SAS men from Northern Ireland executed by the Gestapo

While the battle for Normandy was underway the 1st and 2nd SAS Regiments were operating behind German lines in France, carrying out acts of sabotage, disrupting communications and transport.

As part of “Operation Gain”, on July 4th a group of 12 men led by Capt Pat Garstin MC left RAF Keevil in Wiltshire aboard a Stirling bomber to fly to France.

The Unit had been divided into two groups with all of the Northern Ireland soldiers being with Captain Garstin and Lance Corporal Vaculik who was Free French.

William Pearson Young from Randalstown was one of the five men from Northern Ireland executed. They parachuted behind enemy lines after the Normandy invasion.

On the previous night of 3rd /
4th July a coded BBC radio message had been received by the French Resistance Fighters telling them of a parachute drop however on that occasion the flight was cancelled with insufficient time to inform the French.

The following night the Resistance again went to the same location having received another coded message via BBC Radio however on this occasion the first two Frenchmen to arrive were fired on and killed by Germans and all of the others, except one, returned home not knowing that the Germans knew the recognition letter for the drop which was “B for Bertie”

The Drop Zone was in the Fontainebleau area behind enemy lines near La Ferte-Alais to the south of Paris. At 01.53 the S.A.S. parachuted from the aircraft with most landing on the Drop Zone,
which was a field of wheat, whilst the final five to jump had landed in a Wood. At the edge of the D.Z. was a group of men wearing civilian clothes who greeted Captain Garstin with the words “Vive la France”, immediately after which the soldiers came under fire from automatic weapons.

There was a brief exchange of fire however it soon became obvious that the S.A.S. were surrounded and subsequently Vaculik was captured at 06.00 and Corporal Jones an hour later.

They soon learned that Captain Garstin, Lieutenant Wiehe, Trooper Thomas James “Tot” Barker (Previously of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and from Cookstown) and Lance Corporal Howard Lutton (Who had been Army Air Corps and from County Armagh) had also been captured after being wounded.

The nine were taken to Gestapo HQ in Paris. Here Lutton and Weihe were taken to hospital where Lutton died of his wounds. Weihe was operated on for spinal injuries three weeks later. Garstin and Barker had their wounds bandaged.

The other men were initially taken to a converted hotel near Champs de Mars in central Paris and then a Gestapo headquarters where they were kept and interrogated for three days before being returned to the converted hotel. A day or two later Garstin and Barker were reunited with the other soldiers however Garstin was very weak.

On August 8th the 7 remaining captives were given civilian clothes and were told they were to be taken to Switzerland the following morning to be exchanged for German prisoners of the British.

At 01.00 the following morning
From left to right are the headstones of Patrick Garstin, Thomas Barker, Thomas Varey, Joseph Walker and William Young.

(9th August) they were put on a truck and driven out of Paris, not to the Swiss border but to a wooded area near Beauvais, north of the city.

At Beauvais the prisoners got off the truck and were marched into the forest, where they were lined up. Corporal Vaculik asked if they were to be shot and received a reply to that effect. He was informed that they were to be executed under the Commando Befehl issued by Hitler.

Facing the men were a number of Gestapo. Two Officers who were armed with Sten guns at the ready whilst another read out the Sentence. A Sergeant of the Gestapo who translated and a Gestapo Agent in civilian clothes were also present.

The Sentence was as follows :- “For having wished to work in collaboration with the French Terrorists and thus to endanger the
Memorial plaque in Randalstown

German Army, you are condemned to the Penalty of Death and will be Shot”

On hearing the word “Shot”, Garstin shouted to everyone to make a dash for it as the Germans opened fire. All of the men tried to escape into the woods.

Corporal Vaculik managed to get away while Corporal Jones tripped and fell. The Gestapo men ran past him thinking he was dead and when he got up again he saw four bodies lying where they had been shot but could not identify them before he tried to escape.

Two men escaped and the remaining five died. A grave had been dug in a wooded area about two miles from where the shooting had taken place and near a large chateau that is approximately one mile to the east of Noailles. They were buried there three days later by the Germans.

A Resistance fighter said that the Germans had a two day curfew in place following the shooting and were searching for the bodies of Jones and Vacluik.

