

Serving Faithfully

Newsletter of the Catholic Diocese of the Australian Military Services
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PENTECOST 2020 – WHAT ARE WE TO DO?



Things are certainly different for us this year. Things were certainly different for the disciples too. The Solemn Feast of Pentecost heralded at one moment the end of Jesus' earthly mission to make the Father's love known and to fulfill His promise to ask the Father to send the Holy Spirit; and at the other moment the beginning of the work of the disciples to continue His mission. Life for them and for us changed dramatically and not without some concern and uncertainty either. 'What are we to do?' was their question and it is ours too. All this was going on while they were in their own 'lockdown' – they had sequestered themselves together with Mary in fear – and spent the time in prayer awaiting the promised Holy Spirit.

The social climate for those Apostles was deeply fractured. There was the obvious situation of the Jewish People being under the authority of Rome. There were significant differences between the religious leaders and sometimes open argument had led to different factions forming in the practice of the faith. We can easily get an impression from reading the New Testament – especially the Acts of the Apostles – of a sense of enthusiasm and zeal that was tempered at times by the tensions of the practical application of Jesus' teaching in various places. They had to find ways around these tensions so that they could fulfil their mission. After all Jesus did tell them 'Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.' (Matt 16:24).

Here in Australia in our present time we too are confronting difficulties associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The measures imposed to control the spread of the virus brought special challenges to people of faith. The 'distancing' that forms part of that response is on several levels. That distancing has made it very difficult to maintain our sense of community – in our families, in our workplaces, in our social engagement, in our spiritual community. We have all become aware that the usual community expressions that encourage our spiritual life have not been available. The faithful have not had the opportunity to celebrate the Eucharist or the Sacraments – especially Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick. Special celebrations of Baptisms, Holy

Communion, Confirmation and Marriage have been put on hold. Even limitations on funerals have been hard to accept. Members of families have, in many cases, been unable to 'sit together' and this has been difficult particularly for the grandparent/grandchild relationships. So the 'denial' and 'taking up cross' dimensions of Jesus' words are fairly obvious.

What is also obvious is the working around the difficulties so that we can follow Jesus. The use of the electronic media has brought our spiritual life into a new dimension. We can be part of a celebration together even though we are separated physically. The live streaming of Mass and Holy Hour devotions are two examples. The use of FaceTime, Skype, and Zoom and similar programmes have enabled people to pray together at the same time even though apart. We have more time for private prayer and reflection. There are not as many distractions. There is an increased effort from many to be in touch so that they can be even more encouraging and actively supportive. This is an opportunity for increasing our sense of awareness of the needs of others and to find a way of helping them meet those needs. Differences have become less threatening to our community.

Things will not be the same as they were. The new ways and senses of community expression are an encouragement for renewal of our mission as followers of Jesus and give us new purpose and heart. We are better able to own and reach out in a new

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evangelisation, perhaps better equipped and inspired by our current experience. 'What are we to do?' is our question in our day; and the Holy Spirit, the Gift promised and sent, will continue to enlighten us and illuminate the way. It only remains for us to sincerely, deliberately and openly place ourselves in prayer and reflection in a space where we can let the Holy Spirit dwell in us and renew our hope, purpose and indeed the face of the earth for us.

'Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful and renew the face of the earth.'



Bishop Max Davis AM, DD
Military Ordinary

Serving Faithfully

is a newsletter of the Catholic Diocese of the Australian Military Services.

It is published quarterly by the Catholic Military Ordinariate of Australia.

The Diocese comprises members of the Australian Defence Force and their families, wherever they may be serving.

Its people are scattered widely across Australia and overseas.

Serving Faithfully aims to be a means of sharing events and experiences from across the whole Diocese.

Articles are welcome to be submitted for publication to

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Chaplains and COVID-19



**Fr Damian Styles -
Kapooka Military Area**

Within Kapooka resides the Home of the Soldier, the 1st Recruit Training Battalion - the entry point for where soldiers begin their journey through basic training. During the COVID-19 restrictions there has still been a need to continue to train soldiers.

Kapooka has seen many changes over the last few months in order to conform to policy and direction, but also to achieve the aim of being able to train future soldiers ready. It has seen sacrifice from staff, living longer on base to ensure new arrivals have their two weeks of confirmation that they arrived with no symptoms. While Chaplains here have been lucky to be able continue Character Development lessons and other interactions with recruits and duty staff, it is all done with the challenges of social spacing and constant hand washing. An overall theme that arises though is loneliness.

In the fourth century, holy men and women fled to the deserts of Syria and Egypt to live a simple, austere life seeking God. These early monastics were hermits grouped together. They sought to be 'alone with God'. The term monk (Latin: *monachus*) means 'alone'. These people were not seeking a lonely life, but a life of solitude. COVID-19 has seen restrictions challenging people. While most people are not called to live as monks, I would argue that we are still called to a spiritual life of seeking God in solitude. So while COVID-19 has come with challenges, it has also opened opportunities to realise what is really important in the life of a person.

