



**PLAN FOR  
JOBS**

# Royal Air Force

Chaplains' Branch



## **RAF COLLECT:**

Almighty God, who has promised that they who wait upon thee shall renew their strength and mount up with wings, as eagles, we commend to thy fatherly protection all who serve in the Royal Air Force. Uplift and support us in our endeavour, that we may be a safeguard unto our most gracious Sovereign Lady Queen Elizabeth and a sure defence to our homeland. Help us to fulfil our several duties with honour, goodwill and integrity, and grant that we may prove to be worthy successors of those who by their valour and sacrifice did nobly save their day and generation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Our vision:**  
serving the Royal  
Air Force through:  
**PRAYER**  
**PRESENCE**  
**PROCLAMATION**

**Our mission:**  
nurturing **VALUE,**  
**HOPE** and **REASON**  
amongst those we  
serve



The Venerable (Air Vice Marshal) John Ellis QHC RAF  
The Chaplain-in-Chief

## FOREWORD BY THE CHAPLAIN-IN-CHIEF

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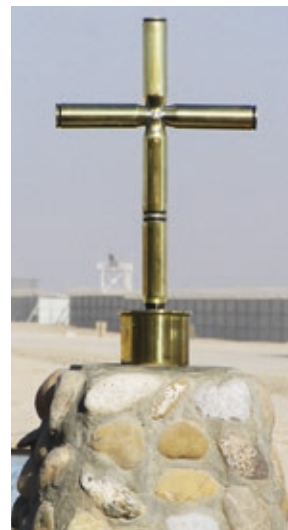
Operating at the very heart of their communities, Royal Air Force chaplains have, for over a century, served alongside personnel in both times of peace and of war across the world. Royal Air Force Chaplaincy is a ministry that offers many opportunities, some under challenging circumstances. We live alongside those we serve and wear the same uniform. We provide spiritual, pastoral and ethical support as we walk alongside our people, embedded as we are within the RAF family. All of this giving us the immense privilege of sharing in a very special world.

The Mission Statement of the Chaplains' Branch is 'To foster human flourishing within the Royal Air Force through the nurture of community and individual value, hope and

reason'. As chaplains, we emphasise the unique value and worth of every human being. We cherish diversity and champion human dignity in the various environments in which we are called to serve. We are also 'dealers in hope', assisting people to find light in the darkest of places. We act, too, as brokers of reason, helping people across the whole force to think through their motives and actions. As a Branch, one of our declared aims is to reflect the increasing diversity of contemporary society, and we hope to build on the significant steps we have already taken in this direction. As you read this booklet, it is my hope that you will gain a deeper understanding of the work that we are called to do, and perhaps even discover a vocation to join us.

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Padre Mitchell at RAF Halton.

## Prayer

Prayer underpins all that we do as chaplains within the Royal Air Force. When serving within chaplaincy teams it is vital that we seek opportunity for prayer; we come from very different religious backgrounds, and the nature and form that prayer may take will differ. Whatever the style of prayer, it is in praying as one that we firmly root all that we do within our distinctive ministries.

For those of us serving in more isolated situations, maintaining a personal prayer life becomes even more vital in sustaining us in our Ministry within this unique community. 'Say one for me Padre' is a common request, and it is rare that an offer to pray for an individual is ever refused. The young, and largely 'non-religious' demographic of the RAF, are in general very open to, and desirous of 'vicarious religion,' the idea that someone is praying on their behalf and indeed an offer to pray with somebody is often met extremely positively.

The role of an RAF chaplain frequently encompasses opportunities for public prayer, such as acts of remembrance, graduation parades, memorials, dedications and other formal occasions, some joyful, others more sombre but all of which form the foundations of the traditions and ethos of the Royal Air Force.

## Presence

As chaplains within the Royal Air Force we exercise an incarnational ministry which requires a certain amount of inculcation into the community in which we minister. A chaplain must understand the ethos of the Royal Air Force in order to minister in a culturally acceptable and effectively appropriate manner.

In much the same way as we might learn a new language or various customs when working in a new context, RAF chaplains must train and learn alongside those to whom we seek to minister. It is in living, working, eating, and deploying alongside those to whom we seek to minister, that we both earn the right to conduct that ministry, and inform and inspire that ministry. As chaplains we seek to serve others by walking alongside those who live and work in this unique community and seeking to serve them according to their needs.



Padre Hake in the College Chapel at RAFC Cranwell.

### Proclamation

There are many occasions throughout the year where chaplains are engaged in leading public worship. Aside from leading worshipping communities on individual units, events such as Remembrance Sunday, Battle of Britain Sunday, religious festivals, and many other events within the life of the Royal Air Force community, are all occasions at which spiritual values are shared.

One of the immense privileges of RAF chaplaincy is the fact that we are also called upon to provide advice to commanders, at all levels, on many and varied issues, some obviously ethical, others may well be more moral or pastoral in essence.

All require the chaplain to be both fully engaged in the issue at stake, and confident in the distinctiveness of what we have to offer as religious leaders. Added to this are the myriad of quiet conversations, debates over the dinner table, chats in the corridor, and welfare meeting discussions, through which the chaplain is able to be a prophetic voice into the lives and decisions of the community as a whole.



Padre Hodder preaching in the Falkland Islands.



Padre Colley teaching Beliefs and Values.



The Reverend Christina Lacey

## SERVING THIS GENERATION: INITIAL TRAINING

After sixteen years of gently pondering, seven years of preparing, visiting stations, praying, filling-in forms, leaving my old job, physical training and getting through the intensity of Officers' and Aircrew Selection Course (OASC), I arrived at my new home for the next thirteen weeks. I had only passed OASC three weeks earlier and the butterflies in my tummy felt like they were re-enacting the Battle of Britain! However, RAF College Cranwell was like my golden fleece and starting Specialist Officer Initial Training (SOIT) training was the beginning of my dream to serve as a Chaplain in the RAF. I found my room and greeted my fellow Officer Cadets, as together we started the mammoth task of unloading our cars.

I was then called to the 'Founder's Corridor' to give my attestation and from that point on I began my mission, not only into the RAF, but learning how to live out my faith without (but at more times with) the label of 'Padre'. This was because from day one we were told to forget our professional role for the next 3 months and focus on being an Officer Cadet.

Militarisation was the first phase, where we got to grips with: uniform, drill, field craft, military terminology, room inspections, saluting and learning to address each other by only using surnames!

The first three weeks were intense and I think I ironed more than I had ever done in my whole life. The days were really long, but the weeks seemed to fly by. Every day started early, rising at 5.30am to clean for room inspections, pressing and dressing for uniform inspection and 'buddy-buddy checks', where we inspected each other prior to the Flight Sergeant's arrival. Then we ensured all our kit was ready for the day, before leaving the block for the day's exercises and lessons. The day's lessons ended at 5.30pm, before returning to the block for more ironing, block



Padre Cannon running with officer cadets at the RAF College Cranwell.

jobs and prepping for the next day late into the night. Oh, and we also had to fit in eating meals in the truly wonderful dining room which was an oasis of home comfort. I never thought I would manage three cooked meals a day! It wasn't long before we had our first weekend off, as a 'reward' for progressing well. As I departed Cranwell on my first home leave, I felt different. It sounds clichéd and cheesy, but I walked taller and found a bit of healthy pride creeping in. Now, don't get me wrong, this wasn't an all-consuming or destructive pride, but rather a satisfaction and feeling of fullness that I was where I was meant to be. The realisation that God's calling to me all those years ago was finally being brought to fruition filled me with a sense of contentedness. Was I living out a foretaste of Philippians 1: 6... "he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion", or perhaps it was simply the tiredness leading to delirium?

In Phase Two we moved into learning about the history of the RAF. It was great to be able to put into





Sikh chaplain Mandeep Kaur at Reserve Officer Initial Training, Cranwell.

context what the Royal Air Force does today in the light of its history and heritage. Just like belonging to the Church, being rooted in something bigger than the immediate gives that springboard into the future. Alongside the teaching and daily disciplines of drill, uniform and tidiness, we focused on leadership skills. The leadership training was personally enlightening in terms of reflecting and unearthing my own skills and working as a team member. It was also great fun dealing with ‘shark infested custard’, or the ‘pretend bomb’ which needed removing from a ‘toxic river’ with merely a few handy pine poles and some rope that happened to be lying around. This was the phase when we gelled as a group and learnt that the vulnerability of asking for help was in fact a strength and enabled the team to reach its full potential.

