
‘Captains of the Soul’: The Historical Context of Australian Army Chaplaincy, 1913–2013

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He who cannot draw on three thousand years [of history] is living from hand to mouth.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

In early October 1941 a 39-year-old Presbyterian Army chaplain arrived in Singapore. Earlier in the year the Reverend Hugh Cunningham had farewelled his wife Beatrice, then pregnant, and their five-year-old daughter. The Glasgow-born chaplain had been a draper and commercial traveller before migrating to Australia in 1925 to pursue a vocation as a minister in the Presbyterian Church. He had offered for chaplaincy service in May 1941. Appointed to General Base Depot Malaya with the Australian 8th Division, Cunningham was one of 34 Australian Army chaplains and 22,000 Australians who went into captivity after the surrender of Singapore to Japanese forces in February 1942. A third would never return.

After being transferred with other Australians from Changi to the Thai border in November 1943, Cunningham suffered the unimaginable horrors of what would become death camps on the bank of the River Kwai. Ernest Gordon, a Scottish prisoner of war whose account of life there was later published as *Miracle on the River Kwai*, recorded the arrival of Cunningham and a British padre in his camp on the Thai–Burma railway in 1944:

The Australian chaplain, Padre Hugh Cunningham, did not fare so well. The Japanese surprised him in the act of thumbing through a school atlas. For two days they confined him in a bamboo cell so low that he could not stand up in it, and so narrow that he could not sit down. To make doubly certain of his discomfort, a guard came by at certain intervals and prodded him with this bayonet.¹

The arrival of the two padres, however, completely altered the dynamic in the camp. 'Between them', wrote Gordon:

they built up the church, and, with it, the morale of many in the camp ... Abruptly, our captors issued an order forbidding religious services, of which they had become increasingly suspicious. They had sworn to bring us to complete subjection; they had not done so. We were bent but not broken. Out of a condition of no purpose had appeared men with purpose. If this improvement continued, the guards reasoned, our gatherings could become a potential focus for revolt.²

The padres' captors initially had little conception of a chaplain's officer status and his apparently unique relationship with the troops. A fellow padre recalled listening to Cunningham's account of his treatment in captivity:

The Japanese were bewildered by [Cunningham's] status and role of chaplain ... He was treated just as firmly and harshly as all the other prisoners. The prison guards constantly brought him in for questioning to try and determine who he really was ... being shown great respect ... [yet] not holding any rank ... Because of their uncertainty about him, he was kept in virtual isolation and given restricted access to his fellow POWs. Eventually one of his Japanese guards was able to gain an inkling of his position and special status. He was given an arm band to wear with green Japanese characters written on it and instructed to wear it at all times. Soon he began to be treated with great honour by the guards ... and he was allowed unfettered movement amongst his fellow prisoners. His captors did not tell him what was written on his arm band and he did not discover its meaning until after he was freed and returned to Australia. The translation read simply, 'Captain of the souls of men'.³

The significance of Cunningham, and his status as a rallying point for morale and resistance among the troops, is undeniable. Yet padres and religious activity served as a focus of morale in several other camps, as Gordon and Australian prisoner of war Geoffrey Bingham have shown in their accounts of the quiet but powerful religious revivals that broke out among prisoners.⁴

Contemporaries and later historians have also highlighted the remarkable discipline, stoicism and will to survive of Australian soldiers and their padres in captivity.⁵ It says much about the underlying significance of Christianity in Australian society during the Second World War. Yet the importance of men like Cunningham and many of his fellow padres (who were remembered by fellow prisoners with enormous affection and respect) was not simply due to the residual strengths of Australian Christianity in the Second World War, or to their personal dedication and individual charisma. Cunningham personified a model of practical service and religious and moral leadership that had been forged by the Australian Army Chaplains' Department during the Great War, and by a generation of chaplains before them in South Africa. This tradition of service and leadership was carried on in the Second World War and through the Cold War in Korea, Malaya and Vietnam. And it continues in the post-Cold War world's operational climate of peacekeeping and desert wars.⁶

The epithet that Cunningham wore around his arm — 'Captain of the souls of men' — points to the questions that lie at the heart of this article. How have chaplains lived up to that poignant description, inscribed on Cunningham's prison armband, of their high calling among Australian soldiers? In other words, to what extent has the Australian Army chaplain been a 'captain of the soul' over the last one hundred years? And what has that looked like in reality? How has it changed over time? How has the Royal Australian Army Chaplains Department (RAAChD) developed to facilitate the chaplains' vocation?

That phrase on Cunningham's armband is a potent symbol of the chaplain's dual role in the Army: first, as a spiritual and moral leader; and second, as a military officer (fittingly, the rank of the majority of chaplains and their entry level has always been captain). It also hints at the possible tensions that this dual role might entail, not least that of the chaplain's service of two masters, God and Caesar. I want to begin this article by considering some ways in which these roles have changed over the last century. I'll then briefly chart the historical development of the RAAChD before attempting to assess the impact and contribution of Army chaplains over the last hundred years. This article draws on some of the key

findings of my forthcoming history of the RAACHD and its chaplains, entitled 'Captains of the soul. A history of Australian Army chaplains'. That larger work, the first full-scale history of Australian Army chaplaincy and its corps, provides the broader backdrop and historical context for many of the conclusions drawn here.

