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## **Signs of Spiritual Crisis or Evidence of Unexpected Commitment? Attitudes to Compulsory Church Parades in the First AIF<sup>1</sup>**

**By Daniel Reynaud**

**Avondale College of Higher Education**

Of all the services provided by chaplains in the AIF during the Great War, no doubt those that attracted the greatest resentment were the compulsory Church Parades conducted on Sunday morning whenever circumstances permitted. Forming part of the army's habit of 'parading' soldiers at almost every possible opportunity, these services, with their forced attendance, became the focal point for Anzac objections to religion in the army, helping to create the impression that the Anzacs, exhibiting a so-called typically secular character and outlook, showed a disdain for religion. Given the widely accepted notion of the secularity of the Anzacs, and their reputation of resistance to institutionalised behaviour, evidence of their dislike of forced religious attendance should be easy to collect. This paper explores the evidence provided by a reading of the surviving letters and diaries of about a thousand Anzacs – the same sample size used by Bill Gammage in his pioneering study of Anzac attitudes and experiences in his book *The Broken Years*.<sup>2</sup> The diaries were chosen largely at random, the chief criteria being their accessibility. Hence all available diaries in the State Libraries of New South Wales and Victoria were read, along with all diaries available online through the Australian War Memorial (AWM), supplemented by others in hard copy from the AWM read in the AWM's research centre. A small number were found on other websites, or were given to the author to read by descendants. Diaries and letters are virtually the only source for attitudes about compulsory Church Parades; other sources such as newspaper reports and memoirs contain almost nothing. It is difficult to judge how representative the diaries are of the attitudes of the whole AIF, but given that the sample is effectively the same as Gammage's seminal study, and encompasses men of a variety of ranks, units, social background and theatres of operation, the data would seem to be about as valid as one could expect.

C. E. W. Bean's massive official history of the Great War established the pattern of encomium about the Anzacs and, though the legend has evolved, most writers adhere to the basic characteristics outlined by him. Unfortunately, he accidentally gave rise to an exclusively secular representation, for his volumes rarely mention chaplains or religion, a striking omission given that he was a son of a clergyman. However, his corpus conceals his intent, for he had planned a separate volume on the chaplains, but was forced to abandon it under pressure of time and finances.<sup>3</sup> H. S. Gullett, who wrote the official volume of the Palestine campaign, documented cases of interest in

religion, but characterised the bulk of the Light Horsemen as ‘merely tolerat[ing] the chaplains, looking on their appointment as an example of that Australian habit of paying lip-service to religion, of pretending that religion mattered here.’<sup>4</sup>

Gammage’s book singles out three areas of silence in the evidence drawn from soldier diaries: sex, politics and religion, the last of which he considered ‘the most surprising’. While noting examples of religious devotion in his findings, Gammage considered that ‘the average Australian soldier was not religious. He was not a keen churchman: he avoided church parades, or if he could not avoid them he tended to show sudden enthusiasm for whichever denomination worshipped within easy marching distance.’<sup>5</sup> Most historians have contented themselves with Gammage’s conclusions, and avoided or omitted a discussion of religion in their studies of the Anzacs. Michael McKernan’s study, the first overt examination of the Australian churches and the war, essentially adopted Gammage’s conclusion for lack of other evidence, while recognising that it was painted in broad brush-strokes.<sup>6</sup> It is difficult to argue with the truth of this statement as a generalisation, yet allowing it to stand without investigation merely tends to reinforce the habit of glossing over the role that religion played in the lives of the Great War Anzacs. A closer reading of the evidence suggests that these broad brush strokes, and gaps and silences, need considerable filling and refining.

