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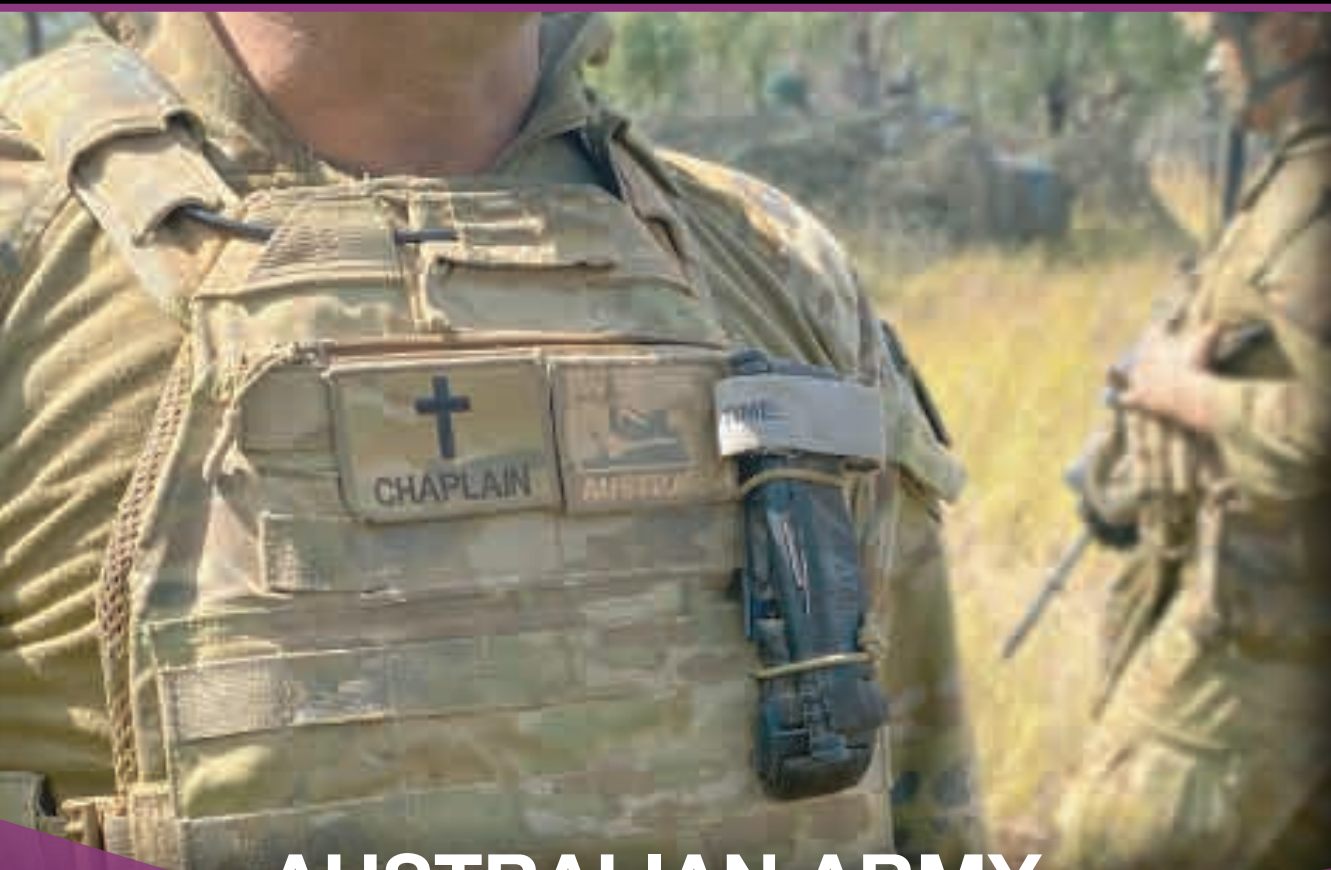

AUSTRALIAN ARMY CHAPLAINCY JOURNAL

FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT

JOURNAL OF THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN
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Royal Australian Army Chaplains Department

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Editorial - Fight the Good Fight

Chaplain Stephen Brooks, CSM

My mother was born in the mountains surrounding Innsbruck, Austria, spending much of her youth in Meran, *Sudtirol* during the time of the 2nd World War. So often is the case in war, civilians suffer the brunt of bloody conflicts, waking each day to an empty stomach and an uncertain future. Late in the conflict, following the invasion of Normandy and the break into Italy from the south, my mother found herself waiting at the train station in the Brenner Pass, when two US fighter planes hugging the terrain passed over. Fascinated by the spectacle she remained standing on the platform unaware of the pending danger. The planes rose quickly, circled, and then dived in for the kill, guns ablaze, bombs released, leaving behind a path of devastation, paved with the bodies of dead and broken civilians. Miraculously my mother was unharmed; it would take her many days to return home arriving on Christmas Eve starving and fearful of what lay ahead. The following morning she woke to the comforting sounds of church bells signalling the birth of the Saviour and her Christmas present, an orange!

When told of this story my heart sunk, and I immediately asked her;

> 'Mother, *after all you went through, weren't you disappointed?*'
> Shrugging, she smiled gently, her reply direct, yet profound.
> *'No, because I was still alive to enjoy it!'*

It would take me many years to finally understand the story's real significance. In that to be given an orange in the depths of winter, let alone 1944, was a rare and prized gift. For my Mother and the many who were facing a bleak and an uncertain future, the orange symbolised gold, a Christmas gift from St. Nicholas' for those in need. She would later tell me how what appeared to be a simple gift of an orange, provided her with great solace and the courage to stay alive; knowing that what it represented was worth fighting for; to live a good, hope filled life.

As we look around us today, some eighty years since that conflict, the focus for many appears to have shifted to building a super fund for a healthy retirement; amassing a property portfolio through negative gearing, or playing the stock market to cash in on supply and demand to name but a few wealth strategies. Whilst there is nothing wrong in prudently planning for the future, it is also worth reflecting on whether, in focusing on relative wealth, we may be overlooking what actually helps us overcome adversity and uncertainty.

This year's journal centres on the theme *fight the good fight*, but some amongst us may also ask; what exactly is *the good fight*, and if it is good, *is it worth fighting for?* Taking into account current regional and global geopolitical developments, where and how chaplaincy might be placed to assist in the fight is no longer a concept to mull over, rather a capability to be employed to achieve maximum effect. It is about understanding that which draws those called to serve to be where the need/fight is greatest.

The message is clear – the deep (spiritual) feelings and beliefs of a soldier profoundly influence their ability to prepare well, fight with conviction, and transition with dignity. How we support them can make the difference between defeat and success.

According to the Chief of Army: *'We are living in perhaps the most challenging era in generations. The time is now and it is up to us.'* Hence the need for chaplains to be prepared to fight tonight - but what does that equate to when wearing the purple?

The 2025 Journal provides an opportunity to unpack the support offered by chaplains within the Australian Defence Force (ADF) – a role which is not centred on the mechanics of unvetted hostilities but rather, the redeeming, transcending power of the human spirit in seeking meaning and purpose amidst the chaos.

The journal begins with an examination of the readiness of chaplains in the field; the place where the *'true measure'* of a Chaplain can be found. The lead article from Dr Grimmel sets the scene for chaplains in today's context, as he examines the work of some of the most experienced wartime military chaplains in Ukraine. The following articles give challenging accounts of what was expected of, and experienced by chaplains during the Boer War and 1st World War.

A chaplains' ability to fortify the spirit of the soldier on the battlefield lays at the heart of this year's journal. To remain authentic and avoid show boating, 7 Bde chaplains in their reflections align the power of the mustard seed – that which appears small and insignificant but when planted grows beyond expectation.

The journey for chaplains and for anyone seeking the good is not linked by one path or one conflict but rather the willingness to be authentic, accept adversity, and to overcome suffering and uncertainty with meaning and purpose. MAJGEN (Retired) Roger Noble best illustrates this in his reflection on finding *real world* resilience and the use of moral enquiry to navigate legal precedence. In attempting to fight the good fight, one must be prepared to shoulder the burden of consequence in the knowledge it was worth fighting for. Perhaps the greatest example of this is the recalling of the Holocaust and the ability of survivors to rise above hatred and suffering to live hope filled lives, so movingly captured in Judith Levitan-Sterling's article *80 years since the Auschwitz*.

The Journal concludes with a number of articles that examine the interoperability of chaplains with coalition forces, Key Religious Leader Community Engagement (KRLCE), and significantly, a paper responding to *Recommendation 78 of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide*, calling on the Department of Defence (DoD) and the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) to prevent, minimise, and treat moral injury (MI).

Herein lies a challenge for chaplains and all those who seek to fight the good fight, to keep the troops safe after the fight of the battlefield has long passed, in the knowledge it was worth fighting for.

Military Chaplaincy in Ukraine:

Defenders of Humanity

Dr. Jan Grimell

Dr. Jan Grimell, PhD. is Associate Professor and Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Umeå University and Research Fellow at Linnaeus University, Sweden. He is an Ordained Priest in the Church of Sweden and a former active-duty officer (currently in the Swedish Army Reserve). His research addresses military chaplaincy, military identity, moral injury, PTSD, and military pastoral/spiritual care among service members and veterans. By combining perspectives from social psychology, sociology of religion, and medical sociology, Jan creates a multifaceted research approach.

Abstract

This article covers the insights and lessons learned by Ukrainian Military Chaplains, detailing their supportive presence within military units and the essential role of confidentiality as a release valve for military personnel and their work in morality, ethics and character formation to preserve soldier's humanity and building resilience. The analysis also examines complex spiritual and existential challenges faced by Military Chaplains, the personal impacts of the war on them and their methods for sustaining spiritual resilience and well-being.

Findings highlight the critical, adaptable support that Military Chaplains provide to military personnel under extreme conditions, and they reveal how the wartime context has shaped their collaboration with mental health providers. The study also identifies desired qualities in wartime Military Chaplains and underscores the importance of church and religious organizations in supporting grieving families, and in facilitating social and charitable activities. This research provides unique insights into the chaplaincy work of some of the most experienced wartime Military Chaplains in Ukraine.

Keywords: Military Chaplaincy, Ukraine, War

Introduction

Military chaplaincy has gained renewed relevance in the wake of the intense and morally complex operations in which the Western world has been involved during recent decades in the war on terror (e.g. Iraq, Afghanistan, various regions in Africa and elsewhere). This resurgence is connected to a growing recognition that existential, spiritual and ethical aspects can significantly affect the mental health and well-being of military personnel and veterans.[1] This is especially evident in the growing body of research on moral conflicts and injuries among military personnel and veterans, and their strong connection to forgiveness-reconciliation-atonement strategies, both secular[2] and religious/spiritual.[3]

For centuries, Ukraine has been a multi-faith society. However, during the Soviet era (1922–1991), the regime was explicitly atheist, and many churches in Ukraine were closed or re-purposed as sports halls or meeting venues. After the fall of communism, religious life experienced a significant revival.[4] According to the Constitution of Ukraine, the church is separate from the state. This means that there is no official or dominant church in Ukraine, and all religious communities exist as equals with the same rights.[5]

Most Ukrainians identify as Christians (Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Roman Catholic or Protestant), while others identify as Muslim, Jewish or Jehovah's Witnesses.[6] It is important to emphasize the society's multi-faith character, as well as the equal rights and equality among religious communities.

The Ukrainian military chaplaincy has undergone a significant transformation from a voluntary, loosely organized service to a formalized, professionalized service within the Armed Forces of Ukraine. In the early 2000s, priests and deacons, primarily from Orthodox, Greek Catholic and Protestant traditions, offered educational services and pastoral care to military personnel, cadets and families on a voluntary basis.

Following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, these volunteer Military Chaplains (from here on MCs) began working directly on the front lines, providing support under unpredictable and challenging conditions. They moved among troops, sometimes for extended periods, without a defined set of guidelines, protections or formal military oversight. Despite these challenges, their presence provided critical pastoral care and moral support, highlighting the importance of having a structured military chaplaincy within the armed forces.[7]

As the war progressed, the demand for a more reliable and institutionalized chaplaincy became evident. The Ukrainian Parliament responded by passing a military chaplaincy law in late 2021, shortly before Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022.[8]

Purpose

A study was commissioned by the Swedish Armed Forces' Chief of Chaplains with the purpose of learning from MCs in Ukraine. The ambition was therefore to find participants who were as similar as possible to Swedish MCs but with extensive experience of serving as MCs in wartime.[9]

Method

This study employed a qualitative, interview-based approach, chosen for its suitability in capturing the complex lived experiences of Ukrainian MCs, a topic with limited prior qualitative research.[10] Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Swedish Ethical Review Authority.[11]

The study sample consisted of 12 male participants recruited through initial points of contact and *snowball sampling*.[12] The selection aimed to align as closely as possible with the characteristics of Swedish MCs,[13] with criteria prioritizing participants who had served as priests or pastors within Christian denominations and, ideally, who had experience dating back to the beginning of the war in 2014. If we sum up the participants' experience as (volunteer and professional) MCs in frontline units from 2014 to 2024, it amounts to approximately 94 years of military chaplaincy experience during wartime.

Participants received information about the study and interview questions. A semi-structured interview guide was used (see Table 1), allowing for relevant follow-up questions based on the responses.

Thematic analysis using an inductive approach[14] was conducted with Atlas.ti software. Initial coding involved marking and naming observations from the transcripts, resulting in 454 unique codes that captured a broad range of insights.

Analytical Themes of Chaplaincy Interviews[15]

- Background of the participants
- The development of military chaplaincy in Ukraine *(institutionalization and professionalism)*
- Main duties today
- What the MC does when the unit is not engaged in combat
- What the MC does when the unit is engaged in combat
- Work involving morality, ethics and character formation in war
- Availability and presence for military personnel
- The role of confidentiality in war
- Perceived spiritual/religious needs during war
- Questions and issues that military personnel bring to the MC in war
- How the MC is affected by the war
- How MCs maintain spiritual resilience during war
- Qualities of a good MC in war
- Wisdom about the implications of war on soldiers, society, theology, Bible usage, etc.
- The importance of church structures outside the armed forces during war

Table 1: Coding of Interview Data

Results

The results are presented according to the following eight main themes, through which several code families were merged under a common heading:

1. Serving through presence while providing a safe release valve for military personnel
2. Perceived spiritual and religious needs when facing the fragility of life
3. War-provoked thoughts and issues
4. Morality, ethics and character formation in war
5. Hard-won insights from the battlefield
6. Qualities of a good MC in war
7. How MCs are affected by war and maintain their spiritual capacity
8. Importance of church structures outside the armed forces during war



Serving through Presence while Providing a Safe Release Valve for Military Personnel

A consistent chorus of voices from the participants emphasized the importance of a pastoral approach that was deeply rooted in being present, available and visible for military personnel. Wherever they were, the MCs were there too, even at the front lines. Through presence, availability, visibility and thereby shared experiences, relationships, trust and cultural competence were established and deepened. This was a process that required time, continuity and commitment.

MC 5 (Orthodox), echoing the sentiments of the other participants, recounted:

> *It's about trust. If I come as an MC to a new unit and then get thrown into a situation, the chances of success are quite small. But the more I get to know the unit and trust is built, the greater the chance, because that's what it's all about – trust. If I am with them and experience the same things they experience, when we eat together from the same plate with a spoon, and sleep where they sleep, and lie and freeze together with them, after that, they will start talking to me, then they start believing in me. That's how it works. Trust has to be earned; it's not something you just get handed to you. And this is what then allows you to start the dialogue processes.*

This process also involved higher tactical (battalion and brigade) commanders. The relationship with them was perceived by many participants as important to their mission, but the rotation of commanders was high due to the war's context. This meant that MCs also needed to work on building trust with new commanders, so that the unit, at all levels, could make the most of having an MC.

Sometimes, participants would voluntarily help scout locations in the rear area of the front line, stack ammunition and dig trenches. They even cooked some food or prepared drinks for smaller units, among other tasks. This was a way to be useful, within certain limits, through their presence, while also, of course, building trust.

The importance of confidentiality or secrecy was linked to the ministry of presence; as military personnel were unlikely to open up to anyone they did not trust. Confidentiality was a thematic chorus of voices among the participants. It was described as a sort of release valve for emotions, experiences, actions and thoughts that military personnel did not want or could not share with their commanders, comrades, psychologists (who have a duty to report) or family members. All of this created, over time, a pressure (like a pressure cooker) that could be safely released in front of an MC bound by secrecy. A significant part of their mission was about listening and containment – a pastoral care of listening that was not necessarily aimed at providing answers, dissection, analysis or interpretation, but rather at facilitating release.

MC 4 (Orthodox) explained:

> *An MC has a very important role because, take just one example, maybe someone doesn't dare tell their comrades that they're scared, but to an MC, they dare to say they are scared. An MC learns a lot of things that soldiers don't tell anyone else; it can be other things, like infidelity, which they won't admit at home or to anyone else, but they will tell the chaplain. They might have criticism of their commanders, which they will tell the chaplain but not anyone else.*

MC 6 (Orthodox) recounted:

> *As an MC, I am some sort of release valve, for often soldiers come to me who are dissatisfied with their commanders, "Why the hell is he doing this and that" and "Why is he so harsh on us", and it is also part of my role to be a release valve for them, at times.*

MC 1 (Orthodox) on confidentiality in collaboration with psychologists:

> *Me and the psychologist have an agreement: if soldiers have secrets which cannot be said or revealed, then they go to me.*

MC 7 (Greek Catholic) recounted:

> *In my brigade, we have exercises with the psychological service aimed at determining when it is suitable for MCs to send personnel to a psychologist, and conversely, at helping psychologists understand when a person should talk to a military chaplain.*

This collaboration also illustrated another significant contrast: psychologists work with check lists and forms, while MCs base their pastoral care on a different ontology, epistemology and understanding of military personnel's spiritual reactions to extreme existential stress.

Perceived spiritual and religious needs when facing the fragility of life

The MCs perceived that religious and spiritual needs increased due to the war, even to the point where spirituality was renewed. However, this did not necessarily mean that there were no atheists in the trenches. Some MCs emphasized that they certainly existed. There were also military personnel who lost their faith, given the horrors they witnessed, just as there were those who found faith in this context. The reasons these needs were perceived to be increasing were multifaceted.

Religious rituals (e.g. prayer, blessing, confession, anointing, worship, communion, baptism, wedding, funeral) activated well-known religious and cultural scripts, creating a sense of stability – even ontological safety – by offering something greater in which to place one's life, if only briefly, during extreme existential stress when life could end at any moment.

MC 3 (Orthodox) recounted:

> *It has become clear that rituals are very important. Let me put it this way: in early 2014, I was there from the beginning, I remember the battles, not far from [a location], and there was a [commander] who said to me, "Hey, priest, what are you even doing here? What use are you, why do we need you here?" But then when the artillery started firing at them and they had to rush into the shelter, this officer said to me, "Hey, can't you bless us now?" Everyone becomes a believer in war, and everyone needs help.*

The fragility of life – the fact that one moment you exist, and the next you are gone – created the general existential backdrop in which military personnel found themselves, whether they wanted to or not. Prayer became a tool for preparation, pointing towards survival, reducing stress, managing fear and as a means to draw more strength and endurance. According to the MCs, beginning to believe in something greater had a similar effect.

MC 5 (Orthodox) explained:

> *Rituals are, of course, immensely significant. If nothing else, for the soldiers and officers fighting, life is fragile; you realize just how thin the thread is that it hangs on – one day you are alive, the next you could be dead. Therefore, prayer is regarded as preparation for battle and a way to deliver even better results.*

MC 8 (Greek Catholic) testified:

> *War is misery, that's just how it is, a terrible misery. Life changes completely; we live today, your comrades live, but suddenly someone is wounded, someone dies, everything can change in an instant. In war, I can certainly say that most people start to become more religious to gain more strength when it really matters.*

What the MCs expressed, both explicitly and implicitly, in their responses was that religion, faith and rituals – along with, of course, morality, ethics and character formation – had a combat-enhancing effect. They contributed to making military personnel more resilient to the trials they faced. Many found support, strength, appreciation and benefit from the work of the MCs in different ways, but not everyone became religious during the war. Participants stressed that it was particularly appreciated by military personnel when they were at the front line. One did not need to be religious to want an MC nearby.

MC 7 (Greek Catholic) recounted:

> *I may encounter military personnel who consider themselves atheists, but they don't mind having an MC close by; they might even think it's good to have one around.*

Military chaplains also provided advice to battalion and brigade commanders on religious and spiritual matters. An interesting phenomenon here was the so-called "spiritual assessment" that MCs could perform on a unit. Largely based on a combination of factors, such as troop morale, the leadership qualities of commanders – which significantly influenced morale – and the collective military chaplaincy experience that an MC possessed.

War's Mental, Emotional and Social Burden

The general complex of issues that the MCs encountered, and which formed the basis of their support to military personnel, could range from questions about killing, the military–civilian gap, fear, to theodicy-like problems (e.g. how can an all-powerful, good God allow all this suffering), and more.

MC 10 (Greek Catholic) summarized several questions he frequently encountered, which resonated with other participants:

> *Am I a murderer? Why don't those who don't fight understand me? How to survive the loss of brothers and the horrors of war? What about "Thou shalt not kill"? What God? Don't bring God into this. There is no God here, only hell. Will I go to hell because I kill people? I cannot sleep well. I can't go to combat any more; I am overcome by fear. We are cannon fodder.*

Other issues they encountered included situations involving excessive alcohol consumption, prostitution, infidelity and family problems. The latter should also be seen in the context of the full-scale war having been ongoing for about two and a half years at the time of the interviews; military personnel and their relatives were beginning to grow weary.

MC 6 (Orthodox) and several others expressed these kinds of challenges:

> *It sounds paradoxical, but the biggest problem soldiers face is family problems, not what happens right up there at the front, but family issues. Soldiers sort out for themselves whether the enemy attacks from the left or the right, or whatever they do, near-death experiences and such, they handle those things. But the problem is that many men have their wives and families, children abroad, and then the issue is that it's been going on for so long now – two and a half years – and some have met new men in other places. That is a huge problem, not a small one, and the longer it goes on, yes, it gets tricky.*

A war of attrition does not only occur militarily, at the Zero Line, between two military antagonists; attrition effects can also be seen between military personnel and their families. This meant that the MCs also acted as mediators, reaching out by phone or visiting in person, to address family issues or other relational military–civilian conflicts. Resolving these problems helped the service members to become more focused, motivated and effective soldiers.

Another aspect was the impact of the Russian Orthodox Church's alignment with Russia's war efforts, leading Ukraine to pass a law banning religious organizations tied to Moscow.[15]

Morality, Ethics and Character Formation in War

The participants stated that one of the most important aspects of their work – some even described it as their primary task – was to continuously and tirelessly focus on and emphasize the maintenance of morality, ethics and the formation of character during the war. Military personnel experienced and witnessed horrific, incomprehensible events and atrocities. The war deformed and changed people, dissolving existing norms and challenging perceptions of right and wrong. Moreover, the need to kill and injure in war fundamentally contradicts the moral compass instilled by a democratic society. Altogether, this creates conditions that erode the human aspect of military personnel, and is something which MCs must be constantly aware of and work at trying to counteract or address the inevitable moral injury that will occur among military personnel, families and communities.

MC 5 (Orthodox) shared the following insight:

> *War deforms people. Both for better and for worse. A person is not the same after the war as they were before. And one of the main tasks of MCs is to be vigilant so that military personnel do not change in a worse direction, becoming worse people, but remain human. It is very easy to become like an animal in war; it is very easy. Therefore, it is important for MCs to follow up and see if there are any tendencies for someone to become like a war animal. You have to be on your toes to prevent that. An MC must ensure that such a process is broken so that one remains a reasonable human being and does not become like a war animal.*

The definition of a “war animal”, for MCs, was someone who had lost their human qualities, including the capacity for rational behaviour and thinking. The participants emphasized that their work focused on preserving the individual humanity of military personnel, as well as upholding broader human ethics in the war, where human dignity was often challenged.

MC 8 (Greek Catholic) explained:

> *One of the MCs' key responsibilities is to support the combat morale, the morale of the troops, as well as ensuring that they retain their humanity and are not dehumanized.*

MC 10 (Greek Catholic) stated:

> *My mission is to ensure that the soldier can fulfil his human and professional potential and remain intact amid the challenges of military service [...] The chaplain is a defender of humanity in war.*

It is important to underline that this did not stand in contrast to the mission of defending one's country – fighting and killing – but ultimately it was about the fact that a soldier who lost their morality, ethics and character became reckless, lacking in judgment and dangerous to themselves, their comrades and their unit. Maintaining morality and character was about retaining one's human character and capacity as a soldier (e.g. pre-thought, planning, sound decision-making, the ability to feel emotions, judgment, motivation and the will to live) to win the war. This was not limited to soldiers but also extended to officers and the tactical level.

MC 8 (Greek Catholic) recounted:

> *An important task is to support the leadership of officers so that they understand the difficulties of making sensible decisions, how to act towards the enemy, and not to give in and lose the good ideals and ethical norms.*

Another important aspect was how military personnel should approach the enemy when they became prisoners, perhaps the same enemy who had killed or tried to kill comrades, fired upon families in the communities or committed violations against both military personnel and civilians. The feelings and desire for revenge could be palpable in such situations, but it was crucial to emphasize how such transgressions could affect the conscience, while also pointing out that it did not benefit Ukraine in any way to kill prisoners, given both the rules of war and the intelligence value prisoners could hold.

Military chaplains worked in several different ways with morality, ethics and character formation, for example, through dialogue and conversation, lessons, pastoral reflections that emphasized ethical aspects, reflection and exercises aimed at practising seeing the beautiful and positive (e.g. camaraderie, friendship, clear blue sky, music, little things) amid the darkness and destructiveness of war, thereby exercising the ability to feel positive, warm emotions and counteracting emptiness. This work was important, not only for preserving the human aspect of the warrior, but also for preventing highly undesirable changes during the war, such as military personnel shutting down their ability to feel or a kind of emotional emptiness emerging within themselves.

MC 4 (Orthodox) recounted:

> *In war, people often close themselves off, shut themselves out from their surroundings. It becomes like a trauma, and in the worst cases, this can lead to suicide.*

MC 1 (Orthodox) explained:

> *The biggest problem is the problem of hollowness when soldiers feel nothing.*

Once again, maintaining the human side of military personnel, in the experience of the MCs, contributed to becoming more resilient warriors. The work required the MCs to have the courage to address issues that challenged morality, ethics and character.

President Zelenskyy has publicly thanked MCs for providing spiritual strength amidst the conflict saying:

> "*I thank you for your service, for being with the soldiers during this year of full-scale war. You supported them spiritually, supported their families [and] in my opinion, the most important thing is that we have you."*[16]

Hard-Won Insights from the Battlefield

This section shines a particular spotlight on, among other things, the importance of acknowledging pastoral limitations, the need for a narrative and the challenges of healing inner wounds.

MC 12 (Protestant) summarized much of what was said in the following pastoral theological manner:

> *Learn the life of a soldier, eat what they eat, sleep where they sleep, acquire military experience, learn the day-to-day life within a military unit. Add all of this to your spiritual and biblical background. Then be prepared to not be able to help, to feel helpless, when you do real wartime counselling, because you will talk to people whose eyes have seen things you have never seen. Pray to God to give you spirited words that can heal this person's emotional and psychic wounds. Talk to the medics when there is a psychiatric case. Acquire experience, grow in it, practice, practice, practice.*

The problem of theodicy was relatively simple to address with comments such as, "It is humans who start wars, not God; people kill people", and so on. However, pastoral care often did not explicitly involve discussions about faith or God, although that could certainly happen. Most pastoral care was about being a fellow human being: listening, supporting, being available, encouraging, helping, crying together, laughing together, being afraid together or giving a hug. Additionally, frontline units were under such intense pressure that military personnel did not have much energy or time to talk. Military chaplains could then be there as a listening companion at post exchanges, ammunition depots or similar places.

Another interesting observation was related to the narrative expressed among the participants when they encountered, for instance, newly mobilized soldiers who were scared, sad, crying or resigned. The recurring narrative was that the future rested on the soldiers' shoulders; they were the defenders of the country, protectors of civilians and the next generation. In this regard, which has also been mentioned earlier, this served as a form of mobilizing and motivating activity.

MC 1 (Orthodox) recounted:

> *And the future of Ukraine also depends on those weapons in their hands. These types of conversations with military personnel happen frequently because they need to understand that everything depends on them, from small actions to the future.*

Another important insight was linked to the growing veteran population that had existed since 2014. Much of the work, more pronounced among some MCs, gravitated towards different types of veteran support. A closely related insight was the difficulty and slowness of the healing process for veterans who had suffered an inner spiritual wound, which recent research terms "moral injury"[17] or spiritual injury.[18]

MC 1 (Orthodox) spoke of this in metaphorical terms, describing it as a type of spiritual dryness or desert:

> *I have known this veteran for many years. He feels nothing but hatred in his heart. Hatred towards the Russians for those they have killed, both civilians and brothers in arms. I would call it spiritual dryness, like in a desert where there is no rain at all.*

This dominant feeling had a hard time loosening its paralysing grip on the veteran's self. This was perhaps not surprising, as the full-scale war was still in full force during the interview phase.

Qualities of a Good Military Chaplain in War

The participants believed that becoming a skilled MC in wartime could not be achieved through study alone; it required hands-on experience in real-life situations. Training focused on "doing, not just reading about it". A younger MC noted that Ukraine has some of the world's most experienced wartime MCs, emphasizing the need for a mentoring system where senior colleagues could guide and support the less experienced.

The fundamental role of an MC is to be present and available for military personnel, providing support within the framework of the existing mandate while establishing trust. They should develop strong communication skills, engaging both vertically (with commanders at all levels) and horizontally (interacting with individuals from diverse backgrounds, both religious and non-religious). It is important to avoid interfering in processes outside their scope and to remain neutral between commanders and troops, listening without taking sides. A high degree of flexibility and adaptability was also emphasized as important. Finally, MCs should not become a burden to their unit; they must ensure they can take care of themselves.

MC 9 (Greek Catholic) summarized several of these thoughts:

> *Mobility, communication, provision and spirituality. In this situation, you have to get used to motion, you have to move, and that means physically but also mentally, because the situation is very dynamic. Communication is the most important skill; you have to find a language, because, once again, during war you have different social representatives from different social groups, so you have to find a proper language. When you come to a unit, you have to understand who is there, and then you have to adjust your language to address people. Communication involves several skills; of course, it's about listening, but it's also about storytelling.*

Additionally, MC 8 (Greek Catholic) emphasized the importance of spiritual robustness:

> *I have only one crucial advice, and that is spiritual robustness. It is very challenging to be an MC in a war; you have to take care of the wounded, and remember that we only get 30 days off from the front, so it is tough. Therefore, you must have spiritual robustness.*

Spiritual robustness was akin to what other participants described as resilient faith, being rooted in one's faith and priestly identity.

How Military Chaplains are Affected by War and Maintain their Spiritual Capacity

A chorus of voices from the participants testified that they had changed significantly in many ways due to the war. Many had been engaged as MCs since the war began in 2014. Colleagues, friends and even relatives had died during the war. Many MCs had fallen, that is, been killed during the war (a number that far exceeds the Swedish death toll during the Afghanistan conflict),[19] and even more had been injured. Many testified that they were tired.

MC 3 (Orthodox) recounted:

> *I am an ordinary person, and I also get tired and exhausted, and since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the workload has increased tremendously.*

The fallen (i.e. dead) and injured colleagues, a shortage of MCs and the formation of new units also meant an increased workload for the existing MCs.

Participants noted that one ritual was particularly emotionally draining, namely, funerals.

MC 1 (Orthodox) recounted:

> *The heaviest and hardest thing is to lay young servicemen with children and wives to rest. You must understand that they have taken away the most precious thing.*

MC 6 (Orthodox) testified:

> *Take, for example, regular funerals, which I'm used to as a priest. But in this war context, it's entirely different, with family members and children participating, and there I stand, holding back tears myself. I can admit that in other funeral contexts I don't cry, but here, the emotional intensity is so high that it's hard not to be affected.*

The MCs' extensive experience with grief and funeral rites as priests became crucial tools in these situations, as did their ability to create a sense of dignity and provide interpretive keys through rituals, Bible stories and narratives, prayers, eulogies, farewells and blessings.

Participants unanimously agreed that taking care of oneself and leading a healthy lifestyle (e.g. avoiding alcohol, establishing good routines with sleep, exercise, and religious and spiritual activities) were essential for maintaining their capacity. They emphasized that it was especially important to sustain their spiritual resilience, not least through prayer, confession, Bible reading, worship and retreats.

MC 9 (Greek Catholic) outlined a range of activities that resonated with other participants:

> *I have my own set of strategies developed years ago which have been effective for me. It is the meditation or spiritual exercises from my Catholic spiritual tradition, the Ignatian tradition, and spiritual meditation and reflection on what is going on. Plus, I must mention an important exercise for me: writing. Plenty of writing. You analyse and distance yourself from your general object, your pain, so you understand that you are more than your pain. This helps a lot – reflecting and writing about your feelings, writing about your experiences, trying to verbalize your experiences helps a lot. Second is physical exercise, which is important on a physiological level. Number three, that's the books I read – books that inspire and help, especially during these times. And number four, that's the music I listen to, which is also important, something that inspires you. And number five is friends – friendship is one of the greatest healing powers in our human world, communication with friends.*

The opportunity for confession was also articulated as important by participants. However, some felt they did not have the chance to confess to the confessor they would have preferred, as these were often civilian priests who could not easily reach the front line. Family retreats and retreats in general were also important for recovery, not least because MCs were away just as much as military personnel.

MC 11 (Protestant) recounted:

> *We organized a multi-day family retreat for chaplains, which many couples were able to attend. It was a wonderful time of respite, both spiritual and physical, and helped restore healthy relationships within their families.*

No one expressed that their theological views had changed because of the war, except that they had become more practical, pragmatic, and ritually and liturgically applied. Additionally, many MCs had gained combat experience from being at the front line and had become desensitized to risks after ten years on the battlefield.

MC 6 (Orthodox) recounted:

> *In 2014, we were terrified and uncertain, and now we have much worse situations, but we have adapted. So yesterday, when I was driving away from the front line, and there was shooting here and there, I just said, "It's fine, let's keep going". So, I can safely say that I and we have developed a certain level of combat experience.*

Another experience articulated by some MCs was the gap between military and civilian everyday realities, even amidst full-scale war. Since normal civilian life continued in the cities, they felt alone when they returned home, estranged from civilian life and the changes that constantly occurred, for example, in Kyiv.

Importance of Church Structures Outside the Armed Forces During War

Churches and religious communities played an essential role in providing the Armed Forces of Ukraine with suitable MC candidates and ensuring their spiritual formation, MC gatherings, training and retreats, among other activities. In addition, there was a broad and very important social and charitable effort among churches and religious communities that also reflected the professional MCs' main tasks. This could involve

sending clothes, sleeping bags, equipment, supplies, food and greetings from families and children – collected by churches and communities – to military personnel at the front or in other locations.

MC 11 (Protestant) recounted:

> *I have recently prepared and sent dozens of parcels to the front for soldiers with whom we have a relationship, as well as for the brothers from our church who are now at war.*

There was an essential interaction between professional and volunteer MCs in the social and charitable work that was vital for military personnel, their families and the religious communities. Many families whose fathers, husbands and sons were at the front belonged to congregations and religious communities, which is why much of their work was shaped by the war. Churches and religious communities adapted their activities, which became significantly influenced by the war.

As a result, prayers, intercessory prayer, sermons, blessings and hymns (e.g. the Anthem of Ukraine) were adapted to the wartime reality that had affected the country, families and relatives, both in the actual congregational life and online. Many parents had lost their sons, many wives had become widows, and many children had lost their fathers. Essential activities included grief support groups, various grief projects, pilgrimages and marches for the fallen (i.e. dead soldiers), involving women, men, families and other relatives. Work with veterans and caring for veterans was also an important aspect of the communities' activities.

MC 1 (Orthodox) recounted:

> *Older veterans sometimes need supplies, and I pass by their apartments and provide them with supplies. And sometimes they are very worried about the future, and once again, I come by and say, "please don't worry, everything will be okay, we will find you a job, we'll take care of you". Another important thing I ask them is, "please do not close yourself off, and never stay silent". God taught us to bear the weights of each other, to share. And of course, we try to convince the veterans and make them believe that we never forget them for their deeds, for what they have done for us.*

This work within churches and communities encompassed religious worship, various group activities, social and charitable initiatives, as well as pastoral care for veterans and their families.

In Summary

Overall, the research highlights the multifaceted role of the Church and MCs in war. A war that has subjected people to the most profound ethical, moral, spiritual, and existential trials. A realm where questions of right and wrong, life and death, meaning and despair have been an undeniable reality. Amid this chaos, MCs on the front lines and elsewhere have played a crucial role, providing ethical guidance, emotional support, pastoral and spiritual care, as well as resilience-building practices among military personnel and the wider community who face the brutal realities of war every day.

While the Military Chaplaincy Service of the Armed Forces of Ukraine is likely the world's newest professionalized chaplaincy structure, including many recently appointed MCs, it also comprises some of the most experienced wartime MCs alive today.



Figure: 1 Military Chaplaincy in Ukraine

Personal Reflections: The Uncertainty of War, Humour, Surrealism, and the Understanding of Wartime Chaplaincy

There is an immense amount to say from a personal, reflective perspective based on this study, but I would like to highlight four thoughts that are particularly significant to me.

As I have already described, conducting interviews with frontline MCs was understandably difficult. It often took a long time before they responded—sometimes they replied relatively quickly, but then they would suddenly go silent for extended periods. During those times, I had no way of knowing whether they had been injured or even killed. This sense of uncertainty and worry is something that families and loved ones live with constantly. It must be incredibly draining and, in itself, create a profound need for pastoral and spiritual support and care.

Despite the fact that many of the participants had served as volunteer MCs since the outbreak of war in 2014—several even before that—they remained deeply humble during the interviews, despite their vast experience. The conversations were marked by humility, warmth, gratitude for our interest in their experiences, and humour, despite everything they had been through and the situation they were in. I asked one of the participants what 'humour and a smile' meant to him, and he replied that they were incredibly important. A smile, he said, is a way to communicate faith, to trust in God, and it helps the soldiers feel more at ease. The smile and humour—even when everything ultimately

revolved around life and death—can be understood as a way to cope with, and not be entirely consumed by, the brutality, darkness, and destructiveness of war. As long as humour remains, the human spirit is still alive.

Throughout the period of interviews, some participants joined the interview directly after combat with their units or were about to head to the front line; at other times, they were on their way to an ammunition depot or a similar location to prepare for battle. At one point, a participant began by stating the number of dead and wounded in their battalion—a figure that was high. Others shared how many of their fellow MCs had died or had been injured in the war. Conducting online interviews from peaceful Sweden and hearing all of this front line detail was an almost surreal experience—unreal. Transferring the potential impact of this from Ukraine to a Swedish context was a staggering and sobering thought.

These reflections tie into my final point: how the interviews have strengthened my understanding of the role of military chaplaincy. Recognising the stresses of war on the human soul, MCs create space for military personnel to process and interpret their experiences, reconnect with their moral and spiritual identity, and maintain operational effectiveness.[20] In full-scale war, when an entire nation's existence is at stake, military chaplaincy is ultimately about using every available means to support and assist military personnel in maintaining both their human and professional capacities to endure combat and battle.

Conclusion: The Greater Need for MCs during War than We Realize

A full-scale war, such as the one in Ukraine, dissolves the norms, values, and everyday realities that characterize a society at peace. The social order is overturned. The struggle is existential—one of life and death—both on an individual level and a societal level. People die, and the victor defines the social system, ideology, and culture that will prevail once the war ends. A full-scale war is therefore profoundly existential, not pathological or medical.

This is why MCs are needed to a greater extent than we might assume—to address the existential challenges that arise. In previous deployment paradigms, such as those in Afghanistan and elsewhere, we have begun to understand the significance of MCs before, during, and after operations. However, these contexts still represent relatively limited periods and situations where the deploying nations remain at peace, far from the conflict zone. The study on MCs in Ukraine highlights the vast existential challenges posed by full-scale war, alongside the dissolution of norms and values, which can lead to a downward spiral where the "war animal" takes shape.

MCs can therefore be understood—and describe themselves—as defenders of humanity. Their role extends far beyond providing religious rituals or spiritual care. MCs protect military personnel from losing their humanity in a situation that constantly threatens to erode it. Since the entire nation is engulfed in war, with all the hardships, trials, and death that come with it, religious and ecclesiastical institutions outside the military context also become crucial support structures for both individuals and society at large. Professional MCs, clergy and volunteer personnel from religious communities should therefore be seen as two complementary functions in a full-scale war.

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Photo on page 12: Ukrainian orthodox priest, Father Pavl, deployed on Operation KUDU conducts a Sunday service during the first rotation of Operation Kudu in the United Kingdom. In January 2023, a contingent of up to 70 ADF personnel joined partner nations in a UK-led and based training programme for Ukrainian recruits and chaplains in the United Kingdom. (Photographer: CPL Jonathan Goedhart) http://images.defence.gov.au/S20230507

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An Historic Failing of Army Chaplaincy: Boer War

War Impressions - Religion in the Field

Mortimer Menpes

Mortimer Luddington Menpes (22 February 1855 – 1 April 1938) was an Australian-born painter, author, printmaker and illustrator. Born and raised in Port Adelaide, South Australia, Menpes migrated with his family to London, England in his early 20s, where he went on to study at the School of Art and exhibit at the Royal Academy. Menpes travelled to Japan and went further abroad for artistic inspiration. Over the next two decades he went to India, China, Kashmir, and Myanmar, among other countries. He also went to South Africa as a war artist during the Boer War.

Abstract

In his book 'War Impressions' published in April 1901 by A. & C. Black, Mortimer Menpes reflects on numerous observations of Commonwealth Army Chaplains during the Boer War who in his opinion, failed to engage with the troops in a meaningful way.

In Chapter XII: '*Religion in the Field'* Menpes laments the inadequate quality, training and character of the clergy who served during the Boer War. He notes that chaplains are human - describing the good, the bad and indifferent; from the dull and timid chaplain to the popular clergyman; there were those who were unable to move from their post to those who were totally self-obsessed. Two short anecdotes on an economical and sporty chaplain gave him particular cause for reflection.

