

Let Us Die Bravely:
United States Chaplains in World War II

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Abstract

This paper focuses on is the role that religion plays in a nation's war machine. Snyder specifically looks at the period from December 2, 1942 through the end of World War II in 1945, considering only the United States and the role of Judeo-Christian religions and their leaders who served in America's military forces. Simply called "chaplains," regardless of what faith they represented, these men played just as vital a role in the American war machine as did the rifleman, the airman, the medic, the seaman and the submariner. He argues that America's military chaplains were vital to the war effort by fulfilling multiple roles essential to the cohesion and fighting capability of the military. In the minds of the fighting soldiers, chaplains necessitated and supported the notion that death was conquerable only through divine salvation. This mindset, in turn, allowed soldiers who accepted this salvation to, at least to some extent, shed their fear of death and dismemberment; in essence, soldiers fought harder and more confidently knowing the chaplain was there to guide their souls to the afterlife once it left their bodies. In the minds of chaplains, often the role conflict that resulted from being a pacifist and a clergyman while serving in the military, an institution that exists wholly to serve the various combat oriented needs of the state, was resolved through a number of psychological techniques and socially popular rationalizations based largely on their extensive knowledge of the Bible to justify their position in the military.

Several years after serving as a captain in the United States military, which, at the time of his commission, was being represented on the battlefields of World War II, Chaplain Karl Wuest recalled this experience from his days campaigning in Italy in 1943-44:

The day was gray and rain-laden, as were many of those fall and winter days in the campaign of Italy. The time was getting on into mid-afternoon, but with the rain and fog it appeared as night. Roads were deep mire. The rain was cold; my clothes were soaked. Traffic was heavy. Since no lights were permitted to shine, driving difficulties were increased. It was under such conditions that I was on my way to visit a [Anti-Aircraft] battery in position in an olive orchard.

As I progressed, more sliding than rolling, nearer the position, I heard no whine, just the whap of a shell, too near. And another, and another, in quick succession. Some of them were air-burst in the gnarled treetops.

The vehicle rolled into a ditch as I found refuge in a pit full of water. And still the shells slammed in, making no more noise, seemingly, than did my heart.

Then, I thought I heard a scream. Maybe I didn't. It might have been the providential voice of God. I raised my head to leave the filthy hole and started forward. Not ten yards away lay a soldier. Shell fragment had torn away half his face and neck.

As I cradled his head on my knee, I gave him absolution and the last rites. His life blood soaked into my uniform. If other shells came in, I was unaware of them. If it continued to rain, I knew it not. I was oblivious to everything. I may have knelt there a thousand years, with his head on my knee. I know not. Life had apparently departed, but I continued tenderly to stroke his forehead.

It may have been his last sigh. But to me, it sounded as if his last word was "Mom."

Yes, he was somebody's boy...What would be her sorrow on the sad news of his death?...What had been his future plans?...Would [his mother] recognize him now as he lay here, dirty, rain-soaked, unshaven, cold, hungry, lonesome, bloody, another victim of brutal war?

Thank God, he had the benefit of religion, even if there were denied to him the comforts of his loved ones at his side in his war-futile demise. In place of home, and bed, and clean white sheets, his was the deathbed of rain-soaked, muddy earth; his pillow, the rain-soaked, mud-spattered knee of his comrade, the Padre.¹

The fact that Chaplain Wuest was not only an active participant in America's war machine but also present on the battlefield in combat situations is incongruous in its normalcy; normal because religion and war have worked together in tandem for several millennia, incongruous because Jesus Christ tells his followers to "resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also."² From the pharaohs of Egypt to the kings of Greece and the Emperors of Rome, ancient civil authorities, who usually possessed some military prowess and expertise, frequently offered prayers, libations and sacrifices to the gods in the hopes that the divinity or divinities would give them glory and honor; but most importantly these leaders wanted victory over their enemies. The incorporation of religion and war continued through the Middle Ages where religious leaders called the pious, which was the majority of European citizenry, to wage war in the Middle East in an attempt to "liberate" Jerusalem from the "heathen" Muslim Turks who controlled much of Eurasia and North Africa. Various other instances of religion and military's working closely together appear throughout the history of Western Civilization after the Crusades, including the destruction, enslavement, and oppression of a multitude of tribal peoples from North and South America as well as Africa over several centuries of exploration, colonization, ministry and conversion.³ Yet when the world was embroiled in the ultimate fight of "good" against "evil," the church and their representatives, would play as significant a role in the second global conflict as the governments and individuals who instigated the battles that cost more in money and lives than any war before or since.⁴

¹ Padre Karl A. Wuest, *They Told It to the Chaplain* (New York: Vintage Press, Inc., 1953), 92-3.

² King James Version of the Bible, "Matthew 5:39," <http://kjvbible.net/cgi-bin/search.cgi>.

³ Doris L. Bergen, ed., *The Sword of the Lord: Military Chaplains from the First to the Twenty-First Century* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004).

⁴ David R. Francis, "More costly than the 'war to end all wars'," *The Christian Science Monitor.com*, August 29, 2005, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0829/p15s01-cogn.html> (accessed March 17, 2009).

After World War I ended in 1918, the churches of America and their representative clergymen, were incredibly embarrassed. During the war, they supported the American war effort with a verve bordering on fanaticism, encouraging Americans to send their best and brightest to the horror filled trenches of Europe in droves. These troops were subjected to biological warfare on a massive scale: withering machine gun fire, tanks and airplanes, not to mention the slew of other physical ailments due to the nature of trench warfare that ceaselessly attacked the body and mind of the soldier. Ultimately 116,516 American soldiers did not return home alive while an additional 234,428 came back to their native soil wounded and disfigured.⁵ The terrible carnage brought about by total war shocked the world and the American clergymen especially. They called the war a “holy war,” a “righteous war,” believing wholeheartedly in the validity of the fight and their position on the side of right. The backlash they received from the American public because of their zeal forced them to realize their mistake in supporting the First World War. With the war won, in the name of peace they declared war on civilization’s greatest enemy, war itself, espousing the popular sentiment of “Never again!”⁶ In the years following the war, hundreds of antiwar resolutions were passed by Christian groups, many of which read similar to the 1926 declaration of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America: “the Church of Christ as an institution should not be used as an instrument or an agency in support of war.”⁷

