

[News story: 100 years on, Defence Secretary and members of the Armed Forces attend Passchendaele commemorations](#)

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon joined The Prince of Wales, The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, The King and Queen of Belgians, Prime Minister Theresa May, and other dignitaries at a commemoration at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's Tyne Cot Cemetery.

The Tyne Cot cemetery is situated on the former battlefields of the Ypres Salient, within sight of the town of Ypres and holds 12,000 graves with 35,000 names on the memorial wall. The service reflected the story and experiences of those who fought in the Third Battle of Ypres and was watched by descendants and members of the public.

The battle began 100 years ago today 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.

The Chief of the Defence Staff, Joint Force Commander and heads of the Royal Navy, British Army and Royal Air Force also attended the ceremony. A Guard of Honour was provided by the 1st Battalion Irish Guards. Musical support was provided by the Band of Her Majesty's Royal Marines Plymouth, the Band of the Welsh Guards and the Central Band of the RAF.



The Band of the Welsh Guards and the Central Band of the RAF at the Tyne Cot Cemetery

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.

Earlier in the day Defence Secretary, Sir Michael Fallon also met with Belgian Defence Minister Vandeput to discuss security and defence cooperation between the two countries. Their meeting highlighted the enduring ties between the UK and Belgium, particularly the UK's commitment to NATO.

The Defence Secretary later toured the Esterline factory in Kortrijk, which specialises in display screens for use in military aircraft.

In the afternoon, a National Service of Remembrance took place at the Welsh Memorial in Flanders organised by the Welsh Government's First World War Programming Committee. This Service of Remembrance commemorated 100-years since the 38th (Welsh) Division attacked the German held frontline on the Pilckem Ridge at the beginning of the Third Battle of Ypres.

[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.

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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 Ingsstad 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.

[RAF Typhoons test NATO ground based air defence capability](#)

ROYAL AIR FORCE TYPHOONS TEST NATO GROUND BASED AIR DEFENCE CAPABILITY

Royal

Air Force (RAF) Typhoon aircraft have been playing their part in a multinational exercise to test NATO's capability to command and control ground based systems to defend the skies.

RAF

Typhoons are deployed to Romania as part of the NATO enhanced Air Policing in partnership with Romania. However there are other dimensions to securing the skies above NATO and the RAF has been playing its part with training sorties to help the UK, Romanian and US forces deployed on Exercise Tobruq Legacy at Capu Midia firing range near Constanta.



In the work up before live firing exercises one of the Typhoon pilots from 3(F) Squadron said: "We gave them two targets today. We came at them from different angles and from different heights. We fly directly towards them. It gives them a chance to use the system to lock onto our aircraft and then we do a couple of evasive turns to test them to their maximum ability."

He added: "It's not an opportunity they are going to get very often to get to track and target a Typhoon. It's a good opportunity to work across the nations."

Exercise Tobruq Legacy is an NATO exercise involving 2200 personnel and over 800 vehicles in Lithuania, Romania and the Czech Republic. The purpose is to improve the level of interoperability of multinational Surface-Based Air and Missile Defence systems forces.



3(F) Squadron from Coningsby in Lincolnshire is deployed to Mihail Kogalniceanu air base near Constanta in Eastern Romania as part of the RAF's 135 Expeditionary Air Wing on a NATO mission to enhance Air Policing over Romania.

Enhanced air policing is part of the Assurance Measures introduced in 2014 to reassure members how NATO provides the cornerstone of collective defence.

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[RAF Lossiemouth supports MSP fact finding mission](#)

RAF LOSSIEMOUTH SUPPORTS MSP FACT FINDING MISSION

RAF

Lossiemouth welcomed representatives of the Scottish Parliament to the UK's most northerly fast jet fighter station today, Thursday, 27 July 2017.

The

Presiding Officer, Members and Officials headed to the Moray better understand

the range of social and welfare policies and how these affect armed forces families.



MSPs

have already visited the Army's Glencorse Barracks in Penicuik in June, and a

visit to the Navy's Royal Marine Commando site in Arbroath is planned for November.

Air

Officer Scotland, Air Vice-Marshal Ross Paterson said:

"Our

Parliamentary visitors will hear how RAF Lossiemouth's Quick Reaction Alert interceptors help protect the nation's airspace, and discover how £400m is being invested on site to make us ready for the arrival of our new Maritime Patrol Aircraft fleet, beginning in 2020.



"Most

importantly, they will meet with our people and their families, including visiting our Childcare Centre, to better understand the particular needs of service families.

"This

is an opportunity to showcase the contribution of the RAF in Scotland to both national security and also how we contribute to Scotland's Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) agenda through our schools' outreach programme."

During

their visit the Parliamentary group visited Typhoon flight simulators and aircraft, a parachute simulator and found out about the work of the RAF's mountain rescue team.



Led

by the Scottish Parliament's Presiding Officer, Ken McIntosh MSP, and chief

executive, Sir Paul Grice, the attending MSPs were:

- Bill
Bowman, Con, North East Scotland

- Finlay
Carson, Con, Galloway and West Dumfries

- Jackson
Carlaw, Con, Eastwood

- Jamie
Green, Con, West Scotland

- Daniel
Johnson, Lab, Edinburgh Southern

- Richard
Lochhead, SNP, Moray

- Lewis
MacDonald, Lab, North East Scotland

- Graham
Simpson, Lab, Central Scotland

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