

MAY 3



remembrance ni



Top row, left to right: SM Brodison DCM, Lt Ambrose McGonigle MC, L-Cpl Howells. Bottom row, left to right: Cpl Nash MM, Lt Ian Smith MC, RFM Coleman

**Limavady's 'Happy Amateur' was outstanding Commando**

## In May, 2012, Limavady lost one of its favourite adopted sons when ‘The Happy Amateur’, Ian Smith MC, died.

Ian Smith, in his nineties, had a long and eventful life, in which he fought Nazis, Greek Communists, Italian Fascists, and was almost blown up in Randalstown during a paramilitary carjacking.

Smith was well known in Limavady for his book ‘A Happy Amateur’, which gives an interesting and vivid account of his time in the army, both as a member of the newly established Parachute Regiment and as a recruit to the Commandos. He also wrote about his life post-WWII, including details of his careers which were as varied as a hotelier and a salmon farmer. He was husband to the late Peggy Smith, who had family ties with the Roe Valley.

In ‘A Happy Amateur’, the late Ian Smith tells his story with wit, personality and no short measure of humour. When he recounts the tale of a childhood visit to 1930s Germany, where Hitler and his Nazi party had been in power a few years but before the onset of war. He speaks about what he and fellow scouts thought of the Nazis, but spends more time on another childhood story of how he was caught in Guernsey sending a message via morse code which read “the headmaster’s balls are not round.”

A chapter entitled ‘Wycliffe and School and Trips Abroad’ contains the following passage: “As far as we could see in our immature way, Germany had regained pride in herself and there was an air of prosperity, this was before the onslaught of the Jews, but I recall heated discussions over the anti Jewish speeches of the Nazis.”

However, the spirit of ‘A Happy Amateur’ is more apparent when he writes: “In 1936 there was a scout camp in Guernsey, I don’t really remember much about it except for one outstanding incident.

“Now all good scouts were expected to know the Morse code by both flag and wireless buzzer. In a forgetful moment I sent a message to another duty cook announcing that ‘the Headmasters balls are not round’. It was unfortunate that not all the Masters had gone to Church.”

It is the tales of daring raids across numerous countries in Europe during World War Two which truly set Smith’s story apart. He tells of how one Belgian “expert in small arms” and his friend who, during the closing stages of the evacuation at Dunkirk, were tasked with sorting weapons recovered from civilian refugees. The Belgian began spinning a pistol on his finger and flinging it into the air, before catching it on his finger again – an act which convinced Smith that “at one time he had been a circus juggler.”

Unfortunately, despite Smith shouting “Oi” and again, “Oi, Oi – for God’s sake stop it”, one of the pistols went off and shot a friend of the ‘arms expert’ through the heart, dead – an incident which obviously made a lasting impact on Smith.

He was among the first members of the Parachute Regiment and the SAS, but eventually joined the Commandos. He was posted to Norway where, disguised, he kept watch on German shipping movements. He recalls one photograph where he was pictured in costume standing under a swastika in Norway.

As for the invasion of Nazi-occupied France, Smith writes with fluency and gives a highly personal account of the battles fought as part of what colleagues described as “some hush, hush thing to do with the commandos.”

He writes: “I have forgotten exactly how many raids we made on the French Coast, mostly unsuccessful, it must have been eight or nine, but I will tell in detail of but two, because in the haze of time I am unable to identify one similar op from another. I remember thinking at the time that we were in what was a singularly unique position. Stalin and others who should have known better were calling for the immediate launching of the Second Front ie the invasion of Europe, and here were we answering this demand. We were on our way to Europe, all seven of us, so look out Mr Hitler.”

After detailing the ensuing action, he also recounts an incredible tale of his time in Yugoslavia, assisting communist partisans in their fight against the Nazis. Among the stories of fighting in the fierce Eastern European nation, he summarised his time there: “Life amongst the Partisans was very different, they on the whole occupied the mountains and anywhere the Germans were not. One immediate difference was the lack of food. Whatever the variety of my way so far, and my experiences were pretty unique, there was always enough to eat, particularly when we were fed by the Navy – it was certainly a rare event to go hungry.” He added: “Generally we got one meal every other day, this was made up of meat from oxen which had been killed that morning, boiled and eaten in the afternoon, it was so tough that the chewing took several hours and so passed the time and eased the hunger pains.”

