

MILITARY CHAPLAINCY IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN DEFENCE FORCE DURING THE NAMIBIAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE, 1966-1989

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1. INTRODUCTION

Ghana's attainment of independence in 1957 initiated a period of decolonization in Africa which, in the case of South West Africa (SWA, later Namibia), manifested itself in the form of the Namibian War of Independence, commonly referred to as the "Border War" or the "Bush War".³ Hostilities started in August 1966 when the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO) and its military wing, the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), intensified the liberation struggle of SWA by means of insurgencies across the Angolan border. By planting landmines, sabotaging telephone and electricity lines and intimidating the local population, they aimed to destabilize the South African administration of SWA. Initially, the South African Police (SAP) dealt with the insurgencies; but an escalation in the intensity thereof necessitated a transferral of the protection of the border to the then South African Defence Force (SADF). A full-scale war developed, which became closely linked to the Angolan Civil War and the Cold War. All branches of the SADF, including chaplaincy services, were involved in the military operations that lasted until June 1989.⁴

This article, the second of three, discusses the evolution and role of military chaplaincy in the SADF during the time of the Namibian War of Independence.⁵ Relevant aspects that will be addressed in this study include: What developments took place in the Chaplain General's office in the course of the war years (i.e. 1966-1989)? What was the nature and extent of the role played by military chaplains in the war "up north"? To what extent did chaplains take part in cross-border operations? To what extent did the chaplaincy service of 1989 differ from that of 1966?

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³ In this article, preference is given to the more neutral term, the Namibian War of Independence.

⁴ See, for instance, J Seiler (ed.), *Southern Africa since the Portuguese coup* (Boulder, 1980), pp. 3-58.

⁵ The first article (see pp. 302-322, *supra*) gives an overview of the development of chaplaincy services until 1966, with special reference to South Africa, while the third article (see pp. 345-366, *infra*) concentrates on the personal experiences and viewpoints of chaplains as far as the Namibian War of Independence and related matters are concerned.

2. A GENERAL OVERVIEW OF MILITARY CHAPLAINCY, 1966-1989

At the time of the first clash between SWAPO and the SAP at Omugulu-g'Ombashe on 26 August 1966, military chaplaincy was still in the process of evolving into a professionalized institution in the SADF.⁶ Changes in the SADF and developments on the border of SWA/Namibia resulted in an enlarged scope for chaplaincy services. Col (Rev.) JA van Zyl, the Director of Chaplains, played a vital role in the restructuring process that enabled military chaplaincy to become a professional support service of the SADF. In 1968, the Corps of Chaplains became a separate directorate with three branches (Army, Air Force and Navy), resorting under the Chief of the Defence Force Administration. A Senior Staff Officer (SSO) was allocated to the office of the Director of Chaplains at Voortrekkerhoogte (today Thaba Tshwane), with a second SSO being added in 1970, handling matters relating to Afrikaans and English chaplaincy respectively.⁷

A memorandum by Col (Rev.) Van Zyl concerning the role of the church in the SADF led to further restructuring of the Corps of Chaplains on 17 September 1970. It became an independent branch under the Commandant General of the SADF, known as the South African Chaplain Service (SACHS). The SACHS handled its own administration and could liaise directly with other sections. Col (Rev.) Van Zyl's designation changed to that of Chaplain General, with the rank of Brigadier, and he was entitled to attend Supreme Command meetings in an advisory capacity when matters related to chaplaincy were on the agenda.⁸

In 1972, the period of conscription was extended from nine to 12 months. To cope with developments in the SADF, the SACHS received full autonomy, with its own headquarters, on 1 April 1973. Col (Rev.) Van Zyl's position was upgraded to that of Major General, and Col (Rev.) DJ van der Walt was appointed Deputy Chaplain General, with the rank of Brigadier. The two existing SSO posts were discarded and five new ones were created: Chaplain Service, Training, Army, Air Force and Navy. At an SSO meeting on 21 March 1973, Maj. Gen. (Rev.) Van Zyl declared this to be a historic moment: for the first time, the church had taken up its rightful position in the SADF. The SACHS could now function as an autonomous support service with the aim of ensuring that each member of the SADF was able

⁶ See A Wessels and I Bredenkamp, "The development of military chaplaincy, with special reference to South Africa (up to 1966)", pp. 319-322, *supra*.

⁷ JF Potgieter, *Die militêre kapelaan die ontstaan en ontwikkeling van die amp, taak en organisasie van militêre kapelane in die geskiedenis van die Christelike kerk, met besondere verwysing na Suid-Afrika* (unpublished D.Div. thesis, University of Pretoria, 1971), pp. 233, 236; JA van Zyl, "Die kapelaansdiens in die SA Weermag" in *Paratus* 25(2), February 1974, p. 3; "Genl-maj (Ds) JA van Zyl" in *In Hoc Signo* 9(1), June 1983, p. 4.

⁸ Potgieter, pp. 236-237, 317; Van Zyl, p. 3; "Genl-maj (Ds) JA van Zyl", p. 4; "Die Korps van Kapelane" in *Paratus* 22(10), October 1970, p. 71; SG van Niekerk, *The history, role and influence of the South African military chaplaincy 1914-2002* (unpublished D.Th. thesis, University of South Africa, 2002), pp. 185-186. Van Niekerk links the restructuring to 10 September 1970.

to participate in religious practices according to the beliefs and customs of his/her denomination. The SACHS did not function as the church of the SADF, and spiritual ministry remained the domain of each denomination.⁹

The appointment of chaplains depended on the number of enlistments in each denomination. In 1970, 52 full-time chaplains represented 11 denominations in the SADF. By 1974, the number had risen to include 73 Permanent Force, 126 part-time, 26 Citizen Force and 111 Commando Force chaplains. Chaplains had to be ordained ministers, and were required to be medically fit, to have a security clearance, and preferably to be under the age of 40. Citizen Force and Commando chaplains needed written permission from their church councils to serve in the SADF. They were appointed and remunerated on the same basis as officers with a similar rank in the units.¹⁰

During 1975, SADF command positions were restructured and on 25 November, the Chaplain General became a full member of the Supreme Command. A new SSO position – Mobilization, Operations and Intelligence – was created in 1977, and in 1978 the SACHS was decreed to be the only institution responsible for the spiritual ministry to the armed forces of the SADF and their dependants. Maj. Gen. (Rev.) Van Zyl's vision of securing the SACHS as a professional institution had been realized. In 1980, he received South Africa's highest service award, the Star of South Africa (Silver).¹¹

In 1981, the SACHS was restructured in order to bring it in line with the other sections of the SADF. Eight directorates were formed, of which three (Director Ministry, Director Personnel and Director Logistics and Finance) were situated at the Chaplain General's headquarters. The expansion of the South African Medical Service (SAMS) and the appointment of chaplains to all three military hospitals necessitated an appointment to oversee chaplaincy in the SAMS. Col (Dr) JI Kemp became the first Director SAMS. The Director South African Army, Director SA Air Force (SAAF) and Director SA Navy (SAN) were stationed at the respective headquarters, while the Director SWA Territorial Force (SWATF) was situated at the headquarters in Windhoek.¹²

⁹ "Genl-maj (Ds) JA van Zyl", pp. 4-5; Van Niekerk, pp. 187-188; Van Zyl, p. 3; "Chaplains Corps" in *Paratus* 24(6), June 1973, p. 64; AP van der Colff, "Ons seuns is bevoorreg" in *Paratus* 25(2), February 1974, p. 6; B de Klerk, "Die dienspligtige en die kapelaansdiens van die SAW" in *Die Kerkblad* 87(2760), 28 January 1987, p. 10; *The Argus*, 8 November 1983, p. 16.

¹⁰ Potgieter, pp. 320, 322; Van Niekerk, pp. 188-189; Van Zyl, p. 3; "Kerk en weermag" in *Paratus* 23(3), March 1971, p. 81. For a discussion of the different forms of chaplaincy, see De Klerk, p. 10 and G Kruger, "Hy bring die evangelie in wonderlike eenvoud" in *Die Kerkbode* 136(5), 1 February 1984, p. 6.

¹¹ Van Niekerk, pp. 190-192; "Genl-maj (Ds) JA van Zyl", pp. 4-5. His successor, Maj. Gen. (Rev.) CP Naudé, received the same award in 1987. See "Hoë eer vir kapelaansdiens" in *In Hoc Signo* 13(1), April 1987, p. 1.

