

Sons of Seend - World War Two

Forward

During the Second World War the wider community of Seend Parish again answered the call to arms and sent their sons to fight for King and Country around the world. Seven of them paid the ultimate price and are commemorated on the War Memorial Cross inside the Holy Cross Church grounds in Seend along with a roll of honour within the church itself.



The Memorial Cross in Holy Cross Church Seend



The names of those who died in WW2

When war arrived for the second time in a generation, Seend again answered the call and sent it sons to fight in the Second World War. Although a greater global conflict which touched every person within the British Isles the price paid in human terms was far less than that sacrificed in the Great War. Of the 7 who paid the ultimate price, three were already serving in either the Army or RAF, whilst the remainder volunteered for either the Army or RAF. During the course of the conflict 5 died as a result of enemy action and the other two died of natural causes whilst under arms. A Global conflict, these 7 served in various campaigns in Europe, the Middle East, Canada and the Mediterranean both on land and in the air.

In compiling these brief notes, I have searched the available records to identify individuals, a little about their lives before the war, their service and where and how they died. It is unfortunate that all records after 1928 remain sealed to general access therefore in some cases the notes on individuals have holes, however hopefully in time, some kind soul might update these men's stories so that their selfless deeds do not fade from our memory.

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Colonel (Ret'd)
Devizes
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Lt Col Sidney Clive Blaber RA

Sidney was born on 12 September 1904 to Sidney and Edith Florence Blaber in Croydon, Surrey where he was baptised on the 22 Dec 1904. By 1911 they were living at Shirley in Devizes Wick. Sidney attended Malvern School between 1918 – 1922 before attending Sandhurst where he commissioned into the Royal Artillery (RA) on 26 Jun 1925. He was promoted Lieutenant on 28 January 1927 and served in 26 Field Brigade RA. His military career took him to various posts in the empire including India where he was ADC to a District Commander between 1931 and 1934.

On 30 April 1934 he married his wife Diana Marion Hartwell (originally from Hove, Sussex and daughter of General John Redmond Hartwell) at Kingsclere in Hampshire and set up the family home in Seend (3 Ways). Sidney and Diana had two children Carol Ann (1940) and Marcus (1942). Promoted Captain on 1 Feb 1937, he initially fulfilling an Adjutants position and then a staff position as DAQMG before being given acting promotion to Major on 1st August 1939.

His early wartime service has yet to be released, but by early 1944 Sidney was an acting Staff Brigadier who asked to be demoted so that he could take command of an operational unit. His request was granted, and he took command of 133 Light Anti-Aircraft (LAA) Regt RA just before D-Day. His unit, as part of 74th AA Brigade, landed in Normandy in August 1944 to join First Canadian Army. At the end of the month, 21st Army Group broke out from the Normandy beachhead and began to pursue the defeated German troops across Northern France. In the last days of the month, 74th AA Bde's LAA regiments were deployed to guard the crossings of the River Seine.

This phase completed, the Regiment moved with the allies and was involved in the clearing the Scheldt Estuary which allowed the port of Antwerp to be used as a supply base, an important element in the original Overlord plan. The planners envisaged a substantial air defence laydown to deal not only with conventional air raids but also the threat of V-1 flying bombs (codenamed 'Divers'). To prevent downed V-1s falling in the city and dock area, the guns had to be positioned at least 10 miles outside the city, integrated into a system of warning stations and observation posts, supported by radar and searchlights. On 18 October 133rd LAA Regt reinforced took its place in the defensive ring at Antwerp.

Sidney's Demise

On Sunday 26th November 1944 Sidney was invited to lunch by the Mayor of a small market town just outside Antwerp. After lunch he accompanied the Mayor and his wife on a stroll in the gardens which unfortunately coincided with the arrival of a V2 rocket. Luckily, the Mayor and his wife escaped injury, however Sidney was mortally wounded and died of his wounds; his loss was greatly felt by the Regiment as he had been viewed as an excellent CO by all ranks. Sidney was buried at the Schoonselhof Cemetery Antwerp, Belgium aged just 40.

Pte George Henry Gerrish

Not much appears in formal records of George's early life or his family connection to Seend. It is believed that he was born in July 1914 in Bradford-on Avon.

George joined the Regular Army as a soldier around 1931/32 and after completing basic training was posted to the 2nd Battalion Hampshire Regiment as an infantry soldier. It would appear from records that his time in the Battalion was not without its challenges and saw him serve several periods of detention between 1935 and 1936 for disregarding authority.

