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God's silent witnesses: Protestant chaplains in the Canadian Military, 1939-1945

John M. MacInnis
James Madison University

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God's Silent Witnesses: Protestant Chaplains in the Canadian Military, 1939-1945

John Michael MacInnis

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FACULTY COMMITTEE:

Committee Chair: Dr. Michael Galgano

Committee Members/ Readers:

Dr. Michael Seth

Dr. Andrew Witmer

Dedication

For my friends, family, and loved ones who kept me sane during graduate school.

Ad maiorem Dei gloriam

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to the Graduate School for their financial assistance in my travel to France this past summer. The experience of going to Normandy was vital in the creation of this thesis. My time in France could not have been possible without Dr. Galgano and Normandy Allies leading the trip, it was a truly unforgettable experience. Dr. Galgano has also been an immense help in guiding me academically throughout my college career.

Table of Contents

Dedication.....	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii
List of Figures.....	v
Abstract.....	vi
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Call to Action.....	4
Chapter Two: Separating the Wheat from the Chaff.....	26
Chapter Three: Through the Valley of Death.....	49
Conclusion.....	74
Bibliography.....	79

List of Figures

Fig. 1: Chaplain John Forth displaying his communion set.....67

Fig. 2: Regimental aid party assisting a wounded soldier.....69

Fig. 3: A chaplain conducting a burial service.....72

Abstract

This thesis documents the establishment and growth of the Canadian Protestant Chaplain Services during the Second World War. Bishop George Wells, the head of the Protestant Chaplaincy Service, defined the chaplains' role as "providing for the men's spiritual and moral welfare." Despite having such an important role in maintaining the faith of their men, chaplains of the Second World War have been largely ignored within Canadian historiography. One goal of this thesis is to bring to light the story of these men who had to juggle not only their own faith, but the faith of their men in extraordinary circumstances. Chapter one describes the difficulty in creating such a service, including infighting among churches and combatting a societal shift towards pacifism that occurred in the 1930s. Chapter two investigates Bishop Well's role as head of the Chaplaincy service, both his attempts to recruit men and his own racial and religious bias in selecting chaplains. Chapter three examines the work of chaplains on the front lines, and their ability to look after the faith of their men.

Introduction

My generation has not lived through a major conflict. The more removed we become; the more apt we are to view the sacrifice of many as distant and to take it for granted. The reasons for committing to a cause is lost on a generation who largely live comfortably and secure. The irony, of course, is found in the hope of those who left family, friends, and country to engage an enemy that threatened the peace and freedom of the world. It was the goal of our grandparents to set upon a course to ensure that their children might never again sharpen the tools of war to defend the survival of entire nations. It is in this achievement that the extent of their sacrifice is minimized. November 11th somehow becomes a day when old soldiers parade, wear medals, and honor their fallen comrades. It is their remembrance not ours. We are a generation who have neither the time nor the inclination to reflect upon the sacrifices of the past.

From 1939-1945 the youth of the Allied nations answered the call of war. The reasons for going were many. They went to do something worthwhile; they went because they were lured by the excitement of war; they went because it was the thing to do; they went because it meant you were a somebody; they went to serve humanity. Many of these soldiers can look back to an individual whose actions under the most trying of conditions proved to be influential. Men rallied around him, felt safe in his presence, felt strength from his example. Often these influential men were chaplains.

My academic interest with chaplains arose from a trip to Normandy this past summer. As someone who has always been interested in religious history, I noticed

something underrepresented in the many museums we visited in France, that being the faith of the men involved. Very few exhibits focused on the faith of the men involved, and even fewer focused on the physical representation of faith in the battlefield, the chaplain. It was in the lobby of the Mémorial de Caen that I decided to focus on military chaplains for this thesis. This underrepresentation is also why I chose to focus on Canadian chaplains. In both the historiography and in the museums of Normandy, less attention has been given to the sacrifice of the Canadian forces and to the work on Canadian chaplains than compared to their American and British counterparts even at the Canadian Museum on Juno Beach.

With this thesis, I hope to show the relevance of Canadian chaplains during the Second World War. While their sacrifice has been largely forgotten, chaplains played a vital role on the battlefield and formed important relationships with their men that supported them in combat and eventually victory. The first chapter will look to outline the historiography of Canadian chaplains, and will examine the complications of Canada's entry into the war and the creation of the Chaplaincy Service.¹ The second chapter will detail the process of recruiting and training chaplains, and the final chapter will focus on the chaplains' work in combat. My goal is to help this and future generations to understand the important role of chaplains and to celebrate their heroism that helped preserve freedom for everyone.

The department was generous enough to give me the financial resources to conduct research in Ottawa last semester. I was able to go through a modest amount of

¹ Also to as "CCS" in this work.

material during my few days there, but there are many boxes in Ottawa that would have benefited this thesis tremendously if I had the time and resources at my disposal. Many of the large mainline Protestant denominations of Canada have archives themselves that I was unable to visit. Archives however house the journals and correspondence of only a handful of chaplains. My guess would be that such material is kept by the chaplains themselves or their families, and it may be many years before these documents end up available to the public. I have used the published memoirs of chaplains to fill this gap. These memoirs were published anywhere from five years to two decades following the war. Given the nature of these sources it is important to give them a caveat. Memories are malleable and fragile, they often fade or are corrupted by the memories of others. Despite this, these memoirs give firsthand perspective that has proved invaluable to this thesis.

Chapter One: Call to Action

Canadian historian Duff Crerar said of the military chaplain, “the field padre’s mind often filled with traumatic memories: the smell of death, awe and horror at the extent of destructiveness of man...the horrors of burying men long dead and often blown to pieces or burned to cinders, and incredible physical and spiritual exhaustion.”² His quote personifies the work of chaplains in the Canadian forces during the Second World War. They were a beacon of hope in an intensely inhumane conflict. In the Second World War, 1253 Canadian ministers, priests and rabbis volunteered as full-time chaplains. Of the 1253, 807 were Protestant Ministers, 446 were Roman Catholic priests, and 10 were Jewish rabbis.³ These men experienced the horrors of the front line without a weapon, they relied on their faith and the men they were serving to get them through times of intense combat.

Despite their constant presence, Canadian chaplains have been largely overlooked by historians. When one examines what little historical literature has been written about the chaplains, one constantly encounters this familiar absence. These expressions are justifiable, as Canadian chaplains, if for no other reason than the virtue of their constant presence, are worthy of historical study. Indeed, they played a very important role in the history of the Canadian military and Canada’s experience of war: a role that should be neither overlooked nor forgotten. By examining the Second World War experience of the

² Duff Crerar, “In the Day of Battle: Canadian Catholic Chaplains in the Field, 1885-1945,” *CCHA, Historical Studies*, 61 (1995): 76.

³ Crerar, “In the Day of Battle”, 80.

Canadian forces through the eyes of its chaplains, the thesis will seek to evaluate the effectiveness of chaplains in the conflict in regards to keeping their faith and maintaining the faith of their men. By taking into account the lessons learned during the First World War, the Canadian Chaplaincy Service was able to be more effective during the Second World War. This thesis also serves to bring to light, the work and contributions of the chaplains during the conflict.

Canada's military historians have generally ignored what one First World War soldier aptly referred to as "the minds and spirits of the men involved,"⁴ particularly the work of the Canadian military chaplains and the role of religion in the Second World War. In his three volume official history of the Canadian Army in the Second World War, C.P. Stacey only makes reference to chaplains in three paragraphs out of 2206 pages.⁵ Similarly, the extensive official history of the Royal Canadian Air Force excludes any mention of air force chaplains.⁶ In Marc Milner's naval history, *Canada's Navy*, no reference to chaplains is made.⁷ This continues even in popular histories such as Mark Zuehlke's *Ortona* and *The Liri Valley*.⁸ The only exception to the noted trend is found in C.P. Stacey's *The Half Million, The Canadians in Britain, 1939-1946*. While a tremendous study, this work on chaplains is limited to Canadian chaplains in Britain.⁹

⁴ John Baynes, *Morale: A Study of Men and Courage, The Second Scottish Rifles at the Battle of Neuve Chapelle, 1915* (London: Cassell, 1967), 3.

⁵ C.P. Stacey, *The Victory Campaign: The Operations in North-west Europe, 1944-1945* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1966).

⁶ Brereton Greenhous, *The Crucible of War, 1939-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

⁷ Marc Milner, *Canada's Navy: The First Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

⁸ Mark Zuehlke, *Ortona: Canada's Epic World War II Battle* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2004); Mark Zuehlke, *The Liri Valley: Canada's World War II Breakthrough to Rome* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2004).

⁹ C.P. Stacey, *The Half-Million, The Canadians in Britain, 1939-1946* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 93, 136-138.

Clearly, Canadian historiography of the Second World War is lacking any substantial inclusion of religion or the work of military chaplains.

Canadian religious histories also appear content to ignore the role of religion and military chaplains during the conflict. Three prominent religious histories fail to even mention the existence of chaplains during the war.¹⁰ The only exception is that of John Webster Grant's *The Church in the Canadian Era*. Within this work, Grant identifies the theological struggle and social concerns between the Roman Catholic Church and the four largest Protestant churches.¹¹ Canadian denominational histories are also largely void of any analysis of the role of religion or chaplains during the war. No general work exists for the United or Anglican Churches, and only relatively recently has such a study emerged for Roman Catholics.¹² Baptist and Presbyterian denominational histories acknowledge that ministers became chaplains but do not delve into their military roles.¹³ It is clear from this that Canadian religious historiography either ignores or fails to take seriously the role of their own ministers as chaplains during the war. When the Second World War is discussed in Canadian religious and denominational histories, it is narrowly viewed through the lens of a specific denomination, and attempts to place religious aspects of the war or the work of chaplains in any type of context are non-existent.

¹⁰ Terrence Murphy, *A Concise History of Christianity in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1996); George Rawlyk, *The Canadian Protestant Experience, 1760-1990* (Burlington, Ontario: Welch Publishing Company, 1990); John G. Stackhouse, *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).

¹¹ John Webster Grant, *The Church in the Canadian Era* (Burlington: Welch Publishing Company, 1988), 162.

¹² Fay, *A History of Canadian Catholicism*, was published in 2002.

¹³ Harry A. Renfree, *Heritage and Horizon: The Baptist Story in Canada* (Mississauga, Ontario: Canadian Baptist Federation, 1990), 243,252-253; John S. Moir *Enduring Witness: A History of the Presbyterian Church in Canada* (Toronto: Eagle Press Printers, 1988), 241-242.

Although they are few in number, several histories have chronicled the deeds of Canadian chaplains. The leading historian in the field is the aforementioned Duff Crerar. In addition to several articles published on the subject of Canadian Chaplains in the First World War, Crerar published *Padres in No Man's Land: Canadian Chaplains and the Great War* in 1995. In this comprehensive analysis, Crerar describes the development of the Canadian Chaplain Service throughout the First World War and the competition between churches and government for control and influence over the chaplains. Crerar also identifies the major institutional mistakes made in the Great War which were corrected at the start of the Second World War: the creation of separate and autonomous Roman Catholic and Protestant chaplaincy branches rather than the contentious single service of the First World War, and the establishment of a distinct auxiliary service to relieve chaplains of the social duties often levied upon their predecessors in the First World War.

Three other excellent articles of Crerar are: "Where's the Padre?": Canadian Memory and the Great War Chaplains"¹⁴, "Bellicose Priests: The War of the Canadian Catholic Chaplains 1914-1919", and "In the Day of Battle: Canadian Catholic Chaplains in the Field, 1885-1945." An additional contribution to the area of First World War Canadian chaplains is Mark G. McGowan's "Harvesting the Red Vineyard: Catholic Religious Culture in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919."

In "Where's the Padre?", Crerar studies the subject of historical memory. In the article, Crerar describes how memory-histories written in the wake of the Great War and

¹⁴ This article appears in *The Sword of the Lord*, a collection of articles about chaplains.

even the Second World War often portray the chaplains in a negative way. Some of these accounts describe chaplains as cowardly, hiding behind cover well out of the reach of the dying soldiers who need him the most. Others wrote that the chaplain was just another incompetent officer who had no real interest in the common soldier. In spite of service records and battalion histories indicating that chaplains showed courage under fire, Crerar claims postwar disillusionment led to anger and frustration of veterans being taken out on the chaplains. As a result, the Canadian chaplain came to be portrayed as a “buffoon, coward or hypocrite”.¹⁵ As this thesis will rely on memoir history at times, it would be wise to remain wary of the influence memory can play on accounts.

Published before *Padres in No Man's Land*, Crerar's article “Bellicose Priests” focuses on Catholic chaplains during the First World War. He argues that in the face of enormous hardship and discrimination from a Chaplaincy Service hierarchy dominated by Protestants, Catholic chaplains were able to rally together and eventually establish equal footing with their Protestant counterparts.¹⁶ This article clearly demonstrates how problems of religious differences in the civilian world carried over into the CCS. In a time that was much less ecumenical than ours, religious bias was often deeply entrenched to the detriment of the soldiers involved. Crerar also demonstrates the planting of the idea of denominational segregation in the CCS that would culminate with the creation of both a Protestant and Roman Catholic chaplaincy service at the beginning of the Second World War.¹⁷

¹⁵ Duff Crerar, “Where's the Padre? Canadian Memory and the Great War Chaplain” In *The Sword of the Lord*, 141-154.

¹⁶ Duff Crerar, “Bellicose Priests: the Wars of the Canadian Catholic Chaplains, 1914-1919”, *CCHA, Historical Studies* (1991), 21.

¹⁷ Crerar, “Bellicose Priests”, 33-39.