It was also the time when we learnt how to critique each other in a positive manner to build up, rather than negatively knock down. The leadership training culminated in a week’s exercise on a very cold training area where we were able to showcase our learning and prove that doctors, dentists, nurses and Padres can nail leadership!

Our final training phase included the Basic Air Warfare Course (BAWC) where we put into practice some of our leadership strategies as well as expanding our fledgling knowledge of the RAF’s roles; past, present and future. The last few days focused on the finishing touches to our leadership skills, mess etiquette and drill with swords (although not for me as Padres are not allowed to carry weapons...as my 11yr old son put it “it sucks to be a Padre when you don’t even get a sword”!).

For me SOIT was hard work, but fulfilling and transformational. It wasn’t simply about training to

become a Royal Air Force Officer, it was the start of discovering how to serve as a Chaplain in the RAF. Although I went through some befuddlement as to whether I should be ‘Officer Cadet’ or ‘Padre’ and what people expected of me, after a few weeks I got to grips with the ‘fuzzy boundaries’. These will always be present in my role as Padre and, in a way, I don’t mind this as I hope I never separate my faith from who I am: my faith is so intertwined with my role that the two are inextricable. You can take the title of Padre away from me, but you can’t take away the desire to serve and demonstrate what it is to be in a relationship with God.



Graduation Day Cranwell.



The Reverend Dr David Richardson

## SERVING THIS GENERATION: SPIRITUAL RESILIENCE

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One of the busiest buildings on any RAF station is the gymnasium, as the requirement for physical fitness extends to all Service personnel regardless of their particular military occupation. Like other armed forces across the world, the RAF recognises that its personnel must be physically robust to face the challenges of working hard in demanding conditions. Or, to put it another way, a great deal of emphasis is placed on physical resilience – equipping servicemen and women to endure whatever the operational environment may bring. Recent decades have brought recognition that other forms of resilience, particularly emotional and psychological resilience, are also required, and British military leaders have sought to develop these through a variety of means. The past few years have seen a great deal of interest by the RAF in spiritual resilience, reflecting a growing awareness that this dimension of human life merits serious consideration.

The whole concept of spiritual resilience is probably most aptly summarised by the psychiatrist and Auschwitz survivor Victor Frankl, who suggests that the meaning of life is best understood by a life that has meaning. Spiritual resilience is about placing life in a context of broader meaning, giving us a framework to understand the challenges of life, on both a corporate and personal basis. A wide variety of social commentators agree that as a culture we are generally spiritually shallow, too busy focussing on short term materialistic goals to make much sense of our world. The novelist Douglas Coupland, to name but one, suggests that we have become ‘de-narrated’, lacking a shared story to live within.

The individualised society that we inhabit has brought many blessings but has also left many of us feeling rootless and insecure. As a result, we struggle

with questions of meaning and morality, lacking a ‘big picture’ to frame both our struggles and our values. We have a deep human need to live within a framework that is bigger than us. Spiritual resilience is all about helping us identify that framework, understanding how we fit into the world, and acknowledging that we are more than mere physical entities.

RAF Chaplains are currently involved in an exciting new project to develop spiritual resilience within the Royal Air Force, alongside those working in the fields of physical, emotional, and psychological resilience. This material is being explored in classrooms on field trips and a variety of other settings. Through the Robson Academy of Resilience, what the German theologian Paul Tillich called questions of ‘ultimate concern’ can be addressed as part of what it means to lead a rounded human life. Where have I come from, where am I going and what am I here for? Facing up to these questions gives us a greater capacity to deal with the realities of life.

As Chaplains, we are uniquely placed to help the RAF explore this subject. From the very day that they enter the Air Force, we walk alongside men and women as they face the challenges and demands of Service life. They have now joined an organisation which has a narrative, an organisation which takes individuals and develops them into a team with meaning and purpose. With a strong sense of group identity and a calling to serve, the RAF has a story stretching back over a century. Through conversations in classrooms, crewrooms and beside desert airfields, Chaplains help our personnel explore their part in that story as it unfolds today. And, of course, we sometimes have the opportunity to share with them the ultimate story which gives life meaning and purpose.



RAF Chaplains support a highly technical and competent community.



The Reverend Alice McDermott

## SERVING THIS GENERATION: RESERVIST CHAPLAINCY

February 2002: The night is calm, but thoughts are whirring. I've been in the RAF for over 10 years, but for the first time I was about to fly into a conflict zone as a Hercules captain. Both my crew's safety and my own are more at risk than they have ever been.

As an aircraft captain on 47 Sqn, I am sitting up in the front of my Hercules aircraft, getting ready to depart Thumrait in Oman. As a crew, we travel north, up the Pakistan border before turning west to our destination, Kabul, Afghanistan. 9/11 had happened 5 months previously, and this was the initial phase of what became Operation HERRICK, Britain's contribution to NATO's mission in Afghanistan.

That night I began to speak to the God that I'd left in my youth, promising that if I returned alive, I would give him another chance.

It was the first time I had reached out to the Lord in prayer for years; it was the first time I was in a place of potential danger. This moment was a significant marker on my journey from RAF pilot to Baptist minister.

But it began so differently; growing up I dreamed of being an astronaut. Studying electrical and electronic engineering at university, I turned to the RAF as a potential passport to NASA. However, the first time I stepped into an aircraft, space flew out of the window. I knew at that moment that I wanted to be a pilot!

I was 'the wrong gender', but in the right place at the right time. Whilst on my cadetship at university, RAF policy changed and women were allowed to train as pilots. I pursued my new dream and after training spent the majority of my career flying transport aircraft. Pre 9/11 this meant flying people and equipment into benign places, such as Canada,



Early days as a fast jet pilot.



C-130Js in Iraq.

the USA, Germany, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Post 9/11 the whole emphasis changed, and the focus was on conflict zones. I flew into Afghanistan and Iraq on countless occasions.

I didn't turn to God immediately on my return from Kabul, but remembered the promise I had made a few years later after a breast cancer scare. I began attending my local church, Newbury Baptist Church. Initially it felt like ticking a box, but I found an amazing welcome with warm people. When the minister suggested I did an Alpha Course, I began to look at faith through adult eyes for the first time.



I started looking at everything — and had a growing, compelling feeling to give my life back to Christ. On Remembrance Sunday 2006 I couldn't hold back any longer, and in spring 2007 I was baptised.

A new life had begun, for then, even as I stood in the baptismal pool, I had my first thoughts about being a minister. My Pastor was praying for me and my future ministry — and I could just hear the words 'full-time ministry'. I did think it was a little bizarre, and I locked it away for a while.

But this feeling kept returning, and I tested it, through preaching and becoming a deacon. The calling to ministry grew and despite having a secure future in the RAF and an offer to fly for British Airways, I realised that God's call required a response. Receiving affirmation from the ministerial recognition committee, I left the RAF and settled into college, sensing that this was all confirmation of my call.

After finishing college, I started my first pastorate in Watford thinking that the RAF was part of my past life. But not long after, I began to sense a nagging feeling that God wanted to use my past experience to minister among those whose lives I understood and had shared. I began exploring options and found I had a burning passion and excitement to pray for those in the RAF family, to be a presence among the RAF community, and to proclaim the Good News in my own gentle, relational way.

I have enjoyed my Reserve service, including a deployment to the Falklands, so much that I have recently transferred to full time service. I love being with people and a conversation opener is often: "Padre, why are you wearing RAF wings?" What an invitation to share my story!

I find it so humbling that God just reaches into our

lives and interrupts what we are doing. There is a deep sense of satisfaction from following this calling to build the Kingdom. At times it's been scary, but more often it's been exciting — journeying from Pilot, to Pastor and now to Padre.



RAF Halton chaplains - Regular and Reserve.



The Reverend Dave Skillen

## SERVING THIS GENERATION: CHAPLAINCY AND PASTORAL CARE

In ancient Roman Law the 'wellbeing of the people is the highest law'. In his ministry, Pope Francis has made this a key concern. Reflecting upon Jesus' approach to the Samaritan woman and the woman caught in adultery, Francis points out that, like Jesus, we too must 'set forth a demanding ideal yet never fail to show compassion and closeness to the frailty of individuals.' Indeed, this pastoral priority is an absolute 'rule' for ministry.

RAF Chaplains incorporate four elements of pastoral ministry into their work as they seek to locate the spiritual wellbeing of service personnel as a principal priority: 1. Encountering; 2. Active Listening; 3. Accompanying; 4. Letting Go.

