



Cover Story

Higher Calling

More than ever, chaplains know their mission is essential," says Chaplain Maj. Gen. Charles C. Baldwin, USAF. "They are fulfilling the legacy of chaplains during times of combat." As the Air Force Chief of Chaplains, Baldwin oversees the work of 2,200 chaplains and chaplain assistants from the active and reserve components of the Air Force. Baldwin's 33-year career with the Air Force includes five years as a pilot before he became an ordained minister and then a chaplain.

Baldwin tells the story of a young airman who came to him refusing to fly on the second night of the Desert Storm attack. "This was a serious situation that had the potential to land him in jail. We talked about the shock of being in a combat situation in which he would most likely have to kill people. I told him I understood, because I had been a combat pilot in Vietnam. We talked through his fears. He did go back and fly," says Baldwin.

During Operation Desert Storm, Baldwin and his fellow chaplains stood on the runway as planes took off, "asking God to watch over them. And we were waiting there on the runway when they made their safe return." He refers to this as a "ministry of presence" that is a cornerstone of the military chaplaincy. "Our role often is to simply be present to show support and concern."

Chaplain Lt. Col. William Stang, of the Indiana National Guard, has seen long deployments to Bosnia and Kosovo in support of peacekeeping efforts. But he says he will never forget standing in a cold farm field beside a National Guard soldier who had just recovered the remains of a child. Stang's Guard unit had been called up to recover and identify bodies from the crash of American Eagle Flight 4184 in 1994. All 68 people on board the commuter flight died. "It was extremely difficult for this soldier. He could only think of his own family. His job was to recover and identify these human remains with care and respect. My job was to reassure and support him," Stang recalls. In the aftermath of that recovery effort, Stang says, "I couldn't take away the soldiers' experience of having seen pieces of bodies. But I could help make sure it didn't haunt them." He followed up with his unit for months afterward to ensure they were getting help for any PTSD.

The chaplain's role

Military chaplains have been caring for the spirit since the earliest days of our country's founding. Colonial militiamen went to war with their local ministers, who held daily prayers and visited the wounded. On July 29, 1775, the Continental Congress officially recognized chaplains when it voted them into the military pay structure. By July 1776, a chaplain had been assigned to each regiment.

Military chaplains play an important role in ceremonial events, lead religious services, provide moral guidance to commanders, and provide confidential counsel to all servicemembers. To become a military chaplain, an individual first must be ordained or otherwise qualified by the religion he or she represents. Initially, chaplains were all Protestant ministers. Today, more than 200 religions have been granted ecclesiastical endorsement by DoD, including the Buddhist, Catholic, Jewish, Mormon, and Muslim faiths. Protestant clergy still make up the majority.

"Chaplains nurture a warrior's spirituality by providing religious services for those who desire that, facilitating the spirituality of those with differing beliefs, and caring for all, regardless of their beliefs," says Chaplain Cmdr. Rick Silveira, USN. At the foundation of the military chaplaincy, he says, is "the free exercise of religion for all military members, including the right to hold no belief."

Chaplains say their role is to perform religious rites for those who share their faith and provide to the best of their abilities religious rites for others. As examples of the latter, Chaplain Capt. Robert Marshall, USN, says: "While I served as the chaplain on the *USS Lincoln*, I had three Muslim sailors who wished to practice their faith. So every Friday afternoon, I turned my chapel into a place for Islamic prayer. While serving the Coast Guard during [Hurricane]

Katrina relief efforts, I made arrangements to get a Coast Guardsman to Shreveport [La.] to observe Yom Kippur at the nearest Jewish temple."

When it is not possible to provide for all religious needs, Chaplain Maj. Kenneth Hurst, USA, says chaplains can offer comfort. He recalls a time at Brooke Army Medical Center (BAMC) in San Antonio when he sat with the family of a seriously wounded soldier who was in surgery. The family was Muslim, and there was no time to call for an imam. "I told the family I was a chaplain of the Protestant faith. I asked them, 'Would you mind if I pray on your behalf in my own faith?' "

On the battlefield

Chaplains are classified as noncombatants, yet in every war in U.S. history they have stood beside their troops on the battlefield. Chaplain Capt. Henry McCain, USA, received the Bronze Star for his service in Iraq from February 2004 to February 2005 as the chaplain for the 95th Military Police Battalion and the 16th Military Police (Airborne) Brigade out of Fort Bragg, N.C. He accompanied his soldiers on patrol in Baghdad. On three occasions, his vehicle was hit by a roadside bomb. One of his units lost four soldiers within three months. During his deployment, he performed nine memorial services.

