

News story: Two World War 1 Majors have finally been identified a century later

The resting places of Major Alexander Henderson Soutar MC, Corps of Royal Engineers and Major Octavius Sidney Darby-Griffith MC, The Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, have been marked 100 years after their deaths in the great war. Two rededication services were held on Wednesday 30 May at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) Jonchery-sur-Vesle British Cemetery and La Ville-aux-Bois British Cemetery, both near Reims in the Champagne region of France.

The services, organised by the MOD's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC), part of Defence Business Services, were conducted by the Reverend Andrew Earl CF, Senior Chaplain HQ NW & Chaplain 2nd Battalion The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment.

Rosie Barron, JCCC said:

It has been a privilege and an honour to organise these 2 rededication services today. Both Major Soutar and Major Darby-Griffith were killed during the Third Battle of the Aisne. It is important that these courageous men, who fought tirelessly to halt the German Spring Offensive in 1918, are remembered.

The Reverend Andrew Earl CF, said:

It is a great privilege to be asked to rededicate the headstones of these 2 former comrades who paid the ultimate sacrifice in the service of their country and to see the ongoing work of the MOD's JCCC. It is important that when we say 'We will remember them', it is more than words, it's an ongoing commitment. May they both rest in peace.



Major Alexander Henderson Soutar MC, Copyright Soutar family, All rights reserved

On 28 May 1918 98th Field Company, Royal Engineers, were involved in fighting around Hermonville. They were forced to withdraw southwards but had to leave Major Soutar behind as he was wounded. It is believed that he succumbed to his wounds having been taken prisoner of war. He was 30 years old.



Members of the Soutar family with military representatives and local attendees, Crown copyright, All rights reserved

James Soutar, the great nephew of Major Soutar said:

The Soutar family is extremely moved by the dedication of David Tattersfield and the Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre of the British Ministry of Defence in locating the final resting place of our ancestor, Major Alexander (Alastair) Henderson Soutar. Major Soutar sacrificed his life for his country 100 years ago, and has lain here unrecognized ever since.

We are all immensely grateful that we are able to come to France to pay him our respects and to thank him for his sacrifice. We are also relieved that his final resting place is now marked and may be known unto all who visit this beautiful place. We feel his soul is finally at peace.

On 9 September 1914 Major Darby-Griffith was commissioned into The Loyal North Lancashire Regiment. He was awarded the Military Cross, which was published in the London Gazette on 25 April 1918. His citation reads:

For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty when in command of a company which took over a sector of the line after an unsuccessful

attack. He quickly reorganised the line, which contained large gaps, and steadied his men under constant shell fire. When, after being relieved, 2 of his platoons were caught by an enemy barrage he distributed them in shell holes, and by working from shell hole to shell hole, got them clear without many casualties. After getting them clear he returned through the barrage and attended to his wounded, remaining with them till the last had been evacuated.



Major Gary Turner from The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment laying a wreath for Major Darby-Griffith, Crown copyright, All rights reserved

On 27 March 1918 Major Darby-Griffith was killed whilst in command of 9th Battalion, The Loyal North Lancashire Regiment. He was 46 years old.



The Standard being lowered as the Last Post is played during the service for Major Darby-Griffith, Crown copyright, All rights reserved

Both Majors were casualties of the Third Battle of the Aisne, a now often forgotten battle in the late stages of the German Spring Offensive. With no known graves, they were both commemorated on the Soissons Memorial in Soissons, France.

The final resting place of these 2 Majors came to light after a researcher, David Tattersfield, submitted evidence to the CWGC to suggest that they had been found. Further research by the MOD's JCCC and the National Army Museum was undertaken to corroborate the evidence that Mr Tattersfield had provided, and the identification of the 'Unknown Soldier' graves were both confirmed by the JCCC.

The service for Major Soutar was attended by 10 members of his extended family who had travelled from as far away as Canada, the USA and Hong Kong to pay their respects. Despite the limited information available, the JCCC traced Major Darby-Griffith's 91 year old granddaughter. As she lives in British Columbia she was unable to make the journey.

Members of the Corps of Royal Engineers and The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment were present at both services.

Mel Donnelly, CWGC said:

For almost a century Major Soutar and Major Darby-Griffith were commemorated on the Soissons Memorial to those with no known grave.

They were both decorated officers who had served on the Western Front for more than 3 years and we are honoured to be able to acknowledge their sacrifice and re-dedicate their graves today.

