British Garrison Churches in Germany 1945 to 2019

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Following the end of World War Two in May 1945, the British army remained in Germany. Initially there to provide support to the Control Commission Administration, it stayed after the formation, in 1949, of the Federal German Republic. Its new role was to help provide defence against any threat from the Soviet Union. That task ceased to be relevant in 1990, but it was not until 2019 that the last garrison withdrew. During this whole period, churches were provided for the military. This article looks at the development of the provision, explores how these churches functioned, including their relations to German churches, and then traces the closure of the churches. It considers the unique position of these churches in British ecclesiastical history. Finally, it is suggested that more research is needed if these churches are not to be forgotten.

Across the world, in almost every town in the former British imperial and colonial territories, there are churches built either to serve the needs of the ruling elite or as part of a missionary endeavour. Many of them remain in use for Christian worship. There is one subset of these ecclesiastical buildings, churches built for the use of the army, where the change of administration has often been less kind to the buildings. In some states, such as Malta, following the departure of the British army, the role of the armed forces changed to such an extent that the military churches became superfluous: the army church in Valetta has become the Stock Exchange. In other countries, where the prevailing religion is not Christianity, the postcolonial military had no use for Christian churches. Space does not permit an extensive review of these buildings and their place in both colonial and postcolonial history, but their role on the Indian subcontinent as part of the heritage of the British army's presence there deserves to be better known, especially where, as with the garrison

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church of St Martin in New Delhi, built in the late 1930s, these were important buildings in their own right.[1] Historians are grateful to Michael Snape for the seminal work that he has done on the Indian Ecclesiastical Establishment, not least in exploring its involvement in providing chaplains during World War One.[2] However, there is a need for more research, not least into the churches that were provided for worship in the Indian army. Moreover, there is a particular group of military churches that were not part of the imperial project. It is these churches, and their relatively short history, with which this article is concerned. They were the churches that served the needs of the British army during its service in Germany between the end of the Second World War in May 1945 and the closure of the final British garrison in June 2019.

In the north-west of the present German state of Lower Saxony is Verden an der Aller, a former garrison town. Hanging in the narthex of the Dom, the principal Lutheran church in the town, are two boards. They list the British army chaplains who served at St Boniface, the garrison church, between 1949 and 1993. Beside them is a short explanation of the history of the church in Caithness Barracks, the British garrison in Verden. As will be explained later, the starting date marks the opening of the garrison church in 1949, rather than the arrival of chaplains in the town in 1945. The final date marks the closure of the British garrison and, with it, the church. These boards are artefacts that encapsulate the story of the British garrison churches in Germany.

The boards, displayed as they are in a German church, are thought to be unique in northern Germany, where British troops were stationed from 1945, initially to guard against any opposition to the Occupation authorities, and later as a defence against any Soviet aggression. There was considerable reluctance on the part of the church authorities of the Evangelische-lutherische Landeskirche Hannovers (Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Hanover) to accept the gift. There was even more discussion as to where the boards might be displayed within the building. Verden had been a garrison

[1] Gavin Stamp, *Interwar: British Architecture 1919–1939* (London, 2024), 250 and plate 1.

[2] Michael Snape, 'The First World War and in the Chaplains of British India', in idem and Edward Madigan, eds, *The Clergy in Khaki: New Perspectives on British Army Chaplaincy in the First World War* (Farnham, 2013), 143–68.

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town continuously since the seventeenth century, but after the British departed, this was no longer the case. These boards were thus symbolic of an aspect of the complex nature of the community's identity, having originally been displayed in a British military church. Having been part of the negotiations that accompanied the offer of these boards, the author was aware of the sensitivity of the British presence in another community, and of the church's being part of that presence.[3]

There has been no study of former British garrison churches, neither around the world nor in Germany. The literature on the subject is limited to contributions in the *Journal of the Royal Army Chaplains' Department* (RAChD), of which extensive use has been made in this article. There are occasional mentions in memoirs of both chaplains and other members of the military community in Germany. The wider role of chaplains in the six months after the end of the Second World War in May 1945 has been discussed in my earlier study, *Britain and the German Churches 1945–1950* (2021).[4] In undertaking this research, the help of David Blake, curator of the Royal Army Chaplains' Museum at Shrivenham has been invaluable, not least in locating a 1994 map showing the locations of the garrison churches in Germany at that time. As an army chaplain, the author served for eleven years during the period from 1977 to 1997, in roles ranging from unit chaplain in Sennelager, near Paderborn, to Assistant Chaplain General with oversight of chaplaincy services in Germany. This article is also informed by the author's personal recollections of the churches and their role in that period.

The history of these churches is here divided into four periods. The first is the period of 'Occupation' between 1945 and 1949. The second covers the years during which the army was transferring to a role as a partner army during the years of the early Cold War, up to 1960. The third is the period in which a professional army was part of NATO's central front. This was a largely settled state between 1960 and 1989. The fourth and final period saw a lengthy winding down process. This began after the collapse of communism and the so-called 'peace dividend' declared by the British government in the early 1990s

[3] The author's name appears on the second board. The information in this paragraph is drawn from personal records.

[4] Peter Howson, *Britian and the German Churches 1945–1950: The Role of the Religious Affairs Branch in the British Zone* (Woodbridge, 2021), 31–62.

