REMEMBRANCE ARMISTICE DAY NEXT WEEK MARKS THE 90TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE TWO-MINUTE SILENCE. **CLARE JENKINS** TAKES A PERSONAL LOOK AT THE WAYS IN WHICH THE TRADITION LIVES ON.

THE SILENCE THAT STILL RESONATES

Every Remembrance Day, during the two-minute silence, my mother remembers her father, John Clement Gardiner, a soldier wounded in the head in 1914.

When the war began, he was on the Army reserve list and from an Army family. So although he was working as a butler at the time, he was among the first to be called up on August 4, 1914. He'd only been married for 18 months at that point, to my grandmother Annie, and was a recent father.

He was in the front line and was wounded when he was caught up in the retreat from Mons in Belgium, which began towards the end of the first month of the war and concluded on September 5.

Before being called up, my grandfather had been a teetotaller and active member of the Temperance League. He returned from his short experience of soldiering a different person. Shrapnel was lodged in his head. When it touched his brain, it turned him into a man dependent on drink, who would wait for my grandmother to come home from giving music lessons, take her "few paltry shillings" off her and spend it on alcohol.

Then, on his return from the pub, he would tie her to a chair or lock her in the pantry overnight, in order to "interrogate" her; try to drill holes through the wall with a spoon to create a spy-hole; and terrorise his children, believing them to be German soldiers.

"It was very frightening," my mother remembers. "I was only a child, about eight or nine, and I'd hear him beating my mother downstairs, and I'd be praying for God to take him. Yet she never had a bad word to say against him. She remembered him as he had been. The war just changed his personality completely."

TRUE GENTLEMAN: John Clement Gardiner, grandfather of Clare Jenkins, in his butler's uniform.

When he was well, she remembers a "true gentleman", loving husband and fond father. Because he'd been brought up in India, he'd make his five children curries out of scraps of meat, and sit them round the fire at night, telling ghost stories and encouraging them to see pictures in the flames. He had been trained in the law before becoming a butler and later fought for bigger pensions for injured ex-servicemen, like himself, who were unable to work.

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And there were many of them around during and after the war. My mother recalls that: "At primary school, in the street where I lived, most of the fathers were gassed. I used to call for my best friend, and her father would be sitting all hunched up in a chair in the corner – he was very badly gassed.

"It destroyed so many lives, didn't it?" she adds. "The Great War, the war to end all wars…"

When he died, of TB, on Maundy Thursday in 1935, the local British Legion wanted a big procession for John Clement Gardiner, in acknowledgment of the work he had done fighting for an improvement to veterans' pensions. But my grandmother preferred a quiet funeral, which took place on Easter Monday. She played the organ at the funeral, before going on to another church to play at a wedding. "They were expecting her, so she couldn't let them down."

That same day, the eldest of her three sons left home to join the RAF. He and my other two uncles all saw active service in the Second World War, while my mother worked in the Land Army (and, as a by-the-by, was one of the 90 former Land Army girls' invited to meet the Queen a couple of weeks ago at Buckingham Palace).

Every Armistice Day service afterwards, my grandmother would wear my grandfather's medals (four, including the Mons Star) while listening to the service on the radio.

It was 90 years ago that King George V decreed that at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, "All locomotion should cease, so that, in perfect stillness, the thoughts of everyone may be concentrated on reverent remembrance of the glorious dead."

The silence still resonates throughout the country. But for some there's a daily silence because of the loss of someone who was part of their lives.

Bill Stewardson's 21-year-old son Alex Green was killed by a sniper in Basra, Iraq, two years ago.

"Being a soldier was all he ever wanted to do," says Bill, from Sheffield. "I think about Alex every single day. I can still hear his voice, still see his face. So yes, during the two-minute silence it's there, but I also think of the millions of people who've died down the centuries, mainly in the two World Wars. And I try to decide whether it was worth something.

