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COMMONWEALTH
WAR GRAVES
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COMMEMORATIONS POLICY

How we Commemorate War Dead

25 August 2020

Policy History

Version	Date	Amendment	Approved By
1	25/08/2020	All content regarding CWGC's approach to commemoration collated into one policy.	Policy and Commemorations Group

Next Review

This policy is reviewed every three years. The next review of this policy is scheduled to commence in August 2023.

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1 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to define how the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) will commemorate war dead.

2 Scope

This policy defines the approach to commemorating all those who are eligible, across all our locations.

It does not include details of eligibility. Please refer to [Commemoration Policy: Eligibility Criteria for Commemoration](#) for this information.

3 Definitions

Alternative Commemoration	Commemoration of a war casualty at a location other than the place of burial.
Cemetery	Includes civil cemeteries and churchyards.
Civilian War Casualty	Non-military casualties who are eligible for commemoration. Excludes members of recognised civilian organisations whose manner of death qualifies them for commemoration as war dead.
Joint or Collective Grave	Grave containing two or more war casualties.
Common Grave	A grave containing multiple burials, often including war casualties and civilians. The burial rights of these graves are typically owned by the cemetery, not privately held.
Grave Marker	Includes headstones and pedestal markers.
Member Government	Governments that fund the CWGC, namely the governments of the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and India.
Next-of-Kin	A war casualty's spouse, parent, sibling or child (except where expressly stated otherwise).
War Cemetery	A cemetery or cemetery plot owned or granted in perpetuity to CWGC for the burial of Commonwealth war dead.
War Dead/ War Casualty	Those eligible for commemoration, excluding civilian war casualties.
War Periods	References to serving in World War One or World War Two mean service at any time during the official war periods stated below: World War One: 4 August 1914 to 31 August 1921 (dates inclusive). World War Two: 3 September 1939 to 31 December 1947 (dates inclusive).

4 Role of the Commission

In accordance with our Royal Charter, the role of CWGC is to take responsibility for the:

- marking and care of the graves of those who served with the Commonwealth armed forces (including specified auxiliary and civilian organisations) and lost their lives in the First or Second World War;
- commemoration of those whose graves are unknown or cannot be maintained, or whose remains were lost, buried at sea or cremated; and
- maintenance of records and registers of those who died.

5 Principles of Commemoration

We commemorate war dead of the First and Second World Wars in accordance with the following principles:

- each casualty should be commemorated by name on a headstone or memorial;
- each casualty should have a single point of commemoration;
- headstones and memorials should be permanent;
- headstones should be uniform; and
- there should be equality of treatment for war dead, irrespective of rank or religion.

6 Determining the Form of Commemoration

The form of commemoration depends on the circumstances surrounding a casualty's death and their place of burial. The decision on the appropriate form of commemoration is made in accordance with this policy and CWGC's procedure [Determining the Form of Commemoration](#).

7 War Graves

Wherever possible, war dead are commemorated with an approved CWGC grave marker directly over the place of burial.

7.1 Approved Grave Markers

The most common grave marker is the standard CWGC headstone. Other commonly used grave markers include pedestal markers surmounted by a bronze plaque or stone tablets.

For a full list of approved grave markers, including images and specifications, refer to CWGC's [Headstone Guidelines](#).

7.2 Non-Standard Grave Markers

Other grave markers may be permitted to meet the specific needs of the site or to accommodate the wishes of the site owner. These cases will be considered on an individual basis.

7.3 Headstone Layout and Inscriptions

CWGC grave markers have a consistent layout to maintain a sense of uniformity. All grave markers include as much of the following details as available about the war casualty, generally in the order listed below:

- badge of the regiment or service that they were serving with at the time of their death (or their national emblem);
- number and rank;
- initials and surname;
- honours and awards;
- name of the regiment or service that they were in service with at the time of their death;
- date of death and age;
- religious emblem (unless the next-of-kin chose not to have a religious emblem); and
- personal inscription (where permitted and requested, see Section 8 for more details).

