

They Shall Not Grow Old as We That Are Left Grow Old

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'Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them.'

These words from the fourth verse of Laurence Binyon's poem FOR THE FALLEN came to him first as he looked out to sea in September 1914, after the start of the Great War and the British Expeditionary Force had suffered casualties at the Battle of Mons and the days of fighting at the Marne.

This verse has rightly been adopted as a proper exhortation by the Royal British Legion at ceremonies of Remembrance. I commend the full poem.

On Thursday, the day of publication, the Mayor, the Chaplain Dr Hazel Sherman and Major Tom Wye will lead the D-Day Commemoration at the Memorial in Chapel Road by Worthing Town Hall. Rarely, I shall have left a working day at Westminster to attend. My view has been that an MP has the responsibility to be with British and Allied troops when possible, on active service and at memorials. When possible I have joined Honorary Alderman Michael Donin's annual service at the Canadian Memorial on the shore by Grand Avenue.

During the Syrian and Afghanistan campaigns, I was taken out by the RAF. In Basra, a Royal Marine from Worthing kindly lent me his bed.

D-Day preparations included civilians in every occupation and all the armed forces. I have a particular interest in the calculations of when the Invasion should land. We know about the weather problem. Just as challenging was the tide. It is known that the Normandy coast has an hour of difference for high tide along a 60 mile stretch. It was clear that a seaborne force needed to come ashore on a rising tide with enough of a beach to land safely, if that is the right word in the face of lethal opposition.

Four years before, the calculations would have been the other way around. We had been preparing defences along our south coast. Airfields had quickly been constructed. The history of war and of conflict should be part of the education of successive generations. Also, I want young people to know how we have succeeded and how we have failed to contain conflict.

The first responsibility of public and political service is to prevent or to end unnecessary conflict. The attractions of pacifism have the problem of what to do in the face of aggression. I respect those pacifists who went to the front line to care for the injured and to retrieve the bodies of the dead.

I first became aware of Tom Wye when he was quietly tending the graves of military casualties buried in local church graveyards. That comes to mind as my sister and brother send me information about our father's uncle who died late in October 1918, less than a month before the November 11th Armistice. The Belgium village Heestert was held by the Germans from the start of the war. Lieutenant Thistle Robinson was awarded the Military Cross. Local farmers buried the dead of both sides under the instruction of the mayor.

My thoughts are for all those involved, on the home front, overseas and especially for the many who came from across what is now the Commonwealth and from allies, particularly the United States.

It is right that the US Commander-in-Chief will be at Portsmouth as we are in Worthing and in surrounding village memorials. We will remember them.