



remembrance ni



Mesa City Cemetery, Arizona

## Lurgan pilot dies in USA

**Robert Lawther from Lurgan who died on this day in 1943. He was in Arizona, USA on Flight Training along with a number of other RAF Personnel.**

He arrived at Falcon Field, Meza on 10/08/1942 and was in Class 11 with the intention of graduating as a Pilot on 19/02/1943.

In the afternoon of Monday 18/01/1943 the training programme consisted of three North American AT- 6 Texan

advanced trainer aircraft, known to the British as Harvards. Each of these would be piloted by a Royal Air Force student.

The exercise was to take off from Falcon Field in Mesa, Arizona, fly in close order in an "echelon right" formation to a height above 14,000 feet where they were to practice close order formations.

Accidents were not uncommon. From 2000 pilots to train at Falcon Field during the war a total of 23 RAF students along with 4 instructors lost their lives.

Robert Lawther was piloting number 2 aircraft in this exercise with number 3 aircraft being piloted by Sergeant Norman Ballance. Unfortunately the Pilot of number 1 aircraft has not been identified.

All were under the instruction of 36 years old Robert C. Hammond who was a government contracted civilian Flying Instructor. On this occasion he chose to fly in the rear seat with Robert Lawther.

The formation practice was going well until Sergeant Ballance's aircraft fell behind so Hammond ordered Number 1 aircraft to slow down with Robert Lawther also slowing to ensure he kept his distance from number 1.

While this was happening Sergeant Ballance increased his speed so he could close with the formation however he overshot Lawther as they were entering cloud and then he banked to the right and began to dive with the intention of avoiding a collision however this was not to be the case.

Flying through the cloud Ballance felt a heavy impact and his controls failed to respond. He pushed back the canopy and bailed out, landing with minor injuries.

Number 2 aircraft, piloted by Robert Lawther, disintegrated and crashed into the mountains below killing both Lawther and Hammond.

A Funeral Service for Robert Lawther took place at Saint Mark's Church in Mesa and he was buried at the Mesa City Cemetery.

Bob Hammond's remains were sent to his parents in Pasadena for burial.

Sergeant Ballance was found blameless by an accident board of inquiry, completed his training, and became a pilot. He survived the war, retiring from the RAF after many years as a Squadron Leader.

Each year on 11th November the Valley Chapter of the Daughters of the British Empire hold a Memorial Ceremony at the Mesa Cemetery for those who were killed. A few surviving RAF veterans who trained at Falcon Field travelled to the ceremony.

Robert Lawther was the son of Mr. and Mrs. John Lawther from Lurgan, County Armagh. He was husband to Muriel Jean Lawther of Lurgan.

## On this Day – January 18

### 1919

Post-World War I peace conference begins in Paris- On January 18, 1919, in Paris, France, some of the most

powerful people in the world meet to begin the long, complicated negotiations that would officially mark the end of WW1.

Delegates from 32 nations assemble in Paris to negotiate what all hope will be a lasting peace. The Versailles Treaty, which is signed 161 days later, imposes ruinous penalties on Germany, creating the conditions for another world war just 20 years later.



Leaders of the victorious Allied powers—France, Great Britain, the United States and Italy—would make most of the crucial decisions in Paris over the next six months. For most of the conference, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson struggled to support his idea of a “peace without victory” and make sure that Germany, the leader of the Central Powers and the major loser of the war, was not treated too harshly. On the other hand, Prime Ministers Georges Clemenceau of France and David Lloyd George of Britain argued that punishing Germany adequately and ensuring its weakness was the only way to justify the immense costs of the war. In the end, Wilson compromised on the treatment of Germany in order to push through the creation of his pet project, an



international peacekeeping organization called the League of Nations.

## **1940**

Finnish 9th Division was ordered to attack Soviet 54th Division.

British begin seizure and censorship of air mail passing through Bermuda.

The Battle of Kunlun Pass ended with the Chinese holding the pass.

## **1941**



HMS Prince of Wales is commissioned in Birkenhead. Sadly she would be the shortest commissioned Royal Navy Battleship as she was sunk off Malaysia by the Japanese less than a year later with the loss of 327 sailors including Vice Admiral Phillips and Captain Leach

The Greeks complete the Capture of Klisura Pass.

