

**The Treatment of the British Military War  
Dead of the Second World War**

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This thesis has been composed by the candidate, the work is the candidate's own, and the work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

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## ABSTRACT

Almost nothing is known about the treatment of the British military dead of the Second World War. It is one of the few aspects of the conflict that has not been afforded attention by scholars. This is remarkable given that death is the most profound and important consequence of war. Drawing on extensive and previously unused sources in the National Archives and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the thesis endeavours to correct this oversight by examining the treatment of the military dead in the European, Mediterranean and African theatres of the 1939-45 conflict. It does this in parts, reflecting the three stages of the burial process. In the first part British burial policy and frontline burial practice are examined. The operations of the army and air force graves services, which were responsible for confirming the location and identity of the dead, are studied in the second part. The third part considers first the manner in which the Imperial War Graves Commission commemorated the British dead in battlefield cemeteries, and then the pilgrimages undertaken to these cemeteries by bereaved relatives in the early post-war period. The successes and failures of the burial process cannot be assessed without this perspective. The research shows that shortcomings in the planning and administration of burial and graves operations resulted in the loss of the remains and identities of thousands of British servicemen. The fact that the bodies of so many others were recovered, and accorded identified interment, is credit to the work of the military graves services and the thesis seeks to recognise their contribution to this hitherto-unexplored aspect of the 'People's War'.

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## AUTHOR'S NOTES

Some of the quotations in this thesis contain mistakes. Except where necessary to clarify that the mistakes are not mine, these have been left unacknowledged for fluency of reading.

All photographs and illustrations are Commonwealth War Graves Commission copyright unless otherwise stated.

## GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAG	Assistant Adjutant General
ACC	Allied Control Commission
ACI	Army Council Instruction
ACS	Army Council Secretariat
ADGRE	Assistant Director Graves Registration and Enquiries
AFHQ	Allied Force Headquarters
AGRS	American Graves Registration Service
AGS	Army Graves Service
AMP	Air Member for Personnel
AOC-in-C	Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief
BAFO	British Air Forces of Occupation
BAOR	British Army of the Rhine
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
BMM	British Military Mission
BNAF	British North Africa Force
CAS	Chief of the Air Staff
CCMU	Cemetery Construction and Maintenance Unit
CMGRE	Central Mediterranean Graves Registration and Enquiries
CWGC	Commonwealth War Graves Commission
DADGRE	Deputy Assistant Director Graves Registration and Enquiries

DAG	Deputy Adjutant General
DDGRE	Deputy Director Graves Registration and Enquiries
DGRE	Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries
DPS	Directorate of Personal Services
DPW	Directorate of Prisoners of War
EAF	East Africa Force
GCU	Graves Concentration Unit
GHQ	General Headquarters
GRC	Graves Registration Commission
GRE	Graves Registration and Enquiries
GREAF	Graves Registration East Africa Force
GREMEF	Graves Registration and Enquiries Middle East Force
GRO	General Routine Order
GRU	Graves Registration Unit
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICRV	Interdepartmental Committee on Relatives' Visits to War Cemeteries
IWGC	Imperial War Graves Commission
IWM	Imperial War Museum
JWO	Joint War Organisation
L of C	Line of Communication
MEF	Middle East Force
MP	Member of Parliament
MRES	Missing Research and Enquiry Service

MREU	Missing Research and Enquiry Unit
MRG	Missing Research Group
MRGR	Missing Research Graves Registration
MRS	Missing Research Section
NLS	National Library of Scotland
NWGC	Netherlands War Graves Committee
POW	Prisoner-of-War
PRO	Public Record Office
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RAF	Royal Air Force
RASC	Royal Army Service Corps
RCAF	Royal Canadian Air Force
RMG	Russian Military Government
RNZAF	Royal New Zealand Air Force
SACMED	Supreme Allied Command Mediterranean
SEAC	South East Asia Command
SHAEF	Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force
TCD	Trinity College Dublin
TNA	The National Archives
UDF	Union Defence Force
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

## PREFACE

‘Killing is the end of war; we have almost forgotten it in these velvet days, and starting our engine of war, are shocked that death plays so busy a part amongst the mechanism.’<sup>1</sup>

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‘The stars dead heroes in the sky  
may well approve the way you die  
nor will the sun  
revile those who survive because  
for the dying and promising there was  
these evils remain:

when you are dead and the harm done  
the orators and clerks go on  
the rulers of interims and wars  
effete and stable as stars.’<sup>2</sup>

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‘Because a decent burial of the dead is a condition for the continued peace of the living; without it, the spirit of the departed returns by night and torments the survivors.’<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Linesman’, *The Mechanism of War*, (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1902), pp. 182-3.

<sup>2</sup> From ‘The Offensive’ by Keith Douglas in Keith Douglas, *Alamein to Zem Zem*, (London: Editions Poetry London, 1946), p. iv.

<sup>3</sup> Ryszard Kapuściński, *Travels with Herodotus*, (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 129.

## Introduction

Stan Brine does not know exactly what happened to the bodies of those of his comrades who were killed at the frontline in the north-west Europe campaign of 1944-45. He does know that eventually they were buried, for he has visited their graves many times over the years, but not how their remains passed from the battlefields where they died to the cemeteries where they are interred. To this mystery Brine often has sought answers, but his conversations with other ex-servicemen have been unproductive and his reading on the Second World War unenlightening. All he has discovered from the copious material he has read is that the burial of British military dead is one of the few aspects of the conflict to have escaped the attention of scholars. This is extraordinary given that death is one of the only certainties of war, and its most important consequence.<sup>1</sup>

- Thesis Objectives

British military frontline dead were buried in three stages. First, corpses and body parts were collected from the battlefield and interred. Second, the Army Graves Service (AGS) and the Royal Air Force (RAF) Missing Research and Enquiry Service (MRES) – the military graves services – confirmed the location and identity of the dead. Third, the Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC) made beautiful the battlefield cemeteries in which they were buried. While some ex-servicemen have written of their experiences of interring the frontline dead or seeing it done, the performance of this task and the rules which governed its completion by British

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<sup>1</sup> Stan Brine, *One Up, Two Up, Brew Up (Book 3)*, (Unpublished), pp. 163-4; Author's information.

personnel have not been the subjects of academic study. Even more obscure is the detail of the second stage of the burial process. Very little has been written on the MRES and less still on the AGS, while the few references to these organisations in secondary literature are usually isolated and vague.<sup>2</sup> More is known of the IWGC, although not with regard to its role in relation to the military graves services. Indeed, many historians have credited the IWGC for work done by the AGS and the MRES.<sup>3</sup> Nor have the three stages of the burial process been studied together and as components of a continuum.

This thesis aims to fill these gaps in military historiography. In so doing it endeavours to demonstrate that the initial failure to plan adequately in the pre-war period for future burial and graves operations, and the subsequent failure to correct quickly the inadequacies of policy and practice once these had been exposed by the experiences of conflict, retarded the efficient interment of the Second World War dead and resulted in the identities and remains of thousands of servicemen being lost. That so many other British personnel were accorded identified burial is due principally to the men of the military graves services who, undeterred by widespread institutional indifference, sought to satisfy the expectation of the public that its dead be buried well. The thesis seeks to acknowledge their hitherto-unrecognised contribution to the 'People's War'.

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<sup>2</sup> Philip Longworth, *The Unending Vigil: A History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission*, (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2003), pp. 177-8; Carl Shilleto, *The Fighting Fifty-Second Recce: The 52<sup>nd</sup> (Lowland) Divisional Reconnaissance Regiment RAC in North-west Europe, September 1944 – March 1946*, (York: Eskdale, 2001), pp. 167-8; Dilip Sarkar, *Missing in Action: Resting in Peace?*, (Worcester: Ramrod, 1998), p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> For example, see Sarkar, *Missing in Action*, pp. 21, 24.

- An Historical Perspective

The remains of British servicemen had not always been attended in death. On 16 March 1908, *Monsieur* Wauthier, an official from the Givet commune in northern France, wrote to Sir Francis Bertie, the British ambassador in Paris:

[y]our humble servant takes the liberty of making known to Your Excellency that a considerable number of British soldiers and sailors lie in unnamed graves in the military cemetery of this garrison. These men died here in captivity as prisoners of war at Givet (Ardennes) from 1803 to 1814. The cemetery ceased to be used as such in 1850.<sup>4</sup>

Wauthier continued: '[t]he old military cemetery in question today bears no mark showing what its original character was. It lies by the road running from Givet to Dinant, which is followed by many tourists, and it might be well to remind them that at that place lie many of their compatriots who died for their country.'<sup>5</sup>

The matter of erecting a memorial to the personnel buried at Givet was referred to the War Office, the Admiralty and the Office of Works, the last-named department being responsible for the maintenance of certain British cemeteries in countries overseas.<sup>6</sup> In discussion, one War Office authority argued: 'it would look rather "mesquin" to drop the matter altogether now that it has reached this stage, & would not impress the French authorities, local and other, with the patriotic sentiments of the British Army. They think a good deal more of this sort of thing than we do.'<sup>7</sup> Other British officials took a different view. One observed of the dead interred at Givet: '[t]heir names, their ranks, their services have been forgotten for many years, and I do not see what advantage would be gained by doing now what, if done at all,

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<sup>4</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/9025, Wauthier to Bertie, (Translation), 16 March 1908.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/9025, Army Council to Office of Works, 7 May 1908.

<sup>7</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/9026, Internal Minute, December 1908. *Mesquin* means stingy and mean-spirited.

should have been done long ago.’<sup>8</sup> This opinion prevailed and in January 1909, Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary, advised Bertie that no monument would be raised.<sup>9</sup>

This decision demonstrated that Britain had not been greatly affected by the movement, which had arisen in the mid-nineteenth century, to afford equal attention to all servicemen who died in battle. Approximately 100,000 Union soldiers killed in the American Civil War of 1861-65 had been buried in identified graves in specially-constructed cemeteries, while the Treaty of Frankfurt, which formally ended the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, stipulated that the erstwhile belligerents should ‘engage to respect and preserve the tombs of soldiers buried in their respective territories.’<sup>10</sup> Yet in the Boer War of 1899-1902, British authorities made little effort to care for their dead. By its end it remained more common for the corpses of British servicemen killed on the battlefield to be abandoned or thrown into mass burial pits than interred in identified graves.<sup>11</sup> As shall be seen, this was to change during the First World War, and by the Second World War the principle of identified and honourable burial for all servicemen was part of British military doctrine. The 1939-

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<sup>8</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/9025, Internal Minute, Undated.

<sup>9</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/9026, Grey to Bertie, 13 January 1909.

<sup>10</sup> Article XVI of the Treaty of Frankfurt, 10 May 1871, cited in Robert I. Giesberg, *The Treaty of Frankfurt: A Study in Diplomatic History, September 1870-September 1873*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1966), p. 292; Thomas Laqueur, ‘Among the Graves’, *London Review of Books*, 30, 24 (2008), 3-9; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. xx; Luc Capdevila and Danièle Voldman, *War Dead: Western Societies and the Casualties of War*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), pp. 22-3, 42-3; James Stevens Curl, *A Celebration of Death: An Introduction to Some of the Buildings, Monuments, and Settings of Funerary Architecture in the Western European Tradition*, (London: B. T. Batsford, 1993), pp. 317-8. For more information on these subjects, see Annette Becker, ‘War Memorials: A Legacy of Total War?’ in Stig Förster and Jörg Nagler (eds.), *On the Road to Total War: The American Civil War and the German Wars of Unification, 1861-1871*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 658-60; Michael Sledge, *Soldier Dead: How we Recover, Identify, Bury, & Honor our Military Fallen*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 33-4, 202; William F. Ross and Charles F. Romanus, *United States Army in World War II: The Technical Services: The Quartermaster Corps: Operations in the War Against Germany*, (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1965), p. 213.

<sup>11</sup> Capdevila and Voldman, *War Dead*, pp. 8, 43; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. xxi; Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men’s Bodies, Britain and the Great War*, (London: Reaktion, 1996), p. 226.

45 war was the first conflict in which Britain fought where this principle applied from the outset.

- Parameters

This thesis is divided into three parts, with each stage of the burial process addressed in turn. In the first part an examination of the origins and dictates of British burial policy is followed by case studies of frontline burial practice in the Second World War. The operations of the military graves services are the focus of the second part. It considers the work of the AGS and the War Office Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries (DGRE), which held overall responsibility for graves matters, and then the events that led to the formation of the MRES in 1945 and its operations thereafter. The discussion in the second part begins in 1914 for the character and development of the military graves organisation cannot be understood without reference to its original incarnation during the First World War. The third part of the thesis examines the operations of the IWGC, but only insofar as these built upon the work of the AGS and the MRES. To this end it proved necessary to study the events surrounding the formation of the IWGC in 1917 – when its principles were forged – but it remains that chapter six is not a history of the organisation. This part of the thesis considers also the pilgrimages undertaken in the early post-Second World War period by relatives of the war dead to battlefield cemeteries on the Continent. It was for these Britons that the military graves services and the IWGC laboured, and thus this perspective is necessary in order to assess the successes and failures of the burial process. These judgments are proffered in the conclusion.

In addition to the aforementioned, a further parameter is that consideration is given only to the African, Mediterranean and European theatres of the Second World War in which British forces fought. The Asian theatre is excluded because there are relatively few primary sources on the conduct of graves operations there. The interment of military personnel in Britain is not examined because the focus is on foreign battlefields. Nor is the treatment of Royal Navy war dead considered. Of this topic there is little to discuss for most sailors were buried at sea or lost there without trace, and those bodies that washed up on land became the responsibility of the army.<sup>12</sup> Finally, this work is concerned with the commemoration of British military war dead only in relation to the battlefield cemeteries developed by the IWGC.

- Historiography

This study makes extensive use of primary documents held at the National Archives (TNA) in London and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) in Maidenhead (the IWGC changed its name to the CWGC in 1960). These two institutions are the main repositories of information on the DGRE and the military graves services.<sup>13</sup> TNA and CWGC documents also provide the foundation for the chapters on the IWGC and war graves pilgrimages, although in these chapters

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<sup>12</sup> Some information on the treatment of British naval dead can be found in J. L. S. Coulter, *The Royal Naval Medical Service: Volume II Operations*, (London: HMSO, 1956), pp. 85-88; and C. H. Joynt, 'The Royal Naval Medical Services' in Sir Arthur Salusbury MacNalty and W. Franklin Mellor (eds.), *Medical Services in War: The Principal Medical Lessons of the Second World War*, (London: HMSO, 1968), pp. 36-7.

<sup>13</sup> The records of the Imperial War Museum (IWM) proved of surprisingly little use for this thesis. An enquiry by the author of the National Army Museum met with a referral to the TNA. Persistent requests to consult the archives of the *Volkbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, the German war graves organisation, elicited no response. The author placed an advertisement in the British Legion magazine in an attempt to contact veterans of the AGS and the MRES, without success. This was disappointing but not surprising, for these organisations were served by relatively few men.

additional primary material is drawn from newspapers and the record of parliamentary proceedings in *Hansard*.

The personal accounts of men who served at the frontline proved valuable in writing the first part of the thesis, particularly as most official and regimental histories avoid overly morbid matters. For example, the Nottinghamshire Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry Regiment spent more time at the frontline than any British armoured formation, and suffered considerable casualties, but the history of its Second World War operations does not explain how the regimental dead were collected and buried.<sup>14</sup>

There are few secondary sources of direct relevance to this work.<sup>15</sup> The only known study to deal specifically with the military graves services is *Missing Believed Killed*, a recently published book on the MRES by Stuart Hadaway.<sup>16</sup> Its existence was discovered after this work had been researched and written and thus it had no bearing on the production of the thesis. In any case, *Missing Believed Killed* has limited value as a source. The text, which is aimed at a popular audience, contains a number of mistakes and generalisations, while its focus is on MRES field operations. The genesis and establishment of the organisation, for example, are not discussed in detail.

On the IWGC, scholarly writing is restricted to *The Unending Vigil*, Philip Longworth's history of the organisation first published in 1967, and *A Distant Grief*, released in 2007, in which Bart Ziino devotes a chapter to its formation and early

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<sup>14</sup> T. M. Lindsay, *Sherwood Rangers: The Story of the Nottinghamshire Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry in the Second World War*, (London: Burrup, Mathieson, 1952).

<sup>15</sup> Historians such as John Keegan and John Ellis have written of the misery and horrors of the frontline, but rarely of what became of corpses. For example, see John Keegan, *Six Armies in Normandy: From D-Day to the Liberation of Paris, June 6<sup>th</sup>-August 25<sup>th</sup>, 1944*, (London: Pimlico, 2004); John Ellis, *The Sharp End of War: The Fighting Man in World War II*, (London: Corgi, 1982).

<sup>16</sup> Stuart Hadaway, *Missing Believed Killed: The Royal Air Force and the Search for Missing Aircrew 1939-1952*, (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2008).

development.<sup>17</sup> Effectively these sources were helpful only in confirming what the author of this thesis had already established through his archival research. Two other books which purport to tell the history of the IWGC were of little use. The 1989 publication *Courage Remembered*, by Major Edwin Gibson and G. Kingsley Ward, is a bizarre mixture of history, vignettes and travel advice for the modern pilgrim, and what historical information it contains has largely been borrowed from Longworth.<sup>18</sup> Julie Summers also draws heavily – in places very heavily – on *The Unending Vigil* in her 2007 book *Remembered*. Its usefulness was limited further by its being essentially a pictorial history of the IWGC/CWGC.<sup>19</sup>

One secondary source which did promise much was *War Dead: Western Societies and the Casualties of War* by Luc Capdevila and Danièle Voldman. In the preface to this 2006 book, the authors state their concerns to be ‘the fate of those killed in war, through what happens to their remains (bodies, fragments of bodies, bits, ashes, the absence of any remains), as well as with the attitudes of survivors and their feelings in the face of tragic events.’<sup>20</sup> However, the first of these topics is discussed only briefly, and in an excessively French-centric and superficial manner. As one reviewer noted, ‘this is primarily a study of the impact of the First World War upon mourning and commemoration.’<sup>21</sup> In this regard their book is typical of much

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<sup>17</sup> Philip Longworth, *The Unending Vigil: A History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission 1917-1967*, (London: Constable, 1967); Bart Ziino, *A Distant Grief: Australians, War Graves and the Great War*, (Crawley: University of Western Australia Press, 2007). Other editions of *The Unending Vigil* are Philip Longworth, *The Unending Vigil: A History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission 1917-1984*, (London: Leo Cooper, 1985); and Philip Longworth, *The Unending Vigil: A History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission*, (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2003).

<sup>18</sup> Major Edwin Gibson MBE and G. Kingsley Ward, *Courage Remembered: The Story Behind the Construction and Maintenance of the Commonwealth's Military Cemeteries and Memorials of the Wars of 1914-1918 and 1939-1945*, (London: HMSO, 1989).

<sup>19</sup> Julie Summers, *Remembered: The History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission*, (London: Merrell, 2007).

<sup>20</sup> Capdevila and Voldman, *War Dead*, pp. xiii-xiv.

<sup>21</sup> Ian F. W. Beckett, ‘War Dead: Western Societies and the Casualties of War’, *History*, 92, 307 (2007), 418-9.

other writing by historians on military war dead. The work of Jay Winter, the late George Mosse, and scholars past and present of the *Annales* school, for example, has generally focused on the 1914-18 conflict and responses to death rather than the act of interment.<sup>22</sup> The Italian academic Giovanni de Luna has taken a broader approach, but his scholarship is concerned more with theories of the body than empirical subjects such as the manner in which corpses are buried.<sup>23</sup>

- Definitions

It is necessary to clarify distinctions of meaning between bereavement, grief, and mourning. These terms, often used loosely and sometimes interchangeably, are not synonyms. A bereaved person has experienced the death of someone he or she knew and cared about. One emotional response to this occurrence is grief. Once the shock of bereavement has subsided, grief can be channelled into rational acts of mourning, of which war graves pilgrimages are an example.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> For example, see Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century*, (New Haven: Yale, 2006); Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of The World Wars*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); George L. Mosse, 'National Cemeteries and National Revival: The Cult of the Fallen Soldiers in Germany', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 14, 1 (1979), 1-20; Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, 'Corps Perdus, Corps Retrouvés. Trois Exemples de Deuils de Guerre', *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 55, 1 (2000), 47-71.

<sup>23</sup> Giovanni de Luna, *Il Corpo del Nemico Ucciso: Violenza e Morte Nella Guerra Contemporanea*, (Torino: Giulio Einaudi, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day 1919-1946*, (Oxford: Berg, 1994), pp. 19-20. Bart Ziino defines these terms similarly. See Ziino, *A Distant Grief*, p. 13. See also Geoffrey Gorer, *Death, Grief, and Mourning in Contemporary Britain*, (London: Cresset Press, 1965), p. 131; Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 55-6.

## *Part One*

### **Chapter One**

#### **Frontline Burial Policy and Practice**

##### Section I: Frontline Burial Policy

- The 1906 Geneva Convention and the 1909 Field Service Regulations

The first significant item of policy to deal with the treatment of dead bodies in wartime appeared on 6 July 1906 when the *Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armies in the Field* was published in Geneva by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Included in it were two articles in which reference was made to the burial of the dead, no mention having been made of this subject in the first Geneva Convention of 1864.<sup>1</sup> Article 3 of the 1906 Convention dictated that it was the duty of every belligerent to protect the bodies of the dead from ‘ill treatment’ and to examine them carefully before their ‘interment or incineration’, while Article 4 directed belligerent nations to ‘forward to the authorities of their country or army the marks or military papers of identification found upon the bodies of the dead’, as well as any personal items such as valuables and letters.<sup>2</sup> The British government ratified the Convention on 16 April 1907 and the War Office published a summary of it in the *Field Service Pocket Book* issued that year.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See *Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field*, Geneva, 22 August 1864. See also Articles 19 and 20 of *The Laws of War on Land*, Oxford, 9 September 1880.

<sup>2</sup> *Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armies in the Field*, Geneva, 6 July 1906, Chapter I, Articles 3-4.

<sup>3</sup> *Field Service Pocket Book (Provisional), 1907*, (London: HMSO, 1907), pp. 152-158. See also *Report to the Army Council on the Conference Held at Geneva 11<sup>th</sup> June to 6<sup>th</sup> July, 1906, for the*

To ensure that the British army did not have to rely solely on the Geneva Convention for information on burial, the War Office produced its own guidelines. In 1909 a stipulation, similar in form and style to Articles 3 and 4 of the 1906 Geneva Convention, was included in Field Service Regulations. Inserted into a miscellaneous chapter, titled ‘Office Work, Casualties, Invaliding, Despatches, Diaries, Code and Cipher’, it read: ‘[a]nyone concerned in burying a soldier, or finding a body after an action, will remove the identity disc and pay book, or, if a civilian, his pass, and will note the number of the equipment and rifle, or any other means likely to assist identification. Such person is responsible that this information is sent, with the least possible delay, to the base record office (or as specially ordered from general headquarters).’<sup>4</sup> An associated paragraph contained information on how to dispose of the effects of the deceased, and an acknowledgment that the Adjutant General’s department was responsible for ‘[b]urying parties and places.’<sup>5</sup> For the first time, the burial of the military dead was, officially at least, an accredited responsibility within the British army.

- The 1923 Field Service Regulations

The momentous experiences of the Great War prompted the War Office to review its extant burial policy, and in 1923 revised and expanded directives were issued in Field Service Regulations.<sup>6</sup> These sought to formalise practices which would ensure

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*Revision of the Geneva Convention of 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 1864, for the Amelioration of the Condition of Wounded in War*, 31 October 1906.

<sup>4</sup> *Field Service Regulations, Part II, Organization and Administration, 1909*, (London: HMSO, 1913), p. 133.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38, 133-4.

<sup>6</sup> In 1920 a new edition of Field Service Regulations was published to supplant that of 1909. The National Library of Scotland (NLS) holds Volume II of the 1920 regulations but has no record of Volume I. TNA holds neither volume for that year. (The stipulations on ‘Organization and Administration’, including those on burial, were printed in Volume I of Field Service Regulations,

that each British serviceman killed in conflict was given a distinct and identified burial. In the aftermath of the Great War the importance attached by the next-of-kin to the preservation of individual graves had been made clear to the War Office, and thus a specific chapter was included on 'Clearing the Battlefield; Graves Registration; Prisoners of War; Salvage, and Enemy Dead'. Authorities also used the new edition of Field Service Regulations to make a delineation between the role of the frontline soldier in effecting burial, and the responsibilities of a DGRE, which would be established in the Adjutant General's branch in time of war and whose personnel would select suitable cemeteries, preserve the records of burials, and provide the means of identifying individual graves.<sup>7</sup> However, it was the difference in tone that proved the most striking difference between the 1909 and 1923 Field Service Regulations. Clearing the battlefield of bodies was now deemed to be 'an important part of the duties of the staff', while the 'importance of collecting the effects of the dead ... and of the greatest care in their preservation and disposal' was something to 'be impressed upon all ranks.'<sup>8</sup>

The new Field Service Regulations stated that commanders in the field had a duty to make the best possible arrangements for attending to dead bodies. This meant arranging for the interment of corpses, preferably using labour provided by survivors from the same formation as those killed, and helping to determine the sites of battlefield cemeteries once the direction and situation of the battle had been

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while those directives concerned with 'Operations' were outlined in Volume II.) Furthermore, the NLS holds only Volume II of the 1929 and 1935 Field Service Regulations. This suggests that Volume II may have been issued singly in 1920, 1929 and 1935.

<sup>7</sup> *Field Service Regulations, Volume I, Organization and Administration, 1923, Provisional*, (London: HMSO, 1923), pp. 39-40, 42-3, 258.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 253-4.

assessed.<sup>9</sup> In selecting these locations, officers were to ensure that the dead were interred as near to the frontline and place of death as possible, and to remember ‘that burial in isolated or scattered groups of graves is to be avoided as far as the exigencies of the operations permit.’<sup>10</sup>

While it was conceded in the regulations that opportunities for searching for and identifying the dead would be mediated by circumstance, the importance of examining corpses before burial was emphasised.<sup>11</sup> For reasons of hygiene and the morale of comrades, these inspections were to be completed at the first opportunity in order that the dead could be interred as expeditiously as possible. The officer commanding a burial party – or another serviceman if no officer were present – would remove the red identity disc and pay book (AB 64), as well as all other personal and government-issue possessions found on or near the body. (The green identity disc was to be buried with the remains.)<sup>12</sup> It was particularly important to locate at least one of the identity discs, worn on a cord around the neck, or the soldier’s pay book – in which all his personal particulars were listed, including a record of bodily scars and defects noted on enlistment, contact addresses for next-of-kin, and a short will detailing to whom personal effects and notification should be sent in the event of death – for these items, which servicemen were required to keep on their person at all times, provided the strongest evidence for confirming identities.<sup>13</sup> If these were missing, burial parties were otherwise to take note of ‘any detail which may assist identification, such as a cap badge, shoulder title, number of

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 253-4, 259.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 259.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* AB64 is an abbreviation of Army Book 64. The RAF equivalent was Form 64. If only one of the two identity discs were found, it was to be left on the body.

<sup>13</sup> *Field Service Regulations, Volume 1, Organization and Administration, 1923, Provisional*, p. 230; IWM, 87/35/1, R. R. Ryder.

equipment', and also to record 'the exact spot on which the body was found and the apparent date of death', and the precise position of graves.<sup>14</sup>

Officers supervising interment would be responsible for cataloguing all such identification details on Army Form W 3314, the official burial return. Three copies were to be made and posted, one each to the War Office, the DGRE, and the Deputy Adjutant General (DAG), 2<sup>nd</sup> echelon. The regulations stated the importance of the position of interment being 'given as definitely as possible to ensure ready recognition [for] [a]s a rule, the map reference on a large scale map is the best and most reliable means of ensuring future identification of a grave.'<sup>15</sup> All items taken from corpses, aside from government belongings which would be disposed of by the Deputy Assistant Director of Ordnance Services, were to be returned to a receiving officer at field headquarters for inspection and cataloguing, whereupon they would be despatched to the DAG, 2<sup>nd</sup> echelon, for eventual return to the next-of-kin. Under no circumstances were effects to be forwarded directly to relatives.<sup>16</sup>

The stipulations governing the construction and marking of graves, as well as the establishment of battlefield cemeteries, were also detailed in the 1923 Field Service Regulations. Single graves were to measure no more than six feet and six inches long, two feet across, and five feet deep, while distances of twelve inches and three feet respectively would separate adjacent graves and those in rows.<sup>17</sup> Temporary crosses, the erection of which would usually precede that of a more permanent memorial or gravestone, were to stand two feet and six inches from the ground and measure one foot and four inches across. On each would be painted or written the

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<sup>14</sup> *Field Service Regulations, Volume I, Organization and Administration, 1923, Provisional*, p. 254.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 260.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 255-6.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 259.

name, identification number and unit of the deceased.<sup>18</sup> In case of problems in the provision of crosses from base workshops to the frontline, the regulations made allowance for the marking of graves with pegs, the details of the deceased being recorded on an affixed label. Where no pegs were available, a bottle or tin driven partway into the ground would suffice as a temporary grave marker with the identification particulars written on a piece of paper and stored in the receptacle.<sup>19</sup> Cemeteries were to be situated 100 yards or more from the closest building and where nearby water supplies could not be contaminated, and in easily accessible locations to facilitate maintenance and, later, the visits of interested parties. Graves would be segregated by nationality and creed to allow for discrete British burial plots and cemeteries.<sup>20</sup>

- The 1929 Geneva Convention

Just as the Great War prompted the War Office to revise Field Service Regulations, so too did it stimulate change at the ICRC. Indeed, the conflict provoked that organisation to improve the codification of the laws and practices of war.<sup>21</sup> Thus, in July 1929, the ICRC published an adapted version of the 1906 *Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armies in the Field*.<sup>22</sup> Of greatest significance was the removal of the clause ‘*clausula si omnes*’ which meant, as Jean S. Pictet observed, that the Convention ‘is binding only if all the belligerents

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 259-60.

<sup>21</sup> David P. Forsythe, *Humanitarian Politics: The International Committee of the Red Cross*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), pp. 6-7, 27-8.

<sup>22</sup> The 27 July 1929 *Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armies in the Field* was ratified by the British government on 23 June 1931.

are bound by it.’<sup>23</sup> As the War Office had done with servicemen in its 1923 Field Service Regulations, the ICRC was seeking to limit the possibilities that existed for governments to abrogate their responsibilities. Accordingly, more detail was added to the existing tenets of the articles relating to the treatment and disposal of the dead, with the rules on examining and identifying bodies, and the directives governing communications between belligerent nations, tightened. For example, it was stated that authorities of warring countries henceforth would be obliged to send reciprocal death certificates for each corpse recovered or discovered, as well as ‘one half of their identity discs, the other half to remain attached to the body.’<sup>24</sup> One of the directives in Article 4, however, was new. It dictated that belligerents:

shall further ensure that the dead are honourably interred, that their graves are respected and marked so that they may always be found. To this end, at the commencement of hostilities, they shall organize officially a graves registration service, to render eventual exhumations possible, and to ensure the identification of bodies whatever may be the subsequent site of the grave. After the cessation of hostilities they shall exchange the list of graves and of dead interred in their cemeteries and elsewhere.<sup>25</sup>

Because the War Office had included information to this effect – in particular, that relating to the formation of the DGRE – in its 1923 Field Service Regulations, ICRC policy had less bearing on the 1930 edition.

- The 1930 Field Service Regulations

The 1930 Field Service Regulations included much of the policy elucidated in 1923.

In particular, the distinction between burial being the responsibility of frontline

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<sup>23</sup> Jean S. Pictet (ed.), *The Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949*, (Geneva: ICRC, 1952), pp. 15-16.

<sup>24</sup> *Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armies in the Field*, Geneva, 27 July 1929, Chapter I, Article 4.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

soldiers, and oversight of graves being that of the DGRE, was maintained.<sup>26</sup>

However, there were some amendments on points of detail. For example, it was stated that burial parties were to be led 'by officers specially detailed in orders issued by commanders of formations', and that chaplains were expected to assume greater responsibility 'for ministering to the wounded and dying, and for burials.'<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, the composition and role of the DGRE was clarified. Aside from its headquarters within the War Office, it would be comprised of graves registration units allocated one to each army and one to each Line of Communication (L of C), with the distribution of these units dependent on the progress of operations. In this regard, the assistance of all 'A' Branch staff in enabling graves personnel to deploy and then to fulfil their duties was expected.<sup>28</sup> The sections relevant to the treatment of the dead, which were spread throughout the regulations and not collected in one cohesive section, also stated that these graves servicemen, who would 'be found on mobilization from personnel surplus to the requirements of and physically unfit for service in units of fighting troops', would be responsible for communicating to the War Office all information accrued in the course of their work, while correspondence received from next-of-kin and other civilians was to be similarly channelled.<sup>29</sup> These directives were included to ensure the centralisation of communications relating to graves and cemeteries, and to prevent any unmediated contact between graves personnel in the field and the public. The War Office may have accepted that the army had a responsibility to care for its dead, but it did not want the public being privy to the manner in which this duty was discharged. Meanwhile, the regulations

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<sup>26</sup> *Field Service Regulations, Volume I, Organization and Administration, 1930*, (London: HMSO, 1930), pp. 114, 188.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 108-112, 115.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 114-5, 118.

accorded responsibility for the construction and maintenance of cemeteries, and the provision, painting and inscription of crosses and other grave markers, to the Royal Engineers.<sup>30</sup>

- The RAF War Manuals

The RAF had no burial policy to revise after the Great War. As a new organisation, it had either to formulate its own decrees or adopt those of another armed service. It chose the latter course. The RAF War Manual, first published by the Air Ministry in 1932 and reissued in March 1934 and again in December 1939, was intended as the air force equivalent of Field Service Regulations. With regard to burial policy, the RAF volumes were based on the 1930 edition of Field Service Regulations to the extent that most stipulations were exact or close repeats of the corresponding army directives and took no account of the differences between aerial and land warfare.<sup>31</sup>

In line with its dependence on the army for burial doctrine, the Air Ministry used the RAF war manuals to cede certain duties to the DGRE. Thus it was stated that while the air force held responsibility for the location, identification and burial of its personnel, the DGRE was responsible for making and keeping the associated records, answering any public enquiries related to the interment of RAF servicemen, selecting the locations of cemeteries where air force dead would be interred, and marking and recording the location of their graves.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 140-1. See also p. xx in this volume.

<sup>31</sup> For example, see TNA, PRO AIR 10/2313, RAF War Manual, Part II Organization and Administration, 1939, Appendix V, Paragraph 8. (The RAF War Manual consulted is a June 1940 reprint of the December 1939 edition.)

<sup>32</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 10/2313, RAF War Manual, Part II, Organization and Administration, 1939, Chapter VIII, Paragraphs 61-3; Chapter XIV, Paragraph 29.

- Army and RAF Burial Policy in the Second World War

After revising its burial policy in 1930, the War Office made no changes to it before or during the Second World War.<sup>33</sup> Throughout the 1939-45 conflict, army burial policy was drawn exclusively from the 1930 Field Service Regulations, while the RAF War Manual, its content in this regard unchanged since 1932, provided the sole codification of official air force doctrine.<sup>34</sup> During the war these policies were subject to occasional clarifications by the DGRE. For example, in September 1939 it published a directive ordering frontline officers to select burial sites that did not interfere unduly with the surrounding landscape, occupy fertile farmland (where a viable alternative existed), or obstruct existing thoroughfares.<sup>35</sup> Instructions were also issued in response to events in the field, particularly where ignorance among frontline servicemen was thought to be undermining the efficient disposal of the dead. Army Council Instruction (ACI) 44 of 1944 stated: '[i]t is reported from theatres of war that identification of the dead is made [diffi]cult by two factors:- (a) neglect of individuals to wear their identity discs, and (b) removal, in some cases, by burial parties of both discs from the body.'<sup>36</sup> Relevant excerpts from Field Service Regulations were printed to remind soldiers of correct procedures.

A further method for administering policy was forced upon the DGRE in the months before the launch of Operation Overlord in 1944. With the War Office determined to plan for each aspect of the invasion of Europe, the DGRE was required to prepare and release statements of burial policy to 21 Army Group in advance of its operations: it had never previously administered such advice to a force before its

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<sup>33</sup> In September 1938 consideration was given to making some changes to burial policy, but none were made. See TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, September 1938.

<sup>34</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/35, Notes for Graves Units.

<sup>35</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/35, Burials and Graves Registration Notes.

<sup>36</sup> TNA, PRO WO 293/31, ACI 44, Part 1, 1944.

deployment.<sup>37</sup> Included in the statements were reiterations of Field Service Regulations and, more significantly, information on burials formulated specifically for 21 Army Group and its intended campaign on the Continent.

Within the Preparatory Administrative Orders, published by the War Office during the spring of 1944, were sections on 'Burials' and 'Disposal of Effects of the Dead', in which were outlined the procedures for dealing with casualties incurred in the marshalling and embarkation areas before the sailing of 21 Army Group. Men killed in these restricted areas would, for example, be deemed to have died on the Continent to ensure that information on their deaths and burial would not, for reasons of security, be 'communicated to relatives or friends of the deceased officer or other rank by the CO [commanding officer] or any other person of the unit until after the arrival of the unit overseas.'<sup>38</sup> Complementary guidance was provided in the Administrative Instructions for Operation Overlord. In these, confirmation was given that the bodies of men who died during the initial crossing of the English Channel to France were to be buried on the Continent and not at sea, while advice was prescribed on how to dispose of the effects of personnel killed after the embarkation of the invasion force.<sup>39</sup>

The Standing Orders for 21 Army Group, issued through the Adjutant General's department, provided a wider-ranging and more detailed exposition of the

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<sup>37</sup> TNA, PRO WO 208/3226, Notes on Operation Overlord; *Field Service Regulations, Volume I, Organization and Administration, 1930*, p. 115. The issuing of ACIs and corrections continued throughout the war.

<sup>38</sup> TNA, PRO WO 199/1239, Preparatory Administrative Order, Part II. See also TNA, PRO WO 199/1253, War Office Administrative Instructions, Operation Overlord, Appendix G, 25 April 1944; TNA, PRO ADM 1/16913, Operation Overlord Disposal of Dead Bodies, 1944-45.

<sup>39</sup> TNA, PRO WO 199/1253, War Office Administrative Instructions, Operation Overlord, Phase II; TNA, PRO WO 219/2998, 21 Army Group Administrative Instruction Number 32.

burial policy to be implemented throughout the Continental campaign.<sup>40</sup> ‘A’ Branch field staff would facilitate the disposal of the frontline dead by inserting in all published operations orders a paragraph on their burial, as well as selecting – before battle and in consultation with graves personnel and members of the medical services – potential sites for permanent cemeteries. The same staffs were to appoint responsible frontline servicemen as Divisional Burial Officers to supervise the proper interment of the dead and the correct marking of graves.<sup>41</sup> These officers would also determine where initial burial should be made. If corpses could not be interred at the sites of proposed permanent cemeteries, or in existing graveyards, bodies were to be collected together in ‘improvised cemeteries’.<sup>42</sup> To this end the Standing Orders contained the first codifications of the terms ‘registration’ and ‘concentration’, both for the guidance of graves personnel whose tasks they were, and for the information of frontline servicemen to ensure a clear delineation of responsibilities. It was stated that ‘registration’ meant to verify the position and identity of a grave and to erect over it a marked cross as proof of this.<sup>43</sup> ‘Concentration’ involved moving, where necessary, bodily remains from registered graves to permanent cemeteries for final interment. Servicemen completing this duty were to adhere to the order which decreed ‘that the permanent resting place [of bodies] shall be in a cemetery as near as possible to where the death occurred [sic].’<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, April, June 1944; TNA, PRO WO 208/3226, Notes on Operation Overlord. The copies of the Standing Orders held at the National Archives are of such poor quality that sections of the text are illegible. No other copy of the Standing Orders was obtained.

<sup>41</sup> TNA, PRO WO 219/1374, 21 Army Group Standing Orders, Section VIII, Graves.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> TNA, PRO WO 219/1374, Standing Orders, Graves Registration 21 Army Group.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 219/1374, 21 Army Group Standing Orders, Section VIII, Graves. The Standing Orders on Graves Registration and Graves Concentration were revised and updated in December 1944. See TNA, PRO WO 171/186, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, December 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Revised Standing Orders for 21 Army Group, January 1945.

The Standing Orders also sought to explain the role of 21 Army Group chaplains. They were to assist in the disposal of the frontline dead through the rendering of burial returns and by policing the interment practices of frontline servicemen.<sup>45</sup> A supplementary DGRE publication, produced in conjunction with the Chaplain General's department, contained information designed to assist chaplains in the fulfilment of these duties, although some of it was ambiguous. One section read: '[n]o chaplain should undertake the duties of O i/c [Officer in charge] at exhumations. If, for any reason, he is compelled to do so, he must ensure that the duties are properly performed, and must personally identify the bodies.'<sup>46</sup> Included elsewhere in this publication were denominational alternatives to the generic Protestant burial service printed in the 1926 and 1932 editions of the *Field Service Pocket Book*; a Jewish interment service; and a directive on despatching condolence letters to relatives of the dead.<sup>47</sup>

## Section II: Frontline Burial Practice

- The British Expeditionary Force (BEF) in France, 1939-1940

The death of Lieutenant P. A. C. Everitt of the Royal Norfolk Regiment on 7 January 1940, coming as it did in the relative calm of the Phoney War, shocked those who witnessed it. When his men returned to camp they announced: 'Lieutenant Everitt's just been shot out of a tree, we've had to leave him and run!'<sup>48</sup> In time his body was

<sup>45</sup> TNA, PRO WO 219/1374, 21 Army Group Standing Orders, Section VIII, Graves.

<sup>46</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/4474, Instructions for Chaplains, circa March 1944.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*; *Field Service Pocket Book Part 1, Countries Other Than India, 1926*, (London: HMSO, 1926), Appendix VI, pp. 284-5; *Field Service Pocket Book, 1932*, (London: HMSO, 1932), Appendix VIII, pp. 247-8.

<sup>48</sup> Peter Hart, *At the Sharp End, From Le Paradis to Kohima: 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion The Royal Norfolk Regiment*, (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 1998), p. 38; *The Half-Yearly Army List: January 1940*, (London: HMSO, 1940), p. 1098.

recovered and Everitt, the first British officer killed in France during the Second World War, was accorded a full military funeral complete with its associated pomp and spectacle. In contrast, four months later Ted Mitchell Smith, signals officer with the Seaforth Highlanders, battled exhaustion and hunger to bury three comrades killed at Zillebeke as his unit fought to withdraw towards Dunkirk. He had just enough time to dig graves and to fashion a makeshift cross from a bottle and stick, but not to hold a service or attend to the other Seaforth dead.<sup>49</sup> Necessity dictated that they were left unburied.

This was the fate of many of the BEF dead. One officer recalled the twisted corpses that lay on the roads leading to Dunkirk, a second the discarded equipment and exposed bodies on the beaches at the end of the evacuation in June 1940.<sup>50</sup> A third, Captain 'Gun Buster', testified to the permeating 'stench of blood and mutilated flesh' at Dunkirk, remembering that '[t]here was no escape from it. Not a breath of air was blowing to dissipate the appalling odour that arose from the dead bodies that had been lying on the sand, in some cases for several days. We might have been walking through a slaughter-house on a hot day.'<sup>51</sup> The campaign in France, and with it the bodies of the dead, were lost to the enemy.<sup>52</sup>

- The Keren Battlefield, 1941

At Dunkirk there was no time to bury the dead, whereas on the Keren battlefield in Eritrea in 1941 members of the West Yorkshire Regiment had time but no space to

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<sup>49</sup> Jim Stockman, *Seaforth Highlanders: A Fighting Soldier Remembers, (1939-45)*, (Somerton: Crecy, 1987), pp. 49-50.

<sup>50</sup> Peter Hadley, *Third Class to Dunkirk: A Worm's-Eye View of the B.E.F., 1940*, (London: Hollis and Carter, 1944), p. 134; Patrick Wilson, *Dunkirk: From Disaster to Deliverance*, (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2000), p. 128.

<sup>51</sup> Gun Buster, *Return Via Dunkirk*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1941), p. 245.

<sup>52</sup> Major L. F. Ellis, *The War in France and Flanders, 1939-1940*, (London: HMSO, 1953), p. 246.

bury theirs. They would wait for dark each night in order to negate the threat of snipers, and then throw the corpses from the hill on which they, and the cadavers, were trapped.<sup>53</sup> While this brought the men temporary respite from the stench and the flies, the dead simply accrued between and behind the frontlines as the engagement wore on. Peter Cochrane, who served with the Cameron Highlanders at Keren, remembered that: '[t]he corpses .. had been smelling to heaven since the second day of the battle; we tried to bury our dead, but explosions dug them up again, while the Italian and Indian and British bodies in the ravine in front of the Ridge just lay there, swelling.'<sup>54</sup> These, he continued, 'passed the stage of looking ludicrous or pathetic and reached that of the grotesque – when the normally loose uniform of shirt and shorts was filled to bursting point, every seam strained, by the tumid body inside, the skin shining as it was stretched tighter and tighter'.<sup>55</sup> It was only when the fighting ended and victory had been won that the Cameron Highlanders were able to traverse the battlefield and bury their comrades. Corpses were interred where they were found.

- The North African Campaign, 1941-43

Elsewhere in Africa, the Eighth Army found it difficult to attend to its dead in the face of an advancing enemy. As his Royal Artillery unit retreated eastwards across the Western Desert to El Alamein in June 1942, Henry Ritchie saw 'stricken crushed

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<sup>53</sup> Ronald Lewin (ed.), *The War on Land 1939-1945: An Anthology of Personal Experience*, (London: Vintage, 2007), p. 75.

<sup>54</sup> Peter (James A.) Cochrane, *Charlie Company: In Service with C Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders, 1940-44*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1977), pp. 66-7. Artillery fire also threatened the dead in another way. Exploding shells sometimes started bush and scrub fires that incinerated corpses before they could be retrieved. For example, see Christopher Bulteel, *Something about a Soldier: The Wartime Memoirs of Christopher Bulteel, MC*, (Shrewsbury: Airlife, 2000), p. 206.

<sup>55</sup> Cochrane, *Charlie Company*, p. 66.

tanks and vehicles with the bodies of men raw and bloody from violent death', recalling that there was 'a smell like a decaying sick room, of blood drying in the sun and corpses with half eaten faces, bloated bodies sprawling ungainly and awkward'.<sup>56</sup> Norman Craig, of the Royal Sussex Regiment, remembered that from some of the destroyed tanks and vehicles that were strewn across the desert 'oozed the sweet, sickly scent of scorched human flesh'.<sup>57</sup> When Duncan McGregor and a colleague from the Royal Armoured Corps thought to bury the remains of a British officer, they came under attack from a nearby German position and were forced to withdraw before the job was begun.<sup>58</sup>

Nonetheless, some burials were made in retreat. When this was done under fire there rarely was time for soldiers to choose the position of a grave or even to take note of the identity of a corpse. Bodies were rolled into hollows or scraped into groundsheets and covered with sand and dirt.<sup>59</sup> During lulls in fighting, however, more time could be found to inter the dead. When two members of their company were killed in a bomb blast near Sollum, Robert John Crawford and his colleagues took the corpses to Halfaya Pass for burial. The dead, he recalled, were interred 'with their faces pointing towards England. We painted little white wooden crosses and placed them on the graves. The crosses bore their names, numbers, arm of Service and the date ... At the foot of each grave we placed a tin helmet'.<sup>60</sup>

Once retreat was turned into advance in North Africa, it became easier, and safer, for the Eighth Army to attend to its dead. After the victory at El Alamein in late

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<sup>56</sup> Henry R. Ritchie, *The Fusing of the Ploughshare: From East Anglia to Alamein, The Story of a Yeoman at War*, (Dunmow: Privately Published, 1987), p. 208.

<sup>57</sup> Norman Craig, *The Broken Plume: A Platoon Commander's Story, 1940-45*, (London: IWM, 1982), p. 65.

<sup>58</sup> Duncan McGregor, *A Desert Rat in Holburn Street*, (Buchan: Ardo, 1994), p. 41.

<sup>59</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Lieutenant S. Breen to Lieutenant Colonel R. H. Hoffman, 4 June 1943.

<sup>60</sup> Robert John Crawford, *I was an Eighth Army Soldier*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1944), p. 26.

1942, the threat of being attacked or overrun by the enemy was reduced and this allowed officers to deploy soldiers on burial duty with greater regularity and in more confidence.<sup>61</sup> Sometimes there was even the opportunity for soldiers to mourn the dead. Major H. P. Samwell and his troops suspended their pursuit of the enemy across Libya to inter a signaller who had trodden on a mine. He was buried in a marked grave and the company padre conducted a funeral for the assembled men. Samwell remembered that the service was impressive and moving, not least because they had time to bury the man well and to lament his death.<sup>62</sup>

- The Italian Campaign, 1943-44

When the war moved to Italy in 1943, the strength of enemy resistance, coupled with the mountainous terrain over which many of the battles were waged, regularly conspired to keep the opposing armies in such close proximity that it was extremely dangerous to collect and bury the dead. For some this was no deterrent. During an engagement near the Garigliano River in January 1944, David Cole watched several of his Inniskilling comrades shovel the pieces of their dead into a blanket and throw the resulting bundle into a shallow ditch.<sup>63</sup> When Alex Bowlby and three fellow Greenjacket riflemen collected the body of a comrade from the frontlines near to Orlando, they simply entrusted their safety to the chivalry of the enemy. The men, who were not fired upon by watching German soldiers, used a camouflage smock to

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<sup>61</sup> For examples, see IWM, 99/16/1, Major A. F. Flatow; R. L. Crimp, *The Diary of a Desert Rat*, (London: Leo Cooper, 1971), p. 190; Major Peter W. Rainier, *Pipelline to Battle*, (London: William Heinemann, 1944), p. 186.

<sup>62</sup> Major H. P. Samwell, M.C., *An Infantry Officer with the Eighth Army: The Personal Experiences of an Infantry Officer during the Eighth Army's Campaign through Africa and Sicily*, (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1945), p. 98.

<sup>63</sup> Sir David Cole, *Rough Road to Rome: A Foot-Soldier in Sicily and Italy, 1943-44*, (London: William Kimber, 1983), pp. 152-3.

ferry the corpse back to the clearing where the unit was stationed. The company major read an impromptu burial service and another man made a cross for the isolated mountain grave from the pieces of an old box.<sup>64</sup>

Other servicemen were more cautious about attending to the dead, preferring to work at night when there was some security of movement. Burials made under the cover of darkness were common throughout the Italian campaign. The Reverend John Wallis, who led many nocturnal excursions to locate and bury Royal Marines from 41 Commando, the unit to which he was attached, remembered one particular interment at Salerno as being especially difficult:

[t]he man was lying with his arms outstretched. He was a very large fellow and even to cover his body with the rocky soil of the terraced vineyard was going to be a long job, but his limbs were so stiff that there was no question of folding them into his body. I had the Intelligence Officer with me and a Corporal who knew where the casualties were. We did our best, working as quietly as we could with the entrenching tools because we knew we must be very close to the German lines. We daren't stand up and so we had to work on our knees crouched as low as possible in the moonlight.<sup>65</sup>

Because no corpse was deemed to be worth the life of another soldier, on certain Italian battlefields the collection and burial of the dead was not risked at all.

One such place was at Cassino in 1944. Here the sight of the unburied dead became so common that bodies came to demarcate the battlefield. Cadavers were used both as directional reference points and indicators of minefield boundaries, some soldiers even able to navigate in darkness using the distinctive smells emitted by particular corpses.<sup>66</sup> Philip Brutton served at Cassino with the Welsh Guards. He

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<sup>64</sup> Alex Bowlby, *The Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby*, (London: Cassell, 2002), pp. 189-190.

<sup>65</sup> John Wallis, *With God's Blessing and a Green Beret: A Pilgrimage*, (Poole: Firebird, 1994), p. 50. For another example of a night burial, see Bowlby, *The Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby*, pp. 101-2.

<sup>66</sup> Philip Brutton, *Ensign in Italy: A Story of the Felix Factor: The Nine Lives of a Young Welsh Guards Officer who Fought in Italy with his Regiment from the Ruins of Cassino to the Alps*, (London: Leo Cooper, 1992), p. 32; Cole, *Rough Road to Rome*, p. 199.

remembers that ‘the stink of the town hit one forcibly – the sickly sweet smell of putrefying bodies which were left unburied half under or in the rubble of the rocks and ruined buildings, too dangerous to approach and dig out for decent burial; the stench of urine and human faeces’.<sup>67</sup> Another serviceman recorded in his unit War Diary: ‘[t]he smell of corpses ... was something the troops could not get used to and as it was impossible to organize burial parties, this area will always be remembered for its stench of death.’<sup>68</sup> One brave soldier confronted the seeming impossibility of this situation by venturing forward of the frontline each night to scatter Lysol over the rotting mass of men and mules on which flies, rats and bullfrogs feasted.<sup>69</sup> Although this was no substitute for the interment of the dead, it did bolster morale by helping to prevent the spread of disease and lessen the smell.<sup>70</sup>

Infantryman Ken Bond was one of those detailed to attend to the dead at Cassino once the months of fighting had ended. His selection for this task resulted from the soldiers of the Essex Regiment drawing lots to determine who would return. In addition to interring corpses, the army wanted Bond and his colleagues to establish who among the regimental missing had been killed and who had been taken prisoner, in order that the appropriate administrative steps could be taken and the next-of-kin informed. Bond recalls:

I personally found two chappies from our own lot. They were just lying there all those months after, among many more, including Germans obviously. There were wires everywhere. It was very grisly – maggots and flies going in and out of the bodies. I took dog tags off these two,

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<sup>67</sup> Brutton, *Ensign in Italy*, p. 31.

<sup>68</sup> John Ellis, *Cassino, The Hollow Victory: The Battle for Rome January-June 1944*, (London: Andre Deutsch, 1984), p. 220.

<sup>69</sup> Walter Robson, *Letters From a Soldier*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), p. 102; Matthew Parker, *Monte Cassino: The Story of the Hardest-fought Battle of World War Two*, (London: Headline, 2004), pp. 271-2.

<sup>70</sup> Although rare, truces were occasionally arranged to allow both sides to retrieve their corpses from the battlefield. For examples, see Brutton, *Ensign in Italy*, p. 52; John A. Walker, *Sergeant Jiggy: A True Story*, (Place Unknown: Cosmos, 2002), p. 130.

and brought them back to the company. One was a Bristolian, the other from more up the country in Gloucestershire. I wrote to their mothers, and neither of them had heard a word about what had happened to their sons until I wrote. And they were most, most grateful.<sup>71</sup>

When one of the mothers later asked for more details as to how her son had died, Bond did not tell her 'that he'd had his head blown off.'<sup>72</sup>

- D-Day, 6 June 1944

On D-Day, the ordered and efficient treatment of the British dead was in marked contrast to that seen throughout the Italian campaign. Cecil Newton, who landed with his tank troop on 'Gold' beach on 6 June, saw non-combatant servicemen attending to the dead as waves of combat personnel, all of whom had been instructed to make their way inland as quickly as possible to consolidate the invasion, left the beaches. He recalls: '[s]tretcher-bearers were methodically picking up the corpses and placing them in rows with feet towards the sea; one row for the British and a separate row for the Germans with their boots protruding. The bodies were covered with a large black tarpaulin, the end of which they turned back to receive another body.'<sup>73</sup> The day after the invasion, Harold Addie, a Royal Navy seaman, observed similar purpose and efficiency on 'Juno' beach, remembering that there 'the dead

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<sup>71</sup> Parker, *Monte Cassino*, pp. 364-5.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 365.

<sup>73</sup> Cecil Newton, *A Trooper's Tale*, (Unpublished), p. 26; John Hall, *A Soldier of the Second World War: The Memoirs of a Junior Officer who Fought in the Front Line from 'D' Day in Normandy to V.E. Day with many Individual Infantry and Armoured Regiments of the British, Canadian and Polish Armies*, (Privately Published, 1986), p. 40.

were being dragged along and placed in stacks for collection.<sup>74</sup> This was done mostly by personnel from the Royal Pioneer Corps, as well as some chaplains.<sup>75</sup>

- Bypassing the Dead: the North-west Europe Campaign, 1944-45

As 21 Army Group pressed inland from the Normandy beachhead, the uniformity of method and purpose that characterised the disposal of bodies during the initial landings was less evident.<sup>76</sup> The manner in which the dead were interred, and whether this were done at all, varied between formations. Bruce McCay fought in an infantry unit that, for practical reasons, never buried its dead:

the job of men in a rifle company in an infantry battalion was to fight, and at this period of the war when we were following up a retreating enemy, this meant moving forward to engage them. We spent no more time on eating, sleeping, the dead, and the wounded than was absolutely necessary. The dead were left where they fell.<sup>77</sup>

McCay assumed that the dead were collected and interred in mass graves by a non-combatant formation, possibly the Royal Pioneer Corps which many frontline soldiers believed was responsible for burial.<sup>78</sup> John Hall, who served in the Royal Artillery, recalled: '[b]odies had to be left where they fell. Sometimes if we were

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<sup>74</sup> Robin Neillands and Roderick de Normann, *D-Day 1944: Voices from Normandy*, (London: Cassell, 2001), p. 301.

<sup>75</sup> Major E. H. Rhodes-Wood, *A War History of The Royal Pioneer Corps 1939-1945*, (Aldershot: Gale and Polden, 1960), pp. 231-2; Leslie Skinner, *The Man Who Worked on Sundays*, (Privately Published, Year Unknown), p. 16.

<sup>76</sup> *The Administrative History of the Operations of 21 Army Group on the Continent of Europe: 6 June 1944 - 8 May 1945*, (Unpublished), p. 137.

<sup>77</sup> Letter from McCay to the Author, 16 May 2003. McCay did not wish to name the unit in which he served.

<sup>78</sup> For example, see Stanley Whitehouse and George B. Bennett, *Fear is the Foe: A Footslogger from Normandy to the Rhine*, (London: Robert Hale, 1995), p. 23. While the Pioneer Corps did bury the dead on occasion, as happened during the initial stages of Operation Overlord, this was not its usual work. See *The Administrative History of the Operations of 21 Army Group on the Continent of Europe*, p. 22.

able to do so, a little mound was dug and identified with an item of clothing, but in the heat of battle we had to take care of the living first.<sup>79</sup>

Even where circumstances did allow for frontline servicemen to attend to their dead, some officers preferred to spare soldiers the task to protect their morale. Major John Leytham of the Royal Engineers once forbade his sappers from looking inside an armoured vehicle for their incinerated colleagues. He believed that the remains should be removed by rear echelon personnel for they did not share the same emotional connection to the dead that his men did. Moreover, behind the frontline there was time to spray the walls with creosote and then to scrape away the charred flesh.<sup>80</sup> Stan Brine, who served with the Royal Dragoon Guards throughout the north-west Europe campaign, asserts that his officers deliberately steered the regiment away from its dead in order to preserve individual and unit morale. He states that he ‘never heard the question of how our casualties were to be buried nor who was responsible for them mentioned during any general instructions or briefings.’<sup>81</sup> This custom was all-encompassing for the men also never spoke of the dead.

- The Case of Leslie Skinner and the Sherwood Rangers

Captain Leslie Skinner, padre to the Sherwood Rangers, thought similarly to the officers of the Royal Dragoon Guards. He believed that combat soldiers were subjected to such horrors in battle that they should be spared burial and its associated

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<sup>79</sup> Hall, *A Soldier of the Second World War*, p. 47. See also Geoffrey Picot, *Accidental Warrior: In the Front Line from Normandy till Victory*, (Lewes: Book Guild, 1993), p. 279.

<sup>80</sup> Patrick Delaforce, *Marching to the Sound of Gunfire: North West Europe 1944-5*, (Stroud: Sutton, 2003), pp. 37-8.

<sup>81</sup> Letter from Brine to the Author, 27 May 2003. See also Letter from Brine to the Author, 13 June 2005; Brine, *One Up, Two Up, Brew Up (Book 1)*, p. 126; Brine, *One Up, Two Up, Brew Up (Book 3)*, p. 38.

tasks. The strength with which Skinner held this conviction led him to take the extraordinary step of assuming sole responsibility for attending to his regimental dead throughout the north-west Europe campaign: the interment of corpses, he determined, would be the central tenet of his war service. On 17 August 1944 he recorded in his diary:

8 men killed, 5 still in tanks. Went back to start line then forward along C. Squadron axis. Buried the 3 dead and tried to reach remaining dead in tanks still too hot and burning. Place absolute shambles. [I]nfantry dead and some Germans lying around. Horrible mess. Fearful job picking up bits and pieces and re-assembling for identification and putting in blankets for burial. No infantry to help. Squadron Leader offered to lend me some men to help. Refused. Less men who live and fight in tanks have to do with this side of things the better. They know it happens but to force it on their attention is not good. My job. This was more than normally sick making. Really ill – vomiting. Buried all five in a 43 Div. cemetery being set up at Cross Roads in Berjou.<sup>82</sup>

The mental and physical ailments Skinner suffered from handling the dead only fuelled his conviction that he was right to act as he did. Nor was danger a deterrent.

Another diary entry reads:

[r]ejoined Doc. Went up with CO in jeep to A. Sqdn. Heavy shelling. Hear Birkett and crew buried by Infantry. On foot located brewed up tanks – Watson and Heslewood died of wounds at Dorsets RAP [regimental aid post] – marked grave and buried 2 Infantry left behind by RAP. Only ash and burnt metal in Birkett's tank. Dorsets MO [medical officer] says other members of crew consumed by fire having been KIA [killed in action]. Searched ash and found remains pelvic bones. At other tank three bodies still inside – partly burned and firmly welded together. Managed with difficulty to identify Lt. Campbell. Unable to remove bodies after long struggle – nasty business – sick. C. Sqdn still wanting me for 2 burials, but after three unsuccessful attempts to reach them had to give up. Ground between us and their position too exposed. Heavy fire each time I tried.<sup>83</sup>

No matter the circumstances surrounding the interment of the dead, Skinner always endeavoured to read a service, however brief, over the grave. Thereafter he

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<sup>82</sup> Skinner, *The Man Who Worked on Sundays*, pp. 48-9.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

completed the burial return and any other official paperwork, disposed of all personal and army effects, checked the will to see if there were any last requests the soldier wished fulfilled in the event of death, and wrote to the next-of-kin.<sup>84</sup>

While Skinner was wholly dedicated to providing pastoral care for his men, he refused to follow regulations that he regarded as flawed or not in their interests. He observed that: '[t]he "book" said that for burials "a chaplain could call on five men" – from where? In a forward area that meant asking for a whole tank crew, which was nonsense. [T]o send to the echelon two or three miles back was impracticable.'<sup>85</sup> These views brought conflict with the Senior Corps Chaplain, whom Skinner derided as being without 'a clue what it means to collect and bury casualties in action', but not with the men of the Sherwood Rangers, who admired and were grateful to their padre.<sup>86</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Stanley Christopherson, the regimental commanding officer, did not detail soldiers to help Skinner, respecting his wish to work alone, nor did he issue instructions for the retrieval of the dead when Skinner was wounded and invalided away from the Sherwood Rangers for a month.<sup>87</sup> It was during this period that all but one of the men posted as missing by the regiment during the first months of the north-west Europe campaign disappeared.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-1; Stuart Hills, *By Tank into Normandy: A Memoir of the Campaign in North-West Europe from D-Day to VE Day*, (London: Cassell, 2003), p. 90. Other regimental officers also penned letters to next-of-kin, but only Skinner wrote to the families of every man that was killed.

<sup>85</sup> Skinner, *The Man Who Worked on Sundays*, p. 100. It is unclear which publication Skinner meant by the 'book'.

<sup>86</sup> Skinner, *The Man Who Worked on Sundays*, p. 51. Stuart Hills, an officer in the Sherwood Rangers, recalled that 'Padre Skinner was constantly at odds with the chaplain establishment.' See Hills, *By Tank into Normandy*, pp. 201-2.

<sup>87</sup> Skinner, *The Man Who Worked on Sundays*, pp. 25, 71-2, 101. While helping an injured soldier on 25 June 1944, a piece of shrapnel struck Skinner across the forehead. Despite his protestations, he was ordered to England to recover from his wound. See Skinner, *The Man Who Worked on Sundays*, pp. 29-30; *The Guardian*, 21 November 2001.

<sup>88</sup> *The Guardian*, 21 November 2001.

Figure 1



Leslie Skinner. His Sherwood Rangers comrade, Stuart Hills, described Skinner as 'a remarkable and much-loved man.' See Hills, *By Tank into Normandy*, pp. 89-90. (Photograph courtesy of the Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry Museum, and reproduced with its kind permission.)

- Burying the Dead: The North-west Europe Campaign, 1944-45

For many other combat soldiers in 21 Army Group, burying the dead was a part of frontline service. In the company of the King's Own Scottish Borderers in which Lieutenant Peter White served, the unit culture was such that personnel volunteered for burial duties or effected interment unprompted. After one particular engagement, he found the major in command of the company burying two men from headquarters, while in an adjacent field other members of the unit could be seen interring comrades.<sup>89</sup> On a separate occasion, White was able to procure volunteers from his platoon to help him collect their dead despite the fact that several of the men were, he remembered, 'part bomb happy with exhaustion and blast and shook with cold and fear'.<sup>90</sup>

For others attending to the dead was a matter of following orders. Rex Flower, a Yorkshire Light Infantryman, was a member of a party sent to collect and bury the bodies of twenty-six soldiers killed six days earlier in a failed attack on a farm. The dead men, including several from Flower's unit, had been lying in the sun since then. He recalls:

[t]he stench was awful. Indescribable. It was a terrible thing to see them, that had been young men in the prime of their life. There was the inevitable dead cattle and horses, also a number of dead Germans grotesque in their tight fitting helmets. Their heads were swollen larger than their helmets, so that there was a large overlap. It was a charnel house. We started on the right. The first was a Sgt from the Hallams. The enemy had a nasty habit of putting grenades under corpses (even their own). When someone came to bury the body, instead of burying him, they joined him. They were lousy swine. The Padre and the Warrant Officer i/c [in charge] had brought a

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<sup>89</sup> Peter White, *With the Jocks: A Soldier's Struggle for Europe 1944-45*, (Stroud: Sutton, 2003), p. 243. Infantryman R. M. Wingfield observed that slow and apathetic digging always indicated that a soldier was preparing a grave rather than a slit trench. See R. M. Wingfield, *The Only Way Out: An Infantryman's Autobiography of the North-West Europe Campaign August 1944-February 1945*, (London: Hutchinson, 1955), p. 46.

<sup>90</sup> White, *With the Jocks*, p. 139.

rope. The corpses were pulled out gently and buried in shallow graves as the earth was baked solid.<sup>91</sup>

The interment of the British frontline dead was also the duty of the thousands of German prisoners-of-war (POW) ordered into burial parties as labourers. Many of the British dead from the north-west Europe campaign, if not the majority, were buried in graves dug by German POWs.<sup>92</sup>

The challenges which confronted those who attended to the dead were physical as well as emotional. A witness to a tank clearance recalled: '[a]n armour piercing shot on one side [had] pierced the turret; the opposite side where it had emerged was splayed out like the petals of a tulip. Ropes were being used to pull the remains out of the turret hatch; the bodies bent, charred, angular and rigid were difficult to remove.'<sup>93</sup> Similar problems were presented by corpses frozen stiff by snow or, in the first three days after death, *rigor mortis*. Decay presented the opposite problem, dissolving the corpse and rendering the handling of the viscous remains – likened by Tom King, a stretcher bearer in the infantry, to 'sacks of crimson jelly' – almost impossible.<sup>94</sup> The stench of bodies in this state was such that

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<sup>91</sup> Delaforce, *Marching To The Sound of Gunfire*, pp. 88-9. In Hoven Woods, Sydney Jary, a subaltern in the Somerset Light Infantry, was instructed by a senior officer not to attempt the burial of the dead for fear that some of the British corpses had been booby-trapped by retreating German forces. See Sydney Jary, *18 Platoon*, (Bristol: Sydney Jary Limited, 1994), p. 83.

<sup>92</sup> Bob Price, *What Did You Do in the War, Grandpa?: Memories of a Young Gunner, Two Weeks' Territorial Camp Which Lasted Seven Years, 1939-1946*, (Woolhampton: Watermill, 1989), p. 117. In August 1944, 21 Army Group headquarters was given permission to keep up to 40,000 POWs in the north-west Europe theatre for use as labourers. This was permitted under Article 27 of the 1929 Geneva Convention which stated: '[b]elligerents may employ as workmen prisoners of war who are physically fit, other than officers and persons of equivalent status, according to their rank and their ability.' See *The Administrative History of the Operations of 21 Army Group on the Continent of Europe*, p. 56; *Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War*, Geneva, 27 July 1929, Section III, Chapter 1, Article 27.

<sup>93</sup> Newton, *A Trooper's Tale*, p. 50.

<sup>94</sup> Whitehouse and Bennett, *Fear is the Foe*, p. 168.

servicemen were known to urinate on their handkerchiefs and then tie them over their faces to combat the smell.<sup>95</sup>

At other times there was little of a man left to bury. An infantryman who saw a fellow private encircled by shells during fighting outside Cleve described what was left of him: '[h]is scalp was stuck on the wall two feet over the door. His head was hanging by the skin of the back of his neck. One leg and one arm were missing and the remaining leg was shattered. His wrist was hanging by a bit of skin. His intestines were in a heap covered by his body.'<sup>96</sup> These remains were collected in a blanket, interment to be made when time permitted.

The difficulties of transporting corpses, and the pressures of combat, made it difficult for servicemen to bury the dead in any place other than where they were found. John Watney described the scene as his unit approached the frontline in Normandy:

the countryside presented an appearance of complete desolation; telegraph poles lay at all angles against the trees, while the lines wound in and out of each other like huge shattered spider-webs; burnt out tanks, smelling of putrefaction, lay by the roadside where they had skidded to their death; beside them a neat line of white crosses marked the place where their crews lay buried; houses, shaken by bursting shells, spilled their tiles over the earth; gardens, full of broken apple trees, sheltered the crude crosses [sic] hurriedly placed over newly dug graves. The sudden sight of these graves had a saddening affect on us; there was no telling where they would be found; some of them rested alone in the wheatfields and orchards with nothing but two bare sticks and a camouflaged helmet to show that a man was buried there; many were grouped together in tens, twenties, thirties, fifties; on some a name was printed, on others, nothing; a few carried the words: 'A German'; some already had flowers on them.<sup>97</sup>

Raymond Mitchell saw numerous shallow graves scattered near to Caen. He remembers: '[s]ome were alone – perhaps an infantryman killed as he moved

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<sup>95</sup> Bob Sheridan, *What Did You Do in the War, Dad?*, (Lewes: Book Guild, 1993), p. 241.

<sup>96</sup> Delaforce, *Marching to the Sound of Gunfire*, pp. 191-2.

<sup>97</sup> John Watney, *The Enemy Within: A Personal Impression of the Invasion of Normandy 1944*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1946), p. 186.

forward – while others lay in small groups, probably the crew of a field gun or tank. Each grave was marked with a rough cross or simply by a rifle thrust muzzle first into the ground and topped with a steel helmet to indicate “ours” or “theirs”.<sup>98</sup> John Stirling was alarmed to find that the grave of his friend, which he and two colleagues found hidden in a copse, was no more than ‘a wretched little earth patch with a cross of sticks holding his label.’<sup>99</sup> For fear that it would be lost in its ramshackle state, the men built around it a distinctive brick border and then, as Stirling recalled, ‘we got a piece of wood and scratched his name deep into it with a pencil, in the hope that it might preserve the sanctity of the spot until the Graves Commission [sic] arrived to do its job.’<sup>100</sup>

If any of the men so interred had been accorded a funeral, it was probably brief, there being a correlation between the formality of funerals and the aesthetics of frontline graves. During the battle for Normandy, Lieutenant Geoffrey Bishop, 23<sup>rd</sup> Hussars, attended a brief and informal ceremony for a colleague killed the previous day. He recalled: ‘[r]eveille was at 4.30 the next morning. At 0730 the Padre, haggard and unshaven, takes the burial service for Bob. All his friends are there. No other sound save the twittering of the birds greeting this sad morning. We make a simple wooden cross and Bob’s beret is placed on it.’<sup>101</sup> Still, it was the rendering of such ceremonies where they were possible, rather than the form

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<sup>98</sup> Raymond Mitchell, *Commando Despatch Rider: From D-Day to Deutschland 1944-45*, (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2001), p. 84. See also Jim Driscoll, *Stand to Your Horses: Recollections of a Tank Driver in the 4<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> Royal Dragoon Guards*, (Unpublished), p. 17.

<sup>99</sup> John Stirling, *D-Day to VE-Day from my Tank Turret: A Personal Account, Written Between D-Day 1944 and May 1945*, (Unpublished), p. 45.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Delaforce, *Marching To The Sound of Gunfire*, p. 49.

Figure 2



A grave in France.

they took, that most soldiers held to be important. Denomination, for instance, was rarely recognised by those who served at the frontline.<sup>102</sup>

- The Burial of the RAF Dead, 1939-45

The burial of British aircrew was mostly done by European civilians and German soldiers. This was because the bodies of the RAF dead, if they did not disappear into the sea, tended to fall behind enemy lines in Europe where the air war was concentrated and the risk of casualties highest. It was inevitable that the bodies of many RAF personnel would lie out of reach of other British servicemen, for Germany marked the frontline from the first day of the air war to the last.<sup>103</sup>

It was a curious aspect of the war that this worked to the advantage of the Air Ministry. For those civilians living under German subjugation on the Continent, burying RAF aircrew was a way in which to demonstrate solidarity and compassion with the British cause, and passively to protest the occupation of their countries. A letter sent by a Frenchwoman to the mother of a British airman with news of his death and in appreciation of ‘all that has been done in the defence of France by the glorious English R.A.F.’, illustrates these sentiments:

[y]our son was attacked by eight enemy planes – fighters and bombers. He held his own for a half-hour before his plane broke up ... and he fell on a path over which the Boches were expected (Dunkirk). We fetched a carriage and brought his body to hide in the house until they had gone by .... [w]e buried him wrapped in his parachute in a cemetery near by. He had been killed instantly by one bullet before he fell – he did not suffer. I assure you as a mother and a Frenchwoman no German hand touched him. I look after his grave, and with my husband and children visit it and put fresh flowers on it regularly. The plants are arranged so that there will

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<sup>102</sup> George Blake, *Mountain and Flood: The History of the 52<sup>nd</sup> (Lowland) Division, 1939-1946*, (Glasgow: Jackson, Son and Company, 1950), p. 217; Skinner, *The Man Who Worked on Sundays*, p. 48.

<sup>103</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Meeting Minutes, 9 September 1948.

always be a succession of blooms – all that I would do if he were my own son.<sup>104</sup>

The bodies and graves of other RAF personnel were tended with equivalent levels of care and devotion throughout occupied Europe. Edith Pritchard's son was killed in June 1941 when his aircraft crashed in Danish waters on its return from a mission to Kiel. After the war Mrs Pritchard received from a Danish villager a letter containing news of her son's burial:

Dear unknown relations of the English airman Pritchard, [w]ith the deepest feelings of compassion I send you, who are unknown to me, a last message from the airman Pritchard. Pritchard's body was washed to our beautiful shore one fine summer's day in 1941. Gently he was – by Danish hands – put on the grass, and soon the ground all around him was decorated with flowers – red ones, white ones, blue ones – for we knew indeed that he was a friend of ours, although unknown to us. We should have liked to bury him ourselves in Danish earth. But the Germans came to take charge of the funeral. We were not allowed to decorate the tomb with wreaths and flowers, because in this way we showed our sympathy with the English. Nevertheless flowers and wreaths appeared there, more than the Germans could take away, and at last they gave up. Now the tomb is decorated by friendly hands – as if it were one of our own, especially at Church festivals and every Saturday evening throughout the summer – as is the custom in this country. Pritchard fell for his country in the fight against Nazi tyranny, but he also fell for our freedom. So we are thankful to him, and to you, that are unknown to us.<sup>105</sup>

While German authorities often resented the attention lavished on dead British aircrew, they rarely opposed civilians disposing of the bodies if it were done under their supervision. When a RAF bomber was shot down over Rheims in April 1943, German officials issued instructions for the interment of the crew members. The local mayor recalled:

[t]he Germans told me to bury the bodies where they lay. But, after some difficulties, I was able to arrange for the airmen to be put in coffins and buried in our cemetery. The coffins, alas, were rather humble; they were made by myself and another inhabitant of my commune. A German military party rendered homage to the seven dead, and one of the party

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<sup>104</sup> *The Times*, 29 May 1945.

