

Fact Sheet 3B

Ambulances, Trucks and Music



Salvation Army Men

Bramwell Booth, General of The Salvation Army, left it to individuals to decide how Salvationists should serve their fellow man. But he did expect all soldiers who were Salvationists still to be Salvationists. This meant following the teachings of Jesus by helping others and worshipping God.

Many men were easy to belittle because of their moral standards, especially if they were the only Salvationist in the troop. They were an easy target for teasing as they did not drink, swear or gamble. Nor did they respond to the taunts. Many wore their Salvation Army jumper underneath their uniform. They became unofficial chaplains, someone their fellow soldiers could talk to or to lead a service when the need arose.

Ambulances

The Salvation Army raised funds to purchase ambulances. They were manned by Salvationists and worked under the direction of The Red Cross Society. They were allowed to wear the Salvation Army cap band as part of the ambulance uniform. The men were volunteers and served in six-month stints.

Fundraising

The initial funds - £2,000 - were raised solely by The Salvation Army. Additional funds were also raised through public support through a Flag Day and by The Salvation Army. By November 1914 the first ambulance fleet of five cars was provided. They were the first motorised ambulances for the British army, as horse ambulances were still being used. By 1917 the first ambulance unit was worn out and needed replacing. It cost £400 to buy each ambulance and a weekly rate of £3 to maintain it. Over 45 ambulances were supplied by The Salvation Army.

Resources

The average 'pain car' was intended to be adaptable. It could take four stretchers, or two stretchers and seven men sitting, or 14 men in total. Each car was manned by two Salvationists - a driver and an orderly - except for the fifth car which had one Salvationist driver and one military medical man. It was recorded that they were stocked with every appliance for comfort including hot water bottles! Later ambulances also came with side tent curtains to provide shelter for up to 30 additional men.



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Duties

Ambulance duty varied. The ambulances could be used to transport patients from the train to the hospital boats bound for the UK, where they would help unload the cars, sometimes supporting the wounded on their backs. Other duties meant transporting the wounded from field hospitals to base hospitals or even collecting the wounded from the firing line. By autumn 1917 it was estimated that 80,000 wounded men had been transported in Salvation Army ambulances.

Shifts also varied. They could be primarily in the morning, only during the night, on call whenever, or 10-20 hours long, days at a time. On an outgoing journey the speed was limited to 20 mph if the vehicle was empty and there was no priority on the road. If the ambulance was behind a convoy of trucks, they were stuck, continuing at the convoy's pace. On the return journey, ambulances were given priority; they could overtake other vehicles and speed restrictions were lifted.

The ambulance men didn't stop helping after their shift. There are reports of them helping the Huts and field kitchens receive supplies, transporting people on urgent errands - and, of course, playing music.

Music

Many ambulance men were also Salvation Army bandsmen. This meant they played musical instruments to help cheer up the troops.

This took several forms. On a large scale, bands would play to large crowds or hospitals. On a smaller scale, small groups or individuals could support Hut meetings or be requested to play by fellow soldiers in a dugout to entertain and to raise morale.

Some Huts had their own instruments, so if a Salvationist soldier was stationed nearby they could 'pick up and play'. Sometimes it would be only two or three men, sometimes up to 26. One Hut records their instruments having been played by over 1,200 different Salvationists.

Audience sizes varied from 500 to 10,000. At Christmas 1917 it was recorded that a band played to 30,000 wounded.

Trucks

The Salvation Army in America supplied trucks and drivers to the Western Front. They drove mostly at night, with no lights, and brought supplies to dugouts and Huts daily -or nightly! They drove for hundreds of miles supplying oranges, lemons, sugar, chocolates and blankets.

The rule was to go fast and to never stop. *'If you have to go, go like the devil!'* Trucks that stopped, even for a dropped starting handle, risked being blown to bits.



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Ambulance Stories

At the beginning of the war the British newspaper *The Daily Chronicle* wrote about the conditions wounded soldiers were in. 'They arrived at the base, huddled on straw, with rough bandages which had not been changed since they received first aid. Parched with thirst and with all the signs of battle still on them, they had to lie for long hours at the railway stations before being moved to the hospitals.'

In 1915 the wife of the Australian governor presented more ambulances and said, 'Ambulances such as these have played a wonderful part in the medical services at the front. Many men who have fallen in the great conflict... have been transported to the base hospitals with so great expedition... that sometimes a man reaches the base hospitals in England 24 hours after being taken from the trenches.'

'I need hardly repeat how glad I should be to have more Salvation Army men out here, in view of the extremely satisfactory service which they have, without exception, given in the past. Yours truly, E.W. Paget, Director of Transport. [Letter written 1917/1918]

In 1917 Sir Arthur Stanley wrote, referring to the ambulance service, 'I thank you for the money, but much more for the men. They are quite the best in our service.'

One wounded soldier recalls, 'A Salvation Army ambulance man bandaged me up. I said to him, "I had a narrow escape that time, old chap." His reply? "Yes, and were you ready?" I remembered and cried to God for salvation.'

A young major attempted a joke at the expense of one of these drivers. As the man was conveying a party of wounded through a French town the major stepped out from a party of officers and stopping the ambulance, exclaimed: 'Hallo, Salvation Army. Are you taking these men to Heaven?' 'No, sir; I cannot say that I am taking them to Heaven, but I am certainly taking them from the other place!' The major's brother officers enjoyed the neat repartee of the Salvationist.

Truck Stories

One driver, late at night during a snowstorm, mistook the river for the road! Fortunately the ice was solid, the truck was empty and he noticed the mistake after a short distance.

Another driver mentioned a driving trick he used to keep him awake after three days and five nights with no sleep. It was to strip to the waist and use cold water to keep alert.

One truck story made the headlines. A supply truck was manned by two young Salvationist men who decided to take a short cut. Unfortunately the short cut led them too close to the Germans. While the truck was being shelled, they drove faster, swerved to avoid a shell hole and landed in a ditch. For the next two nights and days, volunteers worked to free the truck, worth \$5,500, while being shelled. Miraculously no one was hurt and the truck - minus its top which had been removed to make it a smaller target - escaped.



Schools and
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