



remembrance ni



Menin Gate, Ypres, 1919

Banker joins the Gunners and goes to war

Nolan Johnston recalls his grandfather George Nolan Johnston -

George was born in Belfast, on the 8th February 1913.



He attended Belfast Royal Academy and then gained employment with the Ulster Bank.

He was sent to Westport, Co. Mayo to work for some time and returned to take up a position in Dungannon.

The majority of his friends had joined the 8th Belfast Heavy AA Regiment at the start of World War II. George volunteered for a mixed heavy/light AA battery.

He underwent training at **Gillingham** and was posted to a Light AA Defence Unit in **Dover**, after this he went to Forfar before emarking overseas on the SS Tegleberg departing Scotland in March 1943.

This ship took him to **Capetown** and then up the African coast where he landed on 11 May 1943. He travelled to **Alexandria** and then with his driver Charlie Smirk, he was sent to **Egypt via Beirut**.

In July 1943 he was aboard a ship and since he was the only officer on board, he was given the sealed orders for **Operation Husky** 'Detachment 66LAA Regiment.

Sergeant Johnston, army number 1573402, read the orders to the troops. On the 10/07/1943 he and his troops landed in

Syracuse, after a stint there he headed to **northern Italy** to Fozzia Main with the 176 Battery. Then on to Carizuola and Taranti where he then sailed for **Athens**.

In June 1945 he returned to Italy and when the end of the war was announced he joined the Tunisian Police and guarded **Milan** Central Station. From Milan he went to Domodossola until his discharge from the army.

From the memoirs of George Nolan Johnston - The early days

Most of my Belfast school friends had joined the Territorial Army. A great many of them had joined the 8th Belfast Heavy AA Regiment based at Dunmoe, Antrim Road, Belfast.

When war broke out they were immediately called up, albeit to gun sites very close to their homes in Belfast. They were near enough to their homes to come to their mothers about one day per week, to get their washing done and depart with scones, cakes and the like.

I was released by the Ulster Bank, Dungannon on June 14 and for four days was a 'free man'. I had volunteered for a mixed heavy/light AA Battery with regimental headquarters in the Antrim Road and on June 18, 1940, around the time that France fell, I presented myself for duty.

On the gate of the large house standing in its own grounds, opposite Chichester Park, was a soldier with a large chin who challenged me as I approached. I told him I had come to join up, asked him what it was like, and he said that it

wasn't so bad, but the grub wasn't great.

I later discovered that he was one of the members of flute band from the Willowfield area, who had joined up on condition that they stayed together as a band. A promise that the Army promptly forgot.

Clifton Street and a shilling

From here I was sent to Clifton Street, where I signed on, was given a shilling, and put on a truck for Orangefield House. I was checked through there for Heavy AA and put in a truck for Tyrone House on the Malone Road.

Headquarters of, so I was told, to my consternation, 'the Suicide Squad'.

The only information I could get as to our role was that we dealt with dive-bombers. Which, as it turned out, was approximately true. But, especially compared with the role of Heavies, firing into the night at an unseen target at high altitude was really great stuff. We had a small taste of it later, in Dover and again in Sicily. However, here I was, although I did not realise it at the time, in a very queer outfit.

The age limits were 29-65 years, **"for the defence of Belfast"**, and by God we had oldies and young. We had a squad of hard old 'chaws' with ribbons from the last war, complete with a crowd of secondary school youngsters, myself included, plus a squad of young working class. The most interesting, of course, were the 1914-18 boys, who were really very decent and likeable.

Perhaps typical was one, 'Spivvy' Bruce, who joined up at about 16 years of age and whose father was an RSM. Spivvy was captured and a prisoner of war until he was

released in 1918. On arriving back at his own side street home in Belfast, no one knew him; a stranger was in the house.

It transpired that his mother had died when he was a POW and his father had been killed the day he was captured. He lost both sets of teeth over the side of the SS Tegleberg somewhere in the Atlantic en route to Cape Town and Egypt in 1943, and could only eat soft food from then on.

Manning gun sites around Belfast

During this period we manned gun sites around Belfast, mainly down by Dufferin Road, where we manned Bofors guns, Lewis guns and 3" Naval guns. The latter required the shell to be shoved up the breech using the fist. I recall one incident involving this type of weapon, with a South African sergeant, named Heinberg, having his eye blackened by looking down the barrel at the precise moment we shoved a 'push-through' down.

