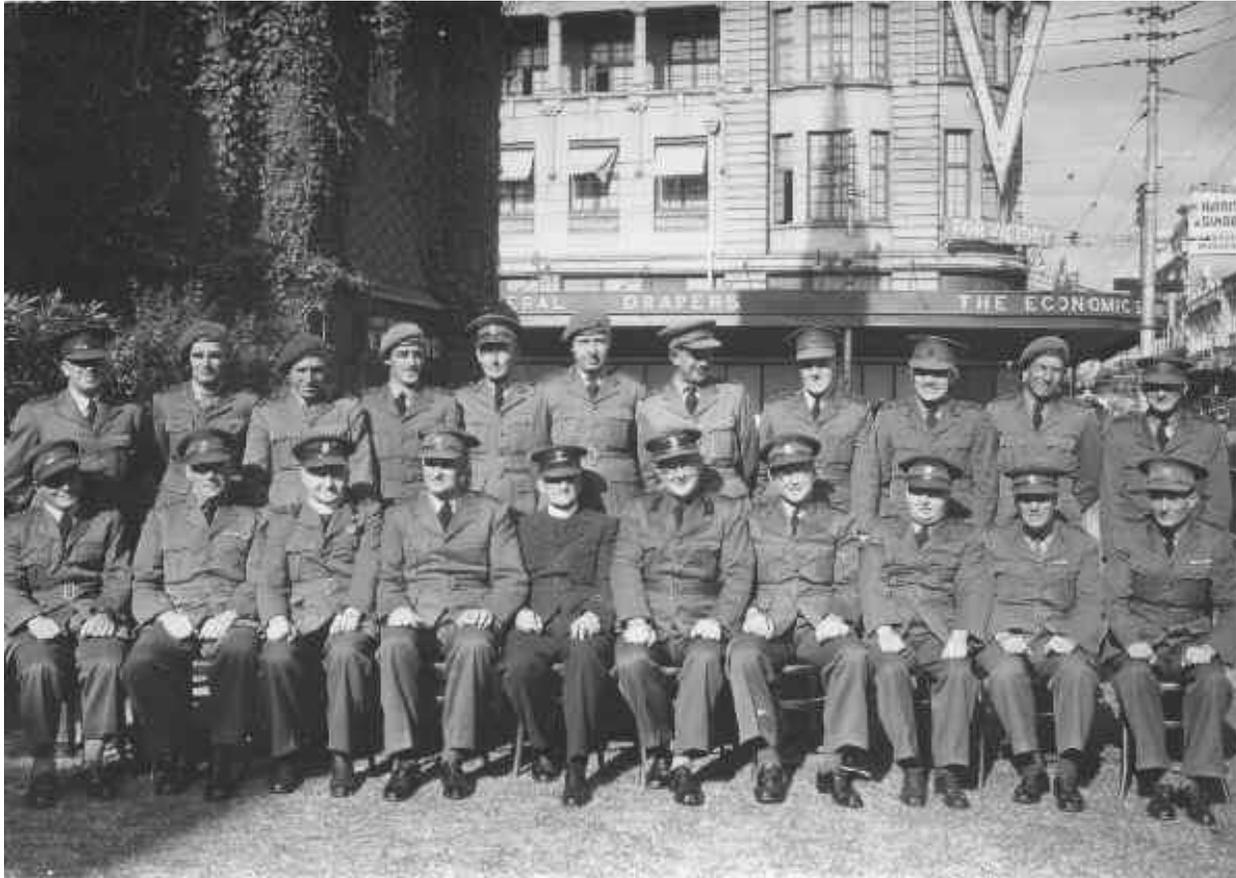


A Chaplain's Story

Although the Australian soldier has built a reputation as a larrikin, a womaniser, a drunk and a thief these titles no more represent the whole than does any other generalisation. Many men needed and sought comfort in times of stress, pain and boredom from the ever present "Padre". Men of the cloth came from many religions including but not limited to Salvation Army, WMCA, the 'recognised' Churches and Campaigners for Christ (Everymans). This is the story of one of them.



Australian Army Chaplain's School - Perth, Western Australia - February 1944

Back row: E(rn?) Miles, P.T.Thomas, unknown, K.Pithers, unknown, G.Vertigan, G.Crouch, J.Johnson, unknown, **John Kenneth Martin**, unknown.

Front row: unknown; R.S.Pickup D.A.C.G. (United Churches); unknown; C.Dawes D.A.C.G. (Methodist); unknown; unknown; R.Herriman D.A.C.G. (Presbyterian); unknown; unknown; unknown.

