



remembrance ni



First and last British WW1 fatalities rest in St. Symphorien

The cemetery at St. Symphorien Military Cemetery was established by the German Army during the First World War as a final resting place for British and German soldiers killed at the Battle of Mons.



**Private John Parr
L/14196**

4th Bn Middlesex
Regiment

Died on 21st August
1914 aged 20

Son of Edward
Thomas and Alice
Rosina Parr of 52
Lodge Lane, North
Finchley.

**Believed to be the
first British battle
casualty of the war**

St. Symphorien Military Cemetery is located 2 Kms east of Mons on the N90 a road leading to Charleroi.

Among those buried here is Private John Parr of the Middlesex Regiment, who was fatally wounded during an encounter with a German patrol two days before the battle, thus becoming the first British soldier to be killed in action on the Western Front.

The cemetery remained in German hands until the end of the war, and afterwards came under the care of the Imperial (now Commonwealth) War Graves Commission.



Looking down from the mound towards George Price's grave

It also contains the graves of Commonwealth and German soldiers who died in the final days of the conflict, including George Ellison of the Royal Irish Lancers and George Price of the Canadian Infantry. Ellison and Price were killed on 11 November 1918, and are believed to be the last Commonwealth combat casualties of the war in Europe. There are 229 Commonwealth and 284 German servicemen buried or commemorated at St Symphorien, of whom 105 remain unidentified.

The Battle of Mons - By the evening of 22 August 1914, the men of II Corps of the British Expeditionary Force had taken



Here repose 53 soldiers of the Royal Fusiliers and Royal Irish Regiment

up defensive positions along the Mons-Condé Canal, preparing for a major German attack expected to come from the north the next day.

The opening shots of the Battle of Mons were fired at dawn on the morning of Sunday 23 August, when the 4th Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment repulsed German cavalry who were attempting to cross the canal over a bridge at Obourg.

The early morning was misty and wet, and the British were still uncertain of the numbers of enemy troops on the far side of the canal. By 10 a.m., the day had brightened up,



German Memorial to the *Royal* Middlesex Regiment
The Germans felt that their stand could only have been made by a Royal Regiment

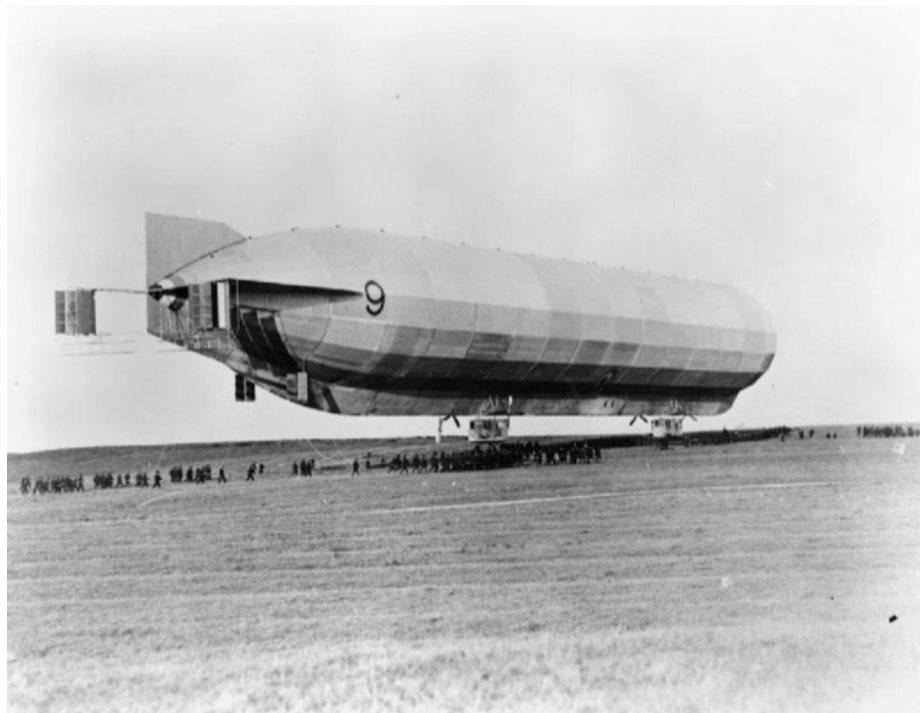
artillery fire had intensified, and it became clear that they were facing a large German force.

