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Bearing the Double Burden: Combat Chaplains and the Vietnam War

John Donellan Fitzmorris III
University of Southern Mississippi

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BEARING THE “DOUBLE BURDEN”:
CHAPLAINS IN COMBAT DURING THE VIETNAM WAR

by

John Donellan Fitzmorris III

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
and the Department of History
at The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Approved:

Dr. Andrew Wiest, Committee Chair
Distinguished Professor, History

Dr. Günter Bischof, Committee Member
Professor, University of New Orleans

Dr. Brian LaPierre, Committee Member
Associate Professor, History

Dr. Heather Stur, Committee Member
Associate Professor, History

Dr. Kyle Zelner, Committee Member
Associate Professor, History

Dr. Karen S. Coats
Dean of the Graduate School

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ABSTRACT

BEARING THE “DOUBLE BURDEN”:

CHAPLAINS IN COMBAT DURING THE VIETNAM WAR

by John Donellan Fitzmorris III

December 2016

Throughout the period of the Vietnam War, soldiers and Marines of the United States Military were accompanied into the combat zones by members of the clergy who were also part of the military. These chaplains attempted to bring God to the men in the field by providing spiritual and moral support through worship services and certain counseling duties. A number of chaplains, however, believed so strongly in their ministry that they refused to simply stay “on base” and instead shouldered their packs and journeyed with their troops into the most perilous combat zones. In so doing, these combat chaplains took upon themselves a “double burden” in that they not only bore upon themselves the spiritual and moral well-being of their troops but also suffered the same hardships, privations, and consequences of seeing and experiencing the worst that combat had to offer.

As a result, combat chaplains underwent a transformation in the field that changed them from mere sacramental ministers in military uniform to “wounded healers” who advocated for their troops—both during and after the war. In experiencing the horrors of combat, suffering the loss of friends, struggling with the sagging morale of their men as well as their own, and dealing with the moral conflicts posed by the fog of war, combat chaplains became committed to the idea of peace and justice after the war, took a leading role in recognizing and treating post-traumatic stress in themselves, and—as a result—

were able to reach out to their fellow veterans and offer them the opportunity to affect their own healing.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the case of dissertations and other works of this sort, the phrase “standing on the shoulders of giants” applies quite accurately. Those familiar with me would not want me standing on anything of theirs, but I must acknowledge their tremendous help and support in the completion of this work.

My first thanks must go out to the chaplains who provided the foundation of this study. Their service, sacrifice, and—in more cases than not—heroism was matched in the field only by their tremendous faith and dedication to the spiritual and emotional well-being of their troops. Their generosity of time and patience with my interviews and constant phone calls and e-mails with further questions is but a mere fraction of the time they have spent in their ministry to the men (and now women) in uniform that have fought our wars and continue to fight our wars. Their work continues to this day, and I am proud to be able to call many of them my friends.

I must also give thanks to those who served on my dissertation committee and forbore my constant queries and delays in getting to the finish line. I am sure that not many “non-traditional students” like myself came your way, but you all were never flinching in your support and suggestions to make this work meet the standards.

Professor Andrew Wiest of the University of Southern Mississippi chaired my committee and became a cherished friend along the way. His folksy demeanor shrouds a keen intellect that the administration of the university and the academic community at large has finally started to recognize. He has forgotten more than I shall ever know about the Vietnam War, and it has been his influence that has driven this dissertation from the academic angle. Professor Kyle Zelner of USM lent his keen eye for detail as well as his

own considerable knowledge of war and society to provide some excellent foundational work. Professor Heather Stur has been a good friend whose studies in the Cold War and foreign policy have allowed me to view the role of the chaplains from a different and refreshing perspective. Professor Phyllis Jestice, my “Viking Queen” now of the College of Charleston, was always there to help me bring the religious aspect of this work into clearer focus. Professor Brian LaPierre, whose studies in the global aspects of communism have also been a valuable resource. Lastly, Professor Günter Bischof, the Marshall Plan Scholar and Director of Center Austria for the University of New Orleans was the individual who first turned my attention to the value of oral history and how it could contribute to a scholarly work. All of their “ministrations” to my labors have been honest, thorough, and worthy of their professions. Thanks also go out to Professors Andrew Haley, Michael Neiberg, Max Grivno, Louis Kyriakouides, Curtis Austin, and William K. Scarborough, and Mrs. Shelia Garris Smith and Mrs. Cynthia Warren, all of whom have been more than patient with me, offered their help without reserve, and have helped make the University of Southern Mississippi truly a gem among history programs.

The great and hard-working faculty of the University of New Orleans also deserve a ton of credit, giving me the impetus to finish my Masters work and then later allowing me to work while also completing this dissertation. My chair, Professor Robert Dupont, and Professors Gerald Bodet, Andrew Goss, Andrea Mosterman, Nikki Brown, Connie Atkinson, Mary Mitchell, Allan Millett (himself a veteran of the Vietnam War), Raphael Cassimere, Warren Billings, and James Mokhiber are all part of a still-great History Department faculty. Thanks also go out to Sherrie Miller and Gertraud Geissner of Center Austria for making my life much easier than I deserved while working at UNO.

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The credit goes all to them, and only the errors I claim for myself.

DEDICATION

We do not give enough credit to those who started us down the road to whatever our careers may be, so I must give thanks to all my wonderful teachers at St. Dominic Parochial School in New Orleans, especially Mrs. Nellie Schott, whose firm belief in me never let me waver and helped me develop the grammar skills that would serve me well; the late Noonie Folse, who combined just enough gentleness with a stern demeanor to keep me on track; and the late Marguerite Foley and the late Father Reginald Masterson of the Order of Preachers, whose simple faith and guidance contributed to the start of this odyssey. Kudos also to the excellent teachers at Jesuit High School who would not tolerate my teenage indolence and demanded that I fulfill my potential, especially Professor Stephen L. Pearce, Messrs. James Woods and Robert Fecas, and Fathers Tony Ozzimo, Thomas Hoffman, and Nicholas Schiro of the Society of Jesus.

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Family may be near the end of this study, but they are first when it comes to the credit. My brilliant and theatrical brother James Fitzmorris, who may have been the

younger brother in age but not in wisdom and advice. My solid and decent brother Patrick, who himself served this country and has been a model of loyalty along with his wife Ena. My brother Ryan and his lovely bride Dania, for taking on the role of those offering the hard, honest truth at times; and my beautiful sister Katherine and her husband Aaron who essentially have adopted my daughter as their own these past few years.

My parents, John and Kay—both my biggest fans and toughest critics—who decided to invest their time and energy in me for one last round and take care of my daughter to allow me to finish this odyssey. Without them, this simply could not have happened. My wife and soulmate Roselyn Keenan Fitzmorris, who took a chance and began a new life with me. Not only has she been a source of spiritual and moral support, but she has been a damned good copy editor along the way.

Finally, my first true love in all this world, my daughter Madeleine Rose Fitzmorris. I had the pleasure of introducing her to many of the veterans and chaplains whom I interviewed. The best gift a father can give his daughter is introduce her to people of quality so she can have a reference should she desire to choose a spouse one day. I wanted her to meet the best, and I found them in our veterans and chaplains. To her I dedicate this work and to all those mentioned, I once again offer my profoundest thanks.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AirCav	Air Cavalry
Americal Division	23 rd U.S. Army Infantry Division. The name is a contraction of “America” and “New Calendonia” where the division was formed in response to the Pearl Harbor attacks.
AO	area of operations
APC	armored personnel carrier
ARVN	Army Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnamese Army)
ATV	All Terrain Vehicle
CAP	Combined Action Program
CO	commanding officer
CP	command post
DEROS	Date Eligible (for) Return (from) Overseas Service
dust-off	helicopter that rescued or extracted soldiers from the field
flechette	A pointed steel projectile, with a vaned tail for stable flight. The name comes from French <i>fléchette</i> , “little arrow” or “dart.”
FO	forward observer

FOB	forward operating base
FSB	fire support base
HQ	headquarters
Kit Carson Scout	Vietnamese who were part of a special program called <i>Hồi Chánh Viên</i> , a term loosely translated as “members who have returned to the righteous side.” It was first created by Marines during the Vietnam War and involved the use of former Viet Cong combatants as intelligence scouts for American infantry units. Approximately more than 83,000 VC defected to the <i>Chieu Hoi</i> or “Open Arms” program
LDS	the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints; that is, the Mormon Church
LOH	light observation helicopter
LTC	Lieutenant Colonel
LZ	landing zone
<i>mamasan</i>	Pidgin term used by American servicemen for any older Vietnamese woman or madam of a brothel. The etymology of the term actually began with American servicemen in referring to elderly Japanese women in occupied Japan after WWII, but it

soon became associated with prostitution throughout Southeast Asia.

MP	Military Police
NCO	non-commissioned officer
O-6	commissioned officer rank – equivalent of a Colonel in the Army and a Captain in the Navy
OER	operational efficiency report
<i>papasan</i>	pidgin term given to elderly Vietnamese men
PFC	Private First Class
PX	Post Exchange – military retail stores
R&R	Rest and Recreation (or Relaxation) – when soldiers were given leave in the middle of their tour
REMF	reach echelon motherfucker – a term used to describe out-of-touch officers and enlisted
Sp4	Specialist 4 - In the United States military, it is one of the four junior enlisted ranks in the U.S. Army, above private first class and equivalent in pay grade to corporal.
TF	task force

- USO United Service Operations – a non-profit group that provides programs and services—including live shows—to U.S. soldiers and their families. It consists of six civilian organizations: the Salvation Army, Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), National Catholic Community Service, National Travelers Aid Association and the National Jewish Welfare Board. They were brought together under one umbrella in 1941 to support U.S. troops.
- VC Viet Cong – the name for the National Liberation Front. They were guerilla fighters in South Vietnam fighting on the communist side.
- WO1 Warrant Officer – often helicopter pilots in Vietnam

CHAPTER I – PREFACE

Some things have a way of working themselves out, but I did not realize that until the sixth interview. Each and every time I sat down to speak in person or conducted an interview over the phone with a chaplain who had served in Vietnam, I started by giving them why I was speaking with them and what I had planned to accomplish. I started by telling each chaplain that I had taught religion in the Catholic schools of New Orleans for sixteen years and done some part-time college teaching until I decided that it was time for me to make a change. So I enrolled at the University of New Orleans, somehow earned a Masters in History, and began teaching History at a local college. I wanted to take that to the next level, and several hundred million gallons of water in 2005 affirmed my decision. The advice of a friend and fellow academic led me to the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg where I managed to convince the department chair to take a big risk on an older student, and soon I enrolled in classes for my doctorate in History. Based on my work for my Masters, I was all gung-ho to be a World War II historian; but I floundered in my first year, trying to find a suitable topic for a dissertation. I had taken a class on the Vietnam War at UNO and had conducted oral interviews, and now I was taking another course on Vietnam in my first semester under my now good friend, Professor Andrew Wiest. There, I got to see and hear from an amazing group of Vietnam veterans, including a man by the name of John Young, who sat in and co-taught the class.

Young and the other veterans who came and told their stories moved me deeply. Vietnam had been an inexorable part of my family since my father's younger brother Michael shipped off to that country in 1967 and then came home in 1969 a changed man.

Michael F. Fitzmorris had been a Navy corpsman (medic) who had been awarded the Purple Heart and the Silver Star for rescuing seven wounded Marines from the roof of the university building in the city of Hue, during the Armageddon that was the Tet Offensive of 1968. A newspaper clipping announcing his award and one picture of him carrying a wounded Marine down a ladder was all I knew of what he had done. He never once spoke to me or even my father about his experiences. Uncle Mike passed away in 1994 from cancer. My father's eulogy, which included Michael's sacrifice in Vietnam, afforded me an even better understanding of what happened; however, it was John Young telling his story to our class that gave me the best insights into what had happened to my uncle. I asked numerous questions and made countless comments that I am sure after a while made some of the younger students in the class exasperated. Evidently, my participation and questions caught the attention of Professor Wiest and others because by the summer of 2009, they had convinced me to get on a plane to Saigon as a part of a student group studying Vietnam and the war that had happened there four decades earlier.

Twenty-three of the most amazing days of my life followed as we toured the country with another of the amazing Vietnam veterans I have had the honor to know, Mr. Joseph Morgan. In tropical heat oppressive even to a lad from New Orleans, I visited the places where Americans and Vietnamese engaged in death struggles, visited temples on the tops of mountains, and crawled in tunnels used by the Viet Cong that had me claustrophobic after a just a few minutes. The people of Vietnam stood out to me the most because I had never encountered such a warm and friendly group of people as the Vietnamese. Adults and children alike marveled at my six-foot-seven-inch, three-hundred-plus-pound frame. I think I became the most photographed man in Vietnam at

the time as every adult and child wanted to take selfies with *Phật Di Lặc*—the “Happy Buddha.” The strains of war still could be seen in the people as I visited a hospital and held in my arms children born with birth defects stemming from the hideous consequences of Agent Orange. In another place, I watched men and women crippled by bombs and shrapnel from the war overcoming their afflictions to make exquisite lacquer and artwork.

In the middle of the trip, our group reached Hue, and one of the first places I went to visit in my off time was the old university building where my uncle was wounded saving those seven Marines. The university had moved across the street, and the building was now used as a hotel. It was quiet and sleepy with only a few people from Russia lounging around the pool. Standing near the very spot where death had held high carnival forty years earlier, a surge of emotion overwhelmed me. The needlessness of war, the maiming of young men, the fracturing of souls—one of whom had been a happy-go-lucky Irish kid from New Orleans named Michael Fitzmorris—was almost too much for me to bear. It was almost as if the ghosts of those who died there—and those who died a little bit each year following—were calling out to me and others, telling us never to forget what happened.

I went on with the rest of the tour, my life altered forever. When I got home, I took up a copy of Eric Hammel’s *Fire in the Streets*, the chronicle of the battle of Hue and proceeded to devour it once more to try and comprehend the full scope of what happened there in early 1968. In the course of my reading, I came across—as if for the first time—the story of an Army chaplain named Aloysius McGonigal, a forty-six-year-old Jesuit priest caught in the middle of the battle. I had been educated by the Jesuits in

high school and in my first stint in graduate school at Loyola University, so the story of a Jesuit priest in the midst of the Vietnam War was too compelling to brush aside.

McGonigal had served as an Army chaplain, but it was the Marines who were fighting in Hue. The Jesuit had decided that Marines needed a chaplain as much as anyone, so he offered his ministry to a Marine company and became then and there a Marine chaplain. Officers and enlisted alike noted his dedication and courage to the point of recklessness in tending to the Marines. He gave no thought to bullets or shrapnel as he walked calmly among the Marines, giving them encouragement or going out into the open to pull the wounded to safety. Aloysius McGonigal was killed on or around February 17, 1968, found dead in the rubble of a house just two blocks from the front line.

I had my topic.

I began combing records concerning chaplains, looked for their memoirs, and tried to locate as many chaplains as possible so that I could meet them in person or at least talk to them on the phone or via e-mail. I wrote letters of introduction—some of which were answered, some not. I also contacted some of the Marines in the battalion that my uncle served as a corpsman and asked them for whatever info they had on chaplains. I read a number of memoirs and became acquainted with the names Charles Watters and Angelo Liteky, two Catholic chaplains in the Army awarded the Medal of Honor in Vietnam. Watters' medal was posthumous, but Liteky survived, then left the priesthood, married a former nun, and became active in the anti-war movement. I read about Vincent Capodanno, the youngest of a large Italian family from New Jersey and a Maryknoll missionary, who joined the Navy to serve the Marines and became known as "the Grunt Padre." He also received a posthumous Medal of Honor.

Little by little, the beginnings of what might be a narrative began to emerge. Who were these men who combined the uniform with the cloth? Who were these priests, ministers, and rabbis, who had dedicated themselves to doing the work of God, going with soldiers into places where God seemed anything but present? To know them, I had to talk with them—or, better put, I had to *listen* to them. I had to hear their stories or find out from the soldiers to whom they ministered what it was that they did, why they did it, and how what they did affected them.

