Ministry of Defence

FORCES CATHOLIC NEWS

THE CATHOLIC VOICE FOR MEMBERS
OF OUR ARMED FORCES
AROUND THE WORLD

2021

Restore us, O Lord God of hosts!
Let thy face shine, that we may be saved!

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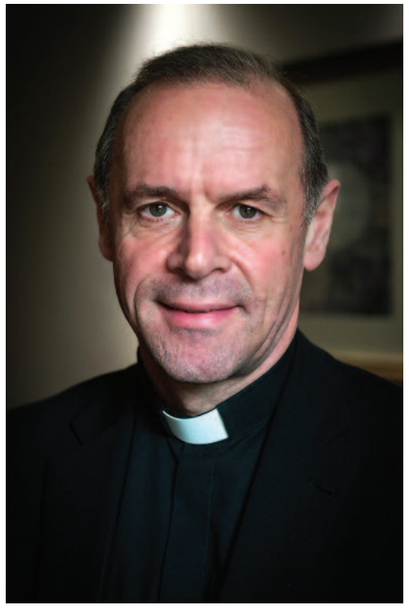
Foreword



Writing the foreword to Forces Catholic News last April, the whole country was still coming to terms with a new reality. The curtailment of our freedoms that very few of us will have experienced before, plus the growing reality of the impact of the virus in our lives, will no doubt shape our world and our outlook in many profound ways in years to come. For all of those who have suffered loss, be it of a livelihood or a loved one, we offer our prayers.

The greatest impact for the Bishopric of the Forces has been in the cancellation of the 2020 HCPT Pilgrimage to Lourdes as well as the International Military Pilgrimage, not to mention the postponement of the Apostolat Militaire International conference at St Mary's in Twickenham. Sadly, these events fall victim once again to Covid in 2021. However, planning for 2022 is underway and we anticipate great interest and desire to enjoy once again the shared living out of our faith at these events next year.

Looking through this year's edition of FCN certainly does not leave you feeling downcast, though. Defence of the Realm continues as it must and, as always, our chaplains and serving Catholics are front and centre, be that in the middle of the desert in Mali, on the Falkland Islands, Cyprus, Gibraltar, Sandhurst … I won't list them all, and they are not all glamorous, but as the baptised we are called to bring that stability, love and truth that comes from our Catholic faith, now more than ever, one might say, in a world where so many things seem to be adrift. Reports I receive about Christian witness across the Armed Forces are indeed encouraging and reveal our faith at its best, reaching out in the thick of a messy world.

Small wonder many clergy have been responding to Pope Francis' directive to go out to the margins. While we may have lost some very talented and experienced chaplains in the last year due to retirement, we are enjoying a period of quality recruitment. Nine new chaplains at my last count. I envy them all as they embark on their mission. Do you know a priest or deacon who may be interested in Forces' chaplaincy? Get them to give me a call!

The world may indeed look different after the pandemic, but the solid rock of our Catholic faith in Christ provides the anchor point we all need, giving us an abiding hope, a hope we must bring to others. This year's FCN gives examples of that faith at work, which is uplifting and inspiring. I hope in reading this copy your own faith and hope will be inspired also.

+Paul

Editorial

2020 will be predominantly remembered for the COVID-19 pandemic. However, despite the tragedy and traumatic impact that the virus caused, and the constraints imposed by national restrictions, life carried on as evidenced by the articles in this edition of the Forces Catholic News, to which, dear reader, I welcome you.

The first article on page 6 by Sqn Ldr Joan Ochuodho RAF, reflects on how 2020 started with a vibrant New Year party and plenty of optimism and hope only to be dashed by the emergence of the pandemic and the consequent shutdown of the country. As the months passed by and we got used to virtual Masses and meetings; essential travel and shopping; face masks and social distancing; and not being able to hug and kiss outside our bubble; we started to improvise and adjust to our constrained environment. Sadly, many events had to be cancelled including pilgrimages (see page 11), Retreats (page 12) and the Chaplains' annual conference and CPD. Others, such as Remembrance Day (page 29), were restricted but despite all the pessimism, Christmas still happened (page 8)!

Reflecting on the COVID experience, Deacon Galloway's thought-provoking piece *Emancipate yourself from mental slavery* on page 9 encourages us to hold onto our summer dreams of change, of a better world, a better life, a kinder and more thoughtful society and not return to the way things were.

Further evidence of the continuation of Service life through the pandemic is provided by Fr Patrick 'PJ' O'Driscoll who talks about his experience in Estonia with 1Royal Regiment of Fusiliers (page 19) and Fr Paul McCourt who extols *The stable presence of chaplaincy*, in the first few months of a deployment to the sub-Saharan desert in Mali, West Africa, with the Light Dragoons in support of a UN Peacekeeping Mission (page 20).

There are farewells to some familiar faces (pages 13, 16 and 26) and some welcomes to new faces: Fr Paschal Hanrahan as the new PRCC(Army) (page 16); Frs Victor Dakwan and Tom Bakulumpagi two new Royal Navy Chaplains (pages 22-25) and Wg Cdr Jeremy Wynne RAF as the new Pastoral Assistant to PRCC(RAF) (page 18). For these and all other articles not mentioned above I offer a big thank you to the respective contributors. Once again, I am grateful to the prowess and professionalism of the production team at Fizzy Print, Austin Crowhurst and Lee Kender.

Please keep up the momentum for next year's edition. Just a reminder that articles should be submitted in 'Word' format and photographs in 'jpg' format please. The deadline for submission is 15 January 2022. However, it is much easier capturing stories as they arise and whilst fresh in the memory, so I do encourage you to write the article there and then and submit it straight away to ian.crabtree277@mod.gov.uk rather than waiting for the deadline. If you have any comments or ideas regarding the publication, then please let me know.

Happy reading!

Ian Crabtree

PS. *The death of HRH Prince Philip, The Duke of Edinburgh, has been announced as we go to print. As this edition is focused on the events of 2020, a fuller appreciation of the Duke's work with the Armed Forces will be given in the next edition which will reflect on the year 2021.*

May he rest in peace.

A family's experience of life under COVID-19

By Sqn Ldr Joan Ochuodho RAF

The start of 2020 was full of optimism as all new year starts tend to be; filled with hope, grand plans and lists of potential accomplishments, even resolutions for some. I have never been one to make resolutions but like many, I had plans for me and my family, with the hope that the year would give us the opportunity to see those plans through. I remember even attending a New Year's party with friends and family and having a great vibrant start to 2020.

Not long after the start of the year did it become clear that COVID-19 was not something that would restrict itself to China, which was reported as the origin of the virus. The gap between January and March 2020 seemed non-existent, when we swiftly moved from going about our day-to-day activities without a care in the world, to everything being shut, including schools. Having to stand in long queues to be able to shop for groceries was a rather alien concept at the time, but soon became the 'new normal' as did many other elements of our daily lives.

My family and I (my husband and 2 boys aged 8 and 4), attend Mass at St Peter and the Martyrs Catholic Church in Winchester. The church has a vibrant community, which brings back memories of the warmth going to mass at RAF Halton brought me and my family when we lived there between 2012 and 2015, even though Halton (The Holy Family) had a much smaller congregation.

We have lived as part of the MOD Worthy Down community in Winchester since July 2018. I always joke that if there were more RAF rather than Army bases around Winchester, I would find my forever home in this city and live in it now! It is a beautiful part of the country with rich history; with great places to go for family walks or the odd run. Living in Winchester is slowly converting me into an outdoor runner.

Until the first lockdown, we attended mass at St Peter and the Martyrs on most Sundays. Sadly, since then, we have had to make do with attending Mass virtually, which is ok in itself but rather difficult for my little boys to fully engage for the whole mass on most Sundays. So as we hope for all aspects of life to get back to what we knew as normal, I especially pray for the day when we will be able to celebrate mass in church again, not just for me, but for my little boys to be able to enjoy the normalcy of Sunday mass.

Despite not being keen on making resolutions, I had consciously decided to try and be a more 'useful' member of the church in 2020. I wanted to join the ranks of those who teach Sunday School, a decision I made sometime in early March 2020. Having taken time to reflect on how best I could serve the church realistically amidst juggling my work and family commitments, I felt this was very much within my ability to do. Sadly, due to the pandemic, I did not get to pursue this but certainly hope to do so when we are able to attend mass with children again.

The lock-down in March also came with a notice for deployment on Operations for me. It was a busy time, as I had the daunting prospect of trying to fit pre-deployment training, (attending various training courses in different parts of the country) into what seemed like an already manic work schedule. I was the Joint Helicopter Command Media Officer at the time. As part of the national response to the pandemic, military helicopters were tasked to support the National Health Service (NHS) in the fight against Coronavirus. This brought with it inevitable media interest in what the helicopters were up to. Our efforts to tell our stories well as the military helicopter world, coupled with reacting to the media interest in what the helicopters were doing in support of the NHS made for a busy spring for me. I however managed to complete my pre-deployment training on time, and undertook my deployed role in early June 2020.

I started my deployed role in UK. I never imagined that undertaking a deployed role remotely would be possible at all. The pandemic certainly made everyone find ways of making the impossible possible. Due to airspace closures and visa delays triggered by the pandemic, I had the unenviable task of trying to fulfil a role based in Nigeria, working virtually from the UK and at home.

One of the effects of COVID for my family was the loss of a job for my husband, Peter. A former RAF Engineer, he had spent most of 2018/19 settling into the commercial aviation world and had just got into a comfortable space, working for Etihad at London Heathrow Airport. When the pandemic hit, there were losses of thousands of jobs within the aviation industry. Peter's job was one of those. This later turned out to be a blessing in disguise in many ways for my family, not that it was apparent at the time.

During the first lock-down, while the children were home due to school closures, and my husband also at home trying to figure out what he would do if the pandemic continued to rage, there was a lot of room for reflection for us as a family despite me being 'head down' trying to get to grips with a job that was based in Nigeria. In any case there wasn't much else one could do other than grocery shopping and taking the opportunity to exercise outdoors once a day.

We thanked God for the fact that our family and friends largely remained safe and unaffected by COVID; and that despite my husband's loss of work, I still had a relatively secure job. We were also conscious of the fact that there were many people out there who had much bigger problems than ours. It was during these reflections that Peter decided he wanted to become a high school maths teacher, a career he had in fact wanted to pursue when he completed his engineering degree years ago but ended up joining the RAF instead. What this change of career did, was give me the opportunity to deploy, (which I eventually did when the airspaces re-opened) without the baggage of worrying about whether our children would be ok, should we have had to source for extra childcare support.

