On his birthday we remember WW1 Medical Officer Samuel Edward Picken

Samuel was educated at the Belfast Royal Academy and studied medicine at the Queen's University, where he graduated in June 1914. He volunteered for service on the outbreak of war and gained a temporary commission at the rank of Lieutenant within the R.A.M.C. on 09/10/1914. He was promoted to temporary Captain exactly one year later.
He was Mentioned in Despatches on 29/05/1917

Samuel was awarded the Military Medal for "conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty in going forward under heavy shell fire and attending to the wounded in advanced trenches and shell holes. He remained in the shelled area for a long period, working incessantly and efficiently at the dressing and evacuating the wounded. He has always shown the same gallant spirit and devotion to duty."

He also served with the Army of Occupation, and was promoted to Acting Major on 13/12/1918. He relinquished the rank of acting Major on 12/10/1919, leaving the army on 10/04/1920 and taking up general practice.

A comrade wrote of him - "When I joined them (the 10th R.I.F.) I found that Dr. S. E. Picken, in the spite of his youth and inexperience, had established himself as a very efficient medical officer, and had identified himself heart and soul with the battalion, which he served so faithfully till the end of the war.

"We have often seen him with absorbed and pitying face, skillful hands, and infinite patience, spending hours in trying to make the waiting easier from some tortured soul. Many to-day, looking at their visible scars, will bless Sammy Picken for smoothing the first hours of shock and pain, and for seeing that they were sent back with all speed to quieter regions.

"Sammy was a battalion M.O., a front line doctor, during all his time in France. It was his own choice.... I remember a dressing station, with a wooden cross at the entrance marking the grave of the previous medical officer, a distinguished V.C. with bar, and a pill box in the salient..."
August 29

Dunoor cemetery in South Ayrshire rainbow - photo Iain Anderson

swimming with water, shelled night and day - a death trap, because from our point of view the door was turned the wrong way. These were some of the residences which Dr Picken had to occupy in the performance of a duty he never shirked.

“He did not talk much, but he had a keen sense of humour, which made him a delightful companion. He rejoiced in the quaint sayings and extraordinary actions of his men, and he was in his glory when a "rag" was in progress, and was ever ready to lend a helping hand.

“When Sam Picken was promoted, when he was mentioned in dispatches, when he was decorated, there was no doubt about the approval of all who knew him. We felt no honour
could repay him for what he had done for all of us, and indeed the honour he valued most was the enduring place which he held in the hearts of thousands of men. That he should have earned such a reputation for courage in a battalion that was noted all over the Western Front for its dash, its reckless bravery, its grim determination to do or die, speaks for itself."

Samuel died in a bathing tragedy on July 14, 1935, when he, his wife, and friends went bathing in the sea at Castlerock. It is believed Samuel suffered a heart attack when they were all leaving the sea and disappeared, his body was recovered a few minutes later in shallow water.

Sam Picken was born at Ballytresna, Randalstown, on the 29/08/1890. He was the son of James and Anna Picken (nee Craig) who in 1901 were living at 'Hazelbank', Ballytresna, Randalstown. James died on 09/06/1902 at Ballytresna and by 1911 Anna and her family were at 7 Richmond Crescent, Antrim Road, Duncairn, Belfast.


On this day – August 29

Retreating British troops from Mons. August 1914
August 29

1939

The Admiralty orders the mobilisation of the Fleet for war.

Operation Peking, as tensions between Poland and Germany increased, three destroyers of the Polish Navy,
Burza, Błyskawica, and Grom were evacuated to the UK to avoid certain destruction or capture in the German invasion.

1940

British prime minister Churchill gave his famous "Never was so much owed by so many to so few" speech, referring to the ongoing efforts of the Royal Air Force crews who were at the time fighting the Battle of Britain.

Armed merchant cruiser HMS Dunvegan Castle (ex Union Castle Line) sank off north-western Ireland. She had been
torpedoed on the previous day by German submarine U-46. It took three torpedoes to stop her. 27 of her crew lost their lives in the attack

Germany apologizes to Eire for Wexford bombing. Intense dogfights over London and Home Counties. Britain refuses German proposal to use 64 Red Cross ships to rescue airmen from the English Channel.