At some point, George was transferred to the 1st Battalion which was a Regular Army unit deployed in India. At the start of WW2 George and the Battalion were sent to El Daba, Egypt on Garrison duties. It moved to Palestine on peace keeping duties in December 1939 and then moved to Moascar in Egypt, then to Mearsa Matruh in Summer 1940. One of its duties was to look after the large number of Italian prisoners after the fall of Sidi Barrani.

In February 1941, the 1st Battalion arrived in Malta, where it became part of the 1st (Malta) Infantry Brigade (with 1st Bn Dorset Regiment and 2nd Bn Devonshire Regiment), which later became the 231st Infantry Brigade. His units duties in Malta included airfield repair and working as stevedores in the docks. Malta was subjected to a prolonged siege and, by July 1942, the food situation had become serious, but the situation eased as the Allies' fortunes improved in the North African Campaign.

In April 1943, the 231st Brigade, including the 1st Hampshire's, was moved to Alexandria, then subsequently to Cairo and Suez, where it trained as an independent assault brigade. In July 1943, the 1st Battalion formed of the first wave of Operation Husky, the Allied invasion of Sicily. The beach landing went smoothly, but the 1st Battalion met strong resistance at Vizzini on 13 July in the form of the Herman Goring Parachute Panzer Division.

On 22 July, the 1st Battalion was engaged in hard fighting for Agrigento, which only fell on 29 July. The 1st Battalion was reduced to three companies after the battle. There was further hard fighting to capture the Regalbuto Ridge, which ended the Sicilian Campaign. It was during one of these later battles that George was gravely wounded and subsequently dies of his wounds on the 3rd August 1943 aged 29. The 1st Battalion suffered 18 Officers and 286 Other Ranks casualties in action in Sicily of which 44 were killed, many of the dead are buried with George at the Catania War Cemetery in Sicily.

Flight Sgt Walter Robert Charles Parfitt

Walter was born on the 5th August 1916 to Alfred and Melinda Parfitt who were living in Rusty Lane, Seend with their three daughters Dorothy, Emily and Gertrude. He was baptised in Seend Church on the 1st October 1916. Locally educated, he joined the RAF in early 1943 and underwent basic training, air gunner and operational training, the later as part of a crew headed by a Sgt Blamey.

Walter was posted as a Sgt air gunner to 156 Sqn RAF based at that time in RAF Warboys, Cambridgeshire. He arrived as part of a formed crew on 29th Sep 1943 and flew a total of 21 missions, 9 less than the magical 30 missions required to complete an operational tour in Bomber Command. His first mission was to Bochum, Germany on 29th Sep 1943 (the day he arrived) and his final mission, number 21 was Rüsselsheim, near Frankfurt on the 12/13 Aug 1944.

156 Sqn was a Lancaster-equipped Pathfinder squadron that served with Bomber Command's main force from Feb 1942 until the end of the Second World War. On the 1 Apr 1944 a new unit, No.582 Squadron, was formed around detachments from Nos.7 and 156 Squadrons and based at Little Staughton in Bedfordshire. Walter and his crew were part of the 156 Sqn element which formed this new Sqn. It was around this time that he was also promoted to the rank of Flight Sergeant and based on his mission dates there appears to be a 4 ½ month gap between his 20th mission and his final sortie.



582 Squadron became operational on 9 April 1944 and took part in the last year of Bomber Command's campaign – the last heavy bomber raid was an attack on an oil refinery at Tonsberg (Norway) on the night of 25/26 April 1945. During this period No.582 Squadron took part in 165 raids, mixing target marking and normal bombing operations. The squadron flew 2,157 sorties and lost 28 aircraft in combat during this period. Members of the squadron won two posthumous Victoria Crosses.