7.4 Headstone Inscriptions for Unidentified Casualties

Grave markers of unidentified war dead are marked with the inscription 'KNOWN UNTO GOD' and as many of the details above that are known. A religious emblem is included, typically a Latin Cross, unless there is evidence to suggest the casualty was non-Christian.

7.5 Religious Emblem for Headstones with Multiple Casualties

Religious emblems will not be included on headstones that commemorate more than one war casualty. An exception may be made if:

- all the casualties on the grave marker are known to have been of the same faith; and
- there is sufficient space available on the marker.

7.6 Headstone Language

CWGC grave markers are engraved in English, as this is the shared language of the Commonwealth. Exceptions to this are:

- personal inscriptions, which may be in any language, as requested by the next-of-kin; and
- new and replacement headstones for Canadian war dead, which may be engraved in English or French, depending on the first language of the war casualty (refer to CWGC's policy *Language on Headstones of Canadian War Casualties*).

7.7 Aliases

An alias may be used on a war casualty's grave marker if there is evidence that clearly indicates the casualty served under a different name (forenames and/or surname) to that they were given at birth, or that they were officially known as during their civilian life. This does not apply to forenames that were dropped or the order changed.

Refer to CWGC's [Alias Names Guideline](#) on how the policy on aliases is applied.

8 Personal Inscriptions

A war casualty's next-of-kin are entitled to request a short personal inscription to be included on the grave marker (refer to CWGC's [Headstone Guidelines](#) for length restrictions).

The exception to this is New Zealand war graves, which are not permitted to have personal inscriptions, as decided by the New Zealand government.

Personal inscriptions may be in any language chosen by the next-of-kin. The inscription should not include references to family members or circumstances that the casualty would not have known, or repeat details engraved elsewhere on the grave marker e.g. date of death.

The table below details the circumstances where new personal inscriptions may be permitted.

Type	Conditions	Cost
New burials or identifications.	Offered to the closest relative as determined by the relevant government.	Free.
First time contacts.	<p>Offered if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a current next-of-kin* specifically asks for a personal inscription to be added; and our documentation establishes that we failed to contact the next-of-kin at the time of preparing the headstone (e.g. for a First World War casualty no next-of-kin is listed on our headstone schedules or register, or for a Second World War casualty the final verification form was not returned or actioned). <p>* A request may be accepted from a relative directly descended from a war casualty's next-of-kin, if they can demonstrate that exceptional circumstances led to the family not replying to us at the time.</p>	Free.

8.1 Altering Existing Personal Inscriptions

Existing personal inscriptions will not be altered, except in the circumstances detailed in the table below.

Circumstance	Cost
To correct an error.	Free.
If requested by relatives who have the agreement of the next-of-kin named on our final verification form.	Repayment basis.
If requested by the next-of-kin of the new burial, to add details of additional burials made in family graves in the United Kingdom.	Free, unless the work requires the existing grave marker to be replaced, in which case it will be undertaken on a repayment basis.

8.2 Approval of Personal Inscriptions

Final approval of personal inscriptions is at the discretion of the CWGC's Commemorations Policy Manager. Where a proposed personal inscription is unusual or contentious in some way, the decision will be submitted to CWGC's Policy and Commemorations Group for final approval.

9 Alternative Commemoration

Alternative commemorations are used when:

- we cannot mark or maintain a registered war grave;
- a burial is known to be in a particular area, but the specific location is unknown; or
- the specific burial location is known but is a common grave (an exception may apply if specifically requested by the next-of-kin - see [Section 15](#)).

In these circumstances, commemoration will be via special memorial headstone or screen wall. See below for more detail on these forms of alternative commemoration.

An alternative commemoration will only be used if non-disturbance of the grave can be assured. If there is a risk to the grave, exhumation may be considered (refer [Commemorations Policy: Caring for War Dead and Our Graves](#)). If an alternative commemoration is used, the grave location will continue to be inspected to ensure the remains are not disturbed.

Decisions to use an alternative commemoration are determined in accordance with CWGC's [Alternative Commemoration Procedure](#).

