

‘NOTHING CAN EXCUSE US IF WE FAIL’

**The British and their Dead Servicemen,
North-West Europe, 1944-1951**

Submitted by Jennie Gray to the University of Exeter
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ABSTRACT

Shortly after landing in France on D-Day, 6 June 1944, the British began a programme of care for the military dead of North-West Europe which would last for some seven years. The dead included not only the fatal casualties of the 1944-45 campaigns to liberate the occupied countries and conquer Germany, but also those who had died during the defeats in Norway and France in 1940. In addition, there the many thousands of missing RAF airmen who had been lost throughout the six years of the war.

The Royal Navy, for obvious reasons, had few land-based dead, and thus it was the Army and the RAF who carried out the complex programme, ranging over vast areas of Europe and into Soviet territory as the Cold War began. The Army had the central role in registrations, exhumations, and the creation of the new military cemeteries, whilst the RAF's focus was almost entirely upon the search for its missing airmen. The Services had different motivations and different agendas, but the ultimate goal of each was the honourable burial of the dead and the creation of registers of the long-term missing, who would later be commemorated on memorials.

The British search and graves units, by the nature of their work, often discovered evidence of war crimes. The high cultural standing of the British dead was intrinsically related to the horrors of the Nazi regime, and revulsion against the nation responsible for so much suffering led to difficult policy decisions on servicemen's graves in Germany. It was a matter of pride, however, that the German dead, many thousands of whom became the responsibility of the British, were treated in almost exactly the same way as their own servicemen.

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DEFINITIONS

Archives

TNA The National Archives

DEPARTMENTAL NAMES

A.G.13 The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries
at the War Office

S.7 (Cas) The Air Ministry Casualty Branch (beginning of war)

P.4 (Cas) The Air Ministry Casualty Branch (wartime)

S.14 (Cas) The Air Ministry Casualty Branch (after the war)

ACRONYMS

AAG Assistant Adjutant General

AD Assistant Director

ADGRE Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries, *or*
Assistant Director, Graves Registration and Enquiries

ADGR&E Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries, *or*
Assistant Director, Graves Registration and Enquiries

AGRC American Graves Registration Command

AGRS American Graves Registration Service

AMGOT Allied Military Government for Occupied Territories

AMP Air Member for Personnel

AOC Air Officer Commanding

ATS Auxiliary Territorial Service

BAFO British Air Forces of Occupation

BAOR British Army of the Rhine

BLA British Liberated Area, sometimes British Liberation Army

BRCS British Red Cross Society

CIP	Central Identification Point
CO	Commanding Officer
DAD	Deputy Assistant Director
DADAGR&E	Deputy Assistant Director, Graves Registration and Enquiries
DADAGRE	Deputy Assistant Director, Graves Registration and Enquiries
DD	Deputy Director
DDW	Deputy Director of Works
ETOUSA	European Theatre of Operations, United States Army
GCU	Graves Concentration Unit
GHQ	General Headquarters
GR&E	Graves Registration and Enquiries
GRE	Graves Registration and Enquiries
GRO	General Routine Order
GRU	Graves Registration Unit
IRCC	International Red Cross Committee
IWGC	Imperial War Graves Commission
KIA	Killed in action
L of C	Lines of Communication
MIA	Missing in action
MO	Medical Officer
MR	Missing Research
MRES	Missing Research and Enquiry Service
MREU	Missing Research and Enquiry Unit
MRGRS	Missing Research Graves Registration Section
MRM	Missing Research Memorandum
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
OC	Officer Commanding
OR	Other Ranks
ORB	Operation Record Book
POW	Prisoner of War

RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RACHD	Royal Army Chaplains' Department.
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAMC	Royal Army Medical Corps
RCAF	Royal Canadian Air Force
RE	Royal Engineers
REFORSEC	Reinforcements Section
RNZAF	Royal New Zealand Air Force
SEAC	South East Asia Command
SHAEF	Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force
SOE	Special Operations Executive
WOCINDOC	War Office Circular of Instructions Relative to Documentation in Theatres of War

INTRODUCTION

Shortly after D-Day, 6 June 1944, the first British units whose primary task was dealing with the military dead began to land in North-West Europe.¹ They were entering Fortress Europe, the immense region which the Germans had controlled since June 1940, within which lay numerous British dead. At first these units were only from the Army, but in the months that followed, as Europe was liberated, RAF units searching for the RAF missing also began to arrive. The Army and the RAF faced two immense, distinct but overlapping tasks. For the Army, it was the registration and dignified burial of the British dead; for the RAF, it was the search for many thousands of missing airmen scattered across a Continent which had been sealed off for four years.

At the most basic level, the Army and RAF units were engaged in a tidying-up process, one which created order and cleanliness out of the brutal, bloody mess of the war. Their work was often deeply unpleasant, involving the exhumation and identification of bodies which were in all conditions of dismemberment and decay, and which sometimes bore evidence of war crimes. Both Services were motivated by a combination of factors, including pragmatism, Service pride, the desire to hold the Germans to account, and a strong sense of moral obligation to their fellow servicemen. This moral obligation was paralleled by the firm expectation of the British public that all the military dead who could be found would be honourably buried and that those who remained missing would be commemorated with great solemnity and dignity.

¹ Lieutenant Colonel Stott gives the arrival of the first GR Units in Normandy as follows: 'Five GR Units were landed in Normandy D+2 to D+6'. TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, appendices for May, Appendix J9, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Honours and Awards', memorandum, 30 May 1945. D+2 meant D-Day plus 2 days, so the GR units were landing from 8-12 June 1944.

The task of caring for dead British servicemen was immensely complex and difficult, ranging over vast areas of Europe and into Soviet territory as the Cold War began to escalate. The focus of this study is on the very different ways in which the Army and the RAF operated, what motivated them, how successful they were in the work for the dead, and how tactfully – or otherwise – they dealt with the relatives. The parallel but very much better funded programme of the Americans provides a valuable contrast. The study also looks at the Army's major contribution to the national commemorative programme, including the selection and development of the cemetery sites. Lastly, the study will show the cultural importance of the Second World War dead, and how the nature of the enemy — Nazi Germany – not only affected their care but their meaning, contrasting this to the treatment and meaning of the German dead, many thousands of whom were buried by the British.

This introduction sets out the parameters for the study: timeframe, geography, the chief organisations and nationalities which were involved in the work, and other essential details. It also explores the academic framework, the almost total lack of existing historiography on the core of the subject, and the main secondary sources which have been used to define the context in which the work for the dead took place. It will then pass on to the vital primary sources, before concluding with a brief description of the eight chapters, summarising the particular facet of the subject which each chapter encompasses.

The timeframe of this study is the comparatively short period of seven years, running from June 1944 to June 1951. During this period, the Services dealt with varying types of loss: those who had died in the 1939-40 campaigns in France and Norway; those who had died in commando raids such as at Dieppe in 1942; those who had died on D-Day and in the subsequent European campaign; and the numerous RAF dead whose loss had occurred at any time from 3 September 1939 onwards. The end of the European war on 8 May 1945 did not, however, provide the

ultimate cut-off point for inclusion in the national programme of commemoration. This was set at 31 December 1947, thus including not only those who remained on active service, often due to the long delays in demobilisation, but also those who had been injured and eventually succumbed to their wounds.²

The geographical area covered is North-West Europe. Although similar searches, burials and registrations were going on in other theatres of war, the North-West Europe theatre was by far the most significant and complex. This was due to several factors. Firstly, Germany was by many degrees the most dangerous enemy which the British faced during the war. Secondly, the Army force involved — 21 Army Group, known from 25 August 1945 as the British Army of the Rhine (the BAOR) — was the most important British military force of the Second World War, and of the early years of the peace when it administered the occupation and policing of Germany.³ Thirdly, the vast majority of RAF losses occurred over this territory. Fourthly, the programme for the dead was inextricably linked to the occupation and subsequent liberation of other European countries, which not only cared for the graves during the war but also provided an immense amount of help post-war in finding and identifying the dead. Finally, the network of British units in North-West Europe, including those in the care of the dead programme, was closely connected to the investigation and prosecution of German war crimes, the exposure of which

² With regards to demobilisation, it took years for all the servicemen to come home and they were still, of course, on active duty if not actually fighting. To give only one example of millions, Geoffrey Cotterell, who is one of the primary sources in this study, was not demobbed until June 1946, see Jennie Gray, *Major Cotterell at Arnhem: a War Crime and a Mystery* (Spellmount, Stroud, 2012), p.210. Not only the wounded but other service people who died whilst serving in Europe also became part of the national commemorative programme which meant burial in Imperial War Graves Commission cemeteries. See Chapter Seven. The dates of the programme can be seen on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website, 'About Us' (last accessed 17/05/2015): <http://www.cwgc.org/about-us/faqs.aspx>

³ The date of the name change is given in Field Marshall the Viscount Montgomery, *Normandy to the Baltic: the Personal Account of the Conquest of Germany* (Hutchinson and Co, London, 1947), p.225.

so strongly emphasised that the British had fought a just war against a monstrous evil.

North-West Europe is defined here as being Germany and the occupied countries of Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, and Luxembourg. Poland will also be covered to some extent because Poland, East Germany, and East Berlin made up one important RAF search area, all having fallen under Russian control in the last months of the war. RAF losses in Poland were partly due to supply-dropping operations during the 1944 Warsaw uprising, or to the occasional bombing raid such as those on Danzig (Gdańsk) in August 1942.⁴ More significantly, however, they were related to the siting of large RAF prisoner of war camps in Silesia, including Stalag Luft III at Sagan.⁵ The most notorious of all war crimes against British servicemen occurred after the mass escape in 1944 from Stalag Luft III.

The work for the dead in the other major European theatre – Italy – has not been included in this study because conditions there were so dissimilar. Italy was first an enemy, and then a co-belligerent; and the British Army and the RAF ran closely associated campaigns (with the exception of those Bomber Command operations which were independently mounted against northern Italian cities such as Turin, Milan and Genoa).⁶ Although there was a programme for the dead in Italy just as there was for North-West Europe, and the same Service authorities were involved, the work operated in a different way. Post-war relations with Italy were, at times, difficult. There was no equivalent to the complex infrastructure centred upon the BAOR and the occupation of Germany. The Army Graves units left Italy with the British troops in July 1947, but an RAF Section (No. 5 MREU) remained to clear up outstanding cases. This operated under strict restrictions imposed by the Italian

⁴ TNA, AIR 27/766, Air Ministry, 97 Squadron, Operations Record Book, September 1939 – December 1942, 11 July 1942.

⁵ Lower Silesia was a German province during the war, but later became part of Poland.

⁶ Amongst other reference books which give details of bombing operations against Northern Italy is Martin Middlebrook and Chris Everitt, *The Bomber Command War Diaries, An Operational Reference Book, 1939-1945* (Midland Publishing, Leicester, 1995).

authorities, such as the insistence that 'all ranks should wear civilian clothes and that Service markings be removed from vehicles', a situation to which there was no parallel in North-West Europe where the British were either seen as liberators or as one of the four governing powers of Germany.⁷

Before describing the nationalities involved in the work for the British military dead, it is necessary to highlight the extremely important role of a non-Service body. This was the Imperial War Graves Commission, the IWGC, which was referred to in much of the relevant military paperwork simply as the Commission. (In 1960, it became the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the name by which it is known today.⁸) The Army had worked with the Commission during and after the First World War, and the relationship was extremely well-established. Once the British re-entered Europe on D-Day, the Army picked up the old responsibilities and the old arrangements with the Commission, in particular caring for the First World War cemeteries, which had had to be abandoned during the war, until such time as the Commission staff could return.⁹ Almost immediately, the Army also began to create the new cemeteries which were necessary, developing them broadly in line with Commission principles. The Commission's involvement in the Second World War cemeteries only began when they were full. As each individual cemetery was completed, the Army passed over responsibility with a roll of all the burials and a

⁷ TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', pp.24-25.

⁸ Edwin Gibson 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* (HMSO, London, 1989), p.223.

⁹ By the end of 1944, a number of IWGC gardeners had been able to start work on the French and Belgian cemeteries, and it was hoped that the caretakers would also be able to resume their duties early in the New Year. On 2 December 1944, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, noted: 'IWGC (1914-18) Cemeteries in France and Belgium have [...] ceased to be a Military responsibility. This Branch is responsible only for the registration of present-war graves which are in these cemeteries.' TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'British War Cemeteries, 1914-18', memorandum, 2 December 1944.

four-page Handing Over Certificate listing the most important details about the cemetery and its occupants.¹⁰ Thereafter, the Commission was the only body accountable for these burial places.

Both during the war and afterwards, the public often confused the Commission with the Army directorate which carried out the fieldwork for the dead, the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries. The two organisations shared the same leadership and the same London address, but they were entirely different entities, working together in a close partnership which was for the most part harmonious. An admirably concise summary of the exact demarcation of powers between the two was given in December 1944 by Lieutenant Colonel Stott, the man in charge of the Directorate's work in North-West Europe:

It is the responsibility of the Army to bury the dead and to make such cemeteries as it may find necessary. The Commission will take over these cemeteries as found, and make the best proposition of them architecturally and horticulturally.¹¹

The main nationalities involved in the British work for the dead in North-West Europe were the United Kingdom and three of the Dominions — Australia, New Zealand and Canada; the degrees of their involvement will be considered in a moment. Where the Imperial War Graves Commission was concerned, these same four countries, together with India, South Africa and Newfoundland (the latter being a Dominion until 1949) were the sole members of the Commission, funding the Commission's work

¹⁰ There are numerous examples of these certificates in the Quarterly Historical Reports of the Western Europe Graves Service Directorate, for example that for Bretteville-Sur-Laize Canadian Cemetery, signed off on 8 October 1946. TNA, WO 267/604, BAOR HQ, Western Europe Graves Service Directorate, Quarterly Historical Report, report ending 31 December 1946.

¹¹ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Visit of Principal Architect and DDW of the Imperial War Graves Commission (approx. 1-14 Dec 44)', memorandum, 2 December 1944.

in proportion to the number of their own war graves. Each of the member governments appointed a High Commissioner to represent their interests; usually a high-ranking ex-military man, he attended the Commission's headquarters in London.¹² The post of Vice-Chairman was held by the eminent Sir Fabian Ware from 1917 until 1948. The Chairman of the Commission was the British Secretary of State for War, an elected politician, and thus this post saw frequent changes of tenure.

The fieldwork on behalf of the dead was almost entirely carried out by the United Kingdom with assistance from Canada, and small but highly valuable contributions from Australia and New Zealand. The reason for this ratio can be found in the composition of 21 Army Group, the major fighting force in the liberation of North-West Europe and the conquest of Germany, and in the mixed nationalities of the RAF Bomber Command aircrew whose deaths amounted to 54.7 per cent of all RAF losses from all causes.¹³ Due to the type of operation which Bomber Command flew, these losses occurred at a disproportionate and extremely high rate in North-West Europe when compared to those of the two other operational Commands, Fighter and Coastal Command.

21 Army Group had two armies under its command, the British Second Army and the Canadian First Army, and thus most of the dead soldiers belonged to these national groups. However, things were never quite as clear cut as there being all-British or all-Canadian armies; the formations attached to each Army changed throughout the campaign and some of these formations were of different nationality. To give one example, at the very end of the war, the First Canadian Army commanded eight British units, including 49th (West Riding) Infantry Division and 4th Army Group, Royal Artillery. It also commanded three units from the occupied

¹² Apart from Newfoundland, member governments remain the same today, as does the Chairman's nationality although his current title is Secretary of State for Defence. For details of the IWGC's composition and funding, see the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website's page on members (last accessed 23/11/2014): <http://www.cwgc.org/about-us/member-governments.aspx>

¹³ Richard Overy, *The Bombing War, Europe 1939-1945* (Allen Lane, London, 2013), p.408.

countries — the 1st Belgian Infantry Brigade, the Royal Netherlands Brigade (Princess Irene's), and the 1st Polish Armoured Division.¹⁴ Such national mixes were highly significant when it came to burying the dead because of the different national issues involved. Whilst this will be explored in detail in later chapters, a key point to be made here is that the Canadians opted for separate burials grounds for their soldiers and had separate graves units to care for their dead.¹⁵ Australians also had separate graves units, but the latter operated in such areas as Malaya, Singapore and Papua New Guinea, where Australian soldiers had done much of their fighting.¹⁶ Australians had also fought in North Africa, Greece and Crete, and a large number of prisoners of war had thereafter been moved to Germany where, inevitably, some of them had died. However, Australian graves units did not operate in North-West Europe because there were no Australian army units at D-Day or fighting with 21 Army Group in the subsequent campaigns.

21 Army Group graves units carried out the registration, burial, exhumation, and reburial work. In contrast, the RAF missing research teams which worked with these units concentrated almost solely upon the tracing and identification of missing airmen. In RAF Bomber Command, the dominant nationalities were the United Kingdom, and in smaller numbers Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The RAF missing research teams were mostly from the United Kingdom but also included a number of Canadian, Australian, and New Zealander personnel in approximate ratio

¹⁴ C. P. Stacey, *The Canadian Army, 1939 – 1945, An Official Historical Summary* (King's Printer, Ottawa, 1948), p.339.

¹⁵ See TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, appendices for June, Appendix J10, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Concentration – Canadian Personnel', memorandum, 25 June 1945, and attached correspondence between A.G.13 and Canadian Military Headquarters.

¹⁶ See, for example, Natasha Bobyreff, 'Second World War Graves' for the Australian War Memorial website (last accessed 10 August 2014): <https://www.awm.gov.au/blog/2013/09/09/second-world-war-graves/>

to the number of men missing from each nation.¹⁷ South African losses were too small to register in percentage terms, but in any case airmen from South Africa joined the RAF rather than remaining attached to their own Air Force.¹⁸ Similarly, there was only the occasional missing airman from some other part of the British Empire. Notable for his unusual nationality, for example, was an Indian from Calcutta, Ramesh Chandra Datta, who died with an otherwise all-British bomber crew on 9 July 1943.¹⁹ He was one of only 9 Indian Bomber Command airmen who were listed as missing or having been killed by 8 May 1945.²⁰

During the war, Australian, Canadian and New Zealander airmen continued to belong to their own Air Forces, the RAAF, the RCAF, and the RNZAF, but they were under the full operational control of the RAF, hence in the search for the missing the RAF accepted the primary responsibility.²¹ There were also a number of Allied nationals flying with the RAF. These included the occasional American, but also, in much greater numbers, the Poles, the Fighting French, and others from the occupied

¹⁷ TNA, AIR 20/9050, Air Ministry, 'Minutes of meeting on the MRES by a Committee appointed by the AMP', 2 August 1945. See Chapter Three for further details of the ratios involved.

¹⁸ TNA, AIR 20/6210, Air Ministry, tabulated figures from Bomber Command, 'Summary of Casualties from All Causes', 3 September 1939 – 8 May 1945. The number of South Africans missing from Bomber Command given in this table is 211 out of a total figure of 11,294. There is no date but the table was clearly drawn up early in the peace before the figures were dramatically revised upwards; no similar breakdown by nationality has been found for the revised figures. An example of a South African airman who joined the RAF was Flight Lieutenant Eaton-Clarke. Jennie Gray, 'The Path Finder Force and 97 Squadron', Alabaster crew (last accessed 11/11/15): <http://raf-pathfinders.com/crew-alabaster/>

¹⁹ Datta was with the Palmer crew from 97 Squadron. Gray, 'The Path Finder Force and 97 Squadron', Palmer crew (last accessed 11/11/15): <http://raf-pathfinders.com/crew-palmer/>

²⁰ TNA, AIR 20/6210, Air Ministry, tabulated figures from Bomber Command, 'Summary of Casualties from All Causes', 3 September 1939 – 8 May 1945.

²¹ RAAF, RCAF and RNZAF - the Royal Australian Air Force, the Royal Canadian Air Force, and the Royal New Zealand Air Force.

countries.²² These airmen operated either with RAF crews, or in separate squadrons such as No. 321 (Dutch) Squadron, RAF, which flew Fokker seaplanes with RAF Coastal Command.²³ Just as with Dominion airmen, the RAF assumed the primary responsibility for lost airmen of the Allied nations because they had been under its operational control.

With soldiers, demarcation lines between nationalities were of considerable significance, particularly in the situation, already mentioned, where the Canadians had separate cemeteries or separate plots within British cemeteries. However, in the RAF nationality was considered unimportant compared to crew loyalty. The crews were always buried together, Dominion, Empire or Allied aircrew with their British comrades, because it was the crew which was deemed the primary unit in the RAF.

Of the three British Services, the Royal Navy had — for obvious reasons — the least connection to the programme of care for the dead of North-West Europe. Although many seamen had been lost in the adjacent waters, few of their bodies had come to land. Post-war, those who had been washed ashore were dealt with not by the Navy but by the Army or RAF units which discovered them, and it was the same for naval personnel who had died as prisoners of war.²⁴ If exhumation was required

²² The occasional American – such as, for example, the pilot Bill Treacy (who joined the RAF and eventually transferred to the USAAF). Gray, 'The Path Finder Force and 97 Squadron', Treacy crew (last accessed 11/11/15): <http://raf-pathfinders.com/crew-treacy/>

²³ For the most part, the Allied squadrons' equipment, aircraft and facilities were provided by the RAF. In very small numbers, some Allied aircraft were brought to Britain after the invasion of their countries, for example, two Dutch pilots brought in two Fokkers, both aircraft with German markings, a very hazardous enterprise which happily ended with the pilots' safe arrival. Such foreign aircraft were rare exceptions. However, some of the British aircraft which were used by the Allied squadrons were funded by the resources of the exiled governments. *There's Freedom in the Air: The Official Story of the Allied Air Forces from the Occupied Countries* (HMSO, London, 1944), pp.13-19.

²⁴ In the GROs controlling the Graves Service work, it is noted that one of the duties is: 'Special search of coastal cemeteries for records of bodies washed ashore.' TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, appendices for May, Appendix G5, undated list headed 'GROs affecting the Graves Service'.

in the case of graves believed to contain seamen, it was the Army which carried out the necessary procedures and confirmed the results to the Admiralty. For this reason, there are few references to the Royal Navy throughout this study.

Whilst the study deals with certain aspects of the Services' relationship with the families, chiefly notification and correspondence relating to the missing and the dead, it does not extend to welfare and financial arrangements because they were not part of the care for the dead programme. The wider subject of how the public were informed about fatal casualties has also been omitted because this too was not part of the programme. However, one important thing to note is that whilst the release of information about Army losses was strictly controlled in order to avoid giving away any information to the enemy, RAF losses were announced as they occurred because there were no operational implications.²⁵

On a matter of terminology, there are several areas to be clarified. Firstly, the Soviet Union was almost invariably referred to as Russia in the contemporary paperwork: for instance, the graves units and search officers were customarily described as dealing with 'the Russians' or working in the 'Russian Zone'. For reasons of clarity, the same policy has been followed here except when looking at the wider historical context of the Cold War.

Secondly, the post-war American care for the dead programme is sometimes referred to as being the responsibility of the American Graves Registration Service (the AGRS) and sometimes that of the American Graves Registration Command (the AGRC). This is because the overall organisation, supervising all aspects of the programme, was the AGRS, whilst the Commands were those sub-organisations which dealt with the fieldwork and recovery of remains. The full title of the key

²⁵ After D-Day, information about the Army casualty figures was controlled by SHAEF, which coordinated the Allies' release of information. The theatre in which the casualties had occurred was kept secret. See Timothy Balzer's interesting article "Canada's Roll of Honour": Controversy over Casualty Notification and Publication during the Second World War', *Canadian Military History*, 20/1 (2011), pp.31-44.

American Command in this study was 'American Graves Registration Command, European Theater', but the British always referred to it as *the* American Graves Registration Command, thus giving the slightly misleading impression that it was the only one. It was the most important of the Commands because three-fifths of all American battle casualties fell in Europe.²⁶

Thirdly, the adjective 'British' is used here to describe the forces under British command, which included servicemen who came from the Dominions and the Empire, and who were usually either with the British Expeditionary Force (the BEF) in 1939-40, 21 Army Group, the BAOR, or the RAF. As the programme for the dead was carried out by the British Army and the RAF, it is always referred to as the British programme, although many other nationalities contributed. However, the term 'the British public' refers only to that of the United Kingdom.

Lastly, the word airman had a specific meaning in the RAF – it was used for anyone who was of lesser rank than officers and non-commissioned officers. However, it has been used here as generic term to avoid such words as 'the flyer' or 'the aviator' which are clumsy and anachronistic.

This study places its major emphasis upon the very different work of the Army and the RAF, with the parallel American programme forming a counterpoint. The Americans carried out very similar procedures to the British, but performed an additional, highly extensive series of duties because bereaved relatives were offered the choice of having their dead repatriated. The majority chose repatriation, and of the 280,000 recovered remains from all parts of the world over 171,000 were

²⁶ Edward Steere and Thayer M Boardman, *Final Disposition of World War II Dead 1945-51*, US Army, Quartermaster Corps, QMC Historical Studies, Series II, No. 4 (Historical Branch Office of the Quartermaster General, Washington, D.C., 1957), p.171.

eventually returned to the United States.²⁷ No repatriation was permitted for the British dead.

The present-day significance of this particular subject is its contribution to the social history of the Armed Forces, and their relationship to relatives and the British public when military deaths occurred. It builds upon previous research into First World War memorialisation, and shows how the Second World War was both a continuation of the same patterns and at the same time markedly different. The cultural significance of the Second World War dead – their sacred value – was that they were irrevocably linked to an enduring peace in Europe, and to a set of values which, although threatened by communism during the Cold War, remained dominant and largely unchallenged until the emergence, at the end of the twentieth century, of Muslim fundamentalism with its utterly different world view.

The British programme of care for the military dead of the Second World War has not received any attention from historians except in the most glancing way, generally when speaking of it as a continuation of the memorial rites and customs of the First World War. There is a very substantial historiography on how the dead of the earlier war were buried and commemorated (a number of these works will be listed shortly), but it appears to have been generally assumed that the First World War provided a set pattern in the care of the dead from which the Second World War did not deviate substantially enough to make a detailed study worthwhile. In reality, there were huge differences in the work for the dead of the two wars, the two most significant being the huge number of RAF missing and the large number of graves in Germany, for which a special policy had to be devised. Moreover, and very significantly, First World War studies do not look at the logistics of how the bodies of the dead were found, identified, and reburied, and there is a similar absence of interest in the subject for the Second World War. One of the less academic reasons for this particular neglect may be cultural reticence; it is perceived as morbid, gloomy, depressing, and that perhaps writing about it is rather tasteless. Something of the

²⁷ Ibid, p. v.

old idea that the privacy of the dead should be safeguarded still lingers on despite the modern age's obsession with sharing information about even the most sacred matters.²⁸

The difficulties of writing about the programme for the dead and the missing of the Second World War may also be one of the reasons why it has been neglected. The subject stands at an intersection between studies of military operations, Service culture, the Home Front, Occupied and post-war Europe, German-Allied relationships, war crimes against servicemen, missing research, memorialisation and funerary practices. It demands varying degrees of familiarity with all these subjects. This study has thus used a very wide range of secondary sources, many of which have only a very small section of direct relevance.

Whilst there have been thousands of works published about the Army and the RAF's war, books and articles which are solely about this particular subject of the care of the dead and the missing are almost non-existent. The only study which falls squarely into the right area is Stuart Hadaway's *Missing Believed Killed, The Royal Air Force and the Search for Missing Aircrew, 1939-1952*.²⁹ It is not an academic book, being more of a narrative than an analytical piece, but it has been very well researched. However, it is limited in its relevance to this study for three main reasons: it is about the worldwide missing research programme, not specifically that of North-West Europe; it is focused upon the RAF's work and thus gives little information about the Army's absolutely vital significance in the care of the bodies of all British servicemen, including those of the RAF; and it does not incorporate the work of the Casualty Branches, consider the wider European picture, or make any detailed comparisons to either the Army's work for missing soldiers or the Americans' parallel programme for the dead and the missing.

²⁸ For a fuller discussion on cultural reticence regarding the dead, see 'Conclusion: Breaking the Silence'.

²⁹ Stuart Hadaway, *Missing Believed Killed, The Royal Air Force and the Search for Missing Aircrew, 1939-1952* (Pen and Sword, Barnsley, 2008).

One other book which covers a very small section of the ground encompassed in this study is Jenny Edkins' *Missing: Persons and Politics*. It spans a very wide field from the First World War to the collapse of the World Trade Centre in 2001. Her placing of the missing in the context of politics is not particularly relevant to this study where the major emphasis falls upon the Services and their work not only with the missing but with the dead. In addition, although the British missing of the two world wars are a small part of her subject, this aspect of her work has not been covered very thoroughly, as evinced by the cardinal error of conflating the Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries with the Imperial War Graves Commission.³⁰

Where published articles are concerned, Peter E Hodgkinson's 'Clearing the Dead', which deals only with the First World War, is the only substantial piece of work on the subject of how the British cared for the dead of the two world wars; Hodgkinson himself refers to the absence of secondary sources on the subject.³¹ Seumas Spark's *Lessons of History: British War Dead in the 1940s and Public Protest* does cover some of the ground of this thesis, but concentrates on public pressure to raise the standard of care for the dead. It also has a rather different viewpoint to that which will be given here; with regards to public protest, it does not make the point that the public's idea in 1945 that the cemeteries and memorials should be farther advanced than they were was based upon ignoring the huge

³⁰ The passage in question reads: 'When the Graves Registration Commission became the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries and, by 1917, the Imperial War Graves Commission, instituted under Royal Charter [...]'; this appears to completely miss the distinction between the military body (the Directorate) and the civilian body (the Commission), which were separate entities despite their common leadership (Fabian Ware). Jenny Edkins, *Missing: Persons and Politics* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 2011), pp.138-139.

³¹ Peter E Hodgkinson, 'Clearing the Dead', University of Birmingham, Online Journal of the Centre for First World War Studies, Issue 6 (last accessed 12/05/2014): http://www.js-ww1.bham.ac.uk/articles/issue6_hodgkinson.pdf

differences between the two wars, lack of knowledge about what was causing the delays, and an over-romanticised view of the process after the First World War.³²

Seumas Spark's unpublished thesis, 'The Treatment of the British Military War Dead of the Second World War', covers some of the ground traversed in this study, but it has a significantly different emphasis, being more of a general overview.³³ There is a wider geographical spread, one which includes the African, Mediterranean and Italian theatres. It also covers a greater period of time, from the First World War through to the various Field Regulations of the inter-war period, Graves work throughout the Second World War, and post-war reviews of Graves policy. This study, whilst making some reference to these subjects, is focused upon the particular set of circumstances in North-West Europe after D-Day, from the liberation of North-West Europe to the occupation of Germany.

Spark's thesis also looks in detail at the work of the IWGC and the post-war pilgrimages, whereas the cut-off point for this study is the handing over of the completed cemeteries to the IWGC. However, the strong concentration of focus here allows for an extended discussion about the effect upon relatives of key aspects of government, War Office, and Air Ministry policy, and an in-depth exploration of the problem of the missing, the handling of which was one of the most significant

³² 'The beautiful and striking cemeteries developed by the IWGC after the First World War had captured the imagination of the British public, and thousands of Second World War bereaved were sustained by the hope of standing by the graves of their relatives in such a cemetery and there finding consolation. [...] Thus, when the war ended in 1945, the public reacted with anger and dismay when it became apparent that the work of burying and commemorating the British dead was not sufficiently advanced to allow for this possibility.' Seumas Spark, *Lessons of History: British War Dead in the 1940s and Public Protest* (The Oxford Research Group, 2011); this is a guest article on the Every Casualty website (last accessed 31/12/15): <http://www.everycasualty.org/downloads/ec/pdf/Lessons-of-History--British-War-Dead.pdf>, page.3. See Chapter Seven for the great differences between the two world wars and how this affected the care for the dead.

³³ Seumas Spark, 'The Treatment of the British Military War Dead of the Second World War', unpublished PhD, University of Edinburgh, 2009.

differences between the work of the RAF and the Army. Other subjects also covered here in far greater depth are: the enormous contribution of the Army to the structure of the national commemorative programme; the treatment of the German military dead; the interconnection between the Graves programme and the prosecution of German war crimes; liaison with the liberated countries; the involvement of the Dominion authorities; the American Graves programme; the differences between the First and Second World War programmes; and the cultural significance of the British war dead.

There is an extreme absence of secondary sources on the programme for the dead even so far as America is concerned, although the Americans, as will be seen, were experts at body recovery and identification. This absence of sources is referred to in *Soldier Dead: How We Recover, Identify, Bury and Honor Our Military Fallen* by Michael Sledge, which does cover some of the areas in this study but from the American point of view.³⁴ This book also covers a wide field, spanning American military deaths throughout the twentieth century and thus including conflicts after 1945 such as Vietnam and Iraq. Although published by Columbia University Press, it is a very emotional book, somewhat too much so for stolid British tastes. However, there is useful information on the Second World War and American cultural attitudes to the military dead, particularly the primacy of the relatives in determining what happened to them.

The wider context of the war and the early years of the peace are extensively covered by books and articles. The vast majority of these are listed in the bibliography, but some of the most useful will be briefly mentioned here. The type of war which the RAF fought is very important in understanding the unique difficulties which the RAF faced with its lost airmen. Use has been particularly made of Richard Overy's *The Bombing War, Europe 1939-1945*, Oliver Clutton-Brock's

³⁴ Michael Sledge, *Soldier Dead: How We Recover, Identify, Bury and Honor Our Military Fallen* (Columbia University Press, New York, 2005).

encyclopaedic work on RAF POWs, and the author's book *Fire By Night*.³⁵ Conditions in post-war Europe vitally affected the work for the dead, and three of the useful contextual books here are Patricia Meehan's *A Strange Enemy People, Germans Under the British, 1945-50*, Toby Thacker's *The End of the Third Reich: Defeat, Denazification and Nuremberg, January 1944 - November 1946*, and Tony Judt's *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945*.³⁶

Where Service culture is concerned, there is some writing on the Army but a dearth of sources for the RAF. Used here are Jeremy A Crang's *The British Army and the People's War, 1939-1945*, and Emma Newlands' *Civilians into Soldiers*; neither book has very much on the central issue of death, although Newlands' book centres upon issues surrounding soldiers' bodies. Both, however, contain a wealth of information on the structure of the British Army, of particular relevance being the massive division between officers and men which, as will be shown here, was perpetuated where notification of death was concerned.³⁷ For the RAF, Allan D English's *The Cream of the Crop, Canadian Aircrew 1939-1945* and Mark K Wells' *Courage and Air Warfare: The Allied Aircrew Experience in the Second World War* have some significant material, whilst the Path Finder Force and 97 Squadron website has

³⁵ Richard Overy, *The Bombing War, Europe 1939-1945* (Allen Lane, London, 2013); Oliver Clutton-Brock, *Footprints on the Sands of Time, RAF Bomber Command Prisoners of War in Germany, 1939-45* (Grub Street, London, 2003); Jennie Gray, *Fire By Night, The Story of One Pathfinder Crew and Black Thursday, 16/17 December 1943* (Grub Street, London, 2000).

³⁶ Patricia Meehan, *A Strange Enemy People: Germans Under the British, 1945-50* (Peter Owen, London, 2001); Toby Thacker, *The End of the Third Reich: Defeat, Denazification and Nuremberg, January 1944 - November 1946* (Tempus, Stroud, 2006); Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (Pimlico, London, 2007).

³⁷ Jeremy A Crang, *The British Army and the People's War, 1939-1945* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2000); Emma Newlands, *Civilians into Soldiers: War, The Body and British Army Recruits, 1939-45* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2014).

provided a great many details about the air war, the type of men who fought in it, and their families.³⁸

There is an immense literature on memorialisation for the First World War, some of which briefly mentions the continuation of the patterns into the Second World War. Jay Winter has a short but very pertinent section on the differences between the two wars in his book *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*.³⁹ There are numerous others of which some use has been made in this study, for example, Gavin Stamp's *The Memorial to the Missing of the Somme*, David Crane's *Empires of the Dead*, David Lloyd's *Battlefield Tourism*, Tim Skelton and Gerald Gliddon's *Lutyens and the Great War*, and Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*.⁴⁰ One useful non-academic reference book has been Edwin Gibson 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*, which unlike most books on the subject does extend in some detail into the Second World War.⁴¹

³⁸ Allan D English, *The Cream of the Crop, Canadian Aircrew 1939-1945* (McGill-Queens University Press, Montreal and Kingston, Canada, 1996); Mark K Wells, *Courage and Air Warfare: The Allied Aircrew Experience in the Second World War* (Frank Cass, London, 1995); Gray, 'The Path Finder Force and 97 Squadron' website (last accessed 11/11/15): <http://raf-pathfinders.com/>

³⁹ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995), p.8.

⁴⁰ Gavin Stamp, *The Memorial to the Missing of the Somme* (Profile Books, London, 2007); David Crane, *Empires of the Dead: How One Man's Vision Led to the Creation of WWI's War Graves* (William Collins, London, 2013); David W Lloyd *Battlefield Tourism: Pilgrimage and the Commemoration of the Great War in Britain, Australia and Canada* (Berg, Oxford, 1998); Tim Skelton & Gerald Gliddon, *Lutyens and the Great War* (Francis Lincoln, London, 2008); Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000).

⁴¹ Edwin Gibson 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* (HMSO, London, 1989).

Works which take a closer look at the cultural meaning of death and bereavement, and the differences which it had for the dead of the two world wars, are Pat Jalland's *Death in War and Peace: A History of Loss and Grief in England, 1914-1970*, and Adrian Gregory's *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day, 1919-1946*. As regards the contrasting view from the German angle, which is explored in Chapter Eight, two of the main sources used are Ian Buruma, *Wages of Guilt, Memories of War in Germany and Japan*, and George L Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers, Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*.⁴²

Due to the paucity of secondary sources on the core of the subject, the material used in this study has been almost entirely drawn from primary sources with their great advantages and occasionally their great drawbacks. Once again, multiple sources have been used. The following list is not exhaustive but rather a description of the most influential.

First-hand contemporary material is very difficult to come by. So far as personal letters or accounts are concerned, there has been a great reliance on a particularly rich source, the Cotterell family's correspondence which relates to the disappearance of the soldier-journalist, Major Anthony Cotterell, after a major war crime was committed against British prisoners of war. The letters provide a vivid view of how the Army dealt with the problem of missing soldiers and the search for war criminals. Geoffrey Cotterell, Anthony's brother, was a British Army Major stationed in post-war Germany, and thus knew a great deal about the search and the

⁴² Pat Jalland, *Death in War and Peace: A History of Loss and Grief in England, 1914-1970* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010); Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day, 1919-1946* (Berg, Oxford, 1994); Ian Buruma, *Wages of Guilt, Memories of War in Germany and Japan* (Vantage, London, 1995); George L Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers, Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1991).

European context in which it was taking place. He wrote to his mother in great detail very frequently; he also told her everything because she wanted to know the truth no matter how bad it was, and his veracity can be confirmed by many official letters and documents which cover the same events.⁴³

Other family archives have also been used, but these generally have only one or two official documents which relate to the notification of a death or disappearance; no personal accounts have been found which concern the experiences of a bereaved person after the death of a serviceman had been confirmed. Pat Jalland, in *Death in War and Peace*, specifically mentions the lack of archival evidence and the 'veil of silence over the suffering of the English bereaved in the Second World War'; she suggests that private mourners were discouraged from expressing or remembering their grief, so that 'the historian suffers from relatively limited primary sources'.⁴⁴

First-hand accounts of the work carried out by the Services are very rare; however, one key example is that written by Duncan Torrance. It is based upon a diary which he kept whilst he was attached to an Army Graves Concentration Unit. Because of his extreme youth and inexperience, the opinions are at times slightly intemperate but the ground which the book covers is unique.⁴⁵ The only other first-hand account of the same work which has been identified is that of Sergeant Gilford Boyd, who

⁴³ See, for example, the investigations into the war crime in which Anthony Cotterell was shot, for example, TNA, WO 309/847, JAG, war crimes dossier, shooting of British POWs at Brummen.

⁴⁴ Jalland, *Death in War and Peace*, p.133.

⁴⁵ Duncan Leitch Torrance, *From Desert to Danube* (Serendipity, no location given, 2009). The slightly different form of this memoir which first appeared on the BBC's website has also been used in this thesis: Duncan Leitch Torrance, *From Desert to Danube* (11 November 2005), BBC, 'WW2 People's War' (last accessed 31/07/2015): <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/categories/c55463/>

was attached to a Canadian Graves Concentration Unit; however, this is not based upon a contemporary document but is a set of reminiscences recorded in old age.⁴⁶

Three useful accounts of the RAF's missing research work were also written long after the events which they record, although one, that of Flight Lieutenant C A Mitchell, contains a number of contemporary documents relating to cases which he carried out as an RAF search officer.⁴⁷ Mitchell's account, *The Missing Research and Enquiry Service*, is valuable because it gives an insight into the unique problems which surrounded missing research in Germany. The account of Douglas Hague, who was attached to the same unit as Mitchell but as an administrative clerk rather than a search officer, enhances the picture of the work in Germany.⁴⁸ Lastly, a short section in Olive J Noble's account of her WAAF career, covering her work as a typist in the Air Ministry Casualty Branch, shows how deeply the losses were felt by RAF personnel even at the lowliest level.⁴⁹

Three valuable sources from the summer of 1944 in Normandy are the photographs of Eric Gunton, the diary of the Reverend Leslie Skinner, and the war reports of Anthony Cotterell, who wrote a very vivid account of the weeks immediately following D-Day, mentioning Skinner and other aspects of the care of the dead.⁵⁰ At the end of the same year, a photographic album for No. 48 Graves

⁴⁶ Sgt Gilford Boyd, 'Canadian Graves Concentration Unit', The Veterans Project (Canada), Episode 27 (last accessed 07/05/2015): <https://vimeo.com/27834301> and <https://vimeo.com/theveterans>

⁴⁷ Imperial War Museum, Documents.9046, Flight Lieutenant C A Mitchell, *The Missing Research and Enquiry Service*, typescript account with supplementary papers (November 1994).

⁴⁸ Imperial War Museum, Documents.6078, Douglas Hague, *The Biggest Detective Job in the World*, typescript account (September 1992).

⁴⁹ Imperial War Museum, Documents.685, Olive J Noble, *Winged Interlude: A WAAF of the Second World War ... Tells All!*, typescript account (1990-91).

⁵⁰ For Eric Gunton's photographs see William Jordan, *The Bayeux British Cemetery* (Jarrold Publishing, Norwich, 2006) and William Jordan, *Normandy 1945: After the Battle* (Pitkin Publishing, Norwich, 2005); Leslie Skinner, 'The Man who Worked on Sundays': *The Personal War Diary, June 2nd 1944 to May 17th 1945, of Revd. Leslie Skinner RChD, Chaplain, 8th (Independent) Armoured*

Concentration Unit covers its work in Normandy from late 1944 onwards, and has several illuminating images.⁵¹ With regards to the Netherlands, a useful first-hand account relates to OPERATION MARKET GARDEN in September 1944.⁵² Eric Baume, a New Zealander who reported for Australian newspapers and was in Holland at the time of Arnhem, wrote a rather high-flown but unique essay on how the British dead were regarded by comrades in arms and the local communities in the liberated areas, entitled *Five Graves at Nijmegen*.⁵³

Of essential relevance to the work with the missing is the British Red Cross Society's 1949 history *The Official Record of the Humanitarian Services of the War Organisation of the British Red Cross Society and the Order of St John of Jerusalem, 1939-1947*, which was based upon contemporary documents.⁵⁴ Another source which is contextually useful is a small booklet entitled *The Care of the Dead*; it dates from the middle of the First World War but is thought to have been written by Sir Fabian Ware, who was absolutely central to the work in both world wars.⁵⁵

Some of the best contemporary material can be found in the Hansard records for the House of Commons and the House of Lords; many issues concerning the care

Brigade attached The Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry Regiment (privately published, thought to be in 1991); Jennie Gray (Ed), *'This is WAR!' The Diaries and Journalism of Anthony Cotterell, 1940-1944* (Spellmount, Stroud, 2013).

⁵¹ Commonwealth War Graves Commission, ADD 9/1/40, No. 48 GCU, Bayeux Photo Album.

⁵² MARKET GARDEN — the airborne operation to capture key Dutch bridges, including Arnhem's.

⁵³ Eric Baume, *Five Graves at Nijmegen* (B T Batsford, London, 1945). Eric Baume biographical details: Valerie Lawson, 'Baume, Frederick Ehrenfried (Eric) (1900–1967), Australian Dictionary of Biography (last accessed 30/08/2014): <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/baume-frederick-ehrenfried-eric-9456>

⁵⁴ P G Cambray and G G B Briggs (Compilers), *Red Cross and St. John: The Official Record of the Humanitarian Services of the War Organisation of the British Red Cross Society and the Order of St John of Jerusalem, 1939-1947* (published at 14 Grosvenor Crescent, London, SW1, 1949).

⁵⁵ Anon, *The Care of the Dead* (Eyre and Spottiswoode, London, 1916).

of the dead were raised in Parliament, both during the war and afterwards.⁵⁶ The governing bodies of the Army and the RAF respectively were the Army Council, whose president was the Secretary of State for War, and the Air Council, whose president was the Secretary of State for Air (or Air Minister). When issues concerning the care of the dead were raised in the House of Commons, it was almost invariably the Secretary of State for War who answered them because he was the man ultimately in charge of the Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries, and the ex-officio Chairman of the Imperial War Graves Commission. The Secretaries of State for War from December 1940 to October 1951 were David Margesson, Percy James Grigg (generally known as Sir James Grigg or P J Grigg), Jack Lawson, Frederick Bellenger, Emanuel Shinwell, and John Strachey; all except Strachey, who did not take office until February 1950, appear at some point in this study.

Other excellent contemporary material can be found in the newspapers; the main ones used here are *The Times*, *The Manchester Guardian*, and the entertaining but sensationalist *Daily Mirror*. There was also the occasional article in magazines, such as that in *Flight Magazine* in October 1945.⁵⁷ On a more general level and useful in setting the background to the war, the type of losses incurred, and the PR view of the Services, are the government pamphlets and booklets produced at the time, such as *There's Freedom in the Air: The Official Story of the Allied Air Forces from the Occupied Countries*.⁵⁸

Moving on to the military histories, one vital source has been *The Administrative History of the Operations of 21 Army Group on the Continent of Europe, 6 June*

⁵⁶ Hansard 1803-2005, Sittings in the Twentieth Century (last accessed 12/10/2015): <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/sittings/C20>

⁵⁷ Major F A de V Robertson, 'Tracing Missing Airmen; Missing Research and Enquiry Service: Following Slender Clues', *Flight Magazine*, 18 October 1945.

⁵⁸ *There's Freedom in the Air: The Official Story of the Allied Air Forces from the Occupied Countries* (HMSO, London, 1944).

1944-8 May 1945.⁵⁹ Although there is not a substantial amount upon the care of the dead in this report, the little which is included has no equivalent elsewhere. Written in 1945, in a condensed but often vivid manner, the account feels very close to the events which it describes. It was not intended for public consumption, unlike Colonel C P Stacey's history *The Canadian Army, 1939 – 1945*, published three years later in 1948.⁶⁰ Whilst this official history mostly concerns operations and army organisation, it does give a clear view of the way in which the Canadian soldier dead were regarded in the immediate post-war years.⁶¹

The most valuable material of all is that which is contained in the military records. Due to engrained British reticence about publically discussing the work for the dead, the frankest and most complete records are those which were compiled by the RAF Missing Research and Enquiry Service (the MRES) and the Army authorities who carried out the work. These documents were never intended for public scrutiny, and therefore the writers had no need to take grief, shock, or squeamishness into account. The Army documents in particular are very blunt and very detailed. Because of the highly sensitive material they contained, they were protected by a 100 year embargo when they were first handed over to the National Archives. Although this embargo has now been lifted, it was imposed at a time when it was felt that this material must on no account be seen by the general public.⁶²

⁵⁹ *The Administrative History of the Operations of 21 Army Group on the Continent of Europe, 6 June 1944-8 May 1945* (Germany, November 1945).

⁶⁰ 'Not intended for public consumption' — the title page of *The Administrative History* contains the admonition that the document is restricted and that 'addressees are personally responsible for its security'.

⁶¹ C. P. Stacey, *The Canadian Army, 1939 – 1945, An Official Historical Summary* (King's Printer, Ottawa, 1948).

⁶² Examples of those closed under the 100 years rule include the War Diary of No. 32 Graves Registration Unit, January-December 1944 and War Diary of No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, October-December 1944, which have the prohibition stamped upon their covers, but the embargo seems to have run right across the board. TNA, WO 171/3786, ADGR&E, No. 32 Graves Registration

The vast majority of the military documents used are in the National Archives at Kew. However, the National Archives of Australia has been a critical source of information about the RAF search. The RAAF compiled crash reports for its airmen, but the reports apply equally to any other crew member on the same aircraft. As it was extremely rare for there to be all-Australian crews, this has been one very useful avenue to discovering what happened to aircrew of other nationalities.⁶³ Unlike the RAF, the RAAF preserved a great many documents in personnel files, which have been freely available to the public online for several years. RAF personnel files, by contrast, were heavily weeded and now usually only comprise the service record, which is restricted to next of kin. The National Archives of Canada also has valuable RCAF material, but it is often less comprehensive than that for RAAF airmen.⁶⁴

An individual voice is the one thing generally missing from military records, but this is not true of the major sources used here. The RAF records will be described first as the structure of them is far simpler than the Army's. The most valuable document is the report written by the Commanding Officer of the MRES, Group Captain E F Hawkins. (Reflecting the huge importance of his work, Hawkins, who had begun with the MRES as Squadron Leader, was promoted first to Wing Commander and then to Group Captain, the rank by which he will be referred to here.) Hawkins' history, entitled 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and

Unit, War Diary, January-December 1944; TNA, WO 171/3794, ADGR&E, No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, War Diary, October-December 1944.

⁶³ The National Archives is gradually releasing the case files raised by the Air Ministry Casualty Branch in respect of Second World War casualties. As of July 2015, the files had been released for dates up to mid-August 1940.

⁶⁴ There is a huge variation in the material available for RCAF airmen, which may possibly be partly due to changes in archival policy over the years. For example, the personnel record of Leslie Kenneth Alexander Grant, who died in England on 17 December 1943, contains nothing but his service record (or at least this was apparently the case when the record was requested by the author in 1998) whereas that for George Wesley Armstrong, who died in Utrecht, Holland, on 23 July 1943, contains almost four hundred pages (record requested by Chuck Garneau in 2013 and given to the author).

Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949’, was written in an accessible and engaging style, and supplemented with numerous appendices.⁶⁵ The MRES was a section of the Air Ministry Casualty Branch, and numerous memoranda from this branch are preserved either in Hawkins’ report or in the National Archives, such as Group Captain R Burges’s seminal paper ‘Missing Research and Enquiry Service’ of 12 July 1945.⁶⁶ Burges was a key figure, as was Squadron Leader A P LeM Sinkinson, who, to give but one instance of his paperwork, wrote the 1948 report ‘Missing Research: Origin and Development’.⁶⁷ Late Air Ministry Casualty Branch reports were often not signed and dated, such as ‘Report on the MRES, North-West Europe’, which was clearly written between October 1947 and February 1948.⁶⁸ However, what all of these reports and memoranda had in common was that they were written in a clear, literate, human style, and not in dry officialise; they thus reveal the high degree of education, intelligence, focus and motivation of the men who composed them.

The outstanding figure in the care of the dead of North-West Europe was Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Owen Stott, who headed 21 Army Group’s (later the BAOR’s) Graves Registration and Enquiries section (GR&E or GRE), which was usually known as the Graves Service. Stott was promoted to Colonel in the second half of 1945 following the expansion of the Graves Service and the broadening of its responsibilities; however, due to the preponderance of quotations in this study

⁶⁵ TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, ‘Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949’.

⁶⁶ TNA, AIR20/9050, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, Group Captain R Burges, ‘Missing Research and Enquiry Service’, report, 12 July 1945.

⁶⁷ TNA, AIR2/10031, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, Squadron Leader A P LeM Sinkinson, ‘Missing Research: Origin and Development’, report, 21 April 1948. Alfred Peverell Le Mesurier Sinkinson always abbreviated his extraordinary name to A P LeM Sinkinson.

⁶⁸ TNA, AIR 20/9050, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, unsigned, ‘Report on the MRES, North-West Europe’, undated but clearly between October 1947 and February 1948.

relating to the first year after D-Day when he was Lieutenant Colonel Stott, he will be referred to as this rank throughout in order to avoid confusion.⁶⁹

This study places a very large reliance upon Stott's papers and memoranda because he was in the central position in the care of the dead, the Army being responsible for the dead of all three Services. He was involved to at least some degree in all the major issues in North-West Europe. Moreover, he was a significant, but today entirely unknown, influence upon the British programme of commemoration because it was he who chose so many of the sites for the military cemeteries, such as that of Reichswald Forest War Cemetery, by far the most important British burial site in Germany.⁷⁰ He is the key figure in this study, not only because of his extremely important role in the care for the dead, but also because he was exceptional in his dedication to collecting material which could easily have formed the basis of an official history of the same type as, but far more expansive than, Group Captain Hawkins' report on the MRES. Stott's detailed Progress Reports and War Diaries contain numerous appendices from other sources, ranging from official paperwork from SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force) to a personal letter of warmest gratitude from 8 Corps to the OC of a graves unit.⁷¹

⁶⁹ The proposal to upgrade Stott's role from ADGRE to DDGRE, i.e. Assistant Director to Deputy Director which carried a Colonel's rank, is made in the following document: TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, appendices for June, Appendix J (number erased), Brigadier J McCandlish, 'A' Branch, 'The Graves Service in Europe', report, 21 June 1945.

⁷⁰ TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, entry for 20-25 March 1945. Reichswald Forest had more than twice the burials of the next largest cemetery, which was Berlin 1939-1945 War Cemetery — 7,418 graves compared to 3,198. Figures from Commonwealth War Graves Commission website (last accessed: 08/12/15): <http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery.aspx>.

⁷¹ 'Letter of warmest gratitude', see TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Appendix F, Major H R Leslie, DAAG at HQ 8 Corps, to Captain H Ingolby of No. 39 GCU, 23 September 1944.

Stott's reports run in series, beginning as a mere adjunct to the War Diary of 'A' Branch, 21 Army Group HQ, and continuing through to the independent War Diaries of GR&E, HQ (Rear), 21 Army Group. These were then succeeded briefly by the War Diary of GR&E, HQ, BAOR, and lastly by the Quarterly Historical Reports of the Western Europe Graves Service Directorate (there are several variations on this name such as North West Europe Graves Service or Graves Registration and Enquiries (Western Europe)), which ran from July 1946 to June 1948.⁷² Because of all these changes of name and structure, Stott's organisation will generally be referred to in this study simply as the Graves Service, the name which the Army and the RAF tended to call it, although in the footnotes the official name on the paperwork will always be given.

Another very useful War Diary was that of the organisation directly under Stott — DADGR&E, HQ, Second Army, which morphed into DADGR&E (Belgium and Holland) under the Western Europe Graves Service Directorate.⁷³ Other extremely important War Diaries used are those for A.G.13, the Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries, the War Office, which was at the top of the hierarchy,

⁷² The following is the sequence of reports with their references.

1. 21 Army Group HQ, 'A' Branch, Progress Reports: TNA, 171/138, June 1944; TNA, 171/139, July 1944; TNA, 171/140, August 1944.
2. 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary: TNA, WO 171/186, September-December 1944; TNA, WO 171/3926, January-December 1945.
3. BAOR HQ, GR&E, War Diary: TNA, 171/8653, January to June 1946.
4. BAOR HQ, Western Europe Graves Service Directorate, Quarterly Historical Reports: TNA, WO 267/603, quarter ending 30 September 1946; TNA, WO 267/604, quarter ending 31 December 1946; and so on in the same sequence until the last report TNA, WO 267/610, quarter ending 30 June 1948, which contains an additional appendix, dated 6 September 1948 with the notice 'Disbandment of Headquarters, Graves Registration and Enquiries (Western Europe)'.

⁷³ TNA, WO 171/11100, Second Army HQ, War Diary of DADGR&E, 1944-45, and BAOR, War Diary of Western European Graves Service (Belgium and Holland), 1945-1947.

and for No. 32 Graves Registration Unit and No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, who were amongst the fieldwork units at the bottom of the chain.⁷⁴

Although the Army was the central organisation in graves registration in North-West Europe, the duty of reporting back to the relatives of soldiers, airmen or sailors was performed by the respective Casualty Branches of the War Office, the Air Ministry, and the Admiralty. Two very important reports used here were compiled by the War Office Casualty Branch, both apparently written in 1946.⁷⁵ There appears to be no equivalent report for the Air Ministry Casualty Branch.

The Army and RAF records on the dead were eventually passed on to the Imperial War Graves Commission, and the invaluable information which they contained about the identity of casualties and where they were buried can now be searched online on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website, a source which has answered many queries.⁷⁶

Apart from Group Captain Hawkins' report, no extensive British report was apparently ever written on the burial, search, exhumation, identification, and reburial aspects of the work for the military dead (this omission will be explored more fully in the conclusion to this study). This was in strong contrast to the extensive reports compiled by the two American services which had carried out the care of the

⁷⁴ TNA, WO 165/36, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1943 and January-December 1944. TNA, WO 171/3786, ADGR&E, No. 32 Graves Registration Unit, War Diary, January-December 1944; TNA, 171/8342, ADGR&E, No. 32 Graves Registration Unit, War Diary, January-December 1945. TNA, WO 171/3794, ADGR&E, No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, War Diary, October-December 1944; TNA, WO 171/10994, ADGR&E, No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, War Diary, January-December 1945; TNA, 171/8349, ADGR&E, No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, War Diary, January-June 1946.

⁷⁵ TNA, WO 162/205, War Office, 'History of Casualty Branch (Liverpool) (Cas L)'. The report was probably completed in 1946 because the last figures given for the Army missing in Appendix K are August 1946. TNA, WO 162/204, War Office, 'History of Prisoner of War Branch (London) (Cas P.W)'. The report was probably completed in 1946 because the last figures given for visitors to Curzon Street House in Appendix C are December 1945.

⁷⁶ Commonwealth War Graves Commission website (last accessed 12/10/15): <http://www.cwgc.org/>

American dead. Active between 1942 and 1945, the Graves Registration Service, part of the US Army Quartermaster Corps, was replaced at the end of the war by the independent American Graves Registration Service, which ran until the official end of the American care for the dead programme on 31 December 1951. Both organisations wrote an account of their work, but that of the Graves Registration Service is short and to the point, whilst that of the American Graves Registration Service is very long and immensely detailed. The first report was *Study Number 107: Graves Registration Service*, issued in 1945, and the second and final account, published in 1957 was the massive 700-page history, written by Edward Steere and Thayer M Boardman, entitled *Final Disposition of World War II Dead, 1945-51*.⁷⁷ In addition to these substantial accounts, use has been made of one very small but fascinating American source, a tiny booklet which was designed to fit into a battledress pocket, *Handbook for Emergency Battlefield Burials and Graves Registration by Troops*.⁷⁸ *Crosses in the Wind*, a personal account of some fifteen months spent with the American graves units after D-Day, has also been of use.⁷⁹

Although the subject of servicemen who had been the victims of war crimes forms only a very small part of this study, it is worth noting that war crime material is very easy to find compared to that concerning the bulk of the work for the military dead. People were very conscious of their role in history in bringing the Nazis to justice, and wanted to make sure that the evidence was on record. Various dossiers held in the National Archives on individual investigations and trials have been used in this

⁷⁷ *Study Number 107: Graves Registration Service*, Reports of the General Board, United States Forces, European Theater, undated but around November 1945 (see Appendix 1, letter from QMG, Chief of Staff, dated 24 November 1945). Edward Steere and Thayer M Boardman, *Final Disposition of World War II Dead 1945-51*, US Army, Quartermaster Corps, QMC Historical Studies, Series II, No. 4 (Historical Branch Office of the Quartermaster General, Washington, D.C., 1957).

⁷⁸ *Handbook for Emergency Battlefield Burials and Graves Registration by Troops* (Office of the Chief Quartermaster, HQ SOS ETOUSA, 1 December 1943).

⁷⁹ Joseph James Shomon, *Crosses in the Wind* (Stratford House, New York, 1991).

study, alongside the United Nations War Crimes Commission reports.⁸⁰ In addition, use has been made of British war crimes files present in the Dutch National Archives due to the major involvement of 33 Netherlands War Crimes Commission in the investigation into the disappearance of Major Anthony Cotterell.

As a prelude to the description of the eight chapters in this study, placed here because it creates the essential framework for what follows, a brief overview of the key British agencies in North-West Europe and their locations will now be set out.

At the time of the commencement of the Normandy campaign, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, Commanding Officer of 21 Army Group's GR&E, had his office in England with Rear HQ on 'the principle that Heads of Services remain at Rear HQ and visit BLA [British Liberated Area] as became [sic] necessary'.⁸¹ As the hoped-for success of the French campaign became a certainty, arrangements were made for Rear HQ to move to France, Stott's office relocating to Bayeux on 14 August 1944.⁸² Paris was liberated on 25 August and Brussels on 3 September. 21 Army Group's Rear HQ moved to Brussels on 26 September, Stott and the Graves Service went with them, and there Stott's office remained for the rest of the war at Avenue Louise.⁸³ It was

⁸⁰ The United Nations War Crimes Commission, *Law Reports of Trials of War Criminals*, Volume IV (London, HMSO, 1948), Volume XI (London, HMSO, 1949).

⁸¹ TNA, 171/140, 21 Army Group HQ, 'A' Branch, Progress Report, August 1944, entry for week ending 5 August 1944. 'BLA' is also used to signify 'British Liberation Army', which is the meaning which always seems to be assigned to the acronym nowadays; however, see TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Appendix H, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Tracing of Missing Offrs and Men, of unlocated ex-PW and of Graves in BLA', as an example of it referring to a geographical area rather than the Army.

⁸² Ibid, War Diary, entry for week ending 19 August 1944.

⁸³ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, entry for 22-26 September. The 'Avenue Louise, Brussels' address is listed in Appendix M of the same War Diary.

only in mid-1946, much against Stott's advice, that the office was moved to Germany, first to Herford, and then to the BAOR's HQ at Bad Oeynhausen.⁸⁴

France and Belgium were the testing ground for much of the GR&E work. The Netherlands was another vital area, but work there was seriously delayed because the liberation took so much longer to achieve. By the end of 1944 only a quarter of the Netherlands territory had been liberated, and around 7 million out of the population of just over 9 million were still living under German rule.⁸⁵ The first graves unit to work in Holland was posted to the new cemetery at Valkenswaard in Noord-Brabant on 9 April 1945.⁸⁶ The work on behalf of the Arnhem dead, who were of the utmost significance in terms of British losses in the Netherlands, began a mere 48 hours after Arnhem was liberated on 14-15 April 1945.⁸⁷ Some Dutch territory which contained British graves was not liberated until after the war ended, the Frisian island of Texel being the last to be freed on 20 May.⁸⁸ Due to these delays, graves work in

⁸⁴ TNA, WO 267/603, BAOR HQ, Western Europe Graves Service Directorate, Quarterly Historical Report, main report, quarter ending 30 September 1946. 'Much against Stott's advice', see 'Administration' section.

⁸⁵ Ernest Watkins, 'Better Water than Blood', *WAR*, issue 87 (ABCA, The War Office, 3 February 1945), p.2.

⁸⁶ TNA, WO 171/10994, ADGR&E, No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, War Diary, January-December 1945, entry for 9 April 1945. Valkenswaard had been the first village to be liberated in the main British advance into Holland in September 1944, but the failure of the Arnhem operation and the very hard winter had delayed the graves work there.

⁸⁷ TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, entry for 4 June 1945.

⁸⁸ Texel was the final resting place of a number of British dead, most of them from the RAF. The liberation of Texel was delayed primarily because of the war which had broken out between Georgian conscripts in the German Army and their masters. After much killing, the Germans on the island eventually surrendered peaceably to the Canadian forces. See: J A van der Vlis, *Tragedie op Texel, 6-26 April van heet jaar 1945* (N V V/H Langeveld & De Rooij, Texel, 1974), and Dick van Reeuwijk, *Sondermeldung Texel: Opstand der Georgiërs* (Het Open Boek, Texel, 1995).

the Netherlands took place after much of what constituted Graves Service policy had already been decided in France and Belgium.

The conquest of Germany culminated in the division of the country into four Zones, governed by the Russians, the Americans, the French, and the British. Hamburg was ostensibly the most important city of the British Zone of Germany, but much of the most important administrative work was done elsewhere, 'in the mysterious towns of Bad Oeynhausen, Bünde and Herford, where the greatest decisions and most solemn decrees [were] enacted'.⁸⁹ These three towns were at the centre of a vast network of British organisations, dealing with the occupation of Germany, the programme for the dead, and the investigation and prosecution of war crimes. The BAOR was at the hub, based at the spa town of Bad Oeynhausen in Westphalia, because that is where it had been located when the war ended. BAFO (British Air Forces of Occupation) was stationed about 16 miles to the east at Bad Eilsen.⁹⁰ As the position in Germany was consolidated, a civilian organisation gradually began to take over many of the BAOR's governing functions. Known somewhat long-windedly as the Control Commission for Germany and Austria (British Element), its name was usually abbreviated to CCG (BE), but it will be referred to here as the Control Commission.⁹¹ Due to the necessity to liaise with the BAOR, the Control Commission needed to be as close to Bad Oeynhausen as possible. However, because accommodation there was so limited, it was based in satellite locations, mainly in Lübbecke, Minden, Herford and Bünde.⁹²

With regards to the RAF's side of the work for the dead, the first missing research sections were No. 1 Section, based in Paris from December 1944, and No. 2 Section,

⁸⁹ Geoffrey Cotterell, *Randle in Springtime* (Eyre and Spottiswoode, London, 1949), p.86.

⁹⁰ Group Captain W J Taylor, 'Historical Background', *The Royal Air Force in Germany, 1945-1993* (The Royal Air Force Historical Society, London, 1999), p.11.

⁹¹ The Allied Control Commission was the successor to SHAEF, and the British Control Commission was one part of it. SHAEF was the original governing body for Germany after its conquest.

⁹² Gray, *Major Cotterell at Arnhem*, p.219.

based in Brussels from May 1945.⁹³ The significant time lag between the commencement of the programmes of the Army's graves units and the RAF's missing research units was largely intentional. Although it was recognised that it was best to start as quickly as possible with missing research, it was not deemed advisable for 'searcher parties to follow too closely on the heels of the advancing Army'. If the searcher parties operated too close to a war front, demining would not have been thoroughly carried out, whilst shelling and bombing were likely to disturb existing burial places and cause new casualties.⁹⁴ RAF missing research officers had not received a soldier's training, and thus it was considered wisest to let the Army finish its job first. However, a further factor in the delay was the bitter winter of 1944-45 which seriously affected the beginning of the RAF's programme.⁹⁵

The Army's care for the dead programme began in Normandy in June 1944 and gradually moved into other countries. The RAF, meanwhile, in its search for the missing, took the decision to start 'in the outer countries of Europe and gradually work inwards, with Germany and Central Europe as the final target' (although some work was done in Germany from August 1945 onwards).⁹⁶ This was due to the RAF search teams very great dependence on the Army's resources, not only for the Army personnel who recorded the graves and performed the exhumations, but also for basic necessities, like food rations and petrol, which only the Army could easily supply in a devastated Continent.

This study is divided into eight chapters, which each cover a particular aspect of the care for the dead programme. Chapters One and Two centre upon the British

⁹³ TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', pp.15-16.

⁹⁴ Ibid, p.141.

⁹⁵ See Chapter Four

⁹⁶ 'In the outer countries of Europe': TNA, AIR2/10031, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, unsigned, 'Missing Research – Origin and Development', report, date stamped 29 March 1950. No 2. MREU, No.3 MREU and No. 4 MREU all began the initial work in Germany in August 1945, Hadaway, *Missing Believed Killed*, Appendix B, p.157.

Army because of its primary role in the care of the dead. The first chapter covers the hierarchical organisational structure, pre D-Day planning (which represented a considerable advance on that of previous operations), and the immediate burials of soldiers during and directly after battle. It considers the type of men who worked in the Graves Service, and the extreme problems of finding suitable staff. Men who worked in this field had to be non-combatant and there was a limited pool of such men. The scale and problems of their immensely difficult task are outlined. There were a number of regulations governing immediate burials, but these were not infrequently ignored. The British system of burying and registering the dead was multi-layered; it included the frontline troops, the Graves Service, the Royal Army Medical Corps, and the Royal Army Chaplains' Department. This set-up did not function well compared to the American system which was based upon casualty evacuation, a procedure in which the dead were treated in much the same way as the wounded. However, British muddling-through was largely due to a paucity of resources compared to the Americans.

In Chapter Two, the focus is upon the Army's post-liberation and post-war work in France and Belgium, from D-Day until the summer of the following year. The work in these countries, and the many complex problems and issues which it uncovered, provided a template for the work to be carried out later in other countries, such as the Netherlands and Germany. The creation of new cemeteries, and the removal of bodies from temporary cemeteries or isolated sites to what would become their final resting place, was the main responsibility. In order to accomplish this work, skilled diplomatic liaison with the liberated countries was essential, especially in the critical matter of the acquisition of land for permanent cemeteries, and the suspension of normal civic rules for burials, for example, allowing British casualties to be interred in blankets or hessian canvas instead of coffins.⁹⁷ An in-depth look at the type of work involved is given by using No. 32 Graves Registration Unit and No. 39 Graves

⁹⁷ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Appendix K, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Burials', memorandum, 27 November 1944.

Concentration Unit as illustration; this reveals the immense difficulties which they encountered, not only those of human making but also appalling weather conditions.

Chapters Three and Four centre upon the highly specialised search for the many thousands of RAF missing. The first chapter of the pair examines the administrative structure, in particular the Air Ministry Casualty Branch and the MRES. It also looks in detail at the motivations behind what was a very lengthy and complex task, motivations which were a mixture of the practical and the moral. The former included Service morale and good public relations, vital at a time where it looked very much as if there might be another war coming, this time with the Soviet Union. The latter included the acknowledgement of the immense debt owed to those who had lost their lives. The RAF was a small, close-knit service, with a strong welfare ethos which was enlightened and modern; the genuine concern for the families of the dead and missing was manifested even in such apparently peripheral matters as the wish to deter occultists from preying upon bereaved relatives. The RAF's high degree of commitment to the search for the missing led to the development of great professionalism, but it also struck a fine balance between humanity and common sense: it was accepted that it was simply not possible to make a microscopic search of every inch of Europe. Nonetheless, the RAF displayed a vastly greater concern for missing airmen than the Army did for missing soldiers.

Chapter Four centres on fieldwork for the missing, showing how the MRES conducted their work and using examples of specific MRES cases. It examines the general factors affecting the search, such as war damage and the extremely bad weather of the first two winters after the war, before moving on to the geographical and political factors, the latter being particularly serious in Germany where the largest number of casualties was concentrated. Also discussed are the nature of the RAF war and its impact on the identification process. There were serious limitations to forensic science at that period, but nonetheless some very simple but effective methods produced good results. More sophisticated techniques had been developed by the Americans, who were generous with their resources. There was a high degree of mutual aid between the American Graves Registration Command and the MRES.

The RAF also made extensive use of non-military British agencies, such as the Press and the police, and received considerable help from the liberated countries, and sometimes even from the Germans. The RAF's considerable success in the search reflected not only its determination but its flexibility as to sources of information.

The focus of Chapter Five is the War Office Casualty Branch, and its work for the missing, the dead, and their next of kin. The mishandling of numerous aspects of this work is demonstrated. One of the key themes is the way in which the Army administration dealt with the missing; they were processed in a particular way and the extraordinarily low missing rate which resulted then became the official figure, one which bore no relation to the number of men who had actually received a named grave. A very different approach was taken to that of the RAF and there was an almost entire absence of proactive searching for missing soldiers, leading to a very much lower clear-up rate for Army missing cases. The other main theme is the War Office Casualty Branch's extreme difficulties in dealing with relatives and with public relations. Relocation to Liverpool in June 1940 produced a number of problems, and seems to have bred a beleaguered attitude in the Casualty Branch which made it often act in a rigid, arrogant, and unsympathetic manner. This produced the inevitable reaction in the public, who showed a marked preference for dealing with the British Red Cross Society when trying to obtain information about missing soldiers. There was a breakdown of relations between the War Office and the British Red Cross Society, with the Casualty Branch resenting the fact that the Air Ministry and the Admiralty continued a close liaison with the Society.

In Chapter Six, the various threads from the first five chapters are drawn together to provide a comparison of the great differences in the way in which the Army and the RAF approached the care of the dead and the missing, and handled relations with the families. These differences lay in Service culture, Service history, the campaigns which each had fought in North-West Europe, and the military and policing responsibilities which each Service undertook. The Army had struggled to modernise its attitudes, but the RAF was a modern Service which, amongst other things, was adept at handling public relations. There was only one area in which the

two Services were totally united, and that was the investigation and prosecution of war crimes, many of which were discovered during normal exhumation and identification work. Here the discussion broadens out into an analysis of the different type of war crimes committed against soldiers and airmen, and the effect which German enmity against Allied airmen had upon the burial of the dead. Lastly, a comparison is made with the American programme in one specific regard, their huge success with naming their dead. Their well-planned (and well-funded) procedures point up all too clearly the major deficiency of the British system — the lack of reliable means of identification. The point is made that the Americans had a joint programme for soldiers and airmen, and the obvious question which arises is would the British have improved their overall results if the Army and the RAF had also run a joint programme? Because of the differences and the scrapping between the two Services, the conclusion is that there would not have been an improvement and indeed that the reverse might have been true.

Chapter Seven looks at the Army's vital role in creating the framework for the national commemorative programme long before the Imperial War Graves Commission became involved. The Commission was a non-military organisation which only began its work when military operations ceased; thus, after D-Day, the Commission did not visit the new cemeteries which the Graves Service of 21 Army Group was creating in France until they had been under development for some six months. The Graves Service chose the cemetery sites and developed their layouts broadly in line with plans which the Commission had supplied, but it reserved for itself considerable freedom of action. It also took great pride in both the practical and the aesthetic aspects of cemetery development, and scrupulously upheld the core principle of the national commemorative programme — that all the dead were equal. During the course of its work, the Graves Work encountered numerous difficulties of definition and policy, some of which were decided at Cabinet, in Parliament, or at War Office level, but many others by the Commanding Officer of the Graves Service, Lieutenant Colonel Stott. Some aspects of the programme for the dead attracted public controversy, particularly the very difficult matter of graves in Germany, but

only one public criticism was truly relevant to the Graves Service's performance and that was that the programme was taking far too long, particularly if compared to that of the First World War. It will be shown that this perception was entirely incorrect, and was based upon lack of knowledge combined with forgetfulness of the historical facts.

The last chapter looks at the context in which the dead of North-West Europe were endowed with their special meaning — the long history of German aggression in Europe and the utterly unprincipled actions of the Nazi regime. The chapter begins with an overview of the British public's high level of knowledge about the war and its opinion of the Germans, an opinion which inevitably blackened after D-Day as the full extent of Nazi criminality became obvious. This not only enhanced the sanctity of the Allied dead, but also affected the manner of their burial if they had lost their lives in German territory. Neither the Americans nor the Canadians would permit their dead to remain there. The British adopted a different policy, but one which raised in some people a great fear concerning the vulnerability of the dead left in enemy ground. The chapter then moves on to the subject of the German dead. From June 1944 onwards, these increasingly became the responsibility of the British in the territories in which they were operating. Despite the widespread revulsion against the German nation, strong efforts were made to treat its dead honourably, not only because this was the mark of a civilised power but also because there was a clear understanding that enmity should end with death. The very different cultural significance of the dead of both nations forms the focus of the last part of the chapter.

Chapter One — The Army and the Care for the Dead: Organisation, Planning, and the Immediate Burials of Soldiers

The year which followed D-Day was an extremely testing period in the care for the military dead of the Second World War. Besides the large number of fatal battle casualties, work had to be carried out on behalf of those who had died in North-West Europe prior to 6 June 1944. The immensity of the task, the extreme shortage of manpower, and the fact that the work was taking place against a backdrop of critical military operations, resulted in makeshift arrangements, compromises, and constant delays.

The interment of battle casualties, either during or very soon after military operations, was generally referred to as 'immediate burial', and such burials were often very different to those which took place in the later period of rationalising all British graves. Although Army policy was to allocate burial grounds prior to battle so that the bodies of those killed could go straight to their final resting place, in practice this proved extremely difficult to achieve. Burials often ended up taking place in isolated spots, and later almost all of these bodies would have to be moved.⁹⁸

All burials and later reburials were the responsibility of the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries. The first part of this chapter will look closely at the Directorate, its hierarchical organisation, and its units in the field which carried out the work. It will also be necessary to sketch out the structure and responsibilities of 21 Army Group, the central organisation in the fieldwork in North-West Europe. 21 Army Group kept the graves units supplied with vehicles, fuel, equipment, rations, billets and medical care, provided (whenever possible) the essential assistance of

⁹⁸ TNA, WO 165/36, War Office, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1943 and January-December 1944, 'APPX. II/43', 'Responsibility for Burials and the Construction and Maintenance of Cemeteries'. The origin of these orders, as stated in the paper, was Appendix A to General Order 1709 of 1943.

the Royal Engineers, raised many of the graves units' personnel and gave their top commander, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, an office at Rear HQ along with the other Heads of Services.

The second part of the chapter is devoted to the immediate burials of soldiers. It is perhaps an obvious point to make but these procedures were unique to the Army. The deaths of RAF airmen over North-West Europe also necessitated immediate burials, but until the liberation and the conquest of Germany these were either carried out by citizens of the occupied countries under German supervision, or by the Germans themselves. There is therefore no parallel between the treatment of these bodies and those of British soldiers, who were almost invariably buried by their own people. What happened with the immediate burials of the RAF dead will be covered in Chapter Four.

The primary British Army body concerned with registration and burial was the War Office department tersely known as A.G.13. A.G.13 tended to be the name which appeared on correspondence with soldiers' relatives.⁹⁹ However, on Army and RAF inter-Service paperwork, the department was generally referred to by its full military name, the Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries, usually abbreviated to ADGR&E, or ADGRE.¹⁰⁰

Part of the personnel branch of the Army and thus ultimately under the control of the Adjutant General, the Directorate had two key duties. The first consisted of registering soldiers' graves, be they in cemeteries, churchyards, or isolated spots.

⁹⁹ See, for example, Dumfries Museum and Camera Obscura, James Byron collection, The War Office (A.G.13) to Mrs M Warwick, letter, 15 November 1945.

¹⁰⁰ Very occasionally the name also appears as the Army Directorate of Graves Registrations and Enquiries with 'Registrations' in the plural but the singular form has been adopted throughout this study.

This registration process was running during the war, but after the war it took on a huge extra dimension when the burial sites of all British servicemen, from all three Services, had to be rationalised. Secondly, the Directorate was responsible for the creation of new Military Cemeteries and the reorganisation of older sites where necessary; frequently this involved a considerable number of new registrations, when bodies whose whereabouts had previously been unknown were found, or bodies were moved — or, in the official term, ‘concentrated’ — to central sites. Once again, this process began after D-Day, and in North-West Europe carried on for four years until the majority of the Army units involved were disbanded in September 1948.¹⁰¹

In 21 Army Group, the organisational structure which cared for the dead was known as the Graves Service, or in the laconic version simply as ‘Graves’.¹⁰² The specialised units which carried out the field work were known (as they were world-wide) as the Graves Registration Units (GRUs) and Graves Concentration Units (GCUs). The name of the GRUs had been changed in January 1944 from Graves Registration and Enquiry Unit to Graves Registration Unit. It had been found that the original title was misleading as although ‘the Units collect data from which enquiries are answered, they do not deal with enquiries themselves’.¹⁰³ Hence, all the registration work in North-West Europe from D-Day onwards was carried out by

¹⁰¹ TNA, WO 267/610, BAOR HQ, Western Europe Graves Service Directorate, Quarterly Historical Report, quarter ending 30 June 1948, ‘KITE No. 3186’, appendix dated 6 September 1948. It is clear that some Army units continued after the disbandment of the Western Europe Graves Service Directorate; for example, in July 1949, DADGRE Berlin and No. 50 CGU are mentioned in RAF documentation as planning to disband that same month. TNA, AIR 55 /62, Air Ministry, ‘Liaison with DDGRE and AGRC’, OC, Berlin Detachment, MRES, to Group Captain Hawkins, memorandum, 12 July 1949.

¹⁰² The RAF sometimes referred to it in the plural as the Army Graves Services.

¹⁰³ TNA, WO 165/36, War Office, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1944, entry for January 1944.

GRUs, although these were essentially the same as the GR&EUs which had performed the work in earlier theatres of war.

Like many other organisations, the Directorate was evacuated from London at the beginning of the Second World War. It remained at Wooburn House in Buckinghamshire until August 1943, when it moved back to London to its former premises at No. 32 Grosvenor Gardens.¹⁰⁴ At the same time, its office establishment was increased to 8 officers and 44 clerks. This increase was directly related to the Sicilian and Italian campaigns, the troops landing on the mainland of Europe for the first time on 9 September 1943. After the move back to London, permanent clerks were very slow to be recruited, and so 50 ATS auxiliaries were attached to deal with the arrears.¹⁰⁵

The Directorate was a far-reaching organisation with a global field of duty. For example, on 1 January 1944, it had 30 units of the Graves Service operating in the field worldwide, from North Africa to India to Italy. Of these 30 units, 4 were dedicated to the dead of 2 of the Dominion countries — South Africa and Canada. South Africa had a Graves Registration and a Graves Concentration Unit which were working in Eritrea and Egypt, and Canada had 2 Graves Registration Units which were working in Italy. Meanwhile, in anticipation of the forthcoming invasion of Europe, 5 new

¹⁰⁴ Wooburn House should not be confused with the Woburn estate in Bedfordshire; it was a very large handsome country house which was demolished in 1963, see: 'Lost Heritage, England's Lost Country Houses', website (last accessed 12/03/2016):http://www.lostheritage.org.uk/houses/lh_buckinghamshire_wooburnhouse_info_gallery.html

¹⁰⁵ TNA, WO 165/36, War Office, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1943, 'Establishment and Organisation', entry for July to September 1943.

Graves Registration Units, numbered 32 to 36, were forming in London at the District Assembly Centre, earmarked for duty with 21 Army Group in France.¹⁰⁶

21 Army Group was the major British force involved in the D-Day landings, code-named OVERLORD, and in the subsequent liberation of Europe and conquest of Germany. At the top of the tree of command was HQ 21 Army Group, headed by General (later Field Marshal) Bernard Montgomery. At the second level of command were the HQs of the British Second Army and the First Canadian Army, together with the HQ of the L of C, Lines of Communication, which was integral to the work of the Graves Service after D-Day.¹⁰⁷

The Graves Service came under the control of 21 Army Group's 'A' Branch, the personnel branch which operated in the rear of the frontline armies. The actual location of 'A' Branch in relation to the main body of the Army produced some difficulties, as *The Administrative History* noted in its summing up of the campaign:

Considerable difficulties arise when Army Group HQ is split into Main and Rear, especially when they are long distances apart. [...] Although it did not prove altogether satisfactory owing to the difficulty of future planning on the 'A' side, it was the practice for 'A' Branch to remain with Rear HQ with forward links on a skeleton basis at Main HQ.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ TNA, WO 165/36, War Office, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1944, 'List and Location of Units of the Graves Services on 1 Jan 44 - APPX.11/44'.

¹⁰⁷ The L of C was separated into a number of administrative groups; those particularly relevant to the initial work in France were 12 L of C Area and 5 L of C Sub Area. The War Diary of No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, for example, refers in its formation as commencing under '12 L of C Area through 5 L of C Sub-Area', the latter supplying the unit's vehicles. TNA, WO 171/3794, ADGR&E, No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, War Diary, October-December 1944, Preliminary Note.

¹⁰⁸ *The Administrative History of the Operations of 21 Army Group on the Continent of Europe, 6 June 1944-8 May 1945* (Germany, November 1945), p.134.

'A' was in charge of a number of personnel matters: Reinforcements, 'A' Personal Services, Enemy Prisoners of War, Medical, Pay, Provost, Education, and, of particular interest here, Chaplains and Graves.¹⁰⁹

It was via this structure that 21 Army Group carried out the wartime work on behalf of the British military dead, and for this purpose it not only received manpower sent by the Directorate at the War Office, but also raised its own units in North-West Europe. For example, No. 37 and 38 Graves Registration Units were raised in the UK in early September 1944 and despatched to 21 Army Group on 28 September, but No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit was raised by 21 Army Group that same month in France.¹¹⁰

The head of the Directorate in London was the Assistant Adjutant General (AAG), Colonel S Fraser, winner of the Military Cross, who had been appointed on 22 July 1943.¹¹¹ However, the key man in the work for the dead of North-West Europe was Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Owen Stott, who headed 21 Army Group's Graves Service. Stott's appointment to 21 Army Group had been confirmed in December 1943, six months in advance of OVERLORD. His official grading at that point was Deputy Assistant Director (DAD). However, on 1 April 1944, his role was upgraded to that of Assistant Director (AD), 'the importance of the work having been realized'.¹¹² Stott would hold this critical post with the greatest efficiency through all his units' various name changes until he became seriously ill in November 1947 and had to be evacuated to England.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, see the section headings, pp.134-142.

¹¹⁰ TNA, WO 165/36, War Office, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1944, entry for September 1944.

¹¹¹ TNA, WO 165/36, War Office, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1943, entry for month of July 1943.

¹¹² TNA, WO 165/36, War Office, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1944, entry for 1 April 1944.

¹¹³ TNA, WO 267/608, BAOR HQ, Western Europe Graves Service Directorate, Quarterly Historical Report, quarter ending 31 December 1947, main report.

Stott's office was located at 21 Army Group HQ (Rear), and further down the tree of command there were other GR&E sections. For example, the L of C had its own GR&E section, headed by a Major H R L Groom, whose official grading was DADGR&E, HQ, L of C.¹¹⁴ Because of the tree of command at 21 Army Group, Groom was junior to Stott.

The frequent Army habit of economising on effort by referring to GR&E even when ADGR&E was actually signified means that working through relevant documents can sometimes be extremely misleading. A similar confusion is generated by the use of the acronym ADGR&E (or ADGRE) for both the Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries, i.e. A.G.13 and all its sub-organisations, and the Assistant Director for Graves Registration and Enquiries, e.g. the post with 21 Army Group and the BAOR which was held by Stott. For the sake of clarification, and to prevent the eternal repetition of 'Graves Registration and Enquiries', the Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries in London will generally be referred to as the Directorate, or occasionally by its short title A.G.13, whilst the GR&E units of 21 Army Group and the BAOR will generally be referred to as the Graves Service.

Documentation is scarce but what is known about the calibre of the Commanding Officers and key personnel working in 21 Army Group's Graves Service suggests a very high level of motivation. This may well be a reflection of the fact that they tended to be past the age of active service but had usually fought in the First World War and won decorations.

¹¹⁴ Groom's name is sometimes spelled with an 'e' and sometimes without; this is probably due to his slightly confusing signature which prolongs the 'm' into something that looks like 'e', but on balance it appears that his true name was Groom, not Groome. See, for example, his signature on the sign-off certificate for Bretteville-Sur-Laize Canadian Cemetery, 8 October 1946, TNA, WO 267/604, BAOR HQ, Western Europe Graves Service Directorate, Quarterly Historical Report, quarter ending 31 December 1946.

Lieutenant Colonel Stott is one of the few men working in Graves about whom a reasonable amount is known. Born in 1891, he was the son of a country schoolmaster but had long ago transcended his background. He had fought in the First World War and won several medals for valour, including the Military Cross and various Italian decorations. He retired from active service as a Lieutenant on 15th March 1923, after winning his Iraq bar General Service Medal. 16 years later, in 1939, he re-enlisted in the Army as a Captain.¹¹⁵ By the time of his appointment to 21 Army Group's Graves Service in December 1943, he was fifty-two years old.