This was Boy Scout soldiering, we had a ghastly time sleeping in a tent one summer near the power station. Trucks nearly ran over us, the dust was dreadful; we really had neither food (half mile away), water nor sanitation. We had the same in Larne and later in Londonderry.

We left Belfast for Larne with expectation from our Sergeant Major. "We send you out with every confidence, you may be in action before dusk, we know that you are trained men, you will not fail".

Thereupon we were dispatched for Larne with all necessary equipment in four trucks. The first truck had all the food, the

second truck had all the tents, the third truck was full of coal and the fourth truck contained four Lewis guns and ammunition.

Larne and Londonderry

Our detachment had the good fortune to be Truck 2, which gave us all the tents, and on a wet slope above the bandstand on the prom, we set up one of these. We also had in our possession our own blankets and groundsheets, and all the Cornflakes and tinned milk for the whole expedition. We settled down for two or three days with wet clothes, but undercover. We ate Cornflakes and milk until they came out through our eyes. It was about three days before anyone found us.

We ended up having great fun at this site and had easily the most efficient gun-team in the Regiment. By a clever piece of war study we changed barrels in about 56 seconds against a Regiment record of about 1 minute 40 seconds.

The secret was that I had three enormously strong miners on my team, I could carry a gun barrel on my own, usually a four man job, and another chap who could lift the auto loader, another four man job, on his own.

I claim credit for a subtle switch in gun drill, which suddenly changed a passive number 4 into an elephant in action. I achieved a massive breakthrough in the spell of gun-drill. Later, in Egypt, I produced a gun-team which was at least 25% faster than anything in the Middle East. It was a trick in

gun-drill of course, greatly enjoyed by the gun-team, but nevertheless would have worked even under fire.

Coping with the Yanks in Derry

We also had spell in Londonderry, and saw the arrival of the first Americans who shambled over the bridge in rubber boots. The British Army marched with a sharp clip-clop; the Yanks shambled in rubber-soled boots.

Derry rapidly developed into a battleground between the Yanks and the Navy, coming ashore from a seven-week patrol in a cramped war ship. The Yanks took over the pubs, the Yanks took over the 'dolls', and we did not count. I was mainly stationed in a tent at Coleraine but we had occasional nights in town.

Nightlife in Coleraine

We knocked pub doors down pleading for a drink and we toured the shops looking for a cigarette. Occasionally we managed to get drink and visited a dance hall. The number of back-alley fights was very entertaining. Little Irish sailors knocking the daylights out of big Yanks, women screaming, all the fun of the fair.

We went over to England. I had been on two or three cruises there by that time. We arrived at Gillingham, Kent, to be trained for a mobile detachment. We were in tents and hence followed a series of mobile exercises to fit us, no doubt, for a mobile desert warfare or mobile invasion warfare.

NI Airborne Padres in D-Day Normandy

Two of the NI Padres in Normandy - The Reverend James McMurray-Taylor served with the RUR (6th Airborne Division) and The Reverend James Douglas died serving with The Wiltshire Regiment

The Reverend James McMurray-Taylor served as chaplain to the 1st Battalion Royal Ulster Rifles (6th Airborne Division). He took part in the Battle of Normandy.

He was born in Ballymena, Co. Antrim on 17th May 1916. He attended Trinity College, Dublin before becoming a Church of Ireland minister in 1939 at the age of 23 years old. Soon after this, war broke out and he enlisted with the Royal Army Chaplains Department and was attached to the Royal Ulster Rifles.

On the morning of D-Day, he held a non-denominational service for those on their way to Normandy. Later that afternoon, accompanied by Sir Hugh Wheldon MC, he left for France in a glider.

The Reverend McMurray-Taylor's 1st Battalion, was in 6th Air Landing Brigade, 6th Airborne Division. During Operation Mallard he landed in Normandy, France on the evening of 6th June 1944. He was padre to hundreds of soldiers and many of those men of the Royal Ulster Rifles would die in the following days.

Reports suggest that McMurray-Taylor conducted burial services for both Allied and German troops. All the while, gunfire and mortar shells filled the air. He would remove



identity tags and personal effects to return to families of the fallen men.

After the war, he became a minister at Derrybrusk, Co. Fermanagh. In 1957, he moved to Killadeas and Castle Archdale where many RAF, USAAF, and RCAF men had their bases during the war.