Thus, one Friday in September 2012, I took the time to visit the veterans of Charlie Company of the U.S. Army 9th Infantry Division, who were having their reunion in New Orleans. Professor Wiest had just published his account of Charlie Company titled *The Boys of '67*, and he had arranged to have several of the veterans of Charlie at the book premier the previous evening. I wanted to meet more of those men, so I went to the hotel with my young daughter in tow because I wanted her to understand at an early age that heroism belongs to ordinary people placed in extraordinary circumstances. One of the men I met right away was Bernard J. “Bernie” Windmiller, Charlie Company’s chaplain. We met for a few minutes, and I asked if we could meet the next day and conduct an interview. Bernie immediately agreed, and I spent four very emotional hours the next day hearing his story. Bernie’s wife Esther was in the next room the entire time, and I am convinced that she had been the stabilizing force for both him and me. Tears in my eyes, I asked Bernie to say a prayer of thanksgiving for me at the fact that I had just made a best friend. Protestant minister and Irish Catholic clutched hands in fervent prayer.

On I went. I traveled to Fayetteville, North Carolina, the weekend of the Super Bowl in 2013, and spent an amazing two days with Chaplain James Johnson and his rock of a wife Barbara. I had read Johnson's own memoir in just one day, but I wanted to meet the man who had spent nearly a full year of hell in the Mekong Delta, not far from where Bernie Windmiller's Charlie Company patrolled. Another friendship had been cemented as Baptist and Catholic talked, broke bread, and prayed together. I then spent probably four to five hours on the phone with Chaplain Jerry Autry, an interview that seemed to me only fifteen minutes in length. Another long phone call to Thomas Carter, a chaplain who had served during Operation JUNCTION CITY along the Cambodian border.

In February of 2014, I went to Dublin, Georgia and had breakfast at the Cracker Barrel with Jack Brown, another chaplain who had written his own memoir about his time in the 82nd Airborne and later the 101st as they moved up to assist the Marines at Hue. Those who know me even casually know that I am not shy about eating, but I hardly touched my food or even coffee as I listened to Brown. His first brush with death was not in the Korean War where he had first served nor even in Vietnam but on the campus of the University of Mississippi that fateful fall in 1962 when James Meredith demanded the right of every American to pursue a college education. That he had seen action at Hue gave me even further insight to what my uncle had endured and again had cemented a relationship. The next afternoon, I was in a South Carolina retirement home interviewing Father Robert Falabella, a recipient of the Silver Star. Despite his age and the fact that he was in a mechanized wheelchair, the light in his eyes told me that this was not a man with whom anyone trifled. I spent a mesmerizing three to four hours in his

presence as he wove the story of the war with his own personal faith and devotion. In July of 2014, I again let my breakfast get cold as I sat and listened to Ed Wallin, a former Paulist priest and chaplain with the 101st Airborne tell of his experiences saying Mass for the troops and going wherever he felt needed. Like Liteky, Wallin had left the priesthood, married, was widowed and married again, and joined the peace movement.

These are but some of the men who shaped this narrative. Volunteers all, men of tremendous faith, many of them undeterred by divisions of race or class, many of them going against their fellow clergy who disapproved of war, sharing the common bond of bringing God to men in places where God seemed absent. Some were wounded, some died in battle, and many came home to find that their position as ministers or even their faith had not immunized them against post-traumatic stress. They were not perfect. They did not always find the right things to say to their troops or Marines. They did not always bring comfort when it was needed most. But they were present with them throughout their struggle when they could have stayed behind on base. They endured some of the worst firefights, heat, jungle rot, terrible food, and fear of death. After hostilities came to an end and the troops came home, the war continued in the minds and souls of their beloved troops. Wounded themselves, these chaplains reached out to their comrades and became the “wounded healers,” still present to their troops, still suffering with them in their hardships.

Their courage and faith and sheer survival did not make their story extraordinary. Such was the story of many a soldier. That they chose to go out into the field with their troops and shoulder the burdens their troops carried along with their own is an extraordinary tale. That the experiences of these chaplains offered a unique perspective

on war—from that of men of peace—is extraordinary as well. That I somehow stumbled on this tale and have taken upon myself the task of telling it has done nothing but increased my own faith and made me friendships as lasting and as genuine as anyone could ever hope for or deserve.

Some things do have a way of working themselves out.

CHAPTER II – INTRODUCTION

And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

- Isaiah 2:4

In the Christian tradition, Martin of Tours was a pagan soldier who cut his military cloak in half to provide warmth for a beggar. The beggar then revealed himself to Martin as the Christ and converted him to the faith. After his death in 397, the kings of France enshrined Martin's remaining half-cloak in a tent called the *capella* and named its caretakers the *capellani*. Thus, the term "chapel" entered the lexicon with those keeping the relics titled "chaplains."¹ As Christianity became the predominant religion among the armies of medieval Europe, military commanders constructed chapels in their camps and carried chaplains along with them. These religious ministers soon proved their worth not only in protecting the relics but also by serving the spiritual and moral needs of the men and sharing in their hardships. Over time, chaplains gained respect as indispensable members of both standing and conscripted armies, "dividing their *capella*" by accompanying their troops on campaign, performing sacramental ministries for them, and ministering to them on a personal and spiritual basis.

Sixteen hundred years later, James Johnson, a U.S. Army Chaplain who served in the Vietnam War reflected on his service and how often he had "halved his cloak" in service to his fellow soldiers. Filled with an overwhelming sadness for the loss of friends

¹ Régine Pernoud, *Martin of Tours: Soldier, Bishop, and Saint* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 161.

and comrades, Johnson experienced physical and emotional trauma after a year of toil and desolation in the killing zones of Vietnam. Like the French soldier-turned-bishop of the fourth century, Johnson left Vietnam old beyond his years and a much different man than the one who first walked into the Mekong Delta in early 1967. Yet, Johnson's odyssey of combat and his life after made him but one of many soldiers who survived the trauma of war and struggled to return to life at home after it. His story and the story of all those priests, ministers, and rabbis who donned the uniform of their country and brought the peace and love of God to soldiers in places where neither love nor peace nor even God seemed to exist offers a unique perspective on war, suffering, and the soldier's seemingly impossible journey home.

Johnson—like many of his fellow chaplains—wrote in his memoirs that the Vietnam War had transformed him from a sacramental minister to a traumatized individual whose journey of coping and reconciliation with his experiences took thirty years. However, true to his ministry, he did not simply focus on himself through the journey. He used his own experience with suffering and post-traumatic stress to transform himself from a minister to a healer—determined to reach back and help bring his fellow suffering troops home. A study of chaplains who served in the combat zones of Vietnam revealed that those who carried the *capella* into the field underwent a transformation because they endured a “double burden.” They shouldered the spiritual and moral responsibility for the troops in the field while at the same time sharing in their physical and emotional suffering. Chaplains performed sacramental and ministerial duties, but they also assisted with wounded, received and helped identify the dead, and took a hand in the notification of families of the deceased. The latter duties magnified

chaplains' stress and trauma both during the war and in the years following. While this is in no way an attempt to elevate chaplains and their role above those of regular soldiers; nonetheless, chaplains who served in the combat zones of Vietnam were unique.

Those who chose to accompany their troops into the combat zones did so in a period that many considered a watershed moment in U.S. History. Their position as chaplains often allowed them to transcend class and race, and their presence in the field sharing in the hardships of their fellow troops made their admonitions of morality and spirituality resonate with greater force. Furthermore, once they had come home from the war, combat chaplains often recognized and identified their post-traumatic stress and the problems they encountered readjusting to civilian life much earlier than the troops to whom they ministered. Their experiences of war—the sight of death, fear of death, miserable conditions, poor morale, and injustice—allowed them the opportunity to transform themselves and the nature of their role. Combat chaplains of the Vietnam War used their double burden to transform themselves from sacramental and spiritual ministers of the United States' military to priests and prophets who healed their fellow soldiers both during and in the years that followed the war. Like Henri Nouwen's "Wounded Healer," combat chaplains used their experiences in Vietnam to reach out to their fellow soldiers and lead them home.²

An examination of the lives and experiences of combat chaplains—their backgrounds, their religious and military training, their war experiences, and finally their experiences after the war underscored the idea that combat chaplains for the most part encountered war as a transformative process and used that transformation to gain an even

² Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (New York, Doubleday, 1990), 87-88.

greater appreciation for life, take up the cause of peace in a variety of ways, and reach out to their fellow soldiers. As warfare had changed by the time of Vietnam, so also did the role and position of the chaplain. At first, chaplains operated on the periphery of armies, and opinions varied among commanders as to the role and effectiveness of ministers who traveled with their troops. With only a few notable exceptions, chaplains played the role of priest, minister, or rabbi safely ensconced in the rear areas. By the time of the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War, chaplains had a far more complex and involved role with their troops. Ministers, priests, and rabbis chose—often contrary to the wishes of some commanders—to accompany their troops in the field.

The primary reason why some chaplains went with their troops was to fulfill their mission and motto of “bringing God to men and men to God.” It was not an easy task for many of them to join the military. Sentiment among the clergy in a variety of faiths trended against the war in Vietnam while many questioned whether clergy's presence in the military constituted tacit approval of violence and combat. In response, chaplains either ignored their fellow clergy or defended their service by noting that soldiers were souls in need of care as much as anyone. When they went into the field, chaplains conducted religious services for the troops, held memorial services for the fallen, did their best to bolster troop morale, counseled soldiers with their multitude of issues, and steadied them in times of extreme duress. Since the military did not separate troops according to religion, combat chaplains by necessity adopted an ecumenical approach. They viewed all soldiers as children of God in need of their ministry—especially in the combat zone. Thus, they ignored or defied orders relegating them to rear areas, donned

helmets and flak jackets, loaded up with C-rations, and braved enemy as well as friendly fire to bring God as well as food, medicine and encouragement to their troops.

Once in the field, chaplains, like their troops, endured incessant gunfire; pounding artillery; the danger of death; and the sights, sounds, and smells of death. In addition, they endured the privations brought on by heat, jungle rot, poor food, minimal sanitation, lack of privacy, sleep deprivation, fatigue, and homesickness. They suffered the loss of comrades as grievously as did their fellow soldiers because they were not immune to developing close relationships with their men and relying on them for support, protection, and companionship. They came back to their bases exhausted but then either sacrificed rest in order to counsel soldiers or prepared to go out again the next day to minister to yet another company of troops. Upon their return from Vietnam, combat chaplains—who wore the uniform of their country like all soldiers did— put up with insults and lack of respect from their own countrymen and even from some of their fellow clergy. Spiritually and psychologically traumatized like their fellow soldiers, they dealt with the resultant post-traumatic stress and difficulties readjusting to civilian life.

That chaplains who went into the field with their troops underwent physical, emotional, and spiritual trauma is unremarkable. All soldiers who went into the field experienced combat situations. What makes the experiences of this small group of men unusual was the nature of their position as moral and spiritual leaders. Combat chaplains held unique positions, undertook very specific tasks, and engaged in responsibilities that placed upon them unusual burdens. As commissioned officers, chaplains held rank but not command and strove to remain both relevant and legitimate in the eyes of their troops. Because the Geneva Convention classified chaplains as non-combatants, the

military frowned upon and sometimes prohibited them from carrying arms even for self-defense. Nonetheless, they wore uniforms, so the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese soldiers targeted them like any other soldier. Lack of food and rest did not keep them from attending to their ministerial duties and counseling soldiers with a variety of marital problems, disciplinary issues, and requests to return home. In addition, chaplains faced never-ending questions from soldiers and civilians alike about the nature of war and their own role in it. By the middle of the Vietnam War, the anti-war movement was gaining traction, and many soldiers themselves questioned their role and place in Southeast Asia. Chaplains also faced resistance and even open hostility from co-religionists and others who felt that religious had no business whatsoever in war. On the other side, they had to deal with a particular brand of Christianity held by preachers and bishops back home who felt that the Cold War represented a struggle between the godlessness of communism and the light of Christianity represented by the free world.

Chaplains served in the combat zone, but they served as instruments of peace and mediation. Those who served in combat often acted as intermediaries between officers and enlisted, between branches of the service, and between the military and civilian communities. With a tradition of military service that pre-dated the American republic, chaplains provided more than just spiritual and moral guidance to their troops. As such, the chaplain corps set up training regimens to try and insure that only the most qualified should wear the uniform. Historian Richard Budd writes in *Serving Two Masters* that from the First World War onward, chaplains gained more control over their professional training and enacted screening procedures for the chaplaincy. The Army and the Navy both set up respective chaplain schools, and would-be chaplains underwent better

training—both military and religious. Thus, they gained competency that would earn the trust, credibility, and respect of their troops.³ However, Budd writes that chaplains served “two masters,” the military as well as God—and the military had its expectations. They trained like the troops (e.g., jump school for airborne chaplains) in order to share the physical rigors of the men to whom they ministered. Thus, by the First and Second World Wars, chaplains had established themselves as integral parts of the American military and ministers to their troops—roles that would remain very much in place by the time of the Vietnam War.

Possessed of such training and personal dedication, many chaplains not only requested but demanded that they accompany their troops into the field and not remain behind at headquarters or behind the lines. Conducting religious services in the field became commonplace, and chaplains and troops alike believed the chaplains’ best position was alongside those troops to whom they ministered. Previous examples provided legitimacy for their expectations. The redoubtable Catholic Chaplain, Fr. Francis Sampson—later Chief of Chaplains during the Vietnam War—accompanied the 101st Airborne in their drop behind the lines in the Normandy invasion and twice joined his men as guests of the Wehrmacht. Fr. Emil Kapaun, a priest who served as an Army chaplain during the Korean War, went into captivity with his men, distinguished himself as an advocate for the rights of his fellow prisoners, and eventually died due to maltreatment from his North Korean captors.⁴ The example of four chaplains—Alexander Goode, Clark Poling, George Fox, and Fr. John Washington—going down

³ Richard M. Budd, *Serving Two Masters: The Development of the American Military Chaplaincy, 1860-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 120.

⁴ Kapaun was awarded a posthumous Medal of Honor in April 2013.

together on a sinking ship off the coast of Greenland in 1943, hands clasped in prayer, no doubt inspired all chaplains.⁵ Combat chaplains fulfilled more than just religious and sacramental duties, though. They served as news reporters by bringing the men information that officers did not normally share or even have. They filled roles such as morale officers, surrogate medics and corpsmen, comforters of the wounded and dying as well as their grief-stricken comrades—all the while dealing with their own grief.

The extant historiography on chaplains in the Vietnam War is limited at best. Numerous authors have written works dealing with religion and war. Robert Bellamah has two excellent works on civil religion in America. Herbert Bergsma chronicles those chaplains who served with Marines in Vietnam.⁶ The Truman administration established a committee to undertake a critical examination of religion in the armed forces. Harvey Cox's work, *Military Chaplains*, is critical of chaplains in that he believed they abdicated their responsibilities as voices of conscience and instead became servants of the military.⁷ Richard John Neuhaus, a Catholic priest and a convert from Lutheranism, outlines the metamorphosis of civil religion in his essay "The War, the Churches, and Religion." In it, he posits the idea that in the turbulent era of the 1960s, opposition to religion was not so much a rejection of the Judeo-Christian ethic as it was a critical assessment of how American civil religion had overtaken those ethics.⁸ Likewise, William M. Newman and

⁵ Dan Kurzman, *No Greater Glory: The Four Immortal Chaplains and the Sinking of the Dorchester in World War II* (New York: Random House, 2005)

⁶ Herbert Bergsma, *Chaplains with Marines in Vietnam, 1962-1971* (Washington D.C.: United States Marine Corps, 1985).

⁷ Harvey Cox, *Military Chaplains: From a Religious Military to a Military Religion* (New York: American Report Press, 1971).

⁸ Richard John Neuhaus, "The War, the Churches, and Civil Religion." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, The Sixties: Radical Change in American Religion* 387 (January 1970): 128-140.

