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Remembrance

Issue



A visit to my Grandad

We went to the tunnels of Arras and stood at the foot of the steps where my Grandad would have stood waiting with the other soldiers for the order to go. What was he thinking standing there, of my Gran maybe, of his family, of the child that his wife was expecting that he would never see? I don't know.

We went to the field where my Grandad fell all those years ago, peaceful and really quite serene, the chaos and commotion of those far gone times we would never really know. The poppies danced among the grass swaying in the wind, maybe they're the soldiers' dreams of what might have been.

We stood with a glass of whiskey and toasted him and all those men; I poured a drop upon the earth so he could drink again.

We stood beside his grave so clean and nicely laid, I tipped a pot of earth I'd brought from his parents' grave in his home village, and exchanged it for a piece from his so they could be together again.



LOST OPPORTUNITIES

I meant to give, but
I was in the garden, muddy
When the collector came
With her tray of poppies.
I'll do it tomorrow, I said.

I meant to write, but
I was in the trench, muddy
When the officer came
With the call to advance.
I'll do it tomorrow, I said.

Evelyn Smith

We went back to his village church and we stood there all alone, I tipped that little pot of earth upon his parents' graves and felt I'd finally brought him home.

He gave his life so long ago so we can now be free. Maybe he thought his sacrifice would bring it to an end but he could never know that we would do it all again. My Grandad and two of his brothers taken from their homes, gone yes, but not forgotten or left lonely or alone.

My dad was only seven when his dad went away, a boy with broken dreams and a pain that would not go away. He did not know it then, and history tells us that it's true, that this proud and precious nation would call its men once more to go and fight for me and you.

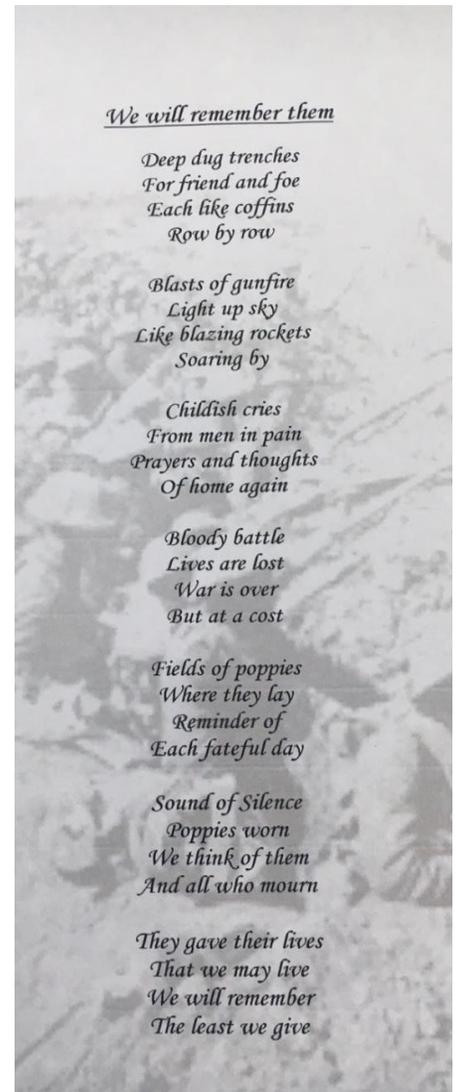
And so it was that once again we stumbled on that day, and once again our country called upon our name, and once again we stood with pride and asked how much we should have to pay.

And so it was that one more time we would send a man to war, to fight in sand, in mud, in blood and in gore. While a mother cries and waits lonely for that letter but always, always, hoping that this time would be better. And so it was that once again another war was done but this time the mother had her prize, the returning of her son.

So on this day we celebrate the freedom that was gained, the price they paid was life and limb and families paid in pain. Solemnly we honour you and soberly we praise, heroes one and all in those dark and distant days. You're gone now but not forgotten and we salute you all with pride.

Seventy-six years have passed since our land was freed, so thank all for what you gave for him and her and me.

Tony Skelton



Jan Stevens

My Grandmother's Sacrifice

Whenever Remembrance Sunday comes around, I cannot help feeling a great sense of loss and sadness, thinking of how it must have impacted on my mother and grandmother. My three uncles died in the 1st World War, men I never had a chance to meet, love or communicate with them in any way at all. My mother always spoke of her three brothers with such pride, telling us stories of their childhood, and how during the war the family sent food parcels to them at the "front", which would include cherries from my grandmother's garden, in season.

Can you imagine what it was like for my grandmother - sadly I never knew her, as she died the week I was born - her three handsome young sons dying so tragically, and she would receive this awful news by a telegram from the war office, not once not twice - but three times, the last two within a month of each other. These young men were from Wales, serving in the South Wales Borderers and Royal Field Artillery. William was a Private in S.W.B., 23 years old when he died from wounds in 1915 and buried at Bethune France. Joseph, also a Private in S.W.B., was 21 years old when he died in action at Ypres in 1918, sadly with no known grave. John, a gunner in R.F.A., was 23 years old when he died in action in 1918 and is buried at St. Vincent France.