As our COVID-19 restrictions continue, see it as an opportunity. Stay positive, test negative.



**Fr Joel Vergara
Royal Military College Duntroon**

The last Sunday Mass celebrated publicly at RMC-D Chapel was on 22 March. It was for me a struggle to announce to the people that there would be no Mass until further notice. It was disheartening to see the reaction of some parishioners. Although, I have assured them that I will offer the Eucharist for their intentions in

private, I know that there's really no substitute when we can sing, pray and worship together. At the end of the Mass, I handed out to the parishioners some guidelines on 'What should I do if I can't go to Mass?' and 'How do I make a spiritual communion?'. It has some prayers and instructions on keeping Sunday holy at their home. More importantly, there's a list of website links where people can subscribe to daily scripture readings and participate in Mass online.

Recently, a parishioner said to me, 'Father, I really miss going to Mass.' And I said, 'I also miss celebrating Mass with people around. I miss the morning and evening coffee with the people after Mass.'

I think this pandemic crisis has awakened a deeper sense of appreciation of how much our community means to us. If there's one good thing that has come out during our COVID-19 experience, now more than ever, we deeply appreciate the source and summit of our faith – the Eucharist. This heightened desire and deepest longing for the Eucharist during this difficult time has allowed us, both priests and lay faithful, a renewal of faith and much better understanding of our relationship with one another and with God.

We realise how deeply Eucharistic we all are!



**Deacon Kevin O'Sullivan
Officer Training School RAAF Base
East Sale**

Officers' Training School (OTS) provides Initial Military Training for all Air Force Officers (including those at the Australian Defence Force Academy). OTS commenced the year, not at its normal location at RAAF Base East Sale VIC, but at

RAAF Base Wagga NSW, which saw Officer and Enlisted Initial Military Training conducted in the same location. As Chaplain to OTS I spent the first three weeks of the five-week course in Wagga. Not long afterwards training moved back to East Sale - COVID-19 hit!

Despite the challenges, and a few weeks on training pause, OTS has continued training, but now under a compressed training model. As the only Chaplain, Kevin states that he operates more like an Army Chaplain than an Air Force one. 'My time is consumed with a strong pastoral focus and having carriage of Military Ethics lessons. I have certainly hit the posting running since arrival in January and am going strong with two-thirds of the year to go.'

A Prayer Amid an Epidemic by Kerry Weber

Jesus Christ, you traveled through towns and villages 'curing every disease and illness.' At your command, the sick were made well. Come to our aid now, in the midst of the global spread of the coronavirus, that we may experience your healing love.

Heal those who are sick with the virus. May they regain their strength and health through quality medical care.

Heal us from our fear, which prevents nations from working together and neighbors from helping one another.

Heal us from our pride, which can make us claim invulnerability to a disease that knows no borders.

Jesus Christ, healer of all, stay by our side in this time of uncertainty and sorrow.

Be with those who have died from the virus. May they be at rest with you in your eternal peace.

Be with the families of those who are sick or have died. As they worry and grieve, defend them from illness and despair. May they know your peace.

Be with the doctors, nurses, researchers and all medical professionals who seek to heal and help those affected and who put themselves at risk in the process. May they know your protection and peace.

Be with the leaders of all nations. Give them the foresight to act with charity and true concern for the well-being of the people they are meant to serve. Give them the wisdom to invest in long-term solutions that will help prepare for or prevent future outbreaks. May they know your peace, as they work together to achieve it on earth.

Whether we are home or abroad, surrounded by many people suffering from this illness or only a few, Jesus Christ, stay with us as we endure and mourn, persist and prepare. In place of our anxiety, give us your peace.

Jesus Christ, heal us.

Kerry Weber is an executive editor of America, The Jesuit Review. (www.americamagazine.org)

Anzac Spirit and COVID-19

Deacon Gary Stone – the veterans' padre and president of the Veterans Care Association – talks about the Anzac Spirit and facing the COVID-19 challenge as a nation.

We celebrate Anzac Day in unusual circumstances this year.

The energy and camaraderie of gathered activities is not possible due to the coronavirus, but the spirit of Anzac remains.

Our Prime Minister has called upon the Anzac Spirit to be our inspiration at this time.

Many commentators are calling this coronavirus a war of sorts.

While we honour and respect our health workers who are definitely at 'action stations', those of us who have experienced 'bombs and bullets' know that we are well short of the horror of human conflict.

But we are fully respectful that for some people at this time, the losing of loved ones to the virus, losing jobs, losing businesses, losing superannuation, losing freedom and facing isolation, is very distressing.

We veterans of armed conflict would certainly want to inspire the broader community at this time through our reflection on the Anzac Spirit.

