

# News story: World War 2 airman finally laid to rest 70 years after he gave his life for his country

He was given a full ceremonial burial on 16 March 2017 at Berlin 1939-1945 War Cemetery, Germany.

The service, led by Reverend Rebekah Cannon, Chaplain of RAF College Cranwell, was attended by representatives of the Royal Air Force, the British Embassy in Berlin and the Royal British Legion. Current members of the Queen's Colour Squadron paid tribute to their former colleague by providing a bearer party for his coffin.

## **Reverend Rebekah Cannon, who led the service said:**

It's been incredibly moving to lay this brave young man to rest today and to be part of his military family here to pay him our final respects.

Wilfred Lawson was born on 24 April 1918 at Penrith in Cumberland, youngest child of John and Elizabeth Lawson. He was 25 years old when he died. He had two older siblings, William and Elizabeth.

Wilfred joined the Royal Air Force in July 1936, before which he had worked for an ironmonger in King's Street, Penrith. He started his RAF career as an Aircraftman Grade 2, progressing through the ranks to Sergeant by the time of his death. In September 1940 he married Margaret Grace Flood and they lived on Sefton Terrace, Leeds.

Sgt Lawson's remains were discovered in September 2014 by the Vermisstenforschung Deutschland, a German group interested in researching those missing in war. Although there were no identifying items found with the remains, the site was known to be where his Lancaster bomber LL721 had crashed in January 1944.

Investigation work led by the MOD's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC), part of Defence Business Services, showed that of the 7 crew members, 3 were captured and held as prisoners of war, 2 were killed and buried at the time in the Berlin 1939-1945 War Cemetery and 2 remained listed as missing and were commemorated on the Royal Air Force memorial at Runnymede, Surrey.

It was possible to identify the remains through DNA analysis of samples from both Sgt Lawson's distant surviving family and relatives of the other missing airman.

**Enid Townson, first cousin once removed of Sgt Lawson said:**

It's amazing news that Wilfred's remains have been found and laid to rest in Berlin. I just wish that his parents and siblings had known during their lifetime what had happened to him.

They never quite gave up hope that there could have been a mistake and that he might one day come home.

**Peter Nelson, first cousin once removed said:**

We give Wilfred our thanks for his bravery in defending the free world. Although he's been lost for so many years he's now been found and will be in our thoughts forever.

**Louise Dorr, who has led the organisation of today's service in the JCCC said:**

It's the MOD Casualty Centre's mission to care for the fallen whether they're from current conflicts or historic campaigns. It's been an absolute privilege to arrange this ceremony for Sgt Wilfred Lawson. Although his blood family aren't able to be here today, his military family is honoured to be able to pay him this final tribute.

A new headstone bearing Sgt Lawson's name has been provided by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC), who will now care for his final resting place in perpetuity.