Then, from 1933 through 1942 as Europe inched closer to war, then became embroiled in it, the American clergymen divided into two camps whose political/theological ideologies concerning the countries’ involvement in European affairs were absolutely opposite the other. There were the neutralists who, whether absolute pacifists, practical pacifists, or isolationists, wanted to avoid war at all costs and there were the interventionists, who, like the neutralists, wanted to avoid war but believed that the best way to stay out of the war was by aiding the allies.⁸ One religious leader who best illustrates this shift from pacifist to interventionist is Richard Niebuhr. Niebuhr, a practical pacifist in the early thirties, eventually changed his mind as Germany, under the leadership of Hitler, and Japan, under the leadership of Emperor Hirohito, slowly inched the world towards war. He joined a growing company of Christian leaders, including John Bennett and J. H. Marion, who under the ideal circumstances of earlier decades could afford to be pacifists. All of these men came to believe that “with the world in flames the absolute pacifist as a political guide, we think, is like a man who, with his house afire, scorns the aid of the fire department and sits down to wring his hands because the house was not built fireproof in the first place.”⁹ Niebuhr frankly stated that the Neutrality Act was “one of the most immoral laws that [was] ever spread upon the Federal statute book.”¹⁰ To him, Americas’ continued neutrality was “the essence of immorality.”¹¹

However, this sentiment was not widely held by clergymen in years and months before 7 December 1941. Before America’s entry into the war, two thousand clergymen signed a statement of “unalterable opposition to America’s present threatened belligerency” and pledged themselves never to use their

⁵ *The Guns of August*, created and produced by Nathan Kroll, 100 minutes, A Universal Picture, 1965, videocassette.

⁶ Gerald L. Sittser, *A Cautious Patriotism: The American Churches and the Second World War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 18.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁹ J. H. Marion, Jr., “If America Is Drawn into the War,” *Christian Century* 58 (July 16, 1941): 908-10, in Gerald L. Sittser, *A Cautious Patriotism: The American Churches and the Second World War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 64.

¹⁰ Ray H. Abrams, “The Churches and the Clergy in World War II,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 256 (1948): 113.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 113.

ministry to “bless, sanction or support war.”¹² Additionally, early in February 1941, 648 churchmen signed a statement calling for “peace without victory now.”¹³ Different from their position in the First World War, the churches and their representatives were no longer fanatically patriotic, but neither were they unpatriotic; instead, they lived in a state of “cautious patriotism.”¹⁴ The churches supported any means that would end the war as soon as possible in a just peace for everyone. Nevertheless, in the early morning hours of 7 December 1941, many of America’s clergymen reconsidered their ideological position and virtually every religious group in America saw the war as an occasion for service.¹⁵ Forced into the war, clergymen now had little choice but to support the United States war effort. John W. Bradbury, the editor of a Northern Baptist publication, put it most eloquently when he stated, “the Christian churches of this country must abandon their aloofness from the military situation and immediately assume the responsibility that is theirs.”¹⁶

Taking this “calling” from Bradbury to heart, clergymen from across the country asked to join the military. They were well received by the government, by the military and by the people serving in America’s military as an indispensable component of the nation’s war machine. In effect, America’s military chaplains were vital to the war effort by fulfilling multiple roles essential to the cohesion and fighting capability of the military. In the minds of the fighting soldiers, chaplains necessitated and supported the notion that death was conquerable only through divine salvation. This mindset, in turn, allowed soldiers who accepted this salvation to, at least to some extent, shed their fear of death and dismemberment; in essence, soldiers fought harder and more confidently knowing the chaplain was there to guide their souls to the afterlife once it left their bodies. In the minds of chaplains, often the role conflict that resulted from being a pacifist and a clergyman while serving in the military, an institution that exists wholly to serve the various combat oriented needs of the state, was resolved through a number of psychological techniques and socially popular rationalizations based largely on their extensive knowledge of the Bible to justify their position in the military.¹⁷

The View from the Top: Importance of the Chaplain to the Military

The government, and the military as a natural extension of that government, has embraced the role of chaplains, including Jewish chaplains, in America’s war machine dating back to the founding of the United States. In every conflict, including the Revolutionary War, the United States military has employed religious representatives in a number of capacities. George Washington, while as an officer in the Virginia militia, repeatedly asked the legislature for funds to be allotted for a chaplain in his unit.¹⁸ Later, when Washington assumed command of the Continental Army at Cambridge, Massachusetts, he counted fifteen chaplains among the twenty-three regiments gathered around Boston. On 29 July 1775,

¹² Ibid., 113.

¹³ Ibid., 113.

¹⁴ Gerald L. Sittser, *A Cautious Patriotism: The American Churches and the Second World War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 2.

¹⁵ Ibid., 134.

¹⁶ Ibid., 155.

¹⁷ I will use the term “war machine” when referencing the United States military institution ubiquitously throughout the following pages. I do this not to overuse a cliché term, but rather I use it because the chaplain was simply one component of a large and complex institution that, much like the engine of a car, cannot operate smoothly and efficiently unless all the components work in harmony with one another. So, although redundant, the term is appropriate.

¹⁸ Albert Isaac Slomovitz, *The Fighting Rabbis: Jewish Military Chaplains and American History* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 4.

the Continental Congress officially recognized the chaplains by paying them the same wages as captains and Judge Advocates.¹⁹

General Washington set the expectation for the role of the chaplain in the military of the United States. He had four distinct functions he felt chaplains should fulfill while serving. The first is the most obvious and traditional: chaplains interceded with providence to secure protection and victory for the soldiers. The second function was to be the conscience of the army and to speak out against drunkenness, gambling and other activities that weakened the cohesiveness of the military unit. The third function of the chaplain was to build and/or maintain troop morale. This function was extremely important to Washington in 1778 while he and his army waited out the brutally cold winter in Valley Forge. The fourth and final function of a chaplain as Washington envisioned it, but certainly not least in importance, was to increase unity and harmony among the troops. Washington believed that a military that allowed the free exercise of religion was an incredibly powerful example of democracy and liberty in the new nation.²⁰

When the country was divided over secession and slavery, chaplains served on both the Union and Confederate sides. All were ordained as ministers in various religious denominations and had to be recommended by some authorized representative of an ecclesiastical body.²¹ Later on in the nation's history, chaplains of World War I served in the trenches alongside the soldiers, experiencing all the horrors of that gruesome conflict, as did their counterparts from all the other nations involved in the first global war. By the end of the war 2,363 chaplains had served in the United States military, twenty-three of whom died during America's involvement in that first truly global conflict.²² Twenty-three years after the First World War, on 7 December 1941, approximately 2,000 chaplains were affiliated with the United States military as regular or reserve officers. By the end of the Second World War, this military unit would have the third highest percentage of casualties, behind infantrymen and airmen, and the number of clergymen who had been or still were involved in the military was over 10,000.²³

The United States government and the military during the years of 1941-1945 considered chaplains an essential component of the war machine for the same reasons Washington had thought them essential, with a few modifications. The importance of the chaplain to the military war machine during World War II is demonstrated in Army Regulations 60-5, which was issued by the War Department on 20 February 1941, almost a year before the attack on Pearl Harbor. In this document General George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff, with the help of the Chief of Chaplains William R. Arnold, details the conditions under which a clergyman may serve in the military and also entails the chaplains' responsibilities, or functions, as a commissioned officer. Although this document detailed the responsibilities of a chaplain in the Army, the Navy had a similar document. Army Regulations 60-5 states "that each chaplain will...serve the *moral and religious needs* of the entire personnel of the command to which he is assigned, either through his own personal services or through the cooperative efforts of others."²⁴ This document

¹⁹ U.S. Army Chaplain Center and School website, "Chapter 1: Origins of the Chaplaincy," http://www.usachcs.army.mil/history/brief/chapter_1.htm (accessed March 28, 2009).

