

HO 45/10724/251861

MILITARY: Suppression of 'camp followers' suffering from venereal disease

1914-1916

These extracts illustrate the war time occurrences of 'camp followers' - civilians who followed travelling troops - and the creation of the Women Police Volunteers partially in response to this.

As a result of the war, many women had greater opportunities for employment, pay and independence and it was feared that this would lead to looser morals including increased drinking and sexual promiscuity. This file focuses on these concerns, noting that this involved both 'professional prostitutes' and 'hysterical girls'. 'Camp following' was seen as a threat to the health of soldiers through the potential spread of venereal diseases. Places with army barracks and surrounding ports were of particular concern.

This led to the introduction of the controversial regulation 40D in 1918 under the Defence of the Realm Act. This made it an offence for any woman suffering from venereal disease to have sexual intercourse with a member of the armed forces.

In 1914 the Women's Police Volunteers (renamed the Women's Police Service in 1915) was created for numerous reasons including watching factories for the safety of Belgium refugees and patrolling public spaces to control 'camp followers' and try and curb undesirable behaviour.

Many early recruits to the Women's Police Volunteers were drawn in through their pre-war involvement in feminist politics and the suffrage movement, such as founder Margaret Damer Dawson, and suffragettes Nina Boyle, Dora Meeson Coates and Mary Allen. Several of these women can be seen in the group photograph included in this selection.

The National Union of Working Women (NUWW) also had approximately 5,000 voluntary women patrols by this time. However neither organisation was initially openly accepted by the authorities and both were denied full powers of arrest.

The well meaning work of these 'morality police' resulted in embarrassing incidences of mistaken identity, with cases reported to the Home Office concerning the way 'respectable' women were treated by patrols.



OFFICERS OF THE STAFF.

D. MEESON COATES (*Chief Inspector*), Miss ST. JOHN PARTRIDGE, M. DAMER DAWSON (*Chief Officer*),
M. S. ALLEN (*Chief Superintendent*), B. GOLDINGHAM (*Principal of Clerical Department*).

Oct. 23rd 1914.

Some Notes on the MAINTENANCE OF PUBLIC ORDER in the neighbourhood of TRAINING CAMPS, with special reference to the Health of the Troops and the duty of the Police.

The new situation created by the assembling of large bodies of men in training camps seems to call for closer co-operation of the civil police with military authorities.

The maintenance of good order within the camp itself is a matter entirely for the military authorities.

The district immediately outside the camp limits, and including the road between the camp and the nearest town, is under the control of the county or borough police.

If for any reason efficient control is not exercised in this area it is only too likely to be the haunt of loose characters, male and female, who seek to prey on the soldiers.

The women, (to deal only with these), will include professional prostitutes, as well as crowds of hysterical and excited girls whose presence there is as mischievous for themselves as for the men. Thus the area may easily become a hotbed of demoralization and disease for the recruits, a scandal to the locality, and a grave menace to its girlhood.

It is unnecessary to enlarge on these dangers; I have it on excellent authority that London is largely

cleared of prostitutes, who, it is presumed, have gone down to the various camps.

I believe that in almost every instance the great majority of the recruits are steady and well conducted men. The weak and vicious are a small minority who need control and help outside the camp as well as in it.

I understand that in and about some camps there is perfect good order, and absolutely nothing to complain of. Where the conditions are otherwise, may it be that all the authorities concerned are attempting to do their duty without sufficient communication with each other? There seems to be in some cases a tendency for the police and military to say to each other, "You mind your own business and I'll mind mine."

The borough police sometimes, and the county police usually, have not much experience in dealing with the kind of situation created by the camp.

Where the difficult area comes under the jurisdiction of different local authorities it would seem desirable to make special arrangements for concerted action, - *for instance where the road between camp & town is partly in the county partly in the borough, - or even, it may be, in two counties.*

Various schemes are in operation for dealing with different parts of the problem. The recreation tents provided by the Y.M.C.A. and other organisations are invaluable. Are there enough of them?