<sup>105</sup> *The Times*, 17 September 1946.

made the following speech: '[h]ere lie together a team of seven English soldiers. We salute them. They died in doing their duty to their country. We, too, will do ours.' Then gun-shots were fired. A large crowd of French people were at the cemetery. They all brought flowers.<sup>106</sup>

Allowing civilians to bury the RAF dead meant that German soldiers were spared a task that was necessary for the preservation of community hygiene, and mandatory under the stipulations of international law and German army regulations.<sup>107</sup>

It was only in the latter stages of the war that British servicemen, mostly soldiers, came to have any particular involvement in the burial of the RAF dead. Even then this was restricted, for it remained that aircraft were most likely to crash behind enemy lines. Fraser McLuskey served as a padre with the Special Air Service in France in 1944. When a Halifax aircraft crashed near where his unit was camped behind German lines, he and his men were able to retrieve the personal possessions of the crew before the German authorities learnt of the crash and arrived at the scene. The Germans placed the corpses in coffins and drove them to a cemetery in the nearby village of Marigny L'Église for burial. Some days after the bodies had been interred, and once he could be assured of relative safety, McLuskey decided to travel to the cemetery: 'I went up with a section of our own men to conduct a service of commemoration. I think every man, woman and child in the parish must have turned up. The little cemetery was packed with the villagers, all dressed in their Sunday best.'<sup>108</sup> Despite the risks involved to their congregation, all the locals stayed after the service to place bouquets of flowers on the graves. Nor were such actions

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<sup>106</sup> *Sunday Express*, 12 August 1945. Paul Fussell has argued that the ordered burial of enemy dead by the major belligerents was more probable early in the war when chivalric notions of the conflict were common. He suggests that once such sentiment dissipated, the dead were afforded less time and respect. See Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 11.

<sup>107</sup> TNA, PRO WO 287/122, German Field Regulations (Translation), Part II, circa 1934.

<sup>108</sup> J. Fraser McLuskey M.C., *Parachute Padre: Behind German Lines with the SAS: France 1944*, (Stevenage: SPA Books, 1985), p. 97.

isolated. As 21 Army Group advanced across north-west Europe, it found everywhere the beautifully-kept graves of British airmen covered in flowers.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> *French Tribute to Six Dead Airmen*, Air Ministry News Service Bulletin 17214, 30, 23 January 1945. See also *Airmen's Graves in Norway*, Air Ministry News Service Bulletin 19066, 23, 20 June 1945; *Manchester Guardian*, 1 July 1944; *Sunday Express*, 13 August 1944; *Daily Mirror*, 2 November 1944; *The Times*, 9 November 1945; *Evening Standard*, 30 September 1947; *Viroslay* Despatch by Alan Melville, WRU 4117, Number 240, 1 November 1944; *Day of the Dead* Despatch by Pierre Le Fevre, WRU 4157, Number 225, 3 November 1944.

## *Part Two*

### **Chapter Two**

#### **The Origins of the Army Graves Organisation and the First Stage of Army Graves Operations, September 1939-June 1944**

##### Section I: The DGRE and the AGS in the First World War

- The Founding of a Graves Service

Fabian Ware was forty-five when the Great War began.<sup>1</sup> Precluded by age from enlisting in the British army, he joined the Red Cross, travelling to Lille in north-eastern France in September 1914 to assume command of a group of fellow volunteers. These men, many of whom were middle-aged like Ware, together developed an interest in finding and identifying British graves, an endeavour for which no other civilian or military formation had assumed responsibility.<sup>2</sup> Using the information and assistance provided by mayoral officials, churchmen and interested civilians to locate burial sites, Red Cross Mobile Unit A, as their group came to be known, saw to it that each British grave was marked with a sturdy wooden cross and the name of the dead man painted clearly on it.<sup>3</sup>

Ware and his colleagues soon discovered that the work of finding and marking graves was beset by three significant difficulties. First, the Red Cross had no agreement with the British army to search for its dead. This meant that its

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<sup>1</sup> A. J. A. Morris, 'Sir Fabian Arthur Goulstone Ware' in H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: From the Earliest Times to the Year 2000*, Volume 57, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 382-3.

<sup>2</sup> CWGC, 2028, Red Cross Memorandum, circa autumn 1914; CWGC, 2029, Ware to Arthur Stanley, 13 April 1915, CWGC, 2029, Red Cross Memorandum, circa spring 1915.

<sup>3</sup> *Reports by the Joint War Committee and the Joint War Finance Committee of the British Red Cross Society and The Order of St. John of Jerusalem in England: On Voluntary Aid Rendered to the Sick and Wounded at Home and Abroad and to British Prisoners of War, 1914-1919, with Appendices*, (London: HMSO, 1921), p. 321; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 3.

personnel could only reach the frontline if local military commanders, many of whom were reluctant to allow unarmed civilians into operational areas, agreed to grant them access. Ware, a powerful personality and fluent in French, had won some concessions from the military authorities in this regard, but this was no basis on which to plan operations in the longer term.<sup>4</sup> Second, supply was proving a significant problem. The personnel of Mobile Unit A, isolated from the other Red Cross formations working in France, had resorted to buying and begging food and provisions from civilians.<sup>5</sup> Third, the men lacked suitable and sufficient transport. While they did have the use of some Red Cross ambulances, their other vehicles were the same private cars in which several of the volunteers had driven themselves to the war.<sup>6</sup> If the work of marking British graves were to be continued on a meaningful scale, an institution or organisation to invest administrative and logistical support was required.

This backing came in October 1914 after Ware convinced Lieutenant General Sir Nevil Macready, Adjutant General to the BEF, of the merit of marking and maintaining graves and the need for a specialist, officially-sanctioned organisation to complete this work.<sup>7</sup> Later that month Macready granted Red Cross personnel access

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<sup>4</sup> *Reports by the Joint War Committee and the Joint War Finance Committee of the British Red Cross Society and The Order of St. John of Jerusalem in England*, pp. 359-60; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, pp. 2, 5; General the Rt. Hon. Sir Nevil Macready, Bart., G.C.M.G., K.C.B., *Annals of an Active Life*, (London: Hutchinson, 1924), Volume I, p. 220.

<sup>5</sup> CWGC, 2029, Sir Arthur Lawley Note, 20 October 1914; CWGC, 2029, Red Cross Authorisation Note to Ware, 24 November 1914; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> CWGC, 2028, Red Cross Memorandum, circa autumn 1914; CWGC, 2029, GRC Staff List, circa autumn 1915.

<sup>7</sup> *Imperial War Conference, 1917: Extracts from Minutes of Proceedings and Papers Laid Before the Conference*, (London, 1917), p. 35; *The Quarterly Army List: January 1915*, (London: HMSO, 1915), pp. 28-9; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 5; Fabian Ware, *The Immortal Heritage: An Account of the Work and Policy of The Imperial War Graves Commission During Twenty Years, 1917-1937*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), p. 24. In his memoirs, Macready states that he had already decided on the need for such an organisation before Ware came to see him. This claim is supported by other evidence. Indeed, it is known that Macready had been greatly disappointed by the manner in which the British dead were attended to during the Boer War. See TNA, PRO WO

to the office of the DAG with responsibility for casualty records, and in November a further level of cooperation was reached when the Army Council agreed to share its information on missing British soldiers.<sup>8</sup> Deciding how the proposed graves organisation should be governed and staffed proved more difficult. By the new year Macready had yet to determine whether Ware or one of his Red Cross colleagues, namely Lord Cecil or Colonel Ian Malcolm, should be given his imprimatur to establish the new body, although he was aware of the need for a decision.<sup>9</sup>

In January 1915 the following passage was published, anonymously, in *The Times*:

[t]en days ago a lady friend of ours left for a town not many miles north of Paris, which had been the scene of heavy fighting in September last. She desired to visit the grave of her brother, an officer in our Army. Comrades in his regiment had given her particulars of the exact locality and even described the temporary wooden cross and its inscription, erected over the grave. She found the place, where quite a number of victims had been interred, but every trace of the identifying crosses or other marks had disappeared. I will not dwell on the distress of our friend, and my sole object in approaching you is to point out that there must be thousands of similar painful cases. I do not know which department of the War Office could remedy this state of affairs by providing a more permanent identification mark for graves than the two battens, generally taken from packing-cases, which are now mostly used.<sup>10</sup>

Macready had to act to assuage the concerns of this correspondent and others who felt similarly and, knowing that public interest in the treatment of those killed would not be transient, to do so in such a way as ‘to safeguard the Government when the

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32/9433, Meeting Minutes, 25 September 1916; *Twenty-sixth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, (London: HMSO, 1946), p. 12; Macready, *Annals of an Active Life*, Volume I, pp. 220-1.

<sup>8</sup> *Reports by the Joint War Committee and the Joint War Finance Committee of the British Red Cross Society and The Order of St. John of Jerusalem in England*, p. 359.

<sup>9</sup> CWGC, 2029, Malcolm to Ware, 11 March 1915; CWGC, 2029, Ware Visit to Paris, 22 March 1915; CWGC, 2028, Malcolm to Unnamed, 6 December 1916.

<sup>10</sup> *The Times*, 9 January 1915.

public should require an account of their stewardship towards the honoured dead'.<sup>11</sup>

In February he selected Ware as the man to lead the new organisation and accorded Mobile Unit A, known as the Graves Registration Commission (GRC) after its inauguration, sole authority for tracing and marking the graves of British servicemen in France.<sup>12</sup> Its staff members, who numbered approximately twelve at its formation, were to register the location and identity of graves, mark their positions with wooden crosses, maintain the order of these sites, and help to establish and configure war cemeteries.<sup>13</sup>

The GRC was only in part incorporated into the army. The Adjutant General's department, to which it had been attached, supplied food, covered the costs of registering graves, and authorised GRC personnel to pass freely within army lines, but its transport and personnel requirements continued to be met by the Red Cross: for example, the onus for securing new recruits fell on Ware.<sup>14</sup> Nor was employment

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<sup>11</sup> Macready, *Annals of an Active Life*, Volume I, p. 220. The following was recorded in the minutes of a War Office meeting in September 1916: '[w]hen the matter was originally put to the War Office that they should bring this organization into the army the Adjutant-General [Macready] pointed out that from a purely military point of view the question as to whether bodies were properly buried, and flowers and crosses placed on the graves, did not directly help towards a successful conclusion of the war but that from a national and sentimental point of view the matter was an important one, and in the letter he wrote to the Government he stated that the Army was prepared to start this work. There were great difficulties in getting the consent of the Treasury but this was eventually obtained. He also stated that after the war, when all the present excitement was over, the popular attention which would be paid to the graves would be universal and that if the matter was not placed upon a satisfactory footing an outcry would certainly occur.' See TNA, PRO WO 32/9433, Meeting Minutes, 25 September 1916.

<sup>12</sup> CWGC, 2029, Macready to Malcolm, 27 February 1915; CWGC, 2029, Ware to Arthur Stanley, 2 March 1915; Ware, *The Immortal Heritage*, p. 24.

<sup>13</sup> CWGC, 2029, Ware Memorandum, 3 March 1915; CWGC, 2029, Ware to Arthur Stanley, 13 April 1915; CWGC, 2029, Ware to Arthur Stanley, circa autumn 1915; *Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission, 1919-1920*, (London, 1920), p. 5; Macready, *Annals of an Active Life*, Volume I, p. 221.

<sup>14</sup> CWGC, 2029, Red Cross Memorandum, 12 February 1915; CWGC, 2029, Ware to Arthur Stanley, 2 March 1915; CWGC, 2029, Ware Memorandum, 3 March 1915; CWGC, 2029, Red Cross Report by Colonel Stewart, circa spring 1915; CWGC, 2029, Ware to Arthur Stanley, 13 April 1915; CWGC, 2029, Ware to Arthur Stanley, circa autumn 1915; Macready, *Annals of an Active Life*, Volume I, p. 220. By March 1915, the Red Cross had spent approximately £12,000 on locating, identifying and maintaining graves in France. See *Reports by the Joint War Committee and the Joint War Finance Committee of the British Red Cross Society and The Order of St. John of Jerusalem in England*, p. 361.

in the GRC governed by standard military regulations, Ware himself stating that he selected those men ‘who on account of age or for other reasons are prevented from serving their country as combatants.’<sup>15</sup> The organisation continued to be essentially civilian in character, its operations and personnel mostly not subject to military rules and conventions.<sup>16</sup> Despite the army having made Ware an honorary major and accorded temporary commissions to certain of his staff, all GRC personnel remained Red Cross volunteers.<sup>17</sup>

In an attempt to widen awareness of the GRC within the BEF, and simultaneously to encourage soldiers always to bury the dead, in April 1915 Macready issued a statement advising that an organisation was ‘engaged in identifying the graves of British Officers and Soldiers, and renewing when necessary the inscriptions on tombstones and crosses so as to ensure as far as possible that there shall be no difficulty in identifying the graves of British soldiers.’<sup>18</sup> The publicity worked and thereafter the GRC began to make good progress. By May 4300 graves had been located and marked, and in the following four months this number increased to more than 31,000.<sup>19</sup> The GRC was expanded to cope with its increased workload. At the end of the summer it employed forty-four staff at its Lillers headquarters in northern France and a further sixty-four personnel in the field.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> CWGC, 2029, Ware to Arthur Stanley, 13 April 1915.

<sup>16</sup> CWGC, 2029, Ware Memorandum, 3 March 1915; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>17</sup> CWGC, 2029, British Red Cross Society to Ware, 29 January 1915; CWGC, 2029, Ware Memorandum, 3 March 1915; CWGC, 2029, Ware to Arthur Stanley, 13 April 1915; CWGC, 2033, Personnel List, 1918. Ware was made an honorary major on 22 February 1915.

<sup>18</sup> CWGC, 2033, Macready Statement, 28 April 1915.

<sup>19</sup> CWGC, 2029, Ware to Arthur Stanley, 10 May 1915; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> CWGC, 2029, GRC Establishment, circa autumn 1915; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 8.

- The Establishment of the DGRE

In October 1915 the War Office severed connections between the Red Cross and the GRC and fully incorporated the latter into the army, renaming it the DGRE in February 1916.<sup>21</sup> Ware was installed as its inaugural director, and promoted to Lieutenant Colonel, and his officers accorded General List commissions and placed on the army payroll.<sup>22</sup> In addition, his authority over graves operations was made paramount, a General Routine Order (GRO) confirming that he was ‘responsible for the selection of sites for burial grounds for British officers and men and for the control and supervision of cemeteries, as well as for the work of the Directorate’.<sup>23</sup>

Greater recognition for Ware and the DGRE soon followed. In March General Sir Douglas Haig, the commander of the BEF, praised the work being performed by the DGRE along the Western Front and recorded its ‘extraordinary moral value to the troops in the field as well as to the relatives and friends of the dead at home.’<sup>24</sup> He acknowledged the foresight of such operations, noting ‘that on the termination of hostilities the nation will demand an account from the Government as to the steps which have been taken to mark and classify the burial places of the dead, steps which can only be effectively taken at, or soon after, burial.’<sup>25</sup>

Recognition brought increased demand from the public for information and this, combined with a burgeoning workload, prompted the DGRE to relocate from

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<sup>21</sup> CWGC, 2029, Ware to Arthur Stanley, circa autumn 1915; CWGC, 2033, Ware to Macready, 23 October 1916; CWGC, 2028, Undated and Unsigned Memorandum, circa April 1917; CWGC, 2018, IWGC Meeting 277 Minutes, 17 January 1946; Ware, *The Immortal Heritage*, p. 24; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 17.

<sup>22</sup> CWGC, 2033, Personnel List, 1918; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 17.

<sup>23</sup> TNA, PRO WO 123/200, GRO 1437, 3 March 1916.

<sup>24</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/5846, Haig to War Office, 15 March 1916; *The Quarterly Army List: January 1916*, (London: HMSO, 1916), pp. 11-12.

<sup>25</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/5846, Haig to War Office, 15 March 1916.

Lillers to the War Office in May 1916.<sup>26</sup> The graves organisation was thus split into two branches: the DGRE in London headed by Ware; and a subordinate field arm, the AGS, commanded by Major Arthur Messer.<sup>27</sup> The benefits of moving administrative operations were two-fold: in London Ware was better-placed to receive the support and advice of Macready, who had returned to the War Office the previous February as Adjutant General to the Forces, and there the DGRE could employ women as clerks, thus freeing male staff for service in the field.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, Ware had plans to extend graves operations into the Middle East and the Mediterranean region and this could be more easily done from the War Office.<sup>29</sup> Three months after the relocation he was promoted to Brigadier General – his meteoric rise from civilian volunteer to general reflected the fact that large-scale, organised graves operations were a new and uncertain undertaking – and his administrative position upgraded from Director to that of Director General, a distinction which meant that he reported directly to the Adjutant General at the War Office.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> CWGC, 2033, Ware to Lieutenant General Sir G. H. Fowke, circa May 1916; CWGC, 2033, Ware to Macready, 27 July 1916; CWGC, 2033, Ware to Macready, 27 August 1916; Michael Roper, *The Records of The War Office and Related Departments, 1660-1964*, (Kew: PRO, 1998), p. 142; *The Quarterly Army List: October 1917*, (London: HMSO, 1917), p. 38.

<sup>27</sup> CWGC, 2029, Sir Arthur Lawley to Ware, 23 October 1914; CWGC, 2029, Red Cross Report by Colonel Stewart, circa spring 1915; CWGC, 2033, Macready to GHQ, BEF, 19 May 1916; CWGC, 2033, Messer Memorandum, 1 August 1916; CWGC, 2033, Ware to Macready, 23 October 1916; Ware, *The Immortal Heritage*, Appendix C.

<sup>28</sup> CWGC, 2033, DGRE to Armies in the Field, 8 August 1916; 'The Registration and Care of Military Graves During the Present War', *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, LXII (1917), 297-302; *The Quarterly Army List: April 1916*, (London: HMSO, 1916), pp. 25-6; Macready, *Annals of an Active Life*, Volume I, pp. 234-5; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 17.

<sup>29</sup> CWGC, 2033, Ware to Macready, 27 July 1916; CWGC, 2033, DGRE to Armies in the Field, 8 August 1916; Ware, *The Immortal Heritage*, p. 24.

<sup>30</sup> CWGC, 2033, Personnel List, 1918; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 18; Ware, *The Immortal Heritage*, p. 25.

- The Disbandment of the Graves Organisation

Despite the further expansion of the graves organisation throughout 1916-17 – at one point it employed over 700 personnel across Europe – operations remained incomplete at the time of the Armistice in November 1918.<sup>31</sup> Accordingly, the task of registering graves and, where needed, exhuming and transferring bodies to sites where permanent cemeteries were planned, continued well into peacetime. As Ware observed in 1920, the graves organisation ‘has been very much delayed on account of the additional labour imposed upon them [sic] by the German advance in 1918 and the vastness of the work.’<sup>32</sup> ‘Progress’, he added, ‘has also been much hampered by successive schemes of demobilisation which have seriously interfered with continuity of personnel, so essential in the performance of work of this character.’<sup>33</sup>

By the time the graves organisation was disbanded on 10 September 1921, its personnel had located, marked, and recorded the position and identity of approximately 500,000 graves in north-west Europe alone.<sup>34</sup> With the closing of the DGRE, responsibility for the care of British and Dominion war graves passed to the IWGC.<sup>35</sup> Formed in 1917 and founded and controlled by Ware, this organisation had been conceived in order to tend the graves of the British military dead in perpetuity.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, pp. 18, 22-3.

<sup>32</sup> *Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission, 1919-1920*, p. 9.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* See also *Imperial War Conference, 1918: Extracts from Minutes of Proceedings and Papers Laid Before the Conference*, (London, 1918), p. 228.

<sup>34</sup> *Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission, 1919-1920*, p. 9; *Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission, 1920-1921*, (London: HMSO, 1921), p. 7; Ware, *The Immortal Heritage*, p. 26; *Daily Graphic*, 14 October 1921.

<sup>35</sup> In France and Belgium this transfer of responsibility occurred on 17 March 1921. The IWGC later recorded the total number of British and Dominion graves from the Great War as 767,978. See *Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission, 1919-1920*, p. 9; *Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission, 1920-1921*, p. 7; Ware, *The Immortal Heritage*, p. 26; *Daily Graphic*, 14 October 1921.

<sup>36</sup> CWGC, 1084, IWGC Meeting 36, 20 September 1921.

Figure 3



King George V (second from right) at Tyne Cot Cemetery, Belgium, 1922. Haig stands immediately behind him. The man with hand to chin is Ware.

## Section II: The DGRE and the AGS, September 1938-February 1943

- The Reconstitution of the DGRE

Speaking at a conference in Germany in October 1936, Ware, a knight and titular Major General since 1920, told his audience that if conflict were to break out once more between the European nations it would result in 'wounds so deep that they would defy healing, and in a multitude of graves which the labours of a century

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King George V (second from right) at Tyne Cot Cemetery, Belgium, 1922. Haig stands immediately behind him. The man with hand to chin is Ware.

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could not make beautiful.<sup>37</sup> Although he found the prospect of another war abhorrent, he was sufficiently pragmatic to prepare for conflict once its possibility began to grow. In September 1938 he wrote to Sir Herbert Creedy, Permanent Under Secretary of State for War, proposing his own return to the army for a six month period to plan the reconstitution of the DGRE and the formation and deployment of a graves service.<sup>38</sup> Cognisant that Ware's knowledge of burial policy and practice was unparalleled, Creedy quickly accepted the offer and later that month Ware, still the vice-chairman of the IWGC, returned to the War Office in an unpaid and honorary capacity.<sup>39</sup> He was sixty-nine.

Ware's first task was to resolve the question of staffing the DGRE. With experience but no War Establishment to guide him, he posited its personnel requirements as one regular army officer to serve as Assistant Adjutant General (AAG), a staff captain, and a small number of clerical and administrative workers, one of whom was to be seconded from the IWGC.<sup>40</sup> Thereafter Ware began to identify candidates he thought capable of filling the senior positions in the DGRE. With no serving officers with experience of graves operations from which to choose, he selected the sixty-one year old Earl of Courtown to be his staff captain – a friend of forty years, Courtown had occupied this post during the First World War and had also worked at the IWGC throughout the 1920s – and Colonel A. R. Macallan, a reservist officer and formerly of the Cameronians, as AAG.<sup>41</sup> In preparation for his

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<sup>37</sup> *Seventeenth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, (London: HMSO, 1937), p. 4; *Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission, 1919-1920*, p. 13; CWGC, 2033, Personnel List, 1918; Morris, 'Sir Fabian Arthur Goulstone Ware', p. 383.

<sup>38</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, September 1938.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*; *Twentieth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, (London: HMSO, 1940), p. 7.

<sup>40</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, September 1938.

<sup>41</sup> TCD, P 49/1/363, Viscount Stopford to the Earl of Courtown, 23 September 1915; TCD, P 49/1/408, Viscount Stopford to the Earl of Courtown, 11 November 1916; TCD, P 49/1/441, Viscount

role, Macallan spent one week at the IWGC – there was no relevant military course in which he could be enrolled – learning his duties and responsibilities.<sup>42</sup> On 4 September 1939, the day after war was declared, the DGRE was officially re-formed and installed in accommodation at the London offices of the IWGC with Ware, who had extended indefinitely his attachment to the War Office, as Director General.<sup>43</sup> The three DGRE officers immediately set about raising a service to be responsible for the graves of all British servicemen.<sup>44</sup>

- Raising the (Second) AGS

In early September Numbers 1 and 2 Graves Registration Units (GRU), which Ware intended for service with the BEF, were formed at Aldershot.<sup>45</sup> They were raised on the extant GRU War Establishments, last revised in 1931. These allowed for the employment of officers and men who were unfit for service at the front, and

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Stopford to the Earl of Courtown, 30 September 1918; CWGC, 2024, Viscount Stopford/Earl of Courtown Employment History, 12 February 1940; TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, November 1938, January, June 1939; TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Meeting Minutes, 9 September 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, War Office and IWGC Cooperation, circa 1949; *The Quarterly Army List: July 1940*, (London: HMSO, 1940), pp. 16, 3006. The name of the AAG appears in various documents as Macallan, MacAllan and MacAllen. In this thesis his name is spelt Macallan as it is thought to be the correct spelling.

<sup>42</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, June 1939; TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, War Office and IWGC Cooperation, circa 1949.

<sup>43</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, September 1939; *The Times*, 7 October 1939; *The Quarterly Army List: July 1940*, pp. 16, 1387h. Ware and Courtown were granted emergency commissions on 3 September, and authorisation for two clerical staff to join the DGRE was given on the 8th. Throughout the war the DGRE was known within the War Office as AG13.

<sup>44</sup> The arrangement, accepted unofficially before the war, whereby the army was responsible for registering the graves of sailors and airmen, was formally confirmed by the Air Ministry in September 1939 and by the Admiralty in March 1940. See TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, September 1938, September 1939, March 1940, Appendix V; *Twentieth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 7; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 162. (The date cited by Longworth in this regard is wrong.)

<sup>45</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, September 1939; CWGC, 2033, Memorandum on Graves Services, 17 October 1939; CWGC, 2033, Director General Memorandum, circa December 1939. The War Office used the name 'Graves Registration and Enquiry Unit' to describe its graves registration formations until January 1944 when the title 'Graves Registration Unit' was adopted. Because many of the documents which pre-date the change of name refer to Graves Registration Units, and the fact that the acronym adopted for both titles was GRU, this thesis uses 'Graves Registration Unit' to describe those formations raised before and after January 1944 in order to avoid confusion. See TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, January 1944.

stipulated that each unit should have, in addition to three bicycles and one truck, thirty-eight personnel: one captain, two subalterns, one corporal, three Royal Army Service Corps (RASC) clerks, one RASC driver, two topographical draughtsmen and one photographer from the Royal Engineers, two batmen, one cook, and twenty-four men for general cemetery duties.<sup>46</sup>

Captain W. H. Hine and Lieutenant A. O. Stott, reservist officers of the East Lancashire Regiment and Army Education Corps respectively, were given the commands of Numbers 1 and 2 GRU.<sup>47</sup> Following their appointment, Ware successfully lobbied the War Office for authorisation to send with them to France a Deputy Assistant Director of Graves Registration and Enquiries (DADGRE). This officer, who would be Hine and Stott's superior, would coordinate and control AGS operations on the Continent. Major C. K. Phillips, who had served in the DGRE during the First World War and had also worked for the IWGC as a solicitor throughout the inter-war period, agreed to fill the position.<sup>48</sup>

The DGRE provided the AGS officers with a dossier of information to guide them in the performance of their duties. Included in it were copies of Field Service Regulations and notes on their interpretation, documents detailing the procedures employed by the AGS during the Great War, general information about the DGRE

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<sup>46</sup> TNA, PRO WO 24/933, War Establishment GRE Unit; TNA, PRO WO 24/933, War Establishment GRE L of C Unit; TNA, PRO WO 165/35, War Establishments; TNA, PRO WO 165/35, Notes for Graves Units; CWGC, 2033, Memorandum on Graves Services, 17 October 1939.

<sup>47</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, November 1938, January, September 1939; TNA, PRO WO 165/35, War Establishments; TNA, PRO WO 167/1371, Number 1 GRU War Diary, September-October 1939; TNA, PRO WO 167/1372, Number 2 GRU War Diary, September 1939; CWGC, 2033, Memorandum on Graves Services, 17 October 1939; CWGC, 2033, Director General Memorandum, circa December 1939. While Stott initially held only temporary command on account of his rank, it was soon made permanent.

<sup>48</sup> CWGC, 2021, Phillips Employment Record, 24 March 1921; CWGC, 2021, Memorandum on Appointments, 10 March 1924; CWGC, 2021, IWGC to Phillips, 16 July 1930; CWGC, 2033, Memorandum on Graves Services, 17 October 1939; CWGC, 2033, Hart Memorandum, 4 January 1940; TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, September 1939; *The Quarterly Army List: July 1940*, pp. 87, 1387s.

and the IWGC, and the observation that graves duties ‘require initiative, imagination, and commonsense on the part of the personnel ... qualities which they should be prepared to exercise at all times.’<sup>49</sup> Ware was in no doubt that he had recruited the right men in this regard. In a letter of 9 September to Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain he wrote: ‘[a] number of my old officers have rejoined me in this work and I can count on them to establish links of sympathy, confidence and affection with the relatives of the dead if the units in the Field are anything like as efficient and well equipped as the two first we are sending out.’<sup>50</sup> Ware expressed similar sentiments in a letter sent to Creedy on 19 September: ‘I should like you to know that my Directorate ... is really functioning and doing useful work.’<sup>51</sup> By the end of the month both graves units, Number 1 GRU having been attached to General Headquarters (GHQ) BEF and Number 2 GRU to the army L of C, were settled in France and ready to commence operations.<sup>52</sup>

- Retreat from France

With the British army incurring relatively few casualties in the opening months of the war, the AGS had little to do after its deployment to northern France.<sup>53</sup>

‘Uneventful’ was the most common entry in the War Diary of Number 1 GRU throughout this time, while over the same period Number 2 GRU personnel spent

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<sup>49</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, September 1939; TNA, PRO WO 165/35, Burials and Graves Registration Notes; TNA, PRO WO 165/35, Notes for Graves Units.

<sup>50</sup> CWGC, 2026, Ware to Chamberlain, 9 September 1939.

<sup>51</sup> CWGC, 2033, Ware to Creedy, 19 September 1939.

<sup>52</sup> TNA, PRO WO 167/1371, Number 1 GRU War Diary, September 1939; TNA, PRO WO 167/1372, Number 2 GRU War Diary, September 1939; TNA, PRO WO 165/35, Notes for Graves Units; TNA, PRO WO 73/142, General Return of British Army Strength on 30 September 1939. The thirty-seven personnel of Number 2 GRU left Britain for France on 15 September, the thirty-four men of Number 1 GRU following eleven days later.

<sup>53</sup> Number 1 GRU was based in Candas, Number 2 GRU in Dieppe.

many days cleaning and oiling their rifles.<sup>54</sup> There was time even for a debate as to whether corpses should be interred in blankets or coffins – the return of bodies to Britain having been banned for the course of the war and a definitive ruling on repatriation deferred until its end – with the Adjutant General to the BEF, Lieutenant General Sir Douglas Brownrigg, reporting to the War Office on 20 December that ‘many British officers and other ranks find it repugnant when coffins are not to be used for the burial of their comrades, at any rate, in the back areas and so long as present conditions prevail.’<sup>55</sup> The most significant event for the AGS during this period of extended calm was the raising of Numbers 3 and 4 GRU at Aldershot early in 1940, with the former establishing camp in northern France on 10 May.<sup>56</sup>

The Phoney War ended the same day when German forces invaded the Low Countries. In a letter to Ware on 19 May, an exasperated Phillips described the widespread confusion since the German attack and complained that army headquarters was failing to provide the AGS with adequate instruction or direction.<sup>57</sup> In the event Ware had no time to respond as Numbers 1, 2 and 3 GRU were soon caught up in the scramble to retreat to Dunkirk and, by June, all graves personnel

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<sup>54</sup> TNA, PRO WO 167/1371, Number 1 GRU War Diary, December 1939; TNA, PRO WO 167/1372, Number 2 GRU War Diary, January 1940.

<sup>55</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, November 1939; CWGC, 2033, Brownrigg to War Office, 20 December 1939; *The Half-Yearly Army List: January 1940*, p. 25. In November 1939, the relatives of a dead soldier applied to the DGRE for his remains to be removed from France and transported to Britain for burial. This request was refused on practical grounds, the DGRE informing them that French law prohibited the exhumation of bodies other than for sanitary reasons. Insufficient shipping space was cited as a further reason against repatriation. In December Macallan issued to the BEF a memorandum in which he stated that the exhumation of bodies was prohibited, and that ‘[n]o application for the removal of bodies to the United Kingdom, whether for burial or for re-burial, will be entertained.’ Similarly, the Dominion governments prohibited the repatriation of bodies for the duration of the war. See CWGC, 2033, Macallan Memorandum, December 1939; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 163.

<sup>56</sup> TNA, PRO WO 167/1373, Number 3 GRU War Diary, May 1940; TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, February, June 1940; TNA, PRO WO 73/143, General Return of British Army Strength on 31 December 1939; TNA, PRO WO 73/144, General Return of British Army Strength on 31 March 1940; TNA, PRO WO 167/1370, DADGRE BEF War Diary, February-April 1940; CWGC, 2033, Ware to General Sir Robert Gordon-Finlayson, 12 January 1940; *The Quarterly Army List: July 1940*, p. 1387d. Number 3 GRU made camp at Labuissière. Number 4 GRU never left Britain.

<sup>57</sup> CWGC, 2033, Phillips to Ware, 19 May 1940.

were back in Britain.<sup>58</sup> They had registered a combined 552 graves before their evacuation from France: BEF losses for the campaign totalled 11,010 killed and missing.<sup>59</sup> Later that summer the DGRE, having arranged for Hine and Stott and certain other AGS officers to be posted to Home Commands from where they could easily be recalled, disbanded the four existing graves units and turned its attention to the Middle East.<sup>60</sup>

- The Establishment of the AGS in the Middle East Theatre

The first step towards establishing an AGS presence in the Middle East had been taken soon after the reconstitution of the DGRE in October 1938. In that month Brigadier Sir Herbert Hart, a New Zealander in his mid-fifties working for the IWGC as Deputy Controller and Chief Administrative Officer of its Eastern Area, had agreed with the DGRE to assist its operations in the region in the event of hostilities.<sup>61</sup> In April 1940 further consideration was given to the possibility of founding a Middle East graves service. At the behest of the DGRE and with the concurrence of GHQ Middle East Force (MEF), Colonel J. K. Edwards, a War Office Liaison Officer, was given the task of determining the merits and viability of

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<sup>58</sup> TNA, PRO WO 167/1371, Number 1 GRU War Diary, May–June 1940; TNA, PRO WO 167/1372, Number 2 GRU War Diary, January, May–June 1940; TNA, PRO WO 167/1373, Number 3 GRU War Diary, May 1940; TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, June 1940.

<sup>59</sup> John Ellis, *The World War II Databook: The Essential Facts and Figures for all the Combatants*, (London: Aurum Press, 1993), p. 255; CWGC, 2033, Registered Graves and Burials, 15 September 1940; CWGC, 2033, Middle East Memorandum, 29 April 1941; CWGC, 2033, War Graves of the Services, 1942.

<sup>60</sup> CWGC, 2033, Macallan to Home Commands, July 1940; CWGC, 2033, Meeting of Officers and Inspectors, 3 July 1940; TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, August 1940.

<sup>61</sup> CWGC, 2033, Director General Memorandum, circa December 1939; CWGC, 2014, Ware to Sir Godfrey Thomas, 9 July 1943; CWGC, 2014, CWGC to New Zealand Defence Force, 18 March 1994; TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, September 1938, October 1938; *Seventeenth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 6; *Twenty-second Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, (London: HMSO, 1942), p. 3. The IWGC Eastern Area comprised Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Greece and Turkey. See CWGC, 2014, Ware to Hart, 22 May 1937.

establishing and maintaining an AGS force in the region.<sup>62</sup> He decreed its formation necessary.

In contrast to the practice employed at Aldershot the previous September, the DGRE determined that the Middle East graves service should be built from the top down rather than from the bottom up. Thus the selection in May of Hart as the unpaid commanding officer of Graves Registration and Enquiries Middle East Force (GREMEF) and the establishment of a headquarters in Cairo preceded the raising of any constituent graves units.<sup>63</sup> Hart, who was given dispensation to remain living in Jerusalem where he was to continue in employment with the IWGC, was promised an emergency commission and the administrative rank of Assistant Director Graves Registration and Enquiries (ADGRE). This appointment would give him control over graves operations throughout the Middle East theatre and make him junior only to Ware within the graves organisation.<sup>64</sup> For his headquarters, which was to be manned by a staff captain and a clerk, its expansion and the subsequent addition of AGS units to be pursued as necessary should hostilities commence, Hart selected a reservist officer with experience of graves work as his staff captain.<sup>65</sup> Pending the arrival of this officer in Egypt from Britain, he asked Captain G. H. Peek, a long-serving IWGC employee with an intimate knowledge of the Middle East, to fill the

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<sup>62</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, April 1940; TNA, PRO WO 106/5066, Reports on Visit of Edwards, 1940; *The Quarterly Army List: July 1940*, pp. 75, 211b.

<sup>63</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, September 1939; TNA, PRO WO 106/5064, GHQ MEF to Edwards, 27 May 1940; TNA, PRO WO 106/5065, Macallan to Edwards, 13 June 1940.

<sup>64</sup> CWGC, 2014, CWGC to New Zealand Defence Force, 18 March 1994; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Middle East and Mediterranean Zone Summary, June 1945; TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, June, September 1940; *The Quarterly Army List: October 1940*, (London: HMSO, 1940), p. 1386i; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 177.

<sup>65</sup> TNA, PRO WO 106/5064, GHQ MEF to Edwards, 27 May 1940; TNA, PRO WO 106/5065, Macallan to Edwards, 13 June 1940; TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, June 1940. The GREMEF War Establishment was first advanced on 11 May 1940.

position in the interim and help him plan for a possible AGS deployment in the theatre.<sup>66</sup>

The most significant problem confronting Hart and Peek was how to staff GREMEF. The DGRE had made it clear that none of the AGS personnel evacuated from the Continent would be committed to the Middle East, and the two men knew also that the provision of officers and men through GHQ MEF could not be guaranteed.<sup>67</sup> Working on the assumption that GREMEF could expect no help with recruitment, Hart identified men he thought fit for command in the field and others, all regional IWGC employees, who might be employed as staff officers.<sup>68</sup> Securing a sufficient number of men to fill the ranks of future graves units presented a bigger problem. As a GHQ MEF official conceded, local inhabitants would have to be drafted into GREMEF for Hart was unable to 'find British white personnel for units'.<sup>69</sup>

Once the staffing issue had been discussed, Hart and Peek sought DGRE clarification on certain particulars with regard to the future administration of GREMEF. One question asked: '[d]oes the Army provide rations, accommodation, office equipment for personnel at formation H.Q.? It is presumed that G.R. & E. units are entirely an Army responsibility. Is this correct?'<sup>70</sup> Macallan replied in mid-June, confirming that the War Office held singular responsibility for all AGS units wherever they were raised and under whichever army command they operated.<sup>71</sup> He

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<sup>66</sup> TNA, PRO WO 106/5064, GHQ MEF to Edwards, 27 May 1940; TNA, PRO CO 323/1748/4, IWGC General Report, 4 October 1940; TNA, PRO WO 169/6811, Hoffman to Ware, 26 November 1942; CWGC, 2014, Ware to Hart, 4 February 1941; *The Quarterly Army List: July 1940*, pp. 3036a, 3521f; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, pp. 115-6, 177.

<sup>67</sup> TNA, PRO WO 106/5064, GHQ MEF to Edwards, 27 May 1940.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 106/5065, Macallan to Edwards, 13 June 1940.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> TNA, PRO WO 106/5064, GHQ MEF to Edwards, 27 May 1940.

<sup>71</sup> TNA, PRO WO 106/5065, Macallan to Edwards, 13 June 1940.

then proceeded to caution GREMEF against developing a reliance on recruiting personnel from outside the army, noting that those IWGC employees who had been given dual roles with the AGS in France had not always been able to devote time to their military duties.<sup>72</sup>

- The Deployment of the AGS in the Middle East Theatre

The GREMEF command became active when Hart received official confirmation of his emergency commission as Brigadier on 3 July 1940.<sup>73</sup> Later that day the Graves Registration East Africa Force (GREAF), the formation of which had first been considered by Hart in May, was raised in Nairobi on his authorisation.<sup>74</sup> A. R. Wainwright, a retired colonel, was appointed as its head and Graves Registration Officer. He had no staff and was not permitted to claim payment or army benefits.<sup>75</sup> Further deployments of graves personnel followed in the autumn. Number 5 GRU, under the command of Captain E. Robson of the Yorkshire Light Infantry, was raised and staffed on the pre-war War Establishment and attached to the Western Desert Force for its campaign against Italian forces in the Cyrenaica region of Libya, and an AGS officer was despatched to Khartoum to supervise graves operations in the Sudan.<sup>76</sup>

In an attempt to strengthen the AGS presence in East Africa, in October 1940 Hart suggested to the War Office that Wainwright be given some men with whom

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> CWGC, 2014, CWGC to New Zealand Defence Force, 18 March 1994; *Supplement to the London Gazette*, 2 July 1940, p. 4010.

<sup>74</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/886, GREAF War Diary, Volume I, July 1940.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 106/5064, GHQ MEF to Edwards, 27 May 1940; TNA, PRO WO 106/5065, Macallan to Edwards, 13 June 1940.

<sup>76</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, June 1940; TNA, PRO WO 169/2537, Number 5 GRU War Diary, August 1941; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Middle East and Mediterranean Zone Summary, June 1945; CWGC, 2033, Macallan to Ware, 12 March 1941; CWGC, 2033, Middle East Memorandum, 29 April 1941; *The Quarterly Army List: October 1940*, pp. 1208-10.

to staff a graves force for the region. This proposal was rejected, whereupon the headquarters of East Africa Force (EAF) approached the command of the Union Defence Force (UDF) in Pretoria for assistance in delivering such an organisation.<sup>77</sup> Major R. H. Hoffman, a British national and ex-British army officer serving in the South African military, was charged by UDF headquarters with its formation.<sup>78</sup> He subsequently devised a War Establishment which he thought better-suited than the War Office model to the requirements of modern warfare, not least because it would be easier to fill. It stipulated there be three officers – one captain and two subalterns – and ten other ranks: three batmen/drivers, three privates for general duties, one cook, and corporals in the positions of clerk, photographer and topographical draughtsman.<sup>79</sup> Two units, Numbers 1 and 2 UDF GRU, were raised in Pretoria on this War Establishment, and Hoffman led his men north to a base in Nairobi in early 1941.<sup>80</sup> Although the units had no formal connection to the War Office, they were charged by EAF with registering British and Dominion graves in Abyssinia, Eritrea

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<sup>77</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, October 1940; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Middle East and Mediterranean Zone Summary, June 1945.

<sup>78</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Middle East and Mediterranean Zone Summary, June 1945; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Staff List, circa September 1943; CWGC, 2014, Hart to Ware, 18 November 1942; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 177. Hoffman had served as a regular officer during and after the First World War before resigning his commission and emigrating from Britain to South Africa in the 1920s.

<sup>79</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, May, August 1941; TNA, PRO WO 165/35, MEF War Establishment; TNA, PRO WO 169/6811, GREMEF War Diary, November 1942; TNA, PRO WO 169/6811, Hoffman to Lieutenant Colonel Hines, 27 November 1942; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Middle East and Mediterranean Zone Summary, June 1945; CWGC, 2014, Hart to Ware, 18 November 1942; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 177.

<sup>80</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/3222, Assistant Director, GREAF War Diary, February 1941; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Middle East and Mediterranean Zone Summary, June 1945; CWGC, 2033, Macallan to Ware, 12 March 1941. Wainwright welcomed the deployment of the UDF units. For some time he had been of the opinion that his office was 'entirely useless unless supplied with personnel for Field Work ... [t]he mere recording of graves as reported practically useless unless a Field Unit can get them marked down with real accuracy.' See TNA, PRO WO 169/3222, Assistant Director, GREAF War Diary, January 1941.

and Italian Somaliland. Hoffman and his men set about this task immediately and good progress followed.<sup>81</sup>

- The Reorganisation of GREMEF

Elsewhere graves operations were beset with problems, a lack of personnel principal among them. When called upon in March to provide an AGS contingent in support of British forces stationed in the Mediterranean, Hart had been able only to send a lone officer to Greece. Responsibility for graves operations on Crete had been vested in the Royal Engineers until such time as GREMEF could despatch trained officers and men to the island.<sup>82</sup> Numbers 6 and 7 GRU had been raised in April in an attempt to address these staffing deficiencies, but as volunteers had been few their formation had not provided the desired panacea.<sup>83</sup> In light of these difficulties, GHQ MEF called a meeting at its Cairo headquarters in May to discuss the conduct of graves operations and the possible restructuring of GREMEF. Among the attendees were Hoffman, who travelled to Egypt from Nairobi, and representatives from Number 1 Australian GRU and the New Zealand GRU, both of these units having commenced operations in the Middle East theatre in support of their national forces.<sup>84</sup>

Three significant resolutions were agreed at the meeting. First, the delegates determined that all graves units operating in the Middle East theatre should be pooled

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<sup>81</sup> Wainwright resigned from his position in March so that Hoffman could be given complete command of graves operations in East Africa. See TNA, PRO WO 169/3222, Assistant Director, GREAF War Diary, February-March, 1941.

<sup>82</sup> CWGC, 2033, Macallan to Ware, 12 March 1941; CWGC, 2033, Middle East Memorandum, 29 April 1941.

<sup>83</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, April-May 1941; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Middle East and Mediterranean Zone Summary, June 1945; CWGC, 2033, Macallan to Ware, 12 March 1941; CWGC, 2033, Middle East Memorandum, 29 April 1941.

<sup>84</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Middle East and Mediterranean Zone Summary, June 1945.

under the central command of GREMEF headquarters and attached to the British and Dominion armies as and when needed.<sup>85</sup> For this purpose Hoffman and his men were to transfer to Cairo in the summer to join the three extant AGS units – two of which, Numbers 6 and 7, remained in cadre – as well as the Australian and New Zealand graves formations, in GREMEF.<sup>86</sup> Second, it was decided that all units would adopt the GRU War Establishment employed by the UDF. Its efficacy had been proven in East Africa, while the fact that it stipulated thirteen personnel rather than thirty-eight was attractive, because recruitment was expected to remain difficult.<sup>87</sup> Third, the delegates decreed that three officers should be appointed to the position of DADGRE in order to relieve Hart of some of his heavy work burden. Peek, who had continued as Hart's principal assistant since the formation of GREMEF, was one of those designated for this role.<sup>88</sup> The second officer selected was a Canadian, Major A. F. Menzies.<sup>89</sup> He had overseen the care and maintenance of British and Dominion war graves in Greece, where he had worked for the IWGC since the First World War, until the German invasion in April had forced his departure from the country.<sup>90</sup> Hoffman was the third officer chosen, his appointment

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, May 1941; TNA, PRO WO 169/6811, GREMEF War Diary, November 1942.

<sup>86</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Middle East and Mediterranean Zone Summary, June 1945; TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, May 1941; TNA, PRO WO 169/6811, GREMEF War Diary, February 1942.

<sup>87</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, May 1941; TNA, PRO WO 165/35, MEF War Establishment; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Middle East and Mediterranean Zone Summary, June 1945; CWGC, 2033, Macallan to Ware, 12 March 1941.

<sup>88</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, May 1941; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 177. See also *The Quarterly Army List: July 1941*, (London: HMSO, 1941), p. 124. It is thought that Captain J. T. Hare, the officer originally designated by Hart to serve as his staff captain, never took up an appointment with GREMEF. See TNA, PRO WO 106/5064, GHQ MEF to Edwards, 27 May 1940; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, July 1943.

<sup>89</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, May 1941; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 177.

<sup>90</sup> *Twenty-second Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 2; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, pp. 121, 172. To coincide with their appointments as DADGRE, Menzies and Peek were promoted to major. See *The Quarterly Army List: October 1942*, (London: HMSO, 1942), pp. 415a, 2282c, 3036b.

to take effect from the time of his relocation to Cairo.<sup>91</sup> There were no IWGC officials available in the theatre to fill the final DADGRE position, and Hart knew that the successes achieved by the UDF units in East Africa owed much to Hoffman's organisation and leadership skills.<sup>92</sup>

- Frustration and Slow Progress in Graves Operations

Amid the restructuring of GREMEF in the summer of 1941, Hart endeavoured to bolster AGS representation in the Middle East theatre. In August 1941 Number 6 GRU was staffed to a working level and sent to the Sudan to complete the task of registering graves there and in Eritrea, and the following month Number 9 GRU was raised in Cairo and then posted to Iraq to register graves in that country and in Iran.<sup>93</sup> The deployment of neither unit went as planned. After his first two weeks in Baghdad, the commanding officer of Number 9 GRU complained to army headquarters in Palestine that his unit consisted only of himself and one local man and that they had no transport or equipment.<sup>94</sup> If these difficulties were attributable largely to the need to staff and equip frontline units as a matter of priority, poor administration and the relative anonymity of the AGS were also factors. For example, when Number 6 GRU called at Asmara to collect equipment and personnel for its operations on the Keren battlefield, military authorities proffered excuses rather than the promised trucks and interpreter. After four days spent wrangling with

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<sup>91</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Middle East and Mediterranean Zone Summary, June 1945; TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, May 1941; TNA, PRO WO 169/6811, GREMEF War Diary, February 1942; CWGC, 2014, Hart to Ware, 18 November 1942.

<sup>92</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, War Office and IWGC Cooperation, circa 1949.

<sup>93</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, July 1941; TNA, PRO WO 169/2536, DADGRE War Diary, August 1941; TNA, PRO WO 24/940, War Establishment Iraq GRU, p. 576; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Middle East and Mediterranean Zone Summary, June 1945; CWGC, 2033, Middle East Memorandum, 29 April 1941; CWGC, 2033, War Graves of the Services, 1942. A detachment of graves personnel entered Syria at this time.

<sup>94</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/2539, Captain P. V. W. Donaldson to Force Headquarters, 4 October 1941.

these officials to no avail, the unit left the town without a translator and in vehicles obtained through private means.<sup>95</sup>

Once in the field the men discovered that the process of registering graves could be similarly long and arduous. The personnel of Number 1 Section of Number 6 GRU learnt this when attempting to locate the remains of several members of the Worcester Regiment killed on Mt Falestoh near Keren in early 1941. Acting on information collated from official and verbal reports that the dead lay there in unmarked graves, the investigating personnel scaled the mountain by its western face on 24 September. No trace of graves or remains was found. Having descended to their camp for the night, the men returned the next day and climbed Mt Falestoh by its northern aspect: again nothing was discovered. Over the following days less physically-taxing matters were attended to, with personnel visiting an Indian army regiment in order to obtain information about battlefield burials, and walking parts of the Keren road in search of the remains of two gunners. They returned to Mt Falestoh on the 29th, climbing the north-eastern side of the peak and then, when this approach also yielded no evidence of the dead, by its north-western aspect the next day. On this face of the mountain they discovered the remains of five soldiers strewn over a wide area, with the bodies and graves of a further nineteen members of the Worcesters found the next day. After the identities of the dead had been confirmed by verifying the details on their identity discs with those contained in burial returns and unit records, Number 1 Section personnel spent several days collecting the dead and transferring them to a nearby cemetery for interment, the officer in charge

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<sup>95</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/2594, Number 6 GRU (Advance Section) War Diary, August 1941.

having decreed Mt Falestoh an unsuitable location for their permanent burial because of its barrenness and relative inaccessibility.<sup>96</sup>

While Number 6 GRU was at least able to function with relative freedom in East Africa, the operations of Number 5 GRU in the Western Desert were restricted by the near presence of the warring armies. Between the winter of 1941 and the summer of 1942, the unit spent much time moving eastwards across the desert to escape the advancing enemy, a state of affairs which made it difficult for its men to pursue investigations of any length or complexity.<sup>97</sup> During this period they rarely had time to become acquainted with the geography of a region before being instructed to relocate elsewhere, something which affected their ability to search for graves in a vast area where, to the untrained eye, navigable landmarks were few.<sup>98</sup> On the rare occasions that the unit was able to settle in one place for a period of time, operations were hindered by the fact that many of the burial returns furnished through 2<sup>nd</sup> echelon, Eighth Army, were incomplete and thus of limited value.<sup>99</sup>

Mindful that progress was slow, and of the growing expectation among Britons that news be provided of their missing and dead relatives, in the spring of 1942 the DGRE released to the national press a report in which the difficulties of graves operations were explained.<sup>100</sup> It was noted that: '[r]ecords of burials made under battle conditions, or by the enemy, lead not infrequently to lack of, or distortion in, names and service particulars. Such records often entail considerable

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<sup>96</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/2593, Number 6 GRU War Diary, September-October 1941.

<sup>97</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/2537, Number 5 GRU War Diary, August-December 1941; TNA, PRO WO 169/2538, Number 5 GRU (Detachment) War Diary, December 1941; TNA, PRO WO 169/6816, Number 5 GRU (Unit and Detachment) War Diary, January-August 1942; Ellis, *The World War II Databook*, p. 32.

<sup>98</sup> CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections; CWGC, 2033, Hart to Ware, March 1942.

<sup>99</sup> CWGC, 2033, War Graves of the Services, 1942.

<sup>100</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 7 March 1942. By this time Number 7 GRU, never raised other than in cadre, had been disbanded.

investigation after arrival; sometimes without immediate success.<sup>101</sup> The account continued: '[w]here identity is complete the next-of-kin are immediately notified of the position of the grave so far as it is known. Postal difficulties from the Middle East are of course a serious consideration, and play their part in delaying the transmission of information to the relatives.'<sup>102</sup> The report also carried a request for the British people to extend its understanding to the AGS: '[g]eography, as well as detection for identification purposes, play no small part in the work. The public would do well to bear in mind that information seemingly withheld is more often due to a difficulty of location, or identification, which must first be worked out and confirmed.'<sup>103</sup> In asking for the consideration of the public, Ware knew that its patience would soon expire if news of missing and dead servicemen did not come quickly, particularly if defeat became victory and hope was replaced by expectation.

- A Change of Leader

Hart, who knew the demands on the AGS as well as anyone, relinquished his GREMEF command on 4 August 1942 in order to devote all his energies to the running of his IWGC office in Jerusalem.<sup>104</sup> He had served the AGS well. With almost no assistance from the DGRE and scant resources, Hart had established a working graves service in the Middle East and overseen the hire or purchase of land

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<sup>101</sup> CWGC, 2033, War Graves of the Services, 1942.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/6811, GREMEF War Diary, August 1942; TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, September 1942; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Middle East and Mediterranean Zone Summary, June 1945; CWGC, 2014, Ware to Major General J. S. Steele, 30 September 1942; CWGC, 2014, CWGC to New Zealand Defence Force, 18 March 1994; *Twenty-third Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, (London: HMSO, 1942), p. 1; *The Quarterly Army List: October 1942*, p. 2329c; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 177. Menzies followed Hart's example and resigned from the AGS in September 1942. See TNA, PRO WO 169/6811, GREMEF War Diary, September 1942; *Twenty-fourth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, (London: HMSO, 1944), p. 5.

for cemeteries throughout the theatre.<sup>105</sup> He had also travelled at length throughout his enormous jurisdiction to observe graves operations and to encourage his men in their endeavours, his enthusiasm and belief in them and their purpose a key factor in GREMEF having survived a difficult beginning.<sup>106</sup>

Hoffman, whom Hart thought a 'capable and efficient' officer, was promoted Lieutenant Colonel and to the command of GREMEF as ADGRE.<sup>107</sup> His appointment, which was made through GHQ MEF rather than by the DGRE, was notable as no officer had previously worked his way into the upper echelons of the AGS from within its ranks, and he was unknown personally to the senior figures at the DGRE.<sup>108</sup> The selection of Hoffman irked Ware for it was the first senior posting made to the graves organisation in either world war that he had not directly influenced, and he had wanted Peek to get the job on the basis of his formal connection to the IWGC.<sup>109</sup> Ware wrote to the DAG to convey his unease at the appointment but, having allowed GREMEF to operate as an effectively autonomous command since its inception, he did not have a strong case for intervening in such matters and his concerns were dismissed.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to Ware, 28 January 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Acquisition of Land for Cemeteries, 16 July 1943; CWGC, 2033, Middle East Memorandum, 29 April 1941; *Twenty-third Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 1; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 177.

<sup>106</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/2593, Number 6 GRU War Diary, October 1941; TNA, PRO WO 169/2536, DADGRE War Diary, November 1941.

<sup>107</sup> CWGC, 2014, Hart to Ware, 18 November 1942; TNA, PRO WO 169/6811, GREMEF War Diary, August 1942.

<sup>108</sup> TNA, PRO CAB 106/454, Operations in Italy, 31 March 1946; CWGC, 2033, Hoffman to Ware, circa 27 October 1942.

<sup>109</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, September 1942; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Middle East and Mediterranean Zone Summary, June 1945; CWGC, 2014, Ware to Major General J. S. Steele, 30 September 1942; CWGC, 2014, Hart to Ware, 18 November 1942; CWGC, 2014, CWGC to New Zealand Defence Force, 18 March 1994; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 177.

<sup>110</sup> CWGC, 2014, Ware to Major General J. S. Steele, 30 September 1942; *The Quarterly Army List: October 1942*, p. 15. As DGRE director, Ware was required to authorise the appointment, although in this case his acquiescence was expected rather than sought.

It quickly became evident that Hoffman, who took up his new role as scheduled in August 1942, planned on running GREMEF his way. In a letter of introduction he informed Ware of his intention to institute the practice of writing and submitting to the War Office regular reports on the state of graves operations in the theatre.<sup>111</sup> Hoffman and his officers also embarked on a tour of the graves units, returning fully cognisant of their difficulties and of the enormous challenge the AGS faced.<sup>112</sup> For all the efforts of GREMEF over the previous two years, it remained that the exact whereabouts and identity of the bodies of thousands of British servicemen were not known.<sup>113</sup> In the Western Desert, for instance, lay the remains of approximately 20,000 British and Dominion soldiers, the majority of whom were either in unregistered graves or in the open.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, many of these bodies were behind enemy lines, including those – referred to by AGS personnel as ‘Wavell’s Lot’ – who had lain unattended in Cyrenaica for two years.<sup>115</sup> If GREMEF were to recover and name all these remains within the near future, before clues to the whereabouts and identity of the dead disappeared, the AGS would need to put more men into the field. Thus, in anticipation of an Eighth Army advance across the Western Desert and the freeing of all the North African battlefields for graves operations, Hoffman embarked on a recruitment drive.<sup>116</sup> The subsequent and decisive victory won by the British and Dominion forces at El Alamein in the autumn proved it a wise decision.

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<sup>111</sup> CWGC, 2033, Hoffman to Ware, circa 27 October 1942.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/6811, Hoffman to Peek, 4 December 1942.

<sup>114</sup> Ellis, *The World War II Databook*, p. 255. There are no statistics on how many graves had been registered by the autumn of 1942, but it is unlikely to have been more than a few thousand and, probably, closer to 1000-2000.

<sup>115</sup> CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 177. General Sir Archibald Wavell commanded British forces in the 1940-41 Cyrenaica campaign.

<sup>116</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Middle East and Mediterranean Zone Summary, June 1945; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 177.

- Recruitment to GREMEF

While Hoffman was desperate to increase the strength of GREMEF, he refused to do so at any cost. In common with most AGS officers, he believed that an undermanned organisation staffed by men wholly committed to its service was preferable to one which included those without any appreciation of, or interest in, its task. This meant identifying soldiers who would find the successful location and identification of bodies a worthwhile and important endeavour.<sup>117</sup> Accordingly, GREMEF officers – including one known widely as ‘Bones of the Eighth’ – made it clear to servicemen interested in being seconded to the AGS that the work was difficult, often gruesome, and not for those looking for an easy war behind the frontline.<sup>118</sup> Eighth Army soldiers who remained undeterred after these warnings were then interviewed by Hoffman and senior members of his staff to determine whether they were suitable for the AGS.<sup>119</sup> In questioning the applicants, GREMEF officers sought to identify those who were meticulous and dedicated by nature, reasoning that men with these characteristics would be most likely to attend to the smallest details of a case and to persevere with its investigation regardless of any complications and complexities encountered. Hoffman and his assistants also tried to find personnel with skills that would be of practical benefit to the AGS: those who had experience as clerks or draughtsmen, for instance.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 178; CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections.

<sup>118</sup> CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections; CWGC, 2033, Hoffman to Fraser, 20 December 1943. Just as men were not forced into the service of the AGS, all those in its employ were allowed to leave at any point. For example, see TNA, PRO WO 169/2593, Number 6 GRU War Diary, October 1941.

<sup>119</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13811, Number 10 GCU War Diary, January 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, GREMEF War Diary, July, December 1943; CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections.

<sup>120</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Staff List, circa September 1943.

Eventually sufficient numbers of officers and other rank servicemen were recruited to allow for the staffing of several new AGS units, although not quite the four that GREMEF had formed in the interim. Hoffman soon found himself moving men between the British units in order to make up the strength of the newly-raised Numbers 11, 12, 17 and 18 GRU, with Number 9 GRU disbanded in the autumn of 1942 and its personnel posted to Number 12 GRU in order that it could be fully staffed.<sup>121</sup> Transferring experienced personnel into new units served another purpose in that it meant no one formation was composed entirely of untrained recruits. Hoffman even acknowledged to a senior aide that he had 'milked' an established unit 'dry' in this regard.<sup>122</sup> Although men new to GREMEF were expected to learn fast and on the job, all were posted where they could gain knowledge from others, and officers were given basic instruction in AGS operations as well as copies of Field Service Regulations.<sup>123</sup> By the winter of 1942-43, the new recruits had been deployed in the field.

At this time the majority of GREMEF units were operating in the Western Desert.<sup>124</sup> Hoffman expected them to remain there until their work was finished, and to then gradually work their way westwards towards the First Army which had

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<sup>121</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Middle East and Mediterranean Zone Summary, June 1945; TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, April 1942; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, January 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/6811, GREMEF War Diary, July 1942; TNA, PRO WO 169/6821, 11 GRU War Diary, August-December 1942; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to Major V. H. Dixon, 29 January 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to Major V. H. Dixon, 8 February 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to War Office, 13 February 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, GREMEF War Diary, January-February 1943. Permission to raise Numbers 13, 14, 15 and 16 GRU was given to West Africa Command in July 1942, but the units were never formed. There were two Indian graves units operating in Iraq, although these were not attached to GREMEF. See TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, July 1941, July 1942.

<sup>122</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to Major V. H. Dixon, 29 January 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, GREMEF War Diary, January 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to Major V. H. Dixon, 8 February 1943.

<sup>123</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13811, Number 10 GCU War Diary, February 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to Major V. H. Dixon, 8 February 1943; CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections.

<sup>124</sup> Hoffman had lost the services of Number 1 Australian GRU. It had been withdrawn from Palestine in the autumn in order to return to Australia with its national force.

landed on the French North African coast in November.<sup>125</sup> However, when informed by the War Office that graves concentration work in Egypt was not to delay the commencement of registration operations along the Eighth Army line of advance – the Adjutant General’s department was anxious to divest responsibility for the control of military cemeteries to the IWGC as soon as possible – Hoffman was forced to alter his plans.<sup>126</sup> Estimating that ‘registrations in the Eighth Army battle zone’ would ‘take six months at a minimum’ to complete should GREMEF remain at its current strength, he cancelled all leave, issued an exhortation to senior officers ‘to make every effort to instil enthusiasm and “drive” into the minds of all personnel during the coming 3 or 4 months’, and ordered Number 10 Graves Concentration Unit (GCU), a unit of eighteen months standing but which had only recently come under his direct authority, to transfer from Addis Ababa to El Alamein in order that he might free several GRUs for operations further west.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to Major V. H. Dixon, 8 February 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to War Office, 13 February 1943; TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, August-September 1942; TNA, PRO WO 169/6811, Hoffman to Ware, 26 November 1942; Ellis, *The World War II Databook*, p. 34.

<sup>126</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to Major V. H. Dixon, 8 February 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/6811, Hoffman to Eighth Army Rear Headquarters, 24 November 1942; TNA, PRO WO 169/6811, Hoffman to Ware, 26 November 1942; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, February 1943.

<sup>127</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to Major V. H. Dixon, 8 February 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to War Office, 13 February 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, GREMEF War Diary, January 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/6811, Hoffman to Eighth Army Rear Headquarters, 24 November 1942; TNA, PRO WO 169/6811, Hoffman to Ware, 26 November 1942; TNA, PRO WO 169/6811, Hoffman to Peek, 4 December 1942; TNA, PRO WO 169/13811, Number 10 GCU War Diary, January 1943. Number 10 GCU, formed on a specially-devised War Establishment in August 1941 from South African personnel who had been left behind in East Africa following the transfer of the two UDF graves units to Cairo, had operated under the command of EAF. See TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, September 1941; TNA, PRO WO 169/6820, Number 10 GCU War Diary, April-October 1942; TNA, PRO WO 169/6819, Number 10 GCU War Diary, November-December 1942; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Middle East and Mediterranean Zone Summary, June 1945.

### Section III: A Study of Number 10 GCU

- The Redeployment of Number 10 GCU

In mid-January 1943, Major R. H. Fry, the South African commanding officer of Number 10 GCU, led his unit, the first British or Dominion unit in the Second World War to be dedicated solely to graves concentration, to Cairo.<sup>128</sup> There he recruited several personnel to strengthen his depleted sections, and drew from MEF the equipment needed for their operations in the Western Desert.<sup>129</sup> These included a compass, binoculars, camera, typewriter, metal and woven measuring tapes and a first aid kit.<sup>130</sup> The unit was also supplied with rations and petrol and equipped with three trucks.<sup>131</sup> The three officers and nine other rank personnel who comprised Number 10 GCU proceeded to El Alamein in mid-February, where they established camp in a series of disused dugouts adjacent to the cemetery, informed the regional mayor of their arrival, and advised nearby military officials of their future supply needs.<sup>132</sup>

One week later Fry had established what needed to be done and how his men should go about it. A preliminary reconnaissance of the region had determined that at least 2000 graves, lying isolated or in Allied and enemy battlefield burial grounds, as well as many unburied bodies, required concentration into the El Alamein

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<sup>128</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13811, Number 10 GCU War Diary, January-February 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Staff List, circa September 1943; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Middle East and Mediterranean Zone Summary, June 1945.

<sup>129</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13811, Number 10 GCU War Diary, January-February 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to Ware, 28 January 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to Major V. H. Dixon, 8 February 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to War Office, 13 February 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Memorandum 7592AG1, 9 June 1943.

<sup>130</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Major V. H. Dixon to Lieutenant Buchanan, 29 May 1943; CWGC, 2033, Instruction Manual, March 1944.

<sup>131</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13811, Number 10 GCU War Diary, February 1943.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.* The strength of Number 10 GCU remained steady throughout its time at El Alamein. For example, see TNA, PRO WO 169/13811, Field Strength Returns, May 1943.

cemetery.<sup>133</sup> Because some of these graves and remains also needed to be registered, Fry decreed that his men, rather than waiting for the assistance of GRU personnel, should perform registration 'so that any bodies for identification could be exhumed ... and removed to the [El Alamein] Cemetery thus obviating the necessity for re-burial at the same spot.'<sup>134</sup> There was a need to expedite the process as the initial search region alone covered tens of thousands of square miles, while the fact that all remains found by the unit were to be brought for burial to the northern extreme of the operational area would further lengthen the time required for concentration.<sup>135</sup> As Fry realised, his unit was faced with a labour of at least several months, perhaps even a year or more.<sup>136</sup>

- Operations in the Western Desert

There were two main tasks which Fry set his men once Number 10 GCU commenced operations in late February. The first involved working at El Alamein cemetery, which had been established near to the town railway station by Eighth Army servicemen during the fighting in 1942. Designated as permanent by GREMEF authorities in the winter of 1942-43 on account of its flatness; an accessible position adjacent to the coast, a settlement and a road; the nearby supplies of water and construction materials; and its iconic location, it already contained the remains of

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<sup>133</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/6811, Hoffman to Ware, 26 November 1942; TNA, PRO WO 169/6811, Hoffman to Peek, 4 December 1942; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to War Office, 13 February 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13811, Number 10 GCU War Diary, March-April 1943; CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections.

<sup>134</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13811, Number 10 GCU War Diary, February 1943.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 169/6811, Hoffman to Ware, 26 November 1942; TNA, PRO WO 169/6811, Hoffman Memorandum, 2 December 1942; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Concentration Cemeteries, February 1943; CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections.

<sup>136</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13813, Number 10 GCU (Number 2 Section) War Diary, August 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13811, Number 10 GCU War Diary, December 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/18054, Number 10 GCU War Diary, January-February 1944.

approximately 1300 men and was expected to contain several thousand bodies by the time of its completion, possibly as many as 6000.<sup>137</sup> In the meantime the existing graves needed attention and so they were tidied, unused sections of the cemetery prepared to receive further bodies, and solid walls built in order to keep out the sand which crept over the graves.<sup>138</sup>

The second task, and the one to which the majority of personnel were committed, involved searching the Egyptian regions of the Western Desert for the dead and returning them to El Alamein for permanent burial. Sometimes these operations were pursued close to unit headquarters, particularly during adverse weather or when the trucks were not running well, with the men returning to camp each night.<sup>139</sup> There was, for instance, much work to be done collecting the dead from the many destroyed armoured vehicles abandoned during the battles for El Alamein.<sup>140</sup> More commonly, however, the field sections ventured deep into the desert, usually for four days at a time, in search of bodies and graves.<sup>141</sup> This was a sufficient period to allow for the conduct of intensive operations far from El

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<sup>137</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/6811, Hoffman to Ware, 26 November 1942; TNA, PRO WO 169/6811, Hoffman Memorandum, 2 December 1942; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to War Office, 13 February 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Concentration Cemeteries, February 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13811, Number 10 GCU War Diary, May 1943; CWGC, 2033, Godfrey Talbot Talk, 6 December 1942; IWM, 99/16/1, Major A. F. Flatow; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 179. Some of these 1300 burials had been made by soldiers during the battle for El Alamein, while others had been performed by AGS personnel who had worked in the area before the arrival of Number 10 GCU. The five cemeteries earmarked as permanent in the Egyptian regions of the Western Desert – at El Alamein, Sidi Marrani, El Daba, Mersa Matruh and Sollum – were all located on the coastal road running between Alexandria and Tripoli. Of these, it was expected that the cemetery at El Alamein would be the biggest.

<sup>138</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13811, Number 10 GCU War Diary, February-March, October 1943; CWGC, 2033, Godfrey Talbot Talk, 6 December 1942.

<sup>139</sup> CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections.

<sup>140</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13811, Number 10 GCU War Diary, March-April 1943; IWM, 99/16/1, Major A. F. Flatow.

<sup>141</sup> CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections; TNA, PRO WO 169/13811, Number 10 GCU War Diary, June-July 1943; *The Sphere*, 22 May 1943.

Alamein, but also short enough to ensure that any exhumed remains would not be exposed to further deterioration.<sup>142</sup>

These longer expeditions required careful planning and organisation. The preparatory process began with officers identifying a particular target zone within the wider search region and then collating from burial returns and casualty lists all the information pertaining to deaths, interments and missing personnel therein.<sup>143</sup>

Thereafter compass bearings and mileages to and from El Alamein were calculated, the appropriate quantities of petrol and rations drawn, and a work schedule formulated.<sup>144</sup> Finally, Fry took a note of the proposed movements of each unit section in order that he would know where to send assistance should person or vehicle suffer an accident during the course of the week.<sup>145</sup>

Once in the field, it was common for the men to find no trace of reported battlefield graves. In the period since interment, fierce desert winds had blown away crosses and rifles that had once identified burial sites, while other markers had been overgrown and obscured from view by camel scrub bush, crushed by the military traffic which had criss-crossed the Western Desert continually since 1940, or removed by Bedouin for firewood.<sup>146</sup> Many graves and small cemeteries had simply been swallowed by the shifting desert sand.<sup>147</sup> Personnel thus became vigilant in

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<sup>142</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13811, Number 10 GCU War Diary, August 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, American Cemetery Memorandum, 27 February 1943.

<sup>143</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/6811, Hoffman to Peek, 4 December 1942; TNA, PRO WO 169/13811, Number 10 GCU War Diary, March 1943; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, Fraser Report, 30 March 1944; CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections; CWGC, 2033, Instruction Manual, March 1944. Usually something was known about when and where the missing had disappeared.

<sup>144</sup> CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections; TNA, PRO WO 169/13811, Number 10 GCU War Diary, October 1943.

<sup>145</sup> CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 169/6811, Hoffman Memorandum, 2 December 1942; TNA, PRO WO 169/13811, Number 10 GCU War Diary, March 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to War Office, 11 June 1943; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, Fraser Report, 30 March 1944.

<sup>147</sup> CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections; TNA, PRO WO 169/6811, Hoffman Memorandum, 2 December 1942; TNA, PRO WO 169/13811, Number 10 GCU War Diary, March 1943. Crosses

looking for other signs – a lone helmet, a collection of stones, inverted bottles and tins – that might indicate a grave was nearby.

Locating the remains of Eighth Army dead proved a painstaking and often frustrating process. One Number 10 GCU section spent six days searching part of the Qattara Depression and found only one grave.<sup>148</sup> On a separate occasion a member of the unit followed a set of vehicle tracks for miles only to discover that the indents in the sand had been caused by a large petrol drum being blown about the desert.<sup>149</sup> Another member, having come across a mound of earth surrounded by a neat fence, decided to excavate on the assumption that he had discovered an unidentified burial ground: he unearthed a one-time meat dump.<sup>150</sup> A further, inexperienced, member abandoned a disinterment when he discovered long hair and combs in the grave and reasoned that he had found the remains of a woman civilian. The skeleton was that of a Sikh soldier.<sup>151</sup> But the men were never easily deterred. One officer noted of his sergeant that he ‘was as keen and as enthusiastic a man as I ever met’, recalling that once their section arrived at its designated site ‘he never gave up whilst there was any reason to believe that there could be graves in the area.’<sup>152</sup>

A successful search for graves always involved such persistence and dedication, as well as considerable skill and ingenuity. On one occasion two officers set out to find the grave of a pilot reported to have been buried approximately 100

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found in very loose sand often marked entombments rather than burials. Entombing casualties meant interring them several feet down and surrounded with heavy objects in order to secure the remains. At one mass entombment, Number 10 GCU personnel had to dig their way past packing cases, railway sleepers and truck engine bonnets to unearth the eighty bodies therein.

<sup>148</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13811, Number 10 GCU War Diary, June 1943.

<sup>149</sup> CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

miles south of Sollum. Driving cross country they found their way to the general area by sun compass, this an achievement in itself. The officers then proceeded to search methodically an area of 400 square miles for the grave, finding it on their fourth day of looking. The body, along with two others disinterred from unrecorded graves discovered on the outward journey, was exhumed and driven to Sollum for reburial.<sup>153</sup>

A separate case involved one of the unit's officers enlisting civilian assistance to find the remains of a pilot who had been buried next to his downed aircraft, repeated efforts to locate the crash site having failed on account of the vast amount of military wreckage littering the search area. The officer, who had acquired a knowledge of colloquial Arabic during the course of his service in Number 10 GCU, asked a group of passing Bedouin if they were aware of the aircraft and grave in question whereupon a tribesman promptly led the section twelve miles to the exact location.<sup>154</sup> Once it had been exhumed, the body, as was the custom with all remains handled by the unit, was wrapped carefully in a blanket, bound with telephone wire – discarded lengths of which were found scattered everywhere throughout the Western Desert – and then guarded from animals and humans until it was reinterred in a permanent cemetery.<sup>155</sup>

Difficult and painstaking as these concentrations were, the work was harder still when unnamed graves and remains had first to be identified and registered. In such cases identification was pursued through several methods. Sometimes rubbing a pencil across faded markings was enough to reveal the original inscriptions and

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<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 169/13811, Number 10 GCU War Diary, April 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to War Office, 11 June 1943; CWGC, 2033, Instruction Manual, March 1944.

produce a name, whether on paper, a weathered cross, or damaged identity discs: these discs, made of a relatively weak fibrous material, were commonly rendered illegible or completely destroyed through prolonged exposure to heat, water, and the acids and gases released by soil and decomposing bodies.<sup>156</sup> Otherwise, the area in which the remains had been found was combed for evidence of identity. Personnel looked in particular for items that could be tied to an individual such as military-issue denture plates, which carried a unique service number, and personal objects such as diaries, letters and photographs.<sup>157</sup> If none of these were found, attempts were made at identifying the dead by a process of elimination. The finding of an epaulette or a particular piece of headgear could prove to which unit the dead man belonged, while a badge of rank on a sleeve or the presence of a certain type of weapon further limited the number of names that could be matched with the body. Records might then reveal that only one person of that unit, rank and function had been killed in the area.<sup>158</sup> Similarly, when dealing with remains, careful note was made of individual characteristics and the nature of any wounds in the hope that this information, taken in conjunction with other evidence, might eventually allow for their successful identification.<sup>159</sup> The dead could also be named through association.