"I just have to hope that with Iraq and

WARTIME MEMORIES: Left: John Clement Gardiner (back row, right) in uniform at a convalescent home after he was wounded at Mons in 1914. Above: Annie Gardiner, grandmother of Clare Jenkins.

FRONT LINE: Troops at Mons in Belgium during the First World War.

Afghanistan, I get to see those countries being more stable, and more peaceful – and the people living lives like we do over here. If they get to that point, at least I'll be able to think Alex's death counted and contributed in a positive way."

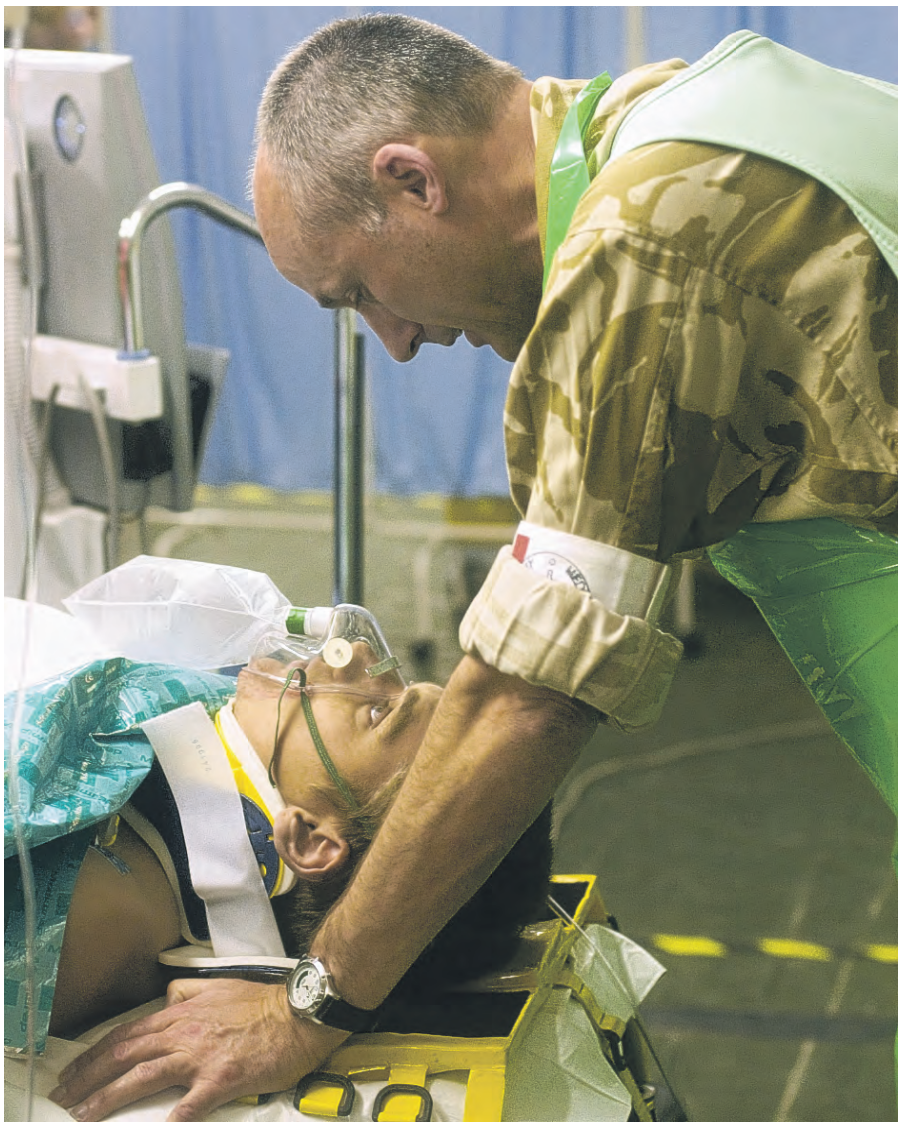
What would be his message to people about observing the two-minute silence? "It would be that everyone wears a poppy, puts money in the box, spends two minutes to think about all the waste and mess and mayhem and why it's happened – and gives a thought to all those people on the other side of the planet who need help."