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which reflected the reduction in defence spending.[5] Whilst it might have been thought that 1995 would have been an appropriate date for British troops to leave Germany, fifty years after their arrival, they were in fact to remain until 2019. In June that year, the closure of Church House at Lübbecke, in North Rhine-Westphalia, marked the end of British army chaplaincy in Germany.[6]

The Army of Occupation: 1945–9

The arrival of British troops in Germany in 1945 was not a new phenomenon. Immediately after the Armistice of November 1918, British troops had occupied the Rhineland alongside French, American and Belgian contingents. Unlike 1945, however, they were not part of the government of the country, but were there to ensure that the surrender terms were enforced. This was the first British Army on the Rhine (BAOR). Its mandate lasted until 30 June 1930. Relations between British churches in 1918 and their German counterparts, which had been generally cordial before 1914, remained frozen at the official level. It seems that this isolation from conditions on the ground of what was still technically an enemy state influenced policy concerning the role of chaplains. From George Bell's biography of Randall Davidson, archbishop of Canterbury, it is apparent that pleas from German Protestant church leaders for help to ameliorate the deteriorating social conditions brought about by the continuing British blockade fell on deaf ears.[7] Something of the same distancing appears to have been applied to army chaplains in that period.

An insight into the experiences of chaplains serving with this earlier occupation force can be gained from the memoirs of the Rev. George Kendall, a Primitive Methodist chaplain. *Daring All Things* contains two chapters that relate to his time in Germany in 1919 and 1920. One of the few comments relating to German churches described Kendall's use a of a village church during a two-week spell with his unit

[5] For the peace dividend, see, for instance, Sean M. DiGiovanna and Ann Markusen, *From Defense to Development? International Perspectives on Realizing the Peace Dividend* (London and New York, 2003).

[6] As it turned out, however, this was not quite the end: recent events have meant that there is now, once again, a British army chaplain stationed in Germany. That is another story.

[7] George Bell, *Randall Davidson, Archbishop of Canterbury*, 3rd edn (Oxford, 1952; first publ. 1935), 917–25. The British blockade was not lifted at the Armistice of 11 November 1918, continuing until the eventual peace treaty was signed at Versailles on 28 June 1919.

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away from their base in Cologne. He did so apparently with the agreement of the local pastor. Kendall commented: 'His duties were very light, for he only held a service on Sunday mornings.'[8] Otherwise, Kendall had to find places for worship where he could. As he noted on another occasion:

> In the course of my duties in another part of the city, I visited a convent which was used as a home for children. I asked the Mother Superior if I could use the chapel for some Sunday afternoon services. I was perfectly frank with her – and told her that I was a Free Church chaplain. She said she understood, others had been to ask for the same privilege but had not told her of their church associations. She would let me use the convent chapel but would put a screen in front of the altar.[9]

Little is known about the official provisions made for places to hold church services during this occupation. Further research might clarify the extent of relations between the British and the German churches and how they changed during the period.

Whatever the relationships that existed between 1918 and 1930, the chaplains who found themselves in Germany in May 1945 were under strict instructions to have nothing to do with the local population. 'Non-fraternization' was the rule. The policy was specifically extended to chaplains:

> While maintaining a sympathetic appreciation of the complex religious issues involved, the Supreme Commander believes that the high ideals to which we have dedicated ourselves and the attainment of the future peace of the world are ends to which religious institutions whole heartedly subscribe, and to which the Clergy give their support. To attain these ends a policy of non-fraternization is deemed essential and must apply to Chaplains and religious workers.[10]

Difficult to enforce in the army in general, non-fraternization proved a completely unrealistic demand for chaplains. In the chaos of May 1945, they were often approached by local clergy who saw them as a

[8] George Kendall, *Daring All Things: The Autobiography of George Kendall (1881–1961)*, ed. Tim Kendall (Solihull, 2016), 133.
[9] Ibid. 134–5.
[10] Shrivenham, Royal Army Chaplains' Museum, MS SHAEF AG 09-1 (Germany) CAP-AGM, dated 30 March 1945, 'Directive for Chaplains as to the Policy in Relations to German Clergy and the Inhabitants of Germany'.

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point of contact with the occupying forces.[11] They would also be required by their own superiors to develop contacts with local church leaders in order to provide for the spiritual needs of the British army, not least for the provision of worship on Sundays.[12]

With no functioning government in Germany in May 1945, and the need to guard against perceived potential resistance to Allied rule, it was obvious that British troops could be in Germany for some time. Nobody could have foreseen exactly how long. To deal with the situation, the Chaplains' Branch at Headquarters 21 Army Group, then based in Lübbecke, began to give directions for how to provide places for worship.[13] These were sent out alongside instructions for Operation Eclipse.[14] The latter provided detailed instructions for the army as to how to operate in defence of the military government that was acting as the interim administration. Geoffrey Druitt, Assistant Chaplain General, in his directions to chaplains, argued that troops should have access to buildings of sufficient standard to allow them to worship God in the most suitable way. To achieve that aim, Druitt argued that one of three routes be followed:

a. The requisitioning of a German church for the exclusive use of British military personnel.
b. The partial use of a local church.
c. The adaptation of other suitable premises by adequate furnishings and re-decoration for exclusive use as a Garrison Church.[15]

There was no intention in Druitt's plan to deny the local population the use of churches. Requisitioning could only take place where 'exclusive use does not impose any hardship upon the local German population (i.e. that they can be adequately accommodated for worship in the remaining churches of the town)', but where that was case,

[11] Peter Howson, 'Agents of Occupation or Reconciliation? Army Chaplains in Germany in the Summer of 1945', in Michael Snape and Stuart Bell, eds, *British Christianity and the Second World War* (Woodbridge, 2023), 198–213, at 199.
[12] Ibid. 200.
[13] Royal Army Chaplains' Museum, MS 21 Army Group 2A/79/ACG, dated 20 April 1945.
[14] Details of Operation 'Eclipse' can be found online at: <http://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p4013coll8/id/2948>, accessed 15 September 2020.
[15] Royal Army Chaplains' Museum, MS 21 Army Group 2A/79/ACG.

