

Chaplains in the Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force

by MICHAEL UNDERHILL

FOREWORD



By [Lieutenant-General Sir Bernard Freyberg](#),
vc, gcmg, kcb, kbe, dso, lld.

I feel honoured to have been invited to write a foreword to the History of Chaplains who served with the New Zealand Forces in the [Middle East](#) and the [Pacific](#).

The volume itself covers a vital period of world history. The [Reverend Mr. Underhill](#) has done his work well, and his observations are always worth reading. Some of his views are criticisms of the military system in war, but his comments are always fair and his suggestions constructive.

I was particularly interested in what he had to say on such difficult problems as 'compulsory Church services', 'grousing', and the all-important question of 'morale'. Some of us may not be fully in accord with his attitude towards our spiritual unpreparedness for war. Personally, I have always felt that the division of opinion within the Church itself was unfortunate, and that some of the sermons on compulsory military training did not help. However, that is now of the past.

Some reference is made by the writer to the assistance given to Chaplains by the GOC, and for the information of readers I may say that it was my practice to help the Chaplains as far as I was able, knowing, as a regimental soldier in the last war, what lay ahead of us, and the need for religion and the value of the Unit Padre.

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I take this opportunity of expressing my sincere appreciation of the great work of New Zealand Chaplains of all denominations. They were a fine team, and their untiring efforts were of untold value and did much to sustain and comfort our men during the critical stages of the war.

Bernard Freyberg

Lieutenant-General,
General Officer Commanding,
2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force

REGULATIONS

The duties to be performed by a chaplain include the Sunday services, baptisms, churchings, funerals, attending the sick in hospital and reading prayers with the convalescents, visiting soldiers under sentence in military prisons or detention barracks at least once a week ... besides attending generally to the religious instruction and welfare of the officers and soldiers and of their families.

Chaplains will be treated with the respect due to their rank and profession, and COs will render them every assistance in carrying out their duties.

King's Regulations for the Army

Chaplains will serve as friends and counsellors to all members of the command to which they are assigned. They will strive to promote religion, morals, and morale, and will co-operate fully with commanding officers in the accomplishment of this purpose.

General Provisions for Chaplains in the American Army

FIELD-MARSHALS

‘The clergy are the most conservative, tiresome, unimaginative men to deal with that I have ever come across: I suggested all sorts of things to them: proper hymns like “Eternal Father Strong to Save” and “Onward Christian Soldiers”, but they would not listen to me: I want this service to be a great recruiting occasion.’

Lord Kitchener, quoted in *Autobiography*, by Margot Tennant

‘I should as soon think of fighting without my artillery as without my chaplains.’

Lord Montgomery in All Saints' Cathedral Hall, [Cairo](#)

COURAGE

‘Courage is not merely a virtue; it is *the* virtue. Without it there are no other virtues. Faith, hope, charity, all the rest don't become virtues unless it takes courage to exercise them.

‘I have never met a man with moral courage who wouldn't, when it was really necessary, face bodily danger.’

General Sir William Slim

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CHAPTER 1

ORIGINS

FROM THE EARLIEST times armies have felt the need for spiritual advisers and Divine aid. In the Old Testament there are many descriptions of battles, and it was the rule rather than the exception for one man to combine the rôles of Commander-in-Chief and Senior Chaplain. Spiritual exercises were considered more important than military training, and a high standard of morals was demanded, with severe penalties for looting or misbehaviour on leave. The God of the Hebrews was at first considered as a God of War, and the title 'Lord of Hosts', meaning God of the Armies, was appropriate.

In modern terms, Jehovah was expected to supply advance intelligence and secret weapons. On occasions the sun would stand still or the sea be made dry, while at other times victory would be assured if the Senior Chaplain kept his arms raised, or if the Church parade marched round the walls of the besieged city.

In the same way the Greeks sought advance information from the oracles and the Romans depended upon their College of Augurs. In fact the tribal or national gods have always been expected to produce supernatural aid and make victories certain. The Red Indian medicine men, the African witch doctors, the Dervishes, and others have all enlisted Divine aid in their wars, and with strong religious propaganda instilled a splendid fighting spirit in their soldiers. In modern times this practice was evident among the Japanese in the Second World War, in which their soldiers, with total disregard for comfort or personal safety, were often worthy exponents of their strong but limited religion of Emperor-worship.

But the Hebrews were pioneers in religious research, and the history of their nation, especially in defeat, was woven into their theology until they believed that prosperity in peace or in war depended entirely on the religious integrity of their people.

In the Christian era the whole attitude towards war has changed until in these days it is considered as a thing essentially evil, only to be embarked upon when the causes of disagreements have been scrupulously examined, and when no alternative remains. The [page 2](#) rôle of the clergy in wartime exemplifies this change of thought. In the early days they were expected to lead the attacks as well as the prayers, and there are many examples in history of Popes, Archbishops, and Bishops initiating wars, inspiring crusades, and taking a leading part in battles. Gradually the idea of combatant clergy became repugnant, but throughout Christian history the need for military chaplains has been recognised and met, although even today the only recognition of chaplains in the French Army is the granting of certain privileges to clergy who happen to be serving in the ranks.

In the British Army the word 'chaplain' first appears in the reign of Edward I, and from that period there is constant mention of chaplains—one of the accounts of the Battle of Agincourt was written by a chaplain. Gradually their position became more clearly defined in regard to

duties, rank, and establishment. In the New Model Army of Cromwell there were Regimental Chaplains, led by a Presbyterian, Master Bowles.

Royal Army Chaplains' Department

The Royal Army Chaplains' Department (usually referred to as the RACHD) dates its official origin from the year 1796 when a system of brigade chaplains was introduced under the first Chaplain- General. At first the Church of England held a complete monopoly, but provision was made for Presbyterians in 1827, Roman Catholics in 1836, and 'Other Protestants' in 1862. In 1859 the rank of chaplain was made official and has since remained the same. Uniform was prescribed in 1860 and became compulsory.

In New Zealand the first chaplain was probably Bishop Selwyn who during the Maori Wars went into camp and travelled with the troops. His habit of ministering to his Church members in both the warring forces may have been logical on Christian grounds but it led to frequent misunderstandings. Eventually the War Office authorised him to appoint three additional chaplains.

At an early date chaplains were appointed to Territorial regiments. Seven New Zealand chaplains served in the Boer War, and many played an honourable part in the First World War. Unfortunately few records were kept of their organisation as a department and their work received little mention in the official histories.

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In the thirties came the Disarmament Treaties and a very strong wave of Pacifism. Pacifist books and societies appeared all over the Empire; huge public meetings were held in [Britain](#) and popular pacifist manifestos were widely signed. Well-known politicians and clergymen were frequent speakers on pacifist platforms. Widely read pacifist books were published. These facts should be remembered when considering the Church in New Zealand before the Second World War. The clergy were influenced by this pacifist teaching, and many felt uncertain of their own positions. The result was that the Territorial Army was looked upon with suspicion by a large section of the community, and many denominations took little trouble in the appointment of Territorial chaplains.

New Zealand Army Chaplains' Department

Officially there was in the New Zealand Army a Chaplains' Department on a Territorial basis, but there were no full-time chaplains. The Army Chaplaincy was administered by the Adjutant-General's office, assisted by three District Chaplains' Advisory Committees corresponding to the three Army districts. These District Committees consisted of civilian clergy, representing the different denominations, who did the work in their own time and at their own expense.

Their duty had been to nominate Territorial chaplains, but the system was not designed for war conditions and so it is not surprising that in 1939 most of the Territorial chaplains were either over age or else physically unfit for active service. These three District Committees continued to

function for the first three years of the war, with the addition of one full-time administrative chaplain who was mobilised as a member of the New Zealand Forces. This was Archdeacon Hawkins,¹ who had been the Senior Chaplain to the 1st New Zealand Expeditionary Force.

Although the District Committees were superseded in 1942 by the Chaplains' Dominion Advisory Council, it should be remembered that they faced great difficulties, and that the members acted only in a spare-time capacity. Indeed, they achieved much under difficult conditions, and official files and minute-books bear testimony to the [page 4](#) many problems they had to face, some trivial, but many of primary importance. They had to work out denominational ratios; they were responsible for the selection and recruiting of chaplains; and they had to understand the chaplains' needs and supply necessary equipment. As there was little tradition and few printed regulations, they had to fight administrative battles in regard to proper recognition of chaplains, and define their privileges and the scope of their work. The Army authorities did their best, but they were busy with other matters and had little precedent to guide them.

There were numerous misunderstandings and mistakes. For example, there was a popular legend in the Department that at the beginning of the war two civilian clergymen approached the Army direct and were commissioned and on an embarkation roll before any Chaplains' Committee had heard of them. In all, there were many difficulties and problems, and the aim of this book is to record how they were met and nearly always solved.

¹ Ven. Archdeacon H. A. Hawkins (C of E); born [Christchurch](#), 20 Aug 1873; served in First World War 1915-17; in Second World War was Senior Chaplain to the Forces in New Zealand, 1940-43; died [Auckland](#), 4 Dec 1948.

CHAPTER 2

THE CHAPLAIN GOES INTO CAMP

IT is difficult in the days of peace to recapture or realise the general atmosphere of a mobilisation camp at the beginning of a war. In those early days the camp authorities were overwhelmed by administrative work and the development of the camp. They had to look after billets, general amenities, supplies, staff, instructors, and training materials as well as make arrangements for the arrival and departure of troops. All these subjects had to be considered in an atmosphere of speed and urgency. The brand-new chaplain was just one more problem for these hard-working and harassed officers.

In 1942 an excellent short course was instituted at [Trentham](#) for chaplains immediately prior to their entry into camp, and here they learned much of Army procedure and routine. But at the beginning of the war the chaplain knew very little about his own official position. There was no handbook of chaplains' work and *King's Regulations* were not very informative. The Army authorities were unable to supply much further information, and in any case were far too busy to answer many questions.

The chaplain went into camp dressed as a captain. His equipment was a box of hymn books, his Bible and Communion vessels, and a Union Jack. He knew that he was expected to take services

on Sundays, but for the rest he had to work out his own destiny and evolve his own daily programme.

To some his task may have seemed easy—the continuation of his normal civilian duties with the trifling difference that both he and his parishioners would be wearing uniform. But this conception of his work was far from the truth. The ordinary civilian clergyman is a specialist, trained to work in what might be called the ‘parochial machine’, with a church as the central headquarters and the work shared by committees and divided into several organisations. In addition, the civilian clergyman lives in a routine which has been established through the centuries. His day is spent in prayer and study, in sermon preparation and the writing of letters, in visiting the sick and the whole, in private interviews, in meetings [page 6](#) and classes of instruction. He has to spend much of his time in specialised and general reading, and this presumes that he has a large library of his own and access to books of reference. It also presumes that he has privacy and quiet.

But when the clergyman becomes an Army chaplain he finds that he has no church, no organisations or committee-men, and his library consists of the two or three books he can carry in his pack. The Army doctor, on the other hand, was more happily placed. He was supplied with trained assistants, with instruments and equipment, and it was considered quite natural for him to interrupt training periods with medical parades. The chaplain often envied the doctor: his position seemed so much more secure and his ‘union’ so much more powerful. The chaplain was sometimes made to feel that he represented just one more annoying complication in Army life. By the end of the war the position of the New Zealand chaplain and his Department was clearly defined, and probably no body of chaplains received better co-operation or more sympathy from Authority; but this progress took place during the war years, and it is important to remember how different the position was at the beginning.

In the first three Echelons there were eight chaplains who had seen service in the First World War, but only one of these, Padre F. H. Buck,¹ had previous experience as a chaplain. In addition some of the others had served with Territorial regiments. These men had a working knowledge of Army routine and phraseology and their experience was of value in establishing the tradition of the Department. But consider the position of the brand-new chaplain who came into camp with no previous military experience. First of all he would probably look around for his church. He would be shown a canteen, a welfare hut, a cinema, or a parade ground. The idea of garrison churches which was common in other Empire forces found little or no expression in the 2nd NZEF. Here was a problem right away. How was the chaplain to get the right devotional atmosphere in a canteen or a cinema? Of course it was impossible, but he had to learn how to make the most of these [page 7](#) facilities. On active service he would consider himself lucky to have any building at all; even in New Zealand camps he would often have to conduct his Sunday services in the open air.

After examining his ‘church’ the chaplain might set out to find his parishioners. He might consider that his work lay solely with the members of his own denomination, or that he should concentrate on that block or area of the camp to which he had been posted. The Sunday Church services in New Zealand camps were usually arranged on a denominational basis, and here for a brief moment the chaplain had an opportunity of meeting his own Church members. But it was

difficult to discover their names and impossible to remember them. He learned the names of many among whom he lived, but here again was a difficulty. The biggest hardship of chaplaincy work was the lack of permanence. There was no security in time. It was impossible to plan ahead. The Bible Class planned for the following week would have to give place to a route march or one of the many other probable contingencies. The men he wanted to see might be on leave, on guard duty, or on some fatigue.

The civilian clergyman is accustomed to work on a progressive plan which bears fruit as he gets to know his people better. But the Army gave little time for progressive work as the military parishioners were constantly changing. The chaplain had to increase the tempo of his work as much of his time was spent amongst strangers, and he had to achieve what he could at the first meeting. When eventually he was posted to a unit with the Division overseas he did have an opportunity of becoming part of the family and of getting to know a large number of men, and yet perhaps half his life in the Army would be spent in training or transit camps, in troopships or hospitals, where an unending stream of new faces and new names would be his daily portion.

Civilian to Soldier

Although he did not, while in camp in New Zealand, learn as many names as he wished, the chaplain certainly learned much about the New Zealand soldier. Alongside the soldier he was medically examined, inoculated, issued with equipment, lectured, marched about, and criticised until he began to fit into Army life. He went on route marches and night manoeuvres, and in the daytime toured the training grounds, often becoming an extra member [page 8](#) of an instruction class. He found many opportunities for friendly conversation and was delighted with the friendship he met.

His modest entry into the everyday life of the camp, whether it was joining in a march or a football match, won for the chaplain most undeserved praise. At first sight it would have appeared that the ordinary New Zealander thought so little of the clergy that when he came across one reasonably human and friendly he thought he had discovered a phenomenon. This was due, perhaps, to the fact that many men had never met a clergyman on a normal social basis, and had come to think of the clergy as a race apart, as 'wowsers', puritans, spoil-sports, saints, or professors who were not to be understood by ordinary men.

The chaplains were greatly encouraged by this friendship. It was the one encouraging fact in a life full of uncertainties and frustration. The men were good; they were decent; they were friendly and touchingly grateful for the smallest kindness. The chaplain needed encouragement at this time. He belonged to a unit, the Chaplains' Department, which existed only in name. Few of his military seniors could give him advice that was at once authoritative and accurate. From old soldiers, majors and above, he received suggestions that were as varied as they were conflicting. His own Church authorities and the Chaplains' Committees had as little knowledge of military matters as they had authority. There were all the problems of denominational relationships, of equipment, of daily routine, and often of unsympathetic commanders. The chaplain did not know whether the meagre results of his work were due to his own deficiencies or to an unreasonable attitude of his military superiors, or whether perhaps the results were perfectly natural under the circumstances.

When a man's position and job is well established and well understood, he can meet the occasional setback with calmness, but when there is no established practice he is tempted to attribute every difficulty to official apathy or hostility. There can be no true picture of the chaplain's life in the first two years of the war unless these fears and misgivings are realised. The days in camp were difficult but they were of great value. He began to feel at home in the Army and to know his way about amongst the mass of initials and [page 9](#) abbreviations used for appointments and military terms; he made the first of a long series of friendly contacts with the staffs of the welfare organisations, and above all, he discovered what a fine man the New Zealand soldier can be—a judgment that he never had cause to change.

Troopships

When the chaplain left New Zealand on a troopship he discovered for the first time one of the most difficult aspects of Army life— enforced idleness. Not the idleness of doing nothing, but that of having little or no opportunity of doing his own work. Later on he learned to accept this philosophically, and could spend hours and days with a clear conscience, jogging across the desert in a truck, sitting in a train or crouching in a slit-trench, cut off from all pastoral work. At this stage the chaplain was on fire to justify his existence, but there was little scope for his work on a troopship. with five or six men in every cabin, no privacy, every inch of the deck occupied, and seldom any public place for an evening meeting. The ships were crowded to capacity and resembled anthills with swarms of men on the move from morning till night. The chaplain searched in vain for a full-time occupation in days that were filled with boat-drill, periods of exercise, and training. It is a pity that some authoritative statement was not sent back to New Zealand warning chaplains that they would have few opportunities for work at sea, and advising them to concentrate on their Sunday and weekday services, visiting the ship's hospital, and the pursuit of casual conversations. On the other hand, several chaplains found a most fruitful field for work on troopships.

At the different ports of call where troops had shore leave, problems of behaviour began to appear and the chaplains found opportunities in their services for talks on 'Wine, women, and song although in the early days this subject was dealt with too frequently, or at least without sufficient finesse. The discomforts of the voyage, the tropical climate, and the constant danger of submarine attack had their inevitable effect on the men. New Zealand began to seem a distant country, and the most light-hearted soldier found himself thinking more seriously of family ties and discovering a new comfort in Church services and the rather unofficial outlook of the chaplain. It was pleasant to lean over the rails of the ship and talk to the padre about home, to pull out the paybook, show him photographs, and discuss plans for the distant, post-war days.

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Many things of interest happened on these voyages, but, taken by and large, life on a troopship was nothing like a pleasure cruise and every soldier and chaplain was delighted when he stepped ashore in Egypt.

¹ Rev. F. H. Buck, MC,* (C. of E); [California, USA](#); born [Canada](#). 24, Dec 1895; in First World War served in Canadian Forces.

*[First World War](#).

CHAPTER 3

ARRIVAL IN EGYPT

SEVEN chaplains stepped ashore with the [First Echelon](#) in Egypt. On their arrival at [Maadi Camp](#) six of them were posted to units, and Padre E. B. Moore,¹ who had been a combatant officer in the First World War, was appointed Senior Chaplain at Divisional Headquarters and acting Senior Chaplain to the Forces. To this group fell the task of laying the foundations of the Chaplains' Department, 2nd NZEF.

[Maadi Camp](#) was the New Zealand Expeditionary Force Base throughout the war, and in time it became extremely well equipped with good roads, adequate buildings, and splendid recreational centres. It lay on the edge of the desert and was subject to sandstorms, glare, and heat. It was within easy reach of [Cairo](#) with all its unsurpassed facilities for leave, such as sightseeing, cinemas, restaurants, and well-stocked shops. And yet few soldiers enjoyed being posted to [Maadi](#). After a campaign its comforts would be appreciated for two or three weeks only, and the bright lights of [Cairo](#) would be an attraction as long as the soldier's surplus money lasted, but then the monotony of camp life made itself felt, and the climate of the [Nile Delta](#) would take its toll of nervous energy. After a day spent on the camp training grounds one would feel too tired to explore the nearby places of historic interest, and it was easier to look for a good meal, drinks, and a cinema; but even this simple programme was made distasteful by the army of street urchins, pavement salesmen, and touts who fastened relentlessly upon the soldier as soon as he set foot in a [Cairo](#) street.

And there were other problems. Beer was usually in short supply and the only substitutes were often potent, nasty, and dangerous. Organised vice was an integral part of [Cairo](#) life and the soldier was often accosted in streets and cafés. Under these circumstances life for any long period in [Maadi Camp](#) was difficult and often led to a rapid deterioration in morale. But alongside the difficulties and temptations there lay many opportunities for healthy recreation. It was the chaplains' duty to encourage the full use of these opportunities.

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The chaplains themselves had the free use of an excellent club in All Saints' Cathedral, where in quiet comfort they could meet their colleagues from every armed force in the [Middle East](#). Members of the British community in [Cairo](#), and other nationalities as well, went out of their way to befriend the soldier on leave. Many supplied hospitality in their homes, while others ran first-class clubs, notably the [Maadi Tent](#) and 'Music for All'. Sporting clubs made their grounds available for troops and there were fine facilities for tennis, golf, and bathing.

The civilian churches, too, were not behindhand. Soldiers were made welcome at their services and time and again they packed them to overflowing; in fact it became the custom to run Army transport from [Maadi Camp](#) on Sunday evenings to these services, and many went to All Saints' Cathedral, to St. Andrew's, and to the Methodist and other churches. There was something

essentially civilian and refreshing in going to a real church after the dusty heat of a military camp, and great pains were taken to make the services helpful for soldiers. In addition, the churches put their halls at the disposal of the troops and often supplied refreshments and arranged concerts. In the same way, many New Zealanders attended the little civilian churches in [Maadi](#) and [Helwan](#), and the Roman Catholic Convent at [Maadi](#) extended an open invitation on Sunday afternoons.

But Cairo contained many other forms of Christian life which were well worth investigating. There were many little-known Christian denominations of great antiquity which performed their old traditional rites in lovely churches built many centuries ago, and in addition the chaplains made contact with many Christian missionaries working among the Moslems. All these influences found expression in the chaplains' sermons and in casual conversations, and when men showed interest it was easy to organise a visit to some ancient church or missionary hospital.

But in the early days the difficulties of Departmental organisation and the problems of [Cairo](#) were uppermost in the minds of chaplains. So many precedents had to be made, so many new questions answered. Some commanding officers, intensely occupied with unit training, were at first uncertain what facilities should be given to chaplains, and some tended to play safe and avoid making decisions.



BAALBEK TO TUNIS

[page 13](#) Other colonels made too many decisions and gave the chaplains orders instead of suggestions: the chaplain was to censor letters, to go on a route march, to organise a concert, to find sporting equipment, to become Mess Secretary. Later, when the chaplain's position was better understood, there was seldom any friction, but in those early days the chaplains in some cases laboured under a sense of persecution and frustration.

Influence of the GOC

One circumstance dominated the life of the Chaplains' Department and was instrumental in solving all difficulties. This was the continued and active sympathy of the General Officer Commanding, 2nd NZEF, [General Freyberg](#). He attended an early chaplains' conference and let

it be known then, and on many subsequent occasions, that he wanted his chaplains to have all reasonable help, and moreover, that they were to consider themselves free at any time to approach him either personally or through the Senior Chaplain. The Senior Chaplain often reported how constant was the GOC's interest, and this powerful support had a far-reaching effect. When a chaplain met man-made difficulties or felt that he was receiving unfair treatment, he realised that he always had a friendly source of appeal and could, if necessary, bring a reprimand upon some officer. On one occasion at least the Senior Chaplain 'brought down the wrath of God' upon some offending commander, but generally the knowledge of the GOC's sympathy was sufficient in itself. For the chaplains would put up with temporary obstructions, being confident, and rightly confident, that under such leadership in the 2nd NZEF common sense was eventually bound to prevail.

Chaplains' Conferences

At an early date in 1940 the first chaplains' conference was held in the [YMCA](#) in [Maadi](#). This came to be a regular weekly event in [Maadi](#) and also, when conditions permitted, a frequent event in the Division. All chaplains would attend, and the presence of the Roman Catholics supplied a solidarity and family spirit which must have been rare in other Empire forces. The meetings would begin with a period of silent prayer, the reading of minutes, and the weekly posting of chaplains to certain duties, such as visits to [page 14](#) prisons or services for small isolated units. Problems of a general nature were shared and discussed, and many a chaplain was encouraged to find that his difficulties were not due entirely to his own incompetence but were common to all his brothers. Perhaps the greatest value of these conferences was the opportunity they supplied for the chaplains to get to know each other and become friends. The wide and friendly acquaintanceship so common in the 2nd NZEF found full expression in the Chaplains' Department. There were never more than fifty-five chaplains at any one time, and thanks to these conferences they became one friendly team, knowing each other by Christian names; and as time went by the mutual liking and respect increased. But this friendliness was not there ready-made: it had to be created, and it came through wise leadership and the satisfactory solution of some of the early problems. In addition to these conferences, the Senior Chaplain held regular meetings with the senior chaplains of the different denominations when matters of policy and posting would be discussed.

Unit Chaplains

The principle of unit chaplains was adopted early in 1940 at the request of the GOC. This was a new development: in the British Army the chaplains were posted, primarily, to minister to their own denominations. But the unit chaplain was expected to be the friend and adviser of everyone in the unit and to conduct Church parades on an undenominational basis. There were great advantages in this system, for the chaplain became an integral part of the regimental life. He was known in the unit as 'Our Padre' and few more honourable titles can be imagined. He shared the common life of the unit with its experience of danger, boredom, and hardship. He came to know well a large number of individuals, including officials and senior officers; and, after satisfactory service in several campaigns, he had a standing and influence in the unit which could be of inestimable value in his work.

But the principle of unit chaplains had its dangers. Many soldiers imagined that the normal divisions of the Church could be lightly set aside in wartime, and some common form of Christianity laid down for the whole Army, with perhaps some special exceptions made for Roman Catholics. Those who held this opinion [page 15](#) were usually those who knew least about the chaplains' work. The chaplains were sometimes treated as though they were a kind of extra welfare officer, useful for organising concerts and refereeing football matches, and some soldiers would have simplified Christianity till all its essentials were missing. Undenominational services and teaching could be very dangerous, introducing a form of religion without doctrine, worship, or vitality. Unfortunately many soldiers had been brought up with little knowledge of Christian teaching and practice. Their doctrine consisted of a vague 'belief in the Lord' and respect for the Golden Rule. They often carried a New Testament in their pocket, not so much for reading purposes, but as a kind of talisman, the traditional protection against the bullet, while their ideas of a liturgical service seldom rose higher than the informal Sunday night song service.

But the chaplains were accredited representatives of specific denominations. They had joined the Army on the definite understanding that they would minister as adequately as possible to their own Church members. While it is obvious that in battle niceties of denominational distinction can be forgotten, the fact remained that only a small proportion of a man's army life is spent in action; and of course it was unlikely that the fifty-odd chaplains in the 2nd NZEF, most of whom were comparatively junior in their own Churches, would find an easy solution to the divisions of the Church, a problem which has baffled the finest theologians for many years. To the outsider these problems of denominational relationship may have appeared trivial in time of war, but they were real problems and they caused much heart-burning to the chaplains. The principle of unit chaplains was made to work and to work well, but it took three or four years, with many trials and errors, before a satisfactory solution was reached in which there was the maximum of co-operation and sound religious teaching.

Denominational Considerations

As far as possible each denomination was represented by its own chaplains who were appointed on the ratio of Church membership in the 2nd NZEF. At the outset the denominational figures were based on information taken from the men's attestation forms, but after conscription came into force the denominational ratios [page 16](#) were calculated on the normal civilian religious statistics, which in 1942 were as follows:

	Per cent
Church of England	44.25
Presbyterian	27.10
Roman Catholic	15.10
Methodist	8.75
Other Denominations	4.80

The final establishment of chaplains in the 2nd NZEF was fifty, excluding one with the [Forestry Group](#) in England, and the denominations were represented as follows:

Church of England	20
Presbyterian	14
Roman Catholic	8
Methodist	4
Other Denominations	4

After many trials and experiments the establishment for the 2nd New Zealand Division was fixed at twenty-six chaplains, leaving twenty-four for the various duties at Base, in the hospitals, and in Line of Communication units.

In New Zealand camps it was often possible, with the help of civilian clergy, for all the larger denominations to be served by their own clergy, but overseas with the Expeditionary Force this was impossible, and, when the principle of unit chaplains was adopted, the posting of chaplains still had to be arranged on a wide denominational framework, which needed great care in preparation and much tolerance in working. For instance, when brigades had four chaplains, it would have been easy to appoint one from the four largest denominations, but this would have still left great inequalities. The smaller denominations would have had no representation at all, and the Church of England chaplain would have had more than five times as many Church members as the Methodist chaplain. However, a system of posting was evolved in which each large military group had Church of England, Presbyterian, and Roman Catholic representation, while the Methodist chaplains and those of the other denominations were distributed as widely as possible.

There were two divergent views which might be said to represent [page 17](#) the opinions of Bishop G. V. Gerard,² the first Senior Chaplain in the 2nd NZEF, and his successor, Padre J. W. McKenzie.³ They both admitted that the Roman Catholics should have complete freedom and independence, but for the rest the Bishop looked for the continuation of denominational teaching while the Presbyterian believed that much compromise would be justified in wartime. Bishop Gerard could not accept the principle of inter-communion and he wanted a system in which Church of England men could receive the sacraments of their Church, instruction for confirmation, and the liturgical services of the Book of Common Prayer. He favoured frequent denominational Church parades. Padre McKenzie readily admitted that the Church of England has certain exclusive teachings and practices, but he felt that the denominations should be almost interchangeable, so that each chaplain could give full religious ministrations to every man in his area. The Bishop was thinking of the ever-present danger that the Christian Gospel should be over-simplified until its vitality was killed, while the Presbyterian realised that the Chaplains' Department could never succeed unless there was complete understanding and co-operation amongst all the chaplains.

Towards the end of the war many opportunities were found for giving denominational teaching, while unhealthy denominational rivalry was avoided by the strong friendship and mutual trust inside the Department for which Padre McKenzie himself had been largely responsible.

The four 'other denominations' who had chaplains were the [Salvation Army](#), the Baptists, the Church of Christ, and the Congregationalists, and where possible two of these chaplains were

posted to the Division. At first, Roman Catholics were posted to units as unit chaplains but this did not work satisfactorily. Roman Catholic chaplains had a very extensive task in serving all their [page 18](#) Church members in the brigade groups, which meant that their units saw little of them. If they were fulfilling their duties correctly they could not hope to act as normal unit chaplains. Accordingly Roman Catholic chaplains were posted to Field Ambulances as the centre of their sphere of work; later they were posted to the different Brigade headquarters and this proved a satisfactory arrangement. In action they worked at the Advanced Dressing Stations.

The Western Desert

In August 1940 the New Zealand force, still consisting of the [First Echelon](#), moved to [Maaten Baggush](#), some twenty miles east of Mersa Matruh. Much has been written about the Egyptian and Libyan deserts, and adequate mention made of the vast distances, the featureless expanses, the flies, the lack of water, the fiery sandstorms of summer and the surprising cold of winter; and yet, with all these hardships, the British soldier began to find an almost indefinable attraction in this Bedouin existence. Polar explorers have described the fascinating changes of colour in a land covered by snow and ice, and the desert, in its own way, had a richness of colour and variety in comparison with which the life of the [Nile](#) Delta seemed fussy and ignoble. The desert was vast, and quiet, and clean, and its austere simplicity satisfied some deep human appetite. It is significant that St. Paul sought the desert for his three-year period of spiritual training and discipline after his conversion; and it was the Early Christian anchorites in Egypt with their experience of desert solitude, who initiated the whole system of Christian monasticism. Deserts change little through the ages and the twentieth-century soldier was still subject to their spiritual influence. In fact his military life made him specially susceptible to such influences, for unconsciously he was practising monasticism and largely fulfilling the threefold vows of a monk in his life of chastity, poverty, and obedience. The vast distances, the silences, and the loneliness purified his thinking, and introduced into Army life a friendliness that discounted hardships and a nobility that softened the horrors of battle.