Dave "Charley" Brown fought in the Battle of Goose Green in the Falklands in 1982. He's now a member of SAMA, the South Atlantic Medal Association, and is involved in the Festival of Remembrance in Bradford.

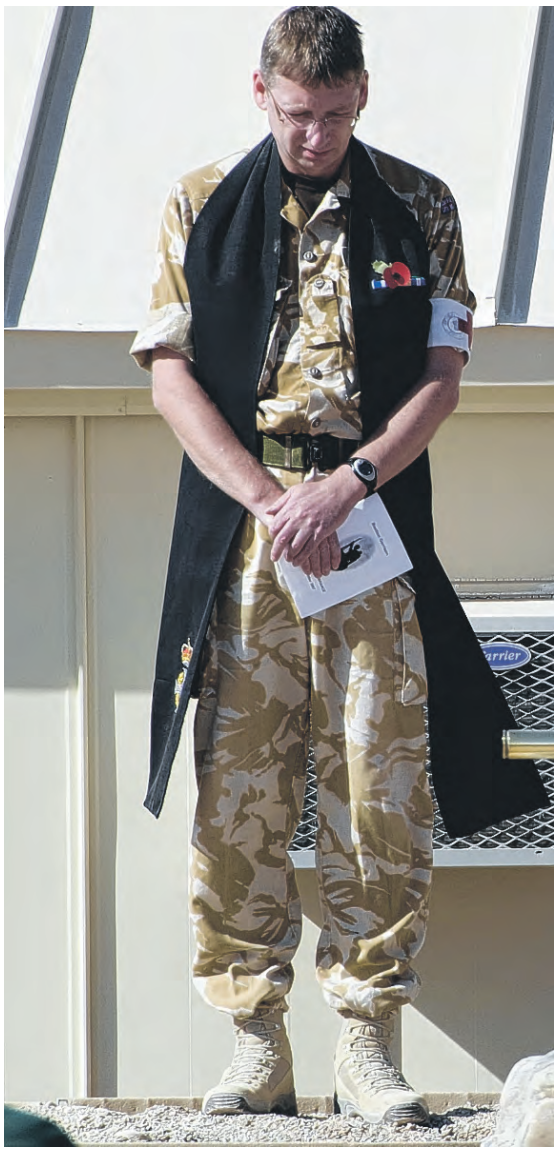
How important does he think it is to remember the two-minute silence? "It's a very high priority, out of respect, and remembering my fallen comrades and friends, as well as those in earlier conflicts, and the lads who are still dying today. The two-minute silence to me is a mark of respect to friends, family, comrades who have died – and the veterans of previous conflicts, soldiers who have died and those still dying in Afghanistan today.

"Wherever I am, I stand still, pause and reflect… and I give thanks that I'm alive and that I have all my limbs and that I can see, because not all of them were that lucky.

"As an association, we look after the interests of relatives and veterans – that's my therapy. We have had problems with veterans in prison, committing suicide, problems with alcohol and drugs – they take them to



STILL FIGHTING: Field hospital at Camp Bastion in Helmand Province, Afghanistan.



wipe out the memories and to help them get a decent night's sleep. They are the victims as well. In Bradford, three years ago and every year since, we laid a separate wreath for those who have died through suicide, illness, alcohol – because they have to live with the consequences of what they've done and seen, and sometimes it's just too much.

"Not just those who fought in the Falklands, but those from Northern Ireland, Afghanistan, Iraq, the Second World War – shellshock, post-traumatic stress disorder, combat stress, call it what you will. And it's what a lot of soldiers from the First World War were suffering from when they were shot for cowardice.

"It's not just for the men who've died, but also for the children, wives and mothers left behind. They've died to give people freedom, the right to live their own lives without fear of being butchered or terrorised, and we should all remember that."