Walter's Fateful Mission

Walter was on a Lancaster Mk3, one of 297 aircraft - 191 Lancaster's, 96 Halifax's, 10 Mosquitos - which were sent to attack the Opel motor factory at Rüsselsheim, near Frankfurt. His aircraft took off from its base at Little Staughton at 22.05 hrs on the night of 12 Aug 44, piloted by Fl Lt Trotter DFC DFM a very experienced RCAF officer who had flown no less than 41 mission and who Walter had flown with for 50% of his operational missions. On route to the target, sometime in the early hours of 13 Aug 44, their aircraft was intercepted by a night fighter, both starboard engines of the Lancaster were set on fire, the plane spun and went down. Three of the crew managed to parachute and survived but were taken prisoner, the remaining four crew members, including Walter were killed. Fl Lt Trotter was one of the three who survived. The dead were all buried at Rheiberg War Cemetery, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany

Sadly the motor factory was only slightly damaged and most of the bombs fell in open countryside south of the target. Of the 297 aircraft dispatched on the raid, 13 Lancaster's and 7 Halifax's were lost (each with a crew of 7 men), some 6.7 per cent of the force sent.

Flight Lt Anthony Matthew Smith

Anthony was born in Devizes in Feb 1921 and brought up with his parents Matthew and Elsie in Seend Cleave. He was educated at Devizes Preparatory School and the Hoy's High School at Trowbridge before reading a BSc degree in Economics at St Luke's College Exeter. He volunteered to join the RAF in early 1941 but was given the time to sit an examination board for his teaching certificate which he duly passed.

He joined the R.A.F. (VR) in June 1941 and in September he went to Canada under the Empire Air Training Scheme, gaining his wings and a commission, and was posted to Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. Here he was engaged in anti-submarine patrols of the St. Lawrence estuary where German U Boats were active and sank dozens of merchant and warships during what was known as the Battle of the St Lawrence (from May–October 1942, September 1943, and again in October–November 1944). Although a pilot Anthony also qualified as a navigation instructor. After two and a half years in Canada he flew as pilot of a Dakota to Prestwick, before finally becoming the pilot and captain of a Lancaster Pathfinder bomber as a member of 582 (Pathfinder) Squadron with whom he flew missions over Europe.

Having survived the European War Anthony was admitted to the R.A.F. Hospital at Ely in Jul 1945 suffering from a long-term illness but was subsequently transferred to the Devizes Hospital in November to be closer to home. Unfortunately, he died on the 23 March 1946 whilst still serving in the RAF and was buried with a CWGC head stone in Seend Church.

Although dying after the formal end of WW2 Anthony was still serving in the RAF and therefore, he was registered with the CWGC even though he was not a war casualty. It was standard practice for serving personnel who died before 31 December 1947 to be included on National and local WW2 memorials.

Pte Albert James Trueman

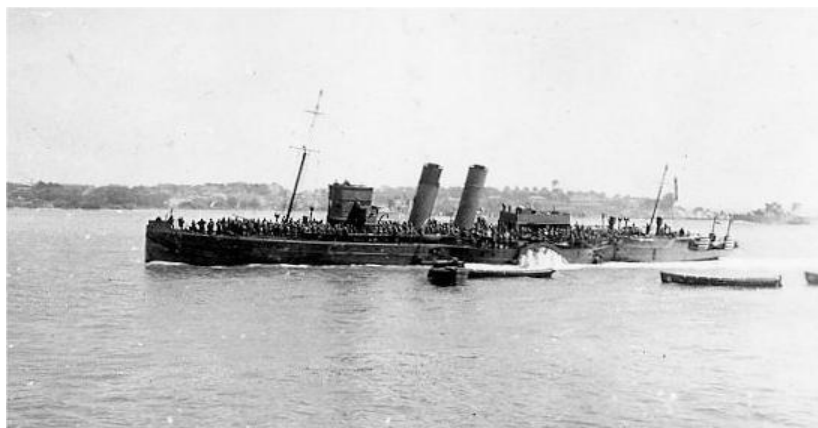
Albert was born in Devon in July 1918 to Frank H Trueman and his wife Marie H Trueman (nee Hayman) who married in Plymouth in Oct 1917. The family moved back at Seend Cleeve (Perrys Lane)

Initially enlisted in the Wiltshire Regiment in 1939 he completed his training at the depot in Devizes. However, rather than post him to the 4th or 5th Battalion's (Bn's) which were both UK based territorial units or the two Regular Bns which were deployed in India and Palestine, it would appear that Albert volunteered to be posted to the 8th Bn Worcestershire Regiment probably as a reinforcement to bring it up to a war establishment prior to its deployment to France as part of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF).

