



Military History Group

U3A Dorking

Newsletter Number 1

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To all members of Dorking U3A

Greetings from The Military History Group, or as Shakespeare penned for Henry V (and then Kenneth Branagh) to say on that autumnal eve of St Crispin's day '*we few, we happy few, we band of brothers*' when exhorting his army at Agincourt to make things happen.

This newsletter is to let you know that as group of fifteen we too have decided to make things happen this Autumn. We have missed our face to face meetings, but not the Lincoln Arms, and have moved to Brockham Pavilion, responsibly socially distancing, for our first meeting in October. If you are like minded why not join us for talks on military matters ancient and modern?

Not academic just interesting and time well spent.

Venue: Brockham Pavilion, Middle Street, Brockham
1000 for 1030 first Tuesday of the month
Free car park
£3 per meeting including coffee
Book sale/exchange

Programme 2020

October 6: *The Battle of Britain* by group member George Blundell-Pound.

We have just past the 80th anniversary of this country saving battle which has added to our lexicon the iconic and memorable '*never in the field of human conflict has so much been owed by so many to so few.*' George will explain and describe the story behind Churchill's words of congratulations to our airmen and why winning this battle was so important to Britain then and to us today.

November 3: *The Unknown Warrior* by group member Barrie Friend

This November sees the centenary of the unveiling of Lutyen's cenotaph accompanied by the laying to rest of The Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey. What were some of the practical and political challenges faced in meeting the tight deadline of November 11th 1920 following King George V's prevarication and then sudden agreement to the burial? Barrie will describe the challenges, how they were overcome and the glory of the event.

December 1: *The Long Range Desert Group* by member Bob Bartlett

The LRDG was the first of what became Special Forces operating initially as the name suggests in the deserts of North Africa. They have their roots in the First World War and desert exploration between the wars. This presentation will cover the early days of the Group who were to go on to operate in the Dodecanese and the Balkans once the Germans were driven from North Africa.

Dates for 2021

January 5
February 2
March 3
April 6
May 4
June 8
July 6

August 3
September 7

Related Links

Zoom history presentations <https://www.danhillmilitaryhistorian.com/archive>

National Army Museum <https://www.nam.ac.uk/whats-on>

Blog on Winston Churchill <https://winstonchurchillblog.wordpress.com/>

British Library Anglo Saxons <https://www.bl.uk/anglo-saxons>

Chelsea History Festival

https://www.chelseahistoryfestival.com/?utm_source=solus&utm_medium=email&utm_term=chf&utm_content=ticketsonsale&utm_campaign=chf2020



MHG Covid meeting in Brockham

The History of the Two Minutes' Silence – in Farnham and elsewhere

John Francis Moss

This year is the centenary of the unveiling of the Cenotaph in Whitehall, and the burial of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey. As we gather at our war memorials on or around 11th November, have you ever wondered why we commemorate our war dead with an act of communal silence, or how it was decided that silence should be two minutes long – and not three minutes or five?

The armistice came into effect on Tuesday, 11th November 1918 – the First World War didn't formally end until Saturday, 28th June 1919 when the Treaty of Versailles was signed (which is why some war memorials show 1914-1919). The main event to celebrate the signing was a victory parade through the streets of London – which included troops marching past a temporary Cenotaph in Whitehall, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, but made of wood and plaster, and not intended to be a permanent memorial.

In anticipation of these celebrations, an Australian journalist working in London, Edward George Honey, wrote to *The Evening News* on Thursday, 8th May 1919:

Can we not spare some fragment of those hours of Peace rejoicing for a silent tribute to these mighty dead? Individually, yes! Too many of us know we will for our own kith and kin, for the friend who will never come back. But nationally? I would ask for five minutes, five little minutes only. Five *silent* minutes of national remembrance. A very sacred intercession!

