

Missionaries of Africa as Military Chaplains in the Second World War

(With Particular Reference to Colonial Units of the British Army)

by



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Introduction

Of the six hundred or more Missionaries of Africa who were mobilized during the course of the Second World War more than sixty were military chaplains.¹ A few German White Fathers, serving officially as chaplains when the conflict came to an end, worked among their fellow prisoners of war.² The few Italian White Fathers who were military chaplains also carried out an important ministry among prisoners at the end of the war. A relatively small number of White Fathers became chaplains in the Belgian colonial forces in Africa. Some of these served in the Far East. After the second (French) mobilization in 1942 Missionaries of Africa were officially welcomed as military chaplains in units of the Free French Forces, the majority from the French colonies, such as the *Zouaves* and the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais*. However, a large number of White Fathers of various Allied nationalities served as chaplains in colonial units of the British Army, such as the King's African Rifles and the Royal West African Frontier Force. The greater attention paid to them in this paper is justified both by their number and the availability of information about them.

The paper studies the contribution made by these chaplains. It also examines some of the inherent contradictions involved in military chaplaincy, the conflict with ideologies at variance with the Gospel, the dilemma of non-combatants on active service, inter-denominational conflicts among chaplains in a pre-ecumenical age, the problems of co-ordination, and the compatibility or otherwise of the missionary's and the chaplain's life.

Military Chaplains in the French Army

Although the 1905 laicity law did not technically rule out the presence of chaplains in the French army, the wholesale mobilization of clergy ensured that chaplaincy work was mainly the unofficial commitment of priests acting as stretcher-bearers,

¹ A working list of 64 military chaplains was used for this article. This is a conservative estimate. Cf. Appendix.

² Missionaries of Africa were also currently known as "White Fathers".

medical orderlies or billeting officers, if not as actual combatants. In practice there were no permanent full-time chaplains. A decree of 1935, however, made provision for civilian priests to volunteer as chaplains, with a captain's salary, and to be attached to a battalion in war time. In 1940, French GHQ defined the chaplaincy as "an optional benevolent institution" on a par with voluntary services such as canteens.³ In these circumstances, although more than two hundred members of the Society were mobilized in France at the beginning of the Second World War, there were few volunteer chaplains among them.⁴

One who did become a volunteer chaplain in April 1940 was Joseph Gelot (1911-2003). For four months he served with light infantry battalions in Tunisia and then returned to his teaching at the scholasticate of Carthage. In the second French mobilization of 1942 he was officially designated a divisional chaplain and served with distinction in the colonial infantry during the campaigns of Corsica, Elba, France and Germany.⁵ He was destined to become a great figure in the Society.

The wholesale mobilization of French priests at the beginning of the war reduced the number of active civilian clergy and with it the prospect of volunteer chaplains. In early 1940 the British Ministry of Information asked the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Arthur Hinsley, to spare some French-speaking priests of his diocese for service in France. Hinsley was unmoved by the appeal, regarding the problem as one of France's own making.⁶ In any case it was a problem that soon solved itself after the fall of France when there was a general demobilization of French forces.

Under the Vichy regime compulsory military service was replaced by youth camps in mainland France and North Africa. These camps had a military character and were staffed by officers of the reserve. Several Missionaries of Africa served as chaplains to the camps.⁷

Following the Allied landing in North Africa in November 1942, there was a second French mobilization ordered by General de Gaulle. This time chaplains were officially appointed to virtually every unit of the Free French forces and were given military ranks. These ranged from Corporal and Sergeant to Lieutenant and Captain. Chaplains served at battalion, regimental and divisional levels in virtually every campaign, North African, Italian, French and German. At the end of the war, nine Missionaries of Africa were serving as divisional chaplains in the Free French forces – mostly colonial units - and no fewer than twenty-four were honoured for gallantry out of a total of nearly thirty chaplains.⁸ Of course, many more Missionaries of Africa who were mobilized after 1942 acted as unofficial chaplains, and these gave invaluable assistance to the designated chaplains. In fact, the effectiveness of the French military chaplaincy derived from the co-operation between official and unofficial chaplains. In 1943 the Vatican recognized the importance of the Society's

³ Corvisier, André and Childs, John, "Chaplains, military" in *A Dictionary of Military History and the Art of War*, tr. Turner, Chris., Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell 1994, pp.126-130.

⁴ AGMAfr. 310003.

⁵ AGMAfr. *Notices Nécrologiques*, XXXIV, pp. 503-507; *Missionnaires d'Afrique, Livre D'Or* 1939-1945, Algiers 1946, p. 34.

⁶ Hagerty, James, *Cardinal Hinsley – Priest and Patriot*, Oxford, Family Publications, 2008, p. 326.

⁷ One was André Gommeaux who appointed to Tabarka in Tunisia in April 1942.

⁸ *Livre D'Or, passim*.

contribution by granting the superior general, Joseph-Marie Birraux (1883-1947), the faculties of a principal military chaplain.⁹

It is not intended in this article to detail the war records of all the French military chaplains in the Society, but several were outstanding. Paul Py (1901-1962) served as a divisional Captain-Chaplain in Algeria, Italy and Germany. He was mentioned in dispatches five times and received the *Croix de Guerre* on four occasions.¹⁰ Roger Fouquer (1906-1993) signed up with the Free French forces in Dar es Salaam as early as 1941 and served as Captain-Chaplain in Ethiopia, Djibouti, Egypt and Syria, before joining General Leclerc in 1943 and becoming divisional chaplain to an armoured regiment that saw action in France and Alsace. He received two citations and was awarded the American Legion of Merit. He remained a Chaplain of Veterans until his death in 1993.¹¹ General (Marshal) Leclerc's widow was present at his funeral. After being held as a prisoner of war in Austria from 1940-1941, Louis Herbaux (1912-1993) became a Second-Lieutenant Chaplain to a Regiment of Moroccan *Spahis* in the second French mobilization. He accompanied his regiment to Italy, France and Germany, earning three citations, the *Croix de Guerre* and the Military Medal. He took part in the annual reunions of Spahi veterans and they also attended his funeral.¹²

White Fathers served as chaplains in other branches of the Free French forces. Joseph Duhautoy (Schuffenecker) (1909-1995) served as a Naval Lieutenant-Chaplain in the Marines and was much decorated.¹³ François Hehn (1911-1996) served as an Auxiliary Chaplain to an anti-aircraft unit.¹⁴ Charles Malfoy (1912-1988) earned distinction as a Captain-Chaplain to a Paratroop Regiment.¹⁵

Military Chaplains in the German Army

The German tradition of appointing Catholic and Evangelical military chaplains was continued in the army of the Third Reich.¹⁶ Christianity was strong in Germany and the avowed purpose of the Nazi regime was to undermine the authority of the Churches and weaken the control they exercised over their adherents. The international character of the Catholic Church presented a major challenge and many heroic Catholics who resisted the Nazis suffered imprisonment and/or death. The regime attempted to curb the growth of international and missionary congregations by closing their formation houses. This happened to the Missionaries of Africa.¹⁷ By signing a Concordat with the Vatican in 1933 the Nazis hoped to remove the grounds for Catholic resistance, outlaw Catholic social and political action and establish an exempt pastoral ministry for the German army. Article 27 of the Concordat provided

⁹ AGMAfr. 310168, Cardinal Maglione to Birraux, March 30th 1943.

