**CWGC are launching a new project to encourage young people to discover and learn about the war dead of the First and Second World Wars who are buried and commemorated in the UK.**

Many CWGC cemeteries and memorials in the UK have links to the air forces (RFC, RAF, RNAS, FAA) so developing links between these sites and local cadet units will be a key aim, as well as encouraging units to locate their local sites and air force casualties.

**Objective:**

To encourage all air cadets and staff across RAFAC to gain a better understanding of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC), their objectives and activities and the stories of those in the air forces who lost their lives during the First and Second World Wars.

**Background:**

On 18 Jan 2021, a joint research programme was launched by the RAF Air Cadets and the CWGC, as one of several initiatives launched in the Air Cadet’s 80th anniversary year[[1]](#footnote-1) [[2]](#footnote-2).

The programme is an opportunity for all air cadets to discover the war dead commemorated near to where they live. Every Air Cadet will be encouraged to research a local casualties of war and share what they have learned with family, friends and in their community.

**Project Overview**

1. CWGC will deliver talks to cadet units via the *Kantor Speakers Programme* to inform them about the work of the CWGC
2. CWGC will assist in a research project into local air force burials/commemorations,
3. Supported by our Public Engagement Coordinators (PECs) and CWGC volunteer guides we will encourage cadets to visit our cemeteries
4. We will encourage cadets to participate in our #ShareYourTribute campaign on social media, as well as sharing their research within their own communities as part of *War Graves Week* each May.
5. **CWGC Talks – Kantor Speakers Programme\***

To begin their involvement in the project, each unit will receive a talk about the history and work of the CWGC. These will be delivered by CWGCs Public Engagement Coordinators and volunteer speakers. The talks will introduce the CWGC to the cadets as well as introduce the aim and objectives of the project. The talk can be delivered face to face or via virtual platforms. Once a unit has received the talk, it will be able to begin phase two of the project.

\*Additional talks on a range of themes are also be available if a unit would like to learn more about the CWGC.

Talks will be booked on behalf of units by the Wing officers. It is expected that all talks will be conducted by end of Mach 2021. Following presentations, CWGCs regional Public Engagement Coordinators (PEC) will contact units to offer additional support for the remaining phases of the project. This will be done by email.

1. **Research project**

Following the talk, each cadet will be tasked with researching at least one air force casualty who is buried locally, creating a profile about that individual’s life. They will then be able to use this information to discover more about the role of these individuals during the world wars as well as learning more about the impact on the local community.

This phase is expected to run from March to May.

Downloadable ‘bitesize guides’ will be available to support and guide them through the research process. Guidance will also be given during the talk and be available via the CWGC website. The aim is for the research project to develop the following skills;

* Research
* Analysis
* Recording, collating and selecting information
* Problem solving
* Decision making

Units should aspire to involve the wider community as well, through the research or through the presentation of the projects (see #4). This section can also contribute to the Skills Section of the DofE Award.

1. **Site visits**

Either as a pre-cursor to the research project, or as a result of the research project, CWGC will encourage all units to visit one of the CWGC sites in their region. CWGC can provide guides to support a visit, or material to support an independent visit.

1. **Sharing their knowledge and experience**

A key part of the project is this final element. We would like every cadet to share what they have researched, discovered, and learned with a wider audience. This can be with their peers, or ideally with the wider community. They can look to explore their findings in a publicly accessible event (e.g. presentation, small exhibition within the Squadron, small ceremony within the cemetery or an article in the local press). Cadets will also be able to post research on social media using the tag #ShareYourTribute, as well as post on the CWGC’s dedicated online Wall of Remembrance.

A dedicated section of the CWGC website will be available from the end of April 2021 to capture the research and projects.

There will be opportunities for cadet units to connect with units overseas to share research and findings, thus starting to develop global networks of young people sharing CWGC projects.

We will develop a strong working partnership with cadet units and a new CWGC initiative - *War Graves Week.* The inaugural War Graves Week takes place at the end of May 2021, and we hope to see Air cadet units hosting events in local cemeteries or venues, sharing their research, and acting as ambassadors for the CWGC during that week.

**Action Plan:**

Air cadets are to be encouraged to use the following to form part of their research:

* Graves of personnel in cemeteries in the locality of the Squadron/Section, especially those that contain CWGC graves.
* Ancestors who have lost their lives during the world wars.
* RAF Squadrons linked to the cadet’s Squadron/Section by number.
* RAF airfields, and losses from these airfields, in the locality of the Squadron/Section.
* Aircraft crash sites in the locality of the Squadron/Section.

**Proposed Outcomes:**

1. To provide a greater understanding of the work undertaken by CWGC, its history and ensuring that those who lost their lives in conflict are not forgotten.
2. To encourage individuals to learn more about CWGC work in the UK and overseas, and to encourage visits to these locations.
3. To provide the opportunity to investigate family history and understand more about what an individual’s ancestors did during the war.
4. To encourage Squadrons/Sections to use all the above to widen the research as part of ongoing projects at unit level[[3]](#footnote-3).
5. To use the research and findings as evidence for the individual’s participation in the DofE Award Scheme[[4]](#footnote-4).

