

The forgotten fallen: British Palestine Police graves in Israel

by Anthony Rae

Most will be aware that ongoing conflicts in the former Middle East region of Palestine since its formation as the State of Israel in 1948 are, sadly, nothing new; many will know of British rule in that land before such conflicts forced them out; but not widely known is the high cost paid by British police officers while endeavouring to keep the peace there

Historic background

Towards the end of the First World War in 1918, British Allied Forces conquered Palestine after 400 years of domination by the Turkish Ottoman Empire. In this they were aided by an Arab revolt, led by British Major T E Lawrence (*Lawrence of Arabia*), which came with an expectation of Arab independence in the region, whilst, at the same time, British policy favoured the establishment in Palestine of a *national home* for the Jewish people

After a period of military rule, in July 1920 a civil administration was set up under a British High Commissioner. In 1921, following inter-communal disturbances, a British-led but locally recruited police force, the Palestine Gendarmerie, was formed from both Arabs and Jews but struggled to maintain law and order. In 1922, the government and security of the region was formally entrusted to the United Kingdom under League of Nations (now United Nations) Mandate until such time as it could be self-governing

Into this contradictory and often both politically and naturally hostile environment came hundreds of British police officers. In May 1922, the Palestine Gendarmerie was reinforced by a 760-strong British Section known as the British Gendarmerie, recruited mainly from the ranks of the Royal Irish Constabulary following the Irish War of Independence. In 1926, this merged into the British Section of the Palestine Police, becoming a very efficient force lasting until the end of the Mandate and formation of the State of Israel in May 1948

By then, thousands had served in the Palestine Police, acting as a non-partisan force to help keep the peace alongside their Arab and Jewish colleagues and with their colleagues they fell, in their hundreds, in a foreign land from where so many did not return. The first to die, on 15 April 1922, was Captain James Wesley Mackenzie, 27, District Commandant of Police for Nazareth and Galilee, who drowned in a gallant attempt to rescue an Arab Inspector who fell into the River Jordan whilst on a mounted patrol near Lake Tiberias. He jumped in after him but tragically both were swept away and perished



Mackenzie's death as a lone British officer who was prepared to sacrifice his life for his men removed any remaining doubts among the Palestine police about serving alongside the British

Memorials were erected in the Mount Zion Cemetery and Jerusalem's Cathedral



Ambush and murder of three British Constables

In 1923, British Gendarmerie Constables Davies, Loydall and Purvis became the first to be murdered in the execution of their duty, when their mobile patrol was ambushed by

bandits. They were buried in the small Protestant Cemetery in Nazareth, but after the British withdrawal in 1948 their burial place became abandoned, forgotten and lost

Between 10 and 14 June 1923, the British High Commissioner of Palestine, His Excellency Sir Herbert Samuel, was scheduled to visit Metullah, the northern-most Jewish colony, and Banyas (Dan) prior to the transfer of the area from French Lebanon to British Palestine control. On the afternoon of Sunday 10 June, 12 members of N° 6 Company, British Gendarmerie, stationed at Nazareth, comprising a Sergeant and ten Constables under the command of Lieutenant R B Parker, in two police vehicles, were detailed to escort the High Commissioner's party from Rosh Pina to Metullah

At 1435 hours, the BG escort patrol was joined by the HC's party in one car with an outrider (a second car having been delayed) and the whole group moved to Metullah arriving at 1700, when the HC's security was handed over to the Palestine Gendarmerie. At 1745 the BG Escort left Metullah and waited at Jahalah for the HC's cars to inform them to await the HC on 14 June at Nebi Yusha. Constable McCormick then travelled with the HC's cars, whilst the main BG Escort took a different route to return to Rosh Pina. The Escort now consisted of two Gendarmerie vehicles: a Ford Touring Car containing Lt Parker and Constables Golden (driver), Davies and Loydall, and a Ford Tender containing Sergeant McMahon and Constables Boland, Bunkall, Croy, Pope, Purvis and Silverwood

