



remembrance ni



From Rifleman to RSM of RUR via Ranville, the Ardennes and Korea

Regimental Sergeant Major William McConnell served with 1st Battalion Royal Ulster Rifles during World War Two. He rose through the ranks of the RUR serving in the Second World War and in Korea. He left the army in 1969 as a

Regimental Sergeant Major and later received an MBE.

William McConnell hailed from Ballyclare, Co. Antrim. To family, friends, and all he served alongside, he was Bill. In 1941, at the age of 17 years old, he forged a birth certificate to enlist in the British Army.

Aged 19 years old, he took part in the D-Day landings as part of 6th Airborne Division landing on 6th June 1944 near

Ranville, Normandy, France. Landing some 35 miles behind enemy lines, his unit faced an SS Panzer Unit. Despite suffering heavy casualties, they held the German unit and forced its withdrawal.

“We were the only regiment in the British Army who sent two battalions in on D-Day and I thought it was a great shame that there was nothing to remember those who sacrificed their lives.” - Bill McConnell interviewed in The Newsletter in 2013

We Fought On D-Day

During the battle for the village of Ranville, a German sniper opened fire on McConnell’s battalion from the church bell tower. Bill took out the sniper despite not having a sniper rifle of his own to do so.

Four men of the Royal Ulster Rifles died that day. Their graves are in the church graveyard rather than the nearby war cemetery. Alongside them lies the German sniper, name still unknown all those years later.

Having survived the Normandy campaign, McConnell returned to England in September 1944.

From there, the Rifles went to Belgium to halt the German advances in The Ardennes.

In March 1945, Bill took part in the Rhine landings and suffered shrapnel wounds as German gunners shot down around 90% of the Rifles’ gliders.

The plywood gliders with cellophane windows were no match for German anti-aircraft guns.

“It was terrifying. There was awful confusion inside the glider... we lost 66 men in 10 minutes.” - Bill McConnell interviewed in The Newsletter in 2013.

Return to Normandy

Bill first returned to Normandy for the 50th anniversary of the landings in June 1994.

While there, he decided to raise funds towards erecting a permanent memorial. He exchanged a bottle of Bushmills Whiskey in return for a small piece of land from a French farmer.

A stonemason from Ballymena, Co. Antrim made the journey to Normandy and work began on two memorials. A memorial to 1st Battalion Royal Ulster Rifles now stands at Longueval. At Sword Beach , another commemorates 2nd Battalion .

On each return to Normandy, Bill laid a cross at the grave of those four men in the Ranville churchyard. He also laid a cross on the grave of the German sniper. His belief is that the German was doing his job, just as they were.

In 2004, William McConnell took part in a BBC Northern Ireland / Doubleband Film production called ‘We Fought On D-Day’. He appeared alongside veterans including Stanley Burrows to tell their personal stories of D-Day.

In 2013, he attended the opening of a D-Day display at the Royal Ulster Rifles Museum in Belfast, Co. Antrim.

He spoke to museum staff, volunteers, other veterans, and visitors about his time with the Rifles in World War Two and Korea.

On this Day - June 17

1916

At the Battle of Verdun heavy German attacks are repulsed on Mort Homme. The French take some trenches on Hill 321 as the Germans are checked at Thiaumont.

1917

Two Zeppelins raid Kent and the eastern counties, a reported one zeppelin destroyed, on the ground three killed and 16 injured.

1940

Winston Churchill issues a grim warning to his fellow citizens: "The Battle of France is over; the Battle of Britain is about to begin."

Anniversary of the sinking of the HMT Lancastria. This is still the the allies single largest loss of life as it is thought up to 6,500 people were killed in this tragedy.