¹² "Genl-maj (Ds) JA van Zyl", p. 5; Van Niekerk, p. 192; *The Argus*, 8 November 1983, p. 16. For a review of chaplaincy in the SAMS, see Van Niekerk, pp. 243-248 and "Kol Kemp tree af" in *In Hoc Signo* 12(3), November 1986, p. 5.

Part-time chaplains played an important role in serving those whose denominations were not represented in the SADF. In 1980, there were 77 Permanent Force chaplains and 200 part-time chaplains. Part-time chaplains also served those professing the Jewish faith. At the request of the Jewish Board of Deputies, a full-time Jewish chaplain was appointed in January 1973, in the person of Rabbi LD Sandler. He firmly established Jewish chaplaincy in the SADF and, under his guidance, the SADF developed the most extensive kosher food facility outside of Israel. The insignia of the Jewish chaplains differed from that of their Christian counterparts, but a good working relationship existed between them, with no trace of anti-Semitism.¹³

In July 1974, the Pentecostal Churches¹⁴ followed the example of the Free Churches and combined their ministry in the SADF. Chaplains ministered in a denominational context and the SADF had a policy of no proselytism. In the operational area, logistics resulted in one denomination standing in for another and intercommunal ministry taking place. Chaplains worked as a close community to ensure that no one in spiritual need was neglected, and the outstanding cooperation between the different denominations in the SADF was noted by many. At all times, the emphasis was on spiritual ministry, but recreation and welfare were often added to the duties of chaplains. In contrast to the situation in other countries, South African chaplaincy included ministry to the families of soldiers and the compulsory attendance of one service on Sundays. Compulsory attendance was also applicable to the Chaplain's Hour, during which prescribed topics were handled to prepare soldiers spiritually for a combat situation – much in line with the "Padre's Hour" of World War II.¹⁵

Initially, chaplains did not receive special training. New chaplains ministered under the supervision of experienced members. In August 1971, the first orientation course focusing on military matters was attended by 26 chaplains. It was subsequently extended to include advanced and specialist courses. The courses sensitized chaplains to the circumstances of soldiers, gave them insight into revolutionary warfare, and prepared them to administer maximum pastoral care during crises. The customs of each denomination were taken into account during training. A training centre was

¹³ "Religious needs of Jewish NSM recognized" in *Paratus* 35(2), February 1984, p. 31; C Weiner, "Shalom, Rabbi Sandler" in *Paratus* 35(10), October 1984, pp. 70-71; AM Behr, "NSM chaplains find SADF a rewarding, enriching experience" in *Paratus* 36(9), September 1985, pp. 17-18; LD Sandler, "Aims of Jewish chaplaincy" in *South African Jewish Times* 40(29), 30 May 1979, p. 10; "Jewish chaplaincy" in *In Hoc Signo* 10(1), May 1984, p. 6; "Chaplain's Service greets Rabbi Sandler" in *In Hoc Signo* 10(2), October 1984, pp. 4-5; "Jewish chaplaincy insignia" in *In Hoc Signo* 11(3), September 1985, p. 11; "Rabbi Eleazer Sandler" in *In Hoc Signo* 14(1), May 1988, pp. 9-10.

¹⁴ Ten Pentecostal churches combined their ministry, including the Full Gospel Church of God, Christian Centres and Rhema. See Behr, p. 18; Van Niekerk, p. 193.

¹⁵ Potgieter, pp. 321-323, 326, 331; De Klerk, p. 10; Van der Colff, p. 7; "Chaplain's Service greets Rabbi Sandler", p. 4; MW Pretorius, "Verskille tussen 'n kapelaan en predikant" in *Paratus* 26(7), July 1975, pp. 31-32; *The Argus*, 8 November 1983, p. 16; *Die Volksblad*, 12 September 1979, p. 3 and 21 June 1991, p. 5. Also see J Vögel, "Why compulsory church services?" in *Paratus* 24(1), January 1973, pp. 34-35, 71. On the "Padre's Hour", see Wessels and Bredenkamp, p. 308, *supra*.

inaugurated in May 1976; and Cpln (Rev.) MA Mothobi of the Bophuthatswana Defence Force was the first black chaplain to attend an SACHS course in 1978. Much was done to provide chaplains with educational texts and audio-visual resources in Afrikaans, English and the African languages. A commission for each of the language groups oversaw the compilation and distribution of the material. A three-day orientation course for the wives of Permanent Force chaplains was also initiated during the late 1970s and subjects such as the organization and administration of the SADF, the threat against South Africa and the handling of emergency situations were discussed.¹⁶

Conferences were held regularly, with time set aside for denominational meetings and – from 1972 onwards – also for separate discussions by the English and Afrikaans churches. From 1969, the wives of chaplains also met at the same time. In 1976, the Chaplains' Wives' Committee was formed to coordinate the work of the spouses of chaplains in the SADF. This committee played an important role in the broader SADF Ladies' Organization and took responsibility for projects such as publications, visits to the injured and sending parcels to the troops in the operational area. Some of their major projects included the renovation of the visitor's accommodation at 1 Military Hospital, Pretoria (Melita); supplying the coffee bars in the operational area with facilities; and sending Christmas gifts to the wives and children of Permanent Force members in the operational area. From 1970 onwards, ministry to South African foreign missions also resorted under the SACHS. In 1976, *In Hoc Signo* was published for the first time as the official mouthpiece of the SACHS.¹⁷

From January 1977, increased operational commitments and a shortage of chaplains resulted in the conscription of theological students who had completed their studies. They served for a period of 12 months under the supervision of experienced chaplains and church councils and were known as National Service Men (NSM) chaplains. From 1980, each branch of the SADF trained its own NSM chaplains, with the Army training the highest number. NSM chaplains underwent the same basic military training as other recruits and were expected to serve for

¹⁶ Van der Colff, pp. 6-7; Van Niekerk, p. 236; "Unieke kursus vir SAW-kapelane" in *Paratus* 23(10), October 1971, p. 21; "Kapelane in die veld" in Supplement, *Paratus* 27(3), March 1976, p. iii; "Die Woord vir elke dag" in *Paratus* 27(6), June 1976, p. 18; "Kapelane se ideaal verwesenlik" in Supplement, *Paratus* 27(6), June 1976, p. iv; "Nuwe hulp vir kapelane" in *Paratus* 28(10), October 1977, p. 11; "Kapelane vir 92 gelowe" in *Paratus* 29(7), July 1987, p. 52; "Publikasies in swart tale" and "Literature is their business" in *In Hoc Signo* 9(2), September 1983, pp. 4, 7; *The Citizen*, 27 September 1978, p. 18; *Die Volksblad*, 21 June 1991, p. 5.

¹⁷ Van Niekerk, pp. 221-225, 228; "1971 Chaplains' conference" in *Paratus* 23(5), May 1971, p. 53; R Cawcutt, "Chaplain's conference" in *Paratus* 23(5), May 1972, p. 23; "English speaking chaplains meet" in *In Hoc Signo* 6(3), November 1981, p. 10; Die kapelaansvroue SAW, *Die kapelaansvrou* (Pretoria, 1982), pp. 124-128; A Strauss, "Die betrokkenheid van vroue in 'n era van oorlog" in *Journal for Contemporary History* 31(3), December 2006, pp. 390-391; "Kersaksie 'n sukses" in *In Hoc Signo* 12(2), June 1986, p. 7; "Bediening in die buiteland" in *In Hoc Signo* 10(1), May 1984, p. 4; "Eerste S.A. kapelaan in die buiteland" in *Paratus* 23(5), May 1971, p. 19; *Die Volksblad*, 21 June 1991, p. 5.

three to four months in the operational area. On completing their basic training, they received the rank of Lieutenant. As young people, ministering to peer groups, their ministry met with openness, friendship and understanding, and they provided the SADF with an essential source of skills. To bridge the training period of the next group logistically, their period of service was extended to 15 months in 1980 and to 24 months in 1981.¹⁸

In August 1980, Maj. Gen. (Rev.) Van Zyl appointed a research commission to look into conscientious questions in respect of military service. The commission members were appointed in a part-time capacity, with the designation of chaplain, and they had to attend an orientation course at Voortrekkerhoogte and visit the operational area.¹⁹

SADF choirs, such as the Canaries (established in 1966) and the David Song Group (established in 1985), resorted under the SACHS. They aimed to promote a positive image of the SADF. They also furthered the Chaplains' Service Fund, which distributed Bibles, Christian literature and films to soldiers in the operational area.²⁰

