



# COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES



## IDENTIFICATION CASE GUIDANCE

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

Substantiating claims for the identities of buried service personnel 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. A high level of proof is still required by CWGC and the military authorities, who remain responsible for the identification of their missing personnel.

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.

Requests for a Special Memorial, where the case does not relate to a specific grave, are not usually considered. As we do not have the same access to the physical evidence that those conducting burials within the constructed cemeteries had, the Commission no longer erects Special Memorials with the superscription 'Believed to be buried in this cemetery'.

### How do I submit a case?

1. Before submitting a case, please read the information on our website including the list of closed and ongoing cases, as well as this guidance in full.
2. Once you have collected all the necessary evidence and prepared your case, submit it to the CWGC Commemorations Team using the online ID Case submission form.
3. If the submission meets our requirements, we will send you a Case Reference to use in all correspondence with us.
4. 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, we may ask you to try to locate additional evidence or address areas of concern and resubmit a revised case.
  - If the case is not clear and convincing, there are significant omissions or contradictions, the case will be rejected.
  - If the case is rejected, you may submit an appeal only if you locate new or additional evidence that addresses the reason(s) for rejection.
5. 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 usually you should address four main aspects: the evidence relating to the grave and the casualty who is buried there; a complete list of all the candidates who share those same details; the evidence which eliminates all but one

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of them from contention; evidence which confirms the proposed candidate's details are consistent with those of the grave and they can be placed in the exact location.

It can be helpful to answer the following questions:

1. What evidence is already known regarding the identity of the unknown casualty (the individual buried in the grave) and where did that 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 the date on the grave marker/headstone be that of burial, rather than death?
5. Is there an explanation as to why an identification was not made post-war? e.g. more than one candidate remained missing at that time.
6. Who are the potential candidates? Are the main official sources of information 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? e.g. officers who were attached to another unit, or casualties who had been promoted just prior to their death.
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?

### Reasons why cases are rejected

To avoid submitting a case which cannot be progressed, please consider the following common issues:

- Identification Cases must relate to a specific grave. We cannot consider cases which are based on a supposition that a candidate is buried in any one of a number of different graves within a cemetery.
- The original record related to a Memorial Cross. We can only consider cases which relate to a registered grave.
- Each document is a snapshot, not the full picture. If the CWGC documents are annotated with an investigation reference, the case is likely to have been considered post war and rejected.
- The case is based on initials on a personal item or marked military equipment. Initials may be those of the wearer of the item, the person who gave it to them, the original owner, or a makers' mark; the initials might be a real name, a nickname or have another meaning. Military equipment was often marked, but frequently re-issued. Therefore, such items were not used by themselves for identification. Cases based on these details cannot be accepted today.



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- Only the proposed candidate has been considered. It is not sufficient for a case to show that the candidate could be buried in the specified grave. The submission must show that all those whose details match the ones known for the grave cannot be buried there.
- The evidence from different sources is contradictory. This is understandable because of the confusion on the battlefield, and the challenges of keeping accurate records during the war. However, for a case to be accepted it must be clear and convincing, so you need to explain any discrepancies.

### 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 eyewitness accounts corroborated by other evidence 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 full copy of the original, not just a single page or 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. WO 95/1224/1  
[discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C7351854](https://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:  
E.g. Smith J. The Cambridge Companion to The Great War. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1991. pp. 19-28.
- 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>