JOHN KENNETH MARTIN

Evangelist, Minister, Pastor, Padre, Chaplain in the Australian Army, Second World War

PREFACE TO ARMY SERVICE

There is nothing glamorous about war. No doubt some ladies can be attracted to a man in a smart uniform. Men and women enlisted for many different reasons and no doubt many hesitated when faced with taking another life. There would have been various depths of psychological damage from which some probably never recovered. The Chaplain or Padre was an integral part of helping the serviceman of all ranks to cope with the jobs that each had to do.

My father, John Kenneth, or J.K. as he was known to many, claimed that Army life contributed to character building.

Myrtle, my mother, always claimed if there had ever been another war, J.K. would have been back like a shot! A big disappointment for J.K. was to receive a notice in later years, firstly to be on a reserve list and later removed from that?

For me, I originally thought this would be a voyage of re-discovery but, in many respects, it has turned out to be a voyage of discovery. From the time I was three and a half years old until I was nine, I rarely saw my father. I guess one could say he probably seemed a somewhat shadowy figure!

However, you will find that this man was compassionate, kind and understanding. He certainly was not a “fire and brimstone” preacher and his sermons may or may not have left a deep impression but he was an excellent minister and pastor.

Thomas, my grandfather, an immigrant Scot from Arbroath, arrived at Moreton Bay (Brisbane) aboard the “Mer Kara” on his 21st birthday after a long, slow journey. He worked with the Queensland Railways between Gatton and Murphy’s Creek as a ganger. He had previously worked on the line from Ipswich to Toowoomba and on the Western line to Roma when he met and married Annie Mary Beitz (descended from German/Pommeranian pioneers). They later settled on a 70-acre property at Lilydale (Helidon?)

In 1902, the year that ended a long drought, Thomas and Annie had a son, John Kenneth, on the 28th April; he was the seventh child of this family.

The home, into which John Kenneth was born, was a slab house with skillion roof and detached kitchen with floors of red gum timber covered with plaited rag mats. The rough flooring boards were scrubbed every week with scrubbing brush and sand-soap. It was a raw existence with bare essentials like bread, cheese, butter and soap all home made and vegetables grown. They killed their own meat, salting some in a brine barrel and smoking bacon by hanging it in the kitchen chimney; every member of the family pitched in.

When Norman, a younger brother, and John were playing, Norman accidentally fell and never recovered. Ann, the youngest sister was born five years after my father.

Early in life, John was taught how to milk a cow with the first job being to strip some of the cows. Later he was allowed to help with the milking having to arise at 5.30am, walking in winter through long grass wet with dew and frost to bring the cows to the yards. After this, the calves and pigs were fed and washing of the milking utensils, breakfast and then off to school. After school the milking and separating were repeated; then tea, followed by homework and then bed.

When the eldest son, Charlie enlisted in 1915, John was taken from school at 14½ years of age to work the farm, as his father and brother William were ill and brother Tom was attending high school. The brothers, the father and mother helped when they could.

The 1914-15 drought wrought havoc with their farm life. Water was carted from a well at the creek near Lilydale P.O. and prickly pear was carted to feed the cattle. Fires were lit to burn off the prickles and, after skinning the animals that had died, the remains were burnt. This was a routine chore for the day

On Sundays only essential work was done. Sunday School was at 2pm and was followed by church at 3pm in a little wooden, white-painted building near the State school. This meant a three-mile walk, six days a week.

Charlie contracted 'flu in Egypt and so missed going to Gallipoli. He was sent to France and was killed at Poziers on 29th July 1916 a day after going into action. He was reported missing for six months. Shortly after this the farm was sold and the family moved to Brisbane.

(It can only be speculation as to whether Charlie's enlistment had any influence on John's later decision to join the Army as a Chaplain).

When the family moved to Brisbane, Queensland employment was hard to come by, so John worked on a milk run and then on a fruit farm at Manly, before commencing as a grocer's assistant at 12/6d. [per week?] at Barry and Roberts in Brisbane until 1924.

It was during this period that John attended the Rosalie Baptist Church, going in to Brisbane with a friend to the Brethren and with his brother to the Church of Christ, Ann Street.

A.C. Rankine, a bluff, but kindly person, was the minister of Ann Street. It was under his preaching that Harry Collins, a chap on crutches, and John made their confession of Christ one Sunday evening being baptised by immersion, in cold water, the following Wednesday, July 18th, 1919. John attended Bible class and later became secretary of the Sunday School.

