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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 is to pardon all of the 306 British soldiers its army executed for cowardice during World War I. The men were sentenced to death for committing military offences during the Great War. Britain's Secretary of Defence Des Browne said: "I believe a group pardon, approved by parliament, is the best way to deal with this." The government decided to exonerate the war veterans posthumously ninety years after they were condemned to death. Mr. Browne added: "Although this is a historical matter, I am conscious of how the families of these men feel today. They have had to endure a stigma for decades." The decision was largely due to campaigning efforts made by the family of Harry Farr, who was shot at dawn aged 25 in 1916 for disobeying orders to return to the trenches. Farr's family battled for 14 years to clear his name.

Harry Farr will be the first British soldier to have his name cleared. He was found guilty of "misbehaving before the enemy in such a manner as to show cowardice". It took just 20 minutes for a court martial to send the young soldier to the firing squad. It seems the judges ignored a lot of mitigating factors, including medical records, that showed Farr was unfit to fight. He had witnessed two years of carnage in some of the biggest campaigns of the War. He fought in one battle in which 20,000 of his comrades perished on the first day of fighting. He was admitted to hospital for five months with severe shell-shock. His nurses reported him to be so traumatized he could not hold a pen steadily enough to write. When ordered to return to the front line, he replied: "I just can't go on." He reputedly refused a blindfold at his execution so his compatriots 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 / cowardice / pardons / veterans / stigma / orders / misbehaving / enemies / firing squads / carnage / battles / trauma / blindfolds

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

3. COWARDICE: With your partner(s), talk about these examples and whether you believe they are examples of cowardice. Rank them according to the most cowardly (10 = a big coward, 1 = not a coward at all).

- _____ A man not fighting for his country
- _____ A man not sticking up for his girlfriend who is being teased by his friends
- _____ A woman not sticking up for her boyfriend who is being teased by her friends
- _____ Someone who does not have enough confidence to 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 engage in these fun 2-minute debates. Students A take the first argument, students B the second. Change partners often.

- a. Cowardice during war should be punishable by death. vs. No way.
- b. All soldiers are heroes. vs. Not all soldiers are heroes.
- c. Military service should be compulsory. vs. Military service should be voluntary.
- d. All armies should be disbanded. vs. Armies are essential.
- e. The British Army is the best in the world. vs. The British Army is not good.
- f. The army is a great profession. 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 on the front line. vs. Women should never fight in wars.

6. COWARDICE: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with cowardice. 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 executed 306 of its soldiers for cowardice during WWI. T / F
- b. The war veterans are being exonerated posthumously. T / F
- c. Families of the executed were not stigmatized by the soldiers' deaths. T / F
- d. The pardon was largely due to fresh evidence coming to light. T / F
- e. Soldiers were executed only after lengthy and thorough trials. T / F
- f. In one battle, 20,000 British soldiers died in one day. T / F
- g. Soldiers were ordered to fight despite being shell-shocked. T / F
- h. A soldier asked to be blindfolded so he couldn't see his compatriots. T / F

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

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------|
| a. pardon | by all accounts |
| b. exonerate | shame |
| c. conscious | fashion |
| d. stigma | acquit |
| e. trenches | died |
| f. manner | fellow citizens |
| g. mitigating | forgive |
| h. perished | front line |
| i. reputedly | extenuating |
| j. compatriots | aware |

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

- | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| a. executed | veterans posthumously |
| b. approved | factors |
| c. exonerate the war | dawn |
| d. endure a | for cowardice |
| e. shot at | squad |
| f. have his name | by parliament |
| g. court | him in the eye |
| h. firing | cleared |
| i. mitigating | stigma |
| j. look | martial |

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 is to pardon all of the 306 British soldiers its army _____ for cowardice during World War I. The men were _____ to death for committing military offences during the Great War. Britain's Secretary of Defence Des Browne said: "I believe a _____ pardon, approved by parliament, is the best way to deal with this." The government decided to exonerate the war veterans _____ ninety years after they were condemned to death. Mr. Browne added: "Although this is a historical matter, I am _____ of how the families of these men feel today. They have had to _____ a stigma for decades." The decision was largely due to campaigning efforts made by the family of Harry Farr, who was shot at dawn aged 25 in 1916 for disobeying orders to return to the _____. Farr's family battled for 14 years to _____ his name.

group
executed
trenches
posthumously
endure
sentenced
clear
conscious

Harry Farr will be the first British soldier to have his name cleared. He was _____ guilty of "misbehaving before the enemy in such a _____ as to show cowardice". It took just 20 minutes for a court martial to send the young soldier to the firing _____. It seems the judges ignored a lot of mitigating factors, including medical records, that showed Farr was _____ to fight. He had witnessed two years of carnage in some of the biggest campaigns of the War. He fought in one battle in which 20,000 of his comrades _____ on the first day of fighting. He was admitted to hospital for five months with _____ shell-shock. His nurses reported him to be so traumatized he could not hold a pen steadily enough to write. When ordered to return to the _____ line, he replied: "I just can't go on." He reputedly refused a _____ at his execution so his compatriots would have to look him in the eye as they shot him.