He enrolled for a year-long programme with Reading University, attending lectures on some days and undertaking the other elements of training in an actual school. His schedule was therefore very much in tandem with those of our sons while I was away, enabling him to do the school runs but most importantly be home with them after school and weekends while I was away. One of the significant worries for us when I received my notice for deployment had been childcare. Our core extended family mostly live in Kenya. We have some close relatives and friends in UK but none of them live close enough to us, nor have the capacity to support us with childcare for lengthy periods of time. We had however remained faithful that somehow, we would find an appropriate solution in good time. The loss of my husband's job and subsequent change of career meant we

could muddle through on our own as a family, without the extra support we thought we had to have. 'Every cloud has a silver lining' has never had more meaning for my family. That said, friends and family in UK did support us immensely where they could, within the limits of lock-down and other COVID restrictions that remained in place. They made arrangements for our sons to have play dates with their children, sometimes cooking enough food for my family to freeze, to reduce the burden on Peter, particularly during the working week. That went a long way to make the whole experience manageable for us.

I was born and brought up in Kenya, therefore the prospect of going to mass in Nigeria during my deployment was exciting. Partly because there was a potential opportunity to appreciate the Nigerian culture, and to experience how the country's cultural wealth enriched the faith and mass in general. Unfortunately, I never did get to experience this as churches were closed during my deployment even in Nigeria. I therefore continued attending mass virtually, with every Sunday feeling like I was back home in UK for an hour.

The challenges of COVID have indeed been felt throughout the country and the rest of the world. One look at various social media platforms gives the undoubted impression that there are many struggling with isolation, loss of life, loss of jobs and livelihoods, loss of businesses and many other negative effects. Loss seems to punctuate everything around us lately. Remaining steadfast in faith and belief that there are better times ahead has at times been challenging. My family and I have however continued to remind ourselves to be grateful even when it does not feel like there is a lot to be grateful for. It has been an opportunity to instil in my children the spirit of prayer and gratitude at their very tender ages. We have missed the warmth of sharing the sacrament of mass every Sunday with the St Peter and the Martyrs Winchester Catholic community. We hope for some light at the end of what currently seems like a rather long tunnel!!

Christmas 2020

Bishop Paul Mason, Bishop of the Forces said "When not engaged in forward operations supporting our troops in defence of the Realm, the breadth and depth of a military chaplain's ministry clearly knows no bounds:

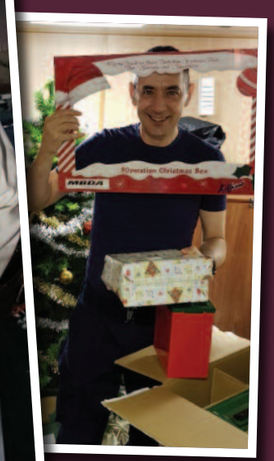
Deacon David Skillen as a wandering minstrel;

a dishevelled though not-quite convincing Archangel Gabriel depicted by Deacon Neil Galloway;

while Fr Daren Brown seems to have found his niche as a far more convincing Santa Claus.

Fr David Conroy on Christmas Day with some of his Royal Navy flock who could not get home for Christmas".

The beautiful Christmas Crib in the Forces Cathedral of St Michael and St George, Aldershot.



Meanwhile, In the Gulf Fr Robert Matau finds some Christmas joy onboard HMS MONTROSE where he led a Carol Service on the flight deck for the ship's company followed by Midnight Mass on the bridge wing.

"Emancipate yourself from mental slavery"

By Padre Neil Galloway RAF

The new year is here, 2021. At last, 2020 is over and we're glad to see the back of it. What a year it was! 2021 will be so much better; no more lockdowns and we can look forward to a return to normal life again.

But wait! We are still under attack; it seems that chaos reigns in our streets once more; the global pandemic continues; in fact it seems to be getting worse. Worldwide political upheaval, social and economic crisis, protests in the streets, violence and terrorist atrocities; we are under siege.

Quick, pull up the draw bridge! Guard the walls! Batten down the hatches! Close the shutters! And retreat into our safe places, our fortresses, our castles, our panic rooms and closed environments once more!

Who can we trust in these dire times? Who is in our bubble, our safe group? Who can be relied upon? Our families, our friends, our tribes, our niche groups, our cliques and clubs? Those who we know, those who we trust, those like us, not the stranger and definitely not the "others", those who do not share our view of the world, those who don't act or think like us; those who are not wearing a mask or keeping enough social distance.

2020 is likely to go down as the year that fun and community was cancelled. A year when our liberties were removed from us. Our churches were closed, we could not worship, could not visit our families, could not hug, hold or kiss the ones we love.

We could not travel freely, could not enjoy our normal pastimes and hobbies, could not socialise or meet. Our economy lay in tatters; furlough, redundancy, the collapse of familiar businesses. The year when our binary thinking and polarised politics finally dragged our nation into the mire.

After the initial mercenary madness of panic buying, we settled down to staying at home, doing the right thing, protecting the vulnerable and saving the NHS.

750,000 people volunteered to help the NHS and the vulnerable. We built huge hospitals in days. Countless number of people worked with charities, faith groups and community groups to help people in their local areas.

The roads went silent; families spent quality time together; the skies were clearer, air cleaner and we beheld a resurgence of nature. People marvelled at the wonder of it all; how we were all pulling together in a "war time spirit". The Queen made a special broadcast to us and we all stood at our front doors and clapped for the NHS.

Yes, the world would be a better place once this was all over. Things would be different, we would better appreciate our families, protect the weak and vulnerable in our society, protect our environment, we would be better people, we swore it.

In the summer, the sun shone in one of the hottest on record and created a lockdown holiday at home many will remember. It was time for the BBQ and for me that means a bit of Bob Marley to get me in the summer mood. One of my favourites is *Redemption Song*. Bob always makes me feel that holiday spirit.

A summer of Zoom Church and outdoor Mass, new ways of working and new ways of worship, and we prayed for a better world.

But then as time dragged on things changed, we became tired and restless, resentful, anxious and angry. We had been trapped in our homes but now our society was becoming trapped in the endless negativity and social bloodletting.

Temporary unlocks gave us some hope, we were even thankful for a return to endless Brexit coverage to break the monotony and distract us.

But the lockdowns continued and even Christmas was taken away from many of us, the future looked bleak with only the hope of a vaccination providing a light at the end of the tunnel. 2021 has not started any better, anther year when everything stopped for Lockdown.

But it does not have to be this way! We don't have to let go of our summer dreams of change, of a better world, a better life, a kinder and more thoughtful society. We don't have to go back to the way things were, and we don't have to be trapped in binary thinking and a polarised society.

We can change, we have the ability and the opportunity, the choice is ours, all we have to do is have faith and exercise our choice, our free will. All we have to do is stop and think before we react, to liberate ourselves from the needless battle. To choose prayer over procrastination, the positive over the negative, the kind action and word over the spiteful or angry reaction, faith over false news.

We were all given a superpower by God, the power of free will, the ability to choose. We don't have to continue the old shouting matches and vendettas; we don't have to be part of the destructive cycle. We can make a difference in our own lives, homes, families, and communities, and when we do, others will too.

As people of faith, we are called to be the catalyst for change in our world; we are asked to be the purveyors of hope in our community; we are bound to be the keepers of the light at the end of the tunnel, for those who are lost in the darkness. Do not be afraid! Don't hide the light of your faith under a bushel, let it shine out to those in darkness, those who live in the shadow of death.

Through prayer and contemplation, we can be liberated from our binary minds, our fears and our negativity. We can exercise our free will to be agents of faith, hope and light. With faith we can make real our summer dreams of a better world. As Bob Marley says in *Redemption Song*, "emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds".

Christ has liberated you from the bonds of slavery to sin and death; now exercise your free will, emancipate yourself from the slavery of negative binary thought and believe in the kingdom of heaven.

Pray for the Spirit to come upon you and listen to more Bob Marley!

Ode 2 Covid

Hands, face, space
Don't go to a crowded place!
Keep your distance,
Until you have enough resistance.

Stay home, Protect the NHS, save Lives!
By locking down until COVID dives.
Only essential travel permitted;
Work from home, be committed.

Self-isolate, form a bubble,
Do not cause trouble!
We don't want any more Tiers;
Remember the Lockdown years!

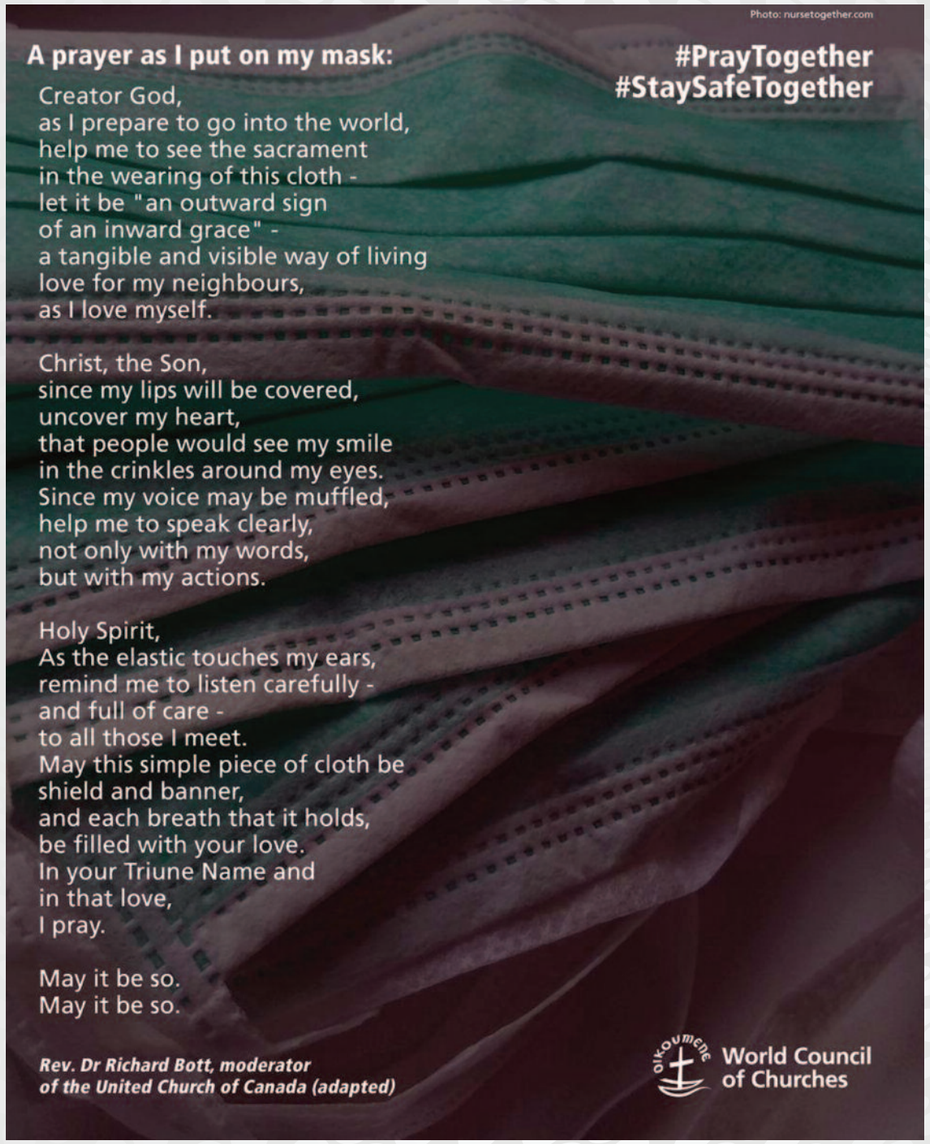
No more travelling to meetings
And no intimate greetings!
Let's chat on Zoom, Skype and Teams
And Keep up our spirits and dreams.

