

It's a very strange feeling, fixing a bayonet - and knowing it's not a drill. Yet, with a friend alongside (even if his beret is red, not the green on top of one's own head!), there is a confidence that the task ahead is achievable. 30 years ago this month, after more than 12 years in uniform at that time, I ceased to be a "virgin soldier." (More of that in November.)

There is nothing like doing something for real - and the associated consequences - to find out whether or not you have really learned the things you needed to have learned. A point which Jesus allows his disciples to find out by his departing from them. Not that he just lets them get on with it. The promise of Divine help is part of the deal. Not by coincidence is this help, this Holy Spirit, referred to by Jesus as The Comforter. He doesn't necessarily give you super powers (or a green beret!), but like your oppo in a battle, it makes all the difference to know you're not alone.

We celebrate these events on Thursday 17th and Sunday 27th; see the services page, looking for Ascension and Pentecost. They are significant festivals, which are equal to - and have in the past been more important than - Christmas, for example. Indeed, even as recently as when I was at school we used to get the day off for Ascension.

They remind us that it is now our turn to continue the mission of the Good News, the primary task of any Christian. For some that will be hand-to-hand fighting - metaphorically, I hope! - with the ignorance and indifference of worldly ways. The drills for this may be learnt and empowered partly within our church buildings but the mission is only achieved out on patrol in the world at large - assuming we break out of those buildings to do so.

The Christians of the Burnhams may be re-grouping for a little while longer, but make no mistake: sooner or later we will find ourselves engaging the enemy. With a friend at our side.