

News story: Grave of Kent born WW2 Pilot Officer finally rededicated after 77 years

Verifying the research submitted was crucial in identifying the final resting place of Pilot Officer (P/O) Hector Garman Webb of the 224 Squadron, Royal Air Force (RAF), who was killed during WW2. A rededication service was held on 8 August 2017 at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) Åndalsnes Church Cemetery, Norway 77 years after he fell.

The service, which was a fitting tribute to the sacrifice made by P/O Webb, was organised by the MOD's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC), part of Defence Business Services, and was conducted by The Reverend Dr David Richardson, RAF Station Chaplain, RAF Halton.

Reverend David Richardson, said:

As someone serving at RAF Halton today, it is such a privilege to be here at this beautiful cemetery to remember the courage and sacrifice of Hector who graduated from Halton nearly 80 years ago.

P/O Webb was just 16 years old when he joined the RAF as an apprentice engine fitter. He later volunteered to train as a pilot and in 1937 he joined 224 Squadron as a Sergeant. He finally received his commission to become a Pilot Officer in 1940.

In the early stages of WW2, 224 Squadron were assigned to provide air cover in support of Operation Primrose – the landing of British troops near Åndalsnes, Norway. On 23 April 1940 P/O Webb's aircraft (Hudson N7249) was approaching Åndalsnes when he was hit by friendly fire and crashed into a nearby mountain. His 3 crew members ejected and parachuted to safety, however, P/O Webb was sadly killed. He was aged just 24.

P/O Webb's burial place had remained unknown, until the grave of an unknown airman buried in Åndalsnes Church Cemetery, Norway was brought to the attention of the Ministry of Defence by Hector's nephew, Ben Sharp. Further research was undertaken by the MOD JCCC to corroborate the evidence and the identification of the "Unknown Airman" grave was found to belong to P/O Hector Garman Webb, meaning his grave could finally be marked with his name.

Ben Sharp who travelled to Norway from the USA to attend the service of his uncle, Hector, said:

It was a very touching ceremony and we were so pleased to see the people of Åndalsnes here to remember him with us.

It is very important for us to take a break in our busy lives and spend time to remember the sacrifices these men made for our freedom. We are especially thankful to the JCCC, CWGC and the local community who have looked after Hector's grave so well for all these years.

Nicola Nash, JCCC said:

It has been a privilege to work on this case and today's ceremony was a fitting commemoration for P/O Hector Webb and the ultimate sacrifice he made.

A new headstone bearing P/O Webb's name was provided by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.