

*Gary Kent presents*

# *Faith* *of the* **ANZACS**

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## *Chapter 1: ANZAC Chaplains*

The First World War is infamous for its slaughter on the battlefields of Gallipoli, France and Belgium: the terrible stories of soldiers caught in the awful meat-grinder of the war. Despite the horrors, Australian and New Zealand soldiers forged a legend built on their resourcefulness and skill, and their undying mateship, which helped bring the survivors through the conflict.

While the Anzac legend focuses its attention on the heroic ordinary soldier, and sometimes the outstanding leadership of particular officers, one group of Anzacs is rarely part of the Anzac story: the chaplains.

Chaplains, commonly called 'Padres' by the soldiers, were clergymen attached to army units to care for their spiritual, moral and social well-being. In the Australian Imperial Force, the volunteer army raised to fight in Europe, each Brigade of about 4,000 men had posted to it four chaplains representing the major denominations: one Church of England, one Roman Catholic, one Presbyterian or Methodist, and one other representing the minor denominations such as Baptists, Congregationalists, or The Salvation Army. Technically each chaplain served the needs of all the men in the brigade of his denomination, but as each was attached to one of the four battalions within the brigade, in practice he tended to work more closely with the soldiers of that battalion, regardless of the denominational loyalties of the chaplain or the men. Away from the front, the four battalions of a brigade could be brought close enough together for men to attend services of their particular church, but closer to the front it was usually impractical for men of one battalion (theoretically about 1,000 men, but in practice more often closer to 500 and as low as 200) to be able to move to the services of another battalion. Thus chaplains came to be associated with particular battalions, and their reputations usually rose or fell with their ability to relate to men of other faiths, and of course to the many men of no faith.

But a chaplain's place in the army could be incongruous, and even more so on a battlefield. Many a soldier or officer wondered

what their role was at war, and chaplains could get a hard time from uncooperative commanding officers and men who felt that the padre who preached love towards one's enemies had no place in a rough war machine devoted to killing them. Officers who were opposed to religion could severely inhibit the work of a chaplain by ensuring that their units were put on fatigue duties whenever the padre planned a service. One chaplain recorded in his diary meeting his first soldiers on the ship from Australia: 'My first feelings were that I would shut myself up in my cabin. Even there I would not find any refuge. From outside my cabin floated the most fearful language I had ever heard. I think some of them must have been trying to "shock" the "Padre". This was my first close contact with the "digger"'.<sup>1</sup>

Some chaplains, like the Anglican T. P. Bennett, also felt the incongruity of being in the army as men of God and servants of the Prince of Peace.<sup>2</sup> Others were more militant, seeing a connection between muscular Christianity and the defence of freedom, especially the British way of life, which at the time was regarded as the epitome of Christian civilisation.<sup>3</sup>

Away from the front, a chaplain's duties consisted of running the compulsory, but usually unpopular, Sunday Church Parade, officiating over readings and hymn singing, and preaching a sermon. The Commanding Officer might also use the parade to make announcements and issue general orders, as well as hoping that the chaplain would exhort the men to do their duty. The chaplain ran extra voluntary services on Sunday evenings or during the week, which would include Communion for the devout. He was also expected to become involved in the social life of the battalion, leading out in organising sports, concerts and other wholesome entertainments to keep the troops well occupied during their leisure hours. He might act as an informal counsellor for soldiers experiencing personal or spiritual problems. Chaplains could also be caught up in such duties as censoring soldiers' letters, acting as the treasurer of the Officer's Mess, running canteens, and supplying soldiers with newspapers, magazines and letter-writing paper. Quite often, he was a channel of contact

between families and the soldiers, particularly of those illiterate men or reluctant correspondents, of whom there were always quite a few!

At the front, the chaplain was supposed to be at the rear of a battle zone, meeting the troops after they came out of the front trenches. On a Sunday, a chaplain could take up to five services in various locations, depending on how widely scattered his battalion or brigade was. During a battle, he usually worked with the medical teams at first aid stations, and afterwards he visited the wounded. And of course, he presided over the burial of the dead, a task that was very important to most soldiers, even if they were not religious. Having a properly-conducted burial service was a great comfort to many men in dealing with the death of mates, and also to their families at home. Often the chaplain collected the personal effects of the dead, noted them in his records, and ensured that they were returned to the next-of-kin. Writing the official letters to bereaved families could be shared with the battalion commander.

As officers and non-combatants, chaplains were exempt from training drills and the like, and many chaplains took the chance to look around the sites of interest in Cairo, particularly those associated with Bible history. But the best chaplains went on the tough training marches with the men, dug trenches beside them and even tried target practice. As one chaplain noted, it gave the men a tremendous respect for the padres who did this.<sup>4</sup>

But life on Gallipoli was quite different from the routines of training bases or the strictures of army manuals. To begin with, there was no safe rear line, as the whole Anzac position at Gallipoli was under constant Turkish shell fire, with few really safe places. Parts of many paths were open to shell and sniper fire, so those who moved around a lot could be very vulnerable. And chaplains moved around a lot, visiting various units in their care, so they were as likely to be hit as any soldier, outside of an actual battle of course. Roman Catholic Father John Fahey, chaplain of the 11th Battalion from Western Australia, was the only chaplain to land in the first wave at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915, having missed

the strict order for chaplains not to land. In the first three weeks he took four shrapnel bullets through his haversack, two bullets through his overcoat, had a book and then a jam tin shot out of his hand, 19 bullets through his waterproof sheet, four shell bursts over his dug-out, and was buried by another shell-burst. He had seen soldiers killed literally either side of him on the beach on the first day.<sup>5</sup> Fahey continued to live dangerously while serving his men during the campaign.

And it would seem that this made a huge difference on the impact of the chaplains on the lives of ordinary soldiers. The fact that they were sharing the risks with the men meant the soldiers gave them a lot of respect. Religion that shared all the hardships of the Anzac soldier was the kind of religion the men wanted. Chaplain Merrington overheard two soldiers discussing the chaplains, unaware that he was one himself: 'The padre was moving about in full view of the enemy, and was a very conspicuous figure. Chaplain Wray had a notebook and pencil in his hand, being evidently busy with the work of keeping a check of the names of the dead, and a list of their personal effects. Some men were waiting under cover, and I heard one say to another, as they looked back at the padre busy with his care for the wounded and the dead. "I'll tell you who've done \_\_\_\_\_ good work here, these \_\_\_\_\_ parsons!"'<sup>6</sup>

A typical day for a chaplain at Gallipoli involved a lot of walking. He would visit the wounded on the beach, help out at first aid stations part way to the lines, and make sure that mail, writing paper, and treats were distributed to the men in the trenches. One chaplain estimated that the typical padre worked 18 hours a day. This included the burial parties at night: 'We get away about 11 pm and back to our dug-outs any time from 2:30 to 8 am, according to the work to be done.'<sup>7</sup>

With the whole of the Anzac positions under artillery fire, it was very difficult to run church services. On a given Sunday, provided conditions permitted it, the chaplains would move through the trenches, running communion and worship services for a few dozen men at a time. The commander of the 5th Battalion

noted: 'On Sunday afternoons, a little after four, you would see the Padre coming down Shrapnel Valley, singing "Jesus, Lover of My Soul" and the lads coming out of the dug-outs like rabbits out of burrows and following him. When he got them into a comparatively sheltered corner he proceeded to lead them in a short Sunday afternoon service.'<sup>8</sup>

One writer tells us of a Sunday evening worship service. Dotted around this bowl of hills are the small campfires of the men in their posts. Over the bay the moon shines on the water and the stars seem close and bright. Overhead, the occasional shell explodes or bullet whines. But here, a chaplain is running a service. Crammed into a trench corner about 30 men begin singing. Their hymn is taken up by the sentries at their posts, and gradually, the men in other trenches around take up the song. Passing by, a platoon of armed warriors joins in the hymn as they march through to their new post.<sup>9</sup>

Gallipoli is no easy landscape to get around on foot. Apart from the fact that Turkish shells and snipers were a constant danger, the physicality of the long walks up steep hills and jarring descents imposed quite a physical strain, for weeks on end, hiking by day, taking funerals by night. And chaplains were usually about twice the age of the average soldier. One chaplain noted when he joined that he would have to become iron hard to keep up with his job.<sup>10</sup>

But that wasn't all. Chaplains had more emotional strain than many soldiers because they dealt with the wounded and dead more consistently, also writing to bereaved families, and it took its toll. The same chaplain wrote about treating the wounded: 'I wanted to bubble and cry and take them in my arms and sooth them, for their nerves were all racked as well as their actual wounds. Instead I joked with them and made them laugh, and gave them cigarettes to smoke while I pulled the hard bandage from the wounds. The grateful looks on their faces as the wounds were freshly dressed were something to remember.'<sup>11</sup>

A chaplain's role was no soft or easy task. But for some of the chaplains, not even their regular duties were enough. One is on

record as having overheard a soldier wish for a fresh egg or a chocolate, so he hunted all over the peninsular till he had enough for one for each man in his unit—probably four or five hundred. One night he singlehandedly cut steps into a steep and difficult part of the track to make it easier for water carriers and stretcher bearers.<sup>12</sup>

Being so close to the front at Gallipoli meant that chaplains were caught up in the fighting on occasion. As expected, their place was usually at the first aid station, where they helped the doctor with the wounded. On Gallipoli, this post could be within metres of the forward trenches. But there were lots of wild stories of chaplains leading charges. Chaplain Dexter wrote: 'Stories are told about myself and a couple of other chaplains leading charges on the first day here, which of course is piffle.'<sup>13</sup> Chaplain Green said: 'The men greatly appreciate the work of the chaplain, and are over generous in their estimates. If you carry a fellow's rifle to help, or some such thing as that you "have led a charge".'<sup>14</sup>

The most militant chaplain on Gallipoli was probably the New Zealand chaplain Henare Te Wainohu. He reputedly stood on a hill crest and performed the Haka, and he was known to carry a revolver. But padres didn't have to get into battle to risk death. Rescuing the wounded after a battle could be equally as dangerous with ever-present snipers. Several Australian and New Zealand chaplains were killed doing their duty at Gallipoli, as well as a number of British chaplains, and others were wounded.