It was in January 1924 John went with Oliver Potter to the College of the Bible, Glen Iris, Victoria. Having only a State School 5th class education, John had to study hard to get through college and in his spare time he earned money by gardening at 2/- an hour. He attended Gardiner Church on Sunday and later helped in the Sunday School at Burnley, Melbourne where A.W. Stephenson was student minister.

In 1925 John was appointed student minister at Warragul, Victoria but at the end of the year he had a nasal operation and contracted a chill which curtailed his study. He returned to his home State of Queensland, the specialist only allowing him to go if he travelled first class sleeper. The trouble soon cleared and he was soon back at Warragul and college the next year. This year brought him face to face with deep personal tragedy (a broken engagement), as well as the tragic Noojee bush fires near Warragul.

The year 1927 was the final year at college and saw the commencement of a student ministry at Gore Street, Fitzroy (Melbourne). Just prior to this John became engaged to Myrtle Pedersen, who had moved to Melbourne and was employed by a church family. At Gore Street friendships were created with Fellow students, Dick Sheppard and his family, Dick Saunders and Vic Boettcher.

John's first ministry after college was at Wynnum-Hawthorn (Brisbane) in 1927-29. John married Myrtle Pedersen in 1928 with T.H. Scambler conducting the service the honeymoon being the Churches of Christ Federal Conference in Adelaide before returning to Queensland.

From 1929 to 1931 John's ministry was at Geeveston-Dover, Tasmania. John and Myrtle left Brisbane on the "Canberra" and on the way from Sydney to Melbourne encountered a terrific storm arriving twelve hours late in Melbourne. [I can remember my mother telling me that she asked the steward for some "strawberry boxes" to be told, "Nobody gets ill on our ships, Madam." Mum informed him that she was a nobody! Of course, I worked out later that it was probably morning sickness].

Leaving his wife in Warragul, Victoria (her home town), John crossed Bass Strait on the "Loongana" and was met in Launceston by the only minister in Tasmania at the time, Mr Fred Collins. A great flood had just swept across the island and John saw some of the devastation as he travelled by train to Hobart. It was just the end of the horse coach period and, after staying the night in Hobart, John travelled to Geeveston by Webster Romitch Coaches who had just begun a motorized era in coaching.

His first Sunday in a new circuit saw a cold wintry Sunday with snow on the surrounding hills. John lived in a flat with a Mrs Sharp, who had just been widowed. From Geeveston, Dover was visited once a month, going down during the latter part of the week and returning the following Monday. At Dover he stayed with Mr and Mrs Harper Knight, who lived on a berry farm. Harper was employed at a timber mill at Hastings, where the caves were discovered. One of the workers, a tree-feller, was running from danger as a tree was crashing to the ground. He fell into a hole, which later proved to be a cave. In that area John was aware that he was on the stamping ground of the

great pioneer preacher, Stephen Cheek, whose name was still fresh in the memory of some residents. On Dover beach he baptised a number of young people who had recently made their decisions to follow the Lord.

My sister, Elizabeth Marianne, or Betty as she is better known, the eldest child, was born at Franklin on 21st October 1929. In 1931 the move was made to Hobart and J.K. became the minister of the Collins Street Church, which he considered to be a very profitable ministry. By the end of 1934 he had enjoyed the fellowship of six ministers in the State which was the greatest number they had for some years. Many family names were prominent in his memory as belonging to those days – Cooper, Heard, Jarvis, Dixon and Harwood.

John was delighted to be invited back in later years to enjoy the centenary of the Collins Street Church. He also found it very rewarding in latter days to meet on the mainland many who were actively engaged in the Church in Tasmania.

Kenneth Ian, my brother, the second child and first son, was born during the ministry in Hobart, October 24th, 1931. In 1934 the family moved to the Swan Hill-Woorinen-Ultima circuit in Northern Victoria. This was like moving from winter to summer. With others, the family was to endure Mallee dust storms during a seven-year drought.

This was, in one sense, a very difficult time in his ministry having to face many problems. To cover this area, a 1924 Dodge tourer was purchased for £35, the family's first car, being paid off at £1 per week, which is what was allowed as running costs. One three-generation family was particularly helpful. Included in that family was a very competent secretary, Clem Mott.