What Menpes regrets is that officers and men alike sought a chaplain who would engage with the troops. *"The type of chaplain who took their work with them wherever they went, who had the strength of character never to deny it – who could win their way and be loved because of their work"*. Yes, there were great opportunities for chaplains to engage the hearts and minds of those they were called to serve, but sadly most appeared to miss them.

Whilst confronting, this article seeks to address the importance of chaplaincy in the field, especially given the current Australian Defence Force's call to readiness. Recent military exercises have called chaplains to prioritise 'field work' as their main effort; to be open to greater scrutiny, to be trained in field craft and to be mentored in their pastoral care and spiritual readiness on exercise and deployment. As the article suggests the true measure of a chaplain is laid bare in the field.

Key Words: Chaplain, character, models of ministry, reflect, religion, spiritual, sport, war

Introduction

Religion seems rather a quaint subject for an artist to take up; but I suppose parsons are human beings like the rest of us, and I don't think that as human beings they "panned out" particularly well (during the Boer War).

In speaking of the Church, I am speaking of it from the standpoint of the ordinary outsider, who has seen and studied the clergyman on the field under every possible condition, and therefore it is as the ordinary outsider that I feel perfectly justified in expressing my views concerning them. It appeared to me that never in this world had such an opportunity presented itself for the right man as during this war in South Africa. Unfortunately, the right man was not there; opportunity after opportunity passed neglected.



Lord Roberts and staff watching the Battle of Osfontein by Mortimer Menpes

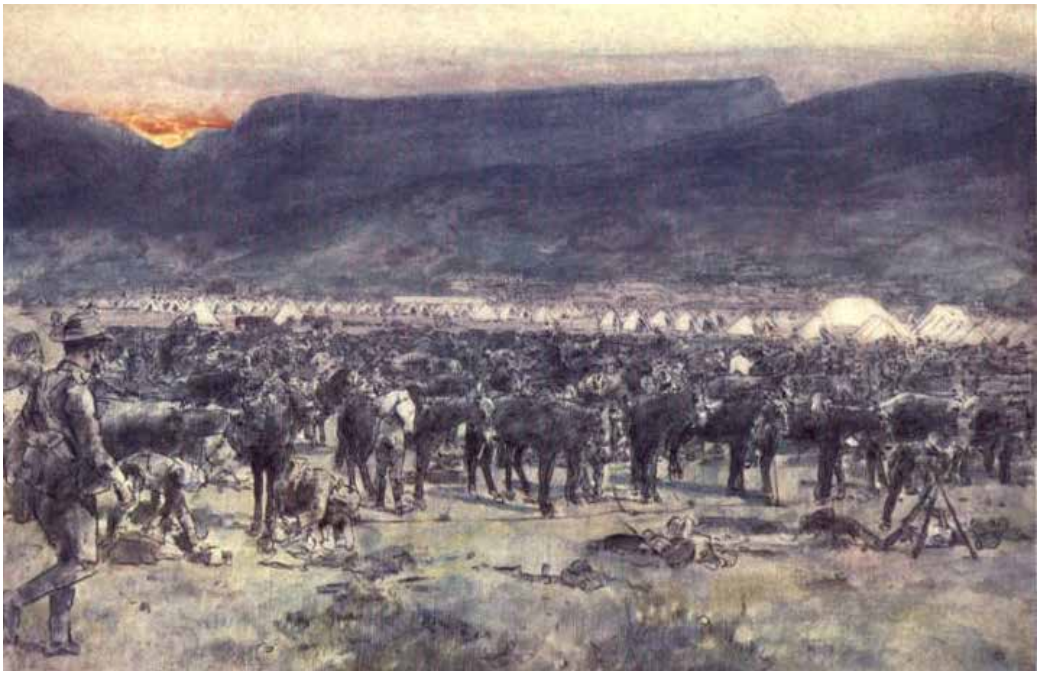
Take for example, a great battle, whether it resulted in reverse or in victory. Many men have been lost; all have passed through a great excitement; all are humbled, softened, more or less susceptible to spiritual influence. Then is the time for a great preacher to arise and with his "magnetic personality" and simple lessons to soothe and win over to his cause that earnest saddened audience of soldiers, to find an echo in thousands of hearts that will reverberate to the ends of their lives.

It was a cause of real regret, to officers and men and correspondents alike, that not one single chaplain in the field seemed to realise on these subtle occasions the splendid opportunities that were presented for good. People often said to me, when talking of these clergymen, "But surely they are good men?" Of course they were good, as good as they were dull; but they were not good preachers, and after all, to an outsider this is rather an important thing.

All that I complain of is that they were men of no magnetism, no strong personality, and without the least capacity to impress themselves and their doctrines upon the people by whom they were surrounded. They were men, doubtless, of spotless lives, but of equally spotless emptiness, mere empty goodness; and is there anything more futile in this wide world?

I maintain that this was wrong. The very best men of the day should have been chosen for this most striking religious work of the nineteenth century. There are dozens of these men in London – fancy Dean Farrar, or the present Bishop of Durham – think of the good they could have done in South Africa!

It seemed to me that there had not been sufficient pains taken to pick out exactly the right kind of man for this special work. Some of the best men and some of the most charming I have known have been clergymen; but they have also been human beings, living, palpitating human beings, full of worldly knowledge and magnetic manliness. And these are the qualities that are needed in a chaplain in time of war. It seems to me that, just as the best Generals, the best doctors, and the best nurses were sent to the front, so should the very best clergymen that the Church possesses have been dispatched.



Camp near Cape Town by Mortimer Menpes

The Dull, Timid and Popular Chaplain

During my stay in South Africa, I had the opportunity of studying many different types. There was the clergyman who always got up and gave the same dull uninteresting sermon, with rather an educated accent, and was sneered at accordingly. Then there was the timid, nervous minister who would go up to a crowd of Tommies on the veldt just at their busiest moment and of course be cold-shouldered by them – they knew what was coming and resented being interfered with. Again, there was his opposite – the popular clergyman, popular because he laid down his work and talked to the soldiers as to equals; yet he too was worthless.

Another type, in my opinion the worst of all, because it was the weakest, was the man who makes no impression upon his fellow-men at all – nothing more than a flickering spirit passing on his way unloved and unregarded through great masses of human lives. Happily, this species of clergyman is rare.

The Quartermaster – Sergeant's Chaplain

Let me relate what I once saw of a Methodist minister at the front. He was a feeble... man, and interested me because he never did anything but sit on his food. Although I was brought in constant touch with him day after day – I saw him in the morning, I saw him in the afternoon, I saw him at night – I always saw him within fifty yards of a wagon to which he was more or less attached, either sitting by the side of it on a biscuit tin, or, inside, perched on the top of a pile of Maconochie rations. There seemed no excuse for this person being at the front at all. He rode in state on the food wagon while everyone else walked. He slept under shelter when the officers had no more than a blanket. He never by any chance talked to the soldiers. He was unrespected, sneered at, pitied, by all.

In fact, he was so much unnecessary baggage occupying precious space. The only excuse we could find for him was that he served as a landmark, a timepiece, - what you will. Whenever we saw him roll himself up and slip off the cart like a seal, and begin pottering about with a tripod, we knew it was time for a meal, as he was considered an authority on such matters. This interested me; in the midst of the labour and strain of that historical march on Bloemfontein it fascinated me to watch the career of this feeble solitary person – to watch him slide off the wagon four times a day, cook his coffee, and clamber back to his seat on the Maconochie once more.



Boer Children by Mortimer Menpes 1901

I tried to think that he was training for some special work, or that he was seeing life; and he grew to be such a familiar figure that one day I boldly asked him why he was there – whether it was an idea of his own or curiosity had led him to the front. “Do you like the life here?” I asked him. “No,” he said; “O no.” “Well, why do you sit here?” “O, well, they say that sometimes it is difficult to find your way on the veldt, and I never stray far from the wagon because I am attached to the Quartermaster-Sergeant and he looks after my rations.” It exasperated me to think this person too much occupied with sitting on his food and eating to have time to look about him, and see the myriads of missed opportunities for doing good that there were gathered round his little cart. If he had stood up on one of his Maconochie times and talked to the few Tommies in his immediate vicinity, even in the most meagre language, he would have done some good. Tommy is a splendid fellow, with a great respect for his religious teachers; but this gentleman did not even try to convert me, although, I am sure, he had every chance of doing so.

The Self-Obsessed Chaplain

There was another type of minister I was continually meeting, who reminded me in many respects of the correspondents. He was fond of advertisement. His one craze was to be noticed – to be sketched or to be written about. If he talked to you, it was always in connection with himself. In common with the correspondents, he was always running grave and foolhardy risks.

There was one story of his that always wrought up the audience to a high pitch of excitement; it affected myself considerably. He described a great battle. The atmosphere was charged with bullets when he, at the critical moment, ran straight into the chaplain on the side of the enemy. He invariably finished by saying, *“And think of us two God-fearing men fighting face to face all through the campaign and neither of us knowing it!”* I think this was the narrowest-minded man I have ever met. He was a Nonconformist. I remember seeing him on one occasion sitting on a rock just outside Bloemfontein mending the knees in his trousers. He was doing it in a public way, as if to point out to all the world that he – a minister – wore out his clothes in an unusual place – the knee. As I paused, I called out to him, *“Hullo! That seems suggestive!”* He seemed pleased, and called back, *“Yes: that’s where I wear them out.”*

The Economical Chaplain

Of course, there was always the economical type of minister. I travelled in a train once with a gentleman who gave us the impression of being amazingly economical. He was a Wesleyan parson, and was carrying with him a large clothes-basket of fruit given to him as a present to distribute among the soldiers at the front. He occupied a whole compartment to himself- ministers generally have that privilege, I notice; - and he suggested to us one day that it would be rather a good plan for us all to share any food we had and eat together. We agreed, and the first meal turned out an utter failure. Religion produced two apples and one bunch of grapes; while we had to supply the meat, bread, butter, and wine – all food brought from Cape Town, which was considered a great luxury. The minister, as we found out to our cost, was an enormous eater: in fact, he ate as much as the rest of us put together. Just as we were half through our meal the train drew up at a

station where I bought sixpenny worth of Muscatel grapes and placed them in the middle of the table. The minister immediately pounced on upon them and ate half. I never saw a man gorge as he did. At the end of the meal, while we were all laughing and talking, he carefully picked up the bunch of grapes and the two apples, placed them cosily in a bag, and without a word drifted into his own compartment. He came gaily in again in the evening, with his apples and his bunch of grapes, and declared very joyously that he had come to dine; but we were not felling hungry, and thought we could dispense with the presence of this good gentleman at any future meal.

The Sporty Chaplain

There is a type of clergyman whom, whilst you admire him as a man, you do not think of associating with the Church. That is the sporting clergyman. He is much more popular than the other clergy, because he lays down his work and is just a good fellow. He can sing a comic song; he can tell stories; he can even dance a skit dance on emergency; and he is the life and soul of any party he goes to. All this because he does not preach- because he is not what they call a "damper." If he goes up to a group of men who are telling funny stories, his presence has not the effect of cleansing the atmosphere or checking the mirth, but rather of making things a shade funnier.

The Chaplain who takes their work with them

What we want is the type of man who takes his work with him wherever he goes, and has the strength never to deny it – who wins his way and is loved because of his work, but such a man was not sent out to South Africa, for I neither met him with Lord Robert's column nor did I ever hear of his being anywhere else. It was not just the Anglican clergy who were amiss. The Nonconformist ministers appeared as a rule seemed to be just as incapable and as inadequate. Only the Roman clergy won universal applause, as indeed they do in every part of the world.

Conclusion

During all the months that I spent in South Africa I never met one clergyman who made me stop and reflect for one moment. We were all just in the condition to receive good impressions at that time. Whether it was the influence of the veldt or the terrible scenes that went on around us, I know not; but every man among us was softened and at his best. One felt to a certain extent that the animal side had been crushed. If there ever was a hope of kindling the spiritual side of our natures, that was the moment. The way Tommy talked of his home, the way he talked of his pals, talked of his wife, was all clean and fresh; Tommy was a better man than he is in London, and might have been taught many lessons which he would probably never have forgotten. But I am bound to say that the chaplains at the front, whether they were Anglicans or Nonconformists, appeared to me to exercise but little influence over the men among whom they were supposed to minister.

One of the things that amazed me most in South Africa – was the deep religious feelings of the enemy, and the simultaneous singing of hymns by different commandos. Religion is to them a habit of life, a daily influence; and I could not help thinking of the difference between these psalm-singing Boers and our own men. I never heard an English Tommy singing a hymn either by himself or in the company of others. I never heard any reference to religious matters among the officers or among the men. I can't say that I particularly expected it; yet when actually on the field one seemed specially to notice its glaring absence among English troops. Curiously enough, I would hear a Presbyterian Scotsman bemoaning that he had to fight against a people who were "*so God-fearing*" as the Boers, or a General remarking that he wished to goodness he had this psalm-singing element among his own men, and declaring that with that additional force they would be invincible; but I never heard either a private or an officer talk of a single sermon he had heard during the war.

They all flocked to hear Miss Fraser sing. She filled the church with soldiers. If there had been a Mr. Fraser to preach such sermons – a Dean Farrar with a strong magnetic personality who could get up and hypnotise a crowd! Such is the type of chaplain we want attached to the army – men magnetic as well as brave, men chosen because of their brilliancy as well as for their goodness – just, in short, the dying man speaking to dying men, whom one would wish to meet in the stress and agony of the battle-field, but whom unfortunately, so far as my own experience goes, one never does by any chance encounter at such a time and in such a place.



Self Portrait by Mortimer Menpes
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‘Fighting Mac’ McKenzie: WWI

A Devotion to Duty

Daniel Reynaud

Daniel Reynaud has published widely on the Anzacs and religion. In addition to many articles, Daniel Reynaud’s books include: *The Man the Anzacs Revered* (2015), a biography of William McKenzie*, Anzac Spirituality* (2018), and *The Anzacs, Religion and God* (2019). He authored and co-presented a series of award winning documentaries titled *Faith of the Anzacs,* including an episode on Fighting Mac. *He is Emeritus Professor at Avondale University, NSW, and was inaugural Visiting Historian at the Anzac Memorial, Hyde Park, Sydney.*

Abstract

William McKenzie was arguably one of the most diligent chaplains of the Australian Imperial Forces during World War One. Chaplaincy circumstances were different to those of modern times, yet some principles remain the same. This article explores features of McKenzie’s personal qualities and professional behaviour that made his chaplaincy so influential, while also noting aspects that cut short his service. It seeks to apply principles that remain relevant today.

Key Words: ANZAC, Chaplain, Fighting Mac, Salvation Army

It may come as some surprise, even to those in the Chaplaincy Corps who understand the value of the work it does, that one of the most popular Anzacs of the Great War, according to the soldiers, was actually a chaplain. Despite the reputation of the diggers as being *“not religious,”* a contention made by a string of military historians, the fact is that one chaplain was feted by the soldiers, and by Australians at home, as perhaps the most famous of them all.[1] This man was William ‘Fighting Mac’ McKenzie, who served as the 4th Battalion chaplain from 1914 to late 1917, before being invalided home to a hero’s reception in early 1918. What makes this stunning is that McKenzie publicly spoke against the bad language, the betting, the booze and the brothels that formed a staple of the stereotypical larrikin diggers’ chief entertainments, and he forcefully appealed to them to turn their lives around. One would expect this behaviour to have consigned him to the ignominious category of ‘wowser’, almost the worst insult that could be bestowed on an Australian of the era. Instead, McKenzie overcame all his inherent and acquired disadvantages to be acclaimed, in the words of one soldier writing home, as *“the Daddy of the lot in the A.I.F.,”* winning *“undying popularity”* with the soldiers.[2] What was it about this extraordinary man that so transformed the soldiers’ opinion? And can anything be learnt from it for today?

McKenzie volunteered for a chaplaincy position as soon as he heard of the declaration of war in August 1914 and was appointed to the 1st Brigade and attached to the 4th Battalion in mid-September. For the previous twenty-four years, he had served as a Salvation Army Officer in some of the toughest towns in Australia, learning by dint of experience how to connect with working-class men in particular. His great size and strength and dynamic personality added gravity to his efforts, especially in the face of opponents not afraid to use force against him. He met this with non-violent resistance without being in any way deterred from his mission. Using humour to disarm attacks, he captured the moral high ground and often left his opponents baffled, if not charmed.[3]



LTCOL William McKenzie, MC, OBE. a.k.a *"Fighting Mac"*, was appointed a Military Chaplain in 1914 - WW1. McKenzie was one of the first chaplains ashore at Gallipoli. He is pictured here in 1918, in an autographed photo quoting the Salvation Army motto: *"Yours in the blood & fire."*

The formal establishment of Army chaplaincy was of very recent creation, its mechanisms only finalised in 1913, where the four main denominations (Anglican, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian and Methodist) were given control over the appointment of chaplains from their faiths, to be distributed among the battalions on a proportion roughly equal to the 1911 census data on religious profession in Australia. McKenzie represented the category later formalised as Other Protestant Denominations (OPD), catering for small faith groups such as the Congregationalists, Churches of Christ, Baptists and The Salvation Army.[4]

The official duties of a chaplain were two in number: to lead the compulsory Church Parades on a Sunday and to conduct burials. Apart from that, there was no job description, no training and no adequate support system in place for the chaplains. There were, of course, many unofficial duties such as running voluntary services and religious activities, organising sports, sing songs, concerts, lectures, cinemas and other wholesome diversions, censoring mail and attending to the welfare of the men through running canteens, liaising with their families at home and supporting the social life of the battalion.

Most chaplains seized on such activities to leverage their effectiveness with the troops. Each had to make his own way in his allocated battalion, contending with the religious inclinations of the battalion commander and 2iC as well as with the opprobrium of many soldiers. It was an invidious position to be a Christian clergyman representing the Prince of Peace while his congregation was expected to kill. Religion was seen as "not only unmanly, but un-Australian," especially in the "unrelieved masculinity" of the military, and the fact that the chaplain was an officer to boot merely added to the reasons why his position garnered little automatic respect. A religious non-combatant in the middle of a war was perceived as an anomaly, if not a downright hindrance.[5]

In such circumstances, McKenzie had to establish a relationship of trust with the battalion officers to facilitate his work, and with the soldiers to be effective. His ensuing popularity can be attributed to his personal and professional qualities that turned a potential failure into one of the most effective chaplaincies in Australian Army history. Some of these qualities were non-transferable, such as charisma, apparently limitless energy and inventiveness, and a phenomenal memory for faces and conversations, but most can be generalised across personality types and talents.

Perhaps foremost among the generic qualities was an optimistic spirit. *"Oh yes, to be cheerful, to be divinely cheerful, is an essential part of the duties of a Chaplain,"* wrote one British Great War chaplain, which McKenzie fulfilled, even when his own private emotions dipped at times.[6] Suffering from the horrific conditions and dreadful casualties in France in 1917, his morale buckled for a while, at one point opining to his wife that *"I'm beginning to wonder if there really is a God after all who loves justice."*[7] Yet, writing for a Salvation Army audience at home he proclaimed that *"I rejoice in abundant health, a disposition for hard work, and a cheerful spirit to help keep my heart a-singing."* When circumstances were dire, he lightened the mood with his characteristic playful alliteration. *"At present we are waging a woeful war in waders with slobbery, watering whirls wearily whisking round one's waist in some of the trenches, and withering wintry winds whistling round your withers. Ugh! It is calculated to cool the combustible characteristics of the fiercest fire-eater, and make him sigh for a little bit o' 'eaven 'ere, and 'ome, sweet 'ome, be it ever so 'umble."*[8]

He was unfailingly cheerful with the troops, and they appreciated him for it. In describing one of McKenzie's legendary impromptu concerts, a sergeant wrote *"he is the greatest card, I think, I have ever met."*[9] Another noted that *"his cheery, bluff personality endeared him to everyone."*[10] He made the chorus 'The Sunshine Song,' taken from an American hymn, into a popular concert and marching song. Its final line ran, *"I carry my sunshine with me where'er I go,"* and one soldier recorded how singing it on the march when in *"a kind of hopeless groove …. has done a whole lot to tide us on our hard and grumbling way."*[11] His concerts were huge successes, even when held just behind the front lines, with one described as *"a ding-dong, slap-up, red-hot, unadulterated Australian 'go,' with lots of ginger in it, and you can rest easy on the result. It went like a succession of gun batteries…. The place was gorged, and the enthusiasm at boiling point."*[12] Travelling by ship from Gallipoli to Alexandria in Egypt, with the passengers and crew terrified of German submarines, McKenzie's *"presence changed the whole atmosphere,"* and *"had the effect of stilling the tempest of fear".*[13]

His unashamed spirituality was another vital feature of his chaplaincy. He not only preached with vigour but also demonstrably lived his beliefs, giving them added conviction in the eyes of the soldiers. Far from hiding his potentially unpopular faith out of fear of it giving offense, he was the most openly evangelistic of the chaplains, constantly running meetings to convert their often passive Christianity into an active, committed faith. These voluntary meetings were remarkably well patronised by the supposedly 'not religious' diggers, and he could have up to 1,500 men at his voluntary services, characterised by urgent appeals for changed lives. This urgency was propelled by the knowledge that some in his congregation *"will have been killed or wounded ere the next Sunday comes around."*[14]

His sermons could move hardened men to tears. A Scottish crewman on a ship remarked of one, *"Man, isn't it gran tae hear such strong fine manly sermons. I wad gang a lang wey tae listen tae they sermons."*[15] His service on the ship of terrified passengers to Alexandria was so deeply moving that *"they fell on their knees in rows, and the man who was both saint and soldier offered prayer."*[16] He was complimented by battalion officers for other sermons, where the men listened with *"perfect attention and evidently like it,"* or *"drank in like new milk"* a homily on Samson with humorous touches to make his moral punch-lines easier to swallow.[17]

A deep personal integrity underpinned his actions, which made his religious convictions more admirable. He *"was not very welcome at first, for he was a padre and that cramped their style somewhat,"* being the butt of several demeaning practical jokes and even being *'counted out'* at his first attempted sing song with the men. Early nicknames included *'The Bloody Parson,' 'God Almighty,' 'Salvation Joe,'* and *'Holy Joe'* before evolving into *'Old Mac'* and *'Padre Mac'* and at last the admiring *'Fighting Mac'*.[18] Yet McKenzie's passion for preaching a message of repentance and transformation combined with a deep respect for the beliefs of others, becoming noted for his gentleness with those who differed from him and his tactful manner of avoiding awkward situations. Despite his *'wowserish'* personal convictions, soldiers did not feel condemned by his words or his actions. He attracted men of all religions and of none to his services and was regarded as *"an 'everybody's man' and not a mere Protestant,"* a remarkable tribute in an era of

entrenched sectarianism.[19] Soldiers would put their cards, smokes and bottles away out of respect when they heard him coming along the trenches, singing in his powerful voice to give them a fair forewarning. When men pushed back against his strictures opposing swearing, he gleefully recounted their humorous responses, recognising that when one man said *"It's the bloody Salvation Army for me every time,"* the soldier was giving his most sacred pledge of loyalty.[20]

The courage of his convictions was matched by physical courage as well. While all the chaplains in the Mena Camp near Cairo railed against the red light district of the Wazzir, McKenzie went further. His Salvationist tradition of direct confrontation of evil saw him enter the brothels at night and drag men out, asking them how their mothers, sisters and nation would feel about their behaviour, and sending them back to the camp. He fully expected to be stabbed by the brothel owners for ruining their business, but it did not deter his course of action.[21] This physical courage would find further manifestation on the battlefields of Gallipoli and France.

Distinguishing between McKenzie's personal and professional qualities as a chaplain is somewhat arbitrary, given that his professional behaviour was merely an extension of his own personal convictions and values. This is what gave such a powerful edge to his professional conduct, for it emanated naturally from who he was. Perhaps the first of his professional qualities was his people-centredness, itself an extension of his deep passion for the souls of humanity. Having honed his natural charm on the streets of tough mining towns in civilian Australia through constant interaction with people in pubs and clubs and on the street, he now approached the diggers with warmth, humour and a disarming modesty, for while he loved a joke, it was even better if it was directed at him. His extraordinary memory meant that he never forgot a face or an encounter, being able to recall it effortlessly years later. This retentive memory also enabled him to converse intelligently on almost any subject, including on highly technical military topics. He mixed with equanimity from the highest generals to the lowliest privates.

Not only was McKenzie people centred, he was also service centred. He applied his enormous reserves of energy to meeting whatever need he saw without asking about whether it was for his battalion or not. He saw the entire AIF, as well as any other soldiers or civilians he encountered, as his parish. In Egypt he ran dynamic concerts so successful that the halls were packed and men pulled the matting off the walls to watch from the outside. No other chaplain was allowed to MC a concert if McKenzie was available, and he proudly told his wife Annie of a senior chaplain unable to control a rowdy audience. McKenzie watched in amusement, then jumped on stage, blew a whistle and had instant silence.[22] He invented games that restored a playful quality to the men and often participated with childlike glee.

At Gallipoli, he often lent a hand to the water carriers struggling up the steep hills with cumbrous open-topped tins of water, or to stretcher bearers making their way down to the beach hospitals. Hearing a soldier wish for a chocolate or an egg, he tramped the length and breadth of the Gallipoli enclave until he had enough for each man in the battalion.[23] Noticing the negative impact on morale of not receiving mail, he asked James Hay, his Salvation Army superior in Australia, to start a *'write a letter to a lonely soldier'*

campaign, expecting it to generate a few hundred letters per mail. Instead, when it was circulated Australia-wide in the secular press, McKenzie was receiving 3,000 or more per mail from civilians all over Australia. While sorting and distributing these letters became a burden to McKenzie, the impact on the men was powerful. One soldier, replying to one of these letters, wrote of it being the first Australian mail since he had arrived in France four months earlier, *"a long time to go without receiving a letter from home."*[24]

In France and Belgium, McKenzie was at the forefront of establishing not only free hot drinks stations for men entering and leaving the trenches but also canteens just behind the lines and well within German artillery range. Soldiers were delegated to help run these, but McKenzie usually bought the supplies himself. He used the profits to purchase specials for the men such as waterproof matches or edible delicacies. An example of one hectic day illustrates his relentless schedule. After less than four hours' sleep, he cycled twelve kilometres each way to conduct a burial. After lunch and an interview, he went shopping in Poperinghe for goods for the canteen, returning at 7.30 pm for a late tea, then at 9 pm by horse for the twelve kilometres for more funerals. Finding insufficient graves dug, he had to rouse out ten men at midnight. After the ride back, he then walked three kilometres to the new camp and retired at about 4.30 but was so exhausted that he only fell asleep at 6. The next day he was back in Poperinghe for more supplies.[25] The men appreciated these canteens selling hot food and drinks as they came out of the line and McKenzie overheard soldiers say *"let us patronise old Mac's canteen."*[26] Several senior Australian officers overtly linked improved morale to access to canteens, especially when the men were *"under severe strain."*[27]

Another quality added a particular edge to McKenzie's influence as a chaplain: hard work. Chaplains in the First AIF were not required to participate in training exercises, yet the most effective ones chose to do so. With a huge physique hardened by farm work in his teenage years, McKenzie revelled in the physicality of training, out-performing fit young men half his age. He carried the packs of soldiers too exhausted on tough route marches across desert sand and dug trenches alongside them. *"Don't they think I'm a tartar for work,"* he told his wife. *"This gives me a great hold on the boys.... You can hardly imagine how popular I am with the men and this helps me so much."*[28] A snobbish soldier agreed despite himself, for he did not like McKenie's *"rough, ill-educated"* manner but noted that his going on route marches and organising *"grand concerts"* meant that *"he is the man for the boys all right."*[29]

On Gallipoli, he put in 18-hour days that often began at the beach hospitals and worked their way up the shell-torn and sniper infested Monash Valley and into the trenches along the ridge lines. At night, he performed funerals under the relative safety of darkness, returning to his dugout in the early hours of the morning. Finding one night free of funerals, he cut steps into a steep and slippery part of a track that had been troublesome to stretcher bearers and water carriers when he could legitimately have caught up on lost sleep. The soldiers badged it *'Old Mac's Steps'* in his honour. During and after the Battle of Lone Pine in August 1915, he worked himself to a frazzle sorting the living from the dead and conducting 450 funerals, helping to dig many of the graves.

These activities represented not just hard work but also an embedded presence. Where many chaplains skipped training exercises for religious tourism in Cairo, earning from the men the derogatory nickname of *'Cook's Tourists'* after the famous travel agency, McKenzie spent as much time with the troops as he could. His presence in the routines of army life, including its toughest moments, earned him enormous respect and trust. At Gallipoli, where chaplains were scarce, McKenzie, although suffering from dysentery, refused to leave until ordered to spend a month recovering in Egypt. There he nevertheless maintained a punishing schedule of hospital visitations when he should have been convalescing. After Lone Pine, he was so physically and emotionally exhausted that he was hauling himself around with the aid of a stick, half cripped by neuritis, yet he stayed with his men. In France, he continued to stay close to his battalion, moving with them into the trenches and being active in no-man's-land during the Battles of Pozières, Mouquet Farm and Broodseinde Ridge, recovering the wounded and burying the dead under shell fire.

Such presence required remarkable courage, although McKenzie was among the few who tended not to feel fear, instead recording *"a most gleeful happy mood"* or of being *"strangely elated"* when under fire.[30] Other chaplains, not so naturally gifted in lacking fear in the face of danger, also demonstrated courage, and in every case, such actions won the deep respect of the men they served. Men observing McKenzie wrote of the impact he had on them. One officer, overwhelmed during the intense fighting at Lone Pine, sought escape in a communication trench. One glance from McKenzie, who was treating the wounded there, sent the man back to the fray.[31] A soldier later recounted with wide-eyed admiration McKenzie's heroics at Lone Pine, concluding *"He was a man!"*[32] His inspiring presence led to the development of myths of him leading soldiers in counter-attacks at Gallipoli, tales that McKenzie dismissed as fantasies.[33]

McKenzie also bridged the gap between the servicemen and women and the civilians at home. He was a prolific letter writer, often churning out forty or more daily, often after everyone else was asleep. Naturally he wrote to the families of those in his battalion who were killed and wounded, replying to the letters he received back as well. However, he also wrote to many other families of men not in his unit. For example, after Lone Pine, he wrote to Willie Dunstan's parents assuring them that their son's serious wounds would not be fatal. Dunstan belonged to a different brigade than McKenzie's and he had only met the lad in passing, yet still took the trouble to write at a time when he was overwhelmed with funerals and letters on behalf the hundreds of men he had buried.[34] His letters home were widely reprinted in the press, creating a further link between his work and an anxious civilian public in Australia eager for reliable news from the front.

In many ways, McKenzie's role was to *"bring humanity to an inhuman situation,"* restoring individuality to those serving in an institution prone to dehumanisation by reducing service personnel to mere numbers and functions.[35] The army even valued chaplains principally through their ability to make men more effective instruments of war. However, McKenzie went beyond the mere fulfilment of his formal service obligations to the affirmation of humanity in each person and the building of community among the men. His days spent in chats with individuals and in small groups were crucial to this end, as were his more public concerts, games, sing songs and services.

There was one area where McKenzie was not a model for other chaplains. His commitment to his mission was so absolute that he neglected self-care in the pursuit of a devotion to duty and service to the greater good. It led to his physical and mental degradation, spending much of 1917 in a cycle of hospitalisation followed by hasty returns to duty before he had really recovered with predictable relapses of fevers and memory loss requiring further treatment. He wrote of conducting ten services requiring considerable walking and cycling between venues on a single Sunday, which was *"evidently was a bit too much for my nervous reserves, as I was trembling like a leaf at 8 pm,"* leaving him with high fever, recurrent nightmares and constant retching.[36] A month later he admitted that *"I am absolutely war weary, my memory is fast failing and I'll have hard work to avoid a collapse later on."*[37] It led to him being returned to Australia in early 1918, too exhausted to continue. A chaplain of comparable stature with the troops was Walter Dexter, who lasted the entire war by understanding how to take breaks without in any way compromising the extraordinary service he gave to the men.[38]

McKenzie's impact was profound, remaining a celebrity in Australia for the rest of his life. A memoirist wrote that he *"rendered consistent and consecrated service of every kind, physical, social, mental and spiritual… in everything he was a tower of strength to the officers and a comfort and keep to the men of his brigade. He never spared himself in any way."*[39] Another, when writing of one of McKenzie's impromptu front line sacred sing songs, breathlessly proclaimed *"he is a grand fellow, the best of the boys will tell you in the A.I.F. he is almost idolised by the Australians you have no idea how that man is liked, I'll bet he can sway the whole of the Australians any way he chooses, and he would give you half of his last penny."*[40] His colonel said to him, *"I cannot find words to express my appreciation for all you are doing among the men."*[41] One observer later wrote, *"in public he is modest and unassuming above most men I have met. He has humility without servility; he is firm without being hard; genial in disposition; incorruptible in character, transparently honest and sincere; he is of that type which commands not only full confidence but profound esteem."*[42] While many other Great War chaplains exhibited these fine characteristics and thus won the respect and love of those they served, McKenzie was the epitome of influential chaplaincy.[43]

Times and circumstances have changed, and the role of the chaplain has become more specialised and better trained. Many of the tasks that McKenzie undertook are now performed by other specialists.[44] Yet in McKenzie's attitude and actions are found the principles behind good chaplaincy which can be adapted to any era. Spirituality, personal integrity, and cheerfulness, a commitment to hard work and an embeddedness among those they serve; and a deep care for the soldiers' individual and collective physical, emotional and spiritual welfare remain the hallmarks of the effective military chaplain. His legacy remains as an inspiration for contemporary Army chaplains.

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A Post Script

Lieutenant Colonel William McKenzie, MC, OBE.

Chaplain Expeditionary Forces, Reverend

William McKenzie was born on 20 December 1869 at Biggar, Lanarkshire, Scotland, to farmer Donald McKenzie and his wife Agnes. He was the third of nine children. In 1884, at fourteen years old, they migrated to Australia and settled near Bundaberg, Queensland. There, he and his siblings worked for his father on their sugar cane farm and smallholding. In July 1887, after several encounters with members of the Salvation Army and a deep personal conviction, William McKenzie became a devout Christian at the age of nineteen. In January 1890 he received his first appointment as a Salvation Army Lieutenant, and by October that year was promoted to Salvation Army Captain.

On 21 June 1899, William McKenzie married fellow Officer Annie Dorothea Hoepper in Horsham, Victoria. By 1911, William and Annie had four children and had settled in Bendigo where William was a Salvation Army Brigadier.

After the outbreak of the First World War, William McKenzie was officially appointed as chaplain to the 1st Brigade of the Australian Expeditionary Force on 25 September 1914. He embarked on the Euripides on 19 October 1914 as the chaplain attached to the 4th Australian Infantry Battalion, arriving in Alexandria on 3 December 1914.

> The Australian Dictionary of Biography notes:
> *McKenzie made his presence felt on the transport. He was a very big man with a big voice to match. He conducted the usual church parades but also organized concerts and sports. Unlike many chaplains he participated in the men's recreations, taking particular delight in the boxing contests. His long reach, jarring upper-cuts and dangerous half-hooks left some of the A.I.F.'s best fighters dazed.*[1]

On 25 April 1915 McKenzie arrived at Gallipoli with the first troops to land, however stayed on the boat helping doctors attend to wounded men. On 10 May 1915 he was allowed to disembark and in his first ten days ashore, McKenzie buried approximately 170 men, often while under fire.

McKenzie was with the 4th Battalion as they took part in the Battle of Lone Pine in early August 1915. By this time, McKenzie had earned the nickname "Fighting Mac". With the evacuation of Gallipoli in December 1915, McKenzie travelled to France. Throughout all of his war service, McKenzie buried the dead and helped the wounded. He also held services in the trenches when possible. McKenzie became known for his efforts to uplift the spirits of the men across Egypt, Gallipoli, and France through organising large concerts and meetings in which songs, some of which were composed by McKenzie, were performed.

McKenzie was mentioned in despatches and later gazetted a Military Cross on 3 June 1916. With the strain of his immense work load, McKenzie suffered many bouts of ill health and depression. He was requested to return to Australia and did so in early March 1918.

Upon his return, William McKenzie spoke in many Memorial Meetings with high attendance, largely from men who served with him and the families of fallen soldiers. However, after his return from the war, he continued to have poor health and suffered from nightmares and memory loss. William and Annie resided in the Sydney suburb of Earlwood from 1938, and he formally retired from active ministry on 1 March 1939. McKenzie's long illnesses ended on 27 July 1947. He died at the age of 77 and was buried in Rookwood Cemetery, Sydney.

Australian War Memorial
https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/P11033535

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Fortifying the spirit of the soldier on the battlefield
through sacred messaging/speech

Chaplain John Dansie

Chaplain John Dansie is a Uniting Church Minister currently serving full time with the Australian Army at RAAF Edinburgh as 10 BDE COORD Chaplain.

Abstract

Written from a Christian perspective, based on the author's experience of military chaplaincy, this article delves into how chaplains might support Defence members in preparing for the challenges of the battlefield. It seeks to develop a discussion around what sacred messaging/ speech looks like as warfare and chaplaincy evolve and how that might fortify, sustain, and prepare soldiers for the fight, while remaining true to their faith. The author is sensitive to the vulnerable nature soldiers are in when facing kinetic action and the need for the chaplain to draw on an individual's spirit to fortify them for the uncertain challenges that lay ahead.

The article emphasises the need for chaplains of all faiths to understand the core tenets of their tradition, and its key teachings, in order to develop an understanding of how sacred speech can speak prophetically to fortify and prepare members to fight the good fight.

The article seeks to:

1. frame the problem
2. develop the mechanics of positioning to provide the chaplaincy effect, and
3. recognise how being present helps fortify the spirit of the soldier for war.

Key Words: chaplain, fortify, preaching, sermon, spiritual fortitude

Introduction

> *"When a soldier faces imminent threat of death, the proclamation of the gospel is of crucial importance, and the true value of a chaplain as pastor is most revealed."*[1]

Joyeux Noel (Merry Christmas) is a French film released in 2005 that examines a Christmas truce between German and allied troops on the Western front in 1914. The action focuses on a particular territorial battalion from the British Expeditionary Force who are ordered into battle against the very soldiers with whom they have just celebrated the peace of Christmas.

A founding precept of the film dramatizes two contrasting sermons, delivered by two vastly different chaplains. A chaplain who has much in common with the soldiers, having come from the same community where the battalion was raised, delivers the first sermon. Known as their Vicar from home, he shares their burdens, trials and uncertainties, yet fortifies them by preaching a sermon based on their quest for love and peace, which is innately spiritual.

The other, a senior military chaplain, has no personal connection to the soldiers or their pending peril and delivers the second sermon, which can be overheard as the credits roll. Unsurprisingly it is about patriotism, the dehumanising of the enemy and winning the war for King and country at any cost; even at the expense of their unrealised futures.

One can only begin to imagine the effect each sermon had on the hearts and minds of those emotionally vulnerable soldiers as they prepared themselves to scramble over the parapet. It is however worth mulling over if both or either sermon helped to fortify their spirit in the face of death. For as G.K. Chesterton once reflected *'The true soldier fights not because he hates what is in front of him, but because he loves what is behind him.'*

Background to human conflict: Warfare / People / Technology

Warfare contains elements that remain the same throughout the ages and elements that change. One of the constants is that it always involves people. People do not change; they bring the same hopes, fears and questions about life with them into every conflict. These questions can be about life, life after death, the reason for war, how their choices or actions affect them now and might affect them in the future, the presence of suffering and much more. The main changes in conflict revolve around advancements in technology and its employment on the battlefield. This includes advances in weaponry, communications, transportation, protection and medical care. As we continue to develop weapons, we are able to increase their range, the lethality and accuracy. At the same time, some weapons have become smaller and harder to detect or defeat such as weaponised drones. Both of these advances make it more dangerous to congregate in groups. The range of drones and Long-Range Fires assets is also extending the danger area so that where it used to be relatively safe behind the lines it can now be dangerous up to 300-400 kilometres from the forward edge of the battle area. The challenge for the chaplain is to understand how they can continue to be a presence to soldiers in the land domain. How can they be in amongst them to help fortify their spirit?

Battleground Definitions

The military describes the battlefield using the terms deep, close, and rear areas. Deep areas are those beyond the range of the relevant formation, the close is where that formation is fighting and the rear is the area behind them. These areas shift when viewed at different levels tactically, strategically and operationally, for instance, a Brigade's "rear" could be "close" for the Division. In some cases, Long Range Fires units might fight from the "rear" but engage targets in the "deep" thus avoiding the "close" altogether. As part of an integrated capability, the chaplain does not work independently but as a Team under command and with the guidance of the Coord Chaplain who responds to wherever the need is greatest.

Positioning Chaplains to be present in the Battleground

The positioning of chaplains is therefore crucial in providing the chaplaincy effect at points of friction across the battlefield; be it from operating in the close fight with the Command Tac, or in Battle Clearance Teams (BCT), Casualty Collection Points (CCP), Role 2 Forward (RSF) or Mortuary Affairs (MA), to supporting and caring for those in the rear.

For the chaplain to be authentically present, the best place for them to operate would be as far forward as possible.[2]

Why? By moving forward to the friction points chaplains are able to support and fortify combat teams. Accessing troops across the Area of Operation (AO) enables a chaplain to give comfort to the dying, care for the wounded and support to all, when and where it is appropriate. Being agile and adaptive, not static and reactionary, means being able to respond by being present so that soldiers experience the humanity of the chaplain who shares their trials, their austerity and suffering as a person who authentically lives their beliefs. Being present to offer a worship service or conduct a service (be it on a pack, the bonnet of a vehicle or in small group gathered to pray - to read scripture, receive a short message or celebrate communion) enables soldiers to embrace the moment and fortify themselves spiritually. By being present the chaplain reminds the soldier that they are valued and respected, because the chaplain is there for them!

In adapting to where the chaplaincy effect is most needed, it may mean having to move to multiple call signs on numerous occasions. Similar to how a civilian preacher might move through several small country towns on a Sunday. Likewise, with the emerging threat of drones and the danger of congregating in large groups, chaplains may need to tailor their presence in relation to the threat level. Chaplains should also seek to understand the tempo of the battle and look for opportunities at key times such as during lulls in the battle or in the preparatory phase before a battle where it might be appropriate to be alongside soldiers and engage with the troops to offer appropriate ministry or a simple blessing.

