



remembrance ni

Eight crossings to D Day beaches by Tandragee sailor



D-Day survivor William Cooke is presented with his 70th anniversary medallion and certificate by Armagh Lord Mayor Robert Turner and by Colonel Arthur Reid.

William 'Billy' Cooke was a wireless operator in the Royal Navy. He enlisted aged just 17 in June 1943. He served in

the D - Day landings, South East Asia, and the Pacific. In the D - Day landings his vessel had been part of a flotilla of 12, ferrying heavy equipment and 20 men to the Normandy coast. They crossed amid bad weather and under cover of darkness, but he recalled that when they arrived it had been “chaos”.

“Between big ships firing and aircraft, I didn’t know what was going on. I was just sitting there with my earphones on me,” he said.

They then waited off the coast, although the boat became inoperable, took on water and began to drift, necessitating it being towed back into position. His most vivid memories were seeing dead bodies floating on the sea. “Utter chaos and mayhem,” he recalled. At one point during the deployment he looked over the edge, and recalled “lots of dead bodies lying about, and floating about too”.

The craft, damaged on its first crossing, had to be towed back to ‘Blighty’, but he then took part in no fewer than seven crossings to Omaha and Sword Beaches after repairs had been carried out. He was awarded the Croix de Guerre in 2014 when the French government recognised the surviving veterans.

After D-Day, Billy was sent for duty to the Far East and the British Pacific Fleet, returning to the UK in November 1945. He was demobbed in March 1946.

Prior to joining the Navy, he had worked for a short time “on the railways” as a clerk at Newry GNR station. After his wartime service, he took up a post as school attendance officer with the then County Armagh Education By the time



The Normandy Memorial at Ver-Sur-Mer officially inaugurated by PM Theresa May in the presence of French President Emmanuel Macron on D Day anniversary 2019. It overlooks Gold beach and the remains of the Mulberry harbour at Arromanches.

he retired, he had been promoted to Chief Attendance Officer with the Southern Education and Library Board.

Billy Cooke was educated at his home village school, Newtownhamilton Public Elementary, after which he went to Newry 'Tech'. He married a local woman. He and Mrs Bertha Cooke were wed at Clarkesbridge Presbyterian Church, three miles from Newtown, in 1954.

The greatest tragedy in their lives was in September 1975 when Mrs Cooke's father James McKee and her brother Ronnie were among the four victims murdered by the IRA in the Tullyvallen Orange Hall massacre. "We never got over it," said Mrs Cooke. "We just had to learn to live with it."

Billy Cooke followed many fulfilling pursuits, not least music. He had a fine, melodic Irish tenor voice and sang in the former Richhill Male Voice Choir, then Portadown Male Voice Choir. He also sang in church choirs, earlier in Newtown -hamilton and laterally in Tandragee Presbyterian Church Choir. They moved to Tandragee in 1981 and to Mullavilly six years later.

He was an all-round musician – he could play the violin, cornet, trombone, piano and harp, and had been a member of Tullyvallen Silver Band, and a member of the Orange Lodge at Tullyvallen. Billy also loved the football scene, being a keen supporter of Portadown and Arsenal. He made the occasional trip to see the Gunners in their Highbury days. Arsenal's unbeaten season when they won the league (2003-04) was especially pleasing for Billy. He was a great conservationist, and thoroughly enjoyed gardening – from flowers to shrubs to vegetables.

Born in Newtownhamilton, the 89 year old was resident in Mullavilly, Co. Armagh at the time of his death in June 2015. Following a service at Tandragee Presbyterian Church, interment was at Newtownhamilton Presbyterian Churchyard. He remained a keen member of the Royal Naval Association and of Gilford Royal British Legion until his death. He had been to the 40th, 50th, and 60th anniversary commemorations of the D-Day landings in Normandy. (Portadown Times 24/06/2015, News Letter 18/07/2015).

Acknowledgment - 'Tandragee Remembers' by Richard Newell. Published by Graceland Print and Design 2009.