Smith also has many tales of war involving Crete and Greece, Lake Comachio in Italy and a host of locations throughout Europe in the worst war ever fought in human history, as well as colourful, humorous and interesting stories of life in the army.

After fighting against the Nazi tyranny in Europe, Smith was almost blown up by a car bomb in Randalstown in the 1970s, a story he tells briefly in a chapter entitled ‘An Incident’.

Despite all this, the lasting impression left by a reading of ‘A Happy Amateur’ is that of warmth, family and humour and a feeling of great empathy towards the sadly deceased Ian Smith.

While it was undoubtedly his time in the army which provides the greatest drama, His final chapter is dedicated solely to his late wife, Peggy, who had family ties with the Boyles from the Roe Valley area.

Ian Smith’s funeral service was held at Christ Church, Limavady on Thursday, May 10, 2012.

## **In Flanders fields the poppies grow**

**On 03/05/1915 a Canadian medical officer, Lt. Colonel John McCrae, penned the words of the now famous tribute as a piece to be read at the funeral of his friend Lt. Alexis Hemer.**

In Flanders fields, the poppies blow Between the crosses,  
row on row That mark our place, and in the sky The larks,  
still bravely singing, fly Scarce heard amid the guns below

MAY 3

We are the dead, short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow Loved, and were  
loved, and now we lie In Flanders fields In Flanders fields



**Lt. Colonel John McCrae**

And now we lie In Flanders fields Take up our quarrel with  
the foe: To you from failing hands we throw The torch, be  
yours to hold it high

If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow In Flanders fields  
In Flanders fields  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow In Flanders fields  
In Flanders fields

# On this Day - May 3

**3rd May 1915 Belfast Newsletter -**

## **THE DIVISIONAL PARADE**

An Official Announcement THE LINE OF ROUTE

ULSTER DIVISION REVIEW

109th Infantry Brigade

Further arrangements in connection with the Ulster Division review have been completed. The 9th and 11th Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, from Randalstown, will travel by four special trains, leaving the camp station at 6:00 a.m., 6:25 a.m., 6:40 a.m., and 7:13 a.m. on the morning of the review. The battalions will be completed in Duncrue Street, Belfast, and will march via York Street, Royal Avenue, Donegall Place, Bedford Street, University Road, Malone Road and Deramore Park South, where they will be joined by the 14th Royal Irish Rifles (Y.C.V.'s), who are coming by road from Randalstown.

After the march through the city in the afternoon, the brigade will rest in Alexandra Park, and the first of the return specials will leave Midland terminus at 6:45 p.m.

The 121st, 122nd, and 150th Field Companies R.E. will travel by train from Antrim at 8:00 a.m. and 8:15 a.m., returning by trains at 5:10 p.m. and 5:25 p.m.

MAY 3

The 16th Battalion Royal Irish Rifles will leave Lurgan by special train at 7:30 a.m., and detrain at Balmoral, marching to the parade ground, and leaving Belfast terminus at 6:45 p.m. for Lurgan.

After the review on the Malone ground the division will, as already announced proceed via Lisburn Road. Shaftesbury Square, Great Victoria Street, Wellington Place, past City Hall, up Chichester Street, and through Victoria Street, High Street, Castle Place, and Royal Avenue to the junction of North Street, where it will split into different brigades, which will follow routes yet to be announced.

In connection with the review a considerable number of men, horse, and transport will have to be billeted in the city, and it may safely be asserted that those who are called on by the police will do all in their power to comply with the wishes of the authorities.

## 1921

The Government of Ireland Act came into force, creating Northern Ireland and Southern Ireland as separate legal entities on the island.

## 1940

War Office announces withdrawal from Namsos; Allies remain only in Narvik to stop the supply of iron ore to Germany.

Allied forces south of Trondheim surrender to Germans. Destroyer Afridi sunk by German bombers off Norway. Hitler postpones X-Day to the 6th May due to bad weather.

MAY 3

## 1942

Off the northern coast of Norway, German destroyers sink the British cruiser Edinburgh which was escorting Convoy PQ-15.

The Japanese make landings on Tulagi in the Solomon Islands.

The Japanese covering force at Tulagi, which consisted of the carrier Shoho and escorts leaves to act as cover for the Port Moresby landings.