The first coloured chaplain, Rev. PJJ Williams, and the first part-time Muslim chaplain, Mawlana AK Aziz, were appointed on 1 October 1976. On 1 January 1979, the first black chaplain, Cpln (Rev.) LS Booysen, was ordained to serve 21 Battalion at Lenz. In January 1983, Miss D de Wet became the first woman to serve in the SACHS as a spiritual worker at 1 Military Hospital. To perform her task effectively, she, too, underwent the training programme for NSM chaplains. Brig. (Rev.) CP Naudé succeeded Maj.Gen. (Rev.) Van Zyl as Chaplain General in 1983.²¹

¹⁸ Behr, pp. 16-17; Kruger, p. 6; Van Niekerk, pp. 240-243; CJ Pretorius, "Grensmanne honger vir die Woord" in *Paratus* 29(1), January 1979, p. 20; "Kommissieparade vir 55 NDP kapelane" in *Paratus* 30(4), April 1979, p. 23; "Opleiding van NDP kapelane: die Woord van God is hul strydbyl" in *Paratus* 34(5), May 1983, pp. 22-23; L Mills, "Chaplains learn the meaning of 'vasbyt'" in *Paratus* 40(5), May 1989, pp. 14-15; C Naudé, "Die kerk se werk in die SAW" in *Die Kerkbode* 145(3), 20 July 1990, p. 5; C Steenkamp, *Kapelaansbediening aan sportlui in die Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag* (unpublished M.Th. thesis, University of the Orange Free State, 1992), p. 104; *Die Volksblad*, 12 September 1979, p. 3. Owing to the nature of the war, the Army dominated the war scene, but it should be kept in mind that chaplains of the SAAF and the SAN served their units in much the same manner.

¹⁹ *Rapport*, 10 August 1980, p. 11; *Beeld*, 11 August 1980, p. 9; "Navorsingspan brei uit" in *In Hoc Signo* 9(3), December 1983, p. 10. The commission consisted of academics from the Theology Seminary at Turfloop and the University of Pretoria, as well as clergy from the Reformed Churches.

²⁰ Van Niekerk, pp. 225-228; "Kanaries wie wat waar hoekom" in *In Hoc Signo* 6(3), November 1981, p. 5; "In memoriam: Kol (ds) WJ Meintjes" in *In Hoc Signo* 12(2), June 1986, pp. 3-4; "Kanaries – fondse groei" in *In Hoc Signo* 13(1), April 1987, p. 3.

²¹ "Opleiding van NDP kapelane: die Woord van God is hul strydbyl", p. 23; Van Niekerk, pp. 190, 247; "First coloured chaplain" in Supplement, *Paratus* 27(11), November 1976, p. iv; "Kapelaaandiens groet sy eerste generaal", "Genl-maj Naudé aan die woord" and "Die eerste dag op kantoor" in *In Hoc Signo* 9(1), June 1983, pp. 1-2, 4; *Beeld*, 22 November 1978, p. 3; *Die Volksblad*, 22 November 1978, p. 3; *The Friend*, 23 November 1978, p. 14.

3. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SADF CHAPLAINCY SERVICES IN SWA AND THE OPERATIONAL AREA, 1966-1989

3.1 Walvis Bay and the SWA Command

Walvis Bay (until 1994 a South African enclave) served as the training camp of 2 South African Infantry Battalion (2 SAI Bn) as from 1962. A military congregation of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) was established in July 1965 and Rev. HR Celliers became the first chaplain to serve the congregation. In 1975 he was replaced by Cpln (Rev.) SM Visser.²² The military congregation had close ties with the civilian congregation, and the two merged in 1980. Although the Free Churches received a chaplain's post in 1974, it remained vacant for much of the time, and persons belonging to denominations other than the DRC were ministered to on a weekly basis by part-time chaplains. NSM chaplains played an important role in missionary work among the local population. During the ministry of Cpln (Rev.) D van den Heever, the recreational facilities at Walvis Bay were upgraded and a coffee bar and library were erected. Military operations in the border area often disrupted congregational organization.²³

In July 1977, the military command of SWA/Namibia was restructured to function more independently from that of South Africa. As from August 1981, all chaplains in SWA/Namibia resorted under SWATF, excluding SAAF and Special Forces chaplains. SWA/Namibia was divided into sectors, each falling under a Sector or Area Chaplain. The border sectors resorted under the control of the SADF, even though most of the troops were SWATF members. Planning was conducted jointly by the SADF and SWATF. Walvis Bay became known as the Walvis Bay Military Area (WBMA) and the SAN established a naval unit with port facilities in the harbour. NSM chaplains of the SAN ministered to the marines who patrolled the port from October 1978.²⁴

Col (Rev.) PE de Kock became the first Chief Chaplain of the SWATF. He restructured the SWA chaplaincy services to function autonomously under the Chaplain General in Pretoria, and issued all Permanent Force chaplains in SWA/

²² Van Niekerk, pp. 255-256, 283-284. Cpln (Rev.) Visser served as the Area Chaplain at Oshakati as from May 1977 and, as such, was responsible for chaplains in Ovamboland and Kaokoland. When referring to chaplaincy in SWA and the border area, the designation Cpln (Rev.) will be used, except when referring to command positions and NSM chaplains.

²³ L. Berat, *Walvis Bay the last frontier* (New Haven, 1990), pp. 11-14, 67; Van Niekerk, pp. 254-257, 260; "NDP kapelaan doen uitstaande werk" in *In Hoc Signo* 11(1), February 1985, p. 7. The role of NSM chaplains during the Namibian War of Independence, especially with regard to Comops, calls for an independent study. Due to lack of space it will not be dealt with in more detail in this article.

²⁴ Van Niekerk, pp. 257, 260, 283-284; W Steenkamp, *South Africa's Border War, 1966-1989* (Gibraltar, 1989), p. 194. The border sectors consisted of Sector 10 (Kaokoland, Ovamboland), Sector 20 (Kavango, Bushmanland, Western Caprivi) and Sector 70 (Eastern Caprivi).

Namibia with the SWATF uniform and chaplain's badges. On 15 January 1984 he was succeeded by Col (Rev.) AJ Bezuidenhout. Chaplains of SWA/Namibia met annually to discuss common interests. In 1987, Col (Rev.) Bezuidenhout was transferred to the Chaplain General's office and Col (Rev.) Visser succeeded him. The latter guided chaplaincy services in SWA/Namibia through the implementation of Resolution 435 of the United Nations (UN).²⁵

The conscription of SWA/Namibia citizens brought new challenges to military chaplaincy. Many of those conscripted were illiterate and most were members of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC). Moreover, they spoke a variety of languages. Owing to political sentiments, the RCC was reluctant to help. This forced chaplains to resort to innovative means of ministry, such as group work and songs. With the implementation of UN Resolution 435 in 1989, 61 Mechanized Battalion Group was withdrawn from the operational area to the WBMA, with severe restrictions on movement and training. Col (Rev.) Bezuidenhout volunteered to serve at the WBMA during this time, and he played an important role in assisting with the closing down of military chaplaincy services in Namibia during the 1990s.²⁶

3.2 Chaplaincy in camps in the operational area

When the SAP handed over the responsibility for the protection of the border to the SADF on 1 April 1974, the latter already had a considerable presence in the area. Military camps had been established at Grootfontein, Rundu, Katima Mulilo, Mpacha and Ondangwa, as bases to assist the SAP. The camps consisted of tents, but they gradually developed into military towns with more permanent structures, where SADF members and their families resided. Initially, spiritual ministry was conducted by Permanent Force and Citizen Force chaplains, rotating for periods of three months. From 1977 onwards, NSM chaplains also performed border duty. Chaplains from the SAP and the SADF interoperated by mutual consent. Ministry in the camps was conducted along the same lines as in the case of the South African bases, but it took place under trees or in tents. The problem of privacy was solved by erecting a chaplain's tent, which served as an office and consultation room, as well as sleeping quarters.²⁷

²⁵ Steenkamp, p. 194; Die kapelaansvrou SAW, pp. 122-125; Van Niekerk, pp. 257, 287; "SWA kapelaanskonferensie" in *In Hoc Signo* 9(2), September 1983, p. 11; "S Visser" in *In Hoc Signo* 13(2), September 1987, p. 3.

²⁶ Van Niekerk, pp. 257, 261-262; *Evening Post*, 31 January 1983, p. 2.

