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Britain to pardon 306 WWI veterans

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17 August, 2006

THE ARTICLE

Britain to pardon 306 WWI veterans

Britain's government will soon pardon all of the 306 British soldiers its army shot for cowardice during World War I. The men were killed for committing military offences during the Great War. Britain's Secretary of Defence Des Browne said: "I believe a group pardon...is the best way to deal with this." The government decided to clear the soldiers' names ninety years after they died. Mr. Browne added: "Although this is a historical matter, I am conscious of how the families of these men feel today." The government considered the campaign made by the family of Harry Farr, who was shot, aged 25, in 1916 for disobeying orders to return to the fighting. Farr's family battled for 14 years to clear his name.

Harry Farr will be the first British soldier to have his name cleared. His crime was "misbehaving before the enemy in such a manner as to show cowardice". It took just 20 minutes for a court to decide he should die. It seems the judges ignored medical records that showed Farr was unfit to fight. He had fought in bloody battles for two years. In one particular battle, 20,000 British soldiers died in fighting. Mr. Farr spent five months in hospital with severe shell-shock. His nurses said he was so stressed that he could not hold a pen and write. When his officers ordered him to go back and fight, he replied: "I just can't go on." When he died, he didn't wear a blindfold so the firing squad would have to look him in the eye as they shot him.

WARM-UPS

1. WORLD WAR I: Walk around the class and find out as much information as you can about World War I. When you have finished, find a new partner and share what you found out.

2. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words from the article are most interesting and which are most boring.

British government / soldiers / British Army / World War I / campaigns / history / misbehaving / cowards / courts / battles / hospital / shell-shock / blindfolds

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

3. COWARDS: With your partner(s), talk about these examples. Do you believe they are examples of people being cowards? Rank them according to the most cowardly (10) or not cowardly at all (1).

- _____ A man not fighting for his country
- _____ A man not protecting his girlfriend who is being teased by his friends
- _____ A woman not protecting her boyfriend who is being teased by her friends
- _____ Someone who cannot ask someone else for a date
- _____ Someone who is afraid of going to the dentist
- _____ Someone who is afraid of his / her boss

4. ARMY LIFE: Imagine you are a soldier. Talk about your life with the other "soldiers" in the class. Change partners often and tell each other what you heard.

5. TWO-MINUTE DEBATES: Face each other in pairs and have these fun 2-minute debates. Students A take the first argument, students B the second. Change partners often.

- a. Cowards during wartime should be shot. vs. No way.
- b. All soldiers are heroes. vs. Not all soldiers are heroes.
- c. Everyone must spend some time in the army. vs. No way.
- d. All armies should be banned. vs. Armies are very important.
- e. The British Army is the best in the world. vs. The British Army is not good.
- f. The army is a great job. vs. The army is a very dangerous job.
- g. One day there'll be no need for soldiers. vs. Soldiers will always be needed.
- h. Women should fight in wars. vs. Women should never fight in wars.

6. COWARD: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the word "coward". Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- | | |
|---|-------|
| a. Britain killed 306 of its soldiers during WWI for being cowards. | T / F |
| b. The British government is now forgiving them. | T / F |
| c. Britain's government did not listen to the families of those who died. | T / F |
| d. The pardon was given because of new information about WWI. | T / F |
| e. Soldiers were sentenced to death only after very long trials. | T / F |
| f. In one battle, 20,000 British soldiers died in one day. | T / F |
| g. Soldiers who were shell-shocked were ordered to continue fighting. | T / F |
| h. A soldier asked to be blindfolded so he couldn't see the firing squad. | T / F |

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|---------------|--------------|
| a. pardon | aware |
| b. committing | unable |
| c. deal with | doing |
| d. conscious | continue |
| e. fighting | forgive |
| f. manner | war |
| g. ignored | very bad |
| h. unfit | disregarded |
| i. severe | take care of |
| j. go on | way |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|--|-------------------------|
| a. committing | names |
| b. the best way to deal | battles for two years |
| c. clear the soldiers' | for 14 years |
| d. conscious of how the families | to decide |
| e. battled | of these men feel today |
| f. It took just 20 minutes for a court | him in the eye |
| g. the judges ignored medical | military offences |
| h. He had fought in bloody | records |
| i. spent five months in hospital | with this |
| j. firing squad would have to look | with severe shell-shock |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words in the column on the right into the gaps in the text.

Britain to pardon 306 WWI veterans

Britain's government will _____ pardon all of the 306 British soldiers its army _____ for cowardice during World War I. The men were killed for committing military _____ during the Great War. Britain's Secretary of Defence Des Browne said: "I believe a group pardon...is the best way to _____ with this." The government decided to _____ the soldiers' names ninety years after they died. Mr. Browne added: "Although this is a historical matter, I am conscious of how the families of these men _____ today." The government considered the campaign made by the family of Harry Farr, who was shot, aged 25, in 1916 for disobeying _____ to return to the fighting. Farr's family _____ for 14 years to clear his name.

clear
offences
orders
feel
soon
deal
battled
shot

Harry Farr will be the first British soldier to have his name cleared. His _____ was "misbehaving before the enemy in such a manner as to show cowardice". It took just 20 minutes for a _____ to decide he should die. It seems the judges ignored medical _____ that showed Farr was unfit to fight. He had fought in bloody _____ for two years. In one particular battle, 20,000 British soldiers died in fighting. Mr. Farr spent five months in hospital with _____ shell-shock. His nurses said he was so stressed that he could not hold a pen and _____. When his officers ordered him to go back and fight, he replied: "I just can't _____ on." When he died, he didn't wear a blindfold so the firing squad would have to look him in the _____ as they shot him.

severe
go
court
battles
write
crime
eye
records

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

Britain to pardon 306 WWI veterans

Britain's government will soon _____ the 306 British soldiers its army shot for cowardice during World War I. The men were killed for _____ military offences during the Great War. Britain's Secretary of Defence Des Browne said: "I believe a _____ ...is the best way to deal with this." The government decided _____ soldiers' names ninety years after they died. Mr. Browne added: "Although this is a historical matter, I am _____ how the families of these men feel today." The government considered the campaign made by the family of Harry Farr, who was shot, aged 25, in 1916 for disobeying orders to return to the fighting. Farr's family battled for 14 years to _____.

