

100 years ago today the mass slaughter of the First War ended

Every family in the UK must have slept so much easier this night one hundred years ago. The terrors of warfare in an industrial age had been great. Life in the trenches was dreadful. It drove some men mad and left many more maimed for life. All too many never returned from their brief lives in battle. Most of those who died were too young to leave children. They left behind grieving parents, brothers and sisters. Today most of us are grandchildren and great grandchildren of the survivors. We are doubly grateful that their generation sacrificed their young lives to resist tyranny, and that our own relatives lived through the trials of war.

Most of the soldiers just accepted their duty, and did not think much in public about the justice or wisdom of it all. Now they have all died we can both remember their bravery and ask ourselves what have nations and statesmen learned from that bitter experience?

The war was about the imperial expansion of Germany. The superior forces of the allies once the USA entered the conflict finally forced an unconditional surrender on the Germans after nearly four years of stalemate on the western front. The power of artillery, the machine gun and barbed wire to defend positions was so much stronger than the ability of forces to attack and overwhelm. As a result much of the war in the West was fought over a few miles each way in Belgium. It led to work on even more fearsome weapons that allowed more mobile warfare with greater chances of success for attackers in the subsequent world conflict. By 1939 planes used for reconnaissance and modest bombing in 1914-18 became terror weapons, with new generations of tanks and faster moving military vehicles. The Second World War ended with the massive explosions of Atom bombs.

The failure of the peace after 1918 to settle the German question should give us pause for thought. A comprehensive victory won at such cost did not give rise to a lasting peace. Far from resolving German aggression and militarism it led to a more fanatical and more heavily armed Germany. We need to remember in future that winning the peace matters as much as winning the war. It entails settling the defeated country in a way which allows it to be stable and successful in future without reverting to invasion and threats to neighbours.

Why did 1945 work when 1918 did not? The allies succeeded in helping Germany and Japan establish working democracies. Clauses against militarism and against re-armament were placed in their constitutions. American power was there as a guarantor of their peace and as a guarantor of the general peace. The Treaty of 1919 left Germany with anger over reparations and a sense they had been exploited in defeat. This led to a dictatorship born of violence and adopted through a sense of grievance pushing Germans to assert new claims over European lands and peoples. After the Second World the allies learned more about how diplomacy and the post war settlement needed to be wiser and

more effective than the 1918 one. As a result they helped create a peace loving democratic Germany (and Japan) that have not threatened others with force since 1945. The formation of NATO and an allied troop presence for many years in Germany established a new pattern of mutual security.

When I first read of the tragedy on the Somme I was angry that men were led in such a way. The more I have read the more saddened I have been by the excessive slaughter, the failure to find tactics that could shorten the war and lessen the death rates, and the ultimate failure to resolve the underlying problems at the heart of the war.

There is much to remember, and much to learn from as we reflect on a much needed peace in 1918. All too often men were sent over the top to repeat the mistakes of past battles, in the false hope that this time enough damage had been done to the enemy to warrant the risk of walking towards a hail of machine gun and rifle fire. All too often they repeated the same slaughter as the previous time frontal assault by foot soldiers was tried. Why didn't they learn? Why weren't they told to shelter or turn back when they realised that their bombardment had not paved the way for success? Could their commanders not see that the defending forces were still too strong for infantry advancing on machine guns? Why were the politicians and Generals well away from the danger so unable to think of new tactics and so careless of such a huge slaughter? Why could they not trust the junior officers to vary the orders as not only led the futile attacks, but were often the first to die?

[Some port statistics for Mr Raab](#)

In 2017 UK ports handled 482 million tonnes of cargo. 62% was imports. Dover accounted for just 5.4% of this. EU trade accounted for 43% of the tonnage handled.

Dover Calais should work fine, but there are plenty of other options if the French change their mind and don't want to keep the business.

[David Gauke attends Wokingham Conservatives dinner](#)

Last night there was a good attendance at the Wokingham Conservatives annual dinner, with the Lord Chancellor as our speaker and guest of honour. He talked about prison reform, explaining how we was seeking to get drugs and organised crime rings out of our jails. He is considering what to do about

the large number of short sentences for prison now given by the courts, which is adding greatly to the pressure on prison places. He explained that there is no evidence that many of these short sentences do any good. There might be more effective alternatives.