The third article of Crerar's mentioned, "In the Day of Battle", also focuses on Catholic chaplains. Tracing the history of Canadian chaplains from the Northwest Rebellion to the end of the Second World War, Crerar argues that while much has changed in war, the role of chaplain remained constant and that "conditions and not policy dictated chaplain tactics."¹⁸ A recurring theme through this and most of Crerar's work is the chaplain's private desire for, and official discouragement of, service at the front. In "In the Day of Battle", Crerar asserts that chaplains needed to be under the same fire as the soldiers in order to improve the quality of their ministry to their men. He also states that the chaplains derived some level of satisfaction from sharing in the same dangers as their men.¹⁹

Other secondary sources pertaining to Canadian chaplains in the Second World War are slightly more diverse in author and style. In 1948, Walter T. Stevens wrote *In This Sign*, a source that is considered the official history of the Protestant Chaplain Service during the war.²⁰ A.G. Fowler published *Peacetime Padres: Canadian Protestant Military Chaplains, 1945-1995*. Although the scope of Fowler's book lies outside the boundaries of the Second World War, the first chapter provides a survey of the Protestant Chaplain Service during the conflict. Augmenting these histories are a smattering of anecdotal narratives and biographies.

Just three years removed from the end of the Second World War, Walter T. Stevens published *In This Sign*. Stevens lays out early in the book his "hope to tell a story

¹⁸ Crerar, "In The Day of Battle", 62.

¹⁹ Crerar, "In the Day of Battle", 64-67.

²⁰ Duff Crerar, *Padres in No Man's Land: Canadian Chaplains and the Great War* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 5.

that will portray the modern minister of God in uniform as the man with the answer for the spiritual hunger of today.”²¹ Stevens includes a brief look at the CCS during the First World War and mentions the detailed story told by Col. William Beattie, whose official history remains unpublished to this day. With no real argument or aim at critical analysis made, Stevens jumps into his account of how the CCS would function with both a Catholic and Protestant operating cooperatively, yet separately. Despite facing hurdles, the CCS was able to pull itself together. By D-Day “new heights of efficiency and training were reached.”²²

Albert Fowler’s *Peacetime Padres* is an official history of the chaplaincy service in modern times intended for a public audience. However, it does provide a survey of the CCS during the Second World War in the opening chapter. Fowler stays consistent with the rest of the literature in saying that the way Canadian chaplains have performed their duties has changed as the Church’s place in society has changed and decrying the little attention given to military chaplains in the corpus of Canadian history. Fowler writes about a desire through the 1960s and 70s to have some kind of history on the CCS published. This was due to the reality that every year saw the deaths of more and more veteran chaplains. In the end no such work came to fruition. Again in the 1980s there was a desire to tell the history of the chaplains as their role was increasingly misunderstood in an ever increasingly secular age. A campaign to collect memorabilia and interviews form

²¹ Walter Stevens, *In This Sign* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1948), 9.

²² Stevens, 102.

chaplains was started by Fowler. He established the “Chaplain’s General’s Oral History Project”, which totaled 37 interviews from war-time chaplains.²³

Because most of the literature on chaplains so far has been focused on Catholic and French-speaking chaplains, this work will focus on Protestant chaplains and their efforts to maintain the faith of themselves and of their men. Religious practice for most Protestant churches in Canada included Sunday afternoon Sunday School and Sunday evening worship. For chaplains overseas, there was no Sunday afternoon religious education, and the chaplains’ religious role Sunday evening was attempting to inset a five minute devotional between a rousing secular sing-song and that evening’s movie. That being said, the chaplains’ perspective is unique because of the sheer number of men, believer and unbelievers, who passed through his door asking for advice and help, begging for money, confessing sins, or just saying thank you.

An effort has been made to try to contextualize chaplains within the worldview of the mid-twentieth century. For some chaplains, the Second World War opened a flood gate of memories and understanding gained in the trenches of the First World War, while for younger chaplains the Second World War provided a new and exciting opportunity to affect religious change impossible in the churches on the homefront. This is but one of the dualities which characterizes the work of Canada’s military chaplains as they acted as important maintainers of faith: understanding and ministering to the minds and spirits of men in Canada’s military.

²³ Albert G. Fowler, *Peacetime Padres: Canadian Protestant Military Chaplains, 1945-1995* (St. Catharines: Vance Publishing, 1996), 8-11.

Canada experienced a boom in national pride as they entered World War II. As the king signed into existence a state of war between Canada and the Reich on September 10, 1939, such English Canadian newspapers as *The Toronto Star*, and the *London Free Press* joyfully declared “Canada is Now At War.”²⁴ In Parliament, Prime Minister Mackenzie King proclaimed Canada’s entrance into war as a “national effort marked by united purpose, of heart and of endeavor.”²⁵ Canada’s leading clergy also endorsed the war. Archbishop Derwyn Owen, the Anglican Primate of Canada, sent a circular letter to the bishops and congregations urging them to be united during this “hour of great testing,”²⁶ Local clergy did their part. Rev. Finaly Stewart of St. Andrews Presbyterian Church in Kitchener, Ontario, prepared sermons to justify the war.

In the interwar years, like the Canadian military it served, the chaplain service-no longer a formal entity- withered on the vine. This neglect reflected a larger series of crises in the Canadian churches during this period. Because the churches had become accustomed to influencing intellectual, social, and cultural life in Canada in the years after 1867, they had become unable to cope with the accelerated changes that took place between 1914 and 1939.²⁷ Protestant church life, as a result, had undergone considerable stress and fragmentation. This period also witnessed church union when the United Church of Canada was founded in 1925, but even this was not an altogether smooth theological transition.²⁸

²⁴ J.L. Granatstein, *A Nation Forged in Fire: Canadians and the Second World War, 1939-1945* (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1989), 24.

²⁵ J.L. Granatstein, *Canada’s War: The Politics of Mackenzie King Government, 1935-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 17

²⁶ Charles E. Riley, *Derwyn Trevor Owen: Primate of all Canada* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1966), 147.

²⁷ Rawlyk, 139.

²⁸ Rawlyk, 140.

On the eve of the Second World War, Canada was thoroughly unprepared to wage war, and despite the apparent agreement and unified resolve, Canada's national effort to fight was fractured and fragile. Despite legitimate intentions, Canada's military, Government, and churches followed the appeasement rhetoric of the 1920s and 1930s and created policies intended to maintain peace. Despite Parliamentary endorsement and media approval, Canadian support for the conflict was anything but clear. Support was blurred by ethnicity and regionalism. Of Canada's 11.5 million people, many of the 5.7 million citizens of British origin expected the national war effort to include the prompt creation of an expeditionary force and possible conscription. This contrasted with the 3.5 million French Canadians who tended to believe they would be fighting in a war of 'limited liability' with the voluntary defense of Canada as the prime objective. For the French-Canadian dailies and the Roman Catholic press in Quebec, cautious approval of the war was tinged with bitter memories of the past. Their hearty endorsement of the First World War in 1914 had turned bitter in 1917 when conscription was forced upon Quebec.²⁹ Even in English-Canada support for the war was hardly as universal as some claimed. While the *Ottawa Citizen* lobbied for conscription, Professor Arthur Lower wrote, "people everywhere are apathetic or appalled; there is no enthusiasm for war."³⁰ The jingoistic speeches and proclamations of a crusade so common in the opening months of the First World War were not rallying cries in 1939. In Parliament, the patriarch of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, J.S. Woodsworth made one of the most passionate speeches of the war, opposing the conflict on the grounds of pacifist

²⁹ Mason Wade, *The French Canadians, 1760- 1967* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1968), 751-752.

³⁰ John Webster Grant, *The Church in the Canadian Era*, (Burlington: Welch Publishing Company, 1988), 113-114.

principles.³¹ While Woodsworth stood alone in the House of Commons to oppose entering the war, he felt confident that his opinions were not solitary. Woodsworth said in session, “that is my belief, and it is the belief of a growing number of Canadians.” Canada’s commitment to the war effort was not as unified as newspaper headlines, political speeches, and sermons suggested. Beneath the façade of Canada’s effort to wage war there was a lack of preparation and rampant mismanagement.³² A fragile national unity was the status quo.

The Canadian military was also unprepared for war in 1939. The Canadian Army’s permanent force had a strength of just over 4450 officers and men, and almost no modern equipment: heavy weapons amounted to four anti-aircraft guns, and sixteen light tanks. The Non-Permanent Active Militia, the main fighting force, had an enlistment figure of 48,761. But with limited training these militiamen could hardly have been tasked with winning on the battlefield.³³ The Royal Canadian Navy, the Royal Canadian Naval Reserve, and the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve collectively had a strength of 309 officers, 2967 ratings, and seven ships. The Royal Canadian Air Force numbered 4061 in its ranks, including 298 Permanent Force Officers in eight regular and twelve auxiliary squadrons. Each squadron was understrength and all but one was equipped with obsolete aircraft.³⁴

As the conflict intensified, Canada’s military expanded until by war’s end the Army included five divisions, the RCAF was comprised of fifty squadrons in their Home

³¹ Granatstein, *Canada’s War*, 16-17.

³² Granatstein, *Canada’s War*, vii.

³³ Granatstein, *A Nation Forged in Fire*, 26, 259-267.

³⁴ Greenhous, 14-16.

War Establishment and forty-six overseas squadrons, and the RCN was the third largest navy in the world with 106,000 men and women and 900 ships. In total, 1.1 million Canadians served in the Second World War, and casualties included 42,042 killed and 54,414 wounded.³⁵ Canada's military totals and sacrifices are all the more impressive considering the lack of preparation, and mismanagement which characterized many of Canada's ministers and officials throughout the war.

The Government's failure to properly prepare for war led to controversy and mismanagement. For example, the cabinet failed to realize that Canada's war effort was far from ethnically homogeneous. Many ethnic Canadians believed that it was not their war, and many ethnic communities were split on the issue.³⁶ The Government failed to solicit the views of ethnic minorities but, based on prejudice, directed a policy of discrimination against Italians, Germans, Japanese, and Jewish Canadians.³⁷ Furthermore, while King tried to be sensitive to political pressures from Quebec, Ottawa failed to fully anticipate the fissures forming in French and English Canada over the implementation of the National Resources Mobilization Act in 1942 and 1944 and the conscription policy of "conscription if necessary, but not necessarily conscription."³⁸

One other group is rarely recognized for its contribution to help mobilize the home front and sustain the battle overseas. This group possessed an influence in Canadian society, and was pressed with a task which demanded commitment, courage,

³⁵ C.P. Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments: The War Policies of Canada, 1939-1945* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1974), 4, 103.

³⁶ Norman Hillmer, *On Guard For Thee: War, Ethnicity, and the Canadian State* (Ottawa: Canadian Committee for the History of the Second World War, 1988), xii.

³⁷ Hillmer, 81, 121, 146, 151-2.

³⁸ J. L. Granatstein, *Broken Promises: A History of Conscription in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 79.

and compassion. At the start of the Second World War the Christian churches supplanted all other organizations as the institutions most identified with and embraced by Canadians. Ninety-seven per cent of Canada's population identified themselves as Christian: either Roman Catholic (45.1 per cent) or Protestant (54.9 per cent).³⁹ Protestant Canada was represented by a plurality of churches, but four dominant denominations comprised almost eighty per cent of all Protestants: The United Church of Canada, the Church of England in Canada, the Presbyterian Church in Canada, and The Baptist Churches in Canada. During the Second World War these four denominations along with the Roman Catholic Church dictated Canadian religious policy, and often appeared to speak in a unified voice, for the good of the national effort against Nazi Germany.

When war was declared many in Canada's churches faced a serious dilemma: continue with their path of appeasement and pacifism, or come out in favor of the war. Most chose the latter, but in doing so found themselves devoid of the mental and spiritual justification for taking such a serious step. The churches overcame a challenge far more difficult than that facing many politicians or military leaders. Most politicians and military leaders were responsible for legislation or the means of economic production to support the war. The churches too made a significant material contribution to win the war, but they were also expected to make a further contribution as well. As the religious leaders of society, it fell to them to be the backbone of the nation's faith. In short, Canada's churches were required to articulate the psychological rationale for waging the conflict against Hitler and Nazi Germany.

³⁹ Grant, 200.

Throughout the 1930s the churches were disturbed by the destruction and chaos of the famines and economic crises of the Great Depression. To alleviate social misery, churches opened soup kitchens and formed ecumenical groups such as the Fellowship for Christian Social Order. Delegates from the Anglican, Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec, and the United Church who attended the Oxford and Edinburgh Conferences in 1937, met in January 1939 seeking ways to implement their ecumenical vision of the World Council of Churches. This effort was no passive enterprise; in describing their ambitions one of the delegates made the following remarks:

Today the churches are seeking to apply the gospel of Christ to the corporate affairs of men in relation to social, economic, and political problems. The churches are but regiments in the Army of the Living God. The World is united against her today with an intensity not seen since the days of Pagan Rome. The church, therefore, must be united in her fight against the World.⁴⁰

Despite their meetings and use of military imagery, Canadian Christian churches were divided over economic restructuring. They were divided over the materialism of an ever-increasing secular age. Calls from unemployed veterans petitioned clergy to “denounce wealth from the pulpits of their comfortable parishes” and spearhead social and financial reconstruction advocating changes to profit-making so that “religion and citizens be fitly joined together.”⁴¹ Although they supported the Government following the outbreak of

⁴⁰ Canon Judd, “A Great Vision, The Ecumenical Movement”, *The Padre's Weekly Bulletin* (January 9, 1939), 3.

⁴¹ Crerar, *Padres in No Man's Land*, 226.

hostilities, 1939 was a year of struggle as the churches tried to overcome the controversy of their anti-war views and the difficulties of the 1930s.

In the 1930s Anglican, Baptist, and United Churches produced declarations denouncing war and participation in any future wars: ‘War, as a method of settling international disputes, is incompatible with the teaching and examples of Our Lord Jesus Christ.’⁴² The Protestant churches were divided in the depth and meaning of these declarations, and their understanding of pacifism was colored by very different historical backgrounds and contexts. For some progressives and Social Gospellers, anti-war sentiment went as far back as the Peace Manifesto of 1914.⁴³ For others, it was directly linked to the events in the 1930s. Anglican Bishops, for instance, in a statement issued in 1930 overwhelmingly denounced any involvement in war. At the Oxford Conference in 1937⁴⁴, the Bishops changed their mind and a statement was issued that recognized a “Just War” belief as a legitimate means to view war. The statement read, “A Christian must take up arms for his country and may refuse to fight only when he is absolutely sure that his country is fighting for a wrong cause.”⁴⁵

Unlike Anglicans, the Baptist churches and the United Church deepened their resolve against war as the 1930s progressed. Delegates to the annual meeting of the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec in 1931, 1933, and 1937 passed resolutions condemning war and debated motions that would exclude them from ever supporting

⁴² Moir, 237-38.

