

**Walter Griffin (IWM SR 9790)**

The very things which you try to accomplish by the use of force you bring onto yourself because you must have something worse or more powerful, which is evil, in order to combat the evil which you are trying to overcome. The result is that, at the – after a period, you have got not only the very thing which you are trying to oppose but you've got something worse than the one that you are trying to oppose. You cannot overcome evil with evil.

Walter Griffin (IWM SR 9790)

The man was saying, telling how terrible it was, and 'you ought to do – the Germans were doing such bad things that they ought to be in any way stopped and if you're agreeable to that', well, he said, 'you ought to be doing something about it'. He said, 'what do you think', he said, 'you would do if it was a case of a German officer was somewhere over here and was molesting your wife and taking your wife away?' And the CO said, 'He couldn't do it, Sir'. 'Of course he could'. 'He could not do this,' he said. And they went on this for two or three times until the CO got the chairman where he wanted him, he wanted him to say, 'Why, well why couldn't he do it?' He said 'An English officer has already done it.'

Philip Radley (IWM SR 642)

We went down, my friend and I, and we joined – we had two others who particularly became close friends of ours – taking the absolutist point of view. We said 'No' and that's that. Well now when we got down there, there was a man I remember who did his best, one of the NCC [Non Combatant Corps] people, did his best to – he'd been presumably through the tribunal and so on – to persuade us to carry on. He said 'Oh but this is all right, you're not killing, you're, it's non-combatant'. And we said 'No' and we went off for the first sentence. When we came back he himself was in the guardroom for refusing, because he was a Seventh Day Adventist and they'd asked him to do some work on a Saturday and he'd refused, so that was that. But there was another chap there who was quite prepared to carry on and was trying to persuade him to carry on. And this was ludicrous. And the next time we got out this other chap was in the guardroom because he'd refused to load munitions. Well, here was the whole thing, I mean it was easy for us. We said 'No' to this because we on principle are not prepared to accept anything. These people had to think it all out every time.

Howard Marten (IWM SR 383)

Then we were given 28 days' field punishment. Now field punishment can be a very nasty thing. In its most extreme form a man can be tied up to a gun carriage, which isn't at all a pleasant thing, but normally he's sent to what is known as a field punishment barracks, and there the prisoners are tied up for three nights out of four. They're tied up maybe to a fence, or to ropes, with their arms extended, and their feet tied together, or they may be tied back to back – it varies in form – and that's done for two hours. Well, it's not exactly a pleasant experience... But finally we had the second court martial, and the whole business was: each of the four of us, it was all gone through, all read and taken down in longhand. It took about a day, these court martials, and it must have been very annoying to the base commandant who had to come down from his office to give evidence in each case and this all had been gone through all over again. So I think the poor, wretched man must have been thoroughly fed up with this business. Anyway, finally, after a few more days, we were taken out to the parade ground. There was a big concourse of men, mostly of the Non-Combatant Corps and the labour battalions, lined up in an immense square. We were taken to one side of it, and then under escort taken out one by one to the middle of the square. I was the first of them and until my verdict was known nobody knew exactly what was going to happen. That was the real test of the whole business, focused on what the sentence was going to be in my case. And then, one of the – an officer in charge of the

proceedings read out the various crimes and misdemeanours: refusing to obey a lawful command, disobedience at Boulogne and so on and so forth. And then: 'The sentence of the court is to suffer death by being shot'. Then there was a suitable pause, and one thought, 'Well, that's that'. And then, but, now the second thing: 'Confirmed by the Commander in Chief'. That's double-sealed it now. Then another long pause, 'But subsequently commuted to penal servitude for ten years'. And that was that. And the thing that interested me and the others particularly was that penal servitude meant your return to England, and would get us into the hands of the civil authorities at a civil prison which was a much more – you see as long as we were in the hands of the military authorities we were subject to military punishments. We could only go on offending.

Harold Bing (IWM SR 358)

I was in a cell by myself the whole time. There was no 2 or 3 to a cell in those days as there is today owing to the overcrowding. The cell was about six feet by thirteen feet with one small window above one's head so that you couldn't see out of it except by standing on your stool for which of course you might be punished if you were found doing it. In the door there was a little spy-hole with a cover on the outside so that the warder could come along and open the spy-hole and spy on you at any time to see what you were up to. So that you had the sense of being watched the whole time – though of course you weren't being watched the whole time, but you may be spied in upon at any moment, which gave you a very uncomfortable feeling at first until in time you grew indifferent to it...First day I said to the warder: 'I'd like a toothbrush'. 'Oh you'll have to put yourself down sick'. 'But I'm not sick'. 'Yes, but unless you're put down sick you can't see the doctor, and if you don't see the doctor you can't get a toothbrush'. So of course I put myself down sick which meant I lost my exercise. Then of course when they came to open the cell to go to see the doctor: 'take your pint pot'. I said, 'What for?' 'That's for your medicine'. I said 'I don't want any medicine, I'm going to ask for a toothbrush'. 'You've got to take your pint pot'. And the doctor had a sort of trolley with a bottle of green liquid and a bottle of red liquid and he seemed to dish it out alternately as people came along. The whole thing struck one as very, very funny, really if you'd got a sense of humour.

