

The Canadian gift of great generosity.

The harvest of 1879 went from bad to disastrous and the government, fearful that another famine was looming, tried to initiate a rapid response almost a pre-emptive strike to ameliorate the worst anticipated scenario. It sought advice from the Office of Public Works (OPW) as to what measures by way of public works might be initiated to meet the imminent threat. On 31st of October and the 7th of November 1879, the Board of the OPW submitted memoranda outlining projects on land drainage and reclamation, the construction of new fisheries Piers and Harbours, and major arterial drainage. The OPW had in fact been well ahead of the Government as on July 23rd, 1879 it had already submitted for Treasury sanction a list of 23 memorials for Piers previously recommended by the inspectors of fisheries.

The Treasury authorized the OPW to advance loans, and the grand juries to hold extraordinary presentment sessions, in order to initiate immediate relief works, actions that were legitimized respectively by the forced relief of distressed act of 1880, Passed by parliament on the 15th of March 1880. The construction of fisheries Piers was being cast, once again, as a relief work solution to anticipated famine crisis.

The crisis anticipated in the country was brought to the attention of the world in letters and newspaper reports circulating widely in Europe and North America. In response early in 1880s the Government of Canada magnanimously gave a gift of \$100,000 more than £20,000 at the time equivalent to millions of euros today depending on the method of calculation for the relief of distress in Ireland.

On the advice of the secretary for the Colonies, Sir M.E. Hicks Beach said, this sum must be administered by a special committee of six persons drawn equally from Mansion House committee for the relief of distress, (set up and chaired by Edmund Dwyer grey (1845-88), Lord Mayor of Dublin and proprietor of the Freeman's Journal newspaper) and the relief committee of the Duchess of Marlborough, wife of the Lord Lieutenant

Of the 29 Piers supported by the Canadian Committee at the time, eight were in County Galway and one in North Clare which were Smeerouge, Pollnadh (Ardmore), Inislacken, Bush Harbour, Roundstone, ***Doleen***, Leenaun, Glengevlagh. (See Table 1.10 below). Some of these also benefited from other charitable donations as well, and these are indicated in the table below.

By the time the Committee was wound up in February 1881, The Canadian fund had expended a grand total of £21,000 on various relief measures, have given more than £11,100.00 for the purchase of boats and nets for poor Fishman in addition to its contribution to the Piers. It was altogether a most munificent gift, magnanimously given by the Parliament and People of Canada, it deserves to be better remembered acknowledged and suitably commemorated today.

Other charitable benefactors also helped.

Fr. Thomas Flannery Parish Priest of Carna and Ballyconneely gave a generous £130 pounds towards Doleen Ballyconneely.

GCC The eight Piers supported by the Canadian Government fund are listed below as suggested to be in charge nor not:-

Piers and marine works sanctioned and carried out 1879-1884 under the Fisheries Piers Committee (FPC) and sources of funding under the Relief of Distress Act 1880											
GCC No.	Pier	Sources of funding made available									Canadian Funding acknowledged
		Date of Origin	Est. cost	Govt. Grant	Canada Fund	Liverpool Fund	New York Herald Fund	Land league Fund	Private Fund	Actual cost	
007	1. Smeerouge,(Renvyle)	1881	£4,000	£2,821	£566	£250	£189	-	-	£3,826	No
070	2. Pollnadh (Ardmore),	1880	£1,400	£1,050	£350	-	-	-	-	£1,400	Yes
166A	3. Inislacken, Island	Pre 1889	£600	£450	£150	-	-	-	-	£600	No
161	4. Bush Harbour, (Parkmore)	1881	£3,130	£2,348	£583	£100	-	-	-	£3,031	No
040	5. Roundstone North \pier,	1880-1881	£2,000	£1,500	£150	-	-	-	-	£1,650	No
032	6. Doleen,	1881	£2,000	£1,500	£350	-	-	£20	£130	£2,000	No
001	7. Glenveglagh (Ashleigh)	1881	£650	£488	£63	-	-	-	-	£551	No
002	8. Leenaun	1822	£800	£600	£200	-	-	-	-	£800	No
			£14,580	£10,757	£2,412	£350	£189	£20	£130	£13,858	

Extract below from letter to Canadian Ambassador:-

There is also a secondary Canadian connection with our village which may be of interest to you and maybe if all goes to plan you could also visit the grave of the Canadian airman W/Op/Air/Gnr: P/O. Ivor Ernest Smithson J/89117 RCAF Age 23, who is buried a short distance from the pier both of which sites which are inter-visible.

Please see the link below detailing the history of flight 407 Squadron Crest 11.03.1944 No. 407 Squadron Wellington XIV HF311 -H F/O. Edmund M. O'Donnell

At 21:58 hours on the night of 11th March off the west coast of Ireland, Flying Officer O'Donnell and crew had made contact with U-256 which had surfaced to recharge her batteries. From German naval reports found after the war, as the Wellington approached on the bombing run it was seen to crash into the sea without being fired upon by the submarine. What the real cause of the crash was remains unknown, but, perhaps due to an incorrect altimeter, the crew was unaware of their actual height in the darkness and crashed into the sea. While the bodies of five of the crew were never recovered and have no known grave, P/O. Smithson's body was washed ashore on July 9 1944 near Ballyconneely, County Galway, Republic of Ireland and identified by the metal identity disc around his wrist. He was buried the following day in the cemetery there.