²⁰ *from The first... taken almost entirely from* Albert Isaac Slomovitz, *The Fighting Rabbis: Jewish Military Chaplains and American History* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 4.

²¹ U.S. Army Chaplain Center and School website, "Chapter 3: The Civil War, 1861-1865," http://www.usachcs.army.mil/history/brief/chapter_3.htm (accessed March 28, 2009).

²² U.S. Army Chaplain Center and School website, "Chapter 5: World War I and its Aftermath, 1917-1941," http://www.usachcs.army.mil/history/brief/chapter_5.htm (accessed March 28, 2009).

²³ Gerald L. Sittser, *A Cautious Patriotism: The American Churches and the Second World War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 156.

²⁴ Army Regulations 60-5, "Chaplains General Provisions" (Washington D.C.: War Department, 1941). All italics in the passage are my own.

continues, stating how chaplains need to “hold appropriate religious services” which will include “Sunday or weekday religious observances, Sunday schools, Bible classes, missions, confessions, and such other *religious or patriotic* exercises...” Also “chaplains *will serve as friends, counselors, and guides without discrimination...regardless of creed or sect*, and will strive to promote *morality, religion, and good order therein*.” In supervisory duties chaplains are the “advisor to the commander and staff in religious and moral activities of the command” and will supervise “the spiritual welfare of the command” whereby the chaplain is the commanding officer’s “logical consultant in all matters pertaining to public religious observances...and in matters involving *morale, morality, and character building*.”²⁵ Finally, this document states that commanding officers must provide every assistance to the chaplain under his command, within reason, so that they may fulfill their obligations as a chaplain within the United States military.

Chaplains were important to the nations’ war machine in that they fulfilled multiple facets vital to the American war effort which helped boost morale and “the good order” of military personnel. Providing for the religious needs of the soldiers was also crucial to the cohesion of this largely Judeo-Christian military force. Also, chaplains must promote religion amongst the soldiers because this, too, affects the fighting capabilities of the military force. Additionally, this document orders chaplains to act as guides, counselors, and consultants on everything moral and religious to every soldier within the war machine. The very verbiage of this document strongly supports the argument that the chaplain was an indispensable component of the nation’s war machine. Furthermore, this document orders that chaplains must not only provide for the religious needs of the soldiers but also that they cannot undermine the military establishment or its involvement in the war. In fact, their duty is quite the opposite; they must promote patriotism with the effect of boosting morale and cohesion amongst the soldiers. Although not explicitly stated by the United States government, it can be surmised that those in control of the military institution, many of whom had experienced combat first-hand in previous wars, understood that in moments of extreme stress and moral ambiguity soldiers need to be assured that an omnipresent, omniscient supreme being is in control. Government and military officials clearly understood that “though [the chaplain] bears no arms himself, he is largely responsible for the most potent of weapons on the line of battle—morale among the fighting men.”²⁶ All this, of course, makes the chaplain’s position in the nations’ war machine very important to those directing the efforts of this institution.

Many military commanders viewed the chaplain as an important component of the military unit in which they served. As Martin Blumenson points out, “General George S. Patton, Jr., who attended church—as he informed a group of visiting clergymen—‘every goddam Sunday,’ believed the chaplains’ work to be important. He routinely inspected the work of his chaplains of all faiths...[and] those whose performances he judged less than excellent had immediate word of his dissatisfaction.”²⁷ Another commanding officer showed his admiration for Chaplain Joseph Lacy after the battle for the Normandy beaches saying, “Every time we caught it really bad it was the padre who was in there when the stuff was worst.”²⁸

When Chaplain Carpenter notified his commanding officer Colonel Daley that he would be going ashore with the first wave of the attack of Operation Husky, Colonel Daley expressed his amazement saying, “I find it strange for a chaplain to be going in with the first wave on a beach landing.” Chaplain Carpenter replied, “A chaplain should always be with his men,” to which the Colonel stated, “Well...I’m proud to

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ John Way, O.P., “The Soldier-Priest,” *Dominicana* 28, no. 2 (Summer 1943): 89.

²⁷ Donald F. Crosby, S.J., *Battlefield Chaplains: Catholic Priests in World War II* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1994), xi.

²⁸ Ibid., 129.

have a chaplain like you.” Feeling that his commander did not quite understand his reasons for going ashore in the first wave Chaplain Carpenter explained, “All Combat Chaplains go with their men, even in an assault landing. The men’s morale is a vital component of the chaplain’s responsibility.” Colonel Daley nodded his understanding.²⁹ Instead of ordering Chaplain Carpenter to go ashore with other rear echelon personnel such as clerks, camp aids and surgeons, which would provide more room on the landing craft for additional soldiers or supplies essential to the fight, Colonel Daley conceded. Being an experienced officer, he allowed his chaplain to accompany the assault troops because he understood that the chaplain was essential to the cohesion and effectiveness of the fighting forces that were preparing to land on the beaches of Sicily.

As a result of their responsibilities, chaplains were important to the commanders’ overall situational awareness and battle preparation. One responsibility of the chaplain, according to George Washington, is to maintain the morale of the soldiers. Chaplains of World War II did this by organizing boxing matches and tournaments, religious services, social/glee clubs, basketball games, and even libraries. All of these efforts, of course, helped soldiers to find a release from their often mundane, sporadically hectic and deadly existence on the front. The organization of these events, for the commander of a given unit, was exceedingly important. For the commander, the happiness of his men was paramount to their fighting capability in the field. So important were these diversions that General Gerow of the V Corps, stationed in England just before the invasion of Normandy, appointed Chaplain Carpenter, a talented boxer in his days before the war, to train a team capable of winning the ETO (European Theater of Operations) Championship Fights. From the start General Gerow had asked the chaplain to use the boxing team as a means of building a spirit of unity among the various units within V Corps. Chaplain Carpenter followed those orders to the letter, even refusing a direct order from a superior officer which required his boxers to fight each other when it came to the championship rounds. The general supported his decision. After they had received their championship trophy, Chaplain Carpenter went into the stands and handed General Gerow the trophy, saying, “The V Corps team members wanted you to have this.” Shaking his hand, General Gerow “expressed his appreciation for what the team had contributed to the high morale of our Corps.”³⁰ Because of his reputation and boxing experience, it is no surprise that General Gerow personally assigned Chaplain Carpenter the task of organizing a boxing team. The consequences of this action, however, had long lasting repercussions. It cannot be quantitatively analyzed, but obviously the repercussions of winning the boxing match had an incredibly positive impact on the morale of the V Corps; morale, as General Gerow understood, would be vital to his units’ combat effectiveness on the beaches and in the hedgerows of Normandy. Many of the men of General Gerow’s V Corps were with the first wave of combat troops to hit the beaches, and with them was Chaplain Alan E. Carpenter.

