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FROM THE WHANGANUI
WWI CENTENARY PROGRAMME



CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS FROM NEW ZEALAND PART I

Pro-war feelings ran high in New Zealand in the second decade of the twentieth century. During World War I 29,000 men volunteered and 19,500 were conscripted to fight. The White Feather League gave white feathers to men who had not enlisted. Even those who stayed at home because they were legally excused on family grounds, were labelled “Family Shirkers”. The greatest animosity was levelled at Conscientious Objectors. These were men who believed that to kill another human being, conflicted with their consciences and moral principles.

Conscientious Objectors were recognised by the international Laws of War. In New Zealand the government recognised that some religious beliefs legitimised some Conscientious Objectors. These included members of The Society of Friends (Quakers), the Russelites (a group that split from Jehovah’s Witnesses) and Seventh Day Adventists. Sinn Fein activists were excused on political grounds. The Labour Party stood politically against conscription. High-profile members, like Peter Fraser, Bob Semple, Tim Armstrong, Jim O’Brien and Paddy Webb, all future Labour cabinet ministers, were imprisoned for sedition in 1916.

Six hundred men were registered as Conscientious Objectors; six of these came from the Whanganui region. Of these, S Stapleton and A J Morris were from Raetihi, F Pauleson from Kai Iwi, Mr Conway from Castlecliff and C K McCormish and M Vernon from the town of Wanganui. All objectors were taken to the military camp at Trentham, where, if they refused to follow military orders, they were court-martialled and sent to jail.

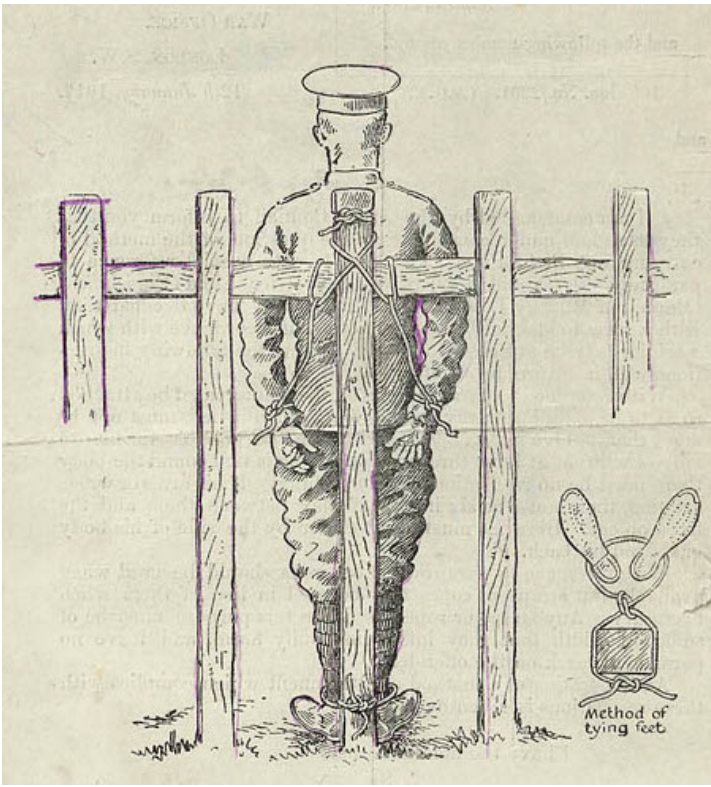
By 1917 James Allan, Minister of Defence, had become very concerned about the increasing number of objectors. In mid-1917 he decided that the most defiant objectors would be sent to the Front Line. There, if they defied military orders, like any other person defying orders on the field of battle, they would be shot. Allen was convinced that this threat would “convert” the hardest objector.

