



A Rededication Service for

**Pilot Officer Robert Alan West  
245 Squadron, Royal Air Force**

**Wednesday 24 May 2023 at 13:00 hours**

**Dunkirk Town Cemetery, France**

**Service Conducted by  
Reverend (Flight Lieutenant) Robert Hadfield RAF**

Originally used during the First World War for 450 burials from the nearby French and Canadian Hospitals, the CWGC plots in Dunkirk Town Cemetery were greatly increased in size during the Second World War, with the addition of more than 790 graves. The majority of these later burials relate to the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force in May/June 1940, including the previously unidentified grave of Pilot Officer West.



A Hurricane of 245 Squadron taxis into the squadron dispersal at Aldergrove after a convoy patrol.  
Image taken 5 May 1941.

Robert Alan West was born on 9 January 1920 at the family home in Clapham to parents Kathleen and Jesse. His father, a mining engineer, registered his birth just a few days later. Robert had an older sister Dorothy and two younger siblings Sheila (alias Sister Mary Francis) and Colin. Robert attended Bedford Modern School, an independent school still in existence today, from September 1930 until July 1938. Robert joined the Officer Training Corps whilst at school and it appears from a very early age, he wanted to join the RAF and become a pilot. The two references obtained by Robert in 1938 from a surgeon and chartered mechanical engineer who both stated his suitability and keenness to gain a Commission in the RAF. He achieved a reasonable level of education at school but failed his physics and chemistry – these he studied further after leaving school in July 1939 and gained the subjects in November 1939. He was also a gifted athlete excelling at Rugby and Rowing and enjoyed art and free hand drawing.

On 5 January 1939 he received the letter from the Air Ministry informing him he had successfully been accepted for a Commission in the RAF. Robert replied from his home address in Hampstead, aged just 19 accepting this offer. In February 1939, as directed he attended Redhill's elementary and reserve flying school for his preliminary flying training. His parents were put down as his next of kin and his religion stated as Church of England. Robert qualified as a Service Pilot in November 1939 and awarded his wings.

Pilot Officer West was lost on a sortie by Hurricanes of 245 Squadron over Dunkirk on 1 June 1940, along with a squadron colleague, Pilot Officer Alan Lancelot Treanor. Both men were engaged in the squadron's attack on a formation of Dornier 215s 8 miles north of Dunkirk. The squadron engaged the hostile formation from the south and so was heading out to sea at least initially, although rapid turns during air combat are common. The Dorniers evaded into the cloud and became embroiled in a dogfight with ME109s. Neither man was seen to

go down. Subsequently a French soldier testified that he saw a Hurricane engaged in a fight with German aircraft above the beaches and that the Hurricane deliberately rammed the German aircraft and both were destroyed.



Bob with his sister Sheila, 1938.

## **Order of Service**

Conducted by

**Reverend Robert Hadfield  
Station Chaplain RAF Lossiemouth**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ  
And the love of God  
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit  
Be with you all.

We are gathered here today in this place of remembrance to honour our fallen in conflicts past and remember with thanksgiving these brave men whom, alongside so many others, answered the call of their country, served with honour and gave their lives in service. We have come together, to give thanks for the life of Pilot Officer Robert West who died on 1 June 1940, and to dedicate this place to his memory.

## **Opening Prayer**

Merciful Father,  
hear our prayers and comfort us;  
renew our trust in your Son  
whom you raised from the dead;  
strengthen our faith  
that all who have died in the love of Christ  
will share in His resurrection;  
who lives and reigns with you  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

**Amen**

## **Ecclesiastes 3, 1 – 8 (King James Version)**

Read by Sergeant Rachel Gill XI(F) Squadron, RAF

To everything there is a season,  
and a time to every purpose under the heaven:  
A time to be born, and a time to die;  
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted:  
A time to kill, and a time to heal;  
a time to break down, and a time to build up:  
A time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
a time to mourn, and a time to dance:  
A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones  
together;  
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing:  
A time to get, and a time to lose;  
a time to keep, and a time to cast away:  
A time to rend, and a time to sew;  
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak:  
A time to love, and a time to hate;  
a time of war, and a time of peace.

