

Text A: Bert Brocklesby

Before the war, Bert was an active and popular member of his community and church. He worked as a teacher and was engaged to a young woman named Annie Wainwright. When war began in 1914, he wasn't sure if he should volunteer, but decided that he couldn't fight because he believed that God didn't want him to kill other people. The reaction in the town was angry – many people wanted him to lose his job and to leave the family home. His family supported him, though, and his father allowed him to stay at home.

At first Bert's refusal to volunteer was legal. However, after conscription was introduced in February 1916, it became more difficult for him to refuse to fight. Conscientious objectors were able to avoid conscription for religious or political reasons, but they had to explain their reasons to a tribunal and agree to support the war by doing non-military work such as cleaning and building .

Bert, though, was an 'absolutist' – he refused to do any work to support the war – he wouldn't even prepare food for soldiers to eat. As a result, he was sent to prison in Richmond Castle with 15 other absolutists. Conditions there were very hard, and both prisoners and prison officers were very hostile to the conscientious objectors' beliefs.

However, things were about to get worse. In May 1916 the group, known as the Richmond Sixteen, were sent to France. Here, they were told that they were on the battlefield and, therefore, if they didn't fight they were refusing to follow army orders. Bert and the other conscientious objectors were put on trial and found guilty of refusing to follow orders. They were all sentenced to death. However, at the last moment, the sentence was changed to ten years in prison. The absolutists were sent back to Britain and spent the rest of the war in prison, where they still refused to do any work that would help the war, even making bags for the army. They were badly treated there and often punished.

In 1919, Bert was released from prison and returned to his home town. Although his family welcomed him, the people in the town didn't forgive him and he couldn't get a job. Soon after he was released, he went to Austria to help child victims of the war. Unfortunately, his fiancée, Annie, couldn't accept his decision to help people she saw as the enemy, as her brother had been killed in the war. She ended her engagement to Bert and married a war hero.

After Austria, Bert went to work as a missionary in Africa, then returned to England where he worked as a teacher. He continued to be a pacifist and, until he died aged 73, he was still protesting against war.

Glossary:

engaged (adj) – planning to get married

missionary (n) – someone who travels to other countries to teach people about their religious beliefs

trial (n) – legal process in a court to decide if someone is innocent or guilty of a crime

pacifist (n) – a person who believes that war and violence are wrong

Text B: Phil Brocklesby

Before the war, Philip was working as an optician in Headingley, a small town near Leeds. When war began in July 1914, he wasn't sure if he should volunteer. Although he wanted to fight to protect his country, he had strong religious beliefs which made him feel uncomfortable about fighting. However, he soon decided that he needed to fight to defend his country and so he signed up at the local recruiting office. However, he felt no anger for his brother Bert for refusing to sign up.

He was sent to fight in France, where he became a 2nd Lieutenant. In June 1916, the Brocklesby family discovered that Bert, who was in prison for refusing to fight, had been sent to France and that his life was in danger. As a result, as soon as he arrived in France, Philip decided to look for his brother, even though this meant that he could get punished for being AWOL – absent from the army without permission. He soon found that Bert was being taken to a camp in Henriville, in north-eastern France, and went there to wait for him. After a short wait, he saw Bert and 40 other men marching up a hill towards him. The brothers were extremely happy and relieved to see each other and were given permission to spend half an hour together. Philip still supported Bert's decision not to fight, even though he had been sent to prison, and in a letter to their mother he wrote about how proud he was of Bert for having such strong beliefs. He also wrote a letter to Bert, describing how his strength was an inspiration to him.

Philip stayed in Henriville while Bert and the other conscientious objectors were put on trial for their refusal to fight. After the terrible sentence was passed, he returned to the army and, two months later, fought in the Battle of the Somme. This was a terrible battle, where 60,000 men were killed or injured, including Philip's commanding officer. Philip was very lucky not to die.

Philip's experiences of war changed his opinion of fighting. Two weeks after the Somme offensive, he wrote to his aunt. In the letter, he talked about his dislike of war and his increasing support for the conscientious objectors.

After the war ended, Philip returned home to Conisbrough, where he became a popular and respected member of his community. He ran a successful opticians and pharmacy. In the Second World War, despite his negative opinions of war, he organised and ran the Conisbrough Home Guard and was given an MBE by the King.

The family, including Philip, continued to be close and to support each other.

Glossary:

- Home Guard** – an organisation in the Second World War made up of people who were not able to fight in war. They worked to defend Britain
- optician (n)** – someone who makes and sells eye glasses
- pharmacy (n)** – a shop that sells medicines
- sentence (n)** – punishment for a crime

