



remembrance ni



Ballymena Military Policeman had prior skills for seagoing and jungle warfare

William (Billy) Telford BEM from Harryville in Ballymena received the British Empire Medal for his bravery in trying to rescue American aircrew from a crashed and blazing plane in Northern India in the dying days of World War Two.



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The citation for the medal read as follows:- 'At Barackpore (Bengal) on May 26, 1945, riding as a passenger in a jeep when an American bomber crashed near the road and caught fire, L/Cpl. Telford at once ordered his driver to make for the scene of the accident, leaped out of the vehicle and regardless of personal danger ran straight to the aircraft which was, by this time, burning fiercely.

'He located two of the crew, both severely injured, in the nose of the aircraft and succeeded in picking one of them up, and carrying him clear of the burning wreckage. The airman died later of his injuries.

'L/Cpl. Telford then attempted to reach the other man, but as he approached the aircraft the second time, an explosion scattered blazing petrol over a wide area and made his task impossible.'

Weapon skills as a B Special

Following training as a 'B Special' from 1935, Billy Telford joined the army in 1940. In January 1941 he joined the Corps of Military Police.

He recalled, "The first morning I went on parade, it was with a Sergeant Mills, originally from the Coldstream Guards. We had some turn (fun) with him when they were issuing the rifles.

'I caught my rifle and transferred it and threw it (drill procedures). The other boy I was with dropped his, you see, and the Sergeant says to me .. 'who told you to do that with the rifle?' '

Then he told me to do it again. I caught it in the left hand, put it in the right hand and threw it back just the way we had been taught with Sgt. Harry Crockett in the B-Specials.

'The Sergeant says, 'where did you learn that?' and I just told him I had learned it in the past. Anyway, we went out on the drill square and I was better at sloping arms or ordering arms. By this time the Sergeant was watching me like a hawk!

'But that was nothing. When we went to train with Webley revolvers, the Sergeant said, 'take your pistol down for cleaning purposes'.

'I got a penny out and soon I had the gun left in about 20 wee bits.

'The next morning I was marched into the commandant and he asked me what regiment I had deserted from. I told him I'd never deserted from anywhere and that I'd been in the police in Ireland.

'Oh, do they have guns?' says this boy sitting in big long breeches, 17/21st Lancers style. 'You're the sort of boy we want here!' Commando training

Special Service Company was a bad mistake

'I did another ten days and then I was posted out for I didn't need any more training. I made only one bad mistake, when I went to a Line of Communication Company. They were forming a Special Service Company and I volunteered.

'Anyway, I went and trained with the Commandos. We used to go out in trawlers into the Firth of Forth. I'll tell you a good one about that ...

'In the B-specials, just before the war started, they were looking for boys to go and train on the Lewis Gun (a light machine gun). They couldn't get anybody from Ballymena sub-district so I said I would go.

'I did three weeks on the Lewis and you know, I learned it. Sgt. Crockett made us dismantle and assemble the gun blindfold. If he wasn't satisfied, he wouldn't pass you out!

'Anyway, we used to go out into the Firth of Forth on the trawlers. It was ice cold. They were just ordinary fishing boats. They weren't naval but the crew were Royal Naval reserve.

'On the bows there was a Lewis gun-post and on the stern there was a twin Lewis mounting. When one of the seamen who would normally man the twin guns fell and dislocated his shoulder, the young naval lieutenant asked our captain if he had anyone who could work with the Lewis.

'The boys in my squad were all used to the Bren gun so I put my hand up. The officer checked me over on the guns and then I asked him how long I would stay on them.

'Until you are relieved,' replied the Naval officer.

'I was there for ten days! The Naval officer went on leave and I was reported absent. When he returned he says ... 'are you still here?' and I says 'Yes sir. You said I was to stay until relieved.'

'Anyway, he goes and back he comes in 20 minutes.

The Naval man says: 'You are in the soup, and I'm in the soup .. but I got you in the soup. I've got your officer in the soup too, we forgot where we had put you!'

