



# **Military History Group U3A Dorking**

## **Newsletter Number 35 June 2023**



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## **Fellow enthusiasts from Barrie Friend – convener of the MHG**

The last month was an extremely busy one for our Military History Interest Group.

George Blundell Pound organised a most successful tour to Southwick House where the D-Day planning, command and control was undertaken for Operation Neptune, the naval element of Operation Overlord. An excellent morning with guests and friends from Milford MHG ended with lunch in a local pub where the landlord addressed us with *his* twenty-minute talk on D-Day, reinforcing the first-class presentation given by Richard Callaghan, historian and Southwick House archivist, in the map room of Southwick House. Fuller details are set out below.

The largest Dorking Military History Interest Group meeting ever held in our six-year history was on 6th June with some 110 guests assembling to hear Dr Robert Lyman's talk on "Burma, The Forgotten War." Many guests brought memorabilia their relatives had used in the war and these items produced lively discussions. Robert's talk was



very well received. We appreciated his knowledge and how he communicated that to us to aid our understanding of those brutal times. Several guests made enquiries about joining our group. The planning for the meeting was undertaken by a small group of our members whom we should thank for such a successful morning. Fuller details are in the attached Newsletter along.

### **Our next meeting**

Tuesday 4th July, 0930 coffee and networking. 1000 Tony Barnes talking on "The Italian Campaign in World War One". Cricket Pavilion, Middle Street, Brockham RH3 7JT. See you all there - do bring a chum!

Jim Barnes has arranged the following talks for the coming months. They all will accompanied be a Ten Minute Slot. Book exchange will be announced later.

August 1st An ecstasy of fumbling: Gas in the Great War- a war winning weapon?

September 5th: Winston Churchill's most agonising decision.

October 3rd: 2nd Lt Alfred Charles Garrie Fowler RNVR and RAF.

November 7th: History of The Royal Navy Submarine Service.

December 5th: Life in the air does have its funny moments!

Carolyn has very generously invited members of our Military History Interest Group for coffee and cake in her garden on August 15th from 1100.

Please let her know if you wish to come along by email [cs.wilson@live.com](mailto:cs.wilson@live.com)

## Tuesday 6th June 1100 Dr Robert Lyman's talk

*“What have we forgotten about the forgotten war.”*



### Dr Robert Lyman

A unique opportunity to attend our local Military History Group lecture by Dr Robert Lyman, a published expert on World War II in the Far East. If you have any memorabilia from the Burma Campaign, please bring it along for discussion.

Tea and Coffee on arrival  
Entry: Free of Charge  
Voluntary Donation to Charity.....

RSVP:  
Liz Lockhart-Mure : [lockhartmure@btinternet.com](mailto:lockhartmure@btinternet.com)  
Barrie Friend : [barrieandmarilyn@gmail.com](mailto:barrieandmarilyn@gmail.com)



### Dr Robert Lyman FRHistS

Dr Robert Lyman FRHistS is a writer and historian. He is a Research Fellow at the Changing Character of War Centre, Pembroke College, University of Oxford.

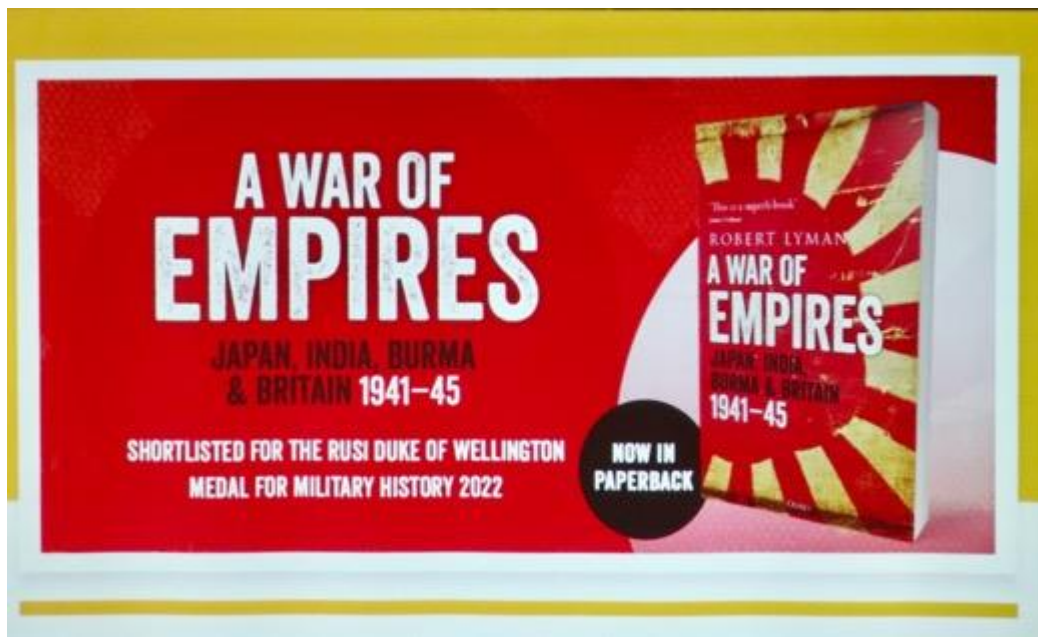
After finishing a twenty-year career in the British Army in 2001 he has published widely on the Second World War in Europe, North Africa and Asia.

He is Field Marshal Bill Slim's military biographer. His presentation of the case for Slim won a National Army Museum debate in 2011 for Britain's Greatest General and his case for Kohima/Imphal won a National Army Museum debate in 2013 for Britain's Greatest Battle.

He was the BBC's historical adviser for the VJ commemorations in 2015 and 2020 and is a regular contributor to documentary films on aspects of the war.

In the pipeline is an account of the two Chindit campaigns (Operations Longcloth and Thursday), an account of American experiences of living under Nazism ('Jackboot'), the story of the British Army between 1918 and 1940 and a combined biography of Britain's greatest generals of the Second World War, Bill Slim and Bernard Montgomery.

Dr Lyman did not charge for his presentation and so a collection took place the money raised, almost £500 to go to a charity supported by the speaker; "Kohima Education Trust", [www.kohimaeducationaltrust.net](http://www.kohimaeducationaltrust.net). The purpose of the trust is to provide educational assistance to the young people of Nagaland, India. This follows the assistance given to those fighting at the time of World War Two. The website gives valuable information, is worth visiting online, and includes information on Robert Lyman's books."



### **A War of Empires: Japan, India, Burma & Britain: 1941–45**

**Shortlisted for the RUSI Duke of Wellington medal for military history 2022**

**'This is a superb book.' - James Holland**

In 1941 and 1942 the British and Indian Armies were brutally defeated and Japan reigned supreme in its newly conquered territories throughout Asia. But change was coming. New commanders were appointed, significant training together with restructuring took place, and new tactics were developed. *A War of Empires* by acclaimed historian Robert Lyman expertly records these coordinated efforts and describes how a new volunteer Indian Army, rising from the ashes of defeat, would ferociously fight to turn the tide of war.