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<sup>156</sup> CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections; TNA, PRO WO 169/13811, Number 10 GCU War Diary, March 1943; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, Major V. H. Dixon to War Office, 19 June 1943; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, June, November 1943; TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Brigadier C. S. Vale Minute, 23 August 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/14817, Marking War Graves Memorandum, Undated; IWM, 93/32/1, Wing Commander B.O. Dias; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 19.

<sup>157</sup> CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections; CWGC, 2033, Instruction Manual, March 1944.

<sup>158</sup> CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections; TNA, PRO WO 169/13809, Number 5 GRU War Diary, January 1943. Graves personnel were always mindful that it was common for soldiers to exchange kit and equipment with others.

<sup>159</sup> CWGC, 2033, Instruction Manual, March 1944; TNA, PRO WO 169/13809, Number 5 GRU War Diary, January 1943. If so instructed by the AGS, the DGRE would write to next-of-kin or their associates requesting more information about the deceased. One such letter read: '[i]n order to assist the Graves Services Overseas in their investigations, we should be grateful if you would obtain from the next-of-kin particulars of this soldier's height, colour of hair (straight or curly) and the size of the boots he normally wore.' See CWGC, 3001, DGRE E. Mullaney Enquiry, 21 August 1948.

For instance, the remains scraped from the weaponry seat of a tank were most likely those of the gunner.<sup>160</sup>

Personnel did not form their own judgments as to the veracity of the evidence they gathered but simply submitted it, and a report cataloguing their findings, to Fry for review.<sup>161</sup> This could take weeks, months even, in instances where the records against which the evidence needed checking were held at the War Office. If and when Fry was able to confirm the identities of the dead, sturdy markers to replace the temporary wooden crosses were manufactured for erection above their graves: these were produced in the shape of a Christian crucifix, the Star of David or other appropriate religious symbol, and were indented or inscribed with name, rank, military number, unit and date of death.<sup>162</sup> Conversely, where Fry had doubts, however small, as to the identity of remains, they were buried as unknown and the grave crested with a marker on which was embossed only that which had been definitely established about the dead man; perhaps his nationality, armed service or unit.<sup>163</sup> Of those men interred as ‘An Unknown Serviceman’ there was nothing known.

It was the successful conclusion of difficult investigations that best pleased the men. ‘It was most gratifying’, a unit officer remembered, to ‘receive a batch of completed pre-fabricated metal crosses from Cairo and know that one’s efforts had confirmed – and sometimes otherwise – that some-one, somewhere, would at last

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<sup>160</sup> CWGC, 2033, Instruction Manual, March 1944.

<sup>161</sup> CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 169/13811, Number 10 GCU War Diary, March 1943; CWGC, 2033, Notes for Graves Units, 5 June 1943.

<sup>163</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13811, Number 10 GCU War Diary, March 1943; CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections; CWGC, 2033, Instruction Manual, March 1944; Research Trip by Author to El Alamein War Cemetery, September 2004. If the religion was known, the marker would take the appropriate form.

know what really had happened to that chap who had been reported “Missing” months and months ago, and what had happened to his remains’.<sup>164</sup>

- A Difficult Existence

Such successes were important, for the men could easily become dispirited or depressed by the macabre nature of the work and its many difficulties. Operations were regularly conducted in temperatures higher than fifty degrees Celsius, while personnel had to contend with the threat of malaria brought by the wet season, as well as the violent rains and sandstorms that swept through the Western Desert halting work for days at a time.<sup>165</sup> Further difficulties arose from the manner in which the Eighth Army had buried and reported its dead. Many of the bodies and possessions exhumed from near the Mediterranean Sea were found to be sodden, rendering their identification impossible, with other complications caused by crosses having been placed over the wrong graves, the spreading of remains between different plots, incorrectly transcribed records, and erroneous map references cited in burial returns.<sup>166</sup> Mines proved an insuperable problem, with several Number 10 GCU personnel killed or maimed by their explosion during the course of operations.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 169/13811, Number 10 GCU War Diary, April, November 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/6816, Number 5 GRU (Unit and Detachment) War Diary, January 1942; TNA, PRO WO 169/13832, 2 Platoon, 46 Quartermaster Graves Registration Company, May 1943.

<sup>166</sup> Peter Roach, *The 8.15 to War – Memoirs of a Desert Rat: El Alamein, Wadi Halfa, Tunis, Salerno, Garigliano, Normandy and Holland*, (London: Leo Cooper, 1982), p. 98; CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections; CWGC, 2033, Instruction Manual, March 1944.

<sup>167</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13811, Number 10 GCU War Diary, April-May, October-November 1943; CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections.

Because of the potential for his men to become downcast, Fry took care to rest them from field operations.<sup>168</sup> Members of his unit were periodically assigned to the El Alamein cemetery where the work was safer, less grisly than the task of concentrating bodies, and not as physically demanding. There the men were helped by indentured Italian POWs as well as labourers hired from among the local population.<sup>169</sup> This rotation policy also served a practical purpose, for Fry was wary of losing personnel and then having to replace them with soldiers who were graves concentration novices and unfamiliar with the desert and its conditions. Allowing the men a day off every week was an equally important aspect of their pastoral care, with personnel able to use each Sunday to relax or to involve themselves in the activities Fry organised. These included sparring with the boxing gloves provided to the unit under a GREMEF welfare provision, and playing cricket against the soldiers of the New Zealand GRU who were stationed nearby.<sup>170</sup>

#### Section IV: The Development of the Graves Organisation and the Conduct of its Operations Before D-Day

- The Raising and Deployment of Number 8 GRU

At the same time as Hoffman was strengthening GREMEF in the autumn of 1942 with a view to its pushing westwards across North Africa with the Eighth Army, the DGRE raised Number 8 GRU for attachment to the Anglo-American First Army in

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<sup>168</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13811, Number 10 GCU War Diary, April 1943; CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections.

<sup>169</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13811, Number 10 GCU War Diary, February-March, October 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman Memorandum, circa October 1943.

<sup>170</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Despatch Note, 28 June 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13811, Number 10 GCU War Diary, June 1943. Fry was later promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and put in charge of all GREMEF concentration operations. See TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Staff List, circa September 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13811, Number 10 GCU War Diary, November 1943.

the event of its deployment to French North Africa.<sup>171</sup> There were two reasons for the unit's formation. First, the DGRE was keen to avoid a repeat of recent events when no AGS personnel had accompanied British forces to Madagascar because the DGRE had not been informed of their departure; and second it was cognisant that the GREMEF remit did not extend as far as Tunisia and Algeria.<sup>172</sup>

Command of Number 8 GRU, which had been raised at Aldershot on the 1931 GRU War Establishment and was the first unit formed by the DGRE in three years, was given to Captain S. C. G. Donovan, Intelligence Corps.<sup>173</sup> Formerly the Senior Postmaster in the Colonial Office and in his mid-fifties, he had lived in a number of countries and spoke five languages fluently, including French.<sup>174</sup> After two months of preparations, the thoroughness of which earned Ware's commendation, Donovan, his two fellow officers, and thirty-five other rank personnel disembarked at Algiers on 13 November 1942, five days after the First Army landings along the French North African coast.<sup>175</sup>

Their deployment did not proceed as planned. The DGRE had intended for the unit to follow the First Army in its eastwards advance towards Tunis. Yet in the weeks after their arrival Donovan and his men found themselves confined to Algiers on account of their being without transport or equipment.<sup>176</sup> By January the unit had secured its vehicles and supplies, but little operational progress had been made. As

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<sup>171</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, August-September 1942.

<sup>172</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, May 1942. See also TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, November 1942.

<sup>173</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, August-September 1942; TNA, PRO WO 175/1330, Number 8 GRU War Diary, November 1942.

<sup>174</sup> TNA, PRO WO 175/1330, Donovan to AFHQ, 7 February 1943; TNA, PRO WO 175/1330, Donovan to AFHQ, 16 February 1943.

<sup>175</sup> TNA, PRO WO 175/1330, Number 8 GRU War Diary, November 1942; TNA, PRO WO 175/1330, Donovan to AFHQ, 7 February 1943; Ellis, *The World War II Databook*, p. 34.

<sup>176</sup> TNA, PRO WO 175/1330, Number 8 GRU War Diary, November 1942; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, Fraser Report, 30 March 1944.

Donovan lamented, the accommodation provided to the unit was cramped and isolated, while the need for him to travel up to 100 kilometres a day in order to inspect cemeteries left him little opportunity to complete his administrative tasks.<sup>177</sup> He was frustrated also by the absence of a DADGRE at Allied Force Headquarters (AFHQ), the War Office having refused the DGRE sanction to appoint an officer to this position.<sup>178</sup> Donovan noted that '[m]uch of the work now done is not proper to a Registration Unit, but is what should be done by the D. A. [Deputy Assistant] Director's Department'.<sup>179</sup> The man to whom he had been made responsible, the Deputy Assistant Adjutant General at AFHQ, had no expertise in graves matters and provided no advice.<sup>180</sup> Donovan's problems were compounded when most of his personnel were seconded to other duties, leaving Number 8 GRU with only one clerk, one draughtsman, and one general labourer by the end of January.<sup>181</sup>

Feeling that a lack of support from AFHQ had made his position untenable, Donovan requested to be relieved of the command of Number 8 GRU.<sup>182</sup> He did so unaware that the 'A' Staff had produced a report in which he was accused, among other things, of being indecisive and too old to take charge of a graves unit.<sup>183</sup> Donovan, who thought these criticisms unfair, wrote numerous letters, including

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<sup>177</sup> TNA, PRO WO 175/1330, Number 8 GRU War Diary, January-February 1943.

<sup>178</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, September 1942.

<sup>179</sup> TNA, PRO WO 175/1330, Number 8 GRU War Diary, January 1943.

<sup>180</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, September 1942.

<sup>181</sup> TNA, PRO WO 175/1330, Number 8 GRU War Diary, January-February 1943. At the same time an embossing machine and a vehicle were taken from the unit for use elsewhere.

<sup>182</sup> TNA, PRO WO 175/1330, Number 8 GRU War Diary, January-February 1943; TNA, PRO WO 175/1330, Donovan to AFHQ, 4 February 1943.

<sup>183</sup> TNA, PRO WO 175/1330, Number 8 GRU War Diary, February 1943; TNA, PRO WO 175/1330, Donovan to AFHQ, 7 February 1943; TNA, PRO WO 175/1330, Donovan to AFHQ, 16 February 1943; TNA, PRO WO 175/1330, AFHQ to Donovan, 18 February 1943; TNA, PRO WO 175/1330, AFHQ to Donovan, 4 March 1943.

some to Ware, in an attempt to clear his name.<sup>184</sup> His efforts were to no avail. On 18 February he was ordered to relinquish his command and return to Britain.<sup>185</sup>

Following Donovan's departure, AFHQ reorganised its graves force in an attempt to conclude a wholly unsatisfactory episode. In March Number 8 GRU was reformed on the MEF War Establishment and a new unit, Number 19 GRU, created.<sup>186</sup> The latter was raised for service in the forward areas in Tunisia, while the restructured Number 8 GRU was attached to the First Army L of C and remained in Algeria.<sup>187</sup> Problems remained, however, with Number 8 GRU having only three persons of the stipulated thirteen on its strength well after its reformation had been effected.<sup>188</sup> AFHQ soon conceded that Numbers 8 and 19 GRU were 'under considerable pressure of work with a great deal of leeway to make good in the First Army area.'<sup>189</sup>

- Hoffman is Called to the War Office

In light of these difficulties, in March Hoffman was summoned to the War Office to discuss the state of graves operations in the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>190</sup> His stay in Britain produced two important developments. First, a decision was taken to bring Numbers 8 and 19 GRU under his command and to accord GREMEF

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<sup>184</sup> For example, see TNA, PRO WO 175/1330, Donovan to Ware, 26 February 1943.

<sup>185</sup> TNA, PRO WO 175/1330, AFHQ to Donovan, 18 February 1943; TNA, PRO WO 175/1330, AFHQ to Donovan, 4 March 1943.

<sup>186</sup> TNA, PRO WO 175/1330, Number 8 GRU War Diary, March 1943; TNA, PRO WO 175/1330, AFHQ to Donovan, 4 March 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, GREMEF War Diary, March 1943. Number 19 GRU was raised on the MEF War Establishment.

<sup>187</sup> TNA, PRO WO 175/1330, Number 8 GRU War Diary, March 1943; TNA, PRO WO 175/1330, AFHQ to Donovan, 4 March 1943; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, March 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Location of Graves Units, 20 July 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to War Office, 21 July 1943.

<sup>188</sup> TNA, PRO WO 175/1330, Number 8 GRU War Diary, March 1943.

<sup>189</sup> TNA, PRO WO 175/1330, AFHQ Memorandum, 13 May 1943.

<sup>190</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, GREMEF War Diary, March 1943; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, March 1943.

responsibility for all graves operations in Algeria and Tunisia.<sup>191</sup> As Ware now recognised, logistically it did not make sense to have two graves forces in northern Africa working independently of each other, while the amalgamation of the separate organisations would be beneficial in that it would allow Hoffman to transfer a number of experienced GREMEF personnel into the beleaguered British North Africa Force (BNAF) units.<sup>192</sup> To ensure that GREMEF could cope with these enlarged responsibilities, the organisation would again be expanded and a DADGRE to assist Hoffman appointed to AFHQ to oversee operations in French North Africa.<sup>193</sup>

The second development came when the IWGC agreed to assume control of completed military cemeteries in the Middle East and North Africa theatres from the DGRE. This transfer of responsibility would be done on a case-by-case basis and according to the provisos that the cemetery was in a presentable condition, no longer in a battle zone, and that each burial within it had been fully documented.<sup>194</sup> At the same time as this agreement was struck, senior IWGC officials petitioned Hoffman to accept a position within their organisation as Deputy Controller of North Africa District.<sup>195</sup> They reasoned he was the man best-placed to coordinate the handover of cemeteries in the region from the army to the IWGC, and to this end wanted him to

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<sup>191</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, March, June 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to War Office, 21 July 1943; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Middle East and Mediterranean Zone Summary, June 1945; CWGC, 2033, Ware to War Office, 27 March 1943; CWGC, 2033, Ware to War Office, 2 December 1943.

<sup>192</sup> CWGC, 2033, Ware to War Office, 27 March 1943.

<sup>193</sup> TNA, PRO WO 175/1330, Number 8 GRU War Diary, April 1943; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, April 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, GREMEF War Diary, March, May 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to Ware, 10 June 1943; CWGC, 2033, Ware to War Office, 27 March 1943.

<sup>194</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, February-March, June 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Cipher Message, 28 May 1943; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 178.

<sup>195</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, March 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Cipher Message, 28 May 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Cipher Message, 9 June 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, GREMEF War Diary, July 1943; *Twenty-fourth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 3.

be given an IWGC post.<sup>196</sup> Hoffman accepted the unpaid role, which was to be performed in conjunction with his army duties but as the secondary of his two concerns.<sup>197</sup>

- A Period of Change

Upon his return to Cairo at the end of May, Hoffman embarked on the reformation and expansion of GREMEF.<sup>198</sup> He gained authorisation from GHQ MEF to raise five new graves units, four of which were for registration purposes and the other for concentration.<sup>199</sup> However, his capacity to plan for the future was curtailed when he learnt that Peek was to return to full-time work with the IWGC and would need to be replaced, and that the DADGRE at AFHQ, having only recently been appointed, was being recalled by the War Office to undertake a special assignment in another theatre.<sup>200</sup> Compounding these unforeseen difficulties was news of the poor state of graves operations in East Africa. Graves units operating there had yet to hand over burial grounds to the IWGC despite there having been no hostilities in the region for two years: ‘cemeteries in Abyssinia and the Somalilands’, Hoffman wrote, ‘are “No one’s Baby” and are not properly maintained or periodically inspected’.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to War Office, 11 June 1943.

<sup>197</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, March 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Cipher Message, 28 May 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to Ware, 10 June 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman Note (2), 27 June 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, GREMEF War Diary, July 1943; *Twenty-fourth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 3. Ware approved of Hoffman being offered the position, and of his accepting it. Hoffman was promoted to Colonel in July.

<sup>198</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, GREMEF War Diary, May 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to Ware, 10 June 1943; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, May-June 1943.

<sup>199</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to War Office, 11 June 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, GREMEF War Diary, May-June 1943; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, May-June 1943; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Middle East and Mediterranean Zone Summary, June 1945.

<sup>200</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to War Office, 11 June 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman Note, 27 June 1943; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, July 1943.

<sup>201</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to War Office, 11 June 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, GREMEF War Diary, June 1943; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Middle East and Mediterranean Zone

At this time Hoffman sent Macallan a detailed review of the deployment of Number 8 GRU. He wrote that the sending of only this unit to French North Africa had not been 'sufficient for the territory and task in hand', and that on deployment the unit 'was wrongly constituted and had not from the practicable point of view received any initial training or adequate instructions as to their duties and responsibilities.'<sup>202</sup> Nor, he continued, had Numbers 8 and 19 GRU been properly provisioned and equipped, observing that '[t]he "A" Staff at B.N.A.F. were also (as usual in large formations) unaware of G.R. requirements and functions'.<sup>203</sup> The review recommended that the Field Service Regulations relevant to the graves organisation be redrafted, and cautioned that the deployment of AGS personnel to the Continent would require extensive resources and the backing of an ordered and committed organisation if the difficulties experienced by Number 8 GRU were not to be revisited.<sup>204</sup>

On a different matter, Hoffman asked the War Office to define exactly what it accepted as constituting a body. He explained that GCU personnel had opened many graves in which little or no trace of bodily remains had been found, and while acknowledging that in these cases '[c]oncentration is "truthfully" out of the question', he wondered whether it would be permissible to bury a 'body' 'by removing some earth from the site or sites and placing it in a sandbag and re-interring it in a permanent cemetery.'<sup>205</sup>

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Summary, June 1945. Due to a convoluted administrative arrangement, graves policy in East Africa was formulated and controlled by the regional command in Nairobi rather than GREMEF. This made it difficult for Hoffman to influence graves operations there in any substantive way.

<sup>202</sup> CWGC, 2033, Hoffman Report, 12 June 1943.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, General Order (Middle East) 147, 12 March 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to War Office, 11 June 1943. In March, Hoffman had issued a General Order reminding commanders of the responsibility they had to assist AGS operations.

<sup>204</sup> CWGC, 2033, Hoffman Report, 12 June 1943.

<sup>205</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to War Office, 11 June 1943. The underlining is Hoffman's.

The task of addressing these issues fell to Colonel S. G. G. Fraser, who replaced Macallan as AAG in July.<sup>206</sup> It was a good portent for the future of the graves organisation that Fraser thought similarly to Hoffman. The new AAG was adamant that the AGS required immediate and major reform if its important task were to be done properly.<sup>207</sup> He agreed that Field Service Regulations needed to be revised to make them clearer and more definite, and acknowledged the importance of better training for personnel and the necessity of the DGRE appointing liaison officers to facilitate a closer relationship between the graves service and the wider army.<sup>208</sup> In this regard he urged Ware to appoint a DADGRE with responsibility for Italy, and to authorise an AGS deployment to Sicily where the Eighth Army had landed in early July.<sup>209</sup> Although this would mean that operations in North Africa and the Middle East would take longer to complete, the numbers of lost and unidentifiable bodies and graves in Italy would be reduced if the AGS followed close behind the army.

On the subject of the body, Fraser formulated two general rules for the guidance of officers. The first read: '[w]here there is satisfactory evidence that an actual interment of some of the mortal remains of the deceased took place but nothing can be found on exhumation, it may be assumed that the remains have been absorbed into the soil, and "concentration" can take the form of moving a bag of soil to the new grave.'<sup>210</sup> To this directive Fraser added that '[n]o mention of the fact of no actual remains having been found, which might cause distress to the relatives,

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<sup>206</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, August 1943; *The Quarterly Army List: October 1943*, Part I, (London: HMSO, 1943), p. 42.

<sup>207</sup> CWGC, 2033, Fraser to Ware, 2 August 1943.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*; CWGC, 2033, Fraser to Ware (Appendix B), 2 August 1943.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, August 1943; Ellis, *The World War II Databook*, p. 37.

<sup>210</sup> CWGC, 2033, Fraser to Hoffman, 22 October 1943.

should be made on any documentary reports concerning this concentration.<sup>211</sup> The second rule he explained to Hoffman thus: ‘[w]here no burial ever took place it is best to treat the case as that of an unlocated [sic] grave and the name would be eventually commemorated among the missing at the appropriate cemetery.’<sup>212</sup>

Number 11 GRU and a detachment from Number 18 GRU, along with a DADGRE to supervise operations, were deployed to Sicily in August.<sup>213</sup> While the late entry of the units into the Italian campaign meant that graves work on the island began six weeks in arrears, their deployment marked a seminal moment nonetheless: it was the first AGS operation launched outside of Africa in more than three years.<sup>214</sup> Shortly after the graves contingent landed on Sicily, the GREMEF jurisdiction was extended to include Italy and the command renamed the Graves Registration and Enquiries (GRE) Mediterranean Pool.<sup>215</sup>

Change was also afoot within the DGRE in London. In the knowledge that his office was falling behind in its work of processing registration reports and answering public queries about grave locations, Ware petitioned the War Office for more staff.<sup>216</sup> The addition of thirty-two personnel – raising the total number of people employed at the department to fifty-four – was approved, as was a move from the existing DGRE offices within IWGC headquarters at Wooburn House in

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<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>213</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, August-September 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13814, Number 11 GRU War Diary, August 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13818, Number 18 (Detachment) GRU War Diary, August 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13803, DADGRE Italy War Diary, September-October 1943; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Middle East and Mediterranean Zone Summary, June 1945; CWGC, 2033, Hoffman Report, 15 December 1943.

<sup>214</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, August 1943.

<sup>215</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, September 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, GREMEF War Diary, September 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Cipher Message, 12 October 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Revision of War Establishment, 23 November 1943; CWGC, 2033, Fraser to Ware, 2 August 1943.

<sup>216</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, July 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13804, GRE Records Office War Diary, December 1943; CWGC, 2033, Instruction Manual, March 1944.

Buckinghamshire to more spacious War Office accommodation in London.<sup>217</sup>

However, by the time the extra staff members arrived, it was realised that the increased work caused by the invasion of Sicily would prevent them from clearing the administrative backlog. The attachment of a further fifty clerical staff for a period of four months was sought and authorised.<sup>218</sup>

For his part Hoffman continued to enlarge the AGS, a process he had first begun several months earlier. Eleven new units – eight GRUs and three GCUs – were raised over the summer and early autumn of 1943. When the GRE Mediterranean Pool War Establishment was finalised in December, the number of units in the organisation was twenty.<sup>219</sup> With few British soldiers having been recruited, Hoffman was forced to staff the new formations mostly with Italian POWs.<sup>220</sup> He knew that many in Britain would be displeased should they learn of enemy servicemen handling the remains of their dead – the AGS adopted the euphemism ‘Dilution Personnel’ to refer to Italians employed in this regard – but the prisoners were a ready source of labour and there was neither option for acting

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<sup>217</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, July-August 1943; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE Staff, July 1943; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 161.

<sup>218</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, September 1943.

<sup>219</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, GREMEF War Diary, May-September 1943; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, May-September, December 1943; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, Proposed War Establishment (Appendix A), 10 December 1943; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Middle East and Mediterranean Zone Summary, June 1945. Sixteen of the twenty units were GRUs, the remaining four GCUs.

<sup>220</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, Proposed War Establishment, circa autumn 1943; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, Proposed War Establishment (Appendix A), 10 December 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman Directive, 4 August 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman Directive, 13 August 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Cipher Message, 12 October 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Revision of War Establishment, 23 November 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Revision of War Establishment, 23 November 1943 (Appendix B); TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Reorganisation Memorandum, 17 December 1943; CWGC, 2033, Ware to Office of the Adjutant General, 2 December 1943; CWGC, 2033, Hoffman Report, 15 December 1943; CWGC, 2033, Hoffman to Fraser, 20 December 1943. The Italian POWs, who volunteered to work for the AGS, were given training in their duties before their deployment. Hoffman did not see their employment as a negative arrangement. He thought the prisoners very good at the work with which they were entrusted.

otherwise nor time to delay.<sup>221</sup> Ware now conceded that graves operations would extend well into the post-war era, while Hoffman estimated that even with the assistance of POWs and hired non-European workers, the concentration of remains in the Middle East and North Africa theatres alone would take a minimum of three more years to complete.<sup>222</sup>

The size of the task and the need for urgency was reflected in the concurrent expansion of the administrative arm of the GRE Mediterranean Pool. By December, Hoffman, who had been upgraded to Deputy Director Graves Registration and Enquiries (DDGRE), was supported by twelve principal officers, three of whom had been appointed ADGRE and the remaining nine DADGRE, and a clerical staff of approximately 130 based at GRE Mediterranean Pool headquarters in Cairo.<sup>223</sup> Of those appointed to the role of DADGRE, each was given a specific role relating to records, statistics, or field operations.<sup>224</sup> A GRE Mediterranean Pool Records Office was established in Cairo in December, with a second administrative centre then set up in Algiers: divided into 'Registrations' and 'Concentrations' sections, these offices were staffed by clerks who were tested on their skills and knowledge of the

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<sup>221</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, November 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to GHQ India, 20 November 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Reorganisation Memorandum, 17 December 1943; CWGC, 2033, Ware to Office of the Adjutant General, 2 December 1943; CWGC, 2033, Hoffman to Fraser, 20 December 1943. When Hoffman first recruited the Italians to the AGS, they were POWs as Italy had yet to change allegiance to the Allied powers.

<sup>222</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman Note, 27 June 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman Note (2), 27 June 1943; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, October-November 1943; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, Proposed War Establishment (Appendix A), 10 December 1943.

<sup>223</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, GREMEF War Diary, November 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13804, GRE Records Office War Diary, December 1943; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Middle East and Mediterranean Zone Summary, June 1945; CWGC, 2033, Ware to Office of the Adjutant General, 2 December 1943.

<sup>224</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Middle East and Mediterranean Zone Summary, June 1945; TNA, PRO WO 169/13804, GRE Records Office War Diary, December 1943.

graves organisation before their employment was confirmed.<sup>225</sup> The divisions of responsibility within the AGS had never been so clearly and professionally ordered.

- Criticisms of Graves Operations

Amid these developments there was bad news for the DGRE. In December 1943 a high-ranking officer from AFHQ informed the Adjutant General of his opinion that graves operations in North Africa were not being performed satisfactorily.<sup>226</sup> In the same month further criticism of the AGS was received from Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Portal, Chief of the Air Staff (CAS).<sup>227</sup> He had recently returned from an overseas tour and was so disappointed by the state of the cemetery at Tunis, sections of which he labelled 'disgraceful', that he had a letter sent to the DGRE to relate what he had seen:

'[m]any graves had wooden crosses without any form of identification, some crosses had apparently had names painted on them but this [sic] had become illegible on account of the weather and on many of the nameless graves were rusty cigarette tins said to contain the particulars of the person buried. The C.A.S. states that he opened three of these tins and in one he found a paper, the writing on which was illegible, the paper in the second tin contained writing which was in the last stage of legibility and the third tin was full of ants.'<sup>228</sup>

Ware recognised in these criticisms the damning implication that he and his London-based staff were ignorant of circumstances in the field.<sup>229</sup> He thus sent Fraser to tour the Middle East and Mediterranean theatres to assess at first hand the progress of

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<sup>225</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman Note, 27 June 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13804, GRE Records Office War Diary, December 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13804, Clerical Trade Test, December 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/18050, Minimum Establishment for Records Office, circa December 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/18050, Clerical Trade Test, January 1944; TNA, PRO WO 170/3960, Report by Major C. Huntingdon, 5 January 1944; TNA, PRO WO 170/3960, GRE Records Office (Algiers) War Diary, January 1944.

<sup>226</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, December 1943.

<sup>227</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/18049, Fraser to AFHQ, 20 December 1943; John D. Cantwell, *The Second World War: A Guide to Documents in the Public Record Office*, (Kew: PRO, 1998), p. 37.

<sup>228</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/18049, Fraser to AFHQ, 20 December 1943.

<sup>229</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, July-December 1943, January 1944.

graves operations, and to make the acquaintance of AGS personnel in order to establish whether their standard of work and the conditions under which they laboured were acceptable.<sup>230</sup>

Between January and March 1944, Fraser travelled over 9000 miles through Italy and the countries of North Africa and the Levant.<sup>231</sup> He was impressed by the dedication and bravery of AGS personnel, and pleased that they welcomed his presence as a demonstration 'that the higher authorities had an interest in them and their work': as one officer noted, there had been puzzlement as to why the War Office had not previously 'thought fit to send a representative to visit the Graves Registration Service in the Mediterranean theatres where active operations had been in progress for nearly three years.'<sup>232</sup> Fraser afforded special praise to Hoffman, whose efforts at forcing supplies and support from 'A' Staff officers he recognised as having been pivotal to the development of the AGS.<sup>233</sup> The AAG soon came to the conclusion that the frontline units were responsible for many of the shortcomings in the treatment of the dead:

[f]rom even a brief trip through Algeria and Tunisia it appears that a great deal of the work now being done by Graves Service Units has been caused not so much by the absence of Graves Service staff and units as by the neglect of formations and units to carry out normal battle procedure. In many cases no formation burial grounds were selected or made known to units, battlefields were not cleared, nor did many units bury their dead, as unburied are still being found in open positions. Even where burial was carried out little attempt was made to collect bodies at

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<sup>230</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, December 1943, January 1944; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, Ware Memorandum, January 1944; CWGC, 2033, War Office Meeting Minutes, 5 January 1944; CWGC, 2033, Lieutenant Colonel H. F. Chettle to Ware, 4 April 1944.

<sup>231</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, January, March 1944; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, Details of Fraser Tour, January-March 1944.

<sup>232</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, Details of Fraser Tour, January-March 1944; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, Fraser Report, 30 March 1944; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Hoffman Report, 18 June 1945; CWGC, 2033, Fraser to War Office, 10 February 1944.

<sup>233</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, Fraser Report, 30 March 1944; CWGC, 2033, Fraser to Ware, 19 February 1944; CWGC, 2033, Fraser to War Office, 10 February 1944.

all before interment, and in many cases no burial returns were made out or submitted.<sup>234</sup>

Fraser concluded his tour convinced that everything possible was being done to complete graves operations in the Middle East and Mediterranean theatres as quickly as circumstances allowed, and he returned to Britain determined to apply what he had learnt to the benefit of the AGS in its forthcoming deployment to the Continent.<sup>235</sup>

- Preparing for North-west Europe

DGRE preparations for the invasion of north-west Europe were well-advanced by this time. Numbers 32, 33 and 34 GRU had been formed – on the same GRU War Establishment as was used in the GRE Mediterranean Pool – and placed on stand-by for attachment to 21 Army Group, and approval for a DADGRE to accompany the units to the Continent had been secured.<sup>236</sup> Major Stott, the erstwhile commander of Number 2 GRU, was selected for this position, and during February and March 1944 he and the men in his charge were schooled thoroughly in their duties.<sup>237</sup> When Numbers 35 and 36 GRU were raised later in the spring, their members were given

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<sup>234</sup> CWGC, 2033, Major C. Huntingdon to War Office, 7 February 1944.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, Fraser Report, 30 March 1944; CWGC, 2033, Fraser to Ware, 19 February 1944; CWGC, 2033, J. C. Latter to Ware, 31 March 1944.

<sup>236</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, August-December 1943; TNA, PRO WO 166/14164, Number 32 GRU War Diary, December 1943; TNA, PRO WO 171/3786, Number 32 GRU War Diary, January 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3787, Number 33 GRU War Diary, March 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3788, Number 34 GRU War Diary, March 1944.

<sup>237</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, December 1943, February 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3786, Number 32 GRU War Diary, February 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3787, Number 33 GRU War Diary, March 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3788, Number 34 GRU War Diary, March-April 1944. Stott's appointment as DADGRE was upgraded to ADGRE on 1 April 1944. See TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, April 1944.

the same training at an army camp in Essex to ready them for service on the Continent.<sup>238</sup>

In addition to receiving this instruction, Stott and the officers of the new units were provided with a manual in which the aspects of graves operations were explained in detail.<sup>239</sup> Written by a senior member of Hoffman's staff for the benefit of other AGS officers, it was the first resource of its kind. The subjects covered ranged from explanations of the religious rites to be observed when interring the dead of different faiths, to how to bury a rigid corpse: '[t]he arms should be forced down to the side with the aid of a shovel.'<sup>240</sup> In the section on disinterment it was noted that '[exhumation] does not take long and during this period the man can smoke to disguise the odour which is inevitable' – '[a]ny unpleasantness that may be in exhumation is more than repaid by the satisfaction one gets at having identified a man and the feeling that one has done a dead comrade a good turn.'<sup>241</sup> The manual warned personnel to avoid 'indiscreet talk', to ensure the AGS avoided acquiring a reputation within the army 'as a "Corps of Ghouls"', although to this injunction was added the recommendation that officers make an example of servicemen who, in their ignorance of its task, derided the graves organisation.<sup>242</sup> The DGRE and the AGS were better prepared for the invasion of north-west Europe than for any previous operation.

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<sup>238</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, March 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3787, Number 33 GRU War Diary, April 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3789, Number 35 GRU War Diary, April 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3790, Number 36 GRU War Diary, April 1944.

<sup>239</sup> CWGC, 2033, Preface to Instruction Manual, 11 March 1944.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*; CWGC, 2033, Instruction Manual, March 1944.

<sup>241</sup> CWGC, 2033, Instruction Manual, March 1944.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*

## Chapter Three

### The Second Stage of Army Graves Operations, June 1944-July 1949

- The AGS Returns to North-west Europe

The personnel of Numbers 33 and 36 GRU landed at Normandy on 10 June 1944, four days after the Allied invasion of north-west Europe.<sup>1</sup> They were followed by their colleagues in Number 32 GRU who disembarked at Arromanches on 13 June, and then by the men in Numbers 34 and 35 GRU several days later.<sup>2</sup> Ware noted that their deployment so soon after the main fighting force represented 'a great improvement in priority on any previous expedition.'<sup>3</sup> However, the ability of the 21 Army Group Graves Service to operate was restricted by the crowded conditions within the Normandy bridgehead and the constant need to move billets in order to accommodate frontline soldiers.<sup>4</sup> It was more than two months before Stott, the ADGRE with responsibility for the theatre, was able to gauge accurately the size of the task facing his force.<sup>5</sup> He immediately petitioned the War Office for more staff.

Stott thought the additional men necessary on two counts. First, he was unsure that his personnel, the majority of whom had no field experience, would be able to attend to the graves of the thousands of servicemen killed since D-Day and

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<sup>1</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/3787, Number 33 GRU War Diary, June 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3790, Number 36 GRU War Diary, June 1944.

<sup>2</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/3786, Number 32 GRU War Diary, June 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3788, Number 34 GRU War Diary, June 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3789, Number 35 GRU War Diary, June 1944.

<sup>3</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, June 1944.

<sup>4</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, June-August 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/186, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, September 1944.

<sup>5</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/186, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, September 1944. Stott was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel on 23 June 1944. See *The Quarterly Army List: October 1944*, Part II, (London: HMSO, 1944), p. 3015.

still keep pace with 21 Army Group if and when it moved from the bridgehead.<sup>6</sup> Second, he was concerned about what was to be done with the remains of military personnel buried on the Continent before D-Day. Among this number were the bodies of POWs, and of soldiers killed in the 1939-40 campaign, who had been interred by the enemy or civilians, often in isolated graves, after the retreat of the British army to Dunkirk.<sup>7</sup> Aside from the additional commitment of resources and labour which the registration of these remains would necessitate, Stott knew that identifying the unknown among the pre-D-Day dead would be especially difficult because of the time that had passed since burial.<sup>8</sup>

In early September Stott was informed that he was to be provided with three new formations, Numbers 37 and 38 GRU as well as a GCU, Number 39, but that their men were to attend only to the graves of the post-D-Day dead.<sup>9</sup> While Stott was awaiting the deployment of the units, he travelled through northern France and into Belgium meeting local officials and concluding agreements with them to facilitate AGS operations.<sup>10</sup> From Belgian authorities he obtained a waiver allowing his men to exhume bodies without the customary judicial permission, as well as the promise

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<sup>6</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, September 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/186, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, September 1944; CWGC, 2033, Fraser to Ware, 23 October 1944.

<sup>7</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, Fraser to British Military Commands, 21 July 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/186, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, July, September-October 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/186, Stott to DGRE, 3 October 1944; Stockman, *Seaforth Highlanders*, pp. 50, 58-9.

<sup>8</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/186, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, October-November 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, March 1945; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Stott to DGRE, 16 March 1945; CWGC, 2033, Fraser to Ware, 23 October 1944.

<sup>9</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, September 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/186, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, September-October 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3786, Number 32 GRU War Diary, August 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3791, Number 37 GRU War Diary, September 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3792, Number 38 GRU War Diary, September 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3794, Number 39 GCU War Diary, October 1944.

<sup>10</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/186, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, September 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/186, Stott Tour Map, September 1944.

that officials across the country would report to him the location of any isolated graves.<sup>11</sup> Stott also used this time away to designate as permanent a number of battlefield cemeteries, arranging in each case for the landowners who owned the relevant territory to divest control of it to the 21 Army Group Graves Service as the representative of the British government.<sup>12</sup> His selections favoured cemeteries which were associated with a particular unit and held special significance for its men, although he always ensured first that the location of these burial grounds met with the criteria set out in Field Service Regulations.<sup>13</sup> In this regard the asymmetry and small size of some cemeteries was not a constraining factor. Stott selected a number of sites with space for only forty to 150 graves in the knowledge that Ware thought these translated better than larger graveyards ideas of ‘reverence’ and ‘peace’.<sup>14</sup> The biggest of the cemeteries earmarked as permanent was at Bayeux where 5000 servicemen were to be interred.<sup>15</sup>

By the time Stott had completed his tour, the new units had been raised and their personnel trained.<sup>16</sup> At the end of September he stationed Number 37 GRU in the Falaise region, Number 38 GRU in the Bény-Bocage area, and Number 39 GCU in Bayeux in order that its personnel could begin moving British bodies from the

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<sup>11</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/186, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, October 1944.

<sup>12</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/186, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, September–November 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/186, Stott to Major General H. W. A. F. Graham, 15 September 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/186, Paris Meeting Minutes, 25 October 1944. Most landowners were happy to gift their land to the AGS or accept compensation for it. If they did not want to part with their land or could not be contacted, steps could be taken to acquire it compulsorily. Stott attempted to avoid such requisitioning wherever possible, and it was rarely needed.

<sup>13</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/186, Stott to Major General H. W. A. F. Graham, 15 September 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/186, Cemetery Graphics, November 1944.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 171/186, Stott to Major E. Lugard and Major T. A. K. Longstaffe, 8 December 1944. In France, forty burials was the minimum number allowed in a military cemetery by law.

<sup>15</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/186, Stott to Major General H. W. A. F. Graham, 15 September 1944; CWGC, 2033, Cemetery List, October 1944.

<sup>16</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, September 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/186, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, September 1944.

invasion beaches to the cemetery in the town.<sup>17</sup> Of the other graves formations, Number 32 GRU was encamped in Bayeux where its men were constructing the burial ground and photographing all the British graves in permanent cemeteries throughout the Normandy region, it being War Office policy to provide the next-of-kin of each dead man with two pictures of his final burial place free of charge, Number 34 GRU was working in northern France, and Numbers 33, 35 and 36 GRU had commenced operations in Belgium.<sup>18</sup> Stott was also based in that country, having moved his headquarters from Bayeux to the more central location of Brussels. In Belgium he was able to access the extensive records which the Ministry of the Interior had compiled on each military burial performed in the country during the war.<sup>19</sup>

- Fraser Tours North-west Europe

In October Fraser flew to the Continent to assess the progress being made by the 21 Army Group Graves Service.<sup>20</sup> The impetus for his journey came from a resolve developed after his trip to the Middle East and Mediterranean theatres earlier in the

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<sup>17</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/186, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, September 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/186, Stott to Major General H. W. A. F. Graham, 15 September 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3791, Number 37 GRU War Diary, September-October 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3792, Number 38 GRU War Diary, September-October 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3794, Number 39 GCU War Diary, October 1944; CWGC, 2033, List of Units Visited by Fraser, October 1944; CWGC, 2033, Cemetery List, October 1944; *The Administrative History of the Operations of 21 Army Group on the Continent of Europe*, p. 92.

<sup>18</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/186, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, September 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3786, Number 32 GRU War Diary, July-September 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3787, Number 33 GRU War Diary, September 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3788, Number 34 GRU War Diary, August-September 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3789, Number 35 GRU War Diary, September 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3790, Number 36 GRU War Diary, September 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, General Routine Orders (AGS), circa May 1945; CWGC, 2033, Instruction Manual, March 1944; CWGC, 2033, List of Units Visited by Fraser, October 1944.

<sup>19</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/186, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, September-October 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/186, Stott Tour Map, September 1944.

<sup>20</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/186, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, October 1944; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, October 1944; CWGC, 2033, Fraser to Ware, 23 October 1944; CWGC, 2033, Fraser Tour Itinerary, October 1944.

year that DGRE officers should regularly visit AGS personnel in the field.<sup>21</sup>

Following a series of meetings in Brussels, Fraser and Stott spent one week travelling through the operational area of the 21 Army Group Graves Service.<sup>22</sup>

Fraser was pleased that the majority of the units had managed to find secure and warm accommodation, and by what had already been achieved.<sup>23</sup> 12,500 of the 15,000 British graves reported to the AGS since June had been registered, more than 400 bodies had been concentrated from isolated burial places into permanent cemeteries, and operations had commenced in Holland.<sup>24</sup> Fraser was similarly satisfied with the choice of permanent cemeteries. In a report to Ware he described Ryes cemetery, for instance, as '[a] fine site with views to the sea and about 2 miles from the [invasion] beaches[,] [h]as about 150 direct burials and some local concentrations and will receive more.'<sup>25</sup>

However, Fraser did identify certain concerns. Most importantly, the question of attending to the pre-D-Day graves remained unresolved. 'A' Staff officers at 21 Army Group headquarters were adamant that this task was beyond the capabilities of its AGS contingent as it was then constituted, while their counterparts at the War Office were equally reluctant to assume responsibility for these graves.<sup>26</sup> Fraser did not proffer a solution to the conundrum, but noted that the 21 Army Group Graves Service was struggling to cope with its workload, particularly with the Royal

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<sup>21</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, Fraser Report, 30 March 1944.

<sup>22</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/3790, Number 36 GRU War Diary, October 1944; CWGC, 2033, Fraser Tour Itinerary, October 1944; CWGC, 2033, List of Units Visited by Fraser, October 1944.

<sup>23</sup> CWGC, 2033, Fraser to Ware, 23 October 1944; CWGC, 2033, List of Units Visited by Fraser, October 1944.

<sup>24</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/186, Statistics Report, 15 October 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/186, Unit Location Statement, October 1944. Since D-Day, the AGS in north-west Europe had also managed to register 7,500 Allied and enemy graves.

<sup>25</sup> CWGC, 2033, Fraser to Ware, 23 October 1944; CWGC, 2033, Cemetery List, October 1944.

<sup>26</sup> CWGC, 2033, Fraser to Ware, 23 October 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/186, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, October 1944.

Engineers engaged at the front and unavailable for cemetery construction duties. The usefulness of the civilian labourers hired in their stead was limited for they did not possess the same tools and skills as the Engineers.<sup>27</sup> Fraser was concerned also about the prospect of a bitter winter. The weather was deteriorating, and should the cold become severe and the ground turn to ice, graves operations would be severely hampered.<sup>28</sup>

- Developments in the Autumn

Fraser returned to London in mid-October and to the news that Ware, having decided that his IWGC commitments had become ‘too pressing to allow him to devote sufficient time to his military duties’, was to resign from the DGRE.<sup>29</sup> Ware, who was now seventy-five, had always preferred his wide-ranging duties at the IWGC to the administrative tasks which occupied his time at the War Office, and his resignation did not come as a surprise.<sup>30</sup> Among certain of his army colleagues it prompted little regret. Since the beginning of the war, Ware had devoted more time to the IWGC than to his military role – he had not inspected graves units in the field since visiting France in 1939 – and as a result the AGS had suffered from inadequate supervision.<sup>31</sup> This lack of leadership, coupled with the fact that Ware did not

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<sup>27</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/186, Paris Meeting Minutes, 25 October 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3786, Number 32 GRU War Diary, October, December 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3794, Number 39 GCU War Diary, November 1944; CWGC, 2033, Fraser to Ware, 23 October 1944; CWGC, 2033, List of Units Visited by Fraser, October 1944; CWGC, 2033, Cemetery List, October 1944.

<sup>28</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/3786, Number 32 GRU War Diary, November 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3794, Number 39 GCU War Diary, November 1944; CWGC, 2033, Fraser to Ware, 23 October 1944; CWGC, 2033, Cemetery List, October 1944.

<sup>29</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, October 1944; *Twenty-fifth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, (London: HMSO, 1945), p. 7; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 181.

<sup>30</sup> Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, pp. 158, 181.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 162, 181; *Twenty-first Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, (London: HMSO, 1941), p. 13.

always acknowledge the good deeds of the AGS – his refusal to correct media reports in which the IWGC was credited for work done by military graves personnel annoyed Fraser – were points of frustration for certain DGRE staff members.<sup>32</sup>

The Army Council appointed Brigadier J. K. McNair, formerly of the Royal Artillery, to succeed Ware on his retirement, which was scheduled for December, and in the interim approved the amendment of the DGRE War Establishment to allow for the new director to be employed and paid as a full-time army officer.<sup>33</sup> The revised establishment also made provision for McNair to hire a further 110 clerical staff once he assumed the directorship, an increase in their number having been necessitated by a burgeoning administrative workload at the DGRE.<sup>34</sup>

The announcement of these changes was followed by another major development. After several months spent arguing the issue with 'A' Staff on the Continent, the War Office declared its intention to raise Number 40 GRU, as well as an additional contingent comprised of one officer and four other ranks on a specially-conceived War Establishment, specifically to register the graves of the pre-D-Day dead in north-west Europe.<sup>35</sup> Having realised that the need to attend to these graves was urgent – the DGRE knew of 3000 such interments, and the number of public enquiries relating to the whereabouts and possible identity of those buried in these

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<sup>32</sup> See TNA, PRO WO 169/18049, Mediterranean Pool Headquarters War Diary, October 1944; and correspondence in CWGC, 2033.

<sup>33</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, October, December 1944; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Establishment, circa autumn 1944; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Establishment (Officers), circa autumn 1944; *Twenty-fifth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 7; *The Quarterly Army List: October 1944*, Part I, p. 210; *The Quarterly Army List: January 1945*, Part I, (London: HMSO, 1945), p. 15B.

<sup>34</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, December 1944; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Establishment, circa autumn 1944; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Establishment (Officers), circa autumn 1944; *Twenty-fifth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 7; *The Quarterly Army List: January 1945*, Part I, p. 15B. Ware was appointed Honorary Advisor to the DGRE in December 1944.

<sup>35</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, November 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/186, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, November 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3793, Number 40 GRU War Diary, November 1944-January 1945.

sites had increased significantly – the War Office determined to deploy these formations by January 1945.<sup>36</sup>

- The Experiences of Captain A. R. Thomas

In November 1944, two months after returning to Britain from North Africa where he had served with Numbers 10 and 25 GCU, Captain A. R. Thomas was ordered to report to Aldershot where Number 40 GRU was being mobilised. He was to be the inaugural commander of this new unit.<sup>37</sup> At the barracks Thomas met his two lieutenants. One of them was an experienced AGS officer whom he had befriended on a previous deployment, and the other was a long-serving member of the Territorial Army who had no experience of graves work but who was cheerful and enthusiastic.<sup>38</sup> Thomas was pleased with their attachment to Number 40 GRU, and to learn that both lieutenants spoke French, for he did not.<sup>39</sup> The three officers were joined at Aldershot by the ten other rank personnel who were to make up the remainder of the unit and, after a period spent training the recruits and arranging for the provision of stores and equipment, they sailed for the Continent in the first week of January 1945.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, December 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/186, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, October-November 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3794, 21 Army Group Memorandum, 11 December 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/186, Statistics Report, December 1944; *The Administrative History of the Operations of 21 Army Group on the Continent of Europe*, p. 92.

<sup>37</sup> CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, GREMEF War Diary, October 1943; TNA, PRO WO 171/3793, Number 40 GRU War Diary, November 1944-January 1945.

<sup>38</sup> CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections; TNA, PRO WO 171/3793, Field Return of Officers, November 1944-January 1945.

<sup>39</sup> CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, December 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/186, Unit Location Statement, December 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3793, Number 40 GRU War Diary, November 1944-January 1945; TNA, PRO WO 171/3793, Field Return of Other Ranks, November 1944-January 1945; *The Administrative History of the Operations of 21 Army Group on the Continent of Europe*, p. 131.

The following weeks proved frustrating for Thomas and his men. Because of inclement weather, the crossing to Ostend in Belgium involved several attempts and took four days. On the Continent, the personnel of Number 40 GRU spent one week in a transit camp awaiting permission to leave.<sup>41</sup> When clearance eventually was obtained, Thomas was instructed to take his unit to Amiens. The 200 mile trip took two days as the roads were clogged with military traffic and were covered in snow and ice, the fears of a particularly harsh European winter having been realised. After reaching Amiens and finding that nobody was expecting the unit, Thomas drove a further 200 miles to and from Lille in search of someone who could provide him with definite instructions. He eventually encountered a fellow AGS officer who confirmed that Number 40 GRU was to register the pre-D-Day British graves in the Amiens region. This task was commenced at the end of January, the adverse weather making progress slow.<sup>42</sup> Thomas did not see this work completed, for at the end of February he was ordered to join Number 48 GCU, a newly-raised formation which was stationed at Leon-Sur-Mer in Normandy.<sup>43</sup>

After two months spent working along the Norman coast, Thomas was instructed to lead several soldiers from his unit to Ghel in Belgium where they were to concentrate into permanent cemeteries the bodies of servicemen killed in fighting

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<sup>41</sup> CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections; TNA, PRO WO 171/3793, Number 40 GRU War Diary, November 1944-January 1945.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 171/186, Unit Location Statement, December 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/8349, Number 39 GCU War Diary, January 1945; TNA, PRO WO 171/8350, Number 40 GRU War Diary, February 1945.

<sup>43</sup> CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections; TNA, PRO WO 171/3794, 21 Army Group Memorandum, 20 September 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3794, 21 Army Group Memorandum, 1 October 1944; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, November 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/186, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, November 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3794, 21 Army Group Memorandum, 11 December 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Changes in Officer Postings, February 1945; TNA, PRO WO 171/8350, Number 40 GRU War Diary, February-March 1945.

for the Meuse-Escaut Canal in September 1944.<sup>44</sup> In Gheel Thomas prepared for operations. He housed his other ranks with a group of Royal Engineers and found for himself a room above a shop, choosing these lodgings on the basis that the adjacent hotel had a bath, something which he regarded as a necessity given the nature of graves work.<sup>45</sup> He secured the services of an interpreter, visited the town clerk who promised to find him 100 local men willing to be employed as paid labourers, and called on the *Burgermeister* who took him to the two cemetery sites selected by Stott.<sup>46</sup> The first piece of land, in a cornfield at Kasterlee, was to be used exclusively for the burial of British and Allied servicemen.<sup>47</sup> The second site was on flat and open ground on the outskirts of Gheel and was to contain only German remains.

Work began at Kasterlee, for there the cornfield had to be cleared. British personnel and labourers removed all the corn, which Thomas distributed among the locals as a gesture of goodwill, and then any other remaining plants and roots. This weeding involved the men crawling across the field in an unbroken line, and was repeated until the ground was completely bare.<sup>48</sup> Thomas then sent his sergeant to the nearest British army depot to indent from it tape measures and minefield markers, to be used during the planning and construction of the two cemeteries, blankets and telephone wire to wrap and bind the dead, and the disinfectant creosol and carbolic soap for hygiene. The sergeant also obtained scrubbing and paint brushes, paint, stencils and several hundred pre-fabricated steel crosses which had been shipped to

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<sup>44</sup> CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections; CWGC, Kasterlee War Cemetery; TNA, PRO WO 171/8351, Number 48 GCU War Diary, May 1945.

<sup>45</sup> CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* In his recollections, Thomas spells Kasterlee as Casterlee. The former spelling is more common.

<sup>48</sup> CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections.

the Continent for the use of the 21 Army Group Graves Service.<sup>49</sup> Thomas accorded the task of painting these and then inscribing on them the details of the deceased to one of his labourers who he had discovered was an experienced sign-writer.<sup>50</sup>

Once Thomas had decided on layouts for the cemeteries, and graves had been dug in the appropriate positions, the concentration of the dead commenced. The order in which this was done often was determined by the local people, many of whom had particular reasons for wanting the exhumation of certain bodies before others. One woman asked Thomas to expedite the removal of fifty British soldiers from a field in order that she could return her cow to pasture and do so with a clear conscience, while among the residents of Gheel there was consensus that the remains of 200 German servicemen buried next to the town church should be disinterred and taken from their midst as soon as possible.<sup>51</sup> Given his reliance on the local people for labour and information as to the whereabouts of graves, Thomas obliged these requests where he could. Moreover, civilians were entitled to voice their opinion given the active roles they played in many exhumations. Farmers with horses and carts regularly helped to transport the remains of British servicemen to Kasterlee.<sup>52</sup>

The local population showed great respect for the British war dead. When Thomas was ready to concentrate the fifty corpses from the grazing field, he arranged for the operation to begin at a particular time. News of the planned exhumations spread and when he reached the field it was surrounded by townsfolk. Working in full view of the crowd – he saw no reason to erect his AGS-issue canvas

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, February 1944; Delaforce, *Marching to the Sound of Gunfire*, p. 21.

<sup>50</sup> CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 171/186, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, September 1944.

screens and hide the dead from the very people who had buried them – the fifty bodies were loaded into trucks.<sup>53</sup> Once Thomas had confirmed that the evidence of identity found in the graves matched the names in his records, the vehicles were driven away in the direction of the British cemetery. ‘As we left’, he remembered, ‘heads were bared, and all the men and women present knelt down along the lane. When we turned into the main street, we found the pavements lined with with [sic] a number of people who all went down on their knees and remained with bowed heads until we had passed. It was ... most moving.’<sup>54</sup>

Nor were displays of reverence for British dead isolated. Thomas recalled entering a village with his men to concentrate the remains of two soldiers whose graves lay along the footpath on the main street: ‘[a]s soon as we commenced all the shops closed, & blinds were drawn. The inhabitants line[d] the pavement on their knees, and, as we lifted the bodies, the church bell kept up a mournful tolling ... until we slowly drew away.’<sup>55</sup> Respect for British dead was manifested also in the attention paid to their graves, the isolated burial sites encountered by Thomas always being well-kept and adorned with flowers and plants.<sup>56</sup>

Some locals invested such effort and feeling into caring for British graves that they actually resented the dead being exhumed. On one occasion when he was disinterring remains from a residential garden, Thomas was confronted by the homeowner who, he recalled, ‘was screaming and flailing her arms about, shouting that no-one was going to touch him [the dead man] – he had to stay there were [sic]

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<sup>53</sup> CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections; TNA, PRO WO 171/8653, Stott Memorandum, 16 April 1946.

<sup>54</sup> CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*; *The Times*, 10 November 1944.

she could care for him.’<sup>57</sup> The woman had to be restrained from attacking Thomas. After she became calmer, he explained what he was doing and why, and told her that she would be able to visit the serviceman’s grave in the British cemetery at any time. In this way the woman was appeased.<sup>58</sup>

On one rare occasion, a British frontline soldier was witness to the care that was bestowed upon the dead. He had been given permission to take leave from his unit to travel to Gheel to search for his brother’s grave, and by chance he happened upon it in the grounds of a vicarage just as the body was being exhumed. The remains of his sibling were driven to the cemetery at Kasterlee, where the soldier was asked by Thomas if he wished to take part in their reburial. Grateful for the opportunity, he helped to carry the stretcher on which his brother lay, took control of one of the rubber cables used to lower the body into the earth, and assisted with the filling of the grave. He then requested permission to take a photograph, at which point, Thomas recalled, his personnel ‘immediately decorated the mound with moss, stones and one or two flowering plants borrowed from adjacent graves.’<sup>59</sup> The soldier declared that his parents would be profoundly comforted to learn of the attention paid to their dead son.

Over the course of two months, Thomas and his men moved more than 400 bodies into the German cemetery at Gheel, and the remains of 100 British servicemen into the burial ground at Kasterlee.<sup>60</sup> During this time they built at the latter cemetery an entrance, erected a fence, cleared paths between the graves, put up boards signifying where the dead from a particular unit had been grouped together,

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<sup>57</sup> CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 171/8351, Number 48 GCU War Diary, July 1945; CWGC, Kasterlee War Cemetery.

produced a detailed scale plan of the burials, and obtained a certificate from local officials which confirmed that a gift had been made of the land.<sup>61</sup> In fulfilling these tasks, all of which had to be completed for the IWGC to accept control of the site, everything possible was done to create a cemetery in which visitors would feel a sense of peace and seclusion. Thus the entrance was built away from the nearest road and in a position where the trees which bordered the field could be left standing, and the design of the burial plots was conceived in order best to fit with this plan.<sup>62</sup> When operations at Kasterlee were complete, Thomas returned with his men to Leon-Sur-Mer before accepting, several weeks later, his release from military service.<sup>63</sup> While graves work still interested him, the prospect of civilian life was too alluring to resist after six years in the army.

- Towards the End of the War

In common with their colleagues in Gheel, AGS personnel stationed elsewhere in north-west Europe had made tangible progress by early 1945. In January, 35,000 graves had been registered and 1753 bodies concentrated into permanent cemeteries.<sup>64</sup> By May, more than 48,000 post-D-Day graves, of which 27,000 were British, had been registered, and 5588 concentrations performed.<sup>65</sup> 6433 pre-D-Day graves had been located, sixty-seven British cemeteries established, and photographs of 3000 graves despatched to next-of-kin.<sup>66</sup> Stott and his administrative staff had

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<sup>61</sup> CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections; TNA, PRO WO 171/186, Cemetery Graphics, November 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/186, Stott Memorandum, 15 December 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Stott Memorandum, 2 August 1945; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Template for Cemetery Handover.

<sup>62</sup> CWGC, 2033, Thomas Recollections.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 171/8351, Number 48 GCU War Diary, July-August 1945; TNA, PRO WO 171/8351, Field Return of Officers, August 1945.

<sup>64</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Statistics Report, 15 January 1945.

<sup>65</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Stott to DAG, 21 Army Group, 5 May 1945.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

also been busy. By May they had responded to 17,600 enquiries forwarded from the War Office about the whereabouts of graves, and established liaisons with the Missing Research Section (MRS) field branch, a small division of the RAF which had been sent to the Continent by the Air Ministry to locate the bodies and graves of missing airmen.<sup>67</sup> Its personnel were to register air force graves, and then to notify AGS officers who would concentrate the remains into permanent cemeteries.<sup>68</sup>

Although pleased with this progress, Stott was concerned that the 21 Army Group Graves Service was still understaffed. Because most members of his headquarters staff were engaged in answering the hundreds of grave location queries received each week, 30,000 burial registration forms had yet to be processed.<sup>69</sup> He was also short of officers and other ranks to man the graves units, his force having been weakened by the demobilisation of large numbers of soldiers. The problem was a pervasive one, for some of the men suggested as replacements were themselves due for demobilisation in a matter of weeks, meaning that it was pointless expending time and money on their training.<sup>70</sup> In order that other ranks in the field were not rendered idle – AGS sections were permitted to operate only when supervised by an officer – 21 Army Group headquarters arranged for some of them to receive direct commissions, but this did not solve the problem of staff shortages in the longer term.<sup>71</sup> These difficulties were compounded by the fact that Stott had now been

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, February-March 1945; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Stott to DAG, 21 Army Group, 4 March 1945.

<sup>68</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Stott to AGS Officers, 16 November 1945. See also TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, RAF Cooperation Memorandum, 16 November 1945.

<sup>69</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, February, May 1945; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Stott to 'A' Staff, 21 Army Group, 23 February 1945.

<sup>70</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/8345, Number 35 GRU War Diary, December 1945.

<sup>71</sup> TNA, PRO WO 219/1374, Standing Orders, Graves Registration 21 Army Group; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, Fraser Report, 30 March 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, March, May, July 1945; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Stott to 'A' Staff, 31

accorded responsibility for graves operations in southern France, despite 21 Army Group not having fought in the region. Upon learning of this additional burden, he protested that 'I am not in a position to organise Registration and Concentration there, neither have I the means of handling such in this Branch.'<sup>72</sup> The War Office was unmoved.

There was also the problem of what to do with the British dead in Germany. Stott did not know whether British servicemen would be buried there or removed to Holland, Belgium or France for interment, the matter being under discussion in London.<sup>73</sup> General Sir Ronald Adam, the Adjutant General, believed that they should be buried where they fell.<sup>74</sup> In voicing his opinion that 'war cemeteries in the heart of Germany would serve as a salutary reminder to Germany of the events of this war', he made it clear that for the War Office the issue was not whether British dead should remain on enemy territory, but where precisely within it they should be buried.<sup>75</sup> The Admiralty was also opposed to repatriation, although the Air Ministry was open to the idea of moving the dead to an adjacent Allied country or even to Britain for burial.<sup>76</sup> There was, however, consensus between the navy and the air force that if there were to be cemeteries in Germany, in deference to tradition they should be located to the west of the Rhine River. Most of the 6500 British and

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May 1945; TNA, PRO WO 171/8351, Captain R. F. Wilkes to BAOR Headquarters, 6 November 1945.

<sup>72</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Stott to 'A' Staff, 21 Army Group, 23 February 1945. Responsibility for operations in southern France had previously rested with GRE Mediterranean Pool. See TNA, PRO WO 169/18049, Hoffman to Fraser, 1 November 1944.

<sup>73</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, March-April 1945; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Stott to DGRE, 2 April 1945; TNA, PRO WO 32/11593, 21 Army Group Headquarters to War Office, 5 May 1945.

<sup>74</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/14353, Royal Warrant for the IWGC Appointment of Ronald Adam, 26 June 1941; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, April 1945; TNA, PRO WO 32/11593, IWGC Committee Meeting Minutes, 30 April 1945; TNA, PRO WO 32/11593, IWGC Committee Meeting Minutes, 14 May 1945; *Twenty-seventh Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, (London: HMSO, 1947), p. 2.

<sup>75</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/11593, IWGC Committee Meeting Minutes, 30 April 1945.

<sup>76</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/11593, IWGC Committee Meeting Minutes, 14 May 1945.

Dominion First World War dead interred in the country lay in this area, and graves maintenance would be easier from the western side of Europe.<sup>77</sup> The three armed services did agree that any such cemeteries should contain no enemy remains – the interment of German dead in AGS burial grounds was permitted elsewhere – and that in Germany no British bodies should be left in civil graveyards, as was common practice in other countries.<sup>78</sup>

For Stott, the options under consideration had drawbacks. Moving bodies across international borders – be it to Britain or elsewhere – would be legally and logistically difficult, yet to leave the dead in Germany would complicate graves operations in other ways. In its one decree on the subject, the War Office had ruled that if land were required for cemeteries in Germany, it would be requisitioned without canvassing German public opinion and regardless of any opposition expressed.<sup>79</sup> The possibility of trouble in this regard, coupled with the fact that civilians in Germany would probably be less willing to assist AGS personnel than were those elsewhere, presented potential difficulties to graves operations in the country. However, it was not for Stott or his military superiors to decide whether the British dead should be buried in Germany. The public importance of the issue meant

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 32/11593, IWGC Committee Meeting Minutes, 30 April 1945; TNA, PRO WO 219/1373, List of British First World War Graves in Germany, May 1945; *Twelfth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, (London: HMSO, 1932), p. 44; Ware, *The Immortal Heritage*, p. 63; CWGC, Germany Graves Statistics.

<sup>78</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Stott to DGRE, 2 April 1945; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Burials in Germany Memorandum, April 1945. In Allied countries, the AGS generally left the British dead in civil cemeteries unless the next-of-kin specifically requested their removal. See TNA, PRO WO 171/186, Stott to Major General H. W. A. F. Graham, 15 September 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/186, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, October 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/186, Cemetery Graphics, November 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, April 1945; TNA, PRO WO 32/11593, 21 Army Group Headquarters to War Office, 5 May 1945. See also *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 453 HC, DEB 5S, (London: HMSO, 1948), pp. 995-6.

<sup>79</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/186, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, November 1944. To this decree it was added that ‘ordinary steps will be taken not to give the local inhabitants justifiable cause for resentment’.

that the decision was to be made by the Cabinet, but with the government unwilling to commit to a policy on repatriation before the general election in July, a ruling was not expected until after that.<sup>80</sup>

- The Progress of Graves Operations in the Middle East and Mediterranean Theatres

In the Middle East and Mediterranean theatres, graves operations were further advanced than they were in north-west Europe, with Hoffman expecting that his men would finish their task by the autumn of 1945.<sup>81</sup> For example, in North Africa fewer than 5000 graves, most dating from the first campaigns fought in the region, remained to be registered, while in Italy AGS personnel already were present in the north of the country.<sup>82</sup> Such had been the efficiency of their operations in Italy that only 3.4 per cent of the British bodies in military cemeteries had been interred as unknown: the corresponding figure for Tunisia, where there were fewer dead, but where graves units had not followed close behind the frontline formations, was 10.2 per cent.<sup>83</sup> Elsewhere in the Mediterranean theatre, AGS servicemen were working on Gibraltar, on the islands in the Adriatic Sea, and in Greece where a start had been

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<sup>80</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/11593, 21 Army Group Headquarters to War Office, 5 May 1945; TNA, PRO WO 32/11593, McNair to 21 Army Group Headquarters, 17 May 1945; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, July 1945.

<sup>81</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/18049, Hoffman to Fraser, 1 November 1944; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Conference Minutes, 3 February 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, January and February Report, 9 March 1945.

<sup>82</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/18049, Hoffman to Fraser, 1 November 1944; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Record Office Report, 17 February 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, General Progress Report, 28 February 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Unit Location Statement, February 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, January and February Report, 9 March 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Record Office Report, 13 April 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Hoffman Report, 18 June 1945.

<sup>83</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, January and February Report, 9 March 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Hoffman Report, 18 June 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Colonel A. B. Lawson to War Office, 25 September 1945; Ware, *The Immortal Heritage*, p. 66; *Commonwealth War Graves Commission Annual Report, 2000-2001*, p. 43.

made on attending to the British and Dominion dead killed during the campaigns of 1940-41.<sup>84</sup>

There were several reasons for this progress across the region. First, the expansion of the graves organisation in the autumn of 1943 had been successful. Hoffman, whose headquarters had been moved to Naples, had thirty-one graves units at his disposal, twenty of which were British.<sup>85</sup> Second, the Mediterranean Pool was led by an experienced cadre of senior officers, many of whom had worked together for several years.<sup>86</sup> Third, Hoffman had no equivalent of the Germany question with which to contend. There existed general agreement among fighting servicemen that the dead should not be interred in civil graveyards in Italy, but there had been no opposition to locating dedicated British cemeteries in the country.<sup>87</sup> The first two of these, at Catania and Syracuse on Sicily, had been established in October 1943 without adverse comment.<sup>88</sup>

However, Hoffman did have his concerns. Mines had long been a scourge of graves operations in his jurisdiction, and they continued to maim and kill his men in North Africa and Italy. The Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, had had to issue an

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<sup>84</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Unit Location Statement, February 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, General Progress Report, 28 February 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, January and February Report, 9 March 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Gibraltar Memorandum, 23 March 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Adriatic Operations, 24 March 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Greece and Crete Report, 3 April 1945.

<sup>85</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/18049, Mediterranean Pool Headquarters War Diary, September-October 1944; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Unit Location Statement, February 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Middle East and Mediterranean Zone Summary, June 1945; *Twenty-sixth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, pp. 27-8. Mediterranean Pool headquarters moved from Cairo to Naples in September 1944. At the same time, Mediterranean Pool Advance Headquarters, which had been located in Naples since March of that year, relocated to Florence.

<sup>86</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Staff List, circa September 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/18049, Mediterranean Pool Headquarters War Diary, October 1944; TNA, PRO WO 169/18049, Hoffman to Fraser, 1 November 1944; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Middle East and Mediterranean Zone Summary, June 1945.

<sup>87</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Burials in Germany Memorandum, April 1945.

<sup>88</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Administrative Instruction Number 3, 10 October 1943; TNA, PRO WO 169/13803, DADGRE Italy War Diary, September-December 1943.

order to AGS personnel forbidding them from knowingly entering mined areas in their attempts to recover the dead.<sup>89</sup> That the bodies of hundreds of servicemen lay out of reach in enormous minefields in the Western Desert and at Anzio also raised the question of whether these remains should be classed as lost or a request made of the Royal Engineers to remove the explosives.<sup>90</sup>

Hoffman also was concerned about the potential effects of demobilisation on the Mediterranean Pool, particularly with regard to its leadership, as many higher-ranked officers were intent on leaving the AGS.<sup>91</sup> Some had tired of the army and its bureaucracy; others wished to take up positions with the IWGC; a few had spent too long working with the dead and their mental and physical health was suffering as a result; and most simply wanted to be reunited with their families.<sup>92</sup> This longing for home was particularly evident among the numerous Mediterranean Pool officers from South Africa and New Zealand who had not seen their native lands for several years.<sup>93</sup> Hoffman, who had not been to South Africa since 1940, did not seek to dissuade his officers from leaving the AGS. Instead he focused on encouraging those of his men who were to remain and planning as carefully as he could for post-war operations.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Conference Minutes, 3 February 1945.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 169/18049, Hoffman to Fraser, 1 November 1944; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, McNair Memorandum, 8 January 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Record Office Report, 23 February 1945.

<sup>91</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/18049, Hoffman to Fraser, 1 November 1944; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Record Office Report, 23 February 1945.

<sup>92</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/18049, Hoffman to Fraser, 1 November 1944.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Staff List, circa September 1943.

<sup>94</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/18049, Hoffman to Fraser, 1 November 1944; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Conference Minutes, 3 February 1945.

- Establishing the Post-War AGS

The war in Europe ended on 8 May 1945. Within a week of the German surrender, a conference of senior DGRE and AGS figures was convened at the War Office to discuss the manner in which graves operations should be pursued in the post-war era.<sup>95</sup> Hoffman and Stott were among the attendees. The delegates charged Hoffman and the members of the Mediterranean Pool with finding the British dead in Austria, Albania, Yugoslavia, Romania and Bulgaria, and renamed his command Central Mediterranean Graves Registration and Enquiries (CMGRE) better to reflect the extent of their additional responsibilities.<sup>96</sup>

Otherwise the discussion was of operations in north-west Europe. Stott moved that in the post-war era the work of the 21 Army Group Graves Service should be organised by territory, particularly given that all the European battlefields on which British soldiers had fought would henceforth be accessible, and that the prevailing system whereby AGS units were attached to formations should be ended.<sup>97</sup> In this regard he proposed the delineation of seven operational areas – Holland, Belgium, Denmark, Northern France, Southern France, Eastern Germany and Western Germany – and giving responsibility for each to an officer of DADGRE

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<sup>95</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Mediterranean Pool Headquarters War Diary, May 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, CMGRE Headquarters War Diary, June 1945.

<sup>96</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Mediterranean Pool Memorandum, circa April 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Notes on Post-war Requirements, 18 April 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Middle East and Mediterranean Zone Summary, June 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Unit Location Statement, June 1945. Hoffman had expected for some time that his command would be made responsible for graves operations in these countries. Indeed, his men had already made preliminary enquiries about working in these places. However, not until May were they formally charged with this duty.

<sup>97</sup> With AGS units attached to formations, Stott was able to exercise only limited control over the deployment of his men. See TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, June 1945; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Stott Report, 15 June 1945; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, McCandlish Memorandum, 21 June 1945; *The Administrative History of the Operations of 21 Army Group on the Continent of Europe*, pp. 60, 142.

administrative rank. These men would report to him in Brussels.<sup>98</sup> Stott also suggested that his office staff be increased, and that five more graves units be raised for the 21 Army Group Graves Service to bring the total number of formations in the command to fifteen. If these changes were made, he believed that his men could attend to the graves of the British dead in north-west Europe within three years.<sup>99</sup>

Having returned to Brussels confident that his proposals would be adopted, Stott was surprised to learn that the War Office wished to despatch three of his units to Asia for service in the war against Japan.<sup>100</sup> He was quick to point out the effect this would have on his organisation:

at the end of the last War the number of Graves Registration and Concentration Units were increased ... This shows that, far from anything being nominated for SEAC [South East Asia Command], extra units should be provided, otherwise the work of this Service will not be completed for an unconscionable time. If units have to be found for SEAC, then even more ought now to be found for this theatre.<sup>101</sup>

Stott warned the War Office that if the ranks of the 21 Army Group Graves Service were depleted, graves operations in north-west Europe might not be completed before 1950-51.<sup>102</sup> As evidence for this claim, he noted that his force was functioning at only half of its theoretical capacity because positions for eleven subalterns had never been filled.<sup>103</sup> Soon afterwards Hoffman, who had decided to leave the AGS for a full-time position with the IWGC as its Deputy Controller, Southern European District, submitted a damning report to the War Office in which

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<sup>98</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, May 1945; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Stott Memorandum, 17 October 1945.

<sup>99</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, May-June 1945; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Stott to 'A' Staff, 31 May 1945.

<sup>100</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, January, May 1945.

<sup>101</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, May 1945; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Stott Note, 27 May 1945.

<sup>102</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Graphic by Stott, 26 May 1945.

<sup>103</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Stott to 'A' Staff, 31 May 1945.

he accused the British army of showing a general lack of interest in, or concern for, its dead.<sup>104</sup>

In June the Army Council approved a series of reforms which, in the words of Brigadier J. E. C. McCandlish, a War Office official, would enable the 21 Army Group Graves Service to complete its 'task in a fitting manner'.<sup>105</sup> He announced that the changes, which were much as Stott had proposed, were the result of a 'compromise between the stringent demands of manpower economy and the natural desire of the public at home to have the graves of its soldiers and airmen found and suitably commemorated at the earliest possible date'.<sup>106</sup> War Office authorities undertook to increase the strength of the 21 Army Group Graves Service from 198 men to 360 by raising six new graves units and staffing fully those extant formations which were undermanned, and pledged not to take from Stott any of his personnel for the war in Asia.<sup>107</sup> His administrative staff would be increased from thirty-six to eighty-one, and Stott promoted to colonel, and to the administrative position of DDGRE, to ensure that his rank and salary were commensurate with his responsibilities. The extent of these, McCandlish admitted, had not been realised previously.<sup>108</sup> For his part, Stott was expected to have graves operations in north-west Europe completed by June 1948.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Hoffman Report, 18 June 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, CMGRE Headquarters War Diary, June 1945.

<sup>105</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, McCandlish Memorandum, 21 June 1945; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, June 1945; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Stott Memorandum, 23 June 1945.

<sup>106</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, McCandlish Memorandum, 21 June 1945.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Proposed Manpower Commitment, June 1945; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, July 1945.

<sup>108</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, McCandlish Memorandum, 21 June 1945; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Proposed Manpower Commitment, June 1945.

<sup>109</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, McCandlish Memorandum, 21 June 1945.

- A Difficult Period

Stott welcomed these changes, particularly as his problems were multiplying as the summer went on. Some of his concerns, such as the surreptitious trade in photographs of graves, were difficulties new to the AGS. Members of the British public, unwilling to wait for the army to provide them with pictures, were offering non-AGS army personnel large sums of money to photograph burial places.<sup>110</sup> This practice, which contravened military regulations, was causing distress to the relatives of the dead and embarrassment to the army, for not only were some graves revealed to be in a poor state, but often the unofficial photographs did not correspond with the pictures later provided by the War Office, remains having been moved into graves in permanent cemeteries in the interim.<sup>111</sup> A further difficulty for Stott stemmed from the attempts to identify unknown casualties. It was taking longer than expected to do this, particularly in cases where bodies had been buried face downwards thereby increasing the exposure of identity discs and papers to acids released by the soil and decomposing flesh.<sup>112</sup> Because of these problems, Stott was unable to assist the numerous French mayors who wanted something done about the British dead buried in shallow graves whose remains had begun to smell badly in the hot weather.<sup>113</sup>

The difficulties confronting the 21 Army Group Graves Service were exacerbated in July when, inexplicably, Adam ordered that graves operations in north-west Europe be finished by the summer of 1947, a full year earlier than the

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<sup>110</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/186, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, December 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/186, Stott to 'A' Staff, 21 Army Group, 28 December 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Stott to DGRE, 15 June 1945.