⁴³ Brian J. Fraser, *The Social Uplifters, Presbyterian Progressives and the Social Gospel in Canada, 1875-1915* (Waterloo, Ontario: Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion, 1988), 155-157.

⁴⁴ Led by Joseph Oldham, the conference sought to analyze the rise of secularism and totalitarianism in the West.

⁴⁵ George Anderson Wells, *The Fighting Bishop* (Toronto: Cardwell House, 1971), 21.

going to war. Then, on the morning of June 9, 1938, Baptist delegates to the annual meeting outlawed Baptists' waging war: "be it resolved, that this Convention urge the churches in the event of war neither to bless nor to give support to it as organizations."⁴⁶ The Baptist delegates wholeheartedly embraced pacifism, yet no one at the Convention voiced the obvious problem, with the declaration. Because Baptist denominations adhere to congregational polity, Convention declarations are not binding on individual churches, unless the declaration is declared as doctrine. No one at the Convention proposed to make the Pacifist Declarations doctrinal. Pacifist views were wholly consistent with the views of Canadian society at the time.

When war was declared in September 1939, Canada's church performed an about face and tripped over themselves to declare ringing endorsements of the Government's declaration of war. Beginning with the words, "without being pharisaic, and without thinking ourselves 100 percent right and everybody else 100 percent wrong", Cannon Judd smugly stated in *The Bulletin* that the Government's declaration of war was exactly what they had predicted, and the article endorsed the war declaration of Parliament.⁴⁷ On August 24, Baptist dissident T.T. Shields called upon the Government to destroy the madmen Hitler and Mussolini.⁴⁸ The President of the Baptist Convention, J.A. Johnston, caked upon his fellow Baptists to keep "cool heads". Johnston also summarized the Baptist position in a letter of support to Prime Minister King. He wrote

We profoundly support whole-heartedly your own
action...Believing in the justice of our cause consistent

⁴⁶ *Baptist Year Book, 1938 (BCOQ), 63.*

⁴⁷ *Judd, 1.*

⁴⁸ Dr. T.T. Shields, "What is Peace?", *The Gospel Witness* (August 24, 1939), 158.

with our Christian faith and our love of liberty and democracy, these always having been basic principles of our Baptist position.⁴⁹

In his letter to Prime Minister King, Johnston failed to mention that only a year before this position the Baptist Convention included a resolution forbidding Baptist participation in any future conflict.

Because of the ambiguity to the war in September 1939, the United Church scrambled to devise a war policy. The task fell to Rev. J.R. Mutchmor, secretary of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service. He wrote that war “is contrary to the mind of Christ”, yet admitted that the pragmatic circumstances of war would dictate their support.⁵⁰ The issue was not resolved at the grass roots level, however. The division within the United Church was no better illustrated than in two articles which appeared side by side in the September 15 issue of *The United Church Observer*. Albert Belden argued that nothing could justify participation in the sin of war and proposed that the world’s five hundred million Christians refuse to fight.⁵¹ On the other hand, W.E.L. Smith acknowledged the travesty of war, yet pointed out there were moments when defending religious freedom through military means was legitimate and justifiable.⁵² Clearly, support for the Second World War was a divisive issue for the United Church in September of 1939.

⁴⁹ *The Canadian Baptist* (21 September 1939), 1.

⁵⁰ J.R. Mutchmor, *Mutchmor* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1965), 20.

⁵¹ *The United Church Yearbook* (15 September 1939), 5.

⁵² *The United Church Yearbook* (15 September 1939), 5.

By order of the Privy Council on June 13, 1921, the chaplain service which had existed in the First World War was removed from active service.⁵³ Responsibility for religious ministry to the reserve units fell to the Commanding Officers who selected their own chaplains. In most cases these non-permanent chaplains rendered good service conducting Church Parades and accompanying their units to summer camp. When war broke out many Commanding Officers appointed these non-permanent chaplains for active duty. This undermined the impending Chaplaincy Service.

Unprepared and scrambling for consensus, Canada's Protestant churches entered the war with no contingency plans to organize committees to oversee war work, or to implement steps for the creation of a chaplaincy service. Leadership merged in remarkable ways, however. By fortunate coincidence, Rev. J.R. Mutchmor, a senior official in the United Church's Evangelism Department, was paid a visit by his former senior office secretary, Mildred E. Magee. In February of 1939 she warned him of the impending war and urged Mutchmor to request the Church of Scotland to give as much information as they could on their program of chaplaincy services to the armed forces. Mutchmor wisely carried through on this suggestion: "In short, Miss Magee had an intuition or hunch, and as a result I wrote to Edinburgh. When war broke out, our office was fully informed of the policy of the Church of Scotland concerning military chaplains."⁵⁴ Thanks to Magee, Mutchmor was able to take the information he had received and propose a Chaplaincy Service to Canadian military officials.

⁵³ Wells, *The Fighting Bishop*, 19.

⁵⁴ Mutchmor, 103-4.

Initial requests to create a chaplaincy service came from individuals not denominations. On September 8th, the Anglican Archbishop of Ottawa John Roper, wrote to the Minister of National Defense, Ian MacKenzie, requesting that “a Chaplain General for the Church of England Chaplains be nominated for appointment.”⁵⁵ At the same time, J.R. Muthmor shared with his colleague Canon Judd his findings from the Church of Scotland concerning chaplains. Mutchmor and Judd decided it was in their best interests to travel to Ottawa for an informal meeting with military officials. They met with Major-General H.H. Matthews and Major-General L.R. LaFleche. From Mutchmor’s description of the visit, the military authorities in Ottawa appeared as unprepared for war as Canada’s churches: “Everything about the building seemed decrepit. Surely Canada had no idea of war. There was not a single sign of readiness, no evidence of even the beginning of preparation.”⁵⁶

The Presbyterian General Assembly was thoroughly disorganized on the matter of chaplains and made no attempt to communicate with the Canadian military in September of 1939. In fact, it took until October 5th before a committee met to deal with chaplains, and it was organized only out of necessity. According to the minutes of the first meeting of the committee, the first item of business called for a need to respond to the request from Muthmor (on behalf of the United Church’s Committee on Chaplaincy) for “a common agreement among the Protestant Churches as to chaplains for Overseas Service, that any chaplain should be named by the Denomination they represent and careful selection should be made.”⁵⁷ At the same meeting, it was clear that Presbyterian were

⁵⁵ Wells, *The Fighting Bishop*, 393-4.

⁵⁶ Mutchmor, 104-5.

⁵⁷ Minutes, Presbyterian Committee on Chaplaincy Service, 1.

scrambling to catch up to their Protestant counterparts. Dr. Stuart C. Parker was appointed as convener of the Presbyterian Committee on Chaplaincy.⁵⁸

In contrast, the United Church had established a War Service and Chaplaincy Committee, both of which met before the end of September. For Anglicans, chaplaincy issues were initially the direct responsibility of each Bishop/Archbishop. Later, a national chaplaincy committee was created and was responsible for all chaplaincy issues including appointments.⁵⁹ Archbishop Derwyn Owen issued instructions to the Canadian Bishops on chaplaincy matters. In a letter to the Canadian hierarchy on September 21st, Owen reported that he had met with the Adjutant-General and requested his brother Bishops to discourage any priests from signing on as chaplains except through the Bishops.⁶⁰

Walter T. Steven in *In This Sign* wrote that the heads of “Anglican, United, Presbyterian, and Baptist churches were early brought into consultation about the appointment of a Principal Chaplain.” Stevens then included a letter from Matthews to George Anderson Wells, the Anglican Bishop of Cariboo, telling him the Protestant leaders had chosen him as their Principal Chaplain:

I have been authorized by the Minister of National Defense to ask if you would undertake the duty of organizing and administering the Protestant Chaplain Services at National Defence Headquarters, Ottawa. I may say that your acceptance of this appointment would meet with the approval of His Grace Archbishop Owen, Primate of all Canada, the Moderators of the United and Presbyterian

⁵⁸ Minutes, Presbyterian Committee on Chaplaincy Service, 2.

⁵⁹ Steven, 21.

⁶⁰ Steven, 23.

churches and the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec, all of whom have signified their intention of assisting and co-operating with you and the military authorities to the fullest extent, and are aware of the desire of the Roman Catholic church for a separate organization.”⁶¹

In the most recent history of Canadian Chaplains, *Peacetime Padres*, Albert Fowler agrees with Stevens’ and Matthews’ descriptions of Wells appointment:

The Inter-Church Advisory Committee was not long in recommending that Bishop George Anderson Wells should be appointed to organize the new Protestant Chaplain Service. It was an inspired choice. Indeed, some have said that the story of Bishop Wells is the story of the Chaplain Branch. Once assured of the fullest co-operation of the heads of the Protestant churches and the military, Wells rushed to Ottawa, reporting for duty on October 21, 1939.⁶²

Even Wells in his autobiography quotes a telegram from Matthews to Owen with the following message: “Heads of United, Presbyterian and United Churches all agree to appointment of Bishop Wells.”⁶³ The relationship between denominations was not unanimous, even though Stevens wrote: “from that first act of co-operation these churches never drew back”⁶⁴ Although the churches did communicate with one another throughout the war, Stevens’ description is far from accurate, frequent jealousy and mistrust characterized the relationship amongst churches.

⁶¹ Steven, 20-1.

⁶² Fowler, 16-7.

⁶³ Wells, 394.

⁶⁴ Steven, 20-1.

The 1930s had been tumultuous years for Canada's Protestant churches. Along with the military, politicians, and the public, the churches had watched the policies of appeasement crumble, and they had ridden the foreboding clouds of war into a national war to defeat Hitler. As Canada embraced war, the churches rallied to the cause, as part of the homefront and as the one responsible for providing religious apologetics for the conflict, to repudiate pacifism and call Canadians to take up arms as the lesser of two evils. The churches also mobilized their own army of chaplains without benefit of policy or procedure. Despite massive unpreparedness, misgivings, and frequent bickering amongst themselves, key individuals within Canada's churches provided the impetus for the chaplaincy service: an important facet of maintaining faith for religious-minded military personnel in their war against Hitler and Nazi Germany.

As fall 1939 turned into winter, the Protestant Chaplaincy Service began to function more smoothly and efficiently. Wells worked towards recruiting and appointing chaplains for the 1st Canadian Infantry Division, and setting up an establishment for Air Force and Navy chaplains. Initially, these chaplains served under the jurisdiction of the Principal Chaplain, Army, but on the 1st of January 1941 and August, 3rd, 1942⁶⁵, Navy chaplains and Air Force chaplains were incorporated as distinctive chaplaincy branches. These developments marked a maturing chaplaincy service. Yet, the work was only beginning. The real tests and almost insurmountable hurdles were still ahead. It remained for the chaplains to prove whether they would succeed or fail dismally in their positions during the Second World War.

⁶⁵ Waldo Smith, *The Navy Chaplain and His Parish* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1967), 194.

Chapter Two: Separating the Wheat from the Chaff

While the tremendous growth of Canada's military during the war was seen by historian J.L. Granastein as a miraculous accomplishment, the growth and success of the Chaplaincy Service was a miracle of even greater proportions.⁶⁶ The official chaplaincy service in the First World War was maintained until 1921. From then onward a few pastors served as voluntary chaplains in militia units, but their experience was as relevant to combat as the poorly executed militia exercises, and any professional training for chaplains was unknown at the time. The task to create a professional chaplaincy service without any official policy or procedure fell to George Anderson Wells. Wells possessed little more than the precedents of the chaplaincy service from the Great War and any remaining chaplains who experience it. But creating the military paperwork for the new chaplaincy service was only one hurdle. He faced a deeper problem, to ensure that as civilian priests and ministers traded robes for uniforms, that they possessed, or quickly acquired, the characteristics of leadership necessary to succeed as a chaplain.

This chapter will examine the three characteristics of leadership Wells believed were essential for chaplains to succeed: religious, natural, physical. These ideal characteristics were not present in all of the ministers who enlisted and were trained as chaplains. Despite Wells' attempts to attract recruits, and to create a military framework for their service, the Canadian Chaplain Service began on very shaky ground. For many potential chaplains, evidence of their ability to provide leadership in combat was not adequately tested or evident until they were sent overseas, and by then it was too late for

⁶⁶ J.L. Granatstein, *The Generals, The Canadian Army's Senior Commanders in the Second World War* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1993), 261,266-267.

those units who were given a poor chaplain. Furthermore, undermining the very foundation Wells was trying to establish, was his own prejudice. The chapter will also include an assessment of the prejudice of Wells as it affected enlisting blacks and religious officers in the Salvation Army and other denominations.

The chapter will have three sections. The first will include an examination of the clergy who enlisted as combatants and their reasons for doing so. The second section will examine the procedure required of clergy to become chaplains and a look at the denominations who were refused chaplaincy appointments. The third and final section will explain the demanding steps needed to establish navy and air force chaplaincies and an assessment of the initial training of chaplains.

Wells believed that chaplains should be chosen from only those who possessed certain personal qualities: they must be friendly, easy-going personality and the ability to foster relationships with their men. But there was more. Wells believed that the role of the chaplain was unique because it combined these important elements of leadership with a decisively spiritual element. According to Wells the three primary characteristics he desired in his chaplains were "religious", "natural" and "physical":

Religious- The dominating purpose of a chaplain's life is to provide for the spiritual needs of his fellows..
 .their chaplain's one aim is to help to build up a strong army, strong in the Lord and the power of His might.

Natural- The chaplain mingles freely with all ranks..
 .He is the friend and comrade to all and encourages all ranks to address him as "padre" or "chaplain".