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'this requisitioning should be made forthwith.'[16] When a church was taken over, it was stressed that it must be made available for the use of all denominations other than Roman Catholics. This reflected how chaplaincy in the British army at that time was divided into two mutually exclusive organizations: chaplains, apart from those of the Roman Catholic Church, were administered by the 'Unified Department', while Roman Catholic chaplains came under their own chain of command. This article concentrates on the work of the Unified Department, making reference to Catholic chaplaincy only where records exist of a distinct policy.

During the summer of 1945, a booklet entitled *Occupation of Germany: Plans and Policy affecting the Brotherhood of Chaplains* was sent to chaplains. It laid out what the hierarchy of the Unified Department envisaged for the religious life of the army in Germany. In this booklet, Druitt was keen to stress that the use of buildings by all denominations called for restraint in furnishings, as well as a sensitivity around displaying extreme forms of churchmanship.[17] Druitt also recognized that it would not be possible, in every situation, to requisition a church, for in rural areas there would usually only be one church, while in towns and larger cities bombing had left many churches unfit for use. In such cases, the chaplain was to 'arrange with the German Pastor for the church to be set aside for certain stated periods for the exclusive use of British troops; during such set periods the Germans will be denied access.'[18] Another section of the chaplaincy plan was entitled 'The Requisitioning of Churches or other buildings for Divine Worship', which laid out how this was to be done in accordance with the non-fraternization rules.

The general principles were given more substance by Padre John William Jackson Steele, the Assistant Chaplain General to the 8th Army. Closer to the local level, his instructions were more practical. In a section headed 'Chaplaincy Ministrations/Duties', he laid out what would be expected from chaplains. Here, with an eye to the future, he wrote:

> The Garrison Churches for the occupational period should now be concentrated upon (that is, those Garrison Churches in the permanent occupation Garrisons).

[16] Ibid.
[17] Royal Army Chaplains' Museum, MS 'Occupation of Germany, Plans and Policy Affecting the Brotherhood of Chaplains'.
[18] Ibid.

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> Normal church records should be kept [in an] AB 301.[19]
> Church collections and church accounts should be run on the approved system.
> Choirs with cassocks and surplices, should be coming into existence.
> The appointment of Church Orderlies or Vergers should be made.
> At some stage during the Final Occupational Period families will no doubt be permitted to come out. This means that Sunday Schools will have to be started. The necessary organisation for teaching and running Sunday Schools will have to be developed during this period.[20]

For many chaplains denied the use of Roman Catholic churches during the fighting in France and Belgium,[21] the ability to use German Protestant churches represented a wonderful new normality.

A picture of what was to result from all these directives is provided by the diary entries of a medical officer who undertook national service in Germany between 1947 and 1949. Stationed first in Bad Lippspringe, near Paderborn, and then in Celle, Captain Walsh and his family attended the garrison churches. An inveterate diarist, he has left records of his experience of church life:

> 19 October 1947
> Up late and to church, where there was a good sermon. A small congregation consisting of the usual people.[22]

Frustratingly, he did not record what building was being used in Bad Lippspringe. The nature of the building was clearer when he moved to Celle, as there the British had taken over the nineteenth-century German garrison church, a building they would continue to use for the next fifty years. The website of the current congregation has noted in its history how:

> In 1945, after the 2nd World War, the British took over the Garrison Church (St. George's) and returned it on 29 June 1997 in connection

[19] AB 301 refers to Army Book number 301 in which records of church services and collections were kept. The originals are extant and held at The National Archives in the archives of the Royal Army Chaplains' Department at Shrivenham but have not been indexed.
[20] Royal Army Chaplains' Museum, MS 'Chaplaincy Ministrations/Duties'.
[21] Leslie Skinner, *The Man Who Worked on Sundays* (published by author, n.d.). Skinner's account of his service with the Sherwood Foresters Yeomanry from D-Day to the end of the war illustrated the policy that Church of England, Church of Scotland and Free Church chaplains were unable to conduct worship in local Roman Catholic churches.
[22] MS Diary of Captain Rodney Walsh RAMC, from the author's private collection.

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with their troop reduction. With the obligation of ecclesiastical use, the church and its property came into private German hands on the 23 December 1997.[23]

The diary entry referring to the 'small congregation' may well reflect the change that had taken place in the life of the army in the autumn of 1946. Following a debate in parliament about the place of compulsory church parades in the life of the army, the government decided that this three-hundred-year-old tradition should be abolished. Apart from some minor exceptions, attendance at church services would henceforth be voluntary.[24] The route to the decision has been charted by Jeremy Crang, who notes that in the discussion that preceded the decision, Field Marshal Montgomery was among a number of senior officers who argued for the retention of compulsory church parades.[25] The requirements of the army in BAOR were cited as one of the reasons, since these parades provided an opportunity for soldiers to attend divine worship that might otherwise not be available since there would be no local English language services which troops could chose to attend.[26] These arguments did not prevail, however, and one of the consequences of the changed provision in the new Army and Navy Act was that the size of buildings required for Sunday worship in German garrison towns would now be quite different from that envisaged by Padre Steele.

Despite the chaos of the first year of the occupation, the army and its chaplains settled into an ordered pattern. No military action was ever required to counter resistance to the administration by the British Element of the Control Commission Germany. There appears to be no evidence for what happened in army chaplaincies in Germany between 1946 and 1949.

