

The First World War and The Salvation Army

Kids Fact Sheets

Did The Salvation Army fight in the First World War?



All Salvationists fought, but they fought by showing God's love to their fellow man, no matter where they were - if they were on a battlefield or making a cup of tea, all were expected to help.

It was a very difficult time as The Salvation Army had members in most of the countries that became involved in the First World War.

What did The Salvation Army do?

We wanted to make sure each person was cared for, that nobody felt alone. Wartime is a very stressful time. Wherever there was a need, we tried to help.



What did The Salvation Army do in the UK?



We raised money to buy the first motor ambulances.

We had hostels near train stations and ports. Hostels were a safe place for soldiers and sailors to stay in if they were travelling, or if they were lost in a new city.

We ran huts in the soldiers' training camps, a place to get some good food and a cup of tea. It was a clean and welcoming place to relax in.

Women and children made socks and clothes for soldiers. We also sent parcels with goodies inside to cheer up soldiers.

We did lots of home visits and made sure families were coping. Public kitchens became popular; food was becoming scarce, and mothers involved in war work had little time to cook meals for their families.

We gave emergency support when there were bombings - emergency repairs, shelter and food.



What did The Salvation Army do abroad?

We had huts and field kitchens run by men and women. Field kitchens used small ovens which could be set up anywhere - in a ditch, in a bombed-out house, or in a field! They could be set up very close to the front line so the troops could have something good to eat.



We worked with the Red Cross and drove the ambulances. We drove the wounded from the front to the hospital and also took them to trains and boats so they could return home to Britain.



Being part of The Salvation Army meant we were already trained to work hard and serve others. When food supplies in a field kitchen became very low, we started making doughnuts. Doughnuts are cheap to make, but smell and taste great! Our doughnuts cheered up a lot of soldiers.



Schools and Colleges Unit



What else did women do?



We visited the wounded in the hospital. We brought them little gifts: chocolate, a Bible, socks, soap, a *War Cry* - The Salvation Army's newspaper. We talked to the men, sang with them, and helped them write letters home.

Sometimes we had to write a letter explaining how they had died. We would tell the family where their loved one was buried and include some of the flowers we had left on the grave.



What else did men do?

If we could help, we did. It might be finding food or fresh water, or giving a lift to a tired soldier or even helping a priest get to a dying soldier.

Most drivers were also part of Salvation Army bands so we played instruments to cheer soldiers up. A song often helps.



What are chaplains and what did they do?



Chaplains are ministers who go with the troops. We tried to help by talking and praying with the soldiers, or by holding religious meetings. We helped bury the dead. But we also helped in other ways. We would make cups of tea or find treats to eat. We would write letters, sew on buttons, or even peel potatoes! - anything to support the men.



What did Salvation Army members who were fighting do?

We still helped by serving others. We usually wore a Salvation Army jumper under our uniform or a Salvation Army badge, so people knew we were happy to help. We talked and prayed, like a chaplain would, and many soldiers treated us like a chaplain. We sang or played instruments. We would help carry the wounded, or give water to others. Sometimes we were teased, but eventually we were respected for showing our love for others.



What did The Salvation Army do in Germany?



The Salvation Army in Germany is called *Die Heilsarmee*. To help the German people there were public kitchens, home visits, and hostels. Most of our records have been lost because of the bombings in WW2, but it seems the support was similar to what was happening in the UK.

In Germany all Salvation Army members had to be involved in the war, but that didn't stop Salvationists serving others. There are stories of them talking and praying, of singing, and of helping the wounded. There are even stories of British and German soldiers helping each other, only to find out that they both belonged to The Salvation Army.



What happened after the war?



We stayed with the troops until it was time for them to return home.



We continued running the huts for the soldiers who were making their way back home. Doughnuts became a symbol of The Salvation Army in the USA, and there is even a National Doughnut Day in the USA today!



We met the soldiers and sailors at the port to help them find their way. We helped them send letters and telegrams to their families.



We had special homes to look after the thousands of soldiers who were being demobbed - preparing to return home.



We ran a grave visitation service, helping relatives visit where their loved ones were buried. Looking after the graves became the responsibility of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.



There was a lot of hunger and poverty in Germany. *Die Heilsarmee* was given the left-over army field kitchens. We used these to run public kitchens for many years after the war. A popular name for them was *Gulaschkanone*.



We started a new branch of The Salvation Army called the Red Shield Defence Service. This is based on the hut work of WW1. It is still making cups of tea for the troops today!



Some facts and figures

Over 20,000 UK Salvation Army members enlisted
Over 60,000 enlisted in the Allied forces
Over 180 huts were built
Some huts could have 5,000 men visiting in one day
The first hut in the UK was built in August 1914
The first hut in France was built at the end of December 1914



The first fleet of ambulances was bought on 28 November 1914
There were more than 55 Salvation Army ambulances
By autumn 1917 it was estimated that more than 80,000 men had been transported in Salvation Army ambulances
There were more than 45 Salvation Army chaplains

