

Military Chaplains: For Service of Our Soldiers¹

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The year 1915 was the centenary of the establishment of the Military Chaplaincy Service. It was also the first time that clergymen from the Baptists, Churches of Christ, Congregationalists and Salvation Army were banded together under the title of Other Protestant Denominations (OPD). So it is a recorded of the early days of that illustrious group. The article looks at the contribution that four Churches of Christ Chaplains in World War I made beyond the expected role of a chaplain, viz., conducting church services, spiritual guidance and burying the dead. It also examines the character of these men and the conditions under which they worked.

War has been variously defined. Douglass Jerrold said of it: "What a fine looking thing is war? Yet dress it up as we may and feather it, daub it with gold, huzza it, and sing songs about it, what it is nine times out of ten but murder in uniform."² Napoleon's view was that it was "a trade of barbarians—the whole art of which consists in being the strongest on a given point."³ His great rival, the Duke of Wellington said, "Take my word for it, if you had seen but one day of war you would pray to Almighty God that you might never see such a thing again."⁴ Shakespeare has Mark Antony say, "In these confines, with a monarch's voice, cry 'Havoc!' and let slip the dogs of war."⁵ The Great War proved all these assessments to be true.

When Great Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914, Australia, as a member of the Empire, was committed to the conflict. For the first time in its history, following Federation, Australia was to go to war as a nation rather than as a collection of colonies as it had done in the Boer and South African Wars. Not only did the Great War bring into being the First Australian Imperial Force, it also gave birth to the Australian Military Chaplaincy Service. It is therefore fitting to celebrate the centenary of this branch of the services by reflecting upon what it meant to be a chaplain; and to look at the lives and ministries of four Churches of Christ World War I Chaplains.

Michael McKernan, when writing about Australian chaplains in Gallipoli and France, observed that:

¹ This phrase was used by Chaplain-Captain H.A. Proctor in a letter, written just prior to his departure for the Front, addressed to the editor of *The Australian Christian*. It was printed in Vol. 20, 1917, 112.

² Jerrold, Douglas, *The Advocate of Peace*, February 1869, 23.

³ Bonaparte, Napoleon, *Napoleon's Art of War*, transl. George C. D'Aquilar, (Boston, MA: De Capo Press, 1995).

⁴ Douglas, C.N., *Forty Thousand Quotations: Prose and Poetical*, No. 104. (New York: Halcyon House, 1917).

⁵ Shakespeare, William, *Julius Caesar*, Act 3 Scene 1 line 273.

The battlefield is a strange place for a Christian minister, dedicated to a message of peace, but, if men are to die or suffer, tradition decrees that their ministers should be with them to help as best they can.⁶

This idea was accepted and Australian clergymen rallied to the call. The first half of the twentieth century was characterised by a depression bookmarked by two Great Wars. Although a small faith community, a significant number of Churches of Christ ministers acted as military chaplains during the wars, some serving in both. Five of them served at the front, either in Gallipoli or the Western Front. There were also many chaplains who ministered to the troops on home soil before embarkation; others were transport chaplains. Churches of Christ have a proud history of military chaplaincy and it is time to tell their story.

Chaplain-Colonel F. J. Miles, Senior Chaplain, "OPD", commences his official war diary with the following statement:

When war led to the formation of the First Division of the Australian Imperial Force, there were in the Commonwealth Military Forces a number of chaplains of the Baptist Church, several belonging to the Congregational Churches and a few representing the Churches of Christ. Under new Chaplaincy Regulations these three had been grouped for administrative purposes under the title of "OPD", i.e., "Other Protestant Denominations" than Church of England, Presbyterian or Methodist.⁷

For the A.I.F., chaplains were appointed on the percentage of the Australian population that the denomination represented, based on the latest census figures. Each infantry brigade was about 4000 in strength and as such had two Anglican, one Catholic and one other Protestant chaplain.⁸ The Presbyterians, Methodists and Salvation Army were large enough to be separately represented because they had a higher percentage of the population than other Protestant denominations. Baptists, Congregationalists and Churches of Christ could have been excluded, but they banded together and in this way the Other Protestant Denominations (OPDs) came to be collectively represented.

In practice, the Salvation Army chaplains were included with the OPDs bringing them under the leadership of the Senior OPD Chaplain. The arrangement worked satisfactorily. Later it was considered wise to add the Hebrew chaplain to the OPD Department (for statistical and record purposes) though obviously the Senior Chaplain of the Department could not, and did not desire to, exercise any control over the spiritual working of the Jewish representatives.

As the war progressed infantry brigade strength was increased to include base camp, hospital, and transport chaplains with the necessary administrators. Eventually over 400 Australian clergymen served with the first A.I.F.⁹ It was a diverse group, representing wide varieties of age, learning, experience, nationality and understanding. Their individual stories are fascinating.

⁶ Michael McKernan, *Padres: Australian Chaplains in Gallipoli and France*. (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986), page x.