On 13 July 1917 Colonel Potter of Trentham Military Camp took matters into his own hands. He had an overcrowded camp and there was a troop ship in Wellington Harbour. At midnight he rounded up his 14 most recalcitrant objectors and marched them down to the troop ship, *Waitemata*, due to sail the next day for England. These men were brothers Archibald, Sandy and Jack Baxter, William Little, Mark Briggs, Garth Ballentyne, Henry Patton, Frederick Adin, Thomas Harland, Albert Sanderson, Lewis Penright, Daniel Maguire, Lawrence Kirwan and David Gray, collectively known as the “Fourteen Intractables”. They were stowed in the ship’s “clink”, in rooms measuring six by three metres, and kept there for long hours. All were seasick and three contracted measles. Each day they were brought on deck, publicly stripped naked, then forcibly dressed in army uniform.

Once in England they were taken to Sling Camp, the New Zealand Expeditionary Force’s main base, near Southampton. Here they were deprived of food, verbally abused, put in handcuffs and leg-irons and subjected to periods of solitary confinement. Under this treatment, Penwright, Adin and Sanderson submitted and became stretcher bearers. Gray was returned to New Zealand, being unfit for military service.

This left ten Intractables to be sent up to the Front. They were put under the command of Lieutenant Colonel George Mitchell, who told them he was prepared to shoot them. Under his punishments and threats, Sandy and Jack Baxter, Hartland, Ballentyne and Little finally submitted, agreeing to be stretcher bearers. Maguire agreed to be a soldier.

LIFTING THE SOLDIERS' SPIRITS



Crucifixion, a contemporary sketch of Field Punishment No 1
Ref: Public Domain

Archie Baxter, Kirwan, Patten and Briggs were sent to the Abeelee Military Camp in Belgium and handed over to the military police. This was a brutal place, where they were subjected to Army Field Punishment No 1, colloquially called “crucifixion”. This was often enacted for two to four hours at a time. When the weather became cold and snowy, Patten and Briggs were excused, but not Baxter and Kirwan. Patten finally relented under the strain and became a stretcher bearer. Briggs, Kirwan and Archie Baxter were sent to the trenches.

Baxter was denied food. Everyday Briggs, Kirwan and Baxter were marched to the Front to join the Otago Battalion. One day Briggs refused to go. A wire cable was tied round his body and he was dragged there. The nails in the duckboards ripped his clothing and lacerated his back. This incident so upset Kirwan that he relented and became a stretcher bearer. Briggs survived his ordeal but was unfit to fight.

Archie Baxter was taken to that part of the Front which was under fire. He physically survived this, but between starvation and shell shock, his nervous system cracked, and he was labelled “mentally deranged”. In August 1918 he returned to New Zealand.

After the war Conscientious Objectors were denied their civil rights for ten years. They could not be employed by government or local body agencies, they could not stand for Parliament and they could not vote in an election.

Part II of this article on Conscientious Objectors will be published in the next issue and will feature Rua Kēnana and Princess Te Puea.

Music was always part of the war effort. Parades with the rousing sound of brass bands drummed up recruitment and welcomed the troops home. Concerts were held to raise funds for the soldiers and patriotic songs boosted the morale of those at home and at the front. In late 1916, concert parties were established by various divisions of the Australia and New Zealand military command to entertain the troops at the front. These entertainment troupes were made up of dedicated and variously talented groups of soldiers. Performing near the front line was never easy but it was considered an important function, providing relief from the strains of war.

After the failed Gallipoli campaign it became obvious that WWI was going to be a long drawn out war. Fighting at the front was not continuous and, when there was no action, the morale of the soldiers was of great concern to those in command. Following large losses at the battle of the Somme in 1916, General Andrew Hamilton Russell, commander of the New Zealand Division, instigated the formation of the first of New Zealand’s concert parties. The group was called The Kiwis and by the end of the war, there were at least five concert parties performing for the troops of the New Zealand Division in Europe. These included The Kiwis, Tuis and the New Zealand or Digger Pierrots. The latter formed in 1917 in a camp at Étapes in Northern France.