'Eventually, I went back to Sergeant Major Avery, my own CSM. He was a very hard man.

'He says: 'You are for the clink. Stand at attention when I address you. Where were you!' 'So I says, I was sitting frozen to death behind two Lewis guns on the bow of a trawler in the Firth of Forth.' Sergeant Major Avery says: 'What were you doing there?'

'And I says, a naval officer put me there and told me that I was to stay until I was relieved. Our own Captain Bunker told me to go with him.' This obviously had the desired effect on the hard-case Sergeant Major and he told Billy: 'I will

make Captain Bunker jump corporal. Go and carry on with your duties.' Billy recalls: 'He could hardly keep from laughing.'

Jungle warfare

In 2005, Billy was interviewed by David Reid (transcription by Bruce Logan) at a gathering of Second World War veterans in Ballymena Services Club where he was a long standing and highly valued member. In the interview, he recounted his experiences in the Far Eastern theatre of operations when the enemy was as much the climate and the jungle – never mind the Japanese army. Allied air superiority meant that air transport was widely used in these campaigns.

" Either we went by glider or by Dakotas. We used to go in a glider, maybe 10 men in a glider. And the first thing you had to do with that glider was to chop it up into wee bits and hide it. Because the Japanese knew there was a subversive element in their midst."

He also recalled flying over the infamous 'hump' of the Himalayas in a 4-engine American aircraft loaded with petrol and oil. The flying conditions were often atrocious and there were many wrecks on this route which was used to take war material into China.

The grim reality of war remained crisp and clear in Billy Telford's memory: "I have plenty of memories, but I'm not allowed to tell you them.

"Whenever you went on a Long Range Penetration job the officer in charge would say: "'You'll see nothing, and you'll hear nothing, and you'll say nothing.' "You were going to do



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something that wasn't nice. And before you went on an LRP jump you were searched. You weren't allowed cigarettes or cigars

...

The only tobacco you could take was chewing tobacco. Because if you smoked in the bamboo jungle, the Japanese could smell it a week after

you threw the cigarette down." Billy Telford died in October 2007 at the age of 93. He was pre-deceased by his wife Etta. His funeral was to Ballymena Cemetery.

Acknowledgements

Ballymena Times; 'In Wartime Mid-Antrim', edited by Eull Dunlop; Bruce Logan; David Reid

On this Day – December 18

1914

Indian troops begin an attack on the Germans near Givenchy (La Bassée)

Burning of Lundy in France - report in Northern Whig

“The boys of the Ulster Division celebrated the anniversary of the Shutting of the Gates of Derry by a band parade and the burning of Lundy. The effigy was ten or twelve feet high, and was suspended at six o'clock in the morning from the branch of a tree which hung across the street of the village in which the 10th (S.) Battalion Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers (Derry Volunteers) are billeted. The French people viewed the effigy with much curiosity. At 5.30 p.m. the band paraded headed by torchlights, and played all the old familiar tunes. One of the officers put a light to the effigy, which burned splendidly for eighteen minutes, having been previously well soaked with paraffin. The National Anthem played by the band and sung by the spectators wound up the proceedings.”

The 10th Battalion War Diary states:- Gorenflos, France,” Closing of the gates Londonderry 18 December 1688” celebrated with usual honours.”

1916

The Battle of Verdun, the longest engagement of WW1, ends on this day after ten months and close to a million total casualties suffered by German and French troops. Germany abandons its plan “to bleed France white.” More than 300,000 are dead. (Photo next page).

The battle had begun on February 21, after the Germans—led by Chief of Staff Erich von Falkenhayn—developed a



plan to attack the fortress city of Verdun, on the Meuse River in France.

1917

German plane raid on London, Essex and Kent. Its reported that 14 are killed and 85 injured.

1939

First Canadian troop convoy, TC-1, arrives at Liverpool.