From Swan Hill-Woorinen-Ultima circuit John then moved in 1936 to Redcliffs-Merbein, Home Missions churches in the midst of the "blockies" of the Murray irrigation area. These churches were mostly made up of returned soldiers from World War I. Their experiences helped in the next ministry as an Army chaplain in World War II. Fruit, vegetables and wood were always available in abundance and in spring asparagus was gathered from along the channels. Orange rejects were bought for 2/- a sugar bag from the Merbein packing shed.

Archie Jeffey was a great friend of the family who lived on a Mallee block at Carwarp. His home was a kitchen with earthen floor and a boarded bedroom with a raised boarded floor. He grew wheat and grazed sheep in the Mallee scrub. On a Monday, lunch was packed with some goodies, to spend the day at Carwarp with Archie and to pick up Mallee roots and loaded on to the Dodge. Archie often stayed with our family on weekends when he could safely leave his animals. He was full of grit. Archie had been discharged from the British Navy because of a heart condition. He lived in these conditions for a number of years and later had a kidney removed.

While at Red Cliffs a third child (second son) Vivian Graham was born on the 18th March 1937.

AUSTRALIAN ARMY

In chaplaincy work John came to know what camaraderie meant. He associated with men and officers of both high and low rank. The men who came through the test became men indeed.

Immediately before World War 2 it was obvious that there was a shortage of Army chaplains and John was asked to go to Seymour camp as a chaplain.

After having just returned home, Senior Chaplain J.E. Thomas called on John to go to Mount Martha (2/15th Training Battalion; 2nd March 1942 – both in diary) to minister to 3,000 troops who did not have a padre.

From Mount Martha he was moved to Darley and was attached first to the 2/8th Training Battalion and then to the 2/4th.



HQ 2/8th Training Battalion

The Australian brand of humour, particularly in the Armed Services, can be quite peculiar and sometimes very off-hand. This was quite an annoyance to the English officers who expected more respect to their uniform. There was a story told that a private passed an officer without saluting and was called back. "Don't you attach any importance to this uniform soldier? he was asked. The soldier looked the officer up and down very carefully and said, "Yes, I do. You actually got a uniform that fits!"



Officer's foot race at Darley camp

Am still uncertain at what stage the Army assumed responsibility of pay for services rendered but there is an early reference to the D.F.O.'s Office [Divisional Finance Office?] as being the "place of the Unburied Dead." At a later stage, an officer going to collect back pay took the lift to the usual floor but the department had been moved to another office. Someone had hung a notice that read, "Deceased Members Only."

On arrival of one of the Unit Training Drafts, an officer told the group he wanted to be their friend. One bright fellow replied, "I've only got one friend; Mr Curtin." [John Curtin, Labor Prime Minister – male call-up December 11, 1941 – two days after war was declared on Japan. Note: Pearl Harbour was 7th December 1941].

During training a Sergeant was lecturing on hand-grenades and after he had finished the usual questioning took place. One bright spark questioned that after having thrown them whether they could be filled again?

Another training session had a situation of one man down and his mate twisting his arm. The response from the man on the ground was, "Who said this was unarmed combat? I'd like to catch the cow!"

As with civilian trades there was the usual futile errands concocted for the unwary raw recruits. One lad was sent up to the Roman Catholic priest for 300 mirrors for the troops. Another man was sent up to Pay Corp for a "verbal agreement" but was told they had run out! A Sergeant D., a cook, came to the Quarter Master for a watch having been told they were to be issued as they had no alarm clocks!

On Saturday nights dances were held in nearby Bacchus Marsh. Soldiers would "nick-off" during the evening to go the local dance(s). One Saturday night it rained rather heavily and when the sun rose in the morning, there was quite a collection of soldiers stranded on the other side of the flooded creek between Darley camp and Bacchus Marsh! To the best of my knowledge they were not charged.

It was in one of these camp situations that John was having a rather animated discussion with a Major when a Non-Com. came up to them and enquired, "Is this man bothering you Padre?" It took John a few split seconds to realise that this soldier, who had nothing to lose, was prepared to punch the Major on the Padre's behalf!

Vestiges of the "White Feather" campaign promoted in Britain during the First World War have been evident in all subsequent campaigns. A Lieutenant said to John his number is now D.D.M.U. - Draft Dodger Military Unit.

On returning to Darley camp one evening, John was driving a jeep and gave a lift to a soldier. It turned out that the soldier's wife was causing problems while the husband was away. John smuggled this soldier back in to camp by putting him behind the front seats and covering him over. There is a letter in John's papers that sounds like this is the same case. Let me read it to you; it's a bit of a sad story.

13 Faussett St

Albert Park

Sunday 5th

Dear Padre

Guess it is time I wrote you as I promised. I have the children in a girls school, run by the Salvation Army.