²⁷ "Kapelane vir 92 gelowe!", p. 52; Steenkamp, pp. 27-28; Van Niekerk, p. 263; G Kruger, "Kapelana en dienspligtige in mooi verhouding" in *Die Kerkbode* 136(6), 8 February 1984, p. 6; L Gouws, "Kapelane op die slagveld: wonderwerk? Bestiering?" in *Paratus* 27(3), March 1976, p. 3; P Roodt, "Bestiering? Beskikking? Kapelana te velde se oorlogservaringe" in *Paratus* 27(6), June 1976, pp. 14-15; "Polisie- en Weermagkapelane skakel" in *In Hoc Signo* 12(3), November 1986, p. 1; *The Argus*, 8 November 1983, p. 16. Also see "Twee kapelane vertel *Paratus* van hul pligte in die bos" in *Paratus* 32(3), March 1981, p. 20.

Chaplains visiting the operational area during the initial phases of the war reported a lack of proper accommodation, recreational facilities and reading material, which resulted in boredom and alcohol abuse. A concerted effort by the SADF addressed these problems and the SACHS supported these efforts by providing spiritual films, videos and literature, and concert groups visited the operational area on a regular basis.²⁸

Coffee bars became extremely popular in the operational area, providing a recreational space with a homely atmosphere, different from the canteens. The Chaplains' Wives' Committee provided music, games and biscuits, and reading material was acquired by means of the Chaplain General's Fund. The coffee bars served as areas for socializing and enjoying quiet moments, as well as for the writing of letters, since post had become the artery between the operational area and home. Chaplains used the coffee bars to execute their ministry and, over time, these venues became the camp's centre of religious activity. By 1984, the number of coffee bars in the operational area had risen from four to 48. Ondangwa was the only base with an SAMS coffee bar at the hospital – a former bomb shelter transformed to serve a spiritual purpose.²⁹

The lack of Bibles resulted in suggestions that a permanent stock should be retained in the camps. Maj. Gen. (Rev.) Van Zyl's viewpoint was that soldiers relied more on their Bibles than on their weapons. Under his guidance, thousands of pocket-size Bibles, or parts of the Bible, were distributed among the troops – as many as 200 000 were handed out from 1978 to 1981. Great emphasis was placed on personal contact, and the availability of a chaplain for every injured man was regarded as a priority. It was also the task of the chaplain to keep in contact with the parents of NSM members – *inter alia*, through circulars and visits to congregations. Most difficult of all, chaplains were also obliged to break the news to relatives in cases involving the death of a loved one.³⁰

In most of the camps, chaplaincy services were rendered by chaplains on border duty, although local clergy also ministered to the military when necessary. When Col (Rev.) PE de Kock, the SSO Chaplains' Army, visited SWA/Namibia in October

²⁸ Kruger, p. 6; Cawcutt, p. 23; Van Niekerk, pp. 263-267; "Chaplains visit troops at border" in *Paratus* 23(8), August 1972, p. 51; "Gaudium op maneuvers" in *In Hoc Signo* 12(1), January 1986, p. 5; *Die Volksblad*, 21 June 1991, p. 5.

²⁹ Strauss, pp. 390-391; Cawcutt, p. 23; "The Chaplains' Service" in *Paratus* 37(5), May 1986, p. 71; "Koffiekamers op grens beteken baie" en "Vroue by koffiekamers in ops gebied" in *In Hoc Signo* 10(2), October 1984, pp. 7-8; "Dames besoek ops gebied" in *In Hoc Signo* 11(2), May 1985, p. 6; "Vrystaatse vroue organiseer" in *In Hoc Signo* 14(2), November 1988, p. 7; "MBH Ondangwa: oase in Ovamboland" in *In Hoc Signo* 14(2), November 1988, pp. 3-4; WW Pretorius, "Gemeenskapsbetrokkenheid by die terroriste-aanslag teen die RSA" in *Die Kerkbode* 133(3), 21 January 1981, p. 82.

³⁰ "MBH Ondangwa: oase in Ovamboland", pp. 3-4; Genl. Maj. (Ds.) JA van Zyl, p. 5; "Twee kapelane vertel *Paratus* van hul pligte in die bos", p. 20; JA van Zyl, "Die kapelaan en die ouer" in *Paratus* 25(2), February 1974, p. 5; "New chaplains: personal contact urged" in *Paratus* 36(3), March 1985, p. 22; "Nuwe hulp vir kapelane" in *Paratus* 28(10), October 1977, p. 11; *The Argus*, 8 November 1983, p. 16; *Die Burger*, 23 April 1982, p. 13. Subsequently, the issuing of Bibles to soldiers was criticized before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. See *The Citizen*, 24 July 1997, p. 8.

1974, he reported the need for a permanent appointment at the Northern Logistics Command at Grootfontein, and on 1 January 1976, Rev. D van den Heever assumed duty as a part-time chaplain. From July 1978, the camp became the responsibility of NSM chaplains. In June 1982, Cpln (Rev.) JWJ Hanekom took over, and served until the implementation of Resolution 435. In September 1975, Cpln (Rev.) JG Lindeque became the first Permanent Force chaplain in the operational area, with Katima Mulilo as headquarters and the Eastern Caprivi as service field. In the Western Caprivi, Cpln (Rev.) GH Theron served from January 1976, with headquarters at Rundu. He was succeeded, first, by Cpln (Rev.) RMJ Britz and, from April 1983, by Cpln (Rev.) NFS Mulder. In 1986 Cpln (Rev.) W Viljoen took over and served until 1989.³¹

Groups, consisting of local clergy, chaplains' spouses or international visitors, regularly visited the operational area as guests of the Chaplain General or the other command structures of the SADF. They experienced a brotherhood that transcended race and denomination, and an enthusiasm to bring the Gospel to local inhabitants. Many Bibles, as well as other spiritual literature, were distributed among the local population through initiatives such as Project Samuel and Project Rome. The latter was a missionary project in the Eastern Caprivi, initiated by Cpln (Rev.) M Turk while he was stationed at Katima Mulilo. NSM chaplains researched the local traditions and compiled a body of literature, combining the local beliefs with Christianity. This material was also incorporated into the local education syllabus, radio broadcasts, slideshows and flysheets. Cpln (Rev.) Theron increased the evangelism campaigns in the Western Caprivi and, with the support of World Vision, also took responsibility for the relief work in the refugee camps in southern Angola, where men, women and children arrived with almost nothing. They were provided with food, clothing and Bibles, and services were held with the aid of interpreters. In 1980, Cpln (Rev.) Bezuidenhout initiated a project which supplied Braille Bibles in the Kwanyama language to children of the Eluwa School, who had been disabled through landmine explosions. By the end of 1983, the four Gospels and Acts had been transcribed into Braille. The funds for the project were raised by the local military staff in Ovamboland. Bibles were eventually distributed in 14 languages throughout SWA/Namibia and, long after the SADF had left, the Gospel was still being proclaimed in the region.³²

³¹ Van Niekerk, pp. 270, 289-291.

³² "Nuwe hulp vir kapelane", p. 11; "Chaplains visit troops at border", p. 51; Van Niekerk, pp. 290, 301-302; "Besoek van Nederlandse predikante aan operasionele gebied" in *In Hoc Signo* 13(2), September 1987, p. 6; "Nuwe waardering na grensbesoek" and "Kerkmanne besoek OPS gebied" in *In Hoc Signo* 11(3), September 1985, pp. 3, 7; "Kapelaansdiens lewer groot bydrae tot projek in Oos-Caprivi" in *In Hoc Signo* 14(1), May 1988, pp. 7-8; "Kapelane onthaal" in *Paratus* 33(4), April 1982, p. 76; "Dames besoek die operasionele gebied" in *In Hoc Signo* 12(1), January 1986, pp. 6-7; "Johannes en Markus in Kwanyama Braille" in *In Hoc Signo* 9(3), December 1983, p. 10; T Leon, "Angolan refugees: SADF helps again" in Supplement, *Paratus* 27(11), November 1976, p. xiv; *Rapport*, 8 February 1981, p. 14.