Lavrenti Beria, head of the NKVD, orders the start of large-scale deportation of Poles to the USSR.

The Finnish 40th Infantry Regiment of the Lapland Group, forces the Russian 273rd Infantry Regiment of the 9th Army to retreat at Pelkosenniemi.

The RAF launch another daylight raid against German shipping in the Schillig Roads, but lose 12 out of 24 bombers. This was the culmination of a series of RAF daylight raids which had cost an increasing number of

aircraft. This eventually caused the RAF to switch to night raids to reduce casualties.

1940

Submarine HMS Triton was declared lost with all hands on this date. She disappeared while on patrol in the southern Adriatic Sea for reasons unknown: the most likely cause of her loss was striking a mine in the Strait of Otranto.

Hitler issues Directive No. 18, confirming plans for Operation 'Barbarossa', previously Operation 'Otto', the attack against the Soviet Union. The aim of this new plan was to destroy the Red Army in western Russia, before moving against Moscow. All preparations were to be completed by the 15th May 1941.



1941

Lt Cdr Malcolm Wanklyn (photo above) was awarded the Victoria Cross for gallantry during a daring attack on an Italian convoy. Wanklyn was the Allies most successful submarine commander of WW2 by tonnage sunk, all the more remarkable a feat as his sub HMS Upholder was lost in April 1942.

1942

Field Marshal von Brauchitsch's resignation as head of OKH is accepted by Hitler, who now assumes personal command of the Army and its operations on the Eastern front. Hitler sacks Army Group Centre's commander, Field Marshal von Bock and replaces him with Field Marshal von Kluge. Stalin creates the Bryansk Front, which is to operate between the West and South West Fronts and lend added weight to the southern prong of the double envelopment of Army Group Centre.

Japanese troops force landings on Hong Kong island on December 18, 1941, and slaughter ensues.

A week of air raids over Hong Kong, a British Crown Colony, was followed up on December 17 with a visit paid by Japanese envoys to Sir Mark Young, the British governor of Hong Kong. The envoys' message was simple: The British garrison there should simply surrender to the Japanese — resistance was futile. The envoys were sent home with the following retort: "The governor and commander in chief of Hong Kong declines absolutely to enter into negotiations for the surrender of Hong Kong..."

The first wave of Japanese troops landed in Hong Kong with artillery fire for cover and the following order from their commander: "Take no prisoners." Upon overrunning a volunteer antiaircraft battery, the Japanese invaders roped together the captured soldiers and proceeded to bayonet them to death. Even those who offered no resistance, such as the Royal Medical Corps, were led up a hill and killed.

The Japanese quickly took control of key reservoirs, threatening the British and Chinese inhabitants with a slow death by thirst. The British finally surrendered control of Hong Kong on Christmas Day.

In Britain, all unmarried women ages 20-31 are called up and required to choose between ATS, WRNS, WAAF, Civil Defense, Land Army, or war industry work, the first military conscription of women in any country.

Congress passes First War Powers Act, giving president power to reorganize governmental agencies, and authorizing censorship of mail and communications.

Destroyer HMS Partridge was torpedoed and sunk by German submarine U-565 off Oran, Algeria. 37 of her crew were lost.

US submarine Albacore sinks Japanese light cruiser Tenryu off New Guinea.

US lands on Musita Island off Buna, New Guinea.

1943

The Kharkov four are sentenced to death.

1944

‘Operation Wacht am Rhein’ begins to bog down in the face of stiffening U.S. resistance and the lack of adequate logistical support, notably fuel for the armored Kampfgruppen of the 6th SS and 5th Panzer Army’s.

In its first mass incendiary raid, 84 US 20th Bomber Command B-29s destroy Japanese-held Hankow, China.

In typhoon off Samar, US Third Fleet loses destroyers Hull (202 killed), Monaghan (257 killed), and Spence (315 killed)—only 91 survive on all three ships.



