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Season's Greetings

Welcome to the latest edition of the McCrae's Battalion Trust Newsletter.

We would appreciate your feedback on our feeble attempts and your suggestions as to what to include in any future newsletter.

You can contact us by email, letter, phone, carrier pigeon, or on the McCrae's Battalion Trust Web page.

If you enjoy the newsletter, please tell everyone you know and pass it on to them.

If you didn't, please keep it to yourself. We are very easily upset and have been known to shed copious amounts of tears at any criticism.

We may even be driven to drink if we ever get our illustrious chairperson to buy a round that is!

All our contact details including how you could join McCrae's Battalion Trust are on that site. We would welcome you with open arms if you decide to join.

Just search online for McCrae's Battalion Trust.



**MERRY
CHRISTMAS**

From McCrae's Battalion Trust

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2022

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CONTALMAISON PILGRIMAGE 2022

It was Wednesday morning, 29th June 2022 when we gathered at Waterloo Place, filled with eager anticipation at the start of the annual pilgrimage to the little French village of Contalmaison. It was the first trip back after two years because of the COVID pandemic. The numbers of people travelling was less than in previous years probably due to concerns raised by the pandemic and travel restrictions imposed, but we were all vaccinated and had the proof required to show it.

We made a couple of stops on the road to Hull where we caught the overnight ferry to Rotterdam. A relaxing evening was spent on board where we enjoyed the food and entertainment and a good night's sleep.

Once off the ferry the following morning we headed for Vimy Ridge to visit the stunning and inspirational Canadian Memorial. The sight of Mother Canada looking out over the battlefield, over her Fallen, reminded us all of the point of the Pilgrimage.

It is a privilege to visit and pay our respects at these sites and can prove to be a very moving and lasting experience.

Another stop at St. Nicolas British Cemetery was scheduled where our piper, Jim McCabe, played a lament at the grave of David Nicholson of the Seaforth Highlanders in the presence of members of his family who were with us on the coach.

That afternoon we arrived at the hotel in Arras and looked forward to a free evening to explore the city, get something to eat and have a drink and just relax.



The following day, Friday 1st July, was the day of the service at Contalmaison. We were joined as usual by the residents of the village and official dignitaries from the French and Scottish Governments for a very moving and humbling ceremony.

After wreaths were laid at the foot of the Contalmaison Cairn we paid a visit to Dantzig Alley British Cemetery at Mametz before returning to the village. We sat down to enjoy an excellent lunch cooked and served by the local residents who always make us so welcome. Entertainment was provided by our Chairperson Craig Herbertson amply supported by Chris Woods and our piper Jim McCabe. The evening was spent back in Arras.

Special mention must go to Les Amis Des Ecosseise, the association set up to manage relations with McCrae's Battalion Trust and ensure the future of the Contalmaison ceremony. The association was formed by Julie Leroy, the daughter of the late Patricia Leroy, former Maire of Contalmaison who was a particular close friend of McCrae's Battalion Trust. Patricia was always first to welcome us to the village every year with a hug and a smile that could light up the darkest room. She played a very important role in the ceremony and the lunch afterwards.

Sadly, Patricia passed within weeks of our own former chairperson Lt. Col. Gary Tait MBE, both from cancer. They are greatly missed by all that knew them and on our Contalmaison Pilgrimage 2023 we will dedicate a bench made here in Scotland to their memory. The seat will have pride of place in the village.

Julie has taken on the mantle left by her mother and has shown she is as dedicated to the continuation of the ceremony as Patricia was. Julie has also inherited her mother's unforgettable smile.

The Trust greatly appreciates the friendliness and respect the village of Contalmaison show us every year, merci beaucoup mes amis.

For all you historians out there on 23rd October 1297 the first Franco-Scottish Treaty was signed in Paris, referred to as 'The Auld Alliance' by the Scots. The 'New Alliance' between McCrae's Battalion Trust, the city of Edinburgh and Les Amis Des Ecosseais looks set to last just as long.

