

News story: Grave of Northumberland born World War 2 prisoner of war finally rededicated

A new headstone has been installed and a rededication service took place in a moving ceremony on Friday 21 April 2017 at Wittenburg Cemetery, Germany.

The service, arranged by the MOD's Joint Casualty & Compassionate Centre (JCCC), part of Defence Business Services was led by the Reverend Heather Rendell (Chaplain to the Forces), Regimental Chaplain, HQ Westfalen Garrison.



(L to R) Phil Richards, Alan Culshaw, Major Pat Ralph, Reverend Heather Rendell, Colonel David Moreton, Steve Foster, Cdr Ian Harrop, Bob Jones, Keith Orton, Crown Copyright, All rights reserved

Nicola Nash, JCCC said:

Private Thompson and his comrades were faced with a tortuous march after years of captivity. We are glad to be able to confirm his final resting place and honour him as he so richly deserves.

Private Thompson was born on 4 April 1919 at Tynemouth, Northumberland. Before enlisting, he was recorded as working as a glazier and lived with his

sister, Elizabeth, on Penman Street in North Shields. George enlisted on 16 October 1939 and was sent, as a Private, to France on 28 February 1940 as part of the British Expeditionary Force.

He was reported missing on 19 June 1940 after being captured at Athies, France. His status as a Prisoner of War (POW) was confirmed a month later.

Pte Thompson was sent to Stalag XXA, located in Toruń, Poland. He was imprisoned for nearly 5 years, until in early 1945 and with the threat of the advancing Russians, the Germans forced the POWs to march towards the West. This 'Long March' was a tortuous undertaking for men that were already weakened from years of imprisonment.

It was one of the worse winters on record, with temperatures dropping as low as -25°C. The men were without adequate clothing, supplies or medical equipment and were forced to march up to 40 kilometres a day, many succumbed to hypothermia, disease and death. Tragically, George lost his life during this march and having suffered dysentery, he passed away near the town of Wittenburg, Germany on 3 March 1945.

Private Thompson was just 25 years old when he died.



(L to R) Phil Richards, Alan Culshaw, Major Pat Ralph, Reverend Heather Rendell, Colonel David Moreton, Steve Foster, Cdr Ian Harrop, Bob Jones, Keith Orton, Crown Copyright, All rights reserved

Reverend Heather Rendell said:

It was a privilege to give a name to the grave of a soldier that died in conditions that should never happen again.

A record of these POWs, including George, was kept by Staff Sergeant (S/Sgt) Aitken of the Royal Army Ordnance Corps. He kept a list of each man that died and where they were buried. He also attempted to intervene with the German guards to get better treatment of his men.

George's burial place had remained unknown, until the grave of an 'Unbekampt Englander Soldat' (Unknown English Soldier) was found at a civilian cemetery in Wittenburg, where George's burial place had been listed by S/Sgt Aitken.

This grave was brought to the attention of the Ministry of Defence by researcher, Steve Foster who has spent many years researching the final resting places of the POWs on S/Sgt Aitken's list.

After extensive historical research by Mr Foster and the JCCC into this unknown grave and the circumstances surrounding George's death, the MOD have now confirmed that this Unknown Soldier is actually Private George Henry Thompson.

Steve Foster said:

It was an honour to help find the grave of Private Thompson 70 years after he died in dreadful circumstance.

A new headstone bearing Private Thompson's name has been provided by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, who will now care for his final resting place in perpetuity.

[Proposed closure of Marks and Spencer in Wokingham](#)

I have been notified of a plan for the possible closure the Wokingham store, following consultation with staff who will be offered jobs in neighbouring stores.

I have written back to Marks and Spencer asking why they think they need to close the store, and why they are pessimistic about its future turnover and profitability. I asked if they have found the best mix between food, household and textile products. They need to examine their merchandising and marketing strategy for what should be a successful and profitable store. They also need to take into account the growth of Wokingham and the surrounding area as new housing goes in.

I will let you know what response I receive.

SNP council election manifesto: what you need to know

Today Nicola Sturgeon launched the SNP's manifesto for the 4 May council elections in Edinburgh. [Read the manifesto in full here.](#)

Brexit can still be overturned – this is your chance

The President of the European Parliament has said Britain would be welcomed back with open arms if voters changed their minds about Brexit on 8 June.

This directly contradicts Theresa May's claim that 'there is no turning back' after Article 50.

Liberal Democrat Leader Tim Farron said: "This shows it's not too late to prevent a divisive, hard Brexit.

"On 8th June, together we can change the direction of this country.

"The Liberal Democrats will be the real voice of opposition to this Conservative Brexit government."

News story: Scottish shipyards begin building Royal Navy's latest patrol ship

Tony Douglas, Chief Executive Officer for Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S), the UK's Defence procurement organisation, pressed the button to cut the first sheet of steel for the HMS Spey at BAE Systems' Govan shipyard on the Clyde today.

Like her four sister ships HMS Forth, HMS Medway, HMS Trent and HMS Tamar, which are all either under construction or preparing for sea trials, HMS Spey will be built at Govan before she is transferred to the Scotstoun yard, where she will be fitted out for operations.

Work to build HMS Spey and the rest of the OPV fleet is sustaining 800 jobs and the vital skills needed to build the fleet of next-generation Type 26 Frigates, which will begin construction at Govan in the summer.

Minister for Defence Procurement, Harriett Baldwin, said:

The start of work on HMS Spey, the fifth Offshore Patrol Vessel, is another milestone in a significant programme of work which is sustaining hundreds of jobs in Scotland and the vital shipbuilding skills needed to build the Royal Navy's new Type 26 Frigates.

The on-going successful delivery of these ships is a key element of the Government's ten-year, £178 billion equipment plan to provide the UK's armed forces with the kit they deserve.

HMS Spey, which will be 90 metres long and displace around 2,000 tonnes, is one of two ships being built under a £287 million agreement signed between the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and BAE Systems in December 2016. She is due to be delivered to the Royal Navy in 2019 and enter service by 2021.

She is expected to carry a 30mm cannon and a flight deck capable of receiving a Merlin helicopter, in support of counter-terrorism, anti-piracy, anti-smuggling and maritime defence operations.

DE&S CEO Tony Douglas said:

The team at Defence Equipment and Support has driven the successful delivery of the OPV programme; today's steel cut is a proud moment not only for us, but for the Royal Navy and our industry partners too.

I am looking forward to continuing this long-standing and close relationship when we begin manufacturing for the Type 26 fleet later in the summer.

Batch 2 Offshore Patrol Vessels have a maximum speed of 24 knots and can sail 5,500 nautical miles before having to resupply.