

News story: Defence Secretary pays tribute to wartime sacrifice at Passchendaele

The battle in Flanders began on 31 July 1917 and was a major engagement in the First World War, claiming the lives of around 275,000 British and Commonwealth military personnel and around 200,000 German lives.

Sir Michael Fallon joined Prime Minister Theresa May, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, The King and Queen of Belgium and other dignitaries last night for the playing of the Last Post ceremony at the Menin Gate in Ypres, Belgium. Music and readings were added to the traditional nightly service which has happened for over 90 years.

The UK Government, in collaboration with the Belgian Government, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, and the Royal British Legion is hosting a series of events to mark one of the defining battles of the First World War. The Chief of the Defence Staff, Joint Force Commander and heads of the Royal Navy, British Army and Royal Air Force are in Belgium, where today visitors will gather to pay their respects at Tyne Cot cemetery near the village of Passchendaele. It is the largest Commonwealth War Grave in the world.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

These services provide us with the time to reflect on the sacrifice not just of the thousands of British and Commonwealth troops who gave their lives, but of the men on all sides who did not return home. This was a battle which touched communities across Europe and it is a privilege to be here in Belgium to stand as friends with the representatives of all the countries who took part in the Battle – friends who continue to be strong allies.

Members of the UK Armed Forces took part in the event with the Pipes and Drums of the Royal Irish Regiment and The Band of the Welsh Guards providing music. The bands will also take part in an evening light show where images from the War will be projected onto the town's Cloth Hall.

The Menin Gate is one of four memorials to the missing which covers the area known as the Ypres Salient. The site of the Menin Gate was chosen because of the hundreds of thousands of men who passed through it on their way to the battlefields. It bears the names of more than 54,000 casualties from the forces of Australia, Canada, India, South Africa and United Kingdom who died in the Salient whose graves are not known.

The full programme of commemorative events includes:

30 July: A traditional Last Post ceremony at dusk at the Menin Gate, Ypres, Belgium.

30 July: Sunset Ceremony at the Cloth Hall, Ypres Light projections onto the Cloth Hall in the Market Square will provide the backdrop to an evening of storytelling and music about the experience of soldiers during four years of war on the Ypres Salient

31 July: A ceremony at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's Tyne Cot Cemetery will take place on 31 July

31 July: A Welsh National Service of Remembrance will take place at the Welsh Memorial in Langemark.

[News story: Portsmouth hosts US carrier strike group ahead of multinational exercise](#)

The USS George HW Bush and elements of her carrier strike group – the USS Philippine Sea, USS Donald Cook and Norwegian ship HNoMS Helge Insgstad are on the final leg of their deployment in support of Operation Inherent Resolve, the Global Coalition's fight against ISIS.

The Nimitz-class carrier has UK personnel on board as part of the UK-US Long Lead Specialist Skills Programme which qualifies them in US carrier operations in preparation for the arrival of HMS Queen Elizabeth and the UK's own carrier strike capability.

Also embarked is Commander UK Carrier Strike Group (COMUKCSG) Commodore Andrew Betton and his team for Exercise Saxon Warrior 17 – a joint maritime exercise that will focus how the two nations work together during a number of challenging scenarios around the UK coastline.

Commodore Betton said:

Exercise Saxon Warrior is a large, multinational joint exercise which involves fifteen warships from five different nations, submarines, over 100 aircraft and about 9,000 personnel

The UK contribution will be two Type 23 frigates supporting the US aircraft carrier, a Royal Navy submarine, the Carrier Strike Group UK battle staff, fixed wing and rotary wing aircraft operating from ashore, and then the central training staff who will be based in Faslane in Scotland.

The exercise, which begins once the group leaves Portsmouth, will also be key to ensuring UK personnel are fully equipped ahead of the arrival of the Royal Navy's new Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carrier, HMS Queen Elizabeth.

Over the next fortnight U.S. Naval personnel will train side-by-side with UK pilots, engineers and deck handlers to build combined maritime and aviation capability and capacity.

Royal Marines Colonel Phil Kelly, the COMUKCSG Strike Commander, said:

This exercise is a great demonstration of the UK's relationship with the United States who are helping us in getting back our carrier strike capability and making a success of the Queen Elizabeth aircraft carrier programme.

The Type 23 frigates taking part in Ex Saxon Warrior will be Portsmouth-based HMS Iron Duke and HMS Westminster who will be joined by Royal Fleet Auxiliary fast fleet tanker Wave Ruler.

[News story: UK Destroyer visits Ukraine after completing multi-national naval exercise](#)

The Royal Navy Type 45 destroyer is leading NATO's Standing Maritime Naval Group 2 (SNMG2), providing reassurance and deterrence in the Black Sea, as well as commanding NATO's counter migration activity in the Aegean. For the next 12 months the Royal Navy is commanding two of the four NATO Standing Naval Forces, demonstrating the UK's commitment to and leadership within the alliance.

The visit follows the announcement last week by the Defence Secretary that the UK is expanding its training of the Ukrainian Armed Forces with new military courses on countering threats from snipers, armoured vehicles and mortars.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

HMS Duncan's visit to Odessa this week is a symbol of our unwavering support to our Ukrainian friends in the face of Russian belligerence and aggression.

We are also stepping up our work with NATO this year, leading half of NATO's standing maritime forces, one of the four enhanced

Forward Presence Battlegroups and have deployed Typhoon fast jets to Romania, in a tangible demonstration of our commitment to European security.