¹⁰ *Livre D'Or*, pp. 58-59.

¹¹ AGMAfr., *Notices Nécrologiques*, XXX, pp. 89-91; *Livre D'Or*, p. 32.

¹² AGMAfr., *Notices Nécrologiques*, XXX, pp. 130-132; *Livre D'Or*, pp. 42-43.

¹³ AGMAfr., *Notices Nécrologiques*, XXXI, pp. 480-482, *Livre D'Or*, pp. 28-29.

¹⁴ AGMAfr., *Notices Nécrologiques* XXXI, pp. 310-312.

¹⁵ *Livre D'Or*, pp. 51-52.

¹⁶ This section relies on Hayden, Mark, *German Military Chaplains in World War II*, Schiffer Military History, Atglen PA, 2005.

¹⁷ *Rapports Annuels*, 1939-1945, pp. 89-101.

for the appointment of an army bishop and virtually allowed military chaplains to operate independently of the Catholic hierarchy in Germany.¹⁸

Franz Justus Rarkowski (1873-1950) came from East Prussia and was ordained a Marist priest in Berlin in 1908. After a lengthy experience of military chaplaincy, he was ordained Bishop in 1938 by the Apostolic Nuncio to Germany and appointed Catholic “Field (i.e. Army) Bishop” shortly afterwards. He held this post until 1945 when he retired. He died in Munich in 1950.¹⁹ He had no seat or voice in the German Bishops’ Conference. Besides Rarkowski, the most celebrated Catholic chaplain in the German army was Mgr. Alois Beck who took part as a divisional chaplain in the Battle of Stalingrad and in subsequent campaigns in Albania and Yugoslavia.²⁰

Although German military chaplains had grades of their own, they were not accorded military rank. They wore chaplain’s badges and flashes on a plain uniform. More conspicuously, Catholic military chaplains wore a regulation pectoral crucifix around their necks. The German air force (*Luftwaffe*) did not have chaplains of their own, but relied on the services of army chaplains or civilian priests. The navy (*Kriegsmarine*), which had also relied on civilian clergy, introduced a full-time naval chaplaincy in 1937.²¹ However, the navy had no bishop of its own. Instead, the army “field bishop” ministered also to naval units.

Most priests of the Society who were called up in Germany served as medical assistants and nurses, not as official military chaplains. After ordination in 1939, Gotthard Dorn (1913-2002) served briefly as official (civilian) chaplain to a military hospital in Marburg. He was conscripted in 1941 and sent to the Russian front as a nurse in the following year. Wounded and taken prisoner by the Russians, he was released in 1945, returning to his chaplaincy in Marburg.²² Theodore Höning (1909-1943) was mobilized on the outbreak of war and died in a railway accident in 1943. Significantly, in the light of Nazi policy, he had been offered the opportunity of becoming a divisional military chaplain, on condition that he left the Society of Missionaries of Africa. This he refused to do and so he remained a simple soldier.²³

At least three Missionaries of Africa were appointed chaplains to fellow prisoners of war by their Allied captors. Peter Klein (1911-1980) served as a nurse on the Russian front in 1941. There he carried out the successful evacuation of a hospital threatened by the Russians. His divisional commander recommended him for a decoration, but the Nazi authorities refused to honour a priest. In 1945 he was taken prisoner by the Americans in France. In 1946 he was appointed chaplain in the POW camp and looked after twenty thousand Catholic prisoners, giving them an hour of catechism each day and hearing confessions for another hour. He was released in June 1946.²⁴

¹⁸ Hayden, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-26.

¹⁹ Hayden, *op. cit.*, pp. 77, 81. Hayden gives the Bishop’s Christian name as “Josef”. The Catholic Hierarchy web site gives “Franz Justus”.

²⁰ Hayden, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

²¹ Hayden, *op. cit.*, pp. 13, 89-107.

²² AGMAfr. *Notices Nécrologiques*, XXXIV, pp. 499-500.

²³ AGMAfr. *Notices Nécrologiques*, VI, pp. 283-284.

²⁴ AGMAfr. *Notices Nécrologiques*, XXI, pp. 163-167.

Thomas Mühlbeyer (1912-1992) was mobilized in 1941 as a medical and “spiritual” assistant. He saw action in Libya, Italy and France before being taken prisoner. He was appointed chaplain to German POWs at Lorient, near Kerlois and remained there until his liberation in 1948.²⁵ Heinrich Stumpf (1912-1982) was mobilized in 1940. He served in a medical unit in Russia until 1942, and then as a warrant officer nurse in France and southern Italy. He was taken prisoner in May 1944 and was appointed chaplain to fellow POWs, first of all in Naples and then in the United States. Based at Heare Camp in Arizona, he and two other priests cared for seven thousand German Catholic POWs in ten camps. Several times he was in danger of being killed by Nazi POWs but was warned in time. In May 1946 he moved to Britain where Cardinal Bernard Griffin, at the request of Cardinal Josef Frings of Cologne, invited him to continue the POW chaplaincy. He was released for this by the Society and returned to Germany finally in 1948.²⁶

Military Chaplains in the British Army

In the British Army, military chaplains of all denominations were controlled by the Royal Army Chaplains Department (RACHD).²⁷ At its head was the Chaplain-General who held the rank of Major-General. He was usually an Anglican priest, but occasionally an ordained Non-Conformist minister held the position. The idea of appointing a Catholic Chaplain-General was never seriously considered by the War Office during the Second World War. Next, there were several Assistant Chaplains-General who held the rank of Colonel. One of these was the Principal Catholic Chaplain. Below these were Deputy Assistant Chaplains-General with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel responsible for a hundred and fifty chaplains. Senior Chaplains at divisional level (SCF) held the rank of Major. Below them other Chaplains were Captains. Where necessary, civilian priests also served the army as “officiating chaplains to the forces” (OCF).²⁸ Although Catholics felt they were entitled to a greater share of senior positions, they were in practice able to manage their own spiritual affairs without interference.²⁹ They were greatly helped in this by the existence of a Catholic Bishop in Ordinary of the British Army and Royal Air Force, responsible to the Archbishop of Westminster and entitled to attend Bishops’ meetings when military affairs were on the agenda.³⁰

Throughout the war this was James Dey (1869-1946), appointed in 1935.³¹ Although he was not a member of RACHD, he ensured that Catholic soldiers received the sacraments and that chaplains were granted extraordinary faculties in war time. In Britain it was the duty of local bishops to supply the requisite number of Catholic chaplains. This they did not do to the satisfaction of Dey, whose relationship with them was notably tense.³² However, the existence of a Forces Bishop gave Catholic

²⁵ AGMAfr. *Notices Nécrologiques*, XXIX, pp. 375-376.

²⁶ AGMAfr. *Notices Nécrologiques*, XXII, pp. 254-257.

²⁷ This section relies on Robinson, Alan, *Chaplains at War – The Role of Clergymen During World War II*, International Library of War Studies 11, London, Tauris, 2008.