Peter L. Halvorson in *Patterns of Pluralism* examine American religion in the 1960s.⁹ However, few—other than the chaplains themselves—have attempted to place the role of chaplains within the broader context of the Vietnam War and the era that it defined. My friend and colleague Jacqueline Whitt of the U.S. Air War College, has written an excellent, critical, and groundbreaking analysis of the Chaplain Corps during Vietnam that illuminated the conflicts chaplains experienced and how they compromised their roles as priests and prophets as servants of the U.S. military. Whitt’s examination, *Bringing God to Men*, places chaplains more into the history of the Vietnam War; however, it also covers a much broader spectrum as it analyzes the military chaplaincy’s overall role in the war. This dissertation, on the other hand, seeks to highlight only a small segment of the Chaplain Corps—those priests, ministers, and rabbis who “humped the boonies” with their troops. In focusing the study more narrowly, one might hope to discover how the experience of combat helped shape combat chaplains and redefine the chaplaincy—both during and after the war.¹⁰

This dissertation seeks to answer the aforementioned questions and examine how *combat chaplains* fit into the overall picture of Vietnam and transformed both themselves and their ministry throughout and after the war. As chaplains moved from the periphery towards an active place in the military consciousness, they saw themselves as integral to the well-being of the troops to whom they ministered. By and large, priests, ministers, and rabbis who experienced combat did not regale their troops with sermons on the

⁹ William M. Newman and Peter L. Halvorson, *Patterns of Pluralism: A Portrait of American Religion, 1952-1971*. Washington D.C.: Glenmary Research Center, 1980.

¹⁰ Jacqueline Whitt, *Bringing God to Men: American Military Chaplains and the Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

righteousness of their cause. They understood the Cold War context and believed in the cause for which they served and especially the troops to whom they ministered. They were not immune to seeing the war in Vietnam as a Manichean struggle between the light of the free world and the darkness of communism. Stephen Whitefield's book *The Culture of the Cold War* highlights the growing influence of ministers like Billy Graham and bishops like Cardinal Francis Spellman, who saw the Cold War in black and white terms and helped drive the nation toward confrontation with communism. Many of the chaplains came from the same evangelical tradition as Graham did while most Catholic chaplains were well-aware of Spellman's influence as Archbishop for the Military and later Archbishop of New York.¹¹

Combat chaplains put aside such notions early in their tours in favor of acting as advocates for their troops in combat zone. Their time with their troops shrank their focus until they saw the war as a matter of survival. The ministry of chaplains then became one in which they subsumed their needs and perspectives in order to reach out to and give comfort to as many men as possible and in the place where they felt they were needed most. The diaries and memoirs of combat chaplains and the recollections of other troops regarding chaplains offer evidence that the focus of combat chaplains was God and the soldier.

Whenever possible, the voices of the chaplains and the soldiers to whom they ministered have formed the foundation of whatever insights might be offered. Accounts of the chaplains and their fellow soldiers along with the reports and archival sources have

¹¹ Stephen Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War, Second Edition* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

underscored the main thesis in its supporting chapters. In addition, several extant works provide a context for the attitudes and experiences of the chaplains. Among the most prominent are Jonathan Shay's seminal books *Achilles in Vietnam* and *Odysseus in America*, groundbreaking illuminations of the struggles Vietnam veterans endure in both the combat zone and on the home front. The heroes Achilles and Odysseus serve as paradigms for the Vietnam veteran, unable at times to overcome his own humanity, unable to find peace or justice in the field or at home, and unable to find healing from the terrible price combat has exacted on his soul.¹² Edward Tick's excellent work titled *War and the Soul*, examines the Vietnam problem as a societal problem in that the post-Vietnam American society cast aside notions of warriorhood. As a result, soldiers coming home from war were expected to "get on with their lives" without any transition from warrior to civilian. Tick points out that the results of such a societal shift are less than admirable.¹³ Reverend Amy Snow, herself a chaplain as well as the spouse of a Vietnam veteran, has written *The Endless Tour*, which is an in-depth examination of post-traumatic stress and—like Tick—explains how post-traumatic stress is a wound of the *soul* rather than just something to be treated by drugs and/or psychotherapy.¹⁴

Last but certainly not least, there is the Bible. Putting aside the religious exhortations and behavioral dictums, the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures (that is, the Old and New Testaments) are replete with references to war and the damage it can do to

¹² Jonathan Shay M.D., Ph.D. *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (New York: Scribner, 1994); Shay, *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming* (New York: Scribner, 2002).

¹³ Edward Tick, Ph.D., *War and the Soul: Healing Our Nation's Veterans from Post-traumatic Stress Disorder* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2005).

¹⁴ Amy Snow, *The Endless Tour: Vietnam, PTSD, and the Spiritual Void* (Bloomington, IN: Trafford Publishing, 2002).

both the individual and society as a whole. The writers of the Scriptures were intimately familiar with war and sin and their results. Combat chaplains “armed themselves” with God’s sacred Word—not so much as to browbeat their troops into good behavior as to remind their troops of the presence of God even in the combat zones, to give honor to the fallen, and offer comfort to the wounded, both in body and soul.

The main arguments of this dissertation place this study within the broader historical context of both the military chaplaincy and the Vietnam War in general. Rather than examine the history of the military chaplaincy in Vietnam in chronological fashion, this dissertation engages three basic themes in three sections that underscore the central thesis: first, what was the nature of the “double burden” for combat chaplains? Secondly what strategies and methods did chaplains employ to ameliorate their burdens? Finally, how did chaplains near the end of their tours and in the years following the Vietnam War undergo transformation?

Chapter I introduces the chaplains who chose to go into combat with their troops. Their personal stories, family life, religious training, and reasons for going into the military all are important in understanding these men and their mindset throughout the war. Of no less importance was their religious outlook, the times in which they lived, and how they viewed the Vietnam War in general. Some of the chaplains spoke through their memoirs while others were gracious enough to lend their own voices—now four decades after the watershed experience of their lives.

The first section lays out in detail what constituted the burden for combat chaplains. Chapter II lays the foundation for the nature of the double burden by outlining in detail how the stresses of combat affected chaplains. Like many of the troops to whom

they ministered in the field, a number of combat chaplains emerged with “thousand yard stares.” They felt the strain and fear of death in fire fights. Chaplains dealt with isolation, loneliness, and homesickness even as they sought to ameliorate the same conditions in their troops. Fresh off the line, they felt both physical and emotional exhaustion, yet could not always seek rest because of the needs of their troops for counsel. Most grievous to the psyches of the chaplains was their constant exposure to death and human destruction—on an even greater scale than the soldiers to whom they ministered. With duties to both the wounded and the dead, priests, ministers, and rabbis who administered Last Rites, said prayers, or offered the Kaddish often did so over scores of mangled, eviscerated corpses. The constant exposure to death on such a large scale intensified the grief and resultant post-traumatic stress in chaplains.

Chapter III explores how chaplains developed deep and lasting friendships with both officers and enlisted, and how death and injury imposed an extra burden on chaplains who suffered the loss of a friend or a soldier whom they had been counseling or in whom they chose to confide. Injuries and deaths deprived soldiers of friends in more ways than just the simple loss of life. Medevac choppers flew away with both the wounded and the dead, often never to be seen again by their comrades. Such sudden bereavement left no time for soldiers to say farewell to their buddies and comrades. The same went for chaplains, and such grief indicated profound relationships that formed among all soldiers—including chaplains.

Combat chaplains did not always get along well with every soldier. Chapter IV examines how combat chaplains’ duties included dealing with the demoralizing and senseless rotation system that undermined any semblance of unit cohesion, incompetence

in officers that placed chaplains and their troops in danger, and numerous officers, NCOs, and even fellow chaplains who used their rank and/or positions to exploit or harass soldiers in a variety of petty and vindictive ways. Such soldiers who insisted on the letter over the spirit of the law, focused on careerism, and openly threatened chaplains with reprisal tested the patience and faith of combat chaplains, and led them to act as mediators for their men—as well as for themselves.

Chapter V explains that not all soldiers accepted their role as killer, and many struggled with their consciences as they strove to make sense of killing other human beings and even engaging in what many considered atrocities. What underscored the relationships that some chaplains had with their fellow soldiers was how those chaplains addressed issues and questions of morality while in the field. One of the largest of the burdens imposed on the military chaplaincy—both in the field and in the rear—were the moral questions posed by soldiers to their spiritual advisors. Combat chaplains understood that soldiers carried with them grave feelings of guilt and remorse for their actions in the combat zones. While a few chaplains made off-handed remarks that attempted to justify the killing, most combat chaplains shouldered the burdens of their men while at the same time carrying their own psychological and moral baggage over what they saw and experienced. As they walked a precarious line between the military and spiritual worlds, they sought to make sense of and put into words their understanding of the morality of war for their men and themselves beyond the usual tropes.

Section Two addresses how chaplains found the means by which they relieved themselves as best as possible of their burdens. “Ministry of Presence” is the theme of Chapter VI and focuses on how chaplains, aware that they “served two masters,”

maintained credibility in the eyes of both the enlisted and the officers. They did this by resolving to be with their men wherever and whenever they went into the field. While such activity exposed chaplains to stresses, combat chaplains justified their presence as part of their ordained ministry and beneficial to the morale of the troops. Most troops in the field did not see chaplains as an extra responsibility or in need of protection; rather, they considered chaplains as necessary components of a successful combat operation. When certain commanders and staff officers blustered against and even resisted chaplains' presence in the field, chaplains used the opportunity to defend themselves and enunciate their mission. In the process, they defined their own purpose more clearly and affirmed themselves.

Chapter VII explores the multitude of liturgical innovations that combat chaplains utilized to create sacred space for the men in the field and at the same time alleviate the burden they carried. The primary method by which chaplains affirmed their mission to the men in the field was through the worship service. While being with the troops bolstered morale—especially during fire fights—chaplains understood that their role had to be commensurate with their appointed duties. The military expected chaplains to minister to men from a variety of denominations, and chaplains could hold a general worship service at any place and/or time. Sharing the sacrament under a poncho during a monsoon, saying Mass on an ersatz altar of C-ration boxes, celebrating the Shabbat in a foxhole, or holding a Christmas Day service on the bank of a rice paddy allowed chaplains to find time and create a sense of the sacred. Yet, as profound as worship services could be in the field, allowing soldiers a few cherished moments to grieve collectively for their fallen comrades was even more crucial for chaplains to hold. One of

the most profound aspects of spirituality in the field—the memorial service—enabled soldiers to honor the fallen. Unable to say goodbye to dead buddies because they had been medevaced to the rear, the living who remained in the combat zones welcomed memorial services because it gave them a small opportunity for catharsis. Combat chaplains by and large rejected the strident rhetoric of the Cold War and did not use memorial services to endorse the war effort or celebrate the patriotism and sacrifice of the fallen. Instead, they focused on the quality and dedication of the deceased, the forgiveness of the Almighty, and prayers for the souls of all those who gave their last full measure.

The last section, titled “Transformation,” goes into depth about the experiences of the combat chaplains once the war came to an end and how they made sense of them. Despite the creation of the sacred and the honor given to the fallen neither troops nor combat chaplains could do away with the grievous wounds done to their souls by the combat zone. However, combat chaplains were among the first to realize that the damage to their psyches and souls were in fact a transformation. Chapter VIII explores how post-traumatic stress visited itself on combat chaplains because of the sights, sounds, and even smells of death. Because of their training and education, these chaplains identified the symptoms in themselves even before the end of the war. In their journals and memoirs after the war, they noticed in themselves the effects combat trauma worked on their bodies and sought to make sense of the fatigue, depression, and nightmares that beset them. Knowing that the young men who comprised the majority of their troops experienced the same trauma if not worse, combat chaplains expanded their wartime and

post-war ministry to help their fellow soldiers confront the demons that the Vietnam War had unleashed upon them.

Chapter IX analyzes the struggle of combat chaplains to come home and then help their fellow veterans come home as well. Readers will go beyond the war in Vietnam to the war that continued on the home front for chaplains and their fellow veterans. In the decades that followed the end of hostilities in Vietnam, many veterans of the war did not receive a homecoming befitting warriors. Many at home either disdained the service of the veterans or ignored that service, wishing to put the entire Vietnam Era behind them. Many veterans of the Vietnam War *themselves* also felt unworthy of a proper homecoming. Participation in or witness to dreadful acts of violence, association with a war many considered unjust, and utter dissolution of their lives once they had returned to the U.S. left many veterans in a state of total despair with little self-regard for themselves. It was in this context that combat chaplains—by virtue of their ministry—found the ability to convert their own psychological wounds into opportunities for healing and growth. Once they had done so, they then turned to their fellow veterans and offered the same opportunities to them. In what Carl Jung termed *metanoia*, chaplains became “wounded healers” as they embraced their psychological trauma and then used it to offer their fellow comrades a way home.

Finally, chaplains who served in combat zones saw their ordeals more than just in terms of psychological transformation. Readers will understand in Chapter X how combat chaplains came home to unfamiliar circumstances, first making the effort to familiarize themselves with a world that had changed even only after one year of absence and then turning back to assist their fellow Vietnam veterans the means to come home. It

was not an easy task even for themselves as combat trauma had numbed their souls, broken down their ability to trust, and rendered them “alien” in their own land. Nonetheless, combat chaplains treated the new situation as they had done in the combat zone. They embraced ecumenism and broke down the barriers that separated the faiths. They saw combat stress as a test of their faith and commitment to their ministry, a chance to express their views on war and the treatment of soldiers, and finally a chance for spiritual conversion both in the field and at home. As they sought to integrate themselves back into civilian, peacetime life, chaplains in particular took a leading role in taking their “double burden” and using it to transform themselves from priests and prophets into healers as they reached out to help bring their troops in from the field.

The conclusion examines where the combat chaplains are in their present lives. While some have died since the war, a number have taken a rather liberal view of retirement and maintain a host of activities both with their fellow veterans and in their various denominational ministries. Age of the body has not dimmed the fire of their spirits. They still carry the *capella* wherever they feel it is needed, and have expressed in their writings and interviews that the “double burden” is as much a blessing as it is a burden—perhaps even more.

CHAPTER III – THE CHAPLAINS

As he was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea; they were fishermen.

He said to them, ‘Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.’ At once they left their nets and followed him. He walked along from there and saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat, with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him.

- -St. Matthew 4:18-22¹⁵

Each decade, era, or generation contains its own uniqueness. Each contains some watershed event or series of events to which those who live in it point as proof that theirs was the defining epoch of a century or even of a nation. Those who lived during the era of the Vietnam War are no exception. Transformative in its character, those—both at home and in the military fighting in Southeast Asia—found themselves different people when the Vietnam War concluded. Such is also the case of combat chaplains; that is, men who donned both the cloth of their ministry and the uniform of the Armed Services and then went to war with their soldiers. In order to understand the burdens that chaplains who served in the combat zones faced, one must understand the chaplains themselves. Who were these individuals who made the decision to accompany soldiers into some of the most dangerous jungles, through water-logged rice paddies, and along the war-torn streets of Vietnam? Those who made up the Chaplain Corps of the United States Armed Forces during the Vietnam War came from different backgrounds,

¹⁵ NAB, 1014.

upbringings, and religious traditions. All the chaplains interviewed and featured are white and men because the integration of the military had not yet affected the Chaplain Corps at the time of Vietnam. Very few black chaplains went to Vietnam, and women serving in most combat situations was still verboten.¹⁶ Most chaplains came from the middle classes with some—like James Johnson—growing up very poor but with a strong sense of family and religious faith that drove him to seek an education and enter the ministry.

Interviews of chaplains and careful studies of their memoirs highlight common themes. One is that the very nature of their vocation indicated that chaplains recognized and accepted transformation in their lives; that is, the choice of religious ministry—in whatever its form—was one that involved a conscious decision to accept what many in religious circles called conversion. Transformation came in several forms to the chaplains, among others: finding their souls changed by the horrors of combat, seeing the war as a futile exercise, or giving their very lives on the field of battle.

Secondly, chaplains who served in the combat zones did so *voluntarily*. In the 1960s, many young people answered the call of President Kennedy to national service, and the military was no exception to that mandate. Combat chaplains had already chosen to enter religious life, and then they chose to join the military, knowing full well that they would have to accompany troops to Vietnam. Their positions as religious and (a majority) as family men offered them insulation from the draft and the obligation to serve; yet, they served—even when such duties might bring them opprobrium from

¹⁶ Whitt, *Bringing God to Men*, 245.

coreligionists and protestors as the war became more and more unpopular with the passing of the decade.

Third, combat chaplains either brought with them or quickly developed an ecumenical attitude in the field. For them, religious differences faded before the olive drab and camouflage of the military. All soldiers deserved their attention and ministry. Thus, Mormons worshipped with Protestants, Jews sometimes took communion at Catholic Mass, and Catholics took solace in confessing their sins at times to Protestant ministers. As the era of the Vietnam War marked a shift in social and societal mores, religious lines also blurred; and chaplains led the way in seeing all soldiers as children of God rather than from denominations.

Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, combat chaplains by their very definition *chose* to share the experiences of their troops. Once in Vietnam, combat chaplains went into the field with the troops and exposed themselves to fire. Why? Certainly, some chaplains wished to make a career of the military and understood that combat experience was integral to promotion. Many others felt a sense of duty to serve those who needed it the most. Joanna Bourke writes that encouraging people to kill in the name of capitalism and freedom did not sit well with many of the clergy.¹⁷ Thus, while many took an active stance against the war, others became chaplains and went to Vietnam. Even when they arrived in Southeast Asia, they could have remained on the bases, saying Mass or holding services and counseling soldiers. Instead, they went out with their troops on patrol, set up areas for worship in some of the most appalling and deadly conditions, and visited

¹⁷ Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face to Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 271.

soldiers right on the line. They said Mass on altars constructed with C-ration boxes, shared the sacrament under a poncho in the midst of a monsoon, or celebrated Christmas in rice paddies. Such experiences Joseph Dulany likened to the cup of Gethsemane, which Christ asked to have removed. Like Christ, though, he accepted the cup—as did his fellow chaplains.¹⁸ Shay writes that soldiers who see that their immediate leader exposes himself to combat risk while his superiors stay away from combat will be loyal to the leader but disaffected from the army.¹⁹ Many chaplains knew this, and those who accompanied their troops into combat exposed themselves to risk—and thus earned the respect and devotion of their troops.

The men who brought God to the troops and formed the foundation of this study are those chaplains who either left a record of their service through their memoirs or consented to be interviewed. As such, this number comprises only a small fraction of the total number of chaplains who were serving in Vietnam. For example, in March of 1967, the United States Army Chaplain Roster lists 306 chaplains serving in Vietnam. Of that number, 133 served in infantry, cavalry, or air cavalry units. By December of 1967, two months before the war in Vietnam reached its apex, the United States had 484,600 troops serving in Vietnam with 138 chaplains assigned to combat units such as the 1st Infantry Division, Bernie Windmiller's 9th Infantry Division, and Claude Newby's 1st Cavalry Airmobile Division. Catholic chaplains were the greatest in number with thirty-eight, followed by twenty-seven from the various Baptist denominations, twelve Methodists,

¹⁸ Joseph P. Dulany, *Once a Soldier: A Chaplain's Story* (n.p.: n.p., 2002), 26; Dulany referenced Christ struggle in the garden prior to the Passion in Matthew 26:39, Mark 14:36, and Luke 22:42.

¹⁹ Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*. (New York: Scribner, 1994), 12; Edward Luttwak, *The Pentagon and the Art of War: The Question of Military Reform*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985), 34.

ten Lutherans, nine Presbyterians, three Episcopalians, and thirty-three more from a variety of other denominations, including Bernie Windmiller's Disciples of Christ. In that month—in all of Vietnam—there was but one Mormon chaplain—Claude Newby.²⁰ Thus, the chaplains whose interviews and memoirs have contributed to the narrative do not stand as indicative of all chaplains who served in the Vietnam War, and it does not represent the military as a whole. On the contrary, one of the unique aspects of the military chaplaincy is that it consisted of almost if not exactly 100% volunteers.

Interviews with eight chaplains and seven memoirs provided the foundation for this study. In addition, several of the chaplains' wives as well as veterans who had the best view of chaplains who went out in combat added important information. Why were these chaplains chosen? Part of the answer lay in their availability and willingness to be interviewed. Many of them agreed to sit down and tell their stories to or do a phone interview with someone who was a virtual stranger. Other chaplains had memoirs and diaries that were part of the public record. Several chaplains have passed away in the four decades since the Vietnam War and left no personal record of their service. Others remain out there although their stories remained to be recorded.

The chaplains who served in the Vietnam War came from a number of places throughout the nation. Some came from the country setting in which James Johnson grew up while others like Bernie Windmiller came from the lower middle class setting of mid-sized cities in the Midwest. Chaplains such as Ed Wallin came from tough, urban environments like New York while Claude Newby grew up in the Mormon communities

²⁰ U.S. Army Chaplain Roster, March 1967, courtesy of the National Archives Research Division, College Park Maryland.

of northern Utah. Most chaplains traveled a great deal in their early ministry, moving from one parish or community to the next—often as they pursued their ministerial education. While it has already been stated that almost all chaplains were white, they moved with relative ease among both black and white soldiers—many of them already having had experience working for racial justice in their own communities.

This dissertation focuses on twelve chaplains in particular while also including the stories and experiences of four more. Among those who served in combat units, this number does not seem very large. The constraints of time, the availability and/or willingness of chaplains to share their stories (some have died since Vietnam while others have chosen not to share their experiences), and the lack of memoir resources leaves a limited pool of information. The oral histories of eight chaplains and the memoirs of seven provide the foundation for this particular study. Combat chaplains came from various backgrounds, but they shared similar characteristics. Although women had begun to play a role in civilian ministry by the time of the Vietnam War, every chaplain who served in Vietnam was male. Also, while the United States waged the Vietnam War with an integrated military, a large majority of chaplains were white. Few if any African-Americans or minorities served as chaplains. The Vietnam War was one of the centerpieces of the Civil Rights struggle, but the egalitarian ethic of the military had not quite extended to the chaplain corps. Third, Bourke points out in *An Intimate History of Killing* that more than one-third of chaplains in the Vietnam War had served in the armed forces prior to entering the ministry.²¹ Those who were part of the Korean War generation entered the chaplaincy somewhat older than their fellow troops and brought

²¹ Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, 291.

with them experience that they used to their and their troops' benefit. Others like those of the "Vietnam generation," closer in age to their troops, went directly from the ministry into the service and then Vietnam. Both groups of chaplains went to Vietnam for a variety of reasons although the underlying reason was ministry to the troops. Some experienced the thrill of adventure while others saw the military as an extension of their missionary work. All of them drew upon traditions of the deep faith their families and their various religious denominations had instilled in them.

Chaplains in Vietnam were all products of the Cold War; and while most did not buy into all the religious rhetoric that marked the Cold War; they certainly could not avoid its influence—especially in regard to the war in Vietnam. As religious men, each of them in some way, shape, or form understood the war against communism. Stephen Whitefield in *The Culture of the Cold War* argues that religion was a primary force during the Cold War, and religious leaders throughout the country saw it as a Manichean struggle between light and dark with religious faith providing the light for the free world. Well before the 1950s, Americans associated religious faith as part of their "Americanism." Dwight Eisenhower, in trying to explain the scope of religion in the United States, once opined, "Our government makes no sense unless it is founded on a deeply religious faith—and I don't care what it is."²² While some of the Founders may have looked askance at Ike's remark, the men who bore the Cross and the Star of David into Vietnam understood their own deep religious faith as part of being American, and it served as the foundation of their desire to serve soldiers in the field. Dulany knew that

²² Stephen Whitefield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 88.

U.S. involvement in Indochina since the Second World War was to assist the French in reclaiming their colonial empire. Beyond that, he trained his focus on the men and getting out alive.²³ Jack Brown did not answer the call to the chaplaincy because of *Sputnik* and the Berlin Wall. He saw the military build-up and decided then and there that his place was alongside the troops who were being drafted to meet the threat.²⁴ All of the men interviewed and recorded shared the same basic sentiments.

Joseph Dulany

Joseph Dulany entered Vietnam fully aware of his surroundings and what might happen to him. A member of the United Methodist Church who hailed from Oklahoma, Dulany entered the U.S. Army reserve and took a chaplain's assignment at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. He then served as a chaplain in the National Guard before accepting active duty in Vietnam in 1966. His departure for Vietnam came suddenly and abruptly, but he accepted it as the price of ministering to his troops.²⁵ When he arrived in Southeast Asia, he marked the drastic contrast between troops freshly arrived and those homeward bound, which provided him a harbinger of the struggles to come after the war. His memoir, titled *Once a Soldier*, tells his story in Vietnam.

Joseph O'Donnell

Fr. Joseph O'Donnell grew up in Chicago and attended Notre Dame on an ROTC scholarship. Those who went on an ROTC scholarship had to take a commission in the Armed Forces after college. However, the call to the priesthood proved stronger than the call to the military, so he "broke contract" with the ROTC in order to enter the seminary

²³ Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 70.

²⁴ Jack Brown, Oral Interview, April 20, 2013.

²⁵ Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 22.

in 1956 and was ordained a Holy Cross priest in 1960. Despite his disrupted military status, O'Donnell joined the Naval Reserve in 1965 with the idea of becoming a staff officer. When he heard that there was a shortage of chaplains for the Marines in Vietnam, he volunteered to go. It was also not an easy decision as he encountered resistance from his own brother clergymen, especially those who harbored anti-war sentiments. O'Donnell tells his story in a chapter that is part of an anthology titled *Sword of the Lord*.

Robert Falabella

Robert Falabella did see his service in terms of the Cold War, but he did not accompany troops to Vietnam primarily to uphold “Americanism” or even democratic ideals. Instead, he saw his role as spiritual, and he wrote as much in his book *Vietnam Memories*. “Free Will does not force us to love. Communism denies us the dignity of choice,” he said.²⁶ Such was the foundation of his desire to go to Vietnam. His Catholicism was strong in its fervor, but it was gentle in its application. For him, salvation remained the true goal of any priest or minister, and salvation by its very nature is a gentle thing. As such, he strove to bring gentleness into the very un-gentle area of the combat zone, and his memoir, *Vietnam Memories*, reflects the gentleness that he saw in each and every soldier to whom he ministered.

Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1930, Robert Falabella grew up as an only child, his one sibling a premature infant that died in 1935. He and his parents then moved to Washington, D.C. where he attended St. Gabriel Grammar School and then Gonzaga High School, one of the two Jesuit institutions in the nation's capital. His father

²⁶ Robert Falabella, Oral Interview, April 21, 2013.

and mother both worked for the government, with his father working as an auditor and his mother as a clerk in the General Accounting Office. In spite of his fondness for dancing and dating the young ladies, he felt the call to the priesthood while in high school. However, he also felt the call to serve in the military, especially when one of his classmates, Bob McGovern, was awarded a posthumous Medal of Honor for his actions in the Korean War.

Falabella chose to follow his vocation to the priesthood first by entering the Jesuit Order. Founded in 1534 by Ignatius of Loyola and six other priests, the Society of Jesus—known as the “Jesuits”—considered itself the “Pope’s Spiritual Army.” Ignatius himself had been a soldier prior to his conversion, and he regarded his priests as “spiritual soldiers” who also became great scholars and missionaries. Falabella embraced the rigorous tradition of Ignatius and enrolled at Spring Hill College—a Jesuit institution—in Mobile, Alabama where he majored in biology and philosophy. Upon graduation and ordination in 1961, he taught at St. Joseph’s Preparatory School in Philadelphia and then theology at the Jesuit Seminary in Woodstock, Maryland before moving on to work in hospital ministry.

From there, Falabella went back to Philadelphia where he served as the director of a residence hall at St. Joseph’s University. He regarded it as a great experience because he learned there to “love students like parents loved their children.” He used his Mass stipend to purchase a pool table for the rec room and even refused to enforce a curfew on the students—with one stipulation: that they always got up in the morning and went to class. His love for and the accountability he demanded from the students would translate well to the troops to whom he would minister.

For a Jesuit, the third year after ordination is when a priest takes what is called “final vows” and enters the Society of Jesus for life. Falabella surprised the Jesuits by putting off his final vows for two years until a new provincial came in and gave him an ultimatum to take final vows or leave the order. At that point, he contacted the Military Ordinariate in Washington about joining the military and becoming a chaplain. He left the Jesuits in 1965—with a good deal criticism from his fellow Jesuits and anxiety about his future—but he believed that he was surrendering himself to the will of God.

Although Falabella did not obtain the endorsement of a bishop, necessary for joining the chaplaincy, the Army overlooked that technicality because of the shortage of chaplains. He soon found himself at Fort Knox, Kentucky in 1966 where a Baptist chaplain served as his commander. He received a foretaste of the antagonism of some of his fellow chaplains when the Post Chaplain, a Catholic priest more concerned with careerism, criticized him frequently for “spending too much time with the troops and not enough time at promotion ceremonies.” The time at Fort Knox was short, though, and Falabella soon went to Vietnam to minister to troops in the field.

James Johnson

James Johnson was a Baptist chaplain who served with the Mobile Riverine Force in the Mekong Delta at Dong Tam, near the city of My Tho. Born in rural North Carolina to parents who were products of the Great Depression, his father had received no more than an eighth-grade education and worked as a “short-timer” in a mill.²⁷ Johnson’s mother was a homemaker who grew vegetables in their garden, potatoes in their cellar, and kept meat in a deep freeze so that it would keep as long as possible. His religious life

²⁷ “Short-timers” were mill workers hired on a seasonal basis.

developed in a Baptist country church established by his mother's two grandfathers. Johnson spent much of his time in that church, attending revival meetings. He listened to pastors whose education may not have been the best but at least refrained from "fire and brimstone" sermons and instead preached sermons of spirituality and community—a message that would not be lost on the future chaplain.

Other lessons Johnson learned that would suit him well were adaptation, adjustment, and endurance. Since his parents valued education and the country school near his home was of low quality, they arranged for Johnson and his older brother to attend Central School in the city. The experience was difficult as he had to walk three quarters of a mile to his bus stop and then take two buses to reach his school. At times, the bus was late; and his teacher was not very understanding. Nonetheless, Johnson developed confidence and tried out for the football team his freshman year of high school. Despite no knowledge of the game and some early discouragement, the tall, lanky teenager took the advice of a coach to keep working. He made the starting squad his sophomore year, and for the next three years, the team lost only one game and tied another on their way to three state championships. From high school, Johnson went on to Wake Forest where an injury his junior year led him to investigate joining the ministry, and he entered divinity school to become a Baptist minister after graduating. At the same time, he felt a call to join the military, so he joined the U.S. Army as part of the Staff Specialists' Program.

Again, Johnson felt like a fish out of water. Again, he adapted, overcame his difficulties, and gained confidence. He joined an Army reserve unit, attended Monday night worship meetings, graduated early from divinity school, and moved to take over as

pastor of a small country church while he waited a call to active duty as a chaplain. When the Vietnam War grew hot in the middle of 1966, Johnson felt the call to the chaplaincy in a manner he found reminiscent of the Old Testament story of Joseph.²⁸ Johnson did not enter slavery, though, but active Army duty; and rather than Egypt, he went to Fort Knox, Kentucky. He took an assignment at the Army reception station where he counseled soldiers who were frightened or who possessed a variety of “other problems,” conducted general Protestant worship services, and recruited a non-Army priest to say Mass for the Roman Catholics.

Johnson’s memoir, *Combat Chaplain: A Thirty-Year Vietnam Journey*, was an emotional account of his odyssey through the swamps and jungles of the Mekong delta and how he balanced survival with devotion to his men. Nowhere in his account or interview did he couch his experience in terms of a “crusade against communism.” Instead, he spoke in terms of agonizing over the sufferings of his troops and himself, questioning the wisdom of those who placed his troops and himself in such an ordeal, and surviving the experience to come home. Such memoirs as Johnson’s became the testament of combat chaplains—and thus of the troops in their care. Possessed of an education that placed them in a different sphere than their troops, chaplains were among the first to write down their experiences and take stock of what they had encountered.²⁹

²⁸ NAB, Genesis 37, 39-50; Joseph, the son of Jacob, was hated by his brothers because their father favored him. They concocted a scheme to slay him, but instead sold him into slavery in Egypt where he then rose in prominence in Pharaoh’s court and helped bring about the preservation of Israel.

²⁹ James Johnson, Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

Claude Newby

Claude Newby, a Mormon chaplain, served the 1/5 Air Cavalry from 1967 to 1968 and then for a second tour from 1968 to 1969. His memoirs, titled *It Took Heroes*, are two compelling volumes that provide detailed yet terse assessments of the life of a soldier in the combat zone. He wrote from both personal experience and from the perspective of a minister to his troops. Newby had served as a combat infantryman during the Korean War before returning home and working as a policeman in Ogden, Utah. His faith led him to rejoin the military as a chaplain. In the Mormon tradition, becoming a minister is called “being set aside.” Newby felt that he had been “set aside” by the call of God, and wanted to serve his fellow troops in the military. Despite considerable resistance and even an initial rejection from his Mormon elders, he went to Vietnam to join the Air Cavalry.