A Transition to a Cold War Army (1949–60)

The re-establishment of political institutions and the handing over of functions to Germans in 1948/49 could have brought these initial,

[23] See online at: <http://garnison-kirche-celle.de>, accessed 3 March 2023.
[24] 'Army and Air Force (Annual) Bill', HC Deb., 29 March 1946 (vol. 421, cols 701–85), online at: <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1946/mar/29/army-and-air-force-annual-bill>, accessed 10 September 2025.
[25] Jeremey Crang, 'The Abolition of Compulsory Church Parades in the British Army', *JEH* 56 (2005), 92–106. Compare also the article by Philip Williamson in this volume, 'Freedom of Worship and the Armed Forces in Early Twentieth-Century England'.
[26] Kew, TNA, WO 32/14688.

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temporary arrangements to an end, and seen the army return to the United Kingdom. However, as the occupation period began to wind down, it was obvious, with the deteriorating security position in Europe, that British troops would be required to help guarantee the defence of the newly emerging Federal Republic of Germany. Based on the three Western zones, this was vulnerable to threats from Soviet Russian forces to the east. Since the guarantee provided by the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949 that created NATO was open-ended, and might well be needed for many years, British troops would remain and a new policy for the provision of churches for military personnel would be required. Whilst it would generally have been feasible to develop a relationship with local German churches, it was decided that the model used in Britain of providing garrison churches exclusively for military use was also to be followed in Germany. In some garrisons, notably Paderborn where the local population was overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, it would in any case have been almost impossible to find appropriate buildings. The principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*, established in the Peace of Augsburg in 1555, was still influencing decisions in 1949.[27]

Although the need for garrison churches was still officially 'temporary', it was likely to be of sufficient duration to require permanent structures. There would no longer, except in the case of the headquarters at Bad Oyenhausen in the new Land of North Rhine-Westphalia, be a case for continuing to use civilian churches. It is no coincidence that the boards displayed in Verden's Dom began the sequence of chaplains at St Boniface in 1949. In Caithness Barracks, which had previously been a German cavalry barracks, a former stable block was converted to become a church. Such buildings were often available in former German barracks, and were frequently chosen to be converted into churches. Retaining traces of the former mangers and with tethering rings on the walls, they were especially atmospheric at services during the Christmas season.

Some of the large barrack complexes built as part of the German rearmament programme in the 1930s which had been taken over by British garrisons had to be provided with new, purpose-built churches. Provisioned with numerous amenities when built, churches had,

[27] This is usually translated as 'whose realm, his religion', and was a compromise that ended this phase of religious wars in central Europe by decreeing that the choice of religious practice should be that of the ruler of a state.

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perhaps not surprisingly given the ambivalent attitude of the National Socialist regime to churches, been omitted from the plans. One such new provision during the 1950s was 'the white church' in the camp at Bergen-Hohne, between Hannover and Hamburg. Although there were always four major units and a host of smaller ones stationed there, the ending of compulsory church parades allowed the erection of a much smaller building than would have been required before 1946. St George's, Hohne, could seat only 250. The comparable camp at Fallingbostel, across the tank firing ranges from Hohne, was provided with a similar building in the form of All Saints. Another church, St Peter's, was to be provided in Barker Barracks at Paderborn.

One completely new camp was built to meet the needs of the newly configured military presence in Germany. The continued requisitioning of a large part of Bad Oyenhausen, including the church, was inappropriate as well as unsuitable. The headquarters of British Forces Germany needed a new home. This was to be provided on a barren site north of Mönchengladbach, North Rhine-Westphalia, to be known as Rheindahlen, after a small local settlement. The initial plans called for two churches, one of which was to be allocated for the use of Roman Catholics. The Royal Air Force, whose headquarters would be based alongside those of the army, insisted that a building be provided for the Church of Scotland and the Free Churches.[28] Unlike the army, the RAF had four separate groupings for chaplains (Anglican; Roman Catholic; Presbyterian, Methodist and United Board of Baptist and Congregational churches; and Jewish) and sought to provide an RAF station with a place of worship for each. Thus, Rheindahlen was to have St Boniface, used by the Church of England, St Thomas More for the Roman Catholics, and St Andrew's for the other denominations. All were attractive buildings, well placed at the centre of the garrison.[29]

The provision of new churches became part of a policy to provide suitable places of worship for the troops and their families. In the summer of 1952, a total of ten new garrison churches were approved to be built.[30] These included some of those already mentioned. Over the next ten years, the RAChD *Journal* reported the opening of newbuild

[28] Anon., *St Andrew's Church: Serving the Community of JHQ for 50 years* (Rheindahlen, 2007), unpaginated [2].
[29] Anon., *Fifty Years On: A Short History of St Andrew's Church* (published privately, n.pl., n.d.).
[30] Command Notes, *Journal of the Royal Army Chaplains' Department* [hereafter: *JRAChD*] 7 (1952), 38.

