Bert Brocklesby

Background

Bert Brocklesby was a Methodist and a teacher from Conisbrough, South Yorkshire.

During the Boer War (1899-1902) an eleven-year-old Bert was confused when he realised that both sides were praying for victory to the same God.

Bert Brocklesby and Conscientious Objection

When the First World War broke out in 1914 Bert Brocklesby refused to enlist. In 1916, when conscription was brought in, Bert applied for exemption as a conscientious objector. As a Christian he considered it unthinkable to take another man's life. He preached a sermon in his local church in which he explained that since it was impossible to imagine Christ bayonetting a German soldier then Christians – trying to live as Christ – could never do that either.

Bert was an Absolutist – he would not help the war effort in any way. Ordered to join the Non-Combatant Corps, where many conscientious objectors did alternative work to aid the war effort, Bert refused.

Bert was imprisoned with 15 others in Richmond Castle while pressure was put on them to join in the war effort. Remaining steadfast in their conscientious objection, they were secretly moved to France where they could be tried under military law because in the war zone their resistance was a much more grievous offence. Bert and his companions were sentenced to death – commuted to 10 years hard labour.

Bert was released from prison in spring 1919, going home to Conisbrough before travelling to Austria where he helped feed children still suffering the effects of the conflict.

In his own words

“God had not put me on earth to go destroying his own children.”

More information

Bert was profiled as part of journalist Ian Hislop’s programme Not Forgotten, broadcast on Channel Four and available (in five parts) on youtube: [http://youtu.be/Na_qVy_Nl-4](http://youtu.be/Na_qVy_Nl-4)

[Bert’s story is told in parts 2 and 3]

The White Feather Diaries includes the story of Bert and many other First World War conscientious objectors: [http://whitefeatherdiaries.org.uk](http://whitefeatherdiaries.org.uk)

Think...

- Is Bert Brocklesby a pacifist?
- What was his motivation for his actions?
- Do you think his pacifism has limits? Could you imagine him going to war or supporting war in any circumstances?
- How practical do you think his pacifism is? Is it likely to make a positive difference?
- What did he hope to achieve? Was he successful?
George Zabelka

Background
Fr George Zabelka was a Catholic Chaplain with the US Air Force during the Second World War. In all he served 22 years as a military chaplain and retired with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

Fr Zabelka died in April 1992.

Fr Zabelka and the Atomic Bomb
In 1945 Fr Zabelka was chaplain to the 509th Composite Group on Tinian Island in the South Pacific – the group that dropped the atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

His duties as a chaplain included celebrating Mass and the sacraments for the military personnel and listening to, counselling, and supporting the troops. It did not cross his mind to question the actions of the US military.

Three months after the war he visited Nagasaki and saw for himself the destruction caused by these bombs and the deaths of innocent civilians. This was a turning point in his thinking leading Fr Zabelka to regret deeply not speaking out against what he now considered to be gravely immoral.

He repented of his inaction in 1945 and dedicated the rest of his life to working for peace.

In his own words
“All I can say today is that I was wrong. Christ would not be the instrument to unleash such horror on his people. Therefore no follower of Christ can legitimately unleash the horror of war on God’s people... All I can say is: I was wrong!”

More information
Read an interview with Fr Zabelka here: http://www.centerforchristiannonviolence.org/data/Media/Fr.%20George%20Zabekla%20Interview%20%5B02%5D.pdf

A film, Zabelka: The Reluctant Prophet, tells the story of Fr Zabelka. It is available in full here: http://vimeo.com/48820359

Think...
- Is George Zabelka a pacifist?
- What was his motivation for his actions?
- Do you think his pacifism has limits? Could you imagine him going to war or supporting war in any circumstances?
- How practical do you think his pacifism is? Is it likely to make a positive difference?
- What did he hope to achieve? Was he successful?
At dead of night on 29th January 1996, three women, Andrea Needham, Joanna Wilson and Lotta Kronlid broke through the perimeter fence that surrounds the British Aerospace factory at Warton in Lancashire. They slipped past security guards, ran across a frosted runway to the hangar containing Hawk jet number ZH 955 and forced opened the door. Then, using household hammers, they smashed the £12m plane’s sophisticated electronics. The women had made no attempt to escape and had draped the aircraft with banners bearing the slogans “Swords into Ploughshares” and “Peace and Justice in East Timor.”

