

Box 3. Shot at Dawn

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**Warning:** This box contains sensitive subject matter which may not be suitable for all ages. Please check before proceeding with these contents.

### List of contents

1. 15 white squares embroidered in red thread, with the names of each service man who served in a Welsh regiment and was executed
2. 15 dolly pegs
3. Washing line cord
4. Zappar Code on one of the white squares

### Key information:

- 15 service men who served with a Welsh Regiment were shot at dawn. In total 306 British servicemen in the entire UK were executed and only 25 Germans.
- The offences which carried death by firing squad were:  
Desertion, Cowardice, Leaving their post, Casting away arms, Disobedience, Striking an officer, Sleeping on duty, Mutiny, Murder and Rape.
- During the war 750,000 Allied soldiers were killed - an average of 400 a day. More than 1,500,000 were wounded. 3,000 men were condemned to death; slightly more than 10% of the executions were carried out.
- The families of the executed service men were brought into dishonour and subjected to abuse.
- As the execution was due to dishonourable conduct the next of kin did not receive a pension from the military. This meant that many families, already socially excluded by the dishonour, were then financially crippled. Wives were unable to pay rent, became homeless, turfed out onto the streets. Children were sometimes taken away from the mother and taken to the workhouse. This impacted families for generations.
- Privates did not have legal representation at their trials, but officers were represented.

Names of the men from Wales or who served with Welsh Regiments, shot at dawn:

Date of Execution	Service Number	Name	Age	Battalion	Crime
11.2. 1915	19459	<b>Private George Povey</b> from Hawarden	23	1/Cheshire	Leaving his post
15.2. 1915	12942	<b>Lance Corporal William Price</b>	41	2/Welsh Regiment	Murder
15.2. 1915	11967	<b>Private Richard Morgan</b>	32	2/Welsh Regiment	Murder
22.4. 1915	10958	<b>Private Major Penn</b> (Major was his Christian name) From: Stourbridge, Worcester	21	1/RWF	Desertion
22.4. 1915	10853	<b>Private Albert Troughton</b> From: Foleshill Warwickshire	22	1/RWF	Desertion
15.11. 1915	15437	<b>Private Charles Knight</b> From: London	28	10/RWF	Murder
7.2. 1916	10874	<b>Private James Carr</b> From: Gloucester	21	2/Welsh Regiment	Desertion
30. 4. 1916	1/15134	<b>Private Anthony O'Neil</b>	*	1/SWB	Desertion
20.5. 1916	12727	<b>Private J. Thomas</b> From: Lamphey, Pembrokeshire	44	2/Welsh Regiment	Desertion
5.1.1917	**	<b>Sub Lieutenant Edwin Dyett</b> From: Cardiff, Albany Road	21	Bat. RND	Desertion
15.5.1917	8139	<b>Private George Watkins</b>	31	13/ Welsh Regiment	Desertion
25.10.1917	15954	<b>Private William Jones</b> From: Glynneath	*	9/RWF	Desertion
22.11. 1917	11490	<b>Private Henry Rigby</b> From: Lancaster	21	10/SWB	Desertion
10.5. 1918	36224	<b>Private James Skone</b> From Pembroke	39	2/Welsh Regiment	Murder
10.8. 1918	44174	<b>Private William Scholes</b>	25	2/SWB	Desertion

\* Age uncertain but believed to be under 18 years old

\*\* Seconded to the army from the navy. Was still a member of Nelson Battalion so did not have an army number

From *Shot at Dawn* by Robert King

### Stories of two soldiers from the 15:

#### Albert Troughton

Albert followed his Commanding Officer's last order of 'everyman for himself' during a bloody battle. His battalion 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Royal Welsh Fusiliers were being slaughtered around him. He fought his way through the Germans, only to be told by an officer that one of his brothers had been killed. Distressed by the news he wandered off for three hours, but was later arrested. All of his unit who could vouch for his good character had been killed or taken prisoner during the battle. Neither his exemplary service record nor the news about his brother being killed, exempted him from the 'King's

Regulation'. On the 21<sup>st</sup> April 1915, he wrote his last letter home. His jailors risked charges but nevertheless smuggled the letter out of jail and sent it to his mother. His last message was:

*'I am dying tomorrow, please clear my name'.*

The next morning, as his letter warns, he was shot by firing squad.

