

CHAPLAINS IN THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

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IT can fairly be claimed that St. Paul was the first chaplain at sea of whom there is any authentic record. It is true that he made that memorable voyage in ‘a ship of [Alexandria](#) sailing into [Italy](#)’ as a closely-guarded prisoner who had ‘appealed unto Caesar’. But, as is told in the 27th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, he proved himself a good seaman and a wise and courageous counsellor and spiritual adviser when the crowded ship got into sore trouble after sailing ‘close by [Crete](#)’ and was wrecked on the coast of [Malta](#). St. Paul can well be regarded as the patron saint of naval chaplains.

There were chaplains in the King's Ships, certainly as early as Edward I's time (1272–1307). There was then no Navy in the modern sense, so that the chaplain's position was ill-defined. None of the early writers seems to have included him in his ‘list of officers’. We know that Drake took one with him in the *Golden Hind* on his famous voyage of 1577–80, for it is to Master Francis Fletcher, ‘preacher in this employment’, that we are indebted for that excellent narrative *The World Encompassed by Sir Francis Drake*.

In those times, the position of the chaplain was a remarkably humble one. But, chaplain or no chaplain, the regulations insisted strongly on the conduct of religious services afloat. For instance, the instructions to the captains of ships taking part in the expedition to Cadiz in 1596 directed that ‘God is to be served by the use of prayers twice daily’—before dinner and after the singing of the psalm at the setting of the evening watch; any man absenting himself was liable to twenty-four hours in irons.

For a long period there was seldom more than one chaplain to a fleet or squadron. Although Buckingham announced in 1626 that the King had ‘given orders for preachers to goe in every of his ships at sea’, the order seems to have been largely a dead letter. From the chaplains' own memorandum to the Admiralty in 1628 we learn that ‘where there is one ship that hath a minister in it, there are ten that have none: all which pay their monthly groat.’

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During the greater part of the seventeenth century the chaplain was ‘rated’ officially, and for purposes of pay, along with the ‘ordinary seamen’, whose wages were taxed to augment the parson's poor pay. In the time of James I, the pay of the seaman rose from ten shillings to fifteen shillings a lunar month, subject to deductions which included fourpence for the chaplain and twopence for the surgeon. The chaplain's pay was at the same rate as the seaman's, plus the monthly groats. In 1629 the wage for seamen and chaplains was raised to nineteen shillings a month. There is much evidence, however, that for a very long time there was many a slip ‘twixt the chaplain and his groats. Someone was making a good thing out of those fourpences, cheating chaplain and seaman alike.

As the century progressed, the lot of the chaplain improved somewhat. It was [Samuel Pepys](#), as Secretary of the Navy, who took the first steps in regularising the parson's position. He deplored 'how few commanders take any [chaplains] and the ill-choice generally made of those that are entertained, both for ignorance and debauching, to the great dishonouring of God and the Government.' [Pepys](#) had it laid down that the chaplain should be appointed by warrant from the Admiralty, so that he became officially a 'warrant officer', though he did not receive any increase in pay.

An interesting account of the life of a naval chaplain in the seventeenth century is given in the diary of Henry Teonge, a poverty-stricken clergyman of [Warwickshire](#), who went to sea to escape his creditors. He served in His Majesty's Ships *Assistance*, [Bristol](#), and *Royal Oak* during the sixteen-seventies. The diary, which is a faithful and detailed account of life at sea in those days, throws a ghastly light upon the insanitary and generally squalid conditions in the ships. Teonge officiated at twenty-one burials at sea in three months.

His monthly income from the seamen's fourpences in the two first-mentioned ships was about sixty-six shillings, and in the *Royal Oak*, manned by 390 seamen, about £6 10s, in addition to which he received the ordinary seaman's rate of pay of nineteen shillings a lunar month. Thus, his whole income for a year of thirteen months was about £55 in the two smaller ships and about [page 143](#) £97 in the larger vessel; and, as he was victualled and free from the attention of his creditors, his post as a naval chaplain had a great attraction for a poor country parson.

A notable career as a naval chaplain was that of the Rev. [Alexander John Scott](#), who sailed with [Nelson](#) in the *Victory* for more than two years and was with him at his death at Trafalgar. Scott first attracted [Nelson's](#) attention as the chaplain of a 74-gun ship in Lord Howe's fleet at [Toulon](#) in 1793 and afterwards as Sir Hyde Parker's 'parson-secretary'. He had a well-deserved reputation for his proficiency in foreign languages, and acted as interpreter for [Nelson](#) when the latter landed to negotiate the armistice with the Danes a week after the Battle of Copenhagen (April 1801). Two years later, Scott sailed with [Nelson](#) in the *Amphion* and changed with him into the *Victory* off [Toulon](#). As Admiral's interpreter Scott received £100 a year in addition to his pay as chaplain of the *Victory*, but he was often employed also as an intelligence officer and on confidential diplomatic missions. 'Absolutely too much learning has turned his head', said [Nelson](#) in explanation of his chaplain's frequent eccentricities.

