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# Airmen who died in hill crashes honoured

## MEMORIAL

An 80-year-old Canadian man was among families who took part in a 1,733ft pilgrimage up Bennachie yesterday to honour three airmen who died in crashes on Aberdeenshire's landmark hill.

John Cummings from Ontario paid his first visit to Scotland to visit the spot where his brother died 73 years earlier.

A memorial plaque was unveiled, commemorating the sacrifice of Pilot Officer Ellard Cummings and Leading Aircraftsman Ronald Stewart, who were killed when their Westland Wallace aircraft crashed into the hill in thick mist on September 3, 1939.

It was the day that Britain declared war on Germany and the tragedy made the 23-year-old pilot and his 24-year-old gunner,

from Paisley, the first official British military casualties of World War II.

The memorial also honours Pilot Officer Brian Lightfoot, from Yorkshire, who was killed when his Gloster Meteor jet struck the hillside in a snowstorm in February 1952. A rough stone cairn was built on the hill beside the scattered remains of the jet. Now the monument on Oxen Craig peak has been restored and a pink granite plaque commemorating all three airmen has been added.

Mr Cummings said he was proud that his brother would be remembered by generations to come. "It was a moving moment," he said. "I last saw him when I was six years old."

Yesterday's tribute was organised by James Mackay, a founder member of hill guardian group the Bailies of Bennachie.