Harold Bing (IWM SR 358)

One had no writing – well, wouldn't say one had no writing facility – the only writing facility in a cell was a slate and a slate pencil and therefore if you filled your slate you had to rub it all out again. There was no writing material except periodically when you were allowed to have the notepaper in your cell and a pen and ink to write your monthly or fortnightly letter. But here again a little ingenuity was used and some prisoners managed to make little inkwells by taking a block of cobbler's wax – which was used for waxing the thread for making mail bags and so on – making a hole in it, sinking a thimble into the wax and then covering it up with another piece of wax. So that what appeared to be a block of wax was in fact a block of wax with a lid and when you lifted the lid there was a thimble sunk into the wax. And that thimble you filled with ink when you had your fortnightly or monthly ink for writing your letter. With ink pots of that kind there was produced in Winchester prison a periodical called the Winchester Whisperer. It was written on the brown sheets, small brown sheets of toilet paper with which we were supplied – different people writing little essays or poems or humorous remarks, sometimes little cartoons or sketches. And all these bits of paper were passed surreptitiously from hand to hand and reached the editor who bound them together with a piece of, with a mail bag, a bit of mail bag canvas used for repairing – bit of old canvas – for a cover and this issue of the Winchester Whisperer was then again passed round secretly, hidden under people's waistcoats or up their sleeves. And as it happened, despite many searches, no copy of that Winchester Whisperer was ever captured by the warders, though I think some of them suspected its existence. And all the copies were finally smuggled out and placed in some depository in London, some library. Most prisons where there were COs managed to do something similar. Canterbury Prison ran a little surreptitious magazine called the Canterbury Clinker and others with, again, similar names in other prisons...I used as a pen a needle, writing with the hollow end – dipping the hollow end into the ink. This meant of course one had to be almost dipping the needle into the ink for almost every word. But it did produce thin writing so that you could get a good deal on one small sheet of toilet paper.

Fenner Brockway (IWM SR 476)

We found the prison system was absolutely inhuman and denying human rights. As I've said, we were not even allowed to speak to each other. Of course we did, but we always had the sense of doing something which was prohibited and which, if we were found doing it, would lead to punishment – bread and water, solitary confinement. And the point arose when many of us thought that it was wrong to accept this

absolutely inhuman system. Let me just emphasise that as always in prison, we were able to defeat regulations. I mean, for example, we had a heating pipe going right through our cells going up to the next floor. We had a complete telephone system. We learned the Morse code in reverse and by tapping on the pipe – we had a prisoner at the end acted as a kind of switchboard, he could actually put our message through on the pipe to the floor above. I played chess with a boy in the next cell. We only had a slate and a slate pencil but we could rub out the moves and a whole game would take a week but by tapping in reverse in the Morse code, one could communicate with the boy in the next cell the whole time. But a point came when many of us felt that it was undignified and humiliating to accept the system itself and we decided openly to resist it. For ten glorious days sixty of us ran our own hall in prison. Speaking openly, on the exercise ground instead of marching five steps behind each other and not saying a word round and round, we took arms, we played games, we organised concerts every night. We were shut in our cells but at a window we had lots of Welsh boys who could sing beautifully. They would sing at the window and everyone down the side would hear. But the effect became disastrous in Walton Prison, Liverpool, because not only did our own boys hear, but the ordinary prisoners heard as well. And so the five leaders were isolated and then we were transferred to other prisons. I was transferred to Lincoln Prison. I had eight months solitary confinement at Lincoln Prison. Three months bread and water treatment until the doctor wouldn't allow more. And yet one had a sense of freedom which I can't describe.

Percy Leonard (IWM SR 382), Lewis Maclachlan (IWM SR 565), Dorothy Bing (IWM SR 555)

There was a bit of a riot when we arrived there and a number of the fellows were smothered with mud and so on, that sort of thing. I was in the middle of it but I didn't get anything at all; they must've thought I was the boss I think, I don't know. But at any rate we – after we'd been there for a while the local populace came round to us and treated us quite alright. Of course they'd heard about COs and knew we were COs and they were going to take it out on us. [Interviewer asks: These were the civilians then not the soldiers?]. Oh yes, no, no soldiers there, civilians. [Interviewer asks: Did that mean at Brockenhurst you were more restricted to camp?] No, no we used to go out – you see, when we went down as individuals the majority of them didn't know who we were. It was just when crowd arrived on that one train, you see. They'd apparently heard that we were coming and that was that...I wouldn't like to say it was the attitude of the church but the attitude of the minister was that he did his best to separate my fiancée, as she was then, and me. He did his very best to separate us. We were both of us workers in the church and of course I was – I think I told you – working on the Home Office Scheme quite a long time during the war, and when I came home at the end, I went to the Church on the Sunday, and the minister used to make a practice of going to the door and shaking hands with people as they went out and when he saw me he refused to shake hands... My father was a very quiet and humble and scholarly sort of man and I'm sure he was a pacifist at heart but he never was outspoken. I think I brought upon him, without knowing it, a good deal of unpopularity because I left, I was away from the village you see, but it was known that I was a conchie and that was something in the country that was very unpopular – you could get away with that in a city, in London of course it really doesn't matter, but in Perthshire this was just the last word of disgrace... It did have a very bad effect on my mother, I think, I was telling you about that. You see, she came from a very united family. During my childhood we were constantly taken to see her sisters and their families and in fact I stayed there when my younger sister was born, with one of these aunts. And as soon as they realised that Harold wasn't going to fight for his country they just cut us dead completely. And then after the war was over it was never healed. They wouldn't have anything to do with us at all, it was a clean cut.