By the time the security guards arrived at the scene the three women had been in the factory for more than two hours and had caused, it is alleged, damage to the aircraft to the tune of £1.7m. They were arrested and taken to the Risley remand centre. While waiting for their trial the women prayed and prepared their defence.

Background

East Timor (today Timor-Leste) is a former Portuguese colony that had been forcibly annexed by Indonesia in 1975. Under occupation its people had suffered the most brutal persecution. Amnesty International estimated that no fewer than 200,000 people – a third of its population – had been killed. Andrea, Joanna, and Lotta believed that British-made Hawk aircraft were being used by the Indonesian military to wage war against the people of East Timor. The women decided to take action because they were determined to prevent the plane from reaching Indonesia in case it was then used against the people of East Timor.

Trial

In July 1996, they were summoned to Liverpool Crown Court, charged with causing, and conspiring to cause, criminal damage. On trial with them was Angie Zelter, who had been arrested a week later than the others after announcing she was going to the factory to continue the damage her friends had started.

Pleading ‘not guilty’, they argued that they had lawful excuse as they were acting to prevent British Aerospace and the British Government from aiding and abetting genocide. The jury cleared them of the charges.

In their own words

“I cannot stand aside and allow the Hawks to be delivered without doing all that is in my power to peacefully resist. I believe that to be silent in this situation is to be complicit with injustice.” (Andrea Needham)

More Information


Think...

- Are the Ploughshares women pacifists?
- What was their motivation for their actions?
- Do you think their pacifism has limits? Could you imagine them going to war or supporting war in any circumstances?
- How practical do you think their pacifism is? Is it likely to make a positive difference?
- What did they hope to achieve? Were they successful?
Josef Mayr-Nusser

Background
The fourth of seven children, Josef Mayr-Nusser was born in 1910 into a family of wine-growers near Bolzano in the Austrian Tirol. The family was German-speaking, and this region only became part of Italy after the First World War. He worked as a cashier for a company in Bolzano.

With the accord between Hitler and Mussolini in 1939 most of the German-speaking citizens of South Tirol accepted the option of moving into Germany. Josef by contrast was among those who chose to stay in Italy because he judged Hitler’s projects to be completely incompatible with the Gospel, joining a resistance movement opposed to Fascism and Nazism.

Josef married one of his work colleagues, Hildegard Straub, in 1942, and a year later their son Albert was born.

Conscription into Hitler’s Army
After Italy signed an armistice with the Allies in 1943, German troops occupied northern Italy. As Nazi control in South Tirol advanced, men were conscripted into Hitler’s army, despite international conventions forbidding conscription of occupied populations. In September 1944 Josef was enlisted into the SS and taken with other recruits to Könitz in western Prussia for three weeks of training - at the end of which they would be sworn in.

At the critical moment on 4 October he told the officer that he could not take the oath of loyalty to Hitler. His faith and conscience would not allow it. His superiors and fellow conscripts failed to persuade him to change his mind, so Josef Mayr-Nusser was arrested, imprisoned and transferred to Danzig (Gdansk) to await trial. In prison there he experienced conditions of extreme cold with very little food.

Condemned in January 1945 for undermining military morale, Josef was sentenced to death. He was transported to Dachau, where he was to be shot, but, much weakened by prison starvation, and feverish with dysentery, he died on 24 February at Erlangen, in the cattle wagon taking him there.

Josef Mayr-Nusser was beatified by Pope Francis on 18 March 2017.

In his own words
‘If no one ever finds the courage to tell them that they don’t agree with their Nazi ideology nothing will ever change’

More information
http://paxchristi.org.uk/2017/03/08/beatification-of-josef-mayr-nusser-martyr-for-conscience-during-world-war-two/

Think...
- Is Josef Mayr-Nusser a pacifist?
- What was his motivation for his actions?
- Do you think his pacifism has limits? Could you imagine him going to war or supporting war in any circumstances?
- How practical do you think his pacifism is? Is it likely to make a positive difference?
- What did he hope to achieve? Was he successful?
Desmond Doss

Background

Desmond Doss was working at a naval shipyard when Pearl Harbor was attacked in 1941, the event that led to the United States’ entry into the Second World War. His work meant that Desmond could have been exempted from military service but he wanted to do more for his country and he entered military service on 1 April 1942.

As a devout Seventh-day Adventist, Desmond held a strong and absolute belief in the commandment *thou shalt not kill* and as a consequence he refused to carry a gun into combat; he would not kill an enemy soldier. As his religious convictions stopped him from bearing arms Desmond was given conscientious objector status and he became a combat medic, first serving on the battlefield in Guam and then in the Philippines. It was for his part in the 1945 battle for Okinawa (Japan) for which Desmond Doss became best known.