Chaplains in the Battleground - Rear / FOB

In the 'rear' areas or within a Forward Operating Bases (FOB), chaplains may not have the luxury of a standalone chapel and will need to utilise what is available. There are many examples during the Afghan conflict where chaplains used recreation rooms or the back part of a café to hold services.[3] Similarly, Navy chaplains speak of holding services in different locations around the ship, which are convenient and quiet when there is no dedicated chapel space. Military chaplains need to be good at making do with the facilities they have available and be willing to offer services wherever their members can get to and at whatever time is convenient. Not only should they be willing to move as far forward as practical for their role but also to remain in the rear when required, to offer services in locations and timings that are dramatically different to civilian ministry.[4] Suffice to say that the duration of military worship services is also vastly different to civilian ministry as is the resources that the deployed chaplain might have available, which further reinforces the need for the chaplain's message to be easily digested in support of fortifying soldiers.

Preaching in the Field

Messaging in the battlefield is vital in ensuring survival and the correct response during periods of chaos. It is therefore essential for the chaplain to understand that the message conveyed to soldiers through sacred speech is not an opportunity to exploit for religious gain, to *proselytize*, nor is to take advantage of vulnerable souls. More is the point that a chaplain who lives their convictions of faith through word and deed can provide opportunities for soldiers to strengthen their spiritual conditioning. How so? Because

the chaplain is present to the soldiers, not to provide all the answers but rather to help individuals ask the right questions. The presence of the chaplain therefore assists in fortifying spiritual conditioning. It seeks to utilise deeply held beliefs and values, combined with identity and purpose, to link with what is viewed as inherently good and valuable by an individual and motivates them to link beyond mere logical arguments; it is that spirit of a person that promotes a willingness to keep going and overcome adversity.[5]

The focus of preaching, is not preaching *at*, but engaging *with* an individual's spirituality through sacred speech; seeking to find their authentic humanity in amongst the uncertainty. Chaplain Hillis, who wrote in the late 1990s, talks about preaching in the marketplace, using stories and teachable moments to engage soldiers with the gospel in practical down to earth ways in everyday situations.[6] He advocates for short sermons that have practical applications. Using parables and stories that provide a pathway to confront the intense rawness of war with a message intertwined with hope, enquiry, and self-reflection.[7]

Delivery Style - the how?

It is important that a chaplain understands what needs to be conveyed though sacred messaging and it is equally important to know the how? Drawing on the wisdom of Chaplain Olson's work, *Be Bold, Be Brief, Be Gone,* he advocates for chaplains preaching in field to be brief and then be gone. This affords the soldiers time to hear a message and participate in worship and then get back to their day to day tasks, whilst assuring them that the chaplain is available for them. To consider how to preach in the current combat environment one should strive to be succinct, be relate-able and be willing to tackle the important issues that soldiers are grappling with. Chap Olson highlights the importance of being bold in preaching, as 'we do not know what has brought people to worship, it is all the more reason to provide them with a message of hope'.[8]

Why Chaplains Preach

In understanding where and how chaplains offer sacred speech, it is worth revisiting the why. In summary, there are two reasons why; the first is obvious; because of who chaplains are, the second stems from the first, to help fortify soldiers.

There is an expectation from sending faith bodies that chaplains as religious faith leaders will remain authentic to who they are in proclaiming the message, teaching values, traditions, and beliefs; with one overarching caveat: *thou shall not proselytize*. As discussed the intent of sacred speech/messaging is to awaken the human spirit which promotes a willingness to keep going and overcome the odds. It is also important that a chaplain develop the skills to remain authentic to their beliefs whilst also being the conjunct for spiritual conditioning of all whom they serve. Since a *"…chaplain who does not share the gospel merely duplicates the work of other helping professions"*[9] Preaching, and leading in worship is one of those distinctive elements that chaplains can offer to help soldiers prepare to defend our nation and its interests. As previously stated the chaplain also extends this role beyond faith alignments in helping to spiritually condition soldiers to seek and utilise their deeply held beliefs and values, combined with identity and purpose. Ultimately, to link with what is viewed as inherently good and valuable by an individual and motivate them beyond mere logical arguments.

Preaching that Fortifies people

The second reason chaplains should deliver sacred speech is to help fortify soldiers.

Chaplains Denning and Wehro posit the view that even in the chaos and complexities of war *"…the enduring elements of sacred speech remain. There will be a sacred text and there will be an existential need."*[10] *"Humans have a will to hope, a will to fight, and a will to overcome overwhelming odds"* and despite constraints chaplains must be prepared to *"address the complex realities of the human dimension."*

Pleizer identifies two main threats for deployed soldiers: their intimate relationships back home and being able to maintain one's humanity post military service. Chaplains are in a unique position to spiritually condition soldiers in the moral and existential challenges they face, since their presence *"…reminds soldiers that they are more than functions within a closed system but foremost human beings to be cared for and to be respected."*[11]

When chaplains listen and understand their context and the world around them, they in turn are able to help soldiers and officers make sense of their own reality. As a military "… *chaplain I am not called to 'bless the bullets,' but to serve as a 'blessing to soldiers' by providing a ministry of hope, healing, and comfort in the midst of a terrible situation that unfortunately will involve the killing of others."*[12]

What Chaplains Preach

Whilst it is important to understand the how and why a chaplain should deliver sacred speech, equally important *is what* they preach. For preaching to be authentic, *the what should reach beyond words;* to the message, deeds/action/presence and the willingness to shoulder the burden of suffering. Words can quickly be discounted when not backed with lived conviction, as so keenly illustrated in the contrasting approaches to delivering sacred speech in the 'introduction', and the implied consequences of the chaplain's words. In a short publication called *Calvary or Cavalry* the author Phil Hancox, looks at how church attendance changed before and after WW1. Hancox concludes that a major factor in people walking away from church after the war was that they had been on the side of empire and the need to fight. This led people to question their faith. If Christianity was about peace why was the church so vocal about supporting war and all the horrors that it brought with it.[13] Here lies the dilemma for the chaplain who seeks to fortify soldiers in preparation for war and what they must endure.

The overarching Bible and Christian message do not fit neatly with warfare. *"Often sacred text does not relate to the battlefield context, military language and illustrations are overdone and the sacred speech is too long."* Whilst this may be true, soldiers nonetheless are more willing to listen to a chaplain's message in the field when that chaplain has lived the same life as the soldier. It is an opportunity not for the chaplain to exploit but to care for the soldiers who are *"tired or homesick or discouraged… and want to hear words of strength."*[14] Sacred messaging therefore only resonates when it is founded on lived experience. The language therefore need not be *"overdone"* if soldiers know that their Padre is walking the ridges alongside them!

Insider or Outsider +

In walking along side soldiers the impact of sacred messaging delivered by a chaplain stems from their status as both insiders and outsiders and how that is held in tension. Chaplain Hillis discusses the importance of the chaplain as prophet, one who is willing to confront the system on moral and religious issues. He notes that because chaplains are *"insiders"* and part of the system they can speak with credibility about difficult issues.[15] Whilst others prefer to play on the outside nature by referring to chaplains as *"joiners"* who can offer a distinctive *"outside"* voice and a key message of hope.[16] To provide context one only need look to the two sermons. The Vicar from home, who joined the battalion from the local community preached from a pastoral heart as an outsider. His sacred message defaults to what is at the core of people's lives and hopes; love and peace. Sadly the senior chaplain is ingrained as an insider and preaches a message which avoids the sacred and therefore betrays the trust which had been put in him, that is it fails to spiritually fortify soldiers to face and overcome what lay ahead.

Conclusions

Chaplains are spiritual and religious experts. One of the key ways that chaplains can fortify and equip soldiers and officers to fight, is through the opportunities they have to be an authentic presence, lead people in worship, offer sacred speech to them and help carry their burden.

- As technology continues to advance chaplains will need to adapt to the changes that come to the battlefield while still working hard to get '*alongside'* their people, understand their hopes, fears and struggles, and look for ways to speak words of hope and encouragement to them.
- Military chaplains need to live authentically and uphold the values and beliefs of their sending faith group and find the balance between being an insider and an outsider.
- Chaplains must get alongside soldiers and officers in the field, in the barracks and in the messiness of life and share their hardships, joys and struggles.
- Chaplains need to adapt and be flexible in terms of how, where and when to be a presence and offer soldiers opportunities for worship and to hear and reflect on sacred speech.
- When delivering sacred messaging/speech, chaplains need to find the balance between the two sermons offered in the film *Joyeux Noell*. The pastoral heart vs the nationalist push for victory, no matter the cost.

The overarching message of Christian chaplaincy is one of hope; it should be conversational and help the soldiers and officers they serve to make sense of their lives and the situations they find themselves in. Ultimately, the role of the chaplain is to awaken the human spirit, which promotes a willingness to keep going and overcome the odds.

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Photograph page 46: *Australian Army Chaplain Gary Pope from the 3rd Brigade Headquarters, delivers a field service to soldiers at Townsville Field Training Area, Queensland. (Photographer CPL Brandon Grey)* https://images.defence.gov.au/assets/Home/Search?Query=20210725army8615249_0084.jpg


Mustard Seed
CHAPLAINCY

Mustard Seed Chaplaincy

Chaplains Daniel Bigg, Emma Cain, Darren Cronshaw and James Hall

Chap Daniel Bigg is a Presbyterian minister serving as Chaplain to 7th Combat Service Support Battalion.
Chap Emma Cain is a Zen Buddhist priest serving as Chaplain to 7th Combat Signal Regiment.
Chap Darren Cronshaw is a Baptist pastor serving as Chaplain to the 6th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment.
Chap James Hall is an Anglican minister serving as Coord Chaplain to 7th Brigade.

Abstract

Military chaplaincy needs models to guide its contribution in a complex organisation. Christianity through the Mustard Seed Parable that Jesus told and Buddhism's story of the Search for the Mustard Seed both offer thoughtful inspiration for chaplaincy. Jesus' Parable of the Mustard Seed suggests to us that chaplains at their best offer to hold a hospitable space to those who are struggling. It reminds us of the importance of a listening ear and generous encouragement. The Buddhist Search for the Mustard Seed underlines for us the importance of authentically sharing the pain and grief of loss. It reminds us of the importance of surrender and mutuality in suffering. The power of sharing stories and models of ministry across different faith traditions underlines the fruitfulness of learning from inter-religious dialogue and interfaith teamwork.

Key Words: advocacy, Buddhism, chaplaincy, grief, hospitality, interfaith chaplaincy, inter-religious dialogue, models of ministry, mustard seed, parables of Jesus

Introduction

Chaplaincy has a unique role in Defence, and chaplains have a unique role as officers. We have no power of command but nevertheless we can be a powerful presence of change for the good, the virtuous, the human and personnel side of the organisation.

The 7 Brigade Chaplaincy team's focus for this year was teamwork. We wanted to explore how best to build a connected and supportive chaplaincy team. This included having a 7 Brigade Chaplaincy meeting separate to the Garrison Chaplaincy meeting each week. This offered us a more targeted Professional Military Education (PME) and allowed the team to gain stronger connections with a smaller gathering of chaplains all from the same brigade. This made a significant difference to how the team operated and was especially noticeable with our involvement as a Brigade Chaplaincy team during the Brigade Warfighter Exercise Diamond Strike and on Talisman Sabre 25.

Part of meeting together has been a time of sharing a devotion or reflection from a member of the team. This started with conversations to establish ground rules. Chaplain James Hall as Coord, expressed the expectation that each chaplain would share a devotion or reflection from their sending faith tradition, and that there would be mutual respect and learning during these times.

In considering that unique role we have as chaplains in Defence, the 7 Brigade Chaplaincy team have enjoyed conversations about the inspiration we draw from our Scriptures – as Christian and Buddhist chaplains. We have been surprised and encouraged especially by the "Parable of the Mustard Seed". Jesus expressed this parable with these questions and metaphor:

> *What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.* (Luke 13:18-19 NRSV)

We have been considering what does this mean for chaplaincy? And what forms might "mustard seed chaplaincy" take?

The Order of the Mustard Seed

An early team devotion that prompted us on this journey was from LECTIO 365 – a daily devotional resources of the 24-7 Prayer movement and its religious order *"the Order of the Mustard Seed"*.[1] The Order follows the practices of loving God through prayer and creativity, loving others through justice and hospitality, and loving the world through learning and mission. As Army chaplains these are great practices to live by. They will sustain us in our ministry and enable us to focus our efforts on serving God and others well. The parable reminds us that sometimes it only takes the smallest amount of faith to have a huge impact.

As chaplains we can often feel small and insignificant in a large organisation. Sometimes what we do is considered a supporting effort and not the main thing. Like the parable though it can often be the case that a chaplain making a small input can have lasting and eternal change in the lives of many. Sometimes we are the small seed and other times we are the large plant where people come to seek refuge and strength in our branches.

Parables of Jesus

It is helpful to interrogate why Jesus, during his earthly ministry, spoke in parables. Parables, like fables, allegories and even many fairy tales, are plain stories with layered meanings. A parable is a superficial earthy story packaging a substantial, meditative, revelational truth. The Apostle Matthew follows his account of the Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31-32) with an explicit statement that Jesus, in speaking in parables to the crowds, fulfils yet another of the thousands of prophetic revelations given which enable his people to discern his true identity (Matthew 13:35). Yet the parables of Jesus also are revelatory. Jesus' parabolic teachings actually disclose hitherto concealed and hidden truths.

Conversely however and somewhat controversially, parables are not clarifying little illustrations used to emphasise a point. Rather they conceal and cover their true meaning from those who are proud and self-reliant (Matthew 13:12-15). They suggest God has a way of leaving the arrogant to flounder in their self-inflated pride and ignorance, while at the same time unveiling divine profundity to the humble, the weak, the poor, the

overlooked and the marginalized. There is a sense in which Jesus came for the sick not the healthy (cf Mark 2:17) and parables are his method of targeted medication. “Whoever has ears, let them hear” suggests as invitation: “Do you have ears? Then listen.”

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

The Mustard Seed parable is a “kingdom” parable. The kingdom concept is the clash of opposing powers. It explains the realm and reign of God’s King, Jesus, breaking into this world and taking back what is rightfully God’s from the powers of evil which have wrongfully hijacked and stolen God’s good creation. Psalm 2 unpacks this clash of kingdoms: *“the nations conspire, the people’s plot, the kings of the earth rise up, the rulers band together against the Lord and against his Anointed one.”*

One way of reading this parable is that the *“mustard seed”* is Jesus, the *“field”* is this cosmos, and God is the gardener who plants God’s Son into our cosmos in the form of a baby born in Bethlehem in backwards Galilee. The planting of this seed causes a ray of spiritual light to penetrate a cosmos hijacked and held in spiritual darkness. It brings opportunity for rich hospitality and new shelter to those who need it.

To draw on other parables of Jesus. Jesus is the seed, but also the tree and the vine, and all humanity is invited to be grafted back into him. As the mustard tree grows in the field providing fruit and shade and harbour for the birds and animals so too the followers of Jesus, his growing church, across the globe and down through the ages, is providing rest and refreshment for the cosmos. This is the Kingdom of God that has broken in, has been planted and is growing in this cosmic field of turmoil filled with powerful and impressive opposing and warring earthly nations and kingdoms. With this picture of how the mustard tree represents the Kingdom of God, the image captures our imagination for how chaplaincy can also offer hospitality, refuge and shelter to those who are struggling.

The mustard seed, literally, is a tiny and humble picture of origins of what the mustard tree becomes. Jesus said the kingdom of God is like this. It begins as a humble resource, seemingly nothing, but when sown in the ground it has the potential in its DNA to grow and become a tree.

As the tree in the field is just a mustard tree, it is not an oak or a mighty cedar, so too, Christ and his agency the Church in this present age between God’s assertion and God’s return is not particularly impressive. The people of God are little people, humble people, servants, overlooked and potentially under-appreciated. But look a little harder, this beautiful pervasive tree of life is Christ and his Church continuing to offer rest and nourishment and hope and healing to the lost and the sick and the maimed and the mauled of this world. This is a Scriptural image of the church’s ministry but it is also applicable to the specific work of chaplaincy.

For those who are feeling beaten up, the words of Jesus have some reassurance, *“come to me all you who are weary and heavy burdened and I will give you rest”* (Matthew 11:28-30). That hospitable generosity and grace that Jesus expressed is the kind if posture mustard seed chaplaincy might adopt.

Mustard Seed Chaplaincy in Defence

As chaplains we welcome and offer a listening ear, generous encouragement and restful perspective to those who are troubled and burdened, whether by the demands of Defence service or by other broader life challenges.

The "good fight" we fight is often that important contribution of supporting the member and their morale and wellbeing, so they can stay in the fight. This is a supporting effort for the mission, but it is also worthwhile because our people are worthwhile looking after as people.

As chaplains we understand that part of why Defence has recruited and posted us to each of our units is that it recognises the importance of looking after its people. A unit's Commanding Officer has ultimate responsibility for the welfare and wellbeing of unit members, but she or he has a lot of other tasks to do and to balance. The chaplain as the CO's asset has the privilege of focusing on member's holistic wellbeing and providing members that reassuring supportive care.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed is not just an illustration of the truism *"from little things big things grow"*. What is perhaps most significant for the parable, especially for its relevance for chaplaincy, is the fully-grown mustard tree's role. A mustard tree is not significant because it is a large impressive-looking tree towering over others in the garden or farm. It is actually more like a maximum 3-metre-tall shrub. Jesus was not championing grand size and impressive outcomes of the seed's transformation. What was impressive was its role. Pay attention to what the tree offered: *"it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches".*

This theme of welcome and hospitality has been significant for some of us in previous ministry roles. Mustard seed church ministry is not growing into some large mega-church but being a hub of hospitality and a safe place of inclusion for anyone who was struggling or stranded or looking for home to find a place of belonging.[2]

Similarly mustard seed chaplaincy is not necessarily having obvious up-front leadership influence in a unit but may well most significantly include offering support and inclusion refuge and advocacy to those who are struggling. Jean Vanier's words resonate with a vision of mustard seed-inspired chaplaincy:

> *In the midst of all the violence and corruption of the world God invites us today to create new places of belonging, places of sharing, of peace and of kindness, places were no-one needs to defend himself or herself; places where each one is loved and accepted with one's own fragility, abilities and disabilities. This is my vision for our churches: that they become places of belonging, places of sharing.*[3]

Vanier's words, and Jesus' parable, inspire us as chaplains to aspire not to evaluate our role according to rank and power, but according to offering safe spaces of hospitable listening, gentle advocacy, nurture of character, fostering of values.

Tom Sine as a futurist urged the church to take trends about the future seriously and be creative about new models of ministry. He urges considering the gospel values of God's *"Mustard seed"* agenda. He argues we are not forced to accept models our culture hands to us, but can experiment with alternative housing, different spending patterns, new ways of doing church. Why not design new churches on a village design that facilitates living as extended families, or develop a Celtic prayer retreat centre, or create highly visual and innovative worship space like Mark Pierson and Mike Riddell have done with Parallel Universe, or offer hospitality like Brown Bear Pub church in London does to reach out to Caribbean young people. Theologically, Sine is convinced the first call of the gospel is not to proclamation or social action (though committed to evangelism and concerned for the poor), but to incarnation. "Only as we flesh out in community something of the right-side-up values of God's new order do we have any basis on which to speak or act".[4]

Buddhism and 'The Search for the Mustard Seed'

The Buddhist tradition also has a story that involves a mustard seed, or rather the *search* for a mustard seed. It starts, dramatically, with the sudden death of a child. Enveloped by intense grief the child's mother, Kisa Gotami, frantically calls on all the doctors in her village searching for medicine that will bring her child back to life. Of course no one is able to help her, but the last doctor she sees suggests that perhaps she should talk to the historical Buddha. So the distraught mother went to the Buddha, pleading for him to return her child to her. The Buddha, unperturbed, said yes, I can help you, but I need a special ingredient for the medicine. You must bring me a mustard seed from a house that hasn't known grief or loss.

Ecstatic with an expectation that bore no connection to reality Kisa Gotami set off on her mission. Of course at some level she knew the inevitability of death, but strong emotion can sometimes distort perception in an effort to protect us from the immensity of our feelings. This is a very human thing to do and it can take many forms. Perhaps we don't visit the doctor to check out a suspicious lump, or we continue on as normal when we notice our partner has become increasingly distant. Or maybe we believe that our dead child might live again. To an outside observer it looks like we are in denial or even delusional, but underneath there is a fight going on, a struggle against reality. This is not a good fight; it is one that creates much suffering. Life, something that previously felt known and understood, is now perceived as vast, awesome and terrifying.

So, convinced that she could bypass the devastation of death that she was experiencing, Kisa Gotami knocked on the first door she came to. She knew that every house would have mustard seeds, they were as common as salt is in Australia.

But what she didn't expect was the genuineness and intimacy that she encountered when each person or family she met willingly told her their own stories of loss. Beloved sons, daughters, mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, uncles, aunts—sometimes the whole extended family, all gone. No house escaped death's touch.

Remarkably, as she moved from house to house a mysterious healing began to take place. Her grief for her son was still there, but it melted into acceptance as she heard each person's story. Her natural compassion rose up along with a desire to care and comfort others, fully knowing the pain that they had experienced. And so she returned

to the Buddha not with a mustard seed, but with a soft and tender heart. It is said that following this experience Kisa Gotami took vows and became one of Buddha's disciples, awakening to the impermanence of life.

The real task that the Buddha set was one of aligning with reality. In this sense the good fight is *not to fight*, but to surrender to what is, with full awareness—a continual alignment with reality and offering responses appropriate to the situation. Paradoxically this *"not doing"* can sometimes feel as challenging as several rounds in the ring!

As chaplains, what might this look like? It's easy to read something like this, particularly a parable, and intellectually skim over it, consigning it to the realm of beautiful metaphor, but chaplaincy is an experiential and relational activity. So how do we do it? By being fully in the fight.

> *Knock, knock!* A woman is at your door, holding her dead child in her arms. How do we respond?
>
> *Knock, knock!* Now we are the ones knocking, bringing news of the dead child – who as an adult died while serving. They are still their parent's child though. How do we meet that family's pain?
>
> Or perhaps, *Knock, knock!* A digger comes to your office and tells you they want to die to escape their struggle. How do we respond?

In the Japanese form of Buddhism that Chaplain Emma Cain practices, this world is seen as a reflection of reality, sometimes referred to poetically as a dewdrop world. Buddhists cannot dismiss the truth of suffering by hiding out in their spirituality (whatever form that takes). Like Kisa Gotami the Buddhist invitation is to be *"in the arena"* with those we care for. This is not an easy task, but we don't need to have all the answers, we just need to be fully present and attentive to those who open their hearts to us.

An evocative haiku written by a lay Buddhist priest just after the death of his young daughter reads:

> *This dewdrop world—*
> *is a dewdrop world,*
> *And yet, and yet…*
> *Kobayashi Issa*

Conclusion

How do we offer chaplaincy support albeit from a unique place in the chain of command? How can chaplains help people learn to live with and overcome their pain? Our "mustard seed" conversations are a perfect example of how two very different traditions can work together and help shape how we as chaplains can help people through difficult times.

Mustard seed chaplaincy, whether from Christian or Buddhist inspiration, encourages us to never underestimate the small impacts that we make each day and to trust and know that we are making a difference in offering support, healing and comfort even when it may not feel like it.

End Notes

1. "24-7 Prayer", https://www.24-7prayer.com/resource/lectio-365/
2. As discussed in Julia Rhyder and Darren Cronshaw, "Mustard Tree Aspirations (Luke 13:18-19)," *W!tness* (2014); and Darren Cronshaw 'Improvising a Renewed Story at AuburnLife: Utilising Biblical Narrative for Congregational Transformation', *Cultural Diversity, Worship, and Australian Baptist Church Life* New Wineskins Volume 2, eds. Darrell Jackson and Darren Cronshaw (Sydney: Morling, 2016), 225-239.
3. Jean Vanier, *Befriending the Stranger* (Mahwaj, NJ: Paulist, 2010), 12.
4. Tom Sine, *Mustard Seed versus McWorld: Reinventing Life and Faith for the Future* (Jacksonville: Seedsowers, 1999), 205.

Photograph on page 54: The AACJ acknowledges the source of the Mustard Seed photo to daily virtue on line which can be found through the following link: https://www.dailyvirtueonline.com/2024/01/26/it-is-like-a-mustard-seed-mark-431/



Children liberated from Auschwitz concentration camp, 1945. (Public Source)

80 years since Auschwitz:
Reflections on Liberation

Chaplain Judith Levitan-Sterling

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Abstract

2025 marks the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Nazi concentration and death camps across Poland and Germany by Allied and Soviet forces in World War II. Liberation of the camps brought an end to the Holocaust. Individual countries commemorate events associated with the Holocaust on dedicated days of remembrance.[1] In addition, the United Nations designated the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz - Birkenau (Auschwitz) death camp as an International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust.[2] On this day (27 January), the international community honours the memory of the six million Jewish men, women and children, systematically persecuted and murdered by the Nazi regime, its allies and collaborators. This unprecedented genocide resulted in the devastation of entire Jewish communities and the obliteration of two thirds of the entire Jewish population of Europe (Brosnan 2018; Gilbert 1986).[3]

This article provides some reflections on the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. It starts with discussions about: the role of antisemitism in facilitating the establishment and operation of Nazi concentration and extermination camps; the experience of liberation for both the prisoners and soldiers entering the camps; and the role of chaplains in the liberation. The article then reflects on faith in the aftermath of suffering; the significance of the 80-year milestone; the current challenges to Holocaust commemoration and education (declining population of survivors, increasing levels and intensity of antisemitism and normalisation of antisemitic thinking). The article concludes with insights that can contribute to building our capacity as members of the ADF and chaplains to 'fight the good fight'.

Key Words: antisemitism, chaplains, faith, holocaust, liberation, Jewish chaplains, respect, suffering

Note on terminology

The English word 'holocaust' has its origins in a Greek term referring to a completely burnt sacrificial offering. The Hebrew word 'Shoah' means catastrophe, calamity or disaster. The term has biblical origins. It is used to describe scenes of complete devastation and destruction by prophets such as Isaiah (10:3) and Zephaniah (1:15). The Shoah is the standard Hebrew term used in Israel and amongst many Jewish communities today to refer to the Nazi genocide of the Jews. It may be a more appropriate term than Holocaust (Hayes 2010; Pasikowska-Schnass 2024). In this article 'Holocaust' and 'Shoah' are terms used interchangeably.

This article adopts the position taken by Yad Vashem, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance that the term ' Holocaust' refers specifically to the Jewish experience of persecution by the Nazis. There are others who adopt a more expansive definition (see Niewyk and Nicosia 2000). Regardless of the definition, it is also important to acknowledge the other groups persecuted and killed by the Nazi regime. These included Roma and Sinti (Gypsies), gay males, prisoners of conscience and political prisoners, and people with physical and intellectual disabilities.

Introduction - Remembering the Holocaust, confronting history

This year a major commemoration ceremony took place at the gates of Auschwitz on International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Heads of State and Government from over 50 countries including Australia, clergy and staff of Holocaust museums and memorials around the world attended the ceremony. All remaining survivors of Auschwitz were invited. Approximately 50 survivors attended, with several speaking at the ceremony.

Tova Friedman was one of these speakers. She was deported to Auschwitz in 1944 when she was five years old. She survived over six months in the death camp before she was liberated. 80 years later, she returned as a mother, grandmother, social worker, author and TikToker. She stood before the dignitaries and diplomats at the Death Gate and spoke of the significance of commemorating liberation at this particular point in history:

> *"80 years after the liberation, the world is again in crisis. Our Judeo-Christian values have been overshadowed worldwide by prejudice, fear, suspicion, and extremism, and the rampant antisemitism that is spreading among the nations is shocking to us, our children, and our grandchildren. Israel, the only democracy in the Middle East, is fighting for its existence and its way of life. We mourn not only the fallen soldiers and hostages but also the turbulence and mistrust in our society. We pray for strength, resilience, and hope".*
>
> *"We all must reawaken our collective conscience to transform the violence, anger, hatred, and malignancy that has so powerfully gripped our society into a more humane and just world before these negative forces destroy us. It's an enormous task, but as our sages[5] say, "The time is short, and the task is great. We may not be able to complete it, but we are obligated to start".*[4]

Overview of approach

Before reflecting on the significance of liberation, it is necessary to establish the context in which liberation took place. How did the death camps come into operation? What factors enabled liberation? To answer these questions, we must confront and consider:

1. the role antisemitic ideas and philosophies played in the materialisation of antisemitic acts, policies and laws of the Nazi regime
2. the military and historical context to liberation
3. perspectives of both the Allied and Soviet soldiers who liberated the camps and those who survived them
4. the role of chaplains in the liberation.

1. The deadly consequences of antisemitism

Antisemitism has a long history in Western Europe. In the Middle Ages it took the form of religious antisemitism based on Jewish rejection of Christian beliefs (Hayes 2010). In the 19th Century, European societies underwent rapid economic and social upheaval. Political and economic antisemitism blamed Jews for social problems and undermined their national loyalties (Kantor 2022; Brunstein and King 2004). Racial antisemitism also gained traction at this time. Based on pseudo-scientific theories about the hierarchy and supremacy of different races (e.g. Social Darwinism and Eugenics), racial antisemitism asserted Jews were a separate inferior race (Kantor 2022).

The Antisemitism promulgated by Adolf Hitler and the Nazis had its foundations in political and racial antisemitism. However, it also claimed Jews were a threat to humanity and needed to be eradicated. Nazi antisemitism was unique in calling for the absolute destruction of European Jewry (Kantor 2022). Through dissemination of propaganda demonising and scapegoating Jewish people for the social and economic woes of Germany, the Nazis initially used racial antisemitism as a political tool to gain support and power (Berenbaum 1993). Once the Nazi party assumed power in 1933, antisemitic measures were normalised, sanctioned by the state and enshrined in government policy and laws. From 1933 – 1945 antisemitism manifested in increasingly violent and fatal measures:

- Public humiliation (e.g physical assault, shaving beards and sidelocks), mandatory markings on clothes (e.g. yellow star), boycotts of Jewish owned businesses and confiscation of Jewish owned belongings and property Organised violence, riots, vandalism and destruction of Jewish property and synagogues
- Laws that discriminated against Jews, excluded them from public life and stripped them of their citizenship rights
- Deportation to crowded ghettos where many died of starvation and disease
- Internment in forced labour camps and imprisonment in concentration and death camps. During the war, more than three million people, mostly Jewish people, were murdered in these camps through starvation, disease, physical violence, shooting and gassing (Berenbaum 1993)
- Implementing the Final Solution, a formal plan to annihilate the Jewish population of Europe through mass shootings and industrial scale murder in the death camps. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum estimates approximately 2.7 million people were murdered in these centres during the war.

  (Gilbert 1986; Berenbaum 1993; Yad Vashem n.d.; United Holocaust Memorial Museum n.d.)

2. The context and experience of liberation

Trends in scholarship about the experience of liberation from Nazi concentration and death camps have shifted from viewing liberation as a single moment of triumph to recognising it was a complex transition process marked by the trauma and resilience of survivors and liberators (Stone 2015).

The complexity of the situation is demonstrated by the intersection of Allied and Soviet military advances at the same time as the industrial scale killing of Hungarian Jewry. In June 1944 Allied forces began pushing German troops east out of France and consolidated their successful push of German troops out of Italy with the liberation of Rome. At the same time, Soviet forces opened up a major offensive on the Eastern front pushing German troops westward.

Despite the tightening pincer grip of Allied and Soviet forces over the Nazis, they continued their commitment to expend resources on the extermination of European Jewry. In March 1944 the Nazis occupied Hungary. Until then, Hungarian Jews had largely avoided deportations. However, in less than two months between 14 May and 8 July 1944 the Nazis and Hungarian army oversaw the deportation of over 400,000 Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz (Berenbaum 1993). 75% of them were murdered in the gas chambers on arrival.

Furthermore, in the face of the advancing Allied and Russian forces, rather than emancipation, the Nazis ordered the evacuation of concentration camps and the movement of prisoners towards the interior of Germany. These measures were intended to limit the number of prisoners falling under Allied control. Initially, evacuations were carried out by train or ship and later by foot. At first prisoners were evacuated and moved from one camp to another. Later, evacuations were referred to as the 'Death Marches'. Prisoners were forced to march long distances and subjected to brutal treatment by the SS guards. A significant proportion died of exhaustion, exposure or were shot by SS guards when they could no longer walk (Gilbert 1986; Reilly 1998; Berenbaum 1993). The liberation of concentration camps occurred against this backdrop of waning German power, forced evacuations from camps, mass deportations of Hungarian Jews and Death Marches.

Majdanek was the first concentration camp that was liberated in July 1944. Soviet forces only found a few thousand prisoners. The majority had been evacuated by the Nazis. Similarly, on 27 January 1945, Soviet forces liberated Auschwitz. When they entered the camp, there were approximately 7,000 prisoners (including children) remaining. They had been too ill or weak to join the Death Marches. As the Nazis retreated, they attempted to destroy the evidence of mass murder. However, the storehouses of personal effects and crematoria attested to the scale of murder that had occurred on the sites (Berenbaum 1993; United States Holocaust Museum n.d).

In April 1945 American forces liberated camps such as Buchenwald, Dachau, and Mauthausen and British forces liberated Bergen Belsen. The liberating armies found bodies stacked and strewn around the camps, starving survivors, and widespread disease.

3. The experience of liberation

Key themes arising from the liberation experience for both survivors and liberators are discussed below:

- ***Liberation was a complex struggle to reclaim humanity for survivors.***

The arrival of Allied troops did not immediately bring freedom or relief from suffering for survivors. Many were too weak or sick, due to their prolonged incarceration and starvation, to actively celebrate freedom. Survivors described mixed feelings of relief, disbelief, and grief upon liberation. Survivor guilt lingered beyond physical liberation (Stone 2015; Berenbaum 1993). They questioned why they had survived when so many others had perished (Stone 2015; Yad Vashem n.d). Author and survivor of Auschwitz, Primo Levi described the experience of liberation in his memoir *The Truce:*

> *"So for us even the hour of liberty rang out grave and muffled, and filled our souls with joy and yet with a painful sense of shame… and also with anguish, because we felt that this should never happen, that now nothing could ever happen good and pure enough to rub out our past, and that the scars of the outrage would remain within us forever."*

- ***What unprepared liberating soldiers encountered at the camps.***

The primary aim of the Allied and Soviet forces was the defeat of Germany, not liberation of prisoners from the concentration camps. Allied soldiers were largely unprepared for what they encountered (Lewis 2021; Reilly 1998). By 1945 most had experience with the vicissitudes of war but did not expect to be confronted by the stench and scenes of mass death and starvation (Reilly 1998). At camps like Bergen-Belsen, Dachau, and Buchenwald, soldiers found thousands of corpses, emaciated survivors, and evidence of torture and medical experimentation (Stone 2015; Bridgeman and Jones 1990).

- ***The triumph of liberation was accompanied by a humanitarian crisis***

Given this lack of preparation, there was no plan for relief efforts. The liberators did not have adequate food or medical supplies (Lewis 2021). Many survivors died in the days and weeks following liberation due to disease, malnutrition, and psychological breakdown. For example, the British Army liberated Bergen-Belsen and encountered 60,000 prisoners, many suffering from typhus, dysentery and starvation. The British Army established medical units and repurposed nearby German military barracks. However, relief efforts were often chaotic and were insufficient to stem the flow of death from disease (Reilly 1998; Shephard 2005). Over half of these prisoners died in the weeks following liberation due to the camp's horrific conditions.

- ***Psychological impact on the liberators***

The negative psychological toll on liberators was significant. Many experienced long-term trauma. Others reported feelings of guilt and compulsion to share what they had witnessed. Many U.S. soldiers reported psychological trauma and long-term negative emotional impacts from their experiences in the camps (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum n.d).

- ***The drive to document and witness***

When the Allied soldiers liberated the concentration camps, they became witnesses to genocide (Azbug 1987). Soldiers played a crucial role in documenting the Holocaust. The United States Memorial Holocaust Museum and Yad Vashem has catalogued and preserved the testimonies of many of these soldiers.

The first Nazi camp liberated by United States forces was Ohrdruf. The US generals (Dwight D. Eisenhower, Omar Bradley, and George S. Patton) insisted on photographing and filming the conditions in the camp. British members of parliament also visited Bergen Belsen.

Eisenhower urged journalists and members of Congress to visit the camps. He believed that firsthand witnessing was essential to counter future denial. He later wrote:[6]

> *"The things I saw beggar description… I made the visit deliberately, in order to be in a position to give first-hand evidence of these things if ever, in the future, there develops a tendency to charge these allegations merely to propaganda."*

4. The role of chaplains

Prior to liberation, the role of the chaplain was to provide religious, spiritual, moral, and welfare services to the soldiers within an ordered military structure. However, upon liberation and in its immediate aftermath, chaplains became the first responders and witnesses to a spiritual and humanitarian catastrophe. They navigated grief, faith, and morality in the aftermath of genocide. In trying to care for the survivors, chaplains transcended their official role (Thompson 2023; Lewis 2021).

At Bergen Belsen, at least thirty British chaplains, attached to both combat and medical units, either witnessed the liberation, were involved in the care of survivors, or visited the camp after liberation (Thompson 2023). A few of these chaplains were Jewish. Reverand Leslie Hardman and Reverand Isaac Levy wrote extensively about their experiences (Lewis 2021). Amongst the American forces who liberated camps such as Buchenwald and Dachau, there were also several Jewish chaplains. Abraham Klausner played a pivotal role in the liberation and its aftermath at Dachau concentration camp (Grobman 1993). In the face of immeasurable suffering and starvation, disease and death, the role of the Allied chaplains, particularly the Jewish chaplains, immediately following liberation was multifaceted. It involved:

- ***Confronting the catastrophe***

Chaplain Leslie Hardman tried to capture the enormity of the suffering in a poem about his experience at Belsen recorded in the Imperial War Museum in London. He drew inspiration from the Rabbinic refrain 'If all the seas were ink' that is found in Rabbinic literature[7] referring to the vastness of Torah knowledge and complexity of governance:

> *"If all of the sky were paper, and all of the trees were pens, and all of the waters were ink, there would still not be enough material to describe the sufferings at the hands of the Nazis."*

- ***Burial and religious services***

One of the first tasks facing the liberators was burial of the dead. At Dachau, Chaplain Abraham Klausner conducted services and funerals (Grobman 1993). At Belsen, thousands of corpses were buried in mass graves. At each mass grave, a burial service was held by chaplains of different faiths. The chaplains conducted burials for over 20,000 bodies in one day. Most of the dead were Jewish. Lewis (2021) recalls an incident when Chaplain Leslie Hardman invited the Protestant chaplain to say the first prayers. The chaplain replied that it would be more fitting for Hardman to do so, as most of the people buried were Jewish.

In addition to burial services, Jewish chaplains conducted prayer services, Sabbath and festival rituals. On the first Friday night following liberation, at Belsen, Leslie Hardman conducted a Friday night service. The service concluded with Kaddish (the mourner's prayer) and the singing of *Hatikva*, "The Hope". *Hatikva* became the national anthem of the state of Israel.

- ***Providing food ahead of the military relief efforts***

Jewish chaplains pressured the military authorities, officials, and national and international Jewish organisations for supplies, relief teams, and more chaplains. Lewis (2021) recounted the extraordinary lengths that Jewish chaplains went to in first days of liberation to obtain food. Leslie Hardman, based in Belsen shot a deer, strapped its carcass to his vehicle and brought it into the camp. He also induced a unit of Polish troops living on a farm to send in milk, vegetables, and eggs. Eugene Lipman, an American chaplain, took food from U.S Army food dumpsters to feed survivors. Grobman (1993) described the work of Chaplain Abraham Klausner who worked tirelessly to secure food, clothing, and medical care, often bypassing military bureaucracy.

- ***Pastoral care***

Thompson (2023) draws from Imperial War Museum documents that recorded the priorities of the chaplains in Belsen. They were 'To help those who lived to regain their humanity'. Thompson (2023) asserts that chaplains developed a particular pastoral role that focused on supporting survivors to talk and to be listened to in order to regain their strength to continue. Thompson highlights the comments of Lieutenant Colonel A.M. Campbell, one of the most senior medical officers at Belsen who praised the chaplains' work: "The true physicians here are the padres, and they are doing more good to the patients than anyone else".

Lewis (2021) records the extent to which British Jewish chaplains put themselves at risk to minister to Jewish survivors. Powdered with DDT from head to foot (in an attempt to protect himself from typhus which was raging in the camp), Chaplain Leslie Hardman went into the huts of prisoners. He talked at length with survivors, smoked, listened to them, fed them and distributed cigarettes. Hardman contracted dysentery and diarrhoea from sharing food with the survivors.

- ***Being a Jewish presence and symbol of hope***

The very presence of Jewish identified chaplains lifted spirits and boosted the morale of Jewish survivors (Lewis 2021). Hardman, in his memoir recalls Jewish people upon first seeing an army officer with the insignia of the Star of David *"touched and then stroked the badge of my faith, and finding that it was real murmured, 'Rabbiner, Rabbiner'"*. (Hardman and Goodman 1958). Grobman (1993) described how Abraham Klausner became a symbol of hope and moral leadership in USA. He was known as "The Survivors' Rabbi".

- ***Testifying to the genocide of the Jewish people***

The British Jewish chaplains used their periods of leave to speak and write about the horrors which they had found in the camps. They explained that most of the victims were Jews and that the catastrophe was primarily a Jewish one (this was not initially accepted in general British public discourse). Hardman and others spoke publicly about the horrors they saw, shaping Holocaust memory in Britain (Lewis 2021).

In Britain, press reports, broadcasts, and film footage from Belsen focused on the horrors of the camp and the actions of the rescuers rather than on the fact that most of the victims were Jews. Thompson (2023) asserts that Christian chaplains often recognised the specific Jewish experiences at Belsen. They tried to disseminate information about Nazi atrocities against Jewish people to the broader British public. Chaplains listened to survivors' experiences and shared survivor stories with others to ensure people learned the truth of what survivors had experienced.

