

# SERVING KING AND QUEEN

David Moss

## FORMER ARMY CHAPLAIN, DAVID MOSS REFLECTS ON WHAT SERVICE TO HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH MEANS FOR CHRISTIANS IN THE ARMED FORCES

In Westminster Abbey lies the grave of the unknown warrior from World War I. The inscription reads:

*'Beneath this stone rests the body of a British warrior unknown by name or rank brought back from France to lie among the most illustrious of the Land and buried here on Armistice Day 11 Nov: 1920, in the presence of His Majesty King George V his Ministers of State the Chiefs of his forces and a vast concourse of the nation*

*Thus commemorated are the many multitudes who during the Great War of 1914-1918 gave the most that man can give life itself for God for King and Country for loved ones home and empire for the sacred cause of justice and the freedom of the world They buried him among kings because he had done good toward God and toward his house.'*

Arguably specific battles and wars come to define the ethos and culture of our British armed services: the Royal Navy looks to the Battle of Trafalgar (1805), the Royal Air Force to the Battle of Britain (1940) and the regiments of the British Army look to such events as the Battle of

Waterloo (1815) and World War I and II. I write as a former chaplain in the Royal Army Chaplains' Department, but with apologies to those of the other Services, as my former service will inform my approach in this article. Army Chaplains look to World War I as the war which defined the ethos of chaplaincy for us, with incarnational ministry, which means we live amongst the troops and, although non-combatant, experience the joys and difficulties of service, including war itself.

The inscription on the grave of the unknown warrior in Westminster Abbey provides us with an insight into the loyalties that a member of the armed forces lived with and still lives with: God, King or Queen, Empire or Commonwealth, Country, Armed Forces, home, loved ones and freedom. These loyalties are layered, displaying multiple layers of commitment. For practicing Christians in the military, their faith in Jesus provides the foundation for service.

If you have ever visited a military base, you will have noticed many indications in which Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II calls for the loyalty of those serving. Many offices will have a picture of Queen Elizabeth on the wall, the Union Flag will be flying freely and everyone's uniform carries badges, many of which have the Queen's crown in them; even the buttons on many of the best uniforms include the Queen's crown. When a monarch changes, then the crown does also.

When I first joined the Chaplains' Department as a regular chaplain (1997), I was posted to Cyprus. Our boys went away to board at a school in England, coming home for the holidays. Ali, my wife, and I immersed ourselves in military life. As one entered the military base, flying high on a flagpole was the red, white and blue of the Union Flag. There was no doubt this was a British base. When we went to the cinema, before we saw the film we all stood to attention and sang the National Anthem. These things hadn't been part of our life in our previous circuit, the Burslem Mission, in Stoke on Trent. In fact I can't recall ever singing the National Anthem in a cinema before this.

Loyalty to the Crown is expected and taught in the forces. This happens in basic training for both commissioned and non-commissioned serving personnel. It is also reflected in the book of rules, which regulates the whole of a soldier's life; Queen's Regulations, or 'QRs' as they are known. Prime Ministers come and go, but the Queen remains constant. In a very real sense, all three of the Armed Services serve the Queen. Of course, this is a result of our history, a civil war and regicide in the mid-seventeenth century.

In 2003, the United Kingdom went to war in Iraq. 46,150 British military personnel were deployed. In the months leading up to this war, there



were constant discussions in the press and on the TV about the rights and wrongs of the war and if it should happen. Our Prime Minister was Tony Blair and he was in a special relationship with the President of the United States George Bush; it seemed as if we would go to war. In the UK there were protests about the possible war. My regiment, 36 Engineer Regiment were planning to go. As their chaplain, I wanted to go with them, not because I was a great supporter of war, but because I wanted to serve God with my soldiers. All these discussions about the rights and wrongs of the war were not missed by the soldiers and officers.

However, as soon as we knew that invasion was imminent: all discussion ceased! No one told us to stop, the discussion just did. The whole regiment worked as one to serve well, fight and survive; I think I am correct in saying that no one was there for Tony Blair, we were there for one another, for Queen and country and, as far as I was concerned I was serving God by being where the soldiers in my care had been sent.