For some people, talk of the Anzac spirit may conjure up images long past of young men scaling the cliffs of Gallipoli or the Kokoda track.

Courage, mateship, endurance, and sacrifice were hallmark qualities that emerged from these times of trial.

Our forebears certainly laid a foundation of service before self, social cohesion and national unity, that blossomed in our nation post war.

But the Anzac Spirit has continued to develop since then, especially in the past 30 years where our troops have served in peacemaking and peacekeeping in many parts of the globe.

Last year the Australian War Memorial developed a new major gallery called The Courage for Peace. Much of the gallery displays video interviews with veterans of recent conflicts. A wonderful 30-minute documentary called The Courage for Peace, showing these interviews is available on YouTube.

Both my son Michael and I were interviewed in making this.

Michael, who spent eight years overseas in his 20-year military service, is recorded as saying (to armed rebels confronting him in Timor):

'... I wouldn't be here risking my life unless I really cared for you ... The soldier's role is all about being willing to sacrifice your life for someone you don't know. It's not just about the soldier next to you. It's about being ready to put your life on the line for another human being; in many cases for another human being who doesn't have the power to protect themselves.'

That powerful statement ushers in a whole new dimension to the Anzac Spirit.

Gary Stone: It's not just about being victorious in war, or caring for your mates, important as that is, it's about caring for others, loving your neighbours, especially the defenceless, and seeking to help them find peace.

Jesus says blessed are the peacemakers, and what a blessing our troops have been to hundreds of thousands of defenceless people from the Middle-East to the Pacific over the past 30 years.

Moreover, many of those veterans, like our Vietnam veterans before us, have gone back to these places afterwards and assisted in

their reconstruction and health and wellbeing.

Our Veterans Care Association has facilitated over 300 wounded, ill and injured veterans and their partners participating in two-week rehabilitation programs in Timor, where we have helped many struggling Timorese veterans and their families.

We are even in the process of building a Veterans University.

Our veterans are getting healthier by transforming their own crises into opportunities to help others.

In the military we dealt with situations by uniting in a common purpose, focussed on a primary mission of protecting life, and restoring peace.

Personal preferences were laid aside, and the good of all took priority over any individual freedoms or comfort that we might have desired.



Deacon Gary Stone

Leaders at multiple levels were needed to be actively present in the greatest areas of need, to visibly lead and inspire their troops, and use innovation to find local solutions to problems.

Indeed everyone was expected to be a leader using their initiative and taking risks to achieve the mission. But the mission was always about going out of our way to seek out and save those most at risk.

Underpinning all of this is a deep spiritual confidence that God was and is with us in Peacemaking. We

just have to do our best and never give up.

This is our Anzac Spirit in full bloom, seeking out and loving neighbours who we have never even met before, even at risk of death.

God blesses such activity, and that indwelling Spirit of God, underpinning the Spirit of Anzac, is why veterans today display such camaraderie and passion for peace.

Indeed Easter and Anzac are partner celebrations of life, death and resurrection, inspiring and giving us hope. More importantly, they must inspire us to mission to those in need.

In the midst of adversity, we can grow and be blessed with courage, character, commitment and compassion to make us better people, and the world, and our churches, better places for all.

May we seize this opportunity to be the people, and become the church, that the world needs at this time. These current crises are presenting us with opportunities to display the Anzac Spirit in reaching out to those who don't have the power, resources or ability to protect themselves.

We pray Lord God that you will inspire us to seek them out and embrace them.

Deacon Gary Stone is chaplain to the ex-services community in south-east Queensland. The Veterans Care Association was set up to support returning veterans and their families to overcome Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and other challenges in returning to civilian life. It gives practical, direct support to the wounded, injured and sick and, as a central hub for Veteran Services, brings together traditional medical practitioners, complementary/holistic practitioners, therapists, counsellors and more to support veterans on the journey to good health and vitality.

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Apology: in the last issue of *Serving Faithfully* the photo caption incorrectly identified the Supreme Knight of the Knights of the Southern Cross. Correct names are below.

L to R:
KSC National Chaplain Bishop Max Davis
Supreme Knight Dr George Sekulla
David Smith MP



Meet our Chaplains: Fr Raphael Abboud - RAAF Base Amberley



Hometown and family:

I was born in Byblos, which is one of the main cities in Lebanon. From birth I grew up in Lebanon and was raised as part of a large family, which was made up by 11 boys and 4 girls.

Year and Place of Ordination:

On the 27 June 2009, I was ordained into my Priesthood and became part of the Diocese of Byblos, and was part of the Parish at St Abda, Jaj, Lebanon.

Favourite Receptions:

I like to travel and experience what the world has to offer.

Favourite Saint and why:

St Charbel Makhlouf has a special place in my heart. St Charbel's Sanctuary is very close to my hometown, and I frequently visited it throughout the months where I would pray and spend some personal time with St Charbel. I hold to my heart a very personal and special experience with St Charbel leading up to my journey into Priesthood.