### 1. Encountering

'Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well...When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?"' (John 4:6-7)

We can restrict the extent to which we are willing to encounter others. This might be because they are

different from us, or because there are circumstances we are unwilling or unable to enter into. We learn from Jesus here something of the beauty of genuine encounter. It was precisely because of his genuine encounter with the Samaritan woman, even when he was weary from the journey, that such an awesome transformation was possible in her. I wonder: what conscious or unconscious obstacles in me, prevent or at least restrict my (and so Christ's) genuine encounter with others? Furthermore, by our openness to encounter others fully we don't merely allow the Lord to speak to them through us, we also allow him to speak to us as we also meet Jesus at the well.

### 2. Active Listening

'He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching he said: "Listen!"... "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."' (Mark 4: 2-3, 9)

The Chinese symbol for 'Listening' involves so much more than the ear. It involves the whole self - body, heart, mind, soul, will and spirit. St Benedict, the great founder of western monasticism who sought to instruct and guide his monks in the ways of Christian docility before God and before one another begins his Rule: 'Listen carefully.' He goes on to nurture, 'incline the ear of your heart.' Many Christians around the world today seek to perfect this virtue in their own daily lives. Called to imitate Christ the 'good listener', who stands at ease ready to hear the yearnings of the heart of others, so must the RAF Chaplain be attentive to their context and situation too, ready with ears to hear.



Padre Norfield conducting a funeral.

### 3. Accompanying

'Now that same day two of them were going to



Padre Firth visiting a Puma squadron, RAF Benson.

a village called Emmaus. As they talked...Jesus himself came up and walked along with them.' (Luke 24:13-15)

The Padre can feel anxious about not being visible enough around the Station but what is our real motivation for going out visiting? Why do we want to be seen? In a world where everything must be quantified in identifiable outcomes, and where outcomes are judged by performance data, the Chaplain encounters the temptation to go chasing worldly outcomes; but to do this would be to stray from the gospel. Instead, the Chaplain is active in unseen places – encountering, listening, accompanying and letting go – and this is where we can make our greatest contribution to the delivery of Airpower. Going out of the office is never about being seen in the pursuit of worldly popularity, or even to please the Station Commander, but is about offering ourselves as chaperons of life and heralds of the Gospel through prayer, presence and proclamation.

#### 4. Letting Go

'One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk."' (John 5: 5,8)

It is right that the RAF Chaplain should feel inspired when hard at work in pastoral engagement, because this is a crucial element of evangelisation - the mission of Jesus Christ and His Church to awaken others to their true dignity and their vocation to know and love God and their neighbour (cf. Matthew 22:36-40). Indeed, I often feel most useful when I am being employed by people in their need. Some might ask, is this the Chaplain's need to be needed? I'm sure that's a potential danger and we must guard against this. Yet, if, as St Paul puts it, we can say, 'I no longer live,

but Christ lives in me' (Galatians 2:20), then people's need for me is actually their need for Christ who has placed me as His co-worker in the field hospital of human experience. I feel inspired and fulfilled therefore precisely because I am answering his call (my vocation) to accompany those in my care until such times as they are ready to pick up their mat and walk again themselves.

#### Conclusion

The life and ministry of the RAF Chaplain is multifaceted and yet each Chaplain is called to share in the singular life and ministry of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd (cf. John 10:11). What a truly inspiring call, privilege and burden to be given by the ever-present God of encounter, active listening, accompaniment and liberation!



Padre Clement at RAF Leeming.



The Reverend Al Nicoll

## SERVING THIS GENERATION: CHAPLAINCY ON A MAIN OPERATING BASE

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As I started writing this article, I heard the roar of our Typhoon flying display aircraft shooting down the runway before rising almost vertically into the uninterrupted blue of the Lincolnshire sky. I admit that my colleague and I took a short break to step outside the station church and watch the Typhoon display pilot throw millions of pounds of advanced military hardware around the sky for 6 or 7 minutes! On other days we might watch a Battle of Britain era Spitfire or Hurricane, from the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight, perform its display routine in the skies overhead. RAF Coningsby “develops the future, delivers the present and commemorates the past of the Royal Air Force’s combat air power.”

RAF Coningsby, along with RAF Lossiemouth and RAF Marham are the tip of the RAF spear, where our air defence and ground attack aircraft are based and from which they deploy on operations around the world. Along with our other large RAF bases they are described as Main Operating Bases or MOBs. RAF Brize Norton provides the aircraft which move people, kit and supplies to where they are needed and provides essential air-to-air refuelling; RAF Waddington is the home of the RAF’s Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR) fleet; RAF Benson and RAF Odiham are the home of the Puma HC2 and Chinook helicopter fleets.

At the heart of each RAF MOB is not the technology though, but the human element - those who make all these impressive, state-of-the-art aircraft work. These aircraft are not worth a thing without the people who fly them, nor could they do any of the impressive feats of aerial acrobatics nor have operational impact that they do, without the many people who maintain them, supply them or those who care for the personnel of the RAF. Amongst these are RAF Chaplains, who provide a unique spiritual and pastoral



Padre Wilson with Rivet Joint at RAF Waddington.

care to our personnel.

When I entered the RAF Chaplains’ Branch 14 years ago I knew that there was something very different and special about the ministry we provide, compared to the civilian ministry I left. Serving on an MOB definitely reinforces that belief. It is a privilege to bring prayer to the heart of the RAF community, to be a ‘faithful presence’ in a secular organisation and to have the chance to discuss issues of faith and belief with the thousands of personnel who make the RAF one of the premier air forces in the world.

It is not unusual for a pastoral conversation in a Chaplain’s office to begin with the words, “I’m not religious, Padre, but...” Whilst the people we serve with are not any more religiously observant than the civilian population we come from, the Chaplain is often the first port of call for our personnel when they are looking for support. You only have to lightly scratch the surface of most service personnel to find





Funeral service at RAF Odiham.

their spiritual heart.

Chaplains work alongside the other caring organisations of the RAF, such as medical, welfare and social work services to provide a full spectrum of care, at home and on operations. In all my years of civilian ministry I never found such a collaborative structure of care. Neither had I come across such an ecumenical model of ministry. The Chaplaincy team I led at Coningsby had Baptist, Methodist and Anglican Chaplains, succeeded by Baptist, Salvation Army and Roman Catholic Chaplains. Further support is provided by World Faith Reserve Chaplains and Civilian Chaplains to the Military. We maintain our denominational distinctions in all the ways that matter but collaborate fully on the practical day-to-day ministry of Chaplaincy. Most importantly, each day is begun and sustained in prayer together.

Serving on an MOB means that we support our personnel while they are at home, in preparation and training, while on exercise around the world, and on operational deployment. It is not unusual for our personnel to spend more than half their year away from home. The ministry of Chaplains extends to what we describe as the Whole Force, which includes the families of those who serve. We run a parent and toddlers' group, collaborate with other agencies to provide special events and meals for the families of those who are deployed, and work with local civilian churches to provide a regular 'Messy Church' event in the community. On station, we provide evangelistic and discipleship courses and lead a growing station church congregation. Within 12 months, 3 of the 5 Chaplains who have served at Coningsby over that period will have deployed on operations as far flung as the Mediterranean, the South Atlantic and the Arabian Gulf; we will also have supported one of our

operational squadrons during a 4-month deployment to Romania.

Serving on a front-line MOB offers some amazing privileges. We work with amazingly talented people, see some astounding sights and get to visit far-flung locations around the world. The greatest privilege, however, is that of the call Chaplains answer - to bring faith and belief to the very heart of the RAF community. We are called to walk alongside people as they enjoy the joys and privileges of RAF service but also walk with them as the demands and sacrifices of military life start to bite. It is a wonderfully incarnational ministry.



Padre Corrigan at RAF Benson.



The Reverend Dr Philip Wilson

## SERVING THIS GENERATION: CHAPLAINCY IN DIVERSITY

I was the Force Chaplain in the Falkland Islands, the sole Padre in a diverse community of thousands of tri-service personnel, civilians and dependents. In my office was a young man, a Private in the Army. He was facing serious issues with his chain of command and had come to me for help, as there was “no-one else”. As our conversation developed it became apparent that he was a man of faith.

He read the Scriptures and prayed. Indeed in his plight he had sought the prayers of his community at home in Africa. He had even fasted as a way to gain peace and clarity of mind regarding the immense issues he faced. He was not, however, Christian. He was Muslim. Looking at the two of us, there was much that obviously divided us: skin colour, nationality, marital status, religion, the Service within the MOD for which we worked.