9.1 Special Memorials (Headstones or Pedestal Markers)

The CWGC approved headstone or pedestal marker are used for special memorials and include an explanatory inscription. Refer [Appendix A](#) for the approved inscriptions for new special memorials and the circumstances where each inscription will be used.

Replacement special memorials will use the original inscription, regardless of whether that inscription is one currently approved.

9.2 Screen Wall or Wall Plaque

A screen wall is used when the number of war dead to be commemorated makes the use of special memorials impractical, or where specific arrangements were requested by the cemetery authority.

Wall plaques may be used to commemorate fewer than six casualties if required due to local conditions.

Wherever possible, the screen wall or plaque will be erected in the same location as the graves. If this is not possible, it will be erected in the closest cemetery or churchyard, subject to the approval of the cemetery authority.

9.3 Unmaintainable Graves

A war grave may be classified as unmaintainable if it:

- no longer operates as a cemetery and is under imminent threat from development or desecration;
- is neglected and derelict, and there is no foreseeable prospect of resuming adequate maintenance;
- is inaccessible to the general public including due to war or political unrest; or
- its location is in doubt.

Commemoration will be a special memorial. Wherever possible these memorials are located within a CWGC cemetery or plot, or as an annex to an existing Memorial to the Missing.

A decision to classify a site as unmaintainable must be made in accordance with CWGC's [Alternative Commemoration Procedure](#).

9.4 Relocating Alternative Commemorations

Except where expressly prohibited (refer [Appendix A](#)), alternative commemorations may be relocated within a cemetery, in accordance CWGC's [Alternative Commemoration Procedure](#).

9.5 Reversing an Alternative Commemoration

If it becomes possible to revert the point of commemoration back the grave, the alternative commemoration will be reversed, in accordance with CWGC's [Alternative Commemoration Procedure](#).

10 Private Memorials

Some war graves are marked by private memorial, generally because the casualty's family declined the offer of a CWGC headstone as they had already, or intended to, mark the grave with their own memorial. We do not own private memorials and are not responsible for their upkeep or repair.

A private memorial is an adequate commemoration if the casualty's initial and surname are legible.

10.1 Replacement of Private Memorial with a CWGC Headstone

We will seek permission from the grave owner and/or the cemetery or church authority to replace a private memorial with a CWGC grave marker if:

- the casualty's name becomes illegible;
- the private memorial is removed by the family or local authority; or
- a relative requests a CWGC headstone, regardless of the condition of the private memorial.

The headstone will be provided without charge if it is CWGC's first marking of the grave.

10.2 Private Memorials which make no mention of a War Casualty

Where a private memorial does not mention (by initial and surname) a war casualty known to be buried in the grave, unless specifically asked not to, we will seek permission from the grave owner and/or the cemetery or church authority to erect a CWGC grave marker, either in place of or in addition to the private memorial.

If permission is obtained and the private memorial remains, a small Gallipoli marker will be placed directly on the grave. CWGC grave markers must not be installed adjacent to or obscuring the private memorial.

Where permission to mark the grave cannot be obtained, alternative commemoration will be used. The grave will continue to be inspected to ensure that it can be located and is not at risk of disturbance.

10.3 Private Memorials in War Cemeteries

Private memorials are not permitted in war cemeteries.

Where private memorials are present in war cemeteries due to historical decisions, when the private memorial requires replacement, it will be replaced with a CWGC grave marker.

11 Memorials to the Missing

War dead with no known grave are commemorated on an appropriate memorial to the missing. Refer to [Appendix B](#) for the types of memorial to the missing and who they commemorate.

12 Cremated Casualties

12.1 Member Countries except India

In member countries except India, cremated war dead are commemorated at the crematorium, regardless of where the ashes were strewn. If ashes are buried in a registered grave (not strewn in a designated ashes garden or similar) it is considered a burial within that cemetery and no reference is made to cremation in the cemetery register.

If a casualty is known to have been cremated but the location of the cremation is unknown, commemoration will be on an appropriate memorial to the missing.

12.2 India and Non-Member Countries

Most cremations in India and non-member countries are for war dead of the Hindu and Sikh faiths. Commemoration is by name on the Cremation Memorial in the war cemetery or plot closest to the original Indian Army burning ghat. War dead commemorated on Cremation Memorials are classified as burials within the cemetery in which the memorial is sited.