David Cotterrell is a war photographer and Professor of Fine Art at Sheffield Hallam University. He's had two stints at Camp Bastion in Helmand Province in Afghanistan, and was in the camp on Armistice Day when a two-minute silence was observed.

"I'd seen things at the field hospital that I wasn't prepared to see. So I was looking for some solace or contextual understanding for the seemingly random and violent injuries. The padre dealt with it by relating the sacrifice to previous precedents, putting it into a historical context.

"I wanted someone to either attack, or compassionately explain, the reasons for the death and injury. It can't do that, but what it can do is offer a simple universal space for people to share empathy, a common experience, and that is the silence."

NEVER FORGET: Clare Jenkins considers the history of remembrance. Picture: Chris Lawton

A year later, he was at Sheffield train station on November 11 when the clocks struck 11. "I was arriving to teach and the announcement came over the Tannoy. There was no formal ceremony, but some people did stop, others pushed past.

"It was the first time I'd heard it at a station and there seemed a greater awareness that this symbolic remembrance could be used to provide a collective acknowledgment that wars haven't stopped.

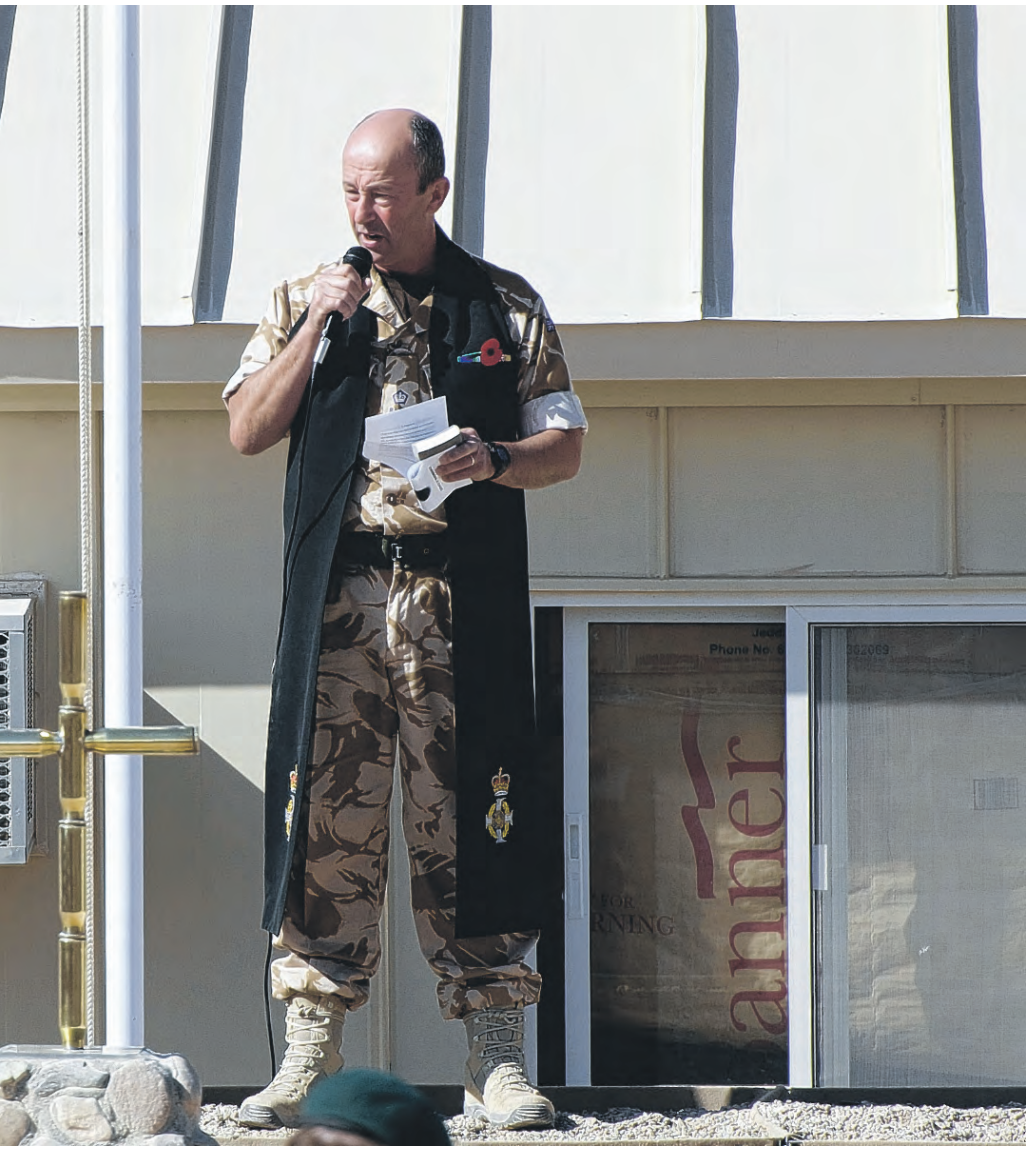
"The two-minute silence relates back to a nostalgic idea of sacrifice by a previous generation. But it should also remind us that we've not resolved things. It can never be enough, but it does offer a shared responsibility to memorialise the sacrifices of historic follies.