This Incident was investigated by Captain Sadler and Major Poat of the S.A.S. who visited Noailles around 20th September and on
speaking with the local Resistance Leader he showed them where he believed the murders had taken place and also where the bodies of the S.A.S. soldiers were buried.

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The Resistance fighter said that the Germans had a two day Curfew in place following the shooting and were searching for the bodies of Soldiers Jones and Vaculik.

The bodies of 5 murdered S.A.S. men lay at the scene for three days before finally being buried by a German Army Unit consisting of one Officer and approximately nine men who had been in the Chateau.

During the Investigation it was necessary to open the grave and on doing so a total of five bodies were found. All of them were dressed in civilian clothing and showed signs of having been handcuffed.

One of the bodies was identified as that of Captain Garstin.

After the war the bodies were re-interred in Marissel French National Cemetery in Beauvais. The Gestapo had tried to conceal their actions so the Investigation looked into the Germans who had occupied the Chateau who had buried the bodies.

A woman Collaborator, who had worked for the Germans in the Chateau and believed that they had been a Luftwaffe Signal Section, identified a number of the soldiers including Captain Hans Garling, Officer Hans Zool and Oberfeldwebel Gall.

**Of the six the men who died five were Irish**
Capt Pat Garstin MC, Royal Ulster Rifles, from Dublin.
Thomas Barker, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, Cookstown
L/Cpl Lutton, Royal Ulster Rifles, Northern Ireland. DOW earlier
Billy Young, Royal Ulster Rifles, Randalstown
Sgt Thomas Varey the sixth man, was from York
Tpr Joe Walker, Royal Ulster Rifles, Moira

**Acknowledgment - Photos by Andy Glenfield**
Destroyer HMS Lynx sank after striking a German mine off Wick in northern Scotland. 70 officers and men were lost and 26 were rescued.

ULSTER AND THE WAR.

... CAPTAIN A. HULSE, reported wounded, is in the Service Squadron of the Inniskilling Dragoons, which was raise in connection with the Ulster Division. He first served in the Pioneer Battalion at Lurgan, and subsequently transferred to the Dragoons at Enniskillen, where he served before going to the front. Captain Hulse is a son of Mrs. Hulse, Alexandra Road, Sydenham, London.

(Belfast News-Letter, 9 August 1916)
HM Submarine B10 was bombed and sunk by Austrian aircraft while alongside for repair at Venice. There were no casualties. An attempt to salvage her failed and she was sold for breaking up. HMS B10 was the first submarine to be sunk by air attack.

1917

Destroyer HMS Recruit was torpedoed and sunk by German submarine UB-16 in the North Sea, just north of the North Hinder lightship. 54 of her complement of 82 lost their lives.
1926

Submarine HMS H29 sank during trials following refitting at Devonport: water entered through a hatch that was obstructed by a pipe and could not be closed. Five civilians and one RN crewman died. H29 was salvaged and sold for scrap in October 1927.

1939

Germany sent a message to Poland noting that its uncooperativeness to work with Germany, ie. its refusal of German demands to annex Danzig, might lead to war, and Germany would not hold the responsibility for starting an armed conflict.

1940

Hermann Göring believed Luftwaffe had control of the air having successfully attacked many convoys and excluded Royal Navy ships from the English Channel during daylight. Overestimated downed RAF planes and underestimated Luftwaffe losses further convinced him the RAF was almost beaten; in reality, RAF was stronger than a month ago, with losses (84 fighters) less that half the Luftwaffe's (227 aircraft). Göring ordered new tactics to destroy RAF's fighting capacity by attacking their airfields, control centers and radar. These tactics could not be put into effect, however, as cloudy weather allowed only reconnaissance patrols; 1 He 111 aircraft was shot down.

1941

Battle of Britain ace Wing Commander Douglas Bader was involved in a mid-air collision with a German Bf 109 fighter
over northern France. He parachuted from his crippled aircraft by releasing and leaving behind in his Spitfire fighter one of his two artificial legs.

1942

192 British bombers (91 Wellington, 42 Lancaster, 40 Stirling, and 19 Halifax) attacked Osnabrück, Germany, destroying 206 houses, killing 62, and wounding 107; 6 bombers were lost on this mission.