Scott left the service after Trafalgar and became vicar of Catterick. On his death at the age of 72, books in forty languages were found in his library, though he modestly had claimed mastery of no more than eight. In his *Recollections of Life in the Victory*, Scott says that [Lord Nelson](#) was 'a thorough clergyman's son. I should think he never went to bed nor got up without saying his prayers.' Every Sunday it was the Admiral's custom either to congratulate his chaplain on the sermon or suggest that it was not as well adapted as usual to the needs of the congregation; Scott often preached from a text suggested by and discussed with the Admiral.

The Orders in Council of 1812 are the naval chaplain's charter, for it was then that his old remuneration was abolished and he was granted a regular salary of £150 a year. A cabin was officially allotted to him 'in wardroom or gunroom', where he was to 'mess with the lieutenants and be rated for victuals'. If he was willing to act as schoolmaster, he was to be entitled to

additional pay and allowances. Another important reform came in 1843, when chaplains, together with masters, paymasters, surgeons, and instructors [page 144](#) were raised from warrant to commissioned status. The naval chaplain had no direct link with the Church ashore until, by an Order in Council of 1902, the chaplain of the Fleet was instituted by the Archbishop of Canterbury as Archdeacon for the [Royal Navy](#).

Unlike all other officers of the Service, the naval chaplain has not been granted a rank; and since his parishioners may range from an Admiral of the Fleet down to Boy, Second Class, that is surely a wise provision. His pay, however, is rated according to seniority; his dress is optional. It is laid down in the regulations that a chaplain shall wear a clerical collar and stock and 'shall be dressed in other respects in such a manner as shall clearly indicate his profession'. He may wear either ordinary clerical dress or a 'blue reefer jacket, not having ranking stripes, but with officers' gilt buttons....' The authorised naval chaplain's cap and badge are worn only with the reefer jacket. With ordinary clerical dress, chaplains wear a black clerical felt hat or college cap.

The Official Attitude towards Religion in the Royal Navy

A thousand years of recorded history lie behind the [Royal Navy](#), and so it need surprise no one to find that tradition plays a great part in naval life. But what is tradition? It is something we all recognise when we meet it, but equally it is something we are content to recognise without defining. Tradition is that which has been delivered or surrendered to the present generation by their predecessors in the Service. The modern sailor is the heir to a great tradition.

We have briefly sketched the evolution of the naval chaplain to his present status. We have seen that from early times there has been a close connection between the Church and the [Royal Navy](#), and so we shall expect to find this connection maintained in the official regulations.

It is noteworthy that the whole of the lengthy first section of the chapter dealing with discipline in *King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions* is devoted to the holding of Divine Service in His Majesty's ships and the responsibilities of commanding officers and chaplains in relation thereto. Another chapter sets out the 'instructions to chaplains and officiating ministers'.

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It is laid down that the ship's company 'is not to be employed on Sunday in any work or duty other than that which may be strictly necessary for the public service'. The captain 'is to take care that the chaplain is treated at all times by the officers and men with the respect due to his sacred office and that he is not required to perform any executive duties in connection therewith, so that nothing may interfere with his being regarded as a friend and adviser by all on board'. For his part, the chaplain 'is to be most careful that the morality of his conduct and the propriety and regularity of his manners and conversation are such as become his sacred office and inspire the officers and the ship's company with reverence and respect towards him'.

The first of the 'Articles of War' states that 'all officers in command of His Majesty's ships of war shall cause the public worship of Almighty God according to the Liturgy of the Church of England established by law to be solemnly, orderly and reverently performed in their respective

ships, and shall take care that prayers and preaching by the chaplains in Holy Orders of the respective ships, be performed diligently, and that the Lord's Day be observed according to law'.

King's Regulations expressly provide that Presbyterians, Methodists, Roman Catholics, and others who entertain religious scruples in regard to attending services of the Church of England, are to have full liberty to absent themselves from these services. When no chaplain of their denomination is borne, and no opportunity offers for them to attend their own services, these men are to be allowed to remain in their mess spaces or such part of the ship as may be appointed by the captain, 'who will take care that the place appointed is so situated as not to give the appearance of their being obliged to form part of the congregation....' If a chaplain of their denomination is not borne, officers and men who are not members of the Church of England must be given every opportunity to attend Divine Service on Sundays at their respective places of worship on shore.