About 1900 hours at Wadi Hindush (or Hindaj), near Ain-el Mellahah, North West of Lake Huleh, Lt Parker, who was in the leading car followed behind by the tender, saw eight men in front acting suspiciously. He ordered his driver to stop and got out, revolver drawn, to see what was happening, when they were immediately fired on from their front and side. Lt Parker returned fire but the three constables in his car were all hit, Loydall was killed outright and Parker then ordered the two wounded constables to fall back to the Tender about 50 yards behind but as they did so, Davies was hit again and mortally wounded

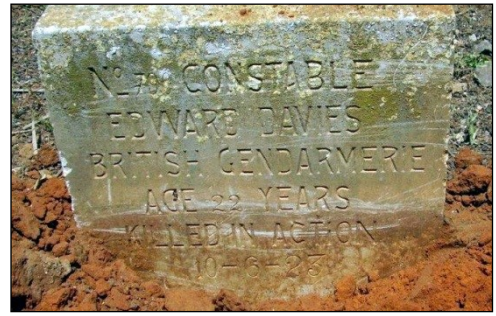
Meanwhile, the tender had also come under fire from both sides. Croy had been wounded and then became cut off from his colleagues and got lost in the confusion. Purvis had been hit twice and was fatally wounded. The remaining officers continued to engage their attackers for some 20 minutes when it began to get dark and fire slackened. Golden volunteered to retrieve the car which he did and all, except Croy who could not be found, left the scene in the two vehicles. During the exchange of fire, their two police vehicles had been hit by no less than 28 shots and five constables were wounded, three fatally

They drove to the village of Yesod Hamaala to seek medical assistance but two of the wounded Constables, Davies and Loydall, were already dead and a third, Purvis, died from his wounds there the following morning before an ambulance could arrive to evacuate them. Croy made his way back to Jahalah village and sent for police and the next day all returned to Nazareth. The HC's visit was terminated early, his party returning on 12 June

The Escort thought there were as many as 20 or more attackers at the ambush, Parker stated he saw eight in the road ahead and they were also fired on from the flanks. The Touring Car was found to have 16 bullet holes, the Tender 12, and their occupants received eight gunshot wounds. Four of the assailants were arrested on 12 June by French authorities near the Lebanon border in possession of Loydall's rifle and under interrogation implicated a fifth man but denied more were involved. They were identified as members of a notorious gang of Arab bandits responsible for several attacks and murders on the Lebanon roads in recent months and had entered Palestine to escape the Lebanon police

The dead Constables

Constable 790 **Edward Davies**, aged 20 years, was killed at the scene and buried in Nazareth Cemetery with military honours on 11 June. He was appointed to the Force on 28 April 1923. Edward, originally from Warwickshire, England, had been secretly married on joining (the Force only taking single men) and was survived by his wife and baby son, who received a police pension and child allowance; he was also survived by his mother and younger brother



Constable 466 **John Albert Loydall**, aged 35, was killed at the scene and buried in Nazareth Cemetery on 11 June with Constable Davies. He was appointed 30 March 1922. John was a single man from Kent, England, his next of kin being his sister; he was a former labourer, soldier and permanent Constable in the Royal Irish Constabulary during the Irish War of Independence from 1920 to 1922

Constable 539 **Joseph Edward Purvis**, aged 23, died from his wounds about 12 noon 11 June in Yesod Hamaala village and was buried alongside his colleagues on 12 June. He was appointed 31 March 1922. Joseph was a single man from Northumberland, England, his next of kin being his mother. He was a former surveyor, soldier and permanent Constable in the Royal Irish Constabulary during the Irish War of Independence 1920 to 1922, during which he had been awarded the Constabulary Medal for gallantry



Whilst most British Mandate police were buried in larger war cemeteries, the few graves at Nazareth became abandoned and long forgotten, but the fallen were remembered by their comrades and their comrades' children, even to this day....

