

# Frank pacifist stuck to anti-war beliefs

**T**hree minutes preaching Gospel love from a soapbox on a Wellington street corner brought three months imprisonment with hard labour for Connie Summers.

It was 1941. New Zealand was at war with Germany and Italy. Emergency regulations were in place to boost armed forces recruitment.

Summers, then Connie Jones, was one of many pacifists and conscientious objectors incarcerated during the war. But she was the only woman sent to jail in New Zealand for stirring up anti-war feeling. Though she lived a further 67 years, she never regretted her action on the street corner that Friday evening.

Neither did she regret the public vilification she attracted and the many times she was punched and jostled, as she walked the town wearing a sandwich board bearing anti-war slogans.

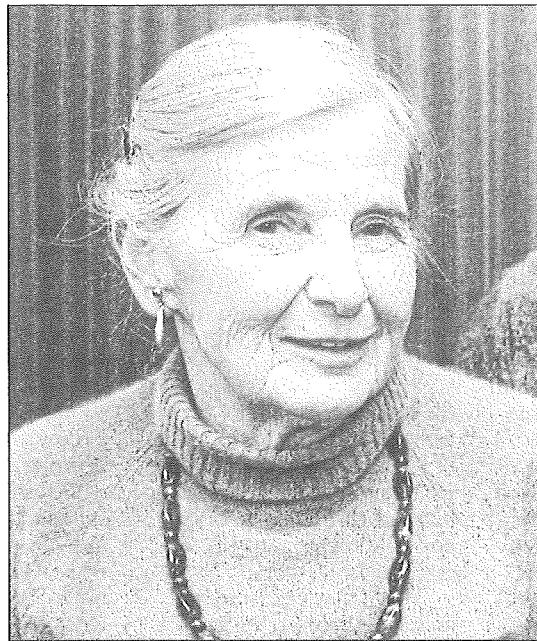
Looking back in 1986, she told *The Press* she wished she had done more to oppose the war. By then she had also protested against the Vietnam War, from 1965 to 1973. She had become so embroiled in 1981 anti-Springbok tour demonstrations that she was arrested five times.

In her own view, Summers lived by principles. She allowed no backing down to public sentiment, no dilution of her beliefs.

She expected her family to follow her lead, even though it caused difficulties, even alienation, among them. She admitted she was openly critical of family members and had many rows with them.

Two of Summers' brothers were conscientious objectors in the war. One served a month's imprisonment at Paparua, near Christchurch.

Summers said she assumed their sense of principle was inherited from their father, who used to cycle 100km from Oxford, North Canterbury, to weekly socialist meetings in Christchurch. She added to them a strong dose of Methodism. Her membership of the Methodist Church brought her into contact with people



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of anti-war beliefs. She joined the Socialist Guild of Youth and became a pacifist while still a student at West Christchurch District High School.

At the outbreak of World War 2, she was drawn into the Christian Pacifist Society. A prime influence there was Rev Ormond Burton. She was supporting him in trying to start a political street meeting in Wellington when the police intervened.

Summers moved back to Christchurch after her release from prison and married. Her husband, John, was a Quaker but his pacifist leanings did not prevent him enlisting in the army medical service in the war. Soon after their marriage, he sailed for North Africa. He served there and in Italy.

The strong-willed and outspoken pair disagreed on his war service and other matters. Their marriage was sometimes stormy but they remained a loving couple until John died, in 1993. They had seven children.

Her husband was an art collector and critic, a writer and a lover of books. Summers supported him in running a Christchurch book shop and worked in it for many years.

The business flourished in Chancery Lane and then Manchester St. It became a "hang-out" for arty and literary types and political radicals. The shop was later moved to an upstairs site on Tuam St.

A former customer, who asked not to be named, says Summers "tended to be grumpy", possibly because of her husband's frequent ill-temper. She was always frank and forthright. Her integrity, consistency and generosity won her wide respect.

She read widely and enjoyed dabbling in the rambling garden that surrounded the family's old villa on a large section in Spreydon.

Summers loved her extended family and was loved in return. One son is the well-known Canterbury sculptor Llew Summers. **MIKE CREAM**

■ Constance May Summers, born Oxford, March 1, 1919; died Christchurch, December 31, 2008. Predeceased by husband John; survived by daughters Faith, Bronwen and Ursula, sons John, Llewelyn, Gwilym and Dylan, 26 grandchildren and 26 great-grandchildren.