²⁸ Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

²⁹ Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

³⁰ Hagerty, *op. cit.*, pp. 289-290. Catholic chaplains in the Royal Navy were under the control of the Archbishop of Westminster and the Admiralty. Hagerty, *Ibid*

³¹ Robinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-77.

³² Robinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 94-95 ; Hagerty, *op. cit.*, p. 290.

Chaplains an enviable advantage over their Anglican opposite numbers who needed licences from the local bishops of dioceses in which they happened to be. When William Temple became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1942 he emulated the Catholic arrangement by appointing his Suffragan of Maidstone Bishop of the Forces in 1943.³³ Anglican Chaplains had another resource in the Bishop of Fulham, a Suffragan of London, who had the oversight of Anglican communities in Northern and Central Europe.

Anglican chaplains spent much of their time running confirmation classes, but were at a loss when there was no bishop to confirm their candidates. This was the case in the Far East.³⁴ Catholic chaplains on the other hand were licensed to confer the sacrament of Confirmation in India and Burma by the progressive Jesuit Archbishop of Bombay, Thomas Roberts, for the area over which he held metropolitan jurisdiction.³⁵

At the outbreak of war there were only 54 Catholic chaplains in the British Regular and Territorial Army. This number rapidly increased with mobilization. By January 1942 there were 401, representing 20% of all denominations. By 1943 there were 680 Catholic military chaplains, 238 of them being supplied by religious and missionary orders or societies, among them the Society of Missionaries of Africa. There were a quarter of a million Catholic soldiers.³⁶ In Eastern Africa, which was about to become an important theatre of war with Italy in the Abyssinian campaign, colonial units of the British Army were on the verge of a colossal expansion. The King's African Rifles (KAR), drawn from five countries, grew from seven battalions in 1939 to 43 by the close of the war.³⁷ In Nigeria two divisions of the Royal West African Frontier Force (RWAFF) were raised to serve in Abyssinia and elsewhere.³⁸ Control of both these regiments was now taken over by the War Office in London. An East African Chaplains Department was also created which in 1942 counted some forty Catholic chaplains, half of whom were Missionaries of Africa.³⁹ In 1944, when Jean-Marcel Saint-Denis (1908-1987), a Canadian White Father in Nyasaland (Malawi), was appointed Senior Catholic Chaplain for East African Forces in the Far East, he recruited nineteen missionaries (several of them White Fathers) as chaplains and took them with him to Sri Lanka and Burma.⁴⁰

As the military units increased, the British authorities appealed for chaplains to serve with African troops. Like the Bishops in Britain, Vicars Apostolic in Africa were asked to supply them. Although there was already a small, but growing number of African clergy, Catholic missionary Bishops were reluctant to appoint African priests as chaplains. Anglican Bishops, on the other hand were happy to send black chaplains to the KAR, although they were not given officer's rank and did not belong to the officers' mess.⁴¹ Five Missionaries of Africa were immediately sent from

³³ Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

³⁴ Robinson, *op. cit.*, pp.126-127.

³⁵ Robinson, *op. cit.*, p.78.

³⁶ Hagerty, *op.cit.*, pp. 290-293; Robinson, *op.cit.*, pp. 87-88.

³⁷ Parsons, Timothy, *The African Rank and File*, Oxford, James Currey, 1999, p. 25.

³⁸ Up to ten battalions.

³⁹ AGMAfr. *Notices Nécrologiques*, XX, pp. 110-114, Hartman Herman.

⁴⁰ AGMAfr *Notices Nécrologiques*, XXVI, pp. 73-84. Saint-Denis became Prefect Apostolic of North Nyassa (Mzuzu) in 1947, but resigned in 1958.

⁴¹ Robinson, *op. cit.*, p.91.

Uganda, six from Tanganyika Territory (Tanzania) and three from Nyasaland (Malawi). Smaller numbers came from Gold Coast (Ghana) and Northern Rhodesia (Zambia). Further appointments were made as the war progressed, and at least five European nationalities were represented.

Four Missionaries of Africa joined up as chaplains in Britain and served in home units of the British Army. Bernard Gaffney (1904-1991) volunteered in 1940 and took part in the Iceland and Norwegian campaigns. In November 1942 he disembarked with British troops in North Africa and acted as chaplain to a British military hospital at Souk Ahras in Algeria. The following year he resigned from the army, having been appointed Regular Superior of the White Fathers in Great Britain.⁴² Leonard Marchant (1904-1990) joined up at the beginning of the war in 1939. After several weeks with the British Expeditionary Force in France, he travelled to Palestine via the Cape. Four months later he took part in two battles at Benghazi in Libya. From December 1944 he served in North Palestine, where he looked after several hospitals and camps. Galilee, as he used to say, was his “parish”. He was demobilized in 1945.⁴³ Thomas Stoker (1907-1988) was unable to leave North Africa after his ordination in 1940. When he finally got to Britain in 1943, he applied to become a military chaplain. He served in this capacity in Europe until 1946, mainly in Germany.⁴⁴

Thomas McGrail (1915-1947*) from Edinburgh was also unable to leave North Africa until the Allied landings took place. Having served as a civilian chaplain to British POWs of the Royal Navy in Algeria, he was evacuated with them to Britain where he took the place of Bernard Gaffney in the army. After spending some time with Southern Command, he was sent to West Africa and thence to India and Burma with the 14th Army, where he was chaplain to Orde Wingate’s Chindits. After Burma he was posted to the Hanover Garrison in Germany, where he was demobilized in 1947.⁴⁵

Saint-Denis, the Canadian missionary already mentioned, was the most important of the White Father chaplains in Eastern Africa. Responding to the Nyasaland Administration’s appeal in 1939, he worked at first unofficially in the medical service. On his way to Somalia via Nairobi he was gazetted a Captain Chaplain, and took part in the Ethiopian campaign. In 1941 he returned to Kenya and was sent in the following year to Sri Lanka, the military staging post for Burma. There he became Senior Catholic Chaplain, with the rank of Major, and accompanied his African soldiers to India and Burma. He was demobilized in 1946 but remained an honorary chaplain of the reserve.⁴⁶

The most decorated White Father chaplain in the KAR was the Frenchman, Louis-Marie Etienne (1886-1963). Having already been a chaplain in the First World War, he was called up again in 1944 from his mission in Northern Rhodesia (Zambia). For

⁴² AGMAfr. *Notices Nécrologiques*, XXIX, pp. 22-24.

⁴³ AGMAfr. *Notices Nécrologiques*, XXVIII, pp. 174-176.

⁴⁴ *Petit Echo*, n. 793, 1988/8, pp. 413-415.

⁴⁵ McGrail left the Society in 1947 and served as a diocesan priest in Papua New Guinea and Australia. (Information supplied by Christopher Wallbank from the British Sector Archives and Stefaan Minnaert from AGMAfr.)