The Battle for Okinawa

During the battle for a 400-foot-high ridge on Okinawa, a Japanese counter-offensive had driven the US troops from the ridge but had left wounded soldiers stranded at the top. Private Doss refused to seek cover and remained in the fire-swept area with the many stricken, carrying all 75 casualties one-by-one to the edge of the escarpment and there lowering them on a rope-supported litter [stretcher] down the face of a cliff to friendly hands. [From Medal of Honour citation]

Over the next few days Desmond Doss courageously came to the aid of many injured men. Always under sustained heavy fire, Private Doss would reach the injured, tend to their wounds, and return them to safety—making multiple trips if necessary.

On one occasion, having been wounded by a grenade, he treated his own injuries for 5 hours rather than call for someone to risk themselves to come and assist. Even then, when he eventually was rescued, he saw another man more profoundly injured and gave up his stretcher in order that the other man would be more swiftly treated.

President Truman presented Desmond Doss with the Congressional Medal of Honour—the highest military honour in the United States—for his actions above and beyond the call of duty at Okinawa. He was the first conscientious objector to receive this award.

More information

Desmond Doss is the subject of the documentary *The Conscientious Objector*

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=4E3reiJYFpw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4E3reiJYFpw)

The Mel Gibson film *Hacksaw Ridge* is based on his story.

Think...

- Is Desmond Doss a pacifist?
- What was his motivation for his actions?
- Do you think his pacifism has limits? Could you imagine him ever choosing to fight in a war?
- How practical do you think his pacifism is? Is it likely to make a positive difference?
- What did he hope to achieve? Was he successful?
Huwaida Arraf

Background

Huwaida’s parents were Palestinian Christians who moved from Israel to Detroit in 1975 shortly before Huwaida was born. Her father did not want to live in Israel because, as an Arab, he felt like a second class citizen.

Huwaida holds Israeli citizenship and has been visiting Israel since she was a small child. After studying at the University of Michigan she went on to study at university in Jerusalem and learned Hebrew on an Israeli kibbutz. She worked with Seeds of Change, a group that helped Palestinian and Israeli young people to meet in peace.

International Solidarity Movement

In 2001, Huwaida was one of the co-founders of the International Solidarity Movement (ISM), a nonviolent campaign to resist the Israeli occupation. This was the time of the second intifada, the Palestinian uprising, and violence was increasing. ISM activists from around the world came to support Palestinian protest and resistance.

It's not that I didn't believe in dialogue. But there was this desperate escalation and I thought people should take to the streets. (Huwaida, quoted in the Guardian newspaper, 2003)

When the Israeli army moved into the Palestinian towns of Bethlehem and Ramallah in 2002, Huwaida and other activists worked to get food and medical help to Palestinians under siege at the Church of the Nativity. They succeeded, but Huwaida was arrested. One of the Israeli soldiers was a former classmate from university in Michigan. In jail, she went on hunger strike to fight deportation for herself and other activists.

Since 2001, hundreds of ISM activists have campaigned in the West Bank and Gaza, and Huwaida also helped organise ships to take aid supplies to Palestinians in Gaza, which was cut-off by Israel.

She now lives back in the USA with her husband, Adam, who has been banned from Israel because of his activism.

In her own words

What is needed is nonviolent direct action against the occupation. This includes roadblock removal, boycotts, refusing to obey curfew orders, blocking roads, refusing to show ID cards or even burning them. Yes, the Israeli army and settlers will use violence. Yes, people will get killed and injured. Hamas claims it has many men ready to be suicide bombers – we advocate that these men offer themselves as martyrs by standing on a settler road and blocking it from traffic. This is no less of a jihad. This is no less noble than carrying out a suicide operation.

(Huwaida Arraf and Adam Shapiro (2002), Why Nonviolent Resistance is Important for the Palestinian Intifada)

More Information

International Solidarity Movement: palsolidarity.org

Think...

- Is Huwaida Arraf a pacifist?
- What was her motivation for her actions?
- Do you think her pacifism has limits? Could you imagine her going to war or supporting war in any circumstances?
- How practical do you think her pacifism is? Is it likely to make a positive difference?
- What did she hope to achieve? Was she successful?
Desmond Doss

Huwaida Arraf
Bert Brocklesby

George Zabelka