But it takes time to see anything attractive in desert life, and in 1940 the New Zealanders had to learn the hard lessons of desert [page 19](#) lore and submit to painful self-adjustment. The troops were widely dispersed because of the danger of air attack, and unit Church parades gave place to the more intimate battery and company services. This meant much more work for the chaplain, with five or six services a morning instead of one, but it seemed more attractive and valuable. The hard formality of the parade ground was absent, and in the evenings as he wandered around the unit, the chaplain found a welcome that had not been apparent in the crowded life at Base. With the dispersal the family life and individuality of units began to grow, and the chaplain found many fresh opportunities to get to know individuals and to play his part in the corporate life. The New Zealand welfare machine which was to give such outstanding service from [Alamein](#) till the end of the war was not yet completely organised, and many chaplains felt justified in spending much of their time looking after canteens and attending to the material welfare of the men. The culmination of all their work in that year was at Christmas with its special services and festivities —the first Christmas away from home, the first Christmas celebrated in the desert.

When the New Zealand transport units took part in General Wavell's Libyan offensive of December 1940, Padre V. R. Jamieson,⁴ attached to the New Zealand Army Service Corps, began that long saga of desert campaigning which ended in [Tunisia](#) with the award of the MBE for long and faithful service. His parish was always on moving wheels, and he had to travel enormous distances to keep in touch with his men. He was present in every action fought by the Division from 1940 till the end of the Tunisian campaign in May 1943, he was Divisional Senior Chaplain from [Bardia](#) to [Tripoli](#) (November 1942 - January 1943), and he watched the growth of the ASC until his work was shared by three additional chaplains.

The Second Echelon

In March 1941 the [Second Echelon](#) arrived in Egypt from the [United Kingdom](#). Eleven chaplains, among them Bishop Gerard, who had been appointed Senior Chaplain to the Forces, 2nd NZEF, [page 20](#) had accompanied this force to England; it had arrived there in June 1940 after [Dunkirk](#) and just before the fall of [France](#).

While in the [United Kingdom](#), units of this contingent were spread over a wide area in the southern counties, and this meant much travelling for the chaplains; fortunately there was a plentiful supply of transport. Civilian clergy gave all possible help, and often their churches were used for Church parades, while very friendly relations were established with village communities. On one occasion, to the embarrassment of some [Wellington](#) soldiers, the suggestion was made by a certain English vicar that it would be a happy gesture to rename one of the village roads 'Taranaki Street'.

Padre L. D. C. Groves⁵ was left in England to look after the Forestry units, and throughout the war he worked hard to keep in touch with the New Zealanders there, visiting men at the New Zealand Post Office and Forces Club in [London](#), and in the New Zealand Convalescent Home in Hampshire, as well as many others serving with the [Royal Navy](#) and the [Royal Air Force](#).

Preparations for [Greece](#)

On his arrival in Egypt in November 1940 Bishop Gerard took up his duties as Senior Chaplain. The arrival of the [Third Echelon](#) in September and the first section of the 4th Reinforcements in December brought the strength of the Department in Egypt to thirty-four. The weekly conferences were held, new postings arranged, and attention given to many problems of administration and personal equipment. The Department was growing into a team.

¹ Rev. E. B. Moore (C of E); [Auckland](#); born [Ireland](#), 14 Jan 1900.

² Rt. Rev. G. V. Gerard, CBE, MC,^{*} m.i.d., (C of E); Rotherham, Yorkshire, England; born 24 Nov 1898; SCF, 2nd NZEF, 1 May 1940–Nov 1941; prisoner of war, Nov 1941; repatriated 26 Apr 1943; SCF, 2nd NZEF IP, 2 Apr- 3 Dec 1944.

^{*} First World War.

³ Rev. J. W. McKenzie, CBE, MM,* ED, m.i.d., (Presby.); [Auckland](#); born Woodend, Southland, 1 Jan 1888; in First World War served in New Zealand [Medical Corps](#); SCF, 2nd NZEF, 15 Dec 1941–30 Apr 1944; Chaplain Commandant of the Royal New Zealand Chaplains' Department.

*First World War.

⁴ Rev. V. R. Jamieson, MBE, m.i.d. (Meth.): [Christchurch](#); born Lower Hutt, 22 Mar 1904.

⁵ Rev. L. D. C. Groves (C of E); Highgate, [Dunedin](#); born [Dunedin](#), 19 Jan 1905.

CHAPTER 4 GREECE AND CRETE

WHEN the Division sailed for [Greece](#), twenty-eight chaplains were with their units in the crowded ships. The minor problems of Base had been left behind, and it was hoped that the wide experience of a campaign would help the Department to evolve a harmonious and efficient routine, but the campaigns in [Greece](#) and [Crete](#) were too short and disjointed for many lessons to be learned. The great distances in [Greece](#) gave little scope for co-ordination or close contact, in spite of the efforts and constant travelling of Bishop Gerard, while the close fighting in [Crete](#) again made the chaplains' work difficult. But they learned much as individuals. They endured their baptism of fire, they tested their equipment and began to learn their place in battle, with its routine of constant visiting, the care of the wounded, and the conducting of burials.

The beautiful ruins in [Greece](#) and the many historic place-names aroused wide interest amongst the men, and the chaplains were kept busy answering questions. But there was little time for sightseeing or historical study as the Division had to make defence lines on two widely separated fronts. Unit Church parades became rare. If a chaplain wanted to hold a service he had to set off across country to visit small, isolated groups. Sometimes it would be a service with a battery or a company, more often with a troop or a platoon, and sometimes with an even smaller group. The Division had a large area to hold and this entailed much travelling for the chaplains.

Transport for Chaplains

Every chaplain in the Division was entitled to a vehicle in accordance with War Establishments, but in the first two years of the war transport was so scarce that the chaplain often went without. In [Greece](#) there were a number of the little two-seater cars specially designed for chaplains in the British Army, but these proved to be too small and when it came to desert travel, were quite inadequate. At different periods in the war chaplains were supplied with station waggons, staff cars, and trucks. On some occasions they had the [page 22](#) use of jeeps, which were ideal for battle conditions, but perhaps the most useful vehicle of all was the 8-cwt., four-wheel-drive truck, known as a 'pick-up'.

This type of truck had a comfortable cab with a tray and canopy on the back, and at first sight might have appeared too large for one man, but in practice was usually filled to capacity. Four large tins of petrol and one of water would take up much of the space, and room would have to

be found for a ration box and a primus stove fitted into a benzine tin. In its load would be the blankets and personal gear of the chaplain and his batman-driver, boxes of hymn books, stationery, and the mixture of welfare supplies and library books which accumulated round the chaplain. Hanging from the roof and from various hooks outside would be all the other paraphernalia needed for life in the field—billies and kettles, hurricane lamps and respirators—and, when every bit of space was used, room would have to be made for the driver's rifle, a spade and a pick, a camouflage net, and sometimes, most bulky of all, a spare wheel. The back of the truck, when all the gaps in the canopy had been blacked-out, made an ideal little cabin for private interviews and correspondence.

In a mechanised age, with campaigns fought over great distances, it was natural that the soldier should become a nomad, and that his vehicle should resemble a gipsy caravan. But the chaplain without a motor vehicle was placed in a difficult position. Before each move he would have to seek help from the Adjutant or from some other busy officer. 'Let me see,' the Adjutant would say, 'I think there is some room in the RQMS's¹ truck, or you might try one of the Signals three-tonners.' In the early days every truck was filled to capacity, and after some experience the maximum of comfort was obtained by carefully placing each piece of luggage and each passenger so that no one welcomed an extra man, let alone a chaplain. His timid request for space would be met with a kindly reply: 'Right-oh Padre, I think we can find a bit of room for you.' But this kindness grew less marked when it was realised that carrying the chaplain also meant carrying his kit and his official luggage, not to mention the batman and his kit. This was always embarrassing for the chaplain, but it was much worse for his bat- [page 23](#) man. It was not very easy to be rude to the chaplain, but there was nothing to prevent the plain unvarnished truth being handed privately to the batman, often in the most un-ecclesiastical language, to the effect that the truck had already been uncomfortably full before he came. In Greece the chaplains used their own vehicles or begged lifts, but inevitably when visiting troops they had to do much of their travelling on foot, carrying their own gear with them. Heavy articles, not strictly essential, were jettisoned and soon a certain uniformity might have been observed in the chaplains' packs, with space found for personal gear, official equipment, and some welfare supplies.

Church Services in [Greece](#)

The chaplain usually arranged his Church services by telephone from unit headquarters, or else on the spot as he travelled around. The officer in charge of the group would pick a suitable spot and the chaplain then handed round the twenty or thirty hymn books that he carried. The service usually lasted about twenty minutes, followed perhaps by Holy Communion. The setting of these services was often impressive—an olive grove, a green valley, or some spur on [Mount Olympus](#) with a glorious expanse of country spread out below.

After the service the chaplain would wander around and talk, and he had many opportunities to make himself useful. Perhaps there was a shortage of writing paper: he would dive into his pack and produce envelopes and paper, promising to get some more sent up with the rations. In addition he often carried tobacco, chocolate, and soap for free distribution, or took orders for boot-laces, razor blades, and a host of other articles not obtainable at the outpost.

But, quite apart from this, a visit from the chaplain was generally welcome as it made a popular break in the uneasy period of waiting for the enemy. The wise chaplain usually carried one or two paper-backed books and magazines, knowing that every man would read them in turn, and often he was asked for New Testaments. The chaplain also brought the latest wireless news, supplemented by his own special supply of rumours and unit gossip. Experience showed that the story of some undignified mishap [page 24](#) suffered by a well-known unit officer would do more for morale than news of ten military victories in other parts of the world.

In some ways this casual visiting was as important as the Church service. The two experiences common to every soldier on active service were fear and boredom, and it was the chaplain's duty to combat and alleviate both of them. The service and the prayers gave inward strength and purpose to a man, whether it was the lonely sentry peering nervously into the dark, the homesick soldier reading his mail, or the young officer acutely aware of his responsibilities; while on the other hand the whole group benefited by this friendly touch with the outside world, and especially by the little scraps of information and the personal messages which helped to bind a unit together. Many a veteran of [Greece](#), recalling that unsatisfactory and uncomfortable campaign, must remember one or two of these services; perhaps it might be one held on Easter Day of that year, a few hours before the battle began, exemplifying a quality of life and a comradeship not often found in the days of peace.

Under Fire

When the battle began in [Greece](#) the chaplain had to revise many of his theories and readjust his outlook. Probably every recruit entering camp had wondered how he would stand up under fire. Books and stories of the First World War described conditions which appeared to be far beyond the powers of normal human endurance. It was a subject often discussed with the chaplains, who gave their opinions and sometimes outlined the Christian teaching about courage.

But there was a difficulty. Downright physical fear is a rare occurrence in modern life. Moral courage is always needed but the demonstration of physical courage is a rare bloom, lightly worn by the rock climber, the steeplejack, and the racing motorist, but outside the experience of ordinary citizens except on such occasions as a rescue from drowning or a fire, or the stopping of a runaway horse. Consequently, physical courage has come to be considered in the abstract—a subject lending itself to theories, half-truths, and errors. Many thought of it as a talent, an innate gift like music or [page 25](#) the artistic temperament, a thing which one either has or has not, something not primarily directed or created by the will.

But in battle the truth became evident. Courage is a virtue, and it is as hard to achieve as honesty or unselfishness, and like them is the fruit of self-discipline. In war it was in constant and urgent demand and it was most desirable that the chaplain should understand this subject. But it is difficult, almost impossible, to speak sensibly on courage in action until a man himself has been under fire. In Greece and [Crete](#) the chaplains learned many important lessons, and gradually they were able to help in removing some of the misconceptions and point the eternal realities. The greatest mistake was to think of courage as the absence of fear instead of being the control of fear. Under shellfire or air attack all men were frightened; in action soldiers were frightened most

of the time. The chaplains were frightened and often said so, though this surprised some of the men, who clung unthinkingly to the text: 'Perfect love casteth out fear.'

Certainly fear varied in its intensity. Sleep, good food, warmth, and confidence kept morale high, while on some occasions intense concentration in a particular job, or the danger of a friend, would inspire an action which later might falsely be described as fearless. Fighting in a war was something quite different from the short, sharp excitement of a football match. It involved nights and days without sleep and long periods of agonised idleness in slit-trenches during artillery bombardments. Fear showed physical symptoms as pronounced and uncomfortable as seasickness, and the 'two o'clock in the morning courage' cannot be too highly honoured. But fear, though an evil, supplied a harvest of virtue for it placed physical courage in the high place it deserves, and when fear was shared and bravely met it supplied a bond of friendship among soldiers that is seldom found in other walks of life.

Dealing with Casualties

With action there came casualties, and of course the chaplain was expected to look after the wounded and bury the dead. Like all other clergymen he found his work easiest when dealing with men whom he knew, and here he reaped the benefit of the constant visiting which helped him to know many of his men and to become a well- [page 26](#) known figure in a unit. The word of comfort and good cheer was greatly enhanced when this personal relationship existed. Unfortunately, in [Greece](#) and [Crete](#) the conditions were not favourable for any orderly systems, as there is seldom sufficient time in a withdrawal. The chaplains did what they could for the wounded and buried the dead whenever possible. But often the wounded and the unburied dead had to be left behind, and sometimes in burials it was not possible to mark a man's grave clearly or make sure of collecting all his personal effects.

[Crete](#)

In Crete the chaplains encountered two new problems. The first was the question whether they should bear arms. With parachutists landing on all sides and attacking by day and night, the chaplain, although legally protected by the Geneva Convention, was in considerable danger; on other occasions, too, when officers and men were few in number and a vital position had to be held, one or two chaplains seized rifles and took their place alongside the fighting soldier. When this subject was discussed in a chaplains' conference later it was agreed that there was no excuse for a chaplain to break an international agreement. Some said they were prepared to fight on occasions and that if they were captured they were quite prepared to forego any privileges reserved for protected persons in captivity, but it was pointed out that one infringement of this convention might unfavourably affect the treatment of all other chaplains taken prisoner. If the chaplain was prepared to go into action as such it was considered wrong for him to seek any other protection than a [Red Cross](#) arm-band and a Geneva certificate in his paybook. For the rest he should either be a permanent combatant or a permanent chaplain.

The other problem was that of going voluntarily into captivity. It is easy to picture conditions where a large number of wounded have to be left to the mercies of an advancing enemy. Perhaps a medical orderly or doctor would stay with these men, or perhaps they would be ordered to

withdraw. In Crete, early in the war, it was not known how the Germans would treat prisoners and wounded, and some chaplains felt their duty demanded that they stay with the wounded until German medical authorities arrived.

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The wounded in [Crete](#) had already had a hard and exhausting campaign in [Greece](#). They had experienced the first large-scale parachute attack in history and many begged the chaplains to stay with them. Four stayed and were captured. They were Padres J. Hiddlestone,² H. I. Hopkins,³ W. E. W. Hurst⁴ and R. J. Griffiths.⁵

Lessons Learned

After several campaigns the chaplains came to the conclusion that each campaign seemed to be entirely different and that the methods found useful in one would not necessarily apply in the next. But those chaplains who went to [Greece](#) or [Crete](#) experienced action under very difficult conditions, and although they came back to Egypt with few new formulas or methods, all of them had grown in moral stature and knowledge. They knew only too well what a soldier felt like when he came back from a battle or a campaign, and they could speak with a certain authority about behaviour on leave without any risk of their advice being mistaken for the limited and restricted opinions of a ‘base-wallah’.

¹Regimental Quartermaster-Sergeant.

²Rev. J. Hiddlestone, MBE, ED, (Baptist); Tasman, [Nelson](#); born Christchurch, 19 Mar 1893; p.w. May 1941.

³Rev. H. I. Hopkins, m.i.d., (C of E); [Temuka](#); born [Dunedin](#), 30 Aug 1908; p.w. May 1941.

⁴Rev. W. E. W. Hurst, m.i.d., (C of E); Stratford; born Moira, North [Ireland](#), 17 May 1912; p.w. 24 May 1941.

⁵Rev. R. J. Griffiths, MBE, (Presby.); Waimate; born [Gisborne](#), 26 Jul 1905; p.w. 23 May 1941.

CHAPTER 5

BASE CAMPS, 1941

WHEN the Division returned to Egypt after [Crete](#) it found that the 5th Reinforcements had arrived from New Zealand. The 2nd NZEF was accommodated in two camps, [Helwan](#) and [Maadi](#), but usually the chaplains held one combined weekly conference in which a full muster would number thirty-six. Experiences in the two campaigns were discussed and improvements to equipment and procedure suggested. On many occasions in battle chaplains had found themselves in positions where they had to act as medical orderlies, and it was suggested that some instruction in first aid would be valuable. Arrangements were made accordingly and an

Army doctor gave a number of lectures. It was also considered desirable that a chaplain should carry a small medical kit, but this was never put into practice.

Rank of Chaplains

In the 2nd NZEF the chaplains had the same system of rank as the Royal Army Chaplains' Department. There were four classes, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th, corresponding to colonel, lieutenant-colonel, major, and captain with the pay and badges of those ranks. At first there was some uncertainty about the chaplain's official title, but Headquarters 2nd NZEF laid down in July 1941 that the use of military titles was to cease: official documents were to be signed with the signature and the initials CF (Chaplain to the Forces) plus the class, e.g., John Smith, CF, 4th Class. In writing to chaplains the title would be 'The Reverend', 'The Reverend Father', or 'Mr.', but in conversation the chaplains were called 'Padre' by everyone from colonels to privates.

There have been frequent discussions on the wisdom of chaplains wearing badges of rank. Naval chaplains do not, and in the Australian Army rank badges for chaplains were removed from 1918 to 1942, when they were restored. In the Canadian Army chaplains wear badges of rank and also use the military titles with the prefix 'Honorary'. In the American Army chaplains use the military [page 29](#) titles though they are commissioned as lieutenants and are familiarly known as 'Chappie'.

In June 1941 Headquarters 2nd NZEF asked the chaplains to consider the subject of badges of rank, and the conclusions reached by the chaplains at this conference were never questioned for the rest of the war. The chaplains considered that they would like to keep their badges of rank. The only criticism of this system was the fear that rank badges would create an unnecessary gulf between the chaplain and the private soldier, but it was considered that the advantages far outweighed this danger. Distinctions of rank are an essential part of Army life and colour all Army thinking. With stars or crowns on his shoulder, a chaplain had a very definite standing. It was a public acknowledgment of the importance of his job, and it greatly facilitated contact with headquarters and senior officers.

Also, in the Army, as in every sphere of life, there is a type of petty officialdom which recognises no authority unless it is official, and so the chaplain, whose work lay in every part of the Army— from orderly room to military prison—often found that his military rank brought more co-operation than his professional position. However undemocratic it may sound, and however contrary it may seem to the concepts of true religion, it is still true that most New Zealand chaplains would agree that their rank was far more of a help than a hindrance in the peculiar personal relationships of Army life. It was the chaplain's personality and manner which decided how he would be received by other ranks. His uniform made little difference here. Finally, it may be argued that ordination to the Christian Ministry is akin to commissioned military status, and that therefore when the chaplain dons uniform it is logical for him to wear some corresponding mark of rank.

Chaplains' Uniform

It was desirable that the chaplain should be easily recognised. In peacetime in New Zealand, and at all other times in Empire forces, the chaplain wears a distinctive cap and lapel badge, but during the war the universal 2nd NZEF badge was compulsory. There is much to be said for the wearing of the clerical collar. It may not look well in uniform but no one can mistake it. One or [page 30](#) two New Zealand chaplains wore this collar right through the war whenever possible, but for the most part it was worn only by Church of England and Roman Catholic chaplains when taking services. In the Royal Army Chaplains' Department the clerical collar was normal dress though it could be replaced by a soft collar and a black tie. But some confusion was caused when the Navy began wearing khaki battle dress and dark ties. Some sailors on land were surprised by the treatment they received from soldiers, while in Army circles strange and apocryphal tales were told of the nautical language and behaviour of certain clerical gentlemen. As in the Royal Army Chaplains' Department, 2nd NZEF chaplains wore black buttons and black badges of rank.

However, when the universal uniform in the desert was shorts and shirts, something more distinctive was necessary to mark the chaplain. In 1941 New Zealand chaplains began to wear a purple loop which slid over the shoulder strap of shirt or tunic. The Royal Army Chaplains' Department carried this idea to its logical conclusion and produced a purple loop with the word 'chaplain' clearly marked in white.

Ecclesiastical Robes

In the 2nd NZEF the Church of England and Roman Catholic chaplains always carried robes, and used them when possible. But they were alone in this respect, although in the Royal Army Chaplains' Department most other denominations wore robes at their Church services. The argument in favour of wearing robes was that they were the normal procedure for Church services, and that in the barrack-room or in the open air they helped to make the service seem more authentic.

The Welfare Workers

After their first experience in action and during the subsequent period of reorganisation the chaplains began to understand something of the work and value of the New Zealand welfare organisation. By a wise action of the [New Zealand Government](#) all the money collected for the Services was administered by one body, the [National Patriotic Fund Board](#). Colonel F. Waite¹ was in charge



Church Service at Sea Nieuw Amsterdam

Church Service at Sea Nieuw Amsterdam



Rev. E. B. Moore, Senior Chaplain, 2nd NZ Division, conducts Anzac Day Service, 1940 EI Staff

Rev. E. B Moore. Senior Chaplain, 2nd NZ Division, conducts Anzac Day Service, 1940 EI Staff



SENIOR CHAPLAINS

*Rev. G. A. D. Spence
(1944-45)*

SENIOR CHAPLAINS

Rev. G. A. D. Spence (1944-45)

*Rev. J. W. McKenzie
(1942-44) and Rt. Rev.
Bishop G. V. Gerard
(1940-41)*



Rev. J. W. McKenzie (1942-44) and Rt. Rev. Bishop G. V. Gerard (1940-41)



SERVICE BEFORE BATTLE *Rt. Rev. Bishop G. V. Gerard and the
Divisional Signals near Katerine Greece*

Service Before Battle *Rt. Rev. Bishop G. V. Gerard and the Divisional Signals near
[Katerine Greece](#)*

Memorial Service, September 1945 Crete
(L. to r.) Rev. G. A. D. Spence, Rev. Father L. P. Spring (Senior RC
Chaplain), and Revs. F. O. Dawson and W. T. Huata at Suda Bay



Memorial Service, September 1945 [Crete](#) (L. to r.) Rev. G. A. D. Spence. Rev. Father L. P. Spring (Senior RC Chaplain). and Revs. F. O. Dawson and W. T. Huata at [Suda Bay](#)



SERVICE BEFORE BATTLE Men of the 25th Battalion Baggush

Service Before Battle Men of the 25th Battalion [Baggush](#)

After a Confirmation—Rev. K. Harawira and the Rt. Rev. G. F. Graham-Brown, Bishop of Jerusalem Beirut



After a Confirmation—Rev. K. Harawira and the Rt. Rev. G. F. Graham-Brown, Bishop of Jerusalem[Beirut](#)

[page 31](#) of this fund in the 2nd NZEF and performed his task magnificently. He was a man who kept in close contact with the humble soldier and he allowed nothing to hinder his plans for the general welfare of the troops. He showed remarkable initiative, and at all times was most sympathetic to the work of the chaplains and supported their plans and ideas whenever possible.

The bulk of the Patriotic Fund was expended by the [YMCA](#) and the Church Army who organised the recreational huts in the camps, and in addition supplied a welfare officer and truck for nearly every unit in the Division. These welfare men were recruited partly from the home establishments of these two societies, and partly from men serving in the Army.

The Church Army is a Church of England society, and in the 2nd NZEF it consisted of a small team which ran a recreation hut in [Maadi](#) and worked with Artillery units in the field. The YMCA was a much bigger organisation and strictly undenominational. It ran excellent recreation huts, hostels, and canteens, and its Mobile [Cinema Unit](#) was an outstanding success. Both these societies were considered to be civilian organisations with civilian staffs, though they wore uniform and received Army allowances. On one or two occasions an exceptional act of courage by welfare workers could not be rewarded with a military decoration for gallantry because of this civilian status, and the award made was membership in one or other of the degrees of the Civil Division of the Order of the British Empire.

The YMCA and the Church Army are essentially Christian organisations whose members are expected to be professing Christians. As such they were of inestimable benefit to the chaplains. Every recreational hut and canteen became a centre for the chaplain's work, but in them he received not only a welcome but active cooperation also. Special places were set aside in their huts and canteens for religious services, and the staffs, besides always being present themselves, were prepared to lead the prayers in the absence of a chaplain. They kept supplies of New Testaments, religious books, and hymn books, and generally lived up to the high aims of their organisations. Their work was well controlled and inspired [page 32](#) by the wise leadership of Mr. Shove² and Mr. Steptoe,³ and the service they gave in the field was splendid.

By dint of their brilliant and courageous efforts the New Zealand soldier was supplied with comforts in every campaign. Before action they gave chaplains supplies of comforts to distribute, and then themselves went into the line to give the soldier the things he needed. On these occasions their cheerful and zealous demeanour was much appreciated. Probably no more amazing sight was seen in the war than the [Maori Battalion YMCA](#) truck lumbering over the desert to its battalion in the middle of the [Alamein](#) battle. The chaplains were deeply indebted to these men and the organisations for which they worked, and all chaplains are concerned by the suggestion that the soldiers could have been better served by an official Army welfare unit, recruited, inspired, and directed by the Army itself. The chaplains have their doubts about this proposal and consider it unlikely that such an organisation could triumph over the problems of 'officialdom'.

Certainly the civilian status and methods of these two organisations were often the cause of ‘administrative headaches’, and no doubt one or two of the men were failures, but could an official welfare unit ever have produced a ‘Snowie’ Watson⁴—surely one of the best-loved men in the Division—or others like him such as Riga Blair⁵ and Geoff Gray?⁶ Moreover, would an official Army welfare unit ever supply that strong Christian influence which was so apparent in the whole outlook of the welfare men?

Concert Parties

The chaplains were often distressed by the tone of British official concert parties, and in spite of many protests the standard remained low throughout the war. Some of the artists had little talent and [page 33](#) tried to succeed by substituting smut for humour, but this evil went further for many leading lights in the theatrical profession who visited the troops seemed to imagine that there was a general demand for filthy jokes and suggestions. Certainly the troops wanted humour, but again and again they told the chaplains they did not want bawdiness.

In this respect the chaplains were delighted by the excellent example set by the [Kiwi Concert Party](#), which abounded in real talent, gave bright entertainment, and was warmly appreciated by troops serving all over the [Middle East](#).

The chaplains were also grateful for the presence of the military bands who often played at Church parades, and at other times softened the rigours of Army life.

¹ Col the Hon. F. Waite, CMG, DSO, OBE, VD; Member of the Legislative Council; farmer; Balclutha; born Duncdin, 20 Aug 1885.

² Mr. H. W. Shove, OBE, m.i.d.; Commissioner YMCA, 2nd NZEF; public accountant; [Auckland](#); born [Auckland](#), 21 Nov 1897; p.w. 7 Nov 1942.

³ Mr. H. J. Steptoe, MBE; Commissioner YMCA, 2nd NZEF; factory inspector; [Wellington](#); born Mackay, Queensland, [Australia](#), 23 Jan 1899.

⁴ Mr. G. N. L. Watson, MBE; YMCA Secretary; [Auckland](#); born [Auckland](#), 10 Jan 1904.

⁵ Mr. R. W. Blair, MBE; Church Army 2nd NZEF; retail trader; Christchurch; born Takapau, Hawke's Bay, 1 Sep 1915.

⁶ Mr. G. Gray, MBE; YMCA Secretary, 2nd NZEF; mercer; [Christchurch](#); born [Christchurch](#), 26 May 1918; wounded 19 Mar 1944.

CHAPTER 6

[LIBYA](#) 1941

IN wartime the chief purpose of the soldier is to fight and the chief purpose of the chaplain is to look after the spiritual health of the soldier. But, as the soldier overseas spent only a small

proportion of his time in action, it follows that a chaplains' history is largely concerned with the periods between the campaigns. The Libyan campaign of 1941 lasted a short month for most of the Division but it was preceded by three months' training in the desert at [Baggush](#). This was a chaplain's paradise. He could lead a settled life in the heart of his own unit. The one difficulty was lack of buildings. In daytime this was no hardship as the weather was always good enough for open-air services, but large open-air meetings at night were almost useless because of the need for a blackout.

Because of the danger of air attack units were spread over wide areas, and each company or battery formed a happy little community of its own. In many places the ground was soft enough for the men to make dugouts, and these were fitted with lights, cooking arrangements, and other comforts. Every night the chaplain would choose a company area and pay a number of calls. He would meet two or three men in each dugout and in time got to know them well. This was far easier than walking into a crowded hut at Base; and the chaplain was welcome. Since there were practically no evening amusements the men stayed 'at home' at nights and looked forward to a visitor, provided he entered by the door and not through the flimsy roof—a mistake that was easy to make in the dark.

Sunday services were usually held on a company basis, four or five in a morning, and there was a warm, informal, civilian atmosphere about them. The early morning celebrations of Holy Communion or Mass were made impressive by the clear, cool freshness of a desert morning as the men stood or knelt round the back of a truck with the tailboard acting as an altar; it was the same at night when the darkness was pierced by the shaded light of an electric torch as the chaplain read from his Prayer Book or Bible.

Every night in the desert with the coming of darkness the same miracle happened. The harsh glare and heat of the day gave place [page 35](#) to the kind of peaceful gloom that might be expected in a great unlighted cathedral. At times there were sandstorms and rain, but the peace of these Sunday evening services remains in memory. Congregational singing was confined to well-known hymns which in the darkness could be sung from memory, but on occasions when a soloist could be found he would use a small light to read by.