It's easy to overlook the chaplains in the Anzac story. Yet they were there, and worked and suffered alongside their fellows. And their impact could be great. Chaplain Blackwood, who was shocked by the language of the Anzacs when he first met them, noted this once he got to know them: 'I have learned long since that the Australian soldier is a "hypocrite" or perhaps to put it more mildly, a "camouflage artist". To one who had not the sympathy to look beneath the surface he seemed rather a hopeless proposition from the point of view of religion. The "Aussie" loved to pretend he had no religion, when all the time, deep beneath the surface in most cases, he had a real sense of God and of His moral Law.'<sup>15</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Donald Blackwood, 'Experiences of Revd Donald B. Blackwood, M.C. M.A. Th Schol. As a Chaplain with the A.I.F., October 1915 to February 1919, and Impressions gained as a Chaplain.' AWM 1 DRL619

<sup>2</sup> T. P. Bennett, Letter to Annie Bennett, 13 June 1915, AWM PRMF0015

<sup>3</sup> See for example E. N. Merrington, Diary, AWM File 3 DRL323

<sup>4</sup> William McKenzie, letter to Annie McKenzie, 11 March 1915, AWM PR84150

<sup>5</sup> Michael McKernan, *Padre: Australian chaplains in Gallipoli and France*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986, 51

<sup>6</sup> Merrington Diary

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Gillison, Diary, undated entry, AWM PR86028

<sup>8</sup> Ronald J. Austin, *The Fighting Fourth: A History of Sydney's 4th Battalion 1914-19*. McRae, Vic: Slouch Hat, 2007, 90

<sup>9</sup> William McKenzie, letter to Commissioner Hay, 2 August 1915, AWM PR85815

<sup>10</sup> W.E. Dexter, Diary 26 October 1914, PR00248

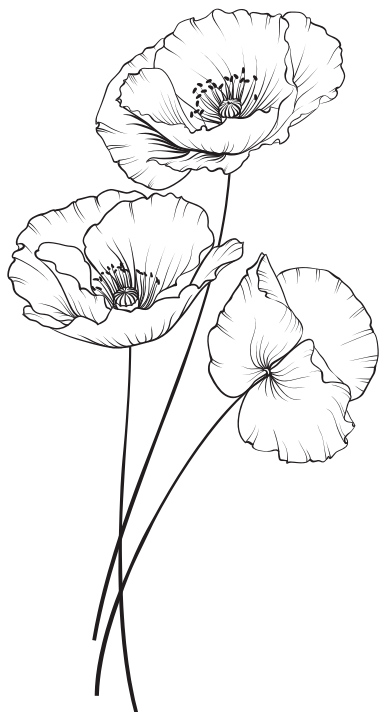
<sup>11</sup> Dexter, Diary 26 April 1915

<sup>12</sup> 'A chat with a chaplain,' *War Cry*, 19 February 1916, 3

<sup>13</sup> Dexter, Diary 27 July 1915

<sup>14</sup> J. Green, letter dated 22 August 1915, published in *Methodist*, 9 October 1915, 8

<sup>15</sup> Blackwood





## *Chapter 2: Fighting Mac: the Story of William McKenzie*

Ask Australians who was the most famous Anzac of the First World War and most will probably answer, 'Simpson, the man with the donkey.' And they would be right, in a way. Simpson is a household name in Australia today. But if you were to ask the soldiers who fought in the First World War, you'd have got quite a different answer.

Prime Minister Billy Hughes was so popular with the troops in France that he was nicknamed 'the Little Digger'. General 'Birdie' Birdwood was also universally known and popular, while Lieutenant General John Monash was held in very high regard—quite a feat since the Anzacs famously didn't think much of generals.

Yet rivalling these famous men was an even more unlikely candidate for the most famous Anzac of the Great War: Captain William McKenzie. McKenzie was Chaplain of the 4th Battalion, an enthusiastic Christian minister keen on evangelism and against booze, brothels and bad language. Yet by the end of the war, he was so popular that it would take him more than three hours to reach the Sydney Town Hall from his office on Goulburn Street, just three blocks away. People mobbed him just to shake his hand.<sup>1</sup> So who was this clergyman who won for himself the nickname, 'Fighting Mac'?

William McKenzie was born in Biggar, Scotland in 1869, and remained proud of his Scottish heritage all his life. McKenzie's family migrated to Australia when he was fifteen, settling near Bundaberg where the teenage McKenzie soon rose to be an overseer on a cane farm. He grew to be a big man, nearly 190 centimetres tall, weighing in at over 100 kilos, with fists the size of hams. He loved fighting and abandoned his strict Presbyterian upbringing. But at the age of nineteen, he had a dramatic turnaround.

The Salvation Army came to town, and despite himself, McKenzie was impressed with their work for the needy.

One morning he heard a Voice telling him to join them. He obeyed, and soon trained as an officer in the Army, and then served in tough working class towns such as Newcastle and Charters Towers.

When the Great War began in 1914, McKenzie volunteered as a Chaplain. He was assigned to the 4th Battalion in the 1st Brigade. He got a frosty reception. 'What the hell have we done to deserve this,' said one soldier, while others played practical jokes on him on board ship. At his first attempt to lead a sing-song, the men cruelly counted him out. But it didn't take long for McKenzie to win the confidence of the troops. A week later, when he started another sing-song, the men counted him back in.<sup>2</sup>

McKenzie did a number of things to change the men's opinion of him. For starters, he held such short and interesting church parades that he attracted up to 2,000 men to them, leaving the other three Brigade chaplains to share the remaining 2,000. He joined in training exercises, carrying the packs of tired soldiers on long desert marches, digging trenches and doing target practice with them. He organised lively concerts and popular sing-a-longs. At one concert, the rowdy men were out of control as a senior Anzac chaplain tried to manage the event. McKenzie jumped on the stage, blew a whistle and got instant quiet.<sup>3</sup> Apparently, he was a very good boxer, taking part in events he organised. On New Year's Eve, he led the Scots of his battalion on a raid on the 2nd Battalion. He also tried to counter the temptations of Cairo by providing wholesome leisure activities. His tireless energy on their behalf earned their respect, while his charismatic personality won their love. He was a born leader, with a tremendous sense of humour, a child-like innocence, real integrity, and constant cheerfulness. His ability to brighten up troops with his own composition 'The Sunshine Song' was legendary, and the song was published in the official 4th Battalion diary later in the war.

Yet the cheap drink and the brothels of Cairo attracted many men. And like the other chaplains, McKenzie preached against the brothels in the Wazir district of Cairo. But unlike other chaplains,

McKenzie also acted. He went down to the red-light district at night, and literally drag men out, and put them on a tram back to the camp. He fully expected a knife in the ribs from the brothel owners for ruining their business.<sup>4</sup>

On Good Friday, 2 April 1915, Australian troops began a riot in Wazir, burning down the brothels and chopping up the hoses of the fire brigades attempting to quench the blaze. Contrary to what some people have stated, McKenzie did not organise and lead the riot. But he may have accidentally inspired it. Once he said to some soldiers that he wished the brothels would be removed. Apparently, they decided to give him his wish. While he did not condone such lawless action, he was happy with the outcome. Later, he was praised for having saved so many men from untreatable venereal disease.<sup>5</sup>

On 25 April 1915, the Anzacs landed on the Gallipoli peninsula, at a cove that later took their name. A couple of weeks later, an impatient McKenzie was allowed to join the fighting men. One of his first tasks was to bury his commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Onslow Thompson, who was killed on the second day. The body remained unburied where it fell in the hottest of fighting until McKenzie came ashore and went to the front line, kneeling close to the ground to avoid becoming a casualty himself.<sup>6</sup>

It was on Gallipoli that McKenzie won the undying respect of the Anzacs. Like other chaplains, he conducted burial services, often under shell fire. But he stood out for the way in which he cared for his men. Once he tramped all over Anzac Cove collecting enough chocolates to have one for each man. Another time, he spent all night cutting steps into a steep and slippery part of a track, to make it easier for stretcher bearers. The stairs were christened 'Old Mac's Steps' by the soldiers.<sup>7</sup> But his actions at Lone Pine are typical of why he was called 'Fighting Mac'.

On 6 August 1915, McKenzie's battalion was waiting to attack the Turks at Lone Pine. The Turkish trenches were deep, and covered with logs and earth. Everyone knew that the attack would be costly. McKenzie should have been in the rear trenches, but instead he was with the men. His diary reads: 'Many trembled

from head to foot, yet despite it all I felt strangely elated and somewhat excited over the prospects.<sup>8</sup> A soldier recalled that before they went over the top, McKenzie turned to the men and said: 'Boys, I've preached to you, and I've prayed with you, and do you think that I am afraid to die with you? I'd be ashamed to think of myself to funk it when you are up against it here.'<sup>9</sup>

As the men charged, McKenzie followed, carrying just a spade. He was to need it: over the next few weeks, he sorted the living from the dead and buried 450 men. For his actions at Gallipoli, he was decorated with the Military Cross.

