



Mr Bailiff, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

I think we have been privileged to witness something rather special here today. Several hundred men and women, boys and girls, from all over the islands and beyond, coming together, watched by many others, to bring back to life a seminal moment in our history.

A moment in time, 100 years ago, when over 1000 ordinary men and boys from Guernsey, Alderney, and Sark, the Norman 'ten hundred', without complaint but with great dignity and courage, marched off to take part in one of the bloodiest conflicts in human memory.

As an island we have come together to commemorate the start of their journey into history. To rejoice in their bravery and their selfless commitment, and to honour their sacrifice.

It is difficult to define, but there is something about the story of the Royal Guernsey Light Infantry that goes to the very heart of our Islands' consciousness and heritage.

After almost three years of the most dreadful warfare mankind had ever known, Guernsey cast aside its historic exemption from conscription and, in defence of the crown to which it had so proudly given its allegiance over many centuries, raised a battalion to join the fight in France. France....the other country from which so much Bailiwick custom and culture is drawn.

A battalion of young men, many not much older than those parading today, marching off, in no doubt about the brutal nature of the battle they were about to join. In no doubt about their likely fate. In no doubt about the odds against their safe return. Marching away under the historic but fatalistic motto of 'Dieux Aix', or God Help Us.

And I hope that all of us who took part in, or witnessed the parade today and the drumhead service, can take just a few moments to imagine what that day would really have felt like, 100 years ago.

There may be an image in our minds. The sound of men marching, crisp orders being shouted, bands playing, patriotic crowds cheering. But behind the pomp and splendor something else. The strains of martial music suppressing a lurking dread in their hearts.....the newly formed bonds of comradeship just keeping at bay the terror of what was to come.....the cheering of the crowds masking the deep sadness of leaving their beloved islands, families, wives & sweethearts....wondering if they would ever see home again.

And of course so many didn't see home again. A generation lost..... the consequences of which would remain with Bailiwick for many years, in fact probably still do. And even for those that did come back, the horrors of what they endured and witnessed resting with them for the remainder of their lives, often unspoken and unshared.

But it was through their sacrifice, and the sacrifice of millions like them, across both World Wars, and the other great conflicts of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, that the Bailiwick now enjoys the peace and prosperity that it does today.

And it is worth dwelling on that. The 20<sup>th</sup> century combined strategic rivalry, ideological confrontation, and the industrialization of warfare to unleash the greatest cataclysms of human history. The peace we enjoy today was won against desperate odds only by countless sacrifice across the generations.

But such peace is fragile. In summer 1914, against the backdrop of a Pax Britannica that looked set to last for decades, it took just 37 days for the mechanisms of peace in Europe to un-ravel and for the world to be plunged into a continuity of conflict that, in essence, lasted until the Berlin wall came down in 1990. So, how secure do we feel in the peace of today? Are we prepared to fight for it? Not just against the forces of terrorism, awful though recent events have been – but against all the other threats to security we face.

The Norman 'ten hundred' marched into history 100 years ago. We are about to unveil a plaque in lasting tribute to that moment. But as we do, let us dwell on their memory as it echoes across the years - not only in thanks for their service and sacrifice, but also in the profound hope that we are wise enough to avoid future generations.....ever again.....having to endure the same.