But lo! a vaccine appears.
Let us give three hearty cheers!

Produced and approved in record time,
Its impact will be sublime.

While we wait for freedom to hug
Wear your mask to stop the bug
From transmitting round and round
So that the R-rate goes aground.

Let us pray with heart and soul
For an end to this rigmarole.
No more isolation and heartache
But face to face tea and cake



HCPT: 2021 – The year of the helper

By Wing Cdr Olivia Steel RAF, Chair of Armed Forces Region

HCPT AF Region helpers in Lichfield Chapel

Back in Feb 2020, when the COVID-19 cases in the UK began to increase and the country was drawing closer to going into a full lockdown as the severity of the virus was beginning to be understood, my thoughts turned to the upcoming HCPT Pilgrimages to Lourdes at Easter and in the Summer. The Armed Forces Region had just completed an extremely successful training weekend at Lichfield and were raring to go.

There was all the usual enthusiasm from our returning helpers and Group Leaders, but we also had an extremely committed and positive group of new helpers all keen to get out to Lourdes and experience everything they were hearing about. I was also extremely heartened to hear of all the beneficiaries (children and young adults at Easter and our VIPs at Summer) who were going to be under our care whilst experiencing a respite holiday with HCPT.

However, the early scientific reports about the virus suggested that it was extremely dangerous for people with existing medical conditions and it was very easily spread. Coming together in large groups should be avoided as well as air travel to Europe. As this information became clearer, we all became concerned that HCPT would have no choice but to cancel the 2020 pilgrimages. Sadly, with a very heavy heart, HCPT did cancel the pilgrimages and it is fair to say that the Armed Forces Region were devastated.

With only a few weeks to go until the Easter pilgrimage, a years' worth of planning had to be shelved, difficult and sad conversations had to be made to families and helpers and we reached out to our financial contributors to understand if they were happy to carry their support forward to 2021. It was a very hard few weeks but everyone in the Armed Forces Region reacted in a typically organised, resilient way, thinking less of their own needs and more of the needs of the region and the charity itself.

Fortunately, HCPT made some very timely strategic decisions which prevented significant financial loss and it adopted a robust communication flow to ensure everyone was kept up to date in those early confusing weeks. As the newly elected Armed Forces Region Chair, I was incredibly proud of my team and humbled, especially with the Group Leaders who took on the responsibility of not only delivering bad news to families but also to children themselves - some of whom will not have fully understood the gravity of the situation and will have no doubt struggled to cope with the short notice change.

As the dust settled and the lockdown took hold, many of our Region members were back on the front line, in hospitals, med centres, squadrons or operational units, some in direct support of COVID activities. However, we still managed to virtually celebrate Easter at Lourdes through many of the initiatives that HCPT put on social media which we shared with our beneficiaries across the country. My concerns about whether the Region would survive not travelling to Lourdes were diminished very quickly as the Group Leaders reassured me that not only had the groups remained solvent but that new helpers had retained the same level of commitment seen at the training weekend.

The groups maintained a high level of communication, linking into HCPT initiatives online and getting active in fundraising. Sadly, many of our usual fundraising events were cancelled because of COVID restrictions and our ability to engage with the military families we support was hampered by lockdown and social distancing, but this didn't prevent the groups staying fresh with ideas of how we could come together virtually if required.

As the summer came and went (normally a quiet time in pilgrimage planning), HCPT declared their determination that in 2021, groups would return to Lourdes and planning started to centre around a summer or October pilgrimage. There were several pre-requisites that HCPT HQ put in place for a safe and successful pilgrimage including that everyone must be vaccinated which set the timeline.

Continued overleaf

Helpers undertaking team training at Lichfield.

Continued

Planning started in earnest for 2021 and the Region began to feel positive again about the future. However, the end of 2020 brought new challenges including a 2nd lockdown and stricter restrictions. With a 3rd lockdown looming, I engaged with all the group leaders about how they felt about planning for a July or October pilgrimage. After careful and thorough consideration, it was deemed too risky to move forward with committing funds to planning to travel to Europe with vulnerable beneficiaries with no guarantee of when we would all be vaccinated. Instead, we are going to use 2021 to refresh, rejuvenate and re-energise our Group Leaders, Group Nurses, Chaplains and helpers ready for 2022.

We have named this year the 'Year of the Helper'. We plan to organise a year of training and spirituality. We have an ambition to travel to Lourdes towards the end of the year on a pilgrimage retreat. Not providing respite care for vulnerable beneficiaries but taking part in a programme of selfcare. If we don't make sure our helpers are fighting fit for 2022, the Armed Forces Region may not survive.

So, what will 2022 bring? The Armed Forces Region will be back with a bang. We hope to have all our current groups travelling at maximum capacity, supporting lots of families and we also hope to have rejuvenated the Army Group which has lain dormant whilst the Group Leader has been working overseas. With the International Military Pilgrimage hopefully gathering again in 2022, Group 507 will be able to reconnect and join them, staying at Hosanna House. We are all very excited about 2021 and already have lots of ideas on how we can strengthen and support our helpers as well as recruit new helpers.

If you are reading this and are interested in getting involved in our 'Year of the Helper' and learn more about how you can support the Military community with children and adults with additional needs in a pilgrimage to Lourdes in 2022 please get in contact at armedforces@hcpt.org.uk

Are you daring to be hopeful? But what will be different?

Wg Cdr (Rtd) Jem Wynne RAF

In the morning, long before dawn, he got up and left the house, and went off to a lonely place and prayed there. Mark 1:35

A year ago, I was skiing in the French Alps at the Army Medical Services Ski Championships enjoying the scenery, sunshine, and the company of colleagues from the Defence Medical Services. There was talk of a new virus in China, but we were, at that stage, unaffected and visited cafes and bars without a second thought, as we all did routinely in the pre-COVID world. I thought it strange to see someone wear a mask on the flight home from Grenoble.

We made plans: to travel, to holiday, to meet with friends and family. As a family we were looking forward to visiting Worth Abbey for a Family Retreat during the Summer holidays, as we have done for a number of years. I knew also, through my role as Chair of the RAF Pastoral Advisory Group (PAG), that the response from those wanting to join one of the PAG-organised retreats had been unprecedented. So much so that a third retreat at Ampleforth Abbey was organised alongside the regular roster of Belmont and Worth to cater for demand.

Alas, none of the planned retreats in 2020 were able to take place. Nevertheless, we decided to plough on and offer the opportunity for 4 retreats in 2021, hoping and praying that we would, somehow, be through the pandemic by then. As I write this, I have just heard that the first of those retreats, planned at Douai Abbey in March, has been cancelled. However, as the vaccination programme continues apace, and with a fair wind, I dare to hope that the 3 other retreats will take place.

The retreats are open to all MOD Personnel (Regular, Reserve and Civil Servant); immediate dependents will be considered should there be capacity. The retreats have been run successfully for many years and offer the opportunity for individual personal development. In 2021, we hope and pray that these retreats will be able to take place:

- Belmont Abbey, Herefordshire, 21 – 24 June
- Worth Abbey, West Sussex, 4 – 7 October
- Ampleforth Abbey, North Yorkshire, 29 November – 2 December

For more information, please look at Defence Instructions and Notices Ref: 2020DIN01-124, or contact:

Sgt Caroline Routledge caroline.routledge475@mod.gov.uk or
Wg Cdr (Rtd) Jem Wynne rafprccpastoralassistant457@mod.gov.uk

Although, for me, there is something special in being able to withdraw, as Christ did, to find that unique sense of peace and quiet at a monastery on retreat, COVID has caused us all to access prayer resources and church services through other means. There is so much available on-line, and I'm sure that many of us are now used to accessing Sunday Mass via Zoom or You Tube.

Continued overleaf

Continued

But could I highlight a couple of on-line spiritual opportunities that the RAF Principal Roman Catholic Chaplain will be offering and facilitating during the year?

Two courses will be available:

- *Unlocking the Mystery of The Bible,* and
- *Jesus: The Way, The Truth and The Life*

both offered by Ascension Press, a leader in faith formation. The courses will be run on Zoom over 8 sessions.

Unlocking the Mystery of The Bible offers the opportunity for participants to get the big picture of The Bible by showing how the 14 narrative books tell the story from Adam and Eve to Christ and the Church. The first course will run during Lent with a second offered later in the year.

Jesus: The Way, The Truth and The Life, is a powerful study of the life of Jesus Christ. We plan to offer two courses this year. For more information, or to express an interest to undertake the course, please contact the RAF Pastoral Assistant at: rafprccpastoralassistant457@mod.gov.uk.

We are also looking at other on-line spiritual formation opportunities that could be offered to a military audience. More details to follow. Keep an eye on the Bishopric of the Forces website (www.rcbishopricforces.org.uk) for further information.

So, has the pandemic offered us the opportunity of a relaunch?

When COVID winds down, do we have an opportunity to relaunch our lives, to start afresh, and to live in a way that is better for ourselves, for our communities and for the world?

What role do we want to play in the relaunch?

What do we want our future lives and the world we co-create to look like?

Perhaps by taking part in one of the retreats or the on-line formation being offered you may find yourself on the launch pad; you may find yourself in a position to take off!

Deacon Dave Skillen, Mrs Westwood, Deacon Neil Galloway

Mrs Joss Westwood Retires from RAF Halton Chaplaincy Centre

Mrs Joss Westwood has recently retired from her role as Chaplaincy Clerk at RAF Halton after many years of dedicated service. She will be well known to many within the RAF RC community not only through the cheerful and helpful way in which she carried out her primary role, but also through her service to the Holy Family Church at RAF Halton.

