

**HE WILL SWALLOW UP DEATH IN VICTORY. WHERE, O DEATH, THY
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A true incident at a Field Ambulance during the War in New Guinea 1942-1943

Kneeling down beside him I wondered however a Padre (Army Chaplain) could get into a forward combat situation where he could be shot down by the enemy.

He was terribly wounded and it was evident by his collapsed state that he had but a slim chance of life. The army surgical team had given instructions, "Give him all the blood you can, he needs all the resuscitation we can give him before we dare try to operate." The surgical teams' skill had been witnessed many times already. Many young lives had been saved by their prompt action with operations, wound excisions and amputations, etc. All these performed under limited and trying conditions. The idea now was to operate as close behind the battle line as possible.

The sounds of the conflict were not far distant and the conditions we functioned in were appalling, camouflaged under shattered jungle in the swamps. We lived in shelters made from ground sheets and blankets etc., with rain at more than one inch per hour! The tents that we did have were rightly reserved for the wounded.

Did this Army Chaplain have a living link with Christ? This was the burning question in my mind. Some of these were embarrassed when the personal Name of Jesus was mentioned to them. The words of the old hymn came to mind, 'How sweet the Name of Jesus sounds, in a *believer's* ear.' I would know by that. Yes, that would be it! I would speak the Name of Jesus to him and observe his reaction. Adjusting the blackout paper around the hurricane lantern (necessary because of the night fighter bomber attacks) and bending low over him, I said, "Padre, is the Name of Jesus precious to you?" His response was overwhelming! "Oh yes indeed it is! Is it precious to you?" He said, "I was doing the Lord's work when they got me!" I wondered how that could have happened. But the next day a young soldier came back out of the line to enquire and he related how Padre C., distressed by the dangers and difficulties in recovering the wounded and the bodies of our men for burial, had insisted, on going out with them on patrol. (The enemy snipers waited for such attempts to be made.) As the patrol went on they were suddenly brought under heavy enemy fire and they had to go for cover. Padre C., although unarmed, could not give up his intention. He went on and sacrificed himself in the attempt. It says of the Lord Jesus, no one has greater love than this, that one should lay down his life for his friends' (John 15, v. 13).

This is what the Lord Jesus had done for His own. Are you one of 'His own,' dear reader? Do you belong to Him? 'For we being still without strength, in the due time Christ has died for the ungodly. For scarcely for the just man will one die, for perhaps for the good man someone might also dare to die; but God commends His love to us, in that, we being still sinners, Christ has died for us. Much rather therefore, having been now justified in the power of His blood, we shall be saved by Him from wrath. For if, being enemies, we have been reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much rather, having been reconciled, we shall be saved in the power of His life' (Romans 5, vv. 6-10).

The Chaplain now asked me my name, and how long I had known the Lord as my Saviour. He then asked what time it was, which seemed very strange. Time never counted. Day and night were the same and we often worked day and night through. I said it was about 8.00 p.m.

A little after this, some of the surgical team came out of the night theatre marquee to check how we were going. They shook their heads and said, "Not yet." I asked the time, saying that the Chaplain wanted to know. They were surprised saying softly, "The patient is wandering in his mind, you should know better." I lifted the leather flap on someone's watch, as they withdrew. "Padre," I said, (now we were alone again) "it's 8.30 p.m." He said, "Thank you, Ted," and then explained, "Before I left M.B. in South Australia, I made an arrangement with my wife to meet her every night before the 'Throne of Grace' at 10.00 p.m. Ted, I want to keep that appointment!" This deeply affected me and I knew at once what he meant. Wherever he was he

would pray at ten o'clock and his wife at home would do the same. In that way both would be before the 'Throne of Grace' together. This beautiful scripture is in Hebrews 4, vv. 15-16, 'Let us approach therefore with boldness to the Throne of Grace that we may receive mercy, and find grace for seasonable help'. It always seemed worse to me when the patient was married. I thought of her at home, praying at ten o'clock not knowing that her beloved husband was stricken in this way.