Two new headstones bearing Major Soutar's and Major Darby-Griffith's names have been provided by the CWGC, who will now care for their final resting place in perpetuity.

[News story: First plot stone unveiled at new service accomodation site in Wiltshire](#)

Lieutenant General Nick Pope CBE, Deputy Chief of the General Staff, together with Mr John Leary, Lovell's Major Projects Director unveiled the stone with representatives of the Army Basing Programme (ABP), Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) and Lovell in attendance.

Work is well underway across the Salisbury Plain Training Area to prepare for the Service personnel returning from Germany in 2019 under the ABP. A critical construction activity is the provision of Service Family Accommodation. This constitutes the building of 917 new homes at 3 sites on Salisbury Plain; Bulford, Larkhill and Ludgershall. In addition, ABP has purchased 100 homes of open market housing at Tidworth. The build of new homes represents a significant investment on Salisbury Plain and is critical to enable the final units to relocate to Wiltshire from Germany and within the UK in 2019.

General Pope said:

The new homes that Lovell are providing on behalf of the Army Basing Programme is testament to the Army's commitment to invest in our estate providing 21st century living and working facilities for our soldiers and their families.

Since Ministry of Defence contracted with Lovell in November 2017, work is now well underway across all 3 sites. At Bulford, where 225 new homes are being built, the Roads & Sewers works are largely complete and over a third of the foundations have already been laid. The Bulford programme is the most advanced of the SFA sites and timber frame installations have commenced.

Alongside the groundworks element, Lovell has also been undertaking enabling works including 2 new section 278 access junctions and the installation of

its administration/welfare facilities and storage compound. These facilities coupled with strong supply chain relationships will allow Lovell to deliver this prestigious project at the fast track rate required in order to ensure homes are ready for the returning Service personnel and their families.

Mark Duddy, ABP Programme Director said:

I am really impressed with the speed of delivery and the amount of progress that has been made since the contract was signed in November; we remain firmly on track to deliver the required new homes to enable the units to return from Germany in 2019. This project is an excellent example of how we are updating the estate by providing first class living accommodation for our Service personnel.

John Leary said:

Lovell were delighted to host today's event to mark the commencement of superstructure works on our SPTA scheme. We were honoured to welcome Lieutenant General Nick Pope CBE to unveil our commemorative stone, representing a significant milestone at the Bulford site and for the SPTA SFA project as a whole. We look forward to continuing to work with the ABP, WYG and our supply chain partners to ensure timely delivery of high quality SFA for our Service families.'

[News story: The injured troops revolutionising motorsport visit The Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre](#)

Team BRIT aims to be the first ever all-disabled team to race in the Le Mans 24 hour race. It has developed the world's most advanced hand control technology to allow its injured drivers to compete equally.

The majority of the team's drivers are injured military troops who spent time at DMRC Headley Court as part of their recovery process. On Wednesday 23 May, the team visited the centre, taking along its Aston Martin V8 Vantage to speak to service personnel and staff about the team, its target and how it is revolutionising motorsport.

Drivers who took part in the visit include Martyn Compton who received burns to 75% of his body following an ambush in Afghanistan, Jon-Allan Butterworth

MBE, the country's most successful military Paralympian who lost an arm following an attack in Iraq and Warren McKinlay, who suffered Cotard's Syndrome as a result of a traumatic brain injury, leading him to believe he was dead.

The team hopes that the visit to DMRC Headley Court will inspire some of those receiving treatment at the centre to consider opportunities such as driving with Team BRIT.

Nicola Norville, Deputy Charities Coordinator at DMRC Headley Court said:

We are delighted to welcome Team BRIT and our former patients to DMRC Headley Court. Their visit demonstrates how valuable the role of intensive rehabilitation is and the incredible outcomes that are achievable. We value the friendship that we have with Team BRIT and look forward to strengthening our links. With the support of the DMRC Benevolent Fund, we hope to capitalise on the opportunities available to us through such initiatives. Thank you to all involved and for your commitment to our patients.

CEO and Founder of Team BRIT, Dave Player said:

The team at DMRC Headley Court plays such a significant role in the rehabilitation of military personnel and we're very proud to be part of the journey of some of the people who have spent time there.

Through Team BRIT and our linked charity KartForce, we hope to show injured troops and any disabled people, that there are incredible opportunities out there and that disability is not a barrier to achieving amazing things.

