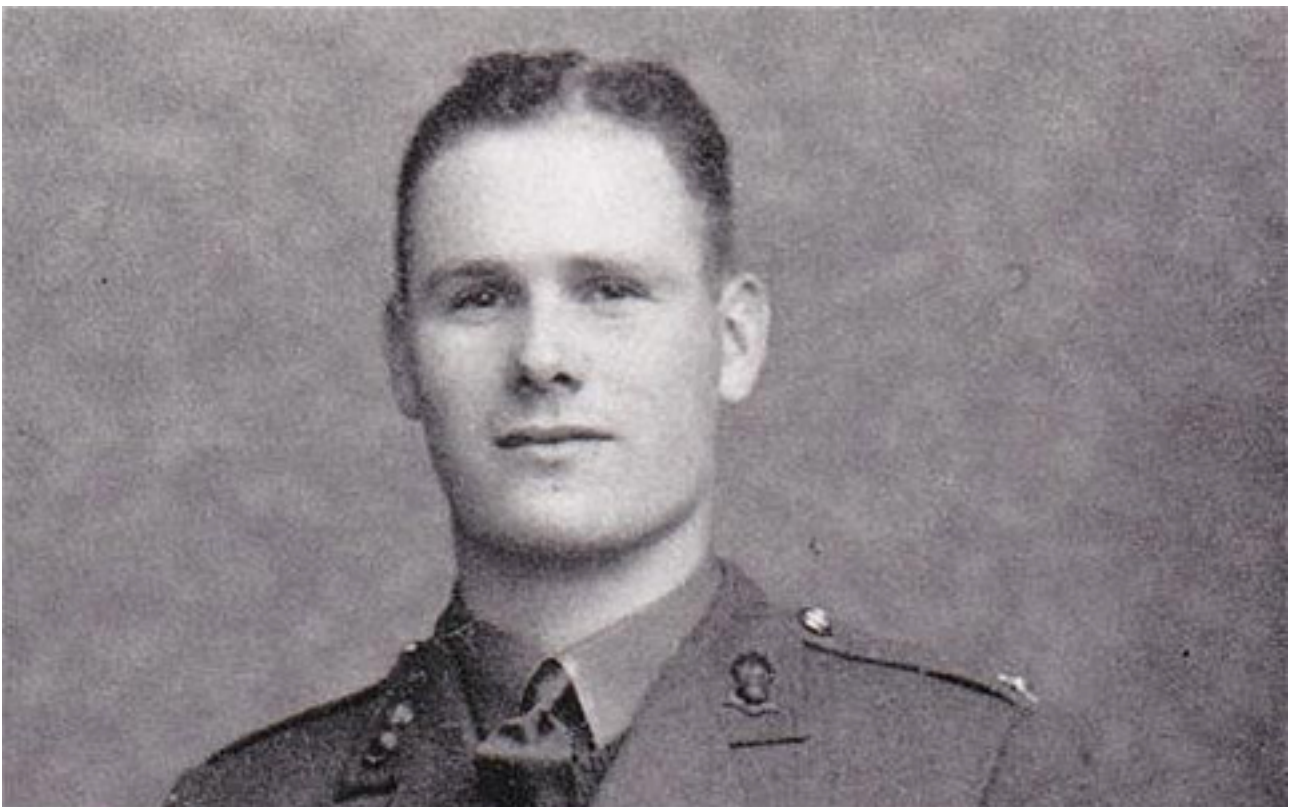


remembrance ni

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## Ubique - Ulster Gunners in WW2 - Part 1

### Colonel Jimmy Hughes, Gunner and RBL stalwart



He fought in World War II, was the deputy principal of Stranmillis college, and became a household name in Northern Ireland through his role as a BBC presenter.

**Colonel Jimmy Hughes, served as a gunner in the Second World War and, in later life, was a prominent educationist and a well-known broadcaster.**

The son of a carpenter, James Hughes was born at Campbeltown, Argyllshire, on January 25 1917. Three years later, he moved with his family to Co Down. He gained scholarships to Regent House Grammar School, Newtownards, and Stranmillis University College, Belfast, and at both institutions he played for the 1st XV.

In 1937, aged 20, he was appointed headmaster of Loughries Public Elementary School, a two-teacher school within cycling distance of his home. He later went up to Trinity College, Dublin, again on a scholarship, but the outbreak of war interrupted his studies.