The Reverend James McMurray-Taylor died in 2001. His grave is in Castle Archdale, Co. Fermanagh.

Fermanagh padre killed in Normandy

James Douglas was the Rector of Colebrooke, Co. Fermanagh. He was appointed in February 1938. Previously he had served from August 1933 as curate-assistant of Magheralin.

He was born in Waterford and educated in Wesley College and Trinity College, Dublin. When he first came to Magheralin, he lodged in the 'Wilderness' with the Gilpin

family. Later in 1935 he married and moved to the curate's house at 19 Avenue Road.

As Chaplain he was attached to 5th Battalion, The Wiltshire Regiment. He was killed in the Normandy landings in 1944, and was later mentioned in dispatches, having been in the front line with his men.

A tribute from Magheralin records, "The resilient and complete faith in God which had characterised Mr. Douglas' ministry in Magheralin was the gift he took with him to the field of battle. That he was able to share God's saving grace with so many young men, and urge them to place their trust in God was indeed a special calling for Mr. Douglas. He felt honoured that God had called him to do this business and he answered that call faithfully to the end. A Padre leading his men in prayer in the fleeting minutes before battle is a sobering moment."

+DOUGLAS, James

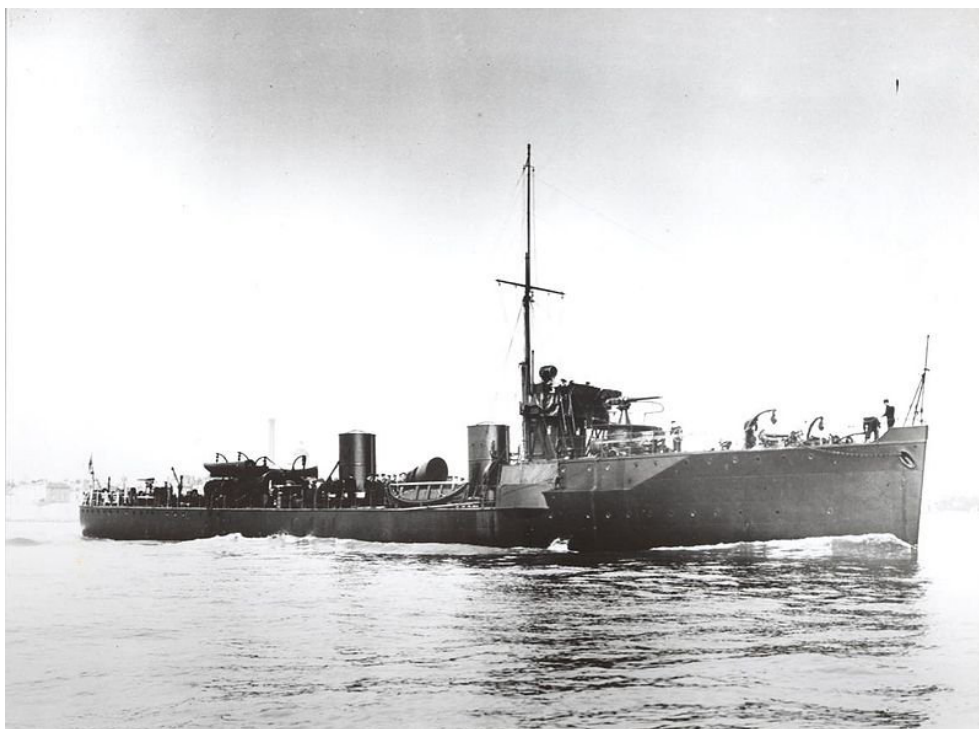
Chaplain 4th Class. 244123. MiD. Attached to 5th Battalion, The Wiltshire Regiment. Died 05/08/1944.

Aged 34. Son of John and Kathleen Douglas and husband to Annie Hildegard Douglas of Dunmurry. Tilly-Sur-Seulles War Cemetery

On this day - June 18

1916

Destroyer HMS Eden sank after colliding at night in the English Channel with the liner SS France, then operating as



a troop transport. 43 of Eden's complement of 76 were lost including her Commanding Officer.

1940



RNAS Yeovilton (Photo above) commissioned as HMS Heron. The Fleet Air Arm base has been in constant use since and home to many units and squadrons of aircraft from Royal Navy and ArmyAirCorps to this day.