- ***Reuniting survivors with their family***

From the first days of liberation chaplains collected the names of survivors and information about them, published lists of them, and, sometimes in breach of regulations about the use of military post, facilitated survivors writing letters to relatives and friends around the world. These efforts formed the basis of what became the Allied-operated tracing service. In 1955 this became the International Tracing Service under the Red Cross (Lewis 2021).

Grobman (1993) describes Chaplain Abraham Klausner's efforts to connect survivors with missing family members. He compiled and published a document (in Hebrew) called the "She'arit Ha-Pleitah" (Surviving Remnant)[8] which consisted of lists of names of survivors from Dachau and other camps. These lists were posted across Europe and distributed globally to help reunite families.

Reflections on liberation: faith in the face of suffering

Engaging with the historical reality of the Holocaust means confronting human suffering. Attempts to make sense of this suffering propel consideration of questions of theology such as the nature of God; the presence or absence of God in the Holocaust; and more broadly, questions of theodicy - reconciling suffering and evil with belief in an omniscient, omnipotent and benevolent God. Like their patriarch Jacob before them, Jewish thinkers have wrestled with God and his role (or lack thereof) in the suffering of his people during the Holocaust. Their ideas sit on a spectrum of belief in God, faith and doubt.

At the one end of the spectrum, Richard Rubenstein argues that the horrors of the Holocaust prove that a benevolent God who intervenes in history does not exist. Not only does Rubenstein remove God from the Holocaust, he also removes Him altogether from this world because of the Holocaust. Rubenstein clarifies that the elimination of God does not undermine adherence to customs and rituals of Jewish life (Cohn Sherbok 1990 & 1996; Yad Vashem n.d).

At the other end of the spectrum Rabbi Eliezer Berkovitz and Arthur Cohen in their respective books - *Faith after the Holocaust* and *Tremendum* - invoke the 'defence of free will' to argue that the Holocaust has nothing to do with God and everything to do with humans. They argue it is not God who caused or even allowed the Holocaust, but human beings exercising their free will. According to Cohen, God's role is to act as teacher rather than as a direct agent in human affairs (Cohn Sherbok 1990 & 1996; Yad Vashem Holocaust Resource Centre n.d.).

Berkovits invokes the Jewish concept that God sometimes hides His face from the world (in Hebrew, 'hester panim'). According to Berkovitz, the Holocaust was a time when God withdrew His presence, allowing evil to unfold without divine intervention. The reasons for this are unknown. Faith after the Holocaust means accepting the suffering of the Holocaust as part of God's incomprehensible plan, that defies human logic and understanding. Importantly for Berkovitz, the covenant between the Jewish people and God endures through the suffering and is not broken by the Holocaust (Cohn-Sherbok 1990 & 1996; Yad Vashem n.d).

In the middle of this spectrum are thinkers who advocate for new ways of engaging with God post Holocaust. Emil Fackenheim argues the Holocaust was revelatory. Arising from it, God issued a 614th Commandment:[9] After the Holocaust, Jews must survive as Jews. He asserts that Jews must not give Hitler a 'posthumous' victory. It is not enough to understand the Holocaust; it is imperative to survive as Jews. This contributes to repairing the catastrophic rupture the Holocaust represents (Cohn-Sherbok 1990 &1996; Yad Vashem n.d.).

Similarly, Irving Greenberg maintains belief in God but asserts a paradigm of brokenness. The Holocaust shattered faith and the traditional covenant between God and the Jewish people. A new voluntary covenant was established between God and the Jewish people based on mutual dignity and partnership (Cohn Sherbok 1990 & 1996; Yad Vashem Holocaust Resource Centre n.d.; Oppenheim 2000). Greenberg was influenced by Eli

Weisel and adopts a 'dialectical theology' where two opposing truths are held at the same time. God is recognised as both absent and present. The covenant was broken and yet endures. The response to the Holocaust today should be to restore the 'image of God' in every person by bringing out their individuality, equality, and their innate and infinite value (Greenburg 2006; Oppenheim 2000).

Elie Wiesel explores issues of theology and theodicy in his novels *Night, Dawn*, and *The Trial of God.* Rather than abandoning his faith completely, Wiesel lived with the tension between belief and doubt. He did not reject faith in God but he critically questioned the concept of divine justice and God's presence and role in the Holocaust. He characterised his faith as a "wounded faith" and conceived of a theology of protest. His faith involved a struggle with the divine silence yet he continued to seek meaning despite despair.

Lastly, Melissa Raphael offers a Jewish feminist theology of the Holocaust, articulated in her work *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz*. She criticises traditional Holocaust theology and argues it does not adequately take into account women's experiences. The focus on questions of divine justice or breaking and repairing a covenant overlook the physical and emotional aspects of women's suffering and resistance. Raphael argues God was not absent in Auschwitz. God was present in the feminine form of the 'shechinah' or divine presence. This "female face of God" appeared through physical acts of care and compassion among women. The Shechinah was revealed in the nurturing, solidarity, and mutual support women demonstrated by caring for each other (Pramuk 2017).

There is also support for these ideas within traditional Jewish texts. The Shechinah is the feminine aspect of God's presence, often described as dwelling among the people. In times of suffering or exile, Jewish tradition teaches that God does not abandon the people but rather goes into exile with them.[10] Mystical and Hasidic traditions describe the Shechinah as being in exile with the people, weeping with them, and sharing in their pain.[11] Raphael describes this so beautifully: Israel's God is "an accompanying God whose face or presence, as Shekhinah goes with Israel, in mourning, into her deepest exile, even if Israel cannot see her in the terrible crush." (Raphael 2003:6).

The Holocaust serves as a potent symbol of human suffering. Awareness and understanding of different responses to questions of theology and theodicy relating to the Holocaust, provide a framework to consider different approaches to suffering more generally.

For chaplains, the importance of having an articulated and considered approach to theodicy is twofold. Firstly, it is a resource from which to draw strength to undertake the work of spiritual care and support. This can involve working with ADF members attempting to process and develop their own sense of purpose, meaning and belonging (Runham 2022). Secondly, such a framework may be a source of resilience when working with people who are traumatised (Currier et al 2017). In particular, it may be a protective factor against burnout or a mechanism for enhancing chaplain wellbeing (Hydinger et al 2024).

Commemorating the Holocaust in 2025

Commemorating liberation and the Shoah in 2025 is shaped primarily by:

- the significance of 80 years as a unit of time since liberation and
- the continued and increasing levels of global antisemitism.

These two factors, set on the foundations of understanding Holocaust history, theology and theodicy, propel a commitment to recount the specific story of Jewish persecution and address antisemitism as well as to champion universal values that protect and preserve human rights and fight against racism and prejudice.

Significance of 80 years

In the Jewish tradition, the span of 40 years represents a generation. The Book of Numbers in the Torah (Jewish Bible) records stories of the Children of Israel wandering for 40 years in the desert before entering the land of Israel. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks assimilates the rabbinic commentary on this issue. He asserts that this period is needed so that the old generation, born into and shaped by slavery in Egypt passes away and a new generation emerges that is spiritually prepared for the challenges of freedom and covenantal responsibility. In the Jewish tradition, 40 years is not only a unit to measure time, but a symbol of spiritual maturation and generational transition. Over the span of two generations, the Children of Israel transform from disparate tribes of slaves to a unified and independent nation, governed by a system of law, living in the Land of Israel (Sacks 2017).

Two generations have matured since survivors were liberated from the concentration camps. They rose up from the literal ashes of the death camps. In a testament to their resilience, they built their lives, families and communities in challenging circumstances with limited resources (Ofer, Ouzan and Tydor Baumel-Schwartz, 2012; Cohen 2007). Many contended with the restrictions of being displaced persons and privations of immigration from Europe to Australia, the USA and Israel (Stone 2015). They and their children have wrestled trauma and its aftermath (Yehuda & Lehrner 2018) Over the span of two generations, the lens through which survivors view themselves has transitioned from that of prisoners to displaced persons, refugees, immigrants and citizens. Liberation is a complex process that takes generations (Stone 2015; Sacks 2017).

Wieviorka (2006) conceived of the concept of the ‘era of the witness’ and identified survivor testimonies as a significant force in Holocaust remembrance. After two generations, there are fewer and fewer survivors who can provide testimony of their experiences in the Shoah. There is a seismic shift taking place as the third generation emerges and explores new ways to carry the torch of collective memory into the future in ways other than through individual testimony (Kook 2020).

The Director-General of UNESCO, in her message on International Holocaust Remembrance Day this year, referenced the ‘twilight’ of the era of the witness and called for an increased, more serious commitment to perpetuating the memory of the Holocaust (UNESCO 2025).

Commemorating the Holocaust in the current context of global antisemitism

In 2025, Auschwitz operates as a museum and a memorial. Unfortunately, antisemitism is not a static exhibit in that museum. Antisemitism did not end with the end of the Holocaust and continues to rear its head in different forms today.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)[12] non- binding working definition of Anti-Semitism states:

> *"Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities."*

Under the IHRA framework, current examples of antisemitism include:

- Calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion; making, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews (e.g. Jews control the media); denying the fact, scope and mechanisms of the Holocaust .
- Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination and denying the right of the state of Israel to exist, delegitimising Israel and applying double standards by requiring behaviour from Israel not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.
- Using the symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism to characterize Israel or Israelis; Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis; Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.

Rise in antisemitism in Europe

A recent EU survey by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) on Jewish People's experiences and perceptions of antisemitism indicates that a significant portion of Jewish people in Europe experience discrimination and antisemitism, particularly in employment and education, leading many to conceal their Jewish identity. The survey, conducted in 13 EU member states, reveals a high level of concern about safety and a prevalence of antisemitic incidents, particularly online.

The European Parliament statement on Holocaust Remembrance Day recognised the rise in antisemitism:

> *"Efforts to remember the holocaust and learn from History are critically important in the current context, characterised by antisemitism and Holocaust denial, and distortion and trivialisation of history caused or amplified by digital technology, social media and foreign interference and propaganda"*[13]

Rise in antisemitism in Australia

Since the October 7 massacre by proscribed terrorist organisation Hamas in southern Israel, and the ensuing broader middle east conflict, antisemitic attitudes and conduct have increasingly become normalised in Australian society.

The Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) reported a 316% increase in antisemitic incidents across Australia[14] between 1 October 2023 and 30 September 2024 compared to the previous year (Nathan 2024). NSW Police data[15] indicates there were 620 antisemitic related incidents reported to NSW police between October 2023 and January 2025. The NSW Jewish Board of Deputies (JBD) in its Submission to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Antisemitism in April 2025 (NSW JBD Submission) refers to the unprecedented breadth of antisemitic incidents across various sectors of communal life. The submission documents that Jewish cultural performances have been cancelled or not publicised; Jewish creatives have been targeted online and doxxed; Jewish academics have been disinvited from conferences; others have given up their positions due to constant and continuing antisemitic abuse. The university student encampments and protests created an environment in which some Jewish students felt unsafe on campus. Jewish individuals have reported being physically assaulted for expressing their Jewish identity or support for Israel in public spaces. Online spaces have been filled with harassment and hate speech directed at Jewish users. In public schools, there have been reports of teachers disseminating antisemitic propaganda through teaching materials as well as incidents of bullying and harassment of Jewish students. Several Jewish chaplains in the ADF have experienced direct attacks on their associated synagogues and schools.

The ECAJ Report on Anti-Jewish incidents in Australia in 2024 noted the emergence of new expressions of antisemitism not previously seen in Australia. They report on antisemitic incidents that include vandalism and arson of property (including synagogues and schools), Jewish homes and small businesses and shops, verbal abuse, graffiti and messages (including threats by phone and on social media).

The imperative to call out antisemitism and fight against it

Since 2010, the United Nations has designated specific themes for the annual commemoration. The theme in 2025 is “Holocaust Remembrance for Dignity and Human Rights”.

The United Nations Secretary General, in a statement at the United Nations memorial ceremony on Holocaust Remembrance Day, declared:

> *“80 years since the Holocaust’s end, antisemitism is still with us - fuelled by the same lies and loathing that made the Nazi genocide possible. And it is rising.”*[16]

In keeping with the theme of this year, he called on everyone to *“speak up against hate, stand up for the human rights of all”*, and to *“make those rights a reality”*.

While antisemitism poses a specific threat to the Jewish community, there is growing recognition that antisemitism undermines the foundational values of democratic societies such as respect, equality and freedom. Antisemitism erodes human rights. It is important to defend society against such threats and there is a need for vigilance against prejudice and racism (Segal 2025). The European Council's statement on Holocaust Remembrance Day reflected this thinking:[17]

> *"Today, we are witnessing an unprecedented increase in antisemitism on our continent, not seen since the Second World War. We condemn in the strongest possible terms the alarming rise in violent antisemitic incidents, Holocaust denial and distortion, as well as conspiracy theories and prejudice against Jews.*
>
> *More than ever, it is crucial that we uphold our responsibility to honour the victims of the Holocaust. We are determined to combat antisemitism and to protect and foster Jewish life in Europe. We denounce all forms of discrimination, intolerance, racism, and xenophobia, and will take decisive action to address these threats to democratic societies."*

Similarly, the Australian Human Rights Commission in its statement[18] on Holocaust Remembrance Day provided:

> *"International Holocaust Remembrance Day is being marked this year at a time when Australia is experiencing an overwhelming increase in antisemitism. Antisemitism is an insidious form of racism. Rising antisemitic incidents in Australia are abhorrent and serve as a call to action for people across the country to stand together in unity for an anti-racist Australia"[19]*

Survivor Roman Kent stated, "we do not want our past to be our children's future."[20] Two generations have grown up since the liberation of Auschwitz with this objective as a motivating force. As the third generation emerges, the challenge of realising this goal is more salient and demanding than ever.

Conclusion: lessons and insights to 'fight the good fight'

After reflecting on the significance of the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi concentration and death camps, there are five lessons or insights that can we take from these discussions to build our capability to 'fight the good fight'.

The role of chaplains in war

Upon liberation and in its immediate aftermath, chaplains were the first responders and witnesses to the spiritual and humanitarian catastrophe, navigating death, grief and faith. (see section 1). They conducted burials, provided physical sustenance, practical support and pastoral care. The recent Defence publication LP 0.0.3 *Chaplaincy in War* clarifies the role of ADF chaplains in combat zones. The role of chaplains in these two different contexts has some similarities. Chaplaincy in War outlines the role of chaplaincy includes honouring the dead; comforting the dying; caring for the distressed; supporting all

members regardless of faith or belief. It is envisaged that chaplains will be present during combat as spiritual first responders and also involved in providing continuity of care from the point of injury to the return to the homefront. Chaplains will also play a pivotal role in character formation, building morale and resilience of teams through fostering a mindset of perseverance, adaptation and growth.

The value of a coherent framework for addressing questions of theology and theodicy in the face of suffering

Liberation of survivors from the Nazi concentration and death camps revealed immeasurable suffering. Section 2 outlined some Jewish approaches to making sense of this suffering. The exercise of grappling with faith in the face of suffering has a broader application. A literature review (Peres et al 2007) of psychological and psychiatric research exploring the relationship between spirituality and resilience in trauma victims found that spirituality enhances coping mechanisms by offering a framework for understanding suffering and promoting hope.

Chaplains, drawing on their individual spiritual or faith traditions, can develop and articulate a coherent framework for addressing the challenges of theodicy. When working with members who have experienced trauma, such a framework may serve as a:

- personal resource from which to draw strength to facilitate discussions with ADF members attempting to process and develop their own sense of purpose, meaning and belonging (Runham 2022;).
- tool to build the chaplain's own resilience (Currier 2017); and operate as a protective factor against burnout or a mechanism for enhancing wellbeing (Hydinger et al 2024).

Recognise the perennial and persistent nature of antisemitism

This article is framed by experiences of antisemitism in two societies, literally, worlds apart. Section 1 described the antisemitic thinking embedded in the state sponsored laws of a fascist regime in Germany in the 1930's. Section 3 explained that following the Hamas attacks on October 7, 2023, and the ensuing conflict in the Middle East, there has been an exponential rise in antisemitic acts directed against Jewish people living in western liberal democracies, including in Australia. Unlike in previous generations, these governments have condemned antisemitic actions and grappled with how to address antisemitic behaviour.[21] Nonetheless, Antisemitism is not a relic of the past. It is very much a force to be reckoned with today.

Call out antisemitic behaviour and the threat it poses to Australian society

In the immediate aftermath of liberation, both the liberators and survivors committed to remember the horrors of the Holocaust to ensure they were never repeated. The mantra of 'Never Again' is a vow of vigilance against antisemitism, racism, and totalitarianism. Implicit in the call out, is a recognition that antisemitic behaviour poses a threat, not just to Jewish people but to the broader community and to liberal democratic societies. Australia's Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism warns that 'when hatred goes unchallenged our democracy is at risk' (Segal 2025:2) The recently released Plan to Combat Antisemitism states:

'Antisemitism erodes and is contrary to values that define Australia: fairness, freedom and mutual respect. It is a hatred that manifests in harmful words, and can lead to violent deeds, undermining the basic right to live free of discrimination and hate, and attacking the very foundations of a thriving democracy. As such, it poses a threat not just to Jewish Australians, but to our entire nation'.[22]

Commit to build a society based on values of dignity and respect that is free of racism

The theme this year for International Holocaust Remembrance Day is "Holocaust Remembrance for Dignity and Human Rights". At both an international level and within Australia, this theme has materialised with calls from leaders and leading institutions to combat antisemitism specifically and racism more generally. Chaplains, by virtue of their unique role and position within the ADF have several opportunities to take up this fight against racism and for dignity:

- In their engagement and interactions with ADF members, external stakeholders, and religious and community leaders, chaplains can lead by example. They can consistently model behaviour that reflects Defence values of Service, Courage, Respect, Integrity, and Excellence.
- Chaplains are positioned outside the chain of command. They offer support to members and advice to commanders. The role of a chaplain is also to support ethical decision-making in complex operational environments. Chaplains can identify, call out, speak up and advise against hate and prejudice across all ranks.
- ADF chaplains operate within the context of multifaith chaplaincy, which itself serves as a model for how to balance diversity and unity. This involves demonstrating behaviour grounded in dignity and respect for the rights of others while maintaining the integrity of one's own beliefs. Chaplains have the remit to provide pastoral care, spiritual support and guidance to all members of the ADF including members of different faith groups and no faith. Chaplains, guided by Defence Values, can work collaboratively, respect theological differences and focus on shared values (Runham, 2022).
- Best et al (2024) confirmed that: ADF chaplains play a vital role in supporting the emotional, psychological, and spiritual wellbeing of ADF members, especially in the face of trauma and stress; ADF members use chaplaincy services regardless of the chaplain's religious beliefs; and ADF members are aware that chaplains provide support that extends beyond their specific religious affiliation. This model of care facilitates conversations about meaning, purpose and belonging between members of differing faiths and backgrounds. While acknowledging and maintaining the integrity of differences, it also provides the opportunity to foster mutual respect, deep understanding and appreciation of each other's humanity.

End Notes

1. The United States Congress established Days of Remembrance that usually take place between April and early May (20 -27 April in 2025). These days loosely correspond to Israel's annual Holocaust Remembrance Day (Yom Hashoah) which falls out a week after Passover on the 27th of the Hebrew month of Nissan (23 April in 2025).
2. Resolution 60/7 of the United Nations General Assembly, 1 November 2005
3. Brosnan, 2018; Gilbert 1986; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d.; Yad Vashem, n.d.
4. Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum. (2025) News. *We, Survivors, know that the consequence of being an alien is active persecution: 80th anniversary of liberation of Auschwitz.* https://www.auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/we-survivors-know-that-the-consequence-of-being-an-alien-is-active-persecution-80th-anniversary-of-liberation-of-auschwitz-,1744.html (Accessed: 1 July 2025).
5. Ethics of the Fathers Ch 2:21
6. General Dwight D. Eisenhower, letter to Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall, April 15, 1945
7. Babylonian Talmud Tractate Shabbat ,11a; Midrash Shir HaShirim Rabbah 1:3
8. The term is referenced in the biblical books of Ezra and Chronicles 1 to refer to survivors of war and the wrath of God.
9. Jewish Tradition particularizes 613 commandments that Jewish people are required to fulfill. This is based on Maimonides' codification of Jewish Law.
10. Babylonian Talmud, tractate Megillah 29A: "Wherever Israel went into exile, the Shechinah went with them."
11. Zohar (Vol. III 20a–23a)
12. The IHRA an intergovernmental organization with 35 Member Countries and 8 Observer Countries. Founded in 1998 to address issues related to the Holocaust and genocide of the Roma.
13. Georgescu, A.-A. (2025) International Holocaust Remembrance Day 2025: 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS)
14. Incidents are classified as antisemitic if they meet the definition of racist violence and the categories developed by the 1991 National Inquiry into racially motivated violence conducted by the then Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC): Irene Moss and Ron Castan QC, *Racist Violence: Report of the National Inquiry into Racist Violence in Australia* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1991) at pp. 14-15.
15. Parliament of New South Wales, Question and Answer Tracking Details: 3227 - Police and Counter-terrorism - ANTISEMITISM INCIDENTS. Available at: https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lc/papers/pages/qanda-tracking-details.aspx?pk=102333 (Accessed 7 July 2025).
16. 'Hold fast to our common humanity': UN marks 80 years since death camps were liberated | UN News. Available at: https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/01/1159476 (Accessed 7 July 2025).
17. Statement by the members of the European Council on the occasion of International Holocaust Remembrance Day - Consilium. Available at: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/01/27/statement-by-the-members-of-the-european-council-on-the-occasion-of-international-holocaust-remembrance-day/#:~:text=We%20condemn%20in%20the%20st-rongest,the%20victims%20of%20the%20Holocaust. (Accessed 7 July 2025).
18. Australian Human Rights Commission commemorates Holocaust Remembrance Day | Australian Human Rights Commission. Available at: https://humanrights.gov.au/about/news/media-releases/australian-human-rights-commission-commemorates-holocaust-remembrance-day#:~:text=This%20International%20Holocaust%20Remembrance%20Day,free%20from%20discrimination%20and%20violence. (Accessed 7 July 2025).

19. Australian Human Rights Commission commemorates Holocaust Remembrance Day | Australian Human Rights Commission accessed 7/7/25 https://humanrights.gov.au/about/news/media-releases/australian-human-rights-commission-commemorates-holocaust-remembrance-day (Accessed 7 July 2025).

20. 2015: Roman Kent :: International Auschwitz Committee :: Remember the past, be responsible for the future https://www.auschwitz.info/en/essentials/essential-speeches/2015-roman-kent.html (Accessed 3 July 2025).

21. The Australian government established Australia's Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism (ASECA). ASECA has recently released the Special Envoy's Plan to Combat Antisemitism Special Envoy's Plan to Combat Antisemitism | aseca https://www.aseca.gov.au/news/article/special-envoys-plan-combat-antisemitism (Accessed 7 July 2025).

22. Special Envoy's Plan to Combat Antisemitism | aseca https://www.aseca.gov.au/news/article/special-envoys-plan-combat-antisemitism (Accessed 3 July 2025).

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My Thoughts on Finding 'Real-World' Resilience:
The essential, enduring individual and military organizational obligation

MAJGEN (Retired) Roger Noble, AO, DSC, CSC.

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Abstract

MAJGEN Roger Noble reflects on the death of an Australian soldier in East Timor and the personal impact to his family and friends, his battalion and chain of command. He examines the need for soldiers to be ready for this kind of event. To be prepared mentally and spiritually for the impact of death and violence.

Noting that war is a terrible and costly undertaking he reflects on the need for soldiers and officers of all ranks to be able to maintain perspective through their moral self awareness and personal balance; not solely rules of engagement or legalistic rhetoric. Using a number of examples he highlights key aspects to success through preparation, reflection and decision making frameworks enabled by disciplined, expert advice; founded on a solid base of moral and legal accountability. He champions an unwavering commitment to integrity and truth in order to achieve the mission.

He concludes that preparation for the individual - moral, physical and mental - is critical to organisational success and individual mental/moral 'survival' and effectiveness. The best protection for the individual, he says, and by extension the organisation, is to instil a strong internal moral compass, a prepared mind and a strong physical state.

Key Words: integrity, mental health, moral compass, reflection, resilience, truth, world view

Introduction

"More life may trickle out of men through thought
than through a gaping wound."

Thomas Hardy

As a cadet in the 1980s time for spiritual reflection was short and choices simple – clean machine guns or church parade. My class suddenly got devout fast. As my long military career progressed and experience accumulated, I found that – at the very least – a sure understanding of yourself and your place in the world was essential ballast in the storm. For many this self-understanding is founded in a formal religious world view and for others it occurs through other ways and means. I have, however, observed that too many give it too little thought until confronted with the realities of the profession or the impacts of life. I have formed the personal view that preparation for war and life require reflection, self-awareness and the development of a moral and personal 'compass' through which balance and direction can always be found – even in the most difficult of circumstances.

On 8 August 2000 I learned the lesson that most soldiers must learn the hard way – the terrible meaning of military life and purpose. At the time I was the Brigade Major of Sector West in East Timor, and we were deep in a serious tactical effort to counter militia penetration and offensive action inside East Timor. Few are probably aware of this post-INTERFET operational challenge, but it vitally engaged our Australian Infantry battlegroup and its NZ counterpart in a daily lethal tactical challenge in the thick jungles and steep mountains of East Timor.

AUSBATT, at the time 6 RAR, included a troop from my old cavalry squadron – 1 Troop, A Squadron, Second Cavalry Regiment. I knew every one of the soldiers in it personally and had great faith in their skill and ability. The cavalry played a key role in moving quickly and far across the area of operations, even up the sides of the mighty Foho Leolaco.

Late afternoon on the 8th August we received a radio message that there was a priority one casualty in the cavalry troop from what we would later learn was the result of an accidental discharge of a rifle in the back of an ASLAV. I listened to the radios at brigade headquarters wondering who was shot and hoping against hope that they would be okay. AUSBATT had it under control and the recently arrived Blackhawks and expert medical crew were quickly on the scene. The soldier was airlifted and flown to Dili where, we were all informed, he had died in flight. The damage was just too much. Then I heard the name – Corporal Stuart 'Monsta' Jones.

I had known 'Monsta' for at least 5 years. He was an exceptional soldier, a textbook leader and a decent, good humoured man. He was priceless. He was one of those Corporals who could always be relied upon to set the Squadron Commander straight – and do it with a smile. He was a big man. I remember him always having to look down at me [and almost everyone else]. My very first quiet thought to myself was – this just isn't worth it. I suspect this is a common thought had by many who experience this kind of loss. The Brigade Commander allowed me to fly to Balibo to link up with the troop and see all the soldiers.

The troop was led by a young Lieutenant Andrew Abbott who was a smart, hard young officer. I saw with my own eyes how all the soldiers turned to him for leadership, and he delivered. He was strongly supported by the 6 RAR padre who walked around with a kind of large shepherd's crook! They focused on the mission and getting back out. They focused on the soldiers and respect for Monsta. A service was held at Balibo for Monsta that was the best I have seen and was almost entirely organised and run by the soldiers of the troop. It was a truly traumatic incident that I know has scarred those involved for life. They did everything possible to save him, but it was not to be. I saw 6 RAR almost to a man and woman, led by its Commanding Officer Mick Moon, support and back the cavalrymen 100%. The Commanding Officer of 2nd Cavalry Regiment, Mick Krause, flew out from Darwin and the Regiment met Monsta and carried him home when he landed back in Australia.

For the first time I understood what the colours, guidons, histories, values and traditions are all really for. They were for us and all those who would face these situations. They are the bedrock that stands through time. I miss 'Monsta' to this day. I think of his family.

He was fighting for a just, meaningful and noble purpose. He was a professional soldier, and I know he was proud to be one. Australia and East Timor are forever in his debt. I know he understood and accepted the risk and knew it was worth it. It is still almost impossibly hard to accept the reality of the cost, especially for family and loved ones.

I realised that I also personally needed to be ready for this kind of event. I reflected on the scale and depth of casualties in previous wars. Not all our fallen could be farewelled and remembered as Monsta was. At Fromelles in 1916 our 5th Division suffered 5000 casualties in just one night. Not all Brigade Majors could get even the short window I got to reflect and think. My deduction was that soldiers must be ready and prepared mentally and spiritually for the impacts of death and violence. It is a fundamental personal and professional requirement. It delivers the buzzword of our time – resilience. It does, however, require reflection and introspection. This can and must be guided and enabled by education, leadership, coaching and experience.

On operations I found that the moral and physical challenges are an inevitable component across all missions. The personal challenges come at you in many different forms and guises. There is an obvious and important focus on the loss and injury of those you know, command or fight alongside. There is injury to yourself – physical but also moral. The moral challenges do, however, come in many surprising and different forms – and they continue to appear to the very most senior levels.

During my 2011-12 Afghanistan tour as Deputy Operations and Plans officer for ISAF I saw the impact of loss and injury on senior commanders. At the peak of Coalition counter insurgency operations, the casualty rate across the Coalition during the 2012 fighting season was high. Senior officers were regular attendees at the continuous flow of ramp ceremonies. These ceremonies are important, emotional and end with the fallen soldier flying out over the mountains and headed home. I realised this had to be carefully – and personally – managed. I am convinced at least one senior US commander was suffering some form of psychological injury because of the frequency and impact of multiple ramp ceremonies. There is an unfailing need to show respect and to stay connected, however I learned you must also preserve and protect your own judgement and perspective. War is a terrible, costly undertaking and it demands focused, calm commanders and leaders who can daily balance risk to mission and risk to force. The stoic value of moderation surfaced as important to me. I found the need to focus on all aspects of the mission – the good, the bad and the ugly. The ramp ceremony must be experienced but counterbalanced alongside the experiences of the living and the successes and outcomes of all those engaged. I found speaking to Afghans – of all kinds and in all circumstances – important to retaining moral and personal balance and perspective. Speaking with soldiers across Afghanistan and absorbing their commitment, perspectives and effort was also another key to keeping the internal compass true and pointing in the right direction.

As a Deputy Commander Land Force Commander in Iraq in 2016 I operated as a backup Target Engagement Authority which required giving direction to shoot and kill the enemy via all available means. You would stand and order the execution of strikes watching the results in real-time. This required your own mental, moral and professional ducks to be aligned and ready.

A decision to strike and kill occurred in minutes and the consequences were normally occurring right before your eyes. It was an environment where the ability to consider critically and decide quickly and objectively was key. It needed to be founded on an understanding that you – and you alone – held the authority to kill and you – and you alone – were accountable. When surrounded by weapons experts, systems masters, lawyers, operational and intelligence staff operating at a real time operational speed it is potentially possible to lose context and drift from the mission and purpose. The keys to success were personal preparation and a decision-making frame enabled by the provision of disciplined, evidence based expert advice, all operating within a culture of speaking openly and directly [without fear]. This all took training, mental and moral preparation, a disciplined system and a learning culture founded on a solid base of both legal and moral accountability. This doesn't just happen by chance. It is and should be integral to the profession and the preparation for war.

Operational moral and ethical challenges come in many forms. Some arrive via email or text message. As a staff officer in Afghanistan, I found myself responsible for reviewing the outcomes of serious civilian casualty incident investigations. At the time civilian casualties were a high profile and a critical friction point between the Coalition and the Afghan Government.

Our command direction was to do everything possible to stop civilian casualties. One action was to increase command oversight which ended in me personally reviewing several of the more serious incident investigations. This was generally not too hard until I read one investigation that to me made poor conclusions and absolved those responsible of obvious wrongdoing. Of course, it involved a leading Coalition nation and had already been endorsed by the senior commanders of that country. I figured it had to be corrected but a stern email back would likely make me the next military casualty and would potentially cause a serious coalition rift. Do you let it go through to the keeper as all the oversight boxes, less mine, had already been technically ticked?

The answer is no. The sophistication then goes into how to address the issue. I was prepared and ready, after only moments, to shift to this challenge and drop the notion of any personal 'duck and cover'. This was possible because of my own personal moral calculation frame and my understanding of my commander's unwavering commitment to integrity and truth AND the mission. I found the right senior commander to tell another right senior commander in the right way that it all needed fixing. It got fixed the right way, with accountability affirmed and solutions incorporated into our business.

The critical organisational conclusion is that we need to prepare and position our people for the full set of challenges – moral, mental and physical. This looks like balanced moral and physical resilience anchored in a robust sense of self, consistent with our organisational values and ethics, that can survive everything from trauma through to the seductive calls to take easy options that avoid any personal risk and accountability. I suggest this is essential for the military professional confronted with the challenges posed by war. It also has the key benefit of arming individuals for dealing with life writ large and forever.

In the physical world we focus hard on personal fitness and have a training system that embeds the requirement to meet certain standards. We also prize collective challenges and training in the physical realm. Contact sport is a one place where we build resilience, follow rules, apply our commitment and personal codes of behaviour in practice in a challenging environment. We don't play sport just because we like sport. It is a means to an end for combat organisations reliant on the physical and moral resilience of our people. Sport and PT are, therefore, essential capability enablers, critical to our performance and capacity to sustain ourselves on operations.

In the moral and ethical world, we are perhaps less rigorous and targeted. In many ways our entire system is founded in the values, culture and systems designed to enable personal effectiveness in war. We need to think about this more and explain it better. My sense is we don't understand and explain what we are doing well enough. Many of the resilience building pieces are long in place and are regularly encountered along the way such as formal training, leadership culture and experience, the laws of armed conflict, spiritual and religious care and community, our discipline system and the application of justice. We do surround our people in the values, culture and expectations of the profession from day one. We provide examples of what right and wrong look like. We furnish the opportunity to learn and grow. Our training has, with variations over time, focused on replicating real world conditions and challenges – less actual violence, injury and death. I would contend that we could be more specific, targeted and demanding of our people and the expectation that they know and prepare themselves mentally and morally for the challenges of the battlefield. The individual has a personal responsibility to know and ready themselves and this must be respected and enabled by the organisation.

As a Brigade Commander I was to learn much from an effort by the Brigade padres who devised a simple, home-grown package of self-reflection designed to allow soldiers to examine their own world view. Through a series of questions and options participants were assisted to test and refine their understanding of their own world view. They were asked to see how and where they aligned with established frames of thinking. While religion [a number of them] were world view options the range and diversity of views extended well beyond religion and traditional frames. It was done individually but within a small group setting. I participated and was struck by how different many of us 'Australian soldiers' were from each other. Many commented that they had never done anything like it before. I wondered how a few of them, given their world views, would stand up to the intense pressure of loss and injury in war. Owning the best car possible potentially may be less significant in and after experiencing violent combat? This experience taught me we must self-reflect and be ready for our very notion of purpose, reason and right and wrong to be blasted by war. This needs coaches, mentors and forums that foster and welcome self-reflection and questioning. It is far better this is begun and considered well before the intensity of war delivers an unrelenting pressure cooker with little room or time for considered, calm personal reflection.

My experience tells me this is a lifelong journey and little is completely static. Nor is the battlefield the only challenge. As a senior officer life in the Defence bureaucratic system was almost always pressured, time poor and busy. The only time I encountered any institutional effort to foster mental and moral self-awareness for senior officers was when I was posted to the US Army.

The US Army had a mandatory program for general officers that was focused on reflection and making time for moral and mental health. It combined physical and mental activities designed to enable discussion and questioning. I found it remarkably powerful, and it had the effect of building stronger personal relationships between frantically busy individuals who are often [wrongly] considered to be beyond the need of any such support network. I have experienced nothing like this in the Australian system. Most who have lived it know the Australian Defence bureaucratic culture prizes being 'busy' over time for reflection, learning and even physical activity and personal health. These are personal issues, not organisational ones. It is little spoken about, maybe a taboo subject, but I suggest much can be learned from the US Army in this case.

My conclusion is the preparation of the individual – moral, physical and mental - is critical to organisational success and individual mental and moral 'survival' and effectiveness. The best protection for the individual, and by extension the organisation, is a strong internal moral compass, a prepared mind and strong physical state. Combined this gives resilience that enables effective and reliable decision making and action under pressure, both on the battlefield and in life. The military is already purpose designed to do this, but we institutionally perhaps fail to understand the holistic power and purpose of our own system. We must prize preparation of the mind and self. This means assigning time and resources to enable it – through service life and from soldier to general. It will deliver the 'resilience' so often talked about or referenced on today's PowerPoint slides. Resilience will be the product of individual and organisational commitment to building and enabling it through a continuous line of experience. This is the very best defence to the genuine risk suggested by Thomas Hardy at the start of this short essay.

Building Resilience through Spiritual Self Appreciation

Chaplain Gavin Keating, DSC, CSC

Chaplain Gavin Keating is currently serving with 5/7 RAR in Darwin. He has previously served as a chaplain at the Royal Military College Duntroon.

Abstract

The Army is uniquely skilled at giving its members identity, purpose, meaning, and a code for living. Although necessary, the very strength of this enculturation is problematic if it is not tempered by individuals who can appreciate their own individual spirituality. Assisting our soldiers and officers to do so is important for building their personal resilience and helping them to 'fight the good fight.' Herein lays the challenge for Army chaplains.

Key Words: appreciation, identity, meaning, purpose, spirituality

Please introduce the person next to you

I was recently privileged to participate in the introduction to a veterans' care program, which included several long serving and distinguished soldiers. As part of the initial *'ice breakers'* participants were asked to spend a minute talking to the person beside them with a view to then subsequently introducing their new friend to the group. It was a pretty standard introductory play. However, the catch was that the introduction could not touch on any aspect of the person's military service. Describing who you are, without referring to your military life (particularly if you joined young and your service is measured in decades) is surprisingly difficult. The services that exist within the profession of arms (for the purposes of this paper simply 'the Army') are uniquely good at providing their members with an identity, a purpose and a code for living. In the Australian Army this process begins immediately after you get off the bus at Kapooka, the Australian Defence Force Academy or Duntroon. You are recruit, officer cadet, staff cadet X, of platoon, squadron, company Y. Your purpose is to complete training so as to competently contribute to the Army mission etc. You will live in accordance with Defence's values of respect, integrity, courage, excellence and service. And so it goes throughout your entire career. There are special titles, ranks, badges, uniforms, hats (particularly berets!) and decorations that serve to cleverly reinforce this very specific form of enculturation. It is a necessary and very important process for forming the institutions that stand ready to fight wars.

Helping service men and women think about their identity

The very power of this process, however, contains some potential dangers, which may only become apparent under specific conditions or a certain times. What happens when the very institution that has provided your identity, purpose and meaning is the source of great hurt, perceived betrayal or moral injury? What happens when it simply comes time to take off the uniform and resume civilian life, where there is no one to provide guidance or a framework? Even under the best of circumstances the transition can be the source of existential crisis, thankfully short lived for most. But for a significant minority the loss

of this 'source of answers' can be profoundly troubling, traumatic and protracted.[1] This is even truer when the cessation of service is involuntary, health related or otherwise unplanned. Is there a fix? Perhaps a partial answer lies in helping our service men and women to think about their identities, purpose and meaning on their own, separately from the answers that their profession necessarily provides. Counter intuitively this process needs to begin almost as early as the institutional enculturation process. Superficially, it may seem that such encouragement could undermine the very process of forging people who embrace the institutional answers that create functioning teams. However, this view assumes that the individual and institutional responses to these existential issues are necessarily in conflict. The opposite is also a possibility, that individuals who have made some effort to develop their own life answers, and reconcile them with the Army's answers, are more *spiritually resilient* simply because they are not solely reliant on institutional dogmas, important as these may be.

The Three Existential Questions

The subject of human resilience has attracted a lot of attention over the last few years. Inevitably, every generation frets that the generation that follows is, or will prove to be, less capable of dealing with the challenges that life inevitably presents, as well as those peculiar to specific times and places. Military service, both in the barracks, but most particularly in war, adds very particular and potentially overwhelming stresses to those typically encountered in the human condition. Issues concerning life and death cannot be safely ignored when you are in the trenches and faced with taking and giving life. Fostering human resilience is a critical part of preparing soldiers for war. Human resilience is multi-faceted and spans the physical, mental, social, and *spiritual* domains.[2] Western armies have traditionally been pretty good at fostering the first three but, arguably, have struggled with specifically addressing the spiritual domain. Chaplains often find people discretely rolling their eyes when you mention the word 'spiritual', which for many is synonymous with 'religious' and simply a prelude to a good dose of 'God bothering.' Put simply, however, spirituality is whatever gives a person's life its meaning and purpose, and how these contribute to forming identity and character. When faced with existential crisis spirituality is what people necessarily fall back on. It provides a basis for making sense of what has happened, determining responses and providing the motivation and means to adjust, adapt and overcome. In past generations, religious belief was a significant contributor to many people's spirituality but the two are not the same; spirituality can exist completely independent of belief in God. On the other hand they are not mutually exclusive and can overlap. If this definition of spirituality is accepted, then all humans, with only some extreme exceptions, necessarily have a spiritual nature.

The former Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, Jonathan Sachs, said in 2016:

> *None of the four great institutions of the modern age – science, technology, the market economy or the liberal democratic state – offers a compelling answer to the three great questions every reflective human being will ask at some stage in his life: Who am I? Why am I here? How then should I live? The 21st century has left us with a maximum of choice and a minimum of meaning.*[3]

Perhaps the renowned and much respected Rabbi underestimated the military's ability to provide people with the answers to these three critical existential questions (the big three). Sachs succinctly outlines, however, how humans conceive their spirituality. It is the cognitive and emotional ability to ask these 'big' questions that helps to define our human being. Your favourite pet Labrador is perfectly content with being fed, walked and patted. Animals do not suffer existential crises. As the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor has remarked, "Only a human being can ask the question "Do I really want to be what I am now?"'[4] Of course, it is possible for humans to choose to avoid addressing Sach's questions. Arguably such avoidance is an answer in and of itself. Such avoidance, however, can come at tremendous cost, particularly when people are faced with life changing circumstances outside of their control. How is meaning and purpose derived under these conditions? The power of self conceived meaning is immense, as demonstrated by Victor Frankl's experiences in the Nazi concentration camps during the Second World War. One of his central observations was that inmates who maintained a strong sense of purpose and meaning had the best chance of survival; those who lost any meaning quickly succumbed.[5]

Spirituality and Fighting Power

All of this may seem too esoteric for a profession that is by necessity inherently practical and action oriented. However, the power of spirituality is reflected in our doctrine and historical experiences of war, albeit often in an indirect manner. The *Fundamentals of Land Warfare* articulates:

> *"Fighting power is the way in which Army generates its capacity through the integration of the physical, moral and intellectual components at both the individual and organisational level... Army's will to fight is provided primarily by the moral component of fighting power [that] supplies and sustains the will to fight. The moral component embodies those individual and organisational characteristics that are fundamental to success — morale, integrity, values, and legitimacy."*[6]

General George C., Marshall, the US Army Chief of Staff 1939-1945, specifically addressed spirituality in a 1941 speech:

> *I have said it is the spirit which endures to the end… [The] determining factor in war is something invisible and intangible, something wholly spiritual… the troops will fight, if they have to fight, with more than their bodies and their hands and their material weapons. They will fight with their souls.*[7]

It has already been acknowledged that the Australian Army necessarily provides institutional answers to Rabbi Sach's 'big three.' However, institutional answers alone are insufficient and total reliance upon institutional 'spirituality' can be highly problematic, both for individuals and the institutions in which they serve. There are grave risks when an individual's spirituality is totally subservient to an institution. If you doubt this then perhaps reflect upon occasions when institutional conditioning served to undermine the very values that the institution professed to uphold: 'This organisation is so important to who I am that

I simply cannot say or do anything that brings it into disrepute, even when I know people within it are acting against our own values.' This test of integrity, made particularly difficult by the pressures of war, is more common than most institutions would care to admit and it is certainly not confined to the military.