On her retirement in December 2020, Joss was presented with an icon of The Holy Family at a retirement lunch in Halton House Officers' Mess by the RAF Principal Roman Catholic Chaplain, Rev (Sqn Ldr) Dave Skillen and the RAF Halton Station Chaplain, Rev (Sqn Ldr) Neil Galloway. This presentation recognised both Mrs Westwood's long service to RAF Chaplaincy as well as her significant and unbridled support to the many Roman Catholic Chaplains who have been stationed at RAF Halton during their tenure.

In honouring Joss' long service, Deacon Dave Skillen said:

"I felt it appropriate to offer a small token of the appreciation of the whole RAF RC Community for her dedicated service which went far beyond her day-to-day role as the Station Chaplaincy Clerk. It was not uncommon to find Joss weeding around the Church grounds in a bid to care for the Church and to help keep it looking loved and open for personal and collective prayer. She did this, and so much more, of her own volition."

Joss now embarks on a well-deserved retirement. We wish her every happiness and blessing.

Support from CWL Services Committee

Main entrance to Erskine House apartment block

The Catholic Women's League (CWL) are strong supporters of the military and have generously provided grants in the past to enable injured active and veteran Service personnel to go on pilgrimage to Lourdes. Mrs Bernie Townsend of the CWL Services Committee, recently sent the following news of their activities during the past year. She writes:

"In the CWL and Services Committee things have been quiet, with fundraising an awful lot down, as in all charities in the past year. I have been in touch with the Services Committee by phone and the Trustees and Executive of the League itself meet only by Zoom, very regularly, with the National President marooned on Jersey! Our National AGM was by Zoom in November and very restricted - a wonderful tool but we do miss the personal interaction.

In the Services Committee we have made 3 grants this year - to the Gurkha Welfare Trust to fund the rebuild of a further veteran/widow's home in Nepal (see copy of completion report on next page); to Erskine House, Veterans' village in Wilton outside Salisbury; and to the Naval and Military Bible Society.

My husband and I went to visit the Wilton Hill Veterans' Village last New Year, again in the Summer and were shown around the campus. This was extremely impressive with 44 individual spacious 1, 2-bedroom and Studio apartments with a community café and enterprise hub. This is the UK's first purpose-built community for vulnerable veterans, helping them get back on their feet after suffering problems in their civilian lives. They can be there for up to 2 years and pay rent at £250 per week, which is covered by Benefits, plus utility charges.

We (CWL) decided to fund 6 Welcome Packs for residents at a cost of £800 each which include a mattress, linen, pots and pans etc. The Prime Minister visited at the beginning of December 2019 on his campaign trail and was very impressed and thinks this sort of facility should exist in other parts of the country where there is a need.

Erskine House apartment living area

Erskine House apartment kitchen

Erskine House apartment bedroom

Earthquake-Resilient Homes Completion Report

Thank you so much for donating £6,100 to The Gurkha Welfare Trust in March, which has built a new home for Gurkha widow, Parbati Ale. Her home has been built and I am delighted to update you on the difference this has made to her life.

Parbati lives in Tanahun District, central Nepal. She is the widow of late Ganesh Ale, who fought as a Gurkha Rifleman in World War Two. She has a daughter and three stepsons. In 2014 she moved into her father's house along with her daughter. Her father's house was in poor condition, it was draughty, and she only had access to an outside toilet. Unfortunately, there wasn't enough space to accommodate her extended family which was difficult for Parbati.

Left: Parbati outside her Father's home

Right: the outside toilet she previously used

Thanks to your donation, Parbati has a new, earthquake-resilient home, which she shares with her family (please see photos overleaf). She has a comfortable home, which has deep foundations, steel-reinforced vertical posts, and concrete banding to hold it in place in the event of geological disturbance. Her home has been painted in a colour of her choice and it has a toilet, basin, a fully functioning kitchen and an electricity supply. She no longer fears for her safety. She will be warm and dry every winter, which will have a positive impact on her health.

Parbati said it's like a dream to have her own home and she wanted to extend her heartfelt gratitude to Catholic Women's League Services Committee.

Thank you so much for your support. Your generosity has meant more than the gift of a new home for a Gurkha pensioner – it has meant the gift of security and dignity.

Plaque in recognition of CWL'S support to the Gurkha Welfare Trust which is sited on Parbati Ale's new home

Parbati's new home being constructed

Parbati standing outside her new home

This is a special place for me as I started work at Erskine Barracks with the Ministry of Defence in 1962 and met my husband there. The former Army Headquarters moved to Andover a few years ago and Wilton Hill is now a very nice housing estate with Erskine House incorporated within the site. To see more, go to https://www.entrainspace.co.uk/ and look at the accommodation and facilities on the website. A site in Portsmouth I believe has been identified for a similar project, which Portsmouth City Council are half funding, and also there is a site identified in Glasgow".

Farewell and welcome PRCC (Army)

With fond farewells and good wishes!

29th October 2020 marked the formal retirement of Fr Michael Fava QHC CB, the Deputy Chaplain General and Principal Roman Catholic Chaplain (Army), after 23 years of dedicated service to both the Bishopric and the Royal Army Chaplains' Department (RAChD).

Commissioned in 1997, Fr Michael served with the Irish Guards before moving to HQ 20 Armoured Brigade. In 1999 he deployed to Bosnia before posting to HQ 1 Mechanical Brigade with whom he deployed twice: to Sierra Leone in 2001, and Kosovo in 2002. While at 1 Mechanical Brigade he also served as Staff Chaplain to the Principal RC Chaplain (Army) at MOD Chaplains' Directorate, which at the time was based in Upavon,

He subsequently served with the Grenadier Guards and the Household Cavalry Regiment and deployed again to Bosnia before becoming Senior Chaplain at Army Training Regiment, Bassingbourn and then the RC Chaplain at Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. In 2009 Fr Michael was promoted to CF2 (Lt Col) on assignment to HQ British Forces Cyprus where he was also responsible for the provision of chaplaincy decompression briefing at Bloodhound Camp.

He was posted to HQ 43 Wessex Brigade as Deputy Assistant Chaplain General (DACG) in 2011. He served as Joint Force Senior Chaplain on Op Herrick 18, and travelled throughout theatre to provide RC worship as the only British RC chaplain. Assignment to HQ 38 (Irish) Brigade as Deputy Assistant Chaplain General was followed by promotion to CF1 (Col) in September 2015 on becoming Assistant Chaplain General at HQ Force Troops Command. In 2017 he was appointed as an Honorary Chaplain to HM The Queen (QHC). He moved on promotion to MOD Chaplains' Directorate at HQ Army, Andover, in November 2018 as Deputy Chaplain-General.

His time with the Bishopric and the army are characterised by gentleness and wisdom and we all wish him well for the next phase of life and ministry. Fr Michael is currently on a period of Sabbatical prior to return to ministry with the Diocese of Portsmouth.

Fr Michael has been succeeded in the role of PRCC (A) by Fr Paschal Hanrahan who is currently serving as the Assistant Chaplain General at HQ 3rd (UK) Division which is based in Bulford.

Welcome Fr Paschal to the role of PRCC(Army)!

Fr Paschal hails from Ennis, Co Clare, Ireland. After studying for the priesthood at St Patrick's College, Maynooth, he received a Dip in Philosophy & Arts, BD in Theology and a HDip in Pastoral Studies. He was ordained priest in May 1998 and served as curate in the town of Kilrush, in West Clare.

He commissioned into the RAChD in Sep 2005 and was assigned as Chaplain (CF4) to the Queens Royal Lancers (QRL). A tour of Iraq (Op TELIC IX) followed, and he was subsequently assigned to 1 The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment (1PWRR) and another tour of Iraq (Op TELIC XIII). Assignments with: 7 & 16 Signal Regiments at Elmpt Station, 3 Regiment Royal Horse Artillery (3RHA) in Hohne, Germany; an exchange with the Australian Defence Force (ADF) on Exercise LONGLOOK; and the Irish Guards in Aldershot, followed. He was selected for promotion to CF3 (Maj) in 2011. During this time, he also deployed to Afghanistan (Op HERRICK 17/18).

In 2012 he completed an MTh in Chaplaincy Studies at Cardiff University and was selected for Brigade Senior Chaplain and served with 12th Armoured Infantry Brigade (12X) in Bulford before attending Intermediate Command and Staff Course (ICSC) at the Defence Academy, Shrivenham. His next assignment saw him serving with the 11 (Royal School of Signals) Signal Regiment at Blandford. While there he was selected for promotion to CF2 (Lt Col) and assigned to the 4th Infantry Brigade and HQ North East in Catterick. He joined the Staff at Army Headquarters in 2017 where he was Staff Chaplain to the Chaplain General. He was released from Army HQ on good behaviour and assigned to 7th Infantry Brigade and HQ East on their move to Kendrew Barracks in Cottesmore. In July 2020 he was selected for promotion to CF1 and assigned to HQ 3rd United Kingdom Division based in Bulford, Wiltshire.

CF = Chaplain to the Forces. The number relates to class and rank (CF1 is First Class = Colonel; CF2= Lieutenant Colonel; CF3=Major; CF4=Captain).

The Deacon

by Deacon Dave Skillen, Principal RC Chaplain, RAF

I often get asked questions about what it means to be a Deacon, and this is no less the case of me as a military chaplain. As deacons in the military are a recent development, I thought it would perhaps be interesting and helpful to share some of my thoughts concerning this question. It seems to me that an important consideration to make when trying to understand the vocation of deacons is first to identify the right question to ask about them. To begin with, we should try to resist the temptation to simply ask, "What can a deacon do or not do?" This is normally asked by way of comparison with the ministry of the priest, in which case we risk seeing the deacon, sadly, as 'less than' the priest, in the vocational sense, rather than as distinct from him. Instead, we might better ask, "Who" is the deacon, by divine and ecclesiastical calling?

Deacons are not mini, or would-be, priests, or father's helpers, or enhanced lay people. Of course, we do 'help' or rather, serve, our bishops, priests and indeed the whole People of God. Deacons are ordained to be a sacramental sign of Christ the Suffering Servant, "who came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (cf. Matthew 20:28). The vocation and ministry of the deacon are complimentary to those of the priest and are distinct from them. Together, the priest and the deacon participate in the ministry of the bishop, who's ministry is that of Jesus Christ the High Priest.

In the Church's hierarchy the deacon sits below the priest who sits below the bishop, yet beautifully the deacon goes ahead of all in ordained ministry for in the practise of the Church all are first admitted to Holy Orders by this way of humble servanthood – the diaconate. Together, each collaborate in the singular ministry of Jesus Christ. The diaconal character of ordained service therefore sets an indelible foundation and mandate for deacon, priest and bishop alike – yes, even the Pope (and we see this abundantly in the life and ministry of Pope Francis of course)!

"Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach."