⁷ F.J. Miles, *War Diary*, AWM 6/4/1 Part 1 for April 25 to December 17, 1915.

⁸ Michael McKernan, *Padres: Australian Chaplains in Gallipoli and France*, x; F.J. Miles, *The Australian Christian*, Vol. 22, 1919, 399.

⁹ Michael McKernan, *Padres*, xi.

II

The Australian Churches of Christ sent five chaplains to the Front during the Great War. The first to go was Chaplain-Captain George Trilford Walden who was born at Newtown, Sydney, on 23 October 1861, but who had moved to Adelaide while a teenager. Due to the influence of a British Churches of Christ evangelist, William Hindle, and the revered T.J. Gore, he decided to enter the Christian ministry.¹⁰ He travelled to the College of the Bible, Lexington, Kentucky, where he graduated with a Master of Arts degree. He ministered at the Lygon Street Church of Christ, Melbourne, and at the West London Tabernacle, returning to Australia in June 1896 to become the evangelist for the Enmore Church of Christ until 1912, when he returned to Adelaide.¹¹ He was fifty three years and seven months old when, on 17 March 1915, he applied for a Commission in the A.I.F. as a chaplain. He was appointed Chaplain 4th Class (Captain) for continuous service and allotted to the 18th Battalion of the 5th Infantry Brigade.¹² Walden was readily accepted because he had previous experience with the 4th Military District of the Commonwealth Military Force, South Australia, from September 1913 to March 1915. He left Sydney with the 18th and 19th Battalions on the *Ceramic* and arrived at Gallipoli, via Alexandria, on 19 August, 1915.

Walden's stay on Gallipoli was short-lived but traumatic. The first Australian army chaplain killed on Gallipoli was Chaplain-Captain Andre Gillison (Presbyterian) who died of wounds trying to retrieve a soldier wounded in a charge. A report on the incident mentioned that Gillison was able to speak with Walden who had just arrived.¹³ Unfortunately, Walden contracted enteritis and was evacuated on 7 September. Until 12 October he was in the Blue Sisters' Hospital, Malta, whence he was sent to Florence to recuperate. He was then recalled to Alexandria and posted to hospital work.¹⁴

Over the course of the war he wrote a number of letters to his Church's national journal, *The Australian Christian*. These letters were, on the whole, cheerful, informative but realistic. In another letter, written after the evacuation of troops from Gallipoli, he explained his health issues, his journey across submarine-infested waters from Italy to Alexandria, his work in twenty-nine hospitals, Churches of Christ soldiers and nurses whom he had met and the unfailingly cheerful nature of the Australian wounded. Concerning the evacuation of Gallipoli he was full of praise, but lamented the loss of his effects:

You have heard news of the evacuation from Gallipoli. It was a wonderful achievement. To think that we moved thousands of men with only two casualties with an enemy at our heels, will be one of the marvels of this war. If our landing was brilliant, the evacuation was masterly. I am afraid from what I hear, all my effects are now being enjoyed by the Turks.

¹⁰ *The Australian Christian*, Vol. 10, 1907, 458.

¹¹ Hayward, H.E., Nutt, D.C., *Enmore Incorporated: Pioneers of Churches of Christ in New South Wales*, (Freshhope: Rhodes, 2014), 15.

¹² NAA: B2455, WALDEN GEORGE TRILFORD, 1.

¹³ Thomas Bluegum, "How Gillison Died," in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Saturday, November 6 1915, 7.

¹⁴ *The Australian Christian*, Vol. 19, 1916, 108-109.

But he did not shirk from the unpalatable. In the same letter he wrote, “I think it is only right to say ‘missing’ in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred means dead.” And he mentioned a soldier who had lost a leg and sustained thirty-five wounds from a shell burst.¹⁵

In Egypt, Walden’s work broadened. He came in touch with men from thirty two battalions and many brigades of light horse at the Gazireh Palace Hospital. His work was to “conduct services on Sundays and visit the sick during the week. I talk to all who are not Roman Catholic, Church of England, or Presbyterian ... and since Col. Nye left, Wesleyan and Methodist.” Already the denominational boundaries of chaplaincy were becoming blurred. He reflected on what he did for the wounded: wrote letters, did their banking, sent cables, talked of home, looked at photographs, put “boys” (as he called them—he was old enough to be the father of many of them) from the same town in touch with each other if one could walk, replaced lost Testaments, distributed Red Cross supplies, had clothing replaced, sought to enlist them as a soldier of Christ, comforted the dying and buried the dead.¹⁶

At the end of November 1915, he was transferred to the 7th Training Battalion at Zeitoon as its first chaplain. He remarked that as such he had to get things organised. That meant furnishing a reading room in which he put a portable piano that he had been given before leaving Australia,¹⁷ and establishing a canteen. Soon the battalion was relocated with other training battalions at Tel-el-Kebir,¹⁸ and shortly after having got everything organised again he was sent to Serapeum to join the newly established 50th Battalion of the 13th Infantry Brigade.¹⁹ On 6 June 1916, he sailed with them on the *Ascania* for France.²⁰