Hughes enlisted in the 3rd (Ulster) Anti-Aircraft Brigade on St Patrick's Day 1939. One of his first jobs was to place his gun at the inner lighthouse in Belfast Lough to defend the city from attack.

He moved to England to train as an officer and, in July 1940, was stationed on Chesil Beach, Dorset, when there was an attack by 40 German Stuka dive bombers. As the bombs exploded on the shingle they sent the pebbles flying like bullets against the spokes of Hughes's bicycle; he was fortunate to escape injury.

In 1941 he became a gunnery instructor in 220 Light Anti-Aircraft Training Regiment, RA, and was then posted to 4 (Ulster) Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, RA. This unit was deployed between Hove and Eastbourne and, in June and July 1944, it was credited with shooting down 88 "doodlebugs" bound for London.



**Colonel James Hughes with his wife Aimee and daughters Rosalynd, Alison and Fiona outside Buckingham Palace after receiving the OBE from the Queen Mother on February 15, 1961**

In September 1944, he was part of the huge operation on Juno Beach that supported the Canadian landings in France. 4 (Ulster) LAA regiment subsequently took part in the liberation of Brussels, the defence of bridges over the Meuse during the Battle of the Bulge and operations in Holland.

Hughes was one of the first British soldiers to get inside the Belsen concentration camp and, in an interview with Ulster Television in 2004, he described his shocked disbelief at the horror of the place.

Having been promoted to major, he became a battery commander and served in that capacity in Holland and Germany. On being demobilised in 1946 he was appointed MBE.

On returning to Northern Ireland he was recommissioned into the new Territorial Army and appointed second-in-command of 247 Light Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Regiment. He subsequently served in the TA for 18 years, including periods as commanding officer of 245 (Ulster) Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, RA (TA) and as colonel on the General Staff. In 1961 he was advanced to OBE (Military ).

In 1948 Hughes was appointed senior lecturer at Stranmillis, and in 1970 became its deputy principal. From 1948 to 1969 he was also a part-time broadcaster for BBC Northern Ireland radio and television. Although he principally covered sport, he will perhaps be best remembered for his authoritative commentaries on the annual Twelfth of July Orange parades.

Hughes's acute intellect, leadership skills, drive and enthusiasm were constantly in demand, and he served on 40 committees, including the Northern Ireland Youth Employment Service Board and the Northern Ireland Youth and Community Leadership Board. He was also closely associated with the work of the Boys' Brigade. Col Hughes contributed to the work of many other voluntary and charitable organisations. He became a Knight of Justice in the order of St John in recognition of his contribution.

He was a stalwart supporter of the Royal British Legion and the Poppy Appeal, serving as national chairman from 1972 to 1975, and was subsequently appointed CBE.

At various times he was chairman of the Northern Ireland War Pensions' Committee; of the Northern Ireland Committee of the Army Benevolent Fund; and of the Irish Ex-Service Trust. He was the first Briton to be appointed president of the European Region of the World Veterans' Federation, for which he was appointed to the Légion d'honneur.

In 1939 Jimmy Hughes married Aimee Walker. They were married for 72 years. He died on August 26, 2012, aged 95. He was predeceased by his wife in June 2012. They had four daughters and had lived in the Castlereagh area. He was survived by their four daughters.

## **Colonel Harry Porter - Gunner at Dunkirk, Battle of Britain and Burma**

Harry Porter joined the 8th (Belfast) Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment (Supplementary Reserve) in 1939 as a Gunner and went with the Regiment to France where it took part in the campaign in North West Europe in 1940. Evacuated at Dunkirk, as a sergeant, he and the Regiment participated in the air defence of London during the Battle of Britain before moving to the Far East in May 1942, where they saw service in India and during the campaign in Burma 1943-45. By the end of the war he was a Major.

Demonstrating, not for the first time, or the last, a certain independence of mind, Porter, against Regulations, filmed many of the Regiment's activities in Burma. These can be seen at - [http://www.lennonwylie.co.uk/8th\\_belfast\\_haa\\_regt.Videos.htm](http://www.lennonwylie.co.uk/8th_belfast_haa_regt.Videos.htm)



### **Colonel H J Porter, OBE, TD, JP, DL**

Later he raised a great deal of money for the Royal Artillery Association in Northern Ireland by showing a slightly expurgated version around the Province and more widely. Later still it attracted a good deal of media interest and it now resides in the Imperial War Museum.