But victory did not come immediately. It wasn't until March 1944, when the Japanese staged their famed 'March on Delhi', that the years of rebuilding paid off and, after bitter fighting, the Japanese were finally defeated at Kohima and Imphal. This was followed by a series of extraordinary victories culminating in Mandalay in May 1945 and the collapse of all Japanese forces in Burma. Until now, the Indian Army's contribution has been consistently forgotten and ignored by many Western historians, but Robert Lyman proves how vital this hard-fought campaign was in securing Allied victory in the east. Detailing the defeat of Japanese militarism, he recounts how the map of the region was ultimately redrawn, guaranteeing the rise of an independent India free from the shackles of empire.

The following are photographs taken by member of Milford MHG Paul Smith during the presentation.



## **The Forgotten War – Burma Campaign 1942-45**

Notes taken by Paul Smith at the presentation.

Well over 100 people attended Betchworth Memorial Hall on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2023 for this special lecture, many bringing with them memorabilia from the Burma Campaign. At the foot of the

stage several tables were full with photographs, maps, medals, insignia, personal histories, books, etc, which were the subject of much interest both before and after the meeting.

Barrie Friend welcomed members and guests and then introduced the speaker:

Dr Robert Lyman is an elected fellow of the Royal Historical Society. The primary focus of his research is the British and Commonwealth armies in the Second World War, where he has published extensively on the Pacific and Far East, North Africa and North-West Europe. He was commissioned from the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in 1982 into the Light Infantry and spent 20 years in the British Army. His PhD was on Field Marshal Bill Slim. In 2011 he won the National Army Museum's debate for 'Britain's Greatest General' on Bill Slim and in 2013 the debate for 'Britain's Greatest Battle' on Kohima and Imphal.

Dr Lyman began by asking who had seen the 1945 American war film 'Objective Burma' which starred Errol Flynn. When first shown in the UK, many had thought it overplayed the American contribution to the war and had walked out of the cinema. Were they right?

He gave an overview of the Burma Campaign – the longest land campaign in UK history - being from 23<sup>rd</sup> Dec 1941 to 15<sup>th</sup> Aug 1945 and set out the political and military background. One of the major problems was that the Far East in general and Burma in particular was bottom of the Allied priority for equipment, shipping, aircraft and manpower. On 7<sup>th</sup> December 1941, the Japanese attacked the US naval base at Pearl Harbour and later declared war on Britain and the United States. The Japanese had invaded Indo-China and in the weeks that followed invaded territories including Hong Kong, Malaya and Singapore. The British position quickly deteriorated and by March, the Burmese capital Rangoon and its vital port had been lost.

There were two reasons for the Japanese invasion of Burma. Firstly, the Japanese knew it would serve them well if they cut overland access to China from Burma via the famed Burma Road. Along this road a steady stream of military aid was being transported from Rangoon, over the mountains of the 'Hump' and into Nationalist China, but if this supply route was closed the Japanese could deprive Chiang Kai Shek's armies of their lifeblood, permitting the Japanese to conquer all China.

As the Japanese pushed northwards, the heavily outnumbered surviving Allied troops carried out a five-month fighting retreat towards India to the Irrawaddy River, accompanied by tens of thousands of wretched Indian refugees, across 1,000 miles of difficult terrain.

In March 1942 Field Marshal William Slim had been promoted to command Burma Corps and having inherited a disastrous situation realised the need for jungle warfare training and that much would have to be improvised in India or on the battlefield. As an example, the 14<sup>th</sup> Army could not cross rivers without boats, and he knew none would be

supplied. In a jungle rich with teak trees his army felled enough to construct 550 boats, strong enough to carry tanks, plus two gunboats.

In the UK the average annual rainfall is 34 inches. In East India and Burma it is between 200-300 inches, and sometimes up to 500 inches – and falls mostly in the Monsoon season, May to October. Fighting in the humid jungle, including during the Monsoon season, had to be learned and undertaken. To appreciate the scale of the task, Robert used the phrase ‘the tyranny of distance’. From Calcutta to Rangoon was 1,800 miles, (the same as from London to Moscow).

There followed many months of stalemate, lightened by some success in Brigadier Wingate's Chindits using guerrilla tactics against the Japanese. In 1943 the Allied High Command was overhauled and much needed air support and re-supply by air became the norm for the forward troops. Slim, in command of the 14<sup>th</sup> Army, imbued his command with a new spirit.

The Japanese, aware that the defenders had gained strength, resolved to end the campaign at a blow with an assault into Assam, in north-east India, aimed at capturing the key towns of Imphal, (capital of the hill state of Manipur), and Kohima. For the first time the defenders stood firm, confident in their air support. Between March and July 1944 fierce battles raged on both fronts. Although now outnumbered the Japanese fought with ferocious courage, their army philosophy being that it was an honour to die for the emperor. The Japanese withdrew from the hills and back across the River Chindwin, harassed by Wingate's Chindits.

As the Japanese had effectively cut Allied access to the Burma Road, the U.S. and other leaders agreed to organize a continual aerial resupply effort directly between India and China. The USAAF had to construct airfields and form units for what was to become the world's largest airlift up to that time. Over 270,000 U.S. personnel were involved,

Flying over the The Hump at the eastern end of the Himalayas was extremely dangerous and many aircraft were lost, in what aircrew called the infamous ‘Aluminium trail’. However, over 650,000 tons of freight was flown over 900 days. Robert advised that a DC-3 Dakota could carry 2.5 tons, which meant that on average 243 aircraft would need to be in the air on any one day.

The Allies' logistical and communications superiority were key and had allowed the quick deployment of reinforcements and equipment. During the battle, the RAF continually re-supplied the garrisons who were able to throw back the Japanese attacks in bitter close-quarter fighting until the relief forces reached them. Bill Slim was able to utilise Indian volunteers, the Gurkha battalions, Burmese and Indian Nagaland Hill Tribes, Hindus and Sikhs, SOE teams and Force 136 to cut off the Japanese advances and in a later book expressed a huge debt of gratitude to them. His enlarged 14<sup>th</sup> Army was logistical, innovative, flexible and spirited.

After the failure by the Imperial Japanese Army of the Imphal offensive in May 1944, their field commander Mutaguchi refused to allow his divisional commanders to retreat, and instead dismissed all three of them. He eventually called off the attack on 3 July. Some

55,000 of Mutaguchi's 85,000-man force ended up as casualties, many dying from starvation or disease. Imphal-Kohima was one of the biggest defeats the Japanese Army ever suffered. There were many more battles.

