

Seven soldiers of the Great War finally laid to rest

Six Commonwealth soldiers and a German soldier who all died during World War One were buried earlier today (Thursday 30 June 2022) in a joint ceremony with the Canadian authorities more than a century after their deaths. The service, which was the largest of its kind this year, was organised by the MOD's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (MOD JCCC), also known as the 'MOD War Detectives', and was held at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's (CWGC) New Irish Farm cemetery in Ypres, Belgium.

The remains were previously recovered from two distinct sites close to one another near the village of St Julien during a planned archaeological dig. One set contained a casualty of the Newfoundland Regiment, a Royal Inniskilling Fusilier, a Hampshire soldier and an unknown soldier of an unknown regiment. The Canadian authorities have managed (through DNA) to name their soldier as Private John Lambert (Newfoundland Regiment) who died on 16 August 1917. Sadly, both the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and the Royal Hampshire Regiment have too many casualties killed on 16 August 1917 for the JCCC to be able to attempt identification.

The second set contained the remains of three casualties: an unknown Royal Fusilier, an unknown soldier of unknown regiment and an unknown German soldier. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to establish their date of death.

Louise Dorr, MOD JCCC Caseworker said:

This has been a long and challenging investigation for us. It's a matter of great sadness to me personally, that we haven't been able to identify any of the British soldiers or the German casualty. Whoever they were, they were somebody's son, brother, husband or father. It's especially poignant that we are burying old enemies together. They all paid the ultimate price of war, and their sacrifice must never be forgotten.

A British soldier lies side by side to a German casualty. Crown copyright.

The British bearer party was provided by the First Fusiliers whilst the musicians were from the Royal Irish Regiment. The firing party was provided by the Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment. These three regiments are the modern-day equivalents of the Royal Fusiliers, the Royal Hampshire Regiment and the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers.

Louise added:

The soldiers taking part in today's service can see they walk in the footsteps of the giants who went before them.

The service was conducted jointly by the Reverend Gary Watt, Chaplain to the First Fusiliers and Father Shawn Daley of the Canadian Army.

The service was conducted jointly by the Reverend Gary Watt, Chaplain to the First Fusiliers and Father Shawn Daley of the Canadian Army. Crown copyright.

The graves will now be marked by seven headstones provided by the CWGC.

Liz Woodfield, Director of External Relations at the CWGC, said:

Today these men have been buried at our cemetery alongside their comrades, with respect and dignity. We are honoured to be able to formally recognise Private John Lambert, and although it has not been possible to identify the other casualties, we pay tribute to the ultimate sacrifice they have made. We will ensure the graves of these brave soldiers are cared for with dedication, in perpetuity.