⁴⁶ AGMAfr. *Notices Nécrologiques*, XXVI, pp. 73-84.

the next three years he acted as chaplain, with an American, Paul Héon (1914-2003), to a hospital in Mombasa (Kenya) and to an infantry brigade at Moshi, Tanzania. His demobilization was delayed by the late return of the bulk of the East African army from Burma. In 1961 he received the OBE and two years later became a *Chevalier* of the *Légion d'Honneur*.⁴⁷

Three Dutchmen from Tanganyika Territory (Tanzania) found the work of a military chaplain in the army very much to their liking: Herman Hartman (1907-1978) and Harry Van der Eerden (1895-1971). Hartman spent six months at Mombasa, a year in Ethiopia – where he was for a time the sole Catholic chaplain – and two years in Kenya. At Nanyuki (Kenya) he shared the task with a Canadian, Raymond Lavallée (1905-1983) from Uganda. Between them they claimed to have baptized more than ten thousand soldiers. Both were demobilized in 1946.⁴⁸ Harry Van der Eerden joined up in 1940 and served in Ethiopia, Madagascar and Burma. The superior general gave him permission to postpone his demobilization until 1949. In the same year, the Netherlands government offered him a chaplain's post in the Dutch army in Indonesia. He was allowed to accept the offer and served until 1950. Altogether, he spent ten years as a military chaplain.⁴⁹ Jan Kok (1901-1978) who joined the KAR from Dar es Salaam in 1941 looked back on his five years in the army as one of the really happy periods of his life, although living conditions were hard.⁵⁰

Antoine Caumartin (1899-1975), a Canadian from Uganda, went to India as a military chaplain in 1944. He was demobilized in 1946, although he had offered to continue as a peacetime chaplain.⁵¹ The first Canadian to be appointed to Tanganyika Territory (Tanzania) was Aurélien Angers (1894-1985). He was proposed as a military chaplain at the end of the war in 1944 and served in POW camps at Nyeri (Kenya) and Moshi (Tanganyika) until his demobilization in 1946.⁵² Edgar Larose (1899-1978), an American working in Tanganyika, was also mobilized in 1944. He spent two years with soldiers of every “race and class”, covering a huge territory that included at different times Kenya, Madagascar, Seychelles, Mauritius and Somalia. He was the only Catholic military chaplain in the various islands of the Indian Ocean at the time he was there.⁵³

It was to be expected, perhaps, that British White Fathers should serve in the colonial regiments of the British army. In the event, there were (at least) seven who did.⁵⁴ One of the most celebrated was Paul Haskew (1907-1967) from Gold Coast (Ghana), who joined the Royal West African Frontier Force as a chaplain in 1942. Haskew took part in the Burma campaign and was reputed to have more baggage than any other British soldier. It included a collapsible bicycle. He returned to Africa in 1946.⁵⁵ Owen McCoy (1907-1988), later to be the first Bishop of Oyo, Nigeria, also

⁴⁷ AGMAfr. *Notices Nécrologiques*, XIII, pp. 439-443; and personal dossier.

⁴⁸ AGMAfr. *Notices Nécrologiques*, XX, pp. 110-114; XXII, pp. 386-389; Hartman personal dossier.

⁴⁹ AGMAfr. *Notices Nécrologiques*, XVI, pp. 359-363; and personal dossier.

⁵⁰ *Petit Echo*, 1978/10, N. 695, pp.607-610.

⁵¹ AGMAfr. *Notices Nécrologiques*, XVIII, pp. 205-207; and personal dossier.

⁵² AGMAfr. *Notices Nécrologiques*, XXIV, pp. 437-444.

⁵³ AGMAfr. *Notices Nécrologiques*, XX, pp. 145-149; personal dossier.

⁵⁴ The writer does not possess comprehensive lists of the chaplains.

⁵⁵ AGMAfr. *Notices Nécrologiques*, XV, pp. 205-209; and personal dossier.

joined the RWAFF in 1942 as a chaplain. However, he did not travel further than Accra, Gold Coast (Ghana). He was demobilized in 1944.⁵⁶

William Smith (1902-1978), a British White Father in Tanganyika Territory (Tanzania), joined the East African Forces as a military chaplain in 1941, serving with Somali troops in Ethiopia until 1942. Afterwards, he was with Somali troops again in Nairobi and British Somaliland until 1945. He was due to leave the East African Chaplaincy in 1946, but was offered a post by the Royal Army Chaplains' Department in the Middle East. In 1952, he was sent to the Suez Canal Zone, where he was chaplain to ten thousand African troops of "every tribe and language", half of them being baptized Catholics or else catechumens impatient for baptism. After a further spell with a European garrison, he was finally discharged in 1954.⁵⁷ John Metcalfe Robinson (1910-1980) was another British White Father called up from Tanganyika (Tanzania) in 1942. Sent to Cairo, where he was billeted with South Africans, he looked after a large hospital and twenty-five other posts. It took him two months to make the round of all the camps, staying a few days in each, hearing confessions and celebrating Mass. He used Swahili, Luganda and Dholuo. After supervising the departure of the African troops, he was demobilized in 1946.⁵⁸ Hugh Bonner (1905-1978), a Scotsman working in Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) volunteered as a KAR chaplain in 1942. "Captain Bonner", as he was always called afterwards, served in Madagascar, the Comoro Islands, Somalia, Ethiopia and India. A great practical joker, he once called in at a mission of the White Fathers, pretending to be an Anglican *padre* seeking to be received into the Catholic Church. Bonner was extremely popular with the African troops, and was demobbed in Britain at the end of 1946.⁵⁹

Finally, two Scotsmen from Nyasaland (Malawi) were also mobilized as chaplains in the KAR. Owen McGhee (1908-1974) served first of all in 1941 as a nurse, but was then appointed chaplain with Nyasaland troops. He was with the 13th Battalion KAR in Abyssinia and then went to Burma. He was demobilized in 1946.⁶⁰ Peter Nixon (1909-1985) volunteered as a KAR chaplain in 1940 and served in Nyasaland (Malawi), Ethiopia, Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Burma. He is said to have kept a pet mongoose to keep snakes away. He was demobilized in 1946.⁶¹

Military Chaplains in the Belgian Army

Such was the speed of the German advance in 1939-1940 that there was little chance of an extensive mobilization in Belgium itself, let alone the appointment of military chaplains. Several Missionaries of Africa served the resistance as clandestine chaplains, the most famous of these being Léon Leloir (1907-1945), the gifted writer, and founder-director of *Grands Lacs*. In 1944 Leloir ministered to some sixty armed groups in the Forest of Ardennes before his arrest and imprisonment in Buchenwald death camp. He was under sentence of death when the Allies released him in 1945,

⁵⁶ AGMAfr. *Notices Nécrologiques*, XXVII, pp. 202-207.

⁵⁷ AGMAfr. *Notices Nécrologiques*, XX, pp. 211-214; and personal dossier.

⁵⁸ AGMAfr. *Notices Nécrologiques*, XXI, pp. 12-16; and personal dossier.

⁵⁹ *Petit Echo*, n. 696, 1979/1, pp.54-57 and information supplied by Patrick Fitzgerald.

⁶⁰ AGMAfr. *Notices Nécrologiques*, XVIII, pp. 47-49; and personal dossier.

