



remembrance ni

Airborne warrior and High Court judge



Mervyn William Dennison , CBE, MC, QC, JP, DL, BA.

His studies at Queens where he read Modern Languages and Law, were distracted by the declaration of war, and in October 1939 Dennison joined the Royal Ulster Rifles.

He served with their 1st Battalion, who were later converted to the Airborne role and, until 1943, formed part of the 1st Airlanding Brigade, thereafter they were assigned to the 6th Airborne Division. Dennison had already parted company with them by this time, however, and in the final days of

1943, having completed his parachute training, he joined the 1st Parachute Brigade in North Africa. At the end of this campaign he was posted to the 3rd Battalion and served with them in Sicily and Italy.

Of the preparations before take-off for Arnhem, Dennison later said, "There had been no time for breakfast before leaving the Battalion quarters at Spalding in Lincolnshire. Despite the fact that strict orders were given that all men were to be given a "fat free" breakfast to lessen the chances of airsickness, nothing deterred the NAAFI ladies from bringing their van on to the airfield. Here they proceeded to distribute a concoction of near cold tea and "sandwiches" consisting of white bread smeared with margarine and containing two slices of cold greasy bacon with the rind still attached. Nevertheless those experienced soldiers in the Company collected all uneaten sandwiches and crammed them into any spare pockets of pouches that were available."

"Only the grace of God and the strong arm of the Jumpmaster prevented me from being pulled out."

Corporal Wise, Dennison's batman, had also taken the chance to eat as much as he could stomach and took surplus with him for future consumption, explaining to his officer, "We'll get no more food today." A sensible course of action on the ground, maybe, but once in the air, Wise began to feel the worse for his trouble and was violently sick. Dennison pitied his poor batman and fetched a steel bucket "...for the Corporal's greater comfort", from the rear of the Dakota and then donated part of his copy of the Sunday Times to the task of cleaning Wise up. Major



Major Dennison in Barletta, Italy, 1943. Left to right: CQMS Jack Haybourne, Major Dennison, Sergeant-Major Alan Watson.

Dennison attempted to empty the bucket out of the side-door when the slipstream caught both himself and the bucket and very nearly dragged him out of the aircraft and to his death, "Only the grace of God and the strong arm of the Jumpmaster prevented me from being pulled out."

Major Dennison jumped with the 3rd Battalion at 13:53, he took the trouble of writing this time on his wrist with a

copying ink pencil. "The drop had been the best we had ever known - accurate, a speedy rendezvous - and "A" Company 100 per cent in position." Corporal Wise had recovered from his sickness enough to fill his stomach again with another of the bacon sandwiches, one of which he also handed to a grateful Dennison. As the landings were taking place, many Dutch civilians were walking out onto the zones to welcome the British soldiers, and one man, dressed in a Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers, shook Dennison by the hand and said, "You are very welcome, Tommy, but why have you waited so long?" The 3rd Battalion had difficulty moving through the swarms of well-wishers, and Dennison, waving his blackthorn walking stick in both a friendly and threatening manner, got his Company through as quickly as possible.

For his conduct during the Battle, Major Dennison was awarded the Military Cross. The citation reads:

“Major Dennison commanded a company of the 3rd Parachute Battalion which was dropped West of ARNHEM on 17th September 1944. During the advance on the town on the evening of 17th September the battalion was held up and shortly afterwards, Major Dennison's company in the rear came under small arms and heavy mortar fire from the flank. Major Dennison led two platoons of his company and over-ran three enemy machine gun posts which formed the nucleus of the opposition on the flank. On the following morning Major Dennison's company acted as rearguard to the battalion advancing on Arnhem, but was cut off from the remainder of the battalion by strong enemy forces. Later the battalion got into serious difficulties and Major Dennison, with reserve ammunition, was ordered to fight his way

through at all costs. This he did successfully against very



strong opposition. Throughout both these actions Major Dennison showed a high standard of personal courage, leadership and determination. Even when severely wounded in both arms, he continued to encourage and inspire his men."

In later life as a High Court judge.

The wounds to his hands were received whilst fighting with a German infantryman who was attempting to bayonet him, this man was quickly

dealt with by a member of "A" Company. Only moments before this incident, Dennison had awakened after a mortar bomb had landed close to him and knocked him unconscious.