RMS Lancastria was a Cunard ship on the Atlantic crossing and was commandeered by the UK Government. After the Dunkirk evacuation approx 250,000 members of the BEF were still trapped in France, the Lancastria and her

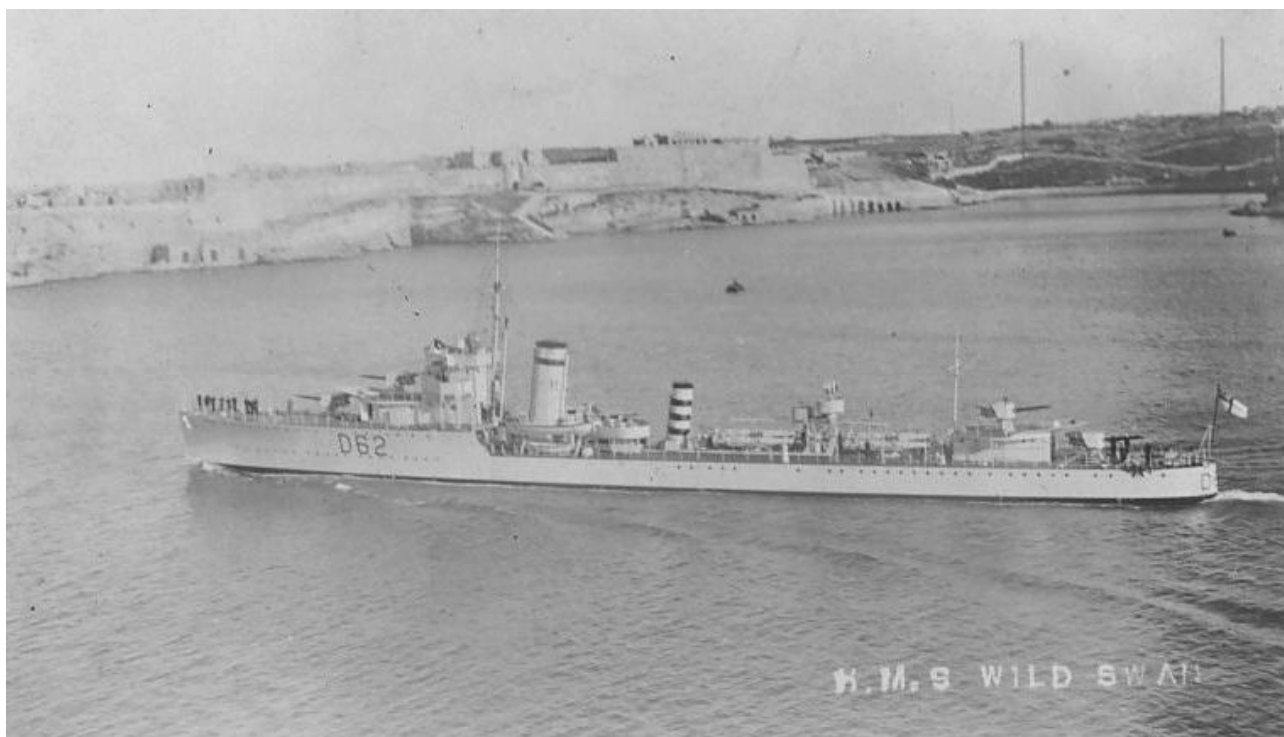
sister ship Franconia were just two of the ships sent to recover them.

Lancastria was sent to St Nazaire and lay 10 nautical miles from the harbour, she was attacked by the Luftwaffe and was hit 3 times, the 4th bomb landed so close the "percussion" effect was the final blow and she sunk within 20 minutes. The crew had stopped counting at 6,000 as the ship was designed for approx 2,500, It is estimated that up to 9,000 people were on board, this included civilians and their families work worked as part of the war effort. We do know that just under 2,500 survived.

Churchill placed a news embargo (D-Notice) on the story as he considered it too damaging to the moral of the country. Initially the embargo was for 100 years and the families still dispute the Government claims that all the facts have been released. Survivors were told not to speak of the sinking and the news finally broke in a New York newspaper.



1942



Destroyer HMS Wild Swan (above) was passing some Spanish fishing boats south of Ireland when 12 Ju88s, mistaking the boats for a convoy, attacked. Wild Swan shot down several aircraft before bomb and collision damage caused her to sink. 31 crew died.