There are instances where Hindu war dead were buried, and the grave marked by a standard CWGC grave marker. If it became necessary to exhume such a grave, wherever practical, arrangements will be made for cremation and commemoration on the appropriate Cremation Memorial.

13 Maidenhead Register

Non-Commonwealth nationals who served with Commonwealth forces and were repatriated to their home countries post-war are recorded on the Maidenhead Register.

For these casualties, the form of commemoration is via CWGC's online casualty database. As these casualties have been repatriated, their graves are not within our care.

14 Civilian War Dead Roll of Honour

Eligible civilians are commemorated on the Civilian War Dead Roll of Honour, held at Westminster Abbey. We are not responsible for the marking or care of the graves of civilian war dead.

15 Common Graves

War dead buried in a common grave will be alternatively commemorated on a screen wall.

Marking of an individual grave will only be considered if specifically requested by the next-of-kin, or if it becomes appropriate due to a change in circumstances in the burial ground. The grave would only be marked if the:

- grave can be individually identified and marked; and
- relevant burial authority gives approval.

16 Joint or Collective War Graves

16.1 Joint Graves

Joint graves contain two war dead and will be marked as detailed in the table below.

Form of Grave	Grave Marker
Single grave containing co-mingled remains.	Single headstone commemorating both individuals.
Single grave usually dug to extra depth containing two separate burials.	
Adjoining grave spaces containing two war dead, whose remains are co-mingled.	Two headstones, one for each casualty, that are touching.

16.2 Collective Graves

Collective graves contain three or more war dead and are either:

- a single grave space containing co-mingled remains;
- a single grave containing individual burials at different levels;
- adjoining grave spaces which contain multiple burials, the remains of all of which are co-mingled; or
- a trench grave (a burial of multiple war dead, shoulder to shoulder, within a continuous trench).

Trench graves are marked by headstones almost or actually touching each other. Each burial will have an individual grave number.

Other collective graves will be marked in a way best suited to the number of war dead and the space available. The preference is, where possible, that separate headstones are erected for all war dead within a collective grave, either:

- marking the actual place of burial for each individual; or
- if the actual place of burial for each casualty is not known, aligned alphabetically by surname, from left to right, at the head of the grave.

Up to three names can be engraved on a standard CWGC headstone. If there are more than three names, two or more headstones be erected at the head of the grave.

17 Double Commemoration

Double commemoration refers to a war casualty being commemorated at two different points e.g. they may have a private memorial on the grave and a CWGC special memorial at another location, or a CWGC grave marker may be on the burial and they are also on a memorial to the missing.

Double commemoration is not permitted and, wherever possible, the second commemoration will be removed as soon as reasonably practical.

Where there are instances of historical double commemorations (e.g. in Canada) these will be permitted to remain until we can seek to correct it as detailed below:

- If the private memorial degrades first, we will seek permission to erect a CWGC grave marker on the grave as a replacement, removing the double commemoration.
- If the CWGC headstone requires replacement first, we will seek permission to install a Gallipoli Marker on the grave, removing the two points of commemoration.

18 Policy Review and Consultation

All reviews of this policy will be conducted through CWGC's Policy and Commemorations Group. Member governments will be consulted as necessary.

19 Responsibilities

CWGC's **Policy and Commemorations Group** is responsible for overseeing reviews of this policy and approving major policy revisions.

The **Commemorations Policy Manager** is responsible for:

- maintaining this policy and ensuring it is communicated clearly and applied consistently across CWGC and member government service authorities;
- scheduling and leading the review of the policy; and
- ensuring member governments are consulted as necessary on any proposed changes to this policy.

20 Related Documents

Commemorations Policy: Eligibility Criteria for Commemoration.

Commemorations Policy: Caring for War Dead and our Graves.

Determining the Form of Commemoration Procedure.

Headstone Guidelines.

Language on Headstones of Canadian War Dead.

Alias Guidelines.

Alternative Commemoration Procedure.