1943

Winston Churchill arrived at Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada aboard the passenger liner Queen Mary.

1944

Dwight Eisenhower moved his headquarters to France.

A V-1 flying bomb exploded in the air above the town of Lamberhurst, Kent, after being shot at by a fighter, the bomb scattered 1-kilogram incendiary bombs.

1945

38 (Irish) Brigade - Edmund O'Sullivan was mentioned in 2 LIR's war diaries for the first time to confirm the award of an MiD (actually listed in the LG on 19th July 1945). It had been a long journey from Algiers to Villach.
CQMS O'Sullivan: “I returned to Austria in August 1945 & now responsible, as duty officer, for mounting the company guard. One day, I had to rebuke Nick Mosley for being untidily dressed while inspecting it. He was not a smart soldier & I probably exceeded my authority...."

Russia invades Manchuria.

US drops the second atomic bomb on Nagasaki.

Canadian Lieutenant Robert Hampton Gray won the last Victoria Cross of the war (posthumously) when his Corsair fighter-bomber was shot down in flames off the Japanese mainland during an attack on the destroyer, Amakusa, which he sank.
Roll of Honour – August 9

Representing their comrades who died on this day

1915

+BURTON, James
Royal Irish Fusiliers. 6th Btn. Private. 12489. Died 09/08/1915. Wounded at Gallipoli, he died at sea. Born in and enlisted at Lisburn. Helles Memorial, Gallipoli, Turkey

+GORMAN, John
Royal Irish Fusiliers. 5th Btn. Private. 13213. Died 09/08/1915. Helles Memorial, Gallipoli, Turkey

+HARPER, Ernest Magowan
Royal Munster Fusiliers, 7th Battalion. Lieutenant. MiD. Died 09/08/1915. B Sc 1913. Ernest began his education at Union Place National School, Dungannon, before entering the Royal School Dungannon in 1903 where he would continue his studies until 1909. Ernest was a member of the RSD 1st XV that won the Schools' Cup in 1906 and was captain of the side in 1908. In 1907 he was placed second in Ireland for Chemistry and a year later he received a medal for finishing in first place in that subject. In 1909 Ernest M Harper won a scholarship to the Royal University of Ireland, and the 1911 census confirms Ernest as an undergraduate at QUB. He was 20 years old. Ernest Harper was awarded the Andrews Studentship in June 1913 before completing his B.Sc. (Hons) in 1914. His aptitude for
science led to his being appointed as Demonstrator in Chemistry at QUB. At university Ernest continued to enjoy playing rugby, turning out for Queen's 1st XV and, on occasion, Dungannon. On the news of war, Ernest volunteered in August 1914. He was gazetted 2nd Lieutenant with 7th Battalion of the Munster Fusiliers on 01/09/1914. The battalion underwent training at the Curragh, where Ernest was promoted to Lieutenant on 05/05/1915. He was with the 7th Battalion of the Royal Munster Fusiliers when he was killed at the Dardanelles. Youngest son of Henry and Jane Harper of Northland Place, Dungannon. Helles Memorial, Turkey including Gallipoli, Panel 186, Dungannon WM

+MORGAN, James

Royal Irish Fusiliers, 5th Bn. Private. 16997. Died 09/08/1915. Aged 27. Son of John and Mary Jane Morgan, of Madden Row, Keady, Co. Armagh. Helles Memorial, Turkey including Gallipoli,

1916 - 18

There are 21 Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers amongst the 365 war graves at Potijze Chateau Wood Cemetery (above), West Vlaanderen, Belgium. Their names are recorded here.

+ANDERSON, William Charles

Potijze Chateau Wood Cemetery (above), West Vlaanderen, Belgium.

