

MOD Honours the sacrifice of World War One soldiers during re-dedication services in Ypres

Both services were organised by the MOD's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC), also known as the 'MOD War Detectives', and were held at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's (CWGC) Ypres Reservoir Cemetery in Ypres, Belgium.

Nicola Nash, MOD JCCC caseworker said:

"After more than 100 years, these four men who were lost, have now been found. There is nothing more rewarding for us than giving a family closure and making sure that every soldier is remembered as he should be."

The first service was held for Lance Serjeant (LSjt) Edward Leonard Cottrell and Serjeant (Sjt) Joseph Frank Brookes Birkin whilst the second was to honour Lance Corporal (LCpl) Wilfred Horace Miller and LCpl Arthur Burton. All four served with the Leicestershire Regiment.

Serjeant Joseph Frank Brookes Birkin

Defence Minister Leo Docherty said:

"We will never fail in our duty to remember those who gave their lives in the cause of freedom during the two world wars. As more fallen servicemen from both world wars are discovered, the MOD Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre will strive to confirm their identities. Their tireless efforts and dedication will ensure these soldiers' names will live on in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's cemeteries."

The four soldiers had no known graves since tragically losing their lives in 1915, however, due to the collective efforts of the MOD JCCC and CWGC following evidence submitted, their final resting places have now been found over a century later.

Private Benjamin Nicolas laying wreath on behalf of members of the Birkin family who were unable to attend

Following submission of research, including from the CWGC, that was considered by the MOD JCCC as the adjudicators, additional research by the team themselves and the National Army Museum led to the four cases being confirmed.

Nicola added:

"Today, we honour those who paid the ultimate sacrifice, along with representatives from the regiment and their family."

John Williamson, great nephew of Sjt Birkin, said:

"It is wonderful this work still continues; this ceremony gives final closure to the family."

Birkin family members in prayer during the service

Research by MOD JCCC also led to LCpl Miller's family being traced meaning they could be invited to today's service to pay their respects.

Maria Miller, great niece of LCpl Miller, said:

"This has been the most humbling experience and a great privilege to be here today."

Maria Miller at the graveside of her great uncle Lcpl Miller's headstone

The services were supported by the Royal Anglian Regiment and were conducted by the Reverend (Captain) Thomas Wilde, CF, Chaplain to the Royal Anglian Regiment, who said:

"When you give a soldier a name you give them meaning a history and a voice."

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

Fergus Read, CWGC Case Officer (Commemorations), said:

"It is always immensely satisfying when we are able to put a name on any headstone. Here, the research for one case helped us to unlock the names of those buried in a further three graves. It is the Commission's privilege to be part of the work to identify the last resting places of these casualties, and to care for their graves in perpetuity."