blindfold
squad
perished
manner
front
found
severe
unfit

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

Britain to pardon 306 WWI veterans

Britain's government is to pardon all of the 306 British soldiers its army _____ during World War I. The men were sentenced to death 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 exonerate the war _____ ninety years after they were condemned to death. Mr. Browne added: "Although this is a historical matter, I am conscious of how the families of these men feel today. They have had to _____ for decades." The decision was largely due to campaigning efforts made by the family of Harry Farr, who was shot at dawn aged 25 in 1916 for _____ to return to the trenches. Farr's family battled for 14 years to clear his name.

Harry Farr will be the first British soldier to have _____. He was found guilty of "misbehaving before the enemy in such a manner as to show cowardice". It took just 20 minutes for a _____ send the young soldier to the firing squad. It seems the judges ignored a lot of _____, including medical records, that showed Farr was unfit to fight. He had witnessed two _____ in some of the biggest campaigns of the War. He fought in one battle in which 20,000 of his comrades perished on the first day of fighting. He was admitted to hospital for five months with _____. His nurses reported him to be so traumatized he could not hold a pen steadily enough to write. When ordered to return to the front line, he replied: "I just can't go on." He _____ a blindfold at his execution so his compatriots would have to look him in the eye as they shot him.

AFTER READING / LISTENING

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

- 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:

- | | |
|-------------|------------|
| • cowardice | • name |
| • group | • squad |
| • exonerate | • unfit |
| • conscious | • comrades |
| • efforts | • pen |
| • battled | • 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 its 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 ever consider (or have you ever considered) becoming a soldier?
- g. Would you want your children to join your country's army?
- h. What do you think it is like to go to battle?
- i. Do you think cowardice during wartime should be a crime punishable by death?
- 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 some of the bloodiest battles of World War I?
- d. Do you think Harry Farr's family should receive compensation from the British government for the stigma they have had to endure?
- 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's refusal to wear a blindfold at his execution?
- g. How concerned are you about the reputation 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?

Britain to pardon 306 WWI veterans – 17 August, 2006 (harder)

SPEAKING

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

| Crime / Wrong | Punishment |
|--|------------|
| Cowardice | |
| Desertion | |
| Telling the enemy of strategies and plans | |
| Refusing orders to shoot an enemy soldier | |
| Bullying other soldiers | |
| Going AWOL (absent without leave) 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 being pardoned. 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. exonerate | acquit |
| c. conscious | aware |
| d. stigma | shame |
| e. trenches | front line |
| f. manner | fashion |
| g. mitigating | extenuating |
| h. perished | died |
| i. reputedly | by all accounts |
| j. compatriots | fellow citizens |

PHRASE MATCH:

| | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| a. executed | for cowardice |
| b. approved | by parliament |
| c. exonerate the war | veterans posthumously |
| d. endure a | stigma |
| e. shot at | dawn |
| f. have his name | cleared |
| g. court | martial |
| h. firing | squad |
| i. mitigating | factors |
| j. look | him in the eye |

GAP FILL:

Britain to pardon 306 WWI veterans

Britain's government is to pardon all of the 306 British soldiers its army **executed** for cowardice during World War I. The men were **sentenced** to death for committing military offences during the Great War. Britain's Secretary of Defence Des Browne said: "I believe a **group** pardon, approved by parliament, is the best way to deal with this." The government decided to exonerate the war veterans **posthumously** ninety years after they were condemned to death. Mr. Browne added: "Although this is a historical matter, I am **conscious** of how the families of these men feel today. They have had to **endure** a stigma for decades." The decision was largely due to campaigning efforts made by the family of Harry Farr, who was shot at dawn aged 25 in 1916 for disobeying orders to return to the **trenches**. Farr's family battled for 14 years to **clear** his name.

Harry Farr will be the first British soldier to have his name cleared. He was **found** guilty of "misbehaving before the enemy in such a **manner** as to show cowardice". It took just 20 minutes for a court martial to send the young soldier to the firing **squad**. It seems the judges ignored a lot of mitigating factors, including medical records, that showed Farr was **unfit** to fight. He had witnessed two years of carnage in some of the biggest campaigns of the War. He fought in one battle in which 20,000 of his comrades **perished** on the first day of fighting. He was admitted to hospital for five months with **severe** shell-shock. His nurses reported him to be so traumatized he could not hold a pen steadily enough to write. When ordered to return to the **front** line, he replied: "I just can't go on." He reputedly refused a **blindfold** at his execution so his compatriots would have to look him in the eye as they shot him.