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churches at Münster in 1954;[31] at Osnabrück, Fallingbostel and Hubbelrath and a chapel at Prince Rupert School in Wilhelmshaven in 1955;[32] at Iserlohn in 1960,[33] as well as the three in the new headquarters at Rheindahlen. There were additionally garrisons, such as that at Herford, where conversion of a part of the barracks was preferred to a newbuild.[34]

One garrison in Germany remained outside the changes that took place in 1949. Berlin remained under military control, organized by the four Allied powers, until the reunification of Germany after the signing of the 15 March 1991 treaty. No mechanism could be found to return it to civilian rule that would be acceptable to all the Allies. St George's Church in Berlin had been established in 1884 to provide an Anglican place of worship for Victoria, the wife of the Crown Prince Frederick William. It was thus an example of another type of British church existing in a foreign country and not affiliated to any group within that country. The original building had been severely damaged by Allied bombing in May 1944. The ruins lay in the Soviet zone of control, so a decision was made to provide a new building in the British zone and for the building to become the garrison church for the military in Berlin. It would remain so until 1994 when the garrison was disbanded and the church returned to civilian control.[35]

The creation of a permanent garrison in West Germany in 1949, and one that was likely to remain in place for the foreseeable future, posed a unique problem for the Church of England. Although the bishop of Fulham, whose jurisdiction included civilian chaplaincies in Europe, had sought to exercise authority over army chaplains in Germany in 1946, the archbishop of Canterbury remained the ordinary for service chaplains.[36] After the war, Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher had made visits to Germany. With British forces now being accompanied by a greater number of families, and thus the requirement for an increased number of episcopal confirmations, it would not be

[31] *JRAChD* 9 (1954), 103.
[32] *JRAChD* 10 (1955), 145.
[33] *JRAChD* 15 (1960), 500.
[34] *JRAChD* 12 (1958), 176.
[35] Royal Army Chaplains' Museum, MS 'History of St George's Church Berlin'.
[36] The outworkings of the Army Chaplains' Act of 1868 would be worthy of a separate study. In particular, an attempt to repeal the Act in the late 1980s was met with unexpected opposition in General Synod: see Peter Howson, 'The Nature and Shape of British Army Chaplaincy 1960–2000' (PhD thesis, University of Aberdeen, 2006), 58–60.

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possible for him to provide the pastoral and liturgical presence that was required. Unlike almost every other garrison around the world, there was no local Anglican bishop to whom an appeal could be made. Nor, as in times past, could the army chaplains provide a bishop from within their own ranks.[37] Another solution had to be found. It was therefore decided that the archbishop of Canterbury would give a bishop the responsibility for oversight of the armed forces. It was proposed that he would be known as 'The Bishop to the Forces', for he could not be styled 'Bishop of the Forces', as that title had been in use for the Roman Catholic bishop since 1917, and the Ministry of Defence thought that there was a danger of confusion. To differentiate the post and to indicate the limit on the bishop's authority, the full title included the words: 'The Archbishop of Canterbury's Ecclesiastical Representative to the Armed Forces.' The first appointment was made in 1948 when Cuthbert Bardsley, the suffragan bishop of Croydon, then in the Canterbury diocese, was appointed. He retained the role until 1956 despite his translation to Coventry. Later appointments were almost exclusively of bishops with a connection to either Canterbury diocese or to the archbishop's staff at Lambeth. Their visits to garrison churches in Germany became a feature of military life over the next fifty years.

A Professional Army with a Job to do (1960–90)

A major change was to take place in 1960 when conscription ended. One consequence was that the army in Germany would now comprise only professional soldiers, many of whom might expect to spend years serving in Germany. Further reorganizations within the terms of service helped to create an army in which the majority of the soldiers were married and had families. The emphasis on worship in garrison churches began to shift from congregations of single men, often with considerable experience of church life before they began their period of national service, and thus able to provide organists and choirs from their ranks but who changed every few months, to congregations of families who would be less mobile. The primary recruiting areas for soldiers in the 1960s were those, such as the north-east of England, where the effects of the decline in church attendance noted by Callum

[37] For example, Bishop Taylor Smith served as Chaplain General between 1901 and 1925, having previously been bishop of Sierra Leone.

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Brown were most obvious,[38] and this became apparent in the garrison churches of Germany.

The new, post-1960 life of garrison churches also saw the development of closer relations with local German churches. In places where German churches had been used by the army this was not a totally new phenomenon. A painted glass window was gifted to the congregation of the Bauernkirche in Iserlohn when the British moved to their newly built garrison church in 1959. It was described as being: 'In gratitude for the privilege of the use for worship since 1945'.[39]

The 1960s were to see developing contacts between the garrison churches and their local neighbours. Chronicled in the pages of the RAChD *Journal*, the 'Command Notes' from the BAOR reported the regular occurrence of joint services, especially during Advent. No doubt the ecumenical spirit of the time helped to encourage a willingness from both sides to work together when they could. One such event, widely reported in Germany, was an Anglo-German carol service held in Christ Church, Lindenhof, Saarn, in 1960.[40] Another Anglo-German service, this time held at St Boniface, the Anglican garrison church in the headquarters complex at Rheindahlen in the summer of 1963, was recorded as 'Attracting wide publicity.'[41] There were also invitations for members of the British military community to attend the Protestant Kirchentag, a biennial gathering of lay Protestants first held in 1949. The Rev. John Youens, at that time Assistant Chaplain General in charge of all non-Catholic army chaplaincy in Germany, received a special invitation to speak to the 1963 meeting, which was held in Dortmund. Following the erection of the Berlin wall in 1961, the Kirchentag became increasingly interested in the theme of peace.[42]

Other links were made through the annual Women's World Day of Prayer, first initiated in 1887 and observed in many countries, and held on the first Friday of March each year. Through the 1980s, there was regular involvement in Bergen-Hohne where representatives of the garrison churches took part in the planning and conduct of the services. Another link was forged at Hohne between the congregation

[38] Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800–2000* (London, 2000), 138.
[39] *JRAChD* 12 (1959), 405.
[40] *JRAChD* 16 (1961), 650.
[41] *JRAChD* 18 (1963), 9.
[42] *JRAChD* 19 (1964), 10.