Roll of Honour – June 17

Representing their comrades who died on this day

1916

+FINNIGAN, John

Leinster Regiment, 7th Btn. Lance Corporal. 1286. Died 17/06/1916. son of Patrick and Lizzie Finnigan. He was born

about 1888, the oldest of four known children, all born in the Caledon area. His father was a labourer. John became a servant and labourer. He was married in August 1912. He and Annie had two children. Church Street, Caledon. St Patrick's Cemetery, Loos, Pas de Calais, France.
Dungannon WM

+FLANIGAN, Edmund Hughes

Royal Army Medical Corps, 102nd Field Amb. Lieutenant. Died 17/06/1916. Age 33 years old. Born at Belfast. Son of Patrick and Ellen Flanigan, of Duivelskloof, Northern Transvaal. Born at Belfast. Banbridge Roman Catholic Cemetery

+GALLOWAY, Alexander

Royal Irish Rifles, 11th (Service) Btn.(South Antrim Volunteers). Rifleman.19510. Died 17/06/1916. Age 21. Enlisted Antrim shortly after the outbreak of war, and proceeded to the front with the Ulster Division. Born Taylorstown, Ballyscullion on 06/04/1894. Worked in Rea's Saw Mill. Member of the UVF and Murray's Temperance True Blues LOL 201, Antrim. Enlisted Antrim. Son of John and the late Mary Galloway nee Murray, of Ballydrummon, Randalstown. Previously of Church Street, Antrim. In 1915 his mother was resident in Castle Street, Antrim. A brother of Thomas Galloway, Henry Street, Ballymena. Warloy-Baillon Communal Cemetery Extension, France. Antrim Town WM. Ballymena and District WM, Antrim Orange District 13 WM. All Saints Parish Church RH

+MARTIN, David

Royal Irish Rifles. 11th Btn. Rifleman. 11/4732.
Died 17/06/1916. Age 17. Son of David Martin, of 122,
Longstone St., Lisburn. Authuille Military Cemetery, Authuille,
France

+McCAULEY, Robert

Royal Irish Rifles, 11th Btn. Rifleman. 18207. Died
17/06/1916. Age 20. Son of Mary Elizabeth McConnell
(formerly McCauley), of 2, Hill St., Dunmurry and the late
James McCauley. Warloy-Baillon Communal Cemetery
Extension, France

+McCORMICK, Thomas

RN. Stoker I. SS/113432. Died 17/06/1916. Aged 22. HMTB
Eden which sank in a night collision in the Channel. Enrolled
04/01/1913 for 5 and 7 years. Pembroke II, St. George,
Victory II (in Eden 01/05/1915 - 17/06/1916). Born
Downpatrick 09/08/1894. Son of James and Catherine
McCormick, who resided in a cottage beside the Killough
Road cemetery. Downpatrick WM. ADM 188/1119/113432

+PUE, James

RN. Stoker 1st Class. K11276. HMS Eden. Died
17/06/1916. Age 22. Born Annalong. Son of Arthur and
Elizabeth Pue, Moneydarraghmore, Annalong,
Kilkeel. Chatham Naval Memorial, Panel 17. Annalong WM

1917

+BELL, John Edward

New Zealand Field Artillery, Gunner. 2/1132. Died 17/06/1917. Age 27. Strand Military Cemetery. Comines-Warneton, Hainaut. Coagh WM

+McATEER, William

Royal Irish Rifles. 9th Btn. Rifleman. 6799. Died 17/06/1917. Age 19. Son of Mr. and Mrs. McAteer, of 3, Gaol Square, Armagh. Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial, Belgium. First Armagh Presbyterian Church WM

+McCLELLAND, Robert

Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. 9th Btn. Private. 29313. Died 07/06/1917. Age 21. Son of William and Sarah McClelland, of Edenreagh, Castledawson. Messines Ridge British Cemetery, Mesen, West-Vlaanderland, Belgium. Bellaghy Presbyterian Church RH

1919

+MONGOMERY, James

North Irish Horse. Private. 1910. Died 17/06/1919. Age 25. Son of James and Martha Montgomery, of 2, Forth Glen, Ballygomartin Rd., Belfast. Brother of Private William Montgomery, 10861, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers who died 16/05/1915 and is remembered at Le Touret Memorial, France. Dundonald Cemetery, Belfast

1940

+BICKERSTAFF, George Thompson

Pioneer Corps. Private. 2181172. Died 17/06/1940. Aged 25. Son of Samuel and Annie Bickerstaff, of Greencastle, Co. Antrim. Rennes Eastern Communal Cemetery, Ille-et-Vilaine, France