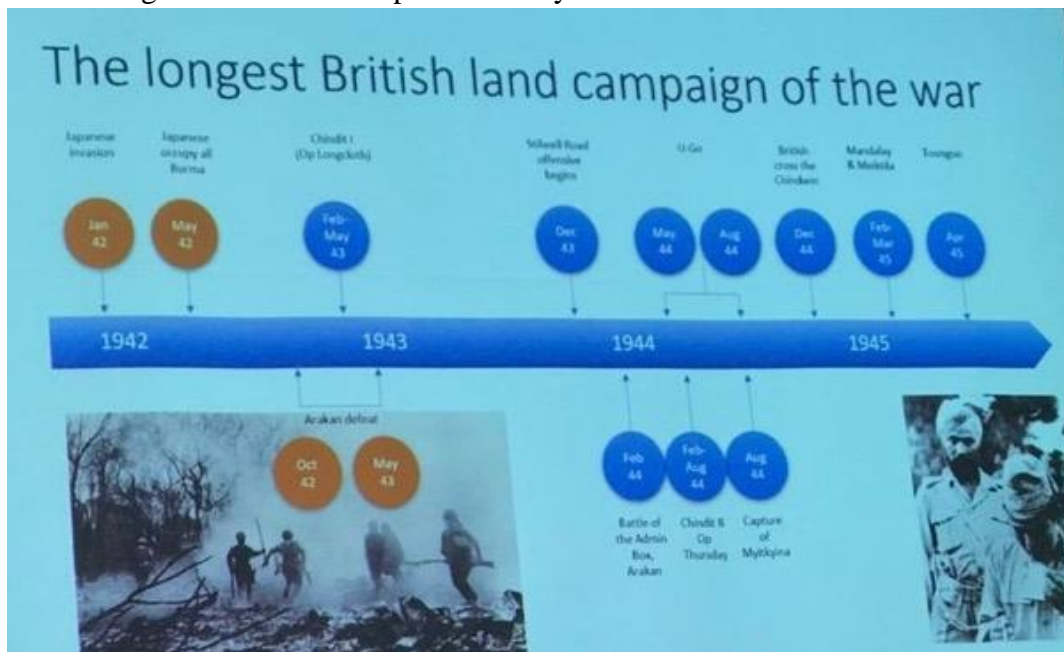
Then followed a Q & A session in which the broad and extensive knowledge of Dr Robert Lyman was again very impressive.

This summary is, of necessity, only a very brief overview of his lecture, which itself is covered much more fully in his highly acclaimed book 'A War of Empires: Japan, India, Burma & Britain 1941-45'. Many copies of this book, and others by him, were snapped up and signed.

That book advises that Kohima War Cemetery lies on the slopes of Garrison Hill and also contains the British 2nd Division's memorial. The inscription on the latter has become famous as the 'Kohima Epitaph':

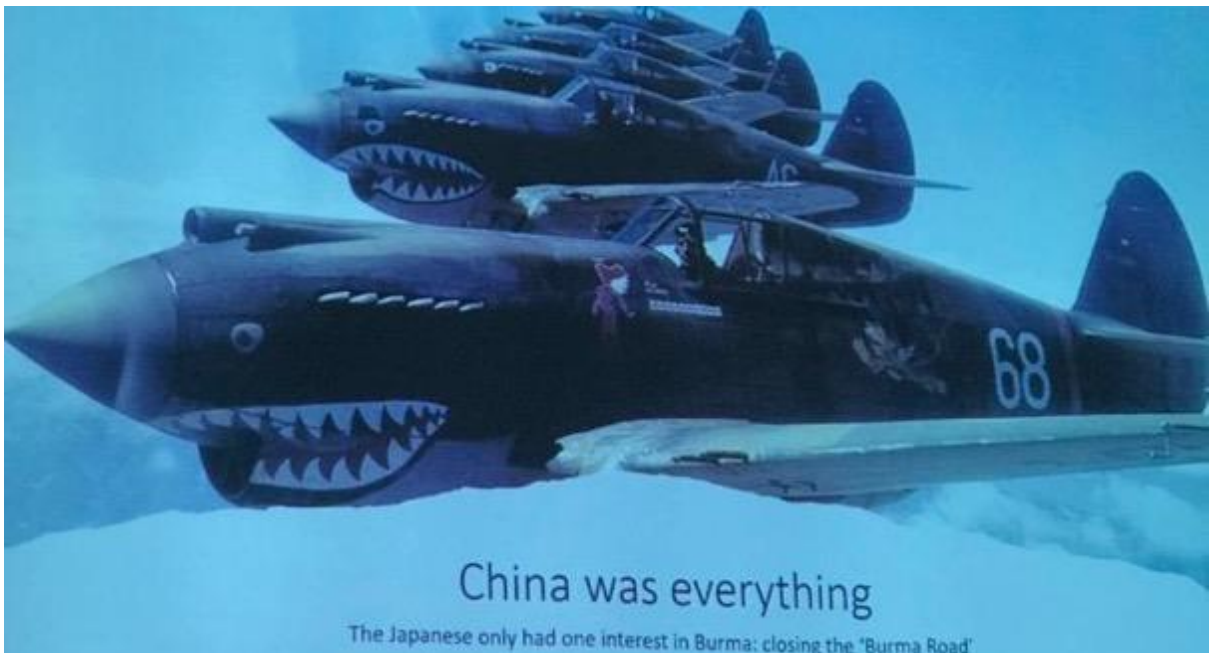
*'When You Go Home, Tell Them of Us and Say, For Your Tomorrow, We Gave Our Today.'*

Following are photographic copies of some of Dr Lyman's slides. They have not come out well but will give the readers some idea as to the content of the morning's very well received presentation. A great deal has been published if you have the interest!

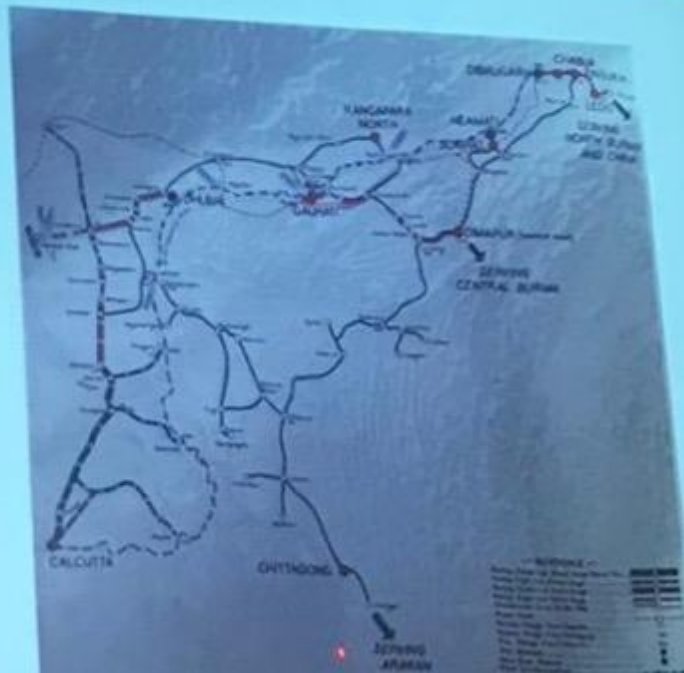


1941 was the beginning of the end of Japan's long war in Asia

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## Lines of Communication and the tyranny of distance



## Japan's worst General v Britain's best?

### Japan

- Bold Japanese offensive but in the face of an impenetrable Allied defence it became attritional, the Japanese suffering considerably at the hands of far superior Allied weapons
- Poor logistic plan
- Poor strategy
- Appalling command relationships

### Allied

- A smart defensive plan, even if it meant withdrawal
- Excellent logistical plan
- Innovation (e.g., 22 CAF brigades)
- Flexibility provided by aerial resupply and air transport
- A new fighting spirit among the men of 14 Army