The deacon's vocation is one of service. But what and who is he called to serve? At the moment of ordination during Mass, the infant deacon goes before the Bishop and kneels to receive the Book of the Gospels. The Bishop then instructs him with the words, "*Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practise what you teach.*" So, the deacon is servant and "herald" of the gospel of Jesus Christ and servant of the Church, the People of God. An awesome privilege and blessed burden!

Dn Dave Proclaims the Gospel at the final Mass at the former Memorial Church of the Holy Family, RAF Halton. July 2018.

The Church lays before us *the three-fold ministry of the deacon*: He is servant (and minister) of the *Word*, servant of *altar*, and servant of *charity*. These are outward expressions of 'who' the deacon is at his core.

Servant of the Word: The deacon is called to proclaim the Gospel in the Mass and at other solemn gatherings of the People. He is called to preach the homily at Mass and generally help the People understand the Scriptures. So, when the deacon preaches at Mass, he is not simply giving the priest a week off that duty; rather, he is fulfilling an important aspect of his ministry as deacon. In taking into his heart and attentively living out the Word of God in his daily life and to the best of his ability, with the help of God's grace, he is bearing witness to the gospel and so serving the Word of God!

Servant of the altar: When the deacon is officiating at Mass, he is carrying out a real work of practical assistance to the bishop (or priest) and the faithful. Often this can seem to be reduced to merely symbolic gestures, but this is not meant to be the case; the deacon is there to *really* serve, whilst also *modelling service* to the whole Church, proposing that all might do likewise in their daily lives (see John 13:15). The Church teaches that the deacon, in the Liturgy, is a bridge between the sanctuary/altar and the pews, between the priest and the People. This is why, for example, the deacon (usually) issues instructions such as calling the assembly to *proclaim the mystery of faith, to share the sign of peace*, and to "*Go forth, the Mass is ended*". This is why he ordinarily reads the prayers of intercessions. This role is real and practical, but it is also, crucially, an indication of his broader role in the mission of the Church. To express it this way: the priest is called to be as Christ in the church, celebrating and administering the Sacraments; the deacon is called to be as Christ *in the world*, celebrating and heralding the Word of God in action. A powerful image of this is seen when the deacon processes into church at the beginning of Mass carrying high the Book of the Gospels. Together the deacon and the priest collaborate in making locally present the ministry of the bishop, who himself makes present to the whole People the fullness of Christ's ministry as High Priest.

Dns Dave Skillen & Neil Galloway at the Installation of Bishop Paul Mason as Bishop of the Forces, September 2018.

Photo. Dn Dave Skillen & Fr Paul Lenoard of Sacred Heart parish, Hook, completing the Cafod Christmas Charity Fun Run, December 2020.

Servant of charity: The first deacons - *seven men of good repute* - were called from the community to serve their bishop (see Acts 6:2-4), assisting him in many and varied practical tasks. This freed the bishop to devote more time to prayer and celebrating the sacraments. From the earliest times the diaconate found its 'niche', as it were, serving the needs of the poor, homeless and the destitute - e.g. *distributing alms to widows*, etc. Many great deacons such as St Francis of Assisi provide powerful examples of this sort of 'service of Charity' for us all. By their work in this ministry of charity, deacons reveal, and render present today, Christ the deacon who sat (sits) with outcasts and ate (eats) with sinners. Deacons remind us of the Lord's servant kingship. This is a most fulfilling part of my ministry both in general terms and as a military chaplain in the Royal Air Force – a ministry of accompaniment and of servant leadership. I so often find myself with people 'outside' the Church, or on the margins of the Church, who crave God's love in their lives – even if they do not always know it is Christ for whom they long! As a deacon in military chaplaincy, I am called to a sacramental ministry which is exercised *on the margins*; called and sent to exercise a service of Word, Altar and Charity out in the world; missionary. The diaconal way is the way of blessed obscurity! *Deo Gratias*!

Please pray for greater awareness and acceptance of the ministry of deacons and for vocations to the diaconate.

Prayer: Lord God, we give you thanks that you have given us the ministry of deacons in the Church to be a sure sign and a powerful reminder that all are called to be servants of one another. We pray for a greater acceptance of the 'permanent' diaconate within the Church and for its nurturing within the community of faith, so that by the witness of their lives of service we all might be inspired to imitate our Lord, Jesus Christ, who reached out in love to the marginalised and the outcast, welcoming them all as your beloved sons and daughters into the family of God.

AMEN.

FOCUS ON THE NEW PASTORAL ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT TO THE RAF PRINCIPAL ROMAN CATHOLIC CHAPLAIN

An exciting new role was created in 2020 to offer administrative support to the RAF Principal Roman Catholic Chaplain in his mission to further the advancement of the Roman Catholic faith among members of the RAF and the welfare of Roman Catholics in the RAF.

Wing Commander (Rtd) Jem Wynne took up this part-time role in September which coincided with his retiring from the RAF after serving 27 years as a Dental Officer. Jem is well known to the RAF RC Community having served with the RAF Pastoral Advisory Group since its inception, latterly as its Chair. He was instrumental in organising the first of the RAF led Retreats which have proved to be so successful over the years.

Jem and his wife, Emma, and their children, Thomas and Polly, have settled in Newcastle upon Tyne and worship at their local Parish of Holy Name. He is keen to pursue the opportunities in delivering catechesis having recently completed the Certificate in Catholic Religious Studies. Jem is very excited about his new role, 'I left the RAF after 27 very happy years but I am grateful for an opportunity now to shift gear, to contemplate the true meaning of life, to simplify its demands, and to refashion my attitudes and lifestyle. Taking up this new role at this time and in being able to dedicate myself in service to the Church has been serendipitous. I feel the influence of the Holy Spirit keenly.'

Should you wish to contact Jem to know more about Catholic life in the RAF, or wish to be added to a mailing list to receive updates about RAF RC life, the International Military Pilgrimage, HCPT and other RC events and initiatives, please email him at RAFPRCCPastoralassistant457@outlook.com. He is very much looking forward to hearing from you.

'I DO THE PRAYING; THEY DO THE SOLDIERING; AND WE LOOK AFTER EACH OTHER IN-BETWEEN.'

By Fr Patrick 'PJ' O'Driscoll RAChD

When I joined the Army as a chaplain in September 2017 it was always my wish to go on deployment. Not only did I want to serve the Lord as a padre but I also wanted to see the world. I was trained at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst and at the Joint Forces Chaplaincy Centre at Amport, near Andover.

My first regiment, 22 Signals, gave me a great foundation of Army life but joining 1 Royal Regiment of Fusiliers gave me a new experience, not only experiencing infantry life but also giving me the possibility of going on a foreign deployment. This hope was fulfilled when the regiment was named as the lead part of the Battle Group for Operation Cabrit 6. Op Cabrit is part of NATO's duty to protect fellow members from hostile threats – in this case it is the Baltic state of Estonia from its next door neighbour, Russia.

Other NATO allies take the lead protecting the Baltic States of Latvia and Lithuania. The Fusilier Battle Group took over from Op Cabrit 5 and the Queen's Royal Hussars in March 2020, and we remained in Estonia until the end of September when we handed over to 5 Rifles for Op Cabrit 7.

From the moment we arrived in Estonia the lads have said it is quite different to previous deployments. The day I arrived, 10th March, Estonia, along with the UK, went into lockdown due to Covid-19. This not only threw up different dynamics on how the Battle Group would work, bearing in mind health and safety and social distancing, but also created new welfare and emotional worries for the soldiers over their families back home. For me it was all about knuckling down and working day-to-day to keep the lads and ladies happy and fulfilling their needs, no matter how small. That's why, for the first two months, making sure there was a decent stock of TVs, Playstations, games and films was a large part of my day. Also, as the camp was gated and I was one of the very few who could get out for pastoral issues, I became the local errand boy, popping out to the cash and carry to buy stuff for the soldiers. It was also good for me as it gave me my private personal and prayer time alone.

In between all this there was also the chance to develop a safe and private place outside the chain of command where the soldiers could talk about their worries and pains. Most of the time this is just having that listening ear or offering words of advice and support to them. It has also meant that they could make that private phone call from my office so that they can have, even at a distance, contact with home.

On a spiritual side celebrating Mass has been a joy and a break from the usual humdrum routine of daily base life. Weekdays it can often be just myself, but on Sunday with up to 10 in the chapel, we have a great celebration of Mass with prayer and music with soldiers from many different parts of the UK and the Commonwealth. My saying since I have come here, and one I hold on to, to give me strength in my ministry, is: 'I do the praying; they do the soldiering and we look after each other in-between.'

With all this we have also had many exercises when my main job is bringing a bit of happiness and laughter to the soldiers in my different ways. My Irish accent, my lack of military knowledge and the morale booster which is the big bag of sweets I keep in my respirator bag always makes the lads laugh, mostly because they are wondering where I keep my gas mask! Due to the virus I have not seen much of Estonia but now, with the country opening up more, along with all the other soldiers, I hope to get out and visit the places we want to visit and meet the people we want to meet.

On a side note the one big personal advantage that this deployment has helped me with is my running speed and my fitness. I have used my time well to build up a running rate of 70 to 80 km a week and a speed which, for my age, makes the soldiers jealous and laugh. Our Danish NATO

partners invited us to take part in what they call the Danecon March – 25km in military kit and carrying a 12kg pack. That was an invitation I could not refuse and I have a certificate to prove I completed it. I was among the first 10 to finish out of 300 taking part. I also came first in a marathon finishing in just under 3 hours. The soldiers are still trying to work out, am I running away fast from hell or quickly to Heaven, and that is where my prayer life comes in – I am still trying to work it out!

Yes, like the rest of the world, these have been trying and difficult times for people wherever they are, but here in Estonia the soldiers, amid their worries for their families, are still willing to stand up to the mark and do their professional duty as soldiers, and it was a privilege and a blessing to be part of it.

The stable presence of chaplaincy

By Father Paul McCourt CF

In the strangest year that we have lived in modern times, where Coronavirus has changed certainty into doubt for huge swathes of the world's population, robbing us of all normality, spontaneity, celebrations and even life itself, the work of a deploying British Army Task Group has continued apace with little time to be at home.

I am the Chaplain to England's Northern Cavalry, The Light Dragoons, which can trace it's history back to the four main antecedent regiments, the 13th/18th Royal Hussars (Queen Mary's Own) and the 15th/19th The King's Royal Hussars, all mounted regiments on horses and now in modern times, still mounted on all terrain 'Jackal' and 'Coyote' armoured vehicles. I have been a Chaplain to the British Army for nigh on 20 years, first as a reservist as well as being a Parish Priest in the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, and for the last seven years as a full-time 'Regular' chaplain. It is in many ways a 'calling within a calling' and is not every priest's cup of tea, but I find it liberating, fulfilling, challenging and thrilling, adjectives that are not always on every Parish Priest's lips. As I write, The Light Dragoons are leading a Task Group of British soldiers joined significantly by a Company of the 2nd Royal Anglian Regiment and many other individual augmentees in a brand new UK Operation in Mali, West Africa, as part of the long established, but most dangerous, of the UN's Peacekeeping Missions. At the request of the UN we are here primarily to protect the civilian population from the rise of instability and violence in the country and to help implement the UN Peace Treaty by our presence here.