⁶¹ AGMAfr. *Notices Nécrologiques*, XXIV, pp. 305-308.

only to meet an accidental death later in the same year. His name appears in the *Livre d'Or* of the French Province for the posthumous award of the *Légion d'Honneur*.⁶²

In the circumstances, the colonial army in Congo and Rwanda-Burundi – the *Force Publique* – became virtually the only Belgian armed force in the Second World War, and the one to which Belgian Missionaries of Africa were officially appointed as military chaplains. At the end of 1940 a battalion of the *Force Publique* was placed at the disposal of the British in Sudan. Joined by the 3rd Brigade, it took part in the Abyssinian (Ethiopian) campaign. Between 1942 and 1943 an expeditionary force was sent to Nigeria, members of which later served in Egypt and Palestine. In Burma a medical unit was attached to the 11th East African Division. Chaplains were recruited from various Christian denominations, but especially from Catholic missionary societies, including the Scheutists, Jesuits and Missionaries of Africa. Probably, its most famous military chaplain was the future Archbishop Jean Jadot (1909-2009), Apostolic Delegate to the United States from 1973 to 1980.

Among the Missionaries of Africa who served as chaplains with the *Force Publique* in the Second World War were Jozef Coussée (1901-1974) and Carlos De Kesel (1908-1979). Coussée joined up in 1941. He served as Captain-Chaplain with the already-mentioned battalion in the Sudan and with the expeditionary force in Nigeria and Egypt. In Sri Lanka and Burma he worked in a field hospital under British command, helping a multitude of wounded Britons, Indians and Africans and earning high praise from his atheist commanding officer. In 1946, and still in the capacity of military chaplain, he went to the United States to study the situation of African Americans and their emigration to Congo. He submitted a thirty page report before being demobilized in that year.⁶³ De Kesel was mobilized in 1940 and was appointed to a regimental staff HQ. A motor cycle accident prevented his joining the troops in Abyssinia. He continued his service in the Congo before demobilization in 1946.⁶⁴ Charles Druyts (1912-1945) and Paul Beeckmans (1904-1954) were two other Belgian confreres who served as military chaplains in the Congo itself.⁶⁵

Military Chaplains in the Italian Army

The Italian armed forces had a well established tradition of military chaplains and this continued in 1940 to 1943 while Fascist Italy was allied to Nazi Germany and afterwards up to the end of the war. Being a deeply religious nation, the priestly character of its Catholic military chaplains was more visible than in any other country. Their full service dress consisted of a cassock or religious habit, with the addition of flashes and badges of rank and even the Roman hat.⁶⁶ In the field they wore ordinary uniform, with chaplain's and officer's insignia, and often the clerical collar.

The most outstanding Italian White Father chaplain of the war was, without doubt, Enrico Gallo (1893-1959). He volunteered as a non-combatant military and hospital

⁶² *Livre d'Or*, p. 50; Alzin, Josse, *Léon Leloir qui n'a rien dit*, Bruges, Editions Bayert, 1946; and personal dossier.

⁶³ AGMAfr. *Notices Nécrologiques*, XVIII, pp. 5-7.

⁶⁴ AGMAfr. *Notices Nécrologiques*, XX, pp. 295-298; and personal dossier.

⁶⁵ AGMAfr. *Notices Nécrologiques*, VII, pp. 114-116; X, pp. 60-64.

⁶⁶ Hayden, *op.cit.*, pp. 123-132.

chaplain with the rank of Lieutenant in 1940 and served in Cyrenaica, on the Libyan front. In the battle for Benghazi the city changed hands no fewer than five times, being heavily bombed by both the Allies and Axis. Gallo was taken prisoner there by Australian troops in February 1941. Although, as a non-combatant, he was offered his freedom, he chose to continue his work as a chaplain for his fellow prisoners of war. These included fourteen priests and 12,000 POWs who were mostly officers. In Egypt he was held in camps at Alexandria, Mustafa and Suez and his chapel at Mustafa was vandalized and desecrated. In May 1941 he was transferred to India where he was placed in prison camps at Nagpur, Ramgarh, Ranchi and Bangalore. In March 1942 he was moved to Yol in the Kangra Valley State, at the foot of the Himalayas. He was finally released in July 1946 and made his way back to Port Said, Naples and Rome.

Apart from the physical hardships of imprisonment, Gallo was frustrated at the incomprehension of British and Indian authorities, when he claimed his rights as a Catholic priest and chaplain. After the Italian armistice in 1943 there was also dissension among the prisoners over whether to support Mussolini or Badoglio. He was a conscientious chaplain and kept a register in which he recorded the names of all who died under his care in the various camps.⁶⁷

Roberto Focá (1887-1973), the controversial Islamic scholar, also served as a military chaplain and officer in Libya. Unlike Gallo, he did not volunteer as a prison chaplain, but returned to Italy in 1942, where he remained a military chaplain until the end of the war.⁶⁸ Annibale Conti (1912-1967) was mobilized in the artillery in 1940 and served on the Graeco-Albanian front. In July 1943 he was taken prisoner by the Allies and helped them regroup Italian POWs in Greece. From there he was sent to a POW camp in Egypt where he remained until 1946. His experience of imprisonment was an unhappy one from the point of view of both his physical well-being and morale.⁶⁹

Military Chaplaincy – Incongruity and Pragmatism

The basic incongruity consisted in the fact that Christianity is committed to peace, flowing from the love of neighbour, and that Christians condemn the savagery of war and especially total war, the arms race and the deployment of weapons of mass destruction.⁷⁰ There is a contradiction when any Christian is caught up in a war, even more so when he is mobilized on account of being a priest. Catholic Canon Law has reservations about priests becoming military chaplains and there are canonical penalties for priests who shed blood or cause bodily harm to others.⁷¹

In World War II the Catholic theological concept of the “just war” did not imply that a Christian could invoke a “God of Battles” or call down a blessing on guns and

⁶⁷ AGMAfr. *Notices Nécrologiques*, XII, pp. 31-36; personal dossier; also Gallo, Enrico, *Ricordi di Guerra e Prigionia*, Marano di Napoli, Società dei Missionari d’Africa (Padri Bianchi), 1955. Cf. also *Petit Echo*, n. 343, 1943, Sept-Oct., p. 112.

⁶⁸ AGMAfr. *Notices Nécrologiques*, XVII, pp. 281-290.

⁶⁹ *Petit Echo*, n. 587, April 1968/4, pp. 184-186.

⁷⁰ Cf. Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, Chapter V.

⁷¹ The 1983 Code reaffirms that of 1917. Priests should not volunteer to be chaplains without permission. Moreover, military chaplains are governed by special laws. Cf. Canons 289 and 569 and the apostolic constitution of John Paul II: *Spirituali Militum Curae* of 1986.

tanks. War was a necessary evil, not an ideal. Nor was it at all clear that the military chaplaincy existed to ensure victory over the enemy. Although many World War II generals earned the fanciful epithet *prima donna* because of their gigantic ego, few saw their role as essentially religious. One who did was Major-General Orde Wingate (1903-1944), the commander of the column that restored Haile Selassie to his throne in Ethiopia and who masterminded the long-range penetration of Japanese lines in Burma. Wingate modelled himself on his Biblical hero Gideon, sang hymns when on the march and always carried a Hebrew Bible.⁷² He was a latter-day General Gordon.