The 8th Bn landed at Le Havre on the 16th January 1940 and moved up to a concentration area at Tourville before moving on to Moncheaux, near the Belgian frontier. At this time, there was on the left of the Maginot Line, with neutral Belgium to its front, and as such had not confronted the enemy for months. But the war of static defence was abruptly ended when Germany invaded the Low Countries, and by 14th May 1940 the 8th Bn had moved to Dan Hoek on the outskirts of Brussels.

From this position they were required to withdraw in concert with the remainder of the BEF as German forces outmanoeuvred French and Belgian Armies. Having taken up various blocking positions the 8th Bn had been moved out of Wormhoudt near Dunkirk to new positions a few miles away, around Herzele and Bambegue to a line known as the 25-mile perimeter. Heavily outnumbered by enemy tanks, artillery and infantry, the 8th suffered heavy losses with only a handful of men from each company able to join Battalion HQ, which itself had been under attack from machine gun fire from all directions. It was during this fighting on the 29th May 1940 that Albert was killed, how he met his fate is unknown as is his final resting place amongst the carnage and confusion of the battle. During darkness the remains of the Battalion, found a gap in the enemy positions and, by crawling up the ditches, were able to get through and make their way to Bray Dunes close to Dunkirk.

Having reached the relative safety of the beaches a count was taken and only about a hundred men of the Battalion could be mustered. Some stragglers arrived later and on the 30th May 1940 a total of 149 men boarded the paddle steamer Glen Gower for the final trip back to England. The unit required a draft of 533 replacements when it finally got back to England and the reconstituted 8th Bn became a training unit in England, where it remained for the rest of the war. Albert is remembered on the Dunkirk Memorial in Dunkirk, France.



The Glen Gower her decks were packed with remains of the 8th Bn – 1940

Chaplin (Sqn Ldr) Philip Charles Usher

Philip was born at Sunnycroft, Trowbridge, Wiltshire on 18 March 1899 to Thomas Charles Usher and his wife, Constance Emma Bell. His father was a member of the Usher's brewing family and was engaged in the business throughout his life. At some-time in the post WW1 period the family moved to Green House, The High Street, Seend.



In 1911, Philip was at school at Hamilton House, Bath. He matriculated in 1919 and was awarded the Westin Scholarship and attended Christ Church, Oxford in 1919.

After being ordained he was appointed Domestic Chaplain to the Bishop of Gloucester, the Rt Revd Arthur Cayley Headlam C.H. who had been Regius Professor of Divinity from 1918 until 1923 and under whose influence Philip came whilst at Christ Church.

From 1924 until 1926, Philip was the Chaplain at St George's Church, Jerusalem. In 1930, he returned to Gloucester as Chaplain to Bishop Headlam, a position he held until he moved to London in 1937 when he was appointed Chaplain at the Grosvenor Chapel, South Audley Street.

He was Warden of Liddon House at the outbreak of the war but on 12 November 1940, Philip was gazetted to the RAF VR with the rank of Squadron Leader. Unfortunately, he died of a cerebral haemorrhage on active service near Jerusalem on 6 June 1941 just 10 days after his father's death. He is buried in the Ramleh War Cemetery aged 42.

Wing Commander Reginald Gilbert Squarey Morgan-Weld-Smith



Reginald was Born on 27 May 1911 in Staines District, Middlesex the Son of Reginald Morgan-Smith, and Mita Drinkwater-Carver. He was preceded by two sisters Joycelyn and Catherine and joined by a brother, Rupert in 1919. In 1924 the family moved into Seend Manor at Seend where they remained until Reginald's father's death in 1964. In 1938 the family changed their last name from Morgan-Smith to Morgan-Weld-Smith.

Reginald attended Canterbury University where he received a BA before joining the RAF in 1932 at the age of 21. He married Joan Margaret Niven¹ of Strathblane, Stirlingshire at Devizes at All Saints' Church, Marden on the 18th July 1936. The marriage produced a daughter.

Reginald's career in the RAF saw him in a number of roles including as a liaison officer to the Army, HQ, an appointment in Stanmore as a Personal Assistant to Air Marshal Sir Charles Burnett, completion of a Flying Instructors Course, a posting to as directing staff to RAF College, Cranwell along with flying appointments to various Squadrons including 614 (County of Glamorgan) Squadron RAuxAF. Promotion came at regular intervals and by 1 Dec 1938 he was a Squadron Leader within the air staff at HQ of an Army-Co-operation Group. At some point in 1940 he was made Commanding Officer of 59 Squadron RAF as an Acting Wing Commander.