On arrival in France Walden noticed, and was saddened by, the number of women and children wearing mourning clothes. He commented that France had given a heavy toll of her husbands and fathers. However, he set about providing for the all-round needs of the troops. He was so successful in managing the Brigade canteens, scouring the country to provide his men with food and comforts, that during this period, Miles reported that he earned for himself the sobriquet—“The Canteen King”.²¹ In a letter from the Front, after the battle of Mouquet Farm in which his unit was involved and suffered heavily, he explained what Miles was referring to:

I get the loan of a cart, drive to some big canteen, and spend every centime I possess, come home, open up my goods, and begin to sell. I have cigarettes, tobacco, sardines, tinned fruits, lobsters, salmon, chocolate, matches, chewing gum, lollies, post cards, paper, pencils, envelopes, etc., etc. ... The mule they give me to draw my limber is a very pious-looking animal, maybe that is why they give him to the chaplains, but he is very conservative, and when a motor cycle or motor car comes along, he darts for the field, and not even the restraint of “Holy Church” can hold him. After he has dragged me over the standing crop or the

¹⁵ *The Australian Christian*, Vol 19, 1916, 108-109.

¹⁶ *The Australian Christian*, Vol. 19, 1916, 184.

¹⁷ The donor of this piano was Reginald Clark, son of the late Henry Marcus Clark who owned fourteen department stores in New South Wales. Walden carried it with him right through the war.

¹⁸ *The Australian Christian*, Vol. 19, 1916, 404.

¹⁹ The Battalion was dubbed “Hurcombe’s Hungry Half Hundred,” after its first C.O. Lt.-Col. Frederick Hurcombe.

²⁰ F.J. Miles, *War Diary*, July-December 1916.

²¹ F.J. Miles, *War Diary*, July-December 1916.

ploughed field, he resumes his innocent ways, and we jog along until the next sign of modern life appears.

Yet with the humour came the hard, cold reality; he had been in the trenches and rest camps, was currently “billeted” in an oat field where “the ground is like Scrooge’s heart, very hard”, has shells land 300 yards away, and comments that “it is astonishing how used one gets even to shells.” But then the real pain: he had buried men under the shade of some “lovely elm trees in one of France’s beauty spots; ‘far from home and kindred’ they sleep.”²²

The last long letter *The Australian Christian* received from Walden was dated 20 November 1916. He outlined the life of his Battalion. For three months it had been on the move, having been four times in different places in the front line. He had the care of four canteens and remarks that, “I am trying to save an officer.” By that he meant freeing up an officer to fight, rather than manage a canteen. The Battalion had been at Pozieres, Ypres and again at Mouquet Farm.²³ He was proud of the Australian soldier; they work and march and fight amid mud, sleet, frost, and snow, endure privations as good soldiers of the Empire. He was amazed how they now ranked with the world’s greatest soldiers.²⁴

In late December 1916 Walden was in London. He visited Twynholm Assembly Hall where he preached.²⁵ He also spent time gathering goods (comforts) for all the canteens of the 13th Brigade, which he managed. This was highly appreciated. On 17 March 1917, Walden was promoted to chaplain 3rd Class (Major).²⁶ In August the news reached Australia and a particularly effusive editorial appeared in *The Australian Christian*. It said of him:

He has been the faithful friend, comforter, and companion of hundreds of our heroic men. He has taken comforts to them right up to the firing line in Gallipoli and in France; he has cared for them on the battlefield, tended to the sick and dying, reverently buried the dead. He has written hundreds of letters from his sympathetic heart, many of them to loved ones of those that he has watched pass into the glory land.²⁷

This was a real ministry indeed.

But Walden no longer had leisure to write. His Battalion was constantly in action.²⁸ Another winter of trench routine followed so Walden took the opportunity for leave in England for the first part of January 1918. Miles mentioned that during his leave he did a lot of work for the 13th Infantry Brigade canteens by securing supplies not available in France. He was now managing five canteens.²⁹ He returned to his unit in the line and the canteen he managed was heavily shelled, and Walden and his workers had several narrow escapes. He talked with men at his private room in the canteen and conducted a Bible Class in French. When the unit came out of the line he conducted concerts and competitions as well as writing the inevitable letters.³⁰

²² In a letter to a friend he apologises for not writing but “he is well and in the thick of big battles.”

²³ *50th Infantry Battalion War Diary*, AWM4/23/67/5. www.awm.gov.au/units accessed 26th May, 2014.

²⁴ *The Australian Christian*, Vol. 20, 1917, 84.

²⁵ *Joyful Tidings*, the monthly record of the Fulham Cross Christian Mission for January 1917.

²⁶ Under A.I.F. order 677 according to F.J. Miles, *War Diary*, March 1917.

²⁷ *The Australian Christian*, Vol. 20, 1917, 453.