On demob Porter joined the family business and in a few months was catapulted by circumstances into the role of managing director. He also joined the Territorial Army rising quickly to command 245 (Ulster) Light Anti-Aircraft

Regiment at the age of 33. On an amalgamation he went on to command the newly-formed 245 (Ulster) Light Air Defence Regiment RA (TA). Later he became its Honorary Colonel and again on an amalgamation, moved to become the first Honorary Colonel of 102nd (Ulster and Scottish) Air Defence Regiment RA (V).

### **He arranged the first Lord Mayor's Show in Belfast**

Alongside all this he progressed in business and also took on a wide range of activities and appointments. As President of the Junior Chamber of Commerce he arranged the first Lord Mayor's Show in Belfast. He founded the Northern Ireland Paraplegic Association and after retirement, was Chairman of the Health and Safety Council for Northern Ireland. As a former top class swimmer - at all-Ireland and Army representative levels - he became President of the Belfast South End Swimming Club and remained so until his death. In his spare time he took part successfully in motor rallies around Ireland.

### **Founder the Royal Artillery Association in Northern Ireland**

On the military side too Porter was always active, founding the Royal Artillery Association in Northern Ireland and setting up the Gunner Luncheon Club which continues to meet on the first Thursday of each month. He was also President of the Dunkirk Veterans Association and the Burma Star Association.

In 1948 Porter married his war-time sweetheart, Marjorie, who survives him along with their two sons and a daughter.

Always family orientated, in his latter years he took particular interest in his five grand-children.

Harry Porter was a man of tremendous energy and enthusiasm who, in whatever field of activity, always affected those around him positively. In the end he achieved his wish "to simply fall off his perch". He died suddenly on 2nd January 2002 at his home on the shores of Belfast Lough. He was 82

## **The wartime service of the 8th (Belfast) Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment**

### **Recalled by Colonel Harry Porter**

The Regiment was mainly recruited in the Spring of 1939 in the aftermath of the Munich Crisis and largely comprised of young men from the City and District of Belfast. Many were colleagues from the same business offices and organisations; such as Gallahers, Belfast Corporation, Banks, etc. Being Supplementary Reserve, it was mobilised before the Territorial Army and at Action Stations manning Anti-Aircraft Guns in the Belfast area prior to the official declaration of war on 3rd September, 1939.

In October the Regiment left Belfast for Practice Camp in Cornwall, firing the guns for the first time as a unit and, after a short embarkation leave, sailed from Southampton to Le Havre, joining the British Expeditionary Force in Northern France before Christmas 1939 in exceedingly cold weather conditions.

The three Batteries and Supporting Units were soon dispersed to undertake battle commitments over a wide

area of the Allied Front in Northern France. Following the German Panzer-Blitzkrieg in May, 1940, all units were soon in action against the German Army and the Luftwaffe. The fortunes of war resulted in evacuations from Dunkirk, Cherbourg, St. Malo and other ports during late May and early June. One Battery successfully brought back three of their 3.7 AA guns and some vital gunnery instruments in spite of having received orders to blow them up. On returning to England the Regiment occupied gun positions during the Battle of Britain, the German Raids on London and Teeside, prior to a period of intensive mobile training covering most parts of the United Kingdom.

In the Spring of 1942 the Regiment embarked in the Belfast built line RMS 'Britannic' sailing in convoy with Royal Naval escort including the famous Battleships HMS 'Rodney' and HMS 'Nelson'. After a long voyage covering the North and South Atlantic it arrived in Durban, South Africa, where a welcome and hospitable stay of ten days was made necessary by engine trouble before finally reaching Bombay. The guns and equipment arrived at Karachi and both elements assembled in Lahore before driving some 2,000 miles in convoy down the Grand Trunk Road to Calcutta. Action stations were taken up there and in East Bengal across the Ganges/Bramaputra Rivers before moving south into Burma to join the XV Corps in Slims' 14th Army which became part of Lord Mountbatten's South East Asia Command.

