

## **Epsom College – Armistice Day 2016.**

Armistice Day is the day we commemorate the ending of the First World War. Peace was declared on the 11<sup>th</sup> hour, of the 11<sup>th</sup> Day, of the 11<sup>th</sup> Month 1918.

One of the worst conflicts of that war was a battle called the Somme. It began on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916 and lasted until 18<sup>th</sup> November. In that period of a few months 1 million men and women either died or were injured. On the first day, 1<sup>st</sup> July there were 57,470 casualties.

In total during this war in Europe there were 38 million casualties, British and our allies, German and their allies, and many from the colonies of the British Empire, with 17-18 million deaths.

How can I ask you to remember all of these today? It is beyond our ability even to imagine 18million deaths in that First World War. It is beyond our belief that we could be so cruel and barbaric to each other.

In addition to this we also remember at this time of year all the casualties of the Second World War, and indeed all

areas of conflict since then in which British troops have given of their own lives in the cause of what we believe to be right – though being right is so often a complex matter to determine in war. Our short war with Argentina in 1982 over the Falkland Islands is just one example of that complexity. My own son James who is 27 and serves in the RAF is there in the Falklands right now. Many young British and Argentinian soldiers died on those small islands back in the early 1982 – and today, and over this whole weekend we remember them, and countless others.

But how, I repeat, can I ask you to remember so many millions. It is impossible, but I can ask you to remember just one person. That should be possible for all of us.

His name is Charlie, Charlie Hutcheson McCrostie. Charlie served as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt, 19<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Highland Light Infantry. He was the son of Hugh and Agnes McCrostie, of 144 Newhaven Rd, Leith, in Edinburgh.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> June Charlie wrote to his mother,

‘Dear Mater,

The parcel from McVittie's came in today in good order – biscuits a wee bit broken, but nothing to speak of, thanks. Its raining hard today so we're just doing a bit of inside work. Reggie Mc Cankie is in the next village to us so I am seeing him a lot. Yours, Charlie.'

In a second letter dated, 27<sup>th</sup> June, he wrote home saying 'We move up into the trenches tonight so I don't expect I'll be able to write perhaps for a few days,' ending his letter, 'Good bye or rather au revoir for the present.'

On the 1<sup>st</sup> July, 4 days later Charlie was shot dead on the first day of battle at the Somme. The bullet that killed Charlie McCrostie, of 144 Newhaven Rd, Leith, passed through the cigarette case that you are holding.

Charlie McCrostie is now identified as reference XVIII. AA.1 at the military cemetery at Villers-Bretonneux in France. He is still remembered by later generations of his family who lent me his cigarette case and a copy of his letter about the packet of biscuits, and moving to the trenches. He can be remembered by you also, and me.

When we remember one, we remember all. When we remember one it is not a number but a person, and when

we remember a person we are reminded that they were all people, people of worth, of nobility, of bravery, people whose lives are as sacred as ours are today.

And when we remember one, we are engaging with God's life in Christ, for God knows each of us even when we are being formed in our mother's womb. Words from the author Sebastian Faulks can perhaps express this for us when he says 'at the hour of my death I would wish to be known unto God.' (from Charlotte Gray).

Charlie McCrostie was known unto God at the hour of his death, and we remember him today – and in remembering him we do honour unto all of them.