Before docking in Odessa, HMS Duncan led the NATO task force through one of the largest naval exercises staged in the Black Sea near the Bulgarian port of Varna.

Exercise Breeze 17 tested naval forces from Bulgaria, Turkey, USA, Italy, Poland, Romania and Greece alongside UK military personnel in their ability to safeguard Black Sea shores and shipping, strengthening the Alliance's readiness and experience of joint operating.

This year, the UK is also leading Standing NATO Mine Countermeasures Group 2 (SNMCMG2). HMS Enterprise will be the flagship of the multinational force responsible for searching for and disposing of explosive ordnance. The group will be based mainly in the Mediterranean, and will be joined by HMS Pembroke in the second half of 2017.

[Press release: UK troops awarded medals for UN peacekeeping mission in South Sudan](#)

85 UK troops from the Engineering and Medical Taskforce in South Sudan have been awarded UN medals by HM Ambassador Alison Blackburne in recognition of their unstinting service in South Sudan.

During their tour, the troops have undertaken projects including support of remedial works to a jetty on the River Nile and helicopter landing sites, flood prevention and other infrastructure improvements, as well as the construction of a temporary field hospital in Bentiu. The field hospital will provide medical care for 1,800 UN personnel, and will be staffed by UK military clinicians for the next 12 months. This will enable other military and civilian staff to carry out the work of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), a challenging operating environment.

Speaking to the medal recipients, HM Ambassador Alison Blackburne said:

It is not only about what you have achieved, but also the way you have achieved it. You have conducted yourselves with incredible professionalism in a collaborative and humble manner. It is an honour to present you with such well-deserved medals.



The UNMISS medal which has been presented to troops from Op TRENTON 2 in Juba, South Sudan. Crown copyright.

Commanding Officer Lieutenant Colonel Jason Ainley has now handed over command to Lieutenant Colonel Katie Hislop, who will continue the valuable work of the UK taskforce. Medical staff will continue to provide high class healthcare whilst the Engineering troops now turn to building the permanent hospital, as well as to UN infrastructure tasks including improving supply routes. This work will enable UNMISS to continue to protect civilians in one of the world's most fragile nations.

Following a commitment made in 2015 by the then Prime Minister to double the UK's commitment to global peacekeeping initiatives, nearly 400 UK military personnel are supporting UN efforts in South Sudan, making this one of the UK's largest operational deployments in the world.

Commanding Officer Lieutenant Colonel Jason Ainley said:

It has been an immensely rewarding and humbling deployment. We have achieved far more than anticipated in January. The UK Engineering Taskforce and Medics are now firmly established in UNMISS and we are honoured to be able to receive our hard-earned UN medals from HM Ambassador.

[News story: Grave of Yorkshire born WW1 second lieutenant finally rededicated nearly a century later](#)

Verifying the research submitted was crucial in identifying the final resting place of Second Lieutenant (2 Lt) Bertie Swallow of the 18th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers, who was killed in action due to the injuries he suffered on 31 October 1918. Almost a century after he was buried as an 'Unknown Officer of the Lancashire Fusiliers', a rededication service was held on 25 July 2017 at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) Harlebeke New British Cemetery in Belgium.

The service, which was a fitting tribute to the sacrifice made by 2 Lt Swallow, was organised by the MOD's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC), part of Defence Business Services, and was conducted by the Reverend Stuart Richards, Chaplain to 1st Battalion, Royal Regiment of Fusiliers.

Louise Dorr, JCCC said:

It is thanks to a member of the public who has submitted all of his research that this grave has been able to be identified.

I'm delighted that we have been able to pay tribute to 2 Lt Bertie Swallow here this morning and to give him back his name.

2 Lt Swallow joined the Royal Field Artillery on 9 December 1915 before moving to the 18th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers on 5 September 1918. Although he was reported wounded on 31 October 1918, his family didn't receive the news that he had died on that date until 28 November 1918. At the time, there was no burial location recorded or even any evidence that his body had been recovered and buried locally.

JCCC now know that Bertie Swallow was buried as an 'Unknown Officer of the Lancashire Fusiliers' in Harlebeke New British Cemetery in Belgium. Records from this cemetery show that the original burial location was just east of the village of Kloosterhoek, where there were no British forces until the 18th Lancashire Fusiliers arrived on 31 October 1918.

There are only 4 other Lancashire Fusiliers officers who were killed within a few weeks of Bertie Swallow's death and who have no known grave, all of them can be excluded as their battalions were between 30-100 kilometres away.

This proved to the JCCC that there is no other candidate for the unknown

grave in Harlebeke. No other officer of the Lancashire Fusiliers is listed as missing or killed in the relevant place and time period. His field burial site was not the scene of any armed conflict until the arrival of the Lancashire Fusiliers on 31 October 1918. By elimination, this confirmed the final resting place of 2 Lt Bertie Swallow.



Reverend Stuart Richards delivers the rededication service for 2 Lt Swallow.
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Reverend Stuart Richards, said:

It is a privilege to tend the flame of remembrance and to ensure that those who made the supreme sacrifice a century ago have a memorial and a name for future generations.

Almost 100 years after he died, 2 Lt Swallow's grave has been rededicated and a new headstone bearing his name has been provided by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC).