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Tending the flame

Michael Edmund

My son represented the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers (RRF) at a service in Harelbeke, Flanders, to rededicate the grave of a previously-unidentified British officer killed in 1918. You can read more about the occasion on the MOD website; and more about 2Lt Swallow on the Fusiliers' Facebook page. [See p.4]

A score of Belgian people attended a ceremony one day last July to acknowledge the existence - and the sacrifice - of 2Lt Bertie Swallow, anonymous no more, who had lain unnamed among them for almost a century.

When Alex told me about the event, I was struck by his description of one particular person: a young man, apparently aged about 15. Among the villagers and the civic dignitaries, he came dressed in his Sunday best, complete with straw boater. And he brought a Union Flag.

After the ceremony and the sounding of 'Last Post'; and once all the "official" wreaths had been laid, this young man quietly approached Alex and asked permission to place his flag upon 2Lt. Swallow's grave.



2Lt. Swallow was an officer in the Lancashire Fusiliers, an antecedent the RRF. Apart from the fact that Alex comes from the village, there might appear to be little connection with Sarratt.

Nevertheless, the last chapter in that fallen soldier's story fully deserves its place on our pages this month, of all months.

Perhaps we take peace in Europe for granted today, but I would like to reflect upon those people and that gesture.

Conducting the Service, Regimental Chaplain Reverend Stuart Richards observed: "It is a privilege to tend the flame of remembrance and to ensure that those who made the supreme sacrifice a century ago have a memorial and a name for future generations."

The good people of Harelbeke are those "future generations", as are we all. And we all owe that peace, our freedoms and our democracies to those servicemen. One young Belgian man who knows this, stepped forward to ask permission to mark a soldier's grave with the flag under which he had fought - and died.

Lest We Forget: I cannot think of more eloquent testimony.