

PORTHCAWL NEWS - MAY 1917



Major CAS Morris.

Porthcawl historian Ceri Joseph continues her series on life in the town during World War One. This month, she looks at May, 1917.

A TOTAL of 158,000 BRITISH and Commonwealth casualties were sustained at Arras.

Although in early April the Canadian and British advance at Vimy Ridge and at Scarpe, respectively, gained three half miles of land, the most in one advance since 1914, this first phase in the Battle of Arras was deceptively successful in relation to the whole of the offensive.

The Arras offensive largely resulted in a stalemate, with its main achievement being the relieving of pressure on the French forces in their attempt to break through the German lines, further south at Chemin des Dames.

Under General Robert Nivelle, the huge number of French casualties suffered through being ordered to continuously attack what was an impregnable German stronghold, eventually led to the mutiny of French troops on May 5. Consequently General Petain, who as Marshall Petain would receive the German surrender on November 11, 1918 in the Compeigne Forest, replaced Nivelle on May 15, 1917. Further, of the 35,000 men who mutinied, approximately 3000 were punished with imprisonment and 57 executed.

The Porthcawl News of May 1917 relayed two contrasting dispatches from Arras. Corporal Arthur Cecil Avenell, 6th Battalion Wiltshire Regiment, who lived with his mother at Suffolk Place had been awarded the Military Medal for gallantry in the field during the Arras offensive at Scarpe, while the death Major Charles Alan Smith Morris of Clevis House, Newton, was to throw a deep sadness over the town.

Charles Alan Smith Morris was the third child and only son born to Maud and Charles Smith Morris on May 15, 1895 at Bridgend. His father, Charles, was the second son of landowner George Byng Morris (1816-1899) who owned the Mynydd Newydd Copper mine at Pforestfach, where he most probably gained the interest which, as a mining engineer, would take him initially to Cardiff and eventually Bridgend.

Charles Senior also played for Swansea RFC 1876-1878; playing against Landoverly College on November 4, 1876 in the first competitive match held at the new St Helen's field. His brother George Lockwood Morris gained Swansea's first international cap in 1878.

Sadly young Charles, although a keen sportsman, would not get the opportunity to play rugby at that level because after completing his education at Wellington College, and his first year at Pembroke College Cambridge, where he was studying law, he enlisted as an officer in the 3rd Battalion Bedfordshire Regiment.

On March 5, 1915 his battalion landed in France where, within a few days, he had been transferred to the 2nd Battalion and was engaged in the Battle of Neuve Chapelle where he suffered a shrapnel wound to the right knee.

Following his convalescence Lieutenant Morris was posted with over 1,500 Bedfordshires to Salonika to swell the ranks of the 5th Royal Irish Fusiliers whose number had been depleted at Gallipoli. Landing on November 18, once again Lt Morris was soon to find himself in the action but this time in charge of a company.

Despite having little frontline experience, on December 8, his battalion having lost men and their position (a fortification on 'Rocky Peak,') Lt Morris personally led a counter-attack and regained the ground. However, the Bulgars



John Street after the war.



Major Morris's grave at Evin Malmaison.

retaliated with constant shell and machine gun fire. Morris was hit and disappeared into the descending fog. Fortunately, his batman found him and carried him down the mountain to safety.

Charles Morris had been shot in the shoulder, yet after another bout of treatment he returned to the frontlines in September 1916. Having been promoted to Captain he was given the command of a raiding party only a couple of days after arriving.

During the months leading up to the Battle of Arras Morris's battalion, 1st Bedfordshires, was engaged in general trench duties; but on April 23, as part of the British 5th Division, they were ordered to attack the German position at La Coulette.

'Captain Charles Morris, in command of 'B' Company was killed whilst he rallied his men and led another attack from the front against the machine-guns dominating the second trench line.' (Extract taken from '1st Bedfordshires. Part Two; Arras to the Armistice')

Officially referred to as Acting Major Morris, he was initially reported as having been killed on April 23. However, some months later his personal effects were among five cases returned to England via the Red Cross, in which it was stated that he had died as a prisoner at Malmaison a fortnight later on May 7. Major Charles Alan Smith Morris was 21 years old.

Initially Major Morris's body was one of six British soldiers buried, by the enemy, in the Evin-Malmaison Communal Cemetery. However, following the end of the war the Imperial War Graves Commission removed the graves to the Pont de Jour military cemetery, Athies, north-east of Arras.

The IWGC, which changed its name in 1961 to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, had acquired many plots of land along the Western front in the years after the war in which to relocate many graves, which had been dug indiscriminately amid the carnage.

Originally the brain-child of Sir Fabian Ware, who had recognized among the enormous number of servicemen being killed the need to document and record the names of the fallen and their graves, the IWGC was granted its Royal Charter on May

21, 1917.

In 1919 Major Morris's parents were two of the first relatives to journey to the battlefields to pay homage to their loved one. For anyone this journey would have proved exceptionally difficult, as modes of travel would have been arduous and the battleground still scarred with ruts and shell holes. Yet for Charles senior it would have been even worse, as he was registered blind. Consequently it was Charles senior who donated £100 to the Porthcawl War Memorial fund, thus enabling it to be designed and erected in 1921.

On the home front, Porthcawlians continued with their aim to feed the town via a plethora of allotments. Over 200 allotments were in use in and around Porthcawl. This may have influenced the decision to hold a 'war cookery demonstration' in John Street, in order to promote food economy.

The end of the month, unfortunately, failed to avoid more sad news. Chief Petty Officer Richard Power, Mercantile Marine, had drowned following a U-Boat attack on his ship, the SS *Mary Baird*. The *Mary Baird* had been sunk off the coast of north west Cornwall on May 18, 1917.

Richard, born in 1872, was one of nine children born to Morris and Martha Power. Morris worked as a pilot at Porthcawl Dock and, as a consequence, the family lived on Pilots Row, which has since been demolished.

Pilots Row would have been in the Square, behind the Pier Hotel. Before Richard was 20 years he had joined the Merchant Service, attaining his Second Mate's Certificate in 1895, First Mate's in 1899 and Master Mariner's Certificate in 1902.

Before 1891 his parents had moved to 5 Wells Street, Porthcawl; and in 1901 Richard had married Sarah Catherine Power (nee Davies) and set up home in Roath, Cardiff, where their daughter Annie was born. Before 1911 Richard and his family had moved to 40 Dinas Street, Grangetown, Cardiff.

By the time of his death, Richard had served in the Merchant Service for over 26 years.



Major Morris's grave by CWGC.



Porthcawl war memorial.



Huw Morgan with Rhian Jenkins

Rhian hands over her baton

AFTER 20 years in charge of Maesteg Male Voice Choir, Rhian Jenkins has decided to take more of a background role and has handed the baton over to her deputy, Huw Morgan.

Members of the choir, although understanding her reasons, are sorry for her decision and would like to thank her for the extremely hard work she has put in over the years to make the choir a popular choice to perform for numerous charities over the UK.

Huw Morgan, who joined as deputy musical director seven years ago, will use his experience and knowledge to ensure the the choir will continue to perform with the same expertise instilled during Rhian's tenure with the choir.