²⁸ *50th Infantry Battalion War Diary*, AWM4/23/67/2.

²⁹ F.J. Miles, *War Diary*, January 1918.

³⁰ F.J. Miles, *War Diary*, February 1918.

When the Germans launched a major offensive against the Australians at the end of March 1918, Walden's unit repulsed them at Dernancourt (April 5). The German threat persisted until ANZAC Day, when the unit participated in the now-legendary attack to dislodge the enemy from Villers-Bretonneux. In a masterly understatement, Walden reported that his work was greatly hampered, but he was able to do a lot for individuals and in a modified form carry on his canteen work.³¹ During May he buried a German lieutenant brought down by the Royal Flying Corps, visited Paris to purchase stores for the canteens, and carried on normal services when possible.

The Allies launched an offensive in August and Walden had one of his most eventful months at the Front. On one occasion his Brigade inflicted heavy losses on the Germans, took 175 prisoners—for 5 casualties (1 killed and 4 wounded). His work was mostly front line visitation; holding services was impossible. The unit's last major engagement was on 18 September. One Sunday night in October while his battalion was "resting" he held a service in a French School Room and found on the blackboard a French statement which, translated, ran "Australian Soldiers the Saviours of Amiens".³² It is strikingly suggestive of the value placed upon the services of the A.I.F. to the population in the Amiens area.

The 50th Battalion was amalgamated with the 51st Battalion on 6 March 1919³³ so Walden took leave during which time he was promoted to Chaplain-Lieutenant Colonel.³⁴ On his return he was located at the 51st Battalion Headquarters where he conducted services, oversaw the repatriation arrangements, saw the various quotas off, wrote letters of introduction and carried on the usual canteen work. He did not leave for Australia until December 1919.³⁵

III

Chaplain-Captain George Percival Cuttriss was born in Dunedin, New Zealand, on 1 September 1883. On 18 March 1902, he embarked for South Africa on the "Kent," as a private in the New Zealand Mounted Rifles. He became a minister of the Churches of Christ and in 1913 took up the ministry at the Hindmarsh Church of Christ, Adelaide. Like Walden he had done service with the Commonwealth Military Force as a chaplain. He was appointed Chaplain 4th Class on 1 March 1916 and attached to the 43rd Battalion of the 11th Brigade. He left Australia on 9 June, although his departure was not without incident. During a march of the Brigade through Adelaide his horse, spooked by a thoughtless and excited bystander, slipped and crushed his leg. Fortunately, no bones were broken.³⁶ He arrived in the United Kingdom in the *Afric* on 23 August and served the 3rd Division and the 43rd Battalion in particular on the Salisbury Plains.³⁷ In a letter to *The Australian Christian* he described his journey and his role.

³¹ F.J. Miles, *War Diary*, April 1918.

³² F.J. Miles, *War Diary*, October 1918.

³³ R. Freeman, *Hurcombe's hungry half hundred: A memorial history of the 50th Battalion AIF 1916-1919*, (Peacock Publication: Norwood, 1991). AWM4/23/67/1.

³⁴ This was on 17 March as noted in his official military record.

³⁵ Australian Imperial Force, Embarkation Records Schedule.

³⁶ *The Australian Christian*, Vol. 19, 1916, 313, 327.

³⁷ F.J. Miles, *War Diary*, November 1916. *The Australian Christian* Vol. 19, 1916, 159 records that Cuttriss' church held a special meeting to grant him leave of absence.

He organised “sports and concerts and attended to the spiritual needs of the troops.” He also notes the death and burial of a soldier en route.³⁸

Cuttriss was a keen observer. In writing about his period in England before going to France he commented on the boredom the men experienced and the raids on London and the coast by Zeppelins, which he described in graphic detail, noting that 100 people were injured and 40 killed.³⁹

When his unit crossed to France on 23 November he was transferred to the 3rd Pioneer Battalion. The Pioneers were soldiers employed to perform engineering and construction tasks. Their prime role was to assist other arms of the service by constructing trenches, establishing camps, and most commonly rebuilding bridges, roads and railways destroyed by German artillery. In 1916 the A.I.F. raised five Pioneer Battalions, one for each Division, which they organised like a normal infantry battalion but made up of personnel with a variety of trades and skills. The Pioneers were raised as Headquarters divisional troops.⁴⁰ Their skills and responsibilities meant that they were constantly in a Forward position and under fire, and their chaplains were with them.

Like Walden, Cuttriss commented on the value of mail to the soldiers. He wrote:

I have watched the faces of the men as the mail was being sorted: the intense expression of expectancy, quivering lips, and moistened eyes, the unnerved hand. I have listened to outbursts of satisfaction as letters from loved ones were received; I have heard the almost inaudible sob of disappointment as the information was passed along, ‘None for you.’