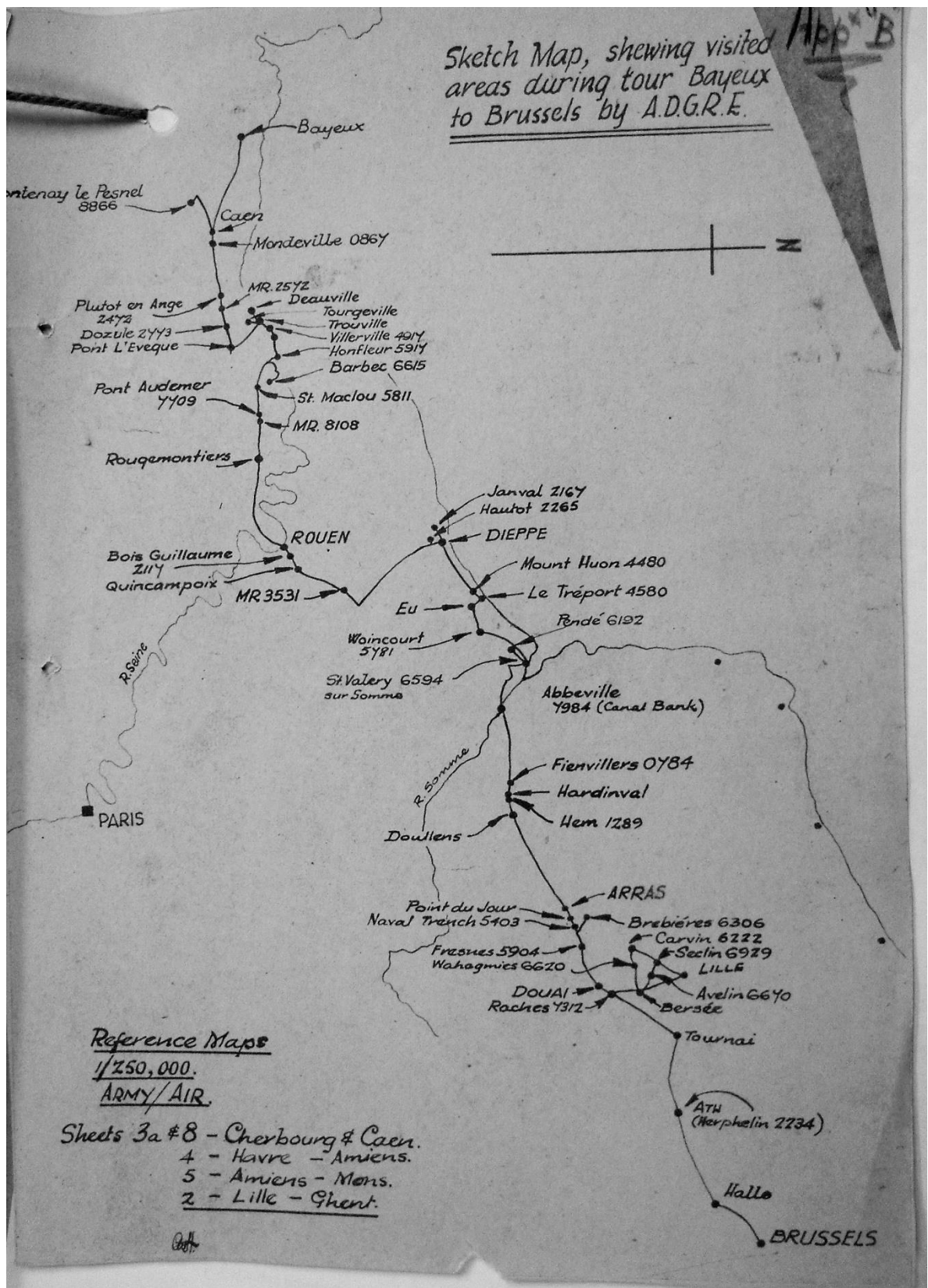
Extremely hard-working, Stott could even turn something like an office move to good account, as can be seen in the map opposite of the work carried out in transit when the Graves Service office relocated from France to Belgium in September 1944.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Stott autobiographical details, Bamfords Auction Site (last accessed 28/08/2014): <http://www.bamfords-auctions.co.uk/buying/auctions/toys-and-collectors-sale-august-28-2014/lot-251-Medals/>

¹¹⁶ Stott's tour in September 1944: TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Appendix B.

Sketch Map, shewing visited areas during tour Bayeux to Brussels by A.D.G.R.E.

APP B



Reference Maps
 1/250,000.
 ARMY/AIR.

Sheets 3a #8 - Cherbourg & Caen.
 4 - Havre - Amiens.
 5 - Amiens - Mons.
 2 - Lille - Ghent.

Stott was also highly meticulous and far-sighted, as is evident from the War Diary for which he was responsible. A War Diary was the daily record of the operations of an Army unit. War Diaries were individually kept by the greatest to the smallest units, and they ranged immensely in style from the exceedingly terse or slapdash to the comprehensively detailed.¹¹⁷ Stott's diaries were decidedly in the latter camp; their entries were carefully dated or numbered, occasionally annotated, and frequently supplemented by well-ordered appendices. They provide a unique and very complete record of the work for the military dead in North-West Europe. When Stott was evacuated to England in November 1947, the immaculately kept files with their lettered and numbered appendices ceased immediately. Records thereafter were kept in a somewhat sketchy manner by Stott's successor, Lieutenant Colonel G A Hill-Walker.¹¹⁸

Stott's excellent qualities as an administrator were reflected in the citation for the Military OBE which he was awarded in October 1945. The citation for the medal was made by Major-General M S Chilton, Deputy Adjutant General, HQ, 21 Army Group, and it concisely summarises why Stott was the ideal choice for the job:

Lieutenant-Colonel Stott's sound judgement, very hard work and skill in managing the Graves Service has been a very powerful factor in ensuring the remarkably successful operation of this Service which has carried out its task admirably, despite the inevitable unexpected difficulties. The Service has always been in control of the situation, a feat which is in itself exceptional, this is mainly due to Lieutenant-Colonel Stott's direction.

¹¹⁷ They can also be incredibly vivid and descriptive; a perfect example of this is the War Diary of 1st Airborne Reconnaissance Squadron written at Oosterbeek during the collapse of the Arnhem operation. WO 361/643, Airborne operations, North West Europe, Arnhem, 1st Airborne Reconnaissance Squadron, War Diary.

¹¹⁸ TNA, WO 267/609, BAOR HQ, Western Europe Graves Service Directorate, Quarterly Historical Report, quarter ending 31 March 1948.

He has carried out negotiations with Allied governments in a wholly admirable manner; this has contributed greatly to the success of the Graves Service.¹¹⁹

Stott's personal contribution towards liaison with the Americans was especially valued, so much so that in mid-1946 the Paris HQ of the American Graves Registration Command forwarded some correspondence with Stott to two much higher American authorities, the Quartermaster General of the War Department and the Commanding General, United States Forces, European Theatre, 'as an excellent example of co-operation between two Allies'. The officer who had forwarded the correspondence wrote to Stott to let him know what had been done:

We forwarded this letter [...] with considerable pride because we feel that the co-operation that exists between our Services may well serve as an example.

Thanking you again for your many courtesies and for the excellent cooperation which we have received through you, from your Service.¹²⁰

British Army senior officers who worked directly with Stott were similarly impressed. In a report made by Colonel S Fraser, the AAG of the Directorate, after a tour of inspection of France and Belgium in October 1944, the following eulogistic description of Stott appears:

¹¹⁹ TNA, WO 373/85, Citation for OBE award to Arthur Owen Stott, date-stamped 11 October 1945.

¹²⁰ The American Graves Registration Command in Paris had been copied in on Stott's memorandum, and it appears that the initiative to forward Stott's memorandum came from them rather than Colonel Traver who had originally received the memorandum. TNA, WO 267/603, BAOR HQ, Western Europe Graves Service Directorate, Quarterly Historical Report, quarter ending 30 September 1946, Alfred B Denniston to Colonel A O Stott, letter, 22 August 1946.

All units were in good billets and showed great keenness in their work. All the officers expressed great interest in the work, and in view of the fact that, with the exception of Lt Col Stott, and a few recent postings, none had any previous experience of the work, it is considered both the results of their work and their continued interest are very satisfactory and reflect great credit on Lt. Col. Stott.¹²¹

Stott was obviously a brilliant manager, with the ability to inspire in his men the all-important 'keenness' so beloved by the British Armed Forces in the Second World War. One of the objects of Fraser's tour was to report on the morale of the units under Stott's command, and what he saw clearly reassured him.

A great deal of thought went into maintaining the graves units' morale, and some of the welfare aspects of this will be considered in the following chapter. It was part of Stott's management strategy to maintain constant contact with the men in the field, keeping them well-informed and encouraging them to feel that they were part of a grand plan. In the War Diary of No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, for example, the entry for 15 October, reads: 'Attended at No. 32 GRU where Lt Col Stott ADGR&E 21 Army Group and Col Frazer [sic] of A.G.13 War Office were staying for interview where many points of Grave Concentration interest and formation details were discussed and instructions received.' A month later the same War Diary noted Stott paying a personal visit to the unit on 17 November 1944: 'This was very helpful as various little queries regarding our work were settled and also the all-important question of transport was improved.'¹²² Following Stott's visit, Major Groom, the DADGR&E at L of C, spent three days with the unit 'for the purpose mainly of

¹²¹ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Appendix D (this report itself has three appendices, A-C), Tour of Inspection, Colonel S Fraser, 23 October 1944.

¹²² TNA, WO 171/3794, ADGR&E, No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, War Diary, October-December 1944, entry for 17 November 1944.

assisting in the preparations for the handing over of cemeteries already full'.¹²³ Groom visited No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit on a monthly basis, but this visit was longer than his usual call.¹²⁴ The units were also encouraged to feel involved by being included in various meetings and conferences, such as conferences at Paris and Brussels with senior officers in the various GR&E sections.¹²⁵

The War Diary entries quoted above were written by Captain (later Major) H Ingolby, the OC of No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit. Like many others in Graves, Ingolby had a non-combat decoration; he had won the MBE, as had the OC of No. 32 Graves Registration Unit at this period, Captain William Richards.¹²⁶ Prior to his posting to No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, Ingolby had been OC of No. 34 GRU with 8 Corps. When he left for his new posting in September 1944, he received a letter of the warmest thanks from Major Harold Leslie at HQ 8 Corps Rear:

My dear Ingolby

It would be ungracious indeed to let you go without recording how much I have appreciated your good work and cooperation on the 'A' side in 8 Corps. Quiet, unobtrusive, but most efficient and willing, it has been. It has been valued, as indeed is well-merited, far beyond the confines of this HQ. Not least must it be a source of satisfaction to you that the

¹²³ 'Handing over', i.e. transferring the care of the cemetery to the Imperial War Graves Commission. TNA, WO 171/10994, ADGR&E, No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, War Diary, January-December 1945, entry for 31 July 1945.

¹²⁴ There is a reference in August 1945 to Groom's 'usual monthly visit', TNA, WO 171/10994, ADGR&E, No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, War Diary, January-December 1945.

¹²⁵ See, for example, the conference in October referred to in entry for 10 October 1945, TNA, WO 171/10994, ADGR&E, No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, War Diary, January-December 1945.

¹²⁶ For Ingolby's decoration see William Jordan, *The Bayeux British Cemetery* (Jarrold Publishing, Norwich, 2006), p.19; for Richards' decoration, see entry for 14 February 1944, TNA, WO 171/3786, ADGR&E, No. 32 Graves Registration Unit, War Diary, January-December 1944.

relatives of the fallen have known the meticulous care and attention shown their dead.¹²⁷

Ingolby proved so valuable in his new command that Stott would recommend him for an award in June 1945, his name being at the top of a short list given in order of priority.¹²⁸

Besides excellent Commanding Officers such as Stott and Ingolby, the Graves Service also had some highly committed Other Ranks. One such was Corporal Eric Gunton of the Royal Engineers, who was attached to No. 32 Graves Registration Unit; his exceptional work as a photographer will be considered in the following chapter.

Moving forward a little to the post-war period in order to put the calibre of the wartime staff into context, there is some evidence that as the Army's global commitments began to reduce, an entirely different sort of man came into the GRUs and GCUs, more by chance than anything else. One such was Duncan Leitch Torrance, who worked in Germany in a GCU from May 1947. In 2009, Torrance published a memoir called *From Desert to Danube*, which was based upon the diary which he had kept from 1944 to 1948. It is very much the diary of an intolerant and rather priggish young man, some of whose opinions were extremely harsh. As an old man, having grown beyond such easy judgments, Torrance acknowledged that some of the text might cause offence, but had the great courage to let it stand without alteration: 'Proud of some of the things I did, ashamed of others. Be dishonest and cowardly to change it.' He described it as 'the story of a common man, by a common man'.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Appendix F, Major H R Leslie, DAAG at HQ 8 Corps, to Captain H Ingolby of No. 39 GCU, 23 September 1944.

¹²⁸ TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, entry for 21 June 1945.

¹²⁹ Duncan Leitch Torrance, *From Desert to Danube* (Serendipity, no location given, 2009), p.4.

Torrance recounts how he came into Graves work in North Africa in 1946. He was nineteen years old, it was his first posting on active service, and with the war over, good jobs were hard to come by. His view was that he was effectively conned into the work: 'I was young, keen, and an easy piece of meat.' He resented the fact that so far as promotion was concerned, graves work was 'an absolute blind alley'.¹³⁰ But often there was a freedom about it which compensated. When his unit was ordered to proceed to Germany in 1947, he made sure that he would go with it, having taken the decision in a somewhat cynical and opportunist way. His attitude was a world apart from the older men who staffed the GRUs and GCUs during the war, at a period when able-bodied youngsters were called upon to fight and would never have found their way into Graves unless they were mentally impaired or in some other way militarily deficient.

Despite his fondness for griping about his work, Torrance could be very sensitive to certain aspects of it. The first job he did in Germany affected him greatly; it was at a mass grave of nineteen British POWs on a forced march at the end of the war, who had unfortunately had been killed by friendly fire.

It was still easy to see that the men must have been very weak. They had marched a long way. Their boots had no heel left and very little of the soles left. They had been buried with their haversacks, which contained their toothbrushes, their letters and all the other marks of privation.¹³¹

Some of the harshest opinions which Torrance expressed about his time in Germany were directed at RAF missing research officers. These men were leagues above the rather resentful Torrance in terms of experience and charisma. Having served during

¹³⁰ Ibid, p.70.

¹³¹ Duncan Leitch Torrance, *From Desert to Danube*, Chapter 15b, 'Back to Exhumations and Crosses', BBC, 'WW2 People's War' (last accessed 31/07/2015): <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/categories/c55463/>

the war, they would all have been several years older than Torrance although probably still under 30 years of age. Ex-aircrew, they had fought for their country and most had won prestigious decorations, whilst his military career was going nowhere. All were volunteers for the search work and highly motivated, but their work was necessarily very grim. Torrance deeply resented what he thought of as their scandalous behaviour, letting off steam in their leisure time.¹³²

For their part, the RAF searchers also complained about the calibre of Army staff, one report referring to their Army counterparts as mostly 'elderly ex-rankers [who...] find conversation in any language too strenuous'.¹³³ Although amusingly gossipy, none of this is terribly conclusive; however, it does at least suggest that some of the post-war GR&E staff were not cast in the same heroic mode as their wartime counterparts.

What is known of the calibre of the wartime staff of the Graves Service indicates that they were highly devoted to their work. The Graves Service was very fortunate to have them, given 21 Army Group's immense commitments. As the *Administrative History* notes:

It has to be remembered that the campaign was waged in the face of an acute shortage of manpower. The most careful planning was necessary to ensure that the strength of the force was always compatible with the task it was set and yet did not weaken the Empire effort at home and in other theatres of war by its demands for reinforcements in particular of the many specialist categories.¹³⁴

¹³² For further details of Torrance's opinions on the MRES, see Chapter Four.

¹³³ TNA, AIR 20/9050, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, unsigned, 'Report on the MRES, North-West Europe', undated but clearly between October 1947 and February 1948.

¹³⁴ *The Administrative History of the Operations of 21 Army Group*, p.133.

Amongst the specialist categories was the Graves Service whose men were non-combatant and thus during the war had to be found from the limited pool of non-combatant soldiers who were in demand for so many other jobs.

Some of the Graves units were clearly very short-staffed. For example, in January 1945, Ingolby noted, perhaps mildly in the circumstances, that his shortage of section officers was 'a handicap', only two of his five sections having officers. As the war entered its final phases, manpower shortages were compounded by the necessity to give leave to men who in all probability had not had any leave for many months, or even years. Ingolby records that the first leave party of 5 ORs left for the UK on 5 January 1945, only three months or so after the unit had begun work, and that another 8 also went on leave before the end of January.¹³⁵

A far more extreme example of lack of officers occurred in Holland in early 1946. Two top-level Graves units were sharing the same office at Maliebaan in Utrecht. By an unfortunate convergence of events, one officer went on compassionate leave, another was taken into hospital and evacuated to England, one went on leave before another had returned, and thus only one officer was left in charge of both units. The work which piled up seems to have driven him close to madness.

By 19th February, Lieutenant Flanagan, had received so many demands from DDGR&E HQ in Brussels, by letter and tele-printer to 'EXPEDITE' answers to letters outstanding from the period prior to his being left in charge, that he drove to Brussels taking with him all the relevant correspondence, case histories and first reports from investigations he and Lieutenant Cahusak were attempting to complete, and reported to Colonel A O Stott [...] to explain the position as it existed in Utrecht.

¹³⁵ It is possible that the Graves Concentration Units had a higher leave entitlement because of their grim duties, but no documentary evidence has been found for this.

It had been a drive of over one hundred miles on difficult war-damaged roads. Flanagan was soothed by the immediate involvement of various heads of GR&E units, including Major Groom, the agreement with them of a schedule of priorities, and almost immediate promotion to Staff Captain. Apparently mollified, Flanagan returned to Utrecht.¹³⁶

One of the frequent problems of 21 Army Group's GR&E units was the poaching of the few staff which they had somehow managed to collect. Just over a week after OVERLORD, Stott recorded that one of his RASC Clerks had been 'instructed to report to G(Ops) for duty at 9.30, 15th instant, the promise of a replacement was somewhat vague'. He noted that the indexes of Burial Reports would soon fall into arrears if the office staff were not 'brought up to Establishment at an early date'.¹³⁷ At this juncture Stott's office was still located in England, as were those of the other Heads of Services who were with Rear HQ. Some three weeks after D-Day, Stott paid a visit to France, having been summoned there by Montgomery to discuss the question of permanent cemeteries. On his return on 3 July, he found that the Sergeant in Charge, one of his very few staff, had been admitted to hospital. This seems to have left only two privates because another promised member of staff had not yet materialised. Moreover, there was no one to deputise for Stott in his frequent absences on duty, as in answering Montgomery's summons to France. He therefore requested – and the phrasing suggests that he had made the request before — the appointment of a Staff Captain to aid him in his work.¹³⁸ The appointment of his Staff

¹³⁶ TNA, WO 171/11100, Second Army HQ, DADGR&E, War Diary, 1944-45, and BAOR, Western European Graves Service (Belgium and Holland), War Diary, 1945-1947, 'Historical Note'.

¹³⁷ TNA, 171/138, 21 Army Group HQ, 'A' Branch, Progress Report, June 1944, week ending 17 June 1944.

¹³⁸ TNA, 171/139, 21 Army Group HQ, 'A' Branch, Progress Report, July 1944, week ending 8 July 1944,

Captain was agreed the following month.¹³⁹ However, prior to this it had probably been with some wry amusement that Stott had noted in a Progress Report:

Move of Advance Section, Rear HQ, 21 Army Group

ADGRE reported that he was unable to send a party as there is only one officer in the Branch.¹⁴⁰

Poaching from the GR&E units never ceased to be a problem, and sometimes the theft caused considerable annoyance and dismay. At least, this appears to be the correct interpretation of the following entry in the War Diary of GR&E, Second Army, written in June 1945:

The first blow has fallen. Private Graham – our Private Clerk – has been posted to SEAC, leaving this HQ on 23 instant. Second blow is the posting of Private Goodhill – to 21st Army Group!!!!¹⁴¹

SEAC was South East Asia Command; the war against Japan was, of course, still going on, and, now that Victory in Europe had been won, Stott had to make a very strong case for SEAC manpower not to be drawn from the Graves Service of 21 Army Group.¹⁴² That he failed to completely stop such transfers is evident from the case of Private Graham.

¹³⁹ TNA, 171/140, 21 Army Group HQ, 'A' Branch, Progress Report, August 1944, week ending 19 August 1944.

¹⁴⁰ TNA, 171/139, 21 Army Group HQ, 'A' Branch, Progress Report, July 1944, week ending 22 July 1944.

¹⁴¹ TNA, WO 171/11100, Second Army HQ, DADGR&E, War Diary, 1944-45, entry for 21 June 1945.

¹⁴² TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, entry for 28 May 1945, which refers to Stott's attached report and appendices J8a, J8b and J8c, explaining why the men should not be transferred; 'A' Branch clearly supported his argument, which was that if

Something which was not poaching but caused the same problems was the constant pressure for the graves units to keep up with the advancing frontline, thus robbing the men in the rear of vital support. On 19 August, Stott raised the matter with 'A' branch:

The matter is now very urgent; shortly it is possible that only 1 GRU will be left in the present British sector (the other 4 units will be going forward with their respective Corps) and there are some 3500 known and mostly isolated graves to be registered. These graves can hardly be left for about 2 months before being registered.¹⁴³

The following month, GRUs in Normandy moving forward left several of the new permanent cemeteries without staff. The OC of No. 32 Graves Registration Unit, on raising the issue with his superiors, was informed that the likelihood of replacements was small 'due to lack of low category personnel available for this work'.¹⁴⁴

By now, it was obvious that the scale of the work had been totally underestimated. Stott recorded on 4 September:

Put forward to 'A' (Org) proposals regarding the set-up of the Graves Service now that we are in a position in some measure to gauge the magnitude of the task before us.¹⁴⁵

the Graves Service was run down too far, its work would not be completed 'for an unconscionable time' (Appendix J8a).

¹⁴³ TNA, 171/140, 21 Army Group HQ, 'A' Branch, Progress Report, August 1944, week ending 19 August 1944.

¹⁴⁴ TNA, WO 171/3786, ADGR&E, No. 32 Graves Registration Unit, War Diary, January-December 1944, entry for 25 September 1944.

¹⁴⁵ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, entry for 4 September 1944.

Only three days earlier, in one of his tours of inspection, Stott had clearly been very disturbed by what he found at La Delivrande and Hermanville, two of the new British cemeteries:

Both are rapidly deteriorating owing to lack of attention – the state of the latter is such that Medical have been asked to have it inspected and reported upon. Further, the following conditions prevail at Hermanville –

- a. Bodies are taken to the cemetery and left lying about until graves are dug. (This also applies to many other permanent cemeteries.)
- b. An O.R. removes effects from the bodies and hands them to the Chaplain on the latter's arrival to conduct the burial service.¹⁴⁶

Personal effects were supposed to be handled with scrupulous, well-documented care, not in the casual manner Stott described above.

The rapidly compounding problems would only begin to become manageable as the advance slowed down. *The Administrative History* summarised the difficult period between 26 July and 26 September as follows:

The frequent moves of corps throughout this phase made the work of the GRUs attached to them very difficult. Before graves could be located and registered as a result of the receipt of burial returns, the GRUs would have to move on again, sometimes for a distance of 120 miles. Consequently the number of non-registered graves, particularly in the area NORTH of the SEINE up to the BELGIAN frontier, began to accumulate. It was not until after the entry into BRUSSELS and ANTWERP that it became possible to deal with graves location and registration methodically.

¹⁴⁶ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, entry for 1 September 1944.

The Administrative History noted that the period of 27 September 1944 to 14 January 1945 was 'comparatively static', and this allowed the Graves Service to catch up with 'the locating and registration of the accumulation of graves'.¹⁴⁷

To the duty of caring for the Army dead had by now been added the complex task of caring for all British servicemen who had died in North-West Europe prior to D-Day. This included the men lost from the British Expeditionary Force in 1940, those lost in specialised raids like Dieppe in 1942, and the losses of the RAF from 1939 to June 1944 (and from thereon until the end of the war in territory which had not yet been secured).

In September 1944 the AAG of the Directorate, Colonel Fraser, attended a meeting at the Air Ministry Casualty Branch 'to discuss measures for searching for "missing" Airmen in liberated areas'.¹⁴⁸ In a hectic tour of France and Belgium the following month, he noted down a series of problems, amongst them the Army dead of earlier campaigns and the RAF missing, commenting in his report on:

the necessity of exhuming all 'unknowns' of the earlier operations in an attempt to identify them. A great many of these are RAF, so the Air Ministry will have to be consulted.¹⁴⁹

21 Army Group was by now approaching the matter as if there were two completely unconnected problems to deal with, pre-D-Day and post-D-Day. They told Colonel Fraser during the course of his visit that the problems of the former were 'beyond the powers of their Graves Registration Service to deal with without reinforcement'.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ *The Administrative History of the Operations of 21 Army Group*, p.92.

¹⁴⁸ TNA, WO 165/36, War Office, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1944, entry for September 1944. Colonel S Fraser is identified in the entry for October 1944.

¹⁴⁹ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Appendix D, Tour of Inspection, Colonel S Fraser, 23 October 1944.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Apparently in response to this complaint, the Directorate sanctioned a special section of one officer and four Other Ranks for attachment to HQ, 21 Army Group, to deal with the registration of graves of those buried prior to D-Day in North-West Europe. An additional Graves Registration Unit, No. 40 GRU, was also created to register these graves.¹⁵¹ No. 40 GRU left for France on 4 January 1945.¹⁵²

Although the Directorate at the War Office usually appears to have obtained the additional resources requested for itself or its units, it did not always get them as soon as it asked for them. For instance, there was a long delay over the proposed extra duty pay for men of the Graves Service employed in exhumation work. The question of this arose in May 1944 and the case was presented to the Adjutant General, 'but after discussion with the Treasury it was turned down until the cessation of hostilities'.¹⁵³ (It ultimately became standard, at 3 shillings a day, and was extended to RAF officers involved in exhumation work as well.¹⁵⁴) Another example was the proposed increase in A.G.13 office staff which was requested in April 1944 but only approved by the Secretary of State for War in June.¹⁵⁵ However, when an additional request for extra staff was made in December of the same year due to the 'steady flow of death casualties in the field', the increase was sanctioned by the Secretary of State for War very promptly that same month.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ TNA, WO 165/36, War Office, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1944, entries for November-December 1944.

¹⁵² Ibid, December 1944 entry, amended in ink at later date.

¹⁵³ Ibid, entry for May 1944.

¹⁵⁴ Details of the additional 3 shillings per day for the Army Graves Service and later for MRES officers are given in TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', p.35.

¹⁵⁵ TNA, WO 165/36, War Office, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1944, entry for April and June 1944.

¹⁵⁶ TNA, WO 165/36, War Office, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1944, entry for December 1944.

There does not appear to have been a great deal of cost-consciousness in the GR&E work; resources were supplied when they were necessary even if they did not materialise at once. However, every so often a tiny reference to economy is made in the documentation, as in the matter which arose in July 1944 of the Star of David temporarily needed to mark Jewish graves. Stott suggested that ‘in view of comparatively small numbers affected’ a supply of ‘pre-fabricated “Stars of David” could hardly be justified’. The War Office agreed to his suggestion that for Jews the arm of a pre-fabricated cross would be removed and a Star of David, to be provided by the Royal Engineers Works Services, would be affixed to the upright.¹⁵⁷

The scale of the work for the military dead was enormous. In addition to the British dead, the Graves Service were also dealing with two other groups. The first was the Allied dead in the areas under British control; these numbers were comparatively small. The second group was much larger; it was the enemy dead in the BLA whose care had been assigned to the British by SHAEF on 4 August.¹⁵⁸

Post D-Day									
	British		Canadian		Allied		Enemy		Total
<i>Burial Reports Received</i>	20,479	56%	7,999	22%	1,332	4%	6,728	18%	36,538
<i>Graves Registered</i>	17,421	54%	7,228	22%	1,231	4%	6,338	20%	32,218
<i>Burial Reports to Registrations</i>	85%		90%		98%		93%		88%
Pre D-Day ('1939/44 Graves'), notified to War Office									2,840

Source: TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Appendix I.1

¹⁵⁷ TNA, 171/139, 21 Army Group HQ, 'A' Branch, Progress Report, July 1944, week ending 22 July 1944.

¹⁵⁸ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, entry for 22 October 1944.

The table opposite shows that 18 per cent of the Burial Reports Received concerned the enemy dead, and that these graves represented 20 per cent of all graves registrations made by the British.¹⁵⁹ The significance of the British taking responsibility for the enemy dead is covered more fully in Chapter Eight; however, the onerous nature of the work needs to be mentioned here because it led to significant overload of the Graves Service. Nowhere was this more evident than at Falaise. Falaise was the hideous killing-ground in which thousands of Germans were caught in late August 1944. The trapped German forces were mercilessly bombarded, and, once the battle was over, what was left was unspeakably awful, the roads and fields being full of dead men, dead animals, and destroyed equipment. General Eisenhower, touring the scene afterwards, found the scene so horrific that he said it could only have been described by Dante; 'it was literally possible to walk for hundreds of yards at a time, stepping on nothing but dead and decaying flesh'.¹⁶⁰ In its analysis of the lessons learnt from the campaign, 21 Army Group would use Falaise as the prime example of what happened when the demands made upon the Graves Service outstripped its resources:

There may be occasions on which clearance of the battlefield becomes an important factor as it did at FALAISE. In such circumstances, the normal procedure of formations and units being responsible for the burial of their own troops, and for the burial of enemy troops found in their area,

¹⁵⁹ The 'Burial Reports Received' figures are the notifications of the original burials, e.g. reports made by a chaplain or a Burial Officer, whilst 'Graves Registered' means that a Graves Registration Unit had officially marked and registered the grave. This does not necessarily mean that the occupant of the grave had been verified, which was often only possible when the grave was concentrated by a Graves Concentration Unit. Date of the figures given in War Diary entry of 31 December 1944; figures set out in Appendix I.1 of the same War Diary. TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944.

¹⁶⁰ Dwight D Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (London, 1948), cited by Paul Latawski, *Battle Zone Normandy: Falaise Pocket* (Sutton Publishing, Stroud, 2004) p.92.

is quite inadequate. It will then be necessary to make arrangements for some special organisation to take over this task for the Graves Service has not the resources to carry it out. The special organisation needed will obviously depend on the size of the problem. It will be necessary to put the HQ of some unit or formation in charge of the operation, and to provide that HQ with the necessary units to execute it.¹⁶¹

In the event, Falaise was dealt with by ad-hoc arrangements, the only way it could be dealt with given the manpower shortage.

In its pre-D-Day planning for the inevitable death toll amongst soldiers, the Army had made extensive arrangements and in some ways had over-catered, as can be seen in the following two instances. A report made by Stott noted the despatch, on 31 May, of 2,000 books, each containing 100 forms, for distribution to all the chaplains of the Second Army; these forms concerned individual grave registrations, and thus there were 200,000 forms altogether. The report also noted that the makers had failed to supply the 10,000 prefabricated crosses promised by 1 June 1944 (these crosses having a special design to conserve shipping space during OVERLORD).¹⁶² The advice now being given to all Graves Registration Units was that they were to proceed with the registration of the graves but were to endeavour to obtain small wooden crosses from the Royal Engineers Works Service until the prefabricated

¹⁶¹ *The Administrative History of the Operations of 21 Army Group*, p.142.

¹⁶² The clever design of these crosses meant that they were neatly stackable, as can be seen in the photograph on page 132. The non-arrival of these crosses was a particular *bête noir* of Stott's: see, TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, appendices for June, Appendix J1 Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'The Start and Expansion of 21 Army Group, Graves Service', report, 15 June 1945.

crosses, now due to turn up at the rate of 10,000 per week, became available.¹⁶³ Given that the usage of such crosses in the six months after D-Day was not much over 32,000, the planned provision of 10,000 a week fortunately turned out to be most excessive.¹⁶⁴

The obligation of units to bury their dead comrades were stressed at the pre-D-Day briefings, so that soldiers would be clear about where their responsibilities lay.¹⁶⁵ After the landings, 21 Army Group kept a close watch on what was happening and soon noticed that although the combat units took on burial duties willingly enough, it was only for their own men. *The Administrative History* observed of the first phase of operations, from 6 June to 25 July 1944:

During the whole of this first period it was noticeable that units were punctilious about burying their own dead, but unwilling to dispose of fatal casualties of other units, even though the bodies were within the unit area. This had an adverse effect on the morale of those in the area.¹⁶⁶

Although *The Administrative History* does not say how this problem was dealt with, it does not mention it again after the first seven weeks, so it appears that whatever measures were taken proved successful.

Chaplains of the Second Army, under the control of the Royal Army Chaplains' Department, were also included in the pre D-Day planning; for example, Stott attended the Chaplain General's Conference on 22 May and there raised various matters, including reiterating the ban on the erection of private or unit memorials on

¹⁶³ TNA, 171/138, 21 Army Group HQ, 'A' Branch, Progress Report, June 1944, week ending 7 June 1944.

¹⁶⁴ See Table 1: 'Burial Reports and Graves Registrations' for the number of registered graves for which the crosses would have potentially been used.

¹⁶⁵ TNA, WO 165/36, War Office, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1944, entry for April 1944.

¹⁶⁶ *The Administrative History of 21 Army Group*, p.25.

servicemen's graves in accordance with Army and Imperial War Graves Commission policy.¹⁶⁷ The inclusion of the chaplains in the planning meetings was because they would play a major role in the registration of the dead, further details of which will be given later in this chapter.

Other aspects of pre-planning represented a considerable advance on that made for earlier campaigns. In the previous year, during the landings in Sicily in July 1943, no representatives or units of the Graves Service had gone ashore with the initial force, and in fact the first unit had only landed six weeks afterwards, inevitably to find a considerable backlog of work.¹⁶⁸ Things were arranged far more efficiently eleven months later. For example, in April 1944, two months before D-Day, 21 Army Group's Administrative Standing Orders, Adjutant General's Branch, were published with 'a full section VIII devoted to Burials and Graves Registration. This being the first time the subject was adequately dealt with before an expeditionary force sailed.'¹⁶⁹ In addition, the graves units landed very promptly after the invasion, the Directorate's War Diary commenting:

The invasion of N.W. Europe took place. Two GRUs landed on D+3, two on D+4 and one on D+12. This was a great improvement in priority on any previous expedition.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ TNA, 171/138, 21 Army Group HQ, 'A' Branch, Progress Report, June 1944, week ending 17 June 1944.

¹⁶⁸ TNA, WO 165/36, War Office, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1943, 'Historical', entry for July to August 1943.

¹⁶⁹ TNA, WO 165/36, War Office, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1944, entry for April 1944.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, entry for June 1944. D+3 meant D-Day plus 3 days, i.e. 9 June 1944. The timescale given slightly contradicts Stott's statement, which is almost certainly the more accurate, that 'Five GR Units were landed in Normandy D+2 to D+6'. TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, appendices for May, Appendix J9, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Honours and Awards', memorandum, 30 May 1945.

The immediate burial of the Army's fatal battle casualties was governed by a set of regulations, frequently reiterated but also frequently ignored. The correct procedure can be found in 'Responsibility for Burials and The Construction and Maintenance of Cemeteries', Appendix A to General Order 1709, promulgated in 1943. In the section headed 'In the Field', it was stated that 'Divisions, Brigades, Battalions or the troops concerned' were responsible for the burial of all deceased personnel, which whenever possible should be carried out in allocated Divisional cemeteries. Records of the graves were to be kept by a nominated officer, who should hand the records to the Graves Registration representative in the area as soon as possible or 'during any lull in hostilities'. Prior to active operations, cemetery sites were to be selected in consultation with the Graves Registration representative, and an estimate of the number of temporary wooden crosses should also be made 'in good time', which estimate the Graves Registration representative should pass on to the Royal Engineers to arrange 'the necessary supply'.¹⁷¹

These well-meant arrangements almost invariably broke down during periods of intense fighting. For instance, the above Order also ordained that the creation of Military Cemeteries was the responsibility of the Royal Engineers although the choice of cemetery was to be dictated by Graves Registration personnel. In addition, the Royal Engineers were responsible for the maintenance of the cemeteries whilst military operations was still going on in the area.¹⁷² However, what happened in practice was that fierce fighting in difficult terrain meant that the Royal Engineers could seldom be spared from their work with the frontline troops (or indeed from supporting the complex infrastructure behind the advancing armies). Colonel Fraser's report made after his visit to France and Belgium in October 1944 stated

¹⁷¹ TNA, WO 165/36, War Office, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1943 and January-December 1944, 'APPX. II/43', 'Responsibility for Burials and the Construction and Maintenance of Cemeteries'.

¹⁷² Ibid.

that in most cases the new Military Cemeteries had been laid out by the officers of the Graves Registration Units themselves, assisted by local labour, 'as no [Royal Engineer] labour could be spared from more urgent operational work'.¹⁷³

The arrangements also broke down when men simply ignored them. Reiterated many times, but still disregarded, were Field Service Regulations dating from 1930, which stated that all officers and men must wear around their necks a red and a green identity disc. If a man was killed, the red disc was removed, but 'the green identity disc will on no account be removed from the body [...] In cases where there is only one identity disc it will not be removed.'¹⁷⁴ Commanding Officers were supposed to regularly check that their men were wearing their identity discs.¹⁷⁵ However, even Commanding Officers, unless omnipresent, could not stop the widespread practice of removing both identity discs from a body. Soldiers who removed the discs did so with the best of intentions in order to report the deaths, but all too often those who took them were themselves killed or captured shortly afterwards, or the discs were lost in some other way. In spite of repeated instructions to the contrary, this practice continued to the end of the war.¹⁷⁶

One of the Army regulations which it was impossible to follow in periods of intense fighting was that relating to isolated graves. Official policy stated: 'isolated burials

¹⁷³ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Appendix D, Tour of Inspection, Colonel S Fraser, 23 October 1944.

¹⁷⁴ It was said to be easy to remember which colour disc to leave with the body because green was the colour of putrefaction. TNA, WO 165/36, War Office, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1944, Appendix II, 'Battle Casualties – Identification of the Dead', extract from Army Council Instructions 26/1/44.

¹⁷⁵ TNA, WO 165/36, War Office, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1943 and January-December 1944, 'APPX. II/43', 'Responsibility for Burials and the Construction and Maintenance of Cemeteries'.

¹⁷⁶ TNA, WO 162/205, War Office, 'History of Casualty Branch (Liverpool) (Cas L)', p.44.

should not take place except under rare operational conditions'.¹⁷⁷ Nonetheless, isolated burials continued to take place very frequently. During the Normandy campaign in the summer of 1944, this type of burial was close to being the norm. Anthony Cotterell, the soldier-journalist in charge of the War Office's publication *WAR*, wrote a vivid account of the campaign which included details of its darkest side. One passage described an isolated burial site:

Three graves had been dug near the hedge. 'See where that Captain's been buried there, Cook,' said Cherry, 'The little white one next to the hedge.'

'Killed 16.6.44,' said Cook, reading out the dead man's name and regiment.

The graves vary in condition but usually they all look as if some effort has been made to make them look more attractive, but the workmanship and available materials vary. These three were particularly attractive, small white crosses about eighteen inches high with the dead man's name, rank, unit, and date of death stated in black. There were bowls of roses at the foot of each grave, the bowls being army ration tins.¹⁷⁸

The way in which Cook and Cherry almost casually observed the graves and Cotterell's own comments on the variations in style of such isolated burials indicate that they were a very frequent occurrence. Indeed, Colonel Fraser's report, made some four months after the battle had passed, spoke of 'the very large number of isolated burials that will require concentration into cemeteries. This will necessitate

¹⁷⁷ TNA, WO 165/36, War Office, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1943 and January-December 1944, 'APPX. II/43', 'Responsibility for Burials and the Construction and Maintenance of Cemeteries'.

¹⁷⁸ Jennie Gray (Ed), *'This is WAR!' The Diaries and Journalism of Anthony Cotterell, 1940-1944* (Spellmount, Stroud, 2013), p.169.

an increase in the Graves Concentration Units.' The inescapable conclusion which Colonel Fraser reached was:

It is very difficult in mobile warfare to avoid a considerable number of isolated graves, but many could be avoided by more forethought on the part of units in choosing burial places. The ideal is, of course, to follow the US practice, which is to treat the dead in much the same way as the wounded, and evacuate them to the rear to suitable burial grounds. To do this would, of course, entail a considerable increase in the Graves Service personnel with a Field Force but would save work and men in the long run.¹⁷⁹

The benefits of the American system of evacuating fatal casualties were not only the efficient handling of the dead but also the maintenance of military morale. As an American study stated in 1945: 'There is no task so depressing to a combat soldier as having to clear his dead comrades from the battlefield.'¹⁸⁰ The American Army struggled with high rates of desertion, and thus a reverend care for the dead may be seen as a crucial factor in maintaining an American unit's battle fitness.¹⁸¹

With slight variations according to the military operation being carried out and the army, corps or division concerned, the American evacuation procedures were carried out under the supervision of the unit's Graves Registration officers. The dead were removed to the collecting points as quickly as possible, in a manner which was 'considerate [...] and without confusion', in order to minimise distress to the dead men's comrades.

¹⁷⁹ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Appendix D, Tour of Inspection, Colonel S Fraser, 23 October 1944.

¹⁸⁰ *Study Number 107: Graves Registration Service*, Reports of the General Board, United States Forces, European Theater, undated but around November 1945, p.12.

¹⁸¹ For the problem of deserters in both the British and American armies, see Charles Glass, *Deserter: The Untold Story of WWII* (Harper Collins, London, 2013).

Normally, bodies were covered, especially if mangled or in an unpresentable condition, while being transported to the cemetery. Routes were prescribed to avoid contact with troops.¹⁸²

Evacuation was often directly to the cemeteries if they were conveniently located. However, the bodies might have to be transported many miles. The 1945 study gives as an example an army team of five men, with two $\frac{3}{4}$ ton trucks with 1-ton trailers, transporting the bodies 150 miles during rapid advances.¹⁸³

The successful use of the American evacuation system depended on an extremely thorough and systematic search of the battlefield as soon as the area was free from enemy fire. Because battle conditions often required practising concealment, the searchers had to look everywhere that might conceivably have been used, and thus familiarity with the battlefield and the units involved was almost a prerequisite.¹⁸⁴ Moreover, the searchers had to be thoroughly aware of which clues might help establish identity in difficult cases. The 1945 study concluded that a reduction in the rates of 'unknowns' was best accomplished by thorough training of Graves Registration personnel, and by making 'the individual soldier [...] identity-conscious by means of tactful and non-fatalistic instructions'. In particular, the key role of identify tags was emphasised because it appears that American soldiers could, at times, be just as cavalier about removing all identity tags as their British counterparts.¹⁸⁵

Despite the evacuation system, the Americans still had to cater for isolated burials, as can be seen in a tiny booklet, designed to fit into a battledress pocket, entitled *Handbook for Emergency Battlefield Burials and Graves Registration by Troops*.

¹⁸² *Study Number 107: Graves Registration Service*, p.6.

¹⁸³ *Ibid*, p.9.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, pp.10-11.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p.21.

Issued by ETOUSA (European Theatre of Operations United States Army), this booklet carefully set out the exact procedure which should be followed when isolated burials were 'absolutely necessary'. Graves of less than twelve men were considered to be isolated burials.¹⁸⁶ Plans of the exact layout of these isolated plots (which were really cemeteries in miniature) were included, together with such rules as the required depths of the graves and the space between them, the position of the markers, and the requirement that internments should be made with all the heads facing in the same direction.¹⁸⁷ A chaplain of the faith of the deceased was required to be present, to read the last rites, this service being conducted 'unless the lives of the burial party are in danger'.¹⁸⁸ Reports of the burial were to be made on the form included in the handbook, and if the deceased was unidentified other information was to be taken, including fingerprints if possible, and a dental chart (the layout of one such was included). Personal characteristics were noted in the absence of fingerprints, such as race, height, weight, colour of hair, moles, scars, and deformities. A sketch of the location must be taken if it was an isolated burial, orientated with permanent landmarks and the Northern point of the compass.¹⁸⁹ In short, the tiny booklet was admirably and succinctly detailed. It did not, however, attempt to prescribe everything, advising that 'individual initiative and resourcefulness are required of all persons when called upon to perform this hallowed and essential mission'.¹⁹⁰

Isolated burials were a great problem to the Americans as well as the British. Although the Graves Registration Service study does not give separate figures for North-West Europe, it notes that at the end of the war isolated burials were a problem of some magnitude, some 20,000 men being 'scattered over Europe when the

¹⁸⁶ *Handbook for Emergency Battlefield Burials and Graves Registration by Troops* (Office of the Chief Quartermaster, HQ SOS ETOUSA, 1 December 1943), p.4.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*, pp.9-10.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p.4.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p.8.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p.2.

campaign ended'. Partly this was due to a fault in pre-planning, because it was considered that much of the problem had occurred in the early phases of the European campaign.¹⁹¹ Despite this, however, there can be no doubt that the Americans made both an art and a science out of their burial, evacuation, and identification procedures, which formed a strong contrast to the frequently ad hoc arrangements of the British.

The British relied upon a mixture of groups: the frontline units, the Graves Registration personnel who travelled in the rear of the advancing armies, and two other Services, both of which moved with the combat troops. The first of these Services was medical. Appendix A of the General Order, cited above, enjoined medical staff of the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) or other medical personnel to cooperate in 'endeavouring to utilise the minimum number of cemeteries', to help choose those cemeteries, and to render prompt burial returns.¹⁹² Medical units in the field reported the deaths of officers immediately by telegram to the collating body, Second Echelon, and the deaths of Other Ranks in daily reports to Second Echelon which also contained additional statistical data.¹⁹³ GRUs were in constant touch with the RAMC because of the death toll amongst the wounded. For example, on 13 April 1945 Major C E Lugard noted in the War Diary of Second Army's GR&E:

Visited 81 General Hospital but found them being relieved by 25 General Hospital. Handed over a supply of AFM 3314 to both and 15 steel crosses to the latter.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ It is not made clear whether 'the early phases of the European campaign' refers to Italy, or to North-West Europe. *Study Number 107: Graves Registration Service*, p.34.

¹⁹² TNA, WO 165/36, War Office, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1944, Appendix A to the General Order 1709 of 1943.

¹⁹³ TNA, WO 162/205, War Office, 'History of Casualty Branch (Liverpool) (Cas L)', p.2.

¹⁹⁴ TNA, WO 171/11100, Second Army HQ, DADGR&E, War Diary, 1944-45, entry for 13 April 1945.

The form referred to by Lugard — Army Form W.3314 — was the standard Army form for notification of death. The form, when filled in under ideal circumstances, gave the dead man's rank, name, service number, religion, means of identification, date of death, unit, and burial details, including a map reference where necessary.¹⁹⁵

The second Service involved in the care for soldiers after death was the Royal Army Chaplains' Department. Appendix A of the General Order gives a detailed description of the chaplains' central role in burial and registration during battle and immediately afterwards; for example, the combat units were required to nominate Burial Officers and parties 'to assist chaplains in organising all unit burials'. Amongst the chaplains' duties were liaising with Graves Registration representatives, making certain that the correct details were recorded about burials, and ensuring that there were 'clear and lasting' records of the graves. The latter included making sure that registration labels or other documentary evidence were buried in a bottle or container with the dead man.¹⁹⁶ Chaplains, along with Burial Officers, were the signatories of the main medium for recording deaths and burials, Army Form W.3314.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ TNA, WO 165/36, War Office, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1943 and January-December 1944, 'APPX. II/43', 'Responsibility for Burials and the Construction and Maintenance of Cemeteries'. There had been considerable problems with this form 'due to the belated arrival' of the revised version, and Stott would specifically mention these in his report on the difficulties encountered by the Graves Service during its first year of work in North-West Europe. TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, appendices for June, Appendix J1 Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'The Start and Expansion of 21 Army Group, Graves Service, report, 15 June 1945.

¹⁹⁶ TNA, WO 165/36, War Office, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1943 and January-December 1944, 'APPX. II/43', 'Responsibility for Burials and the Construction and Maintenance of Cemeteries'.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.



British Sherman tank crew in Normandy: Imperial War Museum, B 6222.

The way in which the chaplains moved with the frontline troops and were clearly regarded by them as a critical element in the care for the dead is alluded to by Cotterell in his Normandy account. He spent some time with a tank recovery unit, headed by an officer named Collins. Burnt-out, or 'brewed up', tanks with human remains inside them were one of the most gruesome and horrific aspects of the campaign. Cotterell wrote of coming across a number of these. At one of the sites:

there were two 17-pounders burnt out. In one of them there was an identifiable body but it was very badly burnt and fell in pieces every time they tried to get him out. They left him for the burial party which would come up later.

'Get the Padre and the disinfectant when we get back,' said Collins.

Travelling on, they happened to chance upon the Padre:

Collins stopped a passing ambulance to speak to the Regimental Padre who was travelling on it. He was a mild young man with spectacles, in the ambulance he had the Second-in-Command of 'A' Squadron who was wounded but not badly and two other wounded men. The other two members of the crew had been killed.

'A little job for you, Padre, on Point 103 tonight. OK?' said Collins.¹⁹⁸

There can be very little doubt that this chaplain was Captain Leslie Skinner, a Methodist, who was attached to the Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry, the same unit with which Cotterell spent most of his time in Normandy. Skinner was indeed 'a mild young man with spectacles', but his appearance belied his fierce devotion to his work. Many years later, the war diary which Skinner kept was published under the title '*The Man who Worked on Sundays*'. The diary makes it clear how closely he was involved in the care for the dead. For instance, on 4 August 1944, he wrote:

On foot located brewed-up tanks [...]. Only ash and burnt metal in Birkett's tank. Dorsets MO says other members of crew consumed by fire having been KIA. Searched ash and found 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.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ Gray (Ed), '*This is WAR!*', pp.189-193.

¹⁹⁹ Leslie Skinner, '*The Man who Worked on Sundays: The Personal War Diary, June 2nd 1944 to May 17th 1945, of Revd. Leslie Skinner RChD, Chaplain, 8th (Independent) Armoured Brigade*

On 17 August, the entry read:

Place absolute shambles. Infantry 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.²⁰⁰

In August 1944, a series of photographs were taken of Skinner's work, which vividly show his direct involvement in caring for dead soldiers. Perhaps the most notable shows him holding a funeral service over an isolated grave in the countryside, far from any official burial ground (see overleaf).²⁰¹ The other two images included here show Skinner and a soldier sewing a shroud, whilst smoking to disguise the smell of decomposition, and Skinner and an unknown Roman Catholic padre labelling one of the standard white wooden crosses.

attached The Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry Regiment (privately published, thought to be in 1991), p.44.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p.49.

²⁰¹ Skinner refers to these photographs in his memoir, and explains that he was not wearing his usual robes for the funeral service as his kit had not yet caught up with him after he had returned from the UK after being wounded. *Ibid*, p.2.



Reverend Skinner photographs, above and opposite: 'The Road to Victory', Picture Post, 24/11 (September 1944); Getty Images.



Skinner's devotion to his work was so remarkable that his obituary notice in 2001 recorded:

Of all the Sherwood Rangers recorded as missing in action in Normandy, all but one were lost while Skinner was away from the regiment, wounded. As for that one, his commanding officer had to forbid him from venturing onto the battlefield in search of him.

The obituary, clearly written by someone who had served with him, records that Skinner was so highly revered that 'by popular demand, he wore, on his chaplain's uniform, the regimental shoulder flashes'.²⁰²

Not all chaplains were highly revered. Although the following small anecdote relates to the campaign in Italy rather than Normandy, it is worth quoting because opinions on the chaplains in connection with their role for the dead are extremely rare. Michael McAllen, an RAMC Medical Officer, lost all respect for the Church of England when he witnessed a Church of England and a Methodist chaplain quarrelling over the corpse of a soldier who had just died, each of them claiming the man for their own. However, he had nothing but admiration for the Roman Catholic padres:

I can recall five or six quite easily — all young and utterly dedicated and fearless in tackling higher authority on behalf of the men — they cared for nothing but the welfare of the men. And if a doctrinal subject came up, they would explain it, but if you said you were not interested they would desist immediately, cheerfully and pleasantly, without any rancour.²⁰³

²⁰² Obituary of the Reverend Leslie Skinner, *The Guardian*, 21 November 2001. 'The Padre's Trail' exhibition at Duxford, IWM, 2014, identified the writer of the obituary as being one of the tank commanders whom Skinner accompanied ashore on D-Day, Captain John Semkin.

²⁰³ Interview between Dr Michael McAllen and the author, 10 May 2005.

In Normandy, as elsewhere, chaplains shared many of the risks of the frontline troops. They were sometimes wounded, like Skinner, or killed like the unnamed chaplain who was caught by mortar fire whilst burying the dead, his death being remembered by the Canadian Military Surgeon involved in trying to save him.²⁰⁴ 21 Army Group's *Administrative History* gives the total roll call of chaplain casualties from D-Day until the end of the war as follows:²⁰⁵

TABLE 2: Casualty Figures for 21 Army Group Chaplains, 6 June 1944-8 May 1945

	Cof E + Others	Roman Catholic	All Denominations
Killed	19	6	25
Wounded	50	14	64
Missing	11		11

Source: *The Administrative History of the Operations of 21 Army Group on the Continent of Europe, 6 June 1944-8 May 1945*

The critical nature of the chaplains' work in preserving the men's morale was fully recognised by the Army. The very great strain upon them was acknowledged, and provision were thus made for them to have a period of two or three days every so often to be spent 'in a quiet and devotional atmosphere', so that they could preserve 'the spiritual-mindedness and the clear vision' demanded by the job.²⁰⁶ *The Administrative History* noted that on 28 September 1944 'St Georges House, which contained an excellent general and theological library, was opened at Brussels as the chaplains' rest and conference centre'.²⁰⁷

In its summary of the lessons learnt from 21 Army Group's campaign in North-West Europe, *The Administrative History* encapsulated the chaplains' involvement in burial work:

²⁰⁴ Major John Burwell Hillsman, cited in Jordan, *The Bayeux British Cemetery*, p.6.

²⁰⁵ *The Administrative History of the Operations of 21 Army Group*, p.125.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p.137.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p.88.

In very many cases the initiation and supervision of burial parties have fallen to the lot of chaplains. It is the chaplain's duty and privilege to perform the Service of the burial of the dead. Even though the chaplain's main duty is with the living, it must be accepted that on occasions a large proportion of his time has to be devoted to dealing with burials.²⁰⁸

Once the battle had passed by, the chaplains' role in the care of the dead reverted to something more traditional, and other parties took the leading role. If the dead were being concentrated, the Service for the Dead might be read over them by a chaplain, but the consecration of the burial grounds could only take place when it was requested by an essentially secular authority, that represented by the Commanding Officer of the Graves Service, Lieutenant Colonel Stott. As a general rule, cemeteries were not consecrated as this prevented problems arising from the fact that men of differing faiths were buried in the same cemetery. (The Canadians, in their separate arrangements, initially adopted a scattergun approach and consecrated the cemeteries for all faiths.²⁰⁹) Nonetheless, there was no objection to individual graves being "blessed" by Chaplains'.²¹⁰

Burial Officers carried out the same work as the chaplains but without the religious element. They were combatant soldiers and shared all the risks of the battlefield. Probably the most notable Burial Officer in North-West Europe was the artist, Rex Whistler, who was a tank commander in the 2nd Welsh Armoured Reconnaissance Battalion. His tragic death in Normandy, on 18 July 1944, occurred on his first day in action. Sergeant Lewis Sherlock, one of the many who greatly mourned his passing,

²⁰⁸ Ibid, p.137.

²⁰⁹ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Appendix J3, Minutes of a Meeting on Burial Policy and Procedure held on 22 December 1944.

²¹⁰ TNA, 171/139, 21 Army Group HQ, 'A' Branch, Progress Report, July 1944, week ending 8 July 1944.

wrote that Whistler was to have painted the names of the dead on the white crosses which were carried on his tank, but 'Fate decreed that he should be the first officer and man to fall in our battalion'.²¹¹

The information which the chaplains or Burial Officers collected about soldiers' deaths passed from them via Second Echelon to the War Office Casualty Branch. The Casualty Branch ran two different systems, the first for officers and nurses, and the second for Other Ranks. The latter was chiefly administered by the Record Offices which had handled the matter in peacetime, each now having a Casualty Wing formed for the purpose.²¹²

Army Second Echelons collected casualty information not only for the sake of the relatives and to honour the dead but also because they were a key part of the system which called for reinforcements, either when operational necessity demanded it or in order to replace soldiers who had been killed, wounded, or otherwise rendered non-operational. 21 Army Group's GHQ (General Headquarters) Second Echelon began its work immediately after the D-Day landings, but the confusion of battle was such that its first full report was not submitted to the War Office until almost a month later. Thereafter the reports were sent every fourteen days.²¹³

The unit with which the dead man had served was expected to give Second Echelon significant details about what had happened to him and where he was buried, this information having been supplied either by the chaplain, the Burial Officer, or the man's comrades or other witnesses. Casualty Branch requests for supplementary information were made through Second Echelons; for example, next of kin enquiries into the circumstances of a death were forwarded to the units so that they could be answered by the dead man's Commanding Officer.²¹⁴ However, the

²¹¹ Hugh and Mirabel Cecil, *In Search of Rex Whistler: His Life and Work* (Francis Lincoln, 2012), pp.240-41.

²¹² TNA, WO 162/205, War Office, 'History of Casualty Branch (Liverpool) (Cas L)', p.2.

²¹³ *The Administrative History of 21 Army Group*, p.24.

²¹⁴ TNA, WO 162/205, War Office, 'History of Casualty Branch (Liverpool) (Cas L)', p.16.

frontline units were clearly under the most immense pressure during periods of heavy fighting, and at such times filling in forms was less of a priority than simply staying alive and winning the battle. When things became quieter, there still remained problems in registering the information. Commanding Officers or witnesses might have been killed, seriously wounded, or captured before the forms could be filled in, or memories might have dimmed.

Second Echelons were also responsible for research into missing cases, liaising with the units and obtaining information from them (in the form of a questionnaire approved by the Casualty Branch), besides tracing potential witnesses, including those who might be in hospital.²¹⁵ From March 1942 instructions to all Second Echelons were circulated in the form of the rather gloriously dubbed WOCINDOCS, a WOCINDOC being a War Office Circular of Instructions Relative to Documentation in Theatres of War.²¹⁶ WOCINDOC Serial No. 40, issued in November 1944, contains a list of code words and phrases to be used in communications with the Casualty Branch. There was an immense traffic of information, and as much of it was by cable there was a need to make communications as short as possible. Most of the code words used by the Casualty Branch to prompt the sending of information were very short and to the point: for example, SMEG – ‘state by which means grave identified’; and FUPAY – ‘forward unit report or explain further delay’. However, code word OSIMENT covered an almost comical multitude of matters relating to enquiries about the missing. Its full text, which gives a pretty comprehensive picture of what information was being sought, runs:

Obtain statement describing precise circumstances in which the missing man was last seen also physical description and home town. If death report is furnished it should be clearly stated whether informant was an eye-witness, whether he examined the body, if not, how far away was he

²¹⁵ Ibid, p.43.

²¹⁶ Ibid, p.24.

when the man was hit and his reasons for assuming that death had taken place. If information is based on hearsay, the informants should be interrogated on similar lines, and statements forwarded.²¹⁷

In forming any judgement of the work which the Army did on behalf of its fatal battle casualties, one must always bear in mind that it took place during an acute manpower shortage and against a background of absolutely critical military operations. The Commanding Officer of 21 Army Group's Graves Service, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, was of the highest calibre, and there were also excellent OCs further down the chain, such as Major Ingolby. However, brilliant leadership could only partially compensate for the chronic short-staffing of the graves units.

There were clearly problems with 21 Army Group burying and keeping track of its dead, and these *The Administrative History* acknowledged in its summary of 'Administrative Lessons from the Campaign':

Respect for our dead and the morale of the living make adequate provision for burials an essential in war. In many cases the immediate burial of the dead has been carried out in too haphazard a manner.²¹⁸

The Administrative History made a number of suggestions on what could be done to improve the situation should some future war demand it. One key point was that the layout and development of permanent cemeteries during active operations could not be left, as it had been, almost entirely to officers commanding GRUs 'who could not really be spared for this work'; instead, special cemetery construction units should

²¹⁷ 'Ibid, Appendix O, 'Code Words and Phrases to Be Used in Cables Concerning Casualty Reports', WOCINDOC Serial No. 40, 2 November 1944.

²¹⁸ *The Administrative History of the Operations of 21 Army Group*, p.137.

be formed for the purpose. In addition, GRUs should be 'allotted territorially instead of, as in Second Army, one GRU per corps and one for Second Army Troops', because it had been found that formations and units often reported burials to their original GRU after changing from one corps to another 'even though the original GRU was not in a position to register their graves in the new area'. It was also considered that the rigid allocation of GRUs to formations had been a failure in a war of rapid advances because it had resulted in a considerable delay in the registration of graves.

Graves registration should be set up on an area basis with all Graves Registration Units under the control of Army Group HQ. This would enable Graves registration to be maintained during active operations.²¹⁹

With regards to the clearing of battlefields, Falaise had been a special case, but one which had been so intensely shocking that 21 Army Group felt that provision should be made for any similar situation in a future war. However, having made one suggestion, *The Administrative History* quickly negated it for practical reasons:

A possible solution would be the provision of special burial units. This is not however recommended, as it is not considered that such units would be justifiable from the manpower aspect. Instead, ad hoc arrangements may have to be made on special occasions, such as at FALAISE.²²⁰

Ad hoc arrangements generally tend to be thought of as typical British muddling through; however, although this is one possible interpretation, an alternative view is that flexibility, improvisation and compromise made up the best policy because of

²¹⁹ Ibid, p.142.

²²⁰ Ibid.

the extreme limitations in manpower, not to mention essential equipment such as vehicles.

Looking at the situation more widely, it can be seen that problems also arose because of the breakdown in Army regulations. Men ignored the rules about identity discs, for example, despite the frequent reiteration of the order to leave the green disc with a body; whether this was due to the confusion caused by battle or by intense emotional involvement, or the Army had simply failed to make its message clear, is not certain — probably it varied from situation to situation. However, another breakdown of the regulations is very easy to understand and that is men burying their comrades in isolated spots. This type of burial demonstrated practicality, affection, and respect within the acute limitations of time, ease of movement, and the duty to fight, and thus made far better sense in the heat of battle than trying to move bodies to pre-allocated cemeteries.

Immediate burials in the field, by definition, usually took place under less than ideal circumstances:

Burials are effected at night or under other very difficult and dangerous conditions, frequently by young Officers naturally anxious to get the work done quickly [...It is] often impossible adequately to mark graves.²²¹

The hastiness of the burials meant that graves or the identity of the men in them could easily be lost because the correct procedures had not been followed or relevant paperwork filled in. However, one side-effect of the speed with which things were done was that rings, letters, other personal items, and even Army identification papers were often left on the bodies against regulations. This proved a blessing in

²²¹ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Appendix H, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Tracing of Missing Offrs and Men, of unlocated ex-PW and of Graves in BLA', memorandum, 25 November 1944.

disguise when unknown graves were later exhumed for concentration, because it made the bodies far easier to identify.²²²

The American system placed the Graves Registration units in charge of the evacuation of the bodies. By contrast, the British relied upon a mixture of contributors — the troops themselves, the Royal Army Chaplains' Department, the Graves Registration units, and the Royal Army Medical Corps. Compared to the American system, the British way of doing things may perhaps appear amateurish; however, once again one must take into account the acute shortage of manpower in the British Army. As Colonel Fraser had acknowledged in his report of October 1944, the American 'ideal' would have entailed a considerable increase upfront in Graves Service personnel, and the fact that it would save work and men in the long run was in one sense academic because there were no more men to be had.²²³

Even the Americans, with their far greater resources and superior scheme for coping with the dead, also ended up with large problems at the end of the war, not only the need to rationalise isolated graves but also to account for a large number of missing.²²⁴ Thus, even though it is perfectly clear that the British system had its faults, in the context of a manpower shortage and vital, rapidly moving military operations it was perhaps close to the best which could be done.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid, Appendix D, Tour of Inspection, Colonel S Fraser, 23 October 1944.

²²⁴ For the large number of American isolated graves, see *Study Number 107: Graves Registration Service*, p.34.

Chapter Two: The Army and the Care for the Dead: Liaison, Cooperation and Fieldwork in France and Belgium

In the year following D-Day, nearly all of the policies which governed the Army's care of the dead in North-West Europe were set. France and Belgium were the first countries to be liberated, and to a large degree they acted as a test bed for the work to be carried out in other liberated countries (a very different set of rules would apply to the work in Germany). Most of the dead of the First World War had been buried in France and Belgium, so there was a precedent to follow; nonetheless, numerous new matters had to be settled before the work of the Graves Service could run smoothly.

The first part of this chapter consists of a brief overview of the Graves Service's work up until June 1945. The chapter will then look at the three military bodies with which the Army's Graves Service had to work in close cooperation — the Royal Navy, the RAF, and the GR&E section of the First Canadian Army — before moving on to the many diplomatic or operational problems which were encountered in France and Belgium, and the solutions which were found to them. The last part of the chapter looks in close detail at British fieldwork, which encountered immense difficulties, such as manpower shortage, poor equipment, and appalling weather. The War Diaries of two Graves Service units who worked closely together, No. 32 Graves Registration Unit and No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, are used as a graphic illustration of the demanding and complex nature of the task.

The Army's work of creating the new Military Cemeteries in North-West Europe began very soon after D-Day. By 4 July, only one month later, there were already six new permanent Military Cemeteries in Normandy: Bayeux, Bazenville (Ryes War

Cemetery), La Delivrande, Hermanville-Sur-Mer, Ranville, and Bény-Sur-Mer which was for the Canadian dead.¹ By 14 August, a large number of graves had been registered:

	British	Canadian	RAF	USA	Enemy	Total
Burial Reports Received	10,124	2,036	30	13	1,226	13,429
Graves Registered	6,815	1,786	30	13	895	9,539
Graves in US sector, registered by US, not included in the above						255
Reinternments authorised by AD,GR&E for operational reasons						65
<i>Source: TNA, 171-140, 21 Army Group HQ, 'A' Branch, Progress Report, August 1944, 'Graves Registration BLA'</i>						

However, the very rapid advance made by the Allies meant a considerable backlog of registrations which could only be tackled during the comparatively static period which followed, from 27 September 1944 to 14 January 1945. By the end of 1944, from a total of 36,538 burial reports received, 32,218 graves had been confirmed and registered.²

During the last phase of the war, 15 January to 8 May, there were four British and one Canadian GRUs working in the L of C areas, whilst four British and two Canadian GRUs followed the advance of their respective armies.³ There was a serious problem for the mobile GRUs in keeping up with their work. The War Diary of GR&E, Second Army, noted:

¹ TNA, 171/139, 21 Army Group HQ, 'A' Branch, Progress Report, July 1944, Cemetery list attached to 'Burials in the Field', memorandum, 4 July 1944.

² TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944. Date given in entry of 31 December 1944; figures set out in Appendix I.1.

³ *The Administrative History of the Operations of 21 Army Group on the Continent of Europe, 6 June 1944-8 May 1945* (Germany, November 1945), p.131.

Visited 35 GRU and went on to do registrations at Issum, Kapellen and Zanten. The rapid rate of moving renders everything very rushed. It is an effort to try to clear up as much as possible before moving on out of touch.⁴

Nonetheless, the GRUs as a body registered 16,000 graves in this last period, most of these burial sites having previously only been twig-marked due to the chaos at the war's end.⁵ As *The Administrative History* noted, this brought the total of graves registered during the campaign to 48,506.

In addition, two BRITISH and one CANADIAN Graves Concentration Units operating in NORMANDY and later in northern BELGIUM and HOLLAND concentrated 4,000 graves. At the end of hostilities there were seventy-nine permanent cemetery sites in existence and twenty-eight plots in communal cemeteries were also being used by arrangement with the local authorities.⁶

As the central body in the programme for the British dead, the Army took care of sailors and airmen as well as soldiers. If drowned sailors had been swept ashore at isolated places like Schiermonnikoog, one of the Dutch Frisian Islands, usually they had been buried by the local population in the same cemeteries as the RAF dead, alongside the occasional Army dead swept ashore many miles from the main war

⁴ TNA, WO 171/11100, Second Army HQ, DADGR&E, War Diary, 1944-45, entry for 8 April 1945.

⁵ TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, entry for 4 June 1945.

⁶ *The Administrative History of the Operations of 21 Army Group*, p.131.

zones.⁷ In such cases, the bodies would remain after liberation in the same local cemetery, although the plots might sometimes be rationalised. However, if a body came ashore in German territory, a different procedure would be followed post-war. For the German Frisian islands, the bodies would be concentrated to Sage War Cemetery at Oldenburg, the nearest of the new Military Cemeteries in Germany to the original burial ground.⁸

In mainland Europe, the bodies of sailors were often concentrated to one of the new British cemeteries. Bayeux British Cemetery, for example, contains four seamen — Stanley Mainwaring, Frank Walker, Ioan Pryce Johns and Davey John Goldsworthy — who died some time prior to D-Day and who therefore were probably originally buried at some other site because the cemetery only came into existence in July 1944. Stanley Mainwaring may perhaps be considered representative. He had been an Able Seaman aboard HMS Charybdis which was sunk off Guernsey on 23 October 1943. He was probably initially buried at Saint-Rémy-des-Landes churchyard on the French coast close to Guernsey before his final interment at Bayeux.⁹

Further inland, the graves of seamen were those of prisoners of war. Sometimes the Graves Service units carried out a search for these graves as part of a special investigation. In one such case, in May 1945, the War Diary of Second Army's GR&E noted:

⁷ See Chapter Four for British sailors and soldiers buried in the Vredenhof cemetery, Schiermonnikoog.

⁸ The policies governing graves in Germany will be discussed in Chapters Seven and Eight.

⁹ The IWGC headstone schedule has Saint-Rémy-des-Landes churchyard (No. 1) crossed out at the top, and the Bayeux details substituted. Stanley Mainwaring page on Commonwealth War Graves Commission website (last accessed 16/11/15):

<http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2328170/MAINWARING,%20STANLEY>

Visited Heslingen and Zeven to find graves of naval personnel killed by fire from RAF who fired by mistake on a party of British prisoners of war.¹⁰

Like the Royal Navy, the RAF had thousands of missing men who were thought to have been lost at sea, but about 60 per cent of the losses in North-West Europe were estimated to be traceable on land.¹¹ In order to find these men, the RAF set up a dedicated service, the MRES, which began work in North-West Europe in January 1945. However, by an agreement made between the Air Ministry and the War Office, the RAF was not responsible for the exhumations, registrations or concentration of its own dead until almost the end of the programme. Until September 1948, these tasks were carried out by the Graves Service, and the RAF only took them over when the Graves Service was disbanded. As a 1950 RAF report on the work for the missing put it:

From the start the RAF Missing Research and Enquiry Service worked in close cooperation with the Army Graves Service. The Army was responsible for the exhumation and concentration of graves into British Military Cemeteries, and for their registration. A Royal Air Force or Dominions Air Force officer was normally present at the exhumation to help in the identification of bodies known or believed to belong to one of the Air Forces. [...] The work was carried out in accordance with the principles agreed between the Air Ministry and the War Office.¹²

¹⁰ TNA, WO 171/11100, Second Army HQ, DADGR&E, War Diary, 1944-45, entry for 10 May 1945.

¹¹ TNA, AIR 20/9050, Air Ministry, S/L A P LeM Sinkinson, Minute Sheet sent to AMP, 2 October 1947.

¹² TNA, AIR2/10031, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, unsigned, 'Missing Research – Origin and Development', report, date stamped 29 March 1950.

Where RAF burial sites were concerned, opening the graves was strictly prohibited by RAF standing orders. One strongly worded memorandum to RAF search officers spoke of the need to work in cooperation with the Army graves units and made the position quite clear under the heading: 'NO INDEPENDENT ACTION'.

In no circumstances are bodies to be exhumed or moved except by an authorised section of a CGU or GRU. This is their province and attempts by the RAF at independent action would serve only to make our overall job more difficult.

[...] Where the need for exhumations is delaying the completion of important cases and areas, details should be reported though Unit HQ to Graves Liaison Officers and MRES HQ.¹³

Frequent delays occurred as a result of this division of responsibilities, and as a result, the head of the MRES came to believe that the RAF would have been better off forming its own graves units.¹⁴ Nonetheless, the RAF kept to the agreed demarcation lines until the main body of the Graves Service was disbanded.

Besides the two British Services, the Army also worked closely with the First Canadian Army, and, if necessary, stepped in to help when the Canadian graves organisation was under strain. For example, although Canadian casualties on D-Day itself were much lighter than had been expected, a high number of casualties occurred during the subsequent bitter fighting in Normandy.¹⁵ In the initial days after the landings there should have been a DADGR&E for the First Canadian Army to

¹³ TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', Part V, Appendix F1, Group Captain R Burges, Missing Research Memorandum MRM No. 25, 1945 (no month or day).

¹⁴ Ibid, Appendix A, Group Captain R Burges, Missing Research Memorandum MRM No. 1, 20 July 1945, p.141.

¹⁵ C. P. Stacey, *The Canadian Army, 1939 – 1945, An Official Historical Summary* (King's Printer, Ottawa, 1948), pp.187-188 and p.221.

complement the similar arrangement in the British Second Army; however, for reasons which are unclear, the post had not been filled. During the short hiatus which lasted until the appointment of Major T A K Langstaff to the DAD role, No. 4 Canadian Graves Registration Unit was copied in on all of 21 Army Group's graves registration orders, as requested by Canadian Military HQ.¹⁶

In early 1944, an agreement had been reached between the British and Canadian governments about burial policy when mixed forces of soldiers were operating. It had been decided that Canadian graves should be in special plots or rows in the British cemeteries unless the Canadian dead were in a majority, when the British dead would be in special plots or rows in the Canadian cemeteries.¹⁷ However, conditions in France after D-Day soon proved how little the demarcation lines between Britain and Canada had been thought through in advance. For example, from July 1944 what seems now an increasingly absurd debate gathered pace about the exact naming of cemeteries – should they be called Permanent, Temporary, or something else altogether? At the root of this problem lay a profound uncertainty about exactly what the Canadian cemeteries represented and how long-term they supposed to be; at one stage it was seriously being mooted that the Canadian dead should be repatriated after the war as the American dead would be.¹⁸ The Canadians were not happy about the use of the adjective 'Permanent', which was then solved, or so Stott thought, by calling the Canadian cemeteries 'Temporary'. This description was adopted for a short while, Stott punctiliously using the compromise name whenever detailing such cemeteries in his reports.¹⁹ However, by October, the War

¹⁶ TNA, 171/138, 21 Army Group HQ, 'A' Branch, Progress Report, June 1944, week ending 17 June 1944.

¹⁷ TNA, WO 165/36, War Office, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1944, entry for February 1944.

¹⁸ TNA, 171/139, 21 Army Group HQ, 'A' Branch, Progress Report, July 1944, weeks ending 8 July and 15 July 1944.

¹⁹ See, for example, TNA, 171/140, 21 Army Group HQ, 'A' Branch, Progress Report, August 1944, week ending 26 August 1944.

Office had come to the conclusion that the new description was only causing confusion, and suggested that all cemeteries in the BLA should be called 'Main'. Stott was asked to discuss the matter with the Canadian authorities and obtain their permission for the change.²⁰ Once again, the Canadians were not happy. 'Without comment', Stott forwarded the response of the OC of the Canadian Section GHQ, 1st Echelon, 21 Army Group, to the War Office:

I feel I cannot agree to the proposal made by the War Office to abolish the nomenclature presently in use and to designate permanent cemeteries as 'Main cemeteries'. I cannot understand the reason for this proposal. It seems to me it would be more desirable to designate sites which have been selected for use in perpetuity as cemeteries simply as 'cemeteries' and differentiate these from other burial grounds by describing the others as 'temporary burial grounds' or 'temporary cemeteries'. [...] the adoption of the nomenclature 'main cemetery' will undoubtedly lead to a large volume of correspondence to ascertain the difference between 'main cemeteries' and subsidiary cemeteries which the public mind would feel must exist.²¹

The problem of naming was cured by the passage of time because the Canadian dead were not repatriated, and any temporary burial grounds were either converted to permanent cemeteries or the dead within them were relocated.

Stott, as ADGR&E, 21 Army Group, had the ultimate control of Canadian matters relating to graves work but always exercised this in a judicious and tactful matter.²²

²⁰ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, entry for 1 October 1944.

²¹ Ibid, Appendix C, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Military Cemeteries', memorandum, 9 October 1944. The text of the Canadian OC's memorandum was transcribed into Stott's memorandum.

²² See, for example, a memorandum from Stott gently rebuking First Echelon, 21 Army Group, for an over-officious letter to the Canadian authorities: 'The case was not put to Cdn. Army as fully or in

Nonetheless, he could on occasions give direct orders. In August 1944, for example, he instructed Major Langstaff 'to have numerous isolated graves situated alongside the Caen-St. Martin De Fontenoy road transferred for hygienic reasons' into the temporary Canadian cemetery at St Martin de Fontenoy.²³ In September, he had to remind Langstaff of the Army prohibition on private unit or formation memorials over service graves in line with the principles of the Imperial War Graves Commission concerning the uniformity of burial grounds.²⁴ With great tact, Stott also had to ensure consistency in other matters concerning burial and registration, as for example at the meeting on 'Burial Policy and Procedure' held on 22 December 1944, which several Canadian heads of GR&E units attended. Amongst the numerous points discussed was the British policy that the movement of bodies should be kept to a minimum, which at the meeting was also accepted by the Canadians. In addition, although the Canadians were to be allowed some latitude in the design of their cemeteries so long as they kept within the principles of the Imperial War Graves Commission, it was considered desirable to place all Graves Concentration Units under the control of HQ 21 Army Group, 'in order to effect uniformity of policy within the theatre'.²⁵

Despite a number of problems and divergencies, there is no evidence to suggest that the field units of the two countries did not work amicably together. In December 1944, for example, the War Diary of the British No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit

quite the form I would have wished'. TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, appendices for February, Appendix J3, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Concentration of Military Graves out of Communal Cemeteries and Churchyards', memorandum, 14 February 1945.

²³ TNA, 171/140, 21 Army Group HQ, 'A' Branch, Progress Report, August 1944, week ending 26 August 1944.

²⁴ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, entry for 7 September 1944.

²⁵ Ibid, Appendix J3, 'Minutes of a Meeting on Burial Policy and Procedure' held on 22 December 1944.

records a visit by request from the OC of a Canadian GCU and that arrangements were made 'to concentrate jointly certain localities where British and Canadians lay together'.²⁶ However, it does appear that Stott, without openly commenting as such, occasionally found the Canadians' work to be somewhat careless. One serious example of this was at Hautot-Sur-Mer (Les Vertus) Cemetery, where the Canadians appear to have compounded the errors of the original burials of those killed in the Dieppe raid of August 1942. The Dieppe raid had contained a very large proportion of Canadians and was of great national significance, so the lack of thoroughness with which matters at Hautot-Sur-Mer (Les Vertus) Cemetery were treated is surprising.²⁷ In December 1944, Stott recommended to the War Office that all the notifications which had hitherto been received for Hautot-Sur-Mer (Les Vertus) Cemetery should be regarded as provisional until the Special Investigation Officer he was despatching to the cemetery could report on his findings. An additional, and equally surprising, problem with the same cemetery was that when the Canadians had moved on they had made no proper arrangements for its care, whilst one Frenchman, who received no payment, had been left in charge of all the vital burial records.²⁸

It appears that Stott was not the only one who had concerns about certain aspects of the Canadian graves work. On 1-2 December 1944, Stott conducted the Chief Architect and Deputy Director of Works of the Imperial War Graves Commission on a tour of cemeteries in Normandy. Afterwards he noted:

IWGC expressed complete satisfaction with all British cemeteries but were somewhat perturbed over grave-spaces and style of development

²⁶ TNA, WO 171/3794, ADGR&E, No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, War Diary, October-December 1944, entry for 9 December 1944.

²⁷ For the Canadians, the Dieppe raid was a yardstick by which later military operations were often judged. See, for example, Colonel C. P. Stacey, *The Canadian Army, 1939 – 1945*, pp.187-188.

²⁸ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Appendix J4, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Cemetery Policy', memorandum, 24 December 1944.

of Canadian cemeteries. Chief Architect despatched a Special Report immediately to the IWGC.²⁹

This specific issue was discussed in the above mentioned meeting on 'Burial Policy and Procedure', held on 22 December. Here it was accepted that the Canadians were to be given some latitude in the design of their cemeteries 'as long as the gen[eral] layout [...] adheres to the aims and principles of the Imperial War Graves Commission, who have to maintain them after the war'.³⁰

As the constituent parts of 21 Army Group, the British and the Canadians might be expected to help one another; however, a great deal of assistance also came from the Americans, favours which were just as frequently returned. Two illustrations from the work of the Second Army's GR&E (but in Germany rather than in Belgium and France) demonstrate not only how British and American units worked together but how essential this was in times of extreme turmoil and confusion. Major Lugard, the OC of the Second Army's GR&E, noted in the War Diary on 5 May 1945:

Visited WITTLOHE cemetery. Also HOYA to make enquiries about 9 American airmen who were said to be buried in the wrecked Jewish cemetery. A French Prisoner of War, who was in the civil hospital, was said to know the names. The Frenchman was found to have been evacuated, and the cemetery could not be found.³¹

On 15 May, in a different and ultimately more successful investigation, Lugard was given the vital piece of information by Americans. By now Lugard was searching for the grave (apparently a communal one) of five RAF airmen at Lessien. The German

²⁹ Ibid, but main diary, entries for 1-2 December 1944.

³⁰ Ibid, Appendix J3, 'Minutes of a Meeting on Burial Policy and Procedure' held on 22 December 1944.

³¹ TNA, WO 171/11100, Second Army HQ, DADGR&E, War Diary, 1944-45, entry for 5 May 1945.

authorities told him that the records of the burials had been moved to Wesendorf but subsequently had been destroyed. Lugard then went on to Ehra, where he met two American officers at the Burgomaster's office who gave him precise directions to the RAF grave. Lugard found the grave which was well-kept but unmarked. Two of the names had once been known, but all the records were now said to be lost. On 31 May Lugard placed an official GRU cross on the grave of the five unknown airmen.³²

However, things did not always work as smoothly because the Americans had a tendency to proceed unilaterally. In November 1944 Stott wrote to the British Liaison Office which worked with the Americans to request that the Americans observed the proper protocol with regards to the graves of American personnel in the British Sector. His request was sparked by the case of 10 soldiers of the US Airborne Army, who had been buried by the British in Holland on 27 September 1944. A burial service had been read over them and the official British burial reports had been filled in. However, when an officer from one of Stott's GRUs had gone to officially register the graves, he had found that they were all empty. Investigations revealed that they had been moved by a prisoner of war working party, 'but the location to which they were taken could not be discovered'. It was not even known if the US Graves Service was operating in the area; the bodies, so far as the British were concerned, had simply vanished. Stott was clearly disturbed by the implications of this – if repeated, such incidents meant that the British would not be able to fulfil their moral obligations to American servicemen who had died in their Sector.³³

³² Ibid, entries for 15 and 31 May 1945.

³³ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Appendix E, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Graves of American Personnel in British Sector', memorandum, 14 November 1944.

The Hautot-Sur-Mer (Les Vertus) Cemetery mentioned above is of significance not only because of its Canadian connection, but also because it illustrates vividly the intense respect for the British dead which was shown by many in the liberated countries. On 3 October 1944, Stott devoted a long and detailed memorandum to the dead of the Dieppe raid, in which he reported the information given to him by the French. Men who had died of wounds in the hospital at Dieppe had been buried at Hautot-Sur-Mer. However, the dead there now also included a number who had originally been buried at other places, such as Varengeville-Sur-Mer; these had been exhumed on German orders and reburied at Hautot-Sur-Mer. Some bodies had never been recovered from the sea, although a certain number of drowned had been washed up at Le Treport and buried there. Great difficulties in identification had been experienced by the French because apparently the Germans 'had stripped the bodies, and such identity tags as were available had been muddled up'. Stott commented that this summary of the facts might appear to contain 'but little concrete evidence, but it will be appreciated that the French themselves had little real knowledge of what was done by the Germans'.³⁴

At the end of his report on what had happened to the dead of the Dieppe raid, Stott, in a very rare piece of personal comment, made his feelings upon the subject known:

I wish to place on record the fact that the French authorities have been most helpful in this matter. When we arrived in the area (very shortly after the Germans had left), it was obvious that the greatest care had been bestowed on the Cemetery which is laid out on the lines of an IWGC Cemetery, the crosses being set in double rows on turf, with flower borders complete, which is in excellent condition. Clearly they had imitated the IWGC Extension in Janval CC [Civilian Cemetery].³⁵

³⁴ Ibid, Appendix B, Lieutenant Colonel Stott to A.G.13., 3 October 1944.

³⁵ Ibid. The IWGC section at Janval Cemetery had been established by the British during the First World War. A suburb of Dieppe, Janval was very close at hand and thus easy to use as a model. See

Valuable help with the pre-D-Day dead was also given by the Belgians. On 3 October Stott called at the Belgian Ministry of the Interior in Brussels, and was told that official records had been kept of all 1939-44 British, Allied and enemy burials in Belgium, and that a liaison officer would be provided for duty at 21 Army Group HQ if required. The offer having been accepted, the new liaison officer, Commandant Lacrosse of the Belgian Army, moved the official Belgium card index to Stott's office.³⁶ Colonel Fraser noted in his report of that same month:

The Belgian authorities have placed the services of a Major of the Belgian Army at the disposal of 21 Army Group, as a liaison officer, for arranging for cemeteries and for work in connection with the graves of 1939-44 in Belgium, and the French authorities are also reported as being very helpful.³⁷

When the RAF began their missing research, they would note that cooperation from the formerly occupied countries was particularly notable in France, Belgium and Denmark.³⁸

In matters which affected the liberated countries, Graves Service policy was decided after consultation with them. At a meeting on 6 October, for example, Stott and a Director of the Belgian Ministry of the Interior agreed various procedures concerning the British dead. Of these the most important points were that the Belgian Ministry undertook: to reserve special plots in civilian cemeteries as and when

Commonwealth War Graves Commission website, Janval page (last accessed 12/10/14): <http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/2000076/JANVAL%20CEMETERY,%20DIEPPE>

³⁶ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, entry for 3 October 1944.

³⁷ Ibid, Appendix D, Tour of Inspection, Colonel S Fraser, 23 October 1944.

³⁸ TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', p.47

required; to grant *Arretes* (administrative orders) for cemetery sites as required by the British, using requisition if necessary; and to issue a warrant granting Stott authority to order the exhumation of servicemen's bodies and their transfer to another site if necessary without having to apply to the Civil Courts for a permit. In addition, the Ministry agreed that the regulations of all local authorities which required bodies to be buried in a coffin would be suspended in the case of the British, Allied and enemy dead in the liberated areas.³⁹

The problem of how to acquire land for the cemeteries was a complex one and needed to be squared with the British authorities as well as those in the liberated countries. Some weeks earlier, on 27 July, Stott had visited the Legal Director of Civil Affairs, 21 Army Group, to inform him of existing law and procedure for the acquisition of land for permanent cemeteries in France, 'the War Office having reported that the 1939-40 French Law still obtains'. Stott asked if the procedure should be conducted through Civil Affairs in the future. In one of those tiny glints of humour which Stott allowed himself from time to time, he noted down the answer to his question:

Director (Legal) replied that, strictly speaking, Civil Affairs were not interested, but would appreciate being kept in the picture.

Stott undertook to advise Civil Affairs in the future when an application for an *Arrete* was made, which location it was at, and when (and if) the *Arrete* was granted.⁴⁰

In September Stott visited a number of British cemeteries with an official representing the French Government, 'who lodged certificates at the Caen Prefecture certifying that French law regarding permanent cemetery sites was not

³⁹ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, entry for 6 October 1944.

⁴⁰ TNA, 171/140, 21 Army Group HQ, 'A' Branch, Progress Report, August 1944, week ending 5 August 1944.

being violated in any respect'.⁴¹ Stott made a similar tour with an official from the Caen Prefecture on 19 September, noting that consent from the local authorities had been obtained in all instances but that there were a few outstanding cases where the permission of the owner of the land had not been obtained because it had not been possible to trace him or his heirs.⁴² Not wishing to give the appearance of requisitioning the land, Stott later raised this matter with the French authorities in a conference in Paris on 25 October, which will be described shortly.

Payment for any services rendered by the liberated countries was one of the key issues which was resolved early on. On 27 November 1944, Stott circulated a memorandum of instructions to the Administrative HQ of the First Canadian Army, the Rear HQ of the Second Army, the HQ of Airborne Corps, and the HQ of L of C, who were to forward these instructions to all British formations and units under their command. Stott informed the HQs that agreement had been reached with the French and Belgian government on a number of financial matters. These were: that payment for services rendered by French and Belgian nationals rested with the governments concerned; that burials could be made in blankets or hessian canvas in lieu of coffins, in line with the usual British Field Service Burial procedure; and that any variation of this procedure by the local authorities, including an insistence on the use of coffins, would have to be paid for by those same local authorities.⁴³ In Holland SHAEF had undertaken to agree with the Dutch government that the same conditions would apply.⁴⁴

The British strongly insisted that British, Allied and enemy dead should not be removed from their burial places by nationals of the liberated countries as this would make the graves work more difficult. The conference held in Paris on 25 October,

⁴¹ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, entry for 14 September 1944.

