

AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE INFLUENCE OF THE MILITARY ENVIRONMENT ON CHAPLAINCY, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE NAMIBIAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE, 1966-1989

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1. INTRODUCTION

Military chaplaincy is a Christian institution that has its roots in a resolution of the Council of Ratisbon in 742 when chaplains were assigned to armies for the first time. Chaplains were, however, forbidden to bear arms.³ Thus the Council accentuated the anomaly inherent to the nature of military chaplaincy: chaplains, who preach love and reconciliation, minister within a military framework which, during war, becomes synonymous with mutilation, death and conquest. This contradiction elicits questions on the character and quality of ministry in a military environment. Literature on modern military chaplaincy does not differentiate between the assignment of military chaplains and civilian clergy: both bring the Gospel and exercise pastoral care.⁴ In comparison, however, chaplains experience a much closer involvement and interdependency with their working environment than civilian clergy. They cannot observe military customs and military discipline from a distance. In the South African military context they become part of it as paid officers. During the Namibian War of Independence (1966-1989), commonly referred to as the Border War or the Bush War, this reciprocation resulted in a debate on the independence of the military chaplain's ministry, and a call for the demilitarization of chaplains.

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³ A Wessels and I Bredenkamp, "The development of military chaplaincy, with special reference to South Africa (up to 1966)", *Journal for Contemporary History* 34(1), April 2009, pp. 301-302.

⁴ See 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organisasie van militêre kapelane in die geskiedenis van die Christelike kerk, met besondere verwysing na Suid-Afrika* (unpublished D.Div.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of Pretoria, 1971), pp. 356-357; C Steenkamp, *Kapelaansbediening aan sportlui in die Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag* (unpublished M.Th. dissertation, University of the Orange Free State, 1992), pp. 87-90; G Latham, "Christianity in the Army", *Paratus* 24(1), January 1972, pp. 30-31; Leërkorrespondent, "Die veldprediker", *Commando* 15(4), April 1964, p. 23.

This article will address the role and influence of the military establishment on the ministry of chaplains to determine to what extent chaplains were in a position to minister without interference from the military command structures or from military traditions and customs during the Namibian War of Independence. Questions that will be answered, include amongst others: what was the status of chaplains with regard to the military command structures, what was the influence of military protocol on the position of chaplains; were chaplains free to minister according to theological principles or were they under pressure to adhere to military doctrines; were chaplains more dedicated to their commissions as military officers than to that of being clergymen; and was the call for demilitarization justified? This will be done against an historical background of the chaplain's position, rank and insignia in the South African military context to determine his status in the military system during the Namibian War of Independence, and to validate the particular arrangements between the military and the South African Chaplain Service (SACHS) within the specific timeframe. Viewpoints conveyed in oral history testimonies will be incorporated into the article to highlight the values and beliefs integral to military chaplaincy.

2. AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE POSITION, RANK AND IN-SIGNIA OF MILITARY CHAPLAINS IN SOUTH AFRICA, 1910-1989

2.1 From unification to the end of World War I, 1910-1918

Two aspects should be noted with regard to the historical position of chaplains in the South African military system. The first include the distinct trends that had characterized the ministry to the armed forces before the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910. These trends were embedded in the socio-cultural differences between the two main white language groups in South Africa (i.e. Afrikaans and English), and they influenced the development of South African military chaplaincy. In the former British colonies (i.e. the Cape Colony and Natal) the customs and traditions of the British military system were followed, and imperial and colonial chaplains were appointed to minister to the armed forces. In the former two Afrikaner or Boer republics (i.e. Transvaal and the Orange Free State) the armed forces consisted mostly of burghers (i.e. citizens), called up in accordance with commando laws to take up arms during periods of war. Local clergy tended to their spiritual needs, but not as chaplains; they might also have been active combatants. The concept of a structured military chaplaincy as it was known in the British imperial world did not exist in the Afrikaner communities. According to the orthodox Calvinist principles underlying the religious concepts of the Afrikaner society, it would have been regarded as a compromise of ecclesiastical loyalty and obedience to God, if clergy had signed up as paid officials. When the different military forces of the four British colonies were amalgamated into the Union

Defence Forces (UDF) in 1912, the Afrikaner custom was followed. No provision was made for chaplains, and the ministry to the armed forces became the responsibility of the local congregations within whose boundaries the military regiments fell. Clergy ministering to the military did so in their civilian capacity.⁵

The second aspect of importance is that military chaplaincy, as an inherent Christian institution, was brought to South Africa by the Europeans and, until the last decade of the twentieth century, black military chaplaincy in South Africa developed mainly as a secondary attachment to its white counterpart. Despite the fact that black viewpoints did not determine the developmental trends of military chaplaincy, it played an important role in the controversy surrounding the demilitarization of chaplains during the Namibian War of Independence.⁶

With the outbreak of World War I (1914-1918) and South Africa's commitment on the side of the Allied forces, various denominations requested the official appointment of chaplains to minister to the South African forces. The Minister of Defence, Gen. JC Smuts, consented and on 16 August 1914 the first chaplains were appointed to minister to the military community at Simon's Town in a part-time capacity. Their appointment is regarded as the official beginning of military chaplaincy in South Africa. A ministerial decision to appoint a full-time chaplain to each command resulted in the appointment of the first eight full-time chaplains by the end of September 1914. A series of appointments followed and during the course of World War I approximately 150 full-time and 41 part-time chaplains served the South African troops. Some denominations also sent clergy at their own expense to minister to the troops in German South West Africa (today Namibia).⁷

During the war years no formal South African chaplaincy structures were created. Chaplaincy matters resorted directly under the Ministry of Defence. In the appointment of chaplains, specific individuals were detached from their civilian clerical duties to minister to the military for a period (usually as long as the hostilities

⁵ Potgieter, pp. 181-182, 188; Wessels and Bredenkamp, p. 308; JH Lourens, "Veldpredikers van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog (1899-1902)", *Commando* 15(10), October 1964, p. 40; 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), p. 3; Die kapelaansvrou SAW, *Die kapelaansvrou* (Pretoria, 1982), p. 92. For an overview of Calvinism in South Africa, see M Wilson and L Thompson (eds), *The Oxford history of South Africa 2: South Africa 1870-1966* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 370-373. For a discussion of the principles of Calvinism, see amongst others, S Kistemaker, *Calvinism its history, principles and perspectives* (Grand Rapids, 1966), pp. 66-70.

⁶ See A Wessels and I Bredenkamp, "Military chaplaincy in the South African Defence Force during the Namibian War of Independence, 1966-1989", *Journal for Contemporary History* 34(1), April 2009, pp. 334-336.

