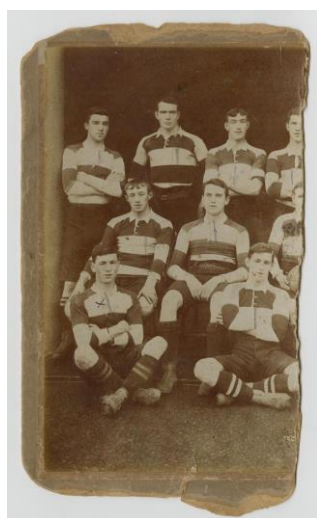


Story of Serjeant Jack Regan, Glamorgan Royal Garrison Artillery

When my wife, Kathleen and I married in 1994 we decided to settle in Kath's family home in Penarth. In the house was a large brass bound "Douai" Bible. Inside the covers were letters and items relating to Kath's maternal grandfather who had been killed in the First World War.

The papers that have been digitised tell the story of Serjeant John ("Jack") Regan and some of the other men of Penarth who went to fight in the First World War. Although many returned safely to their homes and families at the end of the fighting, many did not. Jack Regan was one of those killed in action.

The story starts with two photographs of him in rugby kit. The larger one was taken in 1904 when he played rugby for the Penarth Thistle Rugby Football team. Also in the picture is J. Huett whose sister Jack was to marry in 1907. Another member of the team in the photograph is



his friend and Kath's other grandfather, William Hooper, who would serve in the same artillery battery as Jack Regan. He would survive the war but suffered for the rest of his life from the effects of poison gas and never worked again.

Prior to the war Jack Regan was a member of the Glamorgan Royal Garrison Artillery, part of the Territorial Army formed in 1908. Their role was to man heavy guns positioned in forts and batteries around the coast of Glamorgan to provide a defence against attack from the sea.

Jack Regan belonged to number 4 Company and we have some photographs of them in camp on Penarth Head and training with a practice gun. In the picture marked "No 4" we think John Regan is standing in the centre of the picture. In the other one he is sitting third from the left in the front row.

We know that when war broke out Jack Regan immediately volunteered to serve overseas, but initially he remained in the UK. This may well have been because of the need to man coastal defences in case of an invasion or an attack from



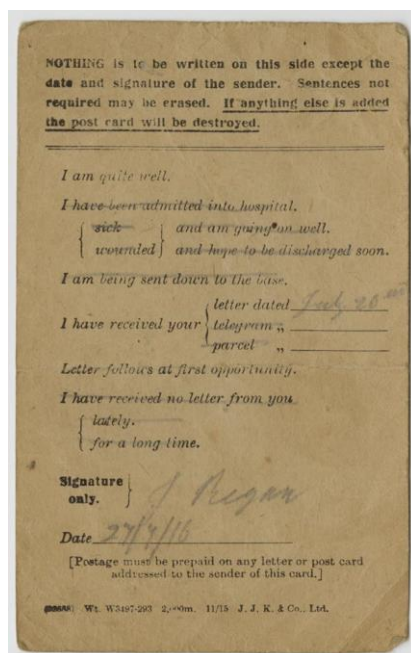
the German fleet. There was also a shortage of heavy guns for the Army at the beginning of the war. In 1916, however, Jack Regan went to join 113 Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery.

The Royal Artillery Historical Trust at Woolwich was able to tell us that 113 Siege Battery was formed at the Royal Garrison Artillery station at Pembroke Dock on 14th February 1916 and that the personnel would have been a mixture of regulars, wartime recruits and territorials like Jack Regan. A number of other members of the Glamorgan RGA also went to form the nucleus of 113 Siege Battery.

The Battery consisted of four 6 inch howitzers. Some more research revealed that the 6 inch howitzer was a medium gun which fired a shell high in the air so it came plunging down on fortifications and trenches. These guns were hauled up to the front by teams of six heavy horses. A magnificent picture of such a gun team entitled "Guns to the Front", by Lucy Kemp Welch, now hangs in the main hall of the National Museum in Cardiff: see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings/paintings/big-guns-to-the-front>

Initially the Battery would have gone to the Siege Artillery School at Lydd in Kent, for training. On 12th June 1916 it embarked at Southampton for France. On the 16th June 1916 it joined the 31st Heavy Artillery Group which was being reinforced before the start of the Battle of the Somme. The Battery fired its first round on 20th June 1916.