He sat opposite me, the two crosses stitched onto my lapels staring him in his face and yet it fazed him not. He respected the position I held and the faith I represented, as I respected him, his duties and his faith. I felt honoured that he trusted me to help. Somewhere in his training or past, maybe, he had heard that Padres were for everyone?

Perhaps an unknown colleague of mine had deeply impacted him? In any case, I learned, once again, that Chaplaincy is a privilege earned through the hard work of many others who have gone before. In the words of Jesus: “Others have laboured and you have entered into their labour” (John 4:38).

Being approached to help by people very different from us happens more often than one might think. Back in the UK, a young woman in the RAF asked to see me, again trusting the Padre more than anyone else, as she sought assistance in her same-sex marriage which was undergoing difficulties.

She respected the job I did and knew full well (because others had told her) that my faith position may or may not have found her relationship acceptable. Put simply: she wanted to engage with Chaplaincy. Where I currently serve, a service person wrestling with issues of gender identity sought the ear of a Chaplain early on in the journey of questioning. It’s hard to imagine a ministry anywhere in the Church where such a diverse community seeks out what we have to offer.

RAF Chaplaincy in the twenty-first century exists in a myriad of world-views and lifestyles. A quick glance through the current brochure of courses offered



Tri-service Chaplains.

at the Armed Forces' Chaplaincy Centre at Beckett House suggests spiritual needs are being cared for in a vast variety of contexts: Buddhist, Sikh, Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, LGBT, Christian and Humanist courses are on offer, themed around the topic of 'Spiritual Resilience'. On the eve of their Centennial year, the RAF Chaplains' Branch adopted a new policy to commission representatives from other, non-Christian world faiths. Whilst the United Kingdom remains essentially Christian in its cultural (if not spiritual) life, it seems unlikely that what Padres have done in the past century will change beyond all recognition; yet – at the same time – things are not standing still, either.

In many ways – and I speak as a minister of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland – RAF Chaplaincy is rather good at dealing with diversity. I have worked happily alongside a variety of Christian denominations, including a wonderful array of Church of England clerics, who have a remarkable ability to see vast swathes of theological issues in completely different ways from each other, let alone from me. Sometimes I enjoy pointing out that Her Majesty on entering Scotland becomes a Presbyterian (although how this actually happens, I admit I have no idea, Reformed theology generally forbidding any kind of transubstantiation, even at Berwick). This little-acknowledged fact reminds us that the United Kingdom itself has historic diversity, expressed in different languages, laws, accents, churches, lifestyles and Parliaments. Indeed, part of the Coronation Oath requires the Monarch to govern the people, "according to their respective laws and customs".



World Faith Chaplains on a visit to RAF Halton.

RAF Chaplaincy, almost imperceptibly, has mirrored this diversity for a hundred years and may well offer the wider Church a role-model for how ecumenism can be done effectively.

I have never felt compromised as an RAF Chaplain: I remain who I am and loyal to the Church that sent me, whose standards I seek to uphold in my daily life and ministry. This is essential to my calling as an RAF Chaplain. It is my fervent prayer that in years to come a Chaplain, perhaps yet to be commissioned, also sitting opposite someone from whom they are very different, will benefit from what little good I may be doing now, for each one of us always enters the labours of those who have gone before.



The Diversity of Chaplaincy: L-R a Methodist (Full Time) Chaplain; a Church of England (Full Time) Chaplain; a Sikh (Reservist) Chaplain; a Muslim (Reservist) Chaplain; and a Church of England (Reservist) Chaplain - all of whom graduated on the same day from RAF College Cranwell.

## WORLD FAITHS CHAPLAINCY

### REV (FLT LT) MANDEEP KAUR, RAF RESERVIST CHAPLAIN (SIKH)

World Faith Chaplaincy emerged in the British Armed Forces in 2005 with the introduction of four civilian Chaplains along with an existing Jewish Chaplain. It was an historic and positive step in the history of Armed Forces Chaplaincy, and these four new Chaplains were very proud to be in this role, being the trailblazers with a challenging path ahead. This was not only new for Defence but also for my own community where the Chaplaincy concept is very new. For me there was another element too, of being both a Sikh Chaplain and a female too! In the military I was questioned very often: but you are a female? Can you be a Chaplain from your tradition? These questions gave not only an opportunity to speak about my faith but also for the other person to listen. That experience of listening and working out fresh understandings happened in a variety of ways as the world faith Chaplains began their work.

Prejudice is nothing new. According to the Greek philosopher Plato, 'it is only men who are complete human beings and can hope for ultimate fulfilment; the best a woman can hope for is to become a man' (Plato, Timaeus 90e). Guru Nanak (1469-1539), founder of the Sikh faith, in sharp contrast, gave a revolutionary view in His scriptures, 'why call her evil from whom are great men born, and without woman none could exist. The eternal Lord is the only One; O Nanak Who depends not on woman.' (Guru Granth Sahib, p.473). Guru Nanak declared that there is only one Creator for the whole humanity who loves all people. So he preached oneness, brotherhood and equality of mankind and the whole world to be as one vast multi-cultural society. In summary, Guru Nanak preached that religion is not a set of rituals.

It is practised only when one's belief is actually put into practice for the welfare of society.

These values continue to be the motivational and essential spirit in all my work as Sikh Chaplain in the Military. For me, the Chaplaincy is not only about providing moral, pastoral and spiritual support to my flock, but also being the voice to the voiceless, a source to develop fair principles/policies for all and stream of knowledge to all.

World Faith Chaplaincy in the Military is a path with a cause, a calling and a mission. It has brought friendship, hope and assurance not only to service personnel but also amongst Chaplains from all

different faiths and backgrounds. Chaplains have been the best faith education tool and their contributions can be witnessed through the positive change in the behaviours from junior to senior command on understanding of Faiths. Twelve years have gone very quickly and I personally feel that it has brought new challenges, tests and experiences as time progressed. Needless to say there is still some way to go.

A Chaplain in the Armed Forces from any faith today can be a friend, a mentor and a non-judgemental listener but if that friend has the same values and faith then it becomes the icing on the cake.

### RABBI REUBEN LIVINGSTONE, JEWISH CHAPLAIN TO HM ARMED FORCES

World Faith Chaplaincy is vital for the sake of supporting those of all variations of faith, culture and belief in the Armed Forces. But it is also greater than that sum of parts in so far as a robust Chaplaincy for minority communities broadcasts the vital message that the British Armed Services can properly mirror the diversity of modern society. The work we do supports our serving personnel through providing a full range of pastoral, welfare, education, advisory, and faith dimensions. Beyond this, issues of diversity and inclusion, and the recruitment of minorities is much enhanced by our presence. As a result, we are building morale, resilience, and spirit not only for our respective communities, but also for the armed forces at large. We also regularly provide a minority voice, perspective, and sensibility where this would often be absent. Advocacy for our respective faiths and their adherents would, otherwise, not exist.

We are proud to work alongside our Christian and other colleagues to create an optimal moral environment that supports operational effectiveness for everyone.

### DR S.M. KARIYAKARAWANA, BUDDHIST CHAPLAIN TO HM ARMED FORCES

As the Buddhist Chaplain to HM Forces for the past 12 years I have witnessed an incremental, positive growth in the British military towards world faiths.

An individual's faith is no longer something to be afraid of or hidden. Unlike the 'good old days', one doesn't need the permission of the unit Chaplain or the Chain of Command's approval to embrace a faith of one's liking. Thanks largely to the MOD's initiative to introduce Chaplains from major world faiths,



Padre Lancaster officiating at a memorial event. Chaplains lead ceremonial occasions for Service Personnel of all faiths and none.

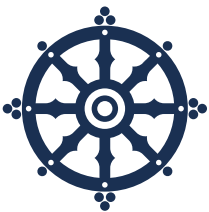
services, service heads and the defence community as a whole, seem to have understood the value of faiths working together. The original words ‘tolerate one’s faith’ seem to have changed into ‘respect one’s faith’.

Moreover, there seems to be a lot more collaboration and collegial working of the faith Chaplains as indicated by the tri-service World-Faith Working Group. As the Buddhist Chaplain I am requested by all faith groups to talk about ‘Mindfulness’.

Though ‘Mindfulness’ originated and spread through Buddhist Meditation, most faith traditions encourage people to practise it for health and well-being.