The day after the ceremony in Contalmaison is our traditional Battlefield Tour Day with visits to Albert, the impressive Thiepval Memorial where James Boyd, one of the Hearts players from Mossend in West Calder is remembered amongst many others. We then visited Pozieres and Beaumont Hamel before another free evening in Arras.



The penultimate day was spent in Belgium, specifically Flanders, with an extended stop in the beautiful and historic city of Ypres where we visited the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing. Almost 55,000 names of British and Commonwealth soldiers are engraved thereon. Ypres, almost completely destroyed in WW1, was restored to its original street plan and architecture, almost exactly to what had existed before the war.

After a bit of shopping for Belgian Chocolate and other souvenirs, we returned to our coach and headed for the ferry from Rotterdam to Hull and then home.

Contalmaison 2023

Next year, plans are already underway and includes a visit to see Deborah, a restored WW1 Tank, and the unveiling of the Lt. Col. Gary Tait MBE/Patricia Leroy memorial bench at Contalmaison.

We have done our best to keep prices down despite the rise in the cost of living. Accommodation is again at the Holiday Inn hotel in Arras and will be £587 per person, sharing a twin bedroom. This includes all transport and a twin berth cabin on the overnight ferry from Hull to Rotterdam. Prices for single accommodation are available on application. A deposit of £200 is required immediately as space is limited. An alternative option, sharing three to a room in the hotel, will reduce the cost per person to £518.

It is an honour and a privilege to be part of the Contalmaison Pilgrimage and with your support we hope it will continue well into the future.

The boys that fought and died and remain to this day lying in the fields of the Somme and elsewhere in France and Belgium, need to be remembered, deserve to be remembered, and it is our duty to do so.



REMEMBRANCE DAY 2022

Remembrance Sunday is a very important date in the McCrae's Battalion Trust calendar for a number of reasons. The first and most obvious reason is that it is the day when the nation remembers the fallen from both World wars and other conflicts. Every year we are invited to take part in the ceremony at the Haymarket. It is both an honour and a privilege to accept the kind invitation.

The Trust specifically remembers those that fought and died in the 16th Royal Scots, McCrae's Battalion, and to lay the wreath in their memory.

A member of the Trust is invited to recite verses from the poem by Laurence Binyon, For the Fallen, first published in September 1914 and spoken at almost every Remembrance Service held since.

'They went with songs to the battle, they were
young,
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow,
They were staunch to the end against odds
uncounted
They fell with their faces to the foe.
They shall grow not old as we that are left grow
old
Age shall not weary them nor the years
condemn
At the going down of the sun and in the
morning
We will remember them.'

For the Fallen - Robert Laurence Binyon (1869-1943)



The afternoon is spent at the Royal Scot Club in Abercrombie Place where the Trust hold their annual fundraising lunch.

This year over 160 people attended where they enjoyed an excellent meal provided by the RSC. A program of entertainment and stories followed ending in an auction and raffle.

The afternoon was hosted in great style by James Bee, former FIFA Assistant Referee and after dinner speaker. The very talented comedian and satirist Eric Davidson had everybody rolling in the aisles with his songs, poems and anecdotes. Jack Alexander presented a slide show about the history of the memorial at Haymarket and music was provided by Craig Herbertson and Ivor Ramsay. All who attended were full of praise and some have already booked their place for next year.

Over £4500 was raised this year. The proceeds go towards the maintenance and upkeep of the memorial cairn at Contalmaison in France and in expanding our educational activities on the history of the battalion and on Remembrance.

Thanks must be given to all those involved in organising the lunch. Specifically, Pam Forbes, who sheds blood and tears every year to ensure everything runs smoothly, and her helpers on the day who sold raffle tickets and bingo cards, collected in and counted the money, and, like Pam, hardly had time to sit down and enjoy the entertainment, or the meal for that matter. They did it with a smile on their faces however and never moaned a bit (well maybe a tiny wee bit).

Thanks to Jack, Craig and Ivor for their involvement and special mention must go to Eric Davidson and James Bee for their excellent contribution to the day.

A big thank you must also go to the staff at the RSC for the professional and friendly service and a big mention to those that donated items for the auction and the raffle, thank you so much.