The captain of a ship is also required to take care that on every weekday, after morning quarters or divisions, short prayers from the Liturgy of the Church of England are read. In ships in which no chaplain is borne, the prayers are read by the captain. One of [page 146](#) the prayers is that unmatched one, the first of the 'Forms of Prayer to be Used at Sea' in the *Book of Common Prayer*. It was composed, probably by Bishop Sanderson, somewhere about the middle of the seventeenth century, a period when the English language was at its noblest. It has been well said that it is 'as sonorous as the sounding seas upon which it is daily recited':

O Eternal Lord God, who alone spreadest out the heavens, and rulest the raging of the sea; who hast compassed the waters with bounds until day and night come to an end: Be pleased to receive into Thy Almighty and most gracious protection the persons of us Thy servants, and the Fleet in which we serve. Preserve us from the dangers of the sea and from the violence of the enemy; that we may be a safeguard unto our most gracious Sovereign Lord, King George, and his Dominions, and a security for such as pass on the seas upon their lawful occasions; that the peoples of our Empire may in peace and quietness serve Thee our God; and that we may return in safety to enjoy the blessings of the land, with the fruits of our labours, and with a thankful remembrance of Thy mercies to praise and glorify Thy Holy Name: through [Jesus Christ](#) our Lord. Amen.

And as those magnificent words sound forth, one sees three centuries of British seamen, bareheaded at prayer on their quarterdecks; and one begins to feel, in part at least, the sense of tradition that inspires the [Royal Navy](#).

That the Admiralty, in spite of its many preoccupations at the time, fully appreciated the importance of religious observances as a prime factor in the maintenance of morale, is shown by the following 'Message from the Board of Admiralty', promulgated as an Admiralty Fleet Order on 28 November 1940:

In the conviction that the present war is a struggle between good and evil, and that in the practice of the Christian Religio may be found today the same support experienced by our Forefathers in establishing in the [Royal Navy](#) those ideals of service and sacrifice which we have inherited, Their Lordships, whilst appreciating that under conditions of war the instructions regarding

Sunday work can seldom be realised, wish to emphasise the need for observing the instructions for the holding of Divine Service and Prayers. They further direct that in battleships and cruisers all possible steps should be taken to provide a space set apart for the worship of God.

Religion is a real and regular background to the life of the Royal [page 147](#) Navy. Many instances could be cited in support of this contention, but let one suffice as an illustration of how the spirit of the foregoing order was obeyed. It concerns the [Royal Marines](#) who formed part of the rearguard during the evacuation of [Crete](#) in May 1941. Here are the words of the Admiralty account of the achievements of the [Royal Marines](#) from 1939 to 1943; ‘The losses of the rearguard were severe, and it was not possible to take off all the survivors. Once again, however, the [Royal Marines](#)’ initiative and powers of improvisation rose to an emergency. One officer discovered a boat and, taking a mixed party of sixty survivors with him, set out for the North African coast. Food ran out on the sixth day, the last rations being a lump of margarine dipped in cocoa. On the eighth day, during Divine Service, the party made a landfall and finally got ashore in the [Sidi Barrani](#) area’.

A naval chaplain who had six years’ service during the war, has recorded that every officer and petty officer with whom he had any dealings did all in their power to enable him to carry out, as far as circumstances permitted, and often in the face of difficulties, the spirit of the Admiralty instructions concerning religious observances. On one occasion at a new training establishment, where no building was available, he decided to hold a celebration of Holy Communion in the open air. The Chief Petty Officer in charge of the church party was somewhat surprised: ‘Bit like Hollywood, isn’t it, sir?’ but he arranged a little chapel most fitting for its purpose.

Chaplains in the [Royal New Zealand Navy](#), 1939–45

When war began on 3 September 1939, there were only two chaplains in the New Zealand Naval Forces: the Rev. G. T. Robson,¹ in HMS *Philomel*, depot ship of the naval training establishment and the Naval Base at [Devonport](#), [Auckland](#), and the Rev. C. B. Ellis,² in HMS *Leander*. (It was not until 1 October 1941, that the King [page 148](#) approved the change of title for the naval forces in New Zealand from ‘The New Zealand Naval Forces’ to ‘The Royal New Zealand Navy’.) Of the three armed services in New Zealand, the Navy was the only one with a permanent chaplain before the war. The Army, of course, had for a long time had its Territorial chaplains on an honorary basis, but the [Air Force](#) had none at all. From 1927 to 1939, the chaplain at the Naval Base was often called upon for duty for all three Services.

Mr. Robson’s name will long be remembered and honoured in the [Royal New Zealand Navy](#). In his booklet, *HMNZS Philomel*, published in 1944, Lieutenant O. S. Hintz, RNZNVR, writes:

This is a book about a ship and not about the men who have served in her. A thousand personalities have gone to the making of that one encompassing personality which is *Philomel*. Nevertheless, the ship for the last seventeen years has had one personality, in the highest sense of the word, whose name requires inclusion in any history. He is the Rev. G. T. Robson, OBE, MC, naval chaplain at [Auckland](#) since 1927, and a man who, through his influence with recruits and sailors alike and through his abiding interest in their welfare, has done much to foster in *Philomel* and in the [Royal New Zealand Navy](#) the traditions of a great Service.

It is not thought that Lieutenant Hintz had Mr. Robson still in mind when he began his next sentence: ‘Among other relics in the grounds of the Naval Base....’

