

WW2 officer's grave rededicated in France

The grave of Second Lieutenant (2nd Lt) Piers Richard Edgcumbe who was killed in France whilst serving with 12th Royal Lancers, has been rededicated in France eighty-two years after he was killed.

The service, which was organised by the MOD's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC), also known as the 'MOD War Detectives', was held at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's (CWGC) Esquelbecq Military Cemetery, near Dunkirk.

Tracey Bowers, JCCC said: "To see so many here today has made this a very special ceremony. Working closely with the family, regiment, and local community during the planning of today's service has reinforced how much this case has meant to so many people. It is an honour and privilege to have been involved."

The rededication service was attended by many family members including his niece, Lady Rosamund Woodward, who said:

"For all these years, each one of us, as members of the family of Piers Richard Edgcumbe, have held in our hearts the image of the man we believed him to be. We have treasured the memories, stories and pictures handed down to us by those who knew and loved him and were closest to him during his lifetime. Now, here today, seeing his name carved into the stone of his final resting place, we feel he has, at last, come home to us.

"We are humbly grateful to the teamwork and dedication of all the amazing people who have worked towards this, and who continue their work for the families and friends of the thousands of other who also, like Piers, made the ultimate sacrifice. Thank you from all of us."

Members of the Edgcumbe family read a poem written by Piers' grandfather in 1915 to commemorate his birth. Crown copyright.

Alongside family the service was attended by representatives of the British Embassy, serving soldiers of The Royal Lancers, including a Lance Guard together with representatives from both Eton College and Trinity College Cambridge. The service was conducted by the Reverend John Power CF, Chaplain to The Royal Lancers (Queen Elizabeths' Own).

The Reverend Power said:

"This service was a real tribute for the life of 2Lt Piers Edgcumbe, so many were included: his family, his school, his regiment as it is today, and a letter read from his grandfather really did make the occasion a celebration of his life and service to his Country"

2nd Lt Edgcumbe was traveling in an armoured vehicle, tasked with a dangerous role to conduct a reconnaissance mission and scout out enemy positions during the huge, allied evacuation to Dunkirk in May 1940. 2nd Lt Edgcumbe was killed alongside his Lance Corporal when a German tank opened fire on them.

His Commanding Officer wrote of him: "I have seldom met an officer who was so cool and brave under fire: he was adored by his men who would have followed him anywhere."

The Eton College obituary wrote: "It is impossible in a short memorial notice to give to those who did not know him any impression of his modesty, his charm of manner, his loveable nature, or his consideration for all whether old or young."

Research was undertaken by many researchers and members of the family to try and identify 2nd Lt Edgcumbe's final resting place. Following further research conducted by CWGC, the National Army Museum and JCCC, the identification was confirmed.

The headstone over the grave has been replaced by the CWGC, including a family inscription and they will care for the final resting places in perpetuity. The CWGC's Commemorations Case Manager, Mel Donnelly, said:

"It is our privilege to mark Second Lieutenant Edgcumbe's grave in Esquelbecq Military Cemetery with a new Commission headstone. It bears a moving personal inscription chosen by his family, recognising his strength and purpose. Today we join them in reflecting on his loss; we invite people all over the world to remember the bravery and sacrifice of Second Lt Edgcumbe and all the casualties from both world wars in this, our annual War Graves Week."