+ANDERSON, William Charles  

+BARRETT, D  
Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. 1st Bn. Private. 8244. Died 09/08/1916. Potijze Chateau Wood Cemetery, West Vlaanderen, Belgium

+BRADLEY, James  
Died 09/08/1916. 3214. Son of James and Margaret Bradley, of Meeting House Lane, Garvagh. Potijze Chateau Wood Cemetery, West Vlaanderen, Belgium

+COLE, Millar

+DEVLIN, John
Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers 1st Bn. Private. Age: 39. Died 09/08/1916 29009. Son of George and Mary Devlin, of Abington, Massachusetts, U.S.A.; husband of Mary Devlin, of 50, Wareham Avenue, Onset, Massachusetts, U.S.A. Potijze Chateau Wood Cemetery, West Vlaanderen, Belgium

+DONELLY J
Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, 1st Bn. Lance Corporal. Died 09/08/1916. 26335. Potijze Chateau Wood Cemetery, West Vlaanderen, Belgium

+DOONAN J
Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers 1st Bn. Private. Died 09/08/1916. 25724. Potijze Chateau Wood Cemetery, West Vlaanderen, Belgium

+ELLIOTT R
Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers "C" Coy. 1st Bn. Lance Corporal. Age: 23 Died 08/08/1916. 17748. Son of Thomas and Hannah Davidson Elliott; husband of Annie Elliott, of 4,
Cobden St., Townhead, Glasgow. Potijze Chateau Wood Cemetery, West Vlaanderen, Belgium

+FENWICK George

+HARIDAY T
Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers 1st Bn. Private. Died 09/08/1916. 24150. Potijze Chateau Wood Cemetery, West Vlaanderen, Belgium

+HAYDEN H
Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers 1st Bn. Private. Died 09/08/1916. 7791. Potijze Chateau Wood Cemetery, West Vlaanderen, Belgium

+HENDERSON, Duncan Frank

+KENNY, Francis Jospeh Leo

+McCLEERY W
Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, 1st Bn. Private. Age: 22. Died
09/08/1916. 3482. Son of Mrs. A. McCleery, of 23, City St., Belfast. Potijze Chateau Wood Cemetery, West Vlaanderen, Belgium

+McMANUS, Bernard

+MOONEY P

+PATTERSON W
Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers 1st Bn. Private. Died 09/08/1916. 28464. Potijze Chateau Wood Cemetery, West Vlaanderen, Belgium

+SHANNON E

+SHIELDS W
Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers "B" Coy. 2nd Bn. Private. Age: 26. Died 13/05/1918. 15996. Son of Ross and Isabella Shields, of 6, Moat St., Londonderry. Potijze Chateau Wood Cemetery, West Vlaanderen, Belgium

+STACEY, Cyril Robert William
Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers 3rd Bn. Lieutenant. Age: 22.
Died 09/08/1916 E.3. Son of Harold William and Jessie Margaret Stacey, of Sao Paulo, Brazil. Potijze Chateau Wood Cemetery, West Vlaanderen, Belgium

+WILLIAMSON J

"No Inniskillings can forget
The way you fought and how your voices rang
And as our rolling drums play out your soul,
Proudly we add your honours to our scroll."

1916

+GILL, William
Royal Irish Rifles, 11th Btn. Rifleman. 3006. Died 09/08/1916. Born in Dromore, the son of Joseph and Mrs. E. Gill. He lived at Ballyskeagh, Lambeg, where, before the war, he had been a damask weaver. He enlisted at Lisburn. He embarked with 11th Btn. for France from Bordon in October 1915. The Rev. J.G. Paton a Presbyterian chaplain wrote to his wife informing her that he, "was killed by a trench mortar bomb which burst close beside him and that death was instantaneous. I conducted a burial service yesterday [and] he is buried in a perfect little cemetery on the hillside. As you know he did his duty well in the big battle of the 1st July, and he always bore himself as a soldier and a man, earning
the goodwill of all who knew him. He has now made the
great sacrifice, and you have every reason to be proud of
him”. He and his wife had five young children. He had three
brothers all living at Ballyskeagh and all serving as Riflemen
in the RIR. They too had enlisted at the start of the war,
David and Robert (along with William) in the 11th Battalion
(South Antrim Volunteers), and they embarked with him for
France from Bordon in October 1915. James served in the
“regulars”. David, who had been promoted to Lance
Corporal in B Company, and James, were both wounded on
01/07/1916. Robert was also involved in the fighting that
day but was unhurt. All three appear to have survived the
war. Ration Farm (La Plus Douvre) Cemetery, Belgium.