Honey's suggestion was based on the silence held across the transport and communications network in Great Britain on Friday, 20th May 1910, the day of the funeral of King Edward VII, when the train he was on came to a halt for five minutes and all the travellers in his compartment removed their hats and stood in silence. Honey's suggestion was not taken up; however, in the lead-up to the first anniversary of the Armistice on Tuesday, 11th November 1919, a South African diplomat, Sir Percy Fitzpatrick, wrote to the War Cabinet, suggesting a silence based on the 'Three Minutes Pause' held in Cape Town during the war, where:

At noon each day all work, all talk and all movement were suspended for three minutes that we might concentrate as one in thinking of those – the living and the dead – who had pledged and given themselves for all that we believe in...¹

Fitzpatrick describes the noonday gun which gave the signal for the silence to start, and the sirens and hooters used for the same purpose across the Rand Goldfields. In the centre of Cape Town, the silence was started by a bugler playing 'Last Post' from a balcony. He concludes that the 'the call at the hour would come from gun or belfry, from mine, factory or ship' – a reminder that there was no national time signal in 1919.

Honey's proposal was for five minutes of silence; Fitzpatrick's was for three: however, the Cabinet, who on Wednesday, 5th November 1919 considered only the latter proposal, concluded:

That a pause of three minutes would involve too great a strain and inconvenience, and that a pause of one minute, as adopted in the United States of America on the occasion

¹ Cabinet Paper, CAB/24/92, p. 2, found on-line at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk - the National Archives website.

of President Roosevelt's funeral [on Wednesday, 8th January 1919] and on other occasions, would be more impressive.²

There's a totally uncorroborated story that following the Cabinet's recommendation, there was a rehearsal of the silence involving King George, a guardsman and a stopwatch, at which the King decided that one minute was too short – so he decided to have two! What is known is that following the Cabinet meeting, Lord Curzon, the Foreign Secretary, lunched with the King where 'His Majesty's pleasure' was sought – and given, concluding a process whereby, in the space of two days and at the highest level of government, the proposed period of silence had been altered successively from three to one, and finally to two minutes – which it has remained ever since.

Although this would be the first ever national memorial silence for the war dead, some earlier local examples have come to light – one of the most interesting being held in Castle Street, Farnham, Surrey on Wednesday, 10th May 1916. It took place as part of the opening ceremony of a country fair organised by a local auctioneer and estate agent, James Alfred Eggar, to raise funds for the local British Farmers' Red Cross Society.

The programme makes clear the nature and purpose of the silence...

11 a.m.—The OPENING CEREMONY will take place at the bottom of Castle Street. After the Bugles have sounded, there will be silence for 2 minutes as a token of respect to the memory of those who have fallen in the War, to the Wounded, to the Prisoners, and to those who are fighting for their Country.

The National Anthem will be sung.³

...while the sounding of bugles immediately beforehand, and the singing of the National Anthem afterwards, impose an additional military and patriotic setting – the experience of silence is always highly influenced by its context.

² Ibid.

³ National Archives: HO 45/11557.



Farnham 4

A number of photographs of the event exist, showing a platform erected outside 74, Castle Street (once Eggar's offices, now a Pizza Express) with about thirty people standing on it, surrounded by a crowd of about 200. Everyone is standing to attention. Some of the men in uniform are saluting, while all the men not in uniform are standing bare-headed. Eggar is identifiable on the platform, as is Canon Bertram Keir Cunningham, the Warden at the Bishop's Hostel, Farnham, standing with what appears to be a copy of the programme in his hand. The hostel was an Anglican training college for clergy in the grounds of Farnham Castle, the official residence of the Bishop of Winchester. However, it had closed for the war, and Cunningham had been helping out in the parish as well as chaplain to Waverley Abbey Hospital. With both the Bishop and the Rector of Farnham (Rev. John MacLeod Campbell Crum) away, Cunningham was ideally placed to represent both the local church and the British Red Cross at this civic event. While Eggar and two representatives from Waverley Abbey spoke from the platform after the silence, it was Cunningham who introduced it.