Vichy France agree to Japanese demands that they be allowed to station forces in northern Indochina.

First mass jump by US paratroopers, at Fort Benning, GA.

1941

Despite protests, Vichy parliament moves to holiday resort in the hills.

Germany and the Soviet Union suffer heavy casualties at Leningrad. Public opinion in the United States is summed up by Missouri senator Harry Truman, who says, “If we see that Germany is winning, we ought to help Russia, and if we see that Russia is winning, we ought to help Germany.”

Russians evacuate Karelian Isthmus to Leningrad. The Finnish troops capture Vyborg and are now only 30 miles North of Leningrad.

Cease-fire in Iran—USSR & Britain occupy.

1942

The German Tiger I heavy tank made its first frontline debut on the Leningrad Front, without great success. Many broke down, one became stuck in swampy ground and was captured by the Soviets. See photo next page
Japanese warships begin to evacuate Milne Bay.

The American Red Cross announces that Japan has refused to allow safe conduct for the passage of ships with supplies for American prisoners of war.

1943

Martial law is declared in Denmark and the Danish Royal Family are ‘isolated’ by the Germans.

1944

American troops marched down the Champs Elysees in Paris as the French capital continued to celebrate its liberation from the Nazis.

The British begin the ‘Race for Amiens’. U.S. troops liberate Soissons, 60 miles Northeast of Paris. Montelimar is taken by the French who also cross the Rhone in several places.

The Canadians enter Rouen. The Russians capture the Romanian oilfields at Ploiesti and enter Hungarian occupied Transylvania. An uprising begins in Slovakia against the pro-
German government of Dr. Tiso.

**Ramleh War Graves in Israel**

**1945**

The lists of the first war criminals to be tried at Nuremberg are drawn up by a ‘Four Power’ Commission of Prosecutors in London. Goring, Hess, von Ribbentrop, Dr Ley, Rosenberg, Dr Frank, Streicher, Keitel, Dr Funk, von Shirach, Dr Schacht, Sauckel, Prof Speer, Bormann, von Papen, Jodl, Krupp, Raeder, Donitz, Baron von Neurath, Seyss-Inquart and Frische are all named.

The Russians announce the capture of 513,000 prisoners in the Manchurian campaign.

The Soviets shoot down a B29 dropping supplies to POWs in Korea.

U.S. airborne troops are landed in transport planes at Atsugi airfield, southwest of Tokyo, beginning the occupation of Japan.

First Allied POWs in Japan are liberated, from Camp Omori, by US Navy forces.

The United States ends military draft.
Representing their comrades who died on this day

1915

+CURRIE, Francis
Royal Irish Fusiliers, 5th Btn. Rifleman. 5393. Died 29/08/1915. Age 27. Son of James and Elizabeth Anne Currie. of Queen St., Portadown. Helles Memorial, Turkey

+JEFFS, Robert

+MAGEE, John

+McDOWELL, William
1916

+LONG, Thomas Wray

1917

+KEAN, Cuthbert Benedict

+TURKINGTON, Thomas Henry

+WHELAN, Robert Selkirk
Royal Irish Rifles. Company Sergeant Major. M.C. M.M.16093. Died 29/08/1917. Age 25. Pre war he was an apprentice plumber. The London Gazette dated 14/09/1917 carried the following citation on the awarding of the Military Cross - “10/16/1916 CSM Robert Selkirk Whelan Royal Irish Rifles - For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty in capturing twelve of the enemy with the assistance of a comrade whilst they were reconnoitring our position. He also showed great courage and fearlessness in the face of machine gun fire bringing and abandoned enemy machine gun into action and enfilading the enemy with it, thereby
facilitating our capture of a strong point. After this he took forward a patrol and captured and enemy field gun, together with its escort, thirty in number. He set a splendid example of pluck and initiative”. Son of John Edwards and Elizabeth of 64 Ravenhill Road, Belfast. Metz-En-Couture Communal Cemetery British Extension, France. St Jude’s C of I Church, Belfast, WM

1918

+DICKSON, Thomas.


