

**MEMO FROM EMMETT MAYOR GORDON W. PETRIE**

**SUBJECT: WELCOME HOME, PFC ASHLEY; YOUR JOURNEY HAS NOW ENDED**

I had planned a completely different memo for November. Then PFC ASHLEY came home. Now that he is finally back, one still realizes that over seventy missed opportunities ticked off where the family could have decorated his grave on Memorial Day. Yet, ironically, maybe that is a blessing for Fred's loved ones who passed on before his return and who now know the "rest of the story".

Hence, with November being the month we honor all surviving veterans of wars or peacetime service to their country, it seemed appropriate to point out why it is important to engage in this annual ritual. This especially follows as fewer and fewer families have "any skin" in the game, which, admittedly, many prefer. Those of us alive in the Sixties—particularly those who served in Vietnam—know how divisive those days were; perhaps every bit as divisive as we currently experience, if not more so.

This Veterans' Day will have special significance. It marks the 100th Anniversary of the "end" of World War I when the belligerents signed an Armistice. The November 2018 edition of *The American Legion* magazine has a reproduction of an audio recording reminiscent of a heart monitor print out. It shows the sound of the artillery activity on the American front near the River Moselle, and clearly shows the contrast at the war's official end at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918. The war flat-lined (at least on the American front) at precisely that time; never mind both sides would get their last punches in up to and including 10:59 a.m.

Regardless of it being all quiet on the Western Front, as often happens with Armistices, fighting continued soon after. Some fighters simply could not remain in their neutral corners. In post-WWI Europe, from Poland's kerfuffle with a newly minted Bolshevik Russia to both of these

belligerents taking on Ukrainian nationalists, to a particular nasty civil war in Finland, not to mention Baltic nationalists fighting whoever wanted to fight, even if each other—recall that much the same happened after a Tito-less Yugoslavia spun itself into oblivion—Europe seemed to explode into a new fireball of violence. What caused such a thing following such a terrible war? Essentially, the collapse of the old empires: Czarist Russia, gone; the German Empire, gone; the Austro-Hungarian Empire, gone; the Ottoman Empire, gone. New states coalesced, vacuums were created, and in many instances, communists filled the void.

What we forget about 1919 (as many of our failed attempts are forgotten in what some describe as the creation of a “New World Order”) our good friend Winston Churchill rallied British, French, Greek and US troops to join with troops of a new country then known as Czechoslovakia to fight the Red Bolsheviks in another localized hot war, post-WWI. Apparently Churchill had not yet figured out from his Gallipoli debacle that as the First Lord of the Admiralty, he should stay out to sea and not worry about land-based conflicts.

By 1924 the score was Reds 1, Allies 0, with the League of Nations officially recognizing the Soviet Union. Thus, the Great War continued in Europe as a “Cold War” until September 1, 1939, when Germany, with the help of the Soviet Union, invaded hapless Poland. Many thoughtful historians, however, see WWII simply as an extension of World War I’s aftermath. They view it as an extension of how the Allies bungled almost everything they did in setting up a “lasting peace in Europe.”

PFC Ashley was a victim of that bungling along with one of those last punches thrown by “radicalized” Germans in the then-not-so-new-country known as Czechoslovakia just before the official end of fighting. Welcome home, Fred; rest in peace. Help us to always remember the true cost of war.