

WW1

Fact Sheet 2A

Bad Behaviour



Money

Many families in the UK were reliant on wages from a soldier. If money was gambled, spent on drink or spent unwisely, there was less money to be sent home. Wages for soldiers in the USA were generous in comparison to other countries, but that meant more could be spent unwisely. The Salvation Army from the USA established a form of bank so soldiers could send excess funds home with ease. Salvationists would visit family members at home to pass on the funds and could also check if there were other needs the family had.

Alcohol

Soldiers were given a daily allowance of rum. If too much was taken, a soldier's judgment could be affected, including wandering into no man's land and being shot. Soldiers were able to drink when off duty, but there were many examples of drinking to excess and being unfit for duty.

Bad Thoughts

A soldier could start to feel negative and suffer from low thoughts. He needed a positive place to be to raise his spirits.

The Salvation Army set up huts in camps and near the front line. It was an alternative place to be, instead of going to places to gamble or drink. They provided a place where no bad language or behaviour was expected - a policy enforced by the soldiers themselves and not the Salvationists running them! Opportunities for Bible study and discussion groups were made as well as rousing religious meetings. It was a place where you were met with a friendly face and you could seek comfort or advice.

Stories

When the Australian Expeditionary Force landed in Egypt, they found a high volume of gambling dens. Soldiers would lose money and become quite drunk. They were getting into a lot of trouble. The Salvation Army chaplain, Captain McKenzie, at risk of his personal safety, was known to go into the dens, dragging the boys out and sending them back to camp! He would remind them of the behaviour their mother would expect from them.

A soldier who had no money left was still allowed to purchase items from The Salvation Army stores and huts. *Jawbone* was the term soldiers used, meaning credit. They were expected to pay back if they could but no records were kept. There are some examples of money being sent months later. A Salvation Army officer would double-check that the soldier was not becoming too heavily in debt for their next wage packet and would offer counsel on how the soldier could manage his funds.



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One Salvation Army officer was berated by a military Major General who thought the officer had no right to be in a camp and involved with the troops. 'I want you to get out. We're here to teach men how to kill. Your religion says you must not kill.' The officer's reply? 'On my way here I saw three soldiers returning drunk. Are they ready for warfare? I saw men arguing over gambling debts. Are they ready for warfare? There are men in the hospital because of excess and self-indulgence. Are they ready for warfare? And here I am, 55 years old, and no one here is fit enough to beat me in any game.' The Major General then agreed and welcomed the officer's help with his men and they parted friends.

In some villages in France the water was of very poor quality, so soldiers started to frequent the wine shops in order to get something clean to drink. The Salvation Army girls provided a healthier alternative by making homemade lemonade and leaving it available for the soldiers for free. They made over 300 litres of lemonade every day, squeezing the lemons by hand.

A stalwart Scottish soldier explained:

'I was a drunken fellow until I went into training six months ago. On my first night in camp I went into a Salvation Army meeting in one of your huts, and one of my chums who knew the men said to the captain, pointing to me, "Here is the worst drunk fellow in camp! Can you save him?"

We all laughed uproariously, thinking it was a fine joke. But, believe me, that captain was from that moment after me, morning, noon and night. How he spared the time I never could tell, for it was all done in addition to his other exacting work. I couldn't go into the canteen for a drink but what he was by my side - until at last I began to feel that I was a wretched sinner.

A few nights later I again went to the meeting and sought salvation. The captain then asked me to introduce him to the next worst man in the regiment!'

One soldier had just received an angry letter from his wife as he had not allowed her to come to the train station to say goodbye. The wife had misconstrued his intentions and had written him a scathing letter. The soldier was on the cusp of replying with an equally wounding letter. The Salvation Army officer advised a change of tone - to let go of the anger, and to reply with a loving letter. The soldier sent the letter and quickly received a second letter from his wife, filled with love and apologies. It was a letter to keep and to cherish during the hardships of war.



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