We certainly are living in interesting times. The 21st Century British Military is not only faith-friendly, but seems to value what faith brings to the hearts and minds of all faith practitioners.

**“A CHAPLAIN IN THE ARMED FORCES FROM ANY FAITH TODAY CAN BE A FRIEND, A MENTOR AND A NON-JUDGEMENTAL LISTENER”**



Buddhism



Hinduism



Islam



Judaism



Sikhism



The Reverend Alex Hobson

## SERVING THIS GENERATION: DEPLOYED ON OPERATIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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I'm writing this on Good Friday, almost 5,000 miles from home in 40 degree heat. My 'parish' is spread over 5 countries, between which I travel in the back of a cargo aircraft, generally at very unsociable hours in the morning. This is one example of life on deployed operations for a Royal Air Force Chaplain.

At heart, Chaplaincy is about embodying God's love for people by being alongside them, accompanying them on their journey and helping them to make sense of it. It is about being fully integrated into an organisation so as to understand its culture, live the experience of those who are part of it, and be able to articulate their concern at all levels of the organisation. Nowhere is this more true than on deployed operations, where Chaplains live, work, eat, sleep and play alongside servicemen and women for a period of months.

Whilst every deployment is different, for me this is Chaplaincy at its best. It has provided me with such a variety of different experiences and so many opportunities for ministry. I have been in Basra in Iraq, when our base came under almost daily rocket attack. I spent time lying on various floors with people wearing helmet and body armour, waiting for the all-clear, and spoke to those who feared for their lives. Sadly, I also spoke at the funeral of one who died, and conducted repatriation ceremonies for others.

As Chaplain at the deployed hospital in Camp Bastion, I was present in the Emergency Department whenever injured troops came in and were operated on, prayed for those who died, and kept vigil with those fighting for their life in intensive care – British, American, or Afghan, friend or foe. I have spent time in Air Operations Centres with those whose working day revolved around making life or death

decisions about dropping bombs, deciding what were legitimate targets, and how to avoid killing the innocent.

Deployed life is not all doom and gloom. Recently I took a US Air Force rock band with me to entertain troops and build relationships at a coalition air base, and I find plenty of opportunities to be the most competitive volleyball player on camp.

But even in less austere locations, servicemen and women are spending 4-6 months or longer away from their homes, their normal lives and the people they love. This brings its own difficulties: for some loneliness; for others difficulties created by having to spend almost every hour of several months with the same individuals; and for others because things that happen at home become so much more difficult when you're thousands of miles away. In recent weeks I have supported people dealing with bereavements that have occurred since they deployed; with relationships which are running into difficulties, or have been ended over the phone; and with people seeking help in knowing how to live with watching the effects of the military actions in which they are taking part. Some simply need to talk things through; some need practical advice; some the Chaplain will speak up for with their commanders; and for all we have the privilege of praying for (and sometimes with) them.

Out here people are away from home, from their loved ones, and all the things which take our attention in normal life; there is no going home in the evening or at weekends, no DIY or gardening (although some people still find some of this to do in the strangest places!). This means that there is more time to think about the deeper questions of life, about meaning and purpose, and about what really matters



Bastion by night.

to people. As a Chaplain, this means many more opportunities to have those deeper conversations with people who are not distracted by the daily round. I'm not sure that I agree with the old line about there being no atheists in a foxhole, but people away from home facing intense experiences tend to be much more open to talking about questions of meaning and faith. And crucial to these conversations is the fact that Chaplains are going through the same things – we too are away from home, missing our loved ones, facing the same discomfort or danger, craving some random foodstuff that can't be found on deployment, longing for the kind of miserable weather we hate when at home. I have, however, had to explain to some people that sitting at the same lunch table as the Chaplain was no guarantee of safety, and that if the siren sounded I'd be the first one on the floor! Of course, often the Chaplain's contribution is not a 'deep and meaningful' but the short conversation or kind word (or Haribo!) in the midst of a stressful or difficult day, or the opportunity for a good moan about whatever, or whoever, is causing frustration.

Deploying on operations has given me unforgettable experiences. Some joyful, some very difficult. I will never forget having tea with the Sheikh of Babylon or leading a young officer to faith in the chapel in Camp Bastion; nor will I forget the Iraqi Christian interpreter telling me about his family members who had been killed for being Christians, or watching a soldier's heart stop beating in an operating theatre and walking down a corridor to tell his comrades the sad news. I have made some special friendships – including with members of other services and servicemen from other countries. Back in the UK,

I have also had the privilege of continuing to minister to people I met while deployed, ranging from

conducting their weddings, to helping them deal with traumatic experiences from operational service.

Like so many others in the armed forces, I struggle with spending months away from the people I love most, and missing out on significant events. Yet, like them, I find deploying on operations perhaps the most rewarding aspect of being in the RAF. It is a very special and unique opportunity to love people in Christ's name.



Remembrance, Iraq.



The Reverend Nick Hanover

## SERVING THIS GENERATION: DEPLOYED ON OPERATIONS IN THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

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Four months is a long time and 8,000 miles is a long way, yet these were the twin challenges facing not only me, but my family, once we knew I was deploying to the Falkland Islands. Just eighteen months into my time with the Royal Air Force I was heading south (a long way south!) as the Force Chaplain to the British Forces South Atlantic Islands (BFSAI). Like many before me, I awaited my 4am pickup with a mixture of excitement and nervous anticipation; concerned I was taking too much and that I was bound to be over the baggage allowance, while convinced I would inevitably forget something important. But all things come to pass and after a surprisingly comfortable 18 hour flight I arrived at the distinctly wintery Mount Pleasant Complex (MPC).

In seeking to safeguard UK sovereignty of the Falkland Islands and the Falkland Islanders' right to self-determination the permanent military presence of around 1,300 service personnel is supported by around 50 MOD civilians and 700 contractors. It's fair to say that providing pastoral care and support for such a large community is not an insignificant challenge. After all, until I deployed I had enjoyed being part of a Chaplaincy team with fellow Padres to guide and support me - in the Falklands I was on my own!

Perhaps unsurprisingly, following an all too brief handover with my predecessor, it was a case of hitting the ground running. Day-to-day welfare issues vied for attention along with the regular aspects of weekly ministry. There were Sunday services and Bible studies to lead and as well as various memorial services. There were school assemblies to deliver, newsletters to write and a weekly feature on the radio to prepare for. All-in-all, the days were long, but

the weeks were short and time flew by!

Which is perhaps just as well because the Padre's office is ideally (dangerously?!) situated between the church and the Oasis Cafe with its endless supply of home-baked cakes. Such good fortune ensures a constant passing 'trade' as everyone knows where the cafe is and that the Padre can be found next door! Chaplaincy is so often a matter of being present, being seen and being available and this deployment certainly afforded plenty of opportunity to get alongside the MPC community in all its diversity.

Indeed one of the unique aspects of life in the Falklands is that it is a Tri-Service environment. So alongside the RAF commitment there is a rotational Army infantry unit and a permanent naval presence. This meant that as well as numerous opportunities to get in the air I had the chance to head to sea with the men and women of HMS Clyde and join the Infantry 'in the field' and on patrol. Seeing the ability and commitment of my colleagues at such close quarters was always impressive and whoever you are, jumping in the back of a Chinook in the middle of the night will always get the heart going!

While I really had little idea of what to expect in the Falklands, there were certainly things I didn't expect! Although I knew the weather was likely to be cold and windy I didn't envisage 'canoe-sledging' or go-karting in blizzard-like conditions. Nor did I anticipate being cast as the victim in a Murder Mystery play, going paint-balling or celebrating the Nepalese festival of Dashain with the Gurkhas. Although I figured penguins would probably feature, I certainly didn't realise I would see a pod of Killer Whales or get as close to mating Elephant Seals as I did!

More predictably, for most, the toughest aspect of





Remembering the 1982 conflict.

deployment is being away from home, separated from loved ones for so long and the stresses and strains that can often arise. In the Falklands this is not helped by the limited, and at times sporadic, nature of communication links to the UK. Believing all ministry, at its best, is incarnational, I have always liked the fact that Chaplains are treated the same as everyone else - same selection process, same fitness requirements, same training as other professional entrants. Military Chaplaincy is unavoidably a ministry fashioned and tested through shared experiences – on deployment, that includes shared frustrations and isolation.