If the above premises are accepted then it follows that the foundational element of the moral component of fighting power is an individual's system of belief and values, situated within the Army's broader organisational value system. Put more bluntly, *at an individual level personal spirituality, an individual's response to the 'big three,' is the bedrock of the moral component of fighting power.* The United States Marine Corps' (USMC) definition of 'spiritual fitness' reinforces this understanding:

> *Spiritual fitness is inner strength from higher purposes. Spiritual fitness is the identification of personal faith, foundational values, and moral living from a variety of sources, such as a connection to the Divine, participation in a transformative community, the pursuit of meaning and significance, shared sacrifice for a greater good, and a commitment to character and a life of honour. Spiritual fitness helps Marines live out the warfighting ethos with character and honour.*[8]

Given that the USMC is well known for its 'institutional spirituality' it is significant that its definition of spiritual fitness acknowledges its foundations in the identification of *personal* faith, foundational values and moral living. The USMC's spiritual fitness doctrine explicitly links spirituality to resiliency, human performance, and combat effectiveness.[9]

Green Zone	Yellow Zone	Orange Zone	Red Zone
Potential Indicators	**Potential Indicators**	**Potential Indicators**	**Potential Indicators**
• Engaged in life's meaning/purpose	• Neglecting life's meaning/purpose	• Losing a sense of life's meaning/purpose	• Feels like life has no meaning/purpose
• Hopeful about life/future	• Less hopeful about life/future	• Hold very little hope about life/future	• Holds no hope about life/future
• Makes sound moral decisions	• Makes some poor moral decisions	• Makes poor moral decisions routinely	• Engaged in extreme immoral behaviour
• Fully engaged with family, friends and community	• Somewhat engaged with family, friends and community	• Weakly engaged with family, friends and community	• Not engaged with family, friends and community
• Able to forgive self and others	• Difficulty forgiving self and others	• Not likely to forgive self or others	• Forgiveness is not an option
• Respectful of others	• Less respectful of others	• Strong disrespect of others	• Complete disrespect of others
• Engaged in core values/beliefs	• Straying from core values/ beliefs	• Disregards core values/beliefs	• Abandoned core values/beliefs

Figure 1. *USMC Spiritual Fitness Guide.*[10]

If spiritual fitness is important for fostering personal resilience, in both peace and war, then a key concern should be how it is fostered during training. Much work is already conducted during *ab initio* training under the auspices of character development, world-views exploration and ethical and moral conduct lessons. However, while these are all intimately linked to spirituality they do not necessarily directly confront trainees with

the requirement to recognise the importance of the 'big three' and challenge them to think carefully about them. 'Knowing yourself' is the first principle of leadership, and this requires 'knowing' across the physical, mental, social, and *spiritual* domains. Leadership also requires leaders to help their followers better understand themselves.

Military Appreciation Process / Spiritual Appreciation Process

The Army is particularly good at teaching the military appreciation process (MAP, or whatever we are calling it this week) and Army planners are highly valued because of this training. It is somewhat ironic, then, that the Army does not apply the same rigour to encouraging the conduct of the *spiritual appreciation process*. Equally ironic is the fact that the fundamental steps of the military appreciation process essentially mirror the key steps required to explore individual spirituality. If understanding the mission is the key to operational success then understanding one's life mission is the key ingredient for living 'the good life' and for building the spiritual resilience required to do so.

The understanding of purpose, method and endstate central to military appreciations almost mirror Sachs' 'big three.' They encourage an understanding of the 'bigger picture'; in the case of spirituality the existential big, big picture. Both require the 'appreciators' to understand a context beyond themselves and to articulate how this will drive their actions. The answers to 'Who am I? Why am I here? How then should I live' provide people with meaning and purpose and hence build their self identity and approach to living. Anything that can be done to encourage spiritual self appreciation contributes towards building resilient, well grounded individuals capable of overcoming the challenges of life, inside and outside of their military service. If the nomenclature spiritual appreciation process (SAP) is too 'kumbaya' for your taste then think personal life mission analysis.

Of course, the analogy between the MAP and the SAP is imperfect. As challenging as the MAP can be (particularly for SSOs) the SAP is infinitely harder. The ability to even conceive the big three evolves only over time, with personal maturation and accumulated life experience, particularly the experiences of failure, loss and pain. Any 'life mission statement' that may eventuate from this process needs to be necessarily revised on a regular basis, particularly as people navigate their way through major life milestones (reaching adulthood, beginning a professional career, forging a life partnership, having children, becoming a grandparent, changing careers, ending careers, facing major life dramas etc). Life roles and identities change and often exist in multiples. The big three are simply not amenable to simple, one time answers. Part of helping people better appreciate their spirituality is shaping their expectations that answers concerning purpose, meaning and identity are seldom straight forward or complete. The reality is that spiritual appreciation is more of a journey than a destination. The biggest difficulty is that the SAP can be really hard. It means that people have to be prepared to confront themselves, honestly and transparently. The Western world seems increasingly hostile to such circumspection and in many ways provides less encouragement and opportunities for deep personal reflection than in times past. Trust in institutional spirituality has been greatly eroded in many parts of society, without being replaced by many authentic alternatives. Social media and its associated 'influencers' only encourage people to contract out their individual spiritual appreciations to those who do not necessarily have their best interests at heart.

The Challenge for Army Chaplains

Of course, in life it is relatively easy to identify areas for improvement and only a little harder to come up with possible solutions. The real challenge is following through on the solution execution.

Another mandatory online course introducing the importance of spirituality and the SAP is not going to help! What will help, however, is introducing the importance of understanding individual purpose, meaning and identity early in people's military careers, encouraging them to understand the links and differences between individual and institutional spirituality and providing time and opportunities for the self reflection that supports grappling with Sachs' big three.

Encouraging young (and not so young) soldiers and officers to explore their own spiritualities will help make them more resilient humans and, paradoxically, better and more resilient members of the profession of arms. Apps, websites, theory lessons, glossy brochures, resilience questionnaires and spirituals retreats may all help. However, the real key is simply getting the conversation started. Herein lays the challenge for Army chaplains.

End Notes

1. See *Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, Final Report – Volume 1: Executive Summary, Recommendations and the Fundamentals* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2024), 8-9, 13 at https://defenceveteransuicide.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report accessed 20 August 2025.

2. The United States Marine Corps describes resilience as 'fitness,' manifested across these four domains. See USMC, *Spiritual Fitness Leader's Guide*, MCRP 6-10.1(1), 2024, 1-5 at https://www.marines.mil/Portals/1/Publications/MCRP%206-10.1%20(SECURED).pdf , accessed 01 August 2025. For a complementary discussion on the domains of resilience see Ben Pronk, Dan Pronk and Tim Curtis, *The Resilience Shield* (Sydney: Macmillan, 2021).

3. Jonathan Sachs, *Statement to the Press on the Award of the Templeton Prize*, 10 March 2016 at https://rabbisacks.org/archive/rabbi-sacks-press-statement-on-being-awarded-the-templeton-prize/, accessed 02 August 2025.

4. Charles Taylor, "Responsibility for Self," in *The Identity of Persons,* ed. Amélie Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 281.

5. Victor E Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning,* Revised Edition, (New York: Washington Square Press, 1984).

6. Australian Army, *Land Warfare Doctrine 1, The Fundamentals of Land Power* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2017), 37, 39.

7. George C. Marshall, *Speech to Trinity College,* Hartford, Connecticut, 15 June 1941, at https://library.marshallfoundation.org/Portal/Default/en-US/RecordView/Index/13052, accessed 17 August 2025.

8. USMC, *Spiritual Fitness Leader's Guide*, MCRP 6-10.1(1), 2024, 1-1 at https://www.marines.mil/Portals/1/Publications/MCRP%206-10.1%20(SECURED).pdf , accessed 01 August 2025.

9. USMC, *Spiritual Fitness Leader's Guide*, MCRP 6-10.1(1), 2024, 1-6,1-7, at https://www.marines.mil/Portals/1/Publications/MCRP%206-10.1%20(SECURED).pdf , accessed 01 August 2025.

10. Figure 3-3. Spiritual Fitness Guide. USMC, *Spiritual Fitness Leader's Guide*, MCRP 6-10.1(1), 2024, p29, at https://www.marines.mil/Portals/1/Publications/MCRP%206-10.1%20(SECURED).pdf , accessed 26 August 2025.

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United States Marine Corps, *Spiritual Fitness Leader's Guide,* MCRP 6-10.1(1), 2024 at https://www.marines.mil/Portals/1/Publications/MCRP%206-10.1%20(SECURED).pdf , accessed 01 August 2025.

Moral Injury:

Addressing Recommendation 78 of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide

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Abstract

This paper responds to Recommendation 78 of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, calling on the Department of Defence (DoD) and the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) to prevent, minimise, and treat moral injury (MI). It outlines the strategic contributions of the Directorate of Spiritual Health and Meaning (DSHM) as part of the response of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Branch (MHWB) within the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to specifically address moral injury (a) education, training and support, (b) early identification and treatment, as well as (c) moral injury research. Drawing on current evidence, the paper demonstrates DSHM's proactive role in coordinating responses to MI within Defence and contributing significantly to broader national and international discourse. Future directions for collaboration between DoD (DSHM MHW) and DVA are outlined, highlighting a spectrum-based holistic clinical approach and cross-agency integration as essential enablers for comprehensive MI care.

Key Words: Chaplaincy, Moral Injury, Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide

1. Introduction

The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide (RCDVS, 2024a) significantly increased public awareness of the severity of suicidality within the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and highlighted concerns regarding suicidal behaviour among those under the care of the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA). Crucially, the Commission drew attention to the association between moral injury (MI) and suicidal behaviour (Jamieson et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2023; McDaniel et al., 2023).[1, 2, 3]

Prior to the RCDVS inquiry, awareness of MI across the Department of Defence (DoD) was limited. Nonetheless, since approximately 2014, various ADF chaplains and allied health professionals associated with the Directorate of Spiritual Health and Meaning have actively engaged in moral injury research and rehabilitation (DSHM, formerly DSHW[1]). Within Australia, the first presentation and rehabilitative program regarding MI was initially conducted by ADF Chaplains Renton McRae and John Saunders (2014)[4] who conducted two-weekend MI retreat programs for serving Army veterans. In 2015 the first Australian MI symposium publication by Tom Frame[5] was released in which several Australian military chaplains contributed chapters, namely Haydn Swinbourn,[6] Robert Sutherland[7] and Sarah Gibson,[8] all noting that pastoral and spiritual care (in one way or another) are relevant to bioethical issues such as moral injury (Carey et al, 2016).[9]

1 DSHM was previously the Directorate of Spiritual Health and Wellbeing (DSHM) as part of the ADF Joint Health Command.

Other ADF Chaplains, Timothy Hodgson and Lindsay Carey, were the first to broaden the potential involvement of chaplains by conducting international reviews of MI research and exploring numerous potential strategies for addressing MI (Carey, Hodgson, et al, 2016; Hodgson & Carey, 2017).[10, 11] These reviews clearly indicated that ADF chaplains, in alignment with the World Health Organization 'Spiritual Intervention Codings' (WHO-ICD-10-AM)[12] were more than capable of undertaking spiritual 'assessments', providing 'support', 'counselling, guidance and education', as well as implementing appropriate 'rituals' with regard to addressing MI.

Subsequently Hodgson and Carey undertook the first empirical exploratory study into the prevalence of MI among RAAF veterans approved by ADHREC[2] (Hodgson & Carey, 2019; Hodgson, 2020).[13,14] The results of this pilot research involving RAAF veterans (n = 187) were subsequently reported to the Australasian Military Medicine Association (AMMA, 2019), noting that approximately 62% of RAAF veterans (n = 116/187: 62.03%[3]) had a potential moral injury (PMI) as a result of their deployment/s due to RAAF veterans witnessing and/or experiencing one or more morally challenging events such as:

- enemy combatant immoral acts against women and children
- people smugglers' immoral acts against men, women and children
- enemy combatants wounding / killing / executing / death of civilians
- enemy combatant wounding / killing / death of fellow service members
- serving members self-betrayal of moral values due to commission or omission
- serving members betrayal of moral values by other serving members

Subsequent qualitative research by Hodgson et al (2021; n = 10)[15] and Jamieson et al (2021: n = 11)[16] involving Australian military personnel also confirmed the 'lived experiences' of veterans enduring a moral injury impact. Due to these Australian research outcomes and other international evidence, the Pastoral Narrative Disclosure (PND) strategy for addressing MI was developed by Chaplain Timothy Hodgson and Lindsay Carey. PND was designed to work in collaboration with other health and welfare providers to ensure a holistic and systematic 'counselling, guidance and education' intervention for veterans, so as to prevent (or at least minimise) and address the impact of MI at the 'coalface' (when potential moral injury events occur) or preferably treat MI post-deployment (Hodgson, 2020; Hodgson & Carey, 2022; Carey & Hodgson, 2018).[17, 18, 19] The DSHM subsequently conducted: (i) further research, (ii) implemented moral injury skills training (MIST), (iii) assessed various MI instruments and MI programs, and (iv) developed educational resources for ADF personnel and their healthcare providers so as to assist in the prevention, minimization and treatment of moral injury.

2. Purpose

While the final RCDVS report of 2024 extensively examined suicidality, nevertheless their constraints of scope, time, and resources prevented comprehensive coverage of MI. This paper aims to document the DSHM's past and current contributions in addressing MI, directly aligning with Recommendation 78's objectives of prevention, minimisation, and treatment.

2 ADHREC: Australian Defence Human Research Ethics Committee.

3 RAAF Study Cohort: It seemed likely that the number and per centage of morally injured RAAF veterans (62%) would have been substantially higher if a larger cohort of RAAF veterans had been recruited and, even more so, if Navy and Army veterans had been involved in the study.

3. ADF Definition of Moral Injury

The RCDVS (2024a)[20] identified considerable debate around MI definitions—which had also been clearly affirmed by the DHSM (Hodgson & Carey, 2017).[21] Following Williamson et al. (2021), the Commission described MI as 'a response occurring after events violating a person's moral or ethical beliefs'. Earlier definitions from Shay (1994, 2002, 2014)[22, 23, 24] Litz et al. (2009),[25] and Jamieson et al. (2020)[26] were also noted.

Before the RCDVS report, however, the ADF had already articulated its definition of MI. Following the Afghanistan Inquiry (ADF, 2020a, p.31, 170),[27] which recognised the impact of MI on deployed personnel, the ADF Joint Health Command developed an official definition. This holistic bio-psycho-social-spiritual definition received endorsement from the ADF Surgeon General and Chief of Defence Force. Recognised internationally for its comprehensiveness, the ADF definition states:

> *"Moral injury is a trauma-related syndrome caused by the physical, psychological, social, and spiritual impacts of grievous moral transgressions or violations of an individual's deeply-held moral beliefs and ethical standards, due to perpetrating, failing to prevent, witnessing, or learning about acts causing significant harm, or experiencing profound betrayal by trusted authorities"* (ADF, 2020b).[28]

4. Background Research

Jinkerson's (2021)[29] integrated review classified MI symptoms into core and secondary categories. Core symptoms included shame, guilt, anger, loss of trust, and existential conflict, significantly influencing secondary symptoms, notably depression, anxiety, intrusive recollections, social alienation, relationship issues, and self-harm behaviours. Numerous researchers and clinicians have noted clear distinctions which exist between MI and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and that 'existing evidence-based therapies for PTSD and depression may fall short in addressing MI (Litz & Walker, 2025).[30] PTSD, a fear-based anxiety disorder, arises from exposure to life-threatening situations, whereas MI represents a broader bio-psycho-social-spiritual syndrome independent from PTSD, though often associated with and potentially exacerbating PTSD – particularly with regard to complex and treatment resistant PTSD. A Venn diagram proposed by Koenig et al. (2023)[31] visually illustrates potential symptom overlap and distinctions between MI and PTSD [Appendix 1].

5. DSM-5-TR and Moral Problems

In 2024, an international collaboration of researchers and clinicians from Harvard University, Duke University, La Trobe University (in collaboration with the DSHM), University of California and the Ballor College of Medicine, wrote a submission to the American Psychiatric Association (APA) DSM-5-TR committee to include moral problems/moral injury within the APA Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders (DSM-5-TR).

Pending further research into MI (particularly with regard to its potential impact, diagnostic spectrum and treatment), the APA DSM-5-TR committee approved a minor but noteworthy revision to the DSM. Subsequently, given the relevance of the bio-psycho-social and spiritual implications of MI, the inclusion of 'Moral Problem' was added to the

DSM-5-TR Z-Code 65.8, forming a revised category which included an abbreviated definition relating to MI. The DSM-5-TR revised classification states:

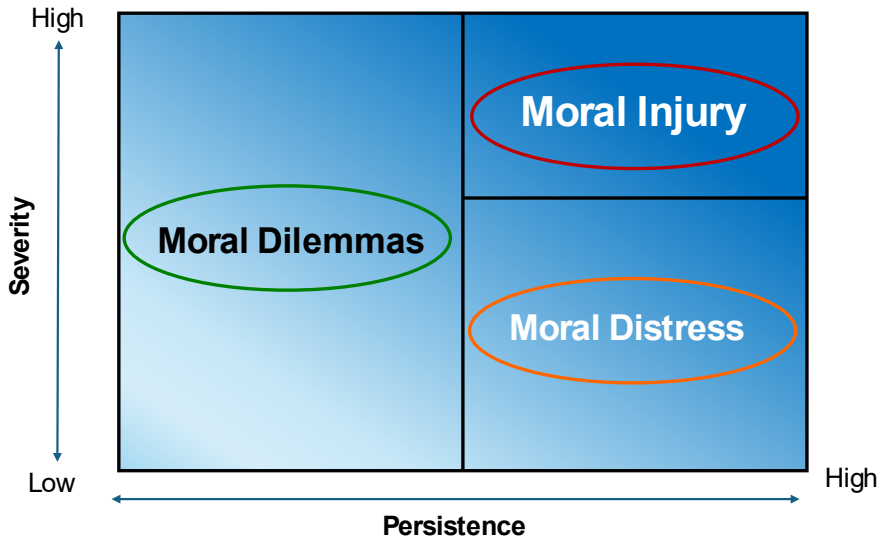
> ***Z65.8 Moral, Religious, or Spiritual Problem:***
> *This category may be used when the focus of clinical attention is a moral, religious, or spiritual problem: (a) Moral problems include experiences that disrupt one's understanding of right and wrong, or sense of goodness of oneself, others or institutions. (b) Religious or spiritual problems include distressing experiences that involve loss or questioning of faith, problems associated with conversion to a new faith, or questioning of spiritual values that may not necessarily be related to a religious institution* (APA, 2025).[32]

It is important to note that the DSM definition of 'moral problem' is a generic definition distinct from the more comprehensive meaning of MI as detailed in the ADF MI definition. Nevertheless, despite those who have argued that MI 'does not need to be a mental disease to be a treatment-valid, clinically measurable, and empirically studied problem' and thus 'does not require a life-threat/DSM-5 Criterion' (Litz, 2025, p. 195),[33] the inclusion of 'moral problem' in the DSM-5-TR Z-Codes, represents a significant step toward recognition of MI within clinical frameworks particularly given its association with suicidality.[1, 2]

6. MI Diagnostic Spectrum

Addressing Recommendation 78 requires an understanding of the diagnostic severity levels for MI. VanderWeele et al (2025)[34] proposed a severity and persistence spectrum, which in light of the changes to the DSM 5 would now distinguish between transient Moral Dilemmas; which may arise given a potentially moral injurious event, to the more severe Moral Distress, or at its extreme severity an enduring Moral Injury (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Moral Problems: Persistence and Severity Spectrum

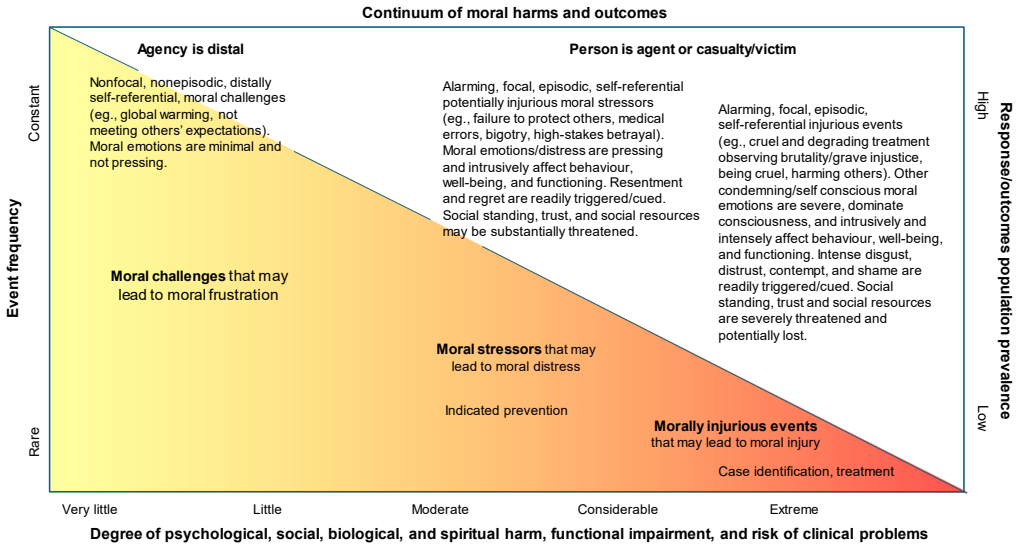


Source: Developed from VanderWeele, Wortham, Carey et al (2025). *Frontiers in Psychology, 16*, 1422441.

Conversely, Litz and Walker (2025)[35] propose a dimensional spectrum categorising moral harms and outcomes, ranging from moral frustration to acute moral distress, culminating in clinical MI (see Figure 2). Within this spectrum moral harms and outcomes lie on a continuum from (*left*) non-episodic 'moral challenges' that may be morally frustrating, to (*centre*) focal episodic moral stressors that may lead to 'moderate moral distress' to then even higher-magnitude but less prevalent morally injurious stressors that may result in considerable or the extreme (*right*) clinical syndrome of MI (Litz & Walker, 2025).[36]

Integrating these different dimensions, Litz and Walker inherently advocate for a proactive tactic, highlighting a multidisciplinary consensus approach for addressing the multidimensional nature of MI (Litz & Walker, 2025).[37] In addressing MI as a syndrome, the role of Chaplains can be vital for contributing to a multidimensional bio-psycho-social-spiritual intervention and thus ensuring holistic care of veterans (Jones et al, 2022; Carey et al, 2016).[38, 39] The prevailing consensus underscores MI as being distinct from PTSD, requiring immediate and informed interventions to avoid exacerbating impacts.

Figure 2. Litz & Walker's Moral Injury Continuum of moral harms and outcomes



7. Challenges

MI presents significant challenges in defence and veteran mental health contexts. DSHM's leadership through targeted training, extensive research, and proactive policy development substantially advances the DoD's response to Recommendation 78. The recommendations proposed in this paper, including embedded MI informed training, standardised assessment tools, and integrated Defence-DVA care pathways, exemplify actionable steps essential for addressing MI comprehensively and effectively.

8. RCVDS Recommendation 78 - Moral Injury

Recommendation 78 (RCDVS, 2024a, p.143) explicitly directs the Department of Defence (DoD) and the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) to collaboratively prevent, minimise, and treat moral injury. Specifically, it outlines the following critical areas: implementing comprehensive education, training, and support programs; ensuring early identification and treatment of MI; and conducting ongoing research to deepen understanding and improve practices.

Recommendation 78 stipulates that Defence and DVA must adopt a shared approach to mitigating MI's harmful effects, particularly in relation to suicide risk among current and former service members. It further instructs that this approach remain adaptive to emerging evidence and best practices, encompassing education and training initiatives, utilisation of validated assessment tools such as the Moral Injury Outcome Scale (MIOS) or equivalent scales, and a commitment to advancing relevant research within Australian military populations.

> **Recommendation 78: Prevent, minimise and treat moral injury**
>
> Defence and the Department of Veterans' Affairs should work collaboratively to develop an agreed approach to minimising the negative impacts of moral injury, including the risk of suicide and suicidality for serving and ex-serving members. The approach should evolve in line with emerging research and best practice, and at a minimum include:
>
> a. implementing education, training and support programs with the explicit objectives of preventing, minimising and treating moral injury
>
> b. considering using the Moral Injury Outcome Scale or other tools, as the evidence base evolves, to support the early identification and treatment of moral injury
>
> c. conducting or commissioning further research to better understand moral injury in the Australian military population.

9. Implementing Education, Training and Support Programs

The Directorate of Spiritual Health and Meaning (DSHM) has substantially contributed to education, training, and support aimed at addressing MI. These efforts include co-authoring ten scholarly journal publications, delivering eight introductory information sessions, and presenting at four international training seminars/conferences (NZ Defence Force, 2017(58); UK Defence Force 2023; US Harvard University MI World Congress, 2024) and seven Australian national conferences (Table 1).

Additionally, DSHM has produced four editions of the Pastoral Narrative Disclosure (PND) training manual as part of the Moral Injury Skills Training (MIST), alongside two widely distributed Moral Injury Flip Books (see Table 1 & Appendix 2).

Table 1. Summary of Education, Training and Support Programs Delivered by DSHM

(a). Implementing education, training and support programs with the explicit objectives of preventing, minimising and treating moral injury. [for Evidence refer to Endnotes]

Activity	RCDVS 78	Status	Evidence
Education			
• Education / Publications (x11) (see also Appendix 2)	RCDVS 78(a)	Completed	40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50
• Education / MI Seminar Intro Presentations (x7)* (refer below Training / Support for MIST Presentations)	RCDVS 78(a)	Completed	51 52 53 54 55 56 57
• Education / Conference Presentations (x8)	RCDVS 78(a)	Completed	58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65
• Education / Resource (Manual / Book) (x4)	RCDVS 78(a)	Completed	66 67 68 69
• Education / Resource (Booklet) (x2)	RCDVS 78(a)	Completed	70 71
Training / Support			
• MIST / Pastoral Narrative Disclosure (PND) training of ADF Chaplains / MSWOs (x10)	RCDVS 78(a)	Completed	72 75
• MIST / Pastoral Narrative Disclosure (PND) training for Community Chaplains (x6)	RCDVS 78(a)	Completed	73
• Training: Accreditation of MIST into Defence Force Chaplaincy College Initial Chaplaincy Training	RCDVS 78(a	Completed / Ongoing	74

Source: RCDVS (2024, p. 143).
Notes: *(*) MI Seminar presentations include both ADF internal introductory briefings and external introductory briefings to civilian chaplaincy organizations presentations. Community chaplains completing the full MIST training are included in Training Support.*
Abbreviations (alphabetical order) *ADF: Australian Defence Force; MI: Moral Injury; MIST: Moral Injury Skills Training; MSWO: Maritime Spiritual Wellbeing Officers (Navy); PND: Pastoral Narrative Disclosure; RCDVS: Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.*

Regarding training and support, the DSHM has conducted ten MIST-PND training sessions for approximately 350 Australian Defence Force (ADF) chaplains and Maritime Spiritual Wellbeing Officers (MSWOs). Additionally, 76 community chaplains working directly with veterans have been involved in one of six training sessions. Furthermore, MIST-PND training has been formally accredited and integrated into the Defence Force Chaplaincy College (DFCC) Initial Chaplaincy Training, ensuring sustainability of MIST for chaplains (see Table 1).

The MIST-PND training program is structured into three sequential stages: (i) an introductory online course on moral injury (MIST Level 1), (ii) an online introduction to Pastoral Narrative Disclosure (MIST Level 2), and (iii) a practical, face-to-face praxis-oriented session to confirm a chaplain's competency in PND (MIST Level 3). MIST-3 program evaluations revealed notably high satisfaction among participants, with average ratings of 4.73 out of 5 by ADF chaplains (n = 201; Carey et al., 2023)[75] and 4.88 out of 5 by community chaplains (n = 76; Carey et al., 2024).[76] DSHM plans to continue embedding and expanding this training approach within both defence and community veteran chaplaincy contexts (given appropriate resourcing) in order to update MIST content in light of further research and to ensure further professional development of chaplains. (see Table 1).

10. Early Identification and Treatment of Moral Injury

The DSHM's strategic initiatives for early identification and treatment of MI encompass three primary activities (see Table 2). Firstly, as described previously, the comprehensive MIST-PND training equips ADF and community chaplains with skills essential for the early recognition and intervention of MI among veterans.

Table 2. Instruments for Early Identification 0f MI

(b). Considering using the MIOS or other tools, as the evidence base evolves, to support the early identification and treatment of MI. [for Evidence refer to Endnotes]

Activity	RCDVS 78	Status	Evidence
• Training and Utilisation in using the screening tool 'Moral Injury Events Scale' (MIES) as part of MIST / PND. Approx. 300 ADF chaplains and 76 community chaplains trained.	RCDVS 78(b)	Completed/ Ongoing	1, 2
• Provided consultancy as part of MIOS development with international consortium (US, UK, Canada, Australia). Recent validation supports its potential as a comprehensive tool for assessing MI.	RCDVS 78(b)	Completed	81
• Development of a MI policy position, plus a universal biopsychosocial-spiritual (BPSS) training framework	RCDVS 78(b)	Ongoing	95
• Priority development, standardisation and implementation of clinical guidelines/pathways to support the early identification and treatment of MI for defence and veteran populations.	RCDVS 78(b)	Ongoing	Ongoing
• Ongoing professional development / training of current evidence-based MI material.	RCDVS 78(b)	Ongoing	Ongoing

Source: RCDVS (2024, p. 143).
Notes: Abbreviations (alphabetical order)
ADF: Australian Defence Force; MI: Moral Injury; MIES: Moral Injury Events Scale; MIOS: Moral Injury Outcome Scale; MIST: Moral Injury Skills Training; PND: Pastoral Narrative Disclosure; RCDVS: Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

Secondly, efforts were invested in supporting the international development and validation of the Moral Injury Outcome Scale (MIOS), through an international consortium involving the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. Australian representation within this consortium included stakeholders such as David Morton (Former Director General Health Policy, Programs and Assurance) and Chaplain (WGCDR) Lindsay Carey (Deputy Director – Research, DSHM).

Although the MIOS is considered highly advanced and validated, its broader implementation remains emergent (Litz et al, 2022; Tao et al, 2023, Plouffe et al, 2025)[77, 78, 79] particularly as 'the incremental and discriminatory validity of the MIOS has yet to be examined' (Litz & Walker, 2025, p.258). Given the validation and extensive international use of the Moral Injury Events Scale (MIES) since 2013, it has become an integral component of the advanced MIST-3 program, ensuring all chaplains are proficient in using this as a basic

screening instrument (Hodgson & Carey, 2024),[80] though likely the MIOS will become the dominant psychometric scale to be used/recognised by clinicians across the ADF and DVA. It is important to note that the Australian Defence Force Chaplaincy College has already approved and implemented an *'Australian Defence Force Chaplaincy and Moral Injury'* policy to ensure ongoing training in MI protocols and thus the early identification and treatment of MI (ADFCC, 2024).[95]

Finally, two additional initiatives are being led by Dr Nikki Jamieson (Assistant Director, Suicide Prevention, Lived Experience and Moral Injury) as part of the ADF Mental Health and Wellbeing Branch response: (i) a unique scoping for the development of an ADF MI policy position and to assist the development of universal bio-psycho-social-spiritual (BPSS) training framework in MI; plus (ii) the development of MI clinical guidelines which will be inclusive of a BPSS approach and thus requiring the involvement of chaplains. Scoping is underway regarding both the policy position and the clinical guidelines. The guidelines will aim to standardise and improve early identification and clinical management of MI across defence and veteran populations, thus addressing a significant gap in current practice and policy integration within the ADF and DVA.

The combination of structured training, validated screening tools, and development of clear clinical guidelines exemplifies DSHM's proactive strategy, fully aligning with Recommendation 78's emphasis on systematic early intervention and thus severity prevention, as well as minimisation of the impact of MI through treatment responses for both defence and veteran care frameworks.

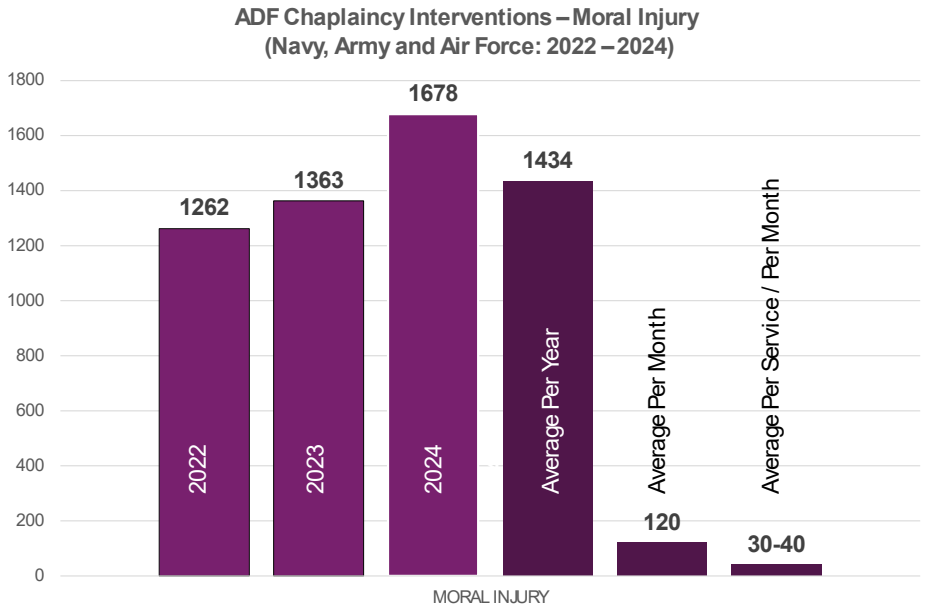
11. Research

The Directorate of Spiritual Health and Meaning (DSHM), in collaboration with Dr Nikki Jamieson (Assistant Director, Suicide Prevention, Lived Experience and Moral Injury), has actively pursued and continues to support comprehensive research initiatives into MI. These efforts are systematically aligned with Recommendation 78 which highlights the necessity for ongoing research to enhance the understanding, prevention, minimization and treatment of MI within the Australian Defence community.

The research conducted by DSHM includes the regular and systematic collation of data with respect to chaplaincy interventions relating to MI. All chaplains who have fully completed 'Moral Injury Skills Training' are deemed competent and fully capable of accurately identifying MI symptoms.[4] The average number of chaplaincy spiritual care interventions per year (2022 – 2024) totalled 1,434 (see Figure 3); although it is also important to note that Army are substantially greater in numerical size than Navy or Air Force. Further, the results would need to be divided across a multiplicity of navy, army and air force bases which would mean a further division of the data by each military precinct. Such specific information is not detailed in this report, neither are the analytics with regard to the type or cause of MI which is considered confidential information.

4 **Moral Injury Skills Training (MIST)** comprises three subjects to complete the '**Moral Injury** Skill Set' qualification (DEFSS00032) within the Australian Qualifications Framework: (i) DEFCHP008 Prepare to implement **Moral Injury** Pastoral Narrative Disclosure (PND); (ii) DEFCHP007 Assist personnel with **Moral Injury** through Pastoral Narrative Disclosure (PND); and (iii) DEFCHP009 Conduct **Moral Injury** Pastoral Narrative Disclosure (PND). https://training.gov.au/search?searchText=moral+injury+&searchType=NRT

Figure 3. Chaplaincy Interventions – Moral Injury (2022-2024)



Source: ADF DSHW Mental Health & Wellbeing Branch: 2025
Note: Combined Army, Navy and Air Force Data Not Necessarily Evenly Distributed Across Services

Another area of research relates to the evaluation of MIST (noted earlier). Evaluations were undertaken of MIST by both military and community emergency service chaplains. Results from these evaluations have consistently demonstrated the effectiveness and high levels of participant satisfaction, reinforcing the value of these educational interventions (Carey et al 2024, 2025).

Furthermore, the DSHM has contributed to the literature by undertaking and publishing detailed research reviews on critical topics such as MI and its relationship with suicidal behaviours, as well as examining the role of chaplaincy in addressing suicidality.[48] These reviews provided foundational information for informed policy making, program development, and clinical practice within Defence mental health services.

Currently, the DSHM is actively developing further empirical research into the specific outcomes associated with PND implementation (see Table 3). Additionally, recognising the importance of advanced scholarly inquiry, DSHM promotes and supervises postgraduate research projects undertaken by ADF chaplains, ensuring ongoing development of expertise and knowledge generation in MI management. Through these varied research strategies, the DSHM continues to advance evidence-based understanding of MI, informing best practice approaches across Defence and community support settings.

Table 3. Conducting or Commissioning MI Research

(c) Conducting or commissioning further research to better understand Moral Injury in the Australian military population [for Evidence refer to Endnotes]			
Activity	**RCDVS 78**	**Status**	**Evidence**
• Collation of MI Chaplaincy intervention data	RCDVS 78(c)	Ongoing	82
• Program evaluation: MIST/PND (Military)	RCDVS 78(c)	Completed	83
• Program evaluation: MIST/PND (Civilian)	RCDVS 78(c)	Completed	84
• Research Review: Moral Injury and Suicidal Behaviour	RCDVS 78(c)	Completed	85
• Research Review: Suicidality and Chaplaincy Support	RCDVS 78(c)	Completed	86
• Research: Support of Post-Graduate MI Research	RCDVS 78(c)	Ongoing	87, 88, 89
• Research: PND Effectiveness Evaluation	RCDVS 78(c)	Ongoing	90, 91

Source: RCDVS (2024, p. 143).
Notes: Abbreviations (alphabetical order)
MI: Moral Injury; MIST: Moral Injury Skills Training; PND: Pastoral Narrative Disclosure; RCDVS: Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

12. DoD and DVA Collaboration

The RCDVS prelude to Recommendation 78 states: "Defence and the Department of Veterans' Affairs should work collaboratively to develop an agreed approach to minimising the negative impacts of moral injury, including the risk of suicide and suicidality for serving and ex-serving members" (RCDVS, 2024-FP, p. 234).[92] While structural and operational differences between these institutions are acknowledged, the imperative for cooperation is both moral and clinical. Given the significant bio-psycho-social-spiritual and systemic impact of MI and its correlation with suicidality, enhanced collaboration between DoD and DVA should be considered a shared and reciprocal obligation.

It should be noted however that the DSHM had already provided initial MI chaplaincy training with respect to the Commonwealth Government's $2.9 million (2024-2026) 'Veteran Pilot Chaplaincy Program' for at-risk veterans and their families transitioning from the DoD to DVA (RCDVS, 2025-V5, p.75; Paras 462-463).[93] As noted by the RCDVS, the initial appointee to this pilot program (and subsequent additional chaplains; n=4) have undertaken MIST and PND training, which was provided by the DSHM.[94] As part of the collaboration between DoD and DVA it is suggested that future DVA chaplains should also be involved in the ADF's MIST/PND training including any ongoing professional development.

A number of potential concrete opportunities exist to develop integration across DoD, DVA and Ex-Service Organisation (ESO) sectors (see Table 4). One recommendation is the appointment or formal recognition of chaplaincy liaison representatives from organisations such as DVA and ESOs (e.g., RSL, Legacy, Disaster Relief Australia, Naval Association of Australia, RAAF Association, various Army Associations), so as to facilitate moral injury-

informed care[5] across all sectors. These liaison roles would improve the continuity of care for personnel transitioning from active service to veteran status.

A second recommendation is the continued expansion of MIST-PND training for community-based chaplains, particularly those working within or alongside veteran organisations (e.g., DVA or RSL chaplains). This could also extend to clergy and chaplains supporting emergency service personnel or others exposed to high-impact occupational trauma who may have previously served in the ADF. Strengthening capability at this community level enhances the post-service care network and supports MI prevention and recovery.

A third proposal involves the joint development and dissemination of shared MI resources between DoD and DVA. Most importantly, to achieve this, it would be necessary to maintain a dedicated and resourced team responsible for "all things MI" including internal and external Defence and DVA collaborations ensuring the collaborative utility of personnel and resources such as clinical guidelines, standardised screening tools, practitioner handbooks, and digital learning modules. Harmonising these materials would support consistency of language, conceptual framing, and referral practices between the two agencies.

Finally, a fully resourced dedicated MI team as a national working group for addressing MI, co-led by DoD and DVA, could be convened to progress a formalised approach to MI care, grounded in best practice, lived experience, and transdisciplinary expertise. This group could oversee implementation of shared care pathways, interoperability of clinical data systems, and the evaluation of MI services across the Defence-veteran continuum (Table 4). A collaborative DSHM and DVA group of chaplains have recently formed to consider enacting such a team.