The submarine USS Spearfish (SS-190) evacuates 12 Army nurses from the Philippines.

## 1942

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MAY 3

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## 1943

The U.S. commander in Europe, Lieutenant General Frank M. Andrews is killed in air crash in Iceland.

The Russians report the ‘smashing’ of a German counter attack in the Kuban, to the South of Rostov.

US troops take Mateur, less than 50 miles Northwest of Tunis.

## 1944

The rationing of all meat, except for steak, is canceled. Supplies of pork and beef are judged to be sufficient for both military and civilian consumption.

## 1945

38 (Irish) Division -Brigadier Pat Scott:

"We discovered that that the German Army Group South East, opposite to the Yugoslavs & the Russians, had not played on the general surrender in Europe, which had occurred in the meantime. There were other complications too.

There was also a Cossack Corps milling about on its own somewhere on our front & the Yugoslavs were not taking too kindly to our having reached Trieste & a few other places to the north of it before them. All in the garden was not a bed of roses."

The British 7th Armoured Division capture the city of Hamburg, the last remaining defence for the Germans in the north

MAY 3

Typhoons and Tempests of 2nd TAF carry out devastating attacks on enemy shipping in the Baltic. Large numbers of flying boats and transport aircraft, attempting a massed evacuation to Norway, are also destroyed.

German envoys meet Montgomery at his HQ on Luneburg Heath, South of Hamburg to discuss peace. The envoys return to Donitz and recommend unconditional surrender of all forces facing the 21st Army Group. The German defence system in NW Germany is now in chaos as troops, civilians



and refugees pour west to escape the Russian advance. General Wolz surrenders Hamburg to the British Second Army and declares Hamburg an open city. The U.S. Ninth Army makes contact with the Russians in the Wismar area. The U.S. Third Army crosses the river Inn, while the U.S. Seventh Army captures Innsbruck and reaches the Brenner Pass. The Russians make contact with the U.S. 9th Army

MAY 3



The first wave of the amphibious assault by 26th Indian Division on Rangoon began (Op Dracula). Royal Marines manned the landing craft and guns of the support shipping. in the Wismar area. SEAC announces the liberation of Rangoon in Burma. German ship "Cap Arcona" laden with prisoners sunk by Royal Air Force in East Sea, 5,800 killed - one of largest maritime losses of life



1954 - CWGC Malta Memorial was unveiled by Her Majesty The Queen. The memorial commemorates over 2,200 airmen who lost their lives during WW2 whilst serving with Commonwealth Air Forces.



# Roll of Honour - May 3

*Representing their comrades who died on this day*

**1915**

## **+LONG, Samuel**

RMLI. Private. PLY/471(S). Plymouth Battalion. RND. Died 03/05/1915. Missing, assumed dead. (Killed in action 'Y' Beach 25-26/04/1915). RM Brigade 22/11/1914 - 03/05/1915. Enlisted 08/10/14. Born Glasgow, 28/02/1887. Son of Alexander Long, Tower St., Belfast. Gallipoli. Helles Memorial. ADM 159/175/471

## **+MILLS, Thomas Alexander**

RM. Private. PLY/16717. Plymouth Btn. RND. Died 03/05/1915. Dardanelles. Aged 17. Enlisted Belfast

MAY 3

09/06/1914 ; Plymouth Battalion at Dunkirk 19/09/1914-  
12/10/1914 ; MEF 06/12/15-26/04/1915.

A member of Ebrington Presbyterian Church, and Murray Parent Club of Apprentice Boys of Derry, he enrolled a few weeks before the declaration of war. He was an apprentice collar cutter in the factory of Messrs. Lowry & Porter.

He formed part of the 29th Division engaged in the landing operations at the Dardanelles. Private Mills was initially reported missing at the Dardanelles, and his father, having written to the Admiralty inquiring about his son, received the following communication from the officer in charge of records, Royal Naval Division: 'The very great number of the enquiries received in this office in respect of members of the Royal Naval Division on active service renders it impossible to reply personally in each case. Correspondents, therefore, receiving this form are asked to be so good as to understand it to signify that the Record Office has no news (or, in cases where a previous report has been made, no further news) of the subject of their inquiry. In all cases where information is received a personal communication will be made at once to the next of kin...'