Field-Marshal Bernard Montgomery (1887-1976) was not an idealist or religious fanatic like Wingate. However, he was the son of an Anglican Bishop and held military chaplains in high esteem, placing them on the same level as artillery! In Cairo Cathedral he famously announced: "I would as soon think of going into battle without my artillery, as without my chaplains".⁷³

Although the chaplains would not have seen themselves as a weapon of war, the other extreme of pacifism was not an issue they normally espoused. In Nazi Germany conscientious objectors were punished by beheading, in spite of which several Catholics suffered for refusing to serve in the army, the most famous being the Austrian, Blessed Franz Jaegerstätter, executed in 1943.⁷⁴ In Britain conscientious objectors were tolerated, and pacifism even caused problems for the recruitment of Anglican chaplains. However, by the end of the war the pacifist movement had collapsed.⁷⁵ There was nothing comparable among Catholic chaplains. The problem of the "just war" became a topic of post-war discussion among Catholic theologians, especially in view of the possibility of nuclear warfare.

Popes Paul VI and John Paul II both publicly denounced modern warfare in all its forms, "whether nuclear or not", as totally unacceptable.⁷⁶ However, in practice national hierarchies have been less demanding, following the military policies and war aims of their respective countries. In the Second World War such theological speculation was a luxury which military chaplains did not indulge in. Their attitude was that of a low-level pragmatism, ethical and pastoral. Only very occasionally were they confronted by a serious ethical dilemma. Here are two examples affecting Missionaries of Africa.

The first does not concern a priest, but a novice conscripted as a combatant. Guy Dalle (1919-1944) was a non-commissioned officer in a French armoured regiment. On patrol at Belmont (Haut Marne, France) in September 1944 and leading his troop of tanks, he was confronted by a church building that posed a potential threat. As a Christian and a missionary seminarian, he refused to give the order to destroy the church, saying "We are made for works of mercy, not of death". Neglecting his own

⁷² Mosley, Leonard, *Gideon Goes to War*, London, Arthur Baker, 1955, pp. 59, 61, 125, 132.

⁷³ Robinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 64, 146.

⁷⁴ Beatified on October 26th 2007. Cf. also Hayden, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-34.

⁷⁵ Robinson, *op. cit.*, p.154.

⁷⁶ Cf. John Paul II at Coventry, May 30th 1982, *The Pope in Britain, Collected Homilies and Speeches*, St. Paul's Publications, Slough, 1982, p. 9. Cf. also Paul VI's "No more war" address to the UN on October 4th 1965.

safety, he emerged from the turret of his tank to take stock of the situation and was immediately shot dead by a sniper in the church tower.⁷⁷

The second example concerns Peter Nixon (1909-1985) already mentioned. As a rule, and in accordance with the Geneva Convention as well as with Catholic Canon Law, military chaplains were unarmed non-combatants. However, the British Army made an exception for the Burma campaign, which involved highly dangerous guerrilla warfare with an enemy that did not subscribe to any conventions. Consequently, military chaplains in Burma were armed for self-defence and given a modicum of weapon training.⁷⁸ In November 1944 Nixon, who devoted all his time to the wounded and dying, made a perimeter tour of his medical unit and encountered a Japanese soldier lying on the ground. Believing him to be wounded, he tried, without success, to get him to stand up. The Japanese seized him by the leg and started to take a grenade from his pocket, clearly intending a suicide attack on the priest. Nixon, who had drawn his revolver, immediately fired a shot and killed the Japanese. As it was a case of legitimate self-defence, Nixon incurred no canonical penalty, but was not surprisingly overcome with emotion.⁷⁹ An Anglican chaplain in Burma, who had a similar experience, was reported to have had a nervous breakdown.⁸⁰

Ethical dilemmas apart, the insertion of Catholic missionary priests into the armed forces was basically a question of pastoral pragmatism. They were there for the spiritual welfare of individuals caught up in the war, to show God's compassion to the wounded, the dying, the alienated, the imprisoned. They brought them the sacraments and helped them confront the possibility of death and disfigurement. The response of the soldiers was impressive. The opinion of Bernard Gaffney was widely shared that "Undoubtedly war improves men".⁸¹ Nixon found the faith of his soldiers in Burma quite extraordinary. They refused to shorten the Eucharistic fast or waive the rule of Friday abstinence. They recited the rosary in groups. They attended Mass whenever possible and they instructed each other in the faith.⁸²

Incidental to this apostolate was the opportunity for evangelization. Although there was a large measure of secularism and indifferentism among Europeans, the opportunity was virtually unlimited among African troops. Hartman found catechumens everywhere and organized a network of staff-sergeant catechists.⁸³ He was not alone in doing this. Everywhere Catholic chaplains were able to make converts and complete the religious education of the baptized. A British general once remarked that the army was "the largest missionary society in the world".⁸⁴ Perhaps an exaggeration, but one with which many White Father military chaplains would have concurred. In helping their soldiers develop a mature faith, they were also helping them come to terms with the contemporary world and with global change.

⁷⁷ *Petit Echo*, n. 351 Jan-Feb, 1945/1, p.7.

⁷⁸ Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 161 and fn. 68. The writer, who took part with the KAR in the post-war Malaysian campaign, remembers that the Catholic chaplain, a Mill Hill Missionary, was issued with a handgun and taught how to use it.

⁷⁹ *Petit Echo*, n.349, Sept-Oct 1944, p.144, Report of Paul Haskew.

⁸⁰ Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 161, fn. 68.

⁸¹ *Petit Echo*, n. 316, Feb. 1940, p. 58.

⁸² AGMAfr. *Notices Nécrologiques*, XXIV, pp. 305-308.

⁸³ AGMAfr. Hartman, personal dossier.

⁸⁴ Major-General E. O. Hay, quoted in Robinson, *op. cit.*, p.15.

The military experience was a major force for change in mid-twentieth century Africa and the chaplains' work was "to baptize" it.

Although dramatic ethical dilemmas, like those mentioned above, were infrequent, the war provided an opportunity for chaplains to educate consciences. The individual soldier has a moral responsibility in warfare. He cannot merely rely on what came to be known after the war as the "Nuremberg defence" – *viz* "I was obeying orders". This fact has long been recognized. Indeed Shakespeare makes it a topic of discussion between Henry V and his soldiers on the eve of the battle of Agincourt.⁸⁵ Generally, soldiers, in whatever army, did not dispute the justice of their cause. They were fighting to preserve their country and their families. They were also fighting in loyalty to their comrades. Such war aims were perhaps more remote in the case of the African colonial military, but they were volunteers for whom enlistment promised an opportunity to improve their prospects and quality of life. The army was a "school" as well as a "missionary society". African nationalism and self-determination were only dimly envisaged, but the military experience fuelled their growth in the aftermath of war.