When he went away to war Jack Regan was the father of a large family with his wife Mary (who was known as Ginny) of four boys and one girl. Ginny was also expecting another child. Eileen, Kath's mother, was born on 6th May 1916.

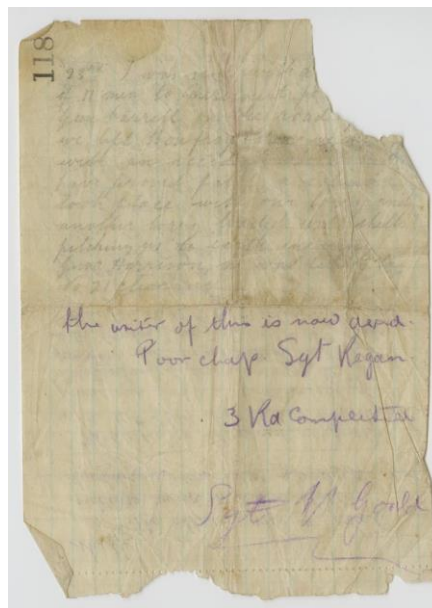


In those days all messages to friends and family were by letter or post card. For reasons of military security letters from soldiers at the front were censored and could take a long time to get to their destination. The soldiers were therefore given cards on which they could send simple messages such as "I am quite well". John Regan sent several while he was in France.

We have two letters home from Jack Regan and a fragment of a third. Written in indelible pencil the letters give news of other Penarth men wounded or killed by shelling or poison gas. One of them thanks Ginny for sending a parcel and a snapshot photograph of her and the children including his new daughter.

He expresses himself pleased that both his wife and daughter looked healthy after what had evidently been a difficult birth. He also refers to finding a ha'penny in the parcel from his new daughter which he says he will keep for good luck. Sadly, we do not have this photo.

The fragment of a letter refers the Battery moving into a position near Maricourt on the night of 18th July after an attack of poison gas that morning had killed one and affected 20 of the section. It was near Maricourt on 31st July 1916 that Jack Regan was killed. The letter was never finished and at the bottom another hand has written: *“the writer of this is now dead. Poor chap Sgt Regan”*

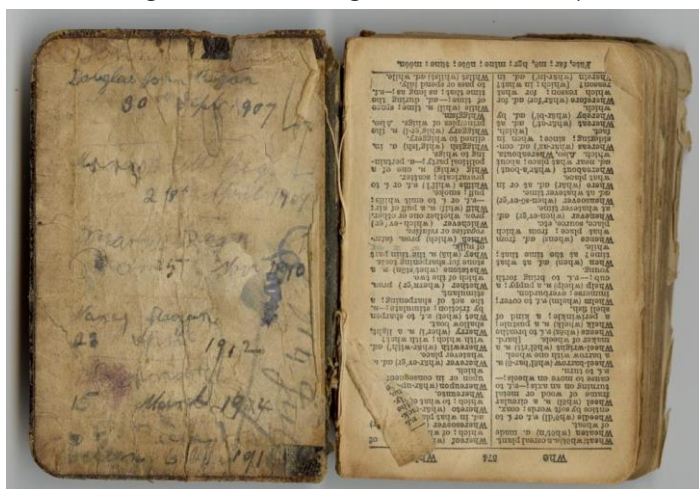


We have a letter to Ginny Regan from Captain J H England which says: *“He was killed instantaneously by a German shell on July 31st whilst in Action bravely fighting his gun in this great Battle. He will be a great loss to us out here as well for he was one of the best men in the Battery; we can ill afford to lose them now. He always did his job well, he never showed any Fear & was always cheerful and brave – we buried him with full military honours in a soldiers cemetery near the Position where he fought so well..”*

There is also a later letter of condolence from the Commanding Officer of the Battery, Major Allen which assured Ginny that her husband, a Roman Catholic, had been buried *“..by a priest of his own Faith”*.

