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Air Ministry News Service

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THE STATION PADRE

The Chaplain had taken off his tunic, and with a hammer in one hand and nails in the other was mending the aerodrome chapel which had been damaged by the blast of German bombs.

"Just another job," he said, as he looked at the broken glass strewn on the floor of the wooden building which was once the Institute and had lately been converted into the station's religious centre.

The life of an Air Force Padre is a succession of what he described as "just another job."

To an outsider it may seem a simple, leisurely life, demanding only a service on Sundays and a few friendly chats with airmen during the week. But there is much more to it than that. His parishioners - officers, airmen and W.A.A.F., men who raid Germany or tackle enemy bombers, and others who service the aircraft - expect much more than a weekly sermon.

In fact, the sermon is but a small item in his weekly programme. The Service Chaplain must be a practical rather than an academic christian, and his success is not judged from the attendance at the voluntary services but on the friendships he makes with the Station personnel.

He is essentially the Station's counsellor - the man to whom anyone can go for advice. If he cannot answer questions himself he must be able to put the inquirer into touch with the people who can. He must be interested in their bodily as well as their spiritual welfare. He must be everybody's friend.

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Here is a selection of the kind of questions for which he has to find answers.

"How much should my widowed mother be getting?"

"My wife wants me to divorce her. What shall I do?"

"Can you get me into the station dance band?"

"The sergeant's a bully. Can you do something about it?"

"My home has been bombed. Can you help me to trace my wife and family?"

"I'm very fond of one of the W.A.A.F. Do you advise us to get married?"

"They say I can't be transferred to the Navy. Isn't there some way of doing it?"

And so it goes on. Every chaplain has a record of intensely human documents.

Generally the Resident Chaplain is Church of England but on some air stations he is a Methodist with a Church of England parson and a Roman Catholic priest as regular visitors. Once a month the church service is a parade, when everyone available must attend. On other Sundays attendance is voluntary ..

The Chaplain is often the entertainments officer. He arranges concerts and film shows.. He may also be called on to organize sporting events.

His parish often extends beyond the borders of the aerodrome - perhaps to smaller satellite flying fields to which he travels by air, or to gun posts where short services are held in a hut or in the open. He visits hospitals. He flies with his parishioners whenever the opportunity occurs.

He may be fortunate enough to have a specially-built wooden church, or he may have to use the N.A.A.F.I. or an annex to the gymnasium. The actual building does not matter. For the good R.A.F. Chaplain the whole aerodrome is his church.