It is hoped that the plan of women-patrols,

approved by the Home Office, may cope with the hysterical girls.

I venture to suggest that frank consultation and co-operation between the military and civil authorities, either centrally or locally, would result in substantial improvements, - which would tend to the health and efficiency of the soldiers, and the comfort and well-being of the civil population. *A precedent may be found in the joint action now arranged, for dealing with sanitation of camps & improvised barracks.*

There remains the pressing problem of how to deal with the professional prostitutes; when they are "moved on" or expelled from one area they will go to another. The more difficult it becomes for them to earn their living in the only way they know, the more desperate will be their efforts to entrap the men. The ordinary forthright's imprisonment for solicitation is of little use. I am glad to say that a scheme is being ~~considered~~ ^{thought out} which may offer a partial solution of this difficulty. *if official cooperation can be gained.*

H. W.

DRAFT.

HBS
been in communication
with the W.O. on the
subject of

Sir, I am ~~re.~~ to inform you that he has

~~I have laid before the Secretary of State~~
your letter of the 7th ~~instant~~ ^{ultimo Nov} regarding ~~various~~ ^{certain}

questions that have arisen in connection with the

~~formation of~~ large military camps ^{now formed} in different

parts of the country, especially ^{the best means to be adopted for} the promotion

of temperance and the prevention of venereal

disease. These questions have received the serious

consideration of the Army Council ^{and the Sps has been ready to} and the

~~Secretary of State~~ ^{assert that in any way control his power; steps} ~~and steps~~ have already been

taken which it is hoped will go far to minimise

the dangers referred to in your letter. As you

are aware, ^{the Sps has indicated} legislation ~~has been passed~~ enabling

the authorities to take measures where necessary

for the restriction of the sale of intoxicating

liquor, and ^{is he hopes} ~~it is hoped~~ that the efforts that are

being made to bring the need for temperance

home to the general public will be beneficial

in their results. It is believed that Lord

Kitchener's recent appeal to the public on the

subject of the "treating" of soldiers will have

the desired result and will also help to foster

a spirit of sobriety and self restraint among the

men.

In the opinion of the Army Council much can

be done to ^{lessen} ~~counteract~~ the dangers to which the

soldiers are exposed by the provision of good

housing for the troops and increased means of

recreation; steps are being taken to meet these

needs as rapidly as possible and the Council are

gladly availing themselves of the assistance

of local committees and bodies such as the Y.M.C.A.

and the Church Army, whose efforts to provide

the

the soldiers with occupation and recreation in their spare time are of the greatest value; the Council are prepared to repay, with ^{in certain} limits, the expenditure incurred in this way. Instructions ^{also} have been issued to all General Officers Commanding for the institution of ^{evening} lectures on five evenings a week on military and general subjects relating to the War.

It has further been decided that lectures on venereal diseases shall be delivered at all Military Stations and Camps by carefully selected lecturers, and the Army Council are now in ~~consultation~~ communication with various leading members of the Medical Profession on the subject.

It has been realised that for the prevention of the evils which may arise in the special circumstances created by the formation of military camps, cordial cooperation between the local civil and military authorities is of ~~the~~ great importance, and the Secretary of State has urged Chief Constables of Police Forces to give the military authorities all the assistance in their power, especially by enforcing the provisions of the law against disorderly prostitutes frequenting the neighbourhood of camps. At the same time bodies of trained women are being ~~formed~~ organised by the National Union of Women Workers with a view to the protection of young women and girls who are not of the prostitute class but are frequenting camps under conditions which expose them to the risk of seduction ^{or} ~~and~~ prostitution: the efforts of these women workers are ^{the S. of S. believe} of great value and the Police have been requested to give

? omit. These female patrols are for preventive purposes & do not want to be regarded as having undertaken any police duties in respect of prostitutes. They are not in the least likely to be of use in protecting soldiers from venereal disease.

give them all the assistance in their power.