McKenzie's courage was the foundation for his enormous religious influence. He was a spiritual giant, and by his own estimation probably led something like 2-3,000 men to Christ during the war.<sup>10</sup> Here is what one of his letters records in Egypt: 'I realise the nearness of His presence and something of the sweetness and power of His great salvation. I confess that I cried myself to sleep last night or in the early hours of the morning after long meditation over the sacrifices and death of the Christ of God. This I think helped me to read the scriptures and preach the truth better at this morning's parade,...when for half an hour some 2,000 of us there sang of the Cross and its meaning and pondered over the story once again.'<sup>11</sup>

Then, on Gallipoli, he would meet in small groups in the front line. One evening he held a service in a bowl of hills, with camp fires dotting the valley overlooking the moon-lit sea. He wrote: 'As we sang the familiar hymn, "Jesus Lover of my Soul, let me to Thy bosom fly", the strains of the grand helpful prayer wafted down and around the valley and was taken up by men on all sides, who were engaged on duty. The sentries standing on guard at the mouths of the trenches near by with fixed bayonets likewise joined in the refrain and while we were singing "Plenteous grace with Thee is found" a platoon of armed warriors marched right past us to take up their position in the support trenches and they too marched on singing "let the healing stream abound, make and keep me pure within".'<sup>12</sup>

After the battle of Lone Pine, McKenzie found the body of a young Scot whom he had led to Christ the day before. In the man's pocket was a letter to his God-fearing mother, telling her of his decision for Christ. Knowing he was dealing with men who might die at any time lent urgency to his work. He wrote: 'Last night when talking to the men I was obsessed with the idea and yearned with unutterable longing to lead them to the blessed Saviour. One is very near to the eternal here, indeed all subterfuges are rudely torn aside and one is ever treading on the threshold of the Eternal World and marching in step with the sinister shadow of death.'<sup>13</sup>

After Gallipoli, McKenzie continued his good work in France, finally being evacuated in late 1917, suffering from exhaustion. His impact on the lives of thousands was recorded by a senior Salvation Army officer: 'Chaplain McKenzie performed deeds that made him appear almost as a superhuman. The men tell such strange stories of his heroism. I scarcely dare relate the half of them. But these brave fellows love him with a strange wonderful love. I have never seen anything like it before, and proud must be the man who has made such a conquest. They speak much of his nerve but more of his real religion, of his prayer meetings with them when death was near. Their fear for his safety was so great that again and again they placed their own bodies between him and the threatening shrapnel.'<sup>14</sup>

When he returned to Australia, thousands came to see him in every town and city he visited. In Sydney, his feet never touched the ground from the train to the Town Hall. In following years, at Anzac Day parades, his hand was seen to be bleeding from the sheer number of people who shook it.<sup>15</sup>

Some have said that the Anzacs were not terribly religious. Perhaps so, but McKenzie noted on Gallipoli that many showed an interest in God. He said: 'Men realise as never before that the most manly thing to do is to worship and glorify God.'<sup>16</sup>

After the war, McKenzie continued in the Salvation Army, being given leadership positions in Australia and China, the latter during China's prolonged civil war. There he exhibited the same fortitude

under hardship and courage in the face of bandits as he had on Gallipoli and in France. He retired in 1939, in poor health and with failing memory. He had been awarded the OBE in 1935 for his community service. McKenzie died in 1947, but his memory was kept alive by the Salvation Army, the occasional newspaper feature and by other Christian writers. However, as with other famous Anzacs, the stories have sometimes grown with the retelling, and McKenzie has been credited with leading attacks in battle, almost winning a VC, starting the riots that burned down the brothels of the Wazzir district in Cairo in April 1915, and other unlikely events. William McKenzie's achievements need no adornment; the plain facts are extraordinary, and his memory is best honoured by a faithful account of a life which by any standard was one of great character, faith and service.

<sup>1</sup> Michael McKernan, *Padre: Australian Chaplains in Gallipoli and France* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 3; Michael McKernan, 'William McKenzie', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*

<sup>2</sup> Adelaide Ah Kow, *William McKenzie, M.C., O.B.E., O.F. Anzac Padre* (London: Salvationist Publishing, 1949), 28-29

<sup>3</sup> William McKenzie, letter to Commissioner Hay, 5 March 1915, AWM PR85815; William McKenzie, letter to Annie McKenzie, 2 April 1915, AWM PR84150

<sup>4</sup> William McKenzie to Hay, 27 December 1914

<sup>5</sup> Richard Collier, *The General next to God: the story of William Booth and the Salvation Army* (London: Fontana, 1969), 228; Ah Kow, 34

<sup>6</sup> Ah Kow, 36

<sup>7</sup> Ah Kow, 39

William McKenzie, Diary, 6 August 1915, AWM PR84150

<sup>9</sup> F. A. McKenzie, *Serving the King's Men: How the Salvation Army is helping the nation* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1918), 56-57

<sup>10</sup> 'Chaplain "Mac," M.C. Conclusion of his speech at the welcome home in the Exhibition Building;', War Cry, 30 March 1918, 2

<sup>11</sup> William McKenzie to Hay, 2 April 1915

<sup>12</sup> William McKenzie to Hay, 2 August 1915

<sup>13</sup> William McKenzie to Hay, 2 August 1915

<sup>14</sup> Ah Kow, 41

<sup>15</sup> McKernan, 'William McKenzie', ADB

<sup>16</sup> William McKenzie to Hay, 2 August 1915

## *Chapter 3: Chaplain Gillison: Martyr of Gallipoli*

About eight and a half thousand Australians and two and a half thousand New Zealanders lost their lives at Gallipoli over the eight months of the campaign.<sup>1</sup> Some were buried at sea, having died on hospital ships, others died in hospitals on the island of Lemnos and in Egypt and were buried there, but most remain on Gallipoli. There are many war cemeteries dotted around the Gallipoli Peninsula, containing headstones for known graves and also for those believed to be buried there. Many others have no known resting place, and human remains continue to be uncovered on Gallipoli.

Embarkation Pier Cemetery, north of Anzac Cove, contains the headstones of several notable Anzacs. Lieutenant Colonel C.E. Thomas, New Zealand Medical Corps, was killed rescuing the wounded at Hill 60 in late August 1915. Another, like him, famous not for taking life but for saving it, was Andrew Gillison. His official role was that of Chaplain to the 14th Battalion, 4th Brigade, looking after the spiritual and some of the social needs of the men. However, he met his death going about another task which he had unofficially adopted—that of rescuing the wounded. While the location of his grave is uncertain, his headstone is in the cemetery where it is believed he is buried.

As a chaplain, Gillison's task was a peaceful one, and by rights he should not have been in the firing line. But Gillison took his spiritual responsibilities seriously, recognising, as Christ did, that to minister to the body was to minister to the soul.

Gillison was born in Scotland in 1868, and after becoming a minister in the Presbyterian church, served in parishes in the USA, England and Scotland. In 1903, he moved to Australia.

St Paul's in Brisbane still has a photo of Gillison on its walls to remind the present congregation of his ministry. In 1909 he was appointed to St Georges Church, in St Kilda, Melbourne, where with his beloved wife Isobel, he raised three sons and a daughter.

The chapel of this church also has a memorial to its former minister and holds the colours of the 14th Battalion.

Gillison was a very cultured and educated man, so it might seem that he was rather out of place in the army. He held an MA at a time when very few people had any kind of university education. However, having served as a private in the Queen's Edinburgh Rifle Volunteer Corps for two years (1885 - 87) before becoming a clergyman, and as a chaplain to the Victorian Scottish Regiment in peacetime, it is no surprise that Gillison understood the mindset of the fighting man, and he volunteered for service when war broke out in 1914. He was 46 years old, and in as fine a physical shape as many of the soldiers half his age, and his warm, engaging personality and wide-ranging experience with the common man and the educated elite gave him the ability to relate well to all kinds of people.

On December 22 1914, he sailed on the 'Ulysses', with his brigade. Three days later, he ran the Christmas services for the birth of the King of Peace to a congregation of soldiers. His diary notes: 'It seems strange to be ploughing the sea with so many men on war but in one sense Christmas was a thing incongruous. At the services I tried to reconcile the situation!'<sup>2</sup>

Gillison went out of his way to make the religious services on board as inclusive as possible, sharing all with the Anglican priest on board. He wrote: 'Services go on as usual. Two church parades in the morning on Sundays and a voluntary service in the evening. One night it is Church of England, the next night Presbyterian. My whole aim in having only one service in the evening is unity.'<sup>3</sup> He also took part in entertainments, delighting the men with comic songs, and participating in boxing matches, taking his defeats along with his wins with good grace.<sup>4</sup> Such an attitude won him the respect of the men, even those who were not religious, for even the most secular hated rivalry between the various churches. One soldier wrote, "Our Padre Capt. Gillison is a fine sport and just the man for his job."<sup>5</sup>

In Egypt and on Gallipoli, he continued to work with ministers of other denominations in the best interest of the men.



In Cairo, Gillison visited various churches, noting with interest the theology and style of worship of the Egyptian Coptics, one of Christianity's oldest groups. He even spent time at the Islamic Al-Azhar University, admiring aspects of Islam, although preferring the faith of his own fathers. At one Coptic Christian church, the local minister interrupted the service in order to have his daughter show Gillison around, after which he asked for 'backsheesh'—a tip! Gillison humorously noted its fund-raising potential in his diary: 'An idea for the minister of St Georges!'