The British complete Operation Excess with all convoyed freighters reaching their destinations. However, the light cruiser HMS Southampton was bombed and sunk off Malta by the Luftwaffe.

Hitler issues Directive No. 22, German Support for Battles in the Mediterranean Area.

## **1942**

The Red Army cuts the main supply route for the German 2nd and 10th Corps at Demyansk near Lake Ilmen, forcing the Luftwaffe to begin flying in supplies. Field Marshal von Bock takes over command of Army Group South from Field Marshal von Reichenau who died of a heart attack. The Soviet South West Front launches an offensive across the river Donets, to the South of Kharkov in an attempt to cut off all German forces north of the Sea of Azov. German troops of 11th Army recapture Feodosiya and seal off the Soviet bridgehead at Kerch in the Crimea.

As Japanese advance, RAF withdraws bombers from Singapore to Sumatra.

Field Marshal Fedor von Bock assumes command of German Army Group South.

Dutch begin to destroy oil facilities at Balikpapan, Borneo so they won't fall into Japanese hands.

## **1943**

The Russians break through the German stranglehold on Leningrad to relieve the city from the East. In the Caucasus, the Russian advance continues. Cherkessk is captured by

the Red Army, who are now less than 250 miles south east of Rostov.



First resistance by Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto. A handful of Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto launched the first of several violent uprisings against the Nazis. Armed only with pistols and molotov cocktails, the insurgents manage to temporarily disrupt the deportations.

The Germans counter attack in Tunisia. They gain ground against the Free French, but are repulsed by British forces.

Australian troops capture Cape Killerton and Wye Point in Papua, New Guinea.

Two transports of Jews deported from Malines / Mechelen arrived at Auschwitz - 1,555 people. After selection, 387 men and 81 women were registered. The remaining 1,087 people were murdered in gas chambers. Among them was Frieda Jungst. She was five years old.



**1944**

**Irish Brigade** - Captain Franklyn-Vaile at Castel di Sangro: "I believe there have been many complaints at home that progress in Italy is very slow. It is easy to fight a campaign from an armchair but people do not realise the conditions: the narrow fronts, the few decent roads..."

German forces of Army Group Centre repel repeated Red Army attacks in the area of Vitebsk.

The Japanese cruiser Kuma is torpedoed and sunk off Penang, Malaya by the British submarine Tally-Ho.

U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt makes the annual State of the Union Address to Congress, proposing the Second Bill of Rights guaranteeing such things as housing, medical care and education.



The Soviet Union responds to the Polish declaration of January 5 with a statement through TASS. The Soviet government disputes Polish territorial claims and insists that the Soviet-Polish border had been determined through “the plebiscite carried out in 1939 on a broad democratic basis”. The statement also accuses the Polish government-in-exile of being “incapable of establishing friendly relations with the USSR, and shows itself incapable of organizing active resistance against German invaders inside Poland. Moreover, by its erroneous policy it has often plays into the hands of German invaders.”

The P-51 Mustang joins the P-38 Lightning and P-47 Thunderbolt in U.S. long-range escort missions over German.

## 1945



Fusilier Donnini (19) received the Victoria Cross for acts of bravery in Stein close to the German border, after killing the enemy with the cost of his own life, saving those of his platoon who overcame twice their own number of the enemy.

Donnini (17 November 1925 – 18 January 1945) of the Royal Scots Fusiliers was the youngest soldier in World War II to be awarded the VC.

German troops evacuate Kracow. A German offensive begins from Lake Balaton, with the aim of lifting the Red Army's siege of Budapest.

British Empire casualties to November 1944 are announced as 282,162 killed, 80,580 missing, 386,374 wounded and 294,438 captured.

Nazis evacuate 66,000 inmates from Auschwitz back into Germany.

On Luzon in the Philippines, the US Sixth Army drives south from Lingayen Gulf toward Manila.

## Roll of Honour – January 18

*Representing their comrades who died on this day*

**1915**

**+ROWE, T**

Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. 11th Btn. Private. 17258. Died 18/01/1915. Husband to Isabella Rowe, of Lisnaskea, Co. Fermanagh. Belfast City Cemetery

**1916**

## **+SHANKS, Moses**

Royal Irish Fusiliers. 3rd Btn. Private. 5765. Died 18/01/1916. Husband to Sarah Shanks, 32 Thomas St., Lurgan. Dougher Roman Catholic Cemetery, Lurgan.