Perhaps this was the finest type of singing ever experienced in Army services. A soldier writing home once said of it:

I have just come back from an evening service, although it's a Friday. I wonder if I am too easily impressed; it seemed a very impressive thing to me. The sun had set and the night had fallen by the time we gathered round. There was no moon at this time and you could see the dim forms of men standing round in a half circle. I think most of the squadron must have been there. The Padre opened with 'Abide with Me' and I had the privilege of holding the torch for him. I wonder what it sounded like a few hundred yards away. I know that it was rather wonderful to hear that old hymn sung unaccompanied—the singers all hidden from one another in the darkness—and it was sung very well.... After that there were more short prayers; then the Padre spoke on the first petition of the Lord's Prayer. 'Give us this day our daily bread'. He spoke very simply, and just for a few minutes, then pronounced the benediction. It all turned my thoughts to

home, to all you dear people, what you are doing. the thousand and one things we think out here.¹

In out-of-action periods the Roman Catholic chaplains often worked in teams of two or three and this passage written by Father J. L. Kingan² recaptures magnificently the solid work achieved and the spirit in which it was done:

As often as possible when not in action, Fathers Forsman,³ Henley⁴ and I would meet together. From the group gathered for Confession individuals would peel off and enter the bull ring. There before the whole world would three priests and three penitents pace up and down in three different directions, setting [page 36](#) things right with the Three Persons that count most in the lives of us all. Meanwhile enquiring eyes from all quarters would look puzzled, and questions would be asked.... However, this sort of thing was soon almost as much taken for granted as lining up in the mess for meals, and would be summarily dismissed with the casual remark: 'Oh, the Doolans are at it again'.

The men were happy at this time. There was hard and interesting training during the day, with opportunities for glorious bathing at lunch-time or in the late afternoon. The YMCA open-air cinemas began their magnificent work and functioned when air raids permitted. The food was good and canteen supplies plentiful. Football was firmly established and the Division played it from [Cairo](#) to [Tunis](#). Many trucks carried a ball, and during the short halts on a long desert journey the men would start punting it about and stretching their cramped limbs. The Maoris won the Divisional championship: the story is told of an irate Maori company commander in one campaign going back fifty yards over a rise and ordering two or three men to stop playing football and to come and get on with the battle.

Many chaplains played too or helped to organise and referee matches. In the test match at [Baggush](#) in November 1941 against the 1st South African Division the referee was Father Kingan, once sports master at St. Patrick's College, Silverstream, and the New Zealand team was trained by Padre Frank Green,⁵ a former South Island representative.

The weekly chaplains' conferences were held in, or just outside, Bishop Gerard's dugout at Divisional Headquarters. Services were arranged for those units without chaplains, and guarded information given about the next campaign. On Friday, 7 November, Bishop Gerard held a confirmation service in a small marquee and a few days later the Division moved towards the Libyan frontier.

Fighting in [Libya](#)

In some ways this campaign may have been the Division's most effective battle, and certainly the casualties were very heavy, comparable with those of the 1st British Airborne Division at [Arnhem](#) in September 1944. But it was a battle which did not lend itself to clear reporting by the war correspondents as it was fought by [page 37](#) small, isolated, and independent groups over a period of three weeks of perpetual movement and constant attack.

The spirit of those days finds fine expression in a poem by Father Forsman.

What though they lie in trackless wadis deep
 Or by some barren lonely sand-knoll sleep
 Among strange dead; they are not dead who Christ
 Upon the altar daily sacrificed,
 Received with reverent knee on arid, pathless sands.
 They drench with grace bare unrepentant lands
 Until the cross above their desert tomb
 Bursts peace abundant in effulgent bloom.
 Then shall hushed hermits rise in vocal throng.
 And singing slake the solitude with song.
 So God the Holy Ghost the earth rebuild.
 With these the temples Thou once filled!

No full story can be told of the chaplains' work in this campaign. Many used their vehicles to ferry wounded from the battlefields to dressing stations, while others for a time became medical orderlies, and one or two at least had their first experience as anaesthetists. Because of the constant movement it was very difficult to arrange burials, which often had to be conducted under shellfire, and it was difficult to mark the graves clearly. There was seldom time to get an accurate map reference and the chaplain would look around in desperation for some landmark in the desert. On several occasions the only mark on that featureless waste was the well-defined track the unit had just made through the virgin sand, but woe betide the chaplain who used that track on a sketch map to show the position of the grave, for time and again transport would pass that way and the little track be widened to more than a mile across—a poor landmark for a six-foot grave. In this campaign one chaplain was wounded—Padre C. E. Willis,⁶ with the 25th Battalion—and six were taken prisoner: Bishop Gerard, Padres Willis, R. G. McDowall,⁷ H. A. McD. Mitchell,⁸ K. J. Watson,⁹ and [page 38](#) Father W. Sheely.¹⁰ These men had good records of service, three of them—Gerard, Watson, and Sheely—being mentioned in despatches. Five others were in enemy hands for a week: they were Padres [M. L. Underhill](#),¹¹ F. J. Green, N. E. Bicknell,¹² and Fathers E. A. Forsman and J. L. Kingan. Padre C. G. Palmer¹³ also spent six weeks as a prisoner at [Bardia](#).

Seven of these chaplains were taken prisoner at the same time and in the same place: six of them were temporarily attached to the four medical units captured by the Germans while the seventh was a patient. The three Roman Catholics had been moved from their units to the dressing stations as soon as the action began, according to their instructions and policy, and the three others, who came from Divisional units, were also temporarily posted to look after the wounded. The three Main Dressing Stations were all together with the addition of the [Mobile Surgical Unit](#), and at the time of their capture they contained not only the large medical staff but also nine hundred wounded, including two hundred enemy wounded. These captured chaplains had much to do in visiting, helping the medical orderlies, and conducting burials.

The Germans later handed over to the Italians, and when they decided to move all the walking wounded to [Benghazi](#), Father Sheely and Padre McDowall volunteered to go with them. Fortunately the whole force was rescued before another party could be moved off.

The hospital area was in the centre of a desert battle and under constant shellfire, which caused a number of casualties including some who were already lying wounded. Food was short and there was practically no water. These conditions, as well as that of being captured, were difficult in the extreme and the chaplains spent their time comforting the sick and helping the wounded. A wounded man can be very frightened as he lies helpless on a stretcher under [page 39](#) shellfire with no chance of getting into a slit-trench, and the presence of a chaplain beside him was appreciated.

Every day the chaplains went around each tent administering Holy Communion privately or saying a few prayers with each man. and in the evenings short services were held in the tents. Sometimes a soloist would sing one of the peaceful evening hymns as a lullaby. Going back into that tent several hours later the chaplain would often hear the tune of that hymn being hummed by some man who could not sleep.

Father Forsman could speak German and Italian, and he often played an important part in demanding better treatment for the wounded. On occasions he acted as the official interpreter between the German and Italian commanders, and later cheered our men immensely by regaling them with accounts of the quarrels and misunderstandings of the Rome-[Berlin](#) axis.

On the day before rescue things had become desperate. There was just enough water for the evening meal and no more. The battle had died away and there was no shellfire. This was the first opportunity for a big Church service. It was decided to hold two at the same time, one conducted by the Roman Catholics and the other by the three other chaplains. All the medical staff who were free attended, besides a great number of walking and crawling wounded. The congregation consisted mostly of men on crutches or swathed in bandages, their faces strained and unshaven, their voices cracked and dry; but the spirit was wonderful and many a man felt that his prayers had been answered when rescue came next morning.

Padre Palmer was captured with Headquarters 5th Brigade at [Sidi Azeiz](#) on 27 November 1941 and taken to [Bardia](#). All officers were removed by submarine, but the padre asked permission to remain with the other ranks in the cold, bleak compound. In the next six weeks he conducted services, helped in the organisation of the compound, and did much by his presence and example to keep morale high. For his work he was mentioned in despatches.

Padre Palmer's work at [Bardia](#) is mentioned by Brigadier Hargest in his book *Farewell Campo 12*:

On the Sunday we had a church service at which Padre Palmer officiated. He was a grand little New Zealand chaplain, whose [page 40](#) sermon that day was a model of brevity, hope and encouragement to weary men from all parts of the Empire. All together we sang our hymns, and at the end the National Anthem, with the mixed guard of Germans and Italians standing on the walls looking down at us over their machine guns. That night in our shed a few of the fellows began singing choruses. These gave place to hymns, which were more widely known. Then the Padre read a little from the prayer book, and the meeting developed into an evening service in which nearly everyone joined.

When the chaplains discussed this campaign afterwards they felt that they could draw no new conclusions about policy in action. A chaplain could only follow his conscience, use his common sense, and work as the occasion permitted.

The Position of Senior Chaplain

When Bishop Gerard was taken prisoner near [Sidi Rezegh](#) his position as Senior Chaplain had to be filled. This office entailed many responsibilities, for in the 2nd NZEF the Senior Chaplain had to do the work of a Deputy Chaplain-General. In the Royal Army Chaplains' Department the Chaplain-General remained at his headquarters in [London](#) and appointed Deputies (DCGs) in the different theatres of war. The senior chaplain with the Army was an Assistant Chaplain-General (ACG) with the rank of Chaplain, 1st Class. The senior chaplain with a corps was a Deputy Assistant Chaplain-General, with the rank of Chaplain, 2nd Class, while the senior chaplain with a division was called the Senior Chaplain (SCF) with the rank of Chaplain, 3rd Class. In the 2nd NZEF there was some confusion in regard to titles, for wherever there was a group of chaplains, many or few, one was always known as the senior chaplain, and it was necessary to add some qualification such as: SCF, Troopship, or SCF, 2nd New Zealand Division, while the most senior of all was known as SCF, 2nd NZEF. The SCF, 2nd NZEF, had to organise for an expeditionary force, and, subject to the Chaplains' Council in New Zealand and the GOC, he had to use his own initiative. It might have been simpler if he had had some distinctive title such as Principal Chaplain. He had 2nd Class rank, although his responsibilities and authority were equivalent to those of a Deputy Chaplain-General.

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Duties of SCF, 2nd NZEF

The duties of the chaplain in charge of the Chaplains' Department, 2nd NZEF, were:

1. To be the official liaison between the Chaplains' Department, the Army, and the Chaplains' Council in New Zealand.
2. To maintain close relations with the GOC. the administrative staff, and the senior officers.
3. To secure the best available equipment for his chaplains.
4. To try to place every chaplain in work that he would enjoy and be suitable for.
5. To watch the War Establishment, the balance of denominations, deficiencies, casualties, and the ministrations of small formations and units temporarily attached.
To visit his chaplains regularly in order to know them well, keeping in mind the fact that such
6. visits demonstrated to a unit that their chaplain belonged to an important and influential Army service.
7. To be readily accessible to all his chaplains, giving them plenty of time to state their problems and experiences.
8. To keep abreast of everyday affairs in Army life so that his Department would always be ready to give the fullest service.
9. To consult the senior chaplains in each denomination on matters of policy or posting, for officially his authority extended only to chaplains of his own denomination.

Senior Chaplains in the 2nd NZEF

Bishop Gerard: Bishop Gerard was the first Senior Chaplain in the 2nd NZEF. He had served as a combatant officer in the First World War, winning the Military Cross. Formerly a prominent footballer, he was a man of great strength and physical stamina, a forthright speaker, and a tireless worker. He travelled constantly amongst scattered New Zealand troops and, in addition to giving them services, often used his own mobile cinema to entertain them. He had all the difficulties of transforming a crowd of strangers of different denominations into one loyal, friendly, and efficient Chaplains' Department. His transparent sincerity and unselfishness did much to break down suspicion in those early days, while the austerity of his life and his self-discipline commanded respect and made him a worthy leader. His talents found fullest scope in time of danger and in action.

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Padre McKenzie: After the capture of Bishop Gerard, Padre J. W. McKenzie was appointed Senior Chaplain. Padre McKenzie was a Presbyterian who had won the Military Medal in the First World War, and in the Second World War had served as a padre with the Artillery in the Greek campaign. When he was appointed Senior Chaplain it was laid down by Headquarters 2nd NZEF that his place should be at Base with this headquarters, though every liberty would be given him for regular visits to his chaplains with the Division. This was a wise instruction and worked excellently. Padre McKenzie was an outstanding success as Senior Chaplain. He did not find preaching easy, but he had statesmanlike qualities and a natural gift for friendship that were of inestimable value in the Department. He was most zealous in visiting his chaplains in the field, haunting the forward areas like an old war-horse, while at Base he was always accessible to his chaplains and always made plenty of time to listen to them. He played a big part in introducing courses for chaplains, showed great wisdom in postings and replacements, and in all his work was delightfully unmilitary. He encouraged all his chaplains to call him 'Jim', and he always seemed to give each one the job he wanted, except that there were never quite enough jobs with the Division. He was overseas for four years and did not return to New Zealand till 1944, when, still at the height of his considerable talents and still in splendid physical condition, he admitted to the amazing age, for active service conditions, of 56 years.

Padre Spence: Padre G. A. D. Spence¹⁴ followed Padre McKenzie as Senior Chaplain in [Italy](#). He had served with the 20th Battalion in [Greece](#), [Crete](#), [Libya](#), and Egypt, had proved himself one of the most successful and respected unit chaplains, and had won the Military Cross for bravery and devotion to duty in these campaigns. In his new position he found the Chaplains' Department well established and enjoying the very best co-operation from the Army authorities. He was not called upon to pioneer in Departmental organisation but to keep a well-designed machine functioning smoothly, and this he did very well. He visited the Division regularly and also found time to see something of the many scattered [page 43](#) outposts in [Italy](#), besides making a short trip to Base Camp at [Maadi](#). His humility and mild appearance belied his conscientious pursuit of duty and his high administrative talents.

Senior Roman Catholic Chaplain

Father L. P. Spring¹⁵ sailed with the [First Echelon](#) and for the whole war, save for one short trip on a hospital ship to New Zealand, was the Senior Roman Catholic Chaplain. In the Greek campaign he was attached to the Machine Gun Battalion. Afterwards he chose duties which gave him most opportunity for controlling the widely scattered work of his chaplains. He was largely responsible for the good relations which existed between his denomination and other members of the Department. By good sense and patience he was able to evolve the most useful arrangement of postings for his chaplains, and to soothe the doubts and fears of many officers who did not realise that the work of Roman Catholic chaplains had to differ in many respects from the work of the others. Father Spring had a very friendly disposition and was widely respected by his own Church members and by many others.

Senior Chaplain at [Divisional Headquarters](#)

After the SCF, 2nd NZEF, made his headquarters at Base it was necessary to appoint a Senior Chaplain for Divisional Headquarters. His duties were to attend to all the immediate needs of the Divisional chaplains in regard to transport and equipment, and to make sure that they were fit for their work and receiving proper co-operation from their units. He also had to see that all the smaller Divisional units had adequate religious ministrations. On several occasions when the Division was at a great distance from Base he had to make postings on his own initiative. He took the chair in the chaplains' conferences in the field, and kept in the closest touch with the Senior Chaplain at Base. Padre Moore was the first to hold this position, and he was followed by Padres Jamieson, Buck, Spence, and F. O. Dawson.¹⁶

¹ *'Titch' of the Div. Car.*; A Memoir of L-Sgt P. L. Titchener; published by Presbyterian Bookroom.

² Rev. Fr. J. L. Kingan, MC, m.i.d., (RC); [Wanganui](#); born Tai Tapu, [Canterbury](#), 16 Sep 1901; wounded 27 Feb 1944

³ Rev. Fr. E. A. Forsman (RC); [Auckland](#); born Pakuranga, [Auckland](#), 20 Mar 1909.

⁴ Rev. Fr. J. F. Henley (RC); Eltham; born [Palmerston North](#), 10 Sep 1903.

⁵ Rev. F. J. Green (Presby.); [Rotorua](#); born Roxburgh, 4 Apr 1912.

⁶ Rev. C. E. Willis (C of E); Cambridge, England; born England, 29 Jun 1907; wounded and p.w. Dec 1941.

⁷ Rev. R. G. McDowall (Presby.); [Auckland](#); born [Riverton](#), Southland, 27 Dec 1898; p.w. 28 Nov 1941.

⁸ Rev. H. A. McD. Mitchell, United States Bronze Star, (Presby.); [Dunedin](#); born 18 May 1900; served in [Fiji](#) 1940-41; p.w. 28 Nov 1941.

⁹ Rev. K. J. Watson, m.i.d., (Presby.); [Christchurch](#); born [Christchurch](#), 18 Apr 1904; p.w. 28 Nov 1941.

¹⁰ Rev. Fr. W. Sheely, m.i.d., (RC); [Te Kuiti](#); born Hunterville, 5 Oct 1907; p.w. 28 Nov 1941.

¹¹ Rev. [M. L. Underhill](#), m.i.d., (C of E); Penrith, England; born [Glasgow](#), 28 May 1910.

¹² Maj N. E. Bicknell, m.i.d.; [Salvation Army](#) officer; [Wellington](#); born [Melbourne](#), 11 Jan 1904; wounded 13 Dec 1942.

¹³ Rev. C. G. Palmer, m.i.d., (C of E); Papatoetoe, [Auckland](#); born Christchurch, 19 Feb 1909; p.w. [Bardia](#) 27 Nov 1941-2 Jan 1942.

¹⁴ Rev. G. A. D. Spence, OBE, MC, m.i.d., (Presby.); [Wellington](#); born Feilding, 8 Feb 1901; SCF, 2nd NZEF, 30 Apr 1944-16 Oct 1945; wounded 17 Jul 1942.

¹⁵ Rev. Fr. L. P. Spring, OBE, m.i.d., (RC); [Napier](#); born Seadown, South Canterbury, 25 Mar 1901.

¹⁶ Rev. F. O. Dawson, MC, (C of E); [Putaruru](#), [Auckland](#); born [London](#), 23 Feb 1909.

CHAPTER 7

[SYRIA](#)

THE Division's route through Palestine to [Syria](#) ran by the Sea of Galilee and through [Damascus](#), and on all sides there was an immediate quickening in interest in the history of these places and the general background of the Bible. This interest continued in [Syria](#). There were many signs of previous civilisations which demanded attention: the huge ruins of [Baalbek](#) and [Palmyra](#), the fortified villages, the Crusaders' castles, and the giant water-wheels were all objects of discussion and inquiry.

The three months in [Syria](#) provided the chaplains with many opportunities for Bible instruction. but it was difficult to give full and precise teaching about every place and many a chaplain thought wistfully of his books of reference and maps at home in New Zealand. The bulk of the Division was stationed round [Baalbek](#): quarters varied from Nissen huts to tents, sometimes close to a village or the main road, or perched on some almost inaccessible hilltop.

There were few facilities for leave in [Baalbek](#) and the intense cold of the early weeks kept most of the men at home in the evenings. The main work of the Division was digging defences, and after long days spent with pick and shovel the men needed some mental relaxation and activity. The chaplains set to work to provide it.

The first difficulty was accommodation. The YMCA and the Church Army equipped a number of canteens where the men could play cards, write letters, or listen to the wireless and have a cup of tea. The value of these canteens would have been lost had they been cleared frequently for

lectures or debates. Often the chaplains were allowed to use the mess huts or the mess tents, which had the advantage of already being supplied with tables and forms, but the chief problems were lighting and heating. The pioneer platoons in various units would usually provide some form of wood stove, but lighting was more difficult. The obvious solution was petrol power lamps which gave a very good light, but these had to be paid for.

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Patriotic Fund

The Patriotic Fund financed all the work done by the [YMCA](#) and the Church Army, and the money was put to excellent use. In addition, a weekly grant of £1 was made to every chaplain for out-of-pocket expenses, such as sending cables, buying comforts for the wounded, and helping the needy. This grant was extremely useful and the chaplains found many ways of spending it. Usually it was not sufficient for all the professional calls on a chaplain's purse, but in action the allowance mounted up and would later be used for some larger project outside its intended scope. But when this allowance had been used, and the chaplain had spent what he could afford of his own money, there was a further source of help—Regimental Funds.

Regimental Funds

Various bodies such as the [NAAFI](#) were continually paying money into unit Regimental Funds, and the GOC issued an order that these funds should be spent, keeping in hand no more than about half a crown a head: i.e., if there were 800 men in the unit, its Regimental Fund should be kept down to about £100. The spending of the money was controlled completely by the commanding officer. Some colonels found this responsibility a great burden and were so afraid that they might waste the money that they hardly spent it at all. It was very annoying for a chaplain to have his request for money from Regimental Funds to buy power lamps, and perhaps tea, sugar, and biscuits—all necessary for evening activities—turned down by a CO₂ who was metaphorically sitting on some large sum, often approaching four figures, specially intended for the soldiers' welfare. Most commanding officers agreed that sports equipment was a justified expense from these funds and, in addition, wireless sets were bought, but at this period of the war quite a number of them would not authorise use of the funds for other matters.

Unit Libraries

Boredom is one of the most common evils in the Army and the biggest enemy of morale. It is a problem that will grow as popular education spreads. One solution is reading, but that depends upon [page 46](#) an adequate supply of books. Some commanders made grants from Regimental Funds for unit libraries; others refused to do this and the chaplains had to use their allowances, their own money, and make a collection among the men. They would then go off to [Cairo](#), [Alexandria](#), or [Beirut](#), where they would spend say £50 on some two or three hundred books. These would form the foundation of a unit lending library, often with a different box for each company.

Wastage in books was heavy: paper-backed books, unless reinforced, had a short life, while many were not returned or came to a grimy end in the bottom of some truck. And yet, allowing

for this wastage, which often necessitated two or three libraries being bought in a year, the books were worth every penny spent on them. It was difficult to get them in sufficient quantity and variety, but once they were bought they were read continuously; and even when they were not returned officially they were still being passed from hand to hand. In Syria the unit library idea was comparatively new, and a grant from Regimental Funds was seldom forthcoming.

Evening Activities

The chaplains organised many evening activities in [Syria](#), but it is necessary to point out that the good chaplain thought of himself as a Minister of Religion first and foremost and never allowed welfare duties to overshadow his real work. He spent his day with the men as they worked, and in the evening wandered around the canteens and the huts where the men lived. In this way he got to know his flock and his visiting would lead to private interviews, small voluntary services, and classes for religious instruction. But of course religion and welfare are closely bound together, and the chaplains were always eager to help anything that promoted mental and spiritual health, though they objected strongly when too material a view was taken of their calling.

In the long, dark evenings in [Syria](#) the chaplains turned their hands to many tasks. They organised foreign language classes, often acting as the instructors. They arranged lectures, debates, discussions, card tournaments, and concerts, and after the Church



Advanced Dressing Station, 4 September 1942, battle of Alam Halfa

Advanced Dressing Station, 4 September 1942, battle of [Alam Halfa](#)



Desert burial, Divisional Cavalry El Agheila

Desert burial, Divisional Cavalry [El Agheila](#)



Rev. J. T. Holland by his altar, Christmas Day 1942 Nofilia

Rev. J. T. [Holland](#) by his altar, Christmas Day 1942 [Nofilia](#)

Burial Service Tunisia



Burial Service [Tunisia](#)



PADRES AT MAADI, June 1943

Back row (l. to r.): D. D. Thorpe, J. J. Fletcher, S. C. Read, R. F. Judson, H. B. Burnett, H. G. Taylor, L. P. Spring, J. F. Henley, J. T. Holland, J. M. Templer, F. J. Green, J. S. Somerville, A. C. K. Harper, E. A. Forster
 Center row: H. S. Sutt, F. O. Dawson, P. C. S. Serpal, W. J. Thompson, M. L. Underhill, H. W. West, V. D. Callaghan, J. W. Rorigers, C. G. Palmer
 Front row: E. Haunak, W. B. Francis, W. A. Mills, F. H. Beck, J. W. McKenzie, G. V. Gerard, T. E. Champion, R. T. Doubts

PADRES AT MAADI, June 1943 Back row (l. to r.): D. D. Thorpe, J. J. Fletcher, S. C. Read, R. F. Judson, H. B. Burnett, H. G. Taylor, L. P. Spring, J. F. Henley, J. T. [Holland](#), J. M. Templer,

F. J. Green, J. S. Somerville, A. C. K. Harper. E. A. Forsman Centre row: H.S. Scott, F. O. Dawson, P. C. S. Sergel, W. J. Thompson, [M. L. Underhill](#), H. W. West, V. D. Callaghan. J. W. Rodgers, C. G. Palmer *Front row:* R. Hannah, W. R. Francis, W. A. Mills, F. H. Buck. J. W. McKenzie. G. V. Gerard. T. E. Champion. R. T. Dodds



Rev. J. W. McKenzie plays his violin as accompaniment for an evening service in the desert, July 1942

Rev. J. W. McKenzie plays his violin as accompaniment for an evening service in the desert, July 1942

[page 47](#) services on Sunday mornings ran a kind of tourist office, sending parties off in trucks to places of interest in the surrounding country.

[Aleppo](#)

For the whole period in [Syria](#) there was always one brigade on the Turkish border with its headquarters in [Aleppo](#). This city supplied many civilian comforts and interests, and many of the civilian Church authorities were helpful. The official brigade services took place in the Armenian Baptist Church, which had been lent for the purpose; these services were attended by British troops and sometimes were taken by a British chaplain.

In fact one of these chaplains was responsible for correcting an error in our services. In the 2nd NZEF it had been the custom for the troops to march to the church and file into the seats in good time for the service. Just before the service began a staff officer would give the command, 'Brigade!' on which the whole congregation would stand while the Brigadier entered. In the open air the senior officer is in command of the parade until he hands it over to the chaplain, but when the service is held in a building, that building for the time being becomes a church and

should be treated as such. The commanding officer should walk in quietly and unannounced and the congregation should stand for the entry of the clergyman.

Chaplains' Courses

The peaceful life of [Syria](#) supplied the chaplains with opportunities for hard, steady, and useful work, but after two months of it many of them were beginning to feel themselves tired and uninspired. The Senior Chaplain, the Rev. J. W. McKenzie, at once took steps to put this right. He interviewed the Officer in charge of Administration (Brigadier W. G. Stevens) and then went to call on Dr. Bayard Dodds, the President of the American University in [Beirut](#). The result was the first course held for chaplains in the [Middle East](#). Nearly every New Zealand chaplain, as well as some from the British and Australian forces, attended one or other of the two courses held in [Beirut](#). Comfortable quarters were supplied in the University, and there was a splendid team of lecturers from the staff, consisting of Americans, Syrians, Armenians, and [page 48](#) Arabs who spoke in flawless English with an encyclopaedic knowledge. Some of the lectures were on the [Middle East](#) background and history of the Bible, while others of a more general nature included such subjects as the political situation in [Syria](#), the history of the Arabs, the religion of Islam, and a description of the many different Christian sects in the [Middle East](#). These courses were most successful. The chaplains were refreshed in mind and body, and their spirits were strengthened by the companionship of their colleagues and the regular periods of devotions.

About this time, too, the New Zealand Roman Catholic chaplains attended an excellent Retreat organised by the Royal Army Chaplains' Department in a Carmelite monastery in the village of Bechare, near the top of the Lebanon Mountains.

In later times further New Zealand courses were held for chaplains in [Cairo](#), [Tripoli](#), and [Italy](#). The British Army, with the full approval of General Montgomery, also adopted this idea, and a permanent school, which was formed in [Jerusalem](#), conducted a series of ten-day courses. This school was open to New Zealand chaplains, most of whom attended while attached to Base units. The syllabus included sightseeing trips as well as lectures, and the chaplains were provided with competent guides for tours of the city of [Jerusalem](#) and some of the other holy places in Palestine. It would be hard to overestimate the value of these courses for chaplains. The fresh knowledge, interest, and rest revitalised all their work.

Routine Work

The ordered life in [Syria](#), free from action and constant movement, permitted a certain pastoral routine to appear in the chaplains' work. Church services were held regularly; sometimes a choir was formed, and often music would be supplied by a brigade band. A chaplains' conference was held every week in [Baalbek](#), and on one occasion the speaker was the Deputy Chaplain-General of the British Army in the [Middle East](#), who gave an interesting talk on the Royal Army Chaplains' Department. Hospitals and detention camps were visited regularly and religious instruction given to classes and individuals; and sometimes, following an accident or fatal illness, there were funerals in the picturesque village grave. [page 49](#) yards, often with the co-operation and participation of the local clergy. Some Church of England chaplains took men down to [Damascus](#) for a confirmation conducted by the Bishop of Pretoria, at which the New

Zealanders knelt beside British soldiers and South African native troops and listened to a service conducted in three languages. Once a party of Maoris, conducted by Padre K. Harawira,¹ who set off by truck for a confirmation service in [Beirut](#), was snowbound for a night on the top of a high pass. However, they found the Bishop next day and another service was arranged for them.

Morale

The three months in [Syria](#) provided a period of rest for the troops after the Libyan campaign and it gave the Division opportunity to absorb the large number of reinforcements which the Libyan casualties had made necessary. The hilly country, the green fields, and the cooler climate made a refreshing change from Egypt. But, for all that, morale was not particularly high. Six days in every week, for weeks on end, many units had to set out for the dull routine of a day's digging. At night as the men clustered round the wireless sets the news seemed to be uniformly bad, whether it came from Rome, [Berlin](#), or [London](#). The entry of the Japanese into the war made some think that the Division should be withdrawn to New Zealand, as it was known that one Australian division had already sailed for home. Many men were availing themselves of the cultural activities arranged in the evenings, but there was always a large percentage too tired, or too lazy, to set about entertaining themselves. These latter would frequent the little cafes and wineshops in the villages and in [Baalbek](#), where the only drinks on sale were cherry brandy and arrack—at least those were the names given for raw alcohol slightly flavoured and coloured.

With strong drink, boredom, and idleness the existence of licensed prostitution proved a danger and a temptation to many. One enterprising effort to combat this problem was made by Padre J. T. [Holland](#),² attached to the ASC, who organised a debate on the [page 50](#) subject. With great care he picked two teams and supervised their preparations; after the case had been well stated in ordinary language by both sides, the audience was allowed to join in the debate. The doctor and the chaplain were not in the official teams but they were present to answer what might be called technical questions on religion and health. Without preaching or emotion this debate calmly and vigorously asserted the medical problems and the Christian principles. The debate aroused such interest that the CRASC³ arranged for it to be held in each ASC company. Prostitution must always be a problem with armies and the only solution seems to be a happy, industrious life based firmly on Christian principles.

