

Fact Sheet 4A

Salvation Army Chaplains



Duties of a Chaplain

Being an army chaplain, or padre, is a role for ordained ministers with a view to administering to the spiritual wellbeing of the soldiers.

This could be interpreted in many ways: holding prayer meetings and services of worship, giving advice or counsel, comforting the wounded and holding services for the dead. Another duty in WW1 was to censor the soldiers' letters. One officer, Adjutant Penfold, remarks on his surprise at finding religion being mentioned so frequently in the letters.

During WW1 between 45 and 55 chaplains were sent from The Salvation Army from various territories - mainly Australia, New Zealand and Canada. Despite the wish to send more chaplains, the policy of selecting chaplains was pro rata to the religious denomination of each force. Salvationists were spread too thinly throughout the forces and the UK military did not officially recognise Salvation Army officers as chaplains until 1918. This did not deter The Salvation Army, though. Officers engaged in other war work, and Salvationists were often called upon to be unofficial chaplains.

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Chaplains were not called upon to be stationed near The Front, but this policy appears to have been disregarded by many. Stories of chaplains cover similar aspects. There are accounts of organising parcels for the troops, and of spending hours every day finding tasty treats for the men. Stories of hospital visits, marking graves, and of burying the dead. Stories of crawling through the trenches to give soup and coffee, as well as a silent, comforting pat on the shoulder. And of course, stories of praying with the men, giving counsel and holding meetings and services. The overall theme is of the practical and humanitarian aid they gave as well as spiritual support.

The Australian Salvation Army officer chaplain William McKenzie - known as *Fighting Mac* because of his love of getting into trouble as a boy and boxing - is probably the most well-known and written-about Salvation Army chaplain. In Australia there is an urban legend of Captain Mackenzie converting hundreds of men to Salvationism in one day. The popular chaplain was not initially meant to be posted, so men changed their denomination to 'Salvationist' on their registration forms ensuring that McKenzie could join them.

Fighting Mac was always ready to peel potatoes or to pray. To sing a song or scrub a soldier. To organise boxing matches or to hold a meeting. To cut a path in a hill or to drag men out of gambling dens. He organised a letter-writing campaign - '*Adopt a soldier*' - where more than 1,000 lonely soldiers would receive mail. It appears most were written by grieving mothers. was chosen as a Salvation Army motto.



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Within the first days of seeing conflict at Gallipoli, McKenzie had buried 170 men including the battalion's colonel. He went where shelling had made burial parties impossible to bury the dead. He brought in the wounded and lasted out the most intense shell-fire with his men, so that he might cheer them and comfort them. Afterwards, he stayed to collect as much as two sandbags full of identity discs and pay books from the dead.

He was notorious for staying with the men, and for going into battle with them - unarmed except for a spade - to help motivate them. Many reports were sent of how many close calls he had encountered or how many bullet holes there were in his cap. One strategy he used was to teach all his men the psalm '*The Lord is my Shepherd*'. He reports hearing men on the battlefield, dying, saying it in their final moments. His hope was that it would help give them some comfort at the end.

Some quotes attributed to McKenzie are -

'I've preached and prayed with you. Do you think I'm afraid to die with you?'

'I know why you kept close (during an advance) - you think I've got your pay in my belt and were afraid I would lose it!'

'We sing to them, play with them, joke to them... make them forget as soon as possible the hell they've come from.'

You may wish to watch a clip on McKenzie - <http://vimeo.com/39817503>