Lost graves found after 89 years

Among comrades at the Nazareth funerals was Michael Higgins, who had joined the Gendarmerie in 1922 and retired as a Palestine Police Inspector in 1947. In 2011 his son, Martin Higgins, an associate member of the Palestine Police Old Comrades Association (PPOCA), found a photo in his father's albums of an unknown Gendarmerie funeral. He sent this to two friends in Israel, Michael Gottschalk and Dr Norbert Schwake, local historians who have been voluntarily caring for British graves in the smaller cemeteries

They thought it may be at Nazareth and checks with the Reverend Emad Daibes of the Anglican Christ Church there found the names of Davies, Loydall and Purvis in their burial records. A search in the cemetery found the three graves, headstones abandoned, broken and sunk into the soil. With funding from the PPOCA and hard work from Mr Gottschalk and Dr Schwake, the site was cleared and the headstones renewed (together with those of two other Constables, Grieve and Goodright, who had both died while off duty in 1935)

On 17 October 2012, there was a ceremony of re-dedication at the cemetery, organised by Michael Gottschalk, in the presence of the Mayor of Nazareth Mr Ramiz Jaraisy, the Reverend Emad Diabes, Mr Paul Price, head of the Commonwealth War Graves

Commission in Israel, and representatives from the British Embassy, Israeli Police, local historians and others. With most ex-PP members now in their 90s, the PPOCA was represented by associate member Anthony Rae, a retired British Police Sergeant and creator of the National Police Officers Roll of Honour, travelling from the UK. Although retired, he had been asked to wear his old uniform by the local police chief. This he did with pride, afterwards donating it to the Israeli Police museum where it went on display



The stones on page 37 are remains of the original headstones which had sunk into the ground, seen here after partial excavation. They were left in situ but the damaged crosses were replaced by new inscribed headstones behind them

Thus after 89 years, thanks to this international brotherhood, there was a second ceremony in the Nazareth graveyard to honour the fallen British Policemen who made the ultimate sacrifice in the service of two countries and who lie in Israel - so far from home - but not now forgotten. Yet, sadly, others remain forgotten, their graves abandoned or lost



BG Michael Higgins



British Gendarmerie funeral at Nazareth

Remembering the fallen – the graves of British Police Officers in Israel

Between 1922 and 1948, over 350 British Palestine Police officers lost their lives and were buried there. Of these, some 200 died during the Second World War and up to 31

December 1947, a period falling within the remit of the UK's Commonwealth War Graves Commission. The CWGC officially cares for these graves, but not the graves of those who died between the wars or after 1947. Most of the other 150 British police dead also lie in the War Cemeteries or the larger civil cemeteries of Jerusalem, Haifa and Ramleh, where they are watched over by the CWGC. Unfortunately, this is not always the case for the smaller graveyards, like Nazareth, where some graves remain abandoned or still lost

In the past, the smaller Palestine Police graveyards in Israel were much neglected and it is only in recent years that things have begun to change, thanks to volunteers like Michael Gottschalk, who care for their country's history and keep an eye on things, cleaning up graveyards and replacing headstones to improve matters felt too important to overlook



Anthony Rae's visit to Israel was not only to attend the ceremony but to research and record the graves of British Police Officers. This was only made possible by the generous assistance of Michael Gottschalk and grants received from the PPOCA and the Police History Society. Anthony spent seven days there visiting six cemeteries and identifying and photographing 340 graves, the remainder are unmarked or yet to be found. The research continues in liaison with the CWGC to locate lost graves and renew missing headstones. The PPOCA closed in 2013 but any outside the CWGC's remit will be financed by its successor, the British Palestine Police Association (BPPA), of which Anthony is a Committee Member responsible for the Roll of Honour, graves and CWGC liaison



Anthony Rae is a retired Metropolitan constable and Lancashire sergeant and creator of the National Police Officers Roll of Honour - www.policerollofhonour.org.uk