Among the few who have challenged the conclusions that the typical soldier was a ‘rough, hard-bitten, cynical, worldly, irreligious, irrepressible, reckless, womanising, gambling, independent-minded hell-raiser’<sup>7</sup> is Robert Linder, whose study of Evangelical Christianity in the war critiques omissions of the discussion of religion in the works of Bean, Gammage and other writers, noting that while Gammage claimed there was little evidence of religion in soldier diaries, his book, heavily laced with quotes from the diaries he studied, ‘is replete with religious imagery and references to Christianity, and brimming with morality and moral judgments.’ Linder’s book then explores the extensive evidence of war-related evangelical expression in Australia, including the AIF.<sup>8</sup> Michael Gladwin’s official history of the Army Chaplaincy Corps also challenges the myth of the irredeemable secularity of the Anzacs and their resistance to religion, concluding that the relationship between chaplains and the soldiers of the AIF was frequently positive.<sup>9</sup> Colin Bale’s research reveals that ‘significant numbers of [soldiers] appear to have been more interested in religion than has often been thought.’<sup>10</sup> The author’s own work also suggests that Christianity may have had a higher profile and impact in the AIF than popularly thought.<sup>11</sup>

Gammage’s argument turned on the lack of evidence, so the nature of the surviving evidence demands investigation. Of the total number of personal war writings which survive, many have only a trifling amount of material extant. For example, of the 188 soldiers whose private papers were

available online through the Australian War Memorial at the time of the study, 58 consisted of only a letter or two, or an account of a specific event, and could not be expected to offer useful evidence about the religious attitudes of those particular soldiers. But of the other 130 containing substantial data in the form of letters and diaries, no fewer than 77 made references to religion that at least suggested their attitudes and values in that regard. So, despite the notion that Anzacs were silent on religious matters, in this particular sample set, nearly 60% of soldiers recorded evidence about religion. Overall, about a third of the roughly thousand soldiers studied provided some indication of their attitude toward religion, the majority of them positive – a far higher proportion than characteristic of the Anzac story in the run of both popular and academic literature.

Church Parades were normally held every Sunday when battalions were out of the line and a chaplain was available. They were usually in the morning, though this could vary if the padre had to run services for different units. If a brigade was parading, soldiers may have had the choice of which service to attend, for each brigade had an establishment of four chaplains representing the major denominational groupings in Australia: a blend of Anglican, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian and Methodist, and occasionally Other Protestant Denominations such as Congregationalist, Baptist or Salvationist. In practice however, hospital duties, illnesses and leave often reduced brigades to one or two chaplains, and many Church Parades only distinguished between Protestants and Catholics – and sometimes not at all, if a general was visiting to make a speech. Parades required the men to be in their best uniform, with all equipment clean to parade-ground standard, and could run for up to three hours by the time inspections, announcements and the service was run. Of the range of religious activities to which the Anzacs were exposed, there is no debate that the compulsory Sunday Church Parade rank as the one most criticised. However, the diversity of expressed opinion about these parades indicates that the attitudes display a greater complexity than might be thought.

The first thing to note about Church Parades is that only a quarter of the soldiers' diaries make mention of the event. While arguing from silence is fraught, in this case the fact is that for many soldiers, Church Parades were not considered worthy of noting. The motivation for diary writing varies considerably from writer to writer, and many soldiers failed to make notes on routine activities, while others wrote in such miniscule diaries that constrained them to record only the most significant events. Some soldiers who showed strong evidence of commitment to Christianity in diaries or letters virtually never recorded Church Parade.<sup>12</sup> All the same, Church Parades appear reasonably frequently in diaries, and from time to time in letters. It is common for the phrase 'Church Parade' to appear in Sunday entries, often with no other qualifying comment. For example, Charles Adamson regularly noted Church Parades in his diaries, but added no comment. However, there are other markers that he was religious, including records of attending voluntary services and

other religious activities.<sup>13</sup> In these instances, the regular noting of Church Parade could probably be taken as suggesting some level of appreciation or at least respect. Others wrote down the sermon topic but without any other remark. Again, this indicates a level of interest, often reinforced by other religious references elsewhere.<sup>14</sup> Many diaries recorded Church Parades without any consistency, noting them some weeks, yet failing to do so on other weeks when other sources show that Church Parade was held.