Roll of Honour – December 18

Representing their comrades who died on this day

1914

+FOSTER, John

Royal Irish Rifles. 2nd Btn. Rifleman. 5623. Died 18/12/1914. Age 56. In the 28/04/1917 edition of the *Newtownards*

Chronicle an article was published under the headline *A Patriotic Newtownards Family* . It was reported that Sarah Jane Foster of 76 James Street, Newtownards had four sons, five grand-sons and four sons-in-law on active service.

Her sons on active service were named as Rifleman John Foster, Rifleman Alexander Foster, Rifleman Thomas Foster and Sergeant Harry Foster. Two of her sons, John and Harry, were killed in action.

Her sons-in-law on active service were named as Private Thomas Johnston, Lance Corporal John McNeill, Rifleman Joseph Reid and Rifleman Charles Reid. It was reported that Rifleman Charles Reid served with the 1st Battalion Royal Irish Rifles and was killed in action on 01/07/1916. Rifleman Charles Reid (No. 6810) was with the 2nd Battalion Royal Irish Rifles when he died on 09/07/1916. His wife Margaret was living at 42 Constance Street, Belfast.

Sarah Jane Foster's grand-sons who served in the Great War were named as Rifleman John Foster (No. 6234), Rifleman Alex Foster (No. 17652), Rifleman Harry Foster, Private William Foster and Rifleman James Logan.

John Foster was the first of Sarah Jane's two sons to die on active service in the Great War.

John Foster was born around 1857/1858 in Carlisle, England and he was a son of George and Sarah Jane Foster. George Foster worked as a mechanic.

In civilian life John Foster worked as a labourer and on 26/10/1880 he and Rose Ann Brown were married in Dungannon Registrar's Office. Rose Ann Brown from the

townland of Altnavannog, Dungannon was a daughter of William Brown, a labourer.

John and Rose Ann Foster (nee Brown) had at least eight children. At the time of his death his family was living at 35 Tyne Street, Belfast. They moved to Bell's Yard, Whitehouse. Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial, Belgium.

+MAJURY, William John

Royal Irish Rifles. 2nd Btn. Rifleman. 7165. Died 18/12/1914 in a Casualty Clearance Station at Bailleul. Aged 21. William John Majury enlisted in Newtownards and he served with the 4th Btn Royal Irish Rifles (Royal North Downs) and then the 2nd Btn Royal Irish Rifles. In some records his surname is spelt McJury and in others McJurey.

William John Majury was born on 07/10/1893 in the townland of Greengraves, Newtownards and in civil birth registration records his name is recorded as 'John McJurey'. A son of William J and Jane (nee Wilson) Majury who married on 19/04/1893 in Dundonald Presbyterian Church. The Majury family lived in the townlands of Greengraves and Killarn, Newtownards. They had at least seven children.

William John Majury had been a member of the Purple Vine Loyal Orange Lodge (LOL) No. 1056 in Dundonald and, after he died, there were two *Killed in Action* notices in the *Newtownards Chronicle* – one placed by his father, mother and brothers and one placed by George Wightman (Worshipful Master) and Charles McIlwaine (Secretary) on behalf of the Lodge. Bailleul Communal Cemetery (Nord), France. Newtownards and District WM. Dundonald Presbyterian Church RH



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+McCULLOUGH, James

Royal Irish Rifles, 2nd Btn. Rifleman. 3213. Died 18/12/1914. James was a Boer War veteran; he left a wife and three children. From Ann Street, Lurgan. Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial, Belgium

+McLAUGHLIN, William

Royal Irish Rifles, 10th Btn. Rifleman. 15442. Died 18/12/1914. Son of the late William McLaughlin. Born at Belfast. Belfast City Cemetery.

