

Remembrance Sunday, 2025.

Remembrance Sunday. The day when we remember all those who have given their lives for their country in both the first and second World Wars and, more recently, in Korea, Malaya, Aden, Northern Ireland, the Falklands, Iraq and Afghanistan.

It is also a moment to honour the courage, dedication, and sacrifice of those who have served in the past as well as those who continue to protect our freedoms today.

But the consequences of war go far beyond the loss of life. It is the destruction, the despair, its brutality, the cost, and the effects of war on so many innocent people; the maimed, the injured, the blind, the lonely and those suffering from the mental scars of conflict. And I don't need to remind you that war leads to hunger, famine, further violence and disease.

And on this Remembrance, we pray for lasting peace, stability, fairness, tolerance, kindness, and hope for a better world.

This year we especially remember the 80th Anniversaries of both VE Day and VJ Day. Many of us, but not all, will know something about the war in Europe from books and films, from family links to those involved or who were witness to the destruction of our cities by Germany's Luftwaffe, and recall how we were very nearly brought to our knees by U-boats severing the sea routes used by merchant ships bringing in fuel, food and equipment enabling us to both fight, and beat, the enemy.

But what about the "other" war. The war against Japan fought in the Pacific and South-East Asia. I think it fair to say that most people would be hard pressed to recall events in that conflict with, perhaps, three conspicuous exceptions: the attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941, the fall of Singapore two months later, and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki with atomic bombs in August 1945. The lion's share of fighting fell to the United States, with support provided by Commonwealth and other nations in the Pacific including Britain's Royal Navy ships and aircraft.

And yet, the 14th Army with the support of the RAF fought the most incredible campaign in Burma against the Japanese in some of the worst possible conditions imaginable. That Army was known as the "Forgotten Army." It included troops from India, Africa and the West Indies.

When Japan finally surrendered in September 1945 it marked the end of a brutal and destructive world war, and a legacy that makes us pause and think of those who "gave their tomorrow for our today". The actual cessation of hostilities occurred on 15th August and the formal surrender took place 19 days later on 2nd September.

I want to look back briefly at those two dates, and two moments to provide signposts to the future. I start with what was a very personal letter written by a British Naval officer to his wife at home. He had just spent two years serving with the Royal Navy's Pacific Fleet in both the Indian and Pacific oceans. I will read just part of it.

"Shortly after 11 this forenoon local time, the signal was hoisted on gaily coloured bunting from mast head and yardarm: "Cease hostilities against Japan." On seeing it I decided that

whatever the chances of sending mail were, I must write to tell you of the terrific feeling I have.

Nearly six years ago I was with you when we first heard the sirens that marked the beginning of the war. You were at my side then, and spiritually in the many months since. Months of separation, fear, boredom, and grimness. At no time can I ever remember any doubt whatsoever as to the ultimate end of this war, it was a faith in itself, and the great company of allies. And yet to me that faith had a single meaning. My entire hope was in one place and that place never failed, it never wavered. My faith, my hope, my everything was you and I pulled myself together. So when I thank Almighty God for everything. I must thank him too for making things easier for me both physically, and mentally.

And now our job is to make a start in the world for those two magnificent sons of ours. We must teach them first of all a faith, a *raison d'être*, and the rest will follow.”

That letter was written in pencil and is among my most treasured possessions, It was written by my father to my mother on the day the war ended and I was one of the two boys who was taught, as a result of 6 years of war, the meaning and importance of a Faith. A *raison d'être* and hope.

The second recollection of the war's end occurred on the day Japan formally surrendered to the Allies onboard the US battleship USS Missouri anchored in Tokyo Bay on 2nd September.

The Supreme Allied Commander, General Douglas MacArthur, made a short speech that day that reverberated around the world and his words are as true today as they were then.

“It is my earnest hope, and indeed the hope of all mankind, that from this solemn occasion a better world shall emerge out of the blood and carnage of the past, a world founded upon faith and understanding, a world dedicated to the dignity of man and the fulfilment of his most cherished wish for freedom, tolerance and justice”

I wonder if you noticed the word ‘faith’ features in both texts.

So how are we doing? Are we remembering the sacrifices made? Have we lived up to a world founded on faith and understanding, of a world where freedom, tolerance and justice are second nature? Have we learned the lessons of the past? Or have we already forgotten that war is the most devastating outcome of any dispute, misunderstanding or territorial invasion. And despite countless warning signs, its outbreak nearly always takes us by surprise and initial fighting is invariably piecemeal. Put another way, a shrinking number of Britons now recall the immense joy and relief that was both VE and VJ day or comprehend the sheer preciousness of peace.

Have we lived up to the hopes of those who fought in war and came home. Australians aptly use the expression The Returned Servicemen League when recalling those who did return. And what about those who didn't, whose graves are in the corner of some foreign field or the ocean deep. Those who “for our tomorrow gave their today” and whose names are inscribed on memorials throughout the land.

So let me ask the same question again. Are we confident we have learnt the lessons of the past or are we going to go through the awful cycle all over again.

Judging by the ongoing problems in today's world and fighting in countries such as Ukraine, Myanmar, Gaza, Venezuela, Sudan, and over 50 other countries or regions too numerous to mention now, we live in perilous times. And I haven't touched on the growing national debt in nation after nation, trade wars, drug and weapon running, border issues, 21st century slave trafficking and man-made global warming, you can be forgiven if any optimism among you is in short supply.

None of us seek war but when an autocrat or dictator threatens either us or an ally, with weapons and the destruction of everything we believe in such as democracy, freedom and truth, there are measures we can use to prevent conflict. It can be deterred through strength, a willingness to stand up for what is right, strong leadership, realistic preparations, unwavering faith and learning the lessons of history so the right decisions can be made.

Which brings me back to today. It's about remembering the huge sacrifice made by so many in years past to preserve the way of life summarised so well by General McArthur.

So how are we doing? The evidence is not encouraging. Do we actually remember? Or are we just giving lip service to it. A recent survey revealed that 4/5th of those under 40 had no idea what the Battle of Britain was. And less than 30% of our population said that they would fight for King and Country in the event of war. Interestingly if you were to ask the Finns the same question, the percentage saying they would fight increases to 80%. Having a border with a potential enemy only a few miles down the road does concentrate the mind. And Finland has the reputation of being the world's happiest nation.

Out of curiosity I did some research into Finland and Christian faith, and discovered that whilst church attendance and Christian beliefs are falling, there is one group going in the other direction. Young men. They are beginning to discover that faith and religion helps to improve their wellbeing and mental health. Can I hope and pray that the young Finnish women will do likewise soon. I leave you to draw other conclusions.

Which brings me to my final thoughts for today.

First, to remember the sacrifices made by so many in order that we can live in a world where kindness, tolerance, fairness and justice prevail, and not one where we are threatened by dictators and tyrants who seek to abolish freedom of thought, beliefs and actions as well as challenge the global rule-based order adopted by so many nations.

Secondly, I stress the importance of introducing the younger generation to understand the past from both word of mouth and reading, in order that they too will learn why Remembrance Sunday remains so fundamentally important to us all.

And finally do what my parents did for me 80 years ago by demonstrating the importance of faith, and especially Christian faith, in our lives as we grew up. It was, they said, a *raison d'être* that once achieved, the rest would follow. How right they were.