Dennison made his way back to the Oosterbeek Perimeter where he spent the remainder of the battle amongst the wounded. On Friday 22nd September, he found himself in

the Vreewijk Hotel at the Utrechtseweg-Stationsweg crossroads, after being laid out on a stretcher and, with another man, tied down to a Bren carrier and driven there with both considerable speed and skill. The Hotel was under the supervision of Corporal "Chirpy" Couling of the 16 Parachute Field Ambulance, Dennison said of him, "He was a man without equal when it came to caring for the wounded. Quite a few men survived that battle because of his unstinting care and devotion to his patients. He deserved so much more." Couling was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

Another man whom Dennison came into contact was an SS Obersturmbahnführer who had been wounded in both legs and feet. He was offered some morphine for his pain, but refused this because he believed that the medical personnel were trying to poison him. Dennison lay next to him, "He turned out to be a very agreeable companion, speaking good English, and as a result received his fair share of what food and cigarettes the Dutch were able to smuggle in to us. When the sad news arrived that the remnants of the Division were to retire across the Rhine, the Germans moved into the hotel. They threatened us with their shouts and curses and told us to get up and get out. We owe something to our friend the SS Colonel who sat up on his blanket, gave them hell and told them to mind their manner to these British, who were both soldiers and gentlemen!"

"Most of the survivors would confirm the chivalry of one brand of good soldiers to another. The Divisional Director of Medical Services (Colonel Graeme Warrack) had spent many hours during the battle driving to and from the German headquarters organising cease-fires to permit the

removal of our wounded, or, on several occasions, to permit the exchange of wounded prisoners. And so the wounded began their journey to prison camp. A few evaded their guards and hid up in the homes of those wonderful Dutch families. Most went into Germany in great discomfort in those "40 hommes, 8 cheveaux" {40 men or 8 horses} bare wooden wagons. Stalags for other ranks ranged from bad to tolerable. Officers did much better in Oflags, but wherever it might have been, one has to remember that it was within five or six months of the end of the war and the Germans were as short of food and necessities as the prisoners."

Major Dennison was taken to Oflag IXA/H. Like many prisoners, he used the time of his incarceration to further educate himself and, with the assistance of the Red Cross and their completely valid examinations, he was able to sit his Bar finals during his stay. When he had finished this, the camp was emptied and its occupants marched westwards, away from the advancing Russians. Once outside the Castle, Dennison, with Lieutenant Tony Baxter, the command of "A" Company's No.2 Platoon, slipped away under cover of "smoke"; quite literally, the guard dogs accompanying the party were distracted when the prisoners covered for the escapers by blowing cigarette smoke at them. The pair successfully found their way to the American lines and were subsequently repatriated.

Mervyn Dennison returned to the Parachute Regiment for a time, but in 1945 he was called to the Bar in Northern Ireland, and two years later he joined the colonial legal service and became a Crown Counsel in Northern Rhodesia. In 1960 he became a QC and a year later was a High Court Judge in Zambia. Dennison returned to his

homeland in 1967, where he was Secretary to Fermanagh County Council until he retired in 1973. He was thereafter a part-time member of the Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve, and was also President of the Northern Ireland Branch of the Parachute Regimental Association.

Public service

He also served as Chief Commissioner, Planning Appeals Commission and Water Appeals Commission, 1973-80; Chairman, Industrial Tribunals in N Ireland, 1981-84. Member Senate, Queen's University, Belfast 1979-87. Honorary Colonel, The Zambia Regiment, 1964-66. JP, 1969-73, Deputy Lieutenant (DL) 1972, Co. Fermanagh. KStJ 1978 (CStJ 1964).

He married Helen Maud (née Spiller), and had two children, Susan and Michael. How they met was related in the following article:

"The army officer who was to become the Honourable Mr. Justice Mervyn William Dennison, MC, QC, acting Chief Justice of Zambia, gained a wife by the simple expedient of elbowing the young lady's (then) current escort into a flower bed and whisked her away in a car. "Naughty of me..." he muses today. "It quite ruined the dahlias. I don't usually act like a caveman, mind you. The fact was, I so liked the look of her at the end of the room that I had to do something drastic. The Royal Air Force officer she was with did not seem to object." It is not surprising, Mervyn Dennison stands six feet four inches in his socks and has a build to match. More, he is a thoroughbred Irishman with a history of regimental rugby and boxing."