The role of the chaplain in the Australian Army

The chaplain's unique and enduring role has been religious ministry, encompassing the conduct of worship services, sacraments and religious instruction, as well as rites of passage such as baptisms, weddings and funerals. The locations have varied: dugouts at Gallipoli; trench saps at Pozieres; on altars made out of unused thunder boxes in Vietnam fire patrol bases; and in the combat outposts of Uruzgan Province. The form has sometimes changed: after the Vietnam War chaplains were spared the often sickening task of battlefield burials (after 1966 dead soldiers were repatriated as a result of public outrage that Australian soldiers were paying for bodies of comrades to be flown home). Yet the task of connecting people with the divine has not changed, whether through preaching, conversation, prayer or the rituals and practices of worship. And while the message of God's gracious redeeming love for all people is unchanging, chaplains of all periods have had to adapt their presentation of that message in a simple and succinct way for an increasing majority of officers and soldiers who have had little previous contact with religious life.

From the outset chaplains played a key role in pastoral care. Yet this role underwent quiet shifts in focus after the 1960s. 'No Psychs accompanied soldiers on to the beach at Gallipoli', observed one chaplain in East Timor recently.⁷ But after the 1960s the increasing secularisation of Australian society coincided with the growing sophistication of the social sciences in general and psychology and sociology in particular. New techniques were becoming available for understanding humanity and for assisting people in times of crisis, stress or distress. As one contributor to the RAACHD's *Command Chaplains Newsletter* noted in the mid-1970s, it had been 1,400 years since Gregory the Great had written the first textbook on pastoral care, while it had not been all that long ago that the physician and parish minister had shouldered the burden of professional care in communities. Today, however, they had been joined by:

*the psychotherapist, the clinical psychologist, the social worker, the marriage guidance counsellor, the welfare officer, the health visitor, the probation officer and a whole host of other professionals and semi-professionals committed to caring for their fellows.*⁸

These changes were occurring against the backdrop of a welfare state which since 1945 had taken over many aspects of caring responsibility that were once the province of churches and voluntary agencies. Some of these welfare agencies such as the Family Liaison Organisation (FLO) had already infiltrated the Army by the 1970s. Such developments, while welcomed by many chaplains for their potential to assist in their crucial role of pastoral care, prompted reassessments of the chaplains' role which have been going on ever since. The introduction in 2000 of a specialised 'care chain of command' — in which chaplains have worked within a larger team of medical officers, psychologists and social workers — has given chaplains powerful tools for pastoral care through training in counselling, clinical pastoral education, critical incident and mental health. Yet, this has also forced chaplains to define their unique role beyond a merely therapeutic model of chaplaincy.

Another role that has expanded significantly over time has been that of educating and training, whether in character training, moral leadership, marriage preparation or in lectures on culture, ideology and spirituality. For over a century chaplains have helped to calibrate the moral compass of soldiers who have been authorised to use lethal force in increasingly complex settings. This has been underpinned by a long-standing Christian tradition of just war theory (especially the *ius in bello*) and rules of engagement that find their true magnetic north in the absolutes of the divine moral and natural law. It has been said that service in the military is a high calling. Those 'who may be required to take another human life should value it most of all'.⁹ A former Anglican Bishop to the Defence Force put it this way:

*Knowing the time and the place in which the 'sword' can or ought to be drawn will continue to determine whether its use will bring humanity nearer to heaven or hell.*¹⁰

The most influential medium for this work — and for introducing many soldiers to both the Gospel and a church tradition — has been character training. There is a long-standing belief in chaplaincy circles that character training emerged from the experience of Korean War prisoners of war and the famous *Korean Document* that advocated spiritual reserves to combat communist ideology. It is true that the ideological fissures of the Cold War and the introduction of National Service expanded character training and transformed it into a more rigorous and universal course of training. Yet the actual origins of character training lie in the Commanding Officer's (CO) hours introduced by Australian chaplains (following a British precedent) during the Second World War. The concept of

moral leadership was first suggested at a conference of chaplains in March 1946 and later fleshed out by two Australian chaplains-general, Charlie Daws and Alex Stewart, during their tour of inspection of Japan in early 1947. Daws and Stewart were struck by the absence of a moral and spiritual compass among members of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF). Many in the force were young (19–20 years old) and had gaps in their schooling and cultural awareness, not least because their early moral and educational formation had been disrupted by the Second World War. With the unanimous support of the occupying force's COs, the chaplains-general pitched the proposal at a RAACHD conference in 1946. It was decided that the instruction and fellowship of the soldiers could best be organised on a unit basis with various 'cells' forming a network throughout BCOF. The chaplains-general also envisioned the creation of periodical schools or courses for soldiers identified as 'moral leaders'.¹¹ The first course was held in July 1946 in the Japanese town of Beppu. Character Guidance courses emerged over a decade later, drawing on lessons learned from moral leadership courses and a Royal Air Force course that was in turn derived from an Australian Catholic layman's book on the Ten Commandments as the 'Maker's Instructions'. Character Guidance courses grew exponentially from the late 1950s and remain a crucial component of chaplains' ministry today. One Vietnam-era chaplain went as far as extolling them as the 'jewel in the crown' of chaplaincy.¹²