Canon Cunningham, in opening the proceedings, said after the bugles had sounded there would be two minutes silence, during which they would think with thankfulness before God of those who laid down their lives for their country, the sick and the wounded, and those who were now fighting for King, Country, and Cause.⁵

His words, as recorded, are very similar to those printed in the programme, but arguably change the already complex nature of the silence from 'a token of respect' to prayer.

⁴ Photograph courtesy of the Museum of Farnham, Farnham Maltings.

⁵ The Farnham Herald, Saturday, 13th May, 1916, pp. 4 & 5.

So, whose idea was the silence – an auctioneer, a clergyman, or someone else? Evidence that Eggar suggested the idea for the country fair is unambiguous, while correspondence after the war shows that he also claimed to be the originator of the silence. However, there are a number of examples of silence being used in the Church of England’s wartime liturgies and rites – such as church bells being rung at noon each day, encouraging people to stop and pray silently for those fighting. At face value, Cunningham seems the more likely candidate. Sadly, no records of the meetings held before the fair which might have answered that question still exist. Eggar’s post-war correspondence also corroborates that the only proposal considered by the Cabinet in November 1919 was Fitzpatrick’s – a three-minute silence based on that held in Cape Town, rather than a two-minute silence held in Castle Street, Farnham. Nevertheless, the citizens of Farnham can be proud that they held what could well have been Britain’s first civic two-minute silence – 3½ years before it became a national institution.

The King’s Proclamation announcing the first national/imperial silence was published in newspapers across the British Empire on Friday, 7th November 1919. Although this was less than two days after his ‘pleasure’ had been sought, it was only four days before the event itself.

TO ALL MY PEOPLE.

BUCKINGHAM PALACE.

Tuesday next, November 11, is the first anniversary of the Armistice, which stayed the world-wide carnage of the four preceding years and marked the victory of Right and Freedom. I believe my people fervently wish to perpetuate the memory of that Great Deliverance, and of those who laid down their lives to achieve it.

To afford an opportunity for the universal expression of feeling it is my desire and hope that at the hour when the Armistice came into force, the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, there may be, for the brief space of two minutes, a complete suspension of all our normal activities. During that time, except in the rare cases where this may be impracticable, all work, all sound, and all locomotion should cease, so that, in perfect stillness, the thoughts of every one may be concentrated on reverent remembrance of the Glorious Dead.

No elaborate organization appears to be necessary. At a given signal, which can be easily arranged to suit the circumstances of each locality, I believe that that we shall all gladly interrupt our business and pleasure, whatever it may be, and unite in this simple service of Silence and Remembrance.

GEORGE R.I.⁶

⁶ This carried in most national newspapers that day, including The Times, Friday, 7th November 1919, p. 12.

The intention was that people should keep the silence just where they were – a suspension of activity for two minutes in the middle of the working day, rather than a ritual activity in itself. However, from the very start, individuals felt the need to gather together in the open air rather than indoors, and for that gathering to be focused in an appropriate place. *The Farnham Herald* comments that ‘no official arrangements had been made’, and during the morning ‘work proceeded as usual’, however:

...a few minutes before 11 o’clock a small crowd gathered at the bottom of Castle Street, and when the clock struck the hour and the signal was given by the fire hooters at the Brewery and the Water Works, the men present bared their heads and all stood in silence for the space of two minutes.⁷

This fits in moderately well with the tone of the proclamation. However, the article also reports the presence of the Chairman and members of the Urban District Council in Castle Street, which had already been acknowledged as having ‘become the spot to which all turn on such occasions’, as well as giving the names of the police officers⁸ in attendance, and those of the two trumpeters from Aldershot who sounded the ‘Last Post’ to mark the end of the silence. Later, the newspaper reports how the silence was kept at the Parish Church at the end of a short service of intercession conducted by the Bishop of Winchester and the Rector, as well as details of how the silence was kept in other churches and the schools in Farnham – all indicating a degree of organization beyond that originally inferred in the King’s Proclamation.