There is also a letter of sympathy was from “T Bartlett” to Mrs Regan. It is notable for the patriotic sentiments it expresses, referring to *“... the losses were not wasted but given for the love of their Homeland and for the Freedom of civilization from the Greatest tyranny known”*. Unfortunately we only have the last page. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission Roll of Honour records that Battery Sergeant Major T Bartlett, 113 Siege Battery was killed a month after Jack Regan on 30th August 1916. Five other members of the Glamorgan RGA serving with 113 Battery also died that day (Bombardier Hunter,

Gunner Boyle, Gunner Grant, Gunner T Jones and Gunner H White).



One of the items returned to Ginny Regan and which has survived is a “Collins Gem Dictionary” that her husband took to war with him. Inside the back cover he has written the names and birthdays of his children. Eileen’s name is squeezed in at the bottom of

the page. We also have a photograph which she was sent of her husband’s original grave at Carney with its simple wooden cross. She never visited France as this was quite beyond the means of a war widow left with six children.

After the war the Glamorgan RGA erected a memorial to their lost comrades in St John's Church, Cardiff. We still have Ginny Regan's copy of the Order of Service when it was dedicated.

Of the 69 names on that memorial I have identified 18 as serving with 113 Siege Battery, the largest single group: BSM T. Bartlett, Sgts. E Boyle and John Regan, Bombardiers Gould, Hunter, W. Jones and Packer and Gunners Boyle, Francis, Grant, Hartrey, T Jones, Lewis, SMJ Spear, J Spear, White, T Williams and Woolhouse.

Of those serving with 113 Battery 5 are known to be from Penarth (T Bartlett, J Regan, S J Gould, A Hartrey, SMJ Spear).

Lt. Fauvel (49 Siege Battery), Gnr. Palfrey and E Walker (recorded as killed on 4th November 1916 Age 16) both serving with 172 Siege Battery and Gnr. GE Maddocks, 4th (Glamorgan Company) RGA were also from Penarth.

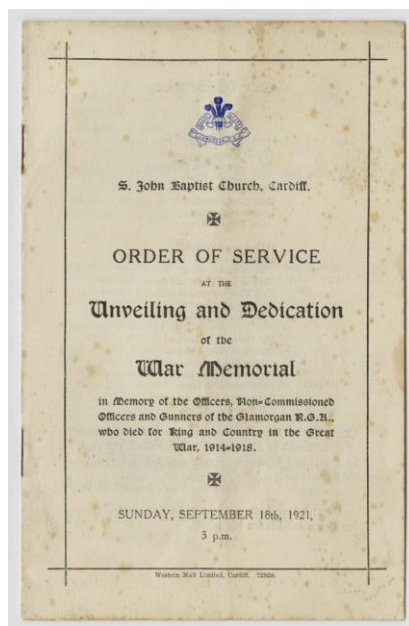
In 1996 we wrote to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission to find Jack Regan's grave – no internet in then – and were informed that he now rests in the Peronne Road Cemetery in Maricourt. We visited the grave in March 1997, the first family members to do so.

We laid a poppy wreath with a note written by Kath to her grandfather which explained who she was and that her mother was the daughter he had never seen and that her mother had married the eldest son of his friend William Hooper. Kath's father, M D J "Mel" Hooper left school at 14 to support his family due to his father being disabled in the war and subsequently went to sea as a cabin boy rising to be Commodore Master of the Graig Shipping Company; but that is another story in itself.



Jack Regan and William Hooper must have been close friends because one of William's daughters was named Elizabeth Maricourt Hooper.

In due course Ginny would have received Jack's war medals. The First World War Medal Rolls show that in addition to the Victory Medal and War Medal, Jack Regan was awarded the Territorial Force War Medal. This is the rarest of the First World War medals with only some 33,000 being issued. It was given to those who had been members



of the Territorial Army at the outbreak of war and who had volunteered for service overseas, but were not sent until 1916 or later – had he been sent earlier, he would have qualified for the 1914 or 1915 Star instead. It was evidently felt that the willingness of those who volunteered at the outset of the war was worthy of recognition. Regrettably, the medals are also missing and Kath suspects they may have been sold by Ginny during the hard times that followed.

Jack Regan is also commemorated on the parish war memorial in St Augustine's Church, Penarth ("Top Church") and on the town war memorial in Alexandra Gardens.

In his willingness to volunteer to serve, Jack Regan lived up to the motto of the Glamorgan RGA:

"Ready Aye Ready"