

News story: Prime Minister's Christmas 2017 message to the Armed Forces

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I want to send a message of thanks to every member of our armed forces and your families, wherever you are in the world this Christmas.

Earlier this year I joined the centenary commemorations for the Battle of Passchendaele.

Gathered in Flanders, we remembered the hundreds of thousands of young men who gave their lives on that battlefield in the cause of freedom.

Through a century of great change since, the high standards and devotion to duty of our armed forces have remained constant.

Today, as we face new threats, your work continues to make the world a safer place.

I saw that first hand this month in Iraq, when I met British soldiers training and supporting the Iraqi Security Forces as they fight against Daesh.

Thanks to their efforts, and the skill of the Royal Air Force, Daesh no longer holds significant territory in Iraq or Syria and a better future is in prospect for that region.

In the Caribbean, the Royal Navy, supported by the other services brought disaster relief to those suffering in the wake of Hurricane Irma.

And twice this year, after acts of terrorism here at home, we deployed troops on the streets of the UK to help keep us safe.

Whenever you are called upon – regulars or reserves – you always give of your best and inspire us all with your service.

The enormous debt we owe to our armed forces and veterans is enshrined in the Military Covenant.

And the Covenant also recognises that your achievements are made possible by the love and support of your families.

Partners and children are often called on to make huge sacrifices of their own – from a change of school or job, to coping with extended periods of separation.

That separation is especially difficult at Christmas time, and we should all be immensely grateful for that sacrifice.

At the Passchendaele memorial service at the Menin Gate this July, those gathered sang the Ypres hymn: 'O Valiant Hearts'.

This Christmas, as people across the United Kingdom celebrate this special time of year with their families and friends we will do so secure in the knowledge that the valiant hearts of our servicemen and -women, many far away from their own loved ones at this special time of year, are working to keep us safe.

Thank you all for your service and I wish you a very happy Christmas.