Yet the same phenomenon was experienced elsewhere. In London, the temporary Cenotaph in Whitehall became an even greater focus for the silence, and a year later, re-built in granite as a permanent memorial to ‘The Glorious Dead’, immediately became the primary commemorative site for the whole British Empire. Yet, for most people, the focus would remain local, at an ever-increasing number of war memorials in cities, towns and villages throughout Great Britain, where the warriors from that place who marched away to fight and had died for their country were known and remembered by name. One hundred years on, neither those physical memorials nor the silence have lost their impact but exist in a vastly changed world. Pausing for those two minutes on or around the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month remains one of the few means by which we can express a real sense of continuity with the men and women who experienced the First World War first-hand.

⁷ The Farnham Herald, Saturday, 15th November 1919, p. 5.

⁸ The article mentions that ‘Supt. Simmons was also present, and Inspector Lucas was in the vicinity, whilst in the road were P.S. Vigar and a constable’.



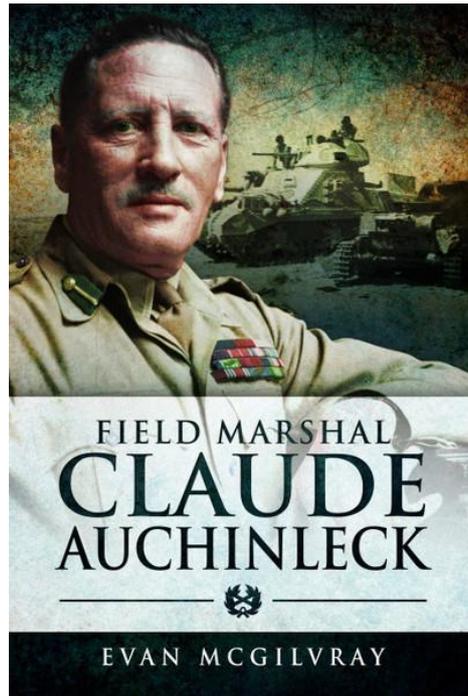
**Supt Simmonds, King's Police Medal, (For services during First World War)
Farnham Division, Surrey Constabulary**

The author of this piece John Francis Moss writes: I served in the Surrey Constabulary as a PC and Sergeant from 1975-1986 – at both Oxted and Caterham. I then transferred to one of the Yorkshire forces and never looked back – I dare not, because I realised how much I missed working in Surrey!

Book Review

Field Marshal Claude Auchinleck

By Evan McGilvray
Imprint: Pen & Sword Military
Pages: 264
Illustrations: 16
ISBN: 9781526716101
Published: 7th August 2020



Evan McGilvray specializes in 20th century military history. His previous works include *Hamilton & Gallipoli: British Command in an Age of Military Transformation* (2015), *Ander's Army: General Wladislaw Anders and the Polish Second Corps 1941-1946* (2018), and *Poland and the Second World War 1938-48* (2019). He lives in Leeds, Yorkshire.

Synopsis

Field Marshal Claude Auchinleck is a study not only of the individual but also of how the British Army, Indian Army and the Empire were transformed during his long military career. Auchinleck was commissioned into the Indian Army from 1904 and served with distinction against the Turks in Egypt and the Mesopotamian campaign, earning a DSO. Between the wars he was involved in the pacification of the Northwest Frontier (now Pakistan).

In the Second World War he briefly led a division in the ill-fated Norway campaign before being appointed Commander-in-Chief, India. He is best remembered for his controversial stint in command in North Africa, where he replaced Wavell in July 1941. He halted Rommel at the First Battle of El Alamein but was then replaced by Montgomery and resumed as C-in-C India, where his logistical support for Fourteenth Army was vital to success in Burma. Post-war he planned and oversaw Partition and British withdrawal from India. Here, as in North Africa, interference from his political masters added to the burdens of command. Evan McGilvray appraises Auchinleck's long and varied career in its entirety.