+BOYLE, Joseph

Pioneer Corps. 46 Coy., Aux. Mil. Private. 2188943. Died 17/06/1940. Aged 37. Husband to Margaret A. Boyle, of Whitehouse, Co. Antrim. Dunkirk Memorial, Nord, France

+BURKE, Daniel Augustus

Royal Army Service Corps. Corporal. 52872. Died 17/06/1940. Aged 32. Son of Matthew and A. M. Burke; husband to Rebecca Burke, of Ballycarry. Ytre Communal Cemetery, Charente-Maritime, France

+CAVANAGH, James

Pioneer Corps. Aux. Mil. Corporal. 6972252. Died 17/06/1940. Aged 48. Son of Alexander and Charlotte Cavanagh; husband to Jane Cavanagh, of Londonderry. La Bernerie-en-retz Communal Cemetery, Loire-Atlantique, France



**Good night Daddy, Jim and Mattie -
Epitaph near St Nazaire**

+DOHERTY, William Jackson

Royal Engineers, 116 Road Constr. Coy. Sapper. 1917143.
Died 17/06/1940. Aged 19. Son of Edward Doherty and of

Annie Doherty (nee Taggart), of Dungiven. Escoublac-La-Baule War Cemetery, Loire-Atlantique, France

+DOUGLAS, William James

Royal Army Ordnance Corps, attd. Royal Engineers. Lance Corporal. 7611733. Died 17/06/1940. Aged 23. Son of John C. Douglas and Eva Douglas, of Waterside, Londonderry. Ars-en-Re Communal Cemetery, Ile de Re, Charente-Maritime, France

+IRVINE, John

Pioneer Corps, 50 Coy., Aux. Mil. Service. Private.13003839. Died 17/06/1940. Aged 42. John was aboard the Lancastria. During WW2 the Cunard Cruise Liner Lancastria was requisitioned by the British Government and became a Troop Transport Ship. On Monday 17/06/1940 the ship was involved in Operation Ariel, attempting to evacuate British Troops and civilians from Occupied France. At 15.48 Lancastria was attacked by German aircraft and received three direct hits from a Junkers JU88 bomber. The result was a disaster with the huge ship, weighing 16,243-ton and carrying around 4,000 - 6000 passengers sinking within 20 minutes. The true number of victims will never be known with estimates of the death toll being between 3000 and 5800 however this was the worst single disaster in British maritime history. The ship lies southwest of Saint Nazaire. John was husband to Sarah Jane Irvine, of Ligoniel. Dunkirk Memorial, Nord, France

+MAGUIRE, Thomas

Royal Engineers, 663 Artisan Works Coy. Sapper. 1903526. Died 17/06/1940. Aged 20. Son of Thomas and Mary A.

Maguire, of Belcoo, Co. Fermanagh. Pornic War Cemetery, Loire-Atlantique, France

+MURPHY, John Joseph

Pioneer Corps, 50 Coy., Aux. Mil. Private. 13003876. Died 17/06/1940. Aged 43. Lost on board the Lancastria. Husband to Mary Ann Murphy, of Cookstown. Dunkirk Memorial, Nord, France. Cookstown WM

+NELSON, William

Pioneer Corps, Aux. Mil. Private. 13007917. Died 17/06/1940 serving at Rennes railway station. Aged 42. Husband of Elizabeth Nelson, of Cookstown. Rennes Eastern Communal Cemetery, Ille-et-Vilaine, France. Cookstown WM

+THOMPSON, James

Royal Artillery, 3 Searchlight Regt. 9 Bty. Gunner. 1465636. Died 17/06/1940. Dunkirk Memorial, France

+WRIGHT, Alexander

Royal Ulster Rifles, 2nd Btn. Rifleman. 7009511. Died 17/06/1940. Aged 33. Born in Belfast, resided in Co. Armagh. Le Clion-Sur-Mer Communal Cemetery, Loire-Atlantique, France

1943

+GOUGH, Patrick

Royal Engineers. 1018 Docks Operating Coy. Lance Corporal. 2199081. Died 17/06/1943. Aged 32. Son of

Patrick and Mary A. Gough; husband of Mary Gough, of Londonderry. Brookwood 1939 - 1945 Memorial, Surrey, United Kingdom

+McGARRY, Henry

Royal Engineers, 1010 Docks Operating Company. Sapper. 2716372. Died 17/06/1943. Aged 37. Lost in SS Yoma with many men from 1010 Docking Company. Two torpedos fired by U-81 at 0733hrs sunk the ship off the coast of Derna, Libya, North Africa. One struck the engine room and one struck the hold. The ship went down in five minutes.