Mr. Robson appeared to know every officer and man who had ever passed through the *Philomel*. A man greatly beloved, he was sure of a welcome wherever he went around the ship or the dockyard. A man deeply versed in the knowledge of men, he was able to help the many who sought his advice by his wise and understanding counsel. A man of infinite patience, he apparently was never in a hurry, never too busy to see any caller, yet he managed to do a vast amount of work among and for the naval men and their families. His long experience of the Service and his wide and deep knowledge of the ways of the Navy made him a mine of information to men strange to those ways. No man ever better deserved the honour of the Order of the British Empire which was conferred upon him in 1940.

In October 1939, the Rev. C. B. Ellis was recalled to England [page 149](#) and he was succeeded in the *Leander* by the Rev. R. A. Noakes,³ who sailed in her when she left New Zealand in May 1940 for her arduous commission in the [Middle East](#)—the [Red Sea](#), the Mediterranean, and the [Indian Ocean](#)—which lasted sixteen months. An additional chaplain, the Rev. G. M. McKenzie,⁴ was appointed in June 1940, and he was drafted to HMS *Achilles*, in which he served for seven months.

Concurrently with the great and rapid expansion of the Naval Base and its manifold activities during the first months of the war, came a corresponding increase in the work of the Base chaplain. It was not long before training needs went beyond even the largely- expanded training establishment at [Devonport](#), and on 20 January 1941 the old quarantine station on Motuihi Island was commissioned as HMS *Tamaki*, and this became the principal training establishment for the thousands of men who joined the Royal New Zealand Navy.

Mr. McKenzie was transferred from the *Achilles* to be chaplain in the *Tamaki*, a post he was to hold until he was demobilised in May 1946. During that period some ten thousand young men and boys passed through the training establishment in the *Tamaki*. As this was their first contact with the Navy, the chaplain's work was of primary importance, and the commanding officer paid tribute to that work in these words: ‘He has conducted himself to my entire satisfaction. A most efficient chaplain with a sound knowledge of youth and their problems. He has been most helpful in every way. Himself a keen student of naval history, he has been able to pass on its lessons and its value. His evening work in the library has been invaluable.... Last, but not least, a very gifted and eloquent preacher whose sermons have been an inspiration to us throughout the commission.’

In September 1941, HMNZS *Leander* returned to New Zealand. Her chaplain, the Rev. R. A. Noakes, having resigned, his successor, [page 150](#) the Rev. C. F. Webster,⁵ was appointed in October 1941. He served in the *Leander* during her subsequent operations in the South [Pacific](#) and in the Battle of [Kolombangara](#), in the Solomon Islands, in which the ship was torpedoed and so badly damaged that she had to return to [Auckland](#) for extensive repairs, subsequently proceeding to [Boston](#) in the [United States](#) for a complete refit. Mr. Webster was appointed to HMNZS *Achilles* when she recommissioned in England and he was serving in her at the time of his death at Trincomalee on 13 November 1944. A most efficient and conscientious chaplain, he

earned the deep respect of all ranks, particularly for his good work when the [Leander](#) was torpedoed in action in the [Solomons](#). Of his service on that occasion the commanding officer of the [Leander](#) wrote: 'Mr. Webster was in the main dressing station in action. On the ship being damaged he immediately asked permission to proceed to the scene of the damage where he did good work among the injured. For the rest of the night and the following day he attended tirelessly on the wounded and dying, performing his priestly duties with marked devotion and his medical duties with efficiency. He set a good example to all around him.' The casualties in the [Leander](#) in this action were twenty-eight killed and fifteen wounded.

Once again, after the death of Mr. Webster, the [Achilles](#) was without a chaplain. The shortage of chaplains in New Zealand for naval service was a major problem and repeated requests to the Archbishop of New Zealand for more men met with no practical response. The Bishops were loath to part with more priests from their dioceses—the not unjustified excuse being that so many had joined the Army and the [Air Force](#).

The successive captains of the [Achilles](#) did not wish to go to sea without a chaplain and so, at intervals, the [Royal Navy](#) lent two of its chaplains for service in the cruiser. The Rev. W. G. Morgan⁶



RNZAF fighter pilot describes an action to Rev. Father W. W. Ainsworth, July 1943 Guadalcanal

[RNZAF](#) fighter pilot describes an action to Rev. Father W. W. Ainsworth, July 1943 [Guadalcanal](#)

*Midnight Mass in RNZAF Chapel, Christmas 1944, celebrated
by Rev. Father P. Battersby Guadalcanal*



*Midnight Mass in RNZAF Chapel, Christmas 1944, celebrated by Rev. Father P.
Battersby [Guadalcanal](#)*



Divine Service on HMNZS Leander, July 1941 Alexandria

Divine Service on HMNZS [Leander](#), July 1941 [Alexandria](#)

[page 151](#) had himself served as an able seaman in trawlers and minesweepers around the coasts of [Britain](#) at the beginning of the war; but when his clerical status was discovered he was appointed a chaplain. He did excellent work and was well liked in the [Achilles](#), the ship's company being sorry to see him go. He was followed by the Rev. C. G. J. Evans⁷ who remained in the [Achilles](#) until she returned to England in 1946 to be paid off, thus severing her connection with the [Royal New Zealand Navy](#). Another English chaplain, the Rev. T. R. Parfitt,⁸ served in HMNZS *Gambia* from October 1943 to July 1946, when she, too, reverted to the [Royal Navy](#). He was a conscientious, painstaking, and popular chaplain.