It was a double execution and he was shot and buried with another soldier Private M. Penn, also from 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Royal Welsh Fusiliers. Both privates are buried together in Estaires Communal Cemetery, Belgium.

**"LAST LETTER HOME" by Private Albert Troughton 21<sup>st</sup> April 1915.**

Albert was suffering from 'shell-shock' as he wrote it. Douglas Haig, who at that time was Lieutenant-General, authorised the execution as a '**deterrent to others**'.

*Dear Mother, and Father, Sisters and Brothers,*

*Just a few lines to let you know I am in the best of health and hope you are mother. I am sorry to have to tell you that I am to be shot tomorrow at 7 o'clock in the morning the 22<sup>nd</sup> April. I hope you will take it in good part and not upset yourself. I shall die like a soldier, so goodbye mother, father, sisters and brothers, if any left. Remember me to Mr. Kendell and them who knew me. Mother I am very sorry nothing happened to me at Ypres, I should not have went away and then I might have stood a good chance of being still alive, but I think that they are paying the debt at the full rate. I thought the most they would give me would be about ten years. It is worse than waiting to be hung.*

*I hope you got my letters; which I sent you while waiting for my court martial. It seems that something told me I would be shot, so I think the time has come for me to die ... I am only a common soldier and all civilians should know that I have fought for my country in hail, sleet and snow. To the trenches we have to go. All my comrades have been slaughtered which I think everyone should know. When our regiment was captured, the Colonel loudly strained "Everyone for himself", but on and on I fought and got clear of the German trenches. This is the punishment I get for getting clear of the Germans.... I have written my last letter to you all at home, so mother don't be angry with me because I have gone to rest, and pray for me, and I will pray for you. Remember me to Mr. Newbold and tell him about it... I have been silly to go away but if you knew how worried I was, and almost off my head. Think how we had been slaughtered at the beginning of the war... You think they would have a bit of pity for those who are living for their country. Goodbye to all at home. Goodbye, Goodbye.*

*From your Son, Albert.*

### **Sub Lieutenant Edwin Dyett**

Dyett was from Cardiff. Born into a military family, his father was a captain in the Merchant Navy, his grandfathers served as colonels and he was related to Sir John French, Commander in Chief during WW1. Dyett was commissioned into the Royal Naval Infantry Division and in the summer of 1916 his division was directed to increase the numbers of the infantry on the Western Front.

Dyett's Battalion, the Nelson Battalion, was kept in reserve as an attack north of Ancre against German lines took place. Chaos descended on the battle field with a tirade of machine gun bullets, gas and tear gas. Dyett, along with another officer reported to the Advance Brigade HQ, waited for instructions and were told to move up to the front line. Unfortunately, under darkness, mud, fog and chaos of being under fire, the two officers were unable to find their units. They separated to try to locate them on their own when Dyett met Sub Lieutenant John Herring, who was rounding up a group of stragglers. Herring was junior to Dyett, but ordered Dyett to join the men, making sure no one fell out as they returned to the front. It appears Herring bore a grudge against Dyett for reprimanding him a few months earlier for taking a woman back to his barracks. However, on this evening Dyett took exception to being ordered by Herring as he was junior to him, refused the order and returned to the Brigade HQ. As Dyett made his way back to HQ, Herring reported him for refusing an order and this activated Dyett's court martial. His trial opened on 26<sup>th</sup> December where he pleaded not guilty. Dyett believed that he did not have to accept an order from a more junior officer, and stated "there is nothing in it", feeling the case did not have any substance. When he was asked, "Do you have anything to say in your defence?", replied: "I do not wish to say anything at all."

Herring believed that he had the authority to order his senior officer.

