

# Lowe, Harry W. (1893–1990)

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Harry W. Lowe served as associate and field secretaries at the General Conference, union president, mission president, administrator, and managing editor of *Ministry* magazine.

## Early Life and First World War

Harry Lowe was born in Southampton, England, August 14, 1893.<sup>1</sup>

On May 23, 1916, Lowe became one of the 16 young Adventist men from Watford conscripted into the 3<sup>d</sup> Eastern Non-Combatant Corp. at Bedford Barracks.<sup>2</sup> From there they sailed to France. Initially, Lowe and the other Adventist men received Sabbaths off. However, on November 3, 1917, a new commanding officer demanded that they work on Sabbaths.<sup>3</sup> When they refused, he made clear to them that under Section 9, note 7 of the Army Act, religious scruples furnished no excuse for disobedience. The men continued to refuse to work on Sabbath, which resulted in their court martial and sentence to six months hard labor at No. 3 Military Prison, Le Havre. Arriving at the prison, Lowe and his fellow Adventist men tried to obtain Sabbath privileges, but their superiors told them that in prison everyone had to work seven days a week.<sup>4</sup>

Lowe later recalled details of what he endured while at Le Havre. Everything had to be done twice and concrete slabs were tied over their shoulders with wire rope. The work was heavy labor in the docks and often involved pointless activity such as hours of sawing logs with blunt handsaws. Every night they had to polish rusty horseshoes with sacking until they shone, only to throw them out to rust again. They endured several hours of Field Punishment No. 1, often nicknamed “crucifixion.” During it they would be tied back-to-back to a gun carriage or tree in a position that placed the body under stress. On the first Sabbath of refusing to work, guards shoved the men into their cells and placed them in irons. Kept on them for eight hours at a stretch, the irons caused extreme pain.<sup>5</sup>

In one of his accounts, Lowe said that

when the first Sabbath came we were working inside the prison sawing logs, and late in the afternoon the guards were doubled, obviously because they were determined not to allow us to cease work at sundown.

The first man to stop work was attacked with fists and sticks and one by one we were manhandled, and then rushed off to the cell block. Each man was placed in solitary confinement in irons and given bread and water twice a day. The



Harry W. Lowe, 1965.  
From <http://www.adventisthistory.org.uk>.

cells were lined with black steel plates and measured about nine by five feet. The irons were shaped like a figure eight, hinged at one end. They were placed over the wrists held high in the middle of the back and then screwed tight at the other end of the iron. After eight daylight hours in irons it was extremely painful to bring the arms forward, and after several days of this was hard to sleep at night because of pain in arms and shoulders. One Friday morning I was by mistake marched out of camp to the docks with other prisoners, and about mid-afternoon I asked the nearest guard if I could tell the officer in charge that I could not work after sundown. I was informed that if I stopped work, I might start a riot, in which case there would be shooting, for which I should be held responsible. The guards after that for the next hour watched me closely. I waited till I had dumped a sack of wheat on the high pile in the hanger and then told the guard I could work no longer. Two guards drew their guns and hustled me round the corner outside the hanger, where the officer gave me a severe tongue lashing and I was escorted back to camp and placed in the cells<sup>6</sup>

The Adventist men always remained under armed guard. Some days they had to march to the docks in order to unload American Liberty ships bringing timber, grain, and military huts, items stacked for later shipment up the line<sup>7</sup>

The case of the Adventist men in Le Havre eventually came to the notice of senior officers, raising uncomfortable questions. On December 22, 1917, military authorities sent Lowe and the other Adventist men at Le Havre back to England and Wormwood Scrubbs prison.<sup>8</sup>

A hearing at the central tribunal released all the men both from the army and from prison and transferred them on to Knutsford Work Centre under a Home Office Scheme.<sup>9</sup> On January 1918 the British Union Conference Committee voted to protest to the War Office about the ill treatment of their young men in the military.<sup>10</sup> By July that same year, Lowe and the other Adventist men had been released back to civilian life.<sup>11</sup>

## Career and Life after the First World War

The South England Conference Session held in London September 4-8, 1919, elected Lowe as secretary of the Sabbath School and young people's department of the South England Conference.<sup>12</sup>

During April 28-May 9, 1921, Lowe and his wife together with some fellow Adventists from England, travelled to the Institute for Missionaries in Waterloo, Sierra Leone, West Africa.<sup>13</sup> The visit was part of an event held to discuss future plans and resolutions for the mission program in the West African Mission. During their stay, Lowe, together with some of his male colleagues, traveled by foot and bicycle to missions in the area to talk to the missionaries and locals. Despite struggling with the heat, they enjoyed their visit and the fresh fruit available in the area.<sup>14</sup>

After having served at the South England Conference for several years, Lowe received a new position. The European Division Winter Council on January 10-19, 1927, elected Lowe mission president for Portugal.<sup>15</sup> At the time, the Portuguese mission had four churches and 176 members.<sup>16</sup> Its office was located in Lisbon, Portugal.

In 1929 leadership summoned Lowe back to Britain to serve as the next president of the Welsh Mission.<sup>17</sup> One of the things that influenced him the most while in Wales was the immense poverty that he and his wife witnessed. During Christmas of 1931, after they visited many of the poor people, he appealed to church members to offer help.<sup>18</sup>

On March 25, 1932, *The Missionary Worker* announced that Lowe had received a call to do departmental work in the union.<sup>19</sup> Later that same year, on November 4, 1932, *The Missionary Worker* reported that he would assume leadership of the South England Conference.<sup>20</sup> In 1933 the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* listed him as the president of the South England Conference.<sup>21</sup>

Lowe remained as president until elected to serve in the home missions office of the Northern Europe Division;<sup>22</sup> a post he held until he became president of the British Union Conference in 1936.<sup>23</sup>

## The British Union Conference

Lowe served as president of the British Union Conference for 10 years until 1946.<sup>24</sup> Evangelism was one of his main goals while there. In 1938 he declared that while evangelism was doing well in Britain, he encouraged members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to increase their efforts.<sup>25</sup> In order to provide additional funding for evangelism, he encouraged members to donate a day's wages to evangelism as well as to sell church publications.<sup>26</sup>

Lowe was also passionate about supporting Adventist institutions. On August 4, 1939, he carried out the opening ceremony of the baby show, sale of work, and concert at Cassiobury Fair<sup>27</sup> to raise money for the Adventist Welfare and Maternity Hospital. It eventually brought in £30.<sup>28</sup>

## America and the General Conference

In 1947 Lowe left Britain to take up a position as associate secretary for the Sabbath School department at the General Conference.<sup>29</sup> He stayed in that role until he became the managing editor of *The Ministry Magazine* in 1960, a responsibility he held until 1963.<sup>30</sup> From 1964 until his retirement in 1971, Lowe served as a field secretary of the General Conference.<sup>31</sup> Lowe stayed in Washington, D. C., upon his retirement,<sup>32</sup> but later moved to California where he died on July 31, 1990.<sup>33</sup>

## Legacy

Harry W. Lowe leaves behind a legacy of dedication and faithfulness to his church and to God. During World War I he stood by his beliefs despite the consequence of prison and ill treatment. On returning to civilian life he went directly into working for the church which he continued to do until his retirement. During his life he held many different positions in the church and worked in three countries, always willing to serve where needed.

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### NOTES

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