



remembrance ni



Ballymena Air Vice-Marshal awarded the United States' Air Medal

Air Vice-Marshal Paddy Harbison, CB, CBE, AFC, FBIM, grew up in Ballymena.

William Harbison (known as Paddy) was an RAF fighter pilot who saw combat flying Spitfires in the Second World War and, unusually, American jets in the Korean War.

He was born in Govan, Scotland, in 1922, to the former Isobel Strachan and William, a police officer in the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

He grew up in Northern Ireland, where he was educated at Ballymena Academy, and was the oldest of five siblings.

He met his future wife, Helen (née Geneva), a flight attendant from Illinois and they married in 1950 and ultimately settled in Falls Church, Virginia. They had two sons, Eric and Michael.

He joined the RAF in 1941 shortly after the Battle of Britain and was trained in Canada before flying missions with 118 Squadron.

One of the most hazardous missions came in March 1945, only six weeks before VE Day, when he led an escort party for more than a hundred Lancaster bombers heading for Bremen. They were attacked by Messerschmitt Me 262 fighters and an intense dogfight ensued, with the RAF struggling to hold off their quicker adversaries, although Harbison managed to damage an enemy plane.

He had another close shave when his Spitfire suffered engine failure over Germany, but as the ground loomed large he was able to restart the engine by furiously working a hand pump in the cockpit.

The end of the war brought its own challenges. Asked to round up men to fly to the Channel Islands, where the German surrender had been delayed by a day, Harbison had trouble finding sober pilots, and a mess hall somehow caught fire amid the celebrations.

After the war, he served with No. 64 Squadron RAF flying the twin-engine de Havilland Hornet, the fastest piston-engine fighter ever to enter service.

He also served with No. 263 and No. 257 Squadrons flying the Gloster Meteor.

In 1948, Harbison participated in an exchange programme with the United States Air Force's 1st Fighter Group.

He was stationed at March Air Force Base in California where he flew the Lockheed F-80 Shooting Star and became the first serving RAF pilot to fly the North American F-86 Sabre.

Harbison returned to England in 1950 where he was assigned to the All-Weather Development Squadron at the Central Fighter Establishment (CFE).

Afterwards he then found himself involved in the Korean War.

He arrived at Kimpo Air Base as an RAF observer and soon realised that aircraft manoeuvres would be a delicate and dangerous dance, because only half the runway was in use, the rest being under repair.

The near-constant take-offs, landings, crash landings and emergency landings by aircraft that had run out of fuel created a risky environment, even before taking into account the threat posed by the enemy's advanced Soviet-made MiG-15 jet fighters.

Not yet 30, Harbison was, like many pilots in the Korean War, a veteran of the Second World War, where he flew Spitfires and P-51 Mustangs in the RAF. The 1950s

heralded a new era: the widespread deployment of jet fighters with swept wings that were far faster than the old propeller-driven machines.

Above northwestern North Korea, where the Yalu River meets the Yellow Sea, United Nations forces fought North Koreans who were supported by the Soviets and Chinese. The area became known as “MiG Alley” and was the scene of many skirmishes between MiG-15s and their American analogue, the F-86 Sabre.

The RAF was keen to learn more about jet-versus-jet combat, which is where Harbison came in. He had been posted to California in 1948 on a pilot exchange scheme with the United States Air Force where he became one of the first to fly the F-86. The RAF had limited involvement in the Korean War, but persuaded the Americans to allow a four-man team of observers.

After a training programme at Kimpo (today, Gimpo international airport, in Seoul) with the merciless-sounding nickname “Clobber College”, Harbison started to follow operations from the cockpit of an F-86.

He was far from a passive onlooker and at one point damaged a MiG, as well as finding himself under fire. He recalled after: “I was very nearly shot down once, but I got away with it... I was pursued from some 35,000ft down to the deck level with a MiG on my tail firing all the way, and the only time he left was when he had run out of ammunition.”

After his service in Korea, Harbison was sent to West Germany to command 67 Fighter Squadron.

In 1953, Harbison was awarded the United States' Air Medal for service as a fighter pilot in Korea.

In 1969 he became director of operations of National Air Traffic Services; three years later he was air attaché for the British embassy in Washington.

Rising to the rank of air vice-marshal in 1975, he became commander of No 11 Group, tasked with defending UK airspace.

After retiring from the RAF in 1977 he joined British Aerospace as a vice-president in its Washington office.

One of his prized possessions was a leather-bound logbook in which he meticulously recorded his sorties.

He passed away on December 25, 2018 aged 96.