The name of Thomas Alexander Mills was read aloud during a special memorial service held in First Derry Presbyterian Church, on Friday, 04/08/1916, to pay tribute to the Presbyterian soldiers of the city of Londonderry, who had died during the first two years of the Great War.

Born Templemore, Londonderry 01/03/1897. Son of Alexander and Margaret Mills, Orchard St., Londonderry. Helles Memorial. Londonderry, The Diamond WM. Ebrington - PCI RH.

**1916**

**+GRIBBEN, Hugh**

7th Bn. Leinster Regiment. Private. 1571. Died 03/05/1916.  
Born Cushendun. Longuenesse (St. Omer), Souvenir  
Cemetery

**+WEIR, Henry Keith Crichton**

South Staffordshire Regiment, 10th Btn. Second  
Lieutenant. Died 03/05/1916. Age 23. LOL 431. Son of  
Henry Crichton Weir and Elizabeth Singer O'Neill Weir of  
Iniscora, Downpatrick. Down Cathedral New Cemetery

**1917**

**+ANDERSON, Louis Henry**

Canadian Infantry, 31st Btn. Private. 115964. Died  
03/05/1917. Age 21. Son of George Anderson, of Lurgan.  
Aubingny Communal Cemetery Extension, France

**+BOAL, John Kirk**

Royal Irish Fusiliers 3rd Batt, attd. 1st . Captain. Died  
03/05/1917. Aged 20. Son of John and Sophie Boal, of  
Antrim House, Antrim. Arras Memorial, Bay 9, Pas de  
Calais, France. Crumlin Presbyterian Church, plaque

**+BRADLEY, George**

MGC(T). Sergeant. 206144. MM. Died 03/05/1917. Aged 26.  
Born in Lisburn, he enlisted at Belfast and served in the  
MGC (17709). Subsequently transferred to MGC(T). Son of  
Robert and Margaret Bradley of 34 Greenmount Villa,

MAY 3

Henderson Avenue, Belfast. Mory Abbey Military Cemetery, France

**+HEASLEY, Alexander**

1 KLR. Private. 91270. Died 03/05/1917. Aged 35. Born in Lisburn, and living at Broomhedge, Moira, he enlisted at Liverpool. Son of James Heasley, Broomhedge Bogs, Moira. Arras Memorial, Bay 3, Pas de Calais, France.

**+GALLAGHER Thomas J.**

Royal Irish Fusiliers. 1st Bn. Private. 20937. Died 03/05/1917. Age 21. Son of James and Margaret Ellen Gallagher, of Edward Street, Lurgan. Arras Memorial, Pas de Calais, France

**1940**

**+LACKEY, John Campbell**

Royal Ulster Rifles, 2<sup>nd</sup> Btn. Rifleman. 7015445. Died 03/05/1940. Aged 33. Born Woodvale, Belfast. Son of Arthur and Sarah Lackey; husband to Agnes Lackey, of 182 Wilton Street, Belfast. Father of Ivan. Belfast. Belfast City Cemetery

**+PRICE, Vincent Cyril**

RN. Signalman. P/JX 126917. Died 03/05/1940. Age 29. HMS Afridi. Sunk off the coast of Norway. Bombed by Stukas, one bomb passing through the wireless telegraphy room. Son of Arthur Herbert Price and Annie Eliza Price. Arthur, an assistant verger at St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast, had served as a gun layer in the RN. Husband to Annie

MAY 3

Jane Price, Ballinlea, Ballycastle. Plymouth Naval Memorial,  
Panel 40

**1941**

**+CARLIN, George**

RAFVR. Aircraftman 1st Class. 968285. 272 Sqdn. Died  
03/05/1941. Aged 20. Son of Margaret Dowds of Waterside,  
Londonderry. Ardmore Roman Catholic Cemetery

# **Every day is a Remembrance Day**

***We will remember them***

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[houstonmckelvey@mac.com](mailto:houstonmckelvey@mac.com)

# remembrance ni

The **remembrance ni** programme is overseen by Very Rev Dr Houston McKelvey OBE, QVRM, TD who served as Chaplain to 102 and 105 Regiments Royal Artillery (TA), as Hon. Chaplain to RNR and as Chaplain to the RBL NI area and the Burma Star Association NI. Dr McKelvey is a Past President of Queen's University Services Club. He may be contacted at [houston.mckelvey@btinternet.com](mailto:houston.mckelvey@btinternet.com)

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