In the sentencing it was announced that Dyett would suffer death by being shot but made a recommendation for mercy as he was very young (21) and had no experience of active operations. The papers went to a number of commanders for authorisation. Major General C.D Shute recommended mercy but General H Gogh, wrote:

*'I recommend that the sentence be carried out. If a private had behaved as he did in such circumstances, it is highly probable that he would be shot.'*

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1917, Field Marshall Douglas Haigh confirmed the sentence.

All believed that his sentence would be still be commuted. But on the 4<sup>th</sup> January 1917, as Dyett played cards with two battalion officers, an officer appeared and read out is death warrant, and that he was to be shot at dawn the next day.

Dyett wrote this letter to his mother, that was later sent by the padre to Dyett's home:

*Dearest Mother Mine,*

*I hope by now you will have heard the news. Dearest, I am leaving you now because He has willed it. My sorrow is for the trouble I have caused you and dad.*

*Please excuse any mistakes, but if it were not for the kind support of the rev. W.C... who is with me tonight, I should not be able to write myself. I should like you to write to him as he has been my friend.*

*I am leaving all my effects to you, dearest; will you give my little...half the sum you have of mine?*

*Give dear dad my love and wish him luck. I feel for you so much and I am sorry for bringing dishonour upon you all.*

*Give... my love. She will, I expect, understand – and give her back the presents, photos, cards, etc..., she has sent me, poor girl. So now dearest Mother, I must close. May God bless and protect you for evermore. Amen.*

Dyett was led out just before 7.30 a.m. at St Firmin, tied to a post, his eyes blindfolded with a bandage, and a white cloth placed over his heart. The firing party were half hidden in a trench. Dyett shouted:

*'For God's sake put me out of my misery – this suspense is killing me.'*

Then as he heard the first click from the rifles he added:

*'Well, boys, goodbye. For God's sake, shoot straight.'*

By 7.30 am he was dead. Dyett's father carried out a campaign to get his son's name cleared, the finding overturned, and his son pardoned. This was achieved in 2006, but sadly long after his father had died.

Dyett was executed for refusing to take an order from a junior officer, an order that was not even given directly to him. The custom and practice then and now in the military is that a senior officer does not have to receive or accept orders from a junior officer.

#### **Zappar code:**

Download the Zappar app on a smart phone or tablet. Hover over the code below to watch a 6 minute film of scenes written and performed by Ad Hoc Theatre about Private William Jones from Glynneath who was shot at dawn. This was created as part of the wider *Exhibition in a Box* project.



### 3. Silence of Shot at Dawn: questions



1. What do you think this box was used for?
2. Is it a happy or sad box?

3. Open the box, notice what's inside.
4. What do you think is in the parcel?
5. Tie the cord between two points, such as chairs, making sure it is stretched, like a washing line.  
Now unwrap the parcel.



6. Peg each square on the line, hanging it by a corner.
7. How many squares are there?

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8. Why are these names on white squares?
9. What does the red thread remind you of?



10. Find the zappor code and watch the film. How does the film make you feel?
11. How does it feel knowing the reason why these names are on the squares?
12. Do you think they deserved to be executed?
13. How would they have been treated today?



### **Suggested box combinations**

- Box 6 Silence of the Aftermath of War
- Box 5 Silence of Censorship
- Box 8 Silence of Propaganda

### **Suggested activities**

- Write a story which has the different voices: from the perspective of the person to be shot, the person arresting him, the judge at the trial, the jailors, the firing party, his family, his community. Consider if they would be treated differently now. Look at the film by Ad Hoc Theatre via the Zappar link.
- Run a mock trial – for and against – how does the outcome change?
- Using the letters and stories of the two soldiers, write a poem, story or song.

### **Caring for the box after use**

- Please place contents carefully back in the box, making sure there are 15 pegs, and 15 squares
- If there is a problem with the Zappar code, please let H4A know
- Please place the written passages in the envelope, returning it to the box
- Please wrap the squares back in the tissue paper and tie