

WWI soldier from Edinburgh laid to rest in France

Gunner Charles Lightfoot from Edinburgh was one of two soldiers whose remains were found in a cave have been laid to rest with full military honours at Vendresse British Cemetery in France on Wednesday.

The service for Gnr Lightfoot and for Serjeant John Smith of Gloucestershire was organised by the Ministry of Defence's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC). This department is known as the MOD War Detectives.

In 2015, French archaeologists working in caves near Chassemy noted an inscription on the cave wall:

15 Sept 1914

Here lies Sjt Smith and 3 Gnrs

29th Battery RFA

Despite the reference to four casualties, excavations revealed just two sets of remains. Research, genealogy and DNA testing found those remains to be Sjt Smith and Gnr Lightfoot who were professional soldiers in the 29th Battery Royal Field Artillery.

They arrived in Rouen just days after war broke out in 1914. Their unit worked their way east towards Belgium, and then

south towards the Aisne and by mid-September they were fighting around the Aisne area.

On 13 September the troops marched from Cerseuil and halted at about 8.30am just north of Braine. German shells were bursting on the road, but they continued to Brenelle, and halted at midday until 5.30pm. They stayed the night of September 13 to 14 in Brenelle and were then brought into action just north of the Chassemy to Brenelle Road. The Battery was heavily shelled and afterwards moved position. At dusk the Brigade moved to the east of the Braine to Brenelle Road.

The war diaries make no reference to casualties during these dates, but other records show the 29th Battery lost four men between 13 and 14 September. Evidence shows that a gun position was hit by a shell on 13 September, and this killed at least two. The men known to have been killed by the shell were Sjt Smith and Gnr Lightfoot, whilst the other two men who died that day were Gnr Adams and Gnr Blyth. By the end of the war their burial place was unknown, and all four were listed on the memorial to the missing at La Ferte-Sous-Jouarre. Whilst Smith and Lightfoot have now been identified unfortunately Gunners Blyth and Adams remain missing.

Alexia Clark, MOD War Detective said: "It has been a privilege to work on this case, and to be able to give these men the dignified burial they deserve, whilst offering closure to their family members. I am grateful to Sjt Smith's cousin and Gnr Lightfoot's great-nephew for offering their DNA to allow us to identify these men, and for the input other members of the families have offered to create a truly special service for them today. Whilst Gnrs Adams and Blyth remain unfound, we have also been able to remember them today, and acknowledge their sacrifice alongside that of their comrades."

Reverend Roger Grafton, Chaplain to 14th Regiment Royal Artillery said: "I am so excited to have been asked to take part in this ceremony at Vendresse. Last year I was asked to

be involved in the burial of an unknown soldier at the Guard's Cemetery in Lesboeufs, so to be invited to take part again so quickly after that is a real honour. I have served with the Royal Artillery for the last 10 years as a chaplain, and one of the Gunners' straplines is "once a Gunner, always a Gunner. To be able to lay two of our own to rest today after so many years is a particular privilege."

Head of Commemorations at the CWGC, Mel Donnelly, said: "We are thankful to everyone involved in helping to identify Sjt Smith and Gnr Lightfoot.

"It was moving and fitting to see them buried with full military honours at Vendresse British Cemetery, and we will care for their graves in perpetuity."



Sjt Smith



Gnr Lightfoot and Nettie



Bearer party led by Sergeant Major P Kinsey



Reverend Major Roger Grafton leads burial service