⁷ Wessels and Bredenkamp, "The development of military chaplaincy, with special reference to South Africa (up to 1966)", pp. 309-310; Van Niekerk, pp. 3, 7-9, 103; Potgieter, pp. 182-184, 190, 193. According to Potgieter, approximately 95 full-time and 60 part-time chaplains served during World War I. The following denominations were represented: the Anglican Church, the three Afrikaans Reformed denominations, the Roman Catholic Church, the Presbyterian Church and the Wesleyan Church. Two Rabbis, a representative of the Salvation Army and a number of black missionaries also served.

lasted), and it was expected that they would return to their civilian congregations on completion of their duties. All chaplains appointed to the UDF formed part of the Citizen Force.⁸

British customs determined military chaplaincy in the UDF during World War I. Chaplains were appointed with the designation of Captain and were remunerated accordingly. They were addressed on their clerical titles and not on the military title. They had to wear uniform and their insignia was a black Malta Cross. They provided some of their own equipment and were non-combatants, wearing a white armband with the Red Cross emblem on it. All chaplains resorted under the Military Disciplinary Code.⁹

The ending of hostilities in 1918 resulted in the demobilization of the South African troops and the abolishment of most chaplaincy positions. An Anglican request for an official full-time military chaplaincy was declined. To the military authorities, chaplaincy was not an integral part of the South African military design. It was an institution added to the deployment of the troops for temporary periods only, and chaplains were viewed as spiritual workers detached from their congregations for a short while to serve on a spiritual basis in the military environment. The Anglican Church qualified this viewpoint as intolerable and an insult to all who desired the best interest of South Africa.¹⁰

2.2 The interim years, 1919-1939

In 1919 the Minister of Defence prohibited the further appointment of chaplains and he transferred his powers as head of the army (including chaplaincy) to the Head of the General Staff. By the end of 1919 all chaplaincy positions were abolished, except those of the Anglican Church and the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) at Roberts Heights (later Voortrekkerhoogte and today Thaba Tshwane). On 15 May 1920 the Minister of Defence announced that all chaplaincy posts would be terminated on 31 December 1920. Due to the numbers of the two congregations at Roberts Heights (the Anglican congregation consisted of 314 members and the Afrikaans congregation of 331 members) the Commanding Officer (CO) of Roberts Heights asked the Minister to retain these two positions. The minister consented and in October 1920 military chaplaincy became a permanent feature of the UDF. Part-time chaplains, representing the different denominations to which the military

⁸ Wessels and Bredenkamp, "The development of military chaplaincy, with special reference to South Africa (up to 1966)", p. 308; Potgieter, pp. 182-183; Van Niekerk, pp. 3-5.

⁹ Van Niekerk, pp. 5-6, 103, 337, 378-379; Potgieter, pp. 182-190; "Die eerste permanente veld-prediker", *Commando* 15(10), October 1964, pp. 39, 45. The four classes of rank in the British Army were: 1st class (Colonel), 2nd class (Lieutenant Colonel), 3rd class (Major) and 4th class (Captain). The highest rank UDF chaplains attained during World War I was a promotion to chaplain 3rd class (Major).

¹⁰ Wessels and Bredenkamp, "The development of military chaplaincy, with special reference to South Africa (up to 1966)", p. 311; Potgieter, p. 195; Van Niekerk, pp. 108-109.

belonged, were appointed at the other military bases. In February 1924 a system of honorary chaplains was implemented: chaplains were attached to regiments and called up with the regiment during training periods. Since 30 July 1935 civilian clergy served as relief chaplains during the recess period or absence of part-time or full-time chaplains. An extension of full-time chaplaincy only took place in 1938, shortly before the outbreak of World War II, when a third full-time chaplain from the DRC was appointed at the Tempe military base, Bloemfontein.¹¹

Military chaplaincy in the years between the two world wars was characterized by efforts on the side of the chaplains to shed the image of being a temporary addition to the military forces, and to gain official recognition as an indispensable part of the military structures. There were several concerns that needed attention. One was the relationship between the church and the UDF with regard to the appointment of chaplains. Both the Anglican Church and the DRC retained a voice in the selection and appointment processes of chaplains and this secured the church's influence in chaplaincy matters, despite the fact that the Minister of Defence reserved the right to accept or decline any nomination. Anglican chaplains were appointed according to the procedures used during World War I. The clerical authorities supplied a list of names from which the Bishop of Pretoria selected an appropriate candidate, who was then appointed by the UDF. In line with the British imperial ministry after the Anglo-Boer War of 1899 to 1902, the Anglican congregation at Roberts Heights functioned as an autonomous congregation.¹²

In the case of the DRC the situation was more complex. To overcome the problem of clergymen becoming mere paid officials and to guard their independence, canonical law required that a chaplain should also be ordained as a fellow-clergyman in the local DRC congregation, with the special assignment to minister to the military. If the chaplain was an ordained DRC clergyman, this system worked well, but problems arose in the case of Cpln JN Murray and Cpln AGO Coertse. They were missionaries and not formally trained as clergymen, and could therefore not serve as fellow-clergymen in a congregation. This meant that they were not entitled to any fringe benefits from the church's side nor as state officials, because they were not Permanent Force members. In 1938 an official agreement was reached between the DRC and the state with the appointment of Cpln (Rev.) GR van Rooyen as the

¹¹ Potgieter, pp. 195-199; Van Niekerk, pp. 108-110, 120, 338; Die kapelaansvroue SAW, p. 110; PL Moolman, *Eerwaarde John Neethling Murray sy bediening as pioniersending van die Waterberg en eerste permanente kapelaan van die Unieverdedigingsmag, 1894-1931* (unpublished M.Th., US., 1977), pp. 143-145; SW Burger, "Veldpredikers in die S.A. Weermag", *Commando* 15(10), October 1964, p. 37.

¹² Potgieter, pp. 199-200; Van Niekerk, pp. 121-122. An example of the church's influence was when, in 1947, the moderators of the DRC insisted that the UDF should honour the agreement between the church and the UDF with regard to the appointment of chaplains, and the Minister of Defence had to agree to this. This followed after a dispute between the DRC and the military authorities on the position of the successor of Cpln AGO Coertse.

third full-time chaplain at Tempe. According to this agreement, the church supplied the UDF with a list of candidates from which the UDF would shortlist three names. These names would be submitted to the congregation where the vacancy had arisen. The church body selected one candidate, who would then officially be called upon to minister as a chaplain. When appointed, the congregation would ordain him as a fellow-clergyman according to ecclesiastical customs, and he would then share in the benefits of fellow-clergymen. He also had to abide with both the Military Disciplinary Code and the Ecclesiastical Disciplinary Code. Cpln Coertse's position was resolved with the founding of a new autonomous DRC congregation, Voortrekkerhoogte, in April 1940, when he was officially ordained and the judicial canonical requirements with regard to his position were met. Until 1939 DRC chaplains also ministered to members of the Nederduits-Hervormde Church (NHC) and the Gereformeerde Church (GC). A commission of the three Afrikaans Reformed churches then decided that these two denominations would in future make use of part-time chaplains from their own denominations.¹³