Though he did not serve in any ship of the Royal New Zealand Navy, mention must be made of the Rev. W. G. Parker,⁹ formerly of [Wellington](#), who had completed nearly seven years' service as a chaplain in the [Royal Navy](#) when he met his death in action in December 1941. He joined the [Royal Navy](#) on 31 January 1935, and at the outbreak of war was chaplain in HMS *Daedalus*, Royal Navy Air Station, Lee-on-Solent. He was appointed to HMS *Prince of Wales* on 14 February 1941, and was in her when that ship and HMS *Hood* attacked the *Bismarck* in the [North Atlantic](#) on 24 May 1941, the *Hood* being sunk. Mr. Parker was among the many missing after the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* were sunk by Japanese aircraft off the Malay Peninsula on 10 December 1941.

But what of the 'little ships' such as the *Matai*, *Kiwi*, *Moa*, *Tui*, *Gale*, *Breeze* and others, as well as the Fairmile motor-launches, all of which did duty in the Solomon Islands and elsewhere? They were not neglected, for when they were occupied in their arduous and monotonous duties in the South Pacific, the Bishop and clergy of the Melanesian Mission did all they could for the spiritual welfare of officers and men. Not only did they conduct services on board the ships but they also entertained the men on shore, arranging sightseeing trips and sports. The Bishop of [Melanesia](#), the [page 152](#) Rt. Rev. W. H. Baddeley, DSO, MC, was a great friend to the [Royal New Zealand Navy](#). He and the Rev. H. V. Reynolds were commissioned as honorary chaplains in recognition of the many services they gave to officers and men serving in the South Pacific. After the *Leander* had been damaged in the Battle of [Kolombangara](#), the ship's company could not speak too highly of what the Bishop had done for them. The Rev. A. T. Hill, of the Boys' School at Pawa, Ugi, was also of great service to our ships in that area.

In addition to those already mentioned, there were a number of chaplains of the Royal New Zealand Naval Volunteer Reserve who did good work in shore establishments at various ports in New Zealand. The spiritual care of officers and men, and of the 'Wrens' in HMNZS *Cook*, the naval base at [Shelly Bay](#), [Wellington](#), was undertaken by the Rev. B. J. Williams,¹⁰ chaplain of the Flying Angel Mission to Seamen, and the Rev. Father N. H. Gascoigne,¹¹ chaplain of the Wellington Institute of the Apostleship of the Sea. The Rev. J. F. Feron,¹² the vicar of a large parish in [Christchurch](#), gladly accepted the responsibility for the spiritual care of the men in HMNZS *Tasman*, the shore establishment at [Lyttelton](#). At Auckland, too, the Rev. Father M. Kenefick¹³ and the Rev. D. N. Pryor¹⁴ took a zealous interest in the welfare of their respective flocks, both in the *Philomel* and the *Tamaki*.

A special and most important work was undertaken by the Rev. H. K. Vickery,¹⁵ RNZNVR, who, as chaplain to the Flying Angel [page 153](#) Mission to Seamen at [Auckland](#), was unable to do normal chaplaincy duty. This was the arrangement of hospitality for [Royal Navy](#) officers and

men whose ships, for various reasons, had to spend varying lengths of time in [Auckland](#). These ships were manned by men from the [United Kingdom](#), very few of whom knew anyone in New Zealand and for whom a crowded city was not the ideal place in which to rest and recuperate. The chaplain at the [Devonport](#) Base had begun a hospitality scheme in a small way, but with his many other duties he had found it impossible to carry on let alone develop the scheme. Mr. Vickery undertook the work. It involved making arrangements with hosts and hostesses, securing transport, writing letters, and the hundred and one details which can make or mar the success of such a scheme. Many hundreds of men were given hospitality under this plan.

Hospital and Welfare Duties

Quite apart from taking daily prayers, conducting Sunday services, leading study classes, and the other tasks which plainly fall to the lot of a naval chaplain, there are other phases of his work. There is, for instance, the regular visiting of the sick and wounded. This is, of course, one of the primary duties of a chaplain, one that he would naturally perform regularly, even though it were not laid down so quaintly in *King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions* that the chaplain is to 'visit the sick bay periodically, taking care that his visits are not so infrequent as to occasion alarm'. Each chaplain visited his own men as far as possible, but for obvious reasons a great deal of this work fell on the chaplain at the Naval Base.

