



Overloon War Chronicles Foundation
presents:

FACES FROM THE PAST

(episode 11)

Author: Arno van Dijk

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 12, section IV, row E.

John Taylor (1915 – 1944)

The Battle of Caen and the deadly Loobeek

"We were going towards the elite German Panzer units. It was the hardest battle-you got bullets mortars bombs shells and everything falling down like rain and I do mean rain. There were blokes with heads blown off and burnt- there were rows and rows of them. There was a big château right at the bottom of Hill 112. We were deployed there with the 16 pounders. We dug in a slit trench. The château was being used as a field medical theatre, there was a large tent and outside the tent on each side were rows and rows of dead bodies covered in coats."
(Source: James Hawkesworth/Jim Constable/bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories)

John Taylor is born on Sunday 12 December 1915 in Everton, a district in the city of Liverpool. He is the son of William Taylor (born December 1888) and Sarah Alice Taylor, maiden name Cowley (born 9 August 1890 in Liverpool).

William works for a long time as an oil mill labourer at the company J. Bibby Sons Limited Cattle Food Oil Refiners Soap in Liverpool where, among other things, seeds are processed into cattle feed via millstones.

William and Sarah get married on 3 August 1913 at St Mary's in Kirkdale, a district in north Liverpool, they move to 104 Buckingham Street in Everton and start a family.

In addition to William, Sarah and John, the family consists of four other sons: William (born July 1914), Edward Thomas (December 1918), George (October 1920), Joseph (1923) and Ernest (14 September 1926).

John is officially baptized on 2 January 1916 at Christ Church in Everton by W. Hill Melling.

By September 1939, William and Sarah are living on Woodfall Close street in Huyton, a village east of Liverpool. At that time, only Joseph and Ernest are still living with them, the other sons having left home.

John enlisted in the British army in 1933.

Meanwhile, John meets Irene Wearing.

Irene is born on 19 October 1919, in Prescott, Lancashire. She is the daughter of Zephaniah Wearing (born 19 December 1897) and Ellen Duggan (born 2 October 1901).

Zephaniah is a slater and tiler for J.B. Johnson & Co. He is the son of his mother, Alice Wearing, from her first marriage. Alice subsequently marries Thomas Duggan, who already has a daughter from his first marriage: Ellen.

Thus, Zephaniah and Ellen meet and marry early 1919.

After Irene, Zephaniah and Ellen become parents to four more children: Pauline (born 7 January 1923), Zephaniah (1927), Thelma (1933) and Robert (1941).

John and Irene fall in love and get married in Liverpool in April 1939. After their marriage, they continue to live in Liverpool.

When war breaks out in September 1939 and John cannot be at home for an extended period due to his responsibilities in the army, Irene decides to temporarily move in with her grandmother, in the Liverpool Road in Huyton.

John and Irene's first child is born in June 1940 in Prescott, a boy named John. But he dies a few months later, in 1941.

Their second child is also a boy, Peter. He is born in January 1942 in Liverpool. But again disaster strikes when Peter dies just a few days later.

Their third child is born a year later, in September 1943 and also in Liverpool. It is a girl. She is given her mother's name: Irene.

John is promoted to Sergeant Royal Artillery in the 75th Anti-Tank Regiment (75ATR), part of the 11th Armoured Division (11AD).

The division lands in Normandy on 13 and 14 June and then places occasional attacks to reach the strategic city of Caen.

The battle for Caen is a huge battle, with many British casualties.

In 2006 James Hawkesworth and Jim Constable describe on the BBC's dedicated World War II personal stories website concerning the 75th Anti-Tank Regiment in the Battle of Caen:

"We were going towards the elite German Panzer units. It was the hardest battle-you got bullets mortars bombs shells and everything falling down like rain and I do mean rain. There were blokes with heads blown off and burnt- there were rows and rows of them. There was a big château right at the bottom of Hill 112. We were deployed there with the 16 pounders. We dug in a slit trench. The château was being used as a field medical theatre, there was a large tent and outside the tent on each side were rows and rows of dead bodies covered in coats."

Until 25 June, the British continue to seek the right approach to take Caen.

