

No 94**October - November 2009**

Dear Christian Friends,

Letter from a Padre in Helmand

Rest and Recuperation (R & R) is available to all soldiers who are serving over four months. It boosts moral, but it can be stressful for both soldiers and families. During my R & R we lost five soldiers and six wounded, some quite badly. Upon my return we have lost three more in the Rifles Battlegroup. Last night I visited eight in hospital who were relatively lightly wounded at a base from which I had only just returned. The tempo of activity rocketed in July.

One impact of sustaining serious casualties is Operation Minimise, the withdrawal of telephone and internet services. This ensures that families are informed through the official channels. We have been in Op Minimise a lot which creates an information vacuum, particularly for families, leading to an increase in stress at home. In the intensity of this activity, one thing is clear, I have spoken to no one who has struggled with their faith or who

has rejected God. On the contrary, more and more people are talking of spiritual re-evaluation of their lives. More are praying and reading the Bible. The saying from previous wars was that there are no atheists in foxholes. This seems certainly to be true in Helmand.

Another Padre wrote:

One of the joys is to see someone making a public declaration of their faith. I recently baptised a fusilier in the Helmand river:



That night he and four mates took Eucharist together. The next day we held a memorial service for another Fusilier who was being buried in UK. We have lost seven of our

soldiers during this operation.

Army Cadet Force (ACF) Camp

In August I had the opportunity to view activities and distribute some NMAFBS literature at a 400 strong Army Cadet camp on Salisbury Plain, at the invitation of ACF Padre John Hallows.

Many of the roughly 120,000 or so members of the Sea, Army and Air Cadet Corps will have spent two weeks this summer at camps around the country. Regrettably as military bases and training areas close the opportunities for holding camps is declining. Prevention of further decline in camp facilities is an item for prayer. We are in the process of producing a booklet on Biblical values, leadership and prayer for all three cadet corps.

Sin, repentance and retribution

Aristocratic, arrogant and a roué, Captain Nesbit Willoughby RN was one of the Royal Navy's more ruthless and daring frigate captains of the Napoleonic Wars. He had twice been convicted by courts martial for insubordination when given command of HMS Nereide, in Rear Admiral Sir Edward Pellew's Indian Ocean Squadron. Nereide was possibly the Navy's least happy frigate. Her previous captain, Robert Corbet, was hated by his crew and found guilty by

court martial of cruelty, having flogged 134 sailors in 211 days, but let off, it is said, because he had once earned Lord Nelson's praise. It is of note that of the 700 NMBS Bibles supplied to Pellew's ships none was ever sent to Nereide. Corbet commanded another frigate, HMS Africaine. The year was 1809.

Willoughby could also be cruel but gained the trust of his brutalised crew and inspired them in a vicious action with three French frigates off Mauritius, in which he lost an eye and 230 of his 281 crew became casualties, 92 fatal.

The Admiralty deemed him unfit for further service, so Willoughby went to St Petersburg and joined the Russian Army as a cavalry officer. He was captured by the French, endured Napoleon's retreat from Moscow and nine months in prison before escaping. On his return the Admiralty deemed him fit again and gave him command of a frigate in the West Indies! Knighted and promoted to Rear Admiral he became ADC to the young Queen Victoria. In later years he donated to our Society, wrote Christian tracts for seamen and soldiers and helped young officers to advance their careers. He died in 1849.

Pellew was once dismissed his ship for insubordination but became one of Britain's greatest Admirals. He

was generous and godly. As Lord Exmouth he was a Vice President of NMBS. His gifts to the Society would have sufficed to purchase about 750 Bibles a year. The highlight of his later career was to lead a mission to liberate thousands of Christian slaves in Algiers in 1816, while C-in-C of the Mediterranean Fleet. He died in 1833.

In another Indian Ocean action in which 50 of Africaine's crew were killed, Corbet died a painful death. Rumours had it that this godless, brutal man was shot in the leg by a member of his crew. His surgeon amputated the leg and he might have lived had not a marine, it is alleged, to whom he had once given 96 lashes, removed the tourniquet as he lay in high fever. Whatever the truth the past caught him up.

Historians judged Willoughby and Corbet for using brutal methods to achieve their own ends. Pellew too had been a disciplinarian and had dealt with mutinous crews but he was never cruel. All were moulded in a harder age. So how should we judge their Christian values?

Pellew: a god-fearing benefactor.

Willoughby: arrogant and cruel but ultimately repentant.

Corbet: his cruelty may have led him to an early grave.

None of them however committed

a worse crime than King David who sent loyal Uriah to an early death on the battlefield just to gain access to his wife Bathsheba. But David was a man after God's own heart and suffered great remorse. Perhaps Willoughby had pondered David's words of contrition in Psalm 51 as he studied Scripture and wrote his tracts in later life.

*Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your
salvation and grant a willing spirit
to sustain me.
Then I will teach transgressors your
ways,
and sinners will turn back to you.*

Psalm 51:1, 11-13 (NIV)

Corbet presumably was not given the option to repent. God is merciful, but we reap what we sow.

Just by reading God's word

Willem & Ada Van Dijk of Lumen Maris Seamen's Mission wrote that they met a Filipino sailor who gave his life to Christ just by reading the Bible. He said no one else was involved except the Spirit of God.

In the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,



Richard Prendergast

Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Isaiah 40:1-3 (NIV)

Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.

2 Corinthians 4:1 (NIV)

Items for Praise and Prayer

- **Praise** God for his continued provision of prayer and financial support and for NMAFBS and for those who come to faith in Christ just by reading God's word. **Pray** for the successful publication of new Seafarer and Military Bibles and booklets for seafarers and the cadet corps.
- **Pray** for the safety of all service personnel facing daily danger in Afghanistan or deployed elsewhere, and those who are talking of a spiritual re-evaluation in their lives that God would hear their prayers and speak to them through their Bibles, that they may know Jesus' love
- **Pray** for safety, endurance, wisdom and the guidance of the Holy Spirit for serving Christians and padres including Estonian and Danish.
- **Pray** for strength and comfort for military families enduring the stresses of separation especially when out of touch with loved ones.
- **Pray** for medical staff and chaplains at Selly Oak hospital and Headley Court caring for the wounded and meeting with their families.
- **Pray** for chaplains and other staff of all three services involved with the repatriated dead and meeting their families at RAF Lyneham.
- **Pray** for merchant seafarers coping with poor working conditions, job insecurity, long separations and the added burden of piracy at sea, and for port chaplains dealing with these issues
- **Pray** that training area facilities available for **Army, Air and Sea Cadet Corps** annual Summer and Easter Camps would not be further cut under government cost saving measures.

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