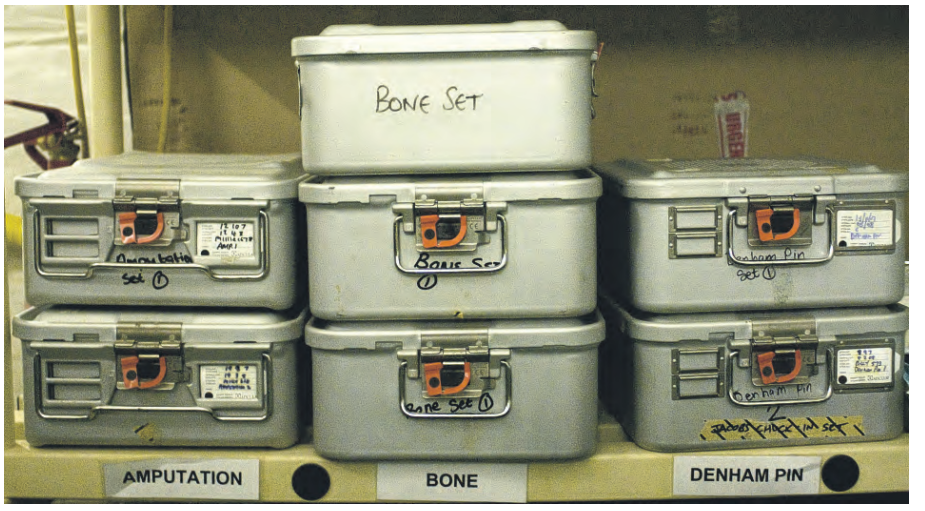
"It's a very simple thing to say that soldiers should never be deployed and wars should never happen. But we live where there is no threat and we have power over our own destinies. When you see people with no power, it's harder to identify a clear solution. We can't transpose a suburban model to areas where people are struggling to survive."

■ **Clare Jenkins's programme *The Two Minute Silence* is broadcast on Radio 4 tomorrow (November 8) at 2.45pm as part of a series of programmes on a remembrance theme.**

■ **David Cotterrell images were produced during research for the exhibition *War and Medicine*, supported by the Wellcome Trust.**

■ **Footsteps of the fallen – Page 34.**





POPPY DAY: Top, Realities of war at the field hospital at Camp Bastion in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. Above, British forces at Camp Bastion collect for the Poppy Appeal. Left, Remembrance Service at the camp. Pictures: David Cotterrell.

ADVERTISING SPOTLIGHT

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