Operation Epsom starts on 26 June with the battle of the Odon, but the Allies then fail to capture Caen.

In the period 30 June to 16 July, there is little action for the 11AD. A relative rest, time to recover and also the number of men can be replenished.

The action returns on 18 July with Operation Goodwood in which, after 2 days, Caen is finally captured, along with the 3ID.

Operation Goodwood is succeeded by Operation Bluecoat which includes the task of guarding the main supply routes and supporting the Americans on the western flank during their breakout.

On 7 August Hitler gives up Normandy. The Allies take advantage of this.

What follows is the rapid and fairly straightforward Allied advance through northern France in a north-easterly direction. In the process, the Channel ports occupied by the Germans are not the Allied goal. Because the goal of this Allied advance is bigger: Antwerp! And especially the port of Antwerp, which needs to serve as a second disembarkation port to shorten the ever-lengthening supply lines from Normandy.

The advance through northern France is called *The Great Swan* by the British, based on the concept of *swanning along* (in the sense of: relatively easy). Everywhere, the British are cheered and welcomed by the frenzied French population. They are handed fruit and flowers, as well as wine and champagne.

Antwerp and its port are liberated, the march continues to Neerpelt near the Maas – Scheldt canal. Here, in the following week, the 8th Corps is formed, which will include 43ID in addition to 11AD and 3ID.

Operation Market Garden will start on 17 September.

In the period 17 September to 25 September, a whole series of Brabant towns along the Corridor (the route to Arnhem) are cleared of Germans. Valkenswaard, Heeze, Leende, Budel, Maarheeze, Asten, Geldrop, Liessel, Ommel, Helmond and Deurne. They then advance from Deurne to Sint Anthonis.

From Sint Anthonis, the British carry out several missions in the days after 25 September. They have to wait for the Americans of the 7th Armoured Division who are ordered by the Allied High Command to launch the operation towards Overloon and Venray. With the ultimate goal of capturing the German bridgehead Venlo.

However, the Americans fail in their approach and their attack attempts. They are withdrawn. The British are now allowed to try and will succeed in liberating Overloon.

After Overloon, the British attack on Venray follows and they first need to cross the Loobeek, the stream between Overloon and Venray. The British crossing starts on Monday 16 October in the morning, but due to heavy rainfall in the preceding period, the brook has burst its banks and in some places it has become 6 metres wide!

John and his men are ordered to cross the stream east of Overloon, between Overloon and Smakt. But also at that location, the British have great difficulty crossing the stream. Also the German resistance is very fierce and the Germans have even laid mines in the stream. In all, there are many British casualties during the various crossing attempts that day. John is one of the fallen.

After the battle he is temporarily buried near the Loobeek, on the territory of the Janssen family, a few hundred metres west of what is now the Pelgrimshuis (Pilgrim House) in Smakt. At that same spot, two of John's other regimental colleagues killed on the same day are also buried: Charles Sidney Franklin (Bombardier in the 75 Anti-Tank Regiment) and George Smith McLachlan (Gunner in the 75 Anti-Tank Regiment).

On 2 June 1947, the remains of the three are transferred to the then-new CWGC cemetery in Overloon. There they are permanently reburied in the back row of section IV. Taylor in grave 12, Franklin in grave 13 and McLachlan in grave 14.

After the war, Irene, John's widow, meets Joseph Williams. They get married in Liverpool at the end of 1946. Their son Joseph is born in 1948.

The deepening:

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

- Everton, where John Taylor was born, is a district within the city of Liverpool. It lies north of the city centre.
- The name Everton comes from the Saxon word *eofor*, meaning wild boar.
- Everton was originally an independent parish until the late 18th century when it was slowly swallowed up by the ever-expanding Liverpool. In 1835, Everton officially became part of Liverpool.
- Located at the mouth of the River Mersey, Liverpool was established as a borough in 1207 by King John (King of England from 1199 to 1216). Borough is a term that stands for fortified city. But the name Liverpool occurred as early as 1190 in the form of *Liuerpul*, meaning a pool or creek of muddy water. Yet it was not until 1880 that Liverpool was granted official city rights.
In the 18th century, Liverpool became an important port due to trade with mainland Europe and Ireland. But also through the slave trade towards America and the Caribbean. By the end of the 18th century, 40% of the total world trade passed through the port of Liverpool. In the 19th century, the city attracted many immigrants, especially from Ireland. Between 1920 and 1939, many new neighbourhoods were set up in the city to accommodate all its inhabitants.
- During World War II, the German Luftwaffe carried out as many as 80 bombing raids on Liverpool. In the process some 2,500 people died and almost half of the houses were destroyed. Large-scale rebuilding followed after the war.
- After World War II, Liverpool experienced good and not so good years. The 1960s was a booming period, especially where the music scene was concerned, including The Beatles and all the other Merseybeat bands. But in the 1970s and 1980s, the city saw high unemployment as its function as a port city continued to decline. Since the early 21st century, the city has been developing into a bustling city again.
- The name Zephaniah, the name of Irene's father, is the name of a prophet from the Hebrew Bible (in Judaism it is called Tanakh, in Christianity it is the Old Testament).
- This prophet lived in Judah at the time of King Josiah (reign 640 - 609 BC) and made his prophecies in the years between 640 and 620 BC. In the Bible Zephaniah is part of the minor prophets. By that term minor prophets, Christians designate a collection of 12 books of prophets found together in both the Tanakh and the Old Testament. Of these 12, Zephaniah is the 9th book. All 12 books are shorter in length than the books of the 3 great prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.
- In terms of content, the book of Zephaniah can be divided into the following 3 parts:
 - The announcement of judgement on Judah and the whole world
 - Prophecy about Judah's enemies
 - Prophecy about Jerusalem
- The Royal Artillery (RA) is officially called The Royal Regiment of Artillery and nicknamed The Gunners. The regiment consists of several sub-regiments, some full-time units, some part-time units. The genesis of British artillery dates back to 1346 and throughout its history it fought in many wars and conflicts. During World War II, more than 1 million Britons served in the Royal Artillery's 960 different regiments.
From its inception, the Royal Artillery was based in Woolwich, in south-east London. In 2003, its headquarters were moved to Larkhill, Salisbury Plain in Wiltshire. This is also where the training sites of the Royal School of Artillery have been based since 1915.
- The Royal School of Artillery at Larkhill was founded in 1915 under the official name School for Instruction for Royal Horse and Field Artillery (Larkhill). In 1920, the school was further expanded and given its current name.

The school offers phase 2 training for recruits who are deployed worldwide after their training. Also located at the complex is the Gunnery Training Team, a consultancy training service team that makes its services available not only to the Royal Artillery, but to the entire British Army.

- The 75th Anti-Tank Regiment, Royal Artillery, was formed in November 1940 from the cadres of the 20 & 59 Anti-Tank Regiments.
- The 75th Anti-Tank Regiment, Royal Artillery, consisted of the 117th Battery, 118th Battery, 119th Battery and 338th Battery in June 1944 and was part of the 11th Armoured Division from June 1944.
- The regiment was disbanded in January 1946.

- Huyton is a village 8 miles (about 12 kilometres) east of Liverpool. It is situated in the county of Merseyside, in the administrative area of Knowsley. Historically, it was in the county of Lancashire.
- Huyton is already an ancient place, founded around the year 600 - 650 on a low hill surrounded by inaccessible marshes.
- Huyton is also already mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086, but in the book it has the name *Hitune*. The Domesday Book is a survey in medieval Latin of most of England and Wales, describing the lands and possessions and their owners at the time. The book was finished in the year 1086. It was compiled by order of William the Conqueror, the first Norman king of England from 1066 until his death in 1087. He sent his officials throughout the country in 1085 to record all lands, possessions and names of owners for the purpose of levying taxes thereafter.
- During World War II, Huyton housed a large internment camp in which Britons who were seen as a threat to national security were detained. More than 40% of the internees were aged 50 and over.
- Also located in Huyton during the war years was a POW camp, which was closed in 1948.
- And Huyton was also home to a base for US soldiers during the war years.

- John Taylor's rank was sergeant. But on his gravestone, that rank is spelt as serjeant with a letter J instead of a G.
 The spelling with the letter J is an old traditional English spelling still used within The Rifles, an infantry regiment within the British Army.
 The spelling with the letter G is of French origin and it is used as a spelling letter worldwide.
 The words serjeant and sergeant are based on the Latin word 'serviens' meaning 'to serve / serving' in English.