In the “Air Cav,” he quickly distinguished himself by his presence with and ministry to men of all faiths. Like Johnson, Newby gave no evidence that he joined the military in order to engage in some “holy cause” against communism. Rather, he simply felt that he had a duty to minister to his fellow Mormons and men of all faiths who wore their country’s uniform overseas. Newby’s religion was simple in that he saw his mission as one in which he brought the Word of God to all soldiers, shared the sacrament with his fellow Mormons, and was present to all of his troops as they “humped the boonies.”

Jack Brown

Jack Brown’s memoir consists of stories and anecdotes that centered on the theme of presence to the soldiers. *Another Side of Combat: A Chaplain Remembers Vietnam* is

Brown's testament to the love all combat chaplains had for their troops. Born June 15, 1933, in Tacoma Park, Maryland, right outside of Washington, D.C. to a Presbyterian family, Jack Brown's parents came from the south. His mother was from Tennessee and worked as a bank teller. His father came from North Carolina and worked as a wholesale grocer, supplying hotels, restaurants, and military bases. Brown's father served as an air raid warden during the war, and young Jack often went out with his father on patrol to tell people "lights out." For his part, Jack visited with the soldiers of an artillery unit near his junior high and collected newspapers, scrap metal, and other items for the war effort. His proximity to military personnel gave him an affinity for soldiers at an early age.

In 1950, Brown's senior year in high school, he played baseball and enlisted in the Naval Reserves. Because of his age, he had to obtain his mother's signature to enlist. He graduated in 1951 and enlisted in the Marine Corps where he served for three years, including a tour in Korea as a telephone repairman at a forward air base during the Korean War. Never once did he see any combat although there were periods of high alert. Promoted to Staff Sergeant in his second year of duty, he went back to Camp Lejeune where he felt the call to the ministry while attending services on Easter Sunday, 1954. He went to see his pastor and then enrolled at Maryville College for ministry training. He played football at the college but struggled academically and had to come home at Christmas after failing several courses. While at home, Brown met his wife Jean, and they both joined the Metropolitan Baptist Church in D.C. They both enrolled at Georgetown Baptist College in Kentucky, married, and Brown helped her get a job while he worked as a student pastor for two small Baptist churches. Ordained to the ministry in 1957 while still a student, Brown worked as a painter, a hand on a horse racing farm, and

a translator of orders (Spanish to English) at a pencil factory—all this while he drove to and from his ministerial work thirty-five miles each day.

Brown graduated in 1958, having received a Presidential scholarship to help him complete his schooling. His first child, a daughter named Lisa, was born the day after he graduated; and he was by then driving over 100 miles daily to conduct Sunday services. He had met with several people back in 1956 about the possibility of joining the military as a chaplain. In 1957, the year of *Sputnik*, the Cold War had entered a new phase in which Americans felt a surge of patriotism and witnessed a military build-up. With the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961, many Baptist leaders began calling for chaplains because of the troop build-ups. Brown did not enlist, though, to “fight communism.” He felt that such a move in his career would afford him the opportunity to give witness to his faith and serve his country by answering the military’s need for young ministers. Furthermore, Brown’s recollection of a Navy chaplain during the Korean War who conducted services in Korean moved him deeply.

In July of 1961, Brown applied for an endorsement from the Baptists, and they accepted his application in October that same year. He went to the Blue Grass Army Depot where he received orders for active duty. He then went to the Chaplain School in New Rochelle, New York in 1962. There, the young minister studied with men of numerous other faiths, broadening his appreciation for and understanding of other religions.

The Cold War became hot for Brown in 1962, but not because of Soviet weaponry in Europe. The man who served in the Korean War (without firing a shot) would taste combat not in Europe or Asia but in the pine woods of northern Mississippi.

He already knew the wickedness of Jim Crow, having lived in Kentucky; but that did not stop him from befriending two Nigerian ministers, who had been the first black students allowed into the First Baptist Church in Georgetown, Kentucky. Working with the 82nd Airborne Division out of Fort Campbell, Brown invited the two men to come and preach to his troops. Not long after that event, Brown and the 82nd went to Oxford, Mississippi to quell the rioters protesting the integration of the University of Mississippi. The first wounded to whom Chaplain Brown ministered in his career were American soldiers attacked by their fellow Americans.

From the battlefields of the Civil Rights Movement, Brown then went to Germany where he served as chaplain to a recon squadron patrolling near the town of Bindlach along the Iron Curtain. As the only chaplain in his unit, he conducted services in the field rather than on base—even holding one within earshot of the East German guards on the other side of the barbed wire. One of the saddest aspects of his ministry—and a portent of what was to come for him—was the handling of death notifications for families of soldiers killed in Vietnam.

In 1966, Brown came home from Germany and reported to Fort Bragg with the 82nd, then went to Fort Benning for jump school, and then returned to Bragg where he served with the 307th engineers' battalion. In 1967, the Army transferred a part of the 82nd to the 101st Airborne for deployment to Vietnam from Fort Campbell. Brown felt that the need for ministry was greatest in Vietnam, so he accompanied his troops to Southeast Asia, flying first to Guam, then Tan Son Nhut Air Base, and then Bien Hoa Air Force Base. From Bien Hoa, he and the 101st went north to join the Second Brigade near Hue and Phu Bai, the two cities near the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ).

Bernie Windmiller

Bernard J. Windmiller, a chaplain from the Disciples of Christ, served with the 9th Infantry Division. He was born July 3, 1932, in Gary, Indiana, the youngest of three sons. Windmiller's father, a skilled laborer in one of the main cities of the Rust Belt, was a devout Baptist and chair of the board of deacons in his church. Windmiller revered his older brother because he had served in the Second World War, but that brother died at the age of fifty-four. The middle son had contracted rheumatic fever as a child and died at the age of twenty-two, leaving young Bernie alone to care for his elderly parents.

Windmiller attended Thomas A. Edison High School in Gary where he lettered in football, track, and baseball; was president of his senior class; and participated in his local Baptist Church as a member of the worship praise band. He then went to King's College in Newcastle, Delaware (near Wilmington) where he played trumpet for a Christian television program called *Youth on the March*. He left the band after his sophomore year because of poor grades, and worked in the steel mills in Gary until receiving his draft notice on April 1, 1954. He then went from Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri to the AIT Signal Corps at Fort Knox, Kentucky and then to Korea. There, he served six months on the Korean Demilitarized Zone as part of a Korean Military Advisory Group detachment looking across "no man's land" toward North Korea. He worked as an advisor to the 11th South Korean division and at Taegu as a telephone operator.

In Korea, Windmiller met his wife Esther, who worked as a teacher in South Korea, and married her upon their return in 1956. At first, they lived in a trailer, and he worked shifts at the local steel mill until he went back to college on the G.I. Bill. He

enrolled at Bluffton, a Mennonite college located in Ohio, while Esther gave birth to their first child, a daughter. His experience at Bluffton was hardly without conflict. He was one of two veterans in a school founded by pacifists. Anti-war sentiment was already so high at the college that the president told him to give up school and leave. He declined the invitation and continued with his studies. In his off hours, he served as choir director and youth minister at the Mennonite Church.

Windmiller then graduated and moved his family to Pasadena, California, where he entered the Fuller Theological Seminary and studied for four years as part of the U.S. Army's seminarian program for chaplains. Upon graduation, he became a First Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Reserve Chaplains' Corps. He moved his family to Chicago in 1964, completed his seminary training in the Evangelical Church of South Chicago, and joined the 7th Army Reserve Division where he participated in weekly (not Sunday) drills. In 1965, Chaplain Windmiller received a call from denominational headquarters to go on active duty, which meant a transfer to Vietnam. Prior to the start of his duty, he took a chaplain course because he had seen a chaplain only once in three months while in Korea and did not want the soldiers in Vietnam to go without a chaplain. Both he and Esther were struggling at the time with four children (including a six-week-old baby), but Esther supported her husband because, in her own words, "I had found my calling through my husband and that was absolute."³⁰

At Fort Riley, Kansas, Chaplain Paul Easley (an African-American chaplain) greeted Windmiller and assigned him to the 2nd Brigade, 9th Infantry and then the 3rd Battalion/47th Infantry as one of only three chaplains (Dick Johnson, a Baptist chaplain,

³⁰ Bernard J. Windmiller, Oral Interview, September 4, 2012.

and Fr. Jim Crannen, a Catholic). Chaplain Crannen was from Green Bay and a huge Packers fan, so Windmiller never ceased to rib him about the Packers-Bears rivalry. When not bantering with Crannen, the chaplains met the draftee soldiers coming off the bus and escorted them to the Quartermaster. All the men came together in a unit called “Charlie Company,” which was unusual in that most units came together in Vietnam, rather than in training. This created more unit cohesion but also more pain and grief when a member was killed in Vietnam. (Windmiller believed that the infusion program, which inserted soldiers into units piecemeal in Vietnam, was terrible for morale.) On January 1, 1967, he shipped out to Vietnam and sent Esther and the children to New London, Ohio. While the troops boarded the U.S.S. *Pope* in Oakland, California, the officers boarded a plane in Manhattan, Kansas. It was never easy to leave family. In the marshes of the Mekong Delta, Windmiller and Charlie Company had their appointment with destiny.

Jerry Autry

In the combat zone, lines blurred, and some chaplains like Jerry Autry picked up weapons and used them to save their fellow troops or at least carried them to give their fellow troops a sense of security. Nicknamed the “Gun-Totin’ Chaplain,” Autry came from the Baptist tradition and served both the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions. Self-diagnosed with “ADD,” Autry felt a growing restlessness at an early age. The Army’s need for chaplains to serve in the Vietnam War would be his tonic.³¹ When he arrived in Vietnam, his ruminations centered about the job he had to do, the troops to whom he had

³¹ Jerry Autry, *Gun Totin’ Chaplain: A True Memoir* (San Francisco: Airborne Press, 2006), 54; Oral Interview, May 13, 2013.

to minister, and the constant struggle against the attempt of commanders to marginalize chaplains. However, when he went home, the ramifications of his experience in Vietnam and the Vietnam War in general occupied his mind. His book *Gun Totin' Chaplain* does not attempt to justify his decision to carry a weapon. Autry stops short of apologizing for his decision, but his memoir offers a stark view of what the combat zone meant even for those who wore the Cross.

Jerry Autry was born in Dunn, North Carolina in 1939 to farming parents who lived along Tobacco Road. The youngest of four brothers, Autry's oldest brother was a Marine who served on Guadalcanal, the second oldest received the Silver Star in Korea, and the third served in the Navy. Thus, Autry expected that he would serve when his time came. He graduated from high school in 1958, just as Elvis was beginning to come into his own, and enrolled at Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina where he played football and graduated in 1964. He attended a Reformed Presbyterian Seminary in North Carolina where he heard about the Army's chaplain candidacy program. He then went to Southeastern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky while also serving as the pastor of a small Baptist church near the seminary. Upon graduation from the seminary, he took his first assignment in the Army at Fort Bragg with the 82nd Airborne. There, he attended jump school, which was second nature to a self-described jock, and prepared to accompany his troops to Southeast Asia. Although he enjoyed the Army, he did not expect to remain in the service after he served in Vietnam. Those expectations underwent transformation as he shared in the ordeals of his troops near the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ).

Vincent Capodanno

Father Vincent Robert Capodanno was known as the “Grunt Padre” because of his unyielding devotion to and presence with his Marine infantrymen. Capodanno and the military seemed at first an unlikely association. The youngest child of Italian immigrant parents who lived on Staten Island, Capodanno felt his vocation at an early age. He graduated from Fordham University in the Bronx and then joined The Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America, better known as the Maryknolls. The main purpose of the Maryknolls was (and still remains) to work in the foreign missions of East Asia, Africa, and Latin America. He enrolled at the Maryknoll Seminary in Ossining, New York, was ordained in 1957, and then traveled to Taiwan to work in the missions among the aboriginal Taiwanese. The motto of a Maryknoll Missionary was to be “needed but not wanted until wanted but no longer needed.”³² Thus, Capodanno served seven years in Taiwan until he went home on leave before being reassigned to Hong Kong as a teacher. His difficulties in mastering languages and a sense of being needed elsewhere led him to request permission of his superiors to join the chaplaincy and serve the troops in Vietnam. Capodanno was able to draw on the strong tradition of Maryknolls who had served in the military. The best example was Chaplain Fr. William Cummings, a “guest” of the Japanese during the Second World War, who made the Bataan Death March and then perished on a prisoner-of-war ship.

Capodanno was an unlikely candidate for the grime of the military. Fastidious and neat in his habits, the priest offered up his hardships in the missions and then the

³² Rev. Daniel Mode, *The Grunt Padre: The Service and Sacrifice of Fr. Vincent Robert Capodanno, Vietnam 1966-1967* (Oak Lawn, IL: Marian Publishers, 2000), 54.

military as a sacrifice and a penance. More importantly, he saw the military as the ultimate expression of the ecumenical nature of God—all men (and women) in the combat zones were children called to live in communion with the Heavenly Father and each other. Such an attitude endeared Capodanno to the Marines under his ministry. Capodanno's transformation came in 1967 during Operation SWIFT in the Que Son Valley near the DMZ.

Charles Watters

Fr. Charles Watters walked a similar path. A product of Seton Hall University, the New Jersey native entered Immaculate Conception Seminary, graduated, and was ordained in 1953 as a diocesan priest. He joined the New Jersey National Guard in 1962, and then went on active duty with the U.S. Army in 1964. Like Vincent Capodanno, the slight, bespectacled Watters did not cut a splendid figure as a soldier. With characteristic self-deprecation, he described himself as the “peaceful kind,” and admitted that “the only thing he shot was his camera.”³³ Nonetheless, he insisted on being where the troops were. The late General Gerhardt Hyatt, former Chief of Chaplains, summed up Watters' devotion to his troops and his duty:

The Army did not tell him to be on the battlefield that day. He could have been back in a safe area. But, it was his investment of his life that he must be with his

³³ John D. Fitzmorris III, “Chaplain Charles Watters” in *America's Heroes: Medal of Honor Recipients from the Civil War to Afghanistan*, James Willbanks, ed. (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO Press, 2011), 354.

men. Then when the battle raged and the wounded were lying on the field, repeatedly he risked his life to bring them in and give them help.³⁴

During his first tour, Watters received the Air Medal and the Bronze Star. When his tour came to an end in 1967, Watters extended his tour for another six months. His transformation came at an aid station during the Battle of Dak To when friendly fire bombarded his position.

Charlie Liteky

While both Chaplains Capodanno and Watters lost their lives in Vietnam, Charles “Angelo” Liteky survived and then underwent the most radical of transformations after the war. Born in Washington, D.C. in 1931, Liteky was a charismatic student who played quarterback for his high school football team and “broke a lot of girls’ hearts” when he went into the seminary in his early twenties.³⁵ Liteky chose “Angelo” as his ordination name and then entered the Army in 1964 as a chaplain. In 1967, Liteky would engage in actions that would ultimately result in his being awarded the Medal of Honor, but his transformation would come in the years following the war.

Ed Wallin

Although his transformation occurred prior to the war, Ed Wallin joined Liteky after the war in the cause of peace. He was born March 13, 1928, in Brooklyn, New York to a Swedish father and an Irish-American mother. His parents moved to

³⁴ Henry F. Ackerman, *He Was Always There: U. S. Army Chaplain Ministry in the Vietnam Conflict* (Office of the Chief of Chaplains, Department of the Army, Washington, D.C. 1989), 171; <http://web.archive.org/web/20060222135811/http://www.usachcs.army.mil/SPECFEAT/Vietnam2.htm>

³⁵ Carol Gambrell, as quoted by Matt Sorgel. “Charlie Liteky: ‘He Was Our Quarterback, and Quarterbacks Save the World.’” *The Florida Times-Union*, April 19, 2009.

Manhattan, one block adjacent to Hell's Kitchen. Wallin attended St. Paul's elementary school, a school run by the Paulist Priests. The Missionary Society of Saint Paul the Apostle, better known as the Paulist Fathers, is a Roman Catholic society of apostolic life for men founded by a priest named Isaac Hecker in New York City in 1858. Part of the transcendentalist utopian movement of the mid-19th century, Hecker converted to Catholicism, was ordained a priest, and then created a religious order that sought to preach the Gospel in a manner in tune with the current culture and the times and using whatever media was available. Needless to say, the Paulists found fertile ground in the era of the Vietnam War.