Like many chaplains, Gillison was fascinated by Egypt's biblical history, soaking up every opportunity to see the places he had previously only read about. He wrote: 'Heliopolis—the city of the Sun—probably the "On" of the Book of Genesis, where lived the priest whose daughter was given to Joseph as a wife if I remember aright—!'<sup>6</sup>

And like other chaplains, the temptations of the brothels and grog shops of Cairo alarmed him. He was not afraid to address the issues directly: 'We had a fine Communion Service this morning at 8 am: and the usual Church Parades at 9:30 and 10:30. I talked very straight to the men on matters which arise in connection with the reports received regard the conduct of the first contingent in Cairo. It was very well received by all.'<sup>7</sup> Gillison's credibility was helped by the fact that he joined in the training exercises of the men, though he had no obligation to do so.

As a Chaplain, Gillison was not allowed to go ashore on April 25, 1915. Instead, he helped treat the wounded evacuated back to the ships, and conduct funerals for those who died. Once ashore, Gillison continued his ministry to the wounded and his care for the dead. He wrote after his first day ashore: 'It was a sad night helping to dress and care for the wounded as they came down.'<sup>8</sup> The work was distressing, and his Gallipoli diary is dominated by descriptions of the fighting, and lists of those he buried. The final entry deals with the armistice of 24 May to bury the vast number of Australian and Turkish dead in No-Man's-Land. He wrote: 'Our dead were the result of the first days advance. I never beheld such a sickening sight in my life, and hope it may not be my

lot again. The way that rifles and equipment left behind on the battlefield were wrecked with bullets, was a revelation of the extent of rifle and machinegun fire.<sup>9</sup> Over the next three months, Gillison appears to have been so busy that he added no more to his diary.

Gillison was no rear-lines parson, with the leisure to write up his notes as he pleased. Not that on Gallipoli there was any real safe 'rear' zone; everyone was vulnerable to shells and even snipers. General Bridges, commander of the 1st Australian Division was killed there, and other generals wounded. But Gillison went beyond the call of duty by spending as much time as possible in the front trenches with the men. A friend wrote of him: 'Gillison refused to take shelter, feeling bullet-proof. He was a very popular padre, combining personal charm with boundless energy and fearlessness to the point of recklessness.' He also noted that 'Gillison was a frequent visitor to the trenches, and lived among the boys of his battalion. If a man was wounded, he was often the first to reach him, and apply first-aid, even before the stretcher-bearers could arrive.'<sup>10</sup> The senior chaplain, Colonel James Green, once 'shouted very vigorously' to Gillison, to take cover in a less exposed position, not knowing who he was. Gillison ignored him and continued his work in full view of the Turks, while a soldier said to Green; 'It is no use, Padre, you can save your breath. He is a chap who fears no bullet.'<sup>11</sup> One soldier wrote: 'Everywhere we hear Chaplain Gillison spoken of in terms of praise for his efforts to cheer the men under hardship and when wounded, and for his bravery in going anywhere under fire, especially during the first week or two here when danger and death lurked everywhere. He is the "whitest" man I have known.'<sup>12</sup> Being called a 'white man' was about the highest compliment of the period. Gillison moved around so much, especially in the vulnerable parts of the line that he was actually once arrested on suspicion of being a German spy! Of course, they soon discovered their mistake and released him.

And then there were the burials. Gillison wrote: 'we still continued our practice of burying all, Protestant and RC alike as did Father Power also. His service may not be all that we would desire, but

it is simple and we can all join in it.' For safety, the funerals had to be conducted at night. 'We get away about 11 pm and back to our dug-outs any time from 2:30 to 8 am, according to the work to be done' he wrote.<sup>13</sup>

Add to that the constant strain of dealing with the dead, even more than the average soldier, and having to write to each soldier's family. The strain, both physical and emotional, was enormous. Gillison so identified with his men, particularly those who were wounded or who died, that he began to feel that he should remain with them permanently. He took greater and greater risks to reach wounded men in exposed places. A fellow chaplain wrote: 'His arms were always ready to support and rescue those who fell wounded and no-one could have been more gallant and energetic on Anzac than the soldierly, refined, genial padre,— who was determined to leave his body on the Peninsula as a pledge of his devotion to his comrades.'<sup>14</sup>

On August 21, the 14th Battalion were part of an attack on strong Turkish positions on Hill 60. The Australians were cut down by machine gun fire, and the attack failed. As usual, Gillison was in the front line. The Turkish guns set fire to the scrub, so Gillison and the Medical Officer, Captain H G Loughran, along with the stretcher bearers, used the smoke as cover to rescue the wounded. However, the fire was setting off grenades and ammunition, so it was still very hazardous.

The next day, Gillison was preparing for the burial of the men killed in the battle. Just as he began, he heard the groans of a wounded man still in the open. Despite strong warnings not to go out, Gillison and stretcher bearer Corporal Pittendrigh, a former Methodist minister, along with a third man, crawled out fifty meters to the wounded man. A Turkish sniper shot and wounded both of them. They ran back to the trenches, but their wounds were severe. Gillison had been hit in the shoulder with the bullet coming out his chest. He died in agony three hours later. Pittendrigh died days later on the way to an Egyptian hospital. Their deaths were a tragedy.

Gillison's funeral was no quiet affair. Many of his fellow chaplains attended and one noted that many 4th Brigade men were at the funeral, for 'Chaplain Gillison was idolised.' Another wrote that 'the sorrow of Officers and men at the death of Chaplain Gillison was deep and widespread. The Brigadier General, afterward Commandant of the entire A.I.F., wrote "He was the best loved man in the entire Brigade."'15

Death was a commonplace on Gallipoli, and men had to move on quickly from the loss of comrades. But Gillison's memory did not fade. Months later, his successor as 14th Battalion chaplain wrote in his diary: 'Dear me! The way the men speak of Mr Gillison is wonderful. He is fairly worshipped by them, and I don't wonder.'16 The official battalion history noted: 'Chaplain Gillison was the first chaplain in the AIF to be killed during the war. He had a most engaging personality, and was the most popular man in the 4th Brigade. A man of exceptional courage, his kindness had endeared him to all ranks, and his death on an errand of mercy sent a cold chill through the hearts of the whole battalion. There was not any personal incident in the whole campaign which caused a greater sensation or gave rise to more sincere regret in the battalion.'17

Journalist-soldier Oliver Hogue, better known by his pen-name Trooper Bluegum, had this to say about Gillison: 'he was no sour-visaged, long-faced Christian. His religion was cheerful, optimistic, and joyous. I met him at St Andrew's, Cairo, and then I knew why the 4th Brigade almost worshipped him... It was meet that such a man should die giving his life for another. Greater love hath no man than this; and Andrew Gillison would not have willed it otherwise.'18

<sup>1</sup> Uncertainty comes in part from varying ways of determining how to count the dead: for example, whether to include deaths by disease or injury long after the campaign included, or drownings in ships sunk on the way to or from the battlefields.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Gillison Diary, 31 December 1914. AWM PR86028

<sup>3</sup> Gillison Diary, 31 December 1914.

<sup>4</sup> Oliver Hogue, *Trooper Bluegum at the Dardanelles*. London: Andrew Melrose, 1916, 225

<sup>5</sup> Alfred Guppy, Diary, 24 April 1915, AWM 3DRL1545

<sup>6</sup> Gillison Diary, no date, pp 26, 35-37

<sup>7</sup> Gillison Diary, 21 January 1915

<sup>8</sup> Gillison Diary, no date, p 62

<sup>9</sup> Gillison Diary, 24 May 1915

<sup>10</sup> Ernest Merrington, Diary, no date, p 95, AWM File 3 DRL3237

<sup>11</sup> Spectator, 22 October 1915

<sup>12</sup> Guppy, 23 May 1915

<sup>13</sup> Gillison Diary, no date, p 65

<sup>14</sup> Merrington Diary, 97

<sup>15</sup> Merrington, Diary, 307; N. Wanliss, *The History of the Fourteenth Battalion, A.I.F.*, (Melbourne: The 14th Battalion and the 4th Brigade Association, Melbourne, 1929), 72

<sup>16</sup> John Cope, Letter to wife, 6 December 1915, AWM PR00490

<sup>17</sup> Wanliss, 72

<sup>18</sup> Hogue, 225



## *Chapter 4: T. P. Bennett: The Padre of Gallipoli*

Unlike America, where religion has played a significant public role in its history and still commands considerable recognition, Australia has had a much more secular history. In particular, Australian men traditionally have had little to do with organised religion. So it may surprise many today that the experiences of Gallipoli inspired in many men a renewed interest in the Christian faith. One of those who noted this was Thomas Pearse Bennett, better known to his friends as T. P. He wrote: 'The war has served to bring home the military aspect of our faith. Suddenly we have discovered that Bible and Battle are virtually synonyms. Contact with death brings home the true meaning of life, and men begin to think, after which it is only a step before men begin to pray — the tremendous power of the open Bible has come home to me — as being by far the strongest influence amongst our soldiers.'<sup>1</sup>

Bennett was an Anglican clergyman who was not merely a witness to this revival in religious interest, but also a major contributor. His ability to communicate and to live his faith helped many men find the relevance of Christianity to their lives in wartime. Before the war Bennett had been the minister in the Victorian country towns of Stawell and Warnambool. After the war, Bennett would be the dedicating minister at the opening of the Stawell War Memorial. But when T. P. sailed away to Egypt in May 1915, he left behind his beloved wife Clara and their young son. They often featured in his letters and diary, and demonstrate how he could see God through the relationships around him: 'My love for my boy teaches me of my Heavenly Father's love for me. Clara, how happy you have made me — God and I alone know — I have never felt worthy of such love as you have freely given me — God bless you my darling wife is the earnest prayer of your affectionate husband.'<sup>2</sup>