"Bullets were constantly flying over our heads. If we weren't being attacked by [improvised explosive devices], there was the constant threat of them," says McCain. Unarmed himself, he says he "put on the 'armor of God' " - a Biblical allusion - "and prayed constantly." On Easter Sunday 2004, he accompanied soldiers to secure a helicopter shot down south of Baghdad. With ammunition exploding all around, McCain went into the burning helicopter to assist in the recovery of the two pilots who died in the crash landing. He found the dog tags of one and the bag of the other so he could identify them for last rites.

McCain also tended to those who survived: "While grieving for their buddies, they also had to deal with survivor's guilt and fear - 'Was I somehow responsible?' 'Am I next?' I had to help them through that and help them find a way to get back out there. Stress levels are high in this war. There is no front line. Our troops live in fear of attack anytime, anywhere. The chaplains' job is to provide comfort, support, and trust. We have never been needed more."

On military bases

Now serving at the U.S. Army post in Mannheim, Germany, McCain says he has been called at all hours for such emergency needs as talking a young soldier out of suicide or making a condolence call. During the days, he might lead a Bible study group or run counseling programs for families.

Silveira is one of about 20 chaplains serving Marines and sailors and their families at Camp Pendleton, Calif. "It is clear that in an all-volunteer military, every individual who signs up comes in looking for meaning and purpose. My role is to try to understand how I can affirm that sense of calling regardless of the individual's religious beliefs," he says.

At military bases across the country, says Baldwin, there is a renewed emphasis on family: "You will see reintegration and reunion efforts. Chaplains are leading retreats that help [servicemembers] get back in touch with spouses and children after a deployment."

In military hospitals

"The chaplain's role in the hospital setting is to provide a voice of calm," says Hurst, who has served as a BAMC chaplain since 2001, including an 11-month tour at the 228th Combat Support Hospital in Iraq. "When you're seriously injured, hearing 'You're in good hands' or 'We're going to take care of you' from a reassuring voice can have a tremendous effect."

At BAMC, where severely injured soldiers go for long-term rehabilitation, Hurst says he has more of an opportunity to get to know patients and their families. "You find out what the patient needs and wants. ... For some, it may be something tangible such as help with housing or child care for family members. Perhaps a young wife just needs to hear that she can handle this major change in her life. Others are looking for prayer," he says.

In 2005, Chaplain Maj. Debra C. Berry, of the Alabama National Guard's 117th Air Refueling Wing in Birmingham, deployed to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, Germany, where servicemembers injured in Iraq and Afghanistan are transported for critical care. She, too, asserts the value of calm, quiet support. "There was a father who flew in to be

with his son - his only child - who was gravely injured in Iraq," she says. "As it became clear his son was not going to make it, he became more and more distressed. I sat with him, finding the right words when I could - sometimes saying nothing at all."

During disaster

When Hurricane Katrina unleashed its fury on the Gulf Coast in August 2005, Coast Guard and National Guard and Reserve forces moved into the areas of devastation for rescue, recovery, and relief.

When Chaplain Lt. Cmdr. Endel Lee, USNR, got the call to head to New Orleans in support of the Coast Guard, his boss cautioned him he would have to wear a flak jacket because the city had become so violent. "I was just back from Iraq, where I wore one every day. So I told him it wouldn't be a problem," said Lee.

Despite having lost his own home to the floodwaters of New Orleans and relocating his family to Mobile, Ala., Lee answered the call. His job was to take care of the spiritual needs of the Coast Guard first responders, those in the boat and helicopter crews saving hundreds of lives in the flood waters. "We were very concerned about them. They were rescuing people all day long in dangerous and desperate conditions," says Lee.

