

Two Horatios: one with a clergy father, the other a clergy grandfather; both military men promoted by merit to high authority; both with a certain amount of audacity and quirky personal peccadillos; both killed in war at sea. We all know who one of these men was... The other, however, was Field Marshal Horatio (Herbert) Kitchener, after the outbreak of WW1, the Secretary of State for War.

I used to believe “common” opinion that Kitchener was synonymous with hundreds of thousands of men being attracted to the carnage of WW1, supported by all the propaganda tricks brought to bear on a society with narrow education and conditioned by the class system. 100 years on, thankfully, there is the ability to challenge due to the freedom of information available. We can make our own mind up - if we can be bothered to think for ourselves.

For the record, Kitchener was a far more capable, insightful and pragmatic person than can be inferred from the pointing finger image (the use of which, incidentally, he was not at all happy about). Indeed, it was Kitchener, of all senior figures, who advised caution in tactics and warned from the outset that the war would last several years, which brought him heavy criticism by politicians whose own agendas were populist in regard to the day’s jingoism.

Kitchener was actually taking Jesus’ advice, who, demanding of his disciples that they prioritise towards the needy, over and above image and respectability, uses this as one of his examples: “...what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace...” At the outbreak of WW1, the British Army had 700,000 fighting men, the Germans had 3.7 million. Intelligence is not the first word that springs to mind.

So why did that generation of young men remain standing side by side, when quite clearly it was not all over by Christmas 1914? Despite the hopelessness, they were there because of the person next to them. It’s always been that way. Forget king and country - duty is about standing next to your friend in the face of adversity, like Christ: crucified alongside two sinners in their hopelessness.

We can now only stand in respect for that generation’s ability to put their very lives in total service to one another, because, thankfully, there are few now who know such a remembrance first hand. (Unless, of course, we ignore that those nasty inventions of WW1 - *vide August’s letter* - are still around...)