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of St Ninian's, the Church of Scotland, Methodist and United Board garrison church (the only one other than St Andrew's at Rheindahlen to be so designated), and the German Mission Seminary at Hermannsburg. The seminary students, who were often going to countries where English was spoken and English church influences were important, attended to experience worship in English (or sometimes, when led by a Church of Scotland chaplain, Scots). Between 1987 and 1988, a chaplain helped moderate a course on Anglo-Saxon church history.[43] This also resulted in an involvement with the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Bergen-Belsen, a local pressure group that was seeking to improve the sparse historical information provided at the site of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.

This was probably the high point of the relationships with the German churches. Some connections lingered – the annual Advent carol services in the Paderborn Dom and the Dom in Münster have remained important dates in the local Anglo-German calendar – but other links do not seem to have survived. One reason was the continual drain of operations and exercises on chaplaincy time. The increase, in the early 1980s, of the length of emergency tours in Northern Ireland from four to six months put extra pressure on the time available to those chaplains remaining in Germany. Contacts at national level, such as the signing of the Meissen Agreement that formalized the relationship between the Church of England and the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (German Protestant Church) in 1991, had an impact on local relations. Closer relations might have been expected to ensue, but failure by the Church of England to identify almost all garrison churches as 'Anglican' meant that they were generally viewed by German churches as falling outside the scope of the agreement. Germans began to look elsewhere for their contacts with British churches. There were also decisions taken at a national level which affected local arrangements. On 8 December 1988, a US Air Force A-10 Thunderbolt fighter crashed into a residential area in the city of Remscheid, North Rhine-Westphalia, killing five people on the ground. There was already considerable concern after a previous major disaster at an airshow in August that year at the US Ramstein air base. Although there had been no British involvement in either event, the decision was taken that all military activities with the German

[43] The author served as an army chaplain in Hohne during this period.

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population would be cancelled. Planned carol services did not take place, and many were not restarted in subsequent years. A similar edict, from the British Foreign Office, was issued in 1995 banning the British military in Germany from holding any events to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war in Europe. No protest appears to have been made by the staff at Ministry of Defence (Chaplains [Army]), the headquarters of army chaplaincy.[44]

A study made in 1987 as preparation work for the mid-service clergy course at St George's House in Windsor Castle, revealed how ecumenical the work of chaplaincy had become in one part of Germany. Its title, 'Pragmatism or Policy?', indicated a drift in Germany to its being 'the army church', rather than 'the church in the army.'[45] Responses from chaplains serving within the boundaries of the 1st Armoured Division area in North Rhine-Westphalia to a questionnaire showed that most had received little or no guidance from their church authorities about how to minister in situations such as those of the garrison churches in BAOR. One chaplain declared that he served a church which had always had an Anglican chaplain as there was a 'Free Church' in the same location. However, he admitted that when he was away from the garrison on a tour of duty in Northern Ireland, the chaplain who conducted worship in the so-called 'Anglican' garrison church was not Anglican. Only the Roman Catholics, at that point still a self-governing group within the Royal Army Chaplains' Department, managed to maintain a clear religious identity, and that would change after the Millennium with the advent of a new policy of 'All Souls Ministry'.[46]

Differences in style within denominations could sometimes be more important than those between them. A change of chaplain in one garrison church in Germany led many in the congregation to believe that a Baptist chaplain had been replaced by an Anglican, when in reality it was a Methodist chaplain who followed an Anglican colleague.[47] Even in the 1st Armoured Division, the area studied in

[44] Both events involved the author, as senior chaplain in Osnabrueck in 1988 and as Assistant Chaplain General United Kingdom Support Command (Germany) in 1995.
[45] Windsor, St George's House, MS 'Pragmatism or Policy? Ecumenism in the 1st Armoured Division'.
[46] Peter Howson, 'Anglican-Methodist Relations in the Context of the British Army', in Jane Platt and Martin Wellings, eds, *Anglican-Methodist Ecumenism: The Search for Church Unity, 1920–2020* (London, 2022), 199–214, at 209.
[47] Personal information.

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the 1987 questionnaire, there was a Baptist chaplain, serving as a member of the United Board, who would baptize infants. His argument was that other URC members of the United Board would do so and so should he.[48] If there is any explanation, it probably lies in the liturgical upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s that affected most denominations. The disappearance of abbreviated services of matins, familiarly known in army chaplaincy circles as 'mangled matins', and the demise of large Sunday schools was as obvious in garrison churches in Germany as in the churches in the UK.

There had been other changes during the period. The Canadian army had maintained a presence in Germany after 1945, serving alongside the British. The move to a settled existence in the 1950s saw the building of spacious and attractive churches for the use of their army. By the mid-1970s, the Canadian government decided to relocate a smaller force closer to the American army in the south of Germany. In 1977, the British army carried out a reorganization of its forces to include a take-over of former Canadian bases. The RAChD thus assumed responsibility for the two striking garrison churches in the headquarters of the 3rd Armoured Division at Körbecke, close to the Möhnesee and its famous dam.[49]

The apparently settled state of the 1980s came to a dramatic end with the events of 9 November 1989 when the Berlin wall effectively 'came down'. The following months were to see massive changes in the internal politics of the countries of Eastern Europe that comprised the Warsaw Pact. By 1991, the Cold War was over and on 3 October 1990 the former German Democratic Republic, the East German state, was absorbed into the Federal Republic of Germany. The rationale for British troops to remain in Germany to defend against a possible Soviet lead invasion had disappeared.

