



TV

## Pacifist diary from front line

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**THE extraordinary tale of a pacifist tricked into fighting in World War One has emerged after his letters home were found.**

Deeply religious Donald McNair was forced on to the front line because he said “Yes” when a tribunal asked if he would defend his wife if she were attacked by a German.



Survivor ... with Janie and kids in 1934

IRVING OF EXETER

The 33-year-old conscientious objector was sent to Palestine in 1916, where one Army captain branded him a coward.

I have the honour to be under your command, but in the capacity of a conscript, any form of soldiering being contrary to my principles as a Christian. — An appeal on these grounds having been disallowed in the Courts; and I beg most respectfully to state at the outset that though I am forced to train I cannot undertake to forego my principles, and fight.  
So long as I remained in the Bay Camp, where I was placed on

Protest ... letter Donald wrote to top brass after being tricked into the Army

## IRVING OF EXETER

He was forced into fighting patrols and to go over the top of the trenches with a bayonet, despite vowing to face a court martial and firing squad rather than fight or kill.

Amazingly, Donald — a member of the ultra-strict Christian Exclusive Brethren — survived.

He had six children and died in 1975, aged 87.

*The young rifleman recounted his experiences in 100 letters home to wife Janie in Tiverton, Devon, whom he wed weeks before he was conscripted and sent to fight the Turks.*

He later buried all but seven of the letters. One which was saved tells of the first time he came under fire.

Donald wrote: “High explosives were pouring on to us in a horrible blast.

“I felt quite placid.”

He also tells of the “incessant blasphemies” of his comrades and how his coat collar is “hot and hurts”.

His son Philip, 84, discovered the letters in a cupboard at his home in January and has published them in a book called *A Pacifist at War*.

He said: “They are fascinating.

“My father was not a coward, but he never shot at anybody.

“His position must have been unique.”

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