

# The Reverend Channell G. Hepburn and Canadian War Chaplaincy

By Isabel Davies and John Harris with Dr. Claire Grogan



## Before the War

The Reverend Channell G. Hepburn was born in Magog on September 15<sup>th</sup>, 1888. He attended Bishop's University from 1906 to 1910, receiving a B.A. in 1908. Channell went on to attend the Divinity General Theological Seminary in New York and received an M.A. in Sociology from Columbia University in 1911. In October 1911 he was admitted to the Diaconate and he would later earn his B.D. *in absentia* from Bishop's in 1917.

### Bishop's University

During Channell's time at Bishop's University, he was very involved in many different extracurricular activities. He joined the Bishop's Hockey team in the 1906-07 season and played left wing. Four years later, he was named the team Captain. Channell also played on the football team and was Vice-President of the club. This wasn't enough activity for the young man however, as he also joined the Racket Club committee. Beyond this, Channell joined several other groups such as the Committee of the Guild of the Venerable Bede, the Committee of the Missionary Union, and Bishop's Dramatic Society. Bishop's was a very small school at the time, and Channell, like most students, was involved in most of its activities. He received several awards during his time at Bishop's, such as Professor Dunn's Prize for Greek Testament, Reverend Dr. G. Abbott-Smith Prize for Unseen Translation, and he was inducted into the Bishop's Honor Roll during the war years. Channell also held the position of Alumni Editor for the *Mitre*, Bishop's seasonal publication. Indeed, he had quite a legacy at Bishop's University. This is shown through the *Mitre*, in which he is often mentioned, both during and after his time as a student.



## Chaplaincy in WWI

At the brink of World War I, the Canadian Forces are being prepared to travel to France, but no chaplains were being considered to join them. It was Sir Sam Hughes, the Minister of Militia and Defense, who chose 33 chaplains to accompany the troops overseas. By the end of World War I, of 4,400 army chaplains 524 were men from the Canadian Chaplain Services, many of which were located in Flanders, Siberia and the Mediterranean. Initially, the chaplains were not used to the best of their ability, being delegated to fill canteens and deliver entertainment, but this does not last long as the chaplains soon move into the trenches. They had the job to help keep morale up in the cold, dirty trenches and provide comfort and support to the men who are far from home. This proved to be a difficult task in light of witnessing the horrors of war, but seeing the men keep fighting and the gratefulness of loved ones helped the chaplains. The CCS used the word of God to help the allies to victory in WWI.

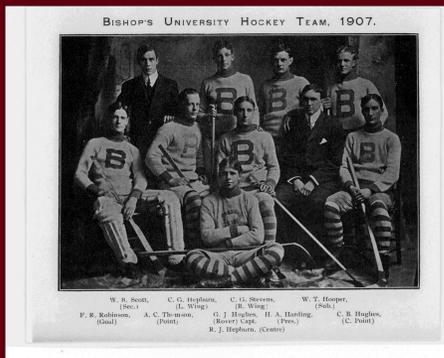
The Chaplain Service still exists today, though they were reorganized after WWI. The Rev. Hepburn saying himself that "it was a definite weakness" when the CCS disappeared and a number of army chaplains were somewhat lost. Today the Royal Canadian Chaplain Service is again active and important. Their motto is *Vocatio ad servitium*: A call to serve.



## Servitude (1917)

"Only the love of comrades sweetens all,  
Whose laughing spirit will not be outdone.  
As night-watching men wait for the sun  
To hearten them, so wait I on such boys  
As neither brass nor Hell-fire may appeal,  
Nor guns, nor sergeant-major's bluster and noise

Ivor Gurney

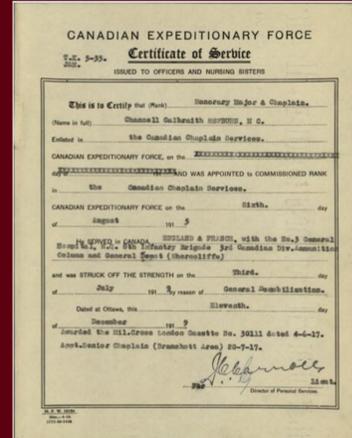


## The Reverend Hepburn at War

Chaplains in the war helped keep morale up and they offered support to the combat troops. This was an important role considering the serious nature of the war and the drastic changes in how war was fought. The Rev. Hepburn exemplified this in maintaining his position after being buried in the Battle of the Somme when a shelling caved-in his post. He wrote a letter to his wife after the event that it "seems funny for a padre to bury himself in this way", showing his good humor and support for the men. Channell earned a Military Cross for gallantry in this situation but remained at the Front despite it. His upbeat and easy-going nature comes through as well in another letter mentioned in the *Mitre* where he speaks of the sense of patriotism he feels in being a Canadian in the war.

In accounts by his peers he is said to have a "happy smile and sparkling humor", offering a friendly face for the other Bishop's men. The Rev. Hepburn stays true to his beliefs and the Canadian fighting spirit. Ivor Gurney's poem "Servitude" presents a maintained morale that became harder to find as the war went on but which describes Channell's character well.

The following tribute to Canadian soldiers at large, Bishop's men in particular, comes from the pen of Major C. G. Hepburn, who, with Mrs. Hepburn, is now at Bramshott Camp. He says, "The longer I remain in the army the greater pride I feel in being a Canadian—and also in no less degree a graduate of Bishop's. So many by their life—and death—have brought much honour to our dear country and Alma Mater. I can assure you, Lenoosville ranks high in the Canadian army, as well she might." In another of his letters, Major Hepburn speaks of meeting Capt. Wilken, a Canadian chaplain, who has recently returned from one of the prison camps of Germany, and he adds: "He told me enough to make one feel the utter folly of even trying to deal with such an enemy as Germany save by force."



## After War

The Rev. Channell Hepburn was one of many Bishop's students to serve in WWI, and not the only chaplain. This, however, speaks to the Canadian fighting spirit and the willpower of Bishop's students. Channell embodied the core values of Bishop's University and of chaplains. He was a cheerful, optimistic, and caring man. This personality is captured in quotations and snippets of his life, throughout his time at Bishop's and then beyond. An involved and active young man he brought great pride to his peers and school. Channell responded to the calling of World War I to help the Canadian war effort. He maintained his cheerful demeanor through the war and after his return home.

Post-War years were unfortunately laden with loss and disconnection for many soldiers and chaplains alike. The life of Rev. Channell Hepburn provides not only a look back in time to one of the most important events of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, but a look back at Bishop's and how it has shaped a life that depicts the best of our University. May his legacy always be remembered.

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