⁴² Ibid, entry for 19 September 1944.

⁴³ Ibid, Appendix K, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Burials', memorandum, 27 November 1944.

⁴⁴ Ibid, but main diary, entry for 11 November 1944.

attended by Stott, Commandant Lacrosse, and General Intendant Lavaud, the Head of the French Civil Service and Military Graves, began with this matter. Stott requested that instructions should be given to the Mayors of the Communes where fighting had taken place that they should not move any of the military dead, and Lavaud assented without demur.

The phraseology of the conference Minutes is slightly quaint, suggesting that they were not taken by a native English speaker. In one or two places the meaning is hard to follow, and it is not always clear who was speaking. However, it appears that Stott informed Lavaud that the exhumation, identification and removal of bodies would be done mainly by the specialised British graves units. The extreme scarcity of French labour to assist the British units was discussed. It was acknowledged that most of the available labour would be needed for the reconstruction of the war-damaged areas, but that in certain cases it might be possible for local workmen to be employed by the British in exhumation work. It was probably Stott who then stated:

In this eventuality, these workmen will receive the necessary sanitary means of protection and suitable remuneration for the difficult work they have to perform. There will not be any requisition of labour.⁴⁵

Any assurance about the provision of the 'necessary sanitary means of protection' was over-optimistic because, as will be seen shortly, the correct equipment was simply not available at that period.

The promise that there would be no requisition of local labour reflected a strong intention to seek cooperation rather than bullying the French into acceding to the wishes of the British. It was a delicate situation because the British and American forces were in an extremely dominant position, not only because of their sheer weight of numbers and the colossal size of their organisations, but also because of

⁴⁵ Ibid, Appendix L, Minutes of a Meeting, 'Paris – 25 October 1944'.

what they could contribute to the rebuilding of devastated Europe. An additional, and not entirely insignificant factor, was that the Germans had not yet been defeated.

A further instance of Stott's tact when dealing with Allied governments occurred later in the same conference when he assured Lavaud that he did not want to use powers of requisition to acquire the necessary land for the cemeteries. Lavaud then gave Stott a small exposition on what the word 'requisition' meant in France; it had two meanings, and the second was quite acceptable to the French. He told Stott:

The requisition will have the simple effect of giving to the British Military Authorities the right to establish the cemeteries on the ground that they find fit for it. This form of requisition is an ordinary practice in the 'Intendance' [...] The establishment of a military cemetery is an indispensable and urgent matter and the absence of the owner must not be an obstacle to the establishment.

Stott then repeated in a slightly more emphatic way what he had already said, that he was 'opposed to any idea of coercion by way of requisition'.⁴⁶

The conference at Paris seems to have gone extremely well, and Stott and Lavaud appear to have easily come to an agreement on all matters bar one. This notable exception was the issue of German graves, about which, both at this conference and at other times, the French would prove extremely obdurate. They refused to take any responsibility for the German battle dead, would take a similar line with the Americans, and it would be three years before the matter was completely resolved.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ For the final resolution of this matter, see TNA, WO 267/607, BAOR HQ, Western Europe Graves Service Directorate, Quarterly Historical Report, quarter ending 30 September 1947, Appendix L (itself with appendages), Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Treatment of Enemy Dead', memorandum, 13 September 1947. Further details of the impasse are given in Chapter Eight.

Outside the formal constraints of a conference, Stott followed the same rule of having a scrupulous regard for French sensibilities. However, he was clearly a pragmatist and not above using the necessity for international cooperation as leverage with his own people, as in the interesting mixture of consideration for the French and operational practicality with which he justified a request for better transport for his units:

Forwarded an application by OC No. 39 GCU, strongly supported by 'Medical' for metal-bodied 3-tonners to be substituted for trucks 15 cwt and trailer 10 cwt, pointing out the extreme urgency of the matter, and that this would enable concentration work to be carried out the more unobtrusively and the more nearly in conformity with the French law on the subject.⁴⁸

In the early days of the creation of the cemeteries, one of the greatest problems was contacting the owners of the land on which the cemeteries were sited, 'they having been evacuated and in a number of cases are at present in Enemy-occupied territory'.⁴⁹ Once contacted, landowners could on rare occasions prove troublesome. (This problem would not exist in Germany, where land for the cemeteries would be taken by 'Military requisition, and not by friendly agreement with local civil authorities'.⁵⁰) On 20 September 1944, No. 32 Graves Registration Unit's War Diary reported that the Commanding Officer:

⁴⁸ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, entry for 2 November 1944.

⁴⁹ TNA, WO 171/3786, ADGR&E, No. 32 Graves Registration Unit, War Diary, January-December 1944, entry for 16 September 1944.

⁵⁰ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, entry for 2 November 1944.

interviewed M Pipon, the owner of the land upon which La Delivrande cemetery is sited. He requested that the graves should be removed from his land. Previously he had been prepared to have a permanent cemetery on his land, now, for some reason, he has changed his mind.⁵¹

A new site for the cemetery was soon agreed with another local landowner, M. Noisette.⁵² However, the graves which had already been created in the supposedly permanent cemetery now had to be dug up and relocated in yet another cycle of exhumation and reburial.⁵³

The people of the liberated countries were generally extremely helpful to the Graves Service, and it was a great rarity for anything to the contrary to be recorded in Graves Service records. However, one strange little incident was detailed in February 1945, when an unnamed civilian was investigated by Stott for making claims for compensation because he said that:

he had found and buried a number of bodies washed up on the fore-shore following the sinking of the "Lancastria" off St Nazaire in June, 1940. The claims of this man, who is serving a sentence of five years' imprisonment for fraud and collaboration with the enemy, were proved groundless.⁵⁴

⁵¹ TNA, WO 171/3786, ADGR&E, No. 32 Graves Registration Unit, War Diary, January-December 1944, entry for 20 September 1944.

⁵² Ibid, entry for 4 October 1944.

⁵³ Ibid, entry for 11 October 1944.

⁵⁴ TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, entry for 19 February 1945. The fraudster was making a particularly heartless claim as the Lancastria was one of the single heaviest naval losses of the war; the thousands of passengers drowned included civilians as well as troops. It is estimated that at least 3,000 people died in the sinking of the Lancastria, which was part of the evacuation of St Nazaire as the Germans overran France. Duncan Redford, *A History of the Royal Navy: World War II* (I B Tauris, London, 2014), p.33.

Pipon and the unnamed fraudster were marked exceptions to the general rule that the liberated countries were exceptionally helpful to the British. Two years later, on 3 November 1946, Stott made a radio broadcast to the liberated countries. Tactfully omitting the Pipon case, he said:

The British Graves Service tenders its appreciation and thanks to all Landowners, Farmers and Allotment-holders, who, without any exception, readily consented to their land being taken as the permanent resting-place of their fallen liberators.

In the broadcast, Stott also touched upon the financial arrangements. He thanked:

all Government Ministers and Officials who are always prepared to arrange compensation for land acquired by the British Graves Service irrespective of the value of such land. Finally that great gesture, the gift in perpetuity to the British of land for cemeteries so that the final resting-place of the fallen may “be forever England”, is most gratefully acknowledged.⁵⁵

The arrangements regarding the cemeteries would later be formalised by treaty. The first such treaty after the Second World War was signed in July 1951 by the Netherlands Government and the Imperial War Graves Commission. The Netherlands provided the land free, and guaranteed to exempt the Commission from taxes and other charges.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ TNA, WO 267/604, BAOR HQ, Western Europe Graves Service Directorate, Quarterly Historical Report, quarter ending 31 December 1946, Appendix D, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, ‘Broadcast to the liberated countries’; the date of the broadcast is given in the main report as being 3 November 1946.

⁵⁶ From Our Correspondent, ‘War Graves in Holland: Agreement Signed’, *The Times*, 11 July 1951.

The fieldwork of the Graves Service in the liberated countries encountered multiple difficulties, and the best way to illuminate these is to follow two major, closely connected units which were both initially based in Normandy, No. 32 Graves Registration Unit and No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit.

It may be helpful at this point to recap on the differing responsibilities of the GRUs and GCUs. The GRUs were responsible for the provision of suitable cemeteries, the preservation of the records of all burials, the erection and labelling of the temporary steel or wooden crosses to identify the graves, the photographing of the graves for the benefit of relatives, and the supervision of the concentration of isolated graves into the main cemeteries 'as soon as circumstances permit'. The GRUs were in no way intended to be responsible for exhumations and reburials.⁵⁷ This was the province of the GCUs, assisted either by local civilian labour or German prisoners of war in the case of German graves.

The GCUs did not merely move bodies. No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit's War Diary recorded that Monday of each week in November 1944 was devoted to 'Special Cases', 'i.e. answering enquiries regarding individual burials instigated by War Office and others'.⁵⁸ 'Special Case' was the commonly used code phrase for situations when a war crime was suspected; this usage can be seen, for example, on the 21 Army Group Exhumation Report which is headed: 'for all SPECIAL cases of exhumation, a pathologist should be present'.⁵⁹ Of the total concentrations for the

⁵⁷ TNA, WO 165/36, War Office, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1943 and January-December 1944, 'APPX. II/43', 'Responsibility for Burials and the Construction and Maintenance of Cemeteries'.

⁵⁸ TNA, WO 171/3794, ADGR&E, No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, War Diary, October-December 1944, entry for 1-6 November 1944.

⁵⁹ TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, 21 Army Group Exhumation Report.

first three months of the Unit's work, 42 were Special Cases, 'mainly War Office enquiries'.⁶⁰

The Unit also erected crosses, as on 1 May 1945 when its War Diary records C Section putting up 77 in Bazoches-au-Houlme General Cemetery, these being for German graves. In addition, once bodies had been removed from their initial burial grounds, there was the 'filling in and cleaning up of sites concentrated', as recorded on 3 March 1945.⁶¹

However, strict demarcation lines could not always be observed, particularly when manpower was short and the case was urgent. The dead were often buried by completely different agencies than the GCUs or, in the case of immediate burials, the combat troops in the area; for example, Lugard wrote in early April 1945 of paying into a Field Cashier the 'money of dead soldiers buried by Belgian Liaison'.⁶² Two days later, on 4 April, he wrote that a Royal Engineers officer had called for advice regarding:

burial of 2 airborne personnel found near here by crashed glider. Went with him and King, the Staff Chaplain, and found that a party of R.E. had already buried the men. Identity was established.⁶³

Against normal practice, even the GRUs were sometimes ordered to take on burial or exhumation work. In the previous year, in France, No. 32 Graves Registration Unit had been given such orders, the unit's War Diary recording on 3 August 1944: 'In the absence of a GCU, this unit detailed to perform such exhumations that may be considered of operational or hygienic necessity'. On 9 August, it noted that the unit

⁶⁰ TNA, WO 171/3794, ADGR&E, No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, War Diary, October-December 1944, entry for 31 December 1944.

⁶¹ TNA, WO 171/10994, ADGR&E, No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, War Diary, January-December 1945, entries for 3 March and 1 May 1945.

⁶² TNA, WO 171/11100, Second Army HQ, DADGR&E, War Diary, 1944-45, entry for 2 April 1945.

⁶³ *Ibid*, entry for 4 April 1945.

had performed its first operational exhumations, the bodies of six soldiers being removed from the site of proposed road widening on the coastal road from Le Hamel to La Riviere.⁶⁴ It was only when No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit was raised that September that the necessity for No. 32 Graves Registration Unit to carry out any exhumation or burial work ceased. The two units would work closely together, and the Commanding Officer of No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, Major Ingolby, would lodge for some time with No. 32 Graves Registration Unit. No. 32 Graves Registration Unit meanwhile had been briefed on 'certain details' regarding Ingolby's responsibilities and the work of 'a GCU from ADGR&E 21 Army Group'.⁶⁵

No. 32 GRU's billet was an excellent one, located on the edge of Bayeux town; it had been occupied by the unit for some months by the time that Ingolby arrived.⁶⁶ The unit was effectively a static unit, its duties rapidly increasing as other GRUs moved forward after the frontline troops. Its first big responsibility had come in July, when Stott had selected a site at Bayeux for a huge permanent cemetery and had allocated the task of developing it to the unit, along with a second cemetery at Ryes.

Bayeux was intended to be the model cemetery. Stott had recommended that one such should be established as soon as possible, reporting in mid-June that the original landing-area should be cleared up in order to make it 'a model [...] by concentrating all "invasion" graves into one large military cemetery to be established, say, to the north-east of Bayeux'.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ TNA, WO 171/3786, ADGR&E, No. 32 Graves Registration Unit, War Diary, January-December 1944, entries for 3-9 August 1944.

⁶⁵ TNA, WO 171/3794, ADGR&E, No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, War Diary, October-December 1944, preliminary note.

⁶⁶ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Appendix D, Tour of Inspection, Colonel S Fraser, 23 October 1944.

⁶⁷ TNA, 171/138, 21 Army Group HQ, 'A' Branch, Progress Report, June 1944, week ending 17 June 1944.



Bayeux cemetery under development, CWGC, ADD 9/1/40, 48 GCU, Bayeux Photo Album.

As noted in No. 32 Graves Registration Unit's War Diary, work on the new cemetery commenced on 8 July and the first two burials took place the following day. The intention at that stage was that Bayeux would eventually hold 5,661 graves.⁶⁸ Officially named Bayeux British Cemetery by the War Office in August 1944, it eventually became the largest British and Commonwealth cemetery of the Second World War in France. It now contains 4,144 burials, only 338 of which are unidentified, and 505 war graves of other nationalities, the majority being German.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ TNA, WO 171/3786, ADGR&E, No. 32 Graves Registration Unit, War Diary, January-December 1944, entry for 1 July 1944.

⁶⁹ Bayeux memorial page, Commonwealth War Graves Commission website, (last accessed 8 June 2014):

<http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/2060300/BAYEUX%20MEMORIAL>.

Other cemeteries were quickly added to No. 32 GRU's responsibilities. In August, it was also made responsible for 'the painting and writing of Crosses for all permanent cemeteries'. Two empty garages adjoining the unit's location had been requisitioned for photography, and for the painting and lettering of the crosses.



Cross painting at Bayeux: CWGC, ADD 9/1/40, 48 GCU, Bayeux Photo Album.

French civilian labour had been recruited to help, although 10 Pioneer Corps sign-writers were also temporarily attached to the unit. There was some low-key grumbling in the unit's War Diary about the way in which these sign-writers kept being reassigned elsewhere. At the end of August, Stott noted with the caution born out of experience that it should be possible to turn out about 100 finished crosses

per day '— for as long as this arrangement lasts!'⁷⁰ The following month, he once again increased the unit's responsibilities. Henceforth it would also be responsible for photographing all graves in permanent cemeteries, and for this purpose all the photographers from the other GRUs would be transferred to No. 32 GRU.⁷¹

Amongst the unit's photographers was Corporal Eric Gunton of the Royal Engineers, who had landed with the unit at Arromanches in June and who remained attached to it until posted to a nearby civilian internment camp in November 1945.⁷² Gunton took many photographs in Normandy which were not related to his official work of recording the permanent graves for the relatives. His informal, unposed images show the beginnings of Bayeux British Cemetery and the way in which it grew out of quiet farmland, bordered by hedges and tall trees. The fields were first marked out with immensely long ribbons of white tape, establishing the grid which would ensure the final, orderly arrangement of the graves. Gunton's photographs show local French civilians at work, digging the graves or creating the structure of the cemetery under the supervision of Graves Registration officers. Gradually the rough pastureland gave way to hard-surfaced pathways and rows of immaculately heaped-up graves with individual crosses (the permanent headstones which would replace these would come later when the Imperial War Graves Commission took over).⁷³

Much of the labour at Bayeux Cemetery came from the workforce of the local porcelain factory which had been forced to close in 1941.⁷⁴ The people were grateful

⁷⁰ TNA, WO 171/3786, ADGR&E, No. 32 Graves Registration Unit, War Diary, January-December 1944, entries for July-August 1944; TNA, 171/140, 21 Army Group HQ, 'A' Branch, Progress Report, August 1944, week ending 26 August 1944.

⁷¹ TNA, WO 171/3786, ADGR&E, No. 32 Graves Registration Unit, War Diary, January-December 1944, entries for January-December 1944.

⁷² William Jordan, *The Bayeux British Cemetery* (Jarrold Publishing, Norwich, 2006), p.15.

⁷³ Gunton's photographs can be found in Jordan, *The Bayeux British Cemetery* and William Jordan, *Normandy 1945: After the Battle* (Pitkin Publishing, Norwich, 2005).

⁷⁴ Jordan, *Normandy 1945*, p.11.

for the work, but when it concerned exhumation and reburial, the task could be viscerally unpleasant. Owing to the shortage of men of non-combatant status in the British Army, much of the exhumation work was performed by French civilian labour, each section of No. 39 Graves Registration Unit going out with several of these men, 'numbers varying from two to ten according to the work in hand'.⁷⁵ Some of Gunton's scenes are extremely harrowing, such as that in which French workers try to wrestle a corpse out of the grip of glutinous mud, or where Ingolby sifts through a mess of decayed flesh, bones, and saturated clothing, laid out upon a sheet on the grass, as he searches for clues to the man's identity. No one is wearing protective clothing, just rubber boots if they are lucky, and nobody has a face mask. Even Ingolby, the OC, only has wellingtons and rubber gloves to go with his normal Army uniform. The French civilians are in ordinary work clothes.⁷⁶ Nothing could make more obvious the extremely difficult conditions under which these men worked. No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit's War Diary records one attempt to remedy what was clearly a dire necessity when, in March 1945, 'Captain Price visited 106 Gen Hospital for masks and gloves for concentration work'.⁷⁷

Lack of suitable clothing was one of several serious difficulties affecting the work of the two Graves units, most being due to wartime conditions or to the appalling weather of that autumn and winter. Despite being in an excellent billet, No. 32 GRU suffered regular bouts of illness. On one outbreak of diarrhoea and gastric troubles affecting a number of men, including the Commanding Officer, the unit's War Diary remarked: 'This is possibly due to (A) Sad state of sanitation or (B) Heavy chlorination of water supplies.'⁷⁸ Good accommodation was a scarce resource.

⁷⁵ TNA, WO 171/3794, ADGR&E, No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, War Diary, October-December 1944, entry for 1-6 November 1944.

⁷⁶ Jordan, *The Bayeux British Cemetery*, pp.16-17.

⁷⁷ TNA, WO 171/10994, ADGR&E, No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, War Diary, January-December 1945, entry for 14 March 1945.

⁷⁸ TNA, WO 171/3786, ADGR&E, No. 32 Graves Registration Unit, War Diary, January-December 1944, entry for 9 September 1944.

Although Bayeux, which had been liberated on 7 June, was undamaged, massive destruction had been caused in the surrounding areas. As has been seen, Ingolby lodged for a while in No. 32 GRU's billet when he first arrived to take up his command. 19 ORs arrived close to the end of September to join him, but it is not recorded where they were billeted; it is probably in reference to finding accommodation for them that Ingolby noted on 8 October: 'Searching for billets[:] difficulty was experienced here owing to so many units requiring winter quarters.'⁷⁹ An additional pressure on the housing stock was that the graves units were constantly increasing in size. No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit almost doubled its numbers in its first few weeks, 21 Army Group sanctioning an increase from three to five sections in November, and also creating an additional unit, No. 48 GCU.⁸⁰

The siting of the cemeteries on land formerly used for agriculture often necessitated the creation of new roads, both temporary and permanent, by the Royal Engineers, who were already seriously overstretched.⁸¹ The Royal Engineers were also required to erect fencing around the cemeteries, together with the large, heavy, main gates. The erection of the gates at Bayeux British Cemetery was obviously delayed

⁷⁹ TNA, WO 171/3794, ADGR&E, No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, War Diary, October-December 1944, entry for 8 October 1944. No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit was eventually billeted at Langlois Farm, Rue la Cambette, Bayeux. TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, appendices for May, 'Location Statement'.

⁸⁰ TNA, WO 165/36, War Office, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1944, entry for November 1944. For a pictorial history of this unit's work, see Commonwealth War Graves Commission, ADD 9/1/40, No. 48 GCU, Bayeux Photo Album.

⁸¹ See, for example, the Royal Engineers agreeing to commence work on roads near La Delivrande Cemetery, TNA, WO 171/3786, ADGR&E, No. 32 Graves Registration Unit, War Diary, January-December 1944, entry for 5 October 1944.

for some time because a note in the War Diary of No. 32 Graves Registration Unit on 1 October 1944 records a request to the Royal Engineers to expedite the erection of the gates.

Roads and transport were always problematical. At Bayeux, the French civic authorities and the British military authorities misunderstood one another about the path of a new road, and as the road could not be moved, the layout of Bayeux British Cemetery had to be altered.⁸² Older roads were often in a shocking condition from war damage, and frequently caused damage to transport, or serious and sometimes fatal accidents. As for transport, it was a never-ending source of frustration, and is recorded as such in the War Diaries of all the units. No. 32 Graves Registration Unit sometimes lost their transport when it was taken by other British units, as happened in August — one of their valuable vehicles was moved forward to the front, and when they tried to get a replacement they were told ‘it was impossible to supply a vehicle as all such vehicles were required for the transport of supplies forward’.⁸³ Later in the year there were considerable troubles in getting vehicles repaired, ‘REME Workshops have been too busy’, so the unit’s men had to mend the vehicles as best as they could.⁸⁴ The transport issue continued to be a problem in the following year; in April, for example, the unit’s Diary recorded the great trouble being experienced in transporting civilian labour to and from the cemeteries.⁸⁵ However, the troubles of No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit in the first few weeks of its assignment had been far worse. On 1 November, its War Diary noted:

The 10 cwt 2 wheeled trailers have been found totally inadequate for grave concentration. (1) They are too small for bodies to lie in them (2)

⁸² Jordan, *The Bayeux British Cemetery*, p.20.

⁸³ TNA, WO 171/3786, ADGR&E, No. 32 Graves Registration Unit, War Diary, January-December 1944, entry for 31 August 1944.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, summary for the month of December 1944.

⁸⁵ TNA, 171/8342, ADGR&E, No. 32 Graves Registration Unit, War Diary, January-December 1945, summary for the month of April 1945.

The backs do not “let down” for cleaning and disinfecting (3) The couplings are continually cracking[?] under the strain.⁸⁶

The situation was only remedied when better vehicles became available, the War Diary noting at the end of November:

With the 3 tonners work became much easier and quicker. Being metal bodied and ‘tip up’ lorries more bodies could be carried and the daily disinfections and clearing was easily carried out. The 15 cwt were retained for carrying French Civilian Labour.

Weather conditions were appalling from September 1944 onwards. No. 32 Graves Registration Unit’s War Diary recorded:

[17 September] Constant downpour of rain makes work of this unit almost impossible, photography at a halt, graves at permanent cemeteries rapidly filling with water.

[18 September] Rain continues, great difficulties experienced with transport on roads which are already thick with mud.

The open trucks with which the unit had been supplied could not cope with the foul weather and terrible roads: ‘the amended Burials Returns which are being brought back to HQ are on many occasions sodden and splattered with mud and hardly decipherable’.⁸⁷ Worse still was the appalling water-logged condition of the

⁸⁶ TNA, WO 171/3794, ADGR&E, No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, War Diary, October-December 1944, entry for 1 November 1944.

⁸⁷ TNA, WO 171/3786, ADGR&E, No. 32 Graves Registration Unit, War Diary, January-December 1944, entry for 10 October 1944. The type of truck was named later in the War Diary on 2 November 1944 when it was still causing problems; it was the Bedford 15 Cwt Open Cab.

cemeteries. By December the situation had become so bad that special authority was received for the issue of overboots to the civilian gravediggers:

in an endeavour to protect them from seepage from occupied graves. Medical officers have advised us that the contact of the skin with these fluids will, at the very least, cause an acute boil condition.⁸⁸

Matters were so serious that the War Diary of No. 32 Graves Registration Unit contains a detailed summary of the month of December, tagged on to the end of the usual daily entries. It ran:

Considerable trouble experienced with civil labour owing to the very bad conditions of work in the cemeteries. The flooded state of the ground and the seepage caused thereby from the occupied graves is causing considerable unpleasantness. Have applied for Boots Knee Rubber as Overboots A.G. will not stand up to work. Experiencing considerable difficulty in obtaining these owing to shortage. Labour restive and undoubtedly conditions are bad.

Boots Knee Rubber eventually turned up and were issued on 18 January 1945.⁸⁹

The work of No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit got off to a slow start because of the need to build up the unit from scratch; this included arranging billets, rations, civilian labour, and essential vehicles and supplies, including maps. However, 'A Section'

⁸⁸ Ibid, entry for 2 December 1944.

⁸⁹ TNA, 171/8342, ADGR&E, No. 32 Graves Registration Unit, War Diary, January-December 1945, entry for 18 January 1945.

under Captain Williams commenced work on 13 October, attending to two Special Cases.⁹⁰

The everyday work appears to have been carried out by means of a grid of squares, overlaid upon maps; for example, 'A Square 8-7 B Beach Area' is referred to in the Unit's War Diary on 1 February 1945. Such a system would have made it easier to manage the enormous task and ensure that each area of ground was cleared before the unit moved on to another part of the grid.

Only 98 concentrations were performed in October, but thereafter things began to speed up. 467 concentrations were made in November and 693 in December despite the appalling weather, a number of cases having to be left until the floods subsided. Over the course of the following nine months, the figures of the concentrations varied, with the lowest figure being in January 1945; this was due to deep snow which made it almost impossible to locate graves and rendered many of the roads off the main highways impassable.⁹¹ The monthly figures for the first nine months of 1945, as given in No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit's War Diary, were:

January	— 296
February	— 813
March	— 341
April	— 468
May	— 938
June	— 893
July	— 1,129
August	— 942
September	— 903

⁹⁰ TNA, WO 171/3794, ADGR&E, No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, War Diary, October-December 1944, entry for 13 October 1944.

⁹¹ TNA, WO 171/10994, ADGR&E, No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, War Diary, January-December 1945, entry for 31 January 1945.

Thus, 7,981 concentrations were performed in the course of one year, from October 1944 to September 1945. Of these, 6,540 were in Normandy and 1,441 at Valkenswaard, Noord-Brabant, Holland. This was the only country to which one of the unit's sections was sent on detachment, the War Diary recording that 'A Section' left for Valkenswaard on 9 April 1945, where it would remain until 10 October. The main core of the unit continued to be based at Bayeux until 29 November 1945, when all sections left for Isselhorst in Germany. The War Diary recorded, with quiet pride, that during its fourteen months stationed at Bayeux the unit had carried out 7,360 concentrations in Normandy and 1,441 in Holland, 'Grand Total 8801'.⁹² The total for each month had been noted throughout the period at Bayeux, providing a concrete record of achievement in what must often have seemed a relentlessly grim, disgusting, and close to endless task.

⁹² Ibid, entries for 27-30 November 1945.



No. 48 GCU reburying a casualty who has been concentrated to Bayeux, and exhuming an isolated grave. CWGC, ADD 9/1/40, 48 GCU, Bayeux Photo Album.

The Graves Concentration Units had by far the most unpleasant part of the programme for the dead because they were constantly dealing with exhumations. Warm weather made exhumations particularly difficult; quicklime and formaldehyde were used to cut down on the stench but 'sometimes it was just about all you could stomach'. Some men just could not stand it — or, indeed, certain other aspects of the work. Sergeant Gilford Boyd, who worked with a Canadian Graves Concentration Unit, recalled how a newcomer to his unit was doing well until the moment that his shovel struck the bones of an unidentified grave in Le Havre: 'I'm telling you, I never saw a person move so fast in my life [...] and he was up and out of that grave and down the street. And so as a result we couldn't keep him.'⁹³

The graves units were kept going by various official efforts to sustain their morale. Stott was always keenly alert to what was going on in his command, from the highest to the lowest, and as early as August 1944, he authorised all units to take one rest-day a week 'as they were near breaking under the strain'.⁹⁴ That same month he also contacted Welfare and explained the position of GRUs in the field, thereby extracting a promise that Welfare would press for the issue of a wireless set to every graves unit of the Second Army.⁹⁵ This was agreed before the end of the month, and Lugard, DADGRE of the Second Army, was instructed to collect the sets from Welfare Depot and distribute them to the units as soon as possible.⁹⁶ At the end of the following month, Ingolby recorded the welfare arrangements for No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit:

⁹³ 'Sgt Gilford Boyd, 'Canadian Graves Concentration Unit', The Veterans Project (Canada), Episode 27 (last accessed 07/05/2015): <https://vimeo.com/27834301> and <https://vimeo.com/theveterans>

⁹⁴ TNA, 171/140, 21 Army Group HQ, 'A' Branch, Progress Report, August 1944, week ending 19 August 1944.

⁹⁵ Ibid, week ending 5 August 1944.

⁹⁶ Ibid, week ending 26 August 1944.

Re Welfare: among other items a wireless set was received and arrangements made for every man to attend his local Cinema and ENSA once during the week – as French Civilian Labour was not available on Sundays this day was considered more or less as a rest day.⁹⁷

France being a Roman Catholic country was very observant of religious duties, thus Easter Sunday and Monday at the beginning of April 1945 perforce became a holiday for No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit apart from 'a little vehicle maintenance and administrative routine' and 'recce of areas to be worked'. Likewise 9 May, the day after the celebratory holiday taken for VE Day, became an additional holiday because no civilian labour was available.

The unit's War Diary, which is sparse, contains only very rare notes on life outside work. Christmas Day 1944 was, for example, observed as a holiday 'and a good day was had by all'.⁹⁸ Another very brief entry on 25 March 1945 reports: 'Football match v. 48 GCU away won.' 'Interior economy and maintenance', however, was a very frequently occurring phrase, but at least this humdrum housekeeping stuff must have been a counterbalance to the frequent horrors of the work.

There was, however, at the end of it all the very great satisfaction of seeing the work completed in the neat, orderly cemeteries. On these occasions, Stott came down to make the final inspection. In June 1945 the unit's War Diary recorded:

Colonel Stott [...] arrived on visit. Included the following cemeteries which were full and ready for handing over to the IWGC: Jerusalem, Fontenay

⁹⁷ TNA, WO 171/3794, ADGR&E, No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, War Diary, October-December 1944, entry for 31 October 1944.

⁹⁸ Ibid, entry for 25 December 1944.

and Ryes. [...] Colonel Stott and party inspected Bény-Sur-Mer, La Delivrande and Cambes Cemeteries which were also full.⁹⁹

The graves units were encouraged to feel that their work and their point of view was appreciated by visits such as these, and by their inclusion in meetings and conferences which gave them an understanding of the wider context of their work; for example, at the conference in Paris in October 1945, the 'question of cooperation with MR and E, RAF, [was] discussed'.¹⁰⁰ They were also assured of the appreciation of the Commander in Chief; for example, on 25 December, GMR Williams, of No. 36 GRU, was presented with the 'C in C Certificate' (it was Stott who had made certain that the graves units would be eligible for this award), whilst on 28 December Montgomery paid a personal visit to the Western Europe Graves Service in which 'various questions' were discussed.¹⁰¹

During the twelve months following D-Day, many unexpected problems arose in the care of the dead which needed clarification. Some were initially recognised by Stott, others were brought to his attention by his officers in the field, particularly Major Ingolby. Ingolby was a highly motivated OC whose alertness to unresolved issues in the fieldwork must have been extremely valuable to Stott. One matter which he brought to Stott's attention concerned personal effects. In November 1944, he sent

⁹⁹ TNA, WO 171/10994, ADGR&E, No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, War Diary, January-December 1945, entry for 12 June 1945.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, entry for 10 October 1945.

¹⁰¹ Commander-in-Chief's Certificate: TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, appendices for January, Appendix J5, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Honours and Awards', memorandum, 12 January 1945; Montgomery's visit: TNA, WO 171/11100, BAOR, Western European Graves Service (Belgium and Holland), War Diary, 1945-1947, entries for 25-26 December 1945.

a letter to Stott, asking what should be done with the rings found on bodies. Ingolby already held a number of these, and was going to treat them as Personal Effects and despatch them to Second Echelon 'in the usual way'; however, he was not certain whether the removal of rings from the bodies was to become established practice.

I very much doubt myself whether such action would be appreciated by the relatives.

It is often essential to remove them from bodies for means of identification when any doubt exists, but even then the rings could be left in the grave.¹⁰²

He sent Stott a further letter on the same day, asking what was to be done with money found on the bodies.

Sometimes, in fact nearly always, the notes are in such an insanitary, smelly state that they are not fit to send to the base, and I understand that the Effects Branch quite naturally dislike receiving such articles.

Ingolby suggested that an arrangement might be made when the numbers of the notes were recorded and thus new notes could be substituted for the same value.¹⁰³

The procedures for rings and money were duly clarified by the War Office and the official policy disseminated in mid-December. Rings and other articles likely to be of sentimental importance or having some monetary value were to be sent to the Effects Section in the usual way. Money which was 'in a sanitary condition' was to

¹⁰² TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Appendix G, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Personal Effects of Deceased Soldiers', transcript of Major Ingolby's first letter, 25 November 1944.

¹⁰³ Ibid, transcript of Major Ingolby's second letter, 25 November 1944.

be paid to the Field Cashier and credited to the deceased's account. Foul currency notes were to be burnt after examination by a Board of Officers, and a certificate completed which would allow the money to be credited to the deceased's account.¹⁰⁴ In other words, a great deal of care was to be taken that valuable assets could not be embezzled from the dead's heirs.

Some local matters did not need to go up to the War Office for a ruling because essentially they were matters of military discipline. In late December Stott wrote to 'A' Branch, recommending the publication of a GRO (General Routine Order) which would be circulated to all ranks concerning the photographing of graves. A number of cases had been brought to his attention where next of kin had received photographs which showed a different location from that in the official photographs. Stott wrote that the explanation was, of course, that these photographs had been taken of graves in isolated locations, and thus they were different from the official photographs which were only taken when the bodies had been concentrated to the permanent cemeteries. Stott was concerned because the discrepancy was 'creating doubt' in the minds of the bereaved.

In addition, during recent tours of duty, it had come to Stott's notice that:

There is in existence a trafficking in photographs – certain individuals have sought out owners of cameras and offered as much as five or six hundred francs for one photograph of a grave. Further, I have reason to believe that unscrupulous owners of cameras have sent photographs to next-of-kin, and vaguely hinted of the trouble and expense to which they have been put to acquire the photographs.

There has been no 'leakage' through the Graves Service; except the one attached to my own Office Staff, all Unit photographers have formed a Photographic Section under the OC No. 32 GRU. The activities of this

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, Appendix G2, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Personal Effects of Deceased Soldiers', memorandum, 15 December 1944.

Section have been strictly confined to the photographs of graves in permanent cemeteries.

Stott was willing to put a benign interpretation on much of the 'trafficking' because it was possible that all ranks had not been informed that every grave was photographed officially and that two prints were forwarded free of charge to the next of kin through A.G.13. Hence his suggestion that the GRO should be published which would forbid any unofficial photography. He also recommended that an amendment stressing the same point should be made to existing GRO 315/44 which concerned isolated and cemetery graves.¹⁰⁵

What has been seen throughout this chapter is how intensely Stott and many of those working for him were devoted to the care of the military dead. In this they reflected the Army's strong commitment to its central role and the acceptance of the increasingly heavy duties which were attached to it. In April 1944, it was briefly suggested at a Directorate meeting that the RAF and the Royal Navy should contribute more. The Directorate's War Diary recorded:

As the War Office deals with the graves of all Services it was suggested that the Admiralty and Air Ministry should be called on for assistance, but it was ruled that as the War Office had undertaken the work they should produce the staff.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, Appendix J5, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Control of Photography and Sketching', memorandum, 28 December 1944.

¹⁰⁶ TNA, WO 165/36, War Office, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1944, entry for April 1944.

It is the only suggestion made in the War Diary for that critical year that some of the Army's responsibilities should be devolved.

The Army took a great pride in its GR&E work, and part of this pride lay in the historical links to the work carried out by the Directorate and the Imperial War Graves Commission after the First World War. In Colonel Fraser's tour of inspection in October 1944, he made a point of going to see the 1914-1918 cemeteries in the Somme area which had been inaccessible since June 1940: 'All appeared well cared for. A note on these is being sent to the IWGC.'¹⁰⁷

The work of the Graves Service in France and Belgium in 1944-45 took place against a backdrop of the many cemeteries which had been created in those countries after the First World War. However, although the earlier war may have set a precedent in the beauty and dignity of its burial places, conditions were so different following D-Day that the Graves Service had many new matters of policy and procedure to decide. Stott's office circulated numerous memoranda and sets of Standing Orders such as those issued in January 1945, 'Standing Orders: Graves Registration 21 Army Group', and 'Standing Orders: Graves Concentration 21 Army Group'.¹⁰⁸ These and the all-important close personal supervision of Stott, together with that of the heads of GR&E in the Second Army, the First Canadian Army, and the L of C, provided a strong direction and continuity in what was done.

The way in which the numerous problems were dealt with remained remarkably constant over the year following D-Day. Although the following quotation is rather long, it gives such an accurate and vivid flavour of the times that it is worth quoting in its entirety. It was written in the War Diary of the Second Army's GR&E by Major Lugard, and it refers to a consultation which took place from 25 May to 27 May 1945.

¹⁰⁷ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Appendix D, Tour of Inspection, Colonel S Fraser, 23 October 1944.

¹⁰⁸ TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, 'Standing Orders: Graves Concentration 21 Army Group', 31 January 1945; also, 'Standing Orders: Graves Registration 21 Army Group', 1 January 1945; and 'Notes for Divisional Burial Officers', last sheet missing, thus no date but of the same period.

24 May

Received message from ADGRE [Stott] asking DAD [Lugard] to come for discussions on 25 May or as soon as possible. Car still in workshops. Arranged air passage and flew down from LUNEBURG to BRUSSELS in late afternoon. Just over 2 hours.

Met Major Ingolby, OC No. 39 GCU, who had just arrived by road from BAYEUX.

25 May

Reported, with Major Ingolby, to ADGRE in morning. Returned for discussions on future arrangements for Graves Service at 1430 hours. Joined by Major Groom, DADGR&E, L of C.

26 May

In car of ADGRE visited GHEEL, CASTERLE, VALKENSWAARD, MIERLOO and BOURG LEOPOLD cemeteries to see how concentrations were being carried out. None, so far, at CASTERLE or BOURG LEOPOLD. At the latter place some points have cropped up about some RAF burials.

Also saw 'A' Sec[ti]on 39 GCU at VALKENSWAARD. Captain Waywell [?] late of 34 GRU, is there during absence of Captain Williamson on leave.

27 May

Saw ADGRE on various points.

28 May

DADGR&E returned to 2nd Army by early aeroplane, leaving BRUSSELS at 0730 and landing at LUNEBURG at 0915.

29 May

Car still awaiting spare parts.¹⁰⁹

The beauty of the passage is how representative it is of much that has been discussed in this chapter: the transport difficulties which constantly dogged everybody; the continuous emergence of new factors, here represented by the points which had cropped up about certain RAF burials; the fact that the Army was working for other dead than its own, once again in this case represented by the RAF; the interacting network of the OCs who worked in Graves — Stott, Lugard, Groom, and Ingolby; Stott's constant keeping in touch with the men involved in the field work, and the equally constant touring of the cemeteries to see that what was being done was being done properly.

What is missing from the above summary is any mention of the liaison work which was carried out with the governments and peoples of France and Belgium. These countries provided the most invaluable help with the Graves Service's work, this being a continuation of the devoted care which had been tendered to so many British graves during the war. A number of issues arose which could have led to violent disagreement, but only one — the obdurate refusal of the French to look after the German battle dead — proved to be a sticking point. The tact with which Stott handled relations with France and Belgium (not to mention the Americans) capitalised on existing good will, and provided the best possible context for the success of the programme.

As has been seen throughout these two chapters on the Army's work, one of the most serious problems was the acute manpower shortage. In June 1945, Stott produced a short historical report at the behest of A.G.13 (brevity having been requested), which summarised the difficulties which had occurred in the first year of

¹⁰⁹ TNA, WO 171/11100, War Diary of DADGR&E, HQ, Second Army, 1944-45, entries for 24-29 May 1945.

the Grave's Service's work and the solutions which had been found. His summary of 'Lessons learnt' mainly concerned organisation, in particular the way in which the GRUs had been allocated, and the need for dedicated Cemetery Construction and Maintenance Units due to the impossibility of freeing up the Royal Engineers originally allocated to the task. Stott acknowledged the 'strong backing by "A" Branch at this Headquarters' which had alleviated many of the problems and the promptitude with which they had published GROs when requested. However, he also drew attention to the serious arrears of Graves Service work due to staff shortage.¹¹⁰

His call for additional staff was officially taken up in that same month by Brigadier J McCandlish at 'A' Branch, who produced a closely argued report requesting that the Graves Service be given adequate resources to carry out its duties 'in a fitting manner and within a reasonable time'. The proposed increase in the establishment, which would allow the Graves Service to complete its work in approximately three years, was, McCandlish stated:

a reasonable 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.

As a clinching point, McCandlish added that it might be found interesting that the Americans had recently 'converted four complete regiments of artillery to Graves Service units' to complete the same task which was facing the Graves Service.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, appendices for June, Appendix J1 Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'The Start and Expansion of 21 Army Group, Graves Service', report, 15 June 1945.

¹¹¹ McCandlish also added: 'It is understood that a similar, but considerably greater, expansion of the Graves Service took place immediately after November [19]18.' TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, appendices for June, Appendix J (number erased), Brigadier J McCandlish, 'A' Branch, 'The Graves Service in Europe', report, 21 June 1945.

With the war in Europe over, a period of general reorganisation was now beginning. 21 Army Group became the British Army of the Rhine, the BAOR, and the structure of the Graves Service altered at the same time, not only reflecting the changes in Army organisation but also the new resources which were granted by the War Office as a result of the requests of Stott, 'A' Branch, and A.G.13. The new and greatly expanded Western Europe Graves Service Directorate was set up under Stott's command, a considerable endorsement of his abilities. HQ Second Army officially closed on 25 June 1945, and some of its GR&E personnel were moved to form the Belgium and Holland section of the new Directorate; those staff who were considered surplus were posted to No. 33 Graves Registration Unit.¹¹² By January 1946, the Directorate would consist of six sections: Belgium and Holland (as just described), to which Luxembourg would later be added; Canadian Army; South France; North France; West Germany and Denmark; and East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Poland.¹¹³

The evolvement of the Belgium and Holland section gives a good picture of what was happening in the Graves Service at this period. When the section was set up, there was a change of Commanding Officers; Major Lugard, the former OC, left for England on 20 June (he had probably been demobbed), and was succeeded by Major C J Benest, MC, who had formerly been OC of No. 36 Graves Registration Unit and thus had much practical experience.¹¹⁴ At the end of June, Brigadier J K McNair, who had taken over from Sir Fabian Ware as the Director General of the Directorate in London, visited the Belgium and Holland section; this was apparently McNair's first tour of the GR&E units, and he was accompanied by the indefatigable

¹¹² TNA, WO 171/11100, Second Army HQ, DADGR&E, War Diary, 1944-45, entry for 25 June 1945.

¹¹³ TNA, 171/8653, BAOR HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January to June 1946, appendices for January, Appendix G3, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Graves Registration, Concentration, and Enquiries Service', memorandum, 22 January 1946.

¹¹⁴ TNA, WO 171/11100, BAOR, Western European Graves Service (Belgium and Holland), War Diary, 1945-1947, 'Historical Note'.

Stott.¹¹⁵ Nonetheless, even with this official acknowledgement, there were the usual delays in getting things done. The Belgium and Holland section was only officially recognised on 14 September 1945 when Benest's appointment was confirmed.¹¹⁶ The boundaries of the areas of responsibility were finalised on 1 October after a conference in which the Belgium and Holland section became responsible for Luxembourg as well.¹¹⁷ The reorganising of the records took even longer, with all records regarding Belgium and Holland only being collected from the HQ of L of C at the beginning of November.¹¹⁸

The new Western Europe Graves Service Directorate continued the work in Belgium and France even as it expanded out to other countries, including Germany. Its work was now on an immense geographical scale: Stott refers to it in one memorandum as extending 'from Marseilles to Copenhagen, and through Germany to Warsaw'.¹¹⁹ Although the lessons which had been learned in Belgium and France provided a very solid operational basis for the vastly increased scope of the work, manpower shortages continued to bedevil the Graves Service, now made especially acute by the progress of demobilisation due to the 'large percentage of GR Service

¹¹⁵ Ibid, but main diary, entries for 28-29 June 1945. McNair took up his duties on 8 December 1944 and Ware became Honorary Adviser from that same date, see TNA, WO 165/36, War Office, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1944, entry for 8 December 1944.

¹¹⁶ TNA, WO 171/11100, BAOR, Western European Graves Service (Belgium and Holland), War Diary, 1945-1947, entry for 14 September 1945.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, entry for 1 October 1945.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, entries for 1-3 November 1945. 19 months later, in June 1947, the Belgium and Holland section would be incorporated into the HQ of the Western Europe Graves Service as part of the continuous process of reordering the Service as the Army's commitments in Europe diminished, men were demobbed, and the work for the dead grew ever closer to completion. See, *ibid*, 'Historical Note'.

¹¹⁹ TNA, 171/8653, BAOR HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January to June 1946, appendices for January, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'The BAOR Graves Service: Position as on 19 January 46', memorandum, 19 January 1946.

Officers in High Priority Release Groups'.¹²⁰ The consequences of this for the progress of the work after June 1945 will be seen in Chapter Seven.

¹²⁰ TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, appendices for May, Appendix H1, War Office telegram, 19 May 1945.

Chapter Three — The Impetus behind the Search for the RAF Missing

This chapter is one of two upon the RAF's search for its missing. This first chapter focuses upon the reasons why the very difficult and protracted search was undertaken, and why the resources allocated to it were substantially increased once the scale of the task became obvious. Missing research derived its impetus from a distinctive ethos formed by the nature of the RAF, its Service culture, and the campaigns it had fought during the war. This ethos ran through all the RAF departments, units and personnel who carried out the work. It also influenced Army-RAF relations because, once the RAF had defined its exact responsibilities vis-à-vis its missing, it approached the work with a high degree of commitment and professionalism which was not paralleled in the Army's approach to missing soldiers.

For the RAF, the relatives of the missing were essentially the bereaved because none of the long-term missing miraculously turned up after the war. The prisoners of war were swiftly brought home, men who had been in hiding emerged, and comparatively quickly it became clear who of the missing would not be returning. Yet understandably, relatives clung on to false hopes that their loved one was still alive. As a sympathetic, and rather picturesquely phrased, RAF report concluded in 1950:

It may be said here that a successful search, like the paths of glory, led but to the grave. None of the missing aircrew members were discovered alive and suffering from loss of memory, despite the persistent hope of many distracted relatives.¹

¹ TNA, AIR2/10031, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, unsigned, 'Missing Research – Origin and Development', report, date stamped 29 March 1950. The allusion 'the paths of glory [lead] but to the grave' is from Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*.

As a broad generalisation, it may be said that the RAF habitually bore in mind the emotional significance of its losses, whereas the same could not always be said about the Army, particularly about the War Office Casualty Branch which could be remarkably insensitive in its attitudes. Although this facet of the differences between the RAF and the Army will be covered in later chapters, some aspects of the RAF's approach to relatives will be discussed here because they characterise one of the prime motivations for the RAF search, the Service's commitment to the welfare of its personnel and, by extension, of their families.

By the time that hostilities ended in 1945, 41,881 members of the RAF were missing world-wide. This figure was the final figure, arrived at in late 1947 (and re-confirmed in January 1951 when the main search for the missing had ended) but not available in the immediate aftermath of the war.² At that period, only a best guess could be made from a mass of data, much of which had not yet been validated. Losses had occurred in every theatre of war, but operations over North-West Europe were known to account for the vast majority of the missing.

Even though the European conflict ended in early May 1945 and nearly all of the prisoners of war came home that same month, the task of collating the information remained formidable. There were numerous cases when men had been notified as POWs but had lost their lives subsequently, often in the forced marches which had taken place at the end of the war. Repatriation, the interviewing of former POWs, the analysis of the records of hospitals and cemeteries, and the beginnings of a

² TNA, AIR 20/9050, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, S/L A P LeM Sinkinson, Minute Sheet, AMP D1729, 2 October 1947. The 1951 figures are in TNA, AIR2/9910, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, illegible signature (possibly K C Stole), 'Missing Research Activities, October to December 1950', report, 3 January 1951.

concentrated search clarified the situation, but only gradually.³ It was thus that the first estimates of European losses greatly underplayed the true figure.

In early July 1945, an Air Ministry Casualty Branch report concluded that some 20,000 men whose fate it might be possible to determine were missing in Europe. The total missing in that region, so the report estimated, were around 31,000, some 4,000 of whom were in the Mediterranean area and some 27,000 in North-West Europe. It was once an allowance had been made for the likely number lost at sea that the figure of 20,000 was arrived at.⁴ The report did not give details of what proportion of those lost at sea related to the Mediterranean or to North-West Europe; perhaps a simple pro-rata calculation was used.⁵ However, in reality the vast majority of them would have been associated with North-West Europe due to the necessity to cross large tracts of sea, where aircraft were frequently targeted by German fighters, or could be lost if they had already been severely damaged.⁶

By October 1947, the total figure for the missing in all theatres of war had been settled upon permanently as being just under 42,000. In a slightly obscure memorandum in answer to questions sent to the Air Member for Personnel by Sir Arthur Longmore, an Air Chief Marshal of the RAF, now retired, who was acting as Vice Chairman of the Imperial War Graves Commission, the position was given as

³ The fate of missing RAF prisoners of war was so successfully accounted for that by the end of 1947 all but two had been traced. Figures given by Arthur Henderson, Secretary of State for Air, in the House of Commons on 10 December 1947, and reported the following day in *The Times*.

⁴ TNA, AIR20/9050, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, Group Captain R Burges, 'Missing Research and Enquiry Service', report, 12 July 1945.

⁵ Some RAF operations against Italy were flown across North-West Europe, for example those against La Spezia in April 1943, but the majority of Mediterranean losses would have been due to operations based in that region. See introduction.

⁶ Several elite German fighter squadrons were stationed close to the North Sea where they could easily intercept British aircraft; one very significant base was that at Leeuwarden in Friesland, North Holland. See, for example, Ab A Jansen, *Wespennest Leeuwarden: De geschiedenis van de strijd van de Duitse nachtjagers en geallieerde luchtmachten boven Noord-Nederland in de jaren 1940-1945* (Hollandia, Leeuwarden, Netherlands, 1971).

follows: 42,000 men were missing and presumed killed in all theatres of war; 37,000 of these were in Europe and 5,000 in other theatres of war. The total figure for the missing was then revised downwards by 40 per cent to 25,200, using the accepted formula to account for those lost at sea. As the author of the report wrote:

The estimate of 40 per cent for those lost in the sea may be considered high, but it is based on trial scrutinies carried out independently, which had consistently yielded this percentage.⁷

Of the 37,000 estimated to be missing in Europe, the fate of 15,200 had already been established. When the allowance for those lost at sea was taken off, it was considered that 8,400 remained untraced. The breakdown of how many of these were in North-West Europe and how many in the Mediterranean area was not given.⁸

The final position for all theatres, estimated in January 1951 when the main search for the missing had concluded, was as follows:

⁷ TNA, AIR 20/9050, Air Ministry, S/L A P LeM Sinkinson, Minute Sheet sent to AMP, 2 October 1947.

⁸ Ibid.

Missing at cessation of hostilities	41,881
Accounted for (known burials)	23,881
Formally lost at sea	9,281
No Information	6,745
	39,907

A note states that a few hundred (the precise figure is not given) of those now defined as traced were men with no known graves, for example when an aircraft had exploded and no remains had been found, or men in located graves which had been destroyed by later war operations. Though it does not say as much, this is probably the answer to the anomaly in the figures in which 1,974 were not accounted for.⁹

The man ultimately in charge of RAF missing research was the Air Member for Personnel, the AMP, the equivalent of the Army's Adjutant-General. Beneath him came the Directorate of Personal Services, the DPS, and beneath this came the Air Ministry Casualty Branch, whose Missing Research and Enquiry Service, the MRES, operated in the field after the liberation of Europe. It was the MRES which, in liaison with the Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries, conducted all the post-liberation and post-war fieldwork of identifying the RAF missing in North-West Europe.

At the outset of the war in September 1939, the resources devoted to missing research had been inadequate to deal with what soon proved to be the rapidly escalating nature of RAF losses. Thereafter, resources were increased in response to a series of crisis points when existing staff could no longer cope with the heavy

⁹ TNA, AIR2/9910, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, illegible signature (possibly K C Stole), 'Missing Research Activities, October to December 1950', report, 3 January 1951.

workload. The changes in name and structure can be briefly summarised as follows. At the beginning of the war, the Air Ministry Casualty Branch was known by the departmental name of S.7 (Cas). Its resources were almost immediately discovered to be too small.¹⁰ It was re-designated P.4 (Cas) and increased in size, but the burden of work was so immense that, in January 1942, the Missing Research Section (MRS) of the Casualty Branch was formed to deal with this specific aspect of RAF casualties. The MRS was confined to offices in Britain until after D-Day. It then became the Missing Research and Enquiry Service, the MRES, which from January 1945 worked in the field in newly liberated Europe. Lastly, there was a massive increase in MRES resources in the summer of 1945 when it became obvious that this was the only way that the search would be completed within a reasonable timescale. The MRES units were never intended to be permanent, and they gradually closed down as their task was accomplished. The last one was disbanded in September 1949 at the same time as MRES HQ.¹¹ A considerably smaller unit was then set up, the RAF Graves Service, which was comparatively short-lived, leaving by the end of 1950 only two Missing Research Officers on the Continent to follow up on various outstanding cases.¹² Thus, the RAF devoted more than ten years to finding and identifying its missing airmen. What had motivated this considerable expenditure of money and effort?

The simple answer is that the impetus came from two main factors, the first being a sense of moral duty, the second being of a more pragmatic nature. These two factors coexisted side by side, and frequently overlapped. The RAF itself acknowledged this. In a key meeting in July 1945, chaired by the Air Member for

¹⁰ The Air Ministry Casualty Branch became S.7 (Cas) again after the war, in August 1946; in April 1947, it became S.14 (Cas), the name which it retained for the rest of the period covered by this thesis.

¹¹ TNA, AIR2/10031, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, unsigned, 'Missing Research – Origin and Development', report, date stamped 29 March 1950.

¹² TNA, AIR2/9910, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, illegible signature (possibly K C Stole), 'Missing Research Activities, October to December 1950', report, 3 January 1951.

Personnel, which had been convened to decide the future of missing research, the duality of motivation was very succinctly expressed by the two central items on the Agenda: 'Does public policy require Missing Research?' and 'Has [the] Air Ministry an obligation to elucidate the fate of "missing" Air Force personnel?'¹³ Public policy was the term used for public relations and the maintenance of the RAF's public image, whilst the word obligation referred to the RAF's moral duty not only to the men themselves but also to their relatives. It is clear, however, that a satisfactory attention to the latter would in itself contribute to a positive image for the RAF.

The last sentence may perhaps suggest an element of cynical calculation about the RAF's acceptance of its obligation to the missing. There may be a partial truth in this, but what cannot then be assumed is that the sense of moral obligation was a sham. Amongst the RAF's motivations was what can perhaps be most accurately described as a feeling of personal connection to the RAF dead. This feeling appears to have run through the whole of the RAF, not simply operational personnel but those working in administrative posts. It manifested itself in the very strong and genuine belief that there was an obligation to find the missing: 'the debt of "the many" to "the few"' must be paid. (This variant of Churchill's famous phrase was always used in the missing research context as applying to *all* RAF aircrew, not simply the fighter pilots of the Battle of Britain.) On 28 February 1950, when over half of the 42,000 men finally estimated to be missing had been identified, an Air Ministry Casualty Branch report summarised the position as follows:

Of the remainder a large number – estimated at between 12,000 and 17,000 – are believed to have been lost in the sea, leaving a residue of between 1,400 and 6,400 whose fate it is still hoped to discover. But there is no end to the problem. The Casualty Branch will not be satisfied until it

¹³ TNA, AIR20/9050, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, Minutes of a meeting on the MRES chaired by the AMP, 26 July 1945.

has found out all that is possible about every one of the aircrew missing during the war.¹⁴

This was a great deal more than just a pious platitude. It reflected the collective sense of responsibility within the RAF for those of their number who were missing or had been killed. Given the comparative youth of the RAF (it had been formed on 1 April 1918, and by the Second World War was still being referred to by some as the Junior Service), it may also reflect the drive to strengthen *esprit de corps*, and to emphasise the image of a strong, independent, elite Service with its own pantheon of dead heroes.¹⁵ Such a desire has to be understood within the context of the constant inter-war and wartime attempts of the other two Services to either destroy the RAF's independence or to appropriate some of its valuable resources.¹⁶

There were a number of reasons why the collective sense of responsibility within the RAF was so strong, not only in those at a very lowly level but also higher up in the top echelons of the Service. Firstly, the RAF was comparatively small and close-knit. The operational Commands used expensive, cutting edge, technologically complex equipment which had to be maintained and flown by highly skilled personnel.¹⁷ Of necessity, there was great inter-reliance – the aircrew may have

¹⁴ TNA, AIR2/10031, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, unsigned, 'Missing Research – Origin and Development', report, date stamped 29 March 1950.

¹⁵ The Senior Service was, of course, the Navy

¹⁶ This particular facet of the RAF's motivation will be explored more fully in Chapter Six.

¹⁷ Cutting-edge technology – certainly there were ill-equipped squadrons at the outset of the war, but as the war progressed vast sums of money were poured into the RAF, especially into Bomber Command. Coastal Command received the least investment due to competition for resources with Bomber Command which it tended to lose due to the priority given to the strategic air offensive. Coastal Command was placed under the operational control of the Admiralty in February 1941, but remained under the administrative control of the RAF; this meant that the Admiralty could formulate what it wanted Coastal Command to do, but this was not necessarily achievable because it was the RAF's Air Staff and the Air Ministry which allocated the resources. A number of examples of the complicated set-up and the competition for resources between Bomber and Coastal Commands are

been the cream of the Service, but they could have done nothing without the combined efforts of many other people, from the ground crew who serviced the aircraft to the WAAFs who worked in such tasks as parachute packing, meteorology, or radio communications.¹⁸

Secondly, the RAF was largely stationed in Britain during the war and its basic social structures thus remained stable even though its aircrew might be lost in their hundreds in a single night. The presence of WAAFs on the operational stations, although greatly disliked by some traditionalists, provided stability and continuity, and perhaps contributed to the widespread sense of the RAF being a family.¹⁹ WAAFs were often romantically involved with aircrew or had a brother-sister friendship with them due to their similar ages and interests. Many WAAFs also had real brothers serving in the Air Force, or friends from their home districts who were doing so. The network of contacts was very wide, and the fact that the RAF was based in Britain meant that this network was constantly emphasised and maintained, not least because aircrew on leave often visited each other's homes and became well known to the family and the local community.

In addition, there was a form of personal contact between the families of aircrew and the operational units which was unique to the RAF, it being the only Service on active duty which operated out of Britain. When aircrew went missing, members of their family or their friends sometimes went to the station at which they had been based to try to get more information. Tragic loss had a ripple effect, bringing friends and families into close contact with the operational units. When Valentine Baker, a Lancaster pilot, went missing in August 1943, his sister, a WREN nurse, went to RAF Station Bourn to talk to other members of his squadron. Unfortunately, although the

given in Duncan Redford, *A History of the Royal Navy: World War II* (I B Tauris, London, 2014), for example p.50 and pp.80-82.

¹⁸ WAAF – member of the Womens' Auxiliary Air Force.

¹⁹ See, for example, Joan Beech's memoir, which tells of some men's dislike of women being in uniform, *One WAAF's War* (D J Costello, Tunbridge Wells, 1989), p.41.

aircrew there felt desperately sorry for her, they knew nothing more than had already been officially notified to the family.²⁰

Aircrew often took the initiative in trying to obtain additional information for the relatives of the missing. After Bob Butler of the Brill crew was notified as missing in December 1943, his friend Dan Brown, who was serving on a different squadron, wrote to Bob's mother:

It happened on Thursday night, over Berlin, and I heard the news yesterday lunchtime, when I phoned through to his station. They put me in touch with the Adjutant of his squadron, and he told me all that is known so far, i.e. that "Flight Sergeant Brill and crew are missing as a result of Thursday night's operations".²¹

Please don't give up hope yet, Mrs Butler, as there is every chance that he got out of it alive, and as soon as I hear any definite news I will let you know immediately.

Dan Brown's letter continued:

I did intend to pack-up flying in the very near future, but I have changed my mind now. So far, I have only flown for the love of it, but now it is a personal affair. I'll avenge Bob, if it's the last thing I do. I am going to keep on flying to the end now, and I'm going to kill or be killed.²²

²⁰ Arthur Spencer to the author, personal correspondence, 6 August 2012.

²¹ Mrs Butler would have received an official telegram from 97 Squadron on 18 December 1943, notifying her that her son had not returned from operations, but Dan Brown clearly wanted to let her know if, for some reason, she had not already been informed.

²² Butler family archives, Dan Brown to Mrs Butler, letter, 18 December 1943.

It was not only operational aircrew who were deeply affected by the losses. Bomber Command, to which Valentine Baker, Bob Butler and Dan Brown all belonged, had by far the largest numbers of personnel and it was also where the greatest losses occurred. Non-operational staff suffered the repeated psychological shock of crews of up to eight men disappearing at once. Bob Philips, a flight mechanic at RAF Station Bourn in 1943, remembered 'it used to shake you when you lost your crew'. Bill Ford, who worked as an electrician at the same station, believed that there was: 'a tendency, due to the colossal losses, to keep a sort of distance from the aircrews — you would go onto your section the following morning and the aircraft you had been working on wasn't there.'²³ The vagueness of the fate of the aircrew increased the necessity for emotional distance. Joan Beech, a WAAF, decided it was a mug's game to become romantically involved with any of them; 'We saw so many of these bomber boys pass before us — we got to know them slightly and then they were gone.'²⁴ Yet although non-operational staff tried to keep an emotional distance from individual aircrew, a composite memory would always be retained of all the promising young men who had never returned.

Even the lowliest members of the RAF intensely felt the sorrow of the many deaths. Olive Noble was a WAAF typist who for some months in the later part of the war, worked in the Air Ministry Casualty Branch in Oxford Street. A major part of her duties was typing the 'Next of Kin' letters. The stream of individual files seemed never-ending: 'On reaching our desks each morning, the sight of piled-up files filled us with a feeling of gloom.' Many of the files included very graphic details of the last moments of an aircraft and its crew: 'Descriptions were vivid and explicit, one could see the whole thing unfolding before one's eyes.' Olive Noble began to suffer from appalling

²³ Jennie Gray, *Fire By Night, The Story of One Pathfinder Crew and Black Thursday, 16/17 December 1943* (Grub Street, London, 2000), p.41.

²⁴ Beech, *One WAAF's War*, p.59.

nightmares, exacerbated by the V2 rockets which falling on the capital at that time, and her health problems became so bad that she had to be transferred.²⁵

For those at the top of the Service, the losses held a particularly sombre resonance. The huge number of the missing in the First World War had mainly been from the Army, combat flying then being in its infancy. However, a number of very high-ranking RAF officers had been in the precursor of the RAF, the Royal Flying Corps, which at certain periods of the First World War had suffered the most appalling casualty rate. These men included Air Chief Marshal Sir Sholto Douglas, Air Officer Commanding of the British Air Forces of Occupation (and from 1946 the Military Governor of the British Zone of Germany), Air Chief Marshal Sir John Slessor, Air Member for Personnel, and Air Vice Marshal Sir Robert Allingham George, Air Attaché in Paris. All three men were in these key posts in the summer of 1945 at a most significant period of missing research when a very considerable increase was being requested for its resources.

Moreover, it was only the top echelons of the RAF who would have known the full picture of the desperate odds faced by operational aircrew. The top secret figures were collated throughout the war, and now make shocking reading. One Air Ministry memorandum to the Air Member for Personnel, dated November 1942, gives figures recommending the length of tours:

based on the assumption that it is thought desirable to provide operational aircrews with a 50% chance of survival. By the term "survival" is meant not being killed, missing, wounded or prisoner-of-war.

The table in the memorandum showed a 'very uneven incidence as between types' based on the current length of the tours. The best and worst rates were for Coastal Command, a torpedo pilot had a 17.5 per cent chance of survival as opposed to the

²⁵ Imperial War Museum, Documents.685, Olive J Noble, *Winged Interlude: A WAAF of the Second World War ... Tells All!*, typescript account (1990-91), no page numbers.

77.5 per cent enjoyed by Catalina pilots. Bomber Command survival figures were considerably less than 50 per cent, a medium or heavy bomber crew having a 45 per cent of surviving their first tour and the crew of a light bomber 25.5 per cent.²⁶ After the war ended, the overall loss rate in Bomber Command would be estimated by its commander, Sir Arthur Harris, as being 41 per cent.²⁷ The top echelons of the RAF would have been extremely aware of the very high casualty rate, and that operational necessity had required so many promising young men to be sent out to their likely deaths.²⁸

The sense of the RAF being a family was further strengthened by official welfare doctrine. An Air Ministry Order of March 1943 began 'Welfare in the Royal Air Force is an integral part of personnel policy', and went on to set out the responsibilities of the Directorate of Air Force Welfare and its duties, including liaising with the agencies which supported missing aircrew's families.²⁹ A rapid, efficient, yet sympathetic service advised families that aircrew were missing or had been killed.³⁰ The information which was tendered was as comprehensive as possible, and

²⁶ TNA, AIR 8/733, Air Ministry, 'Chances of Survival', A G R Garrod, AMT, to AMP, 16 November 1942.

²⁷ Richard Overy's *The Bombing War, Europe 1939-1945* (Allen Lane, London, 2013), p.408.

²⁸ Operational necessity – there were and still are, of course, endless debates about what operational necessity constituted; the biggest issue in wartime and now is whether the strategic air offensive was largely – or, perhaps, entirely — misconceived. See, for example, Richard Overy's *The Bombing War*, and Noble Frankland's *History at War* (DLM, London, 1998). Noble Frankland had not only been a navigator in Bomber Command from 1941-1945, but he was also the editor with Sir Charles Webster of the official history *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany* (HMSO, London, 1961). This did not prevent him from exposing the huge policy differences between Sir Charles Portal (Air Chief Marshal and Chief of the Air Staff) and Sir Arthur Harris, see *History at War*, pp.87-91.

²⁹ TNA, AIR 72/27, Air Ministry, 'Air Force Welfare', Air Ministry Order A.240/1943, 11 March 1943.

³⁰ 'Rapid' service – see Joan Layne's diary later in this chapter, she received the advice that her husband was missing approximately twelve hours after his aircraft failed to return from operations. Some of the very short delay would have been accounted for by waiting to see if any news of the aircraft came in from other airfields.

whenever new information emerged it was also quickly sent on.³¹ Unfortunately, in many cases there was little or no information to send. Families understandably found it very difficult to deal with their husbands, brothers, or sons simply disappearing without explanation, never to return. There was often a strong but quite erroneous perception that the RAF was not divulging information on the missing, a perception which has unfortunately been perpetuated in popular memory and by some historians.³² One of the reasons for the post-war search for the missing was to satisfy the families that all had been done which could be done to find the men. As the Head of the Casualty Branch wrote in July 1945:

Many wives and parents have pressed since VE Day for the release of information which they wrongly suppose the Air Ministry to have, and few will agree that their menfolk were casualties at sea until satisfied that exhaustive search has failed to find traces of them on land. [... Much public] pressure has, in fact, been brought to bear [...] for an immediate full-scale search; [...] unless it can be shown that the problem 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.³³

³¹ See the discussion in Chapter Six for the relative amounts of information tendered by the War Office Casualty Branch and the Air Ministry Casualty Branch.

³² See, for example, Barbara Hatley-Broad, *War and Welfare, British POW Families, 1939-45* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2009), p.141. For the true comprehensiveness of the information given to the relatives, see Jennie Gray, 'Bomber Command Casualty Welfare: The Experience of 97 Squadron Aircrew and their Families', unpublished MA dissertation, University of Exeter, 2012.

³³ TNA, AIR20/9050, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, Group Captain R Burges, 'Missing Research and Enquiry Service', report, 12 July 1945.

Once again, the duality of motivation is seen in the above words, which encapsulate both a very genuine concern for the human cost and an acute awareness of the public relations dimension.

The RAF was well aware that in the absence of official information, families sometimes turned to other means of finding out what had happened to their loved ones. In this, the families were following in the footsteps of First World War relatives of the missing, at a time when mediums and occultists had flourished in droves. Perhaps the most infamous exemplar of these mediums was Ada Deane, who had pursued a lucrative career in faked photographs. Her most popular series was of the Armistice Day ceremony in London during the two minute silence, with ghostly war heroes floating above the huge crowds.³⁴ Ada Deane had a very public practice; other mediums practised their trade more privately, holding séances and readings and other such means of allegedly communicating with the many thousands of men missing on the Western Front.³⁵

Second World War families of the missing followed some of the same occult paths. In the case of Leslie Laver, a twenty-year-old rear gunner from Bomber Command who disappeared in January 1944, it was two and a half years before his family had final confirmation of his fate. During this time, his mother, who had doted upon him, found the pain of not knowing unbearable. She used to say to her daughters, 'I wish I knew what happened to him, I wish I knew'. In her desperation she went to a spiritualist to find out. The medium, holding the dead man's glove, had told her of the moment of Leslie's death, 'he's in a tight cage trying to get out'. The family felt sure this referred to his gun turret, and their only consolation was that the medium had added that he had not suffered long but had died quickly.³⁶

³⁴ Martyn Jolly's book *Faces of the Living Dead, The Belief in Spirit Photography* (British Library, London, 2008) has several examples of Ada Deane's work.

³⁵ See, for example, Pat Jalland on spiritualism and the First World War dead, *Death in War and Peace: A History of Loss and Grief in England, 1914-1970* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010), pp.23-24.

³⁶ Jessie Course (Leslie Laver's sister), interview with the author, May 1997.

It was only on 15 June 1945, shortly after his return from prisoner of war camp in Germany, that a survivor of the crew, Rid Brown, wrote to Leslie's brother, Wally, and told him how the aircraft had been lost, adding: 'I do not think there is much chance of your Brother turning up now. I'd rather presume him dead than live on in the hopes that he may still be alive. I can only offer you and his parents and family my deepest sympathy for your great loss.' Leslie's brother wrote to thank him, and told him:

Yes, we have been very anxious indeed, particularly my Mother who has worried over the affair as she has not known whether she could hope for his return [...] For my part, I think it will be better when her mind is at rest about it one way or another, as he was the youngest of the family and she misses him so much.³⁷

Leslie Laver's remains were eventually identified by the MRES on the Dutch Frisian island of Texel, and the family at least had a grave to visit. Those families who did not have any knowledge of their loved one's fate continued to experience acute anxiety and grief, and like Leslie's mother sometimes tried spiritualism. This resort to paranormal means was not, of course, unique to RAF relatives. The Cotterell family, whose correspondence is often quoted throughout this thesis, were intelligent, witty and cynical rationalists, yet even they resorted to occult means when all other means of tracing Anthony Cotterell appeared doomed to failure.³⁸

The RAF's leadership had a rooted objection to mediums and other occultists, taking a very dim view of what was generally seen as an objectionable preying upon the vulnerable. One has, however, to exclude in this respect Air Chief Marshal Lord

³⁷ Laver family archives, correspondence between Rid Brown and Wally Laver, June-July 1945.

³⁸ In 1946, for example, Geoffrey Cotterell wrote from Germany telling his mother that he was hoping to go to an astrologer the following afternoon with 'the three dates: can't you possibly find out your own time of birth?' Cotterell family archives, Geoffrey Cotterell to Mintie Cotterell, letter, 9 March 1946.

Dowding, the commander of Fighter Command during the Battle of Britain, who was a convinced spiritualist and published *Many Mansions* in 1943, which has many a dead serviceman speaking from the grave.³⁹ The more conventional view of such matters appears in a Minute Sheet and attached letters put together by the personal secretary for the Air Member for Personnel in September 1946, which discussed the wisdom and likely success of prosecuting a test case. The culprit under discussion was a Mr Joseph Bennett of Lamagh, Newtownforbes, in Ireland, and it was hoped that prosecuting him might deter other people from gaining notoriety or money by ‘the heartless kind of “Revelations”’ made by Bennett.⁴⁰ The bundle of documents makes it clear that there had been a number of similar cases, and that these had proved very difficult to prosecute because of the reluctance of the relatives to testify against the mediums. In the instance of Mr Bennett, however, it was the father of a missing airman who had drawn attention to the matter, and there was documentary evidence to support a potential prosecution.

The missing airman was Warrant Officer Ralph Percival West, who had been lost in the South-East Asia campaign on 13 April 1943.⁴¹ The aircraft had been hit by flak, and had immediately burst into flames and crashed; there were apparently no survivors. In June 1946, the Air Ministry informed West’s father that death had now been presumed due to the lack of any further information. It was then that Mr West got in touch with Joseph Bennett. Bennett’s wife replied to Mrs West, and it was this letter which had ended up with the Air Ministry. Mrs Bennett wrote:

³⁹ This book went into several editions. See, for example, Air Chief Marshal Lord Dowding, *Many Mansions* (Rider and Co, London, 1956). Dowding was the author of other works on spiritualism, for example *Lychgate*, first published in 1945.

⁴⁰ TNA, AIR 20/9050, Air Ministry, Sir John Slessor to Air Marshal Sir George C Pirie, letter, 4 October 1946.

⁴¹ The date of Ralph Percival West’s death is incorrectly given as 3 April 1943 in one of the letters attached to the Minute Sheet in the next footnote. His correct details are on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission’s website (last accessed 20/11/15): <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/1816596/WEST,%20RALPH%20PERCIVAL>.

I'm glad to let you know that your son is alive, possibly wounded, he is not in Burma, but is in South West of Burma, not very far from the sea. This is the second time my husband has checked up on your son, and with the same results.

I do hope you will excuse me for not writing you sooner, but really my husband is kept awfully busy with the farm work, and extra tillage, and he is away from home doing divining all over the country quite a lot of his time, so that it leaves him so little spare time in trying to locate missing people, and indeed daily the letters are pouring into him [...].

It was the opinion of the Air Member for Personnel, Sir John Slessor, that it was very unlikely that successful action could be taken against Bennett. He wrote a strongly worded rebuke to Air Marshal Sir George Pirie, the Allied Air Commander in Chief in South East Asia, about the expensive resources which had already been devoted seemingly to confuting Bennett's claim about Warrant Officer West.⁴²

The RAF, in conducting its extensive and difficult search for missing airmen, hoped to end the torments of families like the Wests, and by doing so to demonstrate to the wider public how seriously it took its vast losses. In addition, there was a large element of Service pride in looking after its own, and in engaging in what was a historically innovative search beset with immense difficulties. As the Head of the Air Ministry Casualty Branch, Group Captain Burges, put it in his highly influential report of July 1945:

Briefly, the Air Ministry has to try and find 20,000 men, and these scattered over a Continent: the public expects the debt of "the many" to "the few" to be paid in full: they say this in so many words: there is no

⁴² TNA, AIR 20/9050, Air Ministry, A F Thorp, personal secretary to AMP, Minute Sheet with attached correspondence, 26 September 1946.

precedent in history for the research liability brought about by long-range bombing: no one has been faced with a like question before.⁴³

Of all the RAF operational Commands, Bomber Command, which had suffered the greatest losses, had the highest commitment to the search. When Burges wrote of the administrative structure needed to manage the MRES, and of the need to prioritise personnel, equipment and stores, he noted:

to ensure this priority, the [MRES] should not be put under a Command but report direct to AMP's Department of the Air Ministry in all matters: Commands have already shown lack of interest and a tendency to play off.

However, he exempted Bomber Command from these strictures, writing that they have 'furnished a most useful table showing the probable intensity of losses over the various countries. This more than supports our figure of 20,000 to be discovered.'⁴⁴

Running alongside the moral obligation for the search was the need to maintain good public relations and the highly favourable image of the RAF. This practical consideration was relevant not only during the war itself but also continued into the post-war world, at first because of the fear of a Nazi resurgence, and later because it looked as if there might be another war coming because of the worsening situation with the Russians.

During the war, each of the three operational RAF Commands had its own public appeal: Fighter Command as the nation's saviours during the Battle of Britain;

⁴³ TNA, AIR20/9050, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, Group Captain R Burges, 'Missing Research and Enquiry Service', report, 12 July 1945.

⁴⁴ Ibid. The use of the phrase 'play off' in this context suggests that a certain degree of politicising and attempts to manipulate the situation had been made by the different Commands, although Burges does not go into any further details.

Coastal Command for its part in daring rescues and its protection of essential convoys; Bomber Command because it was conducting a very public war and was the only real means before the invasion of Italy in September 1943 of hitting back at the Germans on mainland Europe. Although the uniforms which RAF flyers wore did not make the distinction between the Commands obvious to the public and there was thus a tendency to perceive the RAF as one body rather than its different constituent parts, it is nonetheless arguable that the image of Bomber Command was particularly relevant to public engagement with the problem of the missing, the vast majority of whom came from that Command.⁴⁵

Bomber Command's war was very high-profile. Its operations were extensively reported in the newspapers, and dramatic raids such as those on Augsburg in April 1942 and on the Möhne, Eder and Skorpe dams in May 1943 were made much of by the Ministry of Information. The aircrew who survived these extremely dangerous operations were lionised — photographed and filmed in all their endearing modesty and bashfulness, looking very much like the charming boy next door. Brendan Bracken, the Minister of Information, personally appeared in newsreels with some of the survivors of the Augsburg raid, whilst survivors of the dams' raid, including Guy Gibson, were filmed with the King and Queen.⁴⁶ It was thus that Bomber Command's

⁴⁵ Training Command did fly some bombing operations as part of its training programme for aircrew, but the high losses in this Command came from training accidents rather than operations, and accounted for 5,327 fatal casualties out of the 8,195 RAF deaths due to accidents. Accident statistics from Max Hastings, *Bomber Command* (Papermac, London, 1993), p.173, and Richard Overy, *The Bombing War*, p.408. For one trainee crew's story, see Harry Green's *Lost in Training: The Final Hours of Lancaster L7575* (Woodfield Publishing, Bognor Regis, 2008).

⁴⁶ See the following from British Pathé: 'Heroes of Augsburg', film of the Augsburg operation aircrew being introduced to the public by Brendan Bracken, the Minister for Information, film issued 4 May 1942, British Pathé website (last accessed 17 December 2013): <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/heroes-of-augsburg>; 'The King with the Dam Raiders', film of the Ruhr dam operation aircrew, including Guy Gibson, with the King and Queen, film issued 3 June 1943, British Pathé website (last accessed 28 December 2013): <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/king-with-the-dam-raiders>

top aircrew became personally known to the millions, both in Britain and the Dominions, who read newspapers or went to the cinema. Films such as the 1944 *Journey Together*, which was made by the RAF Film Production Unit, also brought Bomber Command's war sympathetically before the public. It should be remembered that during the war there was no widespread public feeling that the bombing campaign was morally dubious because of its, at times, ruthless attitude towards enemy civilians. There were indeed a number of critics, of whom the Bishop of Chichester, George Bell, was perhaps the most prominent.⁴⁷ However, to the wider public, Bomber Command's heroes were just that, greatly admired for their dazzling skills and courage.

What also brought Bomber Command's war directly to the public was the display of its aircraft in large city centres, such as Leeds and Manchester, as part of the Wings for Victory war savings campaigns. In London, in the RAF Wings for Victory Week in March 1943, a Lancaster was the focus of events at Trafalgar Square, making a breath-taking impression with its immense size and impressive aura. The crowds which attended the opening ceremony were huge, said by one British Pathé commentator to be the largest in London since the Coronation in 1937.⁴⁸

Such officially sanctioned publicity was complemented by the first-hand experience of millions of Britons because it was impossible in huge tracts of the country to be

⁴⁷ See, for example, the House of Lords debate of 9 February 1944, when the Bishop strongly articulated his moral opposition to bombing: '[...]There must be a fair balance between the means employed and the purpose achieved. To obliterate a whole town because certain portions contain military and industrial establishments is to reject the balance.' Hansard online (last accessed 12 January 2014), <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1944/feb/09/bombing-policy>. For the Bishop of Chichester in the context of other critics of bombing, see Richard Overy, 'Pacifism and the Blitz, 1940-1941', *Past and Present*, 219 (2013), pp. 229-230.

⁴⁸ See the British Pathé film of the events centred on the Lancaster in Trafalgar Square, 'RAF Wings for Victory Week', film issued 11 March 1943, British Pathé website (last accessed 28 December 2013): <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/wings-for-victory-week>

unaware of the war that Bomber Command was fighting. Its aircraft were highly visible on daytime practice runs and extremely audible at night when they flew out to Europe, many hundreds at a time. Noel Coward's 1944 poem, 'Lie in the Dark and Listen', vividly evokes the stirring nature of the bomber war to those who witnessed it:

Lie in the dark and listen.
It's clear tonight so they're flying high,
Hundreds of them, thousands perhaps,
Riding the icy, moonlit sky.⁴⁹

It was well known that the Command's losses were extremely heavy, with the one o'clock news on the BBC accurately announcing the number of aircraft missing from the previous night's operations, these figures having been supplied to the BBC by the Air Ministry. RAF wives and sweethearts sometimes told of listening to these figures being announced. For instance, Joan Layne's diary recorded of the BBC broadcast of 24 September 1943: 'I had listened to the 1.0 PM news, heard that our 'planes had raided Mannheim and that thirty-two were missing, but not for a second did I think that yours could be one of them.' Her husband, Wally Layne, had been shot down the previous night, and she received the telegram informing her that he was missing at 1.15 just after listening to the BBC news.⁵⁰

The large numbers of aircrew in Bomber Command meant that most communities in Scotland, Wales and England had some sort of personal connexion with the bomber war. Community involvement was very much in evidence when it became known that Joan's husband, Wally, was missing. *The Grantham Journal* published a

⁴⁹ Noel Coward, 'Lie in the Dark and Listen', 1944, Barry Day (ed.), *The Complete Verse of Noel Coward* (Bloomsbury, London, 2011), pp.169-170.

⁵⁰ Layne family archives, Joan Layne diary, 9 November 1943 – 9 May 1945, entry for 9 November 1943.

photograph and a short sombre report.⁵¹ When news came through on 9 November 1943 that Wally was a POW, another photograph and a rather more upbeat report appeared. Joan recorded in her diary how she was stopped countless times in the street by people who had heard the good news. She also received a very large number of letters, and a stream of phone calls and visitors.⁵²

Local papers also reported when aircrew achieved commissioned rank, were awarded decorations, were killed, or very occasionally returned as successful evaders. The latter could make the national newspapers; for example, on 13 February 1944 *The Sunday Graphic* in its 'High Spot of the War' column covered the surprise return of Flight Sergeant John Billows to claim his young WAAF bride.⁵³ Similarly, in the Dominions, local and national newspapers reported the doings and the fate of 'our boys', whilst a Lancaster aircraft, flown out from Britain by a tour-expired all-Australian crew, travelled around Australia on a fund-raising exercise from May 1943.⁵⁴

To summarise, there was great public sympathy and engagement with the aircrew of Bomber Command, and this translated into an intense concern for the missing, both during the war and afterwards. It would have been catastrophic for public relations for the RAF to ignore the problem of the missing, nor did the RAF show any inclination to do so, once early doubts about its exact position were resolved towards the close of 1941.

⁵¹ Layne family archives, press cutting from *The Grantham Journal*, no date, but probably 28 October 1943 as it is referred to in a letter from a friend, Bib Brocklesby, to Joan Layne on that date.

⁵² Layne family archives, Joan Layne diary, entries for 10-11 November 1943.

⁵³ 'High Spot of the War', *The Sunday Graphic*, 13 February 1944.

⁵⁴ The all-Australian crew was that of Flight Lieutenant Peter Isaacson. There was no need for a similar expedition for Canada as some Lancaster aircraft were built there and many British aircrew trained in Canada, including, of course, those in the RCAF. For the aircrew training programme in Canada, see, for example, Allan D English, *The Cream of the Crop, Canadian Aircrew 1939-1945* (McGill-Queens University Press, Montreal and Kingston, Canada, 1996) pp.55-60.

The way in which these doubts were resolved once again illustrates the duality of RAF motives. As was seen earlier, the resources dedicated to missing research increased from small beginnings at the start of the war in a series of leaps and bounds in response to the escalating scale of the problem. In October 1941, at one of the crisis points, the Head of the Casualty Branch, Group Captain R Burges, wrote to the Directorate of Personal Services, making the case that the Casualty Branch had no clearly defined brief on what it should do about unresolved cases, that is to say when aircrew were missing. The Branch's work load was increasing all the time, and its main responsibility was dealing with the administrative side of new casualties, including informing the next of kin. What, then, should be happening about the missing, research on their cases being very time-consuming? Burges's memo was forwarded to Air Marshal Sir Philip Babington, who was Air Member for Personnel at that time. Babington in turn passed it on to the Permanent Under Secretary for Air and the Parliamentary Under Secretary for Air. Babington's own position was undecided but he felt that perhaps the best policy would be to present the families with whatever evidence had been collected and leave the burden of actually investigating the matter to them. The Permanent Under Secretary, Sir Arthur Street, replied that 'it would be bad for morale if the idea were to get abroad that the Air Ministry was disinterested in the fate of people who were no further use to the Service'. The Parliamentary Under Secretary, Lord Sherwood, was of the same opinion.⁵⁵ This exchange crystallised official policy on the search and led to the establishment of the MRS, and later of the MRES.

Things had moved on a great deal by the time that Burges once again drew attention to a matter of critical importance, the need for an increase in the MRES establishment after hostilities had ended in Europe. After Burges had submitted a detailed report on 12 July 1945, the matter was discussed in a meeting held in the

⁵⁵ Stuart Hadaway, *Missing Believed Killed, The Royal Air Force and the Search for Missing Aircrew, 1939-1952* (Pen and Sword, Barnsley, 2008), pp.34-35.

Air Member for Personnel's room on 26 July.⁵⁶ Sir John Slessor, then the AMP, chaired the meeting. Amongst those present were Burges, other members of the Air Ministry Casualty Branch, and, representing the MRES, its Commanding Officer, Wing Commander E F Hawkins. The subsequent Minutes began with a statement of what had been decided at the meeting, using the circulated Agenda as its basis:

1. 'Does public policy require Missing Research?'
2. 'Has [the] Air Ministry an obligation to elucidate the fate of "missing" Air Force personnel?'

It was agreed that the answer to both these questions was undoubtedly "Yes".

3. 'If the answer to 1 and 2 is "Yes", how long ought to be allowed for the completion of the work?'

It was agreed to aim at the completion of the task in one year.

4. 'Is the present establishment of the Missing Research and Enquiry Service adequate to achieve the object in 3?'

It was agreed that the present establishment was manifestly inadequate.

This terse but highly effective summary demonstrates clearly the logic behind the RAF's subsequent actions. What was also agreed at the meeting was that the problem was unique to the RAF and that the RAF wished to take full responsibility for it. Liaison with the Army search organisations and the Control Commission for

⁵⁶ TNA, AIR20/9050, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, Group Captain R Burges, 'Missing Research and Enquiry Service', report, 12 July 1945.

Germany would take place, but it was recognised that these were 'not concerned with the RAF missing problem which requires special and different treatment'.⁵⁷

Now that the increase in resources had been agreed, those involved began to canvass additional support for the MRES. Slessor wrote directly to Air Chief Marshal Sir Sholto Douglas, the AOC of the British Air Forces of Occupation in Germany. It was a personal letter, in which Slessor addressed Douglas by his Christian name and signed it 'Yours ever J C Slessor'. The letter began 'This is a preliminary warning letter, the object of which is to enlist your support and assistance in what I regard as a most important activity, namely Missing Research and Enquiry'. Having given Douglas the latest figures on the missing, and having acknowledged that very few of that number could still be alive, he went on:

But relatives naturally wish to get information of the fate of missing aircrew, and unless we can show that everything reasonably possible is being done to trace them, we shall be failing in our duty and, moreover, shall undoubtedly be subject to severe political pressure.