3.3 Special battalions

As from 1974, local inhabitants and people who had fled Angola were recruited to serve in the SADF. This gave rise to ethnic battalions. 201 Battalion (also known as 31 Battalion or Alpha Group) was one of two San battalions, and its base, Camp Omega, was located in the remote Western Caprivi. Approximately 2 500 San, of whom 650 were soldiers, lived in this area. They practised a mixture of traditional religion and Christianity and became known as the Salt Church (later the Prophet Church). FM Mahongo, a former local captain in the Portuguese army, ministered to his people after his conversion. This was their only source of spiritual support until October 1976, when the SACHS, under the guidance of Cpln (Rev.) Theron, started a San ministry. Stumbling blocks included illiteracy, vast distances, difficult terrain and the danger of attacks by insurgents. On 29 November 1986 the San became part of the Evangelic Reformed Church of Africa. Rev. Mahongo served those who spoke Vasekela, while Cpln (Rev.) F Janse van Rensburg, the chaplain at Omega, ministered to the Barakwena group, using an interpreter. By 1988, the two congregations consisted of approximately 320 members. Project Philippus was launched in 1986, when the NSM chaplain, A Celliers, ministered to the San settlements of the Western Caprivi for nine days with the help of an interpreter. In 1987, he visited them again for three weeks, using audio cassettes, pictorial pamphlets and songs. Omega was the first operational base in SWA/Namibia with its own church building. The second San Battalion was known as 203 Battalion, with headquarters at Tsumkwe and, as from 1981, at Mangetti. They were served by NSM chaplains. 203 Battalion disbanded on 18 March 1989. The cessation of hostilities and the withdrawal of the SADF during the course of 1989 resulted in widespread poverty and unemployment among the San.³³

Cpln (Rev.) Theron also played an important role in the ministry to ex-members of the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), known as 32 Battalion, stationed at Buffalo in the Western Caprivi. They saw a lot of action, and this resulted in many burials being conducted without a chaplain present. They were mostly Roman Catholics, and Father Bonifacius ministered to them until July 1977. Portuguese, the language of ministry, was the second language of most of the men; and it was only through the appointment of Pastor IKA de Almeida, one of two ex-Angolan pastors, that the language problem was solved. He knew the vernacular well and delivered a valuable service. At the request of Cpln (Rev.) Theron, he served on a contractual basis from June 1979 until March 1984. Before his appointment, Cpln (Rev.) NG Armstrong and Portuguese civilian priests had ministered to the

³³ "Dames besoek die operasionele gebied", p. 6; "Kerkmanne besoek ops gebied", p. 3; Van Niekerk, pp. 292-298; "Die Boesmans in die Wes-Caprivi: ook vir hulle die nuwe lewe!" in *Die Kerkbode* 141(17), 11 May 1988, p. 8; "Kapel verrys in ops gebied" in *In Hoc Signo* 11(2), May 1985, p. 11; *Rapport*, 8 February 1981, p. 14; *Suidwester*, 23 February 1990, p. 3.

RCC members. Pre-taped Portuguese sermons were used and Portuguese spiritual literature was distributed. Cpln (Rev.) SHA Middlemost was appointed from January 1986, often accompanying trans-border expeditions. On 1 May 1989, 32 Battalion was relocated to the Northern Cape.³⁴

701 Battalion (previously 33 Battalion) consisted of approximately 742 East Caprivians. Most were Seventh-Day Adventists. A local preacher, JM Kalonda, ministered to them from 1983 until 1989. Most local black churches were not positively disposed towards the SADF. 101 Battalion (previously 53 Battalion) numbered approximately 2 000 men, mostly local Ovambos. The Evangelical Lutheran Ovambo-Kavango Church declined to appoint a chaplain to 101 Battalion, and the Evangelies Gereformeerde Kerk van Afrika only supplied a part-time chaplain, who assisted the NSM chaplains in their ministry. A church building was erected at Ondangwa. On 1 November 1988 Cpln (Rev.) EM van Wyngaardt was appointed and he served until 1989, when he was transferred with all other South African chaplains to South Africa.³⁵

3.4 Chaplaincy during cross-border operations, 1975-1989³⁶

3.4.1 Operation Savannah, 1975-1976

The Angolan Civil War, following Portugal's withdrawal, involved the pro-Marxist Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the National Union for the Liberation of Angola (UNITA) and the FNLA. The MPLA received Soviet military equipment and active Cuban support, while the USA clandestinely supported the forces opposed to the MPLA, as well as the SADF operations in SWA/Namibia. In taking over the responsibility for protecting the border, the SADF had to curb SWAPO insurgency and prevent the MPLA from taking control in Angola, as this would further the cause of SWAPO and communism. Military operations included cross-border pre-emptive strikes, which escalated into conventional operations.³⁷

The first cross-border operation was Operation Savannah (1975-1976), which entailed the recapturing of Angolan territory from the MPLA through the use of mobile columns. During its secret forerunner, Operation Sausage II, Cpln (Rev.)

³⁴ Leon, p. xiv; Van Niekerk, pp. 298-301; J Geldenhuys, *Dié wat wen 'n generaal se storie uit 'n era van oorlog en vrede* (Pretoria, 1993), p. 45.

³⁵ Steenkamp, p. 204; Van Niekerk, pp. 289-291; G Töttemeyer and J Seiler, "South West Africa/Namibia: a study in polarization and confrontation" in J Seiler (ed.), pp. 82-84. Also see the editorial in *Die Republikein* 11(240), 15 November 1988, p. 4.

³⁶ This article does not trace the history of military operations. For more information, see Steenkamp, *passim* and articles covering military operations in the special edition of the *Journal for Contemporary History* 31(3), December 2006.

³⁷ See the essays on the Angolan Civil War and on the Cuban and Soviet roles in the regional conflict in Seiler (ed.), pp. 3-57, 105.

Theron served as chaplain. Under his guidance, Ndonga and Kwanyama Bibles were later distributed among the local Angolan population. Usually, chaplains were assigned to formal, cross-border operations, but Operation Savannah was conducted clandestinely. The Chaplain General had no knowledge of it and, therefore, no provision was made for chaplains. Soldiers signed a declaration that they were serving voluntarily; and they were not allowed to carry any kind of identification – not even their Afrikaans Bibles. Initially, chaplains from Oshakati, Ondangwa and Rundu conducted trans-border visits to the troops. When chaplains were eventually deployed during November 1975, they had to leave their Afrikaans Bibles behind on crossing the border. The absence of Bibles compelled the soldiers to assemble together in groups and to recite verses from memory. Cpln (Rev.) MCK Loots used a Portuguese Bible to minister to captured Cubans. Eight South Africans were taken prisoner. The SACHS paid visits to their families, and on 13 December 1976, prayers for their release were offered at a church parade. After their release, this date became a day of thanksgiving, and the church parade became an annual institution.³⁸

2 SAI Bn also participated in Operation Savannah, accompanied by Cpln (Rev.) Visser, who knew the area well. He played an important role in the defence of Fort Rocades (later Xangongo). His successor, Cpln (Rev.) D Goodenough, received a pick-up van from Jonas Savimbi, the leader of UNITA, to assist him in solving the problem relating to the lack of transport. During 1976, 108 chaplains served in the operational area, and approximately 17 were deployed during Operation Savannah. Cpln (Rev.) Loots later commented that Operation Savannah was the highlight of his career, as he had often experienced the power of the Gospel during that time.³⁹

Operation Savannah highlighted several problems. Chaplains used to stay at medical posts; but the experience gained during Operation Savannah led to the slogan: "As informal as possible, and as far forward as possible". Chaplains became extra crew members in fighting vehicles, and were exposed to the same dangers as the rest.⁴⁰ In 1977, the term of conscription was extended to two years; and in the following years, a number of pre-emptive operations by the SADF ensued in Angola.

³⁸ Van Niekerk, pp. 272-280; J Botes, "Kleurryke loopbaan as predikant afgesluit" in *Paratus* 37(12), December 1986, p. 58.

³⁹ Botes, p. 58; Van Niekerk, pp. 255-256, 272-273, 277. Van Niekerk's overview of Cpln (Rev.) Visser's participation in the execution of a FAPLA soldier who acted as a suicide hand grenadier, and the appropriation of goods from the *cuca* shop in Fort Rocadas, may give rise to controversy. Logistical support did not meet requirements; and this led to stealing from Angolan shops to support the squadrons and to "replenish" stock.

⁴⁰ "Kapelane vir 92 gelowe!", p. 52; Van Niekerk, pp. 279-280; Botes, p. 58; Roodt, p. 14. In May 1987, *Die Vaderland* published a series in which the trauma of a chaplain, Rev. T Bekker, who had been severely wounded in the operational area, was recounted.