Table 4. Summary of Potential DoD and DVA Moral Injury Collaborative Activities

Collaboration Initiative	Description	Status	Recommended Lead
Appointment of Moral Injury Chaplaincy Liaisons	Identify and formalise chaplain representatives to bridge MI-related care between DoD and DVA.	Proposed	DSHM and DVA Chaplaincy Services
Continue MIST-PND Training for Defence, DVA and Community Chaplains caring for Veterans	Continue to provide and/or support MIST-PND training, as well as Moral Injury Seminars and Conferences for Defence, DVA and Community chaplains	Proposed	DSHM in partnership with DVA
Shared Resource Development and Dissemination	Co-develop guidelines, manuals, and tools to ensure continuity of MI care across agencies.	Proposed	DSHM, DVA Mental Health Branch
Establishment of National MI Working Group	Develop a coordinated interagency MI task force to progress Recommendation 78 initiatives	Proposed	Joint DoD–DVA Steering Committee

Notes: Abbreviations (alphabetical order) *DoD: Department of Defence; DVA: Australian Department of Veterans' Affairs; MIST: Moral Injury Skills Training; PND: Pastoral Narrative Disclosure; RCDVS: Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide*

5 Moral Injury Informed Care: Care that is provided based upon current knowledge and systematic practice of addressing moral injury.

13. Conclusion and limitations

MI continues to evolve as a conceptual, clinical and organisational challenge - with international research and policy attention accelerating markedly over the past decade. This paper has outlined the progress made by the Directorate of Spiritual Health and Meaning (DSHM) in advancing Recommendation 78 of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. Through its work in education, training and support programs, early identification, treatment development, and research collaboration, DSHM has contributed substantially to the ADF's strategic and clinical response to MI. As a consequence, the Australian Defence Force Chaplaincy Committee (ADFCC) implemented an 'ADF Chaplaincy and Moral Injury Policy' to ensure an ongoing strategy with regard to moral injury and the role of chaplaincy for the benefit of Defence members (ADFCC, 2024).[95]

Nonetheless, this report acknowledges a key limitation: the scope and pace of global research into MI is expanding rapidly, making it impossible for any one agency, including the DSHM, to be involved in all areas of inquiry or implementation – particularly given limited resources. While every effort has been made to remain aligned with contemporary developments, MI is a dynamic field, and future iterations of DSHM's work will need to integrate new findings, including those emerging from international collaborations and veteran community experiences. This will require additional resourcing.

Despite these constraints, the evidence presented demonstrates a sustained commitment by the DSHM to the prevention, minimisation and treatment of moral injury. Initiatives such as the MIST–PND training program, the development and testing of screening and outcome measures, collaborative research, and resource production all reflect a proactive and ethically driven response. Importantly, the Directorate's work has helped to position MI not only as a moral and spiritual concern but as a triage-able and treatable condition within Defence and veteran mental health systems.

Cross-sector partnerships, particularly between DoD and DVA will be critical for ensuring continuity of care across service transitions. Addressing MI demands not only technical competence but moral clarity and collaborative resolve. In this context, the DSHM's leadership offers a valuable foundation upon which future national strategies may be built.

14. Potential Way Forward

While the prevention, minimization and treatment of moral injury should not be the sole responsibility of chaplains, nevertheless the DSHM believe that the variously deployed strategies noted throughout this report have sought to achieve the mandated requirements of Recommendation 78, some of which, however, will be ongoing, such as:

1. Embed MI-informed training across Defence mental health and wellbeing services, ensuring continued delivery and development of the MIST–PND program for ADF, DVA and community chaplains so as to address MI at the 'coalface'; with a planned professional development program every two to three years.

2. Standardise early identification tools by formally adopting the Moral Injury Events Scale (MIES) and supporting wider implementation and validation of the Moral Injury Outcome Scale (MIOS).[6]
3. Establish care frameworks by developing an interoperable bio-psycho-social-spiritual referral pathway (inclusive of medical, psychological, social and theologically trained professionals) with co-designed treatment models between ADF and DVA for the benefit of Defence and veteran personnel experiencing moral injury.
4. Promote coordinated research by supporting postgraduate Defence-led moral injury studies and participating in international research collaborations that shape best practice and classification.
5. Facilitate moral injury understanding, training seminars and conferences for military and community chaplains as well as for the benefit of other health care practitioners and emergency service personnel (e.g., physicians, nurses, psychologists, social workers, paramedics, police) within Defence and veteran community groups to significantly broaden support for veterans across the Australian community.
6. Create a national MI oversight group to guide implementation of Recommendation 78, support cross-agency dialogue, and monitor ongoing outcomes in prevention, treatment, and recovery.

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Disclaimer and Conflict of Interest Statements:

a. **Disclaimer:** The work herein is the work of the authors and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Defence Force (ADF), the Australian Department of Defence (DoD), or the Commonwealth Government of Australia (CoA) or any of its extant policies.

b. **Conflict of Interest Declarations and Acknowledgements:** Four of the authors (LBC, CV, TJH AW) are ADF military chaplains. Two authors are military professionals trained in psychology (MB1 and MB2) and (NJ) is a Social Worker and Suicidologist. Acknowledgement and appreciation is expressed to Principal Chaplain Jason Wright (DG-CHAP-RAN), Bishop Grant Dibden (Anglican Bishop to the ADF), Senior Chaplain Daniel Hynes (RAN), Chaplain (COL) Sarah Gibson (ARA), Senior Chaplain Andrew Nixon (RAN), Rev. Barry Yesberg, (Senior State Chaplain, RSL Western Australia), COL (Retd) Mark S. Francis, RFD, Dr. Peggy Brown AO (Former Commissioner, Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide) and Chaplain (MAJ) Geoffrey Traill (DGCHAP-A Staff Chaplain) for their contributions to this report.

c. **Ethical Approval:** This paper notes research previously approved by the Australian Defence Hurman Research Ethics Committee (ADHREC), and/or includes already published and publicly available RCDVS and ADF data. As this paper did not require or undertake the collection, use and/or disclosure of health information relating to the Defence Health System, or concerning the health of any Defence person, subsequent legal and ethics approval of this paper was not required.

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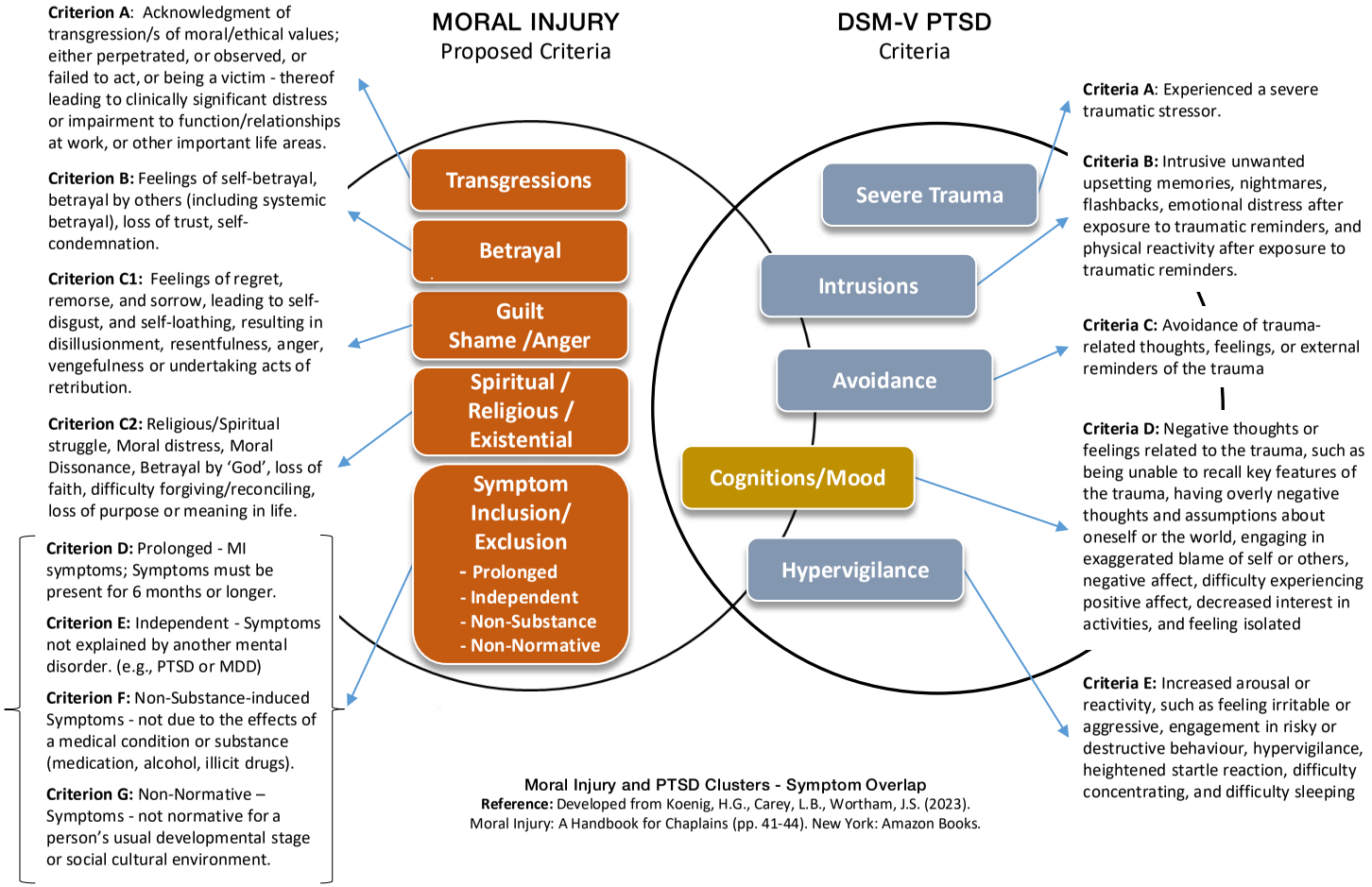
6 MIOS: Moral injury outcome scale. It is important to note that DVA was a sponsor for the development of the MIOS.

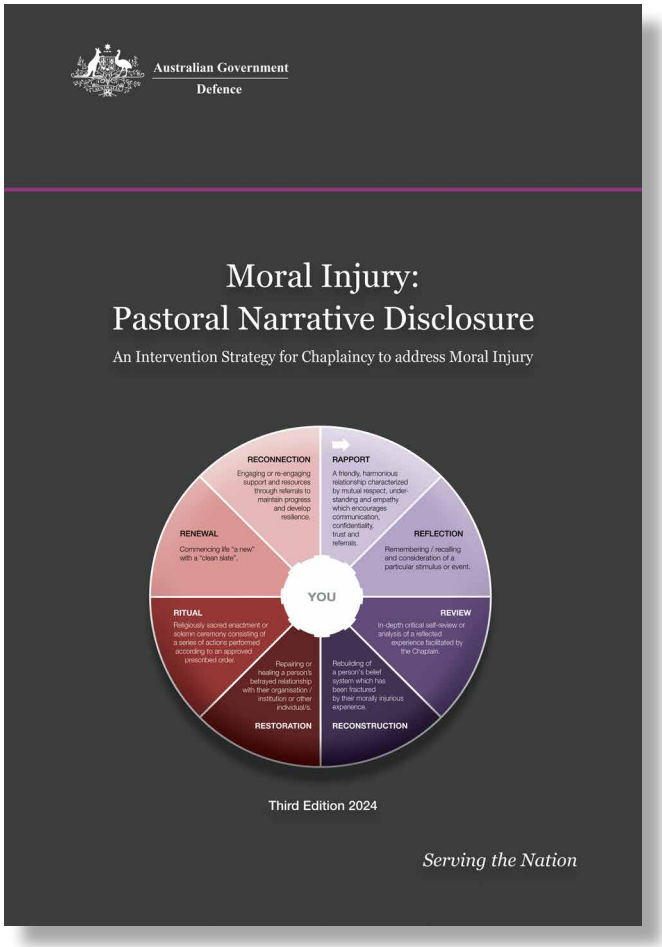
Appendix 1: Moral Injury and PTSD Symptom Criteria Overlap

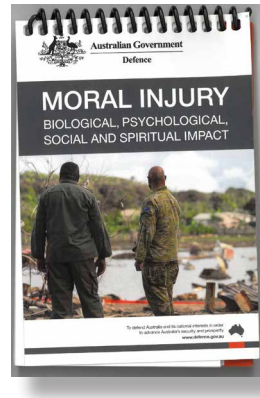


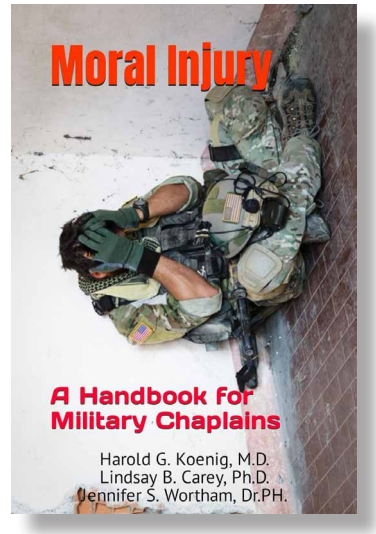
Moral Injury and PTSD Clusters - Symptom Overlap

Reference: Developed from Koenig, H.G., Carey, L.B., Wortham, J.S. (2023). Moral Injury: A Handbook for Chaplains (pp. 41-44). New York: Amazon Books.

Appendix 2: Publications: PND Manual, Moral Injury Handbook & Information Flipbook.







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White Paper

Multinational Religious Affairs (MRA)[1] *in the European Theater*

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Abstract

This white paper explores the concept of Multinational Religious Affairs (MRA) within the European theater, a framework developed to enhance cooperation and interoperability among NATO and partner nation chaplaincies. Over 75 years of NATO's existence and 20 years of continuous warfare have underscored the importance of collaborative chaplaincy efforts to provide spiritual care, resilience, and religious support to military personnel and their families.

In the absence of a unified doctrinal definition within NATO or allied frameworks, this paper introduces MRA as a structured approach to address the complexities, urgency, and aspirations of multinational religious support. The discussion emphasizes interoperability across human, procedural, and technical dimensions, aligning with principles from the "Guidelines for Military Chaplains Co-operation in a Multinational Environment" and U.S. Department of Defense policies.

By detailing the dimensions and levels of interoperability—ranging from informal cooperation to integrated operations—the paper provides actionable insights for fostering mutual understanding, standardizing practices, and enhancing the readiness of chaplaincies in joint missions. Through initiatives like NATO Convergence and existing multinational forums, the framework aims to ensure seamless religious support and advisement across diverse military and cultural contexts.

Ultimately, MRA underscores the vital role of chaplaincy in strengthening alliances, respecting religious freedoms, and demonstrating shared values of humanity and democracy, reinforcing the collective resolve to deter threats to these principles.

Key Words: interoperability, military chaplains, multinational religious affairs/support

Introduction

For more than 75 years in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and after the last 20 years of continuous warfare in numerous theatres, the U.S. Army Chaplain Corps has enjoyed much success in sharing the care of warriors and family members with our international chaplain colleagues in Europe and on the battlefield.

Cooperation has been the watchword among this unique group of clergy and enlisted set apart for offering hope, peace, and tools for spiritual resilience amid danger and shared adversity. Thanks to a healthy appreciation and mutual respect among military chaplains, military and authorized personnel enjoyed opportunities to practice the freedom of religion that they swore to protect and defend.

In January 2020, at the International Military Chiefs of Chaplains Conference (IMCCC) in Berlin, Germany, senior chaplains took another step in reinforcing the spirit of cooperation. Participants in that conference ratified the "Guidelines for Military Chaplains Co-operation in a Multinational Environment" (also known as, Chaplains Co-operation Guidelines). The purpose as stated in the document is to "emphasize the principles of chaplaincy on an international level and enhance the importance and practice of international cooperation of chaplaincies in a multinational environment."[2] The common principles were captured in the preamble of the "Guidelines": "Freedom of thought, belief and religion and to manifest its unhindered practice is a human right. Therefore, the religious tradition of each person has to be respected and protected."[3] The "Guidelines" further address four areas where cooperation is practiced: religious ministry, coordination and cooperation, structure of coordination, and competencies of cooperation.

The matters of chaplaincy addressed in the "Guidelines" are like the matters of religious affairs as defined in the U.S. Department of Defence Joint Publication 3-83, Religious Affairs in Joint Operations. "Religious affairs consist of the combination of [religious support/religious ministry, RS/RM] and religious advisement... Effective management of religious affairs requires consistent and clear communication, coordination, and collaboration between RSTs/RMTs and leaders, which fosters informed and committed command support."[4] (see Table 1).

Religious Affairs in Joint Operations

Religious Support/Religious Ministry	*Religious Advisement*
• Provision and facilitation of religious worship and pastoral support for all authorized personnel.	• Advice on impact of religion on joint operations
• Pastoral care, counselling, and coaching that reinforces spiritual strength and levels of commitment to increase resiliency of the force.	• Advice on impact of military operations on the religious dynamics in the operational area.
• Provide or facilitate ministry to the sick, wounded, and dying to provide religious sacraments and comfort.	• Advice on worship, rituals, customs, and practices of United States military personnel, international forces, and the indigenous population.
• Provision or facilitation of services that honour the fallen and provide care to the grieving.	• Liaison functions related to religious affairs with officials of interagency, nongovernmental, and international entities; multinational forces; and local religious leaders (when directed).

Table 1: Religious Affairs in Joint Operations

Multinational Religious Affairs (MRA)

For US European Command (USEUCOM) and USAREUR-AF chaplains and Religious Affairs NCOs (RANCOs), this paper develops the religious affairs concept further applied to the multinational context of Europe and NATO, calling it Multinational Religious Affairs (MRA).

In absence of clear doctrinal definition in any NATO, ally, or partner nation doctrine, and yet with a clear mission to develop authentic, lasting, and sustainable relationships with our chaplain counterparts in Europe and Africa, USAREUR-AF, the Office of the Chaplain (OCHAP) has developed the concept referred to as multinational religious affairs (MRA). The following contextual realities need to be kept in mind while considering MRA:

1. Complexity. Religious support is always a national responsibility. The differences among NATO member chaplaincies are many and significant.
2. Urgency. The operational reality in Europe is undeniable and immediate. We must act now. NATO member chaplaincies must find ways to find common ground in spite of the complexity and do so now.
3. Aspirational. No two countries will ever be completely interoperable! But we MUST find ways to plan to work together despite our differences.
4. Interoperability is already happening! Chaplains who worked together in the past—and are working together now-- in multinational settings sharing resources, time, and enjoying collegiality. The intent of MRA is to make this spirit of goodwill a planning factor for future operations and accountable to military leaders.

MRA takes into consideration the numerous factors of the complex environment of the European theater for chaplains providing and performing religious support, as well as internal and external advisement, to the commander in. To wit,

- National values and norms of Allies and partners. (e.g., national churches and government-sanctioned religious bodies; interpretations of non-combatant status of chaplains, etc.)
- Denominational emphases and transnational relationships.
- Treaties, International Conventions, polices, and Military Rules of Engagement, etc.
- Military leadership understanding of, and value of, the role of the chaplain as staff officer vs provider/performer of religious rites, rituals, services, and spiritual care and counsel.
- The process of recruiting, assessing, training, and fielding chaplains.

Applying this principle of Religious Affairs to the multinational context is consistent with the spirit and content of the “Guidelines,” and as such may be discussed as Multinational Religious Affairs (MRA.)

Cooperation is only a first step toward the levels of interaction that the international military chaplain community strives to achieve in MRA. Interoperability becomes the guiding principle of MRA and as such requires further definition and explanation.

Interoperability

Interoperability is a key principle of MRA. Interoperability is about people, processes, and technology. However, in army chaplaincy doctrine and policy, there is frequent use of the word "interoperability" and "multinational" but there is no doctrinal definition of what religious support interoperability means; what would it truly entail? What would be the strengths and limitations of interoperable chaplaincies, across a spectrum of capabilities and national desires to commit to a state of interoperability? What would be the mechanisms for beginning bilateral conversations that substantively sought to assess and plan for steps toward real interoperability?

On the other hand, commanders and leaders in NATO formations, and the alliance militaries, understand that interoperability is a necessity. According to NATO Allied Joint Publication 0-1, "Allied Joint Doctrine," interoperability is defined as the following: *"Interoperability is the ability of NATO, other political departments, agencies and, when appropriate, forces of partner nations to act together coherently, effectively and efficiently to achieve Allied tactical, operational and strategic objectives."*[5]

A similar emphasis on interoperability is found within the US Department of Defense literature. In the Joint Publication 3.0, interoperability is defined as *"The ability to act together coherently, effectively, and efficiently to achieve tactical, operational, and strategic objectives."*[6] Furthermore, in Army Regulation (AR) 34-1 "Interoperability," the U.S. Army further defines interoperability as *"the ability to act together coherently, effectively, and efficiently to achieve tactical, operational, and strategic objectives… Interoperability activities are any initiative, forum, agreement, or operation that improves the Army's ability to operate effectively and efficiently..."*[7] This regulation goes even further stating *"The Army level of ambition for achieving interoperability with a particular partner will depend on the Army-partner relationship; combatant command and Army service component command (ASCC) interoperability objectives; the type of operations the United States is likely to conduct with the partner; and the partner's capability, willingness, and ambition for interoperability with the Army."*[8]

Note that in both NATO and US documents, the foundation of interoperability assumes an open and trusting alliance where partner nations speak frankly about national interests, willingness to be interoperable, and desired outcomes of working toward interoperability. Thus relationships, at personal and professional levels, are an essential step in achieving interoperability.

Dimensions of interoperability.

Both NATO and US documents refer to three different dimensions of interoperability are human, procedural, and technical dimensions. According to AR 34-1, the human dimension builds the basis of mutual understanding and respect that is fundamental to unity of effort and operational success at all levels of execution (tactical, operational, and strategic). The procedural dimension ensures that the Army achieves sufficient harmony in policies and doctrine that will enable it to operate effectively with mission partners. The technical dimension focuses on Mission Command, Command and Control (C2) systems, methods and protocols.[9]

Levels of Interoperability

In addition to dimensions of interoperability, an assessment of interoperability involves determining where, along a progressive scale any two parties are enjoying interoperability. As seen in Table 2 below, these levels are scaled from Level 0 “Not Interoperable” to Level 3 “Integrated.” Note also that partners might enjoy very strong capabilities of interoperability in the human dimension, but not necessarily in the procedural or technical dimensions.

		LEVEL 0	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3
Focus Area	**Domains**	**Not Interoperable**	**De-Conflicted**	**Compatible**	**Integrated**
Characterization Principles		- Partner has no demonstrated capability for interoperability with other partner nations - No commonality of procedure or compatibility of process - No command relationships	- Human intervention enables alignment of dissimilar procedures and technical capabilities to address differences between nations - Procedural and technical friction - CMD characterized by detailed control of subordinate units	- Human interaction facilitates standardized procedure and temporary bridging solutions, synchronizing dissimilar capabilities between partners to establish situational operating norms across MN formations - Command characterized by mix of detailed and directive control of subordinate units	- Common doctrine and SOPs reduce the need for LNOs - Permanent technical bridging solutions synch partner equip across MN formations - CMD of subordinate units
Focus Area	**Human**	- No ability for higher HQ to C2 lower - No common language	- Units LNO functions as an RTO only - Command functions through tight control of subordinate units (no autonomy/initiative) - Communication through interpreters only	- Partnered forces push/pull common orders information - Partnered forces incorporated into WFFs as parallel chain to organic staff - Communication facilitated through a common language (could be the second language of both partners) - MSN Command possible through face to face interaction only	- Units LNOs fully integrated into unit operations to facilitate CMD decisions - Partnered Forces function as a member of the staff (CUOPS/FUOPS) - Communication through use of common language - MSN CMD possible through direct/indirect interaction
	Procedural	- No common doctrine - No commonality of procedures -No SOPs exchange	- No formalized commonality of procedures - SOPs exchanged, but not rehearsed - No common doctrine	- Common SOP established for situational mission - Common doctrinal framework facilitates baseline SA	- Common SOPs shared across formations - Common doctrinal framework supports combined training/operations - Institutionalized common training background facilitates rapid integration of formations
	Technical	- Technical incompatibility of equipment completely prevents interface	- Equipment not compatible - Communications facilitated through US forces communications	- Indirect compatibility of equipment; communication facilitated through temporary bridging solutions -Minimal equipment required to complete combined PACE	- Direct compatibility of systems; communications architecture facilitated through permanent/common bridging solutions - U.S. equipment is not needed to facilitate complete PACE

Table 2: Levels of Interoperability

Multinational Religious Support Interoperability (MRSI)

USAREUR-AF OCHAP, considering the operational urgency of the European theater, developed the concept of Multinational Religious Support Interoperability (MRSI). That concept defines MRSI as follows:

> *Multinational Religious Support Interoperability (MRSI) is the positive capacity that exists between allied and partner chaplaincies when shared values and missions are combined with tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) across all three levels of interoperability– human, procedural, and technical– in order to ensure seamless cooperation between chaplaincies while providing/performing religious services and religious advisement across the range of military operations (ROMO, tactical, operational, strategic, cyber).*

Dimensions of MRSI

Just as militaries seek to gain efficiencies for mission success in human, procedural, and technical interoperability, so would chaplaincies. Those dimensions are consistent with the principles found in the IMCCC "Chaplain Co-operation Guidelines" toward a framework of religious support interoperability.

The human dimension in MRSI is by far the dimension that characterizes the levels of cooperation and collegiality already enjoyed by the chaplaincies in Europe. Near the core of the chaplain's vocation is a deep and abiding sense of the preciousness of human life and richness of the human experience. Many faith traditions express this preciousness as sacred or divine. From this point of shared value, chaplains naturally move toward each other as they serve service members, forging personal and professional relationships around a shared vocation of caring for people in service to the divine and humanity.

The procedural dimension among chaplains in Europe is complex given the varied tapestry of cultural and national differences regarding religion and religion's integration into society. However, given a focus on the overarching mission and purpose upon which the alliance is built upon, and the corresponding shared principles of "freedom of thought, belief and religion and to manifest its unhindered practice [as] a human right,"[10] chaplaincies have the potential to unify via standardization of procedures and techniques of organizing and communicating ministry needs and solutions.

Although focusing on technological interoperability, e.g., shared information technologies, equipment, internet platforms, etc. is important for MRA between chaplaincies, it may be better to consider the technical dimension of MRSI to be more interested in the bureaucratic touch-points between chaplaincies. As seen in Table 3 below, the technical dimension of MRSI would be more focused on synchronizing how chaplains manage chaplains—both internal to their own military, as well as how they would interact with allied chaplaincies in shared missions. This includes how chaplains are credentialed, vetted, recruited, accessed, professionally developed, etc. It also includes a deeper understanding of the chaplain's relationship with the faith group for whom they represent and who sends them to serve among the warrior community.

Definition of MRSI Dimensions

Human: Focuses on integrating the behaviours, abilities, and relationships on all levels of execution with an emphasis on

1) religion/spiritual/moral/ethical morale of the military institution, and

2) the practice of professional ministry in a military context.

Procedural: Focuses on techniques and procedures on all levels of execution (tactical, operational, strategic). Focuses on shared value of religious freedoms preserved by nations, professed by faith communities, directed by commanders, and entrusted to chaplaincies.

Technical: Focuses on

1) the institutional structure and how to effectively integrate religious ministry with command and the military institution, and...

2) how chaplaincies practice the principles of Mission Command and methods and protocols for supervising, training, organizing, professional development, and equipping.

3) faith community equities in integrating religious professionals as chaplains in the armed forces.

Table 3: Definition of MRSI Dimensions

Assessment and process of increasing levels of MRSI

A cardinal rule of land navigation is *"before you know where to go, you have to know where you are."* A similar principle of leadership is to develop the ability to see oneself and organization. Thus, methods of assessment are required to move beyond informal levels of cooperation and instead work toward MRSI.

First, each chaplaincy must examine national values and land component command leadership's commitment to interoperability with Allies and partners. Once *"capability, willingness, and ambition for interoperability"*[11] have been assessed by chaplain leadership, then chaplaincies may turn to each other in conversations to assess the levels of or MRSI that are feasible and achievable between chaplaincies.

In Table 4 below are suggestions of what the levels of MRSI would look like, cross-examined by the three dimensions of MRSI. Integrating into extant allied bilateral or multilateral training, exercises, and operations will serve as the laboratories for assessment.

		LEVEL 0	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3
Focus Area	**Domains**	**Not Interoperable**	**De-Conflicted**	**Compatible**	**Integrated**
Characterization Principles For Religious Support/ Religious Affairs Interoperability		- Partner has no demonstrated capability for RS interoperability with other partnered nation's chaplaincies - No commonality of RS procedure or compatibility of process	- Human intervention enables alignment of dissimilar procedures and technical capabilities to address differences between partnered nation's chaplaincies nations - Procedural and technical friction remains but mitigated through routine interaction and cooperation	- Human interaction facilitates standardized procedure and temporary religious support bridging solutions, synchronizing dissimilar capabilities between partners to establish situational operating norms across MN formations	- Common doctrine and SOPs reduce the need for LNOs - Permanent religious support bridging solutions synch partner equip across MN formations
Focus Area	**Human**	- No ability for strategic and operational level chaplains to supervise tactical level chaplains - No common language	- Chaplaincies function through tight control of subordinate units (no autonomy/initiative) - Communication through interpreters only	- Partnered chaplaincies push/pull common orders re: RS/RA information and actions - Partnered chaplaincies incorporated into WFFs provision of RS/RA parallel chain to organic staff - Communication facilitated through a common language (could be the second language of both partners)	- Chaplains fully integrated into unit operations to provide CMD directed RS/RA - Partnered chaplains function as a member of the staff (CUOPS/FUOPS) - Communication through use of common language
	Procedural	- No common religious support/affairs doctrine - No commonality of procedures -No SOPs exchange	- No formalized commonality of procedures - SOPs exchanged, but not rehearsed - No common doctrine	- Common RS/RA SOP established for situational mission - Common doctrinal RS/RA framework facilitates baseline SA	- Common SOPs shared across all chaplaincies - Common RS/RA doctrinal framework supports combined training/operations - Institutionalized common training background facilitates rapid integration of chaplaincies
	Technical	- Differences in religious, cultural, and governmental expectations for exercise of religious freedoms	- Differences in providing RS/RA mitigated through formal/informal interaction to gain mutual respect and understanding	- Chaplaincies recognize national RS/RA differences and apply understanding into mission planning, applying agreed to TTPs	- Chaplaincies are mutually respectful of both CMD and personnel served recognize capability of all chaplains

Table 4: Assessment tool for Multinational Religious Support Interoperability

The Religious Affairs Non-Commissioned Officer and MRA

In many cases among NATO and Partner Land Forces formations, the health and welfare of the force is the responsibility of the Senior Enlisted Leader (SEL.) In the US Army and US Air Force, Religious Affairs NCOs (RANCOs) have demonstrated on numerous occasions that within MRA their role as advisors to US SELs, may extend effectively to multinational SELs facilitating connection with unit chaplains. This may be as simple as exchanging points of contact details for emergency response and support, to planning training and education on the topics of suicide awareness, maintaining resilience, etc., and scheduling religious/spiritual services and pastoral care for allied Soldiers.

The Way Ahead

Working toward standards of, and regular practice of, MRA will require an emphasis on interoperability and will take time. Several MRA forums have already been established to include the Military Chaplains' Strategic Coordination Group (MCSCG), the NATO Land Forces Chaplains' Consultative Committee (NLFC3), and the NATO Air/Space Forces Chaplains' Consultative Committee (NAFCCC.) In the coming years, further efforts to consolidate and synchronize multiple initiatives to develop MRA doctrine, organization, training, leader development and education, and policy are being pursued by the international military chaplain community. An historic initiative is happening under the name "NATO Convergence" where the US headquarters in Europe and NATO multinational military headquarters are working toward combining capabilities, e.g., Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) and USEUCOM; NATO Land Command (LANDCOM) and USAREUR-AF, etc. Senior US chaplains in USEUCOM and USAREUR-AF are integrating MRA into this NATO Convergence initiative.

Conclusion

MRA is an inherent condition in the NATO alliance and among NATO member chaplaincies. Interoperability is more than just equipment and systems – it is about processes and relationships as well. In the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous environment of modern warfare, chaplains must know who they are working with, who they may be ministering alongside, before they deploy. Chaplains need to know the processes and systems of our allies so they can work best within their systems without compromising their own. Integrating the principles of MRA into USAREUR-AF exercise program will ensure development and validation of practical MRA solutions between European chaplaincies. Training together now provides shared understanding before conflict or tragedy occurs.

Enhancing interoperability with allies and partner chaplaincies fosters unity of care and enhances the humanity of service members and their families. MRA is about chaplains developing basic battlefield-critical capabilities like communicating with and understanding our allies and partners to ensure seamless care for Soldiers and families, and vice versa. Pursuing interoperability by engaging with the military chaplaincies of other nations gives our Unit Ministry Teams (UMTs) the opportunity to learn new skills that further strengthen our capability to nurture the living, care for the wounded, and honor the dead.

From the outset, it is understood that it is aspirational for nations or chaplaincies to commit to striving to achieve all three levels of interoperability across all three dimensions. Equally true is that there are already chaplaincies postured for deeper and more effective levels of interoperability. Developing a framework to move informal pledges of cooperation to intentional conversations and methods of assessing levels MRSI between chaplaincies brings honor to the history of the alliance and partnerships, while ensuring enhanced quality of ministry provided to the warriors and families served.

Cooperation will continue to be the watchword among chaplain colleagues, whether interoperability is pursued or not. However, considering the wealth of goodwill and

success over the history of alliances and partnerships, and taking those successes and using them to propel the effectiveness of serving Soldiers and Families, MSRI demonstrates faithful stewardship of that goodwill and the shared commitment to freedom and democracy in general, and religious freedom in particular.

Finally, the practice of MRA within NATO and multinational formations is a profound and visible demonstration of the human values that the alliance and free democratic societies share. Such cooperation reinforces our civilian and military leaders' intent to uphold those values while affording those freedoms to those willing to sacrifice to defend those values; and serves as a clear message to our adversaries the comprehensive international resolve to deter any threat to those values.

End Notes

1. Formerly known as Multinational Religious Support Interoperability (MRSI.)
2. Guidelines for Military Chaplains Co-operation in a Multinational Environment (Chaplains Co-operation Guidelines), International Chiefs of Chaplains' Conference, January 2020
3. Ibid.
4. JP 3-83, Religious Affairs in Joint Operations, 19 December 2022, p. II-1.
5. NATO Allied Joint Publication 0-1, Allied Joint Doctrine.
6. JP 3-0, Joint Campaigns and Operations, 18 June 2022, p. GL-10.
7. Army Regulation 34–1, Standardization Interoperability, 9 April 2020, pp. 1-2.
8. Ibid.
9. Op cit.
10. Guidelines for Military Chaplains Co-operation in a Multinational Environment (Chaplains Co-operation Guidelines), International Chiefs of Chaplains' Conference, January 2020
11. Army Regulation 34-1, Interoperability, 9 April 2020

Key Religious Leader and Community Engagement

Theology and Praxis of an Expanding Role in Operational Environments

S.K. Moore, CD, PhD

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NB: The views expressed in this article and subsequent comments are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Canadian Armed Forces or the Australian Defence Forces.

Abstract

Australia is a leader in the Indo-Pacific, a region of increasing strategic significance globally. Tensions between China and the United States undeniably influence regional dynamics, as these two super powers compete for geo-political prominence. With its various manifestations, grey zone activities are China's choice of aggression due to their potential to alter the balance of advantage, thereby achieving their aims without crossing the threshold of overt conflict; activities designed to undermine Australia's significant influence among the small island developing states (SIDS) of the south Pacific. The Australian Defence Force (ADF) continues to prepare for Peace Operations in the Indo-Pacific region, resorting to force if necessary, mounting Humanitarian Operations as environmental disasters increase due to global warming, erratic weather patterns and unabated sea-level rise, a constant reality for the Blue Pacific.

ADF Chaplaincy has become increasingly indispensable to command due to the chaplains' capacity to establish relationships and build trust with local and regional religious and community leaders in Areas of Operation. Integrated into training and operational planning, Key Religious Leader and Community Engagement (KRLCE) adapts well to both Expeditionary and Domestic Operations, bringing essential support to initiatives in operational environments (OEs).

In today's contemporary context the Australian government is adopting a comprehensive approach to operations where Whole of Government (WoG) and Whole of Nation (WoN) entities, benefiting from military support, collaborate to stabilize and reconstruct adversely impacted areas and their populations in the Indo-Pacific. Adept at conducting analysis of the religious terrain and adroit at engaging religious communities, chaplains look to assist their WoG/WoN partners in creating an atmosphere of trust within civilian populations - an essential prerequisite to successful programming and community building in accomplishing mission mandates.

Key Words: chaplain, religious community, religious leaders

Introduction

The complexities of today's operational environments (OEs) are presenting governments with challenges that eclipse the exigencies of earlier times. The strategic environment of interstate and intrastate warfare now shares space with *grey zone activities*, as aggressive state actions are taken against an opposing state, achieving their aims without breaching the threshold of overt hostilities. Compounding this increase in activities within the Indo-Pacific region are the effects of climate change. The impact is notable, propelling strategic planning and driving operational tempo as the Australian Defence Force (ADF) increasingly shoulders a leadership role regionally. Deemed indispensable by Government and Defence alike, whole-of-government (WoG) and whole-of-nation (WoN) formulations are coming to the fore as a more comprehensive approach to operations is required to address the stability and reconstruction needs of OEs: Peace and/or Humanitarian Operations-Expeditionary and Domestic.

The strategic merit of the chaplain's operational role of engaging religious and community leaders within civilian populations is gaining attention from Task Force Commanders - Key Religious Leader and Community Engagement (KRLCE). Chaplains' capacity to establish relationships and build trust with local leadership in OEs has proven to be invaluable in terms of enhanced security and good relations with the local citizenry, essential to achieving mission outcomes.

This article explores three themes in drawing on Australian Government Policy, ADF Doctrine and current geopolitical issues:

1. the strategic environment of the Indo-Pacific region with its afore mentioned *grey zone activities* and climate change as driving factors of Operations;
2. the theology and praxis of the *centrality of relationship* as it relates to the chaplain operational capability of KRLCE - *a hermeneutic of peace*; and
3. the potential interoperability of ADF chaplains with their WoG and WoN partners as relating to the emerging KRLCE capability within the public space of OEs.

An Evolving Strategic Environment: Geopolitical Dynamics of the Indo-Pacific Region

The global strategic environment is an intricate and dynamic blend of cooperation, confrontation and conflict between states, groups within states and between other state and non-state actors. Any significant deterioration in relations among these may trigger a crisis or constitute one.[1] In recent decades, frequent and recurring conflict, together with extreme poverty inclusive of a deepening climate crisis has created unprecedented mass migration,[2] resulting in internal instability in global regions already plagued by weak governance and sectarian, ethnic, cultural and religious tensions.[3] Continuing unabated, such challenges to international security from such a wide variety of threats, both military and non-military, will be difficult to predict leading to local and regional instability.

A future coordinated Allied Forces response to such crisis is probable: *"Poor resource distribution and lack of open and transparent governance in areas affected by demographic and environmental change may exacerbate tensions...As a consequence,*

NATO may receive requests to provide a military contribution in response to humanitarian crises,"[4] emergencies that may extend beyond the Euro-Atlantic region.

In light of such a probability, ADF-1-3, *Stabilisation and Humanitarian Operations* states, "the Australian Defence Forces (ADF) should be prepared to contribute to stabilisation, humanitarian and peace responses in different operating environments across the globe. The ADF has conducted a majority of these missions throughout the Indo-Pacific region, however a number have been conducted in the northern hemisphere including South Asian and Middle Eastern regions."[5]

As an immediate priority, the Australian Government continues to invest in the security relationships within the Pacific family, working together to achieve shared security objectives, build partner capacity, enhance interoperability and address common challenges, including upholding sovereignty, protecting resources and mitigating the effects of climate change.[6] Citing partnerships with Japan and the Philippines and the need for a collective strategy, Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles underscored the changing security dynamics. He further commented that Australia sees a role for itself in not only defending the homeland but also in protecting its neighbours and the future stability of the Indo-Pacific region.[7] As noted above, precedent exists for ADF engagement beyond the Indo-Pacific. Undoubtedly, as in the past, collaboration with NATO will continue to emerge.