^{Army Council}
The ~~Secretary of State~~ is advised that there is no ground for supposing that there has been any increase in the amount of venereal disease in the Army, and the above measures are to be regarded as mainly of a preventive nature. For the present it is not proposed to initiate further legislation to deal with these matters and it is hoped that the exercise of existing powers by the authorities, the force of public opinion and the patriotic efforts of bodies of voluntary workers will be effectual in preventing or ^psuppressing those evils which ~~the present circumstances are liable to~~ ~~give rise to.~~ might otherwise arise from

the embodiment of military forces on a scale hitherto unprecedented. I am
etc

Sir Thomas Barlow, Bart., M.D., K.E.V.O.,

The National Union of Women Workers of Great Britain and Ireland.

PARLIAMENT MANSIONS, VICTORIA ST., LONDON, S.W.

Patroness—HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN.

WOMEN'S PATROL COMMITTEE.

Chairman—MRS. CREIGHTON.

Vice-Chairman—MRS. JAMES GOW.

*Hon. Sec.—MRS. CARDEN,
40, Gledstanes Road,
London, W.*

*Hon. Treas.—MISS AGNES GARRETT,
2, Gower Street,
London, W.C.*

(to whom letters should be addressed).

OWING to the reports received from many quarters of the unsatisfactory behaviour of women and girls in the neighbourhood of the newly formed camps, the National Union of Women Workers has obtained permission from the Home Secretary and from the Chief Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis to organise a force of Women Patrols, to work in the neighbourhood of the camps and in towns where troops are quartered. These patrols are to be voluntary workers; they will not be on duty for more than two hours at a time, and they will always go about in couples. They will patrol the towns and the neighbourhood of the camps during the hours when the soldiers are off duty. A certain number of whole time organising officers are to be provided, who will in most cases be paid. These will give their whole time to the work, looking after the needs of the different districts and supervising the volunteers.

[P.T.O.]

As far as possible this work will be organised by the Branches of the National Union of Women Workers. Other districts anxious to start similar work should communicate with the Hon. Secretary of the Women's Patrol Committee, who will inform them with regard to the formation of local committees, and the conditions under which Patrols can be appointed, and can receive the cards authorised by the authorities. Permission to use these cards can only be received through the Women's Patrol Committee of the National Union of Women Workers. Patrols will also be supplied with a distinctive armlet. All workers using these cards and armlets must conform to the regulations laid down by the Women's Patrol Committee.

A brief course of training, taking about a fortnight, is being arranged for patrols and organisers. The Hon. Secretary will be glad to hear of women suitable to be organisers, and of women willing to serve as patrols. The help asked from the patrols need not be exacting as regards time but must be regularly given; one, or if possible two, periods of two hours each day, or—if unable to give time each day—on a fixed number of days in the week, is what will be demanded of them, but this must be given with absolute regularity. Patrols must be women of tact and experience between thirty and fifty years of age.

To carry out the plans of the Committee money is needed to provide the salaries of the necessary organisers. The work is urgent and important. Help received at once will enable suitable organisers to be secured and will check the growth of conditions which, if not speedily dealt with, must lead to grave evils.

Subscriptions should be sent to the Hon. Treasurer.

Correspondence on the subject of the Women Patrols and the organisation of local committees should be directed to the Hon. Secretary.

THE NATIONAL UNION OF WOMEN WORKERS OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND.

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40, Gledstanes Road,
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Hon. Treasurer: Miss AGNES GARRETT,
2, Gower Street,
London, W.C.

DEAR MADAM,

The Rescue and Preventive Sectional Committee of the National Union of Women Workers has been giving much consideration to the conditions produced by the formation of large camps of recruits, territorials and regular forces in all parts of the country. Reports have come in from many quarters of the unsatisfactory behaviour of women and girls in the neighbourhood of the camps, amounting sometimes to a real scandal.

