

# Belfast Blitz - 75 Years

Jeff Dudgeon (xxxx)



In May 2015, I proposed to Belfast City Council that we commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Blitz and put up a significant memorial at City Hall to the victims, and it was agreed. Unfortunately, because of issues raised by Sinn Fein and the Alliance Party, the memorial proposal is on hold and may be in jeopardy.

Alongside the erection of fifteen plaques to mark the sites of worst destruction and death (including one at Campbell College), a very well-attended civic service of remembrance was held in April at St Anne's Cathedral jointly with St Patrick's Church (Donegall Street).

The Belfast Blitz consisted of two severe air raids on 15 April and 4 May 1941 which killed around 800 and 200 people respectively. There were two smaller raids before and after on 7 April and 6 May respectively.

A substantial memorial to the 1,000 dead is now being considered for Belfast City Hall grounds, something I am working towards as chair of the council's Diversity Working Group. We have already had the promise of considerable financial assistance from the Northern Ireland War Memorial whose museum is in Talbot Street.

It is my intention that our memorial will include the names of all the civilians, civil defence and military killed in Northern Ireland during the German air raids. By engraving those names, the monument will have both immediacy and poignancy, much like that for the Titanic. People will come to read them and remember. Campbell College suffered considerable death and damage during the second major air raid on the night of 4 and 5 May.

Luckily the pupils had been evacuated in 1940 to the Northern Counties Hotel in Portrush. The casualties instead came from No. 24 (London) General Hospital which had taken over the school in 1940.

Twelve or perhaps fourteen soldiers from the

resident RAMC and the Pioneer Corps were killed, and possibly also patients. The walking medical cases had been marshalled into the underground shelters which pupils had constructed in 1939 and all escaped unhurt.

Staff Serjeant, Norman Seaward aged 30, was however killed ferrying bedbound patients to safety. His gravestone in the City Cemetery says "Treasured in Life. Loved in Death. Wife and Baby."

The Officers Mess took a direct hit, killing four soldiers, including two RAMC. Three large hospital huts were totally destroyed by high explosives while the school's north block was hit and set on fire. Three other huts in the course of construction were set ablaze. A mystery surrounds both the numbers of dead and their names at Campbell, as the Commonwealth War Graves Commission does not record place or cause of death, just date and burial ground.

The names of the thirteen soldiers killed at Newtownards Aerodrome on 16 April 1941 in the Easter Tuesday raid have been ascertained and are detailed in Andy Glenfield's invaluable website 'The Second World War in Northern Ireland' under Greater Belfast <http://ww2ni.webs.com/>. The gravestones of soldiers in Belfast City Cemetery and Milltown Cemetery who died on 4 and 5 May however tell of some who were presumably killed at Campbell.

The four Royal Army Medical Corps gravestone names are: Pte. Herbert Montague Brooker, Staff Serjeant Norman Leslie Seaward, Sgt.



Archibald Herbert Sanderson Stewart, and Major Richard Fowler Ward.

The ten Pioneer Corps names are: Cpl. Thomas Keane, Pte. James Simon Moore, Pte. James Osben, Pte. Leonard Charles Christian, Cpl. Leon Guglielmazzi, Lance/Cpl. John



Thomas Harris, Major Edward V. Hemelryk DSO, Pte. Felix Marasi, Lance/Cpl. Harry Norman Pickup, and Pte. Kenneth Lawrence Shaw.

Two other RAMC soldiers killed on 4 and 5 May 1941, Pte. Montague James Burbage (24th General Hospital) buried in Alderholt, Dorset, and Pte. Denholm Douglas buried in Rutherglen, are probably from the Campbell College dead.

If anyone can provide clues to the names of the hospital dead or their stories it would be most welcome.

Jeffrey Dudgeon (UUP Councillor, Balmoral DEA)



Images Clockwise: The bombed Nissen huts in the grounds.

The main school building (now and after the Blitz damage); Staff Sergeant Norman Seaward's gravestone in Belfast City Cemetery. Jeffrey, now and then. Troops stationed at Campbell.



# Campbell College . . . the Belfast blitz

By Dr Brian Barton



Courtesy Belfast News Letter.

Unlike Westminster, Stormont government ministers did not launch any official scheme for the evacuation of women and children with the outbreak of war. As a consequence, initially, local schools experienced little disruption beyond the carrying of gas masks, and occasional drills in their use.

By December 1940, however, the premises of some of them were being used as shelters, ARP stores and wardens' posts, and had been designated as rest centres in the event of an air raid. By then, a small number had also established branches in the countryside for those pupils who had evacuated (Richmond Lodge, Victoria College and Ashleigh).

But a few months later, after the first major blitz had occurred, this slow pace of change was shattered, and Belfast's educational system was severely disrupted. As a result of the air raids thirty-nine public elementary schools were 'destroyed or partly destroyed.'