## Japanese

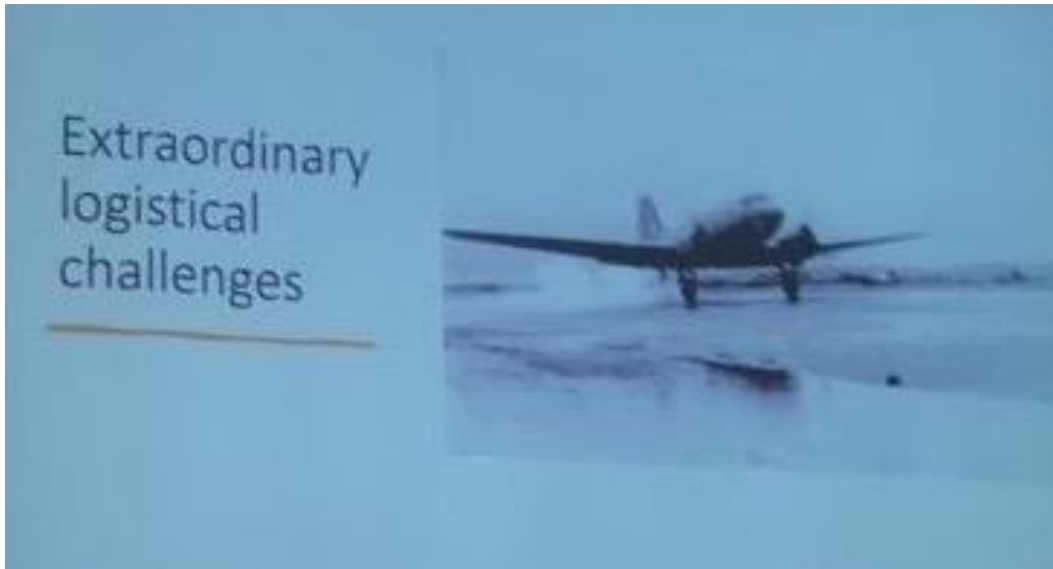
- Bold Japanese offensive but in the face of an intractable Allied defence it became attritional, the Japanese suffering considerably at the hands of far superior Allied firepower
- Poor logistic plan
- Poor strategy
- Appalling command relationships

## Allied

- A smart defensive plan, even if it meant withdrawal
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Transformation of the Indian Army



## **Lieutenant-Colonel James Nimmo Forester Blackater DSO MID TD**

A member of the audience brought memorabilia from her late grandfather.

Taken from what appears to be a regimental biography: Jim Blackater died suddenly at his home in Ferndown, Dorset on 14 April 1980. Born in Glasgow in October 1902, he was educated at Glasgow Academy and Sedburgh where he finished Head of School and Captain of Rugby. For a number of years, he played rugby for the first XV Glasgow Academicals.

Shortly after leaving school, he received his commission in 9<sup>th</sup> Bn (Glasgow Highlanders) Highland Light Infantry (TA) and at the outbreak of war in 1939 was company commander holding the rank of captain. He was promoted to Major in April 1942 was transferred to The Gordon Highlanders the 9<sup>th</sup> Bn then station at Newcastle-upon-Tyne. In a very short time he gained the loyalty, respect and wholehearted support of all ranks. He had a very clear brain, sound tactical knowledge and soon proved himself a first-class leader and dedicated Gordon Highlander.

Within two months of his appointment the Battalion sailed for India and much to the surprise of all ranks were converted to a regiment of the Royal Armoured Corps becoming 116 Regiment (The Gordon Highlanders) RAC and a part of 225 Indian tank Brigade. Jim Blackater made it abundantly clear to higher authority that we were Gordon Highlanders first and foremost and would continue to wear balmorals, Gordon Highlander cap badges and regimental flashes on our shoulders. He also insisted in re-training our Pipe Band in place of our allocated five trumpeters.

After a period of training in India and equipped with American Sherman tanks Colonel Jim led us into Northern Burma. The Regiment gave invaluable support to a large number of infantry battalions and played a major role in the recapture of Burma. In close contact with the enemy Jim was a first-class commanding officer in every way. He loved action and was in his element

when outwitting the Japanese in the many battles from Mandalay to Rangoon. His determination, courage example and keen sense of humour inspired all those who served under him. For his outstanding leadership and devotion to duty he was awarded the DSO and mentioned in despatches.

**LIEUT COL. J. N. F. BLACKATER, DSO, TD**

Jim Blackater died suddenly at his home in Ferndown, Dorset, on 14th April, 1980. Born in Glasgow in October, 1902 he was educated at Glasgow Academy and Sedburgh where he finished Head of School and Captain of Rugby. For a number of years he played rugby for the first XV Glasgow Academicals.

Shortly after leaving School in 1921 he received his commission in 9th Bn (Glasgow Highlanders) Highland Light Infantry (TA) and at the outbreak of War in 1939 was a company commander holding the rank of captain.

He was later promoted to Major and in April, 1942 was transferred to The Gordon Highlanders and appointed to command the 9th Battalion then stationed at Newcastle-upon-Tyne. In a very short time he gained the loyalty, respect and whole-hearted support of all ranks. He had a very clear brain, sound tactical knowledge and soon proved himself a first class leader and a dedicated Gordon Highlander.


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outstanding leadership and devotion to duty he was awarded the DSO and was mentioned in Despatches.

Prior to the War he was Manager of the Glasgow Branch of the Norwich Union Insurance Company and at the end of hostilities returned to the same company when he was appointed to the managership of the Cambridge Office. He retired from business in 1963.

To his wife Kitty, his daughters Ann and Jill and his stepson Peter we extend our deepest sympathy.




**James Blackater family memorabilia**

**Jo Pearson message to Barrie Friend 9 June 2023 about her grandfather James Blackater:**

Very well done for putting on such an excellent meeting and talk by Robet Lyman. He is so interesting, a fount of knowledge, and could clearly have gone on for ages elaborating. How can he hold all the facts so well? An amazing achievement.

I feel privileged to be researching Grandpa Lt Col Jim Blackater, and his brother Clarkson Blackater a POW at Changi, Singapore, and I am completely buoyed-up by the comments of members of the audience who appreciated a snippet of our family story.

Barrie: I am so pleased to hear of your interest in this aspect of WW2 and know you will explore this in future. I had struggled to find the way into the topic, but once we had Grandpa's service records and army number, I then cross referenced the dates to places on the map. Now, I can expand each date by finding the War Office records at the National Archives in Kew.

There was a gentleman who asked me about the POWs on the Burma Railway, and I asked if he had read the Railwayman by Eric Lomax; he had not and did not appear to know where to start. I then made further suggestions, but it was all a bit rushed.

May I take the liberty of starting at the beginning, and if any of this information is helpful to you or your group then please share as appropriate.

**Google:** Burma 1942-1945: Kohima; Imphal.  
POWs Singapore, Burma Railway

**Imperial War Museum:** Again, put the same words in and drill down to your particular interest.

**Web addresses**

ww2.talk.com  
burmatar.org.uk  
cwgc.org Commonwealth War Graves Commission  
forces-war-records.co.uk  
hut-six.co.uk  
iwm.org.uk  
nam.ac.uk National Army Museum  
nationalarchives.gov.uk

**Excellent books** that I took from the Taunton library:  
Kohima by Arthur Swinson  
Burma '44 by James Holland - excellent

The Burma Campaign: Disaster into Triumph 1942-45 by Frank McLynn

**Books** I have collected:

Tank Tracks to Rangoon by Bryan Perrett (grandpa has several mentions)

Burma Victory (Imphal, Kohima and the Chindit issue, March 1944 to May 1945) David Rooney

The End Game Burma (Slim's masterstroke at Meiktila) Michael Pearson

The Railway Man by Eric Lomax

Gods Without Reason by Clarkson Blackater (out of print, but my copy was £40 of eBay a few years ago).