<sup>111</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/186, Stott to 'A' Staff, 21 Army Group, 28 December 1944. See also TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Fraser Memorandum, 8 June 1945; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Stott to DGRE, 15 June 1945.

<sup>112</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Stott to 'A' Staff, 6 May 1945; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Stott to DGRE, 6 July 1945.

<sup>113</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, May 1945.

date previously specified.<sup>114</sup> Stott made it clear that he thought this was unfeasible. The units he had been promised had not yet arrived from Britain, large parts of Holland would probably flood during the forthcoming autumn, making graves operations there impossible from October to the following March, and he could not plan for the future without knowing the number of British dead in Germany or where they were to be buried.<sup>115</sup> The 'A' Staff at 21 Army Group headquarters supported Stott in this regard, and pointed out to the War Office 'that the passing of the summer without any work being done on graves in Germany, owing to the lack of a fundamental policy, means that the ultimate completion of the task of the Graves Service in this theatre will be disproportionately delayed.'<sup>116</sup> McNair replied that amid the changes at Westminster following the electoral victory of the Labour Party, there had not been time for the new government to determine whether the British dead should be buried in Germany.<sup>117</sup>

J. J. Lawson, the Secretary of State for War and *ex-officio* chairman of the IWGC, put this issue to the Cabinet on 7 September.<sup>118</sup> Ostensibly, ministers had been charged with determining whether the repatriation of bodies to Britain from any country would be permitted, but in effect they were ruling only on whether the remains of the British dead in Germany should be left there or moved to an adjacent country for burial. They used the meeting formally to forbid repatriation, and decreed that the bodies of British servicemen in Germany should be concentrated, as McNair explained to Stott, 'to suitable military cemeteries in the general zones in

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<sup>114</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Stott to 'A' Staff, 5 July 1945.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Stott to DAG, 21 Army Group, 5 May 1945; TNA, PRO WO 32/11593, 21 Army Group Headquarters to War Office, 5 May 1945.

<sup>116</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/11593, 21 Army Group Headquarters to War Office, 8 August 1945.

<sup>117</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/11593, McNair to 21 Army Group Headquarters, 23 August 1945.

<sup>118</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/11593, Departmental Memorandum, circa January 1947.

which the men fell, irrespective of whether these were or were not in the British zone of occupation, or were East or West of the Rhine.’<sup>119</sup> This decision made financial sense, while it also met with the wishes of the IWGC commissioners who advocated uniformity in the treatment of the British dead and were opposed to any form of repatriation.<sup>120</sup> Stott was instructed to implement the agreed policy.<sup>121</sup> There was no time to spare, for the completion date for graves operations in north-west Europe had again been revised, this time to June 1946.<sup>122</sup>

- Planning Operations in Germany

The pressure on Stott to expedite graves operations was relieved somewhat in early October when four of the six units promised to him in the summer arrived in the north-west Europe theatre from Britain.<sup>123</sup> Numbers 53 GRU and 56 GCU were immediately stationed in Berlin, while Numbers 55 and 57 GCU were despatched to Valkenswaard in Holland and Paris respectively.<sup>124</sup> The deployment of these formations was the cue for Stott to restructure his force – renamed the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR) Graves Service in August – along territorial lines, and five administrative areas were decreed: Belgium and Holland, Northern France, Southern

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<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 32/11593, McNair to Stott and Major General M. S. Chilton, 11 September 1945. The Dominion governments also voted against repatriating their national dead. See TNA, PRO WO 32/11593, McNair to Stott and Major General M. S. Chilton, 12 September 1945; *Twenty-sixth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 9; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, pp. 182-3.

<sup>120</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/11593, McNair to Stott and Major General M. S. Chilton, 12 September 1945.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, BAOR Headquarters to War Office, 30 September 1945.

<sup>123</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, BAOR Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, October 1945; TNA, PRO WO 171/8352, Number 55 GCU War Diary, October 1945. Having in June promised Stott six units, in July the War Office revised this number to five. As it was, only four units were sent to the Continent in October. See TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, July 1945.

<sup>124</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Unit Location Statement, October 1945; TNA, PRO WO 171/8352, Number 55 GCU War Diary, October 1945.

France, Western Germany and Denmark, and Eastern Germany.<sup>125</sup> The French areas would be divided by the Loire River, while the Rhine River would demarcate the border between the German areas, which meant that the Eastern Germany area incorporated the three non-British zones in Allied-controlled Germany, and Czechoslovakia and Poland in addition.<sup>126</sup>

Meanwhile, stories began to appear in the British press that the 3000 Canadian personnel killed in Germany were to be buried in Holland. *The Times* reported on 22 October that a beautiful site surrounded by trees and adjacent to a lake had been chosen for this purpose, and then eight days later that the Canadian government had taken its decision not to have cemeteries in Germany in deference to the wishes of bereaved mothers.<sup>127</sup> While the Canadian policy was not unusual in the sense that the American, French and Belgian governments were also expected to take their national dead from Germany, it was significant in that Canada was an IWGC member state.<sup>128</sup>

Enquiries of officials at the casualty offices of the British armed services soon escalated. On 1 November the Director of the Casualty Branch at the Air Ministry wrote to Colonel C. M. Clode, who had replaced Fraser as AAG in July, to inform him that the same questions were constantly being asked of his staff: 'will graves be left in Germany or concentrated west of the Rhine?'; 'will isolated graves

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<sup>125</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, July-August 1945; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, BAOR Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, September 1945; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Unit Location Statement, October 1945. Although the revised War Establishment was approved in July, its implementation was contingent upon the deployment of new units to north-west Europe. When it was adopted, Stott was confirmed in the rank of colonel and the position of DDGRE.

<sup>126</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Stott to 'A' Staff, 31 May 1945; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Stott Memorandum, 17 October 1945.

<sup>127</sup> *The Times*, 22 October 1945; *The Times*, 30 October 1945.

<sup>128</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/11593, 21 Army Group Headquarters to War Office, 5 May 1945. See also *British Legion Journal*, 28, 2 (1948), 22.

in Germany be concentrated into local churchyards or war cemeteries?'; and 'will graves in enemy countries be concentrated into an allied or neutral country?'<sup>129</sup>

While the War Office endeavoured to clear up public misconceptions about the graves policies to be followed in Germany, Stott worked at establishing a framework for the conduct of operations in the country.<sup>130</sup> He drafted an order which would compel all German citizens to report the existence of any military graves, and sought permission for the AGS to enter the areas of the country not under British control.<sup>131</sup> It was anticipated that the awarding of access rights for the American and French Zones would be a formality, but not for the Soviet Zone where Russian authorities were suspicious of foreign personnel.<sup>132</sup>

The probability of Russian obstructionism raised the issue of whether it would be prudent to site permanent cemeteries in the Soviet Zone. Even if AGS personnel were allowed entry into this territory, it was unlikely that Russian authorities would consent to their living there while these were constructed.<sup>133</sup> Furthermore, British intelligence sources knew that the Soviet Zone was being stripped of its primary resources, which meant that any building scheme therein would have to be supplied from elsewhere.<sup>134</sup> Because of these concerns, it was confirmed at the end of November that British dead found in the Soviet Zone would

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<sup>129</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/11593, Group Captain R. Burges to Clode, 1 November 1945; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, July 1945; *The Quarterly Army List: October 1945*, Part I, (London: HMSO, 1945), p. 15B.

<sup>130</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/11593, Clode to Group Captain R. Burges, circa November 1945.

<sup>131</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/11593, Allied Control Commission (ACC) Germany Memorandum, 10 October 1945.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 32/11593, BAOR Headquarters to War Office, 31 October 1945. While relatively few British soldiers had been killed in the parts of Germany accorded to the Russians in the post-war division of Germany, British POWs had been buried in the Soviet Zone. See TNA, PRO WO 32/11593, 21 Army Group Headquarters to War Office, 5 May 1945; TNA, PRO WO 32/11593, McNair Memorandum, 20 October 1945.

<sup>133</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/11593, BAOR Headquarters to War Office, 31 October 1945. See also correspondence in TNA, PRO FO 371/64626.

<sup>134</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/11593, BAOR Headquarters to War Office, 31 October 1945.

be transported to the nearest Allied Zone for interment. The bodies of British servicemen killed in Germany were to be buried in four principal cemeteries located in Berlin, Hamburg, Hanover and Xanten.<sup>135</sup>

- Taking Stock

Elsewhere in north-west Europe, graves operations were progressing only slowly. By December 1945 nearly 68,000 graves had been registered, 20,000 bodies transferred into permanent burial grounds, and seven British cemeteries completed and handed over to the IWGC.<sup>136</sup> However, there were still 63,000 unregistered graves, an equivalent number containing remains which required concentration, and a further 34,000 graves in which lay unknown bodies awaiting exhumation and identification.<sup>137</sup> In view of these statistics, Adam decided to act. For the BAOR Graves Service he promised to raise, by the new year, ten GRUs, seven GCUs, and two Cemetery Construction and Maintenance Units (CCMU), whose personnel would fulfil the building duties officially ascribed to the Royal Engineers, and he gave his consent for graves operations to continue until 30 September 1946.<sup>138</sup>

It fell to McNair to inform next-of-kin that it would be at least one year before they would be able to travel to the Continent to visit the graves of the war dead. In a newspaper interview at Christmas, he stated that this was ‘due to the difficulties of transport’ and because he did ‘not want relatives to visit cemeteries

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<sup>135</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/11593, McNair to BAOR Headquarters, 30 November 1945; TNA, PRO WO 32/11593, DGRE to Air Ministry Casualty Branch, 8 December 1945.

<sup>136</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Progress Report, December 1945. Of the 68,000 registered graves, 39,000 were British.

<sup>137</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Progress Report, December 1945.

<sup>138</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/8653, BAOR Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, January 1946; TNA, PRO WO 171/8653, Progress Report, 19 January 1946; TNA, PRO WO 171/8653, Stott to Colonel F. L. Saunders, 12 February 1946.

until they are completed and the last doubts of identification cleared up.<sup>139</sup> McNair added that next-of-kin hoping to visit cemeteries in the Middle East and Mediterranean theatres would also have to wait a while longer.<sup>140</sup>

- A False End

Operations outside north-west Europe had not proceeded as planned during the latter months of 1945. The registration and concentration of graves was effectively complete in the Middle East and North Africa, and was well-advanced in Italy, and responsibility for the majority of cemeteries had been handed to the IWGC.<sup>141</sup> But there remained a number of other frustrating and time-consuming tasks to which AGS personnel were attending. Most of these involved remedial work, such as at Benghazi where parts of the cemetery were being rebuilt after the discovery of mines.<sup>142</sup> In other cases it was just that progress was slower than expected. The two photographers attached to AGS regional headquarters in Cairo, for instance, had still to take and process pictures of several thousand graves located as far apart as Palestine and Eritrea.<sup>143</sup> That operations had not yet been concluded was, however, attributable to a common reason: demobilisation was crippling the AGS. The search for the remaining British dead in Libya, for example, had been suspended for more

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<sup>139</sup> *Sunday Dispatch*, 23 December 1945.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/21666, Progress Report, 29 November 1945.

<sup>142</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/21666, Lieutenant Colonel W. H. Alexander to War Office, 13 June 1945; TNA, PRO WO 169/21666, Lieutenant Colonel H. de G. Warter to War Office, 11 July 1945; TNA, PRO WO 169/21666, Lieutenant Colonel H. de G. Warter to War Office, 10 August 1945; TNA, PRO WO 169/21666, Office Instruction Number 4, 15 August 1945; TNA, PRO WO 169/21666, Lieutenant Colonel H. de G. Warter to War Office, 10 September 1945.

<sup>143</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/21666, Lieutenant Colonel W. H. Alexander to War Office, 13 June 1945; TNA, PRO WO 169/21666, Progress Report, 29 November 1945.

than a month while replacements were sought for the two officers whose duty it had been.<sup>144</sup>

Colonel A. B. Lawson, CMGRE director and a forthright South African officer in the manner of his predecessor, did not believe that work in the Mediterranean and Middle East theatres would be complete by the summer of 1946 when the AGS was due to be disbanded.<sup>145</sup> He thought he had insufficient trained men at his disposal to fulfil this aim, and that as long as War Office authorities continued to send him officers who had not elected to serve in the AGS, graves operations would be further slowed. Lawson wrote to army officials in London:

[i]t has always been the principle to have Graves officers as volunteers, because it was found in practice that certain people are simply incapable of doing a thorough search of a body which has been buried for some time. This is not surprising. We are not so concerned with the officers [sic] feelings as we are with the fact that if the search is not efficiently done an identity may be lost. These new postings to us are not volunteers, and the first of them to arrive has said that he simply cannot face exhumations. He is, therefore, useless to us.<sup>146</sup>

Lawson, who worked to the maxim 'that the last one thousand graves are more difficult to find than the first ten thousand', knew that for all the CMGRE had achieved – by the end of November approximately ninety-five per cent of the 42,000 British and Dominion graves in Italy had been registered – much remained to be done.<sup>147</sup> For instance, the transfer of the dead to Rhodes from the neighbouring

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<sup>144</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/21666, Progress Report, 27 October 1945; TNA, PRO WO 169/21666, Progress Report, 30 October 1945; TNA, PRO WO 169/21666, Progress Report, 29 November 1945; TNA, PRO WO 169/21666, Progress Report, 30 November 1945.

<sup>145</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Staff List, circa September 1943; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, CMGRE Headquarters War Diary, June 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Colonel A. B. Lawson to AFHQ, 19 September 1945; TNA, PRO WO 169/21666, Progress Report, 29 November 1945. Lawson had previously been responsible for graves operations in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. Hoffman thought him an excellent officer. All further mentions to Lawson in this chapter refer to Colonel A. B. Lawson.

<sup>146</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Colonel A. B. Lawson to War Office, 16 November 1945.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Colonel A. B. Lawson to AFHQ, 19 September 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Italy Statistical Analysis, 23 November 1945. CMGRE headquarters was based in

islands could not be done until a sturdy boat was found, and in Austria operations had only recently commenced.<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, Lawson was having difficulties dealing with the governments of the Communist states for which CMGRE was responsible. No definite indication had been received from authorities in Yugoslavia, Romania and Bulgaria that the AGS would be allowed into their territories, while permission for personnel to enter Albania had been secured only after a series of convoluted negotiations with its government.<sup>149</sup>

- Graves Operations in Albania

The possibility of AGS personnel entering Albania had first been raised with the national government in Tirana in the autumn of 1944. Nothing came of this approach.<sup>150</sup> A further request for entry, submitted through the British Military Mission (BMM) in Tirana, was made the following May but was refused.<sup>151</sup> A third petition, in which the Albanian authorities were encouraged to demonstrate some compassion for the next-of-kin of the British dead, was advanced in June and two months later it was decreed that an AGS officer and one other rank could enter

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Florence from August 1945. CMGRE Advance Headquarters moved to Klagenfurt in Austria the following month. See TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to War Office, 31 August 1943; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Colonel A. B. Lawson to War Office, 4 August 1945.

<sup>148</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, CMGRE Headquarters War Diary, August-September 1945; TNA, PRO WO 169/21666, Progress Report, 27 October 1945; TNA, PRO WO 169/21666, Progress Report, 30 October 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Unit Location Statement, October 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Colonel A. B. Lawson to War Office, 16 November 1945; TNA, PRO WO 169/21666, Progress Report, 29 November 1945; TNA, PRO WO 169/21666, Progress Report, 30 November 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, CMGRE Progress Report, November 1945.

<sup>149</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Colonel A. B. Lawson to War Office, 4 August 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Colonel A. B. Lawson to War Office, 25 September 1945; TNA, PRO WO 32/11593, McNair Memorandum, 20 October 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Colonel A. B. Lawson to War Office, 15 December 1945. See also correspondence in TNA, PRO WO 204/3093.

<sup>150</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/18049, Hoffman to Fraser, 1 November 1944.

<sup>151</sup> TNA, PRO WO 204/3093, Brigadier A. L. Hamblen Memorandum, August 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Colonel A. B. Lawson to War Office, 4 August 1945.

Albania, subject to their being deemed of good character.<sup>152</sup> The first two officers proposed by Lawson were refused visas by Albanian officials, Lieutenant Otto Cammerloher because he had been born in Germany, Lieutenant V. F. I. Merrett because he had served in Albania during the war as part of a commando force associated with the anti-Communist King Zog.<sup>153</sup>

Permission to enter Albania was eventually accorded to Major F. McIntosh, an experienced and highly-regarded AGS officer, and his driver.<sup>154</sup> Following a two week journey from Florence, they arrived in Tirana in early October. At this time McIntosh believed there to be at least thirty-five British graves in Albania.<sup>155</sup> He knew for certain that the bodies of several commandos had been abandoned after one wartime raid, and was reasonably sure of a number of RAF aircraft having crashed in the country.<sup>156</sup> This knowledge he hoped to supplement with information provided by the Albanian military, but a visit to its headquarters in Tirana revealed only apathy with regard to the existence and whereabouts of British graves.<sup>157</sup> Albanian General Staff officers did, however, consent to make enquiries of regional officials in

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<sup>152</sup> TNA, PRO WO 204/3093, Telegram to BMM Albania, 29 June 1945; TNA, PRO WO 204/3093, Brigadier A. L. Hamblen Memorandum, August 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, CMGRE Headquarters War Diary, August-October 1945.

<sup>153</sup> TNA, PRO WO 204/3093, Supreme Allied Command Mediterranean (SACMED) to ACC Romania, 12 July 1945; TNA, PRO WO 204/3093, ACC Romania to AFHQ, 13 July 1945; TNA, PRO WO 204/3093, SACMED to ACC Romania, 25 July 1945; TNA, PRO WO 204/3093, Brigadier A. L. Hamblen Memorandum, August 1945; TNA, PRO WO 204/3093, Colonel A. B. Lawson to War Office, 24 September 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, CMGRE Headquarters War Diary, September-October 1945; *The Quarterly Army List: January 1946*, Part II, (London: HMSO, 1946), p. 2307w.

<sup>154</sup> TNA, PRO WO 204/3093, Brigadier A. L. Hamblen to BMM Albania, August 1945; TNA, PRO WO 204/3093, Colonel A. B. Lawson to War Office, 24 September 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, CMGRE Headquarters War Diary, September-October 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, McIntosh Report, 25 February 1946.

<sup>155</sup> TNA, PRO WO 204/3093, Brigadier A. L. Hamblen Memorandum, August 1945; TNA, PRO WO 204/3093, Brigadier A. L. Hamblen to BMM Albania, August 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, CMGRE Headquarters War Diary, September-October 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, McIntosh Report, 25 February 1946.

<sup>156</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, McIntosh Report, 25 December 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, McIntosh Report, 25 February 1946.

<sup>157</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, CMGRE Headquarters War Diary, October 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, McIntosh Report, 25 February 1946.

this regard, and after six weeks, during which time McIntosh was forbidden to leave Tirana, enough information had been gathered for a trip beyond the capital city.<sup>158</sup>

In mid-November McIntosh headed for the Albanian mountains.<sup>159</sup> He was accompanied by a Partisan lieutenant, whose task, although ostensibly one of protection, was to establish whether McIntosh was a spy, and a civilian driver, his own having been forced to leave Albania.<sup>160</sup> When they reached the foot of the mountains, the men left behind the jeep and their heavier supplies and then, with mules to carry their food and bedding, continued on foot.<sup>161</sup> The path they followed climbed to heights of 7000 feet, where deep snow slowed their progress. After a hard trek lasting several days, during which time shelter was taken in the villages of mountain peasants, McIntosh and his party found the remains of eleven RAF personnel.<sup>162</sup> Nine of the bodies were badly burned and conjoined, meaning that these men could be identified collectively but not individually.<sup>163</sup>

The dead were transported back to Tirana, where McIntosh was able to convince the Albanian government to provide him with a block of land for use as a cemetery.<sup>164</sup> The site obtained was on the crest of a hill on the outskirts of the city. There were good views from the plot and, more importantly, there was no possibility

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<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, McIntosh Report, 5 December 1945.

<sup>160</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Colonel A. B. Lawson to War Office, 15 December 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, McIntosh Report, 25 December 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, McIntosh Report, 25 February 1946.

<sup>161</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, McIntosh Report, 5 December 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, McIntosh Report, 25 February 1946.

<sup>162</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, McIntosh Report, 5 December 1945. See also TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, CMGRE Progress Report, November 1945.

<sup>163</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, McIntosh Report, 5 December 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, McIntosh Report, 25 February 1946.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, CMGRE Headquarters War Diary, November 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, CMGRE Progress Report, November 1945.

of buildings being erected nearby.<sup>165</sup> He secured the verbal agreement of Albanian authorities to lease the site gratis to the British government for a period of ninety-nine years and, with the aim of formalising the arrangement, set to work drafting a legal document which would enshrine this commitment when signed.<sup>166</sup>

In early December McIntosh, the Partisan lieutenant and driver embarked on their second foray into the field, this time to the west coast of Albania where the commandos had left their dead.<sup>167</sup> Two armed government soldiers travelled with the men to protect them from the coastal peoples, mainly Greeks, who were anti-Albanian and anti-British.<sup>168</sup> This operation engendered difficulties different from the first. McIntosh was offered no information or help in locating graves, and the villagers put a high price on their labour. He recorded that '[i]n one town of about 1,000 inhabitants everyone available positively refused to help to dig up a body unless a payment of 30/- was made. The body had eventually to be dug up by my Partisan Officer and myself.'<sup>169</sup> While such attitudes were disappointing, McIntosh was more disheartened that he was able to identify only two of the thirty bodies he unearthed during the two week operation. All were fully decomposed, a sign that burial had taken place a considerable time after death, and few forensic clues to their identity were found.<sup>170</sup> The crosses that had once marked some of the graves had

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<sup>165</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, McIntosh Report, 5 December 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, McIntosh Report, 25 February 1946.

<sup>166</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, CMGRE Headquarters War Diary, November 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, McIntosh Report, 5 December 1945.

<sup>167</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, McIntosh Report, 25 December 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, McIntosh Report, 25 February 1946. For each separate journey McIntosh undertook, he was made by the Albanian authorities to apply for a travel permit. These usually took at least a week to process, meaning that much of McIntosh's time spent in Tirana was wasted. See TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, McIntosh Report, 5 December 1945.

<sup>168</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, McIntosh Report, 25 December 1945.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, McIntosh Report, 25 February 1946.

been removed by locals, and if they knew the names of the dead commandos McIntosh was not told.<sup>171</sup>

By the time he returned to Tirana with these bodies on 21 December, McIntosh was striving to complete graves operations in Albania as quickly as possible.<sup>172</sup> Along with the fact that the severe winter was making travel difficult, there were several reasons for him to make haste.<sup>173</sup> The BMM in Tirana was scheduled to close in January and McIntosh did not relish the prospect of operations without the support of its staff members.<sup>174</sup> Their assistance was crucial in hiring workers and finding materials for the construction of the British cemetery, and in helping to obtain the gold with which the AGS conducted its business in Albania.<sup>175</sup> McIntosh knew also that his presence in the country was increasingly resented, something that was evident in the treatment of the Partisan lieutenant who was suspended by the Albanian military for providing him with too much assistance.<sup>176</sup> McIntosh was, moreover, looking forward to his own demobilisation which was to take place when he returned to Florence.<sup>177</sup> It came sooner than expected.

In February government authorities in Tirana ruled that McIntosh was a spy attempting to foment political unrest and, despite British diplomatic representations

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<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.* Across Albania, civilians generally paid little attention to British graves. The wartime interment of the British dead had mostly been done by German or other combat personnel.

<sup>172</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, McIntosh Report, 25 December 1945.

<sup>173</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, CMGRE Progress Report, December 1945.

<sup>174</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, McIntosh Report, 25 December 1945.

<sup>175</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, CMGRE Headquarters War Diary, October 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, McIntosh Report, 25 February 1946.

<sup>176</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, McIntosh Report, 25 February 1946; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, CMGRE Headquarters War Diary, February 1946.

<sup>177</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, McIntosh Report, 25 December 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, CMGRE Progress Report, December 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, McIntosh Report, 25 February 1946.

to the contrary, he was forced to leave Albania.<sup>178</sup> By the time of his departure, he had discovered fifty-two bodies, twenty-two of which he had positively identified, but nine of this total remained to be buried.<sup>179</sup> In addition the cemetery was without a fence, some graves had no marked crosses, and the Albanian authorities – ‘Balkan barbarians’ according to Lawson – had not yet formally agreed to lease the land.<sup>180</sup> Thus McIntosh, who had travelled 8000 miles and spent five months in pursuit of the British dead in Albania, left the country disappointed not to have completed his task.<sup>181</sup> ‘He was’, Lawson informed the War Office, ‘filled with disgust with the treatment accorded him in his effort to collect British dead who had given their lives to liberate Albania.’<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, McIntosh Report, 25 February 1946; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, Progress Report, February 1946; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, CMGRE Headquarters War Diary, February-March 1946.

<sup>179</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, McIntosh Report, 25 February 1946; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, Progress Report, February 1946; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, CMGRE Headquarters War Diary, February 1946.

<sup>180</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, McIntosh Report, 25 February 1946; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, Progress Report, March 1946; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, Colonel A. B. Lawson to War Office, 18 March 1946.

<sup>181</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, McIntosh Report, 25 February 1946; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, CMGRE Headquarters War Diary, March 1946.

<sup>182</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, Colonel A. B. Lawson to War Office, 18 March 1946. Over the following years the AGS and the IWGC constantly sought entry for their representatives into Albania. These efforts came to nothing and, in 1955, it was decided that there was no point in making further representations in this regard until the Albanian government became less hostile to foreigners. It was 1994 before British authorities were allowed to return to the country. They discovered that at some point in the intervening decades, the Communist regime had ordered the graves at the British cemetery to be exhumed and the remains reburied in an anonymous, mass grave hidden from public view: the remains were found under a footpath on the campus of a Tirana university. CWGC staff members erected special memorials to the dead as near to this mass grave as possible and designated the area the Tirana Park Memorial Cemetery, the previous site chosen by McIntosh having been known as the British War Cemetery, Albania. In 1998, CWGC officials re-examined McIntosh’s notes and, after further investigation, were able to identify a number of the bodies he had been unable to name. Of the fifty-two British dead McIntosh found in Albania, forty-six have now been identified. It is presumed that the bodies he was unable to search for before leaving the country disappeared without trace. See TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, McIntosh Report, 5 December 1945; *Manchester Guardian*, 21 March 1951; CWGC, Tirana Park Memorial Cemetery.

- The Conclusion of Graves Operations in the Middle East and Mediterranean Theatres

In common with McIntosh, CMGRE servicemen at work elsewhere in the region were forced to make the best they could of difficult situations as the end of AGS operations – scheduled for 31 May and 30 June in the Middle East and Mediterranean theatres respectively – approached.<sup>183</sup> With many units having only one or two British soldiers on their strength, officers were forced to devolve responsibility for an increasing number of specialist tasks, previously vested only in British or Dominion servicemen, to foreign persons in order to expedite graves operations.<sup>184</sup> Thus non-British civilians and ex-Italian and German POWs worked as batmen and drivers. At the time of its disbandment, more than eighty per cent of personnel in Number 25 GCU, for example, were former German prisoners.<sup>185</sup> In an AGS first, a sub-contract was awarded to a commercial firm, with Kodak Limited engaged to assist beleaguered army photographers in the Middle East theatre.<sup>186</sup>

Logistic difficulties also beset operations in specific areas. By the end of May the AGS still had not managed to secure a boat for its operations in the Greek archipelago, making it likely that the work would continue beyond the summer. As one senior officer observed, '[a] rough estimate for completing work in the islands is two months from the date the boat is available; but this estimate cannot be firm as the

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<sup>183</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, Colonel A. B. Lawson to CMGRE Headquarters, 15 January 1946; TNA, PRO WO 169/24269, Progress Report, 9 May 1946; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, Florence Conference Minutes, 15 June 1946.

<sup>184</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, CMGRE Headquarters War Diary, January 1946; TNA, PRO WO 169/24269, Progress Report, 5 February 1946; TNA, PRO WO 169/24269, Progress Report, 28 February 1946; TNA, PRO WO 169/24269, Progress Report, 9 May 1946.

<sup>185</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/24269, Progress Report, 5 February 1946; TNA, PRO WO 169/24269, Progress Report, 28 February 1946; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, Progress Report, February 1946; TNA, PRO WO 169/24269, Number 25 GCU Disbandment Memorandum, 26 June 1946.

<sup>186</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/24269, Progress Report, 5 February 1946; TNA, PRO WO 169/24269, Progress Report, 28 February 1946; TNA, PRO WO 169/24269, Progress Report, 2 May 1946.

weather has a large effect and the difficulties which may be encountered cannot be known until the islands are visited.<sup>187</sup> Elsewhere, a lone CMGRE serviceman was allowed into Yugoslavia in March and permission for AGS personnel to enter Romania and Bulgaria was received in June, but once work commenced in these countries, in which there were a combined 648 British graves, operations were afflicted by bureaucratic interference similar to that experienced by McIntosh in Albania.<sup>188</sup>

Officially the AGS ceased to function in the Middle East and Mediterranean theatres on 30 June 1946. However, in the Communist states of southern Europe, as well as in Italy and Greece, personnel were given permission to continue working for another four months.<sup>189</sup> Although War Office authorities had considered classifying all bodies and graves not found by the June deadline as lost, they decided that they could not ignore the corpses which had previously remained out of reach, or the new information which former POWs continued to supply to the DGRE concerning hitherto-unknown burials – in Italy it was thought that there were still more than 1100 unregistered interments – and thus a small force was kept in southern Europe to deal with any remaining tasks.<sup>190</sup> The majority of the graves personnel left behind

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<sup>187</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, Progress Report, February 1946; TNA, PRO WO 169/24269, Progress Report, 9 May 1946; TNA, PRO WO 169/24269, Progress Report, 29 May 1946; TNA, PRO WO 169/24269, Lieutenant Colonel R. M. Armitage to DGRE, 31 May 1946.

<sup>188</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, CMGRE Headquarters War Diary, February-June 1946; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, Statistics Report, 30 June 1946. Officials and civilians in Romania and Bulgaria were more forthcoming with information and assistance than their Yugoslavian counterparts, but it remained that graves operations in Communist countries were inherently difficult.

<sup>189</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, Colonel A. B. Lawson to War Office, 18 March 1946; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, Rome IWGC Meeting Minutes, 26 March 1946; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, Florence Conference Minutes, 15 June 1946; TNA, PRO WO 169/24269, Progress Report, 30 June 1946; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, CMGRE Headquarters War Diary, June 1946; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, Lieutenant Colonel T. S. Frowd Report, 13 July 1946.

<sup>190</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Conference Minutes, 3 February 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, Colonel A. B. Lawson to Under Secretary of State for War, 2 February 1946; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, Florence Conference Minutes, 15 June 1946; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, Statistics Report, 30 June 1946; TNA, PRO WO 169/24269, Progress Report, 30 June 1946; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124,

were New Zealanders, the DGRE reasoning that the governments of Communist countries were less likely to object to them than they were to British servicemen.<sup>191</sup>

- The Pressure Mounts on the AGS in North-west Europe

In north-west Europe, the AGS was not to be disbanded until 30 September. However, it seemed increasingly unlikely that its task in the theatre would be complete by then. The BAOR Graves Service had still to register at least 51,000 graves, concentrate 55,000 sets of remains, and exhume and attempt to identify 31,000 bodies in 1600 separate locations.<sup>192</sup> Only 7000 British graves in north-west Europe had been photographed, while at headquarters staff members were receiving approximately 300 enquiries a day, all of which had to be investigated and answered.<sup>193</sup>

That so much remained to be done was not the fault of Stott. In order to meet Adam's autumn deadline, he had been promised an additional nineteen graves units by early 1946.<sup>194</sup> These units had been raised late and on deployment were not adequately staffed or equipped.<sup>195</sup> Number 69 GRU proved a typical example. Its men spent their first weeks together in Ghent in Belgium awaiting stores. An order was then received for their deployment to the south of France, but this could not be

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CMGRE Headquarters War Diary, June 1946; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, Lieutenant Colonel T. S. Frowd Report, 13 July 1946. This force was also to attend to the British dead in Hungary. Across the Middle East and Mediterranean theatres, remains in the most heavily-mined areas were abandoned as lost.

<sup>191</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/11755, Lieutenant Colonel T. S. Frowd to Holbrook, 23 September 1946; TNA, PRO AIR 55/69, Telegram from BMM Romania to MRES, circa late September 1946; TNA, PRO AIR 55/69, Flight Lieutenant B. E. Hogan to BMM Hungary, 4 July 1947.

<sup>192</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/8653, Stott Report, 30 June 1946.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/8653, Stott to Colonel F. L. Saunders, 12 February 1946.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 171/8653, Progress Report, 19 January 1946; TNA, PRO WO 171/8653, Unit Location Statement, March 1946; TNA, PRO WO 171/8653, Unit Location Statement, April 1946.

acted upon initially as they were without a clerk, cook, draughtsman, or rations.<sup>196</sup> Eventually the unit made the journey and set up quarters in Hyeres in March, but without these three positions having been filled. It was only in May, once a French civilian had been hired as a cook and necessary equipment had been procured, that any progress was made in the field.<sup>197</sup>

The autumn deadline was also contingent upon the AGS being granted unrestricted access to the Soviet Zone and this had not happened.<sup>198</sup> Russian authorities had informed British diplomats that entry rights would only be awarded to graves personnel in exchange for the Baltic and Ukrainian peoples living within the British Zone, but as Britain did not recognise the Soviet nationality of these displaced persons a stalemate had been reached.<sup>199</sup> The lack of progress in this regard was particularly frustrating given that Stott had kept five units stationed in Berlin for several months in the expectation that authority to enter the Soviet Zone would be received.<sup>200</sup> Moreover, there was no indication yet that the AGS would be allowed into Czechoslovakia and Poland, nor did Stott have any firm idea of how many British dead lay in these two countries.<sup>201</sup>

The new director of the DGRE, Brigadier A. W. Holbrook, formerly of the Royal Engineers, sympathised with the men of the BAOR Graves Service and the difficulties they were facing.<sup>202</sup> In a welcome expression of solidarity, he wrote to

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<sup>196</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/11008, Number 69 GRU War Diary, January-March 1946.

<sup>197</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/11008, Number 69 GRU War Diary, March-June 1946.

<sup>198</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/8653, Stott to Colonel F. L. Saunders, 12 February 1946.

<sup>199</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/11755, Control Office for Germany Telegram, 4 June 1946.

<sup>200</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/8653, Stott to DAG, BAOR, 27 March 1946; TNA, PRO WO 171/8653, Unit Location Statement, April 1946.

<sup>201</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/8653, Lieutenant Colonel H. Sangster to BAOR Headquarters, 21 April 1946;

TNA, PRO WO 171/8653, Stott to BAOR Headquarters, 30 May 1946.

<sup>202</sup> Holbrook succeeded McNair on 20 May 1946. See *The Quarterly Army List: April 1946*, Part I, (London: HMSO, 1946), p. 212d; *The Quarterly Army List: August 1946*, Part I, (London: HMSO, 1946), p. 15B; *Twenty-seventh Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 5.

Stott in June asking him to propose a realistic date for the conclusion of graves operations.<sup>203</sup> Stott replied that he hoped to have all the graves of the post-D-Day dead registered and concentrated by 31 March 1947, but that it would ‘take a further year to eighteen months to complete all “Pre “D” Day” Graves – including exhumations and Photography ... [depending] upon the extend [sic] to which Units of the Graves Service (including this Directorate) in the field are maintained.’<sup>204</sup> Stott explained that with the officer strength of his organisation having been no higher than fifty-five per cent of the stipulated War Establishment level for several months, and sixty per cent of AGS vehicles in north-west Europe under repair or not working, it was inevitable that progress was slow.<sup>205</sup> After hearing from Stott, Holbrook visited the Continent to witness at first hand the conditions under which the AGS was labouring.<sup>206</sup> What he saw convinced him that its personnel were performing their difficult task exceptionally well.

On his return to the War Office, Holbrook suggested to the new Adjutant General, General Sir Richard O’Connor, that the BAOR Graves Service should be given better support and more time to complete its operations: ‘I am of the opinion that the allocation of man power to the Graves Units in B.A.O.R. has been and still is insufficient for the task. It is false economy to cut down the numbers of personnel in the Graves Service as there is a certain irreducible number of man-hours work to be done’.<sup>207</sup> Holbrook noted that press columnists had begun to make unfavourable comparisons between the manner in which the British and American armies treated

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<sup>203</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/8653, Holbrook to Stott, 6 June 1946.

<sup>204</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/8653, Stott to Holbrook, 8 June 1946; TNA, PRO WO 171/8653, Stott Memorandum on Graves Service Directorate, June 1946.

<sup>205</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/8653, Stott to Holbrook, 8 June 1946.

<sup>206</sup> TNA, PRO WO 267/603, Quarterly Historical Report, 30 September 1946.

<sup>207</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, Holbrook Report, July 1946; *The Quarterly Army List: August 1946*, Part I, p. 40.

their dead, the United States military having nearly finished attending to 150,000 of its graves in north-west Europe.<sup>208</sup> The better results achieved by the Americans, he pointed out to O'Connor, were not necessarily due to superior practice but because their authorities had committed 7000 soldiers to the work. The BAOR Graves Service, for which the War Establishment stipulated a strength of 1000 men, had never been staffed by more than several hundred trained personnel.<sup>209</sup> Holbrook informed the Adjutant General that if Stott was not provided with an additional forty-nine officers and 256 other rank servicemen, graves operations would continue until the spring of 1949.<sup>210</sup>

In September, O'Connor wrote to Colonel Lord Nathan, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for War, stating that he could find no more men for the AGS and that there was no choice but to adopt the spring of 1949 as the end date for graves operations.<sup>211</sup> Sir Eric Speed, the Permanent Under Secretary of State for War, who was privy to this correspondence, did not agree and informed Nathan of his 'uneasiness' in this regard:

I think that the impatience of the Press and public may well increase and that they are hardly likely to be content with another 2½ years delay or more and I think it may be a little difficult to put across the explanation that it is due to our inability to find another 49 officers and 256 other ranks to speed up the work and complete it in half the time. I understand that labour for digging is not the bottleneck; the actual digging is already done very largely by local labour in France, Belgium and Holland, as well as in Germany, although it is not considered policy to publicise this.

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<sup>208</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, Holbrook Report, July 1946.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.* It is thought that at its peak strength, Stott had 703 British and Dominion servicemen in his graves force. Mostly he had considerably fewer skilled personnel available. See TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, Table on Civilian Labour, 22 February 1947; TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, Statistics Tables, 10 November 1947.

<sup>210</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, Holbrook Report, July 1946.

<sup>211</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, O'Connor to Nathan, 19 September 1946; *The Quarterly Army List: August 1946*, Part I, p. 19.

The difficulty is the shortage of British Officers and other ranks who are required for supervision and for doing the documentary work.<sup>212</sup>

Speed recommended that the Adjutant General be asked to find the additional 305 men and to accord the AGS a higher staffing priority generally. O'Connor duly agreed to investigate what could be done.<sup>213</sup>

- The AGS Enters the Soviet Zone

At this time Stott received the good news that Russian military authorities had given their consent to three 'Search Teams' and three 'Disinterring Teams' entering the Soviet Zone from 15 October.<sup>214</sup> Strict conditions were attached to their entry. Each of the 'Search Teams' would consist of one officer and two other ranks, while the individual 'Disinterring Teams' would comprise two officers and six other ranks.<sup>215</sup> A minimum of two days before entering the Soviet Zone, the AGS would have to provide the Soviet Military Administration in Potsdam with maps of where its men planned to travel, and give good cause why they wished to visit these places. Further to this condition, team members were not to proceed anywhere other than those places stated in their applications, although the possibilities of this happening were negligible for they were always to be accompanied by Russian officers.<sup>216</sup> British servicemen entering the Soviet Zone were expected to return to their base in Berlin

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<sup>212</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, Speed to Nathan, 30 September 1946; *The Quarterly Army List: August 1946*, Part I, p. 19.

<sup>213</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, Speed to Nathan, 30 September 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, Holbrook to O'Connor, 15 October 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, O'Connor to Speed and Nathan, 21 October 1946.

<sup>214</sup> TNA, PRO WO 267/603, Quarterly Historical Report, 30 September 1946; TNA, PRO WO 267/603, Stott Memorandum, 5 October 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/11755, Clode to A. S. Woods, 17 October 1946; TNA, PRO WO 267/604, Quarterly Historical Report, 31 December 1946. It is thought that the Russians gave their consent to the AGS entering the Soviet Zone without the Baltic and Ukrainian displaced persons living in the British Zone having been deported.

<sup>215</sup> TNA, PRO WO 267/603, Stott Memorandum, 5 October 1946.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 267/603, Major General Vershinin Memorandum (Translation), circa September 1946.

each night if possible, and none were to stay more than four consecutive days in Russian territory: apart from the security reasons for this ruling, the Russian authorities were reluctant to provide AGS personnel with rations and accommodation.<sup>217</sup> Other conditions of entry were that servicemen wore military uniform while travelling in the Soviet Zone and denim overalls when handling the dead, and transported bodies only in closed vehicles.<sup>218</sup> The AGS was quick to accept these rules knowing that there was nothing to be gained and everything to be lost by disputing them, and arrangements were made for men from Number 53 GRU and Number 56 GCU to enter the Soviet Zone.<sup>219</sup> It was expected that the removal of the British dead from the region would take at least a year.<sup>220</sup>

- The Increasing Hostility of the Public

As information was gathered from the Soviet Zone and hitherto-unknown burials were discovered in other areas, Stott was able to deliver to the War Office more accurate forecasts of what remained to be done by the AGS in north-west Europe. At the end of 1946 he reported that there were 58,000 graves to be registered – an increase of 8,000 on the figure for the previous June – 55,000 concentrations still to be performed, and 30,000 unknown bodies awaiting exhumation for identification.<sup>221</sup> These problems were compounded by the fact that O'Connor had not found the Western Europe Graves Service any more servicemen, and nor was he willing to

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<sup>217</sup> TNA, PRO WO 267/603, Stott Memorandum, 5 October 1946.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>219</sup> TNA, PRO WO 267/604, Unit Location Statement, January 1947.

<sup>220</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/11755, Clode to A. S. Woods, 17 October 1946.

<sup>221</sup> TNA, PRO WO 267/604, Statistics Report, 25 December 1946.

employ and train civilians to fill its skilled staff deficiencies for the predicted yearly cost of doing so was £90,000.<sup>222</sup>

Although the public knew nothing of the Adjutant General's position, many Britons believed that a parsimonious government was solely to blame for the slow progress in graves operations, and for the decision, not yet widely accepted, to bury the dead in Germany. Gertrude Green from Sussex wrote to *The Times* in December:

[a] letter from a friend in great distress tells me that her son's grave is probably to be in Germany. She and her relatives have appealed for a reversal of this decision, but the only answer they have leads them to assume that parsimony on the part of the Government is responsible. It is unbearable that those who mourn the loss of their heroic dead should have their hearts wrung by the thought that England allows them to lie in enemy territory.<sup>223</sup>

Margery Swanwick of Chesterfield thought similarly. In a letter to the *Daily Telegraph* she wrote: 'I myself lost a son and a nephew, both killed in Germany, and it is with the utmost distaste that I contemplate the idea of visiting their graves in a country, and among inhabitants, with whom we have so recently been at war.'<sup>224</sup> She added that '[t]he trouble and expense of moving the graves from Germany to countries of our Allies would indeed be a small matter compared with the satisfaction to those whose feelings are surely entitled to some consideration.'<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, Holbrook Memorandum, 22 November 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, Internal Memorandum, 12 December 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, Internal Memorandum, 16 January 1947. In the autumn of 1946, the BAOR Graves Service changed name, first to the North-West Europe Graves Service and then to the Western Europe Graves Service.

<sup>223</sup> *The Times*, 5 December 1946. Similar sentiments had been expressed after the First World War. For example, see CWGC, 1050, The Countess of Selborne to Sir Laming Worthington-Evans, 30 December 1924.

<sup>224</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 10 December 1946.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.* One letter writer, borrowing the words of Rupert Brooke, declared that it did not matter where cemeteries were located for all foreign fields would be 'for ever England'. See *The Times*, 9 December 1946. See also *The Times*, 13 December 1946; *Daily Telegraph*, 14 December 1946; *Daily Telegraph*, 17 December 1946; *The Times*, 28 December 1946.

In February 1947, O'Connor informed Frederick Bellenger, the Secretary of State for War, that AGS operations would not be completed before the spring of 1949.<sup>226</sup> The Adjutant General explained that the army was short of junior officers and non-commissioned officers and he did not feel that any could be spared for the AGS. At the same time he assured Bellenger that 'I am doing all I can to speed up the work in other ways.'<sup>227</sup> Like Speed, who had continued to argue that somehow more men had to be found for the AGS, Bellenger was 'disturbed' by the position adopted by O'Connor.<sup>228</sup> He replied: 'I would be glad to have an early report on the means you are pursuing for speeding up the work ... [i]n discussing the topics about which the Public write to the War Office I noticed that enquiries about Graves now head the list.'<sup>229</sup>

In the House of Commons Bellenger was being questioned regularly about the progress of graves operations.<sup>230</sup> One MP asked him to ensure 'proper co-ordination between his Department and the War Graves Commission to avoid what happened recently, when an organised party arrived ... and found the cemetery was in a transitional stage, with no list of graves and no flowers, with the result that the visit caused a good deal of distress'.<sup>231</sup> Bellenger replied: '[n]ot all the cemeteries are

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<sup>226</sup> In December 1946, Major General V. Blomfield had succeeded Holbrook as DGRE director. See TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Army Council Memorandum, December 1946; TNA, PRO WO 163/313, ICRV Meeting Minutes, 14 February 1947; TNA, PRO WO 267/605, Stott Memorandum, 31 March 1947; TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, Blomfield to Major General R. Edgeworth-Johnstone, 8 July 1947; *The Quarterly Army List: December 1946*, Part I, (London: HMSO, 1946), p. 36; *The Quarterly Army List: April 1947*, Part I, (London: HMSO, 1947), p. 36.

<sup>227</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, O'Connor to Bellenger, 24 February 1947.

<sup>228</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, Internal Memorandum, 16 January 1947.

<sup>229</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, Bellenger to O'Connor, 19 March 1947. See also TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, O'Connor to Bellenger, 29 March 1947.

<sup>230</sup> For example, see *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 427 HC, DEB 5S, (London: HMSO, 1946), p. 11. See also *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 431 HC, DEB, (London: HMSO, 1947), p. 187; *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 441 HC, DEB 5S, (London: HMSO, 1947), pp. 240-1.

<sup>231</sup> *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 438 HC, DEB 5S, (London: HMSO, 1947), p. 1779. It is thought the incident in question occurred at Ranville cemetery in Normandy in early June. See *Daily Telegraph*, 7 June 1947; *Sunday Pictorial*, 22 June 1947.

properly organised. It is an immense problem to recover so many bodies, scattered as they are over the battlefields, and concentrate them; but I am glad to say that the work is progressing very well indeed.<sup>232</sup> Privately, however, he was concerned. As he informed his ministerial colleague, Ernest Bevin, in August: 'the public will not tolerate any laxity in dealing with the proper registration and care of war graves.'<sup>233</sup>

- The Increasing Isolation of the AGS

By this time Stott had realised that he was not going to be provided with any form of additional resources. On this matter O'Connor remained resolute.<sup>234</sup> Thus Stott turned his attention to reorganising his personnel as efficiently and effectively as possible, converting ten GRUs into five large GCUs on the basis that most of the work which remained to be done involved moving bodies into permanent cemeteries.<sup>235</sup> In Germany, meanwhile, the concentration programme was to be more diverse than first anticipated, with Stott envisaging the construction of fifteen British cemeteries in the country rather than the original four.<sup>236</sup>

The restructuring of the Western Europe Graves Service was part of a wider plan formulated by Stott which was intended to facilitate the completion of graves

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<sup>232</sup> *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 438 HC, DEB 5S, pp. 1779-80. The debate was reported in the national press the following day. For example, see *Manchester Guardian*, 18 June 1947.

<sup>233</sup> TNA, PRO FO 371/64626, Bellenger to Bevin, 12 August 1947.

<sup>234</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, O'Connor to Bellenger, 29 March 1947; TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, O'Connor to Bellenger, 3 May 1947.

<sup>235</sup> TNA, 267/605, Conference Minutes, 10 March 1947; TNA, 267/605, Conversion of Units, 27 March 1947; TNA, PRO WO 267/605, Quarterly Historical Report, 31 March 1947; TNA, PRO WO 267/606, Unit Disbandment Memoranda, 29 April 1947; TNA, PRO WO 267/606, Reorganisation of AGS, 19 May 1947; TNA, PRO WO 267/606, Quarterly Historical Report, 31 June [sic] 1947.

<sup>236</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, O'Connor to Bellenger, 3 May 1947; TNA, PRO WO 32/11593, British Cemeteries in Germany, 4 July 1947.

operations by 31 December 1948.<sup>237</sup> Its central tenet involved what he termed the ‘final sweep’, an operation which was to be conducted in two stages in 41,296 separate mayoralities across the theatre.<sup>238</sup> During the first stage, personnel would systematically comb the land and complete the registration and concentration of any graves that remained unattended, exhume unknown bodies for identification, and obtain from the mayor a certificate stating that all graves within his jurisdiction had been made known to the AGS.<sup>239</sup> The second stage would entail, where necessary, the erection of crosses, the photographing of graves, and the finalising of reports ready for the handover of cemeteries to the IWGC.<sup>240</sup> During these operations, personnel would pay particular attention to the 6000 civil cemeteries in north-west Europe which were thought to contain remains of British servicemen to ensure that no graves were bypassed.<sup>241</sup> Similarly, all enemy graves would have to be attended to for an area to be considered ‘cleared’.<sup>242</sup>

Certain War Office authorities balked at the scale of their ongoing commitment to the dead. In the autumn of 1947 the Director of Finance stated that either the size of the AGS had to be reduced, or the date of its disbandment brought forward, for the War Office could not afford to fund graves operations on this level

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<sup>237</sup> TNA, 267/605, Conference Minutes, 10 March 1947; TNA, 267/606, Conference Minutes, 6 May 1947; TNA, PRO WO 267/606, Quarterly Historical Report, 31 June [sic] 1947; TNA, PRO WO 267/606, Target Dates for Completion of Operations, June 1947.

<sup>238</sup> TNA, 267/605, Conference Minutes, 10 March 1947; TNA, PRO WO 267/606, Reorganisation of AGS, 19 May 1947; TNA, PRO WO 267/606, Stott to Clode, 5 July 1947; TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, Statistics Tables, 10 November 1947; TNA, PRO WO 267/610, Statistics Report, 25 June 1948.

<sup>239</sup> TNA, PRO WO 267/606, Stott to Clode, 5 July 1947.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>241</sup> TNA, 267/605, Conference Minutes, 10 March 1947; TNA, PRO AIR 55/54, Conference Minutes, 14 March 1947; TNA, PRO WO 267/606, Reorganisation of AGS, 19 May 1947; TNA, PRO WO 267/607, Quarterly Historical Report, 30 September 1947; TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, Statistics Tables, 10 November 1947; TNA, PRO WO 267/610, Statistics Report, 25 June 1948.

<sup>242</sup> TNA, PRO WO 267/606, Areas of Responsibility Memorandum, circa June 1947; TNA, PRO WO 267/606, Target Dates for Completion of Operations, June 1947.

until the end of 1948.<sup>243</sup> In addition to lessening the dependence of the Western Europe Graves Service on external labour – it employed 500 European civilians to whom the army had to pay wages – it was suggested that costs might be cut by reducing the scope of its work, particularly in relation to German casualties and the American and French dead in southern France.<sup>244</sup> In this regard the Director of Finance was giving voice to a school of thought which existed within the War Office that the AGS was doing too thorough a job. As one senior official put it, '[h]ow far must the areas where war dead may be found be combed in order to satisfy public opinion?'<sup>245</sup> The DGRE replied that Britain was bound by the Geneva Convention to deal with the German dead, that the target date of 31 December 1948 had been calculated on the assumption that the strength of the AGS would not be further weakened, and that everything possible would be done to conclude graves operations before this point and at minimum cost.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, Internal Memorandum, 12 September 1947; TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, Internal Memorandum, 3 November 1947; *The Quarterly Army List: August 1947*, Part I, (London: HMSO, 1947), p. 59. On 15 September 1947, Brigadier C. S. Vale, the Director of Prisoners of War at the War Office, replaced Blomfield as DGRE director. Vale was formerly of the RASC. See TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, Internal Memorandum, 15 September 1947; *The Quarterly Army List: December 1947*, (London: HMSO, 1947), pp. 35-7; *The Quarterly Army List: August 1948*, (London: HMSO, 1948), p. 213d.

<sup>244</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, Internal Memorandum, 12 September 1947; TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, Internal Memorandum, 3 November 1947. At one point, the AGS in north-west Europe employed over 1000 civilians, mostly as unskilled labourers. See TNA, PRO WO 171/10997, Number 56 GCU War Diary, June 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, Table on Civilian Labour, 22 February 1947; TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, Statistics Tables, 10 November 1947.

<sup>245</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, Internal Memorandum, 18 November 1947.

<sup>246</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, Internal Memorandum, 15 September 1947; TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, Internal Memorandum, 21 November 1947.

- The Disbandment of the AGS

The strength of the Western Europe Graves Service diminished over the first half of 1948. In all areas outside Germany, units were disbanded or amalgamated.<sup>247</sup>

Administrative headquarters were moved to Calais in preparation for the departure of the AGS from the Continent, and in May the supply and administration of the Western Europe Graves Service was devolved to Eastern Command in England in a move designed to appease the Treasury.<sup>248</sup> By this time, approximately 85,000 graves had been registered in France, Belgium and Holland.<sup>249</sup>

In Germany, where a further 25,000 British and Dominion dead lay, AGS operations were less advanced.<sup>250</sup> For instance, the concentration of 5000 British bodies from the Soviet Zone had stalled for a lack of interpreters.<sup>251</sup> The one officer in the AGS who spoke Russian had been demobilised, and other Britons in Germany who were fluent in the language were already employed within the military and civil administration.<sup>252</sup> The seriousness of the situation was such that AGS operations in the Soviet Zone were expected to take another year.<sup>253</sup>

Despite these problems, by the autumn of 1948 AGS operations in Europe were effectively complete except in Poland, entry into this country having only been

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<sup>247</sup> TNA, PRO WO 267/608, Quarterly Historical Report, 31 December 1947; TNA, PRO WO 267/609, Quarterly Historical Report, 31 March 1948; TNA, PRO WO 267/610, Quarterly Historical Report, 30 June 1948; TNA, PRO WO 267/609, Unit Location Statement, April 1948.

<sup>248</sup> TNA, PRO WO 267/610, Quarterly Historical Report, 30 June 1948.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 267/609, Statistics Report, 25 March 1948; TNA, PRO WO 267/610, Statistics Report, 25 June 1948.

<sup>250</sup> Ware, *The Immortal Heritage*, p. 63; *Commonwealth War Graves Commission Annual Report, 2000-2001*, p. 41; CWGC, Germany Graves Statistics. 20,000 of the 25,000 dead were British.

<sup>251</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/11755, Lieutenant Colonel R. M. Armitage to Vale, 29 April 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/11755, Lieutenant Colonel R. M. Armitage to Vale, 13 May 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/11755, Lieutenant Colonel R. M. Armitage to Vale, 25 May 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/11755, Soviet Zone Concentrations, circa May 1948.

<sup>252</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/11755, Lieutenant Colonel R. M. Armitage to Vale, 29 April 1948.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 32/11755, Lieutenant Colonel R. M. Armitage to Vale, 13 May 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/11755, Lieutenant Colonel R. M. Armitage to Vale, 25 May 1948.

secured that year, and in the Soviet Zone.<sup>254</sup> In some 'cleared' regions there remained a few bodies and graves unaccounted for, but these territories had been so thoroughly searched that it had become pointless to continue looking for the dead.<sup>255</sup> The work of the AGS could not continue indefinitely, and thus steps were taken to end investigations. The DGRE informed the mother of Lance Corporal G. R. Bentley that:

the location of his grave has not been reported to this Directorate ... although many searches and enquiries have been made for the graves of those that still remain unlocated [sic]. I fear that after this lapse of time there is now very little hope that his grave will ever be located, and in your great loss and sad distress I extend to you the most sincere sympathy of this Directorate.<sup>256</sup>

On 30 September the War Office closed the DGRE and ended AGS operations in France, Belgium and Holland.<sup>257</sup>

The forty-eight men who remained in the service after this date continued working in Poland until January 1949 and in the Soviet Zone until 31 July, on which day the last AGS unit was disbanded.<sup>258</sup> No fanfare marked the occasion. Rather, there was just the disappointing matter of work unfinished, Russian authorities

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<sup>254</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/11755, Lieutenant Colonel R. M. Armitage to Vale, 29 April 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Vale Minute, 23 August 1948.

<sup>255</sup> CWGC, 3031, Summary of War Graves and Cemeteries, August 1949.

<sup>256</sup> CWGC, 3001, DGRE to B. Bentley, 19 August 1948.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Vale Minute, 23 August 1948; TNA, PRO WO 267/610, Kite Order 3186, circa September 1948; CWGC, 3031, Vale Memorandum, 8 September 1948; CWGC, 3031, Notice of DGRE Closure, 1 October 1948; *The Quarterly Army List: August 1948*, p. 15B; *The Quarterly Army List: December 1948*, (London: HMSO, 1948), pp. 15-15A.

<sup>258</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12036, Statistics Tables, 10 November 1947; TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Vale Minute, 23 August 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Vale to Frank Higginson, 20 September 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/11755, Lieutenant Colonel F. C. Hallows to J. Mackenzie, Foreign Office, 26 April 1949; TNA, PRO WO 32/11755, Lieutenant Colonel F. C. Hallows Memorandum, 26 April 1949; TNA, PRO WO 32/11755, Major J. C. Vincent Report, 29 July 1949; CWGC, 3031, Vale Memorandum, 8 September 1948; CWGC, 3031, Notice of DGRE Closure, 1 October 1948; CWGC, 3031, Summary of War Graves and Cemeteries, August 1949; *Thirtieth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, (London, HMSO, 1950), pp. 22-3; *The Quarterly Army List: December 1948*, p. 15. On 1 October 1948, the Department of POWs and Graves was formed within the Directorate of Personal Services (DPS) at the War Office. Its function with regard to graves was to supervise the AGS personnel still at work in Poland and the Soviet Zone.

having forbidden the men of Number 50 GCU from entering Thuringia and East Prussia to recover the bodies of several hundred British servicemen.<sup>259</sup> The public conclusion of operations was equally subdued. The War Office did not announce that the AGS officially had completed its task in Europe, meaning that the event which denoted this achievement, the handover of Heerstrasse War Cemetery in Berlin to the IWGC, went unnoticed in Britain.<sup>260</sup> For a largely anonymous organisation such as the AGS, this was sadly appropriate.

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<sup>259</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/11755, Lieutenant Colonel F. C. Hallowes Memorandum, 26 April 1949; TNA, PRO WO 32/11755, Major J. C. Vincent Report, 29 July 1949; CWGC, 3031, Summary of War Graves and Cemeteries, August 1949. The graves of British soldiers in Czechoslovakia were attended to at some point in the 1940s, although exactly when this was done and by whom is not known.

<sup>260</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/11755, Lieutenant Colonel F. C. Hallowes Memorandum, 26 April 1949; CWGC, 3031, Summary of War Graves and Cemeteries, August 1949.

**Figures 4-12: AGS Operations in France**



Members of Number 48 GCU chart the position of isolated graves in Normandy, 1946.



Searching the countryside for bodies and graves.



An identity disc.



Painting and preparing crosses for erection in cemeteries.



An exhumation (1).



An exhumation (2).



An exhumation (3).



German burial plot, Tilly-sur-Seulles War Cemetery, Calvados.

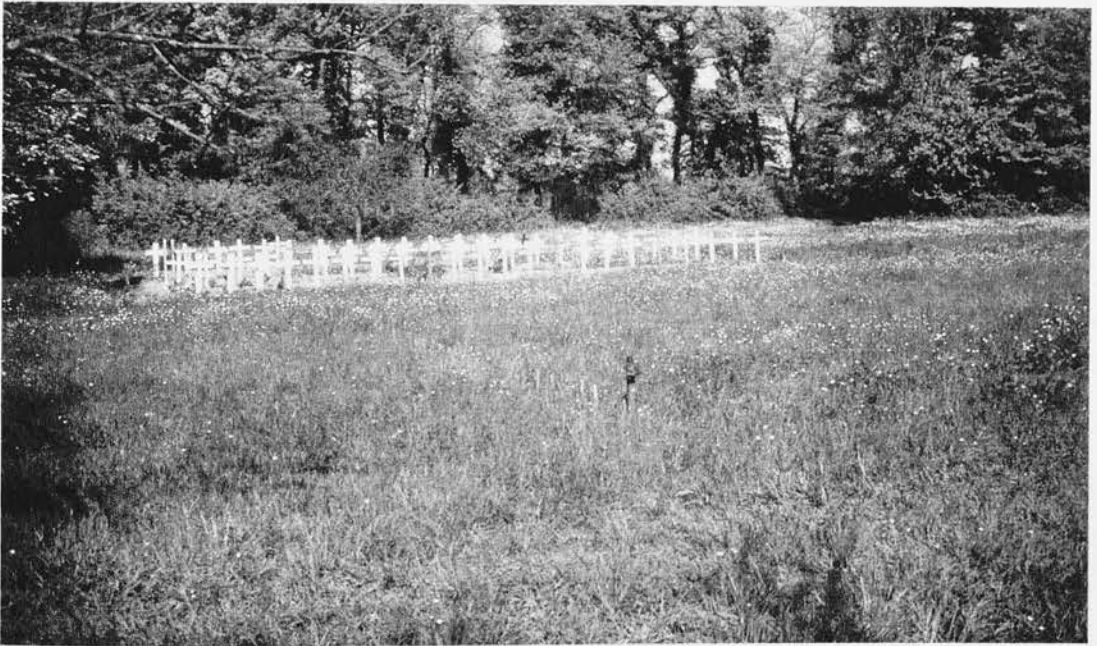


A Number 48 GCU officer (left) prepares to hand over Banneville-la-Campagne War Cemetery, Calvados, to an IWGC official, 1947.

Figures 13-29: The Development of Bayeux War Cemetery by the AGS, 1944-48



A muddy field.



A temporary burial plot (1).



A temporary burial plot (2).



Marking permanent burial plots.



Civilians digging graves (1).



Civilians digging graves (2).



Tilling and levelling the earth.



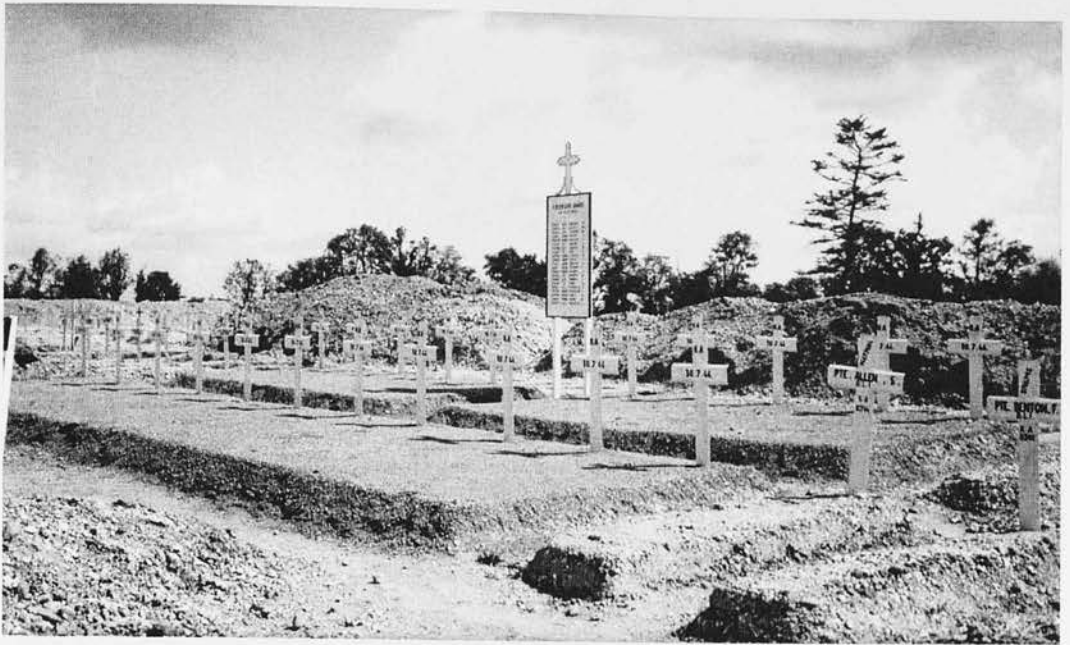
Checking graves.



Crosses awaiting erection.



Crosses being erected.



Scots Guards burial plot.



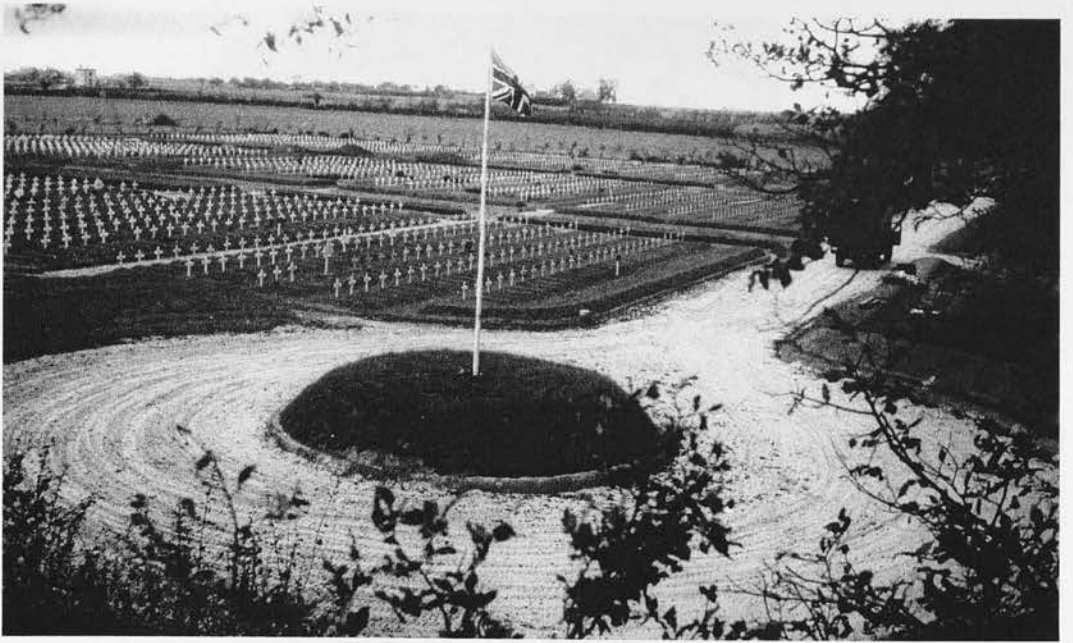
Flattening mounds.



A delivery of amended crosses.



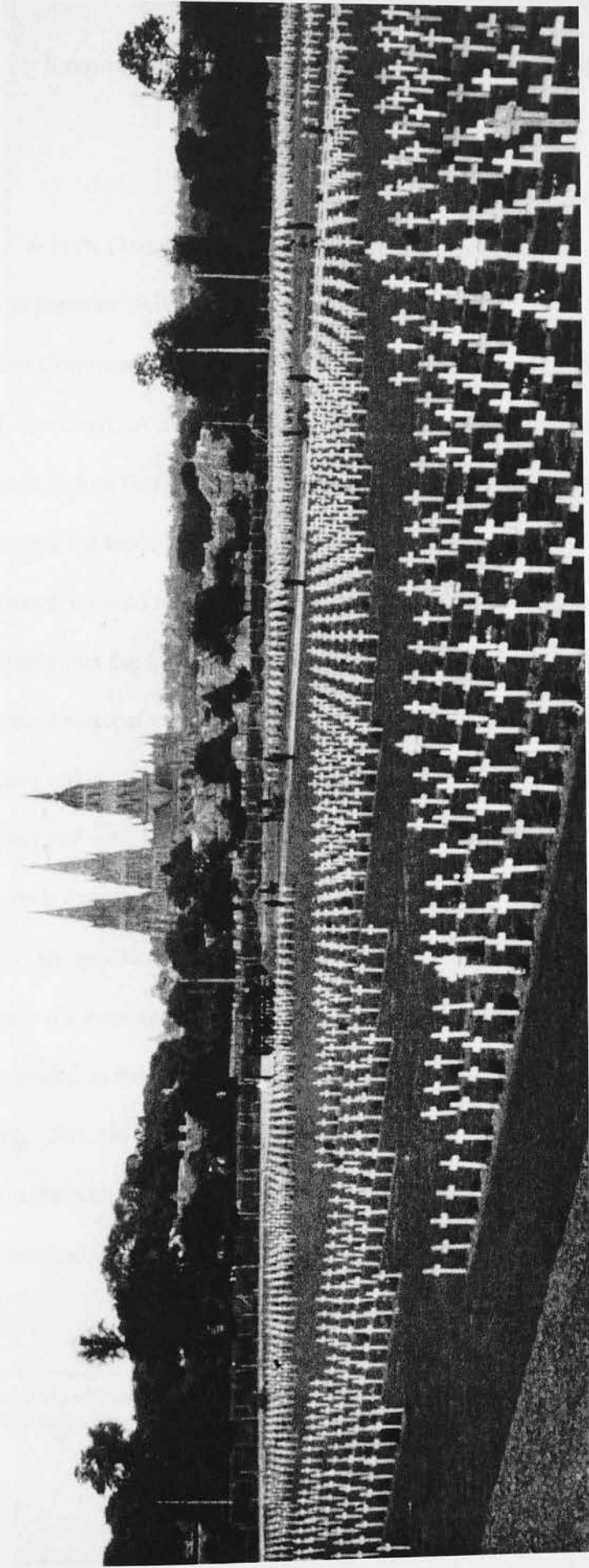
Tidying up.



Nearly finished.



Finished (1).



Finished (2).

## Chapter Four

### Keeping Track of Missing RAF Personnel: September 1939-December 1945

- A New Concern

On 4 September 1939, Blenheim and Wellington aircraft from Number Two Group, Bomber Command, attacked naval installations at Wilhelmshaven on the German North Sea coast. A number of the aircraft did not return to base.<sup>1</sup> It was possible – probable even – that the crews of these aircraft were dead, yet in the absence of conclusive evidence or eyewitness reports, death could only be supposed. If they were dead, it could not be assumed that evidence of their deaths would be found. It was likely that the men had been shot down behind enemy lines, near to their targets and where German air defences were strongest, but that this did happen could not be assumed either. The aircraft may have crashed into the North Sea or the English Channel and sunk to the sea floor. Had they crashed on land, the impact may have been such that the aircraft and the bodies of the crew would have been damaged beyond recognition. Conversely, it was feasible for the families and the Air Ministry to retain the hope that the men were still alive. They could have been captured and incarcerated as POWs or, having avoided capture, be making their way back to Britain. The Air Ministry was aware of all these possible fates, but only knew for certain the names of the airmen. They were listed as missing and the families of the men notified of this status by telegram. Simultaneously, the Casualty Branch, part of

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<sup>1</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part I; John Nichol and Tony Rennell, *The Last Escape: The Untold Story of Allied Prisoners of War in Germany 1944-45*, (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 36.

the secretarial division of the Air Ministry, was given responsibility for the missing aircrew, although exactly what this entailed had yet to be clarified.<sup>2</sup>

The Casualty Branch had no experience of determining the fate of RAF personnel lost overseas. Its role had been to deal with the relatively small number of peacetime casualties resulting from flying accidents in Britain and its duties, although melancholy, had never been taxing.<sup>3</sup> Locating missing aircrew in Europe was a new challenge and, until such time as the Casualty Branch was able to mount a search for the missing men in Germany, investigations into their fate would have to be pursued from London. This posed conceptual as well as practical difficulties, there being no obvious way by which to commence the task. No person at the Air Ministry had any relevant experience on which to draw, and nor were there procedural instructions or regulations to which staff could refer for direction.<sup>4</sup> The stipulations in the RAF War Manual detailed how airmen were to be buried and not how the missing might be found.

In the first three weeks of the war, the Casualty Branch was entirely reliant on the British and foreign media for information regarding the whereabouts of missing airmen, with transmissions from BBC correspondents on the Continent, and German radio, useful sources of information on the fate of RAF personnel.<sup>5</sup> Many Britons recognised the voices of missing relatives and friends on German broadcasts and then notified the Air Ministry, allowing it to change the status of these servicemen from 'missing' to 'POW'. The Casualty Branch was nonetheless wary of relying too heavily on the media. Not only was it sceptical as to the veracity of public news, it

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<sup>2</sup> At this time the Casualty Branch was known as S7 Casualty within the Air Ministry.

<sup>3</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part I; *The Air Force List: September 1939*, (London: HMSO, 1939), p. 877.

<sup>4</sup> See CWGC, 2033, Major H. F. Chettle to Ware, circa December 1939.

<sup>5</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part I.

recognised the awkwardness and potential for embarrassment of having no information to pass on to concerned relatives of the missing other than that taken from, and available in, the public domain.

It was, therefore, a relief when POW capture cards began to be received in Britain at the end of September 1939. The purpose of these cards, which were completed by newly-interned POWs and sent by German authorities to the POWs' next-of-kin, was compassionate in that it allowed prisoners to notify relatives of their capture and prove that they were alive.<sup>6</sup> For the Casualty Branch, capture cards served the more prosaic function of establishing the POW status of missing RAF personnel. The arrival of the cards in Britain also provided an indication of the preparedness of German authorities to abide by the decrees within the Geneva Conventions governing the transfer of casualty information between belligerents. For the Casualty Branch, hamstrung by its inability to deploy in the field, this was promising for it could not hope to locate large numbers of missing airmen without the cooperation of enemy authorities.

To this end the British armed services had agreed on 2 September to cooperate with the Joint War Organisation (JWO) – comprised of the British Red Cross Society and the Order of St John of Jerusalem – to facilitate the exchange of casualty information with the German military. Formal ties for this purpose were forged at the end of the month after contact had been made with the ICRC in Geneva, and this foundation was built upon when the JWO established a POW Department in

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*; Nichol and Rennell, *The Last Escape*, pp. 89-90. See also Hilary St George Saunders, *The Red Cross and the White: A Short History of the Joint War Organization of the British Red Cross Society and the Order of St. John of Jerusalem During the War 1939-1945*, (London: Hollis and Carter,

London in October.<sup>7</sup> The ICRC undertook to send any information obtained from German officials regarding missing British airmen to this department, which would then pass the knowledge to the Casualty Branch, an arrangement which ensured that the Air Ministry would be privy to all relevant Red Cross information.<sup>8</sup> In turn, the Casualty Branch agreed to channel all its enquiries about missing RAF personnel through the JWO and, ultimately, the ICRC. To facilitate these transfers of information, an ICRC Liaison Officer was attached to the Air Ministry and, by the middle of October, Britain and Germany were exchanging casualty data readily and reliably.<sup>9</sup>

Such communications were a melancholy business for they involved the Casualty Branch confirming the deaths of British airmen. The telegrams forwarded from Germany through the ICRC included basic synopses on the fate of aircrew, and this information was expanded upon in the *Totenlisten* that followed.<sup>10</sup> These were photostatic copies of original German documents that recorded the manner of death of enemy servicemen and the site of burial.<sup>11</sup> The first *Totenliste* was received at the Casualty Branch on 14 October 1939 whereupon it was translated into English. Stamped for despatch by German military authorities in Berlin on 27 September, it detailed the deaths of four RAF personnel. Of one of these men, Sergeant Prince, it

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1949), p. 85. As capture cards were sent directly to next-of-kin, the Casualty Branch was dependent on families notifying it that they had received news of their missing relatives.

<sup>7</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part I; S. C. Rexford-Welch (ed.), *The Royal Air Force Medical Services, Volume I, Administration*, (London: HMSO, 1954), pp. 345-6. The 1930 Field Service Regulations stated that '[i]n accordance with international conventions a Prisoners of War Information Bureau will be established for the record and transmission of information regarding prisoners of war and for the disposal of the personal effects of the dead.' See *Field Service Regulations, Volume I, Organization and Administration, 1930*, p. 210.