Effectively Slessor was asking Douglas for his paternal interest in and protection of the units in the Low Countries and Germany, which would be under Douglas for administrative purposes. As he told Douglas, Slessor was also seeking the same paternal protection for the MRES from another very high-ranking friend: 'I am asking Bobby George to father the one in France and enclose a copy of my letter to him.'⁵⁸ Bobby George was Air Vice Marshal Sir Robert Allingham George, the Air Attaché in Paris.

As Air Member for Personnel, Slessor's personal commitment was crucial. Further down the RAF chain of command, the Air Ministry Casualty Branch and the MRES

⁵⁷ TNA, AIR20/9050, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, Minutes of a meeting on the MRES chaired by the AMP, 26 July 1945.

⁵⁸ TNA, AIR 20/9050, Air Ministry, Sir John Slessor to Sir Sholto Douglas, letter, 10 August 1945.

were blessed with a number of similarly committed individuals, who would prove to be highly effective leaders. Of these, the most notable in the Casualty Branch were its head, Group Captain R Burges, formerly of the Royal Navy, and Squadron Leader A P LeM Sinkinson, Officer in Charge of Missing Research and author of a number of memoranda and reports.⁵⁹ In the MRES, the key figure was Group Captain E F Hawkins, whilst one of his most valuable staff members was Squadron Leader William Mace Mair.

As has already been seen, it was Burges who put forward the lucid arguments which at various crisis points ensured that missing research was taken seriously by his superiors. Always clear-sighted, he recognised that the search must be conducted as quickly as possible because the evidence trail was getting weaker by the day. In his pivotal July 1945 report, he wrote of the need to increase the establishment at least five-fold because the existing structure would take five years 'if the clues last as long: they are getting harder to come by already'. 'Five years is too long' was heavily underlined. He listed the consequences of delaying: 'local interest flags, clues become obliterated and next-of-kin embittered'. His proposal for hugely increasing the existing establishment, he realised, might be thought 'far-fetched', but 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'.⁶⁰ This was a very novel way of looking back upon the immense expenditure of resources on the strategic bombing campaign.

The Commanding Officer of the MRES, Group Captain Hawkins, would often be singled out for special praise, especially for his patient work in getting the best out of the sometimes difficult relationship with the Army. An Air Ministry Casualty Branch report noted:

⁵⁹ The detail on Burges's former career in the Royal Navy is in Hadaway, *Missing Believed Killed*, p.24.

⁶⁰ TNA, AIR20/9050, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, Group Captain R Burges, 'Missing Research and Enquiry Service', report, 12 July 1945.

Relations between Army Graves Services and our own people have been most sedulously and successfully fostered by Group Captain Hawkins. This is vital. Fortunately Group Captain Hawkins has a peculiarly happy flair for establishing useful friendships – an invaluable quality in his particular post.⁶¹

This particular Casualty Branch report was undated, but clearly written sometime between October 1947 and February 1948 as it anticipated the winding down of the MRES. Like other memoranda of that period originating from the Casualty Branch, it suggested that Hawkins should be recommended for a high executive post with the Imperial War Graves Commission when his MRES work was completed and he left the Air Force. With the mixture of genuine benevolence and pragmatism which characterised the search, Hawkins was being recommended partly because he was eminently qualified for such a post but also because 'he would undoubtedly watch the interests of the Royal Air Force very carefully'.⁶²

Hawkins' flair for diplomacy was put to its greatest test with the Russians. In another section of the same report, the author described the work of No. 4 MREU, Berlin detachment:

Its province is the Russian Zone of Germany. Our 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. What authority has been given was given to the Army in the first

⁶¹ TNA, AIR 20/9050, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, unsigned, 'Report on the MRES, North-West Europe', undated but clearly between October 1947 and February 1948.

⁶² Ibid.

place, but the OC, MRES, has managed to get permission for RAF teams to do the greater part of the searching.⁶³

Squadron Leader Mair, who had begun as OC of the very first MRES field unit, based in Paris, was by January 1948 the Senior Officer in Charge of Exhumations and Identification. His work was recognised as outstanding and he was recommended for an OBE. The citation described Mair's total devotion to the task and how much of the success of the MRES had been due to his 'foresight, planning and energy'. It concluded:

The Missing Research Enquiry Units have a thankless and at time horrible task to perform but their importance cannot be too strongly emphasised. Squadron Leader Mair's work is particularly noteworthy.⁶⁴

Mair was a Canadian and a member of the RCAF. He was one of the MRES's large contingent of Dominion staff, the involvement of the Dominions being an additional factor in the high level of commitment to the search. In the meeting to discuss the vital expansion of the MRES in July 1945, the Air Member for Personnel commented that it would be desirable for him to write to the heads of the Dominions Overseas HQs 'pointing out the size of the problem [...] and calling for an adequate contribution from the Dominion Overseas Air Forces in search officers, clerks and drivers'.⁶⁵ This was agreed at a further meeting at the beginning of August, in which the following figures on the proportions of the missing by Air Force were quoted:

⁶³ Ibid. There were reciprocal arrangements between the Allies for the care of the dead, but the Russians were often very difficult about the practical implications of this. See following chapter.

⁶⁴ Hadaway, *Missing Believed Killed*, pp.44-45.

⁶⁵ TNA, AIR20/9050, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, Minutes of a meeting on the MRES chaired by the AMP, 26 July 1945.

RAF	- 69%
RAAF	- 7%
RCAF	- 17%
RNZAF	- 3%
SAAF	-
(Allies except US)	- 4% ⁶⁶

The Dominion Air Forces, whilst their aircrew had been under the wartime operational control of the RAF, had always retained separate mechanisms for dealing with casualties.⁶⁷ They understandably had an interest in the search for their own men, and the MRES would act in consultation with them over the search. For example, Missing Research Memorandum MRM No. 21, dated 5 April 1946, contained a statement of policy approved by the Director of Personal Services, which had also been approved by the Dominion Air Forces' HQs in London.⁶⁸

The percentages of the missing by Air Force which were given above were still being quoted one year later, when they appeared in a memorandum dated 24 July 1946, written by Hawkins. The memorandum also gave the breakdown by Air Force of the MRES, showing how many men each Air Force was contributing. The figures for the search officers and their percentage of the total establishment of 172 officers were as follows:

⁶⁶ TNA, AIR 20/9050, Air Ministry, Minutes of meeting on the MRES by a Committee appointed by the AMP, 2 August 1945.

⁶⁷ Dominion Casualty Branches took the primary role in correspondence with the relatives, although the initial information about a loss would come from the airman's RAF squadron. See, for example, Australian National Archives, RAAF, Francis Eugene McEgan personnel file, correspondence from RAAF Overseas Headquarters, Kingsway, London, 1943-1944.

⁶⁸ TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', Part V, Appendix D2, Group Captain R Burges, Missing Research Memorandum MRM No. 21, 5 April 1946.

RAF	106 (62%)
RAAF	22 (13%)
RCAF	30 (17%)
RNZAF	14 (8%)

It may seem from the above breakdown that the RAAF and RNZAF were bearing an undue burden, but there was also an establishment of 300 airmen who were not of officer rank and of these 260 came from the RAF and 40 from the RCAF.⁶⁹

Although the RAF's search was motivated by very powerful factors — moral duty, and a concern for public relations and Service morale — it was nonetheless conducted with cool common sense. There was a realistic acknowledgment that it was extremely unlikely that the fate of all the missing would be discovered. The Missing Research Memoranda, the MRMs, contained strict guidelines on how the search must be carried out and what exactly the MRES's responsibilities were. In addition, a paper dated 5 April 1946, entitled 'Missing Research Policy', set out the guidelines in the clearest terms. It is worth quoting at some length from this key document:

The Air Ministry is impressed with the interest in the problem of searching for traces of missing airmen which is taken by the public generally and especially by those who have lost relatives and friends whose fate remains uncertain. The anxiety of the bereaved, who have remained so long in doubt, is fully appreciated, and their wish to know the full story of

⁶⁹ TNA, AIR 20/9050, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, Group Captain E F Hawkins, memorandum on the MRES, 24 July 1946.

the casualty is sympathetically understood. It is, nonetheless, most undesirable to foster their desire for complete information when it must, with the comparatively limited means available, often fall short of realisation, and may never be fulfilled. It is obvious that to search with full effect for personnel who became missing during a war of nearly six years duration which covered the whole continent of Europe, would require an organisation comparable in size to the whole Air Force – a project quite outside the realm of practical politics. [...]

To expect to search Europe yard by yard, whatever the type of country and terrain, whether wooded or mountainous or flat pastureland, would be unreasonable, nor with the means available would time permit of even a limited attempt to do so.⁷⁰

Instead the search teams operated by areas clearly defined along national or local boundaries, publicising the search and enlisting the help of local organisations such as the police or mayor's office, this method having been determined upon as the one which made the optimum use of manpower and vehicles. The HQs controlling each group of search teams were established at suitable provincial centres where they could get stores and rations from British or Allied formations within reasonable distance; this also saved time and expense.⁷¹

The MRES took a top-down approach, firstly using the information dossiers provided by the Air Ministry Casualty Branch, then investigating all police and local reports, and lastly conducting 'a sweep' which ensured that no known crashes or graves within the current search area were overlooked. Only when there was extremely strong evidence to believe that an unreported crash or grave lay in that search area was a hunt conducted yard by yard. Thus Europe was covered by

⁷⁰ TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', Part V, Appendix D2, P.4 (Cas), 'Missing Research Policy', 5 April 1946.

⁷¹ Ibid.

sections with very little deviation for individual cases which would have been 'wasteful of manpower, time and money'.⁷²

Professionalism was the guiding factor rather than undisciplined enthusiasm. The procedures were carefully planned and thought out, and as the search officers learned on the job so this was translated into revised and more efficient techniques and procedures. The MRES aimed at uniformity in the presentation of facts, subject to variations due to local conditions. Detailed forms were created and duplicated to all relevant parties. Standardised maps were used so that all map references tallied, reference copies of the master maps being kept in Room 503 of the Casualty Branch at 73-77 Oxford Street.⁷³ The Missing Research Memoranda were numbered MRM No. 1, No. 2, and so forth, and sometimes a later MRM called for an earlier MRM to be read in conjunction; taken together, they constituted a complete set of operating instructions. Meanwhile, weekly reports kept tabs on progress by recording mileage, officers and vehicles, the number of enquiries completed and individual cases resolved, together with the number of graves notified to the Army Graves Service, and to Allied and other Services. RAF search officers had a duty to inform the Graves Service of all unregistered military graves of any Service or nationality which they came across during the course of their work, this information being tendered on Army Form W.3372.⁷⁴

Another element of the MRES's professionalism concerned the selection and control of staff. The MRES searchers were handpicked volunteers. Importantly, they were also surviving ex-aircrew who felt a strong degree of involvement with the task. They were chosen for their social skills and ability to look after themselves in foreign countries. The earliest recruits for the initial work in France (before the service was dramatically expanded and necessarily the selection criteria were lowered) had lived

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid but Appendix A, Group Captain R Burges, Missing Research Memorandum MRM No. 1, 20 July 1945.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

and worked in the country before the war. Language skills would always be very much in demand as it meant less need for interpreters; however, many successful search officers did not speak the language of the countries in which they were searching.⁷⁵

The above prerequisites for a search officer, as detailed by Group Captain Hawkins, paint a picture of something of a paragon. A somewhat more tarnished image can be found in the memoirs of Duncan Torrance, who worked with a Graves Concentration Unit in Germany in 1947. Torrance's memoirs were based upon a diary which he kept at that period, and thus are that exceptionally rare thing, a private contemporary account of those engaged in the care for the dead programme. Of the RAF search officers he wrote:

The RAF in Saal had very little to do. I was ashamed of their conduct as occupiers of enemy territory. Probably the worst behaved was the Squadron Leader. [...] He was entertaining German women on mess rations, using WD transport to transport them, and holding drunken orgies in the mess which lasted until between eight and ten in the morning.

He used to break his own speed limit with his jeep coming down the drive to the mess. One Sunday afternoon he took a jeep into the town at two o'clock. He was wearing pyjamas, the officer with him was wearing civvies. They brought two German girls back to the mess.

Another night I caught him in my headlamps, sitting on a bridge in the town, with a German girl and a bottle of gin. Many of these women slept regularly at the mess.

As a youth, Torrance appears to have been somewhat prim and straitlaced, and at the same time probably rather envious of the glamorous ex-aircrew. Old age and maturity caused him to feel deeply ashamed of the above comments. He now

⁷⁵ Ibid, but main report, p.34.

understood the intense pressure which the aircrew had been under, 'these were wonderfully brave men', and speculated that some of the search officers may have been suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.⁷⁶

To return to the official paperwork. The guidelines for the search officers' work were strict. For example, they were allowed to spend money, 'incidental expenses', on giving drinks or meals to informants, but there were very tight procedures for reclaiming the money and strict limits on what could be spent in one day. On 5 December 1945, to take one time point, the limit was set at a maximum of 5 shillings a day in the local currencies of Norway, Denmark, Holland and Belgium.⁷⁷ Expenditure on wreaths for funerals and public ceremonies held in memory of aircrew was likewise strictly governed; they were to be kept:

simple in design and modest in appearance. Any temptation to match, or outdo, ornate tributes provided by others, must be resisted. Expenditure must be kept as low as possible. Expenditure in excess of £1 per wreath will not normally be reimbursed.⁷⁸

Meanwhile, the unit commanders were to watch out for any signs of deterioration in the morale of search officers, 'an important consideration when one remembers the

⁷⁶ In the published version of Torrance's *From Desert to Danube*, these comments were excised (they would have appeared around p.121 if in their original place). They appeared in the form quoted above in his internet version of 11 November 2005 (Chapter 15b, 'Back to Exhumations and Crosses'). Duncan Leitch Torrance, *From Desert to Danube*, BBC, 'WW2 People's War' (last accessed 31/07/2015): <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/categories/c55463/>. As the comments came from a contemporary diary, it is felt they are too valuable to ignore.

⁷⁷ TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', Part IV, Appendix D, Group Captain R Burges, Missing Research Memorandum MRM No.13, 5 December 1945.

⁷⁸ Ibid, Appendix E, A Beckess, S.7 (Cas), Missing Research Memorandum MRM No. 28, 18 December 1946.

unusual and often very unpleasant duties involved', and they were advised to provide the search officers with relief periods spent at HQ where they could work instead on the necessary paperwork.⁷⁹

Alertness of mind and precision in reporting were amongst the key attributes required of the searchers. As MRM No. 25 stated:

27. Your findings are the last pieces of the puzzle in many important cases. In others they are a clue to the finding and identification of a body that may have been sought in vain many miles away.

28. Find everything possible. Report clearly and exactly what you find. Remember that your most discouragingly sparse report may contain just one apparently insignificant item that will enable [the] Air Ministry to close a case.⁸⁰

Because of the RAF's professionalism and focus, there was inevitably friction with the Army, who, it was felt, did not have the same priorities or driving force. Burges's report of 12 July 1945 demonstrated the RAF's great resistance to the War Office ('which is following rather tardily some 8 months behind us') and its attempts to take direction of the entire search operation. The RAF had always resisted this pressure:

seeing that the War Office entirely fail to realise our problems, and 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.

⁷⁹ Ibid, but main report, p.34.

⁸⁰ Ibid, Part V, Appendix F1, Group Captain R Burges, Missing Research Memorandum MRM No. 25, 1945 (no month or day).

The sheer dilatoriness of the War Office had already proved a cause of great frustration. The RAF had agreed to an inter-Service search team in Italy where military and air operations had been closely related, and in May 1945 the RAF part of the search had been placed under the control of HQ MAAF, the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces. However, two months later, nothing had been done, matters still being under discussion with the Army authorities. (The RAF soon revoked this arrangement and instead sent in a dedicated unit, No. 5 MREU.) The probability that the War Office would continue to be tardy in its methods and the conviction that it completely failed to grasp the RAF's problems were, Burges wrote, 'sufficient grounds for independent action'. This was particularly so in North-West Europe where the greatest losses had occurred. Burges summarised the position as being that the Army could have little interest in the RAF's special requirements, and similarly that the Air Ministry was not 'particularly interested in the search for groups of graves in the neighbourhood of Army prison camps or intense military operations'.⁸¹ In other words, due to the very different campaigns which they had fought in North-West Europe, the interests of the two Services diverged markedly.

What emerges from this Burges report, as it does in many other missing research documents, is how clannish was the relationship of the RAF to its dead. It did not want Army interference not only because it had no faith in the Army's methods, but also because it was intrinsically felt that the RAF dead 'belonged' to their own Service. The reasons for the 'family' feeling which appears to have run through all levels of the RAF have already been explored. However, some of its manifestations may perhaps seem rather surprising. For example, Hawkins at one stage proposed the advisability of separate RAF cemeteries or RAF sections in British War Cemeteries. He explained his reasoning as follows:

⁸¹ TNA, AIR20/9050, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, Group Captain R Burges, 'Missing Research and Enquiry Service', report, 12 July 1945.

This would be desirable because of the special features of registration of aircrew graves – the burying of crews together, and the difficulties of commemoration when two or more of the crew are unidentifiable.⁸²

The second part of the sentence referred to the unique RAF feeling that a crew belonged together even in death. For the RAF, the primary unit was the crew, not the Squadron, nor even the Command. The Army with its bias towards the Regiments with their long and proud history had apparently little understanding of the RAF's entirely different point of view.⁸³ The RAF's determination that the crews would lie together is reflected throughout the MRES's work, and it continued after the MRES was disbanded. For instance, in one late case at the end of 1950, the discovery was made that two members of a crew had been buried in separate cemeteries, one at Hotton and one at Rheinberg. The RAF requested that the Imperial War Graves Commission transfer one to the other even though neither man could be identified.⁸⁴

The RAF did succeed in keeping the search for its missing largely under its own control, but the responsibilities for exhumations, reburials and registrations continued to belong to the Army, an arrangement with which the Air Ministry Casualty Branch was often unhappy. In the small things it was considered that the Army did not do well; there was, for example, intense criticism of Army photographs of graves – 'many [of these] have been so badly produced that it has been inadvisable to pass them on to relatives'.⁸⁵ In the hugely significant things, the Army also failed to meet

⁸² TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', p.141.

⁸³ For more details of the Army's strong attachment to regiments and their insignia when it came to the burial and memorialisation of the dead, see Chapter Seven.

⁸⁴ TNA, AIR2/9910, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, illegible signature (possibly K C Stole), 'Missing Research Activities, October to December 1950', report, 3 January 1951.

⁸⁵ TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', p.142.

the RAF's expectations. In October 1947, Sinkinson wrote of the serious time-lag between the notification to the Army of a successful identification of a case by the MRES and the registration of that grave by the Army, the RAF not having the authority to mark the graves. The RAF accepted that this time-lag was due to the accumulation of work and shortage of staff in the Graves Service, but nonetheless resented the knock-on repercussions. As Sinkinson wrote:

Attempts are being made to shorten the delay, which causes great embarrassment to the Air Ministry, especially when relatives, having been told by us that their son or husband lies in a grave in a particular cemetery, visit it, and find it still marked unknown.⁸⁶

In the field, individual Army personnel could also be provokingly sedate in their proceedings. The highly motivated attitude of the MRES field officers was of particular value in that trickiest and most problematical of all areas, the territory under the control of the Russians. In a report written between October 1947 and February 1948 by someone senior in the Air Ministry Casualty Branch, the unnamed author wrote:

The [MRES] Searcher Officers themselves are keen and enthusiastic. None of them are exceptionally prepossessing, but all have the vital spark – real pride in their rather unattractive task. [...] Russian Conducting Officers (who must accompany our teams as a condition of search) make special efforts to go with RAF as opposed to Army teams: this is because the young ex-aircrew in them make efforts to be interesting and to converse, whereas their Army counterparts, who are mostly elderly ex-

⁸⁶ TNA, AIR 20/9050, Air Ministry, S/L A P LeM Sinkinson, Minute Sheet sent to AMP, 2 October 1947.

rankers, find conversation in any language too strenuous and therefore sit in their transport like lumps on a log until the long day is over.⁸⁷

The phrase 'elderly ex-rankers' refers to the fact that most Graves Service personnel had fought in the First World War, had lived a civilian life in between the wars, and when they rejoined the Army for the Second World War were past the age of combat service. It hints almost at a generational gap, with the young aircrew who belonged to the modern, glamorous Service rather looking down upon their older Army counterparts. The age difference may also explain the RAF search officers' greater share of energy and enthusiasm, not to mention the occasional bout of impetuosity which sometimes imperilled relationships with the Russians.⁸⁸

In 1949, close to the end of the search, Hawkins wrote a long and detailed report on the MRES's operations. The most telling section of this report apropos RAF-Army relations was Part VII, 'Some Recommendations for the Future'. It was Hawkins' conviction that the RAF should have its own Graves Service; he believed that it would save a great deal of time in any future conflict if the RAF's missing research units could carry out the exhumations, reburials and registration of 'their own RAF dead'. Hawkins was scrupulously even-handed, but nonetheless it is possible to read between the lines of his report and taste the infuriation which the Army had sometimes caused. Hawkins' view was that if the RAF had its own Graves Service, the effects could only be beneficial:

The delays occasioned by having to wait for an exhumation officer from the nearest Graves Unit, by the interminable processes of registration of

⁸⁷ TNA, AIR 20/9050, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, unsigned, 'Report on the MRES, North-West Europe', undated but clearly between October 1947 and February 1948.

⁸⁸ See the following chapter for details of one RAF search officer, whose keenness to solve the identity of a missing airman led to him being expelled from the Zone and his Commanding Officer notified that he would not be admitted in future.

graves through the local [GCU], Graves Registration HQ, and finally A.G.13 War Office, would be avoided; many errors which inevitably creep in through repetition and recopying of grave numbers and other details would disappear if the MR Unit conducted its own exhumations and registrations and communicated its findings direct to the Air Ministry.⁸⁹

The RAF's conviction that only the MRES could properly conduct the search fuelled its reluctance to close down this highly important service. The end date for winding up the MRES was constantly moving; however, by 1947 the preliminary disbandment began with the closure in July of No. 1 MREU and in October of No. 2 MREU. Dates were agreed for the other units to close between February and May 1948, only for a new target date of 30 September 1948 to be set (a deadline which itself would be exceeded); this was mainly due to the scale of the problem in Germany, where 9,000 cases were outstanding in the British Zone alone.⁹⁰ The decision on when to close the MRES was a difficult balancing act, weighing cost against the probability of success and taking into account the effect upon the relatives of men who still remained untraced.⁹¹ Increasingly, however, it was the most difficult and isolated cases which remained, and pursuing them was becoming prohibitively expensive pro-rata. The Air Ministry Casualty Branch began to plan for the day when 'the Berlin detachment and the body of Liaison Officers are the sole relics of MRES'. Then, as always, the concern would be to keep matters as far as possible in the hands of the RAF, and for this reason it was thought highly necessary that the remaining staff should be answerable to someone from the RAF:

⁸⁹ TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', p.141.

⁹⁰ TNA, AIR 20/9050, Air Ministry, Signed A.H., AMP's office, memorandum, 9 April 1948.

⁹¹ TNA, AIR 20/9050, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, unsigned, 'Report on the MRES, North-West Europe', undated but clearly between October 1947 and February 1948.

for discipline, administration and results [...] The field workers would still deal direct with [the Air Ministry Casualty Branch] but they must have one RAF master on the spot.⁹²

No. 4 was the last of the five MREUs to be disbanded. Together with MRES HQ, it was finally disbanded on 30 September 1949, 'leaving behind a small rear party'.

This rear party, known as the RAF Graves Service, was established on 1st October 1949. It comprised six officers in Germany and two liaison officers in France who were attached respectively to the American Graves Registration Command HQ in Paris and to the Imperial War Graves Commission local HQ at Arras. The RAF Graves Service is continuing the work of missing research and graves registration, and hopes to complete operations, so far as is humanly possible, by the end of the summer of 1950.⁹³

As the Western Europe Graves Service Directorate had been disbanded one year earlier, the RAF was now the most prominent Service in North-West Europe working on behalf of the British military dead.⁹⁴ This could lead to odd incidents such as the June 1949 visit by the relatives of a soldier buried in Calvados to Flight Lieutenant Prior, the RAF Liaison Officer at American Graves Registration Command Headquarters. The mother doubted her son's identity. Prior could do nothing to help, noting in his report that he had referred the relatives to the War Office Casualty

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ TNA, AIR2/10031, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, unsigned, 'Missing Research – Origin and Development', report, date stamped 29 March 1950.

⁹⁴ TNA, WO 267/610, BAOR HQ, Western Europe Graves Service Directorate, Quarterly Historical Report, quarter ending 30 June 1948, 'KITE No. 3186', Appendix, 6 September 1948.

Branch in London and the Imperial War Graves Commission in London because 'I had nothing to do with War Office Records'.⁹⁵

In addition to the RAF Graves Service mentioned above, the Missing Research Graves Registration Sections, the MRGRS, were also created; all these units had a short lifespan and were fully disbanded by 21 October 1950. Now only two Missing Research Officers remained on the Continent, Flight Lieutenant Hughes in Berlin and Flight Lieutenant Massé, who had a dual role as Liaison Officer working with the Americans at Liège and the Imperial War Graves Commission at Arras. The tight control which was now being exercised on RAF missing research is reflected in the fact that the work of each man was under periodical review. However, their retention was easy to justify according to a report in January 1951 on missing research activities. The report stated that Hughes's work had 'universal ramifications' as could be seen in the attached table of body recoveries from 27 June 1950 to 31 December 1950:

⁹⁵ TNA, AIR55/62, Air Ministry, Liaison with DDGRE and AGRC, Flight Lieutenant Prior, 'Weekly Report', 30 May-4 June 1949.

RAF	41
RCAF	13
RAAF	10
RNZAF	2
Unknown Airman	3
Army	22
Navy	1
USA	3
Total	95

As for Flight Lieutenant Massé, he was continuing in his dual role because ‘his value has again been stressed by the Colonel Commanding the American Graves Registration Detachment’ who had submitted a plea for Massé’s retention. As the report pointed out, the liaison with the Americans was not just one-sided, as proved by the recent American identification of Flying Officer Anthony at Dubika and his reburial by them in a Belgrade British Cemetery.⁹⁶

The RAF’s motives for its long, difficult and expensive search were both moral and practical, but there were no particularly clear-cut lines between the two. It makes more sense to see the motivations as dual-aspect; for instance, the genuine concern for the relatives of the missing resulted in a course of action which could only benefit

⁹⁶ TNA, AIR2/9910, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, illegible signature (possibly K C Stole), ‘Missing Research Activities, October to December 1950’, report, 3 January 1951. The body was that of Flying Officer Roland Anthony, who had been killed on 31 July 1944. Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Roland Anthony page (last accessed 18/11/15): <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2224007/ANTHONY,%20ROLAND>

the RAF's public profile. The Service's professionalism during the search was also dual-aspect; it encompassed great humanity but was based upon common sense, a realisation that it was completely impracticable to search Europe inch by inch. Economy was a further factor. Whilst the deadline for the search was ultimately extended by more than four years after the initial vastly over-optimistic target date of the summer of 1946, eventually the search was wound up for practical reasons when there were still thousands of men missing.⁹⁷

The RAF did not go into the war well-prepared for what became the immense problem of the missing. Resources for missing research were inadequate at the outset, and as the size of Bomber Command increased exponentially during the war, the magnitude of the problem was forever increasing. However, the Service learnt quickly from its mistakes; at the various crisis points when the gulf between resources and the problem was brought to the attention of high-ranking officers, action was rapidly taken to improve matters.

It took time at higher levels to define the exact degree of responsibility which the RAF bore to its lost airmen. Once this was clarified, however, the RAF showed a very strong commitment to the task. Whilst there was certainly an element of self-interest, there was also a genuine crusading belief, prevalent not only in the Air Ministry Casualty Branch but running throughout the Service, that 'the debt of "the many" to "the few"' must be paid.⁹⁸ This belief found a willing echo in the MRES search officers who were all ex-aircrew. As will be seen in the next chapter, the search in the field was beset with colossal difficulties to which ingenious solutions were often found. The professionalism which the RAF showed in its work on behalf of the missing reflected its general ethos as a modern Service, one which was run

⁹⁷ In the seminal meeting of July 1945 the Minutes note: 'It was agreed to aim at the completion of the task in one year.' TNA, AIR20/9050, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, Minutes of a meeting on the MRES chaired by the AMP, 26 July 1945.

⁹⁸ TNA, AIR20/9050, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, Group Captain R Burges, 'Missing Research and Enquiry Service', report, 12 July 1945.

upon specialisation and professionalism, and which was geared towards rewarding those qualities.

Chapter Four — The RAF and Missing Research in the Field

The RAF's quest to find the missing in Europe began in France in January 1945 and expanded out to other countries during the following four months. It rapidly emerged that the difficulties of the work had been greatly underestimated. The acknowledgement that the search could not succeed without massive further investment led to the increase in resources described in the previous chapter. However, the complexities of field work meant that the search was far more protracted than had been forecast even with improved resources.

The focus of this chapter is upon the major problems which the RAF encountered during field work and what the solutions were — when they could be found. A particular emphasis will be placed upon the fact that the search often took on a multinational quality. It was the extremely comprehensive nature of RAF records which had made the search possible in the first place, the Air Ministry Casualty Branch and the MRES possessing a complete list of everyone who was missing, together with all known information about them.¹ The Army then provided the framework in which the necessary exhumations and registrations took place. However, the RAF's hunt for its missing would never have been successful if its personnel had not fully understood the incalculable value of resources outside the British military establishment. In Britain, many civilian organisations were used, such as the Press, the College of Heralds, and two laundry journals. Nonetheless, the major input undoubtedly came from national organisations and individuals overseas. The MRES would, for example, make use of United States expertise, the Americans being leaders in the field of missing research. It was the RAF's flexibility as to

¹ This was due to the highly comprehensive nature of RAF records at squadron level; each operation was recorded in the Operational Record Book (ORB), with a list of all aircraft flying, the members of their crew, the bomb load, and the time of take-off. See, for example, TNA, AIR 27/768, Air Ministry, 97 Squadron, Operations Record Book, 1 January 1944 – 31 May 1945.

sources of information as well as its intense determination to succeed which led to at least some evidence being discovered about the fate of 84 per cent of the 41,881 men missing at the end of the war. This very considerable achievement will be summarised at the end of this chapter.²

RAF missing research in the field got off to a slow start because the MRES was beginning virtually from scratch. Professionalism and efficiency improved markedly as time went on, but by Group Captain Hawkins' estimate it took nearly two years to get a really competent Service together and it was late 1946 before things were running smoothly.³

Widespread war damage was another prime factor in slowing down progress in the early years. The situation in Europe changed markedly from January 1945 when the first field unit, No. 1 Section, began work in France, to September 1949 when MRES HQ with its last remaining unit was disbanded in Germany. As the work of European repair, reorganisation, and reconciliation progressed, work in the field became easier in some respects; however, the actual process of identification became, conversely, more difficult because of such factors as the fading of local memory and the decay of personal effects buried with the deceased.

² The missing figures (also detailed in the previous chapter) come from TNA, AIR2/9910, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, illegible signature (possibly K C Stole), 'Missing Research Activities, October to December 1950', report, 3 January 1951.

³ TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', p.141.

Appendix A
COUNTRIES SEARCHED BY M.R.E.S. (EUROPE) 1944-1949.

- N° 1 M. R. E. U. [diagonal lines /]
- 2 M. R. E. U. [diagonal lines \]
- 3 M. R. E. U. [horizontal lines]
- 4 M. R. E. U. [vertical lines]
- 5 M. R. E. U. [solid black]



Map of MRES operations. Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 - 1949', TNA, AIR 55/65.

A further problem faced by the MRES, just as with the Graves Service, was the gradual demobilisation of its search officers, who for the most part had enlisted only for the duration of the war. Meanwhile, political problems with the Russians worsened and the search in areas under their control became fraught with difficulties.

For obvious reasons, the worst operating conditions in the material sense were encountered at the beginning of MRES field work. War damage included roads and railways in shocking condition, canals breached, bridges down, and severely damaged telephone systems. There was an extreme shortage of essential supplies, and motor vehicles and their spare parts were very hard to get hold of. The first MRES staff, arriving late in France because of the appalling winter weather, discovered that all their transport had been reallocated and replacements could not be obtained until the end of April.⁴

Bad weather was a serious handicap in many other ways. Floods or frozen ground made exhumations impossible and locating graves extremely difficult. Three very bitter winters followed one after another, that of 1946-1947 being the worst for almost one hundred years. Transportation and supply problems seriously affected the British Zone of Germany.⁵ Living conditions there for RAF personnel, whilst better than those for the conquered Germans, were hardly ideal; one operations clerk, stationed at No. 4 MREU near Hamburg, recalled of the bitter winter of 1946-1947 when even the river Elbe froze:

At HQ, a large house situated overlooking the Elbe, a wood-burning stove in the hallway provided the only heating in the entire premises. There were occasions when all personnel from the CO downwards huddled

⁴ Ibid, p.16.

⁵ Patricia Meehan, *A Strange Enemy People: Germans Under the British, 1945-50* (Peter Owen, London, 2001), p.239.

around this contraption and we airmen shared out our NAAFI rations with the German civilians.⁶

Localised problems were attached to the search in specific countries. In Norway, field work in the north was only viable for two and a half months of the year, whilst there was also a post-war problem with bandits (although it was in Greece and the southern areas of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria where bandits really were a major hazard).⁷ In the Netherlands, there was widespread flooding due to war damage. Even in non-flooded areas the soil was often very waterlogged because so much of the land lay below sea-level. Because of the softness of the soil, aircraft which had crashed had sometimes penetrated so deeply that bodies and clues to their identity were unrecoverable except with specialist equipment. The MRES had to take a view as to whether the immense amount of time and expense to find such bodies was justifiable.⁸

War damage was not only material but psychological. Memories of bombing raids, many of which had been carried out by the RAF, could make dealing with local people very difficult. MRES search officers were given detailed instructions on how to approach the civilian population:

A tactless approach to one who may have suffered considerable hardship through RAF operations is more likely to cause such a person to withhold information than to become a reliable informant.⁹

⁶ Imperial War Museum, Documents.6078, Douglas Hague, *The Biggest Detective Job in the World*, typescript account (September 1992), p.2.

⁷ TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', p.17. Hawkins includes a map dated 15 July 1948 which shows the known bandit areas, Part III, Appendix C.

⁸ See, for example, the Hart crew case at the end of this chapter.

⁹ TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', p.34.

This consideration affected the liberated countries as well as Germany. Although they had not suffered the saturation bombing which had flattened Germany, countries such as France and the Netherlands had been routinely bombed because of the German industry, installations, anti-aircraft defences, and command centres sited there. Secondary targets (for when an aircraft was unable to reach the primary target, usually in Germany) were almost invariably in the occupied countries. The peoples of these countries suffered doubly, not only because of the bombing itself but also because the Germans reacted harshly when attempting to maintain the status quo.¹⁰

Germany was a case all of its own. The post-war division of Germany into four Zones, each of which held RAF graves, created difficulties as the search teams had to operate under British, American, French or Russian jurisdiction. Dealing with the Germans themselves, who could be extremely secretive and uncooperative, also at times hampered the search. Downright hostility could be encountered — Flight Lieutenant Mitchell, a search officer, later recalled that ‘the mere sight of an officer bearing the insignia of aircrew on his left breast was like [a] red rag to a bull to some’, and he often overheard venomous remarks made about him in German.¹¹ However, the need for Germans to ingratiate themselves with their new rulers, and possibly gain a reward like cigarettes (which were a universal currency), meant that some people went out of their way to be helpful.¹²

¹⁰ Richard Overy, *The Bombing War, Europe 1939-1945* (Allen Lane, London, 2013), p.568.

¹¹ Mitchell had some knowledge of German, though not extensive. Imperial War Museum, Documents.9046, Flight Lieutenant C A Mitchell, *The Missing Research and Enquiry Service*, typescript account with supplementary papers (November 1994), pp.5-6.

¹² In Geoffrey Cotterell's novel about the British Zone of Germany, *Randle in Springtime*, based upon a contemporary diary, Randle paid two cigarettes to the man who carried his luggage to the station and two a week to the woman who did his washing; whenever a cigarette butt was discarded, it was eagerly seized by the Germans as being of great value. Geoffrey Cotterell, *Randle in Springtime*, (Eyre and Spottiswoode, London, 1949), p.82 and p.113.

There was, in any case, very little point in making difficulties because search officers were so strongly determined to carry out their duties and, as representatives of the occupying powers, could make life very difficult if they chose.¹³ A firm statement of what the search officers required was thus usually enough to ensure cooperation. One of Mitchell's most memorable investigations was the follow-up on a crash near Duisburg on 15/16 October 1944. A local woman took him to an allotment and there he found: 'peas, cabbages, etc, growing there under which lie two bodies not in coffins and with a metal cross roughly stuck in the ground inscribed "Two unknown British Flyers"'.¹⁴ In his account of this investigation, written some 50 years later, Mitchell noted:

My interpreter informed me that she had heard on the local grapevine that, owing the extreme shortage of food, the possible loss of any crops would be a bit of a blow. Using the same line of communication I replied that the British were experts in the field of severe rationing, furthermore, I was not prepared to allow airmen to remain buried without coffins in unconsecrated ground any longer than was absolutely necessary. I heard nothing further about the matter of crops.¹⁵

¹³ Geoffrey Cotterell, in his search for his brother, sometimes used his status as an officer in the British Army to strong-arm information out of Germans, something totally against his normal character, as the following quotation makes clear. 'Am now back from the visit to Essen [...]. We organised a revolting episode to make Dr Lathe talk, which was to produce a warrant for his arrest for having given false information. Poor Dr Lathe [...] immediately trembled, while his wife, advised by Kamp to pack a few things, broke down. It was all very repulsive. After a while we went away for an hour or so to let him think on his previous statement (which had a few inconsistencies with Dr. Saniter's).' On Cotterell and Kamp's return, Dr Lathe gave further information and more or less cleared himself. Cotterell family archives, Geoffrey Cotterell to Mintie Cotterell, letter, 8 April 1946.

¹⁴ Imperial War Museum, Documents.9046, Flight Lieutenant C A Mitchell, *The Missing Research and Enquiry Service*, Investigation Report, No 22 Section, No 4 MREU RAF (Germany) to Air Ministry P.4 (Cas), 18 May 1946.

¹⁵ Ibid, but typescript account, p.10.

Unfortunately, the two airmen's bodies, when exhumed, could not be identified due to lack of evidence. This was a frequent occurrence. As aircrew mortality was almost invariably due to crashes, fire, high explosives, fall from a great height, or drowning (and later being washed ashore), the labelling of the dead at the time of burial had frequently been guesswork, some of it extremely perfunctory. In addition, German burial methods had run the whole gamut from the meticulously respectful to the lazily slipshod, the latter style becoming more prevalent as the war was gradually lost. Some of the dead had been buried in wooden coffins, an autopsy having been performed and their effects scrupulously accounted for, as happened to Squadron Leader Kenneth Foster of the Fletcher crew in September 1943.¹⁶ Others had been treated far more cavalierly, buried in sacks or makeshift shrouds, shovelled into a mass grave, or buried next to isolated crash sites. Sometimes, when an aircraft had exploded in mid-air, body parts had been scattered over a wide area and no particularly strenuous effort had been made to collect them; this happened to the Carlos Brown crew, lost in November 1943, whose remains could still be found in the woods near Brandau in Germany in the 1950s.¹⁷

Isolated burials at crash sites tended to occur when bodies were discovered some time after the German crash site investigations had concluded, or when German resentment of the *Terrorflieger* (terror fliers) was uppermost; later, as the end of the war approached, there was neither the willpower nor the resources to properly care for the dead. It tended to be only in the out of the way places that the rites of a full military funeral, which had once been fairly common, continued to be observed right up until the war's end.

¹⁶ 'Protokol, Der Bürgermeister als Otspolizeibehörde', Maikammer, 24 September 1943. Copy of report from and translation by Uwe Benkel.

¹⁷ Australian National Archives, RAAF, Flight Sergeant R W Sinden personnel file, 'Casualty Enquiry Investigation Report', 30 May 1947; Missing Aviators Research and Recovery Team, 'Crash Site Information for Avro Lancaster Mk. II, JB221, 97 Squadron, Crashed 26 November 1943', report, undated but relating to investigations on 20-21 March 2010, courtesy of Rod Little.

One such place was the Dutch island of Vlieland in the Frisian islands. The Frisian islands were of great significance in the air war because they and their nearby waters were the first part of Europe to be crossed by Allied bombers flying from the many airfields sited in the east of England. The islands faced the North Sea and, due to sea currents, dead airmen were often washed up on their shores.¹⁸



German funeral for an RAF airman at Vlieland, Dutch Frisian Islands. Courtesy of Dirk Bruin.

On Vlieland, the habitual respect shown to the dead was due not only to its distance from the main conflicts but also to the type of German units which were stationed on

¹⁸ Bomber Command navigators' route maps show the Frisian islands with heavy scoring over them due to the flak installations there. See for example, the Owen crew's route map for 14/15 January 1944 for the operation to Brunswick, which shows the outward flight path going over the Frisian islands. Imperial War Museum, Documents.3574, Private Papers of Group Captain C B Owen DSO DFC.

the island. Many of them were reservists from the Kriegsmarine who had been civilians before the war and had worked in the fishing or commercial fleets. The islanders considered the Kriegsmarine to be far more observant of the proper traditions than the Wehrmacht.¹⁹ However, it is worth noting that one of the worst war crimes against Allied airmen was committed on the nearby German Frisian island of Borkum; thus, not all places remote from the main conflicts were free of violent hatred or prejudice against aircrew.²⁰



Aftermath of an air crash in North Holland, 16 May 1941. The pilot, W A McVie, RAF, has been killed; his crewmate is under German arrest and has presumably been brought here to identify the body. Courtesy of Patrick van den Berg and the De Boer family.

¹⁹ Dirk Bruin, personal correspondence with the author, 28 October 2012.

²⁰ For the war crime on Borkum, see James J Weingartner, 'Americans, Germans, and War Crimes: Converging Narratives from "the Good War"', *The Journal of American History*, 94/4 (2008), pp.1167-1173. See, also, Chapter Six for a discussion of war crimes against Allied airmen, including the Borkum case.

Even where airmen had been properly laid to rest in cemeteries, they had often not been identified correctly in the records. As Hawkins wrote in his 1949 summing-up report, 'The exhumations [...] brought to light an alarming percentage (in some cemeteries over 50%) of errors made by the Germans in their original registrations and grave markings'.²¹ For the MRES this was a considerable increase in workload, for it meant that an RAF search officer had to be present at all exhumations to verify the identity of those buried in each marked grave. Wrongly marked graves meant fresh cases added to the list of 'unknowns', and the necessity of informing the relatives that they had been given the wrong grave details. In the end, as Hawkins wrote, 'it became necessary to treat a cemetery as a whole in order to work out the separate identities of each occupant'.²²

Another difficult problem was encountered in those thousands of cases where airmen had come down in the sea. Sea currents could move the bodies of dead combatants to the most astonishing places. On the Dutch Frisian island of Schiermonnikoog, the Vredenhof Cemetery includes the graves of a British sea captain, a soldier of the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers, and fifteen French soldiers who were all washed ashore on 1 August 1940; the two British men were known to have been killed at Dunkirk, and it is likely that the French soldiers came from the same place.²³ Aircrew were obviously affected in the same way. If dead aircrew were split up by the sea currents, one useful method of identifying them by association with their crewmates was thereby lost. Men buried at Vredenhof, for example, sometimes have crewmates buried considerable distances away, such as at Bergen-op-Zoom in Holland, Klovedales Cemetery in Sweden, and Esbjerg in Denmark. The Melville crew, who ditched in the sea some sixty miles off the British coast at Cromer

²¹ TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', p.23.

²² Ibid.

²³ Wyb Jan Groendijk, personal correspondence with the author, 28 October 2012.

in March 1944, has one grave at Vredenhof, one at Vierhuizen in Groningen, one man presumed to be lost at sea, and the other five crew members buried in England.²⁴



An airman washed up on the shores of Europe. Horace Baker, RAF, who died on 18 February 1942 and is buried in Vredenhof Cemetery, Schiermonnikoog. Courtesy of Wyb Jan Groendijk.

When identifying an exhumed body, the MRES used a number of techniques. What would appear to be the most obvious means of identification, i.e. dental records and identity discs, could not be relied upon. The RAF did not keep comprehensive or up

²⁴ 'Schiermonnikoog Island (Dutch Frisians) – "Vredenhof" Cemetery – Identified Air Force Personnel', official list, no date or author but enclosed with Air Ministry letter of 31 March 1948 (now lost; original reference: T.23781/48/S.14 CAS.C.6), courtesy of Wyb Jan Groendijk. Melville crew details from W R Chorley, *Royal Air Force Bomber Command Losses of the Second World War, 1944* (Midland Publishing, Hersham, 2008), p.143. Chorley gives slightly different burial details to the Air Ministry cemetery list for Pilot Officer Kennedy.

to date dental records, and those which did exist, as Hawkins wrote in his summing-up report, 'often proved useless and occasionally misleading'. The Dominion Air Forces dental records were, however, 'of the greatest value'. It was Hawkins' very strong recommendation for the future that the RAF should maintain proper dental records.²⁵ Nonetheless, dental records could be of no value when, as so often happened, bodies were badly mutilated.

Identity discs had their own severe limitations. Almost invariably the discs, together with service dress insignia and any papers, had been removed by the Germans for intelligence purposes. Some of the ways in which this occurred rendered later identification of the bodies close to impossible. One particularly bad case, affecting several hundred airmen, occurred at Limburg in Belgium, the details being recorded by Lieutenant Colonel Stott:

Throughout the Occupation, two German officers were resident in this district, and, under their supervision, all effects including identity discs and uniform markings were removed from the bodies before burial. When the day of Liberation came, these Germans and their assistants moved out, taking all the effects with them. No "key" to the burial ground has been found, and I have not been able to establish that the Germans ever maintained one.²⁶

²⁵ TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', p.142.

²⁶ In the memorandum Stott describes two burial grounds at Limburg which contained RAF graves, and it is not entirely clear when speaking of the bodies affected whether he is referring to the first burial ground which contained 450 graves or the second which contained 140 graves, or both. TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, appendices for March, Appendix J5, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Exhumation – Policy, Pre "D" Day Graves', memorandum, 4 March 1945.

Almost invariably, personal items were removed by the Germans, sometimes scrupulously accounted for, sometimes stolen. Flight Lieutenant Mitchell recalled that in none of the exhumations which he attended did anything ever emerge of a personal nature; his opinion was that they had either been stolen by the Germans themselves or by the 'light-fingered Russian POWs who were drafted in to assist in clearing the wreckage and removing the bodies'.²⁷

Those identity discs which the Germans missed were often with bodies discovered some time after the crash, or they had become detached from their owner and had remained at or near the crash site. However, British identity discs were very apt to degrade and become indecipherable, particularly in damp conditions or after prolonged immersion.²⁸ Details could sometimes be revealed by the infra-red process, as in the case of Sergeant L G Spurgeon lost on the Hamburg operation of 2/3 August 1943.²⁹ However, this was not always possible, and once again Hawkins recommended a change in British practice, to the type of metal disc issued to the American forces.³⁰

Identity discs and dental records were, in fact, so unreliable that the MRES had to develop many other methods of determining who a man was. As a consequence, the operating manual was constantly being corrected and augmented. For example, the following simple procedure to help authenticate hair colour was recommended as late as March 1947: it had been observed that dye in such items as the Mae West could completely alter the shade of the hair, and MRES officers were advised to

²⁷ Imperial War Museum, Documents.9046, Flight Lieutenant C A Mitchell, *The Missing Research and Enquiry Service*, typescript account, p.15. There was a German system for documenting dead airmen's effects, and this is referred to in two testimonies for a case to which Mitchell himself was allocated, for example the Statement by Hermann Kriethe, Military Government Court Duisburg, 21 February 1946, which is included in Mitchell's papers. See later in this chapter.

²⁸ For full details of the inferior quality of British identity discs, see Chapter Six.

²⁹ TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', p.132.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p.141.

clean the hair with petrol and then leave it for a few minutes to dry before assessing the colour.³¹

Clothing was considered to be the best chance of naming a body. The large part which laundry marks played in identification will be considered shortly; however, other personal aspects of clothing, such as the type of handkerchief or braces, or a maker's label on shirts and underwear, could provide useful evidence. Even standard service dress could be read for personal clues. The searchers would look for wear, tear, repairs, and any quirks of style, such as decorations being worn in an idiosyncratic manner. They would examine the uniforms for holes where insignia, such a pilot's wings or a flight engineer's brevet had been cut out by the Germans (these two insignia were different in shape so could be used for identification). The battledress size on the uniform was an indication of height, e.g. size 14 for height five foot nine to five foot ten.³² Brass buttons varied between RAF and Dominion Air Forces, and so did colour, the RAAF uniform being a darker blue whilst airmen from South Africa sometimes wore brown uniforms.³³ Members of 2nd TAF (Tactical Air Force) wore khaki battledress.³⁴ Dominion Air Force members wore a shoulder flash embroidered with the name of their country.³⁵ Variations in the crew's role on the

³¹ Ibid, but Part V, Appendix H, Group Captain R Burges, Missing Research Memorandum MRM No. 25B, 24 March 1947.

³² Ibid but Appendix F1, Group Captain R Burges, 'Notes for MREU Exhumation Officers', Missing Research Memorandum MRM No. 25, 1945 (no month or day).

³³ See Hawkins' Case No. 6, where the South African pilot was identified by his brown uniform. Ibid, but main report, p.133.

³⁴ The khaki battledress could potentially lead to their burial as Army 'unknowns'. See TNA, AIR 55/62, Air Ministry, Liaison with DDGRE and AGRC, No. 4 MREU report, 5 August 1949.

³⁵ Flight Lieutenant Mitchell observed in his memoirs that it was remarkable how perceptive children were in identifying parts of aircraft, shoulder flashes, chevrons and badges, a memory validated by a document from 1946 in which he himself noted that two children who saw two bodies after an air crash 'state quite definitely that the words "Canada" was written on the shoulders of each'. Imperial War Museum, Documents.9046, Flight Lieutenant C A Mitchell, *The Missing Research and Enquiry*

aircraft could also help differentiate between crew members; for instance, rear gunners on Lancasters wore heated flying suits against the freezing temperatures in their gun turret.

The identification of one or more members of a crew greatly increased the possibility of a successful identification of the others. However, sometimes the search officers appear to have been fishing for a solution for these unnamed crew members where there was only vestigial evidence to support it. In the case of the Mooney crew, lost in January 1944, only two men were positively identified. In his report, the search officer then went on to suggest possible identities for the other five crew members on somewhat tenuous grounds. He thought, for instance, that one body might be that of Flight Sergeant Worsdale because it wore an Other Ranks shirt and an American belt, and Worsdale being 'an A/B [Air Bomber], may have trained in Canada, and there would have obtained a belt of American manufacture'. This submission, however, was vetoed by his Commanding Officer, who reiterated that the only positive identities were those of Flight Sergeant Woolf and Sergeant Grey, that serious errors had been made in the German identification of the bodies, and that he therefore recommended in those cases where identity could not be confirmed by exhumation evidence that 'collective marking be made'.³⁶

As the MRES built up its expertise, it became knowledgeable in the ways in which the type of burial and its location affected the possibility of identifying a body. Climate, ambient temperature, the type of soil, its acidity and moisture content, all played a part in decomposition and in the type and rate of the discolouration and fading of clothing or clothing marks. There was, of course, no DNA testing available at that period. Some simple but effective scientific aids were available, such as the Brocca Scale which made it possible to calculate the height of an individual by

Service, typescript account, p.12; No. 4 MREU Investigation Report, Flight Lieutenant C A Mitchell, 18 May 1946.

³⁶ Australian National Archives, RAAF, Flight Sergeant Godfrey Woolf personnel file, MRES Investigation Report, 24 August 1948.

measuring the long bones of the skeleton. Later in the search, infra-red photography provided by the Americans was often used to clarify faded markings on identity discs or items of clothing.³⁷

The contribution of the Americans to the British search is one of the prime examples of how willing the Air Ministry Casualty Branch and the MRES were to use multinational resources. Although American assistance was only one of several such resources, it will be considered first and in some depth because the parallel nature of the American search was of such major significance. It should be stressed here that the American Graves Registration Command was looking for all American casualties, not just airmen; there was none of the division of responsibility seen with the RAF and the British Army. However, this chapter will focus mainly upon the work of the American Graves Registration Command with regards to its airmen.

In field operations, the American Graves Registration Command used similar methods to the MRES: area sweeps which began with a publicity blitz and continued with the following-up of every lead acquired from local reports or documentary evidence. Where American policy differed markedly from that of the MRES was in the removal of disinterred remains, which were taken to mobile collecting points and thence to central cemeteries or identification points. If the body was then formally identified, the wishes of the next of kin would dictate whether the body was repatriated to the USA or re-buried permanently in an American Military Cemetery in Europe.

³⁷ For use of fingerprinting with exhumed bodies, see *Study Number 107: Graves Registration Service*, Reports of the General Board, United States Forces, European Theater, undated but around November 1945, p.14. An example of the highly detailed American Graves Registration Command check list for exhumed bodies was included in Hawkins' collection of the forms which the MRES used. Although the sample form related to an RAF casualty, Hawkins drew attention to the form because he was of the opinion it should be adopted by the RAF in future. TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', Part V, Appendix D3, 'Identification Check List', AGRC Form No. 11. See also p.85.

The Americans went to very considerable lengths to identify their dead; even those cases which appeared absolutely hopeless were subject to the closest methods of recording, as the following example will show. The remains of the unknown casualty labelled X-244 had been buried at Henri Chapelle in Belgium, the date of death being recorded as 24 December 1944. On 5 November 1947, the remains were disinterred along with six other bodies belonging to one crew in an attempt to ascertain firstly 'the amount of remains interred in each grave', and secondly to solve the mystery of X-244. The six bodies were found to be complete, but X-244 was fragments only. The remains consisted only of '3 very small pieces of skull bone and approximately ½ lb of flesh'; there were no other clues apart from 'Remnant of one (1) pair' of cotton drawers attached to the flesh. Obviously the case was almost impossible to solve, but nonetheless, the entire report was filled in down to every last detail, for example each line of the list of twenty-six possible items of clothing and their significance, and every one of the forty-five possible physical identifiers, even if most entries were 'None' or 'U.T.D.' Lastly, the remains were prepared and placed in a casket; the casket was then sealed, boxed, marked, and recorded, each stage of the process being witnessed and certified by an inspector, 1st Lieutenant Raymond G Johnson.³⁸ Two years later, the case of X-244 was reviewed, and this time it was decided that the remains should be classified as unidentifiable.³⁹

It should be noted that there was nothing with the remains of X-244 to definitely confirm that he was an American. Indeed, the American Graves Registration Command often appears to have acted upon the presumption that all bodies were American unless there was strong evidence to the contrary, a tendency which the British well knew. When arrangements were made in the second half of 1946 for a

³⁸ It actually says the GRS inspector on the form, but by this period the AGRC had replaced the GRS.

³⁹ 'Unknown X-244 (Henri Chapelle cemetery, Belgium), OQMG Unidentified Remains Report', 22 November 1948, US 7th Armoured Division Association website (last accessed November 2012): www.7tharmdiv.org/docrep/images/US-Non-7AD/.../X-244.pdf

joint final sweep of Holland to find any American 'unknowns', Lieutenant Colonel Stott decreed:

The following should be present at every exhumation effected:

- i. The Pathologist
- ii. A US Graves Service Officer
- iii. A US AAF Officer
- iv. A British Graves Service Officer
- v. A British RAF Officer

[...] The aim is first to establish nationality.

Where nationality cannot be established [...] such bodies will be moved to the nearest established military cemetery (or Special Service Plot in a Civil Cemetery) irrespective of the nationality of such cemetery, and reinterred as 'Unknown'. [...]

Bodies should not be removed to an American Cemetery on the grounds that they "may be Americans".⁴⁰

Hadaway describes a case in 1946 when an MRES officer, Flying Officer S K M Powell, reported the apparent disappearance of the remains of Sergeant Gill and his crew from the cemetery at Benediktbeuern in Bavaria. The American Graves Registration Command had previously been working at the same cemetery. Powell wrote to his superiors:

⁴⁰ TNA, WO 267/603, BAOR HQ, Western Europe Graves Service Directorate, Quarterly Historical Report, quarter ending 30 September 1946, Appendix E, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Location, Identification, and Concentration of "UNKNOWNNS" in Holland, 7 August 1946.

It seems that the Americans have stolen these bodies. (Once again another incident of this happening.)

It is therefore requested that American Graves Registration be contacted immediately so that the bodies may be retrieved, if they are still in this country.⁴¹

For the most part, however, the relationship between the British and American teams was very harmonious. The MRES had some close dealings with the American Graves Registration Command, and for a time No. 3 MREU, whilst working in the American Zone of Germany, actually had offices at the Command's large establishment at Karlsruhe; these offices had been 'very kindly' offered by the Americans and led to a close liaison of mutual benefit.⁴²

The Americans' extremely high success rate in identifying their dead was in large part due to the creation of Central Identification Points known as CIPs.⁴³ The first

⁴¹ Hadaway, in describing this case, suggests that the bodies were found so far west when retrieved that they had already been identified as American and were on their way to the United States for repatriation — Stuart Hadaway, *Missing Believed Killed, The Royal Air Force and the Search for Missing Aircrew, 1939-1952* (Pen and Sword, Barnsley, 2008), p.69. In fact, the first American bodies were not shipped home from Europe until 1947, see Edward Steere and Thayer M Boardman, *Final Disposition of World War II Dead, 1945-51*, US Army, Quartermaster Corps, QMC Historical Studies, Series II, No. 4 (Historical Branch Office of the Quartermaster General, Washington, D.C., 1957) p.668.

⁴² TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', p.23.

⁴³ The creation of the CIPs was initiated after a tour of the European battle areas by Dr Harry L Shapiro, the Chairman and Curator of Physical Anthropology at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Shapiro had been invited to comment upon the methods used by the American Graves Registration Command, and after three weeks' observation in the field he recommended the creation of a centrally located laboratory where identification could be carried out by highly skilled personnel using state of the art scientific equipment. Steere and Boardman, *Final Disposition of World War II Dead*, pp.614-616.

CIP was located at Strasbourg in France, and from August 1946, all American remains, including those which had been identified, were sent to the CIP, together with their personal effects and anything else which might confirm their identity. A second CIP was later established at Neuville-en-Condroz in Belgium. The methods used by the CIPs included the chemical analysis of clothing and skeletal reconstruction which could produce information about racial origin, age, and stature. There was also a technique known as fluoroscopy, similar to modern CAT scans, which could reveal identification tags, jewellery and other metallic objects embedded deep in the tissues.⁴⁴

One invaluable means of identifying otherwise nameless RAF bodies was laundry marks. British laundry journals ran details of such marks in their publications in the hope that one of their readers might identify them; however, laundry marks were often discovered in less than pristine condition and steps had to be taken to make them readable.⁴⁵ There are a number of MRES memoranda on the subject of laundry marks. An addendum to MRM No. 25B, for example, written in March 1947, contains two new paragraphs numbered 21A and 21B. 21A describes a simple but very successful method of cleaning and magnifying the laundry mark; 21B refers to the infra-red photography by then available from the American Graves Registration Command for use in clarifying difficult laundry marks. Particularly problematical laundry marks were sent to Squadron Leader William Mace Mair, one of the MRES's leading lights. By early 1947, Mair was located at the Liaison Section at the American Graves Registration Command in Paris, where presumably he ensured that the laundry marks were examined using the latest American methods.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ W Raymond Wood and Lori Ann Stanley, 'Recovery and Identification of World War II Dead: American Graves Registration Activities in Europe', *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 34 (1989), p.1369.

⁴⁵ TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', Part V, Appendix G, A Beckess, S.7. (Cas), Missing Research Memorandum MRM No. 25A, 9 December 1946.

⁴⁶ Mair is named in the memorandum, his address being given as being at the Liaison Section at the AGRC; although it does not say so as such, the obvious inference from the text is that he or his

The fact that the two searches – British and American – were effectively running side by side, going over the same ground, meant a much increased likelihood of isolated or unknown Allied bodies being found. This was particularly so in certain areas, such as around three prime targets of the British and American bomber forces – Hamburg, Kiel and Neumünster. As the official American history somewhat poetically put it:

The wrecks of Allied bombers that fell in running the gauntlet of anti-aircraft fire had littered the environs of these target cities, while others further afield bespoke of the havoc wrought by pursuing German fighter craft. Because of the relatively late arrival of American formations in the long-sustained air bombardment of Germany, a preponderance of the wrecks bore the emblem of the Royal Air Force. Hence, the location of a single American burial place required an examination of several Allied graves.⁴⁷

The history also notes the very high degree of British, American and German cooperation in the Hamburg area in 1947 which ‘brought excellent results’. This region had previously been separately swept by both British and American search units, but the combined operation which re-combed the ground produced 41 previously unknown Allied graves, of which at least 17 were American. Because of the success of the Hamburg operation, two further major areas which had been heavily bombed were tackled in the same way – Hanover and Celle.⁴⁸

One interesting case shows how the discovery of the other nation’s casualties were often made by accident. A 1989 article in the *Journal of Forensic Sciences* describes

team ensured that the problematical laundry marks went to the right place for testing. Ibid but Appendix H, Missing Research Memorandum MRM No. 25B, A Beckess, S.7. (Cas), 24 March 1947.

⁴⁷ Steere and Boardman, *Final Disposition of World War II Dead*, p.243.

⁴⁸ Ibid, pp.267-268.

the case of a missing American airman whom the authors simply refer to as 'ESW'. ESW was a crew member on an American B-17 bomber which was shot down in October 1943. In March 1947, the American authorities were alerted to the location of ESW's remains (as yet unidentified) by the MRES. The Americans had already swept that particular area of West Germany but had missed the grave in a cemetery at Michelbach. An MRES unit at Butzbach, who had clearly conducted their own sweep of the area, telephoned one of the American Graves Registration Command's mobile units to notify them of their discovery of the loss of an American aircraft and the burial of an American airman. It was this information which eventually led to the positive identification of ESW and, in 1949, the repatriation of his remains to the United States.⁴⁹

It was not only the Americans who aided (or occasionally hindered) the British search; Hawkins in his summing-up report acknowledged the very great debt that the MRES owed to the liberated nations. Denmark came in for special praise. Excellent office and living accommodation had been provided in Esbjerg by the Burgomaster and the fullest co-operation had been given by his countrymen, whilst it had been 'gratifying to find carefully preserved records of RAF crashes and burials' and the very great care which had been taken of the graves.⁵⁰ Hawkins also made a point of paying tribute to the Norwegian Navy, which had put boats and men at the service of the MRES, thus allowing access to areas which were extremely difficult to reach overland.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Wood and Stanley, 'Recovery and Identification of World War II Dead: American Graves Registration Activities in Europe', pp.1370-71.

⁵⁰ TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', p.17.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Although national organisations in the liberated countries provided invaluable resources, it was often private individuals who were the key to solving difficult cases. Some witnesses were ex-members of the underground, who proved particularly useful in France, Belgium and Denmark.⁵² Most, however, were just ordinary local people, and amongst them the best helpers were children. As Stott said, at the end of 1946:

But for the help of the local peoples, and especially children of ten to sixteen years of age on numerous occasions, the graves of scores of British soldiers and airmen [...] could never have been found by Registration Officers.⁵³

A detailed instance of the help given by children relates to the loss of a Lancaster at Luyksgestel, Holland, at 12.30 in the morning of 15 March 1944. It was witnessed by a Mr Van der Meyden. Once the Germans arrived at the scene, they followed standard practice and made everyone leave, so Mr Van der Meyden did not know how many bodies had been discovered. Later, however, when he was ploughing the field in which the aircraft had crashed, he found a body which he himself buried at that place. He told the missing research officers who came to his farm after the war that the body had been very badly burned and that there had been no clothing left on it which might aid recognition. An airman's cap had been found at the scene and put on the grave to mark it, but this had disappeared.

Thinking that perhaps a child had taken the cap, the search officers went to the village school and enlisted the help of the schoolmaster. He asked his children to find out all that they could about anything which had been taken from the crash site.

⁵² Ibid, p.47.

⁵³ TNA, WO 267/604, BAOR HQ, Western Europe Graves Service Directorate, Quarterly Historical Report, quarter ending 31 December 1946, Appendix D, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Broadcast to the liberated countries'; the date of the broadcast is given in the main report as being 3 November 1946.

By this means, rings and a watch which had once belonged to the crew were described, together with the initials which had been engraved upon them, description being the only evidence available because unfortunately all the items had subsequently been lost. In addition, the children named a man who had pieces of the aircraft wreckage. Amongst the pieces which this man gave the search officers was part of the starboard fin of the aircraft; on it was a plate with a number which eventually provided the vital piece of corroboration. The crew was then officially confirmed to be that of William Darby Coates, and the next of kin were notified.⁵⁴ Unfortunately, the crash had been so violent that that, even after exhumation, it was not possible to name the men individually. All were reinterred under a temporary communal grave-marker which listed all their names.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Coates family archives, the Air Ministry Casualty Branch to Mr J Coates, letter, 23 August 1946.

⁵⁵ Clearly, it became possible to identify several of the crew later, as three have named graves, and the other four are named for two shared graves. Canadian National Archives, RCAF, personnel file of Flying Officer John Moody Baldwin; Coates family archives, communal cross details from the official photograph of the Coates crew's temporary wooden grave-marker, see above.



In another investigation in Belgium, once again the critical pieces of evidence came from civilians. The seven man crew of a Stirling had been missing since the spring of 1943. Search officers went to a Belgian village twenty miles from Louvain, where there were reported to be three graves, two marked with the names of sergeants, the third marked 'Three Unknowns'. It had also been reported that the two remaining members of the crew had baled out. The search officers could not find the graves, and the lead would have ended there had not two Belgian cyclists, a brother and sister, arrived to give further information. They knew the correct cemetery, and moreover had preserved a shirt cuff with a gold link in it and a piece of shirt collar with a name on it. These had been hidden in a secret recess in their mother's cottage

during the war years. The family were also able to confirm that all the crew had died and none had escaped by parachute.⁵⁶

It was not uncommon for civilians to take on the task of recording the dead's names and details, or making sure that they were buried properly. One Frenchwoman whom Hawkins particularly praised for her work of 'inestimable value' was Madame L'Herbier, who was later awarded an OBE for services to missing research. From 1940 onwards, with German permission, she had assiduously collected the details of Allied casualties, together with relics and personal effects, and these were handed over to the relevant national authority after the liberation.⁵⁷ On a smaller scale, Sake van der Werff, a hotel owner on the Dutch island of Schiermonnikoog, took personal responsibility for ensuring the respectful burial and, whenever possible, the preservation of a record of identity of all nationals who were washed up on the shores of the island.⁵⁸

In Germany, understandably, very different attitudes prevailed towards lost aircrew. Hawkins noted:

Search 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 RAF bombing, their attitude was generally uncooperative.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Major F A de V Robertson, 'Tracing Missing Airmen; Missing Research and Enquiry Service: Following Slender Clues', *Flight Magazine*, 18 October 1945, p.422-23.

⁵⁷ TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', p.16.

⁵⁸ Sake van der Werff had begun this type of work many years earlier, in 1906, when a single unknown sailor had been washed up on the island; later, he gave devoted care to the dead of two world wars. Dagmar Brendecke and Walter Brun, 'The Graves in the Dunes', undated, outline for a documentary film, courtesy of Wyb Jan Groendijk.

⁵⁹ TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', p.23.

To meet these difficulties, different procedures were devised for Germany, the key regulation being that the Burgomaster of each rural or urban administrative district was required to render a complete and certified account of all the RAF crashes or buried aircrew in his area. However, large areas of Germany were heavily forested and these were under the control of the forest masters.⁶⁰ Parts of these forests were close to impenetrable, and crashes which had occurred there had sometimes gone undetected, or perhaps had been deliberately ignored. The extreme difficulties of recovering the remains of aircrew must also have played a part. As has already been mentioned, the remains of the Carlos Brown crew were still lying about in the woods near Brandau a decade after their deaths. The aircraft had exploded in mid-air and debris had been scattered over a wide area. Two complete bodies had been found, and the few body parts which had been discovered around that same time had been placed in a box and buried with them. However, that appears to have been the end of any efforts at recovery.⁶¹ In the 1950s, human bones were sometimes retrieved by the dog of one of the hunters who frequented the woods, and he would merely take the bones back to where the dog had found them.⁶²

The most difficult territory for the MRES to work in were built-up areas which had been heavily bombed or fought over, such as the Ruhr and Berlin. Often records had been lost, evidence and graves had been destroyed, witnesses had been killed or had moved away. In addition, it must have been very hard for witnesses to differentiate one particular night from many others in a long period of heavy air raids. For the authorities, the terrifying confusion and violence of such raids can hardly have been conducive to methodical identification and internment. The testimony of

⁶⁰ Ibid, p.23.

⁶¹ Australian National Archives, RAAF, Flight Sergeant R W Sinden personnel file, Casualty Enquiry Investigation Report, 30 May 1947; Missing Aviators Research and Recovery Team, 'Crash Site Information for Avro Lancaster Mk. II, JB221' relating to investigations on 20-21 March 2010.

⁶² Missing Aviators Research and Recovery Team, 'Crash Site Information'.

two Germans about an aircraft shot down on 14/15 October 1944 vividly brings this home.

One of the dead [airmen] lay in Schultestrasse just opposite my lodgings. The former "SA Obertruppfuehrer" Kriethe took some things like papers, money, chocolate, biscuits, lighter and safety razor off him. He gave all these things to me as long as there was no responsible authority to take them.[...] One day Kriethe came along and fetched all he had brought and as far as I know he handed them over to an officer of the "Flak". Kriethe must be in possession of a certificate. The dead [airman] lay 4 or 5 days longer in Schultestrasse until I bought him with the assistance of a Sergeant I did not know to the garden between Duesseldorferstrasse and Schultestrasse, where already some more dead airmen were lying around. We had just had a great air attack so that the bodies were lying everywhere in the town. Later on the dead airmen were taken away by the "Luftschutz" police.⁶³

The statement made in February 1946 by Hermann Kriethe acknowledged that he had taken the things from the dead airman, but he declared that the certificate which he had been given for the belongings when he handed them over to the authorities was lost during a subsequent air attack. What gives his statement such an air of veracity is the remembered longing for the food items which would have been such luxuries at that stage of the war: 'Today I cannot remember exactly what I handed

⁶³ This type of statement was taken at local military courts; they were signed by the witness with a declaration that they had made the statement without any influence or compulsion and had checked it through. Imperial War Museum, Documents.9046, Flight Lieutenant C A Mitchell, *The Missing Research and Enquiry Service*, statement by Heinrich Philippe, Military Government Court Duisburg, 20 February 1946.

over but I know that there were one packet of chocolate and one of biscuits among the things.’⁶⁴

When the MRES came to investigate cases which had occurred in heavily bombed areas, they often found it impossible to name individuals and could only guess at whether crews had been buried together. Casualty Enquiry No. 906/59, relating to the Brill crew who had been shot down over Berlin on 16 December 1943, illustrates some of the difficulties which the MRES faced in these cases. The Brill crew had been reported dead by the Germans to the International Red Cross, and the news had reached the Air Ministry and the families in February 1944.⁶⁵ Later, additional information was obtained from captured German records which stated that the aircraft had crashed at Schillerpark and No. 22 Tuerkenstrasse. The MRES followed up these reports in February 1947. They were able to interview a number of witnesses, including German officials who had been on duty on the night of 16 December 1943, and some inhabitants of No. 22 Tuerkenstrasse where a gun turret with the air gunner still inside it had crashed through the roof into an upstairs flat. Another house, at Barfusstrasse, had also had a crew member crash through into the top floor flat. The witnesses were asked if they could remember any characteristics which might help identify these men.

The MRES must have interviewed the witnesses in an attempt to discover some details which would differentiate between the unnamed bodies of several of the crew. They could not even be sure that the bodies belonged to the Brill crew due to the common procedure which the Germans had adopted during the Berlin air raids. It had been discovered that in practically every case where a number of aircraft had been shot down on a single night, the bodies had all been taken to the Fliegerhorst Staaken near Doeberitz, or some similar central Leichenhaus, and there had become mixed up. The Brill crew had been found by the civil authorities, but shortly afterwards they had been removed by the Wehrmacht to be identified. They had later

⁶⁴ Ibid, Statement by Hermann Kriethe, Military Government Court Duisburg, 21 February 1946.

⁶⁵ Butler family papers, British Red Cross to Ellen Butler, letter, 19 February 1944.

been buried at Doeberitz Elsgrund Cemetery. There were no cemetery records and therefore the only proof which could be taken into account was that which could be found on the bodies themselves.⁶⁶ It appears from the lack of further identifications that the German witnesses had not provided any useful additional evidence. However, in other cases, German testimony did indeed provide the definitive answer, as will be seen in the following two examples.

In January 1945, a gravedigger named Herr Oehmen had collected two bodies from a Mosquito crash and had buried them in the cemetery at Grevenbroich, near Allrath in Westphalia. In July 1948, a search officer from 20 Section, No. 4 MREU, interviewed Herr Oehmen and later took him to the cemetery in the hope that he could identify the two unmarked graves. Herr Oehmen could only indicate an approximate place, and the two bodies could not be found there despite extensive exhumations. Knowing American proclivities in this respect, the MRES now asked the American Graves Registration Command if they had by any chance removed the bodies. When the reply came back in the negative, the search teams were faced with the options of digging up the entire cemetery or going back to Herr Oehmen. Hawkins describes what happened next:

The case became something of an obsession with the search officer. Whenever he was in the neighbourhood, he called on Herr Oehmen, who, although 70 years old, was a man of great mental alertness. In their last talk, he said that he sometimes woke at night thinking about the two bodies. This suggested that somewhere in his subconscious mind were hidden the true facts.

Astonishingly, in September 1948 the search officer took Herr Oehmen to Bonn, where a psychiatrist at the University interviewed and then hypnotised Herr Oehmen.

⁶⁶ Australian National Archives, RAAF, Pilot Officer Norman G McIntyre personnel file, No. 4 MREU Investigation Report, 7 February 1947.

In his trance, Herr Oehmen falteringly admitted that he might have buried the two crew members in a row opposite to that which he had originally pointed out. Ten graves, all marked 'Unknown Russian soldiers' and 'Unknown French soldiers', were later exhumed. In the last grave, the search officer discovered Captain Roberts and Flying Officer Webb, the crew of the Mosquito, with evidence which made their identity incontrovertible.⁶⁷

In the second case, a letter which had been received by the British Red Cross Society Overseas Department was forwarded to the Air Ministry Casualty Branch in January 1948. It was from a German, Karl Kropf, living in Bavaria in the American Zone of Germany. Kropf enclosed a photograph he had found at the scene of a crashed aircraft at Donchery in France in May 1940. Kropf said that he alone knew where the owner of the photograph was buried. A search officer went to see Kropf in the American Zone and obtained a map from him, drawn from memory, which showed the approximate location of the body. After two days of digging, the body was found and later identified using the photograph.⁶⁸

It seems unlikely that Kropf could have been looking for favours from the British as he had chosen to make his approach through the Red Cross. In fact, in both these cases one gets the impression that the witnesses were acting in good faith because their conscience troubled them rather than looking for what they could get out of the transaction. Coercion, which was sometimes used by the British and by others, had

⁶⁷ TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', pp.133-134. These two airmen are Captain William Richard Roberts, a South African, a pilot, and Flying Officer Eric Webb, a navigator; both were killed on 22 January 1945 and are buried in adjacent graves at Rheinberg War Cemetery. Commonwealth War Graves Commission database (last accessed 26/07/2015): <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2032597/ROBERTS,%20WILLIAM%20RICHARD>; <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2033185/WEBB,%20ERIC>

⁶⁸ Ibid, Hawkins, pp.129-130.

clearly not been necessary.⁶⁹ In many instances, in fact, it does appear that the Germans offered information willingly and in a spirit of cooperation. The Anglo-American combined search operations in Hanover and Celle in 1947, which were mentioned earlier, saw large-scale meetings (organised with the help of the Control Commission) of not only all the Burgomasters in the area but of the police, journalists of the press and radio, and representatives of all religious faiths. All these different groups contributed significantly to publicising the search, the American official history commenting that although the results were 'not so gratifying as in the Hamburg area, a considerable mass of information was received'.⁷⁰

This section on international cooperation cannot be concluded without looking at what happened with the Russians, who, as the 1940s wore on, became increasingly impossible to deal with. When the war ended, reciprocal arrangements were in place for the Allies to aid one another in tracing their missing.⁷¹ The sense of mutual loss

⁶⁹ Coercion, see for example Geoffrey Cotterell's letter of 28 January 1946 about a key witness to his brother's disappearance, Gustav Etter. 'Two weeks ago he was taken away to be grilled by the War Crimes Commission, complete with electric lights and six hours of questioning.' The hot, bright lights were directed into the subject's face as a barrage of questions hurled at him. Cotterell family archives, Geoffrey Cotterell to Mintie Cotterell, letter, 28 January 1946. Etter was not implicated in the shooting of Anthony Cotterell and British prisoners, and this interview was to make sure that he was not lying, see TNA, WO 309/2035, Major T P A Davies, memorandum attached to Etter's deposition, 17 January 1945. The best known use of coercion was by the Americans investigating the war crime at Malmédy, suspicions of which at the trial meant that none of the convicted Germans were executed. See, for example, James J Weingartner, 'Americans, Germans, and War Crimes: Converging Narratives from "the Good War"', *The Journal of American History*, 94/4 (2008), p.1166.

⁷⁰ Steere and Boardman, *Final Disposition of World War II Dead*, pp.267-268.

⁷¹ Anthony Eden, speaking in the House of Commons to the Secretary of State for War on 10 December 1947, voiced a common view about the intransigence of the Russians: 'Would the right hon. and learned Gentleman bear in mind that, towards the conclusion of the war we made very full reciprocal agreements with all our Allies to help them to trace their missing, in return for which they would help us to trace our missing? I think the House would feel it indefensible that an Ally should refuse us this very reasonable concession.' They Work For You website, (last accessed 26/07/15):

was keen, and memorial ceremonies were sometimes shared. After one such occasion, *The War Illustrated and Afterwards* carried a photograph of the immense Red Army memorial in Berlin on its back page:

In the heart of Germany's capital, in the famous Tiergarten, this impressive memorial, surmounted by a Red Army man in bronze, commemorates Russia's victory over the Third Reich and the memory of Soviet forces who perished. British, US and French troops took part in the unveiling ceremony by Marshall Zhukov on November 11 1945, when the 2nd Battalion of the Devonshire regiment mounted a guard of honour. The Russians worked hard, often by lamplight, to finish the memorial in time.⁷²

The shared sense of grief faded away during the following months. By mid-1946, the mixed British search teams of Army and RAF personnel were encountering severe difficulties in working in the Russian Zone of Germany. The tense situation is readable behind the lines of Stott's highly specific instructions to Army groups going into this territory; for example, all rations and petrol for the complete trip had to be carried by the search parties, and wherever possible they were to return to the British Sector of Berlin that same day. Meanwhile, they had to conduct themselves impeccably:

When travelling to and from the place of work in the Russian Zone, all ranks will be properly dressed. Denim overalls &c. will be put on at the actual place of work and removed prior to leaving for return to Berlin.

And then in very emphatic capitals:

<http://www.theyworkforyou.com/debates/?id=1947-12-10a.984.5&s=missing+research+1945-01-01..1949-12-01#g984.7>

⁷² *The War Illustrated and Afterwards*, 21 December 1945.

In no circumstances will any officer or O.R. proceed to any place in the Russian Zone other than those named in the applications [...].⁷³

The section of No. 4 MREU which was set up in Berlin in October 1946 found the Russians continually obstructive and suspicious. A list of places that the section wished to visit had to be sent in on a weekly basis, and these lists were often not returned for several weeks, reappearing with places crossed off or only accessible on a particular date when the section officers could be accompanied by a Russian officer. From time to time the Zone was closed for 7-10 days for no apparent reason. Regulations required each search officer to be in possession of an identity card with a photograph, issued by the Russians. No British officer or airman could go into the Zone unless escorted by a Russian officer or soldier of similar rank, and no one was permitted to interrogate German witnesses directly; they had to do so through the Russians' interpreters. One officer, whose keenness to solve the identity of a missing airman led him to question a civilian, was expelled from the Zone and the Officer Commanding notified that he would not be admitted in future.⁷⁴

In 1947, the section in Berlin was separated from the rest of No. 4 MREU and came directly under the control of HQ MRES because negotiations with the Russians had become so problematical that they had to be carried out at a high level.⁷⁵ Eventually, the search was allowed to go into all areas of the Russian Zone of Germany apart

⁷³ TNA, WO 267/603, BAOR HQ, Western Europe Graves Service Directorate, Quarterly Historical Report, quarter ending 30 September 1946, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Concentration of British Dead in the Russian Zone', memorandum, 5 October 1946. Stott appended (Appendix G) a translation of the strict rules controlling the visits which had been issued by Major General Vershinin, Chief of the Administration for Repatriation and Search of Nationals of the United Nations, S.M.A. in Germany (undated but clearly of this time period).

⁷⁴ TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', p.24.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

from Thuringia, for which permission was consistently denied, the last attempt to gain entry being made in July 1949.⁷⁶

Poland, set back well behind the Russian Zone, was another particularly difficult area to gain access to.⁷⁷ However, in April 1948, after lengthy negotiations, searcher parties were allowed into the country. Realising that time was of the essence, Hawkins hand-picked a team with a plan of operations which had been mapped out some months beforehand. 'No time was lost in getting the team into the country before a possible change in policy might again postpone the trip.' It was a highly successful visit. 417 bodies of missing aircrew were located, and only 9 of those known to be missing in Poland were not found. The bodies were concentrated in three cemeteries reserved for British military burials.⁷⁸ Amongst these cemeteries was Poznan Old Garrison Cemetery, located in the west of Poland, approximately 200 miles east of Berlin, where the ashes of the officers who had been shot after the mass escape from Sagan's Stalag Luft III were buried after being retrieved from the cemetery at Sagan.⁷⁹ Also concentrated at the same cemetery were the remains of other RAF prisoners of war who had died at Stalag Luft III, and at additional POW camps in Poland such as Stalag VIIC, also at Sagan.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ The Russians' reasons for refusing to allow access to Thuringia are not given in the documentation. TNA, AIR 55 /62, Air Ministry, Liaison with DDGRE and AGRC, memorandum from OC Berlin Detachment, MRES, to Group Captain Hawkins, 12 July 1949.

⁷⁷ The question of gaining access to Poland was raised in the House of Commons more than once, for example on 21 January 1948, see: Hansard, Missing Research, HC Deb 21 January 1948 vol 446. Hansard online (last accessed 5/03/2015):

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1948/jan/21/raf-missing-research-units#S5CV0446P0_19480121_HOC_152

⁷⁸ TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', p.24.

⁷⁹ Re the ashes of those shot after the escape from Stalag Luft III, see Hadaway, *Missing Believed Killed*, p.117.

⁸⁰ The Commonwealth War Graves Commission website gives the information that the majority of the 283 Second World War burials at Poznan are those of airmen, many of whom died in bombing

On June 24 1948, when the work had by no means been finished, the Russians shut off access to and from the British, American and French zones of Berlin, an action which culminated in the Berlin airlift and the escalation of the Cold War. They did not, however, interfere with the RAF search officers' work, and the last members of the MRES team arrived back safely in the American Zone of Germany in early December 1948.⁸¹

So far, this chapter has described the organisations and groups contributing to the search which were based in North-West Europe. In Britain itself, the Air Ministry Casualty Branch used many agencies which had no direct connection to the search, such as the laundry journals which have already been mentioned. In fact, the RAF seems to have approached any authority or person whom they thought might be able to help. The Kropf photograph showed a young man at the wheel of a car with the number plate WH8571. The number sequence having been traced back to Bolton in Lancashire, the RAF obtained a list of registered owners of the car from the taxation officer at Lancashire County Council. It was thus that the unknown body at Donchery was identified as Sergeant George Atkinson of 105 Squadron. Atkinson had not actually owned the car but had been given a photograph of it by a friend who had.⁸² In another case, this time of a missing Wellington crew, the College of Heralds was used to confirm the identity of two sergeants; both hailed from old established families and had been wearing heraldic signet rings.⁸³

operations on Stettin, and others who died while prisoners of war. Commonwealth War Graves Commission website (last accessed 15/09/2014):<http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/34718/POZNAN%20OLD%20GARRISON%20CEMETERY>.

⁸¹ Hadaway, *Missing Believed Killed*, pp.116-117.

⁸² TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', pp.129-130

⁸³ *Ibid*, p.135.

Where there was no hope of naming individual bodies, the aircraft's identity could sometimes be used to confirm who its crew had been. As has been seen, one of the key pieces of evidence which established the burial place of the Coates crew was the number plate on the starboard fin of their Lancaster. Comprehensive records of aircraft manufacturing details were supplied to the RAF by the Ministry of Aircraft Production, the Directorate of Aeronautical Inspection, and firms such as A V Roe who produced the Lancasters, not only in Britain but through licensed associates such as Victory Aircraft in Canada.⁸⁴

The RAF also used the services of the British police. Hawkins developed a very good relationship with Scotland Yard, and some of his search officers were taken round the Laboratories for a demonstration of the Yard's use of forensic science.⁸⁵ The RAF also instigated enquiries with county police forces when necessary, as in the case of a fighter shot down over Calais in 1940. The pilot was eventually identified by a single clue, that of the name of an English county. There was no record of this particular pilot's flight details in Air Ministry records, but the Casualty Branch took the problem to the Chief Constable of that county who went to extraordinary trouble over the matter. In the end, the missing man was identified and the reason for his absence from Air Ministry records became clear — he had belonged to the Fleet Air Arm, the Royal Navy's flying service.⁸⁶

The MRES sometimes used the British Press to help solve a case. , a method which Hawkins refers to as 'novel' in his report, which suggests that it was infrequent to take such an approach. In particular, he cites one case where the Press were invaluable, albeit producing a great many useless answers before the correct one. The only clue in this particular enquiry was a small case, handed in by a Frenchman

⁸⁴ For details of the use made of aircraft parts and serial numbers, *ibid*, but Part V, Appendix I1 and I2, Missing Research Memoranda MRM No. 30 and No. 30A, 9 December 1946.

⁸⁵ TNA, AIR 20/9050, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, unsigned, 'Report on the MRES, North-West Europe', undated but clearly between October 1947 and February 1948.

⁸⁶ Major F A de V Robertson, 'Tracing Missing Airmen; Missing Research and Enquiry Service: Following Slender Clues', *Flight Magazine*, p.423.

who had found it near a crashed aircraft. The case contained two photographs of an attractive girl, one of which showed her in nurse's uniform, and a card on which was written an affectionate message from 'Barb' to 'Bob'. This information was given to the newspapers and on 18 September 1945 the London Press ran the story.

Daily Mirror TUES SEPT 18 1945

FORWARD WITH THE PEOPLE
No. 13,024 ONE PENNY
Registered at G.P.O. as a Newspaper.

BATTLE FOR OIL HAS BEGUN

WHO IS 'BARB'?
WHO WAS 'BOB'?

A girl's photograph found near a crashed RAF aircraft is the only clue to the identity of an airman who has been buried as "unknown" at Argenteuil, Seine et Oise, in France.

Investigation on the spot has disclosed that the photograph of the unknown girl was found in a folding metal pocket case in pink and gold enamel. Also in the case was a card written to "Bob" and signed "Barb."

The Air Ministry attach particular importance to tracing "Barb." They hope that she will prove to be the first link in the chain of evidence which may lead to establishing the identity of not only "Bob," but the other members of the crashed bomber.

Will anyone who recognises the photograph get into touch immediately with the Air Ministry (Casualty Branch), Room 503, 73-77, Oxford-street, London, W.1.





(Above.) The photograph found near the crashed RAF bomber. On the left, the signature "Barb" which was on the card found with the photograph.

As Hawkins writes:

The response was extraordinary; telephone calls, telegrams and letters poured in. Barbara was recognised from Land's End to John O'Groats, and many points between. She was a W.A.A.F., a W.R.E.N., a dentist, a nurse [...] Barbara was also a very bad girl, at present in a Remand Home, and the wife of a baronet [...]. Two letters, apparently from lunatics, had a certain entertainment value, but did not add to the sum of our knowledge. One contained complimentary references to Lord Dawson of Penn, and stated that the writer had hurt his hand, but was better now.

One writer enclosed a photograph of a girl he did not know, but which he stated 'had fallen out of a library book in Hammersmith', thus presenting us with a second unknown. Another writer enclosed the picture of a lady described as 'the pin-up girl of the 14th Army'. The lady, who was in native attire, was attractive but was not Barbara.