21 References

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission Charter of Incorporation.

War Graves: How Cemeteries Abroad will be Designed (The Kenyon Report).

Appendix A: Approved Inscriptions for Special Memorials

The table below details the approved inscriptions for new special memorials, including appropriate use, guidance on location and approved inscriptions.

Type	Appropriate Use	Location	Inscription
A	For graves known to be in a particular cemetery, but the specific location in that cemetery cannot be located. ¹	Must be positioned in a way that doesn't give the impression of a false grave.	BURIED ELSEWHERE IN THIS CEMETERY
B	For those known to be buried in certain individual graves, but there is uncertainty about which person is in which grave.	Not permitted to be relocated within the cemetery.	BURIED NEAR THIS SPOT
C	Where there is good reason (but not certainty) to believe a grave is of a particular individual.	Not permitted to be relocated within the cemetery.	BELIEVED TO BE [NAME]
D	Where the original registered grave location was lost or destroyed in later battles (known as the Kipling Memorial). Where there are six or more graves lost or destroyed in a particular location, a headstone (without any superscription) for each individual is erected around or alongside a small stone memorial (known as a Duhallow Block) with an explanatory inscription for all.	Must be positioned in a way that doesn't give the impression of a false grave. These special memorials are not permitted to be relocated within the cemetery.	TO THE MEMORY OF [NAME] BURIED AT THE TIME IN [LOCATION] BUT WHOSE GRAVE IS NOW LOST [or BUT WHOSE GRAVE WAS DESTROYED IN LATER BATTLES] THEIR GLORY SHALL NOT BE BLOTTED OUT
E	For unmaintainable graves where the special memorial is erected in the same town or village of the burial.	Must be positioned in a way that doesn't give the impression of a false grave.	BURIED IN [CEMETERY/CHURCHYARD]
	For unmaintainable graves where the special memorial is erected in a different town or village to the burial.	Must be positioned in a way that doesn't give the impression of a false grave.	BURIED IN [CEMETERY/CHURCHYARD] [TOWN/VILLAGE]

Note 1: *Superscriptions previously, but no longer used for new commemorations, include: "KNOWN TO BE BURIED IN THIS CEMETERY", "BURIED IN THIS CEMETERY", "KNOWN TO BE BURIED IN GRAVE ..." and "BELIEVED TO BE BURIED IN THIS CEMETERY".*

In sites where these superscriptions exist, they will continue to be used on replacement headstones.

Appendix B: Types of Memorials to the Missing

The table below details the different types of memorial to the missing and who they commemorate.

Memorial	Who they Commemorate
Naval Forces Memorials	<p>Commonwealth naval and marine war casualties who were lost or buried at sea.</p> <p>Located at the manning ports of member countries and commemorate all those from a particular manning port, irrespective of the theatre of war or the ship on which they served.</p> <p>Naval personnel who died on shore and who have no known grave are commemorated on special panels on the Naval memorials.</p>
Land Forces Memorials	<p>War casualties of the Commonwealth armies and other Commonwealth land forces.</p> <p>Each memorial commemorates those who died in a particular campaign, or in a particular theatre of war, within certain predetermined dates. The memorial may also commemorate troops who died enroute to a campaign, as long as they belonged to units which had been officially designated to that campaign.</p> <p>Prisoners of war who died in captivity and have no known grave are commemorated on the memorial for the campaign in which they were taken prisoner, even if their death occurred elsewhere and outside the prescribed dates of the campaign.</p>
Air Forces Memorials	<p>Commonwealth Air forces war casualties with no known grave.</p> <p>Each memorial covers a particular theatre of war or the command structure operating in those theatres.</p> <p>May be sited on their own, or form part of a memorial for other services.</p>
Merchant Navy Memorials	<p>Seamen of the Commonwealth Merchant Navies who died as a result of the increased risks of war and who were buried or lost at sea.</p>
National Memorials	<p>War casualties of a single Commonwealth country in a specific theatre of war. Perform the dual role of a national and a campaign memorial e.g. the Vimy Memorial and the Villers Bretonneux Memorial.</p>