- The village of Smakt forms one village community together with the neighbouring village of Holthees. It is worth noting that Smakt is situated in the province of Limburg and Holthees in the province of North Brabant. This is because the provincial border runs between the two villages.
- In the region, Smakt is better known under the village name De Smakt.
- Smakt has been a place of pilgrimage since 1877, namely of St Joseph.
 19 March is the name day of this saint and certainly in earlier times many pilgrims then came to visit the now still existing St. Joseph chapel (built in 1699).
 Later, a church was also built and the Pilgrim House, a place where pilgrims could eat and drink and buy devotionalia (religious utensils). Over time, the Pilgrim House became a café-restaurant.
- Between the 2 villages, there is a war memorial on the bank of the Loobeek. That monument is in memory of villagers who died by violence during World War II.

The photos:

In the Overloon War Chronicles Foundation's search for a photo of John Taylor, despite the foundation's connections in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, it has so far not been possible to find a photo of Taylor. If any reader of this article has a photo of John Taylor, we would like to request to contact the foundation.



Lieutenant D. Orchard of Manchester tests radio communications atop an Achilles M10 17-pounder tank destroyer, part of the 117 Battery of the 75th Anti-Tank Regiment, the regiment in which John Taylor served as a sergeant. Photo taken by Sergeant D.H. Hewitt on 4 October 1944 in the Netherlands.

Lt. Orchard, D. (R.A.) of Manchester tests the wireless communication of an A/Tk. S.P. gun. M10 17-pdr tank destroyer (Achilles) of 117 Battery, 75th Anti-Tank Regiment, Holland, 4 October 1944.

Creator: Hewitt C.H. (Sergeant)

No. 5 Army Film and Photo Section, Army film and Photographic Unit

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During a break in the battle, the British of the 117 Battery, part of the 75th Anti-Tank Regiment, are carrying out maintenance on their Achilles tank destroyer. Photo taken by Sergeant D.H. Hewitt on 4 October 1944 in the Netherlands.

A 17-pdr. S.P. gun of "A" Troop (117) Bty, of an (75) A/Tk. Regt., R.A., (11 Armoured Div.), receiving an overhaul during a lull in the battle.