The Time of Withdrawal (1990–2019)

Although a 'peace dividend' was declared in Britain in the 1990s, the new defence policy initially envisaged a reduction of the number of troops in Germany rather than a complete withdrawal. A map of the location of garrison churches, the only one ever produced, was drawn

[48] St George's House, MS 'Pragmatism or Policy?' The chaplain concerned was subsequently admitted to Anglican orders.

[49] Graham E. Watson and Richard A. Rinaldi, *The British Army in Germany (BAOR and After): An Organizational History 1947–2004* (Takoma Park, MD, 2005), 90.

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in 1994 and shows the significant number that were still in existence.[50] One early round of closures occurred when 3rd Armoured Division returned to England in 1993.[51] As a result, the garrison churches in Körbecke, Söest and Lippstadt, taken over from the Canadian army in 1977, do not appear on that map.

As early as September 1990, after a coalition had been formed to remove Iraqi forces from Kuwait following their invasion on 2 August 1990, it became clear that troops based in Germany would soon become a resource to be deployed elsewhere. They were highly trained, reasonably well staffed and with access to weapons and material. The Kuwait war was to have a significant impact on the life of garrison churches. With almost all troops from the 1st Armoured Division deployed to Saudi Arabia by Christmas 1990, pastoral ministry for the remaining troops and the large number of 'headless' families had to be provided by a number of Territorial Army chaplains engaged on regular terms and deployed to Germany. That could only be a temporary solution and when, after 1992, increasing numbers of troops were sent to the former Yugoslavia, a new solution had to be found. With deployments involving the majority of troops from a brigade, a decision was taken that chaplains would deploy with units. It was decided to implement a policy of employing clergy as civil servants. Often referred to as 'Retired Chaplains', since most were former members of the RAChD, the posts could also be filled by clergy with other previous experience with the military community. The policy worked well, although one unintended consequence was a further decrease in contacts with local German communities.

The gradual decrease in the number of garrison churches and of chaplains ministering in Germany during the 1990s revealed a new challenge. The churches had often been attended by former members of the military community who had retired locally, by members of the wider civilian community who served the needs of the army but were not entitled to any of the benefits of service life, and by local members of the German population who enjoyed British styles of worship. These 'non-entitled' members of the church communities began to take up an increasing amount of chaplains' time. In addition, veterans from earlier generations who had settled in Germany were beginning to die. Their next of kin would often request a funeral with a military

[50] Royal Army Chaplains' Museum, MS 'Map of Garrison Churches in Germany, 1994'.
[51] Watson and Rinaldo, *British Army in Germany*, 116.

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element. Unless such veterans had paid their German church tax,[52] local German clergy were unable to take any responsibility for providing funerals, or indeed for any other pastoral offices. With the very different approach taken in the United States army, where veterans remained entitled to certain benefits including a 'military' funeral, pressure began to mount for British chaplains to make their churches and their time available for such funerals. By the mid-1990s, the time and resources being devoted to such tasks resulted in a directive from the Assistant Chaplain General at United Kingdom Support Command (Germany), the successor to BAOR, that such requests should be directed to the churches that formed part of the Church of England's civilian diocese in Europe, unless there was a clear reason why an army chaplain should be involved.[53]

Decisions also had to be taken about how far the ministry of those who were not members of the service community should be recognized within garrison churches. Serving in Verden in October 1992, I was able to present to an American civilian, with no connection to the British military community, a certificate from the bishop to the Forces to assist at the administration of holy communion. That might seem a local measure and fully acceptable. In contrast, the case of the ordination to the priesthood of Carsten Peter Thiede was more troubling for its implications. His priesting merited two short mentions in the RAChD's *Journal*, but this failed to give details of this peculiar episode.[54] Thiede had previously worked in the United Kingdom. He had become an Anglican whilst in England and had been licensed as a reader. On his return to Germany, he became part of the worshipping congregation at St Peter's Garrison Church in Barker Barracks, Paderborn. As a German and someone not a member of the service community, he was however accepted for ordination within the diocese of the

[52] This was a voluntary payment collected by the state and paid to participating churches that allowed access to occasional services and other activities provided by such churches.
[53] Royal Army Chaplains' Museum, MS ACG UKSC(G), Policy Instruction, dated May 1995. It is worth noting that around this time the Diocese in Europe deaneries were reorganized, creating a deanery of Germany. Within the deanery, there were real attempts to work more closely with the forces chaplains, and at least one meeting of the Council of Anglican Episcopal Churches in Germany (made up of the deanery of Germany and German parishes of Convocation of American churches in Europe) was held at Lübbecke. The relationship between the diocese of Europe and the limited number of army churches that saw themselves as 'Anglican' (of which there were three: St Boniface Rheindahlen, St George's Hohne and St Peter's Paderborn) is worthy of an article in itself.
[54] See *JRAChD* 40 (2001), 42–4.

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Forces, and ordained priest in Paderborn in the summer of 2000. Whilst the Anglican chaplain in Paderborn saw no difficulties with this, others were troubled about why it had not taken place within the diocese in Europe. Thiede died suddenly in 2004 and therefore did not live long enough after his ordination for problems to arise as garrison churches closed across Germany.

More closures of British bases in Germany, and their associated churches, became the norm during the first years of the twentieth-first century. With the demands of operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, fewer troops remained and the programme of barrack closures accelerated. Arrangements were made for furniture, artefacts, records and stained glass to be returned to Great Britain or disposed of elsewhere. A considerable amount of surplus furniture and other items were sent to Fiji, connecting the sizeable Fijian community within the British army with their home churches.