However, in amongst this extraordinary collection, were three letters from members of the RCAF who identified Barbara as Miss Barbara Johnston, a nurse from Windsor, Ontario. It was thus that the body of her fiancé was finally identified as being that of Flight Sergeant Robert Whitley, RCAF, who had died on the night of 29/30 May 1942.⁸⁷

A successful outcome for a complex missing case relied on great perseverance, attention to detail, open-mindedness as to probable and improbable sources of information, and, not infrequently, skilled diplomacy. One case which Hawkins considered particularly commendable was that of a Mosquito crew of two men. The case occupied the Air Ministry Casualty Branch for almost four years and Hawkins attributed its final success to a number of factors: informed conjecture based on British records and captured German documents; the search team's refusal to be 'frustrated by the difficulties placed in their way' by the Russians (the crash site was in the Russian Zone, effectively out of reach except by telephone); and the tactful perseverance of the Liaison Officer at AGRC HQ, Flight Lieutenant H J Prior, who handled the delicate matter of the remains having been abducted by the Americans.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', pp.136-137.

⁸⁸ Hawkins does not mention Prior by name in his report, only by job title but A P LeM Sinkinson's letter of congratulation was addressed to Prior. Australian National Archives, RAAF, Flying Officer Keith Ross Holland personnel file, A P Le M. Sinkinson to H J Prior, letter, 25 June 1948.

In this particular case, the information originally sent by the Red Cross in 1944 had been terse in the extreme. An item in IRCC telegram SB 4591 had simply read: '27/10 Mosquito 1315 hours; two unknown dead; buried Warnemünde cemetery.'⁸⁹ Before the MRES was given the case, the Air Ministry Casualty Branch had narrowed down the possibilities of who the two men were by checking the extremely comprehensive RAF records for a matching date, aircraft type, and feasible hour and location of crash given take-off time, likely speed, and destination (this was, of course, at a time before computers could make such a check in a matter of seconds). Only one Mosquito loss, that of NS.654, a photographic reconnaissance aircraft from Coastal Command, RAF Benson, matched the data. The circumstantial evidence was so strong that the next of kin were informed.

Nonetheless, as was Air Ministry Casualty Branch policy, confirmatory evidence was sought that the graves in Warnemünde were indeed those of the crew of Mosquito NS.654. This proved most fortuitous as it transpired that the bodies had been removed by the Americans. They had taken them to the CIP in Strasbourg which had been unable to identify them, and the bodies had then been reburied as 'unknowns' in the United States Military Cemetery at Neuville-en-Condroz in Belgium. The two bodies were finally retrieved by the British, individually identified, and laid to rest in the British Military Cemetery at Heverlee in Belgium 'after a journey half across Europe'.⁹⁰ This case, in which Hawkins took obvious pride, shows the paucity of information with which many cases started, and the long and difficult route to a successful outcome. It also (although Hawkins did not say as much) demonstrates that in the complicated world of post-war missing research you could never be too careful.

⁸⁹ Ibid, Casualty Branch to RAAF HQ Overseas, letter, 24 December 1944.

⁹⁰ Hawkins, *Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service*, pp.130-131. Flying Officer Keith Holland had been identified by his dental plate, details of which had been tactfully obtained from his next of kin, and this had differentiated him from his navigator, Flying Officer Geoffrey Bloomfield. Australian National Archives, RAAF, Flying Officer Keith Ross Holland personnel file, A P Le M. Sinkinson to H J Prior, letter, 25 June 1948.

These two chapters on the RAF, the Air Ministry Casualty Branch and the MRES have outlined the nature of RAF missing research, the problems which hampered it, and the resources which were used to solve the problems. Nothing like the search had ever been attempted before; the many thousands of dead had vanished into the sea or were scattered all across Europe, and information about what had happened to many of them was vestigial or non-existent.

The problems which affected missing research changed dramatically in the decade of the search. The search in the field could not commence until the liberation of Europe was well under way, and the MRES's first years were hampered by the severe damage and shortages caused by the war, together with the need to build up a professional field service from scratch. The ever increasing and often very considerable lapse of time between burial and exhumation meant the degradation of materials which would once have easily established identity. Forensic science was limited and not adequate to deal with the variable type of burial methods, whilst the frequently very sloppy procedures used in recording identity, both in Germany and the occupied countries, meant that local cemetery records could not be relied upon. Whilst the search was always difficult, the problems with missing research in Germany were unique; a combination of German resentment and self-protective secrecy, catastrophic war damage, and intransigent authorities in the Russian Zone, combined to make this the hardest area or all to work in. Nonetheless, private individuals were often the key to the successful solving of a case, just as they were in the liberated countries where the population was for the most part very eager to help.

The Dominion Air Forces contributed largely to the search, just as they had done to the Allied air offensive. However, many of the resources which the RAF used were totally outside the British military establishment. The Air Ministry Casualty Branch cultivated the good will of civilians and civilian agencies, and in the field the MRES

cooperated well with other nations, especially the Americans despite the occasional problem of a stolen corpse. In fact, one of the main factors which contributed to the success of the search was the striking willingness demonstrated by the Air Ministry Casualty Branch and the MRES to go beyond conventional or British-controlled methods and to utilise the most surprising sources of information, such as the hypnotism of Herr Oehmen.

Although there was no historical precedent for the RAF search, there is some cause to suggest that the Service should have been better prepared for it. Its tardiness was partly due to the fact that its exact responsibility for the missing was not established until late 1941. No amount of preparation could have altered the scale or complexity of the work, nor the fact that it could not commence until the Germans had been defeated; however, some idea of what was involved might have been explored earlier, perhaps by consulting Scotland Yard or by examining the programme for the recovery of the dead carried out by the Americans after the First World War. Nonetheless, once it was possible to commence the field work, the RAF gave the search a very high level of commitment, not to mention a certain fierce possessiveness which excluded the Army as much as possible.

A possible serious methodological error may have been in the calculation of how many men had been lost at sea. For obvious reasons, it was very rare for airmen to be able to transmit a message which detailed what fate had overtaken them. It did happen occasionally, such as on 22 March 1944 when the Operations Record Book of 97 Squadron recorded: 'F/O Moroney and crew [...] failed to return, the last message heard was at 20.38 hours, position given as 53.21N 03.45E baling out', the position being over the North Sea some 70 miles off the Norfolk coast.⁹¹ This type of evidence was fairly incontrovertible, but in hundreds of other instances aircraft disappeared with no explanation whatsoever. Nonetheless, there is a high likelihood that these vanished aircraft had indeed been lost at sea, because even catastrophic

⁹¹ TNA, AIR 27/768, Air Ministry, 97 Squadron, Operations Record Book, 1 January 1944 – 31 May 1945, 22 March 1944.

mid-air explosions produced debris and, surprisingly frequently, identifiable bodies, as in the case of the Carlos Brown and Brill crews.

In Europe, as elsewhere, many missing remained when the MRES was disbanded. Some of the missing have subsequently been found, either by accident or increasingly by amateur aviation researchers. These researchers often follow up local reports of a crash, and use metal detectors or even geophysics machines which, of course, were not available in the 1940s; by the former means, human remains from the Carlos Brown crew were discovered in 2009 by a local researcher.⁹² The MRES had been operating with limited time and resources and, within those constraints, had frequently had to decide whether a good outcome could realistically be achieved. Pragmatic decisions not to pursue difficult cases sometimes had to be taken. Clearly, some of the judgements which they made in this respect were very accurate. In the case of the Hart crew, lost in Holland in January 1943, their Lancaster had penetrated deeply into the earth. Two bodies which had come down separately were identified, but five other crew members were unaccounted for and almost certainly still inside the buried Lancaster. Initially, there had been the intention to pursue the matter further: a memorandum from No. 2 MREU stated: 'No 3 B.R.U. [Base Recovery Unit] will be requested to raise the aircraft.'⁹³ However, eighteen months later this decision had obviously been rescinded because the next of kin of the missing men were now advised: 'The major part of the aircraft penetrated deeply into the soft earth, which is land reclaimed from

⁹² They were discovered by Felix Klingenberg when he was using a metal detector to search for aircraft pieces. Letter from Felix Klingenberg to Mr J Tutt (brother of one of the crew), 4 November 2009, courtesy of Rod Little.

⁹³ Australian National Archives, RAAF, Pilot Officer Allan Robert Hart personnel file, No. 2 MREU, memorandum, 27 June 1946.

the sea, thus preventing the recovery of the five members for burial.⁹⁴ In fact, it took modern imperatives, methods and resources to find the missing crew members.⁹⁵

Excavating buried aircraft was always a huge problem given the shortage of specialised equipment and the men to operate it. An RAF report included in Stott's paperwork demonstrates this all too vividly:

Of the original requests made by the [Air Ministry] Casualty Branch for excavations of buried aircraft only 25 per cent have been selected by the Base Recovery Unit for their future programme. This Unit, equipped with the necessary mechanical gear, necessarily proceeds very slowly indeed; only one aircraft has been excavated in the area since last May [a period of just over a year], resulting in the identification of four aircrew and there is little purpose, therefore, in sending requests for further excavations or reminders on cases already submitted.⁹⁶

The American Graves Registration Command was massively better funded and could afford to expend huge effort on individual cases, such as the complex and lengthy Zegveld Operation which sought five crew members of a B-17 which had sunk to the depth of twenty-five feet in the marshy Dutch polder.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Ibid, Casualty Section, Albert Park Barracks, Australia, to Mr A Davison, letter, 19 February 1948.

⁹⁵ The modern imperative was that in 2001 the crash site was wanted for the expansion of the Amsterdam docks; the excavation was undertaken by the Royal Netherlands Air Force Salvage Team and took five weeks, being one of the largest that the team had ever handled. Jennie Gray, 'The Path Finder Force and 97 Squadron', website (last accessed 11/11/15): <http://raf-pathfinders.com/crew-hart/>

⁹⁶ TNA, WO 267/603, BAOR HQ, Western Europe Graves Service Directorate, Quarterly Historical Report, quarter ending 30 September 1946, Appendix O, 'Report by Head of S.14 CAS on visits to MRES Units in Europe June-July 1947'.

⁹⁷ The other five crew members had already been accounted for. Steere and Boardman, *Final Disposition of World War II Dead*, pp.208-209.

This chapter has looked at the huge problems which RAF missing research faced, and how at the same time that vast improvements were being made in the search process, the chances of identification were diminishing due to the increasing length of time since the original burial. Solutions were found to many of the more intractable problems, but numerous cases were unsolvable due to lack of evidence or resources. Nonetheless, the RAF's achievements in missing research were very impressive. Of the 41,881 missing men about whom information was sought, the burial place of 57 per cent would be ascertained, 22 per cent would be formally declared as having been lost at sea, 5 per cent would be marked as having no known grave but some information had been obtained about their fate, and it was only in the case of 6,745 men – 16 per cent – that it would not be possible to discover anything at all.⁹⁸ These figures demonstrate that the RAF achieved considerably more than might have been expected of it given the enormity of the task.

⁹⁸ TNA, AIR2/9910, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, illegible signature (possibly K C Stole), 'Missing Research Activities, October to December 1950', report, 3 January 1951.

Chapter Five – The War Office Casualty Branch: Its Work for the Missing, the Dead, and Their Next of Kin

One of the major themes which runs through this study is the marked divergence between the Army and the RAF in their work on behalf of the military dead. The work carried out on behalf of the missing constitutes the greatest difference of them all. What will quickly become apparent in this chapter is that there was almost no similarity between the RAF approach to the missing, as seen in the previous two chapters, and that of the Army, which will be described in this.

The War Office Casualty Branch which handled the administrative routines relating to missing soldiers was also responsible for those relating to fatal battle casualties, these two matters having a tendency to converge as so many of the missing would be assumed, after a certain lapse of time, to be dead. In both matters, the War Office Casualty Branch was responsible for notifying the next of kin and answering any enquiries they might have. The mishandling of numerous aspects of this work is one of the major themes of this chapter.

The main source used is the War Office Casualty Branch report, apparently completed in 1946.¹ At the end of 1941, the Casualty Branch was divided, with the prisoner of war section being established in London, a considerable distance from the main body in Liverpool. The Casualty Branch report used in this study was produced by what came to be known as 'Cas L', in Liverpool, as opposed to 'Cas P.W', the London section, which would produce its own post-war report, also

¹ TNA, WO 162/205, War Office, 'History of Casualty Branch (Liverpool) (Cas L)'. As stated in the introduction's footnotes, the report was probably completed in 1946 because the last figures given for the Army missing in Appendix K are August 1946.

apparently in 1946.² Unfortunately the title page is missing from both Casualty Branch reports in the National Archives, and it has so far not been possible to trace a complete copy of the Cas L report or discover the details on the title page by any other means. The title 'History of Casualty Branch (Liverpool) (Cas L)' which is used in this study is apparently that given by the National Archives and may not be the original name. Of much greater significance, however, is the lack of anything identifying an author, his rank, or any indication of the role which he carried out in Cas L. Nonetheless, the occasionally intemperate tone of some of the passages indicates someone who had an intimate knowledge of the way in which Cas L operated and of its considerable unpopularity. He is also likely to have been reasonably senior in Cas L for the creation of the report to be entrusted to him.

The major source used in the previous two chapters on the RAF was Group Captain Hawkins' report on the MRES, the MRES being a division of the Air Ministry's Casualty Branch. Both this report and the War Office Casualty Branch report were written for internal Service use, not for the general public, and thus to a large extent reflect the sort of dialogue being carried on within the RAF and the Army about the dead and missing after the war. Both were intended as a possible guide in a future war, a comprehensive record of the sort of situations which had been encountered, the solutions which had been found to problems, and the structure which had been needed to carry out the work. Thereafter, any similarity ends. The two reports covered different aspects of dealing with casualties, Hawkins' report being entirely on the search for the RAF missing, whereas the Cas L report dealt with a number of issues, of which the question of the Army missing formed only a part. Hawkins was writing about fieldwork in Europe and, sometimes, about casework in Britain, whereas the Cas L report was almost solely confined to administrative work in the UK. However, the most striking difference between the

² TNA, WO 162/204, War Office, 'History of Prisoner of War Branch (London) (Cas P.W)'. As stated in the introduction's footnotes, the report was probably completed in 1946 because the last figures given for visitors to Curzon Street House in Appendix C are December 1945.

two reports is the intelligent, engaging tone of Hawkins' writing and the narrow-minded, irritable voice of Cas L. For the most part the latter's report is studiously dry and factual, containing huge amounts of data on the mechanics of running the Branch, such as heating, office furniture, clerks' pay grades, and so forth. However, every so often the tone of dry officialese gives way to an outburst of aggrieved resentment, the most startling of such passages being a diatribe against Press reportage which will be quoted later.

The problem with the Cas L report lies, in fact, not in any difficulty in believing what it states or how thoroughly it covers its subject, but in counteracting the bad impression which certain parts of it create. The attitudes in the report cannot be considered as characteristic of the entire Army programme for the dead, as is immediately evident when the work of the Graves Service is contrasted. They do, however, present a graphic illustration of the Army's serious problems with public relations and, in particular, with the relatives of the dead and the missing.

The Army administrative structures which dealt with the missing and the dead were wartime creations. In peacetime there had been no centralised system for notifying soldiers classed as 'non-effective', whether they be sick, injured, or dead, or if they had disappeared for some unknown reason. The responsibility for dealing with these matters had rested with the units, or occasionally with the hospital authorities or the individual soldier's Record Office; thus the occasions when the War Office had communicated directly with the next of kin were 'very rare in the case of other ranks and infrequent in the case of officers'.³ Perhaps this lack of experience in dealing with the public was one reason why the wartime Casualty Branch, a centralised body created very promptly by the War Office in September 1939, would lack humanity when dealing with the relatives.

³ TNA, WO 162/205, War Office, 'History of Casualty Branch (Liverpool) (Cas L)', p.1.

The responsibilities of the War Office Casualty Branch were wide-ranging. Briefly summarised they were: the collection of casualty statistics and the maintenance of records for the Government and the War Office; liaison with the Directorate of Public Relations at the War Office, including the production of casualty lists which might be published in the Press; liaison with the British Red Cross Society, the Central Prisoners of War Committee, and other such bodies; communications with the next of kin, including despatch of the Royal Message of Condolence; and the handling of missing procedures leading up to the decision that a man had been proved or must be presumed to be dead.⁴

Although the Army was the central organisation in graves registration in North-West Europe, the duty of reporting back to the relatives of soldiers, airmen or sailors was performed by the respective Casualty Branches of the War Office, the Air Ministry, and the Admiralty. The Dominions also had their own Casualty Branches.⁵ Only Newfoundlanders were directly enlisted into the British Army, and apart from them there were no Dominion soldiers under direct War Office control.⁶ The War Office Casualty Branch's role in Dominion cases was to pass on information to the Dominion authorities so that the Dominion authorities could handle relations with the next of kin ('expressions of condolence customarily conveyed' as the Cas L report somewhat icily put it) and control the Press and public relations aspect.⁷ This

⁴ Ibid, pp.1-6.

⁵ The Dominion authorities maintained HQs in Britain; for example, in the case of the Royal Australian Air Force, RAAF Overseas HQ was located at Kodak House in Kingsway close to Adastral House. There it received information from the Air Ministry Casualty Branch, which it forwarded to its own Casualty Section in South Yarra, Australia.

⁶ Newfoundland was a separate Dominion until 1949 when it became a Canadian province. Edwin Gibson 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* (HMSO, London, 1989), p.36.

⁷ TNA, WO 162/205, War Office, 'History of Casualty Branch (Liverpool) (Cas L)', p.19.

explains why, in personnel matters, the War Office Casualty Branch dealt only with the relatives of British soldiers.

The RAF and the Army viewed their missing in a very different light. One significant sign of this is the way in which the Army often called these men ‘the “missing”’ in inverted commas as if to signify that there was an ambiguity about such cases. Although the RAF also sometimes adopted this usage, its significance was by no means the same as in the Army where it reflected a somewhat ruthless policy aimed at reducing missing numbers as quickly as possible.⁸ Far from ‘the missing’ meaning what the RAF meant by the term, i.e. men who had disappeared on operations whose fate or whereabouts were currently unknown, in Army parlance it could more accurately be defined as meaning those men whose cases the Casualty Branch had not yet processed.

As has been seen, the Graves Service working in North-West Europe after D-Day thought of the dead in terms of two time bands: casualties who were pre-D-Day, and those who came afterwards. The problem of identifying men who had been buried for a considerable length of time was the main reason for this divergence. A division along timelines was also bureaucratically neat, and the Casualty Branch followed the same approach in the statistics which it kept for the missing of Northern Europe. These were maintained for three different campaigns: the BEF in France up to June 1940; the Norway campaign from April to June 1940; and North-West Europe from 6 June 1944 to the end of the war.

The 1940 French and Norway campaigns had involved crushing reversals, and the loss of many soldiers through death or capture. During the subsequent months, a

⁸ The RAF did not use the inverted commas very often, but one such instance was in the Minutes of the seminal meeting chaired by the AMP, 26 July 1945. TNA, AIR20/9050, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, Minutes of a meeting on the MRES chaired by the AMP, 26 July 1945.

flood of prisoner of war reports came in, and in Table 4 the left-hand figures reflect this (in the Branch's jargon, they were compiled 'after General Reporting of PW').⁹ The right-hand figures show the numbers who remained missing on three subsequent dates, 31 December 1944, 31 December 1945, and 17 August 1946.

Registered as Missing after General PW Reporting					Remaining Missing		
Campaign	Date of Return	Officers	Other Ranks	Total	31/12/1944	31/12/1945	17/08/1946
France 1940	02 December 1940	407	10,696	11,103	442	55	10
Norway 1940	07 October 1940	14	257	271	7	0	0
N.W. Europe	31 March 1945	164	2,876	3,040	<i>no figures</i>	207	4
	Total Missing	585	13,829	14,414	449	262	14
1946 figures do not including missing POWs, which were 54 ORs in N.W. Europe							
<i>Source: TNA, WO 162/205, History of Casualty Branch (Liverpool), Appendix K</i>							

The most astonishing thing about the above figures is how incredibly small they are, particularly when it is considered that in July 1945 an Air Ministry Casualty Branch report estimated that some 27,000 airmen were missing in North-West Europe.¹⁰ To highlight this immense difference, it should be noted that at the nearest available comparison point, six months later at the end of that same year, the Army was recording its missing in North-West Europe as being 262 men.

⁹ As noted on the table, the missing prisoner of war figures were not included. It is likely that the majority of these men were amongst those who took part in the forced marches at the end of the war, marches in which RAF prisoners in very large numbers also took part. Such was the chaos of the times that records of the prisoners' movements, or deaths, were inadequately kept, or were lost in the general confusion of the war's end. For conditions on the forced marches, see for example Oliver Clutton-Brock, *Footprints on the Sands of Time, RAF Bomber Command Prisoners of War in Germany, 1939-45* (Grub Street, London, 2003), pp.112-115.

¹⁰ TNA, AIR20/9050, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, Group Captain R Burges, 'Missing Research and Enquiry Service', report, 12 July 1945.

The RAF did not believe that it was possible to find all its missing airmen; a formula was worked out to calculate the substantial number lost at sea, and this was eventually settled on as being 40 per cent. Nonetheless, even with 40 per cent taken off, the number of the RAF missing still vastly exceeded the Army total.¹¹

The obvious question is: why were there so few Army missing? As was seen in Chapter One, the Army methods of burying and recording its dead were not so efficient as to produce a very small number of 'lost' bodies. Like all Army procedures for dealing with the dead, the reporting chain was liable to buckle when under severe pressure. The disasters of the 1940 campaigns in France and Norway led to great difficulties in filing casualty reports. After D-Day, things were easier to handle because the Army was, by and large, victorious, but nonetheless the process left a great deal to be desired. More significantly, however, the missing figures included thousands of men who had simply disappeared. In such cases, procedures were based upon Army order ACI 2085/1941, which laid down that as soon as possible after an officer or a man went missing, his unit should make full enquiries and forward any information received to GHQ, Second Echelon, and thence through to the Casualty Branch.¹² In practice, it was found that units often did not send any report, or sent a report which had insufficient detail or was clearly unreliable. To try to remedy this, a questionnaire was designed for the units to fill in, but the problem of insufficient or unreliable data continued, mainly because it was often impossible to gather evidence in a war zone, the witnesses almost invariably being fellow soldiers who had more pressing matters on their mind, and were themselves liable to be wounded, captured, or killed.¹³

In order not to waste time on enquiries which would be rendered pointless if information came through that a missing man was a prisoner of war, the Casualty Branch allowed a period of time to elapse after the disappearance, generally around

¹¹ For further details on how the RAF calculated its missing figures, see Chapter Three.

¹² TNA, WO 162/205, War Office, 'History of Casualty Branch (Liverpool) (Cas L)', p.43.

¹³ See Chapter One on these procedures with regards to battle casualties.

4 months, before instituting routine enquiries. A number of avenues were then explored: following up with the missing man's unit to find out why no report had been made and what evidence was available; getting in touch with the next of kin to see if they had received any news, for example from comrades of the missing man; contacting the International Red Cross to ascertain whether they had received any information from relatives; and making enquiries, via the International Red Cross and the 'Man of Confidence' at the various POW camps to see whether any prisoners of war knew what had happened.¹⁴

There were other routes to finding out about missing men. All prisoner of war mail reaching Britain was scrutinised by the Postal Censorship and any information about casualties was sent on to the Casualty Branch.¹⁵ The British Red Cross played a valuable part through its Hospital Searchers, who relayed the evidence of hospitalised witnesses to the War Office.¹⁶ In addition, the BBC (and other less official listeners) monitored enemy broadcasts which sometimes gave lists of prisoners or other valuable information.¹⁷ Though this source were considered unreliable because the Germans used the broadcasts for propaganda purposes, occasionally something of real significance did emerge, as in the case of the shooting and probable death of the missing soldier-journalist Major Anthony

¹⁴ In the original list, it includes the British Red Cross, but as will be seen later in this chapter, this was only for the earlier period of the war. TNA, WO 162/205, War Office, 'History of Casualty Branch (Liverpool) (Cas L)', p.43.

¹⁵ Ibid, p.45.

¹⁶ Ibid, pp.43-44.

¹⁷ 'Other less official listeners' – the official British Red Cross History states that broadcasts were often picked up by 'enthusiastic amateurs in this country, some of whom passed the information on to relatives for whom they were supposedly intended'. P G Cambray and G G B Briggs (Compilers), *Red Cross and St. John: The Official Record of the Humanitarian Services of the War Organisation of the British Red Cross Society and the Order of St John of Jerusalem, 1939-1947* (published at 14 Grosvenor Crescent, London, SW1, 1949, p.345.

Cotterell, which was reported in an enemy-controlled Radio Hilversum broadcast of October 1944.¹⁸

All the above avenues of enquiry or sources of information helped solve missing cases. However, the single greatest determining factor in reducing the number of Army missing was the methods which the Army used to classify them. The Casualty Branch's intention was to investigate these cases 'with a view to the eventual necessity for presumption of death', or to establish 'the facts of deaths in unusual or suspicious circumstances; of causes of individual complaints and public outcry'.¹⁹ Its strategy was described unequivocally in the post-war report:

Policy: Although the utmost care had been taken to get conclusive evidence, often involving protracted enquiries, it was the policy of the Department to record death as soon as the evidence warranted it, to relieve suspense, to enable relatives to readjust their lives (e.g. widows to remarry) and to clear up estates, insurances, etc.²⁰

The Army used two specific terms in its decision to register a missing soldier as being dead — 'acceptance of death' and 'presumption of death'. Acceptance of death required firm evidence, but this evidence ranged along a spectrum between the absolutely indisputable to the sound but with minor discrepancies. Presumption of death was when death appeared overwhelmingly likely but there was no incontrovertible proof.

Acceptance of death relied on one or more of three essential factors. These were: the receipt of a valid death report from an official source, such as from the Germans

¹⁸ TNA, WO 309/847, JAG, war crimes dossier, shooting of British POWs at Brummen, 'Spotlight on the Invasion', Radio Hilversum, intercepted broadcast of 4 October 1944, BBC transcript.

¹⁹ TNA, WO 162/205, War Office, 'History of Casualty Branch (Liverpool) (Cas L)', pp.1-2.

²⁰ Ibid, p.46.

via the International Red Cross; the finding of a grave whose occupant could be verified; or an eyewitness account of the death which was reliable and could be corroborated, even if only in general terms. Acceptance of death had two categories. Category A was where 'the evidence was clear and sound in every respect' including the correct name and Army number of the missing man. Category B was where the evidence was sound but there was 'some discrepancy or mutilation of name or other particulars' in the report, or the report was neither an eyewitness report nor an official report although it was 'tantamount' to the latter. Category C was reserved for presumption of death.²¹

One illustration of the system of categorisation might be a Normandy tank crew of five men where the tank had been hit, 'brewed up', and when discovered contained what appeared to be only four burned bodies. If three of these were identified but not the fourth, the first three men would be Category A and the other two crew members would be Category C, 'presumed dead', it not being possible to tell whose body was in the tank. If there were two unidentifiable bodies in the tank, the missing two would be labelled as Category B because the evidence was overwhelming that these were the two missing members of the crew. This labelling in categories was used for administrative purposes, and was not communicated to the relatives.

The key importance of Category C, 'presumption of death', was that it led to the issue of a War Office Certificate of Death. Although this had no legal authority, it was generally accepted as evidence of death for Probate and similar matters.²² Because of the great value of this document, evidence concerning the probable death was weighed very carefully according to the post-war Casualty Branch report. Any possible problems with the evidence were ascertained, such as cases of possible mistaken identity when men had similar or identical names. Rumours and hearsay were followed up, particularly when there were alleged sightings of the missing man in the United Kingdom. What was considered highly suspicious was the situation

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid, p.47.

when the man's family made no enquiries about him, and in that case, 'as a last resort', the police might be requested to interview the relatives.²³

According to the Casualty Branch report, 'Presumption of death was never implemented against the wishes of next-of-kin'. The standard procedure was that a letter would be sent to the relatives notifying them of the decision to presume death and giving them time to lodge an objection. However:

the number of next-of-kin resisting presumption of death action was never more than 80 and this figure was reduced by the end of 1946 to a couple.²⁴

Some next of kin pressed strongly for presumption of death as soon as possible. Where the relatives had a genuine reason for their wish, this was known as a 'pressure case' and kept on the Pressure List. The Casualty Branch report listed the types of genuine reason: they pertained to situations where there was 'exceptional and undiminishing anguish (particularly if affecting physical health)'; where there was need for the relative (always referred to as a 'she') to readjust her life, for example, to remarry; or where there was necessity for the relative (once again a 'she') to consolidate her financial position, for example, to cash in on an insurance policy 'to settle debts or to provide for the children'. Where these genuine reasons existed, the policy was to take 'slightly more risk [...] in presuming death than in the ordinary course' and to presume death despite the lack of confirmatory evidence.²⁵

This ostensibly helpful attitude towards the relatives chimed with the drive of the Casualty Branch to decrease missing numbers. In a key passage, the post-war report described the means for rapidly reducing the numbers in situations where large numbers of men had gone missing on a particular campaign:

²³ Ibid, p.48.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid, p.49.

Each Theatre presented its own particular problems but nevertheless offered, after due time had elapsed, its particular justifications for block presumption of death on set occasions.

It was reasoned that given a certain set of circumstances, there would be no incentive for a man to desert and little possibility of it, and if, after due lapse of time, he had not been reported by the enemy as a prisoner of war, and he had not been located in his Unit, then he must have been killed without any surviving witness.²⁶

A number of formulae were used to define the 'certain set of circumstances'; these ranged from the 'Dunkirk formula' through to the 'Immobilised formula' when a man had been wounded badly enough to be incapacitated. Each formula was balanced upon an assessment of the likelihood of desertion. The Dunkirk formula, for example, rested upon the complete entrapment of the BEF by the sea and by the Germans: 'The incentive was [...] to be evacuated to the United Kingdom, where a man would be paid, fed, re-clothed, etc', i.e. there was no incentive to desert because the only alternative was to become a prisoner. If a man was known to have been with the trapped forces, and was not subsequently found in the UK or reported to be a prisoner of war, the 'only conclusion possible' was that he had been killed:

Some 350 cases were presumed on the 'Dunkirk formula'; the 'formula' was never proved false by reason of a man who had got within the perimeter being reported alive after death had been presumed on the formula.²⁷

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid, pp.49-50.

The Casualty Branch defended its system for reducing the number of missing as being extremely accurate due to the 'unremitting effort by the Missing Section'. The post-war report stated that of the 49 per cent of missing cases accepted to be dead (i.e. with strong evidence to prove death), 'less than a dozen turned out to be fictitious', practically all occurring in Burma. Of the 51 per cent presumed to be dead (i.e. with vestigial or no evidence to prove what had happened to them), only about half a dozen turned up alive, including one deserter.²⁸

The 'unremitting effort' put in by the Missing Section cannot be thought of as the equivalent of the RAF's search for its missing, which was in a different league altogether. The RAF's success in tracing its missing even in the most difficult of circumstances was due to the creation of the MRES, a dedicated search group staffed by extremely motivated officers, whose work was supported by the highest echelons of the Service. The Army had no equivalent of the MRES, and simply did not put the same amount of effort into the search for its missing. It did not initiate the same type of focused searching, and thus it was that many of its missing cases were solved almost by accident, such as when a previously nameless body was identified by the Graves Service or by RAF investigators.

From November 1944 the Army divided the dead of North-West Europe into two broad categories, the first being what was sometimes called 'the 1939/44 dead' and the second being the unknown dead of 'the present operations'. In November 1944, Stott informed the War Office of the following points concerning the 1939/44 dead:

- a. Exhumations to date have not been justified by results
- b. Evidence has been obtained which shows that Germans stripped bodies before burial
- c. Civilians did all in their power to preserve identity

²⁸ Ibid, p.54. The report does not give percentages, and only approximate figures, see later in this chapter.

- d. Fingerprint experts would not help much as charts are not maintained in the British Service[s]; Ordnance experts in Clothing would prove useful, but this would depend upon the time that had elapsed since burial, and on the nature of the soil.²⁹

It was rare indeed for the Army to conduct an active search for missing personnel, but a highly effective experiment was initiated by Stott that November when he sent one officer of the Graves Service to make enquiries on the spot in the Arras-Lille-Dieppe-Rouen area. This officer investigated 67 enquiries made by the War Office and GHQ Second Echelon about soldiers and airmen who had gone missing in the pre-D-Day era. He had astounding success, finding answers to 65 of the 67 enquiries. As in numerous other searches, the best information came not from adults but from children of 12 to 16 years old, who had taken an acute interest in crashed aircraft, airborne troops' operations, and commando raids, and thus remembered many of the crucial details.³⁰

It is not known why the Army did not continue with this type of search, but whatever had made Stott's experiment such a success was not repeated. This was particularly so with regards to the pre-D-Day dead, the identification of whom the War Office was at first inclined to write off as a lost cause; Stott noted, for example, at the beginning of March 1945: 'we only attempt to identify Pre "D" Day "Unknowns" when they are the subject of Special Enquiries'.³¹ However, he himself continued to support any attempt to identify the pre D-Day dead, writing to the War Office on 16 March:

²⁹ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, entry for 7 November 1944.

³⁰ Ibid, Appendix H, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Tracing of Missing Offrs and Men, of unlocated ex-PW and of Graves in BLA', memorandum, 25 November 1944.

³¹ TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, appendices for March, Appendix J1, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Attachment of RAF Officer', memorandum, 4 March 1945.

Even though it may result only in one per cent success, I still incline to the view that all pre “D” Day “Unknowns” should be exhumed in an effort to identify.³²

On 22 May 1945, the War Office gave in, and directed that ‘in ALL cases where identity cannot be established by other means’, exhumation should be carried out.³³

Where the missing of the post D-Day campaigns were concerned, Army searcher organisations, consisting of officers and NCOs, travelled to the locations where men had disappeared and interviewed local witnesses and officials. They also looked for isolated graves at a distance from the main battle areas. However, as the Casualty Branch report admitted, the evidence obtained ‘did not affect a large number of cases in Europe’, though it was useful in solving some difficult cases.³⁴ Instead it appears that the Army came to rely upon the MRES and the Control Commission Search Bureau to do its searching for it; this happened more or less by default as both organisations advised the Army of any unknown or unregistered graves which they came across.³⁵

³² Ibid, Appendix J5, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, ‘Exhumation – Policy, Pre “D” Day Graves’, memorandum, 16 March 1945. See also, TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Appendix H, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, ‘Tracing of Missing Offrs and Men, of unlocated ex-PW and of Graves in BLA’, memorandum, 25 November 1944.

³³ Ibid, but main diary, entry for 26 May 1945. It is perhaps notable that Stott recorded in the diary entry the full details of the Authority given, so that it was easy to refer to it if any questions arose.

³⁴ TNA, WO 162/205, War Office, ‘History of Casualty Branch (Liverpool) (Cas L)’, p.45.

³⁵ See, for example, Lieutenant Colonel Stott’s remarks about the MRES and the Control Commission Search Bureau in January 1946: ‘These Services have numerous “Search” Teams in Germany: Their job is to search for “Missing” and advise the Graves Service of any graves found.’ TNA, 171/8653, BAOR HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January to June 1946, appendices for January, Appendix G3, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, ‘Graves Registration, Concentration, and Enquiries Service’, memorandum, 22 January 1946. See also the following memorandum: TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, appendices for May, Appendix J6, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, ‘Tracing of Missing Personnel’, memorandum, 25 May 1945: ‘The Graves

The Army did have some focused services, for example a special section of the Casualty Branch deciphered incomplete, damaged, or garbled burial reports.³⁶ However, in the absence of an organisation like the MRES, the Army did not make much progress in missing cases even when the stakes were high. One such high-profile case demonstrates just how limited the Army's efforts were even when considerable pressure was being applied.

The case was that of the soldier-journalist Major Anthony Cotterell, whose supposed fate had been broadcast by the Germans in the Radio Hilversum broadcast mentioned above. This case was very high-profile for a number of reasons, not least the fact that the Germans clearly knew who Anthony Cotterell was and that he was not the ordinary type of Army Major.³⁷ Anthony Cotterell was a moderately famous writer on British Army matters, amongst whose work was a best-selling and very influential account of conscript life which was well-known to the German propaganda ministry.³⁸ He was attached to the Army Bureau of Current Affairs (ABCA) as editor and star writer on their fortnightly publication *WAR*, and through this work was personally known to the Adjutant General, General Sir Ronald Adam, one of Britain's top soldiers and the man ultimately in charge of the Army's work for the dead and the missing. Adam was to lend his support to the Cotterell

Service undertakes searches for graves only when there are reasonable grounds for the belief that graves actually exist.'

³⁶ TNA, WO 162/205, War Office, 'History of Casualty Branch (Liverpool) (Cas L)', p.44.

³⁷ Anthony Cotterell was mentioned by name in the Radio Hilversum broadcast, although his name was slightly garbled because the broadcast was poor quality. Cotterell family archives, The War Office Casualty Branch to Mintie Cotterell, letter, 10 April 1945.

³⁸ Known to the German propaganda ministry — see Cotterell family archives, Geoffrey Cotterell to Mintie Cotterell, letter, 12 November 1945: 'Our chief reporter knew all about Anthony's work. He himself worked in the Goebbels department which watched over English publications and he says that *What No Morning Tea* ... (What something? he said. What something? It was the first one...!) ... was discussed at great length!' The reporter was referring to Anthony Cotterell's book *What! No Morning Tea?* (Victor Gollancz, London, 1941).

family's search for Anthony even though he clearly believed that Anthony was dead.³⁹

The Cotterells were a very proactive family who had no hesitation in putting pressure on any important supporter whom they could acquire. Anthony's brother Geoffrey would advise his mother about one particular avenue she was exploring:

Of course if there is any kind of difficulty with the Yanks, which there won't be, send at once to Sir R. Adam — or right away as you think best'.⁴⁰

On another occasion he told her when she demurred about bothering a key witness, 'Don't be bashful about ringing up the Tannenbaums. This is no time to spare other people's feelings.'⁴¹ (It is easy to understand how the Cotterells became a considerable irritant to the War Office Casualty Branch.) The family also utilised many other resources. One such was the *Daily Express*, where, pre-war, Anthony had been a top reporter and had become well-known to a circle of international journalists. Anthony had also been a close friend of Sidney Bernstein's wife, that same Sidney Bernstein who had made films for the Ministry of Information and owned a chain of cinemas; he too was persuaded to lend his support and his personnel to the search. Then there were the on the spot enquiries. Geoffrey was a Major in the Army (and, like his brother, a best-selling writer).⁴² In late 1945 he obtained a posting to the British Zone of Germany where he could take a very active part in the search, amongst other things gaining the invaluable support of a major Netherlands War Crimes unit, 33 Netherlands War Crimes Commission, based at

³⁹ Adam referred to Anthony Cotterell's death in 'A Farewell Message from the Adjutant-General', *WAR*, issue 97 (Army Bureau of Current Affairs, War Office, London, 14 June 1945).

⁴⁰ Cotterell family archives, Geoffrey Cotterell to Mintie Cotterell, diary letter, ending 30 October 1945.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, Geoffrey Cotterell to Mintie Cotterell, letter, 8 December 1945.

⁴² Geoffrey Cotterell's best-selling novel on life in the British Army was *Then A Soldier* (Eyre and Spottiswoode, London, 1944).

Herford in Germany.⁴³ Yet despite all these interested and influential parties, the War Office put no significant resources into the Anthony Cotterell case.

The massive investigation into what had happened to Anthony Cotterell was down to two key factors: the ceaseless pressure of his family, and the fact that Anthony's disappearance was connected to a war crime — the shooting in broad daylight in the middle of Brummen, a large Dutch village, of a number of British prisoners of war. Virtually all of the work into Anthony's disappearance was either done by his brother Geoffrey, by the Control Commission Search Bureau, or by war crime investigators, both British and Dutch. In all of Geoffrey's immense correspondence on the subject and in the large dossiers on the Brummen war crime in the British and Dutch national archives, there is never any mention of a British Army search unit looking for Anthony.

Even the personal support of the Adjutant General apparently had little effect. That the news of Adam's support had filtered through the various official channels is clear from a number of documents. When Geoffrey was in Germany, he would be very amused to be granted a sight of an enormous dossier which, amongst other things, contained the exasperated remarks of several nameless officials: "The next-of-kin are pressing this case at a very high level." "The A.G. is believed to be interested" etc.⁴⁴

The enquiries made in the Netherlands were carried out by a number of parties, and these were summarised in a War Office letter to British civilian officials at the Control Commission in Germany at the end of September 1945:

Extensive enquiries have been made of the Burgomaster, Doctors' Association, Hospitals and Political Bureau by the Town Major of

⁴³ For Geoffrey Cotterell's work with 33 Netherlands War Crimes Commission, see Jennie Gray, *Major Cotterell at Arnhem: a War Crime and a Mystery* (Spellmount, Stroud, 2012), Part Four.

⁴⁴ Cotterell family archives, Geoffrey Cotterell to Mintie Cotterell, letter, 2 November 1945.

Zutphen, without results, and [...] a search of the cemeteries in the Enschede area has also proved fruitless.⁴⁵

It is regrettable that in spite of the information available [...] no firm trace has yet been found of Major Cotterell or any reliable evidence obtained in regard to his ultimate fate.

It is not known whether your “Searcher” organization has already handled this case, but if not, it is requested that any further steps which may be possible should be taken to clear it up without delay.

The letter concluded that as General Sir Ronald Adam, the Adjutant-General of the British Army, had taken a personal interest in the case, ‘an early report would be appreciated’.⁴⁶

The Control Commission Search Bureau took the matter of Anthony Cotterell’s disappearance very seriously, allocating a Major David Conroy to the case. In a letter written in December 1945, Geoffrey Cotterell told his mother:

I got to the Search Bureau at Bünde on 13th December, to find that a South African major [Major David Conroy] was on his way down to the south with the priority job of finding Etter [a key witness]. This seemed of course the usual pattern. The people at the Search Bureau have the case very much on their minds, and all hasten to say that the War Office has been appalling about it. They have a VIP file (=Very Important Person) — for example there was a request from the Duchess of Windsor while I was

⁴⁵ The Town Major was Captain John D White, Officer Commanding, 137 Town Major, Zutphen. A copy of White’s findings, dated 11 September 1945, is in 33 Netherlands War Crimes Commission files, Dutch National Archives at The Hague (copy courtesy of Ymi Ytsma).

⁴⁶ The War Office to the British Section of the Control Commission for Germany, letter, 27 September 1945, 33 Netherlands War Crimes Commission files, Dutch National Archives at The Hague (copy courtesy of Ymi Ytsma).

there — but Anthony is considered above this, and his case is the only one kept directly by the Colonel of the department.⁴⁷

The concentrated effort which the Control Commission Search Bureau put into the Anthony Cotterell case was in extreme contrast to the lackadaisical response of the War Office, which appeared content to let other people do its work for it.⁴⁸

The lack of a dedicated Army search unit meant that the Army's record in solving its missing cases was poor, as is clearly demonstrated by the overall results. The Army's use of categorisation and block presumptions of death meant that there was a vast difference between 'the Missing' as popularly perceived, i.e. men whose fate was unknown, and 'the "missing"' as defined by the Army. The figure for the latter was constantly being reduced not because the men had been found or their fate had been ascertained, but because they had ceased to be officially classified as missing. Thus, the Army figures for the missing dwindled down to almost nothing by the end of 1946, and were no reflection at all of the number of soldiers whose fates and graves remained unknown.

The true picture was very different. During the entire period of the war and up until an unspecified month in 1946, the Casualty Branch investigated 'some 35,000' missing cases worldwide (separate figures are not available for North-West Europe). The deaths of 'approximately 17,000' were accepted on burial reports or on eye-witness statements, and the deaths of the remainder were presumed'.⁴⁹ To put it more bluntly, 49 per cent of the Army's missing cases were solved and 51 per cent

⁴⁷ Cotterell family archives, Geoffrey Cotterell to Mintie Cotterell, letter, 23 December 1945. The Colonel of the department was possibly Lieutenant Colonel A J M Harris or Lieutenant Colonel R A Nightingale, whose names appear on several items of official correspondence.

⁴⁸ Sadly, despite the considerable resources which were put into the search by various parties — though not, of course, by the War Office — Anthony Cotterell's fate was never determined. See Gray, *Major Cotterell at Arnhem*, pp.272-283.

⁴⁹ These are approximate percentages as the figures given are themselves so approximate. TNA, WO 162/205, War Office, 'History of Casualty Branch (Liverpool) (Cas L)', p.54.

were not, thus the fate of more than half of all missing soldiers remained unknown. As was seen in the previous chapter, the RAF achieved a significantly higher clear-up rate on a far more complex and intractable task.

The Casualty Branch also had a poor, though less easily quantifiable, record in dealing with relatives of the missing and the dead. One graphic illustration of this was the lack of provision for those who wished to deal with the Casualty Branch in person. Reception areas for personal enquiries were located in London, in Bainbridge Street, Bloomsbury, but only from 1939 to mid-1940. On 30 June 1940, the Casualty Branch moved to Liverpool, taking with it the Effects Branch which was responsible for the belongings of the missing and the dead. Their new home was the Blue Coat Hospital in Wavertree. There they remained until October 1945, although along the way the name had to be changed to the Blue Coat School in order to avoid confusion to the public, some of whom visited expecting to find a military hospital.⁵⁰ After leaving the Blue Coat Hospital, the Casualty Branch remained in Liverpool at alternative premises until October 1947, when it moved to Droitwich and became part of Records.⁵¹ It hardly needs pointing out that for most people, unless they lived in the Liverpool area, visiting the Casualty Branch in person was likely to be difficult, time-consuming, expensive, or even downright impossible, particularly in wartime.

In December 1941, due to the increasing numbers of prisoners of war and the administrative anomalies between the Casualty Branch and the Directorate of Prisoners of War which were causing 'constant irritation' and thus numerous complaints, the prisoner of war section of the Casualty Branch was relocated back

⁵⁰ TNA, WO 162/205, War Office, 'History of Casualty Branch (Liverpool) (Cas L)', pp.11-12.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p.14.

to London. As the Cas P.W report would point out, the relocation was 'timely and undoubtedly did much to counter the growing criticism of the War Office'.⁵²

Due to the very large number of men in the Army, the work of the War Office Casualty Branch was a matter of national importance, and matters relating to it were not infrequently raised in the House of Commons. The relocation of the prisoner of war section back to London was the subject of a parliamentary question, answered by David Margesson, the Secretary of State for War:

As a measure of administrative convenience, certain branches of the War Office which deal with prisoners of war have been brought together in offices in Curzon Street. Among these is the sub-section of the main War Office casualties branch [sic] which, among other matters, notifies to the next-of-kin information about British prisoners of war. The branches which have been thus brought together remain under their previous administration.⁵³

There appears to have been no suggestion that the main body of the Casualty Branch should also relocate back to London.

Cas P.W's new office, shared with the Directorate of Prisoners of War, was at Curzon Street House, Curzon Street, London, a very central location off Piccadilly. The move to Curzon Street House allowed the creation of a central London Enquiry Centre which could serve the main Casualty Branch as well as the P.W section. On paper this must have sounded as if it would answer the great need for the Liverpool Casualty Branch to have a presence in central London. The new Enquiry Centre did indeed receive numerous enquiries from friends and relatives of the dead, the

⁵² TNA, WO 162/204, War Office, 'History of Prisoner of War Branch (London) (Cas P.W)', p.3.

⁵³ Hansard, British Prisoners of War, HC Deb 08 January 1942 vol 377. Hansard online (last accessed 07/03/2015): http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1942/jan/08/british-prisoners-of-war#S5CV0377P0_19420108_CWA_107

missing, and the wounded, both by personal visit and by telephone. As the Cas P.W report noted, this Centre 'of course, duplicated the Enquiry Room in Liverpool but by reason of its location received many more enquiries than its counterpart in Liverpool'. A table of the number of visitors, set out in the report, showed that in the four year period from the opening of the Enquiry Centre in December 1941 until the end of December 1945, 1,602 people went to Curzon Street House on matters concerning POWs, as opposed to 10,902 for all other casualty enquiries.⁵⁴ Thus, just over 85 per cent of the Curzon Street House enquiries concerned matters which fell into Liverpool's remit. However, as all the relevant records were located in Liverpool, the Enquiry Centre was largely ineffectual, having to pass on anything complex to the main body of the Casualty Branch. Anyone enquiring about anything other than the simplest matters at Curzon Street House would have to receive their answers by post from Liverpool, albeit (so it would appear) very promptly.⁵⁵

The great care taken over the Enquiry Centre in London indicates a fundamental difference of approach between the two wings of the Casualty Branch. No figures for personal enquiries are given in the Cas L report for the Enquiry Room in Liverpool, but that they were small is clearly established by the remark of the Cas P.W. report about there being many more in London. In fact, no details at all are supplied in the Cas L report about the Liverpool Enquiry Room, although in other respects the report almost overflows with office minutiae, such as the exact number of square feet allowed per clerk and all the tedious ramifications of this particular issue. The highly significant omission of any details about how it interacted with the public face to face reflects Cas L's indifference to accommodating the relatives.

The geographical isolation of the Casualty Branch in Liverpool was fraught with drawbacks, such as the need for considerable duplication of records with

⁵⁴ TNA, WO 162/204, War Office, 'History of Prisoner of War Branch (London) (Cas P.W)', Appendix C, 'War Office Enquiry Centre for Prisoners of War and Casualties (Cas P.W) Curzon Street House'.

⁵⁵ See, for example, the Cas L letter to Mintie Cotterell, 10 April 1945, which begins 'With reference to your call at Curzon Street House on 9 April', Cotterell family archives.

concomitant potential for errors, a problem which was obvious right from the start.⁵⁶ Indeed, Cas L's report recognised that the move to Liverpool had been a major error, listing amongst the various consequences of 'the isolation of the Branch in the provinces' the severing of direct communications with inter-connected Army offices such as A.G.13.⁵⁷ However, what the report did not recognise was another unfortunate side-effect of the Branch's comparative inaccessibility: the development of an arrogant and disobliging attitude towards next of kin which was probably largely due to the lack of direct personal contact.

Next of kin, it appears, were supposed to know their place and not trespass on the Casualty Branch's preserves. The Cotterell family, whose efforts on Anthony's behalf were clearly considered to be impertinent and intrusive, received stiff, stereotyped letters from Liverpool which refused to engage in any personal debate. For example, on 9 January 1945, a letter arrived, answering one which Anthony's mother, Mintie Cotterell, had sent to the Blue Coat School. Her letter had included first-hand testimony from Tony Hibbert, whose escape from the truck on which he and other British prisoners were being transported had precipitated the shooting of Anthony and several other soldiers. Hibbert, who had been hidden by the Dutch after his escape, was later informed by them of all that was known of subsequent events. In late October 1944, Hibbert managed to escape back to England. By the end of the year, he had met the Cotterells at least twice and had passed on everything he knew.⁵⁸ This information was also given to ABCA at the War Office and appeared in *WAR* in a very condensed version in December 1944.⁵⁹ However, it was ignored by the Casualty Branch in favour of repeating its usual line:

⁵⁶ This is admitted several times in the Cas L report, for example, p.13. TNA, WO 162/205, War Office, 'History of Casualty Branch (Liverpool) (Cas L)'

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.60.

⁵⁸ Gray, *Major Cotterell at Arnhem*, pp.160-162, and pp.181-183.

⁵⁹ Editorial, *WAR*, issue 83 (Army Bureau of Current Affairs, War Office, London, 9 December 1944).

No official prisoner of war report has yet been received in respect of your son. You will, it is felt, appreciate that such a report can only originate from enemy sources and pending the receipt of an official prisoner of war report through the recognised channels, or of a card or letter from him confirming that he is a prisoner of war, it will be necessary for him to remain officially recorded as missing, but this should not be regarded as indicating that the Department has any information which throws doubt on the accuracy of the information you have received.⁶⁰

This dismissive reply reflected the Casualty Branch's strict adherence to its policy of not instigating missing enquiries until several months had passed in the hope that a POW report would clear up the matter; however, such a response is astonishing in this particular context, especially considering that the war crime had also been reported to the Protecting Power by Anthony's CO in October 1944.⁶¹

Seven months later, the veracity of the report had at last been accepted, possibly because other witnesses of the same shooting had been repatriated and the evidence had become indisputable. The Casualty Branch wrote to Anthony's brother, Geoffrey:

All available information has been given to the Casualty Section of General Headquarters, 21st Army Group, and they have been requested to make all possible enquiries in an endeavour to ascertain your brother's fate. [...]

In all the circumstances there would appear to be little doubt that your brother must have succumbed to his wounds at Zutphen and, unless the reply to the enquiries at present in progress reveals anything to the

⁶⁰ Cotterell family archives, War Office Casualty Branch to Mintie Cotterell, letter, 9 January 1945.

⁶¹ The CO was Major Freddie Gough, who had also been on the truck. See Gray, *Major Cotterell at Arnhem*, p.180.

contrary, the Department will be constrained to presume his death on this basis.

I am to convey to you an expression of the Department's sympathy in your prolonged anxiety.⁶²

The long delay in accepting the information supplied by Mintie Cotterell sheds a poor light on the Casualty Branch's refusal to take action on missing men, even in such dramatic circumstances as a war crime; it evidently disliked the idea that useful information could come from unofficial channels such as the Cotterells. Looking back for a moment to the RAF chapters in this study, the use which the RAF made of any potential source of information, including even the most bizarre such as the hypnotised German gravedigger, is in dramatic contrast to the Army's rigid attachment to a set way of doing things.

The Cotterells would soon bypass the Casualty Branch altogether because of its relentlessly unhelpful stance. As Geoffrey wrote to the celebrated author Robert Graves in September 1945, one year after Anthony had gone missing:

The most embittering thing of all is that the War Office has consistently refused to do anything but search the graves and cemeteries round Zutphen and Arnhem: where he almost certainly was not buried. However we are continuing all our efforts through every kind of MP, peer or general we can get hold of.⁶⁷

The Cotterell family did not have a privileged background, but they had the drive to make themselves well-connected; they were also extremely well-informed and

⁶² Cotterell family archives, the War Office Casualty Branch to Geoffrey Cotterell, letter, 12 July 1945.

⁶⁷ The Library, St John's College, and St John's College Robert Graves Trust, Geoffrey Cotterell to Robert Graves, letter, 22 September 1945.

ruthless about exploiting whatever influence they obtained. Most families, however, simply would not have had the confidence, the will-power, or the resources to challenge or ignore the Casualty Branch. Their only resource was to complain. In its post-war report, the Casualty Branch acknowledged that there had been complaints about its work but said that these could 'nearly always be disposed of by full explanation':

There were many types of next-of-kin and other enquirers, the ignorant, the illiterate, the knowledgeable (genuine and self-styled) and the influential, and each type had to be handled suitably although the same sympathetic consideration was given to all.⁶⁸

What is significant about the above characterisation of enquirers is how very negative it is. It is of a type with the remark about the 'small number of correspondents [who] wrote abusive letters' who were dismissed with extraordinary coldness as being 'usually bereaved parents or wives whose sense of loss had become an obsession'.⁶⁹

That Cas P.W in London had a very different understanding of the emotional turmoil of the relatives is evidenced by the great care which was taken over the Enquiry Centre at Curzon Street House:

A large room was very comfortably equipped for the purpose, and an atmosphere of informality, friendliness and sympathetic understanding was cultivated to put visitors at their ease. Fortunately a woman of suitably sympathetic temperament and wide experience of human nature was available to preside over the room. [...]

⁶⁸ TNA, WO 162/205, War Office, 'History of Casualty Branch (Liverpool) (Cas L)', p.54.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p.34.

Gratifying evidence in abundance was received that the Enquiry Centre was greatly appreciated and people even called at intervals just for a friendly chat which they openly confessed made them feel better!⁷⁰

There is no passage remotely similar in Cas L's report. Nonetheless, Cas L clearly prided itself on the tact of its procedures, for example reporting:

It is important to free relatives from all suspicion, however unwarranted, that the missing or the wounded have been forgotten, and still more that proper respect has not been paid to the dead.⁷¹

Various thoughtful practices were instituted to spare the feelings of the relatives, such as arranging with the Post Office to delay the notification of bad news at inappropriate times. Telegrams were not delivered after 10 o'clock at night but held over until at least 7 o'clock the following morning, whilst immediately before Christmas the delivery of bad news was suspended for a day or two.⁷² However, such generalised niceties, being more or less invisible, appear to have been lost upon the public, not least because, in the more noticeable matters, the Casualty Branch was so adept at making itself disliked. Inevitably, its failure to show a human side had a ripple-out effect. Besides personal complainants, a number of official bodies took up 'individual grievances and general criticisms' against the Casualty Branch, including the British Legion, the Prisoner of War Relatives Association, and Army welfare officers. The Casualty Branch, however, preferred not to deal with these intermediaries where individual cases were concerned but simply to copy them

⁷⁰ TNA, WO 162/204, War Office, 'History of Prisoner of War Branch (London) (Cas P.W)', Appendix C, 'War Office Enquiry Centre for Prisoners of War and Casualties (Cas P.W) Curzon Street House'.

⁷¹ TNA, WO 162/205, War Office, 'History of Casualty Branch (Liverpool) (Cas L)', p.61.

⁷² Ibid.

the answers which it sent directly to the relatives.⁷³ Whilst this may have involved it in less circular correspondence, such behaviour once again made it look high-handed and arrogant.

It should be pointed out that the Casualty Branch was not alone amongst Army departments in displaying monumental tactlessness towards next of kin. One example is the extremely brusque letter sent by A.G.13 (the Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries in London) to a Mrs M Warwick in November 1945. The letter notified her that her son, Corporal J Byron, was buried at Achim in Germany. Without any preamble or expressions of sympathy of any sort, it informed her of the plot, the row and the grave number, concluding:

This is a small temporary burial ground, so in due course the bodies of those buried there will be reinterred in one of the selected main cemeteries. When this has been done, you will be duly informed.

Yours faithfully, *etc*

Not only was the phrasing terse to the point of insult but this was a letter which had been printed *en masse*, and the individual details which related to Mrs Warwick and her son had been — very obviously — typed in later.⁷⁴ Nothing could more clearly indicate the lack of official Army sensitivity towards an individual tragedy.

The RAF rule was to type individual letters to the next of kin, and even if the phrasing of the letters was all of a pattern, to the person who received them it would at least look as if they were being addressed as an individual. One such was the letter from the Air Ministry to Mrs D H W Little on 12 May 1944, which told her where her husband was buried in Germany, and softened the painful news with expressions

⁷³ Ibid, p.34.

⁷⁴ Dumfries Museum and Camera Obscura, James Byron collection, The War Office (A.G.13) to Mrs M Warwick, letter, 15 November 1945.

of regret and 'the very sincere sympathy of the Department with you in your sad loss'.⁷⁵

Unlike the Air Ministry Casualty Branch which did not differentiate between ranks, the War Office Casualty Branch ran two separate systems for the reporting of deaths, one for officers and nurses, and one for Other Ranks. Information about officers and nurses was forwarded a great deal more promptly, by a combination of telegram and telegraph or even telephone, and was thus acted upon a great deal more quickly than that for Other Ranks, which was generally sent in on paper forms.⁷⁶ The segregation between officers and Other Ranks even extended to the colour-coding of correspondence, green for officers and pink for Other Ranks.⁷⁷ The ostensible logic behind this was that the sheer numbers of Other Ranks would overburden the fast track system, but it also maintained the stratified – some would say, essentially undemocratic — nature of the British Army.

This discriminatory policy was defended in Parliament in August 1942 by the Secretary of State for War, Sir James Grigg, on the grounds that if everyone was treated the same and casualties were heavy it would overwhelm the system, and that 'whether casualties are few or many' it was desirable that only one system should be followed. The MP who was questioning the matter then asked Grigg if he was aware that:

the present arrangements very often cause unnecessary distress; has he not heard of instances where next-of-kin receive a printed form which they think is of no importance and only later in the day find out that it is a notification of death, and would not some other arrangement, if not by telegram by some special, distinguishable letter, be better so that it would be possible for near relatives to have the news broken more gently?

⁷⁵ Little family archives, the Air Ministry to Mrs D H W Little, letter, 12 May 1944.

⁷⁶ TNA, WO 162/205, War Office, 'History of Casualty Branch (Liverpool) (Cas L)', p.3.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p.5.

Grigg replied that he would certainly consider 'whether it is possible to mark the communication in some way so as to signify its importance' but reiterated that more elaborate arrangements would lead to delays and that 'a delay in the notification would be a worse evil than the other'.⁷⁸ (It may be remembered here that all RAF airmen's deaths or disappearances were reported in a matter of hours to the next of kin.) Grigg's answer makes it clear that this method of dealing with the deaths of Other Ranks was a policy fully endorsed by the Government. However, it would tend to be the Casualty Branch which got the blame when such policies caused personal distress because it was the Casualty Branch which was sending out the communications.

Despite its evident unpopularity, the Liverpool section of the Casualty Branch scornfully dismissed the ways in which it might have tried to regain the trust of the public. The most dramatic manifestation of this short-sighted policy was the repudiation of any relationship with the Press (apart from *The Times* which published the official Casualty Lists), and the refusal of various offers to broadcast the story of its work on BBC radio.

An unintentionally comical section in the post-war report, headed 'Anti-War Office Press Criticism', betrayed the degree of animosity Cas L felt against the newspapers:

From time to time during the war malevolent or maladroit articles appeared in the gutter Press imputing to the Casualty Branch and the rest of the Army casualty reporting agents ineptitude, procrastination or callousness.

Accusations rested normally [...] upon a supposition that the War Office need never fail to tap dead, inaccessible or non-existent witnesses,

⁷⁸ Hansard, Death on Active Service, HC Deb 04 August 1942 vol 382. Hansard online (last accessed 05/03/2015): http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1942/aug/04/death-on-active-service-notice-to-next#S5CV0382P0_19420804_HOC_69

and [...] seemed almost to postulate Army immunity from the obligations of time and space.⁷⁹

The report went on to say that on at least three occasions ‘so-called “feature-writers” were given the fullest opportunity to report on the Casualty Branch’s procedures and performance:

but their weakness for what they apparently call ‘the human angle’ produced copy that the Casualty Branch was unable to stomach without heavy disinfectionation [sic], which evidently so dehumanized two of the ‘stories’ in the eyes of the Editors as to render them unfit for publication.

The report stated that attempts to interest the Press in the Casualty Branch’s work were never resumed, ‘both parties possibly recognising a lack of common ground and a marked divergence of approach’.⁸⁰

The Casualty Branch took a similarly fastidious attitude to any suggestion that it might use the radio to communicate with the public. ‘This particular form of advertisement’ was deemed to be rife with problems. Nonetheless:

The War Office Casualty Branch (although not in the least keen) would not necessarily have been entirely averse to the delivery of a very carefully framed general disquisition upon casualty procedure by a picked speaker of proved popular acceptance and known to hold the respect and confidence of the wireless-conscious section of the public.

This prim and demanding attitude ruled out compromise. The radio scripts offered to the Casualty Branch were rejected, the amendments made to the scripts were

⁷⁹ TNA, WO 162/205, War Office, ‘History of Casualty Branch (Liverpool) (Cas L)’, p.42.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p.42.

likewise rejected, and in the end, just as with the Press, the idea of mutual cooperation was dropped.⁸¹

The Casualty Branch's failure to reach out to the public through the mass media was one reason why it had such a bad public image. Another was the dramatic contrast with the British Red Cross Society, which showed a warmth and kindness which meant an immense amount to anxious relatives of the missing. Bizarrely, the relatives' trust in the British Red Cross was a source of offence to the Casualty Branch, its post-war report betraying what is tantamount to a personal sense of grievance about the situation. The main text of the report, disregarding the extensive appendices, is 65 pages long and of this almost 7 pages is devoted to the Branch's problematical relationship with the British Red Cross, nearly three times the amount which is devoted to the Branch's relations with 'the Public', meaning the next of kin.⁸² That the problems were mutual is clear from certain muted comments in the British Red Cross's official history of its work from 1939 to 1947, which nonetheless show a spirit of forbearance missing in the Casualty Branch's report.

The Red Cross's primary loyalty was to the relatives, not to the Services. As Jenny Edkins points out in *Missing: Persons and Politics*, 'It was the relatives of the missing who [...] provided the voluntary contributions that funded the Red Cross'.⁸³ This important factor should not be read as meaning that the Red Cross agenda was dictated by self-interest, but rather that the charity was independent of the military establishment, being perfectly capable of financing and organising those aspects of its work of which the War Office did not approve.

As the British Red Cross itself acknowledged, there was a very complicated path to tread between respecting the Service departments' official procedures and responding to the desires of the relatives:

⁸¹ Ibid, p.39.

⁸² Ibid, pp.26-34.

⁸³ Jenny Edkins, *Missing: Persons and Politics* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 2011), p.140.

To meet the wishes of all parties was at times not easy – indeed upon occasions it was impossible, for they were irreconcilable. To anxious relatives, news about a missing man or a dangerously ill patient was a personal matter. To Service Departments, the established procedures of notification could not lightly be disregarded.⁸⁴

The department which was at the heart of the difficulties with the War Office was the Wounded, Missing, and Relatives Department.⁸⁵ It was created on 1 May 1940, its function being to take over services hitherto carried out by the Prisoner of War Department which, the charity had realised, would shortly be overwhelmed with work.⁸⁶ The Department's four main functions were: to make enquiries about the missing through the International Red Cross on behalf of all three Services; to administer on the Army's behalf a searching service in hospitals in order to check for missing men or to find witnesses as to why a man had gone missing; to handle enquiries from relatives of the missing; and lastly to answer relatives' enquiries about the wounded.

The Wounded, Missing, and Relatives Department was located in a palatial building at 7 Belgrave Square in central London, near Buckingham Palace. The offices were open to all relatives seeking information; there they were received in 'comfortable surroundings, showing no signs of an official atmosphere', and were attended to by a sympathetic and experienced staff. At times when the numbers of missing rose sharply, the offices were open on Sundays as well as during the week, and they always remained open until 9 o'clock at night, so that people who had been working during the day could still call in person. A vast number of enquiries were

⁸⁴ Cambray and Briggs, *Red Cross and St John: The Official Record*, p.339.

⁸⁵ Its full title was: The Wounded, Missing, and Relatives Department of the War Organisation of the British Red Cross.

⁸⁶ Cambray and Briggs, *Red Cross and St John: The Official Record*, p.339.

handled; after Arnhem in September 1944, personal visits numbered more than 600 a week and by November 1944 some 21,000 letters answering postal enquiries had been sent out. However, in all its work, the Department tried to restrict its information about missing men to 'such as the Service Departments considered to be permissible from an unofficial body', and it fully accepted that the Service Departments reserved to themselves the right to inform relatives that a man was presumed to be dead.⁸⁷

Throughout the war, the British Red Cross's relationship with the Air Ministry and the Admiralty ran smoothly, and the charity's post-war history includes a number of grateful letters of thanks from these Services.⁸⁸ However, its relationship with the War Office rapidly became somewhat torturous. At the beginning of the war it had been understood that, as in the First World War, the British Red Cross would assist with tracing the missing, but no clear demarcation lines had been drawn up between the War Office and the charity. The only specific role which had been defined was that of the Hospital Searchers. The War Office at first left the British Red Cross to do the liaising with the International Red Cross under the mistaken impression that it would be 'irregular for British Government Departments to approach the IRCC directly'. At the same time, the Society became involved in extensive correspondence with relatives, and errors were often made in the information given to the relatives due to what the Casualty Branch report called 'well-meant optimism'.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Ibid, pp.340-341.

⁸⁸ Ibid, pp.342-343. The British Red Cross does not appear to have retained records connected with the Casualty Branches of the Army, the RAF or the Navy (Jemma Lee, British Red Cross Museum and Archives, to the author, email, 8 April 2014). It is not been possible to find the official wartime correspondence between the British Red Cross and the War Office Casualty Branch elsewhere.

⁸⁹ TNA, WO 162/205, War Office, 'History of Casualty Branch (Liverpool) (Cas L)', p.26

In late 1941, matters came to a head. A question in the House of Commons on 19 December about the task of tracing the missing drew an irritated response from Duncan Sandys, apparently speaking on behalf of the Secretary of State for War:

The Hon. Member seems to think that the responsibility for tracing the missing rests with the British Red Cross Society. That is not so. The War Office is and always has been responsible for this service. While it is very grateful to the British Red Cross Society for such additional help as it is able to give, the War Office has in no way farmed out its responsibility to any outside organisation.⁹⁰

At this same period, the War Office decided to go over the head of the Wounded, Missing, and Relatives Department, and deal directly with the International Red Cross. It also attempted to block the cables sent by the International Red Cross to

⁹⁰ Duncan Sandys was at that time Financial Secretary to the War Office. Sir Henry Morris-Jones was the member asking the question directed at the Secretary of State for War but answered by Sandys. Hansard, Tracing Missing Soldiers, HC Deb 19 December 1941 vol 376. Hansard online (last accessed 05/03/2015):

<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1941/dec/19/missing-soldiers-tracing>. There were a number of further occasions when the matter was raised in the House of Commons, for example, 10 February 1942, Hansard, Tracing Missing Soldiers, HC Deb 10 February 1942 vol 377. Hansard online (last accessed 05/03/2015):<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1942/feb/10/missing-soldiers-tracing>.

On this occasion, the MP raising the question of the Secretary of State for War was Major General Sir Alfred Knox, who had an explosion of military choler:

Sir A. Knox: Who is really responsible? Is it the Red Cross or a Department of the War Office?

Sir P J Grigg: The War Office.

Sir A. Knox: Why is the Red Cross meddling with it?

The British Red Cross 'naturally took strong exception' to this — Cambray and Briggs, *Red Cross and St John: The Official Record*, p.348.

the Wounded, Missing, and Relatives Department which were the Department's principal source of information.⁹¹ Thereafter, the relationship between the two organisations was bedevilled with problems, particularly as the public understandably preferred to deal with the British Red Cross rather than the War Office Casualty Branch. It did not help that the Casualty Branch had removed itself to Liverpool, whilst the Wounded, Missing, and Relatives Department remained at its central London address. That the Wounded, Missing, and Relatives Department continued to answer a vital need was shown by the enormous number of people who used its services: 'enquiries made personally by callers, or sent by post, at times numbered one thousand a day'.⁹² This was despite the fact that since the Army's change of policy the British Red Cross no longer made enquiries of the International Red Cross on behalf of the War Office, although it continued to do so for the Air Ministry and the Admiralty.

The Wounded, Missing, and Relatives Department finally closed five months' after the war's end, on 1 October 1945, having first thoughtfully notified relatives with unsolved missing cases. It is worth quoting part of the Red Cross letter about the closure because it shows so vividly why the relatives of missing soldiers formed a relationship with the Red Cross which was simply not possible with the War Office Casualty Branch. The letter spoke of the Red Cross being extremely sorry to have to bring its work to an end, but now that all territory was in Allied hands there was no longer any necessity for enquiries to be made through the International Red Cross. The letter ended:

You know how much we have felt for you during this sad and anxious time, and we are deeply grieved that we have never been able to send you happier news.

Again with my deepest sympathy,

⁹¹ Cambray and Briggs, *Red Cross and St John: The Official Record*, p.347.

⁹² *Ibid*, p.356.

Yours sincerely

The letter was personally signed by Lady Margaret Ampthill, the Chairman of the Department. She did not use her title but her Christian and surname only. She also wrote in by hand the name of the relative to whom the letter was being sent.⁹³

The main Casualty Branch complaint against the BRCS (it preferred to use this acronym) was that it was over-enthusiastic and too prone, in its amateurish well-meaning way, to pass on what appeared to be good news, such as 'ill-timed congratulations' that a man was a prisoner of war, which the Casualty Branch would later have to correct by telling the relatives that the man was in fact dead. However, to put this complaint into perspective, the Casualty Branch itself had at times the same problem as it admitted in its report, albeit characteristically adding that 'no blame could be attached to the reporting authorities'. For example, a combatant unit might have reported that a soldier was wounded, and this news was duly passed on to the relatives by the Casualty Branch; much later it would be established that the wounded man had, in fact, died on the same day, never having reached a medical unit, his death now being confirmed by the discovery or registration of his grave by the Army Graves Service.⁹⁴

The way in which the British Red Cross handled the matter of missing servicemen was also a particular source of annoyance to the Casualty Branch:

The fundamental differences between the Casualty Branch's approach to the Missing problem and that of the BRCS lay in the latter's tendency to precipitate action and assumption (unchecked by responsibility for the legal, financial and other effects of any incorrect official recording of

⁹³ Cotterell family archives, the Wounded and Missing Department of the British Red Cross Society to Mintie Cotterell, letter, September 1945. The letter heading reads simply the 'Wounded and Missing Department', the inclusion of 'Relatives' having been dropped.

⁹⁴ TNA, WO 162/205, War Office, 'History of Casualty Branch (Liverpool) (Cas L)', p.33.

deaths that had always to be borne in mind by the Casualty Branch) and [the BRCS's] freedom to concentrate on the proportion of 'missing' cases in which they were at any time in active correspondence with the relatives.⁹⁵

The Casualty Branch thought the British Red Cross was far too quick to act on letters received from relatives who said that their loved one was missing. This was because the charity initiated enquiries about these missing men more or less as soon as it heard from the relatives, in direct contradiction to official Casualty Branch wisdom which said that several months must elapse between the missing date and the commencement of enquiries about the men.⁹⁶ Although there was a certain logic to this because many of the missing would thereafter be reported as prisoners of war, it did mean that the Casualty Branch appeared dilatory, callous, and uncaring in the face of the extreme anxiety of the relatives, an impression which it did very little to combat as can be plainly seen in the letters to the Cotterell family.

The Cotterell family letters also betray how much the Casualty Branch resented relatives taking matters into their own hands. The British Red Cross had a far more accurate appreciation of the situation, understanding that 'it was, of course, beyond human endurance' that relatives should be expected to refrain from making enquiries when official answers were not forthcoming.⁹⁷ That the relatives frequently complained to the British Red Cross about the War Office is obvious from a paragraph in Cas L's post-war report which refers acidly to the charity as having 'every opportunity of learning the public's reaction to the official casualty reporting machinery'.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Ibid, p.28.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Cambray and Briggs, *Red Cross and St John: The Official Record*, p.345.

⁹⁸ TNA, WO 162/205, War Office, 'History of Casualty Branch (Liverpool) (Cas L)', p.34.

The difficult relations between the British Red Cross and the War Office are alluded to very tactfully in the charity's history. Perhaps the most overtly critical statement was: 'there were periods when the official attitude of the War Office tended to dishearten the Wounded and Missing Department', this being juxtaposed to 'the many expressions of gratitude' which the Department received from relatives whom it had been able to help. Half a dozen letters were chosen to illustrate the point, the first reading:

With all my heart I thank you and your Department of the Red Cross Society for your kindness and sympathy. You have been such a wonderful tower of strength; and I always, in those long anxious days, felt that if he could be found, it would be through the Red Cross.⁹⁹

The last sentence illuminates another reason why the Casualty Branch acted as if it was wronged: as the British Red Cross history noted, the public believed that the Red Cross had 'ways and means of obtaining news which were not possessed by official bodies'.¹⁰⁰ The public's belief was clearly not the British Red Cross's fault, but it caused the Casualty Branch great irritation nonetheless. In a significant passage in the post-war report about this problem, once again the Casualty Branch's sense of aggrievement burst forth:

Throughout the war there was a tendency on the part of the public to place implicit faith in the BRCS Missing Department and to regard the War Office Casualty Branch as ancillary or to assume that it would prove inefficient and unresponsive. [...] There were signs, however, that the Casualty Branch was successful in gaining the confidence of the public as the war progressed.

⁹⁹ Cambray and Briggs, *Red Cross and St John: The Official Record*, pp.356-357.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p.340.

What signs these were the report did not specify other than noting that, in the later stages of the war, relatives of the missing would approach 'the BRCS as well as, rather than instead of, the Casualty Branch, on the principle of leaving no stone unturned'.¹⁰¹ This somewhat dismal self-bestowed accolade only confirms the inability of Cas L to form a relationship of trust with the British public.

A large number of the Casualty Branch's problems clearly stemmed from its move to Liverpool in June 1940. Cas L's isolation in the provinces, far from other Army departments and related organisations, appears to have bred a self-righteous, beleaguered attitude which made things very difficult for the relatives. Due to the lack of direct contact, the move also seems to have contributed to the breakdown of relations with the British Red Cross, a point which was obliquely made in Cas L's report. Although the Army's problems with the British Red Cross went much higher up than Cas L, Cas L's attitude cannot have helped at all.

The post-war report of Cas P.W does not display the same harshness of attitude as Cas L's. The possibility exists that Cas P.W. was well aware of the difference in approach between the two parts of the War Office Casualty Branch, the very first sentence of its report stating that its work was 'in many respects conducted on quite different lines from that of the remainder of the Casualty Branch'. The reason for Cas P.W's move to London had been to increase cooperation and smooth the administrative anomalies between the Casualty Branch and the Directorate of Prisoners of War. Such a close association was thereafter formed between the two that from early 1943 onwards they shared the same Director. After the war, the Directorate of Prisoners of War also reported on its work during the conflict, and Cas P.W's report punctiliously stated that this report 'should be read in conjunction' with its own report.¹⁰² This type of cooperation and respect for others' work was not possible without the clear understanding that the different bodies, both military and

¹⁰¹ TNA, WO 162/205, War Office, 'History of Casualty Branch (Liverpool) (Cas L)', p.64.

¹⁰² TNA, WO 162/204, War Office, 'History of Prisoner of War Branch (London) (Cas P.W)', p.3.

civilian, who worked for the welfare of soldiers and their families, were irrevocably linked. Such an understanding often escaped Cas L. Moreover, Cas L neglected all chances to win back the trust of the public (or even perhaps such parties as the British Red Cross) through its ultra-fastidious refusal to put its case and explain the undoubted difficulties of its work through the mass media.

Cas L was unpopular not only for its policies (some of which, such as the preferential treatment of officers, were publically endorsed by the Government) but also because of the dramatic contrast between its haughty attitude and the gentler, more humane approach of the British Red Cross. Extraordinarily for an official document, the Cas L report conveys the distinct impression that Cas L was jealous of the British Red Cross.

Although the major reason for Cas L's problems was undoubtedly its isolation in Liverpool, an additional factor must have been the particular personnel who made up the department and who developed its unique office culture. No evidence is available about them other than that there was a huge change of staff when Cas L moved to Liverpool, but the new staff would have been mostly at the clerical level, not management. The identity of the author of Cas L's report – how senior he was, exactly what role he played in the Casualty Branch, whether he had been originally based in London or had been recruited in Liverpool — remains an unknown factor.

To the wider public, the distinction between Cas L and Cas P.W would have been opaque, and the two tended to be subsumed in 'that much abused institution, the War Office', as Sir James Grigg, the Secretary of State for War, put it in the House of Commons in February 1943.¹⁰³ Grigg went on to add:

I say to anyone who is disposed to criticise the Secretary of State for War and the War Office — and no person or institution in normal times is more likely to be criticised — that we should remember with gratitude the vast

¹⁰³ The Cotterell family letters, for example, invariably refer to the War Office, rather than to the War Office Casualty Branch.

change that has come over the Forces during the last two or three years and the magnificent Army which has been formed.¹⁰⁴

The War Office undoubtedly had a very difficult and extremely complex role to fulfil, but nonetheless the obvious failure of Cas L to hold the trust of the British public reflects badly upon the War Office's commitment to the welfare of soldiers and their families. In particular, the policy of not instituting enquiries about the missing until three or four months had passed since their disappearance may have been based upon practical reasoning in that many would eventually turn out to be POWS, but it took not the slightest account of the acute stress suffered by relatives desperately hoping and praying for news.

A serious War Office failing concerned fieldwork on behalf of the missing, or "the missing" as the Army so often called them. The extraordinarily small numbers in Cas L's table of missing figures reflect the drive to presume missing men as being dead as quickly as possible. The use of formulae for presumption of death, based on the likelihood and attractiveness of desertion, allowed large numbers of men to be written off in blocks. Cas L defended this system as being very error-free, with a minuscule number of cases proving to have been classified incorrectly. However, cases where men went missing in the numerous situations undefinable by any set formula were not pursued with any rigour, and this included even high-profile cases such as Anthony Cotterell's. Whilst the formulae and missing procedures may have been administratively convenient, they showed nil comprehension of how important it was to bereaved relatives to have a grave to visit, or at least to know something of what had happened to their loved one. Overall, the War Office Casualty Branch's failure to perceive the necessity for and recommend the creation of a dedicated

¹⁰⁴ Hansard, Sir James Grigg's Statement, HC Deb 25 February 1943 vol 387. Hansard online (last accessed 22/03/2015): http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1943/feb/25/sir-james-griggs-statement#S5CV0387P0_19430225_HOC_349

search unit led to a poor rate of success with missing cases, in marked contrast to the practices and achievements of the Air Ministry Casualty Branch.

Chapter Six — The Divergent Agendas of the Army and the RAF

The marked difference of approach between the Army and the RAF has been a common thread throughout this study. This summarising chapter will look more closely at the reasons for this polarity, which was rooted in the profound difference in Service culture, the dissimilar campaigns which the two Services fought in North-West Europe, and the roles which they carried out in the post-war world. It will also revisit the two most significant aspects of Army-RAF differences — the attitude to the relatives, and the vital matter of the missing — before going on to examine the one matter in which the Services were absolutely united, which was the investigation of war crimes. Many such crimes came to light during the ordinary course of Graves Service and MRES work, and the men of both Services were highly alert to the possibility of war crimes evidence in exhumed graves. What will also be touched upon is how differing German attitudes to RAF and Army personnel affected the type of war crime committed, and how the dead were buried.

In previous chapters, the Army's worldwide clear-up rate for missing cases was given as 49 per cent, and the RAF's as 57 per cent for known graves, with another 27 per cent being cases where partial information was discovered. The last section of this chapter will contrast the British programme to that of the Americans. The Americans used very different criteria to assess results, which centred on the identification rate of recovered remains. No direct comparisons can thus be made, but the American identification rate was so close to being 100 per cent that it is clear that the British programme, taken as a whole, was not so efficient. Unlike the British, the Americans had a common programme for soldiers and airmen, and the obvious question which occurs is: would the Army and the RAF have emulated the astonishing results claimed by the Americans if they had set aside their differences and pooled their resources?

As a very quick visual summary of the cultural difference between the two Services, one could hardly start at a better place than the contrasting architecture of their respective headquarters. The War Office was located at the eponymous, extremely imposing, baroque-style Whitehall building, completed in 1906; the Air Ministry was based at Adastral House in Kingsway, which despite being almost contemporaneous with the War Office had the design-style of the modern age.¹ Adastral House symbolised a new era; the War Office, for all its grandeur, was looking backwards.

When General Sir Ronald Adam, the Adjutant General, wanted to suggest a modern Army during a 1943 film about the Army Bureau of Current Affairs (ABCA), he played down the splendour of his immense baroque office by a highly deliberate show of informality.² The audience who would be viewing the film were not only ABCA Education Officers but the ordinary troops whose counterparts appeared in a number of scenes in the film. Adam sidestepped the traditional hierarchical nature

¹ Whitehall was in the heart of London's government district, Kingsway was some distance out, although still very much in central London. For Kingsway's development, see Architecture.com (RIBA), 'Kingsway and Aldwych' (last accessed 09/02/2015):<http://www.architecture.com/Explore/Locations/KingswayAndAldwych.aspx>. Also see 'The Old War Office Building', Ministry of Defence (last accessed 09/02/2015):https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/49055/old_war_office_build.pdf. The name Adastral House was derived from the RAF's motto *Per Ardua Ad Astra*.

² The rather stilted scene takes place between Adam and William Emrys Williams, a civilian educational specialist. The scene is designed to show informality and human values within the magnificence of the establishment office. This may not seem very notable by modern standards but it was extraordinary in the context of the times. Adam understood the tendency of the troops to perceive all officially sanctioned efforts to inform them as hogwash. So did Field Marshal Montgomery with regards to Army newspapers. For a very good view on the line which was walked between the respectable and the less respectful Army newspapers, see S P Mackenzie, 'Vox Populi: British Army Newspapers in the Second World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 24/4 (1989).

of the Army by making it obvious that he understood the troops' point of view: 'There is one thing we must be quite certain about. No propaganda, no long-winded lectures.'³

Adam was one of the most influential leaders in the attempt to form a modern Army out of the old elitist one. This was necessary not only because of the demands of modern warfare but also because of the huge intake of new recruits. Of the nearly three million men who joined the Army between 1939 and 1945, three-quarters were conscripts.⁴ ABCA, a scheme for educating the troops to which Adam gave his full support, was part of the initiative to modernise and to get the conscript force fully behind the war effort.⁵ Nonetheless, until well into the war, the Army's public image continued to be that of a force run by hidebound traditionalists who had all come from public school.⁶ The perception of ossified tradition was sometimes aired in the House of Commons, as the following amusing exchange from February 1942 proves:

Captain Margesson [The Secretary of State for War]: When things go wrong with the Army, as they are bound to do from time to time, it is the custom to put it all down to what people are pleased to call the "brass hats". It is interesting to observe, by the way, that that phrase is rather out of date — brass has disappeared from the Army hat; though not, I believe, from those of the sister Services. But in my opinion, and in that of well-

³ Imperial War Museum, MGH 56, *The Story of the Army Bureau of Current Affairs*, black and white film (Army Film Unit, Ministry of Information, 1943).

⁴ Jeremy A Crang, *The British Army and the People's War, 1939-1945* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2000), p.2.

⁵ For the genesis of ABCA and Adam's involvement in it, see Jennie Gray, *Major Cotterell at Arnhem: a War Crime and a Mystery* (Spellmount, Stroud, 2012). Also, Roger Broad, *The Radical General: Sir Ronald Adam and Britain's New Model Army, 1941-46* (Spellmount, Stroud, 2013), pp.121-130.

⁶ At times a very well-deserved image. See the infamous Colonel Bingham in Gray, *Major Cotterell at Arnhem*, pp.40-43, and Crang, *The British Army and the People's War*, pp.62-63.

informed observers, the brass has also disappeared from the minds of the leaders of the Army, [if], indeed, it was ever there. Those Members of the House who have informed themselves of the various activities of the Army, by personal contact with its senior staff officers, must have gained the impression that the directing staff comprise a body of hard-working, hard-thinking and sensible officers.

Major Milner (Leeds, South-East): And hidebound.⁷

Despite the various Army reforms, many of the old traditions remained in place, one of the most significant in the context of this study being the rigid separation between Officers and Other Ranks. As has been seen, this led to priority being given to officers' cases in the processing of casualty reports. Sir James Grigg, who succeeded Margesson as Secretary of State for War, would defend this discriminatory policy on the grounds that if everyone was treated the same it would overwhelm the system.⁸ Whilst this may well have been true, it nonetheless reflected the lower value which continued to be placed upon the ordinary soldier.

The RAF's fighting men, the aircrew, were generally of much higher calibre than the Army rank and file. The RAF Volunteer Reserve (the RAFVR), which massively augmented the peacetime force of regulars, was made up of men who had chosen to perform their wartime service in the RAF and had been selected from a large pool

⁷ Margesson, clearly not amused, retorted that he did 'not in the least agree that they are hidebound', and went on to give extensive details of 'the impetus to reform' which had 'made itself felt right down to individual units'. Hansard, Captain Margesson's Statement, HC Deb 19 February 1942 vol 377. Hansard online (last accessed 04/03/15): http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1942/feb/19/captain-margessons-statement#S5CV0377P0_19420219_HOC_330.

⁸ Hansard, Death on Active Service, HC Deb 04 August 1942 vol 382. Hansard online (last accessed 05/03/2015): http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1942/aug/04/death-on-active-service-notice-to-next#S5CV0382P0_19420804_HOC_69

of applicants. Candidates for aircrew had to be intelligent and highly motivated because of the technical aspects of their job; a great deal of time and money would later be expended upon their specialised training, particularly that of the bomber crews. Each member of a bomber crew had a distinctive role to fulfil, and, because teamwork was vital — not only within the crew itself, but also between aircrew and ground crew — the Army's strong hierarchical division between higher ranks and lower ranks would have been counterproductive.⁹ The comparative egalitarianism continued through to the care of the dead. When it came to the notification to relatives that men were missing or the subsequent search which was made for them, the RAF made absolutely no distinction between different ranks; the case of an Aircraftman Second Class (AC2), the lowest rank in the RAF, was treated in exactly the same way as that of a Wing Commander.¹⁰ That this was partly a matter of smaller numbers is obviously true, but it also reflected the nature of the RAF as a highly specialised and intensely interdependent Service.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, the RAF had only been an independent force for 21 years. In the early years of its existence, both the older Services had tried to destroy it.¹¹ Until the 1930s when the threat of war became clear, the

⁹ For the family background and education of a fairly typical bomber crew, the lengthy training, taking years, and the inter-dependence of a bomber crew in the various technical roles, see Jennie Gray, *Fire By Night, The Story of One Pathfinder Crew and Black Thursday, 16/17 December 1943* (Grub Street, London, 2000), pp.11-28.

