We honour and care for the 1.7 million men and women of the Commonwealth forces who died in the First and Second World Wars, ensuring they will never be forgotten. Funded by six Member Governments, our work began with building, and now maintaining, cemeteries at 23,000 locations all over the world.

Today, over a century after we first began, our work continues through our staff, supporters and volunteers who preserve our unique cultural, horticultural and architectural heritage and ensure that the stories of those who died are told.

The names of the First World War dead are inscribed on bronze panels attached to the obelisk’s base.

The names of Second World War dead are inscribed on bronze panels attached to the surrounding walls.

Four Portland stone statues of sailors guard the memorial.

THE CWGC EXPERIENCE is a unique visitor attraction. Take a look behind the scenes at the work of the CWGC.

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commonwealth war graves foundation
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The copper globe symbolises the earth. It is a leading mark for ships, helping them navigate into Portsmouth Harbour.

Four bronze statues depict the ‘four winds’ above ships’ prows.

Naval crown showing the sails and prows of wooden ships. Below is an anchor surrounded by a wreath: one half is laurel for victory, the other oak, reflecting the construction of ships in the age of sail.

Bronze reliefs above the names depict the key actions and battles fought by the Royal Navy during the First World War.

Four lions symbolise the British Empire. The Royal Navy played a key role in British imperial and military power in the early twentieth century.

Lieutenant-Commander Malcolm Wanklyn VC commanded the Royal Navy submarine Upholder during the Second World War. Operating from Malta in the Mediterranean, he was one of the most outstanding submariners of the war. For his valour and relentless determination he received the Victoria Cross. Malcolm and the entire crew of Upholder disappeared while on patrol in April 1942. He was 30 years old. He is commemorated on Panel 61, Column 3.

Soon after the Second World War began Frank Sturmey became a Royal Marine. He fought at Normandy, landing on Juno Beach on D-Day. As they neared the beach Frank and his comrades came under heavy German fire. He was injured during landing and taken to a hospital ship where he later died. He was buried at sea.

Frank was 21 years old. He is commemorated on Panel 87 of the memorial.
Traditionally, sailors killed in conflict either went down with their ships or were buried at sea. After the First World War, the Admiralty and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission built permanent memorials to preserve the memory of those who died. As a principal manning port for the Royal Navy, Portsmouth was one of three sites chosen.

In 1946 the memorial was extended to commemorate navy personnel who died in the Second World War.

Mothers, wives and sweethearts gathered where the names of the casualties of HMS Royal Oak have just been posted. Many of the 833 who died are commemorated on the memorial at Portsmouth.

Set in a commanding position on the promenade at Southsea Common, and with magnificent views out to sea, the Portsmouth Naval Memorial is a much-loved local landmark. The obelisk and its surrounding walls record the names of over 24,000 men and women who lost their lives serving with the Royal Navy in the two World Wars, and who have no known grave.

The Portsmouth memorial is one of three on the south coast of England, along with the other manning ports of Plymouth and Chatham. The architect Sir Robert Lorimer was tasked with designing three identical monuments of ‘unmistakable naval form’.

Working with sculptor Henry Poole, he created tall obelisks to serve as leading marks to ships out at sea. At the top ships’ prows branch out, supporting representations of the four winds and a copper sphere symbolising the globe.

After the Second World War, architect Edward Maufe complemented the obelisks with curved walls to hold new memorial panels, blended into the different landscapes at each site. All the memorials are notable for their striking sculptures of naval servicemen.