What person or experience most influenced you to answer the call to the Priesthood?

St Charbel was my influencer, which is one of the reasons he is my favourite Saint. Now can you work out my personal and special experience?

What called you to Military Chaplaincy?

God has called me for a reason to Military Chaplaincy allowing me to support the Catholic Church and to be a faithful shepherd to his people though I'm not worthy. Allowing the Holy Spirit to intervene in my work and life helps me spiritually to play the role I am called for and to support those in search for Jesus Christ and true faith. My calling to the Military was the work of God and his Son Jesus Christ and I am here to serve the Lord.

What has been your greatest challenge as a Military Chaplain?

Ordinated as a Maronite Priest and serving at Our Lady of Lebanon Co-Cathedral Parish - it is challenging to be away from the Maronite community; and, in particular, the family I have back in Sydney, my loved ones in Australia. Coming from a large family in Lebanon, I am truly blessed to have my loved ones in Sydney waiting and supporting me in meeting my role with the Military.

What does it mean when we say Military Chaplaincy is a ministry of presence?

Being a part of the Units. It is important to be on the ground and present with our members, offering pastoral and spiritual support through our ministry. This presence also for me extends to family members who play a big role in the Military.

What do you enjoy most about Military Chaplaincy?

Expression of my faith and freely delivering the word of God to our members is most rewarding. Doing this in my uniform makes me feel proud of what I can achieve in Military Chaplaincy.

Do you have any stories about your life as a Military Chaplain?

As structured as the military is, life as a Military Chaplain is far from structured. Every person has specific needs from our Ministry and we need to be able to easily adapt to each one's needs.



Painting of
Mary Help of Christians in
St Paul's Chapel,
Royal Military College.
Artist Alan Pomeroy

The Australian bishops, at a recent plenary meeting, entrusted Australia to Mary Help of Christians in the light of the continuing effect of COVID-19 on our lives. Mary Help of Christians has been official patroness of Australia since 1844; and in July 1970 Chaplain-General The Most Rev John Aloysius Morgan proclaimed Mary Help of Christians as patroness of the Military Vicariate (subsequently the Military Ordinariate).

Entrusting Australia to Mary Help of Christians

O Immaculate Mary, Help of Christians, Queen of heaven and earth, and tender Mother of humanity, at this time when a pandemic threatens all your children, we entrust to you our nation, Australia, and all who live in this country.

We commit to your intercession all the members of our community, beginning with the weakest ones, from the unborn to the sick, the disabled and the elderly.

We commit to you our families, our young and old, and all who are vulnerable, those who are quarantined or anxious.

We entrust to your Immaculate Heart those who have lost their livelihood or employment, our pastors and other essential service workers, and our leaders at this time.

We implore your intercession especially for the protection of doctors and nurses and those who minister to the contagious sick in this crisis.

Reign over us, Mother of God, and teach us how to make the Heart of Jesus reign and triumph in us and around us, as it has reigned and triumphed in you!

A Gift in Your Will

Making a gift to the Catholic Military Ordinariate is a meaningful way to fund the education of future priests and deacons and to support our clergy in providing spiritual guidance to our service men and women and their families.

To make a bequest, you should consult your solicitor or trustee company. It may be sufficient to make an addition or amendment to an existing will by adding a codicil.

A useful website for more information is: includeacharity.com.au

Jack's 100th bash cancelled

It has shut schools and pubs and now the coronavirus has put an end to Jack Grant's 100th birthday bash.

The NSW Grenfell father of eight turned 100 on March 31 and the party that was planned at his home for Saturday March 28 was cancelled.

'Jack's son James in Adelaide couldn't cross the border, his grandchildren in Dubai couldn't get out and family in Queensland couldn't make it either,' close friend Deidre Carroll said.

'His daughter has asked me to put a note in the Grenfell Record asking people to pop in to say Happy Birthday to Jack on his birthday.'



Jack Grant and wife Meg being chauffeured to an Anzac Day service in 2016

'The parish council had planned a morning tea after Mass on Sunday but that won't happen either because there's no Mass now.'

'Jack passed his test the other day,' Deidre said. 'He still drives around town and goes to the chemist and paper shop. He can drive a radius of 20 kilometres.'

'Jack's a bit deaf but he talks and reads and knows everything. He still comes to Mass every Sunday. Jack was the oldest acolyte in the Archdiocese until he gave it away about 18 months ago.'

'Jack had his St Patrick's golf day recently with his son. They do it every year. Jack makes his own Irish cream and takes it for everyone to enjoy. It's Jack famous Irish cream.'

A former farmer, Jack and Meg retired to Grenfell in 1994.

Two of their children have died and son Paul is a priest in Sydney. His daughter Felicity Suckling lives in Wagga Wagga and her mother-in-law is the sister of Archbishop Francis Carroll of the Canberra-Goulburn Archdiocese.