Despite being outnumbered, the British soldiers on the south bank of the canal fought tenaciously throughout the day. Many were reservists who had returned to the army just weeks before, but they were well-drilled and disciplined, with a high-level of rifle training. Their relentless fire inflicted heavy casualties among the Germans. Despite this stiff resistance, the sheer weight of German numbers and the accuracy of their artillery meant that the British struggled to hold their positions. By 10.30 a.m. the

first German soldiers had crossed the canal and some British units had been forced back, and by mid-afternoon German infantry troops were crossing in force. By nightfall, the Battle of Mons was over and the British had begun a long, hard retreat towards Paris.

On this Day – November 27

1916



The Royal Navy flew the first rigid airship in Britain when HMA R9 took to the skies in Cumbria. She would be used for experimental and training purposes to develop the technology and procedures for operating such craft but airships quickly fell out of favour.

German Zeppelin raid on the NE coast and N Midlands of the UK. Its reported 2 Zeppelins brought down and 4 killed and 37 injured on the ground.

1939

The Scharnhorst and Gneisenau put in to Wilhelmshaven after returning from their successful sortie in to the North Atlantic.

Australia and Britain establish the Empire Air Training Scheme.

1940

Romanian extremists, “Iron Guard”, begin a murder campaign with 64 executions.

The British Admiralty decides to send the Battleship Ramillies and 2 Cruisers from the Mediterranean fleet to reinforce the Atlantic fleet. They are to sail to Malta with a supply convoy, link up with Force H and then sail onto Gibraltar.

Just as the reach the rendezvous point, Ramillies, the 2 Cruisers, the Aircraft Carrier Ark Royal and 10 Destroyers are intercepted by Admiral Campioni’s squadron of 2 Battleships, 7 Cruisers and 16 Destroyers. However, as soon as the Battleship Renown from Force H joined in, the Italians withdrew with 1 Cruiser and 2 Destroyers damaged, while the British suffered damage to the heavy cruiser HMS Berwick.

1941

Nazi spy Hermann Göertz was arrested in Clontarf, Dublin. He parachuted into Ireland 18 months previous & liaised with the IRA. He hoped to foment rebellion in Ulster to divert war efforts & ensure Britain did not gain control of Irish ports.

German Panzer's only 19 miles from Moscow. Some armed patrols have penetrated in to the western suburbs of the city and managed to get a good look at the Kremlin.

The Tobruk garrison links up the New Zealand Division of the Eighth Army at El Duda. Rommel forces, now under constant attack by the RAF are forced to turn his forces around in order to deal with this new development. Gondar, the last Italian held town in East Africa surrenders to British forces after a tough battle. The Italian commander, General Nasi surrenders 23,500 men, while the British suffer 500 casualties.

Japan rejects the USA's demand for their withdrawal of forces from China.

US Pacific forces put on war alert.

1942

Continuing their occupation of Vichy France, German troops take the naval base of Toulon.

Army Group Don under Manstein is formed to relieve Stalingrad.

The French scuttle 79 warships docked at Toulon as German troops enter the City, but four submarines manage to escape.

British troops are only 22 miles from Tunis.

1943



Rev Harry Graydon MC, chaplain to 2 LIR

The British 8th Army begins an offensive across the Sangro river.

38(Irish) Brigade, London Irish Rifles -

1700 Off to lying-up area west of the river. Weather broke slightly with some "drizzle"

1800 44 RTR reported to have 27 tanks across river & 50 RTR, 32



2200 Barrage down on San Maria & Mozzagrognà, supporting 8th Indian Division's attack.

1944

4,000 tons of bombs stored in an ammo bunker beneath RAF Fauld accidentally explode. Seventy perish in what will become the largest conventional blast ever recorded on British soil.

