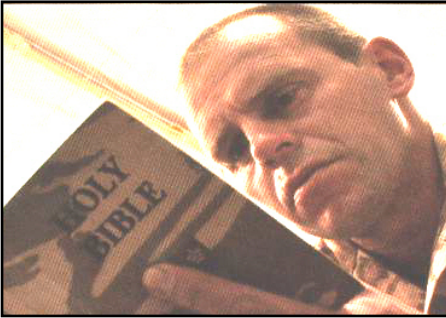


No 92**June - July 2009**

Dear Christian Friends,

'Commando Vicars' on Channel 4

See Royal Marine Padre Bill Gates, above with NMAFBS Bible, in a documentary on military chaplains: Sunday 14 June at 8pm. *Photograph from Defence Focus - May 09*

Austerity in Helmand

These reflections are edited from letters received from other padres now serving with units in Afghanistan:

Three days after I arrived with my regiment at the forward operating base, I announced that there would be an Easter Sunday service at 8 pm in the welfare tent. The holy table was a cardboard box covered with an army desert scarf and a cross made of some pieces of wood and two rusty nails. A disposable cup became the chalice and a small container lid the paten. There was not enough light to see by. I waited to see if anyone would turn up to pray and have Holy Communion with me,

hoping that someone would bring a head torch. Slowly some people started to arrive including the CO and RSM until there were 24 with head torches so the service could start. It was in two parts: Easter evening prayer with a pause then Eucharist prayer. In this way people had the chance to leave if they wanted without feeling that they would have to stay for two services. I mentioned that a relationship with the Creator through his Son is what makes us a new person. Over the next few days, soldiers commented on how much they had enjoyed the service.

Another padre wrote: We had a sunrise Easter service this morning before a day of training and it is in this place that the meaning of the resurrection takes on new focus. As the sun rose above the desert and we read from 1 Corinthians 15 of how death has lost its sting and we now have the victory through Christ, we were encouraged by the certainty of our faith. Christ HAS risen so our faith is certain and all God's promise are true!

Sanguin is quiet now because of the poppy harvest. The wildlife is varied and the terrain is beautiful with the desert stopping at the river and becoming lush jungle and farmland. It is amazing to see fields of dark green

poppies growing in patches in the desert sand. You can quickly see why few other crops can provide the income for the farmers that the poppy does. It is like a truce but with some IEDs (explosive devices) and small arms fire, but nothing intense. A suicide bomber killed 10 and injured 30 here earlier in the year.

Conditions are basic but functional. The food is hardly manna from heaven on the desert. I share a tent with six others. On a cool day, the temperature inside reaches 31° C and this is spring, the worst is yet to come. I have no privacy except when I go to the toilet which is beyond description! We get one 3 minute shower per day and no laundry. The camp is very small and it feels like being in a prison. In three days I have listened to so many people already with their stories and concerns. Local army and Taliban wounded are brought here for emergency treatment. I spend a lot of time with the lads in the sangers (sandbagged watchtowers). I take drinks and sweets to them during the loneliest times of the night so I try to sleep during the day, if the heat permits. Please send us sweets.

A few days ago we lost a young Welsh Guardsman and an interpreter in an explosion. Another soldier wounded. They were the first casualties of the tour. Some have been shaken by this, whilst others are grimly resigned to what is seen as an inevitability. For Christians, we understand that physical death is an inevitability this side of the second coming, but a tragedy none the

less. But it is a tragedy that Christ has transformed and removed the sting. That message is key in this environment. In the shadow of death we need fear no evil. This tour will be very difficult and very challenging. I know I will be exposed to things over which I will have no control but I believe God will give me strength and grace to sustain me in my weaknesses here. When I think back to Basra now, I realise that I was in a five star place and did not know it!

In a later letter a padre said that bodies including Taliban were now being placed in the chapel for examination and he was looking for white sheets to cover the body bags. The daytime temperature in the chapel tent is now 43°C. The stench can be imagined. Please send a supply of sheets. On May 12 he held a vigil in memory of a corporal who was killed and over two hundred soldiers turned up.