I don't know what to do about them as the eldest & youngest are fretting & will not eat. Things were in a terrible mess. The house was filthy, the children covered in vermin, both body & hair.

And their mother drunk on wine. I knew things were bad, but never realised that a woman could slip so far. The babies had only the few rags they stood in.

I am trying to get their Mother to pull herself together. One day she promises to go straight and slips the next day, but I am persevering. I have to apply to the court for custody of the children, so look like having a busy time.

Well Padre, as I am no hand at writing, will explain when I get back.

So thanks a lot.

Gunner J.T.Russell VX103046

When the American troops arrived in Australia the unit was moved from Darley to Drysdale (5½ hours - 28th January 1942 – diary), then Rowville (20th February 1942 – diary), then Watsonia (27th March 1942 – diary).

These rapid moves prompted John to write in his diary that the Army's motto was, "See Australia First." [When I was very young, I can remember a sardonic quote that was actually, "Join the Navy and see the world; join the Army and see the next!"]

Somewhere in these camps, I learnt to play Chinese Star Checkers. I was asleep in a bunk and probably called for my mother when I awoke. An officer came in to keep me company and brought in the checkers, I think. He was Major somebody-or-other; I just can't remember his name as I was only about five or five and a half at that time.

18th March, 1942 – Censorship regulation imposed on camp. One said a chap used to write, "Dear Mum and Censor."

It was around this time that John was told that he was too old to be sent overseas. From a study of the correspondence of that time, it seems he may have planted the idea that he would return to civilian service. It could have been as little as four days later he was examined at Caulfield and classed as A1 subject to X-ray result; i.e., fit for overseas service! From Watsonia John was transferred to the 1st Armoured Division, then at Gunnedah, N.S.W. which later moved to Morowa, W.A. and took one week to go across the continent by train.

While at Gunnedah there was a route march of 73 miles through rough, yet lovely, bush country. People were very hospitable and one station owner evidently killed a sheep for the soldiers. Noted that they were recalled on the fourth day. [That comment made me wonder whether they were actually lost but I doubt it!]

In the notes have found a couple of references that the ordinary soldier grudgingly accepted that half the padres were human after all. I think that joining in some of the activities like route marches must have reinforced that view?

The Methodist Chaplain General travelling through inland Australia came across a plain with a lone tree standing in the centre and put a notice on it, "This is the place for a saw mill."

Some of the exercises in W.A. could be a very dusty affair. At one stage John was in a jeep and stuck behind some trucks throwing huge clouds of dust. He encouraged his batman to pass the trucks and resume his correct position near the head of the column. This was not appreciated by a Sergeant or whatever trying to wave him back in to line. John encouraged his driver to defy the signal!

After some similar maneuvers, J.K. arrived too late for a meal and went around to the back door of the mess and entered the kitchen for a cup of tea. The Cook Sergeant returned to find this "intruder" in his kitchen and ordered J.K. out and if he would not leave, he would throw him out! J.K. enquired as to who else would be doing the throwing out as the Cook Sergeant was of a lesser rank!

There was a sequel to this in that after the war John and Myrtle were walking down Swanston St (Melbourne City) and was hailed, with great gusto, from across the road, "Hey, Padre!" After a very animated, friendly conversation

and continuing on their separate ways, Myrtle enquired as to who that was, the reply being, "The Cook Sergeant who was going to throw me out of his kitchen!"

When returning from leave, John was transferred to 2/2 C.C.S. on the Atherton Tablelands, Queensland and then served with 2/9 Armoured Regiment and the 2/6th Infantry Battalion. At about this time the Queensland Railways must have had a poor reputation for travel time as one bright lad suggested that their theme song should be, "I'll walk beside you!"

John was then transferred to 2nd Corps Signals at Lae and crossed to Bougainville with this unit.

One time, while on leave and travelling on a tram in Melbourne, my parents overheard a conversation between two ladies. One declared her son had just been promoted to Brigadier. When the other expressed her amazement, the first lady then retorted with, "Brigadier, bombardier or whatever!" My father had to turn his head away to hide his amusement.

Returning from leave, John was then posted to the 2/9th Ambulance at Morotai. Arriving too late for the next troop movement to Borneo, he went with the rear party on an L.S.M.