Physical- Chaplains must be between the ages of 30 and 50 years ... be medically passed by a medical board as medically fit...and must be cheerful.⁶⁷

From these requirements, it is clear that Wells wanted chaplains who possessed a realistic understanding of the passion, diplomacy and discipline that clergy would be forced to exercise while in the military. He expected first-rate work from his chaplains; half-hearted efforts were unthinkable. Yet, throughout the war Wells received reports that some chaplains performed less than admirable work as religious leaders in uniform. Part of this problem may have originated at the very beginning. The Principal Chaplains lost a group of clergy in the early days of the war who may have become excellent chaplains, but instead they opted to join the active services.

Most clergy who enlisted volunteered as chaplains. For example, of all the United Church ministers who served in the war 26 served as Auxiliary Service Officers, 42 fought as combatants (two were killed in action), and 227 donned the uniform of the Chaplain Services (three United Church chaplains were killed or died on active service).⁶⁸ These figures are important. Considering the shortage of chaplains which became a dominant characteristic of the Chaplaincy Service, there existed a potential for 68 more United Church ministers to fill the ranks of the chaplains.⁶⁹ Furthermore, because many of those who enlisted in the active services had some type of previous military experience, it is highly probable that they may have been more likely to possess the necessary characteristics for the chaplaincy than a minister who had little interest in

⁶⁷ Wells, *The Fighting Bishop*, 320.

⁶⁸ United Church Yearbooks, NAC, RG 24

⁶⁹ United Church Yearbooks, NAC, RG 24

military matters prior to 1939. What is certain, however, is that where denominations, such as the United Church, failed to introduce any type of vetting of its clergy, Such vetting was not absent in the army.

Wells was an open and ardent advocate that only priests and ministers who possessed the best qualities of leadership should enlist as chaplains. In letters and speeches Wells urged church leaders and denominational war committees to “do everything possible to ensure that the best available clergy were released for active service.”⁷⁰ Throughout the Second World War Canada’s ministers and priests experienced a complex serious of pressures and influences which prompted them to enlist as chaplains.

To find pastors for the chaplaincy Wells urged church officials and military leaders to act as unofficial recruitment agents. Some might argue that this process represented a seriously organized and concerted recruiting drive, but in reality it was almost as haphazard as civilian initiatives. Anglican priest, H.D. Cleverdon, for instance, became a chaplain because his superior, Archbishop Derwyn Owen, Canada’s Anglican Primate, said there was a need for chaplains. In most cases these religious officials were motivated by the perceived necessity of raising the Church's image in both public and military settings, and not because particular ministers appeared to possess the necessary leadership gifts to succeed as chaplains.⁷¹ In the United Church, Great War chaplain, George Fallis, spoke at St. George's United Church in North Toronto. During Fallis' sermon he stated that there was a great need for chaplains. Those words caught the

⁷⁰ Wells, *The Fighting Bishop* (Toronto: Cardwell House, 1971), 438.

⁷¹ Riley, 147-148.

attention of the young assistant at St. Georges', Charles A. McLaren, who promptly enlisted in the chaplaincy.⁷²

Although Anglican minister John A. Livingstone stated he was "told to enlist," Protestant Church officials created no specific policy to induce ministers to enlist as chaplains. Protestant Church Officials could be stubborn, too, in discouraging and refusing the denominational endorsement to clergy situated in mission or church subsidized appointments. For instance, when war broke out D.H. Rayner was serving as a Presbyterian missionary in British Guyana:

I wanted to join the chaplaincy but I was told that you had to be 3 years in the Pastorate [in Canada] before consideration was made of your application for the chaplaincy...Finally in January 1943 I was accepted into the Chaplain Service.⁷³

The random, haphazard way priests and ministers enlisted in the chaplaincy underscores the failure of the denominational leaders to come together and institute a policy to ensure the best leaders were chosen as chaplains. Furthermore, although civilians and chaplains alike were required to complete the standard medical and psychological tests, a further test for chaplains assessing their ability to relate religious beliefs to the men, and their natural attributes of personality to form relationships would have assisted the denominational committees and Wells in his choices for the chaplaincy.

Cultural pressure was another reason to enlist in the military. It was a visible and invisible motivator in Canadian society during the Second World War. From the patriotic

⁷² Granatstein, *Broken Promises*, 321.

⁷³ Granatstein, *Broken Promises*, 350.

pomp and circumstance of marching bands and regimental traditions, to the relief of depression unemployment, and the peer pressure of joining up with friends, enlisting in Canada's fighting forces was accorded cultural status and appeal.⁷⁴ Ministers enlisted because of the peer pressure associated with family, friends and church acquaintances who were enlisting in a culture rallying for war. As United Church minister G.A. Meiklejohn remarked, "My brother-in-law, cousin, and Sunday School teacher were all enlisting, and one enlisted out of a feeling of helping them and the Canadian fellows."⁷⁵ United Church minister W. Stuart MacLeod enlisted because of those in his "generation who were paying the supreme sacrifice."⁷⁶

For many clergy following "God's Call" to provide pastoral care for the men in the military was paramount in their decision to enlist. Providing pastoral care was expressed in different ways, but it usually included one or both themes of humanitarianism and soteriology. Clergy who emphasized the humanitarian aspects of pastoral care specifically referred to helping the young men and women of the forces. As United Church minister, Noble Hatton explained: " I enlisted to shepherd the young men and women going to war."⁷⁷ Others agreed and spoke of the need to provide a "service" for the men and women in the service.⁷⁸

For some, religious motivations for enlisting included both the humanitarian need to help the boys and the spiritual necessity of caring for their souls. Anglican minister

⁷⁴ Robert L. Fraser, *Black Yesterdays: The Argylls' War* (Hamilton: Argyll Regimental Foundation, 1996), 9-19.

⁷⁵ Farley Mowat, *The Regiment* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973), 3.

⁷⁶ Mowat, *The Regiment*, 5.

⁷⁷ Mowat, *The Regiment*, 6.

⁷⁸ Minutes, CCS Conference of Senior Chaplains, RCAF, 24 February 1942." NAC, RG 24, File 76/57.

J.C. Daisley, was eloquent in expressing the dual themes of humanitarianism and soteriology.⁷⁹ Clearly, those clergy who believed that it was imperative that the physical and spiritual needs of Canada's fighting personnel be met, came closest to exemplifying the attributes of leadership — religious, natural, and physical — which Wells believed was essential to each chaplain. The degree to which ministers emphasized aspects of physical or spiritual over and above the other underscored the uniqueness and variety of ministry styles clergy brought to the chaplaincy.

Wells had no means of knowing whether the newly appointed chaplains possessed or lacked the qualities of leadership — religious, natural, and physical — they were seeking in their chaplains. The Chaplaincy Service was going to war with a tenuous foundation.

The reasons ministers enlisted as chaplains underscore several themes from the First World War which were repeated at the beginning of the Second World War. According to David Marshall, in *Secularizing the Faith*, when the Great War commenced the Church's post-millennial expectations of society were out of touch with people intent on profiting from the material benefits of an industrializing society.⁸⁰ Duff Crerar, in *Padres in No Man's Land*, contends that as the war progressed, only chaplains were able to bridge the gap between the churches and society and speak the everyday language of the foot soldier.⁸¹ At the beginning of the Second World War the Church was again out of touch with a society and world preparing for war. But, their shared reasons for enlistment

⁷⁹ Wells, 50.

⁸⁰ David Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith: Canadian Protestant Clergy and the Crisis of Belief, 1850-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 156-157.

⁸¹ Crerar, *Padre's in No Man's Land*, 164-168.

provided a basis for common understanding and connectedness between the chaplain and believers which was reminiscent of the experience of World War I chaplains. Whether or not chaplains were able to maintain that connectedness with the men at the front and their families back in Canada will be assessed to some degree in the next chapter.

Protestant clergy wrote to Ottawa anxious for a chaplaincy position. Baptist clergy were especially eager to begin chaplaincy work. Part of this eagerness may be explained by one of their most charismatic leaders, Baptist Pastor T.T. Shields. From his pulpit at Jarvis Street Baptist Church in Toronto, Shields, "spoke out more bluntly than any other Protestant leader for a maximum Canadian war effort" arguably, the most outspoken advocate of war. Regardless of their rationale, in their impatient enthusiasm to be appointed as chaplains, some Baptist pastors took it upon themselves to try to "force their way" into the chaplaincy through a barrage of letters to the Minister of National Defense. Responding on behalf of the Minister, Principal Chaplain Wells addressed the problem in a letter to H.H. Bingham (Chairman of the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec):

...there has been a continuous stream of letters from quite a few Baptist ministers whose names are not on your list and who are writing to the Minister himself. There have been more letters addressed to the Minister of National Defence from Baptist clergy than from all the other Denominations in Canada combined and some of them are very insistent and not a few any too polite...For example, one man has written 7 letters, he is over age and according

to our policy cannot receive an appointment. We have told him so over and over again, but he keeps on writing.⁸²

To provide structure and uniformity to the application procedure Wells set forth the criterion ministers were required to meet before being approved as chaplains. As stated in *Instruction For The Canadian Chaplain Service* appointments to the Service are made on the recommendation of the Principal Chaplains. No clergyman will be appointed without the approval and recommendation of the branch of the Church to which he belongs.

Qualifications: a) An applicant must be a duly accredited clergyman of the religious communion to which he belongs and must have served in the active ministry of that branch of the Church for at least three years, b) No chaplain will be permitted to serve overseas who is under 30 years or over 50 years of age, except those selected for Senior appointments, c) Every applicant is required before appointment to be passed by a Medical Board as medically fit for general military service.⁸³

These qualifications are surprising. Instructions states that the "personal work" of the chaplain will "be of the greatest possible value." The document notes further that "the life that the chaplain leads.. .will count most in the service." The role of a chaplain in Instructions appears contradictory. While it lifts up the personal work and life of the chaplain as most important, no personal characteristics, such as leadership potential and

⁸² Wells, 57.

⁸³ George Anderson Wells, *Instructions for The Canadian Chaplain Service* (Ottawa: J.O. Patenaude, King's Printer, 1939), 7-8.

the ability to form relationships with the men, are included in the list of qualifications. Furthermore, the absence of personal questions from the list of qualifications is curious considering the standard enlistment requirements for officers in the army. All those seeking commissions were required to complete form MFM 136 which required responses to ten criteria including: "character, common sense, sense of responsibility, military knowledge and application, qualities of leadership, personality, instructional ability, appearance and bearing, conduct, general comment."⁸⁴

The qualifications listed in *Instructions* are all the more surprising considering the desired characteristics of leadership — religious, natural, and physical — referred in Wells' letter at the onset of this chapter. In the letter, "religious" referred to faith and sobriety. Perhaps questions could have been asked of the applicant referring to his ability to relate the claims of the Gospel to the nominally-churched, and inquiry could have been made regarding issues of alcohol consumption. Second, where the section on "natural" addressed the ability of a chaplain to relate to his men, surely a question could have been posed to discern the personality type of the individual. Third in reference to "physical" the letter noted that overseas chaplains should be under forty-five "and preferably under forty", yet *Instructions* lists the maximum age for overseas service as fifty. If Wells had even alluded to some of the questions posed here he would have given themselves some basis for discerning the suitability of a priest or minister as a leader in the chaplaincy. It also seems likely that these qualifications were hastily drawn up given the circumstances.

⁸⁴ "Confidential Report — Army Form, M.F.M. 136,"

If a minister or priest thought he could meet the qualifications outlined in Instructions, he completed a denominational application form and mailed it to his denomination's chaplaincy committee. Across the denominations, these committees were anything but uniform and instead of assuring themselves that a candidate for the chaplaincy possessed sufficient leadership qualities, committees were all too frequently preoccupied with accusations of discrimination when applications were denied.

For Anglicans, the Council for Social Service (CFSS) coordinated all Anglican chaplaincy activities, and while permission of the Bishop was strongly encouraged, it was not required. Baptist pastors not belonging to the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec were required to secure the endorsement of the President or Moderator of their own particular denomination. Once that was achieved, their names were sent to the central Baptist war committee administered by the BCOQ for further approval. Baptist Pastors in the BCOQ only applied to the one committee. The Baptist War Service Committee (BCOQ-WSC) was responsible for overseeing all issues pertaining to the war, however, the Chaplain Service Committee (BCOQ-CSC) was organized to deal exclusively with chaplaincy matters. The United Church adopted a two-tier system similar to the one used by Canadian Baptists. Because the majority of decisions concerning chaplaincy were decided by the Committee on Chaplaincy (UC-COC), the War Service Committee (UC-WSC) — responsible for overseeing all of the United Church's efforts in the war — almost always gave automatic approval to the decisions of its sub-committee.

In addition to the bureaucratic nightmare of organizing themselves, war service committees and chaplain service committees faced criticism from within their own

denomination. Pastor A.E. Jastner, for instance, accused the BCOQ-CSC of discrimination. Jastner secured a letter of endorsement from his denomination [the Ontario Baptist Association, part of the North American Baptist Convention (German)] and applied for a chaplaincy position with the BCOQ-CSC. Eventually, he received word from Dr. Bingham that his application had been approved and passed on to the chaplaincy officials in Ottawa. However, when four other Baptist clergy were appointed as chaplains ahead of him, Jastner wrote to Dr. Bingham's associate George Edwards (Secretary of the BCOQ-CSC) and stated accusingly, "I have a very serious question to ask you Mr. Edwards: Why are you people of the Ontario and Quebec Baptist Convention carrying on a programme of discrimination against us?"⁸⁵ Ironically, if the charge of discrimination was to have been laid it should have been directed against the Principal Protestant Chaplain's Office and not against the BCOQ-CSC. From correspondence between Dr. Bingham and George Edwards, apparently, A.E. Jastner's name had been held back by the Principal Protestant Chaplain's Office because of "unspecified concerns." Perhaps his German ancestry and his ordination in the North American German Baptist Church made Wells reluctant to hire him.⁸⁶ Whatever Wells' immediate reservations, however, Jastner was given a chaplaincy position a few months after the incident.⁸⁷

Clergy, who did not meet the minimum requirements of three years in a pastorate and the minimum age of thirty, pursued numerous activities in the hopes of future enlistment as a chaplain. Robert Nicholson, for instance, began Officer' training at

⁸⁵ "Correspondence," G. Edwards to H.H. Bingham, 27 September 1941

⁸⁶ "Correspondence," H.H. Bingham to George Edwards, 23 October 1941

⁸⁷ *Yearbook of The BCOQ 1941-1942*, 64.