Acknowledgments - Ballymena Guardian, Jane Witherspoon

US President Truman unveiled memorial to Lurgan born General

Field Marshal Sir John Greer Dill, GCB, CMG, DSO. An equestrian statue in his honour was unveiled by President Harry S Truman in Arlington National Cemetery in November 1950.

Sir John Dill was born in Lurgan on 25th December 1881, son of the local bank manager. He attended Cheltenham College and the Royal Military College at Sandhurst. In 1901 he joined the 1st battalion of the Leinster regiment and saw action in the Second Boer War.



On the outbreak of the World War I he became brigade-major of the 25th brigade (8th division) in France where he was present at Neuve Chapelle, Alvers Ridge and Bois Grenier. By the end of the war he was a brigadier general, had been wounded in

action and mentioned in despatches eight times. After the war he gained a reputation as a gifted army instructor. He was promoted to major general in 1930, taking up appointments at the Staff College and then in the War Office.

Dill commanded British forces in Palestine (1936 – 1937). He was commander of I Corps in France (1939-40), returning to the UK in April 1940 when he was appointed Vice Chief of the Imperial General Staff by the then Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. In May 1940, after Churchill had replaced Chamberlain, Dill was appointed as CIGS. Later in 1940, he became ADC General to King George VI.

Churchill posted him to Washington as his personal representative in 1941 where he became Chief of the British

Joint Staff Mission, then Senior British Representative on the Combined Chiefs of Staff.

In Washington Dill found his feet, excelling as a diplomatic military presence. In 1943 alone he attended the Conferences in Quebec, Casablanca and Tehran, and also meetings in India, China and Brazil.

He served briefly on the combined policy committee set up by the British and United States governments under the Quebec Agreement to oversee the construction of the atomic bomb.

He was immensely important in making the Chiefs of Staff committee – which included members from both countries – function, often smoothing ruffled feathers in the clash of cultures that followed. He was particularly friendly with General George Marshall (he of the Marshall Plan) and the two exercised a great deal of influence on President Roosevelt who described Dill as “the most important figure in the remarkable accord that has been developed in the combined operations of our two countries”.

Dill served in Washington until his death in November 1944. Following a memorial service in Washington Cathedral he was buried in Arlington National Cemetery. He was posthumously awarded an American Distinguished Service Medal in 1945 as well as receiving an unprecedented joint resolution of Congress appreciating his services. An equestrian statue in his honour was unveiled by President Harry S Truman in Arlington National Cemetery in November 1950.

On this Day – December 25



1916



The Christmas truce



1939

A fresh Russian division is thrown into the attacks at Taipale. The Russian air force bombs 11 towns and villages.

Soviets attempt to break out at Suomussalmi, Finland, but fail.

The admiralty announces the completion of a minefield, 500 miles long and 35 wide, down the East coast.

1940

The Admiral Hipper intercepts a convoy bound for the middle east, but is forced to withdraw by three escorting cruisers and has to put in to Brest for repairs.

Pope Pius XII celebrates Christmas Midnight Mass in afternoon due to blackout.

1941

The British retake Benghazi.

Hong Kong surrenders after a 7 day siege, with more than 2,000 killed or missing and 2,300 wounded.

The RAF and American Volunteer Group shoot down 51 Japanese aircraft over Rangoon for loss of just 12 of their own number.

Japanese secure Jolo Island in Philippines. Over 3,000 starve to death in Leningrad. Hitler removes Guderian from command of Panzer Group 2.

1942

Heavy fighting continues all around the perimeter of Stalingrad, while the decimated and starving troops of 6th

Army receive their last rations of horse meat, the 12,000 horses in the pocket having now all been slaughtered.

Convoy JW-51A arrives at Murmansk without loss.

In Tunisia, Germans retake Longstop Hill; Americans lost 500 men in 4-day battle.

1944

The 2nd Panzer Division is just four miles from the river Meuse, Southwest of Liege, but is stopped by the U.S. 2nd Armored Division with British help.

The last Japanese port on Leyte is captured and MacArthur proclaims that Leyte is secure.

US lands at Palompon on Leyte in the Philippines, cutting off the last Japanese port on the island, and ending the assault phase of the campaign.

Royal Irish Fusiliers pipers and the opposing Fallschirmjaeger

On Christmas Day 1944, the Adjutant, Captain (later Lt Col) Brian Clark MC, sent the Battalion pipers from 1st Royal Irish Fusiliers out to play on the hillsides. Brian's gesture was appreciated by friend and foe alike and, as the skirl of Irish warpipes floated through the mountain air, the opposing Fallschirmjaeger reciprocated by singing and applauding.