(I was ignorant of the location of Kohima & Imphal, and for where the prayers come from that we say each year at Remembrance Day.)

**Facebook: WW2 Burma Research.**

My friend Mary Cole is one of the admin people on this facebook page. Everyone is welcome, and people post a wide variety of information or questions. It's been invaluable to me.

**National Archives, Kew:**

Once information has been found about an ancestor, it is possible to go to the National Archives, Kew. Register in advance (all information given on the website). To request a file in advance, again, use the search buttons to drill down. I've only just scratched the surface on my first visit last weekend, but it was a hugely rewarding experience.

For information:

My mother (89 years): Jill Richardson, is at Newdigate. My sister Fiona is nearby.

**DSO:**

National Archives WO 373/40/2

Blackater, James Nimmo Forrester

Rank: Captain, Major Temporary Lieutenant Colonel

Service No: 24944

Regiment: 116 Royal Armoured Corps, Gordon Highlanders

Theatre of Combat or Operation: Burma

Award: Distinguished Service Order

Date of announcement in London Gazette: 12 July 1945

**Mentioned in Despatches**

WO 373/92/235

Blackater, James Nimmo Forrester

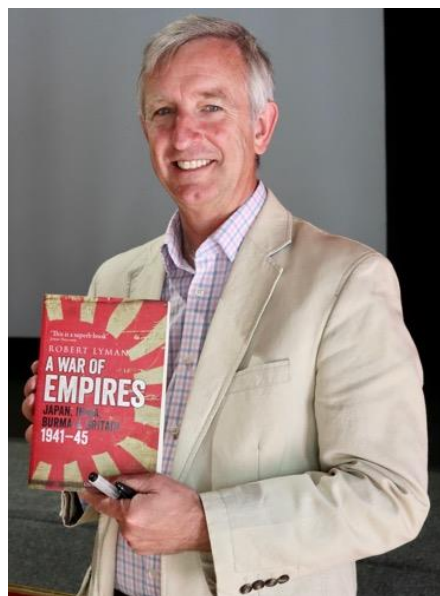
Rank: Major

Service No: 24944 TA

Regiment: Royal Armoured Corps  
Theatre of Combat or Operation: Burma  
Award: Mention in Despatches  
Date of announcement in London Gazette: 20 September 1945

### Memorabilia Table





## Southwick House Museum visit 18 May 2023

### Paul Smith Milford U3A Military History Group

Members of Milford's Military History Group joined up with colleagues from Dorking U3A to visit Southwick House Royal Military Police Museum, near Portsdown Hill, Portsmouth on

Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> May. This is where the HM Royal Navy's plans were laid for the WW2 Normandy Landings on 6<sup>th</sup> June 1944.

Here is the grand entrance to Southwick House which was used by C in C Dwight D Eisenhower, Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, Admiral Ramsay and other top allied force commanders during 1944.



**Richard Callaghan from the RMP Museum welcomes members of the u3a**

Below is the map room with the original wall chart showing the routes to be used by the naval forces to cross the Channel. An enormous undertaking (Operation Neptune) meticulously planned by Admiral Ramsay for the landings on Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword beaches Normandy.



The museum houses many other interesting items including this BSA motorbike used by the Royal Military Police.



After the visit we had a splendid lunch in the Golden Lion village pub not far from the museum.

In the afternoon some of us went on to visit Fort Nelson, (on top of Portsdown Hill) with stunning views across Portsmouth and the Solent. The Fort was built to defend Portsmouth from flank attacks from the West, North and East by Napoleon.

All in all, a great day, made all the more enjoyable with glorious sunshine!



**Faultless and riveting presentation by Richard Callaghan BA (Hons) Curator  
Royal Military Police Museum**

**Additional Photographs from Paul Smith**









## The Home Front, Surrey

### First World War

Robert Bartlett

**Brockham Special and PC keeping busy!** 1916 14 April: A consequence of the Zeppelin threat resulted in prosecutions more associated with Air Raid Wardens and the Second World War. Too much light and riding without lights were offences prosecuted. Special Constable George Bailey and PC Webb Surrey Constabulary Brockham and Betchworth <sup>1</sup> The comment from the Bench that it was good to see Specials were useful as well as ornamental was a sharp comment based

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<sup>1</sup> Surrey Mirror 14 April 1916

on what has been lost to time.

Elizabeth Wanstall, Brockham was summoned for displaying too much light from her window. Special Constable George Bailey stated the facts of the case. The case was dismissed with a caution. Rosina Joyce, Brockham Green was fined 10s for not screening her light from her window. Special Constable Bailey proved the case and the chairman remarked that the bench was pleased to find that special constables were as useful as well as being ornamental. Florence Jenkins, Betchworth, was stopped by PC Webb for not having a light on her bicycle for which she was fined 2s 6d.<sup>2</sup>

**Cox Stanley Digance** PC 287 later superintendent, born October 1893, Wandsworth. The census of 1901 shows Stanley D Cox living with Parents George and Catherine Cox in Putney age 21 in November 1914 joined Surrey Constabulary 22 January 1915 Defaulter's Book entry 1763. 1917 residence on enlistment form his address is shown as County Police Station, Guildford, and occupation of Police Constable. **1916 October:** The following picture is on display in Peronne on the Somme at an exhibition of the missing giving the date as Daily Mirror October 9, 1916.<sup>3</sup> At the time PC Cox was a member of the Surrey Constabulary and had given a blood donation which may well have been an unusual thing to do in 1916.

1917 enlisted Royal Garrison Artillery No 160310. On attestation papers expressed preference for Military Mounted Police, but served only with 22 Heavy Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery, 1/1 Kent Heavy Battery 1st Reserve Battery. Reassigned gunner signaller.

He was obviously found. Aged 23 years 11 months 2 March 1916. 17 May 1917 called up. Signals Depot 20 October 1917 BEF 1 March 1918. 13 August 1918 wounded sprained right ankle (War Office Casualty List 1667). He describes his service from his home in Walton on Thames in September 1921: 22 Heavy Battery RGA; supporting 1/1 Kent with RGA. Class Z 7/5/19. Winchester training to be driver and gunner June 1917. Photograph as a PC at Guildford October 1916. Re-joined Surrey Constabulary May 12, 1919. 26 June 1920 married Margaret Garland (1894-1949)

1921 living in Walton on Thames, 1932 living at the police station. 1932 to 1936 living at the police station, Guildford with Margaret. 1937 to 1938 living Farnham. 1939 Register living in Tilford Road, Farnham with Margaret Cox, Stanley E Cox. Occupation police superintendent 1951 he married Doris Elizabeth Taylor. 1955 living at 33 Meadow Way, Reigate. Died January 1955 Reigate

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<sup>2</sup> Surrey Mirror 14 April 1916

<sup>3</sup> Police Constable S Cox Guildford October 9, 1916, Daily Mirror from exhibition to the missing in Peronne