McMaster University, and Max De Wolfe, although too young for the chaplaincy, volunteered as a civilian worker in the YMCA War Services until he met the age qualification for chaplaincy.⁸⁸ Both men later served as Baptist chaplains in World War. This eagerness to serve within the chaplaincy shows an intersection between faith and patriotism. These young men felt their vocation was to serve God as a minister, while also serving their fellow countrymen within combat.

As the war progressed the numbers of available chaplains declined. The need for more chaplains prompted Wells to relax some of the rules. With more men within the military, there was a greater need for chaplains. United Church minister R.D. MacDonald, for instance, was accepted into the chaplaincy even though he had only served two years in ministry. Anglican priest, L.G. Philips was approved by Wells for chaplaincy work, even though he had only one year in the pastorate. When he was approved into the chaplaincy, Presbyterian minister, J.M. Anderson had only been ordained for a year, and his age of twenty-nine was below the minimum required.⁸⁹ Meanwhile, the rules regarding the physical examinations were stringently enforced. Many priests who were considered acceptable candidates for the chaplaincy were excluded because they failed to meet the physical requirements of the medical examination, not once but repeatedly.

Once a minister or priest had secured the approval of his Bishop or denominational chaplaincy committee, his name was forwarded to the Principal Chaplain's Office in Ottawa for final approval. The Principal Chaplains Office had the

⁸⁸ Wells, 69.

⁸⁹ Wells, 23

right to refuse any name he deemed unworthy of becoming a chaplain. For the most part, the Principal Chaplain's Office gave blanket approval to all the names approved at the denominational level. Wells, however, seemed very reluctant to approve chaplains from denominations other than the "Big Four." In fact, the tensions which emerged speak of his discrimination and prejudice, and these actions were hypocritical. While Wells called for ministers and priests who exhibited characteristics of leadership to enlist as chaplains, he refused entry into the Chaplaincy Service on the basis of polity and color.

In his annual report of 1942 to the Minister of National Defense, Wells spoke proudly of the "care" he had taken to "maintain the denominational balance" in appointing ministers to the Chaplaincy Service:

Care has been taken when making appointments to maintain the denominational balance in each District across Canada. Each of the main denominations has been given representation in the proportion of one chaplain per 1,000 personnel as shown in the religious census which is now taken every three months. In order to give representation to some of the smaller denominations it has been the policy to group a number of them together and to select for appointment a clergyman who could be considered, in some measure at least, as representative of the group.

Denominations represented so far are:

Church of England 124

United Church 81

Presbyterian 41

Baptist 29

Lutheran 6

Ukrainian Greek Orthodox 1

Standard Church of Christ 1
 Salvation Army 1
 Pentecostal Assemblies and other 2
 Canadian Jewish Congress 2
 Total 288

It is expected that in the near future a chaplain will be selected from The Canadian Conference Of The Evangelical Church. It is possible that other denominational groups may be given representation as the members justify it and as qualified men are available.⁹⁰

In his history of the Protestant chaplains in the Second World War, *In this Sign Conquer*, Major Walter Steven, too, praises Wells for the consistency he showed "in his endeavor to be generous to the other arms of the Protestant faith."⁹¹ Yet, Wells was neither consistent nor generous in his treatment of appointing chaplains from The Salvation Army. In July 1938, Salvation Army Major Alfred Steele presented a brief to the Minister of National Defense outlining a proposal by The Salvation Army to provide Auxiliary Services to service personnel. The brief was accepted and by the summer of 1939, "nine Salvation Army officers were sent to military camps throughout Canada to gain experience and to familiarize the troops with the role of Auxiliary Services."⁹² Then in October 1939, Steele was made a military chaplain in the Chaplaincy Service. Steele resigned after two months in order to coordinate the Salvation Army's Auxiliary Services; however, he served a second term as a chaplain between March and December 1941.⁹³ In

⁹⁰ Wells, 79.

⁹¹ Steven, 23

⁹² R.G. Moyles, *The Blood and Fire in Canada: A History of the Salvation Army in the Dominion, 1882-1976* (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates Limited, 1977), 134.

⁹³ "Correspondence," Wells to Major-General B.W. Browne, Adjutant-General: 26 February 1942

December 1941, the General Secretary for The Salvation Army in Canada, Colonel George Peacock, wrote the Adjutant-General, Major-General B.W. Browne, asking that Salvation Army Major Morgan Flannigan be appointed in Steele's place.⁹⁴ When the letter was passed to Wells for comment, he replied with an emphatic "no". Wells stated, without explanation, that "Salvation Army officers are not eligible for appointment" and that Steele's appointment in March 1941 was "a special arrangement", an arrangement in which Wells refused to classify him as chaplain from the Salvation Army. Instead, Steele's denominational affiliation was listed as "Other Denominations".⁹⁵

Not content with being snubbed by Wells, Peacock and Salvation Army officer Colonel Bunton arranged an interview with Wells in his Ottawa office. Peacock asked, "why Salvation Army officers had not been appointed to the Canadian Chaplain Service in the same way as clergymen of the main Protestant Denominations"? Wells claimed that The Salvation Army could not be considered a religious denomination in the ordinary sense of the word and that Salvation Army officers were not ordained ministers of the Christian Church in the regular sense of that term.⁹⁶ Wells explained further that appointments were usually based on the religious census of each Military District and "it was difficult to find any unit or area where there were sufficient Salvation Army men to justify the appointment of a chaplain."⁹⁷

⁹⁴ "Correspondence," George W. Peacock to Major-General B.W. Browne, Adjutant-General: 12 February 1942

⁹⁵ Steven, 181.

⁹⁶ It is safe to say that Wells favored Mainline Protestant denominations, such as the Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran and United Churches. While tension existed between himself and less established denominations, such as the Pentecostal Assemblies and the Salvation Army.

⁹⁷ "Correspondence," Wells to Major-General B.W. Browne, Adjutant-General: 26 February 1942

Race relations influenced the appointment of a black Canadian as chaplain. On 30 December 1942 the Rev. C.A. Stewart, minister of the Afro Community Church of Canada, and A.W. Roebuck, MP, wrote J.L. Ralston, the Minister of National Defense, requesting that a black chaplain be appointed for black soldiers. Ralston passed the request on to the Adjutant-General, who in turn passed it on to the Deputy Adjutant-General who asked the Principal Chaplains for their comment on the matter.⁹⁸ Wells replied on 7 January 1943:

1. I have no knowledge of the number of negro soldiers in the army; but, from personal observation as I have visited our troops in Canada and overseas, I would say that the number is very small indeed and would certainly not justify the appointment of a negro chaplain.

2. I believe that the greatest number of negroes in Canada is settled in Nova Scotia. It might be worthwhile to have a report from M.D. 6 giving the number of negroes and their denomination. We shall then be able to decide what can be done if it is thought necessary that anything should be done.⁹⁹

The failure to appoint a black chaplain may be initially regarded as a matter of inadequate establishment levels or as a moral stand against segregation, however, efforts to determine the exact numbers of black soldiers places the motives of the principal chaplains and the military in doubt. Attempts by the Adjutant-General's Office to ascertain the number of black soldiers in the army were feeble. A request was made to the

⁹⁸ J.L. Ralston to H.F.G. Letson [Adjutant-General], 4 January 1943; "CCS (P), Appointment of Negro Chaplains"

⁹⁹ Wells to A.E. Nash, 6 January 1943; "CCS (P), Appointment of Negro Chaplains".

Records Department who replied that "information from which to compile figures of negro enlistments is not available."¹⁰⁰ With this response, the Adjutant-General had several options at his disposal. He could have requested the C.O. of each Military District to submit lists of black soldiers. Or he could at least have requested the number of black soldiers in the greater Halifax area, as Wells suggested. But no investigation of the number of black soldiers in MD 6 was ever made.¹⁰¹

The issue was left untouched until 21 September 1943 when one of the MP's for Halifax, Gordon B. Isnor, wrote Wells requesting he consider appointing a black chaplain.¹⁰² Apparently, this was not Isnor's first inquiry to Wells, as noted in Wells' response:

I remember in the early days of the War writing quite a long letter to you giving you the basis of appointment of chaplains.. .At that time I pointed out that the basis of appointment is one chaplain for every 1,000 personnel in the army. That means that we would have to have at least 1,000 negro soldiers in the army before we would be justified in appointing any chaplain.

It is hard to believe that between all of the denominations there would not collectively be 1000 black troops, but it is uncertain if Wells made an attempt to investigate the matter or to ask that such an investigation be conducted.¹⁰³ Wells decision against appointing a

¹⁰⁰ Wells to A.E. Nash, 6 January 1943; "CCS (P), Appointment of Negro Chaplains".

¹⁰¹ The most recent Canadian census available to the public is from 1921. The 1931 census will be released publicly in 2023, and the 1941 census will be released in 2033. This information will provide insight into the demographic breakdown of Canada along religious and racial lines.

¹⁰² "CCS (P), Appointment of Negro Chaplains".

¹⁰³ While this thesis mentions black chaplains, no mention of other minority chaplains was found within the primary material used. If given the time, research into Asian-Canadians and Native peoples and their relations with the Chaplaincy Service would have been attempted.

black chaplain was also based on Wells own cultural prejudices. In the same letter to Isnor he remarked:

The question of having a negro chaplain for white personnel is an open one, of course, but in my judgment it would be a great mistake, and I am not prepared to recommend any such appointment. It is true that there are coloured chaplains in the United States army, but that is because there are whole regiments of coloured troops without any white personnel. I am sure you will see how difficult this matter is. No matter how friendly we may be to the coloured folk, and I am personally very friendly disposed toward them, I am sure you will agree with me that it would be very unwise to create a situation in order to please a very small group which would create dissatisfaction [sic] in a very large number.¹⁰⁴

Wells was not alone in his belief that enlisting a black chaplain would create a situation if he were to oversee the ministrations of white soldiers. Isnor agreed in a letter of 1 December: "it was never my intent that there should be an intermingling of a black chaplain and white soldiers."¹⁰⁵ Wells and Isnor both argue that white soldiers could not be served adequately by a black chaplain. It would seem that for a chaplain to provide the best service possible to his men, they must share the same religious and racial background.

¹⁰⁴ "Correspondence," Wells to G.B. Isnor, 24 September 1943; "CCS (P), Appointment of Negro Chaplains", NAC, RG 24

¹⁰⁵ "Correspondence," G.B. Isnor to M.H. Hepburn, 1 December 1943; "CCS (P), Appointment of Negro Chaplains", NAC, RG 24

Much of the prejudice against appointing a black chaplain originated in the military policy and cultural philosophy of the times. Although the army had accepted black troops from the beginning of the war, black men were refused enlistment in the RCAF and the RCN until 1943.¹⁰⁶ Even in the army, however, the failure to appoint a black chaplain was based on the racial prejudices of Wells and senior military officials rather than on fact. For instance, to determine the exact number of black troops in the army, General H.F.G. Letson, Adjutant-General could have requested an informal census be conducted. He even could have made such a request in MD 6 around Halifax, which was done in March 1944.¹⁰⁷

Wells could have done more. A man with his influence could have easily suggested that a part-time chaplain be appointed, but instead, he said nothing. Furthermore, a black chaplain, W. A. White, served the black construction battalion during the First World War with distinction.¹⁰⁸ Concerning White's chaplaincy, Wells, again, was silent. One would think that White's chaplaincy should have created some sort of precedence for appointing even a part-time chaplain in the next war. Wells' war diary and correspondence is, again, silent on the issue.

The rigorous responsibility of securing priests and ministers for the chaplaincy was intensified by the daunting task of creating a chaplaincy service which reflected the three branches of the military or served their needs. Wells was appointed as Principal Chaplain (PC) and authorized to appoint army chaplains "to each military district on a

¹⁰⁶ Granatstein, *A Nation Forged in Fire*, 109.

¹⁰⁷ "Correspondence," H.F.G. Letson to J.L. Ralston, 14 March 1944, "CCS (P), Appointment of Negro Chaplains".

¹⁰⁸ Granatstein, *A Nation Forged in Fire*, 68.

basis of one Protestant Chaplain for each 1000 Protestants.” The Draft General Order which established the home war establishment for the Canadian Chaplain Service was effective 15 October 1939, and also included provision for a clerk at NDHQ [National Defense Headquarters] for Wells, and one clerk for each military district.¹⁰⁹

After selecting which men were to become chaplains, the problem of how to train them effectively was to be solved. Between 1939 and 1943 the only training provided to chaplains was the 12 page booklet, *Instruction for the Canadian Chaplain Service*. Chaplains lamented the absence of formal training, and at a Conference of Roman Catholic army and navy chaplains, on 11 February 1942 considerable attention was directed to the need for training chaplains in military basics:

A question that evoked considerable discussion was the necessity of a training school for chaplains where they could receive instruction in military law, map reading, gas drill, motorcycle riding, etc., and at the same time familiarize themselves with the customs and practices of the different branches of the service. It was not considered practical that the chaplains already appointed should be obliged to attend a training school of this kind, but it was suggested that senior chaplains might arrange for a series of lectures in these subjects for the chaplains under their jurisdiction without interfering to any great degree with their work.¹¹⁰

Air Force chaplains agreed with their army and navy colleagues, and at an RCAF Conference on 24 February 1942, Flight-Lieutenant E.C. McCullagh presented a paper,

¹⁰⁹ CCS, Proposed New Units, CASF, Chaplains NAC 24

¹¹⁰ Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments*, 87

"The Training of Chaplains" which stated "all chaplains needed to attend intensive training in military procedure at such places as the School of Administration at Trenton, or the course at No. 1 "M" Depot."¹¹¹ Protestant air force and army chaplains suggested training in line with the military's instruction for other officers:

Major Hamilton spoke in favour of sending new chaplains to the Officers' Training Centre's four week course. The PC stated that he would try to get authority to send new chaplains to Gordon Head, or Brockville.¹¹²

Wells concurred with the Conferences suggestions and on 17 June 1943 newly enlisted army chaplains were required to attend a four week course located in Brockville, Ontario, with doctors, dentists, and others whose role in the military was not combat related. This course oriented chaplains to military law, practice and protocol, and, unlike similar instruction during the first four years of the war, it now included a series of lectures from an experienced chaplain.¹¹³

Days of training consisted of a combination of drills, marches, lectures, tests and exams, and sporting events. Days ranged from being filled with boredom or immense work. Some days were spent in a whirlwind of activity ranging from classes, military drill and inspections to evening lectures and sporting events.¹¹⁴ On other days, little was accomplished and as one chaplain wrote, "I spent a good part of the afternoon

¹¹¹ Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments*, 89.

