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Search for family of the first ever plastic surgery patient: World War One sailor received first ever skin graft after suffering horrific injuries at the Battle of Jutland

- **Walter Yeo became the first person in history to have modern plastic surgery**
- **Suffered horrific injuries while on HMS Warspite in World War one**
- **Was treated by Sir Harold Gillies, who performed skin grafts**
- **Researchers are now trying to trace any of Mr Yeo's surviving relatives**
- **They want to find out how successful the pioneering operation was**
- **'1914FACES2014' project commemorates this year's WW1 centenary**
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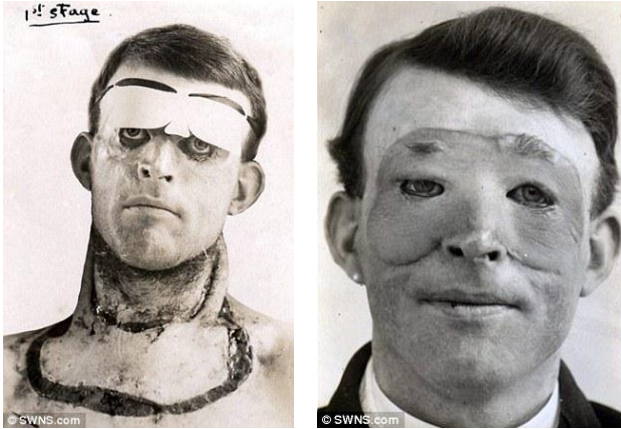
By [ANNA HODGEKISS](#)

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When Walter Yeo was horrifically wounded during World War One, he became the first person in history to undergo modern plastic surgery. These century-old photographs show before, during and after pictures of the groundbreaking medical procedure carried out on the disfigured sailor nearly 100 years ago, Mr Yeo sustained terrible facial injuries including the loss of upper and lower eyelids while manning the guns aboard HMS Warspite in 1916.



Remarkable recovery: Sailor Walter Yeo was horrifically wounded during World War One (left). He became the first person in history to undergo plastic surgery (right). Researchers are now trying to find out how successful the surgery was from any surviving relatives Mr. Yeo may have.



The first stage of the skin graft from Mr Yeo's neck. He was treated by Sir Harold Gillies, who used tubular 'pedicles' from the forehead, scalp, chest, neck or shoulders but retained a connection to allow blood flow

But in 1917 he was treated by Sir Harold Gillies - the first man to use skin grafts from undamaged areas on the body and known as 'the father of plastic surgery'. His remarkable transformation features an upcoming exhibition at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum which will explore the pioneering efforts to repair the lives of WW1 veterans through plastic surgery.

Researchers working on the '1914FACES2014' project for this year's World War One centenary have appealed for information from any of Mr Yeo's surviving relatives.

They want to find out how successful the pioneering op proved to be and trace others whose shattered features were rebuilt by Gillies and his colleagues.

Marjorie Gehrhardt, associate researcher with Exeter University's college of humanities, said: 'I am trying to find out how the wounded sailors and soldiers - and also their families and the people they met every day out on the streets - coped with these very visible injuries. "It would be wonderful to hear from people who knew the wounded combatants directly or indirectly. If they have memories or anecdotes they are happy to share, photographs of the men before or after their injuries, letters, family portraits or memoirs, everything can help us learn more about how veterans lived after the war, and how society at large coped with their return.'

London-based Sir Harold opened a specialist ward for the treatment of the facially-wounded at Queen Mary's Hospital in Sidcup, Kent.

Mr Yeo was born in 1890 and after marrying wife Ada, he was severely injured during the Battle of Jutland while manning guns. Records show he was admitted to Sir Harold's care on August 8, 1917 - just two months after he opened his specialist hospital. He is thought to be the first patient to benefit from his newly-developed technique, a form of skin grafting called 'tubed pedical'. The young sailor, of Plymouth, Devon, was given new eyelids with a 'mask' of skin grafted across his face and eyes.

Documents show that after the procedure, Mr Yeo, a gunnery warrant officer, was 'improved, but still had severe disfigurement'. Sir Harold is credited with developing new, untried techniques to treat the injuries created by this new kind of war, taking grafts from undamaged areas of flesh. He used tubular 'pedicles' from the forehead, scalp, chest, neck or shoulders but retained a connection to allow blood flow. He and his colleagues developed many techniques of plastic surgery and carried out more than 11,000 operations on over 5,000 men.