**Action Plan Methodology**

Air cadets are to be given the opportunity to undertake research in whatever area they wish. The list below gives ideas of possible research areas:

* Look at cemeteries in the locality of the Squadron/Section, especially those with a CWGC plaque at the entrance; a ‘CWGC plaque’ at the entrance denotes a CWGC grave is somewhere in the cemetery grounds.
* Use the CWGC website (<https://www.cwgc.org/>) to look at Casualty Lists (<https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/>) for find cemeteries in the locality and background information on those buried in the cemetery.
* Investigate the service history of the individual(s); where did they enlist, what rank were they when killed, etc?
* Look at the history of the unit the individual was assigned to.
* What were the circumstances leading up to the death of the individual and where are they commemorated?
* Consider, through the CWGC, the possibility of ‘adopt a grave’; with prior agreement of CWGC, lightly clean (sweep leaves, keep area clean, etc) and monitor condition of the grave and surrounding area. Reporting any problems and concerns to CWGC.

The project can be further developed. Cadets could be encouraged to investigate the service history of their ancestors. In many cases, the wartime records of ancestors have been lost or destroyed after time or families don’t talk about wartime service.

* Did any ancestor serve in the Armed Services? Talk to parents, and grandparents, to find out the basics. Did anyone lose their life during WWI or WWII?
* Investigate the personal life of the ancestor; where did they live, were they married, do they have any other living relatives, did they have siblings who served and killed.   
  Use family tree templates to draw out relationship to individual; family tree templates are freely available on the internet.
* Use the CWGC Casualty Lists to see if the ancestor was killed during WWI or WWII.
* Investigate the service history of the ancestor; where did they enlist, where did they serve, what rank was they when killed, etc?
* Look at the history of the unit the ancestor was assigned. Where was it based, etc.
* Investigate the timetable leading up the ancestor’s death; look at the circumstances, did the action have key objectives and were they achieved.
* How was the ancestor killed and where are they remembered? How many others were killed in the action? Is there a major monument commemorating the action and where?
* Look for collectables for ancestor; see if parents/grandparents have photos or even medals.

Check the RAF squadron history archives to see if there is a RAF squadron the same number or associated with the Squadron/Section.

* Look at the wartime history of the RAF squadron; where was it based, what aircraft did it operated, did the squadron win any ‘Battle Honours’ for outstanding actions during the war, before and since.
* Look at the CWGC Casualty Lists to see who were killed from the squadron; look at dates, locations, where buried, etc. Were any deaths part of a notable action?
* From the Casualty Lists, did anyone originate from near to the Squadron/Section; if yes, can local investigation work can be carried out on the family?
* Use the information from wartime records to investigate individuals or actions of note from the RAF squadron’s history.

Check for RAF airfields within the locality of the Squadron/Section; deconflict with neighbouring Squadrons/Sections.

* Investigate the wartime history of the airfield; was it solely occupied by the RAF or did it transfer to USAAF use after 1943? What happened to the airfield after the war?
* What aircraft and squadrons flew from airfield? Did any squadron(s) win any ‘Battle Honours’ for outstanding actions whilst at the airfield, if so, for what.
* Look at the CWGC Casualty Lists to see who died from RAF squadron(s) based at the airfield during the war; look at dates, locations, where buried, etc. Was this part of any notable action?
* From the Casualty Lists, did anyone originate from near to the Squadron/Section; if yes, can local investigation work can be carried out on the family?
* Use the information from wartime records to investigate individuals, squadrons, or actions of note from the airfield in the airfield’s history.

Investigate air crashes in the locality of the Squadron/Section. Use the internet to trace any crash sites in the locality.

* What aircraft type(s) was involved, what squadron, what was the serial number/code?
* How many crew were onboard at time of crash, how many casualties (killed/injured)?
* What were the names of the crew?
* What was the circumstances leading up to crash?
* Where are the dead buried? If local, look at following para 1e above.
* **Do not** attempt to conduct any form of archaeological dig at the crash site. It is an offence to tamper with, damage, move or unearth any items at such sites[[5]](#footnote-5).

**Useful Links**

There are numerous sites associated with military and family history. The following sites may be useful when starting your research:

CWGC project pages - <https://www.cwgc.org/our-work/outreach/learning-resources/raf-air-cadets-research-project/>

CWGC ‘How to Research’ Guides

* <https://www.cwgc.org/our-work/outreach/learning-resources/raf-air-cadets-research-project/>
* <https://www.cwgc.org/media/o41ntsuk/cwgc-how-to-research-air-force-ww1.pdf>
* <https://www.cwgc.org/media/miabpcuv/cwgc-how-to-research-air-force-ww2.pdf>
* <https://www.cwgc.org/our-work/outreach/learning-resources/how-to-research/>
* <https://www.cwgc.org/media/hz5lxnrx/ideas-for-sharing-your-project-v3.docx>

Military Research sites

* RAF Units – <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Royal_Air_Force_aircraft_squadrons>
* Roll of Honour – <http://www.roll-of-honour.com/index.html>
* International Bomber Command Centre – <https://internationalbcc.co.uk/>
* Bomber Command – Losses Database – <https://losses.internationalbcc.co.uk/>
* Aviation Safety Network – Crash Database – <https://aviation-safety.net/database/>
* Air of Authority – History of the RAF Organisation – <http://www.rafweb.org/Menu.htm>
* The National Archives – <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>

**Awards and Rewards**

Each cadet who completes the project will receive the ‘CWGC Award’ as a way of rewarding them for taking part. This takes the form of a printed certificate to recognise and reward their engagement with us.

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1. <https://www.cwgc.org/our-work/news/thousands-of-air-cadets-to-learn-about-uk-war-graves/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.cwgc.org/our-work/outreach/learning-resources/raf-air-cadets-research-project/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.cwgc.org/media/hz5lxnrx/ideas-for-sharing-your-project-v3.docx> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.dofe.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/DofE_Widgit_Resource_sheets_SKILLS.pdf>

   DofE Award Scheme > Skills Section > Learning & Collecting > Military History. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/aviation-archaeology> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)