Other soldiers often added some level of description that indicated their feelings towards them. Negative comments feature in 85 of the 248 diaries that recorded Church Parades – a remarkably low rate given the easy assumption that these parades were widely disliked. Yet the nature of their critiques of these parades demonstrates that even this level of recorded dissatisfaction is not as powerful as it might seem. The diversity of the criticisms of Church Parade is interesting to investigate, encompassing a series of overlapping categories. A good number of comments reflect anti-religious attitudes, ranging from active dislike to indifference. Other objections consist of a dislike of the sermon topics, anti-institutionalism, a dislike of the sectarianism represented by some chaplains, the poor quality of many padres, personal objections to particular denominations or practices, and the inconvenience and tedium of the event caused by non-religious factors. Even soldiers who were personally religious and approving of the concept and practice of Church Parades could be critical of the way in which formal religious services were held.

Anti-religious sentiment is evident in the comments about Church Parades in 37 diaries. Doubtless, this represents only a small proportion of those who held anti-religious views, but it is still a surprisingly low figure. The most common protest against Church Parades was through the frequent attempts of soldiers to evade attendance. Diaries record the diversity of excuses and evasions practised around them. Switching religions was a common form of evasion, and many men suddenly became Catholic when the Anglican Church Parade was called. Occasionally this tendency was countered by the officer in charge reversing which religion was the target of the parade, thus catching the men out when they thought they were going to avoid it.<sup>15</sup> Others simply adopted the religion of whichever parade offered the path of least resistance or promised the greatest physical comfort, such as being allowed to sit and smoke during the service. One soldier 'made a special point of dodging this ordeal [Church Parade] as I could never see any sense in them.'<sup>16</sup> A sergeant gave a list of the typical excuses he heard while rounding up the men for parade, observing that 'if the sergeant is soft and yielding he would never get anyone on parade because they are never at a loss for an excuse to dodge church parade.'<sup>17</sup> Another soldier noted with evident disgust, 'A great event! I am given three days C.B. [Confined to Barracks] for refusing to attend that farcical absurdity Church

Parade.<sup>18</sup> But there may be more to this entry than meets the eye. The man's diary makes clear that his artistic, non-conformist attitudes made him 'not one of the boys', and his resistance to church reflected his triumph in doing something that got him popular approval.<sup>19</sup>

Other writers spelled out a dislike of the sermon topics. Several diaries noted popular objections to sermons against swearing and immorality, in some cases feeling that Australians were unjustly considered to be in special need of such admonitory preaching, though one diarist who recorded the objections of his mates actually approved of the sermon, considering it well merited.<sup>20</sup> Some, including certain chaplains, were uncomfortable over the association of Christianity with the war machine. One soldier noted of a Christmas service, 'The parson quoted, Peace on Earth etc. but like all church services did not fit in with the occasion.'<sup>21</sup> Other chaplains offended by poor choice of content. One foolishly attempted to argue 'that it was not so very dangerous fighting. That there were almost as many dangers in times of peace with trains, cars and orange peels of all things.'<sup>22</sup> Another attracted the judgment, 'Fool of a padre and fool of a sermon – the church parades do the men little good and the parsons make asses of themselves,' while another was pilloried for 'patriotic piffle. Eric snorts about England being the light of the world.'<sup>23</sup> He was not alone in opposing patriotic sermons and attempts to paint the Allied cause as that of God, instead of considering God to be above sordid human squabbles.<sup>24</sup>

Many diaries indicate an indifference to Church Parades, which almost certainly accounts for the silence about them in the majority of diaries, manifest through lacklustre singing and surreptitious – even occasionally brazenly overt – gambling during the services. One keen gambler noted the victory of a game of House over attention to a Church Parade, justifying the gambling on the grounds that 'the Chaplain bleats too much.'<sup>25</sup> Even if the preaching was good, indifference could be the dominant response. 'Very fine sermon, but like so much water on a duck's back to the majority present.'<sup>26</sup> One soldier elaborated on soldierly attitudes to Church Parades, writing that they were on the whole indifferent to 'the usual denominational churches' for, while individual padres could be popular, being 'dragged off' to Church Parades made them resent the padres. He added:

And contrary to what we all anticipated, the imminence of death and uncertainty of life on active service does not make men think more of religion and its consolations. Do not think for a moment that I am attempting to decry the church or its pastors who have come out here, but that is the actual state of affairs. Military service does *not* tend to make a man more religious but on the contrary makes many forget the influences under which they lived their former ideals and has in an alarming number of cases an undermining influence on their morals.<sup>27</sup>