¹¹² Wells, 72.

¹¹³ Wells, 36.

¹¹⁴ Barry D. Rowland, *The Padre* (New York: Amethyst, 1951), 7.

sleeping."¹¹⁵ This same chaplain also received instruction and examination in "written drill; Air Force Law; and Leadership and in Morale."¹¹⁶

For chaplains already overseas by May 1943 they either received no training or some informal instruction with the doctors, dentists and paymasters at the Canadian Army Service Corps Depot in Aldershot, England.¹¹⁷ Meanwhile, back in Canada, the Chaplaincy Service endorsed the officer's training chaplains received, yet it quickly became apparent that the best instruction for a chaplain still came from another chaplain. While instruction in military code and practice was of immense importance, officer training did little to recognize or develop the leadership skills unique to chaplains. In this way officer training failed. Officer training also failed to educate chaplains on the most basic of medical procedures which were of such importance in battle when chaplains were working at regimental aid posts.

The creation and development of the Protestant Chaplaincy Service was a difficult process. Without an official, functioning service, lacking trained chaplains, and in the absence of any clear direction, the chaplaincy service in the Second World War had to be created from essentially nothing. Wells overcame significant hurdles and deserves credit for the eventual success of Service, but his failure to test for the desired leadership characteristics of potential chaplains added to the tenuous foundation of organization.

¹¹⁵ Steven, 40.

¹¹⁶ Smith, *Tempest*, 23.

¹¹⁷ Grant, 211.

Chapter Three- Through the Valley of Death

In the midst of a fierce offensive on the German line in Normandy, Pastor Waldo Smith, a chaplain attached 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade, was making his rounds to his soldiers along the front line. During this trip, Pastor Smith surprised two soldiers, each holding a machine gun in one hand and a small bible in the other, reciting their prayers. One of the men turned to Smith and said, “Here, we don’t forget to say all our prayers.”¹¹⁸

While such a positive interaction would have likely lifted the spirits of Pastor Smith, the Canadian chaplain was not immune to or exempt from the negative aspects of war. One could argue that they experienced the very worst war had to offer. They were tested in all the same ways as their men, yet they had to find ways of staying positive in the face of overwhelming adversity. Given their vocation, chaplains had the responsibility of being a glimmer of light in a very dark situation. Daily, chaplains found themselves tested both physically and spiritually by situations that were violent and unforgiving. Although not combatant soldiers in a conventional sense, they nevertheless endured as much as any soldier on the front.

Chaplains have at times been portrayed as cowardly non-combatants who hid behind the lines in relative safety while their men suffered on the battlefield; encouraging others to do the dirty deeds of war, while remaining untouched by the horrors of war

¹¹⁸ Waldo Smith, *What time the Tempest: An Army Chaplain’s Story* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1953), 20.

themselves. In "'Where's the Padre?' Canadian Memory and the Great War Chaplains", Duff Crerar demonstrates how chaplains were oftentimes remembered by the soldiers they served in a very negative fashion. Described as incompetents and cowards, veterans often used the forum of their post-war memoirs to vent accumulated frustration with their chaplains.¹¹⁹ Rightly so, Crerar argues that the evidence we have of chaplain exploits during war show these assertions to be inaccurate. These memories, whether a form of cathartic release or some other phenomenon; do not correctly depict the struggles and actions of the Canadian chaplain. This chapter will consist of three sections: first an examination of the tension between chaplains and Canadian officers; second, an examination of the pastoral role of chaplains as the spiritual leaders of their men; and third, an examination of the physicality of the chaplains' role on the front and their experience in combat.

In the Second World War the men of the Canadian Chaplain Service were the only military officials responsible to "seek the spiritual and moral welfare of the men...by maintaining a high morale among them."¹²⁰ Meeting the needs of the men's "spiritual and moral welfare" was an all-encompassing role. Responding to the events of battle, chaplains tried to provide for the men the means of grace before battle, a friend while they bled, and the presence of God in the face of death.

To accomplish this role chaplains used a unique approach: their physical presence, their mental ability to provide emotional stability, and their faith and training to serve as spiritual representatives and leaders. The chaplain's approach was not rigid and

¹¹⁹ Crerar, "'Where's the Padre?', 141-154.

¹²⁰ Wells, *Instructions for The Canadian Chaplain Service* (Ottawa: J.O. Patenaude, King's Printer, 1939), 7-8.

these aspects frequently overlapped. It was also contingent upon the chaplain's own individual abilities and his efforts to develop bonds of trust, camaraderie and relationship with his men. Furthermore, because no two chaplains were alike, some failed while others succeeded beyond expectation. In short, the chaplains role improved the faith of believers in the ranks and helped them overcome the realities of battle and to some extent aided in their military success.

In the Second World War, 368,263 Canadians were sent overseas to fight.¹²¹ Many followed in the footsteps of relatives who fought in the Great War, and trained in the open plains and hedgerows of southern England, as well as the rocky hills of Scotland. Then they set a new course away from the fields of Flanders and, after the disaster at Dieppe¹²², made war in the dusty hills of Sicily and the olive groves of Italy. The battle continued with the amphibious assault in Normandy, repeated and costly attacks for victory at Caen, and the inglorious task of clearing the channel ports while others streamed towards the bigger prize of the Siegfried line and Berlin. Meanwhile, Canadians continued fighting through the Dutch lowlands, and proceeded to the thick woods of Germany

From the fall of 1939 until 1944, most Canadian soldiers in Britain prepared for battle. Their initial expectations of engaging the enemy, however, were impeded at every turn. In April 1940, the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry and the Edmonton Regiment prepared to embark from Scotland to attack the forts guarding the port of

¹²¹ C.P. Stacey, *Six Years of War: The Army in Canada, Britain and the Pacific* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1955), 191.

¹²² The Dieppe Raid was a devastating setback for the Allies. Of the 4,963 Canadians who embarked from England for the operation, only 2,210 returned, and many of them were wounded. Casualties totaled 3,367, including 916 dead and 1,946 prisoners of war.

Trondheim, Norway, but, before the ships were loaded, the raid was cancelled.¹²³ On 20 May 1940, Major-General Andy McNaughton made a reconnaissance tour of Dunkirk in anticipation of Canadian soldiers assisting the evacuation of Dunkirk, but such plans were also cancelled.¹²⁴ Then on 12 and 13 June 1940, the 1st Infantry Brigade, and the 1st Field Regiment, Royal Canadian Artillery landed in France. Their tenure in France was limited to a few days before they turned back and sailed for England.

While the Canadian military's external enemy was obvious, internally tension and infighting between chaplains and the military officers within their assigned units was sometimes an unfortunate reality. Between the 19th of August and 7th of September 1941, Canadians took part in a raid on Spitzbergen, Norway.¹²⁵ Captain F.A. Smith was appointed Canadian chaplain to the raiding party. Smith spoke glowingly of the experience; however, it is clear from his report that his role was regarded with indifference, disrespect, or directly undermined. Despite these slights, Smith worked diligently to build relationships between himself and the men. During the eight day journey each way for Smith, "considerable time was spent visiting the men in their quarters, as well as those in the ship's hospital and punishment cells."¹²⁶ The senior officers, however, did not respect the chaplain's duties and Smith had to cut his visits with the men short because he was ordered to serve a regular rotation with the other officers conducting "look out duty on the bridge."¹²⁷ To further obstruct Smith's role as

¹²³ Stacey, *Arms, Men and Government*, 109.

¹²⁴ Stacey, *The Half-Million*, 5-7, 10.

¹²⁵ Titled Operation *Gauntlet*, the purpose of this raid was to seize Spitzbergen with the intention of liberating the Norwegians and Russians held captive, destroy German weather stations, and the elimination of German coal stocks on the island.

¹²⁶ H/Lt.-Col. W.T.R. Flemington, "Report: APC (P), September 1941," NAC, RG 24

¹²⁷ H/Lt.-Col. W.T.R. Flemington, "Report: APC (P), September 1941," NAC, RG 24

chaplain, once the expedition reached their objective, the mining settlement of Barentsberg, Smith was ordered to “accept certain duties apart from his own work,” including supervisory tasks and menial labor.¹²⁸ Certainly chaplains could choose to help where needed, but serving a regular bridge rotation with the other officers and being reduced to menial labor was much different from an occasional variation from the chaplain’s regular tasks. It was also a clear violation of the chaplain’s role as established by Wells to “seek the spiritual and moral welfare of the men...by maintaining a high morale among [them].”¹²⁹

The commanding officer displayed little respect for Smith as a spiritual leader, particularly in relation to worship. According to Wells, “a chaplain is expected to hold parade services every Sunday morning for the troops in his charge...and notification of such service should be published in Unit or Brigade Orders.”¹³⁰ On Sunday 24 August, Smith arranged for voluntary church parade but no effort was made by the commanding officers to facilitate worship, in fact, there was “much activity aboard moving stores in preparation for landing.... consequently few men were free to attend the voluntary services.”¹³¹ When church parades conflict with key elements of military planning, such as “preparation for landing” naturally the church parade should be cancelled or made voluntary if possible. Yet, all too frequently, when such activities did not occupy soldiers on Sunday mornings, commanding officers could become indifferent to church parades. For example, on Sunday August 31st Smith led a volunteer church parade in the center of Barentsburg, Svalbard. The service was not published in any orders, there were no

¹²⁸ H/Lt.-Col. W.T.R. Flemington, "Report: APC (P), September 1941," NAC, RG 24

¹²⁹ Wells, *Instructions*, 7-8.

¹³⁰ Wells, *Instructions*, 7-8.

¹³¹ H/Lt.-Col. W.T.R. Flemington, "Report: APC (P), September 1941," NAC, RG 24

conflicting duties, and only a handful of men attended. Smith was disappointed, but to try to be positive he emphasized the geography and the historical significance of the service, rather than the limited number of worshipers: “the surrounding peaks formed a vast natural cathedral, this was possibly the most northerly Christian service held by English speaking people.”¹³² A further act of spiritual indifference by the men finally broke Smith’s optimistic attitude. On the return trip Smith reported a brisk demand for Bibles. He suggests, however, that the enthusiasm for Bibles was probably motivated from the embossed inscription “Spitzbergen 1941” and, thus, its value as a souvenir, rather than any religious importance.

As a fitting conclusion to an expedition where Smith was stymied in his physical, mental and spiritual role as chaplain, his very legitimacy was brought into question:

In the Ship’s company was a representative of the Russian Embassy in London, a young man of refinement and culture. On several occasions he engaged the Chaplain in conversation. Later he remarked to the Russian interpreter - “That Canadian Chaplain is the first Christian clergyman I have ever spoken to in my life, he is not a police spy, is he?”¹³³

Considering the restrictive nature of communist society in the 1940s, the accusation of the Russian representative was not unusual. The Soviet Union had been actively suppressing religion within its borders, it would make sense that a Russian individual

¹³² H/Lt.-Col. W.T.R. Flemington, "Report: APC (P), September 1941," NAC, RG 24

¹³³ H/Lt.-Col. W.T.R. Flemington, "Report: APC (P), September 1941," NAC, RG 24

would view a clergyman with suspicion. But, there is a touch of dramatic irony to his words. It is a fitting coincidence that on an expedition where the chaplain's role was ignored and demeaned, Smith's very identity as a chaplain was questioned.

Smith's report and experience in the Spitzbergen raid was a stark pronouncement regarding the realistic beliefs and attitudes of many soldiers and officers in relation to the Chaplaincy service the chaplains' role was not automatically acknowledged; they would have to fight their way and earn the trust and acceptance of the men. Such a struggle would test the physical stamina, mental creativity, and spiritual depth of the chaplains, yet, if they were willing to persevere, their influence on religious-minded men would be significant.¹³⁴

Smith was not alone in his experience, as other officers were not above petty attempts to disrupt the work of chaplains. Some COs cancelled Padre's Hour frequently, with or without advanced warning to the chaplain.¹³⁵ In some instances, Padre's Hour was "treated with indifference, which in its practical results, is the equivalence of hostility."¹³⁶ On other occasions, Padre's Hour coincided perfectly with unscheduled but mandatory military exercises.¹³⁷ Even when Padre's Hour could take place, the chaplain had a difficult time obtaining a room large enough to welcome more than a few soldiers.

¹³⁴ In my limited research, no evidence was found of chaplains interacting with men who were explicitly atheist. It would be interesting to see how these men viewed chaplains and how chaplains influenced their time on the front.

¹³⁵ Padre's Hour was a time designated for chaplains to be with their men. It will be discussed more fully later in the chapter.

¹³⁶ Rowland, 34.

¹³⁷ Rowland, 50

Some officers refused chaplains access to a vehicle, even though some regiments were scattered over long distances, forcing chaplains to carpool together.¹³⁸

Throughout the conflict there was still confusion and exasperation on behalf of officers when it came to chaplains. Lawrence Wilmot witnessed firsthand the disrespect chaplains received at the hands of frustrated officers. Wilmot recorded that his first commanding officer did not like chaplains because he wanted his men free to experience every pleasure. The only thing chaplains were useful for, in his estimation, was burial services.¹³⁹ Wilmot had other early run ins with the CO, including one that he considered humorous in retrospect:

While the artillery major was hearing Landry's statement at BTN. HQ, the CO. accosted me and accused me of trying to convert the Indians - of the Maretta regiment who were camped within our area. When he declared that he was going to report me to the Divisional Commander, I suggested that, if I were he, I would check the report carefully, for I was convinced someone had been pulling his leg as a bit of a joke. He took the hint and I heard nothing further about the situation, except that the officers who learned of the exchange, dubbed me "Wilmot

¹³⁸ Rowland, 51

¹³⁹ Laurence F. Wilmot, *Through the Hitler Line: Memoirs of an Infantry Chaplain* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2003), 18.

of the Indians" at such times as they wished to embarrass the CO. at Officers parties.¹⁴⁰

Wilmot experienced conflict not only with the CO, but also with the local dental officer. When he went to have a tooth pulled, "The dental officer, fairly gushing sentimentality, declared that he was too busy attending the needs of these glorious lads who had been risking their lives for the rest of us to attend to the needs of a chaplain, who could come anytime to have his needs attended to."¹⁴¹ Although these moments of tension may have been trivial in the long run, they are still decent evidence that some officers did not know exactly what to do with chaplains and vice-versa. This had the potential to lead to moments of great frustration for chaplains.