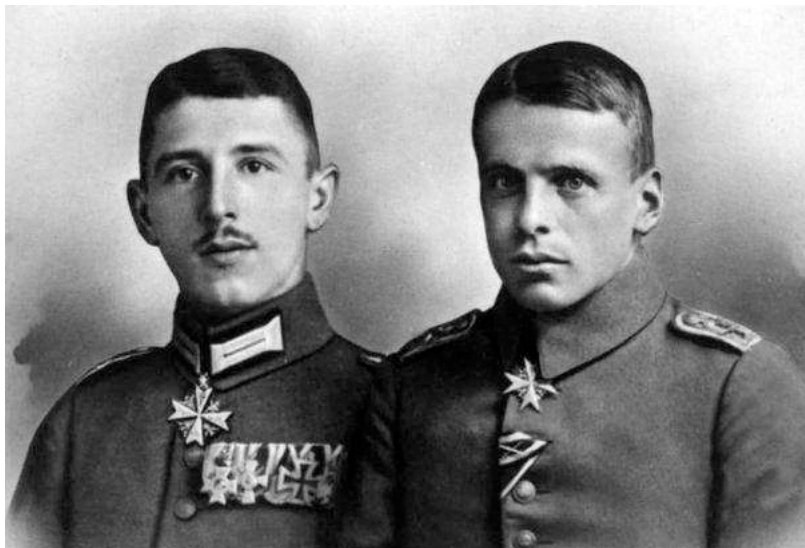
The son of a Methodist minister, he was born in Cork and educated at Methodist College, Belfast, and later at Queens University. Following a brief illness, Mervyn Dennison died 12/01/1992, aged 78. His wife passed away on the 18/09/2014, aged 93. Acknowledgment - The Pegasus Archive

On this Day – January 12

1915

The Germans recapture the eastern slopes of Hill 132. (Soissons)

1916



Two German flying aces - Max Immelman and Oswald Boelcke - are both awarded the Pour le Mérite aka "the Blue Max" for downing eight Allied aircraft each.

1918

Remember the Officers and Men of HM Ships Narbrough and Opal who died on this day in 1918 and are commemorated on Portsmouth Naval Memorial. See Louis Storey from Belfast in today's Roll of Honour.



H.M.S. "OPAL" at full speed (Jutland) - Copyright Imperial War Museum SP2017

HMS Narborough and HMS Opal sister ships in company off Scapa Flow both wrecked when ran aground in a violent gale and snowstorm. Each carried officially 80. Only one survivor from both vessels. 188 killed. Most of the casualties were never found. See Louis Story in Roll of Honour today. Below - Portsmouth Naval Memorial



The French repel German flamethrower attack on the Chaume Wood (Meuse).

1936



Happy birthday to 33 Squadron RAF - Crest A hart's head affrontée, coupé at the neck - approved by HM King Edward VIII in May 1936. The badge was developed from an unofficial emblem produced in the early 1930s

1940

Soviet bombers raid cities in Finland.

1941

Recruiting of Norwegians for the 'Nordland' Regiment of the 5th SS Motorized Division 'Wiking' begins.

1942

Hitler orders Admiral Otto Ciliax, who commands the battleships Scharnhorst and Gneisenau and the cruiser Prinz Eugen at Brest, to prepare to return to Germany. The new German battleship Tirpitz, sister ship of the Bismarck is ordered to Norway.

British capture Sollum.

Japan formally declares war on the Dutch East Indies.

Field Marshal von Leeb, C-in-C of Army Group North, requests permission to withdraw his forces south of Lake Ilmen behind the river Lovat, as the 2nd Corps at Demyansk is in serious danger of being cut off. Hitler refuses von Leeb's request who resigns in protest. His place as C-in-C of Army Group North is taken up by Field Marshal von Kuechler.

Off Nova Scotia, German U-boat U-123 sinks British freighter Cyclops, the first loss in Germany's "Operation Paukenschlag."

Col. Charles Lindbergh is refused a military command due to his vocal pre-war isolationist work.

US forms National War Labor Board to deal with union wage demands.

In US, Victory Book Campaign begins to collect reading material for servicemen.

1943

The Red Army begins an offensive to restore the land communications with the encircled city of Leningrad. The Germans abandon a 300 miles salient in Caucasus. And withdraw towards the Kuban Bridgehead. The Red Army gains several more streets in the bloody battle for Stalingrad.