## Reading

### Flying West (extract)

Written by Captain Michael J. Larkin

Read by a representative from the British Embassy

I hope there's a place, way up in the sky  
Where pilots can go when they have to die.  
A place where a guy could buy a cold beer  
For a friend and a comrade whose memory is dear.  
A place where no doctor or lawyer could tread,  
Nor a management-type would e'er be caught dead!  
Just a quaint little place, kind of dark, full of smoke,  
Where they like to sing loud, and love a good joke.  
The kind of a place that a lady could go  
And feel safe and secure by the men she would know.

There must be a place where old pilots go,  
When their wings become heavy, when their airspeed gets low,  
Where the whiskey is old, and the women are young,  
And songs about flying and dying are sung.  
Where you'd see all the fellows who'd 'flown west' before,  
And they'd call out your name, as you came through the door,  
Who would buy you a drink, if your thirst should be bad,  
And relate to the others, "He was quite a good lad!"

And there, through the mist, you'd spot an old guy  
You had not seen in years, though he'd taught you to fly.  
He'd nod his old head, and grin ear to ear  
And say, "Welcome, my Son, I'm proud that you're here!"

## **Address**

by Reverend Robert Hadfield

## **Reading**

### **I Flew**

Written by Brad Baker

Read by Rachel Bainbridge, Great Niece of Pilot Officer West

When the last checklist's run and the bag drag done,

I'll reminisce on the days I once knew,

I won't remember the oh-three-hundred alerts,

But only that I flew!

I will not remember the crew rest in tents,

Nor recall how cold Artic winds blew,

And I'll try not to remember the times I got sick,

But only that I flew!

I will never forget when nature became angry,

To challenge my intrepid crew,

I'll always remember the fear I felt,

And the pride in knowing I flew.

I'll remember the sights my mortal eyes saw,

All colored in multiple hues,

Those beautiful lights on cold winter lights,

Seen only by those who flew.

God was extremely good to me,

He let me touch his face,

He saw my crew through war and peace,

And blessed us with His grace.

So when I stand at St. Peter's Gate,

And tell him that I'm new,

I know he'll smile and welcome me,

Because he knows

**I FLEW!**



### **The Act of Remembrance**

Let us remember before God and commend to his sure keeping those who have died for their country in conflict; those whom we knew, and whose memory we treasure; and all who have lived and died in the service of humanity.

### **The Exhortation**

Read by Sergeant Stuart Thomson XI(F) Squadron RAF

They shall grow not old as we that are left grow old;  
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.  
At the going down of the sun and in the morning  
We will remember them.

**We will remember them.**

### **The Last Post**

Played by Air Specialist (Class 1) Catherine Pollit, Trumpeter of the Band of the Royal Air Force College

### **The Silence**

### **The Reveille**

#### **Kohima Epitaph**

Read by Air Specialist (Class 1) Callum Ellis XI(F) Squadron RAF

When you go home tell them of us and say:  
'For your tomorrow, we gave our today.'

## **Laying of Wreaths**

### **The Prayers**

Almighty God, we give you thanks for the life of Robert and for the grace and mercy that he has received from you. For all that was good in his life and for the treasured memories he left behind. We give thanks for his courage, devotion to duty and sacrifice.

Lord, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

Almighty Father, your love enfolds us in both life and death; we thank you for all the men and women who have served in the Royal Air Force and her allies, especially for those who gave their lives or health, for their families and all who have supported them.

Lord in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

### **Prayer for the Royal Air Force**

Read by Squadron Leader Mark Graham XI(F) Squadron RAF

Almighty God, who has promised that they who wait upon thee shall renew their strength and mount with wings, as eagles; we commend to thy fatherly protection all who serve in the Royal Air Force. Uplift and support them in their endeavour, that they may be a safeguard unto our most gracious Sovereign Lord, King Charles, and a sure defence to our homeland, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

In praise, thanksgiving, remembrance and hope, we pray for the coming of God's Kingdom in the words that Jesus taught us:

### **The Lord's Prayer**

**Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
forgive us our trespasses  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever.  
Amen.**

### **The Blessing**

May God grant to the living, grace;  
to the departed, rest;  
to The King, Commonwealth  
and all people, peace and concord.  
And to us and all his servants, life everlasting.  
And the blessing of Almighty God,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
be upon you and remain with you always.  
**Amen.**



The Ministry of Defence, through the Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre, is responsible for the research, identification and burial of all British casualties worldwide.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission cares for the graves, memorials, records and memory of the 1.7 million Commonwealth servicemen and women who died during the two World Wars.

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