Review⁹

⁹ University of Manchester, Library
https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/about/search/?client=Library&site=Library&output=xml_no_dtd&proxyst

The author is a practised military historian with a number of published books concentrating mainly on the activities of the Polish military during the Second World War. A biography of Auchinleck is therefore a change of direction but there are no clues why McGilvray chose this particular subject. However, it is easily argued that Auchinleck was one of the great men of the Second World War who has possibly not received the attention he deserves. So, who was Field Marshall Sir Claude John Eyre Auchinleck? (21 June 1884 – 23 March 1981)

One of the great commanders listed on the National Army Museum website with his papers deposited at the University of Manchester, Library. Shortly after the outbreak of the Second World War, Auchinleck was recalled from India to England to form, train and command 4th Corps in readiness for the war in France. Allied operations in Norway were going badly and in May 1940 Auchinleck was appointed commander, (the youngest Lt General in the Indian Army) of the Anglo-French land and air forces in the north of the country. He did not have a chance to exert his authority as a commander as the whole concept of the operation was flawed and set on a course before his arrival in theatre. Unsurprisingly, the Norwegian campaign, a Churchill folly, went very badly and along with Dunkerque led to evacuation with the loss of men and equipment.

In July 1940 Auchinleck was appointed General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Southern Command, a key role planning coastal defences against the expected German invasion. In November 1940, when the immediate threat of invasion had receded, Auchinleck was promoted to full General and appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army. He soon impressed Churchill by dispatching a force to help put down the rebellion of Rashid Ali al-Gaylani in Iraq. His area of operations and responsibility was vast. After only six months Auchinleck was transferred again, this time to replace General Archibald Wavell as Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, in the wake of the failure of the 'Battleaxe' offensive in the Western Desert and the advance of the Axis forces under Field Marshal Rommel. Early gains at Rommel's expense in the 'Crusader' offensive were quickly reversed during the first half of 1942, and Auchinleck's forces suffered a series of defeats, culminating in the loss of Tobruk in June 1942.

In the immediate aftermath of this disaster Auchinleck removed Lt.-Gen. Neil Ritchie as Commander of the 8th Army and assumed direct control himself. He succeeded in stabilizing the defensive line in the First Battle of El Alamein in July. Auchinleck was continually urged by Churchill to take early offensive but he would not be "bullied" into action, requiring time to train and re-equip. Despite halting the Axis advance, Auchinleck was dismissed in August 1942 and replaced as Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, by General Alexander, with Lt.-Gen. Bernard Montgomery appointed Commander of the 8th Army.

The speed and manner of his removal shocked Auchinleck and his supporters; the sense of injustice which was compounded by Montgomery's criticisms of his predecessor particularly

ylesheet=Library&sort=date%3AD%3AL%3Ad1&ie=latin1&numgm=5&oe=UTF8&proxyreload=0&q=Auchinleck#stq=Auchinleck

in his memoirs published after the war. Auchinleck and Montgomery had failed to agree on almost every point of policy whilst in the UK post Dunkerque. Many see the decision to sack Auchinleck as unjust. Declaring him a failure seems unforgiveable. As Churchill said when he had to sack him, "like shooting a magnificent stag". Some historians believe that the more senior he became the better general he was though much if this may be no more complicated than the gaining experience and senior followers. Correlli Barnett in his book "Desert Generals" describes Auchinleck's contribution in the desert war and in particular on 17 July 1942:

Auchinleck had won a historic battle. (The first Battle of El Alamein) It had been desperate, difficult and gallant as Wellington's repulse of Napoleon at Waterloo -----.
Nevertheless, Auchinleck had saved the Middle East --.