The Royal New Zealand Naval Hospital, opened in August 1941, was near the Base and was visited almost daily by the Base chaplain. But there were also many cases requiring special treatment and these were scattered all over [Auckland](#). Men in the Public Hospital, the Military Annexe, Green Lane Hospital, the auxiliary hospital at the Ellerslie racecourse, the Avondale Mental Hospital, and Little St. Dunstan's, all received the solicitous care of the Base chaplain. The United States authorities established a hospital in [Remuera](#) where a number of British seamen also received treatment. It was to this hospital that the numerous casualties from HMAS [page 154 Canberra](#) were taken after the Battle of Savo Island, in the Solomons, in August 1942. These men looked for their spiritual ministrations to the Base chaplain.

A painful, difficult, but important task that also fell to the Base chaplain was calling on the relatives of those who had lost their lives. Generally the relatives had been informed by telegram, but it happened now and then that the chaplain was the first bearer of the sad news. This delicate task was a most wearing one, yet there is no doubt that it was supremely well worth while. Every chaplain, too, had the difficult and unenviable task of writing letters of sympathy to the families of the men known personally to him.

'Following the custom of the Service, the dead were buried at sea.' These words appear in many of the 'letters of proceedings' of captains of His Majesty's ships reporting on actions fought by them during the war. They recall yet another tradition of the [Royal Navy](#) which has always believed that the sea on which he sails and fights is the sailor's fitting tomb. As Kipling has written:

We have fed our sea for a thousand years
And she calls us, still unfed,

Though there's never a wave of all her waves
But marks our English dead.

Thus did Drake go to his rest off Puerto Bello in 1596. At Jutland, on 31 May 1916, 5590 officers and men of the 6000-odd British seamen who died that day went down with their ships. In December 1939 the *Achilles*, [Ajax](#), and *Exeter* buried their dead at sea off the [River Plate](#).

The solemn rite of burial at sea is about the last service the naval chaplain can perform for his dead shipmate. In ships where no chaplain is borne, this duty devolves upon the captain. The body, sewn up in the dead man's hammock and weighted with a projectile, is borne aft on a grating to the quarter-deck and placed close to the ship's side, where it rests under a Union Flag in the presence of the ship's company, assembled by divisions under the silent guns. At the command 'Off Caps!' all heads are bared while the burial service is read. Overhead the White Ensign flutters in the breeze and all about is the sea, restless to the horizon, reminder of perils passed and of dangers to be met. Vigilance can never relax in time of war, and even while the silent assemblage follows the words of the chaplain or the captain, others are on watch [page 155](#) and alert for instant action. The ship may slow down, but it is seldom safe to stop. At the appropriate passage, the Union Flag is removed, the grating tilted, and the body passes overside to sink quickly into the depths of the sea, to the accompaniment of three volleys fired by the [Royal Marines](#), or a gunner's party, followed by the sounding of 'Last Post'.

To the Base chaplain fell also a great deal of welfare work on behalf of the men serving overseas. This work covered a wide field and required endless tact and patience: domestic problems such as sick wives, sick children, mothers in hospital, obtaining help or arranging hospitality for children, unfaithfulness, domestic disputes, and finding accommodation for families arriving in Auckland. The great influx of Americans made its impact upon certain sections of the community, especially upon some of our sailors' homes, in a manner that brought no credit to either side. All these matters had to be given careful attention, for if a sailor is worrying about the conditions under which his wife and children are living, it affects his morale and his fighting efficiency suffers.

Under the general heading of welfare work must be mentioned the part of the chaplains in assisting the Army Education and Welfare Service. At sea they also undertook other jobs, each essential in its way, but for which no special officer was appointed. Thus the tedious task of censoring letters was done, in part, by the chaplains.

General Impressions

From the very beginning of his naval life, a chaplain learns that a warship is designed primarily for fighting purposes, and that, although provision is made for him and his work and every reasonable facility is granted to him, he is just one of the many spokes in a great wheel, although not an unimportant one, and that he exists for the Service and not the Service for him. An instructor was once overheard addressing his class in these words: 'Each one of you is a cog in a machine. The captain is a cog. Every officer is a cog. I am a cog. If one cog were to slip, or to falter, or to pause, you know what would happen to the machine. But in the Navy no cog ever slips or falters. It can't, because we are all welded together. We are the Navy'.

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Provided then, that the chaplain does not mind living in a very circumscribed area, in the middle of his parish where he cannot get away from his parishioners and where the only privacy for work and sleep is to be found in a cabin about eight feet square, which is ‘open house’ to officers and men alike; and provided that he is satisfied with spiritual activities that are somewhat more restricted than on shore, he will soon find that he has undertaken a real man's job.