Luxury in the Mediterranean

In contrast about this time of the year seamen's missions' chaplains ask for Bibles to meet the demands of cruise ships visiting their ports. In April my wife and I took a holiday aboard the liner *Queen Victoria*, which proved to be a blessing in more ways than one. Having spent many years at sea aboard austere missionary ships and not to mention the Grey Funnel Line, we decided to experience a luxury cruise before all our money disappears down the recession black hole!

Late last year the leader of the *Queen*

Victoria's Christian crew members, an Asian chef, asked a Seamen's Centre in Alaska for 30 Bibles. They passed the request to Seamen's Christian Friend Society in Sydney where the *Queen Victoria* was due to visit. Rather than send the Bibles to SCFS Sydney I took a box with me when we joined the ship in Southampton. On handing them over, together with a quantity of booklets, the leader insisted on contributing towards the cost and invited us to join the Christian group's twice weekly worship and Bible study. He said they usually started about 12. I said we would be ashore then. "No", he said, "12 midnight when we finish work!" So each Wednesday and Sunday we worshipped and studied the Scriptures with the crew from midnight until 2 am.

The crew rarely get ashore to a church in nine months of continuous service away from home. Mostly the fellowship was made up of Filipinos. They had a great music group, keyboard, guitars and the ship's doctor on a saxophone. The workload and contract terms of merchant seafarers especially Asians are arduous. It was a humbling experience to see their love for the Lord and enthusiasm for praising Him long into the night, when they would normally be resting in preparation for another hectic day of service at the beck and call of us passengers. When we left they thanked us for encouraging them. But really it was they who had been an encouragement to us.

Anarchist/Evangelist?

The following extract made us laugh.

It was received from the chaplain to a Cadet Corps unit:

"I am happy to say that all the cadets took the Scripture booklets and I sensed a good rapport with them though the one 'disturbing element' was not present. He is a right little anarchist. He could possibly make a good preacher or evangelist!"

Legalised transparency

Transparency and *culture change* are on the lips of political leaders in the wake of the recent parliamentary allowances scandal. These words apply to us all. The Freedom of Information Act attempts to legislate *transparency* between people and organizations. But Psalm 139 already shows us how transparent we all are before God.

Culture change can only come from God, as the Apostle Paul wrote:

"So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature." Galatians 5:16 NIV

So seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and *Transparency* and *culture change* will be added also. (Matthew 6:33).

Pray for Godly government (1 Tim 2:2).

Please visit NMAFBS new web site, same address: www.nmafbs.org

In the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,



Richard Prendergast

O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely. Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. From Psalm 139

Items for Praise and Prayer

- **Praise** God for his continued provision of prayer and financial support despite the recession and for the 6,000 copies of *Combat the Stress* already sent out and that all booklets would give help where needed.
- **Pray** that God would challenge those who put NMAFBS Bibles up for sale on EBAY and that those who buy them would be blessed.
- **Pray** for the safety of all service personnel facing daily danger in Afghanistan or deployed elsewhere, also for wisdom, endurance and the guidance of the Holy Spirit for padres and serving Christians.
- **Pray** for Military Christian Organizations including AFCU, NCF, SASRA and service chaplains involved in outreaches this summer at Chatham Military Show (27-28 June), Southsea and Aldershot Shows (4-5 July) and New Wine (South) (2-8 August).
- **Pray** that Port Missioners and Chaplains from Seafarers' Missions would have increased opportunities to share the Gospel and distribute Bibles and booklets to cruise liners and other ships' crews.
- **Pray** for the growth and witness of Christian fellowships on cruise ships including Royle and his group onboard *Queen Victoria*.
- **Pray** for the work of the Padres and staff in the **Army, Air and Sea Cadet Corps** distributing New Testaments, booklets and prayer cards and bringing the Gospel to cadets especially at annual Summer Camps.
- **Pray** for the Lord's direction at our Annual General Meeting (30 June).

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