¹⁰ AC2 was the lowest rank in the RAF, followed by AC1 and LAC. The NCO range of ranks began with Sergeant. Officers' ranks began with Pilot Officer; Wing Commander was the rank below Group Captain, and though senior officers occasionally flew on operations, a Wing Commander was likely to be the highest rank lost on operations. Very early in the war, even AC2s flew on operations — for example, AC2 Stanley Isherwood, killed 29 September 1939 and buried in Germany. <http://www.cwgc.org/find-wardead/casualty/2073860/ISHERWOOD,%20STANLEY> However, from 1942 all bomber aircrew were NCOs or above, in recognition of the appalling risks which they ran.

¹¹ The older Services also made life very difficult for the RAF, for example, in 1919 refusing to let the RAF use their officer ranks, thus forcing the Chief of the Air Staff, Sir Hugh Trenchard, to create

Treasury limited its funding in a manner which denied the RAF full independence, for example in the field of military intelligence.¹² The issue of the independence of the RAF was revived more than once during the war itself, when criticisms of its ability to support Army or Navy operations were raised, often in a highly acrimonious fashion.¹³ For its part, the RAF had a very strong determination to preserve its autonomy, and it is arguable that this determination affected how it viewed its missing of the Second World War: they had an almost totemic significance which was absent for missing soldiers. The RAF dead enhanced the image of a strong, independent, elite service which had its own glorious history. They were also a uniting factor, pulling together the various Commands, because so many airmen had friends who had been killed in different parts of the Service.¹⁴

When it came to finding the missing in North-West Europe, the RAF's strong sense of group identity strengthened the resolve of the MRES; it is very notable that every RAF search officer, whilst carrying out his duties, was required by MRES Standing Orders to 'salute a grave on arrival and again on departure as a mark of respect for

new ones. The new rank titles (Pilot Officer, Flight Lieutenant, and so on) came into being on 4 August 1919. 'RAF Timeline 1918-1929' (last accessed 23/2/2015): <http://www.raf.mod.uk/history/raftimeline19181929.cfm>

¹² Kevin Jones, 'From the Horse's Mouth: Luftwaffe POWs as Sources for Air Ministry Intelligence during the Battle of Britain', *Intelligence and National Security*, 15/4 (2000), p.63.

¹³ See, for example, the statement of the Secretary of State for Air, Sir Archibald Sinclair, to the House of Commons on 4 March 1942. Hansard, Sir Archibald Sinclair's Statement, HC Deb 04 March 1942 vol 378. Hansard online (last accessed 04/03/15): http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1942/mar/04/sir-archibald-sinclairs-statement#S5CV0378P0_19420304_HOC_281.

¹⁴ See, for example, Jack Skingley's poem, 'Our Heroes', which is thought to have been written at least in part as a tribute to his friend in Fighter Command, Wing Commander Eric Woods, who was killed on 16 December 1943; Jack Skingley was in Bomber Command. Jennie Gray, 'The Path Finder Force and 97 Squadron', website (last accessed 11/11/15): <http://raf-pathfinders.com/crew-edwards/>

those who had died so that others may enjoy the benefits of democracy'.¹⁵ There appears to have been no similar Standing Order for the Army. Although this is by no means to suggest that the Graves Service units were lacking in respect — many instances have already been given of their outstanding devotion — it does point up how seriously the RAF identified with its own dead and missing.

When it came to the campaigns which the Services fought in North-West Europe, the different manner in which Army or RAF casualties occurred produced markedly dissimilar problems in caring for the dead. With the exception of commando raids and specialised operations such as the Bruneval and Dieppe raids of 1942, Army warfare meant large groups of men moving together, supported by a very large establishment. The deaths of soldiers were thus for the most part dealt with by their own people and not the enemy.¹⁶ RAF casualties, on the other hand, occurred in groups of one to eight men, usually completely isolated from any sort of war front, and on a widely scattered geographical basis. Unlike Army deaths, the reporting of RAF deaths was almost entirely by the enemy via the International Red Cross, although there were a number of lesser sources, such as prisoner of war letters.

The timespan of the two Services' losses was also completely different. RAF losses were a steady drip of attrition over a period of six years, from September 1939 onwards. There were peaks within those years, such as the disastrous Nuremberg raid of 29/30 March 1944 when almost 12 per cent of the crews flying out did not return from the operation, but generally speaking the losses occurred at a rate which was administratively manageable.¹⁷ By contrast, the Army only fought in North-West

¹⁵ Imperial War Museum, Documents.9046, Flight Lieutenant C A Mitchell, *The Missing Research and Enquiry Service*, typescript account, p.16.

¹⁶ The Bruneval raid was 'a mere flea-bite' but a PR success; Dieppe was a horrendous disaster. See Gray, *Major Cotterell at Arnhem*, p.89, and Ken Ford, *Dieppe 1942, Prelude to D-Day* (Osprey Publishing, Oxford, 2008).

¹⁷ Martin Middlebrook and Chris Everitt, *The Bomber Command War Diaries, An Operational Reference Book, 1939-1945* (Midland Publishing, Leicester, 1995), pp.487-488. These pages give the Nuremberg loss rate of 11.9 per cent and also an average percentage for the winter operations

Europe for a comparatively short period in 1940 in Norway and France, and did not do so again until D-Day four years later. Due to the length of time that they had been buried, men missing from the first two campaigns would eventually pose identification problems similar to those for the RAF missing. However, this was not the same for the Army's casualties which occurred from 6 June 1944 onwards, which for the most part could be dealt with more or less as they occurred. The great problem with such immediacy, though, was that at moments of crisis the casualty or missing reports could climb into overwhelming numbers. The most notable example of this was the battle of Arnhem, when a force of around 12,000 men flew out and fewer than 4,000 got back to England.¹⁸ This happened in a very short space of time, from 17 September to 26 September 1944, and the catastrophe immediately generated an immense number of enquiries from anxious members of the public. At such times, the administrative structures for dealing with the dead and missing were severely over-stretched, perhaps leading to the notable lack of sympathy and tact displayed in some of the Army's dealings with next of kin.¹⁹

If soldiers' bodies were not treated respectfully, it had a strong negative effect upon the fighting man, but this link between combatant morale and the dignified burial of the dead was only relevant to the Army. Before Europe was liberated and Germany conquered, the RAF dead were cared for by the occupied peoples or the Germans, and all that the RAF could do was process any information which was received about

from 18/19 November 1943 to 31 March 1944 of 3.8 per cent, which obviously would have been lower without the catastrophe of the Nuremberg raid.

¹⁸ The exact numbers of the Arnhem force and those who got home in the evacuation from Oosterbeek are disputed, but are generally thought to be of this magnitude. See, for example, Lloyd Clark, *Arnhem: Operation Market Garden, September 1944* (Sutton Publishing, Stroud, 2002), p.219, which gives the figure of 11,920 flying out and 3,910 escaping from the Oosterbeek perimeter.

¹⁹ In the War Office Casualty Branch report, Appendix H is a chart which shows the peaks and troughs of casualty reports against the staff available to handle them. Arnhem predictably is a spike, but the largest one is for the prisoners of war returning from Europe in May-June 1945. TNA, WO 162/205, War Office, 'History of Casualty Branch (Liverpool) (Cas L)'.

their fate. In terms of military morale, therefore, it was the psychological impact of the losses at the RAF's operational stations which mattered, not the taking care of the bodies. The commitment to welfare structures, both official and personal, for operational airmen and their families, was strengthened by the RAF's powerlessness to do very much else. In a very real sense, the RAF *had* to concentrate upon welfare during the war, employing a comparatively sensitive and caring approach which would last into the post-war years.

Service culture and campaign differences were the most significant foundations for Army-RAF differences in the care of the dead. However, there were also some less obvious factors. The Army had been through a similar process in the First World War, and therefore had some experience of what to expect and how to go about it. One of the few things which can be said in favour of the Casualty Branch of the War Office as opposed to that of the Air Ministry is that its work was planned well in advance and commenced very promptly at the outbreak of war. The RAF was very slow off the mark in understanding how vast its casualties would be and how difficult it might be to account for them. As has been seen, the resources initially allocated proved to be completely inadequate, and missing research resources increased thereafter in response to a series of crisis points. Most notably, it was not until late 1941 that the RAF fully accepted its responsibility for the missing, more than two years after the war had started.

Nonetheless, the experience gained from the First World War was not so straightforwardly beneficial to the Army as it might seem. Previous experience was obviously useful to the Graves Service working in the field in North-West Europe, but it may possibly have contributed to the Army's inflexibility in other matters – for example, in the refusal to see that times had changed which manifested itself in such absurdities as the Casualty Branch's refusal to make use of the mass media. The RAF, beginning from scratch, had to learn on the job, but the benefit which was derived from this was that modern methods, including the skilled use of PR, were devoted to ensuring that as many men as possible would receive a named grave. The Air Ministry Casualty Branch was certainly aware that it was pioneering a new

approach to lost servicemen, as evidenced by Burges's remark that 'the War Office entirely fail to realise our problems, and [...] old methods will not meet the need created by long-range air operations'.²⁰

The RAF had a very public war. Based largely in Britain, it could not very easily conceal what was going on at its stations, and, within obvious limits, there was no military necessity to do so. As a corollary of this, there was a reasonable degree of openness with the Press and other media, both during the war and afterwards. The case of Bob and Barb, in which the Air Ministry Casualty Branch asked for help in order to identify a missing Canadian airmen, is one of the most outstanding examples of how adroit the RAF was at getting the public on its side by utilising the mass media.²¹ Interestingly, there are several mentions in Air Ministry Casualty Branch papers of the intention to produce a popular account of the work of the MRES which would be on sale to the general public.²² Whilst this idea does not appear to have come to fruition, the fact that it was entertained at all tells a great deal about RAF openness in a matter in which it took great pride.

The combatant part of the Army was based wherever it was fighting its battles, living in situations of constant danger where the need for military secrecy was paramount. Nonetheless, Montgomery, the Commander of 21 Army Group, regarded the Press and Radio journalists attached to the Group as 'an integral part of my staff'. He had a very realistic appreciation of the function of publicity in the conduct of a modern war, 'not only on the morale of the home country, but also upon the actual fighting soldiers, who listen to broadcasts and who rapidly receive copies of their home newspapers'. Strikingly, Montgomery acknowledged that the failures

²⁰ TNA, AIR20/9050, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, Group Captain R Burges, 'Missing Research and Enquiry Service', report, 12 July 1945.

²¹ Bob and Barb, see Chapter Four, p.243.

²² See, for example: TNA, AIR 20/9050, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, unsigned, 'Report on the MRES, North-West Europe', undated but clearly between October 1947 and February 1948.

as well as the successes should be reported 'in the fullest possible way'.²³ His view formed a very stark contrast to the attitude of the War Office Casualty Branch in England, which carried its pernickety dislike of the Press and Radio to ridiculous limits. Its comment about the newspapers producing copy that the Casualty Branch was 'unable to stomach without heavy disinfectionation [sic]' says everything about the reason why the relationship was discontinued.²⁴ The sections on the mass media in the War Office Casualty Branch's post-war report could never have been written by anyone from the Air Ministry Casualty Branch.

When contrasting the different care for the dead programmes, the weight of responsibility which each Service carried needs to be taken into account. There can be no doubt that the Army shouldered an immense burden. It fulfilled the central role in the care for all the British dead, this role having been agreed early in the war with both the Air Ministry and the Admiralty. It maintained the central register of the dead; it performed the exhumation and transportation of many thousands of isolated bodies to the cemeteries, having first chosen the sites and created the layout for those cemeteries, which would only cease to be its responsibility when the Imperial War Graves Commission was able to take them over. All this on its own was quite enough, but the Army was also the central body for all British prisoners of war.²⁵

It almost goes without saying that the Army's fighting and policing roles were immensely demanding. The North-West Europe campaign was carried out over vast territories and involved huge numbers of men. As the *Administrative History* vividly put it, the average strength of the Group was approximately one million men, 'equal to the population of Birmingham but spread out from Normandy to the Baltic and constantly moving'; all these men had to be 'fed, paid, clothed, equipped, cared for and transported'. Additionally, 21 Army Group had to take a large degree of

²³ Field Marshall the Viscount Montgomery, *Normandy to the Baltic: the Personal Account of the Conquest of Germany* (Hutchinson and Co, London, 1947), pp.xii-xiii.

²⁴ TNA, WO 162/205, War Office, 'History of Casualty Branch (Liverpool) (Cas L)', p.42.

²⁵ *Ibid*, pp.1-2.

responsibility for the civilians in the areas in which it was operating. Once again, *The Administrative History* set out the situation very succinctly:

These civilians had to be retained in a reasonable state of health and be given adequate food and the bare necessities of life. If this had not been done they would have become an operational hindrance which would have curtailed the radius of action of the forces in the field. In order to administer the civilian population the import, manufacture and movement of certain essential stores for civilian use had to continue. These conflicted directly with the maintenance of military forces and priorities had to be decided constantly between the military and civil requirements.²⁶

After the war came the policing and control of Germany until the civilian Control Commission could begin to take over some of the work. The RAF took a share in the occupation of Germany; BAFO (British Air Forces of Occupation) was stationed at Bad Eilsen, close to the BAOR's HQ at Bad Oeyhausen, its principal role being to support the BAOR and to carry out air policing of the occupation.²⁷ Air Chief Marshal Sir William Sholto Douglas, who commanded BAFO, would be Montgomery's successor as the Military Governor of the British Zone of Germany.²⁸ Nonetheless, the RAF cannot be thought of as carrying the same magnitude of responsibilities as the Army, either during the war or afterwards. It was, of course, a much smaller Service, so responsibilities have to be seen in scale, but it is arguable that its

²⁶ *The Administrative History of the Operations of 21 Army Group on the Continent of Europe, 6 June 1944-8 May 1945* (Germany, November 1945), p.151.

²⁷ Group Captain W J Taylor, 'Historical Background', *The Royal Air Force in Germany, 1945-1993* (The Royal Air Force Historical Society, London, 1999), p.11.

²⁸ Air Chief Marshal Sir William Sholto Douglas held the post of Military Governor of the British Zone of Germany from 1 May 1946 to 31 October 1947.

narrower range of military duties left the RAF freer to concentrate upon welfare and the care of the dead and missing.

The two major points of difference between the Army and the RAF in the care for the dead programme were the methods used in dealing with the relatives and the policy for the missing. Although much of this material has already been touched upon, a different light is shed upon it when a direct comparison is made between the two Services.

Just as the headquarters of the two Services symbolised their cultural identities, so the location of the Casualty Branches illustrates the markedly different approach which the Army and the RAF took to relatives. The War Office Casualty Branch was situated in Liverpool for almost the entire war and well into the peace. It made no particular provision for relatives visiting its Liverpool office. Meanwhile, its shared Enquiry Centre at Curzon Street in London (which was not established until the very end of 1941) was handicapped by the fact that all the records remained in Liverpool, thereby rendering the Enquiry Centre incapable of offering little more than tea and sympathy. The Air Ministry Casualty Branch, by contrast, was in the heart of London, at 73-77 Oxford Street, in 'a suite of offices above some shops diagonally opposite the Dominion Theatre in Tottenham Court Road'.²⁹ It thus looked approachable rather than intimidating.³⁰ It had the benefit of the London transport network and thus could hardly have been more accessible to the vast majority of relatives. Those in charge clearly understood that relatives would want to visit the offices, and great

²⁹ Imperial War Museum, Documents.9046, Flight Lieutenant C A Mitchell, *The Missing Research and Enquiry Service*, typescript account, p.2.

³⁰ The Casualty Branch had originally been at the Air Ministry's main building, Adastral House in Kingsway, but moved to Oxford Street in late 1942. The details are given on the National Archives 'Discovery' website (last accessed 18/11/15):

<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C16484>

thoughtfulness went into making sure that enquiries could be fully answered on the spot. This thoughtfulness extended into the peace. For instance, in April 1948, it was recorded:

Large-scale cemetery plans are being prepared, showing the position of every grave in each cemetery. Copies will eventually be sent to the Casualty Branch which will then be able to show next of kin the exact position of a particular grave.³¹

The Air Ministry Casualty Branch appreciated how treasured even the slightest scrap of information about a loss would be to the families. Instructions to MRES search officers directed that their reports should 'include matters of human interest, not merely the bare facts. They will thus provide suitable material to be worked up into letters to next of kin.'³² However, there was a very fine line to be walked. MRM No. 11 warned: 'Irrelevant and unnecessary details are to be avoided. Local colour, when expressed too vividly, obscures the outline of an account.'³³ Although the relatives would almost certainly have preferred the local colour, objectively the work could not function efficiently except within a strict discipline.

The Air Ministry Casualty Branch also had an acute awareness that the passage of time did not heal wounds. Five years after the war, a report on Missing Research noted:

The passing on to the relatives of information collected by Missing Research is one of the most delicate tasks of the Casualty Branch. It

³¹ TNA, AIR2/10031, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, Squadron Leader A P LeM Sinkinson, 'Missing Research: Origin and Development', report, 21 April 1948.

³² TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', p.48.

³³ Ibid, Part V, Appendix B1, Group Captain R Burges, Missing Research Memorandum MRM No. 11, 16 November 1945.

frequently happens that news of a casualty is not obtained until several years after the event. It is necessary to tell the next-of-kin but, in the process the past is recalled and grief inevitably renewed. A tactful and sympathetic approach is therefore imperative. The many kindly letters of appreciation received in the branch prove that the right method has been found.³⁴

It is notable that the War Office Casualty Branch no longer existed by this point, having been merged with Records and relocated to Droitwich in North Worcestershire in 1947. The Air Ministry Casualty Branch remained in central London, although it eventually moved to Seville Street in Knightsbridge.³⁵ It was only in April 1949, four years after the war ended, that its offices became slightly more inaccessible when it relocated to Stanmore, a north-west suburb of London.³⁶

As was seen in the previous chapter, the War Office Casualty Branch lacked finesse in almost every aspect of dealing with the relatives. However, it did make some attempts to soften the agony of loss, such as the delaying of bad news which would otherwise have been received late in the evening or in the Christmas period.³⁷ In addition, the Army practised a type of benevolent paternalism aimed at protecting relatives from distressing revelations about their loved one's character or behaviour. WOCINDOC Serial No. 21, dated 7 May 1944, defined the duties of 2nd Echelons with regards to the effects of deceased servicemen. The protocol was reiterated in a further WOCINDOC, Serial No. 53, dated 14 April 1945, which drew the attention

³⁴ TNA, AIR2/10031, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, unsigned, 'Missing Research – Origin and Development', report, date stamped 29 March 1950.

³⁵ The Seville Street address appears on a letter from the Air Ministry (S.14 is the originator but this only appears in the case reference) to Mrs D Dushman, concerning her missing husband David. Dushman family archives, Air Ministry to Mrs D Dushman, letter, 3 March 1949.

³⁶ Move to Stanmore, see the National Archives 'Discovery' website (last accessed 18/11/15): <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C16484>

³⁷ TNA, WO 162/205, War Office, 'History of Casualty Branch (Liverpool) (Cas L)', p.61.

of all GHQ 2nd Echelons to the 'need for intelligent interpretation' of the duties of the Standing Committees of Adjustment which processed the effects. WOCINDOC 53 stated:

The onus rests with the Committees to extract and destroy any articles or documents which they consider might be offensive or cause distress to relatives. This allows sufficient discretion to ensure that belongings which might cause revulsion and pain are not despatched to relatives.³⁸

Running alongside this protocol was an additional protective policy adopted by the War Office Casualty Branch: it tendered all reliable information to relatives but omitted anything which had come from an enemy broadcast, together with 'the more painful details of the evidence'. The omitted evidence was only released if there was pressure for a detailed account of what had happened.³⁹ This policy can be seen in textbook operation in letters to the Cotterell family, where information which was at first withheld from the mother Mintie was finally released to her son Geoffrey after his insistence.

The enemy broadcast regarding your brother admitted its origin, saying that the information had been furnished by a German war reporter who arrived as Major Cotterell was being put into a lorry with the other wounded; during this operation he lost consciousness. The reporter added that your brother was asked whether he had a last wish and he replied in a low voice, 'I am dying'. In the absence of any definite news of Major Cotterell, this distressing and unofficial information has not been given to your mother.⁴⁰

³⁸ Ibid, but Appendix O.

³⁹ Ibid, but main report, p.46.

⁴⁰ Cotterell family archives, The War Office to Geoffrey Cotterell, letter, 12 July 1945.

The RAF and the Dominion Air Forces practised a similar benevolent censorship over personal effects, but were not so protective about other information given out to relatives. One example of the former was the case of three dead Australian airmen whose personal effects had been collected from their RAF stations in the UK:

Forwarded herewith for appropriate action are diaries found amongst the personal effects of the above named deceased members.

2. It is recommended that all these diaries be destroyed owing to their general moral tone, which would, undoubtedly, cause distress if read by their next of kin.

3. It is advised that one negative extracted from the personal effects of Warrant Officer McKenny has been destroyed by this Headquarters for similar reasons.⁴¹

However, when dealing with news of losses or casualties, the RAF routinely passed on a surprising amount of information, some of which had the potential to be extremely upsetting. When the Moroney crew went missing on 22/23 March 1944, the wife of the wireless operator, David Dushman, was informed very soon afterwards that the aircraft had been abandoned some 40 miles off the coast of Texel, one of the occupied Dutch Frisian islands, and that although a search had been organised as soon as possible, no trace of either the aircraft or the crew had been found. The sole consolation which could be offered was that 'there is a possibility that they may have been picked up and are safe even though they may be in enemy hands'. The news of this ditching at night in the North Sea, so far from land, could only lead Rose Dushman to fear that her husband and his crew mates

⁴¹ Australian National Archives, RAAF, Francis Eugene McEgan personnel file, RAAF Overseas Headquarters, Kingsway, London, to The Secretary of Air, Department of Air, Melbourne, letter, 26 December 1944.

had drowned. Almost exactly five years later, a sympathetic letter arrived from the RAF, telling her that only one member of the crew had been located, his body having been washed ashore on the German Frisian island of Juist. This obliquely confirmed that all the crew had been lost at sea. The only way of softening the blow was to tell Rose Dushman that her husband would be commemorated on the planned memorial to the RAF missing, that which eventually became Runnymede.⁴²

In David Dushman's case, the wartime evidence, although scanty, pointed unmistakably to the likelihood of his death. In thousands of other missing cases, nothing whatsoever was known. For both the Army and the RAF, the missing formed a different category to the dead, even if the missing were indeed the dead because the number of those turning up alive after the war was infinitesimal. Both Services had to deal with the desperate refusal of relatives to accept the finality of their loss, and even the Air Ministry Casualty Branch's more sympathetic approach was sometimes insufficient to settle the matter. A corporal at a MRES unit in Germany remembered:

From time to time the grieving parents of a missing crew member desperate for some news of the fate of their son would bypass [the] Air Ministry and write direct to our CO. One man was convinced he had identified his son in a newspaper photograph of concentration camp inmates and that he might have survived the war: nothing ever came to light to substantiate this.⁴³

⁴² Dushman family archives, 97 Squadron and Air Ministry letters to Mrs D Dushman: two typescript copies, the first dated 1 April 1944, the second undated; the third letter being the original from the Air Ministry, dated 3 March 1949.

⁴³ The unit was No. 4 MREU near Hamburg. Imperial War Museum, Documents.6078, Douglas Hague, *The Biggest Detective Job in the World*, typescript account (September 1992), p.2.

A common belief was that loss of memory prevented missing men from being identified. However, as one RAF report put it:

None of the missing aircrew members were discovered alive and suffering from loss of memory, despite the persistent hope of many distracted relatives.⁴⁴

Relatives of missing soldiers also clung on to the idea that their loved one was still alive, perhaps in a hospital somewhere, with no knowledge of who he was or how he had got there. Provisions for such eventualities had actually been made early in the war when it had been arranged through the Army Medical Directorate that any such cases, at home or abroad, would be notified at once to the War Office Casualty Branch. Through the Protecting Power, the German government had also been persuaded to report any cases of unidentified prisoners of war. However, only about six such cases were ever reported, and of these only two were unidentified by June 1946.⁴⁵

The other persistent post-war hope of relatives was that their missing loved one was being held by the Russians. Anthony Cotterell's family were amongst those who clung to this illusion. For some time after the war, articles appeared in the British newspapers alleging that British nationals were being held by the Russians and that information about them was exceedingly hard to obtain. In October 1945, Geoffrey Cotterell wrote to his father about an article in the *News Chronicle* which had reported that even British and American liaison officers, searching for British and American personnel, had been refused admittance to the Russian-controlled areas of Germany. Geoffrey concluded robustly: 'So that settles that ... There are British

⁴⁴ TNA, AIR2/10031, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, unsigned, 'Missing Research – Origin and Development', report, date stamped 29 March 1950.

⁴⁵ TNA, WO 162/205, War Office, 'History of Casualty Branch (Liverpool) (Cas L)', p.49.

people in Russia.⁴⁶ And indeed, the occasional British soldier was sometimes unexpectedly released, as in the case of a South African officer in March 1946, who, as Geoffrey told his mother, had been 'recovered from the Russians [...] quite suddenly and out of the blue – and with no explanation whatsoever'.⁴⁷

In the 1990s, American conspiracy theorists would develop an obsession with the idea that American (and thus, by extension, possibly British) soldiers had been abandoned by their government in the Soviet gulags. Careful historical research has proved that this was nonsense, and even the 30,000 German prisoners of war held by the Soviet Union as war criminals were all released by early 1956.⁴⁸ Like the lost memory theory, the story that some of the missing were held by the Russians was almost entirely a myth, but nonetheless one which conscientious British search officers or well-connected individuals who had lost someone close to them felt duty-bound to follow up if they were able to.⁴⁹

Within the Services, the perception of the missing and what was due to them varied enormously. For the Royal Navy, any search for missing men lost in the sea became pointless after a very short time, and thus the main focus would always be on the commemorative aspect. As for the other two Services, the Army's attitude was worlds apart from that of the RAF, whose dedication to discovering what had happened to its missing airmen was truly remarkable. Several reasons have been given in this study as to why the Army approached the matter of missing soldiers very differently, but nonetheless a certain sense remains that the Army as a body (as opposed to the small sub-section which included the dedicated staff of the Graves Service in North-West Europe) simply did not care in anything like the same way as the RAF.

⁴⁶ Cotterell family archives, Geoffrey Cotterell to Graham Cotterell, letter, 25 October 1945.

⁴⁷ Ibid, Geoffrey Cotterell to Mintie Cotterell, letter, 2 April 1946.

⁴⁸ See Timothy K Nenninger's 'United States Prisoner of War and the Red Army, 1944-45: Myths and Realities', *The Journal of Military History*, 6/3 (2002), pp.761-781.

⁴⁹ In the case of Anthony Cotterell, his old mentor, George Edinger, felt compelled to follow up the possibility that Anthony was being held by the Russians. Gray, *Major Cotterell at Arnhem*, p.264.

Was there partly a class dimension to this? Some sense, perhaps, that the rank and file of the Army was unimportant because they were mostly working-class lads, the bottom of the pile both in societal and military terms? It is hard to believe that this was the reason because the lack of dedicated searching extended to officers as well as men, even in such high profile cases as Anthony Cotterell's, which was linked to a serious war crime involving the deaths of several British POWs.⁵⁰

For the RAF, however, there was certainly an element of honouring meritocracy in the search for missing airmen. The RAF was a highly specialised service which had invested a great deal of money, time and effort in training its aircrew; these could not then be lightly discarded as if they were valueless. Everything which the RAF did centred on its flyers, who were vastly outnumbered by those who supported them and their aircraft. One graphic example of this was on the operational stations where more than 40 ground crew contributed to keeping a Lancaster flying for the crew of 7 who flew it (and this is not counting all the ancillary services like catering, accommodation, and medical services).⁵¹ Operational airmen were the heart of the RAF, that vital core which provided the whole reason for its being. Perhaps one of the reasons why the Army did not have the same focus upon missing soldiers is that the fighting men were in an approximately 2:1 ratio to support staff, and thus did not have the rarefied status of operational airmen.⁵² Another is that there was always an element of ambiguity about the Army's relationship to missing soldiers, whereas the RAF's search for missing airmen was free from the slightest shadow of doubt and was therefore, in its dedicated fervour, more akin to a religious quest.

The ambiguity was caused by the possibility of desertion, or even collaboration, which was ever-present for missing soldiers but completely absent for missing

⁵⁰ See, for example, TNA, WO 309/1951, JAG, war crimes dossier, shooting of British POWs at Brummen.

⁵¹ Gray, The Path Finder Force and 97 Squadron, 'Keeping a Lancaster Flying' (last accessed 12/04/2015): <http://raf-pathfinders.com/bomber-command-keeping-a-lancaster-flying/>

⁵² Anthony Cotterell, *She Walks In Battledress* (Christophers, London, 1942), p.7.

airmen. The Army was always keenly aware of the possibility of desertion although in actual fact it was an absolutely negligible factor in missing cases. The War Office Casualty Branch report recorded that of all the missing who had been presumed to be dead, only one man in all the various theatres of war turned out to be alive and a deserter. This was Private L Phillips, who disappeared during heavy fighting in France in July 1944. His death was presumed in November 1945 due to the lapse of time, pressure from his mother, and the fact that he had had a clean military record. In July 1946, two years after his disappearance, Phillips was picked up in civilian clothes in his home town of Coventry, and formally declared to be a deserter. The report does not say what happened to him.⁵³

The Phillips case was clear-cut but a number of others remained shadowy in definition. As the War Office Casualty Branch report stated:

There still remain, unhappily, a few cases not possible to close and which must remain in the 'unlocated' category because the evidence points to desertion coupled, in some cases, with collaboration with the enemy. It may well be of course that most of these are in fact dead but circumstances have, to date, precluded official presumption of death by the War Office.⁵⁴

With a missing soldier, the possibility always remained that he had deserted and had even perhaps assisted the enemy, however infrequent such a scenario actually was. By contrast, desertion and collaboration were simply not possible in the case of operational airmen. If an airman suffered from what was deemed cowardice, or LMF,

⁵³ TNA, WO 162/205, War Office, 'History of Casualty Branch (Liverpool) (Cas L)', pp.47-48.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p.54.

this would have been dealt with back in Britain.⁵⁵ Once airborne, an airman had no incentive to desert and no opportunity for it either. Collaboration was sometimes alleged against individual RAF prisoners of war, but as such cases occurred after capture, in prisoner of war camps, it was not a facet of missing cases.⁵⁶ This is why there was no element of moral haziness about the RAF search – there could never be any suggestion other than that these were noble heroes who had flown out of Britain to their probable deaths. The RAF search was a clean quest, and easy to present to the public as such. It could also assume the guise of an exciting detective story, as in the article in *Flight Magazine* of 18 October 1945, quoted in Chapter Four, or even a moving love story as in the case which so caught the public's imagination, that of the nurse Barb and her fiancé Bob.

Despite their differences in much of the care for the dead programme, there was one critical matter in which the RAF and the Army were absolutely united and that was the intent to uncover war crimes and to bring the perpetrators to justice. Because their work so frequently involved exhumations, the MRES and the Graves Service were one of the prime means of discovering evidence of what were then often referred to as atrocities. Often there had been no prior knowledge that a crime had taken place. In September 1944, for example, Stott noted that an atrocity had been brought to light by arrangements to move a body for operational reasons. A report was sent on to SHAEF and instructions were issued that bodies in the locality (Les

⁵⁵ LMF – 'Lacking in Moral Fibre'. For combat stress and breakdown in aircrew, see for example Mark K Wells, *Courage and Air Warfare, The Allied Aircrew Experience in the Second World War* (Frank Cass, London, 1995).

⁵⁶ For prisoner of war collaborators see, for example, Oliver Clutton-Brock, *Footprints on the Sands of Time, RAF Bomber Command Prisoners of War in Germany, 1939-45* (Grub Street, London, 2003), Chapter 16.

Bains near Villy Bocage) were not to be disturbed until further notice.⁵⁷ There were other similar instances, and by the end of October 1946, the Graves Service had brought to light 42 atrocity cases in the course of its everyday duties.⁵⁸ This side of its work was considered so important that it was listed as one of the Graves Service's key duties.⁵⁹

Grave Concentration Units were directly involved in some high-profile war crimes trials. One such was the trial of General Kurt Meyer, which took place at a Canadian Military Court convened at Aurich in Germany between 10 and 28 December 1945. Meyer faced a number of charges, including the incitement of his troops to murder Canadian prisoners in Normandy in the hours immediately following the D-Day landings.⁶⁰ The War Diary of No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit mentions, on 27 September 1945, a visit from Lieutenant Colonel C S Campbell, OC of UK Detachment, No.1 Canadian War Crimes Investigation Unit, 'concerning two alleged atrocity cases concentrated by this unit', which were evidently connected to the Kurt Meyer charges.⁶¹ Captain Norman Wallace, 'B' Section Concentration Officer, later

⁵⁷ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, entry for 3 September 1944.

⁵⁸ TNA, WO 267/606, BAOR HQ, Western Europe Graves Service Directorate, Quarterly Historical Report, quarter ending 30 June 1947.

⁵⁹ TNA, 171/8653, BAOR HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January to June 1946, appendices for January, Appendix G3, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Graves Registration, Concentration, and Enquiries Service', memorandum, 22 January 1946.

⁶⁰ Trial Summation: 'Kurt Meyer was accused of having, as Commander of the 25th S.S. Panzer Grenadier Regiment of the 12th S.S. Panzer Division, incited and counselled his men to deny quarter to allied troops; ordered (or alternatively been responsible for) the shooting of prisoners of war at his headquarters; and been responsible for other such shootings both at his headquarters and during the fighting nearby.' The United Nations War Crimes Commission, *Law Reports of Trials of War Criminals*, Volume IV (London, HMSO, 1948), Case No. 22, The Abbaye Ardenne Case, Trial of S.S. Brigadefuhrer Kurt Meyer, p.97.

⁶¹ TNA, WO 171/10994, ADGR&E, No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, War Diary, January-December 1945, entry for 27 September 1945. Campbell's full details are from P Whitney

went to Aurich to give evidence at the trial, being absent from No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit (then stationed at Isselhorst) from 5-17 December.⁶² Wallace was the twenty-second witness for the prosecution, appearing directly after two Canadian Graves Concentration Unit witnesses. He had exhumed a body which still had both its identity discs, showing that the man in the grave was H L McKiel, a private in the Canadian Army. Wallace had been warned by local French civilians that McKiel had been shot in the head, but stated at the trial that he could find no evidence of this, perhaps because the lower jaw was missing. In his expert opinion the body had been in the ground for about a year and had not previously been moved.⁶³

No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit was also involved in an investigation between 3 and 28 February 1946 into possible war crimes against members of the RAF. The War Diary noted:

Section detached to Bramsche for the purpose of investigating and identifying RAF casualties buried at Achmer, Bramsche and Malgarten. This investigation is being carried out in conjunction with American Graves Registration personnel and JAG's branch (War Crimes Section) HQ, BAOR.

Lackenbauer and Chris M V Madsen (Eds), *Kurt Meyer on Trial: A Documentary Record* (Canada Defence Academy Press, Kingston, Ontario, 2007), p.226.

⁶² TNA, WO 171/10994, ADGR&E, No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, War Diary, January-December 1945, entries for 5 and 17 December 1945.

⁶³ 'Q. How do you arrive at that conclusion? A. Well, if a grave is opened and a body moved, the action of the air on the body tends to make it decompose a lot quicker than is usual. In this case, however, the head was still attached by tendons to the body and, therefore, in my opinion, it could not have been moved formerly.' Lackenbauer and Madsen (Eds), *Kurt Meyer on Trial*, p.290.

No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit's involvement in the investigation was completed in March, 'all casualties being interred in a temporary cemetery constructed by this unit at Achmer'.⁶⁴

It is notable that the American Graves Registration Command was involved in this case, possibly because of their forensic expertise. The Americans also played a small part in investigations into the war crime which had led to the disappearance of Anthony Cotterell, the particular unit involved being attached to ETOUSA (European Theatre of Operations, United States Army). A specialist unit with expertise in identification using dental charts, it performed the first exhumations at Enschede in Holland, where it was thought that Anthony Cotterell and other victims of the same shooting might be buried. Anthony's father, Graham Cotterell, was a Harley Street dentist who had carried out his son's dental work, and this meant he could provide an accurate tooth chart which was highly unusual for the British Forces.⁶⁵

The police forces and war crimes units of the liberated countries were also active in assisting British war crimes investigations. In the Anthony Cotterell case, 33 Netherlands War Crimes Commission, which was based at Herford, near Bad Oeynhausen, played a critical part. Men from the liberated countries also worked as part of the British war crimes teams, for example, Captain A R D'Astignes who had been in the French Maquis and Captain M A J de Ferrare from the Belgian Army, both of whom worked at some point on the Anthony Cotterell case.⁶⁶

The JAG (Judge Advocate General) Branch mentioned above, located at the headquarters of the BAOR at Bad Oeynhausen, was the primary British legal

⁶⁴ TNA, WO 171/10994, ADGR&E, No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, War Diary, January-December 1945, entries for February and March 1946.

⁶⁵ The form which was used was the standard form for the Grave Registration and Enquiries Division, but it is not known if the unit came from this Division. Gray, *Major Cotterell at Arnhem*, pp.243-244.

⁶⁶ Both D'Astignes and de Ferrare are mentioned in Geoffrey Cotterell's letters. De Ferrare took the deposition of a key witness (Dr Heinrich Lathe) at Essen, see TNA, WO 309/1951, JAG, war crimes dossier, Deposition of Heinrich Lathe, March 1946.

authority where war crimes against servicemen in North-West Europe were concerned. The courts which were convened by JAG were military courts, the judge and the jury coming from the Armed Forces. In the case of the extremely important Sagan trial in 1947 (of which more below), the court was presided over by a Major General, and consisted of three Army officers and three representatives of the RAF.⁶⁷

By late 1945, the various war crimes units which had operated with 21 Army Group, by then known as the BAOR, had been merged to form the War Crimes Group (NWE), which, like JAG (War Crimes Section) was located at Bad Oeynhausen. The War Crimes Group had a Special Medical Section, which was suspended for an unknown reason between October 1946 and April 1947 (the name of this unit once again reflects the use of the word 'Special' to indicate war crimes). When it recommenced its work, Stott issued guidelines for his units, indicating 'how the two Services, "War Crimes" and "Graves"' should work together. The Graves Service should report any suspected war crime directly to the Special Medical Section, indicating how quickly they needed the exhumation performed, and they would then be notified directly by the Section when the pathologist was available:

Meantime the body in question should NOT be disturbed or disinterred, as the moving of bodies and examination of their clothing for identification purposes sometimes leads to the loss of valuable information.⁶⁸

The MRES were also highly aware of the need to preserve evidence. In his summary of the lessons learned from the work of the MRES, Hawkins wrote:

⁶⁷ The United Nations War Crimes Commission, *Law Reports of Trials of War Criminals*, Volume XI (London, HMSO, 1949), Case No. 62, Trial of Max Wielen and 17 Others.

⁶⁸ TNA, WO 267/606, BAOR HQ, Western Europe Graves Service Directorate, Quarterly Historical Report, quarter ending 30 June 1947, Appendix N, 'Special Exhumations in cases of alleged atrocities'.

Search officers are often in the best position to detect the initial evidence of war crimes and should be specially instructed to keep a look out for such evidence, and to obtain a pathologist's report when war crime is suspected.⁶⁹

RAF search officers had a certain zeal for pursuing their own enquiries about suspected atrocities, and Missing Memorandum MRM No.5 specifically addressed this issue:

While the tracing of war criminals is not one of the primary duties of the Missing Research and Enquiry Sections, there is no objection to this activity if pursued as a sideline, provided that it does not interfere with their regular work.⁷⁰

The RAF's official war crimes investigation service, the Special Investigating Branch (SIB), was based in London, in South Kensington, close to the London Cage, more formally known as the War Crimes Interrogation Unit, where suspects were interrogated. The SIB of necessity carried out much of its work in North-West Europe, its major assignment being the immensely complex and time-consuming Sagan case.⁷¹ The London Cage was a part of Army Intelligence and thus under the control of the War Office, but it had no bias as to which Service it was working with. In fact, the Sagan case was so nationally and internationally important that the 1957 book about the London Cage by the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel

⁶⁹ Ibid, p.141.

⁷⁰ Imperial War Museum, Documents.9046, Flight Lieutenant C A Mitchell, *The Missing Research and Enquiry Service*, Missing Research Memorandum MRM No.5, 6 September 1945.

⁷¹ For the interaction between the London Cage and the SIB, see Lieutenant Colonel A P Scotland, *The London Cage* (Evans Brothers, London, 1957), pp.123-160.

Scotland, devotes three of its fourteen chapters to Sagan; it was by far the most significant case which the London Cage handled.

Sagan was so momentous because it was the most calculated and blatant crime committed against British servicemen by the Germans.⁷² The story remains very well-known to this day, its memorability ensured because of its extreme Manichean quality — good versus evil, the larky schoolboy escapade of the Great Escape being answered by extreme brutality against all the rules of war. Of the 76 officers who escaped from Stalag Luft III at Sagan in March 1944, 50 were executed in reprisal, this order coming personally from Hitler. Post-war, the investigations into the multiple murders were pursued by the RAF with a close to fanatical sense of purpose. Although the main perpetrators were dead, this eventually culminated in the trial of Max Wielen and seventeen others at Hamburg, from 1 July to 3 September 1947.⁷³

The Sagan war crime was the extreme manifestation of an intense German hatred of Allied airmen which ran through all levels of society. Civilian enmity towards the *Terrorflieger* was deliberately stoked by the German High Command, but it was not until the Stalag Luft III escape that the propaganda chief, Josef Goebbels, extolled the German people to take the law into their own hands if they caught Allied airmen.⁷⁴

With the marked exception of the Stalag Luft III murders, the murder of RAF personnel tended to take place opportunistically. The RAF bomber crews were crashing or parachuting out many miles behind the front line: there were often only one or two survivors, it was easy to dispose of them, and there may have been few

⁷² 'The most striking perhaps historically is the case of the Stalag Luft III, which was a plain case of deliberate murder committed against prisoners of war.' The United Nations War Crimes Commission, *Law Reports of Trials of War Criminals*, Volume XI, p.viii.

⁷³ 'Fanatical sense of purpose': see Simon Read, *Human Game: Hunting The Great Escape Murderers* (Constable, London, 2013). For details of the case, see The United Nations War Crimes Commission, *Law Reports of Trials of War Criminals*, Volume XI, Case No. 62, Trial of Max Wielen and 17 Others.

⁷⁴ S P Mackenzie, 'The Treatment of Prisoners of War in World War II', *Journal of Modern History*, 66/3 (1994), pp.494-495.

or no witnesses. In both Germany and in the occupied countries, RAF survivors were handled by what were generally second- or third-rate troops – these may well have felt ferocious anger against the *Terrorflieger*, a wholly different sort of feeling to that against members of the Army. In Germany itself, they were interacting with the civilian population, who were naturally predisposed against them.

The exact number of airmen murdered by the Germans is uncertain because of the paucity of evidence. James Weingartner suggest that during the course of the war over 200 ‘and perhaps many more’ Allied airmen were murdered by German civilians, soldiers, or police and party officials.⁷⁵ Jörg Friedrich estimates that more than 100 pilots (he probably means airmen) were lynched in the last year of the war, this being after open season had been declared upon them.⁷⁶ Whatever the exact numbers, it was well-known to the RAF during the war that it was happening, and perhaps as a consequence some of the crimes were imagined by surviving aircrew due to the extreme stress of parachuting or crash-landing at dead of night in enemy territory.⁷⁷

The lack of evidence made it difficult to bring such crimes to trial.⁷⁸ Nonetheless, a number of them reached the courtroom. One such concerned the murder of an unknown airman at Enschede in Holland on 21 November 1944 by Eberhard

⁷⁵ James J Weingartner, ‘Americans, Germans, and War Crimes: Converging Narratives from “the Good War”’, *The Journal of American History*, 94/4 (2008), p.1170.

⁷⁶ Jörg Friedrich, *The Fire: The Bombing of Germany, 1940-1945* (Columbia University Press, New York, 2006), p.433. Friedrich also gives an account of the killing by a mob of six American airmen at Rüsselsheim, and the murder of three Bomber Command aircrew in Essen; the suggestion is that in these cases the civilians involved were incensed by recent Allied air raids. *The Fire*, pp.433-434.

⁷⁷ ‘Well-known during the war’ – see, for example, the official comment on the evasion reports of James Rainsford and Oscar Ramsden, 7 November 1943, WO 208/3315 and WO 208/5582, TNA, which notes: ‘Germans known to be shooting parachutists over Germany and occupied territory.’

⁷⁸ See, for example, Peter Hessel, *The Mystery of Frankenberg’s Canadian Airman* (James Lorimer and Company, Toronto, 2005).

Schoengrath and six others, all members of the SS.⁷⁹ A similar case in which the victim was likewise unknown culminated in the trial of Hans Renoth and three others in February 1946:

It was alleged that a British pilot crashed on German soil, and after emerging from his machine unhurt was arrested by Renoth, then attacked and beaten with fists and rifles by a number of people including the other three accused. Renoth stood aside for a while, then shot the pilot.⁸⁰

The trial of Johannes Oenning and Emil Nix in December 1945 differed from the above in that the identity of the victim, a Royal Air Force officer, was known, but the motive behind the killing appears to have been the same as the other two cases, that is to say extreme personal enmity against an airman simply because he was an airman and thus associated with the bombing campaign.⁸¹

One of the best known crimes against airmen was that which took place on Borkum in the German Frisian islands on 4 August 1944. The victims were seven American airmen from a crew of nine (two had parachuted out over the mainland, were humanely treated, and survived the war). They were savagely beaten and then shot in the head, the atrocity being carried out by men of the Nazi Labour Service, the townspeople incited by the mayor, and an off-duty soldier.⁸² Borkum itself had not suffered from bombing, but when the case came to trial multiple witnesses attested

⁷⁹ The United Nations War Crimes Commission, *Law Reports of Trials of War Criminals*, Volume XI, Case No. 71, Trial Of Eberhard Schoengrath And Six Others.

⁸⁰ 'Hans Renoth, Hans Pelgrim, Friedrich Wilhelm Grabowski and Paul Herman Nieke, at the time of the alleged offence two policemen and two customs officials respectively, were accused of committing a war crime, "in that they at Elten, Germany on 16th September, 1944, in violation of the laws and usages of war, were concerned in the killing of an unknown Allied airman, a prisoner of war." All pleaded not guilty.' Ibid, Case No. 68, Trial of Hans Renoth and Three Others.

⁸¹ Ibid, Case No. 67, Trial of Johannes Oenning and Emil Nix.

⁸² Weingartner, 'Americans, Germans, and War Crimes', p.1167.

that the soldier involved (who had not been found and therefore could not stand trial) had shouted that his wife and children had been killed in an air raid upon Hamburg. However, as James Weingartner says when writing about this incident. 'the Borkum atrocity was not a purely spontaneous manifestation of popular outrage'; it was grounded in official encouragement to retaliate against downed Allied airmen.

War crimes committed against soldiers tended to be very different. These crimes were easier to detect because soldiers usually travelled together in large bodies, even when they were prisoners of war being moved to POW camps; thus, there were almost always multiple witnesses, not only amongst the soldiers themselves but in the civilian populations. Soldiers interacted mainly with first-rate military personnel, and were in very little danger of being lynched by German civilians. Crimes could be committed against them in the violent heat of the moment, such as in the Kurt Meyer case, or in the shooting of Anthony Cotterell and several other British prisoners of war which was precipitated by the escape of two men from their truck.⁸³ There were also the completely unpredictable and pointless crimes, committed simply because it was possible, such as the murder of Captain Brian Brownscombe, a medical officer of the RAMC, who was shot in the head by his SS guards moments after they had been cheerily fraternising with him.⁸⁴

The one scenario in which soldiers encountered the same level of officially sanctioned German violence as airmen was when they were commandos, taking part in specialised operations. The commandos carried out 'smash and grab' raids into German-held territory, their primary order being 'to strike suddenly and get away again before being brought to action'. Highly efficient killing methods were taught, and applied as necessary.⁸⁵ Hitler's Commando Order of 18 October 1942 justified

⁸³ Gray, *Major Cotterell at Arnhem*, pp.160-168.

⁸⁴ R M Gerritsen, *For No Apparent Reason: The Shooting of Captain Brian Brownscombe GM, RAMC* (R N Sigmund Publishing, Renkum, Holland, 2000), pp.14-16.

⁸⁵ Commando Training Instruction No. 1, The War Office, 15 August 1940, Stephen Bull, *Commando Tactics: The Second World War* (Pen and Sword, Barnsley, 2010), pp.24-25.

the summary execution of commandos on the grounds of what it defined as their criminality and habitual callousness in murdering their prisoners.⁸⁶ The undeclared reasons behind the edict, however, were the fact that these specialised operations were almost totally unpredictable, and when successful had a dramatic effect upon the morale of the peoples of the occupied countries.

Downed airmen likewise posed a constant threat to the authority and stability of the regime in the occupied countries; they were heroes to the people, many of whom risked their lives to hide those who had escaped alive from the loss of an aircraft. Even when they were dead, the airmen were a focus of intense feeling. Their powerful symbolism can be seen in the case of the Mooney crew who died at the beginning of January 1944. The aircraft came down at La Calamine, two miles over the Belgium border, and the Germans intended to bury the crew locally as was the usual practice. However, when it was discovered that the whole population intended to attend the funeral, the German authorities removed the bodies in order to avoid any anti-German demonstrations. The dead airmen were taken over the border into Germany, and the burial was performed by Russian POWS at the Ehrenfriedhof, Aachen.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ The Commando Order begins: 'For some time our enemies have been using in their warfare, methods which are outside the international Geneva Conventions. Especially brutal and treacherous is the behaviour of the so-called Commandos who, as is established, are partially recruited even from freed criminals in enemy countries. Their capture orders divulge that they are directed not only to shackle prisoners but also to kill defenceless prisoners on the spot at the moment in which they believe that the latter, as prisoners, represent a burden in the further pursuance of their purpose.' The Commando Order was of great importance in the trial of Nickolaus von Falkenhurst, commander-in-chief of Armed Forces, Norway. See The United Nations War Crimes Commission, *Law Reports of Trials of War Criminals*, Volume XI, Case 61, Trial of Generaloberst Nickolaus Von Falkenhorst, pp.20-21. For the justification or otherwise for the promulgation of the Commando Order, see Stephen Bull, *Commando Tactics: The Second World War*, pp.80-82.

⁸⁷ Australian National Archives, RAAF, Flight Sergeant Godfrey Woolf personnel file, MRES Investigation Report, 24 August 1948.

The powerful connection between the airmen and the occupied civilian populations produced an almost entirely baseless German concern that surviving airmen would become 'terrorists' and carry out acts of violence alongside the Resistance, in other words they would not just hide from capture but would actively conspire against the regime. One of the most horrific reactions to this perceived threat was the murder of Flight Sergeant Kenneth Ingram of the RAF and Bob Archer of the USAAF at Apeldoorn on 2 October 1944, together with six Dutch nationals. The bodies were put on display in various streets around Apeldoorn with a placard with the word 'Terrorist' hung around their necks.⁸⁸

Part of the reason for the concern about terrorism was that the Germans were well aware there were nationals from the occupied countries in the RAF, and that these would find it much easier to blend into the civilian populations. The British made no secret of the mixed nationalities operating with their forces; in fact, it was frequently used for propaganda, such as in the Ministry of Information's booklet, *There's Freedom In The Air: The Official Story Of The Allied Air Forces From The Occupied Countries*.⁸⁹ It is notable that of the 76 men who escaped from Stalag Luft III at Sagan, only 3 got back to Britain and they were all from the occupied countries — 2 were Norwegian and 1 was Dutch.⁹⁰ Any airman who got back home to Britain could,

⁸⁸ TNA, WO 309-750, JAG, war crimes dossier, killing of Flight Sergeant Kenneth Ingram and Bob Archer, USAAF.

⁸⁹ *There's Freedom In The Air: The Official Story Of The Allied Air Forces From The Occupied Countries*. (HMSO, London, 1944). The booklet was prepared on behalf of the Air Ministry. Not all the airmen from the occupied countries flew on bombing operations; there were for example Dutch squadrons in Coastal Command, flying patrols, attacking enemy shipping and submarines, protecting convoys, and carrying out air sea rescue. Once again no secret made of this. *There's Freedom In The Air*, p.19.

⁹⁰ The three successful escapers were Jens Einar Müller and Per Bergsland, who were Norwegian, and Bram van der Stok, who was Dutch. Their names are given, slightly inaccurately, in Simon Read's *Human Game*, p.33. See also *The Telegraph's* obituary for van der Stok on 1 July 1993.

of course, carry important information with him, another reason for the animosity which airmen aroused.

War crimes committed by Germans against members of the RAF were an extreme manifestation of the general enmity towards them, and this enmity had further repercussions when it resulted in slapdash burials and grossly inaccurate records, as was seen in Chapter Four. However, nothing was ever black and white in these matters. Many instances can be found where airmen's remains were treated with the utmost respect. The treatment of the RAF dead was, in fact, largely dependent upon the period of the war, the locality, and the particular individuals who were dealing with the matter. Soldiers' remains were also sometimes treated in a cavalier way. Regarding the pre-D-Day dead, Stott wrote in November 1944, 'Evidence has been obtained which shows that Germans stripped bodies before burial'. Since cemetery records were often badly kept and besides were very vulnerable to wartime destruction, this type of action, given the absence of fingerprint and dental records, rendered post-war identification almost impossible except via the testimony of local witnesses.⁹¹ Thus, there is no absolute dividing line to be drawn between the Germans' treatment of the RAF dead and the Army dead, however deeply the airmen were hated in some quarters.

One additional factor also qualifies the impression of a specific German harshness towards dead airmen and this is that it was not reflected in the reporting process. In fact, the notification of airmen's deaths received a type of preferential treatment which was not extended to soldiers or sailors. The P/W section of the War Office Casualty Branch particularly drew attention to this fact in its post-war report, noting that the 'regard which the Germans had for the Air Force was curiously reflected in a "Gentleman's Agreement"'. This had been negotiated early in the war by the International Red Cross, and ensured reciprocal arrangements between the Germans and the British to telegraph the names of any Luftwaffe or RAF personnel

⁹¹ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, entry for 7 November 1944.

who had been captured or buried by the other side; the Casualty Branch report added that this arrangement was 'meticulously observed by the Germans'.⁹² As the notification of the death or capture of soldiers or sailors was often inordinately delayed, anxious families of missing RAF personnel were thus effectively given an advantage over those of the Army and the Navy. However, despite this arrangement, the notification that an airman was alive and a prisoner of war often came through exactly the same channel as for soldiers, i.e. a postcard from a prisoner of war camp. One clear example of this can be seen in the first entry in Joan Layne's diary:

Tuesday November 9th 1943. My dear husband — Today I received your postcard stating that you are a prisoner of war. I can't tell you just how I do feel — after the agony of the last forty-six days I can really begin to live again.⁹³

The last part of this chapter considers the success which the Army and the RAF had in finding and identifying their dead, and whether they would have achieved better results if they had run a common programme for soldiers and airmen. The American programme, which was all-inclusive, had an exceptionally high identification rate,

⁹² TNA, WO 162/204, War Office, 'History of Prisoner of War Branch (London) (Cas P.W)', p.3. Information sent to the British was of two main kinds: firstly, the telegrams sent by the Germans to the IRCC, giving brief details of casualties, and, secondly, the detailed lists sent later, the *totenliste*, which gave more specific details such as the place of burial. Of the latter, Hawkins wrote: 'Mistakes in dates, names, etc, were common [...] but on the whole a genuine effort was made to keep a detailed account of the action taken.' TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', p.4.

⁹³ Layne family archives, Joan Layne diary, 9 November 1943 – 9 May 1945. Wally Layne was on the run for several days before he was captured, but no official German confirmation came through after he had become a prisoner of war.

and although this rate was based upon different criteria it still forms a useful comparison to the work of the British. A number of other factors also have to be put into the balance when making the comparison, such as the lavish scale of American resources and the late entry of the Americans into the war; however, they do not substantially alter the fact that the Americans achieved better results than the British.

The Americans had a history of taking extraordinary care with the military dead. The practice of looking after dead soldiers had begun with the American Civil War of 1861-1865, some fifty years before the British began an equivalent programme. By the time of the First World War, considerable expertise had been built up. The Graves Registration Service was founded in 1917 when the United States entered the war, its policy being to follow closely behind the combat troops. It was clearly understood that the speed with which the war graves were registered was critical; identification rates dropped off precipitously with any increase of the time between the original burial and the registration of the grave. This policy led to astonishing results, it being eventually claimed that only 3.5 per cent of the total American dead of over 79,000 remained unidentified.⁹⁴ The Graves Registration Service was re-established as soon as the United States joined the Second World War in December 1941. It worked to a manual published a mere four months earlier. Although many of the practices of the earlier world war were to be followed, there were also some significant changes in procedure, one of the most important being the policy of fewer cemeteries or burial grounds, only 54 in all, as opposed to 2,240 after the First World War.⁹⁵ In North-West Europe there would only be 9, compared to the thousands of burial sites included in the British programme.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ W Raymond Wood and Lori Ann Stanley, 'Recovery and Identification of World War II Dead: American Graves Registration Activities in Europe', *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 34 (1989), p.1366.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ American Battle Monuments Commission, 'World War II Burials and Memorializations', last accessed 07/06/2015): <http://www.abmc.gov/node/1274>, see also their Commemorative Sites Booklet.

The intense importance attached by the Americans to identifying their dead meant that they went a great deal further than the British in collecting potentially useful evidence. With immediate burials, official policy dictated that identification tags and all personal effects should be left upon the corpse. In many cases, a certificate of identity was created, signed by at least one but preferably two members of the dead man's unit who had been able to recognise and name him. In cases where no one was able to identify the dead man, special care was taken to record any other information which might help, such as the exact place where the body was found, any serial numbers of machinery, vehicles or planes, and the details of any identified dead in the same area.⁹⁷ If necessary, fingerprints and dental charts were obtained. Profile and full-face photographs might be taken, and if the man had suffered disfiguring injuries morticians would spend many hours reconstructing the face in order that the subsequent photograph would be a recognisable one. Morticians were considered indispensable to the Americans' identification procedures; their use of cosmetic wax, needles, and other artefacts could make all the difference in recreating a damaged face.⁹⁸ If, despite all efforts, identification could still not be made, the unidentified body would be marked as an 'X' case, the X being the preface to a serial number which could then be cross-referenced to the grave in which the remains were buried.⁹⁹ These bodies would later be exhumed more than once in further attempts to identify them, and one such case was given in Chapter Four.

These rigorous procedures gave the Americans a major advantage over the British. The other enormously significant factor was the use of the Central Identification Point

⁹⁷ *Study Number 107: Graves Registration Service*, Reports of the General Board, United States Forces, European Theater, undated but around November 1945, pp.14-16.

⁹⁸ *Study Number 107* describes the morticians as taking great pride in their work, 'despite advanced decomposition and sickening odors in many cases'. They were also highly observant of items remaining on the bodies which might appear to the untrained eye be of no value, such as razor blades or peculiar buttons. *Ibid*, pp.16-17.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p.17.

in preference to graveside identifications. As the official history of the American Graves Registration Service noted:

The establishment and operation of the Central Identification Point in Europe, replacing graveside processing and identification, provided one of the highlights of the entire operation. [...] The successful identification of all but approximately 3 per cent of the recovered dead constituted a great overall achievement.¹⁰⁰

The British were limited to graveside identifications, which were often carried out in the most appalling conditions.

Worldwide, out of 280,994 recovered American dead, only 10,011, around 3.5 per cent were still unidentified at the close of the programme.¹⁰¹ This was a staggering achievement. It is extremely important, however, to emphasise at this point that this percentage was for the recovered dead, i.e. it did not represent the clear-up rate for missing cases which was the angle from which the British approached the matter. In fact, a straightforward comparison between the American figures for recovered remains and the British figures for solving missing cases is simply not possible. The key fact is that the term 'recovered remains' meant bodies, or parts of bodies, which the Americans actually had in their possession; this did not directly correlate to the number of missing, or even to the total of the military dead. Moreover, the term 'recovered remains' included servicemen who had never been 'missing' in the first place; for example, servicemen who had been interred in the United Kingdom became 'recovered' once their bodies had been exhumed and taken to an American

¹⁰⁰ Edward Steere and Thayer M Boardman, *Final Disposition of World War II Dead 1945-51*, US Army, Quartermaster Corps, QMC Historical Studies, Series II, No. 4 (Historical Branch Office of the Quartermaster General, Washington, D.C., 1957), p.693.

¹⁰¹ The last figures available in the official report, dated April 1954, show 281,769 recovered dead of whom only 8,744 had not been identified. *Ibid*, p.651.

identification processing point, thus being brought back under full American control.¹⁰²

To reiterate the British clear-up rates for missing cases, these were 49 per cent for the Army, and 57 per cent for the RAF where known graves were concerned. To the latter must be added the 22 percent of cases where the missing men were formally declared to have been lost at sea, and the 5 per cent where there was no known grave but there was some information about what had happened to the men. Although no direct comparison can be made to the American figures for recovered remains, it is nonetheless obvious that the Americans enjoyed outstanding success in identifying their dead. This reflected not only far greater American expertise, but also larger resources and some circumstantial factors.

The resources available to the American graves units dwarfed those of the British. Worldwide, the American programme was a behemoth. The final cost of American Graves Registration Service operations – search, recovery, identification, the concentration of the scattered dead, the final burial overseas or repatriation to the United States — was \$163,869,000.¹⁰³ At the peak of the programme between the latter part of 1947 to the first half of 1948 (the period when the dead in Europe began to come home), 13,311 people were engaged upon it. The result of all this effort was that slightly more than 280,000 remains were recovered at an average recorded cost of \$564.50.¹⁰⁴ The actuarial detail may appear somewhat tasteless, but was consistent with the general American approach to war in which detailed costings

¹⁰² See, for example, the figures for the recovered dead who had previously been buried in the UK. Ibid, p.237.

¹⁰³ Steere and Boardman, *Final Disposition of World War II Dead*, Preface, p.v.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p.690. The average cost for each set of remains was \$564.50 on 30 June 1951 – at this point the total of recovered remains and its associated cost were slightly lower than at the conclusion of the programme. Ibid, p.690. No breakdown of costs for North-West Europe (or indeed Europe as a whole, including the Mediterranean area) is available. Much of the United States' war was conducted in the Pacific Ocean areas, in Japan and on the Asiatic Mainland, regions which sometimes presented far more difficult challenges than Europe.

were frequently compiled, such as for each individual bombing raid.¹⁰⁵ There are no equivalent figures for the recovery and burial of the British dead. However, as a rough comparison, taken at the height of the American programme when 13,311 were engaged upon it, the Western Europe Graves Service Directorate, arguably the most significant Directorate in the entire British programme, had 12 Officers, 1 Liaison Officer, 1 Allied Liaison Officer, 85 ORs, and 42 Civilians.¹⁰⁶ Whilst it is true that many other people were also engaged in the British programme, from A.G.13 staff to the MRES to Directorates in other parts of the world (no official global figure is available), the very modest size of the Western Europe GR&E Directorate puts the American resources sharply into perspective. This is so even when taking into account the fact that the American programme was at its peak due to the immense undertaking of the last stage of its work, the repatriation of the bodies.¹⁰⁷

Circumstantial factors which helped the Americans achieve better results than the British related mainly to timing. The United States did not join the war until December 1941 and thus there was no American equivalent to the 1940 losses of the British in France and Norway. America only commenced its bombing campaign in Europe in August 1942, three years after the RAF, which had been losing men since the

¹⁰⁵ See Richard Overy, *The Bombing War, Europe 1939-1945* (Allen Lane, London, 2013), p.408. Anthony Cotterell, who reported for *WAR* on both the US Army and the USAAF in 1942-43, made some very interesting observations on cultural differences, such as: 'Americans look on the Army more as a nine-to-six job. Their loyalty is more akin to the pride of a business man employed by a first-rate firm. Whereas the British soldier's loyalty is based on the feeling that we mustn't let the old place down, plus personal attachment to officers.' 'Quit Horsing Around and Police Up', Anthony Cotterell, *An Apple for the Sergeant* (Hutchinson and Co, London, 1944), p.140.

¹⁰⁶ At the beginning of 1948, HQ was located at Chateau Prunay, Louveciennes, in France, and these are the figures as given at that point, some 8 months before the organisation was disbanded. TNA, WO 267/609, BAOR HQ, Western Europe Graves Service Directorate, Quarterly Historical Report, quarter ending 31 March 1948.

¹⁰⁷ The majority of relatives bereaved in the Second World War chose repatriation, and of the 280,000 recovered remains from all parts of the world over 171,000 were eventually returned to the United States. Steere and Boardman, *Final Disposition of World War II Dead*, p. v.

beginning of September 1939. The American dead had thus been lost comparatively recently, a hugely significant factor in identification rates. The Americans' high identification rate may also possibly reflect their not infrequent tendency to jump to conclusions about identity which sometimes led them into serious errors with the dead of other nations.¹⁰⁸

The Americans were not infallible and made mistakes. Serious errors could sometimes occur between registration and concentration, such as two individuals being listed for the same grave location or bodies becoming separated from the material which identified them. The absence of a master file of dental records, to match that maintained for fingerprints, made some identification attempts extremely difficult or impossible.¹⁰⁹ But at least there *were* dental records and fingerprints, and, what was perhaps just as valuable, a master file of casualties. The problems which Stott had with inadequate British record-keeping are clearly illustrated by a note he made in his quarterly report for the period ending 31 December 1946:

On the 6 Oct 46 I put forward to War Office a suggestion that Cas L or appropriate Records Officers by now had compiled lists by Theatres of all casualties since 3 Sep 39, and that such lists would obviate my having to refer the checking of service particulars to the following authorities:-

War Office (A.G.13).
Admiralty.
Air Ministry.
GHQ 2nd Echelon.
Home Records Offices.
Dominion Records Offices.

¹⁰⁸ See Chapter Four for the American tendency to claim all the military dead as their own.

¹⁰⁹ Michael Sledge, *Soldier Dead: How We Recover, Identify, Bury and Honor Our Military Fallen* (Columbia University Press, New York, 2005), pp.118-120.

War Office (A.G.13) replied regretting that no authority had compiled alphabetical lists and that the creation of such lists at the present time is quite impossible.

Stott added, in his usual quiet but meaningful way, 'All Officers of the American Graves Service are in possession of alphabetical lists of casualties – in book form'.¹¹⁰

It is notable that the RAF, which kept extremely comprehensive records, was able to provide the Air Ministry Casualty Branch and the MRES with a complete list of every airman who was missing, together with all known information about him. It was this key difference with the Army which enabled the RAF search for the missing to take place. Record-keeping at such a high level of detail was possible because of the nature of the RAF war, aircraft and their crews being scrupulously recorded in the Operational Record Books and any loss being known within a matter of hours.¹¹¹

Beyond the question of record-keeping, any overview of the American system all too quickly points up the major deficiency of the British system — the lack of reliable means of identification. This included such basic failures as the absence of dental charts (with the marked exception of the Dominion Air Forces, which were singled out by Group Captain Hawkins for special praise); no fingerprint sets; no evacuation system for the soldier dead; and no photography of the unidentified soldier dead (let alone anything so un-British as a mortician first reconstructing a disfigured face).¹¹² However, the factor which stands out from all the rest because it would have been such a simple matter to fix was that the British identity discs were of very poor quality. They were made of fibre (the American disc was made of durable metal) and thus

¹¹⁰ TNA, WO 267/604, BAOR HQ, Western Europe Graves Service Directorate, Quarterly Historical Report, quarter ending 31 December 1946, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, entry for 31 December 1946.

¹¹¹ Losses would be known by the simple calculation of when the aircraft's petrol ran out and the absence of any report of the aircraft landing at a different location to its home station.

¹¹² Dental records: see TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', p.142.

were very apt to become degraded, particularly after long immersion in water or if a body was buried face down with the disc underneath it, the moisture in the decaying flesh rendering the disc-stamping illegible.¹¹³ Scandalously, it appears that this matter was brought to the attention of A.G.13 well before the major campaigns in North-West Europe. In June 1943, A.G.13 received a report from GHQ, Middle East Forces (MEF) that the identity disks did not last well, and when buried with a corpse became illegible and peeled. This bore out several isolated reports already received.¹¹⁴ The same problem was mentioned again in the A.G.13 War Diary in November 1943 when a report from the Lethbridge Commission confirmed the problem.¹¹⁵ By this time the invasion of Italy had taken place. The A.G.13 War Diary continued to allude to the problem in 1944, but apparently no action was taken by the War Office, or indeed the Air Ministry if it was aware of the problem.¹¹⁶ Post-liberation, the poor quality of the identity discs would cause particular problems with identifying the soldier dead from the French and Norwegian campaigns of 1940 due to the length of time which the men had been buried, and of course the same applied to airmen who had been lost in the early years of the war. In August 1948, a short report on the work of the Graves Service during the war called for a new identity disc, acknowledging that 'the present one is most unsuitable' and that due to this the 'identification of a large number of casualties' had been lost.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ The War Diary of A.G.13 refers to them as being made of fibre in November 1943. TNA, WO 165/36, War Office, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1943. Stott devoted a memorandum to the problems of bodies buried face downwards and particularly mentioned the softening of the disc when it was in prolonged contact with the moisture of decomposing flesh. TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, appendices for May, Appendix J2, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Burials', memorandum, 6 May 1945.

¹¹⁴ TNA, WO 165/36, War Office, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1943, entry for June 1943.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, entry for November 1943.

¹¹⁶ See, for example, *ibid*, entry for January 1944.

¹¹⁷ TNA, WO 32/12968, DGR&E, War Office, Brigadier C S Vale, Minute 1, 23 August 1948.

It did not help the utility of the identity discs that the troops (or in the case of airmen, the Germans) were so cavalier about removing them from corpses. Even British medical units also failed in this respect, Stott noting in June 1945 that an increasing number of hospital burials were being discovered 'of naked bodies wrapped in blankets and without any means of identity being left on the body'.¹¹⁸ A far more substantial problem, however, occurred with frontline troops whose responsibility it was to bury the dead with adequate means of identification. The War Office cannot be accused of not constantly reiterating the way that soldiers should act towards the dead, but the fact that its instructions were so frequently ignored, and that the War Office was well aware of this, suggests that something should have been done about enforcing or improving the system for immediate burials. This was recognised by some senior officers who were aware that the American system was far superior, but implementing such a system would have cost considerable resources upfront and the British could not really afford it.¹¹⁹

The American programme for the Second World War dead was a reflection of an intense national preoccupation with the sanctity of human remains. Ultimately, it has to be said that the British had a more fatalistic attitude towards the business of the battle dead, and that this cultural difference could perhaps be seen as a blessing when one had fewer men and far less money.

Would the Army and the RAF have improved their results if they had worked together in a common programme like the Americans? The fact that the two Services found it difficult to work together harmoniously suggests that a shared programme would not have been a success.

During the war there were some attempts to present the Services as having a joint policy, for instance the government pamphlet issued in the names of all three, *Advice*

¹¹⁸ TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, entry for 22 June 1945.

¹¹⁹ See for example, TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Appendix D, Tour of Inspection, Colonel S Fraser, 23 October 1944.

to the Relative of a Man who is Missing. This pamphlet described the procedure by which notification was received that a man was a prisoner of war, and what efforts were made to find him if no such news was received. It warned relatives not to try to glean information from enemy broadcasts because of their use for propaganda purposes, and said that 'the official listeners' never missed any name included in such broadcasts but passed all such information 'to the Service Department concerned'. The leaflet concluded:

There is, therefore, a complete official service designed to secure for you and to tell you all discoverable news about your relative. This official service is also a very human service, which well understands the anxiety of relatives and will spare no effort to relieve it.¹²⁰

The impression of unity and common policy which the pamphlet presented did not reflect what was happening in reality. Behind the scenes there was not only lack of unity but even policies which directly contradicted one another.¹²¹ Probably the most notable example of this concerned the British Red Cross. The War Office Casualty Branch, having fallen out with the British Red Cross, disliked the harmonious

¹²⁰ Government leaflet, *Advice to the Relative of a Man who is Missing*, not obviously dated but perhaps March 1944 ('3/44' appears in a string of letters and numbers), author's collection. Certainly this leaflet appears to be a successor to that issued in July 1940, after Dunkirk, which is mentioned in P G Cambray and G G B Briggs (Compilers), *Red Cross and St. John: The Official Record of the Humanitarian Services of the War Organisation of the British Red Cross Society and the Order of St John of Jerusalem, 1939-1947* (published at 14 Grosvenor Crescent, London, SW1, 1949), p.344.

¹²¹ This was, of course, not invariably the case. For example, there were many cases of overlap in the deaths of servicemen, for example soldiers travelling in ships which were sunk or in aircraft which were shot down, and special procedures for dealing with such cases were agreed between the War Office, the Air Ministry and the Admiralty. TNA, WO 162/205, War Office, 'History of Casualty Branch (Liverpool) (Cas L)', p.18.

relationship which was continued by the Air Ministry and the Admiralty with the charity. Its post-war report noted:

It should also be recorded that both the Admiralty and the Air Ministry relied on the Missing Department of the BRCS to a much greater extent than did the War Office to carry out their enquiries; and the introduction of a common inter-Services policy in this direction would seem desirable.¹²²

The case was put even more strongly in the conclusion to the report, where a recommendation about standardisation between the Services in their dealings with voluntary bodies called for 'no facilities or privileges' to be granted by one Service whilst they were being denied by another.¹²³

It seems probable that the Army would have liked to have taken the central role and set the rules in every single matter pertaining to the dead and missing, just as it did for the registration and burial of the dead, and for British prisoners of war. The occasional comment here and there in Army documentation suggests a slightly proprietorial interest in what the RAF was doing; for example, A.G.13's War Diary noted in June 1943 that the RAF had 'decided to adopt a scheme for burying all RAF dead in the UK in certain regional cemeteries'.¹²⁴ The RAF was here exercising an independence which it would not have with post-war burials in North-West Europe. Given the very unusual nature of a note about the RAF appearing in A.G.13's War Diary, it would seem that the War Office was alert to the possibility that the RAF might wish to follow a more independent path when the war ended.

¹²² Ibid, pp.63-64.

¹²³ Ibid, p.65.

¹²⁴ TNA, WO 165/36, War Office, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1943, entry for June 1943. An example of such a regional cemetery is Cambridge City Cemetery, which contains many of the dead of the bomber stations of Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire.

There is a memorandum in Stott's paperwork, dated 11 February 1945, which shows that the RAF did occasionally undertake burials in North-West Europe despite the standing agreement to the contrary. Stott refers to RAF burials 'affected by the RAF direct into British cemeteries which have been established by me', i.e. the new Military Cemeteries:

Frequently it happens that a Registration Officer proceeds to a cemetery to register notified graves only to find that a number of RAF have been buried there since his previous visit, and for which the Branch (or any DAD in the Field) holds no record. For example since October last, about 100 RAF personnel have been buried by [the] RAF in Evere British Cemetery, Brussels.¹²⁵

This was an extremely rare instance in which the usual division of responsibilities between the Army and the RAF was not observed; for the most part, the restrictive guidelines were scrupulously adhered to by the RAF. However, the RAF also firmly resisted the acquisition by the Army of any more control than it already had. In July 1945, when the Air Ministry Casualty Branch was seeking vastly increased resources for missing research, it conclusively rejected the Army's proposal for a joint search for the missing in North-West Europe. Group Captain Burges's reasons for this were that the Army could have little interest in the RAF's special requirements, and similarly that the Air Ministry was not 'particularly interested in the search for groups of graves in the neighbourhood of Army prison camps or intense military operations'.¹²⁶ The RAF insisted in taking sole responsibility for its missing, and the

¹²⁵ TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, appendices for February, Appendix J1, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Burial Reports', memorandum, 11 February 1945.

¹²⁶ TNA, AIR20/9050, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, Group Captain R Burges, 'Missing Research and Enquiry Service', report, 12 July 1945.

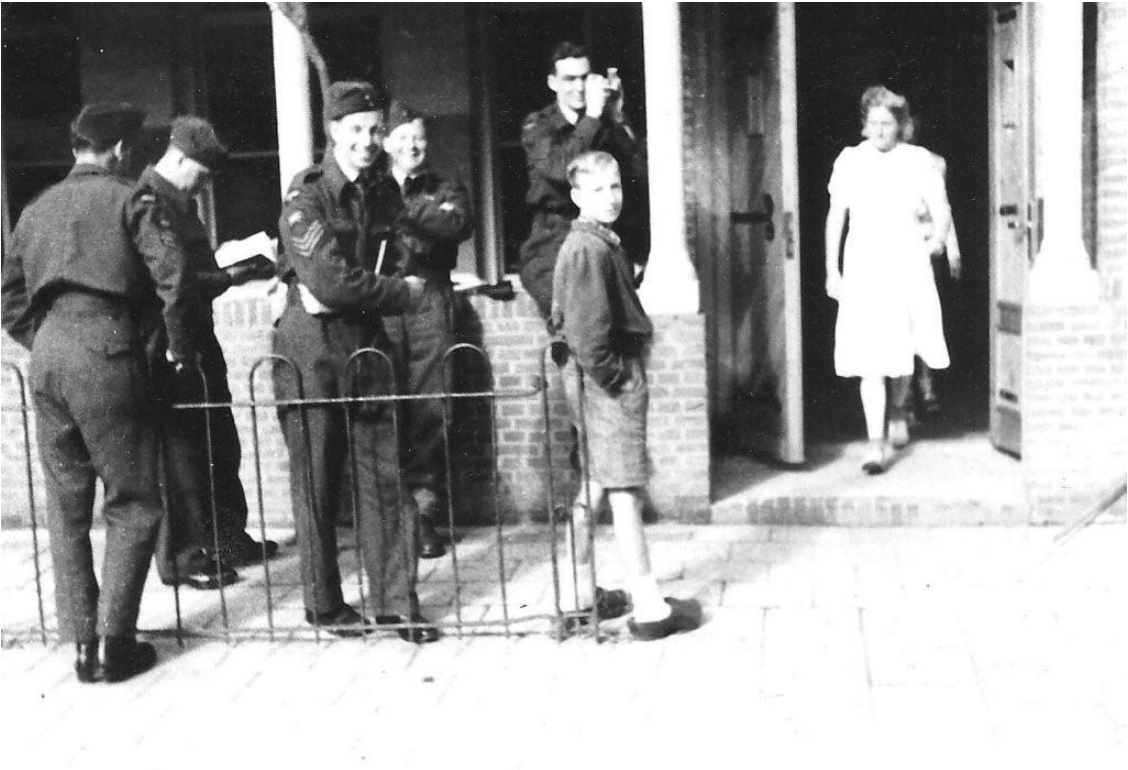
results which it achieved without the Army's help, coupled with the significantly lower rate which the Army attained for missing soldiers, show that it was completely right to do so.

The RAF, as has been seen, was resentful of the delays which the Army caused to its work. Sometimes, however, these delays were simply difficulties of liaison, and Stott himself felt that the work carried out in conjunction with the MRES was not always satisfactory: 'an overlapping of work had often occurred unnecessarily'. Certainly, the Army could not be accused of lack of support — at the time of Stott's comment, on 10 March 1947, 20 per cent of all Graves Service concentration personnel were attached to the MRES.¹²⁷ These mixed Army-RAF teams were very effective. One such was working in November 1947 on the Dutch Frisian island of Schiermonnikoog. It was made up of RAF search officers from No. 2 MREU, and Army Graves Registration or Concentration officers from the Western Europe Graves Service (Belgium and Holland), based at Utrecht.¹²⁸ The team can be seen in the photographs on the following pages.

¹²⁷ TNA, WO 267/605, BAOR HQ, Western Europe Graves Service Directorate, Quarterly Historical Report, quarter ending 31 March 1947, Minutes of Conference held at HQ, GR&E Directorate, Western Europe, on 10 March 1947.

¹²⁸ See correspondence from Flight Lieutenant K G Springborn, No. 2 MREU, from the Graves Services offices at 10A Maliebaan, Utrecht, October-November 1947. Courtesy of Wyb Jan Groendijk.





Previous pages: photographs of the Army and RAF teams at the Vredenhof Cemetery and at the Hotel van der Werff on Schiermonnikoog, courtesy of Wyb Jan Groendijk.

Mixed teams like this one, the Army and the RAF working together in the field, demonstrate that the two Services could indeed act as partners in a common enterprise. However, top-level policy differences were immense, and, had a full partnership ever been formed, it would have been necessary for one of the Services to give up its strongly held views on how the matter of 'unknowns' (men in unidentified graves) and the missing (men whose fate was not known) should be approached. The likelihood of that happening seems to have been remote; thus any more limited Army-RAF partnership would have had to operate within the tension generated by two such markedly different viewpoints. Given the War Office's attitude to missing soldiers, it seems likely that a common programme between the two Services would actually have reduced the RAF's clear-up rate although it may possibly have done something to improve the Army's. Whichever way matters were arranged, what is certain is that there was no possibility that the British could have matched the Americans' identification rate. This is because they were at war for so much longer, the resources were severely limited, and the necessary pre-planning had not gone into ensuring that adequate means of identification were provided.

Chapter Seven – The Graves Service and the National Commemorative Programme

The ultimate purpose of the MRES and the Graves Service in North-West Europe was the identification and honourable interment of the dead, and the creation of a register of the long-term missing. Once the searches and the burials had been completed, the very comprehensive records and the many thousands of graves passed into the care of the Imperial War Graves Commission, and the debt owed by the Services was effectively discharged apart from observation of the annual rites of mourning.¹

The Commission was the caretaking body for the national commemorative programme, its responsibilities being to safeguard the dead, to embellish and maintain the burial places, and to design, erect, and care for the memorials. It was only once the Commission had taken over that the general public would finally see the work which had been done. However, what the public would never realise is that, prior to the Commission taking charge, an immense amount of the physical structure for the national commemorative programme had already been created by the Army. It was the Army that chose the cemetery sites, laid them out, filled them, and enforced the rules on who was buried there and the memorials which could be made.

This chapter's focus is on the work carried out by the Graves Service which laid the foundations for the national commemorative programme. It begins with the relationship between the Army and the Commission, the rules which governed the programme and the rare exceptions which were permitted, and the impact of the enforcement of those rules upon soldiers who wished to honour their lost comrades.

¹ The Army's hand-over of records to the Commission has already been mentioned several times. For those of the RAF, see, for example, TNA, AIR 55/62, Air Ministry, Liaison with DDGRE and AGRC, No. 4 MREU report, 'Liaison with IWGC', 5 August 1949.

Many unanticipated problems or complexities arose, which will be detailed throughout the chapter. Those with the widest implications were decided at Cabinet level or debated in Parliament, the two primary examples being the controversial matter of war graves in Germany and the retention of the no-repatriation policy. A number of other problems were referred by Lieutenant Colonel Stott for clarification or authorisation to the War Office in London. However, in many instances, Stott was the ultimate authority, a responsibility he carried out with scrupulous adherence to the principles of the national commemorative programme.

Most of the problems were handled quietly by the Graves Service and never became known to the general public. Serious controversy did arise about certain aspects of the work, but only one particular issue — the public's perception that the programme for the dead was taking far too long — could reasonably be attributed to the Graves Service's performance. This perception was largely founded upon misunderstandings or erroneous comparisons to the work for the dead of the First World War, but it was also due to the secrecy that surrounded the Army's work, which meant that the public was never aware of its considerable difficulties. The second part of the chapter will deal with this issue. It will close with an account of the aesthetic and practical decisions taken about the burial sites, the Graves Service acting in accordance with the principles defined by the Commission whilst at the same time retaining for itself considerable freedom of action.

The relationship between the Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries and the Imperial War Graves Commission was long-standing and deeply interwoven, the main unifying factor being Sir Fabian Ware, the man who had revolutionised the

care of the military dead.² The Directorate had been created during the First World War under Ware's leadership. When, in 1921, its work for the earlier war was deemed complete, the Directorate was closed down, to be resurrected on the outbreak of war in 1939 with Ware once again the Director General. He would hold this post until October 1944 when he was seventy-five years of age. The reason given for his resignation at that point was that his work with the Commission was 'becoming too pressing to allow him to devote sufficient time to his military duties'.³ Ware also held the post of Vice-Chairman of the Commission, having done so since its creation in 1917 (the Chairman was the Secretary of State for War, a government post which saw a steady turn-over of politicians during the years of Ware's ascendancy). In recognition of his exceptional services, Ware was decorated many times, including by foreign governments. He only retired from the Commission when he was almost 80 years of age, some ten months before his death in April 1949.⁴

Not only did the Directorate and the Commission share the same highly esteemed principal, they also for long periods had offices in the same building, which during the latter part of the Second World War was 32 Grosvenor Gardens, Belgravia, not far from Buckingham Palace. As Sir James Grigg, the Secretary of State for War, told the House of Commons in September 1944:

² For a detailed account of how Ware revolutionised the care for the dead, see, for example, David Crane, *Empires of the Dead: How One Man's Vision Led to the Creation of WWI's War Graves* (William Collins, London, 2013).

³ After Ware's departure, the office establishment of the Directorate was amended to include 'a full-time Director Grade B', the first occupant of the post being Brigadier J K McNair, CBE, McNair's seniority reflecting the great importance of the post. McNair took up his duties on 8 December 1944 and Ware became Honorary Adviser from that same date. TNA, WO 165/36, War Office, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1944: amendment of office establishment, entry for October 1944; appointment of McNair and Ware's new appointment, entry for December 1944.

⁴ Obituary of Sir Fabian Ware, *The Times*, 29 April 1949.

All persons calling at the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries in Grosvenor Gardens to inquire concerning graves of this war are interviewed by either a military or civilian officer, and given all information available, and any advice or help possible. The Imperial War Graves Commission who have a subsidiary office in the same building interview any inquirers concerning graves of the 1914–18 war in a similar manner.⁵

The Commission was not able to begin its work for what was then the current war until the various war zones had been secured.

The Directorate and the Commission were so closely intertwined that their respective roles were often confused, and this was true even for the soldiers fighting in North-West Europe who might possibly have been expected to better understand the status quo because they were responsible for the military dead in their unit areas.⁶ The Army sometimes attempted to make matters clearer, as in a 1943 Order which instructed soldiers:

The primary function of [the Commission] is the maintenance, in perpetuity, of all war graves and cemeteries. [...] It is a non-military formation and only functions on the cessation of hostilities, or in areas where active operations have ceased.⁷

⁵ Hansard, War Graves, HC Deb 27 September 1944 vol 403. Hansard online (last accessed 04/03/15): http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1944/sep/27/war-graves#S5CV0403P0_19440927_CWA_75.

⁶ To further clarify this point, the soldiers would have been working with representatives of the Directorate, i.e. the Graves Registration Units.

⁷ TNA, WO 165/36, War Office, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1943 and January-December 1944, 'APPX. II/43', 'Responsibility for Burials and the Construction and Maintenance of Cemeteries'.

If the soldiers on the spot were often unsure about the demarcation lines between the Directorate and the Commission, the British public were even more so. As one leading article in *The Times* put it, in April 1948, the Commission was 'an organization which is not generally understood'. The newspaper then went on to offer a short exposition of the Commission's role. What is surprising is that such an explanation was thought necessary; after all, it was three years since the European war had ended, and that particular year was the last major year of the Army's work in North-West Europe, yet still the educated *Times* readership needed enlightening as to the role of the organisation acting on its behalf.

A further reason for the confusion was the secrecy which attended the Army's part in the care for the dead. Its work was never carried out in a blaze of publicity, and thus people were not very cognisant of what the Army actually did, nor at what point the Commission took over. This meant that criticism was sometimes directed to the wrong quarter. A reader's letter, published in *The Times* some 16 months before the article mentioned above, summarised the different work of the Army and the Commission, and pointed out that the Commission was sometimes wrongly blamed when the fault lay with the Army, or indeed with Government policy. The particular issue for which the Commission was being blamed at that time was a reputed Government refusal to allow bodies in Germany to be moved when relatives objected to them being left in German soil. The confusion of thought among next of kin was resulting, the writer of the letter said, 'in a tendency to blame the War Graves Commission and to discount [its] Armistice Day broadcasts'.⁸ In fact, the Commission itself had no responsibility for the decisions made about the graves in Germany, this aspect of policy-making being completely outside its remit.