As such, the role of the Padre is undoubtedly a unique one and perhaps all the more so when deployed. Throughout my time in the Falklands, I felt challenged and fulfilled in equal measure. To witness and experience first-hand the pride and the professionalism of those who serve within the military community, be they military personnel, civil servants or contractors was tremendously encouraging and it was a privilege (not to mention a lot of fun!) to work alongside and share life with such incredible men and women. As my first ‘out of area’ experience it certainly set the bar pretty high and leaves me looking forward to the next.



Padre Hanover in the Falkland Islands.



A Memorial Service in the Falklands.

## THEY SERVED THEIR GENERATION: THE REVEREND STANLEY HARRISON

### GEORGE MEDAL CITATION 1941

“One night in November, 1940, an aircraft crashed and burst into flames about three miles from the aerodrome and, although it was not his duty to do so, Mr. Harrison boarded the ambulance which was proceeding to the scene. On arrival, he immediately plunged into the wreckage and despite the scorching heat and exploding machine gun bullets, commenced to drag a member of the crew from the burning debris. He then supervised the work and led the fire picket, himself extricating a second member of the crew and assisting to remove a third. Further efforts were unavailing, however, as the remaining members of the crew were completely buried under the wreckage. Throughout he displayed the utmost courage and an entire disregard for his own safety.”



Padre Harrison

Some 1½ hours after the crash, Wing Commander Harrison rescued a police dog alive. At one stage a Calor gas cylinder bottle exploded near these officers and the fire thereupon began to gain ground. Undeterred by this, they continued their search of the wreckage until it was clear that there could be no survivors. Whilst Wing Commander Harrison was undoubtedly the leader in the rescue operations, Flying Officer Evans was conspicuous in always being with him in the most dangerous places.”



Blackburn Beverley.

### OBE CITATION 1957

“On 5th March, 1957, a Royal Air Force Beverley transport aircraft carrying RAF personnel and police dogs crashed on the village of Sutton Wick, Drayton, Berkshire. The aircraft, which had a large quantity of petrol on board, immediately caught fire and a major conflagration ensued. Wing Commander Harrison, Station Chaplain, and Flying Officer Evans, a Medical Officer from Royal Air Force Station, Abingdon, were soon on the scene of the crash and for three hours they worked together to rescue the occupants of the aircraft. They extricated fourteen bodies from the wreckage and displayed courage and resourcefulness of a high order, refusing to give up while there was hope of finding survivors among the wreckage.

## THEY SERVED THEIR GENERATION: THE REVEREND GEOFFREY HARDING

Padre Harding joined the Royal Air Force Chaplains' Branch in 1943. Attached to a Mobile Radar Unit in 1944, he is believed to be the first RAF Chaplain to land on the Normandy beaches during D-Day.

### MILITARY CROSS CITATION

"This Chaplain landed with a unit on the beaches of Normandy on 'D' day. The beach was under intense bombardment and was strewn with dead and wounded. Mr Harding worked for 36 hours, most of the time under direct fire, giving help to the wounded and burying the dead. He set an inspiring example and was responsible for saving many lives. During the evening of 'D' day he walked along a road, which was under fire, into a village in enemy hands. He entered a house in which were many snipers and obtained water which he took back to the wounded. His gallantry and disregard for his own safety were worthy of high praise."

### PADRE HARDING'S ACCOUNT

"Well, we were plagued by that beastly 88 millimetre. In fact in the end we had 25% casualties. We rushed up and down the beach one way or the other but we



Normandy, 1944.



Normandy, 1944.

couldn't get out of the range of the beastly thing.

I thought we really had had it, I was giving myself up to an early grave and I must admit that most of my remarks on the previous Sunday to the congregation now felt rather thin. But it came to me very, very strongly indeed, almost as though a voice spoke in my ear that we must get off that beach at all costs and take refuge under the shadow of the cliffs. So I went forward, found a suitable site in the 3rd house up on the left where there was an open courtyard. The few Germans ran away and apparently hid themselves in the house next door thus proving no trouble to us. And I then waved forward everybody I knew to get off that blasted beach - I use the word in its proper sense - as fast as we could... . But somehow we got off the beach and got our wounded off too.

Somebody told me at the time I walked up and down the beach as calmly as if I were walking up and down an aisle in the church, but that was simply due to the fact that I'm constitutionally lazy and entirely refuse to be hurried, least of all by the enemy."

## THEY SERVED THEIR GENERATION: THE REVEREND JOHN WANLESS

### JAPANESE PRISONER OF WAR - 1943-1945

There were 5 RAF Chaplains who became Prisoners of War at the hands of the Japanese. Most, if not all, of these men ended up in Japanese camps. During their time in the camps the Chaplains continued to minister to those among whom they lived, taking services, giving sermons, and marking significant occasions such as Armistice Day, Christmas and Easter. While four of the RAF Chaplains survived their time of imprisonment one, Padre John Thirlwell Wanless, suffered a very different fate.



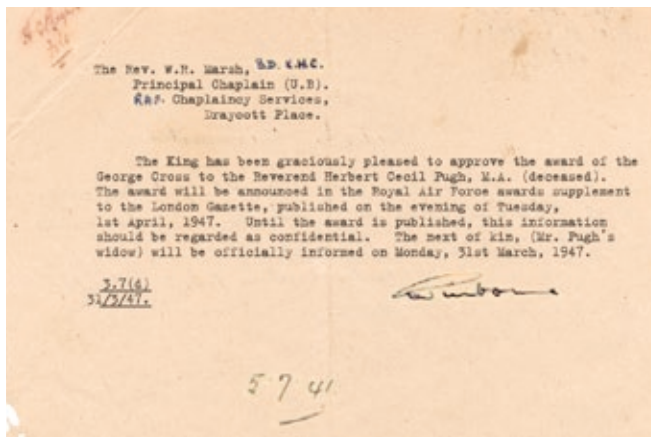
managed to complete the death march found themselves at Ranau, where they either died from illness, exhaustion or starvation. The very few who survived were executed just before the end of the war. Padre Wanless died of enteritis on 30th June 1945 having managed to make the march, carrying baggage like a mule, with no food. His body has no identified grave. His name is found on the Singapore memorial.

Padre Wanless received a posthumous Mention in Dispatches for Distinguished Service in October 1946.

Padre Wanless was part of the group of POWs who made the 'Death March' from Sandakhan to Ranau in Borneo in the spring of 1945. This march took almost 2,500 prisoners to their deaths. 641 of the prisoners were British, Padre Wanless among them. The rest of the prisoners were Australian. 6 Australians were able to escape and were the sole survivors. Those who



Japanese camp, Borneo.



## THEY SERVED THEIR GENERATION: THE REVEREND CECIL PUGH

Padre Pugh was posthumously awarded the George Cross in 1947. If the letters we have in our archive are anything to go by, he may never have been honoured at all, were it not for The News of the World. In October 1946 a Flt Sgt Sharp wrote to the paper asking why Padre Pugh had never been acknowledged. This letter caused many others to write adding their support, and the Air Ministry looked into the case. From one of the letters sent in 1946:



“I was one of the more fortunate members of the troops on board, and in actual fact came out the same hold as the one the RAF Padre entered. I didn't see him enter, although while in the lifeboat waiting to be picked up by the escorting Corvette I heard several members of the boat remark to the effect that they did see the Padre enter the hold containing the trapped personnel, he must have known full well that it was impossible to come out again alive, in view of the fact that the hold when I left was covered in at least five feet of water and was still gushing in, only a few moments after I left the Anselm it gave one definite plunge and passed below the water out of sight in few seconds, in view of this I doubt very much if the Padre could have survived more than a few moments in that hold of death. Whilst I was scrambling out I passed literally dozens of screaming men with their heads fastened between the rungs of the connecting ladder, it was horrible to hear their screams and to pass them by, knowing full well that it was absolutely hopeless for them to get out alive.”

### GEORGE CROSS CITATION:

The Reverend H. C. Pugh, after seeing service in this country, was posted to Takoradi and embarked on H.M.T. Anselm, carrying over 1,300 passengers, for West Africa at the end of June, 1941. She was torpedoed in the Atlantic in the early hours of the 5th July, 1941. One torpedo hit a hold on Deck C, destroying the normal means of escape. Mr. Pugh came up on deck in a dressing gown and gave all the help he could. He seemed to be everywhere at once, doing his best to comfort the injured, helping with the boats and rafts (two of these were rendered unserviceable as a result of the explosion) and visiting the different lower sections where the men were quartered. When he learned that a number of injured airmen were trapped in the damaged hold, he insisted on being lowered into it with a rope. Everyone demurred because the hold was below the water line and already the decks were awash and to go down was to go to certain death. He simply explained that he must be where his men were.