¹ Rev. K. Harawira, (C of E); [Auckland](#); born Te Kao, [North Auckland](#), 31 Jul 1892.

² Rev. J. T. [Holland](#), (C of E); [Christchurch](#); born Newcastle-on-Tyne, England, 31 Jan 1912.

³ Brig. S. H. Crump, CBE, DSO, Commander Royal Army Service Corps, 2nd New Zealand Division.

CHAPTER 8

[ALAMEIN](#)

THE sudden recall of the Division to the [Western Desert](#) in June 1942 interrupted the ordered and peaceful life of [Syria](#), and instead of well-organised services every Sunday the chaplains

once again had to look for spare moments when small groups of men would be free for public worship. Some remarkable changes appeared in the Division during its three months' static warfare in the Alamein Line. Plans which had been well laid in the early months of the year began to bear fruit, the experience gained in three short campaigns added a certain confidence and efficiency in battle, and the whole Division began to work as a corporate entity.

The man in the ranks began to have more respect for the administrators and leaders. Of course the man in the ranks had himself changed. He now knew a great deal more about Army life and about battle conditions; he understood the reasons for many regulations which in the past had seemed meaningless. The same kind of change was taking place in the Chaplains' Department. The chaplains were becoming more sure of themselves and more useful. They knew the bounds of their work, and their position was recognised with encouraging sympathy and support.

About this time the whole Department was delighted by the announcement of the first decorations for gallantry won by chaplains. The Military Cross was awarded to Padres Spence and Dawson, who had served with the 20th and 18th Battalions respectively in [Greece](#), [Crete](#), and [Libya](#). Special mention in the citations to these awards was made of their bearing in extreme danger, their help with the care of the wounded (on occasions Padre Dawson acted as anaesthetist during operations), and their zealous devotion to duty at all times.

On the long journey to [Tunisia](#) the stocks of the Department rose steadily. Units without chaplains began to apply to the Senior Chaplain for one of their own, while small groups kept asking for services. In the early days Church services had sometimes been suffered as an affliction, but now it was common for the chaplain to receive special requests to go somewhere to hold one. This made [page 52](#) all the difference. When a chaplain knew that he was really wanted, he could prepare for the service with confidence and give of his best. But there were few service during the four long months in the Alamein Line. The Division was surrounded by barbed wire and minefields. Anywhere inside the [Alamein Box](#) was subject to shellfire and bombing, though the infantry on the southern and western sides had the hardest life.

Occasional services could be held at night, and sometimes a handful of men would walk back for a service in one of the tents of an Advanced Dressing Station. But for the most part the work of the chaplain lay in visiting his men, going from group to group, having a few words with everyone he met. By now the chaplain had become a personality in the unit, and he could speak with knowledge of everyday conditions and sometimes soften the hardship of heat and flies with a word of comfort or humour; for he knew his men and understood their life. And the soldier was beginning to know him, too, for people lived very close to each other and it was easy to see if a man practised what he preached.

Unit Chaplains

The unit chaplain came to enjoy something of the position of the family doctor who is helped in his diagnosis and treatment by his knowledge of the homes and lives of his patients. The chaplain lived at unit headquarters. He often attended the Colonel's conferences and learned much of the inner life of the unit. In action and at other times he nearly always lived next to the doctor, and often the two became firm friends. When a new chaplain came to a unit he usually

found a ready-made friend in the doctor, who could outline his work as it had been done by his predecessor and also give much wise counsel about the unit. With very rare exceptions the New Zealand doctors gave the chaplains the maximum of friendly help and advice.

The young platoon commanders took their commands and responsibilities very seriously, and often they enjoyed the chance of discussing their hopes and fears with the chaplain, expressing intimate thoughts which they would have hated brother officers to ear. It was inevitable that the chaplain came to know the officers well as he shared the same mess in all periods outside battle; and he also [page 53](#) came to know what the men thought of the officers. A wise chaplain could do much to inspire the right spirit in a unit by judiciously expressing the men's point of view, and by reminding the men that even the officers had to obey orders and were not therefore personally responsible for every regulation and restriction.

On occasions the chaplain would approach the commanding officer direct on some aspect of unit life. Of course the sympathy of the Colonel was of crucial importance. An Eighth Army chaplains' handbook states this succinctly: 'There may be two opinions but there is only one colonel. Go first to him, ask him what he wants, and work to that. No other plan can possibly work.' Some colonels were not sympathetic, but they were rare exceptions. More frequently they were friendly but without much knowledge of organised religion, though some were good churchmen and thoroughly understood the chaplain's work and desires.

In the Navy, in the close confines of a ship, there is sometimes danger of the 'lower deck' looking upon the chaplain as the Captain's spy, but this danger was not apparent in the 2nd NZEF.

The chaplain had to make his position in a unit. Until he had proved himself and was known, his influence and preaching could not take full effect, but when he was accepted his power was considerable. In this respect notable service was given by Padre Spence with the 20th Battalion, Father Kingan with the 26th, Padre H. G. Taylor¹ with the Divisional Cavalry, and Padre Palmer with the 5th Field Regiment. These chaplains sometimes presented a problem to the Senior Chaplain. He might want to give a new chaplain Divisional experience or else he might feel that a really successful chaplain ought to be rested for a time at Base. But the Senior Chaplain would only have to suggest such a change and he would receive a volume of protests from the chaplain concerned and from his unit, which did not want to part with him. Once or twice a Senior Chaplain in these circumstances made the mistake of asking such a chaplain what he wanted to do: would he like a rest? No man whether chaplain or combatant should be asked whether he would like a rest from the front line. Honour nearly always [page 54](#) triumphs over common sense and the answer is usually an emphatic denial.

A good chaplain came to enjoy some of the freedom of the ancient court jesters, and at the right time would be no respecter of persons. A witty word of rebuke could often ease the strain and tension in a mess when tempers were running high, or some outright remark might break down smouldering jealousy or suspicion. On the other hand few chaplains would have dared to speak as Padre Taylor did on one occasion. Only a man with his record and personality could, in a Church parade, vigorously denounce those who, he considered, had succumbed too easily to nervous exhaustion in battle.

In spite of the need for denominational compromise, limiting as it did clear and direct doctrinal teaching, the life of a unit chaplain brought great rewards and many opportunities, and no finer title could be sought than that of being known as 'Our Padre'. But that title had to be earned and its implications cannot be better expressed than by a certain formula in the same [Eighth Army](#) handbook: 'The show was going long before you came. It is a close-knit family; when you have earned a place in it by humility, service, and worth, they will take you to their heart and back you through thick and thin. If it is not so YOU will normally be in the wrong.'

Batmen-Drivers

Except for certain duties at Base and in hospitals the chaplain was always entitled to the service of a batman-driver. At the beginning of the war the chaplain's batman was an administrative problem. Where was he to come from? Was he subject to the normal rota of fatigues and duties? Did his appointment end as soon as the chaplain left the unit? Eventually it was recognised that the batman had a full-time job in looking after the chaplain, and often it was possible for the chaplain to keep the same batman-driver through several postings.

The batman-driver, as his name suggests, looked after the vehicle as a normal driver, and looked after the chaplain as a normal batman. But the chaplain was not a normal officer and his batman had many special duties, sometimes as a sacristan looking after Church property, sometimes as an altar server. He prepared places for services, handed out hymn books, and packed up afterwards. [page 55](#) He supplied never-ending cups of tea to the many people who called on the chaplain, and often he had to be a Master of Ceremonies in evening activities.

The position of batman carried with it a certain opprobrium, smacking of servility, safety, and privilege. The New Zealand civilian soldier did not at first see why the officer should have a personal servant, and he felt that democracy was in peril if someone else cleaned the officer's boots. And yet the batman gave outstanding service through the war. In combatant units many batmen had to face all the normal dangers of battle and additional ones when they acted as messengers. Time and again the devoted work of a batman helped an officer to give the maximum of service and keep going. In action an officer had little time to think of himself, and it was the batman who supplied the regular meals, insisting that time be taken to eat them; it was the batman who dug the slit-trench and made sure that the officer had a few hours' sleep.

A chaplain usually liked to have a man of his own denomination as batman. It was important, too, that he should be sober, friendly, and interested in the chaplain's work; and once a good man had been found it was desirable, in spite of administrative difficulties, that he should stay with the same chaplain when he was transferred from one unit to another. The New Zealand chaplains received wonderful service from their batmen-drivers, some of whom were killed in action, and it is only fitting that this tribute should be paid.

¹ Rev. H. G. Taylor, DSO, (C of E); [Kaitaia, North Auckland](#); born Foster, Victoria, [Australia](#), 12 Mar 1908; wounded 23 Mar 1943; served as SCF, 2nd NZEF, [Japan](#), 1947-48.

CHAPTER 9 IN ACTION

WITH certain exceptions the chaplain went into action with his unit. In the First World War there were occasions when chaplains received instructions not to go into the front line, but in the 2nd NZEF the infantry and Artillery chaplains were right up forward with the men. Those posted to armoured regiments and certain Divisional units also appeared in the battle area, but only after the determination of individual chaplains had established a precedent; several stories were told of chaplains who carefully avoided their colonels in action in case they were sent back out of battle. When the Roman Catholic chaplains were attached to combatant units they always went to the Advanced Dressing Stations before action began so that they could keep in touch with the wounded and dying of their faith. They also frequently paid visits to the forward areas.

What was the chaplain expected to do in battle? Was he to retire to a secret place and pray for victory, or was he to advance with the leading men—an example of courage and carelessness of death? Until action had been experienced it was hard to see the problem in its true perspective. Many histories and war books have given a picture of battles which is quite misleading: of two armies clashing for several short hours, with thousands of wounded lying on the ground, and many an opportunity for deeds of daring. But in the Second World War battles did not take that shape. They would begin with an attack, certainly, but most of the time would be spent in holding positions and in being subjected to bombing and to shell and mortar fire, not for a few short hours but for long days and long nights.

The chaplain did not set out to be a shining example of courage. He found it hard enough to find courage for his own routine duties. The regular visiting of front-line positions demanded much physical strength and all the physical courage he had, for unless he appeared calm and cheerful and helpful when he arrived his visit was worse than useless. In addition to his regular visiting the chaplain had to try to comfort the wounded in the Regimental Aid Post, steeling himself to remain strong in the presence of terrible wounds. He [page 57](#) had also to bury the dead. The civilian clergyman frequently encounters death but no previous experience had prepared the chaplain for his duties in battle. Time and again the bravest of soldiers would not be prepared to do the work of the chaplain. They were ready to dig the grave and carry the body, but the chaplain himself had to make the identification, remove the soldier's identity disc hanging from his neck, and collect all personal belongings from his pockets, not forgetting to remove any watches. It was a hard job but it had to be done, and it was done though few realised how much it cost. In time a specialised battle routine was worked out for each arm of the service, and the newly appointed chaplain would learn from his predecessor or from others in the unit where his duties in action lay. In this respect the normal friendliness of the unit doctors was again invaluable.

With the Infantry

Few would deny that the infantry have the hardest and most dangerous life of any part of the Army. In battle they come to grips with the enemy, and often for long periods are pinned to the ground by shell and mortar fire. Out of battle their life is largely spent in a monotonous routine

of weapon training, route marches, and digging. They have little transport of their own and no other unit suffers more hardship in regard to food and sleeping conditions. But for all that there is a glory in this life. They are the 'common labourers' in war, without whom no battle can be fought and no victory consolidated.

The infantry chaplain shared the same Spartan existence, often living far from his truck and his scanty equipment. No other chaplain had to face such physical hardships or such constant exposure to danger. No other chaplain had as many wounded to look after or dead to bury; and, in addition, after every action there was a constant stream of new faces in his battalion as reinforcements replaced the casualties. Under these conditions it was hard to build up a unit spirit and keep continuity. The infantry chaplain needed great physical and mental stamina and deep reserves of spiritual strength so that his contact with each stranger remained fresh and sincere. On the other hand, his battalion was seldom split up and he always had the bulk of his parishioners [page 58](#) living all around him as companies were seldom dispersed more than easy walking distance away. In training periods his work was similar to that of most other chaplains but in action he had to evolve a special technique of his own.

Night Attacks

Before an attack the chaplain usually left his vehicle and batman-driver at B Echelon and climbed on to the doctor's truck, where room was found for his blankets, spade, and haversack. Most of the Division's attacks took place at night and followed a well-defined pattern. First the rifle companies advanced and captured the position; a success signal would then be fired and the supporting arms moved forward, the doctor's 3-ton lorry among them. On arrival at the new Battalion Headquarters, the Regimental Sergeant-Major would lead the doctor to a place suitable for his aid post, where probably some wounded already awaited treatment. The chaplain would help to unpack the medical supplies and would then talk to the wounded before setting out on a short tour of the new positions.

The main impressions of a night attack were always the same. They began with a period of waiting for zero hour—a period of tension, nervous irritability, and last-minute preparations. Then the riflemen, with fixed bayonets, disappeared into the dark, while the infantry supporting arms lay in their trenches waiting for the success signal. Noise of shells, small-arms fire, and distant shouting would be heard, and bright flashes and fires seen. Presently one or two wounded would arrive back, usually with completely false stories of failure and calamity.

When the supporting arms reached the new positions they found a scene of intense activity and confusion. A group of prisoners crouching disconsolately in some hollow sheltering from the fire of their own troops; the Colonel speaking on the telephone with Brigade Headquarters or sending messages to his own company commanders; the signallers running out wire in every direction; the machine gunners and anti-tank gunners digging gunpits.

After seeing the wounded sent back to the Advanced Dressing Station the chaplain would set out on a trip round the company areas. The time would be about midnight; often a bright moon [page 59](#) lit the scene. Here and there a line of slow-moving white dots would signify tracer bullets from enemy machine guns, while from close at hand came the explosion of mortar bombs. The

boom of our own field guns in the rear would be followed by the scream of their shells as they passed overhead for the target just a few hundred yards away. It was an eerie walk, and it was obviously important that it be made in the right direction and not too far.

Presently the chaplain would hear the unmistakable sound of New Zealand voices and see a number of figures ahead. He would find the company commander absent-mindedly giving small and unimportant instructions while he concentrated on making sure that his company was in touch with the other companies on either flank. The platoon commanders could be heard urging their men to get their defences dug and their weapons into position. But the men were disinclined for work. It was as though they had just finished playing in an exciting football match. They were tired and excited; they wanted to stand around and discuss the attack. Their first fears had passed, but their new positions, perhaps only several hundred yards farther forward than the previous ones, seemed strange, exposed, and dangerous. And in addition there was one other powerful emotion: nearly all of them wanted to have a quiet look around for some loot in the abandoned enemy trenches.

Out of the gloom a voice and figure would appear. 'How are you, chaps?' it might say, and one of the soldiers would suddenly exclaim, 'Why, it's the old Padre!' and they would stop for a moment and talk. The chaplain could feel the sense of strain and weariness in their quick, nervous speaking, and tried with calm and friendly talk to relax the tension for a moment. Then he would probably hand round some cigarettes or chocolate and move on to the next group.

Arriving, after about an hour, back at Battalion Headquarters, he would dig a trench and, in spite of the noise and discomfort, would fall asleep immediately. Just before dropping off to sleep he would often see the Colonel setting out on his tour round the companies, a tour which took much longer than the chaplain's and was not necessarily his last duty for the night. Infantry colonels had to work hard.

Early next morning the whole scene looked different; the excitement and horror of the previous night would appear at first to have been nothing more than a nightmare. Battalion Headquarters was now completely organised with a telephone line out to each company and one back to Brigade Headquarters. Before daylight the cooks' trucks would come up from B Echelon with a hot breakfast and fresh information about the attack.

Burials

After breakfast the chaplain considered his programme. First he had to see about burials. There might be one or two bodies lying near the Regimental Aid Post and others in the company areas, while there were bound to be several farther back—men who had been killed during the advance. Conditions in every battle were different, but frequently it was possible to have some movement in daylight round Battalion Headquarters, and the chaplain could arrange some burials. He would find a suitable place and get some graves dug and the bodies carried to them. Each had to be carefully identified and the personal possessions collected. He would open the shirt and remove one of the two coloured identity discs, cutting off the red one and leaving the green, as he unconsciously murmured the aid-to-memory, 'Red for registration, green for grave.' He had to check the name on the disc with the name in the paybook; then he searched each pocket and put

everything he found into a parcel. Later these parcels were handed to the orderly-room sergeant when he came up from B Echelon.

When the bodies were ready for burial the chaplain would have a word with the Colonel. Perhaps it would be possible to fetch one or two of the man's friends and a time for the burial would be arranged. Often these burials had to wait for nightfall, and sometimes they were interrupted by shellfire. No respect for the dead justified the risk of one man's life. The little group stood round the grave as the chaplain read from his prayer book, but before the earth was piled on the blanket-covered body, a tin or a shell case containing a paper with all particulars would be placed in the grave. This was necessary because identity discs were made of a material which quickly rotted underground. The Germans and Italians more sensibly used metal discs.

The chaplain had to see that the grave was well marked and all [page 61](#) particulars—name, rank, number—carefully recorded in his notebook. Rough crosses would be made and inscribed, and a map reference for the grave obtained from the Intelligence Section. This map reference, with a small sketch map of the grave, would later help the Graves Registration Unit. From each paybook the chaplain copied the name and address of the next of kin, and later in the day would transfer this information to the special burial form, complete with sketch map on the back, which would then be handed with the parcels of personal belongings to the orderly-room sergeant.

Letters

If there was a quiet period in the day, or alternatively so much shellfire that the chaplain was forced to stay in his trench, he might start writing his letters to the next of kin. They would not be very good letters, written under such conditions, but the chaplain always had to consider the possibility of being killed himself and no letter written at all. Months later the next of kin often wrote back and from these letters the chaplain learned what kind of information they wanted. In response to many requests chaplains always tried to get photographs taken of the graves. Relations asked whether there had been last messages but this hardly ever happened. A man was either killed outright or so seriously wounded that morphia was administered, and death was usually preceded by deep and peaceful sleep.

The infantry chaplain found these letters especially difficult to write when he had not known the man he had buried. All he could do was describe the funeral, give some information about the death, and then endeavour to get more personal information from the man's friends. Often the chaplain would encourage these same friends to write letters of condolence, helping them in the writing, for the ordinary man has little experience in this difficult task.

Letters to the next of kin were a difficult but important part of the chaplain's work, but fortunately they were not the only letters he had to write. He kept in touch with his men in hospital and those who were prisoners of war. Frequently, too, he had to write to authorities in New Zealand about the domestic problems of soldiers. But the happiest letters of all were those that he wrote about the [page 62](#) living, for the sheer love of it, writing to fathers and mothers about men he had seen in Church services or knew well.

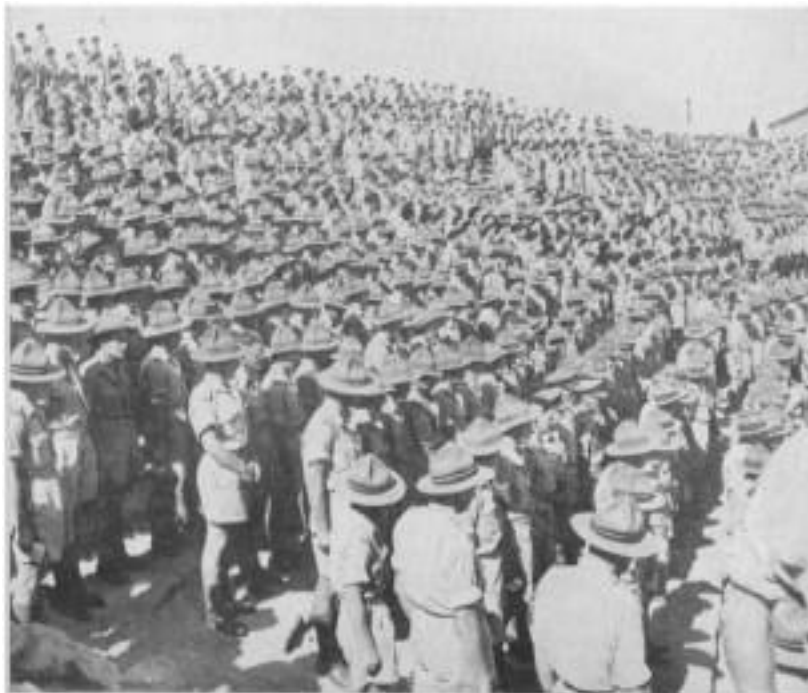
Daytime in the Front Line

On the morning after an attack it was seldom that the chaplain had time to write letters or even complete his burials. Periodically he would go to ground as shell or mortar fire became heavy. He might hear shells landing in one of the company areas, from which presently a message would come telling of several casualties. If possible the wounded were brought in by stretcher or Bren carrier, and the doctor would attend to them at once. Under favourable conditions they could be evacuated in daylight by ambulance, but frequently they would have to be held in the Regimental Aid Post till dark. Slit-trenches would be dug for them, and the chaplain tried to comfort them as they lay in pain, often in considerable danger. Sometimes a long carry on a stretcher was possible to some point where an ambulance could come in safety. At other times they would be carried by jeep.

Frequently no movement in daylight was safe, and the wounded, if brought in, were attended by a crouching doctor and orderlies. At most times it was dangerous to walk about, even if hidden by some land feature, and everyone not working felt a strong desire to lie all day in a trench. Because the chaplain made his own timetable he was strongly subject to this slit-trench attraction. It was so easy to put off activities till later in the day, and it was so difficult, when shelling and common sense demanded safety in a trench, to decide when to leave it.

If the shelling was really bad, of course, there was no doubt, but at other times the chaplain suffered much mental indecision. Ought he to try to do a bit of visiting, or would it be as sensible as it was desirable to get into the trench for a while? Often it would be possible to visit one of the companies without much danger of drawing enemy fire.

The long day would pass and with night came great activity. The trucks arrived with the evening meal and perhaps the mail. There would be more burials, or word of another attack that night, or some patrols. If there was no attack the chaplain would visit a company. He would ask a signaller for the correct telephone line,



Church service at El Djem Theatre, 1943 Maadi

Church service at El Djem Theatre, 1943 [Maadi](#)



Church service—Rev. H. G. Taylor and the Divisional Cavalry
Maadi

Church service—Rev. H. G. Taylor and the Divisional Cavalry [Maadi](#)



*Rev. Father J. L. Kingan (in front) with Italian orphans
Castelfrentano*

Rev. Father J. L. Kingan (in front) with Italian orphans [Castelfrentano](#)

*Rev. A. C. K. Harper, killed
in action, 22 February 1944*



Rev. A. C. K. Harper, killed in action, 22 February 1944



First Moral Leadership School Group, 22 June 1945 Riccione
Second row from bottom (third from left): Lecturers, Revs. H. S. Scott, H. F. Harding, J. S. Somerville, E. O. Sheild, and A. Gill.
YMCA Secretary

First Moral Leadership School Group, 22 June 1945 [Riccione](#) Second row from bottom (third from left): Lectures, Revs. H. S. Scott, H. F. Harding, J. S. Somerville, E. O. Sheild, and A. Gill.
YMCA Secretary



Interior of chapel at Stalag VIII B Prisoners of war made the furniture Lamsdorf, Upper Silesia

Interior of chapel at Stalag VIII B Prisoners of war made the furniture [Lamsdorf](#), Upper Silesia



The cortege of a prisoner of war at Stalag VIII B

The cortege of a prisoner of war at Stalag VIII B

[page 63](#) and then, holding it lightly in his hand, proceed like a tram to his destination. Seldom did he manage to get round the whole company. His visit would be interrupted by the evening meal, the reading of mail, or shellfire, and soon many of the men would be snatching a few short hours of sleep before their turn came for picket duty. It is hard to imagine a more gruelling life with its scanty sleep, poor meals, and constant nervous tension. Only in moments of great activity was the danger forgotten or the mind at rest; and, in addition to the danger and the hardships, there was a good deal of heart-break as one fine man after another was killed or wounded.

It was never the custom for infantry chaplains to go back to B Echelon, which was usually well out of range of shellfire, at any period while the battalion was in the line. The chaplain stayed with his men, and when eventually the battalion was relieved he was just as tired as anyone else. Each day had taken its toll of physical stamina and mental strength; each day it had become harder to walk around calmly and speak in a quiet voice. No doubt a chaplain living at B Echelon, with regular meals and good sleep, could have found opportunities to come up to the front line on most days, and on this basis would, perhaps, have been braver and more cheerful company, but he could never have felt that he really belonged to an infantry battalion. The sharing of everyday experiences was part of his calling, and although this front-line life does not lend itself to graphic description, yet it represented the most valuable and the most glorious part of his work. The tragedy was the extreme weariness of the chaplains as they came out of the line, for that was the time when the men were most receptive to the consolation and teaching of the

Christian Gospel. Memorial and thanksgiving services would be held, and perhaps the weariness of the chaplains enhanced their message. Every chaplain who served with the infantry felt conscious of many missed opportunities but none of them would deny their pride in having lived and suffered with such fine men.

The Maori Chaplains

Throughout the war the [Maori Battalion](#) had its own Maori chaplain, and for the last three years there was a second chaplain who worked with the Maori troops at Base. A special church service [page 64](#) book in Maori was produced, with hymns and an order of service based on the *Book of Common Prayer*, for owing to the unusual denominational ratio, the five Maori chaplains were all members of the Church of England. Padre Harawira, who had gone to the First World War at the age of sixteen, was the first chaplain, and he served in [Greece](#), [Crete](#), [Libya](#), and [Syria](#) before being invalided home. His place was taken by Padre W. Rangi,¹ a man of great spiritual force, well-loved and respected. He was once described as having the face of a New Testament saint and the fire of an Old Testament prophet. He was not young for infantry work, having three sons serving with him in the battalion, but he made little of age and was giving splendid service up to the time when both his eardrums were burst by an exploding shell at [Alamein](#).

Padre N. T. Wanoa² served with the battalion from [Alamein](#) to [Tunis](#), after spending the first three years of the war as a combatant, during which he rose to the rank of lieutenant after good service in [Greece](#) and [Crete](#). He had been a vicar before the war and was commissioned as a chaplain in 1942.

Padre Wi Huata³ arrived in the [Middle East](#) in 1943 and served throughout the Italian campaign. He was a young man with many talents. Life, vitality, and enthusiasm flowed from him at all times, whether he was living in the front line or taking a choir on tour round the Base hospitals. Energetic in all things affecting the welfare of his men, he showed great courage and proved himself a worthy representative of a great battalion. He was awarded the Military Cross for his fine work with the battalion in [Italy](#). His religious duties were performed with sincerity and love, and he presented over a hundred men for confirmation.

Padre Manu Bennett⁴ another distinguished son of the Rt. Rev. F. A. Bennett, Bishop of Aotearoa, arrived in the [Middle East](#) in 1944 and also saw service with the battalion in [Italy](#).

It was right that the Maoris should have chaplains of their own race for they had many characteristics which deserved real know- [page 65](#) ledge and sympathy. In battle they won respect for their fiery courage and their most light-hearted contempt of danger. They did not bother much about minor regulations and red tape, and many a time everyone, save Authority, smiled at some ingenious interpretation of military law. Like all New Zealand soldiers they grew restive in the monotonous routine of a Base camp, and sometimes this boredom led to trouble. But the crimes of a few individuals could not tarnish the record of the battalion in action nor disguise the fact that as a race they have an interest in spiritual things which is often deeper and more natural than that of the pakeha.

Every morning before daylight in the front line prayers would be taken by the chaplain, but if he were absent an officer or private would always step forward to take his place.⁵ They took a real interest in their Church services and made them beautiful with their singing. Sometimes in big services at Base the Maoris would sing an anthem in their own language. There was one occasion on a hot, sticky, dusty day, when some two thousand soldiers attended a service in a cinema in [Maadi](#). The Church parade seemed formal and uninspiring until the Maori contingent stood up and sang. Then the war and the dust and the heat were forgotten in a moment. Something of home and of beauty was brought very near, and the glorious unaccompanied harmony brought new life to the listeners, as refreshing as rain in the desert. Time and again a small group of Maoris separated from their battalion would attend a pakeha Church parade and sing a hymn in Maori with the same wonderful effect, giving a fresh meaning to the words of Isaiah: 'The desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose.' The Maori chaplains were always popular members of the Department where they willingly took their share of all extra duties, and in the battalion they were worthy members of a race famed for its martial tradition and respect for the deeper things of life.

With the Field Regiments

The job of the Artillery chaplain was completely different from that of his colleague in the infantry. In action a much larger part [page 66](#) of his parish could be visited. It was not possible in daylight to visit certain guns or the observation posts, but other guns were well within his reach. The members of a gun crew were tied to their gun, and only occasionally could one man get away to attend a religious service; even then men hesitated to go as they felt they were throwing extra work on their friends.

There was only one solution: the chaplain had to visit each gun. He would talk with the men, say a few prayers, or perhaps conduct a short service. His visit might be interrupted by the gun being ordered to fire or by enemy air attack, but his work was seldom delayed for long as there were always other guns he could call on. In fact there seemed to be too many, and the chaplain spent days on end going from one gun to the next. This made great demands on his stamina; physically it was very tiring; mentally and spiritually it was harder still.

The first few visits of a day would be easy. The chaplain would get into the gunpit, and after some general conversation and exchange of news and rumours, would say prayers or administer Holy Communion. Then perhaps he would take orders for the canteen or receive messages to pass on. As the chaplain climbed out of this gunpit he would feel that he had made a useful contribution. Then he would find his way to the next pit and start all over again.

The chaplain, like all gunners, had to endure the noise of his own guns, which, in addition, were one of the chief targets of the enemy artillery. Gunners often said that they could not hear enemy shells in action and were kept so busy that they had little time to think of them, but the chaplain must have had many a nervous walk from gun to gun. Fear and noise are both extremely tiring, and the Artillery chaplain was often a weary man by the end of his round of visits. After visiting the guns he would still have calls to make at the Aid Post and B Echelon, and perhaps make time to look in at a dressing station. And of course there were often burials, too, and letters to write.

Conditions in each campaign varied greatly. In Libya in 1941 Padre Buck, with the 4th Field Regiment, had to contend with the constant movement, the attacks and counter-attacks from every direction which marked this campaign. At other times—the static period in [Alamein](#) and the days before the break-through—the [page 67](#) chaplain had a long and exhausting round of duties, looking after men who were taxing their physical strength to the utmost. Perhaps there were a few more comforts in serving with the Artillery but there was never any shortage of hard work or danger.