One of five children, two of Jack's brothers were priests. Leo was a Monsignor and has a street named after him in Kelso, a suburb of Bathurst. Brother Noel was in Portland which is about 40 kms from Bathurst. They have both died.

Fr Leo and Fr Noel officiated at Jack's wedding to Meg Rue on June 22, 1951.

A wedding telegram read, 'I'll Grant you'll never Rue the day, we wish you health, happiness and success.'

The parish council thought of arranging a papal blessing for Jack's 100 birthday but he received one in 2017.

'Something fantastic' – that's how Jack Grant described his Catholic faith as he celebrated his 100th birthday.

Archbishop Christopher Prowse phoned the Grenfell father-of-eight to wish him happy 100th birthday and asked Jack what his faith meant to him.

'I don't think I could have ever lived without my faith,' Jack responded. 'It's been something fantastic.'

'I can still remember my Mum getting me out of bed to go to Mass when I was a seven or eight year old boy and an altar server.'

Jack is still at Mass every Sunday and was the oldest acolyte in the Archdiocese until he gave it away about 18 months ago.

'Do you remember when I visited Grenfell for a pastoral visitation a couple of years ago and I put my mitre on your head?' Archbishop Christopher asked Jack. 'We had a photo together.'

'Your wife Meg is not with you to share your birthday Jack but I'm pleased you are with some of your children and grandchildren.'

Jack had a party planned at home for last Saturday evening but had to cancel it due to the pandemic protocols.

But he celebrated today with daughters Felicity and Carmel who both live in Wagga Wagga. A steady stream of phone calls kept Jack busy with birthday greetings and some grandchildren and a great-grandchild also popped in.

Jack's wife Meg died in October 2017, aged 93, and Jack lives alone in Grenfell. He keeps in good health, perhaps due to his love of red and white wine. Jack recently renewed his drivers licence and drives to the chemist and paper shop.

The centenarian is also known for his famous Irish cream.

Adapted from articles originally published in Archdiocese of



Jack Grant with Archbishop Christopher Prowse of Canberra-Goulburn Archdiocese

*Canberra and Goulburn 'Catholic Voice'.
Author Felicity de Fombelle*

Jack was an articled clerk in Canowindra, 300 km west of Sydney, when he joined the Militia in October 1941. He enlisted in the AIF the following July and served until discharged from the 64th Infantry Battalion in December 1945.

He was part of the 1944 US and Australian invasion force of the island of Morotoi in the, then, Netherlands East Indies. The island was needed as a base to support the liberation of the Philippines and the Australian-led Borneo campaign in 1945.

The Letter

WGCDR Mary Anne Whiting

In 1993 my dad, RAAF Navigator, Wing Commander E A (Bill) Whiting showed me a letter he had received from a former aircrew colleague and pilot, Group Captain John Pratt, when Dad and John were serving in Tengah with No 1 Squadron during the Malayan Emergency – it was 1952. Dad was 36 at the time, married for 10 years to my mother, Theresa, and father to two daughters.

Dad's early years were spent in Charleville, Queensland, learning how to ride horses and, I gather, having a great time especially when he attended Nudgee College as a boarder, where he got into sports, playing rugby, swimming and wrestling. He had too much of a good time apparently because he had to repeat Year 12.

After leaving school he travelled and worked for a time in China where he met a young Chaing Kai-shek who, was to go on to be Chairman of the National Government of the Republic of China in the 1940s.

Returning to Australia he worked as a stockman before joining the Air Force as a cadet at Point Cook. On the verge of failing his pilot's course, he discharged and returned to Charleville to attend to his grandmother's estate. Jessica Hughes was the first woman to hold a liquor licence in Queensland and ran a hotel with accommodation and meals in Charleville. She would employ local indigenous women as house keepers and cooks, paying them at the same rate as her non-indigenous employees, saving some of their wages for a dowry when the girls married.

Dad told me he often had to take his billy cart full of food down to the local convent for the nuns and to various other needy folk around town. The lawyer who assisted Dad to settle her estate told him she had given away more money than she earned.

Dad was greatly influenced by the Catholic faith of his grandmother and Ethel, his mother, both women having been deserted by their husbands. Jessie ran the hotel with the assistance of a very special friend, Michael Johnston. Known as Mick, he always referred to Jessie as Mrs Hughes, and Dad believed they loved each other very much. Mick could neither read nor write, but knew a good horse when he saw one. Buying and selling horses and livestock made Mick a wealthy man and he paid Dad's fees at Nudgee, handing over great wads of cash to the Christian Brothers, who were probably very grateful Dad failed his first Year 12 exam!