3.4.2 Cross-border operations, 1978-1989

The first cross-border operation after Operation Savannah was Operation Reindeer, an air and ground attack on SWAPO's training and logistical support base at Cassinga in May 1978, with Cpln (Rev.) RP Jordaan serving. During the 1980s, the Namibian War of Independence became inseparable from the Angolan Civil War and Angola became one of the battlefields of the Cold War. The conflict became increasingly conventional, with the SADF and UNITA fighting against the MPLA and Cuban troops. In June 1980 Operation Sceptic took place, with Cpln (Rev.) Bezuidenhout and Lt AH le Roux serving. From 1981, PLAN's infiltration became more sophisticated. This resulted in Operation Protea in 1981 – the largest mechanized operation by the South African military forces since World War II – with Cpln (Rev.) Bezuidenhout, Cpln (Rev.) B Buitendag, Lt JJ Pretorius, Lt GJ Rossouw and Lt GJ van Wyk serving. Reporters, filming a television programme on religion and spiritual experiences in the operational area, conducted interviews with troops who had participated in Operation Protea. At the end of the year, Cpln (Rev.) W Viljoen accompanied the troops on Operation Daisy. Cplns (Revs) LA Bouwer and JG Lindeque participated in Operation Dolfyn in May 1983. During this operation, Cpln (Rev.) Bouwer had to take over the command at Ongiva. From 1983, the intensity of the conflict escalated, with SWATF handling 70% of the fighting. In the meantime, at the home front, riots in black townships escalated, and the SADF was increasingly called on to support the SAP. Back in SWA/Angola, 17 chaplains participated in Operation Askari during December 1983 and January 1984. From June to July 1985, Cpln (Rev.) JW van Niekerk and Lt FJC Oosthuizen accompanied Operation Boswilger. They were again deployed during Operation Benzine in 1986. In June, Cpln (Rev.) SHA Middlemost served during Operation Suiderkruis. During Operations Moduler, Hooper and Packer in 1988, it was decided that a chaplain should be allocated to each combat team, with an additional chaplain at the combat headquarters and a senior chaplain at the task-force headquarters. Chaplains had to serve where the troops were. Operation Moduler lasted from July to December 1987. Seventeen chaplains served, and Cpln (Rev.) A Erxleben kept a diary, in which he described the trauma of having to place the burned dead bodies of comrades in plastic bags at the Chaminga and Humbe Rivers. The lack of an own vehicle forced the chaplains to travel with the commanding officers, and this hampered the chaplains' ministry. Cpln (Rev.) Visser of 61 Mechanized Battalion was the only one who had his own vehicle and crew. Fourteen chaplains participated in Operation

Moduler, eight in Operation Hooper (the extension of Operation Moduler) and six in Operation Packer, which succeeded Operation Hooper.⁴¹

Operation Hunter, which lasted from May 1987 to March 1988, was a Special Forces operation, accompanied by Cpln (Rev.) CS Schoeman of 5 Reconnaissance Regiment. Information gathered during this undertaking led to Operation Firewood, with Cplns (Revs) SG van Niekerk and CF Sieberhagen participating in the preparations. Cpln (Rev.) Sieberhagen accompanied the troops. A stalemate situation developed, which became a turning point in May 1988. The last operation was Operation Excite in August 1988, in which Cpln (Rev.) LA Bouwer, Cpln (Rev.) JW van Niekerk and Lt GJ Olivier participated. Diplomatic negotiations and the signing of an accord at Ruacana on 22 August 1988 resulted in the ending of hostilities and the implementation of UN Resolution 435.⁴²

During cross-border operations, when towns were taken, military positions occupied and enemy arsenals seized, chaplains had an unprecedented opportunity to administer the Gospel amidst fear, trauma, mutilation and death. War left men devoid of masks; and the SACHS was able to provide a structure and opportunities for spiritual ministry to those experiencing anxiety, fear, homesickness, sorrow and anger. When Maj. Gen. (Rev.) Van Zyl retired, he commented on the many times he had witnessed the work of salvation in the lives of soldiers under these trying circumstances. The fact that chaplains were part of the operations provided an open channel of communication and an opportunity for pastoral care at all times. NSM chaplains declared that troops in the operational area were extremely receptive to religion, and spiritual topics were often discussed during the daily routines. Evaluation studies revealed that 92% of the soldiers regarded the presence of chaplains during operations in a positive light.⁴³

3.5 UN Resolution 435

Resolution 435, implemented on 1 April 1989, stipulated a reduction of the South African forces to 1 500 men over a period of three months, and elections under the

⁴¹ Geldenhuys, p. 46; Van Niekerk, pp. 303-309; "Radio- en TV-span besoek operasionele gebied" in *In Hoc Signo* 6(3), November 1981, p. 1; S Visser, "Van die Kapelaan-generaal" in *In Hoc Signo* 14(1), May 1988, p. 2; *Die Burger*, 7 November 1985, p. 2; *The Star*, 15 October 1985, p. 15. Van Niekerk gives a list of participating chaplains.

⁴² Van Niekerk, pp. 307-309.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 309, 314-315; Visser, p. 2; Roodt, pp. 14-15; Gouws, p. 3; CJ Pretorius, p. 20; "Kapelane vir 92 gelowé!", p. 52; RH Moore, "The chaplains in the operational area" in *In Hoc Signo* 6(1), March 1981, pp. 8-9; "Van die Kapelaan-generaal" in *In Hoc Signo* 9(1), June 1983, p. 2; "Die kapelaan en 'n militêre operasie" in *In Hoc Signo* 11(1), February 1985, p. 8; "Kapelane val Buffelspoort binne" in *In Hoc Signo* 14 (1), May 1988, p. 1; "SACHS and demobilisation" in *In Hoc Signo* 14(2), November 1988, pp. 1-2; EA van Niekerk, "Kapelansdiens handhaaf gesonde balans" in *Die Kerkbode* 139(14), 15 April 1987, p. 12; *The Cape Times*, 12 July 1985, p. 8. For a description of the feelings of a chaplain coming back from the operational area, see *Rapport*, 11 March 1979, p. 13.

supervision of the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG). This was an uncertain period for military personnel, their dependants and the local population. Under Col (Rev.) Visser, SWATF Chaplaincy formulated a strategy in October 1988 to oversee the transfer of chaplains to South Africa and the implementation of Resolution 435. The strategy focused on Christ as the one certainty to hold on to, with Bible study, prayer and pastoral guidance comprising the basis of spiritual support. SWATF Chaplaincy distanced itself from any theology of revolution and liberation, as well as from the dissemination of anti-SWAPO sentiments.⁴⁴

Between April and mid-May 1989, the SADF in SWA/Namibia was scaled down to 12 000 soldiers; and by June, there were less than 1 500 SADF soldiers left. Homebound soldiers visited demobilization camps where the SACHS played an important role, as part of multidisciplinary teams, in debriefing the troops and helping them to readjust to civilian life. In this context, chaplains focused on the religious, ethical and spiritual needs of the troops.⁴⁵

SWATF officially demobilized on 1 April 1989. Chaplains were now remunerated by the DRC of SWA/Namibia, which received a grant from the SACHS. An interdenominational evangelism effort was subsequently launched in SWA/Namibia, with the help of Kwasiza Bantu, New Life Action, the Rhema Church and Media for Christ. Elections took place on 1 November 1989; and on 21 March 1990, Namibia became an independent state. After 23 years of warfare, the SADF returned to the routine of peace-time manoeuvres. Conscription was halved and then abolished.⁴⁶

4. CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES AFFECTING CHAPLAINCY, 1966-1989

When the SADF took over the protection of the SWA/Namibian border in 1974, the Cold War was intensifying in southern Africa. South African politicians talked of a "total onslaught" by Moscow, directed against the free world and Christian civilization. It is not surprising, therefore, that justification for the SADF's military presence in SWA and Angola was linked to the Cold War. This resulted in a nationalistic surge of patriotism; and among Afrikaans-speaking chaplains of the DRC, the image of the fighting padre and belief in the just war principle⁴⁷ featured strongly during the initial stages of the Namibian War of Independence. In 1971, JF Potgieter asked chaplains to inculcate patriotism and the preservation of language,

⁴⁴ SG van Niekerk, pp. 309-311; "Van die Kapelaan-generaal" in *In Hoc Signo* 14(2), November 1988, p. 2; R Magennis, "Our thanks to God for chaplains" in *Paratus* 29(5), May 1978, p. 28; "Alles is swewend, onseker: NG Kerk verloor lidmate in SWA, gemeentes ontbind" in *Die Kerkbode* 144(13), 13 October 1989, p. 1.

⁴⁵ "SACHS and demobilisation", pp. 1-2; "Kapelane val Buffelspoort in", p. 1. Also see R van Niekerk, "Die terugkeer na die lewe beplan" in *Die Kerkbode* 136(6), 8 February 1984, p. 6.

