

News story: FOUR UNKNOWN IRISH SOLDIERS BURIED ONE HUNDRED YEARS AFTER THEIR DEATHS IN THE GREAT WAR

Two burial services have taken place on the Western Front honouring four unknown Irish soldiers who fell during the First World War. The first service took place at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's (CWGC) Messines Ridge British Cemetery near Ypres, Belgium on Tuesday 19 March with a second burial taking place earlier today (Wednesday 20 March) at Guillemont Road Cemetery, on the Somme in France.

The services, organised by the MOD's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC), part of Defence Business Services (DBS), were conducted by the Reverend Nathan King CF, Chaplain to 1st Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment. The bearer party at each service was composed of members of 1st and 2nd Battalions of The Royal Irish Regiment.

Despite extensive research, it was not possible for the JCCC to identify any of these soldiers due to the high numbers of casualties in both areas.

Rosie Barron, JCCC said:

It has been a privilege to organise these two services and to work with The Royal Irish Regiment to ensure these Irish soldiers have had the burial they deserve. Although their identities remain unknown, they are now at rest alongside their comrades and their sacrifices will not be forgotten.

The first service (19 March) saw a soldier of The Royal Irish Rifles and an unknown soldier of an unknown regiment, laid to rest at Messines Ridge British Cemetery. The remains of these two soldiers had been discovered during work to widen a drainage ditch south west of the town of Wijtschate. Research, conducted by JCCC, shows they were most likely killed in either June 1917, during the Battle of Messines or in April 1918, during the Battle of the Lys.

Colonel Des Bergin representing the Irish Embassy and Lieutenant Colonel Ret'd Dominic Hancock of the British Embassy lay wreaths at the graveside (taken at the Wednesday 20 March service)

A second burial service took place today (20 March) for a soldier of The Connaught Rangers and an unknown soldier of an unknown regiment at Guillemont Road Cemetery. The remains of these two soldiers had been uncovered during work on a wind turbine project near the village of Guillemont. They are believed to have been killed in September 1916.

The Reverend Nathan King, said:

For our services of burial, we have commended the treasured remains of soldiers lost in conflicts of the First World War. These are moving events and reaffirm the loss incurred in conflict, for those killed and the sense of loss suffered by family members. Although soldiers die, some of them unknown, their lives are celebrated here, and their souls offered to God, as held in the beliefs of the Christian faith. People are never forgotten, and their lives honoured.

Paul Bird, CWGC Recovery Officer said:

Although it has not been possible to identify these four soldiers, their service and sacrifice has not been forgotten. They have been laid to rest with respect and dignity alongside their comrades in Messines Ridge British Cemetery and Guillemont Road Cemetery. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission will proudly mark and care for their graves, together with all of those who served and fell, in perpetuity.