The recently struck 2023-2026 Australia-NATO Individually Tailored Partnership Program (ITPP)[8] underscores this expanding collaboration founded on over two decades of Australian contributions to NATO-led operations, missions and exercises. This was established on mutual respect for the rules-based international order. Joint operations in Afghanistan, capability development and scientific research characterize this strategic relationship. Bi-lateral consultation also continues on issues such as Gender, Peace and Security (GPS), resilience, arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation, emerging and disruptive technologies, space and cyber defence.[9]

Geo-politically, the shared security challenges that affect both the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions continue to intensify for Australia due to the entrenched and ever-increasing strategic competition between the United States (US) and the People's Republic of China (PRC). The unprecedented conventional and non-conventional military build-up in the Indo-Pacific region by the PRC is concerning absent any strategic reassurance or transparency.[10] The challenges to regional stability and prosperity arising from this competition are compounded by a range of other security risks, including grey-zone activities, technological advancements and ensuing climate change.[11]

Grey Zone Activities in the Indo-Pacific Region

With their mis/disinformation, state and non-state actors have become more adept at covertly attacking an adversary while obfuscating attribution. *Grey zone activities* "do not seek overt conflict but is a way for adversaries to alter the balance of advantage and achieve their aims without the material, financial and social cost of armed conflict."[12] Particularly challenging to the Indo-Pacific more broadly, such foreign interference was a recurring theme at the recent Australia-New Zealand Ministerial Consultations as something

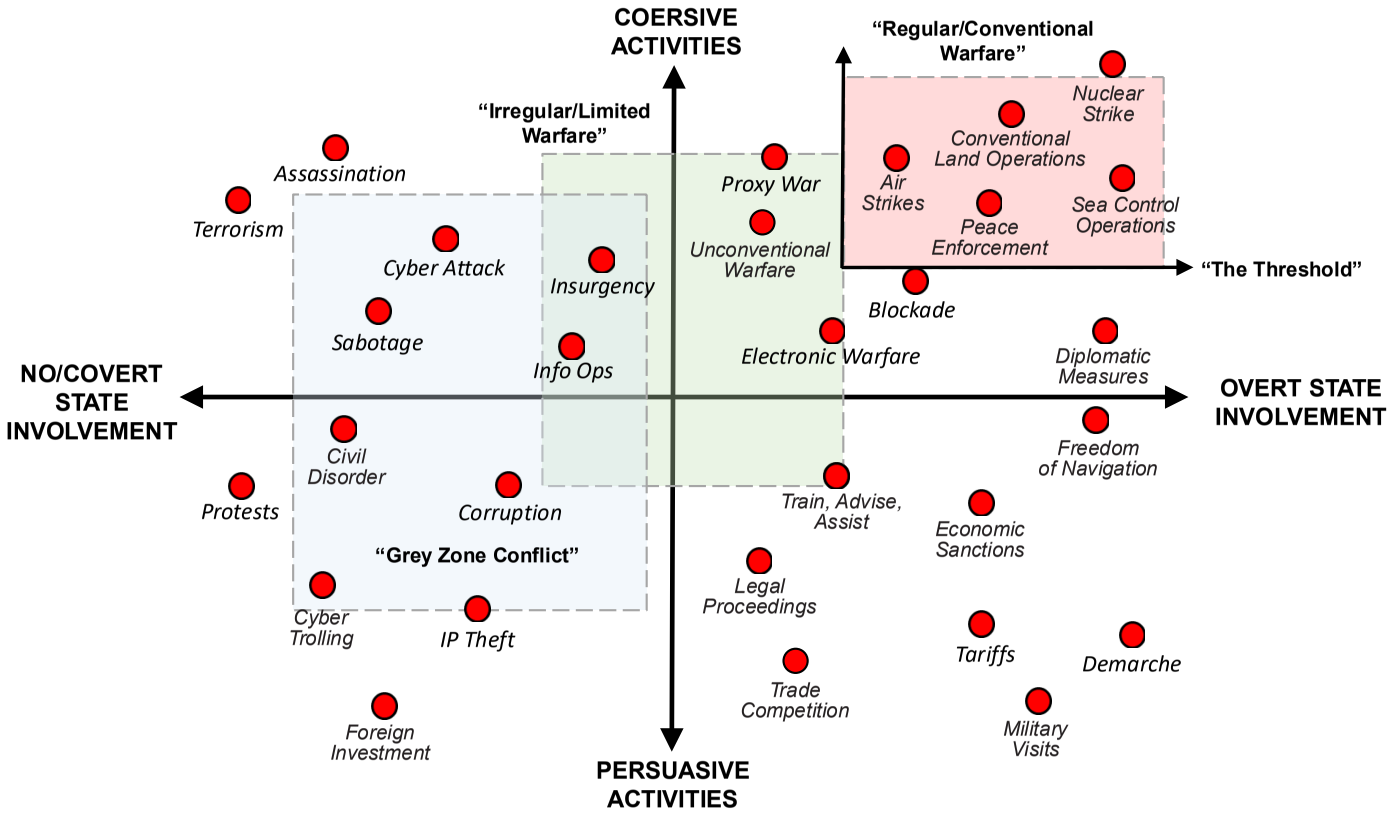

Figure 1: Two-Dimensional Matrix of Competition.

This two-dimensional matrix was originally created by Dr. David Connery, former Director of Joint Doctrine with the Australian Defence Forces. The CAF Pan-Domain Force Employment (PFEC) incorporates and expands on his ideas featured in his Matrix of Conflict.
See https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/library/land-power-forum/matrix-conflict-types

to confront and combat.[13] Renee DiResta, formerly of the Stanford Internet Observatory in California, describes *grey zone activities* as a "...kind of *warm war*; not the active, declared, open conflict of a hot war, but beyond the shadow boxing of a cold one."[14]

Underscoring these concerns, Australian National Defence Strategy concurs, "*Grey-zone activities* have also expanded in the Indo-Pacific. In addition to conventional military forces, some countries are employing para-military forces more frequently, including China's actions in the South China Sea. Threats posed by state and non-state actors in the cyber domain are also multiplying."[15]

The Matrix of Competition (see Figure 1) portrays the kinds of competitive activities known to the contemporary context. The Horizontal Axes follows a continuum from no/covert state activities to its opposite, overt state involvement. The Vertical Axes denotes persuasive actions to the more coercive. Instead of simply categorizing activities in terms of the level of violence associated with it, the matrix describes activities according to the method (coercive to persuasive) and the nature of the actor employing it.

The progression of warfare moves from the *grey zone activities* box…to the green box representing irregular or limited warfare…to the reddish box depicting regular or conventional warfare. The red dots cite additional types of *grey zone activities* and the quadrant in which they are found. To challenge such aggression is of strategic necessity.

The Strait of Taiwan is a sea lane in international waters where the Freedom of Navigation (covert/persuasive quadrant) is increasingly contested. In response to PRC's contention that the Strait is in Chinese waters, the missile destroyer of the Royal Australian Navy, the HMAS Sydney (DDG 42), and the supply ship HMNZS Endeavour (A11) of the Royal New Zealand Navy navigated through the Strait of Taiwan on 25 September 2024, the first time Australian and New Zealand naval vessels have transited the Strait together. Five PRC warships 'escorted' them through the Strait.[16]



HMAS Sydney (DDG 42) Creator: Picasa | Credit: Commander, U.S. 3rd Fleet. Copyright: Public Domain

More recent still, in February 2025 a Chinese Navy formation held two live-fire exercises in the Tasman Sea between Australia and New Zealand raising serious concerns in both countries. An unprecedented show of firepower, these ships were armed with 'extremely capable' weapon systems. This was again, a *grey zone activity*, demonstrative of PRC's training to be a true blue water navy - flexing muscle.[17]

During the 2019 and 2022 Australian federal elections, the PRC used the social media app WeChat to disseminate disinformation to Chinese-language speakers. False claims were spread about certain political candidates and their parties.[18]

Again, at the 53rd Pacific Island Forum (PIF) Leaders Meeting (Aug 2024) in Tonga, the Pacific Policing Initiative (PPI) was proposed. This was an Australian initiative to improve military coordination for humanitarian crises by establishing new training centres of excellence and deployable forces to collectively oversee the region's own security needs. Attempting to undermine the new proposal, the Chinese pushed to unilaterally increase their security presence across the Pacific region. Ultimately, they failed.[19]

The Taiwanese frequently face PRC cyber-attacks. Chinese policy narratives are propagated in international forums, where information manipulation is used as a means to isolate Taiwan internationally.[20] Australian scholars also note that the Chinese create conflict between different levels of government internally by employing subnational engagement in an effort to challenge federal prerogatives, a grey zone tactic used in other parts of the world as well.

Climate Change

The Joint Statement on Australia-New Zealand Ministerial Consultations (ANZMIN) recognizes climate change as the single greatest existential threat to the Blue Pacific.[22] The Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are especially vulnerable due to their continued loss of entire swaths of land and associated livelihoods to sea level rise having relatively few options due to a shrinking land mass.[23] With the preponderance of built infrastructure located in risk-prone coastal areas, increased numbers of climate migrants are likely to exert additional pressures on land, natural resources, infrastructure and institutions.[24]

These effects amplify existing stressors across the region, such as poverty, food security and cross-border migration and displacement. Transboundary tensions intensify, exerting additional pressure on Australia's national security.[25] The potential scope and speed of climate-induced human movement are far greater in the immediate time-frame. Conflict between groups may ensue when such acute stressors are introduced to populations ill prepared to meet them and governments inadequately resourced to respond.

The ADF "seeks to reduce human suffering, save lives and enhance the human dignity of populations affected by ...natural and human-caused disasters."[26] However, meeting these needs creates greater pressure on ADF capability, capacity and infrastructure. Exacerbating these realities, there remains potential for state volatility, which could require additional support from Australia or the broader Pacific family.[27]

The above abridged treatment of the geopolitical dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region serves as a backdrop for an examination of the strategic efficacy of the emerging chaplain operational capability, Key Religious Leader and Community Engagement (KRLCE). Singular here is the import this capability brings to Command as the Indo-Pacific region evolves in strategic significance globally. To this end, theology and praxis of ministry will function as a lens through which to consider chaplaincy's integral role of *relationship building* among civilian populations in Areas of Operation (AO).

An Expanding Hermeneutic of Peace and the Role of Chaplains

As a multi faith community, military chaplaincy represents numerous religious traditions, each with its own understanding and interpretation of belief based upon the sacred texts and teachings of their particular tradition. At the core of this collaboration resides a *hermeneutic of peace* that recognizes peace and justice inherently achieved by peaceable means where possible.[28] These men and women of faith often witness the residual effects of violence known to conflict zones or the devastation left by natural disasters, often accompanied by the movements of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in search of sustenance and safety. It is circumstances in time and space such as these that challenge one's belief and time-honoured traditions, precipitating new self-understandings of chaplaincy. This *hermeneutic of peace* manifests in the impulse among chaplains to draw on the understanding, imagination and requisite values of their collective faith traditions to aid those having suffered loss, either in *re-humanizing* the *other* by facilitating dialogue across the divide of estranged communities or assisting those struggling to rebuild their lives following disaster. As *agents of peace*, chaplains engender trust and further cooperation where tragedy, in whatever form, has left its mark.

The Centrality of Relationship

Increasingly deployments involve military and civilian personnel interfacing with civilian populations in cultures appreciably religious, an added layer of complexity. As such, "the perceived legitimacy of a campaign ...must be established and maintained in the eyes of public audiences."[29] The significance of "impartiality, trust, cooperation and open-hearted relationships"[30] cannot be overstated, a climate to which chaplains contribute as trusted agents. Their capacity to build relationships is undeniably a strategic asset to command, acutely applicable in faith-oriented societies.

Deemed as "fields of meaning" and "repositor[ies] of concepts,"[31] root metaphors "play a significant role in determining the categories we use for our different experiences."[32] The Latin root for relation is *relatio*, which brings with it the sense of "a carrying back, bringing back."[33] Famed Roman orator of the First Century, M. Fabius Quintilianus, offers more clarity to the Latin of "carrying back, bringing back" with his image, "through the frequent carrying of the hand back to the inkstand, i.e., by often dipping the pen."[34] The Latin *relatio* offers the image of a scribe continually *returning* to the inkwell to replenish the quill, a picture of perpetual *renewal*. Reaching back two millennia, it is this root metaphor of *return*, *replenishment* and *renewal* that the agency of relation draws on in an effort to be current. It is the intentionality of attending to relation that is rewarded with *replenishment* and *renewal*, i.e., the mutuality of relation, *self* with the *other*. Mennonite peace-builder, John Paul Lederach poignantly

offers, “The centrality of relationship...brings people into the pregnant moments of the moral imagination: the space of recognition that ultimately the quality of our life is dependent on the quality of life of others.”[35]

The chaplain’s ability to engage the religious *other* is not dissimilar to the depiction here. Engendered trust is the reward of authentic relationship building where over time engagement reaps mutual confidence: *return, replenishment* and *renewal*. Such engendered *trust* soon develops into the chaplain/religious *other* encounter becoming a safe space to share concerns and aspirations. For those living in conflict situations, its residual estrangement, or the unmooring impact of displacement due to a natural disaster, creating a hospitable environment where trust, kindness and safety exist may be for them an experience that will remain with them in memory. Trust enables the resumption of human communication. Kindness bears witness that where violence has been a reality, it may be overcome and put behind them, providing the space for the vulnerability required for the journey toward healing. Safety is the companion of trust for those who have, or presently are, living with threats, danger or disorientation due to displacement. Restoring safety creates the space for the bonds of trust to grow.[36]

Relation in Creation

Theologian and scholar, Miroslav Volf of Yale, offers an enlightening exposition of the creation story through the lens of relation. He introduces the axis of interdependence and independence as a means of describing the nature of God’s relation with humanity and, in turn, relation between *self* with the *other*. Citing God’s activity in creation, he introduces the notion of “separate yet bound,” God separated the “light from darkness, day from night, water from land, the sea creatures from the land cruisers”[37] each “separate” yet “bound” in relation. God’s activity also

> “Bound humanity to the rest of creation as stewards and caretakers of it, to [Godself] as bearers of [God’s] image, and to each the other as perfect complements – a matched pair of male and female persons who fit together and whose fitting harmony itself images God.”[38]

Seen here, inscribed within patterns of relation in the order of creation, a binding of *self* and the *other* together in interdependence is understood to be an “intricate pattern of separate-and-bound-together entities.”[39] As created beings, relation is of pivotal importance, contributing to wholeness. He reminds us that the human *self* is not formed through a rejection of the *other* but, rather, through a complex process of “taking in” and “keeping out,” something that occurs in relation. “We are who we are not because we are separate from the others who are next to us, but because we are both separate and connected, both distinct and related; the boundaries that mark our identities are both barriers and bridges.”[40] In terms of wholeness, interdependence yields a sense of relational reciprocity with respect to “making room” for the *other* within the *self*, something Volf refers to as *embrace*.

In his delineation of the notion of *exclusion*, wilful independence is seen to reconfigure God’s inscribed patterns of relation in the order of creation; interdependence. Marred, distorted, broken and/or violent, wilful independence may potentially alter relations in one

destructive manner or another. In Volf, *exclusion* is meant to convey reconfiguration in the sense that sin does not destroy what God has created; rather its subversive nature brings distortion, deformity and disharmony to God's purposes.

Missions may range from a variant of Peace Operations to Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), which can be either Domestic or Expeditionary, depending on the presenting circumstances. "Governments endeavouring to mitigate the impact of Sea Level Rise (SLR) on coastal populations, with its associated human, material and livelihood losses, by relocating its citizens elsewhere must also consider the potential for conflict in receiving areas. Depending on their ethnicity, 'newcomers' may upset the ethnic balance in a new location leading to unanticipated tensions. Such deliberation is especially critical if mass displacement and relocation is reactive and takes place under stressful conditions."[41]

Chaplains enjoy a high degree of social capital with religious/spiritual leaders and their communities. When conducive to operational outcomes, under commander's direction and in his/her explicit/implicit intent, chaplains may establish lines of communication with religious communities, forming relationships, building trust and enhancing security within AOs—an essential conduit for command. During such encounters, misconceptions are often clarified and misunderstandings allayed that otherwise would inhibit mission progress and serve to exacerbate already fractious relations between groups—*conciliation*, as cited in the United Nations Charter.[42]

In response to a period of rioting during the fall of 2021, the Solomon Islands government requested assistance from Australia. Chaplain Kerrie Frizzell deployed with a Multinational Police Support Group comprised of ADF, New Zealand and Fiji Defence Forces personnel (OP LILIA, 2022). As a chaplain, Frizzell more easily engaged the local citizenry due to the religious orientation of their culture - something that is widespread throughout the Pacific



ADF Chaplain Kerrie Frizzell provides KRLCE support to OP LILIA in the Solomon Islands 2022

Islands. But more significant still, “Being a female chaplain in the Solomon Islands,” she relates, “opened up avenues of connection with the women of that country that was either restricted or prohibitive to the men who had gone before me.” In societies more patriarchal in nature, gender issues are often on full display. *Establishing relationships* and *building trust* with the *other*, female chaplains are well positioned to give voice to women and youth whose concerns are seldom heard, yet are significant segments of local populations.[43]

A Whole-of-Government - Whole-of-Nation Approach

The Australian Government continues to invest in the security relationships within the Pacific family, working together to achieve shared security objectives, build partner capacity, enhance interoperability and address common challenges upholding sovereignty, protecting resources and mitigating the effects of climate change.[44] ADF-I-3, *Stabilisation and Humanitarian Operations* stipulates to achieve such stability, whole-of-government (WoG) coordination between Defence and other government departments and agencies (OGDA) will be critical and should be regarded as business as usual for planning ADF operations. A WoG approach may be understood to encompass government departments/agencies working across portfolio boundaries to achieve a shared goal and an integrated government response to particular issues.[45]

Operational Anecdotes

Functioning quite naturally as *boundary spanners*,[46] chaplains bring to their WoG and WoN partners the prospect of engaging leadership at various levels of society, and not solely in the religious realm. In establishing relationship with Archbishop Christopher Cardone at Holy Cross Cathedral in Honiara, Solomon Islands, Chaplain Hayden Parsons (OP LILIA, 2021) was afforded the opportunity to deliver an Easter message that was



Australian Army Chaplain Hayden Parsons is presented a farewell gift by Archbishop Christopher Cardone during a service at Holy Cross Cathedral in Honiara, Solomon Islands. (Photographer CPL Julia Whitwell)

streamed via the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation. Hearing Chaplain Parsons' Easter message, the Governor General, Sir David Vunagi, GCMG, extended to Parsons a personal invitation to meet with him at his official residence. Instances of this nature serve as a porthole through which to observe the potential that exists with KRLCE. Of course, context and opportunity factor into successful engagement of this kind. The message here is other mission members stand to benefit from such access - unique to chaplains as faith group leaders in their own right where religion is societally pervasive. Recognizing his contribution to key messaging in Pacific relations, Chaplain Parsons' effort did not go unnoticed by Joint Task Group (JTG) command.[47]

National Defence Strategy (2024) underscores that in order to meet the strategic challenges Australia faces, be that the threat of conflict and the prospect of coercion, strategic analysis and operational application of former times must broaden to inculcate a coordinated WoG as well as a whole-of-nation[48] (WoN) approach to operations. This will necessitate harnessing all arms of Australia's national power in order to establish a holistic, integrated and focused approach as a means of protecting security and advancing national interests,[49] a harmonised and focused statecraft, of which diplomacy and defence are both core elements.[50]

Rostek and Gizewski[51] note that as a WoN approach, Australia's *National Strategy for Disaster Resilience*[52] emphasizes "shared responsibility" whereby multiple stakeholders are empowered to directly participate in resilience building and crisis response - a more feasible method of countering security threats and containing the societal impacts of natural disasters. Pertinent to the capacity of chaplains to build relationships and establish trust among civilian populations in OEs, such efforts run parallel to much of what chaplains are about in that they: "engage *individuals, families, local communities and authorities*...[creating] enhanced partnerships, sound understanding of the risk environment and disaster impacts, and *adaptive and empowered communities* capable of acting when necessary."[53]

In the context of national security, this refers to the ability to draw upon all elements of society to manage threats and risks, to adapt to them, and to recover from them should an attack or event occur, without losing the ability to provide basic functions and services to the members of that society.[54] Among societal actors and decision makers, the spiritual resilience and local support networks of religious communities factor singularly in enabling vital sectors of society to absorb and adapt to the shocks and setbacks that they are likely to face. Their contribution cannot be underestimated nor can the chaplain`s capacity to facilitate their participation.

Reinforcing the above emphasis of the importance of building relationships, ADF doctrine, LWD 3-8-6 *Civil-Military Cooperation*, defines the public space of OEs as possessing three key sectors: government, humanitarian space, and "…most importantly, civil society (including the infrastructure and cultural aspects of *communities, organizations and people*)."[55] Deemed critical to achieving mission outcomes, civil society "…includes extended familial organisations or identities, cultural and *religious*…where community relationships and interactions between community service organisations [and] people in communities."[56] These are domains where chaplains, as religious leaders, are received well (*social capital*).



Operation Solania 2022, Australian Army Chaplain Stephen Copland spoke with local church members at Our Lady of Rosary Church in Angaur, Palau. (Photographer: CPL David Cotton)

Chaplain Steve Copland participated in a short-term deployment to Palau in March of 2022. Of significance, Chaplain Copland collaborated closely with the Task Group CIMIC operator, who understood chaplaincy and what KRLCE could bring to the operation. Increasingly, chaplains are finding opportunity to assist CIMIC personnel by facilitating successful encounters with religious communities, which, in turn, benefit from the humanitarian assistance that CIMIC programming offers to local communities. Chaplain-CIMIC cooperation enhances security and benefits public relations, vital to achieving mission out comes.[57]

Similarly, ADF 1-3, *Civil-Military Interaction* (CMI) recognizes, "*Individuals, households, communities and social networks*...[as playing] a critical role in disaster preparedness and response, with traditional knowledge often mitigating the scale of a disaster and assisting during a response."[58] *Religious considerations* and the importance of *face-to-face relationships* with community leaders are among the leading considerations in determining the significance communities may place on family or tribal status, age, gender, ethnicity, and social roles and expectations.[59] CMI uses enabling capabilities, such as CIMIC and information operations (IO), to build relationships based on necessary relationship effects.[60] "Deliberate, consistent and respectful engagement—without intent to influence—supports a high level of situational awareness which enables ADF personnel to better understand civilian actor needs and priorities."[61] As such, CMI specifies the importance of context-specific interaction where *equal and trust-based relationships* among the local population can be built and maintained,[62] collaborating with civilians engaged in humanitarian action with a commitment to humanitarian principles.[63] Functioning at



Tonga's Prime Minister the Hon. Siaosi Sovaleni (centre) and Australian High Commissioner to the Kingdom of Tonga, Her Excellency Rachael Moore (centre left), talk with Royal Australian Navy Chaplain Simote Finau (far left), French Armed Forces (centre right) and the Republic of Fiji Military Forces officer Major Jiuta Baleisolomone (far right) on the island of Nomuka, during Operation Tonga Assist 2022. (Photographer LSIS Daniel Goodman)

the Operational level, CMI activities are founded in ADF communication, planning and coordination, conducted with government agencies as well as international and local non-military actors, in preparation for and in the conduct of ADF operations - most assuredly a WoG/WoN approach.

A strong suit of KRLCE is its adaptability, i.e., as an operational capability it can be generalized to varied contexts. Regarding WoG/WoN formulations, chaplains bring the capacity to adjust to presenting conditions. Humanitarian Operations is a case in point.

When natural disaster strikes the damage to local infrastructure is normally quite extensive. Communications is often among those domains hardest hit, leaving local populations more vulnerable still. Determining how to assess the degree of devastation in more outlying areas is especially challenging. Compounding this is establishing how to inform the citizenry of available aid and where medical assistance may be found near them.

Despite severe infrastructure disruption, the "social networks" of religious communities often continue to function as they have for millennia. Faith group leaders are frequently able to communicate through their people in one way or another to ascertain where help is needed the most and to "get the word out" as to where support may be found. Due to their natural rapport with local religious leaders, chaplains are strategically positioned to initiate such "word of mouth" communications when reaching the local populace is difficult. Religious communities are social entities with built-in systems of human support even in the face of extreme hardship.[64]

OP TONGA ASSIST 22 is a salient example of how a chaplain adapted to the constraining circumstances of the devastating tsunami that hit Tonga in 2022 resulting from the Hunga Tonga Hunga Ha'apai undersea volcanic eruption. The widespread destruction left many communities isolated with limited communication, compounded further by the COVID 19 pandemic. Organizational paralysis in some government agencies severely curtailed the ADF HADR effort.

Chaplains James Hall, Maumau Monu and Simote Finau were able to support the WoG effort through their contacts with religious communities. Chaplain Finau, himself an indigenous Tongan, easily connected with local religious and community leaders by telephone and then in-person, discerning where the greatest community need existed. If it wasn't for the KRLCE activities of the JTG chaplains, the mission would have had far more limited effect. As a witness to the chaplaincy KRLCE effect, Chaplain Finau was subsequently awarded an ADF Gold Commendation from Commander Joint Operations, Lieutenant General GC Bilton, AO, CSC.[65]

Conclusion

The above policy and doctrinal references underscore the centrality of relationship and its inherent trust at all levels within the civilian sector; essential lines of communication for ADF personnel and their WoG/WoN partners in OEs. Theologically founded and praxis oriented, a salient feature of chaplains' activities in AOs have much to do with the interdependence of relationships: creating relational bridges (*embrace*) in overcoming resistant boundaries (*exclusion*) to realize reciprocal trust (*mutuality*). Key Religious Leader and Community Engagement within the ADF has emerged as a relevant and strategic chaplain operational capability that is comprehensive in its adaptability to OEs at home or abroad. A channel to local communities and a conduit for Task Force Commanders, chaplains enhance communication with civilian populations.

Of significance as well is the wisdom of Defence leadership to enlarge the chaplaincy tent to include broader representation of faith tradition and ethnicity. JTG Commanders will benefit greatly from chaplains on their staff who, indigenous to the host nation, may share the same religious expression of the dominant societal group, speak their language and grasp the nuances of both culture and custom of the local populace. The chaplain role described above stands as a singular contribution in the public sphere of operations, of notable benefit to commanders and WoG and WoN endeavours.

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Sending Prayers while Collecting Bombs

Key Religious Leader and Community Engagement on Operation 'OP Render Safe 25-1' East New Britain - Papua New Guinea

Chaplain Andrew Murray

Chaplain Andrew Murray is currently posted to the 6th Engineer Support Regiment, based at RAAF Amberley. Andrew started his Army career as a SERCAT 5 member posted to 12th/16th Hunter River Lancers in 2021 and deployed on domestic operations in support of the 2022 NSW floods.

Abstract

Key Religious Leader and Community Engagement (KRLCE) is a chaplaincy integrated operational capability for the ADF, based on developing relationships with key religious leaders and communities in an area of operation [AO] that are consistent with a spirit of good will, trust, mutual learning, and support. Its aim is to negate or diminish the negative impacts of military operations on the local population through a good flow of information and trust relationships.[1]

ADF chaplains have been successfully conducting KRLCE activities and contributing to mission achievement since the Vietnam War. Army chaplains Fr Gerry Cudmore and Fr John Williams actively built effective relationships with Catholic communities in Phuoc Tuy Province greatly assisting the Australian Task Group.[2] In more recent times, many ADF chaplains have been involved in KRLCE in East Timor, Afghanistan, Iraq and throughout the Indo-Pacific region with similar positive effect. It is important to not underestimate the role faith and religion play in other cultures and societies, particularly within nations close to Australia. ADF chaplains are well placed to engage as religious leaders, affording them access to, and influence with, church groups and community leaders. This article reflects on KRLCE activities employed within OP Render Safe 25-1.

Key Words: chaplain, key religious leader and community engagement

A Strategic Overview

As part of Australia's support to neighbouring nations, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) has led OP Render Safe, a multinational operation that has been in effect for twenty years, to uncover and render safe explosive munitions from previous conflicts.

In 2025, OP Render Safe 25-1 focused its attention in East New Britain (ENB), Papua New Guinea (PNG), in an area held by Japanese forces during WWII. In the ensuing battle to dislodge them, both Japanese and Allied Forces abandoned large stockpiles of Explosive Remnants of War (ERW), which for more than eighty years have posed an ongoing deadly threat to the lives and livelihood of local indigenous communities.

Each OP Render Safe deployment focuses specifically on one of the following three phases: logistics reconnaissance, technical reconnaissance, and disposal.

The focus of deployment 25-1 was on phase two, technical reconnaissance, in which the multi-national contingent collected information on the type and location of ERW. In order to do so, the task group required the building of strong partnerships with local



United States Army, Japan Self-Defense Force and Australian Army personnel inspect a stockpile of Second World War-era unexploded ordnance discovered in a cave in East New Britain, Papua New Guinea, on 12 June 2025 during Operation Render Safe 2025. The multinational mission brought together defence personnel from eight nations to identify and record UXO ahead of future clearance operations. (Photographer CAPT Katy Manning)

authorities and community groups. Against this backdrop, 6ESR Chaplain Andrew Murray accompanied OP Render Safe 25-1 to support its mission and gain KRLCE experience as part of the in-country team.

Operational Planning and Preparation

As with all military operations, planning and preparation are essential. The ADF understands the importance of deploying chaplains as part of an integrated capability, and the effect chaplains have in engaging with religious groups. This interaction must be a planned effect with a measurable outcome.

Chaplain Murray was no exception in this regard and his planning and preparation drew from the set of available resources to develop relationships with key religious leaders and communities in the AO. Personally, these resources included his foundational training in gaining cultural insight and his own enhanced people skills as a minister. From an ADF perspective, he was able to utilise Defence open source materials, including materials available on the KRLCE SharePoint Portal *(developed by members previously deployed to the region)*. Additionally, he was able to acquire Tok Pisin Bibles and learned Tok Pisin phrases.

Community Engagement

Aside from a chaplain's main effort of pastoral care for members within a force element, community engagement is a key component of the chaplain's role. In carrying out this role, the chaplain must be cognisant of staying in their lane. In short, this means not being involved in kinetic or intelligence activities that may undermine trust in the chaplain.

On OP Render Safe 25-1, there was no such role conflict issue due to the nature of the operation. Having LT Adam Ampa'oi, an expatriate from PNG, together with members of PNG Defence Force, and officials from the Provincial Disaster Centre provided the right balance, support, and focus. As part of an integrated capability the Team was able to break down cultural/religious barriers, engage using local indigenous language, build trust relationships and obtain important information on the location of ERW.

ENB has large active Christian faith groups including; Roman Catholic, United (Methodist), Pentecostal (AOG and Foursquare), and Seventh Day Adventist within the many village communities. The crosses stitched on the collar of the 6ESR chaplain's uniform provided a strong visual message to the local people, acting as a conduit to engage with community members, people at the markets, church leaders and even local political figures. Why? Because ministers of religion are highly regarded and respected both within ENB and PNG, even more so when coupled with wearing an ADF uniform.

As the contingent moved through the AO so did its confidence in seizing opportunities to engage with locals, play ad-hoc games of footy, mingle in markets and capitalise on the Tok Pisin they had learnt. All these activities assisted in obtaining pertinent information, ultimately enhancing achievement of mission outcomes. All the while, the presence of the chaplain helped provide the conduit for information flow from the force element to the community and from the community back to the force element. Engaging with Churches provided a significant method for information flow in local communities. The chaplain was able to speak into these communities in ways not generally open to other force element capabilities.

Effect of Key Religious Leader Engagement

The key advantage for commanders is the unique perspective chaplains bring with regard to the intersection points between religion and the broader sociocultural aspects of the AO. Chaplains as religious persons within the military, bridge the knowledge and experience gap, which exists for many in the modern ADF.

The command team of OP Render Safe 25-1 understood this enduring value of making connections with religious leaders and how that can positively support Australia's interests. The Operation had three Tactical Areas of Responsibility (TAORs) and in each TAOR, the chaplain hoped to be able to attend a Sunday service. As activities of sacred significance, church attendance could provide access to ministers who hold senior roles both within their church and within the ENB region.

Forming relationships with local church leaders provided a negotiating channel to deal with and navigate complex situations, clearly illustrated in the following example. During an information gathering exercise about medical evacuations, a local helicopter was utilised to determine key information on the timing for aero-medical evacuations. During these drills, the down wash from the rotors caused a building adjacent to a church to sustain minor damage. Utilising the chaplain's church contacts, the contingent was able to connect with the church pastor and elders of the village to effect repairs with limited damage to reputation. Whilst it is highly likely that contact could have been made with the pastor through other channels, the speed and ease of using existing relationships meant that the contingent entered the village on good terms and were welcomed as guests not people seeking forgiveness.

The value of relationships, rather than simply gathering information, was evident throughout the wider ENB community, and were highlighted through the co-ordination of a visit to a Catholic church. Having arrived for the service anticipated to begin at 6am, the Task Group contingent were informed that it actually commenced at 7am. Since they were unable to return at the later time due to other commitments, the lay leaders who were setting up for the service welcomed them and quickly provided spaces for prayers and other rituals to be undertaken. Likewise, taking the time to speak with people, to share meals, and stories communicated a high level of respect to the people and their communities.

The effect of having the chaplain present was not limited to local services. There was also keen interest shown from International attachments and PNGDF members. Ironically, KRLCE was happening in amongst the contingent members, leading to a significant number of conversations held around faith and belief. Many prayers were offered and scriptures were explored, including the concept of chaplaincy being explained to the Japanese observers, who were very welcoming of the idea. Being alongside the people they served allowed the chaplain to be better understood, and for the chaplain to better understand the significance of their role. Taking the time in preparation to explain *"on the ground effects"* and the chaplaincy quirks in a military system yielded great benefits. Chaplain Murray observed that it is essential for a chaplain to learn and utilise military systems and tools in order to provide the effect, as an integrated capability. The presence and engagement of the chaplain goes beyond religious leaders exchanging pleasantries.



Australian Army Chaplain Andrew Murray with Lieutenant Adam Ampa'oi, from the 6th Engineer Support Regiment speak with members of the local community alongside Papua New Guinea Defence Force personnel in Kokopo, East New Britain, during Operation Render Safe 25-1. (Photographer CAPT Katy Manning)

Religious Area Assessment

As the subject matter expert (SME) on religious matters, one of the key tasks for a chaplain whilst deployed is the compilation of the Religious Area Assessment (RAA). The RAA templates provides information on names, contact details, broad sociological observations, faith group details and other pertinent information that help informs command planning for current and future deployments.[3]

Utilising specially developed analysis tools, chaplains undertake initial and ongoing research into religion and religious communities in the AO. Chaplains can make regular contributions to planning and execution of the mission, through the provision of investigative summaries, determined implications and recommendations to commanders. This assists command in mission achievement through a variety of mechanisms, including avoiding local cultural pitfalls and transgression of local customs and beliefs.

From the extensive KRLCE activity on OP Render Safe 25-1, Chaplain Murray was able to provide a comprehensive RAA, which has since been incorporated into the PNG RAA Command Report as a guide for future OP Render Safe deployments to the area.



Australian Army Chaplain Andrew Murray shares a message of support during a church service in Kokopo, East New Britain. (Photographer: CAPT Katy Manning)

Lessons Learnt

"In the present regional operational environment Australian Defence Force chaplains provide specialist knowledge, spiritual standing and an unrivalled capability to contribute to strategic planning and mission success through key religious leader engagement."[4]

KRLCE has key strategic outcomes. As stated, within PNG the vast percentage of the population practice their faith. It is also clearly understood that PNG is an area of high strategic importance for Australia and its allies. Having shared values upon which to build relationships with near region neighbours which have stood the test of time is a great foundation for relationship. Therefore, fostering familial bonds foundered on respect of religious practice and beliefs can only serve to enhance Australia's reputation as a partner of choice for future endeavours.

Connecting from a faith perspective provides an excellent starting point and a vital means by which Australia seeks to promote and foster its interests now and into the future. For the chaplain on operations, their role provides greatest impact when it is authentic and part of the KRLCE Team in planning and application.

The following are learnt lessons that are offered to assist in providing the chaplaincy effect as an integrated capability:

1. **Authenticity.** Be authentic, that is, know your role, know the uniform, and live your faith.

2. **Communication**. Learn to speak in a language that commanders can understand thus making the "so what" of chaplaincy on operations clear. Doing so will help chaplains achieve mission goals even if the commander does not share the chaplain's religious beliefs.

3. **Theological perspective**. Be ready to frame what you are doing in the region from a theological perspective when communicating with locals.

4. **Relationships**. Relationships are more important than information. Presence is more powerful than product. Be prepared to get alongside to connect in order to achieve your main mission - to build credibility and enduring relationships that remain for future deployments into the region.

5. **Language**. If possible, learn the language local people speak or at least some phrases, as a sign of respect and willingness to engage.

6. **Chaplaincy role**. Lean into your role as a chaplain. In the Pacific it is a key reason why you've been put on the OSD. Being ready to pray before stepping off, sharing a scripture or blessing is of immense value to those from Pacific nations.

Being able to create relationships with our near region neighbours and friends on values that have stood the test of time and distance means that our relationships with the people of these nations can also stand the test of time and distance. Fostering networks from a place of deep and unwavering faith is an excellent starting point and a vital asset to Australia as it seeks to promote and protect her interests now and into the future.

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Leading Chaplaincy Teams Virtually:
Authority and Influence of Coordinating Chaplains

Chaplain Ricky Su, CSM

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Abstract

In the evolving landscape of the Australian Defence Force (ADF), virtual chaplaincy teams are increasingly frequent within postings or on deployments to support personnel across dispersed geographic locations. To fight the good fight, chaplaincy need to adopt the opportunities that technology offers to enhance our teaming capability. This shift presents unique challenges, particularly in fostering cohesion, trust, and effective communication in teams that seldom meet face-to-face. The role of the Coordinating Chaplain (COORD CHAP) is crucial in navigating these dynamics. By focusing on trust-building, setting clear expectations, and ensuring a balanced approach between task-oriented goals and relational dynamics, COORD CHAPs can enhance both team performance and individual satisfaction to achieve the best chaplaincy effect.

This article examines the key leadership strategies for managing virtual chaplaincy teams within the ADF, including the importance of psychological safety, media-rich communication, and conflict resolution. Furthermore, it explores the comparative effectiveness of transactional and transformational leadership styles, suggesting that the latter better sustains trust and team cohesion. The findings highlight the importance of skilled coordination in fostering team unity, enhancing overall performance, and mitigating the inherent challenges of virtual collaboration. By leveraging these leadership strategies, COORD CHAPs can ensure that virtual chaplaincy teams remain both effective and supportive, despite the physical barriers to traditional team structures.

Key Words: virtual, leadership, administrative, technical, authority, leadership, COORD CHAP

Introduction

In the contemporary landscape of the Australian Defence Force (ADF), virtual chaplaincy teams are increasingly employed to support personnel across geographically dispersed areas. Like other virtual teams, these chaplaincy teams face distinct challenges, particularly in fostering cohesion and trust among members who may rarely meet face-to-face. The role of the Coordinating Chaplain (COORD CHAP) is pivotal in ensuring both the performance and satisfaction of the team members. Effective leadership in this context requires a strategic focus on trust-building, clear and consistent communication, and balancing task-oriented objectives with relationship dynamics. By addressing these challenges, COORD CHAPs can cultivate a sense of unity and purpose, despite the limitations of the virtual environment. The way that the COORD CHAP can effectively enhance virtual teaming in barracks will naturally enhance our operational chaplaincy capability to fight the good fight. This article will focus on leading the unique dynamics of virtual chaplaincy teams in the ADF in a domestic setting; however, these principle can be applied to operations. This article seeks to highlight leadership strategies required for success and the impact of skilled coordination on team performance and well-being.

What is a Virtual Team?

Virtual team is a work arrangement where team members are geographically dispersed, have limited face-to-face contact, and work interdependently through the use of electronic communication media to achieve common goals. Virtual teams connect knowledge workers (in this case, CHAPs/MSWOs) together over time and distance to combine effort and achieve common goals.[1]

There are many examples of virtual chaplaincy teams in the ADF. In the Army, the 16th Aviation Brigade COORD CHAP has geographically dislocated chaplains in different time zones located in Darwin, Brisbane, Oakey, Sydney and Townsville. In the RAAF, the Senior COORD CHAP at RAAF Base Amberley supports CHAPs at Amberley, Richmond, Darwin, Tindal and Townsville. In the Navy, COORD-South has CHAPs/MSWOs in Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia, and across two time zones. ADF COORD CHAPs are expected to lead and manage their chaplaincy teams virtually.

Key Functions and Ingredients for Efficient Virtual Chaplaincy Teams

To ensure the success of a virtual chaplaincy team, it is crucial to address the cognitive, affective, motivational, and behavioural needs of its members. A sense of psychological safety is fundamental, enabling team members to bond and build trust within the virtual environment. Achieving this requires the establishment of a clear purpose, well-defined expectations, and specific goals for the team. Effective communication, a constructive team culture, and robust conflict resolution strategies are also essential.[2 3]

The COORD CHAP/MSWO plays a pivotal leadership role in fostering a shared sense of purpose that motivates the team towards high performance. Virtual chaplaincy team meetings serve several functions, including the sharing of information and the transfer of knowledge to enhance the team's collective knowledge, skills, and abilities. These meetings enable collaborative decision-making and problem-solving. Additionally, there is a strong commitment to cultivating both social and professional development within the team, ensuring that members support and elevate each other's growth.

What Constitutes an 'Effective' Virtual Chaplaincy Team?

Is there a framework for COORD CHAPs/MSWOs to evaluate whether their virtual chaplaincy team is performing well? Lin et al. (2008) concluded from their literature review that the efficiency of the virtual team is defined by two factors; team performance and a member's satisfaction. Team performance is defined by the team's output, meaning the chaplaincy effect, and satisfaction is a reflection of people's perception of decisions and agreement on outcomes. These two variables are the most current variables in assessing the virtual team's efficiency and success.

$$\textit{Effective Virtual Chaplaincy Team} = \textit{Team Performance} + \textit{Individual Satisfaction}^{4}$$

Providentially, these two variables can be influenced by a COORD CHAP/MWSO's leadership and management. However, it is advisable to place emphasis on social dimensional factors like relationship building and team cohesion to improve performance

compared to a task dimensional factor like COORD coordination. It is a balancing act but, when in doubt, focus on trust building as a 'high level of trust generates a high degree of performance'.[5]

Challenges of Virtual Teams

Virtual teams face several challenges including limited opportunities for face-to-face interaction compared to being geographically co-located. Additional difficulties include managing across time zones and maintaining high levels of participation during virtual meetings. Engagement in communication can be restricted, making it harder to foster active participation. Building relationships and trust becomes more complex in virtual settings, leading to potential issues such as a lack of commitment to a shared vision, an increased risk of miscommunication, conflict, misunderstandings, and reduced accountability within the team.

Media Rich Communication – Trust, Sharing of Meaning and Expectations

One key ingredient to overcome the challenges of a virtual team is good communication. Where possible, the use of media rich communication platforms (Skype video/ TEAMS) during virtual meetings can be used to mitigate against communication gaps. Sedrine et al. (2021) defines media richness as 'the ability of a technology to provide an immediate feedback, verbal and non-verbal signals'[6] Technology provides media richness to facilitate not only effective verbal, but also non-verbal communication like body language, tone, gesture, eye contact and facial expressions.

Team communication is a dynamic process. It is more than a transactional process of exchange of information between the sender and the receiver. It involves mutual influence, through constant defining and redefining relationships with team members. Communication incorporates trust, values, respect and involves mutual sharing of meaning with others. COORD CHAPs can influence and set team expectations early to establish team norms. The way that the team communicates can shape the climate and psychological safety within the team. High trust fosters good open and honest communication in team engagement, interactions, innovation and decision making in order to avoid confirmation biases and group-think. A COORD CHAP has the responsibility to ensure that the team is able to interact and communicate in a respectful and psychological safety virtual environment.[7]

Transactional Verses Transformational Leadership and Management

Leading virtually faces the classical challenges of leading traditional teams and those linked to the virtual form. 'Virtual leadership' is like any other leadership, a process of social influence, the art of positively influencing others to get the job done.[8]

Transactional leadership establishes the basis for leader-follower relationships by setting clear expectations, defining responsibilities, negotiating agreements, and offering recognition and rewards for meeting chaplaincy performance goals.