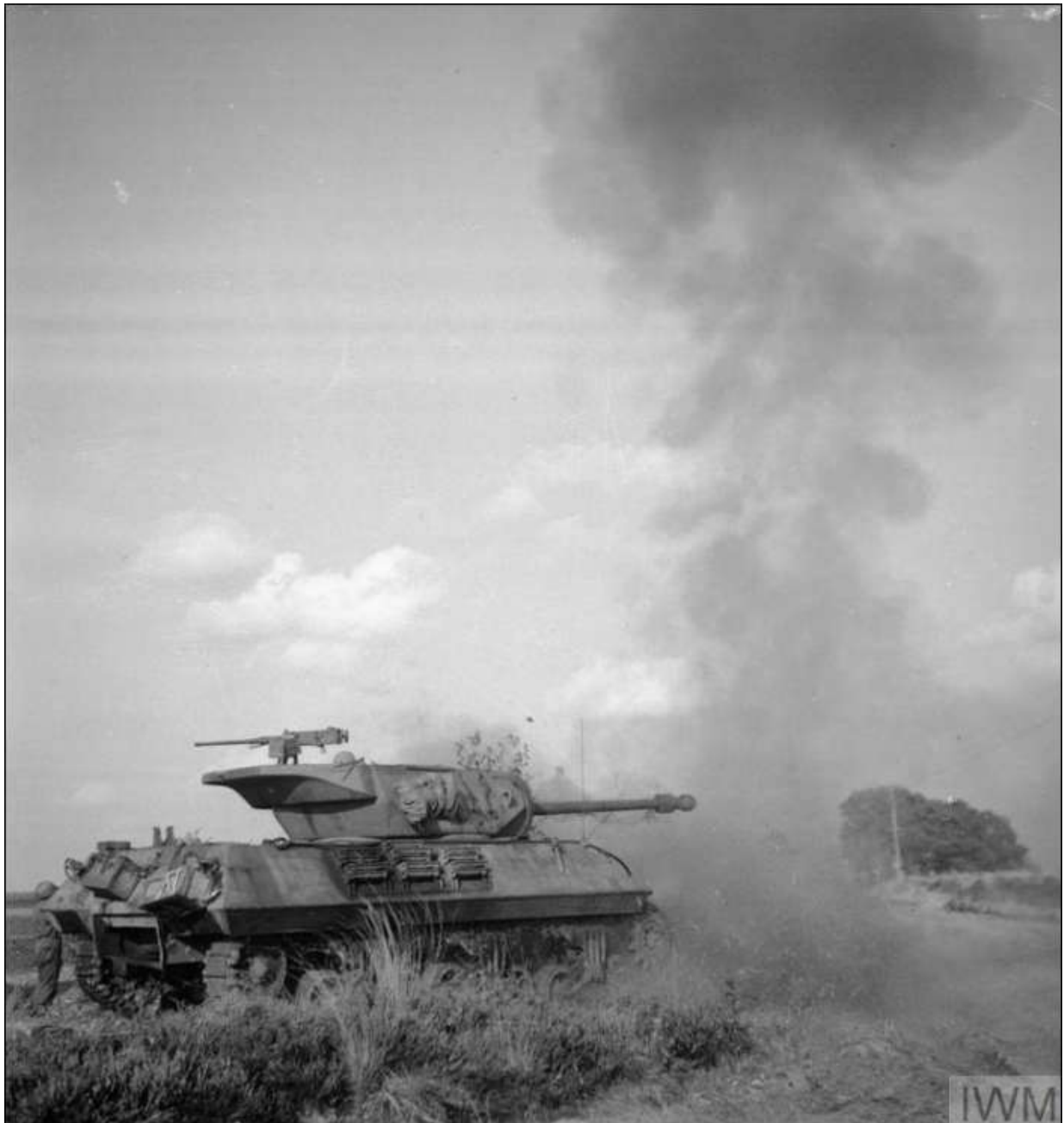
Achilles tank destroyer of 'A' Troop, 117 Battery, 75th Anti-Tank Regiment, 11th Armoured Division in Holland, 4 October 1944.

Creator: Hewitt C.H. (Sergeant)

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An Achilles tank destroyer of the 75th Anti-Tank Regiment fires on German bunkers ("pillboxes") near the German border. Photo taken by Captain J.L. Evans on 12 October 1944 in the Netherlands.

An Achilles tank destroyer of 75th Anti-Tank Regiment, Royal Artillery, 11th Armoured Division, fires its 17-pdr gun at pillboxes on the German frontier, 12 October 1944.

Creator: Evans, J.L. (Capt)