However, like some enlisted men, not all officers believed in God or religion. Chaplain Wuest encountered such an officer. Writing in his book, Chaplain Wuest expressed that an officer who does not assist the chaplain will find an “important feature of the chaplain’s task...hampered and a definite morale factor...weakened and made inoperative.”³¹ Chaplain Carpenter, too, had difficulties with his commanding officer, Colonel Daley, who often worked the soldiers seven days a week without allowing them time to attend religious services. Yet the hindrance of the chaplains’ work by superior officers was a rare occurrence. In a post-war questionnaire, 72 per cent of the chaplains responding stated that they had the cooperation of their commanding officers.³²

²⁹ Alton E. Carpenter and A. Anne Eiland, “8 July 1943,” *Chappie: World War II Diary of a Combat Chaplain* (Mesa: Mead Publishing, 2007), 63.

³⁰ Alton E. Carpenter and A. Anne Eiland, “22 April 1944,” *Chappie: World War II Diary of a Combat Chaplain* (Mesa: Mead Publishing, 2007), 102-3.

³¹ Padre Karl A. Wuest, *They Told It to the Chaplain* (New York: Vintage Press, Inc., 1953), 24.

³²Waldo W. Burchard, “Role Conflicts of Military Chaplains,” *American Sociological Review* 19, no. 5 (1954): 531.

View from the Bottom: Importance of the Chaplain to the Enlisted Man

The importance of the presence of the chaplain on the battlefield to the enlisted soldier cannot be understated. Chaplains made it a point to accompany the soldiers on every training and combat exercise. They were so adamant about staying close to the men that the phrase “Tell it to the chaplain” became a familiar response to anyone in need of comfort, guidance, and counsel during this war.³³ To some, of course, the presence of the chaplain was of little significance. For many more, especially those closest to the battle, the presence of the chaplain was welcome, if not desired. Many soldiers never missed an opportunity to show appreciation for their chaplain, even if the soldier was not religious. On 27 August 1944 Chaplain Higuchi wrote, “The men are always happy to see the Chaplain but more than often advise me to go back [away from the fighting].”³⁴ Chaplain Stroup, when complimenting a wounded man in the aid station for keeping the spirits of the other men high, was told by the soldier, “There just ain’t words to tell you what you’ve meant to us.”³⁵ In the days following his injury, Chaplain Albert J. Hoffman received dozens of commendations from the regiments infantrymen and officers, most believing he was the most extraordinary soldier any of them had ever seen.³⁶ Also, the two Catholic chaplains who accompanied the marines of Task Force 61, Chaplains Francis W. Kelly and Thomas Reardon, were greatly valued by the men. A marine correspondent described Kelly as “a genial smiling fellow with a faculty for plain talk,” and Reardon, like so many other chaplains, was affectionately called “Padre.”³⁷ The enlisted soldiers truly admired and appreciated the chaplains.

There is good reason for the enlisted soldier to admire the chaplain so much. When these soldiers received the dreaded “Dear John” letter from their spouse or girlfriend, the enlisted men, and officers too, turned to the chaplain for comfort, understanding, and guidance. Men were told in these letters that their significant other was ending the relationship. The reasons varied but often it was because of infidelity. On 25 March 1944, Chaplain Carpenter wrote in his diary that, “one nineteen-year-old told me, ‘When I get home, I’m going to kill my father. I’ve learned he’s having an affair with my wife.’ Another broken-hearted young man shared with me the letter he had just received from his wife. He was devastated and wanted my advice. She had written, ‘I know you want me to be happy. I have fallen in love with a flyer, and I know you will give me a divorce because you love me.’” Carpenter finishes that day’s entry with these four lines, “I grieve for these men. They have enough to deal with in facing death. They don’t need these added burdens. This war is costing our country far more than just the lives of our young men.”³⁸ This is simply one example of a situation chaplains faced on almost a daily basis. The concerns expressed by Chaplain Carpenter were not unique. According to Chaplain Wuest, “the basic fundamental for the chaplain to succeed in the duties of his office is that he be a good and sympathetic listener.”³⁹ In many ways, “a good and sympathetic listener” was just as important to the soldier as food and ammunition. In 1942, Army chaplains conducted an average 53 personal conferences per day, and this

³³U.S. Army Chaplain Center and School, “Chapter 6: World War II and Its Aftermath,” http://www.usachcs.army.mil/history/brief/chapter_6.html (accessed March 28, 2009).

³⁴The University of Hawai’i at Manoa Libraries. “Japanese American Veterans Collection Digital Resources: Chaplain Higuchi Wartime Correspondence-27 August 1944,” <http://128.171.57.100/libdept/archives/mss/aja/higuchi/index.html> (accessed November 1, 2008).

³⁵Russell Cartwright Stroup, “Thursday, June 1, 1944,” *Letters from the Pacific: A Combat Chaplain in World War II* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 77.

³⁶Donald F. Crosby, S.J., *Battlefield Chaplains: Catholic Priests in World War II* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1994), 105-6.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 36.

³⁸Carpenter, Alton E. and A. Anne Eiland, “25 March 1944,” *Chappie: World War II Diary of a Combat Chaplain* (Mesa: Mead Publishing, 2007), 97-8.

³⁹Padre Karl A. Wuest, *They Told It to the Chaplain* (New York: Vintage Press, Inc., 1953), 31.

number only grew as the war progressed, indicating the importance of the chaplain as a guide and counselor for the men.⁴⁰

In addition to being counselors, the soldiers appreciated the chaplain because of the religious services they provided. Also important to the soldier is aid when they lie helpless, wounded, under fire, and possibly breathing their last breaths. Along with the medics, chaplains helped comfort these men as they lay in the mud, the snow, and the sand with shells bursting around them and bullets flying just above their heads. While chaplains administered physical aid to the men, they would also administer spiritual aid by praying with them, giving them the Last Rites if they were Catholic, saying the traditional Hebrew prayers for the Jewish soldiers, or just praying for the wounded and dying man if they were Protestant. Often, chaplains put their lives at great risk to bring comfort to the wounded, dying or dead, and these efforts did not go unnoticed by the soldiers with whom they served.