When War broke out Dad applied to join the Air Force again, and was rejected; so he joined the Army and, after some rudimentary training, sailed out of Sydney harbour on the Queen Mary, then a troop ship, watched by one Theresa Waugh and her sister Bertha from North Heads – little did Mum know her future husband was on board. He ended up in Syria with an anti-tank regiment fighting against the Germans and Italians, and was promoted to captain, in the field, but never got the opportunity to put his pips up.

Unlike the ill-fated 8th Battalion, which stopped over in Singapore on the way home and became prisoners of the Japanese in Changi and on the Thai-Burma railway, Dad's battalion made it back to Sydney. On leave in Charleville, his mother handed him a letter – dated before he left for Syria and calling him up for Air Force service – she hadn't opened it because it was addressed to Dad!

He then re-joined the Air Force, trained as a navigator, married Mum three weeks after meeting her at a dance in Sydney – her parents loved Dad especially as he was a Catholic – saw operational service in the Pacific on Catalinas, and eventually served with John Pratt on Lincolns, at No 1 Squadron.

As John outlined in his letter: on return from a bombing mission the crew were clearing their weapons, when one was fired accidentally by Andy Stapleton and John was shot on the right side of his head with the bullet going through his neck. Dad grabbed John and applied pressure on his neck. He then started to say the Act of Contrition over and over again for John. Dad must have been covered in John's blood and, from what I understand, Dad kept the pressure on John's neck in the ambulance until the doctors took over at the hospital. Until I read John's letter, I did not know about the incident as Dad never discussed it with me.



GPCAPT John Pratt and WGCDR Mary Anne Whiting

John's letter expressed so beautifully and generously his thanks to Dad and what John described as Dad's moral courage in saying the Act of Contrition, something John said always had a great effect on him. I treasured John's letter, and at Dad's funeral service, attended by a large group of people including the Nudgee Old Boy's Association, the RSL and the RAAF Association, I read out John's letter, and to this day it moves and inspires me – and I keep it near my desk where I work at the RAAF History and Heritage Branch.

I had tried looking for John over the years and even searched through the Defence telephone list asking anyone with the surname Pratt if they were related, with no success.

I recently lost the love of my life, Geoffrey, and asked the Military Ordinatee Vicar General, Monsignor Peter O'Keefe, to

say Geoff's funeral service for me. I had worked with Peter when we were based in Wagga and I had the great privilege again, when Bishop Max invited me to be part of World Youth Day to assist with looking after the military pilgrims. Bishop Max then invited me to be part of the Military Ordinatee Finance Committee.

A week before attending my first meeting last March, I came across John's letter again and read it; as always it brought tears to my eyes. I remembered Dad's courage, which I witnessed several times as a child: once rescuing someone who was drowning, helping a young boy who ran into a plate glass window, and confronting a parent who had mistreated a child – they never did it again. Like his grandmother, Dad was generous when it came to helping others; a long-time member of the St Vincent de Paul Society, he would team up with the Salvation Army to distribute groceries and deliver furniture to those in need. I remembered, also, Dad's love of family, his deep faith, his love of a good party and the company of friends.

Attending my first Finance Committee meeting, I was introduced to everyone. When introduced to one gentleman, he asked if I was related to Bill Whiting. 'Yes', I said, 'did you know Dad?' 'Yes', he replied, 'your father saved my life.' Then it hit me: 'John, I have been looking for you for years!'

I am a great believer, if you look for the right thing and keep an open mind, you will find it somehow. I believe, finding John and having my opportunity to thank him for his letter was more than coincidental – it was the jolt of faith I needed.

Empowering student military veterans to enjoy academic success

With a strong family history of service, including a great-grandfather who was a POW in Malaysia during the Second World War and made it home, a career in the military seemed like a natural choice for Nicholas Stanford.

Nicholas spent four years in the army as an infantry soldier and was discharged in February 2019. He then enrolled in a Bachelor of Paramedicine at Australian Catholic University (ACU) after a friend who was studying at ACU told him it had 'an awesome' paramedicine program.

In joining the university, Nicholas had access to ACU's innovative Student Veterans Support Program (SVSP), which was established by the university to support student military veterans, as they make the transition from military to university life.

'I think the biggest issue faced by student veterans is the culture shock of going from a very disciplined environment where everything is planned for you and it's all very structured and regimented, to an environment where it is very individually driven and casual', said Nicholas.

'Not having studied in a university sense in a very long time meant I had to learn how to reference and structure assignments all over again. The SVSP helped me understand that I wasn't alone, and that I had someone to talk to about university stresses that can be unique to student veterans.

'Also, the opportunity to travel to Los Angeles in January this year to attend the Student Veterans of America National Conference was a hugely beneficial experience.'

As part of its initiatives to support student veterans, ACU sponsored Nicholas and another SVSP participant to attend the 2020 US Student Veterans Association's National Conference (NatCon) in Los Angeles, California. NatCon is the largest annual gathering of student veterans, advocates, thought-leaders, stakeholders, and supporters in higher education in the world.

