

# Gary Lock

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Thank you. And thanks for the opportunity to be here this evening. Er, I'm really representing the Director General of Chaplaincy and Navy, who was suppose to be here but was unable to be and asked if I step in and then he told me I had to do a little talk. He owes me.

As a Navy chaplain, which I am. We have a good reason to represent Christ and church in the Navy and many may wonder, are they compatible? Can a minister and indeed a Christian be in the military? And I say, can he not be there?

You know, if we could discuss and have been discussing for hundreds of years; the rightness of war, they wrongness of war, we've been discussing the inevitability of it for years, we can discuss the solutions and there are many and varied out there but in the middle of all that there's one I like to call a mine field between those two areas. And like any mine field in any battle zone, you'll find that people will try to transit that mine field in their daily activity of life. Often out of necessity and risk, often a very great risk but it's the people who are at risk and not the mine field. It's the people who are in the middle of this mine field who are my emphasis tonight. And the people who are in the middle of this mine field are the combatants and the non-combatants. The non-combatants can be the inhabitants of the battle zone who are trying to survive, non-government organizations and many others who do not pick up a weapon to use against someone else who may oppose them.

But the group I really want to focus on for a few moments are often misunderstood and maligned at times and they are the combatants. They're our military personnel who are sent into places of battle and war at the behest of our government. I want to make three very short points concerning these people and some stories cause we all love stories don't we?. But firstly, I want to think about that very important for these folk that go in uniform, whether it be on ships, in the air or indeed on the ground is a sense of connection. They love to be connected. In 2003, after war was declared in Iraq, with Iraq; I moved around the HMAS ANZAC as part of my task on board as a chaplain as we positioned ourselves to provide naval gunfire support to the very soldiers who were about to invade Iraq through the Al-for Peninsular. I noticed

some things about the members of the ships company, that I'd read about in books but have never heard before or seen before personally.

These four things were common and upper most in their thinking, people who do not have a religious bone in their body and then those who did were saying to me that they were praying. Regardless the situation had brought about the need for a connection to God in the middle of their crisis and the uncertainty of what we're about to go to. Second thing they did was they showed me photos of their families. I saw more photos in that time, in the uncertainty leading up to that point of what we were about to do that I had in all the ships and places and everything I'd been deployed to over the years. They became and were strongly connected to their families in that point in time and became very worried about them and what may happen to their loved ones if they didn't come back, which was a very real risk.

People asked about their mates around the ship as well and what was happening to them, so their connection to their mates all through the ship were very important for them as well, 'cause they cared, they cared about each other. And the fourth thing I noticed was that people wanted to know what was happening outside the ship; what we call the battle space. Just around about us were three British ships an Australian ship. Along with the task that we were given, was the need for connection to God, to family, to mates and to what was happening in the battle space.

It was this need for connection with others and knowledge in the middle of uncertainty. As a Christian chaplain, it was my privilege to help facilitate that need for connection. A sense of connection and belonging is viable in the mine field in amongst all the debates that we can have.

Second thing, I'd like to think about these particular focus is the concept of configuration and if you notice, a good preacher always adds 'alliteration' don't you? That's what I'm doing. Configuration is the idea of the arrangement of parts and elements. In other words, something brings all the bits together; so you can do something about it. I stood with one of our commanders, on board one of our ships in the Persian Gulf in early March, just before war was declared, a video feed was coming in from a helicopter just off the Iraqi coastline; war had not been declared and an Iraqi gunboat was getting close to a designated line. The idea was that if it crossed this line, it was to be engaged.

I saw this particular commander, an Australian guy; struggle to the point where he was, where he was going to say to his superiors, and finally did, that he could not order its destruction. As it would have been an aggressive, warlike action, when war had not been declared. To do it then was an act of war, we talked about it later as outlined all the parts that he had to think through in very quick time but it was his values and understanding that was developed out of his religious beliefs that had guided his decision making as to what was right in that particular period of time. In all the briefings and everything else, but was this side of it that was actually guiding him as to what was right. So we debriefed together and I was able to affirm the process he'd

used including the reference point of faith that had helped him to do what was right in this circumstance. It may all seem chaotic and different to anything that we may have experienced before.

We all need a reference point to come back to, to help us to configure or put together all the bits to know what's right in the circumstance that we might find ourselves at some time. Christians and chaplains can provide that reference point through faith. This reference point of faith that helps people to configure thinking and actions in the midst of confusion of war particularly if a desire comes to purposely destroy people and cross the line from appropriate action in war to criminal actions is very vital. If we believe God's way is best, then all the decisions are configured by that understanding.

Christians and chaplains have a great part to play in this because Jesus and his teachings are our reference point. Particularly when people do not have a reference point. A community, the defense force still loosely have this reference point even if we don't understand where it comes from.

Thirdly, I just want to bring out is the ideal of confidence. War brings about many conflicting thoughts, emotions and views within people. And one of these is that of the eternal, what happens if I do die? To see people killing and to possibly be killed focuses one clearly on many things including eternity. And be traumatized by the experiences of war would impact a person in future in some form. And it's important to be able to rise above it, if one is going to rise above it to go on and live confidently. I believe your understanding of the eternal is very important at this point. A person's view of eternal life after death is often challenged by what happens and what they see and experience in war. Some are drawn closer to God and faith, others reject God and faith and some become ambivalent.

One fellow came to the last service we held on board before we went up into um, into the naval gunfire support, he asked to see me afterwards and in coming to the services we got to know him. I knew he had a Christian leanings and be heavily involved in our taskings in which we were about to be involved, he said to me; that if we were sunk and he died that he knew he was going to be with the Lord in eternity and he had no fear of dying. He understood the importance of the eternal at this point in time. He went away with a sense of well-being and got on with his job. I've seen him since and his doing very well. He needed to be able to share this and be affirm in his statement of faith. Christians and chaplains are not there, ah, if Christians and chaplains are not there in the midst of war the opportunity for people to be able to be affirm and confident in their faith and discuss these vital aspects of life and death and faith would not be as readily available.

As a chaplain, I believe very strongly because of the above stories and many others, along with the words of Jesus that Christians need to be there; in war. If we aren't, then most struggle to connect, configure and have confidence to do the task that they have to do; let alone be part of eternal life. We can argue and discuss the inevitability of war, solutions but ultimately it's the people involved that are most important. I believed Christians should be involved, as

a Christian chaplain it's a privilege for me to be there in these environments, particularly war, in support of our people who are combatants, know to point them to Jesus and his teachings and it fits with the words of the bible that says "then how can people call for help, if they don't know who to trust? And "how can they know who to trust, if they haven't heard of the one who can be trusted?" and "how can they hear if nobody tells them?" and how is anyone going to tell them unless someone is sent to do it. That's why the scriptures claims a sight to take your breath away, grand processions of people telling all the good things of God. Thank You.