

Graves of two soldiers killed in northern France rededicated

The services, which were organised by the MOD's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC), also known as the 'MOD War Detectives', were held at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's (CWGC) Fosse 7 Military Cemetery (Quality Street) and Bancourt British Cemetery on 17 November.

The graves of both men were identified after two members of the public, Alan Gregson (for Pte McLean) and Andrew Pugh (for LCpl Smith) contacted the CWGC presenting evidence suggesting they had been found. Further research conducted by the National Army Museum and JCCC confirmed their findings.

Nicola Nash, JCCC case lead said:

Today we stood in two beautiful cemeteries and heard nothing but birds and the distant rumbling of everyday life. A very different scene would have faced our two soldiers over a hundred years ago, when these two men made the ultimate sacrifice for their country. Having their families attend today just shows that their sacrifices will never be forgotten and they will always be remembered with grateful thanks by us all".

The rededication services for both men were attended by members of their families.

Philip Maclean, great nephew of Pte McLean said:

The re dedication service for our Gt Uncle James was a moving and emotional experience. We are so pleased as a family he is no longer a missing soldier. We would like to thank the MOD, CWGC and the Army for their considerable efforts".

Malcolm Clague, grandson of LCpl Smith said:

The families of Brunton Hunter and Malcolm Clague wish to thank everyone for the very poignant and fitting service for our grandfather who gave the ultimate sacrifice.

We thank the Commemorations team for your hard work and for bringing together representatives of the Regiment, the Padre and the CWGC. We were especially touched by the presentation of the flag by the Military Attaché from the British Embassy Paris as a tribute to the life given by L/Cpl Brunton Smith. A moving act of remembrance for which we offer our grateful thanks to all and will

recall with gratitude in the years to come”.

The services were conducted by the Reverend Timothy Clarke-Wood CF, Chaplain to 4th Battalion The Royal Regiment of Scotland and were attended by serving soldiers of the same regiment.

The Reverend Clarke-Wood said:

There are key moments in our shared history that stand as vital. When within the tragedy of such epic loss as WW1, we can in our present take time to honour and consider the individual who has died – we are on the right track. The celebration of inherent human dignity is found in such moment as the rededication of our fallen heroes”.

The headstones over their graves have been replaced by the CWGC. Liz Woodfield, Director of External Relations at CWGC, said:

We thank Mr Gregson, Mr Pugh and the National Army Museum for their research and dedication in helping to identify the graves of Pte McLean and LCpl Smith. We are privileged to honour these two brave men who made the ultimate sacrifice fighting for their country. We will care for their graves in perpetuity.

How they died

LCpl Smith joined the 8th Battalion, Royal Scots in 1915. He spent almost all of the war along the Western Front, in France and Belgium. On 21 March 1918, some 6,500 German guns and 3,500 heavy mortars opened up a huge 5-hour barrage against the British 3rd and 5th Armies on the Western Front. Although the Allies knew an attack was imminent, they did not know where and how the main attack would occur. The German tactics succeeded and on the first day, British casualties amounted to 38,500 men. The Germans pushed the British back several miles, with heavy casualties inflicted during their fighting retreat. During 23-26 March, German successes continued with the capture of Peronne, Bapaume and Albert. On 24 March, as LCpl Smith's battalion were withdrawing through Bapaume, he was one of the casualties lost during the continual artillery bombardment and fighting.

Pte McLean was living in Invergordon when he joined the 10th Battalion, Gordon Highlanders. Referred to at the time as 'the big push', the Battle of Loos was the biggest British attack of 1915 and saw the first engagement of New Army units. Five battalions of the Gordon Highlanders saw action in this battle, with a further two involved in a subsidiary attack in Hooze, north of the Loos battlefield. Just two days before this battle began, on 23 September 1915, the 10th Battalion, Gordon Highlanders were in the front lines facing Loos-en-Gohelle. The day was spent listening to the near constant, heavy artillery bombardment of the enemy trenches. During the afternoon, the

battalion 'shewed their bayonets and cheered' to trick the enemy into thinking an attack was imminent. It was during this day that Pte McLean tragically lost his life.