Even some chaplains decried compulsory church as counterproductive to a spirit of worship.<sup>28</sup> Some soldiers noticed clerical reluctance, one writing, 'These compulsory parades are by no means a success. No one is over enthusiastic, not even the Padre.'<sup>29</sup>

Some objections centred not on the content but the presentation. A 'droning old padre' was the source of dislike by one soldier, while another critiqued a chaplain who used a 'weird, unnaturally, pathetic voice and drawls in such an artificial way that makes one think that religion is after all only a professional stunt as it is served out to us.' The same soldier complained that the old-fashioned padre made the services, 'as dull and melancholy as possible', apparently thinking that threats of divine punishment would somehow draw soldiers closer to God and the Church. Yet the rest of this man's diary shows that this was not an anti-religious statement so much as an appeal for religion to be made relevant to modern audiences.<sup>30</sup>

Indeed, many of the critiques of Church Parades were not inherently anti-religious at all, rather objecting to some aspect of how they were run. Most commonly, they attracted criticism because the majority of soldiers could not see or hear what was going on.<sup>31</sup> There were multiple complaints about boring, inaudible preachers and too few hymn sheets for a realistic chance of effective participation in singing. In many cases it is evident that these criticisms were made by soldiers who wished for lively, engaging Church Parades, rather than their cancellation. An officer wrote, 'The parsons complain of not being able to get hold of the men and when they get a chance as today with about 2500 or 3000 men they seem to do their best to make as dull a show as possible. The men can barely hear, others have to stand the whole time in the blazing sun.'<sup>32</sup>

Despite the Anzacs being noted for their dislike of denominationalism, sometimes soldiers objected to Church Parades because of differences in denominational cultures and understandings of Christianity. A devout soldier gave as his excuse for skipping Church Parade, 'I got tired of hearing the chaplain talking nonsense.' He ranted against institutionalised religion, wanting them to take Jesus as Leader seriously.<sup>33</sup> A Non-Conformist soldier, having enjoyed a Church of England social, was then immediately forced into an Anglican Church Parade, to which he objected because of Anglicanism's 'awful superstitious humbug, and you have an awful time of it listening to their chanting and tom-foolery.'<sup>34</sup> A number of devout men were offended by the attitudes and behaviours of their non-believing fellow-soldiers, who treated the sacred occasion with irreverent disdain.<sup>35</sup>

Lazy chaplains who appeared to do little else than turn up for meals and for Church Parade were also targets of criticism, as were those who appeared insincere, were indiscreet, or whose manner was exclusive or constantly critical and negative. Needless to say, their Church Parades were routinely criticised.<sup>36</sup> One soldier objected to services being held while serving in the line, when the



men were at risk of observation from German planes, and were tired from their exacting military duties.<sup>37</sup>

Occasionally, a padre accidentally engaged an audience with an unintended joke: 'On the last Sunday before leaving the whole Brigade was in a state of slumber as usual, when the preacher raising his voice above the usual drone exclaimed loudly "You live on bread." Everybody woke with a start and from end to end of the Brigade simultaneously from 2000 throats came a muffled whisper "And jam".' The same soldier recorded another chaplain making a similar faux pas: 'Another church incident last Sunday. The preacher was explaining how we lived from day to day – not knowing what the next would bring forth. For instance he said "you don't know what we will have for dinner tomorrow" – and as one man fully 100 men exclaimed out aloud "Stew." And as they said so it came to pass.'<sup>38</sup>

One chaplain commented several times that Church Parades were unpopular because they were lumbered with the additional negative tasks of cleaning all equipment and standing on parade for inspection for up to three hours. He argued that, 'a disinclination to submit to an unfair imposition of that nature, under the guise of religious exercises, did not prove a lack of religious feeling, but merely a spirit of protest against an out of date military custom, which was militating against a true spirit of worship.'<sup>39</sup> While he may be considered a biased source, having a vested interest in presenting religion as popular, he noted that the frequent voluntary services were well patronised, claiming that this showed 'that it was not the service itself which was resented in the great majority of cases.' Another chaplain also preferred the voluntary services, finding that 'the Church Parades are stiff and unpopular things.'<sup>40</sup> Soldier diaries also recorded objections to the additional burdens imposed by Church Parades beyond merely enduring a sermon, noting that this was a key motivation in attempted evasions of the event.<sup>41</sup>