Until 1935 chaplains were appointed as part of the Citizen Force with no option of joining the Permanent Force. They were seen as commissioned officers with the relative rank of combatant officers. The four classes of rank were in accordance with that of the British Army used by the UDF during World War I. Most chaplains were appointed as chaplain 4th class (Captain), but their remuneration was less than that of Permanent Force members on the same level. They had no pension benefits, and although they were entitled to medical benefits, their families were not. As during World War I, they continued to wear the UDF uniform with a black Malta Cross as insignia. The custom to address chaplains on their clerical titles was retained. The underlying principle was that chaplains were non-combatants and had no command authority. As preachers of the Word they should not be subordinate to officers, nor have subordinates within a rank structure, as the latter might interpret the rank as being inaccessible. Chaplains came with the authority of God and should be able to minister on an equal level to all military members.¹⁴

Chaplains experienced that they were regarded as outsiders, while their conditions of service was seen as inconsiderate and unjust. In 1931 Cpln Coertse, supported by Cpln (Rev.) ES Banfield of the Anglican Church, petitioned the Chief of the General Staff to appoint chaplains as Permanent Force members and to improve their conditions of service. He complained that the rank of chaplains was fictitious

¹³ Moolman, pp. 145-147; Burger, p. 37; Potgieter, pp. 199-204, 246; Van Niekerk, pp. 110, 114, 347; *Die Volksblad*, 21 June 1991, p. 5; C Janse van Rensburg, *Die plek en taak van die kapelaan in die Suid-Afrikaanse Polisie* (unpublished M.Th. thesis, University of South Africa, 1984), pp. 76-84.

¹⁴ Potgieter, pp. 204-209; Van Niekerk, pp. 121-122, 379; "The rank of the chaplain", *Paratus* 23(3), March 1971, p. 81; *The Argus*, 8 November 1983, p. 16. Cpln. Coertse designed a new distinctive chaplaincy badge with a hand holding a torch, encircled by a wreath, but it was eventually replaced by the British chaplaincy emblem. According to Potgieter the new design was introduced in 1935, but Van Niekerk set the date at 1933.

and that chaplains were placed in a humiliating position with regard to other military personnel. He regretted the subordinate position given to the church in the UDF. In 1936 a UDF Force Order was issued, stating that chaplains should be treated with the respect due to their rank and that COs should render them all assistance necessary to carry out their duties. Nothing should be allowed to interfere with their image as the friend and advisor of all ranks. Only in September 1938 did the Minister of Defence change the chaplaincy posts at Roberts Heights to full-time positions in the Permanent Force, with improved conditions of service. The complaint by chaplains that their outsider status in the military set-up was unacceptable and the viewpoint that they should be a fully integrated and indispensable part of the military structures were in stark contrast to the demand for demilitarization during the Namibian War of Independence.¹⁵

2.3 World War II, 1939-1945

With the outbreak of World War II in September 1939, South Africa again participated on the side of the Allies. Although ill-prepared for the ministry to thousands of troops, the UDF now had a military foundation in the persons of the three Permanent Force chaplains from which the ministry to the troops in East and North Africa and in Italy could be organized. Similar to World War I, the different denominations took the first step to secure ministry to the troops, requesting the appointment of military chaplains. During the first months of combat, most denominations appointed individuals or councils to liaise with the UDF on the matter of military chaplaincy. Recruitment was done in denominational context on a pro-rata basis. Appointments were temporary as part of the Active Civil Force, and it was stipulated that all chaplains would be demobilized with the ending of hostilities. A total of 492 chaplains served the UDF during World War II; 247 of these were part-time chaplains.¹⁶

During the war years, chaplaincy was constituted as a separate branch under the Adjutant General and a system of Principal Chaplains (with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, 2nd class) and Camp (later Senior) Chaplains (with the rank of Major, 3rd class) was implemented. The Principal Chaplains took responsibility for the administration and coordination of chaplaincy services in denominational context. Cpln Coertse and Cpln (Rev.) RF Strathern for the DRC and the Anglican Church respectively, were Permanent Force members. The other three, Cpln (Rev.) JA Gurney for the Free Churches, Cpln (Rev.) JE McGarity for the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) and Rabbi I Levinson for the Jewish faith, were appointed as members of the Active Citizen Force. A Principal Chaplain was also appointed at the war front in the

¹⁵ Potgieter, pp. 205-206, 209, 211; Van Niekerk, pp. 114-116, 118-122; JA Gurney, "Development of DD transport for chaplains", *Paratus* 23(12), December 1971, p. 31. The latter gives a humorous view of the "dispensable" position of chaplains.

¹⁶ Potgieter, pp. 211-212, 214-215; Van Niekerk, pp. 123, 162-163.

person of Cpln (Rev.) GR van Rooyen, the only Permanent Force chaplain in North Africa. On his return to the Union, he was succeeded by Cpln (Rev.) GHS Runge. Chaplains' headquarters was opened at Voortrekkerhoogte and in January 1941, a Staff Officer, Maj. RA Polkinghorne, was appointed to liaise with the chaplains on military matters.¹⁷

During the war years, the Principal Chaplains, in collaboration with the relevant church bodies, provided the military authorities with the names of candidates who had been ecclesiastically approved and who were deemed physically fit. Each successful candidate had to sign a declaration that his appointment was approved by his denomination and that he was not against state policies. He was then either placed at a military base or sent to the war front. Until the middle of 1940 chaplains were appointed as Lieutenant (5th class) with the temporary rank of Captain (4th class). The salary was therefore that of a lieutenant. After a petition to the Department of Defence, chaplains were appointed as Captain (4th class) and remunerated accordingly. Chaplains serving at the war front were allowed to remove their rank insignia as it was experienced as a hindrance to their ministry. Wearing no rank placed them in a position where they could interact with all ranks on an equal basis, without fear of being treated as a subordinate. Black chaplains wore the same insignia, but were paid the salary of a warrant officer. Part-time chaplains had no rank and did not receive a uniform allowance, although they were allowed to wear uniform while serving in the military camps. Chaplains did not wear clerical insignia, except for the English-speaking chaplains who were identified by their collars. Chaplains were non-combatants and did not carry weapons. They were addressed on their clerical titles.¹⁸

Despite the Calvinist view that Christians are all equal and that one chaplain cannot be in command of another chaplain, the absence of a command structure and clearly defined communication lines hampered the effectiveness of the chaplaincy services. All the Principal Chaplains were equal in status and each could only take decisions with regard to his own denomination. The lack of a chaplaincy structure also hampered the effective utilization of manpower and resources and resulted in duplication on denominational lines. The Adjutant General, with no formal religious background, often had to take decisions usually made by a Chaplain General with ministry experience. In October 1940 the Anglican Church suggested once more that a chaplaincy structure with a Chaplain General at the head should be constituted, but the suggestion was not heeded. In 1942 Cpln (Rev.) CF Miles-Cadman of the Anglican Church wrote a memorandum to the Chief of the General Staff, complaining about

¹⁷ Potgieter, pp. 216-218; Van Niekerk, pp. 123-125, 128, 148; "Padre JA Gurney", *Paratus* 23(12), December 1972, p. 55.