**1941**

## **+CHASE, Herbert I**

RN. Telegraphist. D/J65192. HMS Caroline. Died 18/01/1941. Age 40. Son of Thomas Henry and Jessie Chase, Belfast; husband to Nita A. Chase, Belfast. Family Memorial Carnmoney Cemetery.

**1943**

## **+HUNTER, James Stewart**

RAFVR. Sergeant. 1018437. Died 18/01/1943. Aged 24. 100 Sqdn. Son of Annie Hunter, of Strabane. Runnymede Memorial, Panel 154

## **+LAWTHER, Robert**

RAFVR. Leading Aircraftman. 1532123. Died 18/01/1943. Aged 20. Robert was in Arizona, USA on Flight Training along with a number of other RAF Personnel. He arrived at Falcon Field, Mesa on 10/08/1942 and was in Class 11 with the intention of graduating as a Pilot on 19/02/1943. Robert Lawther was the son of Mr. and Mrs. John Lawther from Lurgan, County Armagh. Husband to Muriel Jean Lawther of Lurgan. Mesa City Cemetery, Arizona, United States of America. Lurgan WM. See article above



**Bedford House Cemetery is a Commonwealth War Graves Commission burial ground for the dead of the First World War located near Zillebeke, itself near Ypres, on the Western Front. The cemetery grounds were assigned to the United Kingdom in perpetuity by King Albert I of Belgium in recognition of the sacrifices made by the British Empire in the defence and liberation of Belgium during the war.**

**+McVEIGH, Patrick Alexander**

Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. 1st Btn. Fusilier. 6978380. Died 18/01/1943. Age 26. Son of John and Margaret McVeigh, of Brantry, Co. Tyrone. Rangoon Memorial, Myanmar





### **+O'NEILL, Leonard**

Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, 1st Btn. Fusilier. 704614. Died 18/01/1943. Age 20. It is believed he died in an action near Donbaik, Burma when a patrol from D Company, engaged a much stronger force of Japanese troops resulting in many casualties, some from sniper fire. He enlisted with the Royal Irish Fusiliers on 30/07/1940 and transferred later to the Inniskillings. He had previously worked as a brick worker and labourer. Born on 18/07/1922. Son of Harry J. and Elizabeth O'Neill, Stewartstown. Rangoon Memorial, Taukkyan, Rangoon, Face 11, Stewartstown WM

### **+PATTERSON, Robert**

Royal Irish Fusiliers, 1st Btn. Fusilier. 7046820. Died 18/01/1943. Aged 22. Son of Thomas and Mary Patterson, of Belfast. Massicault War Cemetery, Tunisia

**1944**

**+BLEMINGS, Thomas Alexander**

Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, 2nd Btn. Serjeant. 6977259. Died 18/01/1944 in the Battle of Garigliano. Aged 34. Son of Robert and Elizabeth Blemings. He was born in County Tyrone about 1910. The family were living in Kilmore, Minterburn, Tyrone in 1911. Minturno War Cemetery, Italy. Dungannon WM. Garigliano Memorial in Enniskillen Castle.

**+ERDIS, William**

Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, 2nd Btn. Fusilier. 6982593. Died 18/01/1944. Aged 22. Son of Margaret "Maggie" Erdis of Belfast. No known grave and his name is on the Cassino Memorial, Italy.

**+GRANT, Albert Martin**

Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. 2nd Btn. Major. 76010. Died 18/01/1944. Age 27. B.Sc. Son of Albert and Emily Margaret Grant, of Belfast. Minturno War Cemetery, Italy

**+KERR, William**

Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, 2nd Btn. Corporal. 7013556. Died 18/01/1944. Age 25. Son of George and Mary Kerr; husband of Mary Kerr, of Londonderry. Minturno War Cemetery, Italy

**+LAMBERT, Thomas Patrick**

Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, 2nd Btn. Lance Corporal. 6979370. Died 18/01/1944. Aged 24. Son of William and Helena Lambert; husband to Bridget M. E. Lambert, of Dungannon. Cassino Memorial, Italy. Dungannon WM

**+MAGUIRE, James**

Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, 2nd Btn. Fusilier. 6979589. Died 18/01/1944. Aged 22. Son of James and Mary Maguire, of Enniskillen. Minturno War Cemetery, Italy

**+McCANN, Lawrence**

Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. 2nd Btn. Lance Corporal. 7043680. Died 18/01/1944. Age 28. He was born in Co. Armagh. No known grave and his name is on the Cassino Memorial, Italy.