The chaplains' traditional role as adviser to commanders and staff on religious, moral and ethical issues represents the area in which chaplains have exercised a prophetic role. A long-standing tradition of chaplains has publicly challenged the tactical — and sometimes the strategic — *status quo*. An Australian chaplain became one of the most vocal critics of the Boer War as a result of what he witnessed on the African *veldt*. Padre Timoney was outraged by punitive British policies that were being implemented by Australian troopers against civilians and infrastructure. Using his platform as war correspondent for the Sydney-based *Catholic Press* newspaper, Timoney sent a flurry of articles and letters exposing the cruel operations and their destructive effects.¹³ It was in the context of this deteriorating guerrilla war that prisoners began to be shot, the most famous case of which resulted in the conviction and death by firing squad of Lieutenants Harry 'Breaker' Morant and Peter Handcock of the Bushveldt Carbineers. Timoney's sympathies are clear from a *Catholic Press* article published in December 1900:

*[The Boers] see their country in ruins, their field and crops destroyed, their cattle driven away by the enemy, and the flames from their burning houses rising sky high. I have known instances in which our troopers did not leave in a house a morsel of bread for the women and children. Is it any wonder that among a people so independent a spirit consumes them?*¹⁴

For publicising such sentiments, Timoney was reported to have had a 'dramatic interview' with Lord Alfred Milner, British High Commissioner in South Africa and one of the chief architects of the war. The flinty padre refused to withdraw one word he had written.¹⁵

Chaplains have always had to tread a fine line in their relationships with senior officers. Second World War chaplains, for example, generally felt that senior officers gave them excellent support, especially those in the higher echelons of generals and brigadiers. There was a tendency for some officers, however, to believe that they virtually 'owned' their chaplains and could do with them as they saw fit. Students at the fledgling Army Chaplains' School were warned of the tendency of brigadiers to adopt 'attitudes of omnipotence'. When one brigadier took it upon himself to post a chaplain in September 1943, the response of the chaplains-general (who alone possessed the authority to recommend postings) was swift and decisive. The result was a regulation ordering that no chaplain could be transferred from one unit to another without at least the approval of the Deputy Chaplain-General.¹⁶

Several chaplains were forced on occasion to challenge men of high rank when they considered the situation demanded it. The most notable of these run-ins was with the irascible General Blamey himself. At least one chaplain believed him to be 'hostile and contemptuous' towards chaplains. Anglican padre Fred Burt, for example, was incensed at Blamey's infamous quip that the men of 21 Brigade were 'rabbits' (the implication being that only rabbits got shot in the back). 'This was a cowardly lie', retorted Burt. 'I buried about 100 of them and they "fell with their faces to the foe".' While home on leave, Burt addressed the Perth Millions Club and replied to one question with the following observation of Blamey: 'If a man cannot run a police force of 400 men [the Victorian Police Force], how do you expect him to run two armies?' When Burt was ordered by the pro-Blamey Adjutant-General (Major General Lloyd) to apologise to an irate Blamey, Burt refused, opting instead to leave the Army. It wasn't Burt's first run-in with officials. Earlier in the war he had publicly castigated the French Consul in Palestine for his anti-semitism.¹⁷

During the Vietnam conflict, United Churches padre John Hughes' article on chaplaincy in the *Army Journal* reasserted the conviction of Great War chaplain Geoffrey Studdert-Kennedy (*aka* 'Woodbine Willie'), 'that War [was] pure undiluted filthy sin' and had 'never redeemed a single soul'. Hughes lamented that the children of the Second World War generation were now 'entangled in the military morass of South-East Asia'. Nevertheless, Hughes gave short shrift to contemporary arguments that chaplains were an 'anachronism'. The chaplain's ministry, he argued:

*was no more concerned, in the primary meaning, with the issues of pacifism or patriotism, than the practical help of the Good Samaritan had to wait upon the theological verdicts of the Jerusalem Sanhedrin before becoming effective.*¹⁸

In Hughes' opinion the chaplain had only one justification for his role:

*and that [was] found in the compassion of Christ. As long as there are men and women broken and lost in body, mind or soul, there, in Christ's name, will the Army chaplain seek to minister to them.*¹⁹