¹⁸ "Padre JA Gurney", p. 55; Potgieter, pp. 220-222; Van Niekerk, pp. 123, 126, 163, 379-380; *The Argus*, 8 November 1983, p. 16.

the official viewpoint on chaplaincy. He stated that, while all other support services were given full and absolute rank, chaplains received only relative rank. He pointed out that the allocation of offices and personnel to further ministry, depended on the goodwill of the respective COs; that the lack of transport provision left chaplains at the mercy of Transport Officers; and that, in comparison with the other sectors, chaplains were discriminated against with regard to rank and remuneration. It was clear that the official viewpoint did not change from that held during World War I. Chaplains were still regarded as outsiders and dispensable. In September 1942 the Adjutant General declared at a meeting of Principal Chaplains that chaplains were “only of sentimental value”.¹⁹

2.4 In the aftermath of World War II, 1946-1966

Most chaplains were demobilized at the beginning of 1946. After World War II, the UDF started a process to place the Permanent Force on a surer foot and this also involved chaplaincy matters. On 8 October 1946 chaplains gained their independence when a separate unit, the Corps of Chaplains, was created directly under the Chief of the General Staff. For the first time, chaplains (and the church) had direct access to the supreme military command. The number of Permanent Force chaplains was increased and in 1949, the Minister of Defence, Adv. FC Erasmus, appointed Cpln (Rev.) Miles-Cadman as Deputy Chaplain General to liaise with the Chief of the General Staff on chaplaincy matters. He fulfilled the need for a Chaplain General, but when he retired in May 1954, the position was abolished.²⁰

Since 1952 the British system of classes was done away with and chaplains were ranked according to the general ranking system of the UDF. In 1957 the UDF was renamed the South African Defence Force (SADF) and chaplaincy matters shifted once more to the highest command. For a short while Principal Chaplains again had direct access to the Commandant General, but in 1958 this regulation was adjusted and chaplaincy matters resorted back to the Adjutant General.²¹

Changes to the chaplain's uniform, insignia and rank were discussed, but not always implemented. At a conference held during April 1957 it was decided that all chaplains will receive the status of Colonel. An order, issued on 15 February 1963, stated that COs should support chaplains in all possible ways to facilitate free ministry, and that chaplains should receive the respect due to the rank of Colonel.

¹⁹ Van Niekerk, pp. 126-136.

²⁰ Potgieter, pp. 224-227; Van Niekerk, pp. 171-172; Die kapelaansvrou SAW, pp. 93-94, 110; JA van Zyl, "Die kapelaansdiens in die SA Weermag", *Paratus* 25(2), February 1974, pp. 2-3. Only one Permanent Force chaplain, Cpln Strathern of the Anglican Church, was still serving in 1946.

²¹ Potgieter, pp. 228-229; Die kapelaansvrou SAW, pp. 93, 111; Van Niekerk, p. 179.

The relevance and integration of chaplaincy in the South African military design was now recognized.²²

2.5 The Namibian War of Independence, 1966-1989

The implementation of a system of compulsory military training necessitated the restructuring and extension of all military systems to ensure purposeful utilization of resources. On 1 July 1966 the SADF constituted a new section, the Division for Physical and Spiritual Wellness, to care for the well-being of the troops. It resorted under the Chief of the Defence Force Administration with three Staff Officers: one for chaplaincy and welfare, one for sport and physical training, and one for recreation. Cpln (Rev.) JA van Zyl took responsibility for the organization of chaplaincy and welfare, but soon after his appointment, he requested the Minister of Defence to separate the two sections. The request was based on the Calvinist principle that the church should never be in a subordinate position to any other division or section. The Minister consented and from 5 January 1968 the Corps of Chaplains became an independent directorate with three branches (Army, Air Force, Navy). Cpln (Rev.) Van Zyl was the first Director of Chaplains.²³

In 1970 the Corps of Chaplains was restructured as an independent institution and henceforth called the South African Chaplain Service (SACHS), under the Commandant General of the SADF. Cpln (Rev.) Van Zyl's designation changed to that of Chaplain General, with the rank of Brigadier. He was entitled to attend meetings of the Supreme Command and chaplains once more had direct contact with the highest military authority. In April 1973 the SACHS received full autonomy with its own headquarters. Cpln (Rev.) Van Zyl's rank was upgraded to that of Major General and a Deputy Chaplain General was appointed. At a meeting of Staff Officers in 1973, Cpln (Rev.) Van Zyl declared this an historic moment: the church was finally occupying its rightful position in the SADF in accordance with the Calvinist principle that Christianity should govern all spheres of life, including the military.²⁴

Chaplains had to be ordained by their respective denominations, medically fit and a South African citizen with security clearance. There was no probation period and until 1971, chaplains did not receive formal training. A mentor system was used and newly-appointed chaplains were placed with more experienced chaplains. In line with chaplaincy services abroad, a training centre for South African chaplains was inaugurated in 1974. The Staff Officer for Training visited all military units annually

²² Van Niekerk, p. 19; Potgieter, pp. 224-230.

²³ Potgieter, pp. 231-233; Van Zyl, p. 3; Van Niekerk, pp. 180-181; "Genl.-maj. (Ds.) J.A. van Zyl", *In Hoc Signo* 9(1), June 1983, p. 4; "Ds A de V. Visser tree af na 14 jaar as kapelaan", Supplement, *Paratus* 27(11) November 1976, p. xiv.

²⁴ Potgieter, pp. 236-237; Van Niekerk, pp. 185-188; Van Zyl, p. 3; "Genl.-maj. (Ds.) J.A. van Zyl", pp. 4-5; Die kapelaansvroue SAW, p. 111; "Die korps van kapelane", *Paratus* 22(10), October 1970, p. 71; *The Argus*, 8 November 1983, p. 16.

to give chaplains the opportunity to voice problems and deficiencies. Chaplains remained part of the denominational structures and attended synods. In the case of Anglican chaplains, they were licensed by the Bishop of the diocese where they were stationed. The requirement that DRC chaplains should also be a minister in a local congregation was still adhered to.²⁵

Chaplains wore the uniform of the branch to which they were assigned. Discussions on the matter of rank and insignia led to a number of decisions that were implemented on 1 April 1968. All military ranks for chaplains were abolished, as this practice was contrary to canonical requirements for clergy and it hampered the ministry to all members of the SADF, irrespective of their status and position. The term "chaplain" and (in Afrikaans) "kapelaan" (replacing the Afrikaans term "veldprediker") was recognized as a designation, indicating the unique position of the chaplain in the military unit. All chaplains were equal and they were entitled to the salute and protocol of a Colonel. They were distinguished by a Christ monogram on a purple background. Chaplains were addressed on their clerical titles. Their salaries were competitive and their benefits were in accordance with the rest of the military forces. Although chaplains could be transferred in peace-time, it happened with recognition of personal circumstances and with the consent of the congregation. Similar to international customs, chaplains had no choice but to accompany the military unit to which they were allocated during combat periods. As far as it was practical, there were no restrictions on their movements between the troops, even during cross-border operations. On 21 March 1969 a circular was sent out, stating that COs would only have precedence to chaplains at commanding occasions. This was altered on 2 February 1970 when it was stipulated that the chaplain was equal to the CO at all times.²⁶

The custom to minister in denominational context was retained. The principle was that each soldier had the prerogative to be ministered to according to the beliefs and customs of his own denomination. If no Permanent Force chaplain for a specific denomination was available, a local preacher from that denomination ministered in a part-time capacity. Denominational commissions could discuss relevant clerical matters with the Chaplain General and a chaplain from each denomination served as liaison officer. Logistics sometimes determined that similar denominations were grouped together; i.e. all Afrikaans churches and all English churches. During border

²⁵ Potgieter, pp. 322-323, 327; Van Niekerk, pp. 188-189, 215; Die kapelaansvroue SAW, pp. 112, 118-119; CF Matthee, "Kapelane is volkome 'kerkgebonde'", *Die Kerkbode* 143(4), 3 February 1989, p. 11; "Kapelane se ideaal verwesenlik", Supplement, *Paratus* 27(6), June 1976, p. iv; C Naudé, "Die kerk se werk in die SAW", *Die Kerkbode* 145(3), 20 July 1990, p. 3; *Die Volksblad*, 21 June 1991, p. 5.