Urging perseverance during Battle of Britain Winston Churchill delivered speech to British House of Commons, "Let us so bear ourselves that . . . men will still say, "This was their finest hour".

French Army in general retreat as German troops capture Le Mans and Cherbourg.

The garrisons of Belfort, Metz and Dijon surrender.

Hitler and Mussolini meet in Munich to discuss French request for peace.

General de Gaulle forms the French National Committee in London and vows to continue the war on the side of Britain, saying that "France has lost a battle, but France has not lost the war."

German planes raid Thames Estuary and East Coast.

Canada introduces military conscription, but overseas service is voluntary.

1941

British press give details of development of Radio Location (radar) and its use in Battle of Britain.

Free French troops occupy Damascus in Syria.

Germany and Turkey sign a ten-year non-aggression pact.

1942

The British Eighth Army evacuates Sidi Rezegh and El Adem.

Germans announce the killing of Heydrich's assassins, just two hours after ultimatum demanding information expired.

German troops seize Fort Maxim Gorky in Sevastopol, digging out Russian naval infantry (in their black Sailor hats) with flame-throwers.

1943

Field Marshal Wavell is to become the Viceroy of India, with General Auchinleck becoming the C in C of India. A new East Asia Command is to be established.

Radar (Radio Detection and Ranging) becomes the official term for Radiolocation.

1944

38 Irish Brigade - north of Orvieto:

"From the 17th onwards, the Faughs were operating with the 56 Recce,

The combination of the new regiments carried the brigade forward to Citta della Pieve and the shores of Lake Trasimene after a series of stirring adventures together..."

The Eighth Army take Assisi.

The US First Army cuts off and isolates the German forces defending Cherbourg.

The British 2nd Division manages to advance 14 miles towards Imphal.

1945

Eisenhower arrives in Washington to a heroes welcome.
British demobilization begins.

Japanese resistance ends on Mindanao in the Philippines.
The USAAF begins the fire blitzing of 58 smaller Japanese cities. Truman approves OPERATION DOWNFALL with the JCS predicting 200,000 US casualties.

Roll of Honour - June 18

Representing their comrades who died on this day

1917

+DOWIE, Frederick

Royal Engineers. 2nd Special Coy. Pioneer. 130272. Died 18/06/1917. Aged 28. Seriously wounded at the Battle of Messines on Saturday 09/06/1917. He died of wounds nine days later at a base hospital in Calais. Born in Co. Tyrone. Fred Dowie was a member of Ballybriest L.O.L. He enlisted in Glasgow. Calais Southern Cemetery, Pas de Calais, France. Cookstown WM, Molesworth St PCI RH

+JACKSON, Herbert Meynell

Royal Flying Corps. Lieutenant. Died 18/06/1917. Aged 22. 53rd Squadron and General List. Wounded with the Royal Irish Rifles in 1916. Son of Matthew and Elizabeth Ann Jackson, of Greenisland Lodge, Greenisland, Belfast. Arras Flying Services Memorial. St Nicholas Parish Church, Carrickfergus WM

1941

+CAMPBELL, Alexander

RAFVR. Sergeant (Wireless Op./Air Gunner). 974217. Died 18/06/1941. Aged 19. 50 Sqdn. Son of James and Jane Campbell, of Belfast. Hatfield (Woodhouse) Cemetery, Yorkshire

1942

+DOUGLAS, Harold

Royal Artillery. 1 HAA. Regt. 2 Bty. Gunner. 821263. Died 18/06/1942. Aged 28. Son of Harry and Margaret Douglas; husband of Mary Jane Douglas, of Newton St. Boswells, Roxburghshire. Belfast City Cemetery, Glenalina

1943

+SLOSS, Francis Neville

RAFVR. Corporal. 1544915. Died 18/06/1943. Aged 19. Pathfinder 83 Squadron. Francis was a wireless technician, part of the ground crew in RAF Pathfinder 83 Squadron. On 18th June 1943, Sloss was an observer on board Avro Lancaster I ED439 OL-N when it crashed at Highgate Farm, Swaton, Lincolnshire. The Lancaster's pilot was Australian

Flight Sergeant Max Kieran Cummings. They were new to RAF 83 Squadron at RAF Wyton, Cambridgeshire. Recently posted from RAF 467 Squadron at RAF Bottesford, Leicestershire, they completed a night raid on Cologne, Germany, the previous night. Son of Francis Alexander and Alice Mary Frances Violet Sloss of Bangor. Bangor Cemetery