Notably it was veteran chaplains, such as Anglican Roy Wotton and Methodist padre Frank Hartley who had buried hundreds of young Australian men in the jungles of New Guinea, who most vocally opposed Cold War conflicts that were burying hundreds more in the jungles of South-East Asia. Hartley was labelled the 'pink parson' by Prime Minister Bob Menzies because of his stand against the banning of the Communist Party in Australia, his support for nuclear disarmament and his opposition to Australian foreign policy, including the Vietnam conflict.²⁰ Hartley's message was uncompromising, equating shrill anti-communism with Nazi fascism:

*'We must preserve our way of life' is the slogan belonging to those who consider themselves belonging to today's Master Race. I'm not surprised that a case is being made for the use of Napalm Bombs, Phosphorous Bombs, Germ Warfare.*²¹

In more recent years, Roman Catholic padre Gary Stone publicly denounced Australia's participation in the Second Gulf War, while Religious Advisory Committee to the Services (RACS) member Anglican Bishop Tom Frame publicly supported it before a high profile *volte-face* in which he damned it as unjust and immoral.²² Nevertheless these public voices have constituted a minority.

Certainly, the chaplains' officer status has constrained their ability to speak truth to power publicly. At the same time, however, it has enabled them to engage in truth-telling and 'tough love' from a position *within* the chain of command and at the grassroots, whether with commanders or other ranks. Indeed, officers appear to expect it. One Australian infantry commander suggested recently that the ideal chaplain will be, among other things:

*a physically and mentally robust person. The best chaplains will possess and harness this toughness. A good chaplain can expect to have forthright discussions with all members of a unit, from the sailor, soldier, or airman or airwoman who has a personal issue to the commanding officer who has a policy that is dangerous or simply just wrong.*²³

The creation of the RACS in 1981 also bequeathed a mechanism by which leaders of military chaplaincy were able to exercise a prophetic role within the highest echelons of the Australian Defence Force. They have had access to the ear — and occasionally the devotional aspirations — of Army Chiefs without the constraints of a commission. RACS members and chaplains alike have also played an important part in helping their churches to take *informed* stances on Australia's strategic outlook and defence commitments.

Far less well known is the chaplains' important contribution to the nation's corporate memory and the commemoration of Australians at war. Among the most articulate and best educated soldiers both on the battlefield and on the home front, and trained by profession to be shrewd judges of human nature, chaplains have bequeathed a rich vein of historical sources. They have published unit and campaign histories, memoirs and have served as war correspondents (two in fact, during the Boer War, when journalists such as Banjo Paterson were incapacitated). Chaplains were also at the forefront of honouring Australian sacrifice in war, whether in creating Anzac services, building chapels or sponsoring the erection of 'sacred places' as war memorials on the Australian landscape. An Anglican Great War padre, David Garland, created the first Anzac services, and Anglican padre Arthur White invented the dawn service. But both men eschewed a militaristic or mawkishly sentimental nationalist Anzac myth for a full-blooded recognition of individual sacrifice that pointed towards the supreme sacrifice of Christ. Over time, however, the religious meanings would be shed in favour of a more secularised civil religion.

Some role changes have been welcomed. After the Great War, chaplains largely forsook the time-consuming and potentially distracting roles of entertainments officer (or 'Charlie Chaplains', as some padres called it), orderly or canteen manager. A new role has recently emerged in Australia's peacekeeping and humanitarian operations, where chaplains' role in using their religious understanding to win 'hearts and minds' has proved crucial, even if under-utilised. Increasing international recognition of military chaplains' 'external operational mandate' of fostering reconciliation and peace in war zones suggests that new roles for chaplains will emerge in the future. One small incident recounted by an Australian chaplain during the Second Gulf War is telling in this regard:

after discussing with an Iraqi colonel what we each perceived to be the differences between Islam and Christianity he embraced me with the words 'but we can still be brothers'.²⁴

Since the Great War, chaplains have also channelled large quantities of money and resources from Australians — especially Australian churches — to both their soldiers and local civilians in impoverished or war-torn countries. Others have established non-government organisations, while some even sought to adopt children from countries such as Vietnam after serving with the Army there. A prevailing joint operational tempo, tri-service training and combined health elements have all created new roles for Army chaplains who have increasingly had to minister to sailors and airmen as well as diggers. Finally, the growing importance of both Special Forces and women within the Army since the early 1990s has fashioned new roles for padres and 'madres' alike. All of these issues will be discussed in more detail in my other article in this journal.

The evolution of the RAACHD

Soldiers fight battles, it has been said, but it is 'generals who make the decisions that lead the soldiers to fight'.²⁵ Likewise in both peacetime and war the Chaplains' Department (hereafter called the Department) senior officers and church advisers have grappled with the difficulties of ensuring that chaplains can fulfil their calling. Another aim of my research has been to chart the origins and history of their efforts.