Lastly, we need to thank all those that attended and made the event one of the best so far and their generosity in raising such an amazing amount of money for the Trust.

A sincere thank you and fingers crossed we will see you again next year.





'THE SCARF' PRODUCTION

Most of you will be aware of 'A War of Two Halves,' the play performed at Tynecastle about the 1st. World War and the players from Hearts that joined McCrae's Battalion. The play received excellent reviews and was enjoyed by all that watched it but this was not the first play to feature the story of McCrae's Own.

Over 10 years previously in 2010/2011, West Calder High School wrote, produced and performed 'The Scarf.' The story of a group of young men that followed their sporting heroes to the fields of the Somme.

The play was inspired by one of the original Hearts players that joined McCrae's Battalion, James Boyd.



Boyd was born in the small West Lothian village of Seafield before moving with the rest of the family to the even smaller hamlet of Mossend, on the outskirts of West Calder.

The family stayed in Front Street, Mossend, and James attended the then West Calder Public School. By all accounts he did well at school before leaving at the age of 14 years to start work as a trainee journalist.

He played football with Mossend Burnvale, the local amateur team. They played cricket during the cricket season and football during the football season. His brother Archie meanwhile played in goals for Hearts first team. James soon joined him at Tynecastle after he also signed for Hearts.

When war broke out James and his brother tossed a coin to see who would join McCrae's and who would remain at home to look after the family. James won, or lost depending on your point of view.

James Boyd joined his Hearts teammates in the 16th Battalion Royal Scots, the Sporting Battalion, McCrae's Own.

The evening before James set off for France with McCrae's, the family gathered round to wish him luck. His 3-year-old niece, Jean, sat on his knee and cuddled in as he sang her a wee song. It would be the last time she would see her Uncle James.

In 2010 some of the pupils at West Calder High School were told the story of McCrae's and ex-pupil James Boyd. They decided to do a project on him and what happened at the Somme.

Jack Alexander visited and gave a talk on Boyd and others from the school that had fought with the Battalion.

The pupils visited the field where Front Street used to stand and West Calder Cemetery where the Boyd Family Plot has James Boyd's name engraved at the top, even though he lies somewhere in France in a grave known only to God, like so many others.

The class also paid a visit to and were given a guided tour of Tynecastle.

They made a short documentary film to complete their project that was later shown in the school when they held a small dedication ceremony.

In the quadrangle at West Calder High School there was a small stone carved Lion Rampant, the school emblem. The stone Lion was from the original West Calder Public School that James Boyd attended.

A plaque was engraved with the words 'Lest We Forget' and placed on the Lion. A total of 49 staff and ex-pupils from the school died or were reported missing in World War 1 alone. Some of them from McCrae's Battalion.

A small ceremony took place in the quadrangle. Involved were a few parents of those involved, the local minister the Rev. John Povey, Jack Alexander and Captain Gary Tait MBE, Royal Regt. of Scotland, (later Lt. Col. Gary Tait MBE and Chairperson of McCrae's Battalion Trust).

One of the pupils played the pipes and a short service was delivered by the minister. The stone Lion was later recognised by the War Memorial Trust as an official World War 1 Memorial after visiting the school.

The Lion is now on display at the new West Calder High School, the third school to be built since James Boyd was a pupil. A plaque made by the school with the names of 49 members of staff and ex-pupils that fell, is also on display.

As a result of the project, two pupils from West Calder High School attend at the Haymarket annually, thanks mainly to Jack Alexander to begin with and now by invitation from Hearts, where they take part in the wreath laying ceremony on Remembrance Sunday.

Interest in World War 1 and McCrae's Battalion continued to grow at West Calder High School and they then wrote, produced and performed the play 'The Scarf.'

It was performed annually for almost 10 years before the school was demolished and the new school opened at a different location. 'The Scarf' was also performed at the Regal Theatre in Bathgate and at Howden Park Theatre in Livingston and was last performed by Broxburn Academy a few years back.

The finale of the play is a scene based on the present-day ceremony at the village of Contalmaison in France and the Memorial Service held there on the 1st of July every year.