+DAVEY, William Hamilton

Northumberland Fusiliers, B" Coy. 27th (Tyneside Irish) Battalion. Major. OBE. Died 29/08/1920. Age 40. QUB M.A. LL.B. Barrister - at - Law. Entered Queen’s 18/10/1899. William Hamilton Davey was an editor of the Ulster Guardian and he had been awarded the OBE. He stood in the General Election of December 1918 as a pro Home Rule candidate for the Irish Parliamentary Party in the Duncairn constituency in Belfast. The seat was won by the Irish Unionist, Sir Edward Henry Carson. Son of Robert and Jane Davey; husband to Ruby Irene Davey, Pier House, Cultra, Co. Down. Born at Carrickfergus. Carrickfergus (Victoria) Cemetery, Co. Antrim. There are seven Commonwealth
burials of the 1914-1918 war and 11 of the 1939-1945 war here.

1941

+KELLY, Hugh Alphonsus

1942

+KELLY, John

+MURPHY, John

1944

+BOTTOMLEY, Henry Charles William
+DICK, Thomas

RAFVR. Sergeant (Air Gunner).1798176. Died 29.30/08/1944. Aged 19. 12 Squadron. Aboard Avro Lancaster PD273 which took off from R.A.F. Wickenby for a raid on Stettin, Poland on the night of 29/30 August 1944. Survivor, Sergeant A. Madelaine Flight Engineer, stated, ” Approaching the target we were told to descend below the cloud layer by the Master Bomber and we started our run at 10,000’. The flak was extremely heavy and we had to turn away to avoid debris from a Lancaster that exploded alongside us.

“Suddenly the mid upper gunner reported a fire beneath him and I started to don a portable oxygen bottle in preparation for going down the fuselage to help douse the fire. The navigator passed me on the way to the bomb aimers compartment breaking my intercom, connection. Looking down the fuselage all I could see was a white glow and a thick white vapour. Out of this came the wireless operator wearing his parachute, he stopped me from entering the fuselage to attend to the fire and indicated that I should join him in the bomb aimers compartment. The pilot then indicated that I should leave, I left, noting that all the engine were still running.

“I saw the wireless operator leave the aircraft and immediately open his chute which reminded me to open mine. Smoke was rising to 10,000’ and I was falling in the target area and worried about landing in a fire."  

Thomas’ remains were buried along with his fellow Crew member, Sergeant (Air Gunner) Thomas Brian Dufty,1852960. Son of Adam and Annie Dick of
Carrickfergus, Co. Antrim. Old Garrison Cemetery, Poznan, Poland.

+MURRAY, Charles Malachi

RAF. Sergeant (Flight Engineer). 535937. MiD twice. Died 29 - 30/08/1944. Aged 27. 166 Squadron, RAF. On the night of 29 - 30/08/1944 he was aboard Avro Lancaster 1, PD261, AS-S as Flight Engineer when the aircraft left R.A.F. Kirmington, Lincolnshire on a mission to Stettin, Poland. 402 Lancaster Bombers took part in this raid of which 23 were lost including AS-S which is believed to have been shot down by a German Night Fighter with the loss of all on board. Having finished his initial training at Henlow, he was assigned to 6 Squadron and posted to the Middle East where he was stationed in Palestine and Egypt before the outbreak of war. Early in the war, his squadron was involved in the North African Campaign providing air cover and, for his services, he was awarded the ‘Africa Star’. Following the allied victory at El Alemein, 6 Squadron was recalled to the United Kingdom. In October 1942, he was transferred to Coastal Command 228 Squadron. He flew many missions over the Atlantic in Sunderland flying boats, spotting German U-boats, which were ravaging allied convoys at the time. At different times he was stationed at Lough Neagh and Lough Erne. In March 1944 Charlie was transferred to 166 Squadron Bomber Command. Son of Patrick and Emily Murray from Acton, Co. Armagh. Charles Murray’s remains are together with the rest of the Crew at Poznan Old Garrison Cemetery, Poland.
+STEWART, Charles Fullerton


VETERAN

FORSYTHE, James Roy

Air Commodore James Roy Forsythe served in the Royal Air Force during World War Two. Known as Paddy, he was born in Belfast, Co. Antrim on 10/07/1920. His father was managing director of one of the city's linen manufacturing firms.

