DNA test identifies Essex soldier of the Great War

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Private (Pte) Reginald Joesph Blake, from Tendring, Essex, was buried in France today nearly 110 years after he went missing in action.

Pte Reginald Joseph Blake, of 11th Battalion The Essex Regiment, was laid to rest yesterday (22 April 2026) at a burial service organised by MOD's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC), also known as the 'War Detectives'. The service took place at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's (CWGC) Loos British Cemetery Extension, which was opened in September 2024.

JCCC Caseworker, Rosie Barron said:

> It has been a privilege to work with 1st Battalion The Royal Anglian Regiment to organise the burial service for Pte Blake today. His family now have answers as to what happened to 'Uncle Joe' after nearly 110 years of him being missing. Although his family was not able to join us today, I know that this has been a great comfort to them and has revived his memory. May he now rest in peace alongside his comrades.

Pte Blake's remains were recovered in 2020 during the construction of a hospital on the outskirts of Lens. DNA testing, coordinated by JCCC, confirmed his identity. His nephew, Bryan Blake, provided the DNA sample that made identification possible.

Bryan Blake said:

> My sister and I believe we are the last remaining relatives of Joe. We are sad that such a young life was taken, and grateful for the dedicated work of the JCCC and CWGC giving the recognition, and final resting place he deserves.

Pte Blake's coffin was carried to the grave by serving soldiers of The Royal Anglian Regiment (Crown Copyright)

The services were supported by serving soldiers from 1st Battalion The Royal Anglian Regiment and were conducted by their Chaplain, the Reverend Joseph Roberts CF. A Trumpeter from The Band of The Royal Yorkshire Regiment also supported the services.

Reverend Joseph Roberts CF said:

> The Essex Regiment's lineage lives on within the 1st Battalion The Royal Anglian Regiment, which makes it an even greater privilege, and a deeply solemn honour (as their chaplain) to conduct this burial for Pte Blake. Standing alongside personnel of Essex Company, who continue to carry this proud identity forward, we recognise the significance of laying him to rest with comrades who also made the ultimate sacrifice for

> the freedoms and liberties we cherish. Today, we ensure that Pte Blake's story is remembered with honour and with gratitude. May he abide in eternal peace.

Soldiers from 1st Battalion The Royal Anglian Regiment lay Pte Blake to rest (Crown Copyright)

On 21 April 2026 a burial service was also held at CWGC Warlencourt British Cemetery for an unknown soldier found on the Somme. Another unknown soldier was buried yesterday afternoon (22 April 2026) also at CWGC Loos British Cemetery Extension having been found near Arras.

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

> Today's ceremony stands as a powerful reminder that our duty endures, and our work continues and is as important today as when we were first founded. Private Blake's grave will be cared for with dignity and respect, in perpetuity.

https://www.gov.uk/government/news/dna-test-identifies-essex-soldier-of-the-great-war