Through my U3A Ancestry group, I have had the opportunity to trace where each of them died, but because they were not officers, very little information is available for individual soldiers, or "Non-Comms ". They were mostly referred to by number, e.g. 3 died 4 injured etc. I discovered this when I accessed the diaries of their commanding officers, available at Kew, which has amazing information in hand-written daily diaries written up for each day, telling of battles fought, marches taken from one area to another, what was needed regarding ammunition etc. One of my uncles, John, was actually mentioned by name by his officer, being the only one to die that day. The historian at Kew said this was most unusual, but it made it so real for me.

My son took me to France about 3 years ago, and we were able to visit the graves of William and John, but sadly Joseph was on the wall of honour, having no known grave. It was the most touching thing I have ever experienced, the beautifully kept Cemeteries hold a Book of Remembrance at each one, and I was able to sign them on behalf of my grandmother and mother, who never had the opportunity to do so.

My father also fought in the 1st World War, in the K.O.Y.L.I 's - how a Welsh man from Wrexham finished up in the Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry always baffled me, but I was told by an historian that when young men enlisted in 1914 /1915 they were sent to units with the most need.

Dad was at the Somme, Ypres (he called it Wipers) and Passchendaele, I am testament that he did survive this awful war, but was wounded at the Somme with shrapnel to the knee, and was sent to Queen Mary's Hospital at Roehampton. Like most of his generation, he never spoke of his experiences, only recalled the humorous bits. Now that I am older and having learnt so much more about the Great War, I wish I had asked more questions, but not sure that I would have been given the answers.

So yes, Remembrance Day means a lot to me, and I will wear my poppy, and remember the men and women of all wars, who have paid the ultimate sacrifice and their families who have endured their loss.

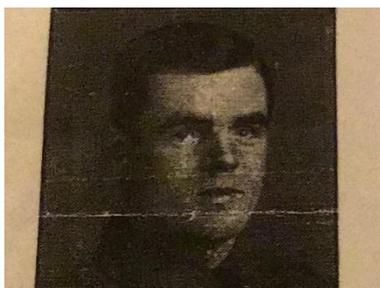
Dilys Anscomb

These three poems and pictures were submitted by Dilys Anscomb in memory of her three great uncles who lost their lives in the war.

He laid his richest gift on the altar of duty – his life

*One of the many to answer the call,
For those he loved he gave his all,
Somewhere afar in a soldier's grave,
Lies our loved one among the brave.*

*Gone to rest through the pathway of duty,
Venturing his life that others may live,
Such are the words of the tablet of beauty,
In letters immortal in honour we give.*



Pte William Brewis
May 10th 1915
Aged 23

*In health and strength, he left his home,
Not thinking death was near,
It pleased the lord to bid him come,
In His presence to appear.*

*Some day we hope to meet him,
Some day we know not when,
To clasp his hand in the Better Land,
Never to part again.*



Pte Joseph Brewis
March 6th 1915
Aged 21

*We think we see his smiling face,
As he bade us a last goodbye,
And left his home forever,
In a foreign land to die,
He sleeps beside his comrades,
In a grave across the foam,
But his name is written in letters of love,
On the hearts he left at home.*

*His smiling face and happy voice,
Will never greet us more,
He lies the victim of the Huns,
Upon a foreign shore.
How grieved and sad are those he loved,
And who are left to pine,
Their only hope to meet again,
Some day in God's good time.*



Gunner John Brewis
April 12th 1918
Aged 23

ESCAPE FROM DISASTER

By Roy Buchanan

Dunkirk was a humiliating disaster at the beginning of the Second World War. 338,000 troops were rescued but thousands of pounds worth of equipment had to be abandoned. The 52nd Lowland Division of the Royal Artillery were at bay and forced to fight a rear-guard action in order to hold off the advancing Germans long enough to allow the evacuation from the beaches to take place. A sergeant in charge of an anti-tank unit did his duty. When the last soldier had been rescued, he was told "Well done, leave the gun behind, it's every man for himself now. Good luck." Leading the men of his unit he made his way to the beach. It was empty. All the boats had gone.

This stranded and worn out group of soldiers decided to escape by taking the coast road south to put distance between themselves and the pursuing enemy. Travelling by night to avoid detection and sleeping by day in barns and outbuildings, they were listed as missing. As they approached Dieppe they came across a fishing boat which they took hoping to sail it across the channel to England, a distance of about 75 miles. None of them had sailing experience. Ten days after the famous evacuation they landed somewhere on the Sussex coast. Their families were delighted when they heard the news that they had been found, tired, hungry and dirty. For many years later the sergeant had nightmares and suffered depression, unable to expunge his feeling of disgrace. At the end of the war he was demobbed but struggled to find work. In 1951 he died of a heart-attack, aged forty-five.

The sergeant was my Dad. I was nine years old.

Thank you to all members who contributed to this very special issue of members words.

Sgt John Buchanan
Royal Artillery