According to the chaplains who served alongside them in the blood, rain, mud, snow, flying bullets and shells, the soldier of America's fighting forces during World War II, and previous wars, fought harder because of the presence of the chaplain. Father Francis A. Kelly, a Catholic chaplain, wrote from the line:

“One could not ask for a more inspiring sight than to see these young lads assisting at Mass and approaching the Sacraments before entering the battle line...it does not break their nerve, it does not render them one whit less brave; on the contrary, it strengthens them and fortifies them and sends them forth realizing that they are ready to meet all that may come their way. The more I see them and the more I observe them, the more I am convinced that only those who are unprepared to meet their God are cowards in the battle line. We know no such thing, because our men are ever ready to answer the call of Him who holds sway over life and death...One knows that if they have been brave warriors here, they shall receive the crown of eternal victory hereafter.”⁴¹

Holding services before the battle provides the soldiers with significant mental, even spiritual, courage and strength. While waiting on a troop transport ship anchored off the coast of England on 4 June 1944, Chaplain Carpenter writes, “Earlier this evening we had what might be the last religious service for many of these men. From the looks on their faces and the sound of their voices raised in song, one could not detect that they faced tomorrow with fear.”⁴² Albert Isaac Slomovitz relates how a Jewish chaplain, Rabbi Robert I. Kahn, “held a prayer service for troops going into a combat area. Assembling the men, he arranged for Catholic and Protestant lay leaders to lead the appropriate prayers. He then held a brief Jewish service. Afterwards, he passed out bibles, rosaries, and mezuzots. The soldiers took all these items with them into combat.”⁴³ Leading the men through a liturgical procession and providing symbolic religious articles, chaplains necessitated and supported the notion that death was conquerable only through divine salvation, which in turn allowed the soldier who accepted this salvation to, at least to some extent, shed their fear of death and injury.

To enable men to fight harder and to shed their valid fears while engaged in deadly combat, chaplains led by example. On the beaches of Normandy, France, a chaplain inspired his comrades by simply following

⁴⁰ U.S. Army Chaplain Center and School website, “Chapter 6: World War II and Its Aftermath,” http://www.usachcs.army.mil/history/brief/chapter_6.htm (accessed March 28, 2009).

⁴¹ John Way, O.P., “The Soldier-Priest,” *Dominicana* 28, no. 2 (1943): 90.

⁴² Alton E. Carpenter and A. Anne Eiland, “4 June 1944,” *Chappie: World War II Diary of a Combat Chaplain* (Mesa: Mead Publishing, 2007), 111.

⁴³ Barish, ed., *Rabbis*, 321, in Albert Isaac Slomovitz, *The Fighting Rabbis: Jewish Military Chaplains and American History* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 85.

the orders he had been given. Donald F. Crosby relates, “As the injured piled up in ever-swelling numbers, he [Chaplain Joseph Lacy] directed crews of litter bearers, often standing up while bullets whizzed past his head. His courage inspired many of the terrified men to move about more freely, and the army later awarded him the Distinguished Service Cross for his heroism.”⁴⁴ Crosby writes of another chaplain who was awarded the Bronze Star “in recognition of the many times he put the needs of his men ahead of his own. The citation noted that he had repeatedly gone ‘without hesitation’ into areas under heavy artillery attack to assist men who were injured or had been killed by enemy fire. His ‘courageous action’...had won for him the ‘respect and admiration of the entire combat team’ that he had accompanied into battle.”⁴⁵ In the thick of combat, seeing the chaplain, a representative of God, on the battlefield allowed soldiers to fight harder and more confidently knowing the chaplain was there to guide their souls to the afterlife once it left their bodies.

Because of the usually dangerous nature of warfare, many enlisted soldiers, and quite a few commanders, made considerations for their souls in the afterlife. The importance of the chaplain, and religion, to soldiers is evident in the consideration they made for their souls in the afterlife, which is apparent by the soldier’s presence at religious services. In the Pacific, which was a particularly brutal campaign for all sides involved, danger for all troops was ever present. Days before the invasion of Guam in the Pacific Campaign, Donald F. Crosby writes, “...when combat neared, the minds of many men turn to thoughts of annihilation and the hereafter. [Chaplain] Joseph Tschantz of Brooklyn discovered that many marines in his care needed no urging from him to attend Mass and go to confession—they kept him and another priest on the same ship busy most of the day and far into the night as well.”⁴⁶ Chaplain Stroup had a similar experience with his men as they fought the Japanese on Biak Island near the western tip of New Guinea. Owing to the persistently hazardous conditions, Chaplain Stroup wrote on 29 June 1944, that he had a “splendid service here on Sunday, the first time I had a chance to get any large part of my men together, and an even more gratifying service last night when I had almost a hundred men for a midweek service, which is quite unusual.”⁴⁷

The response of the soldiers when faced with incredible, perilous circumstances is not surprising. Chaplain Eichhorn recorded the number of soldiers who attended the services he conducted or was present at and the numbers are as low as 10 and as high as 2,000 and 3,500 (estimated).⁴⁸ Chaplain Alan Carpenter noticed during the first worship service he held on 19 April 1943, literally hours before his unit was to continue their pursuit of veteran German soldiers across Sicily, that “the men sat on their helmets amid a profusion of wild flowers, and we had an unusually large attendance.”⁴⁹ Chaplain Reardon, serving with the marines of Task Force 61 on Guadalcanal, was amazed by the religious fervor of the men. On Sundays, he sometimes had to offer Mass as many as seven times, since he wanted to reach as

⁴⁴ Donald F. Crosby, S.J., *Battlefield Chaplains: Catholic Priests in World War II* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1994), 129.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁴⁶ Donald F. Crosby, S.J., *Battlefield Chaplains: Catholic Priests in World War II* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1994), 186.

⁴⁷ Russell Cartwright Stroup, “Thursday, June 29, 1944,” *Letters from the Pacific: A Combat Chaplain in World War II* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 95.

⁴⁸ 10 September 1944 at Rear Echelon for XV Corps in Paris; 6 May 1945 in Dachau Concentration Camp; 7 September 1944 at Temple Rothschild in Paris. David Max Eichhorn, *The GI’s Rabbi: World War II Letters of David Max Eichhorn*, Greg Palmer and Mark S. Zaid editors (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004), 230 and 239.

⁴⁹ Alton E. Carpenter and A. Anne Eiland, “19 April 1943,” *Chappie: World War II Diary of a Combat Chaplain* (Mesa: Mead Publishing, 2007), 48.

many of the men scattered around the beachhead as he possibly could.⁵⁰ Even while waiting at a staging area on Sansapor, an island largely removed from the fighting, Chaplain Stroup wrote on 17 October 1944, "So many have commented on the fact that the attendance at Sunday services has increased amazingly of late. I can't speak for what it was before, but it really has been most unusual and I am deeply gratified by it."⁵¹ All these examples highlight the fact that soldiers behind the battle, preparing to enter battle, and participating in the battle make considerations for their souls in the afterlife.

