

This is to certify that the patient mentioned below and whose description is stated hereon is the authorised holder of this Identity card.



Forename: Paul	Surname: Warren
Service No: J8346	Nationality: American

Awards/Honours: —	Patient Unit: 35 Sqn	Death: 2004	Age at Death: —
Profession: Wireless Op/Air Gunner	Patient Rank: Flt Lt	Dr Rank:	Dr Unit:

Notes:

Known as 'Sid'.

On return from an operation over Frankfurt, Warren's plane encountered German fighters over the French coast, and the ensuing fight damaged the elevator and rudder controls, and two engines. Unable to make turns to return to an airfield, the pilot decided to crash land in a field. All seven crewmembers escaped the crash alive, including fellow Guinea Pig Vic Hobbs.

THE GUINEA PIG CLUB

Pat Taylor

A lot of WW II was fought in the air – with planes much more advanced from those in the ‘war to end all wars.’ For the aircrews there was one really bad flaw – the gas tank was located to the front of the plane. Many, many aircrew members sustained horrific burns, especially to face, hands, wrists, neck, thighs and scalp.

In pre-war planning, four special burn units were set up for treatment of officers and severely burned service personnel. One was at the Queen Victoria Hospital in East Grinstead, Sussex. Dr. Archibald McIndoe, a British civilian surgeon and Dr. Ross Tilley, a Canadian military surgeon were assigned to this hospital. Dr. McIndoe was from New Zealand; did his basic training there followed by some advanced training in the United States. He immigrated to Great Britain and became the 4th doctor to qualify as a plastic surgeon and became a consultant to Royal Air Force (RAF).

Dr. Tilley was born in Bowmanville, Ontario; did his basic training through the University of Toronto, followed by some advanced training and became the 4th doctor to qualify as a plastic surgeon in Canada. As a member of the Canadian Army Medical Corps, Militia, he was transferred to active service with the Air Force Medical Branch at the start of WWII. He was transferred to London, England and then to the Queen Victoria Hospital burn/plastic surgery unit –Ward III with Dr. McIndoe. Two young plastic surgeons, one a civilian, one military – what a team (I’m taking the liberty of making them a team as both biographies credit them with the same ideas.) Soon there were so many injured airmen that Dr. Tilley approached the Canadian military for a new 50-bed wing just for the burned Canadian airmen. It was funded and built by Canadians and staffed by Canadian orderlies, nurses and clerks. The wing was dedicated 5 Sept.1943.

“To the gallant young men of the Royal Canadian Air Force whose wounds have brought them here and to the Surgeons, Nurses and Staff who have cared for them, this building has been erected by the people of the Dominion of Canada.”

First aid treatment of burns at that time was to apply tannic acid to the area. This would form a hard crust, which stopped body fluid from leaking, thereby treating shock and hopefully preventing infection. Major side effect—it contributed to. contractures and later to poor skin grafting results. And removal of the crust was very painful. This was not acceptable to these two young surgeons. Dr. McIndoe, (remember, a civilian) went to the RAF Medical Board and the Members of Defence and convinced them to ban the use of tannic acid. Instead, the affected areas were kept clean and loosely covered with a Vaseline-like soaked gauze. The injured airmen would be treated for shock, given painkillers and then priority transport to the nearest burn unit. Dr. McIndoe noticed that the men rescued from the sea (salt water) recovered from burns better. He started using saline soaks and baths when dressings needed to be changed. Male orderlies needed to be able to lift men in to and out of the bathtub.

For each airman the surgeons designed a personal reconstruction plan – on average 10 -15 surgeries over 3 years and shared this plan with the airman – a degree of trust and confidence between surgeon and patient was absolutely essential for a successful outcome. Skin was grafted to their wounds from their arms, chest and abdomen. Some of these plans consisted of new techniques. In some cases the surgeon had to create a new nose, new eyelids, lips, cheeks, eyebrows or ears. Some men might wake from surgery with what looked like an elephant’s trunk growing from their nose or cheek.

