

Blessing ceremony for WW2 airman, Arnold Hallas, in Italy.

On Friday 29 April, 77 years after his final flight, a blessing ceremony was held for Flying Officer (Fg Off) Arnold George Raymond Hallas, RAF, at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's (CWGC) Padua War Cemetery, Italy. Several members of the family attended the service that was organised by the MOD's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (MOD JCCC), also known as the 'MOD War Detectives'.

The ceremony took place to bless the additional remains of Fg Off Hallas, which were recovered by Aerei Perduti Polesine, an Italian aircraft recovery group in November 2020 and was conducted by the Reverend (Squadron Leader) Rebekah Cannon, Chaplain RAF Brize Norton.

Padre, RAF trumpeter and RAF NATO representatives. Crown copyright.

The RAF Air Historical Branch was able to review documents that confirmed Fg Off Hallas was given a burial by the Padre who attended the crash site straight after but observed only partial remains were recovered. The aircraft parts and artefacts found by the recovery group enabled an identification to be made by MOD JCCC without the need for DNA testing.

Tracey Bowers, JCCC said:

"This case has highlighted the difficult conditions that were faced 77 years ago and the sad reality of war in that sometimes it was not possible to recover all of a casualty.

"We are grateful to the recovery group for the dignity and care that was taken during the excavation of Spitfire NH231 and the understanding of the family in this sensitive case."

On 30 April 1945, Spitfires of No. 601 Squadron took off from Bellaria, Italy, on a reconnaissance operation. Fg Off Hallas was flying as Mustard 4 in Spitfire NH 231. Whilst looking for enemy transport, the formation was fired upon by light, but intense, fire from enemy positions. As they turned back, Fg Off Hallas called up and reported that he had been hit in the engine. After flying through bad weather, he reported that the temperature was rising and at 4,000 feet he took the decision to bail out. His aircraft dived several times and was seen to roll, finally diving straight into the ground. Fg Off Hallas was 24 when his Spitfire crashed just months before the end of the Second World War and two days before it officially ended in Italy.

The service for Flying Officer Hallas Crown copyright.

Heather Garden, 93, Arnold's only surviving sibling said;

"It is such a great pleasure to witness the return of the rest of Arnold's body to his grave. My grateful thanks to all those who made this happen. Arnold's sacrifice can now be fully recognised in perpetuity"

The Reverend Cannon said:

"Today's service was emotive for all involved and particularly moving to have so many family present here today to see Arnold their relative laid to rest"

CWGC Horticultural Supervisor, Francesco Migliosi, said:

"Flying Officer Hallas lies at rest alongside his comrades from the Italian Campaign in the CWGC's Padua War Cemetery. We are grateful that it has been possible to bring closure to the family and honoured to be able to care for his grave in perpetuity."