The Red Army breaks through the German-Hungarian defensive lines and captures Mohacs.

The German ship 'Rigel' is sunk. Over 2,570 are drowned, most of them prisoners of war.

B29 bombers from Saipan again pound Tokyo, but this time the Japanese reply with raids against the U.S. airbases on Saipan.

1945

UN Charter is now ratified by twenty-nine nations.

Roll of Honour – November 27

Representing their comrades who died on this day

1914

+CUMMINS, Paddy

Royal Irish Rifles, 1st Btn. Rifleman. 9110. Died 27/11/1914. Age 23. Born Belfast 1891. Laventie, France

+FEARAN, Bernard

Royal Irish Rifles, 2nd Btn. Rifleman. 6839. Died 27/11/1914. Born at Ballybot, Co. Armagh. Enlisted Newry. Disembarked France with Expeditionary Force in August 1914. Le Touret Memorial, France

+HUGHES, William

Royal Irish Rifles, 2nd Btn. Rifleman. 8445. Died 27/11/1914. Born Tullysaren, Glenaul, Co. Armagh. His effects were willed to his mother Mary. Cambrai Memorial, Louverval, France

+WATSON, William

Royal Irish Fusiliers, 1st Btn. Sergeant Major. 4734. Died 27/11/1914. Age 24. Son of William and Margaret Watson, of 24, Hill St., Lurgan; Husband of Thomasena Watson, of 36, George St., Lurgan. Ploegsteert Memorial Cemetery, Belgium

1915**+BINGHAM, A**

Royal Irish Rifles, 15th Btn. Quartermaster Serjeant. 15/12571. Died 27/11/1915. Age 29. Eldest son of Julia and the late Thomas Bingham, of Belfast. Forceville Communal Cemetery, France

+PRESTON, Charles

Royal Irish Rifles, 18th Btn. Rifleman. 216. Died 27/11/1915 at home. Age 44. Born about 1871 in Clabby, County Fermanagh. The 1911 census lists Charles as aged 40 living with his wife Mary Jane and family at house 43 in

Seskinore, Omagh, County Tyrone. Charles was a general labourer. He enlisted at Finner Camp, County Donegal. He was living in the Omagh at the time. Grave at Seskinore, Omagh, County Tyrone. Fivemiletown WM

1916

+ALLEN, Joseph

Australian Tunnelling Corps 3rd Coy. Sergeant. 4224, Died 27/11/1916. Age 44. Son of Joseph and Catherine Allen of Lurgan. Husband to Sarah Allen, of "Linwinny", Brighton St., Cottesloe, Western Australia. Hersin Communal Cemetery Extension, France

1917

+HUGHES, William

Royal Irish Rifles, 2nd Btn. Rifleman. 8445. Died 27/11/1914. Born Tullysaren, Glenaul, Co. Armagh. His effects were willed to his mother Mary. Cambrai Memorial, Louverval, France

+TREANOR, Arthur

Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. 2nd Btn. B Coy. Private. 26030. Died 27/11/1917. Age 23. Son of John and Catherine Treanor, of Tamary, Hilltown, Co. Down. Tyne Cot Memorial, Belgium

+WATT, Herbert

Irish Guards. 2nd Btn. Lance Corporal. 11772. Died 27/11/1917. Age 24. Son of William and Mary Watt, of

‘Maryville’, Springfield Rd., Belfast. Cambrai Memorial,
Louverval, France

1941

+CARSON, Robert Samuel

RAFVR. Sergeant. 1062319. Died 27/11/1941. Aged 22.
Son of James and Margaret I. Carson of Campsie, Omagh.
Omagh (Dublin Road) Cemetery

1944

+McCLUNE, William Joseph

RAFVR. 189 Squadron. Flight Sergeant. 1088075. Died
27/11/1944. Aged 23. On take off, Lancaster Q-Queenie in
which Sgt Billy McClune was the bomb-aimer was climbing
for about eleven minutes. At 1,000 feet the bomber was
beginning a turn when disaster struck. It was on a wrong
heading and too low and tore through a hillside of fields and
hedges, before a massive explosion collapsed the Lanc into
a disintegrating inferno.

