

Imprisoned for pacifism

Constance Summers

b. 1 March 1919

d. 31 December 2008

It was May 1941, in Pigeon Park, Wellington, when Constance Summers stepped onto a butter box to speak against the war. Summers was a member of the Christian Pacifist Society, and part of a roster of speakers who would share their pacifist views every Friday evening on Manners Street, Wellington. As word had spread that a woman was to be the first speaker that night, the crowd grew. She was just 10 words into her Christian pacifist message when the police dragged her away. At 22 years old, she was sentenced to three months of hard labour at Point Halswell Women's Prison.

Conditions at the prison were grim and Constance was set apart from the other women because of her beliefs.



*The only woman in New
Zealand jailed for
WWII anti-war
activities*

***“I don't understand man's terrific desire to
destroy and go on destroying.”***

“And as my sentence was over the three months in winter, it was quite hard. In fact, it was the only time in my life I've ever had chilblains and that was because I worked out in the garden or else, when the weather was wet, cutting lots of wood for fire. And I did that because most of the girls were given indoor work when the weather was werty, and they mended the putties that the men more in the army. And the one matron looked at me and said 'I suppose you won't want to do this Constance?' And I said 'No Matron'. So I used to be left outside the prison gates and left to cut wood when the weather was wet.”

Summers went on to march againts the Vietname war, and refused to allow her sons to participate in cadet training at schgool. in 1981, she was arrested five times for blocking city streets in protest of the Springbock rugby tour.