



Overloon War Chronicles Foundation
Presents:

FACES FROM THE PAST

(episode 10)

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The Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery in Overloon, popularly known as the English cemetery, contains 281 graves. Each with its own story. In this report series, the Overloon War Chronicles Foundation highlights such a special story every time. This time grave number 2, section III, row B.

Bertie Anger (1925 – 1944)
Avenue of Remembrance

"The peloton took cover and I quickly checked our losses. Our company commander needed to know what the current situation was, so I went back a line myself. Through the cover of hedges, stumps and a burning tank, I reported our current situation."
(Source: Testimony of John Lincoln, soldier of the Royal Norfolk Regiment)

It's hard to say goodbye, but there's no going back. The mother watches her son as he walks down the Avenue of Remembrance. On his way to his regiment which is stationed further on the base. Towards that terrible war.

Bertie Charles Anger is born in 1925 in Stoke-by-Nayland, a small village in south Suffolk, on the border with Essex. He is the son of Percy Charles Anger and his wife Maud Mary Anger. Bertie's father Percy owns a construction company in the village, P. C. Anger & Son Ltd. Bertie's mother is the landlady of the local pub, the Black Horse Public House, where the whole family lives.

Bertie has 2 sisters, Eva Cicely (Ciss) and Mary, as well as 3 brothers: Arthur, Roy and Peter.

After his school years, Bertie chooses the butcher trade and starts working for Village Butchers, a butcher's company with 3 stores in the region. The company is run by brothers Cyril and Frank Webb, who took over the company after the death of their father and founder Walter Webb in 1930. Bertie starts there with delivering orders to customers.

Bertie joins the army, he becomes Private (soldier) in the Royal Norfolk Regiment, 1st Bn. (the 1st battalion). Royal Norfolk Regiment is the official name, but the name Norfolks is widely used.

And then the day comes for Bertie when he has to leave for the front.

Via Normandy, Northern France and Belgium the Norfolks arrive in The Netherlands, where the regiment will be deployed in the battle for Overloon and Venray, the first phase of the capture of the German bridgehead Venlo.

After Overloon is liberated with great difficulty on 13 October, the British immediately face a new assignment that same evening: to conquer the forecourt from Overloon towards the Loobeek (Molenbeek) so that the British could then advance to Venray. It is a difficult assignment, as the British have to advance towards the Loobeek over open terrain and they know that it is precisely there that the Germans can use their defense and firepower to the maximum.

Major General Lashmer Gordon Whistler (nicknamed Bolo Whistler, commander of the 3rd infantry division and responsible for the attack on Overloon and Venray) has meanwhile decided to deploy 2 battalions for the attack towards the Loobeek which he had held in reserve until now: The Lincolnshires Battalion of the 9th Brigade and the Norfolks Battalion of the 185th Brigade, the battalion in which Bertie serves.

The Lincolnshires will attack towards the Loobeek from the west side of the Overloon – Venray road, the Norfolks will attack simultaneously from the east side of the road towards the Loobeek.

In the night before the attack, the night of Friday 13 to Saturday 14 October, Bertie and his regiment spend the night in the woods around Overloon. That Saturday morning, before sunrise, the breakfast for the men is brought by the company cooks and the rations for the day are distributed.

The morning starts with fog around Overloon, but will be followed by rain with some clearing. The bad weather of the past few days has ensured that the surface has largely become soggy.

It is now just before 7:00 am. British Churchill tanks of the 2nd Squadron Coldstream Guards arrive at the Norfolks to support the Norfolks' attack. The sound of the tanks is heard from a distance by the Germans and the Germans fire directly with an 88mm cannon with several German grenades hitting the Norfolks and exploding!

It is now 7:00 am. The signal for the British attack is given, for both the Lincolnshires and the Norfolks. But the Lincolnshires quickly run aground on the west side because of the enormous numbers of German artillery shells that they receive from the German positions. The Lincolnshires suffer heavy casualties and later comparisons are even made with the First World War, in which soldiers were sent en masse from their trenches into the deadly no man's land and died there en masse.

It's hell! It won't be until the afternoon of this Saturday that the Lincolnshires on the west side will be able to advance again towards the Loobeek. But only after the British artillery has applied a creeping barrage by firing huge numbers of shells at the German positions, each time shifting the impacts a bit forward and thus pushing back the German resistance.

At 07:00 am the Norfolks attack on the east side also starts. The men of Company B and Company D emerge from the woods and advance towards the Loobeek, supported by the Churchill tanks. But at the same time as the Lincolnshires on the west side, the Norfolks on the east side also quickly come under fire from the German lines, the Germans who also here fire with huge numbers of mortars and shells. The group of Churchill tanks spreads to the left and right and the Norfolks platoon also spreads behind them. The British take cover in ditches on either side of a road and carefully crawl forward in the ditches.

Enemy fire increases instantly. Within minutes, 4 Churchill tanks are knocked out by 3 superior German Panther tanks! Pull back! The rest of the Churchill tanks have to go back! First, the tank crews quickly lay a smoke screen and manage to retreat to the relative cover of the forest. But that withdrawal leaves the Norfolks platoon alone, unsupported! Still, the men keep crawling and stooping forward, using whatever cover they can find along the way.