Wallin had gone to high school at Power Memorial Academy, the same school where Lew Alcindor (later Kareem Abdul-Jabbar) later broke upon the sports world. After graduation, Wallin worked on Wall Street, dealing mostly in Mexican railroad bonds; but then he followed his vocation and enrolled at St. Paul's College in Washington, D.C. Ordained a priest in 1956 by Cardinal Francis Spellman as one of a record class of seventeen priests, he received his first assignment to a parish in Minneapolis on the edge of the University of Minnesota campus where he served until 1962. While in Minnesota, Wallin assisted a fellow Paulist in writing a book titled *Christ among Us*, which ran afoul of the authorities in Rome.

From Minnesota, Wallin received an assignment to St. Patrick's Parish in Memphis, Tennessee in 1962. There, he undertook parish work and also served as chaplain to Memphis State University (now the University of Memphis) and the University of Tennessee Medical School. His experience with segregation in Memphis and his training as a Paulist led him to commit to social justice. Wallin began advocating

for African-American students at Memphis State so that they could have access to public facilities. He set up a hall for the students so that they could have meals as well as dances and picketed local stores and restaurants to force them to integrate. His actions led the local chapter of the John Birch Society to label Wallin the “Number Two Communist in the City of Memphis.” (He was upset that he was not Number One.) In addition, several of the fraternities on campus harassed him and the members of the Newman Society (the club for Catholic college students), subjecting them to beatings and attempts to tear down the American flag from their building.

Because the bishops in the south largely went along with segregation, Wallin received no help from his diocese in his efforts. Needing money for his ministry, Wallin took on another job as chaplain for the Air Force ROTC detachment at Memphis State. In fact, when a group of cadets joined the fraternities in harassing Wallin and the Catholic students, Wallin pulled rank and threatened to have the leader of the ROTC cadets decommissioned. Ever the gadfly, he desegregated the eateries around the Air Force base in Memphis, defended war protestors, and integrated a hospital despite considerable resistance from a nun who was afraid that she would lose white patients. He defied a racist bishop in Mississippi to march with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and James Meredith and managed to thwart racist thugs attempting to break up the marches by having nuns march in front. He knew that “no one would fuck with the nuns.”³⁶

Wallin began his Vietnam odyssey reluctantly, but he knew of the chaplain shortage in the military. Since he desired to be on the ground with the troops, he joined the Army because the Navy could not guarantee him an assignment with the Marines.

³⁶ Edward Wallin, Oral Interview, July 15, 2014.

Thus, in the fall of 1966, thirty-nine-year-old Ed Wallin went to jump school at Fort Campbell, Kentucky with the 101st Airborne. His plan was to make himself fit enough to “go where the soldiers go.” In just three short months, the diminutive Wallin was in better shape than many of the eighteen year olds in the division, received a promotion to Major, was named Senior Catholic Chaplain, and even helped a Jewish chaplain train for airborne duty. On Thanksgiving Day, 1967, the 101st received orders to head for Vietnam, and Ed Wallin boarded a C-130 for Bien Hoa Air Base. He carried with him a firm faith in his troops and his mission, but he also carried along with him a growing personal conflict that would direct the course of his life after the war.

The experience of each of the aforementioned chaplains—as well as several more—play an integral role in understanding the main thesis of this dissertation, that combat chaplains in Vietnam took upon themselves the double burden of surviving the combat zone while also shouldering the cares and concerns of their men. Why have they been chosen? In addition to their availability through either interviews or leaving their memoirs, these men *chose* to enter religious ministry and then *chose* to enter the combat zone. In a situation filled in many parts with young men chosen for duty or professional soldiers whose life’s work centered on entering the arena of combat, combat chaplains stood apart by their decision to accompany Army and Marine infantrymen into war. They stood apart because they became agents of change both during and after the war as they strove to help soldiers either maintain their humanity or recover their humanity in the years after the war. Combat chaplains on the whole saw their roles beyond that of their own particular needs and desires, and as such, combat chaplains transformed not only their fellow soldiers but also themselves.

SECTION I –THE BURDEN

CHAPTER IV - THE BURDEN OF THE COMBAT ZONE

At once the Spirit drove him out into the desert, and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him. – St. Mark 1:12-13³⁷

The combat zone was without doubt the arena of the “wild beasts.” Claude Newby’s account illuminates what life was like for a soldier “humping the boonies.”

The regular infantryman’s combat tour was a year—if he made it all the way—of near total misery. He was always wet and muddy or hot and soaked with sweat, engulfed in the stench of unwashed clothing and bodies. Often, he drank water that was “fortified” with dead polliwogs and leeches; and he was accustomed to finding leeches in unpleasant places on his person.

Several factors rendered the regular field trooper’s existence incomparable to that of anyone else. These factors included carrying everything they needed on their backs; constant vigilance around the clock; unending danger; spirit-draining, back-breaking, and exhausting labor; and an existence almost devoid of such creature comforts as frequent baths, clean clothes, beds, and uninterrupted nights. They humped and dug every day. They pulled perimeter guard, OP duty, or ambush every night, no matter what else occurred. All this was interspersed with intentional dashes into combat and those totally unexpected times of terror during firefights and ambushes by the enemy. And with all this, the regular infantryman

³⁷ NAB, 1065-1066.

got few breaks even during occasional stints providing firebase security or palace guard. Exhaustion and sleepiness were the grunts' constant companions.

The infantryman came to the war alone, committed to a one-year tour. If he survived the first battle, he was accepted as a veteran. He lived in unrelenting stress, and endured unimaginable horrors. Often he would carry the bodies of killed or terribly wounded buddies, sometimes for hours until they could be flown from the field; there was no escape from close companionship with death and maiming. Nothing compares to the regular infantryman's existence in combat, not in the Army and not in life...

...C-rations constituted at least two-thirds of the meals eaten by the grunt. It [the article in Stars and Stripes] didn't mention that the 'hots' served to men in the field frequently consisted of the likes of cold or lukewarm, often watery potatoes and stringy beef served from olive-drab oval thermite [thermos] cans.

For the soldier in the field, valorous actions were seldom witnessed, sometimes depreciated, and often lost in the cracks of memory. The burden of the chaplain was to verify such actions and confirm what equally tired and exhausted grunts witnessed.³⁸

Combat was neither glorious nor a place of renown; rather, it was for most who ventured into it a "desert experience" where Satan lurked.³⁹ Like the desert of Christ, the

³⁸ Claude Newby, *It Took Heroes: A Cavalry Chaplain's Memoir of Vietnam: Volume I* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 455-456; Newby, *It Took Heroes: A Cavalry Chaplain's Memoir of Vietnam: Volume II* (Oren, UT: Sunrise, 2000), 225.

³⁹ NAB, Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:13, and Luke 4:1-13; the "desert experience" refers to the narratives found in the Synoptics where Christ spent forty days in the desert wilderness and faced a variety of temptations by the devil in preparation for his ministry.

combat zone possessed profound transformative powers for all who entered it. Unlike that desert, the combat zone was neither restorative nor affirming but debilitating and demoralizing. The sights, the sounds, the smells, and even the very feel of the combat zone exacted dreadful consequences upon most who experienced them. The Cold War rhetoric of the day at times continued the long-held belief that war and confrontation “reinforced one’s manhood,” but most notions dissipated amidst the grim realities of the war in Vietnam.

The combat zone also illuminated new realities for combat veterans and their chaplains in much the same manner as combat flares did in the middle of the night. Combat chaplains suffered wounds to their psyches like most soldiers; yet, many also experienced profound transformations of their faith. If one is to examine the role of faith in war, one must understand the nature of the arena in which God seemed to many as anything but present. Claude Newby testified to some of the worst carnage and its effects on the minds and souls of the men in his care. His summation of the life of a combat trooper could have served as required reading material for all soldiers about to embark for Vietnam. What Newby also could have added was that he (and all combat chaplains) shared the same stresses.

Unique among stressful situations, combat’s intensity did not distinguish based on rank or role. The transformation combat chaplains underwent resulted from sharing the very experiences that combat soldiers endured. Combat strain and fear of death assaulted all soldiers in the field, but chaplains carried the burden of a soldier as well as the burden for those to whom they ministered. Those who ministered to troops in the field for the most part did not fire weapons; yet, bullets, bombs, hyper alertness, the sight of viscera,

and the smell of death did not make distinctions. Chaplains feared the combat zone like anyone else and yet had to help soldiers unwilling to go back out into the field. They exposed themselves to death and human destruction when they assumed the roles of medic, hospital visitor, and caretaker of the dead. Priests, ministers, and rabbis put aside their own anxieties to administer Last Rites, say prayers, or offer the Kaddish over scores of mangled, eviscerated corpses. They put aside their own revulsion and visited aid stations, triage units, and hospitals filled with men writhing in agony from horrific wounds, intensifying their own grief and resultant post-traumatic stress. Carrying the *capella* into the crucible of combat brought about transformation as combat chaplains saw firsthand what type of transformation—both to the body and soul—combat conditions could effect.

The Arena of Death

Exposure to death and serious injury added to the worry and anxiety chaplains carried both for themselves and their troops. William Tecumseh Sherman's famous quote: "War is all hell" a century before the Vietnam War referred less to the destruction of property than it did to the carnage that it wrought on human beings. The ability to eviscerate a human body had grown exponentially since the days of Sherman's drill bore rifles and exploding shells; and thus, the ability to eviscerate human souls with the experience of combat grew as well.

In *Achilles in Vietnam*, Jonathan Shay expresses the profound effects of death:

Danger of death and mutilation is the pervading medium of combat. It is a viscous liquid in which everything looks strangely refracted and moves about in odd ways, a powerful corrosive that breaks down many fixed contours of

perception and utterly dissolves others. Without an accurate conception of danger, we cannot comprehend and cannot properly value the moral structure of an army. We must grasp what is at stake: lethal danger and the fear of it.⁴⁰

All soldiers in the field and immediate rear areas saw wounded men and shredded corpses. Reverend Amy Snow reduces what combat meant in her book *The Endless Tour* when she surmised that “God, the all-powerful, was lost in the jungles of Vietnam for some veterans.”⁴¹ It would be combat chaplains who discovered that their duties gave them an intimate relationship with death and could shroud God from their sight at times. When it came to reacting to combat death and maiming, chaplains became “just one of the troops.” It did not take long for them to comprehend what their troops dealt with in the field. There is a first time for everything, and soldiers and chaplains alike all had that moment when they first faced combat deaths. Fear reigned supreme, not just in the midst of attacks but also when peace and quiet seemed to prevail.

Where death held high carnival, fear and frustration occupied prominent booths. Jonathan Shay captures the essence of fear in Vietnam troops—an unwelcome guest who never departed.

In Vietnam the enemy struck not only at the body but also at the most basic functions of the soldier’s mind, attacking his perceptions by concealment; his cognitions by camouflage and deception; his intentions by surprise, anticipation, and ambush. These mind games have been part of war since time immemorial,

⁴⁰ Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 10.

⁴¹ Rev. Amy Snow, M.A. *The Endless Tour: Vietnam, PTSD, and the Spiritual Void* (Victoria, B.C.: Trafford Press, 2002), 20.

but never in the American military experience have they been directed so skillfully and with such thoroughness at the enlisted man as in Vietnam.⁴²

Amy Snow echoes Shay in stating that the life of a Vietnam veteran—both in the combat zone and thereafter—was one of “futility.” Guerilla warfare with limited objectives, an inability to distinguish the enemy, and the needless death of friends in the worst possible ways undermined his spirit.⁴³ Jerry Autry’s first view of death came when a jeep just ahead of him blew up crossing a creek. He had just arrived in country and went to the city of Hue. On his way to LZ Sally, he wondered what he had gotten himself into as he saw the aftermath of the Tet Offensive in 1968. When the jeep ahead tried to drive through the ditch only to be blown up by a booby trap, Autry and his brigade chaplain ran over to help the driver and the PFC riding with him. They found both men dead and badly mangled. The pallor of the brigade chaplain’s face and his repeated saying of “Oh, Jesus” told the Autry that he was not the only one having an emotional reaction to this view of death.⁴⁴

In May of 1969, Claude Newby compared his and his troops’ experiences to “lifetimes compressed into sixty days.” Fear, anxiety, and exhaustion were the agents of compression. On his second tour, Newby flew in on a chopper to the LZ and examined the faces of the men freshly returned from an area of heavy fighting.

Each of their young faces appeared exhausted, wary and old, and each set of eyes appeared to stare a thousand meters beyond us.⁴⁵

⁴² Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 34.

⁴³ Rev. Amy Snow, M.A., *The Endless Tour: PTSD and the Spiritual Void* (Victoria, B.C.: Trafford Publishing, 2002), 113-114.

⁴⁴ Autry, *Gun Totin’ Chaplain*, 78-79; Oral Interview, May 13, 2013.

⁴⁵ Newby, *It Took Heroes, Volume II*, 37, 135.

Newby—and every chaplain like him—possessed that same expression after his two tours. That expression, the “thousand-yard stare” originated among soldiers who used it to describe the look of a comrade freshly returned from an extended or intense period of fighting. Exhausted by the strain of battle, a soldier’s eyes no longer seemed to focus on anything close at hand; rather, it appeared as if they looked to “the beyond” or on an object literally a thousand yards away. Stanley Kubrick’s film about the Vietnam War, *Full Metal Jacket*, features a stark description of “the stare”:

A Marine gets it after he's been in the shit for too long. It's like... It's like you're really seeing beyond. I got it. All field Marines got it. And you'll have it too.⁴⁶

The stare manifested itself upon chaplains who went into the field with the troops and served as the first sign of transformation. More than just a change of appearance, the mind and soul changed as well. As body counts increased and conditions worsened, many soldiers acclimated to that which no one should ever become acclimated and disengaged emotionally from the world and each other.

The nature of their training and ministry enabled chaplains to realize what was going on within them. The double burden led them to agonize over their own circumstances but also for those of the troops. Jim Johnson, chaplain with the U.S. Army’s Mobile Riverine Force, felt it after his troops engaged the VC in October 1967.

Shortly after nightfall, we move the wounded again to the command post. One dead body is left outside covered with a poncho. The other body remained in place where he died about 100 meters away...Finally the dustoff chopper arrives. I help load the wounded. We evacuate six WIA’s [*sic*]. The dead body remains

⁴⁶ *Full Metal Jacket*, directed by Stanley Kubrick, Natant Harrier Films, 1987.

with us, as there is no room on the chopper... I'm getting used to torn flesh, blood and guts. What a terrible realization.⁴⁷

Chaplain Joseph Dulany, serving the 4/27th, saw in several young lieutenants a marked change:

After a few months of combat experience they (the lieutenants) were seasoned and hardened men. If they lived, they were forever changed. The stress and stark reality of facing and experiencing death in combat could be seen in their weary and hollow eyes and their overall demeanor. They had seen too much, too quickly.⁴⁸

What he might have added, had a mirror been handy, was that his face changed.

Faces of the Dead

When battles were over, the faces grew more haggard and the burdens heavier. Chaplains did not have to be on the battlefield to endure the sight of death and grievous injury. Viewing up close the aftereffects of bullets, grenades, mortars, and exploding shells traumatized chaplains and all those who handled the dead in the quiet of tents or empty hangars. Medics and pilots and grave registrants may have had little connection to the dead soldiers, but what they saw moved them deeply. Chaplains were no exception and bonded with the dead as they prayed for their souls. Furthermore, chaplains took on the double burden when they accepted that soldiers looked to them as a living connection with their dead comrades. The weight of such responsibility took its toll on the

⁴⁷ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 85; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

⁴⁸ Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 56.

chaplains, especially when struggling with specter of death. Robert Falabella wrote of what he experienced while walking through the hospitals:

I found that my visits to certain wards of the hospital sadly depressing as well as terribly frightening. In these wards were the men who recently underwent surgery for gunshot and shrapnel wounds in the stomach or other parts of their body.

There were men with one or more of their limbs amputated or without the sight of one or more eyes. The sight of this physical evil was always unnerving. Being out in a combat situation, things are happening so fast that there is little time to think about what could happen. But when I would visit each week these special wards, I was vividly reminded of the risks and hideous horrors of combat.⁴⁹

In August of 1967, Bernie Windmiller and the 4th/47th moved down to a built-up base camp named Dong Tam in the Mekong Delta (where he first met Chaplain Jim Johnson). When the first casualties came in after the Viet Cong hit a patrol unit, Windmiller ran out to the choppers bringing in the wounded and saw a man with massive head trauma. The experience moved him greatly. Joseph Dulany encountered a man who had lost all his limbs and was blinded.