Harry Farr will be the first British soldier to have _____. His crime was "misbehaving before the enemy in such a manner as to _____". It took just 20 minutes for a court to decide he should die. It seems the judges ignored medical records that showed Farr was _____. He had fought in bloody battles for two years. In one particular battle, 20,000 British soldiers died in fighting. Mr. Farr spent five months in hospital with _____. His nurses said he was _____ he could not hold a pen and write. When his officers ordered him to go back and fight, he replied: "I just can't go on." When he died, he didn't wear a blindfold so the firing squad would have to look him in _____ they shot him.

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words 'world' and 'war'.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "BRITISH ARMY" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about the British Army.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- | | |
|-------------|---------------|
| • soon | • misbehaving |
| • military | • 20 minutes |
| • deal | • unfit |
| • conscious | • severe |
| • campaign | • go on |
| • clear | • eye |

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- b. What do you think about the British government pardoning the soldiers?
- c. What do you know about World War I?
- d. Why do you think the soldiers are being pardoned now?
- e. Are there any soldiers in your family or family history?
- f. Would you like to be a soldier?
- g. Would you want your children to join your country's army?
- h. What do you think it is like to go into battle?
- i. Do you think people should be killed for being cowards during wartime?
- j. How do you think Harry Farr's family feel about the pardon?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. Do you think Harry Farr should get a medal for spending two years fighting in World War I?
- d. Do you think Harry Farr's family should receive compensation from the British government?
- e. Would you fight as a soldier if you thought your government went to war for the wrong reasons?
- f. What do you think of Harry Farr for not wearing a blindfold when he died?
- g. Do you care about the image of your family name ?
- h. What questions would you like to ask Harry Farr?
- i. What do you think his answers would be?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b. Was there a question you didn't like?
- c. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d. What did you like talking about?
- e. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

ARMY PUNISHMENTS: With your partner(s), decide on the punishments for the following crimes or wrongs a soldier might commit.

| CRIME / WRONG | PUNISHMENT |
|---|------------|
| Being a coward | |
| Running away | |
| Telling the enemy of your country's plans | |
| Refusing orders to shoot an enemy soldier | |
| Bullying other soldiers | |
| Disappearing for a week | |
| Hitting a senior officer | |
| Killing a prisoner of war | |
| Other _____ | |

Change partners and exchange your ideas. Decide on who has the most sensible punishments.

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information about this news story. Talk about what you discover with your partner(s) in the next lesson.

3. A SOLDIER'S LIFE: Write an article about life as a soldier. Show your article to your classmates in the next lesson. Talk about which articles you liked best and why.

4. LETTER: Write a letter to the soldier Harry Farr. Tell him what you think of his pardon. Tell him what you think of war. Ask him three questions. Read your letter to your classmates in the next lesson. Your partner(s) will answer your questions. Which letter did you like best and why?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

a. T b. T c. F d. F e. F f. T g. T h. F

SYNONYM MATCH:

| | |
|---------------|--------------|
| a. pardon | forgive |
| b. committing | doing |
| c. deal with | take care of |
| d. conscious | aware |
| e. fighting | war |
| f. manner | way |
| g. ignored | disregarded |
| h. unfit | unable |
| i. severe | very bad |
| j. go on | continue |

PHRASE MATCH:

| | |
|--|-------------------------|
| a. committing | military offences |
| b. the best way to deal | with this |
| c. clear the soldiers' | names |
| d. conscious of how the families | of these men feel today |
| e. battled | for 14 years |
| f. It took just 20 minutes for a court | to decide |
| g. the judges ignored medical | records |
| h. He had fought in bloody | battles for two years |
| i. spent five months in hospital | with severe shell-shock |
| j. firing squad would have to look | him in the eye |

GAP FILL:

Britain to pardon 306 WWI veterans

Britain's government will **soon** pardon all of the 306 British soldiers its army **shot** for cowardice during World War I. The men were killed for committing military **offences** during the Great War. Britain's Secretary of Defence Des Browne said: "I believe a group pardon...is the best way to **deal** with this." The government decided to **clear** the soldiers' names ninety years after they died. Mr. Browne added: "Although this is a historical matter, I am conscious of how the families of these men **feel** today." The government considered the campaign made by the family of Harry Farr, who was shot, aged 25, in 1916 for disobeying **orders** to return to the fighting. Farr's family **battled** for 14 years to clear his name.

Harry Farr will be the first British soldier to have his name cleared. His **crime** was "misbehaving before the enemy in such a manner as to show cowardice". It took just 20 minutes for a **court** to decide he should die. It seems the judges ignored medical **records** that showed Farr was unfit to fight. He had fought in bloody **battles** for two years. In one particular battle, 20,000 British soldiers died in fighting. Mr. Farr spent five months in hospital with **severe** shell-shock. His nurses said he was so stressed that he could not hold a pen and **write**. When his officers ordered him to go back and fight, he replied: "I just can't **go** on." When he died, he didn't wear a blindfold so the firing squad would have to look him in the **eye** as they shot him.