

PREFACE



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HRH The Duke of Kent KG

For the 75th Anniversary of VE Day, His Royal Highness The Duke of Kent, President of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, wrote an article, part of which is below. Although written specifically to remember VE Day, it is equally pertinent to VJ Day and indeed to World War One.

By his kind permission, it serves as an excellent Preface to Elton Remembers. It sets our local remembrance into the national and indeed international context.

VE Day is a Vital Opportunity to Engage the Next Generation in Remembrance.

For those of us who are of an age to recall it, VE Day was a momentous occasion which still stands out vividly in our memories. As we mark its 75th anniversary, we reflect on the courage and sacrifice of those who served in the Second World War, and the enormous human cost of the peace and liberty we have enjoyed since the victory in 1945. We offer those men and women from across the Commonwealth our eternal gratitude.

Throughout my 50 years as President of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC), I have seen at first-hand the dedication and passion that has been channelled into ensuring the legacy of the fallen is not lost. Whether through the preservation of memorials or the diligent gathering of records of those who fought, we are ensuring people have the chance to reflect, learn and understand the scale of the conflicts.

The anniversary of VE Day, along with that of the Normandy landings last year, and the centenary of the Great War in 2018, has rightly shone a particular spotlight on the bravery of service personnel,

and provoked an outpouring of public admiration. These milestones provide an invaluable opportunity to put human faces to the names and numbers in our history books, and to reaffirm our commitment to remembrance. Most crucially, they allow us to educate our young people on the importance of the continuing remembrance of the war dead, so that we can ensure such atrocities never happen again.

The unique sense of the appreciation for the past can come from something as simple as unearthing old photographs, or recognising a familiar name on a memorial; or, indeed, within the extensive, digital database of war records – how far we have come since the original, paper archives!

And who could fail to be inspired by the spirit and sense of duty of those soldiers who are still with us today? By Mr Harry Billinge, the Normandy veteran campaigning to commemorate his fallen comrades? Or by Captain Tom Moore – now an honorary Colonel – who has raised a staggering amount for the NHS, in the days before his 100th birthday?

But with each passing year, the ranks of those with a personal connection to the war are shrinking. That is why it is vital that we pass that baton of remembrance on to the next generation, and do all we can to ensure the voices and experiences of those who fought are not lost, or forgotten.

Through my work with the CWGC, it has been my privilege to visit war cemeteries all over the world, to pay my respects. These memorials are, in many cases, the last physical reminders of the world wars, and it is a testament to the CWGC team that so many remain, with sites in 23,000 locations in 153 countries. It is thanks to their efforts that people will have the chance to visit them for centuries to come.

On the anniversary of VE Day, we celebrate peace and we pay tribute to the men and women who died for it. But let us also reflect on the lessons learned and the relationships built, in order to ensure a lasting legacy of the dead for the next 100 years and beyond.

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