

As you know, I am a Parish Councillor, at the November meeting, 2nd Nov, 2010. we were asked to forward a volunteer, to let the two maroons, (very large rockets) off, to mark the beginning and end of the two minute silence, to be held at the very old village church, this Sunday just gone.

It was decided that as the youngest and probably more able of the councillors, the job would go to me, normally when something of this nature comes up, I pretend to be writing something very important down, from the last item on the agenda, I made the fatal mistake of looking up, only to be met by eight sets of questioning eyes, anyway, it was suggested that I go to the top of the hill which flanks the north side of the village, where I would wait for the signal to let of the first rocket, that being from another councillor, positioned at the church, this plan had not been thought through, I mentioned that there was no gas in the village, let alone a mobile phone signal, the wheels of thought ran wildly around the gathered gentry, "my kids have a pair of walkie talkies, you can lend them", said Councillor Nicky Warner, they would not work from the hill to the church, so I suggested that I stand round the back of the church with one walkie talkie and one of the others stand at the front of the church, where the ceremony would take place, it was agreed and I was to await delivery of the maroons to my cottage, a couple of days later, Councillor Robin Barlow, tapped on my door, on opening it, I found him carrying what could only be described as a pair of small exocet missiles, with four foot long sticks, Tony Blair would have loved to have found these beauties in Iraq, whist looking for weapons of mass destruction. The rockets were placed safely in the garden shed, to await the launch day, later that evening, the walkie talkies were in the shed too.

Remembrance Sunday arrived and dressed in my best suit, I waited for my second in command, my thirteen year old daughter, Saski, she would shield the matches with this months issue of My Teen magazine, as I was told that the normal priest, the very reverend Miss Cackett, would not be available to take the service, so the baton was taken up by no less than the Cannon of Exeter, very eminent and a stickler for getting things 'just right'. It was half passed ten and I should now be in position at the church, no sign of Saski, perhaps her hair wasn't quite right or that lipstick didn't sit well with her shoes, whatever the reason, I could not keep the Cannon waiting.

Armed with rockets and communications, I drove to the church, famed for it's Norman tower, there was quite a crowd, milling around in a sombre mood, I found the chairman of the parish council, Colonel Bennett, talking to none other than the Cannon himself, they were inside the ancient church, by the wonderful twelfth century, oak doors, as I approached the chairman, he informed me that the person who was to be in charge of the second walkie talkie was nowhere to be seen, so could I ask one of the other councillors to help out, the only other councillor I could see was with his wife, their combined age must be in excess of one hundred and eighty years, "do you think you could help me by letting me know when to let the twin Apollo's off?", "pardon?" came the reply, as Councillor Scott was hard of hearing, I repeated myself, only to be told that he already had a job. While standing by the memorial outside the front of the church, he was to play a cassette recording of 'The Last Post' after the names of the fallen had been read out. The first of the rockets were to be sent heavenward, just as the last post finished, not a second before, nor after, marking the start of the two minute silence, the second should be launched exactly two minutes later, ending the two minutes silence.

"So you see I can't help you" said Councillor Scott, but my wife would be delighted to lend a hand, from the look on her face, she looked far from delighted, as the names of the fallen were being read out to the now rather large crowd, I was still trying to explain how to

use the walkie talkie, “press the button on the side and say O.K” I repeated desperately for the fourth time, “it’s not bloody rocket science is it”? well I suppose it is, anyway, I ran through the church and out the back, to the cemetery, I found a spot, about ten foot from the church, took the protective plastic from the fuse, and pressed the two rockets, firmly into the moist soil, then pulled them up again, (so that they would not stick allowing them to fly freely into the sky,) whilst quietly apologising to the long dead occupant of the grave, no more than a foot from the launch pad, I could just make out the name, ‘Elizabeth’ and the date 17 something, I placed the projectiles six foot apart, so one did not set the other off when the anticipated rush of thrust came from the first missile.

“Saski” at last, you’re here, I said as my teenage Amy Winehouse approached, “right, hold the magazine next to the fuse”, there was quite a keen breeze by now, “fire one” came crackling from the walkie talkie laying on the floor, quick, hold the magazine closer I cried, the fuse was lit, perfect, we took a step back and waited, the rush of spitting fire grew until it was at full throttle, then, there was the most horrendous explosion, I instinctively turned away from the blast, only to see my daughter being chased screaming up the cemetery path by what can only be described as, half the fires from hell, the other half of the fire was making it’s way up the church walls and windows, spiralling like a wave of glitter and flame, licking it’s way up the thousand year old masonry, I gathered my thoughts together and cuddled my now returned, much shocked daughter, we embraced, both realising we had survived the blast and were very lucky to be alive, the smoke was clearing and we could see quite a large area of burnt grass beneath us, “Fire Two”, quickly and very bravely, my daughter, ran to the second rocket, magazine at the ready, she looked like a veteran at a gun emplacement, with the sound of the last explosion still ringing in our ears, I struck the match, the wind got the better of it, “fire Two” came from the badly melted walkie talkie, a casualty from the blast, I took four match’s from the box, struck them, held them to the inch and a half of fuse, I was mortified to see that because of the intensity of the four match’s, they had burnt the first inch of fuse straight away, a second later there was fire and brimstone bellowing from the base of the rocket, then, a second explosion, this one seemed to be much loader than the last, I again shielded myself and turning, I saw Saski, running for her life shouting “Oh crap” as she ran, followed by the second wave from the ‘Golden Palm Tree’ flame show, this time she did not return so quickly but kept her distance, I surveyed the damage, the second blast seemed to have reached further up the church walls and windows, this was made evident by the bits of molten plastic, still dripping from them, the doors, which had taken the brunt of the blast, were marked but luckily the windows were still in tact, there was a lot of burnt cardboard and plastic, along with a pungent smell of cordite, there was now two large scold marks beside the grave, who’s stone was now blank, as well as scorched, all that remained of the ‘lethal weapons’ was two burnt four foot long sticks.

We checked ourselves out and thanked god for sparing us, I had flash burns under both my eyes and Saski would need a new Hoodie, apart from that, we had made it.

We went through the church and quietly opened the massive front door, gingerly, we looked out onto the gathered crowd, they were watching as the last of the wreaths were being placed on the monument for the dead, it was only luck that prevented my daughter and my names being added.

“Well done you two” said Colonel Bennett, “spot on” from his highness the Cannon, which was on all accounts, praise indeed.

As we worked our way back to the car, we went around the side of the church, where the

gate to the cemetery can be found, it was there that we came across my wife, she was trying to calm and pacify a group of elderly ladies, who had not quite the energy to make it up the steep hill to the front of the church, they had decided to stand by the gate of the old cemetery, to lean on the ancient wall and listen to the service from there.

One of the ladies, who was still visibly shaken by what she described as a noise, not too dissimilar to that, which she had heard during her time in London, during the Blitz, she said she thought the church was going to collapse, why did they not use rockets that sail high into the sky and pop, along way from crowd of parishioners, why did they use two land mines which could easily have taken out half of the German army in one fool swoop.

I have kept a very low profile since that morning, I am not looking forward to the next parish council meeting, let alone canvassing for re election, I do not expect the locals to look favourably on me for quite some time, after all, my own family is just about talking to me.

I certainly will remember this remembrance Sunday.

Tony Farrington.