View from the Middle: Importance of the Chaplaincy to the Chaplain

World War II chaplains served in the military for a number of reasons. One staunch pacifist clergyman turned military officer, Russell Cartwright Stroup, eloquently articulated the Christian justifications for the war. In a letter home to his brother and mother, Chaplain Stroup wrote:

I have asked myself so many times, "What am I doing here?"...I love peace so passionately and hate war so utterly. More than a hatred: I am convinced that war is utterly futile and senseless...yet here I am in the midst of it, feeling that it is right for me to be here and that, indeed, I could be nowhere else—even though this might cost me my life...

There is the challenge of the work. Here are men who need me...I feel that the church has never faced a greater opportunity, a heaven-sent chance to touch tomorrow's manhood and to save America for Christ...

...I may be mistaken, but I doubt that there can be effective leadership in the church of tomorrow by men who, able to serve in the war, chose not to do so. Too many of our church men will be veterans...

...I must follow the Master: He would be found where mankind is suffering, and He would be sharing that suffering.

There is also the motive of "patriotism." I have always loved America deeply...I cannot be indifferent to the call of my country, even though I may hate what we are called upon to do...

We are compelled to halt the aggression of an evil movement in the world. I do not think war will make a better world...But if we had stood by and allowed the Nazi, the Fascist, and the militarist to run wild in our world, the darkness would become deeper and the night longer...

...I want to be found on the side of the dignity and worth of human personality, of liberty, of the rights of man. I want to be found opposing tyranny, oppression, bigotry, and the exultation of materialism. I do not think that God blesses war, but I do hope that He blesses those who, in good conscience, are willing to sacrifice, in peace or war, for what they believe are principles in accord with His Holy Will."⁵²

Through this passage we can see that Stroup felt a duty to his country being a citizen of the United States. Almost all Christian pacifists and neutralists were able to justify America's involvement in the war

⁵⁰ Donald F. Crosby, S.J., *Battlefield Chaplains: Catholic Priests in World War II* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1994), 40.

⁵¹ Russell Cartwright Stroup, "Wednesday, October 17, 1944," *Letters from the Pacific: A Combat Chaplain in World War II* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 137.

⁵² Russell Cartwright Stroup, "fifth day," *Letters from the Pacific: A Combat Chaplain in World War II* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 42-3. All italics in the passage are my own.

following 7 December 1941 and Stroup, along with Karl Wuest, Hiro Higuchi, and many others, all joined the military in the days following the attack by the Japanese for patriotic reasons. However, many chaplains, including these three, had an additional purpose for joining the military and that was to be shepherds of the large religious flock filling the rank and file of the war machine as well being fishers of men. Being well versed in the teachings of Jesus Christ they attempted to live a life as close to those teachings as possible and this meant that they must “be found where mankind is suffering” and they must “be sharing that suffering” so that they may better minister to the veterans who returned from the war.

In addition, these men felt compelled to protect and foster the Christian values they fervently believed in. The war provided this opportunity on an unparalleled scale. Essentially chaplains were given a congregation of at least 1,200 soldiers; usually they were given responsibility over many more. No chaplains who authored my primary sources had churches with congregations of this size, and it is fair to say that the majority of chaplains who served during World War II did not have congregations of this size. Almost overnight, these men went from being ministers of relatively moderately sized congregations comprised of the local populace to being responsible for much larger multiethnic, multi-religious, sometimes multinational congregations. Undaunted by this enormous challenge, many chaplains saw service in the military as an amazing opportunity to strengthen the religious base of the nation as well as increase the number of believers.

To add to these convictions, the Jewish chaplains felt they were not only protecting their particular religious beliefs but also, of course, that they were protecting the very existence of the Jewish people. In a sermon delivered over the radio on 28 September 1943, Chaplain David Max Eichhorn said, “one-fifth of our number lie in martyr’s graves. The lights of freedom and happiness and mercy have completely extinguished for millions of Jews in Germany and Poland, in France and Roumania.” He continues, saying, “even though the present is extremely dark, let us not despair for the future...there will be many new years in the centuries to come when men will be happier because we have struggled and men will be nobler because we have refused to retreat.”⁵³ To Jewish soldiers, including the chaplains, many of whom had family members who were affected by the policies of the Nazi government, this war was much more than a fight against Fascism and oppression and anti-democratic ideologies; it was a fight for survival. This understanding imbued Jewish religious military personnel with a determination to serve in the armed forces not generally expressed by their Christian counterparts.

Despite these reasons for joining the military, chaplains were often in conflict over the role they fulfilled as a clergymen and the role they fulfilled as chaplains. Waldo W. Burchard conducted an incredibly insightful survey of current and ex-military chaplains in the San Francisco area in the summer of 1952. He stated that, “the person who finds himself playing two such divergent roles will seek some means of resolving the conflict between them...[and] the types of solutions available can be reduced to three: (1) abandonment of one of the conflicting roles, (2) rationalization, which may assume many different forms, or (3) compartmentalization of role behaviors.”⁵⁴ Burchard points out that Jewish chaplains shared the same dilemma. Burchard states that, “there are...five major items in Christian philosophy from which role conflict for the military clergyman derives. These are the doctrines of love, of universal brotherhood, of peace, and of non-resistance to evil, and the commandment, ‘You shall not kill.’ These doctrines...are manifestly incompatible with the aims of a nation at war.”⁵⁵ David de Sola Pool, who wrote in *The Military Chaplain* in 1951, expressed this notion best, saying that “We [chaplains] may with utter sincerity proclaim the purpose of our taking up arms as a righteous one, but the bitter unescapable fact

⁵³ David Max Eichhorn, *The GI’s Rabbi: World War II Letters of David Max Eichhorn*, Greg Palmer and Mark S. Zaid editors (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004), 46-8.

⁵⁴ Waldo W. Burchard, “Role Conflicts of Military Chaplains,” *American Sociological Review* 19, no. 5 (1954): 528.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 529-30.

remains that war as an instrument even of man's noblest purposes is and ever will be irreconcilable with religion."⁵⁶

Despite the irreconcilability of war and religion, Burchard found that 25 per cent of those responding to his survey claimed their decisions to join the military were influenced by patriotic motives. Another 25 per cent stated their motives were influenced by a simple desire to serve. Only 10 per cent of chaplains surveyed claimed religious motives for joining the military.⁵⁷ This is a significant finding by Burchard for it shows that clergymen who joined the military during World War II chose service to their country and the men of their country above the perceived righteousness of the fight. Also, it is interesting that these motives superseded religious motives considering that the Axis Powers, most notably the Japanese and the Germans, claimed to be anti-religious. These motives demonstrate the cautious patriotism clergymen expressed before and during the war. Instead of joining the war for purely religious reasons, as they did during World War I, clergymen joined for socially popular reasons, even if one of those reasons was based on Biblical principles.