He craved for water, I poured some into his mouth, on condition that he would not swallow it, but return it into a bowl. He did so obediently. He said, "Ted, would you let me feel your fingers on my forehead, cooling it with the water." I knew he wanted to feel me close to him. How wonderful are Christian links by the Holy Spirit here below and of course, they are eternal in their character. Padre C. then asked me to pray for his wife and children. (Oh! there were children). Tears fell from my face as I besought the Lord for them all, in their time of need. Yes, I was conscious of being heard, (see 1 John 5, vv. 14-15).

A little after 9.00 p.m. the surgical team returned and they were troubled by his condition. He was a very bad risk they said, but had hopes of him improving with the last of the blood transfusion, they would then have to try and operate when they had finished the few others still on the waiting list. They then withdrew. It was now 9.20 p.m. and I told Padre C. this. He said, "Ted, I'm in great agony, will you pray that I might go to sleep? I want to make ten o'clock." Sleep I thought was almost impossible for him in his pain, also a battery of 25 pounder artillery was blasting away, not too far distant. The guns were too close to our hospital area for comfort, but we all knew that suitable positions were not to be had easily in that campaign. It was a comfort to pray and I asked the Lord to make him sleep and to make ten o'clock.

To see him sleep was like a miracle and I knew that it must be approaching ten o'clock. The team returned and the patient awoke. They said yes, they had conferred and they would just clean up the theatre and then proceed with the risky operation. I checked the time. It was just about ten o'clock. I knelt down on the rough coconut logs (wired together to stop them floating away in the mud) and said, "Padre, it is now ten o'clock." He was obviously relieved to hear it. He said, "Ted, will you excuse me while I pray." He was quiet for some few minutes, I could tell that he was praying, but could not hear what was said. Suddenly his voice strengthened and was louder. I said, "Are you speaking to me?" "Oh!" he again became aware that I was there. "Oh, Ted, will you repeat it with me?"

*'Jesus, Lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly,
While the nearer waters roll,
While the tempest still is high:
Hide me, O my Saviour, hide,
Till the storm of life is past,
Safe into the haven guide,
Oh, receive my soul at last!'*

My experience was that then, in that awful place of darkness, suffering and death, there came a heavenly light. I knew that the Lord was right there, that heaven was not far away, that Jesus had come to take His loved one to be with Himself. Yes, Him who 'has annulled death, and brought to light life and incorruptibility by the glad tidings' (2 Timothy 1, v. 10).

The dying man began plucking at the blanket and I knew he was going. I leapt up and ran through the light trap of the theatre marquee. Quickly he was transferred to the brilliantly lit, but sickeningly hot atmosphere of the theatre. I saw him clearly now and his awful wound but Padre C. was beyond our care. He was indeed now, in the bosom of Jesus, 'the Lover of his soul. 'We all felt shocked. One of the young surgeons broke down sobbing. We were not unfamiliar with

suffering and death in that awful place, but this was different. He was a non-combatant, he was unarmed, and inoffensive. Evidently those who had known him, loved him.

Scripture says of the Lord Jesus, 'He was led as a lamb to the slaughter.' Read Isaiah Chapter 53. Was it not for you, dear reader? 'But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities.' Have you not the faith that it was for you? Face death we all must. A person may live without Christ, but can you die without Christ? No! Of some it is said, 'without Christ, having no hope and without God in the world' (Ephesians 2, v. 12). That need not be true of you. God, 'who yea, has not spared His own Son' (Romans 8, v. 32), wants you to have the blessing. Eternal life is now known in the sphere of salvation down here. Read Acts 2, vv. 27-41. Then eternity with Christ above-in His bosom.

*'How sweet the Name of Jesus sounds
In a believer's ear!
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
And drives away his fear.'*

May the precious Name of Jesus so sound in your ear today, dear friend.

E.L.C.

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