Between surgeries, these 20 something year old men didn’t feel ill. And the doctors wanted and encouraged them to act like 20 something year olds. There was a piano in the ward, a radio, a keg of beer—often replenished. Ladies from the town visited the ward, brought flowers; maybe they were the ones that made the bright window curtains. Dr. McIndoe obtained permission for the men to get out of ‘hospital blues’ – encouraged the men to get into street clothes or uniform if they wanted to. The airmen resisted invitations for tea or beer with local residents – that is, until they were supplied with trousers with zippers – much easier to manage with bandaged hands after a ‘loo’ visit. Dr. McIndoe led excursions to local pubs; there was to be no distinction between the ranks; they were all ‘just PEOPLE.’ The town organized parties and dances. Mr. Dove, a Royal Canadian Air Force veteran, said, “Dr. Tilley inspired everybody to do it, to get out and meet the public and decide that you’re going to be able to live and go back and produce in society.” Some town’s people opened their homes and boarded airmen between surgeries. One of these was the rather substantial home of Neville and Elaine Blond. After the war, this building became the Blond McIndoe Research Building focusing on burn, wound healing and skin cancer research. East Grinstead became known as “The Town That Didn’t Stare.”

In the early summer of 1941, after a night of much drinking, a group of airmen decided to honour themselves by forming the “Guinea Pig Club.” They were, after all, experiments in plastic surgery. The Club had 649 airmen members – 176 were Canadian. A Guinea Pig with wings became their logo. Three groups could belong: patients of the wards, East Grinstead medical staff and the ‘Royal Society of the Prevention of Cruelty to Guinea Pigs’ meaning those friends and benefactors who made life of a Guinea Pig a happy one. This club went a long way in helping with physical restoration and mental rehabilitation – one of the first support groups in medical history. Many Guinea Pigs, despite disfigurement, found love and married – some married nurses from the hospital. By marrying, or seeking a job the Guinea Pigs were challenging the perception that disabilities were life-limiting and should be kept from the public eye. A Membership Fee of 2 shillings a year went to helping with medical costs, assisting with unemployment support, publishing a magazine called “The Guinea Pig” and hosting holiday

dinners. The original plan was to disband after the war. But it continued and celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2016. It made a substantial donation to the RAF Benevolent Fund – a fund to help airmen as they aged – i.e. with scooters and accessible showers. In 2019 the Benevolent Fund helped more than 71,700 current and former members of the RAF and their families.

As mentioned previously, these were youthful, fun-loving men mainly in their 20s. As such, the first secretary was an airman with severely damaged fingers therefore guaranteeing minimal minutes; first treasurer had severely damaged legs therefore unlikely to 'walk off' with the Club funds. Prince Phillip accepted to become President of the Club; Dr. McIndoe first President of the British Branch and Dr. Tilley first President of the Canadian Branch. They even referred to the Queen Victoria hospital as "the sty". The Guinea Pigs planned yearly reunions – one was held at the Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum located at the Hamilton International Airport.

After the war Dr. McIndoe turned to private practice in plastic surgery. He stayed in contact with some of the Guinea Pigs and continued to operate on club members who needed further surgery after the war. He was Knighted in 1947. Ward III, the original unit in the Queen Victoria Hospital became a medical research centre specializing in plastic surgery and wound healing when the Blond McIndoe Research Centre merged with the Hospital. Dr. McIndoe died in 1960, age 59.

Dr. Tilley also returned to private practice. He continued to operate on the Guinea Pig members and paid attention to their emotional and psychological health for the next 40 years. The Canadian Guinea Pigs commissioned a bust of Dr. Tilley for the Queen Victoria Hospital. A ward at the Hospital is known as the Ross Tilley Ward. A dream of Dr. Tilley's was to develop a burn unit. The Ross Tilley Burn Unit opened, in 1984, at the Toronto Wellesley Hospital where he was on staff. This unit is now located at Toronto Sunnybrook Hospital. Dr. Tilley died in 1988, age 83.

The Guinea Pigs were also remembered in East Grinstead by a 'public house' or pub known as 'The Guinea Pig.' It was demolished in 2008 and replaced by a social housing complex known as Guinea Pig Place. To quote Mr. Dove again: "the surgeons put the airmen's bodies back together, performing experimental plastic surgery. But they did more; they took the battered boys and helped rebuild their spirits and gave them back their confidence and returned them to society." The last meeting of the Guinea Pig Club was held in 2018 – after 77 years. But, in a way, it lives on in the CASEVAC Club – pronounced 'Cazzyvack,' short for 'casualty evacuation.' Membership is limited to those service personnel injured in the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars.



Last verse of their anthem :

We've had some mad Australians,

Some French, some Czechs, some Poles. We've even had some Yankees,

God bless their precious souls.

While as for the Canadians

Ah! That's a different thing

They couldn't stand our accent

And built a separate wing.

Reading: As For the Canadians' By Rita Donovan

References: 'The Night Vic Hobbs and Paul Warren Bit the Dust', The Guinea Pig, New Year 1979, pp. 31-2.