

"The Priest among the soldiers"

To be a Chaplain in the Great War would have most certainly been a heart wrenching duty for those who served. Often at odds with their religious beliefs, the 'Padre' would put his own welfare aside and work all hours of the day and night to tend to those who were most in need.

The average age of a Chaplain was between 30 and 40 years - (Voyage only Chaplains were accepted up to the age of 52 years). They had no special training as they entered the Forces, and probably didn't know what to expect or how they would fit in with the Military way of life.

Chaplains enlisted for either 'Continuous' or 'Voyage-only' service. The latter being that they were assigned to troopships to either Egypt or England and returned with then next hospital ship to embark. With the larger proportion of priest's being Anglican usually 2 were assigned, with 1 Roman Catholic and 1 Protestant minister also being included in a brigade.

Over 42% were Anglican, 20% Roman Catholic almost 17% Presbyterian, 13% Methodist and the remaining were of other denominations, such as Jewish and Salvation Army.

A total of 414 Clergymen served within the Australian Forces during World War 1 and with over 330,000 soldiers and nurses serving over the 4 years of war, one can only imagine the workload of these remarkable men. More than 60,000 men and women died, 155,000 were wounded in action, 4,044 were prisoners of war and 431,000 suffered from sickness or non battle injuries.

The role of chaplains was not only to tend to the spiritual needs of the soldiers.

His duties were wide and varied and he would work in areas that he would never could have imagined.

Stretcher bearing, assisting with wounded, soup kitchens, and many other duties.

One of the most unpopular duties would be that of censoring letters to be sent back home.

On board ships and in the field, chaplains were responsible for conducting the burial of the dead, which for safety reasons had to be undertaken at night.

This would have been the largest duty they performed.

Chaplains recorded the details of the deceased, place of burial, and arranged for recovery of their personal effects to be returned to their loved one's at home.

They also often wrote to the family with details of the soldier's death - these letters

would become more difficult as the months and years passed, and numbers of dead increased.

On board the troopships chaplains organised study groups, sing-alongs, and boxing tournaments.

The voyage would provide a great opportunity for ministry through church parades, religious services, and individual counselling.

They also organised activities to improve the morale and welfare of soldier such as sports events, sing-alongs, concerts, and lantern slide nights.

As time went by the Red Cross, YMCA, and the Australian Comforts Fund took on more of these activities.

A total of 72 honours and awards were bestowed upon chaplains on

active service with Australian forces during the First World War, including: two Orders of St Michael and St George; two Commanders of the Order of the British Empire; four Distinguished Service Orders; nine Officers of the Order of the British Empire; one Member of the Order of the British Empire; 23 Military Crosses; one French Croix de Guerre; and 31 Mentions in Despatches.

Truly remarkable men

SEE THE AUSTRALIAN CHAPLAIN'S WEBSITE FOR A COMPLETE LIST OF ALL WHO SERVED:

<http://ww1chaplains.weebly.com/>

Information about the Chaplain Kits, both Australian and UK, are on this website:

<https://sites.google.com/site/chaplainsatwar/chaplain-kit>