²⁶ Potgieter, pp. 231-236, 351; Van Niekerk, pp. 181-182; Naudé, p. 3; "Genl.-maj. (Ds.) J.A. van Zyl", pp. 4-5; "The rank of the chaplain", *Paratus* 23(3), March 1971, p. 81; B de Klerk, "Die dienspligtige en die kapelaansdiens van die SAW", *Die Kerkblad* 87(2760), 28 January 1987, p. 10; *The Argus*, 8 November, 1983, p. 16.

duty it often happened that one chaplain was responsible for the preaching to and pastoral care of all in the military unit and, with the consent of all denominations, they then refrained from using specific denominational customs or terms. In the military units the chaplain's office was within convenient reach of all the troops. If a chaplain ministered to more than one unit, he had specific consultation hours. In big military units one of the chaplains was appointed to liaise with the CO, the troops and the other chaplains.²⁷

Each denomination had its own place of worship and gathering. Where chaplains were more permanently deployed, they had a clerk or typist at their disposal. If there were families, the chaplain functioned much the same as in a congregation. Preference was given to individual contact rather than to group ministry. A chaplain's period, resembling the "Padre's Hour" of World War II, was used to discuss a variety of relevant topics. Similar to international customs, chaplains were provided with literature designed by a Literature Commission, but they were allowed to use the spiritual literature from their own denominations as well. The Literature Commission consisted of chaplains, and each language group had its own commission. Every second year topical issues and administrative matters were discussed at the chaplains' conferences.²⁸

In 1978 the responsibility of the SACHS in the SADF was demarcated as the official channel through which chaplains were able to exercise all religious and ecclesiastical tasks within the SADF. Cpln (Rev.) Van Zyl emphasized the following Biblical principles with regard to the task of the SACHS: the spiritual welfare of the troops was the responsibility of the Church; it could never become the task of the SADF. As such the SACHS was the voice of the Church in the SADF and it brought pastoral care to the lowest level of the SADF. According to the Calvinist belief that the Church is a Divine institution, and not humanly invented, it was imperative that the Church should resort under the highest authority in the Defence Force and that it should not take a subordinate position in its relation to other military structures. Since the military forces comprise God's general grace to society and the church God's particular grace, the church comes to the military with the authority of God; and there is no higher authority. This power is a spiritual power and it does not desire to move on the level or terrain of any other power. The status of chaplains, with reference to rank, showed their salute protocol and their place in the military

²⁷ Potgieter, pp. 326-327; Van Niekerk, pp. 178-179; De Klerk, p. 10; Naudé, p. 3; *The Argus*, 8 November 1983, p. 16; *Die Volksblad*, 21 June 1991, p. 5.

²⁸ Potgieter, pp. 321-332, 335; Van Zyl, p. 3; Van Niekerk, p. 203; De Klerk, p. 10; *The Argus*, 8 November 1983, p. 16; "New chaplains: personal contact urged", *Paratus* 36(3), March 1985, p. 22; "Literature is their business", *In Hoc Signo* 9(2), September 1983, p. 7.

structures, but it did not place them in a rank structure, because it is impossible for a person of God to be in a subordinate position to other people.²⁹

3. THE REQUEST FOR DEMILITARIZATION

The Namibian War of Independence started in 1966 as a low intensity insurgency of the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) across the northern border of South West Africa (SWA, today Namibia). SWAPO's aim was to destabilize the South African administration of SWA through acts of terrorism. When the SADF took responsibility for the protection of the border in 1974, military chaplaincy in South Africa moved from a position of outsider and dispensable status to one where chaplains were deemed equal in status to all military officers during ministry, and where they formed an integral part of the deployment of the SADF forces. In due course, the clashes with SWAPO developed into a full-scale (anti-)guerrilla war, which also spilled over into Angola.

In the global context, the Namibian War of Independence became part of Africa's quest against European colonialism and the denouncement of the system of apartheid in South Africa. Consequently, many in the multiracial English denominations supported SWAPO's fight against the SADF as part of the black liberation struggle. The SADF was seen as an instrument used to retain the *status quo* and it was declared an unwanted occupational force in SWA. Antagonism against the SADF deepened during the 1980s when the SADF was deployed in the local townships during riots, and the viewpoint emerged that the presence of military chaplains in the SADF implied the church's blessing and sanctioning of the SADF and of the policy of apartheid. This resulted in the negation of all aspects of military chaplaincy: the payment of chaplains by the SADF, their training in the use of weapons, their subjection to the Military Discipline Code, the security clearance and the wearing of uniforms. According to Rev. C Begbie of the Methodist Church uniforms indicated identification with the hateful system of apartheid, and Rev. D Katane wanted to know what chaplains were defending other than apartheid and discriminatory laws? Father B van Rensburg of the RCC declared that the one paying the salary becomes the master, and according to the National Catholic Federation of Students military jurisdiction over chaplains damaged the credibility of the church in the eyes of those who suffered oppression at the hands of the Army. Newspapers reported that "troopie chaplains" were trained to kill in the SADF.³⁰

²⁹ Potgieter, pp. 340-345, 350-351; Van Niekerk, pp. 185-186, 190; "Genl.-maj. (Ds.) J.A. van Zyl", pp. 4-5; "Van die Kapelaan-Generaal", *In Hoc Signo* 6(3), November 1981, p. 2.

³⁰ *Evening Post*, 31 January 1983, p. 2; *Sunday Tribune*, 15 September 1985, p. 19; *The Sowetan*, 25 November 1982, p. 8; *The Star*, 27 June 1978, p. 6, 27 June 1979, p. 3 and 15 October 1985, p. 15; *The Citizen*, 16 May 1984, p. 13 and 12 October 1985, p. 8; *The Cape Times*, 9 July, 1985, p. 2 and 11 July 1985, p. 4; *The Sunday Star*, 15 September 1985, p. 4; *Die Vaderland*, 9 January 1979, p. 1; I van der Linde, "Die weermag, die kerk en lensiesop", *Insig*, October 1989, p. 49.

