

War Detectives to trace descendants following return of partial WW1 casualty remains

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The partial remains of 72 British soldiers who served and died during the First World War have been returned to France from a museum collection.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission's (CWGC) recovery unit in France has received the partial remains and will now arrange their interment.

The remains will be placed in the existing grave of each individual at the CWGC's Mont Huon Military Cemetery, France.

They have been safely returned to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in France, where they will be placed in the existing casualty graves at Mont Huon Military Cemetery near Dieppe where they will continue to be cared for by the CWGC, in perpetuity, with the utmost respect.

The partial remains of 12 British personnel who survived the First World War and therefore are not buried in a military ceremony, have also been returned to CWGC in France for subsequent interment.

The Ministry of Defence Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre – known as the War Detectives – will now attempt to trace and contact any living descendants and in time arrange a blessing service.

Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre caseworker Nicola Nash, said:

“We in the MOD War Detectives team will work diligently to trace and contact the relatives of those whose remains have been returned to the care of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

“For each of the 72 in this case, as with all the fallen we identify, we will attempt to build family trees and then, using publicly available sources, identify surviving next of kin. Ultimately, we will attempt to contact each family in the hope of providing them with a respectful and fitting conclusion to their relative's story.”

The partial remains were originally transferred from a military hospital in France shortly after the First World War for scientific study, which was common practice at the time.

The remains have been securely stored by the Mütter Museum and Historical Medical Library in Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

The CWGC was informed of their existence in late September 2025, and it immediately undertook the necessary detailed and meticulous work with the museum to verify their origin and status, confirming many of these remains belong to British war casualties who are already buried and cared for by the CWGC within Mont Huon Military Cemetery in France.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission has worked closely with the museum and the Ministry of Defence to ensure that each set of remains is treated with the utmost respect.

CWGC Director of Commemorations Richard Hills said:

“We have worked closely with the museum and the Ministry of Defence to ensure that each set of remains is treated with the utmost respect. This work forms an essential part of the Commission’s ongoing commitment to care for all who served and died in the world wars, reflecting its enduring mission to honour all who rest in its care and ensure they are appropriately commemorated now, and for generations to come.”

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<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/war-detectives-to-trace-descendants-following-return-of-partial-ww1-casualty-remains>