He also offered some observations on the German peace proposal, identifying the problems with it and the likely response from the allies.⁴¹ In another letter he remarked that he censored letters at the request of the commanding officer and trained the stretcher-bearers whom he regards highly and observes that “the majority of them are Christians.” He was also starting a canteen.⁴² Cuttriss received high praise from his commanding officer who wrote:

I have to report that his work is satisfactory in every way. He is doing, in my opinion, good work among the men, not only from a religious standpoint, but also from a man standpoint, and appears to be working in the hearts of the men in a manner which can only bring the best possible results, from a disciplinary point of view. He is particularly interested in all that appertains to the men’s welfare.

During 1917 this unit was almost constantly at the Front. They fought at Messines and at Polygon Wood, Broodseinde and the First Battle of Passchendaele, these last two being part of the Third Battle of the Somme. On 27 October 1917 he had his first leave since arriving in France, which he spent in England. Cuttriss reported to Miles in November 1917, while the unit was in the reserve area, that his current activities, beyond the spiritual, included supervising the Battalion Band, controlling concerts, managing the canteens, acting as Divisional Burials Officer, and writing the history of the 3rd Division.⁴³

³⁸ *The Australian Christian*, Vol. 19, 1916, 592.

³⁹ *The Australian Christian*, Vol. 19, 1916, 739.

⁴⁰ AWM.gov.au/units/unit_11394.

⁴¹ *The Australian Christian*, Vol. 20, 1917, 11.

⁴² *The Australian Christian*, Vol. 20, 1917, 125.

⁴³ This appeared as a work entitled *Over the Top with the 3rd Australian Division* with a foreword by Major-General Sir John Monash published by Charles Kelly of London.

He had twice narrowly escaped death, on one occasion being blown a dozen feet by a mortar shell.⁴⁴ His work as Divisional Burials Officer was very heavy: he wrote many letters and toured the forward cemeteries used by the Division and where necessary made arrangements for the repair of all damage effected by shell fire. He handed the management of the canteens over to the Battalion officers. Moreover, he became chaplain to two Canadian companies.⁴⁵

His unit was “at rest” in early March 1918 when he was appointed Chaplain 3rd Class (Major). He assisted in the instruction of stretcher-bearers and held services,⁴⁶ but he was back in the line for all of April. During that time he identified sites for and established cemeteries, and he conducted many burials under heavy shellfire. This work he carried out in part for other Divisions operating in the same area. Consequently, correspondence was very heavy. He also took the opportunity to visit the advanced Casualty Clearing Stations.⁴⁷ There was no relief; except for three days the month of May was spent in the Forward Area. Cuttriss opened several new cemeteries and controlled all burials. Miles comments that: “it seems strange that while several of this officer’s assistants have received decorations, mainly on his recommendations, no recognition of his work as D.B.O. has yet been made.”⁴⁸ Cuttriss’ letter to Miles about his activities is worth quoting in full because of its significance:

I found the cemetery given as near VILLERS - BRETONNEUX—62d.0.28.c.6.7 is not suitable as a burials plot. It is situated in a depression and the graves are sunk into the side thereof. I have decided, therefore, to establish a cemetery about 200 yards EAST of the hollow. There are about two graves at that place. Scattered over the area referred to above, there are a large number of isolated graves, many of which are not marked in any way; others are marked by sticks to which are attached identity discs. Many bodies are barely covered; this obtains specially along the foot of the railway embankment.

I have no knowledge of the conditions under which these burials were carried out, but it would appear that no systematic effort was made to centralise burials. A more unsatisfactory state of affairs would be difficult to imagine.

In some of the cellars in VILLERS—BRETONNEUX enemy dead are practically nude, and in an advanced stage of decomposition. These will be disposed of as early as possible.

May I point out that the constant change in the personnel of the Burials Section makes my work very difficult. I do not wonder that men prefer to be in the trenches, rather than be engaged in this work of Burials, which, under existing conditions, is the least to be desired of all Military Service. It is essential for health, morale and sentimental reasons that more regard be given to carrying out of all burials under active service conditions.

G.P. Cuttriss, D.B.O.

⁴⁴ F.J. Miles, *War Diary*, November 1916.

⁴⁵ F.J. Miles, *War Diary*, December 1917, January 1918.

⁴⁶ Order 677 1 March 1918.

⁴⁷ F.J. Miles, *War Diary*, April 1918.

⁴⁸ F.J. Miles, *War Diary*, May 1918.

3rd Australian Division A.I.F.
FIELD,
24/5/18

An OPD Churches of Christ chaplain acting as Burials Officer for the 3rd Division A.I.F chose the site for the now iconic cemetery.

