

Chapter 2

OAC History Overview

By Russ Hodder

Like in any story, we cannot start in the middle; we must look to the beginning. The beginning of Open Air Campaigners (in 1892) and the following 91 years is recorded in James A. Duffecy's book, "The Truceless Warfare Advances." Here is a quick summary for those who have not read that book.



Early Beginnings

The story of Open Air Campaigners begins with General Sir John Field. After a distinguished career serving the British Empire, mainly in India (Queen Victoria even knighted him), Sir John retired to the seaside resort at Ramsgate. He had been led to the Lord as a young soldier and maintained a consistent walk with the Lord for his entire life.

Looking out the window of his retirement home, he saw a large crowd gathered at the nearby public pier. God's Spirit told him, "Go talk to those people about Jesus." After praying about that and with the encouragement of his wife, he did precisely that. What followed was a regular series of open-air meetings in one of the slum areas of London.

Sir John had a somewhat rebellious son named Edward Percy Field, who received his education at Cambridge University. After graduating, he left England and found his way to Australia, but couldn't find the work he was looking for. Eventually, he found himself working on a road gang. Recognized by one of his father's friends, who had also immigrated to Australia, Percy was offered a job as a teacher. From there, he worked his way up to becoming a successful criminal lawyer. He was not living for the Lord at the time. His "wake-up call" came when he was diagnosed with throat cancer. On his way back to England for surgery, he sought the Lord in prayer and confessed his sins. When reaching England, his doctor declared him free of cancer! After receiving his physical and spiritual healing, he returned to Australia with a new passion to serve the Lord.



Following his father's example, Edward collected a group of men around him while living at the seaside town of Coogee to reach people for Christ in public places. His March 20, 1, 1892, journal entry reads, "On Sunday, we began open-air services at Coogee." This beach outreach was the official beginning of public open-air meetings held to reach people for Christ in many different places, including daily noon-hour

meetings in the center of Sydney. In 1897, failing health forced Edward to make the sad decision to return to England with his family, suspending the outreach.

In 1913, some men associated with Edward Field, W.R.H. Grant among them, never forgot his passion for reaching people for Christ; they formed the "New South Wales Evangelistic Prayer Band" and began regular open-air meetings in Sydney. Others joined, including W.A. Guilford, William Bradley, W.R. Angus, and R.H. Gordon. The growing group of evangelists and volunteers took on the name of "Open Air Campaigners" in 1922. The members ministered during the week in parks, factories, and on the streets. On a Sunday afternoon children's meeting at Coogee Beach led by Wallie Guilford, Jim Duffecy trusted

Christ in 1924 at the age of 12. Sunday culminated in a big open-air meeting near the Sydney City Hall. Later, they moved the street meeting to the corner of Goulburn and Pitts Streets, where it was held every Sunday night for the next fifty years.



GOULBURN STREET OPEN AIR EARLY SUNDAY EVENINGS
ABOUT 1945

The First OAC Branch Outside Sydney

In 1932, in the Hunter Valley coal fields, 150 miles north of Sydney, OAC founded its first branch. The Great Depression settled hard on Australia. Communism began to influence the labor unions. Morris Elder, an official of the mining company, formed an unlikely friendship with a labor activist named George Wotherspoon. Under God's direction, both of them started a campaign to reach these miners, with the intense prayer support of the believers. God worked it so that the power of communism and the equally bad Spiritism started to fade. Prayer, evangelism, and meeting the physical needs of the people caused a revival in the coal fields. The work continued there until the outbreak of World War II.

World War II

Australia, being a part of the "British Commonwealth," found itself at war after the British declaration of war when the Germans overran Poland in September 1939. OAC staff volunteered as army "Welfare Officers." These "Welfare Officers" fulfilled the roles of military chaplains as the United Service Organization (USO) does in the United States armed forces. "Recreation tents" were set up near military bases. A "home away from home" atmosphere was created where soldiers could come to relax and unwind. The gospel was supplied to those interested, but since OAC personnel were not



OAC tent in Largs army base,
New South Wales in 1943

part of the military, attendance was never mandatory. A good testimony came from those soldiers who trusted Christ, and the military officers appreciated all that was done for the men. God used Evangelist Bill Tate to cause a revival at a military prison camp, which was set aside for men who committed the worst of crimes while in the service. Some of these men, whose lives were transformed by Christ, went on to make real contributions to the war effort and to live productive lives. The military had good things to say about that!

All of this was at a crucial time. By then, the Japanese, who were in New Guinea, had already bombed Darwin, Australia's northernmost city, and were poised for invasion. Australia joined the Allied armed forces and began pushing back the Japanese.

The Post-War Years: New Domestic Branches Established (1948-52)

OAC faced a significantly changed world after the war. Nothing would ever be the same again. OAC staff and volunteers who had served in the military were ready to jump in and evangelize. Change in leadership proved necessary to reach this new world. Ken Werry, who had served as superintendent of the correspondence school of The Bible Institute of Los Angeles, which is now Biola University, was called to direct OAC.

The first interstate branch was opened in Melbourne, Australia, in 1948. Jim Duffecy was invited to conduct the first crusade there. Other OAC branches were formed in Brisbane, Queensland, and Adelaide, South Australia. Visiting preachers, including Hyman Appelman and Louis Talbot (then President of Biola), added to the draw of these outreaches.

Another important evangelistic event occurred in 1949, when OAC invited German pastor Martin Niemöller to conduct his "Faith Triumphant Crusade" in six states of Australia. Martin Niemöller had been a very successful captain of a German U-boat during

World War I. As an initial supporter of Adolf Hitler when he came to power in Germany, Niemöller changed his mind as he saw Hitler's evil designs on the Jews and the Church. Hitler wanted war hero Niemöller to be a Nazi "poster child" for "German Aryan supremacy." Niemöller, as a Bible-believing Christian and a pastor, refused to go along and actively opposed Hitler. He was arrested and put in prison, where he remained until the collapse of Nazi Germany in 1945. He became a much-in-demand speaker in the Christian world.



DR. HOWARD MOWLL



*Martin Niemöller speaking in Sydney.
Jim Duffecy seated on left
and Anglican Bishop Hillard
from Sydney*

Niemöller had received an invitation from OAC to conduct an evangelistic crusade in Australia. He had never heard of OAC, so he checked with his friend Dr. Howard Mowll (Anglican Primate and Archbishop of Sydney), who gave OAC an enthusiastic endorsement.

Niemöller arrived in Australia in August 1949 and, with OAC, conducted a series of very successful evangelistic meetings. Niemöller is important to the history of OAC because he was invited to speak in New Zealand as well, and he was accompanied by OAC evangelists. This event led to the establishment of OAC's first overseas branch, New Zealand, in 1954! From then, the overseas development of OAC moved to Canada in 1956, the USA in 1957, Germany in 1963, then in a few years Italy, and in 1969 the U.K. branch was opened.



JIM DUFFECY

To this point, we have briefly examined our consideration of the history of Open Air Campaigners as recorded by Jim Duffecy in his book "The Truceless Warfare Advances" (and other sources), which brings us up to 1983, the year that book was published. This was also the year when Jim Duffecy went home to be with his Savior. The question remains: What has happened in Open Air Campaigners since 1983? That is the subject of the balance of this book.



Back Row L-R: Frank McInnes, Eric Sinclair, Dick Hall, Harold Wyatt,
Front Row L-R: Keith Langford-Smith, Less Werry, Jim Duffecy