For all of the negatives, what is striking about the diaries is the sheer number of positive comments about compulsory Church Parade. While 85 of the 248 diaries recorded negative statements about Church Parades, 138 recorded positive ones, with the total number of positive comments almost double those of the negatives. This in itself is surprising, but when one takes into account the fact that some of the negative comments came from religious men who were unhappy with the poor quality of compulsory religious services, then the proportions shift even more in the unlikely direction of appreciation for compulsory services.

The most frequent positive comments about compulsory church revolve around enjoyable services, especially the sermon. 'Still another glorious Sunday with a splendid church service in the morning the Chaplain did not beat about the bush but spoke very straight to the men. I enjoyed the

service immensely one of the best I have heard,' wrote one Anzac. He described many services as 'splendid' or 'impressive', the latter term also commonly used by other Anzacs about services.<sup>42</sup> Many simply recorded their approval of particular services, while others gave some details of the composition of the service or the theme of the sermon.<sup>43</sup> In contrast to the tedium of long Church Parades, one soldier noted a third anniversary battalion parade with appropriate telegraphic approval: 'Padre spoke shortly and fittingly. Sang hymn Psalm 100, read Psalm 93. Prayed.'<sup>44</sup> In a pungently observant diary, one soldier recorded a full dress Church Parade on a transport ship, referring to a dour and gloomy Presbyterian Padre ironically as being, 'right off the tip of the sirloin,' but adding, 'He's an earnest old chap though and his address was good as was the A.I.F. service.'<sup>45</sup> One hard-living officer, of no apparent religious inclination, got up just in time for one Sunday service, observing, 'It was a nice little service and I liked it, curiously enough.'<sup>46</sup>

Soldiers frequently appreciated a relevant, informative and high quality sermon, especially if delivered in a direct and open manner. One soldier praised a service which included a question box as being very interesting and informative.<sup>47</sup> Another appreciated the topicality of a well-attended Church Parade near Gallipoli where the two officiating chaplains explained the Pauline origins of Christianity in the region.<sup>48</sup> In a diary otherwise light on religious comment, one wrote, 'We had a church parade and enjoyed it, for we had a good sermon.'<sup>49</sup>

Central to the enjoyment of services was the quality of chaplain, and soldiers often noted their chaplains with respect and affection. 'Usual Church Service conducted this morning by our Chaplain. He is a fine chap. I think he and our skipper are the most popular officers in the battalion.'<sup>50</sup> Another considered that his chaplain's services were 'always worth attending.' He also noted the humility of another chaplain who 'asked that the men drop all thought of his rank as Captain, because he considers he isn't entitled to it.'<sup>51</sup> One sensitive padre even addressed 'a good practical sermon to those "who felt service parades a burden".'<sup>52</sup> A particularly effective chaplain could attract men to services across the great Protestant-Catholic divide. One officer, along with several other non-Catholic officers, attended the Catholic Parade on board 'Out of compliment – and affection – to our own Padre,' appreciating his 'few direct, straightforward words to the boys on the subject of clean living. He is a fine fellow Father Devine.'<sup>53</sup>

Not all chaplains were accomplished, but it did not necessarily detract from the value of the service: 'Australian parson bit flowery although not bad service,' wrote one.<sup>54</sup> Another recorded enjoying both a voluntary and a compulsory church service despite the fact that, 'Our Padre is delicate, can't preach for sour tarts, and his voice cracks every second word, but he is sincere, which covers everything, and consequently we all like him, and rejoice in having him with us.'<sup>55</sup> Other chaplains were guided through a process of delivering appropriate services. The Reverend Albert