In the midst of this we find Cuttriss reporting that with the coming of the cricket season some time was devoted to the game when the Battalion was in the reserve position. Somehow he managed to provide some of the equipment. He also referred to the helpfulness of the a/C.O., Adjutant and Officers of the Battalion. Not all chaplains could report so favourably. They showed their loyalty to him by attending church parades.⁴⁹

But Cuttriss was clearly feeling the strain. A letter in March 1918 to a friend from his home church is quite negative. He had neglected writing to his friends, the weather was bad and there was incessant shelling, the sad nature of his work was getting at him and he had not been in a frame of mind to write a coherent account, every building around him was rubble. He gloried in the victories of his unit, but lamented at the price paid for them. He said, "with my brave part we gave them the best burial that was possible under the circumstances." Indicative of his state of mind are the last words of the letter: "I just keep pegging along, though at times my heart almost fails me."⁵⁰ Here was a man with battle fatigue.

Finally, he asked to be relieved of his work as Divisional Burials Officer. This was granted pending the arrival of his replacement who was delayed. In June, the Senior OPD Chaplain informed the administrative headquarters that he had received Cuttriss' resignation and recommended acceptance. Five days later Brigadier-General T. Griffiths wrote saying that Cuttriss should be retained until the arrival of his replacement from Australia.⁵¹ In July he received a letter from John Monash, the General Officer Commanding Australian Army Corps as follows:

Corps Headquarters
20th July, 1918

My Dear Chaplain,

I regret very much to learn that in all probability you will be returning to Australia shortly, as the military chaplain who is to relieve you in your present duties will shortly arrive at the Front.

I take this opportunity of extending to you my very best thanks for the splendid service which you have rendered in so many different capacities, in all of which you have been quite indefatigable, and of the greatest service to me and the 3rd Australian Division. As an army chaplain, your work among the troops it too well, and too favourably, known to need recognition by me. You have also for a long time carried out the difficult and dangerous duties of Burials Officer for the Division, a task which you have always performed with the fullest sense of its gravity and importance.

⁴⁹ F.J. Miles, *War Diary*, June 1918, Appendix I.

⁵⁰ *The Australian Christian*, Vol. 21, 1918, 147.

⁵¹ NAA: B2455, CUTTRISS GEORGE PERCIVAL, 17.

In addition the 3rd Division owes to you much for useful work in the historic and literary field, and the works which you have published, both in prose and in verse, have reflected renown upon the Division as upon yourself.

I sincerely trust that your present resolve to do what is possible in Australia to stimulate recruiting will be given opportunities for fulfilment, and I trust that it will be possible for you later on to resume work at the Front.

I can, with the utmost confidence, repeat what I said of you in the few lines of introduction which I wrote to your book – “Over the Top” – that you have, at all times and under all circumstances, displayed the very best qualities which have made the Australian soldier famous throughout the world.

With very kind regards,

Yours most Sincerely,

(signed) John Monash.⁵²

Cuttriss handed over the work as D.B.O. to his successor, Arthur Forbes, but remained with him for a few days conducting all the burials in connection with the current offensive. He was finally released on 16 September and sent to the United Kingdom for duty with the No. 2 Command Depot. He was to act as a transport chaplain to Australia on the *Sardinia*. He arrived back in Adelaide on 28 December 1918 and he was demobilised on 12 February 1919, owing to cessation of hostilities.⁵³ On his return he resumed his ministry at Hindmarsh, Adelaide.

IV

Chaplain-Captain Henry Adam Proctor was born in Liverpool, England, on 15 November 1883. He trained as an engineer and then as a clergyman. He was the evangelist at the Lancaster Church of Christ, England, when after six years with the church he decided to accept an invitation to work with the church at North Richmond, Melbourne. He left England aboard the *Reinic* with his family on 6 March 1913 and arrived in Melbourne in early May.

Proctor was not without courage. The Melbourne *Argus* of Wednesday 27 January 1917 referred to his gallant rescue of two girls in danger of drowning at Sandringham. He formally enlisted on 1 March 1917 and was appointed as Chaplain 4th Class having been a home chaplain for a few months. He left Melbourne on board the *Shropshire* with reinforcements and reached Plymouth on 27 July whence he proceeded to Verne Citadel, Portland, where he ministered to 2000 men⁵⁴ until he went to France in October to the 4th Australian Infantry Base Depot (A.I.B.D) at Le Havre.⁵⁵ He was originally meant to be a voyage-only chaplain, but rendered such good service that he was retained for frontline duties.⁵⁶

Prior to leaving Australia, Proctor wrote a letter to the editor of the “Christian” saying that he wanted to be of service to any of “our brethren” who had relatives at the front, so could he please have

⁵² F.J. Miles, *War Diary*, July 1918, Appendix V.

⁵³ NAA: B2455, CUTTRISS., 21.

⁵⁴ Verne Citadel was a holding station for wounded about to be sent home, all being unfit for further military service. Proctor remarks that they are “weary, maimed and blind. They are the price civilisation has to pay for itself.”

⁵⁵ F.J. Miles, *War Diary*, October 1917.