The confusion about the demarcation lines between the Army and the Commission sometimes even extended into official correspondence with the relatives, as one particular case demonstrates perfectly. Monica Sutherland, the mother of a sub-lieutenant in the Fleet Air Arm, who had been killed in 1944 and buried at Lingen in

⁸ 'Soldier's Wife', Letters to the Editor, *The Times*, 13 December 1946.

Lower Saxony, wrote to *The Times* in July 1947. A letter she had sent to the Admiralty in 1946 about her son's burial place had been forwarded by the Admiralty to the War Office, who in their turn had told her that his grave would be moved to a permanent British Military Cemetery. Almost a year later, the Admiralty informed her that the Commission was responsible for all war graves, as indeed it was, but only for the completed cemeteries. However, Monica Sutherland only ascertained that such was the case when she wrote to the Commission about her son's grave and received a reply in May 1947 stating they had not yet taken over the care of the graves in Germany. Monica Sutherland was clearly distressed by the circuitous route which the inadequate answers to her letters had taken:

It is nearly three years since he was killed, and I have no assurance that any one at all is looking after his grave. Is it beyond the power of whoever is the responsible authority to spare time to make some decisions about the graves of English servicemen in Germany?⁹

Her son, whom she did not name in the letter, was Christopher Waltham Porter. Ironically, he had been moved to his permanent resting place at Reichswald Forest British Cemetery on 4 June 1947, almost exactly one month before his mother wrote her letter.¹⁰ The comfort of knowing this had been denied to her because official

⁹ Monica Sutherland, Letters to the Editor, 'British Graves in Germany', *The Times*, 2 July 1947.

¹⁰ Porter can be traced because he was the only sub-lieutenant of the Royal Naval Reserve killed in Germany in July 1944 and buried at Lingen; he was with HMS Daedalus, serving with 29 Squadron of the RAF. See page for Christopher Waltham Porter, Commonwealth War Graves Commission website (last accessed 30/08/15) which contains a copy of the concentration report from Lingen to Reichswald Forest: <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2041178/PORTER,%20CHRISTOPHER%20WALTHAM> Confirmation that Porter was indeed Monica Sutherland's son can be found on the website of Christchurch, University of Oxford, his family having had strong connections to the University. Christchurch website (last accessed 30/08/15): <http://www.chch.ox.ac.uk/cathedral/memorials/WW2/christopher-porter>

policy was that all next of kin who had a relative in a particular area should be informed at once.¹¹ Apparently no one had told Monica Sutherland that this was the case, the failure to give up-to-date information being a very common occurrence where graves in Germany were concerned.

The national commemorative programme was guided by a set of principles which defined who was eligible for the programme, where they were to be buried, and how they were to be remembered. The foremost ethos was that everyone was equal in death. Attainment of this ideal was only made possible by the nation effectively commandeering the bodies of dead servicemen and removing nearly all freedom of choice from their next of kin. The principle that it was the nation, rather than the relatives, which decided what happened to the dead had been a highly controversial policy when originally introduced for the First World War.¹² A key moment in the adoption of that policy was the House of Commons debate which took place on 4 May 1920.¹³ Whilst strong arguments were made against taking away all rights from

¹¹ See the letter in *The Times*, on 10 July 1947, from Major General R Edgeworth-Johnstone, Director of Public Relations at the War Office, which is given later in this chapter.

¹² Many books have been written about the First World War burial and commemoration programme, two of the chief books used here are Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995), and Tim Skelton & Gerald Gliddon, *Lutyens and the Great War* (Francis Lincoln, London, 2008). Others are listed in the introduction.

¹³ This debate is not infrequently mentioned by historians; however, most seem to have misunderstood its nature. It has tended to be viewed as an autocratic means of taking away freedom of choice, but when read in its entirety it is clear that the debate was long, difficult, and at times deeply distressing. Several who spoke had themselves been bereaved in the war, including Herbert Asquith, the former prime minister, who had lost his gifted son Raymond in 1916. It was very difficult for these men to speak of such matters in public because the avowal of feeling was against the prevailing mores, but they made themselves do so as relatives, to show what the relatives' feelings were upon the subject. Historians' harsh judgement on the debate, for example that made by Gavin Stamp, do not reflect accurately the nature of what happened: 'Equality in death, like equality in life, had to be enforced by the state, and the British people had to learn that liberty is incompatible with war, and

the relatives, notably by Viscount Wolmer who spoke of 'rigid militarism; not in intention, but in effect', ultimately it was the principle of equal treatment for all which prevailed, for reasons most vividly given by William Burdett-Coutts:

My point is that we, who speak for the nation, ought not so to act that the mourning woman in cottage or tenement, or in a moderate home, often not so well off as the wage-earner, should say to herself, or should have in her heart the thought, even if silent and unexpressed, "My man made the same sacrifice, died the same death, for the same cause as that one. Why should he not have as beautiful a monument?" To my mind it is absolutely hateful to think of introducing these differences of means and opportunity into the atmosphere of this great National Memorial.¹⁴

There was no similar debate in the 1940s; the basic tenets had been too long established and for the most part found satisfactory. However, the ban on repatriation, which had been instituted very early in the First World War and which was an integral part of the national commemorative programme, would be questioned anew. The policy would be reaffirmed in a statement to the House of Commons by Jack Lawson, Secretary of State for War, in October 1945. He told the House that the Governments which made up the Imperial War Graves Commission — the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Newfoundland, and India — had all decided that repatriation would not be permitted. Lawson then read the statement prepared by the Imperial War Graves Commission, a key passage of which stated:

that once a man had enlisted, his body – whether dead or alive – belonged to the King.' Gavin Stamp, *The Memorial to the Missing of the Somme* (Profile Books, London, 2007), p.89.

¹⁴ Hansard, Imperial War Graves Commission, HC Deb 04 May 1920 vol 128. Hansard online (last accessed 04/03/15):

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1920/may/04/imperial-war-graves-commission#S5CV0128P0_19200504_HOC_343

To give effect to even a moderate demand for repatriation would be a task of even greater magnitude than it would have been in 1918 [...] Private repatriation by a few individuals, who could afford the cost, would be contrary to that equality of treatment which is the underlying principle of the Commission's work and has appealed so strongly to the deepest sentiments of our peoples.¹⁵

The renewed controversy about repatriation continued for some time after the war's end because the criteria for inclusion in the commemorative programme would eventually extend two and a half years after Victory in Europe. Understandably, relatives found it difficult to accept why those who died after the war ended could not be brought home. Some of the dead who could not be repatriated were actually civilians from the Control Commission in Germany. Their burials were governed by the same rules as the military, and they were buried under the ranking 'Commissioner'. One very sad such case was that of Marjorie Davies, a 26 year old clerk, who was found drowned in her bath at Düsseldorf on 30 November 1947. Her case was raised in the House of Commons after her parents were refused permission to bring her home, to attend her funeral at their own expense, or even to visit her grave the following spring.¹⁶ She was one of the last to be buried under the

¹⁵ Hansard, War Graves, HC Deb 23 October 1945 vol 414. Hansard online (last accessed 17/05/2015): http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1945/oct/23/war-graves#S5CV0414P0_19451023_HOC_62

¹⁶ Hansard, Clerk's Death (Burial Arrangements), HC Deb 15 December 1947 vol 445. Hansard online (last accessed 17/05/2015): http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1947/dec/15/clerks-death-burial-arrangements#S5CV0445P0_19471215_HOC_31. Marjorie Davies is buried at Munster Heath War Cemetery in Germany; see her page on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website (last accessed 09/06/2015): <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/1475473/DAVIES,%20MARJORIE>

the Second World War commemorative programme, which encompassed war deaths between 3 September 1939 and 31 December 1947.¹⁷ It is perhaps worth briefly noting that although the repatriation of servicemen's bodies was permitted after 31 December 1947, they had to be brought home at the relatives' expense, and the War Office discouraged it, taking the line that fatal casualties should be buried as close as possible to where they had died (this having been one of the key tenets of the wartime programme).¹⁸

Whilst the ban on repatriation was in operation, the only circumstances in which the next of kin could claim the body of a soldier for private burial was if he had died in his home country.¹⁹ A similar rule applied to the RAF. However, as the RAF was for the most part stationed in Britain during the war, British airmen who died in accidents, a very significant cause of UK-based mortality, were often buried in their home graveyards whilst Dominion airmen were buried in RAF plots such as that at Cambridge City Cemetery.²⁰ Whilst this might seem unequal treatment, it is hard to

¹⁷ The First World War dates also ran on after the end of the war, from 4 August 1914 to 31 August 1921. Commonwealth War Graves Commission website, 'About Us' (last accessed 17/05/2015): <http://www.cwgc.org/about-us/faqs.aspx>

¹⁸ See House of Commons debate, 11 February 1949, which Charles Royle opened as follows: 'I refer to the question of the repatriation of soldiers' bodies from different parts of the world, and particularly Germany, where soldiers may happen to die from natural causes, or, alternatively, by accident. Of course, I am referring only to circumstances which have arisen since the end of the war, and in no way to the deaths of soldiers in the course of their war activities.' Hansard, Soldiers' Bodies (Repatriation), HC Deb 11 February 1949 vol 461. Hansard online (last accessed 17/05/2015): http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1949/feb/11/soldiers-bodies-repatriation#S5CV0461P0_19490211_HOC_165.

¹⁹ Edwin Gibson 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* (HMSO, London, 1989), p.80.

²⁰ See, for example, the grave locations for the Thackway crew, killed 17 December 1943, Jennie Gray, *Fire By Night, The Story of One Pathfinder Crew and Black Thursday, 16/17 December 1943* (Grub Street, London, 2000), pp.104-111.

see what other policy could have been followed other than requiring British soldiers and airmen to be buried in official UK cemeteries or plots alongside their Dominion comrades. In the Dominions themselves, the positions were reversed, though this was only of real import in Canada where so many British airmen were trained.²¹

Eligibility for inclusion in the national commemorative programme was not automatic for civilian personnel who had died supporting the war effort in North-West Europe or the subsequent occupation of Germany. For example, Stott was advised by the War Office on 8 November 1945: 'that the graves of "Civilian dockyard personnel employed overseas by the Admiralty" should not be regarded as "war graves".'²² However, eligibility did extend to other civilians belonging to certain organisations, and a long list of these was held by Stott; it included ENSA (Entertainments National Service Association), the BBC, the British Red Cross Society, the Salvation Army and various other religious organisations, together with war reporters and war artists.²³

Also eligible, whether their families wished it or not, were the dead of other nationalities who had served with the British forces. This was a policy which caused great distress, and in 1947 the French, Belgian and Dutch Ministers of the Interior asked Lieutenant Colonel Stott to have the matter specially reconsidered. Stott applied to the War Office for clarification, telling them:

To date, I have refused all applications since the policy is that foreigners, whatever their nationality may be, who have served in the British Forces

²¹ For the training programme in Canada, see Allan D English, *The Cream of the Crop, Canadian Aircrew 1939-1945* (McGill-Queens University Press, Montreal and Kingston, Canada, 1996), pp.52-60.

²² TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, entry for 8 November 1945.

²³ TNA, 171/8653, BAOR HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January to June 1946, appendices for January, Appendix G1, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Eligibility for burial in Military Cemeteries', 15 January 1946.

are treated exactly as all other member of the British Forces, and so they are not eligible for repatriation to their native countries for reburial.

What complicated the situation was that foreigners who had Army numbers for their own country were eligible for repatriation, and it was only those who had British Army numbers who were not. The particularly tangled case which had prompted Stott to write concerned a Belgian soldier.

The two sons of a well-known Belgian family (not that the standing of the family matters) managed to get to England in June 1940. One joined the Belgian Brigade, and the other joined the British Forces. Both were killed and buried in Holland during the 1944-45 operations, and we have not yet succeeded in making the family understand why we cannot grant their application for the body of the son who served in the British Forces to be repatriated. The family contends (as do all others) that the two sons joined the fighting forces only in order to take their part in the invasion of Europe and the defeat of the enemy, and that they never had any intention of making the fighting services their career.²⁴

Stott asked for a formal declaration of the correct policy, which was duly provided – in very terse form – by the War Office. This reiterated the policy exactly as Stott had stated it, and added:

²⁴ TNA, WO 267/607, BAOR HQ, Western Europe Graves Service Directorate, Quarterly Historical Report, quarter ending 30 September 1947, appendices to September, Appendix K, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Repatriation – Allied Dead to their Native Countries for Re-burial', memorandum, 30 August 1947.

If any foreign government wishes to obtain an alteration to this rule in any special case, then they must apply through the normal diplomatic channels.²⁵

Stott duly passed this message on in very polite letters in their own languages to the Ministers of the Interior concerned.²⁶ It is not known what happened to the Belgian brother who had belonged to the British forces because Stott does not mention his name.

The ruling on foreign nationals in the British forces had an echo in a similar policy which governed the burial of the enemy dead. This included not only the German military, but also those who had been forced to work for the German war machine. In one instance in late October 1944, Stott asked the War Office to confirm the policy for the burial of Russian civilians who had been workers for the Organisation Todt.²⁷ Because the Organisation Todt was considered to be a subsidiary organisation of the German Army, the particular Russian about whom Stott was writing had been buried as a Prisoner of War 'in an Enemy plot'.²⁸ Stott asked for confirmation that this was the right policy, and this was duly confirmed by the Directorate on 2 November 1944.²⁹

The type of burial given to the servicemen eligible for inclusion in the national commemorative programme was also governed by a set of policies. One Air Ministry memorandum very briefly but succinctly encapsulated the system:

²⁵ Ibid, attached copy of A.G.13 reply to DD, GR&E Directorate Western Europe, 5 September 1947.

²⁶ Ibid, attached copy of the letter in French to the Belgian Minister of the Interior, dated only September 47, together with a handwritten note by Stott stating that similar letters were sent to Holland and France.

²⁷ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, entry for 20 October 1944.

²⁸ Ibid, Appendix G, Lieutenant Colonel Stott to A.G.13, 20 October 1944.

²⁹ Ibid, but main diary, entry for 2 November 1944.

In friendly countries graves in communal cemeteries are not normally disturbed; in ex-enemy countries they are all concentrated in a British Military Cemetery.³⁰

To elaborate upon this in the specific case of North-West Europe: in the liberated countries the dead were almost invariably left in situ except when they lay in isolated graves; in Germany virtually all of the graves were concentrated to large British Military Cemeteries.

The policy for war graves in Germany was so important that it had to be decided at Cabinet level, but this was delayed for two months after the war's end. It was not until 9 July 1945 that a secret memorandum on the subject was put forward for Cabinet discussion by the outgoing Secretary of State, Sir James Grigg. Grigg had just lost his seat in the general election of 5 July 1945, and was shortly to retire from public life; thus his memorandum would be acted upon by the Labour government of Clement Attlee rather than the wartime coalition government led by Winston Churchill. The memorandum had been prompted by a letter from Sir Fabian Ware at the Imperial War Graves Commission, dated 17 May 1945. The first part of the memorandum was taken up with the Commission's wish to adhere to the ban on repatriation which had been adopted during the First World War — it had notified Grigg that it was approaching 'the participating Governments to secure their approval and support'. Grigg stated in the memorandum that he was asking for the approval of the Cabinet for the continuation of the policy (it would eventually be confirmed in the House of Commons in October 1945 by Grigg's successor, Jack Lawson).³¹ The rest of the memorandum was taken up with the difficult question of graves in Germany. Grigg outlined the two courses of action which he thought should be

³⁰ TNA, AIR2 10031, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, memorandum, date stamp 17 February 1950 but probably written earlier.

³¹ See the House of Commons debate on repatriation mentioned earlier in this chapter, Hansard, War Graves, HC Deb 23 October 1945 vol 414.

considered. The first was to concentrate all the dead to countries west of the Rhine, as, Grigg believed, was the policy of the Canadian, American, French and Belgian governments. There were a number of practical reasons in favour of this, such as the future upkeep of the cemeteries and the wishes of the public, Grigg noting: 'There is undoubtedly a body of opinion in this country which would be against leaving the bodies of our men in German soil.' The second course of action was to allow 'permanent cemeteries in Germany proper'. It is worth quoting at length from Grigg's reasons for recommending this particular policy, which would eventually be adopted with very little discussion by Attlee's government:

(a) There are already several British cemeteries in Germany from the last war [...] It does not appear that we need fear any difficulty in ultimately being able to maintain them properly

(b) There is a body of opinion in this country which considers that the sight of British war cemeteries in Germany would have a salutary effect on the people of that country.

(c) To remove all graves out of Germany [...] would involve, in many cases, very long hauls. The ordinary concentration, under operational conditions, of isolated graves into nearby cemeteries is done in blankets or hessian sheets. It is probable that the movement of bodies through Germany could be done by night in this manner, but if the concentration were to be in cemeteries in France, Holland or Belgium, we should be faced with a demand for putting the bodies into coffins which would entail a very considerable demand for both labour and material.

(d) To remove all graves out of Germany would probably start a demand for the removal of graves out of other enemy or ex-enemy territory [...] We may ultimately also have similar difficulties in the Far East.

(e) Lastly, and of great importance is the argument that if we once accede to wholesale concentration over such distances, we open the door

to demands from next-of-kin for the repatriation of bodies to the United Kingdom.

Grigg therefore recommended that the decision should be in favour of graves being concentrated to British Military Cemeteries in Germany 'in the general area in which the men fell'.³²

It is perhaps due to the upheaval caused by the unexpected election results that it was another two months before the matter, which was obviously of some urgency, was raised at Cabinet level. On 6 September 1945, Grigg's successor, Jack Lawson, endorsed Grigg's line of reasoning, and after discussion the Cabinet 'approved the proposals of the Secretary of State for War and invited him to proceed accordingly'.³³

The result of this very specific policy for Germany was a major divergence from the work in the liberated countries, where concentration was generally only carried out for bodies in isolated graves or temporary burial grounds. The bodies which had been buried in civilian cemeteries or churchyards remained there unless they were those of Canadian soldiers (Canada followed a different policy of concentrating all its soldiers in Military Cemeteries, largely to facilitate relatives' visits after the war).³⁴

In the liberated countries, the policy of not moving graves unless it was necessary resulted in a multitude of registered burial sites. In France alone for the Second World War, there were 1,550 such sites. These ranged from single graves such as an isolated grave at Cahagnes (of which more in a moment), to small churchyards, municipal cemeteries, and up through the varying sizes of British War Cemetery to the very largest which was Bayeux. There were 456 Second World War burial sites

³² TNA, CAB/66/67/19, Cabinet papers, P J Grigg, 'War Graves on German Soil', 9 July 1945.

³³ TNA, CAB/128/1, Cabinet papers, Cabinet Minutes, 'War Graves on German Soil', 6 September 1945.

³⁴ TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, appendices for April, Appendix J1, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Burials in Germany', memorandum, 2 April 1945.

in the Netherlands, 322 in Belgium, and so the pattern repeated itself, a vast network of burial sites all over Europe.³⁵

Not everyone liked the policy of retaining graves in civilian sites. Field Marshal Montgomery, the Commander of 21 Army Group and the BAOR, was one of the those who was against it. Montgomery appears to have disliked the many scattered burials in civilian cemeteries and churchyards, and in fact issued a directive in July 1944 that 'whenever possible, all future dead shall be buried only in permanent military cemeteries'.³⁶ Some two months later, Stott wrote to a high-ranking officer on Montgomery's staff, effectively asking for his support in tempering Montgomery's views. In the letter, Stott gave the position on smaller burial grounds, having first consulted with Sir Fabian Ware about this. Ware felt that there might be a bias towards large cemeteries 'which enable a better display', as in the example of the Americans and Canadians, but his own opinion was that 'a small cemetery [...]

³⁵ Search on cemeteries for the Second World War, Commonwealth War Graves Commission website (last accessed 12/06/15): <http://www.cwgc.org/>

³⁶ TNA, 171/139, 21 Army Group HQ, 'A' Branch, Progress Report, July 1944, 'Burials in the Field', memorandum, 4 July 1944. This is not to suggest, however, that Montgomery took an impersonal view of dead soldiers. As Trevor Royle, one of his many biographers, writes, 'Montgomery was sensitive and often openly moved about the deaths of soldiers close to him. It was a demonstration of humanity unusual in a battlefield commander.'³⁶ Trevor Royle, *Montgomery: Lessons in Leadership from the Soldier's General* (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2010). As is recorded in several books, including Royle's, the death on 21 April 1945 of John Poston, one of his highly valued liaison officers, caused Montgomery great distress. Poston was buried in the field at Soltau, in Lower Saxony, where Montgomery's HQ was encamped, but, true to the principle of concentrating the British dead killed in Germany, his body was reburied at Becklingen War Cemetery on 25 October 1946. There is a photograph of John Poston's newly made grave at Soltau on p.139 of Johnny Henderson with Jamie Douglas-Home, *Watching Monty* (Sutton Publishing for Imperial War Museum, London, 2005). The Commonwealth War Graves Commission website, page for John William Poston, contains the Becklingen concentration report (last accessed 13/11/15):<http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2389684/POSTON,%20JOHN%20WILLIAM>

translates more adequately the idea of peace and reverence at which we aim'. Stott continued:

In order that he may reassure himself that the position is appreciated by Field Marshal Montgomery, the Director-General has asked me to ascertain, through you, that there will be no question raised by the Commander-in-Chief if he should see small groups of graves or even single graves in French Civil Cemeteries, and some of our own small cemeteries.³⁷

Behind the decision to preserve the multiple burial sites lay respect for the relatives and the confirmed British principle that where a body lay was sacred soil. It was known and appreciated that next of kin resented any moving of their loved one's body after burial, and, where possible, the policy was to leave the bodies where they were.³⁸ If a move was essential, every effort had to be made to prevent a body from being relocated more than once.³⁹ In addition, there was a general policy governing the exhumation and concentration of bodies:

The permanent resting place shall be in a cemetery which is constructed on a site as near as possible to where death occurred.⁴⁰

³⁷ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Appendix J3, Lieutenant Colonel Stott to Major General H W A F Graham, confidential letter, 15 September 1944. Graham was in charge of Administration at 21 Army Group.

³⁸ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Appendix J3, Lieutenant Colonel Stott to Major General H W A F Graham, confidential letter, 15 September 1944.

³⁹ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Appendix J3, Minutes of a Meeting on Burial Policy and Procedure held on 22 December 1944.

⁴⁰ TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, Standing Orders: Graves Concentration 21 Army Group', 31 January 1945.

The strictness with which the various rules were applied meant that most relatives appear to have accepted that it was the national programme which determined where the bodies of their loved ones lay. However, for those relatives who were determined enough to argue their case, the British policy of not unnecessarily moving bodies from their original resting place did offer a tiny loophole and element of choice. Working within the general drift of this policy — but not exactly to the letter of the law — was General Sir John Marshall-Cornwall, whose son, James, had been killed on 30 July 1944 at Cahagnes in Normandy. In late 1944, Stott, writing to the War Office about the case of Captain George Charles Grey, whose grave was in open country not far from the original landing sites, described the particular difficulties which he was facing at that point:

I have [another] case outstanding – that of General Sir J Marshall-Cornwall who has applied to buy the land so that the grave of his son may remain in situ; in which event he himself could be held responsible for the maintenance of the grave. The case [of Captain Grey], however, does not appear to be similar, as it seems the next-of-kin merely wishes that the grave ‘should remain in its present position’. If it gets around that graves will be preserved in their present positions merely for the asking, I fear we may be over-run with such requests.⁴¹

Stott thought that giving way to such requests would greatly complicate concentration work and imperil the future maintenance of the isolated graves. However, his advice was over-ruled, and in March 1945, he noted that the War Office had been informed of the agreement that Lieutenant Marshall-Cornwall’s grave should remain in situ, ‘the deceased’s father having arranged to purchase the

⁴¹ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Appendix J2, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, memorandum, 4 December 1944.

necessary land together with a Right of Access for the maintenance of the grave in perpetuity'.⁴² The Commission would later supply a standard headstone.⁴³

The grave of Captain Grey, who had been killed on the same day as Lieutenant Marshall-Cornwall, likewise remained at its original site. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission records:

The grave of Captain Grey, who was killed by a sniper whilst his tank was hit advancing through nearby Lutain Wood, lies in an isolated piece of ground at a fork in the main road from Caumont to Villers-Bocage in the hamlet of Le Repas.

As both the family of the officer and the inhabitants of Le Repas were emphatic in their desire for Captain Grey's body to remain in the village, it was decided that it should remain there. The grave is marked by a private memorial.⁴⁴

Stott made an additional note in the War Diary about Captain Grey's case on 13 February 1945. The wording is slightly cryptic, but seems to indicate that the use of Graves Service building materials for grave construction could not easily be authorised in Captain Grey's case because the responsibility for the grave had passed to the French. Stott wrote:

⁴² TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, entry for 29 March 1945.

⁴³ Commonwealth War Graves Commission website, page for James Gerald Marshall-Cornwall (last accessed 04/06/15):<http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2633451/MARSHALL-CORNWALL,%20JAMES%20GERALD>

⁴⁴ Commonwealth War Graves Commission website, page for George Charles Grey (last accessed 04/06/15):
<http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2326445/GREY,%20GEORGE%20CHARLES>

Instructed by War Office that it had been agreed that the grave of Captain Gray [sic], MP, should be allowed to remain 'in situ', but they hesitate to recommend that the request for the release of cement be met since such is required for a purpose which conflicts with Army policy for the Concentration of Graves.

Stott, however, made the decision that 'a reasonable amount of cement could be released'.⁴⁵

Neither the Lieutenant Marshall-Cornwall nor Captain Grey burial places follow the usual lines of commemorative practice. At Lieutenant Marshall-Cornwall's burial place, two brass tablets give an account of the battle in which he died, ending: 'He gave his life for his country and the liberation of France.'



Grave of James Gerald Marshall-Cornwall at Cahagnes: Paul Reed

⁴⁵ TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, entry for 13 February 1945.

The grave of Captain Grey is marked by a large stone cross. Beneath it, a substantial stone gives the simple details of his life and death, including that he was MP for Berwick on Tweed. A beautiful lead plaque with a picture of the Palace of Westminster is attached to the monument, saying that the stone had come from the Houses of Parliament.⁴⁶



Grave of George Charles Grey at Le Repas: Paul Reed

⁴⁶ Presumably the stone came from the restoration of the Houses of Parliament after the building was severely damaged by bombing in 1941.

Neither of these touching personal memorials would have been allowed inside official British military cemeteries, where the only memorial permitted was the standard Commission headstone with its limited inscription.

It is notable that in both these cases the dead man was the son of a successful and influential father, Captain Grey's father being Major-General Wulff Henry Grey, CB, CMG. It is not known whether their rank and standing had any bearing in either case, but it would seem highly unlikely, given how strictly the rules were applied. What does seem very feasible, however, is that both fathers would have been aware through their own military career of the loophole in the rules, and, moreover, would have had the authority and confidence to argue their case.

What the Grey and Marshall-Cornwall cases show is that even in a programme which strongly enforced equality, and thus uniformity, there was some latitude for the wishes of individual relatives to prevail. This was even the case in Germany, where there are a few graves which were left undisturbed, apparently at the wish of their relatives. One of the most notable of these is the grave of Brigadier Claude Nicholson, the commander at the defence of Calais in June 1940, who died three years later as a prisoner of war and is buried at Rotenburg (Fulda) Civil Cemetery in Central Germany.⁴⁷

There were two other matters in which the relatives were allowed a very regulated degree of choice. The first was that they could request the transfer of their loved one's body from a civilian to a Military Cemetery (but not vice-versa).⁴⁸ The second was that they could request that their loved one be cremated; however, permission to do this was hedged about with caveats. The relatives had to make their own arrangements and bear all the costs; the ashes could either be reinterred in the grave

⁴⁷ Commonwealth War Graves Commission website, page for Brigadier Claude Nicholson (last accessed 12/06/2015):

<http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/1475332/NICHOLSON,%20CLAUDE>

⁴⁸ See, for example, TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, appendices for February, Appendix J3, 'Concentration out of Communal Cemeteries and Churchyards' and attached papers, 14 February 1945.

or scattered elsewhere (a note being made on the memorial stone to reflect this); and lastly, 'in no circumstances' would the repatriation of the ashes be permitted, thus even this possible avenue of bringing a loved one home was blocked.⁴⁹

The only other matter in which the relatives were permitted a choice came once the Commission had taken over the cemeteries and the temporary cross erected by the Army was replaced by the final stone head-marker. The correct military emblem for the formation to which the dead man had belonged took its place at the top of the stone, and at the foot of the stone were the four lines permitted for the relatives' tribute.⁵⁰ These individual inscriptions were clearly very valued by the families, and many are extremely touching. Some are high-flown, some poetic, some absolutely personal, such as that for Corporal J R Martin of the Rifle Brigade, who was killed on 21 July 1944 and buried at Banneville-la-Campagne; it is written almost in the form of a note by his wife, Joan, and his mother:

Parted by fate.
You and our baby Jackie.
Will meet you again.
Joan, mum.⁵¹

⁴⁹ TNA, WO 267/603, BAOR HQ, Western Europe Graves Service Directorate, Quarterly Historical Report, main report, quarter ending 30 September 1946.

⁵⁰ 'These inscriptions were limited to no more than four lines of text, each containing no more than 25 letters, although some examples exist of slightly longer inscriptions.' Glossary, Commonwealth War Graves Commission website (last accessed 28/08/2015): <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/glossary.aspx>

⁵¹ Commonwealth War Graves Commission website, headstone schedule for Banneville-la-Campagne, 10 August 1945 (last accessed 2/12/15): <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2324106/WHISTLER,%20REX%20JOHN>

However, these personal inscriptions were not permitted for New Zealanders; their Government maintained the position it had adopted after the First World War and denied the relatives this small consolation on the grounds of equality.⁵²

The rules which governed the burial and commemoration of the dead were as restrictive to soldiers' friends as they were to the next of kin. What was most meaningful to comrades-in-arms (and, indeed, to local people in the liberated countries, as was seen in the case of Captain Grey) was that the graves should remain in the location where the men had fought and lost their lives. One vivid account of the intense meaning surrounding these improvised burial sites was given by Eric Baume, a newspaper correspondent, who reported the Nijmegen part of MARKET GARDEN, the airborne operation to capture key Dutch bridges in September 1944. At one point there came a lull in the fighting due to a blocked road. The newly dug graves of five British guardsmen — officers and Other Ranks — lay close by, and Baume observed how many people, Dutch civilians as well as soldiers, came to see the graves and pay their respects: 'no men had greater hosts or companions than those of us who, for these short days, had stood at unarranged intervals besides the graves'.⁵³ At one point, Baume broke off the narrative to observe:

⁵² After the First World War the New Zealand government decided that the proposed lettering charge (which was only partially implemented and then dropped altogether) worked against the principle of equality; this position then had to be maintained for the following war, otherwise there would have been unequal treatment for the dead of the two world wars. See Grant Tobin, 'Personal Inscriptions', *New Zealand Communication Trench* (June 2011), pp.11-14. There are, however, a few First World War exceptions to the New Zealand ban, for example at Courcelles-au-Bois cemetery in France, see Gibson and Kingsley Ward, *Courage Remembered*, p.67.

⁵³ Eric Baume, *Five Graves at Nijmegen* (B T Batsford, London, 1945), p.32.

It occurred to me then, suddenly, [...] that none of the five guardsmen had done anything more valiant or outstanding or unusual than to die. But that in being thus dead, almost on an island around which all their contemporary world moved, they had become the very centre of quiet, unemotional, un sentimental thought, and had been a lodestone to those who, praying for peace, thought seriously, rightly or wrongly, that they could obtain it hard by this hallowed ground, within these sacred portals.⁵⁴

Another view of the emotional impact of burial sites close by the spot where men had lost their lives was given by Anthony Cotterell. Travelling with a tank crew in Normandy in the summer of 1944, he wrote how individual country graves were somehow much more meaningful than those in the established cemeteries:

The isolation and simplicity of graves like these is sometimes more readily suggestive of the horror of it all than the mass mournfulness of a cemetery. It was a lyrically lovely evening, mellow and radiant. We were in a field, and the graves were the only sign that a few hours ago men had lost their lives to take it all to pieces.⁵⁵

Soldiers themselves often expressed a wish to be buried permanently at the scene of their deaths. Rex Whistler, the artist, who was Burial Officer for the 2nd Welsh Armoured Reconnaissance Battalion, talked of this to a fellow soldier shortly before his death:

One evening he talked about being killed. I think the subject arose because we passed the grave of an airman who had been shot down the

⁵⁴ Ibid, p.27.

⁵⁵ Jennie Gray (Ed), *'This is WAR!' The Diaries and Journalism of Anthony Cotterell, 1940-1944* (Spellmount, Stroud, 2013), p.169.

week before. He said that he would like to be buried just where he was killed, left there and not moved to an enormous cemetery. It would mean so much more to anyone who visited the grave [...] They would see the last bit of country he saw, perhaps feel the same things about it as he felt.⁵⁶

Whistler was killed on 18 July 1944 and buried about fifty yards from the spot, a service being held over his grave.⁵⁷ But just over a year later, when the isolated graves in that area were concentrated, his body was moved to Banneville-la-Campagne war cemetery in accordance with standard British policy.

GRAVES CONCENTRATION REPORT FORM

Report No. 48931/196/3/68

The following have/had been concentrated here :-

Name of Cemetery BANNEVILLE BRITISH CEMETERY

Full Map Reference France Sh 34 4 8 1/250,000 NR. II.133674

2917
British

(1) Serial No	(2) Regt or Corps	(3) Army No	(4) Name & Initials	(5) Rank	(6) Date of Death	(7) K/A D/F or Died	(8) Plot	(9) Row	(10) Grave	(11) Date of Retrial	Previous Location of Grave Plot & Map Ref	Report Number
1	R.A.	872840	MOORE A.E.	L/Cdr	26-7-44	K/A	III	E	6	9-8-45	Banneville, 3363, 4250 1/50,000 France Sh 72/2 NR. 122670	
2	"	954286	KEMP R.	Cor.	26-7-44	"	III	E	7	"	"	Graves
3	"	14340290	SIMPSON R.M.	"	"	"	III	E	5	"	"	Regl.
4	11 D.L.I.	1692597	THOMPSON F.	Pte	7-8-44	"	III	E	3	"	MR. 118668	AW 3372 1636
5	"	4460302	TYLER F.	"	"	"	III	E	4	"	"	NOT held 8636
6	"	4462000	STRICK J.	L/Cpl	8-8-44	"	III	E	1	"	"	in this 7836
7	"	4464676	WELLS F.	Pte	26-7-44	"	III	E	2	"	"	Unit, 2636
8	1 R.B.	14233223	PAMILLION W.	Rfn	21-7-44	"	III	F	27	"	Banneville, 3363, 4250 1/50,000 France Sh 72/2 NR. 093676	
9	K.S.L.I.	14437491	ROCHE M.	Pte	20-7-44	"	III	F	26	"	"	
10	W.C.	131651	WHISTLER R.J.	Lieut	18-7-44	"	III	F	22	"	MR. 096671	33/602
11	1 R.B.	6916795	MARIE J.R.	Cpl	21-7-44	"	III	F	24	"	MR. 098668	33/679 2188
12	"	6923851	SALBOT R.W.	Rfn	"	"	III	F	25	"	"	"
13	R.E.R. S.V.	409234	THOMAS T.R.	Sgt	19-7-44	"	III	F	23	"	Banneville, 3363, 4250 1/50,000 France 72/2 NR. 122672	Grave Regl AW 3372 NOT held.

Date: 10 Aug 1945

Where a grave has not already been registered, a Registration Report on AD 43572 will be prepared, and attached to this FORM.

Serial 12 extracted for further checking M.B.A. Sgt.

Commanding "A" Section 43 Graves Concentration Unit: Major R.A. [Signature]

Commanding 43 Graves Concentration Unit: [Signature]

Comment: notified to unit 31.1.46.

Concentration Report. Rex Whistler is tenth on the list. Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

⁵⁶ Hugh and Mirabel Cecil, *In Search of Rex Whistler: His Life and Work* (Francis Lincoln, 2012), pp.238-239.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.240-41

The principle of equal treatment for all not only governed where men were buried but also the memorials which could be made. Because of the primary role which it took in the creation of the cemeteries, it was the Army which initially policed the rule that only Commission memorials could be allowed within their precincts. In wartime, this essentially consisted of thwarting the very natural desire of soldiers to erect memorials to their lost comrades. As a 1944 set of Army Council Instructions stated:

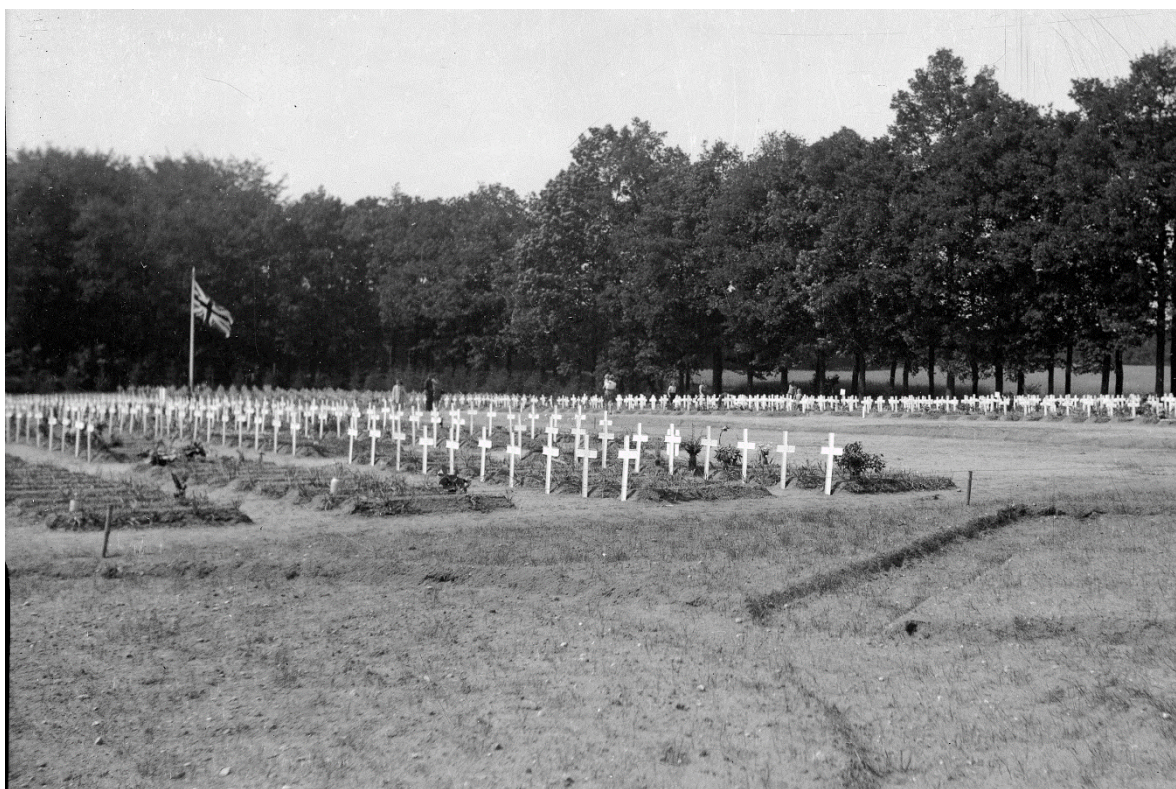
The erection of private or unit memorials in military cemeteries cannot be permitted and the erection of unit memorials in Service plots in civil cemeteries is also prohibited.⁵⁸

Soldiers being soldiers, these official prohibitions were sometimes ignored. The troops also took matters into their own hands by putting up permanent crosses, against all regulations, even once the Graves Service had become involved. By November 1944, numerous instances were being recorded of units having new crosses erected over isolated graves and over graves in civil cemeteries, even though such graves had officially been registered and the bodies were almost certainly awaiting transfer to a central cemetery. The units were also removing the official letters 'GRU' which were attached to the registered crosses, or the registration tags which were sometimes affixed. These actions led to great concern that the graves would thereby become 'lost'. Stott requested that an order be circulated as soon as possible throughout 21 Army Group that 'in no circumstances' should such actions take place, and that units must not erect crosses in permanent cemeteries either.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ TNA, WO 165/36, War Office, A.G.13 (The Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries), War Diary, January-December 1944, Appendix IV, 'Imperial War Graves Commission – Erection of Memorials and Headstones', extract from Army Council Instructions 26/1/44.

⁵⁹ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Appendix C, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, memorandum, 11 November 1944.

The extemporised memorials to the missing put up at the scene of a loss had a unique resonance which could not be replicated later in the official memorials to the missing which listed hundreds or thousands of men. One such was at Lauenburg in Germany. Discovered later by Major Lugard, OC of the Second Army's GR&E, its details were noted in the War Diary: 'At Lauenburg a cross was found with 12 names of men of the 2nd Cameronians who were lost when crossing the Elbe on 1 May 1945.'⁶⁰ The need to make a personal tribute was immense, and where named graves were concerned, it was still possible to bend the rules a little even in the official cemeteries in the period before the Commission took over. A *Times* reporter,



Arnhem-Oosterbeek Cemetery as it would have appeared around the time of The Times report, before the IWGC took it over. Gelders Archief, 1560-1847.

visiting Arnhem in May 1946, one year after the liberation, at a time when few British other than those in the military could visit the area, noted:

⁶⁰ TNA, WO 171/11100, Second Army HQ, DADGR&E, War Diary, 1944-45, entry for 13 June 1945.

On the fronts of the crosses, at their foot, there are, here and there, scribbled in pencil, the awkward, touching phrases used by the inarticulate in an urge to express their grief – messages written by fathers, brothers, or comrades, also in the Army, who have managed to make their way here.⁶¹

Although individual memorials were banned inside the cemeteries, there was some latitude for the retention of temporary cemeteries which had been made by a formation.⁶² Stott refers to this when he speaks of ‘the urgent representations of certain Formations that their particular cemeteries (on which they have expended a great deal of time and care) be converted into permanent cemeteries’, so that the bodies there would not have to be moved to a more anonymous and less meaningful site.⁶³

⁶¹ Special Correspondent in Holland, ‘War Graves in Holland: Dutch Plan for Individual Care by Volunteers’, *The Times*, 8 May 1946.

⁶² Individual private memorials were put up anyway, but they were outside Commission-controlled grounds. Many of the memorials that were erected by comrades which can be seen today are from a very considerable period after the war. One moving example is the Sherwood Rangers memorial at Tilly-sur-Seulles, which was put up fifty years after the deaths of the Commanding Officer, Major Laycock, Lieutenant Head and Captain Jones, who were all killed by a direct hit on HQ by a shell on 11 June 1944. Laycock was one of two commanders which the Sherwood Rangers lost in a matter of days. See Gray, *Major Cotterell at Arnhem*, p.97. For the location of the memorial see Normandy Battlefield Guide website (last accessed 27/12/2014): http://battlefieldsww2.50megs.com/sherwood_rangers.htm

⁶³ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Appendix J3, Lieutenant Colonel Stott to Major General H W A F Graham, confidential letter, 15 September 1944.



Not all temporary formation cemeteries became permanent. One such was the temporary cemetery for 5th Battalion Coldstream Guards behind the Pastor's House at Heppen, Belgium – the men's helmets are on the temporary white wooden crosses. TNA, WO 171/11101.

What also helped to give some personal resonance to the otherwise strictly controlled procedures was that the official policy was to concentrate unit dead together whenever possible.⁶⁴ In the case of the RAF, crew members were always buried together, and a great deal of trouble was taken to achieve this, as has already been seen.

One matter, apparently trivial but of the greatest importance to the dead men's comrades, was that the correct formation title and badge should appear on the headstone. A memorandum forwarded to Stott in February 1945 makes this very clear. It was from the OC of 102 (Northumberland Hussars), an anti-tank regiment

⁶⁴ Ibid, Appendix G3, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, memorandum, 15 December 1944.

with the Royal Artillery, who had requested that it be forwarded to the appropriate authority for approval. The OC wrote:

As this Regiment has, since its conversion to a unit of the Royal Artillery, always worn, with the approval of the War Office, the badge of the Northumberland Hussars, it is hoped that the graves of the officers and men who have been killed [...] may bear the same badge [...] and that the full title of the unit [...] may also appear on the headstones. [...] It is felt strongly that this would be the wish of the relatives of all concerned.⁶⁵

The graves of the regiment's men in North-West Europe would indeed be registered by Stott's Graves Service with the correct information, which was passed to the Imperial War Graves Commission to act upon later as it saw fit.⁶⁶

So far in this chapter, what has been seen is the enforcement of the major principles of the national commemorative programme. The Graves Service also followed a number of lesser principles or policies, relating to specific situations which had arisen during the course of its duties. The most important of these policies were first deliberated with A.G. 13 at the War Office. For example, in August 1944, Stott

⁶⁵ TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, appendices for March, Appendix J6, 'Copy of a letter No. NH/22 dtd 28 Feb 45 from OC 102 (Northumberland Hussars) anti-tank Regiment R.A', no date.

⁶⁶ See, for example, the Commission's headstone schedule for two men of this regiment, Harold Anderson and R J Williams, who were both killed on 22 July 1944, and buried at Hottot-Les-Bagues in France. Commonwealth War Graves Commission website, page for Harold Anderson (last accessed 5/12/2015):

<http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2338511/ANDERSON,%20HAROLD>

For another example of the same policy, see the War Diary entry for 2 April 1945 about the old Territorial Army's badges. TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, 2 April 1945.

travelled to London to present a number of points for 'discussion and decision'. These were:

- a. Commemoration of 'cremated' dead – e.g. those found in burnt-out tanks
- b. Commemoration of dead with no known graves.
- c. Commemoration of dead whose graves have been subsequently totally destroyed by enemy action.
- d. Commemoration of men who have been executed – cowardice, looting etc.

Pin-point locations were maintained for the first three types, and it was decided that in these cases the Imperial War Graves Commission would have a memorial erected as near as possible to the spot. So far as (d) was concerned, it was decided that such cases should be recorded and registered as "Died", the view being held that the punishment expiates the crime'. All Graves Service officers, chaplains and Burial Officers were informed of these decisions – 'verbally and in strictest confidence in the case of (d)'.⁶⁷ An entirely different attitude to desertion prevailed in the military compared to the First World War, as can be seen in phrase 'verbally and in the strictest confidence' – there was to be no parade of shame. In practice, no British soldiers were executed for cowardice; the Labour government had abolished the death penalty for desertion in 1930, and any pressure to reinstate it was strongly resisted by the War Office.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ TNA, 171/140, 21 Army Group HQ, 'A' Branch, Progress Report, August 1944, week ending 5 August 1944.

⁶⁸ Neal Ascherson, Review of *Deserter: The Untold Story of WWII* by Charles Glass, 28 March 2013, *The Guardian* (last accessed 12/09/2014): <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/mar/28/deserter-untold-story-glass-review>. 'An entirely different attitude prevailed in the military compared to the First World War.' — *The Administrative History of 21 Army Group* shows just how different this attitude was by noting that it had become

Many other queries concerning policy arose upon which Stott made his own decision. One such was the marking of graves containing unidentified mixed remains after an aircraft had crashed or a tank or other military vehicle had been destroyed. When the machine's identification details were known, it was possible to ascertain from unit records who the occupants had been, but this did not help in putting names to individual remains. Stott's orders in this matter ran:

The post-war treatment of these graves is a matter for the I.W.G.C. but in order to assist that body to carry out what will be their probable method of marking the graves, the following instructions for temporary marking and recording of the graves are issued.

Stott then defined a number of permutations for the temporary memorials and the compilation of the permanent records, which related to the degree of identification possible and whether the number of bodies was determinable. Evidence had to be obtained if the presumption was that 'all occupants of the vehicle were still in it at the time of destruction'. If there were any cases not covered by the extensive instructions or 'any other cases where any doubt arises', they should be forwarded to Stott for instructions.⁶⁹

There was a similarly complex and difficult issue for graves which, when opened, proved to contain no recognisable remains, either because what had been buried there had been absorbed into the soil or because there had never been a burial in

apparent that many of the 'battle crimes', such as cowardice, desertion and insubordination, were committed on the spur of the moment, often under enormous pressure, by soldiers who were not naturally 'military criminals' and who, if given another chance, might well make good. *The Administrative History of the Operations of 21 Army Group on the Continent of Europe, 6 June 1944-8 May 1945* (Germany, November 1945), p.135.

⁶⁹ TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, appendices for February, 'Standing Orders – Graves Concentration 21 Army Group', Appendix A. 'Marking of Graves Containing Unidentified Remains', 31 January 1945.

the first place. In the latter case, it had sometimes been the practice to create a token grave or to erect a cross if a body had been completely destroyed (for instance, by a shell burst or a mine), and at times even the standard Army form for the dead, Army Form W.3314, had been filled out. Stott's ruling in this particularly difficult matter was that in cases where there was satisfactory reliable evidence that some sort of burial had taken place, concentration would 'take the form of moving a bag of soil from the old grave to the new, it being assumed that the remains have been absorbed into the soil'. Once in the Military Cemetery, the bag of soil would be memorialised in the same way as a whole body. If there was no evidence, however, that there had ever been a burial, the token grave had to be destroyed, and the man who had supposedly been buried there had to be classed as missing; he would later be commemorated by the Commission as being amongst those who had no known grave.

The fraught and difficult matter of these apparently empty graves was considered so sensitive that the instructions on them were highly confidential and only released to officers of the Graves Service units:

It is necessary that extreme care is taken in dealing with these cases, as it happens quite frequently that the next-of-kin have been informed by some comrade of the deceased that no burial was possible, and to report or send them a photograph of a false grave would cause them unnecessary distress; [...] it was found in the last war, that in dealing with all such cases it was best to adopt an honest course from the outset.

Stott concluded in his orders on the subject: 'All possible steps will be taken to discourage any form of token grave.'⁷⁰ Nonetheless, he supported the idea of named

⁷⁰ TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, appendices for February, Appendix H2, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Concentration of Graves', memorandum, 16 February 1945.

graves even when the remains were vestigial, suggesting in one letter that a named grave could have been provided for Major L G Warrington and Lieutenant D Brooke, whose bodies had clearly been completely destroyed, because in the first case, the shreds of Warrington's clothing which had been recovered might have 'portions of the body (although microscopic)' adhering, and, in the second case, that ashes could have been collected from Brooke's burnt-out tank.⁷¹

The most controversial matter in the programme for the dead was always that of the graves in German territory. Considerable dissatisfaction was generated by various aspects of the work there, such as the way in which the process of concentration was carried out without keeping the relatives fully informed. The case of Monica Sutherland, detailed at the beginning of this chapter, shows how mishandled the process was. The culprits in that particular case were the Casualty Branches of the War Office and the Admiralty, but also to some degree the Government, which supported the policy that it was too expensive and time-consuming to keep the thousands of affected relatives up to date with what was going on in the German programme.

A similar case to Monica Sutherland's appeared on *The Times* 'Letters' page in July 1947. Once again it related to a grave in Germany. It was written by Alfred J Angel, whose bomber pilot son had previously been buried on Baltrum in the German Frisian islands. Although Mr Angel did not say so in his letter, he was writing very close to the fourth anniversary of the death of his son, Alexander, who had been

⁷¹ TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, appendices for May, Appendix J5, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Burials Policy', memorandum, 14 May 1945. Major L G Warrington (killed 20 November 1944) is commemorated on the Groesbeek Memorial and Lieutenant D Brooke (killed 9 June 1944) on the Bayeux Memorial.

killed on 12 July 1942.⁷² Mr Angel had managed to visit Baltrum in September 1946, ‘thanks to the great kindness of the local British military chief’, but the graves, although registered in the local records, were unmarked in the cemetery. Three months before writing the letter to *The Times*, he had learned ‘from private sources’ that all the bodies of Allied servicemen had been removed from the islands to a mainland cemetery in north Germany.

No one in authority had yet taken the trouble to notify us of the removal; no one has told us where our son has been re-buried, and it seems nobody, except us, cares.

On 10 July 1947, Major General R Edgeworth-Johnstone, Director of Public Relations at the War Office, used *The Times* to reply to Mr Angel:

The anxiety of relatives is fully appreciated, but the task must be worked to a plan and it is inevitable that some must wait longer than others. As concentrations from a particular area are completed so next of kin are informed. Such notifications cannot be sent piecemeal since accuracy over the number of the lot and the grave is of the first importance [...]

Finally, it is desired to reassure those who feel that “nobody cares”. Units carrying out these sad tasks have set themselves a high standard, and those who have seen them at work would testify to the devotion and respect with which they carry it out and to their pride in “their own” cemeteries.

⁷² Alfred J Angel, Letters to the Editor, *The Times*, 7 July 1947. For the date of his son’s death, see page for Pilot Officer Alexander Alfred Angel, Commonwealth War Graves Commission website (last accessed 06/01/2015): <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2073517/ANGEL,%20ALEXANDER%20ALFRED>

There were a number of exchanges in the House of Commons about the inadequacy of information given to relatives whose loved one was buried in Germany. In November 1948, for example, a series of tough questions on various aspects of the programme in Germany were fired at the Secretary of State for War, Emmanuel Shinwell. Amongst those speaking was Sir Allan Noble, who asked Shinwell why information that graves in Germany were to be moved was not immediately given to next-of-kin to avoid the disappointment of visiting the old site in vain. The following exchange then took place:

Mr Shinwell: It has been the policy that all graves of Service personnel in Germany should be concentrated into military cemeteries. Owing to the numbers involved, it would have been quite impracticable to notify the next-of-kin of the date of removal and they have been informed only after the remains have been reburied in their final resting place in a military cemetery. [...]

Commander Noble: Will the Minister give an assurance that this notice or warning, is given as soon as possible? He will no doubt appreciate the distress of people going to visit an old site.

Mr Shinwell: I am fully aware of the difficulties and the feelings of those concerned, and I will do everything I possibly can to alleviate their suffering.

Mr Walter Fletcher: Will the Minister say why it is impracticable? Just to state that it is impracticable is not very satisfactory. Can he give any reasons why it cannot be done?

Mr Shinwell: Unfortunately, in these matters arrangements have to be made to disinter bodies. A great deal of difficulty arises from that — I must

leave some of these matters to the imagination of hon. Members — and we prefer to deal with the matter as we propose.⁷³

The subject of the impracticability of informing relatives was immediately dropped, as if no one wished to press the matter further now that the disinterment of bodies had been mentioned.⁷⁴

As was seen earlier in the chapter, policy on war graves in Germany was decided at Cabinet level, and it was not until four months after the war's end that the definitive policy was confirmed. The delay impacted upon the work of the Graves Service, because it was only once the decision had been made that it was possible to decide how many cemeteries would be created in Germany and where they would be sited. No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, the main unit at Bayeux whose work was described in Chapter Two, left France on 29 November 1945 for Isselhorst in Germany. However, once there it found itself marking time. No concentrations were carried out in December because of delays in selecting the new cemetery sites.⁷⁵ It was the same in January of the following year, no work being done except for the exhumation of seven 'Special Cases'. The following months were also very slow, and this is reflected in the very brief nature of the entries in the War Diary. Temporary cemeteries were made as necessary, and one section of the unit was sent to assist with the development of Rheinberg British Cemetery. However, it was not until June that the War Diary noted, seemingly with relief: 'This month has seen real progress made in carrying out a long-delayed concentration programme.' By now

⁷³ Hansard, War Graves, HC Deb 02 November 1948 vol 457. Hansard online (last accessed 04/03/15): http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1948/nov/02/war-graves#S5CV0457P0_19481102_HOC_74

⁷⁴ It is not known why the subject was dropped so quickly, but it seems likely that it related to acute British reticence about openly discussing death and the care of bodies. See Conclusion: Breaking the Silence.

⁷⁵ TNA, WO 171/10994, ADGR&E, No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, War Diary, January-December 1945, entry for December 1945.

responsibility for the work at Rheinberg British Cemetery had devolved upon No. 2 Cemetery Construction and Maintenance Unit, and this left No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit to concentrate on its core duties.⁷⁶

There was a further reason for the delays in beginning work in Germany and that was the shortage of suitable vehicles. The dire nature of the situation with regards to transport was summarised by Stott on 19 January 1946:

This Branch is allotted one Staff Car [...] The fresh car, sent down from Herford on 1st Jan 46, has so far made only one long journey, the rest of the time it has been in workshops.

There are six Staff Officers and two Liaison Officers at this Branch, and three cars at least are necessary in order that the numerous liaison visits may be made, apart from my own visits and tours. The "country" to be covered extends from MARSEILLES to COPENHAGEN, and through GERMANY to WARSAW. [...]

Units outside Germany have for months had to operate with at least 50% of Unit Transport off the road undergoing repairs. At one time 60% of all Unit Transport in France, Belgium and Holland was off the road. This was not due to bad maintenance but that the vehicles are just worn out and replacements are extremely hard to obtain.⁷⁷

The manpower situation was almost as bad, with the existing graves units being ten officers short. Most of the new officers being posted were due for demobilisation shortly after arrival and 'in some cases they are released even before the Posting

⁷⁶ TNA, 171/8349, ADGR&E, No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, War Diary, January-June 1946, entries for these months.

⁷⁷ TNA, 171/8653, BAOR HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January to June 1946, appendices for January, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'The BAOR Graves Service: Position as on 19 January 46', memorandum, 19 January 1946.

Order is carried out'.⁷⁸ Stott wrote that the officers who he had been able to retain were being trained in Graves Service duties:

but [...] in the absence of vehicles, Stores, etc, such training is confined to the reading and discussion of Standing Orders and GROs, and I am consequently not happy about the present circumstances of a number of young Officers having but little to do.⁷⁹

The reason for describing in some detail the delays in the commencement of work in Germany is that there was another frequently voiced criticism of the programme for the dead, and that was that it was all taking far too long. It is the only criticism which can fairly be associated with the proficiency of the Graves Service. However, as has been seen above (and, indeed, in the earlier chapters on the Army's work), the delays in the progress of the work were beyond the Graves Service's control.

Public criticism of the perceived tardiness of the graves work appears to have started in 1946. A *Times* Special Correspondent who visited the Arnhem cemetery in May of that year observed that the progress of British work was slow in comparison to that of the Canadians and Americans, and that the main reason for the delay was intense British cautiousness. It is one of the very rare instances when the opinions of the Graves Service units were reported in the Press:⁸⁰

⁷⁸ A telegram from the War Office dated 19 May 1945 speaks of the 'large percentage of GR Service Officers in High Priority Release Groups'. TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, appendices for May, Appendix H1, War Office telegram, 19 May 1945.

⁷⁹ TNA, 171/8653, BAOR HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January to June 1946, appendices for January, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'The BAOR Graves Service: Position as on 19 January 46', memorandum, 19 January 1946.

⁸⁰ In the partnership of the Directorate and the Commission, it was the Commission which was the public face of the burial and commemorative work, and it was the Commission's comments upon the work which appeared in the press or on the radio, such as in the annual Armistice broadcasts. It was rare indeed for the Graves Service in North-West Europe to comment directly.

The British war graves units are adamant in refusing the use of unofficial information of any sort on the ground that the work of investigation, registration and reburial has shown many cases of mistaken identity; accordingly they feel it unfair to inform next-of-kin of the location of a grave until the facts have been definitely established.

The Special Correspondent did not comment upon the graves units' explanation, which was an extremely valid one given the very considerable difficulties of the work. Perhaps, though, the reporter's comparison with the Canadian and American rate of progress was commentary enough. He noted that in contrast to the American cemetery at Molenhoek, 'a place of very great beauty in the soft Dutch sunlight', the British cemetery at Arnhem was:

still rather a bleak place, with rows of rectangular sandy graves and steel crosses lying under the shelter of a huge windbreak of tall elms, but the graves themselves are gay with daffodils – tended either by private persons or by the schoolchildren of Arnhem, who still play in the streets wearing the red berets [of the British airborne soldiers] which they picked up on the battlefield.⁸¹

The steel crosses were the temporary grave markers which would eventually, when the cemetery was completed, be replaced by permanent Commission headstones; this was one of the main reasons why the cemetery looked so unfinished. However, to put the Special Correspondent's comparisons into context, the American cemetery at Molenhoek was only temporary, and the dead in it would later be moved to

⁸¹ Special Correspondent in Holland, 'War Graves in Holland: Dutch Plan for Individual Care by Volunteers', *The Times*, 8 May 1946.

Margraten, the only permanent American burial site in Holland.⁸² Burials at Margraten would not be completed until the end of 1949, over a year after the Grave Service had completed its work in North-West Europe.⁸³ As regards the Canadian cemetery, the reporter does not give a name. There would be only three permanent Canadian cemeteries in the Netherlands — Bergen-Op-Zoom, Holten, and Groesbeek; they contain just over 5,000 graves, marginally over a third of the number of graves in the 453 British burial places in the Netherlands.⁸⁴

In April 1947, almost one year after *The Times* article mentioned above, the newspaper once again commented on the delays in the British programme, but drew no comparisons to the work of other countries; instead it used the First World War as the contrast. The reasons which it cited for the delays were the huge number of casualties involved and how different the pattern of loss had been to the First World War:

Theatres of operations were more widespread; graves in remote regions of desert and jungle have to be found and identified; and air crews have been shot down far from the field of the big battles.⁸⁵

This explanation does not appear to have been much attended to by *Times* readers. Only three months later, Mr Angel wrote the letter to the newspaper about his son, cited above, and in it criticised the slow rate of progress compared to the First World

⁸² Edward Steere and Thayer M Boardman, *Final Disposition of World War II Dead 1945-51*, US Army, Quartermaster Corps, QMC Historical Studies, Series II, No. 4 (Washington, D.C.: Historical Branch Office of the Quartermaster General, 1957), p.315.

⁸³ *Ibid*, pp.321-323.

⁸⁴ As was seen in Chapter One, some of the Canadian cemeteries contained British dead, and vice-versa. Figures for casualties in the Netherlands - search on Bergen-Op-Zoom, Holten, and Groesbeek war cemeteries, Commonwealth War Graves Commission website (last accessed 12/1/2016): <http://www.cwgc.org/>

⁸⁵ Leading article, 'Graves of the Fallen', *The Times*, 22 April 1947.

War. The letter contrasted the current programme to “those “silent cities”” which dotted the fields of France and Belgium after 1918 when casualties had been considerably heavier. Mr Angel does not seem to have been aware that the problems of concentrating the graves in Germany, including his own son’s, had no parallel in the First World War. This was firstly because there had been no long-range air war, and secondly because Germany did not become a battleground which was ferociously contested for several months before surrender. The entirely different scale of the problem in Germany for the First and Second World Wars can be established by the simplest means — looking at the numbers of men buried there. These were 3,137 for the earlier war, in two cemeteries (Hamburg and Cologne), and 25,301 for the later war, in 12 major burial sites and 14 sites with less than 7 graves, 8 of which are single graves only.⁸⁶

In replying to Mr Angel’s letter, Edgeworth-Johnstone, Director of Public Relations at the War Office, repeated the same explanation that *The Times* had given in April of that year — that compared to First World War, there were greater difficulties to overcome:

the fighting was far more widespread and the great extension of aerial warfare has required a meticulous search over vast areas and rendered identification more difficult.⁸⁷

A similar explanation was given by Sir Fabian Ware in a radio broadcast on Remembrance Sunday that November. He spoke of the ‘magnitude of the task’ and

⁸⁶ Figures from Commonwealth War Graves Commission website (last accessed: 08/12/15): <http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery.aspx>. The figures for the Durnbach Cremation Memorial, commemorating 23 Indian servicemen who died whilst prisoners of war and were cremated in accordance with their religion, have not been included.

⁸⁷ Major General R Edgeworth-Johnstone, Director of Public Relations at the War Office, Letters to the Editor, *The Times*, 10 July 1947.

explained that 'there is hardly a country on earth where our sailors, soldiers, and airmen do not rest'.

Bear with us, then, if in your sorrow you feel that the cemetery where he whom you love lies ought to have been brought to a more perfect state that it has yet reached. Remember that the work of the Army Graves Service and the Missing Research Service of the Air Force is a task of immense complexity, and that it has not yet been fully completed, yet it must precede the handing over of all the cemeteries to the Commission's care.⁸⁸

In his letter, Mr Angel was mirroring the very high expectations of the public which had been set by the First World War work of the Directorate and the Commission. Unfortunately, there was a tendency to romanticise that earlier programme through forgetfulness, or ignorance, of the true facts of the matter. The first element which appears to have been forgotten is just how long the work for the earlier war took (this, it has to be remembered, was the work of the Commission, because the Directorate's graves work ended in 1921). The colossal programme of public works cost over £8 million pounds, and an undertaking of that size could not be completed quickly; by 1937, Ware was recording that in Belgium and France alone there were nearly 1,000 architecturally constructed cemeteries, and 600,000 headstones.⁸⁹ The largest of the Commission's memorials in Europe, the Memorial to the Missing of the Somme at Thiepval, was not inaugurated until 1 August 1932, 16 years after the first day of the Battle of the Somme on 1 July 1916.⁹⁰ The Canadian memorial at Vimy was not unveiled until July 1936, eighteen years after the war had ended.⁹¹ By this

⁸⁸ 'Scattered War Graves, Sir F Ware on Magnitude of the Task', *The Times*, 10 November 1947.

⁸⁹ Gibson and Kingsley Ward, *Courage Remembered*, pp.55-56.

⁹⁰ Stamp, *The Memorial to the Missing of the Somme*, p.147.

⁹¹ Page for the Vimy Memorial, Commonwealth War Graves Commission website (last accessed 2/9/15):

measurement, the memorials for the missing of the Second World War were unveiled remarkably quickly, the two which are most relevant to this study – Runnymede and Bayeux – being unveiled in 1953 and 1955 respectively. These memorials, of course, could not have been completed without a full set of the names of the missing first being provided by the Services.

The second element which seems to have been forgotten, or had never been clearly appreciated in the first place, is the substantial differences between the two world wars, only some of which were outlined by *The Times*, Major General Edgeworth-Johnstone, or Sir Fabian Ware, as quoted above. None of the three mentioned, for example, the very different — and very difficult — situation in Germany. Additionally, the vast majority of First World War deaths, which had taken place in France and Belgium, had occurred in a highly concentrated area. As warfare had been static except for the beginning and end of the war, burial work had been carried out at the cemeteries behind the line even whilst the war had been in progress, the bodies being carried back by road or light railway.⁹² This type of early internment was not possible for many of the dead of the Second World War due to the fast-moving, wide-ranging nature of military operations.⁹³ There would be many more isolated graves which required moving to central cemeteries than there had been after the First World War.⁹⁴ A further immense difference between the two wars

<http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/87900/VIMY%20MEMORIAL>

⁹² A small booklet, anonymously published but generally thought to be the work of Ware, appeared in 1916 and one passage therein described this process: 'The Army has been quick to realise the desirability of burying its dead in the nearest of the 300 or more recognised cemeteries behind the line. The bodies are carried back by road or light railway to one of the little wooden, iron, or canvas mortuaries which the Graves Registration Units have set up in the cemeteries.' Anon, *The Care of the Dead* (Eyre and Spottiswoode, London, 1916), p.11.

⁹³ See, for example, Colonel Fraser's report which mentions the large number of isolated graves in Normandy. TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Appendix D, Tour of Inspection, Colonel S Fraser, 23 October 1944.

⁹⁴ Gibson and Kingsley Ward, *Courage Remembered*, p.60

was the four year gap from June 1940 until June 1944, in which the British dead in the occupied countries lay beyond reach. This not only included soldiers lost in the Norway and French campaigns of 1940, but also the many thousands of RAF airmen who had buried since September 1939 by the Germans, often in a very offhand manner. Moreover, it would be another year before all RAF graves in Germany became accessible, meaning that those who had been killed the earliest had been lost for close on six years.

Lastly, what the public does not appear to have realised is how inefficient some of the procedures had been after the First World War. As the Directorate was closed in 1921, only three years were spent on searching for lost graves and identifying 'unknowns', as opposed to some seven years for the following war if the RAF search is taken as the measurement. The First World War had brought very specific problems in finding and identifying the dead, two of the most significant being the late beginnings of the official grave registration programme and the long period of trench warfare in which high explosives often obliterated or deeply buried human remains. Nonetheless, the search for the missing does appear to have been somewhat perfunctory. Peter Hodgkinson's article, 'Clearing the Dead', contains evidence which, when juxtaposed with the Second World War documents which are used in this study, indicates that the search for the bodies and the work of identification was not carried out with any degree of thoroughness but was a very incomplete job. Hodgkinson calls the decision to end the official Army search for the dead in 1921 'arbitrary', and some of the recovery and identification work which he describes was certainly carried out in a very sloppy and ad hoc manner. The indisputable proof of this was that bodies continued to be discovered in large numbers for years afterwards. Hodgkinson gives the following figures: '28,036

bodies were found between 1921 and 1928 (with 25% identification), and approximately a further 10,000 up to 1937'.⁹⁵

Given the above factors, it is obvious that the work of the Second World War was not only far more complex but was carried out to a better standard. Yet many bereaved relatives, not being in possession of all the facts and forgetting the details of the earlier programme, felt that the Second World War programme was not of the same high standard as the First.

It is worth noting vis-à-vis complaints about the slowness of the programme that the Graves Service in North-West Europe did achieve the target date of the end of 1948, although sadly Stott was not present to see this accomplished.⁹⁶ Stott had planned for this date from 1 June 1945, when he put forward a proposal for the size of establishment needed to 'complete the task of location, registration and concentration of present-war graves in about three years'.⁹⁷ Almost two years later, in March 1947, he evidently felt that things were still on target:

It is the hope and aim to finish the task by the end of 1948. Over 90% of 21AGp casualties in the Liberated Countries have now been concentrated to British Cemeteries.⁹⁸

The work in Germany, with its huge complexities, took up much of the effort of the last year, and by the end of June 1948, the Western Europe Graves Service

⁹⁵ Peter E Hodgkinson, 'Clearing the Dead', University of Birmingham, Online Journal of the Centre for First World War Studies, Issue 6 (last accessed 12/05/2014): http://www.js-ww1.bham.ac.uk/articles/issue6_hodgkinson.pdf, pp.9-11.

⁹⁶ Stott had fallen seriously ill and been evacuated to England in November 1947, see Chapter One.

⁹⁷ TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, entry for 1 June 1945 and Appendix J2 for that month.

⁹⁸ Minutes of Conference held at HQ, GR&E Directorate, Western Europe, on 10 March 1947, Quarterly Historical Report of the Western Europe Graves Service HQ, for quarter ending 31 March 1947, NA WO 267/605.

Directorate had handled 67,020 burials.⁹⁹ It closed down that September.¹⁰⁰ The RAF continued its work for another three years, albeit with a steadily reducing establishment which, by 1951, only consisted of two men, one in Berlin and the other working as a Liaison Officer with the Americans at Liège and the Imperial War Graves Commission at Arras.¹⁰¹

It is worth noting that even in America, where such a vast amount of money and effort was dedicated to the care of the dead, there was widespread dissatisfaction. The Steere and Boardman report speaks, for example, of the violent public reaction against the secrecy which had surrounded military affairs during the war; once victory had been achieved, 'a storm of resentment burst upon the "Top Brass"' and 'the so-called "Caste System"' of the officer corps. The intense degree of suspicion about what the Government and the military had been doing extended to the care of the dead programme and the work of the American Graves Registration Service. The AGRS found itself working under the closest public scrutiny and in a close to unwinnable situation where, regardless of the colossal amount of paperwork involved, a single error could be construed 'as conclusive evidence of ineptitude and indifference in the discharge of a sacred trust'.¹⁰² However diligent the AGRS was, it was impossible for there to be no mistakes. Sometimes, as has been seen, these were picked up by the British, which serves as a valuable reminder that the Americans were not perfect and that the British could at times excel them.

⁹⁹ 'Amendment List No. 6', Quarterly Historical Report of Western Europe HQ, GR&E Directorate, for quarter ending 30 June 1948, NA WO 267/610.

¹⁰⁰ TNA, WO 267/610, BAOR HQ, Western Europe Graves Service Directorate, Quarterly Historical Report, quarter ending 30 June 1948, 'KITE No. 3186', Appendix, 6 September 1948.

¹⁰¹ TNA, AIR2/9910, Air Ministry Casualty Branch, illegible signature (possibly K C Stole), 'Missing Research Activities, October to December 1950', report, 3 January 1951.

¹⁰² Steere and Boardman, *Final Disposition of World War II Dead*, p.58.

The last part of this chapter concerns the huge contribution made by the Graves Service to the sites of the national commemorative programme in North-West Europe. The very great care taken in choosing locations and in plotting out the best layouts for the cemeteries was essential to what would become, in time, the matured beauty of these burial places.

In the partnership with the Commission, it was the Army which was the dominant force. Stott's definition of the demarcation lines between the Army and the Commission, previously quoted in the introduction, is well worth repeating here because it shows so clearly that the Commission inherited the Army's work, it did not dictate it:

It is the responsibility of the Army to bury the dead and to make such cemeteries as it may find necessary. The Commission will take over these cemeteries as found, and make the best proposition of them architecturally and horticulturally.¹⁰³

It is always clear in the military paperwork that the Army intended to maintain this division, and that the War Office did not want the Commission to interfere too early. For instance, in one of Stott's memoranda, dated 12 February 1945, he noted 'War Office (A.G.13) are anxious that activities of I.W.G.C. officials continue to be confined only to areas where operations have ceased'.¹⁰⁴

A more detailed and striking example of how the Army intended to remain in charge can be seen in the documentation surrounding the visit, in late 1944, of the Commission's Principal Architect and Deputy Director of Works to the new British

¹⁰³ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Visit of Principal Architect and DDW of the Imperial War Graves Commission (approx. 1-14 Dec 44)', memorandum, 2 December 1944.

¹⁰⁴ TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, appendices for February, Appendix J2, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'I.W.G.C.', memorandum, 12 February 1945.

and Canadian cemeteries in Normandy. This was a very important visit because it was the first time that the Commission would be directly involved in the Second World War cemeteries in North-West Europe which the Graves Service had been developing for six months. The prior arrangements for the visit shed an interesting light upon the degree to which Stott limited the Commission's advisory role. The responsibility for looking after the visitors was allocated to No. 32 Graves Registration Unit, Stott's instructions being that the unit was to give all possible help to the visitors so long as it did not interfere with the normal course of its duties. The visitors were to be taken onto the ration strength of the unit, their car was to be garaged, and their driver accommodated and fed. Reports and letters were to be typed by the unit's staff, and maps supplied if necessary. It was anticipated that the visitors would 'indicate approximately how they would like development of existing cemeteries completed'. For example, at Hermanville the visitors were expected to indicate where the last 150 graves would be placed, together with the position of the entrance to the cemetery. At Bayeux, the main British cemetery, the situation was more complex; here it was thought that the visitors would indicate:

- (a) Any modifications of plots desirable only beyond the four main centre plots, these modifications being compensated for by the creation of triangular plots [...].
- (b) Any extra land it might be desirable to have included in the *Arrete*.
- (c) A position recommended for Mohammedan graves.

However, Stott also gave No. 32 Graves Registration Unit strict orders to limit the Commission's actions. In no circumstances were any Commission recommendations to reduce the grave capacity of a cemetery, to change the existing measurements of the graves, or to alter any other points not covered in the

instructions, to be implemented in any form before consultation with Stott himself.¹⁰⁵ In other words, although Stott would offer the Commission every facility, he would not give them any latitude to interfere with the work already in hand.

The Army's determination to preserve its freedom of choice was entirely logical because it was the Army which dealt with battlefield conditions and their aftermath. However, given the strictness of his instructions to No. 32 Graves Registration Unit, it seems that Stott may have anticipated that the Commission visitors would try to exceed their remit. That they did indeed try to do so on at least one occasion is suggested by a short note written by Stott that December:

DDW [Deputy Director of Works] intimated that he would have an order sent out through the Commission and the War Office [...] to the effect that all future burials be carried out on the trench system, (this to facilitate the erection of headstones after the war).

This was a highly impertinent suggestion as it meant that the Commission would effectively be going over Stott's head and communicating directly with the War Office. However, Stott pointed out the drawbacks of the trench system and apparently the matter was dropped.¹⁰⁶ Stott was a diplomatic man, able to hold his own without causing offence. Nonetheless, it is possible that he took a certain quiet satisfaction when, two weeks later, he drew the attention of the Commission visitors to 'the present circumstances and condition of IWGC Gardeners who have returned from Enemy Internment Camps and resumed work'. The Commission, it seems, was not aware of the great difficulties being experienced by its own staff. Stott recorded

¹⁰⁵ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Visit of Principal Architect and DDW of the Imperial War Graves Commission (approx. 1-14 Dec 44)', memorandum, 2 December 1944.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, but main diary, entries for 1-2 December 1944.

that he had suggested 'immediate arrangements for pay and clothing' be made for these men.¹⁰⁷

One of the most important recommendations suggested by the visitors was an enlargement to the Bayeux site. The visitors' advice was tendered, Stott noted, 'because they deemed it most suitable for the erection of two Special Memorials – one to the Invasion Dead and one to the Missing'. Stott carried through the recommendation, and later a memorial would indeed be placed there to the missing who had died in the early stages of the campaign in France.¹⁰⁸ Stott also noted in the same memorandum, written in February 1945, that although the principle remained that the Army made the cemeteries where and how it deemed necessary, the Commission 'will get a look at all cemeteries ere they are developed "beyond redemption"'.¹⁰⁹

One of the most positive aspects of the Commission's visit in December 1944 was the enthusiastic response of No. 32 Graves Registration Unit, which recorded: 'Minor adjustments suggested by representatives of IWGC for all cemeteries. Though minor they will greatly beautify the cemeteries.' Work on these improvements began the very next day, clearly having been sanctioned by Stott.¹¹⁰ This War Diary entry, and numerous other documents, reveal how much the Army wished the cemeteries to be visually attractive. A great interest was taken not only in the practical side of things

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, entry for 20 December 1944.

¹⁰⁸ Unveiled in 1955, the Bayeux memorial commemorates '1,800 men of the Commonwealth land forces who died in the early stages of the campaign and have no known grave. They died during the landings in Normandy, during the intense fighting in Normandy itself, and during the advance to the River Seine in August.' Commonwealth War Graves Commission website (last accessed 8/6/2014): <http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/2060300/BAYEUX%20MEMORIAL>

¹⁰⁹ TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, appendices for February, Appendix J2, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'I.W.G.C.', memorandum, 12 February 1945.

¹¹⁰ TNA, WO 171/3786, ADGR&E, No. 32 Graves Registration Unit, War Diary, January-December 1944, entries for 4-16 December 1944.

— such as access, a well-drained soil, and a location where no water supplies could be contaminated — but also in how the cemeteries would appear to visitors once they were completed.¹¹¹ The keen interest in aesthetics went right to the top. When Colonel Fraser, the executive head of the Directorate in London, visited Normandy in October 1944, he included in his report to his superiors a descriptive list which suggests almost a connoisseurship in cemeteries.

BAYEUX: Situated just off the new bye pass [sic] road (BOULEVARDE ANGLAIS). A very fine site on rising ground with views of the town and cathedral. Capacity up to 5,000 if necessary. Already fenced and road making in progress with local labour. Has a considerable number of direct burials and is taking concentrations from the surrounding area. [...]

LA DELIVRANDE (029812): A fine site overlooking DOUVRES and its suburb LA DELIVRANDE. Will take local concentrations including several hundred graves from a nearby temporary cemetery that cannot be retained as local authorities need the ground as building sites. Capacity 1,100 graves. Fenced.

HERMANVILLE (BEACH) (076797): A beautiful site completely surrounded by trees about 1 mile from the original landing beaches. Contains at present about 750 graves nearly all original burials and will take 1000-1200. Local concentration from the beaches is commencing. The layout will be irregular as the original graves though in orderly lines did not follow a considered plan, but that should not detract from the final beauty of the place. [...]

¹¹¹ The principles for the siting of a cemetery can be seen in detail in TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, 'Notes for Divisional Burial Officers', last sheet missing but probably written by Stott around January 1945.

TILLY SUR SEULLES (832681): A fine site with good possibilities. Concentrations have begun, and it will serve a considerable area. Capacity 1,500 graves.¹¹²

One of the cemeteries in Colonel Fraser's report which did not quite meet with his approval was Bény-sur-Mer, a Canadian cemetery. Fraser wrote that it was 'a quite nice site' but that the layout chosen had 'somewhat spoiled' it; in particular, the graves were 'all in long rows with no real divisions between plots'. He understood that the Canadians intended to move all the graves to another site (this, in fact, never happened).¹¹³ The Commission, in its December visit, were also unhappy about the Canadian style of doing things; Stott described them as being 'somewhat perturbed over grave-spaces and style of development of Canadian cemeteries'.¹¹⁴

With the occasional exception, such as Hermanville Beach which 'did not follow a considered plan', the Army followed a system in creating the cemeteries, using standard plans known as Types A to D Cemetery Layouts. Prior to D-Day Stott had sought the Commission's advice on the development of cemeteries and it appears that these were the plans which the Commission had provided, which Stott then

¹¹² The numbers in brackets are the cemetery codes but the Bayeux number is not given, probably because Bayeux was the model site. TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Appendix D, Tour of Inspection, Colonel S Fraser, 23 October 1944.

¹¹³ Ibid. For details of Bény-sur-Mer's continued existence, see Gibson and Kingsley Ward, *Courage Remembered*, p.125.

¹¹⁴ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, entries for 1-2 December 1944. Dissatisfaction with Bény-sur-Mer continued into the following year and in June 1945 led to its removal from the list of cemeteries to be handed over to the IWGC, Stott noting that 'the condition of this cemetery is far from satisfactory [...] and investigations are proceeding'. TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, entry for 12-16 June 1945.

circulated with detailed explanatory notes 'to all concerned'.¹¹⁵ The plans, however, were not binding. In Stott's memorandum about the Commission's visit, a key qualifying word was underlined, an unusual means of emphasis in Stott's paperwork:

Regarding the remaining cemeteries not yet seen by the visitors, these will be developed broadly as on the lines indicated in IWGC plans. It will be sufficient therefore if the visitors indicate briefly any outstanding exceptions which there may be to this rule.¹¹⁶

The basic principles were common to all four types of plan. The location of a site was considered very important:

The beauty and character of a cemetery depend on good natural background and the views therefrom and a careful use of the levels of the site and should be located where they can be visited after the war with reasonable ease and comfort.

Graves were to be spaced according to an exact formula which dictated their length and breadth, the space between them, and the orientation of the rows. The latter was a particularly thoughtful provision because it ensured that the inscriptions would be easy to read when the final headstones were placed by the Commission:

¹¹⁵ TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, appendices for February, Appendix J2, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'I.W.G.C.', memorandum, 12 February 1945.

¹¹⁶ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Visit of Principal Architect and DDW of the Imperial War Graves Commission (approx. 1-14 Dec 44)', memorandum, 2 December 1944.

'Headstones should face East, West or South – never North as the incised lettering is not easily legible where there is no shadow.'¹¹⁷

The influence of Lieutenant Colonel Stott in laying the groundwork for the later mature beauty of the cemeteries cannot be underestimated, given his constant attention to detail, his unremitting touring of the cemeteries, and the fact that in many cases it was he who had chosen the cemetery sites in the first place. One War Diary entry, for 20-25 March 1945, tells of Stott making a selection of sites in Germany:

ADGRE toured Second and First Cdn. [Canadian] Army Sectors, and selected cemetery sites immediately behind the West-bank of the River Rhine.

The sites selected were at Reichswald Forest, Kleve, Goch, Kalkar, Udem, Xanten, Kapellen, Issum, Sittard and Brunssum.¹¹⁸ All except the first were temporary sites, but Reichswald Forest would go on to become the most important British cemetery in Germany.

Stott also chose the site for the Arnhem-Oosterbeek cemetery, this being selected after consultation with the local Dutch authorities on 4 June 1945.¹¹⁹ On the following page are two photographs of the cemetery being developed in August 1945. The first shows two British officers walking in the cemetery grounds; it is very likely that

¹¹⁷ For Type A-C Cemetery Layout, see TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Cemeteries', 1 November 1944.

¹¹⁸ TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, entry for 20-25 March 1945 inclusive.

¹¹⁹ TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, entry for 4 June 1945.

the left-hand figure is Lieutenant Colonel Stott, on one of his habitual tours of inspection.



Arnhem-Oosterbeek Cemetery, August 1945, Gelders Archief, 1560-1847, 1560-1851.

Stott's enormous professional pride in the scrupulous manner in which the military dead were cared for can be seen in his very detailed memoranda. That it was also a matter of personal pride can be seen in what is perhaps the sole instance in his paperwork which records a matter over which Stott, a diplomatic and equable man, appears to have come close to losing his temper. The cause was an item entitled 'Burial Parties' in a publication called *Current Reports from Overseas*, which was produced under the direction of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. (This publication was confidential, and its cover was marked: 'This document must not fall into Enemy hands.') Appearing in the November 1944 issue, the piece was very short, and its author was identified only by the phrase 'From a British Source'. On 3 January 1945, Stott wrote a long memorandum to 'A' Branch about this piece, in which he defended the Army formations who were in charge of immediate burials and answered the other issues which had been raised, including a somewhat ludicrous point about dead cattle of which there had been thousands in Normandy during the summer of 1944.¹²⁰ This last, Stott answered with something very close to sarcasm: 'Formation Burial Officers do not bury, and Graves Service personnel will not register the graves of dead cattle.' The other more serious points he dealt with very briskly. It may be remembered that the Graves Service was not only dealing with the British dead but also those of the Allies and the enemy, and that the worst situation that the Army had encountered in the care of the enemy dead had been at Falaise in the summer of 1944.¹²¹ The wording which had particularly annoyed Stott in *Current Reports from Overseas* was the following:

¹²⁰ 'We were next to a cow, one of the thousands whose swollen bodies were strewn about the Normandy fields. Like all the others, its legs stuck up in a horribly girlish high kick. There was a filthy smell of decay. So outstandingly filthy that presently we moved. We moved some fifty yards, but found that it wasn't enough to get out of range of the unfortunate animal.' Gray (Ed), *This is WAR!*, p.178.

¹²¹ See Chapter One.

The speedy erection of official crosses of a really good pattern is a matter of importance. The Germans can teach us a lot in this matter, for they recognize the effect of seemly, orderly burials on the morale of their troops. A glance at any German wayside burial plot brings out this fact most vividly.¹²²

After explaining why there had been no proper official crosses in the British Liberated Areas until mid-August 1944 (due to the same problems of supply which had held up the D-Day provisions, as mentioned in Chapter One), Stott continued:

Regarding [the German system of burial], I disagree – this apart from the fact that comparisons are ever odious. “From a British Source” should have visited the FALAISE Sector in September or October and viewed the thousands of bodies which the enemy left unburied – left so long that it was impossible to identify about 85% of them, or even to count them accurately. Graves left by the enemy during his retreat through FRANCE and BELGIUM are no credit to him – registration of these graves has been most difficult.

Thus –

The present system is satisfactory.

No system will work if formations ignore Standing Orders.

“From a British Source” wrote while completely ignorant of the facts.

By writing the detailed criticism of the opinions expressed by ‘From a British Source’, Stott showed how intensely he cared about the good name of the British programme for the dead. Accomplishing a very high standard in the identification, registration,

¹²² TNA, WO 208/3111, ‘Burial Parties’, *Current Reports from Overseas*, 61 (CIGS, The War Office, 1 November 1944), pp.13-14.

and reverential burial of lost servicemen was the imperative which drove on the Graves Service, and in particular its Commanding Officer.

This chapter has seen the key importance of the Graves Service of 21 Army Group in laying the basis for the national commemorative programme in North-West Europe. It selected and developed the cemeteries, and policed the rules about who would be buried in them and what memorials would be allowed even when this contradicted the wishes of 21 Army Group soldiers. Although it reserved a large degree of independence of action, the Graves Service nonetheless carried out its duties in full mindfulness of how the burial grounds would eventually become the responsibility of the Imperial War Graves Commission. It worked within the principles established for the national programme, and always adhered strictly to the central ethos that there should be equal treatment for all the dead. In one particularly fraught case, Lieutenant Colonel Stott wrote to the War Office:

I have refrained from selecting any cases and submitting them to you for special consideration, because I feel unable to discriminate: to me all are alike.¹²³

That this was no empty boast has been proved by numerous instances given throughout this and other chapters.