No. 5 Army Film and Photo Section, Army film and Photographic Unit

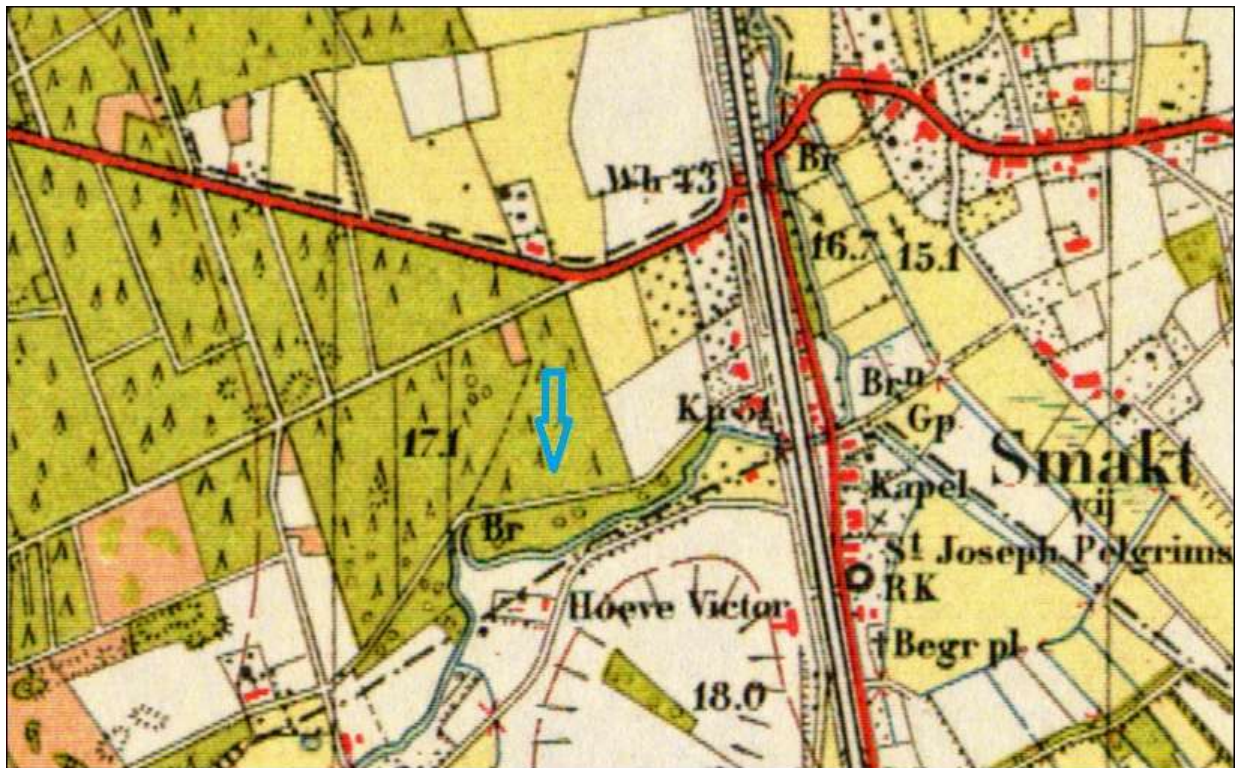
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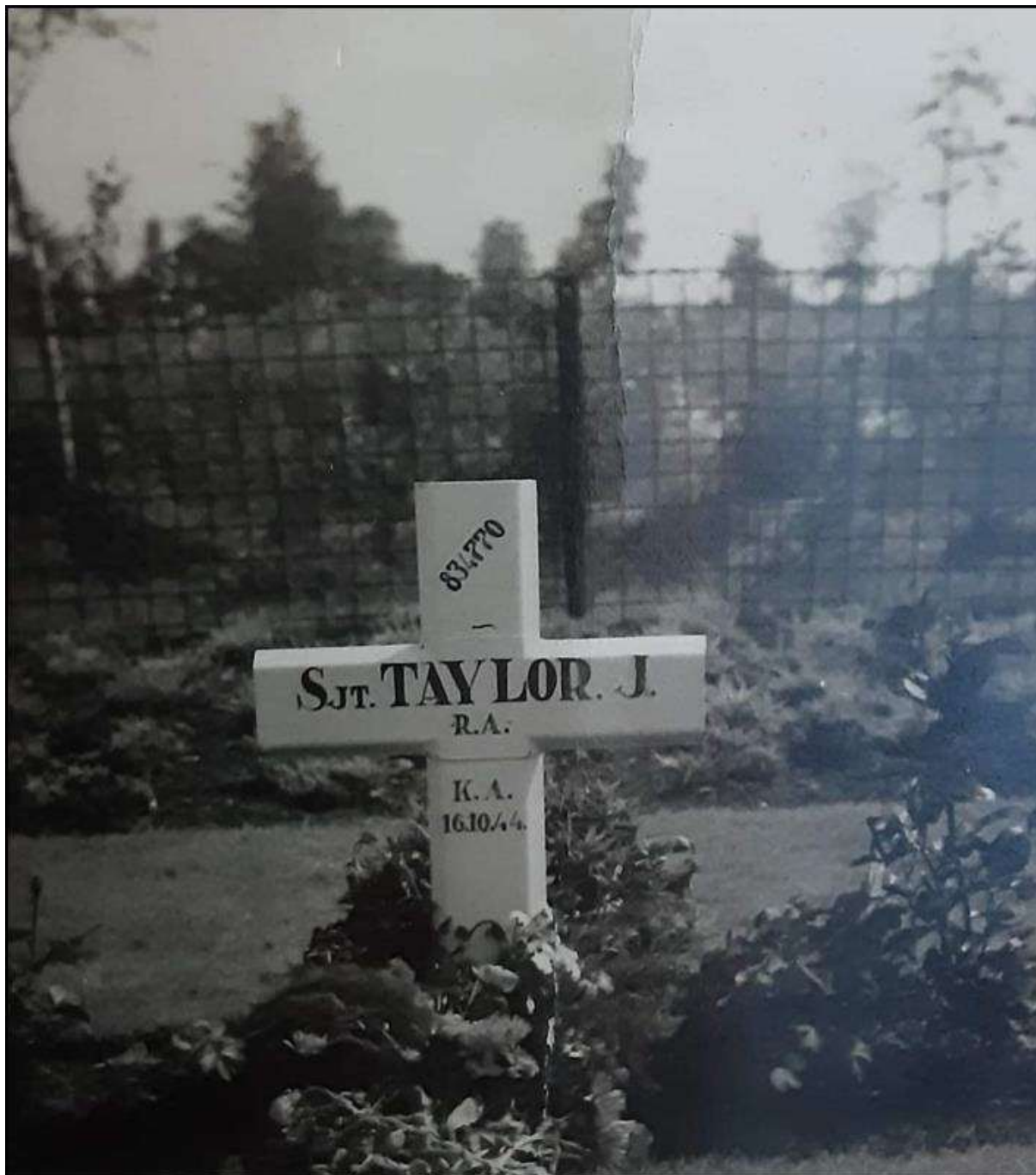