¹ Rev. W. Rangi (C of E); Taneatua, [Auckland](#); born Tolaga Bay, 30 Jul 1891.

² Rev. N. T. Wanoa (C of E); Te Kaha, [Opotiki](#); born Rangitukia, Auckland, 9 Aug 1906; wounded 23 May 1941.

³ Rev. Wi Te T. Huata. MC, (C of E); Hastings; born NZ, 23 Aug 1917.

⁴ Rev. M. A. Bennett (C of E); Feilding; born [Rotorua](#), 10 Feb 1916.

⁵ ‘The only troops known to have asked for, and to have been granted the privilege of regular Family Prayers were the [Maori Battalion](#) of the New Zealand Division in the [Eighth Army](#).’ *Lambeth Calls*, by Canon J. McLeod Campbell.

CHAPTER 10

THE ROAD TO TUNIS

ON the long journey from [Alamein](#) to [Tunis](#) conditions did not permit any regular routine for chaplains. Time and again Sundays would be fully occupied in battle or in travelling, and there were few static intervals when religious and recreational activities could be arranged in the evenings. For some units of the Division there was a short pause for garrison duty at Mersa Matruh and a longer pause at [Bardia](#) to rest and reorganise.

In the attack behind [El Agheila](#) in December 1942 Padre Bicknell was wounded and was eventually evacuated to New Zealand. As the first chaplain to represent the [Salvation Army](#) he had a long record of steady, conscientious work, for which he received mention in despatches. From Alamein onwards he had been serving with the 24th Battalion.

After the action at [Nofilia](#) there was a halt of several days, during which it was possible to make adequate arrangements for the Christmas services before the long desert advance was resumed. In time this travelling life came to have its own clearly marked routine. In the brigade groups the chaplains were able to look after their own units and the other smaller groups that were attached. When Sundays were fully occupied with material affairs it was often possible to hold Church services during the week, and whenever an attack was imminent short pre-battle services would be arranged and Holy Communion administered.

But much of the time was spent in travelling in convoy in desert formation with each vehicle two hundred yards from the next. During the halts the chaplain might wander off visiting, but he

always had to keep on the alert as it was never certain whether a halt would last for ten minutes or twenty-four hours.

With the ASC

There was one group of chaplains who spent their whole time travelling and never, or at least very seldom, enjoyed the privilege of living in one fixed spot. These were the chaplains attached to the NZASC. At first Padre Jamieson was chaplain for the Reserve [page 69](#) Mechanical Transport Company and the three other ASC companies, but in [Syria](#) an extra chaplain was appointed and Padre Jamieson remained with the [Reserve Mechanical Transport Company](#). Later a chaplain was appointed for each of these three companies— Supply, Petrol, and Ammunition—bringing the total to four, and among them they covered the smaller NZASC units such as the Tank Transporter Company, etc.

To the outside world the ASC was a strange tribe which seemed to consist of laconic individuals permanently tied to the driving seat of big trucks, with no apparent entity or attachment other than to their vehicles. But the ASC had a unit life as real as it was strong. Certainly its members were well dispersed and their lives spent in perpetual travel, for there was always someone or something in urgent need of transport. The chaplain had much to do in keeping in touch with a scattered flock and learning their special hardships and interests.

There was plenty of danger, for supply convoys were a favourite target for air attack, and it was never pleasant to contemplate an explosion near ammunition or petrol. Moreover, it was often necessary for one of these trucks to stay for long periods in the battle area until its contents were needed, which meant that the drivers had the unenviable duty of being on the battlefield without any set tasks to occupy the anxious periods of waiting. The ASC chaplains came to appreciate these conditions and to play their part in this specialised gipsy life. Their constant travelling supplied many opportunities for such extra work as services with small units and visits to the dressing stations.

[Tripoli](#)

By the time [Tripoli](#) was reached the Division was beginning to get very tired; the chaplains, too, were feeling the strain. On being invalided home before the break-through at [Alamein](#), Padre Moore. Senior Chaplain at [Divisional Headquarters](#), had been replaced by Padre Jamieson. He in turn was followed by Padre Buck, who arrived when the Division was at [Tripoli](#).

A short course for chaplains arranged by the latter in a comfortable hotel in [Tripoli](#) took the form of a series of lectures interspersed with periods of devotion and rest. At this time many [page 70](#) New Zealand Roman Catholic soldiers joined their comrades in the [Eighth Army](#) at a Solemn Mass of Thanksgiving in [Tripoli](#) Cathedral.

Organised Vice

One important subject received close attention from the chaplains in [Tripoli](#). This was the problem of prostitution, the dangers of which every army has to face. It is the duty of the medical

authorities to do their best to protect the soldier from venereal diseases, though on several occasions in the early months of the war the chaplains had objected to the tone used by some doctors while lecturing on this subject. [Tripoli](#) had been the Axis base in North [Africa](#) and it was said that the disease rate in the town was very high. In a talk with Padre Buck, [General Freyberg](#) said that he wanted the chaplains to give this subject special attention. The chaplains appreciated the spirit of this request from the GOC, knowing that he was as deeply concerned about the spiritual dangers as those of health.

For many reasons it was considered undesirable to handle this subject in sermons on Church parades, and it was felt that a clear-cut statement of the fundamentals of the Christian faith, not ethical lectures, was the best answer to moral problems. This meant that the chaplains would have to be given some time on the normal daily syllabus, and, after much consideration, a series of weekly lectures was planned and arrangements made to cover every Army unit, with the Roman Catholics speaking to their own men. But alas for well-laid plans. No sooner had the first lecture been given than the Division was once again on the move. However, the chaplains had achieved something, for the Divisional authorities had unconsciously approved the system of 'Padres' Hours'

The Padre's Hour

In the British Army an experiment was bearing fruit. Once a week the chaplain was given the opportunity of speaking to the men of his own denomination on a religious subject in the 'King's time', that is inside the daily training syllabus. The scheme had been thought out carefully and many very helpful pamphlets had been written. The chaplain never spoke to more than forty or [page 71](#) fifty men at the same time so that a good discussion could follow the talk. In the 2nd NZEF some chaplains, with the permission of the commanding officer of their units, had given occasional lectures, but it was not till the very end of the war that the Padre's Hour found its official place in the life of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force.

Divisional Units

The short and pleasant stay in [Tripoli](#) was interrupted by the sudden move to [Medenine](#), and once again the long caravan set out into the desert. Desert life had become almost second nature, and by now the chaplains were thoroughly experienced, ready to seize every opportunity for religious ministrations, though philosophically prepared to take the barren periods with calmness.

Three chaplains had unusual jobs. These were the men posted to the Anti-Tank Regiment, the Anti-Aircraft Regiment, and the Machine Gun Battalion. In action these units were constantly split up and posted to different brigades, making it almost impossible for the chaplain to minister to all his men. At one time in [Syria](#) it was suggested that these units did not need chaplains, but each had a full muster of men and quite as much unit spirit and corporate life as any other, and the work of the chaplains was appreciated. One of them, Padre W J. Thompson,¹ was mentioned in despatches while serving with the Anti-Tank Regiment.

The Wounded in the Field

In action these three chaplains reported at the Advanced Dressing Stations as soon as an attack was expected and took their places alongside the Roman Catholics, staying there while the battle lasted. It was work of great value and intense activity. All through the night of an attack and all the next day the doctors worked continuously till the last wounded man had been treated, and in this period the chaplains were constantly on their feet. They met each ambulance and talked to each man. Sometimes they stood by the stretcher as the doctor dressed a man's wounds, or else they went off to another tent where the men lay after treatment. Their time was fully occupied in giving religious ministrations or in little acts of [page 72](#) personal kindness, which varied from carrying a stretcher to promising to send a cable. And of course there were the inevitable burials. Although it was sometimes suggested that, where possible, all the dead should be sent back to the dressing stations for burial, this was seldom done. The advantages would have been the concentration and careful marking of graves and the avoidance of funerals within range of enemy shellfire.

Casualty Clearing Station

Farther back with the Main Dressing Station there was usually at least one chaplain, and there was always one permanently attached to the Casualty Clearing Station, where the more serious operations were performed and patients kept till they were fit for the journey to the hospitals. Padre H. F. Harding² served longest with this unit and for his work was awarded the MBE. Often before some critical operation he would strengthen a man with prayer and sometimes stood by his side in the operating theatre as he received the anaesthetic.

The Divisional Cavalry

While the wounded were receiving treatment and sympathetic care in the rear of the battle, the [Eighth Army](#) was being led towards [Tunis](#) by the light tanks and Bren carriers of the Divisional Cavalry- Padre Taylor served continuously with this unit from [Greece](#) to [Cassino](#) and he was one of the best known and most respected chaplains in the Division. His conscientious and courageous pursuit of duty was cloaked by an exuberant and lighthearted friendliness. He found time to take services with many isolated groups of soldiers and was always welcome, even with those hard-bitten men, the New Zealand Engineers!

In his own unit, where he was affectionately known as 'Harry [Kaitaia](#)'. he had very great influence and there was seldom a time when he did not know the name and face of every man in the regiment. He was untiring in his visiting and organising, and on occasions a great and outspoken preacher. Gradually he made his position in battle an established tradition which was widely appreciated by the troopers and officially approved by the Colonel. [page 73](#) A short distance behind the first line of skirmishing Bren carriers and light tanks came the chaplain, often some two miles ahead of Regimental Headquarters. He travelled in a Bren carrier, which had been specially allotted to him. with a medical orderly and a [Red Cross](#) flag. At night he took his place with the advanced laager, and in the early light of the morning nearly all would be present as he took prayers or celebrated Holy Communion.

Padre Taylor was wounded on the way to [Tunis](#) but refused to go back. The only time that he was seen to be frightened was on one occasion when his colonel sought him out and said, 'I will put you on charge if you don't wear this,' and he pinned a medal ribbon to his shirt. This was the first intimation he had of the immediate award of the DSO; he was the second chaplain in the war to receive this decoration. Padre Taylor's friends in the Department often accused him of believing that there was no more important unit in the war than his beloved 'Div. Cav.'. and certainly his regiment believed that there was no other chaplain like him; and they were right.

End of Tunisian Campaign

The fighting round [Takrouna](#) and [Enfidaville](#) was some of the fiercest that the Division saw; coming at the end of a very hard year, it made great demands on stamina and endurance. For his work in the long campaign from [Alamein](#) to [Enfidaville](#) a Military Cross was awarded to Father Kingan of the 6th Brigade. Father Kingan had originally been attached to the 26th Battalion, where he was greatly beloved. With the doctor. Sam Rutherford,³ and later the [YMCA](#) secretary, Geoff, Gray, he formed a remarkable team in that unit. Their friendliness, courage, and devotion to duty as they cared for the spiritual and material needs of the men had a profound influence on the battalion. Father Kingan was widely known and respected by all denominations in the 6th Brigade, in which he served with valour and distinction from the time that he was posted to the 26th Battalion in 1941 till the day when he was seriously wounded in an Advanced Dressing Station in [Italy](#).

[page 74](#)

Morale

All the chaplains were tired in this last battle in North Africa, but many were refreshed by a welcome visit from Padre McKenzie who searched them out in the front line and comforted them. For a year the Division had endured constant action, movement, and stress, and it was only natural that the men should be thoroughly tired at the end although some of the chaplains considered that more could have been done to keep them fresh. The chaplain was in an ideal position to know what the troops were thinking, for like the civilian policeman he appeared to wander around and watch people working. He normally enjoyed the confidence of senior officers, and thus knew the inside story of many matters of policy and strategy; his daily visiting and personal interviews made him well acquainted with the hopes and fears of the other ranks, while his frequent contact with brother chaplains gave him a good general picture of the life of the Division.

Many chaplains considered that morale was a subject that did not receive proper attention, believing that the spiritual and mental happiness of the men were sacrificed for physical health. The welfare services supplied by the [YMCA](#) and the Church Army were excellent and owed much to the splendid co-operation of the Army authorities. The Army Postal Service delivered mail with unfailing regularity to all places and on all occasions, and letters from home, whether received at Base or in the middle of a battle, were very important in maintaining morale. The supply of radios, army newspapers, bands, and concert parties did much to keep the men bright and alert, but more could have been done. The modern civilian soldier has a background of education and mental activity unknown in earlier wars, and unless these intellectual appetites are

satisfied he will become a prey to boredom and fear. Air Marshal Tedder. Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, [Middle East](#), was thinking of this when he asked for the formation in [Cairo](#) of that successful club known as 'Music for All'. where cultural magazines and classical music were avidly sought by his [Royal Air Force](#) sergeants and other servicemen.

In the 2nd NZEF periods between battle were devoted almost entirely to training and physical exercise. The chaplains believed that no daily training syllabus was complete without one period [page 75](#) specially designed to exercise the mind. Quizzes, spelling bees, and cultural lectures would have been better than nothing, and the chaplains believed that such periods could have been arranged with valuable results.

Some of the following suggestions could have been put into practice, but the suggestions are not as important as the implications behind them, namely that the soldiers should have been given much more mental exercise and that this could have been supplied quite easily:

Reinforcements in [Maadi](#) should have had some teaching on battle psychology in which some of the following points could have been emphasised:

Most men are frightened in battle, but you don't look as frightened as you feel. It is a man's duty to disguise this fear and keep high the morale of his friends.

1. The longer you stay in a trench the more frightened you get The best cure for fear is activity.

Night attacks usually appear at the time to be complete failures but next morning things often look a lot better. First reports of an attack are usually absurdly false and pessimistic.

A man has usually greater reserves of nervous energy than he thinks and the use of this extra bit wins battles.

2. Training should include one or two lectures on Army organisation so that the soldier could appreciate what contingencies cause the normal and infuriating succession of cancelled orders. It is hard to see what danger there would be in Base officials and administrators having an opportunity of 'putting themselves onside' with the fighting soldier, and it would be invaluable if some exaggerated ideas of muddle and silly 'red tape' were thus removed. Time should be set aside for frequent lectures on war aims and world events. It was frequently said that the New Zealander is too wise to be fooled by propaganda, and this is largely correct: but this very wisdom would have helped him to enjoy the truth when it was ably expressed. Such lectures would depend for their success upon the right men being found to give them: those who possessed the two essential talents—knowledge of a [page 76](#) subject and the ability to speak in public. Men of this type were rare, very rare, but they did exist and
3. with care a good team could have been found. For example, there was in the Division a history lecturer from [Otago University](#) who could give really inspiring lectures on the growth and constitution of the British Empire, lectures which crowds of men attended in their spare time. There was a foreign correspondent from a great newspaper who could speak on world affairs, and an Artillery officer who had worked in a Russian factory. These men could always get packed audiences for evening lectures, but their talents should have been used throughout the whole Division in the daily syllabus. Their success would have depended

entirely upon their gift for public speaking for the soldier had his fill of dull instructors, though one brilliant exception was Major Jasper Maskelyne, of the British Army, a well-known figure on the [London](#) stage. His lectures on security to New Zealand troops were extremely witty and packed with valuable information.

- There was room for a system of informal talks describing the different aspects of the war effort. In this instance a high standard of public speaking would not have been necessary, provided there was an opportunity for questions. The ordinary soldier would have been
5. interested and cheered if he could have heard something of the work of a fighter pilot, of a man serving with the Commandos, the [Long Range Desert Group](#), or with submarines —just to mention a few.
 6. The system of Padres' Hours would undoubtedly have been of benefit to morale. Urgent overhaul of [British Broadcasting Corporation](#) news bulletins should have been demanded, with one programme designed for civilians and another for soldiers. The Libyan debate which followed the fall of [Tobruk](#) suggested that we had everything save good
 7. Generals. This may or may not have been the truth but it was discouraging information for the troops. Later the [BBC](#) set about preparing the civilians for the possible loss of [Alexandria](#) and Egypt. Perhaps civilian morale needed such preparation, but it was depressing for the soldiers, fighting in the Alamein Line, to hear that the [BBC](#) half-expected them to lose the battle.

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The chaplains were convinced that the men should be given some mental training for battle, that they should know what they were fighting for, and that they should enter an attack not only with knowledge of their weapons and physical health, but also with alert minds stimulated and strengthened by regular mental exercise.

¹ Maj W. J. Thompson, m.i.d.; [Salvation Army](#) officer: [Christchurch](#): born [Waihi](#), 22 Feb 1903.

² Rev. H. F. Harding, DSO. MBE, (C of E); [Christchurch](#): born [Dunedin](#), 23 Sep 1908.

³ Capt A. M. Rutherford. MC and bar: Inglewood; born Higheliff, [Dunedin](#) 27 Mar 1915: wounded 22 Mar 1943.

CHAPTER 11

BASE, 1943

THE Division found a transformed [Maadi Camp](#) on its return from [Tunisia](#). The camp had been acting as the headquarters of the Expeditionary Force, and in four years its size, scope, and amenities had steadily increased. The original Central YMCA, standing in the centre of the camp as its name suggests, had grown haphazardly into a large and useful building. Across the road the Roman Catholics had built an attractive little stone chapel, suitable for small services, with accommodation for two chaplains and another room for private interviews. For the whole period in [Maadi Camp](#) the Roman Catholics held their Sunday services in Shafto's cinema, a great barn of a building with four walls, a stage, and a screen. So closely did this well-known landmark

come to be identified with [Roman Catholic Church](#) parades that it was often facetiously referred to as the 'Latin Cathedral'.

The Church Army Hut at the other end of the camp had also grown and, though used by all, it became the centre of Church of England work. The best building, and the only one carefully designed for [Middle East](#) conditions, was the [Lowry Hut](#). It was built round a comfortable open-air lounge, with a splendid stage and a number of rooms set apart for billiards, table tennis, photography, music, and other activities. A fine open-air theatre, called the El Djem Amphitheatre, had been carved out of a sandy hillside, and could hold 5000 comfortably. Large Church parades were often held there.

Normally the camp population consisted of the headquarters' staff, reinforcements under training, and troops in transit, but at this time the 4th Brigade had been there for almost a year undergoing training with armoured vehicles. The chaplains in this brigade had a splendid opportunity of getting to know their men and the new reinforcements, and they were able to pursue an uninterrupted programme of teaching and fostering unit organisations. Their service on Anzac Day 1943, in which each chaplain participated, was graced by a choir of 150 singing with the brigade band.

The work of the other chaplains in the camp was more difficult and less effective. Most of them were reinforcements for the



Service for the NZASC, 1944 near Alife, Italy

*(L. to r.) Capt J. M. Sidey, Rev. S. C. Read, General Freyberg,
Brig C. E. Weir, Revs. P. C. S. Sergel and J. M. Templer*

Service for the NZSC, 1944 near [Alife, Italy](#) (L. to r.) Capt J. M. Sidey, Rev. S. C. Read, [General Freyberg](#), Brig C. E. Weir, Revs. P. C. S. Sergel and J. M. Templer



Padres' Conference Presenzano, south of Cassino

Back row (l. to r.): H. S. Scott, A. D. Horwell, H. W. West, J. M. Templer

Third row: K. F. Button, W. R. Francis, H. F. Harding, C. G. Palmer, W. A. Mills, S. C. Read, W. J. Thompson, H. E. Rowe

Second row: D. V. de Candole, J. S. Somerville, L. P. Spring, J. W. McKenzie, W. T. Huata, A. H. Finlay, F. O. Dawson

Front row: G. A. D. Spence, J. A. Linton, H. G. Taylor, M. G. Sullivan, O. R. Marlow, J. C. Draper

Padres' Conference [Presenzano](#), south of [Cassino](#) *Back row (l. to r.):* H. S. Scott, A. D. Horwell, H. W. West, J. M. Templer *Third row:* K. F. Button, W. R. Francis, H. F. Harding, C. G. Palmer, W. A. Mills, S. C. Read, W. J. Thompson, H. E. Rowe *Second row:* D. V. de Candole, J. S. Somerville, L. P. Spring, J. W. McKenzie, W. T. Huata, A. H. Finally, F. O. Dawson *Front row:* G. A. D. Spence, J. A. Linton, H. G. Taylor, M. G. Sullivan, O. R. Marlow, J. C. Draper



Rev. H. E. Rowe, 25th Battalion padre, conducts the Thanksgiving Service for the 6th NZ Infantry Brigade near Lake Trasimene, August 1945

Rev. H. E. Rowe, 25th Battalion padre, conducts the Thanksgiving Service for the 6th NZ Infantry Brigade near [Lake Trasimene](#), August 1945

Memorial Service—General Freyberg talks with the Revs. G. A. D. Spence, H. E. Rowe, W. T. Huata, J. S. Somerville, and the Rev. Father L. P. Spring Cassino, October 1945



Memorial Service—[General Freyberg](#) talks with the Revs. [G.A.D.Spence](#), [H. E. Rowe](#), [W. T. Huata](#), [J. S. Somerville](#), and the Rev.[Father L. P. SpringCassino](#), October 1945



*3rd NZ Division Chaplains' Retreat at Bourail, New Caledonia,
July 1943*

*Back row (l. to r.): W. R. Castle, W. St. A. Osborne-Brown,
J. S. H. Perkins, J. R. Nairn, N. C. Hall, R. W. Murray, R. C.
Aires, F. Columb*

*Centre row: D. L. Francis, O. T. Baragwanath, K. Liggett, J. C.
Pierce, J. W. Parker, G. R. Thompson*

Front row: W. E. Ryan, J. D. Froud, A. S. Ward, E. O. Sheild

3rd NZ Division Chaplains' Retreat at [Bourail](#), [New Caledonia](#), July 1943 Back row (l. to r.): W. R. Castle, W. St. A. Osborne-Brown, J. S. H. Perkins, J. R. Nairn, N. C. Hall, R. W. Murray, R. C. Aires, F. Columb Centre row: D. L. Francis, O. T. Baragwanath, K. Liggett, J. C. Pierce, J. W. Parker, G. R. Thompson Front row: W. E. Ryan, J. D. Froud, A. S. Ward, E. O. Sheild

*CHRISTMAS, 1943, in the Solomons Vella Lavella
The Revs. D. L. Francis, G. R. Thompson, and A. H. Voyce took
this service*



*CHRISTMAS, 1943, in the [Solomons Vella Lavella](#) The Revs. D. L. Francis, G. R. Thompson, and
A. H. Voyce took this service*



*Dedication Service, Maravari, led by Rt. Rev. Bishop G. V. Gerard
Vella Lavella*

Dedication Service, Maravari, led by Rt. Rev. Bishop G. V. Gerard [Vella Lavella](#)



*Chapel built by islanders at the Allied Military Cemetery,
Maravari, Vella Lavella*

Chapel built by islanders at the Allied Military Cemetery, Maravari, [Vella Lavella](#)

[page 79](#) Division, eagerly awaiting a vacancy, and it was difficult to concentrate on work which might soon be interrupted. The spirit of the troops was quite different from that of the men serving with the Division. The routine was comfortable but dull, with none of the danger and excitement which helps to build corporate spirit and loyalty in a combatant unit. The chaplains were posted to the different training depots in the camp, spending much of the day with their men on the training grounds, and in the evenings visiting the canteens and the welfare huts. A number of religious activities such as Bible Classes and choir practices enjoyed a precarious existence as both the chaplains and the men were always changing. However, the United Christian Fellowship, which had begun as the Baptist Fellowship, enjoyed a long and flourishing life. The Roman Catholics had their chapel for weekday devotions and instruction. In the Church Army Hut the Church of England chaplains conducted regular services of Holy Communion and Evensong and prepared many men for confirmation. The Protestant Churches held Communion services in the [Lowry Hut](#) and the Central YMCA, where every Sunday evening a song service arranged by the [YMCA](#) was conducted by chaplains.

Many duties took the chaplains outside the camp. There were weekly services for the New Zealand Post Office and the New Zealand Club in [Cairo](#), and an afternoon service for New Zealanders was held every Sunday in the Egyptian YMCA building. Twice a month chaplains had a long and refreshing drive to visit small units and isolated men. One spent a night with the Port Detachment on the [Suez Canal](#) and another went to [Alexandria](#), where many New Zealanders were to be found in the Port Detachment, in British hospitals, or at the [YMCA](#) hostel.

The Maadi chaplains had many contacts outside the New Zealand sphere. The Roman Catholics often ministered to men of their own denomination serving with British units in the immediate vicinity of the camp, and they were frequently in touch with their own chaplains and civilian clergy in [Cairo](#). Visits were exchanged with the South African chaplains in their camp at [Helwan](#), and many an envious glance was cast at their beautifully designed garrison churches. Relations with the Royal Army Chaplains' Department were very cordial and many British chaplains, including the DCG, [page 80](#) the Rev. H. J. Clarke, and the ACG from British Headquarters, the Rev. F. P. W. Alexander, visited [Maadi](#) to take part in conferences or services. In return the British chaplains invited the New Zealanders to share in many of their activities, whether they were important services on special occasions or meetings convened to hear some eminent clergyman on a short visit to the [Middle East](#). These visitors included several Church of England bishops and leading representatives of other denominations, among them Dr. I. F. Church, former President of the Methodist Conference in England.

In 1943 permission was sought for the New Zealand chaplains to attend the refresher courses organised by the Royal Army Chaplains' Department in [Jerusalem](#). Permission was given and a large quota fixed so that the maximum number of Divisional chaplains could attend during their short stay in [Maadi](#). The leader of these courses was the Rev. J. E. Fison of the Royal Army Chaplains' Department. He was a man of great talent, spiritual force, and friendliness and all New Zealand chaplains appreciated his help and kindly welcome. Opportunity was also taken of enrolling New Zealand candidates for the Christian Ministry in the excellent series of studies arranged by the Royal Army Chaplains' Department. A list of these men, over forty in number, was made in 1942, and the chaplains tried to keep in touch with them and supply them with books and other help as the occasion permitted.

Prisons

The New Zealand Expeditionary Force in Egypt made use of the British Army prisons for soldiers undergoing detention: short sentences were served in the detention barracks at [Helmieh](#) and longer ones in the military prison at [Abbassia](#). Once a week a New Zealand chaplain visited these men. A staff car would deposit him outside the grim gates of the prison and, after signing a book inside, he would be conducted to some small room filled by a dozen or twenty hot and weary New Zealanders. There would usually be a short service, followed by the distribution of such comforts—boot polish, shaving materials, and toothbrushes—as the regulations allowed. Finally there would be a short period for personal interviews.

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Often in these interviews men would complain to the chaplain about the length of their sentences, and on his return to [Maadi](#) Camp he would go to the correct office at Headquarters and ventilate these grievances. Often they were imaginary, for some prisoners tend to believe that they are completely innocent or grossly misjudged. But sometimes there was something to be put right, and perhaps such an occasion might lead to the chaplain's first meeting with the Legal Staff Officer. Crime and domestic problems brought chaplains into frequent contact with this officer, and they owed much to the wise and kindly advice of the legal branch of the force.

Domestic Problems

Within the martial machinery of Army organisation there existed an elaborate system to protect the rights and interests of the common soldier. It has been said that a court martial gives the accused a fairer hearing than any other court of justice. In addition, there was machinery to help the soldier face domestic problems. If he heard of difficulties in his home in New Zealand there were ways of making official inquiries, and the soldier might be excused duty while he attended to these personal matters. In extreme cases he could be sent home on compassionate leave.

This system was good and the intention was excellent, but in the exigencies of war many a man facing trouble was uncertain of his legal rights and timid in making inquiries. This was where the chaplain could help. He would visit men awaiting court martial and help in getting the right man to act as the Prisoner's Friend. He could find out for the prisoner the answer to certain legal questions which affected his case, and he could, on occasions, appear at the court martial and testify to the prisoner's good character. If the man was convicted and had to serve a prison sentence, the chaplain could still keep in touch with him by letter or personal visit, and when he was released it was often possible to help in his rehabilitation. The chaplain might respectfully suggest what unit the man should be sent to, and then make sure that he received sympathetic treatment in that unit.

But crime and its consequences were not the only problems a soldier had to face. Letters from his family at home might bring news of death, serious illness, or unfaithfulness. The soldier then [page 82](#) needed advice and immediate sympathy for there were occasions when such a letter caused a man to attempt suicide. At first a man felt powerless to do anything, for the distances were so great and the Army seemed so inhuman. The wise soldier talked it over with the chaplain, who would listen sympathetically and help in various ways. He would first try to comfort the man and strengthen him to bear the bad news; then he might have a confidential talk with the man's commanding officer and make sure that he was treated kindly and given time to deal with his affairs. Finally the chaplain helped in practical ways. Sometimes a wisely written letter could avert a domestic tragedy, or at least delay it till the soldier could deal with it in person at the end of the war. At other times the break seemed final and all the distasteful proceedings of divorce had to be faced. Many chaplains said that they dreaded the arrival of mail for it brought so much bad news. A broken engagement may be a small thing as the years roll by, but, at the time, to a soldier serving far from home, such news may be overpowering in its pain; and hundreds of engagements were broken. As a chaplain tried to comfort a man he often longed for the chance of some straight speaking with the wife or fiancée in New Zealand, though it must be admitted that marital infidelity was by no means confined to the wives.

The best regulations and the finest laws cannot cover all the difficult cases, and the chaplain felt free to approach the authorities direct and submit that some individual deserved special treatment. For example, owing to the acute shortage of shipping, it was laid down at one time that those going on furlough could go to no other country than New Zealand. But if a man had all his family in [London](#), and if perhaps they had been bombed out in the blitz, it was quite reasonable to suggest that in this case the regulation might be relaxed. The chaplains were impressed and delighted by the painstaking care and thorough investigation that all such cases received.

Weddings

The chaplains in [Maadi Camp](#) had to take many weddings and almost invariably the civilian churches round [Cairo](#) were used for them. A special entry had to be made in the registers that the [page 83](#) marriages had been solemnised according to the 'Foreign Marriage Act of 1892'. This was a British law and did not necessarily apply to New Zealanders. New Zealand camps might have been deemed New Zealand territory and therefore subject to New Zealand law. but the fact remains that most of these weddings took place outside the boundaries of the camp.

There were many regulations and Army forms in connection with marriages. In 1944 these were revised and published by Headquarters 2nd NZEF, with one amusing misprint. New Zealand soldiers were warned that if they wished to marry South African girls they might be required to make an 'Anti-nuptial' financial settlement! The Army always tried to dissuade soldiers from making what were considered unsuitable marriages, and the chaplains also used their influence in this respect.

