

# 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.

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## [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.

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**[News story: Defence Secretary announces £539 million investment in](#)**

## new missiles systems

The deal ensures our Armed Forces have the best equipment available to protect the new Queen Elizabeth Class Carriers and the extended fleet from current and future threats.

The half a billion-pound contracts will sustain over 130 jobs with MBDA in the UK, with missile modification and service support being carried out in Stevenage, Henlow, Bristol and Bolton.

### **Secretary of State, Sir Michael Fallon, said:**

This substantial investment in missile systems is vital in protecting our ships and planes from the most complex global threats as our Armed Forces keep the UK safe.

Backed by our rising Defence budget, these contracts will sustain high skilled jobs across the UK and demonstrate that strong defence and a strong economy go hand in hand.

As part of a £41 million contract, the Meteor air-to-air missiles will arm the UK's F-35B Lightning II squadrons. It will provide the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy with a world beating missile that can engage with targets moving at huge speed and at a very long range. The weapon will enter service on Typhoon with the RAF in 2018 and the F-35B from 2024, and will be used on a range of missions including protecting the Queen Elizabeth Class Carriers.



Meteor missile fired from a fighter jet. Image courtesy of MBDA Systems.

Meanwhile, a £175 million in-service support contract for the anti-air Sea Viper weapon system will ensure that the Royal Navy's Type 45 Destroyers can continue to provide unparalleled protection from air attack to the extended fleet. Under the contract, the missiles will be maintained, repaired and overhauled as and when required to ensure continued capability. The Sea Viper missile defends ships against multiple threats, including missiles and fighter aircraft.

The final contract is a £323 million deal to purchase the next batch of cutting-edge air defence missiles for the British Army and Royal Navy, offering increased capability at a lower cost. Designed and manufactured by MBDA UK at sites in Bolton, Stevenage and Henlow, the next-generation CAMM missile will provide the Armed Forces with missiles for use on sea and on land. CAMM has the capability to defend against anti-ship cruise missiles, aircraft and other highly sophisticated threats. Signalling our continued investment in Type 26 programme, CAMM will provide the anti-air defence capability on the new Type 26 Frigates for the Royal Navy and will also form part of the Sea Ceptor weapon system on the Type 23 Frigate and will also enhance the British Army's Ground Based Air Defence capability by replacing the in-service Rapier system.

**Tony Douglas, Chief Executive Officer of Defence Equipment and Support, the MOD's procurement organisation, said:**

Work on these cutting-edge missiles, which will help to protect the

UK at home and abroad and secure jobs across the country, demonstrates the importance of Defence investment. That is why, working closely with our industry partners, we continue to drive innovation and value into everything we do; securing next generation equipment for our Armed Forces at the best possible value for the taxpayer.

**Dave Armstrong, Managing Director of MBDA UK, added:**

MBDA is delighted by the continued trust placed in us by the Ministry of Defence and the British military. The contracts announced today for Meteor, CAMM and Sea Viper will help protect all three UK Armed Services, providing them with new cutting-edge capabilities and ensuring their current systems remain relevant for the future. They will also help to secure hundreds of high-skilled people at MBDA UK and in the UK supply chain, maintaining the UK's manufacturing base and providing us with a platform for exports.

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## **[News story: Defence Secretary meets UK troops on NATO deployment](#)**

Sir Michael witnessed the launch of the UK-led Enhanced Forward Presence deployment in Estonia, where an 800-strong British-led battle group will work with Estonian, French and Danish partners.

Working under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Mark Wilson, the UK troops from 5 Rifles battle group, based in Bulford, Wiltshire, and The Queen's Royal Hussars, based in Paderborn, Germany, will work with our Eastern European allies and ensure that we stand with them shoulder to shoulder in the face of any potential aggression.

The UK has committed more than 300 vehicles to support Estonia during this deployment, including Warrior infantry fighting vehicles, Challenger 2 tanks, AS90 self-propelled artillery guns and Terrier, Titan and Trojan armoured battlefield engineer vehicles.

Attending the flag-raising ceremony at an Estonian military base in Tapa, the Defence Secretary was joined by his allied colleagues, marking the contributions from France and Denmark to the UK battlegroup.

**Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:**

The troops I have met today are part of one of the UK's largest ever deployments to Eastern Europe. This marks our commitment to European security and standing with our allies in the face of an increasingly assertive Russia.

Earlier on Thursday Sir Michael met with the Estonian President Kersti Kaljulaid, where they welcomed the launch of the EFP deployment. The Defence Secretary emphasised the continued UK commitment to Euro-Atlantic defence and security.

This deployment to Estonia takes the total British deployment in Eastern Europe to nearly 1,000, with 150 UK personnel based in Poland as part of the UK's support of the US-led EFP battalion there. NATO is also establishing battlegroups in Latvia and Lithuania.

UK commitments in the region will be boosted further by the deployment of RAF Typhoon aircraft to Romania, set to arrive over the next few weeks, to carry out a NATO Air Policing mission in the Black Sea.

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## [News story: £1.4 billion deal for Royal Navy's new attack submarine](#)

The submarine, named Agamemnon, is part of the Astute Class, the largest, most advanced and most powerful attack submarines ever to enter service with the Royal Navy. The submarines are being built by BAE Systems in Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria, which employs around 8,000 people in its Submarines business, with thousands more working in the UK submarine supply chain.

The new contract guarantees a better deal for the UK taxpayer and for the Armed Forces, with an incentivised contract arrangement that will help to save money and demands the best possible work from industry.

### **Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:**

This latest investment means we are well on our way to completing our fleet of Astute submarines. These are the most advanced submarines ever operated by the Royal Navy and are already providing unprecedented levels of stealth and attack capability across the world.

Backed by a rising defence budget and a £178 billion equipment plan, Barrow will remain the hub of our submarine build programmes providing high skilled jobs for years to come.





Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon with BAE Systems apprentices inside Devonshire Dock Hall where HMS Agamemnon is under construction. Picture: Michael Vallance, BAE Systems.

Construction of the 7,400 tonne, 97-metre long Agamemnon began in 2012, and is well underway in the Devonshire Dock Hall at Barrow, alongside Boat 5 – Anson – and the yet-to-be-named Boat 7. Their sister submarines, HMS Astute, Ambush and Artful are already in service with the Royal Navy, contributing to operations around the globe.

**Rear Admiral Paul Methven, Director Submarines Acquisition for the Submarine Delivery Agency, said:**

The signature of this contract secures another world-class nuclear submarine for the Royal Navy. These are the most technologically advanced submarines we have ever operated, offering much greater firepower, better communications and more advanced stealth technology than their predecessors.

Today marks another significant milestone for the Astute programme, that demonstrates the UK's ability to deliver complex engineering projects, providing a fleet of submarines which will protect the UK's interests around the globe.

Featuring the latest nuclear-powered technology, the Astute Class submarines can circumnavigate the world submerged, manufacturing the crew's oxygen from

seawater as they go. They also have the ability to operate covertly and remain undetected in almost all circumstances despite being 50 per cent bigger than the Royal Navy's current Trafalgar Class submarines which are being replaced by the Astute Class.

**Will Blamey, Managing Director of BAE Systems Submarines, said:**

Securing the contract for the sixth Astute class submarine is a significant milestone for BAE Systems and the result of many years of hard work by our highly skilled workforce. The Astute class submarines are amongst the most highly capable and technologically advanced in the world and we're immensely proud to build them for the Royal Navy.

Alongside work on the Astute Class, BAE Systems is also the industrial lead for the Dreadnought programme, the Royal Navy's next generation of nuclear deterrent submarines.