### **Chief Constable Sant's report May 1916**

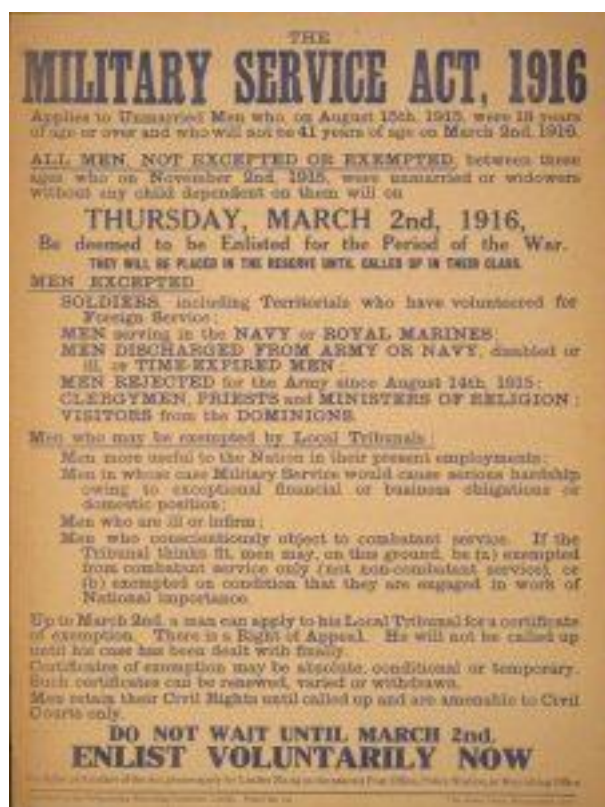
**Report of May 1916:** The chief constable began this report by outlining his concerns over the question of Special Constables who also served in the Volunteer Training Corps having now to attest, and the resulting clash of duties owed to two different authorities; he had so far received no reply to his letter asking for assistance from the Home Office and making suggestions.

However, the Home Office continued to send instructions, this quarter relating to: changes in procedures for warning factories of hostile aircraft; reporting the presence of hostile aircraft to military authorities (constables were to be issued with cards for making such reports to 'the nearest Military Authority', despite some doubt as to who in the county these actually were); the removal of number plates bearing 'OHMS' from vehicles and the issue of a 'stencil number plate' and card; amendments to the Aliens Restriction Order regarding their employment in munitions factories; the 'delicate and difficult' duties of the Police regarding the inspection of registration cards; the re-arrangement of areas for air raid warning; expelling 'undesirable persons' from 'certain localities'; alterations to the Competent Military Authorities in Eastern Command; the 'Belgian decree' requiring all male Belgians aged 20 to report for service and the ascertainment of how many of these were in Surrey; the prohibition of meetings where 'there is reason to apprehend that the holding of the meeting in a public place will give rise to grave disorder; and watchmen employed for the protection of munitions works to be appointed as Special Constables.

In response to a 'remarkable order' from the officer commanding the Chilworth Guard stating that local police, rather than the military, should guard munitions stored at Chilworth station, Sant sent a letter to the General Officer Commanding the Central Force, informing him that he only had three regular constables to the 120 soldiers in the area; the GOC, who had not realised the situation, admitted that the approach had been 'tactless' and rescinded the order at once.

Other such irritations for the Chief Constable were: 1. A demand from the Sub Aliens Registration Officer at Weybridge that the police furnish him a weekly return of the change of address of all persons registered – thus proving himself 'quite ignorant of the magnitude of the work this would entail' and earning himself a terse response that Registration Officers were responsible. 2. The Home Office's order that police should assist the Army Council in tracing men enlisted under the Military Service Act who have failed to respond: Sant considered that the Home Office statement that 'the duties (explained here in detail) which will devolve upon the

Police ... are likely to be onerous' an understatement.<sup>4</sup>



**The Military Service Act comes into force.**

**1916 May 12: Introduction of Special Constables:** Special Constables were appointed to assist the police as a voluntary, part-time organisation, paid only their expenses, and drawn from all walks of life – individuals who probably already had a full-time job, or who perhaps had retired. As a body, Special Constables compensated for the loss of those regular police who had joined the war effort and added an extra layer of protection during wartime. They had a key role to play in local counter-invasion plans, but they also provided much needed reinforcement in ensuring that wartime regulations and restrictions imposed on the civilian population, from rationing to the blackout, were observed. The Surrey Mirror of 12 May 1916 carried a report of the Budget Committee of Surrey County Council at which it was stated that the Surrey Constabulary was 73 men under strength and could afford to lose no more and that ‘if it wasn’t for the Special Constables doing such a magnificent job [we] would not have been able to spare so many officers for enlistment’.<sup>5</sup>

**PC 160 Noah Smithers**  
**Surrey Constabulary**  
**Age 32, Died of Wounds 21 May 1916<sup>6</sup>**

<sup>4</sup> Marion Edwards <https://www.surreyinthewar.org.uk/story/a-policemans-lot-the-surrey-police-in-wartime-part-2-1916/>

<sup>5</sup> Written by Marion Edwards Surrey Heritage Archives May 2018

<sup>6</sup> [www.surrey-constabulary.com](http://www.surrey-constabulary.com) Roll of Honour



**Lance Corporal Smithers**

PC Smithers served as a Lance Corporal P/1978 in the Military Foot Police. PC Smithers was the son of Mrs Smithers, of Green Side, Ripley, Surrey and is buried in Noeux-Les-Mines Communal Cemetery; Pas De Calais He enlisted at and gave his residence as Guildford.

Age	22
Height	5' 10 ½"
Complexion	Dark
Hair	DarkBrown
Eyes	Brown
Birthplace	Pyrford

Noah Smithers joined the Surrey Constabulary on 26<sup>th</sup> June 1905 aged 22 and was sworn in before Col. Hadaway and Mr Alan Chandler at Guildford on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1905. His appointment number was 1456 and his collar number 160. At the time of his appointment, he gave his trade as Farm Labourer working for Mr Cleverley at Ripley. He was first stationed at Farnham later serving at Frimley Green, Virginia Water, Addlestone, Horley and finally Lingfield. During his service he was promoted from third class to 1<sup>st</sup> class Constable.



Noah Smithers was one of 375 casualties suffered by the Military Police in the First World War. He had started his working life as an agricultural labourer, following in the footsteps of his father,

and at least three of his brothers. Noah was born in Pyrford on 3 September 1894, the youngest of eleven children. His parents John and Emily (nee Snelling) had married at Pyrford Parish Church on 4 May 1867 and Noah was baptised in Wisley on 28 July 1889. In 1891 the family lived at Old Deers Farm on Wisley Lane when eight children were living at home. By 1901 they had moved to The Green in Ripley and Noah was now at work. Four years later on 26 June 1905 he joined Surrey Constabulary.<sup>7</sup>

Noah was sworn in on 1 July 1905 at Guildford before Col Hadaway and Mr Alan Chandler; his appointment number was 1456 and his collar number was 160. He stood almost five feet eleven inches tall, had a dark complexion, dark brown hair and brown eyes. Noah had just left the employment of Mr Cleverley of Ripley. He was stationed at Frimley Green, Virginia Water, Addlestone and finally Limpsfield. Noah was promoted from 3rd Class to 1st Class Constable but was unable to escape strict police discipline when he was fined ten shillings on 6 September 1911 for spending just over two hours in a public house on his day off four days earlier. Apparently, he did not have a 'reasonable excuse' for spending his time in this way! Noah enlisted for military service in August 1915 at Guildford.<sup>8</sup>

He arrived in France on 18 September. The role of the Military Police was a varied one. As in civilian life they were responsible for the detection of crime and the arrest of the perpetrators as well as the control and protection of local populations, which required great diplomacy in time of war. Traffic control became an essential part of their work to ensure that the military forces could move as freely and quickly as possible. Noah and his comrades also had control of Prisoners of War until they could be handed over to appropriate detention facilities. Battles could result in much confusion with men losing touch with their units, as happened in the retreat from Mons (1914) so the Military Police manned 'stragglers posts' to facilitate the reuniting of the lost with their battalions. This was also a way of identifying those who had gone 'absent without leave.'

