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OF PORTUGAL**

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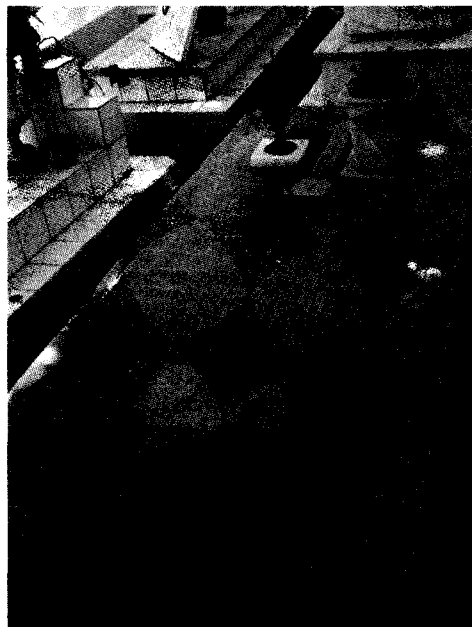
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## COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES IN THE ALGARVE

Carol Rankin

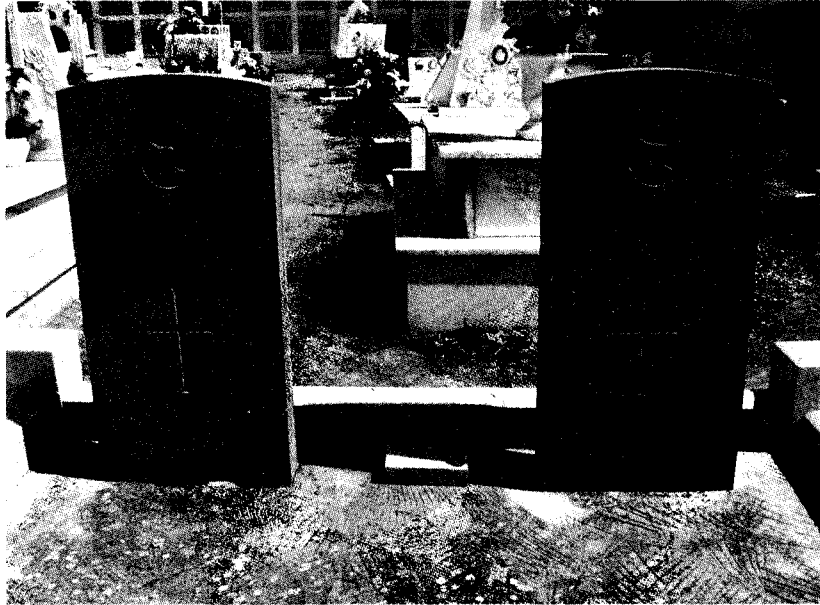
Able Seaman William Thomas BOYLE J/28254 had enlisted in the Royal Navy at the start of the First World War. After various appointments in 1917 he was drafted to *HMS Cormorant*, a receiving ship at Gibraltar for service with HM Torpedo Boat (HMTB) No 92. In early 1918 his ship set out from her base at Gibraltar on routine anti-submarine patrol and escort duties and anchored in Lagos bay at 7.30 am on 10<sup>th</sup> February. After normal shipboard duties they weighed anchor and sailed for Portimão where they anchored at 14.30 hours. That evening, about 20.30 hours the stern of the MTB swung round fouling the moorings of a sailing lighter. In seeking to clear the moorings William Boyle was knocked overboard by the sailing lighter's spar and was either killed outright or knocked unconscious and then drowned aged 21. A search for his body continued for three hours, when it was then abandoned and the following day HMTB No. 92 left for her home base at Gibraltar. Able Seaman William Boyle's body was subsequently washed up in Portimão harbour and he was buried in the town's Municipal Cemetery. The cemetery is located on the South West fringes of the town – parallel to the north wall of the cemetery is a path, half way down this there is a small avenue of cypress trees in the middle of which William's grave can be found north of the path. It is in section 45-50 of the cemetery. The inscription reads: *In Memory of Thomas William Boyle. Able Seaman of H.M. Torpedo Boat No. 92. This stone was erected by his shipmates. February 10<sup>th</sup> 1918.* (It appears that the names William and Thomas have been carved on the gravestone in the wrong order) Following William's tragic death, a Court of

Enquiry recorded that "he accidentally drowned and that no blame was attributable to anyone for the accident".



Flight Sergeant George Tod Wright GIBSON 977499 and Sergeant Gilbert Joseph ORTON 1495406 are buried in Sagres Cemetery. The story of their aeroplane crash has been well documented. Both young men were members of the RAF's Volunteer Reserve and were serving with 210 Squadron as part of the 10 man crew of a Catalina flying boat, one of the most widely used multi-role aircraft of the Second World War. These aeroplanes were used for anti-submarine warfare, patrol bombing, convoy escorts, search and rescue missions and cargo transportation. On the afternoon of 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1943 the sky was overcast and the residents of Sagres heard the noise of aircraft engines coming from the north. It became increasingly loud to

the point of being deafening when a Catalina emerged from the clouds, flying very low and heading straight for the ground. The residents thought that it was going to land in the middle of their houses and rushed outside in panic, military personnel at Sagres Fort abandoned their posts to help them - before it hit the ground the aeroplane managed to gain a bit of altitude and turned in the direction of the sea. The local population ran after the aeroplane as it headed towards the bay of Tonel thinking it was trying to land, when suddenly the plane exploded and the pieces fell into the sea. Everyone who witnessed it was horrified, fishermen launched boats to try and help any survivors and people rushed down the steps to the sea. Here lodged between the rocks, still attached to his seat, they found the body of Sergeant Gilbert Orton. No other bodies could be sighted; later Flight Sergeant George Gibson's corpse was washed up on the beach at Tonel. Of the other 8 crew members, no other remains were ever found and what caused the aeroplane to explode has never been ascertained. Gilbert Orton died aged 21, George Gibson aged 23, and both were buried with full military honours at a ceremony attended by the British Military Attaché as well as much of the local population. Sagres Cemetery is on the right hand side as you come in on the Lagos road, the entrance is down a small lane beside A Sagres café/restaurant. Once through the gate, look for the double Commonwealth War grave half way down the left side of the cemetery where the names of these young RAF crewmen are inscribed on two matching headstones.



*Sources:*

*Commonwealth War Graves Register*

*“Sailor Boy” by Michael Pease*

*[www.battleships-cruisers.co.uk](http://www.battleships-cruisers.co.uk)*

*Article by Jon Wilson, 2002.*

*“Aterrem em Portugal” by Carlos Guerreiro*

*“Flying Cats: The Catalina Aircraft in World War II” by Andrew Hendrie*

*CAROL RANKIN (BA Hons) spent many years leading Fine Arts tours to Portugal and wrote part of two guide books. She has lectured to the BHS on a variety of subjects and contributed articles to previous Annual Reports. She currently works as an Archivist and researcher.*