

THE CHAPLAINCY

During times of turmoil and war, mankind always looks to religion and religious figures for comfort. Both ancient and modern societies have turned to religion and communities have extended the comfort of religion to those serving in the heat of battle. Priests and other religious figures petitioned gods and spirits for victory in war. The Scriptures often refers to priests accompanying troops into battle. (**see: Deut. 20: 2-4; Joshua 6: 2-5**).

The modern chaplaincy's roots and origin are essentially in the medieval church. The word chaplain dates from this period. A fourth century story tells of the pagan Roman soldier called Martin of Tours. As Martin and his men were returning from the battlefield in the middle of a severe winter, they met a shivering beggar at the city gate of Amiens. Martin had compassion on the beggar. He cut his cloak in two parts and gave one to the beggar. That night he had a vision of Christ wearing the beggar's cloak. As a result, Martin converted to Christianity. Martin enraged Emperor Julian by saying, "*Hitherto I have served you as a soldier; allow me now to become a soldier to God...*" The Emperor later released him from the army. He was baptized and in 371, the people of Tours were so impressed by his holy life and miracles, they made him their Bishop.

Martin of Tours later became the patron saint of France and his cloak, considered a holy relic, was carried into battle by Frankish kings. This cloak was called in Latin the "cappa." Its portable shrine was called the "cappalla" and its caretaker priest, the "cappellanus". Eventually, all clergy affiliated with the military were called "capellani," or in French, "chapelains, hence chaplains. The Council of Ratisbon (742) first officially authorized the use of chaplains for armies, but prohibited "the servants of God" from bearing arms or fighting.

However, religious figures in this era often went into battle as fighting men with the army. The conflict between the religious function and the military role can be seen in the career of the patron saint of military chaplains, St. John Capistrano, who besides serving as a Church Diplomat led the army at the Battle of Belgrade in 1456. This European tradition extended to colonial America where the chaplain both fought alongside and ministered to his neighbors in the militia. The tradition in colonial America of the fighting chaplain began changing. After the Civil War, chaplains were no longer permitted to carry weapons. And today, chaplains are supposed to be issued a Geneva Convention Identity Card. Chaplains are ordained clergy, endorsed by their faith group to serve all people, regardless of religious or non-religious affiliation.

THE UNITED STATES MILITARY CHAPLAINCY

THE ARMY: Chaplains had no role on the United States Army until 1791. However, colonial clergymen frequently raised military units from their own congregations and community, and often led them in battle. A number of New England clerics served at Concord. Some even shouldered their muskets and fought along side their fellow soldiers.

The first appointed Army Chaplain was Rev. John Hurt in 1791. He had already served seven years during the Revolutionary War. "The history of the Chaplaincy from this time on (*until the Civil War*) is full of uncertainties."

During the War of 1812, Chaplain James J. Wilmer was the only chaplain known to have died during this war. During the Civil War the Army Chaplaincy developed many procedures still in place. Most chaplains became less a "fighting parson", and more "spiritual" in their emphasis. The Civil War witnessed for the first time, a large number of Roman Catholic chaplains in the field; the advent of the first Jewish chaplains; and the first Black and Indian chaplains. Three Army Chaplains were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

The act of 1883 mandated that the chaplain should also "perform the duties of schoolmaster" at the Post. Additionally, chaplains generally held services in civilian settlements; established Indian congregations; officiated at functions; visited the sick, prisoners and soldiers in barracks; served as post gardeners; and, occasionally as legal counsel.

World War I and II had thousands of chaplains from various faith groups serving the spiritual needs of the fighting men. Today, the Army Chaplains, men and women clergy, continue to serve the men and women of the United States Army, National Guard, and Reserves with spiritual and moral support.

THE NAVY: The Navy Chaplaincy dates back to the Continental Navy. What was critical was that the Continental Congress adopted regulations which provided a place for religion and the chaplain in the Navy. Using the guidelines of the "Mother Country", Divine Services were written into the Navy Regulations. However, few ships were authorized to be built and thus there were few Navy Chaplains. Rev. Benjamin Balch

was the first Chaplain known to have served in the Continental Navy. From 1785 to 1798, there was no American Navy and, therefore, no Navy Chaplains.

The first Navy Chaplain to die as the result of enemy action was Chaplain John L. Lenhart, who was on board the *Cumberland* when she was rammed and sunk by the CSS Virginia (formerly called the *Merrimack*).

With a new edition of the Navy Regulations in 1802, additional duties of chaplains stated that they should “perform the duty of schoolmaster, instructing midshipmen...” The Navy Chaplain had to be a teacher of writing, mathematics, navigation, and whatever else they might need to make them proficient, besides his religious duties. That did not change much until 1906 when the Navy established certain guidelines that eliminated the teaching function and established procedures and qualifications for Navy Chaplains and the establishment of the Chaplain Corps.

Navy Chaplains have served with distinction during WWI, WWII, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, and Iraqi Freedom. Navy Chaplains provide ministry to all the sea services, including, the *Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, Sea Bees, and Merchant Marine*. He or she may wear many uniforms during their tour of duty.

To recount the history of the Chaplain Corps and omit two of its most revered Navy chaplains would be a grave mistake. Chaplains Joseph T. O’Callahan and Vincent Capodanno were both awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

THE AIR FORCE: Before 1939, the Army’s air arm was a fledgling organization; by the end of the end of WW II, the Army Air Forces had become a major military organization comprised of many air forces, commands, divisions, wings, groups, and squadrons, plus an assortment of other organizations. The National Security Act of 1947 became law on July 26, 1947. It created the Department of the Air Force, headed by a Secretary of the Air Force. From this beginning grew the Air Force Chaplaincy. At first the Air Force Chaplains received their training at the Army School and eventually established their own school.