Amongst the tunes from the German side was 'Stille Nacht', that most beautiful of carols. Later in the evening the Germans mounted a fireworks 'display' by firing their MG42s into the air, criss-crossing the night sky with tracer. Thus did

the Faughs create a Christmas truce in Italy. Paradoxically, in 1914, the same battalion had not observed the famous truce on the Western Front.

Some days before Christmas, and in clear daylight, a drunken Fallschirmjaeger had staggered into the Faughs' lines loaded down with bottles of alcohol and wishing everyone a happy Christmas. He was most upset when his newfound Irish friends, having helped him consume his burden of alcohol and permitted him to regain sobriety, insisted that he remain with the Faughs rather than returning to his own lines. He thought this quite unsporting of them.



On Christmas Eve, at Lichtjes op Oorlogsbegraafplaats Jonkerbos in Nijmegen, as at many other War

Cemeteries in the Netherlands, candles are lit on every grave to show respect and gratitude to those men who have given the ultimate sacrifice for freedom. Despite the rain and cold wind many people, including the Mayor of Nijmegen, attended and helped children to place a candle on each grave, 1642 in total.

Roll of Honour – December 25

Representing their comrades who died on this day

1916

+BLEAKLEY, RT

Royal Irish Rifles, 9th Btn. Rifleman. 17/1738. Died 25/12/1916. Born in 14 Upper Malvern St., Belfast on 29/06/1883. Enlisted Belfast 11/09/1914. Was discharged from 9th Btn. C Company at Ballykinlar on 31/05/1915 with astigmatism as being “permanently unfit”. He re-enlisted. Pre-war he was a boiler-maker in Harland & Wolff shipyard. Son of Robert, a sea captain, and Mary Jane (nee McIntyre) Bleakley of Craigs Cottages, Whitehouse. Robert Jnr and Alice Louisa White married in Southampton in 1910. They had three sons and a daughter. The family later lived at 88 Argyle St., Belfast. St Quentin Cabaret Military Cemetery, Belgium. Carnmoney C of I WM. Rosemary Street Presbyterian Church, Belfast, RH. Midland Railway Company, Belfast, WM. There is a person of this name and

regiment named on the Great War Memorial in Carnmoney Parish Church.

+MATTHEWS, W

Royal Irish Rifles, 9th Btn. Rifleman. 9/15566. Died 25/12/1916. There are no family details on CWGC entry. St Quentin Cabaret Military Cemetery, Belgium

1918

+BOSTON, Thomas

Machine Gun Corps, 10th Btn. Lieutenant. Died 25/12/1918. Age 25. Born on 22/01/1893 in Belfast. Eldest son of John and Margaret Boston. He was born on 22/01/1893 in Belfast. The family lived in Ormeau, Belfast. His father was a Publican and Auctioneer. Thomas worked as an apprentice to Linen Trade. Thomas Boston was working in Upperlands at William Clark & Sons Ltd before enlisting. He was an adjutant in the South Derry Volunteers and was commander of Upperlands U.V.F. Thomas enlisted originally with the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. He later transferred to the Machine Gun Corps. Lieutenant Thomas Bolton was serving with the 10th Battalion of the Machine Gun Corps when he had influenza in Cairo after the war had finished. He developed pneumonia and died on Christmas Day 1918. Cairo War Memorial Cemetery, Cairo, Egypt

+SHORTT, Fanny

Voluntary Aid Detachment. Nurse. Died 26/12/1918. Aged 32. UK Book of Remembrance, Berkshire. Dundonald cemetery.

1940

+AYRE, Robert Neilson

RNR. AB. P/X 19200. Died 25/12/1940. Age 28. HMS Newark. Son of Margaret Ayre, Wolff St., Belfast. His late brother served as a stoker in RN for 16 years. (Belfast Weekly Telegraph 11/01/1941). Halifax (Camp Hill) Cemetery, Nova Scotia, Canada

+EDMENSON, Walter Alexander

HMS Caroline. RNVR. Sub-Lieutenant. Mentioned in despatches. On the outbreak of war his appointment as a Midshipman was to St Angelo for MTB 191. In 1940 he was promoted Sub-Lieutenant, and in August 1940 was recommended for further promotion to Lieutenant. His Commanding Officer in recommending him for promotion commented, "this officer's report shows the real fighting spirit, and I am confident that his audacity during three separate attacks, assisted the minesweeping trawlers considerably." Edmenson was then in command of MAC5 operating out of Harwich and took a lively part in the rescue of RAF officers and men shot down during the Battle of Britain. RS Allison in his history of HMS Caroline records, "It was with deep regret that all who knew this gallant young officer received the news that at about 10 o'clock on the morning of 26th. December, 1940, about ten miles to the south eastward of Harwich, Sub-Lieutenant Edmenson, while proceeding in his coastal motorboat was blown up by a mine, all that was noted being the heavy explosion which occurred and the absence of any survivors." Died 26/12/1940. Born 23/07/1919, son of W A Edmenson, Castlehill Road, Knock, Belfast. Campbell College 2468. RNIYC WM. QUB WM.