A greater difficulty was experienced where there was a conflict between Church teaching and the national ideology. This was especially the case in the German army. The oath of loyalty to the Führer taken by every soldier of the Third Reich, was generally interpreted as an obligation of loyalty to the country as a whole, rather than to the specific policies of the Nazi government, and it did not, in effect, rule out the possibility of plots against Hitler by military officers. The same could be said of the "Führer Prayer" in the Catholic soldier's prayer book.⁸⁶ However, criticism of the authorities was largely avoided by Nazi exploitation of the Catholic fear of Bolshevism and the presence of a residual anti-Semitism in the Church. It should not be forgotten that, even in Britain, an anti-Semitic stance was taken by the *Catholic Herald* under Michael De la Bédoyère's editorship in 1940.⁸⁷

It is sometimes said that the two world wars reinforced the loyalty of missionaries to their country of origin and thus helped to align the Church in Africa with the colonial powers. This was less true of the Catholic Church than of national/established Churches such as the Church of England. It was also less true of the Second World War than of the First World War. In the latter conflict it was possibly more true of French chaplains and missionary conscripts than of those missionaries who served as chaplains in the British Army. These were of various nationalities and not necessarily those of the African colonies from which they were drawn. German and Italian missionaries were far from accepting the political ideologies of their Fascist rulers and, in any case, their colonies did not ultimately survive. It must also be said that a general consequence of the world wars was the scandal of European nations fighting one another and the moral bankruptcy of the colonial project.

An Early Experience of Ecumenism

⁸⁵ Shakespeare, *Henry V*, Act 4, Sc. 1, 145.

⁸⁶ Hayden, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-54

⁸⁷ Hagerty, *op. cit.*, pp. 345-347.

Missionaries of Africa who became military chaplains found themselves serving with chaplains of other Christian denominations and even of different faiths. This was true of every national army in World War II. It ensured a measure of inter-religious communication, but in practice there was little actual co-operation. Catholic priests in the armed services had their hands full simply caring for their own co-religionists and making the sacraments available to them. The situation, however, was different in the British army in which one Christian denomination, the Church of England, held a privileged position. Where the number of Catholic soldiers was relatively small, this created little difficulty. In the African colonial army, however, Catholics were very numerous indeed. Saint-Denis reckoned that in Somalia forty per cent of his army corps was Catholic and in his regiment in India and Burma it was fifty per cent.⁸⁸ In the Canal Zone, as we have seen, William Smith was responsible for ten thousand Africans, half of whom were baptized Catholics or catechumens.⁸⁹ This made for difficulties of all kinds, since the British Army was officially Anglican and there were proportionately few Catholics among its European officers. Drum-head services and compulsory Church parades in the KAR were Anglican in character, even though the vast majority of the soldiers attending were Catholic.⁹⁰ Anglican chaplains tended to be fewer than Catholic chaplains in the colonial army and occasionally a non-Catholic commanding officer expected a Catholic chaplain to stand in at a non-Catholic funeral or other service.

Herman Hartman found several British officers who had never met a Catholic priest before and Paul Haskew came across non-Catholic officers who tried to be helpful but were completely ignorant and mistaken about Catholic doctrines and customs.⁹¹ Enrico Gallo's problems in the prison camps were also – as we have seen – due to the incomprehension of British and Indian officers. Catholic soldiers were struck by the universality of their Church wherever they happened to be, but Protestants had difficulty finding a church that suited their taste.⁹² Anglican chaplains spent much of their time organizing social welfare and entertainments, but Catholic chaplains had other priorities that were more strictly pastoral.

In one respect Catholic chaplains exercised a strong influence on their Anglican counterparts in the British army. Their ministry of bringing communion to soldiers on the front line, of hearing confessions and anointing the dying in situations of extreme danger was hugely impressive, so much so that Anglican chaplains began to emulate them. Traditionally, prayer for the dead, auricular confession and reservation of the Blessed Sacrament were rarities in the Protestant Churches. The example of Catholic chaplains at work convinced Protestants, especially Anglicans, that they should make a place for these practices. Beginning with the First World War and throughout World War II, there was a movement that made them more visibly Catholic in these matters.⁹³

⁸⁸ AGMAfr. *Notices Nécrologiques*, XXVI, pp. 73-84.

⁸⁹ AGMAfr. *Notices Nécrologiques*, XX, pp. 21-214.

⁹⁰ This was still the practice when the author served in the KAR in the 1950s.

⁹¹ AGMAfr. personal dossiers.

⁹² AGMAfr. Hartman, personal dossier.

⁹³ Robinson, *op. cit.*, p.26.

Altogether, military chaplaincy in the Second World War was a not unprofitable early experience of ecumenical contact.

Problems of Compatibility

To conclude this article, the question must be asked: “What was the impact of military chaplaincy on individual Missionaries of Africa and on their Society?” Enrico Gallo remarked that “the separation from the Society was painful, but it was not a waste of time”.⁹⁴ It is safe to say that this was the general attitude of all who became military chaplains. While they lamented their separation from the Society they were positive about their experience in the armed forces. They looked back on their years in the military with satisfaction and even pleasure. All recognized that they had been given a great pastoral opportunity and that the work had been well worthwhile. It is noteworthy that a significant number asked to prolong their service as chaplains, or even to return to it at a later date. Their work was appreciated by the military authorities and they were given all the facilities they needed. Van Der Eerden had a house at Nanyuki (Kenya), with an office, a bedroom and a parlour that was ideal for the job. Hartman, who likewise had the rank and salary of a Captain, was given a car, a driver and a servant. He was also entitled to an annual leave of twenty-eight days.⁹⁵

Although they were given no basic training and virtually no introduction to military life, the army catered for their spiritual needs after a fashion. Hartman recorded that they were given an annual retreat of three days. Edgar Larose returned to Nairobi from Madagascar to find himself taking part in a retreat for chaplains being preached in a local convent by the Spiritan Vicar Apostolic of Kilimanjaro, Mgr. Joseph Byrne (1880-1961).⁹⁶ The encounter with missionaries of other societies was also enriching. Many were able – when the postal service with Algeria was restored – to carry out the correspondence with their superiors required by the rule. They also shared their salaries and Mass stipends with the Society, as stipulated by Mgr. Joseph-Marie Birraux (1883-1947), the Superior General.

What was the attitude of the Society towards its military chaplains? Birraux’s monthly letter to the Society was all too frequently a lamentation, deploring the costume, the drinks, conversations, games and diversions of priests who had been mobilized. “Re-read the Directory”, he thundered in 1943.⁹⁷ The following year, his Good Friday meditation was also about clerical dress. The blessings enjoyed by the Society were due, he said, to fidelity to the Directory. While French chaplains were expected to wear a khaki *gandourah*, the dress of chaplains in the British army “did not inspire confidence” as a *decens habitus clericalis*.⁹⁸ Later in the year he expressed the fear that the military experience was welcomed by missionaries as a liberation from regular life and discipline.⁹⁹ As the war drew to an end, Birraux

⁹⁴ AGMAfr. *Notices Nécrologiques*, XII, pp. 31-36.

⁹⁵ AGMAfr. personal dossiers.

⁹⁶ AGMAfr. personal dossiers.

⁹⁷ *Petit Echo*, n. 344, December 1943, p. 113.

⁹⁸ *Petit Echo*, n. 346, March-April, 1944, p. 29. The *gandourah* was the Arab tunic worn by White fathers; “decens...” : Latin for: “a decent clerical dress”.

