

We can't just be an open door

The sprawling makeshift camp at Calais epitomises the very quandary we find ourselves in over the migrant crisis.

As a compassionate and civilised society we naturally want to do all we can to help our fellow man, particularly those in less fortunate and vulnerable positions.

Seeing the vast shanty town, more associated with poverty-stricken and war-torn states, on our border is enough to concern the most stoic of commentators. But the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

Britain's response to the global migrant crisis has to be measured.

We simply cannot open our shores to every last person who wants to live here. To do so would set an horrific precedent and only encourage tens of thousands of more economic migrants from poor African countries to risk life and limb to get to a perceived El Dorado.

Let 6,000 from the Jungle camp come to Britain now and in a year's time there will be 60,000 at Calais, in even worse conditions.

This would play into the hands of exploitative people smugglers and present an even bigger challenge to us and our European neighbours.

And in the current climate the potential for opportunist terrorists to capitalise on large movements of people across borders is massive. We have every sympathy with those who want to come to Britain. Some of the migrants have fled war, some simply want a better life.

And Britain has always been a tolerant society that has held out a helping hand to those in need. We continue to be the world's second biggest donor to disasters around the world.

But rather than encouraging the world's poor to migrate halfway across the globe, what we need is a concerted effort to right the ills that are displacing so many people from their homes.

We are experiencing a perfect storm following disastrous wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, coupled with the conflict in Syria, and a mass movement of north Africans.

It is easy for millionaire celebrities to tug on our heartstrings but they do not live in the hard-pushed and under-pressure communities migrants would ultimately end up in. They do not consider the consequences.

Nor can it be said that France is the first safe country they have arrived in.

Those in genuine need of help and asylum should – by international law – declare themselves and seek refuge in the first safe place they come to.

Memorial is fitting tribute to soldiers

Confronted with the horror of war, who knows how each one of us would act?

During the First World War more than 300 British and Commonwealth soldiers were executed for cowardice or mutiny.

With the benefit of hindsight, today we can appreciate that during the treacherous conditions of warfare that it would be a fierce struggle to keep a sane mind.

Some of these men had never left home before, some were only children.

Now, not only is it thought that many soldiers were not given fair trials, some were not properly defended.

They may have been suffering from shell shock or post traumatic stress disorder. In the modern era, it could also easily be argued that these men's lives were taken for a simple misdemeanour – not mutiny.

But the reality of war at the start of the 20th century is a very different beast to what world we live in today.

It is entirely appropriate the National Memorial Arboretum in Alrewas remembers those individuals who were executed by their own side. It must be remembered these men went to war to fight for our freedom. We owe them the ultimate debt of gratitude.

Historical

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The moving Shot at Dawn memorial will see three more names added to it

Pardons at last for soldiers shot at dawn

Killed by their own commanding officers for 'mutiny', their stories were lost to history before one man's selfless quest to reveal them

It is almost impossible for us to appreciate the extreme difficulties soldiers faced on the frontline during the First World War.

From the treacherous conditions of shelling, mud, lice, disease, casualties and ultimately death – it was a daily battle to keep a sane mind in the midst of warfare.

Yet within this there were those shot at dawn for their apparent 'cowardice'.

But now the names of three soldiers who were executed for mutiny – their refusal to obey, so to speak – will be added to the National Memorial Arboretum's Shot at Dawn memorial in Staffordshire 100 years to the day of two of their executions.

At a unique ceremony this Saturday, the names of Jack Braithwaite, Gunner William Lewis and Jesse Robert Short will be inscribed on individual plaques attached to three new wooden stakes that will be added to the existing memorial.

Two of the mutineers – Jack Braithwaite, from the New Zealand Otago Regiment, and Gunner William Lewis, from Scotland – were shot on October 29, 1916.

Jack had lost his stripe in May 1916 for being absent without leave.

But this was followed by three court-martials in June and July 1916 for acts such as stating a falsehood to an officer, absent without leave and two charges of escaping confinement and escaping while being escorted to a field punishment compound.

Prison sentences with hard labour followed.

On August 28, 1916, an Australian soldier known as Private Little complained the hot water had run out in the showers at Blargies. As the matter escalated, Little started yelling for his meal. Braithwaite, on mess orderly duties, took Little aside to his tent and gave him a meal.

His mistake was to take Little from the custody of a Staff Sergeant Shearing. Braithwaite was charged with mutiny along with others.

In his letter to the General Field Court-Martial, Jack would comment how in Egypt similar actions had been punished with seven or 14 days

in prison or seven days' loss of pay and that he did not understand 'that a simple act of peace-making could be brought to look like deliberate mutiny'.

He was shot at 6.05am on October 29, 1916, five minutes after Gunner Lewis – whose story remains more of a mystery.

Jesse Robert Short, from Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, was executed in 1917.

On September 11 of that year, Corporal Short was at the base camp at Etaples, France, where – having recovered either from wounds or illness – he was undergoing re-training before being returned to the front line.

Disturbances broke out in the camp that day and one group of 80 soldiers carrying placards and armed with sticks marched on a bridge across the river Canache.

Cpl Short tried to persuade the soldiers to lay down their arms and referring to its command-

er said: "Don't listen to that officer, that b****r ought to have a rope tied round his neck with a stone on it and be chucked into the river."