After a year of intense preparation, whilst the world grappled with COVID 19, its restrictions, consequences and lockdowns, we carefully and professionally trained throughout for a six-month deployment in the sub Saharan desert which began at the beginning of December 2020.

We are now almost two months into things. We've settled into a newly constructed camp and we have begun our work in earnest. The troops will be engaged on various peacekeeping missions over the coming months, bringing protection to the local Malian population and helping to stabilise an area of Africa which has experienced some penetrating problems in recent years.

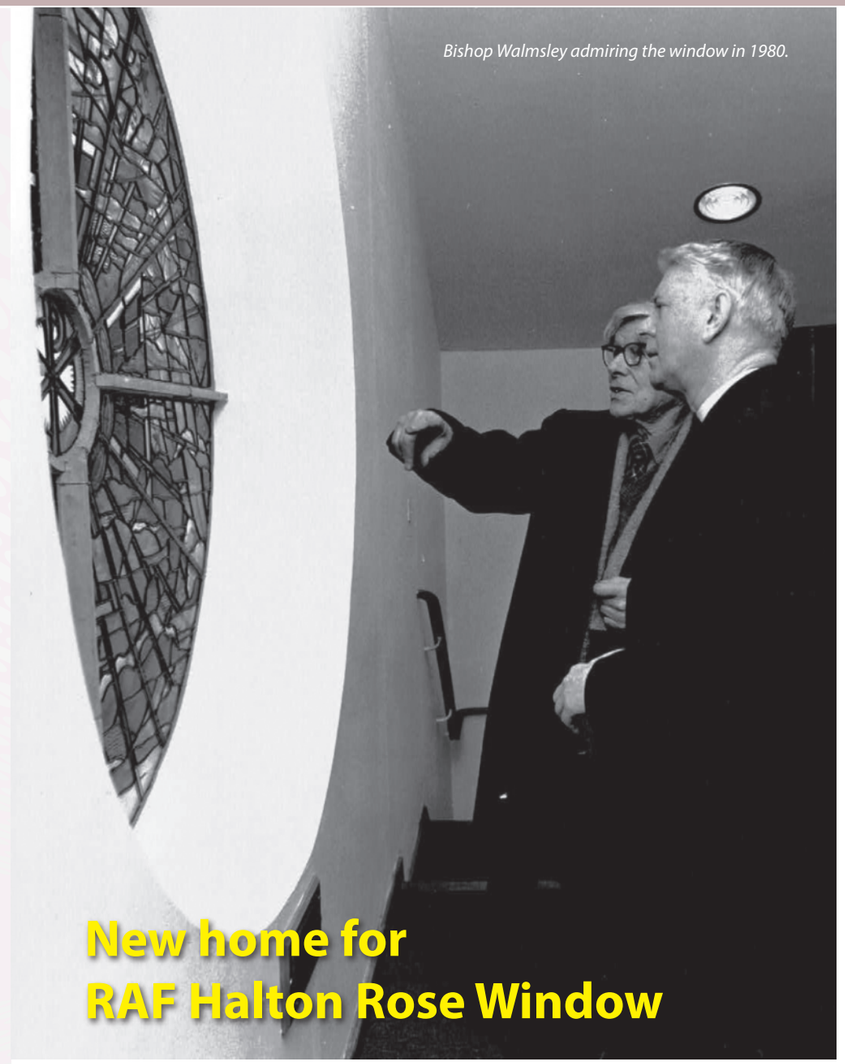
For me as the Chaplain to this Task Group, my work is similar but different to the work of any priest. In a clearly defined role, I am responsible for the

spiritual, pastoral and moral care of the deployed force. Soldiers are mostly young men and women whose average age is 23 and who like many in their generation are full of questions and opinions, vitality, quick wit and a deep desire for challenge. Added to this, they are inspiring to live with and they thrive within a culture built on the shoulders of the best in our society, men and women who unselfishly place themselves at the front of the defence of the realm and the establishment and maintenance of world peace.

At Christmas, I offered Midnight Mass at our newly commissioned 'flat-packed' altar under a starry desert sky with a cool breeze blowing around us – a far cry from Christmases past in draughty churches packed with excited joy. Christmas here will stay with me for the rest of my life, for in the simplicity of our outdoor makeshift church, the atmosphere of prayer was one I have never before encountered in 30 years of priesthood. Young people, who far from home and without their families, now together as a new family, knelt before the new- born Christ the Prince of Peace with much on their minds.

There lies much ahead of us, all as yet unknown, yet the stable presence of chaplaincy in a culture of much uncertainty is highly valued and prized – even if not everyone would admit it. I will write an update further into our tour, but for now I ask the prayers and good wishes of the Catholic community at home, at Mass in your parishes and in your private prayers and devotions to join with me in the intention offered at every daily Mass here in Mali, for the protection of all our people, their security and their safe return home, having accomplished a dangerous mission to bring the priceless gift of peace to those who do not have it.

January 2021



Bishop Walmsley admiring the window in 1980.

New home for RAF Halton Rose Window

At a special Mass on 8th November 1980, a magnificent round window depicting the world with the RAF Chaplains insignia upon it, was installed and dedicated as a memorial window to RAF Chaplains in the Station Church at RAF Halton. The church was filled to capacity and the Chief Celebrant was the then Bishop of the Forces, Rt Rev Frank Walmsley CBE.

Upon the closure of the Church in 2019, Deacon David Skillen sought to save as much of the heritage of the church and community as possible. To this end, he arranged for the rehoming of a lot of the interior of the church and this included the Rose window behind the altar.

The window was removed and taken to Chapel Studios Stained Glass company, who undertook extensive restoration to the window, including unbuckling, crack repairs and specialist cleaning.

Once this was completed the window was then transferred to Lightbox Studios, where the window was box mounted and back lit to enable it to be remounted inside its new home.

This new home was decided upon as RAF Cosford, a natural move as the No 1 School of Technical Training, where many of Halton's personnel had trained, had already moved to Cosford. The window was in a sense simply following the same path as the Halton trainees.

The window was eventually installed in the station church at RAF Cosford and was rededicated in a ceremony on 4th February 2020 by Bishop Paul Mason, RC Bishop to the Forces, and Rev (AVM) John Ellis, the Chaplain in Chief of the RAF.

Rev (AVM) John Ellis, Chaplain in Chief RAF

Bishop Paul blesses the window.

MY Life so far in the Royal Navy – The experience of a new Naval Chaplain

By Rev Victor Dakwan RN

"The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step". This is a Chinese proverb ascribed to Lazio and on reflection, my life in the navy is but a new step of my own existential journey in this spatio tempora realm. It is not an aimless journey, nor is it wondering, but a constant respond to the call of Jesus Christ to us all to "carry the Good News to all mankind". (Mathew 28,18-20).

Like Moses who heard the call in the wilderness through the burning bush encounter (Gen 3,1-5ff), God continues to speak to us in mysterious ways. The greatest journey of all is the journey of life. And mine started on that faithful day on the 14th of June in 1979 in Nigeria. Growing up in a typical small village of Oku/Bushuyu in cross River state with my grandmother, was the most rewarding of my life experiences that has continued with the help of God, to sustain me in all my endeavours. But the journey to the Royal Navy began with a simple advert on the television at the proper time with the proper person to explain what God was saying. And in that gentle breeze was Fr Daren Brown in Mansfield. He was visiting my parish from Germany where he had been serving.

Hands to bathe! Fr Victor takes the plunge

Taking a ride in HMA ARGYLL's seaboat

Sometimes, a seed planted on the ground may take longer than we expect before it takes root. Even though it was 2015 when Daren spoke to me about the military, it was in 2019 that I made the real move and passed my AIB (Admiralty Interview Board). On the 13th of January 2020, I began my training as an officer Cadet at Britannia Royal College Dartmouth. As part of my marinization I served with HMS PRINCE OF WALES and, with the dawn of Covid-19, passed out of training on the 4th of April 2020.

"Man proposes but God disposes" is a common saying. After my passing out, I had thought I will travel to Nigeria to see my Dad whom I have missed so much and have not seen for a long time due to God's work. But with covid-19 restrictions, it was impossible to travel. Then I received a phone call from the Deputy Chaplain of the Fleet telling me to go to HMS Drake for preparation to deploy to Bahrain to join HMS ARGYLL. And so, on the 24th April I deployed to theatre until the 25th July 2020.

On return from Bahrain, after my isolation period, the sad news of my Dad's exit to eternal glory reached me. So, I was unable to visit my Dad until he passed away. At the moment, I have been reassigned to HMS Raleigh where I have had the privilege of ministering to the young recruits and the people of God here.

In a resume', ministering to the people of the FORCE brings ENVAGILISATION alive. In the words of St Paul, "though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible". (1 Cor 9,19). This thought is expressed in another way in the Navy when it is said "you are a friend to all, faith and non - faith". At sea I felt like Saint Paul on his missionary journey and while the world suffered the inability to participate physically, at the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, we had the rare privilege of celebrating the Eucharist and ecumenical services everyday onboard the ship with the Captain and almost all of his officers in attendance being fed by the Lord.

Services at HMS Raleigh have been the most inspiring and powerful. I have been blown away in my false belief that we live in a secular age with the young people having no faith. Here in the Navy, the reverse is the case. Young people are not just willing to worship God, but they are happy worshiping God. Here indeed we are celebrating our gift of faith. And if any priest desires a rejoicing community on a Sunday, the military is where the community is waiting for you to hear the word of God saying to you, "Rejoice, rejoice and I say again Rejoice".

Training at BRNC Dartmouth

Keeping a lookout on HMS ARGYLL's bridge

Helping the chefs with a ship's company BBQ on the flight deck

Providing a helping hand in one of HMS ARGYLL's machinery spaces

Reflection on the ship's forecastle

Fr Tom with his sister and father, PRCC(N) and guests, after his passing out parade at HMS Excellent

Living with and among the sheep!