But the Norfolks remain too visible for the Germans, who are constantly bombarding them with mortars, machine guns and their 88mm cannons. To further enhance the massive German firepower, their Nebelwerfers are deadly rocket launchers that fire 6 rockets within 10 seconds and make a huge shrieking and terrifying noise on launch. The British are afraid of those Nebelwerfers and call them Moaning Minnies or Screaming Meemies.

The situation for the Norfolks on the east side seems to be getting more and more desperate, especially when they are also bombarded by their own artillery trying to hit the German targets in front of them! Without the support of the tanks, progress becomes increasingly difficult for the British! Still, the Norfolks carry on.

The British pass burning haystacks and slowly move towards the Loobeek. But the German fire is getting fiercer! Halfway through the route to the Loobeek, the British reach the first position codenamed Cartwright and dig in there. They are constantly being fired on by mortars and grenades and the rain makes their newly dug positions flood.

Finally they manage to get to some thin undergrowth, about 200 metres before their second target, a side road ahead. And then the crossing of the Loobeek still has to come! John Lincoln, a soldier in the Royal Norfolk Regiment since February 1944, will write about this situation later in his book *Thank God and The Infantry*: *"The platoon took cover and I quickly checked our losses. Our company commander needed to know what the current situation was, so I went back a line myself. Through the cover of hedges, stumps and a burning tank, I reported our current situation and a plan was made to continue the advance with the support of our artillery and mortar fire."*

But that hard battle towards the Loobeek, the fierce German resistance and their constant shelling, cost many Norfolks their lives that day. One of the dead that day is Bertie Anger.

Bertie is buried in the temporary cemetery on the Venrayseweg. On 14 May 1947, his remains, together with the other British soldiers buried there, are transferred to the CWGC cemetery in Overloon.

Bertie is only 19 years old when he is killed. It is a huge blow to the family when they hear of his passing.

The last time Bertie's mother sees her son alive is in Colchester, a town about 8 miles (13 kilometres) from Stoke-by-Nayland. It is the period just before Bertie will leave for Normandy to go to war with the Norfolks. Colchester has historically been an important garrison town and has an important military base, dating back to Roman times. In Colchester, Bertie and his mother say farewell to each other on the Avenue of Remembrance that day, and Bertie walks down the avenue towards his regiment. His mother watches him as far as she can, until he disappears from view.

That very last moment of that day on that Avenue of Remembrance will forever hold a very special and emotional meaning for Bertie's mother.

After the war she visits Bertie's grave at the CWGC cemetery in Overloon several times.

Bertie's sisters Ciss and Mary also visit the grave. As well as Bertie's nephew Richard, the son of Bertie's brother Peter, who comes to Overloon a number of times.

Bertie's youngest brother Peter was born in 1938 and is too young to remember his brother Bertie. Nevertheless, he thinks a lot about Bertie throughout his life, especially during official commemorations such as Remembrance Sunday, on which the United Kingdom commemorates the end of the First World War. Every year Peter ensures that on that day a small wooden cross and a poppy with Bertie's name on it are placed in the Garden of Remembrance at St Mary's Church on Church Street in Stoke-by-Nayland. A tradition that his son Richard continues to this day.

The family also still owns Bertie's roller skates, which Bertie used to skate around the village in his childhood. A wonderful memory of Bertie's carefree childhood, a wonderful memory of a boy who died far too soon in a land far from home.

The deepening:

In this section, various facts and parts of the story are further explained and, where necessary, placed in context. These explanations are listed below in the order as presented in the story above.

- Stoke-by-Nayland is a village of a few hundred people in the very south of Suffolk, on the border with Essex, and just north of the River Stour.

Administratively, it also includes the village of Withermarsh Green and the 2 hamlets of Scotland Street and Thorington Street. The village has traditionally centered on amenities in the town of Colchester (in Essex), located about 8 miles (13 kilometres) from the village.

The history of Stoke-by-Nayland dates back to the year 946, when it was first mentioned in a will of an earl by the name of Aelfgar, who gave land therein to probably a monastery.

- Stoke-by-Nayland is known for its characterful cottages and timber-framed houses.

- Stoke-by-Nayland should not be confused with the village of Nayland, 2 miles away, which lies directly on the River Stour.

- Village Butchers was a butcher shop founded by Walter Webb in Birch Street in Nayland in 1899. In 1903 the company moved to High Street. Later, 2 new branches were opened in Boxford and Stoke-by-Nayland. After Walter's death, the company was run by his sons Cyril and Frank. In 1966 Cyril died and the shops in Boxford and Stoke-by-Nayland were closed. Only the store in Nayland survived. When Frank Webb retired in 1974, this store was also closed.

- Major General Lashmer Gordon Whistler (3 September 1898 – 4 July 1963), the commander who ordered the Lincolnshires and Norfolks to advance toward the Loobeek on 14 October 1944, was nicknamed Bolo Whistler. He served in both World War I and World War II. In World War II he served under Field Marshal Montgomery and was commanded by Lieutenant General O'Connor in the battle of Overloon and Venray.