Confirmations

Many Church of England members received instruction and were confirmed during the war. While Bishop Gerard was with the Division he conducted many confirmation services, and at other times help was received from visiting Bishops, including those of Pretoria, Uganda, [Persia](#), Portsmouth, [Maidstone](#) and Ripon, while in Italy New Zealanders were confirmed during the visits of the Archbishop of [York](#) and the Bishops of Lichfield, [Southwark](#), and North Africa. The Anglican Bishop in [Jerusalem](#) confirmed many in [Syria](#) and Palestine, and in Cairo Bishop Gwynne and Bishop Gelsthorpe were always available in All Saints' Cathedral, and on many occasions arranged special confirmation services for New Zealanders in transit.

General Hospitals

The chaplains who worked at Base were by no means confined to [Maadi Camp](#). Each General Hospital had an establishment for three, usually consisting of one Church of England chaplain, one Roman Catholic, and one other. Hospital work was hard and specialised, and, though not lending itself to headlines or glory, it supplied scope for some of the best work done by the Department.

Duties were many and varied and fell into several well-defined divisions. On the staff side were doctors, nurses, and orderlies, all [page 84](#) of whom required a chaplain's help and advice. The officers' mess was composed almost entirely of medical practitioners and hospital chaplains must have received their fill of medical 'shop'. The sisters, nurses, and voluntary aids formed a large and important section of hospital life, and like everyone else needed spiritual help and comfort. The orderlies and other men working in the hospital were nearly all men who could not serve in the front line. Some had been seriously wounded and were not fit for further combatant service, while others had been medically regraded before seeing any action. There was always a third group consisting of conscientious objectors who were not prepared to act as combatants. All medical units had their quota of conscientious objectors and it was noticed that these men with sensitive consciences seldom excelled the others in hard work or loyalty to the unit. Of course

there were splendid exceptions, but many people felt that it would have been easier to admire these men had they served as medical orderlies with the infantry in the front line, sharing the same dangers and hardships as the common soldier.

A General Hospital with these diverse elements on its staff was a difficult unit in which to foster *esprit de corps* and there was plenty of work here for the chaplain. But his main work was with the sick and wounded and it was impossible to devote too much time to regular visiting. The three chaplains co-operated and usually worked to some rough plan whereby each bed-patient was likely to see at least one chaplain every day. Those men on the Dangerously Ill and Seriously Ill lists were visited by the chaplains of their own denomination at least once a day, frequently more often, and sometimes during the night, for the chaplains were on call every hour of the day and night.

When the chaplain began his daily round of visits he usually carried a supply of [Red Cross](#) comforts, writing paper, and library books. He would try to speak to each man in each ward. Some who were feverish or in pain would want just a word of sympathy and a prayer, while others would welcome a much longer talk which frequently led to religious discussion and instruction. When a man was completely incapacitated by bandages or wounds the chaplain would write letters for him. Of course the chaplain had a big correspondence of his own as he answered questions from [page 85](#) next of kin or tried to comfort them in the death or illness of sons and husbands, but frequently he found time to act as amanuensis in the wards. The story is told of one soldier, a Maori, who was lying prone in bed, begging a chaplain to write some letters for him. The chaplain looked sympathetically at his body covered by the bed clothes, and, sitting down by the side of the bed, he wrote five letters.

‘You seem fairly fit,’ said the chaplain when he had addressed the last envelope. ‘Where are you wounded?’

‘In the foot, Padre,’ was the answer.

‘But why don't you write your own letters?’ the chaplain asked.

‘Oh, I thought your handwriting would be better’, said the Maori.

There were always a number of Empire and British troops in these hospitals, and occasionally Germans and Italians, besides the New Zealanders. The chaplain's visits had to be carried on day by day, week by week, and he needed great reserves of energy and will-power to keep up the standard of his work.

In addition to visiting the bed-patients the chaplain looked after the walking wounded and when possible arranged trips and concerts. In each hospital a room or a tent was set aside for a chapel, which the chaplains furnished and used for the celebration of Holy Communion, small services, and as a place for private devotion. On Sundays there would be services in the chapel and a unit service in some larger place for the staff and walking wounded, while special arrangements would be made for the bed-patients. Short services would be held in some of the wards and Holy

Communion administered privately to patients in bed. At Christmas time a carol choir composed of staff, nurses, and patients used to go round the wards.

The chaplains at these hospitals were given an office where they could hold private interviews and distribute comforts and books to those patients who could walk. Much of the unit welfare work fell upon them, and although it was extremely valuable and necessary, it was always liable to encroach on their main work—the spiritual care of those in bed. The supply of work was never-ending and the conditions were difficult. The Middle East climate was exhausting for a man who had to be continually on his feet, the sticky heat [page 86](#) sapped his mental energy, and the very nature of a hospital had a depressing effect on those not hardened to a medical regime. There were frequent deaths—and that meant death-bed prayers, funerals, and letters to the next of kin; there were men in great pain, splendid young bodies smashed by the senselessness of war; and there was the pallid boredom and misery of malaria, dysentery, and jaundice.

The pluck and spirit of the wounded set a high standard for all who worked in a hospital. The chaplain could only do his best. He watched the convoys of ambulances come in after a battle and had a brief word with each man. There was not much that he could do on those occasions except be friendly, answer questions, and arrange to send cables or letters. Later, when the men were settled in the wards, the chaplain came to know them better, and these friendships grew until the day when they were cured and left for a Convalescent Depot, or were fit enough to leave on the hospital ship for home. Not every good chaplain made a good hospital chaplain, and when one was seen to succeed in this difficult work every effort was made to leave him undisturbed. Padre R. T. Dodds¹ and Padre A. MacFarlane² were very successful and spent their whole war service working in General Hospitals.

Convalescent Depots

Men discharged from the General Hospitals were sent to a Convalescent Depot for several weeks until they were considered fit enough to go back to their normal duties. The depot was usually placed in some attractive spot near the sea; it was the chaplain's duty to look after these men during their short stay. Time and again it was not only bodies that needed attention. Battle exhaustion and lingering disease left wounds on the mind, and the chaplain had to give much of his attention to morale and mental health. In this unit the chaplain could throw himself wholeheartedly into welfare work and recreational organisation, for the men were free most of the day and the chaplain came to know them as he shared their sports and sight-seeing trips. Men came and went, and the chaplain's contacts and friendships ripened for a brief moment and [page 87](#) were then interrupted. Choirs, Bible Classes, and Church services fluctuated according to the population of the moment.

Sometimes a chaplain was posted to a Convalescent Depot as a rest from battle, but the work was specialised and did not benefit from frequent changes. [Padre N. E. Winhall](#),³ who sailed with the [Second Echelon](#), was the first chaplain with the 1st Convalescent Depot when it was by the [Suez Canal](#) at [Moascar](#). He was awarded the MBE for hard and devoted work which unfortunately was cut short by ill-health. Padre C. MacKenzie⁴ also served long and faithfully with this unit.

Hospital Ships

Two hospital ships were staffed by New Zealanders, the new Dutch ship *Oranje* and the [Maunganui](#), already well known to New Zealanders, especially to soldiers of the 1914–18 War. These ships carried wounded and sick back home and they also made trips with other patients to [Britain](#), South Africa, and [Australia](#). Towards the end of the war the [Maunganui](#) was posted to work in the [Pacific](#).

The chaplain on a hospital ship was really a normal hospital chaplain, except that he lived on a ship. At one time the Senior Chaplain posted a new chaplain to the [Maunganui](#) each time it reached the [Middle East](#), and thus a Divisional chaplain had a voyage home, a few weeks in New Zealand, and then returned for duty in the [Middle East](#), rested and refreshed. This practice ceased when the ship's staff complained that the constant changes were proving detrimental to the good work of the ship. There were special difficulties on the *Oranje* as she was manned by a Dutch crew and administered by a joint staff comprised, at various times, of British, Dutch, Australians, and New Zealanders. Not every chaplain succeeded in these conditions, one of which was the difficulty in creating a unit spirit amongst the mixed staff, but at the request of the staff, Padre Holland was specially recalled for a second term of duty as he had been very successful on the first. Life on the hospital ships varied between the intense activity of a voyage home, laden with wounded and sick, and the quiet peace of the voyage out in a ship empty but for the staff.

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Railway Companies

The 2nd NZEF supplied two specialist railway groups, a Construction and Maintenance Group and an Operating Group. A chaplain served with these, and his parish was as long and as narrow as the railway. He spent his time travelling from station to station and from detachment to detachment. Each night would see him in a different place with a different group of men. He would hold a service for them in the evening and probably a celebration of Holy Communion next morning. The rest of his stay would be spent in welfare work and in getting to know the men. Small groups appreciated these regular visits from their own chaplain, and in spite of the unusual conditions good work was done by the chaplains until the time when these units were disbanded after the close of the North African campaign.

¹ Rev. R. T. Dodds (Presby.); [Whakatane](#): born [Dunedin](#), 1 Feb 1897.

² Rev. A. MacFarlane, m.i.d., (Presby.); [Mosgiel](#); born [Mataura](#), 3 Nov 1900.

³ [Rev. N. E. Winhall](#), MBE, (C of E); [Auckland](#); born [London](#), 1 Aug 1905.

⁴ Rev. C. MacKenzie (Presby.); Cambridge; born England, 4 Feb 1909.

CHAPTER 12 CHURCH PARADES

UNIT Routine Orders on Saturday mornings used to mention the Church services for the following day under two headings: Church Parades and Voluntary Services. When the time came for Church parade the Roman Catholics marched off to Mass and the others to where the unit service was to be held. A building was normally better than the open air for Church parades, for the men could sit down and escape from some of the parade-ground formality; there was often a piano, and it was easier to sing indoors. The service usually consisted of two or three hymns, a reading from the Bible, some prayers, and a short address, the whole lasting about half an hour. Church of England chaplains used a special prayer book, which was distributed before the service and consisted of a shortened form of Morning Prayer with a small selection of psalms, prayers, and hymns. The other chaplains used a hymn book compiled by the [YMCA](#), but, although two books were used, all the services followed a uniform pattern.

The chaplain had to triumph over his surroundings and make the ugly cinema or gloomy canteen feel like a real church. He had to lead the singing and tell the men when to stand and when to sit during the service. He had to be acutely aware of the 'feel' of a service and take steps to keep that 'feel' right. If a hymn was not a success it had to be stopped in the middle; if the day was particularly hot he might shorten the Scripture reading and the prayers; and if he felt that attention was wandering he had to find some way of regaining interest. Some chaplains could sense the feeling of a congregation before the service began and would adapt their methods accordingly.

The chaplain found difficulty in preparing his sermons. He had few books of reference and no quiet study in which to read them; moreover, if he prepared his sermon too early in the week it would often be out of date or unsuitable by Sunday because of some military event or item of news. His sermon had to be short, concentrating on one important point, and a leavening of wit and Army phraseology was appreciated.

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The chaplain enjoyed a relationship with his congregation and parishioners which was much closer than that normally found in civilian life. After the service he would receive praise, suggestions, and friendly criticism, which was often extremely valuable. Many an officers' mess helped to keep the chaplain on the right track. 'My chaps said they liked your sermon this morning,' one platoon commander would say. 'The men don't know that last hymn,' another would add, while perhaps a third would make a suggestion: 'Why not tell us one Sunday, Padre, what is the Christian teaching about death. I think the men would be interested, but don't make it too gloomy.' When a chaplain had served for some time with a unit and had proved himself, he could be sure that his congregation would give him friendly and intelligent support as he tried to apply the teaching of [Jesus Christ](#) to the everyday life of the soldier. But in Base camps and in some other places, the chaplain often had to preach to strangers who would not give him the same sympathetic hearing.

Denominational Church Parades

Church parades on a denominational basis took place, when conditions permitted, about once a month at the beginning of the war. They caused a great deal of extra trouble, and besides, many

commanding officers disliked seeing their units split into five or six sections on Sunday mornings. An officer had to be found for each group, and it was a complicated business getting the men into their right groups and to their correct destinations. In the Division the men usually preferred their own chaplain to any other, regardless of denomination.

The main advocates of this system of occasional denominational parades were Church of England chaplains who wanted an opportunity to give uncompromising Church teaching in regard to preparation for confirmation, attendance at Holy Communion, and other matters of special interest to Church of England men. It would seem that when there is co-operation and friendship between the members of a Chaplains' Department, there is then a real place for an occasional Church parade by denominations, in spite of administrative and other difficulties. The good work of chaplains and the religious opportunities of war may both be wasted unless [page 91](#) men can be helped to become better members of their own Churches. And reunion in Christendom is more likely when men understand and live up to the teaching of their own faith.

Compulsory Church Parades

In the 2nd NZEF the main Church service on Sunday morning was compulsory. The Roman Catholic services at first were not, but later, at the request of the authorities, the Roman Catholics for the sake of uniformity made them so. Atheists and agnostics were excused but everyone else had to attend. No man could legally be forced to attend a service taken by a chaplain of another denomination, but with the system of unit chaplains in the 2nd NZEF, the unit Church parade was to all intents and purposes compulsory.

Since the war ended compulsory Church parades have been abolished in the British Army, and during the war there was frequent criticism of the system by New Zealanders. The whole idea sounds un-Christian and undemocratic, and yet many chaplains approved of it. So, too, did many senior officers and quite a number of other ranks; for like many other British institutions it may have seemed out of date but it worked. It was a relic from the days when the soldier proceeded everywhere in military formation—to his meals, to his shower, to the doctor, to Church.

Tradition dies hard in the Army for the lessons of war come down through the ages and are not lightly to be set aside. In this war a man was compelled to go to Church but his liberty was protected in several ways. On enlistment he was asked to state his religion. This question often surprised soldiers, and if a man asked why the Army wanted this information he was liable to receive the common reply—that the Army would want to know which chaplain to get for the funeral. If the soldier gave the wrong denomination, or later for any reason wished to change it, he had complete liberty to do so. Any man could have avoided compulsory parades by having his religious classification changed to that of atheist.

Many men said that they liked going to Church but hated the compulsion; they said it spoilt the whole spirit of the service for them. Many civilians listening to soldiers talk must have agreed heartily and decided that such Church parades were old-fashioned [page 92](#) and wicked. But these civilians did not know much about the Army, or about soldiers, or about chaplains. A very strong case can be made for compulsory Church parades, provided the practice is limited to certain specific occasions.

Grousing

When the recruit goes into camp he is ordered about from morning till night. He is told when to get up in the morning, how often to shave, and what to wear. On the parade ground he is controlled by a petty dictator and often humiliated in public. He is marched to the dentist and the doctor and has to submit to their examinations and treatment. He is given patriotic addresses by politicians and endless instruction by experts—and by others not so expert. At first his life seems to be one long round of duties, fatigues, and irritating restrictions, but in time he begins to discover that there is a reasonable routine and a sensible explanation for many regulations.

The trained soldier still has to perform many distasteful duties and seldom volunteers for extra fatigues, but he does not find Army life nearly as bad as his conversation would suggest. The grousing of a soldier must be taken with a grain of salt. It is a natural and traditional form of self-expression, and muttered fulminations against a sergeant or a regulation do not always give a true picture of a soldier's feelings.

Often there was grousing when a Church parade was ordered, but this was levelled more against the preliminaries than against the service. At the beginning of the war there seemed to be a tradition that the Church parade should be the chief ceremonial parade of the week, with great emphasis laid on 'smart turn-out' and drill. Some commanders argued that it would be showing disrespect to God if the Church parade was the poorest military manoeuvre of the week, but few privates could view their precision on the parade ground as an act of corporate devotion. Sometimes the Church parade was considered as the Regimental Sergeant-Major's own parade—the one day in the week when he could drill the whole unit as he wished before handing it over to the Adjutant. In the early days a soldier was often drilled and marched about for almost [page 93](#) an hour before he was allowed to sink on to his seat in Church with emotions far removed from religion.

If the service was held in the open air the soldier had to put up with even more drill. A whole series of commands would produce the formation known as a 'hollow square', which in point of fact was three sides of a square with the fourth side left open for the chaplain. Each side would be meticulously dressed from every direction, and then the Adjutant would take over. He would fall the officers out in front, give a few commands to show his authority, and then turn smartly to the Colonel; he in turn would stand the men at ease and hand the parade over to the chaplain. The chaplain would then announce the number of the first hymn, sometimes singing it as a solo.

It is easy to make fun of these Church parades and almost impossible to exaggerate some of the silly formality which preceded them, but as the war continued much of the stiffness dropped from them, and troops were marched to the service with the minimum of fuss. Occasionally an old-fashioned sergeant-major survived and set about the laborious business of forming a hollow square. Alas, he was often sacrificed for the general good, and the chaplain, with a gesture worthy of Montgomery, would destroy the beautiful precision and the formal atmosphere by blandly uttering some mild request: 'Would you chaps mind getting out of those straight lines and coming in a bit closer so that I can speak to you without shouting?'

This over-emphasised preliminary drill accounted for much of the complaint about Church parades. But another side of Army life must be appreciated before the advocates of compulsory services can be understood. Nearly everything in the Army is done by orders and commands. It is often stated that *King's Regulations* covers every event that can conceivably happen to a man, and the Army in its long life has produced a mass of regulations which prevent, discourage, or punish the mistakes common to soldiers. Experience has shown that all men are lazy in looking after their health. Very well: the Army will compel men to be healthy by regulation. They will be under the close care of a doctor, they will have frequent lectures on health and hygiene, and penalties will be inflicted on those who break the medical laws. The soldier has been proved [page 94](#) untrustworthy in regard to security, so his letters will be censored, his conversations with civilians reported, and he will have frequent lectures on the subject. Under these conditions the civilian soldier often felt that he had returned to the conditions of his childhood when his every action was supervised by an anxious parent.

This system of life by regulation tended to destroy individual initiative, but the soldier came to see that there was wisdom in its pedestrian routine, although he still reserved to himself the right of complaining and grouching.

The Army dealt with religion in the same matter-of-fact way. Statistics showed that the great majority of recruits claimed to be Christian, so Christian chaplains were supplied and regular times set aside for services. Religion was important, and so the soldier would have to parade for religion in the same way that he paraded for the dentist. Most civilians would benefit by a system of compulsory dental inspection and treatment, for though they admit the importance of dental health they find many excuses for avoiding the dentist. People often treat religion in the same way; and so it will be seen that there were certain justifications for the Army's system of compulsory Church parades.

But were these reasons strong enough to receive the approval of the chaplains? Compulsion in religion is quite contrary to our national tradition. What did the chaplains say?

The chaplains said very little at first. They came into the Army as recruits and found a well-tested organisation which it was unwise to criticise till judgment was fully formed. The compulsory Church parade gave them a large congregation every Sunday, with an opportunity of introducing themselves to the unit and proclaiming the Christian message in the comradeship of arms. There were some obvious advantages. The civilian going into camp found himself in a completely different world, and it was important for the chaplain to state emphatically at the beginning that this new world contained just as many opportunities for the practice of religion as there were in the old. These Church parades showed the recruit what importance the Army attached to religion. The chaplain was aware of these advantages; but did they justify compulsion and the attack on the religious liberty of the individual?

There was a further advantage. A war takes the cream of one [page 95](#) generation of men to distant parts of the world. It uproots them from their civilian work and studies, removes them from their homes and that whole elaborate fabric which is known as the New Zealand, or British, 'way of life'. The restraining influences of home are left behind and many spiritual dangers have

to be faced. Surely, some chaplains would say, if the Army takes so much trouble in looking after the bodies of its soldiers it should also supply safeguards for their souls.

For example, imagine a young New Zealander, brought up on a backblock farm, finding himself suddenly in [Cairo](#), a city whose spiritual dangers are clearly shown by the military statistics for crime and venereal disease. Surely, say these same chaplains, the soldier should be compulsorily armed and prepared to meet these dangers, and who could do that better than the chaplains?

The critics return to the attack. We admit all that, they say. We see quite clearly the need for religion and sound spiritual teaching, but we object to this compulsion. Surely a good chaplain will have a great influence in a unit, and by dint of faithful visiting and splendid sermons attract a large congregation comprising most of the unit; and volunteers will receive his message much more eagerly than men pressed into attendance.

This argument is indisputable but it does not cover all the facts. It presumes that a new system will be introduced into the Army in which voluntary services will take the place of compulsory ones. The chaplain will have to begin with a small band of faithful churchmen and expand it until it includes the whole unit. How long will this take, Will the war last long enough? It presumes that times will be set aside for voluntary services. Men can go to Church if they like, or stay away if they like. It will mean an optional period on Sunday mornings. That period can therefore be filled by other optional activities. The unit football committee can hold a meeting, provided the majority do not want to go to Church, while the quartermaster might even consider it a suitable time to issue equipment. As soon as that period of the morning becomes optional a host of other alternatives will appear, and *did* appear when the system was tried.

These difficulties are not insurmountable and with wise leadership they could be avoided, but how long would it take the chaplain to [page 96](#) get a system of voluntary parades well and firmly established? In the Division a chaplain was attached to a unit and, if he was any good at all, he could always count on loyal and friendly support; but this came after the men had got to know him. Some chaplains were popular preachers with an immediate appeal to troops, but many did not find preaching easy and it was not until they had proved themselves by their courage and unselfishness that the men would listen with appreciation to their services. Any chaplain of average ability could command the respect and support of a unit if he was given reasonable time.

In the battle area no Church service was compulsory and many Divisional chaplains dispensed entirely with compulsory Church parades. But the Division was quite different from the Base camps or the training camps in New Zealand. Outside the Division the chaplain was usually dealing with troops in transit, and he did not have time to prove himself or to become known; it has been pointed out elsewhere how the spirit of the Division differed from that of a Base camp, where a strong case for compulsory Church parades can be made. The emphatic statement of Christian principles was more important here, and no one needed it more than the man least likely to attend a voluntary service. But the critic still complains about compulsion. Is it probable, he asks, that the man least likely to attend a voluntary service will profit from a compulsory one? A man can be forced to listen, but can he be forced to pray? Of course a man cannot be forced to pray, and if this argument was pressed to its logical conclusion there would still be a good case for turning compulsory Church parades into compulsory Bible Classes, in

which straightout ethical and Christian teaching could be given with the reading of appropriate passages from the Bible. But the critic presumes that compulsory Church parades caused a feeling of rebellion and disapproval quite different from the grouching connected with route marches and extra fatigues, and that under such conditions no Church service could achieve its purpose. Such criticism, however plausible in theory, was not true in fact.

What did the Soldier think?

The keen soldier-churchman felt the need for services and enjoyed them; most of the other men enjoyed them once they were there. [page 97](#) Hymns were seldom sung with quality or enthusiasm, save on special occasions when the men were deeply moved or when the conditions were unusually favourable. An exception was the [Maori Battalion](#), where the singing was always good. The presence of a brass band at a service did not help the singing as the men were inclined to listen. It was often better to suggest some subjects for private devotion and let the men sit while the band played sacred music. It was easier to sing at night, and of course there was quite a different atmosphere in the song services.

The men appreciated the prayers, especially those for relations at home and for spiritual strength in meeting the demands of battle or the everyday problems of Army life. They would listen to sermons with attention, specially enjoying those which gave the Biblical history of well-known places in the [Middle East](#), and they would take moral warnings in good part if given simply and sincerely.

The behaviour of men in compulsory Church parades was exemplary and this suggests that these parades were not unpopular. Several hundred men crammed into a cinema, with the officers sitting in the front seats, would have been difficult to control had they wished to make trouble. The officers would have been badly placed to keep order, and they would not have liked to interrupt the service by giving audible rebukes. It would have been easy for troops to 'play up' during a Church parade but there is practically no instance of anything like this ever having happened. On the contrary, chaplains would be pleased if their civilian congregations were as well behaved and attentive.

There were many evidences that the services were enjoyed and followed with close attention. On one occasion when two or three thousand troops attended a big open-air service in [Maadi](#), a special form of service had been distributed with the Scripture reading printed in full. The lesson was read beautifully by a Maori chaplain, and when he reached the bottom of a page there was noise like the wind in a forest as the whole congregation turned over the leaf.

No, the critics were definitely wrong when they suggested that there was any strong disapproval of Church parades in the 2nd NZEF. Many a man unconsciously appreciated the fact that they [page 98](#) were compulsory. The war made a man think deeply, and often a self-styled agnostic found himself taking a new interest in doctrinal teaching. Such a man would have hesitated to set out publicly for a voluntary Church service, thereby demonstrating to his friends that he had 'got religion', but in the anonymous attendance at a compulsory parade he could receive the teaching and the faith quietly, until the time came when he could accept it in its entirety.

Front-line Religion

‘No man is an atheist in a fox-hole’, an American once said, and there is much truth in his remark, though it lends itself to unfortunate interpretations. To some it suggests that overpowering fear will force a man to cast away the reasoning of a lifetime and clutch at any superstition or unseen power which might bring help or safety.

In the pacifist years what was called ‘front-line religion’ was dismissed as lightly as physical courage and described as a thing of no lasting value. Many chaplains lying in a slit-trench during a bombardment had an opportunity of testing this opinion. Certainly a man's thoughts turned to prayer, but fear did not seem to be the dominant motive. With death close at hand, many a married man used to think of his wife and children. The man in the trench could do nothing to make the shelling stop. As he listened to the scream of each shell he wondered whether he would be hit, and, if hit, whether he would be killed, buried, or crippled. The whole thing seemed to be a matter of chance. He would be hit or he would not be hit. Never did a man feel so unimportant, so humble, or so powerless.

The unforgettable emotions of enduring shellfire and seeing friends killed were bound to make a man take a more serious view of life. In this mood he found fresh meaning and comfort as he stood amongst his own friends at a Church service and listened to his own chaplain. The fact that he did not become a regular churchgoer for the rest of the war and the rest of his life proves nothing. And to suggest that front-line religion is just a cheap symptom of acute fear is as blasphemous as it is untrue.

Memorial Services

Immediately after action, units and brigades arranged memorial



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[page 99](#) services to commemorate the fallen and give thanks for preservation. It made little difference whether these services were compulsory or voluntary. They were always well attended and the spirit was wonderful. Indeed all Church services in the Division were popular and well supported. In the training periods some chaplains kept the services voluntary, while others made them official parades. It made little difference, for if the men respected the chaplain they would go willingly to Church, and a bad chaplain did not last long in the Division.

Conclusions

It would seem that a good case can be made for compulsory Church parades in training camps in New Zealand, at Base camps overseas, and with certain Base units. In Divisional units parades could remain compulsory till a campaign began. In this way the recruit entering camp learned the place of religion and the chaplain in the Army; the young man, wrenched suddenly from his civilian background, received a certain spiritual protection as he wandered in the far parts of the world; and every man in a Divisional unit came to know his chaplain and was thus prepared to make full use of him in battle.

In addition, the corporate spirit of a unit was greatly helped by corporate worship. Compulsory parades failed when the chaplain was bad, but there was no place in the Army for a bad chaplain. It was better to send him home at once. When the chaplain was good, and this means sincere, hardworking, and honest, with perhaps no special gifts of oratory, proficiency in sport or on the stage, then he could be assured that his work in the Army would be useful and that his congregations would be loyal and friendly. In spite of what individuals may say, in spite of traditional grouching, the system of Church parades in the 2nd NZEF whether compulsory or voluntary, worked exceedingly well, and many of the most popular chaplains always had compulsory Church parades outside the battle area.

CHAPTER 13

ITALY

FIRST impressions of [Italy](#) were disappointing, for the troops had hoped to leave behind the squalor and corruption of the [Middle East](#), and they expected to find the normal comforts and orderliness of western civilisation when they stepped on to the continent of [Europe](#). But the ancient cities of [Bari](#), [Taranto](#), and [Naples](#) were dirty, overcrowded, and war-weary, while the poverty and shortage of food led to much pilfering by civilians. The habits of many of the Italians drew caustic comment from the troops and unfavourable comparisons were made with the humble citizens of [Cairo](#). 'If this is a Christian country,' said some, 'then give me Egypt.'

However, the New Zealanders discovered in time that the south of [Italy](#) had seen many invasions and that the resulting polyglot population was not typical of the whole nation. In the country north of Rome there was a far higher standard of culture, and many acts of kindly hospitality softened these early and unfavourable impressions. Many escaped prisoners of war bore testimony to the warm courage of Italian women who risked their lives in feeding and hiding our

men, and the troops often noted with pleasure the care with which the local people looked after the graves of Allied soldiers.

The presence of Italian civilians created special problems. Good wine was plentiful, but it proved too strong for those accustomed only to beer, and this led on occasions to acts of violence by soldiers, while the shortage of food and commodities tempted others to steal and sell Army property.

The chaplains sailed to [Italy](#) with their units and later ships brought their trucks, each one loaded with a generous issue from the [YMCA](#) of 100 pounds of sugar, 48 tins of milk, and 24 pounds of tea, for welfare purposes. The three weeks spent by the Division in a bivouac area near [Taranto](#) was a time of activity for the chaplains as they visited in their units, polished up their Italian, and tried to see something of the surrounding country. Much amusement was caused when the chaplains challenged the 5th [page 101](#) Brigade to a football match, which they won after a hard game punctuated by hilarious barracking. Two chaplains were seconded to the [YMCA](#) to serve with the Prisoner of War Sub-Commission, an organisation set up to assist escaped Allied prisoners. Unfortunately, fewer prisoners escaped than was expected and after two months these chaplains returned to the Division.

A number of Roman Catholic chaplains had studied in Rome and they spoke Italian fluently. They shared their knowledge with great generosity, helping individuals in their shopping and in their contacts with civilians, while their familiarity with local conditions was invaluable in gaining many extra comforts and privileges for the men. Their help was specially appreciated in Rome, and it was largely through their influence that so many New Zealanders were able to make a thorough examination of the lovely and ancient buildings of that city. In addition, arrangements were made for a number of New Zealanders to have the privilege of an audience with His Holiness the Pope. Roman Catholic soldiers were made welcome in the civilian churches, which were often lent for special soldiers' masses.

There were many opportunities to meet other distinguished Church leaders besides the Church of England bishops mentioned previously. The Very Rev. J. Hutchinson Cockburn, former Moderator of the Church of [Scotland](#), was present at a Church of [Scotland](#) chaplains' conference at [Ancona](#), and Archbishop Griffin, head of the [Roman Catholic Church](#) in England, paid a visit to the troops and preached at a great service in the Cathedral at [Siena](#). In January 1945 Bishop Gerard, while serving on the hospital ship [Maunganui](#), spent a few days amongst the New Zealand troops stationed near the port of [Bari](#).