In contrast, **transformational leadership** goes further by fostering the growth of chaplaincy team members, encouraging them to think in new and unconventional ways, inspiring them to achieve beyond their perceived limits, and motivating them with a focus on values and high ethical standards that shape their actions. Bass showed that both transactional and transformational leadership produced positive team performance and satisfaction. However, transformational leadership does better in sustaining a high level of trust and team cohesion, and hence, team performance.[9]

COORD CHAPs do not have military executive (**Command**) authority but they are to exercise and comply with normal administrative and technical authority, as well as have responsibility to exercise **Leadership** of the chaplaincy team and individual support chaplains, as well as the **Management** and coordination of chaplaincy services and resources. This includes leading the team virtually (See Table 1).[10 11]

Table 1: *The distinctions between Command, Leadership and Management for COORDs*

Command: *The Power*	**Leadership:** *The Art*	**Management:** *The Science*
Legal authority to direct tasks	Do the right thing	Doing things right
Legal authority to impose discipline	Achieve a shared understanding	Planning
Responsible and accountable for the military element under command	Set the direction	Resource allocation
	Align people to the task	Coordinating
	Motivate and Inspire	Administering
	Set the example	
	Develop the next generation	

ADF-P-0 ADF Leadership Ed 3, p.8.

Practices of Effective Virtual Team Leaders

There are some helpful leadership practices to maintain, shape and motivate virtual chaplaincy team. The key is to establish a norm that works for the virtual team, whilst acknowledging that the diverse team members are understood, appreciated and leveraged to perform their best chaplaincy (See Table 2).[12]

Table 2: Practices of Effective Virtual Team Leaders

Leadership Practice of Virtual Team Leaders	How Virtual Team Leaders do it?
1. Establish and maintain trust through the use of communication technology	• Focusing the norms on how information is communicated • Revisiting and adjusting the communication norms as the team evolves
2. Ensure diversity in the team is understood, appreciated, and leveraged	• Allowing diverse opinions to be expressed through the use of asynchronous electronic means (emails, Signal app, collaboration platforms like TEAMS) • Established ground rules to enable team members to be heard
3. Managing virtual team meetings	• Encourage idea divergence between meetings (asynchronous idea generation), and idea convergence and conflict resolution during virtual meetings (synchronous idea convergence)
4. Enhance external visibility of the team and its members	• Frequent one on one virtual meetings with individual members
5. Ensure individuals benefit from participating in virtual teams	• Find opportunities for virtual recognition and appreciation amongst the virtual team • Making sure each team member's chain of command is aware of member's contribution
6. Face to face meetings	• COORD CHAP to visit their geographically dislocated chaplains where possible and try to incorporate social activities as part of the workplace visitation Ministry of presence should be a priority

Modified from Table 1, Malhotra et al, 2007, p 62

Team Culture - Cooperation Verses Collaboration In Team Dynamics

Leading virtual teams requires the COORD CHAP/MSWO to manage team dynamics and establish team culture and norms. Team norms are the actionable expressions of the team's culture, and together they guide how team members work together to achieve their goals. One consideration for the COORD CHAP/MSWO is to determine whether they want to establish cooperation or collaboration culture in their teams to achieve goals, decision making and problem solving.[13] [14] This is dependent on the context and the construct of the virtual chaplaincy team, ie., day-to-day chaplaincy operations verses team project.

Cooperation: involves chaplaincy team members meeting virtually to divide tasks and to work independently toward a common objective. The COORD CHAP assigns, directs and coordinates the team with allocated tasks and the team members cooperates with the COORD CHAP working independently to achieve the chaplaincy effect.

Example of Cooperation

The COORD CHAP/MSWO assigns the directed tasks to the virtual chaplaincy team members as a coordinated project, clearly outlining the goal, time-line, and deliverables. Each team member is assigned specific tasks based on their individual expertise, knowledge, and skills, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. While the team members work independently on their respective components, the COORD CHAP/MSWO maintains oversight to ensure that the various elements align with the overall objectives of the project.

Collaboration: In contrast, collaboration requires a deeper level of engagement, where team members actively work together, sharing insights, responsibilities, and decisions. Collaboration fosters a more integrated process, with team members depending on each other's contributions and engaging in open communication and problem-solving. It promotes innovation and collective ownership of outcomes, making it ideal for complex projects requiring diverse skills and perspectives.[15]

Example of Collaboration

The COORD CHAP/MSWO initiates the assigned task by presenting it to the virtual chaplaincy team as a collaborative project, clearly articulating the overarching goal, timeline, and expected deliverables. The team engages in a collective decision-making process, leveraging the diverse knowledge, skills, and abilities of its members to facilitate divergent thinking before tasks and roles are assigned. This approach promotes open and constructive exchange of ideas, continuous feedback, and mutual support as the project evolves under the coordination of the COORD CHAP/MSWO.

A key aspect of this collaborative effort is the principle of shared leadership, whereby team members choose to take the lead in areas aligned with their expertise. For example, a chaplain with a background in philosophy is well-positioned to guide the development of the ethical components of the lesson package, while another chaplain with operational experience in war-like scenarios assumes responsibility for managing case studies for syndicate group discussions. This division of leadership ensures that each element of the lesson package is developed by those with the most relevant expertise.

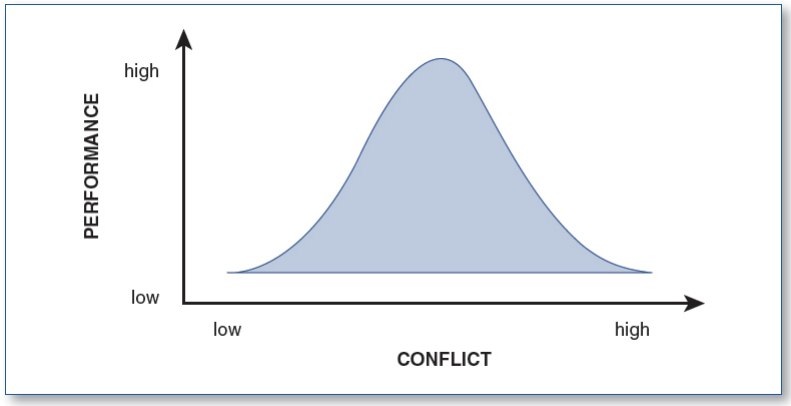
As the project approaches completion, one or more team members deliver a presentation or simulation of the lesson, while others provide feedback to refine the final product. The COORD CHAP/MSWO oversees the final assembly and submits the completed lesson package to COMD on behalf of the chaplaincy team. Afterward, the team engages in a reflective session to celebrate successes and identify areas for improvement in future collaborative efforts.

While both cooperation and collaboration are valuable in team settings, collaboration typically leads to more cohesive and creative outcomes through the synergy of shared efforts and collective problem-solving.

Managing Conflict: Task-Orientated vs Relationship-Orientated Conflict

Conflict is not to be avoided but welcomed as it can be advantageous for the team, however, it can also hinder performance.[16] Team leaders that avoid or fear conflict can generate to dysfunction within the team. Conflicts are usually a result of differences involving facts or data, processes or methods, goals and purpose, values or beliefs. It is crucial for the COORD CHAP/MSWO to distinguish between task conflict and relationship conflict when managing virtual teams. These two conflicts are correlated but also distinct. In most cases, there is co-occurrence of task conflict and relationship conflict. Team members can also misattribute task conflict to relationship conflict by unintentionally triggering it.[17] Instead of tackling and solving the problem, people attack each other; 'be hard on the problem, soft on the people' (See Figure 1).[18]

Figure 1: The relationship between conflict and team performance



Griffith and Dunham, 2014, p.53.

Task conflict, also known as cognitive conflict, refers to the perceived disagreements among team members regarding the content of their decisions. These conflicts often arise from differences in viewpoints, ideas, and opinions. For instance, in a professional development session with a case study, the CHAP team members may disagree on the priority of tasks during a critical incident, such as balancing reporting requirements with chaplaincy confidentiality.

Task conflict, contrary to being inherently negative, can offer several advantages. First, it promotes better decision-making by fostering a deeper cognitive understanding of the issue at hand. Secondly, task conflict can lead to greater acceptance and satisfaction with group decisions. As team members articulate their perspectives, they gain a broader understanding of one another's values and viewpoints, which, when resolved through group consensus, enhances positive team dynamics. However, excessive task conflict can have detrimental effects, reducing both team members' satisfaction and overall performance. Therefore, a balance is necessary to ensure that task conflict remains constructive rather than disruptive.

Relationship or emotional conflict is the perception of personal animosities and interpersonal incompatibility. It degrades group satisfaction and commitment resulting in limiting sharing of information within the group. Time and energy are spent on each other rather than focusing on the problem that the group is trying to solve. It also limits the group's cognitive function due to rise in tension, anxiety and stress. Moreover, it can encourage behaviours that are against the Defence values. For example, in the professional development session, CHAP A believes that the due to the nature of the critical incident, reporting should be a priority, while CHAP B believes that chaplaincy confidentiality should be maintained at all cost. CHAP A perceives that CHAP B is just being painful because CHAP B holds a grudge against CHAP A.

COORD CHAPs/MSWOs can demonstrate leadership by moderating the virtual team when there is task conflict, relationship conflict or both. Research shows that teams experiencing positive group affective tone have stronger cohesion and higher performance.[19] This means that the COORD CHAPs/MSWOs should focus on developing trust in the team as it moderates the connection between task conflict and relationship conflict, as trust plays a pivotal role in moderating satisfaction and group processes.

Managing Difficult Virtual Members

COORD CHAPs/MSWOs are expected to have the skills to facilitate, manage and lead virtual teams. At some point, there will be opportunities to help the team resolve conflict, refocus to the team's objectives and goals, and maintain team cohesion and behaviour. Outlined below are some facilitative interventions that might be useful (See Table 3).[20]

Identifying and dealing with difficult team members and addressing team dynamic is essential to lead a virtual team. These are some solutions and techniques to manage difficult team members (See Table 4).[21]

Table 3: Facilitative Interventions

Intervention	Specific things you can say or do
Boomerang	Don't get backed into answering questions the group should be answering for themselves. Boomerang the question back to the group.
Maintain/Regain Focus	'Wait a second. Let's keep a common focus here.'
Say what is going on	Simply identifying and describing a destructive behaviour to the group is enough to change that behaviour. Be sure to 'check for agreement' after your process observation.
Accept, Legitimise, Deal with or Defer	This is a general method of intervening that works well for dealing with problem people and emotional outbreaks of all kinds.
Check for Agreement	Almost any time you make a statement or propose a process, give the group an opportunity to respond. Don't assume they are with you.
Don't be Defensive	If you are challenged, don't argue or become defensive. Accept the criticism, thank the individual for the comment and boomerang the issue back to the individual or group
Use the Group Memory	The group memory (i.e. the easel/notepad on which minutes or key points are being recorded) can also be used to reinforce many of the interventions and preventions.
Use a Time-out	When team members are fighting, losing sight of the big picture or becoming uncooperative for some reason, try calling for a time-out. Ask that members take a five-minute break, after which the meeting will resume.
Call a Team Member's Bluff	Use when a team member threatens to do something unless or until the team changes direction. (This intervention is risky; you must be willing to accept a team member's decision).
Use Leading Questions	Use when the team has too narrow a focus and you want to gently guide them into another direction, or when the team needs a 'jump-start'.

Modified from De et al., 2014, p. 313

Table 4: Dealing with Difficult Team Members

Difficult Team Members	Problem	Possible Solution
The Silent Member	Withdrawn. May be bored, indifferent, timid or insecure.	Ask for their opinions. Give positive verbal and non-verbal reinforcement. Perhaps spend some time with them during breaks to establish trust and introduce them to others in the group.
The Heckler	Combative individual who wants to play devil's advocate.	Stay calm. Don't lose your temper. Appeal to them for cooperation. If necessary, restate the team's agreed expectations for meetings.
The Fighters	Two or more persons clash at the personality level.	Interrupt politely but firmly. Stress points of agreement, minimise points of disagreement. Re-focus on issue/ point of discussion.
The 'Stand Pat'	Won't budge. Refuses to accept the group's decisions. Often prejudiced. Unable or unwilling to see your point or those of others.	Present their view to the group: 'Does anyone else feel as Pat does about this?'
The Side-Tracker	Off the subject or agenda.	Take the blame for sidetracking them: 'Something I said must have led you off the subject. This is what we should be discussing ... (restate point).'
The Verbal Stumbler	Lacks ability to clearly express themself. Has the ideas but finds it difficult to put them into words.	Help the person out. Rephrase their statements. "Checking what I think you are saying is…..(summarise the verbal stumbler's point).."
The Whisperer	Engages nearby people in side conversations while someone else has the floor.	Interrupt politely and ask if they could share their information with the group.

The 'Eager Beaver' ***(Talker - Monopoliser)***	Monopolises the conversation.	Interrupt politely with 'That's an interesting point. What do the rest of you think about it?'
The Mistaken	Member is obviously incorrect.	To bring out correction tactfully, say 'I see your point, but how can we reconcile that with … (state correct point)?'
The Latecomer	Comes late and interrupts meeting.	Announce an odd time (8.46 am) for the meeting to emphasise the necessity for promptness. Reinforce the Defence value of respect.
The Early Leaver	Announces, with regret, that they must leave for another important activity.	Before the meeting begins, announce/ confirm the ending time and ask if anyone has a scheduling conflict.
The 'Technology' is not my friend	Using 'technology' as excuse to disengage. Have camera turned off due to "technical" issues.	1:1 Meeting to trouble shoot use of technology. Try to understand why member is disengaged.

Modified from De et al., 2014, p. 315

Conclusion

Virtual chaplaincy teams in the ADF, like other virtual teams, face unique challenges that require skilled leadership to foster cohesion and trust across geographical distances. The effectiveness of these teams hinges on both performance and member satisfaction, which can be significantly influenced by a COORD CHAP's leadership approach. Emphasising trust-building, robust communication, and balancing task and relationship dynamics are essential for overcoming the limitations of virtual settings. With the right strategies, COORD CHAPs can guide their virtual teams toward high performance and collective satisfaction, ensuring effective chaplaincy effect is well placed to support our people.

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‘I Vow Again’

A chaplain’s reflection on the poem ‘In Flanders Field’ by John McRae

Chaplain Neil Anderson

Chaplain Neil Anderson is the Regional Support Chaplain for Western Australia based at Leeuwin Barracks, East Fremantle, W.A.

In hallowed ground where silence dwells,
I tread upon the fields once bright,
Beneath the weight of sorrowed bells,
Now shrouded deep in endless night.
And vow again to fight the good fight

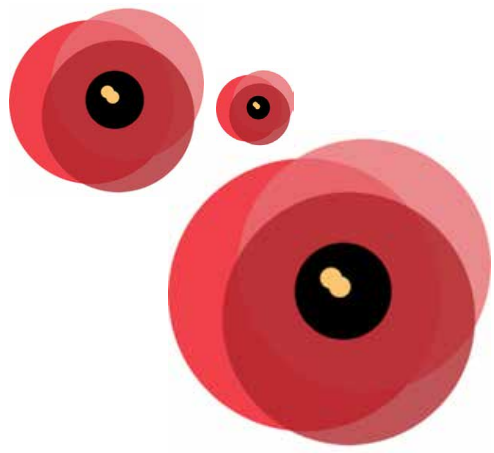
Where poppies bloom, a blood-red tide,
I stand as witness, heart laid bare,
And echoes of the lost abide,
In sacrifice and whispered prayer.
I vow again to fight with care.

The brave who served, their spirits soar,
Yet here their voices softly call,
In dreams of peace, they seek no more;
In rustling leaves, they mourn the fall.
I vow again to give my all.

O cherish well the lives they gave,
And in the stillness, hear their plea:
“For freedom’s light, we boldly braved,
remember us, and let us be,
we leave our vow safe with thee”.

Let not their valour fade in time,
Or in each heart their legacy,
Nor their stories lose their rhyme;
But bloom anew like poppies free,
To vow again and fight for thee.

So gather ‘round, ye living souls,
For in this field, where shadows blend;
In unity, let love console,
Our courage rise - on hope depend,
To fight for good until the end.



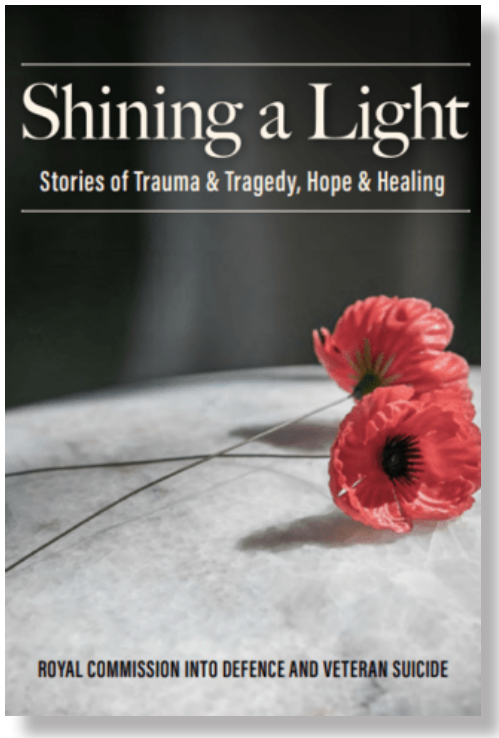
Book Review - Shining a Light

Stories of Trauma, Tragedy, Hope & Healing

Author: *Journalist* Patrick Lindsay AM,
Commonwealth of Australia 2024
ISBN: 978-1-921241-98-7 (print)
ISBN: 978-1-921241-97-0 (online)
245 pages

Reviewed by Chaplain Andrew Murray

Chaplain Andrew Murray is currently serving as Support Chaplain to 6th Engineer Support Regiment at Amberley Military Base QLD.



The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide (the Commission) has cast significant light into dark and unspoken of corners of Defence and its culture, including the same for the Department of Veteran Affairs and external support organisations. Not only this, it has given voice to those who had previously been silenced. The full report is over 3000 pages in length over 7 volumes. Shining a Light seeks to bring to the fore the humans who have been let down and broken by Defence and their lived experiences in an accessible and easily grasped manner. The book is available for download as a PDF file on the Commission's website.

The book does not purport or try to be a substitute for the findings of the Commission, and it should not be approached as such. There are some sobering statistics within Shining a Light, however its key focus, as mentioned, is the lived experience of the real people who have bravely shared their stories at the Commission. The most jarring is the reality that the often-repeated line that: *"current serving members of the ADF are at less risk of suicide than the wider population",* is simply not true.

Shining a Light is broken into chapters, which can be read in any order, punctuated with reminders to take short breaks to keep yourself safe even as you read. There are some harrowing stories, including stories of lives being ground down into hopelessness, families being destroyed, relentless bullying, sexual assault, and suicide. It is difficult to put into words my own feelings as I read the book. Feelings of anger, despair, indignation, embarrassment, and shame kept appearing. Sometimes these were my own and other times I couldn't help but feel them out of compassion and empathy.

Reading this book can be heavy going, I have no doubt that anyone who picks it up will be moved in some way or another. But that is precisely the point. The book is not a voyeuristic window into the suffering of others but an invitation to step into that suffering and to do something to bring healing, to do something to prevent this kind of suffering from happening in the future. For chaplains, it can feel overwhelming when the sheer volume of brokenness we encounter makes it seem we are trying to move a mountain one pebble at a time. But we are uniquely positioned and equipped to step into such brokenness. As a Christian chaplain I am reminded of the life and work of Christ and am strengthened by the Holy Spirit to shine a light when all seems dark. One thing I have done as a result of reading this book is to make deliberate efforts to stay in contact with chaplains who have left service.

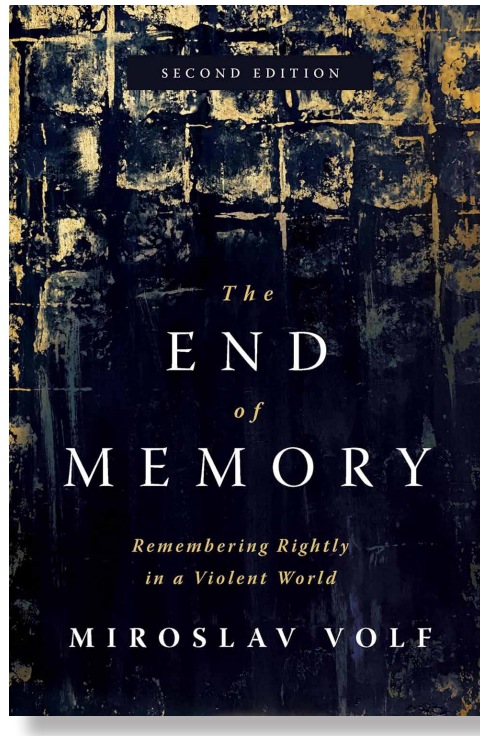
Shining a Light is a deeply moving and heart-breaking read. I strongly encourage all chaplains to read it and to encourage the command teams in the units to also read it. If this book is read with the lens that you can make a difference, even if it is simply a difference for one person at a time, that act of kindness, mercy, compassion, empathy, can be the difference between healing and brokenness, health or sickness, life or death. It is then, that those acts of kindness, truly do move mountains.

Book Review - The End of Memory

Remembering Rightly in a Violent World

Author: Miroslav Volf
Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2006, 2021.
ISBN 978-0-8028-7867-0
xii+296 pages

Reviewed by Chaplain Darren Cronshaw
Chaplain Darren Cronshaw is a Baptist pastor currently serving at the 6th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment. He is also a Professor of Practical and Inter-cultural Theology with Australian College of Ministries (Australian University College of Divinity).



At Defence Force School of Signals in 2024 our CO took her team to the Shrine of Remembrance to begin the year – important as it is to remember the sacrifice of those who have served before us in war and peacekeeping. Over a hundred fresh-faced school-leavers were there at the same time ready to hop on the bus for Australian Defence Force Academy and their Officer Cadet journey. What experiences and memories will they collect, I wondered?

Some memories are worth holding on to, including highlights of character and virtue where we have seen humanity at its best. "Lest we forget" is a moral imperative encoded in our national Australian psyche for this reason.

Some memories, though not pleasant, just need to be held – we remember Auschwitz and Rwanda and other significant wrongdoings because we fear repeating those remembered wrongs.

Other memories may be beneficial to let go. Experiences of trauma and wrongs inflicted are emotionally and psychologically difficult to navigate. How do we remember rightly in a violent world where people suffer injustice or trauma greater than we previously could have imagined? What is the path to wholeness after being hurt, to healed memories after suffering wrongs, perhaps even to forgiveness albeit without excusing evil?

Miroslav Volf is a theologian with a fascination for how to support human flourishing. He is a professor at Yale Divinity School and has authored over 20 books including the seminal *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* based on his experience of civil war and "ethnic cleansing" in the former Yugoslavia, and *Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World* on how religion can be at its worst in promoting violence and

its best in peacemaking. Back in 1984 when his theology studies were interrupted by compulsory military service in Yugoslavia, he came to be labelled a national security threat and interrogated repeatedly. In *The End of Memory*, he reflects autobiographically on this experience and how he processed, integrated and remembers the wrongs done to him through Captain G's euphemistic "conversations".

What do we do with haunting memories of wrongs suffered? Volf reflects on his own experience how he was helped by the by passage of time, truthfully remembering, a community that valued human rights, belonging to a community of faith, dislodging the memory from the core of his identity, and avoiding letting the experience of victimization lead to harming others and instead actually letting it benefit others as an exemplary memory. Remembering rightly, he suggests, can foster solidarity with other victims and promote protection from further violence.

I appreciated how Volf acknowledged how some people find meaning and purpose in wrongs inflicted on them. This reminds me of journalist Dean Yates' experience of trauma narrated in *Line in the Sand* which led him to a new sense of purpose of advocacy for workplace mental health. But sometimes wrongs are simply unjust and also seemingly meaningless with no apparent good.

Volf draws on writers who reflect on the Holocaust such as Elie Wiesel, the experience of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission as a compelling case of public remembering of wrongs, the experience of the West after 9/11, and the impracticable conflict of Jews and Palestinians in Israel. In no way does Volf want to ignore truth and justice or ever excuse fear and abuse. A dominant cry is that past wrongs such as genocides and terrorism should never be forgotten. Yet letting go of such memories – after sensitive attention to personal healing and appropriate advocacy for justice – may be a gift of grace to embrace.

Helpful religious resources for remembering rightly lie in the Exodus and Passover. Jews (and then also Christians) remember Israel's Exodus from Egypt and that those who experienced wrongdoing remembered their wrongdoers but were called to go on to act in favour of others who are weak and oppressed and to oppose oppressors. Christ's death and resurrection challenge those who follow Jesus' example to also realise the powerfully transforming virtue of forgiveness and unconditional grace alongside the claims of justice. Volf further discusses how "non-remembrance" may be a gift of paradise in heaven, and even achievable in this life through therapy and forgiveness, not to lose our identity but to lose our identity being too closely interwoven with wrongs done to us or by us.

Volf concludes: "although the book may be hazardous to recent conventional; "wisdom" about the memory of wrongs, it is, I believe, good medicine for our cultural health and personal flourishing." (p.248)

For those who enjoy watching more than reading, or would like to hear Volf in his own words, see the video accessible online "Theology of the Embrace in Wartime" where he discusses reconciliation and how to remember in the context of wartime and terrorism, 9/11 and Ukraine, and his own experience of interrogation and Christian faith.

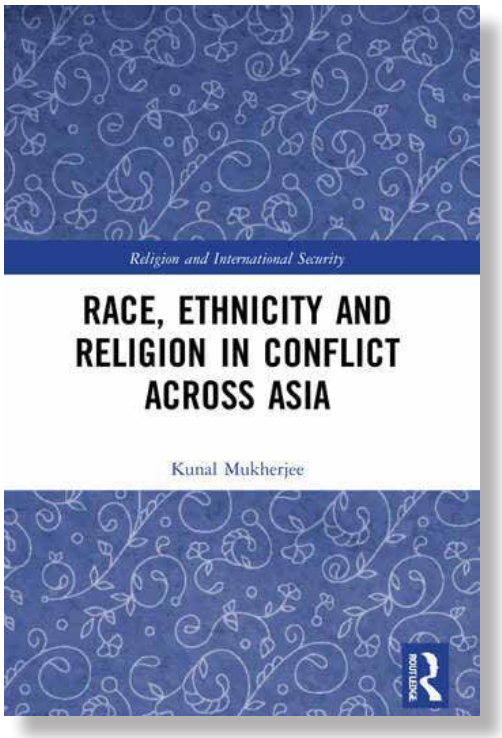
Remembering rightly is an important topic pastorally and ethically, with wide-ranging implications for international relations and the wellbeing, resilience and moral injury of military members. *The End of Memory* is a thought-provoking resource for chaplains or for those who share a sense of religious faith with Volf. It may also be of interest for readers simply curious about the values offered by faith and forgiveness, reconciliation and justice as we integrate and heal from traumatic and unjust memories.

Book Review - Race, Ethnicity and Religion in Conflict Across Asia

Author: Kunal Mukherjee
Religion and International Security series
London: Routledge, 2021
ISBN 9780367617059
viii+240 pages

Reviewed by Chaplain Darren Cronshaw

Chaplain Darren Cronshaw is a Baptist pastor currently serving at the 6th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment. He is also a Professor of Practical and Inter-cultural Theology with Australian College of Ministries (Australian University College of Divinity).



At our best, humans can welcome and learn from one another's ethnic or religious differences. At our worst, conflicts fester and continue for generations along lines of cultural, religious and historical difference. People of faith can perceive that violence is an appropriate way of "fighting the good fight" of better positioning their own social/political/cultural/religious territory. We see the sad consequences of this in the Gaza strip as Hamas and Israel clash violently. But we also regularly see conflicts flare up in the Asian region as secessionist groups seek greater autonomy or independence or as their central governments stamp down on their demands. Many of these secessionist conflicts are ongoing and involve serious human rights abuses and the potential to catalyse more serious regional conflict.

This book offers case studies of 8 secessionist groups or movements – in Northeast India, Tibet, Chinese Xinjiang, Burmese borderlands, Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in Bangladesh, South Thailand, Kashmir in South Asia, Aceh in Indonesia. Kunal Mukherjee is a Lecturer in International Relations (Asia Pacific) at Lancaster University. One feature of his research is that he visited these regions and collected local insights from extensive fieldwork, interviews and participant-observation. His analysis is not just from academic books but grassroots conversations.

Another feature of Mukherjee's scholarship is he invites reader to clearly see the powerful influence of race, ethnicity and religion in each of these conflicts. He uses the lens of critical race theory, and draws on his own ethnic minority experience of racism as an Indian background citizen in Britain, to show how race and its power dynamics is often a subtle form of discrimination.

Mukherjee helped me see some of the recurring patterns of what causes a secessionist group to emerge and the conflict dynamics with its central government. At the foundation of many of the conflicts is that cultural and religious identity is often a stronger bond than nationalism. Thus religion, or its repression, is a clear source of conflict in some regions such as the Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang or Tibetan Buddhists, both of which have been repressed by the Chinese central government as a distrusted potential source of dissent.

There are often divergent views of history such as in Tibet which believes they have been independent of China as a kind of priest and patron of China, whereas China asserts Tibet has always been part of China.

Conflict is often a by-product of colonial divisions, such as in Myanmar where Karen, Chin and Kachin groups who were favoured by Britain are now marginalised, and where the Burmese military rule now has its ongoing internal colonisation dynamic.

There are often multiple levels of conflict. For example, in Northeast India there is conflict between the region and the rest of India, within the states of the region, between tribal and non-tribal groups, and within the tribal groups. Sometimes it is clear what a group wants, and sometimes there are so many different groups that is difficult to identify a clear secessionist agenda such as in South Thailand.

Sometimes the conflict is between a secessionist group and its governing country, but other times bordering countries are fighting over a region. For example, 4 wars have happened over Kashmir between India who wants to hold the region as a buffer and Pakistan who believes they could better govern the majority Muslim region. This makes Kashmir one of the most dangerous and volatile regions of the world caught between 2 nuclear powers.

In other places the role of international or key power support is catalytic in the ongoing conflict. For example, the Tibetan struggle for independence depends largely on India's support of the diasporic government-in-exile, and yet Northeast Indian insurgents have relied heavily on China providing weapons and training support.

Migration often plays a part in conflict, as when whole groups are forced to move to avoid genocide such as the Muslim Rohingya and Karen and other Christian groups from Myanmar (as I learned from reading Myanmar's 'Rohingya' Conflict), or when a central government seeks to dissipate conflict by transforming local demographics such as Han migration to Xinjiang and Tibet, or Bengalis migrating to CHT.

Tragically the conflicts can involve severe human rights abuses – rape and other gender-based violence, forced labour, land theft, torture and detention, unfair trials, overly severe punishment and death sentences.

Some regions have greater autonomy and a special status, others want this, and others have had it promised but not delivered. Some regions want better resourcing from their central government, others feel their own resources are capitalised and drained by their central government. There is often a trust deficit and a need for both constructive dialogue but also substantial empowering of local voices and agency, according to Mukherjee.

The book offers specific insights into each of the 8 secessionist groups or movements and the conflicts they are battling. Yet it also points to common threads that are worthwhile to monitor and be attentive to in any ethnic/religious based conflict: what are the historical roots of the conflict including colonialism, what is the role of neighbouring and international powers in exacerbating or

resolving conflict, and what are local people asking for and what do they need to feel empowered? This has implications for unravelling conflict and safeguarding peace and Australia's national interests in the region. As Mukherjee asserts, the risk is that if minority groups and their interests are ignored or left behind, it may lead to further extremism.

Another underdeveloped question is what is the role of religious beliefs and leaders in navigating peaceful solutions? I would have liked to have seen Mukherjee interview more religious leaders and identify where peace-making and reconciliation is happening at its best. In a region where religion and culture is so important in many people's lives, and where these elements are often at the core of violent conflict, the book's case studies underline the importance of engaging with key religious leaders and together navigating paths towards peace.

Race, Ethnicity and Religion in Conflict Across Asia is helpful background reading for Diplomats, Commanders, Defence Linguists or Chaplains engaged in Key Religious Leader and Religious Community Engagement working operationally in regions with secessionist groups or movements and/or those wanting to understand broader ethnic/religious-based conflict.

Two Book Reviews: Trauma-Informed Evangelism

Cultivating Communities of Wounded Healers

Authors: Charles Kiser & Elaine A. Heath
Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans (2023)
ISBN 978-0-8028-8235-6
224 pages

Post-Traumatic Jesus

A Healing Gospel for the wounded

Author: David W. Peters
Lousiville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press (2023)
ISBN 978-0-664-26732-2
161 pages

Reviewed by Chaplain Cam West
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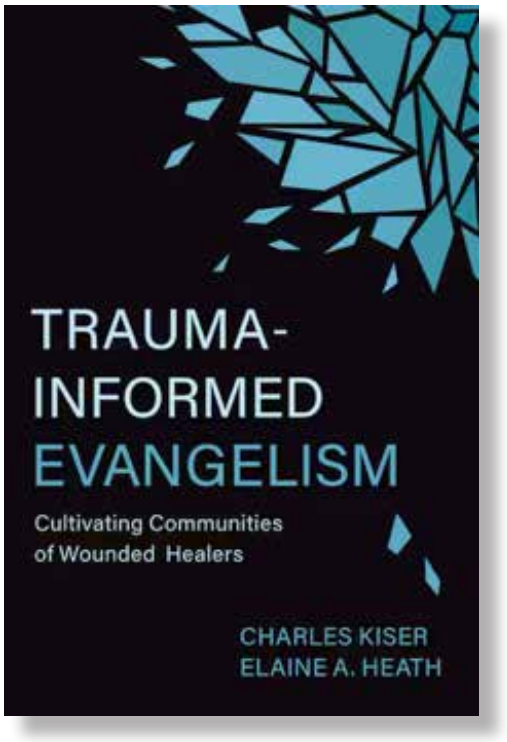


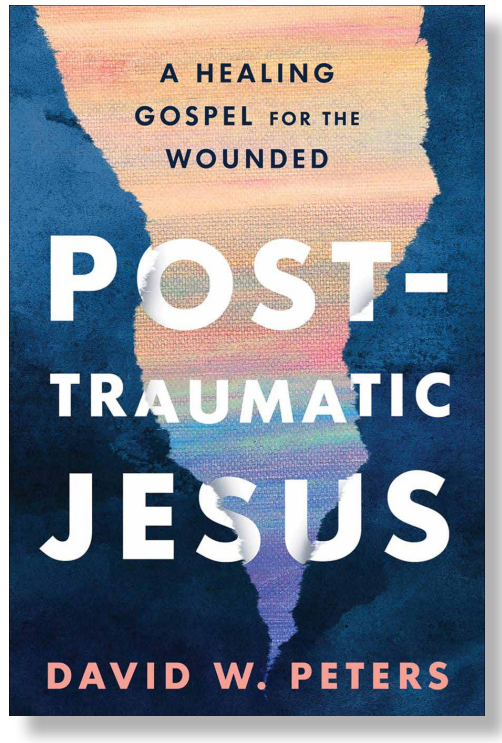
As the shadow of war looms, religious leaders – but especially military chaplains – need a theology robust enough to account for and to address trauma. Both of these books are a valuable contribution towards that goal: the first seeks to apply a trauma lens to help understand the Christian message, the second demonstrates the deep sympathy between the Christian gospel and contemporary understandings of trauma.

Trauma-informed evangelism is co-written by pastor and church planter Charles Kiser and his academic supervisor Elaine A. Heath about the former's doctoral work grappling with the spiritual wounds that cultural Christianity had inflicted on the "nones" and "dones" even in the south of the USA,[1] posing an obstacle to his evangelistic efforts. Kiser's stated purpose shows clearly why this book should be of great interest to Christian chaplains in defence:

> The aim of the book is to imagine the practice of evangelism among neighbours who carry spiritual abuse and trauma. What does it look like to share the good news of Jesus, to make disciples of Jesus, among people who have been harmed in the name of Jesus? How does the church relate to those who have been harmed by the church? How do we practice evangelism in ways that aren't themselves tantamount to coercion, domination, and abuse? (Kiser and Heath 2023, 3)

Some chaplains will not share the authors' concerns with Christendom and "white supremacist heteropatriarchy," but will nonetheless find much value in the book if they share the authors' aim. Kiser and Heath identify common themes in spiritual harm including withdrawal of relationship, mistreatment of those at the margins, exploitation of pastoral authority, secondary harm from witnessing trauma and include a discussion of moral injury in the context of spiritual harm.

They contend that questions of trauma and grace are not of peripheral concern to Christian scriptures, theology and experience, but insist that central elements of the gospel such as crucifixion and resurrection speak directly to traumatic experiences. The book identifies ways that it is possible to encounter the triune God in the traumatic narratives recorded in scripture and they offer restorative images of God as pathways of experiencing spiritual healing.



Kiser and Heath undertake an invaluable service for Christian chaplains in defence in their proposals for how Christian leaders can be more effectively trauma-informed; not just that there are ways to constrain excess and limit abuse that may occur in the pursuit of evangelistic goals, but how a trauma-informed reading of scripture and lived theology can positively promote spiritual healing as part of the *missio dei*.

One particular trauma-informed evangelistic practice is worth highlighting for chaplaincy in the defence context: flipped hospitality. In contrast to the default model in Christendom of churches as hosts who extend hospitality, Kiser and Heath propose Christian leaders consider the evangelistic possibilities of being guests who receive hospitality: "Becoming a guest requires vulnerability and the acceptance of a power differential which puts a guest in the hands of the host, and many of our neighbors who carry spiritual trauma simply do not feel safe becoming a guest of the church," (2023, 132). Chaplains are often privileged to be the beneficiaries of being graciously welcomed into an organisation and its various sub-cultures in ways that require vulnerability. Instead of enlisting volunteers to support the vision of a local congregation, chaplains seek to participate in the *missio dei* through the ways that they serve the organisation and – moreover – its people even while they're unable to be uncritically affirming of all that occurs in the defence context; in short chaplains are offered the opportunity to be a blessing.

Though Peters' experience – as a former Army chaplain – is different, his goal in *Post-traumatic Jesus* is similar: his book "examines the stories in the Gospels through the lens of trauma, paying

careful attention to how the authors used these stories to cultivate hope and healing for traumatized people, preserving the story of the post-traumatic Jesus who extends his wounded hands to us," (2023, 9). In seeking to read the bible through the lens of trauma, not from the posture of an academic, but as an exercise in pastoral care, he presents thirty brief devotional reflections on gospel accounts through the lens of trauma.

As an Iraq war veteran as well as episcopal priest, Peters is aware of the frequency that soldiers are implicated in traumatic episodes in the gospels, from carrying out Herod's genocidal order to kill the male babies in occupied Palestine, to their crucial (in both senses of the word) role in the political execution of Jesus as an alleged threat to the empire. One of his most striking chapters is that of the "Post-traumatic exorcism," (53–56) which reflects on the episode commonly known as the exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac found in all three synoptic gospels. He opens with an account of decimation as punishment for collective cowardice, with comrades executing attempted deserters with clubs, made even more visceral following a similar sentence carried out by Wagner mercenary on a comrade who had surrendered in Ukraine. From this he explores the near-certainty that many veterans of the Roman imperial army had on a variety of occasions experience of being both predator, and prey and observes, "If we get PTSD from being the prey, we get moral injury from being the predator," (54). Peters eloquently meditates on the role of combat trauma in this well-known episode, vividly highlighting the transformative spiritual healing that Jesus brings about:

> *And now this legionnaire who participated in the violence of the legion finds the violence of the legion participating in him. He has become that which he feared. He may have escaped the legion, but the legion has not escaped him. He embodies the legion's trauma. But Jesus stays with him.*

This example demonstrates the strength of the book: Peters' focus on gospel texts surrounding the life and ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus through the lens of trauma, as an important and profound corrective to what he identifies as the clear "failure of many churches to genuinely connect the gospel to people's most wounded parts" (10).

The book is let down by a few minor quibbles about the format. Firstly, the notes are sparse and almost half refer to a single – though admittedly seminal – work, Judith Herman's Trauma and Recovery. Secondly, and more importantly given what the book has to offer, a scripture index would have been extremely helpful. Finally, while the introduction and discussion questions do a sufficient job of situating the work and relating it to previous scholarship and applying it to the reader's life respectively, these could have been expanded. Particularly for chaplains and ministers who serve people from a military background in their congregations, it would be helpful to have some more threads to pull together. However the snapshots remain helpful as they are.

Both of these books are important reads for chaplains in the defence context, as examples of what it can look like to take seriously the fact that "the scriptures of Judaism and Christianity [were] written in part as a response to communal suffering [and] thus suffering, and survival of it, was written into the Bible," (2014, 12–13). They show how Christian theology and spirituality contain significant resources for promoting spiritual healing, health and fitness – so that soldiers are able to prepare for and survive what the Chief of Army recognises as "the corrupting nature of war," (Stuart 2024). Both of these books also serve chaplains by highlighting the potential for vibrant faith to also be corrupted. In the defence context, it is impossible to avoid weighty matters of life and death, and to seek to alleviate uncertainty and suffering by using faith in unhealthy ways.[2] *Trauma-Informed Evangelism* and *Post-Traumatic Jesus* are highly recommended for Christian chaplains in defence, and the format of the latter is one that also allows chaplains to on-recommend it even more widely, but especially to other Christians in defence.

End Notes

1. Moore (2022) summarises: “Over the past few years, comprehensive research has chronicled the rise of the “nones” and “dones.” The nones are ostensibly those who do not self-identity with any religious affiliation, most prevalent among zoomers and millennials. The dones are those exiting established religions, most notably Christianity. For a variety of reasons, they are done with church.” In addition, he considers an emerging third category, the “Umms” who are fond of the local church, take Jesus seriously and are not bitter or cynical. “They are umms because they are uncertain and hesitant about how to reengage with the church. And although their individual stories are myriad and diffuse, I would like to present four potential types of umms and their struggles: disoriented, demotivated, discouraged, or disembodied.”

2. According to Williams, “Toxic religion results from using religious language, religious stories, as a way of pretending to ourselves that we are after all in charge, that actually we really are the centre of things and our limits can be overcome. We can come to believe we have access to absolute and infallible truth, to an even and just perspective on all things; we know what the world is really like and there’s no more to be learned. It’s the basis of toxic religion, but also of toxic forms of irreligious belief, especially when, even if a system calls itself atheistic, it still clings to certain religious ideas (bad ones) by pretending that human beings can actually answer all the questions they set themselves, and overcome all the limits that might threaten their power,” (2025, 2).

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