T. P. found himself very busy on the troopship to Egypt. On his first Sunday he talked himself hoarse, addressing three large separate services without the benefit of amplification: 'Sunday 23rd May. This morning we had a beautiful celebration of Holy Communion at 7.45; the men themselves got the room ready for

the service everybody seems to want to help and do something so of course we let them. 9.30 and 10.30 church Parades. The men sang vigorously and well and seemed to take a lively interest in things. The Brigadier was kind enough to approve of what I said & opined that it was a well thought out sermon.<sup>3</sup> He enjoyed having a congregation of about 1,000 men, having been used to small rural congregations with a female majority. He commented to his wife on how strange it was to be in an exclusively male society of 2,500, but added, 'All the same I wish I had my dear old girl with me.' He followed this with a plea to the official censor to permit the remark—a joke, because the Chaplain was usually the official censor of the soldiers' mail.<sup>4</sup> In fact, his diary contains:

- Copy of Rules for Censor
- All names of places are to be eliminated & names of units also
- Name of unit is permitted in the body of the letter but not at the beginning or the end.
- NO reference to the state or number of the troops or their morale is permitted.
- Any information such as disposition & strength of forces etc which might be of use to Enemy is prohibited.
- No criticism of operations or commanders is permitted.
- All letters must be left open.
- Any letters not complying with above will be rejected by the Censor.<sup>5</sup>

Bennett had the knack of putting spiritual things in a way that the soldiers could relate to. He based one sermon on a cricket match held on board that week. His brigadier again commended him: 'A happy subject Padre — they all listened well.'<sup>6</sup> His papers contain the text of part of one of his sermons. The subject matter was taken from the Gospel of Matthew 27:22, on the Roman Governor Pilate's question: 'What shall I do with Jesus?'. The style is direct and engaging, and he challenged each soldier to answer the same question which had puzzled the Roman Governor of Judea at the trial of Jesus. Unlike Pilate, he urged them to accept Jesus rather than try to pass the responsibility to others, and end up condemning Jesus to crucifixion.<sup>7</sup>

But Bennett did more than preach. He organised sports and amusements on board the ship, including pole jousting bouts, where soldiers used pillows to try to knock their opponent off a beam into the water-filled canvas tub below. Sing-songs could last for an hour after the voluntary evening service, and on one occasion the men asked for another sermon as well. Bennett socialised with the men, visited the sick in the ship's hospital, and acted as a spiritual advisor and counsellor to those who sought him out. It was the many one-on-one conversations that he felt were the most influential, and he was not easily put off by those who resisted religion. One evening he spoke with a captain who claimed to be an atheist. Bennett saw through the language and noted that the captain was a spiritually sensitive man, adding to his wife, 'this kind of life does give one an insight into human nature!'<sup>8</sup>

Arriving in Egypt in June 1915, Bennett was struck by two things: the strong biblical associations of the land, and the physical and moral filth that assaulted his senses. Docking in Aden, his sense of humour emerged as he commented on a popular English hymn: "'Araby the Blest'" evidently is not as sweet smelling as the hymn writer would have us believe.'

A series of diary entries record: 'Monday 21st June. Some of the sights of Cairo are shocking. Saw postcards a nigger boy was selling, indecent. I never thought it was possible for human nature to sink so low.

'Sunday, 4th July. Took service under Sphinx, in the strangest conditions. The men sang Rock of Ages, it was thrilling to hear them. Sermon on the ancient surroundings, pointing on to the Rock — Jesus the Strength. I can't describe my feelings as I spoke to those men many of whom would never see Australia and their homes again.'<sup>9</sup>

T. P. wasn't afraid to confront the evils that tempted the men. He spoke very directly, and the men appreciated his frankness: 'Sunday 25 July. Service in YMCA, everyone crammed in. The singing, Lesson & sermon all got into a grand swing — the men all talked about it afterwards. I hit hard about careless language



and quoted examples of the same which I heard during last week in our front lines to the astonishment of many on Parade.' By this stage the soldiers knew and trusted him so well that after services he would have 'a constant stream of visitors in my tent — the men are coming to break down the barrier between themselves and the chaplain which always seems to exist until a mutual knowledge and understanding is built up between the two parties and that is a matter of tact and time as a rule.'<sup>10</sup>

His time was not idle, for he regularly visited the hospitals filled with the casualties from Gallipoli, and helped trace wounded men in hospitals in response to the pleading letters of folks from Australia. On one occasion he trawled through 40,000 names to locate some men. T. P. made a point of active co-operation with other brigade chaplains, forging a particularly effective partnership with Chaplain Bladen, whom he found to be not at all like the stereotypically narrow-minded Methodist he had feared he might be.

In mid-August 1915, T. P. Bennett was posted to Gallipoli. Conditions were tough. An Allied offensive at Lone Pine and the Nek a couple of weeks earlier had caused heavy casualties. Men were also suffering from dysentery and other diseases. Bennett was soon heavily involved in night-time burials, taking worship services under fire in the trenches and organising whatever comforts he could to refresh the men. His diary is full of the highs and lows of living on Gallipoli—the splendid spirit and courage of the men, wonderful times of fellowship in services, confirmations for men joining the Anglican Church, the friendship of other chaplains like McKenzie and Bladen, and of course the funerals. Excerpts from his letters include: 'Friday 12 October. The saddest day I've spent on the Peninsula. Funeral for Bowra — a gentleman in every sense of the word — churchman, Communicant, chorister — the number of his men present in the Gully Cemetery is an eloquent testimonial. Two brothers present — heartbroken. A sad walk back to my dugout.'

'Sunday 3 October. Two wonderful celebrations of Holy Communion — bullets — shells. Two Parade grand services. Singsong at Cooks

fires — A.1. all made up a helpful Sunday. A splendid lot of mail came to hand.'

'Sunday 7 November. Shrapnel Gully. Splendid services all day. Best singsong.'<sup>11</sup>

It has sometimes been said that there are no atheists in foxholes. While the war didn't automatically make men religious, it at least led them to think deeply about things that mattered. Bennett noted this in his diary: 'The truth of the matter is that the realities of war have melted away the surface shyness of men about religion — they feel they are up against questions of life and death — As a censor I can testify to the real part religion bears in a soldier's life — it was shown in the innumerable letters home I have read in which the writers ask for the prayers of their relatives or express their trust in God.'<sup>12</sup>

While almost everything we hear about the Anzacs suggests that they were not interested in religion, the evidence indicates that this is not so. It would be over stating the case to speak of a spiritual revival on Gallipoli. But certainly the men were interested in spiritual things and responded well to chaplains who lived and taught their faith in simple and honest ways.

Unfortunately, religion appears to have had little lasting impact on the majority of men at Gallipoli. While they responded well to real religion, what they often got was the religion of particular denominations, and they hated the conflict between the churches. It is sad, but instead of helping, too often the churches got in the way of the men and God. But individual chaplains like Bennett were effective because they put the needs of people before church rules. Among Bennett's papers are heart-rendering letters received from the families of the men in his care: 'Thank you for returning our son's Testament. It always will be treasured. Our family is shocked, especially Mother.'

Another letter, all the more agonising by the pains which the almost illiterate mother took to write: 'Shourley it was a Grait kindness for you to wret to me about Daniel words could niver

explain how Graitfull I feel... I must ask you if you pleas if you can tell me anything about him is he not able to wret what is the matter with him if we are having no word from him. I am wretten often to him but got no word from him Your letter is the last word I am had from him it was Grief to know him sick but the want of word from his is still more affliction.<sup>13</sup>

And in the middle of all of this, T. P. had not forgotten his own family. His beloved wife was the subject of much affectionate wishes, and in one afternoon nap, he dreamt he was with her alone. Waking up was a sharp disappointment. He wrote to tell of the items that he had collected for his son's 'museum': a Turkish rifle and bayonet, telegraph wire from Lone Pine, a hand grenade and bits and pieces of shrapnel.

The Gallipoli hills are baking hot in high summer, but in late November 1915, snow fell. Weeks of climbing the steep hills under fire, digging graves at night, writing letters to the families of the dead had worn down his morale. Bennett was forced to cancel Sunday services, as 18 inches of snow made movement difficult, and he injured himself when he slipped on ice. The war was taking its toll: 'Sunday, November 28. Too dark in dugout to read or write after 2 pm. What is in store for us all? The first Advent Sunday on which I missed my Communion — How I miss my Eucharist.'<sup>14</sup>

But relief was at hand. He picked up again, noting in early December more helpful church services run for the men—and his narrowest escape from an exploding shell.

Then, within a couple of weeks the peninsula was evacuated. Bennett and the other survivors returned to Egypt. Yet the impact of his ministry was a lasting one. His commanding officer, Colonel Crouch, wrote two tributes to his chaplain. The first was affectionately dedicated to T. P., 'The Padre,' eulogising the work of Bennett. The second described one of Bennett's communion services on Gallipoli.

### **The Padre**

*Who is the friend of all the corps  
From Melbourne pier to Anzac shore  
And lives to serve us more and more?*  
THE PADRE

*Who, when on ship we were not well  
Would come and liven our sick spell  
And story, joke and yarn would tell?*  
THE PADRE

*Who came on deck at close of day  
To start the songs on organ play  
And brighten up the soldiers way?*  
T. P.