Chaplains of World War II were not immune to the effects of "shell shock," or to use a more modern term, Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome. Chaplain Hiro Higuchi wrote to his wife on 8 July 1944, saying, "war is hell—I have seen what hell is like...it's just hell—undreamable goriness and fear...The first time in battle, we were shelled for five hours straight—I crawled in a little culvert barely able to squeeze my body through and just sweated the whole thing through." He continued, writing, "there was a time I was afraid I would crack after seeing an old friends body come in. A friend I knew in LA [Los Angeles]. I just sat down and cried like a baby—and I don't blame men for cracking up."⁵⁸ Several months later, while reflecting on his battlefield experiences, Chaplain Higuchi wrote to his wife on 24 February 1945, telling her, "I often think of the first days of combat—and the strangeness of it all. The dusty roads of Italy—and the terrific shelling I used to run into...[one] time while going up for services on Sunday...[I] ran right smack in a counter attack, [I] ran for cover with bullets whining above my head and shells bursting in the trees. Made it that time too...Funny how we think of those things now and just shrug it off—but at the moment it kind of gets you."⁵⁹ Because of his experiences, Chaplain Higuchi noted that his "temper is certainly shorter and once in a while [he loses] it," and when he sees the covered bodies of American soldiers lining the road he uses to drive to the front, Chaplain Higuchi comments, "A few more weeks of [seeing] this and I shall go mad."⁶⁰

Along with Chaplain Higuchi, Chaplain Stroup suffered from the pressures and stresses of combat. Writing home on 2 June 1944, Stroup laments, "Most of the burials have fallen to me and a Catholic chaplain in a nearby unit. It's heartbreaking business...it becomes almost more than one can bear...It is not an easy thing to hold in your hand the smiling picture of a sweet-faced mother, knowing that soon the word will come to her which above all she dreads to hear."⁶¹ Along with the general hazards of death and injury present on an active front, praying with his friends moments before they died, and then burying them, began to take their toll on Stroup. On 9 July 1944, he wrote, "Seriously, I have the feeling that at

⁵⁶ David de Sola Pool, "Religion's Answer to a Troubled World," *The Military Chaplain*, Summer 1951, in Waldo W. Burchard, "Role Conflicts of Military Chaplains," *American Sociological Review* 19, no. 5 (1954): 528.

⁵⁷ Waldo W. Burchard, "Role Conflicts of Military Chaplains," *American Sociological Review* 19, no. 5 (1954): 530.

⁵⁸ The University of Hawai'i at Manoa Libraries. "Japanese American Veterans Collection Digital Resources: Chaplain Higuchi Wartime Correspondence-July 8 1944," <http://128.171.57.100/libdept/archives/mss/aja/higuchi/index.htm> (accessed November 1, 2008).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, "24th February 1945."

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, "18 October 1944" and "20 October 1944."

⁶¹ Russell Cartwright Stroup, "Friday, June 2, 1944," *Letters from the Pacific: A Combat Chaplain in World War II* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 78.

my age a year out here is about all I could stand physically or spiritually. I've been here half that time already."⁶² Chaplain James Deasy, who served on Iwo Jima from the first day of the invasion on 19 February 1945 through the end of the battle, would remember for the rest of his life a particular cemetery he visited on the island which contained the bodies of thousands of dead American marines.⁶³ Donald F. Crosby writes that while visiting a cemetery just beyond the beaches of Lingayen Gulf in the Philippines, Chaplain William Leonard was overwhelmed. "3,500 new crosses lined up row after dismal row...most of the dead were youngsters only eighteen or nineteen...[Chaplain Leonard thought] 'For this, some poor woman labored nine months, brought the child into the world, took care of every need, watched him grow up, proud, and this is the way it ends? There's got to be a better way.'"⁶⁴ What Chaplain Leonard witnessed at that cemetery "changed his views about the justice of warfare," and he is now a staunch pacifist.⁶⁵

Because of these experiences, chaplains in both the European Theater and the Pacific Theater of Operations came to detest the enemy who had caused all this suffering and death. In Italy on 8 July 1944, Chaplain Higuchi wrote to his wife that "the Germans are a crummy lot...They are inhumanly brutal..."⁶⁶ Later, on 22 July 1944, he wrote, "The more I come across German brutality—the less I like them and wish they were really wiped out of the map."⁶⁷ Particularly in France, the attitudes of chaplains towards the German enemy became increasingly unkind after the massacre of unarmed American soldiers at Malmady during the Battle of the Bulge. After this incident, Chaplain Leo Weigel came to the conclusion that the Germans, and especially the SS, were "a menace that should be exterminated now because [they] will not be checked any other way."⁶⁸ As the American armies moved further into Germany in the early months of 1945, they began to liberate a variety of camps. At Dachau, Chaplain Andrew Pollack became so enraged with what he saw that he decided "the notion of unconditional surrender" did not "sound so extreme," for the Germans merited nothing less.⁶⁹

In regards to the Japanese, Donald F. Crosby writes that "is worth noting that most chaplains (both Catholic and non-Catholic) shared the country's widespread [enmity for] the Japanese."⁷⁰ Because the

⁶² Russell Cartwright Stroup, "Sunday, July 9, 1944," *Letters from the Pacific: A Combat Chaplain in World War II* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 99.

⁶³ Donald F. Crosby, S.J., *Battlefield Chaplains: Catholic Priests in World War II* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1994), 225.

⁶⁴ Spector, *Eagle Against the Sun*, pp. 518-520; William Leonard, interview, August 14, 1987; Leonard to Donald F. Crosby, May 27, 1993, in Donald F. Crosby, S.J., *Battlefield Chaplains: Catholic Priests in World War II* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1994), 201.

⁶⁵ Donald F. Crosby, S.J., *Battlefield Chaplains: Catholic Priests in World War II* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1994), 150.

⁶⁶ The University of Hawai'i at Manoa Libraries. "Japanese American Veterans Collection Digital Resources: Chaplain Higuchi Wartime Correspondence-July 8 1944," <http://128.171.57.100/libdept/archives/mss/aja/higuchi/index.html> (accessed November 1, 2008).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 22 July 1944.

⁶⁸ Donald F. Crosby, S.J., *Battlefield Chaplains: Catholic Priests in World War II* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1994), 201.

⁶⁹ Andrew Pollack to Joseph M. Marling, May 1, 1945, *WLTOC* 83 (May 19, 1945): 83-4, in Donald F. Crosby, S.J., *Battlefield Chaplains: Catholic Priests in World War II* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1994), 173.