Whistler was military responsible for the attack on Overloon and Venray, the first part of the capture of the German bridgehead Venlo. That capture of bridgehead Venlo was codenamed Operation Constellation by O'Connor and was subdivided into 4 sub-operations.

Successively Castor, Pollux, Sirius and Vega, where the 1st phase Castor was the code for the attack on Overloon and Venray. Whistler gave Castor his own name: Operation Aintree, named after the famous British horse racing track on Omskirk Road in Aintree, a village east of Liverpool.

- Field Marshal Montgomery considered Whistler the best infantry brigade commander he knew.

- After the war, at a time when more and more British colonies were seeking independence, Whistler was asked to assist in the British decolonization processes because of his high leadership qualities.

- The Nebelwerfer used by the German forces against enemy forces was a 15 cm or 21 cm caliber rocket launcher. In 10 seconds this Nebelwerfer could fire up to 6 missiles. The firing of the missiles caused a high-pitched shrieking sound. That's why the Allies gave the Nebelwerfer the nicknames Moaning Minnie and Screaming Meemie. These weapons were much feared because the explosive power of the fired rocket-propelled grenades was contained in the tail and detonated a metre above the ground the moment the tip of the grenade hit the earth. This made it a weapon that could inflict an enormous number of casualties. The British paid a lot of attention to getting rid of these Nebelwerfers which immediately revealed their location due to the smoke development when fired and hence could be destroyed.

- Colchester Garrison in the city of Colchester has been an important military base since Roman times. The first permanent military garrison in Colchester was established by the Legio XX Valeria Victrix, in AD 43, after the Romans conquered much of Britain. Today, the 2nd and 3rd battalions of The Parachute Regiment have their home base there.
 - The Avenue of Remembrance in Colchester is the so called umbrella name of a 4 mile (6.4 km) road. The road forms a bypass road from the west of Colchester to the east of the town. The Avenue consists of the successive roads Cymbeline Way, Colne Bank Avenue and Cowdray Avenue. The road was opened in June 1933, 750 trees were planted along the section of the Cymbeline Way, turning the road into a proper avenue.
 - Half way down the Avenue, at The Albert roundabout, in the southwest corner of the roundabout, is the Wall Memorial. The Wall Memorial is a garden containing a wall with 9 plaques with names of soldiers from Colchester, among others, who fell during the First World War and for whom each a tree was planted along the avenue. The monument was unveiled in October 1998.
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- Remembrance Sunday is the anniversary of the end of the First World War in the United Kingdom. That day of commemoration is always the second Sunday in November, that Sunday is the closest to the official end date of the First World War: 11 November 1918.
 - The poppy is the symbol of this commemoration. The hell of the battle at the front in France and Belgium during the First World War completely destroyed landscapes. The only flowers growing on the ruins were poppies.
 - The poppy is worn as a commemorative symbol in the United Kingdom from All Souls' Day (2 November) through Remembrance Day itself (11 November) or the associated Remembrance Sunday.

The photographs:



Bertie Anger (close-up)
(Photo: Collection Jackie Andrews)



Bertie Anger
(Photo: Collection Jackie Andrews)



*The parents and sisters of Bertie. On the left Eva Cicely Anger, on the right Mary Anger.
(Photo: Collection family Anger)*



*The Black Horse in the 1920s.
(Photo: Collection family Anger)*



*The Black Horse in 1960.
(Photo: Collection family Anger / Keith Slater Collection)*



*The Black Horse in the 1970s.
(Photo: Postcard, photographer unknown)*



The daily routine, such as a quick wash and shave, continued in the trenches, despite the German mortar and grenade attacks.

*This photo was taken near the Loobeek, even though the official description of the Imperial War Museum (see below) states that this location would be south of Venray. In the book *Thank God and The Infantry* by John Lincoln, in which this photo is also published, author John Lincoln correctly reports the Loobeek as the exact location.*

(Photo: Imperial War Museum, No. 5 Army Film and Photo Section, Army Film and Photographic Unit, Photographer Sergeant Gross, 16 October 1944)

Although men (of the 1st Norfolk Bn.) are holding the line South of Venray, the normal routine matters still have to be done. A wash and a shave is good even in a front line trench.

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*The monument to the Royal Norfolk Regiment, 1st Bn. next to the Loobeek in Overloon.
(Photo: Collection Piet Peters)*



Close-up of the English text on the monument. The Dutch translation is also present on this monument.

(Photo: Collection Piet Peters)



*Cap badge of the Royal Norfolk Regiment.
(Photo: Collection Piet Peters)*



*The grave of Bertie Anger in the CWGC cemetery in Overloon.
(Photo: Overloon War Chronicles Foundation)*

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The Overloon War Chronicles Foundation aims, among other things, to retrieve the photos and stories of as many graves as possible in the CWGC cemetery, to pay tribute to the fallen there and thus keep this history alive. More information about the project and the Overloon War Chronicles Foundation at:

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