Nicholas said that he planned to implement much of what he had learnt at the conference and that there were common experiences with the US Student Veterans that transcended national boundaries. 'NatCon has given me many tools and skills to help build and develop ACU's Student Veterans Program into a key part of the university system and help others understand that veterans aren't there to be helped, that we can help and can be an integral part of the university.'

ACU's work in empowering student veterans to realise their academic goals saw the university launch the Veteran's Entry Program (VEP) in 2019, with more than 30 military veterans enrolling to commence in 2020.

The SVSP and VEP reflect ACU's commitment to promoting the academic success, empowerment, and professional development of student veterans through advocacy and supporting resources. These initiatives aim to alleviate transitional issues for veterans and help them achieve their study and career goals.

ACU Academic Registrar and Director of Student Administration, Kathryn Blyth said, 'In 2018 ACU identified that veterans and Defence Force personnel were an unrecognised equity group within higher education. To address this, ACU established the VEP to acknowledge the formal and non-formal learning accrued during years of service. The design of the scheme allows assessment on a case-by-case basis, recognising the skills and knowledge acquired in service to our country.'

ACU Pathways Director Marta Skrbis said the SVSP is currently being enhanced with a veterans-specific transition program enabling students to enter, transition and adjust into tertiary study.



Nicholas Stanford (Australian Catholic University)

'We are designing face to face and online workshops, seminars and interactive sessions developing academic literacies and study skills, supporting mental health and wellbeing and providing opportunities for social interactions. Dedicated staff, also student veterans themselves are available five days a week to offer advice, support or guidance. This enhanced program will be fully available from July 2020.'

VEP is part of the wider SVSP that aims to provide ongoing support to veterans, from applying and enrolling, to timetabling and orientation, as well as academic, counselling and financial support. ACU Vice President Father Anthony Casamento csma said, 'At ACU we recognise the challenges faced by veterans reentering education, but also the strengths of our veterans and the skills and personal qualities developed through military service. Our student veterans share ACU's commitment to the pursuit of knowledge, the dignity of the human person and the common good.'

ACU Pro Vice Chancellor (Engagement) Professor Sandra Jones said, 'ACU has a long-standing commitment to student veterans, and the SVSP brings together a range of supports and activities from across all areas of the university. The VEP and SVSP ensure that student veterans at ACU are supported in their studies from enrolment to graduation.'

BACKGROUND TO ACU'S STUDENT VETERANS SUPPORT PROGRAM (SVSP)

In early 2019, ACU partnered with the Australian Student Veterans' Association (ASVA), La Trobe University, Charles Darwin University and Western Sydney University on a major national project to increase access to and support of younger military student veterans in higher education.

The project built on findings from previous research by La Trobe University's Centre for Higher Education Equity and Diversity Research (CHEEDR) with the ASVA, which found that most student veterans were not identified within higher education institutions, and many felt marginalised and unsupported.

The team successfully applied for a grant to fund a major national project to increase access to and support of younger military student veterans in higher education.

The Department of Veterans Affairs funded the capacity-building project, 'From the Military to the Academy', which enabled ACU to develop a framework to bring together activities across the University to support current and future student veterans.

Through this framework ACU appointed its first Student Veteran Administration Officer who worked with staff across the university to develop a comprehensive program to support student veterans across all ACU campuses, beginning with the establishment of the first ACU Student Veterans Association chapter.

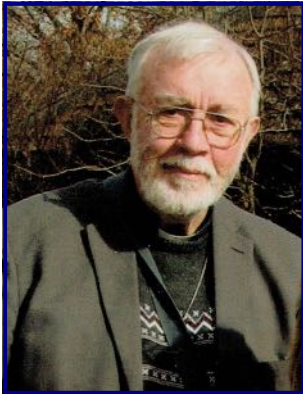
The SVSP has already made considerable progress in exceeding the goals of the funded project and has laid the groundwork for a smooth transition for military veterans enrolling in the Veteran's Entry Pathway (VEP) scheme for 2020.

The launch of VEP made ACU the first Australian university to offer consistent entry requirements for veterans, regardless of state of residence and study. The pathway scheme allows for adjustment factors following two years of military service; veterans are eligible to receive a Selection Rank in Queensland, NSW and ACT using a table of equivalence for service undertaken in the different Forces.

Australian Catholic University media release 20 March 2020

The Soldier Who Served Two Empires

By Robert Willson



Reverend Robert Willson

Over the Christmas holidays my family became engrossed in solving a large Jig Saw puzzle, with a thousand pieces. The scene, Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Opera House, was spread out in our lounge room and everyone who passed it looked for ways to fit another piece into the picture. Such projects can become addictive, or maddening!

