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MEDIA RELEASE

COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION ACCEPTS SPECIAL COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS IN FULL

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (the Commission) has today welcomed the report produced by a Special Committee formed to review historical cases of non-commemoration and committed to implement the Committee's ten detailed recommendations in full.

The Commission established the Special Committee in December 2019, following a Channel 4 Documentary *Unremembered – Britain's Forgotten War Heroes* – first broadcast in November 2019. The Committee's mandate – agreed by the Commission's six member Governments – was to produce a report on the commemoration by name of all Empire war dead of the two World Wars, identify gaps in that commemoration and propose how any such gaps could be rectified.

The report finds that 116,000, and potentially as many as 350,000, of those who died while serving the forces of the then British Empire during the First World War remain unmemorialised, a century after their passing. The vast majority were of African, Indian or Egyptian origin. Of those who were commemorated, up to 54,000 individuals were deliberately commemorated differently from European combatants. This was in direct contravention of the core principle of equality of treatment in death, on which the original Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC) was founded.

Publishing the Commission's official response to the Committee's report, Director General, Claire Horton, CBE, said: *"The Committee has produced an excellent report, which pulls no punches. Our response today is simple: the events of a Century ago were wrong then and are wrong now. We are sorry for what happened and will act to right the wrongs of the past. We welcome the Committee's findings and embrace fully its detailed recommendations"*.

Ms. Horton added: *"Many of the recommendations can be acted on at once, others will require further work and investigation. We are already prioritising several areas simultaneously for immediate action, building on activities already put in train over recent years to tell the stories of those who died. As we do, we will continue in our mission to live up to a promise made more than a century ago and inscribed in stone at CWGC sites around the globe: "THEIR NAME LIVETH FOR EVERMORE"*".

In accepting fully the findings and shortcomings identified in this report – and apologising unreservedly for them – the Commission also committed itself to positive, pro-active and inclusive action, and to engaging directly with the communities affected to address the issues raised.

At the same time, the Commission renewed afresh its abiding commitment to equality for all in commemoration, in perpetuity, building on *"the world-wide work of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission that has for over a century, maintained a global remembrance landscape and helped shape the deeply felt values and culture of commemoration and remembrance we know today"*.



Commenting on the report, the Commission's Vice-Chairman, Lt Gen Sir Bill Rollo KCB CBE, said: *"I would like to thank the Members of the Special Committee and its Chair, Sir Tim Hitchens, for this very thorough, detailed report, and its very clear recommendations.*

One hundred years ago our predecessors set out a clear commitment to commemorate the First World War dead equally, by name, in a way which had never been done before. They succeeded remarkably in Europe, but as the report makes clear, they fell short in a number of other parts of the world".

Sir Bill continued: *This report will enable us to continue and, ultimately, complete our work to commemorate and recognise all those who lost their lives in this catastrophic conflict. Where names can be found they will be. Where they cannot, the Commission, working directly with the communities affected, will seek alternative means by which their memory can be properly preserved. We will also widen the search to cover both World Wars.*

Above all the knowledge of what went wrong, and the need to put it right, will shape our approach to the future, arming us with a renewed determination to ensure that we fulfil the original promise to commemorate equally all who died in the two World Wars.

– Ends –

Note for Editors:

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission's official response to the Special Committee's report and recommendations can be found at www.cwgc.org/non-commemoration-report

For interview requests with the Commission's Director General, Claire Horton, CBE, media should contact media@cwgc.org.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) commemorates the 1.7 million Commonwealth servicemen and women who died during the two World Wars. It also holds and updates an extensive and accessible records archive. The Commission operates in more than 23,000 locations in more than 150 countries and territories.

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