*And when old Egypts land was seen  
And wandering steps had hellwards been  
Would try our lives and lips to clean?*  
T. P.

*And if we strayed far from the road  
Would point the path that should be trod  
And guide our erring feet to God?*  
T. P.

*Who comes along the trench we fight  
Gives us the means to Home to write  
Then censors all that is not right?*  
T. P.

*And if at last we bite the clod  
Who sees our bodies 'neath the sod  
And asks us mercy from our God?*  
T. P.

*And when in soldiers grave we rest  
Who writes to folks at Home distress  
Tells them we did our very best?*  
T. P.

*Oh Padre good, our help and stay  
Our love for you grows day by day  
We are but men, so for us pray,  
Dear Padre.*

## **Holy Communion in the Trenches**

*A mud dugout an earthen floor  
The light breaks through old biscuit tin  
The cold wind comes through open door  
A Cavern's darkness lurks within*

*Outside, the shrapnels onward shriek  
The sullen bombs aimed low to kill  
Explosive shells without a break  
Contest the air with bullets shrill*

*The Priest, all khaki, save his bands  
Brings to the place a holy quiet  
On rough hewn wooden table stands  
The radiant Cross on napkin white*

*The war-tired soldiers gather round  
Full conscious of the Mystery  
And humbly kneeling on rough ground  
No noise they hear no sights they see  
They seek the body of the Lord  
The thirst for the redeeming Blood  
With hearts attuned, minds in accord  
They take the gift of Heavenly Food*

*They leave, each strengthened in his frame  
Their spirits nourished for the fight  
Assured as by a Living Flame  
Whateer befalls them will be Right*

*R.A.C. <sup>16</sup>*



Bennett recorded another poem by Crouch, again showing that spiritual matters were important to the soldiers at Gallipoli:

### **Anzac Parade Ground**

*As a man sows, so shall he also reap  
The Chaplain's voice is accents slow and deep  
Reaches the hearts which good he strives to keep.  
A few yards off the Doctor fights with pain  
To heal the sick, who've suffered in war's strain  
And cure their ills that they may fight again.  
Two thousand years ago on Sabbath day  
The sinners came, the sick around Him lay  
Priest and healer both, he turned not aught away  
And so again, the double part is played  
Midst dangers oft they labour not afraid  
The Priest and Healer meet at same Parade.*

R.A.C.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Bennett, Diary, 20-21 March 1915, AWM PRMF0015

<sup>2</sup> Bennett, Letter to wife, no date, AWM PRMF0015

<sup>3</sup> Bennett, Letter to wife, 23 May 1915

<sup>4</sup> Bennett, Letters to wife, 9 May, 13 May, 1915

<sup>5</sup> Bennett, Diary, 7 September 1915

<sup>6</sup> Bennett, Letter to wife, 6 June 1915

<sup>7</sup> Bennett, Papers

<sup>8</sup> Bennett, Letter to wife, 21 May 1915

<sup>9</sup> Bennett, Letter to wife, 2 June 1915, Diary

<sup>10</sup> Bennett, Letters to wife, 25 July 1915, 1 August 1915

<sup>11</sup> Bennett, Letters

<sup>12</sup> Bennett, Diary, 12 November 1915

<sup>13</sup> Bennett file, AWM PRMF0015

<sup>14</sup> Bennett, Diary

<sup>15</sup> Bennett, Diary, no date

<sup>16</sup> Bennett, Diary, no date

<sup>17</sup> Bennett, Diary, 5 December 1915

## *Chapter 5: The New Zealand Chaplains of Gallipoli*

The Anzac legend in Australia focuses on the brave work of Australian troops on Gallipoli. But Australians weren't the only legends at Gallipoli. New Zealand troops played a prominent part in the ill-fated campaign, and contributed to the name Anzac—the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps. On Chunuk Bair, the Kiwis made a brave stand against hopeless odds, and nearly held this vital hill from which they could see the original Allied objective: the Dardanelles Straits on the other side of the peninsula. Among some of the legends of New Zealand's campaign are the stories of several chaplains who are now all but forgotten. But it wasn't always so.

Chaplain Alfred Greene of the Salvation Army served the New Zealand Expeditionary Force from 1914 to 1920. Born in Australia, he had worked in Victoria and Tasmania, labouring from a tent among the copper miners on the harsh west coast, before moving to New Zealand in 1902. Having become an army chaplain, he spent time in camps in Egypt, for which he received the Military Cross, before spending most of the rest of the war looking after the wounded in military hospitals. He earned the nickname 'Buckshee', adapted from the perennial cry heard in Egypt for 'backsheesh' (a tip) from his position as distributor of all patriotic gifts from New Zealand.<sup>1</sup> After the war, he helped organise the repatriation of the New Zealand troops, and only arrived home himself in 1920. Like many Salvation Army men, his manner was unpolished, direct and warm, and this lack of pretence or social sophistication helped the men relate to him. His commander said of him, 'Men of all creeds swear by him.'<sup>2</sup>

Another great Kiwi chaplain was John Luxford. He had served as a chaplain during the land confrontations at Parihaka in the 1890s, then in the Boer War, and lastly, at the age of 61, was with the New Zealanders at Chunuk Bair. The sheer hillsides and rugged countryside was no place for an unfit man and many a younger man struggled, yet Luxford served faithfully and well. He was known for his typically Methodist confrontation of 'loose

living' by any soldiers in his care, and he was equally ruthless in publicly exposing any lapse by the Army to look after the moral well-being of the men. Yet services could move hardened men. In June 1915, Luxford was noted as having given a 'charming and helpful address' at a joint Protestant communion service with Australian chaplains.<sup>3</sup> His age did not keep him from the action for he was wounded on 9 October 1915 at Chunuk Bair, and lost his right leg. Even this couldn't keep him down: he received an artificial leg and, moving with the aid of two canes, was appointed Senior Chaplain-in-Charge of the New Zealand Forces in July 1916, just ten months after his grievous wound. However, other denominations objected to having a Methodist placed over them without consultation, so a rotating leadership was established with representatives of the Church of England, Roman Catholics and Presbyterians sharing the load. Luxford continued to serve, also working in the interests of the minor Protestant Churches of Christ, Baptists and Congregationalists. For his outstanding work, when many another man might have pleaded he had done enough, Luxford was made a Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George (CMG). He died in 1921, at the age of 68, worn out by his efforts during the war.

Catholic chaplain Patrick Dore, a native Irishman, was the popular chaplain of the Auckland Mounted Rifles, winning the Military Cross for his bravery in rescuing the wounded. Dore was a lively man who helped lift spirits on the Peninsula, and he famously paid little attention to denominational boundaries, serving all men equally. On August 22 when he was leading a team of stretcher bearers around the Aghyl Dere, a bullet struck him in the spine. Recognising the serious nature of the wound, the stretcher bearers immediately took him to the beach hospital, bypassing the dressing stations where all wounded men were supposed to be assessed first. Their action saved his life, and he was repatriated to New Zealand. He lived in pain for three years but died in 1918 while surgeons were operating to ameliorate his wound. Just 33 years old, he was buried in Foxton, his pre-war parish.<sup>4</sup>



Major William Grant also made a mark. A Scots Presbyterian who arrived in New Zealand aged 11, he was a white-haired 56-year-old father figure to the men at Gallipoli. Fit and deeply tanned, he was energetic and cheerful, direct in his manner, and widely respected and admired, not merely for his total indifference to danger, but also for his ability to mix with all without the least condescension, or embarrassment at their language. An officer wrote of him: 'He takes absolutely no notice of the shrapnel and bullets, he only smiles. He told me that he had no orderly, and no dug-out of his own to sleep in, and was living on bully beef and biscuits. I asked him 'But where do you sleep?' He said just where he dropped; he didn't care as long as he was with his boys.'<sup>5</sup> He met his death at Table Top on August 28, going 'a little further' into the enemy trenches, seeking a wounded man. Along with Chaplain Dobson, Grant set out along the recently captured trenches of Hill 60, looking for wounded men. They found three of their own and a Turk, and stopped to dress their wounds. Grant said, "This is the valley of the Shadow of Death." "Yes," replied Dobson, "but if one is to go there are worse ways of going." "This is the best way," was Grant's reply. That was practically his last word. Grant pushed ahead looking for more wounded men and accidentally turned into Turkish-held trenches, and was instantly shot dead. Dobson, who was immediately behind him, was stunned, but the Turks by then had time to observe that both men were wearing Red Cross armbands, and angrily waved Dobson away. Later, Dobson returned with a team of men, who recovered Grant's body and buried it. An Australian chaplain wrote this about Grant: 'Here was a true man, a hero-chaplain and a good soldier of Jesus Christ. His hands were dyed with the blood of an enemy to whom he showed kindness in his last moments.... The noble army of martyrs praise Thee!... There was something of the saint and hero about Grant. He gave no thought to self.... True as steel, sincere as crystal, tender as a woman, his spirit shone aloft as a bright star even in the darkest sky. But, the loss is great.'<sup>6</sup>

Grant's companion, Dobson, also had an interesting story. Just 29 years old on Gallipoli, he had served in the Cadets, before

being ordained in 1913 and appointed to the Marlborough Sounds. This area was nothing to a man born in Westport on the precipitous west coast of the South Island, and he walked over 3,000 kilometres in just one year, meeting the spiritual needs of his small and widely dispersed Anglican congregations. Clearly, Gallipoli hills did not intimidate him. He was also wounded on the Peninsula, and served for the rest of the war, being awarded the Military Cross in France for treating and rescuing the wounded under a heavy bombardment. He was one of no fewer than fourteen New Zealand chaplains who were decorated for bravery during the war, but enjoyed the distinction of being one of just a handful of men to serve for the full duration of the war.