He offered devotions daily and nightly for the rescuers and made sure that they talked about their experiences. "They were exhausted. I encouraged them to sit and talk, to take a mental break, to have a conversation with their families. We wanted to offer them some normalcy in the midst of chaos," says Lee, who also accompanied many Coast Guard members to the sites of their own homes, which had been destroyed by the hurricane and flooding. "I listened to their hurt, and I stood with them as they called their families to say their homes were gone."

Lee says his role in New Orleans was to be a "hero helper." Capt. Bob Mueller, Coast Guard deputy sector commander, Sector New Orleans, would argue that Lee was one of the heroes. "If not for Chaplain Lee, we would have a lot of broken Coasties right now. He helped them through the stress," said Mueller.

During his career providing ministry to the sea services, Lee has worn four uniforms, serving the regular Navy, Navy Seabees, Coast Guard, and Marine Corps. No tour of duty has been the same. The military chaplain, Lee says, has "an extraordinary mission field. This is cutting-edge ministry, and there is nothing else like it. It is tremendously rewarding."

Two Chaplains Remember Sept. 11

Chaplain Maj. Gen. Charles C. Baldwin, USAF, was at the Pentagon Sept. 11, 2001, for a meeting. After the attack, he ran to the site of devastation and didn't leave for 18 hours, ministering to the injured as chaos roiled around them.

"I remember a second lieutenant supply officer came up to me to ask how she could help. ... And for the rest of the day, ... I saw her helping, taking care of people," says Baldwin. In the days after the attack, Baldwin says a frequent question was, "Where was God on Sept. 11?" "I told them He was right there with us in the middle of the flames. There were many reminders of God's presence. I often thought of that supply officer."

At the site of the attack at the World Trade Center in New York City, the Coast Guard mobilized its Chaplain Emergency Response Team (CERT). Chaplain Capt. Wilbur C. Douglass III, USN, now chaplain of the Coast Guard, was dispatched to lead the team.

"We walked freely throughout the [Ground Zero] area, stopping to talk to and comfort [police officers, firefighters], and emergency workers. One day two obviously exhausted firemen were leaving the scene. ... One of them came over and gave me a big bear hug. You remember those moments," says Douglass.

During the third week CERT was in operation, the city began escorting grieving family members to a site near Ground Zero in an effort to allow them to find some closure. Chaplains accompanied them. "We were all aware just how important our mission was during those weeks," says Douglass.

MOAA Honors Military Chaplains

Once a chaplain, always a chaplain," says Chaplain Brig. Gen. Wayne W. Hoffmann, AUS-Ret, MOAA's national chaplain. "The military chaplaincy is a unique ministry, an inclusive ministry - serving people of all denominations. It is as much a lifestyle as it is a position," says Hoffmann. Chaplains may retire from the ministry, but they remain chaplains for life, he says. Chaplain Capt. Gary Pollitt, USN-Ret., executive director of the Military Chaplains Association of the United States of America (MCA), also subscribes to the chaplain-for-life philosophy.

MOAA and MCA share similar goals in their advocacy for military servicemembers and their families. In 2005 the associations launched a national award sponsored by MOAA to honor military chaplains. The David E. White Leadership Award is named for the first recipient of the award. Rear Admiral White was Navy Chief of Chaplains during his active duty career and served as executive director of MCA. This June, the second annual award went to Chaplain Col. David E. Lapp, USA-Ret., selected by representatives from MOAA and MCA. "Well beyond his own awareness, Rabbi Lapp has made a contribution of noteworthy and enduring benefit to the welfare of his religious community, other religious communities, the armed services, and the nation," says Pollitt.

Lapp retired in 1982 after 24 years in the Army, and in his retirement he served as director of the Jewish Chaplains Council of the Jewish Welfare Board, which certifies Jewish chaplains for the U.S. military and VA. Lapp's military career included 14 deployments. He recalls his service in Vietnam: "I traveled every day in a chopper to meet all over the country with small groups of five, 10, 20 people at a time, to have a [worship] service and talk to them. It meant a lot to me to see these young men and to be able to help them in this type of crisis. ... They were never sure they would return from combat."
