

By  
John R. Tunis

The American  
**LEGION**  
M O N T H L Y

~PAGE  
FOURTEEN~

NOVEMBER, 1936

~An Excerpt from

VOL. 21, No. 5

# Three ARMISTICE DAYS

LONDON, 1928. It stands in the middle of Whitehall, that wide thoroughfare which connects Trafalgar Square with Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament. Behind us are unpretentious government offices, the Horse Guards and that alley called Downing Street where lives the man who more than anyone rules the destinies of this nation—the Prime Minister.

It stands in the midst of the rush and roar of London traffic, a square monolith covered at the base with wreaths. Here is the heart of London. Here is the heart of the British Empire. This is the Cenotaph. On it, with majestic simplicity are three words: **THE GLORIOUS DEAD.**

This chill November morning the Cenotaph is surrounded by serried masses of men. There are the Guards in their scarlet tunics and their huge bearskin hats, the marines in blue uniforms and white caps, the Air Force in black shakos and blue dress garb. Yet the scene is sombre, because these soldiers are only a little square of color guarding the monument from a huge mass of civilians. Up and down Whitehall as far as one can see are thousands and thousands packed in so they cannot move.

A soldier in khaki, a little man in a British warm who wears the cap of a field marshal, comes forward with a wreath in his hand. His boots glimmer in the November sun. Behind him are his sons, also in uniform, behind them the generals and admirals of his forces, and nearby in civilian clothes Prime Minister Baldwin and the members of the Cabinet, the lords and officials of the government.

The little man in the British warm walks slowly to the base of the monument. He is a tired, a weary little man as he leans over and places his wreath beside those heaped-up flowers around the base. Then he straightens, salutes, and stands at attention.

Suddenly from St. James Park comes the sound of a gun. They used to say it was impossible for (Continued)

a British crowd to be quiet. That was before there was an Armistice Day. For the hum of London dies at the sound of the gun. You can see a gull flapping across the roofs and hear the beating of



its wings. Somewhere in the distance a horse paws the ground and neighs. A flag flaps in the breeze. Never such a silence as this. A King and his people pause sixty seconds in solemn celebration for the dead. It is the Great Hush.

All over England, all over the Empire today, on the ranches of Australia and the farms of Canada, in offices and factories, in fields and forests, a people pause and think of their dead. In every village throughout England men and women and children have gathered together beside the Norman church, grouped around a stone cross for a service ending with this solemn moment of silence. Everywhere on the roads drivers stop their cars and climb down from their seats. Expresses that hurl themselves from London to Scotland without a stop en route slow down, halt while the passengers stand silently. Throughout the British Isles all trains, all traffic comes to an end. A nation remembers its dead.

The moment dies at the Cenotaph. The King and the Princes depart. The troops before us form, re-form and march away. But the tribute to the departed has only begun. Lines form, long lines stretching as far down Whitehall as we can see, two abreast on each side of the monument. Men and women, little children by their side, pass by to lay a flower, a poppy, a wreath or merely a tear upon the stone. At a moderate walking pace they come, men wearing war medals

proudly, men in silk hats and morning coats, men in caps and torn jackets, men on crutches, men hobbling on canes or supported by poorly dressed women. You notice that some of these men have strips of cardboard instead of medals on their chests. Those pieces of cardboard are pawn tickets. They wear them proudly.

Down Whitehall we come to Parliament Square and Westminster Abbey. Here again one feels the marvelous and solemn sense of pageantry of the British race. Four abreast, slowly, reverently, two lines enter the Abbey. We take our places in line. Just ahead is a group of British Legionnaires. They are from Bristol, a city in Somerset, and like everyone else they are carrying wreaths or poppies. As we near the entrance a woman with a shawl thrown over her head, in a shabby dress, remarks that it takes forty minutes to enter the Abbey and pass out the other end. Now we are under the portico.

Without any command, by mutual consent the hum of conversation dies away. Once inside the Abbey there is no noise, no sound except the shuffling of hundreds of feet and the murmurs of the medaled bobbies giving quiet orders, asking the crowd to move along. "Now then . . . please . . ." Slowly we approach the stone. Just a slab in the pavement beside which the two lines diverge and pass on either side. It is heaped with poppies: In fact we can hardly discern

the carving on the stone because each passer-by drops a poppy. In an hour it will be a field of red.

Beneath This Stone Rests The Body  
 OF A BRITISH WARRIOR  
 Unknown By Name or Rank  
 Brought From France To Lie Among  
 The Most Illustrious Of The Land  
 And Buried Here On Armistice Day  
 1920

Remember, he is one of 94,000. The other unknown British soldiers lie in unmarked graves on the plains of Flanders.

We pass into the street. As we return along Whitehall and reach the Cenotaph in the center, the lines are still going by. So they will go by all day long, hour after hour. Here comes a section of the Metropolitan police, veterans all, their war medals shining on their tunics. Next a group of veterans, and then the contents of three motor coaches with disabled men from the Legion Poppy Factory at Richmond. They receive cheers from the veterans selling poppies on the sidewalk, and they carry signs: "Pay More For Your Poppy Today." A long line of unemployed files past, caps in their hands, mufflers round their necks, socialists, communists, all sorts and conditions of men, all bearing wreaths to show they are still thinking of pals now lying on what was once the Western Front. It's

[OldMagazineArticles.com](http://OldMagazineArticles.com)

a long line, a drab line, only the dark blue coats of the pensioners from the Royal Chelsea Hospital making a spot of color in the procession.

When we get up into Mayfair and Kensington traffic is moving and people are rushing about. Just another November day in a big city. No, that is not correct. Here too there are signs a nation remembers. Sandwich men bear signs: "NO MORE WAR," "WE DEMAND PEACE OF THE NATIONAL PARTY." Everywhere men and women request signatures to peace petitions. Of all crowd demonstrations anywhere in the world, this is the most spontaneous, the most moving. You feel a whole people bound together in a clearly defined fervor, in remembrance of their dead, in pursuit of peace. This is a country which detests war.

