

## The Boy in the Picture

by Gavin Murphy

### ***Titanic Research***

Thursday 28 March 2002

#### **The story of Ned Parfett: newsboy, soldier and photographic icon.**



Perhaps one of the most evocative images of the *Titanic* disaster is that of the young newsboy outside the White Star Line offices at Oceanic House in Cockspur Street, London, S.W., holding an *Evening News* poster announcing "Titanic Disaster Great Loss of Life".

That boy was Ned Parfett and his short life was no less spectacular, and his death just as tragic, as that of *Titanic*. Six and a half years after this poignant photograph was taken, Ned was killed during a German bombardment while serving with the British army in France, just days before the Armistice. He was 22.1

According to his great nephew Dominic Walsh, young Ned enlisted in the Royal Artillery in 1916, first serving as a dispatch rider before reassignment to reconnaissance duties. Youth did not prevent bravery. He was mentioned in dispatches<sup>2</sup> and awarded the Military Medal for his gallant conduct during a series of missions at the front.



*The  
grave  
of  
gunner  
12898,  
E. V.  
Parfett*

Ned was one of four brothers from Cornwall Road, Waterloo, to enlist "for King and country". One brother served in the disastrous Dardanelles campaign of 1915, surviving to become part of the occupation army in defeated Germany. Another brother served in the bloody battle of the Somme in 1916, only to be

wounded and gassed at the third battle of Ypres in Belgium.<sup>3</sup> The third brother also survived. Only Ned failed to see out the war.

He died on 29 October 1918, less than two weeks before the end of the war. Ned was killed near Valenciennes, when a shell landed on the quartermaster's stores, just as he was collecting some clothes before going on leave. After his death, the officer who recommended Ned for special recognition wrote to one of his brothers:

"On many occasions he accompanied me during severe shelling and I always placed the greatest confidence in him."



### Today's Oceanic House

The Oceanic Steam Navigation Company, owners of the White Star Line, has long since departed from Oceanic House<sup>4</sup> and gone out of business. Now instead of a red burgee with a white star flying outside the building, you will find a red, white and blue flag with a white star, signifying the state flag of Texas! Oceanic House is home to the Texas Embassy Cantina,<sup>5</sup> a lively restaurant serving Tex-Mex food. It appears that the upper floors are no longer offices and are either vacant or only used for storage.

While the haunting image of young Ned on a street corner in Trafalgar Square is etched in the minds of many *Titanic* researchers, there is no report of Ned Parfett's ghost haunting the cantina's patrons.

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[1]Dominic Walsh (1998) Fate of a Titanic Newsboy. *The Times* (London), 11 November 1998.

[2] This is a commendation in an official report of the British (and Empire/Commonwealth) military. It recognises a man's heroic actions by specifically naming him.

[3] Referred to by many soldiers as "Wipers" due to its difficult pronunciation.

[4] The White Star Line had a second London office located at 38 Leadenhall Street, E.C. The White Star Line headquarters were at 30 James Street, Liverpool. There was a fourth British office in Canute Road, Southampton.

[5] Texas Embassy Cantina, 1 Cockspur Street, London, SW1Y 5DL, tel. 020 7925 0077/0277 or fax on 020 7925 0444.

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Courtesy of Gavin Murphy

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