1944

+KELLY, Hugh Francis

Royal Ulster Rifles, 2nd Btn. Rifleman. 7023165. Died 18/06/1944. Aged 21. Landed on Sword Beach on D-Day. Son of Hugh and Sarah Ann Kelly (née Mitchell), of Jamaica Street, Belfast. Bayeux War Cemetery, Calvados, France

+LAMB, Harold Lamb

General Service Corps, Private. 14770658. Died 18/06/1944. Aged 37. Bangor New Cemetery, Co. Down

+WINDRAM, James Causley

Coldstream Guards. Major (Director of Music). 47956. Died 18/06/1944. Aged 57. L.R.A.M. Son of William Charles and Catherine Windram; husband of Olive Atkinson Windram, of Annalong. St Pancras Cemetery, Middlesex

+WRIGHT, Frederick George

Essex Regiment. 2nd Btn. Private. 4923019. Died 18/06/1944. Aged 30. Son of David and Mary Ann Wright; husband to Ellen Wright, of Comber. Ryes War Cemetery, Bazenville, Calvados, France

1945

+CURRIE, Ernest Stewart

Royal Army Service Corps. Driver. T/107789. Died 18/06/1945. Aged 29. Son of Moses and Margaret Currie, of Portadown; Husband to Muriel Enza Currie, of Portadown. Seagoe Cemetery, Portadown.

VETERANS

They served and returned

BLACKWOOD, William John

RN. Senior Chief Petty Officer. 346494. Enrolled 11/11/1903 for 12 years. Served to 19/06/1925. War service in Ringdove, Tyne, Vivid, and Argus. Born Hamilton, Co. Armagh 04/06/1881. ADM 188/525/346496

CAMPBELL, James Scott

RN. Blacksmith. M26461. Enrolled 19/06/1917 for hostilities. Pembroke II and Blenheim. Demobbed 02/05/1919. Born Belfast 03/06/1899. ADM 188/1070/26461

DALTON, Frederick Alexander

RN. AB. SS2445. Enrolled 19/06/1908 for 5 and 7 years. Served to 21/06/1913. Joined RFR 22/06/1913. Served 11/08/1914 - 06/03/1919. Served in Suffolk, Pembroke I, Titania and Wallington. Born Belfast 02/05/1890. ADM 188/1096/2445

GILLESPIE, Frederick Walter

RND. Stoker First Class. SS 105645, RFR/B/8915. Howe Battalion. Wounded in Dardanelles 19/06/1915. Transferred

to fleet 26/07/1915. Brother of Elizabeth Stanley, Albert Terr., Sydenham, Belfast. ADM339

HALL, George

RND. Stoker First Class. 288162, RFR/B/731. Howe Battalion 15/09/1914. Wounded Dardanelles 19/06/1915. Husband to Margaret Hall, McClure St., Belfast. ADM339

JOSS, Edward

RN. Stoker First Class. SS111416. HMS Shannon. Jutland. Enrolled 25/10/1911 for 5 and 7 years. Served in Shannon 19/06/1915 - 06/03/1919, and Pembroke. Joined RFR 07/03/1919. Born Belfast 02/10/1893. ADM 188/1117/111416

KERR, Harry

RN. Acting ERA IV. M32144. Formerly RNVR. Enrolled 19/06/1918 for hostilities. Demobbed 14/03/1919. War service in Vivid and Hecla. Born Kilrea 22/02/1897. ADM 188/1082/32144

LEINSTER, James Henderson

RMLI. Private. 16417. Chatham Division. Enlisted 19/06/1909. War service in Cadmus 17/10/1912 - 01/07/1916, Wildfire and RM Brigade 13/10/1917 - 16/12/1918. Served to 08/06/1922. Joined RFR. Born Lisburn 04/07/1891. Son of James Leinster, Grand Street, Lisburn. Hillhall - PCI RH. ADM 159/126/16417

MILLS, Charles

RN. Acting Stoker I. K52626. Enrolled 17/07/1918 for hostilities. Pembroke II and Gunner. Demobbed 19/06/1919. Born Ballymoney 06/04/1896. ADM 188/968/52626

Every Day is a Remembrance Day

We will remember them

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 houston.mckelvey@btinternet.com

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