Talbot, Dean of Sydney, improved his Church Parades after coaching from his Battalion officers, who penalised him for slip ups or sermons greater than ten minutes by making him stand drinks for the Officers Mess.<sup>56</sup> He never overcame all his detractors, but nonetheless developed into an effective and respected chaplain.<sup>57</sup>

While some criticised Church Parades for their jingoism, others found inspiration and purpose in messages that connected God and the British cause in the Great War. One soldier recorded Dean Talbot on board his ship on the eve of the Gallipoli landings, delivering 'a grave and moving service', urging them to remember their mission.<sup>58</sup> Another soldier, an active Christian, recorded a pre-embarkation service in Brisbane, with a hint of ironic humour: 'The Parson gave a grand patriotic sermon. He even exhorted the Almighty to help destroy the devilish Hunnish Militarism, wish he would, it might save us a job.'<sup>59</sup> An officer wrote of finding moral direction in the message of one chaplain, who justified violence against the Hun as helping to 'thrash the offending Adam out of him.' He found such an attitude helpful as it allowed him to fight without vengeance and hatred.<sup>60</sup> A confrontingly honest sermon before a huge battle from a respected padre found favour with one listener, for addressing directly that they needed to spiritually prepare for the fact that many would be killed in the coming days.<sup>61</sup>

Others found a valuable personal challenge and admonition in the preaching. While many a sermon against swearing was delivered, most were considered to effect little change. For some, however, the message worked. One slack church attender noted with a start, 'a fine address this evening on the "Trial of Jesus and Peter's denial" – i.e. he hit up the swearing and our almost daily denial of Christ. A very timely sermon for me at any rate.'<sup>62</sup>

Evident in a number of diaries is a keenness of men to attend compulsory services. There were many ways of avoiding them but some soldiers went out of their way to be certain of attending. 'We still have church parade of a Sunday and the boys all make for the best positions to hear the service,' wrote one man on a troopship.<sup>63</sup> Several soldiers noted with regret the services they were unable to attend because their duties kept them away. One soldier was even part of a small group running their own service when duties forced their absence, one they 'were that interested in it that we were late for our dinner.' Another walked six miles with his friend to catch a service run by a favourite chaplain.<sup>64</sup>

A number of diary entries record the comfort and emotional support gained from Church Parades, singling out both the message of the sermon as well as the singing and the overall atmosphere. 'Had church parade. It is wonderful how sweet the word of God is, when one is lonely. It comforts,' wrote one. The following week he noted, 'Attended church parade. Felt comforted and strengthened by the sermon, on the Barren Fig Tree, delivered by Chaplain Grey of Waratah.'<sup>65</sup> One

devout platoon officer noted the text of a sermon, 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the Shadow of Death I will fear no evil, for thou art with me,' which was singularly appropriate as during the sermon a land mine exploded nearby and shook the ground.<sup>66</sup> Another wrote with evident emotion: 'Church parade. Same old hymn "The night is dark and I am far from home" makes home quite close and twice as dear to us.'<sup>67</sup> The capacity of Church Parades to provide a boost in morale has rarely been acknowledged.

Circumstances could add relevance and poignancy to services. Of the first Church Parade held on Gallipoli, a soldier reflected on the dramatic contrast provided by the calm landscape of rugged hills and placid harbour, just half a mile from 'the roar of battle':

9 o'clock sees us assembled for Church Parade – the first since leaving Egypt. No Hymn books are there, yet in that well-known hymn – 'Rock of Ages' there swells from the throats of men a tunefulness and feeling which is deeply stirring. The text is – 'Choose ye this day whom ye will serve, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.' I have never seen these men listen as they have done this day; notwithstanding their outward apparent callousness, these rough-hewn men have an undercurrent of thought which is only brought to the top on occasions such as this, when, more than anywhere else, they are brought face to face with the stern fact that 'we know not what a day or an hour may bring forth'. We sang 'Jesus Lover of my Soul' with even more fervour than we did the first Hymn. The service closed with Benediction and National Hymn.