The money raised by performing The Scarf paid for pupils to attend the actual ceremony at Contalmaison where they laid a wreath on behalf of the school.

The following quotes are excerpts from a letter sent to the school by Lt. Col. Alan Hamilton, MBE, Royal British Legion, after attending a performance:

"...BOTH MOVING AND HUMBLING. AS A VETERAN I HAD A TEAR IN MY EYE SEVERAL TIMES. I WAS HUMBLLED BY THE DEPTH OF UNDERSTANDING AND FEELING FOR THE FALLEN. THE TRENCH HUMOUR I CAN RELATE TO. I WANTED TO STAND UP AND SALUTE THE BAND OF BROTHERS AS THEY ADVANCED. INSPIRING TRULY MAGNIFICENT AND COURAGEOUS PERFORMANCE. I HAVE SELDOM BEEN SO MOVED AND UPLIFTED AT THE SAME TIME. I WAS PARTICULARLY IMPRESSED BY THE LAST SCENE AT THE CAIRN."

Lt. Col. Hamilton was so impressed he loaned the school a pocket watch carried during the actual battle of the Somme and a whistle last used on the first day of the battle, to signal the start of the attack on enemy lines. A signal that resulted in the massacre of so many young lives. The school were very honoured to be allowed to use both as props in the play especially the whistle. It was blown in the scene where the characters 'go over the top' as it was blown at the Somme. All the pupils survived unlike those that heard it the first time.

At the unveiling of the Cairn at Contalmaison in 2004 'wee Jeanie' was present. She laid a wreath in memory of Uncle James.

'Wee Jeannie' lived until she was 104 years old, and every year till her passing, she sent a wreath to be laid at the Cairn.

Jack Alexander had contacted her and informed her of what was happening at West Calder High School. It was her wish that the wreath she sent annually be laid by the pupils from the school. It was a request they were honoured and humbled to carry out. Unfortunately, due to her age and not living locally she was not able to ever see the play.

MSP Neil Findlay was so impressed when he saw it he had a motion passed through the Scottish Parliament congratulating West Calder High School for its achievement.

If any school or theatre company or Hollywood Studio wishes a copy of the script, please contact MBT, it'll cost you a cup of tea and a custard cream!

(The fact that The Scarf happens to be an anagram of Hearts FC is purely coincidental).



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PHOTOGRAPHY

MAN'S BEST FRIEND

MCCRAE'S MASCOT JOCK AND OTHER WEE DOGGIE TAILS...

(I MEAN TALES...)

Long before 'Scooby Do' or even 'Lassie' there was another famous canine hero.

The more mature members of McCrae's Battalion Trust may remember watching 'The Adventures of Rin Tin Tin' on TV back in the 50's. Set in the not so wild west, Rin Tin Tin was a German Shepherd based in a frontier cavalry post. Week in and week out he saved lives, dealt with bad guys and did everything but talk, ride a horse or tote a hog leg basically.

However, the Rin Tin Tin of the 1950's TV series was a dog called Flame, the original Rin Tin Tin had sadly passed on in August 1932.

In 1918, not long before the end of the Great War, Corporal Lee Duncan of the U.S. Air Service found a German Shepherd and 5 pups in the ruins of Saint-Mihiel in France. The place was almost completely razed to the ground by artillery shelling during the battle to capture the town. The pups were only a couple of weeks old and still had their eyes closed. The mother was in a bad state and looked likely to die from starvation but still managed somehow to feed and care for her pups. Corporal Duncan rescued the dogs, fed them and somehow managed to sneak them aboard a ship bound for New York at the end of the war.

He arranged homes for the dogs including the mother but kept 2 of the pups for himself, a bitch and a dog he named Rin Tin Tin.

He taught Rin Tin Tin a few basic tricks and took him to local dog shows where he performed for the amusement of the audience however, Rin Tin Tin didn't always co-operate. He could be very aggressive and would continually growl and snap at everyone, especially if there was a loud noise or bang that perhaps reminded him of when he was a pup back in France. The performances quickly came to an end as he couldn't be trusted not to attack or bite.