<sup>8</sup> See correspondence in TNA, PRO WO 32/14357.

<sup>9</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part I; Rexford-Welch (ed.), *The Royal Air Force Medical Services*, pp. 350-1. See also TNA, PRO WO 32/14357, Relations Between the Casualty Branch and the British Red Cross, Undated; TNA, PRO WO 32/14357, Relations Between the Casualty Branch and the ICRC, Undated.

<sup>10</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part I. *Totenlisten* translates as lists of the dead.

<sup>11</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part I.

was stated: '[b]rought down by enemy on 3/9/39 – Broken neck and both thighs – Died in Marine Hospital Wesermunde on 4/9/39 – Buried Geestemunde Cemetery, soldiers' section.'<sup>12</sup> Because there was no reason to doubt the truth or accuracy of the information provided in the *Totenliste*, the Casualty Branch confirmed Prince and the three other airmen dead upon receipt of this document.

The subsequent receipt of further *Totenlisten* throughout October and November generated more work than the existing staff of the Casualty Branch could cope with, and in late 1939 the department was expanded by the Air Ministry. At the same time it placed the Casualty Branch under the jurisdiction of the Directorate of Personal Services (DPS), which was a division of the department of the Air Member for Personnel (AMP).<sup>13</sup>

- The Escalation of the Air War

Several months later, in May 1940, the Wounded, Missing and Relatives Department of the JWO was established. Not only did this department provide the Casualty Branch with an additional avenue for keeping track of missing airmen through the ICRC, but it was agreed that it would deal also with enquiries from the relatives of missing personnel.<sup>14</sup> The timing of this happening was propitious for the strategic air

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* Presumably Prince had been killed in the early morning of 4 September and not on the 3<sup>rd</sup> as stated in the *Totenliste*.

<sup>13</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part I; *The Air Force List: December 1939*, (London: HMSO, 1939), p. 13. The internal title of the Casualty Branch changed from S7 Casualty to P4 Casualty to reflect its transfer from the secretarial division to the personnel division of the Air Ministry.

<sup>14</sup> Rexford-Welch (ed.), *The Royal Air Force Medical Services*, p. 353; P. G. Cambray and G. G. B. Briggs, *Red Cross & St. John: The Official Record of the Humanitarian Services of the War Organisation of the British Red Cross Society and Order of St. John of Jerusalem 1939-1947*, (London: Publisher Unknown, 1949), pp. 339, 341. Also in May 1940, the Directorate of Prisoners of War (DPW) was established at the War Office. See Nichol and Rennell, *The Last Escape*, p. 37; David Rolf, "Blind Bureaucracy": The British Government and POWs in German Captivity, 1939-

offensive against Germany began on 15 May 1940 when Bomber Command aircraft attacked railways and oil depots in the Ruhr.<sup>15</sup> For the Casualty Branch, the implications of this development were profound. Since the German invasion and occupation of the Low Countries on 10 May, the 1200 mile flight from southern England to northern Germany had become more dangerous as it entailed a longer time spent flying over or near enemy territory.<sup>16</sup> The strategic air offensive also meant more personnel going missing because of the large numbers of aircraft involved. On 15 May ninety-nine bombers attacked the Ruhr, more than had been despatched on operations the previous October and November, and in the four months from May to August, Bomber Command listed 269 aircraft missing, 196 more than for the previous eight months.<sup>17</sup> There was a further escalation in the air war in 1941 when, in the three months from June to August, 11,396 bombers were despatched on raids and 411 of these went missing.<sup>18</sup>

With the increase in the numbers of missions being flown and airmen being killed, more staff at the Casualty Branch became involved with despatching notifications in cases where death had been confirmed. As this work was of primary importance, the investigations into the fates of airmen listed as missing, and about whom nothing had yet been established, temporarily had to be abandoned.<sup>19</sup> All the while more airmen went missing. It soon became apparent that the Casualty Branch

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45' in Bob Moore and Kent Fedorowich (eds.), *Prisoners of War and their Captors in World War II*, (Oxford: Berg, 1996), p. 49.

<sup>15</sup> Sir Charles Webster and Noble Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany 1939-1945*, Volume I, (London: HMSO, 1961), p. 144.

<sup>16</sup> *Bomber Command Continues: The Air Ministry Account of the Rising Offensive Against Germany July 1941-June 1942*, (London: HMSO, 1942), p. 30; Richard Overy, *Bomber Command 1939-1945*, (London: Harper Collins, 1997), p. 202.

<sup>17</sup> Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany 1939-1945*, Volume IV, pp. 431, 434.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part II.

needed to be reconfigured. Its two different tasks – processing notifications where death was certain, and investigating the whereabouts and status of airmen whose fate remained unknown – needed to be dealt with separately. The creation of the MRS in December 1941 to fulfil the second of these tasks was designed to formalise this demarcation.<sup>20</sup> It was now that the term ‘missing research’ entered the RAF lexicon.

- The MRS: December 1941-December 1944

After being separated from the rest of the Casualty Branch to ensure that they were not fettered by other duties, the Flight Lieutenant and two civilian clerks who staffed the MRS soon brought a previously-unknown method and order to their work. They assiduously collected and collated information on missing airmen; initiated enquiries through the JWO; and, mindful that the identification of bodies would be a difficult and exact science, planned for the future by establishing contacts with jewellers, tailors, watchmakers and launderers.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, case files were opened for each missing RAF aircraft. In these were stated details relating to the last mission undertaken by each aircraft, such as the date, time and place of its departure, the expected time and place of its return, the purpose of the operation, the intended flight path of the aircraft, its type and identification number, and the names and ranks of each crew member on board.<sup>22</sup>

These details, obtainable from flight records, then were supplemented by other information the MRS was able to gather on the likely whereabouts of the aircraft and its crew, with each piece of recorded information given a weighting

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO AIR 55/76, Sinkinson Report, 23 April 1946; Rexford-Welch (ed.), *The Royal Air Force Medical Services*, p. 353.

<sup>22</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part II; CWGC, 2033, Douglas Hague Recollections.

according to its source and likely veracity.<sup>23</sup> The evidence of returning aircrew – provided to Air Ministry Intelligence in debriefing sessions at the end of each operation – was seen to be particularly valuable in this regard, as the testimonies given were those of eyewitnesses.<sup>24</sup> For example, during a raid on Cologne, Flight Lieutenant C. S. Chatten recalled seeing ‘a Lancaster spiral away on fire and from its markings he recognised it as one that had taken off just ahead of him from Bourn in Cambridgeshire ... he realized it was piloted by his friend, Len Hyde.’<sup>25</sup> Men returned from operations also often were able to indicate the likelihood of there having been survivors from downed aircraft, it being a habit of aircrew to watch aircraft fall in the hope of seeing parachutes unfurl nearby.<sup>26</sup> However, the destruction of many aircraft went without witnesses, at least among RAF personnel. Sergeant F. V. Shaw remembered watching ‘a Lanc flying straight and level about a mile away. She was being repeatedly attacked from dead astern but took no evasive action and there was no answering fire from her guns. I concluded that all on board were either dead or wounded and watched until she disappeared, still flying a level course.’<sup>27</sup> If all its aircrew were dead, and if it were not shot down first, this Lancaster may have flown on the same course for hours and crashed only when it ran out of fuel, anywhere within a radius of several hundred miles. All the information provided by witnesses such as Shaw was incorporated into case reports and used to predict the likely fates of missing RAF personnel, with one of three labels appearing

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<sup>23</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part I.

<sup>24</sup> John Nichol and Tony Rennell, *Tail-end Charlies: The Last Battles of the Bomber War 1944-45*, (London: Penguin, 2005), pp. 11-12, 48; CWGC, 2033, Douglas Hague Recollections; Miles Tripp, *The Eighth Passenger*, (London: William Heinemann, 1969), p. 47. Tail gunners especially witnessed many crashes. Because of the wide range of vision allowed from their gun turrets, it was their duty to keep the captain informed when other aircraft above or behind them in the formation were hit.

<sup>25</sup> Nichol and Rennell, *Tail-end Charlies*, p. 48.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

next to the names in MRS records: 'Missing Believed Killed', 'Missing Believed Prisoner of War', or simply 'Missing' for those men about whom the MRS knew nothing.<sup>28</sup>

As no clue to the whereabouts of an airman, however trivial it seemed, was overlooked, the compiling of case reports was a long and laborious process. This process was exacerbated by the steadily increasing workload of the MRS. During 1941 Bomber Command despatched 30,608 aircraft on operations, of which 914 went missing. The comparative figures for 1942 were 35,050 and 1400; 64,528 and 2314 in 1943; and 148,448 and 2573 in 1944.<sup>29</sup> Throughout this period the MRS focused solely on accruing information and compiling case reports as the basis for future investigative operations in the field. As long as the Continent remained under German occupation, it could do little else. Even the invasion of Normandy in June 1944 had no immediate effect on the work of the MRS, for in order to mount a methodical search for missing airmen, the Allied armies needed first to secure a bridgehead of several hundred miles to ensure that investigations could be conducted unhindered by the enemy. In the meantime the compilation of case reports continued, and in so doing the weight and quality of the evidence accumulated was sometimes sufficient to prove the fate of a missing airman.

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<sup>28</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part I. The conferral of these labels was never taken as definitive or absolute. For those men listed as 'Missing Believed Prisoner of War', there was a good chance that their POW status would be confirmed through ICRC channels, in which case the MRS would no longer be responsible for them.

<sup>29</sup> Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany 1939-1945*, Volume IV, p. 437.

- The Case of Flying Officer John Joseph Berg

On 17 June 1944 the Casualty Branch cabled Mrs J. Berg of Grimsby, Lincolnshire, to inform her that her husband, John Joseph Berg, was 'MISSING AS A RESULT OF AIR OPERATIONS OVER ENEMY TERRITORY ON THE NIGHT OF 16/17 JUNE 44'.<sup>30</sup> The telegram also stated: 'ANY FURTHER INFORMATION WILL BE IMMEDIATELY COMMUNICATED TO YOU PENDING RECEIPT OF OFFICIAL NOTIFICATION FROM THE AIR MINISTRY NO INFORMATION SHOULD BE GIVEN TO THE PRESS'.<sup>31</sup> It was not until October that the MRS learnt anything of the fate of Berg and his crew when a *Totenliste* was received from the ICRC. The *Totenliste* recorded that six British airmen had been killed on 17 June when their aircraft had been shot down, but only three of the dead were named, the remaining corpses having been too badly disfigured to be identified. The date and place of burial were given as 19 June and Varsseveld Cemetery in Holland, with German authorities also providing the numbers of the six adjacent graves in which the men had been interred.<sup>32</sup> From the names written on the *Totenliste*, the MRS identified the aircraft that had crashed. However, as a consultation of flight records revealed that the aircraft had departed on operations with a crew of seven, the MRS could confirm only the fate of the three men named in the *Totenliste*, for while the whereabouts and identity of the seventh and missing crew member remained unknown, it could not be certain of the names of the three unidentified dead.<sup>33</sup> On behalf of the JWO and the Casualty Branch, the British Red Cross wrote to Mrs Berg

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<sup>30</sup> IWM, 9293/30/554, Air Ministry to Berg, 17 June 1944.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> IWM, 9293/30/554, Air Ministry to Berg, 17 December 1944.

<sup>33</sup> IWM, 9293/30/554, British Red Cross to Berg, 9 October 1944.

on 9 October to inform her of these developments and to reassure her ‘that every effort is being made in order to clarify this distressing situation.’<sup>34</sup>

On 21 October Mrs Berg received from Leicestershire a letter from Flying Officer R. Kay, the seventh and missing crew member. He wrote:

I’ve been in England some days now, after a hectic time on the Continent, & I’d hoped that the authorities had informed you of the fate[?] of Jack [Berg] & the rest of the crew. Apparently they haven’t & this unpleasant task is left to me. Well Mrs. Berg I won’t ‘beat about the bush’, but I’m afraid I can offer no hope concerning Jack.<sup>35</sup>

Kay explained that they had been late leaving their target and had become isolated behind the main aircraft formation. Their bomber was shot down twenty minutes later by a German fighter.<sup>36</sup> Kay had parachuted from the burning aircraft and, assisted by Dutch civilians, had managed to evade capture and make his way through Holland to Britain. Although he offered Mrs Berg no hope that her husband was alive, he did not confirm his death. Kay recalled that: ‘[w]hilst I was in the vicinity of the crash the Dutch locals told me that only five bodies were found, but that one airman was caught in a local town & made prisoner. I supposed that the aforementioned airman was F/O [Flying Officer] Heath the rear gunner, but after reading your Red Cross letter I don’t know what to think.’<sup>37</sup> For Mrs Berg there remained a faint hope that her husband was still alive. For the MRS, the identity of the three unnamed corpses in Varsseveld Cemetery remained unproven.

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> IWM, 9293/30/554, Kay to Berg, 21 October 1944. To Mrs Berg Kay wrote: ‘I hope you won’t think this letter is too frigid & matter-of-fact but I know you’ll understand that I’m completely out of my depth.’

<sup>36</sup> IWM, 9293/30/554, Kay to Berg, 21 October 1944.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* The original *Totenliste* received from the ICRC had listed the three identified dead as Flying Officer J. Heath, Acting Squadron Leader G. S. Smith, and Flying Officer L. Pulfrey. The names of these men had also been given to Mrs Berg by the British Red Cross in its letter of 9 October.

Two months later the MRS had its answer and Mrs Berg had her loss confirmed. On 13 December the Casualty Branch cabled to inform her that her husband was dead. Supplementary information obtained from the ICRC – the nature of which was not stated – had proved beyond doubt that the men interred in graves twelve to fourteen in Varsseveld Cemetery were the three remaining members of the seven man crew: Berg, Flight Lieutenant Tizard and Flight Sergeant Townsend.<sup>38</sup> On 15 December the British Red Cross wrote to Mrs Berg to express its regret at hearing news that the Air Ministry was to list her husband as ‘Missing Believed Killed’, then two days later she received a letter from the Casualty Branch.<sup>39</sup> It noted: ‘[t]here is unhappily no reason to doubt the accuracy of the German list, and the necessary steps for the formal presumption, for official purposes, of your husband’s death will be taken shortly.’<sup>40</sup> With this letter the question of whether or not Flying Officer Berg was dead was closed.

- Creating the MRS Field Branch

The six months of work it took to solve the Berg case was a reminder to the MRS that pursuing enquiries from London was no substitute for working in the field among the dead. In this regard, Casualty Branch officials had monitored the progress of operations in north-west Europe and, by the autumn of 1944, they felt confident enough in the position of the Allied armies on the Continent to consider sending a MRS detachment to France. In September they met with Fraser, representing the army, to discuss what the despatch of such a formation would involve and, as the

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<sup>38</sup> IWM, 9293/30/554, Air Ministry to Berg, 13 December 1944.

<sup>39</sup> IWM, 9293/30/554, British Red Cross to Berg, 15 December 1944.

<sup>40</sup> IWM, 9293/30/554, Air Ministry to Berg, 17 December 1944.

War Office was responsible for the bodies and graves of all British servicemen, to seek its authorisation for Air Ministry involvement in the handling of the dead.<sup>41</sup>

With AGS personnel overworked, the DGRE willingly devolved responsibility for finding and identifying missing airmen to the MRS.<sup>42</sup>

The arrangement was confirmed in November when the Air Ministry was accorded permission to raise a force, the MRS field branch, to search for missing airmen.<sup>43</sup> There was, however, some confusion as to where MRS responsibilities ended and those of the DGRE and the AGS began. The AGS would be responsible for registering the graves of those airmen whose deaths had been confirmed and whose whereabouts were already known, but the question remained as to whether the AGS or the MRS field branch should be responsible for marking the burial places of RAF personnel located and identified by the latter organisation. Initially it was deemed sufficient for the Air Ministry to be given broad responsibility for missing airmen. This in itself represented an enormous investment in the new MRS field branch, for it was now estimated that 30,000 aircrew were missing as a result of operations in north-west Europe. Of these, sixty-nine per cent were thought to be British personnel, seventeen per cent Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) personnel, seven per cent Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) personnel, and three per cent Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) personnel.<sup>44</sup> Exactly how many of these men had disappeared over land and how many over sea was not known.

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<sup>41</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, September 1944.

<sup>42</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, October 1944.

<sup>43</sup> Some documents refer to the MRS field branch as the MRES. This creates a nomenclature problem as these were different organisations. In this thesis, the detachments of MRS personnel which worked in the field between December 1944 and July 1945 are referred to collectively as the MRS field branch, a division of the MRS based at the Casualty Branch of the Air Ministry in London, while MRES refers to the missing research organisation which operated post-July 1945.

<sup>44</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part II. RAF personnel from other Allied countries were estimated to comprise four per cent of the missing.

A War Establishment was quickly devised for the inaugural missing research field detachment. Number 1 Section MRS was to consist of seven officers and seven other ranks. It would be commanded by a Squadron Leader, with six Flight Lieutenants serving as Search Officers. Of the other ranks, one would work as a clerk and assist the Squadron Leader, while the remaining six would serve as drivers.<sup>45</sup> Six cars would be placed at the disposal of the section to ensure that the Search Officers would be able to work independently and, as the arbiters of missing research operations, attend every crash site. The need for mobility was recognised as paramount for aircraft, unlike soldiers on the battlefield, rarely fell together.

E. F. Hawkins, from the Administrative and Special Duties Branch of the Air Ministry, was chosen to command Number 1 Section MRS and, in the event of later expansion, the MRS field branch as a whole.<sup>46</sup> Hawkins, who was fifty-seven, had started his career as a regular soldier before becoming the representative in Europe of the aircraft manufacturer Hawker Siddeley. He spoke French, German and Italian fluently, and had, as one Air Ministry official later observed, ‘a peculiarly happy flair for establishing useful friendships – an invaluable quality in his particular post.’<sup>47</sup> Hawkins shared much in common with the six men he recruited as Search Officers. Volunteers, as per MRS field branch policy, each of the Search Officers had lived and worked in France before the war: a tailor, a lawyer, a farmer, a travel agent, a wool merchant, and a bar manager.<sup>48</sup> Their nationalities – three Britons, a Canadian, an Australian and a New Zealander – reflected the multinational composition of RAF aircrew and RAF dead.

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<sup>45</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part II.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* See also *The Air Force List: July 1945*, (London: HMSO, 1945), pp. 4, 682.

<sup>47</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, MRES North-west Europe Report, February 1948; TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Slessor to Longmore, 22 September 1947.

<sup>48</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part II.

- The Deployment of Number 1 Section MRS

In December 1944 Hawkins moved to Paris to establish a field headquarters and make preparations for the deployment of his section. He procured accommodation and offices for himself and his men in a building occupied by British army personnel and, once this was done, scheduled field operations to begin in January.<sup>49</sup> However, the deployment had to be deferred. As warm billets were at a premium in the particularly harsh winter, Hawkins was unable to secure suitable accommodation for Number 1 Section MRS outside Paris. Further difficulties arose in February, and by the time his men eventually joined him early that month, the vehicles previously allocated to the formation had been diverted to a different theatre. With replacement transport not due to arrive until the end of April, the section found itself confined to Paris.<sup>50</sup>

Despite these setbacks, Hawkins determined that he and his men would make profitable use of their time. They travelled to cemeteries close to Paris to search for RAF casualties, and examined the records of the French Red Cross and the French graves services for new or corroboratory information that would strengthen the case reports held by the MRS. The time in Paris afforded Hawkins and his Search Officers the opportunity to study the records compiled by *Madame L'Herbier*.<sup>51</sup> A French citizen, she worked for a small division of the French Red Cross known as the *Amicale des Infirmières Pilotes et des Secouristes de l'Air* whose members had

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Internal Memorandum, 24 July 1946.

<sup>50</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part II.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

gathered information on the fate of missing French airmen throughout the war.<sup>52</sup>

L'Herbier had also collected details of the fate and burial places of Allied airmen, as well as items of evidence from aircraft crash sites.<sup>53</sup> As Hawkins later noted, she had 'anticipated by some years the activities of the R.A.F. Missing Research Service, and the results of her efforts were of inestimable value to the Casualty Branch and to No.1 Section in their early approaches to the immense problem confronting them.'<sup>54</sup>

By April the winter had passed and transport for Number 1 Section MRS had arrived, allowing Hawkins and his men to begin the search for missing RAF airmen.<sup>55</sup> Through enquiries made of French civilians, they quickly found that not only was the information in many MRS case reports outdated and inaccurate, but that there was a significantly greater number of dead RAF airmen than there were case reports.<sup>56</sup> The preparation of these files from afar had always been an inexact science, but no person within the MRS had anticipated that there would be many missing airmen of whom the organisation had no prior knowledge. Nor could the Casualty Branch explain how such an anomaly had arisen. Since 1941 the entire concept of missing research had been predicated on the notion that case reports would provide the documentary foundation of searches for missing airmen. One week of field operations had exposed this as false.

Realising that it had grossly underestimated the size and difficulty of the missing research problem, the Casualty Branch hastily set about strengthening the

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<sup>52</sup> *Amicale des Infirmières Pilotes et des Secouristes de l'Air* translates as the Union of Pilot Nurses and Air Rescuers.

<sup>53</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part II.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* L'Herbier was awarded the Order of the British Empire in recognition of her wartime actions.

<sup>55</sup> It is thought that Number 1 Section MRS commenced its operations in northern France.

<sup>56</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part II. See also TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Number 4 MREU ('G' Section) Operations Record Book, June 1947.

MRS presence in the field.<sup>57</sup> In May 1945, Number 2 Section MRS was raised on a War Establishment 'similar' to that of Number 1 Section MRS.<sup>58</sup> The headquarters of Number 2 Section MRS would be in Brussels and its region of operations would be Belgium. Further formations were soon deemed necessary, and in June Numbers 3 and 4 Section MRS were raised for service alongside Number 1 Section in France, where in the north there was a particularly heavy concentration of RAF casualties. By the summer of 1945, these four sections of the MRS field branch, working under the overall command of Hawkins, had investigated and determined the whereabouts of a few hundred of the estimated 30,000 missing airmen.<sup>59</sup> This was slow progress, particularly given that the war in Europe had ended.<sup>60</sup>

- A Critical Juncture

Group Captain R. Burges, the Director of the Casualty Branch, was concerned about the difficulties Hawkins and his men were encountering on the Continent.<sup>61</sup> He was also mindful of the worsening public mood, the period of grace afforded to the Air Ministry by the families of missing RAF personnel having passed. The criticisms expressed by G. R. J. Vick of Cheshire in a letter to Prime Minister Winston Churchill were typical:

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<sup>57</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part II.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Beckess Report, June 1945.

<sup>60</sup> After the war ended, the Air Ministry transferred responsibility for the Casualty Branch from its personnel division back to its secretarial division, where it was known as S14 Casualty. The exact date of this administrative reorganisation is not known.

<sup>61</sup> A Royal Navy commander before his retirement, before the outbreak of war Burges had been a Flight Lieutenant in the Auxiliary Air Force. He was made an honorary Wing Commander on 11 September 1939 and, as an officer of the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, was assigned to the DPS in March 1940 as a Retired Officer. On 1 December 1943 he was promoted to honorary Group Captain, Administrative and Special Duties Branch. See *The Air Force List: March 1940*, (London: HMSO, 1940), pp. xxx, 13; *The Air Force List: November 1941*, (London: HMSO, 1941), p. 19a; *The Air Force List: October 1944*, (London: HMSO, 1944), p. 978.

[m]y only son, No. 2209015, Sgt. J. A. Vick, Royal Air Force, No. 138 Squadron, was reported 'missing' from air operations against the enemy on the night of June 2/3rd, 1944, and for nearly a year my wife and I have suffered untold agony in our anxiety for news of his safety, or ultimate fate, however, to date we have not been able to obtain any information other than the bald statement that he is 'missing' ... the next-of-kin of those who have failed to return are entitled to expect more energetic action to be taken in tracing them. The majority of us know that the 'missing' will not return now, but this is not sufficient. We want to know what was their fate ... so that many of us may get to know the last resting place of those we loved.<sup>62</sup>

Realising the potential for trouble if more was not done to find missing airmen, Burges instigated a review of the MRS field branch. In June he sent A. Beckess, his assistant and Senior Staff Officer in the DPS, to France and Belgium to study missing research operations.<sup>63</sup> Reporting his observations and recommendations on his return to London, Beckess was unequivocal in his call for an expansion of the missing research organisation, noting that it was 'inadequately equipped' in every department and that more Search Officers, drivers and batmen, clerks, vehicles and supplies were required if the search for the missing were to be completed within one year and so prevent 'the scent for clues of all kinds [becoming] stale.'<sup>64</sup> That there was a clear danger of evidence disappearing was reflected in the low number of individual cases, 890, that the MRS field branch had successfully concluded by this time. Beckess stated in his report that '[a]t the present rate of progress and with the present scale of organisation, it [missing research] will be a labour of several years'.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Vick to Churchill, 21 May 1945. The underlining is Vick's.

<sup>63</sup> *The Air Force List: July 1945*, pp. 50-1.

<sup>64</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Beckess Report, June 1945.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Burges to Venn, 12 July 1945.

The Casualty Branch now estimated that the total number of aircrew missing in Europe was approximately 31,000.<sup>66</sup> 7000 of these men had been labelled as ‘Missing’ aircrew, while the remainder were described as ‘Missing Believed Killed’: in the words of Burges, ‘those who have been presumed dead on lapse of time without evidence and who, though technically dead, are in fact, missing’.<sup>67</sup> The Casualty Branch estimated also that the bodies of 4000 RAF personnel were in the Mediterranean region and that at least 10,000 of the 31,000 missing airmen were in the sea.<sup>68</sup> Faced with these statistics, and in the knowledge that the MRS field branch as it was then constituted could only hope to conclude a maximum of 4000 cases annually, Burges determined that reform was necessary. He envisaged an organisation – tentatively labelled the Missing Research Group (MRG) – which would replace the MRS field branch and aim to complete missing research operations by the autumn of 1946.<sup>69</sup>

- Proposals for the MRG

The proposals for the MRG, which Burges sent to Air Commodore G. O. Venn, Director of the DPS, were ambitious in that the Casualty Branch had never previously asked the Air Ministry for so much in terms of men and material.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Burges to Venn, 12 July 1945.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* The Casualty Branch did not countenance the idea that a significant number of missing aircrew might be alive. Most of the estimated 2800 airmen who had escaped from POW camps or avoided capture in occupied Europe had returned to Britain. See Overy, *Bomber Command 1939-1945*, pp. 202, 204.

<sup>68</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Burges to Venn, 12 July 1945. Bomber Command, which of all the RAF commands kept the fullest and most accurate casualty statistics, was able to provide the Casualty Branch with estimates predicting how many of its dead would be found in particular countries. It remains that RAF casualty statistics, including those from Bomber Command, are incomplete. See Ellis, *The World War II Databook*, pp. 258-9; Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany 1939-1945*, Volume IV, p. 429; Overy, *Bomber Command 1939-1945*, p. 194.

<sup>69</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Burges to Venn, 12 July 1945.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

However, as Burges observed, the dimensions of the MRG were ‘hardly outsize when compared .. with those of the Disarmament Wings or the Bombing Research Mission and, compared to the amount of manpower and material which was used to create the problem facing us, the requirements of the proposed scheme are negligible.’<sup>71</sup> He suggested incorporating the extant MRS field branch sections into wings that would be organised by geographical location, with each wing operating under the command of a central field headquarters. Integral to the proposals was the injection of men and supplies into the missing research organisation – Burges wanted between thirty and forty Search Officers in each wing. The twenty-five officers and thirty-six airmen operating in France, Belgium and Holland with the MRS field branch would form the nucleus of the MRG, with new recruits making up the strength of each of the new wings. He also envisaged an organisation that would include specialised medical, operational, accounting, catering and accommodation staff, all necessary equipment including adequate transport, and any other auxiliary services necessary to allow for a five-fold increase in missing research operations.<sup>72</sup>

In addition to his suggestions concerning personnel, Burges advanced proposals for the governance of the MRG. He wanted to enshrine its subordination to the Casualty Branch, and suggested that the MRG be made to report directly to the AMP. Burges did not trust RAF field commands to provide for the MRG without coercion from London, noting that they ‘have already shown lack of interest and a tendency to play off.’<sup>73</sup> By placing the AMP at the apex of the reporting structure, the cooperation of RAF field commands could be forced, and MRG officers would

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* See also TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Slessor to Air Chief Marshal Sir Sholto Douglas, 10 August 1945; TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Slessor to Air Vice Marshal R. A. George, 10 August 1945.

be able to ignore British commanders who took umbrage at missing research work being performed in their jurisdictions. Such stipulations were pertinent given that any type of MRG would be a new and unfamiliar entity.

Burges wanted to distance the MRG from the AGS. Describing the War Office as tardy and its methods as ‘dilatatory’, he informed Venn of the need to minimise army interference in missing research operations.<sup>74</sup> Observing that ‘the War Office entirely fail to realise our problems’, Burges noted ‘that old methods will not meet the need created by long-range air operations; their own problem is relatively small, being on the one hand to find comparatively few “missing” in the area of military operations, and on the other to discover unaccounted for prisoners-of-war.’<sup>75</sup>

At the same time as these proposals were advanced, the existing missing research organisation was expanded. During July Number 5 Section MRS, with headquarters at The Hague, was raised for operations in Holland, and Number 6 Section MRS formed to investigate missing research cases in Norway from a headquarters in Oslo.<sup>76</sup> The creation of two more formations was scheduled for August: Number 7 Section MRS would search for missing airmen in Denmark from headquarters in Esbjerg, and Number 8 Section MRS, with headquarters at Bunde, was to scour the Allied zones in Germany.<sup>77</sup> These developments, which seemed to contradict the recognition by some officials that the MRS field branch required reform, underscored the need for the Air Ministry to take unified and decisive action.

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<sup>74</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Burges to Venn, 12 July 1945.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part II.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Number 3 MREU Operations Record Book, July 1946.

Burges saw only two options: '[e]ither to jog along at the "five year" speed, while local interest flags, clues become obliterated and next-of-kin embittered; or to handle a new problem in a new and revolutionary way with a good chance of solving it in a year.'<sup>78</sup> Observing that 'the public expects the debt of "the many" to "the few" to be paid in full', he noted that 'unless it can be shown that the problem [missing research] is being handled on an adequate scale, far in excess of our present effort, and with the possibility of being concluded in a reasonable time, it contains the seeds of a public scandal of some magnitude.'<sup>79</sup>

- A Seminal Meeting

A meeting in the Air Ministry on 26 July to discuss Burges's proposals was chaired by the AMP, Air Marshal Sir John Slessor. As Director of the Directorate of Plans in September 1939, Slessor had overseen the debate within the Air Ministry regarding the merits and otherwise of a strategic air offensive.<sup>80</sup> He also had a practical knowledge of bombing operations, having commanded Number 5 Bomber Group from May 1941 to March 1942.<sup>81</sup> That he understood well the human costs of aerial bombardment was a good portent for the future of a MRG. Other attendees included Hawkins and, representing the Casualty Branch, Burges, Beckess and Squadron Leader A. P. Le M. Sinkinson. The DGRE was not represented.<sup>82</sup> All the officials present came fully briefed, Beckess having sent them information on the proposals

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<sup>78</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Burges to Venn, 12 July 1945.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany 1939-1945*, Volume I, p. 135. Overy describes Slessor as 'one of the most influential thinkers in the pre-war RAF'. See Overy, *Bomber Command 1939-1945*, p. 28.

<sup>81</sup> Sir John Slessor, *The Central Blue: Recollections and Reflections*, (London: Cassell, 1956), p. 366; Steven D. Chambers, *Political Leaders and Military Figures of the Second World War: A Bibliography*, (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1996), p. 235.

<sup>82</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Meeting Minutes, 26 July 1945.

for the MRG, excerpts from his June report on the MRS field branch, and copies of letters that the Air Ministry had received from relatives of missing airmen concerned about what was being done to find them.<sup>83</sup>

The meeting agenda was framed around four central questions. The first two questions read: '[d]oes public policy require Missing Research?' and '[h]as [the] Air Ministry an obligation to elucidate the fate of 'missing' Air Force personnel?'<sup>84</sup> The attendees at the meeting agreed that for both questions the answer was, indubitably, yes.<sup>85</sup> The third question read: '[i]f the answer to 1 and 2 is 'yes', how long ought to be allowed for completion of the work?'<sup>86</sup> To this question it was proposed, and accepted, that the MRS should aim to complete its work within one year.<sup>87</sup> The fourth question asked: '[i]s the present establishment of the Missing Research and Enquiry Service [MRS field branch] adequate to achieve the object in [question] 3?'<sup>88</sup> The meeting attendees 'agreed that the present establishment was manifestly inadequate'.<sup>89</sup> Having settled that the Air Ministry had a duty to conduct a thorough and prompt search for its missing airmen, they set about expanding the MRS field branch along the lines proposed by Burges. The MRES was born.

- The Function and Structure of the MRES

The new MRES units were to find and then identify the missing RAF aircrew, before arranging for the registration of their graves.<sup>90</sup> It made sense that the reformed

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<sup>83</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Beckess Memorandum, 23 July 1945.

<sup>84</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Meeting Agenda, 26 July 1945.

<sup>85</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Meeting Minutes, 26 July 1945.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> It is unclear exactly when the decision was taken to make the MRES responsible for registering the graves of RAF personnel. It is possible that some MRS sections were already involved in graves

organisation should assume the responsibility of graves registration as it was the logical endpoint of a process that began with finding and identifying the dead. However, this devolution of duty was only partial as once the interred had been named, MRES personnel would contact an AGS officer to arrange for the erection of a grave marker and have the registration confirmed through DGRE channels.<sup>91</sup> Graves concentration would remain the exclusive duty of the AGS, and it would continue to register the burial places of those RAF personnel who had already been identified and interred, the involvement of the MRES being limited to registering the graves of missing airmen which it found.<sup>92</sup> The AGS would also be responsible for performing all exhumations, whether for identification or concentration purposes.<sup>93</sup> Although this meant that the MRES would have to maintain constant contact with the AGS, the Air Ministry and the War Office hoped to keep these interactions to a minimum. For example, the Casualty Branch would be made wholly responsible for communication with other military departments, foreign governments, and the British public regarding missing research operations, and the Air Ministry would ensure that RAF commands, such as 87 Group in France and British Air Forces of Occupation (BAFO) in Germany, were aware of MRES requirements in order that these were fulfilled from air force resources.<sup>94</sup>

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registration before the 26 July meeting, although it is probable that it was only then that the arrangement was formally recognised.

<sup>91</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Sinkinson to A. F. Thorp, 2 October 1947; TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part V.

<sup>92</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part VII; TNA, PRO AIR 55/76, Cooperation Memorandum, 16 November 1945.

<sup>93</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 55/76, Cooperation Memorandum, 16 November 1945. MRES policy decreed that '[i]f a man is registered by number but not by name, or the information is incomplete but judged to be enough to enable Air Ministry to trace him, exhumation is unnecessary.' The exhumation of bodies was permitted only when there was no other evidence for establishing identification, or where there was reason to doubt the stated identity of the interred. While the MRES thus sought to avoid wanton exhumations, its policy did dictate that '[e]very unknown must be exhumed.' This echoed the AGS position. See TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part V.

<sup>94</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Meeting Minutes, 26 July 1945.

A new War Establishment was created for the MRES. As the Director of the Casualty Branch, Burges would assume a second title of Inspector of Missing Research, and would take responsibility for administering the general policy of the MRES. His principal assistants would be Sinkinson, who would act as Head of Missing Research, and Beckess who, as Senior Staff Officer, would serve as Deputy to Head of Branch.<sup>95</sup> Hawkins, whose command of the MRS field branch had been transferred to the new MRES, would be assigned more staff, with a Squadron Leader, a Flight Lieutenant, one clerk and a driver to assist him at field headquarters.<sup>96</sup> In addition to his role overseeing the field operations of the new organisation, Hawkins would be responsible for maintaining liaisons with bodies such as the Prisoners of War and Displaced Persons Division of the Allied Control Commission (ACC) for Germany, and with AGS representatives where they were needed.

The MRS field branch sections would be incorporated into three wings or 'parent units'. Number 1 Missing Research and Enquiry Unit (MREU) would be responsible for all missing research work in France and Luxembourg; Number 2 MREU for operations in Belgium, Holland, Czechoslovakia and the French Zone in Germany; and Number 3 MREU for searching Norway, Denmark and the American Zone in Germany.<sup>97</sup> The Casualty Branch deferred the raising of a fourth 'parent unit', which would search for missing airmen in the British and Soviet Zones in Germany as well as Poland, because permission to enter Russian-controlled territory had not been obtained.

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<sup>95</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 55/76, Casualty Branch Memorandum, circa October 1945; TNA, PRO AIR 55/76, Air Ministry Office Instruction, 1 December 1945; TNA, PRO AIR 55/76, Directive on MRES Policy, 14 March 1946.

<sup>96</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part III.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

Each MREU would consist of 118 personnel, with officers of the rank of Wing Commander and Squadron Leader respectively serving as first and second in command. A Flying Officer would serve as Adjutant. There would be forty Search Officers in each MREU. These personnel would be split into eight independent five-man sections each comprising one Squadron Leader and four Flight Lieutenants.<sup>98</sup> Forty drivers and thirty-five aircraftmen would make up the remainder of each MREU.<sup>99</sup> The presence of a large number of airmen was intended to ensure that Search Officers could concentrate on their duties in the field and not be overburdened by matters of organisation, administration or supply. In this regard, the MRES War Establishment made generous provision for transport, stipulating that each MREU was to be accorded forty 'utility' passenger cars – one for every Search Officer – as well as a 'heavy' passenger car for the use of the commanding officer, a motorcycle for the despatch rider, two vans and one three-tonne truck.<sup>100</sup> Although the experiences of the MRS field branch had disproved many preconceptions about missing research operations, reliable transport for Search Officers was accepted as essential.

- Recruiting MRES Personnel

From July the Casualty Branch commenced the recruitment of volunteers willing to forgo demobilisation and the fruits of peacetime to serve in the MRES, including the

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Meeting Minutes, 26 July 1945. As it transpired, sometimes there were insufficient numbers of officers in each unit to have eight of these sections. For example, see TNA, PRO AIR 55/76, Missing Research Policy, 5 April 1946.

<sup>99</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part III.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

125 airmen who were needed as Search Officers.<sup>101</sup> Given that many applicants would be deterred from joining the MRES on discovering its function – Hawkins believed that interested men ‘should have all sides of the work, and its arduous and exacting nature, explained to them before a decision is reached as to their suitability for search duties’ – he and Burges attempted to facilitate the recruitment process by targeting redundant aircrew and regular officers who were due for retirement.<sup>102</sup> It was hoped that some of the thousands of men in these categories would take the chance to remain in the RAF or, in the case of officers from the Dominions, to continue their period of secondment.<sup>103</sup>

Being encouraged to apply to the MRES did not, however, guarantee acceptance, there being neither time nor money to waste on training men who were not suited to the organisation and its work.<sup>104</sup> This meant identifying at an early juncture those recruits who were enthusiastic and diligent, capable of interacting with others, collected and diplomatic in the face of challenges and criticism, and resourceful enough to survive in foreign and sometimes hostile environments. It was thought that men who were gregarious and of cheerful disposition would be less inclined to succumb to the melancholy nature of missing research operations, and be more likely to integrate better into foreign communities. In this regard, the MRES preferred recruits who had experience of living and working on the Continent, while fluency in at least one European language – ideally French or German given that the

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<sup>101</sup> In the early post-war period, the total staff at the Casualty Branch numbered approximately 250. More than two-thirds of these personnel were employed by its MRS division, a significant change from December 1941 when the MRS had had only three staff members. See TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part II; TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Burges to Venn, 12 July 1945.

<sup>102</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part IV; TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Meeting Minutes, 26 July 1945.

<sup>103</sup> Officers from the Dominions were wanted in the MRES not just for their skills – and in the case of many RCAF officers for their fluency in French – but also because the Air Ministry viewed the search for missing RAF airmen as a Commonwealth concern. See TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Slessor to Air Marshal Johnson (RCAF), 9 August 1945.

<sup>104</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part IV.

majority of missing airmen were expected to be in France and Germany – was also highly prized.<sup>105</sup>

- Training MRES Search Officers

Successful applicants had to be trained. The experience of leading Number 1 Section MRS into the field had convinced Hawkins of the need to instruct Search Officers thoroughly in their duties before deployment. The nature of missing research work was too intricate, and the burden of responsibility on Search Officers too great, to expect that they might learn their trade as they worked. Thus officers with experience of missing research operations were enlisted to lecture MRES recruits on such subjects as how to procure help and information from civilian populations, search methods, the collection of evidence, and the identification of remains.

- Training MRES Search Officers: Making Contacts and Establishing Relationships

Since the MRS field branch had exposed the catalogue of case reports as incomplete, the assistance afforded by European civilians to MRES personnel would be crucial to the success of missing research operations. Search Officers would depend on the inhabitants of Continental communities, who in some cases had served as the custodians of the RAF dead since early in the war, to provide them with information about aircraft that had crashed in the area.<sup>106</sup> Hawkins accepted the impossibility of codifying a set of guidelines to govern the interaction between Search Officers and European civilians – apart from its lack of practicality, the very idea would have

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Meeting Minutes, 26 July 1945; TNA, PRO AIR 55/76, Sinkinson Report, 23 April 1946.

<sup>106</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part V; TNA, PRO AIR 55/76, Missing Research Policy, 5 April 1946.

falsified these relationships – but he did believe that useful advice could be provided on the development of cordial relations.<sup>107</sup>

Search Officers new to a region would refer to a list that suggested the order in which to approach local persons. It ranked civilians according to their predicted usefulness.<sup>108</sup> Search Officers initially were to seek out the office of the *Mairie* or *Burgermeister*. Aside from the courtesy of calling first on the community's leader, being on good terms with the *Mairie* or *Burgermeister* increased the likelihood of MRES personnel finding suitable accommodation. Moreover, often the mayoral chambers would be the repository for records relating to deaths and burials in the area. It was recommended that Search Officers call next on the police, followed by the cemetery keeper, and then to make contact with 'local inhabitants'.<sup>109</sup> In their conversations with these people, Search Officers were to seek information that would lead them to members of the wartime resistance who were expected to have detailed knowledge of crashed aircraft and of the fate of the occupants. Where such help was not available, Search Officers were to focus their investigations on likely burial places such as fields, clearings or churchyards near to wrecked aircraft.<sup>110</sup>

Search Officers were also warned to be discerning and alert to falsities when pursuing their enquiries.<sup>111</sup> It was expected that most people who knew something of crashed aircraft and RAF graves would willingly share this information, but in areas that had suffered greatly from Allied bombing the Casualty Branch believed that Search Officers might find it difficult to elicit accurate information from local

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<sup>107</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part V.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*; CWGC, 2033, Douglas Hague Recollections.

<sup>111</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part V.

inhabitants. Some would inevitably associate an RAF uniform with the misery of being bombed and, as Hawkins noted, '[a] tactless approach to one who may have suffered considerable hardship through R.A.F. operations is more likely to cause such a person to withhold information than to become a reliable informant.'<sup>112</sup> It was expected that Search Officers would meet resentment in Germany, and possibly in Italy and some areas of northern France.<sup>113</sup> In Normandy, as in Hamburg, the tact displayed by a Search Officer might prove crucial to the eventual success of a missing research operation.

- Training MRES Search Officers: Finding Airmen

It was not feasible for the RAF to search every corner of Europe for its dead. As the Casualty Branch acknowledged, even to attempt such an exercise would require an organisation of a size equal to that of the entire air force.<sup>114</sup> Therefore, the adoption of a clearly defined and ordered system of searching was vital if the MRES were to maximise its chances of success. In the first instance, the search for missing airmen would be ordered along national lines, with each MREU allocated particular countries. Thereafter each country would be searched by region with officers using obvious boundaries – provincial borders or physical barriers such as mountain ranges

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<sup>112</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part IV.

<sup>113</sup> In 1944 the Foreign Office issued to 21 Army Group servicemen a pamphlet on France and its inhabitants. In this publication it was noted that 'bombing in thickly populated areas has caused increasingly heavy civilian casualties. It is only natural that these should have caused some resentment.' Geoffrey Picot, who served in France, witnessed such resentment. He wrote in his memoir: '[i]n Normandy we saw nothing but destruction: wrecked farmsteads, damaged villages, obliterated towns. I was familiar with the dismal face of the French peasant, the look of gloom, the look of despair, the look that might have meant anything. Lord knows those Normans suffered! It was a strange kind of liberation we bought them. For many, caught inescapably in a battle, it was the liberation of death.' See *Instructions for British Servicemen in France 1944*, (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2005), p. 31; Picot, *Accidental Warrior*, pp. 157-8.

<sup>114</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part V; TNA, PRO AIR 55/76, Missing Research Policy, 5 April 1946. MRES policy stated that '[o]nly when there are grounds for believing that an unreported crash or grave is in a defined and accessible position will it be permissible to search an area yard by yard. To justify such a search, the grounds must be very strong indeed.'

– to define these. In France, for example, operations might be ordered by *Départements*; in Germany by *Kreise*.<sup>115</sup> Individual unit sections would then work at a local level by searching particular tracts of land within these regions.<sup>116</sup> The attraction of this simple search method was that while it did not allow for confusion, it did allow for flexibility. If a large number of RAF casualties were concentrated in a certain place, or if a stretch of terrain made searching difficult, the MREU commanding officer could transfer sections between areas as and when needed.<sup>117</sup>

In addition to being strictly ordered, the search for missing airmen was also to proceed according to a definite pattern. A section first would investigate cases concerning those airmen of whom the MRS had established something about their disappearance. This work was expected to represent a small fraction of MRES operations.<sup>118</sup> The second and bigger aspect of its burden would involve hunting for the bodies of airmen of whose disappearance nothing was known. This would be done in two steps, with Search Officers investigating first any reports compiled by local officials concerning burials made in the region after 3 September 1939, and then performing an ‘area sweep’.<sup>119</sup> The second of these stages would entail MRES personnel travelling across regions interviewing inhabitants in order to discover whether there were missing airmen nearby for whom they had yet to make account.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> *Départements* and *Kreise* are administrative regions.

<sup>116</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part V; TNA, PRO AIR 55/76, Missing Research Policy, 5 April 1946.

<sup>117</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 55/76, Missing Research Policy, 5 April 1946.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part V.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part II; TNA, PRO AIR 55/76, Missing Research Policy, 5 April 1946.

- Training MRES Search Officers: Identifying Dead Airmen

The most important element in the training of new Search Officers involved the identification of dead airmen. This was the crux of all missing research work, for only when every possible effort had been made to bury all RAF casualties in named graves would the Air Ministry be absolved of its responsibility to their families. European civilians would sometimes be able to provide the MRES with the names of airmen they had found or interred, while other RAF personnel would be identified easily enough by their identity discs or a name label found stitched to the battledress tunic. Nonetheless, Burges and Hawkins ensured that Search Officers were taught sophisticated techniques of identifying human remains and aircraft. The successful identification of bodies would often depend first on establishing a link between an airman and his machine.

Establishing the identity of an aircraft was simple when its markings and alphanumeric identification number remained visible. However, when the wreckage of an aircraft was scattered over a wide area, or when its livery had been destroyed or obscured – usually by fire, prolonged submergence in water, or an overgrowth of foliage – there was need for more subtle methods of identification. Accordingly, Search Officers were given instruction about where to locate the manufacture and serial numbers specific to particular aircraft. These were stamped on the radio call plates and data plates located in the cockpit, the weapons, each propeller, engine casings, and on eight components of a Rolls Royce engine.<sup>121</sup> Provided with any of these numbers, MRS staff could identify from Air Ministry records the exact aircraft

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<sup>121</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Parts II, V; *Bomber Command Continues*, p. 6. See also TNA, PRO AIR 55/66, Engine Memorandum, 10 July 1946.

in question and then name those who had been on board, meaning that Search Officers would have a finite set of names to which to match human remains.<sup>122</sup>

As the strongest evidence for identifying the dead often would have been destroyed when the aircraft crashed or in the time that had elapsed since – the human body, identity discs, pay books, personal documents, photographs and letters were not fireproof, waterproof, or resistant to decay – Search Officers were instructed to pay careful attention to remnants of clothing and equipment. They were to report such details as the nationality indicated on shoulder flashes; whether a distinctive patch had been stitched to the battledress tunic; the manner in which decorations were sported; the form of emblems engraved on brass buttons; the size of footwear and whether the dead man had worn flying or escape boots; the design and make of handkerchiefs and braces; the brand and size of shirts, trousers and underwear; and whether clothing was standard or officer issue. Where possible Search Officers were to record the name of the place where a garment had been made as it was possible that it was also the home town of the deceased. In addition, clothes were to be examined for laundry marks, numbers and sewn tabs, and a note made of the type of life jackets and parachutes found with remains.<sup>123</sup>

Because the MRES could not rely on finding such evidence as this, medical specialists were enlisted to lecture Search Officers on human anatomy, dentistry, the resistance of the body to fire and certain liquids, and how the moisture content of certain types of soil dictated, as Hawkins noted, ‘the rate of decomposition and .. the

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<sup>122</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 55/76, Sinkinson Report, 23 April 1946.

<sup>123</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part V. Brass buttons were usually marked with RAF, RCAF, RAAF or RNZAF and were, therefore, indicators of an airman’s nationality. RAAF personnel wore braces marked ‘Police’. The level of detail Search Officers were expected to include in their reports was great. For example, Burges wrote: ‘if you find Sergeant’s stripes on a man but see also that there is a

type and rate of discoloration [sic] of effects and clothing.’<sup>124</sup> It was hoped that an understanding of these subjects would help in matching pieces of different bodies together, and in the identification process itself once the remains had been assembled.<sup>125</sup> Thus the anatomy tuition given to the recruits focused on the thicker and stronger bones – the jaw bone, the pelvis bone and the major arm and leg bones – which were the most resistant to fire and decomposition and, therefore, the most likely to provide evidence for confirming identities.<sup>126</sup> Measurements taken from the larger leg bones, for instance, could be used to estimate the height of a casualty, using Pearson’s Formula.<sup>127</sup> Dentistry lectures concentrated on the nature and effects of dental surgery in order that airmen might be identified through comparisons made between their teeth and dental records. Search Officers were told to note when examining a casualty whether any teeth were missing and if they had been deliberately excised or forced out as the result of injuries sustained at the time of death; the type of metal used in fillings, caps and crowns; and the size and location of tooth cavities as well as the extent of gum decay.<sup>128</sup>

Search Officers also were to describe any discernible or remaining features of the body such as eye colour; the shape of the nose, lips and eyebrows; the size of the nipples; and whether or not the larynx were prominent. Where possible they were to measure the circumference of the skull, and look for appendectomy scars and signs of other operations and healed fractures. The penis was to be studied to see if the

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hole in the sleeve whence a crown might have been removed, state it just that way. Don’t take it for granted he is a Sergeant.’

<sup>124</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part V.

<sup>125</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part IV.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part V.

<sup>127</sup> For an example of where Pearson’s Formula was applied to solve a missing research investigation, see TNA, PRO AIR 55/63, Flight Lieutenant J. C. Hall to Wing Commander M. J. A. Shaw, 18 October 1948. See also Appendix One.

<sup>128</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part V. See also Appendix Two.

casualty had been circumcised – this could be a particularly valuable pointer to the identity of an unknown corpse, particularly in cases where one or more of the bodies were known to be Jewish – and the pubic region and other parts of the body inspected for the quantity, type and colour of hair: a variety would indicate that the remains under observation were probably those of multiple airmen.<sup>129</sup> Even the feet were to be examined for corns and callouses.<sup>130</sup>

Other evidence for the identification of airmen was expected to come from objects found with the remains such as keepsakes, jewellery and the metal brevets which RAF personnel wore to indicate rank and function. Items such as metallic cigarette cases and rings, which were generally resistant to decay and fire, potentially were important clues for establishing identity as they often were engraved with the name or initials of the dead man or the date of a significant happening such as a twenty-first birthday or wedding anniversary.<sup>131</sup> The bodies of RAF personnel also could be identified by establishing an association with the amulets that many airmen took with them on operations. Miles Tripp carried a stocking, a brooch, a pink scarf and a small bone elephant when he flew. Two of his crewmates insisted on flying with their distinctive scarves, the wireless operator with the brassiere of his girlfriend.<sup>132</sup> Only two members of the crew flew with no such idiosyncratic objects which, given the superstitions of the others, potentially was as instructive.

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<sup>129</sup> The colour of hair could also pose problems for Search Officers. As Beckess noted: '[w]henver there is moisture present in the remains, special precautions should be taken to clean the hair before recording a description. Excess moisture and such things as the dye in the Mae West can completely change the shade of human hair. In all doubtful cases hair should be thoroughly cleaned in petrol and left for a few minutes to dry.' See TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part V.

<sup>130</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part V.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part VI.

<sup>132</sup> Tripp, *The Eighth Passenger*, p. 30.

- Preparing to Deploy the MRES

By the end of 1945 the MRES was ready to be deployed. In December Hawkins travelled to RAF Sundern in the British Zone in Germany to oversee this process. This station was an ideal choice for MRES headquarters for it already housed the BAFO command and was located centrally in Europe.<sup>133</sup> Here he would have unfettered access to the Commander-in-Chief, BAFO, something which the Air Ministry had decided was worthwhile to ensure that the MRES was given the supplies and support it requested, and his administrative staff would be close to the thousands of German documents that had been captured, primarily from *Dulag Luft*, in 1945.<sup>134</sup> Throughout the war the German military had kept records of RAF casualties who had been killed or incarcerated in Germany and although these files were not always accurate, they did provide important material for supplementing and corroborating existing case reports.<sup>135</sup> The advantage conferred by the capture of these documents had been complemented by former POWs who had furnished the MRS with information on the whereabouts of crashed aircraft and dead airmen in Germany. The MRES personnel about to enter the field were certainly better informed than their MRS field branch predecessors, just as they were also better trained and equipped. Whether they could find the missing airmen of the RAF within the promised timeframe remained to be seen.

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<sup>133</sup> Upon moving from Paris to BAFO headquarters, Hawkins was accorded the additional administrative title of Assistant Inspector of Missing Research. His position as MRES commanding officer came with the rank of Group Captain. See TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Meeting Minutes, 26 July 1945; TNA, PRO AIR 55/76, MRES Commanding Officer Duties, 20 December 1945.

<sup>134</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Meeting Minutes, 2 August 1945; TNA, PRO AIR 55/76, Missing Research Policy, 5 April 1946. *Dulag Luft*, in Wetzlar, had served as a transit post and screening camp for captured Allied airmen. Its archives were, therefore, of interest to the MRES. See TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part I; Overy, *Bomber Command 1939-1945*, p. 126.

<sup>135</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part I; CWGC, 2033, Douglas Hague Recollections. The information gleaned from captured German documents proved vital in solving a number of missing research cases. For examples, see TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part VI.

## Chapter Five

### The Location and Identification of Missing RAF Personnel: December 1945-September 1949

- The Deployment of the MRES

Number 1 MREU was the first MRES formation to be deployed, arriving at its headquarters in Le Mans in early December 1945. For operational purposes, the unit defined the English Channel coast, its first search area, as comprising all the land within the eight seaside *Départements* between Dunkirk and Brest. This tallied neatly with the way in which the unit was structured for each of its constituent sections was allocated a single *Département* in which to start work.<sup>1</sup>

The personnel of Number 2 MREU were deployed across Belgium and Holland following the establishment of a unit headquarters in Brussels at the end of December, while Number 3 MREU arrived in Esbjerg at the beginning of January 1946.<sup>2</sup> This town was an obvious choice for the unit base as its people had accommodated Number 7 Section MRS since its deployment there the previous summer, and it was near Jutland, the region of Denmark where there were most RAF casualties. The *Burgermeister* of Esbjerg provided Number 3 MREU with a home and headquarters by gifting it the use of a small hotel.<sup>3</sup> Once his men had settled in, the unit commanding officer deployed four of his sections in Jutland, where Number 7 Section MRS had been operating, two in Zealand and another in Funen. At the same time, Number 6 Section MRS, which had been working in Norway from a base

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<sup>1</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part III.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Upon its arrival in Brussels, Number 2 MREU absorbed into its strength Numbers 2 and 5 Section MRS.

<sup>3</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Parts II-III; TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Number 3 MREU Operations Record Book, July 1946.

in Oslo since the previous July, was incorporated into Number 3 MREU, and then instructed to complete the search for missing airmen in that country.<sup>4</sup> By the middle of January all three MRES units had commenced operations.

- The Case of Spitfire MH 756

The value of the comprehensive training that Search Officers had been given was soon evident. When conducting an area sweep of the Alençon area of Normandy, a Number 1 MREU section heard rumours of a wrecked aircraft in the region.<sup>5</sup> By questioning local people, the investigating Search Officer established that sometime in June or July 1944 an aircraft had crashed in a field several miles away at La Ferrière Bochard. Subsequent enquiries at the mayoral office in Condé-sur-Sarthe determined that an air battle had been waged over Alençon on 5 July that year.

When the Search Officer and his men visited the crash site there was little to be seen as the aircraft, having crashed nose first and at great speed, had been completely buried below ground. If this were initially a disadvantage, it was to their benefit that the earth had insulated the aircraft and its contents against fire. An excavation of the area resulted in their finding a glove, a finger and pieces of a Spitfire, then four-fifths of its alphanumeric identification number – H 756 – was sighted. Casualty Branch officials subsequently advised that Spitfire MH 756, piloted by Flying Officer W. R. Chowen, personal number J 26678, had failed to return from operations on 5 July 1944. Although it now seemed likely that the section had found Chowen, further

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<sup>4</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Parts II-III.

<sup>5</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part VI; TNA, PRO AIR 55/76, Sinkinson Report, 23 April 1946. The exact date of this investigation is not known, although it is thought to have occurred in April 1946.

evidence was required to establish this definitely.<sup>6</sup> After the excavation had been deepened by six feet to allow for the extraction of the remains of the pilot, an identity disc, J 26678, was discovered.<sup>7</sup> The Casualty Branch informed Chowen's family of his death.

- Raising New MRES Formations

With the work of all three units proceeding well, Burges and his staff turned their attention to Germany where Number 8 Section MRS, which had been searching for missing airmen in the Ruhr from its headquarters at Bunde since August 1945, had achieved little success.<sup>8</sup> The industrial area of the Ruhr had been the primary target of Bomber Command throughout the war – the RAF lost at least 1577 aircraft and 6070 personnel in this region – and had suffered widespread damage.<sup>9</sup> Mounds of concrete rubble made it difficult to locate and gain access to crashed aircraft and bodies, meaning that missing research personnel were even more dependent than they were elsewhere on local people advising them of the whereabouts of wreckage and human remains. However, as some inhabitants of the Ruhr harboured specific reservations about helping men with whom they associated their bombing, and others saw no good reason to render assistance while the bodies of relatives and friends who had served in the *Luftwaffe* remained in Britain, often appeals for information met either no response or feigned ignorance.<sup>10</sup> These difficulties convinced the Air

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<sup>6</sup> In a single person aircraft, such as the Spitfire, the identification of either the aircraft or the pilot meant the automatic identification of the other.

<sup>7</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part VI; TNA, PRO AIR 55/76, Sinkinson Report, 23 April 1946.

<sup>8</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part II.

<sup>9</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, 20 Section Progress Report, 20 January 1949.

<sup>10</sup> As Hawkins later observed: '[s]earch work in the devastated industrial areas was exceedingly difficult and there was no sympathetic population waiting and willing to produce information and relics of crashes; indeed having suffered considerable hardship from R.A.F. bombing, their attitude was generally unco-operative.' See TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part III. See also Appendix Three.

Ministry to bring forward the formation of the fourth MRES unit – it had hoped to defer its raising until the Russian Military Government (RMG) decided whether to allow the MRES into the Soviet Zone in Germany – to subsume and replace the beleaguered Number 8 Section MRS.<sup>11</sup>

After establishing its headquarters in Hamburg in April 1946, the newly-raised Number 4 MREU divided the British Zone into four search areas: northern, central, south-eastern and south-western.<sup>12</sup> The Ruhr was within the south-western region, and it was decided to search there last on account of the experiences of Number 8 Section MRS and because it contained the heaviest concentration of RAF casualties in the British Zone. By searching the three other areas of this territory first, Number 4 MREU hoped that its Search Officers would become accustomed to German conditions and attitudes before operations in the Ruhr recommenced.<sup>13</sup>

The decision to raise Number 4 MREU coincided with the formation of MRES Mediterranean/Middle East.<sup>14</sup> The genesis and War Establishment of this force differed from the four MREUs, reflecting that its creation had not been a part of the original MRES model. MRES Mediterranean/Middle East was raised by RAF Mediterranean and Middle East Command, and it was to this formation and not Hawkins that its officers were responsible, the force connected to the MRES only by name and function.<sup>15</sup> MRES Mediterranean/Middle East commenced operations in

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<sup>11</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Internal Memorandum, 24 July 1946.

<sup>12</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part III.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 55/66, Sinkinson Memorandum, 30 April 1947. It is thought that the selection of personnel for MRES Mediterranean/Middle East was less discerning than it was for the four MRES units. One senior MRES officer was later to complain that numerous MRES Mediterranean/Middle East Search Officers were not suited to missing research work. See TNA, PRO AIR 55/66, Meeting Minutes, 25 April 1947.

Italy in the spring of 1946 from headquarters in Naples, before moving to the north of the country and a new base in Treviso.<sup>16</sup>

- Considering the Future of the MRES

Although missing research operations had begun on a large and organised scale only recently, by the summer of 1946 the scheduled date for the disbandment of the MRES was near.<sup>17</sup> With this in mind, Slessor had made enquiries about how many missing airmen had been discovered and how many remained to be found.<sup>18</sup> The statistics made obvious that the bodies of thousands of RAF personnel would have to be left untraced should the MRES be disbanded as scheduled. Of the 31,000 RAF personnel missing in north-west Europe, only 7000 had been located. Even if half of the 31,000 were in the sea, this left 8500 aircrew still to be found.<sup>19</sup> As Slessor mused: '[t]he relatives of all the 24,000 expect the maximum to be done; and in a number of cases we have assured relatives that, while we have not yet had time to deal with the area in which their relation may be found, we shall cover it in due course.'<sup>20</sup>

However, maintaining the MRES was not straightforward. Although it was a relatively small branch of the air force, the costs of keeping the organisation in the field were substantial, particularly given the post-war penury afflicting the armed

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<sup>16</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part III. Missing research operations in the Middle East theatre were begun later in 1946. There were far fewer RAF casualties in this region than there were on the Continent. See TNA, PRO AIR 55/66, Missing RAF Personnel, 31 January 1947; TNA, PRO AIR 55/67, Meeting Notes, 25 March 1947.

<sup>17</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Meeting Minutes, 26 July 1945. On 26 July 1945 it was agreed that the MRES should aim to complete missing research work within a year. This meant within a year of its formation, therefore July 1946, and not within a year of its deployment.

<sup>18</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Slessor to Air Commodore E. S. Burns, 1 May 1946.

<sup>19</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Slessor to de Freitas and Brown, 1 August 1946.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* The underlining is Slessor's.

services and the manpower shortages in the RAF caused by demobilisation.<sup>21</sup>

Supplying MRES personnel was especially difficult for BAFO which was based in the country most severely affected by the war, and the strain on this command would be exacerbated once Numbers 2 and 3 MREU transferred respectively into the French and American Zones in Germany and BAFO became responsible for supporting three missing research units.<sup>22</sup>

Despite these concerns, Slessor concluded that the MRES needed to remain in existence and continue its work.<sup>23</sup> On 1 August he sent his recommendations on its future to Sir William Brown, Permanent Under Secretary of State for Air, and Geoffrey de Freitas, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, both fellow members of the Air Council. Slessor began by citing the thoughts of Air Marshal Sir Philip Wigglesworth, the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief (AOC-in-C), BAFO. Wigglesworth was not among the most senior members of the Air Ministry, but his views on this topic were valued for as BAFO commander he had reason to wish for the partial or full disbandment of the MRES. While acknowledging that BAFO found it difficult to supply missing research operations, Wigglesworth had expressed support for the MRES remaining in existence on the basis that its work was important for the sake of RAF and public morale. In relaying this opinion to de Freitas and Brown, Slessor also informed them that Hawkins had told him 'that if we

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<sup>21</sup> Ironically, demobilisation was a process for which Slessor, as AMP, held responsibility.

<sup>22</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Casualty Branch Statistics, 24 July 1945.

<sup>23</sup> Slessor knew that evidence relating to the identities of the First World War dead was still being uncovered in France, and that enquiries about casualties from this conflict continued to be received. He predicted that the Air Ministry would continue to receive information on dead RAF airmen from the Second World War for at least another ten years, and a large number of related casualty enquiries for a further three to four years. This influenced his thinking on MRES disbandment. See TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Slessor to de Freitas and Brown, 1 August 1946.

postponed reduction till the middle of next year he thinks he could break the back of the job.’<sup>24</sup>

Slessor thus proposed that the Air Council approve an extension to allow missing research operations to continue beyond early 1947. He thought this a logical course of action given that the MRES was extant and functioning, and ‘on grounds of the great public interest in the question, the desirability of maintaining the prestige of the Service [the RAF] and the political pressure that the utmost possible be done’.<sup>25</sup> Slessor realised that the financial and personnel benefits which would be generated for the Air Ministry by the disbandment of the MRES might be outweighed by the severity of the public and political backlash such action would incur.<sup>26</sup> He knew that during the preceding seven months, MPs at Westminster had put forward ten parliamentary questions and more than 300 separate enquiries on the subject of missing research operations, many of these on behalf of aggrieved constituents, while such was the desperation of other civilians for news of their relatives that they were engaging the services of psychic mediums and spiritualists.<sup>27</sup> As Slessor observed, the disbandment of the MRES was less the prerogative of the Air Ministry and more a ‘political question’ determined by ‘public reactions’.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Slessor to de Freitas and Brown, 1 August 1946.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Slessor to Unknown, 22 June 1946.

<sup>27</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Slessor to Wigglesworth, 1 August 1946; TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Slessor to de Freitas and Brown, 1 August 1946. For examples of parliamentary questions on missing research operations, see *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 419 HC, DEB 5S, (London: HMSO, 1946), pp. 252-3; *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 420 HC, DEB 5S, (London: HMSO, 1946), p. 388; *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 426 HC, DEB 5S, (London: HMSO, 1946), p. 1. In addition to their concerns that psychics were preying on vulnerable people and making money through deception, Air Ministry officials were worried about civilians being given false hope that their relatives remained alive. See related correspondence in TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050.

<sup>28</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Slessor to Wigglesworth, 1 August 1946; TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Slessor to de Freitas and Brown, 1 August 1946.

Hawkins had expressed the hope that the MRES would be given until the summer of 1947 to complete its task, but realising that this might be asking too much of the Air Council, Slessor recommended instead that missing research operations continue until April.<sup>29</sup> To this was added the caveat that should the winter weather impinge on the work of the MRES, a further three month extension to its existence could be awarded when the future of the organisation was reviewed in March.<sup>30</sup> These proposals were approved, although Brown was not entirely convinced of their merits. He observed in a letter to de Freitas:

I may personally be inclined to underestimate the sentimental importance of pursuing this form of research. My impression is that we cut it off much sooner in World War I. Every officer or man we retain on this task means one officer or man the less to man the R.A.F. But, having recorded that personal opinion, I am ready to agree that our expected economics should be deferred if those better qualified to judge than I – and A.O.C.-in-C., B.A.F.O., and A.M.P. are already on record – attach more importance than I do to the ‘morale’ effect, on the Service and on civilians interested.<sup>31</sup>

For his part, Hawkins was instructed to expedite missing research operations.<sup>32</sup>

Realising that this would be difficult without according priority to certain MRES procedures, he issued a directive to Search Officers instructing them ‘to discontinue sweeping operations ... and ... to concentrate on Air Ministry Casualty Enquiries’.<sup>33</sup>

As one MRES officer noted subsequently, this instruction represented ‘an important change of policy and there is a feeling of regret amongst officers that the work is not to be done as thoroughly as heretofore.’<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Slessor to de Freitas and Brown, 1 August 1946.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Brown to de Freitas, 7 August 1946. In writing of post-First World War ‘research’ operations, Brown was referring to work performed by the AGS.

<sup>32</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Slessor to Wigglesworth, 1 August 1946.

<sup>33</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 55/76, Hawkins to MREU Commanding Officers, 24 July 1946.

<sup>34</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Number 3 MREU Operations Record Book, August 1946.

- Making Progress

Unaware of the internal machinations at the Air Ministry over the summer of 1946, missing research personnel had been making progress in finding and identifying airmen. The quick advance of Number 1 MREU southwards through France prompted the unit to relocate its headquarters from Le Mans to Chantilly in August in order that it might commence searching the central and southern *Départements* of the country, and Luxembourg.<sup>35</sup> In Holland and Belgium missing research operations had been slowed somewhat by flooding, but by September Number 2 MREU had nearly completed its work in these countries.<sup>36</sup> With the exception of one section which was left in Holland to conclude investigations into several outstanding cases, the unit transferred to Diez in the French Zone in Germany later that month.<sup>37</sup>

For Number 3 MREU, progress had come more easily in one country than another. Few difficulties had been experienced in searching Denmark for it was flat and easy to traverse, the winter had not been long enough or sufficiently severe to interfere unduly with missing research operations, and the Danes had assisted MRES personnel by providing them with shelter, provisions and detailed records relating to the location of crashed aircraft and graves.<sup>38</sup> In Norway operations had proved more complicated. The men of the erstwhile Number 6 Section MRS had begun work in the south of the country before gradually moving northwards, and in the rugged and

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<sup>35</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part III. Mines found on stretches of the English Channel coast had been the one significant problem Number 1 MREU had encountered in France. In these areas it had been forced to suspend its search for missing airmen in early 1946. Once the mines had been removed, unit personnel returned to complete their work.

<sup>36</sup> The floods prompted the unit to enlist the help of special salvage crews and the Dutch navy to raise aircraft from the water. See TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part III; TNA, PRO AIR 55/67, Meeting Notes, 25 March 1947.

<sup>37</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part III. A section of Number 2 MREU remained in Holland until May 1947. See TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Number 2 MREU Operations Record Book, June 1947.

<sup>38</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Parts II-III.

inhospitable territory past Narvik, where there were a number of wrecked RAF aircraft, they experienced significant difficulties. Although this region had been searched in the high summer – outside this ten-week period the extreme cold and lack of daylight rendered operations impossible – the weather conditions encountered still had been demanding, and bandit gangs had also proved a hindrance.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, it was difficult for personnel to obtain transport in remote northern Norway. On one occasion, when a pre-arranged flight was cancelled, two Search Officers travelled to their destination by fishing smack, a journey which meant them rounding Cape Nordkyn, the northern-most point of the Continental mainland and inside the Arctic Circle.<sup>40</sup> By August these officers and their men, aided by the Norwegian armed services and police, had located the wreckage of fifty aircraft, along with approximately 100 graves, some of them belonging to British soldiers.<sup>41</sup> The following month the Number 3 MREU personnel in Norway completed their operations in the country, whereupon they travelled to Denmark to join their colleagues and the unit commenced the process of relocating to Karlsruhe in the American Zone in Germany.<sup>42</sup>

Less had been achieved by Number 4 MREU, which was encountering in the Ruhr the same difficulties as had Number 8 Section MRS before it. Eventually the lack of substantive progress was such that stronger action was required. The nature of Allied military and political authority in Germany allowed the MRES to demand

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<sup>39</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part II.

<sup>40</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Number 3 MREU Operations Record Book, July 1946.

<sup>41</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Parts II-III; TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Number 3 MREU Operations Record Book, July-September 1946; *Birmingham Mail*, 12 September 1946.

<sup>42</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part III; TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Number 3 MREU Operations Record Book, July-November 1946. Number 3 MREU, minus one section which remained in Esbjerg, transferred to Uetersen in Germany on 13 September and into the American Zone in November, with personnel preparing for the next stage of their operations in the intervening two months. For example, two experienced officers spent one week lecturing new Search Officers on missing research techniques.

of *Burgermeisters* that they compile accounts of what they knew about aircraft crashes and burials of airmen in their areas of jurisdiction and then to attest to the accuracy of these.<sup>43</sup> The information gathered in this way helped facilitate operations.<sup>44</sup>

A further welcome development followed in October 1946 when the RMG advised that the MRES would be permitted to enter the Soviet Zone in Germany.<sup>45</sup> By this time, 38,000 RAF personnel had been listed as 'missing', and of these 9200 had been found. If at least 15,000 were presumed to be in the sea, 13,800 remained to be located and it was thought that a significant proportion of these men would be found in the British and Soviet Zones in Germany.<sup>46</sup> The *Daily Telegraph* anticipated that 'many British families will receive definite information within 12 months about the fate of their relatives reported missing or presumed killed.'<sup>47</sup>

The Soviet Military Administration in Potsdam imposed the same restrictions on the MRES entering the Soviet Zone as it did on the AGS, as well as the additional stipulation that the six Number 4 MREU Search Officers permitted access to the region should never converse with civilians other than through interpreters chosen by the Soviet authorities.<sup>48</sup> The effect of the enforcement of these conditions was to make it difficult for MRES personnel to work in the manner to which they were

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<sup>43</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Parts III, V. A similar procedure was later used to obtain information from police authorities in the Ruhr. See TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Number 4 MREU (20/22 Sections) Operations Record Book, January-February 1948. See also Appendix Four.

<sup>44</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 55/67, Meeting Notes, 25 March 1947.

<sup>45</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part III; TNA, PRO AIR 55/76, Stott Memorandum, 5 October 1946.

<sup>46</sup> TNA, PRO WO 219/1370, DPS to Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF), 19 June 1945; *Daily Telegraph*, 29 October 1946. See also TNA, PRO AIR 55/66, Missing RAF Personnel, 31 January 1947.

<sup>47</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 29 October 1946.

<sup>48</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part III; TNA, PRO AIR 55/67, Meeting Notes, 25 March 1947. That the RMG was willing to enforce these conditions was evidenced when a Search Officer was expelled from the Soviet Zone for talking directly to a civilian. The officer was never readmitted. See TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Berlin Detachment Operations Record Book, October 1947; TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Number 4 MREU (Headquarters) Operations Record Book, April 1949.

accustomed.<sup>49</sup> In particular, their ability to interview local inhabitants was curtailed. Instead, the Search Officers relied for information on Soviet authorities asking local *Burgermeisters* what they knew of RAF graves and aircraft, and when this assistance was refused, there was nothing that the MRES could do to redeem the situation.<sup>50</sup> It was similarly powerless to intervene when the RMG closed the Soviet Zone, which it did often and usually for no apparent reason. During these closures, which tended to last between one and two weeks, the Search Officers could only wait in their Berlin headquarters for the zone to be reopened.<sup>51</sup>

- Reconsidering the Future of the MRES

While the MRES was thus making progress, it was being achieved only slowly, and when the time came for the Air Ministry to consider the future of its missing research organisation in March, approximately 26,000 RAF personnel had not been accounted for.<sup>52</sup> At the review meeting, Burges took issue with those who sought to measure the success of missing research operations solely in quantitative terms, declaring that sentiment should always be the prime motivation for the existence of the MRES: the relatives of missing airmen were entitled to know where their dead lay.<sup>53</sup> Although

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<sup>49</sup> A MRES official observed: '[o]ur right to search this zone is flimsy; it rests on no contract, but has been weaned from the Russians by local diplomacy. It might be withdrawn for no good reason, at any moment.' See TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part III; TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, MRES North-West Europe Report, February 1948; TNA, PRO AIR 55/62, Soviet Zone Activities, 22 August 1949.

<sup>50</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Number 4 MREU (21 Section) Operations Record Book, March 1947; TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Berlin Detachment Operations Record Book, May 1947.

<sup>51</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Parts III. For examples, see files in TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598.

<sup>52</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 55/66, Missing RAF Personnel, 31 January 1947. About 4000 of the 26,000 missing were in the Middle East, while the remainder were somewhere on the Continent. Almost nothing is known about missing research operations in the Middle East theatre. It is thought that the AGS may have taken much of the responsibility for finding and locating missing airmen in this region.