He is far from being a stranger in a strange community, because a very large proportion of his shipmates—officers and men—have been accustomed to having a chaplain alongside them from their very earliest days in the Service. To all alike, officers and men, irrespective of creed, the chaplain can be a trusted friend and adviser. The sailor talks to his chaplain with a frankness that is almost embarrassing until he becomes accustomed to it. Such trust is not to be treated lightly; that it is given at all speaks volumes for the conception of a chaplain held by the sailors. A young petty officer, detailed for a shore job in South Africa, had an interesting experience of Army educational work there. He wrote home in glowing terms of the information officer who was attached to each unit, an officer who could be approached for advice on any subject. The petty officer could find no higher praise for this officer than to describe him as a ‘secular chaplain’. That is not only a tribute to naval chaplains, but also a considered judgment on them.

As was stated earlier, religion is a real and regular background to the men of the Navy. That is, of course, part of the naval tradition, but it is also more than that. The Rev. A. Campsie, MC, senior Presbyterian chaplain in the [Royal Navy](#), sums it up well in an article, ‘The Faith of a Sailor’. He writes:

There is ‘something about a sailor’—something at least about the comparatively ‘ancient mariner’ whose business it has been through the years to sail the seas. The war has brought to his life new hardships and new dangers, and yet, incalculably great as these new trials may be, they have but added to what was already there. Risk and peril are always a part of the sailor's life, in peace as in war. Today he has to contend with the violence of the enemy, but he has always to contend with the violence of the elements. Dangerous living doesn't begin for him [page 157](#) with a war; it's an inescapable part of his normal life. So long as he follows the sea, trouble and danger are following him or lurking in his path. His is a kind of warfare in which there is no discharge until his seafaring days are done. This constant accompanying with risk and danger is one factor in the sailor's life which makes a difference and which makes *him* different.... And as ‘man's extremity is God's opportunity’, I would reverently say that God has many and unusual opportunities with the sailor. His mind cannot for long get far away from thoughts about God and about the deep and elemental things of life. The sea doesn't breed cynics, or atheists, or men who scoff at religion. Sailors aren't saints (though saints are to be found amongst them); but in the main you will find, beneath their often misleading exterior, men of humble and reverent mind—men with that simple and childlike faith in God which, according to Christ, is a necessary passport to His Kingdom.

And there's another factor in the life of a sailor which makes a difference. Besides his close-up view of the ‘works and wonders of the Lord’, there is also his close-up contact with his fellowmen. Few outside the Navy can realise the confined and cramped-up nature of the life

which men are obliged to live in a man-of-war. Day in, day out, and often for weeks at a time, the sailor has no escape whatever to privacy and solitude. His life at sea resembles nothing so much as a non-stop circus! This, I think, is his heaviest handicap, spiritual as well as physical. The soul of man, if it is to thrive, needs its regular seasons of solitude; and yet the sailor, for protracted periods can hardly be by himself for five minutes in the course of a day. But still, though this is a big disadvantage, it has its compensation: no one gets a more rigorous schooling than the sailor in community living, in ‘the art of living together’. And is not this the most important, if the least mastered, of all the arts? I might speak of the discipline of the Service—of that discipline which is imposed from without—and of its moral and spiritual value (when it is wisely administered, as it usually is) to the individual and to the Service as a whole. No ship can be happy without it. But I would rather remind you of this other discipline, this inward discipline of the spirit, which the sailor must impose upon himself if his life at sea is to be bearable at all. He has to learn to consume his own smoke. If he goes about ‘with a face like a sea-boot’, spreading gloom and depression around him, he will soon know about it—not from any higher authority, but from his messmates. A ‘good messmate’ is the best title a sailor can merit. It is one, I am sure, which our Lord would honour. It involves a high measure of forbearance and long-suffering, of [page 158](#) cheerfulness and self-control—all distinctively Christian virtues. Sometimes, of course, it may involve reaction when the restraints are removed. When he sets his foot on shore, the sailor may not always be particular about his company, so long as it is change of company: his self-control may lapse. But this inner discipline goes a long way towards making him the likeable soul he is usually found to be. He's a good companion, considerate of others, tolerant of his fellows, easy to get on with and ready to lend a helping hand. He is cheerful and generous in disposition, and fond of his home above all other things.

The Navy has a traditional respect for religion. Careful provision is made for the observance of divine worship. And you would be wrong in regarding this religious tradition as a formal custom, artificially preserved by a sentimental respect for the past. Nor is it artfully sustained as a useful piece of Service discipline. There is far more to it than that, as you would realise in the simple sincerity and spontaneity of a naval church service. It's a tradition which through the generations is nourished and kept alive by the sailor's everyday experiences as he passes to and fro upon the deep. From these it continually draws fresh sustenance and new life. Some people are always anxious, foolishly anxious, lest religion should perish from the earth. There is still less reason for anxiety lest it should perish from the sea—from the lives of those ‘who go down to the sea in ships and who see the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep’.