Worse was to come, Rin Tin Tin then had an accident and ended up with a broken leg. Lee Duncan refused to have him put down and with love and care Rin Tin Tin recovered. Not only did he recover but he lost his aggression and was more sociable and keener to learn new tricks.

Warner Brothers studios were in desperate trouble at this time and in the process of making a film, 'The Man From Hell's River'. It was a last attempt to prevent them from going bankrupt.



The film featured a wolf as part of the plot. The wolf they hired though was very unwilling and it looked like the film would have to be shelved. An executive from the studio had seen Rin Tin Tin at a dog show and the decision was taken to replace the wolf with Rin Tin Tin. The film was a roaring success and everyone raved about this German Shepherd that starred in it. It was such a success it prevented Warner brothers from bankruptcy and Rin Tin Tin was hailed as 'The Dog That Saved Hollywood.'

For the next 10 years Rin Tin Tin made numerous films, each one a bigger success than the last and his fame grew. He sired 48 pups during his lifetime and some of them carried on where he left off.

Rin Tin Tin Jnr. appeared in several films including 'The Lighthouse By The Sea' in 1924. It was watched by a little girl and her friends during her birthday party at home in Holland. She wrote in her diary on 14th. June 1942 how she wished she had a dog like Rin Tin Tin. Her name was Anne Frank.

The original Rin Tin Tin died peacefully of old age on the 10th. Of August 1932 having attained stardom that equalled and even surpassed the likes of Charlie Chaplain and Laurel and Hardy.

He was taken home to France, the country of his birth, and buried with honours at Cimetiere des Chiens et Autres Animaux Domestique, north of Paris. Even today people still visit and pay respects to the dog that saved Hollywood.

As for another well-loved canine, a great Dane called Jock, life was not so happy. Jock was the mascot of McCrae's Battalion and went with the Battalion to the killing fields of The Somme in 1916. He had a special bond with Pipe Major Sgt. William Smith Duguid in particular and was always by his side.

The Battalion, 1,350 men, went over the top on the 1st. July 1916 and 810 were either killed or wounded, many in the first half hour of the battle.

Sgt. Duguid was tasked with being a stretcher bearer and survived the battle, but was traumatised at what he saw and what he had to do. Recovering badly wounded, dead and dying colleagues, some blind, some missing arms and legs, many of whom were his friends and colleagues.

The 1st. of July 1916 became known as the blackest day in British Army history. Duguid wasn't the only one effected by that day.

Jock the faithful, loyal, beloved mascot of McCrae's Battalion was also traumatised. The story goes that he pined for the loss of his pals, stopped eating and died of a broken heart. Whether he actually stopped eating or not is debatable but he certainly mourned the loss of his fellow comrades from the battalion. Jock remains to this day somewhere in France, buried near the town of Erquinghem beside so many of his pals in a grave known only to God. Ever faithful, ever loyal, truly a great Great Dane if ever there was one.

