Identification Cases

This document guides researchers wishing to submit a case for the identification of a casualty who is currently commemorated on one of the CWGC’s Memorials to the Missing.

Substantiating claims for the identities of buried servicemen can be extremely difficult owing to the passage of time and the limited number of surviving official documents. Careful investigations were conducted at the time of burial so to overturn a decision, CWGC usually require new evidence not available to those who conducted the original enquiry. Requests for a Special Memorial, where the case does not relate to a specific grave, are not usually considered.

The CWGC’s policy, in agreement with the Member Governments is that the remains of Commonwealth war dead should be allowed to rest in peace. Therefore, exhumation for the purposes of DNA sampling will not be considered.

How do I submit a case?

1. Please submit your case by email to the CWGC Commemorations Team at commemorations@cwgc.org
2. You will receive a Case Reference to use in all correspondence with us.
3. Your submission will be reviewed by a CWGC Commemorations Case Officer who will consider the evidence submitted in conjunction with any additional material available from the CWGC archives.
   - If the case has merit i.e. all the evidence supports the case for identification, it will be forwarded to the Service Authorities for further investigation and then for Adjudication.
   - If the case has some merit but requires further evidence, the enquirer may be asked to address areas of concern and resubmit a revised case.
   - If the case is not clear and convincing, there are significant omissions or contradictions, it will be rejected.
   - If the case is rejected the enquirer may submit an appeal only if they locate new or additional evidence that addresses the reason(s) for rejection.
4. CWGC receive a large number of cases each year. There is currently a significant backlog so please be prepared for it to take us some time to review your case. We appreciate your patience and will update you as soon as we can.

What research do I need to include?

As well as proving the link between the candidate and the unidentified casualty, it’s equally important to discount all other potential candidates from the investigation. Every case is unique, but the following aspects should usually be addressed:

1. What evidence is already known regarding the identity of the unknown casualty and where did the information originate? e.g. a rank, regiment or date of death now on the headstone, came from an original grave marker.
2. What evidence is there to show the place of death or original burial of the casualty? E.g. CWGC concentration records.
3. Is the recovery location recorded as a battlefield cemetery, German cemetery etc? Why would the unknown casualty have been at that location? E.g. buried by the German authorities.
4. Is the date of death likely to be accurate? Could dates of death for POWs be burial, rather than death dates?
5. Is there an explanation as to why an identification was not made post-war? E.g. manual searches would not have been possible if the first letters of a surname weren’t known/incorrect.
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6. Who are the potential candidates? Are the main sources of information e.g. MIC, Medal Roll, SDGW, Service Record, Soldiers Effects, for each of them consistent in reporting their date of death, rank and unit?

7. Could there be any doubt about what rank or regimental insignia the unknown casualty or any of the candidates were wearing when they died?

8. Can you find evidence to place the candidate(s) at the location that the casualty was originally buried or recovered from? Can you exclude all the other candidates based on their location and/or circumstances of death?

9. If the last reported location of the candidate differs from the recovery/burial location of the unknown casualty is there any evidence of medical evacuation or an alternative explanation for the discrepancy?

What evidence should I include and how should I reference it?

Clear and convincing evidence from official documentary sources must be provided to validate your case.

You should consider:

- Why was the source created, who was it intended for and does that impact on how reliable it may be?
- Are reports from individuals e.g. Red Cross interviews, supported by other accounts and are multiple accounts consistent?
- Is the evidence open to different interpretation? E.g. if an account refers to a geographical feature e.g. ‘the hill’, or a direction e.g. ‘in front of’ have you considered whether there was more than one hill or which direction was being faced?
- Have you been able to source a map (s) from a relevant date rather than a generic location map, as this may provide more specific detail?

Fully referenced copies of all evidence must be included with the submission. This includes primary sources, reference books, published articles and authoritative online sources.

- CWGC must be able to independently verify all the evidence submitted.
- Un-cited resources or hearsay cannot be accepted as official evidence e.g. ‘I’ve read that the battalion were involved in fighting near to Ypres’.
- Evidence must be
  - Referenced
  - From a reputable source
  - A copy of the original, not just a transcript
  - Translated if necessary

References should include:

- Primary sources - a title, archive reference numbers and page numbers if relevant. If sourced online include web address:
  E.g. Battalion War Diary of the 1st Battalion Welsh Guards, September 1916. WO95/1224/1
discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C7351854
- Books - Author, the title of book, the edition, the place of publication, the publisher, the year of publication and the relevant page numbers:
- Websites - Author or organisation, a title and the web address:
  E.g. CWGC. Army Fatalities, France: 16 July 1916. https://www.cwgc.org/find/find-war-dead