⁹⁹ *Petit Echo*, n. 347, May-June, 1944, p. 49.

opined, somewhat unrealistically, that a new post-war order would depend on the restoration of “hierarchical subordination”.¹⁰⁰ In the remaining months of the war Birraux returned many times to these strictures, which now included a ban on sports costume, radio and cinema.¹⁰¹ It was the proverbial finger in the dyke.

There can be little doubt that the military experience of White Fathers represented an opening on to the outside world that was at variance with the clerical etiquette of the old style rule book, but one searches the published statements of the Society almost in vain for an appreciation of the positive achievements of its military chaplains. Van Der Eerde made a telling remark in 1955 that, in his ten years in the army, as far as the Society was concerned, he felt as if he was on a desert island. There had been “no sign of life from any confrere great or small”.¹⁰² The distinct impression is one of hostility and suspicion on the part of Bishops and Superiors towards military chaplains, who no longer had the appearance or behaviour of a missionary priest. There is virtually no evidence of any interest in the important pastoral contribution made by them.

It must be admitted that several military chaplains were not on good terms with their Vicars Apostolic. There were cases in which Bishops seized the opportunity of ridding themselves of a troublesome subject by appointing him chaplain. Equally, there were some military chaplains who were happy to distance themselves from their Bishop. In a few cases, a missionary was on good terms with the vicariate, only to find that his Bishop did not want him back when he was demobilized. However, these cases were not the experience of the majority.

Understandably, the chaplains had considerable difficulty readjusting to civilian life and integrating with their missions after the war. Some of them had adopted the outlook and manners of the officer class, not to mention their habit of command. Some, especially the British (in British Africa), exhibited pretensions of a superior status that drew them closer to the colonial administration. This was not appreciated by their confreres.¹⁰³

On the other hand, the Mother House in Algeria went out of its way to welcome military chaplains who called during the war and the Vatican Information Office, which was run by the Society in Algiers, kept in touch with chaplains in the POW camps. Henri Marchal, in his General Report to the 1947 Chapter spoke of a “special interest in chaplains” and (in another connection) of profound changes in colonial politics and the rise of indigenous nationalism. These, he remarked, were just beginning to be apparent.¹⁰⁴

Nevertheless, the Society could probably have done more for its military chaplains. Superiors were overwhelmed by the immediate problems created by the war and baffled by the emerging post-war mentality. If they were aware of the changes in African social and religious life anticipated by Marchal, they did not associate them

¹⁰⁰ *Petit Echo*, n. 349, Sept-Oct, 1944, p.57.

¹⁰¹ *Petit Echo*, n. 351, Jan-Feb 1945, p. 3.

¹⁰² AGMAfr. Van Der Eerde to Durrieu, April 24th 1955, personal dossier.

¹⁰³ Communication from John O'Donohue June 4th 2009; also personal dossiers.

¹⁰⁴ AGMAfr. Marchal, H., *La Société et ses Oeuvres*, 1947 Typescript, 11, 49, 50. The changes were mentioned in connection with the attachment of vicariates to the Society's provinces.

with the chaplains. The war was however a major factor in such change and with hindsight it may not be too fanciful to suggest that, in a small way, military chaplains helped to shape it.

Sources for this article

The main sources for this article are held in the General Archives of the Society of Missionaries of Africa in Rome and in the archives of the British Sector in London. These consist of correspondence, personal dossiers and semi-archival published materials, especially the Necrological Notices, the magazine *Petit Echo* and the French “Golden Book” (*Livre d’Or*) of the Second World War. I am indebted to Stefaan Minnaert (General Archives), Rudolf Hufschmid (General Secretariat), Christopher Wallbank (British Sector) and to Jean-Claude Ceillier, Patrick Fitzgerald, John O’Donohue and David Bond for their contributions and comments. The following books are also cited in the text.

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Appendix

Working List of Military Chaplains

Note: This is a tentative list of names gleaned from archival and semi-archival sources. Where possible they have been checked from necrological notices and personal dossiers. An asterisk denotes the year of departure of a missionary who left the Society. In such cases there are no necrological notices.

1. Albrecht, Achille 1914-1974*
2. Angers, Aurélien 1894-1985
3. Becquart, Henri Eugène 1908-1988
4. Beeckmans, Paul 1904-1954
5. Bertulli, Cesare 1917-1976¹⁰⁵
6. Bonner, Hugh 1905-1978
7. Boillin, Louis 1919-
8. Brenner, Louis 1913-1989
9. Caumartin, Antonio 1899-1975
10. Conti, Annibale 1912-1967
11. Coussée Jozef 1901-1974
12. De Kessel, Carlos 1908-1979
13. Dorn, Gotthard 1913-2002
14. Druyts, Charles 1912-1945
15. Etienne, Louis-Marie 1886-1963

¹⁰⁵ Whether he was a military chaplain seems doubtful. Bertulli was Chaplain of cursillos in Mozambique, to which he was appointed during the war. The cursillo was invented in Mallorca by a Spanish soldier in 1943. It became a worldwide movement six years later.

16. Foca, Roberto 1887-1973
17. Fouquer, Roger 1906-1993
18. Gaffney, Bernard 1904-1991
19. Gallo, Enrico 1893-1959
20. Garnier, Louis 1917-1993
21. Gelot, Joseph 1911-2003
22. Ghys, Jacques 1914-1991
23. Gommeaux, André 1911-1972*
24. Goutailler, Pierre 1913-1987
25. Granier, Henri 1912-1996
26. Hamel, Adrien 1916-1983
27. Hartman, Herman 1907-1978
28. Haskew, Paul 1907-1967
29. Hehn, François 1911-1996
30. Héllard, Alex 1915-
31. Héon, Paul 1914-2003
32. Herbaux, Louis 1912-1993
33. Klein, Peter 1911-1980
34. Kok, Jan 1901-1978
35. Larose, Edgar 1899-1978
36. Lavallée, Raymond 1905-1983
37. Leloir, Léon 1907-1945
38. Lethielleux, Jean 1900-1998
39. Malfoy, Charles 1912-1988
40. Marchant, Leonard 1904-1990

41. Maurel, Paul 1911-2001
42. McCoy, Owen 1907-1988
43. McGhee, Owen 1908-1974
44. McGrail, Thomas 1915-1947*
45. Muhlberger, Thomas 1912-1992
46. Nixon, Peter 1909-1985
47. Paillard, Jean 1913-1991
48. Porrot, Jean-Marie 1905-1980
49. Pruvost, Jean-Paul 1912-1977
50. Py, Paul, 1901-1962
51. Robinson, John Metcalfe 1910-1980
52. Roly, Jacques 1913-
53. Sainsaulieu, Yves 1913-1963*
54. Schaskow, Alfred 1917-2007
55. Schuffenecker (Duhautoy), Joseph 1909-1995
56. Segretain, Xavier 1916-2000
57. Smith, William 1902-1978
58. St. Denis, Jean-Marcel 1908-1987
59. Stoker, Thomas 1907-1988
60. Stumpf, Heinrich 1912-1982
61. Tabart, Jean 1915-1956
62. Van Der Eerden, Harry 1895-1971
63. Vogt, Walter 1913-1994
64. Vuillard, Joseph 1912-1981