Roll of Honour - June 09

Representing their comrades who died on this day

1917

+CRAIG, William

Captain. HMT Harbury. Died 09/06/1917. Sunnyside, Antrim Road, Belfast. Fortwilliam Park - PCI RH. Family memorial, Balmoral Cemetery, Belfast

+SMYTH, William Smyth

12th Bn. Royal Irish Rifles. Rifleman. 1782. Died as a Prisoner of War at Ruckhiem, Germany, 09/06/1917. Aged 26. Born Ballycastle. Married. Lived at 20 Church Street, Port Glasgow, Niedertzwehren German

1918

+CAIRNS, I

Royal Irish Royal Irish Rifles. Rifleman. 14181. Died 09/06/1917. Dundonald cemetery

+TYRELL, Walter Alexander

RNAS. Petty Officer. 32nd Squadron RAF. MC. Died 09/06/1918. He was educated at RBAI (Inst) and the Belfast Municipal Technical Institution He was a member of the QUB OTC and was working as an apprentice motor engineer when he commissioned into the Royal Flying Corps in July 1917. He served in the RNAS (Armoured Car Section) as a Petty Officer from 26/12/1914 to 24/11/1915. During this time, he spent 8 months in France and suffered an injury, when an armoured car crushed his foot. Subsequently he used a specially made boot.

Alexander was Ireland's fourth ranked air ace, with 17 victories. The first was on 30/10/1917 over Passchendaele, the last two being at 1845 hrs and 1850 hrs on 06/06/1918. He was awarded the Military Cross, the citation for which read: "For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. On one day this officer attacked two enemy triplanes, destroying one and driving down the other out of control. After this he was attacked by two other machines, one of which he forced to land, taking the occupants prisoners. On various other occasions, he has destroyed or driven down out of control enemy machines."

One particular victory, his second, on 11/11/1917 is described here: "Three 32 Sqn DH5s flown by 2nd Lts Howson, W A Tyrrell and Claydon, were engaged on an OP. At 1000 over Westroosbeke, Clayton & Tyrrell first

intercepted an Albatros with a yellow and green fuselage and yellow nose. Clayton was forced to pull out of the fight with a gun jam, but Tyrrell carried on the attack. The German began a staggering flutter in a downward direction. As the pilot attempted to pull the stricken Albatros out of the dive, Tyrrell fired again, his bullets striking the pilot's head and the instrument panel in front of him. The Albatros reared upwards before spinning down again. Tyrrell lost sight of his quarry at 300 feet as it fell through and below other circling German aircraft - it was too dangerous to follow. There no German pilot fatalities on this day. Nevertheless, Tyrrell added this 'out of control' to his score."

Alexander was killed, at the age of 19, while flying his Fouquierolles SE5a biplane. He was brought down by enemy machine gun fire from the trenches. Born 23/08/1898. Son of John Tyrrell and Jeanie Tyrrell (nee Todd) of Fairview Buildings, Crumlin Road, Belfast, and later Ballyholme. Beauvais Communal Cemetery, Oise, France. First Bangor PCI RH. Bangor WM. RBAI WM

1940

+CARROTHERS, T

Royal Artillery. Gunner. 458599. Died 09/06/1940.
Dundonald cemetery

+JAMESON, John

Royal Artillery. Gunner. 1474572. Died 09/06/1940. Aged 30. 8 HAA Regiment. 23 Bty. Son of Samuel and Alice Jameson, of Belfast, Northern Ireland; husband to Sarah Jameson, of Belfast. Pont-de-L'Arche Communal Cemetery, Eure, France. Regimental WM and RH, St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast

+REA, William

Royal Artillery. Gunner. 1476657. Died 09/06/1940. Aged 22. 8 HAA Regiment. 23 Bty. Son of Patrick Rea, and of Ellen Rea, of Belfast. Pont-de-L'Arche Communal Cemetery, Eure, France. Regimental WM and RH, St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast

1942

+McCAGHEY, Harold Abraham

RCAF. Flight Lieutenant. C/2076. Died 09/06/1942. Aged 38. Son of William J. McCaghey and Jean McCaghey, Belfast; Husband to Elva M. Mccaghey, Ancaster. Ancaster (Bethesda United Church) Cemetery, Shaver Family Plot, Canada

+O'NEILL, Charles

RAF. Sergeant (Air Gunner). 613758. Died 09/06/1942. Aged 22. 83 Sqdn. Son of Edward and Mary Ann O'Neill, Armagh. Reichswald Forest War Cemetery, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany

1943

+ROBINSON, William Arthur

RAFVR. Sergeant. 1504635. Died 09/06/1943. Aged 22. 619 Sqdn. Son of Joseph and Barbara E. Robinson, of Belfast. Runnymede Memorial, Panel 163. QUB WM

1944

+BURNS, Gerald Joseph

RAFVR. Sergeant (Air Gunner). 1796555. Died 09/06/1944. Aged 24. 44 Sqdn. Son of Hugh and Agnes Burns of Belfast. Moringny-Champigny Communal Cemetery, Essongy, France

+HALFPENNY, John James

Royal Ulster Rifles, 2nd Btn. Rifleman. 7015482. Died 09/06/1944. Aged 27. Son of Frank and Annie Halfpenny, of Ligoniel, Co. Antrim. La Deliverande War Cemetery, Douvres, Calvados, France

+MEARN, Herbert

Royal Ulster Rifles, 1st Btn. Corporal. 14412609. Died 09/06/1944. Aged 19. He was killed in action during enemy attacks on the Battalion on 09/06/1944 at Longueval. He had originally served in the General Service Corps. From Coleraine, County Londonderry. He was the son of Margaret Mearns. Ranville Cemetery, Calvados, France

***McILROY, James**

Royal Ulster Rifles, 1st Btn. Rifleman. 7012990. Died 09/06/1944. Aged 30. Mortally wounded while serving in D Company at Longueval on 09/06/1944. From Belfast, he joined the Battalion in May 1943. Son of Henry and Sarah McIlroy and husband to Nancy McIlroy of Belfast. Ranville Cemetery, Calvados, France



Sergeant W Hardy, 1st Battalion of the Royal Ulster Rifles (6th Airborne Division) receives the Military Medal for Gallantry in the Field from General Sir Bernard Montgomery. Sergeant Hardy was decorated for his part in the Airborne Divisions actions during 5/6 June 1944. US06-743SP

+PATTERSON, John

Royal Ulster Rifles, 2nd Btn. C Coy. Rifleman. 7020205.
 Died 09/06/1944 during fierce fighting at Cambes-en-Plaine.
 Aged 32. Brother served in RAF. Son of John and Elizabeth
 Patterson, husband to Florence Paterson Summerhill St.,
 Belfast. Cambes-en-Plaine War Cemetery, Calvados,
 France

+PATTON, Richard George

Royal Ulster Rifles, 2nd Btn. A Coy. Rifleman. 6979411.
Died 09/06/1944 in Cambes. He suffered fatal wounds from shrapnel during the battle to take the woods near the village. Born in Co. Armagh. On enlisting he joined the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. Later, he joined the RUR. Cambes-en-Pleine Cemetery, Cambes, Normandy, France.

+PROSSER, Reginald Henry James

Royal Ulster Rifles. 1st Btn. 21 Platoon, D Coy. Rifleman. 7020918. Died 09/06/1944. Aged 21. Son of Henry and Florence Prosser, of Southall, Middlesex. Bayeux War Memorial, Calvados, France

+RICE, William John

Royal Ulster Rifles, 2nd Btn. A Coy. Rifleman. 7011646.
Died 09/06/1944 during fighting at Cambes Wood. Aged 46. 13 years served. He landed on Sword Beach on D-Day. Brother served in Royal Navy. Son of Thomas Rice and Elizabeth Rice (née Bingham); husband to Mrs J. Rice, Arkwright St., Belfast. Cambes-en-Plaine War Cemetery, Cambes, Normandy, France

+SCOTT, William John

Royal Ulster Rifles, 2nd Btn. 7011203. Died 09/06/1944. Cambes-en-Plaine War Cemetery, France.

+WILLIS, Norman

1st Btn. Royal Ulster Rifles. 21 Platoon, D Coy. Rifleman, No. 7017941. Died 09/06/1944 at Longueval. Aged 23. Joined the Battalion in May 1943. From Belfast, he was the

son of James and Elizabeth Willis. Ranville War Cemetery,
Calvados, France

Every Day is a Remembrance Day
We will remember them

NOTE

09/06/1944 - Allied forces continue to land a considerable number of men and equipment in Normandy. Facing them, in the British area of responsibility, the Germans positioned three divisions northwest of Caen: the 21st Panzer Division, the 12th Panzer Division and the Panzer-Lehr.

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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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