The following week, heartsore from hearing the day before of the death of his mother, the same soldier wrote: 'We had a Church Service this morning again. I went with a very sad heart; as the Minister preached I did not hear much, but in some strange and wonderful way God spoke to me.'<sup>68</sup> A lack of enthusiasm for hymn singing could dampen the spirit, but diaries also frequently noted the effectiveness of singing at compulsory services. An 'off colour' soldier wrote of being struck by the lyrics of 'Abide with Me' in a parade service held in a barn.<sup>69</sup>

While men on Church Parade could be forced to endure blistering heat or sandstorms in Egypt, or miserable rain or pitiless frosts in France and Belgium, adverse circumstances did not always prevent an effective parade. One wrote positively of a Church Parade held in the rain marked by good preaching and enthusiastic singing.<sup>70</sup> And, just as many complained not being able to hear the sermon, so some also recorded their pleasure and relief at being able to hear the preacher at large services.<sup>71</sup>

Some soldier's diaries show them not to be particularly religious, but capable of waxing lyrical about specific services. Archie Barwick, whose insightful and revealing diaries have been published, wrote the highest praise for popular Salvation Army chaplain William McKenzie while excoriating McKenzie's coreligionists for excessive prudery and condescending lecturing. Religion for him had to stand on its own merits, hence the value of his extended description of one Church Parade.

Church parade this morning, and it was held in a very pretty little place just imagine if you can a brilliant sunny morning, and us marching smartly down a fine road lined on either side by beautiful shady trees and a nice little river running alongside one row of trees, and every here and there you would pass quaint old French farm-houses with their tiled roof's [sic], and pretty flower gardens around them, after a mile or so of this we come to the enclosure, where the service is to be held it is no more than an acre in extent and like all the rest of France is beautifully grassed and clean on three sides of this square we are walled in by bonzer green trees, and the other is bounded by the road and railway, as we march in our markers are ready, and we have formed up in two shakes, in a few minutes the other Battalions make their appearance, shortly followed by the Brigadier and the padre.

While the service was being held we could hear our boys practicing with the machine guns, their sharp and snappy bark can be heard for miles and aeroplanes were humming and droning over us, like a well oiled sewing machine while the church bells were mingling their mellow tones with the rest, and over all a great peace and beautiful sun was shining, the padre's sermon was chiefly on the new phase the war has entered upon and the great name and fighting qualities of the Australians and especially our old 1st Division, he urged us to keep it going.<sup>72</sup>

Others also record services in settings of lyrical beauty, noting attractive sun-drenched fields in France or the impressive circle of ocean and sky with all heads bowed for prayer on board a transport.<sup>73</sup>

Soldiers also appreciated services which took on a trans-sectarian character, for they typically resented denominational distinctions in the face of united military service for their nation and Empire. Writing home, one soldier observed, 'Just come from the morning Church Parade.... Feel much better after the service, tho' it was not the one I'm used to, being Church of England Ceremony.'<sup>74</sup> A Catholic soldier wrote, 'We have no chaplain so an officer recited the Rosary with us and afterwards a Salvation Army chaplain gave us a non-Sectarian lecture on self-control which was

very good.<sup>75</sup>

Juxtaposing the positive comments about Church Parades could perhaps create an impression that they were popular events. They were not. It is evident from many statements by soldiers and observers, participant and historians, the faithful and the profane, that Church Parades were unpopular. What this study seeks to show, however, is that to equate the unpopularity simplistically to an overriding secularism among the Anzacs is to miss the fact that reactions to the parades were diverse, and that negative attitudes were often the result of factors other than a disdain of religion. Objections to anything compulsory played a part, as did the distasteful duties all too often attached to Church Parades, which also lengthened their duration beyond the patience of many. Many objections arose over the poor quality of the events, indicating a desire for more effective spiritual meetings rather than their elimination. But the fact remains in the solid testimony of many Anzacs that they enjoyed at least some of these parades, finding spiritual refreshment, nurture and inspiration in them. Far from confirming the apparent secularity of the Anzacs, a study of Church Parades reveals a greater level of spiritual engagement than many have previously suspected.

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<sup>1</sup> A draft of this paper was presented at *Christianity and Crisis*, Evangelical History Association Conference, The Scots College, Sydney, 8 August 2015

<sup>2</sup> Bill Gammage, *The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1974)

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