

The top half of the cover features three portraits of men in football kits. The man on the left is young with dark hair, wearing a maroon and white kit. The man in the center is middle-aged with dark hair, wearing a light blue and white kit. The man on the right is older with white hair and blue eyes, wearing a maroon and white kit. The background behind them is a collage of war-related images: a battleship, several fighter planes, and tanks in a field.

SEASON IN HELL

BRITISH FOOTBALLERS KILLED
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The bottom half of the cover shows a football match in progress. Several players in maroon and white kits are running on a grass field. A ball is on the ground in the foreground. In the background, a large stadium with a blue roof is visible, filled with spectators.

NIGEL MCCRERY

Season in Hell

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Season in Hell

British Footballers Killed
in the Second World War

Nigel McCrery



Pen & Sword

MILITARY

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO ALL THOSE UKRAINIAN FOOTBALLERS
KILLED DEFENDING THEIR HOMELAND
DURING THE RUSSIAN INVASION

Especially Remembering

Dmitry Martynenko, Igor Sukhih, Victor Yurchenko, Oleg Naumenko,
Sergiy Shestak, Yuri Kazistov, Aleaxander Ivaschik, Yriy Bloha,
Valery Rysinsky, Alexander Sukhenko and Denys Kotenko

May their names live in blessed memory

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Introduction

It occurred to me some time ago that when military historians write about great campaigns and famous battles they talk about casualties often running into the tens of thousands. I also noticed that the majority talk about them as numbers, forgetting that each of these numbers represents a person. They had wives, husbands, children, mothers and fathers, people who loved them and whom they loved. The devastation of each loss affected dozens of people, many of whom never recovered. The object of this book and the others I have written is to put flesh to the names. Each of my books contains short biographies and accounts of people's military lives. I have chosen in this endeavour to write about sportsmen and women lost in war. In many cases, the loss of these individuals must have affected the population in much the same way as if we had lost hundreds of major sporting stars today. Even now in Ukraine (at the time of writing) eleven football league players have been killed defending their country. Perhaps they were less well known to us, but they were certainly known to the Ukrainian people and many others outside the country. I hope that this book will help put a face to some of the casualties of the Second World War and show that the numbers should never mask the fact that each and every one was a tragedy.

Nigel McCrery
19 April 2023

Acknowledgements

Barnaby Blacker

Barnaby sadly left us last year, and I think it was a shock to everyone. My editor on a number of books, he was a bright, intelligent and kind man whom I am going to greatly miss. He had the rare knack of not only being a great editor and spotting mistakes, which I often make, but of advising you about those mistakes and the best way to correct them, without being sarcastic or patronising. I know I'm going to miss Barnaby, and my condolences go out to his family and friends.

My thanks also go to the following people: Abigail Cobby for always being by my side and giving me the best of advice; Matthew Jones, production handler at Pen & Sword; Pen & Sword Books for their kindness in publishing so much of my work; the various football clubs who have lent their time and effort with the research into this book; Alan Clay for his invaluable assistance with all my books; Richard Black and the London Medal Company; Ashley McCrery and William Ivory for their non-stop support. If I have forgotten anyone I'm very sorry, but believe me, your help and contribution were very valuable.

1940

Season in Hell



Private James 'Jumbo' Gillespie
Inside Forward
Luton Town FC, Portsmouth Town FC
8th Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment
Died 21 May 1940
Aged 21

James Gillespie was born in 1919 in Greenock, Renfrewshire, Scotland, the son of William and Mary Gillespie. His talent as a footballer was apparent from an early age, and he joined Luton Town FC, working initially with their ground staff. However, while playing for Luton's Rob Roy, the Luton and District and South Beds team, his ability and energy quickly attracted notice. It was not Luton, however, which signed him as an amateur, but Portsmouth. Realizing they had been a bit slow and lost the talents of a very capable inside forward, Luton then managed to persuade him to return to the club and signed him as a professional.

Like so many other players, Gillespie's career was sadly cut short by the war. He enlisted in the 8th Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment soon after the outbreak of war, and his battalion formed part of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). After their unsuccessful attempt to halt the Nazi advance, the British were forced to conduct a fighting retreat towards the beaches at Dunkirk. Gillespie was killed in action on 21 May 1940 in the battle for the Escaut Canal during the retreat. In one account of the battle a witness stated that Gillespie took on twelve SS motorcyclists, firing his Bren gun from the hip. The Germans used a lot of motorcycle troops during this campaign. He managed to kill the crews of the first two motorcycles before he was finally hit and killed himself.

He is buried in the Comines (Komen) Communal Cemetery, British plot, Grave 83, Belgium.




Stanley Holbrook Docking
Newcastle United, Tranmere Rovers
Inside Left
Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve
Died 27 May 1940
Aged 25

Stanley Holbrook Docking was born on 13 December 1914 in Chopwell, Gateshead, Tyne and Wear. He was a talented and robust inside left with a powerful shot, standing five feet ten inches tall and weighing fourteen stone. He played for the colliery club of his native village before joining the Birtley FC. In the 1933–34 season he had a few games with Newcastle United 'A' as an amateur and clearly impressed, since on 17 August 1934 he signed as a professional with Newcastle. He made his debut against Fulham on 19 January 1935, playing his final game for Newcastle on 16 April 1938 against Sheffield Wednesday. He made a total of twenty-one appearances for the club, scoring three goals. He was transferred to Tranmere Rovers in May 1938, playing for them until the following year, turning out on thirty-one occasions and scoring seven goals.