His image comes to my awareness when I hear of someone becoming a quadriplegic. This man lost all of his limbs and was blinded after stepping on a land mine. It looked like all that remained was a torso and a head. The head was bandaged in such a way that his facial features could not be seen. I had never seen anybody so mangled and damaged that was still alive. I stood beside his bed

⁴⁹ Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 58-59, 65; Falabella, *Vietnam Memoir*, 76; Oral Interview, April 21, 2013.

and prayed. I never learned his name, but the memory of seeing his battered body remains with me still.⁵⁰

Joseph O'Donnell, a Navy chaplain assigned to the Marines, went down to DaNang soon after he arrived in country to obtain shatterproof glasses. A call came in to expect casualties after the VC ambushed fifteen Marines who were out in the field. O'Donnell rushed to the helipad to meet the choppers carrying the wounded and saw that eight had already died, all with horrific wounds. He anointed all fifteen Marines without bothering to ascertain their faith and then went outside the hospital where he vomited and cried for several hours.⁵¹

Viewing the dead was a grievous task in and of itself, but chaplains also assisted in the recovery of the dead. Both the Army and the Marines look upon recovery of the dead as a sacred trust. At the height of the Tet Offensive, Robert Falabella met two lieutenants who organized their men to recover fallen comrades after an artillery attack. The priest joined them in the ghastly and sorrowful task, and one of the first bodies they recovered was that of a married soldier. Fighting off his fear, Falabella's thoughts turned immediately to the man's wife. Another body belonged to a medic who had attended Mass for the first time in years. A rush of grief surged up for the man who had touched his heart with a sensitivity and desire for a deeper meaning to his faith.⁵²

One of the most heartbreaking aspects of the combat zone was losing soldiers who might otherwise have survived had they been able to receive immediate treatment. Watching men die or hearing of their deaths and being powerless to do anything about it

⁵⁰ Windmiller, Oral Interview, September 4, 2012; Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 67.

⁵¹ O'Donnell, "Clergy in the Military, Vietnam and After," 218.

⁵² Falabella, *Vietnam Memoir*, 68-69; Oral Interview, February 21, 2014.

added to the emotional devastation. Chaplains felt it in themselves and saw the anguish in the faces of the deceased's comrades. One of Claude Newby's troops, Sp4 Ted Pierce, a fellow Mormon, had his legs amputated by a mortar round while using the bathroom behind a tree. He died a little over an hour later waiting for a medevac that would have saved his life had it arrived sooner. Pierce would have rotated to the rear in just a few hours. On February 5, 1968, Jack Brown was again in the 24th Evac Hospital when medics brought the wounded into the triage unit. Among them was a soldier whom seven or eight doctors and nurses tried to keep alive but eventually succumbed. On his second tour, Joseph O'Donnell received notice of incoming wounded on the public address system. He was unprepared for the sights that greeted him as the choppers touched down on the aircraft carrier.

Several marines were brought to the ship by helicopter, and the most seriously wounded came immediately to where I was stationed. One of the doctors called me to help him. A young staff sergeant had been critically wounded and needed a chest tube. I anointed the sergeant and held him in my arms while a doctor made a small incision and inserted the tube. The man bled out about three pints of blood all at once. The doctor's eyes said it all. I just held him, a twenty-eight-year-old husband and father, as he talked of his life. He asked me to write a letter to his wife, to tell her that he loved her, and that he had been faithful. Within a few minutes, he died in my arms. It was most painful to lay him back on the gurney and move on to other patients.⁵³

⁵³ Newby, *It Took Heroes, Volume II*, 238; Jack E. Brown, Ed. D., *Another Side of Combat: A Chaplain Remembers Vietnam* (Nashville: Cold Tree Press, 2006), 17; Oral Interview, April 20, 2013; Joseph O'Donnell, "Clergy in the Military—Vietnam and After." in *The Sword of the Lord: Military*

As if being able to do nothing and watch a man die were not enough, having to see a man die when his tour was almost completed and was just days from rotating home was nearly unbearable. On base in Cu Chi, Robert Falabella endured his first mortar attack when a VC round destroyed a barracks where several “short-timers” had been celebrating their impending departure. Of the five men celebrating, only two were still alive when Falabella found them, and one died soon afterward. The terrible sight of blood and viscera stayed with him throughout the rest of his tour.

I would have to be a year in Vietnam to fully appreciate the tragedy of such a moment: to go through the day-in and day-out routine of facing the possibility of instant death; of writing your loved ones and telling them everything was going to be all right; of enduring the anguish of knowing there were those who loved you back home and were therefore dying a little every day in the fear of receiving word of your injury or death; of sweating out those last few weeks; and then only a few hours to go—a few hours and then finally free from that land and its hardships.⁵⁴

The Futility of Death

As hard as it was to lose soldiers, losing them to friendly fire or human error brought even more grief to chaplains and taxed their spirit. Jonathan Shay again captures the essence of the impact of friendly-fire deaths on soldiers and how modern warfare became transformative for both soldiers and their chaplains. Needless human error, faulty equipment, or simple equipment failure undermined both soldiers’ and chaplains’

Chaplains from the First to the Twenty-First Century, ed. Doris Bergen (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2004), 230.

⁵⁴ Falabella, *Vietnam Memoir*, 28; Oral Interview, April 21, 2013.

trust in their own military institution which operated under the principle that they were not to kill one's own with weapons and technology meant for the enemy. Edward Tick writes that war has become too stressful for even the strongest; thus, war that takes one's comrades due to needless error or incompetence strains soldiers past the breaking point. Bombs like the one that took the life of Chaplain Charles Watters at Dak To on November 19, 1967, or the napalm dropped too close to Lt. Col. Hal Moore's 7th Cavalry in the Ia Drang Valley were major examples of what friendly fire could accomplish. Smaller but no less heartbreaking incidents occurred when platoons fired on each other by accident or helicopter gunships mistook Americans for enemy combatants.⁵⁵

Needless death or death due to stupidity or arrogance could drive all soldiers, including chaplains insane. Deaths in which the weapons of war literally disintegrated corpses or left them mangled worked a different kind of agony on the minds and emotions of chaplains. Some soldiers like Larry "Bandito Charlie" Garner died from small wounds that left little evidence of damage. Most, however, got torn apart by bullets, shrapnel, mortars, and artillery rounds. Seeing the evisceration of corpses was hard on all soldiers and especially difficult for chaplains who worked with many of the men later killed. One cannot describe the destruction of other human beings and exposure to death or mutilation—all of which are intrinsic to war—as a positive experience.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 143; Edward Tick, Ph.D. *War and the Soul: Healing Our Nation's veterans from Post-traumatic Stress Disorder* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2005), 77; LTC Hal Moore is the author of *We Were Soldiers Once and Young*. Moore's book is the definitive account of the Battle of the Ia Drang Valley when the U.S. Army and the North Vietnamese had its first major engagement of the Vietnam War; Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 126.

⁵⁶Robert S. Laufer, Ph.D., "War Trauma and Human Development: The Vietnam Experience," *The Trauma of War: Stress and Recovery in Viet Nam veterans*. Stephen M. Sonnenberg, M.D.; Arthur S. Blank Jr., M.D.; John A. Talbott, M.D.; ed. (Washington, D.C., American Psychiatric Press, 1985), 33.

On September 15, 1967, Jim Johnson had already endured the casualties of a number of his men when an ATC (Armored Troop Carrier) took a direct hit amidships. The wounded were piled one on top of the other as Johnson leapt aboard to start giving first aid and encouragement to those still alive. What he saw left an indelible imprint on his mind as he had to refuse water to a soldier who was partially disemboweled and saw another with “part of his brain hanging out through a huge hole in his ear.” The worst sight was that of only a slightly wounded soldier who “stared out into space” while another sang hymns as he sat in his own and another’s blood.⁵⁷

Claude Newby had more than his share of carnage ministering to the soldiers of the Air Cavalry. On March 20, 1967, a combined VC and NVA force ambushed a company. In the withdrawal, the soldiers were forced to leave Pfc. Donald Jones, who had been killed, on the field. When the company returned, they found Jones disemboweled. Newby could only stare silently along with his fellow soldiers at the mutilation of their comrade. Knowledge that the VC mutilated their comrades intensified the grief of the soldiers as well as their guilt for having survived or for having to leave behind a buddy.⁵⁸

Holiday times and combat were about as incongruous a pairing as one could imagine. Enduring fire and watching comrades die while filled with thoughts of home and celebrating cherished holidays made the burden chaplains carried even more difficult to bear. On Thanksgiving Day 1967, Claude Newby had just finished conducting a

⁵⁷ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 55; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

⁵⁸ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume I*, 131; Stephen M. Sonnenberg and Arthur S. Blank Jr., *The Trauma of War: Stress and Recovery in Viet Nam veterans* (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Press; 1st edition (June 1985), 5.

worship service for a medical battalion. He then flew to an LZ where he saw twenty wounded troopers and a corpse burnt when their chopper went down. One man's head had exploded from the heat. He moved among the wounded and the dead, brokenhearted for both the men and their families. That he saw such a sight on Thanksgiving only intensified his pathos as he knew that several families would receive the dreaded telegram delivered by an officer and a chaplain to their front door. He wondered how those families would treat Thanksgiving Day from thence forward.⁵⁹

More slaughter followed on December 17 when thirty-six soldiers in the 1-12, 1-8, and 1-9 Air Cav gave their lives in the 506 Valley. With room on board only for the wounded, the pilot ordered the men to place the dead below it in a cargo net. Newby beheld the sight of contorted corpses, looking like huge fish caught in a net, and he put the otherworldliness of the experience into words.

Seventy-two eyes, less the occasional empty socket or missing face, stared vacantly into the heavens...I moved among the bodies and looked deeply into those staring, glazed-over eyes, letting the strange images burn into my mind. Everybody was contorted. Many rigor mortis-stiffened arms reached upward to ward off some horrible evil, as it were, while other arms stretched heavenward as if to grasp solace or rescue from some source visible only to the spirit, which had so recently departed the body.

Newby again thought of the families of the dead and prayed for them as they would forever associate the coming Christmas season with the death of their loved ones.

⁵⁹ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume I*, 48.

Such a scene would not be the only time he suffered the deaths of men in the 1-12 and greeted a chopper carrying bodies in a cargo net.⁶⁰

Even worse spectacles waited. Newby had hopped a chopper ride from Bin Hoa to LZ Dolly and as a token of thanks took a photograph of the chopper pilot. The next day, the VC shot down the chopper over the Saigon River. The rescuers found a corpse partially consumed by wild hogs. All the chaplain could do was stare and pray that the pilot was already dead when the hogs reached him. On October 30, Newby conducted a worship service for a platoon in a small bunker, where he became acquainted with Sp4 Eugene Carroll. Carroll, not known for wearing his helmet, got caught by an NVA machine gunner who laid open the man's head in such a manner that his brain was visible through the wound. Newby and the medics worked on the mortally wounded man for several minutes as they waited for a medevac. The man died, and they carried him out of the field when they retreated. His most gruesome experience came in April 1969 when a chopper pilot rolled out a small bundle wrapped in a poncho. The poncho unraveled to reveal the severed head of a trooper who happened to be the pilot's best friend. Faced with his own horror at viewing the remains of a man to whom he ministered, Newby had to turn his attention to the grieving soldier.⁶¹

The bodies of dead enemy soldiers after conflicts had occurred left a lasting impression on chaplains although in a different way. During the Tet Offensive, Robert Falabella saw the bodies of dead VC stacked like cordwood. Joseph Dulany went out

⁶⁰ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume I*, 71, 80; Shelby Stanton, *1st Cav in Vietnam: Anatomy of a Division* (New York: Presidio Press, 1999), 132.

⁶¹ Newby, *It Took Heroes, Volume I*, 346; Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume II*, 77, 107, 243, 245-247.

with his troops as American artillery pounded a VC position over the border in Cambodia. The “scorched earth” scene in the town—utter destruction combined with deathly quiet—gave Dulany an eerie feeling. Later, the sight of NVA dead being interred in a mass grave aroused serious emotions in him. He wondered how the families of those soldiers received word of the death of their loved ones.⁶²

The Death of Non-Combatants

If seeing soldiers die in the combat zone and witnessing how weapons could render their bodies, few can imagine the pathos inherent in watching what the combat zone could do to civilians—especially children. When those not even capable of taking part in combat become combat victims, the effects on the minds and souls of the soldiers and chaplains were devastating. Seeing young children wounded in such a way had a traumatic effect on both troops and their chaplains. When Claude Newby visited a civilian hospital in Phu Cat, he came across two infants suffocated by a smoke bomb and looking like waxen dolls. Seeing wounded Vietnamese civilians in another part of the hospital with children playing among them intensified his grief over the previous sight.⁶³ On November 6, he excused himself from a briefing to help with wounded civilians and found two children among the casualties. One was a baby with a gaping hole over its right eye and the other a mortally wounded little girl. The medic told the chaplain it was the second child he had lost in as many days.⁶⁴ On December 30, 1967, Jim Johnson met a “*papasan*” (an old Vietnamese man) carrying the limp body of what was probably his granddaughter. The little girl had been hit by a single artillery marker round designed to

⁶² Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 54, 100.

⁶³ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume I*, 26.

⁶⁴ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume I*, 485; *It Took Heroes, Volume II*, 255.

gain the attention of Bravo Company. Johnson watched the medic unwrap the bandage from the little girl.

When the last part of the bandage is lifted from the girl's face, I take a step back, fighting the urge to vomit.

I see a mass of torn flesh, bone and facial tissue. Where her left eye was is now a gaping hole. Her nose is hanging down over her mouth. She's breathing through open wounds between what was her left eye and where her nostrils should be.

Her breath is an odd wheezing sound and her mouth is grotesquely misshapen. It appears that most of her little teeth are also gone. There's more missing flesh along her left and right cheek bones. From where the eye was, portions of her brain is [*sic*] exposed. I wonder how she can still be alive. The medic's hands shake. Frank (Pina) whispers a curse and looks up and away into a nearby coconut tree.⁶⁵

The shock and despair at the death of such a small child transformed Johnson. He saw his own daughter reflected in the little girl, and he saw that his friend Frank Pina suffered likewise. Johnson could not vent at the insanity of war because he had to move on with the company. Walking through the city of My Tho with the as they cleared the city of VC during the Tet Offensive, he espied a baby floating face down in the water. Then he passed the ruined church of a friend named Pastor Ha only to see an infant trying to nurse on its dead mother. A few feet further on, two children crying and tugging at

⁶⁵ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 133; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

their dying father increased his feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. Children would become Johnson's focus of his life from thenceforward.⁶⁶

Tension and Anxiety

The illumination provided by combat deaths added to the burdens chaplains bore, not just because of their horrific and disgusting results but also because it gave them and soldiers a view of what might happen to them in the field. Vincent Capodanno was the first Navy chaplain killed in the war. On September 4, 1967, the Maryknoll saw that a Marine had been hit and was pinned down by a VC machine gunner. Already wounded in the arm, the chaplain, along with a medic, ran to the wounded Marine and shielded the wounded Marine with his body until the gunner riddled Capodanno and medic, killing both.⁶⁷ Two months later, during the battle of Dak To, Chaplain Charles Watters met his death by friendly fire.⁶⁸ Both Capodanno and Watters were awarded posthumous Medals of Honor, but most combat chaplains preferred to remain alive and without medals.

Sometimes the combat zone did not need to kill or even injure to break a man physically. On November 8, 1967, Claude Newby waited out an artillery barrage from under a small culvert. Although he wrote that he had felt greater fear in previous attacks, his legs began to shake uncontrollably—where they had never before shaken.⁶⁹ Jerry Autry wrote that whenever he was at an FSB, an encampment that provided artillery support to infantry out in the field, he began to get “antsy.” Autry seemed to have a sixth

⁶⁶ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 194; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

⁶⁷ Slomovitz, *The Fighting Rabbis*, 116.

⁶⁸ Henry F. Ackerman, *He Was Always There: The U.S. Army Chaplain Ministry in the Vietnam Conflict*. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Chief of Chaplains, 1989), 283; John Fitzmorris, “Charles Watters,” *America's Heroes: Medal of Honor Recipients from the Civil War to Afghanistan*, James Willbanks, ed. (2012), 354-357.