It reminded me of the story of one of the great discoveries of a relic of Christianity in early Britain, now to be seen in the British Museum. It is an image of six early Christians, probably priests, with hands upraised in the traditional attitude of prayer. They are

about one-third life-sized. They wear long sleeved tunics with beaded sashes down the centre and across the tunic. When I saw them I was immediately reminded of the traditional chasuble worn by a priest at the celebration of the eucharist. They appear to date from the third century after Christ. (British Museum image: tinyurl.com/six-priests)

We are able to view this remarkable early Christian relic because of the determination of a gifted archaeologist who excavated Lullingstone Villa, a Roman Villa in Kent. The wall painting of the six priests originally stood on the west wall of a house church or chapel, in the Villa. When the Villa fell into ruins about the 4th century, as the last Romans left Britain, the fragments of the wall painting collapsed into a room underneath the Chapel. There the fragments rested for centuries until after the Second World War.

THE JIGSAW PUZZLE

Colonel Geoffrey Meates, a retired army officer, excavated the rubble of the Villa and carefully collected all the fragments of the wall painting, about three thousand of them. He laid them out on a very large trestle table. People viewed them, shook their heads and told him that no one would ever reconstruct the wall painting. However, though it took years, he succeeded. Today this vast jig saw puzzle is a treasure of the British Museum.

My wife and I spent many hours in the Museum during a visit to Britain. The Lullingstone Villa exhibits are a tribute to Colonel Meates who was a soldier of the British Empire and then an archaeologist of the Roman Empire during his retirement. He served two empires with distinction.

In the library of Kings College, London, the diaries and letters of Meates are preserved. If published they would make fascinating reading. Born in 1900 and trained in the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, Meates sailed for India in 1921. There he served in many capacities including that of a district magistrate and he was a friend of the Maharajah of Chattapour. But the climax of his military career came when Meates was involved in the retreat from Dunkirk and went on to command the 7th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment at the siege of Malta. He served with great distinction.

EYNSFORD

When Meates retired from the Army in 1945 he made his home near the pretty little town of Eynsford in the Darent Valley in Kent. There he began to follow a second passion, that of archaeology, and his discoveries greatly enriched our understanding of the Roman Empire and especially of early Christianity in Roman Britain.

One day my wife and I decided to take the train to Eynsford

and see Lullingstone Villa for ourselves. Alas we found that the site of the villa was not open to visitors because a new visiting centre was being built. But the sheer beauty of this rich and fertile district helped us to understand why wealthy Romans or native Britons were attracted to the place.

The Villa was built probably about AD 80, only 40 years after the Romans conquered southern Britain. About AD 150 the building was considerably enlarged. Colonel Meates made a remarkable discovery of two marble busts wearing semi military dress, in the cellar. These may possibly be those of Pertinax, Roman governor of the province of Britannia, and his father-in-law Publius Helvius Successus. Some suggest that Lullingstone may have been a country retreat for the governor of the Roman province.

MOSAICS

The religious traditions surrounding the Villa are fascinating. One room had apparently long been used as a pagan shrine. It appears that later the room above the pagan shrine was converted into a Christian chapel with the six praying figures and the famous Chi-rho symbol, the first letters of Christ's name in Greek. This chapel provides some of the earliest evidence for the Christian faith in Britain. But it is remarkable that the pagan shrine underneath still seems to have been in use. Maybe some members worshipped the old gods while others followed Christ.

Lullingstone has one of the earliest places of Christian worship ever discovered in Britain. We do not know when the Christian faith was first established in Britain but the martyrdom of St Alban at Verulamium, (now St Albans), reminds us of the many persecutions of Christians before the decree of the Emperor Constantine extended toleration to them in AD 313.



Lullingstone Villa
Image: Wikimedia Commons

The end of Lullingstone is unclear. Sometime early in the 5th century, about the time the last Roman administration left Britain, a fire destroyed the building and it was abandoned. Traces of the mosaics were uncovered from time to time but it was Colonel Meates who devoted the later years of his life to excavating and recording the treasures of Lullingstone.

I have researched to find a portrait of Meates but the only photograph I have shows him with trowel in hand, directing operations by volunteer workers. He wrote up his discoveries in a most systematic way and was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1950. As far as I know he never married and died in 1985.

Of course when the little Christian community at Lullingstone faded out it was only the beginning of the Christian story in that part of Britain. About A.D. 597 Saint Augustine of Canterbury arrived from Rome to begin a new mission for Christ in southern Britain.

The famous lines from 'The Dying Patriot' by James Elroy Flecker refer particularly to Saint Augustine's mission but the early Christians at Lullingstone may be included in them.

I saw them march from Dover, long ago
With a silver cross before them, singing low,
Monks of Rome from their home where the blue seas break
in foam,
Augustine with his feet of snow.

Robert Willson, a retired priest in the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn, has been for thirty years a free-lance writer and reviewer for *The Canberra Times*.

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Mosaic in Lullingstone
Villa: Bellerophon on Pegasus,
spearing the Chimaera