<sup>53</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 55/67, Meeting Notes, 25 March 1947. Burges attended the meeting in his new capacity as observer of the MRES and advisor to the Air Ministry. Beckess had succeeded him as Director of the Casualty Branch sometime in February or March 1947. See TNA, PRO AIR 55/53, MREU Operational Areas, 11 February 1947; TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Number 1 MREU Operations

he accepted that this concern was insufficient justification for prolonging missing research operations indefinitely, he believed that the MRES should continue functioning beyond the spring.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, he knew that the organisation had not been afforded the best possible chance to complete its task. It had far fewer vehicles than the number stipulated by the War Establishment, and some Search Officers were having difficulty in securing the services of AGS units to effect exhumations and concentrations on their behalf.<sup>55</sup> For example, the officers of Number 3 MREU had made numerous representations to their Number 85 GCU counterparts in the hope of expediting exhumations in the Karlsruhe area, but to no avail as the army unit was understaffed and overburdened.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, it was clear that severe weather over the previous winter had further hampered operations. In many areas roads had become so icy as to be impassable; the cold had seized engines and rendered immobile many of the vehicles the MRES did possess; heavy snow had hidden graves and aircraft from view; and where an interment or wrecked aircraft was found, the frozen ground had made digging and the collection of evidence difficult.<sup>57</sup> With these factors in mind, the Air Ministry agreed to postpone temporarily the dissolution of the MRES. The organisation would remain operating at its extant strength until 30 June 1947, and thereafter its four constituent units would be

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Record Book, April 1947. At the meeting it was announced that all RCAF personnel were to be withdrawn from the MRES before July to return to Canada. In making this announcement, Air Vice Marshal R. E. McBurney of the RCAF noted 'that the Canadian authorities appreciated that there would be public criticism in Canada at the curtailment of missing research by the R.C.A.F., but they felt that it could be demonstrated [sic] that a big effort had in fact been made; they realised that the job was not finished but were prepared to take the consequences and to face any criticism.'

<sup>54</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 55/67, Meeting Notes, 25 March 1947; TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Beckess to Air Commodore A. S. Ellerton, 2 May 1947.

<sup>55</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Number 3 MREU Operations Record Book, February-March 1947.

<sup>56</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Number 3 MREU Operations Record Book, February-May 1947.

<sup>57</sup> For example, see TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Number 2 MREU Operations Record Book, January 1947.

disbanded in stages over a five month period.<sup>58</sup> MRES Mediterranean/Middle East would be given until February 1948 to complete its missing research operations.<sup>59</sup>

Despite the apparently definite nature of these rulings, uncertainty continued to surround the existence of the MRES.<sup>60</sup> Those at the review meeting had moved that their proposals 'be regarded as fairly elastic as to precise dates', and they had reserved the right to keep sections of units operating in certain countries for 'mopping up' purposes after the organisation was disbanded. Others in the Air Ministry wanted the MRES dissolved immediately, the advocates of this position reasoning that the inevitable public backlash this decision would provoke was of lesser concern than the finances and personnel requirements of the RAF.<sup>61</sup> That Philip Noel-Baker, the Secretary of State for Air, chose to involve himself in this debate was further evidence of the uncertain position of the MRES, and of the fact that missing research had become increasingly politicised, for no previous occupants of his position had intervened in the affairs of the organisation. On 9 June he advised that he would consider the existence of the MRES during his forthcoming trip to Europe and that a decision on its dissolution would be made later that month.<sup>62</sup>

Having returned from his Continental tour, during which he discussed with Hawkins and other MRES officers the progress and problems of missing research

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<sup>58</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 55/67, Meeting Notes, 25 March 1947. Steps would be taken to replace the RCAF personnel who were to be withdrawn from the MRES.

<sup>59</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Beckess to Air Commodore A. S. Ellerton, 2 May 1947. The MRES Mediterranean/Middle East War Establishment stipulated for fifty-three officers and 238 other rank airmen. In March 1947 it was staffed by twenty-seven officers and 161 other rank airmen. Sinkinson wrote of the formation in April: 'it did not begin effective work until much later, as for some time after its inception, strength was far below establishment. That is why the proposed date of its final disbandment (1<sup>st</sup>. February 1948) is later than that of M.R.E.S. (N.W. Europe).' See TNA, PRO AIR 55/67, Meeting Notes, 25 March 1947; TNA, PRO AIR 55/66, Sinkinson Memorandum, 30 April 1947.

<sup>60</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Air Commodore A. S. Ellerton to Slessor, 8 May 1947.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO AIR 55/67, Meeting Notes, 25 March 1947.

<sup>62</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Air Commodore A. S. Ellerton to Slessor, 8 May 1947; TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, J. S. Orme Memorandum, 9 June 1947.

operations, the Secretary of State wrote to Slessor and Sir James Barnes, who had succeeded Brown as Permanent Under Secretary, to express his concern at the imminent disbandment of the MRES:

I feel that the work which the Missing Research Units are doing is of such importance that if we abandoned the task before it is given a reasonable chance of completion, there might be serious repercussions, particularly in view of the large effort which the Americans are putting into their Research Operation. In this connection I understand that in 'John Bull', published on 6<sup>th</sup> June, there was an article containing adverse comment on our policy of winding up the Units before the work is completed.<sup>63</sup>

Noel-Baker's thinking also was likely to have been influenced by the intended incorporation of MRES Mediterranean/Middle East into the MRES as Number 5 MREU. This plan had been announced in June and the date for the inauguration of the fifth unit set for 1 July, the day on which the disbandment of the MRES was scheduled to commence.<sup>64</sup> Number 5 MREU was to be made responsible for completing missing research operations in southern Europe, an area defined as including Italy, Austria, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey and the islands of the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas.<sup>65</sup> Recognising that this unit would need time to fulfil its task, Noel-Baker gave permission for Number 5 MREU to operate until May 1948, and simultaneously took the opportunity to extend the operating period of the other MRES units: Numbers 1 and 2 MREU would remain in the field until the end of 1947, Number 3 MREU until the following February, and Number 4 MREU until the following April. As he acknowledged, 'I fully realise that in this way we might go on postponing the winding up of this work

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<sup>63</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Noel-Baker to Slessor and Barnes, 28 June 1947.

<sup>64</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part III; TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Beckess to Air Commodore A. S. Ellerton, 2 May 1947.

<sup>65</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part III; *Daily Telegraph*, 29 October 1946.

indefinitely, but I am convinced that it is most important that we should do all we can to complete the work'.<sup>66</sup>

- Development and Disbandment

Number 5 MREU was based in Italy for less than a month. Primarily this was because the War Office intended to withdraw British military personnel from the country during the summer and the Foreign Office did not want a significant MRES presence to remain in the country thereafter.<sup>67</sup> However, it suited Number 5 MREU to leave Italy as the majority of missing research cases there had been concluded by MRES Mediterranean/Middle East, and a headquarters located more centrally in southern Europe would facilitate operations in the eastern reaches of the search area. Leaving two sections to complete any outstanding investigations, at the end of July Number 5 MREU transferred its headquarters to Klagenfurt in Austria.<sup>68</sup> From this new base the unit planned to search Yugoslavia – where some MRES personnel were already at work, having been allowed to enter the country the previous month after a long series of negotiations between the British and Yugoslavian governments – and Austria and Hungary, before moving down the Balkan Peninsula.<sup>69</sup> Rights of entry into the newly-Communist states of Albania, Bulgaria and Romania had not been obtained, and while graves operations in these countries mostly had been completed by the army, the MRES wanted access so that it could ensure that the work had been

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<sup>66</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Noel-Baker to Slessor and Barnes, 28 June 1947; TNA, PRO AIR 55/66, Sinkinson Memorandum, 30 April 1947; TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, MRES North-West Europe Report, February 1948.

<sup>67</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 55/67, Meeting Notes, 25 March 1947.

<sup>68</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Parts III, VII; TNA, PRO AIR 55/71, Wing Commander M. J. A. Shaw to Squadron Leader A. H. S. Browne, 3 November 1947.

<sup>69</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part III; TNA, PRO AIR 55/73, Unknown to Foreign Office, 25 January 1947; TNA, PRO AIR 55/73, Major R. G. Dakin to Captain Petnicki, 31 May 1947; TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Noel-Baker to Slessor and Barnes, 28 June 1947.

conducted to its satisfaction.<sup>70</sup> It suspected that AGS personnel, who lacked the specialist training given to Search Officers, had buried as unknown some RAF personnel who could have been identified.<sup>71</sup>

At the time Number 5 MREU moved to Austria, plans were enacted to disband Numbers 1 and 2 MREU.<sup>72</sup> Although Noel-Baker had secured the existence of these units until the end of the year, the Casualty Branch had agreed to dissolve formations earlier than scheduled where possible.<sup>73</sup> In disbanding Number 1 MREU, however, it opted for caution by creating from the remnants of the unit a small missing research formation based in Paris. Known as France Detachment, this force was intended to insure against the possibility of fresh evidence of missing airmen and unregistered graves being uncovered in France.<sup>74</sup> The reticence to declare missing research operations therein wholly complete was informed by statistics. On 30 September, by which time both Numbers 1 and 2 MREU had been disbanded, there was still no account of 21,800 missing RAF personnel.<sup>75</sup> As it was now thought that approximately 13,400 airmen were lost in the sea, it was presumed that there were

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<sup>70</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 55/73, Unknown to Foreign Office, 25 January 1947; TNA, PRO AIR 55/73, Memorandum on Entry into European Countries, 28 January 1947; TNA, PRO AIR 55/73, Yugoslavia Memorandum, circa January 1947; TNA, PRO AIR 55/67, Meeting Minutes, 14 February 1947; TNA, PRO AIR 55/73, Major R. G. Dakin to Captain Petnicki, 31 May 1947. Permission to enter Soviet-controlled Hungary was obtained in October 1946, although it seems that MRES personnel did not travel into the country until the autumn of the following year. It is thought that authority for the MRES to enter the Soviet Zone in Austria was also secured in October 1946. The conditions imposed by Russian authorities on RAF servicemen entering the Soviet Zone in Austria were similar to those which governed the operations of British graves personnel in the Soviet Zone in Germany. See TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part III; *Daily Telegraph*, 29 October 1946; and related correspondence in TNA, PRO AIR 55/69.

<sup>71</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 55/73, Yugoslavia Memorandum, circa January 1947; TNA, PRO AIR 55/67, Meeting Minutes, 14 February 1947.

<sup>72</sup> A section of Number 2 MREU operated for a short time in Czechoslovakia during the summer of 1947. See TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part III; TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Number 2 MREU Operations Record Book, May-June 1947; TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Number 3 MREU Operations Record Book, August 1947.

<sup>73</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part III; TNA, PRO AIR 55/67, Meeting Notes, 25 March 1947.

<sup>74</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part III; TNA, PRO AIR 55/53, Address Memorandum, 1 September 1947.

<sup>75</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Sinkinson to A. F. Thorp, 2 October 1947.

8400 bodies on the Continent of which the MRES had yet to find any trace, and while these were probably in Germany and eastern and southern Europe, this was not known for certain.<sup>76</sup>

If this were cause for concern, the news from Germany was encouraging. In the Ruhr a change in searching technique, whereby difficult cases were temporarily eschewed in favour of more straightforward ones, had meant Number 4 MREU achieving better results.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, the MRES section at work in the Soviet Zone, which had been named Berlin Detachment, was making strong progress.<sup>78</sup> In November 1947, for example, its men travelled a distance of 5568 miles in investigating fifty-one missing research cases involving 212 personnel, positively identifying eighty per cent of these bodies.<sup>79</sup> On account of its good work, Berlin Detachment was given authorisation to operate beyond the April 1948 deadline until September of that year.<sup>80</sup> And while the disbandment of Number 3 MREU proceeded as planned at the end of February, the decision to extend missing research

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<sup>76</sup> In August 1946, Slessor had suggested that the percentage of missing RAF personnel lost in the sea and 'out of reach of search' might be as high as fifty per cent. By 1947, the Casualty Branch generally worked on the prediction that forty per cent of missing airmen were lost in the sea. See TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Slessor to de Freitas and Brown, 1 August 1946; TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Sinkinson to A. F. Thorp, 2 October 1947. The figure of 8400 included those airmen who had been buried as unknown.

<sup>77</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part III; TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, MRES North-West Europe Report, February 1948.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Berlin Detachment Operations Record Book, September-October 1947. Berlin Detachment had been placed under the direct command of Hawkins, who had deemed its separation from Number 4 MREU 'advisable on account of the somewhat intricate negotiations which had from time to time to be carried out at a high level' in order to broker entry into the Soviet Zone.

<sup>79</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Berlin Detachment Operations Record Book, November 1947; TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, MRES North-West Europe Report, February 1948.

<sup>80</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Saunders to Henderson, 16 January 1948; TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, MRES North-West Europe Report, February 1948. Saunders had been keen to secure this extension for Berlin Detachment in the knowledge that any 'break in operations in the Russian Zone might delay the job indefinitely.'

operations in the Soviet Zone indicated a growing acceptance within the Air Ministry that the MRES should remain in the field until its task was complete.<sup>81</sup>

- The Case of Mosquito NS 654

With the majority of its more straightforward investigations finished, from the beginning of 1948 the MRES concentrated on missing research cases that, through want of evidence or other complications, had long gone unsolved. Forming what Hawkins termed ‘the hard-core of missing research operations’, these cases were not always pursued successfully.<sup>82</sup> For example, France Detachment had an unknown airman disinterred from the cemetery at St Avold in an attempt to identify him. The remnants of a British battle jacket, RAF-issue underpants, parts of a parachute harness and a flying suit were found in the grave, but little of the airman remained distinguishable and his name was not determined.<sup>83</sup> Other cases, however, were concluded successfully.

The investigation into the disappearance of RAF aircraft NS 654 was initiated by the MRS in late 1944 after the Air Ministry received an ICRC report which stated: ‘27/10 Mosquito 1315 hours Two unknown dead. Buried Warnemünde Cemetery.’<sup>84</sup> Having predicted that the Mosquito was probably NS 654, the MRS set out to establish its identity as incontrovertible. Flight records showed that this aircraft had taken off with a RAAF pilot and a RAF navigator from RAF Benson on the morning of 27 October 1944 to photograph potential bombing targets in the Berlin area. The predicted flight time was six hours. The MRS had established that had the pilot

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<sup>81</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part III.

<sup>82</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 55/63, Investigation Report, 24 September 1948.

<sup>83</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part V.

<sup>84</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part VI.

followed his mapped route –there was no evidence to suggest that he had not – the aircraft would have been over the Baltic coast and in the vicinity of Warnemünde at the reported time of the crash.<sup>85</sup> As RAF records showed that no other Mosquito could be placed in this region at this time, the MRS accepted that the crashed aircraft was NS 654, and the crew members' next-of-kin had been notified of their relatives' deaths and burial places by the Casualty Branch.

Captured German documents obtained by the MRS in 1945 revealed that a RAF Mosquito, identification number NS 65, had crashed at 1350 hours on 27 October at Gut Steinfeld, eleven kilometres east of Rostock. The papers recorded that the two men pulled from the aircraft wreckage were so badly burned as to be unrecognisable, and that their bodies had been buried in separate graves in New Cemetery, Warnemünde. While the information contained in these documents suggested that the aircraft in question could be NS 654, the time of the crash conflicted with that cited in the original ICRC report. Yet even if the crash had occurred at 1350, rather than at 1315, NS 654 would still have been near Warnemünde. The MRS was prepared to countenance that the different times cited in the two reports probably represented no more than an incidental discrepancy, and that the abbreviated identification number stated in the captured German documents was due to a transcription error, or the result of the digit '4' having been obscured by the fire that had consumed the aircraft.<sup>86</sup> What was known for certain was that field investigations would be required to determine conclusively the identity of the aircraft and its occupants.

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* It was reasonable for the MRS to assume that the aircraft had crashed near to the burial site.

<sup>86</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part VI.

In October 1946, Number 4 MREU was provided with a report detailing all that was known about Mosquito NS 654, but as a result of Soviet obstruction no enquiries were possible until March 1948.<sup>87</sup> When finally access to the crash site was brokered, the Soviet officer with whom Berlin Detachment was dealing would allow it to travel only as far as Rostock. Eventually a Search Officer was given permission to telephone the *Bürgermeister* of Gut Steinfeld who was able to confirm that local people had removed two corpses from the wreckage of an aircraft fitting the description of a Mosquito in October 1944, and that the bodies had been buried in Warnemünde New Cemetery. When MRES personnel were later permitted to visit this cemetery, they learnt from the caretaker that two unknown men had been interred there on 30 October 1944, and that their bodies had been exhumed by the American Graves Registration Service (AGRS) in August 1947. Believing the graves to be those of United States Air Force personnel, the Americans had transported the remains found therein to Strasbourg for examination at the American Central Identification Centre. Identification could not be made and the bodies were buried in the American military cemetery at Neuville-en-Condroz in Belgium, their gravestones marked 'Unknown'.<sup>88</sup>

Through enquiries conducted by the RAF Liaison Officer attached to AGRS headquarters in Paris, MRES personnel were able to determine the path of the remains since their exhumation. After arranging for the bodies to be disinterred from Neuville-en-Condroz cemetery, and then performing a more thorough examination of them than had been conducted by the Americans, it was established that the remains were those of RAF airmen. The discovery of an intact upper denture also made it

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

feasible to identify the men by name. When contacted by the Casualty Branch, the mother of the navigator confirmed that her son had not worn dentures, while a simultaneous enquiry to RAAF authorities in Melbourne elicited the fact that the pilot had worn an upper denture. After four years of investigations, there was thus enough evidence to be certain of the identities of the two airmen, and they were buried by AGS personnel in individual graves in a British cemetery near Louvain in Belgium.<sup>89</sup>

- New Frontiers and Old Questions

With the MRES expecting that its final months would be taken up with similarly difficult investigations, it came as something of a surprise when permission was received in April 1948 for it to operate in Poland, negotiations to this end having been ongoing for a number of years.<sup>90</sup> For the three servicemen whom Hawkins selected to search the country, the potential loss of evidence as a result of the passage of time was partly offset by their being able to take advantage of a dossier of information that the Casualty Branch had been compiling since the end of the war on RAF casualties in Poland.<sup>91</sup> The MRES entered the country knowing that seventy-five aircraft and approximately 400 bodies were to be found there, and that within the

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> In June 1947, Noel-Baker had argued that one good reason for not disbanding the MRES was that a search team might yet be granted entry to Poland. See TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Noel-Baker to Slessor and Barnes, 28 June 1947; *Sunday Express*, 13 October 1946.

<sup>91</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part III; TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, British Embassy (Warsaw) to Foreign Office, 3 March 1948[?]; TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Sir D. Gainer to Foreign Office, 16 March 1948; TNA, PRO AIR 55/63, Poland Progress Report, 14 August 1948; TNA, PRO AIR 55/63, Poland Progress Report, 21 October 1948; *Manchester Guardian*, 7 January 1949.

Figure 30



A Search Officer inspects the remains of an airman. The casualty's height was calculated using measurements taken from the femur (foreground). This information, coupled with evidence garnered from studying fragments of clothing, allowed for his identification. (TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305)

Figure 31

SPECIMEN COPY

No. 4 M.R.E.U.

Body No. 2

EXHUMATION REPORT

RECOMMENDED IDENTITY.	No. _____	RANK	F/Sgt.	NAME _____	
	AIRCREW CATEGORY _____	SERVICE	R.C.A.F.		
CEMETERY OR PLACE OF BURIAL	Ahlen East Cemetery (M.R. L. 52/B. 122513)				
PLOT	E 1	ROW	2	GRAVE	Communal

DESCRIPTION OF BODY: Baldy smashed and burnt - Skull smashed

HEIGHT: Cannot be determined (short, medium, tall)

BUILD: Cannot be determined (thin, broad, etc.)

HAIR: Not found

TEETH: Lower jaw missing  
(Use chart if man might be Dominion personnel)

LEFT								RIGHT								
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Upper
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Lower

FINGERS AND HANDS: Not found

IDENTIFY DISC: None  
(or identifying articles)

+ = Naturally missing  
o = filling  
/ = missing

DOCUMENTS OR LETTERS:

OR RELICS: Nil

CLOTHING:

- TUNIC } Can. B/D. Tag on B/D - Height: 5' 5"-5"
- TROUSERS }
- SHIRT Parts of Can. shirt
- UNDERWEAR Civilian blue stripes
- SWEATER White flying
- SOCKS White flying
- BOOTS Escape type, size 6 Can.

MISCELLANEOUS Sgt's chevrons and crown, Canadian flash

EQUIPMENT: Elec. heated flying suit, parts of Mae West and parachute, Oxygen mask, Inter cc

CROSS SHOWS	See exh. report No. 1
CEMETERY RECORD	See exh. report No. 1
DATE OF DEATH	24-3-44
REMARKS	Boards marking graves were of no value for identification as they were placed at random on the grave-coffins - were also in two layers without positions corresponding to boards

REINTERRED AT	_____
PLOT	_____
ROW	_____
GRAVE	_____
DATE EXHUMED	26-11-47
EXHUMATION DONE BY	Capt. Butcher, 39 GOU.
RAF OFFICER WITNESSING	F/O. R. A. Topp, 24 MRES.

Part of a MRES exhumation report. With regard to the 'Teeth' section, the Dominion air forces kept accurate dental records for their personnel. The RAF came to regret not having done the same for British aircrew. (TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305)

Figure 32

APPENDIX D.3 (Contd.)  
X-6276

Goatee UTD  
(Light, color, extent)

Eyes UTD Eyebrows UTD  
(Color, setting, shape) (Color, bushiness, extent across nose)

Nose UTD Ears UTD  
(Size, shape, straight) (Size, set close to or far from head)

Mouth UTD Lips UTD  
(Large, medium, small) (Small, large, full)

Teeth See Tooth Chart  
(White, size, unevenness, spacing, noticeable crowns, fillings, extracts)

Chin UTD  
(Prominent, receding, pointed, dimples, double)

Jaw UTD Circumference of head in inches UTD  
(Large, small, normal) (Hat band)

Neck UTD Larynx UTD  
(Size, length, short, normal, wrinkled) (Prominent, normal)

Shoulders UTD Arms UTD  
(Broad, straight, small, rounded) (Length, muscular, color, extent and quantity of hair)

Hands UTD

Fingers UTD  
(Short, thick, long, slender, size of knuckles, missing fingers or joints)  
(Unusual characteristics of fingernails)

Chest UTD  
(Size of nipples, color, quantity and extent of hair, large, small, normal)

Waist UTD  
(Size of navel, appendectomy, amount, quantity, and color of hair)

Back UTD Circumcision UTD Pubic Hair None  
(Quantity and extent of hair) (Yes-no) (Color)

Hernioplasty UTD  
(Yes-no; location)

Legs UTD  
(Inseam, muscular, knock-kneed, bowed, normal, quantity, color and extent of hair)

Feet UTD Toes UTD  
(Size, corns, callouses, flat) (Slender, straight, crooked, overlap)

Evidence of healed fractures UTD  
(Nose, arms, legs, etc.)

NOTE: Use attached charts "A" and "B" to indicate parts not received.

Part of a MRES exhumation report. 'UTD' is 'Unable to Determine'. (TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305)

crypt of a chapel in Sagan were the ashes of fifty airmen who had been murdered by the German military in 1944.<sup>92</sup>

As operations commenced in Poland, Arthur Henderson, who had replaced Noel-Baker as Secretary of State, toured Germany where he visited MRES personnel. This visit seemingly persuaded him that the dissolution of the organisation should be postponed once more on account of the good work that he had seen and because missing research operations remained incomplete.<sup>93</sup> Air Marshal Sir Hugh Saunders, who had replaced Slessor as AMP in October 1947, concurred, and it was agreed to review the progress of the MRES in August to determine whether September remained a viable date for its complete disbandment.<sup>94</sup>

By the time of this review, which took place in September, Berlin Detachment and Number 4 MREU, the existence of which also had been continued after April 1948, were the only two MRES formations still working in the field, Number 5 MREU and France Detachment having been disbanded during the summer.<sup>95</sup> In addition to the manifold difficulties of working in the Ruhr and the Soviet Zone, missing research operations in Germany remained incomplete because of the demobilisation of large numbers of personnel. Both of the surviving formations were

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<sup>92</sup> *The Times*, 17 April 1948; *Manchester Guardian*, 7 January 1949. See also TNA, PRO AIR 55/63, Poland Progress Report, 14 August 1948; TNA, PRO AIR 55/63, Poland Progress Report, 21 October 1948; TNA, PRO AIR 55/57, Sinkinson to Squadron Leader E. C. Rideal, 25 October 1948. Having escaped from *Stalag Luft III*, these fifty airmen had been recaptured and then executed.

<sup>93</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Henderson to Saunders, 9 April 1948.

<sup>94</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Saunders to Henderson, 21 April 1948; *The Air Force List: April 1949*, (London: HMSO, 1949), pp. 13-15.

<sup>95</sup> In southern Europe, search operations did not cease entirely after the disbandment of Number 5 MREU, which gradually had worked its way from central Europe to Turkey to mainland Greece, via the Dodecanese and Aegean archipelagos. Two of its officers stayed on in Austria in order to complete any outstanding work related to missing research operations in that country, and four Search Officers remained in Athens. Number 5 MREU never gained entry to Albania, Romania and Bulgaria, despite the persistent efforts of the Air Ministry. For more information on these subjects and on MRES operations in Greece and Turkey, see TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part III; TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Air Commodore A. S. Ellerton Memorandum, 12 July 1948; *Manchester Guardian*, 12 December 1947; and files in TNA, PRO AIR 55/58, 63, 66, 68-72.

chronically understaffed, and in particular need of Search Officers.<sup>96</sup> One senior MRES figure suggested that certain German civilians already serving with the organisation – scores were employed as interpreters, clerks, typists, cooks, cleaners, night-watchmen, foremen, labourers, sign-writers, batmen and boilermen – could be trained to fulfil the investigative duties undertaken by Search Officers, but Hawkins rejected this proposal, essentially on the grounds that the bodies of RAF personnel should not be handled by former enemies.<sup>97</sup> Faced with this constraint, an officer commanding a Number 4 MREU section observed:

[i]t is most obvious ... that this Section at its present strength cannot possibly complete the task in hand by the close-down date of the Unit, i.e. September 1948. As we are now towards the end of Missing Research activities those cases which remain to be solved are naturally the ones of a more difficult nature. Apart from the normal investigations it will be observed that an immense task still remains in the execution of final registration action. This final registration action ... is one of the most important links in our entire procedure. Any amount of most thorough investigation work can be rendered useless if the final registrations, movement of bodies and marking of crosses is not efficiently and accurately carried out.<sup>98</sup>

Saunders and Henderson were sympathetic to this argument, and in September it was agreed to permit Number 4 MREU and Berlin Detachment to continue operations until March 1949 with a further review on the disbandment of the MRES to be scheduled for February.<sup>99</sup>

This decision afforded Hawkins and his men only brief respite. To coincide with the closing of the DGRE and the cessation of most AGS operations in north-

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<sup>96</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 55/63, Officer Commanding Number 4 MREU to Hawkins, 13 June 1948; TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Number 4 MREU (20/22 Sections) Operations Record Book, August 1948.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, MRES North-West Europe Report, February 1948; TNA, PRO AIR 55/69, Civilian Employment Memorandum, 23 June 1948; TNA, PRO AIR 55/69, Hawkins to Officer Commanding Number 4 MREU, 29 June 1948; TNA, PRO AIR 55/59, Civilian Labour Minute, 6 October 1948; TNA, PRO AIR 55/59, Civilian Labour Establishment, circa January 1949.

<sup>98</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Number 4 MREU (20/22 Sections) Operations Record Book, August 1948.

<sup>99</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Saunders to Henderson, 22 September 1948.

west Europe on 30 September 1948, the War Office devolved to the Air Ministry complete responsibility for 'all exhumations, body transfers to Military Cemeteries, [and] erection and painting of crosses for all R.A.F. war casualties recovered.'<sup>100</sup>

While a similar situation had arisen previously in Yugoslavia after the departure of the AGS from that country in 1947, for the MRES this was a much greater burden to assume and its response was to form three Missing Research Graves Registration (MRGR) sections to fulfil those duties which had hitherto been performed for it by GCU personnel.<sup>101</sup> A total of seventy-three German civilians staffed these new formations, with the only RAF member in each MRGR section the Flight Lieutenant who was placed in command.<sup>102</sup> Necessity had meant Hawkins overcoming his objections to Germans handling the air force dead.

- The End of Missing Research Operations

Operations in Poland were completed in December 1948. Over eight months and after journeys totalling 25,000 miles, the three servicemen Hawkins had sent there had located seventy-two of the seventy-five aircraft and 417 of the 426 RAF personnel missing in the country, and arranged for the remains they had found to be

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<sup>100</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 55/59, Civilian Labour Minute, 6 October 1948; TNA, PRO AIR 55/59, Civilian Labour Memorandum, 11 November 1948; TNA, PRO AIR 55/59, Wing Commander C. B. Millett Memorandum, 23 December 1948; TNA, PRO AIR 55/59, Civilian Labour Minute, 3 January 1949; TNA, PRO AIR 55/59, Policy Memorandum, 12 April 1949.

<sup>101</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 55/73, Yugoslavia Memorandum, circa January 1947; TNA, PRO AIR 55/67, Meeting Minutes, 14 February 1947; TNA, PRO AIR 55/66, Meeting Minutes, 25 April 1947; TNA, PRO AIR 55/71, Wing Commander M. J. A. Shaw to Squadron Leader A. H. S. Browne, 3 November 1947; TNA, PRO AIR 55/59, Civilian Labour Minute, 6 October 1948; TNA, PRO AIR 55/59, Civilian Labour Memorandum, 11 November 1948; TNA, PRO AIR 55/59, Wing Commander C. B. Millett Memorandum, 23 December 1948; TNA, PRO AIR 55/59, Civilian Labour Minute, 3 January 1949.

<sup>102</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 55/59, Civilian Labour Minute, 6 October 1948; TNA, PRO AIR 55/59, Civilian Labour Memorandum, 11 November 1948; TNA, PRO AIR 55/59, Wing Commander C. B. Millett Memorandum, 23 December 1948; TNA, PRO AIR 55/59, Civilian Labour Minute, 3 January 1949; TNA, PRO AIR 55/59, Policy Memorandum, 12 April 1949.

interred in British cemeteries at Krakow, Poznan and Malborg.<sup>103</sup> By the time they returned to MRES headquarters in Germany, it had been established that 41,881 airmen had gone missing in Europe. Of these, 21,000 had been traced, between 12,000 and 17,000 were thought to be in the sea, and between 2000 and 7000 were unaccounted for.<sup>104</sup>

Although the MRES had come to accept that most of the men in this latter category would not be found, all hope was not abandoned and, in February 1949, the Air Ministry ratified another six-month extension to missing research operations.<sup>105</sup> However, simultaneous with this work, preparations were made for the departure of the MRES from Germany. For example, its personnel contacted officers of the French Search and Exhumation Sections to arrange for them to take future responsibility for any dead British airmen who might be discovered in the Soviet Zone, and charged the caretaker of Heerstrasse cemetery with the duty of burying any such bodies brought to him by the French.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part III; TNA, PRO AIR 55/63, Poland Progress Report, 21 October 1948; *The Times*, 17 April 1948; *Manchester Guardian*, 7 January 1949. (Malborg is also known as Malbork.) Not all of the 417 RAF personnel named by the MRES could be identified individually.

<sup>104</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 7 January 1949.

<sup>105</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, MRES North-West Europe Report, February 1948; TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Agenda for Meeting on MRES Future, circa September 1948; TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Number 4 MREU (20/22 Sections) Operations Record Book, February 1949; TNA, PRO AIR 55/59, Wing Commander C. B. Millett Minute, 23 February 1949; TNA, PRO AIR 55/59, Squadron Leader E. C. Rideal Memorandum, 26 February 1949; TNA, PRO AIR 55/58, Unit Location Statement, 1 April 1949; TNA, PRO AIR 55/58, Unit Location Statement, 14 July 1949; TNA, PRO AIR 55/60, Disbandment of Berlin Detachment, 28 July 1949; TNA, PRO AIR 55/62, Soviet Zone Activities, 22 August 1949.

<sup>106</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 55/62, Soviet Zone Activities, 22 August 1949. See also TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Berlin Detachment Operations Record Book, February 1949.

The MRES ceased operations in September 1949.<sup>107</sup> Immediately thereafter its personnel began arriving in Sundern to obtain their clearances from the RAF. While this represented the final military duty for most of these men before their return to civilian life, from the officers eight were selected for the RAF Graves Service which, working from Rheinberg and Rotenburg, was to complete any tasks left unfinished by the MRES in Germany. These officers, who were to be assisted by six other ranks as well as fifty German civilians recruited mostly from the MRGR sections, were to remain in post until April 1950.<sup>108</sup>

Hawkins retired from active service knowing there was little more the MRES could have done to locate the 20,000 RAF personnel whose bodies were still missing. He was proud that his men had found 22,000 British and Dominion aircrew, and of the manner in which they had approached their task as a worthy and important endeavour.<sup>109</sup> As the commander of Number 3 MREU used to remind his officers: ‘[r]emember above all that you ... have a responsible and humane duty to perform. In your wholehearted pursuit of information you may alleviate the suffering of next-of-kin of our fallen brother Air Crew. By your efficiency and endeavours prove your gratitude.’<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 55/60, Disbandment of Number 4 MREU, 29 August 1949; TNA, PRO AIR 55/59, Civilian Labour Memorandum, 12 September 1949; TNA, PRO AIR 55/60, Photography Memorandum, 27 September 1949; TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Number 4 MREU (Headquarters) Operations Record Book, September 1949. On 6 September, Saunders wrote to Henderson suggesting that the MRES continue operations until 31 March 1950. This proposal was rejected, the disbandment of the organisation officially confirmed on 21 September. See TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Saunders to Henderson, 6 September 1949.

<sup>108</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 55/59, Civilian Labour Memorandum, 11 November 1948; TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Number 4 MREU (Headquarters) Operations Record Book, September 1949; TNA, PRO AIR 55/59, Civilian Labour Memorandum, 12 September 1949; TNA, PRO AIR 55/60, Memorandum on Operations from 1 October 1949, 20 September 1949; TNA, PRO AIR 55/60, Number 4 MREU Disbandment, 24 September 1949.

<sup>109</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Foreword; *Daily Telegraph*, 7 October 1949.

<sup>110</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 55/64, Number 3 MREU Advice Booklet, Undated.

## *Part Three*

### Chapter Six

#### **The Establishment of the IWGC and its Second World War Task**

##### Section I: The Origins and Establishment of the IWGC

Following the formation of the GRC in 1915, Ware made it a principle of its operations that the bodies of British servicemen should remain where they died. He then secured a ban on their exhumation for the duration of the war, thus raising the question of who would maintain these graves in the longer term.<sup>1</sup> The Prince of Wales's National Committee for the Care of the Graves of British Soldiers was formed in January 1916 to advise the government on matters pertaining to war graves and, once the conflict had ended, to arrange for their preservation and upkeep.<sup>2</sup>

By 1917 Ware thought that this committee, of which he was a member, had too limited a charter to allow it to provide adequately for the remembrance of hundreds of thousands of war dead.<sup>3</sup> He suggested that it be replaced by an imperial organisation – Ware wanted the Dominions represented to reflect the allied nature of

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<sup>1</sup> CWGC, 2033, Macready Statement, 28 April 1915; TNA, PRO WO 32/5847, Macready to Sir Reginald Brade, 1 September 1915; *Imperial War Conference, 1917*, p. 34; Fabian Ware, 'War Graves and the British Commonwealth', *The Nineteenth Century and After*, CII (1927), 631-41; Rudyard Kipling and Douglas Macpherson, *The Graves of the Fallen*, (London: HMSO, circa 1918), p. 15; Sidney C. Hurst, *The Silent Cities: An Illustrated Guide to the War Cemeteries and Memorials to the 'Missing' in France and Flanders*, (London: Methuen, 1929), p. vii; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, pp. 13-4. In writing sections of this chapter, I have taken guidance from Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*. Where this is the case, acknowledgement is given in the appropriate footnote.

<sup>2</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/5847, Macready to Sir Reginald Brade, 1 September 1915; TNA, PRO WO 32/5847, Sir Reginald Brade to Lieutenant Colonel Lord Stamfordham, 5 October 1915; TNA, PRO WO 32/5847, Sir Reginald Brade to Field Marshal Lord Grenfell, 14 January 1916; TNA, PRO WO 32/5847, Press Statement, 29 March 1916; TNA, PRO WO 32/9433, Meeting Minutes, 25 September 1916; TNA, PRO WO 32/9433, Ware Memorandum, 7 March 1917; 'The Registration and Care of Military Graves During the Present War', 297-302; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/9433, Ware Memorandum, 7 March 1917.

the war effort – with executive powers to arrange for the care of the war graves in perpetuity.<sup>4</sup> The Prince of Wales wrote to David Lloyd George to explain Ware's proposals for the new organisation: it would operate under Royal Charter, be governed by representatives from its constituent countries, and be linked to, although independent from, the DGRE.<sup>5</sup> The prime minister saw the merits of such an institution and promised that the subject of its formation would be raised with delegates at the imperial conference in the spring.<sup>6</sup>

At the conference the Earl of Derby, Secretary of State for War, argued the case for the proposed organisation by informing his fellow delegates that the time had come for more effort to be invested in the care of graves. Acknowledging that British efforts in this regard rarely had been adequate in the past, he expressed his determination to see 'that the graves of those who have fallen in this War are looked after by those who are living at the same time, and handed on to those who come after them.'<sup>7</sup> These sentiments met with unanimous support, and in May the king signed the IWGC into being.<sup>8</sup> As Longworth writes, never before had a single organisation been charged 'with the care of all the dead of a nation in any war.'<sup>9</sup>

That the IWGC had been accorded a task of great importance was evident in the composition of its governing body. The Prince of Wales was made its president

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/9433, Prince of Wales to Lloyd George, 15 March 1917.

<sup>6</sup> CWGC, 1001, Lloyd George to Prince of Wales, 15 March 1917.

<sup>7</sup> *Imperial War Conference, 1917*, pp. 23, 128.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5; TNA, PRO WO 32/9433, IWGC Charter, 10 May 1917; *Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission, 1919-1920*, p. 5; 'The Registration and Care of Military Graves During the Present War', 297-302; Ware, 'War Graves and the British Commonwealth', 631-41; Ware, *The Immortal Heritage*, p. 23. For a full account of the proceedings which led to the formation of the IWGC, see *Imperial War Conference, 1917*, pp. 23-38, 86-93, 137-50; TNA, PRO WO 32/9433, IWGC Draft Charter, circa spring 1917.

<sup>9</sup> Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 28.

and Derby, by virtue of his ministerial position, its chairman.<sup>10</sup> The other *ex-officio* members were the Secretaries of State for the Colonies and for India, the First Commissioner of Works, and the Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, South African and Newfoundland ambassadors to the United Kingdom.<sup>11</sup> Seven unofficial members, each selected because of his professional expertise, comprised the remainder of the governing body.<sup>12</sup> They included General Sir Herbert Plumer, Admiral Sir Edmund Poë, Rudyard Kipling and the prominent trade unionist Harry Gosling.<sup>13</sup> Ware also became an unofficial member. He was made vice-chairman and thus effective director of the IWGC – the roles of president and chairman were mostly symbolic – in order that its work and that of the DGRE could be coordinated by one person.<sup>14</sup> He was, moreover, the inspiration behind both organisations.

The commissioners were charged with the responsibility of determining how to commemorate the British and Dominion dead in a manner that was both reverential and practical. Their first step in this regard, announced after the inaugural meeting of the IWGC on 20 November 1917, was to enshrine equality as the key tenet of remembrance policy:

[t]he Imperial War Graves Commission ... has laid down for a guiding principle that as the sacrifice has been common, so the memorials to the

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<sup>10</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/9433, Prince of Wales to Lloyd George, 15 March 1917; TNA, PRO WO 32/9434, List of Commissioners, circa November 1917; *Imperial War Conference, 1918*, p. 226; *Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission, 1919-1920*, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/9434, List of Commissioners, circa November 1917; *Imperial War Conference, 1918*, p. 226; *Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission, 1919-1920*, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/9433, Ware to Creedy, 15 October 1917; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 29.

<sup>13</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/9433, List of Unofficial Commissioners, circa October 1917; TNA, PRO WO 32/9434, List of Commissioners, circa November 1917; *Imperial War Conference, 1918*, p. 226; *Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission, 1919-1920*, p. 5; Ware, *The Immortal Heritage*, p. 61; Harry Gosling, *Up and Down Stream*, (London: Methuen, 1927), pp. 221-3; W. S. Sanders and Marc Brodie, 'Harry Gosling' in Matthew and Harrison (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Volume 22, pp. 1029-30; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 29.

<sup>14</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/9433, Prince of Wales to Lloyd George, 15 March 1917; TNA, PRO WO 32/9434, Derby Memorandum, 30 October 1917; TNA, PRO WO 32/9434, Ware to Derby, 16 November 1917; TNA, PRO WO 32/9434, Meeting Minutes, 20 November 1917; *Imperial War Conference, 1917*, p. 92.

dead should be identical, and that, therefore in the treatment of the graves no distinction should be made between officers and men. The Commission feels strongly that it would be inadvisable to leave the provision of memorials to private initiative. If memorials were allowed to be erected in the War Cemeteries according to the preference, taste, and means of relatives or friends, the result would be that costly monuments put up by the well-to-do over their dead would contrast unkindly with those humbler ones which would be all that poorer folk could afford. Thus, the inspiring memory of the common sacrifice made by all ranks would be obscured, the cemeteries would lose that regularity and orderliness most becoming the resting-places of soldiers, who fought and fell side by side, and would, in the end, grow to be ill-assorted collections of individual monuments. The governing consideration which has influenced the Commission's decision is that all who died for the Empire's sake are members of one family, and children of one mother who owes to all an equal tribute of gratitude and affection, and that, in death, all from General to Private should receive equal honour under a common memorial, the symbol of their comradeship and of the cause to which they gave their all.<sup>15</sup>

The commissioners were, however, unsure as to the form the cemeteries should take. Advice had been sought from the director of the National Gallery of British Art, Charles Aitken, and from the celebrated architects Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker, but their contradictory responses had confused matters.<sup>16</sup> It seemed to Ware that everyone had a view and most were different. In the face of this confusion the commissioners requested the guidance of Major Sir Frederic Kenyon, the director of the British Museum.<sup>17</sup> He was respected as an arbiter of artistic taste, and because of his connection to the army it was hoped that his opinions would hold credence with

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<sup>15</sup> CWGC, 1137, Draft Statement, December 1917. This quotation is taken from a draft of the final statement.

<sup>16</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/9434, Ware to Derby, 22 October 1917; CWGC, 1137, Aitken, Baker and Lutyens Report, 18 July 1917; CWGC, 1137, Aitken to Ware, 20 August 1917; CWGC, 1137, Ware to Baker, 9 November 1917; CWGC, 1137, Ware to Aitken, 11 November 1917; *Imperial War Conference, 1918*, pp. 226-7; Lieutenant Colonel Sir Frederic Kenyon, *War Graves: How the Cemeteries Abroad Will be Designed*, (London: HMSO, 1918), p. 4; Herbert Baker, *Architecture and Personalities*, (London: Country Life, 1944), p. 88; Christopher Hussey, *The Life of Sir Edwin Lutyens*, (Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club, 1989), p. 372; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 32. See also Appendix Six.

<sup>17</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/9434, Ware to Derby, 22 October 1917; TNA, PRO WO 32/9434, Derby Memorandum, 30 October 1917; TNA, PRO WO 32/9434, Meeting Agenda, 20 November 1917; TNA, PRO WO 32/9434, Meeting Minutes, 20 November 1917; *Imperial War Conference, 1918*, p. 227; *Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission, 1919-1920*, p. 6; *The Times*, 24 November 1917.

current and former servicemen.<sup>18</sup> Kenyon was engaged to consult with such interested parties as soldiers and next-of-kin and then to formulate a series of proposals for the design of the war cemeteries.<sup>19</sup> These were contained in his February 1918 report.<sup>20</sup>

Building on the tenet of equality the IWGC had made inviolable, Kenyon recommended that each grave be marked with 'its own headstone, of uniform dimensions, on which the name of the dead will be carved, with his rank, regiment, and date of death', and that these be arranged in ordered rows.<sup>21</sup> Three key principles informed this suggestion. First, he thought that the cemeteries had to be recognisable as burial grounds. While he did not advocate a morbid form of remembrance, he thought it 'right that the fact that they are cemeteries, containing the bodies of hundreds of thousands of men who have given their lives for their country, should be evident at first sight, and should be constantly present to the minds of those who pass by or who visit them.'<sup>22</sup> Second, he believed that the sight of massed and ordered headstones was appropriately military in nature and would

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<sup>18</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/9434, Ware to Derby, 22 October 1917; H. I. Bell, 'Sir Frederic George Kenyon' in Matthew and Harrison (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Volume 31, pp. 341-2; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 32.

<sup>19</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/9434, Meeting Minutes, 20 November 1917; Kenyon, *War Graves*, pp. 2-3, 22; Kipling and Macpherson, *The Graves of the Fallen*, p. 2; Sir Reginald Blomfield, *Memoirs of an Architect*, (London: Macmillan, 1932), p. 175. Many Britons wanted to repatriate the bodies of the dead and advocated making permissible individual acts of remembrance, and a strong anti-IWGC movement developed in the immediate post-war period. For more information on opposition to the IWGC, see Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, pp. 44-55; Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, pp. 225-27; and files in CWGC, 1050; and CWGC, 1084.

<sup>20</sup> Kenyon, *War Graves*, p. 22.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6, 7-8. Kenyon proposed that each headstone 'be 2 ft. 6 in. in height and 1 ft. 3 in. in width; not so large as to be cumbersome and oppressive, but large enough to convey the effect desired.' They were eventually made so that they would stand two feet, eight inches from the ground, and as wide as Kenyon had suggested, with each being three inches thick. See Ware, *The Immortal Heritage*, p. 28; *Their Name Liveth: Some Pictures of Commonwealth War Cemeteries 1914-1918, 1939-1945*, Volume I, (London: Methuen, 1954), p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> Kenyon, *War Graves*, pp. 7-8.

suggest 'the spirit of discipline and order which is the soul of an army.'<sup>23</sup> Third, he reasoned that individual headstones, which would be erected in place of the wooden crosses used by the AGS, would provide a focus for the emotions of next-of-kin.<sup>24</sup> To this end Kenyon proposed that the bereaved be allowed to compose an epitaph of up to three lines for inscription on the headstone of their relative.<sup>25</sup> He explained that further 'variety in uniformity' could be incorporated if national and regimental emblems were carved into the headstones, a measure that would allow for the subtle differentiation of the graves of those from different countries, and for the perpetuation of the strong regimental associations which existed within the British army.<sup>26</sup>

Kenyon suggested also that each cemetery contain two standard monuments. The idea for the first of these had been proposed by Lutyens, who thought that 'one great fair stone of fine proportions, twelve feet in length, lying raised upon three steps, of which the first and third shall be twice the width of the second; and that each stone shall bear in indelible lettering, some fine thought or words of sacred dedication', would make a striking and powerful addition to the cemeteries.<sup>27</sup> The second standard monument was to be a large cross. It would be used to signify that the cemeteries belonged to a Christian empire, something which Kenyon believed was important given that the headstones would not be of cruciform shape and Lutyens's monument was to be essentially atheistic in form.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8, 14; CWGC, 1137, Draft Statement, December 1917; Captain A. W. Hill, *Our Soldiers' Graves*, (London: HMSO, 1920), p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Kenyon, *War Graves*, p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9, 23.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11; CWGC, 1137, Lutyens Memorandum, 28 August 1917; CWGC, 1137, Ware and Archbishop of Canterbury Meeting, 17 October 1917.

<sup>28</sup> Kenyon, *War Graves*, pp. 10-11, 23; Blomfield, *Memoirs of an Architect*, p. 178; Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, pp. 83-4; Thomas W. Laqueur, 'Memory and Naming in the Great War' in John R. Gillis

Acting on the assumption that the ban on the repatriation of bodies would be extended to include peacetime, the commissioners accepted the main points of the Kenyon report and set about implementing them.<sup>29</sup> First they appointed men to design the cemeteries. The title of principal architect was conferred upon Lutyens, Baker and Reginald Blomfield, with each given responsibility for planning the development of burial grounds in a particular area, and a team of subordinates to execute their ideas.<sup>30</sup> In addition, Lutyens was instructed to proceed with plans for his monument – it was named the ‘Stone of Remembrance’ because this title was not specific to one faith – and Blomfield was asked to fashion a ‘Cross of Sacrifice’ for erection in each cemetery.<sup>31</sup> Kipling chose the biblical words THEIR NAME LIVETH FOR EVERMORE as the text for the Stone of Remembrance, and devised the phrase ‘Known unto God’ for inscription on the headstones of unidentified servicemen.<sup>32</sup>

The commissioners had also to consider the issue of how the IWGC was to be funded.<sup>33</sup> The Treasury had accepted that it would pay for any operations concerned with remembering the national war dead, and it restated this commitment

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(ed.), *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 162. For Christian servicemen an image of a crucifix would be inscribed upon the headstone. The headstones of Jews, Hindus, Muslims and other non-Christians who had died in the service of the British Empire would be marked by an appropriate symbol.

<sup>29</sup> *Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission, 1919-1920*, p. 6; Blomfield, *Memoirs of an Architect*, p. 175. The ban on repatriation was extended.

<sup>30</sup> CWGC, 2004, Baker to IWGC, 6 March 1918; CWGC, 2004, Blomfield to IWGC, 6 March 1918; CWGC, 2017, Memorandum on Architects, circa early 1918; *Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission, 1919-1920*, p. 7; Kenyon, *War Graves*, pp. 19-20; Baker, *Architecture and Personalities*, p. 89; Blomfield, *Memoirs of an Architect*, pp. 173, 176-7.

<sup>31</sup> *Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission, 1919-1920*, p. 7; Kenyon, *War Graves*, pp. 11-12, 23-4; Kipling and Macpherson, *The Graves of the Fallen*, p. 11; *Their Name Liveth*, Volume I, p. 3; Blomfield, *Memoirs of an Architect*, p. 179; Mary Lutyens, *Edwin Lutyens: By His Daughter*, (London: John Murray, 1980), p. 154; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 36. See also Appendix Seven.

<sup>32</sup> *The Times*, 10 November, 1928; Ware, *The Immortal Heritage*, pp. 31-2; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 43.

<sup>33</sup> Kenyon, *War Graves*, p. 21.

at the Imperial War Conference held in June 1918.<sup>34</sup> At this time the Dominion governments also affirmed their intentions to provide financial assistance, and it was decided that each of the member states should fund the IWGC in proportion to that country's percentage of the imperial war dead.<sup>35</sup> While pleased to have secured funding, Ware and his colleagues were concerned about the possibility of the Treasury interfering in the formation of remembrance policy, for under this arrangement the British Exchequer would be responsible for providing the IWGC with more than eighty per cent of its budget. They feared that the IWGC would be unable to operate as an imperial entity if the Chancellor imposed conditions on the spending of these monies.<sup>36</sup> For their part, Treasury officials were reluctant to allow the organisation to spend as it chose, particularly as the commissioners had not provided them with a firm estimate of the cost of developing the battlefield cemeteries. However, in June 1919 the Chancellor relented.<sup>37</sup> While the IWGC thus won an important victory, the treasuries of the member states subsequently were able to impose financial restrictions by agreeing that the organisation's budget would be limited to ten pounds per grave.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/5849, Treasury Memorandum, 3 June 1916; TNA, PRO WO 32/9433, Meeting Minutes, 25 September 1916; *Imperial War Conference, 1917*, p. 35; *Imperial War Conference, 1918*: p. 228; *Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission, 1919-1920*, p. 3; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, pp. 16, 38.

<sup>35</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/9433, Ware Memorandum, 7 March 1917; CWGC, 2043, Treasury Meeting, 20 June 1919; *Imperial War Conference, 1917*, pp. 5, 35-7; *Imperial War Conference, 1918*, pp. 4, 32-3, 226; *Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission, 1919-1920*, pp. 3, 15.

<sup>36</sup> CWGC, 2043, Treasury Meeting, 20 June 1919; TNA, PRO T 1/12519, Internal Memorandum, 12 January 1920; Ware, 'War Graves and the British Commonwealth', 631-41.

<sup>37</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/9433, Ware Memorandum, 7 March 1917; TNA, PRO T 1/12519, Treasury Meeting, 20 June 1919; TNA, PRO T 1/12519, Internal Memorandum, 12 January 1920; CWGC, 2043, Treasury Meeting, 20 June 1919; CWGC, 2043, G. L. Barstow to Ware, 4 March 1920; *Imperial War Conference, 1918*, pp. 30, 226; *Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission, 1919-1920*, pp. 7, 15; *Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission, 1920-1921*, p. 3; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, pp. 38-40.

<sup>38</sup> TNA, PRO T 1/12519, Internal Memorandum, 12 January 1920; CWGC, 2069, Winchester House Meeting, 28 July 1919; CWGC, 2069, Memorandum on Costs, circa July 1919; CWGC, 2069, Director of Works to Financial Adviser, 7 August 1919; *Imperial War Conference, 1918*, pp. 29, 31,

- Remembering the Great War Dead

Because of these tight financial constraints and the edict requiring the architects to adhere to the principles established by Kenyon, the style of the cemeteries developed by the IWGC in the post-war period was understated, although their modesty also owed something to the desire of the principal architects, whose number was eventually expanded to seven, not to remember the dead in a gaudy and ostentatiously sentimental manner.<sup>39</sup> The architects thus created cemeteries that were free of idiosyncrasy and not of a particular era or fashion, the only definite influence evident in the burial grounds being horticultural.<sup>40</sup> In Europe, attractive miniature rose species, which were hardy and small enough not to overwhelm graves, were grown alongside headstones, with each cemetery made to resemble a peaceful English garden by the additional planting of crocuses, snowdrops, daffodils, poplars, willows, yews and lawns.<sup>41</sup> Baker, in particular, was fond of emphasising

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227; *Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission, 1919-1920*, pp. 7-8, 12; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 38.

<sup>39</sup> CWGC, 1137, Lutyens Memorandum, 28 August 1917; CWGC, 2001, Blomfield Report, February 1918; CWGC, 2017, Memorandum on Architects, circa early 1918; Kenyon, *War Graves*, pp. 19, 20-2, 24; Baker, *Architecture and Personalities*, p. 89; Blomfield, *Memoirs of an Architect*, p. 178; Ware, *The Immortal Heritage*, pp. 30-1; Curl, *A Celebration of Death*, pp. 317-9; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 128. The cemeteries in France and Belgium were designed by Lutyens, Baker, Blomfield and Major Charles Holden; those in Italy, Macedonia, Egypt, Greece and Germany by Sir Robert Lorimer; those in Syria, Palestine and Turkey by Sir John Burnet; and those in Iraq by Major Edward Warren. See *Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission, 1920-1921*, p. 5; *Eighth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, (London: HMSO, 1928), p. 5; Hurst, *The Silent Cities*, pp. viii-ix.

<sup>40</sup> CWGC, 2001, Blomfield Report, February 1918.

<sup>41</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/9433, Meeting Minutes, 25 September 1916; *Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission, 1919-1920*, pp. 5, 7; *Twenty-second Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 5; *Twenty-ninth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, (London: HMSO, 1949), p. 15; Kenyon, *War Graves*, pp. 12-13; Hill, *Our Soldiers' Graves*, pp. 2-3, 5-10, 12; W. F. W. Harding, 'The Horticultural Work of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission', *Journal of the Royal Horticultural Society*, LXXXVIII (1963), 252-3; Jane Ridley, *Edwin Lutyens: His Life, His Wife, His Work*, (London: Pimlico, 2003), p. 280; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, pp. 73-4, 114.

such a connection, noting ‘that the homely sense of the English churchyard should strike the key-note of the designs of the cemeteries’.<sup>42</sup>

As well as providing for the remembrance of the dead, the IWGC took steps to ensure the permanence of its work. Ware persuaded the member states to establish a £5 million endowment fund to secure the maintenance of the cemeteries, and arranged for the relevant foreign governments to accord the IWGC authority over all British and Dominion graves in their territories.<sup>43</sup> These provisions became relevant once the organisation completed its construction operations in 1932, by which time it had erected 587,117 identified headstones and inscribed on memorials the names of 517,773 servicemen who had no known graves.<sup>44</sup>

The scale of this achievement, coupled with the beauty of the cemeteries, made the IWGC a venerable institution. One admirer, Stanley Baldwin, declared in 1928 that its work ‘has been a revelation and a comfort.’<sup>45</sup> He also expressed his hope that the organisation never would have to undertake such a task again. Initially

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<sup>42</sup> CWGC, 1137, Baker to Ware, 9 November 1917; Baker, *Architecture and Personalities*, pp. 88-9. The cost of producing and erecting each Stone of Remembrance and Cross of Sacrifice was such that the Stones were eventually placed only in the larger graveyards, while the Crosses routinely were placed in all cemeteries containing forty or more burials. See CWGC, 2069, Winchester House Meeting, 31 July 1919; CWGC, 2069, F. C. Sillar Memorandum, 22 October 1946; Gibson and Ward, *Courage Remembered*, p. 53.

<sup>43</sup> *Imperial War Conference, 1918*, p. 228; *Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission, 1919-1920*, p. 11; *Eighth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, pp. 3, 6; *Twenty-first Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 5; *The Times*, 10 November 1928; ‘The Registration and Care of Military Graves During the Present War’, 297-302. On the IWGC endowment fund, see *Report from the Select Committee on the Imperial War Graves Endowment Fund Bill: Together with the Proceedings of the Committee and Minutes of Evidence; Public Bill for Imperial War Graves Endowment Fund*; and correspondence in TNA, PRO WO 32/3145; TNA, PRO WO 32/3146 and CWGC, 2081. Most of the agreements with regard to war graves in foreign territories formalised arrangements that had been made during or immediately after the war. For example, see *Agreement Between the United Kingdom and France Respecting British War Graves in France*, 26 November 1918.

<sup>44</sup> *Eighth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 6; *Thirteenth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, (London: HMSO, 1933), pp. 3, 45; Ware, *The Immortal Heritage*, p. 66; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, pp. 126-7. Of the 517,773 ‘missing’ servicemen, the bodies of 180, 861 had been found and interred in graves marked unknown. See also *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, House of Lords, Fifth Series, Volume CXXXIV, (London: HMSO, 1945), p. 1022.

<sup>45</sup> *The Times*, 10 November 1928.

Ware was certain that it would not, but by 1938 his faith in this regard had begun to waver and, in September of the following year, he found himself preparing the IWGC for what he termed 'a new harvest of death'.<sup>46</sup>

## Section II: The IWGC and its Second World War Task

- Starting Again

Although the IWGC had been formed with the specific purpose of providing for the remembrance of the Great War dead, when the Second World War began there was an expectation that it should be involved. In a letter to Neville Chamberlain in December 1939, the organisation's chairman, Leslie Hore-Belisha, wrote that the government would save money and labour if responsibility for the permanent care of any new battlefield cemeteries were vested in the IWGC. He added:

experience indicates that it would be of comfort to the relatives of the dead to be in communication with such an experienced body as the Imperial War Graves Commission as soon as possible after the reception of the news of their loss, rather than that they should have to wait for the cessation of hostilities to know what steps were being taken for the permanent marking of the graves or for the commemoration of 'missing' who had no known grave.<sup>47</sup>

The prime minister advised Hore-Belisha to secure a Supplemental Charter for the IWGC authorising it to provide for the remembrance of the Second World War dead.<sup>48</sup>

The IWGC began working on this task without waiting to receive this formal imprimatur. During the winter of 1939-40, its officials convinced the French

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<sup>46</sup> *Twentieth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 3; Ware, 'War Graves and the British Commonwealth', 631-41.

<sup>47</sup> TNA, PRO PC 8/1390, Hore-Belisha to Chamberlain, 6 December 1939.

<sup>48</sup> TNA, PRO PC 8/1390, Chamberlain to Hore-Belisha, 8 December 1939. The Supplemental Charter was awarded in February. See TNA, PRO WO 32/9439, IWGC Supplemental Charter, 6 February 1940.

government to sanction the use of French land for new British cemeteries, and in Britain canvassed opinion regarding the form of headstones. It was agreed that the type used to commemorate the Great War dead should be employed again.<sup>49</sup> Yet for all this purpose and efficiency, most IWGC staff did not believe that a major undertaking was at hand. The work of the caretakers and gardeners who tended the Continental cemeteries had not been interrupted by hostilities, and the bodies of the few casualties suffered by the British military in north-west Europe had been interred in extant IWGC burial grounds.<sup>50</sup> This quasi peace ended in May with the German invasion of the Low Countries and France. IWGC employees resident in north-west Europe were forced to flee and ‘the work of a generation’, Longworth writes, ‘was abandoned to the enemy.’<sup>51</sup>

- The Quiet Years

Excluded from much of the Continent from this time, the IWGC attended mainly to administrative tasks. Acting on information provided by the DGRE, headquarters staff sent letters to the bereaved asking them to confirm the personal details of dead relatives so that no mistakes were made when it came to inscribing headstones, and inviting them to compose an epitaph for the grave marker.<sup>52</sup> Ware knew that it was

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<sup>49</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, September, November 1939, January 1940; TNA, PRO ADM 1/24243, IWGC Pamphlet, February 1942; CWGC, 3002, Ware to War Office, 7 February 1940; CWGC, 3002, Ware to Frank Higginson, 13 February 1940; CWGC, 2033, Cemetery Design Memorandum, 26 February 1943; *Twentieth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, pp. 6-8; *Twenty-first Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 4; *Their Name Liveth*, Volume I, p. 1; Hussey, *The Life of Sir Edwin Lutyens*, p. 566; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, pp. 161-3. See also Appendix Eight.

<sup>50</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, November 1939; CWGC, 2035, Unknown to Ware, 9 October 1939; *Twenty-first Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 2; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, pp. 162-3; Gibson and Ward, *Courage Remembered*, pp. 59, 61.

<sup>51</sup> Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 163. See also pages 164-72 in the same volume.

<sup>52</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/35, DGRE War Diary, September-October 1939; TNA, PRO WO 165/35, IWGC Memorandum on Casualties, circa March 1940; TNA, PRO ADM 1/24243, IWGC Pamphlet,

best to complete as much as possible of this work before greater demands were made of the IWGC.

This relatively quiet existence continued until 1943 when, the course of the war having turned decisively against the enemy, the IWGC began to make preparations for transforming the battlefield cemeteries into permanent memorials to the dead.<sup>53</sup> Early that year Lieutenant Colonel Sir Herbert Ellissen, previously a senior IWGC employee, was lured from retirement to advise the organisation on such subjects as cemetery construction, and in the summer Professor Edward Salisbury, director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, agreed to advise it on horticultural matters.<sup>54</sup> Also during this period, the commissioners resolved to accord to the Second World War burial grounds ‘the same general architectural and horticultural treatment’ that had been applied to the graveyards of the 1914-18 conflict, and to engage a principal architect to design the cemeteries in the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>55</sup>

- A Principal Architect on Tour: North Africa, 1943

The highly-regarded Hubert Worthington was selected for this position.<sup>56</sup> The holder of the Royal College of Art chair in architecture, he possessed a suitable professional pedigree having been apprenticed once to Lutyens, while he was looked

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February 1942; CWGC, 4028, Verification Form; *Twenty-first Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 10; *Twenty-second Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 2; *Twenty-third Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 5.

<sup>53</sup> CWGC, 2033, Frank Higginson Memorandum, 13 February 1943; CWGC, 2033, Cemetery Design Memorandum, 26 February 1943.

<sup>54</sup> CWGC, 2013, Ware to Ellissen, 23 January 1943; *Twenty-fourth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 4; *Twenty-fifth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 6; *Twenty-ninth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 7; *Daily Telegraph*, 23 July 1943; Harding, ‘The Horticultural Work of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission’, 252.

<sup>55</sup> CWGC, 2033, Cemetery Design Memorandum, 26 February 1943; CWGC, 2033, IWGC Resolutions, circa March 1943.

<sup>56</sup> CWGC, 2004, Worthington Appointment Memorandum, 5 July 1943.

upon favourably also because of his status as a First World War veteran.<sup>57</sup> His appointment was made on the recommendation of the eighty-year-old Kenyon, who had always advocated that the IWGC employ, wherever possible, architects who were ex-servicemen on the basis that those ‘whose comrades lie in these cemeteries, are best qualified to express the sentiment which we desire the cemeteries to convey.’<sup>58</sup>

Following his appointment, Worthington was instructed to tour North Africa to decide which of the battlefield cemeteries established there should be preserved and developed.<sup>59</sup> Although these officially were not decisions for the IWGC, the commissioners were unwilling to accept responsibility for a large number of burial grounds in the region on the basis that it would be difficult and expensive to organise a widespread building programme in a 450,000 square mile area comprised mostly of desert, and thereafter to maintain numerous sites.<sup>60</sup> Thus they advised Worthington to designate ten or fewer cemeteries in North Africa as permanent – the AGS would be ordered to alter its concentration programme according to his

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<sup>57</sup> Ridley, *Edwin Lutyens*, pp. 228, 244; Hussey, *The Life of Sir Edwin Lutyens*, p. 226; John H. G. Archer, ‘Sir (John) Hubert Worthington’ in Matthew and Harrison (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Volume 60, pp. 356-7; *The Guardian*, 27 July 1963; *The Times*, 27 July 1963; *The Times*, 31 July 1963.

<sup>58</sup> CWGC, 2033, Frank Higginson Memorandum, 13 February 1943; CWGC, 2033, Cemetery Design Memorandum, 26 February 1943; CWGC, 2033, IWGC Resolutions, circa March 1943; CWGC, 1137, Worthington Selection Memorandum, 19 May 1943; CWGC, 2004, Worthington Appointment Memorandum, 5 July 1943; Kenyon, *War Graves*, p. 20; Bell, ‘Sir Frederic George Kenyon’ in Matthew and Harrison (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Volume 31, p. 341; Archer, ‘Sir (John) Hubert Worthington’ in Matthew and Harrison (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Volume 60, pp. 356-7.

<sup>59</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, GREMEF War Diary, July-August 1943; CWGC, 2004, Worthington Tour Diary, September 1943; CWGC, 2035, Worthington Tour Report, 20 October 1943; CWGC, 1137, IWGC Meeting Minutes, circa October 1943.

<sup>60</sup> CWGC, 2033, Frank Higginson Memorandum, 13 February 1943; CWGC, 2035, Worthington Tour Report, 20 October 1943; CWGC, 2033, Lieutenant Colonel H. F. Chettle Memorandum, 4 April 1944; CWGC, 2033, Frank Higginson to Ware, 13 April 1944; CWGC, 2033, IWGC References in Fraser Report, circa April 1944; CWGC, 2033, Draft Memorandum, Undated.

recommendations – and to favour those that were located near to harbours, railways and roads to facilitate access for post-war visitors.<sup>61</sup>

Throughout his seven-week 13,000 mile tour, Worthington spoke with diplomats and generals, members of the AGS, and frontline servicemen. These discussions helped him to recommend which cemeteries to reject as unsuitable and which to retain for development.<sup>62</sup> Of those which he chose to preserve, some stirred in him particular interest and excitement. He thought that the ‘historic’ cemetery at Tobruk, despite the many impracticalities associated with the site, should be made permanent because it possessed ‘poignant and heroic associations of the highest order’, while of the graveyard at Sollum he wrote:

250 miles from El Alamein and 85 miles from Tobruk, this cemetery will be one of the largest of the Western desert, and with Hellfire Pass on one side, and Sollum pass on the other, it has a remarkably impressive setting, in the centre of Sollum Bay, with the sea in front as a base, and the chain of hills between the passes as a background. As you look South, the Cross of Sacrifice will tell against the hills, with their ever changing lights and shadows, as you look North, the White Cross will stand out against the brilliant coloured sea. The site possesses both beauty of natural setting, and the irresistible appeal of a historic battleground. The harbour gives facilities for cruising ships bringing visitors, and it is beside the main, through, Pilgrimage road.<sup>63</sup>

As for Tunisia, Worthington explained to Ware that its ‘European cultivation’, along with ‘the beauty of the country-side, the ease of communications, the many villages

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<sup>61</sup> CWGC, 2033, Frank Higginson Memorandum, 13 February 1943; CWGC, 1137, Ware, Duke of Gloucester and Adam Meetings, 23 September 1943; CWGC, 2035, Worthington Tour Report, 20 October 1943; CWGC, 1137, IWGC Meeting Minutes, circa October 1943; CWGC, 2033, Lieutenant Colonel H. F. Chettle Memorandum, 4 April 1944; CWGC, 2033, Frank Higginson to Ware, 13 April 1944; CWGC, 2033, IWGC References in Fraser Report, circa April 1944; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 179. The commissioners envisaged each cemetery containing a minimum of 2000 bodies.

<sup>62</sup> CWGC, 2004, Worthington Tour Diary, September 1943; CWGC, 2035, Worthington Tour Report, 20 October 1943; CWGC, 1137, IWGC Meeting Minutes, circa October 1943.

<sup>63</sup> CWGC, 2004, Worthington Tour Diary, September 1943; CWGC, 2035, Worthington Tour Report, 20 October 1943.

and prosperous farms ... suggests a larger number of smaller cemeteries, for smaller cemeteries have a greater charm, where circumstances justify their use.'<sup>64</sup>

Worthington proposed that the IWGC retain and develop seventeen battlefield burial grounds in North Africa: nine in Tunisia, two in Algeria, and six on the Mediterranean coast between Tripoli and Alexandria.<sup>65</sup> The largest site selected was at El Alamein, and the smallest at Thirbar Seminary near Beja in Tunisia where there were 120 interments.<sup>66</sup> For the graveyards in the desert Worthington wanted to build pergolas in which visitors could shelter from the heat, and to install irrigation systems to allow for growing grass and temperate flora. Around these sites he advocated the erection of high stone walls to block drifting sand.<sup>67</sup> Acknowledging the need to uphold 'a great tradition', Worthington assured the commissioners that his designs would accord to the architectural principles of the IWGC and that the cemeteries would be without ostentation in the manner of those built after the First World War.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> CWGC, 2035, Worthington Tour Report, 20 October 1943.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*; CWGC, 2033, Frank Higginson Memorandum, 13 February 1943; CWGC, 2004, Worthington Tour Diary, September 1943; CWGC, 1137, IWGC Meeting Minutes, circa October 1943; CWGC, 2033, Frank Higginson to Ware, 13 April 1944; *Twenty-fourth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 3; Lillian Craig Harris, *Cemeteries and Memories: The Second World War in Tunisia*, (Oxford: Michael Tomkinson, 2007), p. 52. More than seventeen cemeteries were eventually developed in North Africa. See *Thirty-seventh Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, (London: HMSO, 1957), pp. 57-9.

<sup>66</sup> CWGC, 2035, Worthington Tour Report, 20 October 1943; CWGC, 1137, IWGC Meeting Minutes, circa October 1943.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*; CWGC, 2004, Ware to Worthington, 19 April 1945; CWGC, 2004, Worthington to Ware, 21 April 1945; Archer, 'Sir (John) Hubert Worthington' in Matthew and Harrison (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Volume 60, pp. 356-7; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, pp. 179, 211. In some places the AGS had built stone walls to serve as barriers against creeping sand, but as these were not always sufficiently high, their extension was sometimes needed. The army had fenced other desert cemeteries only with barbed wire. See TNA, PRO WO 165/36, Fraser Report, 30 March 1944.

<sup>68</sup> CWGC, 2035, Worthington Tour Report, 20 October 1943.

- Moving into Europe

Several months after Worthington returned from his tour, the IWGC appointed another two principal architects. In the spring of 1944 the Canadian-born Briton Louis de Soissons was selected to design the cemeteries in Italy.<sup>69</sup> A British army First World War veteran, he had studied at the Royal Academy and in Paris and Rome, and favoured classical architecture.<sup>70</sup> His appointment was followed in the autumn by that of Philip Hepworth as the architect responsible for planning the cemeteries in France.<sup>71</sup> He too had fought in the 1914-18 conflict, been schooled in Paris and Rome, and was a classicist.<sup>72</sup> de Soissons, who was fifty-three at the time of his appointment, and Hepworth, at fifty four, were also thought by the IWGC to be of the right age for principal architects, sufficiently young to cope with the rigours of extensive travelling, but old enough to have established excellent professional reputations.<sup>73</sup> Once their contracts were confirmed, de Soissons and Hepworth toured Italy and France respectively to study the battlefield cemeteries and make plans. Soon afterwards their remits were broadened, the former given responsibility for designing the cemeteries throughout the Mediterranean and southern Europe, the latter all those in north-west Europe.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> CWGC, 2002, Ware to de Soissons, 24 October 1944.

<sup>70</sup> CWGC, 2017, Kenyon to Frank Higginson, 17 August 1944; *Twenty-fifth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 5; William Allen and Andrew Saint, 'Louis Emmanuel Jean Guy de Soissons' in Matthew and Harrison (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Volume 51, pp. 528-30.

<sup>71</sup> CWGC, 2002, Memorandum on Appointments, 10 October 1944.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*; CWGC, 2017, Hepworth Career Synopsis, circa June 1944; *Twenty-fifth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 5; Allen and Saint, 'Louis Emmanuel Jean Guy de Soissons' in Matthew and Harrison (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Volume 51, pp. 528-30.

<sup>73</sup> CWGC, 2017, Major T. L. Dugdale to Ware, 23 June 1944; CWGC, 2017, Frank Higginson to Ware, 18 August 1944; Allen and Saint, 'Louis Emmanuel Jean Guy de Soissons' in Matthew and Harrison (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Volume 51, p. 528.

<sup>74</sup> TNA, PRO WO 171/186, 21 Army Group Graves Service Headquarters War Diary, November 1944; CWGC, 1137, Hepworth Report, circa January 1945; CWGC, 2035, Technical Staff Memorandum, 27 March 1945; CWGC, 2002, de Soissons Tour Report, June 1946; *Twenty-fifth*

In the meantime, Worthington's proposals were judged too expensive. With work set to begin at Massicault, Tobruk and Sollum, the IWGC declared that it could not afford what he was planning – the cost of implementing his design for the Tobruk graveyard was estimated at a prohibitive forty pounds per grave, while the twenty pounds per grave figure for Sollum was also too high – and building operations were suspended while he simplified his proposals.<sup>75</sup>

- The Difficult Post-War Years

The work of the IWGC in the immediate post-war period was defined by a constant push for economy. de Soissons and Hepworth were, like Worthington, made to modify their cemetery designs.<sup>76</sup> Altering plans which had been months in conception was a time-consuming task, and the frustration this engendered among the architects was exacerbated when the organisation rejected their revised designs because the cost of raw materials and skilled labour had risen in the interim.<sup>77</sup> The shortages that were forcing higher construction prices also affected other industries on which the IWGC relied. For instance, it took the organisation until 1946 to find a firm capable of manufacturing and engraving some of the 300,000 plus headstones it

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*Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, pp. 5-6; *Twenty-sixth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, pp. 17, 27.

<sup>75</sup> CWGC, 1137, Frank Higginson to Worthington, 18 September 1944; CWGC, 1137, Peek to Worthington, 20 November 1944; CWGC, 2004, Ware to Worthington, 19 April 1945; CWGC, 1137, Peek to Worthington, 30 May 1945; CWGC, 2035, List of Completed Drawings and Sketches for Western Mediterranean District, Undated; *Twenty-fifth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, pp. 3-4, 17; *Twenty-ninth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 14; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, pp. 180-1, 203.

<sup>76</sup> Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, pp. 180-1.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 203, 206-7; CWGC, 2069, F. C. Sillar Memorandum, 22 October 1946; CWGC, 2069, IWGC Memorandum, 3 July 1947; CWGC, 2069, Ellissen Memorandum, 15 July 1947; CWGC, 2069, F. C. Sillar to Captain E. J. Scholtz, 6 August 1947; CWGC, 2002, de Soissons Report, July 1948; CWGC, 2044, Reports on Visit to Western Mediterranean District, December 1948; CWGC, 2002, Hepworth to IWGC, 23 May 1951; CWGC, 2077, Finance Memorandum, circa October 1951; *Twenty-seventh Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, pp. 4, 11, 22; *Twenty-eighth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, (London: HMSO, 1948), p. 5; *Thirty-second Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, (London: HMSO, 1952), p. 46.

required, and it was only in that year that the first water pipelines and concrete headstone beams were laid beneath cemeteries.<sup>78</sup>

With little tangible evidence that the IWGC was attending to its Second World War task, the British public began to voice its concerns. In September 1946 Reverend Colin Cuttall wrote to the *Daily Telegraph* from Southwark Cathedral to ask why the 'sacred' graveyard at Arnhem had not been transformed 'into a worthy memorial to brave Englishmen.'<sup>79</sup> He observed that 'the ground is waterlogged, the paths between the graves are rutted sandy tracks, and there is no fencing of any kind to keep out cattle. Flowers planted by the Dutch people alone redeem the situation.'<sup>80</sup> In a letter to *The Times* in the same month, Mr G. E. Ballyn of Bath wondered whether the lack of progress in developing the cemeteries were a reflection of official apathy.<sup>81</sup> As a former newspaper editor and a keen student of public relations, Ware was cognisant of the dangers of adverse publicity.<sup>82</sup> He used his regular Armistice Day broadcast on the BBC Home Service to refute this charge, and to announce that it could take ten years to complete the cemeteries because of the magnitude of the task and the difficulties caused the IWGC by economic and other factors beyond its control.<sup>83</sup> Nonetheless, there was a feeling among senior civil servants that the organisation was operating inefficiently and that Ware was to blame.