But perhaps the most flamboyant New Zealand chaplain was the Reverend Henare Wepiha Te Wainohu, a pioneer Maori minister who became a legend to his men at Gallipoli. Te Wainohu was born on June 4, 1882 in the little village of Mohaka, Hawkes Bay, from the Ngati Kahungunu and Ngati Pahauwera. He was raised on a sheep farm.

In 1896 he came to Te Aute College, a predominantly Maori Christian boarding school near Pukehou. A revival was under way at the school. Teams sang hymns at rugby matches and formed a Christian union. Te Wainohu opposed this and formed a rebel group, the Te Kooti gang, based on the Maori nationalist Hau Hau movement. But it wasn't long before Te Wainohu's heart was touched, and he became a leader in spiritual things.

Being a Christian didn't make Te Wainohu any less of a tough man. He excelled at rugby, loving both the physical challenge and the teamwork. He led the team haka before and after matches, and won the nickname 'Taika', or Tiger.<sup>7</sup>

After high school, he met friends at Gisborne who were studying at Te Rau Theological College. He decided to stay and qualify for the Anglican priesthood. Here he learnt fluent English and soon was working as a deacon, then a priest in Wairoa.

When the First World War broke out in 1914, Te Wainohu was made a chaplain, and attached to the Maori Contingent. These troops were sent to Malta, and held back from Gallipoli,

as it was felt they were not good enough to fight alongside their Pakeha brethren.

However, on July 3, 1915, the Contingent was sent to Gallipoli. As they approached in their small boats, one soldier noted that the yellow eroded hills looked just like Hawkes Bay. Perhaps for a moment Te Wainohu felt at home.

On the evening of August 7, the Maori Contingent prepared for its first battle, as part of the extended assault for the key summit of Chunuk Bair. Te Wainohu preached a sermon that has become famous: 'Remember you have the mana, the honour and the good name of the Maori people in your keeping this night.'<sup>8</sup> Then they sang, in Maori, *Jesu, Lover of My Soul*.

Soon after, yelling a fearsome haka, the Maori contingent charged the Turkish lines at Destroyer Ridge, then on to Big Table Top. Many fell dead and wounded as the Turks fought for their lives. Along with the unit's doctor, Captain Peter Buck (who had been at Te Aute with Te Wainohu, and who later achieved great fame as an athlete, doctor, politician and leader) Te Wainohu was rescuing the wounded even as the bullets flew. Not far from him, Chaplain William Grant met his death going about the same task.

Over the following days, as the New Zealanders fought for control of Chunuk Bair, Buck and Te Wainohu tended to the wounded. Te Wainohu also forcibly collected supplies for the beleaguered defenders on the summit. For his work, he was awarded the Military Cross. Many of the men dear to Te Wainohu's heart were buried on the hill.

Te Wainohu invested considerable effort into promoting the moral and spiritual welfare of the Maori troops. In particular, he sought to make them proud of being Maori. And he succeeded. Years after the war, one officer told the story of seeing Te Wainohu performing a haka on a hill top at Gallipoli.<sup>9</sup> The Maori left Gallipoli with the reputation of being real men, and even fiercer than the dreaded Ghurkhas. As they left, their Pakeha comrades carried their packs down to the beach and shook hands with them, as a tribute to their virtues as warriors.

Te Wainohu accompanied the Maori troops to France in 1916, continuing to serve their needs. He made available prayer books in Maori, and sought to have their work recognised. After the war, Te Wainohu returned to Wairoa, but continued to work for the welfare of former soldiers. Unfortunately, he contracted stomach cancer and died in 1920, at the age of just 38. His legacy was the lively faith of those who he had served so well in war and in peace.

New Zealand chaplains served their men well, setting an example of courage and of living faith under the most trying circumstances. Their work for the wounded, their cheerfulness under fire and their hope endeared them to the warriors of the Land of the Long White Cloud.

<sup>1</sup> J. Bryant Haigh, *Men of Faith and Courage: the official history of the Royal New Zealand Chaplains Department*. Auckland: The Word, 1983, 62

<sup>2</sup> Peter Bradley, 'Men of all creeds swear by him,' *Hallelujah*, Vol 1, No 3 Autumn 2008, 19-20

<sup>3</sup> Ernest Merrington, *Diary*, 13 June 1915, AWM File 3 DRL3237

<sup>4</sup> Haigh, 53-55

<sup>5</sup> Haigh, 51

<sup>6</sup> Merrington, 314-316

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/DNZB/alt\\_essayBody.asp?essayID=3T23](http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/DNZB/alt_essayBody.asp?essayID=3T23)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/media/photo/hwtewainohu>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.wargraves.co.nz/HawkesBay/Wairoa%20Cemetery/index.htm>



## *Chapter 6: Anzac soldiers*

The Anzac story began on the battlefields of Gallipoli. There, the sons of Australia and New Zealand engraved themselves into their national memory through their courage and resourcefulness. The very first commemoration of Anzac was on the first anniversary of the landings. Ceremonies were held in capital cities in Australia and New Zealand, and Australian troops marched through London.

Several places vie for the honour of observing the first memorial service. But the tiny town of Tinui in the Wairarapa, New Zealand, is believed to be the first place to hold an Anzac Day ceremony when the local vicar led a procession to plant a large wooden cross on Tinui Taipos, the hill behind the town on 25 April 1916.

Anzac Day hasn't always been universally accepted. After the war it took some time for it to become established, as the war had a bitter legacy for many. Soldiers often struggled with the terrible memories of the recent conflict, while many civilians were heartily sick of the war and wanted to forget it. But by the 1930s, with enough time passed by and nostalgia for the unique mateship forged in war creeping into the veterans' minds, Anzac Day marches were common in most towns and were generally well attended. However, many ex soldiers refused to march, often because they didn't like the way Anzac was taken over by conservative interest groups, the government and the returned soldiers associations. The Anzac legend in Australia suffered after World War Two because of the lower profile of Australian soldiers during that war, and because of anti-war sentiment during the 1960s. But since the revival of Australian nationalism in the 1980s and the passing of the last Great War Anzacs, Anzac Day observance has dramatically increased, with no signs of it slowing down. In New Zealand, the Anzac legend has remained important, though it lacks the centrality to the New Zealand identity that it has in Australia. It has a much smaller literature in print and media than in Australia, even on a per capita basis. Nevertheless, the Anzac story is an important element of the Kiwi national spirit.

In modern times, Gallipoli has become something of a pilgrimage for a new generation, keen to honour the memory of those who fought and died.

For many Australians and New Zealanders, Anzac Day has taken on the form of a secular religion, complete with reverential services and rituals. For those who can't make the pilgrimage, there is the annual Anzac Day service, held in virtually every town and community. Anzac is memorialised in monuments and buildings around the two nations. Virtually every city, town and hamlet has at least one memorial, which may be an obelisk or public plaque, a memorial hall or names of servicemen or the war dead in some prominent public building, and the architecture of these often has a similarity to churches and religious monuments.

While Australia and New Zealand may have created a kind of national secular religion out of Anzac, it is interesting to ask what religion the Anzacs had. Looking at their enlistment papers, nearly all of them list a religion. But that is hardly surprising, as it was expected at the time that people had some religious affiliation, even if they didn't go to church. Besides, many recruiters weren't too worried about getting the soldiers' religion right. Some recruits were simply asked, 'Protestant or Catholic?' and if they said 'Protestant' they were written down as Church of England, even if they were Presbyterian or Methodist. So the enlistment data is far from reliable. But while the majority of Australian and New Zealand men at the time were not regular church attendees, many men still carried some sort of affiliation with a church, one they were baptised in as a child, or married in. And naturally, there were also many active Christians in the army, since they were a cross-section of peace-time society, from the highest ranks to the lowest. Reading the diaries of some of the chaplains, they record taking voluntary communion services with generals and privates kneeling side by side. Or they tell painfully of having to bury a soldier who was a pillar in their local parish at home.

As one would expect, the four main denominations were Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian and Methodist, although Anglican was a standard default religion for many who had none, and many men who listed 'Catholic' hadn't seen the inside of a church for some time. A certain percentage of these men were active church-goers; many others were occasional or purely nominal members.

A greater proportion of the men from the smaller denominations were active in their local churches, since these often socially marginalised groups tended not to be popular with nominal Christians. These churches included the Congregationalists, Salvation Army, Baptists, Lutherans, Brethren, Quakers, Seventh-day Adventists, and Mormons. Then there were a number from the Orthodox churches of Eastern Europe, as well as Jews, some who insisted on having 'free-thinker', 'atheist', 'agnostic', or 'none' written as their religion, and even a handful of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims.

While it can be hard to gauge exactly how many men were active in their local churches, many older church buildings still carry the honour boards of those from their congregation who served, while church newspapers carried the sad lists of casualties from their faith. These reveal that many Anzacs were in fact Christians.

