

MOTH speakers tell what Remembrance means

We are assembled here as an act of Remembrance — to keep faith with our friends, relatives and fellow-servicemen and women who gave their lives during the two World Wars, and on our Borders.

Similar acts of Remembrance are taking place today all over the world. They will be attended by many veterans of those wars.

Yet it astonishes me that out of the millions who fought, the percentage of those who make an effort to remember is very small indeed, and when one confronts veterans and requests them to attend, so often the reply is "I had enough whilst I was in the forces, and would now rather forget about it."

What a let-down for the friends they left behind, those who did not come home, but lie buried in the sands of the desert or in the soil of Italy — what a let-down for those brave airmen who failed to return from the hazardous flights to Warsaw, to help the Polish people — what a let-down for shipmates entombed in ships lying at the bottom of the world's oceans.

They don't seem to realise that we are not remembering the Army, Navy or Air Force, but that we are remembering 'people'.

Today we live in a vastly changed world to that which we set out to defend in 1939, but one thing has remained unaltered, and that is human nature. As a result, we still face the same kind of perils today as we did then, and no doubt our offspring and their offspring will have to be on their guard for many years to come.

But things haven't changed much really — 436 years before the birth of Jesus Christ, the Athenian statesman Pericles made a statement that is as valid now as it was then: "Freedom is the sure possession of those who have the will to defend it."

On Sept 3 1939 I was a young Royal Navy sailor serving in Britain's newest and most powerful destroyer — *HMS Ashanti*. We had been patrolling the Denmark Strait between Iceland and Greenland for nearly a month. Yes, the Navy was prepared, cold, wet and very uncomfortable. When at 11 o'clock the Captain announced that "we are now at war", little did I realise what would befall me during the next five years in many parts of the world — from the bitter cold of the Arctic Ice to the

FOR several years a group of ex-officers of the various branches of the British Forces living in retirement in Hillcrest, Natal, have organised an Armistice Day service in Highbury School Church in Hillcrest. When Moth Geoff Wingrove, a former Royal Navy Petty Officer, was invited to give the address, this is what he said:

heat and sweat of Burma — from the gentle waters of the Eastern Mediterranean and Greek Islands to the mighty and awesome seas of the Atlantic Ocean.

Being young and innocent, death and destruction was far from my mind until a few weeks later I joined *HMS Southampton* to become a member of the ship's company of the very first British warship to be hit by a bomb in World War II. It gave me my first reason to remember for whilst the casualties were light, and only one life was lost, it was the life of a shipmate, a boy seaman of 16 years of age.

That ship seemed to have a fascination for the Luftwaffe and committing shipmates to the deep at sunset as a result of their attentions became a familiar routine from Narvik to Malta, until the ship herself succumbed under a hail of bombs in January 1941 with the loss of another 90 shipmates. And now I had many more friends to remember, and I particularly remember the bravery of men who lost their lives trying to save shipmates trapped by blazing oil fuel in the engine room and boiler rooms.

Most of us who survived were drafted to other ships to replace casualties, and I went to *HMS Orion*, where in the following few months I was to experience even greater horror in the battles for Greece and Crete, and where I accumulated many more reasons for today's Remembrance.

There were over 500 dead, including our Captain, when we crawled back into Alexandria, on what was my 21st birthday, and there were many more acts of bravery to recall including the heroism of our Padre, the Rev Ellison, later to be Bishop of London, who, ignoring the hail of bullets from diving planes, tended the wounded and dying lying around the upper deck and who could not be placed under cover, because of the carnage below.

Then on to Burma, bombarding and landing Royal Marine Commandos under the deadly accurate fire of Japanese mortars — exciting days, but they still cost precious lives.

Yes, I have a lot to remember, and I am by no means unique among Royal Navy men. Among my memories, I recall with pride the utter loyalty of shipmates to each other and to their ship, and their resolve — there was no doubt whatsoever that we were going to win, and I never ever heard anybody express doubt about the outcome, not even during those harrowing days when we in the *Southampton* covered the northern flank of Dunkirk to prevent interference from the German Navy, not even on that fateful day the ship was sunk, or at Crete where we received such a drumming from their air force, and lost so many ships and lives, including Lord Louis Mountbatten's *HMS Kelly*.

Let us resolve to keep this special day in their memory alive. Let us War Veterans, before we fade away, create an awareness amongst future generations by carrying out that request, engraved on our Cenotaph in Durban "Tell it to those that follow".

Ladies and Gentlemen, you and I are gathered here today in freedom because we lived up to that dictum of Pericles. And at 11 o'clock, when we pause in silence, let us remember and pay homage to those who gave their lives in helping us to retain that freedom, and let us specially remember our young men who have given their lives defending freedom and our Borders.

(Moth Wingrove is with Jacky Fisher Shellhole).