

Burial Service Held on the Western Front for a Soldier of the Essex Regiment and his Comrade

On Tuesday 5 November, on what was the Western Front just over a century ago, a soldier of The Essex Regiment and an unknown soldier of an unknown regiment, who were killed during the Great War, were finally laid to rest with full military honours. The ceremony took place at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's (CWGC) New Irish Farm Cemetery, near Ypres, Belgium and was conducted by the Reverend Paul Whitehead CF, Chaplain to 3rd Battalion The Royal Anglian Regiment.

The service was organised by the MOD's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC), also known as the 'MOD War Detectives', who also try to make an identification when British remains are found.

Rosie Barron, JCCC said:

This burial service has been especially poignant as we build up to Remembrance Sunday. Although it has not been possible to identify them, these two men have now been laid to rest alongside their comrades. Today we remember their sacrifices and the loved ones they left behind who mourned for them.

The Reverend Whitehead said:

Although we do not know these young men's names, every person is created in God's image. It is a fitting tribute to pray and personally commit them into the hands of our heavenly Father who has always known them intimately by name.

The remains of these two soldiers were found alongside twenty-one others during ground work at an industrial development at Briekestraat, just north of Ypres. The location, thought to be the original Irish Farm Cemetery, is an original wartime cemetery created by 1st Battalion The Royal Fusiliers under war conditions. Until the discovery, it was believed that all those buried there had been transferred to the New Irish Farm Cemetery, some 300 metres away, after the war.

The service was conducted by the Revd Paul Whitehead CF and was supported by soldiers of C (Essex) Company of 1st Battalion The Royal Anglian Regiment.

Nineteen of the twenty-four soldiers found were buried with full military

honours on 28 September 2017. Five were not buried at the time as it was thought that they may be identifiable. Two soldiers of The Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment) were buried on 9 October 2019.

One of the soldiers buried today was found with shoulder titles of The Essex Regiment and a Church of England Men's Society pendant. Research carried out by the JCCC War Detectives showed that this soldier most likely died between May and September 1915. Due to the high number of soldiers of 2nd Battalion The Essex Regiment who were killed in the area in 1915, the soldier could not be named.

No artefacts were found with the second soldier which would enable him to be identified.

The firing party from C (Essex) Company of The Royal Anglian Regiment fired a volley of shots in salute to the unknown soldiers.

The burial service was supported by current soldiers of 1st Battalion The Royal Anglian Regiment who supplied a bearer party and a firing party for the ceremony.

The graves will now be marked by headstones provided by the CWGC, who will care for their final resting place in perpetuity.

Geert Bekaert, CWGC Central European Area Director said:

Although it has not been possible to identify these casualties by name, we are honoured to lay them to rest with respect and dignity alongside their comrades at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's New Irish Farm Cemetery. We proudly mark their graves, ensuring that their service and sacrifice will not be forgotten. The Commission will care for them, together with all of those who served and fell.