During the war Docking served as an Aircraftman 2nd Class with the RAVR. He died of disinfectant poisoning at the Royal Victoria Infirmary, Newcastle-upon-Tyne on 27 May 1940. Docking was buried at Whitley Bay (Hartley South) Cemetery, Sec B, Grave 415. He was residing at 66, Plessey Crescent, Whitley Bay, at the time of his death.


His obituary appeared in the *Newcastle Evening Chronicle* on 27 May 1940.



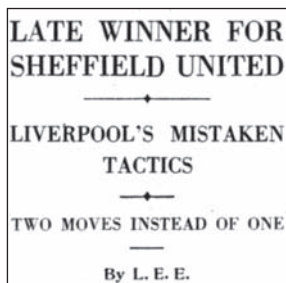
No. 10.

STANLEY DOCKING
(Newcastle United, Inside Left)

A big, powerful and bustling forward who favours the direct line for goal. Another of United's local products, who joined the club from Birtley about the same time as his team mate Garnham in 1933. "Stan," who is a native of Chopwell, the training ground of many past and present League footballers, has not had a regular place in the St. James's Park Senior team. Is a tireless worker with youth in his favour, and whose day will undoubtedly come.



Season in Hell



Gunner Joseph (Joe) Carr
Sheffield United
Full Back
Royal Artillery
Died 31 May 1940
Aged 21

Carr was born in 1919 in Sheffield, the son of James Richard and Gertrude Carr. He made thirty appearances at full back for Sheffield United. During the war Carr served with the 22nd Field Regiment, Royal Artillery, part of the British Fourth Infantry Division. He actually enlisted on 16 October 1939, only a month and a half after the declaration of war, serving as Gunner Number 941740. He was killed in action during the Battle of Dunkirk on 31 May 1940 and is buried at the Oostduinkerke War Cemetery, Row C, Grave 74, Belgium.

1940



Private Samuel Grenville Roberts
Nottingham Forest
Inside Forward
2/5th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment (Prince of
Wales' Own)
Died 3 June 1940
Aged 20

Samuel Grenville Roberts was born on 16 August 1919 in Blackwell, England. He played inside forward for Huthwaite Swifts (1934), Huthwaite CWS (1935) and Huthwaite Colliery, before playing for Nottingham Forest between 1937 and 1939. He appeared on six occasions but failed to score.

During the war Roberts served as a private (4541167) with the 2/5th West Yorkshire Regiment (Prince of Wales' Own). He died of wounds following a strafing attack by Stukas at Dunkirk on 3 June 1940. Roberts is commemorated in the Dunkirk Town Cemetery, Plot 1, Row 1, Grave 26.

Season in Hell

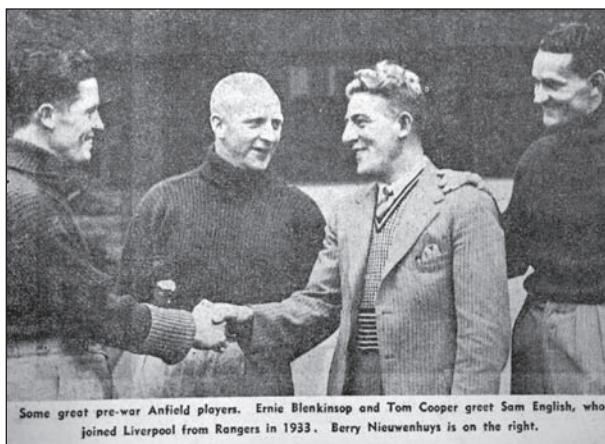


Thomas (Tom) Cooper
England, Port Vale, Derby County, Liverpool
Right Back
Royal Military Police
Died 25 June 1940
Aged 35

Tom Cooper was born on 9 April 1904 in Stoke-on-Trent and has the dubious distinction of being the first England International to have been killed in the Second World War. Cooper was a naturally gifted player as well as a crowd-thriller. He began his career with Longton before moving to Trentham, and then was sold to Port Vale for £20. He played in twenty-one Second Division league matches for them during the 1924–25 and 1925–26 seasons.

In March 1926 Cooper was sold to controversial George Jobey's (1885–1962) Derby County for £2,500. He was an important member of the team that came second in the 1925–26 season, giving Derby promotion out of the Second Division. In 1926–27 Derby came a creditable twelfth in the First Division, in 1927–28 they finished an impressive fourth and in 1928–29 they came sixth. In the 1929–30 season they were runners-up, ten points behind Sheffield Wednesday and two points ahead of Manchester City. Cooper was made team captain in 1931, leading the club to fifteenth place during the 1931–32 season, seventh in 1932–33 season and fourth in 1933–34. He made a total of 267 appearances for Derby County before being sold to Liverpool in December 1934 for £7,500.

He appeared for Liverpool on 127 occasions between 1934 and 1939. His final league game for Liverpool, before the league was suspended due to the war, was against Chelsea, Liverpool taking the honours 1-0. The last time Cooper donned a red shirt was against Crewe Alexandra in the Western Division on 22 March 1940, Liverpool coming out on top 6-3. He also turned out for Wrexham occasionally during the war.



Some great pre-war Anfield players. Ernie Blenkinsop and Tom Cooper greet Sam English, who joined Liverpool from Rangers in 1933. Berry Nieuwenhuys is on the right.