Gen. Leclerc drives the last Germans troops out of the Fezzan in Southern Libya with his Free French forces from Chad.

1944

Churchill and de Gaulle meet for talks at Marrakesh.

1945

The German 'Nordwind' offensive is stopped 13 miles from Strasbourg. British and U.S. forces link up in the Laroche area.

Koniev's 1st Ukrainian Front launches a major winter offensive from its bridgehead across the Vistula at Baranov in southern Poland.



Roll of Honour – January 12

Representing their comrades who died on this day

1915

+McGRATH, James

Royal Irish Rifles. 4th Btn. B Coy. Rifleman. 6743. Died 12/01/1915. Age 17. Son of John and Jane McGrath, of 1, Moores Lane, Newry. Newry Old Chapel Roman Catholic Cemetery

1916

+REAINS, William John

RN. Chief Stoker. 169665. HMS Vivid. Died 12/01/1916. Aged 40. His death followed a prolonged illness (contracted in Gallipoli) and an operation in the Naval Hospital Devonport. 22 years service. Enrolled RN when he was 18 years old. Served worldwide. Somali and Long Service Medals. Born in Church Lane, Donaghadee on 24/04/1875. Son of William John and Margaret (nee Stewart) Reains who were married on 02/05/1873 in Christ Church, Byculla, Bombay, India. William John Reains Junior was baptised in Shore Street Presbyterian Church Donaghadee. William John Reains Senior, died of heart disease on 03/10/1880 in Bombay. Margaret Reains (nee Stewart), died of pulmonary tuberculosis on 26/02/1885 in Church Lane, Donaghadee. The three children were raised by their maternal grandparents, Samuel and Sarah (nee Carson) Stewart.

William John Reains joined the Royal Navy when he was 18 years old and, on 11/02/1901, he and Alice Maud Hallett married in St Peter's Church of England Church Plymouth. At the time of his marriage, William John Reains was serving in HMS *Hyacinth*. William John and Alice Maud Reains of Herbert St., Devonport, Plymouth. Plymouth (Weston Mill) Cemetery. Shore Street - PCI RH

1917

+CAMPBELL, Geoffrey William

Black Watch (Royal Highlanders), 4th/5th Btn. Private. 6421. Died 12/01/1917 when a shell hit a communications trench at Beaumont Hamel a month after he had arrived at the front. Age 18. Geoffrey was born between October and December 1898 in Shillelagh, County Wicklow. William and Edith Campbell were school teachers at Ampertaine National School which was located beside the main road to Kilrea. Son of Geoffrey William and Edith Rosetta Campbell, of Ampertaine School, Upperlands, Co. Derry. Vlamertinghe Military Cemetery, Belgium. WJ Clarke & Sons Upperlands WW1 WM

1918

+STORY, Louis Percival St John

RNVR. Surgeon Probationer. HMS Opal. Died 12/01/1918. Aged 22. Both the Opal, and the HMS Narborough ran aground during a snowstorm, on South Ronaldsay, Orkney.

They were on a night patrol to hunt German warships suspected to be laying mines on the Scottish coast. By 5.30pm the weather had deteriorated to such an extreme

degree that the destroyers were in danger of swamping and foundering and visibility was near zero. The Opal and Narborough were sent back to Scapa Flow.

For the next four hours Opal regularly sent reports indicating her course and intention to return, but at 9.27pm, a garbled message stating "have run aground" was received, followed by silence. The weather was so atrocious that no vessels could be despatched until the following morning, and it was two days before the Opal was found, battered, broken and empty on the Clett of Crura.

The single survivor, who had been on board the Narborough, reported that the ships had suddenly crashed headlong into the rocks, probably due to a navigation error by the Opal's captain. Both wrecks were abandoned and broken up by the sea over the next few weeks taking the bodies of both crews, bar the single survivor, with them. Son of the Reverend Lawrence Parsons Story and Katharine Evelyn Story, Ulsterville Avenue, Belfast. Faculty of Medicine QUB, 1913 - 1915. Portsmouth Naval Memorial, Panel 31. RBAI WM. QUB WM. Christ Church, Durham St., Belfast WM

+WILLIAMSON, Thomas

Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. 1st Btn. Private. 166588. Died 12/01/1918. Age 33. Son of Elizabeth Williamson, of Belfast; husband to Ellen Williamson, of Belfast. Shankill Graveyard, Belfast