The Yoma, captained by George Patterson, was part of Convoy GTX-2. They were on the way from Algeria to Alexandria in Egypt. Many of the British troops were Royal Engineers like Henry McGarry, there to assist with the planned invasion of Sicily. The captain, 29 crew members 3 gunners, and 451 military personnel died in the sinking. HMAS Lismore, HMAS Gawler, MMS-102, MMS-105, and the Fort Maurepas picked up 130 crew members, 5 gunners, and remaining military personnel. Before the outbreak of WW2 Harry served in the Irish Guards. Born 1906 in Colinward, Carnmoney. Son of William McGarry and Mary Ann McGarry of Belfast. Husband to Esther McGarry. Father of Eliza Jane born 02/10/1935 and Phillip who was born in March 1936. Phillip died the following year. Brookwood Military Memorial 1939 - 1945, Surrey, Panel 6

+WARING, William Henry

RAFVR. Sergeant. 1348637. 49 Sqdn. Died 17/06/1943. Aged 33. He was part of a crew of seven in Avro Lancaster III ED785 which took off from RAF Fiskerton, Lancashire, at 2211hrs on night operation on Cologne when the plane was

shot down by a night fighter over Western Scheldt, Netherlands 17/06/1943 all except one who was taken POW, perished at the crash site. Son of Richard and Sarah Waring. (Irish 1911 Census) Residing with his parents and siblings at 34 Castle Street, Lisburn. Runnymede Memorial, Surrey. Lisburn Cathedral RH

1944

+BRADLEY, Arthur Desmond

Royal Ulster Rifles, 2nd Btn. Rifleman. 7021600. Died 17/06/1944. Born 01/10/1924. He enlisted aged 17 at Omagh, Co. Tyrone on 30/07/1941. Before the Second World War, he worked as a labourer. He lied about his age to join up. His enlistment papers give his date of birth as 03/06/1923. He landed on Sword Beach with the Battalion on D-Day. He wrote to his family on 13th. On 17/07/1944 Arthur's father received a letter stating : "Dear Sir, It is my painful duty to inform you that a report has been received from the War Office notifying the death of No. 7021600 Rfn. Arthur Desmond Bradley, Royal Ulster Rifles which occurred in northwest Europe on the 17th June 1944. The report is to the effect that he was killed in action. I am to express the sympathy and regret of the Army Council at the soldier's death in his country's service. I am, sir, your obedient servant." Son of William Bradley and Jane Bradley of Magherafelt. Deliverande War Cemetery, Douvres, Normandy, France. Castledawson WM.

+CREANEY, William John

1st Btn. Royal Ulster Rifles. 1st Btn. Rifleman. 7019654. Served as a Private in the Special Air Service Regiment,

AAC. Died 17/06/1944. Aged 22. Reported as 'missing in action' in the Belfast Telegraph of July 1944, he had four and a half years' service. Prior to enlisting he had been employed by Mr William Biggs Mineral Water Factory, Lisburn Road, Belfast. Son of Mr William Creaney of Coolfin Street, Belfast. Bayeux Memorial, panel 1

+CUNNINGHAM, William John

The Parachute Regiment, A.A.C. 9th Btn. Warrant Officer Class I (R.S.M.) MiD. 7011364. Died 17/06/1944. Aged 32. Son of Isaac and Margaret Cunningham, of Orchard Cottage, Warrenpoint. Ranville War Cemetery, Calvados, France

+KELSO, James Guthrie Wallace

RAFV. Flight Sergeant (Pilot). 1795060. Died 17/06/1944. Aged 23. 102 Sqdn. Son of Dr. James Bolton Kelso and Minnie Kelso, of Portrush. Vlieland General Cemetery, Friesland, Netherlands

+TOTTEN, John

RAFVR. Sergeant. 1796569. Died 17/06/1944. Aged 24. Son of John and Isabella Totten of Lisburn. Lisburn cemetery

VETERANS

BUCHANAN, Thomas George

RAMC. Lt.Colonel. MiD. From Lisburn. Served in Gaza, Palestine and Egypt in WW1.