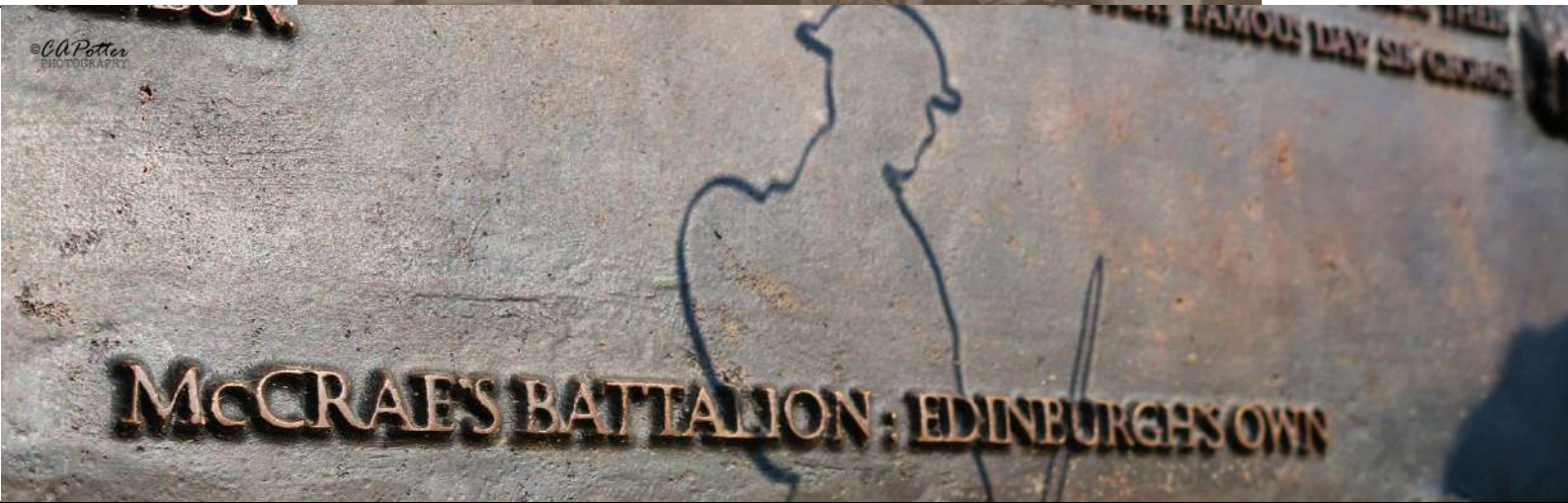
Sgt. Duguid died at Bangour Hospital in West Lothian on the 1st. June 1929 and lies buried in Piershill Cemetery in Edinburgh. He never recovered from the things he witnessed at the Somme. His story is just as tragic as that of Jock's but that is for another day.

Perhaps it might be appropriate on the 1st. of July 2023, we lay a wreath at the Cairn in Contalmaison in memory of Jock, and the other animals that were lost at the Somme in 1916.

Next there is the story of Sergeant Fredrick Buglass from the Black Watch who, while marching through Germany in 1918, found a little stray dog. Taking pity on it, this tough no-nonsense battle-hardened soldier, picked the wee thing up and carried it on his shoulders as they continued to march along. The dog was passed from soldier to soldier who all wanted to help rescue the unfortunate little pup. The lonely, abandoned homeless little pup had found a new home and several hundred new owners. It was adopted into the Black Watch Regiment, promoted to the rank of official mascot, and spent the rest of its life being pampered and cared for by all.

Sgt. Buglass survived the war, returned to Edinburgh and ended up secretary of Tollcross Hearts Supporters Club. I'm assured this is all true by his Grandson, the one and only Craig Herbertson, Chairperson of McCrae's Battalion Trust.

Lest we Forget.



WHAT DID YOU DO IN THE WAR, GRANDAD...?

UNCLE HARRY'S WAR: PART I

It all started way back in the 60's when I was around ten or twelve years of age. I sat in front of the television set to watch John Mills star in 'Dunkirk.' My Mum sat down beside me and said, "You should speak to your Uncle Harry, he was there!" I did.

I cannot speak to the accuracy of the events he told me about, nor can I provide any factual evidence but can only repeat what he told me.

It has nothing to do with McCrae's Battalion or even WW1 but a few of you may find it interesting and worth reading about.

In 1939, Henry Todd Anderson was a fully-fledged electrician living in Broxburn, West Lothian.

As a young man he joined the territorials and married Annie-Roy Greenan, (my Aunt), from the small hamlet of Westerton, half way between Broxburn and Newbridge.

As war broke out and being in the territorials, he was one of the first to be called up.

He told me how his initial training consisted of drill, drill and more drill, with a broom handle as they hadn't been issued with rifles!!

Eventually though he was issued with the real thing and was posted to Scarborough for further training.

The day he left for France he left the house in Westerton and walked to the main A8 Edinburgh Road to catch the bus to Edinburgh. He was chased by my Mum and the family dog, a spaniel called Sandy because Harry had forgotten to take his rifle with him. A good start to his army career.

His brother-in-law Hughie Greenan, had also joined up. That day they stood in the kitchen of the house in Westerton and shook hands, wishing each other the best of luck. Not knowing if they would ever see each other again or even survive the war.