James received his education at Methodist College, Belfast, Co. Antrim, and studied law at Queen’s University, Belfast, Co. Antrim. While at university, he was a member of the University Air Squadron. He enlisted in the Royal Air Force in September 1941. He trained in the United States of America under the Arnold Scheme. With an assessment of “above average”, he remained in America as an instructor.

Forsythe was keen to see combat and do his part in the war effort. In early 1944, he trained as a Bomber Pilot and joined RAF 625 Squadron at a Flight Lieutenant. He flew Avro Lancaster Bombers from RAF Kelstern, Lincolnshire.

Dresden and Operation Manna

On 13th-14th February 1945, he took part in the Bomber Command raids on the city of Dresden, Germany. On the
night of 13th February 1945, Forsythe’s crew were in the air for more than 11 hours.

In 2009, he spoke about the controversial firebombing raid on the medieval German city and defended the crews of RAF 625 Squadron:

We were clearly briefed to go for the marshalling yards. We were supporting the Russians, and there was no question of taking out everybody.

Forsythe always maintained the marshalling yards were the only target and the RAF hit them with precision. As well as disrupting enemy rail transport, this action would aid the Red Army which was to launch a ground attack. He suggested an unusually strong wind caused the devastating firestorm, which destroyed much of the city and left tens of thousands dead. In the aftermath of the Dresden Raid, he described Prime Minister Winston Churchill as “cowardly”. He claimed it was Churchill’s decision to launch the attack on the German city but afterward the Prime Minister sought to blame Air Chief Marshall Arthur “Bomber” Harris.

On several raids, searchlights coned his plane as the crew unleashed their bombload on cities such as Stettin and Chemnitz. The Pilot would corkscrew the plane to escape the anti-aircraft fire. Once, flak from an anti-aircraft gun smashed through the nose of the Lancaster killing a Bomb Aimer but Forsythe managed to return the Lancaster to base.

Towards the end of WW2 Paddy’s crew took part in Operation Manna. The operation saw more than 6,500 tons of food dropped to the starving population of the German-occupied Netherlands. The Lancaster crew flew several of
these sorties, approaching at heights of around 250 feet. A truce negotiated with German gunners somewhat protected them. In total, Paddy Forsythe flew 32 bombing operations. He received the Distinguished Flying Cross for his actions in the Second World War.

Life after the War

In 1946, Paddy married his first wife Barbara who died in 1983. In 1989 he married his second wife Wayne from New Zealand. When not in the air, Forsythe was a keen rugby player and devoted much time to developing rugby union within the Royal Air Force. He was chairman of RAF Rugby from 1971-1974 and later became life president. He also served as president of London Irish Rugby Football Club.

After the Second World War, Forsythe joined Transport Command’s Lancastrian Flight carrying mail between England and New Zealand. He attended the Empire Central Flying School and became an instructor. In 1955, he took command of the University Air Squadron at Aberdeen University in Scotland. In 1958, he took command of RAF 16 Squadron flying English Electric Canberra planes from RAF Laarbruch, Germany. Further roles, saw Paddy on the staff of the College of Air Warfare, head of an RAF aid mission to India, before taking command of No. 6 Flying Training School at Acklington, Northumberland. By now, Forsythe was a Group Captain and received a CBE for his work in the development of student pilots. His final roles with the Royal Air Force were in the Air Plans Division, Director of Recruiting, and finally as Director of Public Relations.

Air Commodore James Roy “Paddy” Forsythe died on 29/08/2009 aged 89 years old.
Every Day is a Remembrance Day

We will remember them

To return to Home Page - click on Remembrance NI masthead.

Are you on Facebook? Please like the Remembrance Ni Facebook site to receive notice of new posts

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

Copyright - all material in this remembrance ni publication is copyright, and must not be reproduced in print or electronically.