

I have found the World War 1 commemoration events this week incredibly moving. Many men from across our parishes went to war. Very few were anything more than patriotic volunteers determined to defend our allies and this great Country and Empire from the grave threat of invasion. I doubt any leader, political or military, thought that the war would take so long or that so many, nearly 900,000 soldiers, would not return to their villages, homes and families.

The war, until the outbreak of the next European conflict, was known as the Great War. It was anything but. Yes we defeated the enemy but at such a huge cost. I have spent some time recently looking at the names on the war memorials in my area and even though there is no personal relative connection to any inscription I cannot help but feel the sadness and pain for the families. I stand looking at the stones and wonder what it was like for the men in the trenches. If they knew and truly understood what cause they were fighting for. If they were scared. If they felt any pain when they were shot. I have to stop myself because I probably know the answers to all those questions.

It is those answers that help formulate my views of global conflicts today. Our armed forces are now fully professional services, unlike the “volunteer” force of 1914. They are ready to go to war at any given point. And yet throughout the commemoration events of this week we heard of the importance of peace and reconciliation. Words that are right in the context of 1914 but seem somewhat hollow as deadly conflict presently rages across the Middle East and elsewhere with little sign of a truce or peace or reconciliation.

We must never forget our men who died so bravely in World War 1. We won't. But today we must also pray for peace, and allow those in battle to do what our men did not - return to their villages, homes and families.