After training in Scarborough, Harry was posted to London to continue preparations for war. It was there he was placed under the command of a 'particularly cruel and nasty' English Sergeant Major, Harry's words not mine.

This Sergeant Major seemed to have a 'dislike for anybody that was Scottish' and especially Uncle Harry. The wage for a soldier at that time was not much and being an electrician Harry 'subsidised' his earnings by doing 'jobs on the side' and sometimes 'appropriated' plugs/fuses/ light bulbs etc. etc. from army stores.

The extra money he made was sent home to the family in Westerton.

The Sergeant Major did his damndest to catch him but failed, however, this increased the friction between him and Harry that was to manifest itself later in France.

Shipped across the channel with the BEF he came face to face with the German Army. He told me "We were boys against men Sandy, they simply walked all over us, and we didn't stand a chance. They knew how to fight, we didn't! Our officers didn't have a clue!"

On the retreat to Dunkirk, he and another Scots soldier were ordered to man a Bren Gun position at a road junction, by the same Sergeant Major that he had issues with in London.

Harry explained that neither of them had been trained and didn't know how to use a Bren Gun, re-load it, etc., etc. but both were told if they left that post without being ordered, they'd be court-martialled and shot for cowardice.

Uncle Harry was convinced the Sergeant Major had deliberately abandoned them to face the advancing German Army. Payback for the Sergeant Major.

They sat at their post as ordered trying to work out how to load and fire the gun when a dispatch rider on a motorbike suddenly rode up. He asked them what were they doing and Harry told him they were ordered to man the Bren Gun until relieved. The dispatch rider said "Do you hear that noise? German Panzer Tanks and the whole German Army are heading towards you!"

They quickly abandoned their post and left.

They eventually reached the beach at Dunkirk, hoping they would not meet the Sergeant Major and face court martial.

That was when it got serious. They lined up in single file on the wide-open sands as the Stuka Dive Bombers bombed and machine gunned them continually. There was nowhere to hide, all they could do was throw themselves onto the ground and hope for the best.

Soldiers were being killed like flies in a trap. He said the worst noise he ever heard was the noise the Stuka made as it dived on the beaches.

Hour after hour, air raid after air raid, he eventually reached the water and waded chest deep into the sea. Small boats would pick them up and transfer them to a larger ship while the Luftwaffe continued their attacks.

Ordered not to abandon their kit many exhausted soldiers drowned, standing for hours on end in the freezing surf.

Numb from the cold, tired and weak and almost on his last legs, Harry was about to be picked up by a boat when a bomb exploded close to where he waited. The force of the explosion swept him off his feet and he went under the water. Weighed down by his kit he knew he was drowning but could only reach out his hand above the surface.

Harry began to black out when suddenly someone grabbed his hand and pulled him into the small boat. As he passed out, he heard someone say "C'mon Harry, you're going home to Broxburn! You're no getting left here!"

Uncle Harry never knew who pulled him out the water or that he was from Broxburn, exhausted and half drowned he passed out.

He came round at some point and realised everyone on the boat were crammed together at one end. A single soldier sat at the opposite end of the boat, his body trembling furiously. Uncle Harry told me as his eyes began to focus on this soldier, he realised why no-one was sitting beside him.

The soldier had no head.

Nerves or the rocking of the boat made it look like he was still alive. It was an image Harry would never forget. Eventually someone tipped the soldier over the side.

Once on board a Royal Navy Destroyer he was taken below deck, given a cup of tea and a digestive biscuit, the first food and drink he had for days. He fell asleep and didn't regain consciousness till they had docked back in Britain.

My Mum and my Auntie Roy, went to meet him at Waverly Station when he arrived back on leave. They waited patiently on the platform urgently looking for him when this stranger tapped them on the shoulder. Now almost bald, having lost most of his hair, this thin, pale, old before his years young soldier walked up to them and said, "It's me!"

He had changed that much in such a short period of time that his own wife and sister-in-law did not recognise him.