Further dislocation was caused by the mass evacuation of staff and children (over half of Belfast's population – 220,000 – had fled from the city by late May 1941), and by the deleterious impact of the air raids on the concentration and receptivity of pupils.

From the outset, Campbell College experienced greater disruption than most other schools. Many of its pupils were evacuated to Portrush from September 1940 until February 1946, in what was aptly named 'Operation Seachange.'

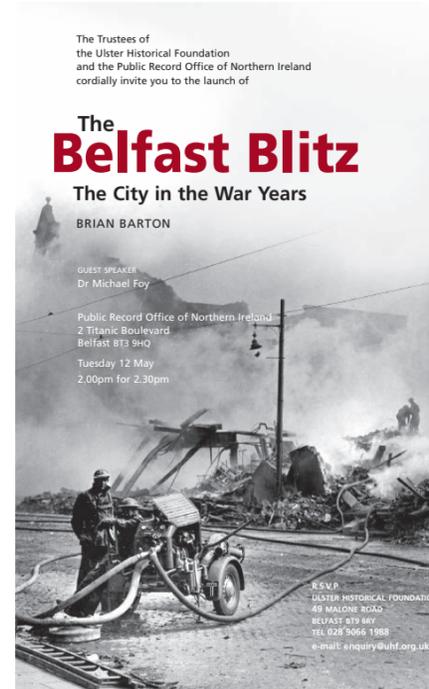
This was because a number of its buildings had been requisitioned by the War Office for use as a military hospital (i.e. '24 General Hospital'). Subsequently, the school's changing rooms were transformed into operating theatres and X-ray rooms, rows of baths were installed in classrooms, and Nissen huts were erected in the grounds; over 34,000 servicemen had been treated there as patients by October 1945.

During the 4 and 5 May 1941 air raid, Campbell College was struck with tragic consequences. Three large huts behind the Headmaster's office were demolished by high explosives; one of these had been used as the officers' mess. Three others in course of construction, and a building known as the 'North Block', were set ablaze.

An anti-aircraft gunner later claimed that the premises had been saved from more extensive damage because the servicemen based there were 'well organised' as fire-fighters.

The Campbell fatalities represented the army's greatest loss of life in a single incident during this raid and that is before patient numbers are included.

In the wards, 400 beds were rendered 'uninhabitable'. All 'walking cases' in the main hospital building had been able to take refuge in underground shelters built by the pupils in 1939, and all of them escaped unhurt. The surviving records of the other military hospitals in Belfast suggest that they



Brian's new book.

were not especially busy during the air raids.

For example, the report for Donegall Road (part of the Union Infirmary) merely states that it 'attended to [a] few casualties, both civil and military' and, at Stranmillis, it is recorded that 'several casualties [were] admitted', but that the attacks 'called for no special attention'.

Campbell College contributed to the war effort in other ways. Those pupils who had not evacuated used the school grounds for

agricultural production (with an output of 15,000 eggs each year, 1940 -1945, as well as vegetables and grain).

In mid-1940, after the fall of France, when German invasion seemed imminent, as a deterrent any ground located within five miles of airstrips near Belfast that was deemed suitable for enemy airborne landings, was obstructed.

As a result the playing fields at Campbell suddenly took 'on a strange appearance and became straddled overnight with hurdles, goalposts, cricket screens and every shape and form of improvised landing obstruction'.

Above all, the patriotic spirit had always run deep amongst the staff and pupils of the school. They were conscious of, and once again preserved, its exceptional tradition of military service. At its Speech Day in 1939, held during the last week of the summer term, the Headmaster had stated in his report:

'Tomorrow, forty-eight of the boys here present will have spent their last day at school; full of the hopes and ambitions of youth, they are going out into this very troubled world. That they will prove themselves worthy of the school, I am confident.' His 'confidence' was fully justified; 1,025 of those who had attended Campbell joined the armed forces, they won over 270 military awards and decorations, and over 100 of them lost their lives.

At a memorial service held on 10 November 1946, the Principal stated in an emotionally charged address:

'We are met here today to pay tribute to the memory of those former members of the school whose names have been recited as we stood – those who went and did not return.'

'In this hall was centred their life at Campbell, here each day, morning and evening, they met for prayers, here they sat with you on festival days, on Speech Days, at concerts, at plays. Here in these buildings they lived and learnt and grew to manhood. Here too on each returning Armistice Day, they stood in silence as we have done today, and in remembrance of the service unto death of another generation, dedicated their own lives, as we shall shortly do, to the glory of God'

'God and the service of their fellow men. Twice in the lives of the older among us we have seen the spirit of service of a generation tested to the full. Twice we have seen the Sons of Campbell, when the test came, answer the call.'