By Rev Tom Bakulumpagi RN

As a recently commissioned Chaplain to Her Majesty's Service in the Royal Navy, I have had the joys of going through a ritual birth into full entry to the service. The glorious memories of the landscape of Dartmouth Royal Navy College, which confronts you with her beauty on arrival but then sadly fades away once the programme starts when you no longer have the luxuries and time to even appreciate her beauty anymore amidst the busyness of the programme; the robustness of the training whose objective is to make you acquire a military bearing; and the opportunity to train with other officer cadets, was just outstanding. Though it was at the height of the pandemic, we kept to our bubbles and the college staff delivered the training package to a remarkable standard. Like anything else, some days were better than others. AOP (Accelerated Officers Programme) as advertised was very intense and run at a terrific pace. The focus was underpinned with Command, Leadership and Management (CLM).

Training on Dartmoor

Life at sea - helping in the ship's galley

The Royal Navy challenges you at all levels of life, mainly mentally and physically testing the attitude and response to various real scenarios in the field of work. As a priest and chaplain, the privilege of working closely with my flock, learning more about self and an appreciation of humanity at its strength and weakness was priceless. One discovers immediately that there's a genuine thirst for support and an openness amongst the sailors. As a trusted friend you find yourself part of the family, and literally most of them eager to draw from your life's experiences as well as sharing deeply their lives with you, seeking pastoral guidance.

Undergoing training on the River Dart

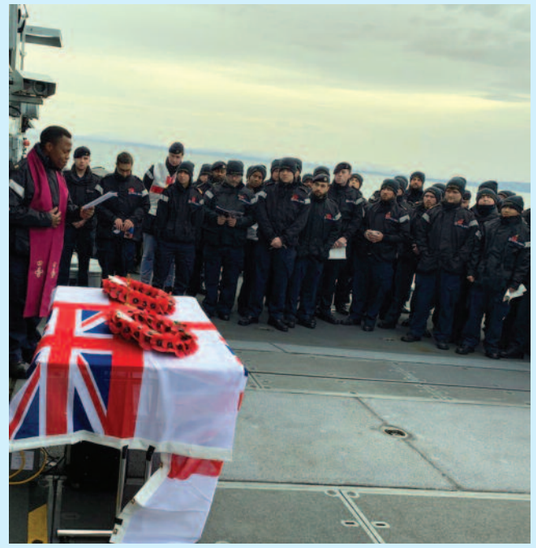
I recall in March 2013, while reflecting on Psalm 133 at his first Chrism Mass as pontiff, Pope Francis reminded all priests of the need 'to go out' in order to experience their own anointing. He also spelt out that priests have been anointed for the poor, prisoners, oppressed, neglected; and I would add to that list sailors who on their long deployments experience a sense of poverty of separation from family and loved ones. This invitation is an opportunity to revive those drooping spirits and calling us literally to live out our priestly life and vocation as shepherds living with and among the sheep, smelling the "smell of the sheep".

The job of a chaplain, who is also known as "Bish" in the RN, requires one to be with the flock. I had the privilege to deploy for the first time with a Type 23 frigate in October through to November 2020 to the far North of the Atlantic. We would spend 6 -7 weeks at sea with a series of tasks ranging from firing a Sea Ceptor missile to keeping a tight leash on the Russians and other exercises. I and my three colleagues on IST (Initial Sea Training) were accommodated in the junior rates Mess; this coincidentally, provided for an opportunity to build a rapport with the ship's company starting from the lower ranks working upwards. A closeness, that won us trust and ease amongst all souls on board. Besides, it worked symbiotically, with us benefitting from their wide range of knowledge about the workings of the ship and broad experience of their areas of expertise, as well as ministering to them pastorally.

Life on board a warship has a unique tone and pace. A typical working day starts with a briefing piped by the OOD (Officer of the Day), highlighting the key events on the daily orders and at the end emphasizing the command aim that underpins all activities on the ship. Life is non-stop with watches and routines. Being on IST, meant spending time with a given department for two days while learning and answering questions in the task book that related to that department. The efficiency of all departments in performance and responding to any operational defects, known as OPDEFS, is amazingly superb. The trip to the far North of the Atlantic saw us cut through waves up to ten meters high. On this one occasion while sprinting back from the Arctic, I experienced a rather unpleasant imbalance in the body sitting in the Op's room, literally floating in space. I made an excuse and started ascending to 2deck heading for my cabin for a lie down. On my way through the corridors I met with a few others staggering in the same direction running for their safety. I later learnt it was a form of seasickness that I was experiencing for the first time.

It is widely expected that on deployments the ship comes alongside a port and sailors can ease off the pedals by catching a breath ashore. In our case Covid-19 restrictions stood in the way and denied us the chance. We came alongside a few ports, and this brought excitement to all on board hoping against hope that maybe we would be allowed to run ashore. Sadly, everywhere we came alongside the story was the same; the furthest one could go was to the end of the Jetty.

In my very limited time of service in the Royal Navy, I have found ministry in the RN chaplaincy very unique with unique challenges; a perfect response to that invite "Go out…".



Fr Tom leading a Service of Remembrance on the ship's flight deck.

The Power of Prayer

The Sisters of Mary Morning Star based at Lynton Convent in North Devon were faced with what appeared to be an insurmountable task – to clear their hillside of felled trees which were blocking paths and flower beds making the area impassable and dangerous. They realised that they themselves could not physically move the trees so one of the Sisters resorted to what Sisters do best – she prayed, asking the Lord to send an army of volunteers to help.

Not surprisingly, her prayers were answered and through the Lord's servant, Deacon Phil Waites, the Officiating RC Chaplain to RM Chivenor, a group of volunteers from 24 Commando Royal Engineers turned up on 15th September for a day of hard labour. The Sisters were incredibly grateful for their help and once again have demonstrated the power of prayer!

Farewell and Welcome to RN Chaplains

By Cdr Ian Crabtree KSG RN,
Pastoral Assistant RNRC Chaplaincy

In July, Fr David McLean OP retired from the Royal Navy after 24 years' service during which he has served in a number of shore and sea appointments among them: BRNC Dartmouth, HMS Raleigh, and HMS Nelson; as a Staff Chaplain at JSCSC Shrivenham, to Flag Officer Sea Training (FOST) and most recently to Chief of Joint Operations at Northwood. Operational deployments included tours in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as on the staff of UK Maritime Component Commander in The Gulf.

Fr David is a Dominican Friar and is now ministering in the Diocese of Plymouth. We thank him for his many years' service to the Royal Navy and wish him well in the future. Regrettably, because of lockdown restrictions it was not possible to hold a social farewell event, but we hope for an opportunity to do so in better times.

Having over the last few years said farewell to a number of Catholic Chaplains it has been a great relief and pleasure to welcome two new Chaplains during the year, Fr Victor Dakwan RN from the Diocese of Nottingham, and Fr Tom Bakulumpagi from the Archdiocese of Southwark. Fr Victor is serving at HMS Raleigh and Fr Tom is assigned to Surface Flotilla East based in Portsmouth with chaplaincy responsibility for the Minor War Vessels and Patrol Vessels.

In addition, three other Catholic priests passed their Admiralty Interview Board (AIB): Fr Charles Millar and Fr Rob Carey from the Archdiocese of Birmingham and Fr Sam Burke OP, a Dominican Friar currently attached to Edinburgh University. Fr Charles should complete his initial training in April 2021; Fr Rob hopes to join BRNC Dartmouth in September 2021 and Fr Sam in 2022. The good news continues with two further Priests hoping to sit the AIB in July 2021.

This is a very welcome and quite dramatic turnaround for the Naval Catholic Chaplaincy and means that by the end of 2022 we should have a total of 10 serving Catholic Chaplains, which includes one on Full Time Reserve Service. In addition to the many prayers that have been offered, much credit for this uplift must go to our Principal Chaplain, Fr David Conroy, who on assuming the mantle of PRCC(N) made recruiting his number one objective.

Please continue to pray for further vocations to all 3 Services to ensure that we maintain sustainability through a steady input of new chaplains to compensate for those leaving.

Changes to the Registration of Marriages for Weddings

From 4 May 2021 Marriage Certificates will only be issued by the Local Registration Office and not by an Authorised Person for Marriages. These constitute the most significate changes to the Registration of Marriages since they were introduced in 1837.

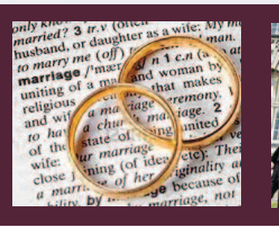
The Local Registration Office will maintain an electronic register which will hold more information than is currently recorded and will be the sole place of issue of Marriage Certificates.

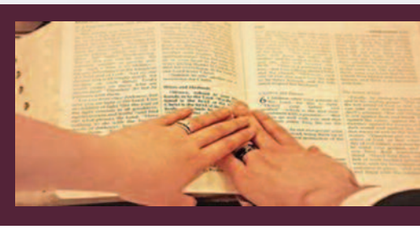
Instructions have been passed by the Bishopric Vicar General to Authorised Persons for Marriages detailing actions they must take to close off their copy of the Marriage Register and the return of associated documents.

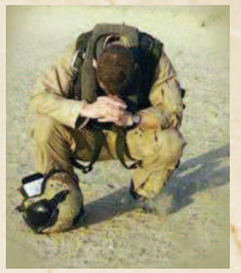
The Bride and Groom will no longer sign the Marriage Register at the time of the wedding. Instead, they will sign a "Marriage Schedule" produced in advance of the wedding, which will also be signed by the Authorised Person and up to six witnesses, though only two are required by law.

Once signed, it is the responsibility of the Authorised Person to return the signed form to the Local Registration Office within 21 days. The Local Registration Office will then issue the couple with their Marriage Certificate.

The marriage ceremony itself does not change. Vows and consent are still required as it is this consent which makes the marriage, not the signing of the Marriage Schedule or the issue of the Marriage Certificate.







PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS TO MILITARY CHAPLAINCY

O Lord Jesus Christ,
instil in the hearts of priests
the desire to dedicate
their lives to you as chaplains
to our Armed Services.
Give them wisdom and strength,
to hear your call.

Give courage and compassion
to those who serve you as Forces Chaplains.
May their hearts be filled
with zeal and love of you
so that your name
may be better known and loved,
for you live and reign
for ever and ever.

Amen.

41 (INDEPENDENT) COMMANDO ROYAL MARINES REMEMBERED IN ANNIVERSARY MASS

From: NZ

Date: Monday, 09 Nov 2020, 6:44 am

To: Conroy, David (SUL-CHAPLAIN RC)

Subject: grateful for advice from daughter of Evan Critchley DSM 41 Independent Commando

Dear Father Conroy

My name is Susan and I got your details from the web

Good afternoon from Wellington, New Zealand; I wonder if you can help me?

My Dad was a Royal Marine with 41 Independent Commando in Korea; my Dad was Evan Critchley D.S.M; my Dad helped many of the wounded in his Unit at the Battle of the Chosin Reservoir on the 29th November, before going on to rescue wounded others later, near Wonsan.

