

## Sermon: Remembrance Sunday 2006...

It is 91 years since the Gallipoli Campaign in which Fusiliers fought very prominently. Particularly the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers and the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion the Lancashire Fusiliers. The Lancastrians famously *won six VCs before breakfast*.

On 25<sup>th</sup> April 1915, the beaches of the Gallipoli peninsula were stormed by Allied forces in an attempt to knock Turkey out of the First World War and to turn the flank of the stalemated Western Front. The expedition moved to the Middle East full of a strange sense of exaltation: here was an almost sacred mission aimed at Constantinople and the ending of a terrible struggle.

The land attack was a sequel to the naval attempt a month earlier to force the Dardanelles. But this had put the Turks on their guard and under a German General they redeployed their forces and improved their defences. A Fusilier Brigade consisting of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royals, 1<sup>st</sup> Lancashire, the Royal Munster and the Royal Dublin was the first to land to cover the disembarkation of the rest of 29 Division. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion's casualties that day amounted to nearly half its strength and included the Commanding Officer, the Second-in-Command and all the Company Commanders.

It was a bloody Campaign, famous for the ANZAC losses of 9000. But we should not forget that the British lost 43,000 dead and the French 27,000. The Turks were led by the brilliant General Mustapha Kamal – an officer in the Fusiliers this week told me that Kamal was a military genius - while the Allied Campaign was undermanned and under-equipped.

Let us give special thanks today for what those brave men gave in 1915. Let me also congratulate Fusilier Daniel Smith on his recently being awarded the George Medal in Iraq. Daniel and his family are with us in church this morning. There were brave men at Gallipoli and there are brave men today.

I must say I was not surprised to be told this week by that pathetic church organisation called Ecclesia that we should not wear red poppies, but white. Ecclesia said *red poppies suggest redemption can come through war*. Well, what's wrong with that? Redemption can indeed come through war - when men are prepared to shed their blood to redeem us from the enemy. I would go further and say that when our soldiers give their lives in battle, their sacrifice is joined to the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross.

It is a bit much when organisations such as Ecclesia and other so called *peace activists* presume to lecture soldiers about the nature of war. Soldiers do not like war – because it is they – and not the peace activists – who are called to fight. But soldiers know that there is a worse thing than war, and that is the triumph of evil. Sometimes war is the moral, the righteous, thing to do. The soldiers are the true peace activists, because peace is what they are fighting for. This is the lasting peace which only comes after victory. And the Bible itself warns us against those who *cry peace where there is no peace*.

I wonder where soldiers get their courage from? Surely their love of our country and their fierce attachment to their Regiment. Through the knowledge that they are fighting a good fight. Through their loyalty to their comrades-in-arms.

But I heard a fascinating programme on the radio this week and it was about soldiers and their music. It seems that there are three sorts of soldiery music. First of course there are the stirring marches, the drum and the bugle and the sound of men marching. But there is another kind of music – the songs of love and enforced absence from those they love. The classic of all these songs must be *Lilli Marlene* which we pinched from Rommel. I can remember my dad singing it to me when I was a boy, and not long after he had been demobbed – the English version of course:

*Underneath the lantern, by the barrack gate  
Darling I remember the way you used to wait  
T'was there that you whispered tenderly,  
That you loved me,  
You'd always be,  
My Lilli of the Lamplight,  
My own Lilli Marlene.*

It's astonishingly moving. And it is not sentimental. Sentimentality happens when the emotion being expressed is fake – when the emotion is not worthy of what is being said or sung. But the wartime songs of love and loss *do* match the emotion felt. Men were thrust into strange lands, miles away from their loved ones. And they might be killed tomorrow. That is not sentimental. That is heartfelt. What else should they sing in such a situation? *Lilli Marlene* is perfect – and both sides knew it.

There is another sort of army music. It is bored, fatalistic and downright scurrilous. These are the songs such *We're here because we're here* and *Why are we waiting?* Soldiers will tell you that most of what passes for warfare is hanging around waiting for orders, smoking, trying to sleep. In these songs the trooper expresses his frustration and resignation, literally, as it were, *Sod this for a game of soldiers!* There are the songs about sleeping with the Sergeant Major's wife. There are the others about Hitler's having only one ball and Goering two – but very small.

So soldiers' music reminds us that military service is glorious, full of love and longing, fear and death – but also full of tedium, exasperation, deadpan humour and what's simply bawdy. In other words, all human life is there. Today we give thanks for that life, for those who lived it and those who gave their lives for us.

There is no better verse to take away with us than the one we heard in the second lesson:

*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*