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Celebrating the life of a soldier who hated war

Tom Roberts | Aug. 7, 2009 NCR Today

Henry John ?Harry? Patch, who at 111 was said to be Britain?s last survivor of World War I, spent the last few years of his life condemning the futility of war and noting, as The New York Times [1] put it in an appreciation today ?the common humanity of soldiers who meet as enemies on the battlefield.?

The new wars of the 21st century certainly don?t have the same choreography as the pitched battles involving only combatants of earlier centuries. But Patch?s general disposition about war and who declares them and who fights them certainly remains relevant today.

Patch once said, according to the Times account, that war was ?the ?calculated and condoned slaughter of human beings? too often sent into combat as ?cannon fodder? by politicians who should have settled their conflicts by dueling among themselves. ?War isn?t worth one life,? he said. ?Too many have died.??

There seems some apt balance, some justified symmetry to all the glorification of war that we see in ads for the military and in the patriotic excesses that accompany calls to war, that the last survivor of an especially bloody and gruesome war should declare it futile.

It is said when he attended remembrances of the war dead, he always insisted that those present ?Remember the Germans.?
At his funeral, no weapons were allowed and among the pall bearers were soldiers from Germany, Belgium and France.

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[1] http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/07/world/europe/07funeral.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=henry%20patch&st