The name Digger Pierrot arose from two sources. “Digger” was an affectionate slang term used by Australian and New Zealand soldiers to describe each other during the war and it was adopted by others as a term for the ANZAC soldiers. The origin of the word is often debated but the general consensus is that it stemmed from the mining background of the soldiers from both countries. The ANZAC soldiers were also really good trench makers and other armed forces adopted this name to describe them.

Pierrot derived from a sad, clownish character in Italian theatre, which was adopted by other cultures and changed over time. He became a traditional French pantomime personality who dressed in a white clown like costume with spots and a cone hat. The Digger Pierrots made a slight change to the iconic costume by sewing a kiwi or fern leaf onto the front pocket.

Performances contained a wide variety of acts and were essentially a combination of music hall and vaudeville. Pantomime, popular songs (especially the sing-along



The Digger Pierrots and their Orchestra, 1917

Ref: National Library of New Zealand 1/2-012914-G

type), skits (often featuring military life) and comedy routines were popular with the troops. There were also speciality acts such as ventriloquism, magic and acrobatics. The lengths that the performers went to produce a first class concert was amazing. Stage sets, lighting, large tents, bands, and in some cases, an orchestra with up to 18 members, accompanied the performers.

Male actors, or female impersonators as they were called, played the female roles in some performances. The theatre traditions of pantomime have always had men playing female roles but as very few women were at the front, men stepped up to play those roles. They were much admired for their glamorous and often funny performances and many a time received standing ovations and calls for encores. The Kiwis troupe had a skilled female impersonator called Charles Stuart Nelson who was hugely popular with audiences during and after the war.

Many concert parties continued to perform after the end of the war. The Digger Pierrots reformed after peace was declared in November 1918 to entertain troops awaiting demobilization in the United Kingdom and France. After they returned home in 1919, they continued to perform concerts, along with other concert parties, to raise funds for returning soldiers and other worthy causes. The Digger Pierrots completed a New Zealand tour in 1919 and another in Australia in 1920.

THE RED BARON

Entering the third year of war, both Germany and Britain were despondent at the lack of progress and high casualty rates. To raise public morale, the governments and military officials needed success, and they needed heroes, and so the fighter ace was born. The most famous fighter ace of World

War I was Manfred von Richthofen, known to the French as the Red Devil, to the British as the Red Baron, and to the Germans as the Red Battle Flyer.

Manfred Albrecht Freiherr von Richthofen was born into an aristocratic Prussian family in 1892. His father, a retired cavalry colonel, enrolled Manfred as a military cadet at a Prussian academy, but it was his uncle Alexander von Schickfuss, a big game hunter, who inspired his nephew to become a crack shot with an air rifle. Young Manfred loved sports, gymnastics and taking risks, like climbing the Wahlstatt Church steeple to tie his handkerchief to the lightning rod.

In 1912, at the age of 20, he joined a Cavalry regiment, but quickly became bored, transferring to the Air Service in 1915. A chance meeting with Germany's first fighter ace, Oswald Boelcke, inspired him to train as a fighter pilot. Despite crashing on his first solo flight, Richthofen qualified and was selected by Boelcke to join a newly formed elite air force JASTA 2 in 1916.



Manfred von Richthofen, the Red Baron

Ref: *Stars and Stripes*, April 2018

were painting parts of their planes red. With other squadrons adopting their own colours, decoration of fighter planes became general throughout the Luftstreitkräfte (German Air Force).

During "Bloody April" of 1917, Richthofen shot down 22 British aircraft, raising his tally to 52. In June 1917 he was given command of the first Jagdgeschwader, or fighter wing. It was for their mobility and the bright colours of the four fighter squadrons of Jagdgeschwader 1 that his wing became known as "The Flying Circus".