¹ Rev. G. T. Robson, OBE, MC,* [RNZN](#) (C of E); Takapuna, [Auckland](#); born [Te Aroha](#), 7 Jul 1887; Chaplain, New Zealand Territorial Forces, 1914–31; served overseas with 1st Canterbury Battalion, 1st New Zealand Division, 1917–19; appointed Chaplain, New Zealand Naval Forces, 14 May 1927; Senior Chaplain, [Royal New Zealand Navy](#); retired May 1948.

* First World War.

² Rev. C. B. Ellis, RN, (C of E); born [Ireland](#), 27 Jul 1904; joined Royal Navy 2 Oct 1934; Chaplain in HMNZS [Leander](#) 30 Apr 1937–6 Oct 1939.

³ Rev. R. A. Noakes, (C of E); born [Kent](#), England, 23 Dec 1913; Chaplain in HMNZS [Leander](#) 6 Oct 1939–11 Aug 1941.

⁴ Rev. G. M. McKenzie, VRD, (C of E); Kelburn, [Wellington](#); born Southbrook, [Canterbury](#), 1 Aug 1898; served in New Zealand Territorial Forces 6 Apr 1914–22 Oct 1931; appointed Honorary Chaplain, RNVR (Wellington Division) 4 Feb 1932; temporary Chaplain, RNZNVR, 10 Jun 1940; served in HMNZS [Achilles](#) 10 June 1940–23 Jan 1941; HMNZS *Tamaki* 24 Jan 1941–8 May 1946.

⁵ Rev. C. F. Webster, (C of E); born England, 2 Dec 1910; Vicar of Mangaweka 1938–41; Chaplain, [New Zealand Military Forces](#), Foxton Camp 1940–41; appointed Chaplain, [RNZN](#) and served in HMNZS [Leander](#) 25 Oct 1941–21 Jan 1944; HMNZS [Achilles](#) 22 Jan-9 Nov 1944; died Trincomalee, 13 Nov 1944.

⁶ Rev. W. G. Morgan (C of E); born Wales, 9 Jul 1913; served as Able Seaman in minesweepers 1941–42; appointed Chaplain, [Royal Navy](#) 1942; served in HMS *Rooke* 1942–43; HMS *Slinger* 1944–45; HMNZS [Achilles](#) 3 Jul- 6 Dec 1945.

⁷ Rev. C. G. J. Evans (C of E); born Wales, 1903; joined [Royal Navy](#) as Chaplain 30 Oct 1936; served in HMNZS [Achilles](#) 9 Jan-19 Sep 1946.

⁸ Rev. T. R. Parfitt (C of E); born England, 24 May 1911; joined Royal Navy 22 Jun 1943; Chaplain in HMNZS *Gambia* 13 Oct 1943–1 Jul 1946.

⁹ Rev. W. G. Parker (C of E); born [Wellington](#) 1905; appointed Chaplain, [Royal Navy](#), 31 Jan 1935; served China Station in HMS *Daedalus* and HMS *Prince of Wales*; killed in action, 10 Dec 1941.

¹⁰ Rev. B. J. Williams (C of E); [Wellington](#); born Scarborough, England, 27 Apr 1902; Chaplain to Seamen's Mission, [Wellington](#), Feb 1924–Oct 1949; appointed Honorary Chaplain, RNZNVR, 15 Jul 1936.

¹¹ Rev. Fr. N. H. Gascoigne (RC); [Wellington](#); born [Palmerston North](#), 14 Dec 1910; Chaplain of the Wellington Institute of the Apostleship of the Sea and of the Port of [Wellington](#); appointed Honorary Chaplain, RNZNVR, 31 Mar 1942.

¹² Rev. J. F. Feron (C of E); [Christchurch](#); born [Sydney](#), 3 Mar 1892; appointed Honorary Chaplain, RNZNVR, 21 Dec 1933.

¹³ Rev. Fr. M. Kenefick (RC); [Auckland](#); born [Ireland](#), 19 Sep 1908; Chaplain of the Auckland Institute of the Apostleship of the Sea and of the Port of [Auckland](#); appointed Honorary Chaplain, RNZNVR, 14 Jun 1943.

¹⁴ Rev. D. N. Pryor (Presby); [Auckland](#); born [Dunedin](#), 13 Mar 1902; appointed Honorary Chaplain, RNZNVR, 11 Sep 1942.

¹⁵ Canon H. K. Vickery, VRD, (C of E); [Auckland](#); born 12 Jul 1885; served as private in Australian Imperial Forces overseas, 1914–16; Chaplain to Seamen's Mission, Newcastle, [New South Wales](#), and port chaplain, Royal Australian Naval Reserve, 1922–28; Chaplain to Seamen's Mission, [Auckland](#), since 1928; appointed Honorary Chaplain, RNVR (Auckland Division) 4 Feb 1929; Chaplain in hospital ship [Maunganui](#), Apr-Oct 1941.

HONOURS AND AWARDS

Officer of the Order of the British Empire

- G. T. Robson