The deck level was already caving in and the hold was three parts full of water so that, when he knelt to pray, the water reached his shoulders. Within a few minutes the ship plunged and sank and Mr. Pugh was never seen again. He had every opportunity of saving his own life but, without regard to his own safety and in the best tradition of the Service and of a Christian Minister, he gave up his life for others.

## THEY SERVED THEIR GENERATION: THE REVEREND ALAN GILES

### THE FALL OF SINGAPORE AND IMPRISONMENT 1942

“...the senior Chaplain out there at the time was Alan Giles and, obviously the Air Force was having to get out, he decided that the Chaplains who would go first would be the ones who were married, and then next the ones who were engaged and that left me - because I was neither married nor engaged - and himself. Of course, he was married, he had his own family out there but of course he stayed behind.”



Padre Giles could have left Singapore with his family, but, having seen them safely onto the ship, he went back to his post. He and Padre Goss, who is quoted above, along with Padres Rorke, Wanless and Tucker became prisoners of the Japanese.

Speaking of their time as prisoners, Padre Goss recalls an episode when Padre Giles was put into solitary confinement:

“Yes, Alan Giles was suddenly hauled in and we all got very frightened and I’m sure he did too. He really didn’t know what it was for and I don’t think we’ve discovered even to this day. But I think it was something to do with, possibly, preaching at one of these services. They may have thought he said something which he shouldn’t have said. Anyway they hauled him in. Rather sensibly he put his cassock on before he went to the head office and I don’t think they hit him at all-surprisingly. They shouted at him a good deal, shouted at him and then put him in prison, right underneath one of these sentry points in the wall. They had a little box under there and he was

locked in. But there was a tiny little flap in the door and fortunately just near to it there was a loo. So we used to go to the loo and then slip round the corner, hoping we wouldn’t be spotted and we could talk to him through there. He was all by himself more or less in the dark and we’d pass him little bits of things to eat and so forth. And I remember one day I asked him was there anything special he wanted. He said ‘Yes, I want my prayer book.’ So next time we went to the loo we took a prayer book with us and passed it through. He was in there about 4 or 5 days but I don’t think anybody knows why to this day.”



16 February 1942: Japanese forces take control of the British ‘Gibraltar of the East’.

## THEY SERVED THEIR GENERATION: THE REVEREND ALEC ROSS

Padre Ross was killed in Action when flying over the village of Biawak, Sarawak on 18th December 1963.

From an account written by Padre Brigg

“A very nasty but hardly remembered little war broke out between Indonesia and our small forces in North Borneo. Very rapidly as the battles developed, the original small garrisons were supplemented by units from the UK and our station at Labuan became a very busy and hard-pressed centre for both army and RAF personnel. So much so that it quickly became obvious that a full-time Chaplain (RAF) was needed.”

*Padre Brigg asked for a Chaplain to be nominated by the Branch. It was felt no-one should be made to go into such a dangerous setting. Padre Alec Ross volunteered, despite being told that at ‘his age (50 or so) he would find the rough field conditions very taxing’.*

“I thereafter returned to Singapore, and shortly before Christmas Alec Ross reported to FEAF HQ for duty in Labuan. Within a single week, I had to go to the Changi airport to receive Alec back from the front - in a coffin! An incredible story was told me by accompanying officers. Apparently, Alec had insisted on being taken straight away to the centre of the fighting so that ‘the lads’ might know that there was a padre close at hand and also so that he might take to them something of the Christmas message and a few simple seasonal gifts. The fact that a padre had come among them seems to have travelled like a bushfire among the forward troops, and signals for him to fly hither and around. It was on such an



errand of mercy, when flying in a light spotter aircraft near the enemy lines with an Army Sgt-pilot that an enemy shot entered the craft, passed through the leg of the pilot and into the heart of the padre sitting alongside.”

So ended the tragically short ‘active service’ ministry of one of our most beloved Chaplains....The influence for good which his enthusiastic determination to see as many troops as he could before that fateful Christmas dawned was quite immeasurable, and it is no exaggeration to say that his image left such an impression out there that the way was wide open to the next Chaplain who was subsequently sent out to try and replace him.



Taylorcraft Auster AOP.6 air observation aircraft.

## THEY SERVED THEIR GENERATION: THE REVEREND DERMOT MCKAVANAGH

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Padre Dermot McKavanagh received an urgent message from his Station Commander asking him to report to an aircraft hangar on his unit.



An airman working in the hangar had climbed into the cockpit of a jet aircraft and removed the safety pins from the ejector seat. The man was unable to cope with a deteriorating marital problem and was sitting in the aircraft threatening to pull the handle of the now live seat. He warned everyone to keep away; he would allow only Padre Dermot to come near. Padre McKavanagh visited the section regularly and was well known to the airman.

Dermot called out to the man that he was climbing the cockpit ladder to talk with him, and having mounted the steps, he was obliged to lean over the side of the cockpit to talk to the man confidentially.

At any moment the man could have pulled the handle and decapitated the chaplain.

After a long time in conversation, Padre McKavanagh persuaded the airman to replace the safety pins and leave the aircraft. They both returned to the church for further discussion, which resulted in a reconciliation of the man with his wife. In due course they had a child who was christened Dermot.

For this pastoral care Padre McKavanagh was awarded The Queen's Commendation for brave conduct.





## SERVING THE NEXT GENERATION: THE RAF APPLICATION PROCESS

<b>Enquiry</b>	The prospective candidate makes an initial enquiry towards becoming a Service chaplain
<b>Referral</b>	The prospective candidate is referred to the Chaplaincy website
<b>Initial Contact</b>	The Branch recruiter makes initial contact and arranges a Station visit
<b>Station visit</b>	The prospective candidate completes a Station visit
<b>Interview</b>	The Sending Church interview takes place and references are taken up
<b>The AFCO process starts</b>	The local Armed Forces Careers Office (AFCO) arranges a medical, processes the paperwork and submits it to the Officer and Aircrew Selection Centre (OASC)
<b>Interview</b>	The prospective candidate is interviewed at HQ Chaplaincy Services
<b>Selection</b>	The prospective candidate completes the selection process at OASC
<b>Training</b>	The successful candidate attends the 12 week Specialist Officer Initial Training (SOIT) or Reserve Officer Initial Training (ROIT) Course at RAF College Cranwell
<b>Graduation</b>	On successful completion of SOIT or ROIT the new chaplain will be posted to his or her first unit or reserve squadron



During your time as an RAF Chaplain you will serve at your home unit but you could be called upon to support training, exercises and operations both at home and abroad; these detachments could range from a few days up to four months. Some of the places you could serve include the UK, France, Belgium, Norway, Germany, Northern Spain, Estonia, Romania, Cyprus, the Falkland Islands, the Middle East, Creech AFB Nevada and, Florida.

## SERVING THE NEXT GENERATION: FITNESS REQUIREMENTS

You must be physically fit to complete your initial and specialist training, and to carry out your role effectively. To check your fitness levels, we put every candidate through at least two separate fitness tests as part of the application process.

The first of these is the Pre-Joining Fitness Test (PJFT) which takes place at a fitness centre local to you. The second is the Familiarisation Visit fitness test at RAF College Cranwell.

### **The PJFT Test consists of the following:**

2.4km (1.5m) run on a treadmill (set to zero incline).

Achieve the required number of press-ups - within 60 seconds.

Achieve the required number of sit-ups - within 60 seconds.

The second fitness test will take place at RAF College Cranwell as part of your familiarisation visit.

### **The Familiarisation Visit Fitness Test consists of the following:**

Achieving the required score on the Multi-Stage Fitness Test (MSFT or Bleep test).

Achieve the required number of press-ups - within 60 seconds.

Achieve the required number of sit-ups - within 60 seconds.

How fit you need to be to pass these tests can vary depending on role, age and gender. The requirements are listed on the charts (Male and Female).