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<sup>78</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Meeting Minutes, 9 September 1948; CWGC, 3002, Headstone Supply Meeting, 4 July 1946; CWGC, 3002, Headstone Production Memorandum, 22 March 1947; *Twenty-eighth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, pp. 5, 21; *Thirtieth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, pp. 27-8; Gibson and Ward, *Courage Remembered*, p. 55; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, pp. 200-1, 204.

<sup>79</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 3 September 1946.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* See also related correspondence in *Daily Telegraph*, 6 September 1946; *Daily Telegraph*, 10 September 1946; and letters in *Daily Mail*, 11 September 1946; *The Times*, 16 September 1946.

<sup>81</sup> *The Times*, 20 September 1946.

<sup>82</sup> Ware edited the *Morning Post* from 1905 to 1911.

<sup>83</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 11 November 1946. See also *Sixteenth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, (London: HMSO, 1936), p. 7.

- The Retirement of Ware

By the autumn of 1946 Ware was seventy-seven, weak from phlebitis, and no longer the force he once had been.<sup>84</sup> That something was amiss with his leadership of the IWGC was evident when lazy and underperforming officials were not removed from important posts, and other staff became so frustrated with the organisation that they resigned.<sup>85</sup> The permanent secretaries at the War Office and the Treasury wanted Ware replaced and together resolved to force his retirement, but he was able to stymie their plotting by invoking the support of important acquaintances. For example, J. J. Lawson, the IWGC chairman, refused to act against his old friend and colleague.<sup>86</sup> Despite the continued efforts of the civil servants to oust Ware, whose pride and reluctance to forfeit a £3000 annual salary made him a formidable opponent, he remained vice-chairman until his retirement from the IWGC in June 1948 when he was replaced by Admiral Sir Martin Dunbar-Nasmith.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/15464, Speed to Sir Alan Barlow, 26 March 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/15464, Speed to Sir Edward Bridges, 10 December 1946; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, pp. 193-4.

<sup>85</sup> Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, pp. 192, 198, 224.

<sup>86</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/15464, Speed to Sir Alan Barlow, 26 March 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/15464, Sir Alan Barlow to Speed, 5 April 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/15464, Internal Minute, 27 June 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/15464, Speed to Lord Bruce, 11 October 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/15464, Sir Edward Bridges to Speed, 4 December 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/15464, Speed to Sir Edward Bridges, 10 December 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/15464, Sir Edward Bridges to Speed, 13 December 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/15464, Meeting Record, 6 January 1947; TNA, PRO WO 32/15464, Internal Minute, 16 January 1947; TNA, PRO WO 32/15464, Bellenger and Ware Conversation, 17 April 1947; TNA, PRO WO 32/15464, Sir Edward Bridges to Speed, 29 April 1947; TNA, PRO WO 32/15464, Sir Godfrey Thomas to A. C. W. Drew, 14 July 1947.

<sup>87</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/15464, Speed to Lord Bruce, 11 October 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/15464, Frank Higginson to Emanuel Shinwell, 19 February 1948; *Twenty-eighth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 2; *Twenty-ninth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, pp. 4-6; *Manchester Guardian*, 19 March 1948; *The Quarterly Army List: August 1946*, Part I, p. 6; *The Quarterly Army List: December 1946*, Part I, p. 5; Morris, 'Sir Fabian Arthur Goulstone Ware' in Matthew and Harrison (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Volume 57, pp. 382-3; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 193.

- The Second World War Cemeteries

The new administration inherited an organisation distracted by this saga and affected by manifold difficulties.<sup>88</sup> The cost of raw materials and skilled labour remained high, approximately 80,000 next-of-kin had yet to be contacted about epitaph inscriptions, and by November 1948 only 40,000 headstones had been manufactured.<sup>89</sup> In the Middle East and Greece the movement of IWGC officials was restricted by political and civil unrest, the organisation was barred from the newly-Communist countries of southern Europe, and in North Africa the discovery of mines, a cholera outbreak, the theft of materials, and the desecration of graves by anti-imperialist protestors had interfered with operations.<sup>90</sup> It was not until 1949, when much of the building programme was sub-contracted to construction firms, that significant progress was made in developing the battlefield burial grounds of the Second World War.<sup>91</sup>

As work at sites was completed, the success of Worthington, de Soissons and Hepworth in creating well-planned and picturesque cemeteries from limited resources was revealed. At Ancona, for example, de Soissons used attractive pebbles collected from the seaside to adorn paths and benches and thus enliven the architecture.<sup>92</sup> Careful use was made of the natural contours of each site, and of

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<sup>88</sup> Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, pp. 193-5.

<sup>89</sup> *Twenty-ninth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, pp. 12, 15, 29; *Thirtieth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 34.

<sup>90</sup> TNA, PRO FO 141/1176, Cemetery Desecration Memorandum, 26 September 1947; TNA, PRO FO 369/4914, British Embassy (Cairo) Letter on Cemetery Desecration, 8 September 1953; CWGC, 1137, Hepworth Tour Report, 4 December 1948; *Twenty-ninth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, pp. 17-18, 24, 27; *Thirtieth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, pp. 9, 15-16, 27; *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 449 HC, DEB 5S, (London: HMSO, 1948), pp. 172-4; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, pp. 204, 214-6.

<sup>91</sup> Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, pp. 201-2. See also *Thirty-first Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, (London: HMSO, 1951), pp. 17, 40; *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 449 HC, DEB 5S, pp. 172-4.

<sup>92</sup> Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, pp. 212.

horticulture, to create symmetry and perspective in the cemeteries, with evenly-spaced avenues of trees used to define borders and entrances and to screen unwanted vistas.<sup>93</sup> In the Salerno graveyard de Soissons had liquidambars and poplars planted in a semi-circle behind the Cross of Sacrifice to create a spectacular natural frame for the feature, while at the Bruyelle burial ground in Belgium, Hepworth had a row of willows and poplars grown to hide an unattractive house and telegraph poles.<sup>94</sup>

The principles which informed the choice of trees and the horticulture programme generally were the same as those followed after the First World War.<sup>95</sup> Growing miniature roses alongside headstones was again favoured – 250,000 rose bushes were planted in the cemeteries in north-west Europe alone – with small and attractive perennial species used similarly.<sup>96</sup> Aside from their inherent beauty, these roses and perennials were ideal for adorning graves as they were long-blooming, and their roots were too short to become entwined around the subterranean beams by which the headstones were aligned.<sup>97</sup> Large flowering bushes that could be trained to develop in a particular direction were planted behind the headstones for variety, and compact and easily-shaped shrubs such as rosemary were grown at the end of each row of graves further to enhance the sense of ordered spacing.<sup>98</sup> Lawns were

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 211-3; CWGC, 2035, Worthington Tour Report, 20 October 1943; CWGC, 2002, Hepworth Tour Report, October 1945; Harding, 'The Horticultural Work of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission', 254-5.

<sup>94</sup> CWGC, 2002, Hepworth Tour Report, October 1945; Harding, 'The Horticultural Work of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission', 255.

<sup>95</sup> *Thirty-eighth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, (London: HMSO, 1957), p. 15; Harding, 'The Horticultural Work of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission', 252.

<sup>96</sup> TNA, PRO FO 371/124702, Meeting Briefing Notes, 1 October 1956; *Thirtieth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 27; *Thirty-second Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 18; Harding, 'The Horticultural Work of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission', 253-4; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 228.

<sup>97</sup> CWGC, 2035, Worthington Tour Report, 20 October 1943; Harding, 'The Horticultural Work of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission', 253.

<sup>98</sup> CWGC, 2035, Worthington Tour Report, 20 October 1943; *Thirty-third Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, (London: HMSO, 1953), p. 29; Harding, 'The Horticultural Work of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission', 254.

used for effect, with horticulturists interlacing certain species of grass and clover to produce, in the words of one, ‘that vivid emerald green which forms such a desirable background against which to see the border plants and Portland headstones.’<sup>99</sup>

Healthy lawns were such an important feature of the cemeteries that precautions were taken to prevent rabbits and goats destroying them, and where there was sandy earth it was excavated and replaced with tonnes of fertile soil to facilitate grass growth.<sup>100</sup>

Only in the driest parts of Africa were the cemeteries not made reminiscent of England.<sup>101</sup> The IWGC had wanted to irrigate the desert burial grounds so that grasses and a wide variety of plants could be cultivated, but the logistics and costs involved, along with the discovery that highly-saline water damaged headstones, forced it to moderate these plans.<sup>102</sup> By 1953 Worthington was advocating planting indigenous flora, hardy acacias and olive trees at such sites as El Alamein.<sup>103</sup> The effect was not as calming as that imparted by the green and wooded cemeteries on the Continent, yet the desert shrubs did have their own stark attraction that was in keeping with the surrounds.<sup>104</sup>

Not everyone shared the conception of these cemeteries as beautiful, or believed that money should be spent on the memorialisation of the war dead. In a

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<sup>99</sup> *Thirty-eighth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 11; Harding, ‘The Horticultural Work of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission’, 256.

<sup>100</sup> CWGC, 2035, Worthington Tour Report, 20 October 1943; CWGC, 2002, Hepworth Tour Report, October 1945; CWGC, 2044, Worthington Tour Report, March 1953; *Twenty-ninth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 15; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 228.

<sup>101</sup> *Thirty-seventh Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 24; Harding, ‘The Horticultural Work of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission’, 257.

<sup>102</sup> CWGC, 2035, Worthington Tour Report, 20 October 1943; *Thirty-seventh Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, pp. 11, 25.

<sup>103</sup> CWGC, 2044, Worthington Tour Report, March 1953.

<sup>104</sup> TNA, PRO FO 371/124702, Meeting Briefing Notes, 1 October 1956; *Thirty-sixth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, (London: HMSO, 1955), p. 28; *Thirty-seventh Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 24; Research Trip by Author to El Alamein War Cemetery, September 2004.

letter to R. A. Butler, the Chancellor, in October 1954, one member of the public outlined his objections:

[w]hy not debunk the Imperial War Graves Commission as soon as it can be closed down and use the money for the living, widows and orphans and dependants and poor maimed relics of the war[?] The Imperial War Graves Commission started on that wave of emotion which shouted 'War to end War' 'Dig out the Rats' 'Hang the Kaiser' squeeze the pips out etc. The gallant officers and staff who were given the job of spending the millions a year have done a fine job aesthetically and romantically and like the B.B.C. have acted as a fairy godmother to architects, contractors, ex-servicemen as gardeners, wardens and office staff. I have consulted many ex-servicemen who agree that the money wrung from us taxpayer [sic] (who all served in the wars) should be spent on the living not on stones and cemeteries that look like dummies on parade 'No. 6 there, get back in line'. I have consulted Sir Ian Fraser [president of the British Legion] and others; not one dare hurt the feelings of sentimental relations and of the few who love a Sunday visit to a Cemetery by suggesting a rational Humane view.<sup>105</sup>

Although such criticisms prompted discomfort at the IWGC, the organisation was not deterred from its task.<sup>106</sup>

As progress was made with developing the cemeteries, the IWGC endeavoured to provide for their ongoing protection and maintenance by concluding war graves agreements with foreign governments.<sup>107</sup> Authorities in Communist countries, reluctant as they were to provide foreign organisations with permanent rights of entry into their territories, did not prove amenable in this regard and thus IWGC officials continually had to negotiate for access to war graves in the Eastern Bloc.<sup>108</sup> Outside this region, countries were willing to recognise the IWGC as the

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<sup>105</sup> CWGC, 2088, W. Tudor Owens to Butler, 14 October 1954. The underlining is Tudor Owens's.

<sup>106</sup> Avoiding altercation with the public was, Longworth writes, a 'traditional concern' of the IWGC. See Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 182.

<sup>107</sup> *Thirtieth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, pp. 10-11, 23, 34; *Thirty-fifth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, (London: HMSO, 1955), p. 10.

<sup>108</sup> TNA, PRO FO 371/64626, Bellenger to Ernest Bevin, 12 August 1947; TNA, PRO FO 371/64626, Ernest Bevin to Bellenger, 9 September 1947; TNA, PRO FO 371/64626, IWGC Soviet Zone Operations, circa November 1947; TNA, PRO FO 371/64626, Internal Memorandum, 26 December 1947; TNA, PRO FO 369/4098, Lieutenant Colonel R. B. Pembroke to Mrs Beatrice Griffiths, 15 September 1949; TNA, PRO FO 369/4984, IWGC to Foreign Office, 19 February 1954; *Twenty-*

official custodian of the British and Dominion dead, and enshrining this acknowledgment in international law proved straightforward. For example, France simply updated the corresponding treaty it had signed with Britain after the First World War.<sup>109</sup>

- The End of the Task

By the summer of 1956, the IWGC had nearly completed its Second World War task.<sup>110</sup> In the Netherlands thirty-six of thirty-eight cemeteries were complete; in Italy thirty-three of forty burial grounds were finished; in France the corresponding figure was fifty-two of sixty-seven, and operations in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt continued at just three sites.<sup>111</sup> More remained to be done in Germany, although even there it was hoped to conclude work within eighteen months.<sup>112</sup>

Cassino War Cemetery, containing more than 4000 graves and a monument to the memory of servicemen killed in the Italian campaign and without known

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*eighth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 11; *Thirtieth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, pp. 9-10; *Thirty-first Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, pp. 22, 26; *Daily Telegraph*, 3 June 1946; *Manchester Guardian*, 21 March 1951. Ostensibly Czechoslovakia provided an exception to the rule given that an agreement was reached with the government in Prague, but the securing of this treaty needed a British promise to care for Czechoslovakian war graves in IWGC cemeteries. See *Agreement Between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the Czechoslovak Republic for the Mutual Upkeep of War Graves*, 3 March 1949; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, pp. 196, 220; and files in TNA, PRO FO 369/3859 and TNA, PRO FO 369/4098.

<sup>109</sup> *Agreement Between the Governments of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Union of South Africa, India and Pakistan of the one part and the Government of the French Republic of the other part regarding British Commonwealth War Graves in French Territory*, 31 October 1951.

<sup>110</sup> TNA, PRO FO 371/124702, Meeting Briefing Notes, 1 October 1956; CWGC, 2004, Unknown to Worthington, 13 December 1954; *Thirty-seventh Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, pp. 6, 17.

<sup>111</sup> *Thirty-seventh Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, pp. 11, 31, 57-9.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58; TNA, PRO FO 371/130595, Commonwealth-German-French Joint Committee Meeting Minutes, 25 October 1956; *Thirty-eighth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 31.

graves, was officially opened in the autumn of 1956.<sup>113</sup> It was a grand occasion. Conducted in the presence of British and Dominion representatives and led by Field Marshal Earl Alexander, the erstwhile commander of most of the 8000 men buried or commemorated on the memorial at Cassino, the inauguration ceremony included the reading of prayers and the laying of wreaths.<sup>114</sup> The event was all the more poignant for the rugged surrounds and the positioning of the cemetery within this landscape, de Soissons having aligned the features at the centre of the burial ground – the memorial, the Cross of Sacrifice and the Stone of Remembrance – on an axis with the iconic battlefield of Monte Cassino.<sup>115</sup> Ware would have approved.

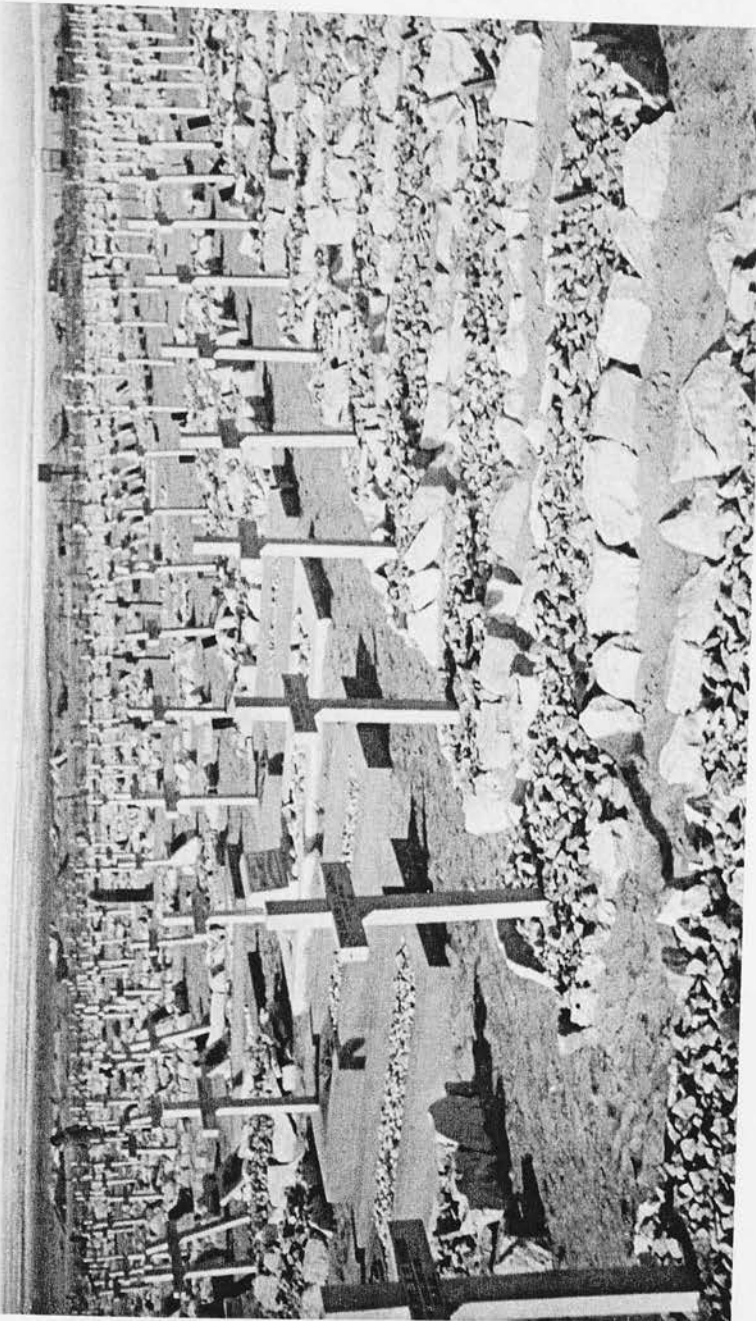
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<sup>113</sup> TNA, PRO FO 371/124241, Cassino Ceremony Plans, 2 July 1956; TNA, PRO FO 371/124241, Sir Ashley Clarke to Selwyn Lloyd, 4 October 1956; *Thirty-seventh Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, pp. 7, 57-60; *Thirty-eighth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, pp. 7, 34, 67; *The Times*, 25 September 1956; *Daily Telegraph*, 26 September 1956.

<sup>114</sup> TNA, PRO FO 371/124241, Cassino Ceremony Plans, 2 July 1956; TNA, PRO FO 371/124241, Sir Ashley Clarke to Selwyn Lloyd, 4 October 1956.

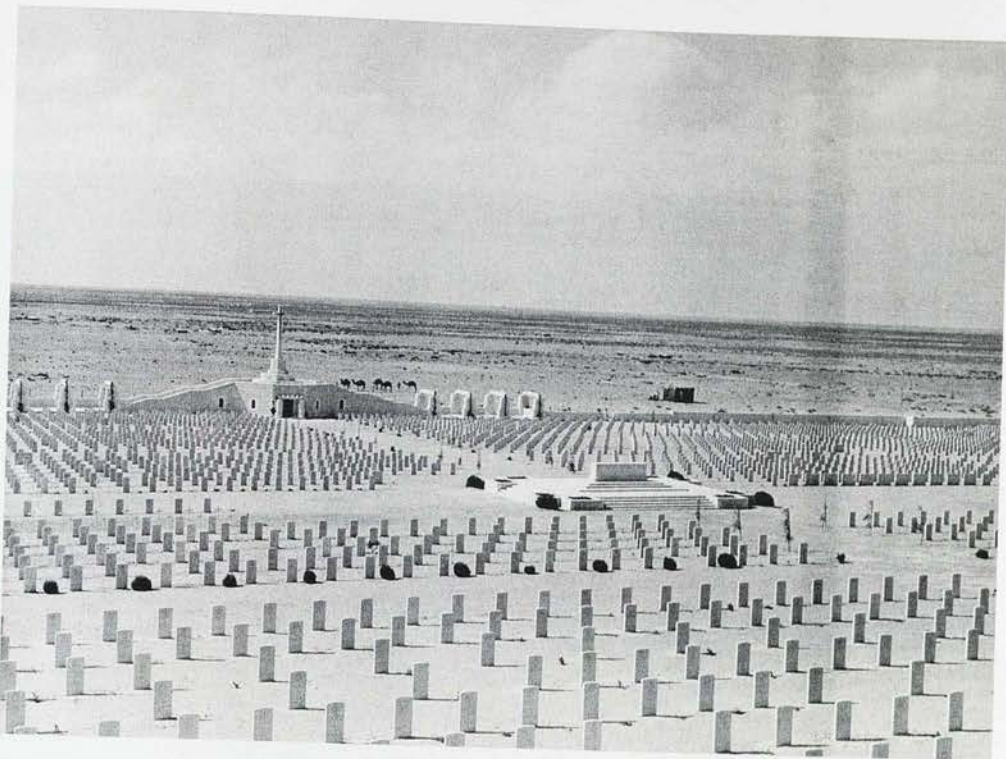
<sup>115</sup> TNA, PRO FO 371/124241, Cassino Ceremony Plans, 2 July 1956; *Thirty-seventh Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 7; *Evening News*, 26 September 1956; Research Trip by Author to Cassino War Cemetery, December 2004.

Figures 33-37: El Alamein War Cemetery



Mid to late 1940s.

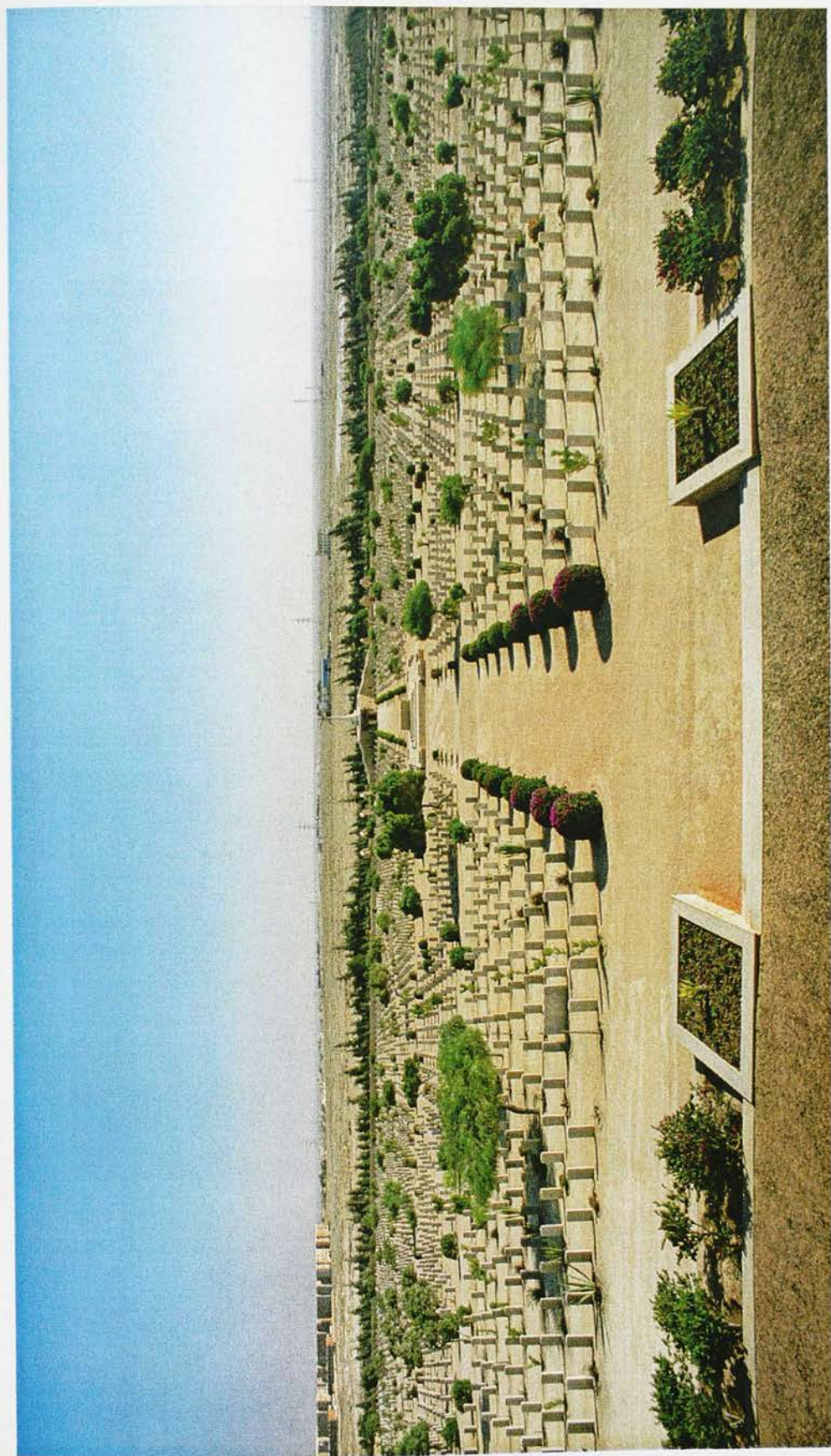




The cemetery soon after completion, circa late 1950s.

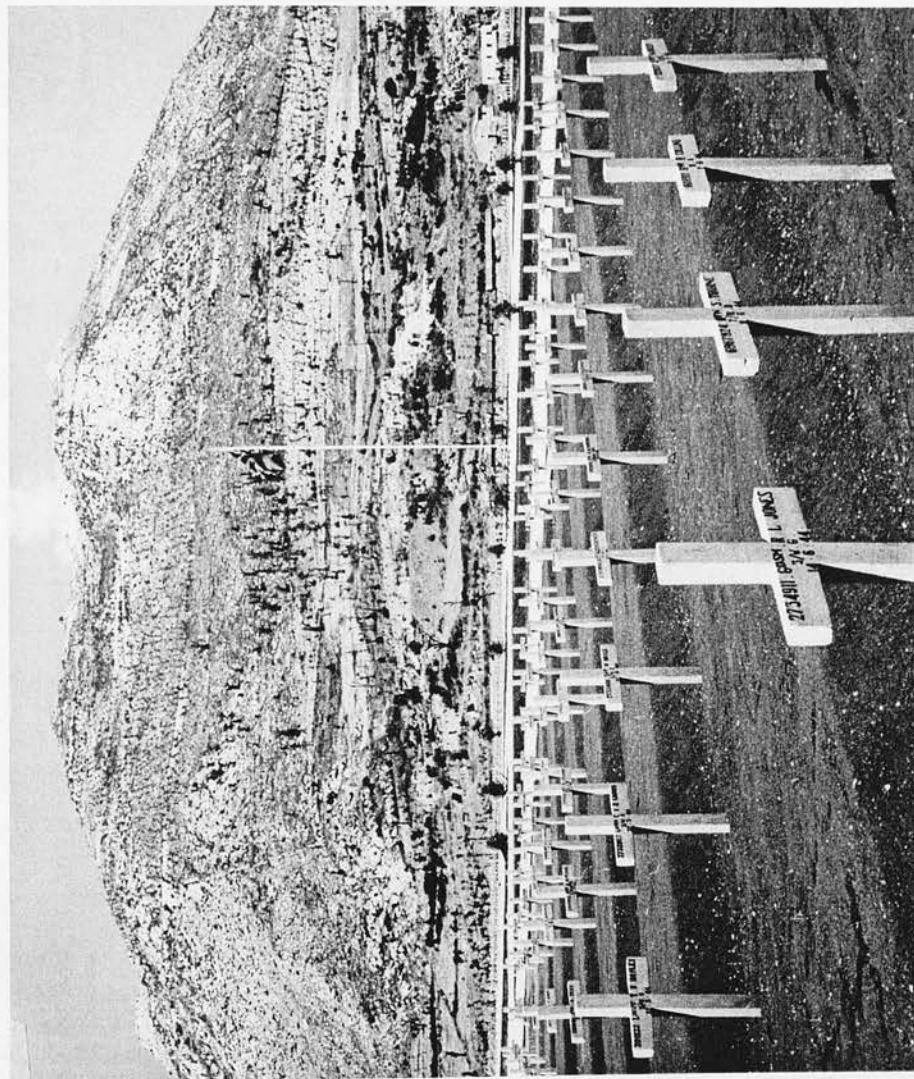


The cemetery more recently (1).

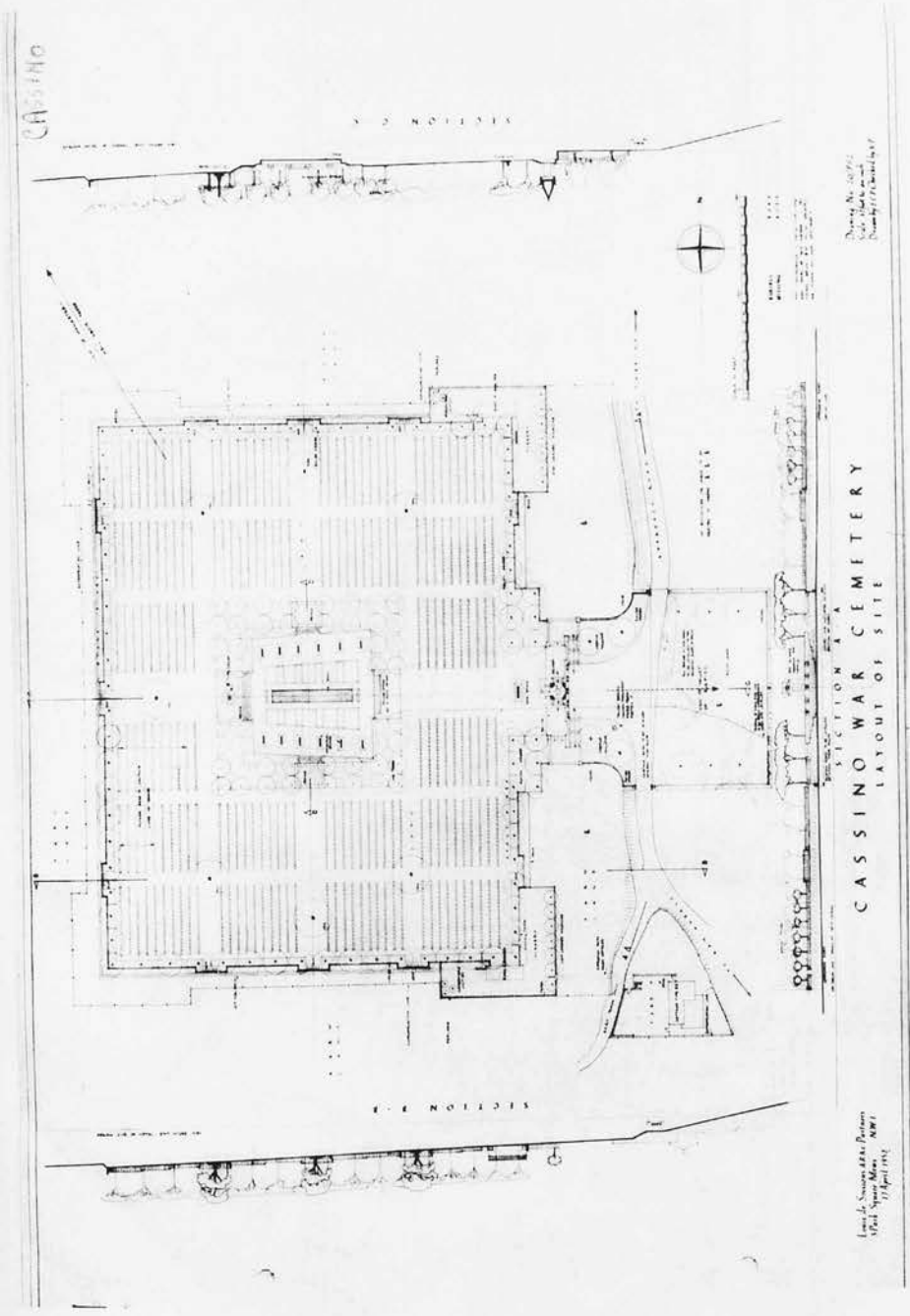


The cemetery more recently (2).

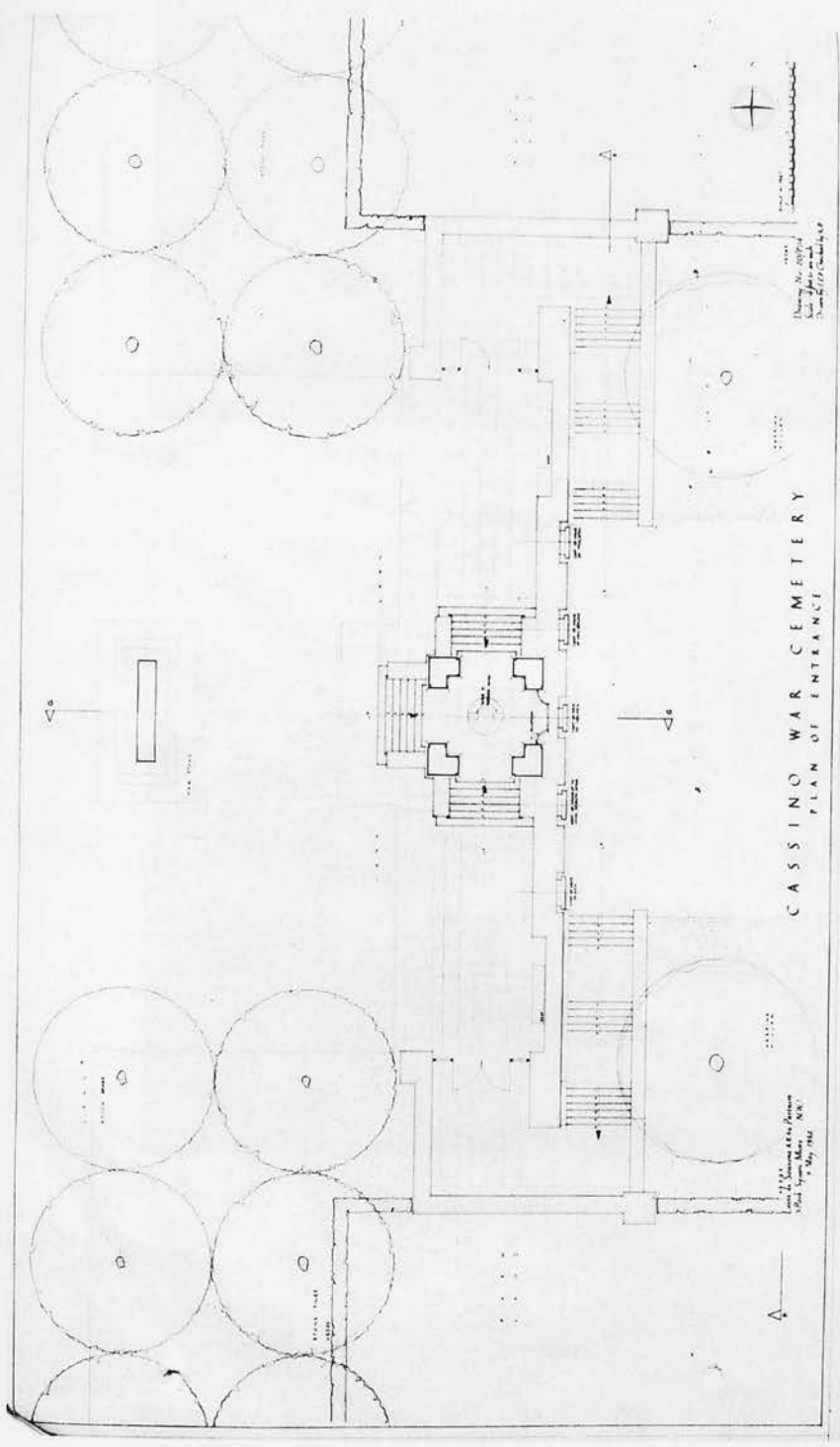
Figures 38-45: Cassino War Cemetery



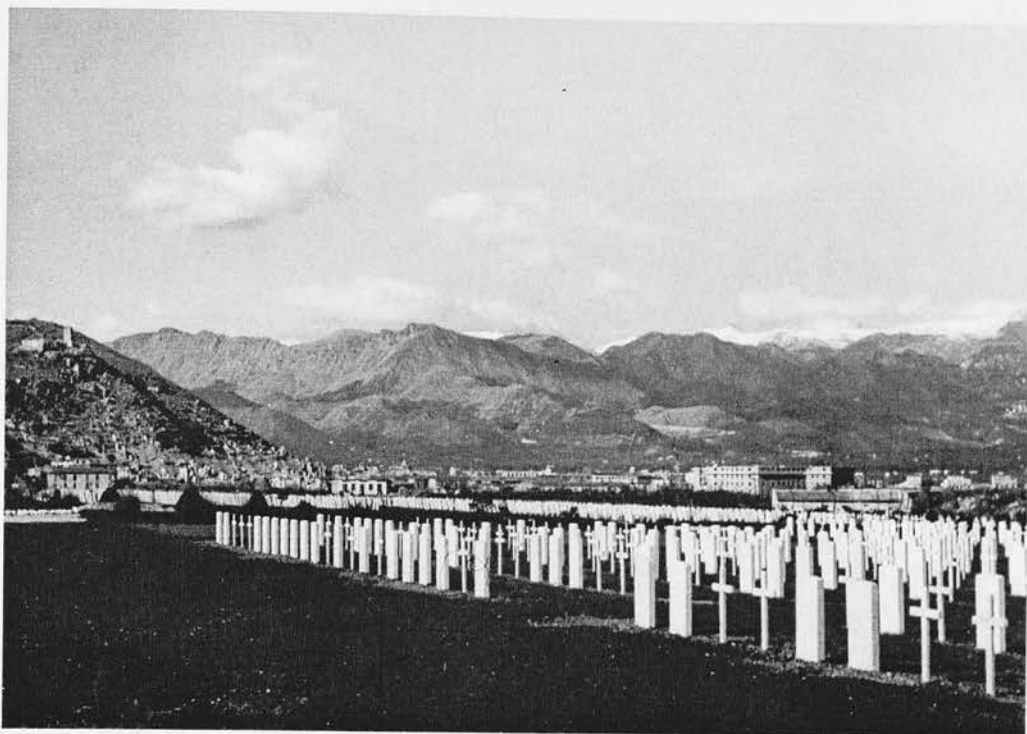
July 1948.



de Soissons's plan (1).



de Soissons's plan (2).



The cemetery in transition (1).



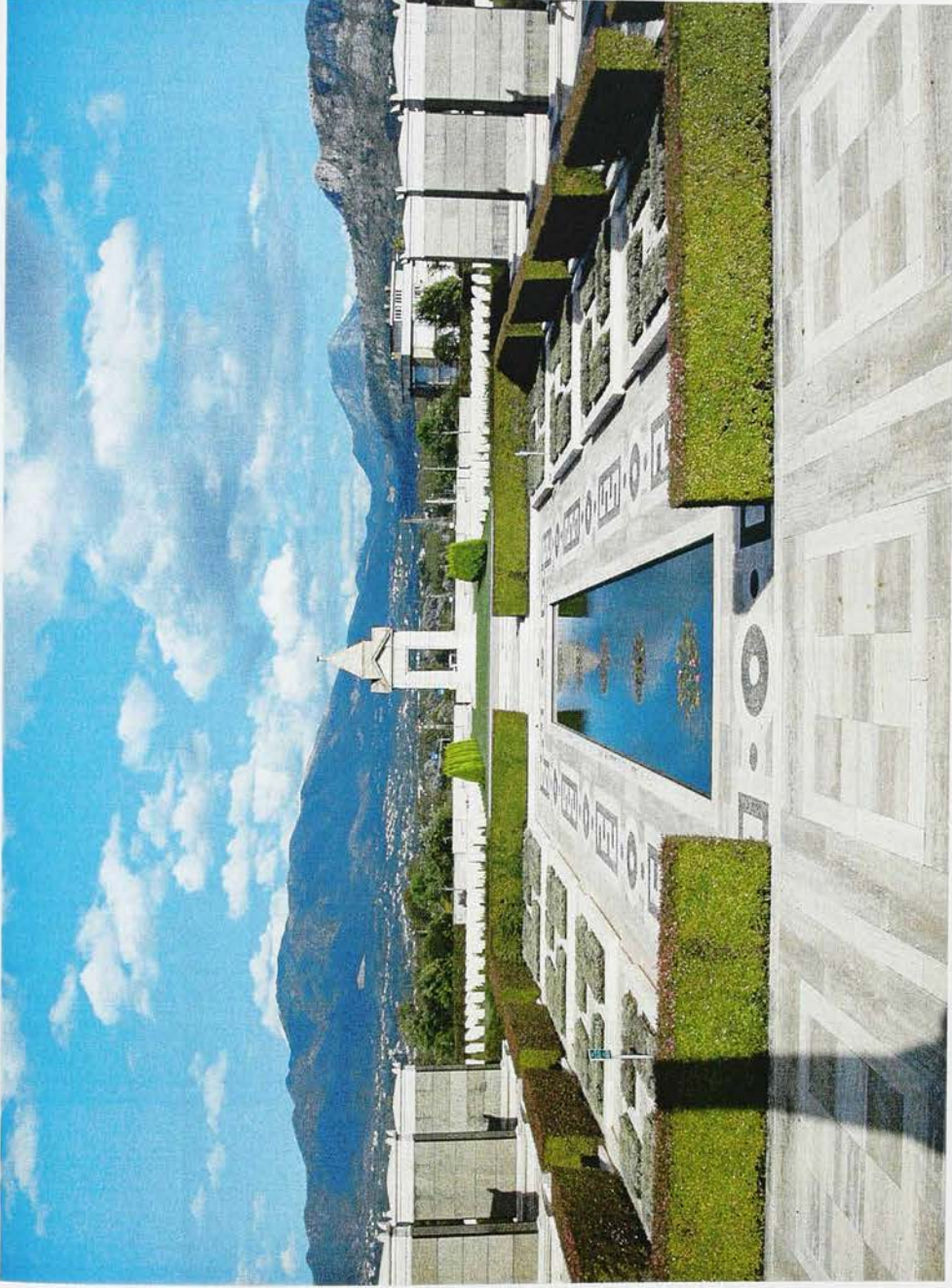
The cemetery in transition (2), January 1956.



The inauguration ceremony.

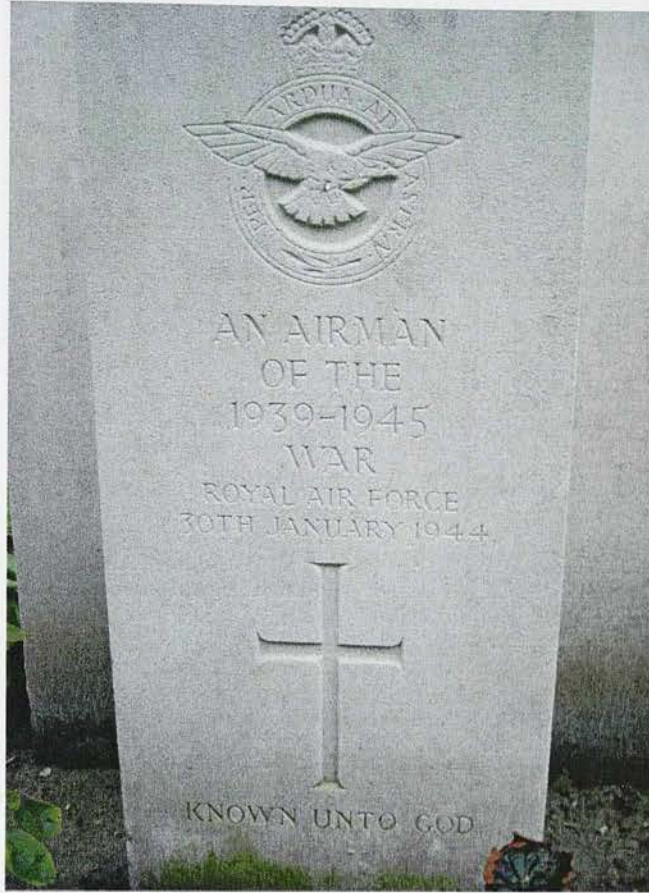


Alexander inspects the Cassino Memorial at the inauguration ceremony.



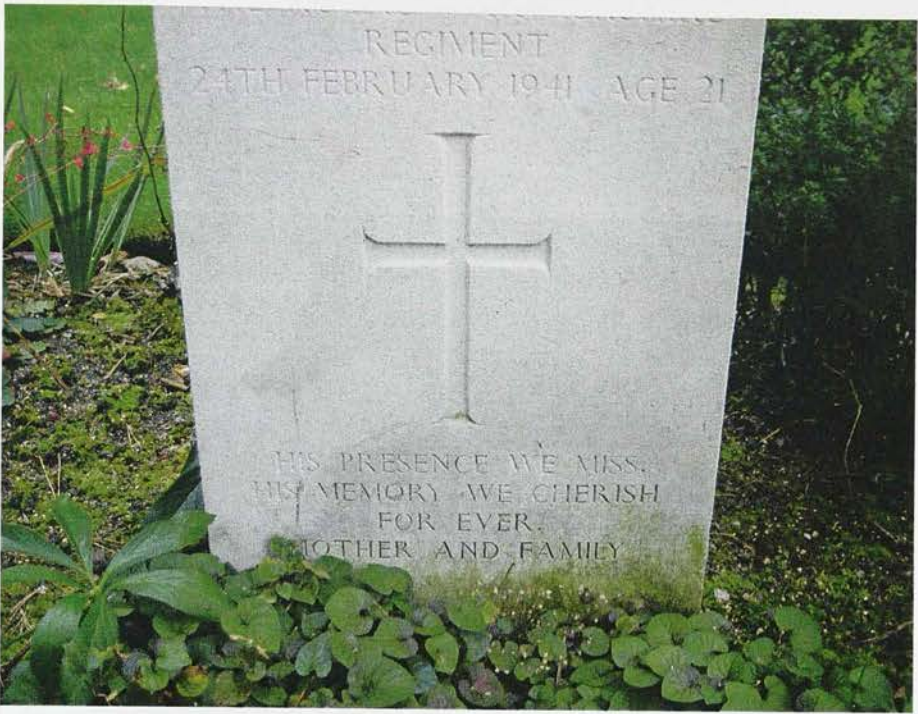
Cassino War Cemetery and Memorial.

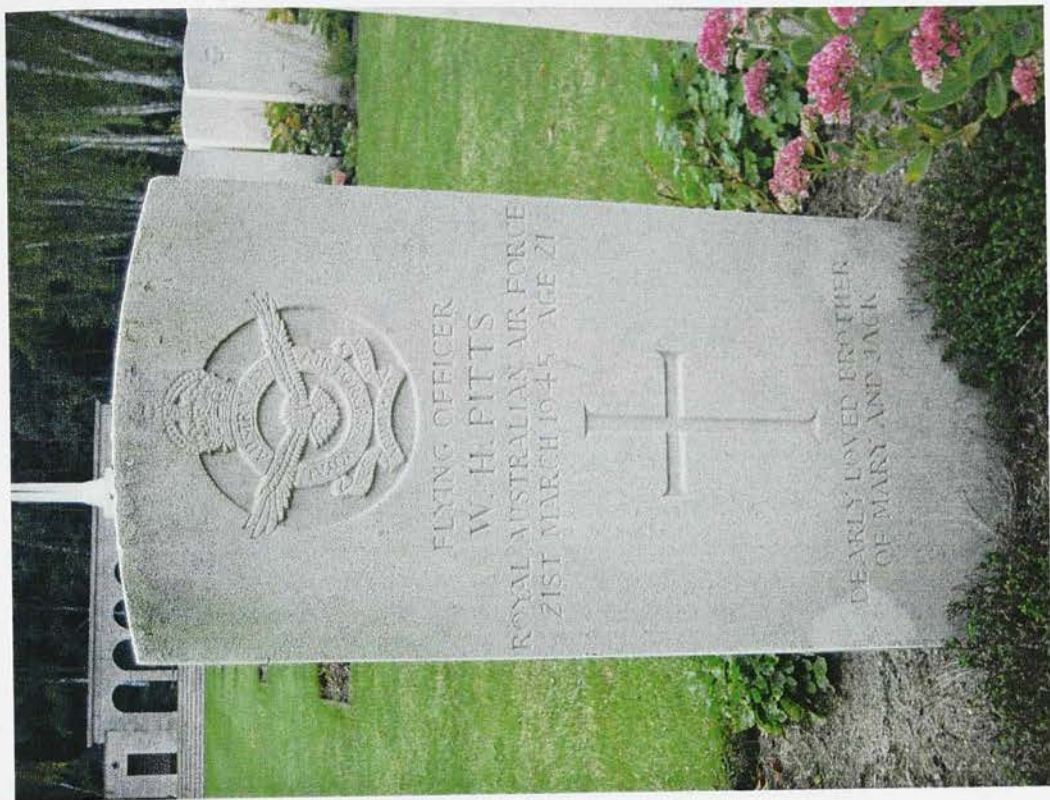
Figures 46-61: Berlin 1939-1945 War Cemetery (Formerly Heerstrasse War Cemetery)

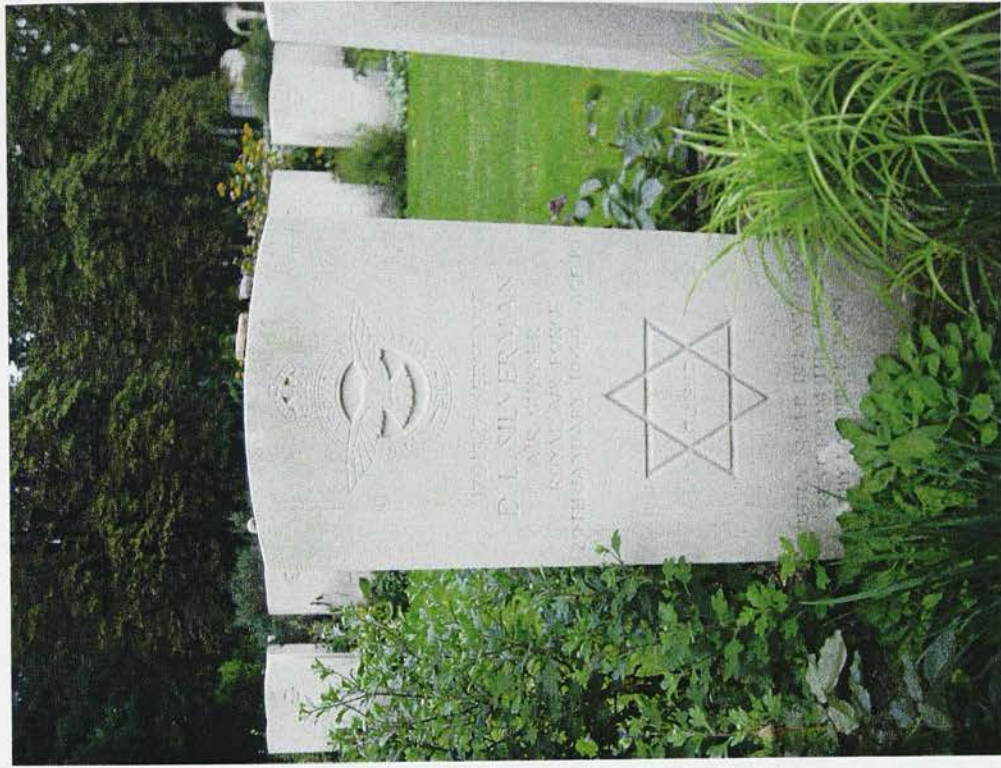
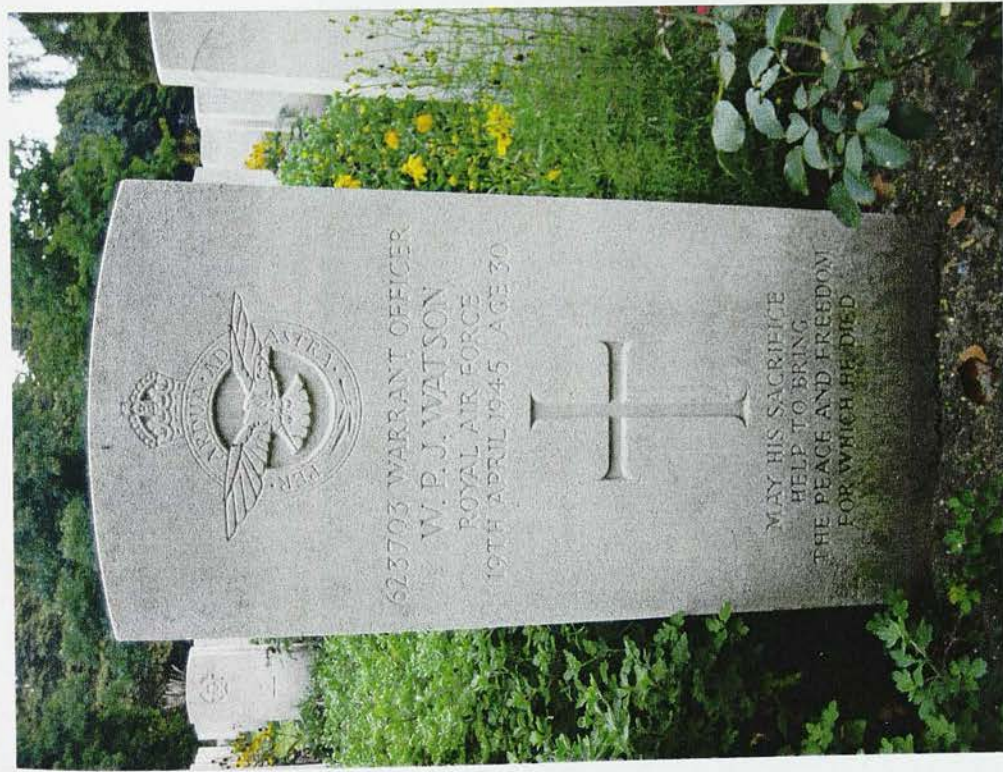


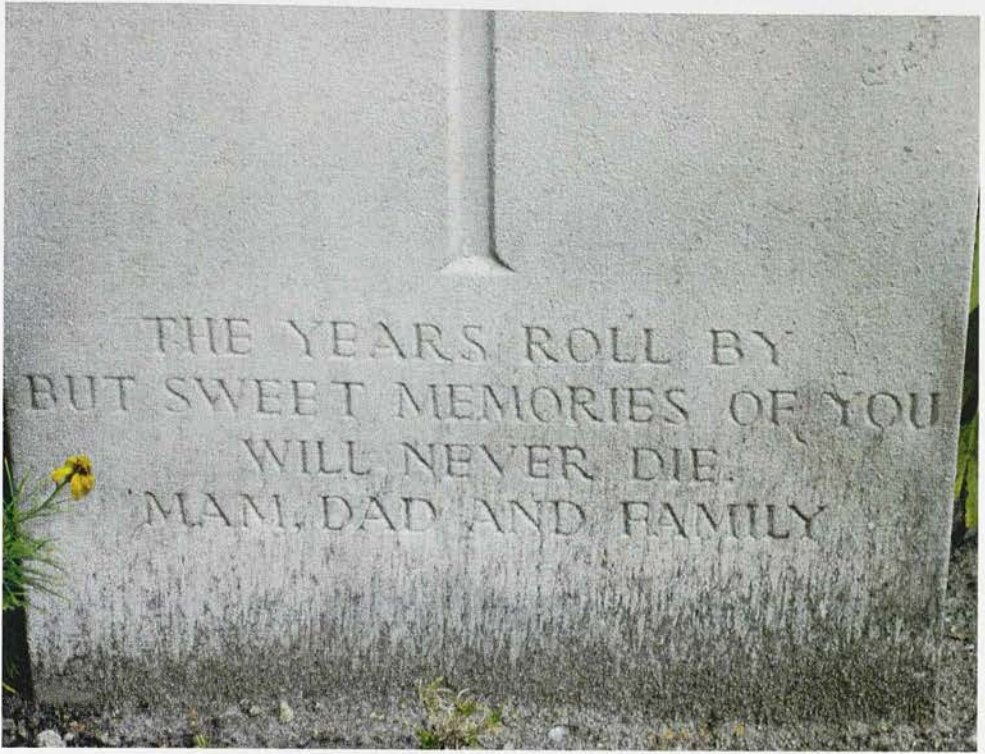














(Photographs: the Author)

Figure 62



Durnbach War Cemetery, Germany. Where the remains of servicemen could not be separated and individually identified, they were buried together and the headstones placed side-by-side. See, for example, the eleven headstones in the foreground. Durnbach contains many such clusters of graves, filled with the remains of air force personnel.

## Chapter Seven

### Visiting the Dead: Pilgrimages to British Second World War Graves

- The Prospect of Consolation

In the House of Commons in April 1945, Winston Churchill was asked for an assurance that Britons would be able to visit war graves overseas after the cessation of hostilities, and whether the government intended to provide funds for this purpose. He replied that careful consideration would be given to these matters, but at a later date.<sup>1</sup> There were two principal reasons for the prime minister to be non-committal. First, the government knew of the continuing demand for provisions and accommodation in the areas containing battlefield cemeteries, and that to allow British civilians into these regions in the near future would exacerbate an already difficult situation.<sup>2</sup> Second, it did not want to devote ships and vehicles to transporting war graves pilgrims while demobilised servicemen, displaced persons and essential goods needed urgent carriage.<sup>3</sup>

These considerations determined the official attitude towards war graves pilgrimages over the following months. For example, when Rosanna Norman of Bournemouth wrote to the War Office in the summer to ask when it ‘would be possible to go over to Normandy to visit the graves of relatives’, an official replied

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<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 409 HC, DEB 5S, (London: HMSO, 1945), p. 1672. See also *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 403 HC, DEB 5S, (London: HMSO, 1944), p. 931.

<sup>2</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, War Office to Commander 1 Airborne Division, 3 October 1945; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Clode to Mr Woods, 18 January 1946. (The name of the officer commanding 1 Airborne Division is not known.)

<sup>3</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, War Office to Commander 1 Airborne Division, 3 October 1945; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Clode to Mr Woods, 18 January 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Internal Memorandum, 25 February 1946.

that ‘transport and other difficulties’ precluded her being given a definite answer.<sup>4</sup> The commander of 1 Airborne Division also was sent a version of this standard reply when he enquired in the autumn about the possibility of organising a trip to Arnhem for relatives of men killed there.<sup>5</sup> The Air Ministry, meanwhile, simply informed prospective pilgrims that exit visas were required for overseas travel and that these were not granted to civilians for the purpose of visiting military cemeteries.<sup>6</sup>

Not until exit visas were abolished later in 1945 did the subject of war graves pilgrimages become a matter for debate in government and military circles.<sup>7</sup> War Office and Air Ministry officials became concerned that as there was no longer anything preventing Britons from travelling to non-military zones on the Continent – effectively all of western Europe excluding Germany – visitors to war graves might witness the handling of human remains, or think that the incomplete state of the battlefield cemeteries reflected a lack of concern for the dead.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, it was resolved to draw as little attention as possible to the subject of war graves pilgrimages in the hope of deferring them until the graves services and the IWGC had completed their tasks.<sup>9</sup>

It was misguided to think that public interest in the matter could be thus contained. For thousands of Britons who grieved for servicemen buried on foreign battlefields, the prospect of visiting the grave of a relative or friend, and there finding

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<sup>4</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Norman to War Office, 18 July 1945; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Courtown to Norman, 8 August 1945.

<sup>5</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Commander 1 Airborne Division to DGRE, 12 September 1945; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, War Office to Commander 1 Airborne Division, 3 October 1945.

<sup>6</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, IWGC to Passport and Permit Office, 30 May 1945; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, J. W. Stafford to IWGC, 9 June 1945; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Courtown to Captain F. Tyrrell, 26 June 1945; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Mr Woods to Captain Turner, 16 January 1946.

<sup>7</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Mr Woods to Captain Turner, 16 January 1946.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Clode to Mr Woods, 18 January 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Internal Memorandum, 25 February 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, McNair Memorandum, 26 March 1946; *Daily Telegraph*, 8 April 1947.

<sup>9</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Clode to Mr Woods, 18 January 1946.

consolation, was a sustaining hope. Many of the bereaved saw such a trip as central to the mourning process and to achieving some kind of catharsis. It was, therefore, unsurprising that over the winter of 1945-46, ministers frequently were questioned by MPs about what financial and logistical help the government would afford their constituents in undertaking pilgrimages.<sup>10</sup> In reply to one of these enquiries, J. J. Lawson, the Secretary of State for War, declared that no assistance could yet be provided and that continuing transport difficulties would exclude anything being done for this purpose for at least six months.<sup>11</sup> While the position adopted by the government did not affect those Britons who could afford to journey overseas, and who were content to arrange visits to graves themselves, for the majority of the bereaved it was unsatisfactory since travel in post-war Europe was an expensive and difficult undertaking. As Ware observed in a letter to McNair at the time, 'there may be serious trouble if some steps are not taken immediately to examine the question [of government assistance for pilgrimages] and to decide on some public pronouncement.'<sup>12</sup>

- Action and Inaction

The subject was discussed in the War Office in the early spring. Those involved in the deliberations generally agreed on the need for the government to help civilians wanting to visit war graves, but were aware that it lacked the resources to oversee the

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<sup>10</sup> For examples, see *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 415 HC, DEB 5S, (London: HMSO, 1945), p. 1239; *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 419 HC, DEB 5S, pp. 798-9; *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 421 HC, DEB 5S, (London: HMSO, 1946), p. 297.

<sup>11</sup> *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 419 HC, DEB 5S, pp. 369-70.

<sup>12</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Ware to McNair, 28 February 1946.

provision of any such aid.<sup>13</sup> This recognition prompted recollections of post-First World War practice when the government had provided some money and instituted other measures to facilitate pilgrimages, but had devolved their administration to reputable voluntary organisations.<sup>14</sup> One mandarin recalled this arrangement had worked well, not least because the organisations concerned had been given the time-consuming task of assessing who among the bereaved needed financial assistance to travel abroad.<sup>15</sup> McNair favoured adopting a similar system and in March he proposed that an inter-departmental committee, comprised of War Office, Air Ministry, Admiralty, Ministry of War Transport, Treasury and Foreign Office representatives, be established immediately to consider what assistance could be afforded, with a view to announcing this to placate the war bereaved.<sup>16</sup>

In the meantime, Jennie Laurel Adamson, a Labour MP whose younger son had been killed while serving with the RAF in 1944, raised the subject directly with Clement Attlee:

[v]arious Government Commissions are now abroad on official business and all expenses are paid by the State and I think that the time has come when a certain measure of consideration should be extended to the bereaved to visit, under an organised scheme, the last resting places of those who gave their lives in the country's cause. In my official capacity it may be that I should experience little difficulty in visiting my own son's grave but I feel that I would not be justified in taking advantage of a privilege which is denied to others. It is, of course, my natural desire to make the journey as soon as possible but I cannot do so in the present absence of a scheme applicable to all other wives and parents. May I, therefore, recommend for your sympathetic consideration the setting up of an organisation which could deal with this matter, with a view to securing that visits will be authorised at a cost which will not cause

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<sup>13</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Internal Memorandum, 21 February 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Internal Memorandum, 25 February 1946.

<sup>14</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Internal Memorandum, 25 February 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Ware to McNair, 28 February 1946.

<sup>15</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Internal Memorandum, 25 February 1946.

<sup>16</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, McNair Memorandum, 26 March 1946.

hardship to the large majority of the people concerned and that all necessary facilities will be afforded to them.<sup>17</sup>

The prime minister, who previously had not expressed a direct interest in the pilgrimage issue, requested that his ministers, including Lawson, look into the matter.<sup>18</sup>

Other developments at this time presaged the need for government action.

First, several independent travel agencies and touring associations announced they would conduct trips to cemeteries in north-west Europe from the summer. This drew attention to official inaction in this regard.<sup>19</sup> Second, articles and letters began to appear in national newspapers about certain civilian organisations on the Continent, such as the *Federation du Calvados de l'Association France-Grande-Bretagne* and the Netherlands War Graves Committee (NWGC), which were tending war graves.<sup>20</sup>

As a correspondent explained to readers of the *Manchester Guardian*, the purpose of the latter organisation was to ensure that:

every Allied grave in Holland is looked after, not as part of a big, semi-official scheme but by the efforts of individuals who will make themselves responsible for single graves. The individuals themselves, whenever possible, will get in touch with the families of the dead men, send them pictures of the graves and their surroundings, tell them what is being done to care for the graves, and later, when it becomes possible for civilians to travel in numbers to Holland, will give hospitality to parties of relatives coming to visit the individual graves for which they care. There has been no lack of volunteers for the committee's work; 12,000 of the graves at Margraten, for instance, have already been adopted by individuals, and the rest are cared for by school children. Volunteers are still coming in.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Adamson to Attlee, 10 May 1946; David Doughan, 'Janet Laurel Adamson' in Matthew and Harrison (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Volume 1, pp. 284-5.

<sup>18</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, J. M. Addis to A. C. W. Drew, 14 May 1946.

<sup>19</sup> *Daily Mail*, 23 May 1946; *News Chronicle*, 23 May 1946; *Sunday Pictorial*, 26 May 1946.

<sup>20</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 10 June 1946; *The Times*, 10 June 1946; *Daily Mirror*, 14 June 1946; *Daily Herald*, 17 June 1946. *Federation du Calvados de l'Association France-Grande-Bretagne* translates as the Calvados Federation of the France-Great Britain Association.

<sup>21</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 8 May 1946.

As news spread of these acts of care, the public was quick to express its appreciation. One bereaved father, whose son was buried at Arnhem, declared that: '[t]hose of us who are anxiously awaiting the time when we can visit the graves of our sons owe a deep debt of gratitude to the children of Arnhem for the loving care they are bestowing upon the graves of our dear ones.'<sup>22</sup>

Despite the growing demand for action, the committee proposed by McNair to consider the provision of government assistance for war graves pilgrimages had not been formed by the summer.<sup>23</sup> As Clode explained to an Air Ministry counterpart in July, in the previous month the War Office had decided 'that it was too early to do anything in the matter and that it would be reviewed again at the end of the summer.'<sup>24</sup> He added: '[i]n this case it is doubtful if any decision will be taken before the autumn. By then, the spate of enquiries will probably have fallen as the weather for visits abroad will not be so good.'<sup>25</sup> This stance bothered the Air Ministry, which was anxious to alleviate the pressure being exerted upon it by the bereaved and by service associations.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, Slessor was concerned that the Air Ministry and the War Office were being duplicitous in discouraging some civilians from visiting war graves while advising others 'that although no official organised arrangements have been made facilities can be obtained through travel agencies.'<sup>27</sup> As he remarked in August to O'Connor, his War Office counterpart: 'I feel that this sort of approach is likely to lay us open to sharp and justifiable

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<sup>22</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 15 July 1946. See also *Daily Telegraph*, 11 July 1946.

<sup>23</sup> See *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 423 HC, DEB 5S, (London: HMSO, 1946), p. 310.

<sup>24</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Clode to E. Cowan, 16 July 1946.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, E. Cowan to Clode, 12 July 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Beckess to Clode, 1 August 1946.

<sup>27</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Slessor to O'Connor, 23 August 1946.

criticism, particularly in view of the previous references to the subject in the House [of Commons]'.<sup>28</sup>

In the hope that an official war graves visits scheme could be made operational by the spring of 1947 if they acted promptly, Slessor and O'Connor resolved to form an inter-departmental committee to consider its implementation.<sup>29</sup> However, the ostensibly simple task of convening this advisory body soon became a palaver. It was accepted that its leadership should be provided by the War Office, but no army department was willing to host its meetings or to provide its chairman and secretary, primarily out of concern that to do so would beget additional and more demanding work in the future.<sup>30</sup> Thus commenced an extended period of squabbling during which time senior War Office authorities argued that their section was ill-equipped to sponsor the advisory body.<sup>31</sup>

- The First Pilgrimage

While the War Office was embroiled in this debate, the Airborne Forces Security Fund organised and led, independently of the government, the first large pilgrimage of British civilians to the graves of the Second World War dead. In September 1946, 200 pilgrims, all of whom had a connection to the First Airborne Division, travelled to Arnhem at the invitation of the Dutch government to mark the anniversary of the

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, O'Connor to Slessor, 29 August 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Slessor to O'Connor, 9 September 1946.

<sup>30</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, McNair Memorandum, 26 March 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, O'Connor to Slessor, 29 August 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Clode Minute, 4 November 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Holbrook Minute, 13 November 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, ACS Minute, 19 November 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Internal Memorandum, 27 November 1946.

<sup>31</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Holbrook Minute, 13 November 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, ACS Minute, 19 November 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Internal Memorandum, 27 November 1946.

engagement fought there in 1944.<sup>32</sup> The visitors, who were billeted where possible with local families that had aided British servicemen during the battle, attended a civic commemoration ceremony on the banks of the Rhine River, and Anglican and Roman Catholic services conducted in Arnhem cemetery in the presence of Queen Wilhelmina and 5000 local people.<sup>33</sup>

While these were significant occasions – it was particularly moving that so many Dutch civilians braved very poor weather to attend the ceremonies at the cemetery – for many of the pilgrims they were a prelude to what was most important to them: standing by the graves of their next-of-kin.<sup>34</sup> Mr and Mrs Baskeyfield of Stoke-on-Trent had journeyed to Holland for this reason. However, they failed to find the burial place of their son, John, who had been awarded the Victoria Cross posthumously for singlehandedly defending a bridge against German tanks. Mr Baskeyfield lamented: '[m]y wife and I were informed officially that our son was buried here at Arnhem. But tonight we have been told that his name is not among the records of those buried here.'<sup>35</sup> 'We are distressed beyond words', he continued.<sup>36</sup> 'The authorities here say that they will do their best to clear up the mystery and find out where our son is buried, but that is no comfort to us at the moment. We have had a wasted journey and a most bitter disappointment.'<sup>37</sup>

Other pilgrims were more fortunate in that they found what they sought. Among the many wives and mothers on the Arnhem pilgrimage was Lylie Gronert

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<sup>32</sup> *Twenty-eighth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 13; *Manchester Guardian*, 23 August 1946; *The Times*, 16 September 1946; *Daily Mail*, 18 September 1946.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* A later pilgrim to Arnhem commented: '[o]f the kindness extended to my wife, my son's fiancée and myself I cannot sufficiently express my appreciation. The hospitality was at times almost embarrassing.' See *Yorkshire Post*, 26 June 1947.

<sup>34</sup> *Twenty-eighth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 13; *Daily Mail*, 18 September 1946.

<sup>35</sup> *Daily Mail*, 18 September 1946.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* See also *Daily Telegraph*, 10 September 1946.

from Cornwall. The *Daily Mail* reported that she ‘found the place where, under closely blooming dahlias and glowing petunias, lay her twin sons, John and Claude – both paratroopers who ... died side by side and were buried together. “This is all I came to see,” she commented, adding “[n]ow I can rest.”’<sup>38</sup>

The general success of this trip to Arnhem, coupled with the announcement made later in the autumn that the Dutch people intended to use the proceeds raised from their ‘Poppy Day’ to pay for impoverished Britons to visit the war graves of their next-of-kin in Holland, further highlighted the tardiness of the British government in affording its citizens such opportunities.<sup>39</sup> There was increasing impatience at its inaction in this regard.<sup>40</sup> For example, frustration among the bereaved led to the formation of the National War Grave Visit Association Fraternity. In December its General Secretary, W. E. Bennett, wrote to the Foreign Secretary:

we ask your help and assistance in this our ‘Sacred Cause’ ... Most of us ‘Working Class People[.]’ who cannot afford to visit our loved ones [sic] Graves Overseas, and with no help forthcoming from ‘Our Government’ for whom most of us Believed in. It must strike those who are fortunate enough to have their loved ones returned from war Safely that there are others less fortunate and who’s [sic] heartbreak this Christmas is a ‘Vacant Chair[.]’ We have one here and the best son in the World is lost to us for ever with no pension, no mention, and no thought from his Government for whom he fought in the P.B.I. [Poor Bloody Infantry] and voted for ... [w]e want our first Party to leave here 1947 Spring possibly France, Italy, Holland etc: and ask your subscription and as Foreign Secretary help in foreign countries to where we might send Parties.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *Daily Mail*, 18 September 1946.

<sup>39</sup> *The Times*, 1 November 1946.

<sup>40</sup> See *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 427 HC, DEB 5S, pp. 11, 20; *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 428 HC, DEB 5S, (London: HMSO, 1946), p. 113.

<sup>41</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Bennett to Aneurin Bevan, 22 December 1946. Bennett intended his letter to go to Ernest Bevin, the Foreign Secretary, but he addressed it to Aneurin Bevan, the health and housing minister. The underlining is Bennett’s.

Bennett received a reply from the Foreign Office in January, informing him that his letter would be considered by the Interdepartmental Committee on Relatives' Visits to War Cemeteries (ICRV), this body finally having been formed under the direction of the Army Council the previous month.<sup>42</sup>

- The ICRV

The ICRV convened for the first time in February 1947.<sup>43</sup> In attendance were officials from the War Office, the Admiralty, the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Transport, and the Control Office for Germany and Austria, as well as Beckess and McNair, representing the Air Ministry and the IWGC respectively.<sup>44</sup> Chaired by Major General V. Blomfield, the director of the DGRE, the inaugural meeting began with those present affirming the need for the government to provide some form of assistance to civilians wishing to visit war graves.<sup>45</sup> The ICRV members then expressed support for implementing a revised version of the scheme adopted between 1921 and 1923 when the government had reimbursed seven-eighths of the money, to a maximum of £25,000, expended by each of the Salvation Army, the Church Army, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and St Barnabas's

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<sup>42</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, ACS Minute, 4 December 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Army Council Memorandum, December 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Foreign Office to Bennett, 17 January 1947; TNA, PRO WO 163/313, ICRV Meeting Minutes, 14 February 1947; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, ICRV Draft Report, March 1947; *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 433 HC, DEB 5S, (London: HMSO, 1947), p. 100.

<sup>43</sup> TNA, PRO WO 163/313, ICRV Meeting Minutes, 14 February 1947.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* McNair took a job with the IWGC after leaving the War Office.

<sup>45</sup> TNA, PRO WO 163/313, ICRV Meeting Minutes, 14 February 1947; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Army Council Memorandum, December 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Meeting Minutes, 29 January 1947. The ACS provided the ICRV secretary. See TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, ICRV Draft Report, March 1947.

Hostels on transporting persons of limited financial means to First World War cemeteries.<sup>46</sup>

After a second meeting in March, at which detail was added to the principles agreed previously, the ICRV submitted its recommendations to the armed service ministers in May.<sup>47</sup> The most important of these was the proposal not to provide assistance to persons wishing to visit graves in the Middle East, Africa, and Mediterranean countries other than Italy because it would be particularly difficult to arrange accommodation and transport for them once there, and inconvenient to ship civilians to these regions for at least eighteen months.<sup>48</sup> The committee members acknowledged that it was iniquitous to discriminate against people on the basis of where their relative had been killed, but believed that 'equal treatment for all is quite impossible.'<sup>49</sup> In any case, it was thought 'that the number of relatives excluded by this recommendation will, in practice, be very small, since there can be few who would qualify for assistance who at the same time could face with equanimity the domestic upheaval, and loss of wages, which would result from a long absence from this country.'<sup>50</sup>

The ICRV recommended that voluntary organisations be made responsible for subjecting applicants to means tests to determine whether they required a monetary subsidy in order to travel abroad, and for ensuring that no person was aided

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<sup>46</sup> TNA, PRO WO 163/313, ICRV Meeting Minutes, 14 February 1947; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Report on Post-First World War Pilgrimage Scheme, circa February 1947. The £25,000 cap had applied to each of the voluntary organisations with the exception of St Barnabas's Hostels, which was given a £5000 reimbursement limit.

