By Dr Andrew Murrison MP

The statement by Liam Fox on 16th May heralds an amendment to be tabled before the report stage of the Armed Forces Bill that will write the military covenant into law for the first time, lifting it from the obscurity of Army Personnel Doctrine Volume 5. It is good news.

There's trouble when the Military Covenant - the unwritten agreement between fighting men and a nation that pledges to see him alright - is broken. And a decade of discretionary warfare has tested it to the limit. Shocking accounts of neglect from the abuse of soldiers on British streets, shoddy accommodation, inadequate kit and poor care for the injured and their families have shamed a country that, at times, has not kept the bargain. But the public has responded famously with organisations like Help for Heroes and the spontaneity of the Wootton Bassett phenomenon in which ordinary people gather to pay their respects to the fallen in the now immortalised Wiltshire town.

In the opening days of this administration, David Cameron stood on HMS Ark Royal to pledge to write the military covenant into the law of the land. He has been true to his word.

Over centuries the covenant has been variously honoured and ignored. Kipling's 1890 poem "Tommy" makes sardonic reference to this in the words of the eponymous squaddie. However, it has been the discretionary wars of the twenty-first century that have caused us to define the parameters of our duty to those who may sacrifice all in the service of their country.

Having spent three years as shadow defence minister concerned with personnel and been in uniform as a regular or reservist since 1981 I thought I would take the opportunity to write a history of the military covenant at the point at which it evolves into the Armed Forces Covenant. You can pre-order from Amazon and my royalties are going to The Royal British Legion.

Editor's note : We hope to publish a review of "Tommy this, an' Tommy that" next month.