The tail gunner, Sgt Ricky Dyson, was knocked
unconscious. When he came round he found himself still
sitting in his turret which, with a section of the aircraft’s
fuselage, had been ripped off and catapulted away from the
burning wreckage. Once conscious Dyson quickly realised
what had occurred. With full fuel tanks and a full bomb load
Q-Queenie had crashed into high ground, exploded and
burst into flames.

Part of the fuselage behind Dyson’s turret was also on fire,
blocking any escape that way. He struggled out of his flying

suit, grabbed an axe held in the turret for that very situation and hacked at the perspex, breathing in smoke and flames that were engulfing it from behind. His first strokes only chipped at the toughened perspex until ever despairing blows broke open a small opening. He scrambled through, fell to the ground on to his back, then ran into the dark while behind him his gun-turret filled with roaring flames. In his headlong dash for safety Dyson collapsed into a hedge.

Looking back at the burning Lancaster and hearing cries for help, Dyson instinctively rushed to see if he could rescue any of the other crew members. He found the pilot, Presland, still trapped in his cockpit, one leg severed below the knee, flames licking at his body. Amidst the smoke, fire and exploding ordnance, Dyson managed to pull Presland free and dragged him some way from the aircraft.

Going back again, he beat at the flames and pulled out, first, the bomb-aimer, Sergeant Billy McClune. Next he found the navigator, Sergeant Alan Probert, who was seriously injured with his clothing on fire, about fifteen yards from the aircraft.

Dyson put out the flames with just his hands. Dyson tried but failed to rescue mid-upper gunner Jack Fender. He was himself found by the rescue parties wandering around, suffering from shock. The pilot, Doug Presland, and mid-upper gunner Jack Fender, had severe burns and other serious injuries, whereas Dyson's 'were only slight. The horror of that night was printed on my mind for ever'.

Fender was freed by firemen; both he and Presland survived after prolonged hospital care. All other crew members died of their injuries. Dyson received extensive treatment for burns to his face and hands, followed by extensive medical treatment, before being sent on recuperative leave. In addition to clinical care, psychological assessment would follow. William McClune was the son of John and Harriet McClune of Belfast. Knockbreda Cemetery

1945

+MARSHALL, Roland Gomm

RAFVR. Flying Officer (Pilot). 167288. Died 27/11/1945. Aged 21. Son of William Howard Marshall and Miriam Marshall, of Heptonstall. Heptonstall (St Thomas Apostle) Churchyard. Yorkshire. QUB WM

1946

+BILVERSTONE, Louis Alan Walter

RAFVR. Corporal. 1616004. Died 27/11/1946. Aged 24. Son of Arthur and Alice Bilverstone, Husband to Eleanor Brisbane Bilverstone, Belfast. Griston (Ss. Peter And Paul) Churchyard

VETERANS

DICKEY, Alfred Charles

RAMC. Captain. Campbell College. Queen's University Scholar in Anatomy, 1912. M.B., B.Ch., 1916. Mesopotamia from 27/11/1916. Born 25/09/1893, son of Rev. CCM Dickey, The Manse, Draperstown, Co. Derry. Post - war Physician and Surgeon. Beeston Road, Leeds, Yorkshire.

WATSON, James Derek

RNVR. Surgeon-Lieutenant. 1943-46. MB QUB 1942. Born Abbeville, France 27/11/1919. Son of J Watson, Castlerock. Campbell College 2527. Medical Practitioner, Belfast. Former senior medical officer Department of Health and Social Security, Belfast

Every day is a Remembrance Day

We will remember them

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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

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