WHAT DID YOU DO IN THE WAR, GRANDAD...? UNCLE HARRY'S WAR: PART II

I now jump ahead to the day after D-Day, the 7th June 1944, he landed at Normandy. I remember him saying "now we knew how to fight."

Harry was now a Sergeant and had transferred to the Royal Corps of Signals. Being an electrician, his main role was to set up and maintain wireless communications as they advanced towards Berlin.

He told of a night march somewhere in France. They were walking ankle deep in a small stream, bordered on either side by steep inclines. As dawn broke, they realised the stream was red with blood.

A Polish outfit had ambushed a German patrol. The Poles hated the Germans and had no mercy when they met. The German corpses were left to rot on the hillside and their blood flowed down the slopes to fill the stream at the bottom.

He also told me, in all seriousness, that when the Germans fired their guns the British ducked, when the British fired the Germans ducked, when the Americans fired EVERYONE ducked.

He said even back then the Americans were notorious for friendly fire incidents. They all thought they were John Wayne and fired at anything that moved, then asked questions later! Again, Uncle Harry's words not mine.

One night, in the back of an army lorry, Harry had rigged up an electric ring of sorts connected to the truck's spare battery. Him and his platoon were having a welcome cup of tea and a cooked chicken they had taken 'prisoner' from a farm they had passed that afternoon. Stealing from locals was prohibited but food was scarce at times. Suddenly the canvas flap flew open and standing there were senior officers and a General that had arrived in camp unannounced.

Fearing he'd be disciplined on the spot Sgt. Anderson offered the General a cup of tea and a piece of chicken. It was gratefully accepted. If they disciplined Harry after that they'd need to discipline the General too! Nothing more was said but the 'cooker' and what was left of the chicken was confiscated.

Harry was with the British troops that first relieved Belsen. He refused to go into detail of what he saw there but whatever he saw obviously haunted him. He told me he was responsible for setting up communications so that the horror of what they found was passed back to headquarters. He was adamant the ordinary German soldiers and civilians must have known about the concentration camps but turned a blind eye.

It left him with a low opinion of all things German I'm afraid. An opinion that lasted till the day he died.

After the war officially ended an off-duty Harry Anderson was walking down a street in Berlin. An Army truck pulled up alongside him and the door flew open. A voice shouted out, "See we both made it then Har!" The voice belonged to his brother-in-law Hughie Greenan. He had served with the Royal Horse Artillery at El Alemein and then at Anzio but that's another story.

Hughie had been driving along the same random street in Berlin when he saw Harry walking towards him. It was the first time they had seen or been in touch with each other since that day back in Westerton when they shook hands and wished each other good luck.

I wrote to the West Lothian Courier many years later with the story of what Uncle Harry told me about Dunkirk, on the off chance someone from Broxburn might come forward and say 'that was me that pulled him out the water!'

A week later I received a phone call from someone who believed his father may have been the one that pulled Harry into the boat. He believed they were the only two men from Broxburn that survived Dunkirk. Unfortunately, his dad had died three weeks before his son read about the story in the Courier so we will never know for certain.

Uncle Harry never ran into that Sergeant Major again either. Did he survive Dunkirk?

Despite everything he put him through Harry always hoped he had.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and I hope you found it interesting.

Sergeant Henry Todd Anderson 232725 Royal Corps of Signals story is only one of many thousands that should be told and told again and passed down through the years to those that come after them.

My aunt once told me that every night in bed Harry tossed and turned, kicked out and sometimes woke up in a sweat. Every night he slept he went back to that beach in Dunkirk.

Like the story of McCrae's Battalion, they are stories that should never be forgotten. Neither should the debt we owe to those that fought for our freedom, for our future and our children's future, and who continue to do so.

Lest We Forget.





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PHOTOGRAPHY

Merry Christmas
from McCrae's Battalion Trust



"Why did you bring an
umbrella?"

"It looked like rain...dear!"



Sandy Potter

Important Dates

January

MBT AGM
Friday 27th January 2023
(Open to members only)

June/July

Contalmaison Pilgrimage Trip
2023
Thursday 29th June 2023 -
Tuesday 4th July 2023