Auchinleck returned to India in August 1942, and in June 1943, was appointed Commander-in-Chief, India, for a second time. Auchinleck played a vital role as War Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council and as commander of the main staging-area for operations against the Japanese in Burma. William Slim, commander of the Fourteenth Army was later to write:

It was a good day for us when he (Auchinleck) took command of India, our main base, recruiting area and training ground. The Fourteenth Army, from its birth to its final victory, owed much to his unselfish support and never-failing understanding. Without him and what he and the Army of India did for us we could not have existed, let alone conquered.

His background and prestige within the Indian Army were immensely useful in mobilizing enormous numbers of troops and supplies for service in both the European and Far East theatres of war. In June 1946 he was nominated Field Marshal in recognition of his wartime service.

Following the defeat of Japan, Auchinleck's last years in India were spent preparing the country's armed forces for the constitutional process of transferring power from Britain, which led to the formation of the independent states of India and Pakistan. When he realised that partition was inevitable, he worked tirelessly to ensure an orderly and equitable division of personnel, equipment and facilities, despite the worsening political situation and criticism by Indian nationalist leaders of his being biased towards Pakistan.

His hopes of completing the task were frustrated when Mountbatten, under pressure from local politicians and the British Government, brought forward the date of independence to 15 August 1947. Lord Louis Mountbatten was described by Lord Alanbrooke as "quite irresponsible, suffers from the most desperate illogical brain, always producing red herrings." A difficult man to work with over such complex issues as the independence of India and the separation of Pakistan. Yet he did with his reputation enhanced.

Auchinleck stayed on as Supreme Commander of the two Dominions' armies for a short period, but in November 1947 his headquarters as Supreme Commander were closed and he left India before his work was fully done. He refused the offer of a peerage, despairing at the tragic events

of Partition. At the end of 1967 he moved to Marrakesh, Morocco, where he died of influenza on 23 March 1981.

Philip Warner in John Keegan's work "Churchill's Generals" describes Auchinleck as:

"one of the most capable generals of the Second World War but through a combination of misfortune was unable to stay to the end at the operational centres where the ultimate accolades were to be won. --- He was faced with virtually impossible tasks and then, having failed to complete them to Churchill's satisfaction he was moved out to what appeared to be a backwater appointment, that of C in C India. --- His presence in this post had a greater effect on the outcome of the war ---- he mobilised the resources of the sub-continent with great skill ---."

Philip Warner believes Auchinleck was a complete professional and highly talented. He would not compromise his principles or adopt methods which appeared to him to be dishonest. He lived and died according to his own code of honour.

McGilvray's book covers from cradle (and before) to grave encapsulating the extraordinary times of the first 50 years of the 20th century. The impact Auchinleck had on these events and they on him. It is a thoroughly researched work, the first biography of the Field Marshall for some years in a field not crowded with references. The author appears to lose his way when he strays from the main subject. The balance is not there to refer to Chamberlain's supporters as a "near traitorous clique", "effete British upper classes", being more "concerned with Bolshevik threat from the Soviet Union as it threatened their way of life" while they "considered that Nazi Germany could well be beneficial to them." "So many of the political elites in the UK could not be trusted owing to their pro-German sympathies. Churchill would sort this group out and have them imprisoned. It takes character to imprison your friends to preserve one's country from a foe."

This start to chapter five is concerning in that it is all too simplistic, taking no account of the nuances, pressures and realities of politics of the 1930s. And who of Churchill's friends were imprisoned? It would be interesting to learn who of Churchill's friend were locked up. Mosely or Mosely supporters were hardly friends of Churchill? For all his authority imprisonment was not a power he exercised though habeas corpus was suspended and internment introduced by Parliament.

This is a very readable book, fully researched and well written. It is also a manageable size with about 230 pages of text as opposed to the 700-page biography blockbusters that are the current fashion. Auchinleck had a greater impact on the war than is recognised (he turned down a peerage) but as an individual he was more suited and therefore happier in his very senior roles in India and later Pakistan. Auchinleck's contribution to the defeat of the enemy in the Far East was significant and for this he will be remembered.