After more than a decade of failed attempts following Federation in 1901, the Department was established in December 1913. Just for the record, it should be noted that the precise date of the birthday of the Australian Army Chaplains' Department has been the subject of controversy. After a request from the Army Newspaper Unit for the date of the birthday of the RAACHD, the Department's

1979 conference concluded that the birthday was the commissioning date of the first chaplain who left for the Sudan campaign in 1885 (in actual fact, there were two chaplains). The historically fickle conference changed its mind the next year, however, after an address from Brigadier Maurice Austin on the appointment of chaplains and the establishment of the Chaplains' Department proper in December 1913. Nevertheless, veteran chaplain Douglas Abbott argued as late as 1995 that the 1 December 1913 date was incorrect, apparently on the ground that attempts had been made to establish and organise the Department since 1902.²⁶ This argument, however, carries little weight. While there certainly were attempts to create a department in 1901 (a year earlier than Abbott suggests), all the proposals put forward before 1913 for an establishment and a departmental structure came to virtually nothing. Moreover, the historian of the RACHD, Michael Snape, has conclusively dated the beginning of that department from 1796, the year a Royal Warrant established the position of Chaplain-General and an administrative structure under his authority. There is no question, *pace* the 1979 chaplains' conference and Abbott, that the birthday of the Department is 1 December 1913, as formally promulgated in the *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette*.²⁷ I'm sure this is a heartening finding for all who have organised corps centenary celebrations!

In 1913, then, the Department was established with a multi-denominational leadership structure quite unlike other imperial chaplaincy corps. The latter typically had one senior or principal chaplain at the top. The Australian Department's four-pronged structure reflected the absence of an established church in Australia and a level playing field since the Church Acts of 1836 — in terms of status and state funding — for Australia's *four* major denominations. For several chaplains the creation of four chaplains-general resulted in embarrassment about such obvious sectarian divisions and confusion among allied chaplaincy corps about who was actually in charge. In any case, the Department's administrative superstructure groaned under the weight of Great War demands and struggled to ensure sufficient numbers of chaplains. Amid massive demobilisation and the denuding of Army in the inter-war years the Chaplains' Department was close to moribund, with only the occasional attendance of chaplains at training camps.

The major change during these years was the abolition of badges of rank in 1920, which set the Australian Department apart from every other Allied corps (although it brought Army into line with the Australian Navy). The decision did not receive popular support from the majority of Army chaplains and it split senior chaplains along denominational lines. It was only passed because it had the support of the Anglican and Roman Catholic chaplains-general.²⁸ In 1942, after three years of

operations in which the ambiguity of not wearing badges of rank caused confusion and frustration, there remained only one dissenting voice among chaplains-general. The reinstatement of badges of rank that year was almost a unanimous decision.²⁹

It was not until 1942, with the complete remodelling of the Army to fight the war against Japan in the Pacific, that the Department gained for itself a proper command and staff structure. Over the course of the Second World War, the Department comprised a staggering 754 chaplains. This was easily the largest and most ecumenical gathering of religious leaders in Australian history.

Nevertheless, the leadership structure of part-time chaplains-general, which lasted for some 60 years, proved inadequate following the creation of Australia's first regular professional army (the Australian Regular Army) in 1947. Although the years between 1945 and the early 1970s were marked by profound ecumenical cooperation, they were also marked by policy 'on the run', grounded in the old dispensation of a volunteer Army and marked by reactive rather than forward thinking. Pleas for greater professional standards in training and service conditions were ignored by senior chaplains and an 'old guard' of part-time chaplains-general. Maximum seven-year commissions meant that many able chaplains were lost to their home churches or to Navy and Air Force. The period of equipoise came in 1971 when a cadre of chaplains finally secured permanent rather than short-service commissions for the first time. The post-Vietnam Army's move towards tri-service arrangements from the mid-1970s led to a wholesale remodelling of the Army Headquarters organisation and resulted in the creation in 1981 of the RACS and Principal Chaplains Committee system. The increasing professionalisation of chaplaincy was furthered in 1989 with the abolition of the British 'classification' system (of four classes of chaplain) and the adoption of a 'divisional' structure which linked relative rank to recognised competencies and experience. Extended reform from the mid-1990s resulted in the creation of a specialist officer structure in 2002 and tri-service training in 2003. By 2003 the Department had comprehensively addressed a range of issues — leadership, organisation, training, resourcing, service conditions, recruitment and retention — that had never been adequately dealt with during the first 90 years of its existence.

Training is just one area that has come a long way since 1913. Great War chaplains were given no training whatsoever. William Moore recalled being referred to a firm of military tailors in Adelaide 'for advice as to whether I should wear Breeches or Slacks!' The CO of his light horse brigade initially took so little notice of Moore that he had to apply personally for a horse.³⁰ Even on arrival in the field, chaplains usually met with little direction. Anglican padre Kenneth Henderson recalled

asking his senior chaplain 'for all the advice he could give me' on arrival in France. "My boy," replied the grizzled chaplain, taking his pipe out of his mouth, "I can give you no advice. Every man must work out his own salvation. Think out where you'll be most useful, and go there".³¹ Great War chaplains benefitted from British and American chaplaincy training on the Western Front after 1917, but fifty years later things were little different. Anglican padre Peter Dillon received his first chaplaincy training *after* his return from a tour of duty in Vietnam. Few chaplains received specialist training and preparation at Canungra before deploying to South Vietnam. Roman Catholic padre Keith Teefey described his introduction to the Army:

*I did a two week Chaplains' School which explained the structures of the Army, showed me how to put on a uniform, salute, put up a hutchie, handle a ration pack ... After that one is on one's own ... My way was just to go with the troops. In the preparation for [South Vietnam] I went on exercises with them in the cold and the wet and the heat of the Putty Ranges and Shoalwater Bay, dug fighting pits, did early morning PT [physical training] ... or whatever.*³²

A lack of training was sometimes embarrassing for the innocent padre abroad, as one found out when he asked the headquarters battery of his artillery unit at Nui Dat where their guns were located.³³

The tradition of ecumenical cooperation has remained consistently strong within chaplaincy. Indeed one could almost argue that there are no sectarians in Australian foxholes. Jewish-Christian relations have also been warm both during and since the Great War, while chaplains have provided every opportunity for the spiritual needs of those of other faiths. Nevertheless, denominational emphases and tensions will always remain, especially at senior levels and because most chaplains spend the majority of their time outside foxholes. Sporadic debates have emerged about the validity of the Salvation Army's church and ordination status, while the Second World War witnessed some unedifying scenes in which Lutheran pastors applying for chaplaincy were tailed by intelligence operatives and even detained in prison on suspicion of Nazi links or sympathies.³⁴ The only major bust-up was a controversy in the 1950s over traditional Anglican consecration of the 'colours' of units, but that was sorted out by diplomacy and compromise in 1956. An Anglican Chaplain-General 'consecrated' the colours; the Catholic Chaplain-General 'blessed' the colours (canon law forbade the consecration of non-sacred objects, so the same blessing given to a marriage ring was used, substituting 'colours' for 'ring'); and the United Churches Chaplain-General 'dedicated' the colours to God and country. Roman Catholic Deputy Chaplain-General Alo Morgan

called it a compromise and a fiction — but a necessary one. The practice worked well when the Hall of Remembrance at the Australian War Memorial was dedicated in 1959 and has been retained ever since.³⁵

Chaplains have played an important role in intellectual life. Since Anglican padre Kenneth Henderson's thoughtful and critical analyses of chaplaincy during the Great War and afterwards, the RAACHD has similarly benefitted from able theologians and intellectuals within its ranks. Such chaplains have, however, remained a minority. The Anglican journal *Capellanus* provided a valuable but short-lived forum for discussion of practical and theological issues of chaplaincy during the Second World War. But it was not until the late 1960s that there emerged a flowering of intellectual engagement with the pressing moral questions raised by modern armed conflict and the provision of uniformed chaplaincy. This had much to do with the RAACHD's massively expanded role in the development and delivery of character training, combined with the need to attempt to unravel multiple moral and theological Gordian knots: the nuclear age, the ideological polarities of the Cold War and the countercultural 1960s, the rise of the social sciences and caring professions, and the tragedy of the Vietnam conflict. A group of intellectually engaged chaplains published the *Command Chaplains Newsletters* and *Intercom* journal between the early 1970s and 1994. Since then, however, there has been no equivalent forum or clearing house, apart from conferences, for thinking hard about chaplaincy and the many complex theological issues it raises. This is despite the introduction since the 1990s of postgraduate theological study for those ascending to senior positions and a large body of literature on chaplaincy developed by British, American and Canadian chaplaincy corps. While some Australian thinking has continued in recent decades, some have questioned whether the theological nettle of chaplaincy has truly been grasped.

Plaster saints in barracks? The RAACHD's contribution to the Army

What overall conclusions, then, can be drawn about the contribution of the RAACHD and its chaplains to the Army over its first century? This is not an easy question to answer. The chaplain and the historian of chaplaincy alike deal with intangibles that cannot readily be weighed or measured. As one historian of American chaplaincy has noted:

*When the spiritual impact of a sunset or a starry sky, a symphony or a throb of sympathy or affection can be measured, it may be possible to compute those potent forces outside the sphere of the physical sciences which the chaplain is in the Army to intensify and direct.*³⁶

Generalisations are always risky in assessing the impact of chaplains on diggers. Yet the value of chaplains in boosting morale cannot be gainsaid. Two Australian officers put it this way in a seminal journal article on Army manpower published in 1980:

[T]he universal experience of generals from Xenophon to Montgomery who claim that man's faith is important to him and thus the Army, cannot be denied. Indeed experience has led us to believe that there is an inner strength in all men connected with his belief in God and the leader who disregards it is no better than a fool.³⁷

Another finding of 'Captains of the soul' is that chaplains in their various roles have contributed significantly as 'force multipliers' for the Army's mission of warfighting, peacekeeping and humanitarian work. Chaplains have assisted in the repair of broken souls, broken hearts and broken parts; the fine-tuning of the soldier's moral compass; and the preservation of his or her ethical sensibilities.