There were other, more important, artefacts. Chief among these were the many painted glass windows that had been installed in many of the garrison churches. These had often been donated by units and in some churches, such as St Christopher's in Dempsey Barracks in Sennelager, formed an impressive display that depicted the history of the church as part of the military community. Most of them were repatriated to the United Kingdom to find new homes in army and other churches. Some, such as the impressive east windows in St Boniface, the Anglican church in the headquarters complex at Rheindahlen, remained in place.[55]

Amongst the final places to close, inthe summer of 2019, was Church House at Lübbecke. At a time when economies needed to be found, and barrack closures were brought forward, it was notable that Church House remained in daily use for almost forty years, until the very last days. It was a tribute to the place of chaplaincy that it was needed to perform the services it had been doing for almost forty years until the very last days of British military involvement in Germany. Originally built as a training centre for the Hitlerjügend organization, the complex was captured in the closing days of the war and became, briefly, the officers' mess of Field Marshall Montgomery's headquarters. It then fulfilled the same function for the 2nd Division until that division was relocated to the United Kingdom in a reorganization

[55] Royal Army Chaplains' Museum, MS 'Catalogue of Stained Glass from Military Churches in Germany'.

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in 1982.[56] At that time, the RAChD was looking for a replacement church house, as the existing one in Wuppertal was scheduled to close. Repurposed, the Lübbecke complex provided support to chaplains and the wider military community in Germany. It remained in use as one of the last British facilities still in operation as the final drawdown of British troops took place. It eventually closed with some ceremony on 15 June 2019.[57] It had been a fitting successor to other church houses that had served since the first one had opened in 1945.

Conclusion

Reviewing the experience of British army chaplaincy in Germany through the story of the garrison churches, it is possible to see how that ministry was exercised in the geographical context of northern Germany. In the first years, the garrison churches provided places for religious worship for the large British force that stood ready to support the British Element of the Control Commission Germany, should it become necessary to back up its decisions as the de facto government with force. This was also a period when reconstruction was to replace de-Nazification as the main goal, a process in which chaplains were directly involved through their dual role as chaplains who also reported to the Religious Affairs Branch of the Control Commission.[58]

As the role of the army in Germany changed during the 1950s, and national service came to an end in 1960, church provision was needed for the new settled military community. With this new arrangement came a replacement of the old order of requisitioned buildings, from which Germans had been excluded, to a new experience of mutual recognition and cooperation. It was always limited, and over time decreased, because of the pressures on chaplains to accompany troops on operations. This began in the late 1960s with deployments on Operation Banner in Northern Ireland, continuing through the 1970s and 1980s, and then increasing after the end of Communism, with a first mission to the former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia (now Northern Macedonia) in the 1990s and subsequent missions to Iraq and Afghanistan.

[56] Watson and Rinaldi, *The British Army in Germany*, 95.
[57] The author was an invited guest at the closing ceremonies.
[58] Howson, *Britain and the German Churches*, 63–77.

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Germany was an unfamiliar land for many. Whilst Roman Catholics, especially before the reforms following Vatican II in the 1960s, might feel at home in churches in many parts of Germany, there were few parallels with the Anglican experience or even those of the Church of Scotland or the English Free Churches. A distinct lack of interest by British church leaders in using the experience of army chaplaincy to forge relations with churches in Germany, especially after 1950, is worth noting. As this author has argued elsewhere, the shift within army chaplaincy after 1960, from the primacy of control by the churches to that of the army, brought with it increasing isolation for the garrison churches and, ultimately for many, a crisis of identity.[59]

This crisis of identity was sometimes identified as a tension between being 'the church in the army' as against 'the army church', something which became more obvious from the late 1960s. This meant that to serve as an army chaplain in Germany was to become a citizen of a strange ecclesiastical land where familiar rules were no longer a trusted guide. Undoubtedly the ecumenical movement of the 1950s and 1960s, spearheaded by the Anglican-Methodist schemes and the 1972 formation of the United Reformed Church in England, helped non-Catholics to change the experience of garrison churches into centres of ecumenical worship more reminiscent of the wartime army than of what was taking place in Britain. Perhaps the changes were assisted by the unwillingness of the British churches to provide clear guidance on how chaplains and chaplaincies were to understand their ministry across denominations. That might not matter so much in hospitals, schools, prisons, and other settings where sacred spaces were known as 'chapels' and provided limited ranges of worship, but for army chaplains in Germany their ministry was in a garrison church, with all that this meant in providing the focus of worship for a sizeable and often diverse community. Chaplains posted to Germany after the mid-1960s often found themselves in a context in which normal ecclesiastical rules were not always seen as applicable. It is a tribute to their ministry that they coped and provided a ministry to their fellow soldiers, often in a time of considerable need.[60] It is strange that ecumenical debates in Britain have so rarely made reference to experiences in the army community, and especially ones from Germany,

[59] Howson, 'The Nature of British Army Chaplaincy 1960–2000', 247–9.
[60] Howson, 'Anglican-Methodist Relations in the Context of the British Army', 207.

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where garrison churches created ecumenical working relationships that could have become a model for churches in England.

Garrison churches have almost always been dedicated, not consecrated. With an army so often on the move, this simplified the process of closing a church when it was no longer needed. When the time came to leave, the lights were turned off and the doors closed. The building was then handed back to the appropriate authority. This is what happened in Germany. The result is that there are now few traces of the widespread and vigorous church life that existed in the British military community between 1945 and 2019. The boards in the Dom in Verden-Aller are one of the few reminders of the almost seventy-five years of service.

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