+FOSTER, John

Royal Irish Rifles, 2nd Btn. Rifleman. 5623. Died 18/12/1914. Age 56. Husband to Rose Ann Foster of 26 Bells Yard, Whitehouse, Co. Antrim. Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial, Belgium

+McJURY, William John

Royal Irish Rifles, 2nd Btn. Rifleman. 7165. Died 18/12/1914. Age 21. Son of William and Jane McJury of Millbank, Dundonald, Co. Down. Bailleul Communal Cemetery, Nord, France

1915**+McCORMICK, John**

Royal Irish Rifles, 19th Btn. Rifleman. 48. Died 18/12/1915. Age 23. Belfast City Cemetery

1917**+GAULT, James**

Royal Irish Rifles, 14th Btn. Lance Corporal. 14692. Died 18/12/1917. From Doagh, Co. Antrim. CWGC records states death was 08/12/1917. Local sources such as Steven Moore in "The Chocolate Soldiers" page 231, state 18/12/1917. Le Cateau Military Cemetery, France

1918**+GILMOUR, James Montgomery**

New Zealand Expeditionary Force. Wellington Regiment. Private. 80768 Died 18/12/1918 of pneumonia in Tidworth Hospital. Age 37. Born 04/01/1881 in Boveedy, west of

Kilrea in County Derry. He was a New Zealand rugby league footballer for a time. He worked as a labourer before enlisting in Wellington. He took ill in England. He was admitted to Tidworth Hospital on 15th December with a severe attack of influenza. Three days after admission he developed pneumonia. He was the son of Rev. George James and Agnes Gilmour. His next of kin on embarkation was Miss J.M. Gilmour (sister), Well Brae, Strathaven, Scotland. Tidworth Military Cemetery, Wiltshire

1942

+SPRAGUE, Richard Alfonso

RAF. 47 Sqdn. Wing Commander. DFC. 26067. Died 18/12/1942. Age 34. Son of Colonel Louis C. Sprague, Royal Irish Rifles, and Frances Sprague, of Paddington, London. El Alamein War Cemetery. Lurgan WM

VETERANS

ALLEN, Robert George

RNVR. Surgeon Lieutenant. MD QUB 1939. MCB. Born 18/12/1916. Son of James H Allen, Cregagh, Belfast. Postwar North Thoresby, Grimsby.

BROWN, William John

RN. Stoker II. K54774. Enrolled 19/10/1918 for hostilities. Pembroke II. Invalided 18/12/1918. Born Belfast 31/10/1900. ADM 188/970/54774

McCULLOUGH, Charles

RN. Submarines. Took part in Arctic convoys. Born 18/12/1923 in the Brown's Square area of the Shankill

Road, Belfast, he was a member of the Life Boys and Boys Brigade Company at Townsend Street Presbyterian Church. After his war service he started a confectionery and wholesale grocery business, and later became a civil servant. In 1958 he was elected to Belfast Corporation and later became an Ulster Unionist councillor. He was elected a member of the Ulster Senate (the upper house at Stormont) in 1968. In 1970 he left the UUP for the nascent DUP. When the Senate was dissolved in 1972 he stood down from politics whilst retaining his strong political convictions. He was a very active member of the Orange Order, the Apprentice Boys of Derry and the Masonic Order. He died aged 90 on 04/10/2014. He was Vice-President of the Belfast Branch of the RNA at the time of his death. Husband to Peggy and father of Shirley and Charles, his funeral from Townsend Street Church took place to Roselawn Cemetery. His funeral was attended by the Senior Naval Officer Northern Ireland, Lord and Lady Carswell, RNA President Cdr Peter Campbell and HM Lord Lieutenant of Belfast, Dame Mary Peters.

McNEILL, James B

Lancashire Fusiliers, 2nd Btn. Lance Corporal. 2753. Born Bushmills 08/03/1895. Served in both wars with the above regiment, lived 34 and 29 Sherwood Street, married and moved to Ballyclare. Brother of Robert Boyd McNeill. Son of Arthur and Isabella McNeill. Died 18/12/1975. Ballyclare Cemetery, Doagh Road, Ballyclare

Every day is a Remembrance Day

We will remember them

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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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