

News story: Family of World War 1 soldiers attend their relatives' funeral a century after they gave their lives

The niece of Private (Pte) Henry Wallington and 2 great nephews of Pte Frank Mead have finally been able to attend their relatives' funeral 100 years after they were killed during World War 1. Margot Bains, Paul Mead and Chris Mead attended a moving service for the 2 soldiers of the 23rd (County of London) Battalion, and a third Unknown Soldier who served in the same Regiment, at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) Hermies Hill British Cemetery in France.

Private Frank Mead (Copyright Mead family) All rights reserved
The 23rd Battalion present the Union Flags to the family, Crown Copyright, All rights reserved

The service was conducted by the Reverend Martin Wainwright CF, reserve Chaplain to the 4th Battalion, The Princess of Wales' Royal Regiment (PWRR), whose current serving members formed the bearer parties for their 3 former comrades.

Family members lay flowers for their loved ones, Crown Copyright, All rights reserved

The MOD's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC), part of Defence Business Services, who are also known as the 'MOD War Detectives' organised the commemoration and funeral with full military honours, after they successfully identified Pte's Wallington and Mead and traced their surviving relatives.

Great nephew Paul Mead and niece Margot Bains conduct a reading, Crown Copyright, All rights reserved

Nicola Nash, JCCC, who led the work to identify the soldiers said:

It has been a very moving ceremony and a great honour to name these two men and it has been fantastic to see the families here too.

Nicky added:

We will continue with our research to name the third soldier.

Research shows that Pte Wallington and Pte Mead were killed on 3 December

1917, during the Battle of Cambrai, the battle which marked the first large scale use of tanks. The only artefact found with these men that gave a clue to their identity was a single 23rd (County of London) Battalion shoulder title. After painstaking historical research, the JCCC narrowed the candidates down to 9 possible names and used genealogy to trace surviving members for DNA analysis to be conducted. Two DNA samples returned positive results, identifying Henry Wallington and Frank Mead. Although the third soldier was found with the other 2 men, all other DNA tests have come back negative, but the JCCC will continue investigating in the hope a future identification for him can still be made.

Margot Bains, niece of Pte Wallington said:

We have never been to a military funeral before. It was beautifully done with military precision and it was so moving and to see the French people here too.

Chris Mead, great nephew of Pte Mead said:

I am absolutely amazed the time and the trouble the MOD JCCC, the soldiers, everybody involved have gone to has been fantastic. We couldn't have asked for any more. It has been emotional.

The CWGC have now provided 3 new headstones at the Hermies Hill British Cemetery bearing the names of Pte Wallington, Pte Mead and an Unknown Soldier of the 23rd (County of London) Battalion.

The burial service for the three soldiers, Crown Copyright, All rights reserved

Paul Bird, CWGC Recovery Officer said:

It was a great honour to recover these 3 casualties from the battlefield when they were discovered near Anneux in 2016. It is a privilege to be here today to see them laid to rest in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's Hermies Hill British Cemetery alongside their comrades from the 23rd Battalion, London Regiment. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission will proudly mark and care for their graves, together with all of those who served and fell, in perpetuity.