

Importance of strong bonds

[DR JONATHAN BOFF]

Far from home, in difficult conditions, often under intense pressure, the powerful bonds that form between soldiers are one of the most important parts of army life.

These friendships built under fire are unique and a crucial factor in enabling them to do the job that they do. It was this loyalty to their comrades that kept many soldiers motivated to fight even in the horrific conditions of the First World War.

As millions of citizen soldiers adapted to the hardships of military life, they pulled even closer together – uniting in something that few at home could even imagine.

And in the years that followed, the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month would be just one of the anniversaries which would give them pause to remember those they had lost.

The men who came back and the bereaved wrote a new language of commemoration – the poppy, the two minutes' silence, the Cenotaph – a language which we all speak still today. These commemorations helped them to remember lost friends, lost colleagues, their brothers in arms.

I'm interested in what remembrance means to the soldier serving in today's army so I've come to talk to Captain Alan Williamson who has served in the infantry in deployments to Afghanistan.

[CAPTAIN ALAN WILLIAMSON]

I think institutionally, remembrance is still very important within the army. With the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan certainly a lot of recent memory of loss and therefore remembrance plays an important part in our working lives.

From a personal point of view, having served on a couple of tours of Afghanistan and lost soldiers under my command, I find it quite cathartic to have a bit of personal reflection and remembrance.

[DR JONATHAN BOFF]

For the soldiers I have met both here on Salisbury Plain and on visits to the Western Front, remembrance takes on a much greater significance. Men like me who have never fought can perhaps only begin to imagine but standing amongst the memorials to those who died almost 100 years ago, it's clear that the commemorations created after what was then known as the Great War still resonate with serving soldiers today.

IMAGES COURTESY OF GETTY IMAGES