59 Squadron RAF History

No.59 Squadron was formed at Narborough Airfield in Norfolk on 1 August 1916 as a squadron of the Royal Flying Corps. On 13 February 1917, the Squadron crossed the English Channel, deploying to Saint-Omer in northern France to operate in the army co-operation role, equipped with Royal Aircraft Factory R.E.8s.[3]

During the Second World War it was attached to RAF Fighter Command (1937–1940), Bomber Command (taking part in the Millennium II raid on Bremen) and Coastal Command (1940–1945). After the war, 59 Squadron was attached to Transport Command, flying troops to India from September 1945 until 15 June 1946, when the squadron was disbanded. Reginald took command of the Squadron, then based in Thorley Island, in early 1940

The Battle of Britain

The Battle of Britain was fought between the Royal Air Force (RAF) defended the United Kingdom (UK) against large-scale attacks by Nazi Germany's air force, the Luftwaffe. The British officially recognise the battle's duration as being from 10 July until 31 October 1940, which overlaps the period of large-scale night attacks known as The Blitz, that lasted from 7 September 1940 to 11 May 1941. German historians do not accept this subdivision and regard the battle as a single campaign lasting from July 1940 to June 1941, including the Blitz.

The primary objective of the German forces was to compel Britain to agree to a negotiated peace settlement. In July 1940, the air and sea blockade began, with the Luftwaffe mainly targeting coastal-shipping convoys, ports and shipping centres, such as Portsmouth. On 1 August, the Luftwaffe was

¹ After Reginald's death in 1940 Joan re-married Lt.Col. Alastair Stevenson Pearson DSO+3 Bars, MC The Parachute Regiment in September 1944.

directed to achieve air superiority over the RAF with the aim of incapacitating RAF Fighter Command; 12 days later, it shifted the attacks to RAF airfields and infrastructure. As the battle progressed, the Luftwaffe also targeted factories involved in aircraft production and strategic infrastructure. Eventually, it employed terror bombing on areas of political significance and civilians.

Action in which R.G.S. Morgan-Weld-Smith was killed

At this phase of the Battle of Britain the Luftwaffe attacked shipping convoys in the English Channel and Channel ports along with coastal radar stations on the South coast. On 6 July Adolf Hitler issued Directive No. 16, calling for preparations to be made for Operation Sealion – the invasion of Britain. Hitler demanded that “the British Air Force must be eliminated to such an extent that it will be incapable of putting up any sustained opposition to the invading troops”; this new phase was to commence in mid-August.

Following reports of an enemy aircraft build up at Cherbourg on 1 Aug 1940, Bomber Command were initially tasked with the attack but as their resources were already stretched the mission was given the Coastal Command and 59 Sqn was ordered to bomb the Luftwaffe airbase at Querqueville in three waves using 13 Blenheim Mk 4s. Taking off at 1500 hrs they were escorted by 236 Sqn also equipped with 10 Blenheim Mk 4s in the fighter role. Reginald lead the attack in his Blenheim Mk4 bomber accompanied by his two-man crew being his Observer – Pilot Officer David H Davis AFM, MID x2 (27) and his Air Gunner – Sgt Peter Pryde (19)



Blenheim Mk 4 Bombers

The target was difficult to find due to the weather condition but eventually the force managed to spot it through a gap in the low clouds and made their attack. The flak was very heavy and two aircraft of 236 Sqn were shot down. German Bf109s also managed to take off and were seen to enter the battle but none of the German pilots reported attacking Reginald's plane. The bombing was effective, and a good deal of destruction of the aircraft and facilities was achieved.

Apparently, Reginald's aircraft was hit by flak on the run into the target and he sustained injuries to his face. After dropping his bombs, the aircraft was hit again by flack which gravely injured Sgt Pryde. It is believed that damaged, the aircraft was forced to ditched in the sea, a theory supported by the arrival of the aircrafts pigeon at its RAF loft. A reconnaissance flight was launched but no sign of the men was found. The bodies of the crew finally washed up along the French coast over the following three weeks and were buried in local cemeteries, RGS at St Pierre-en-Port Communal Cemetery (40km west of Dieppe), Davis at St Valery-en-Caux Franco-British Cemetery (32km west of Dieppe)

and Pryde at Valery-les-Roses Communal Cemetery (24km west of Dieppe) over 160km from their original target in the Cherbourg area.