Disaster struck in July 1917 when Richthofen was shot in the head during combat. Despite being temporarily blinded he landed his craft and underwent two operations to remove bone splinters from his head. Returning to service against doctor's orders, it is thought the ongoing effects of this head injury contributed to his death. On 21 May 1918 he engaged in a risky low-level pursuit of a Royal Air Force plane over enemy territory and is thought to have been shot by a member of the Royal Australian Artillery. Buried with full military honours by the Australians, he was only 25 years old and had claimed 80 kills.

Our grateful thanks to Gillian Tasker for this article.

In November 1916 Richthofen shot down his most famous adversary, British ace Major Lanoe Hawker VC, after a lengthy dogfight. In January 1917 he was awarded the "Pour le Mérite", or the Blue Max, having claimed his 16th kill. The same month he became commander of his own unit of aircraft, known as JASTA 11, and had his Albatros biplane painted red. Soon, the pilots in his squadron

SURGERY DURING THE GREAT WAR

During the early months of World War I abdominal injuries had an unacceptable 85% mortality rate. In the South African (Boer) War (1899 to 1902), the British advised laparotomy, a large surgical incision giving access to abdominal organs or spaces, in all cases of penetrating abdominal wounds. The early results were very poor and a subsequent British military order called for conservative treatment.

As the war progressed patients were brought to clearing stations and underwent surgery near the front with a subsequent decrease in mortality to 56%. There was an organised hierarchical and tiered casualty care system. It should also be understood there were no antibiotics, poor anaesthesia and only rudimentary blood supplies.

The large number of head wounds early in the war led to the invention of the Brodie helmet, made of steel, which became standard kit. Just 12% of wounds to the torso were recorded, but many soldiers hit here never made it to a hospital. Leg wounds were the most commonly recorded area of injury and amputation was often necessary. Arm injuries were caused by high explosive artillery shells and shrapnel. The mud in the trenches increased the risk of infection and gangrene. Standing in mud and water for long periods caused chronic foot infections.

There were advances in anaesthesia and fluid resuscitation. Shock, described as "the rude unhinging of the machinery of life" by Samuel Gross in 1862, was categorised into two areas: hypovolaemic shock (from blood loss) and septic shock (from infection). Fluids were given through the rectum and blood transfusion was developed.

Nursing care of the ill and wounded improved during the war, with many young New Zealand women volunteering to serve in Egypt and France.

Post-traumatic stress was not recognised. Many soldiers were diagnosed with "shell-shock", which we would now recognise as PTSD. Unfortunately, many of these soldiers were labelled cowards, and this could lead to execution. Of the five New Zealanders executed during WWI,

at least one, Private Victor Spencer, had been earlier diagnosed with shell-shock.

Rehabilitation was rudimentary at best. Many returning wounded struggled for years with unresolved physical disabilities from their injuries.



Harold Gillies as a prefect at Wanganui Collegiate School, about 1900

Ref: Wanganui Collegiate School Museum Collection

War, ironically, leads to many advances in medicine. During WWI, the specialty of plastic surgery was basically invented. Initially, this was to reduce the disfigurement of major facial injuries. The advent of the "Tin Hat" for infantry resulted in many more surviving what would earlier have been fatal wounds.

As a result, many survivors were left with terrible facial disfigurements. The pioneer of this surgery was Sir Harold Gillies, born in Dunedin and educated at Wanganui Collegiate School. His first "plastic" patient was a sailor, Walter Yeo, burnt at the Battle of Jutland. Gillies performed a flap repair to his face, an entirely new surgery at the time. These surgical techniques were developed further in World War II by another New Zealander, Gillies' cousin, Archibald McIndoe, who was prominent in treating burnt allied airmen at the now famous "Guinea Pig" Hospital in East Grinstead. These New Zealand surgeons are now revered, and their memory is preserved by the Gillies McIndoe Foundation, a plastic surgery research trust.

Our grateful thanks to Major Burton King FRACS RNZAMC, Surgeon, and Major Graham Sharpe ONZM FANZCA RNZAMC, Anaesthetist, for this article.

For information on all national activities commemorating the centennial of World War I, visit the official website www.ww100.govt.nz.