In the late 1970s, these sentiments led to a suggestion by the Methodist Church and the RCC that military chaplains should be demilitarized and that they should take responsibility for the spiritual and pastoral care of the soldiers as civilian clergy. With regard to ministry in the operational area, it was suggested that a pool of ministers should be selected to minister on a roster basis for limited periods. Their remuneration would have been the responsibility of the SADF, while all other clergy would be paid by their respective denominations. During the next decade the issue was hotly debated at ecclesiastical meetings, public forums and in the press. The Anglican Church became the chief champion of demilitarization and a rift developed between those who condemned military chaplaincy and those who supported it.³¹

In 1985 the *Natal Mercury* stated that the attitude within the Anglican Church was hardening and that questions were asked on the principle of a just war. At a synod meeting in Pietermaritzburg, a motion was forwarded that chaplains would need the consent of the Bishop of the diocese within whose territory they were ministering, if they were not licensed in that diocese. This meant that, on deployment in the operational area, chaplains would need the consent of the Bishop of Namibia to minister in the area. The latter, Bishop James Kauluma, made it clear that he would refuse permission, as the SADF was a foreign army and the right arm of an oppressor. Members of the Anglican Church would thus have been without spiritual and pastoral care in the operational area. The motion was overturned at the last minute, but it elicited a debate on whether the prime function of the church (while objecting to an unfair society) was to minister to all or to lead the way to confrontation and conflict. Archdeacon the Rev. TV Mentz commented on the Anglican Synod in Pietermaritzburg and stated that he was astounded that the Synod had been obsessed with political issues and had forgotten the right of every Anglican to be served according to his or her spiritual needs. Other delegates declared that the Synod had become a political platform and that it was being hijacked by the Left. This discord was not confined to the Anglican Church. Discussions on military chaplaincy became the most sensitive issue in English churches and English chaplains often experienced hostility at the hands of fellow-clergy. The Presbyterian Church rejected the demilitarization of chaplains, but they asked for a full investigation into military chaplaincy. RCC priests, like Father Van Rensburg, drew public attention to the matter of demilitarization by fasting.³²

³¹ Wessels and Bredenkamp, "Military chaplaincy in the South African Defence Force during the Namibian War of Independence, 1966-1989", p. 335; *Sunday Tribune*, 17 July 1983, p. 20; *Sunday Times*, 29 September 1985, p. 3; *The Citizen*, 11 July 1985, p. 13 and 13 July 1985, p. 5; *The Cape Times*, 22 February 1978, p. 9 and 12 July 1985, p. 8; *The Natal Mercury*, 13 July 1985, p. 15.

³² *The Cape Times*, 25 November 1982, p. 5, 9 July 1985, p. 2, 11 October 1985, p. 7 and 12 July 1985, p. 8; *The Natal Mercury*, 16 May 1984, p. 20 and 10 July 1985, p. 10; *Daily Dispatch*, 24 November 1982, p. 21; *The Sunday Times*, 14 July 1985, p. 9; *Sunday Star*, 14 July 1985, p. 14; *Sunday Tribune*, 17 July 1978, p. 20; *Die Burger*, 12 October 1985, p. 9; *The Star*, 12 July 1985, p. 11.

English chaplains did not share the viewpoint that they were sanctioning apartheid. They defended their positions within the SADF, stating that they were aware of their responsibilities and that they had a calling to minister to all members of the church, irrespective of the circumstances. They were of the opinion that civilian status would hamper their ministry as they would not be able to accompany troops during combat operations. They did not experience the uniform as identification with the SADF, but as identification with the people whom they served. In November 1982, Cpln (Rev.) JM Daines addressed the triennial synod of the Anglican Church in Port Elizabeth in a debate on the role of the army chaplain. He defended military chaplaincy, stating that chaplains had complete freedom when preaching, and that they had received nothing but encouragement from the Chaplain General. He pointed out that chaplains were appointed by the SADF on the recommendation of the church and that they had to abide with ecclesiastical requirements before taking up their positions as chaplains in the SADF. At a Chaplains' Conference in July 1985 all chaplains present issued a declaration in which they explained the values and beliefs integral to the SACHS. They unanimously stated 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.³³

In the late 1980s the role of chaplains in the SADF and their participation in the Namibian War of Independence were also debated in the Afrikaans denominations. Two DRC clergy who had finished their national service as chaplains in the SADF, M Maree and L Erasmus, stated that the entwinement of chaplaincy and the military establishment eroded the pastoral relationship with the troops. They were of the opinion that the military structures prevented objectivity on the side of the chaplains. They criticized the wearing of uniforms as a symbol of autocratic power structures and stated that, coupled with the ranking system it stood in the way of reconciliation in the South African society. They referred to the dual role of military chaplains (being both clergy and soldiers) as the "schizophrenia" of chaplains.³⁴

A formal request for the demilitarization of chaplains was never put to the Chaplain General's office, but a spokesperson for the latter commented on the logistics of such a suggestion. The practical mandate of military chaplaincy arose from the special demands which had placed members of the SADF beyond the reach of normal ministry, such as operational mobility and life-threatening situa-

³³ "Persverklaring/ Press Release", *In Hoc Signo* 9(3), December 1983, p. 3; *The Cape Times*, 25 November 1982, p. 5; *Die Burger*, 24 November 1982, p. 11 and 23 November 1985, p. 11; *Sunday Tribune*, 26 March 1978, p. 18 and 17 July 1983, p. 20; *The Star*, 25 November 1985, p. 19 and 30 September 1986, p. 9; "From the Chaplain General: declaration at Chaplains' Conference on 21 Nov 1985", *In Hoc Signo* 12(1), January 1986, pp. 1-3.

³⁴ *Rapport*, 24 June 1990, p. 3; *Vrye Weekblad*, 6 July 1990, p. 3.

tions. By the time chaplains were sent to the operational area, they had undergone a certain amount of military training. It would have been difficult to give piecemeal training to members of a pool of clergymen. Civilian clergy, untrained in military operations, might endanger their own lives and that of others during combat situations. Furthermore, the SADF could not provide protection for civilian clergy when it needed all its manpower for military operations. He also pointed out that training in the use of weapons was optional. In the case of the Seventh Day Adventists the SACHS had an agreement with their church bodies which exempted them from weapons-training. Civilian clergy would also have had to deal with numerous security requirements, like filling in forms, before being able to continue with their task. Being part of the military structures ensured an open door at all times.³⁵

In 1988, the Chaplain General, Cpln (Rev.) C Naudé, answered the critique in a letter to *Die Kerkbode*, emphasizing that the only objective of the SACHS was to ensure that all soldiers were spiritually cared for. He referred to the frustration of part-time chaplains who complained that they were always treated as outsiders and that troops often accused them of not understanding them. Both Cpln (Rev.) Van Zyl and Cpln (Rev.) CF Matthee, Director Chaplaincy, corroborated Cpln (Rev.) Naudé's explanation of the mission of the SACHS in letters to newspapers and journals. Cpln (Rev.) Van Zyl stated that the SACHS had always followed an open door policy with regard to ecclesiastical doubts and grievances. Cpln (Rev.) Matthee emphasized that chaplains were still part of canonical structures. As far as "his master's voice" was concerned, he pointed out that the different denominations were not in a position to pay the salaries of chaplains. He referred to the position of theological professors and ordinary clergy, who were paid by the respective universities and church bodies, without the accusation that they were renouncing their ecclesiastical loyalty and becoming conducive to these institutions.³⁶

