



August 29, 2010

### **MINUTE FOR MISSION - NO RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION**

A few of us have been engaged over the summer in an adult bible study program. One of the themes that we always seem to return to is the symbolism in the bible. There are many stories that tell of how people's faith was marked or symbolized... something they wore, something they did, something they said...something that set them apart as followers of Jesus...as Christians.

When I joined the army back in 1976, I was issued with lots of uniforms and equipment that clearly signified us...it signified we were in the CF, in the infantry, in the PPCLI, what rank we held, and our last name...all of that was visible just by looking at a uniform. The other item we were issued that never got exchanged or replaced was our dog tags.

Canadian military dog tags are issued to everyone regardless of rank. If you are in the military, you get them, whether you are riding a tank or riding a desk. They are worn around your neck on a strong chain and they come in two parts with a perforation between the two: the top part has the words "DO NOT REMOVE" stamped on the back and is intended to be left on your body in the event that you are wounded in action, to aid in your identification and treatment. The bottom part is supposed to be snapped off in the event that you are killed in action. That half is retained by the commanding officer, along with notes regarding the location of your body, to aid in burial and/or recovery of your body after hostilities have ceased.

Before the dog tags were issued to me, I had to fill out a form to provide certain information that would be shown on both halves. The information shown included:

- Social insurance number, that's your army ID number too;
- Your initials and surname;
- Your blood type; very important - I had friends who had that information tattooed on each arm;
- The words "Canadian Forces"; and,
- The last line on the dog tags was reserved for your religious affiliation.

When filling out the form as a recruit, I asked what "religious affiliation" meant and why it was on the dog tags. The clerk told me with some impatience that it meant "RC, Protestant or Jew" and it was on there so that you got the correct pastoral care and burial rites. I asked the clerk "what happens if I'm none of the above?" He replied, "just write in No Religious Affiliation". I asked him, "what sort of burial rites will I get?" He said, "whoever's closest and available"

I wore those dog tags for 20 years and I never thought about that line on my dog tags again...NO RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION...until recently. I think about it a bit more now that I've been coming here to church. When I started attending First United, it was a bit like being a recruit in the army again...a new experience and a lot to learn. Many of you welcomed me, but no one asked my religious affiliation and stamped it on a tag to wear around my neck.

Back in May though, when I was confirmed and became a member of First United, I was given a little wooden cross to wear. I guess that's my dog tag now. If you follow the practice and wear one too, it identifies you as a Christian ...a follower of Christ.

The other practice that identifies all of you is your support to the United Church Mission & Service Fund. To be faithful Christians, to bear Christ's name, we each have a need and responsibility to give to those who are in want. This is part of our ministry, and although it's a gift at arms-length, it is still a vital component of outreach that has a significant beneficial impact on those on the receiving end, where it provides for food and shelter, counselling and education, disaster relief, social justice initiatives and many other things. Thank you for your ongoing support to M&S.