

# Shot at Dawn

**In the First World War**, 28 New Zealand soldiers in northern France and southern Belgium were court-martialled and condemned to death, almost all for desertion in various forms. Some of the men were frequently in trouble; some were suffering from 'shell shock' (combat fatigue); some were not fully recovered from Gallipoli or injuries; and some were victims of indifference or dislike by their superior officers. Few were fairly represented at their courts martial.

Of these 28 men, 23 were later imprisoned or sent back to the front lines of their units. But five soldiers were shot. All of them were Privates. They were:

**Frank Hughes**, aged 28, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Canterbury Infantry Regiment, shot at Hallencourt, France, 25 August 1916.

**John Sweeney**, aged 37, 1st Battalion Otago Infantry Regiment, shot at Méaulte, France, 2 October 1916.

**John (Jack) Braithwaite**, aged 35, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Otago Infantry Regiment, shot for mutiny by a British squad at Rouen, France, 29 October 1916.

**John King**, aged 32, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Canterbury Infantry Regiment, shot at Steenwerck, France, 19 August 1917. (Born Frank Needs in Victoria, Aus, in 1885, he enlisted in NZ as John King.)

**Victor Spencer**, aged 21 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Otago Infantry Regiment, shot at Mud Huts Field Punishment Camp, Dickebusche, Belgium, 24 February 1918.



Victor Manson  
Spencer,  
*Behind the Lines*  
p171, Nicholas  
Boyack

**The Pardon for Soldiers of the Great War Act** became law in 14 Sept 2000, pardoning these five men executed during the First World War for either mutiny or desertion. In 2005 Prime Minister Hon. Helen Clark honoured their memory, and issued the medals, certificates and medallions which they earned serving in the war.

# Soldiers' Memorial

## Quarantine Island/Kamau Taurua Community

(formerly St Martin Island Community)

**The members of the Quarantine Island/ Kamau Taurua Community** feel that remembering these five soldiers in this way at Quarantine Island /Kamau Taurua fits in with our ideals of peace, social justice and restoration. As far as we know, it is the first such memorial to them in New Zealand.



It is set near the edge of the roughly-levelled 'parade ground', still discernible, made by the soldiers quarantined with disease on this Island 1915-18. As well as the post representing those to which the condemned men were bound, eight paving slabs represent the commanding officers and men in each firing squad, who were also victims, forced to shoot their own men.

## Lest we forget these men, also.



Private John J Sweeney  
*Behind the Lines* p179,  
Nicholas Boyack

More Information:

1. Christopher Pugsley, *On the Fringe of Hell*. (War history, NZ deserters)
2. Nicholas Boyack, *Behind the Lines*, (WW1 commentary based on soldiers' diaries)
3. Michael Morpurgo, *Private Peaceful* (Fiction)

Search Online:

Auckland Museum online Centotaph for individual records.

'WW1 Pardoned Soldiers to be recognised with Awards'; Govt media release 12 July 2005;

Hon Helen Clark, World War One Medal Presentation Ceremony, Parliament, 31 August 2005

Ian McGibbon, Te Ara Encyclopedia of NZ (has discrepancies);

'First New Zealand soldier executed', Frank Hughes; <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/page/first-new-zealand-soldier-executed>, (Ministry for Culture and Heritage), updated 3-Oct-2014

Archives NZ record on Frank Hughes' death. <https://m.flickr.com/#/photos/archivesnz/15023785035/>

See our website for links and articles. [www.quarantineisland.org.nz](http://www.quarantineisland.org.nz)