1941

+CONWAY, Robert

Pioneer Corps. Private. 1302489. Died 25/12/1941. Age 41. Husband to Elizabeth Conway. Bangor Cemetery

+FORSTER, John Jacob

Hong Kong Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. Sub-Lieutenant. 37 A. Died 25/12/1941. Born Fermanagh. Armagh Royal School. Played rugby for Armagh. Trained as an engineer at Swan Hunter shipyards at Newcastle on Tyne. After a six year apprenticeship he got his first post on a ship. Several ships later he accepted a post as superintendent engineer at Taikoo Dockyard, Hong Kong. On the outbreak of war he was taken under the Admiralty and given the rank of Lieutenant Engineer. He was shot dead by the Japanese on the day of the surrender of Hong Kong. It is believed he was ring to escape to get to is wife and young children. Son of Mrs Forster and the late Captain John Forster, Victoria House, Armagh. His brother Albert was working ihn Holland and was taken prisoner at the outbreak of war. Plymouth Naval Memorial, Panel 96

+HANDS, Samuel

Pioneer Corps. Private. 13011402. Died Between 24/12/1941 and 25/12/1941. Aged 37. Son of Benjamin and Margaret Hands; husband to Barbara Ellen Hands, of Broughshane. Tel El Kebir Memorial Cemetery, Egypt

+PROES, Geoffrey Ernest Sullivan

Royal Artillery. Major. 23683. Died Between 19/12/1941 and 25/12/1941. Aged 39. Son of Colonel E. S. Proes and Mrs.

E. Proes; husband to Nancy M. Proes, of Omagh. Sai Wan Memorial, China, (including Hong Kong)

1942

+JOHNSTON, John

Royal Army Service Corps. Private. S/93146. Died 25/12/1942. Age 36. Born in Belfast. Son of James Johnston and Ellen Johnston. Husband to Mary Johnston, also from Belfast. At the time of Private Johnston's death, the couple had a young daughter named Sadie. 1939 - 45
Commonwealth Cemetery, Charlottenburg, Berlin, Germany

1944

+BLACK, Hector

Royal Artillery. Gunner. 1472337. Died 25/12/1944. Aged 41. 447 Bty., 66 (4th Bn. The Gloucestershire Regt.) Searchlight Regt. Husband to Margaret Black, of Dundonald.
Ballygowan Presbyterian Churchyard

1945

+MAWHINNEY, Hugh

H M.L.S.T. 3020 Stoker 1st Class. C/KX 171958. Died 25/12/1945. Age 31 years old. Son of Robert and Rachel Mawhinney, of Antrim. Kranji War Cemetery, Singapore

VETERANS

HUNTER, George Howard Barron Noel

RN. Commander (E). OBE. Mentioned in despatches. RN 1932 - 63. Special Entry 1932. MBIM CEng MIMechE FIMarE RN Engineering College 1933 - 36. 1939-45 War. Commander (E), Dec., 1948. Assistant Director Marine Services 1963 - 70. Born 25/12/1913. Son of Dr SR Hunter, Rosemount, Dunmurry. D 10/1959. Campbell College 1970

IRWIN, John McCaughey

RAF. B Com 1942 QUB. MCB. Born 25/12/1920. Son of Samuel C Irwin, Cliftonville Rd., Belfast. Insurance manager. Helen's Bay, Co.Down

JOHNSON, William H

HMS Springdale. Born 29/11/1925. Belfast. Died 26/12/1975

McKINSTRY, Robert Noel

RN. Surgeon Lieutenant. 1914 - 1919. OBE 1945. Jersey's Medical Officer of Health between 1939 and 1957. According to historian Louise Willmott, he was also involved with every major form of organized resistance in Jersey during the Nazi occupation. School Medical Officer State of Jersey. Born 25/12/1892. Son of Robert McKinstry, Bessbrook. Campbell College 1047. Elmwood - PCI RH. Bessbrook WM

Every day is a Remembrance Day

We will remember them

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masthead.**

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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