



Private Herbert Francis Burden

Shot at Dawn

Soldiers who were court-martialled for desertion or refusing orders were shot at dawn by firing-squads made up of their own comrades.



Many were suffering from shell-shock, or combat stress as it would be described today. They were often not given fair trials and their families were left to bear the stigma of their 'cowardice'.

In the National Arboretum in Staffordshire there is a Memorial to those who were executed in this way. It portrays a young

British soldier, blindfolded and tied to a stake, ready to be shot by a firing squad.

It is modelled on Private Herbert Francis Burden who, at the age of 16, lied that he was two years older so he could join the Northumberland Fusiliers and fight in

the war. Ten months later he was court martialled for desertion after leaving his post to comfort a recently-bereaved friend stationed nearby, having seen many other friends killed at the Battle of Bellwarde Ridge.

He was 17 when he was shot for desertion, officially still too young even to be in his regiment.

Pte Burden's statue is surrounded by a semi-circle of stakes. Each stake bears the name of one of the 306 men who were also shot at dawn in WW1.

It was Pte Burden's case which led John Hipkin, a retired Newcastle teacher, to set up the Shot at Dawn campaign in the early 1990s.

In 2007 these soldiers were pardoned posthumously.