Under these circumstances, we have approached the Home Secretary and the Chief Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis, and obtained their permission to organise a force of Women Patrols to work in the neighbourhood of the camps and recruiting stations. Our intention is that these patrols should be voluntary workers, that they should not be on duty for more than two hours at a time, and that they should always go about in couples. In most cases it would not be necessary to arrange for a continuous service, but only during the hours that the soldiers are off duty. We intend also to provide organising officers, who shall give their whole time to the work, looking after the needs of the different districts and supervising the volunteers. The extent to which we are able to employ paid organisers will, of course, depend upon the support we receive from the public. It is possible that some workers may be able to offer themselves as organisers without salary. These arrangements may have to be modified in country districts.

A Special Committee, called the "Women's Patrol Committee," has been formed by the National Union of Women Workers' Executive to control the whole work and to organise it for London. In the country we hope to work as far as possible through our Branches.

We recommend that if there is a camp or any large number of recruits or territorials in a district where there is a branch of the National Union of Women Workers, a special sub-committee should be formed by the Branch to consider the appointment of Women Patrols. On this Committee there should be representatives of the diocesan organisations for Rescue and Preventive Work, the G.F.S., the Y.W.C.A., and of any other organisations working amongst girls in the district, such as the Church Army and the Salvation Army, also of club leaders and school teachers. If possible, we should hope to be able to send down one of our organisers to help to start the work. She would need to have hospitality provided, and, if it were desired to keep her for any length of time, the Local Committee would have to be responsible for her salary. The patrols would in most cases be volunteers. We are authorised to supply our patrols

with a card signed by the Chief Constable, and an armlet. Patrols to whom the same privileges are accorded would have to be trained according to the methods laid down by us, to have their names and qualifications approved by us and to agree to work according to our regulations. This is necessary, seeing that we have been authorised by the authorities to raise this force and the responsibility for its efficiency rests with us.

In places where no Branch of the National Union of Women Workers is in existence, the Central Women's Patrol Committee recommends the formation of a special committee on the lines indicated above, and will be glad to assist in every way any properly authorised and responsible committee, and to give recognition to their workers, if trained and appointed on approved lines. Where work of a similar kind is already being done, we should be glad, if desired, to give to duly qualified workers the recognition described above.

We are now working out lines of training and regulations for the patrols. We consider that each patrol should have about a fortnight's training. It might prove the best plan in some cases to send the volunteers to London for their training.

It is desirable from the first that the work of these women patrols should be distinct from ordinary rescue work, though they should work in connection with the local rescue worker and send on rescue cases to her. They should be women of tact and experience, between 30 and 50 years of age, though no hard and fast line can be laid down. They must know how to win the confidence both of the military authorities and of the police, and be very careful to avoid what might be considered interference or officiousness by either. They must be able to win the sympathy and trust of girls. The help asked from them need not be exacting as regards time, but must be regularly given; one period, or if possible two periods, of two hours each day—or, if unable to give time each day, on a fixed number of days in the week—is what will be demanded of them, but this must be given with absolute regularity.

All information as to the details of the work and the regulations to be laid down will be supplied later to those who need them. Meanwhile, it would be well at once to form a Sub-Committee to inquire into the need for work in the district, and, where such need is demonstrated, to look out for suitable volunteers, and, if you should know of such persons, for women suitable to act as organisers. The need is urgent where there are camps, and at the best some time must pass before the patrols can be organised.

We shall be grateful for any financial help towards the scheme which may be obtained by our friends. The larger the number of competent whole time organisers we can employ, the better we shall be able to carry out our plans for the safe-guarding both of the young soldiers and of the girls and women.

Subscriptions should be sent to the Hon. Treasurer.

Correspondence on the subject of the Women Patrols should be directed to the Hon. Secretary.

Yours faithfully,

LOUISE CREIGHTON,

President.