In many ways the chaplain was seen as an unofficial officer. While they held an honorary rank and were not part of any official military hierarchy, they frequently had to put up with men venting their frustrations to them in discussion groups and more private venues. There they voiced self-pity and anger that they would not normally voice to regular officers.¹⁴² Requests for compassionate leave, although legitimate, were also a source of stress for the chaplain as he would have to liaise between the troops and the officers.

Chaplains had to keep their men's spiritual health in good shape while simultaneously keeping their own spiritual house in order. The chaplain's status as a non-combatant would also present him with an internal struggle that was a further cause of

¹⁴⁰ Wilmot, 20.

¹⁴¹ Wilmot, 33.

¹⁴² R. O. Wilkes, *God's Dodger: The Story of a Front-Line Chaplain, 1905-1945* (Sidney, British Columbia: Elysium Publishing Company, 1973), 21.

strain. Joanna Bourke identifies this struggle in her book *An Intimate History of Killing*; chaplains often had a difficult time harmonizing the tenets of love and peace that lay at the heart of the New Testament with encouragement to kill the enemy. Some chaplains could not make the reconciliation and became outspoken pacifists either during or after the war. When they were able to reconcile the matter however (identifying the Great War as a "crusade" and the Second World War as a "just war"), however, they could develop a "bloodlust" and intensely spur their men on in their gruesome duty.¹⁴³

For some chaplains the desire to take up arms and become an active combatant was the proper way to work out one's faith, particularly after many denominations began painting their struggle and the killing of the enemy as endorsed by Christ. According to some theologians, the sword had been "the chosen instrument" in Christ's time; in the early twentieth century it was the bayonet, and to kill was not necessarily to sin.¹⁴⁴ Although the submission to "bloodlust" may not have been the driving force behind every clergyman who enlisted, there are examples of Canadian clergy enlisting as combatants. As an active combatant a clergyman could have the unrestricted access to the men at the front he desired. For those who did not take up arms, however, there would be constant struggles with the sometimes perceived impotency and contradictory nature of their position.

Chaplains such as Rusty Wilkes were not spared these pressures, but he entered the chaplaincy with a strong sense of the justice of the war against fascism. He became fond of teaching spiritual warfare lessons on the "armour of God" and using the

¹⁴³ Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare*, (London: Granta Books, 1999), 268-70.

¹⁴⁴ Bourke, 275.

illustration of the David within his men facing a monstrous Goliath of an enemy, signifying God fighting on their side.¹⁴⁵ While these expressions may not have been to the extreme of some chaplains, one can still see how Canadian chaplains fought to reconcile their faith to war and struggled with combative impulses.

Perhaps the struggle with "bloodlust" and other issues of harmonizing Christianity with warfare best falls into a final area of adversity and trial experienced by Canadian chaplains; the hardship they encountered on a spiritual level. In *Religion in the Ranks*, Joanne Rennick argues that throughout history there has been an important link between religion and faith in the military.¹⁴⁶ The Canadian chaplain provided an important spiritual factor in maintain faith. While they experienced as much hardship as any soldier, their perseverance in the trying times provided much needed strength to the men around them. Indeed this was one of the primary purposes that they were brought to war. The Canadian chaplain would have a trying time, however, attempting to deliver messages of hope, joy, peace and love against the backdrop of such expansive and violent conflict.

While there is evidence that Canadian chaplains, the poet F.G. Scott possibly being the most well-known example, could reconcile the ideals of their faith with the war going on around them, the evidence illustrates that it was a real spiritual struggle. How could one maintain a spotless conscience in endorsing the slaughter of a demonic enemy when provided with examples of that same enemy being a brother in the faith? From youth, Pastor Wilmot had been convinced of God's calling for him to bring His message of peace and love to humanity. Understandably, he wondered how those engaged in total

¹⁴⁵ Wilkes, 36, 39.

¹⁴⁶ Joanne Rennick, *Religion in the Ranks: Belief and Religious Experience in the Canadian Forces* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2011), 3.

war would receive such a message.¹⁴⁷ Evidently it was a message that needed constant reinforcement, as Wilmot records his insistence to the men of God being present even in the ordeals they were going through. He would later parallel the sacrifices of his time being of a sort with early Christian Roman martyrs.¹⁴⁸ For Christians, persecution is viewed as a testing situation for one's faith. That Wilmot would juxtapose this dark period for the Christian faith with the struggle of the Christian warrior in the Second World War is evidence of the fact that wartime experience was a spiritually trying time for the Canadian chaplains.

In their discussions with the troops, chaplains would have to address any number of spiritual questions. One in particular that he recorded was, "why does God allow the war?"¹⁴⁹ Many Canadian chaplains were undoubtedly asking themselves the same questions that the men around them wanted answers to. That he was expected to provide logical answers in the face of any of his own possible misgivings would be an added hardship for a chaplain. When he learned that a young Private he was acquainted with had been killed in another unit Waldo Smith wrote, "My last meeting with him was in company with his friend Bailey who was very much concerned for him. We three knelt together in prayer before they left. Now he, so young, has gone to join the great host of the youth of this generation who have given there (sic) all in answer to the call of this hour."¹⁵⁰ In the face of such sentiment there had to have been questions about God and his relation to the war going on around him.

¹⁴⁷Wilmot, *Through the Hitler Line*, 19-20.

¹⁴⁸Wilmot, *Through the Hitler Line*, 55-56, 64.

¹⁴⁹Smith, *Tempest*, 49.

¹⁵⁰Smith, *Tempest*, 50.

Existing in an environment in which men's minds were bent on how best to destroy one another made it a real test to try and maintain faith. It was especially hard on men as spiritually sensitive as the chaplains. Pastor Rowland described the situation around him as, "a repetition of Calvary because the people in power during the 20s and 30s refused His Way for the same reason the Jews of old rejected Him - it suited their interests not to see the reasonableness and necessity of His way. Because they then shut their minds to obvious facts and truths these young men today must agonize and bleed to save humanity from complete black-out."¹⁵¹ Seeing humanity as this desperately messed up spiritually must have caused serious spiritual torment for Pastor Rowland and his like.

For all these reasons, there is also evidence that chaplains such as Rowland questioned the effectiveness of their work with the troops. He expressed feelings of doubt that he was fulfilling the work God had called him to do adequately. He also claimed to feel dissatisfied with what work he had accomplished thus far.¹⁵² When faced with mounting casualties and increased problems amongst the men, it is not hard to conjecture that Rowland and chaplains like him were bound to face such feelings. It would have been impossible for them to keep ahead of the demands their job presented them with. This in turn would lead to feelings of spiritual inadequacy.

The physical presence of the chaplain in battle was much more than simply the "presence" of another body at the front. During the days of preparing the men to fight, Pastor G J. Cherrier complained that the activity of chaplains was very limited, and believed that they should receive their own training including, "covering the ground in an

¹⁵¹ Rowland, 60.

¹⁵² Rowland, 62.

effort to administer the sacraments to as many of their men as possible.”¹⁵³ To sustain the faith of men in battle chaplains needed instruction.

The Principal Chaplains overseas concurred with Cherrier and set in motion a series of steps that trained chaplains for battle. Firstly, on the 3rd of February 1941, Protestant and Roman Catholic Chaplains met together at Aldershot and resolved that during battle their most important priority was to “be in touch with the greatest possible number of wounded.” Therefore, they decided that unit chaplains should remain with the MO [medical officer] of the unit at the RAP, and Brigade Chaplains should attach themselves to the Field Ambulance. Second, meetings began in March 1941, to familiarize chaplains with battle conditions. At one of these sessions, Major K. Hunter 1st Canadian Infantry Division, lectured on the role of the medical services when the divisional and corps soldiers go into action, for the purpose of helping chaplains decide where they could best be used in battle. Third, subsequent lectures included instruction in First Aid.¹⁵⁴ Fourth, from the 9th to the 11th of April 1941 chaplains initiated their own war games. During these exercises, every effort was made to work out a procedure for chaplains during actual conditions of warfare. The following policy was agreed upon:

- a) - look after the requirements of their own regiment.
- b) - keep in touch with all attached troops.
- c) - make regular visits to the MDS [Medical Dressing Station] and ADS [Advanced Dressing Station].

¹⁵³ Wells, 107.

¹⁵⁴ H/Lt.-Col. W.T.R. Flemington, "Report: APC (P), January 1942"; "Comments On and From Formations - Canadian Reinforcement Units," NAC, RG 24.

d) - keep the Senior Chaplain posted as regards their needs, location and general conditions.¹⁵⁵

Fifth, chaplains were tested on their ability to write letters to next of kin. At the suggestion of General A.G.L. McNaughton, GOC-in-C [General Officer Commanding in Chief] all chaplains were asked to submit copies of the kind of letters they would write to a grieving family back in Canada—not revealing too many military details, and yet, being sympathetic and thoroughly describing pertinent details of the cause of death and final resting place.

Many chaplains expressed their enthusiasm and approval for the training they were receiving. Captain C.K. Nicoll, 48 Highlanders of Canada noted the high morale of the men who were acting as patients for the chaplains:

This was one of the most successful schemes in which I have taken part. The men were in excellent spirits and entered into the experiences with enthusiasm. I am sure that each one had the assurance that no matter how slight or serious the case might be in actual warfare, he would receive the best attention from the time the stretcher bearer took charge until he reached either the CCS or Base Hospital.¹⁵⁶

Captain H.K. Grimmer agreed, calling the scheme a success because the chaplains had a clear understanding of their place in battle and were able to practice their duties. He

¹⁵⁵ H/Lt.-Col. W.T.R. Flemington, "Report: APC (P), April 1941," NAC, RG 24

¹⁵⁶ H/Capt. C.K. Nicoll, "Report to the APC (P), August 1941," NAC, RG 24

noted, further, "information regarding Burials and Casualty Returns was placed in the hands of each chaplain, and practice in handing such matters was carried out."¹⁵⁷

Eventually the chaplains had to exit training and encounter the horrors of battle. They did so in two of the hardest fought campaigns of the war, the Italian campaign and the Battle of Normandy. The Italian campaign was very costly for Canadian forces, with 5,399 killed, 19,486 wounded and just over 1,000 soldiers taken prisoner.¹⁵⁸ Throughout the campaign Canadian forces encountered immense enemy resistance as they fought through the Hitler Line in May of 1944, and the Gothic line from the fall of 1944 to the spring of 1945.¹⁵⁹ The bloodiest battle occurred during the Italian campaign for the Canadians was Ortona. The Battle of Ortona, which lasted through December of 1943, saw over 1300 Canadian men killed during a single week of fighting.¹⁶⁰ The Battle of Normandy also proved to be costly for the Canadian forces. Canadian troops suffered 961 casualties on D-Day, the majority on Juno Beach.¹⁶¹ Between the 6th of June and the 21st of August 1944, the Canadians would have over 18,000 casualties in Normandy, including over 5,000 dead.¹⁶²

The experience the Canadian servicemen killed or wounded in Italy, a campaign still marred in controversy, left an indelible impact on all involved. In a letter taken from a German corpse, Farley Mowat offers us a glimpse into what Allied forces faced during their time in Italy: "The Fuhrer has ordered us to hold Rome at all costs. This shouldn't be

¹⁵⁷ H/Capt. H.K. Grimmer, "Report of the APC (P), August 1941," NAC, RG 24

¹⁵⁸ William McAndrew, *Canadians and the Italian Campaign, 1943-1945* (Montreal: Art Global, 1996), 156

¹⁵⁹ McAndrew, 160.

¹⁶⁰ Zuehlke, *Ortona*, 365.

¹⁶¹ Antony Beevor, *D-Day: The Battle for Normandy* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 131.

¹⁶² Peter Combee, *Normandy Allies: Historical Summary of the Battle of Normandy*, 46.

too hard if you have any idea of the kind of country here. It is made for defence and the Tommies will have to chew their way through us inch by inch, and we will surely make hard chewing."¹⁶³ This experience of "hard chewing" would cause the expectations of chaplains to confront the realities of modern combat.

Before experiencing the "hard chewing" of German resistance, chaplains had to aid their men in preparing for combat. It is noteworthy that after nearly three and a half years of training in England, when the order was received on April 25th, 1943 to "prepare for action," the religious-minded men believed there was a spiritual dynamic to their final preparation.¹⁶⁴ Major J.G. Jones, Senior Chaplain, 1st Canadian Infantry Division, reported a growing spiritual response amongst the men to the announcement of impending departure for the theater of combat. This response included confirmations, baptisms, and on June 14th, Jones had the largest attendance at a communion service since the beginning of the war. Other chaplains from the 1st Div. reported similar findings, and per Jones this was "indicative of a growing seriousness and spiritual concern on the part of the soldiers."¹⁶⁵

One reason for the sudden increase in the men's attention to religion was their belief that religious piety was connected to physical protection. For instance, as they approached the Sicilian coast in the early hours of July 10, 1943, Major S. East led his troops in prayers. In the hold of the *HMS Derbyshire*, Pastor East and his troops prayed: "Loving Father, protect me in all danger and watch over my loved ones and my

¹⁶³ Farley Mowat, *And No Birds Sang* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979), 181.

