

MEDIA RELEASE

**PUBLICATION OF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE
ON HISTORICAL CASES OF NON-COMMEMORATION**

A report by a Special Committee, established by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in December 2019, has concluded that 116,000 casualties of the First World War were not commemorated by name or possibly not commemorated at all outside the European theatre of war.

That figure could be as high as 350,000 and the Committee's report has found that between 45,000 and 54,000 additional casualties were also commemorated unequally. The report provides ten far-reaching recommendations for action by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC), in light of its findings.

Highlighting the complex situation on the ground, during and after the war, the report makes clear that there were several contributing factors. These ranged from the legacy of poorly marked wartime burials and the treatment of some groups by the military authorities, to the actions and demands of colonial administrations and the impact of contemporary imperial attitudes on Imperial War Graves Commission decision-making. However, despite the many practical complexities involved, the Special Committee is unambiguous and uncompromising in its findings on the role of the Imperial War Graves Commission.

The Special Committee, chaired by Sir Tim Hitchens, Commonwealth War Graves Commissioner and President of Wolfson College Oxford, says that: *"Though there were clearly unique challenges and difficulties faced on some of the battlefields outside of Europe, there is also evidence that many casualties in these regions were denied named commemoration where it was possible, and some were deliberately treated differently. In short, these men were deprived of the equality in death promised by the Imperial War Graves Commission and of the opportunity for their story to be told"*.

CWGC's predecessor organisation, the Imperial War Graves Commission, included in its founding principles a commitment to equal commemoration for all in death, regardless of their rank or religion in life. In light of the inconsistency between the report's findings and those principles, the Committee concludes that *"more than a century since this work began, it is time to put right the mistakes and bad decisions of the past."*

The Committee's Chair, Sir Tim Hitchens, said: *"I would like to thank all those who gave their time, energy and expertise to the important work of the Special Committee. The Committee has gone about its work with the utmost professionalism and diligence, providing a comprehensive set of recommendations for action"*.

He continued: *"The implementation of our recommendations would start to put right the wrongs of the past and we know that the Commission will consider them very seriously, as it continues on a mission as important today as it was a century ago. Our report is designed to provide a clear roadmap for tackling these important issues and building on its many remarkable successes."*

– Ends –

Note for Editors:

1. The Special Committee's full report is available at www.cwgc.org/non-commemoration-report and the summary of recommendations is attached.

2. The Committee's appointment followed a November 2019 Channel 4 Documentary *Unremembered – Britain's Forgotten War Heroes*, in which David Lammy MP and Professor Michele Barrett, Professor of Modern Literary & Cultural Theory at Queen Mary University of London, explored the issue of partial or non-commemoration of World War One combatants and carriers.
3. The Special Committee included historians, subject matter experts and representatives groups active in the area of military commemoration. A full list of Committee members forms part of the report.
4. The following Special Committee members are available for interview and media should contact committee@cwgc.org. They are:
 - a. **Sir Tim Hitchens**, Special Committee Chair
 - b. **Professor Michèle Barrett**, Emeritus Professor, Queen Mary University of London
 - c. **Shrabani Basu**, journalist and Sunday Times best-selling author
 - d. **Selena Carty**, cultural and ancestral consultant/genealogist, founder of the NGO BlackPoppyRose
 - e. **Blondel Cluff CBE**, Chair of the National Lottery Community Fund and former Overseas Representative of HM Government of Anguilla
 - f. **Dr Nicholas Westcott CMG**, Director of the Royal African Society and Research Associate at SOAS University of London