Cpl Short was court-martialled the next day, found guilty of inciting mutiny and sentenced to death. He was executed weeks later.

All three soldiers were subsequently pardoned.

The Shot at Dawn memorial currently remembers 306 soldiers shot for alleged desertion or cowardice during the conflict. The individual plaques are arranged in the form of a Greek theatre around the statue of Private Herbert Burden, of the 1st Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers, who was shot at Ypres in 1915.

The non-inclusion of mutineers' names and the absence in particular of Jack Braithwaite's name was highlighted by Western Front Association New Zealand member Geoff McMillan following a visit to the Arboretum in 2015.

When he did some research, he discovered the other two missing names.

Richard Pursehouse and Lee Dent, of the Chase Project – a military history research group based in the UK in Staffordshire – assisted with the research and got in touch with the Shot at

Dawn memorial artist, Andy DeComyn, who was keen to help.

Among the guests due to attend the service this Saturday are relatives of the soldiers – Bryan Ritchie and his wife, Marilyn, from Edinburgh on William Lewis' behalf; Jack Braithwaite's nephew, David Braithwaite, from New Zealand, and his wife, Rae; and Jesse Robert Short's grandson, Neil Graham, among others.

Brigadier Evan Williams of the New Zealand Defence Force is also expected to attend.

At the end of the service, the Last Post will be played by Steve Taylor, a former soldier in the Staffordshire Regiment.

Mr McMillan explained how he was puzzled to find Jack Braithwaite's name was missing upon his visit last year and then set out on pursuit of its inclusion. He said: "When I visited the Arboretum, I was moved to see how the names of hundreds of soldiers executed for desertion or cowardice in the First World War were recorded in the Shot at Dawn memorial, but puzzled that the name of fellow Kiwi Jack Braithwaite was missing.

"I am really pleased the Arboretum has been so interested in my research on this issue and have been so supportive of the idea of paying tribute to the three mutineers by adding their names to the memorial."

Sarah Montgomery, managing director of the Arboretum, said: "When we discovered the names of the three mutineers were missing, we felt it was only right they should be added. We are very grateful to Geoff for telling us about the fascinating stories behind these three mutineers who will now be commemorated alongside hundreds of other soldiers who were executed for alleged offences such as desertion and cowardice."

The Shot at Dawn memorial was created by the Birmingham artist Mr DeComyn in 2000 as a gift to the relatives, which was unveiled by Gertrude Harris, daughter of Private Harry Farr, in June 2001. During the 1914-18 war, 346 British and Commonwealth soldiers were executed – a higher figure than those recorded by both the French and Germans.

● The ceremony will be held on Saturday at 10am.

PETER RHODES



OOPS. On Tuesday I foolishly suggested the UKIP 'handbags at dawn' row happened at the European Parliament building in Brussels. It actually occurred at the European Parliament building in Strasbourg. At vast expense every week, the EU Parliament moves between the two buildings. Everyone knows it is madness. No-one knows how to stop it. You and I pay for it. But not for much longer.

'STOP and think' is the stern instruction on the Co-Op Bank's latest leaflet to fight fraud. Sound advice. If only we all stopped and thought a little more, the scammers and con merchants would be history. So I stopped and thought and read the Co-Op leaflet. At the end it says that if you suspect fraud you should "Please contact us immediately." I looked for the contact details. How odd that in preparing this stop-and-think advice, no-one stopped and thought to provide a phone number.

IF the Belfast cake-shop trial is such a victory for gay rights, how come one of Britain's leading gay-rights activists is ashamed of it? This week the Court of Appeal in Belfast ruled that



Hero

a Christian-owned cake shop which refused to ice a cake with a message supporting gay marriage was guilty of discrimination. Amid the inevitable rejoicing, the veteran equality campaigner Peter Tatchell breaks ranks. Originally behind the campaign, Tatchell has now changed his mind. He says: "This verdict is a defeat for freedom of expression. It seems that businesses cannot now lawfully refuse a customer's request to propagate a message, even if it is a sexist, xenophobic or anti-gay message and even if the business has a conscientious objection to it."

TATCHELL is a brave man, both physically and morally, and a personal hero of mine. On this issue he is quite right and the Belfast court is horribly wrong. This latest verdict paves the way for mischief. How long before a Zionist tries to order a cake with a big Star of David from a Muslim cake shop, and then rushes to court, crying 'racism' if the order is refused? This is a can of worms and it would be bad enough if this case had come about by pure chance in the everyday business of buying and selling. But did it? The Belfast case is almost identical to a case involving the Christian owner of a cake shop in Colorado who was convicted under anti-discrimination laws after refusing to make a same-sex wedding cake. That case was followed keenly by the worldwide gay community. The attempted cake-purchase in Belfast came just a few weeks after the Colorado conviction in 2014. If that's a coincidence I'm Mary Berry. Was this row inspired by a desire to get a cake – or to get the Christians? The sooner the Supreme Court overturns this verdict, the better.

YES, I admit it. We've been out panic-buying Marmite. Ever since the Brexit-inspired price-rise spat a few weeks ago, we have lived in dread of running out of the stuff. I have therefore raided Waitrose and amassed enough Marmite to last us two years. One pot.

I BUMPED into a crowd of moorhen by the lake in the park and wondered what was the correct collective noun. It is apparently a plump of moorhen.

AND a scoop of journalists, since you ask.