

Friends of Millbank

Chairman's VJ-Day Newsletter – 15 August 2020 (VJ-75)



Dear Friend of Millbank

At the going down of the sun and in the morning we shall remember them

This Newsletter marks the 75th Anniversary of the surrender of Japan and the ending of the Second World War. This is a time for commemoration but also for reflection, as it follows hard on the sobering 75th Anniversaries of the atomic bomb blasts which devastated Hiroshima (6 August) and Nagasaki (9 August), causing immense suffering and loss of life (mainly of civilian non-combatants) and precipitating Japan's surrender. This anniversary, VJ-75, has therefore rightly been more muted than Victory in Europe Day, VE-75 on 8 May. Nonetheless, I feel sure many of us will have participated in, seen or read about the national commemorations of this anniversary, personified by the Prince of Wales who led the tributes at the National Memorial Arboretum.

It is a fitting moment therefore to reflect briefly on some familiar poetry and remember the fallen:

1. Laurence Binyon's 'For the Fallen'. The fourth stanza reads:

*They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.*

Laurence Binyon composed his poem 'For the Fallen' in mid-September 1914, only a few weeks after the outbreak of the First World War, following the initial battles of the British Expeditionary Force in France. Those battles (Mons, Le Cateau and the first battle of the Marne) had been the first time many in the RAMC and QAIMNS had encountered and dealt with the devastating wounds of modern warfare. Binyon said in 1939 that the words of this fourth stanza came to him first, finding inspiration as he sat looking out to sea from a clifftop on the north Cornish coastline. These words have been adopted by the Royal British Legion as an Exhortation at ceremonies of Remembrance for fallen Servicemen and women.

2. The Kohima Epitaph:

*When you go home, tell them of us and say,
For your tomorrow, we gave our today*

John Maxwell Edmonds (1875-1958) composed this famous epitaph towards the end of the First World War. It is now found on many memorials and veterans' monuments worldwide. The most famous is the Kohima Memorial which commemorates the Allied dead of the 2nd India Division that repulsed the Japanese 15th Army (a force of 100,000 men who had invaded India from Burma in March 1944), hence its popular name, the Kohima Epitaph.

The story of the Kohima Epitaph is summarised on the website of the Burma Star Association (which commemorates the Burma campaign that started with the Japanese invasion in 1942), <https://www.burmastar.org.uk/>. This Association sadly closed down on VJ-75 due to the fact its youngest few surviving veterans are now in their late 90s. One of these few veterans is Nurse Madge Lambert, whose experiences caring for the wounded are recounted on the Forces Net site below.



Nurse Madge Lambert in WW2 (photo credit: Basil and Madge Lambert)

The Burma Star Association's ethos carries on, for it has merged with the Burma Star Memorial Fund, which aims to fund scholarships at University College London for courses in global health and applied infectious disease epidemiology, both very relevant to the Burma Campaign – and even more relevant today (see <https://www.forces.net/news/burma-campaign-veterans-say-goodbye-star-association> and <https://burmastarmemorial.org/> for more details).

I strongly encourage Friends of Millbank to support the Burma Star Memorial Fund, for the Royal Army Medical College at Millbank was renowned for tackling global public health and infectious disease challenges (think typhoid, tetanus, leishmaniasis, sleeping sickness and brucellosis to name but a few). We also commemorate Far East Prisoners of War and their medical care through our annual keynote George Blair Memorial Lecture (in memory of the FEPOW brother of our Life President, Dr John SG Blair). Our next George Blair Memorial lecture will be on Friday 30 October, current global health crisis permitting! See our website for further details.

Lastly, Professor Geoff Gill from the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine has asked me to inform you that their Far East POW research group has updated their website 'Captive Memories' (see attached). The other attachment refers to their latest related book 'Captive Artists', all for VJ-Day.

In Arduis Fidelis

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