<sup>47</sup> TNA, PRO WO 163/313, ICRV Meeting Minutes, 28 March 1947; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, ICRV Draft Report, March 1947; TNA, PRO FO 369/3976, ICRV Report, 9 May 1947.

<sup>48</sup> TNA, PRO FO 369/3976, ICRV Report, 9 May 1947.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* See also *Daily Telegraph*, 8 April 1947.

<sup>50</sup> TNA, PRO FO 369/3976, ICRV Report, 9 May 1947.

in this way more than once.<sup>51</sup> It also proposed that financial assistance be made available for two persons to visit each grave, but on the proviso that they knew the person interred as either widow, widower, child, step-child, foster child, parent, step-parent, foster parent, sister, step-sister, adopted sister, brother, step-brother, adopted brother or grandparent. For pilgrimage purposes, the government would regard only those people who belonged to one of these categories as relatives of the war dead.<sup>52</sup>

- Parliamentary Questions

The week after the ICRV submitted its recommendations, Harry Truman, the United States president, declared that his government would pay for war graves pilgrimages for those Americans who had elected not to repatriate the remains of their next-of-kin.<sup>53</sup> It was reported in Britain that these trips, which would cost millions of dollars, were expected to begin within two years, after the United States administration had repatriated the bodies of 94,000 servicemen whose return had been requested by their families.<sup>54</sup>

It was in this context that Bellenger, the Secretary of State for War, was asked in the House of Commons in June 1947 if the government were ready to declare what assistance it would afford to civilians wanting to visit military cemeteries overseas. He replied that it was not.<sup>55</sup> Dissatisfied with this response,

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* It is thought that in 1949 it was agreed to class grandchildren as relations of the war dead. See TNA, PRO T 231/554, M. D. Montgomery to E. T. Ruddle, 26 January 1949; TNA, PRO T 231/554, E. T. Ruddle to M. D. Montgomery, 8 February 1949.

<sup>53</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 14 May 1947. See also *Manchester Guardian*, 14 May 1947.

<sup>54</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 14 May 1947. See also *Evening Standard*, 25 August 1947.

<sup>55</sup> *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 438 HC, DEB 5S, p. 1778. See also *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 433 HC, DEB 5S, p. 100; *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 436 HC, DEB 5S, (London: HMSO, 1947), pp. 72-3, 92-3; *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 437 HC, DEB 5S, (London: HMSO, 1947), pp. 1268-9; *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 438 HC, DEB 5S, p. 73; *Manchester Guardian*, 14 May 1947.

one MP demanded that Bellenger ‘get something done about this very important matter’.<sup>56</sup> Over the following weeks MPs from across the political spectrum continued to press the Secretary of State on the subject.<sup>57</sup>

In July Bellenger announced that the government, having considered the recommendations of the ICRV, would provide some aid to facilitate war graves visits, but not before the summer holiday season.<sup>58</sup> The lack of detail in this statement, and Bellenger’s subsequent refusal to specify when this help would be proffered, drew further criticism from MPs and calls for more immediate action. He replied that civilians were not yet permitted entry into the British Zone in Germany because of an ongoing lack of transport and accommodation in the region – a remark which caused one MP to observe that tourists were allowed into the American Zone – and that fairness dictated that the government not render assistance to any pilgrims until this situation changed.<sup>59</sup>

- Further Delays

Over the following weeks little was done to act on the ICRV recommendations.<sup>60</sup> For instance, it was decided to defer until the autumn consideration of the financial arrangements to be made between the government and the voluntary organisations

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<sup>56</sup> *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 438 HC, DEB 5S, pp. 425, 1778-9.

<sup>57</sup> *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 439 HC, DEB 5S, (London: HMSO, 1947), pp. 189-90, 207, 2008-9.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189; *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 440 HC, DEB 5S, (London: HMSO, 1947), p. 119.

<sup>59</sup> *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 440 HC, DEB 5S, pp. 1032-3. War graves pilgrims had also been allowed into the French Zone in Germany by this time. See also *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 443 HC, DEB 5S, (London: HMSO, 1947), p. 1521; *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 444 HC, DEB 5S, (London: HMSO, 1947), pp. 122-3.

<sup>60</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Martin Lindsay to Major John Freeman, 29 August 1947.

that would implement its pilgrimage scheme.<sup>61</sup> Then, as one of a series of measures designed to stabilise the British economy, in August the government announced a ban on private travel to places beyond the sterling area – effectively all non-Dominion and non-Commonwealth countries – in order to conserve supplies of foreign currencies after a run on the pound that month.<sup>62</sup>

This news sparked further protest from the bereaved. In September the *Daily Graphic* published the views of a woman who was identified only as a mother from the Isle of Wight:

I am only one of thousands who lost all personal happiness because of the war. But my case is typical. My elder son was burned to ashes in his tank, leading a night charge which got the 51<sup>st</sup> Highlanders through to avenge St. Valery ... when I wrote nearly two years later to the War Graves Commission asking if any arrangements were being made for relatives to go to the Normandy battlefields and cemeteries, I received a brusque circular letter saying that if I wished to see my son's grave I had better apply to a Tourist Agency. I suppose I could have done this and gone with a gay crowd of tourists. I never tried ... This summer some friends who were doing a motor tour of France took a snap for me. The same wooden crosses without inscription, the grass uncut and the next cross leaning over sideways ... The point is that although arrangements can be made for visitors from America to Normandy, none can be made for us who live but a few miles away.<sup>63</sup>

Another aggrieved civilian, C. B. A. Greenfield, informed Treasury mandarins that he and other bereaved should, on compassionate grounds, 'be allowed up to £35 [in foreign currency] per annum per person expressly for the purpose of visiting the cemeteries in which our beloved lie.'<sup>64</sup> This, he argued, was the least the

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<sup>61</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Meeting Minutes, 20 October 1947. See also TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, War Office to Church of Scotland Committee, 14 July 1947; *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 441 HC, DEB 5S, pp. 139-40, 241.

<sup>62</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Meeting Minutes, 20 October 1947; *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 443 HC, DEB 5S, pp. 267-8; *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 444 HC, DEB 5S, p. 43.

<sup>63</sup> *Daily Graphic*, 24 September 1947.

<sup>64</sup> TNA, PRO T 231/554, Greenfield to Treasury, 12 September 1947.

government could do, having denied its citizens the opportunity to repatriate their dead.

- A Long-awaited Announcement

The view that exemptions should be made for the war bereaved gathered support throughout the autumn and winter, and in January 1948 the government consented to overseas war graves visits on the basis that civilians be permitted only £10 worth of foreign currency for this purpose and not more than once each year, and that Germany remained closed to them.<sup>65</sup> This development prompted the Labour administration finally to settle the details of the official pilgrimage scheme. It determined that the British Legion, the Church Army, the Church of Scotland Committee on Hut and Canteen Work for His Majesty's Forces, the Salvation Army, and the YMCA would lead parties of the war bereaved to north-west Europe from the summer, with the government to defray seven-eighths of the cost, up to a pre-determined maximum amount, for those who could not afford to pay their own way.<sup>66</sup> A travel document of temporary validity that was cheaper and easier to obtain than a regular passport would be made available to all relatives who joined these trips, with the voluntary organisations obtaining these, as well as foreign currency,

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<sup>65</sup> TNA, PRO T 231/554, E. C. Shee to J. M. Tipper, 14 November 1947; TNA, PRO T 231/554, J. R. Griffin to Mr Hunter, 20 November 1947; TNA, PRO T 231/554, F. C. Barker to O. J. Hubbert, 26 April 1948; *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 446 HC, DEB 5S, (London: HMSO, 1948), pp. 21-2, 116; *British Legion Journal*, 27, 11 (1947), 247.

<sup>66</sup> TNA, PRO FO 369/3976, ICRV Report, 9 May 1947; TNA, PRO T 231/554, Internal Memorandum, 13 October 1947; TNA, PRO T 231/554, E. C. Shee Memorandum, 26 January 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Meeting Minutes, 20 October 1947; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Meeting Minutes, 18 February 1948; *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 449 HC, DEB 5S, pp. 774-5; *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 475 HC, DEB 5S, (London: HMSO, 1950), p. 39; *British Legion Journal*, 28, 1 (1948), 12; *British Legion Journal*, 28, 2 (1948), 22; *British Legion Journal*, 28, 3 (1948), 41; *British Legion Journal*, 28, 5 (1948), 87; *The Church Army 66<sup>th</sup> Annual Report*, (London, 1948), p. 8.

accommodation and transport, on their behalf.<sup>67</sup> The pilgrimages would also be open to those whom the government did not class as relatives of the war dead, but these visitors would be required to secure their own foreign exchange and would not be eligible for the special travel document.<sup>68</sup>

With the parameters of government assistance thus established, Emanuel Shinwell, the Secretary of State for War, announced in April 1948 that from the following month civilians could apply directly to one of the voluntary organisations to make a war graves pilgrimage to France, Belgium or Holland. In doing so they were to state their name and address, the location of the cemetery they wanted to visit, and the dates when they could travel.<sup>69</sup> He made it clear that financial assistance would be given where necessary – the cost of these three or four day pilgrimages was expected to vary between £12 and £17 depending on destination – and that this official scheme would eventually be expanded to include other western European countries.<sup>70</sup>

- The Problem of Germany

The decision to exclude the British Zone in Germany from the first stage of the scheme concerned Shinwell, as nearly three years had passed since the end of the war and no British civilian pilgrims yet had visited the region. The War Office had wanted to allow at least a limited number of the bereaved to travel there in order to

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<sup>67</sup> TNA, PRO FO 369/3976, ICRV Report, 9 May 1947; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Meeting Minutes, 18 February 1948; TNA, PRO T 231/554, British Legion Form; *British Legion Journal*, 28, 9 (1948), 175; *Glasgow Herald*, 17 April 1948. It is thought that the £10 limit on foreign exchange each individual was allowed for war graves visits was later increased. See TNA, PRO T 231/554, Foreign Exchange Form, May 1949; TNA, PRO T 231/554, M. D. Montgomery Memorandum, 14 December 1949.

<sup>68</sup> TNA, PRO T 231/554, Foreign Exchange Form, May 1949; TNA, PRO T 231/554, M. D. Montgomery Memorandum, 14 December 1949.

<sup>69</sup> *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 449 HC, DEB 5S, p. 775.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 774-5; TNA, PRO T 231/554, British Legion Form; *Glasgow Herald*, 17 April 1948.

diffuse what had become a febrile political issue, but British authorities in Germany, with the concurrence of mandarins at the Foreign Office, had eventually opposed this out of concern that neither they nor a weak German economy could cope with an influx of visitors.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, these officials did not want civilians seeing cemeteries that were unfinished, particularly those where German-erected wartime grave markers had yet to be replaced, and thus it had been agreed to defer pilgrimages to the British Zone until 1949.<sup>72</sup>

However, public and political interest in the matter did not abate and, in July 1948, the government was forced to consider the issue anew.<sup>73</sup> It agreed to allow some relatives to visit war graves in the British Zone for a period in the autumn provided that they did not draw on local petrol and food supplies, stay in the region, travel by public transport, or venture more than fifty miles inside the border, stipulations which resulted in access being possible to six cemeteries only, all of which were in reasonable condition.<sup>74</sup> The five voluntary organisations responsible for administering the pilgrimage scheme agreed not to publicise these trips widely so

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<sup>71</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, BAOR Memorandum, 31 January 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Meeting Minutes, 18 February 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, BAOR to ACC Germany, circa February 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Foreign Office Telegram, 19 March 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, War Office Telegram, March 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, BAOR Telegram, circa early April 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Brigadier P. R. Antrobus to Vale, 29 April 1948; *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 446 HC, DEB 5S, pp. 21-2, 116; *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 448 HC, DEB 5S, (London: HMSO, 1948), pp. 1874-5.

<sup>72</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, BAOR Headquarters to DGRE, 7 June 1947; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, DGRE to War Office, 22 January 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, War Office Telegram, March 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, BAOR Telegram, circa early April 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, DGRE to British Legion, 22 April 1948; *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 449 HC, DEB 5S, p. 775.

<sup>73</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Brigadier P. R. Antrobus to Vale, 16 July 1948; *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 452 HC, DEB 5S, (London: HMSO, 1948), p. 49.

<sup>74</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Brigadier P. R. Antrobus to Vale, 16 July 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Meeting Notes, 22 July 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, H. A. Cridland to Catherine Edwards, 17 August 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Procedures for War Graves Visits.

that the few places available could be given to those people whom bereavement had rendered particularly emotionally unstable.<sup>75</sup>

- Towards the End

By July 1948 applications were being accepted for war graves visits to Luxembourg and Denmark, with Norway and Italy added to the official list of pilgrimage destinations by the following spring.<sup>76</sup> In June 1949 the restrictions on civilians entering the British Zone in Germany were abandoned, making large-scale war graves visits to this region feasible for the first time.<sup>77</sup> Immediately this news was announced, the British Legion received nearly 1000 applications from relatives wishing to travel to cemeteries in western Germany.<sup>78</sup>

In May 1950 the Labour government declared that the provision of public funds for war graves visits was to be reduced before ceasing completely on 31 March 1951.<sup>79</sup> For those people who hoped for government assistance to visit graves in the Middle East, Africa, and certain Mediterranean countries, this news was particularly

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<sup>75</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Meeting Notes, 22 July 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Meeting Notes, 26 July 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, H. A. Cridland to Catherine Edwards, 17 August 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Internal Memorandum, 28 October 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, Procedures for War Graves Visits.

<sup>76</sup> TNA, PRO T 231/554, British Legion Form; *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 459 HC, DEB 5S, (London: HMSO, 1949), p. 1015; *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 463 HC, DEB 5S, (London: HMSO, 1949), pp. 250-1, 1025-6; *British Legion Journal*, 28, 9 (1948), 175; *British Legion Journal*, 29, 2 (1949), 24; *Sunday Chronicle*, 30 May 1948.

<sup>77</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 55/60, Policy on Visits of Next-of-Kin, 1 July 1949; TNA, PRO AIR 55/59, Civil Labour Memorandum, 18 July 1949; *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 466 HC, DEB 5S, (London: HMSO, 1949), p. 83; *Manchester Guardian*, 3 June 1949; *News Chronicle*, 3 June 1949.

<sup>78</sup> *British Legion Journal*, 29, 7 (1949), 132; *Manchester Guardian*, 3 June 1949; *News Chronicle*, 3 June 1949. These pilgrimages began before RAF missing research operations had been completed. As one MRES officer noted in September: '[w]ork was suspended in the cemeteries covered by No. 2, M.R.G.R.S. on account of visits by next-of-kin sponsored by the British Legion.' See TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Number 4 MREU (Headquarters) Operations Record Book, September 1949.

<sup>79</sup> *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 474 HC, DEB 5S, (London: HMSO, 1950), p. 178. See also *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 475 HC, DEB 5S, pp. 38-9; *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 491 HC, DEB 5S, (London: HMSO, 1951), p. 37; *The Observer*, 10 December 1950.

disappointing.<sup>80</sup> Other bereaved, however, were less affected by the end of the official pilgrimage scheme. Its conclusion spurred the Dutch people to pledge even more money, through the auspices of the NWGC, to provide for Britons to visit the graves of their next-of-kin in Holland, while organisations such as the Airborne Forces Security Fund continued to assist the war bereaved to travel to north-west Europe.<sup>81</sup>

- Catharsis

For the tens of thousands of Britons who embarked on war graves pilgrimages, their journeys stirred varying emotions and satisfied different needs.<sup>82</sup> Some wished to see where relatives had been killed or to stand in their presence: one MP remarked that many people derive ‘an indefinable comfort in being able to go to that spot of ground which holds the remains of those whom one loves’.<sup>83</sup> Other bereaved wanted to satisfy themselves that the cemeteries in which their next-of-kin were interred were in good order and pleasing aesthetically. Mrs Branson of Northampton, who with her husband travelled to Italy on a British Legion pilgrimage, observed: ‘[t]he resting place of our loved one, our only child, is all that we could wish for; the

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<sup>80</sup> For example, see correspondence in CWGC, 2087.

<sup>81</sup> *Birmingham Post*, 17 August 1951; *Daily Mail*, 17 April 1952; *The Times*, 7 July 1954; *The Scotsman*, 15 September 1954. The British Legion also arranged for war graves pilgrimages under its own auspices after the end of the official scheme in March 1951. It later coordinated war graves visits to countries beyond the Continent. See *Thirty-fifth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 27; and files in TNA, PRO FO 371/138547.

<sup>82</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12462, British Legion to DGRE, 6 October 1948; TNA, PRO T 231/554, M. D. Montgomery Memorandum, 14 December 1949; *British Legion Journal*, 28, 9 (1948), 175, 180; *British Legion Journal*, 29, 2 (1949), 24; *British Legion Journal*, 29, 10 (1949), 194-5; *Twenty-ninth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 10; *Thirty-first Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 9; *Daily Telegraph*, 30 March 1949; *Daily Telegraph*, 1 June 1949; *Manchester Guardian*, 3 June 1949. It is not known exactly how many Britons made war graves visits, although it is known such visits were popular. By the beginning of October 1948, the British Legion alone had taken 4000 relatives on pilgrimages.

<sup>83</sup> *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 488 HC, DEB 5S, (London: HMSO, 1951), pp. 969-70; *Thirtieth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 9.

splendid way in which it is laid out and the growing of our own English flowers doesn't make it seem they are in quite such strange surroundings.'<sup>84</sup> Many pilgrims derived great consolation from these reminders of home, and from hearing that these links to Britain would be perpetuated. The relatives of seventy-five British airmen, who in 1950 visited Denmark at the invitation and expense of its government, were assured by the Danish Foreign Minister that the cemeteries at Copenhagen and Svino would remain English in character. In making this promise, he pledged also that his countrymen would 'keep and maintain those graves as if they held the remains of our own soldiers.'<sup>85</sup>

For those Britons whose next-of-kin had no known grave, travelling to where they were commemorated could be as important an act as visiting a grave, albeit rarely as cathartic. For example, more than 1500 relatives, the majority of whom were wives and mothers, attended the 1957 unveiling of the Hepworth-designed Dunkirk Memorial on which are inscribed the names of 4700 British servicemen who went missing during the Continental campaign of 1939-40.<sup>86</sup> Following the ceremony, many of the visitors searched the memorial for the name of their missing person, while others laid wreaths at its base. Although years had passed since their relatives had disappeared, some people collapsed with emotion, overwhelmed by the meaning of the occasion; the sense of finality.<sup>87</sup>

Rarely did time diminish the need for the bereaved to find consolation. Ten years after their son Jack, aged sixteen, had been killed in Normandy while serving

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<sup>84</sup> *British Legion Journal*, 29, 7 (1949), 125.

<sup>85</sup> CWGC, 3, Salvation Army Memorandum, 4 April 1950. See also *Sunday Express*, 20 November 1949; *The Times*, 26 November 1949; *Daily Telegraph*, 18 March 1950.

<sup>86</sup> *Thirty-eighth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 7; *Daily Telegraph*, 29 June 1957; *Daily Telegraph*, 1 July 1957; *The Times*, 1 July 1957; CWGC, Dunkirk Memorial.

<sup>87</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 1 July 1957; *The Times*, 1 July 1957.

with the Durham Light Infantry, Mr and Mrs Banks of Lancashire, accompanied by their daughter Jean, went to Jerusalem cemetery near Bayeux to visit his grave.<sup>88</sup>

Mrs Banks, who was dressed in black, had seldom travelled beyond the borders of her home county. The *News Chronicle* reported that as she placed red roses by Jack's headstone, 'the tears she had not shed since the War Office letter 10 years back found release.'<sup>89</sup> 'I can't say in words,' Mrs Banks said, 'what today has meant.'<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> *News Chronicle*, 12 July 1954; CWGC, Jerusalem War Cemetery (Chouain, France).

<sup>89</sup> *News Chronicle*, 12 July 1954.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

## Conclusion

### Reflections on the Burial of Second World War British Military Dead

- Retrospection

In August 1948 the outgoing director of the DGRE, Brigadier C. S. Vale, declared ‘that the Graves Service and especially the Graves Directorate have never been properly organised and staffed and that if hostilities occur in the future the whole question must be dealt with more effeciently [sic].’<sup>1</sup> That the AGS and the MRES were still at work more than three years after the end of hostilities in Europe was, he reasoned, evidence enough for this statement.<sup>2</sup> Vale’s observations immediately drew support from Blomfield, his predecessor at the DGRE and now the Director of Personal Services at the War Office, who observed: ‘[i]f we are to have an improvement in the organisation and method for the care of graves in the next war, now is the time to make preparations.’<sup>3</sup> ‘I do not think’, Blomfield added, ‘that the Graves Directorate .. had a fair “do” during the last war, and when I was appointed Director in 1946 I was told that the Directorate had always been the “Cinderella” of the War Office. Unfortunately they had, to a large extent, accepted this status.’<sup>4</sup> Soon after these comments were made, the War Office and the Air Ministry, in conjunction with the IWGC, began to review military burial policy and Second World War graves operations.

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<sup>1</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Vale Minute, 23 August 1948; *The Quarterly Army List: August 1948*, p. 15B.

<sup>2</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Vale Minute, 23 August 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Meeting Minutes, 9 September 1948.

<sup>3</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Blomfield Minute, 25 August 1948; *The Quarterly Army List: December 1948*, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Blomfield Minute, 25 August 1948.

- Policy and Culture

It was inevitable that the treatment of British military dead was beset by difficulties for burial policy lacked cohesion and instructive detail. Army and IWGC officials came to agree that '[t]he inadequacy and lack of clearness in reference to the Graves Service and its work in both F.S.R. I. [Field Service Regulations Volume I] and the F.S.P.B. [Field Service Pocket Book]' had precluded the frontline dead being attended efficiently.<sup>5</sup> The dictates which governed the interment of bodies, the most crucial stage in the burial process in that it was the foundation for each subsequent phase, were particularly vague and ill-formed. A reading of these gave some officers the impression that the collection and burial of corpses was the duty of non-combatant personnel, engendered in others a belief in a type of amorphous war graves organisation that fulfilled these tasks, and confused those who attempted and performed interment.<sup>6</sup>

That British burial policy was unclear throughout the war – although an improvement on Field Service Regulations, the instructions issued for the Normandy invasion were still deficient – reflected that the War Office ascribed relatively little importance to interring the frontline dead. Its authorities blithely tended to accept that many officers were ignorant of their burial responsibilities and that others never attempted to discharge them. Nor did they question why burial policy was often

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<sup>5</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, Fraser Report, 30 March 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Stott Report, 15 June 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Hoffman Report, 18 June 1945; CWGC, 2033, Lieutenant Colonel H. F. Chettle to Ware, 4 April 1944.

<sup>6</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, Fraser Report, 30 March 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Stott Report, 15 June 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Hoffman Report, 18 June 1945; CWGC, 2033, Hoffman Report, 15 December 1943; CWGC, 2033, Fraser to Ware, 23 October 1944; *The Administrative History of the Operations of 21 Army Group on the Continent of Europe*, p. 142. For examples pertaining to this concept of a war graves organisation, see Blake, *Mountain and Flood*, p. 216; Alex Bowlby, *Countdown to Cassino: The Battle of Mignano Gap, 1943*, (London: Leo Cooper, 1995), pp. 70, 80, 129; Stockman, *Seaforth Highlanders*, pp. 58-9; Wallis, *With God's Blessing and a Green Beret*, p. 40; Peter White, *With the Jocks: A Soldier's Struggle for Europe 1944-45*, (Stroud: Sutton, 2001), p. 217.

ignored by those who did attend to the dead, or act to revise the relevant stipulations in Field Service Regulations when this was suggested by Hoffman and Fraser.<sup>7</sup> As Hoffman later observed, '[t]he Dominion forces and Governments, quite rightly, take a much more lively interest in their respective dead, and set a much higher standard of G. R. & E. status and requirements than those imposed, or [th]ought necessary, by the Imperial Army.'<sup>8</sup> Collectively British authorities recognised, albeit in a limited way, that the interment of the military dead fulfilled a need for bereaved civilians, but they did not appreciate the extent to which morale at the frontline was boosted when the remains of servicemen were buried promptly and efficiently, or the economies in time and effort which this produced.<sup>9</sup>

It was the practice of the United States army to attend to the frontline dead in the same manner as for the wounded and to evacuate bodies from the battlefield as soon as possible, whereupon corpses were moved quickly along specified channels to pre-designated sites for interment. This method was initially labour-intensive, but it minimised the possibility of identities and remains being lost, and made the work of the AGRS immeasurably easier.<sup>10</sup> In north-west Europe, frontline units, including elite formations such as 82nd Airborne Division, had designated officers whose tasks

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<sup>7</sup> CWGC, 2033, Hoffman Report, 12 June 1943; CWGC, 2033, Fraser to Ware, 2 August 1943; CWGC, 2033, Fraser to Ware (Appendix B), 2 August 1943; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, August 1943.

<sup>8</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, Fraser Report, 30 March 1944; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Hoffman Report, 18 June 1945; CWGC, 1137, IWGC Meeting Minutes, circa October 1943.

<sup>9</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, Fraser Report, 30 March 1944; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, Fraser Memorandum, 25 April 1944; TNA, PRO WO 208/3111, Current Reports from Overseas Number 61, 1 November 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Stott Report, 15 June 1945; TNA, PRO CAB 106/454, Operations in Italy, 31 March 1946; CWGC, 1137, IWGC Meeting Minutes, circa October 1943; CWGC, 2033, Fraser to Ware, 23 October 1944; *The Administrative History of the Operations of 21 Army Group on the Continent of Europe*, pp. 25, 137; Ross and Romanus, *United States Army in World War II*, pp. 213-4, 680.

<sup>10</sup> CWGC, 2033, Fraser to Ware, 23 October 1944; Ross and Romanus, *United States Army in World War II*, pp. 84, 212-14, 216, 469-70, 690; Stephen E. Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers: The US Army from the Normandy Beaches to the Surrender of Germany*, (London: Pocket Books, 2002), pp. 317-18; Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, pp. 38-9, 51, 53, 69.

included supervising interment and liaising with the AGRS, and high-ranking commanders took a direct interest in graves operations.<sup>11</sup> Under George Patton, the Third Army became so efficient and devoted in dealing with its casualties that 99.42 per cent of these were identified before interment.<sup>12</sup> In the British army, in which there was often a significant interval between the death and the burial of a serviceman, the corresponding figure regularly was lower than ninety per cent.<sup>13</sup>

Rather than adopting proven American methods, or completely overhauling burial policy in another way, British officials in their post-war review chose to make only limited alterations to existing regulations.<sup>14</sup> For example, it was recommended that in future AGS units should not be attached to armies, in order to afford graves personnel greater freedom of movement, while the revisions made in 1949 to the RAF War Manual also were mostly cosmetic.<sup>15</sup> This suggested that military authorities still did not attach much importance to the interment of the frontline dead, or understand the extent to which policy helped determine the burial culture of the armed services. It is telling that most of those involved in the review were

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<sup>11</sup> Ross and Romanus, *United States Army in World War II*, pp. 214, 216, 684-8, 690, 698; Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers*, p. 317; Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, pp. 38-9; Neillands and de Normann, *D-Day 1944*, pp. 141-4.

<sup>12</sup> Ross and Romanus, *United States Army in World War II*, pp. 214, 687, 690.

<sup>13</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, Fraser Report, 30 March 1944.

<sup>14</sup> CWGC, 2033, Fraser to Ware, 23 October 1944; TNA, PRO CAB 106/454, Operations in Italy, 31 March 1946; TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Meeting Minutes, 9 September 1948; *The Administrative History of the Operations of 21 Army Group on the Continent of Europe*, p. 137; Ross and Romanus, *United States Army in World War II*, pp. 214, 216. It is not known whether new and revised editions of Field Service Regulations were issued after the Second World War, or if changes to army burial policy were incorporated into other documents. It is very difficult to identify post-Second World War developments in this regard.

<sup>15</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part VII; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Stott Report, 15 June 1945; TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Vale Minute, 23 August 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Vale to Frank Higginson, 2 September 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Meeting Minutes, 9 September 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Beckess to War Office, 9 April 1949; *The Administrative History of the Operations of 21 Army Group on the Continent of Europe*, p. 142. In 1949 the ICRC revised the Geneva Conventions to take account of the experiences of the Second World War. Four separate Conventions were issued, with the articles relating to burial and the treatment of the dead contained in the first of these. See *Convention (I) for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field*, Geneva, 12 August 1949.

institutionalised officers and civil servants of middling rank and that no fresh or alternative opinions were sought.

- Identity Discs

This failure to learn from experience had disturbing corollaries with events in the inter-world war period when important lessons about graves operations in the 1914-18 conflict were overlooked. Most crucially, nothing was done following the First World War to improve the durability of British identity discs despite their manifest inadequacies. Not until 1942 was consideration given to producing them from stainless steel, the substance from which American military identification tags had long been fashioned, or from asbestos.<sup>16</sup> A lack of material led the Casualty Branch to exclude these possibilities.<sup>17</sup> The War Office gave the matter even less thought. It chose to ignore the numerous reports it received during the Second World War concerning the poor quality of identity discs.<sup>18</sup>

The extent of the mistake made in not issuing British servicemen with sturdier identity discs was realised after the conflict ended. In a February 1946 letter to Slessor, Marshal of the RAF Sir Arthur Harris, formerly the head of Bomber Command, recounted a conversation he had had recently with a member of the wartime Dutch resistance: '[h]e [the Dutchman] said that providing our aircrews with identity discs which were inflammable was a certain means of losing identities & "incredibly foolish". I rather agree'.<sup>19</sup> Harris's statement prompted an Air Ministry

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<sup>16</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part VII; Ross and Romanus, *United States Army in World War II*, p. 213.

<sup>17</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Burges Minute, 15 February 1946.

<sup>18</sup> For example, see TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, June, November 1943; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, Major V. H. Dixon to War Office, 19 June 1943.

<sup>19</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Harris to Slessor, 11 February 1946; R. J. Overy, 'Sir Arthur Travers Harris' in Matthew and Harrison (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Volume 25, pp.

mandarin to comment: 'it does seem the most incredible bit of folly and must be put right.'<sup>20</sup> However, not until the late 1940s was there widespread agreement among military officials that all British servicemen should be issued with stainless steel identity discs and their constant wearing of these be policed.<sup>21</sup>

- Leadership

A second profoundly significant failure of the inter-war period was not to consider the formation of a future military graves organisation. As Hoffman stated, 'the Graves Service in peace time was overlooked, entirely forgotten, and relegated to an obscure pigeon hole at the War Office.'<sup>22</sup> Consequently, when the reconvention of the DGRE was mooted, the only person who feasibly could head the nascent department was Ware, who was sixty-nine at the time and reticent about reprising his military role for longer than six months.<sup>23</sup> The extent to which the Army Council was dependent on his filling this role was evident from the nature of his contract, the length of which he was free to determine, and by its permitting him to serve as director of the DGRE while remaining vice-chairman of the IWGC.<sup>24</sup> The official rationale for this compromise, echoing First World War practice, was to allow for one person to coordinate the operations of both organisations, but this aim was illusory. Both these positions merited a full-time commitment and Ware, whose

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401-5. Burges observed: '[i]t is an exaggeration to say that identity discs are inflammable [but] they will undoubtedly burn under some conditions.' See TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Burges Minute, 15 February 1946.

<sup>20</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Internal Minute, 14 February 1946.

<sup>21</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Vale Minute, 23 August 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Vale to Frank Higginson, 2 September 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Meeting Minutes, 23 March 1950; TNA, PRO WO 32/14817, British Joint Services Mission Memorandum, 11 September 1950; TNA, PRO WO 32/14817, Beckess to F. J. Stephens, 26 November 1953; TNA, PRO WO 32/14817, Marking War Graves Memorandum, Undated; TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part VII.

<sup>22</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Hoffman Report, 18 June 1945.

<sup>23</sup> CWGC, 2017, Ware to Kenyon, 8 August 1944.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

main concern and interest was the IWGC, could not provide this to the War Office. The significant 'economy' he promised would result from his twin appointments never eventuated, and he later conceded that '[n]o man ought to try to shoulder the dual responsibility.'<sup>25</sup>

The selection of a part-time army employee to head the DGRE was doubly damaging for it contributed to the perception, fostered initially by the unusual wartime-only status of the department, that it was not an integral part of the War Office – the 'Cinderella' complex identified by Blomfield. This sense of the DGRE being atypical was reinforced when Ware appointed friends and colleagues to important positions within the army graves organisation. Not only did this make it difficult for the DGRE to play anything other than a reactive and subordinate role, but inevitably it also retarded AGS operations. Graves officers initially found it difficult to secure equipment and resources as 'A' staff either ignored their requests or accorded them very low priority, and while this situation could have been relieved through the intervention of army commanders, Hoffman noted that they 'were entirely ignorant of, and apathetic to, the very minimum requirements necessary to make the Service even partially effective'.<sup>26</sup> Only after the senior posts in the AGS began to be filled by full-time officers were the damaging effects of this isolation mitigated.

The first and most important of these new leaders was Hoffman. Through his actions he made clear his rejection of the concept that the AGS was inferior to other

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*; *Twentieth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, p. 7; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, pp. 161-2.

<sup>26</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman Letter on Transport, 11 August 1943; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, Fraser Report, 30 March 1944; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Hoffman Report, 18 June 1945.

branches of the army, and in so doing he instilled among his men a hitherto-unknown sense of professionalism and comradeship.<sup>27</sup> He once observed that:

[u]nlike all the other Services ... the G. R. & E Service does not exist in peacetime and has no individual Service Badge or Corps tradition to bind it together. The personnel ... come from different Regiments, Corps, and Branches of the various Services, as well as from the Dominions and India, and it is for this reason that I have always called it a 'Pool' or a 'Team', in an endeavour to attain a Corps or Regimental outlook, and even esprit de corps, amongst the scattered units and staffs of G. R. & E[.].<sup>28</sup>

Among those to benefit from Hoffman's example was Fraser, who proved a particularly good AAG, not least because he was not intimidated by Ware. It is instructive that Hoffman and Fraser were the most effective servants of the Second World War army graves organisation and its most vociferous critics.

The leadership they provided, along with Colonels Lawson and Stott, was especially important given the lack of interest shown by successive Adjutants General in the DGRE and the AGS.<sup>29</sup> Adam, who was Adjutant General from June 1941 to June 1946, was no particular supporter of graves operations, while his successor, O'Connor, ascribed them little value and appeared even to resent the existence of the AGS.<sup>30</sup> Their ambivalence is all the more marked considering the strong leadership Slessor and Saunders afforded the MRES. Slessor, in particular, paid remarkable attention to his MRES responsibilities. For example, he once ordered an investigation into matters which a distressed member of the public had

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<sup>27</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to Ware, 10 June 1943; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, Fraser Report, 30 March 1944.

<sup>28</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Hoffman Victory Statement, 9 May 1945.

<sup>29</sup> All mentions to Lawson in this chapter are to Colonel A. B. Lawson.

<sup>30</sup> *The Quarterly Army List: July 1941*, p. 15; *The Quarterly Army List: August 1946*, Part I, p. 15.

raised with him and then, better to assuage the concerns of his correspondent, wrote a personal reply explaining what the MRES had established.<sup>31</sup>

- Enterprise and the Limits of Tradition

The leaders of the RAF missing research organisation can be credited also with encouraging their men to be bold and to experiment with new techniques and procedures in their work to name the dead. Search Officers engaged hypnotists to obtain information from people whose memory of events had faded – at least one problematic investigation was solved in this way – and made use of infra-red photography to reveal markings on damaged clothing and objects.<sup>32</sup> Several MRES personnel were even given leave from their duties in Germany to visit Scotland Yard in London to learn more about methods the British police were using to identify bodies.<sup>33</sup> This ethos of enterprise stemmed from 1945 when the missing research organisation was invented anew.

Had authorities at the DGRE been as open to change, systemic faults in AGS operations, and in the administration of military graves matters as a whole, could have been corrected at an early juncture and with considerable benefit.<sup>34</sup> For instance, separating the tasks of graves registration and graves concentration meant, as Vale admitted in 1948, that much of the work done by GRU personnel was wasted: GCU servicemen had to cover the same ground and check what had been

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<sup>31</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, W. O. Clark to Slessor, 10 March 1947; TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Slessor to W. O. Clark, 29[?] March 1947.

<sup>32</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part V; TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Number 4 MREU ('G' Section) Operations Record Book, October 1947; TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Number 4 MREU (20/22 Sections) Operations Record Book, September 1948.

<sup>33</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Berlin Detachment Operations Record Book, November 1947; TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, MRES North-West Europe Report, February 1948.

<sup>34</sup> TNA, PRO WO 165/36, Fraser Report, 30 March 1944.

established already before proceeding with their own duties, and in the period between operations numerous graves were destroyed or disappeared into the landscape.<sup>35</sup> Amalgamation of the registration and concentration tasks also would have been beneficial in that it would have allowed for the pooling of supplies and equipment, and lessened the administrative burden on the AGS: the fewer times bodies were handled, the fewer forms there were to complete.<sup>36</sup> This latter consideration was doubly significant given that clerical errors did affect the identification of the dead.<sup>37</sup>

While the separation of registration and concentration duties restricted the efficacy of the AGS, an even greater hindrance to graves operations was the arrangement where, under normal circumstances, the DGRE permitted MRES servicemen to perform only the first of these tasks. It was difficult for AGS commanders, understaffed as their formations almost always were, to accommodate MRES requests to exhume and concentrate the bodies of airmen, while RAF Search Officers found it frustrating having to wait, sometimes for several weeks, for assistance from a GCU. This arrangement was particularly unsatisfactory given that MRES personnel, with the concurrence of the Air Ministry, were willing to effect exhumations and concentrations.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Vale Minute, 23 August 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Vale to Frank Higginson, 2 September 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Meeting Minutes, 9 September 1948.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part VII.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, Lawson to War Office, 18 March 1946; TNA, PRO AIR 55/73, Yugoslavia Memorandum, circa January 1947; TNA, PRO AIR 55/67, Meeting Minutes, 14 February 1947; TNA, PRO AIR 55/54, Conference Minutes, 14 March 1947; TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Number 3 MREU Operations Record Book, February-May 1947.

- Cooperation

These problems could have been avoided through the creation of inter-service graves units, and certainly there was much to recommend closer interaction between the army and the RAF in this regard.<sup>39</sup> Commenting in 1947 on the difficulties the MRES was encountering in gaining entry to Communist countries in southern Europe, one of its officials lamented: ‘where British Army Graves personnel have been into a country it has been very difficult for the R.A.F. to follow behind, as the governing powers state that as one British unit has already entered and covered the area, why should another unit wish to go in again?’<sup>40</sup> The MRES never convinced the Albanian, Bulgarian and Romanian governments otherwise, and missing research operations were not pursued in these countries. This vexed authorities at the Casualty Branch who believed that DGRE officials could have done more to aid the MRES, particularly in the crucial first year after its deployment.<sup>41</sup>

Although their superiors in London did not always recognise it, AGS and MRES personnel in the field understood that their organisations shared a common purpose.<sup>42</sup> A member of Number 4 MREU recorded in his Operations Record Book in May 1947: ‘[t]he cooperation from Units of 39 G.C.U. give extreme satisfaction[,] in particular ‘A’ Section under command of Capt. H. Butcher which was responsible for concentrating over 500 bodies.’<sup>43</sup> That same month the officers of Number 1

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<sup>39</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Vale Minute, 23 August 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Vale to Frank Higginson, 2 September 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Meeting Minutes, 9 September 1948.

<sup>40</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 55/73, Yugoslavia Memorandum, circa January 1947.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO AIR 55/67, Meeting Minutes, 14 February 1947; TNA, PRO AIR 55/54, Conference Minutes, 14 March 1947.

<sup>42</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 55/67, Meeting Minutes, 14 February 1947; TNA, PRO AIR 55/63, Officer Commanding Number 4 MREU to Hawkins, 13 June 1948.

<sup>43</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Number 4 MREU (20/22 Sections) Operations Record Book, May 1947.

MREU invited their colleagues from Number 79 GCU to attend a dance they had organised.<sup>44</sup>

- The Role of the IWGC

Just as military graves operations could have been better orchestrated, so too were there failures of cooperation between the DGRE and the IWGC. In the late 1940s a War Office official observed:

during the culminating stages, and after the cessation of hostilities the I.W.G.C. were unable to provide personnel, in adequate numbers, to take over the war cemeteries as expeditiously as would have been desirable; through shortage of manpower they could not give early technical advice on the layout of permanent war cemeteries. This had the natural repercussion of slowing down the work done by the Army Graves Service and eventual handover of cemeteries.<sup>45</sup>

While this did not represent the IWGC view, which was that these difficulties were primarily the fault of the army graves organisation, the IWGC and the DGRE did admit to certain problems in their relationship. For instance, both parties acknowledged that the transfer of casualty records had been so poorly managed – there were no rules governing the interaction of the organisations – as to occasion an extensive and unnecessary duplication of effort.<sup>46</sup>

The inequitable nature of the relationship which existed between the institutions was the cause of other difficulties. In the early years of the war, the operations of the army graves organisation were tailored to suit IWGC rather than military requirements, and the undue representation the civilian institution was afforded in DGRE and AGS affairs continued after 1944, courtesy of Ware being

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<sup>44</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Number 1 MREU Operations Record Book, May 1947.

<sup>45</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, War Office and IWGC Cooperation, circa 1949.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Hoffman Report, 18 June 1945; TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Meeting Minutes, 9 September 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Frank Higginson to War Office, 28 October 1948.

made Honorary Advisor to the DGRE upon his retirement from the War Office and through his long-standing connections to senior army and RAF authorities.<sup>47</sup> Most of these men, including the Adjutant General, who it was customary to appoint as an unofficial member of the IWGC, were inclined to defer to Ware on subjects concerning the dead. The skewed character of the relationship between the IWGC and the army graves organisation was manifest also when, in the post-war period, Ware did little to correct the widespread belief that the military alone was to blame for the delays in completing the battlefield cemeteries.<sup>48</sup> Forever mindful of the value of reputation, in public he was content to distance the IWGC from the military graves organisation, something that was easily done given the relative anonymity of the DGRE, the AGS and the MRES, and the extensive profile and esteemed reputation of the IWGC.<sup>49</sup>

The fact that interactions between the DGRE and the IWGC were not always mutually constructive or well-managed led eventually to the proposal that in future wars the latter organisation should be wholly responsible for attending to the British military dead.<sup>50</sup> The advocates of this arrangement, who were from the armed services, suggested that its benefits would include savings in manpower and better communications on graves matters, most importantly with the bereaved. As a War Office authority reasoned: '[t]he general public would only have to deal with one department to ascertain burial information and any general particulars appertaining to

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<sup>47</sup> CWGC, 2033, Fraser to Ware, 28 March 1944; TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, War Office and IWGC Cooperation, circa 1949.

<sup>48</sup> *The Times*, 13 December 1946; *The Times*, 10 November 1947.

<sup>49</sup> *Twenty-eighth Annual Report of the Imperial War Graves Commission*, pp. 4-5; *The Times*, 10 November 1947.

<sup>50</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Vale Minute, 23 August 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Blomfield Minute, 25 August 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Vale to Frank Higginson, 2 September 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Meeting Minutes, 9 September 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Vale to Frank Higginson, 20 September 1948. See also TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, War Office and IWGC Cooperation, circa 1949; TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Meeting Minutes, 23 March 1950.

War Graves, up to date next-of-kin have been puzzled by having to deal with so many different departments, they cannot understand the relationship between War Office and I.W.G.C.'. <sup>51</sup> However, this proposal was not developed further because of the civilian status of the IWGC, and by 1950 officials reviewing the conduct and administration of graves operations had reverted to discussing how to improve the Second World War system. <sup>52</sup>

- Forsaken and Forgotten

Developments since then have rendered academic much of the detail of the post-Second World War review of burial policy and graves procedures. The military has not raised a specialised graves organisation, nor has the IWGC/CWGC been requested to fulfil functions other than those stipulated in its charters. This is unlikely to change for modern conflicts, when compared to the world wars, are relatively small in scale. Certainly, no role is envisaged now for the CWGC other than preserving the memory of the 1,695,156 names which are inscribed on the gravestones and memorials in its care. <sup>53</sup> The AGS and the MRES, meanwhile, are all but forgotten.

In February 1948 an Air Ministry official suggested that a history of the MRES should be written so that the public might be informed 'of the cost, effort and scrupulous care taken to account for our missing dead'. <sup>54</sup> The Chief Information Officer at the Air Ministry demurred, noting that such a publication would probably

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<sup>51</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, War Office and IWGC Cooperation, circa 1949.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Meeting Minutes, 9 September 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Frank Higginson to War Office, 28 October 1948; TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Lieutenant Colonel F. C. Hallowes to A. S. Laing, 28 July 1949; TNA, PRO WO 32/12968, Meeting Minutes, 23 March 1950.

<sup>53</sup> *Commonwealth War Graves Commission Annual Report 2007-2008*, p. 53.

<sup>54</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, MRES North-West Europe Report, February 1948.

not sell well and that '[t]he story, though fine, is very grim and could not be held to be good publicity as such for the R.A.F. and its recruiting campaign. Parents, schoolmasters etc. who read it would tend to turn their sons and pupils' thoughts elsewhere.'<sup>55</sup> It was deemed unwise, as Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham observed in 1949, 'to alarm nervous mothers' whose sons were contemplating careers in the RAF.<sup>56</sup> Thus the account of missing research operations compiled by Hawkins for the Air Ministry was not made available to civilians, and nor was a proposed monograph on the DGRE and the AGS. In fact, there is no evidence that this work was written for the War Office, as originally was mooted.<sup>57</sup> Given that the United States army produced full and frank accounts of the Second World War operations of the AGRS – a large American committee dedicated six years to reviewing its performance in an endeavour further to improve national burial policy and practice – it seems unlikely that recruitment was the sole reason for the reticence to publicise information about the British military graves organisation.<sup>58</sup> Another explanation is that high-ranking military officers and officials were reluctant to publish a story which revealed that their apathy and inaction had resulted in the identities and remains of thousands of servicemen being lost.

It is a profound shame that the British public was denied the opportunity to learn more about the military graves services. It was because of the dedication of AGS and MRES personnel that so many of the war bereaved were able to stand by

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<sup>55</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Chief Information Officer Memorandum, 5 March 1948. The name of the Chief Information Officer is not known.

<sup>56</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, Brooke-Popham to Saunders, 31 July 1949.

<sup>57</sup> TNA, PRO WO 366/5, Meeting Minutes, 7 May 1945. See also additional files in TNA, PRO WO 366/5; and documents in TNA, PRO WO 32/11560.

<sup>58</sup> Ross and Romanus, *United States Army in World War II*, p. 700. For accounts of AGRS operations in the Second World War and related matters, see Ross and Romanus, *United States Army in World War II*; Edward Steere, *The Graves Registration Service in World War II*, (Washington DC: Office of the Quartermaster General, 1951); Edward Steere and Thayer M. Boardman, *Final Disposition of World War II Dead 1945-51*, (Washington DC: Office of the Quartermaster General, 1957).

identified graves to mourn their dead. Vale wrote that the AGS 'succeeded in completing its task far more successfully than might have been expected', and it is likely that bereaved Britons, who had been effusive in acknowledging the service rendered them by the civilians of north-west Europe, would have appreciated the chance to thank AGS and MRES personnel for their efforts.<sup>59</sup>

Most graves service commanders would have welcomed public recognition for their men, but of greater concern to these officers was the manner in which their personnel were regarded by the wider military establishment. For example, it irked Lawson that his men were not treated as the equals of other soldiers. In 1945 he wrote:

[a] hard working officer of a Graves Unit is entitled to the sympathy and respect of all those whose duty is different. The Other Ranks ... have a record of a minimum of cases requiring disciplinary action which cannot be excelled in any other Service. They do their difficult duty with an efficiency and respect for the dead which does them credit.<sup>60</sup>

Ironically, the respect which Lawson sought for his men they did not seek themselves. They and other graves personnel were content to labour in the knowledge that their work relieved the torment of people who agonised about the missing and provided solace to those who mourned the dead. As one AGS officer remarked: '[w]hen I come back after weeks of search and have not found a grave, I'm filled with sadness ... I'm happy that I've brought comfort to some people, but when it's impossible, I tell you it makes me unhappy.'<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> CWGC, 3031, Vale to Frank Higginson, 30 September 1948.

<sup>60</sup> TNA, PRO WO 170/7365, Lawson to War Office, 16 November 1945.

<sup>61</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 15 February 1944.

Figure 63



Arnhem Oosterbeek War Cemetery, September 2007. A Dutch schoolgirl talks to an Airborne Regiment veteran at the annual Arnhem remembrance ceremony. The schoolgirl was among 1000 local students who placed flowers on the graves, thus perpetuating a tradition established at the end of the Second World War. 15,000 people attended the ceremony.

In common with this officer, many members of the graves services came to regard their work, as Longworth has observed, as something of a 'vocation'.<sup>62</sup> Unwavering belief in the worth and importance of their task helped them to confront the horrors of destroyed and decomposing bodies – one officer supervised the exhumation and concentration of 434 corpses during a twenty-six day period and his feat was not exceptional – and to do so without complaint.<sup>63</sup> Men willingly risked their health and handled bodies without protective apparel rather than wait for new supplies of gloves and aprons.<sup>64</sup> This determination to identify the dead and accord them honourable burial is even more extraordinary given that there were no tangible or obvious benefits to service in the AGS and the MRES. The structure and small size of the organisations meant the chances of promotion were almost non-existent, the numbers of honours awarded to staff were few, the work was dangerous – mines, booby-traps, unexploded bombs and unstable ordnance were encountered regularly – and it was only in April 1946 that military authorities consented to paying a stipend to servicemen who performed exhumations.<sup>65</sup>

Yet for the remarkable personnel of the AGS and the MRES, the successful identification of a body or the correct marking of a grave was incentive enough. In this regard, the statement issued by a MRES commander to his Search Officers is fitting testament to the efforts of all those who, without hope or expectation of thanks or reward, staffed the British military graves services between 1939 and

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<sup>62</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9050, MRES North-West Europe Report, February 1948; TNA, PRO AIR 55/63, Officer Commanding Number 4 MREU to Hawkins, 13 June 1948; Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*, p. 178.

<sup>63</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 29/1598, Number 4 MREU (20/22 Sections) Operations Record Book, May 1947.

<sup>64</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305, Part VII.

<sup>65</sup> TNA, PRO WO 169/13802, Hoffman to War Office, 11 June 1943; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, Fraser Report, 30 March 1944; TNA, PRO WO 169/18049, Mentions and Awards Memorandum, 13 April 1944; TNA, PRO WO 165/36, DGRE War Diary, May 1944; TNA, PRO WO 171/3926, Stott to Deputy Adjutant General, 21 Army Group, 30 May 1945; TNA, PRO WO 170/9124, CMGRE Headquarters War Diary, April 1946.

1949. He wrote: ‘you might feel a bit uncomfortable about messing around with a dead body, but remember this body has a mother or father and/or wife who is waiting in England or other parts of the world hoping that come day he or she will be able to see the grave of the one they lost during this struggle for freedom – SO DO YOUR BEST.’<sup>66</sup>

- The People’s War

The Second World War has been described as a People’s War in which Britons participated in an unprecedented fashion. As part of the collective war effort, millions of citizens were recruited into the armed forces and hundreds of thousands were killed.<sup>67</sup> In the historiography of the conflict it is recognised that the People’s War brought with it the expectation of a better future for those who survived.<sup>68</sup> What this thesis has shown is that public expectations of fitting treatment extended to the military war dead. The ethos of Beveridge was not just for the living.

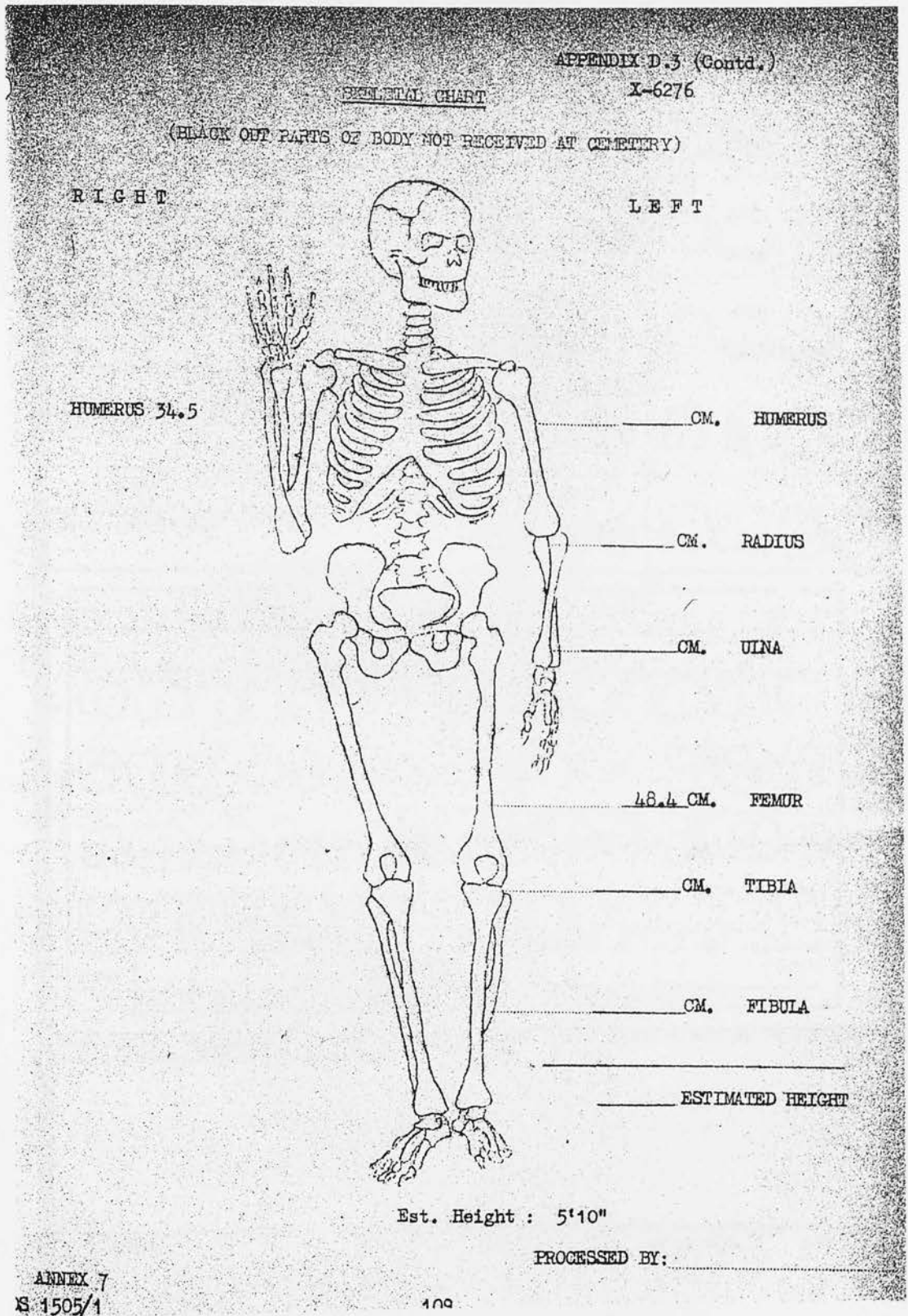
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<sup>66</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 55/64, Number 3 MREU Advice Booklet, Undated.

<sup>67</sup> W. Franklin Mellor (ed.), *Casualties and Medical Statistics*, (London: HMSO, 1972), pp. 829-39.

<sup>68</sup> Angus Calder, *The People’s War: Britain 1939-1945*, (London: Pimlico, 1992), pp. 530-6; Arthur Marwick, *Britain in the Century of Total War: War, Peace and Social Change 1900-1967*, (London: Bodley Head, 1968), pp. 308-9, 313; Arthur Marwick, *British Society Since 1945*, (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 28.

Appendix One: MRES Skeletal Chart<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305.

## Appendix Two: MRES Tooth Chart<sup>2</sup>

IDENTIFICATION DATA	TOOTH CHART	APPENDIX 4 (Contd.)
<p><b>MISSING TEETH:</b> ALL TEETH MISSING THROUGH EX- TENSION (NOT THOSE FRACTURED OR DISPLACED BY TRAUMATIC WOUNDS) SHOULD BE "X"ED OUT AND LABELED THUS:</p>	TOP VIEW	SIDE VIEW
	<p><i>Tooth Missing</i></p>	
<p><b>DOWNED TEETH:</b> BLOCK IN SOLID AND CROWN OF TOOTH SHOULD BE LABELED GOLD, PORCELAIN, SILVER OR GOLD AND PORCE- LAIN, THUS:</p>	<p><i>Gold Crown, Porcelain Crown</i></p>	
	<p><b>BRIDGE WORK:</b> BLOCK IN SOLID AND CROWN OF TOOTH SHOULD BE LABELED GOLD BRIDGE, GOLD AND PORCELAIN BRIDGE, THUS:</p>	<p><i>Gold Bridge</i></p>
<p><b>FILLINGS:</b> DRAW FILLING ON TOOTH AS ACCURATELY AS POSSIBLE (BLOCK IN AND LABEL GOLD, SILVER, OR AMALGAM), THUS:</p>		<p><i>Gold Filling, Silver Filling</i></p>
	<p><b>CAVITIES (Cavities):</b> OUTLINE LOCATION AND SIZE OF CAVITY, SHADE IN THUS:</p>	<p><i>Cavity, Decayed</i></p>

RIGHT								LEFT								
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
M A X I L L A								M A N D I B L E								
Side Views								Side Views								
UPPER								UPPER								
LOWER								LOWER								
Note								Note								
16	15	14	13	12	11	10	9	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	

**PLATES (Plates):** DRAW DIAGRAM OF RELATIVE SIZE AND SHAPE OF PLATE, BLOCK IN TEETH ATTACHED AND INDICATE RETAIN-  
ING CLASPS ON NATURAL TEETH WITH THE WORD, "CLASP."

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<sup>2</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305.

# Appendix Three: MRES Civilian Questionnaire (Translation)<sup>3</sup>

## QUESTIONNAIRE.

The information asked for in this questionnaire is urgently required by the Missing Research & Enquiry Service to enable them to trace missing R.A.F. casualties. Please complete the form as soon as possible and return it without delay to:-

H.Q., MED/ME, Missing Research & Enquiry Service, R.A.F.,  
c/o AIR DIVISION, ALLIED COMMISSION for AUSTRIA, (B.E.).  
via Local Military Government.

Complete one of these papers for each Allied aeroplane which crashed in your area at any time during the war. DO NOT include particulars of more than one crashed aeroplane on the same sheet of paper.

1. Date of the crash . . . . .
2. Time of the aeroplane crash {  
(During the day.  
(At Night. (Cross out the words that do not apply)
3. Place where the aeroplane crashed. (a) Commune . . . . .  
(b) Name of the nearest town or village . . . . .  
(Please be as accurate as possible) (c) Direction and Distance in kilometres from (b) . . . . .  
(d) How can we reach the site by car /on foot/ by mule . . . . .
4. Was the aeroplane (British (American (Russian) Was it marked with (a red, white and blue roundel (a white star, (a red star

(Cross out the words that do not apply)

5. Type of aeroplane (Heavy four motored bomber (Light two motored bomber (Single engined fighter
- (Cross out the words that do not apply)

6. Were there any large letters or numbers marked on the aeroplane?

If so, show them here . . . . .  
and state on what part of the plane they were painted . . . . .  
(Every aeroplane has large letters and numbers painted on it. If these are known, write them in under question 6 and state their position on the aeroplane. For example: BEW.205 on the side of the fuselage near the tail).

7. State the target or place where the aeroplane was going:-  
If known . . . . . If suspected . . . . .  
(Refers to the place the aeroplane was going to bomb. Unless this is known or you have good reason to suspect, please do not fill it in).

8. Number of airmen in the crew of the aeroplane . . . . .  
(State the number of airmen that you know or believe to have been in the aeroplane when it crashed).

9. Fate of the crew (Descended by parachute . . . . . Evaded . . . . .  
(Taken prisoner . . . . . Wounded . . . . .  
(Died in hospital . . . . . Killed on the spot . . . . .

(Fill in against each phrase the number of crew to which each phrase is applicable. For example, suppose a four engined bomber has crashed with a crew of eight, the question might be completed as follows:-

4 Descended by parachute	1 Evaded capture
3 Taken prisoner	0 Wounded
1 Died in Hospital	3 Killed on the spot.

It must be realised that the total of the above numbers will not necessarily agree with the total number of crew as stated in question 8 because, for instance, some of the airmen who descended by parachute may also have been taken prisoner or evaded capture.)

<sup>3</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 55/69.

10. Names and military numbers of members of crew, if known:-

Fate of each member if known, as in question 9 above:-

.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....

(In this space write in the personal numbers, names and initials of any of the crew which you may know, and opposite their names state what happened to them. For example:- Taken prisoner, killed on the spot etc.)

11. Bodies of crew buried at:-

Commune . . . . .	Cemetery . . . . .
	Grave No. . . . .

(If possible, return with this paper, burial certificate for each airman or grave.)

12. Has the crash already been investigated by Allied Military authorities. If so, state by whom and approximately on what date, if known. (Please give full details.)

13. Names and addresses of local people who may be able to give information about the fate of the crew:-

# Appendix Four: MRES Area Search Certificate<sup>4</sup>

No. 4 Missing Research and Enquiry Unit

APPENDIX B.1

## Area Search Certificates.

To: The Landkreis Director of .....

An den Herrn Landrat des Kreises .....

In pursuance of the scheme in operation throughout the entire British Zone of Germany for the purpose of obtaining all available information relating to the burial places of Allied airmen and details of aircraft crashes you are hereby informed that the Burgomelsters responsible for the undernamed Gemeinde have submitted to the British Military authorities negative reports in respect of their areas.

*In der Britischen Zone von Deutschland läuft augenblicklich eine Operation, die dem Zweck dient, alle verfügbaren Informationen, die sich auf Grabstellen alliierter Flieger und Einzelheiten von Flugzeugabstürzen beziehen, einzuholen. Sie werden hiermit davon in Kenntnis gesetzt, daß von den Bürgermeistern der unten angegebenen Gemeinden, als Antwort auf die englischen Anfragen, in bezug auf ihren Gemeindebereich negative Berichte an die britische Militär-Behörde abgegeben wurden.*

.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

The importance of these returns cannot be overstated and you are, therefore instructed to verify their accuracy and sign the declaration hereunder.

*Es wird auf die Wichtigkeit des genauen Ausfüllens dieses Schreibens hingewiesen und Sie werden hiermit unterrichtet, ihre Genauigkeit zu bestätigen und die untenstehende Erklärung zu unterzeichnen.*

### DECLARATION

I ..... being Landkreis Director for Landkreis ..... do hereby declare that the Gemeinde named above are under my jurisdiction and that I confirm the accuracy of the returns made by the Burgomeisters of those Gemeinde.

Note:—If an inaccuracy is discovered the correct information is to be attached to this declaration which can then be duly completed.

### ERKLÄRUNG

Ich ..... der Landrat des Kreises ..... erkläre hiermit, dass die oben angeführte(n) Gemeinde(n) unter meiner Verwaltung stehen und bestätige, dass die Angaben jener Gemeinde(n) auf Wahrheit beruht(n).

Vermerk: Wird eine Unrichtigkeit bei der Überprüfung entdeckt, so sind die richtigen Informationen mit dieser Erklärung abzugeben, welche dann vorschriftsmässig vervollständigt wird.

Signed (Unterschrift) .....

at (Ort) .....

Date (Datum) .....

This Declaration must be handed to the Royal Air Force Investigation Officer, together with any further information, by the Landkreis Director concerned.

*Diese Erklärung muss von dem betreffenden Landrat an den Untersuchungsoffizier der Royal Air Force, zusammen mit sonstigen Informationen, ausgehändigt werden.*

PSS(HQ)5802/20M/6-47

DS 1505/1

87

PSS(HQ)5802/20M/6-47

<sup>4</sup> TNA, PRO AIR 20/9305.

# Appendix Five: MRES Burial Detail Acceptance Form<sup>5</sup>

Specimen C O P Y  
 From: HQ, No. 4 M. R. E. U. R. A. F. Station  
 SUNDERN  
 Date: 10th May, 1948  
 Case Ref.: 4 MREU/906/1600/P.4.  
 Graves R. E. Directorate  
 H. Q. British Army of the Rhine  
 British Army of the Rhine 1  
 Pro D Day.  
 000546  
 NO. ~~91178~~

## BURIAL DETAIL ACCEPTANCE

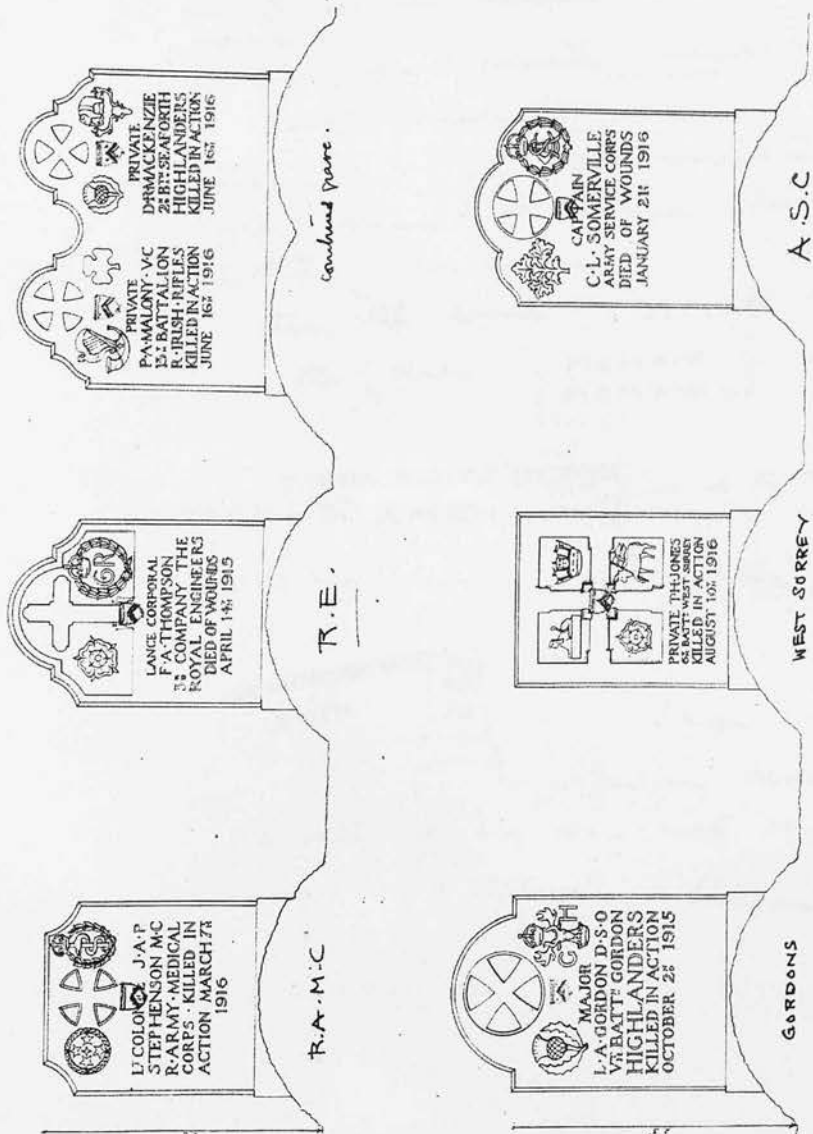
- Air Ministry letter reference P. 415164/S.14 Cas. C.7. dated 19th April, 1948 has given acceptance for the identities shown below.
- It is requested that marking and any necessary movement of bodies be effected.
- If the required marking or movement cannot be carried out as shown below please note this fact with details in paragraph 6 below and amend the burial figures in column 10 in red ink.
- This B.D.A. is submitted to you in triplicate. It is requested that two copies are returned to this H.Q. as soon as possible with the endorsement in paragraph 6 completed. This unit will then raise final graves registration report form for general distribution.

(1) Service Number	(2) Rank	(3) Name and Initials	(4) Crew Category	(5) Force	(6) Case Category	(7) Date of Death	(8) Disinterred from Ahlen Gem. Kreis Beckum M.R. 152/B-15	(9) Concentrated to Reichswald 3 A/E B5	(10) Reinterment Requested to
							P R G P R G	P R G P R G	P R G
J. 25947	F/O	Jackson, O. L.	A/B	R. C. A. F.	M.	25-3-44		36	F 2
J. 85604	P/O	Dowdell, S. G.	Pilot	R. C. A. F.	M.	25-3-44		36	F 3
J. 22802	F/O	Mackay, G. I.	Nav.	R. C. A. F.	M.	25-3-44	El 2 Com.	36	F 4
H. 192142	Sgt.	Halbert, E. J.	M. U. G.	R. C. A. F.	M.	25-3-44		36	F 5
157804	Sgt.	Webb, H. C.	WOP	R. A. F.	M.	25-3-44		36	F 6
Special marking or Formation of Graves is requested as follows :- Action							Signed :- M. P. H. Ste phenson, P/L MRES. R.A.F.		

6. Action by G.C.U. The action as indicated on this form has been taken. The following remarks are made :-

APPENDIX L - 4

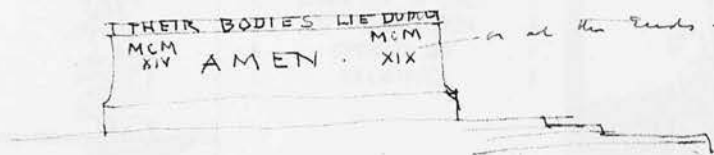
Appendix Six: Suggested Designs for Headstones<sup>6</sup>



<sup>6</sup> CWGC, 1137. These sketches were drawn by Baker in 1917.

## Appendix Seven: Stone of Remembrance Letter<sup>7</sup>

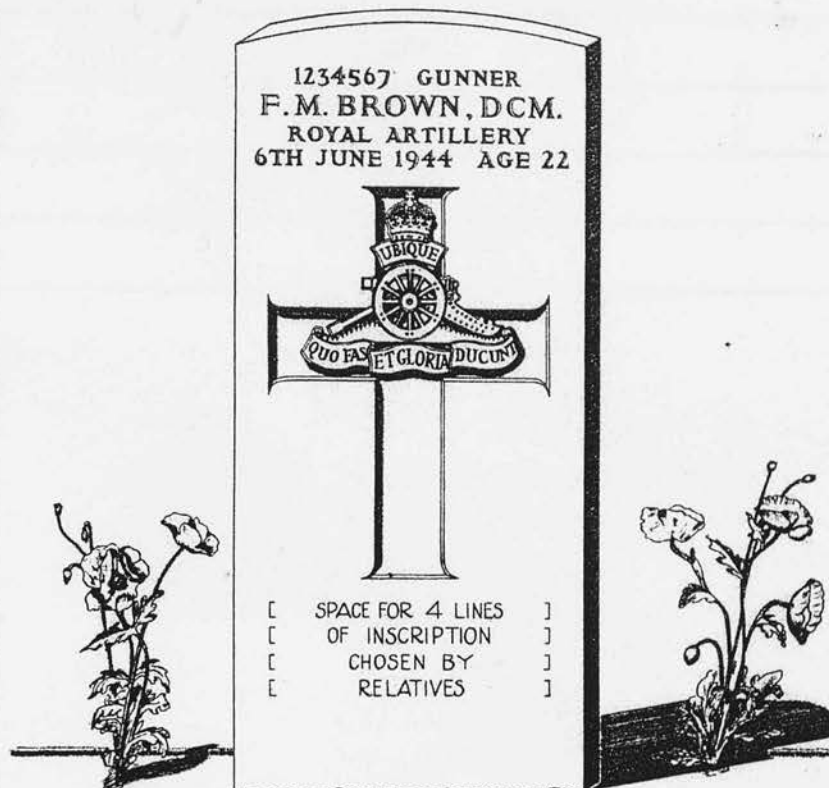
but it does not come up to the  
 size I should like. which I  
 have represented by a block of  
 the alphabet from M. to T with  
 an O as an initial letter & shown on the  
 model.  
 There is one solution which may  
 be worth considering.  
 That is to cut the inscription  
 right round the upper face & edge of  
 the stone continuously  
 \* then the word AMEN  
 in the date. MCMXIV in the face  
 MCMXVIII (?)



I hope I may see  
 you on Monday  
 & talk it all over with you  
 as before. Lutyens

<sup>7</sup> CWGC, 2017. Part of a 19 October 1918 letter in which Lutyens explained to Kenyon ideas for the Stone of Remembrance.

## THE HEADSTONE



THE HEADSTONE STANDS 2 FEET 8 INCHES ABOVE GROUND;  
IS 1 FOOT 3 INCHES BROAD AND 3 INCHES THICK.

IT IS INSCRIBED WITH A BADGE AND RELIGIOUS EMBLEM  
AND THE SERVICE PARTICULARS OF THE DECEASED.

AT THE FOOT OF THE STONE IS A SPACE IN WHICH CAN BE  
ENGRAVED AN INSCRIPTION CHOSEN BY THE RELATIVES. THIS  
INSCRIPTION MUST NOT EXCEED 60 LETTERS IN LENGTH.

IMPERIAL WAR GRAVES COMMISSION

WOODBURN GREEN - JAN. 31. 1945.

DRAWN - BY M. NEWELL.

P3096 P2341, 3258, 1000(Ty. P) 3/46

<sup>8</sup> TNA, PRO WO 32/17366. Epitaphs on Second World War headstones were limited to sixty letters, six fewer than had been afforded First World War next-of-kin. Otherwise the headstones of the two conflicts were identical in design.

**Appendix Nine: Percentage of CWGC Funds Supplied by Member Countries,  
2007-08<sup>9</sup>**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
United Kingdom	78.43
Canada	10.07
Australia	6.05
New Zealand	2.14
South Africa	2.11
India	1.2

<sup>9</sup> *Commonwealth War Graves Commission Annual Report, 2007-2008*, p. 39.

Appendix Ten: IWGC Second World War Burials and Commemorations in Selected Countries<sup>10</sup>

Country	Identified Burials	Unidentified Burials	Total Burials	Identified Burials as a Percentage of Total Burials	Commemorated on Memorials (Unidentified Burials and Missing)	Percentage of Dead Given Identified Burial	Total Commemorated by Name (Columns Two and Six)
Belgium	10,100	733	10,833	93.23		93.23	10,100
Egypt	15,475	1042	16,517	93.69	12,130	56.06	27,605
France	37,677	4351	42,028	89.65	6307	85.66	43,984
Germany	25,312	1255	26,567	95.28		95.28	25,312
Greece	2495	1469	3964	62.94	2870	46.51	5365
Italy	41,421	1783	43,204	95.87	4046	91.10	45,467
The Netherlands	18,123	1020	19,143	94.67	1030	94.62	19,153
Total	150,603	11,653	162,256	92.82	26,383	85.09	176,986

<sup>10</sup> Compiled from information provided to the author by the CWGC. The burial statistics cover cremations, and include naval personnel. With regard to Belgium and Germany, the missing and unidentified dead were commemorated in other countries.

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AN 13.	British Transport Commission Papers.
CAB 21.	Cabinet Office Papers.
CAB 106.	War Cabinet Papers.
CO 323.	Colonies Correspondence.
CO 1032.	Colonies Correspondence on Defence.
DO 170.	Commonwealth Relations Office.
FO 141.	Foreign Office Correspondence with Embassies.
FO 369.	Foreign Office Consular Department Correspondence.
FO 371.	Foreign Office Political Department Correspondence.
MT 9.	Board of Trade and Ministry of Transport Maritime Papers.
PC 8.	Privy Council Correspondence.
T 1.	Treasury Board Papers.
T 220.	Treasury Correspondence on Imperial and Foreign Matters.
T 231.	Treasury Exchange Control Division Papers.
WO 24.	Papers Concerning Establishments.

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2-4

1001

1008

1039

1045

1050

1084

1131-2

1137

2001-4

2010

2013-14

2016-18

2021

2024

2026

2028-9

2033

2035

2043-4

2059

2063

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2081

2087-8

2710

3001-2

3027

3031

4002

4028

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