As the accounts of many chaplains and soldiers have testified, chaplains have also acted as a kind of 'sacred sapper', building bridges through their words and deeds to help thousands of soldiers at every level of the Army to connect with the divine and the transcendent. This is, after all, surely one of the fundamental reasons for the existence of both church and synagogue. 'The military chaplain is meant to bring humanity to an inhuman situation', said Father Mulcahy in an episode of *MASH*.³⁸ Australian chaplains have certainly done that. But this seems to me to be only half the task. The military chaplain is also meant to bring — and embody — the divine persona in an inhuman situation.

The limits of the chaplains' impact on diggers is certainly tangible in declining attendance at religious services since the 1960s, occasionally high venereal disease rates and hedonism among soldiers, or a certain reserve about deeper things. Is this evidence simply confirmation of Rudyard Kipling's poetic observation that 'single men in barr[a]cks don't grow into plaster saints'? Some Australian historians appear to have too easily taken the ostensibly blasphemous digger at his word. Australian religion and spirituality, like the digger, has been observed as notoriously taciturn. One Great War chaplain likened the digger to a 'camouflage artist'; a Second World War chaplain likened him to a deep artesian well that only needed the correct method of tapping. Historian Manning Clark and others have likened Australian spirituality to 'a whisper in the mind and a shy hope in the heart'. A shyness indeed, but a hope nevertheless, as sociologist Gary Bouma points out.³⁹ There is a massive body of evidence concerning the many thousands of Australian soldiers who have gratefully accepted the religious ministrations of chaplains,

or have made decisions to follow Christ; or for sharply rising worship attendance rates in proportion to the proximity of battle. Exactly what religion has meant for the digger is a vast and complex subject beyond the scope of this article, or indeed the history I have recently completed. But the digger, it would seem, doth protest too much. And others, perhaps, have made too much of such protestations.

Equally difficult to measure is the chain of influence that is started when a chaplain leads a man or woman to higher ideals and transcendent loyalties.⁴⁰ One brief case study among many may suffice. Anglican padre Aubrey Pain patiently guided a young soldier through a maze of existential and intellectual doubt in the Changi and Kranji prisoner of war camps. Sixty years later that young soldier wrote this about Pain:

A chaplain by the name of Aubrey Pain stuck by me through thick and thin ... One day he said to me, 'Geoffrey, you have a very good mind. You pose significant questions. But I don't have the answers.' He smiled his deliberate and devised sanctimonious smile and said, 'I can't prove God to you. But I tell you something,' he peered into my eyes. 'I tell you, Geoffrey, I know him!' With that he lowered his head as though heading off into a gathering storm, and, forward bent, he loped off. I half-grinned, but I knew he was better than my literary mentors ... Aubrey Pain was a man in whom there was no guile and everybody seemed to love him ... a chaplain to whom men came time and again. He had stuck with me in my struggles to find something beyond what I had known. He would wave away my polemics as if they counted for nothing. Although very much an Anglo-Catholic he would preach on Good Friday in the Changi Square like a Salvation Army officer or a militant Methodist preacher. When he was a priest before what he called 'the altar', he was a sacerdotal minister of the holy rites and a different person in manner of speaking ... he seemed to love the times we talked on theology and practical spirituality. The test of the man was that the men loved to talk to him. They appreciated his ministrations at the bedside or just where they were working. He was unmarried, but in no way effeminate. In the services he would have his glass of beer with the men but he had no time for blue jokes or bawdiness. Men appreciated him and acted accordingly. Every so often the memory of him comes to me ... For me he was one of the greats.⁴¹

That young soldier, Geoffrey Bingham, was ordained in the Anglican Church after the war, serving as a missionary, theological educator and author for 60 years. His remarkable vocation included authorship of over 200 books; a powerful preaching and teaching ministry that filled churches in Australia, Britain, America,

New Zealand, Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Thailand and New Guinea, and brought him the award of an Order of Australia medal.⁴² The profound lessons learned in captivity, and the spiritual revival that many experienced there, were foundational for Bingham's long and influential ministry.⁴³

In the final equation, the contribution of chaplains is perhaps best summed up by the poignant words carved into the tombstones of so many unidentified Australian soldiers whom their padres buried: 'Known only to God'.

Still another reality cannot be ignored. Chaplains, like the soldiers they serve, have not been immune from the temptations and stresses peculiar to military life. Some chaplains have sworn like troopers, drunk like fish, been too much 'one of the boys', 'played the officer' to compensate for their ineffectiveness, crumpled under pressure, 'gone native' with martial enthusiasm, lapsed from acceptable standards of moral conduct, dwarfed their ministries due to unnecessary clashes with COs, or been better suited to pastoral care in a parish church, lacking the instinctive abilities of a soldier's chaplain in a war zone. In doing so, some have lost the integrity and 'set-apartness' (or holiness) of their vocation, causing damage that has taken their successors enormous effort to repair. In the mid-1990s Colonel J.C. Brewer, Chief of Staff of the 2nd Division, offered this sobering reflection on his contact with chaplains over 32 years as an officer in the ARA, including service in Malaya. He catalogued some of the failures he had seen among chaplains:

Being the most popular officer in the unit or even competing with the Commander for the title of most influential individual in the unit — behaviour I have observed in chaplains in different places ... chaplains who were unable to cope with having to conduct themselves as officers. Some decided, in their wisdom, to be magnanimous to the soldiers and to tell them that they didn't have to salute. Consider the confusion that results ... I have had the experience of a chaplain in my unit who professed that he had lost his faith. That was a tough interview for a young regimental officer, I can assure you! I have seen others who strove so hard for acceptance that they became the hardest drinkers and cursers in the unit. There have been others who have been pacifist; some who disdained the uniform and what it represents and found every possible reason to avoid being involved in unit activities; some who were reclusive, electing to sit behind a closed office door waiting for clients; some who thought that their role was that of welfare officer for the soldiers and who shunned the officers and NCOs because they represented management and must therefore be at the source of the problem.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, a strikingly consistent finding of my research is that such chaplains have only ever constituted a tiny minority. One former Protestant Principal Chaplain, for example, could recall in over 40 years of Army chaplaincy only two cases of gross misconduct requiring instant dismissal of chaplains.⁴⁵ And on the other side of the ledger, Colonel Brewer observed that:

I have had other experiences of chaplains, such as the two outstanding members of [3RAR] in Malaya ... in the early 1960s ... I have the utmost regard for chaplains of all denominations ... A good chaplain is a priceless asset and the spiritual reward from doing the job well, must be profound ... at the divisional level the chaplains are a fundamentally important resource. Their importance derives from their influence ... The relationship between the Commander at all levels and his chaplain is an important one that is neglected at peril ... There have been some outstanding chaplains whose positive contribution to the overall effectiveness of their unit has been incalculable.

Moreover, for the bewildered young recruit, as Brewer had once been, the padre was 'the welcome presence of the personage who could provide legitimate reassurance and encouragement — a source of stability in a period of uncertainty and turbulence.'⁴⁶

This enduring and valued contribution of the RAACHD and its chaplains underscore two broader findings. The first is the way in which many chaplains have managed to reconcile — practically, morally and intellectually — the possible role tension resulting from serving church and state simultaneously. The second is the extent to which Army chaplaincy managed to expand its resources and reach within one of Australia's largest public institutions — from a profoundly religious and monotheistic base — at exactly the time that scholars have observed a decline in Australian religious adherence. Religion, like chaplaincy in other areas of Australian public life, has not gone away. In fact, chaplaincy's size and profile has actually increased. In turn, these findings stand in contrast with the prevailing pacifist and secularising outlook of historians and sociologists of the 1970s and 1980s who assumed first that military chaplaincy contained insoluble role tensions, and second, that religion was retreating from the public square to give the nation a secular future, with religion relegated to the private sphere (if it still existed at all).⁴⁷

One thing that can be said without any qualification is that the chaplains' ministry of presence — in the field and on the home front — has established a proud tradition of devoted service that has garnered a deep gratitude and respect from

diggers of all ranks and their families. It is clear from my other article in this volume that Australian society's outwardly religious complexion has changed significantly over the last fifty years, but, as chaplains of all eras will testify, a deep and abiding respect for the chaplain and his position in the Army has not. Padre Keith Teefey, for example, was well aware of this reputation when he entered Army chaplaincy in the 1960s:

I was amazed and often embarrassed by the welcome and the cooperation I received wherever I went. I was always made aware of those who had gone before me, and that I was trying to fill 'big boots'.⁴⁸

That respect has not come without a cost. For over a century well over two thousand Army chaplains have accompanied Australia's soldiers wherever they have gone, from the blood-drenched beaches of Gallipoli to night patrols in the remote mountainous desert regions of Afghanistan. While seeking to minimise and repair the tragic human cost of war, they have also borne it. Scores of chaplains lost their lives during the First and Second World Wars, many while acting as stretcher-bearers on the Somme, among the Light Horse in Palestine or with diggers in the swamps and jungle tracks of New Guinea. Others died while ministering to fellow prisoners in the green hell of Japanese prisoner of war camps. Chaplains have been wounded in all conflicts in which Australia was involved during the last century, in some cases carrying the physical and psychological scars for the rest of their lives. Chaplains have also tended the wounded in aid posts and field hospitals overseas, and in repatriation hospitals at home. They have sojourned with soldiers and their families through the joys and the tragedies of daily life, helping to heal the human cost of soldiering and providing a listening ear, a waterproof shoulder and wise counsel. In this way Australian Army chaplains have exercised a profoundly incarnational ministry. The padre has been described as 'God's flesh and blood representative within the unit'.⁴⁹ A digger might think such a description too ethereal and insist that the padre is embedded in the unit or, as one digger put it during the Vietnam War: 'one of us, without a gun'. In this light, then, there are good grounds for believing that to a significant extent Australian Army chaplains have, like Padre Hugh Cunningham on the River Kwai, been 'Captains of the soul'. ■

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