1919

+WEIR, Matthew

Royal Irish Rifles, 12th Btn. Rifleman. 12/19310. Died 12/01/1919. Age 27. Born Randalstown 16/06/1892. Enlisted in Larne on 15/09/1914. Discharged on 03/10/1917 as a result of wounds to his left leg which rendered him unfit for war service. He died of septic pneumonia in the Royal Victoria Hospital and was given a military funeral. The Larne Times of 18/01/1919 reported this was the second attack of pneumonia following 14 operations. It also noted that he had been injured in battle on 01/07/1916 and had lain on the battlefield for three days where he was found by a group of Canadians who took him to their base hospital where shortly afterwards he recovered consciousness. He was then evacuated to a hospital in London. Whilst in the hospital he was visited by his mother and relatives. Due to his wounds and illness Matthew was discharged from the Army on the 02/10/1917, his silver war badge was number 246-789.

Matthew Weir was moved to the U.V.F. Hospital in Belfast and then to Londonderry and then back to the U.V.F. Hospital in Belfast. After many months of suffering including fourteen operations and two bouts of pneumonia Matthew Weir died due to cardiac failure in the Royal Victoria Hospital.

The funeral took place on the 19th January from the family home at Glynn Road to the New Cemetery, Larne. The coffin which was covered with the Union flag was borne by his friends and former comrades. The services at the house and the graveside were conducted by the Rev. R. Miller and Captain Rev. Thomas Warwick, C.F. A detachment of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers in charge of a sergeant

accompanied the funeral and formed a firing party at the grave.

Matthew was a member of the UVF and of Boyne Defenders LOL 1297. His brother William James Weir died from wounds received in action on 10/08/1917 (Brandhoek New Military Cemetery). Son of William and Charlotte (nee Morgan) Weir, of 9, Coronation Terrace, Glynn Rd., Larne. Larne New Cemetery. Larne WM

1940

+McCULLOUGH, Samuel

RN. AB. D/JX 139461. Died 12/01/1940. Age 22. HMS Olympia. Son of Isabella McCullough, Loopland Dr., Belfast. (Belfast Weekly Telegraph 20/01/1940). Plymouth Naval Memorial, Panel 38

1945

+LATTIMER, William

RN. AB. D-JX 197774. HMS Drake. Died 12/01/1945. Age 41. Husband to Matilda Lattimer, Belfast. Carnmoney cemetery. Sec. D.D. Grave 122

VETERANS

HAMILTON, Henry (Harry)

10th Battalion, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. 10th Battalion (the Derrys). Private/Signaller.

He volunteered for active service in September 1914 (aged about 21 years); before enlisting he was a member of the Portstewart Company, Coleraine Battalion, North Derry

Regiment, Ulster Volunteer Force. The Derrys trained at Finner Camp, County Donegal, and Seaford, Sussex, and arrived at the Western Front in October 1915. Harry served in France and was wounded during the Battle of the Somme (July 1916). He was taken as a prisoner of war by the Germans in 1918. He contracted pneumonia after being released at the end of the War and recovered fully. His parents, Mr. Robert and Mrs. Hetty Hamilton, lived at Mullaghacall Cottages, Portstewart. Harry was the agent-in-charge of the L.M.S. Railway Station at Magilligan, County Londonderry, when he died on 12 January 1941, aged 48 years. He is commemorated on Portstewart Presbyterian Church's Roll of Honour and the Roll of Honour of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

KEOWN, Thomas George

RN. Chief Petty Officer Stoker. 305825. HMS Valiant. Jutland. Enrolled 08/01/1904 for 12 years. Re-engaged 13/01/1916. Served to 12/01/1926. Joined RFR 13/01/1926. War service in Valiant (13/01/1916 - 07/01/1918), Vivid and Endymion. Born Portadown 02/01/1886. ADM 188/498/305825

SILLS, Alfred Oswald

RNVR. Chaplain 1944-46. Jesus College, Cantab. Westcott House. Ordained 1940. Born 08/01/1917. Son of Rev. A. Sills (Church Missionary Society), China; (Guardian) Miss L. N. R. Jackson, Derryvolgie Avenue, Belfast. Died 1987. Campbell College 2166

Every day is a Remembrance Day

We will remember them

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forward to remembrance ni at email below**

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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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