Much of this work was done behind the lines but not all. They could find themselves under heavy shellfire which may well have happened to Noah resulting in his death from wounds on 21 May 1916. He was laid to rest in Noeux-les-Mines Communal Cemetery, 6 km south of Bethune. The personal inscription on his gravestone is 'Gone but not forgotten.' He is also commemorated on the memorial at Surrey Police HQ, Mount Browne in Guildford.

Noah's father predeceased him in 1908 and his mother died in 1924. She had spent her last years at Greenside in Ripley.<sup>9</sup>

### **Surrey Constabulary 73 officers under strength Special Constabulary**

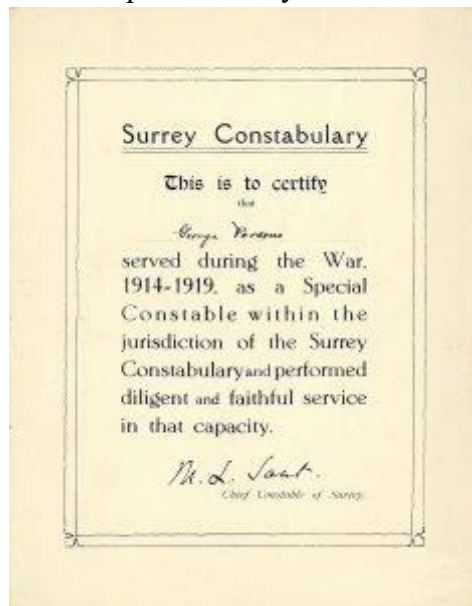
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<sup>7</sup> Phil Cooper <https://www.surreyinthewar.org.uk/story/lance-corporal-noah-smithers/>

<sup>8</sup> Phil Cooper <https://www.surreyinthewar.org.uk/story/lance-corporal-noah-smithers/>

<sup>9</sup> Phil Cooper <https://www.surreyinthewar.org.uk/story/lance-corporal-noah-smithers/>

**May 1916: Special Constables** were appointed to assist the police as a voluntary, part-time organisation, paid only their expenses, and drawn from all walks of life – individuals who probably already had a full-time job, or who perhaps had retired. As a body, Special Constables compensated for the loss of those regular police who had joined the war effort and added an extra layer of protection during wartime. They had a key role to play in local counter-invasion plans, but they also provided much needed reinforcement in ensuring that wartime regulations and restrictions imposed on the civilian population, from rationing to the blackout, were observed. The Surrey Mirror of 12 May 1916 carried a report of the Budget Committee of Surrey County Council at which it was stated that the Surrey Constabulary was 73 men under strength and could afford to lose no more and that ‘if it wasn’t for the Special Constables doing such a magnificent job (we) would not have been able to spare so many officers for enlistment’.<sup>10</sup>



### **Certificate awarded to George Parsons as a Special Constable by Surrey Chief Constable M L Sant <sup>11</sup>**

In Surrey, by the end of August 1914, over 150 Special Constables had already been sworn in, and numbers continued to rise. In the Surrey Times of 15 May 1915, it was reported that 2071 Specials had been enrolled, all over military age and including members of the peerage in their ranks. This number was revised downwards, however – on 17 January 1919 it was reported in the Surrey Herald that a total of 1612 Special Constables had enrolled during the course of the war. On 26 February 1916, the Surrey Times and County Express carried an appeal from the Guildford Borough Emergency Committee for women to join the ranks of the Special Constables, in order to ‘deal with the population in times of national emergency’.<sup>12</sup>

### **Life as a ‘Special’ in Surrey**

Sources in the Surrey Archives and in local newspapers researched by Marion Edwards illustrate

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.surreyinthewar.org.uk/story/special-constables/> Marion Edwards

<sup>11</sup> SHC CC98/23/9

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.surreyinthewar.org.uk/story/special-constables/> Marion Edwards

the varied duties of local Special Constables including their unofficial activities such as fund raising for local charities and institutions, and the many difficulties they encountered.<sup>13</sup>

Special Constables were principally appointed to assist the police in carrying out orders given under the Defence of the Realm Act ('DORA'). These duties covered emergencies arising from air raids and invasion, as well as more prosaic activities such as enforcing blackout conditions, overseeing rationing and general law enforcement. Lists of named Special Constables, with their addresses, appear in various Surrey History Centre (SHC) collections, along with detailed correspondence dealing with their enrolment and management. The recruitment of the Special Constabulary in Walton on Thames, Hersham and Oatlands is well documented.<sup>14</sup> This force of volunteers, 140 strong with ages ranging from 23 to 62, was led by Arthur E Pettit of Burley Lodge, Oatlands Drive, who strove, not particularly successfully, to foster military discipline in its ranks: when exhorting participation in regular drill he wrote 'It is scarcely necessary to call the attention of the force as a whole to the importance of qualifying as a composite body as rabble against rabble has about an equal chance, whereas a compact body has evident advantages against a disorganised mob'. Relations with Chief Constable Sant of the Surrey Constabulary could be strained, especially over the question as to what equipment should be supplied to the specials and Sant is referred to as 'that arch rotter' in one letter.<sup>15</sup>

Training, while considered tedious by some 'Specials', could also be quite hazardous – in November 1916, Special Constables and Voluntary Aid Detachment companies had a narrow escape near Kingston in a thunderstorm, when they were almost hit by tree falling across tram cables while marching to do their drill. They cleared this and pulled down another unstable tree in driving rain.<sup>16</sup>

The difficulties the 'Specials' encountered could be serious or amusing, exciting or deadly boring – one anonymous 'Special' was reported in the Surrey Comet of 14 April 1915 as considering that 'even the arrival of a Zeppelin would be welcomed as a pleasant change' if it meant he could escape from his uncongenial patrol partner. His wish was perhaps granted in 1916, when the destruction of not one but two Zeppelins was reported in local newspapers as witnessed by Surrey residents and 'Specials'. Invasion dangers could sometimes be misinterpreted, however – after the reported escape of prisoners of war in 1916, Special Constable R D Hutchings stopped a speeding car at Horsell Bridge, only to find that the irate driver was Francis P Neville, chauffeur to Mr L Waddington of Easdale, Horsell Common. Assistance to the British armed forces was another duty carried out by the 'Specials' – in 1915, an army lieutenant landed his Sopwith biplane in a field near Stoke Lock, on the River Wey at Guildford, and was guarded overnight by Special Constables. The authority of the volunteers did not always go unchallenged: correspondence laments that when asked to make himself scarce, a gardener responded, 'I won't