⁵⁶ NAA: B2455, PROCTOR HENRY ADAM, 11.

a complete list of members serving in the army. With the English brethren he hoped to establish an organisation to look after the interests of their church boys when they arrived in England. He had grand ideas for this organisation:

If the co-operation of our chaplains can be secured, it might be possible to extend the limits of the usefulness of the suggested organisation; for instance, the names of our wounded and sick brethren could be sent to London, and arrangements made for their visitation and aftercare. ... At the end of the war, when hundreds of our young men will be waiting to return to Australia, the suggested organisation might prove to be a clearing-house for difficulties, etc.

In the same letter he recognised that there might be difficulties preventing carrying out his suggestion, but he would do his best.⁵⁷ There is no evidence that the organisation was established.

In his *War Diary* for November 1917 Miles described Proctor as the “waiting man”. By this he meant that he would fill the next OPD vacancy created by a chaplaincy casualty at the Front. Miles had arranged that Proctor move up automatically without awaiting the regulation delay of “orders.” The move came in January 1918 when he was posted to the 3rd Australian Casualty Clearance Station (A.C.C.S). His role there was to conduct services, visit patients in wards, provide comfort, write letters and carry on general chaplaincy work, but he was destined to much more than that.

Proctor’s first letter to *The Australian Christian* following his arrival at the Front gave some indication of the ebb and flow of the war. He was writing at the beginning of spring and the casualties were becoming more numerous. He wrote:

During the last week I have not been to bed before 2.30 a.m. My work sometimes is very trying, for the constant presence of suffering and death tends to take away one’s optimism. It is hard to retain one’s cheerfulness in the midst of so much pain, but without cheerfulness a chaplain’s work, in such a place as this would be nigh on valueless. ... There was a time when I felt quite faint at the sight of blood; now, however, I can hold a smashed limb during an operation, or help to hold down a patient struggling against anaesthesia.⁵⁸

He remarked that Walden had moved into the area, that he hoped to see him soon and said of him that “he is doing a splendid work, and his four years’ service makes his effort increasingly valuable to the men.”

Miles noted that in the latter part of February 1918 Proctor was sent to England, at the insistence of the General Officer Commanding, to work on an invention in consultation with the Inventions Board.⁵⁹ We would be ignorant as to what was behind this except for Proctor’s letter of 25 July 1918. When the casualty station was under heavy attack from German artillery and aerial bombing, which he described in graphic terms, the decision was taken to move the station back. He remarked, “I made an apparatus for drawing the iron [of tent] stakes in extra quick time, and superintended its use.” He was an engineer after all. Almost as a throw away line he wrote that he had officiated at thirty-one funerals in March and April.⁶⁰ The letter also revealed other services that he rendered: helped in the distribution of soup and

⁵⁷ *The Australian Christian*, Vol. 20, 1917, 112.

⁵⁸ *The Australian Christian*, Vol. 21, 1918, 294.

⁵⁹ F.J. Miles, *War Diary*, February 1918.

⁶⁰ *The Australian Christian*, Vol. 21, 1918, 438.

drinks, acted as a stretcher-bearer, assisted as an anaesthetist, provided hot meals for the doctors and nursing staff at midnight every night, wrote letters for the dying. His inventive genius and desire to help found another outlet. Miles reported, "Major Lockwood, D.S.O., M.C., recently exhibited at a Parisian Congress of Army Surgeons a retractor for use in severe chest cases which obviates the necessity of cutting one or more ribs. This instrument was made and designed by Mr. Proctor."⁶¹ In his August 1918 report Miles mentioned that Proctor had made more "appliances" to aid the surgeons and for the comfort of the cases.

Proctor's unit was almost constantly in the front line from August to the armistice. His reports to Miles show him to have been very busy. American casualties were coming through the A.C.C.S and the Railway Operating Division casualties as well. Proctor mentioned a figure of 600 a day. Further pressure was placed on him when a further 1200 cases passed through the station due to a fire that destroyed all the tents of the 36th C.C.S. He had only three hours sleep in 48 hours. This pressure lasted for six days.⁶² It might seem strange that Miles should report in November that Proctor was assisting with the Education Department in his unit by teaching commercial law, but he had completed a law degree just before leaving Australia.

For a short time Proctor was deployed to visit the scattered Australian Railway Companies in the North of France. He enjoyed the experience and wrote a long report to Miles. In his report he made three points: (1) such units should have a permanent padre, (2) the moral tone was poor without good guidance, and (3) he found the railway men big-hearted.⁶³ Proctor remained in Germany with the army of occupation⁶⁴ following the Armistice. His unit was the first to be so deployed. Proctor was recalled to England in March and received an educational settlement, which enabled him to undertake a doctoral course at the University of Edinburgh until October. He was promoted to Chaplain 3rd Class on 27 August 1919. At the conclusion of his study he posted to the *Zealandic* as a transport chaplain leaving early in January 1920.

The last word on Proctor should be left to Miles. He wrote:

My Dear Proctor,—

On the eve of your departure for Australia, I am constrained to write this line of commendation concerning the excellent work done by you as a chaplain in the Australian Imperial Force. On the transport coming from Australia, in camps and depots in the United Kingdom, while serving your unit in France, you rendered such excellent service that it called forth expressions of gratitude and good will from officers of all ranks.

