

Enough war stories thanks

Members have been contributing stories about their relative's war experiences so I thought it was time to write about some of my relatives, who, with one exception, did not have any war service, and have all campaigned for peace.

My grandfather Albert Ockenden was born in London 1874 and was a builder. He came to NZ in 1901 and married Frances Alice McKenzie in 1908 and they had four daughters. They were at some time members of the Fabian Society, which is British socialist organisation whose purpose is to advance the principles of democratic socialism via gradualist and reformist effort in democracies, rather than by revolutionary overthrow. Albert's name appears on the register for service in WW1 even though he was already forty when the war started. His fourth daughter was born in August 1918 and I think this ensured he would not be called up. I know he was very much against the war and may well have refused to serve. By the time I knew him in the 1940's he spent a lot of time reading books promoting peace among nations and we still have these books. He was a close friend of many of the men who were conscientious objectors or anti-war protestors in WW1. He and his wife clearly instilled the same thoughts and passions in their daughters. These daughters regularly attended the Socialist Sunday School, where lifelong interests in equality and assistance for the poor were nurtured. The Sunday school had a set of Ten Commandments, several of which decree love and fellowship of other people. The tenth commandment reads, "Help to bring about the day when all nations shall live fraternally together in peace and prosperity."

My grandfather had a box of blocks that he probably made for his daughters, and as young children, my brother and sister and I used to enjoy playing with them and building towers, which perhaps resemble war memorials. My grandparents didn't like us to be building war memorials, we had enough of them! My sister used to talk about "a piece of Muriel" which translated into "Peace Memorial" and these were acceptable. (Muriel being their second daughter)

Lorna, their eldest daughter, and my mother, married Jack McGlinchy in 1936. Jack was born near Glasgow and served in WW1 in the Kings Own Scottish Borderers. Apart from the medal cards, all his service records were burnt when the archive was bombed in WW2. His regiment served at Gallipoli and at least one cousin claims he was mentioned in dispatches, but I have never found proof of this. His experiences at Gallipoli and maybe elsewhere, clearly affected him and from at least his time in NZ he became very opposed to any further war action. He spoke at anti-conscription rallies in the 1930's and in one report he was described as a returned soldier and local Labour Party activist.



Jack McGlinchy with his RSA badge (1947)

Jack was a member of the RSA and wore their badge on his suit. Jack believed that as a member of the RSA he could do more to promote peace from within the organisation than his token resignation would have done. I never saw his medals, nor did I once recall him going to an ANZAC Day parade.

My father, Jack, died in 1952 and in 1958 Lorna married Neil Duff. Neil had been a conscientious objector in WW2 and he strongly believed war was wrong and immoral. When he did not report for service he was arrested and eventually served the remainder of the war in detention camps. He used to recount his stories with “When I was staying with the king....” The main occupation of these CO’s was planting pine trees. After his release he spent some time at the Riverside Community in Upper Moutere, founded by Archibald Barrington who was a well-known anti-war activist, and co-incidentally a good friend of my grandfather.

Lorna herself was strongly opposed to any form of violence or warfare and after the family left home she became a tireless worker for the peace movement and UNICEF.

Muriel, their next daughter had become a Quaker and married a fellow Quaker, John Morrison, thus setting the scene for more anti-war activities. John was an openly declared pacifist. His dedication is typified in the photo below¹. John is the person in the centre.

Christian pacifists demonstrate outside Christchurch's Addington Showgrounds, Show Day, 1938.



John had trained as an electrician and gained an exemption from war service. Because of the exemption he was offered promotion to fill the place of a married man who had been conscripted. After a few days of agonising he felt he could not take this man's job and resigned. Through a Quaker friend he and Muriel heard of a job in Auckland as the supervisors of a home for about twenty psychologically disturbed children. When John was called up again, he argued that he was doing an important job here and who would they get to replace them? There being no possible replacement he did not serve in WW2. Muriel, in particular, continued to work both within the Quakers and other anti-war activities.



A CND Hiroshima anniversary parade. Muriel is fourth from left carrying a banner.

Their third daughter was certainly involved in the antiwar movement. There is a report in The Press in 1935, reporting that several members of the Ockenden family, including Enid were involved in the annual conference of the No More War Movement.

The Ockenden's fourth daughter Marjorie, continued the anti-war activism perhaps even more actively than the others. Sometime during WW2 as a young teacher she was sent to a school in the far north. She became friendly with a local Maori boy who went off to war and was killed. She saw this as a terrible waste. After retiring, she too helped organise meetings for the Sumner Peace Group including collecting signatures for a petition leading to Christchurch city becoming nuclear free. In 2002 her efforts in the peace movement were recognised with her being awarded a mayoral commendation, but four days before the ceremony she died suddenly.

Pictured is a stand arranged by the Sumner Peace Group, promoting their philosophy and may-be selling cakes and produce for fund raising. Marjorie is in the centre and on the left is Jean Thompson, a lifelong friend and neighbour. The man standing is Jean's husband, Noel, who also was a Conscientious Objector in WW2



The Sumner Peace Group's display stall

I can't find any proof of it, but I'm sure several of the Ockenden sisters took part in anti-Vietnam war protests. Probably, this included the occasion when the anti-war movement tried to lay a wreath for the dead Vietnamese one Anzac day. I know they protested week after week during the 1981 Springbok tour.

As for me, clearly both my parents instilled the same message of peace. I recall upsetting my teachers at school, who were mostly ex-servicemen, because I refused to parade in the school cadet uniform when the Governor General came to town. I was called up twice to do the CMT for over 18 year olds, but managed to find good excuses to defer it; then Walter Nash cancelled it. I'm glad I did not have to choose whether or not to go to war,

and even more pleased that neither of my sons have ever had to face the challenges that the young men of 100 years ago did. Perhaps the activism of my relatives has helped.

Brian McGlinchy

¹ *Out in the Cold* Pacifists and conscientious objectors in World War II. Grant David, Reed Methven 1986. (page 40)