He was asked about a range of issues, from why the probate fees went up to the need to draw a line under investigations into soldiers actions in Northern Ireland many years ago. I raised with him the need to move on from the Chequers proposals which have found so little favour on either side of the Channel, in the wake of the news that they annoy a Remain MP like Jo Johnson as much as the many Leave MPs who find them unacceptable.

I would like to thank David Lee for hosting the event at St Anne's Manor, the organisers and all who attended.

Be realistic about what our armed forces can do

Twice in the twentieth century government and Parliament sent the professional but small British army onto the continent to fight against German militarism and expansion. In 1914 around 100,000 men were sent as the British Expeditionary Force. They fought bravely at Mons, on the Marne and later at Ypres. They retreated a long way but helped the French slow and turn the rapid German advance, stopping them capturing Paris. Most of that force was killed and by year end the UK was embarked on recruiting a far mightier citizens army capable of measuring up to the scale of Germany's forces.

In 1939 a larger expeditionary force was sent, expanding to around 400,000. This army with our French allies was heavily outnumbered and outgunned by German forces. It had to be rescued from the beaches at Dunkirk, whilst the German forces went on to conquer France. Around 60,000 of the force did not return in the rescue.

On both occasions the UK had been aware of the threat for some time. On both occasions the UK sent an army that was far too small, and inappropriately equipped to stand up to the forces ranged against it. The original British army of 1914 did not have the equipment needed to fight a trench based war, with insufficient machine guns, grenades and artillery. The army of 1939 was better equipped, but lost most of it in the retreat that resulted from the far stronger forces ranged against it.

In 1914 the army command had not thought through tactics in the machine age. As the war got bogged down towards the end of 1914, more thinking was needed over how you defended men in trenches, and how you could mount an attack at such well defended positions. The answer was not clear until the invention of the tank sought to inject some mobility and pace into the static battlefield. Several years were spent whilst at war experimenting with mining, with more

intense artillery bombardments on trench lines and in seeking an alternative front in the Dardenelles. Gas also found its cruel way into the repertoire of torture at the front. Most of this failed to produce a breakthrough, and was pursued in battle in ways which allowed far too many casualties for no good purpose.

It is difficult not to be angry to read of the many times armies of men were asked to undertake a frontal assault of a kind which had failed many times before, only to fail again. Wellington sought to conserve his troops and keep them out of danger as much as possible, knowing replacements were hard to come by. In 1914-18 there was a wanton approach to the loss of life, brought on by the huge numbers of volunteers followed by conscription and by a stubborn refusal to see that killing so many was not advancing the cause of victory.

So what can we learn from this for today? Our current army is not large enough to fight a major war against a substantial hostile power. We need the NATO alliance and the engagement of the USA to help keep our peace. The army has been used to fighting asymmetric wars against terrorist groups in splintered countries and neighbourhoods. In some of these Middle Eastern conflicts our force committed has been small, and has not always had the equipment it needed. Were we to be drawn into a wider war we would need time to expand our military numbers and to produce many more vehicles and weapons.

There is a need for more thought over what kind of weapons we might need and what we might face at a time of rapid technological change. Our professional army would become the core of an expanded army were need to arise, which we trust it does not. We need above all to ensure that home defence is strong, which as always depends on our ability at sea and in the air to control approaches to our coast. We also need to ensure that we can sustain our weapons and maintain military production on these islands if our supplies from abroad are disrupted as they were in both major wars of the twentieth century. Our island position makes it so much easier militarily to defend ourselves. It also requires plenty of sea power to ensure supply from abroad, and plenty of flexibility to produce more of what we need at home.

[More money for roads maintenance](#)

The Minister for Roads has written to me and other MPs today to tell us how he intends to divide up the £420 m of money this year announced in the Budget for additional highways maintenance.

He tells me that Wokingham will receive an extra £1,177,000 and West Berkshire an extra £1,913,000. I look forward to our Councils bringing forward more schemes to fill more potholes, mean more road edges and improve surfaces. This money is on top of existing maintenance budgets.