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Fighting Mac Returns Home: Avondale Academic Presents Biography to ANZAC Chaplain's Church and Family

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Fighting Mac returns home: Avondale academic presents biography to ANZAC chaplain's church and family

Brenton Stacey

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The most comprehensive and accurate biography of the Gallipoli chaplain worshipped by the Anzacs despite being a wovser is now in the keeping of his family and of his church.

Author Dr Daniel Reynaud presented *The Man the Anzacs Revered: William 'Fighting Mac' McKenzie Anzac Chaplain* to William McKenzie's great-grandson and to The Salvation Army at an Evensong concert presented by the Conservatorium of Music at Avondale College of Higher Education on May 2, 2015. Stephen Hansen accepted the book on behalf of the family. His mother, Olga, was a daughter of McKenzie's son, Donald. Susan Petterson from The Salvation Army's Newcastle & Central New South Wales Divisional Headquarters accepted the book on behalf of commander Major Gavin Watts.

In her speech, Petterson described McKenzie, who received the Military Cross for his actions at the Battle of Lone Pine—McKenzie should have been in the rear trenches but followed the charge carrying just a spade to bury the dead—as “brave and courageous.” “He'd given his life completely over to God, and Jesus was his best friend, so he was able to do the things he did because Christ lived within him.” Referring to the presentation, she added, “If McKenzie were here today, he would say, ‘This is wonderful and thank you very much,’ but he would also say, ‘I give all the glory to God.’”

McKenzie became the most famous Anzac by the end of the war even though he stood for “almost everything the typical digger loved to hate,” says Reynaud, associate professor of history at Avondale. “He railed against booze, brothels, betting and bad language, and he ran frequent evangelistic campaigns for the Anzacs where he forcefully appealed to them to become Christians. But the soldiers just about worshipped him.”

The Scottish-born Salvation Army officer served on Gallipoli and on the Western Front as chaplain of the Australian Imperial Force's 4th Battalion. “His tireless energy on the soldiers' behalf earned

their respect, while his charismatic personality and integrity of character won their love,” says Reynaud.

While stationed in Cairo before the Gallipoli landings, McKenzie not only preached against the brothels but also went to the red-light district and dragged men out, putting them on a tram back to camp. On Gallipoli, McKenzie conducted burial services, often under shell fire. But he went further, finding chocolates for each man, or cutting steps into a steep part of a track at night. By the end of the war, McKenzie had led between 2000 and 3000 men to Christ. He became one of Australia's most popular and enduring celebrities. People mobbed him just to shake his hand, and his visits to cities and towns were characterised as being like a Royal Progress.

The Man the Anzacs Revered is, according to Professor Peter Stanley of the Australian Centre for the Study of Armed Conflict and Society at the University of New South Wales, a “full, sympathetic but careful” re-telling of McKenzie's story.

Signs Publishing book editor Nathan Brown also recognised this after reading the manuscript. He represented *The Man the Anzacs Revered's* publisher at Evensong and stated,

What I found was not only a good story and work of serious historical research but a true Australian hero and a story of national significance... [McKenzie's story] belongs to our nation, to the best of our Anzac tradition, to the Australian church and also particularly to The Salvation Army, which has kept the story alive through its history and so provided a platform for Daniel to share in this fuller way and for us to be able to give it back to them.

A book review of *The Man the Anzacs Revered: William 'Fighting Mac' McKenzie Anzac Chaplain* is on the following page.

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