### MALES - 100% pass rates:

AGE	2.4 Km Run	Multi-Stage Fitness Test	Press-ups	Sit-ups
	(Mins)	(Score)	(No.)	(No.)
15-16	11.39	9.03	20	35
17-29	11.11	9.1	20	35
30-34	11.36	9.04	19	32
35-39	12	8.09	18	29
40-44	12.26	8.03	17	26
45-49	12.54	7.07	16	23
50-54	13.27	7.01	15	20

### FEMALES - 100% pass rates:

AGE	2.4 Km Run	Multi-Stage Fitness Test	Press-ups	Sit-ups
	(Mins)	(Score)	(No.)	(No.)
15-16	13.54	6.07	10	32
17-29	13.23	7.02	10	32
30-34	13.47	6.08	9	29
35-39	14.13	6.04	8	26
40-44	14.48	5.08	7	23
45-49	15.19	5.04	6	20
50-54	15.53	4.09	5	17

#### Useful Links to websites and videos for fitness

[https://www.raf.mod.uk/recruitment/media/1954/20150825-pjft\\_prtc\\_fitness\\_protocols-u.pdf](https://www.raf.mod.uk/recruitment/media/1954/20150825-pjft_prtc_fitness_protocols-u.pdf)

<https://www.raf.mod.uk/recruitment/media/1852/intro-v3.mp3>

<https://www.raf.mod.uk/recruitment/media/1855/shuttle-v3.mp3>

[https://www.raf.mod.uk/recruitment/media/2231/20170117-pub772-fit\\_for\\_action.pdf](https://www.raf.mod.uk/recruitment/media/2231/20170117-pub772-fit_for_action.pdf)

## SERVING THE NEXT GENERATION: RAF CHAPLAINCY CAREER PATH

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### Requirements

To serve as an RAF Chaplain there are certain requirements that you need to meet.

You must be aged between 26 and 53 years old, attesting before your 54th birthday.

You must have the academic qualifications required by the Sending Churches for ministerial training, be ordained and have 3 years' pastoral experience.

You must be a citizen of the United Kingdom or the Republic of Ireland, the holder of dual UK/other nationality or have been a Commonwealth citizen since birth.

You must initially commit to a minimum of 6 years' service, meet the health and fitness criteria and pass a fitness test, the details of which are provided in this publication.

### Role

As an RAF Chaplain you will be involved in the lives of our personnel, regardless of their rank or religious background. Your personal sacrifice may be considerable as you will serve alongside our people, providing vital spiritual, pastoral and ethical support wherever they go, including deployed Operations. Your home-based duties will be equally important in support of personnel and their families on RAF stations. While exploring innovative ways of engaging with your community, you can also expect to fulfil the more traditional roles of leading regular worship, including officiating at weddings, baptisms and funerals.

### Sending Authorities

The Chaplains' Branch recruits clergy from the following denominations: Church of England

(including all Anglicans), Roman Catholic, Church of Scotland, Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Baptist, United Reformed, Methodist, Elim Pentecostal, Assemblies of God, Salvation Army and Churches in Community International. In addition to the specified Christian denominations, the RAF has recently commissioned a number of chaplains from other world faiths and the Ministry of Defence is continuing to develop relationships with endorsing authorities for the Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, Jewish and Sikh faiths to provide additional commissioned chaplains. For up to date information on the current recruiting situation, please contact the Branch Recruitment Officer.

### Specialist Officers' Initial Training

Like all RAF specialist branch officers, you will begin your RAF career on Specialist Officers' Initial Training Course (SOIT) at RAF College Cranwell in Lincolnshire. You will follow a challenging 13-week course designed for professionally qualified entrants to the RAF, exploring how to apply your ministry in a military context. The course includes fitness development, military training and academic study as well as practical outdoor leadership challenges.





Beckett House, the Armed Forces' new Chaplaincy Centre.

### Reserve Officer Initial Training

Chaplains wishing to serve in the Royal Air Force Reserves follow a similar process to those joining the Regular forces, however their training and commitments are very different. Selection is dependent on reaching the same standards as regular officers, currently they are required to complete 4 specific residential weekends and also a 15-day residential period at the RAF College Cranwell. On successful completion, candidates would then be given the opportunity to attend a short period of graduation training prior to graduating alongside SOIT and Main Squadron officer cadets. Applicants are required to commit to attend 27 days per year for an initial 12 year term.

### Specialist Training

After SOIT, you will complete a chaplain-specific induction course at an appropriate time within your first 6 months of service. The course explores the theology of military chaplaincy and considers its application to practical life in the Armed Forces.

### Foundation Tour

For your first tour, you will probably be posted to a large base where you will work within an interdenominational team to minister to your community. There will be a senior chaplain on base who will be able to guide you and give you the benefit of their experience.

### Your Career Prospects

You will join the RAF on an Initial Commission (IC) of 6 years as a Reverend (Flight Lieutenant), with an option to leave after 4 years (with 12 months' notice). Chaplains on a 6-year IC may apply for a 12 year commission after completing 3 years regular service. Promotion to Reverend (Squadron Leader) is after 3 years' satisfactory service from the date of commission. A chaplain may be eligible for competitive boarding for promotion to Reverend (Wing Commander) once they have completed the requisite amount of time in rank as a Reverend (Squadron Leader).

### Ongoing Development

The Armed Forces Chaplaincy Centre (AFCC) at Beckett House, Wiltshire is the chaplaincy training centre for all 3 Services and you will visit frequently for continuing ministerial education and other training courses. There are also opportunities to study at postgraduate level at a later stage of your chaplaincy career.

### Transferable Skills

As a chaplain in the RAF, you will have all the development opportunities and career prospects available to your civilian counterparts, together with the chance to work around the world and gain unique personal experiences. Most RAF chaplains go back into civilian ministerial work when they leave the RAF.

### COMMANDING OFFICERS' COMMENTS ON CHAPLAINS:

"In all that he has done, he has been the epitome of a successful Station Padre, caring for those who seek his support and counsel in an unobtrusive but extremely effective manner. His hallmark is his strength of character which has been so vital in his meeting the many demands placed upon him."

"Although largely invisible in the UK, the tempo of ops throughout his tour has been exceedingly high, and this has placed a tremendous burden on the personnel here. Add to this the relentless loss of life, punctuated by numerous Repatriation Ceremonies, the terrible injuries we have seen and the hostile deployed environment, and one can begin to appreciate the incredible emotional strain our people are living with. It is not overstating the issue to say that this Chaplain has been the outstanding shining light of understanding, compassion and humour for all those he has met; his altruism and resolve are inspirational and I consider him the finest padre I have seen in 15 years of ops."

"There can be few ministers of the Church who compare with him. I have no doubt he is one of the best, and most effective, Padres it has ever been my pleasure to work with."

"Our Padre carries out all his duties with the highest degree of professionalism, and is equally at home in the classroom, visiting sections on the unit, or offering pastoral counselling. Typically, much of this work goes on out of the public gaze, but it is there in abundance."

"The Padre does not shy away from a challenge and I was touched recently by the sensitive, caring and highly professional manner in which he dealt with a particularly tragic death of a young girl. He has a delightfully deft touch, is the soul of discretion and has elicited nothing but praise from the families who have benefited from his support."

"Finally, he has been a good friend and provided wise counsel. He has enjoyed my complete trust and features high on my 'must take on ops' list."



Bastion memorial cross made from empty shell cases, now at the National Memorial Arboretum, Staffordshire.



# ARE YOU CALLED TO MINISTER HERE?

search: RAF Chaplains

## Contact Us

If you would like more information about RAF Chaplaincy, please do contact us.

### Branch Recruitment Officer

Email: [Philip.Wilson126@mod.gov.uk](mailto:Philip.Wilson126@mod.gov.uk)

Telephone: 01400 267025

Or visit our Website:

[www.raf.mod.uk/recruitment/roles/roles-finder/personnel-support/chaplain](http://www.raf.mod.uk/recruitment/roles/roles-finder/personnel-support/chaplain)





## THE RAF VISION

The RAF's role, in conjunction with Defence organisations, is to deliver the UK Defence vision:

- Defend the UK and its interests.
- Strengthen international peace and stability.
- Be a force for good in the world.

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### Recruiting now

- Competitive pay and pension
- Training and life-long learning
- Six weeks' paid leave
- Free medical and dental care
- Subsidised food and accommodation
- Sport and adventure training

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### Equal opportunities

The RAF is an equal opportunities employer that recognises the value of an individual's ability regardless of their gender, colour, race, nationality, ethnic or national origins, background, religion or belief, sexual orientation or marital status or civil partnership. The RAF believe that harnessing the talents and skills of individuals from different groups enhances operational effectiveness.

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### Welfare in the RAF

To find out more about the RAF's commitment to the care and welfare of its personnel, visit

[www.raf.mod.uk/recruitment/lifestyle-benefits/life-as-a-regular](http://www.raf.mod.uk/recruitment/lifestyle-benefits/life-as-a-regular)

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