As the Italian campaign developed, the 2nd NZEF became widely scattered. Church services were held out of doors when the weather permitted, but at other times they consisted of small groups congregated in houses or other buildings, often right in the front line. In the large towns the British usually commandeered a building to act as a garrison church, and at [Senigallia](#) the New Zealand chaplains played a big part in converting a cinema for this purpose.

Chaplains' conferences were held regularly in the [Bari](#) area and within the Division, and on several occasions the GOC was present. [page 102](#) The great Christian festivals were observed as well as the conditions allowed. In addition to the normal Easter services in 1945, a Methodist

rally was held on Good Friday, an inter-denominational rally on the next afternoon, and a Presbyterian conference on Easter Monday.

In fine weather, [Italy](#) with its green hills and valleys, its plenteous supply of vegetables and fresh fruit, its ancient cities and venerable buildings, provided a refreshing change from North [Africa](#), but with all these advantages there were many problems and hardships to be faced. The presence of venereal disease was an ever-present danger to troops on leave, while the joint use by soldiers and civilians of houses in the battle area brought many temptations. The weather in the winter months was extremely bad and in the hilly country, which permitted close contact with the enemy, the Division experienced long days and nights under continuous shellfire and suffered many casualties.

Battles in [Italy](#)

At Cassino the Department suffered its first and only fatal casualty. Padre A. C. K. Harper,¹ who had served continuously with the 4th Field Regiment since December 1941, was severely wounded by a shell-burst, dying shortly afterwards. His record was excellent and he was well known and respected, not only in his own unit but in all the Field Regiments. There were other casualties, too. Padre D. E. Duncan² was badly wounded while serving with the 21st Battalion and was invalided back to New Zealand. Padre H. G. Norris³ was wounded while helping to put out a dangerous fire in a dump of mortar shells close to a Regimental Aid Post. Fortunately he recovered in hospital and saw further service. Padre H. S. Scott⁴ was also in hospital for some time after having been wounded while with the 26th Battalion.

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Five further awards for gallantry were won by infantry unit chaplains in [Italy](#). The work of Padre Huata in the [Maori Battalion](#)—for which he was awarded the Military Cross—has already been mentioned. Padre Judson,⁵ 24th Battalion, and the son of a winner of the Victoria Cross in the 1914–18 War, also won the Military Cross. An ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church, he had gone overseas as a private in a Field Ambulance and had risen to the rank of sergeant-major before being commissioned as a chaplain. During an attack on [Orsogna](#) early in December 1943, Padre Judson organised a forward Regimental Aid Post under heavy fire, he himself dressing wounds and on occasions acting as a stretcher-bearer. His citation for this award also mentions a similar exploit in [Tunisia](#) when he went forward behind the attacking troops to collect the wounded and evacuate them by jeep.

Padre A. K. Warren⁶ won the Military Cross for outstanding courage and leadership in organising the evacuation of wounded at the [Gaiana River](#). It was not until 1944 that his Church authorities would release him from his position as Dean of [Christchurch](#), and when he arrived in the [Middle East](#) he was above the normal age for service in the field. However, he was very fit and was given the difficult task of following that most popular chaplain, Padre Taylor, in the [Divisional Cavalry Regiment](#), which had just become an infantry unit. At Padua he was extensively wounded by shrapnel, but as so often happens with tall men—he stood 6 feet 5 inches—his most serious wound was in a foot.

Padre P. C. S. Sergel⁷ of the ASC did temporary work with the 25th Battalion at [Cassino](#) and in that bloody battle his care for the wounded earned him the American Silver Star for gallantry.

An outstanding example of courage while with the infantry was the work of Padre Harding in the 23rd Battalion. This unit had a succession of most daring commanders who inspired it with a devotion to duty and a disregard of danger that was seldom excelled. Amongst such warriors Padre Harding served with distinction. He [page 104](#) was a man who put his religious duties first on all occasions and allowed nothing to interfere with them. In action he spent his whole time with the most advanced sections and was constant in his visiting. He was the third New Zealand chaplain to receive the DSO, which is significant when it is realised that in the whole Royal Army Chaplains' Department, which at its peak numbered over three thousand chaplains, only four such awards were gained. As a comparison it is interesting to note that in the Canadian Chaplains' Service there was one VC and one DSO, while no DSOs were awarded in the Australian Chaplains' Department. Padre Harding's citation makes particular reference to an occasion when a number of men were wounded and buried by a direct hit on a house in the front line. As the rescuers advanced they came under heavy shellfire, and the successful completion of this task was largely due to his help and influence.

But it was not only the infantry chaplains who earned distinction in [Italy](#). Here two other units, the Armoured Brigade and the Engineers, had chaplains with them for the first time as they went into action.

The Armoured Brigade

There were five excellent chaplains with the 4th New Zealand Armoured Brigade; its first commander, Brigadier L. M. Inglis, once said in private conversation that he always made the Senior Chaplain give him his best men. Certainly they were fine chaplains, but perhaps the Senior Chaplain may have had his own story to tell. He might have suggested that such a wicked brigade needed good chaplains!

The three chaplains with the armoured regiments had to work out a special technique for action and they had little precedent to guide them. An armoured regiment has many specialists who in action are scattered in great depth. Up forward were the advanced troops, each consisting of three tanks, with squadron headquarters a little in rear. Regimental headquarters was still farther back, and in close proximity came the Regimental Aid Post and A Echelon, consisting of fitters' trucks and signals personnel. More rearward still would come B 1 Echelon, with the light aid detachment close by, and there was also a B 2 Echelon yet farther in the rear. The [page 105](#) chaplain visited all these sections but spent most of his time near the forward tanks.

A tank in action filled many rôles. Sometimes it was an armoured machine-gun post supporting the infantry, sometimes it had a mobile artillery rôle, but probably its most important function was to deal with enemy tanks. This meant that the tanks had to lie right up in the front line, protecting the infantry from tank attacks or edging forward in search of a target. The armour-piercing shells from enemy tanks and anti-tank guns were deadly. When a shell penetrated a tank turret it often continued its flight inside, ricocheting round and round, wounding the occupants and exploding the racks of shells. Few civilians would expect a tank to catch fire, but with its

cargo of petrol and shells, a direct hit would cause a raging inferno which, with periodic explosions, would burn for hours in a pall of black smoke.

As the chaplain worked his way forward he would talk to each tank crew. Sometimes they would be seated at the back of the tank making a brew of tea, or they might be sheltering in a nearby house as they waited for instructions. Lying up in the forward positions there was comparative safety inside the tank or immediately behind it, but walking about was dangerous. In Army phraseology all unarmoured vehicles were referred to as 'thin-skinned', and as they did their forward visiting, crawling and sheltering from occasional shell-bursts, the chaplains must often have applied that term to themselves. It was not safe, or wise, to approach the most advanced tanks, though their progress could be watched, and when one received a direct hit the chaplain would dash forward with the other rescuers. When a tank caught fire it was known as a 'brew-up', and the watchers would have a long moment of suspense until all the crew were seen to jump clear and run the gauntlet to safety. When there was no movement it meant that the whole crew was either dead or wounded.

The confined nature of a tank made rescue difficult, and if it was to be achieved the men had to work quickly because of the flames. It was necessary to climb on top and open the turret, and it was even more difficult to remove the man from the driver's seat. To lean down and pull a wounded man from a tank was a long and painful job in the most ideal conditions; they were seldom, if ever, [page 106](#) ideal and speed was of paramount importance. With the tank on fire, its petrol and ammunition likely to explode, the rescuers had also to face machine-gun bullets and mortar shells.

The three regimental chaplains received three different awards for gallantry though all were earned in the same kind of work. Citations for decorations are usually brief and written in cold, military language, dull reading when several are taken together, but the reader must try to imagine the circumstances, remembering that there were never sufficient awards to cover every act of daring, and that only the most outstanding examples could receive official reward.

Padre L. F. F. Gunn⁸ was awarded the MBE. His citation refers to his zeal in performing all his duties with the 20th Armoured Regiment whether in periods of training or in action, where he was noted for his courage in rescuing the wounded and conducting burials in exposed areas.

Another Presbyterian, Padre J. S. Somerville,⁹ had served with the 19th Armoured Regiment from its training days in [Maadi](#) and the men had come to see the strong and courageous character which lay behind his friendly and humble manner. His calm demeanour never left him, and in the citation for his Military Cross special mention is made of his influence under trying circumstances. At the [Gajana River](#) the forward tanks met heavy and unexpected opposition. Padre Somerville was in the thick of things and at once organised the evacuation of the wounded. His coolness and cheerfulness played an important part in getting them to safety, but his bearing did more than that, for at a most critical moment it put fresh spirit into all the troops fighting in the vicinity.

The third chaplain in this team was Padre R. McL. Gourdie,¹⁰ of the 18th Armoured Regiment, who was awarded the DSO. Padre Gourdie was a man of great physical stamina with an

impressive record of success on the athletic track, and at all times he performed his duty with industry, courage, and enthusiasm. He [page 107](#) haunted the front line, covering great distances on foot, and on one occasion at least carried the evening rations to a tank which was considered to be in an unapproachable position. His citation mentions a special day when one of his squadrons had forced a long, narrow salient in the enemy line near [Strada](#) village. When the foremost tank was hit, Padre Gourdie, who was travelling in the RAP carrier, went forward on foot, and with the assistance of the spare driver, who was not hit, managed to evacuate all the rest of the wounded crew. Later in the day he repeated this performance and dragged three men out of a blazing tank. In the meantime the infantry were receiving heavy casualties, and Padre Gourdie repeatedly went forward, loaded the wounded on his carrier, and then ran the gauntlet through terrific fire down 600 yards of open road.

Communicant Groups

In the 4th Armoured Brigade a movement was instituted which, had it appeared earlier in the war, would have made a very valuable contribution to the work of the Chaplains' Department. As it was, the chaplains during a course held in Rome gave it considerable attention and made plans for extending the system throughout the Division. Padre M. G. Sullivan,¹¹ of the 22nd Battalion, was largely responsible for the idea, and his enthusiasm and ability set it going. Each unit chaplain in the brigade collected in a group his regular communicants, regardless of denomination, and set out to hold a series of discussions on the religious problems confronting the Church in the Army and in civilian life. The regimental groups discussed the same subjects and a combined brigade conference was planned, but unfortunately it did not take place as a long term of action prevented further meetings. Had this system been started earlier it might have unified the boundless goodwill and loyal faith of hundreds of men and chaplains throughout the 2nd NZEF, and from it might have arisen a strong and determined body of men which could have been invaluable in the ecumenical work of the Church.

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The Engineers

The New Zealand Engineers for the most part did not take kindly to military life with its intricate organisation based on tradition, regulation, and restriction. Given their own type of work they were happy, and if initiative, courage, and speed were needed, so much the better. They were individualists, a little army within an army. They submitted but did not take kindly to uniform, rifle drill, and parades, and treated this side of their life as one of the annoying restrictions which war introduced between a man and his work.

The Engineers had no chaplain of their own until 1943. In Base camps they had attended Church parades and individuals had sought the ministrations of chaplains of their own denomination, while in the field they welcomed occasional services from one or two chaplains, such as Padre Taylor, of whom they approved. They were split into many sections inside and outside the Division, and in the early days it had not been possible to post a chaplain to them, nor is it quite certain whether one would have been welcome.

By the end of the Tunisian campaign conditions had changed and the Senior Chaplain was able to find a chaplain for them. In [Africa](#) they had suffered many casualties as they laid or picked up minefields. Indeed the many little crosses beside the main road to [Tunis](#) recalled the text: 'They shall prepare thy way before thee'

In Italy their most dangerous duty was the construction of bridges in the battle area, for while the infantry could usually find their own way across rivers, the engineers had to get the armour and transport over. Night after night they followed the rifle companies and, often in the most appalling weather and under severe enemy fire, struggled to make a bridge so that the tanks and supporting arms could cross before daylight.

Their chaplain was Padre J. K. Watson¹² who had served in the ranks during the early years of the war. He was an ordained minister of the Methodist Church and was commissioned as a chaplain in 1943. As the engineers were not accustomed to having a chaplain on their strength he had many difficulties, but his commanding officers were helpful and hard work combined with courage bore its inevitable reward. He commanded respect and attention by [page 109](#) consistently working with the most forward troops, and was awarded the Military Cross for splendid work done in the [Cassino](#) area.

Bridges were needed in the most hotly contested parts of the battlefield, and the engineers had to work amid shellfire and machine-gun bullets on ground thickly strewn with mines, often subject to attacks by enemy infantry. The long hours of a night would slowly pass with their regular number of casualties, alarms, and setbacks. A sapper might have been excused if he had hoped that his company would not be called upon to go forward more than once or twice in a week, but Padre Watson went forward with every company and never once stayed in B Echelon when the engineers were working in the front line.

In reality the Engineers were like any other group of New Zealanders, having a limited knowledge of organised religion, but at the same time they had a great respect for real character and practical common sense, and it was fortunate that their first chaplain should have been a man of Padre Watson's calibre. His courage, combined with a transparent sincerity and friendliness, made a great impression, and the standard he set for his successors as chaplain to the New Zealand Engineers was very high.

Leadership School

Soon after victory in [Europe](#) a Leadership School organised by the Chaplains' Department came into existence. The idea was copied from the courses run by the [Royal Air Force](#) in Rome, one of which Padre E. O. Sheild¹³ attended as an observer. His report was considered by the chaplains, and when a plan had been made for similar courses in the 2nd NZEF the proposal was submitted to the GOC. Official approval was given and, through the courtesy of the [National Patriotic Fund Board](#), the Divisional YMCA hostel at [Riccione](#) was made available and every help given by the [YMCA](#) secretary, Allister Gill.¹⁴

Padre Sheild was appointed principal of the school and three other chaplains were released for this work. Together they prepared a syllabus and solved all the administrative and other

problems. It [page 110](#) was decided that each course should last for ten days, including two Sundays, and provision was made for a maximum of sixty students at a time. Courses were run on a denominational basis in that there were three divisions: Church of England, Presbyterian, and Other Denominations. The syllabus remained the same with the exception of certain periods on Church history and Christian doctrine which varied with each course. Plans by Father Spring for a series of courses for Roman Catholics did not eventuate.

An effort was made to select students from men who had already shown some capability for leadership; accordingly, commanding officers were asked to pick the candidates from their units and it was suggested to them that they should consult their chaplains when making the selection.

The school was open to all ranks, and many officers attended. Its object was to 'train leaders by showing that the Christian way of life gave the only outlook which provided coherence and meaning to all experience, and provided power by which fine words and ideals could be translated into action.' The daily syllabus contained Church services, discussions, and three lectures under the general headings:

- (1) The foundations and fundamentals of leadership;
- (2) The dynamic at work in history;
- (3) The application of leadership.

Two lectures were held each morning and the third in the afternoon. After lunch the afternoons were free until four o'clock and most of the men took advantage of the magnificent facilities for sea-bathing on the beach at [Riccione](#). In the evenings there was a kind of 'brains trust' in which written questions that had been submitted to the staff were answered and freely discussed.

At the conclusion of each course the students were invited to give their opinions on the school, and of the 450 who attended all expressed their approval of it. Information about each man attending the school was sent to his Church in New Zealand. The school was a notable venture by the Department and credit is due to the many authorities concerned for the speedy efficiency with which the organisation was planned and put into practice, though much of the success was owed to the enthusiasm and talents of Padre Sheild.

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Courses for Chaplains

The chaplains themselves had several opportunities for attending refresher courses in [Italy](#). Twenty-six went to a New Zealand course held in Rome in July 1944. Comfortable accommodation was provided in a hostel and the lectures and discussions took place in the [New Zealand Club](#). While the course was being held the chaplains made wide use of the services of Father J. W. Rodgers¹⁵ who was doing very valuable work in showing New Zealanders round the wonderful buildings of Rome. During the course a number of useful discussions took place, and methods were considered for deepening the spiritual life of men in the 2nd NZEF and preparing them for civilian life after the war. An excellent pamphlet on 'Spiritual Rehabilitation', prepared by Padre Holland, was approved, and further encouragement given to the formation of

communicant groups within the brigades. New Zealand chaplains also attended refresher courses run by the Royal Army Chaplains' Department at [Bari](#) and [Assisi](#), and three were present at the International School of Religion organised by the South Africans at Lake Como.

Prisoners of War

Before the end of the war in [Europe](#) a picked group of officers and men was sent from the 2nd NZEF in [Italy](#) and from New Zealand to form a Repatriation Unit in the [United Kingdom](#) for released prisoners of war. Six chaplains were on this establishment. At first there was some delay in the arrival of the prisoners and the chaplains went in search of New Zealanders serving with the British forces. One concentrated on men serving with the Royal [Air Force](#) and another went to the [Royal Navy](#). In addition to these six chaplains there was a seventh New Zealand chaplain serving in England at this time. He was Padre S. C. Read,¹⁶ who after long service with the Division had been posted to the New Zealand Forces Club in [London](#) to look after the affairs of the National [Patriotic Fund Board](#), where he did excellent work.

When the prisoners began to arrive they received extra rations in very comfortable surroundings. Some had to enter hospital [page 112](#) because of privations suffered in prison camps and on the forced marches of the last few months of their imprisonment in [Germany](#). The chaplains found work with released prisoners of war unlike anything else they had attempted. Long years behind barbed wire had left their marks on the minds of the men and sympathetic treatment and understanding were needed. They responded magnificently to good food, freedom, and friendliness, and this led one chaplain to assert that men just released from captivity were in better mental and physical health than those who had served for a similar period with the Division in action. The chaplain who said this was an experienced man, but perhaps appearances were deceptive for many former prisoners suffered a severe relapse in health and morale on their return to New Zealand. There was no doubt that imprisonment in enemy hands placed a great strain on body and soul.

All the New Zealand chaplains who had been captured returned safely. Bishop Gerard had been repatriated some two years earlier but the other nine passed through the Repatriation Unit in England. Their experiences had varied. At some times and in some places they had received many opportunities for continuing their spiritual work, being allowed to move freely in nearby prison camps, but on other occasions they were strictly confined in their own prison for officers. Where possible the chaplains conducted regular services in prison camps, and they spent much of their time giving religious instruction and in helping to organise activities which would combat the deadly monotony of prison life.

In his award of the CBE special mention is made of the part played by Bishop Gerard while he was a prisoner of war, and he himself bore testimony to the work of the other chaplains. In one prison the Bishop found a number of Church of England confirmation candidates who had been prepared by a Presbyterian chaplain, Padre Mitchell. This chaplain had an excellent record and was awarded the United States Bronze Star. Another prisoner of war chaplain, Padre Hiddlestone, received the MBE, and Padre Hurst was mentioned in despatches for good work while a prisoner.

The intimacy of life in prison, the perpetual shortage of food, and the other hardships provided many temptations for a slackening in morale, petty selfishness, and despondency. The captured [page 113](#) chaplain had both to conquer these problems in his own life and to help others.

Information on chaplaincy work in prison camps has had to be gleaned from former prisoners of war and the chaplains themselves. These men form a small, exclusive band in the brotherhood of returned men. Their common experience of acute mental suffering and frustration has welded them together and they refer to each other as 'Kriegies'. Captured chaplains themselves, looking back on their Army life, believe that the most fruitful period of their ministry was the time they spent in enemy hands.

Thanksgiving Celebrations for Victory

The GOC was present at the first chaplains' conference after the end of the war in [Europe](#). At this conference he thanked the chaplains for their work throughout the war and enlisted their aid in meeting certain immediate problems. He asked that 13 May should be observed as 'Thanksgiving Day' and directed that all available personnel should attend the special Church services. An order of service was drawn up for the 2nd NZEF and a special one arranged for the Roman Catholics.

The latter celebrated the Solemn High Mass of Thanksgiving in the Basilica of St. Anthony in [Trieste](#). The Mass was sung by Father Fletcher¹⁷ and the sermon preached by Father Walsh.¹⁸ Some weeks later this great church was again filled by New Zealanders, including [General Freyberg](#), when a Solemn Requiem for the Fallen was celebrated.

Later in the year, on 19 August, special Thanksgiving services were held throughout the Division to commemorate victory against [Japan](#). Four memorial and dedication services were also attended by [General Freyberg](#) and a special contingent of troops and chaplains. The first of these was held at [Suda Bay](#) in [Crete](#), where it was estimated that some ten thousand [Cretans](#) took part, the second at the British military cemetery near the [Sangro](#), the third at [Cassino](#), and the fourth at [Alamein](#).

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But the story of the Chaplains' Department does not end with the announcement of victory, for there were several other groups of chaplains who played an important part in the spiritual life of the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force.

¹ Rev. A. C. K. Harper (C of E); born England, 15 Sep 1904; killed in action 22 Feb 1944.

² Rev. D. E. Duncan (Presby.); Wairoa; born Waikanae, [Wellington](#), 30 Aug 1912; wounded 9 Oct 1944.

³ Rev. H. G. Norris (C of E); [Christchurch](#); born [Temuka](#), 12 Nov 1911; wounded 7 Mar 1944.

⁴ Rev. H. S. Scott (Presby.); [Te Awamutu](#); born [Onehunga](#), 21 Sep 1907; wounded 3 Dec 1943.

⁵ Rev. R. F. Judson, MC, (Presby.); [Auckland](#); born [Auckland](#), 25 Mar 1911.

⁶ Very Rev. A. K. Warren, MC, (C of E); Dean of [Christchurch](#); born [Wellington](#), 23 Sep 1900; wounded 29 Apr 1945.

⁷ Rev. P. C. S. Sergel, US Silver Star, (C of E); [Hamilton](#); born NZ, 11 May 1907.

⁸ Rev. L. F. F. Gunn, MBE, (Presby.); [Christchurch](#); born [Invercargill](#), 19 Oct 1909.

⁹ Rev. J. S. Somerville, MC, (Presby.), [Wellington](#); born [Dunedin](#), 7 Jul 1910.

¹⁰ Rev. R. McL. Gourdie, DSO, (C of E); Pongaroa, [Wellington](#); born [Ashburton](#), 21 Apr 1913.

¹¹ Rev. M. G. Sullivan (C of E); [Te Awamutu](#); born [Auckland](#), 30 Mar 1910.

¹² Rev. J. K. Watson, MC, (Meth.); [Christchurch](#); born South Milford, [Yorkshire](#), England, 24 Mar 1911; wounded 3 Jun 1944.

¹³ Rev. E. O. Sheild (C of E); [Oxford](#), England; born [New Plymouth](#), 23 Jul 1910; served with 3rd Division 1942–44 and 2nd Division 1944–45.

¹⁴ Mr. A. Gill, YMCA Secretary, 2nd NZEF; men's outfitter; [Pukekohe](#), [Auckland](#); born [Auckland](#), 8 Jul 1908.

¹⁵ Rev. Fr. J. W. Rodgers (RC); [Auckland](#); born [Dunedin](#), 3 Dec 1909.

¹⁶ Rev. S. C. Read (Presby.); [Auckland](#); born [Invercargill](#), 24 Aug 1905.

¹⁷ Rev. Fr. J. J. Fletcher (RC); Reefton; born [Dannevirke](#), 28 Nov 1906.

¹⁸ Rev. Dr. F. H. Walsh (RC); [Wellington](#); born [Christchurch](#), 26 Mar 1910.

CHAPTER 14

THE PACIFIC

NEW ZEALAND troops in the [Pacific](#) were employed in two major rôles: first, as garrison troops in the defence of [Fiji](#), [Tonga](#), and Norfolk, and later, as the 3rd Division, in amphibious landings on the Japanese-held islands of [Vella Lavella](#), the Treasury Group, and [Nissan](#) ([Green Islands](#)).

In the first defensive phase, small forces with inadequate equipment had the difficult task of preparing defences and then doing permanent sentry and coastwatching duty on the beaches, with the unpleasant knowledge that their presence might discourage but certainly could not withstand a determined Japanese attack. The task of the individual chaplains with these small forces was hard, for it was difficult to keep morale high as welfare and recreational facilities

were small, and there was no well established Chaplains' Department to give advice and administrative support. Unfortunately the work of the chaplains with these garrison forces has been recorded in no documents and an account of it has had to be omitted from this history.

The 3rd Division was formed in [Fiji](#) in 1942. On being relieved by American troops it moved back to New Zealand, where the seventeen chaplains with the force had a chance to get to know their men and make arrangements for their future work. The Division moved to [New Caledonia](#) at the end of 1942 and made its headquarters at [Bourail](#); later, in separate brigade groups, units saw action on [Vella Lavella](#) (September 1943), the Treasury Group (October 1943), and [Nissan Island](#) (February 1944).

General Conditions

The Division had to face the problem of great distances, as any large-scale map of the [Pacific](#) will show, and close contact was made difficult through the force being usually divided into three groups—[Divisional Headquarters](#), 14th Brigade, and 8th Brigade. There were constant delays in the arrival of warlike stores and welfare supplies, which had to travel by sea and air, and much [page 116](#) confusion was caused by the different systems of priorities used by [United States](#) and Dominion forces serving in that theatre.

The climate of [New Caledonia](#) was tropical, roads were few and bad, and the scenery a mixture of forbidding hills and monotonous vegetation consisting largely of the stunted naiouli tree. Large parts of the island are uninhabited and, apart from [Noumea](#), there were no towns with facilities for leave.

The Chaplains

Because the Division had to be split into many parts fifteen chaplains above the normal Divisional establishment were appointed. There was a permanent chaplain with each of the two Field Ambulances which, owing to their isolation, had frequently to act as small General Hospitals.

The biggest problem the chaplains had to face was the question of morale. Many soldiers had enlisted with the hope of serving in the [Middle East](#) and were disappointed when they were posted to the [Pacific](#). Many had already spent dreary months on garrison duty in out-of-the-way places and were pessimistic about the chance of the 3rd Division seeing action. Indeed their fears were largely realised for it was not till August 1943 that the Division moved into the battle area in [Guadalcanal](#).

While the Division was training in New Zealand, and for the first five months in [New Caledonia](#), the Chaplains' Department suffered much from having no Senior Chaplain. In other units many men had been specially transferred to the 3rd Division from the Middle East so that use could be made of their experience in the formation and administration of this new force. The GOC (Major-General H. E. Barrowclough) suggested that this course should be followed in the appointment of a Senior Chaplain, but the Chaplains' Advisory Council in New Zealand replied that this position must be given to a man with experience of work in the [Pacific](#). An excellent

man was found in Padre K. Liggett¹ who had been transferred to [Norfolk Island](#) after service in [Fiji](#). He was a man of strong character with a friendly disposition and marked administrative talents. In the huge area covered by the Division he placed



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[page 117](#) his chaplains well, and then did his best to keep in close touch with them by constant travelling which often involved sea and air trips.

In December 1943, Bishop Gerard, repatriated from [Italy](#) a few months earlier, paid an official visit to the Division at the invitation of the GOC. He conducted a number of confirmations and gave many interesting talks on the early years of the 2nd Division in the Middle East and his experiences as a prisoner of war. In the following year, when Padre Liggett relinquished the position of Senior Chaplain, Bishop Gerard was asked to succeed him. At that time it was still thought possible that the 3rd Division might continue its active rôle and existence, but the pressing demand for men in other services and in industry, following the need for increased production in New Zealand to supply [United States](#) forces in the [Pacific](#) and the heavy drain on manpower, made it impossible for the Dominion to maintain two divisions and the 3rd Division was disbanded. The New Zealand troops were then concentrated in [New Caledonia](#) before their return to New Zealand, and in the difficult days of reorganisation and disbandment the Bishop once again showed his great qualities as a leader.

Chapels

Where troops were stationed in one place for any long period the chaplains had a chance of creating a regular organisation, and it was found possible to build a number of garrison chapels.

They were made from local timber and material supplied by the Engineers. The expense was met by the Patriotic Fund and much of the labour was voluntary. Padre W. R. Castle² was largely responsible for one at Base and there were others at the [Base Reception Depot](#), at the 4th General Hospital, and at the Roadhouse in New Caledonia. Memorial chapels were also built on the sites of the soldiers' cemeteries on [Vella Lavella](#) and [Mono Island](#).

Contact with Missionaries

One or two chaplains were recruited from New Zealanders serving with Christian missions in the [Pacific](#), while several other missionaries were able to help the Army in different ways. One of [page 118](#) these, the Rev. A. H. Voyce,³ gave much valuable information about [Bougainville](#) to the Americans. Native churches were often used for Church parades, and the troops were greatly impressed by the results of missionary work. Many a soldier, lukewarm in his religion, was challenged by the simple inquiry of a native: 'You a [Jesus](#) man? Me a [Jesus](#) man.'

In New Caledonia the French pastor, M. Ariège, often lent his church for Army services, and he and his wife made numerous New Zealanders welcome in their home. In September 1943 the little missionary yacht *Bishop Patteson* landed the Rt. Rev. W. H. Baddeley, DSO, MC, Bishop of [Melanesia](#), at [Guadalcanal](#), and he came ashore to visit the New Zealand troops. He conducted several confirmations and made a profound impression when he preached at a big morning service organised by the 14th Brigade. At Vella Lavella, the resident missionary, the Rev. A. W. E. Silvester of the New Zealand Methodist Church, who had remained through the Japanese occupation, welcomed the Americans and New Zealanders as they arrived. The soldiers were so impressed by the work of the mission that they subscribed a very large sum for its re-establishment.

Routine Religion

The normal work of a chaplain outside the battle area has already been described in this book, but conditions in the [Pacific](#) differed much from those in the [Middle East](#). It was possible to hold only one Divisional conference, a two-day affair which took place early in 1943 at [Bourail](#). Members of the [YMCA](#) and AEWS⁴ were present, and valuable advice was given by the GOC and other officers on the chaplains' work in action.

On Sundays the chaplains sometimes had to take services at different places separated by as much as fifty miles, and the journeys had to be made in jeeps over the rough jungle tracks. The enervating climate put mental and physical energy at a premium: during the day the chaplains would help to erect recreational huts or clear spaces for deck-tennis and basketball courts, while at night they ran libraries and organised lectures and concerts.

