

NURSING AND MARTYRDOM IN NEW WORLD REGIONS AND EUROPE DURING THE PAST CENTURY - Part 3

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INTRODUCTION

Martyrdom in the twentieth century has a special quality of anguish which is unique. Unlike persecutions during the early Christian centuries, where death often entailed a public spectacle with mourning family and friends and inquisitive crowds in an arena, the blood shed by the twentieth century martyr often has occurred in captivity in a remote region of the world, or as will be described in this article, in a concentration camp before a few uninvolved witnesses or in conditions of total anonymity.

Many nurse martyrs of our time had the choice and the opportunity to avoid their violent deaths by renouncing their beliefs or by fleeing, but realising the likely consequences they chose to remain. As Diana Dewar points out "Choice is the touchstone of true martyrdom and separates martyrs from victims" (Dewar 1980).

PERSECUTION AND MARTYRDOM IN BRAZIL

Brazil was discovered by Cabral in the sixteenth century and as with other expeditions and conquests in the New World, priests and friars followed the conquistadores. The major part of missionary work among the Indians during this period was undertaken by Roman Catholic orders. Protestants gained entry to Brazil during the nineteenth century as was the usual case in other world regions. Presbyterian missionaries were the first to begin evangelising in Brazil in 1859 and they were followed by Methodists in 1876 (Neill 1964:390).

In May 1924, a few years after the end of World War I, three American missionaries set out from Cuiaba in Brazil hoping to make contact with a fiery indigenous tribe, the Nhambiquera Indians. Arthur Tylee, one of the party of three men, had together with his fiancée Ethel Canary, undergone missionary training at the Moody Bible Institute in America. After graduating they both applied and were accepted by the Inland South American Missionary Union for mission work in Brazil.

After many weeks the three men reached Jurueña, a relay station in the Amazonian Jungle, which was staffed by Brazilian employees. They sighted the first bronze-skinned naked Nhambiqueras a few days after their arrival. Arthur Tylee forthwith

Abstract

In this last article on nursing and martyrdom, the persecution and death of nurses in Brazil, New Guinea and in Europe during the First and Second World War are described. While many nurse martyrs had the choice and opportunity to avoid their violent death by fleeing, all chose to remain with the people they served.

Opsomming

In die laaste artikel oor verpleging en martelaarskap word die vervolging en dood van verpleegsters in Brasilië, New Guinea en gedurende die Eerste en Tweede Wêreldoorloë in Europa beskryf. Alhoewel baie verpleegmartelare die keuse en geleentheid gehad het om die gewelddadige dood te vermy deur te vlug, het almal verkies om by die mense wat hulle dien te bly.

decided to settle at Jurueña after his marriage to Ethel so as to try and make contact with this tribe. Soon after their wedding Arthur and Ethel Tylee built a house north east of the relay station and began to make friends with the Indians. The tribe was very unpredictable, friendly at times, but on two occasions, Arthur Tylee was confronted by the steel of a knife at his throat. After many months in the harsh climate of the Amazon, the Tylees' health deteriorated to such an extent that they took extended leave and returned to America (Hefley J & Hefley M 1979:541).

MILDRED KRATZ - DIED 31 OCTOBER 1930

During their studies at the Moody Bible Institute the Tylees had become friendly with a trained nurse, Mildred Kratz, who was studying there too. They contacted her on their return to

America and asked her to help them in their mission work in Brazil. On their return to the Amazon, they brought Mildred back with them to help with the medical work. The Nhambiquera Indians were by now coming to the mission station regularly in groups and often joined the mission staff in prayers.

In 1929 a 'flu virus brought in by Brazilian visitors quickly spread among the Indians and Nurse Kratz was kept busy treating the patients in and near the Mission Station. Ten months later on 27 October 1930, three Indians arrived at the mission station saying that some of their friends had died of the 'flu. This tale was later discovered to be untrue. Four days after this event on Saturday 31 October, more Indians arrived and appeared to be very morose and sullen. By Monday a crowd had gathered at the mission, and after hearing a weird call uttered by a tribesman, Mrs Tylee saw an Indian grab hold of Mildred Kratz. As she tried to go to Nurse Kratz's aid, she was stopped by another Indian but he released her when she shouted at him. Mrs Tylee instinctively ran toward their bedroom where her baby was lying sleeping but without warning she was hit on the head by an Indian with a hoe handle. Bleeding and dazed, she crept to her baby's bed and saw that she was already dead. As Ethel Tylee turned round she saw Nurse Kratz's body lying on the floor impaled by an arrow. Her husband and three other Brazilians were also dead. Mildred Kratz and the others were buried the next day under the trees at the mission house (Hefley J & Hefley M 1979:543).

MARTYRDOM IN NEW GUINEA

This island, the second largest in the group of Asian Pacific Islands, was evangelised in the seventeenth century, a period in which Christian martyrdoms occurred on a number of the smaller islands. In the twentieth century however, martyrdoms have taken place in the remoter interiors on the larger islands, one of which is Papua in New Guinea. The first missionaries were martyred here on 4 April 1901 by the cannibal islanders who "hacked their torsos into pieces for cooking the same day" (Hefley J & Hefley M 1979:171).

MARJORIE BRENCILEY DIED - 6 AUGUST 1942

When Japanese warships were sighted off the Papuan coast in January 1942 during World War II, the Australian authorities ordered all women on the island, excluding missionaries and nurses, to be evacuated. Marjorie Brenchley, a trained nurse, was nursing at a Cottage Hospital at the Sagara Mission at the time. The Mission Station was situated on the Southern Coast of the island fifty miles from Port Moresby. It had been founded by an Anglican Priest, Vivian Redlich, who also established the much needed hospital there in 1940. Father Redlich was recovering from a bout of illness at the Diocesan Headquarters at Dogura when the Japanese invaded the island. Fearing for the safety of his people at the Mission Station, particularly Nurse Brenchley and Miss Lashmar, a teacher, he decided to return to the Mission Station immediately. He arrived at Oro Bay in a mission boat just as the Japanese started to bomb Burma (Dewar 1980:75).

Father Redlich made his way to Sangara which was situated thirty miles inland, hiding when necessary in the jungle to avoid the Japanese. Arriving at the mission station just as the Japanese were beginning to attack, he found Marjorie Brenchley and Lilla Lashmar in hiding. Together the three joined another group of missionaries who were also trying to escape but a Papuan sorcerer and his followers betrayed them to the Japanese. The group of missionaries were captured as they were attempting to cross a river. Notwithstanding the pleas of a Papuan evangelist, Father Redlich, Nurse Brenchley, and all the other missionaries, including a child, were handed over to the Japanese. They were all beheaded on Burma Beach on 6 August 1942 (Kenneth 1987:74).

MAY HAYMAN - DIED 9 AUGUST 1942

May Hayman, a trained nurse from Australia, joined the missionary staff at Gora, a Mission Station on the coast of New Guinea overlooking the Solomon Islands. She had undergone her nurse training in a hospital at Adelaide and thereafter practised for a while in a large hospital at Canberra. After a few years she decided to train as a missionary and went to Sydney for the training. May Hayman was the fiancée of the Anglican Priest, Vivian Redlich, who ran the mission station at Sangara on the south coast of the island (Dewar 1980:74).

Early in January 1941 after the Australian Government had ordered all their nationals to leave New Guinea because of the impending Japanese invasion, Nurse Hayman chose to remain at her hospital at Gora. On 21 July 1942 the Japanese preparatory to landing, started bombing Gora. May Hayman together with the other missionaries on the Mission Station and a small group of Christian Papuans fled into the jungle which bordered the mission (Kenneth 1987:141).

The fleeing party sent a message with one of their Papuan guides to a Papuan priest who was at a mission outstation at Siai on the lower Kumusi River. The people at Siai gave the fugitives food and built them a hut deep in the jungle where they remained hidden for a time. On the 8 August they had to flee again when

rumours of a Japanese advance reached them, but they were betrayed by a Papuan guide and ambushed by a Japanese patrol at Papondetta. All but the two women, Nurse May Hayman and Miss Robinson the teacher, were killed. The two women were then taken to a wire coffee store where the Japanese soldiers imprisoned them. Nurse Hayman and Miss Robinson were taunted constantly by the Japanese soldiers who offered them food and then withdraw the food as May and Mavis stretched out their hands. On 9 August the patrol took them to a nearby coffee plantation where they were murdered and their bodies were thrown into a prepared trench dug by the soldiers.

Today a stone altar stands beside the new main road to Oro Bay, erected on the site of the martyrdom of the two women. A memorial window was contributed to the church which Nurse Hayman had attended while nursing at Canberra. At the hospital a plaque was erected and a bowl of fresh flowers is kept in her memory (Dewar 1980:79).

May Hayman and Father Vivian Redlich had been engaged for only a month at the time of the Japanese invasion and their subsequent martyrdoms took place on different parts of the island.

NURSING AND MARTYRDOM IN EUROPE DURING THE FIRST AND SECOND WORLD WAR

The suffering and martyrdom of well-known woman such as Edith Cavell, is familiar to many. Few are aware of the many other nurses who suffered persecution in Europe during the war years and tribute will be paid now to those unknown wartime nurses who were killed or who died in concentration camps.

EDITH CAVELL - DIED 15 OCTOBER 1915

It is fitting once again to record the martyrdom of this well-known wartime heroine. Miss Cavell, an English trained nurse, underwent her training at the London Hospital in 1895. She nursed in England for a number of years before taking up an appointment in 1907 as Matron of the Berkendael Medical Institute in Brussels. It was here that she established a school of nursing in 1909 which soon acquired international recognition for the quality of their training of nurses. When Germany invaded Belgium in 1914, this hospital was taken over by the Red Cross and became a place of refuge for war casualties of all nationalities (Masson 1985:115).

Nurse Cavell carried on with her nursing duties in the hospital among the German, British and Belgium soldiers, but at the same time she helped organise an underground escape route for hundreds of allied soldiers. In August 1915 she was arrested by the Germans and charged with harbouring French and English soldiers and assisting them to escape. She did not deny these charges and notwithstanding the attempts of neutral diplomats to obtain a reprieve for her, she was executed before a firing squad on 12 October 1915 (Donahue 1985:408).

EDITH STEIN - DIED 9 AUGUST 1941

I wish to pay tribute to Edith Stein, philosopher, educator and a woman of outstanding intellectual gifts who undertook a nurse training course during World War I. She practised nursing in hospitals in Germany whenever the need for additional nursing help was required in the hospitals run by the Red Cross. During the Second World War she used her nursing knowledge and skills among the women and children in the concentration camp at Westerbork, where she was a prisoner.

Edith Stein was brought up in an Orthodox Jewish home but joined a Carmelite order after her conversion to Christianity. She was studying for a degree at the University of Breslau when Germany entered the First World War. Edith immediately interrupted her studies to complete a nursing course which was being organised for women students. The students attended lectures at the Allerheilighospital (All Saints Hospital) in Breslau which offered the emergency course. In her autobiography she writes: "I heard lectures on surgery and communicable diseases in wartime; I learned to apply bandages and give injections" (Stein 1986:298). She states furthermore that she and her classmates vied with each other in an effort to make their training as thorough as possible. Finding the nurse training manual insufficiently explicit, she borrowed her sister's medical textbooks and studied anatomy from a medical atlas of anatomy. Once she had completed the course she volunteered to place herself unconditionally at the disposal of the Red Cross. She was also given permission to continue nursing at the hospital so as to improve her skills. She nursed patients suffering from tuberculosis and later practised at a surgical polyclinic. When she became ill with bronchitis in October 1914, her volunteer work temporarily was terminated.

Edith Stein continued her studies at the University of Göttingen under Edmund Husserl where she obtained her degree with honours. Soon after this she again wrote to the Red Cross requesting permission to enter the nursing service and on 7 April 1915 she took up an appointment in a Lazaretto - a hospital for infectious illnesses - at Mährisch Weisskirchen, which was staffed by the Red Cross. Here she nursed soldiers suffering from typhoid fever and at the same time started working on her doctoral thesis. In 1917 she obtained her doctorate in philosophy under the supervision of Edmund Husserl. The title of her doctoral thesis was "On the Problem of Empathy" and her examination was passed with honours. The translator's notes of her unfinished autobiography claim that Edith was addressed as "Schwester" during the times when she was nursing. This is the title used for trained professional nurses in German-speaking countries. The translator states that she was entitled to be addressed as "sister" because she had completed an intensive training programme sponsored by the Red Cross Organisation under the emergency programme in Germany (Purcell 1983:499).

In 1922 Edith Stein became a Christian. She adopted the Roman Catholic faith but was permitted to enter the Carmelite Order only ten years later. Thereafter she was called Sister

Benedicta of the Cross and she remained in Cologne until 31 December 1938 (Kenneth 1987:120). Pressure on the Jews began to increase and when the Nuremberg Laws were passed, Sister Benedicta was blacklisted in the official records of the Nazis. When the Jewish persecution became acute in Germany, her religious order sent her to another Carmelite convent at Echt in Holland but soon two German officials arrived at the convent and took Sister Benedicta into custody. She was taken to a concentration camp at Westerbork from which place she wrote to the nuns asking them to send clothes, blankets and medicine. Once again she resumed her nursing skills and did all she could for the children and women in the camp. A Jewish businessman who was one of the few to survive the concentration camp experience said that the great calm and composure which emanated from her make a striking impression on the prisoners. "The misery in the camp was indescribable. Sister Benedicta walked among the women, comforting, helping, soothing like an angel. Many mothers were almost demented and had for days not been looking after their children but had been sitting brooding in listless despair" He further added that immediately upon her arrival, Sister Benedicta, began caring for all the children. She washed, fed and gave nursing care to as many as she was able in an effort to relieve the misery she encountered around her (Stein 1986:121).

On the 7 August 1941 she and her sister Rosa, who also had been interned, together with other Jews, were last seen on a railway station platform at Schiftenstadt. It was from here that Jews were transported to the death camp at Auschwitz. On 9 August Sister Benedicta of the Cross, in the company of many other Jews in the camp at Auschwitz, entered the gaschamber (Neill 1964:48-50).

ODETTE MALOSSANE - DIED 1944

This French nurse was the matron of a field hospital at Vassieuse in France during World War II. In July 1944 when the Germans invaded France, she was among a group of medical personnel who were fleeing from the Germans together with their patients and other civilians. The party took refuge in a cave in the Vercors region in the south of France where the nurses and doctors among them took care of their patients as best they could without the necessary medical supplies. They had no food and the only available water was the moisture which dripped from the stalactites in the cave.

On the 27 July the advancing German troops discovered their hideout and ordered everyone out of the cave at gunpoint. The Nazi soldiers then proceeded to line up all the stretcher cases and shot them on the spot. The medical and nursing personnel with the remaining war casualties and civilians were herded into army trucks and taken to concentration camps where Matron Odette and those with her all died (Masson 1985:140).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is evident that the nurses whose deaths have been recounted in this and in the previous articles, had been convinced that their profession placed a special trust and commitment on them to remain where they served. While most suffered violent death in circumstances related to their witness for Christ, a number were persecuted primarily for their allegiance to Christ, particularly those who were martyred by communists. As the nursing profession in this country celebrates a century of professionalism it is fitting that we pay tribute to the known and the many unknown nurse martyrs of our time. Their life and death has

revealed the profundity of what caring and commitment in the nursing profession really mean.

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