On arrival in the Far East members of the Regiment quickly realised that the Japanese were not the only enemy when experiencing the monsoons, mud, mosquitos, flies, malaria and, in turn, dense jungle and intense heat. The Regiment took part in the Arakan Campaigns over a period of some

two and a half years firing effectively against the Japanese Air Force and even more extensively against ground targets when their long range and accuracy earned them the nick name of 'The Twelve Mile Snipers'. Some elements took part in the famous Battle of the 'Admin Box' at the Ngakyedouk Pass when, surrounded by the enemy, the guns were kept firing until the siege was lifted. Members of the Regiment are proud that several of their comrades received awards for gallantry as a result of this heroic stand which was the turning point in the Arakan Battles. The ultimate success of the Burma Campaign, together with those of South-East Asia and the Pacific, precipitated by the atom bomb attack on Japan, resulted in the surrender of the Japanese in August, 1945.

Unfortunately, there were many comrades in arms who were called upon to make the Supreme Sacrifice and are resting in British War Cemeteries in France, Belgium and in the Far East. A Memorial Tablet in memory of the men of the Regiment who died in the Arakan Campaigns was unveiled in Saint Marks, Akyab, at Easter, 1945. This little battle-torn Church was one of the first to be retaken in all Burma and men of the Regiment assisted in restoring the fabric of the building.

'When you go home  
Tell them of us and say  
For your tomorrow  
We gave out to-day'

When peace was declared the Regiment embarked at Madras on yet another Belfast built ship, the RMS 'Stirling Castle', and eventually took part in a farewell Parade and March Past in Belfast in the Autumn of 1945. This was the

last official parade of the Regiment in the City. However, many members came together again in 1947 when the Territorial Army was re-formed and so helped to continue the spirit of the 8th in the new organisation - the successor of which is one of the most efficient and enthusiastic units in the Volunteer Reserve today.

It is a fact that war brings people closer together and members of the Regiment have always been proud to wear the 'Red Hand of Ulster' on their uniforms and to have had an 'esprit-de-corps' second to none. Service in this well led and proud unit has resulted in many lifelong friendships being formed resulting in business partnerships, marriages between families and other ties and connections. Well attended Annual Reunion Dinners are held in Belfast and in London where contact is maintained with those members from the Mainland, who joined during the war fitting in so splendidly and who were proud to become part of the Regiment in every way.

The Regimental Benevolent Fund, raised by families and friends during the war, has been able to assist many of those who require a helping hand.

Whilst 'anno-domini' is taking its toll we like to think that the unique spirit of the 8th will remain until the last member was 'shuffled off this mortal coil'. If a little of its magic touches the next generation, it will have been inspired by the enthusiasm and devotion of duty to those who, at a critical time in our History, were privileged not just to be in the 8th Regiment, but to be the Regiment itself.

## Some 8th Belfast Gunners

### +CRAWFORD, Robert

Royal Artillery. 8th (Belfast) Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment. Gunner. Died 13/10/1940. Aged 26. With the 8th (Belfast) he saw action with the British Expeditionary Force at Dunkirk, France. In December 1939, the regiment occupied themselves with the defence of the port of Le Havre. 21st Battery moved to Arras, deployed there in May 1940. By then, fighting was intense and German tanks and machine guns surrounded Crawford's battery near St. Valery. Their heavy anti-aircraft guns destroyed and breech blocks removed, the men retreated. Aiding the infantry with small-arms fire, they made their escape at Dunkirk. On arriving home, the gunners were given the task of defending against the blitz. After training in Blackpool, they departed for Coventry, Plymouth, and Wolverhampton. By September 1940, the regiment had concentrated on London as enemy attacks intensified. On 2nd October 1940, they helped extinguish around 2,000 incendiary bombs burning the Harrow School.

Gunner Crawford died on 13/10/1940 aged 26 years old. Between 08 and 16/11/1940, Luftwaffe bombs fell on the regiment's barracks. Three men died and twelve more sustained injuries in these attacks.

Robert Crawford's grave is in Glenalina Extension of Belfast City Cemetery. His headstone bears the inscription: Manly and brave, his young life he gave. In silence, we remember.

His name features of the Regimental Roll of Honour at St. Anne's Cathedral, Belfast.

### **+EDGAR, Leonard**

Royal Artillery. 8th (Belfast) Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment. Gunner. 1475599. Died 23/04/1940. Served with 8th in the France and Belgium campaign of 1939-1940. Born in Belfast, he lived there when he enlisted. He was the son of Leonard Edgar and Sarah Ann Edgar, Belfast, and husband to Norah Edgar of Belfast. His grave is in Wimereux Cemetery, Pas-de-Calais, France. There are 14 Commonwealth war graves there and 6 more unknown burials. His headstone bears the inscription "We will remember in the sunset glory. The life he gave will never grow old". His name is also on the family plot in Belfast City Cemetery.