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Many of the working hours of the day had to be spent in training with the troops. For example, it was essential that the chaplain had as much practice as the combatant soldier in the difficult business of beach landings and jungle fighting. Much training for this was done during a temporary halt in the [New Hebrides](#). The men had to climb down cargo nets slung over the side

of the troopship into the small landing craft waiting below. These small boats were then driven through the surf to the beach, and as soon as they grounded the crouching troops had to spring out, struggle through the shallow water, and then, heavily laden with their full battle equipment, rush across the sand to the shelter of the jungle. At the end of the exercise the performance was repeated in reverse, and it was no easy business at the end of the day, when muscles were tired and the equipment seemed to have grown heavier, to get back on to the troopship. As the little landing craft was tossed up and down by the swell it was not easy to get a firm hold of the net and, once on it, difficult to hold on when the wind blew it away from the side of the ship. On one of these occasions Father Ryan⁵ fell backwards into the landing craft and was hurt. The news of his injury was widely exaggerated until his death was unofficially reported; his many friends were greatly relieved when, two weeks later, they met 'Father Bill' as alive and well as ever.

In Guadalcanal, after the troops had been nearly a year away from home, many domestic problems arose, and the chaplain spent much of his time in heart-to-heart conversations and in the composition of difficult letters to New Zealand. But by far the biggest problems were those caused by distance, the climate, and the shortage of welfare supplies and facilities for leave.

Contact with the Americans

Because of the wide dispersal of the troops the chaplains had little opportunity of meeting other chaplains though some had very happy relations with their colleagues in the United States Army. Many New Zealand chaplains bought quantities of welfare material from the American Post Exchanges until a Divisional order forbade this practice. The American chaplains were most helpful in looking after New Zealand wounded in American hospitals, while [page 120](#) the Senior American Chaplain in the South Pacific, Colonel Kronke, gave valuable assistance in the early days in [New Caledonia](#). In many places, notably at [Noumea](#) and on a [United States](#) seaplane tender anchored in Blanche Bay in the Treasuries, New Zealand chaplains regularly conducted services for Americans when an American chaplain was not present to look after certain denominations.

In Action

For the New Zealand troops of the 3rd Division, fighting in the [Pacific](#) consisted chiefly of assault landings from landing craft and patrol battles in the jungle; at all times the troops were subject to air attacks. The Japanese made full use of the poor visibility in the jungle to infiltrate small groups of men behind our lines and across our communications, where they did much damage by sniping and occasional ambushes. At night no movement was possible and the men lay alert in their trenches, often half full of rain water. The jungle at night was alive with noises, any of which might be made by an insect, a bird, or a Japanese soldier, so that the New Zealanders fired at any unusual movement or sound.

The chaplain faced many problems. His own life was often in considerable danger; one or two chaplains carried revolvers, though there is no record of their use at any time. He had to combat the appalling and enervating humidity of the climate, the difficulty and dangers of movement, and the scanty supply of welfare and medical provisions.

Many spoke of the good work done by the chaplains in action, especially that of Padres D. L. Francis,⁶ J. R. Nairn,⁷ and J. S. H. Perkins⁸. In the fierce fighting at Falamai Beach, on [Mono Island](#), Padre O. T. Baragwanath⁹ set a splendid example and received mention in despatches. Another chaplain, Padre G. D. Falloon,¹⁰ was with the 35th Battalion when it went into action on Vella [page 121](#) Lavella, and for his work in that campaign he was awarded the Military Cross and also mentioned in despatches. The citation to this award pays tribute to his ‘complete disregard of his own safety in order to succour the sick, wounded, and fighting soldier. In spite of the presence of the enemy he carried heavy loads of comforts, unescorted, to the forward troops under the worst possible jungle conditions, and his part in holding the morale of the men cannot be assessed too highly. He personally assisted and supervised the bringing in of all killed in action, overcoming almost insurmountable difficulties.... His fearlessness and presence in the front line was an inspiration to all....’

The Pacific chaplains had to face long, weary months in training areas, subject to difficult conditions in climate and country. They had many administrative problems and, after a short period in action, had also to share the general disappointment when their division was disbanded. In addition, they faced many hardships and dangers only to find that their own countrymen sometimes considered the [Pacific](#) campaign of little importance or interest when compared with the 2nd Division's work in the [Middle East](#).

¹ Rev. K. Liggett (C of E); [Opotiki](#); born England, 29 Apr 1905; SCF, 2nd NZEF IP, 17 Apr 1943-2 Apr 1944.

² Rev. W. R. Castle, (C of E); Chaplain, [Royal New Zealand Navy](#), HMNZS *Tamaki*, [Auckland](#); born New Orleans, [USA](#), 30 Sep 1910.

³ Rev. A. H. Voyce; Methodist missionary; [Bougainville](#); born [Tasmania](#), 28 Mar 1899.

⁴ Army Education and Welfare Service.

⁵ Rev. Fr. W. E. Ryan (RC); [Auckland](#); born [Auckland](#), 12 Dec 1910.

⁶ Rev. D. L. Francis (C of E); [Waiuku](#), [Auckland](#); born [London](#), 15 Oct 1901.

⁷ Rev. J. R. Nairn (Presby.); [Wellington](#); born [Auckland](#), 31 Mar 1911.

⁸ Rev. J. S. H. Perkins (C of E); [Amberley](#); born Tapanui, 9 Dec 1912.

⁹ Rev. O. T. Baragwanath, m.i.d., (Presby.); [Dunedin](#); born [Auckland](#), 12 Oct 1913.

¹⁰ Rev. G. D. Falloon, MC, m.i.d., (Presby.); [Christchurch](#); born [Oamaru](#), 12 Nov 1911.

CHAPTER 15

DEPARTMENTAL ADMINISTRATION

THE administrative headquarters of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in Egypt was situated for the first years of the war on a hill in [Maadi Camp](#). The combatant soldier, goaded by irritating restrictions, and the officer, plagued by frequent demands for statistical returns, have always said hard things about their administrators, and so it was quite natural that this hill came to have a vulgar name, a name which must not sully the august pages of a chaplains' history. It will be referred to as 'Upper Maadi', and it deserves mention for it introduces the problems of Departmental organisation, as it was on this hill that the Senior Chaplain had his quarters. Bishop Gerard was here only occasionally, but later it became the permanent home of the Senior Chaplain.

The onerous duties of the Senior Chaplain have already been described, and it will have been appreciated how much administrative pioneering was necessary before the Department could run smoothly. In fact so much of the Senior Chaplain's time was occupied in building a firm foundation for the Department that some important items of routine administration were almost entirely neglected till the end of the war. When the Department had achieved corporate efficiency, and after Headquarters 2nd NZEF had moved to [Italy](#), an experienced chaplain was sent back to look after affairs in [Maadi Camp](#), which had now become a training ground for reinforcements and a transit camp. This chaplain, [Padre Underhill](#), had time to examine some of the less urgent matters of administration and to try a few experiments.

Contact with New Zealand

Each month the Senior Chaplain sent a report to the Chaplains' Advisory Council in New Zealand and, in addition, had much correspondence with the civilian Church leaders. The denominational Senior Chaplains also sent regular reports to their own Church leaders. But most of this correspondence can be dismissed as routine administrative business. A much wider system of reporting was needed before the ordinary Church member in New Zealand [page 123](#) could appreciate the work of the chaplains and the spiritual life of the soldier; every other phase of Army life was described by the war correspondents of the Public Relations Service and their reports found their way into most of the newspapers and journals in the Dominion. It is true that a few chaplains had written articles for religious papers, and sometimes extracts from their letters had been published, but this did not give an adequate picture of the chaplains' work. In the first place, chaplains were too modest to describe their own exploits, and secondly, most of these descriptions concerned work at Base.

In 1944 an attempt was made to encourage all the chaplains to put on paper some description of their work. These articles were edited at Base and sent on to New Zealand for as wide a distribution in the newspapers as possible. In the editing the articles became anonymous, and the chaplains wrote more freely when there was no suggestion that they were trying to advertise their own individual actions. Moreover, by editing it was possible to keep the subjects in proportion and individual chaplains could be mentioned by name when their work was worthy of praise. This method of reporting never grew to adequate proportions and yet its possibilities and importance were clearly shown.

The Keeping of Records

Practically nothing in the nature of a Departmental war diary was attempted till Padre Spence became Senior Chaplain, and by that time many things of interest and importance had been forgotten. In addition, few records were kept of denominational and sacramental work. Particulars of baptism and confirmations, etc., should have been kept on an official roll at Base.

In the British Army in the [Middle East](#), chaplains sent a regular routine report to the office of the Deputy Chaplain-General, and in the American Army every chaplain serving overseas sent a monthly report to the office of the Chief of Chaplains in [America](#).

The multiplication of paper forms and returns is an evil of this age and for long it has been a danger to the smooth working of an army in the field, but for all that there was room in the Chaplains' Department for some reasonable collection of religious facts and figures. For example, facts about the number of services and [page 124](#) attendances, whether voluntary or compulsory, together with a description of religious activities and experiments and a list of routine duties, would have been of practical and historical value if they could have been recorded throughout the whole Expeditionary Force at various times.

The Denomination as a Unit

When the New Zealand system of unit chaplains had been in operation for several years the Department became a team of friends, and it was found possible to encourage denominational loyalty and teaching. Of course, the Roman Catholics were always more of a separate entity than the others. Among several enterprising experiments was a very successful Retreat they organised in the period between the campaigns in [Tunisia](#) and [Italy](#). The Retreat lasted for a whole day, from seven in the morning till seven at night, and over four hundred men were present.

At an early date a list of candidates for the Christian Ministry had been prepared and circulated to all chaplains but few of these candidates had much instruction or encouragement in their studies. In 1944 these candidates were put in touch with the nearest chaplain of their own denomination, and they received information on the special study courses organised by the Royal Army Chaplains' Department.

Communicant Forms

The Communicants' Fellowship introduced by the 4th Armoured Brigade in [Italy](#) showed that the communicant members of the different denominations were usually the keenest supporters of religion, and that through them the chaplain could exert a wide influence. Accordingly a system of simple paper forms was introduced and these were handed around and filled in after services of Holy Communion. On these forms the man wrote his name, denomination, military address, and the name of his Church in New Zealand. These forms were sent back to Base, where they were sorted and passed on to representatives of the different denominations. A roll of these communicants, mounting in one short year to over three thousand names, was kept at Base.

This information was put to various uses. The Church of Eng- [page 125](#) land chaplains used it in three ways. Firstly, by reference to Base a new chaplain to a unit could be informed of all his communicants. Secondly, at the great Christian festivals a circular letter was sent to every man on the roll, pointing out the significance of the day and the religious duties expected. These letters were received with warm approval by the soldiers. Thirdly, as soon as the communicant form was received at Base a specially printed letter was sent to the vicar in the man's parish at home. Sometimes the vicar then wrote a letter of encouragement to the soldier and visited his family. This system of communicant forms was of value and could work well provided there was a chaplain at Base with time to deal with them.

Helping the Chaplain

The chaplain serving in the Division lived a hard life cut off from religious reading and the company of other chaplains, and it was difficult for him to remain spiritually and mentally fresh or to keep himself abreast with movements in the civilian Church. For example, a great religious movement, which was organised by the National Council of Churches and known as the 'Campaign for Christian Order', made a profound impression in New Zealand and yet was hardly heard of by the men overseas. In 1944 arrangements were made for Church magazines to be sent regularly to the chaplains by air mail.

A regular letter, enclosing religious pamphlets and magazines together with Departmental news and gossip, was later sent by the chaplain at [Maadi](#) to a number of chaplains serving in the Division. This served a useful purpose in giving the Divisional chaplain an unofficial link with the outside world, for whereas he could always write to the Senior Chaplain and be certain of getting a helpful reply, yet he felt that the Senior Chaplain was too important and too busy a man to encumber with a stream of questions and a formidable shopping list.

The Ideal Organisation

In each war it must take a lengthy period for the different parts of the Army to discover under fresh circumstances the best system of administration, and when something like perfection has been [page 126](#) gained it is only natural for the administrator to look back wistfully and wish that he had known as much at the beginning of the war. Looking back on the life of the Chaplains' Department—admittedly being wise after the event—it would seem that there was a real place for a small administrative headquarters consisting of a staff chaplain with a telephone, a clerk, and an office next door to the Senior Chaplain, Great care would have been needed in the selection of a staff chaplain. The type of man needed was one who had served with a combatant unit, with a mature character that would at once stand up to the deadening atmosphere of Base and also enable him to help his brothers in the field. His duties would be to evolve a system of records and religious statistics; he would keep in close touch with every chaplain and pass on to them important news and descriptions of successful experiments. He would also keep a roll of keen Church members and candidates for the Christian Ministry, passing this information on to the Senior Chaplain of each denomination. He would be responsible for everything that might be termed 'chaplains' publicity' and could help the Senior Chaplain in keeping some continuity in the work at Base.

The chaplains often discussed Departmental organisation, and several times it was suggested that there should be one senior Chaplain-General in New Zealand to control chaplaincy work in the three services and formulate matters of high policy with the Minister of Defence. But the chaplains always realised that if the wrong man was made Chaplain-General things would be worse than ever, and no doubt too little administration is better than too much in affairs of religion.

CHAPTER 16

CONCLUSIONS

AN attempt has been made in this history to give a picture of the life of a man serving in the New Zealand Army Chaplains' Department in the Second World War. Much space has been given to the everyday routine of different parts of the Army as this materially influenced the programme the chaplain set for himself. Perhaps too little has been said of the message the chaplain tried to give and its importance for the troops and indeed for the whole world, but this book was intended to be history, a recitation of facts with some conclusions, not an apologetic. The choice and arrangement of the facts, and the conclusions, were made by the author alone and express his own opinion, though he was enormously helped by the research, the criticism, and friendly help of many other chaplains. In this last chapter an attempt is made to lay down a few general principles.

What are Chaplains for?

The chaplain's duty is to see that men in uniform receive the same opportunities for the practice of their religion as they do in civilian life. The fact that Army life in wartime is vastly different from civilian life does not change the essential Christian message. The need for the teaching of the Church, the administration of the sacraments, and the spread of the Gospel remains the same. New spiritual dangers have to be faced, new methods of pastoral practice devised, while the emphasis on certain virtues and sins has to be changed.

The New Zealand chaplains went further than this. They were satisfied, as far as men can be amid the welter of modern propaganda and conflicting ideologies, that the war was being fought for moral causes and not for national aggrandisement, and so in their preaching and teaching they were prepared to lay great stress on the moral truths at stake. They tried to increase the general efficiency of the Army by attending to the physical welfare of the troops, by supporting on all occasions the Army tradition of good discipline and order, and in battle they endeavoured to play some small part by setting a good example of cheerfulness and courage.

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The value of a chaplain in this respect has been acknowledged on many occasions, and one General in the First World War is reported as saying that a really good chaplain was worth an extra battalion in a division. But such praise is liable to obscure the real duty of a chaplain. He was not put into the Army to be a welfare officer, a political commissar, or professional brave man. but to preach and present the Christian faith. War aims, the success of battles, and welfare

work were of secondary importance. Just as Bishop Selwyn ministered to soldiers on both sides during the Maori Wars, many New Zealand chaplains in the Second World War welcomed the opportunity of ministering to the enemy when they were prisoners, or even when the chaplains themselves were prisoners. War aims and nationality make no difference to a man in his need for religion, nor should they ever obscure the first duty of a Christian minister. But where an army has a strong body of practising Christians its efficiency and morale is bound to benefit by the Christian emphasis on personal discipline, on kindness and cheerfulness, and by the Christian's faith in prayer and belief in immortality, for these things will steel a man's will and carry him forward confidently through danger to death itself.

But it is only fair to add that some Christians did not make good soldiers. Men who had come from conventional homes and who had perhaps been regular though unthinking members of a Church but had never worked out a real, conscious faith for themselves, sometimes compared very badly with the pagan who often set a magnificent example in courage, devotion to duty, and real friendliness.

It would seem that a chaplain's first duty in the Army is to learn the special conditions of military life and then use every opportunity for satisfying the religious needs of the soldier, and secondly, to do his best to improve the mental and physical welfare of the unit to which he is attached

What makes a good Chaplain?

Chaplains were selected by the leaders of the different denominations in New Zealand, and then, provided that they passed the medical examination, were sent into camp. It should be remembered what a large number of chaplains was needed to staff the [page 129](#) three Services in their home and overseas establishments and that this made great demands on the Churches, for the supply of recruits to the Christian Ministry was almost entirely stopped by the war. and every chaplain had to be taken from a civilian post. In spite of these difficulties the Churches were prepared to send their best men to serve with the armed forces; to make this possible older men came out of retirement and the civilian clergy often had their work doubled, besides acting as honorary chaplains to troops stationed in their districts.

The Churches were prepared to send their best men, but how were they to decide who were most suitable for chaplaincy work? Obviously a chaplain had to be of the right age, enjoy good health. and generally give the impression of having those qualities that would appeal to men. This is a very vague description. The right age? A chaplain should not be too young. It was desirable, almost essential, that he should have had several years' experience in the Christian Ministry.

But what was the maximum age to be? In the days of peace the prime of life is often thought to come at the age of 40, but that is old for the Army. [General Freyberg](#) once said that he would like to have all his battalion commanders under 30 and his company commanders under 25. By the end of the war his hope had largely been fulfilled and these young officers were very successful. The rigours of campaigning severely tested any man over the age of 35. From this it would be easy to infer that the ideal chaplain should enter the Army in his thirties, but in the 2nd Division there were several chaplains who had served in the First World War and yet were fit enough to serve with combatant units in the 1939–45 War. These men included Bishop Gerard. Padres

McKenzie, Buck, Moore, McDowall, and Harawira, and mention has already been made of Padre Rangi serving alongside his three sons in the [Maori Battalion](#) and Padre McKenzie giving good service until the age of 56. It would seem fairly easy to suggest a minimum age, but the maximum would depend upon the individual concerned. Provided he had health and strength and a youthful outlook he was young enough.

Some chaplains and many soldiers were so anxious to serve overseas that in their medical examinations they withheld important information, and much trouble was caused by the arrival of recruits [page 130](#) in the [Middle East](#) who proved quite unfit to face the rigours of desert life and battle conditions. Under these circumstances Padre McKenzie was fond of saying that a chaplain was no use unless he could march twenty miles with ease. With due respect to a great leader that statement is only a half-truth. Except on a few occasions, notably in [Crete](#), soldiers were seldom called upon to march long distances during a campaign. Certainly they had to face physical hardship such as artillery bombardment, irregular meals, nights without sleep, and the rigours of the weather, but experience has shown that a strong will is more important than a strong body when such conditions have to be experienced. It was the strongest man physically who first succumbed on Scott's journey from the South Pole, and in modern polar expeditions men are selected as much for their mental as for their bodily strength, while in warfare there has been little to suggest that great athletes have any monopoly of endurance.

So much for age and health. What about the more general characteristics which fit a man for chaplaincy work? The answer must be equally vague. In the First World War there were many surprises. For example, in the British Army competent authorities were surprised by the immediate success of clerical dons dragged from the universities and their world of libraries and abstract thought. They often proved more adaptable and did better work than men with much practical experience in industrial parishes.

No doubt certain gifts and talents were of great value. The gift of preaching has always been one of the strongest arms of the Christian Church, and chaplains so endowed were able to give forthright sermons couched either in soldiers' language or in faultless English which commanded immediate attention and provided their congregations with new inspiration and a better grasp of the eternal truth. A knowledge of history was a great asset in the chaplain's work, while the gift of tongues was invaluable. It came in handy when dealing with prisoners of war. It enabled many chaplains to run foreign language classes in the soldiers' leisure time, and some Roman Catholic chaplains did great service to the Division in [Italy](#) by their knowledge of Italian. Some had the gift of writing, notably Father Walsh, and contributed to the military journals and the excellent pamphlets of the AEWS.

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A chaplain found his work made easier when he could show proficiency in some sport for by refereeing and playing games he came to know his men very well. Perhaps the greatest gift of all was to be a 'good mixer', to have the ability of making friends easily and quickly, for so much of Army life was spent amongst strangers. An imposing and terrifying list could be composed of the qualities needed by the ideal chaplain but such a list would give a false picture. A man did not have to have unusual gifts to be a good chaplain. It was sufficient if he had average health, was

between the ages of 30 and 50, and was a sincere and hard-working Christian clergyman. Provided this type of man was used in the right way he was bound to succeed.

Imagine such a man arriving in the [Middle East](#). He would have a few weeks in Base Camp to get his bearings in a foreign country and then would be posted to a combatant unit with the Division. Here he would get to know one body of men well. He would find and make his own opportunities for work, and after some experience in action, the soldiers would discover his sincerity, faith, and friendliness, and by the very warmth of their acceptance of him supply an atmosphere in which he could give of his best. Under these circumstances a chaplain did not have to have any great ability in preaching or possess any outstanding 'parlour tricks'. It did not matter much if he was a poor preacher, no good at sport and rather shy, for if he was game in action, industrious in his visiting, and sincere in his life he was bound to succeed. However, if such a man was left too long in a Base job, where he could never experience the warmth of unit corporate life or have much chance of showing his own innate quality, he might begin to lose his self-confidence and become less and less useful to the Department.

There were failures, and occasionally a man broke down at a critical time. Sometimes a man was definitely not suitable for chaplaincy work and there was only one solution to this problem: to send him straight home, for there is no place in the Army for a bad chaplain. This solution caused difficulties, for the Senior Chaplain had the delicate and unpleasant job of deciding that the man was no good and of acquainting him with the fact, and then he [page 132](#) had to convince the Army authorities that the chaplain must be replaced at once by a new man from New Zealand.

Some men broke down in spite of being good chaplains. A chaplain can give of his best only for a limited time and then inevitably he has to pay for his separation from opportunities for quiet study and regular prayer. His useful life can be prolonged, and was prolonged, by the many excellent courses and special amenities arranged for chaplains. But even then there is a limit, and the following times might have been set as the maximum service of a chaplain in the Second World War: two years with a combatant unit, one year with a non-combatant Divisional unit, one year at Base, and then back to civilian life. Probably three years' total service would have been better than four.

There is ample evidence in the two wars to support this thesis, but if it was put into practice it would demand in the first place that the Senior Chaplains were in the closest touch with their men and ready at the first sign to order their transfer, and secondly, that the Army authorities were prepared to co-operate in this endeavour to keep the chaplains' team full of fresh and energetic men. In a war there are always occasions when soldiers have to be pushed and worked beyond the limits of sound economy. The winning of a certain battle may be more important in the long run than the continued efficiency of one division or of one body of men. but under this head it should be realised that the normal useful working life of a chaplain is of limited duration. General Slim has said: 'Courage is an expendable quality. If there are continued calls on our courage we begin to overdraw. If we go on overdrawing we go bankrupt—we break down.' This statement might still be true if 'chaplaincy work' was substituted for the word 'courage'.

The preceding paragraphs have suggested that no very special qualifications were needed for an Army chaplain. It was enough if a man had sufficient experience as a clergyman, average health, and was what might be called a good Christian. But it would be a poor Chaplains' Department composed entirely of this rather colourless type, and certainly the New Zealand Chaplains' Department abounded in and was enhanced by its many 'personalities', who together made a strong team when their different ages, ex- [page 133](#) periences, and talents were blended. It was certainly a good team. Did it achieve its purpose?

Dividends

The quality of a doctor or a clergyman is an extremely difficult thing to assess. A doctor may have a huge practice, be able to command extremely high fees, and yet not be a good doctor. The same thing can happen in religion: a clergyman may be extremely popular and draw large congregations and yet fail lamentably in his duty, for it is possible for a man with certain gifts of personality to treat the truth with an unscrupulous or unconscious disregard and proclaim a gospel which is at once attractive and shallow to the point of barrenness. There has always been this danger, and the New Testament gives an uncompromising warning: 'Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets.'

When assessing the value and quality of the New Zealand chaplains there are four different opinions to be heard: firstly, that of the Army authorities, and secondly, that of the Church leaders at home. But perhaps the most important opinion is that of the soldiers for whom the Department primarily existed; and lastly, of course, there are the thoughts of the chaplains themselves.

When senior officers are asked to express an opinion on the work of chaplains they must always face the temptation of taking a sub-Christian view. It is so easy for them to be blinded by the more material things. For example, if a chaplain was brave in battle, popular on Church parade, zealous in his care for the welfare of the men, and likely to help promote good discipline and morale, then he might be termed a good chaplain, and no one would complain very much if he were disloyal to his own Church and some essential Christian principles. Besides able chaplains, the Army authorities wanted to have an efficient Chaplains' Department with its purpose, privileges, and duties clearly defined so that it could fit easily into the Army framework. Thanks to wise Senior Chaplains this hope was largely fulfilled in the latter years of the war. Many of the senior officers were sincere practising Christians. well qualified to pass judgment on the work of the chaplains, and their many generous tributes to the Department gave great pleasure [page 134](#) to the chaplains and may be taken as evidence of warm official approval. If more proof is needed the number of awards and decorations can be mentioned. Roughly 150 chaplains served in the [Pacific](#) and in the [Middle East](#), and of that number twenty-four received decorations and eighteen were mentioned in despatches.

The civilian Churches were pleased by these marks of appreciation and the many tributes paid to their men. but they did not fail to remark that though many returned soldiers were loud in their praise of chaplains, this praise was not accompanied by a very marked increase in Church attendance in civilian life. This is fair criticism and points to the lack of sufficient doctrinal teaching by the chaplains, but on the other hand the first requirement in the Army was to satisfy

the immediate spiritual needs of the soldier, no small task in itself, and in the hard conditions of war the needs of the post-war Church had to take second place. Certainly the chaplains were disappointed when many of their good churchmen in the Army failed to rehabilitate themselves into the civilian Church, but with the failures there were notable successes. At the end of the war a number of men came forward to offer their services in the Christian Ministry, while many others discovered and accepted Christianity through their experience in the Army.

If anyone should want to know what the soldiers thought of their chaplains he could find the answer more satisfactorily by asking returned men than by reading a chaplains' history. The inquirer will receive many different answers which will come from conflicting memories. There is bound to be mention of one or two bad compulsory Church parades, and perhaps of some silly action or saying of a chaplain, probably offset by the more powerful memories of a good chaplain. The happy informality of Church services in the field will be remembered, and perhaps the soldier will speak of some special occasions when he was deeply aware of spiritual forces.

When the chaplains look back on their war service certain things stand out. It was a privilege to be a chaplain, for though a man fell far behind in his regular study and spiritual habits and lost touch with contemporary thought in the Church, he learned lessons and enjoyed experiences which were bound to enrich the rest of his life and work. The devoted and unpaid work of those who served



*Senior Allied officers at Dedication of Memorial Church, Falamai
A padre from a United States Engineers' unit and Rev. E. O. Sheild
in front row Mono Island*

Senior Allied officers at Dedication of Memorial Church, [Falamai](#) A padre from a United States Engineers' unit and Rev. E. O. Sheild in front row [Mono Island](#)



Dedication Service—Inside the church, Falamai Mono Island

Dedication Service-Inside the church, [FalamaiMono Island](#)



Burial service, RNZAF Espiritu Santo

Burial service, [RNZAF Espiritu Santo](#)

[page 135](#) on the Chaplains' Advisory Council must be remembered, and also the work of the civilian clergy who faced many extra hardships and difficulties in wartime but seldom received the praise lavished on chaplains in the Services. The war gave abundant evidence that all men are hungry for religion, and in that fiery furnace, when the trappings of civilisation had been removed, the Gospel of Christianity was seen in its simplicity, tested under every circumstance, and again and again found to be true.

Chaplains remember how often they failed in their high calling: those occasions of physical and moral cowardice, those opportunities missed and those failures caused by too feeble a faith and inadequate prayer. But they have happier memories: the amazing comfort of the Psalms when things looked desperate, and the times when they were conscious of being filled with a power that was not their own. supported by the invisible Communion of Saints and the prayers of the faithful. Above all, the chaplains remember the friendship of the Army, for the comradeship of arms is no empty phrase, representing as it does the most beautiful and enduring fruit of war. It is a harvest that should not be neglected for it is the possession of every returned serviceman, and it will be a tragedy if the cares of civilian life separate the chaplains from active participation in those organisations which bind 'old comrades' together. The life of the nation could benefit much from this friendship, which transcends age and class and has a certain enduring quality due to the circumstances of its birth, when hardship and danger were faced together and heartbreak and grief bravely shared.

Whatever failures there were in the life and work of New Zealand chaplains it must be recorded that they were constantly with their men and took their full share of suffering and hardship. Indeed it was by suffering that their work was ennobled, and it is by their suffering, perhaps, that they can claim fellowship with that great Apostolic band of Christian missionaries throughout the ages whose glory and purpose have been described for ever by St. Paul:

In all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; [page 136](#) by pureness, by knowledge, by long suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God; by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left; by honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report; as deceivers and yet true; as unknown and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as chastened and not killed; as sorrowful and yet always rejoicing; as poor, and yet making many rich; as having nothing and yet possessing all things.

ROLL OF HONOUR

Killed in Action

- Rev. A. C. K. Harper
- 22 February 1944

HONOURS AND AWARDS

Commander of the Order of the British Empire

- G. V. Gerard
- J. W. McKenzie

Distinguished Service Order

- R. McL. Gourdie
- H. F. Harding
- H. G. Taylor

Officer of the Order of the British Empire

- G. A. D. Spence
- L. P. Spring

Member of the Order of the British Empire

- R. J. Griffiths
- L. F. F. Gunn
- H. F. Harding
- J. Hiddlestone
- V. R. Jamieson
- [N. E. Winhall](#)

Military Cross

- F. O. Dawson
- G. D. Falloon
- W. Te T. Huata
- R. F. Judson
- J. L. Kingan
- J. S. Somerville
- G. A. D. Spence
- A. K. Warren
- J. K. Watson

Mentioned in Despatches

- O. T. Baragwanath
- N. E. Bicknell
- G. D. Falloon
- G. V. Gerard
- H. I. Hopkins
- W. E. W. Hurst
- V. R. Jamieson

- J. L. Kingan
- J. A. Linton
- A. MacFarlane
- J. W. McKenzie
- C. G. Palmer
- W. Sheely
- G. A. D. Spence
- L. P. Spring
- W. J. Thompson
- [M. L. Underhill](#)
- K. J. Watson

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United States Silver Star

- P. C. S. Sergel

United States Bronze Star

- H. A. McD. Mitchell

	Summary						United States Silver Star	United States Bronze Star	Totals
	CBE	OBE	MBE	DSO	MC	m.i.d.			
Church of England	1		2	3	3	5	1		15
Presbyterian	1	1	2		4	7		1	16
Roman Catholic		1			1	3			5
Methodist			1		1	1			3
Other Denominations			1			2			3
	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	2	2	6	3	9	18	1	1	42