The public made a number of complaints about the programme for the dead, but only one directly related to the Graves Service's performance and that was the idea that the work taking far too long. This perception was due to an over-romanticised

¹²³ TNA, WO 267/607, BAOR HQ, Western Europe Graves Service Directorate, Quarterly Historical Report, quarter ending 30 September 1947, appendices to September, Appendix K, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Repatriation – Allied Dead to their Native Countries for Re-burial', memorandum, 30 August 1947.

view of the duties carried out after the First World War, and to a large degree of public ignorance about what was actually involved in the work for the Second World War dead, particularly in Germany. The veil of silence intentionally drawn over the most harrowing aspects of the Graves Service's work meant that the public could not understand the complex and time-demanding procedures which were involved, nor the degree of dedication with which they were carried out. The continued misconceptions about the precise nature of the Army and the Commission's roles combined with the protective secrecy in which the work was enwrapped to obscure just how greatly the national commemorative programme was indebted to Lieutenant Colonel Stott and the Graves Service of 21 Army Group.

Chapter Eight – The Meaning of the British Military Dead

Germany was by far the most dangerous enemy which the British faced during the Second World War, yet so far little has been said about it in this thesis because the material has chiefly concerned what happened after a serviceman died. Germany's role in the burial of airmen and the difficulties of the post-war work in German territory have been described, but little has been said about how the nature of Nazi Germany affected the British perception of wartime loss. In this chapter, which considers the cultural meaning of the British military dead, the nation which bore the primary responsibility for the war must be included. Whether British casualties died in accidents, from illness, or by direct military action, the significance of their loss can only be realised in its proper context — the waging of this particular war against this particular enemy.

The first part of this chapter sets the meaning of the British military dead within the war background. It shows the British public's high level of knowledge about the conflict and its opinion of the Germans, an opinion which inevitably blackened after D-Day as the full extent of Nazi criminality was gradually revealed. The behaviour of the German nation not only formed a Manichean contrast to the perceived nobility of the military dead, it also affected the manner of their burial if they had lost their lives in German territory. Neither the Americans nor the Canadians would permit their soldiers to remain in such a place, as if the very soil of Germany were infected. As has been seen, the British adopted a different burial policy, but one which raised in some people a great fear about the vulnerability of the dead left in enemy ground.

The second part of the chapter looks at the British care of the German dead. As the enemy forces were pushed back towards their homeland, it became increasingly difficult for them to care for their dead properly; thus, the German dead progressively became the responsibility of the British in the territories in which they were fighting or subsequently maintaining the peace. Despite the widespread revulsion against

the German nation, strong efforts were made to treat its dead honourably, not only because this was a requirement of the Geneva Convention and the mark of a civilised power, but also because there was a clear understanding that enmity should end with death.

The very different cultural significance of the dead of both nations is briefly considered in the last part of the chapter. What is also examined are the subtle differences in the meaning of the British dead of the two World Wars. Although both wars were fought against Germany, the image of the Second World War dead is less complex and ambiguous than that for the dead of the earlier war, mainly because it was this particular 'royal fellowship' which helped achieve lasting European peace.¹

During the Second World War, the British government ran a massive public relations campaign dedicated to getting the whole population fully behind the war effort. In addition to widely displayed, beautifully designed posters, the Ministry of Information was involved in numerous publications about dozens of aspects of the war, such as *Atlantic Bridge* which detailed how RAF Transport Command ferried vital aircraft to Iceland, Newfoundland, the Americas, Africa and Egypt.² In such publications, an

¹ 'Royal fellowship of death', from *Henry V* (Act IV, Scene 8), Henry's speech after Agincourt. The phrase 'A royal fellowship of death' had been closely associated with the memorialising of the military dead since the First World War. In particular, it was highlighted by the 1925 unveiling of Charles Sargeant Jagger's masterpiece (see later in this chapter), the memorial to the Royal Artillery at Hyde Park Corner, which carries this inscription. Almost unbelievably vast crowds came to watch the ceremony — see the British Pathé film 'A Royal Fellowship of Death' made in 1925 (last accessed 6/11/15):

<http://www.britishpathe.com/video/a-royal-fellowship-of-death/query/a+royal+fellowship>

The phrase 'A royal fellowship of death' would also have carried immense resonance with the audience for the 1944 film version of *Henry V* starring Laurence Olivier.

² *Atlantic Bridge: The Official Account of RAF Transport Command's Ocean Ferry*, prepared for the Air Ministry by the Ministry of Information (HMSO, London, 1945).

exciting text was complemented by clearly designed maps and superbly evocative photographic images. Meanwhile, BBC radio broadcasts covered numerous aspects of the war. The Forces programmes, such as 'Sincerely Yours, Vera Lynn', 'Hi Gang', and 'Your Cup of Tea', brought a family-like feeling of involvement, whilst dramatic first-hand reportage of various battles, such as Chester Wilmot's on D-Day and Stanley Maxted's from Arnhem, vividly stirred people's imagination.³

In the private sector, the book industry, despite having to compete with the Ministry of Information for the severely rationed paper supply, managed to produce many titles which satisfied the voracious appetite of the British public for information or stories about the war, whilst the national newspapers, journals, and photographic magazines such as *Picture Post* and *The War Illustrated* also played a vital part.⁴ The cinemas were of immense importance, not only in the broadcasting of newsreels but in showing war-related films such as the fictional *In Which We Serve* (1942) and the very popular documentary *Desert Victory* (1943). Whilst it is difficult to quantify how influential the films were, the fact that over 30 million people were attending the cinema every week by the end of the war indicates the immense popularity of the medium.⁵ The cinema was vitally important because so many other sorts of

³ For a selection of Forces programmes and first-hand battle reportage, including Chester Wilmot's on D-Day and Stanley Maxted's from Arnhem, see *British War Broadcasting, 1938-1945*, Compact Disk CD41-004 (England, 2002).

⁴ The difficulties of the book trade, which had to compete with HMSO for the scarce paper supplies and was thus subject to subtle forms of censorship, are clearly described in Valerie Holman, *Print for Victory: Book Publishing in England 1939-1945* (The British Library, London, 2008). With regards to the public's voracious appetite for information about the war, one of the best-selling books in the publishing industry in the early part of the war was Anthony Cotterell's *What! No Morning Tea?* (Victor Gollancz, London, 1941); it answered a huge need to know what it was like to be a new conscript in the Army.

⁵ Robert Mackay, *Half the Battle: Civilian Morale in Britain During the Second World War* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2002), p.180.

amusement were either banned or severely limited, and it provided 'an easy, convenient and vital form of relaxation', not to mention essential information.⁶

With these multiple sources of text, image, sound, and commentary, the public were very well informed about the global picture and the progress and fate of 'our boys'. They were also highly conscious of the people of other nations who had sought refuge in Britain, exiled monarchies such as Queen Beatrice of the Netherlands and King Haakon of Norway and their governments. Booklets were produced with dramatic photographs which emphasised the involvement of other nations in the common cause, such as *Before We Go Back: Norway's Fight Since April, 1940*.⁷ First-hand accounts by exiles from the occupied countries were published in Britain, telling how their homelands had been brutally seized, such as L de Jong's *Holland Fights the Nazis* and Elie J Bois' *Truth on the Tragedy of France*.⁸ In addition, the stationing of Canadians, Australians, and other British Empire nationalities in Britain, together with vast contingents of Americans, emphasised the sense that the British were at the centre of the fight against the Germans.

Public awareness of the military and political situation was so mainstream that it sometimes appeared in commercial advertisements, occasionally to rather comical effect. On 28 January 1944, the *Daily Express* carried an advertisement for Crawford biscuits. It showed a young woman, apparently a wife, with the caption:

MY PEACE TERMS – A new type of government for Germany ... A fresh set of chair covers ... and back to fresh butter, cream cheese and Crawford's Cream Crackers.

⁶ Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards, *Britain Can Take It: British Cinema in the Second World War* (I B Tauris, London, 2007), p.3.

⁷ *Before We Go Back: Norway's Fight Since April, 1940* (HMSO on behalf of the Royal Norwegian Government Information Office, London, 1944).

⁸ L de Jong, *Holland Fights the Nazis* (The Right Book Club, London, 1941); Elie J Bois, *Truth on the Tragedy of France* (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1940).

A similar, but intensified, awareness of the international issues could be found amongst the British living overseas. In January 1945, Rachel Fourmaintraux, an Englishwoman married to a Frenchman, who had lived through the German occupation of France, wrote to a close friend in England about what the Germans had done to her adopted country: 'It's no good my saying "I can't speak of it, you must use your imagination" — because nothing you could possibly imagine could come up to the appalling reality.' The way in which Rachel Fourmaintraux's letters mixed immense international problems with small domestic ones shows how central the wider issues were to ordinary people's thinking:

What a problem is the future of Germany. Are these fiends in human form to be allowed to go home and have children to bring up with their own mentality? Anyhow, Churchill and Roosevelt know all about it. Don't worry about us — we have potatoes so shan't starve and a little coal enough to last us a month so hope the present deep snow and arctic cold will have moderated by then.⁹

The public's interest in international affairs continued after the war, and was reflected in the substantial newspaper coverage. For example, the front page of *The Times* on 20 June 1945 carried articles not only on the progress of the war in Japan and on the upcoming British election but also a wide sweep of international matters: the Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King losing his seat in the Federal election; King Haakon of Norway inviting Hr Gerhardsen, the Mayor of Oslo and Chairman of the Norwegian Labour Party, to form a government; King Leopold of Belgium and his struggles to hold his crown after his highly controversial conduct during the war; President Truman's succession to the White House; the formation of an Italian government; and the trial of 16 Poles for sabotage in Moscow.

⁹ Mack family archives, Rachel Fourmaintraux to Dorothy Day, letter, 4 January 1945.

The Second World War, in national mythology, placed Britain at the very centre of the universe, this idea being reinforced by the many nationalities that had lived in Britain during the war. In the early years of the peace, the sheer dreariness and shabbiness of life in a war-damaged and deeply impoverished Britain meant that, for some people, a retrospective golden glow was projected back over the war years. David Kynaston's *Austerity Britain* describes a drab and difficult period where people struggled with continued rationing, inadequate housing stock, and, for some, a pervasive sense of anti-climax. When Kynaston writes that 'the prosaic realities of peace frequently came to seem less attractive than the relative glamour [...] of war', he is writing about ex-servicemen, but it could equally have applied to other sections of the population.¹⁰ This retrospective glamour enhanced the story of Britain's finest hour and the glorious memory of those who had died to defend the free world.

The very high regard in which the British dead were held in the liberated countries also contributed to their illustrious memory and the pride which their fellow countrymen felt in them. This was perhaps most markedly true of the Netherlands, which formed a very strong relationship with the British dead during and after the battle of Arnhem. In a BBC broadcast made on 27 September 1944 by Johan Fabricius, a Dutch writer who had taken refuge in England, he said of the British soldiers fighting in OPERATION MARKET GARDEN:

Some of these brave young men will stay behind in our country for ever. They will not rest on cold foreign soil. The soil of Holland, which, in the course of our long and glorious history, received so many heroes for their eternal sleep, will proudly guard your dead as if they were the deeply mourned sons of our own people.¹¹

¹⁰ David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain, 1945-51* (Bloomsbury, London, 2007), p.97.

¹¹ 'A Tribute from the People of Holland', Johan Fabricius, BBC Home Service broadcast, 27 September 1944, reported in *WAR*, issue 83 (ABCA, The War Office, 9 December 1944).

After the war, the British dead came to symbolise not only liberating heroes but also all the Dutch who had been lost in the war. In May 1946, a *Times* Special Correspondent reported from Holland on the plan for every war grave to be adopted:

A middle-aged woman of placid resolution had had her husband and a son deported to Germany. They had never come back. 'I don't know where they are buried', she said; 'I can't look after their graves, but if I look after one of the English graves it will seem like theirs as well.'¹²

Some eighteen months later, the newspaper recorded that 'on one day recently [...], over 30,000 Dutch people visited the graves of the fallen of Arnhem'.¹³

Letters continued to appear in British newspapers for several years after the war which described what dedicated care was still being tendered to British war graves in all the liberated countries. One of the most striking of these letters appeared in *The Times* on October 1950, and concerned a mining village called Meurchin in Pas de Calais. A single British grave was in the churchyard there, and every week since the war fresh flowers had been placed on it by 'a working woman, mother of seven children, who does not remember the buried officer individually, but remembers the mess to which he belonged'.¹⁴ Such stories acted as a moving affirmation of the many noble sacrifices which had been made.

¹² Special Correspondent in Holland, 'War Graves in Holland: Dutch Plan for Individual Care by Volunteers', *The Times*, 8 May 1946.

¹³ The author added: 'On occasions it is alleged that graves are cared for by those whose real interest is in the reward of cigarettes and food sent from England, but one has only to mark the many graves of the unknown that have been adopted to see without a doubt that this cynical charge applies only to a few isolated instances.' Special Correspondent, 'The Dead of the Empire: Work of Army and Imperial War Graves Commission: Ideals and Achievement', *The Times*, 11 November 1947.

¹⁴ C W Hume, Letters to the Editor, *The Times*, 26 October 1950. Because there is only one Commission grave at Meurchin, the grave upon which the flowers were placed must be that of Alfred Jack Baines, killed in May 1940. The fact that flowers were still being placed on his grave more than

During the war, Robert Gilbert Vansittart, a diplomatic advisor to the Government who sat in the House of Lords, became famous for his strongly argued proposition that the German race was innately evil. In 1940 he gave seven radio broadcasts which were so popular and controversial that they were turned into a booklet, *Black Record: Germans Past and Present*. It appeared in January 1941 and by December of that same year had sold 400,000 copies.¹⁵ Vansittart followed it up in 1943 with *Lessons of My Life*, which was mostly devoted to the German nation's maleficent propensities.¹⁶ Vansittart had no shortage of believers. In simple terms his argument ran that: Germany was a highly aggressive militaristic culture which had attacked its European neighbours three times in 75 years; all Germans were responsible for the latest war; Germans could not be trusted to think straight because they were so brainwashed by their culture; the Nazi ideology must be utterly obliterated; however, this on its own was not enough – the Germany character must be completely remade. Even those who did not entirely subscribe to Vansittart's theories believed that a crusade against Nazism was also a crusade against German militarism and aggression, which must be put a stop to once and for all.

The British view of Germany became increasingly harsh during the last year of the war because of what seemed the pointless prolonging of a conflict which could only end in defeat but which was still costing thousands of British lives. The V1 and V2 rockets, which from 12 June 1944 began falling upon London and the Home

ten years after his death shows that the memory of the British forces in France continued to be greatly cherished. Commonwealth War Graves Commission website, page for Alfred Jack Baines (last accessed 14/06/2015):

<http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2280198/BAINES,%20ALFRED%20JACK>

¹⁵ Details of the sales figures for *Black Record* are given in the Library Edition of December 1941. Lord Vansittart, *Black Record: Germans Past and Present* (Hamish Hamilton, London, 1941).

¹⁶ Lord Vansittart, *Lessons of My Life* (Hutchinson, London, 1943).

Counties, causing multiple casualties and destroying homes, also led to a hardening of attitudes.¹⁷ However, it was the liberation of the concentration camps as the Allied Forces advanced across Europe that really confirmed the blackest view of the German race.¹⁸ For the BBC, Edward Murrow reported upon Buchenwald on 15 April 1945, and Richard Dimbleby upon Belsen on 19 April; both broadcasts were deeply shocking.¹⁹ The *Daily Express*, then one of Britain's most influential newspapers, opened two exhibitions in London on 1 May, the first in Trafalgar Square called 'Seeing is believing', and a second and more comprehensive one in the paper's reading room in Regent Street. The appalled visitors were interviewed on the way out of these exhibitions; one person commented 'I feel we ought to shoot every German. There's not a good one amongst them.'²⁰ Meanwhile, the troops were also given their own education into what had been happening. Chris Barker, a soldier then stationed in Italy, wrote to his love, Bessie Moore:

Thanks for the news of the *Express* Exhibition of the concentrations camps. The photos we have had reproduced out here have been pretty horrible, and aroused bad feelings in some of the chaps.²¹

¹⁷ H E Bates, *Flying Bombs Over England* (Froglets Publications, Westerham, 1994), p.11.

¹⁸ See, for example, Ben Shephard, *After Daybreak: The Liberation of Belsen, 1945* (Jonathan Cape, London, 2005).

¹⁹ For a transcript of Ed Murrow's report, see Media Resource Centre, UC Berkeley (last accessed 12/11/15):

<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/murrowbuchenwaldtranscript.html>. For the original sound recording of Richard Dimbleby, see BBC archives (last accessed 12/11/15): <http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/holocaust/5115.shtml>

²⁰ Maureen Waller, *London 1945: Life in the Debris of War* (John Murray, London, 2004).

²¹ Simon Garfield (Ed), *My Dear Bessie, A Love Story in Letters, Chris Barker and Bessie Moore* (Canongate, London, 2015), p.201.

Captain Robert Barer, who was attached to the Guards Armoured Division, was the first Medical Officer to enter the typhus-infected concentration camp at Sandbostel in April 1945. Very soon after the liberation of the camp, he wrote a report, sparing none of the hideous details and concluding:

I cannot help feeling that unless every single German gets a true picture of what has happened in Nazi Germany this war will have been fought in vain.

Finally, there is the problem of the SS and the Gestapo. I think there is only one solution – complete extermination. [...] Anyone who can stand by and watch human beings treated as they were at Sandbostel and other places has forfeited the right to live. After a war which has cost us so many fine and useful lives it would be wrong to be unduly squeamish about worthless lives. There is only one satisfactory treatment for a foul cancer – cut it out!²²

In the closing months of the war and the early years of the peace, the value of the 'fine and useful' lives which had been lost was always particularly highlighted by the criminality of the nation which had caused their extinguishment. A similar comparison to Barer's was made in a condolence letter to Anthony Cotterell's parents. Writing in September 1945 from the Headquarters of the Air Division, BAFO, in Germany, Brian Spray told the Cotterells:

Even after one has been over here and seen and heard evidence of the inhuman, bestial behaviour of the SS amongst their own people, it is

²² Captain Robert Barer, Gwen Barer (Ed), *One Young Man and Total War – From Normandy to Concentration Camp, A Doctor's Letter Home* (The Pentland Press, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham, 1998), p.287.

difficult to believe that such a brave, upstanding life as Anthony's should come to an end at the hands of these men.²³

The appalling revelations about German conduct made even the ordinary citizens seem like members of an alien species. A handbook for soldiers going into Germany in 1944-45 told the men that although the Germans looked the same as the troops, they were not the same but should be seen as 'a strange people in a strange, enemy country'.²⁴ This extreme distancing continued into the occupation of Germany. Montgomery, the first Military Governor of the British Zone, made his attitude clear in a speech of 2 October 1945 given to the Newspaper Society in London:

It is not part of my plan to pamper the Germans – far from it. They brought this disaster upon themselves, and they must face the consequence. On the other hand, I am not prepared to see widespread famine and disease sweep through Europe, as it inevitably must if we allow hundreds and thousands of Germans to die.²⁵

Nonetheless, within a comparatively short period, the process of adjustment began and the occupation of necessity became one of mutual accommodation rather than

²³ Cotterell family archives, Brian Spray to Mintie Cotterell, letter, 11 September 1945. Brian Spray was writing about a false newspaper report that said that Anthony Cotterell had been murdered by the SS; in fact, the cause of his death was never fully established. See Jennie Gray, *Major Cotterell at Arnhem: a War Crime and a Mystery* (Spellmount, Stroud, 2012), Chapter 38.

²⁴ Anon, *Instructions for British Servicemen in Germany 1944* (Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, 2007), p.8.

²⁵ This speech, because it was 'the first authoritative British version of present-day life in Germany', received widespread press coverage. 'F.M Montgomery on Life in Germany', *The Manchester Guardian*, 3 October 1945.

the righteous domination of the victor over the vanquished.²⁶ In 1946, Montgomery was succeeded as Governor by Air Chief Marshal Sir William Sholto Douglas, a very different sort of man. Near the end of his own tenure in the job, Douglas was officially shadowed by a rather star-struck German reporter-photographer:

To me he seemed a man of great sincerity, self-consciously mixing formality with naturalness. [...] At last I got some unusual shots, which show that a man who can tackle such problems as shattered Western Germany, may have to fight the odds when juggling with a cup of consommé. This, however, makes him the more likeable.²⁷

By the end of the decade, people had begun to move on to the begrudging acceptance that, after all, Germany had its uses. In Tony Judt's telling phrase, a sort of 'collective amnesia' about the German record started to develop; the Cold War was posing an increasingly grave threat, and the value of West Germany as a buffer state and an ally against the Russians had become extremely clear.²⁸ Janina Struk dates the collective forgetting as beginning after the last trials at Nuremberg ended in July 1949; thereafter, she writes, the concentration upon atrocity stories began to fade out.²⁹ However, as many books detailing the horrors of Nazi Germany began to appear in the 1950s, it cannot be said that the subject had been in any way

²⁶ Patricia Meehan in *A Strange Enemy People* gives a good overview of the changing attitudes to the Germans. Patricia Meehan, *A Strange Enemy People: Germans Under the British, 1945-50* (Peter Owen, London, 2001).

²⁷ L F Gruber, 'A German Exposure', *British Zone Review*, 25 October 1947, p.11.

²⁸ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (Pimlico, London, 2007), p.61. In May 1949 the Federal Republic of Germany, commonly known as West Germany, was created out of the former French, American and British Zones, whilst that October the Soviet Zone became the German Democratic Republic, signifying the hold which the Soviet Union intended to keep over it.

²⁹ Janina Struk, *Photographing the Holocaust: Interpretations of the Evidence* (I B Tauris, London, 2004), p.150.

forgotten.³⁰ Certainly by 1951, the end date of this study, there had been no significant alteration in the way in which heinous German behaviour massively highlighted the sanctity of the Allied dead.

Those who had died in the great venture to defeat German aggression were crusaders, liberators, defenders of liberalism, democracy and freedom; there was no question that their memory would not be greatly honoured. A history of the Canadian Army, published in 1948, vividly portrays the pride felt in the sacrifices made. Describing D-Day, the author wrote:

The Canadian soldiers who gave their lives in this great enterprise and in the further bloody fighting to which it was the prelude take their rest today north of Beny-sur-Mer. [...] Nothing could be more peaceful now, or more unlike that wild June day when devastation rained from the skies and the Allied armies stormed ashore; and the visitor may think, perhaps, of other peaceful little towns, far away, from which these lads came of their own will to fight and die for the freedom of man on the beaches of Calvados.³¹

It had been no accident that 21 Army Group's badge showed two crusaders' swords in gold on a blue cross on a red shield, a badge which was to be retained by the BAOR.³² Montgomery, who was particularly fond of the crusading motif, wrote of the European campaign of 1944-45: 'I think it is right to say that the keynote of this

³⁰ A couple of examples of the many publications on the subject of Nazi Germany in the fifteen years after the war are Lord Russell of Liverpool, *The Scourge of the Swastika, A Short History of Nazi War Crimes* (Cassell & Co, London, 1954), which went through three editions in the space of two months, and William L Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (Simon Schuster, New York, 1960), which was a massive best-seller in America and Europe.

³¹ 'Of their own will' – there was no military conscription in Canada. C. P. Stacey, *The Canadian Army, 1939 – 1945, An Official Historical Summary* (King's Printer, Ottawa, 1948), pp.188-189.

³² Graham Watson, *The British Army in Germany: An Organisational History, 1947-2004* (Tiger Lily Publications, LLC, 2005), p.149.

campaign was the Crusading Spirit, which inspired all ranks of the Allied Expeditionary Force.³³

The stark contrast between the nobility of the British dead and the criminal nation which had demanded the sacrifice of their lives meant that burials in Germany were fraught with meaning. Many next of kin, and many political and military opinion-makers, did not want the British dead lying in enemy soil. One mother wrote to *The Times* in December 1946:

When it was first reported in the Press last May that our men were to be buried in Germany, I wrote a very strong protest to the War Graves Commission, one, I am sure, of many. In reply I was told that so far no confirmation had been received that my son would rest there, but in October I had the news of his burial at the British cemetery near Soltau.

I entirely endorse the letter in your issue of today. That our heroic dead should not lie among friends, but among such a foe as the Germans have proved themselves to be towards the dead of all countries, must add considerably to the grief of those who number their beloved ones among those left on enemy soil.

Yours truly, Mother of a VC³⁴

She was certainly not alone in her feelings. Canada, which had its own Graves Registration and Concentration Units, did not allow its soldier dead to remain buried in Germany. However, it could not make the same rule for its airmen because the RAF bore overall responsibility for casualties. The Reichswald Forest War Cemetery in North Rhine, Westphalia, has 4,000 British airmen, including 699 Canadians and

³³ Notably, General Eisenhower's memoirs, first published in 1948, were entitled *Crusade in Europe*. Bernard Montgomery, 'Foreword', Desmond Hawkins (ed.), *War Report: D-Day to VE-Day* (BBC, London, 1985), p.9.

³⁴ 'Mother of a VC', Letters to the Editor, 'Graves in Germany', *The Times*, 9 December 1946.

one lone Canadian soldier – all the other Canadian soldiers who died in the area were concentrated to Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery in the Netherlands. Sage War Cemetery at Oldenburg, North-West Germany, contains mostly RAF burials and these include 125 Canadian airmen. Some of the airmen buried there had been brought from the German East Frisian islands, including Mr Angel's son whose case was mentioned in the previous chapter.³⁵

A prime reason for concentrating the British dead in Germany in British-controlled cemeteries was fear that otherwise the Germans might desecrate the graves. Isolated incidents did occur, and one such is recorded in the War Diary of No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, a section of which was sent to Cologne in March 1946 'to commence investigation into violation of graves in Cologne Southern Cemetery'.³⁶ No further details are given in the War Diary, but the speed with which No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit relocated the bodies may be significant. On 13 May, work commenced on the movement of 500 RAF casualties from Cologne Southern Cemetery to Rheinberg British Cemetery which had only just entered development, the first plots having been opened less than two weeks earlier. All the RAF casualties had been moved by the following month.³⁷ Concern over the vulnerability of British graves in Germany even extended to the Commission's cemeteries. In October 1949, for example, one MP asked the Secretary of State for War to confirm, 'in view of the strong anti-British feeling that there is in Germany', that the cemeteries would not be 'handed over in any way to the care of the German authorities'. Shinwell replied: 'They are in the care of the Imperial War Graves

³⁵ Edwin Gibson 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* (HMSO, London, 1989), pp.131-132.

³⁶ TNA, 171/8349, ADGR&E, No. 39 Graves Concentration Unit, War Diary, January-June 1946, March 1946.

³⁷ *Ibid*, entries for May and June 1946.

Commission', probably meaning by this that they would remain permanently under the guardianship of the British authorities.³⁸

Despite the immense strength of feeling against the German nation, the British followed the principle that the enemy dead should be treated in almost exactly the same way as the Allied dead. The main difference was that the enemy dead were segregated, shut within their own plots so that they did not lie side by side with the men whom they had fought. All the Allies followed this practice, segregation beginning immediately after battle — the American booklet *Emergency Battlefield Burials* has a whole section on how this should be accomplished.³⁹

In completed Commission cemeteries, it is extremely rare for British and German graves to exist side by side. In Belgium, for example, the only Commission cemeteries where this is the case are St Symphorien and Hautrage, both First World War cemeteries which originally began as German cemeteries; there are no Second World War burials within them.⁴⁰ During and after the Second World War, if it was necessary to have Germans in the same cemetery as the Allies, they were interred in clearly separated plots, such as at Bayeux where the three blocks of German graves are positioned together on the north-west boundary.⁴¹

³⁸ Hansard, War Cemeteries in Germany, HC Deb 25 October 1949 vol 468. Hansard online (last accessed 04/03/15):

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1949/oct/25/war-cemeteries-germany#S5CV0468P0_19491025_HOC_212

³⁹ *Handbook for Emergency Battlefield Burials and Graves Registration by Troops* (Office of the Chief Quartermaster, HQ SOS ETOUSA, 1 December 1943), p.11.

⁴⁰ St Symphorien, on a wooded and hilly site, is very different in atmosphere from most British cemeteries. See, for example, Commonwealth War Graves Commission website, (last accessed 18/10/14):

<http://www.cwgc.org/find-cemetery/cemetery/90801/ST.%20SYMPHORIEN%20MILITARY%20CEMETERY>

⁴¹ See Bayeux War Cemetery plan, Commonwealth War Graves Commission website (last accessed 18/10/14):

<http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/2033300/BAYEUX%20WAR%20CEMETERY>

The numbers of the enemy dead which the British dealt with should not be underestimated. In the first six months' of the work in North-West Europe, the figures show that 18 per cent of the Burial Reports concerned the enemy dead, and these graves represented 20 per cent of all graves registrations made by the British.⁴² To show consideration to the enemy dead was not only an act of humanity, it was also in accordance with the 1929 Geneva Convention. This stated that enemy dead must be sought for, identified if possible, and then honourably interred, preferably individually, according to the rites which they had once professed. Their details must be registered, and their graves properly maintained and marked, so that they might always be found.⁴³ As signatories of the Geneva Convention, Germany and Britain had a vested interest in caring for the dead of their adversary during the war because it benefitted their own casualties. In the post-war world, when no German state existed, the principle of reciprocity no longer applied, but this did not alter the British approach because of the national commitment to equality in death.⁴⁴

Whilst in principle the terms of the Geneva Convention was strictly upheld by the British, the ideal was – for understandable reasons — not always followed by the combat troops whose responsibility it was to bury the battle dead. Even if they were willing to give an honourable burial to those who had so recently been trying to kill

⁴² The across the board statistics for the dead cared for by the British can be seen in Chapter One, Table 1, 'Burial Reports and Graves Registrations'.

⁴³ Max Planck Institute, *Encyclopaedia of Public International Law, 4: Use of Force — War and Neutrality Peace Treaties (N-Z)* (North Holland Publishing Company, Amsterdam, 1982), p.315.

⁴⁴ Reciprocal Aid no longer applied for the Second World War dead in any signatory country by May 1946; instead, the costs were to be born by the dead serviceman's nation. See, for example, Missing Research Memorandum MRM No. 24, 22 May 1946, in which Group Captain R Burges notes: 'Now that "Reciprocal" Aid no longer operates, no local (Foreign Government) assistance can be invoked [...] the reasonable expenses of burial of serving personnel for whom the RAF was responsible at the time of death will be charged against RAF funds.' TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', Part V, Appendix E, Group Captain E Burges, Missing Memorandum MRM No. 24, 22 May 1946.

them, the ideal was almost impossible to maintain during violent action along a rapidly changing front. Anthony Cotterell observed in Normandy in the summer of 1944:

We passed little knots of dead bodies, sometimes a single one, more often in twos and threes.

'I don't mind seeing these German buggers, but it's seeing one of our own unburied that I don't like,' said someone in the truck. But in fact the bodies were usually German ones. The advancing English had naturally used what little time they had to bury their own comrades first. The bodies had usually been looted, with the valueless contents of their pockets strewn around them. This wasn't always so, it just happened to be so in this particular area.⁴⁵

Leslie Skinner, the chaplain, did his best to ensure the quick burial of the enemy dead in Normandy even when they were being ignored by his British comrades. Late one evening, returning to the Sherwood Rangers Regimental HQ, he found everyone preparing the standard defence formation for the night in a farmyard and paddock.

Evidently place has been strenuously defended. Several Boche dead lying around.

Too prominently visible for decency or comfort. Very tired and fed up I started to tie them up for burial. Before I had finished Brigadier turned up, having followed me from C. Squadron and come to see the Colonel. He stopped to speak to me as I finished the burials and was being sick again in the ditch.

⁴⁵ Jennie Gray (Ed), *'This is WAR!' The Diaries and Journalism of Anthony Cotterell, 1940-1944* (Spellmount, Stroud, 2013), p.157.

He said I was overdoing things a bit. Nice of him. What else can I do.⁴⁶

It was only once the Graves Registration and Concentration Units became involved that the treatment of the German dead was very close to being of the same standard as that of the Allied dead. In Normandy, for example, Norwegian, American and enemy deaths were all registered under the same system in July 1944. Nonetheless, there was clearly a problem with the identification of German corpses — on 8 July one of Stott's reports states that 'about 25% of the enemy dead have been buried as "Unknowns"'.⁴⁷ Pressure on resources – in particular, the assumptions which had to be made in the stress of the moment when it was necessary to economise on effort — must have led to many lapses in the recording process. Stott instructed all GRU commanders to use their discretion:

In areas occupied by the enemy for, say, a fortnight after date of death or burial, it could be safely assumed that the enemy graves services had recorded the graves, and there would be no need to register such graves.⁴⁸

The various Armies under SHAEF command were responsible for the enemy dead in territory which they had liberated; by extension, this also meant controlling the way in which the civilian population interacted with enemy graves. For example, in the Netherlands, late in the war, some incidents occurred of Dutch farmers ploughing over German graves and erecting the crosses elsewhere, actions which led to a British request to SHAEF that 'immediate steps be taken to forbid any interference

⁴⁶ Leslie Skinner, *'The Man who Worked on Sundays': The Personal War Diary, June 2nd 1944 to May 17th 1945, of Revd. Leslie Skinner RChD, Chaplain, 8th (Independent) Armoured Brigade attached The Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry Regiment* (privately published, thought to be in 1991), p.49.

⁴⁷ TNA, 171/139, 21 Army Group HQ, 'A' Branch, Progress Report, July 1944, week ending 8 July.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, week ending 15 July 1944.

by civilians with any military graves'.⁴⁹ However, once the war was in its final days, SHAEF instigated a new policy:

The Supreme Commander considers that the care of these enemy graves should be assumed by the Governments of the countries in which they are located, and directs SHAEF Missions to negotiate with the respective Governments with a view to obtaining an agreement to this effect.⁵⁰

Accordingly, Stott approached the Belgian and Dutch governments, and they both agreed to undertake the care of all enemy soldiers themselves. However, when the matter was raised with the French, they proved far more obdurate and refused to take any responsibility for the German battle dead. This problem festered on for more than two years. In September 1947 (by which time the Belgian and Dutch Governments had concentrated approximately 23,000 enemy bodies), Stott wrote a long and slightly terse message to the Directorate in London, summarising the current position.

The Geneva Convention and the 'Laws and Usages of War' demand that we treat the enemy dead in the same way as our own. Only in France are my Units treating 'enemy dead killed in combat with the British'.

By this he meant that it was only France that was refusing to take responsibility for the German dead if they had been killed fighting the British, a refusal which France also extended to those who had been killed by the Americans. Difficulties had recently come to a head between the French and the Americans, concerning firstly

⁴⁹ TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, entry for 26 March 1945.

⁵⁰ Stott transcribed the relevant letter from SHAEF, dated 29 April 1945, into the War Diary. Ibid, entry for 6 May 1945.

the concentration of isolated German graves in areas traversed by the American forces, and, secondly, the future maintenance of cemeteries containing Germans. Stott had been attempting to reconcile the two opposed parties, and had at last succeeded; he told the Directorate that the Americans had accepted the principle that they should be responsible for isolated enemy bodies, and that the French Government had at last intimated that they would take over the cemeteries which contained Germans when requested to do so by the British and Americans, 'and will maintain them until the Peace Treaty when they will claim refund of expenses from the Germans'.⁵¹

In Britain, the ideal of caring for the enemy dead on equal terms was actively supported by the public, as can be seen in the following correspondence in *The Times* in July and August 1948. The newspaper clearly recognised the public's interest and encouraged a reasonably prolonged debate which included Dutch and German correspondents. The sequence began with a letter written by 'A Regular Officer' who had visited three British Military Cemeteries in Holland and found all to be beautifully kept. However:

it was the cemetery at Mierlo which gave me cause for reflection, since, unlike the others, there was a cemetery of German soldiers within 50 metres of the British cemetery and equally visible from the main road to visitors to the British cemetery. In the German cemetery many graves had been overgrown, crosses had rotted in the weather and fallen over, and the boundary fences were in a bad state of repair. It was a pathetic pretence at a Christian burial.

⁵¹ TNA, WO 267/607, BAOR HQ, Western Europe Graves Service Directorate, Quarterly Historical Report, quarter ending 30 September 1947, Appendix L (itself with appendages), Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Treatment of Enemy Dead', memorandum, 13 September 1947.

The letter writer felt that if no one was at present responsible for such cemeteries, then someone should be appointed, and the cost borne by the German nation.

As I see it the point at issue is whether a dead German is still an enemy and his grave not worth marking, or whether in death all are equal and the graves of all should therefore be maintained with equal care.⁵²

His point was picked up by another correspondent the next day.

It is disturbing to hear that German graves are so sadly neglected. Their dead were soldiers like our own and did their duty as all soldiers do – to the country of their allegiance. Unfortunately, however, their country is no longer a political entity and the question arises, who can now act for the German nation.⁵³

Only the following day, the matter was taken up by the Royal Netherlands Embassy in London, replying in a slightly tart manner to the issues which had been raised. The letter stated that the Dutch authorities were in the process of concentrating all German war graves into one large cemetery in De Peel, which would 'of course, receive proper care and attention'. The semi-derelict cemetery at Mierlo was shortly to be abolished. The letter concluded:

The present state of German graves is indeed unsatisfactory. Allied graves, quite apart from the official arrangements, have received care and attention from private Dutch people in the neighbourhood. It is perhaps not unnatural that so soon after the war this individual and private

⁵² 'A Regular Officer', Letters to the Editor, 'German War Graves', *The Times*, 8 July 1948.

⁵³ F J Bellenger, Letters to the Editor, 'German War Graves', *The Times*, 9 July 1948.

attention should have been given to the graves of Holland's liberators and not to those of its late enemies.⁵⁴

On 17 July, a further letter from the Netherlands was published, this time from P Weys, the Administrator of Dutch Military Cemeteries. Weys wrote that the correspondence in *The Times* had only just reached him and he hoped that he was not too late to explain how the matter stood.

There are about 28,000 Germans buried throughout the country, the majority lying not in already existing cemeteries but along the wayside in fields, gardens, or forests.

The Dutch Government has acquired a large stretch of ground at Venray, where all fallen Germans will find eventually their last resting place, and up to the present about 11,000 have been buried there. The work is necessarily slow because of the time, patience, and care needed to identify the bodies, but it is done by Dutchmen with devotion and respect for the dead, in spite of the boundless suffering caused them by their late enemies.⁵⁵

Finally the matter was taken up by the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, the German War Graves Association (also sometimes called the German War Graves Commission in the English translation). *The Times* published the Association's long and detailed letter which traced the history of First World War graves whose care had been regulated by international convention, each nation being obliged to look after all the war graves on its own territory. In the case of

⁵⁴ Press Attaché, the Royal Netherlands Embassy, Letters to the Editor, 'German War Graves', *The Times*, 10 July 1948.

⁵⁵ P Weys, the Administrator of Dutch Military Cemeteries, Letters to the Editor, 'German War Graves', *The Times*, 17 July 1948.

Germany, both this work and the maintenance of German war graves on the territory of other nations had been carried out by the Association. Since 1945, however, it had not been possible for the Association to perform this role as no similar arrangement to the First World War had been made as regards German war graves. Although the Association had been recognised by the British, Americans and French in their respective Zones as being the only German organisation suitable to carry out the work, 'adverse conditions' had prevented the arrangement from being put into practice. Cooperation in taking care of the war graves, the writer stated, was 'an essential basis for the mutual understanding of the nations and the maintenance of peace'. The letter concluded:

Now fighting has been over for more than three years, and in Germany everyone is convinced that each British mother and father will fully understand the painful longing of the German mothers and fathers to be allowed to take care of the graves of their dead sons.⁵⁶

As a small aside, it is worth noting that the German War Graves Association did not always cover itself in glory. In 1952, British families reading their Saturday newspapers at breakfast may have noticed a small item about the head of the Association (here referred to as the Commission) in Cyrenaica, his notoriety assured because he was the nephew of the former Field Marshal Kesselring who had so

⁵⁶ A Klaus von Lutzau, Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, Letters to the Editor, 'German War Graves', *The Times*, 5 August 1948. The Imperial War Graves Commission thereafter formed a closed association with the German War Graves Association, which seems to have answered the problems on the British side at least. See, for example, the letter from F C Sillar, Principal Assistant Secretary, Imperial War Graves Commission, to *The Times*, 5 June 1952, which states that the Commission had been 'in close touch' with the German War Graves Association 'for a considerable time'.

brilliantly denied the Allies the easy capture of Italy.⁵⁷ The item reported the arrest of the former Lieutenant Colonel Otto Verstcher on charges of misappropriation and robbing dead German soldiers of gold teeth. When the accused was found guilty, however, his name was then given as Otto M Voresther, a former Lieutenant Colonel in the Afrika Korps, and no further mention of Kesselring was made, so the original identification appears to have been incorrect. Voresther was sentenced to three years imprisonment. Some of the British following this unsavoury story may well have concluded that the Germans were so irredeemably bad that they could not even be trusted with the sacred duty of caring for their own dead.⁵⁸

What is certain is that the Germans had – and have continued to have – a very different relationship with their war dead. This was markedly so in the case of the Nazi leadership, whom in the 1940s no one could possibly publically admit to mourning. Their names could scarcely be mentioned and there were no graves to visit. The burnt remains of Adolf Hitler had been taken away to the Soviet Union as a war trophy. Those members of the Nazi hierarchy who had been found guilty at the Nuremberg trials had been hanged and cremated, the ashes being cast into a river to obliterate every last remaining trace of them.⁵⁹ Commemoration of such a deeply criminalised – and physically absent – leadership was impossible. Nor could there be any national commemoration of the ordinary military dead because of the perceived link to militarism. The revelations about the concentration camps and other major war crimes, which so unanswerably justified the Allied cause, meant, in George Mosse's words, 'the total discrediting of the German war effort'.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Kesselring was the towering figure in the German defence of Italy. There are many accounts of the Italian campaign but one of the most interesting is found in the relevant chapters of Kesselring's own memoirs: *The Memoirs of Field Marshal Kesselring* (Greenhill Books, London, 2007).

⁵⁸ 'Arrest of Kesselring's Nephew', *The Times*, 9 August 1952; 'German Graves Robbed', *The Times*, 22 September 1952.

⁵⁹ This included Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring, who had committed suicide.

⁶⁰ George L Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers, Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1991) p.202.

The strong determination of the Allies to destroy anything which honoured Germany's tainted past meant that in 1946 any monuments from the First World War or later which appeared to exalt militarism were demolished. The rule was not applied across the board; for example, local monuments to the Great War dead were generally not destroyed, but militant inscriptions were removed, such as that reading 'Germany must live, even if we must die' at a Military Cemetery at Langemarck.⁶¹

As a result of these factors, German memorialising moved from honouring fallen heroes to being about all the victims of war, including the servicemen who had been caught up in an unjust conflict:

The soldiers fought on to the bitter end [...], though their cause was betrayed by Adolf Hitler, because they felt that they could not desert their comrades. The German soldier was no longer heroic but he was decent.⁶²

The particular problems which Germany had with remembering the Second World War found their expression in the *mahnmale*, the monuments of warning, for which there is no British equivalent. There were no *mahnmale* before the Second World War; instead, the soldiers of the First World War had been honoured with the same type of romanticised memorial as in Britain, 'fallen soldiers, dying, like marble Christs, for the Fatherland'. The first *mahnmale* were merely ruins left untouched and unrepaired, such as those of the Kaiser Wilhelm Gedächtniskirche in Berlin, but

⁶¹ Ibid, p.212. That the destruction of these memorials was not motivated by a desire for vengeance in Britain can be seen at government level in the Cabinet Secretary's notebook which captures a very short, informal discussion in which the Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, seemingly disagreeing with the quadripartite decision, says 'Cdn't we say — we do not & shall not interpret it as covering dest[ru]ction] of village war memorials'. TNA, CAB/195/4, Cabinet papers, Cabinet Secretary's Notebook: Minutes and Papers, 23 May 1946.

⁶² Ibid, p.216.

more specific *mahnmale* began to be constructed in the 1960s, following on twenty years of collective forgetting.⁶³

This type of commemoration has continued into very recent years, one example being the monument to the forced labourers, 'Transit', sited in Nuremberg, which was unveiled in 2007.⁶⁴ Probably the best known of the *mahnmale* is the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, also known as the Holocaust Memorial, which is located close to the Reichstag and the Brandenburg Gate. It was unveiled in 2005 after years of argument. As Hilary Silver writes in an article about 'the "New" Berlin':

The public debate over [...] the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe [...] makes clear that Berlin is the premier site for debating the historical narrative of the German nation. The design, location, and message of the memorial were all subjects of conflict.⁶⁵

The dangerous ambiguity of paying honour to Germany's military dead has prevailed for so long that there is now a complete divergence between the German and British traditions. In 2014, an article appeared in the *Sunday Times* on the near-total silence in Germany about the 100th anniversary of the beginning of the First World War. The article quoted Thomas Kielinger, the long-time London correspondent for *Die Welt*:

In Britain there is a seamless thread back to the past, which keeps the past alive. There is an unbroken tradition – the Cenotaph ceremony and

⁶³ Ian Buruma, *Wages of Guilt, Memories of War in Germany and Japan* (Vantage, London, 1995), pp.203-204.

⁶⁴ Nuremberg Forced Labour Memorial, 'Sites of Memory: Historical Markers, Memorials, Monuments, and Cemeteries', website (last accessed 10/10/15): <http://sites-of-memory.de/main/nurembergforcedlaborubahn.html>

⁶⁵ Hilary Silver, 'Social Integration in the "New" Berlin', *German Politics and Society*, 81/24 (2006), p.6.

Remembrance Sunday are big events in Britain. In Germany, November 11 kicks off the carnival season.⁶⁶

Neil MacGregor, the director of the British Museum, in an interview with *The Times* on 7 November of the same year, described the difference between the British and the Germans even more succinctly:

History for us is about reaffirming national achievement, national destinies. Whereas for Germans history is, in Michael Stürmer's extraordinary phrase, "that which must not be allowed to happen again".

The Cenotaph, mentioned by Thomas Kielinger above, is central to British remembrance for both the World Wars. Created as a temporary structure for the 1919 Peace Day Parade, it was recreated permanently in stone in 1920 after a huge swell of public acclaim, for 'in some mysterious way, the design of the Cenotaph embodied the nation's deep and terrible bereavement'.⁶⁷ As with other memorials or ceremonies of remembrance which originated at that period, the Cenotaph became an enduring focus, the centre of a network of monuments, rites and customs which were readopted after the Second World War.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Harry Mount, 'Lying Cold and Alone; The War Dead Germany Struggles To Remember', *The Sunday Times*, 23 March 2014.

⁶⁷ Allan Greenberg, 'Lutyens's Cenotaph', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 48/1 (1989), p.11.

⁶⁸ One aspect of continuity was that First World War memorials were reused for the Second World War. This was to prevent the absurd situation of there being countless doubles. The War Memorials Advisory Council was firmly against this, as can be seen in a speech in the Lords by Viscount Esher in the Lords: 'The ones erected last time were almost constructed on a pattern, and all over the country, in town and village, we know the war memorial when we see it, because we have seen a thousand others exactly like it. I am not condemning the war memorials of the last war; most of them were artistically inoffensive, and they gave great pleasure to the citizens. But surely two such memorials in every town and village would be absurd. Even the great memorials cannot be repeated.'

It is worth remembering, however, these rites did not continue uninterrupted by the war, and that it was not inevitable that they would be resumed after it. Adrian Gregory's *The Silence of Memory* noted how Armistice Day was effectively cancelled from 1939 onwards and not reinstated until 1946, by which time it had been renamed Remembrance Sunday and no longer had the 'emotive power' that Armistice Day had held between the wars.⁶⁹ Gregory described Remembrance Day as 'a compound of the memories of two wars, but a partial and sectional memory of each'. Writing in 1994, he saw Remembrance Day as 'the memory of a memory', and called the language which surrounded the commemorations 'dead' and 'empty rhetoric'.⁷⁰ He did not foresee the capacity for the Day to be reinvented to embrace subsequent wars, nor the massive rise in interest in family history which led to a passionate involvement in and respect for past generations who had fought in the two world wars. Both of these factors have hugely contributed to Remembrance Day becoming the powerful symbol which it is today, and to the growth of social pressure to wear the commemorative red poppies which is nowadays popularly known as 'poppy fascism'.

The continuous thread which links British commemoration of the military dead of the two World Wars obscures certain subtle differences in the meaning of the men who were lost. Both wars were conceived as a just fight to defend freedom and democracy against German militarism and aggression. For example, a large First World War memorial in Leominster, Herefordshire, carries in huge letters the message: 'In proud and grateful remembrance of the men of Leominster who laid down their lives in the cause of Humanity'.⁷¹ This was not an uncommon type of epitaph, and, until the late 1920s, the First World War dead were perceived in very

I do not suppose, for instance, that the Government contemplate another Cenotaph in London [...].'
House of Lords debate, 'War Memorials, HL Deb 14 February 1945, Hansard online (last accessed 11/10/15): <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1945/feb/14/war-memorials>

⁶⁹ Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day, 1919-1946* (Berg, Oxford, 1994), p.222.

⁷⁰ Ibid, pp.226-227.

⁷¹ The memorial stands near to St Peter and St Paul's Priory Church, Leominster.

much the same way as those of the Second World War would later be viewed, that is to say as heroic figures who had laid down their lives for the good of mankind. However, there was one major difference: the many hundreds of thousands of graves were also viewed as a lasting admonishment to keep the peace.⁷² The much quoted words of King George V at Flanders in 1922 summed up this hope:

I have many times asked myself whether there can be more potent advocates of peace upon earth through the years to come than this massed multitude of silent witnesses to the desolation of war.⁷³

As events unfolded on the international stage from the late 1920s onwards, what became increasingly obvious was the manifold futility of a war which had cost millions of lives and not achieved a thing. This perception of futility combined with a highly influential literary genre, which included the poetry of Wilfrid Owen and the memoirs of Edmund Blunden and Robert Graves, to change the cultural perception of the war dead; gradually they came to be seen less as glorious warriors and more as duped innocents who had been sacrificed by their generals.⁷⁴ After victory in 1945, this view became more prevalent, and was thoroughly confirmed by the explosion of interest in the First World War set off by the 50th anniversary of its commencement.⁷⁵ The dead of the First World War are now inevitably viewed

⁷² David W Lloyd, *Battlefield Tourism: Pilgrimage and the Commemoration of the Great War in Britain, Australia and Canada* (Berg, Oxford, 1998), pp.176-177.

⁷³ Quoted on Commonwealth War Graves Commission Home Page (last accessed 26/12/2014): <http://www.cwgc.org/>

⁷⁴ For a brilliant exposition on the literary legacy of the war and its implications for the meaning of the military dead, see Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000).

⁷⁵ Paul Fussell's book (see previous footnote) was first published in 1975. Other influential works of the same period were *The Donkeys* by Alan Clark, published in 1961, which has since been largely

through the prism of the Second, because, unlike the earlier war, the later war achieved lasting European peace and the final curbing of German aggression. Today, the dead of the Second War remain glorious warriors because they achieved exactly what they had set out to do, whilst those who died in the First World War are frequently considered to be as much victims of their own side as of the Germans.

Jay Winter, in his brief summary of the differences of commemoration between the two wars, writes:

Many of the commemorative forms created after 1918 were intended to warn; when the warning was not heard, [...] that message of hope, of using the witness of those who had suffered during the war to prevent its reoccurrence, was bound to fade away.⁷⁶

The idea of the dead as a warning against warfare was not replicated after the Second World War because the failures of appeasement had made the maintenance of peace for its own sake deeply suspect. Warfare was now considered preferable to that disastrous clinging to peace which had allowed Hitler so much latitude.

The much publicised instances of German brutality during the First World War, such as the outrages committed in Belgium after the invasion in 1914, bore no comparison in scale and viciousness to the atrocities committed by the Germans during the Second World War.⁷⁷ What had become an unarguable certainty by May 1945 was that Imperial Germany had never posed the same annihilating threat to Britain as Nazi Germany, even though it had appeared to do so at various crisis

discredited but has left its mark, and *Oh, What a Lovely War*, a 1969 musical film, adapted from a radio play which became a stage play.

⁷⁶ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995), p.99.

⁷⁷ The National Archives holds various files on allegations of German war crimes in Belgium, such as TNA, FO 371/1913.

points of the war.⁷⁸ Ultimately, there could be no question that the Second World War had been absolutely essential to the survival of the British way of life. The dead thus had a different message to those of the earlier war — that watchfulness and the courage to stand one's ground were the duties which their deaths imposed upon the survivors. As Brian Spray, writing to Anthony Cotterell's parents, so movingly put it:

In offering you my sincerest and deepest sympathy in a loss which is immeasurable, I can only express the most earnest hope that the rest of us for whom Anthony and so many others gave their lives may see to it that right and decency are never again allowed to be threatened by might and inhumanity. Their sacrifice has placed the opportunity fully in our hands and nothing can excuse us if we fail.⁷⁹

The British military dead of the Second World War are a source of great pride, affection and loyalty, and have been ever since the war itself. The particular group of dead which have been followed in this study, those of North-West Europe, belong to a great band of heroes whose graves, known or otherwise, span the globe. As a *Times* leader described it in 1950:

Wherever they lie, whether in distant countries or beneath the sea or in their native soil, whether their graves are marked and lovingly tended or

⁷⁸ 'Various crisis points of the war', such as the highly successful submarine attacks on British shipping which reached a peak in 1917 and led to food shortages and ultimately to rationing. Alan G V Simmonds, *Britain and World War One* (Routledge, London, 2011), p.213-215.

⁷⁹ Cotterell family archives, Brian Spray to Mintie Cotterell, letter, 11 September 1945.

only a name on a tablet asks a question that can never be answered, all alike are to be had in everlasting remembrance.

The leader saw the missing of each Service as qualitatively different, describing each group separately, together with the commemorative provisions which would be made for them:

Of the three Services the men of the Navy are perhaps most fortunate in the grandeur of their unmarked resting-place; for

What grave may cast such grace round any dead,
What so sublime sweet sepulchre may be
For all that life leaves mortal, as the sea?

The writer added that the names of those 'whose bodies have gone the immemorial way of their calling' would be recorded at 'the three great manning ports of the Navy, beside those of the men who went before them a generation ago'.⁸⁰

Regarding the soldiers 'whose bones must be supposed to lie on a hundred stricken fields', the leader said that the wise decision had been taken to 'preserve the record of their sacrifice on tablets set in the military cemeteries nearest to the scene of their campaigns, among the graves where their own comrades rest'.

As for the RAF, the special nature of its losses meant that the fate of many airmen would never be known:

The Royal Air Force is the loneliest of the Services, and in it the mystery of men's fate may be most impenetrable. Of many it is known only that they went out to do their duty and did not return. Those whom death

⁸⁰ 'The three great manning ports' – Chatham, Plymouth and Portsmouth, all of which have extremely large memorials for the First World War which were extended for the Second World War.

scattered, none knows where, memory will reunite by bringing together their names in five great companies.⁸¹

The 'five great companies' would be the monuments at Malta, El Alamein, Singapore, Ottawa in Canada, and the main memorial which 'will look out from its green hill over England's past at Runnymede'.⁸²

The last phrase echoes the importance of the military dead in the continuous narratives of British history. Public opinion, which has remained remarkably stable on the matter for the last seventy years — or 100 years if one casts one's mind back to the beginnings of Britain's current way of viewing the military dead — would not allow it to be otherwise. The war dead are absolutely critical to the national story. Each new war adds yet another layer of meaning. The furore which attended the action of Charlie Gilmour, in July 2011, when he swung from the Cenotaph's flags during the London riots, illustrates the strong respect with which the Cenotaph as a symbol of all the war dead is generally regarded. Gilmour's defence, that he did not know what the Cenotaph was, was robustly derided because as a Cambridge history student he was expected to know what the Cenotaph symbolised.

It is hard to think of another national monument whose ill-treatment would have generated such indignation, except perhaps the statue of Churchill close to Westminster Abbey. This statue was itself attacked in 2000 and 2007, the first time by demonstrators, the second time by vandals. Again, there was a furious storm of

⁸¹ Leading article, 'No Known Grave', *The Times*, 31 January 1950.

⁸² The Runnymede Memorial was unveiled on 17 October 1953, Commonwealth War Graves Commission website, Runnymede page (last accessed 03/01/2015): <http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/109600/RUNNYMEDE%20MEMORIAL>

indignation. An attack on monuments such as these represents an attack on the nation itself, and upon its national story; some would say upon its national myths.

The confirmed belief in the nobility of the British military dead is eternally augmented by the Germans' black record, to borrow Vansittart's phrase. Without such a powerful and demonic enemy, one which came so close to success in 1940, the aura which surrounds the military dead may perhaps never have shone so brightly. Whilst some commentators and historians have attempted to moderate the Manichean extremes, for example by arguing that the Allies were not so saintly as has been painted and that criminal acts were also committed by the Allies against the Germans, the general public view remains unaltered – that these dead have a transcendent quality because they gave their lives to combat the forces of evil.⁸³

⁸³ The principal attempt to reset the balance has come in the debate over the Allied strategic bombing campaign, which it has become fashionable to portray as a war crime. A number of contributions to this debate have been very flimsy, for example A C Grayling's *Among the Dead Cities: Is the Targeting of Civilians in War Ever Justified?* (Bloomsbury, London, 2007), which attracted a great deal of publicity when it appeared. Amongst the serious attempts to examine the military and moral issues is Paul Addison and Jeremy A Crang, (Eds), *Firestorm: The Bombing of Dresden 1945* (Pimlico, London, 2006). An example of a book written from the German point of view is Jörg Friedrich, *The Fire: The Bombing of Germany, 1940-1945* (Columbia University Press, New York, 2006).

Conclusion: Breaking the Silence

This thesis breaches the historiographical silence which, with the exception of Seumas Spark's article and unpublished thesis, has cloaked the work which the Army and the RAF carried out on behalf of the Second World War military dead. Today, the national commemorative programme, with its many thousands of identical stone grave-markers, its neat cemeteries, and sombre memorials, hides the complex and harrowing duties which the two Services performed before the formalised structures of remembrance could be put in place. This concluding chapter will look at why the true nature of the programme for the dead has remained concealed for so long; it will summarise what has been uncovered in the course of this study and why it has been worthwhile breaking that long silence.

At the time that the work was being carried out, the truth of what was happening was kept away from the public. There was some very minor reporting of certain aspects of the programme, such as the article by *The Times* Special Correspondent at Arnhem in 1946, and that in *Flight Magazine* on the RAF search published in 1945.¹ However, there was virtually no discussion in Parliament or the public forum about what the care of the bodies really entailed. On one notable occasion, already mentioned, when the subject was alluded to in the House of Commons, the Secretary of State's answer to an MP's question immediately stopped further debate:

Unfortunately, in these matters arrangements have to be made to disinter bodies. A great deal of difficulty arises from that — I must leave some of

¹ Special Correspondent in Holland, 'War Graves in Holland: Dutch Plan for Individual Care by Volunteers', *The Times*, 8 May 1946; Major F A de V Robertson, 'Tracing Missing Airmen; Missing Research and Enquiry Service: Following Slender Clues', *Flight Magazine*, 18 October 1945.

these matters to the imagination of hon. Members — and we prefer to deal with the matter as we propose.’²

The more distressing aspects of the Services’ work never became public knowledge, and it was clearly the intention that this should remain the case until the last living links to the military dead were severed. The veto on the relevant files when they were finally deposited in the National Archives was intended to last until 2046.

Why was the silence about the work maintained, both during its progress and in after years? There are two main possible reasons. The first shades into the camp of the conspiracy theorists – that the secrecy surrounding the work was deliberately engineered by the military, and what had been a temporary expedient eventually ended up as the permanent status quo. The second, and far more cohesive reason, is that the silence was due to cultural inhibition, a taboo on discussing or sharing such matters which has lasted almost unchanged until the present day. Both of these two possible explanations are worth exploring, but as the evidence comes down so strongly upon the side of the cultural factor, it is that one which will receive the major consideration here.

The idea that military scheming was behind the concealment is not supported by the evidence. Firstly, what would be the motivation? Presumably it would be to withhold the shocking truth about the deaths, not only because it might act as a deterrent to a new generation of soldiers and airmen, but also to conceal the inefficiency of British methods, especially if a comparison was made to the more successful programme of the Americans.

In order for such a blanket of secrecy to be effective, it would have been necessary to practice it from the very beginning of the work, not only in North-West Europe but

² The Secretary of State at the time was Emanuel Shinwell. Hansard, War Graves, HC Deb 02 November 1948 vol 457. Hansard online (last accessed 04/03/15): http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1948/nov/02/war-graves#S5CV0457P0_19481102_HOC_74

elsewhere, for example by impressing upon the ordinary troops, who were responsible for immediate burials, that they must not talk about such things. There is not the slightest hint in any of Stott's extensive paperwork of any such policy, nor in the many RAF reports and memoranda. The need for secrecy about all aspects of the British war effort was drilled into servicemen (and indeed into the civilian population), but this particular matter was apparently never highlighted.³

Certainly what is true is that sensitive information was carefully managed and contained by the Graves Service. A very simple example in Graves Service paperwork is the use of the code phrase 'Special Case' to denote a possible war crime; this limited (probably none too successfully) the number of people who were in the know.⁴ A far more complex instance was seen in Chapter Seven in the matter of token graves. Instructions on how to deal with such graves were highly confidential and thus only imparted to officers of the Graves Service units, who were trusted to be aware of the implications for next of kin.⁵ In another example, 'Standing Orders: Graves Registration 21 Army Group' contained the strictest instructions that on no account should individuals of the Graves Service answer private enquiries; this would be considered 'a definite breach of trust even though [...] the information is not within the categories prohibited by ordinary censorship regulations'.⁶ There is,

³ The admonition that civilians should be extremely careful about what they said appeared in many wartime posters, such as 'Be Like Dad, Keep Mum, and 'A Few Careless Words May End in This'. The Services were subjected to their own campaigns, in particular the famous 'Careless Talk Costs Lives' series. John D Cantwell, *Images of War*, Plates 15-20.

⁴ For instance, on the confidential Exhumation Form for 21 Army Group which contained the instruction: 'For all SPECIAL cases of exhumation, a pathologist should be present.' TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, 21 Army Group Exhumation Report.

⁵ TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, appendices for February, Appendix H2, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Concentration of Graves', 16 February 1945.

⁶ TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Standing Orders Graves Registration 21 Army Group', 1 January 1945.

however, no suggestion in these or similar cases that anything was intended other than the containment of information which might cause distress to next of kin.

There is no contemporary published account about the programme for the dead. Although a series of massive official histories on the British war effort were written in the late 1940s and during the 1950s, none exists for this particular aspect of what the British did.⁷ Again, there is nothing conspiratorial about this omission, and, in fact, there clearly was every intention that such a history should be produced. The Adjutant General was the man ultimately in charge of Army Graves Registration and Enquiries units because the care for the dead was considered a personnel matter. From 1941 until 1946, the Adjutant General was General Sir Ronald Adam, a deeply humane and very approachable man.⁸ Despite his multitude of responsibilities, Adam was well aware of the Graves Service's work, and in March 1945, close to the end of the war, he visited the HQ of 21 Army Group's GR&E and 'expressed himself satisfied' with the progress of the work.⁹ When the war ended and the idea of the comprehensive histories came under discussion, a conference on War Office Historical Monographs was held to consider a list of potential subjects. Adam pointed out that, although Graves Registration and Enquiries had not been included in the provisional list approved, 'it was desirable that something should be written to place on record the guiding principles and methods which had been adopted in carrying out this work'. Adam said, however, that he did not feel it should be included in the War Office series, 'but dealt with on a wider basis, by the Imperial War Graves Commission'.¹⁰ This was not because Adam was passing the responsibility or was uninterested, but because the subject did not belong solely to the Army but to all

⁷ For example, S R Rexford-Welch, (ed) *The Royal Air Force Medical Services*, Volumes I-III (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, volumes printed in 1954, 1955, and 1956).

⁸ For Adam's humanity and approachability, see Jennie Gray, *Major Cotterell at Arnhem*, pp.66-68.

⁹ TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, entry for 11 March 1945.

¹⁰ TNA, WO 366/27, War Office, Sir Desmond Anderson, Chief Editor, War Office Historical Monographs, memorandum to Sir Fabian Ware, 12 May 1945.

three British Services, together with the five other nations who formed the Commission.

The matter was passed for comment to Sir Fabian Ware, who apparently suggested that Colonel Chettle, the Commission's Director of Records, should be contacted. At a subsequent meeting, Colonel Chettle agreed that the Commission should produce the monograph 'as not only all three Services, but the Dominions and Colonies, were affected'. Chettle indicated that he might write the monograph himself, but only after his retirement, which he thought would probably be the following year.¹¹ No history, however, was ever produced, either by Colonel Chettle or by anyone else at the Imperial War Graves Commission.¹²

It is perhaps no great loss. The information about the MRES and the Graves Service which has been used in this study almost entirely comes from Service papers which were never intended for public circulation; thus, those who wrote them spoke plainly about matters which could have been deeply upsetting to relatives of the dead or to the general British public. Any book or report produced by the Imperial War Graves Commission in the 1940s or early 1950s would inevitably have been extremely anodyne in comparison, and would have veiled many of the most unpleasant issues which are so vital in an analytical context to show the complexity, difficulty, and harrowing nature of the work of the MRES and the Graves Service.

To summarise, no deliberate attempt was made to conceal the mistakes which had been made, and, indeed, various preparations were made for the anticipated report. Colonel Fraser at A.G.13, the War Office, sent out a memorandum as early as 18 May 1945 to the HQs of the main military forces, stating:

The writing of the history of the war is now being started, and it is essential that the Graves Service aspect should not be neglected, especially from

¹¹ Ibid, 'Notes on Interview with Colonel Chettle', 28 May 1945.

¹² Roy Hemington, Commonwealth War Graves Commission, to the author, email, 30 October 2013.

the point of view of avoiding, in any future campaigns, the mistakes made during the early stages of this war.¹³

He asked for short reports to be prepared, showing the main problems encountered and the solutions which had been found. In response to this, Lieutenant Colonel Stott produced the short report on the work in North-West Europe which was referred to in Chapter Two. In August 1948, there was a further allusion in Army paperwork to the preparation of a history, which noted that the delay was caused by the fact that the graves work had not yet been completed.¹⁴ Perhaps, therefore, the reason why such a history was never produced was that by the time the British search and burial programme was concluded, some three years later, the impetus had gone out of the idea.

The theory that the British military were concealing their record because of its poor results compared to the Americans' also has no evidence to support it. The public complained vociferously post-war about certain aspects of the British programme, but the conduct of the American programme was not raised, probably because people were largely unaware of it. It is worth noting that the Americans too developed an enduring silence about the programme of care for the military dead, which continued into later wars. Michael Sledge, in his book *Soldier Dead* published in 2005, commented upon the widespread ignorance about the matter; people had some knowledge of the ceremonial provisions, or indeed what had happened to the

¹³ The main military forces were: 21 Army Group, Middle Eastern Forces (MEF), Allied Land Forces South East Asia (ALFSEA), Allied Forces HQ (AFHQ), and copy to GHQ, India. TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, appendices for June, Appendix H1, Colonel S Fraser, A.G.13, War Office, no title, memorandum, 18 May 1945.

¹⁴ See TNA, WO 32/12968, DGR&E, War Office, Brigadier C S Vale, Minute 1, 23 August 1948, which states: 'A full report on the working of the Graves Service during the last war, details of mistakes which have been made and the lessons which have been learnt, is now in course of preparation but it is difficult to complete it in view of the fact that work in the Far East is still in hand.' It also mentions work outstanding in Poland and the Soviet Zone of Germany.

wounded, but virtually none at all concerning who had actually looked after the bodies.¹⁵ The date of Sledge's book is pertinent in this context because it went to press some four years after 9/11, the attack upon the Pentagon and the Twin Towers, thus falling into the period when the recovery of the body parts of the civilian victims had become a national obsession.¹⁶

Cultural factors alone would explain the enduring silence, and there is no need to look for anything more sinister. One academic who has analysed the British cultural issues surrounding the dead of the two World Wars is Pat Jalland. She charts the dramatic change in cultural mores which was due to the decline of religion and the crushing impact of the First World War. The mass grieving after that war represented a break with 'hundreds of years of Christian history which had taught the importance of the good death and the hope of life eternal'.¹⁷ During the 1930s, the huge advances in medicine also contributed to the change in beliefs. There was a strong movement away from 'a dominant Christian culture of acceptance of death and more open expression of grief [...] to a culture of avoidance and reticence'.¹⁸

The openness about death which had been a feature of earlier British attitudes to mourning can be somewhat startling to contemplate. For several centuries, portraits

¹⁵ Michael Sledge, *Soldier Dead: How We Recover, Identify, Bury and Honor Our Military Fallen* (Columbia University Press, New York, 2005), p.3. Sledge only mentions Joseph James Shomon's frank account about the programme for the dead, *Crosses in the Wind*, extremely briefly (p.51), so it does not appear to have been a book which made a big impact. Joseph James Shomon, *Crosses in the Wind* (Stratford House, New York, 1991).

¹⁶ The immense efforts to find and identify even the smallest pieces of the victims of 9/11 were covered in Channel 5's programme, 'The Last Secrets of 9/11', broadcast on 14 August 2014. Part of the description for the programme runs: 'To date, almost 22,000 individual pieces of human remains have been recovered from the debris. [...] More than 1,600 victims have been identified. However, of the other 1,115 there is currently no identifiable trace. Their families have no closure, no fragments of their loved ones to bury.' Channel 5 website (last accessed 24/10/15):

<http://www.channel5.com/shows/the-last-secrets-of-911/episodes/the-last-secrets-of-911-3>

¹⁷ Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996), p.381.

¹⁸ Ibid, p.1.

or effigies of family members on their deathbeds were often created as intimate memorials.¹⁹ Later, in the Victorian age, photography replaced these exquisite deathbed artefacts. One outstanding example is the photograph of Lord Frederick Cavendish, Chief Secretary for Ireland, taken after his assassination in 1882 in Dublin. Cavendish's body is lying in Dublin Hospital, but the deathbed is so beautifully arranged in a mass of ferns and flowers that the corpse is reminiscent of a virgin maiden's rather than that of a senior British politician.²⁰ So little inhibition about death (and a shockingly violent death at that) was attached to this image that it was sent by Cavendish's heart-broken widow to various relatives and friends.²¹

Victorian deathbed portraits were not considered morbid and obsessive, or even rather ghoulish and tasteless, as anything of a similar type would have been after the early years of the twentieth century. They also bear little relation to the shocking images of the neglected, rotting and anonymous dead of the First World War, most famously portrayed in C R W Nevinson's painting 'Paths of Glory', which attracted the attention of the censor.²² In part, it was the revulsion caused by such unapologetic presentations as Nevinson's of the true facts of the war that increased the national unwillingness to look upon the military dead. In 1925, the Committee supervising the creation of Jagger's memorial to the Royal Artillery at Hyde Park

¹⁹ See, for example, the Aston Portrait of 1635, which shows Thomas Aston and his son standing by the corpse of his wife, who has died in childbirth. In the painting, the two representations of the dead woman show her as ghostly pale compared to the strong, though sombre, colours of the living family. Another example from the same century is the extremely touching and beautiful stoneware model of five year old Lydia Dwight, lying on her deathbed, which was lovingly made by her father in 1674. Julian Litten, *The English Way of Death: The Common Funeral Since 1450* (Robert Hale, London, 1991), Colour Plates 4 and 5.

²⁰ The immediate, rather irreverent thought inspired by the photograph is that Cavendish looks like a male Ophelia, Ophelia as portrayed in John Millais' painting of 1851-52, which is hung at Tate Britain.

²¹ Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, Plate 8.

²² C R W Nevinson, 'Paths of Glory', 1917, is owned by the Imperial War Graves Museum. See the IWM catalogue entry (last accessed 27/10/15): <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/20211>

expressed doubts about the 'gruesomeness' of Jagger's proposal for a figure of a dead soldier at the north end of the monument, even though most of the body would be covered by a greatcoat.²³ In the end, Jagger's proposal was accepted, and the final bronze presents an intensely moving figure of heroic stature, lying above the inscription 'A Royal Fellowship'.²⁴

British reticence on the subject of death was a trait which had begun to develop some years before the First World War, even amongst religious families. The five children of the middleclass Hughes family, all of whom eventually went into religious orders or married clergymen, lost their mother from tuberculosis in 1906. Some sixty years later, Kathleen Hughes, the youngest of the five, wrote in a private family memoir of her mother's death:

Although our Father tried to continue speaking of our Mother, none of us could do so for fear of displaying emotion [...] and all the pent-up grief was buried deep inside behind a facade of self-control [...] For years and years I never uttered the word 'mother, let alone referred to my own, it became a sacred word that I was frightened to use in case I broke down.²⁵

Twelve years later, in 1918, Kathleen lost her beloved husband in the influenza pandemic. She wrote:

Everything now was swallowed into the depths, and these two tragedies were so woven together they could never be talked about. [...]

²³ Ann Compton (Ed.) *Charles Sargeant Jagger: War and Peace Sculpture* (Imperial War Museum, London, 1985), p. 94.

²⁴ Ibid, Plates 91 and 92. The figure's left hand can be seen, and also – but only just – the side of his head and his ear; these personal details confirm him, despite his mythical quality, as an individual rather than the universal soldier.

²⁵ Jennie Gray (Ed), 'Links in a Chain', *R.J. and Kathleen* (Chatham House, Chislehurst, 2001), p.47.

Photographs were hidden away, they were sacred and private, someone might use their names to me, no one was allowed 'within', they were mine.²⁶

The photographs to which she was referring were ordinary family photographs, not deathbed portraits.

British cultural reticence deepened in the interwar years, but it was the Second World War which really ensured that it became the dominant rule. In Jalland's view, the Second World War 'marked a deeper break with the past than the Great War'.²⁷ What came instead of openness about death was 'a pervasive model of suppressed private grieving which became deeply entrenched in the nation's social psychology'. Jalland describes such cultural reticence as extending to include civilian casualties in the Blitz. It was not 'in the interests of war effort or morale' to reveal the true horrific details of those who died in the bombing raids:

Therefore the dark side of the Blitz story [...] was suppressed or sanitised. To sustain morale, wartime censorship prohibited detailed reports of gruesome deaths and mass burials.²⁸

A similar secrecy surrounded mass military burials in Britain during the war. As has been seen, the one circumstance in which the British military dead could be buried in their home country was if they had died there. The British and Dominion servicemen who died in Britain in wartime were interred quietly and sombrely, as befitted a nation which was fighting for its survival. Mostly such burials were for very small numbers, but in cases where many men had been killed at the same time, the

²⁶ Ibid, p.54.

²⁷ Pat Jalland, *Death in War and Peace: A History of Loss and Grief in England, 1914-1970* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010), p.10.

²⁸ Ibid, p.124.

instinct was not to draw attention to the fact. After the worst night of the war for bad-weather air crashes, 16/17 December 1943, the large number of RAF dead were either escorted home individually to their families by an RAF officer, or interred in an RAF burial plot with honour guards and volleys of shot; however, it was all done on a very sombre low-key scale and so quietly that, except for individual death notices, it was never reported in the newspapers.²⁹

Overt expressions of grief were considered self-indulgent and destructive to the social cohesion and maintenance of morale which were necessary to fight the war. After the war, the silence continued. The one situation in which the awful details of wartime deaths were freely aired in public was in the case of war crimes. Knowing about such matters was almost a civic duty. War crimes provided an unshakeable justification for the war, and also a warning to history, an admonition never again to indulge in appeasement. The latter was certainly the lesson which Chris Barker, a soldier stationed in Italy, drew from the information about the concentration camps disseminated amongst the troops at the very end of the war:

Main thing for me is that these horrors went on from 1933-Sept 2nd 1939, without apparent condemnation from our peace-at-any-price leaders.³⁰

Because of strong cultural inhibitions about describing the work for the dead and the missing, there are very few first-hand accounts on the subject, and none of them are particularly long, with the exception of Geoffrey Cotterell's series of family letters about his missing brother. Without the military records, it would be impossible to form a comprehensive picture of the scale and complexity of the work of the MRES and

²⁹ See, for example, the mass burial at Cambridge City Cemetery for those killed on 16/17 December 1943. Jennie Gray, *Fire By Night, The Story of One Pathfinder Crew and Black Thursday, 16/17 December 1943* (Grub Street, London, 2000), p.105.

³⁰ Simon Garfield (Ed), *My Dear Bessie, A Love Story in Letters, Chris Barker and Bessie Moore* (Canongate, London, 2015), p.201.

the Graves Service. Within these secret records, men brought a sharp analytical focus to the numerous problems and the devising of the best possible solutions; they spoke about distressing matters with complete freedom because they had no need to temper their words to the feelings of the politically cautious, the squeamish, or the bereaved.

The British programme for the dead of North-West Europe was documented by deeply committed individuals, in particular Group Captain Hawkins for the RAF and Lieutenant Colonel Stott for the Army. Hawkins's completed report is very readable, but still clearly intended only for Service use; he wrote of it that it was intended 'not only as a record of achievement, but as a guide for the future if, unfortunately, occasion should ever arise again for a similar task to be performed'.³¹ Stott's vast collection of material, held in his Progress Reports and War Diaries, was never transmuted into a publishable form, but it was gathered and systemised in a manner which is possibly unique amongst British War Diaries. Most Army War Diaries are very dry and matter of fact, the entries being very short — the shorter the better appears to have been the view of many of those who had to compile them.³² It is likely that Stott, who took his work with the greatest seriousness, deliberately compiled what was, in effect, all the material necessary for an in-depth history of Graves Registration and Enquiry work in North-West Europe. However, it would be pure speculation to conclude that Stott himself was thinking of writing up a polished account from his many papers. If he was, then the possibility was denied to him. His

³¹ TNA, AIR 55/65, Air Ministry, Group Captain E F Hawkins, 'Report on Royal Air Force and Dominions Air Forces Missing Research and Enquiry Service 1944 – 1949', foreword, p.ii.

³² 'The less the better' – see, for example, the War Diary of No. 32 Graves Registration Unit which repeats exactly the same brief entry, beginning 'Normal operational role continued throughout the month' for seven months, from May to December 1945. TNA, WO 171/8342. There are of course exceptions to the general rule, like the War Diary of 1st Airborne Reconnaissance Squadron, written at Oosterbeek in September 1944, which is a vivid historical record in its own right and occasionally extremely funny despite the utterly dire situation in which it was written. TNA, WO 361/643, Airborne operations, North West Europe, Arnhem, 1st Airborne Reconnaissance Squadron, War Diary.

health gave way in late 1947, possibly partially due to extreme overwork.³³ He was evacuated to England, and was never able to resume his post. This personal disaster removed him from his paperwork, which of course belonged to the Army and not to him. He died in 1954, at only 63 years of age.

Even if Stott had written an account to be made available to the public, it is inconceivable, given the highly responsible man that he was, that he would have breached the protective cordon surrounding the most disturbing aspects of the Graves Service's work. The same is true of Hawkins and the MRES. Despite their understandable limitations, the histories compiled by Hawkins and Stott hold a deserved place within the massive effort made to document both the military and the civilian aspects of the British at war. The same intense motivation lies behind all the official histories, the desire to create not only a future guide but also the record of an absolutely unique moment in British history. All had behind them the assumption that the British would have the resources to run such a mighty war machine again. However, perhaps Stott and Hawkins had another motivation beyond the common rationale. Their work was also in a sense a memorial to the dead, and an acknowledgment of all those who worked so tirelessly on their behalf but whose vital contribution would never be known by the public.

Why, then, has it been worthwhile writing this account and breaking the long-enduring silence about the care of the military dead? The answer is that what has been revealed here is a complex, poignant, and astonishing undertaking which has

³³ TNA, WO 267/608, BAOR HQ, Western Europe Graves Service Directorate, Quarterly Historical Report, quarter ending 31 December 1947, main report. Extreme overwork — there is only one recorded instance of Stott taking any leave between December 1943 and May 1945; he went on leave to the UK on 18 April 1945, had 10 days off, spent 2 days at the War Office, and returned for duty in Brussels on 3 May. TNA, WO 171/3926, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, January-December 1945, entry for 18 April.

its place not only in British memorial practice, but also in the history of the Services, the war, and post-war Europe.

The British programme was carried out during what was one of the most extraordinary seven year periods of the Continent's history — the liberation from the Nazis, the annihilation of German nationalism, and the rebuilding of countries shattered by occupation and war. The care for the dead programme crossed national boundaries, and was aided by the unprecedented degree of goodwill in the liberated countries. After Victory in Europe, it was intrinsically linked to the occupation of Germany, the graves and search units being a part of the enormous network of British formations centred on the BAOR. The vital work was carried out against a background of growing Soviet intransigence, with admittance to Soviet-held territory often being denied.

Throughout this period, despite widespread revulsion against the German race, strong efforts were made to treat the thousands of German dead for whom the British had become responsible in as dignified and respectful a manner as their own servicemen. Magnanimity, however, had its limits. Relations with the defeated Germans were coloured by the hideous nature of the crimes committed by the Nazi regime, and many relatives did not want their dead loved ones, either airmen or soldiers, to remain in tainted German ground. The solution adopted involved the concentration of many thousands of bodies into British Military Cemeteries in Germany, inside whose boundaries the soil was symbolically that of England.

This study has revealed what is very rarely appreciated today — the Army's absolutely vital central role in the care of all the British dead. It carried out this work whilst also conducting the very dangerous and critically important military operations which helped to accomplish the liberation of Europe, and the conquest and subsequent policing of Germany. The Army also had a hugely important, but today almost entirely unknown, influence upon the national commemorative programme; it chose the cemetery sites with an eye for their beauty as well as their practicality, and policed the rules which governed who would be buried in the cemeteries and how they would be remembered. Far from the Imperial War Graves Commission having

the major role in the care of the dead which people then (and now) tended to assume, the Commission actually had little significant influence until that moment when it took over the cemeteries and had to 'make the best proposition of them architecturally and horticulturally'.³⁴

This study has made clear the immense scale of the problems faced by the Army and the RAF, such as the Army's acute shortage of manpower, the paucity of resources like vehicles and protective clothing, the very limited nature of forensic science at that period, the special difficulties which the RAF search teams encountered in Germany, and the escalating problems with the Russians. Not everything was done efficiently, and the key problematical areas were those connected with liaison with the relatives. The War Office Casualty Branch had a particularly difficult attitude, largely due to its relocation to a comparatively inaccessible site in Liverpool in June 1940. By contrast, the RAF — a modern Service with a modern welfare ethos — maintained offices open to relatives in central London throughout the war and well into the peace, and did comparatively well in dealing with the human issues.

The public were often very disgruntled with administrative aspects of the work, rightly so in the case of the War Office Casualty Branch's lack of a proper respect for the relatives' feelings. In addition, the Government tendency to restrict information produced a particularly distressing situation for relatives of men buried in Germany — these families often had to wait several years for news of who was caring for their loved one and when he would reach his final resting place. About the lack of information, they had every right to complain; however, the associated idea that the programme was taking far too long rested on ignorance of the immensity of the task, especially in Germany, and on misleading comparisons to the work of the First World War which was erroneously cited as a paragon.

³⁴ TNA, WO 171/186, 21 Army Group HQ, GR&E, War Diary, September-December 1944, Lieutenant Colonel Stott, 'Visit of Principal Architect and DDW of the Imperial War Graves Commission (approx. 1-14 Dec 44)', memorandum, 2 December 1944.

What only a small section of the military knew was that the real flaw in the British programme was the lack of reliable means of identification. Two of the major problems, given that there was no DNA-testing at that period, were the absence of dental records and the use of identity discs which were liable to degrade. These factors seriously affected the identification of soldiers' bodies from the 1940 campaigns in Norway and France, and those of airmen from September 1939 onwards, the latter having generally been buried by the Germans. (Dental records would have been particularly valuable in such cases because the Germans had a marked tendency to remove identity discs and other means of identification.) The Americans had far better methods of establishing identity and their very high clear-up rate reflected this, although other factors were also involved such as the late entry of the Americans into the war.

Successful identification rates relied not just upon material evidence found with the corpse, but also upon the methods by which the bodies were processed. When it came to immediate burials — those which took place during or soon after battle — the British system of burying and registering the dead was flawed because it was multi-layered; it involved the frontline troops, the Graves Service, the Royal Army Medical Corps, and the Royal Army Chaplains' Department. This set-up did not function as well as the American system which was based upon casualty evacuation, a procedure in which the dead were treated in much the same way as the wounded. However, although senior officers in the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries recognised the superiority of the American system, resources were not available to effect a change in procedure in North-West Europe in 1944, and the British muddled through as best as they could. Similarly, the later exhumation and identification work was carried through with whatever resources the British could muster, which were generally inferior to those of the Americans.

Another vital issue which this study has illuminated is the profound difference in the work which the Army and the RAF carried out on behalf of the dead and the missing. The reasons for this lay in Service culture, Service history, the campaigns which each had fought in North-West Europe, and the military and policing

responsibilities which each Service undertook during the war and afterwards. Briefly put, the Army and the RAF had very different agendas, and thus it cannot be said that there was a common unified British programme, as there was for the Americans. The one issue in which the Services were totally united was the desire to prosecute those who had committed war crimes, and an important aspect of the graves units and the search officers' work was to find and then preserve evidence of such crimes until a pathologist could attend the scene.

The motivations behind the Services' work were a mixture of the practical and the moral. The former included Service morale and good public relations, vital at a time where it looked very much as if there might be another war coming, this time with the Soviet Union. The latter included the acknowledgement of the immense debt owed to those who had lost their lives. However, the Services quantified these obligations in different ways, particularly in the case of the missing, with whom the RAF had a far more intense engagement than did the Army. The Army missing were treated in a fairly ruthless way despite the support from Lieutenant Colonel Stott for more intensive investigations aimed at naming 'unknowns'. There was a lack of dedicated searching, and the missing were often written off in blocks according to defined formulae. These formulae were defended as being extraordinarily accurate in confirming the deaths of the missing; however, whilst administratively convenient, they did nothing to answer the passionate desire of the relatives to have a grave to visit or, at the very least, to know something of what had happened to their loved ones. The RAF's search for the missing in North-West Europe outlasted the Army's work for the dead by three years, and resulted in the identification and honourable burial of thousands of men whose fate would otherwise never have been known.

This study marks out the burial, identification, and commemorative differences between the two World Wars, which are generally assumed to be of one common type. It notes how the Allied dead of the Second World War are still greatly sanctified and revered because they sacrificed their lives to defeat a hideous evil, and that although there had been a similar view after the First World War it did not last because of the failures of the peace. It also shows the human cost of the national

commemorative programme — the removal of any choice from the relatives of where and how their loved one was buried, and the parallel cost to the soldiers in North-West Europe, who wanted to remember their lost comrades in their own way. The national programme was carried out in the very commendable name of equality, but it was an equality which combined with the social pressure for the bereaved to keep their grief private to produce a considerable degree of deadening uniformity. This study has to a large extent put the focus back on the individual dead and those who took care of them. In short, it personalises; it counterbalances the tendency of the national programme to reduce individuality. In doing so it illumines the true cost of the war, which is often revealed by the simplest details: the cherished photographs of his fiancée which provided the vital link to a Canadian airman's identity; the stained money in dead soldiers' pockets, which prompted one dedicated Graves officer to query how the families could best be reimbursed. Above all, it reveals the powerful relationship of the Services to the dead, as best exemplified by the intensely focused MRES search teams and the extremely devoted staff of the Graves Registration and Enquiry units.

When the Services' work was completed, the burial places and the registers were handed over to the Imperial War Graves Commission, and the Commission became the custodian and representative of the national commemorative programme. The confusion between exactly what was done by the Services and what would later be done by the Commission was almost universal during the war, and seldom clarified during the early years of the peace. The work of the Services went largely unpublicised, initially out of operational necessity and the need to maintain the nation's morale, latterly out of respect for the bereaved's feelings and widespread cultural reticence. What became familiar instead was the finished result — the imposing cemeteries, burial places, and memorials which are at the centre of national mourning. Thus, by default, it has come to be assumed that it was the Commission, not the Army and the RAF, which carried out most, or indeed all, of the work.

The extraordinarily significant role of the Army and the RAF in the care of the military dead in North-West Europe has almost entirely been forgotten by history because of its tragic and macabre nature, the protective secrecy in which it was wrapped, and the fact that the Commission was its inheritor. Nonetheless, it is part of the same national story as the Cenotaph. The beautifully preserved graves and the dignified monuments to the missing conceal the immense exertions which the British made to find, identify, bury, and honour their lost servicemen.

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7. Internet Resources

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Australian War Memorial: <https://www.awm.gov.au>

Christchurch, Oxford: <http://www.chch.ox.ac.uk/cathedral/>

Commonwealth War Graves Commission: <http://www.cwgc.org/>

Futuremuseum collections: <http://www.futuremuseum.co.uk/collections.aspx>

Hansard :<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/sittings/C20>

MOD – History of the RAF:<https://cms.raf.mod.uk/rafpublished/history/>

Normandy Battlefield Guide: <http://battlefieldsww2.50megs.com/>

The Pathfinders and 97 Squadron: <http://raf-pathfinders.com/>