¹⁶⁴ H/Major J.G. Jones, "Report: SC (P), 1 CID"; "The Story of the CCS and the Part the Chaplains Played in the Sicilian Campaign", NAC, RG 24

¹⁶⁵ H/Major Roy Essex. "Central Mediterranean Forces Report: August 1943". NAC, RG 24

comrades. Trusting in thee for forgiveness and for life, I commend myself into Thy hands. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.”¹⁶⁶

Similar actions were taken by soldiers preparing for D-Day. In addition to "receiving the blessing of their chaplains on the task that lay ahead" soldiers on the landing craft turned to their chaplains and to God to strengthen their resolve and faith.¹⁶⁷ This included prayers and the impromptu singing of "Onward Christian Soldiers" by believers and non-believers alike: "Strange that that song should come spontaneously to the throats of us, whose usual marching songs.. .were anything but Christian. The occasion, however, seemed to call for the appropriate incidental music. It went on verse after verse."¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Smith, *The Navy Chaplain and His Parish*, 27.

¹⁶⁷ Granatstein, *Broken Promises*, 79.

¹⁶⁸ Philip Warner, *The D Day Landings* (London: Mandarin, 1990), 38.



Figure 1: Major John W. Forth, Chaplain of the Camron Highlanders of Ottawa, displaying his field Communion set near Caen, France, 15 July, 1944.¹⁶⁹

As was to be expected with anyone serving in these major European campaigns, chaplains were subject to extreme deprivations of sleep and other necessities. The consequence was almost constant feelings of being run down and resulting illness. Wilmot recorded frequent bouts of dysentery, most intense enough to keep him confined to his quarters all day.¹⁷⁰ He also experienced foot irritation aggravated enough to seek treatment at the regimental aid post (RAP). Near the end of 1944, after the heavy and steady fighting from the Gothic Line to the Po River Valley, he reported being near

¹⁶⁹ Accessed January 10, 2017. <http://data2.archives.ca/ap/a/a138363-v6.jpg>.

¹⁷⁰ Wilmot, 44.

exhaustion.¹⁷¹ These ailments, however, would be some of the least of the physical adversities he would experience.

Although the deliberate targeting of chaplains and other non-combatants was against the ethics and rules of war, no one could be guaranteed protection from indiscriminate shelling. In his memoir, Pastor Rusty Wilkes described a handful of close encounters with enemy shells. He once got lost and found himself in quite an open area exposed to enemy shelling.¹⁷² On another occasion while out visiting troops he was forced to seek cover in a ditch.¹⁷³ He also described what was probably the closest call he had. On a day of heavy shelling, while sitting on the veranda of an Italian farmhouse, he noticed a British vehicle loaded with ammunition pull in nearby. The driver did not stop for long, and not a minute after he left the farmhouse's yard a shell dropped right where he was parked.¹⁷⁴

One of the roles a chaplain frequently filled was organizing and leading stretcher bearers. Pastor Waldo Smith had a lot of experience with this. On at least one occasion he was fired on by snipers as he went out to collect the wounded. This prompted some ingenuity on his part, as he took a Red Cross armband from where it was barely visible on his arm, attached it to a branch and held it high as he led other stretcher bearers out to collect. After that his party were left alone.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ Wilmot, 55.

¹⁷² Wilkes, 70.

¹⁷³ Wilkes, 75.

¹⁷⁴ Wilkes, 82.

¹⁷⁵ Smith, *Tempest*, 49.



Figure 2: A chaplain assisting the Regimental Aid Party in loading a wounded soldier onto a jeep near Caen, France, July 1944.¹⁷⁶

Carrying such a flag also became common practice for Rusty Wilkes and the stretcher bearers who went with him. While in the heat of battle, often against the better judgement of the CO, Wilkes encountered many other tragic stories and near-misses. While aiding men in the Gothic Line offensive who were trapped in the German orchestrated "killing ground" of the Foglia River Valley, he described coming to the aid of a young soldier:

One young man, whom I shall never forget, lay tangled in wire and wounded by mines and shrapnel, called out to me as I approached him. "Padre, for God's sake, dont(sic) come near me the place is loaded with mines. Someone has to

¹⁷⁶ Accessed January 13, 2017. <http://data2.archives.ca/ap/a/a140192.jpg> .

stay alive to return and tell the people at home what a hell they sent us into". I said to him, "If I have the good fortune to live through this, I shall certainly do all in my power to outlaw war in the world; but in the meantime we are going to do what we can to get you out of this mess and to a place where they can help you"¹⁷⁷

So one can see that Canadian Protestant chaplains were not exempt from physical peril, nor did they necessarily seek to avoid it. The chaplains undoubtedly dealt with the same mental and emotional stress associated with physical danger as regular soldiers. There was also, however, psychological strain that was unique to the chaplain's position. This additional stress compounded the hardships of the chaplains and demonstrates further just how terrible the situation they found themselves in was.

During the war every soldier lost friends and comrades. The crucible of conflict forged the type of relationships that frequently left soldiers feeling a great deal of grief when one of their fellows was lost. The fact that the chaplain was connected with a large number of soldiers and was expected to be a "friend" to every man greatly augmented the encounters with death he would experience. In their writings chaplains demonstrate that even though they dealt with death on an almost daily basis, it still carried a great sting. After the death of a "particularly nice batman" Wilkes admitted to feeling particularly overwhelmed and to spending "a few hours pondering the inhumanity of war."¹⁷⁸ After losing a man to a mine while leading a burial party he wrote, "This was a severe blow to me; the area had been supposed to have been swept for mines before we entered the area; but just in case I had insisted that he walk in my footsteps directly behind me; he asked

¹⁷⁷ Wilkes, 81.

¹⁷⁸ Wilkes, 40.

me would it be alright if he just stepped aside to pick up a weapon left a few feet out of reach by a wounded man yesterday, I had scarcely time to reply when there was an explosion which knocked me headlong and blew off his foot."¹⁷⁹ Obviously this experience would have tremendous psychological impact on a chaplain.

The chaplain had a unique role to play. When a soldier was killed he was expected to withstand his own torrent of grief (and heavy grief was not uncommon when fellow soldiers were killed) and be a consoling presence for the men around him as well. The chaplain was expected to be an agent of closure for grieving men, conducting burial services and dealing with the emotional fallout death created. Crerar's comments on the grisly scenes the chaplain would witness and have to bring closure to are reinforced by chaplain recollections. Wilmot recalled retrieving bodies in a ghastly state of decomposition after they had been hastily buried in slit trenches during battle.¹⁸⁰ He describes this gruesome work in the wake of the battle for the Hitler Line:

This was an experience which I could never forget, - exhuming the bodies of men who had been buried in shell holes where they had fallen and bringing them for decent burial to the central cemetery beside the little Italian shrine. Decomposition had already commenced; some had already been disturbed by Italians looking for a pair of boots, and prompted some very hard words about the people of the land on the part of the burial party. It took me weeks to get rid of the smell of death and decomposition which seemed to cling long after the experience.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Wilkes, 42.

¹⁸⁰ Wilmot, 54

¹⁸¹ Wilmot, 79.

It is a safe assumption that most normal clergymen would never have to deal with spectacles as extreme as those already mentioned. Yet this was the call of the military chaplain. In times where comrades were lost and death was a real possibility, the chaplain could not give in to any anxiety or doubt that he may have honestly felt, but had to suffer and assuage the misgivings of those around him.



Figure 3: A chaplain conducting a burial service, San Leonardo di Ortona, Italy, 10th of December,

1943.¹⁸²

¹⁸² Accessed January 13, 2017. <http://data2.archives.ca/ap/a/a167913-v6.jpg>.

Waldo Smith records his experiences of having to act as a source of encouragement as soldiers faced bleak situations. On the eve of battle, as the men around him prepared to engage in yet another costly battle in Normandy, Smith encouraged them with the words of Christ in Matthew 6:34.¹⁸³ In the King James Bible the verse reads, "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

Attached to combat units at the front, the Canadian chaplain suffered the same as any other soldier: physically, psychologically and spiritually. These various hardships combined to create an environment where even the most stalwart believer would have their faith tested. Just because they presented a firm resolve to the men around them does not mean that they were not deeply affected by the tragedy that they witnessed daily. The testimony presented above provides firm indication of this fact. Though some have argued to the contrary, Protestant chaplains were in positions that put them under great strain.

¹⁸³ Smith, *Tempest*, 101.

Conclusion

On 4 May 1945 a message was broadcast over the BBC at 2030 hours: " It has been announced from the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Force that all German forces in North-west Germany, Holland and Denmark have surrendered unconditionally to 21st Army Group effective at 0800 hours tomorrow." Upon hearing the message all units initiated an immediate cease-fire. But the war was not over for Baptist Chaplain A.E. McCreery, chaplain to the 22nd Canadian Armored Regiment. That evening the unit received a report that wounded German soldiers were "somewhere on a side road between Nutte and Brink[Germany]." McCreery, assisted by Lieutenant N.A. Goldie set out on a "mercy mission" to retrieve the wounded Germans. When the two officers failed to return a search patrol was sent. After two days of intense investigation McCreery's spent body was finally found — Goldie's remains were never recovered.¹⁸⁴ Although it is impossible to determine the exact minute of McCreery's death, he died within twelve hours of the end of the war, and may be, arguably, the last Canadian killed in action during the Second World War.

McCreery's role and anonymity during his last few hours are not incognizant. As one of the last Canadians killed in action he died without a gun, with no way of defending himself. McCreery's role as a chaplain was to sustain and boost the faith of his comrades. The great irony of his death is that he perished trying to do the same for his enemies, he was trying to save their lives so they could live to see another day. It is also of significance that this profound sacrifice was made virtually anonymously. Few, if any,

¹⁸⁴ Colonel A. Fortescue Duguid, *History of the Canadian Grenadier Guards, 1760-1964* (Montreal: Gazette Printing Company, 1965), 352.

have ever heard of Albert McCreery and his last mission. McCreery, like his fellow chaplains, fought hard in his duty to look after the religious-minded Canadians of the military, yet their role and sacrifice has gone essentially ignored by military historians and many Canadians.

1253 Canadian ministers and priests (800 Protestant, 446 Roman Catholic and 7 Jewish) donned a military uniform and served as military chaplains in the Canadian Army, the Royal Canadian Air Force, and the Royal Canadian Navy during the Second World War. Essentially ignored by their contemporaries and succeeding generations, chaplains played a primary role in sustaining and boosting the faith of believers in uniform overseas during the Second World War. For many chaplains, the defining moment of their ministries occurred during episodes of battle or danger when the secular and the sacred became inseparably combined. According to Major E.W. MacQuarrie:

These are the things that stand out of a padre's battle
experience. What to him, can be more precious than his
feeling of the Presence of the Lord? And He does come —
in the dark, in the night, in a voice of song — in the
murmuring cry of a wounded man— in the question so
wistfully asked, "Why does He allow it?" — or sometimes
in the voice of thunder as a shell bursts beside a man and
leaves him unscathed, but more thoughtful. In a thousand

ways He comes and a padre remembers what he has
seen.¹⁸⁵

It would be very wrong to conclude that chaplains were solely, or even primarily, responsible for Canada winning the war. Many soldiers, sailors, and airmen did not. It would be very wrong to conclude that chaplains were solely, or even primarily, responsible for Canada winning the war. Many soldiers, sailors, and airmen did not encounter a chaplain, or had little to do with a chaplain or his religious message. Yet, despite initial setbacks, chaplains themselves were eyewitnesses to the profound and lasting effects of their presence and beliefs upon the lives of their men.

Chapter one of this thesis examined the tension within Canada at the beginning of the conflict. A strong sense of pacifism was present in the major Protestant denominations during the 1930s, with even a few churches claiming that pacifism was a fundamental part of Christianity. This came into conflict with the reality of Hitler's eagerness to go to war. For the sake of the men in the field, the Protestant churches had to pivot towards a Just War attitude and select someone to lead a Chaplaincy Service. The man selected was Bishop Wells, a relatively unknown player within the Anglican Church of Canada.

The second chapter deals with Wells and his ability to make a functioning Chaplaincy Service. He and his Catholic counterpart had to create criteria for enlistment, a difficult task when no one knows how a man will act under the pressure of combat. This chapter also dealt with the personal faults of Wells, such as his racism towards Black-

¹⁸⁵ E.W. MacQuarrie, "Highlights of a Padre's Experience," *The United Church Observer* (15 June 1944), 26.

Canadians, and against non-mainline Protestant churches. The third chapter examines how chaplains interacted with their men in combat. From their tension with officers, to their attempts to keep the men around them holy, it was a difficult task. Although whatever negative attitude men may have had of their padre, it disappeared when the specter of death began to loom large.

Like most Canadians repatriated back to Canada, chaplains were reunited with families and eagerly immersed themselves in their parishes and congregations content to set aside the memories of war and resume normality in the world they had fought to preserve. But normality in post-war Canada was nothing like its pre-war equivalent and former chaplains found themselves in the midst of great changes. As rural-urban migration increased, and as society erected barriers against the harmful effects of communism, Canada's churches experienced phenomenal growth in the nation's suburban regions.¹⁸⁶

Hopefully this humble thesis will provide a jumping off point for other better equipped scholars to dig deeper into the Canadian chaplaincy and the padres in it. Race and the chaplaincy service is something barely covered within this work, and a topic that deserves much more focus. More archival work can be done relating to individual padres, as this work mainly used memoirs, the National Archives in Ottawa holds a tremendous amount of material on individual padres. It would also be interesting to see how the Canadian Chaplaincy service compared to its contemporaries in the Second World War,

¹⁸⁶ Grant, *The Church in the Canadian Era*, 160.

as well as the Canadian service in the First World War. To my knowledge such a work has not been completed.

The work of Canada's military chaplains in the Second World War stands on its own merits. It is the story of a group of civilian priests and ministers who were willing to sacrifice their comfortable lives with families and their churches to step out into the unknown and battle their own fears, while also struggling to keep the faith of their men alive amid the bloody horrors of war. The efforts of these men were at times hindered by their own men, and have largely been forgotten in the museums and historiography of the Second World War, their historical voices muted by the popularity of the combat soldier and the great men of the conflict. They stand as God's silent witnesses.

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