

Speech: United Kingdom Defence Adviser's Speech at 2017's Remembrance Day Luncheon

Your Excellency President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, UK High Commissioner to Ghana – HE Mr Iain Walker, The Minister for Defence – Honourable Dominic Nitiwul, The Deputy Minister for Defence – Honourable Major (Retired) Derek Oduro, The Honourable Adam Afriyie MP, The Honourable Meg Hillier MP, Chief of the Defence Staff for the Ghana Armed Forces – Lt Gen O B Akwa, The Inspector General of the Ghana Police Service, Chief of Staff of the Ghana Armed Forces, Service Chiefs and Commandants here present, Chairman of the Veterans' Administration of Ghana, Ambassadors, High Commissioners and Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Senior Officers of the Ghana Armed Forces (serving and retired), Former members of the British Armed Forces, Distinguished invited guests, Sirs, Ma'ams, Ladies and Gentlemen, and of course, Veterans of the Ghana Armed Forces.

Good afternoon – I too wish to add my welcome to you all as we gather on one of the most important days of the year; important militarily, but also I believe, nationally. I wish to thank HE Mr Iain Walker and Mrs Walker for hosting this event here at their Residence. And, it is my particular pleasure to once again welcome those veterans of the Ghana Armed Forces who have joined us today – indeed, it is in their honour that we hold this event each year – you are all most welcome.

As ever, we are very grateful for the considerable assistance we have received that has enabled us to deliver this event today. I would like to thank: The Labadi Beach Hotel; The Accra Brewery Company; Blue Skies; Unilever Ghana; GNPC; Nyansa Africa; The British Chamber of Commerce; and G4S Security – for their extremely generous support. I would also like to thank the Ghana Armed Forces and especially the Chief of Staff and the Director of Music by whose kind permission the Band is playing today.

I must of course mention again this year the staff, and particularly the children, of the Multikids Inclusive Academy: Mandy Budge, Farouk and Judith – and Kwasi and Lois – it is the children of Multikids who have again provided the great array of display-pieces as their symbols of Remembrance.

I thank the staff of the B-H-C and particularly the Residence Staff and Works Group, for their efforts in ensuring that we are all accommodated here today and I thank you all for coming together to remember and honour the fallen, and those involved in operations today – but importantly here today, also in supporting Ghana's veterans. I must also thank one particular individual: W02 Darren Nicholl, known to all as Paddy, as this is his final Remembrance Day here in Ghana, but also as a serving member of the British Armed Forces – so much of what is delivered here today is down to his endeavours.

This is my second Remembrance Day in Ghana – my first, last year, left a very

strong impression and I was left in no doubt as to the pride that Ghana justifiably has for her Armed Forces, and particularly for the historic achievements of those Armed Forces. And it is with a view to Ghana's military history that the backdrop behind me has been produced for today, which possibly requires some explanation: starting at the top and working clockwise:

- RSM Alhaji GRUNSHI DCM MM – the man who fired the first shot of the First World War;
- Major Seth Kobla ANTHONY – the first Black African commissioned as an officer in the British Army, and later Ghana's first representative to the UN, and High Commissioner to the UK, India and Canada;
- Lt Col Felix Walter Martey HAMMOND BEM – who passed away just this year;
- Sgt Cornelius Francis ADJETEY – a pivotal figure amongst the three now immortalised at the Christiansborg Crossroads Shooting Memorial;
- And finally, Major Maxwell Mahama who tragically lost his life this year – at this point I would like to welcome particularly Mrs Barbara Mahama, wife of Maj Mahama – Ma'am, you are most welcome here today. All are figures that reflect not just Ghana's military, but also I feel – national history.

Both the former H-C to Ghana, Jon Benjamin, and I spoke last year on the role of Ghanaians and other African soldiers during the First World War – especially relevant given the series of 100th anniversaries of First World War events that we will continue to see recognised up to November 2018. Indeed, this year serves as the centenary of women in conflict, and of the Battle of Cambrai, whilst also being the 75th anniversary of the RAF Regiment. And HE Mr Iain Walker has this year particularly noted the 100th anniversary of the Third Battle of Ypres, which history recalls as Passchendaele – a word that still evokes visions of hundreds of thousands of men dying upon an horrific battlefield churned to mud. Fought between July and November of 1917, this was a battle on a scale that, although leaving an indelible mark on the world, is today perhaps difficult for many to truly comprehend.

Although fought far away from the actions of the largely African forces on this continent, there are aspects of that time that many of us can relate to today – the ideals of service, loyalty and sacrifice. If we consider the combination of these three elements, then we can develop a sense of the selflessness that would have been required to fight in such a battle – a selflessness that is still required today when our servicemen and women fulfil their duty on behalf of our respective nations.

Much has happened in both the UK and Ghana since this event last year – but throughout Ghana has continued to deploy a significant number of personnel on UN Peacekeeping operations; has deployed forces as part of the African response in support of democracy in the Gambia, and closer to home, to deal with the challenge of Galamsey; the United Kingdom has deployed personnel to both South Sudan and Somalia as a refreshed commitment to UN Peacekeeping; whilst we continue to counter the threat of Daesh or IS; to support stability in Eastern Europe; and to support our partners around the world who themselves face other threats, perhaps not imagined 5, 10, 15 or 25 years

ago.