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.surreyinthewar.org.uk/story/special-constables/> Marion Edwards

<sup>14</sup> SHC ref 9117/box 2

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.surreyinthewar.org.uk/story/special-constables/> Marion Edwards

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.surreyinthewar.org.uk/story/special-constables/> Marion Edwards

move on for you or any other bugger of a special policeman.’<sup>17 18</sup>

### **Special Constable Percy Webb**

Perhaps the most fascinating account of life as a Special Constable in Surrey is that of Percy Webb, who enrolled in the Walton on Thames area in 1914. Percy’s brief typescript ‘The Diversions of a Special Constable’<sup>19</sup> talks of the ‘discomforts’ of cold night duties, especially wet ones, his efforts to evade attendance at parades ‘owing to the pressure of other work’ and the absence of any ‘stirring personal adventures’ – although he does recount his part in organising the warning against ‘the first Zeppelin night raid’ on Guildford in October 1915.<sup>20</sup>

The Zeppelin passed over Walton and it was thought that it was being signalled to by a flare from the garden of a house ‘then in the occupation of foreigners’ (who turned out to be blameless Belgians). While attempting to enforce the blackout, Percy admired the stoical reaction of a ‘cheerful hawker’: ‘Are you frightened Mr Webb? I’m not: what I says is, if they ‘its me they ‘its me, and if they doesn’t, they doesn’t’.<sup>21</sup>

The night destruction of three Zeppelins is described vividly by Webb (although he admits to having missed witnessing the first, having gone off duty): the third, the ‘Cuffley (Hertfordshire) Zeppelin,’ he saw ‘glowing like a great elongated sun ... till it collapsed and streamed downwards to the earth’.<sup>22</sup>

A ‘small riot’ following the sinking of the Lusitania in May 1915, when a naturalised German watchmaker was attacked in Hersham, is reported at length by Webb, who aided the Sergeant of Police at the scene in attempting to persuade the rioters to disperse. Windows were broken, a policeman knocked unconscious and tempers ran high and in Percy’s opinion, ‘the women were the worst and most bitter,’ although he sympathised with one, who said ‘Why should I go away, they’ve killed my husband.’<sup>23</sup>

The ‘supernatural’ also provided some night-time ‘thrills’ to Webb, who on one occasion heard a ‘ghostly footstep’ preceding him along the road – only to find that the sound was an echo of his own ‘wet and heavy coat’ against his leg. Early morning patrols had their compensations: ‘I was sorry when the 3 to 6 patrol was given up. In peaceful times one rarely sees the night grow grey and darkness give place to form and colour, till the rim of the sun appears above the horizon, and living nature awakes. One morning we saw the herons leave Burwood Park in the dawn, and following down to the river, found one of them fishing off Rosewell’s boathouse; a sight that I have certainly never seen there before.’<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> SHC ref 9117/box 2

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.surreyinthewar.org.uk/story/special-constables/> Marion Edwards

<sup>19</sup> SHC ref 9117/Box 2

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.surreyinthewar.org.uk/story/special-constables/> Marion Edwards

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.surreyinthewar.org.uk/story/special-constables/> Marion Edwards

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.surreyinthewar.org.uk/story/special-constables/> Marion Edwards

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.surreyinthewar.org.uk/story/special-constables/> Marion Edwards

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.surreyinthewar.org.uk/story/special-constables/> Marion Edwards

Percy closes his account with the words of a woman who, meeting him on a dark night, said to her startled companion ‘Taint a soldier, it’s a gentleman.’ He wondered ‘Now was that a compliment or not? I would rather have worn the more honourable uniform,’ thus nicely summing up the dichotomy of a Special Constable’s position.<sup>25</sup>

### **Defence of the Realm Act in 1916**

On 21 August 1916 the chairman of the Surrey Emergency Committee, who was based at Caxton House in Westminster, sent a circular letter to the parish committees informing them that ‘in view of the changed military situation ...[it] was no longer necessary that supplies of food and fodder should be destroyed, that livestock should be destroyed or removed or that the civil population should be required to leave their homes’. However, it was still the Local Emergency Committees responsibility to arrange the removal of horses, motors, vehicles etc; control the voluntary movements of the civil population; arrange for the supply of spades, pickaxes and other tools, required by the military authorities; and to place at the disposal of the military authorities’ persons physically fit to do any work required by them in cases where such arrangements had hitherto been made by the committees.<sup>26</sup>

After 3 October 1916 the Horley Parish Committee did not sit again until 8 January 1919 when it was disbanded. Why they did not sit for such a length of time is not recorded in the minutes but the rational explanation was there was just no need! It was at this last meeting in 1919 that a letter from the Home Secretary and Lord Lieutenant was read out to the Committee thanking them for all their hard work.<sup>27</sup>

**1916 September 2: Van Smash at Woking.** Arthur Pacey, the driver of a van that crashed through the parapet of the canal bridge at Woking, when some ten persons were injured, was charged at the police- court on Saturday with driving in a manner dangerous to the public. The defendant stated that the accident was due to the fact that a little boy ran in front of the car, and that in trying to avoid him he dashed into the parapet. The police gave evidence that the van approached the bridge at a speed estimated at between thirty and forty miles an hour. Pacey was fined £10, with the alternative of two months in the second division. The fine was paid in gold.<sup>28</sup>

### **PC 252 Ernest Alfred Warrell**

#### **Surrey Constabulary**

**Aged 27, Killed 3 September 1916**

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<sup>25</sup> [www.surreyinthegreatwar.org.uk/story/special-constables/](http://www.surreyinthegreatwar.org.uk/story/special-constables/) Marion Edwards

<sup>26</sup> [www.surreyinthegreatwar.org.uk/story/horley-and-the-defence-of-the-realm-act/](http://www.surreyinthegreatwar.org.uk/story/horley-and-the-defence-of-the-realm-act/) Laurence Spring

<sup>27</sup> [www.surreyinthegreatwar.org.uk/story/horley-and-the-defence-of-the-realm-act/](http://www.surreyinthegreatwar.org.uk/story/horley-and-the-defence-of-the-realm-act/) Laurence Spring

<sup>28</sup> Denbighshire Free Press 2 September 1916

A Sergeant in the 17<sup>th</sup> Battalion Kings Royal Rifle Corps aged 27 when he died, PC Warrell was the son of David and Elizabeth Warrell, of Lingfield, Surrey. He enlisted in May 1915 and is buried in the Knightsbridge Cemetery, Mesnil-Martinsart.

Having joined the Surrey Constabulary on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1912 aged 24, he was sworn in at Guildford before A. Chandler and J H Kenton on 12<sup>th</sup> December 1913. His appointment number was 1699 and his collar number 252. At the time of his appointment, he gave his trade as Bricklayer's Labourer having been employed by Mr Head at Edenbridge, Kent. He was first stationed at Woking and during his service was promoted from 3<sup>rd</sup> class to 2<sup>nd</sup> class constable.

Age	24
Height	5' 11"
Complexion	Fresh
Hair	Dark Brown
Eyes	Blue
Birthplace	Rickmansworth, Herts