When somebody joins the UK armed forces, they make promises to the Crown. The Oath of Allegiance is not to the government of the day, but to the Queen and her successors. When non-commissioned officers become Warrant Officers as Warrant Officer II they wear a crown, when they become a Warrant Officer I they wear a Royal Coat of Arms. A chaplain is a commissioned officer. On my Chaplains' Commission from the Queen, now framed, are the words:

*'To our trusty and beloved Rev... Greeting! We, reposing especial trust and confidence in your loyalty, piety and good conduct, do by these presents, constitute and appoint you to be an Officer in the Royal Army Chaplains' Department of Our Land Forces ...'*

There is one word which differs from a regular officer's commission, in the chaplains' version the word piety replaces the word courage. In many ways, having chaplains in uniform, holding the Queen's Commission, reflects an earlier model of church and state, but importantly even in a more secular space, there is still a place for chaplaincy. By chaplains wearing uniform, the ministry is incarnational, working and living amongst the military because one belongs to them.

I have a small travel Bible. This accompanied me to all the places the Royal Army Chaplains' Department sent me as a military chaplain. In some ways it is an example of the sacrifices all serving personnel make when they take 'the Queen's shilling'. In the front I listed all the countries I served in as a chaplain, 16 countries in all.

The work and service of military Christians, and chaplains, is well supported by a variety of Christian military charities. As a chaplain, I worked very closely with these. Soldiers' Airmen's Scripture Readers Association (SASRA) is a wonderful organisation; Readers, with the agreement of the chaplain and Commanding Officer, can



*By chaplains wearing uniform, the ministry is incarnational, working and living amongst the military because one belongs to them.*

visit soldiers and airmen in the barracks, talking about faith and encouraging believers from amongst those they meet. The Armed Forces Christian Union (AFCU) is another group. This organisation produces a very good magazine, holds conferences and encourages Christians serving in the military. One of the most useful groups which supports the faith in the military is the Naval and Military Bible Society, who work closely with the Scripture Gift Mission. Through them, chaplains endeavour to present New Testaments to new recruits. In addition to this, whilst serving and especially whilst on operations, booklets are available for chaplains to distribute. In the Iraq War (Op Telic), I was able to distribute many copies of the New Testament which

had desert camouflage covers. It was a delight to see some soldiers, who had never showed any previous inclination for the spiritual life, reading the Bible together in their down time.

In the time of John Wesley, there was a Methodist who felt called by God to serve in the Army. He was called John Haime; he was a volunteer soldier who wrote to Wesley as he was serving overseas. He became one of Wesley's preachers, creating an Army ministry (at the time there was no such thing as Methodist army chaplains).

Wesley's Journal quotes a letter from John Haime:

*'1744 May 1, - We marched to the camp near Brussels. There a few of us joined into a society, being sensible, where two or three are gathered together in his name, there is our Lord in the midst of them. We sung a hymn, which drew about two hundred soldiers together, and they all behaved decently ... Our society is now increased upwards of two hundred; and the hearers are frequently more than a thousand, although many say I am mad; and others have endeavoured to incense the Field Marshal against us.'*

I mention John Haime because there is a tradition of people joining up in order to share their faith with others or coming to faith in the Services and continuing to serve the Crown, but with the desire to make a difference for Christ where they have been placed. These are 'unofficial' missionaries, but people called by God. For example, I know of one officer and family who joined up to serve Christ, they are inspirational, supporting soldiers, families and chaplains wherever posted. Her Majesty as a practising Christian influences how military believers understand their relationship with the Crown. It makes it easier in many ways, but it is important to recognise that being a Christian in the Services is difficult, challenging and at times involves persecution. There are Christians from Commonwealth countries who join the military. Ten or so years ago there was an influx of soldiers from Fiji, some joining because of God's missionary call. Congregations, many of them with a Methodist core, sprang up in a variety of military bases, a great work of the Spirit.

Serving Christ, the King, the Queen is complex and not understood by all

Christians. Like many things, this is a divisive subject. As we approach this Platinum Jubilee, please pray for: our Armed Forces, chaplains, Christians in the military, our Queen and the royal family.

*The Revd David Moss is currently a Methodist Superintendent minister, serving in the East of Cornwall, in the Callington and Gunnislake Circuit.*



# KING OF KINGS, MAJESTY

*Jarrood Cooper*

King of Kings, Majesty,  
God of Heaven living in me  
Gentle Saviour, closest friend  
Strong Deliverer, beginning and end  
All within me falls at Your throne

***Your Majesty, I can but bow  
I lay my all before You now  
In royal robes I don't deserve  
I live to serve Your Majesty***

Earth and Heaven worship You  
Love eternal, Faithful and True  
Who bought the nations, ransomed souls  
Brought this sinner near to Your throne  
All within me cries out in praise.

Your majesty, I can but bow  
I lay my all before You now  
In royal robes I don't deserve  
I live to serve Your Majesty  
I live to serve Your Majesty