There were so many casualties in my Dad's Unit, that I feel very sad when I think of all they went through. My Dad never said anything at all about any of his work.

As it is the 70th Anniversary of Chosin and the Korean War, I would love for the men of 41 to be remembered by a Mass and possibly a tree being planted, something that would be there for generations to come. The widows of 41 Members and children of 41 Members (like me) and grandchildren would love this. What do you think? I am Catholic and so was my Dad.

Would it be possible for you to say a mass for the repose of the souls who were either killed in battle, who died in the prison camps or whose whereabouts is unknown, on or around the anniversary when many of these men were killed, which is 29 November.

Best wishes Susan and Paul

Fr David Conroy QHC RN celebrated the Mass on 26th November, in the Holy Trinity Chapel, HMS Sultan, which was recorded by the establishment media team and a link to the recording sent to New Zealand. Unfortunately, to comply with COVID regulations in force at the time, the Mass had to be celebrated by the priest alone with nobody else present.

It is hoped to be able to pursue the idea for a more permanent memorial to be sighted in the new Memorial Garden being developed in the Royal Marines Barracks at Bickleigh, near Plymouth, which is currently home to 42 CDO RM and where 41 CDO trained before deploying to Korea.

There is a tablet, erected by members of the Corps, friends and relatives, in the Barracks dedicated to the memory of the officers and men of 41 Independent Commando Royal Marines who fell, serving in Korea, from September 1950 to June 1953 and in gratitude for those who returned. This can be seen in greater detail at: 41Commando Memorial Bickleigh (devonheritage.org)

You can read about the members of 41 CDO RM at: https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/john-underwood/

41 (Independent) Commando (courtesy of Wikipedia)

During the Korean War 41 Commando was reconstituted as 41 (Independent) Commando following a request from the United Nations Command for more amphibious raiding forces. The "Independent" designation meant that their commander had sole responsibility for their unit and did not have to consult with higher headquarters on operational and logistical matters. On 16 August 1950, 219 Royal Marine volunteers were assembled in Bickleigh then the Commando School. They were commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Douglas B. Drysdale DSO, MBE an experienced World War II Commando veteran who was the Chief Instructor at the Royal Marines Officer school.

Continued overleaf

41 CDO RM training before conducting a raid. Mne Critchley is stood on the left with his medical bag.

Continued

The Commandos travelled to Japan in civilian clothes, with most of the civilian clothing issued by the Admiralty. The unit received more volunteers en route from 3 Commando Brigade involved in the Malayan Emergency. Arriving in Japan on 15 September 1950, the Commandos were issued American winter uniforms and weapons but retained their green berets, battle dress and boots. The first mission of the unit was in October when the Commandos embarked on two American high speed transports the USS Horace A. Bass (APD-124) and USS Wantuck (APD-125) supported by the destroyer USS De Haven (DD-727), where they executed a series of raids on the North Korean coast near Wonsan to disrupt North Korean transportation facilities.

On 10 November 1950, 41 (Independent) Commando joined the United Nations advance in North Korea where they served with the United States Marine Corps; the second time the two organisations had served together, the first being the Boxer Rebellion. During the Battle of Chosin Reservoir, Lt. Col. Drysdale was given command of a 900-man unit of his own Commando, American, and South Korean forces called Task Force Drysdale. Their hard fighting together with the American Marines and Army led to 41 Independent Commando being awarded the American Presidential Unit Citation that the 1st Marine Division earned. However, it was not awarded until 1957.

The Commando reformed in Japan and in April 1951 were assigned to what eventually became the 1st Commonwealth Division. They raided the North Korean coast with the Republic of Korea Marine Corps until 41 Commando returned to England in December 1951; those who had served less than a year in the commando were drafted into 42 Commando operating in Malaya. They were disbanded on 2 February 1952, the Commando having 31 Marines killed and 17 captured with one Royal Marine choosing to stay in North Korea, who returned to the UK in 1960.

Post Korean War

In 1960, 41 Commando was reformed as part of the United Kingdom's Strategic Reserve. The Commando served in various places throughout the world. These included East Africa in 1964, while in 1969 they were the first RM Commando to participate in operations in Northern Ireland. In 1971 they were stationed in Malta, and in 1974 together with 40 Commando they took part in United Nations operation in Cyprus following the Turkish invasion. In 1977 they left Malta and in 1979 carried out public duties in London. In 1981, then based at Deal, Kent, they were disbanded again.

Remembrance 2020

Reduced representation and social distancing made a marked difference to Remembrance Services in 2020. Many people have commented on how the absence of the crowds and march pasts made the Cenotaph Service more meaningful as the silence was more profound and allowed greater reflection. Sadly, we were unable to send representatives of the Armed Forces to Westminster Cathedral this year as congregation numbers were restricted, though a Trumpeter from the Band of the Irish Guards did attend to play the Last Post. A similar experience was had around the nation and in our establishments and units, some of which are captured below.

GIBRALTAR

Each year on the anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar, the sailors who fell in battle are remembered in a short ceremony in the idyllic Trafalgar Cemetery in Gibraltar. In 2020, to comply with Coronavirus restrictions, the ceremony was scaled down and moved to the vicinity of the Statue of Lord Nelson, which is close by to the cemetery. Prayers were led by the British Forces Gibraltar Command Chaplain, Fr Danny Hernandez RN.

The following month, Fr Danny led a short wreath laying Service at North Front Cemetery to support the Gibraltar Branch of the Royal Engineers Association (REA), to mark what would have been the 100th birthday of Sapper Walter Watts.
Sapper Watts was tragically killed on the 29th November 1943 following an explosion in Gibraltar. His great niece had planned to travel to Gibraltar to visit Sapper Watt's final resting place for the first time, on his 100th birthday and lay the wreath in person.

However, when the Coronavirus restrictions prevented her being able to travel to Gibraltar, she called on the support of the REA. Although unable to attend the Service in person, using modern technology, she was able to join the short ceremony virtually through WhatsApp. Major Simon Andrews RE, representing the Royal Engineers, laid the wreath.

FASLANE
Clyde Naval Base Chapel on 11th November 2020 with Reverends. Mark Davidson, Tommy Goodwin, Mark Noakes, Mike Woodall, and Michael Maloney (RC OCM) in attendance.

HMS SULTAN
A socially distanced Act of Remembrance at HMS Sultan, Gosport, Hampshire, led by Fr David Conroy QHC RN, Chaplaincy Team Leader and PRCC(N).

They shall grow not old as we that are left grow old;
Age shall not weary them nor the years condemn;
At the going down of the sun, and in the morning,
We will remember them.

SMILE

Two 90-year-old men, Mike and Joe, have been friends all of their lives. When it's clear that Joe is dying, Mike visits him every day. One day Mike says, "Joe, we both loved football all our lives, and we played football on Saturdays together for so many years. Please do me one favour, when you get to Heaven, somehow you must let me know if there's football there."

Joe looks up at Mike from his death bed and says: "Mike, you've been my best friend for many years. If it's at all possible, I'll do this favour for you."

Shortly after that, Joe passes on.

At midnight a couple of nights later, Mike is awakened from a sound sleep by a blinding flash of white light and a voice calling out to him, "Mike... Mike..."

"Who is it?" Asks Mike sitting up suddenly. "Who is it?"

"Mike. It's me, Joe..."

"You're not Joe. Joe just died."

"I'm telling you, it's me, Joe." insists the voice.

"Joe! Where are you?"

"In heaven", replies Joe. "I have some really good news and a little bad news."

"Tell me the good news first," says Mike.

"The good news," Joe says, "is that there's football in heaven. Better yet, all of our old friends who died before us are here, too. Better than that, we're all young again. And best of all, we can play football all we want, and we never get tired."

"That's fantastic," says Mike. "It's beyond my wildest dreams! So, what could possibly be the bad news?"

"You're in the team for Saturday."

BISHOPRIC WEBSITE

http://www.rcbishopricforces.org.uk

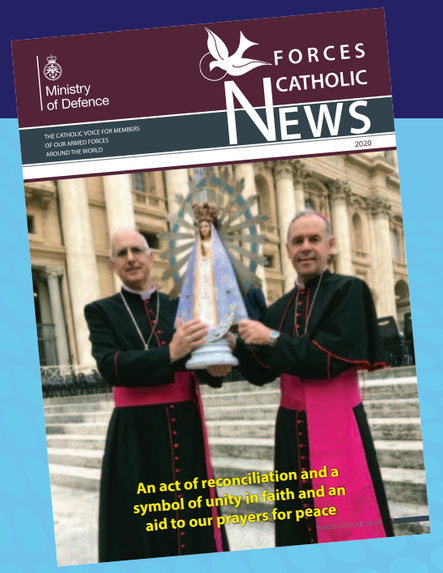
Have you any news to publish? Or events to advertise?

The Bishopric Website is a resource for the Forces Community and provides a window for others to see something of the ministry of the Bishopric of the Forces.

Items for publishing should be sent to:

Cdr Ian Crabtree KSG RN at rnrcpastoralassistant193@btopenworld.com or Wg Cdr Jem Wynne RAF at rafprccpastoralassistant457@outlook.com

Photographs should be high-quality from an iPhone or similar device and submitted as separate attachments.



FORCES CATHOLIC NEWS

Have you any news to publish? Or events to advertise?

Closing date for the next edition is 15th January 2022.

Items for publishing should be sent to:

Cdr Ian Crabtree KSG RN at rnrcpastoralassistant193@btopenworld.com or Ian.crabtree277@mod.gov.uk

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Editorial Team

General Editor & RN Rep
Cdr Ian M Crabtree RN, Chaplaincy, Admiralty House North Wing (PP13),
HM Naval Base, Portsmouth, Hants PO1 3LR
Mil: 9380 24232 Civ: (+44)(0)23 9272 4232 Email: ian.crabtree277@mod.gov.uk

Army Rep
Fr David Smith CF (RC), Chaplain 2ITB, Helles Barracks, Catterick Garrison DL9 4HH
Civ: (+44)(0)1748 873849 Email: David.smith229@mod.gov.uk

RAF Rep
Wg Cdr Jeremy Wynne RAF (RTD)
Mob: 07834 609153 Email: rafprccpastoralassistant457@outlook.com

Bishopric of the Forces
Bishop Paul Mason, Bishop of the Forces, Wellington House, St Omer Barracks,
Thornhill Road, Aldershot, Hants GU11 2BG
Tel: Mil: 94222 3234 Civ: (+44)(0)1252 348234 Email: Paul.mason111@mod.gov.uk

Design

Fizzy Print Ltd
Unit 3, Fairway Business Centre
Airport Service Road
Portsmouth
PO3 5NU

Tel: 02392 697739