

Muk-gai, a Buddhist monk, visits an all-but-forgotten cemetery near Paju in South Korea, where rest the bodies of 769 North Korean soldiers who came to fight the South. Muk-gai, a South Korean Buddhist monk, does not consider them enemies. “Once they are dead, we should forgive everything they did in life”, he said. He sees it as his spiritual duty, and an old Eastern tradition, to care for their souls.

The 56-year-old monk, with a shaved head and simple grey tunic, visits the graveyard once a month. He taps on a small drum as he walks past headstones that dot the hillside. He chants to ease the suffering of spirits that he said haunt the grounds. They were among the thousands of soldiers whose remains were left scattered across the divided peninsula when the Korean War ended with a cease-fire in 1953.

Muk-gai came to know about the cemetery “when ghosts with gaping wounds and military uniforms began visiting him during his meditations”. They communicated their longing for their families and their need for love, he said. He said that at first he was scared by the spirits but got used to them! Muk-gai said the soldiers have not aged since dying, so they still look young. He feels like they are his sons.

In the silence of that cemetery the soldier is heard!

Silence is perhaps the true language of Remembrance.

The silence of Armistice Day – the silence of Remembrance Sunday - is the recognition that to do justice to what has happened, to do justice to the cost of war – its sacrifice and shame - we need to be silent together. We need to recognise that sometimes the most important thing we can do is hold our tongue.

Have you noticed this with war veterans? The importance thing is not the war stories they tell but the war stories they *don't* tell: the memories that are unspeakable, the experiences which can't or shouldn't be told. **In fact, they are almost entirely silent on the**

subject. Silence was the only language that can somehow do justice to the feeling, the memory, and the imagination.

*The Warrior's Code of Honour
By Paul R. Allen*

“The blast-furnace of battle burns away impurities encrusting your soul. The white-hot forge of combat hammers you into a purified, hardened warrior willing to die rather than break your word to friends – your honour.

Although still alive on the outside, you are dead inside – shot thru the heart with nonsensical guilt for living while friends died..... Their faces are the tombstones in your weeping eyes, their souls shine the true camaraderie you search for the rest of your life but never find. You live a different world now. You always will....

You never speak of your world. Those who have seen combat do not talk about it. Those who talk about it have not seen combat..... You did your duty, survived the dance, and returned home.

***Down thru the dusty centuries it has always been thus.
It always will be, for what is seared into a man's soul
who stands face to face with death
never changes”***

One of the things that we notice when we are silent is the sound of our own breathing. It is something we don't listen to or think about enough. We all breathe the same air; in and out it goes, in and out of each one of us. This is true for us in today's community of remembrance here.

Memory and silence, sense of smell, sound of breathing are the basic ingredients of our humanity. They are more acute for those who have faced trauma, and they carry the triggers which leave so many veterans with PTSD.

What do we Remember in our silence?

From Casualties of War

by Professor John J. Tierney, Jr.

This year the Chilcot report on the British occupation of Iraq concluded that the occupation was unnecessary, misdirected, and flawed from the beginning, calling the aftermath “more hostile, protracted and bloody than ever we imagined”.

The initial British invasion force consisted of 46,000 troops and support but dwindled down over the ensuing occupation. By the end in 2009, the U.S. fatality list numbered about 4,500 amidst a force of about 160,000. The total British fatalities from this six-year mission: 179. That’s right: 179 in six years, described as “more bloody than we ever imagined.”

July 1, 1916: the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) charges from the river Somme in France over no-man’s land toward German trenches just yards away, expecting to end World War I. They never made it. Hundreds of enemy machine guns and artillery cut them to pieces, averaging eight dead each second! By 2 PM on that same day, the BEF had suffered 60,000 casualties, 20,000 dead! The Battle of the Somme ended on November 18, with 92 more charges by the BEF (none as bad as the first). The war went on for two more years, taking tens of thousands of men from both sides on any given afternoon.

There was no "Chilcot Report" in 1916. That battle took five miles of French ground and cost 420,000 British casualties.
How our perspectives have changed.

There is a profound disparity between what our modern generation calls “suffering” and what earlier generations, around the globe, accepted as the price of war. Consider some casualty figures from World War II: *Battle of Stalingrad (1.8 million), Berlin (1.3 million), Moscow (1 million), Narva (550,000), France (469,000), Luzon (345,000), Kharkov (300,000), Kursk (388,000), and The Bulge (186,000).*

We live in an extremely dangerous world where there are apparently 47 ongoing conflicts adding daily to the mounting casualty statistics

and we mustn't forget that 90% of today's war dead are civilians (half of them children). It is surely more than likely that we will be calling on our armed forces to risk life and limb again as we deal with the threats of terrorism.

For the sake of those war dead: for the sake of the millions of other war victims who aren't dead, but bereaved, forced to become displaced or stateless persons who have lost every material thing they ever had, there must surely be a better way! Isn't all that suffering far too high a price to pay for any victory, or more often no victory at all?

But never forget that the power of remembrance is that while it may connect us with sadness it also inspires us in hope.

We believe that in Jesus, the Prince of Peace, we have the possibility of reconciliation between human beings and God. Our God has given himself, made the final sacrifice of himself, to reconcile us to himself. His grace, his undeserved love, reaching out to us, you, and me.

Therein is our hope for the future, and our encouragement not to allow the past to capture us in its worst moments but to build us up for the future. We remember not only to honour the fallen, but to raise them in our hearts and to promise to live lives worthy of their sacrifice.

The Veteran's Lament

So here we stand again. A year has passed.
Once more our sorrow turns to millions killed.

What have we learned?
What do you say to us, dear soldier
from your eternal silence?

Do you implore us to improve our killing efficiency,
to make bigger and better bombs,
condemning millions more to your sad fate?

Do you cheer us on in our blindness?
How many thousands have we added to your number, this past
year?
No – I hear you plead now. I hear you cry to us across the years:

‘Weep not for me but for those yet unborn.
Go! – save your own children from my fate
Go! – thank me, by walking away today
to reject the futility, the waste, and the lie
that you have repeated over and over
even as you stand
for where do your billions go,
if not to ensure far more will know the hell I knew?
It is too late for me.
I have no voice but yours,
please – speak for me.

So, when you stand here again,
when this next year has passed,
come here in certainty
that you have taken some small step
along a different road...’

Bill, World War Two veteran