An Achilles tank destroyer of the 75th Anti-Tank Regiment, part of the 11th Armored Division, Royal Artillery. Photo taken by Captain J.L. Evans on 12 October 1944 in the Netherlands.
An Achilles tank destroyer of 75th Anti-Tank Regiment, 11th Armoured Division, Royal Artillery, Holland, 12 October 1944.

Creator: Evans, J.L. (Capt)
 No. 5 Army Film and Photo Section, Army film and Photographic Unit
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The temporary burial site of Taylor, Franklin and McLachlan between 16 October 1944 and 2 June 1947 (see the blue arrow). Their graves were located on the grounds of the Janssen family on the Loobeek, a few hundred meters west of the current Pelgrimshuis (Pilgrim House) in Smakt. Lance Corporal Patrick Sweeney of 4KSLI also died on 16 October 1944, his grave was a little further west on the grounds of G. van Herpen (Holthees). The remains of all 4 were collected on 2 June 1947 and reburied in the CWGC cemetery in Overloon.
(Source and detailed staff map from 1934: Piet Peters)



*The grave of John Taylor in the CWGC-cemetery in Overloon, 1948.
(Photo: Collection Susan Watkin)*



Edward Thomas Taylor and his wife at the grave of his brother John during their visit to Overloon.

(Photo: Collection Susan Watkin)



Maria Janssen from Holthees at the cemetery, here behind Franklin's grave, to the left the grave of John Taylor, to the right the grave of McLachlan. Members of the Janssen family found John Taylor's body after he was killed and was temporarily buried on their grounds, where also Franklin and MacLachlan were temporarily buried. After the war Maria learned English and was therefore a contact person for John Taylor's family.

(Photo: Collection Susan Watkin)



*The gravestone of John Taylor in the CWGC cemetery in Overloon.
(Photo: Collection Leo Janssen)*



*Part of the back row E of section IV at the CWGC cemetery in Overloon. John Taylor's grave 12 between the grave of Andrew Swinley (grave 11, with photos in front of the gravestone) and Charles Franklin (grave 13, in the photo on the far right).
(Photo: Collection Leo Janssen)*

Sources and credits:

Royal Artillery Attestation of the Royal Regiment of Artillery for JohnTaylor (Service No. 834770)

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Original series of Faces from the past (episode 1 – 11) created by author Arno van Dijk.

All episodes in this series Faces from the past have been written and composed by the author without the aid of any kind of artificial intelligence.

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:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/OverloonWarChronicles>

Email: overloonwarchronicles@gmail.com

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