11.03.1944 No. 407 Squadron Wellington XIV HF311 -H F/O. Edmund M. O'Donnell

Operation: Anti Submarine Patrol

Date: 11th March 1944 (Saturday)

Unit: No.407 Squadron RCAF (Demon Squadron)

Type: Wellington XIV Leigh Light

Serial: HF311

Code: No prefix letters given -H

Base: Limavady, County Londonderry, Northern Ireland

Location: North Atlantic approx. 500 miles off West coast of Ireland

Pilot: F/O. Edmund Michael O'Donnell J/16923 RCAF Age 23. Missing

Pilot 2: F/O. Hugh Campbell Sorley J/20049 RCAF Age 24. Missing

Nav: P/O. Charles Grant J/18993 RCAF Age 29. Missing (1)

W/Op/Air/Gnr: P/O. Franklyn LeRoy Travers J/90591 RCAF Age 21. Missing (2)

W/Op/Air/Gnr: P/O. Reginald Carl Gaudet J/89118 RCAF Age 23. Missing

W/Op/Air/Gnr: P/O. Ivor Ernest Smithson J/89117 RCAF Age 23. Killed

REASON FOR LOSS:

Attacking a submarine at night in the middle of the ocean was a hazardous task at the best of times that required a great deal of skill and courage.

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A very low level of attack was required to drop depth charges with any degree of accuracy which made air pressure altimeters marginal at best, and, for many crews deadly, if not corrected for pressure changes.

Left: P/O. Franklyn LeRoy Travers (courtesy Frank Travers)

While on patrol, aircraft would fly at a height of 1500 to 2500 feet which was considered to be the ideal altitude.

Coastal Command Wellington's were equipped with the Leigh Light, which, after the aircraft had detected a U-boat with their ASV radar, provided a high intensity searchlight to illuminate the target. As they approached the target the pilot would bring the aircraft down to 500 feet and the light operator switched on the Leigh Light. Once the U-boat was caught in the beam, the pilot would immediately drop down to as little as 50 feet over the wave tops to press home the attack using 250lb depth charges. Taking the U-boat by relative surprise left little time to submerge and so the attacking aircraft would usually be met with a hail of 20mm canon and machine gun anti aircraft fire.

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Earlier on the 7th September 1943 this crew sank U-669 in the Bay of Biscay, northwest of Cape Ortegal, Spain, in position 43.36N, 10.13W, by depth charges. Commander of U-669 was Oblt. Kurt Kohl. The boat was sunk with all 52 hands. The actual target was listed as U-584, escaping with no damage.

From: Officer Commanding, No.407 Squadron, R.C.A.F.

To: Air Ministry (P.4. Cas.)
 Headquarters, Coastal Command.
 Headquarters, 15 Group.
 R.C.A.F. O/S. Headquarters.
 R.A.F. Records Officer, Gloucester.
 R.A.F. Station, Limavady.

Date: 20th March 1944.

Ref: 407S/227/1/52/P.1.

CIRCUMSTANTIAL REPORT

Wellington MK. XIV HP. 331 - Missing 11.3.44 -
 Ref. Limavady Signal T.177 dated 12.3.44

1. Take off 1630 hours 11.3.44 Limavady.
2. E.T.A. 0230 hours 12.3.44 Limavady.
3. Duty. Aircraft to proceed to and patrol in area
 53°15N to 51°45N by 20°30W to 22°00W. Aircraft
 to be on patrol 2055 hours. Off patrol 2305 hours.
4. Crew.

Captain	F/O.	E.M. O'Donnell	J.16923
2nd Pilot	F/O.	H.C. Sorley	J.20049
Navigator	P/O.	C. Grant	J.18993
WO/AG.	W/O.	Gaudet R.C.	R.97612
WO/AG.	W/O.	Smithson I.E.	R.83073
WO/AG.	W/O.	Travers F.L.	R.68012
5. Enemy Action. Possibility of usual patrols of JH.290, HE.177,
 FW200s, BU222s - JU88 met flight, though very little
 enemy aircraft activity seen in this area.
6. Weather. On take off at base cloud was 3/10 at 1500'.
 Visibility 6 miles. Aircraft would pass through
 patches of drizzle on track out. In patrol area
 surface wind was S.W.15-20, 10/10 cloud at 600 feet-
 1000 feet. Visibility 8 miles. Freezing level
 4000' at base, 8000' in patrol area. For return
 cloud was 10/10 at 1000-2200 feet. Visibility 8
 miles. Possible diversion to Sillioth.
7. Messages. No messages received from aircraft.

Burial details:

F/O. Edmund Michael O'Donnell, Runnymede Memorial Panel 247. Son of Edmund Michael and Mary Katherine (née Cassin) O'Donnell of Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Right: F/O. Edmund Michael O'Donnell.



F/O. Hugh Campbell Sorley, Runnymede Memorial Panel 248. Son of John Neil and Eunice Ethel (née Blair) Sorley of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

P/O. Charles Grant, Runnymede Memorial Panel 250. Son of George and Ann Grant (née Duff) of Turtleford, Saskatchewan, Canada.

P/O. Franklyn LeRoy Travers, Runnymede Memorial Panel 253. Son of James E. and Mary O. (née Woodcock) Travers of Talbotville, Ontario, Canada.



P/O. Reginald Carl Gaudet, Runnymede Memorial Panel 250. Son of Carl and Vera Gaudet, of Powell River, British Columbia, Canada.

P/O. Ivor Ernest Smithson, Ballyconneely Catholic Cemetery. Son of James Oliver and Addie (née Cuningham) Smithson of West Windsor, Ontario and husband of Gladys Fay (née Wakefield) Smithson of Guelph, Ontario, Canada.

Researched by Aircrew Remembered, researcher and RCAF specialist Colin Bamford for relatives of this crew.

Further information courtesy of Frank Travers, nephew of P/O Franklyn LeRoy Travers, also to Les Allison and Harry Hayward - "They Shall Not Grow Old" and from "[uboat](#)"

Source data: Service Files of the Second World War—War Dead, 1939–1947. Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Canada.