### **KNOX, James**

Royal Artillery. 8th (Belfast) Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment. 21st Battery. Gunner. 147640. The regiment fought a rearguard action to stall the Germans on their advance to Dunkirk, France. They became known as The Lost 1,000. On 05/06/1940, James Knox received wounds fighting at Somme, France. Evacuated from Le Havre, France, he returned to the United Kingdom. Treatment began at The Scottish Emergency Medical Hospital, the former Bangour Village Hospital, West Lothian, Scotland. Born on 3rd September 1909, he was the son of John James Knox and Harriet (née Chambers) Knox of Earl Street, Belfast. Knox

lived at Upper Mervue Street, Belfast. He died 30th October 1985. His grave is in Victoria Cemetery, Carrickfergus

### **+LANNIGAN, Thomas Wright**

Royal Artillery. 8th (Belfast) Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment. 21st Battery. Gunner. 1475147. Died 16/11/1940. Aged 34. From the Shankill area of Belfast, In July 1939 he joined the territorial army in Belfast. After training, he joined 8th (Belfast) Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment. In 1940, 21st Battery fought in the rearguard during the retreat from Dunkirk. The Belfast-born Gunner died as a result of enemy action in Middlesex, England.

Born on 22/09/1906, he was the son of Robert John Lannigan and Jane Stranaghan Lannigan (née McCullough) of Belfast. Robert and Jane had five children. On 2nd April 1911, the Irish Census records Thomas and his family living at 24 Disraeli Street, Shankill, in the house of Hugh McKay and Isabella McKay. During the Second World War, three of Thomas' brothers served in the Army and one brother served in the Royal Air Force. On 16th October 1933, Thomas married Isabella Todd in St. Anne's Cathedral, Belfast. Isabella died two years later on 26th June 1935. He later married 22 year old Alma Reynolds in St. Anne's Cathedral on 16th December 1935. His funeral took place on 20th November 1940 in a burial plot belonging to Mary Anna Todd Fee. At his time of death, Thomas' given address was 23 Disraeli Street, Belfast. He spent leave time there with his mother Jane Ferguson six weeks before he died. His grave is in Glenalina Extension, of Belfast City Cemetery. His headstone bears the inscription: Gone where all is silence.

## **MENARY, George Herbert**

Royal Artillery. 8th (Belfast) Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment. Sergeant. As a gunner with 21st Battery of 8th (Belfast), he saw action with the British Expeditionary Force as part of the evacuation from Dunkirk in 1940. In 1940, he received a promotion to Bombardier while based in Coventry during the Luftwaffe's Blitz on major UK cities. One year later, in 1941, another promotion came, this time to Sergeant. After serving in Europe and the United Kingdom, Menary found himself in India where he was Pay Sergeant for 21st Battery. He was born on 22nd November 1906 in Belfast. He died on 1st April 1949. Sergeant George Herbert Menary from Belfast, is buried in Dundonald Cemetery

## **+ROBINSON, Robert**

Royal Artillery. 8th (Belfast) Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment. 21st Battery. Gunner. 1465720. Died on active service in London, on the night of 13th-14th October 1940 aged 33. Gunner Robinson was more often known as "Charlie". Born in Belfast in 1907, he served with 8th (Belfast) at Dunkirk. At the time, 8th (Belfast) had a base at Clapham Common. Records show Luftwaffe bombs falling in the area during the first two weeks of October 1940. Born in 1907, he was the son of John Robinson and Maria Robinson of Shankill Road, Belfast. He was the husband of Sophia Robinson also from Belfast. His grave is in Glenalina Extension, of Belfast City Cemetery.

## **+TINSLEY, Ernest**

Royal Artillery. 8th (Belfast) Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment. 21st Battery. Gunner. 1456311. He died on 22/11/1940,

aged 33. Ernest was the son of Agnes Tinsley. He was husband to J Tinsley of Belfast. Ernest Tinsley's grave is in Glenalina Extension, of Belfast City Cemetery

The Regimental War Memorial and Roll of Honour are in Belfast Cathedral.

## **Acknowledgments**

Belfast Telegraph

Gunner magazine

Harry Porter

Lennox Wylie

Wartimeni

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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](mailto:houston.mckelvey@btinternet.com)

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