Some Christian writers over-state the case and make out that the majority of men were Christians. They weren't; the majority were secular men. But there was a significant minority, probably more than one in ten, who were genuine church-goers and serious about their faith. One soldier-writer, adopting the pen-name 'Frederick Brown', noted that religion and Australians were not necessarily associated: 'Strange as it might seem for an Australian youth of 22 to say it, that dominant interest of mine was religion.'<sup>1</sup> His writing is filled with religious reflection, showing that his faith was no mere nominal attachment, nor was it superficial in thought, as he debated the complexities of religion in a war. The response of the less religious men varied. Brown noted that many men prayed, and believed in Fate, but that this did not add up to a belief in God or Christianity. Many hated the compulsory Church Parades on Sundays, and not all Chaplains had the ability to relate to the men. Even religious men could complain about the poor preaching of some chaplains: '7 February 1915: Attended Church Parade and listened to a very powerful harangue by the Dean on the use of bad language and profanity – the intention was good but the matter rather poorly put...' '21 February 1915: Church Parade as dull as usual with the Dean.'<sup>2</sup> But the Anzacs always respected any sincere believer who fulfilled his given tasks with

integrity. Such men gave Christianity a good name among their fellows.

One of the things that is widely believed about the Anzacs is that they had little to do with religion, but that is not necessarily true. The Anzacs, like their British and American counterparts, had little time for religious humbug. One soldier wrote home to his fiancée: 'I have lost a great deal of faith in religion and the whole pale of religion since I have come abroad and seen the world. I guess if you see what we soldiers see you would think likewise. Our pay sergeant was in pre-war time a Sunday School teacher but he says as far as he is concerned with religion he is finished with it – a hollow mockery.... At the same time I don't want you to think I am a thorough heathen for I am not – I am just the same as I was when I went away from you – but "religion as she is seen" has a lot to answer for I think.'<sup>3</sup> His anger was not with faith, but with false representations of Christianity too often embodied in the formalised religion of the churches.

But to real faith, they were often surprisingly open. Accounts from Gallipoli suggest that faith had its place in Anzac hearts. Chaplain T. P. Bennett noted that the war brought home issues of faith to the soldiers, while Chaplain Lawrence Rentoul wrote: 'Though the majority of the troops had "never been to any church," yet I found them quite responsive to the human touch, and the personal kindly interest.'<sup>4</sup> Chaplain Blackwood noted that the Australian soldier pretended no interest in religion while exhibiting a fine understanding of God's moral law, and Chaplain A. H. Tolhurst wrote: 'If all men are not religious or even religiously inclined, some undoubtedly are. And in view of the numbers already killed in the war and the vastly greater number wounded and invalided, men were possessed by serious thoughts, and were in a large measure quite thankful for the opportunity to worship.'<sup>5</sup>

Of course, chaplains may not be the most impartial witnesses to the beliefs of the Anzacs, as they had a vested interest in the matter. So let the testimony of ordinary soldiers make its own statement. The diary of Albert Atkins, a gunner, has little to say about religion, yet when it is mentioned, it is always favourable.



On one occasion he notes a 'church parade before Breakfast, a very good address by the minister, who is Irish and rolls his r's, on what he called gross blasphemy and colossal thoughtlessness. "Swear not at all" was his text and he was quite right but do not think it will have much effect except a few individuals.'<sup>6</sup> William Blaskett not only noted the formal religious services of the battalion, but went out of his way to attend voluntary ones. An accomplished pianist, he enjoyed playing for services and hymn singing. He also felt the presence of God's protection. He wrote: 'Narrow escapes are so common that one is apt to forget that God's protection is over him and to take them as a matter of course. But when you sit down calmly and think about things you realise that God is indeed good and does answer prayer, for I know how much you must pray for my safety. Of course, some people might say it's easy for you and me to believe in God's protection, because so far I am safe. But if anything should happen, I want you to try to think that God knows best. I am sure you will do so.'<sup>7</sup> Other letters showed how he was able to reconcile his faith with the random deaths of the battle field. Blaskett rose from private to captain, and was killed in April 1917. Condolence letters emphasised his courage, and the respect that he earned from his men for his integrity and faith.

Eric Chinner impressed those who knew him. His shining faith was often expressed through his fine singing voice, and he also spoke at various Christian meetings. Of a service held in the Egyptian desert he wrote: 'I cannot explain just how lovely it was. Try to picture this:- a desert – sand everywhere. An altar has been made out of sandbags and on the top is a white cross. Over the front of the altar is the flag of St George. Grouped around are numbers of soldiers – rough voices singing to the accompaniment of a little box organ. Then the silence – and the Chaplain spoke to us about the disciples who saw Jesus after his resurrection.'<sup>8</sup> Chinner was also killed in battle, in July 1916, having become a platoon commander. Again letters testify to the respect he earned as a soldier and a Christian. One colleague wrote of him: 'One of the things that especially drew me to him was his brave stand as a Christian man. Most of our officers are good men, but he was

out of the ordinary.... in every way he showed that he had moral as well as physical courage. He did not sacrifice his manliness but accentuated it by his good Christian character.<sup>9</sup> Joseph Sullivan served as a soldier on Gallipoli, but was seriously wounded, and was invalided back to New Zealand. His faith was undiminished by the war, for he undertook ministerial training, and returned to the Front as a chaplain, certainly one whose previous war experience gave credibility to his ministry to soldiers.<sup>10</sup>

Pilot Robert Little, who became one of Australia's leading fighter aces, kept a notebook containing details of lectures on aviation engines, addresses of friends and flying notes, but it also had a summary of the books of 1 Samuel and 1 Kings from the Bible, apparently made from his own personal reading.<sup>11</sup> The faith of the Horniman brothers shows in their letters, commenting about how wartime services made them nostalgic for the services at home in Campbelltown.<sup>12</sup> Company Quarter Sergeant Major Alfred Guppy, a regular and enthusiastic worshipper, also noted how services reminded him of home.<sup>13</sup>

It is clear that many active Christians drew strength from their faith. Geoffrey McRae wrote from Gallipoli: 'Here, you never know when your hour may come but courage I have begotten by prayer and trust in God's Almighty protection. For which I pray daily and sally forth, knowing that whatever befalls me will be for the best; I also know that I have the daily prayers of the family on my behalf. I am therefore convinced that if God sees it good I should return in safety I shall.'<sup>14</sup> McRae was another who failed to survive the war, being killed at the head of his battalion in July 1916. Roman Catholic Lt Michael Ryan wrote to his mother after being wounded by seven bullets, incredibly none of them serious: 'I can assure you that I thanked the good God sincerely for my deliverance. The whole thing is nothing short of providential.'<sup>15</sup> Sapper Ted Brown, another Catholic, wrote home: 'I am not in the least bit afraid of what lies before me, and I beg of you all not to have any fears or worry about me, as I am going away well prepared. I went to Confession and Communion last Sunday... I have a very strong feeling that God Almighty will look after me and grant me a safe return. But if I am to go, it is with a firm

belief in my Maker and His infinite mercy and forgiveness.’<sup>16</sup> Of Methodist Corporal Reg Lewin, killed in the great August battles of Lone Pine and the Nek, a friend wrote: ‘His letters were always cheery, not disguising the perils of the campaign; but breathing a fine spirit of trust in God.’<sup>17</sup> Salvation Army Corporal Dave Harvey wrote in 1918: ‘I have found that Christ is more real to me than ever.’<sup>18</sup>

While the majority of Anzacs were not religious in the ordinary sense, a good number were active in their faith, and many others relied on spiritual nurture through prayer, fellowship and hymn singing, without subscribing to the formal association of denominational affiliation. Probably one in four or five had an active faith in God. There is therefore a true spiritual legacy in the story of Anzac.

<sup>1</sup> Frederick Brown, unpublished manuscript, AWM MSS1360

<sup>2</sup> Herbert Carter, letters, AWM 3DRL 6418

<sup>3</sup> John Baillie, letter, 7 December 1917, AWM PR00621

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Bennett, Diary, 20–21 March 1915, AWM PRMF0015; J. Lawrence Rentoul, ‘Report of the Chaplaincy Service, A.I.F. (Presbyterian) During the War, 1914–1919’, AWM 1 DRL 644, 8

<sup>5</sup> Donald Blackwood, ‘Experiences of Revd Donald B. Blackwood, M.C. M.A. Th Schol. As a Chaplain with the A.I.F., October 1915 to February 1919, and Impressions gained as a Chaplain.’ AWM 1 DRL 619; Adolphus Henry Tolhurst, ‘War Reminiscences of an Australian Padre,’ AWM MSS 1342

<sup>6</sup> Albert Atkins, Diary 30 April 1916, AWM PR00613

<sup>7</sup> William Blaskett, Letter to parents, 13 August 1916, AWM 1 DRL0130

<sup>8</sup> Eric Chinner, Letter to mother, 23 April 1916, AWM 1DRL0200

<sup>9</sup> Secretary, YMCA Army Depot Adelaide. Letter to Chinner’s parents, 12 August 1916, AWM 1DRL0200

<sup>10</sup> J. Bryant Haigh, *Men of Faith and Courage: The official history of the Royal New Zealand Chaplains Department*, Auckland: The Word, 1983, 55

<sup>11</sup> Robert Little, Notebook, AWM PR86090

<sup>12</sup> Lancelot Horniman, Letters, AWM 1DRL 0357; Robert Geoffrey Horniman, Letters, AWM 1DRL0358

<sup>13</sup> Alfred Guppy, Diary, 31 January 1915, 21 February 1915, 13 March 1915, AIF AWM 3DRL1545

<sup>14</sup> Geoffrey McCrae, Letter 26 June 1915, AWM 1DRL0427

<sup>15</sup> Letter published in *Advocate*, 3 July 1915, 14

<sup>16</sup> Letter published in *Advocate*, 23 October 1915, 14

<sup>17</sup> Letter published in *Methodist*, 2 October 1915, 10

<sup>18</sup> Letter published in *War Cry*, 13 April 1918