It is clear that at the root of the request for demilitarization was not an ecclesiastical concern over the influence of the military establishment on the ministry by chaplains, but the socio-political viewpoint that the SADF was an instrument to ensure continued white power in southern Africa. Adherence to the request would have meant a return to the situation of 1912 when the spiritual care of the military

³⁵ *The Cape Times*, 22 February 1978, p. 9; *Sunday Tribune*, 15 September 1985, p. 19 and 7 April 1996, p. 18; *Beeld*, 29 August 1997, p. 8; D Laufs, "Almal moet die Woord hoor", *Woord en Daad* 32(342), July 1992, p. 7; J du Randt, "Die kapelaan in die SAW", *Commando* 20(5), May 1969, p. 37; G Kruger, "Hy bring die evangelie in wonderlike eenvoud", *Die Kerkbode* 136(5), 1 February 1984, p. 6; "In depth article: the chaplain in uniform", *In Hoc Signo* 14(1), May 1988, pp. 8-9.

³⁶ Naudé, p. 3; *Beeld*, 29 August 1997, p. 8; CF Matthee, "Kapelane is volkome 'kerkgebonde'", *Die Kerkbode* 143(4), 3 February 1989, p. 11; CF Matthee, "Predikante en kapelane", *Die Kerkbode* 142(9), p. 13; D Laufs, "Almal moet die Woord hoor", *Woord en Daad* 32(342), July 1992, p. 7; J du Randt, "Die kapelaan in die SAW", *Commando* 20(5), May 1969, p. 37; G Kruger, "Hy bring die evangelie in wonderlike eenvoud", *Die Kerkbode* 136(5), 1 February 1984, p. 6; "In depth article: the chaplain in uniform", *In Hoc Signo* 14(1), May 1988, pp. 8-9.

was the task of civilian clergy; a situation defined by the Anglican Church as a disregard for religion on the side of the authorities.

4. PERSONAL REMINISCENCES OF CHAPLAINS ON THE ROLE OF MILITARY STRUCTURES AND COMMAND POSITIONS

The question now arises: how did chaplains, who ministered in the SADF during the Namibian War of Independence, experience the influence of the military establishment on their ministry and what were the underlying perspectives and values which determined ministry in the SACHS? To answer these questions interviews were conducted with both English and Afrikaans chaplains and with the command structure of the SACHS.³⁷

With regard to the influence of the military structures on the ministry by chaplains, all the respondents indicated that there were no rigid requirements or supervision as far as their ministry was concerned. They were given the freedom to bring the Gospel according to the doctrines and beliefs of their respective denominations. This was in line with the viewpoints expressed during the 1980s by the command structure of the SACHS in the press and by Cpl (Rev.) Daines at the triennial synod of the Anglican Church in Port Elizabeth. Despite the fact that Cpln (Rev.) G van der Watt became estranged from the military design due to its macho-chauvinistic culture, he never experienced that the command structures scrutinised his ministry.³⁸ This did not imply an absence of authority. Cpln (Rev.) DA Smit stated that “the freedom to think independently was a given. In training bases, chaplains could preach to and teach the members of their own denominations in church services and church periods whatever fell in the ambit of their denomination’s doctrine and teaching. But the authorities displayed their disapproval when chaplains taught, or said something in the chaplain’s periods, that were contrary to military doctrines or traditions.”³⁹

³⁷ Also see A Wessels and I Bredenkamp, "Suid-Afrikaanse kapelane in 'n era van militêre konflik, 1966-1989: enkele persoonlike ervarings en perspektiewe", *Journal for Contemporary History* 34(1), April 2009, pp. 339-360.

³⁸ Interview: I Bredenkamp – G van der Watt, 15 May 2008. Col (Rev. - at present Dr) G van der Watt reported for conscription in 1981, having completed his theological studies. After his basic training, he was stationed at Okahandja, a multi-ethnic/multicultural training basis for the South West African Territorial Force. He also ministered to the local coloured congregation at Veddersdal. After six months he took up an appointment as Permanent Force chaplain at the military base in Bethlehem, where he served for four years. He then resigned from the SADF. As Permanent Force chaplain he also visited Ondangwa and the Caprivi during border duty.

³⁹ DA Smit–I Bredenkamp, 17 July 2008 (e-mail). Col (Rev.) DA Smit served for 17 years as a chaplain in the SACHS, from December 1982 until his retirement in December 1999. He served as the unit chaplain in Bloemfontein at 1 SA Infantry Battalion, OFS Command for six years and thereafter at the Headquarters, OFS Command for five years. The last six years of his ministry he served as unit chaplain at the Headquarters, Natal Command, Durban.

Chaplains received literature on topics that were to be discussed during these periods, but it became clear during the interviews that chaplains incorporated their own views and sometimes even disregarded the forwarded literature altogether. Although chaplains had a free hand in bringing the Gospel, the interviews revealed that the CO's attitude determined the quality of ministry. Cpln (Rev.) Thornley testified that "the support of the captain gave chaplains free rein in the unit and we were able to get on with our work as we saw fit. [...] I had a wonderful commanding officer who assisted me in every way he could."⁴⁰

Where the opportunities for ministry were not offered, it was the responsibility of the chaplain to negotiate it with the CO.⁴¹ None of the respondents recalled a negative attitude on the side of the command structures, but Cpln (Rev.) F Celliers remembered one of his colleagues who, during border duty, had to sit outside the gate of a border camp because the CO refused to give permission for his entrance. The interviews confirmed that incidents like these were exceptional. Cpln (Rev.) Cilliers also referred to the attitude of some Permanent Force members which, although not forthright, indicated that "our problems started when we allowed social workers and chaplains into the system".⁴² Cpln (Rev.) Williams mentioned that this negative attitude was restricted to officers of the lower ranks. He emphasized that there were many COs who really cared for their troops and for whom he had the utmost respect because of their professionalism and integrity. It seemed as if this alienation between chaplains and junior officers resulted from the viewpoint in some military circles that the chaplain did not deserve his rank.⁴³ The respondents were of the opinion that the structure and the communication channels of the SACHS and the SADF made it easier to deal with problems that needed reference to, for instance, social welfare. Chaplains were able to influence moral issues and they often guided the COs on these. Both Cpln (Rev.) Thornley and Cpln (Rev.) Williams related how

⁴⁰ Interview: A Wessels–R Thornley, 12 March 2008; R Thornley–I Bredenkamp, 13 June 2008 (e-mail). Capt. (Rev.) Thornley completed his conscription of nine months in 1963 and afterwards served for 14 years as an instructor in the South African Navy, before he resigned to study theology. He served as a Methodist chaplain at the Military Academy, Saldanha Bay, but asked to be transferred to SAS Saldanha, while still ministering at the Academy and at the Air Force base at Langebaan as well. In 1992 his ministry shifted to Simon's Town until his retirement in 2003.