Press release: Alun Cairns visits Afghanistan and praises: "incredible spirit and contribution" of Welsh soldiers

Welsh troops based in Afghanistan are showing the "incredible spirit" of Welsh soldiers throughout history as they work to support the war-torn country, Alun Cairns said today.

The Secretary of State for Wales spoke after a 24-hour visit to see soldiers of the Welsh Guards based in the Afghan capital Kabul. Mr Cairns sat down with soldiers to learn more about their role in providing security and mentoring help to Afghan officials as the country's Government continues its work of reconstruction. He also met senior British army commanders for an update on the troops' peace-keeping mission.

Mr Cairns said:

I was inspired by the incredible spirit and determination of the soldiers I met who are doing their job in a volatile and often dangerous environment.

Having heard from the soldiers first-hand about their life in Kabul, I am incredibly proud of what the Welsh Guards are doing. This is a regiment with a century-long history of serving across the world in conflicts from WWII to Palestine and the Falklands. They are now on their third tour of duty in Afghanistan, and showing the incredible spirit they always do.

While I have always championed our Welsh servicemen and women, being in Afghanistan really brought home to me the work they do in dangerous circumstances. All of Wales owes them a vote of thanks.

There are currently 260 members of the Welsh Guards battle group deployed to Kabul as part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission from all parts of Wales. The Secretary of State for Wales visited the Regiment's base camp, sat in on preparations for a patrol and also learned more about their support for the Afghan National Army Officer Academy – often compared to the country's equivalent of Sandhurst – which is producing the Afghan army's future officer corps.

Notes to editors:

- The Welsh Guards came into existence on 26 February 1915 by Royal Warrant of George V in order to include Wales in the national component to the Foot Guards. They were the last of the Guards to be created, with the Irish Guards coming into being in 1900. Just three days later, 1st Battalion Welsh Guards mounted its first King's Guard at Buckingham Palace on 1 March 1915 – St David's Day. Since then the Welsh Guards has served in WW2, Palestine, Aden, The Falklands War, Northern Ireland, the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan. The Welsh Guards are Wales's Senior Infantry Regiment with a formidable reputation forged throughout the last century.
- The regiment maintains very close links to the Royal Family and the Colonel of the Regiment is HRH The Prince of Wales. Due to the regiments dual role as combat soldiers and ceremonial troops, it is inextricably tied to the Royal Family. It is the fifth regiment of Foot Guards and

regularly conducts guard duty at the Royal palaces and on state occasions such as the Trooping of the Colour.

[News story: Defence Secretary praises troops about to embark on countering elephant and rhino poaching operation](#)

The Defence Secretary met several personnel at West Midlands Safari Park today as they prepare to deploy to East Africa next month. The personnel met zoological experts at the park, which works with conservation bodies to help protect threatened species such as African elephants.

Mr Williamson said:

Our Armed Forces are a force for good around the world and are at the forefront of protecting the world's most endangered species from criminal gangs.

This evil trade is worth £17 billion and poses an existential threat to the planet's most majestic mammals – it is our duty to preserve them for future generations.

Britain is leading the way in putting an end to barbaric illegal wildlife poaching, and I'm proud of the immense contribution our Armed Forces are making in stopping criminals' profiteering from the slaughter of rhinos and elephants.

The Government is also introducing one of the world's toughest bans on ivory, showing how seriously we take this issue.

A specialist team of two dozen troops, drawn from a variety of British Army units, will spend weeks working alongside park rangers passing on expertise in areas such as tracking and counter insurgency tactics built up in previous operational tours in countries including Afghanistan.

Over the past year several British Army teams have worked in Gabon in the west of Africa and Malawi in east Africa to help park rangers improve their tracking of poachers. The training has allowed them to cover far larger distances as they attempt to find criminals who shoot the elephants and rhinos for their valuable ivory.



Military personnel at West Midlands Safari Park. Crown Copyright.

Earlier this month Prime Minister Theresa May confirmed that Britain would bring in a ban on ivory sales, as part of a plan to protect elephants for future generations. The ban will cover ivory items of all ages – not just those produced after a certain date. The maximum penalty for breaching the ban will be an unlimited fine or up to five years in jail.

Major James Cowen, leading the deployment in Malawi, said:

We're enthusiastic about this mission because it represents a real opportunity to pass on our expertise and build partnerships with counterparts who are working night and day to help protect these animals. It shows that the British Army is flexible and committed to an international outlook.

The operation is funded with help from the Department for Food, Rural Affairs and Agriculture.