⁷⁰ Here Crosby used the word "hatred," but I chose to remove it because many chaplains in both theaters of war encouraged their soldiers not to hate the enemy. Crosby even tells of a chaplain who lectured a group of men for systematically executing captured German prisoners in the days following the Battle of the Bulge. Also, Chaplain Stroup delivered several sermons on loving the Japanese despite all they had done. He even counseled a Jewish soldier, who had lost many members of his family to the Holocaust, not to hate the

Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor while feigning a desire for peace, Americans viewed the Japanese as deceitful and diabolical. Their tenacity in combat, combined with their brutality, earned them additional malice from American servicemen. During the battle for Iwo Jima, Chaplain Charles F. Suver's anger at the Japanese grew while he attended to the increasing number of wounded being brought into the hospital tent. He said, "I often found myself cursing (under my breath) the Japs and [I came] pretty close to hating them. Had any of them walked into the hospital tent I would have been among the first to shoot..."⁷¹

Under the conditions of both theaters, it is quite understandable that these men of God would hold such feelings for their enemies. However, it must be remembered that chaplains taught love and compassion to their soldiers and tried to live this example by giving aid whenever possible to their enemies. Chaplains prayed over wounded and dead Axis soldiers in Europe, as well as providing medical aid. In the Pacific, many chaplains tried to encourage American soldiers not to hate the Japanese but to be merciful as God is merciful. Here, too, chaplains gave aid to the wounded and dying Japanese soldiers whenever possible.

The experiences of Chaplains Higuchi, Stroup, Leonard, Pollack, Suver and others, and the emotions they elicited, were characteristic of front line service for men in the chaplain corps. Some chaplains, just like the soldiers they served with, cracked under the pressure of unrelenting combat. As chaplains were wounded or killed in battle, the pressure on those still on the front lines increased. The situation became so dire that in the early months of 1945, Chief of Army Chaplains William R. Arnold said, "Our chaplains are simply playing out. They are not quitting. They are not giving up; they are simply exhausted and unable to go further."⁷² Considering their importance to the fighting abilities of the men, Arnold and his fellow officers had every reason to be concerned for the welfare of the chaplain corps.

Along with physical exhaustion, chaplains suffered from spiritual exhaustion due to their experiences. Some chaplains, even though they arguably served on the side of right, questioned their religious beliefs. The horrors they witnessed, the bloodshed by their friends and comrades combined with the utter destruction of urban centers, not to mention the methodical and systematic annihilation of whole communities, caused some of these men of God to question their faith and how the Almighty could let such things happen. However, chaplains generally held the belief that war was the sin of men, specifically of godless men. Clergymen, in peacetime, often preached of the freedom of choice Gods' children have. They taught that God did not force anything on his creations; instead, He allowed them to make their own decisions, decisions that should be guided by His counsel through prayer and adherence to religious doctrine. As chaplains, these men taught the soldiers this, also. Although they could not comprehend why God had allowed such evil to overwhelm the globe, they still believed that He was the answer to everlasting peace.

Donald F. Crosby writes, "...for the chaplains on Iwo Jima, the battle signified not just a major victory against the enemy, but the prevailing of the Almighty over the forces of darkness."⁷³ He quotes one Protestant chaplain as saying, "This has been an awful experience. My two closest buddies are now dead, as well as other close friends among the officers and men. But despite the loathsomeness and tragedy of

Germans but instead show them love. *Catholic Universe Bulletin*, November 17, 1944, in Donald F. Crosby, S.J., *Battlefield Chaplains: Catholic Priests in World War II* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1994), 65.

⁷¹ Suver, "Iwo Jima," 9, in Donald F. Crosby, S.J., *Battlefield Chaplains: Catholic Priests in World War II* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1994), 224.

⁷² Donald F. Crosby, S.J., *Battlefield Chaplains: Catholic Priests in World War II* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1994), 161.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 226.

it all, I can see how God has already begun to use even this battle for His glory.”⁷⁴ Chaplain Stroup wrote of the service he had held for the men on his ship. He writes, “I stressed the fact that in a world of hate there is a God of Love, in a world of greed there is a God who Gave...and in a world where death is everywhere there is a God who gives us eternal life through Christ.”⁷⁵ For Stroup and many other chaplains, the world in which they lived was full of sin. The consequences of a sinful world were war and strife, and only God could alleviate these things. Although these men were surrounded by the grotesque horrors of total war, they believed God was using these battles for His glory. Tested by fire, many chaplains of World War II ultimately came out of the war with a stronger faith in God. More than ever before, they were determined to bring peace to the world through the love and salvation of Jesus Christ and the heavenly Father.

Conclusion

In conclusion, chaplains were, and continue to be, a necessary element in the military of the United States. Their position in the military is vital to the cohesion and battlefield capabilities of the fighting forces. America’s politicians and military officers have employed chaplains since the founding of the country. George Washington, as both a politician and an officer, understood their importance to the fighting capabilities of America’s armed forces. He believed chaplains fulfilled multiple roles within the military organization. By fulfilling these roles, chaplains strengthened the cohesion of the military forces. Keeping with the expectations of Washington, United States government and military officials of World War II explicitly listed the duties chaplains must perform as officers. By paying careful attention to the responsibilities delegated to this particular branch of the military, politicians and officers ensured the highest possible levels of morale, morality, and “the good order” of America’s war machine.

For the men who comprised the various parts of this war machine, chaplains were extremely important. Whether they faced the sting of bullets or shells or a loved one’s rejection, soldiers turned to the chaplain for comfort and understanding. Men about to enter into battle, and especially those already engaged in it, looked to the chaplain for spiritual guidance and strength. By providing religious services and materials, chaplains also provided the men with the courage and fortitude necessary to face indescribable conditions and situations. Also, seeing a representative of God on the battlefield allowed many men to shed their fear of death. The chaplain encouraged the notion that death was conquerable through divine salvation. On the battlefield, while a man lay wounded, possibly dying, the chaplain, through God, was able to grant this divine salvation. The knowledge that the chaplain would guide their souls to the afterlife once it left their bodies gave the men the physical and spiritual might to persevere in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

Finally, for the clergymen of World War II, their role as officers was bolstered and justified by their willingness to serve their country and their countrymen in their time of need. Furthermore, these men felt called to serve in the military in order that they may be shepherds of the Judeo-Christian flock of America’s military. They felt compelled to bring to men and women under extenuating and dangerous circumstances the “good news of Jesus Christ” with the intention of saving the souls of those to whom they ministered. In addition, chaplains of World War II wanted to protect the ideologies they had spent their lives learning and preaching. They believed that any reconstruction of the post-war world would be in vain if it was not guided by the hand and wisdom of God. With this in mind, most chaplains worked tirelessly promoting and living the teachings of Jesus Christ, setting an example to those under their care of love and forgiveness for all.

⁷⁴ Suver, “Iwo Jima,” 2, in Donald F. Crosby, S.J., *Battlefield Chaplains: Catholic Priests in World War II* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1994), 226.

⁷⁵ Russell Cartwright Stroup, “Fifth Day,” *Letters from the Pacific: A Combat Chaplain in World War II* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 42.

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