**James Girvan (also called John)**

James (also known as John) was born about 1885 (Not yet located birth certificate). His father was Thomas and his mother Mary Jane Girvan, who were married in Newington Presbyterian on the 19th May 1886. In the 1901 census the family was residing at 5 Bloomfield Street, Pottinger including siblings James (named as John) 18, Frederick 16, Margaret 14 and a boarder Jane Kerr aged 16. James enlisted at 20 years of age in the Regular Army on the 21st December 1905 to serve 9 years with the Colour followed by 3 years in the Reserve and was allocated service number 8348 with the Royal Enniskillen Fusiliers initially. He was actually transferred into the Royal Flying Corps (Service No. 144555) on 6/3/1918 and with all others at the time transferred on its formation to the Royal Air Force on 1st March 1918.

James married Margaret McFerran Hodgen on 15th April 1914 at Malone, Shankill Parish, Belfast. Margaret was born on the 26/01/1890 in Milltown, Belfast. Her father was Robert Hodgen (a Beetler by occupation) and her mother Barbara (formerly named McFerran).

James’ father Thomas had died on 18/11/1910 at RVH aged 60. James and Margaret had two children Robert born 4/3/1915 and Barbara born 11/15/1917.

James’ career progressed well in the RAF and by the 17/09/1918 he had been promoted to Acting Sergeant and reclassified as a signalling drill instructor.

James had a trade title of Disciplinarian in addition to his promotion in rank.

James died on 8th Jan 1927 Ref No D/1927/43/1007/10/31 Groni Site.



Disciplinarian Meaning

The role appears to have covered a range of duties, but they were not just simple Military Police. Consider the work of the senior disciplinarian in 60 Squadron.

"Aspinall, an old Guardsman brought into the Flying Corps by Basil Barrington-Kennet in the very early days, was the disciplinary warrant officer. He had qualified as a rigger and had tried to learn to fly, but it was as a disciplinarian that he really shone. He played no inconsiderable part in the achievement of whatever success the squadron may have had. He was a first-class soldier, and his instructions to flight commanders in the form of little typewritten lectures were gems of their kind. It should be remembered that at times the casualties in the squadron were very heavy, and officers became flight commanders at an age which would have been regarded as absurd before the war." The Great Man," as we called him, would explain with profound respect to a captain, promoted most deservedly, at the age of nineteen the necessity for assuming a judicial demeanour when an air mechanic was brought up before him on some minor charge; he would, further, instruct the young flight commander most carefully in the punishments appropriate to each offence and all this without in the smallest particular transgressing that code of military etiquette which regulates so strictly the relations between commissioned and warrant officers. "

But then we have Sergeant P E Gayer of 56th squadron "picked by the commander of No 56 Squadron, who set out to build the best squadron band around" whose RFC Trade was Discipliarian and who is said to have been the founder of what became the RAF bands, who spent his time teaching men how to march in formation and play at the same time.

Another example is Sergeant George Billing whose RAF trade was disciplinarian who left the army in Sept 1918 as Acting Regimental Sergeant Major (discharged as 'permanently unfit' with a hernia and enteric fever) and joined the RAF on 1st October as a Private and was promoted Sergeant the next day going to work at the Discharge Centre and Reserve Depot in January of 1919.

In later years the role sometimes became part-time and the same man had other duties so for example in the 1980’s R B Louglin, a member of the RAF Regiment, was posted in from a major operating base in Germany to become the discipline Sergeant and weapons instructor at RAF Bawdsey

James (John) was heavily involved in Stick signalling after his own Army service experiences.