

Two Great War RAF officers' graves rededicated

The graves of Second Lieutenant (2nd Lt) Alan Thompson Watt Boswell RAF and Second Lieutenant (2nd Lt) Robert Percy Gundill RAF who were killed on 2 October 1918, have been rededicated more than a hundred years after they died.

The service which was organised by the MOD's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (MOD JCCC), also known as the 'MOD War Detectives' was held at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's (CWGC) Duhalloy Advanced Dressing Station (ADS) Cemetery, near Ypres Belgium on Wednesday 29 June.

Tracey Bowers JCCC said:

"These two brave young men served throughout the Great War firstly with the Army before transferring to the Royal Flying Corp showing courage and devotion, it is a privilege to be here today to see their names on their headstones and pay our respects to them."

The rededication service for 2nd Lt Boswell was attended by members of his family including his great nephew Russell Evans who read the poem "High Flight" at the ceremony.

Russell Evans, said:

"There were nine wonderful wreaths laid by various branches of the military and CWGC on the headstones of Alan Boswell and Robert Gundill, his fellow airman who both died in an air crash in October 1918."

2nd Lt Boswell, aged 28, came from Woolwich and was a very talented athlete and represented Wales in hockey and football, and his County at cricket and rugby. Alan was employed as a School Master when he enlisted into the Welsh Regiment in December 1914. Alan was quickly promoted to the rank of Serjeant and was discharged from the Army on being granted a commission into The Royal Flying Corps in September 1917.

2nd Lt Boswell served with 105 and 109 Squadron before joining 108 Squadron in July 1918 as a Pilot. He had a total of 81 flying hours by October 1918.

2nd Lt Gundill, aged 21, came from Pontefract and was a liquorice manufacturer before he enlisted into the West Yorkshire Regiment on Dec 1914, a month before his 18th birthday. Pte Gundill served overseas, including Egypt and France, he was wounded in June 1916 when hit by shrapnel in his back. 2nd Lt Gundill was granted a commission into The Northumberland Fusiliers on 25 April 1917.

2nd Lt Gundill applied to transfer to the Royal Flying Corps where he was appointed as an Observer on 6 July 1918 and posted to 108 Squadron.

The ceremony conducted by Reverend (Squadron Leader) Adrian Klos and supported by members of XI(F) Squadron RAF Coningsby was held with family members present, alongside one of the researchers who submitted the case.

Newly engraved headstones for 2 Lieutenants Boswell and Gundill. Crown copyright.

The Reverend Klos said:

“Today, we have been rededicating the graves of two of our service personnel, 2nd Lt Boswell and 2nd Lt Gundill, and to have Boswell’s family with us today was very moving. To hear the emotion in the great nephew as he read the words of High Flight and recognising the sacrifice of his family member made.

“It was a real privilege to be here as RAF and members of the MOD, and recognising the family price these young men paid, we will honour that together.”

How they died

2nd Lt’s Boswell and Gundill were flying as a tandem crew on DH9 D1080 as part of a bombing raid in the locale of Menin when they went missing on 2 October 1918. The Officer Commanding the 108 Squadron stated they left the aerodrome at 1207 hours and were last seen flying at 3,000 feet west of the objective, but they failed to return.

Geert Bekaert, Area Director for Central and Southern Europe at the CWGC, said:

“These brave men died in the final months of the First World War. The support they gave from the air to the infantry troops when the Allies were advancing through Belgium was critically important. It is an honour to commemorate them and we will care for their graves in perpetuity.”