

PRESS RELEASE

From

Geoffrey M. Hodgson (g.m.hodgson@herts.ac.uk) and

Nicola Bennett (nicola.bennett@nzdf.mil.nz) Marketing Manager NZ National Army Museum

For global release on Monday 21 March 2011

A Bible – lost and found in the trenches in the First World War – will be returned home to New Zealand

On 12 April 1918, Herbert Hodgson (1893-1974) fell into a shell hole during an attack near Messines in Belgium in the First World War. There he found a Bible encrusted with mud. As he wrote in his memoirs: ‘There was no name inside it but the army service number 34816 had been written across the top outer edges of the pages.’ He was told by an officer that the original owner would be impossible to trace and he should keep it for luck.

His family tried to trace the army service number, but without success. But in June 2010, using the Internet, Geoffrey Hodgson (the publisher and editor of Herbert Hodgson’s memoirs) identified the original owner of the Bible as Richard Cook of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force.

Cook died in a hospital in France in October 1917, of wounds received a few days earlier in battle near Passchendaele in Belgium. He is buried in the war cemetery in Étaples in France.

Herbert Hodgson survived the First World War and became the acclaimed printer of the rare 1926 edition of Lawrence of Arabia’s *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. Single copies of this beautiful edition are advertised at prices in the order of US\$80,000. His memoirs – entitled *Impressions of War* – were published by Martlet Books in 2010. They tell the story of how he found the Bible in the trenches.

Herbert Hodgson’s family will generously donate the Bible to the National Army Museum in Waiouru in New Zealand at a ceremony at 1.30pm on 23 March 2011.

David Hodgson (one of Herbert Hodgson’s sons), Geoffrey Hodgson (the publisher of Herbert Hodgson’s memoirs – who is no relation of Herbert Hodgson), and some relatives of Richard Cook, will all be present at the 23 March ceremony in Waiouru.

Major Ian Passingham, author of *Pillars of Fire: The Battle of Messines Ridge 1917*, and *The German Offensives of 1918: The Last Desperate Gamble*, describes *Impressions of War* as ‘a must-read for anyone wishing to put the First World War into its proper perspective.’

Professor Peter Simkins MBE, former Senior Historian of the Imperial War Museum, writes: ‘Herbert Hodgson’s *Impressions of War* provides the reader with a splendid example of the extraordinary insights which even a private soldier from a working-class background was able to offer concerning life, death and conditions on the Western Front.’

See <http://www.martlet-books.co.uk/impressions-of-war.htm> for more details of the Bible story and the book *Impressions of War*.