⁴⁶ SG van Niekerk, pp. 311-313.

⁴⁷ See Wessels and Bredenkamp, p. 307, *supra*.

culture and moral ethics in their ministry; and many sermons focused on the need to curb the spread of communism.⁴⁸

The DRC accounted for approximately 70% of the number of chaplains deployed during the Namibian War of Independence; and their theological viewpoints dominated decisions and formed the basis of much of the spiritual literature. Some denominations expressed the opinion that the SACHS had become a branch of the DRC, which, in turn, promoted government (i.e. National Party; apartheid) policy. The multiracial English churches⁴⁹ did not share the Afrikaner interpretation of the Namibian War of Independence as a religious calling, and did not see the need for lectures on topics such as “revolutionary warfare”. Many criticized the Chaplain General’s political attitudes and the “crusade mentality” of DRC ministers.⁵⁰

To critics, proof of the symbiotic relationship between the SACHS and the state and the lack of an objective policy on the part of the SACHS, could be found in the Chaplain-General’s stance on bonus bonds (a state loan scheme to obtain additional funds for the defence budget). From the inception of the bonus-bond scheme in the late 1970s until its suspension in 1984, it led to much controversy. Some church leaders viewed it as a form of gambling. They condemned it as a sin, asking their congregations to refrain from buying bonus bonds. Others supported Maj. Gen. (Rev.) Van Zyl, who regarded the buying of bonus bonds as an act of patriotism, securing the South African Christian civilization against communism and protecting the lives of those in the operational area.⁵¹

For many years, the English churches participated in theologically motivated criticism of apartheid as a repressive system. Black unrest resulted in a perception of the SADF as an instrument used by the government to ensure white power. The

⁴⁸ Potgieter, p. 372; "1971 Chaplains' conference", p. 53; J Seiler, "South Africa's regional role" in Seiler (ed.), p. 105; G Latham, "Christianity in the army" in *Paratus* 24(1), January 1972, p. 30; "SA in totale oorlog, sê genl Malan" in *Paratus* 28(10), October 1977, p. 10; T Cronjé, "Wagters op ons grense" in *Paratus* 33(4), April 1982, p. 76; W Dreyer, "Verdedig aanvalle in buurstate só" in *Die Hervormer* 175(5), August 1983, p. 5; JH van Wyk, "Die etiek van die hakkejag en voorbehoedende invalle" in *Woord en Daad* 18(190), June 1978, p. 16. For an alternative view see G Baines and P Vale (eds), *Beyond the Border War - new perspectives on Southern Africa's Late-Cold War conflicts* (Pretoria, 2008), pp. 42-93.

⁴⁹ The major English denominations included the Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian and Congregational Churches.

⁵⁰ Behr, p. 18; SG van Niekerk, p. 358; EA Van Niekerk, p. 12; P Moll, "Demilitarizing the chaplaincy" in *SA Outlook* 114(1354), April 1984, p. 51; A van Niekerk, "Kapelansdiens: so is posisie in SAW misbruik" in *Woord en Daad* 32(342), July 1992, p. 1; I van der Linde, "Die weermag, die kerk en lensiesop" in *Insig*, October 1989, p. 49; H Pieterse, "Kapelane: 'wiens brood men eet...?'" in *Insig*, 31 August 1994, p. 10; "In diepte artikel: Burgerlike ongehoorsaamheid" in *In Hoc Signo* 14(2), November 1988, pp. 9-12; *Beeld*, 15 July 1998, p. 6; *Rapport*, 8 February 1981, p. 14; *Cape Argus*, 24 July 1997, p. 7; *The Citizen*, 24 July 1997, p. 8; *The Sowetan*, 25 November 1982, p. 8. This viewpoint was not unfounded, as the Chaplain General commented on the close relationship between church and state. See "Kommissieparade vir 55 NDP kapelane", p. 23.

⁵¹ See the editorial comments, letters and news reports in the press, e.g. *The Citizen*, 13 January 1978, p. 6; *Beeld*, 13 January 1978, p. 2; *Die Vaderland*, 25 November 1978, p. 6 and 9 January 1979, p. 1; *Die Kerkbode* 135(3), 20 July 1983, p. 15; *Die Nasionalis*, 30 November 1984, p. 4. Also see Potgieter, p. 372; SG van Niekerk, pp. 193-194; Dreyer, p. 5; Van Wyk, p. 16.

SADF was increasingly described in negative terms as an unwanted occupation force in SWA; and military chaplaincy was criticized for its role in sanctioning the war, resulting in a negative judgement of the just war principle, the chaplain's uniform, his training in the use of weapons, his remuneration by the SADF, security clearance, and the subjection of chaplains to the Military Discipline Code. Tension arose when Revs W Mbete and D Katane of Soweto objected to an army chaplain wearing his military uniform to the annual synod of the Methodist Church in June 1979.⁵²

In the late 1970s, both the Methodist Church and the RCC suggested that military chaplains should be demilitarized.⁵³ Over time, the call for the demilitarization of chaplains became stronger, especially in the Anglican Church. At the Anglican Synod in July 1985, a motion, which envisaged the suspension of Anglican ministry in the operational area, was overturned at the last minute. Although the Presbyterian Church rejected a proposal to demilitarize chaplains, they asked for a full investigation into military chaplaincy. The RCC suggested that chaplains should only serve in a part-time capacity, and some people, such as Father B van Rensburg of District Six, drew public attention to the matter by fasting. English churches gave their full support to the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) and also decided to minister to the forces fighting against the SADF, but this never got off the ground.⁵⁴

The ECC and conscientious objections against military service intensified; and during the late 1980s and early 1990s, this led to several court cases. By September 1989, there were 771 conscientious objectors. The English churches called for non-military national service, and from the 1970s onward, they supported a system of passive resistance. During December 1983, a Board for Religious Objection was created, with Judge MT Steyn as chief adjudicator. Provision was made for religious pacifists to be exempted from military service, but not for people with moral or political objections. Maj. Gen. (Rev.) Van Zyl criticized conscientious objectors as

⁵² Moll, p. 51; A van Niekerk, p. 1; Van der Linde, p. 49; *The Star*, 27 June 1979, p. 3 and 12 July 1985, p. 10; *Die Burger*, 7 November 1985, p. 2; *The Sunday Star*, 15 September 1985, p. 4; *The Natal Mercury*, 10 July 1985, p. 10; *Evening Post*, 31 January 1983, p. 2. Also see NC Manganyi, "The baptism of fire: South Africa's black majority after the Portuguese coup" in Seiler (ed.), pp. 169-179.

⁵³ Demilitarization meant that a pool of civilian ministers should be selected to serve in the operational area on a rotational basis for limited periods. They should be appointed and remunerated by their respective churches and should not wear any insignia that could link them to the SADF.

⁵⁴ "Agtergrond: ECC sry teen dienspelig" in *In Hoc Signo* 12(2), June 1986, pp. 6-7; *The Daily News*, 27 October 1980, p. 18; *The Cape Times*, 22 February 1978, p. 9 and 11 July 1985, p. 4; *The Star*, 12 July 1985, p. 11, 27 September 1985, p. 18, 15 October 1985, p. 15 and 30 September 1988, p. 9; *The Argus*, 19 June 1978, p. 2; *The Natal Mercury*, 10 July 1985, p. 10 and 13 July 1985, p. 15; *The Sunday Star*, 11 December 1988, p. 2. Also see B Clarke, *Anglicans against apartheid* (Pietermaritzburg, 2008), pp. 253-335, 382-449.

persons who wanted to enjoy Christianity, without any effort to ensure religious freedom during a Marxist onslaught.⁵⁵

The debate on military chaplaincy led to much uncertainty among English chaplains as to their position and ministry. Cpln (Rev.) JM Daines, the Principal Anglican Chaplain, found it difficult to fill vacancies. Controversy also arose between the Anglican Church and the Gay Association of South Africa when Cpln (Rev.) J Vogel complained that military chaplains were treated like “degenerate homosexuals” by fellow clergy. English chaplains voted unanimously to wear uniforms in accordance with the Geneva Conventions, enabling them to accompany soldiers during operations. In the face of canonical discussions on their status, Methodist chaplains protested that they were being insulted; while RCC chaplains demanded: “Back us or sack us”. In 1982, Cpln (Rev.) Daines defended military chaplaincy at the Anglican Synod in Port Elizabeth, stating that the SACHS had never placed any restrictions on his ministry. It was argued that it was naïve to vilify only the SADF, as if the other side were fighting with water pistols.⁵⁶