A report in the Lisburn Standard 22/11/1918 stated that he had “died in Egypt on 19/11/1918 of wounds received in action. He mobilised with the North Midland Mounted Brigade Field Ambulance on the opening of the war, his captaincy dating from 19/08/1914. He was promoted to the rank of major 24/09/1915, and later was appointed temporary lieutenant-colonel... This gallant officer, who had seen a good deal of active service, is survived by his wife (a niece of Lady Paget) and a daughter.”

The following week’s edition of the Lisburn Standard (29/11/1918) reported, “Following the intimation that Lieutenant-Colonel T. J. Buchanan, RAMC, had died of wounds in Egypt, further inquiries were made by the relatives, who had not been officially notified, and it was found that he was still alive. Letters have been received stating that he was recovering from an attack of influenza. On two occasions he was mentioned in despatches from Palestine. His father resides at Lissue, Lisburn, also his wife and child. “

“Inst in the Great War” records - “The school magazine School News lists a Lt Col T G Buchanan of the Royal Army Medical Corps in the Roll of Honour published after the end of the war; however no officer of this name appears in the records of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission or in the listing of “Officers Died in the Great War”.

However, an officer of this name attended Queen's University Belfast and served with the North Midland Mounted Brigade Field Ambulance, but he is known to have survived until 1945. Therefore it is suspected that the school mistakenly believed he had died and was so added to the Memorial and Roll of Honour”.

On 14/05/1908 he passed Bachelor of Medicine, Surgery & Obstetrics at the Royal University of Ireland. In the 1911 United Kingdom Census, he is listed as single and a house surgeon at the General Infirmary, Burton on Trent, England. His address in the Medical Register is 275 Branstone Road, Burton-on-Trent. On 17/06/1913 he was commissioned as a Lieutenant in the Field Ambulance of the North Midland Mounted Brigade.

On 15/09/1915 he married Evelyn Kathleen Julia Macfaren Myhill at The Church of St Stephen, Norwich, Norfolk, England.

On 24/09/1915 he transferred to the Royal Army Medical Corps and was promoted to the rank of Major. He entered France in October.

He served in the Middle-East from 1917 and was attached to the Royal Artillery. **On September 25 he was Mentioned-in-Despatches for a first time.** In early October 1917: The British launched a campaign to seize the Palestinian Territory from the Ottoman Empire that ended in the capture of Gaza (November) and Jerusalem on December 9.

On **14/06/1918 he was Mentioned-in-Despatches for a second time** by General Allenby. In August the British launched one last effort in the Middle-East culminating with the capitulation of the Ottoman Empire on October 30.

In July 1925 he was appointed Medical Officer to Ministry of Pensions. In 1940 he was the Assistant-Director. He was born on 20/11/1883 in Magheragall, Co Antrim. Son of Thomas and Maria Jane Buchanan. He died 17/06/1976 at Norwich Road Wroxham, Norwich.

ROBINSON, Samuel

RN. Lieutenant Commander. School teacher. Served 11/1940 - 04/1946. HMS Vernon Portsmouth. HMS Dick Whittington. HMS Nile (Alexandria, Egypt) 09/1942 - 01/1944. Rosyth. Married Joan Mitchell, Belfast 29/12/1930. Four sons, one step-son. Born Belfast 24/12/1912. Died 17/06/1977.

SANDS, John

RN. Anzio and South Pacific. Husband to Rosaleen. Father of Bobby, Bernadette, Marcella and John. Funeral from St Agnes' Church, Anderstown Rd., to Belfast City Cemetery. Age 91. News Letter 17/06/2014

SCOTT, Brian Lockhart

RNVR. Sub. - Lieutenant. QUB 1940 Ap Sci and 1944-46. BSc. Born 07/10/1922, Son of WF Scott, Orama, Malone Park, Belfast. Died 17/06/1994. Campbell College 2771

Every day is a Remembrance Day

We will remember them

To return to Home Page - click on Remembrance NI masthead.

Information about individuals who served - please forward to remembrance ni at

houstonmckelvey@mac.com

remembrance ni

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 houstonmckelvey@mac.com

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