On arrival at Labuan the group transferred to an L.S.T. to go down the coast to the oilfields. This proved to be a short but rough voyage in the China Sea. Wireless was banned and the captain had to rely on the sun for his bearings in a mine swept passage. He ultimately said, "By guess or by God we go to our rendezvous at 1200 hours," so skimming over a minefield they headed for their destination. The U.S. sailors manned life preservers but the Australian soldiers were ordered aft with many prayers being offered. [Elsewhere in the diary there is a notation that said, "I clung to 'Mae West' as one of the best little girls I'd ever clung to!"] Eventually they saw a welcome flashing light signalling them to their landing point. After wading ashore, they camped within the light of 32 burning oil wells that the retreating Japanese had set alight. Australian Army engineers extinguished the fires in the course of the next three months. There is a hand-written notation about the Army engineers supposedly using "Wirraway" aircraft tied down to blow the flames away while they capped the wells.

In Borneo, when the camps were established with tents side by side it created a saw-tooth shape; ideal for the local monkey population to chase one another all the way down and then all the way back. At first light this was not necessarily appreciated by the troops inside the tents! The local natives also used jars half filled with nuts to catch the monkeys and try to sell them to the troops. The monkeys would grab a handful of nuts and not be able to get their paw out and just would not let go!

For many, many years afterward the smell of the jungle was in J.K.'s Army trunk and permeated the clothes that travelled in it. Once smelt, never forgotten; I think I would recognise that smell even today.

A Padre Ballard (Methodist Church) must have been with an advance group in a pocket on Labuan Island and a lad shaken up by some of his mates falling around him was comforted by the Padre as they lay on the ground together, "Well I expect you think that this is a peculiar place for a Chaplain to be?" The soldier replied, "Padre, if I go there is no one I'd like to be with more than the Padre!"

There was a story told about an Aussie digging a slit trench and a Yank comes along and says, "Why bother about digging that, Aussie, as the one that's got your name on it, you'll get." The Aussie retorted with, "But what of the one with 'To Whom It May Concern' written on it?"

During the war, the Chaplain General, Alan Brooke, issued various bulletins to the Army Padres often with some humour:

"My dear Padre,

You probably know that L.H.Q. has been called 'The Chair-borne Division.' Did you know that the elite of this Division are 'The Paragraph Troops?' I do not feel particularly 'elite' but now and then I

cannot avoid paragraphs. Will you give due consideration to these which follow? etc"

The last months of the war John spent on Labuan Island with the 2/1st C.C.S. On Sunday 30th September 1945 he baptised Robert Dunkling in the China Sea.

From Labuan he was returned to Brisbane and thence to Melbourne to be discharged and to return home to Ballarat. [Dad did tell me he actually saw the tip of the Philippines but peace was declared and his group were turned around immediately].

APPRECIATION

Scattered through the correspondence there are various letters, notes and cards of appreciation and encouragement of the work done by John (most of it undated):

1. I hope we meet again sometime. I was getting cynical about Army Padres and it was very refreshing to meet sincerity.

With kind regards

Yours sincerely

Ken Shaw QX48742

Capt. K.M. Shaw

2/4 Aust. Fld. Regt

2. YOUR TEMPORARY TRANSFER TO THE 2/2nd. BN. This has been duly noted. A letter from D.A.C.G. Archibold will be tabled at the next Conference of the C's G on Thursday for their information. I hope it will only be a temporary expedient and that you will soon be back with your unit. The D.A.C.G. reports that the C.O. of the C.C.S. was loath to lose your services even for a short time. [Interpret!] That a great compliment to any Chaplain. Worth will tell, even in the Army. I will file the correspondence for Allen's perusal on his return. I am sure the transfer will help things considerably. I hope you find that your time with the infantry lads is well worth while.

YOUR OWN WORK. It is very obvious that you have won your way into confidence of the officers and men alike. The Army life offers a very big compensation to the fellow who digs in well.

Wishing you the very best in your work for Christ,

I remain,

Yours in the Bonds of His service;

B.A. Rogers

Snr. Chaplain (U.C.) Vic. L. of C. Areas.

WHERE YOU 'BIN?

My mother did not realise that even though the war finished in 1945 that during discharge the M.O. recommended that John go to the hospital at Heidelberg to have certain tests that confirmed he had hookworm, which was treated before his discharge in 1946

In 1946, John returned to civilian work at Ormond Church of Christ but later was advised by his medical officer to have a change in his daily work load.

BENDIGO

So, in 1949 John, together with Myrtle and Vivian (Elizabeth and Kenneth stayed in Melbourne), came to Bendigo and practised as a chiropodist until his retirement in 1976.



Contributed by Viv Martin of Victoria.