The threat of terrorism of course looms large – in the UK, across wider Europe and globally. Indeed, Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso continue to suffer from the scourge of terrorism, whilst Nigeria continues to combat Boko Haram, and Somalia faces Al Shabaab. Challenges of this nature can be seen throughout the world at the moment.

But, as we collectively seek to defeat such threats in the modern world, we do so able to draw upon the experience and example of those who have gone before us. Much of the world is free today because of the sacrifices made by our predecessors; many will enjoy freedom into the future because of the sacrifices made by military, police and civilian personnel deployed around the world today. Indeed, in this year Ghana has lost 2 officers: both from different generations, serving in different times, but with the common bonds of service, loyalty and sacrifice – of selflessness.

Lt Col Felix Martey Hammond British Empire Medal (Retired) made a determined effort to join us last year, as he has across many previous years, but sadly passed away earlier this year. In reflecting on his life, I have been struck by how much it was lived with a sense of service, loyalty and sacrifice. From his enlistment into the Royal West African Frontier Force on 3 March 41, to his service through the ranks, to his development as a provider of education, to his time supporting Ghanaian troops returning from Burma, through his latter service as a Commissioned Officer, in his role within the religious community and latterly in supporting Ghanaian veterans. There is a consistent theme of “others before self” – selflessness.

This ideal from an earlier generation now reflects in the new generation of Ghanaian Servicemen and women. And I think there is one individual from this new generation who has reinforced the relevance of service, loyalty and sacrifice to us all today. Major Maxwell Mahama was taken from his family far too early in his life. Here was a young, capable and professional officer serving his country in any way required of him, who sacrificed his life in the course of that service, demonstrating loyalty to his nation and to the people of Ghana until the end. Service, loyalty and sacrifice – demonstrated by Major Mahama’s service to Ghana, seen throughout the life of Lt Col Hammond and qualities that were relevant to those men who fought and died at Passchendaele – qualities that span the generations.

And these are qualities that would have been relevant through the careers of those veterans here present today and qualities that form the core of the character of our veterans, who have reassumed their place in the society from which they came. We can see this in the life of Lt Col Hammond, in the work of those at the VAG and in the work done by people such as Derrick Cobbinah of Forces Help Ghana – all of whom are veterans who continue to serve on behalf of other veterans.

They are veterans who continue to play a role in society, who continue to have a purpose – indeed, who continue to add value within society. Those of us who come from like-minded societies would do well to recognise, to remember, not just the service given – but also the service veterans

continuously give within our society.

Whilst it saddens me to hear of a veteran on the streets in the UK, it also saddens me to hear of veterans who are attacked, even shot, in their own homes in Ghana. Perhaps if we value the service given by our veterans, and recognise the value they still offer to society, then our societies will better care for the interests of our veterans.

It is for this reason that I applaud the efforts instigated by the GAF to look at their relationship with veterans and why I commend the work of Forces Help Ghana, the Veteran Administration of Ghana and others such as the Royal Commonwealth Ex-Services League (who still support Ghana's veterans today), the Royal British Legion and other organisations around the world that support our veterans.

And so, I turn again to the purpose of today – Remembrance – if we have a responsibility to our veterans – then we certainly have a public responsibility to remember the fallen – men and women like Maj Mahama, friends, family and those who fell at Passchendaele. I said it last year – but it bears repeating – to say the words ‘Lest we Forget’ is easy – to ensure we live up to those words is less so. It is right that we honour the memory of those who have lost their lives and offer thanks for the service, loyalty and sacrifice of those who have fought for the freedoms we enjoy today – some of those men are sat amongst us today – Gentlemen, I, for one, salute you.

This year we reflect on 100 years since Passchendaele – and 60 years since Ghana gained her independence. But what of the next 60 or 100 years? As we remember those who have gone before, we must recognise those who serve today – almost 3000 Ghanaians serving overseas on UN operations, and 4700 UK personnel are similarly deployed around the globe on a range of missions, tasks and operations – and we should recognise that these personnel will one day also be veterans deserving of our support, respect, and protection – Lest We Forget – their service will continue to provide peace for others into the future.

Our servicemen and women, now and for the foreseeable future, are engaged in activities that, like their predecessors, seek to keep our people safe; to create an environment that is secure, peaceful, and with the conditions for opportunity and prosperity – an environment within which society can progress. And so, as we remember those who have gone before – we should focus not just on the fact they fought, but why they fought – and why our people are required to fight today – to enable people to live in a society that benefits from peace, security, opportunity and prosperity.

And so, Servicemen and women have served across the years to create a society fit for all: and a society that should welcome, support and protect our veterans when their service is complete. It is our responsibility to ensure that not only do we remember, but that we take the opportunities created to develop a better society for the future: a society that creates opportunity for all – and one that values our veterans. They are proud of their tradition and Service: it is important that we are too.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you all for joining us today in honouring particularly our Ghanaian veterans – people like Lt Col Felix Hammond, Maj Maxwell Mahama and those veterans sat here with us today – and of course those that have fallen – events such as today ensures that they are never forgotten.

Your Excellency, President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, Ministers, Members of Parliament, Ambassadors, High Commissioners, senior officers and officials all here present, Sirs, Ma'ams, Ladies and Gentlemen – I thank you for your attention – please enjoy the remainder of your lunch and the rest of the afternoon.