It was a great joy to be able to secure a period for you at the University of Edinburgh, and I greatly rejoice in the splendid record which you have made there.

He returned to Australia on 12 April 1920 and was discharged from the service on 1 August of that year. He returned to his ministry at North Richmond, Melbourne.

⁶¹ F.J. Miles, *War Diary*, May 1918.

⁶² F.J. Miles, *War Diary*, October 1918.

⁶³ F.J. Miles, *War Diary*, December 1918, Appendix 1.

⁶⁴ *The Australian Christian*, Vol. 22, 1919, 194.

V

Chaplain-Captain Arthur Edward Forbes was born on 4 December 1881 in Brisbane. He served in the South African War, as bugler with the 3rd Queensland Mounted Infantry, during which he won the Distinguished Conduct Medal (D.C.M). On his return he trained for the ministry. At the outbreak of the Great War he was minister of the Belmore Church of Christ, Sydney. On 1 March 1915 he was commissioned as a Home Chaplain (4th Class), but he desired to go overseas and as it seemed that was unlikely in the immediate future he enlisted as a regular soldier.⁶⁵ However, he was attested as a chaplain on 1 August 1917 and sailed with reinforcements for England on the “Anchises.” He arrived in Liverpool, England, on 2 October where he was posted to No.3 Camp, Park House. Here he conducted as many as five services on a Sunday and visited three Military Hospitals which held about a thousand patients.⁶⁶ A letter to the editor of *The Australian Christian* shortly after his arrival speaks of the great privilege he has been accorded to serve thus and mentions that on the journey over he was the only Protestant chaplain aboard. He led a “song service” where the men chose the hymns. He casually mentioned that “130 made the good confession.”⁶⁷

On 3 April 1918 Forbes was deployed to the A.I.D.B in Le Havre. Here he worked with other Free Church chaplains in conducting services, and providing and distributing comforts to out going drafts.⁶⁸ Forbes found the work exceptionally difficult because of the short turnover time: troops were only there for 12 to 36 hours before moving to the Front. He did, however, make arrangements to minister to an adjacent Royal Flying Squadron that had no chaplain. He wrote on 24 June 1918 saying that he had not yet arrived at the firing line but was behind it with reinforcements, and expected “one happy day” to go forward.⁶⁹ In the same letter he mentioned meeting one of his old parishioners who was on the way to the front. The young man was killed a month later.

From July his work began to extend into the Forward area where he visited the 61st Casualty Clearing Station. On 10 September he relieved Cuttriss and conducted church parades for the 3rd Pioneer Battalion and some 5th Divisional troops. He remained with his unit until the end of February 1919 when he was brought to England for transport duty to Australia.⁷⁰ He left England aboard the *Dunluce Castle* on 16 March and arrived in Australia in on 18 May and was discharged in June. After demobilisation he took up the ministry of the Auburn Church of Christ. But that was not the end of his chaplaincy work. He remained a part-time chaplain and from 1919 to 1922 held appointments as Chaplain 1st Class (Colonel) and Senior Chaplain, 2nd Military District; he reverted to Chaplain 4th Class in 1922.⁷¹

⁶⁵ A.E.E. Bottrell, “Forbes, Arthur Edward (1881-1946)”, Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, Vol. 8. (MUP, 1981).

⁶⁶ F.J. Miles, *War Diary*, December 1917.

⁶⁷ *The Australian Christian*, Vol. 21, 1918, 57.

⁶⁸ F.J. Miles, *War Diary*, April 1918.

⁶⁹ *The Australian Christian*, Vol. 21, 1918, 560.

⁷⁰ F.J. Miles, *War Diary*, September 1918, February 1919.

⁷¹ A.E.E. Bottrell, “Forbes, Arthur Edward (1881-1946)”, Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, , Vol. 8. (MUP, 1981).

VI

Four chaplains from the same small faith community went to the Great War under the banner of Other Protestant Denominations. Leaving aside their expected role of conducting church parades, running voluntary services and Bible studies, comforting the sick and dying, they performed other duties that made them notable. Cuttriss and Proctor were promoted to Chaplain-Major and Walden to Chaplain Lieutenant-Colonel. Walden and Proctor went with the occupying force into Germany while Cuttriss and Forbes served as transport chaplains back to Australia. Cuttriss made his name as Divisional Burials Officer, was responsible for determining the site of a number of iconic cemeteries, and had to be relieved due to battle fatigue. Proctor learned to be an anaesthetist but made his name as an inventor of appliances that helped surgeons and the forces as a whole. Forbes arrived late, having already won renown in an earlier war, but replaced Cuttriss. Walden became the “Canteen King,” seeking always the comfort and welfare of his men. He oversaw the repatriation arrangements thus being the first of them to leave Australia and the last to return. King George V honoured him with the Order of the British Empire (OBE).