⁴¹ DA Smit–I Bredenkamp, 17 July 2008 (e-mail).

⁴² Interview: I Bredenkamp–F Celliers, 31 July 2008 (telephone). Col (Rev.) Celliers completed his conscription at 3 SA Infantry Battalion, Potchefstroom in 1974 and participated in the first cross-border operation into Angola. Since 1979 he served as a Methodist part-time chaplain and in 1982 he was appointed as Permanent Force chaplain at Voortrekkerhoogte. In 1984 he became a member of the South African Medical Corps chaplaincy at 1 Military Hospital and in 1989 he was transferred to the Department of Correctional Services.

⁴³ Interview: I Bredenkamp–DM Williams, 11 Augustus 2008 (telephone). Col (Rev.) Williams completed his conscription at Oudtshoorn in 1965. There was no Permanent Force chaplain available during this time and this inspired him to study theology. He was appointed as Methodist chaplain in the Air Force, Pretoria in 1979. His first operational service period was in Zimbabwe. During the following 11 years he did border service on a regular basis and also accompanied the Specialist Forces (Recces) during military operations.

they used their chaplain's status to prevent exploitation of the troops. Cpln (Rev) Thornley stated: "[...] we could not allow these young men to be bullied or abused." After an incident in which a soldier died of exhaustion, Cpln (Rev.) Williams started exercising with the troops.⁴⁴

As far as the military environment was concerned, the respondents experienced that the troops were often suspicious of clergy in uniform and they had to win the confidence of the troops before attaining success in their ministry. Being part of the military set-up and sharing the military lifestyle made it easier. Cpln (Rev.) Williams mentioned that sharing the experiences of the soldiers, especially during cross-border operations, enhanced his ministry and facilitated an understanding for the need of the soldier.⁴⁵ Cpln (Rev.) WS Boshoff mentioned that some of the officers would only visit him for a conversation on spiritual matters or otherwise after he had accompanied them during a military operation.⁴⁶ Despite the vision of the SACHS, based on a close association and integration between the chaplains and the troops, the respondents experienced that there was an emotional barrier that the troops preferred the chaplain should not overstep. Except when they were deployed during specific cross-border operations, chaplains stayed in the camps during border duty. Superstition foreshadowed the presence of a chaplain during reconnoitring expeditions as a bad omen. In the border towns, rank often led to suspicion and stress in the relations between officers. Although chaplains did not work with the officers as much as with the troops, the officers trusted and confided in the chaplain over time. As far as the chaplain's own rank was concerned, some respondents experienced it as negative, creating barriers in the ministry, while others were of the opinion that it opened doors to get tasks done. They were unanimous that the guideline was to prevent the rank from having any significance as far as the ministry was concerned. As indicated, not all the chaplains fitted into the military design. Cpln (Rev.) Van der Watt did not enjoy the weekly visit to the mess with the other officers. He could not associate with the macho-chauvinistic culture, which he experienced to be determined by a specific language usage and drinking habits. He ascribed much of the trauma that he had to deal with in the military camps where he ministered to this macho-chauvinistic culture of the military establishment.⁴⁷

On the demilitarization of chaplains, all the English chaplains related the tension and verbal attacks at the hand of fellow-clergy. They experienced that some got very personal and insulting, while others did all in their power to defend them.

⁴⁴ Interview: A Wessels–R Thornley, 12 March 2008; R Thornley–I Bredenkamp, 13 June 2008 (e-mail); Interview: I Bredenkamp–DM Williams, 11 Augustus 2008 (telephone).

⁴⁵ Interview: I Bredenkamp–DM Williams, 11 Augustus 2008 (telephone).

⁴⁶ WS Boshoff–I Bredenkamp, 16 July 2008 (e-mail). Lt (Rev. - at present Prof.) WS Boshoff reported for his two year conscription period in 1985 after completion of his theological studies. He and his family were stationed at 101 Battalion, Ondangwa, where he served as chaplain.

⁴⁷ Interview: I Bredenkamp–G van der Watt, 15 May 2008.

Despite this, their calling was to bring the Gospel and human care to the soldiers. This confession formed the foundation on which all the respondents evaluated their ministry. They insisted that the chaplain should be clergyman first and foremost.

5. EVALUATION

Although the task of civilian clergy and military chaplains does not differ, the dynamics present in a military and civilian congregation differ vastly. It will be difficult for a civilian clergyman to fully comprehend and understand the soldier and to provide him with maximum pastoral and spiritual care. This should be done by someone who understands the military environment and it can best be provided by someone who is able to relate to all the experiences of the soldier. Sharing the lifestyle and dangers of the soldiers provide a foundation for trust, understanding and friendship which transcend military operations. An historical analysis of the role of chaplains during the Namibian War of Independence shows that this was indeed the mission of the SACHS and that the request for demilitarization was based on socio-political sentiments, rather than on a firm belief that the military establishment prevented clergy from ministering independently.

It should also be noted that the position of chaplains in the military establishment is not unique to South Africa. International customs influenced the development, role and position of South African military chaplaincy and in the South African context many of the customs were determined by British traditions. In evaluating the request for demilitarization one should keep in mind that most Western countries have selection processes in place and that in most defence forces chaplains would need security clearance. Furthermore, after their appointment, most chaplains undergo training in military procedures to fully comprehend the position and emotions of the soldier and, in most cases, the chaplains wear uniform. In the foreword to a document on chaplaincy in the United State's Coast Guard, the then Commandant, Admiral JS Gracey, declared that, over the years, the chaplains of the US Navy had worked their way into the body and soul of the Coast Guard by providing their value to the Navy's health and spiritual well-being and that the Navy felt fortunate and proud to have them wear the "true-blue of the US Coast Guard".⁴⁸

It falls outside the task and duty of the chaplain to be subversive to military orders as this might endanger lives. Chaplains who feel that they cannot remain in uniform on conscience grounds have the option to resign. Most choose to stay because they believe they have a calling. As early as March 1916 Cpln John Murray wrote that chaplains are in the service of the Lord to win lost souls.⁴⁹ Respondents

⁴⁸ United States Department of Defense, "A history of Navy chaplains serving with the US Coast Guard", Document 1983D208.2:C36/7, 1983, p iii.

⁴⁹ Moolman, p. 140.

clearly stated during the interviews that their task is to bring the Gospel and to be there for the soldiers who might need pastoral care. When questioned, they admitted the anomaly in their service, but it did not hamper their ministry. They declared themselves clergy first and foremost who bowed to the spiritual authority of the church. Their viewpoint was that chaplains can contribute invaluable insight to keep the humanity of soldiers intact during combat situations.

In the South African context the church retained influence in the appointment of chaplains since the beginning of the institution of military chaplaincy. Although chaplains wear uniform and are paid by the Ministry of Defence, they see themselves as sent by the church. This gives them a unique place in the armed forces. Their insignia emphasizes that they come in the sign of the Cross of Christ, with the sword of the Word and not with the defensive measures of a secular authority. Most chaplains do not think of themselves as defence force officers, but as clergy who has a responsibility to God at the end of their chain of command.