

Remembrance Sunday 2015

For those of us who have lost one or both of our parents, I wonder if you can remember a particular comment or lasting phrase from them? My father died 10 years ago now aged 90, and I remember him saying to me on a number of occasions, *'I wish I could forgive the Japanese, but I can't.'*

I believe my father struggled with this for a great deal of his life. The horrid memories of war from the bitter fighting in the jungles of Burma would never leave him. The nightmares of disease - mainly malaria, the sheer scale of suffering that he knew about, with so many casualties, the torture and the massacres, the forced labour, the monsoon rains... the nightmares continued all his life and would never fade.

I wonder too if you can remember a particular day or event when growing up when some event in the news shocked your parents? I remember well the 27th August 1979 when my father was in deep shock by the death of Lord Louis Mountbatten of Burma who was assassinated by the IRA. I was almost 9 but I can remember the tears of my father.... the shock, the anger, the bitterness, the hatred towards the IRA for this evil attack.

My father was an active member of the Burma Star Association and was a very proud man. He would attend local and national meetings and go on trips and enjoy meals out with the local branch. He would often say to me before bedtime, *'Off to the Burma Star, see you in the morning...'*

My father had two great pals called Doug and Ivor and both were members of the Burma Star and they lived nearby. Each of them would take it in turns to carry the standard in church and on parades.

My job would be to polish his medals before each event - and today on this Remembrance Sunday I wear his medals to church in honour of what was achieved in the Far East and other parts of the world during the Second World War.

It is with great pride that I keep my father's medals in tribute to his time spent serving his country at war and to his best friends Doug and Ivor who have also passed away. They consist of the 1939-45 Star Campaign Medal, the Atlantic Star, the Burma Star, the Defense and War Medals.

Today we remember again with our heartfelt sentiments of tribute to the men and women whose valour and sacrifice secured victory and salvaged our freedom: the millions who endured the sufferings of imprisonment, oppression and bombardment, never losing faith that one day justice and freedom – the hallmarks of morality – would prevail. In humility and reverence we salute them all. We also remember those who continue to fight for freedom and peace in the troubled countries of the world today.

It is our duty to give thanks for the scope and magnitude of Allied self-sacrifice; for the quality of courage and heroism that was repeated again and again during the wars throughout Europe, in Africa, in Asia; in the air, on the sea as well as on land, **all in valiant search of justice and freedom**. We must remember – so that we always appreciate these supreme blessings – and never take them for granted.

On a visit to Ontario, I visited the Canada Warplane Heritage Museum in Hamilton and in one of the rooms there was a display entitled '*Canada remembers the Burma Campaign*'. Over 8,000 Canadians served with the allies in this campaign. Some of the photos on view were shocking and brought tears to my eyes!

The stories of the darkest days of all wars contain the stories of true courage and ultimate sacrifice by servants of peace. The devastation caused must never be forgotten.

The difficult experiences of the Veterans of the war would take a high physical and emotional toll—a toll that, for many including my father, lasted a lifetime.

In the Hills of eastern India, north of the border with Burma, is the famous Kohima Memorial, which marks the place where Allied forces turned back a Japanese invasion of India in 1944. At the base of the monument are the words of John Maxwell Edmonds, a British poet who originally wrote the lines to commemorate the men who died in the First World War—an epitaph that also summarizes the contributions of all who died in the cause of peace and freedom over the years:

"When You Go Home, Tell Them of Us and Say, For Your Tomorrow, We Gave Our Today."

We give thanks to God for the rewards of freedom and justice that were granted to us, and we must ensure that they are appreciated, guarded, preserved, extended and passed on to the next generations. We only have to open the newspapers today to realise how precious these gifts of freedom and justice are, and how many people in the world are not yet fortunate enough to enjoy them.

Christ was the ultimate peacemaker who came to teach us to pursue peace. 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God' he said. Let us today not only give thanks and remember, but also pursue all that is good and righteous for our children and their generations to come.

The sacrifices and achievements of those who gave so much to restore peace and freedom to the world cannot be forgotten.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.