+LYNN, John
Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, 1st Bn. Private. 4471. Died
09/08/1916. Aged 26. Son of James and Elizabeth Lynn, of
Mousetown, Coalisland, Co. Tyrone. One of four brothers
who died on service during the First World War; two of
whom are buried in Belgium, one in France and the fourth in
Israel. Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery, West Vlaanderen,
Belgium

1917

+ALLISON, Hazlett Samuel

Royal Irish Rifles, D Coy. 7th Bn. Major. MiD. Died
09/08/1917. Aged 23. Son of Lt. Col Hazlett Allison and
Mary Allison, of The Shola, Portrush, Co. Antrim. A graduate
of Cambridge University. B.A. (Honours) in 1914. Ypres
(Menin Gate) Memorial. West-Vlaanderen, Belgium
**+CASSIDY, James**
Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, 10th Btn. Private. Died 09/08/1917. He was born on 16th June 1888 in Kilrea, son of William and Margaret Cassidy. The family moved from Kilrea to Upperlands in 1893. James was part of a large family and had nine sisters and two brothers. James was a labourer. James Cassidy enlisted in Coleraine. In May 1917 he was awarded a parchment certificate for gallantry in battle. It was about this same time that he was wounded, and was home on ten days leave. Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial, Belgium. Wm Clarke & Sons, Upperlands WM

**+CAMPBELL, James**

**+DILWORTH, George**

**+HARRIS, Hugh**
+SEYMOUR, Samuel Herbert  

1918

+CAMPBELL, William  

+O'HARE, J  
Hampshire Regiment, 15th Btn. Private. 17552. Died 09/08/1918. Lijsenthoek Military Cemetery, Belgium

+REID, JF  

1940

+SANDERSON, Samuel  
RAFVR. Sergeant (Observer). 746826. Died 09/08/1940. Aged 29. 41 Madison Avenue, Belfast. Belfast City Cemetery, Glenalina. 502 (Ulster) Squadron WM, St Anne’s Cathedral, Belfast
1943

+HAIRE, Robert Henry
RAFVR. Leading Aircraftman. 1002842. Died 09/08/1943.
Aged 23. Son of Robert and Susan Haire, of Lisburn.
Chungkai War Cemetery, Thailand

1944

+BARKER, Thomas James

Special Air Service Regiment, A.A.C. 1st Btn. Private.
enlistment Tot worked with Messrs David Anderson & Son
Grocers, Cookstown. At the age of 17 he joined the Royal
Inniskilling Fusiliers. A month before his 18th birthday he
transferred to the Royal Ulster Rifles. He later became a
paratrooper with the 6th Airborne Division and finally joined
the Special Air Service. On the night of 4th July 1944 a unit
of paratroopers was taken prisoner and executed on the 8th.
Son of John and Florence Barker, of Cookstown. Marissel
French National Cemetery, Oise, France. Cookstown WM

+O'FEE, James Edward
RAFVR. Sergeant. 1544258. Died 09/08/1944. Age 24. 18
Sqdn. Son of James and Jenny O'Fee, of Kilrea. Cesena
War Cemetery. Cesena, Forli

+YOUNG, William Pearson
Special Air Service Regiment, AAC. Royal Ulster Rifles, 1st
‘Coldagh’ Ballymoney. Marissel French National Cemetery,
Oise, France.
YOUNG, William Pearson
1 SAS (D Squadron). Trooper. 7018947. Croix de Guerre (posthumous). POW 4.7.1944 - executed in a wood near Beauvais, France 06/07/1944. Age 22 years. A brother was serving in the RAF and five cousins were also serving. His father and four uncles served in WW1. Eldest of five sons of William and Elizabeth Young (both died 1959), Kemmill Hill, Randalstown. Marissel French National Cemetery, Oise, France

VETERAN

BECK, William Alexander
RNVR. Surgeon Sub Lieutenant 29/07/1918. Served as a Surgeon Probationer. Appointed to Haslar RNH along with Allison and Lyttle FROM QUB. Later served in HMS Rifleman, a destroyer. BRA. Matriculated QUB 1916. Graduated QUB MB 1921, BCh, DPH 1923, and went into general practice in the city. He conducted medical examinations of recruits to RN and RM. Born 09/08/1898. Son of WA Beck, Bannville, Knutsford Drive, Belfast. Agnes Street - PCI RH

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We will remember them

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