Graves of two Midlands World War 1 soldiers identified in France

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The graves of two British soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice during the First World War were formally rededicated today in France.

Rededication services were held for Captain (Capt) Martin Warren, of Worcester, at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) Pargny British Cemetery, and for Lance Corporal (LCpl) Arthur Mantle, of Nottingham, at CWGC Joncourt East British Cemetery near Saint Quentin.

Organised by the Ministry of Defence's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC), also known as the MOD War Detectives, the services were led by Father Terkura Igbe CF, Chaplain to 1st Battalion The Mercian Regiment. Serving soldiers from 4th Battalion The Mercian Regiment and The Rifles were also in attendance.

Rosie Barron, JCCC Caseworker, said:

> It has been an honour to work with The Mercian Regiment to arrange these rededication services today. Both Capt Warren and LCpl Mantle were just 20 years old when they died in the last year of the First World War. Until now their families have not known where their loved ones were buried. It is important to honour the memories of these men and for their families to know that they are resting peacefully amongst their comrades.

Father Terkura Igbe CF added:

> I am convinced that the greatest of society, and indeed of nations, is constructed on the genuine sacrifices of individuals who understand the importance of values and the call to duty. At the prime of their lives, Capt Warren and LCpl Mantle were involved in a history-making event that would be one of the key defining moments on the European continent. Today, they are physically no longer, but spiritually they are among us. I am privileged to be part of these re-dedication services in honour of our fallen comrades as their memories are now consolidated through the mark of known headstones.

Capt Martin Warren

Capt Martin Warren was born in Worcester on 7 May 1897. He was educated at King's School Worcester and worked in the laboratory at Hill, Evans & Co Vinegar Factory. He was Commissioned into 5th Battalion The Worcestershire Regiment in May 1915, on his 18th birthday. He arrived on the Western Front in November 1915, and was attached to 1st Battalion The Worcestershire Regiment, and rose to the rank of captain before the German Spring Offensive of March 1918.

On 24 March 1918, the 1st Battalion was holding a line of defence along the Somme Canal at Pargny. Capt Warren was mortally wounded during heavy fighting. He was 20 years old. A wartime letter from a chaplain described how:

‘Martin was killed on the retreat from the Somme Canal. He was constantly doing exceedingly good work, having first to protect the retirement of another Division and then counter-attack. Later we slowly retired to the third position and he was mortally wounded and had to be left behind. His death is greatly lamented. He was the life and soul of our mess, He was my organist and chief helper. His courage and keenness were a great example and encouragement to others. He was always the first to start sports and games when we were in rest. He was the truest type of Englishman that one can ever wish to meet.’

His body was initially buried by German forces. After the war, his remains were moved to Pargny British Cemetery and interred as an unknown captain of The Worcestershire Regiment. He was previously commemorated on the Pozieres Memorial.

Today’s service was attended by his great-nephew, Paul Watkins, who said:

> We are deeply honoured to represent Capt Martin Warren’s family at his rededication ceremony. We feel a deep sense of pride knowing that our Great Uncle has finally been identified and is now properly laid to rest with the dignity of a named headstone. It is a privilege to lay a wreath in recognition of his ultimate sacrifice.
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> Our mother, Pamela Watkins, née Warren, was Capt Warren’s niece. Orphaned as a very young child, she grew up knowing very little about her relatives. As a result, our understanding of this side of our family has been limited. We are now enjoying the journey of discovering more about our family’s history. The ceremony at the beautiful Pargny Cemetery will remain in our hearts forever.
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> We are deeply thankful to everyone who has worked so diligently to identify our Great Uncle’s final resting place and trace our family.

Paul Watkins, the great nephew of Captain Warren stands at his graveside with the military party (Crown Copyright)

LCpl Arthur Mantle

LCpl Arthur Mantle was born in Nottingham in early 1898 and served with 1/8th Battalion The Sherwood Foresters (Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment). Following the Allied attack near Amiens on 8 August 1918, the stalemate of the Western Front was broken and the German Army was rapidly pushed back eastwards. On 3 October 1918, the 1/8th Battalion took part in the assault east of Joncourt. During fierce fighting near the villages of Ramicourt and Montbrehain, the battalion was forced to withdraw, and LCpl Mantle was killed in action at the age of 20.

His remains were recovered and buried in Joncourt East British Cemetery as an unknown lance corporal of the Sherwood Foresters. He was previously commemorated on the Vis-en-Artois Memorial.

LCpl Mantle’s great-nephew, Kevin Shakespeare, attended the service and said:

> My family and myself were amazed when JCCC contacted us regarding the identification and rededication service being arranged for Lance Corporal Arthur Mantle. I am proud

> and honoured to have been able to attend Arthur's service and pay respect to him and his brave comrades who paid such a heavy price which has allowed me to live such a privileged life. May they rest in peace.

The service for Lance Corporal Mantle was attended by his great nephew Kevin Shakespeare - third from left. (Crown Copyright)

The identification of both men's graves followed detailed submissions from researchers to the CWGC. After further analysis by the CWGC, the National Army Museum, and JCCC, the evidence was confirmed, allowing the Commission to restore their names to their places of rest.

The CWGC has now installed new headstones bearing their names and will care for their graves in perpetuity.

Director of the Commemorations at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Richard Hills said:

> We are honoured to be able to place new headstones over the graves of Captain Martin Warren and Lance Corporal Arthur Mantle. It is important that, wherever possible, every soldier who died is commemorated by name, and today we reaffirm our commitment to care for their graves in perpetuity.

https://www.gov.uk/government/news/graves-of-two-midlands-world-war-1-soldiers-identified-in-france