

## **IDENTIFICATION CASE GUIDANCE**

### **WHAT IS AN IDENTIFICATION CASE?**

An Identification Case may only be initiated where a grave is already within the care of the CWGC and is marked with a Commission headstone or marker which does not include the name of the casualty i.e. it includes the text 'Known Unto God'.

The name of the candidate who is being proposed as buried in the grave will currently appear on a CWGC Memorial to the Missing. The only exception is where the candidate is not a Commonwealth casualty, so would instead be commemorated by their own equivalent organisation.

### **WHO CAN FORMALLY IDENTIFY A GRAVE?**

The formal identification of a deceased military casualty, and the re-registration of a CWGC grave are official processes conducted jointly by the appropriate military authority and the Commission.

CWGC policy, in agreement with our 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.

### **CAN A GRAVE BE IDENTIFIED TODAY?**

Yes - a small number of successful identifications are still made each year. But because of the detailed investigations conducted at the time of burial, we will only overturn a historic decision if we have significant new evidence which was not available to those who conducted the original enquiry.

Extensive investigations were conducted both during and after each of the two World Wars to locate those who were known to have been casualties but who remained missing, and to verify the details of those who had registered graves. This included systematic searches of the former battlefields to locate temporary field graves made during conflict and those who had been lost during the fighting but not buried - as well as the formal identification of graves within both military and civil cemeteries.

The formal identification process involved cross-referencing information from casualty lists, burial registers, eyewitness accounts and any physical evidence found during burial, including insignia and other artefacts. A sequence of checks was made to verify the details of each casualty and grave prior to any Commission grave marker or memorial panel being engraved, in accordance with our policies. Unless there was absolute certainty, a grave was not identified by name.

A high level of proof is thus still required to make a formal identification. An incorrect identification means that not only has the casualty in the grave been wrongly named, but if they lie in another grave, or are recovered today from the battlefield, their name will no longer appear on the list of those who are missing.

### **WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE CASUALTY AND THE CANDIDATE?**

- Casualty = the casualty who is buried in the grave in question and whose partial details appear on the grave marker.
- Candidates = all those casualties whose details match to those listed on the grave marker and who are named on a Memorial to the Missing, or Special Memorial.

- Proposed Candidate = the single individual whose circumstances of service and death make them the only viable match to the casualty.

## WILL CWGC INVESTIGATE ALL SUBMISSIONS?

These principles are applied to all potential cases:

- There must be significant new evidence, which was not available to, or can be shown not to have been considered by, the post-war investigation team.
- Cases cannot be accepted based solely on the claim that only one missing candidate matches to the details associated with the casualty buried in the grave.
- It must be possible to place the proposed candidate at the burial/concentration location, not just in the vicinity.
- Positive/corroborative evidence must link the proposed candidate with the grave in question, with no other grave bearing the same details.

Unless a submission meets these principles, an investigation cannot be progressed.

## DO I HAVE A LEGITIMATE CASE?

We do not reconsider cases which are **based on initials on a personal item or marked military equipment** (usually annotated with a case reference e.g. EFX or SWD and struck through on historic CWGC documentation). As these marks are not new evidence and were deemed unreliable, they are not used for identification purposes today.

- Initials are open to interpretation – they might have been a real name or a nickname; they could have been those of the wearer of the item, the person who gave it to them, the original owner, or a makers' mark. Marked military equipment was frequently re-issued to a different soldier. Historically, personal items were only used if its ownership could be independently corroborated. As we do not have access to either the objects or eyewitnesses today, we do not use this as a basis for identification.

Identification Cases must relate to a specific, registered grave i.e. have a CWGC Grave Reference. We are unable to consider cases which:

- **are speculative** – for instance, a claim that a candidate was buried in a cemetery because their comrades lie there. Casualties can be buried many miles from where they were last seen; may have been moved multiple times; or may not have been identifiable.
- **seek to erect a Special Memorial** - a reference found to a candidate having been buried in a cemetery, but they remain missing. The grave may have been lost in later battles, or the reference was to a Memorial Cross rather than a grave. We do not erect new Kipling Memorials or equivalent Special Memorials today.
- **are a search for unrecovered remains** - a reference has been found to a field grave, but the candidate is listed as missing. The battlefields were searched for such graves but not all references were accurate, and some were to Memorial Crosses rather than graves. Please see [Finding and Reburying our war dead](#) for further information about the regulations which apply today.

## WHAT PROCESS SHOULD I FOLLOW?

Please prepare your case according to these guidelines, including copies of properly cited evidence, as per the following detailed guidance:

- Wherever possible your submission should be presented in a single document which includes your contact details.
- All cases, irrespective of the nationality of the casualty or candidate or where you are living, should be sent directly to CWGC using the [ID Case Submission form](#). Unfortunately, we are unable to accept submissions via file sharing links, or those sent by post in hard copy or on media such as CDs or memory sticks.
- Within a month of receipt, we will triage your submission to ensure that it complies with the outlined principles and is accompanied by sufficient evidence.
- We will notify you of the outcome and if appropriate, allocate an ID Case Reference.
- In due course, a CWGC Case Officer will review your submission in detail. This will include not only a complete verification of the evidence you have provided, but a full research investigation as is necessary.
- Depending on the outcome of that investigation, and which of our partner organisations may be involved, we may
  - reject the proposal, if the case is not clear and convincing, or there are significant omissions or contradictions.
  - ask that you try to locate additional evidence or address areas of concern and resubmit a revised case.
  - decide that there is sufficient evidence to progress the case to the next stage. Please note that your submission and contact details will be shared with the relevant partner organisation(s).
- If a case is progressed to a partner organisation, following the conclusion of a second stage investigation, an Adjudication will be reached. Only if the case meets the required standard of proof will a formal identification be made.
- If CWGC or our partners decide at any stage that the case is rejected, we will provide you with a summary of the reasoning behind this. We understand that you may be disappointed if your case is rejected, but ask that you respect the official decision as being final.
- If you locate significant new or additional evidence that specifically addresses the reason(s) for rejection, we may agree to re-open the investigation.
- For an accepted case, wherever possible the current Next of Kin will be traced and officially notified. As a courtesy to the family involved, this may be completed prior to you being updated about the outcome of the case.
- CWGC will arrange for the Commission records to be updated, and a new headstone installed. In some cases, a rededication ceremony may be held. Arrangements will vary according to the protocols of our partner organisations.

## HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?

- We receive hundreds of cases each year, and do currently have a continuing backlog.
- These investigations can be both complex and involve multiple parties. Competing lines of enquiry or interdependent cases may have to be researched before a conclusion can be reached.
- CWGC and our partners have increased the number of staff dedicated to investigating historic cases, of which Identification Cases constitute one aspect. Our investigations include those for casualties we have recently recovered from the battlefields, and cases where very close family members are involved.
- At present it can take up to 5 years for an Identification Case to be resolved. By following this guidance, you can help us to reduce that timeframe and we are grateful for your patience.
- We understand that you will be keen to track the progress of your case. Due to the volume of enquiries, we are not able to provide regular, routine updates but will notify you as soon as a case has been reviewed. If you need to get in touch, please use the [Contact Us](#) link on our website and quote the Identification Case reference.

- A list of Identification Cases which have been opened in the past decade is available on the CWGC website. We suggest you check the list before preparing a case to avoid resubmitting a case which has already been fully investigated, or may already be under review.
- This list provides the details of the cemetery and grave which is the subject of the case, together with the status of the investigation. It does not include the details of the proposed candidate so that descendants are not given the false impression that a grave has already been identified.
- We ask that the privacy of family members is respected. Both the military authorities and CWGC have policies on who we consider to be the official Next of Kin for our specific purposes.
- Some people find research into their family by an unrelated member of the public to be intrusive and attempts to instigate contact can be unwelcome. Please be assured that the authorities will liaise with families and officially notify them as appropriate.

## WHAT SHOULD I INCLUDE IN MY SUBMISSION?

Every case is unique, but you should address four main aspects:

- **Consider the evidence relating to the grave and the casualty who is buried there**
- **Compile a complete list of all the missing candidates who share those same details**
- **Present the evidence which shows that all but one of them could not be buried in the grave**
- **Demonstrate that your proposed candidate's details are consistent with those of the grave, and they can be placed in the exact location.**

These are the type of questions that you should consider, though they may not all be relevant to every case:

- What evidence is already known regarding the identity of the unknown casualty and where did that information originate? Check the rank, regiment or date of death now on the headstone, and how these were established.
- What evidence is there to show the place of death or original burial of the casualty? e.g. the CWGC concentration document. Consider if they might have been moved more than once.
- Why would the unknown casualty have been at that location? Check whether the recovery location was recorded as a battlefield cemetery, a Regimental Aid Post, a German cemetery etc.
- Is the date of death likely to be accurate? Consider if the date on the grave marker/headstone was that of burial, rather than death.
- Can you find an explanation as to why an identification was not made post-war?
- Who are the potential candidates? Confirm the main official sources of information for each of them are consistent in reporting their date of death, rank and unit when they died.
- Could there be any doubt about what rank or regimental insignia the unknown casualty or any of the candidates were wearing when they died? Consider officers who were attached to another unit, or casualties who had been promoted/appointed just prior to their death.
- Based on their location and/or circumstances of death, can you demonstrate that none of the other candidates could have been buried in the grave?
- Can you find evidence to place the candidate(s) at the location where the casualty was originally buried or recovered from?
- 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?

Casualty archive documentation - which can currently be made public - is freely available on the CWGC website. Not all documents have survived; those that have provide snapshots of the process of burial, identification and commemoration rather than the complete picture. A small percentage of documents remain confidential for reasons of privacy, data protection or sensitivity.

## HOW SHOULD I PRESENT MY EVIDENCE?

Please include in your submission the details of the grave and those of all the candidates you have considered, with an explanation as to how you have excluded all but one of them. You should also show how you have linked your proposed candidate to the grave. Your document must include:

- Clear and convincing evidence from official documentary sources, including primary sources, reference books, published articles and authoritative online sources must be used to validate your case.
- Fully referenced copies of all evidence must be included in your submission. For large official records such as war diaries, you only need to include key extracts, providing the full document is also accessible.
- Links to websites may be added for ease of reference, but material must be included in the submission as content may be removed or the website closed.
- CWGC must be able to independently verify all the evidence submitted.
- We appreciate receiving translations of documents in any language other than English.

You should additionally take into consideration:

- 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?
- 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'.

References should include:

- **Primary sources** - a title, archive reference numbers and page numbers if relevant. If sourced online, please include the 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>