At the Chaplains’ Conference on 21 November 1985, a declaration was issued by all the chaplains present, unanimously stating that they served God first and foremost, and were obedient to Him only. They rejected all forms of discrimination and racism and stated that they had a calling to serve the soldiers of the SADF. They denied that their presence promoted war and pointed out that neither side could claim to have God’s exclusive anointment.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ “Alternative national service?” in *SA Outlook* 120(1426), April 1990, p. 230; J Daines, “The work of the Board for Religious Objection” in *In Hoc Signo* 12(1), January 1986, p. 10; Editorial in *Die Kerkbode* 136(6), 8 February 1984, p. 1; *Beeld*, 26 June 1990, p. 5; *The New Nation*, 6-12 July 1990, p. 10; *Business Day*, 27 September 1989, p. 2; *Die Burger*, 21 February 1985, p. 5 and 11 July 1985, p. 2; *The Star*, 27 June 1978, p. 6 and 24 February 1982, p. 7; *Evening Post*, 23 February 1984, p. 8; *Die Volksblad*, 21 October 1980, p. 7; Clarke, p. 388; Baines and Vale, pp. 80-90, 197-199, 113-116, 139-140. The Board consisted of three theologians, an army chaplain and an SADF officer. If the objector’s religion was not represented, a minister could be co-opted. As part of its campaign against military chaplaincy, the Anglican Church withdrew its representation on the Board in 1985. The Minister of Police, Mr L le Grange, regarded the passive resistance campaign of the English churches as public disobedience. The whole issue of conscientious objections calls for an independent study and will therefore not be further pursued here.

⁵⁶ *Sunday Tribune*, 26 March 1978, p.18 and 17 July 1983, p. 20; *The Cape Times*, 25 November 1982, p. 5; *The Argus*, 19 June 1978, p. 2 and 8 November 1983, p. 16; *Die Burger*, 24 November 1982, p. 11; *The Citizen*, 11 August 1983, p. 15; *The Daily News*, 8 October 1983, p. 2; *The Sunday Star*, 14 July 1985, p. 14; W Blumenthal, “National service - a Jewish problem?” in *South African Jewish Times* 43(18), 10 September 1982, p. 18.

⁵⁷ EA van Niekerk, p. 12; “From the Chaplain-General: declaration at Chaplains’ Conference on 21 Nov 1985” in *In Hoc Signo* 12(1), January 1986, pp. 1-3; *The Star*, 25 November 1985, p. 19; *Die Burger*, 23 November 1985, p. 11; JA Gurney, “The chaplain” in *Commando* 15(6), June 1964, p. 63. Although a formal request for the demilitarization of chaplains was never put to the Chaplain-General’s office, a spokesperson for the latter commented on the logistics of such a suggestion: clergy, untrained in military operations, might be a danger to themselves and to others; and the SADF could not provide escorts for civilian clergy when it needed all its manpower for military operations. See *The Cape Times*, 22 February 1978, p. 9; *Sunday Tribune*, 15 September 1985, p. 19.

It was only during the final phase of the war, and in its aftermath, that a debate took place in the Afrikaans churches on the role of chaplains in the SADF and their participation in the Namibian War of Independence. Two ex-NSM chaplains, M Maree and L Erasmus, criticized military chaplaincy as an extension of the state, and objected to chaplains participating in the planning of military operations. They were of the opinion that unfounded criticism of the liberation theology resulted in chaplains losing sight of the structural injustices that had led to a revolutionary policy of violence. They expressed the opinion that chaplains had only been used in the Namibian War of Independence to boost the morale of the soldiers and to motivate them. They referred to the dual role of chaplains, as both clergy and soldiers, as the “schizophrenia” of chaplains, hampering impartial ministry and creating circumstances unfavourable for racial reconciliation. Arguments were also put forward to the effect that the preaching of chaplains was limited, because subjects of a sensitive nature had to be avoided, and that the chaplain’s apolitical stance actually supported the *status quo*. Maree and Erasmus also criticized chaplaincy structures.⁵⁸

In 1988, the Chaplain General, Maj. Gen. (Rev.) C Naude, warned that ministers should not become so involved with a social liberation theology that human-rights issues, social interests and politics took the place of spiritual ministry. He also warned that, through the church and religion, the enemy was securing support. He emphasized that the only objective of the SACHS was to ensure that all soldiers were spiritually cared for. Cpln (Rev.) CF Mathee, Director Chaplaincy, stated that the SACHS was the voice of the church in the SADF – and not the other way around. He referred to research by Prof. H Boshof of the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, who concluded that most troops experienced chaplains as much-needed and irreplaceable pastoral companions in the operational area.⁵⁹

5. EVALUATION

The Namibian War of Independence lasted for 23 years. During this time, military chaplaincy in South Africa developed into a professional institution of the SADF, characterized by interdenominational goodwill, support and ministry. For the first time, South African chaplains ministered to a multi-racial congregation in the operational area of SWA/Namibia. Here, chaplains brought pastoral care and shared

⁵⁸ *Rapport*, 24 June 1990, p. 3; *Vrye Weekblad*, 6 July 1990, p. 3. Also see the viewpoints of chaplains, conscientious objectors and the editor in *Beeld*, 16 August 1989, p. 6 and 17 August 1989, p. 8.

⁵⁹ *The Citizen*, 15 August 1988, p. 10; *Beeld*, 18 August 1989, p. 5 and 12 October 1989, p. 8; CF Mathee, "Kapelane is volkome 'kerkgebonde'" in *Die Kerkbode* 143(4), 3 February 1989, p. 11; CF Mathee, "Predikante en kapelane" in *Die Kerkbode* 142(9), p. 13. For a detailed review of the Chaplain General's viewpoints, see Naudé, p. 5. For an overview of the necessity of military chaplains in the SANDF, see *Sunday Tribune*, 7 April 1996, p. 18; D Laufs, "Almal moet die Woord hoor" in *Woord en Daad* 32(342), July 1992, p. 7; J du Randt, "Die kapelaan in die SAW" in *Commando* 20(5), May 1969, p. 37.

trying and dangerous circumstances with soldiers. Chaplains also provided guidance to the troops in respect of their adjustment to civilian life and the changed socio-political circumstances after demobilization. Young and enthusiastic NSM chaplains rendered a service that far exceeded their military commitments, bringing the Gospel to the local people of SWA/Namibia, thus making the country the most intensely evangelized area in southern Africa between 1970 and 1990. Long after the departure of the military forces, the ministry of the chaplains was still bearing fruit.

Like most other spheres of human existence, military chaplaincy does not escape the historic trends of a given time (i.e. the *Zeitgeist*). Despite the fact that it is proclaimed to be an institution that is under Divine, rather than human guidance, it should be evaluated in terms of the historic background of the given time frame.⁶⁰ Two distinct sentiments affected chaplaincy during the Namibian War of Independence. The more liberal English churches, under the auspices of the South African Council of Churches, initiated and supported pressure, both internationally and locally, to end the war and to bring a new dispensation to South Africa. In the nationalistic Afrikaans churches, the concept of the fighting padre linked the war to the Will of God in terms of the just war principle – in this case, the protection of Christianity against communism. The dominance of Afrikaans in the SADF and the SACHS resulted in a more subdued English voice in military chaplaincy. Although English chaplains experienced a sense of insecurity and a feeling of estrangement due to constant criticism, the debate on the role of military chaplains sensitized all chaplains to the Biblical requirements for their ministry, and the re-evaluation of military chaplaincy benefited the new dispensation after 1994.

From this study it is clear that, in combat, troops need the spiritual comfort of a pastor, counsellor and trusted friend: the chaplain. During the course of the war years from 1966 to 1989, military chaplaincy (like the SADF in general) gained a vast amount of experience and underwent structural changes. From 1990 onwards, military chaplaincy, as in the case of the SADF, had to adapt to peace-time conditions, as well as to the transformation challenges brought about by the dramatic socio-political changes that characterized the 1990s.

⁶⁰ This is illustrated by the shortage of Afrikaans-speaking chaplains during the two World Wars, when strong anti-British sentiments (owing to reminiscences of the concentration camps and the scorched-earth policy of the British forces during the Anglo-Boer War) prevented Afrikaans clergy from siding with Britain. Similarly, the anti-apartheid sentiments in the liberal English communities led to a shortage of English-speaking chaplains during the Namibian War of Independence.