**+MOFFATT, Robert Moffatt**

Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. 2nd Btn. Corporal. 6984532. Died 18/01/1944. Age 20. Son of Robert Moffatt and May Moffatt of Coleraine. Minturno War Cemetery, Italy.

**+MOONEY, Edward**

Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. 2nd Btn. Fusilier. 6985143. Died 18/01/1944. Age 21. He was born in Co. Londonderry. No known grave and his name is on Panel 6 of the Cassino Memorial, Italy.

**+O'KELLY, Francis**

Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. 2nd Btn. Lance Corporal. 6980512. Died 18/01/1944. Age 28. Son of James O'Kelly and Ann J. O'Kelly of Belfast. No known grave and his name is on the Cassino Memorial, Italy.

**+SHARKEY, John**

Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. 2nd Btn. Corporal. 6976645. Died 18/01/1944. Age 32. Husband to Margaret Sharkey of Greencastle, Co. Antrim. Minturno War Cemetery, Italy.

**+WYLIE, Andrew Stewart**

Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. 2nd Btn. Fusilier. 7014320. Died 18/01/1944. Age 24. Son of James Wylie and Jane Wylie of Belfast. Minturno War Cemetery, Italy

**1945**

**+NICHOLL, John**

RAF (Auxiliary Air Force). Corporal. 873038. Died 18/01/1945. Age 47. Son of John and Sarah Nicholl of Ahoghill; husband to Elizabeth Nicholl, of Glasgow. Trinity Presbyterian Churchyard, Ahoghill

## **VETERANS**

**HURLE, Joe**

Fusilier Joe Hurle from Stewartstown served with 2nd Battalion Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. He was part of the British Expeditionary Force from 15/09/1939 until 31/05/1940. Having taken part in the July 1943 Sicily Landing, Joe then landed in Italy in September 1943. He was wounded after stepping on a mine at Anzio and was discharged on 18/01/1945

**SPENCE, Arthur Leonard**

RAFVR, Squadron Leader, DFC. Arthur (known as Artie) was born in Donegal on 25/02/1908, a twin to his elder brother Herbert Campbell Spence by 6 minutes. They were



the sons of Andrew Spence, Secretary of the *Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway* and Lily Spence nee Wheeler.

On 10/09/1925 Artie joined the Northern Bank at Head Office.

On 02/05/1939 Artie volunteered and enlisted into the RAF Volunteer Reserve. He was 'Called up on Active Service' on 02/09/1939 with Service Number 81694.

He returned to work from 05/10/1939 to 26/10/1939, reason unknown.

His rank and promotions were Leading Aircraftman, Pilot Officer, Flying Officer, Flight Lieutenant (1941) and Squadron Leader followed in 1943.

Artie was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) in 1941 gazetted on 23/09/1941. The news of his award was syndicated amongst local newspapers:

On 14/03/1942 the Belfast Newsletter reported that the marriage of A L Spence to Alice Madeleine Irwin would take place in April at St Peters Church, Belfast. The wedding took place on 29/04/1942 and was reported in the Belfast Telegraph of the same date.

On 19/11/1945 Artie resumed duty with the Northern Bank at Head Office. Transfers followed to Royal Avenue (1948), Knock (1951), Head Office (1951), Lurgan (1958), Head Office (1954), Queen's Square (1967) and Dublin Regional Director (1971).

A 'Welcome Home' dinner was held on 29/04/1947 by members of the CIYMS at Clarence Place Hall, Belfast.

Artie Spence as retired as Dublin Regional Director on 28/02/1973.

Squadron Leader Arthur Spence DFC RAFVR died on 18/01/1981

# Every day is a Remembrance Day

***We will remember them***

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

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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 [houstonmckelvey@mac.com](mailto:houstonmckelvey@mac.com)

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**Please forward** - information about those who served - names, regiment, ship or unit, date of death to [houstonmckelvey@mac.com](mailto:houstonmckelvey@mac.com)

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