⁶⁹ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume I*, 489.

sense like Newby when it came to combat zones, and FSBs only made his hair stand even more on edge. Sure enough, harassing fire came from behind a tree line, and the troops finally located and killed the gunner—an old man whom the VC had chained to his weapon. Later, as he wrote his account of the incident to his wife Jackie, Autry could feel himself sweating and shaking again; so the chaplain got up to walk around in the dark. Sensing someone near the base, he popped a hand flare, located several VC sappers, and fired several rounds from his weapon. Even after the troops repulsed the attack, Autry's anxiety remained so high that he decided to fly out on a chopper and collect himself.⁷⁰

Even more agonizing was the anxiety and tension chaplains endured with their troops as they waited in the jungle for air support or extraction. Jim Johnson slogged through the mud, encountered a firefight, and came across a VC camp complete with camouflaged bunkers and shelters near the Rung Sat with the 3/60th. At the end of their mission, the battalion moved to an extraction point on a waterway so shallow that a Boston whale boat (a small boat with a flat bottom and outboard motor) was the only craft able to extract the troops. Johnson wrote that waiting for the boat—which would take only ten soldiers at a time—and crossing a waterway so exposed to VC fire aroused an almost insane fear in him.⁷¹

Sometimes the stress of the combat zone did not always occur as a result of enemy actions. Soldiers resented those whom they believed made them the most miserable, and in most cases this meant the officers. Such resentment sometimes

⁷⁰ Autry, *Gun Totin' Chaplain*, 180-184; Oral Interview, May 20, 2013.

⁷¹ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 40-42; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

translated into physical harm. Twenty percent of all officer deaths in Vietnam came as a result of what the troops called “fraggings.”⁷² Usually a deftly-tossed grenade into an officer’s hooch or even a well-timed shot in the middle of an attack, fraggings happened with alarming frequency during the Vietnam War and directly reflected the lack of regard troops had for their officers and the war in general.

While most chaplains escaped such treatment, one or two sometimes found themselves in close proximity to a targeted officer. Joe Dulany slept in a cot next to a battalion surgeon when a disgruntled soldier threw a gas grenade in the hooch. The surgeon had not given the soldier a requested transfer out of the field.⁷³ Another way the enemy came from within was when emotionally troubled soldiers placed others in danger. One such case involved a private named Branch, whom Jim Johnson described as “more than half a bubble off plumb” and who he had tried to counsel on several occasions. Branch had rigged two booby traps that had malfunctioned and then blew up an outhouse before his comrades apprehended him and sent him to Long Binh Jail. All were relieved that the VC had not infiltrated, but the incident unsettled everyone because one of their own had turned on them.⁷⁴ Claude Newby’s moment came when a medic suffered an emotional breakdown and holed himself in a bunker, threatening to commit suicide. Newby shook off his own fear and went in alone and unarmed into the dark bunker. He then coaxed the medic’s finger off the trigger of the M-16, the barrel of which the medic had situated under his chin. After a few more minutes of quiet talk,

⁷² Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 126.

⁷³ Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 98.

⁷⁴ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 60-61; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

Newby called in the company commander who agreed to have the medic transferred to a hospital in the rear, and thus they diffused the situation.⁷⁵

Even religious services could invite stress and anxiety. While a later chapter will cover how chaplains tried to make sacred ground in the midst of the sacrilege of combat, the enemy did not respect the sanctity of a religious service in the field. Vincent Capodanno kept his sermons short and to the point because concentrating so many men in one area invited attack from the VC and the NVA. Claude Newby conducted a number of worship services while mortars and artillery pounded him and his men.⁷⁶ Robert Falabella relates his visit to conduct services for a company of the 5th Mechanized in the Boi Loi, an area of heavy jungle known for being a hotbed of combat:

I found that their experiences were bad. Many of their buddies had been killed or maimed for life in those woods. Whenever they had to go to the Boi Loi, they expected it to be costly. The terrain was thick with foliage and trees, giving Charlie many hiding places...So there was the Boi Loi: beautiful one moment; a nightmare the next.⁷⁷

The strain of the combat zone did not ease for troops even when their DEROS approached and even arrived. The pain of seeing troops wounded or killed when they were close to their DEROS already weighed heavily on the minds of chaplains. Some chaplains even asked for relief or received relief from the combat zone as their dates approached. When Joseph Dulany had had enough, he asked for a transfer to a support unit. The division chaplain became angry with his request, accused the chaplain of

⁷⁵ Newby, *It Took Heroes, Volume I*, 369-370.

⁷⁶ Mode, *The Grunt Padre*, 104-106; Newby, *It Took Heroes, Volume I*, 132.

⁷⁷ Falabella, *Vietnam Memoir*, 32; Oral Interview, April 21, 2013.

shirking his duties, and implied that his request would stagnate his career. Jim Johnson also encountered some resistance from superiors, but his battalion chaplain sent him to the rear when he saw the strain on Johnson. Most chaplains were more understanding. Claude Newby earned a trip to the rear when a pew kneeler slammed during a chaplain's meeting causing him to drop to the floor. The commander overrode the chaplain's protests and transferred him to the rear.⁷⁸

Even on the landing strips at Tang Son Nhut and DaNang airfields, waiting for their airplane to take them home, troops endured the anxiety of combat. The airstrips were open to gunfire or even a mortar attack, so troops had to run to the planes. The VC often shot at planes as they took off, so no one could breathe easy until their "Freedom Bird" actually cleared the runway. When his time to go home finally arrived, Joseph Dulany took stock of his fellow soldiers' condition as well as his own.

The young soldiers called home in the U.S. 'the world.' In doing this I believe that they were attempting to disassociate themselves from Vietnam as a place and the horrendous things that some of them had done and seen while here. I was unwilling to do this. In fact, I think it was impossible for any of us to do. All the same, I was glad to be leaving. My time in Vietnam with the artillery group headquarters and then with the infantry had been eventful and fulfilling. I had served both units the best that I knew how by faithfully conducting services, visiting the hospitals and offering companionship and understanding to the men in the maneuver companies. I had shared my faith openly. The soldier in me had

⁷⁸ Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 102; Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 206-208; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013; Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume II*, 203-204.

been expressed. I realized that I was a soldier by virtue of wearing the uniform, holding rank and experiencing hostile fire. In reality, however, I was an observer and not a true warrior. Above all, I was not a hero. I was simply a person who made an attempt to witness to that which I believed important: the reality of God's love through Jesus Christ. I had been there and done my best to make this witness in a trying and terrible setting. Now, 'worn out' physically, mentally, and spiritually, I was ready to leave.⁷⁹

Conclusion

That war is hell is a given. That it is hell for all soldiers is also a given. Chaplains were no different from those to whom they ministered. Victor Frankl writes that people try and seek meaning from the worst conditions—giving them greater moral and spiritual meaning.⁸⁰ And here is where chaplains play the strongest role because they had the power to be the guides along the path toward such enlightenment. They became intimate with both death and the possibility of death, experienced the rage and frustration at deaths due to friendly fire or human foolishness; suffered exhaustion at the end of patrols and missions; and endured constant hunger. Like the troops, they came out carrying with them the thousand-yard stare and the hideous memories of seeing such carnage. The question remains, then, how do the experiences of chaplains in combat somehow provide a unique perspective on the war in Vietnam? Aside from the fact that they voluntarily chose to accompany their troops in the field, combat chaplains stood apart from the average infantryman or even the officer who commanded them in that their

⁷⁹ Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 81.

⁸⁰ Tick, *War and the Soul*, 206.

training and spirituality allowed them the opportunity to see the violence and destruction in a more holistic view. Their duties as ministers to a multitude of men augmented the shock and loss that death inflicted on their troops and thus contributed to the double burden. Tending the wounded and care for and blessing the dead brought them into close contact with war's horrific nature on a greater scale, and their feelings of guilt and grief left them desolate amidst the desolation of war.

From that desolation, the chaplains of the combat zone forged a greater understanding of what their troops suffered because they suffered it alongside them. Bullets, shrapnel, and the stress and strain of lethal circumstances combined to inflict grievous wounds upon the psyches of the troops, and yet less deadly but just as insidious perils awaited both the troops in the field and the chaplains who administered to them and sapped their morale. And again, just as with combat stress, the desolation created by the draining of morale would serve to transform chaplains from ministers to prophets and advocates.

CHAPTER V – THE LOSS OF FRIENDS

How can the warriors have fallen in the thick of battle! Jonathan—slain upon your heights! I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother! Most dear have you been to me; More wondrous your love to me than the love of women. How can the warriors have fallen, the weapons of war have perished!

– 2 Samuel 1:25-27

The story of David and Jonathan in the First and Second Books of Samuel tells of a lasting and abiding friendship between two men, who are warriors, profound in its depths of passion. In fact, a number of scriptural scholars and exegetes have closely scrutinized the closeness of these two warriors in the Hebrew Scriptures, attempting to derive from the narrative evidence of what might be a homoerotic relationship. Whether or not the relationship reached the level of erotic love is another subject for other writers; however, one can say with a degree of certainty that the relationships forged by those who go into war is of a depth that no non-combatant can properly understand. David and Jonathan are but one example of such deep and lasting friendships between warriors. Achilles and Patroclus in Homer's *The Iliad*, Gilgamesh and Enkidu in the Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, and Enjolras and Grantaire in Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables* reflect the depths of love and passion that exist between warriors. Jonathan Shay's examination of the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus is one of the foundations of *Achilles in Vietnam*. Shay attempted to explain that friendship between warriors is so deep that loss of such a friend brings about a total disorganization of the psyche.

Those who don the cloth of religious life accept that they must treat all humanity as they would their friends. For combat chaplains in Vietnam, ministering to all the

troops and getting to know them on a personal basis was the focus of their jobs, but that did not mean that they did not forge friendships with particular soldiers throughout the war. When they lost a comrade to whom they had become close, it shattered them emotionally and psychologically as it would any soldier. Jonathan Shay explains that a soldier suddenly bereft of a close friend enters the realm of a “berserker;” that is, one who literally loses his mind to rage and disbelief and wreaks havoc upon his enemy. As Achilles exacted his rage upon Hector, so sometimes did soldiers deprived of their closest buddies. The nature of the double burden was that combat chaplains in Vietnam could not afford the luxury of acting on their emotions. Bullets, shrapnel, and the sights of death may have played havoc with the psyche of chaplains who went out into the field; but it was the loss of friends for others soldiers and those to whom combat chaplains had become close that worked the most grievous wounds upon them. Their training and ministry would never have countenanced them “unleashing Mars” on the Viet Cong or the NVA. They endured the loss of their friends and at the same time labored to remain in the role of healer and minister to their fellow troops. Edward Tick notes that the central loss of a soldier’s life—a friend, a close buddy—leads him or her to ease the similar burdens others carry.⁸¹ In short, one’s own sense of loss makes it easier to help others deal with their loss. In dealing with the loss of friends, combat chaplains transformed their burdens in becoming better ministers to their men.

War and Friendship

What one must understand in confronting the issue of death among soldiers is that friendship in the war zone becomes magnified *precisely because of* the war zone. The

⁸¹ Tick, *War and the Soul*, 138.

Cold War, with its pursuit of homosexuals as deviants and threats to national security, placed a temporary straitjacket on the ability of people to form same-sex friendships that expressed any degree of passion. Ironically, the one remaining enclave where men could express feelings to each other and rely upon each other in emotional and even physical ways was the military. Although the military of the Vietnam War was a long way from “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” the prying eyes of society did not penetrate the military screen and see the closeness and passion men could feel for each other in the combat zone where fear of death was the soldering iron of emotions.

Perhaps no greater bonds existed than the ones shared suffering creates. The combat soldier knew and comprehended suffering in a manner that only a fellow combatant could truly understand. Troops who endured combat together often forged friendships that ran deeper than just those of a group that occasionally gathered for beers or sporting events. Troops who survived Vietnam and other wars often maintained the closeness of those bonds even if they were separated by great distances and even time. Losing a close friend in the combat zone (or due to lingering wounds after returning home) broke more than just friendships. William Nash wrote that the bonds that developed between comrades in an operational environment, especially in combat, were unlike any others in human experience. The degree of intimacy, trust, and life-and-death responsibility warriors felt for each other was unparalleled. Nash described the relationship as akin to that of mother-son rather than brother-brother. Thus, the loss of a close comrade became like that of losing a child.⁸²

⁸² Charles R. Figley and William P. Nash, ed., *Combat Stress Injury: Theory, Research, and Management* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 25.

Death and injury assaulted chaplains like any soldier because—despite their positions and the natural hesitation of soldiers to form relationships—they were not immune to forming close friendships with their fellow soldiers. In fact, their training and faith demanded that combat chaplains reach out in fellowship to their troops, to make themselves vulnerable to the ravages of war. Shuttling among companies in the battalions did not prevent combat chaplains from forming close friendships. Breaking those bonds through death wrought emotional damage on them like any other soldier. Jonathan Shay writes that the loss of a close comrade wrecked the psyches of many soldiers, especially when that comrade was a source of psychological stability in the combat zone. Shay interviewed a veteran who looked up to a particular soldier nicknamed “the Keeper of the Minds” because he exercised the greatest calming influence on the platoon. When the Keeper died in an attack, the survivors went about numb and in a fog, never able to reconcile their sense of loss.⁸³

Combat chaplains could serve as “Keepers of the Minds,” but chaplains themselves looked to particular soldiers for their stability. The loss of close comrades added to the double burden in that they felt the loss of a friend but also someone who had a calming influence on their troops and themselves. Although all soldiers cared deeply for fellow comrades, the average infantryman refrained from becoming too close to all the men in his unit. With the problems of the rotation system that shuttled troops in and out units piecemeal, lack of unit cohesion did not create an atmosphere conducive to numerous friendships. Thus, the soldier adopted no more than a couple of “buddies”—usually from among the men in his platoon. Combat chaplains occupied the “liminal

⁸³ Whitt, “Conflict and Compromise,” 81; Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 43-44.

space” and thus moved freely among the officers and enlisted, developed friendships with both, and often became close to those whom they counseled.

In addition, while individual troops could afford to concentrate on just one or two friends or “buddies,” chaplains’ training and ministry mandated that they cast a wider net. When death and injury deprived chaplains of a close friend in the field or a trooper whom they had been counseling, it contributed to the double burden. Not only did chaplains lose a friend or someone in whom they had an emotional investment, a trooper or group of troopers lost a close buddy as well; and chaplains had to put aside their own grief as they ministered to the anguish of the troops. Such anguish spoke of deep relationships that formed between soldiers and chaplains as each death shook them to the core, which only made matters worse for them when they lost close comrades. In an arena where friendship remained one of the sole vestiges of civilization and comfort, bullets, mortar, and shrapnel dissolved spiritual bonds and took parts of the survivors’ souls as well.

Death then Disappearance

Aside from the viscera and fear, combat death and injury in Vietnam possessed an unnatural aspect in that it allowed very little time for the bereaved to say farewell to the deceased or the injured. No doubt, medevacs (helicopters designed specifically to fly wounded out of the field to hospitals in the rear) contributed to saving far more troops that might have died otherwise. Medevacs, however, also spirited away troops almost as if in the manner of a trap door or—better put—a rapture. Bereavement of such a nature left no time for soldiers to say farewell to their buddies and comrades, and chaplains endured the same anguish when they were in the field. To understand how such experiences undermined morale in the field, one should examine how soldiers of the line

felt about losing close comrades. Jim, a soldier interviewed after the war by Herbert Chalsma, summed up the feeling that went through the mind of every one of the troops in the field.

Casualties began to mount, comrades dying or getting wounded and flown away for good. You wonder when it'll be your turn.⁸⁴

The experience of Jim and many troops in the arena of combat did not exclude chaplains. Injuries and deaths deprived combat chaplains of many troops with whom they forged deep relationships and made them fear for their own lives. The closeness of these bonds contributed to their transformation both during and after the war.

Claude Newby, who seemed to be everywhere at all times with his troops, suffered the deaths of many he called friends. Those wounded who did not die were spirited away in choppers. Only sometimes was he able to say goodbye. One evening, two fellow chaplains named Nicholas Wayowitch and James Carter used guest cots in a bunker while Newby—who seemed to have a “spider sense”—decided against sleeping there and found other accommodations. An NVA 122mm delayed fuse round crashed right into the quarters where Newby’s two friends slept. The mortar blew off Carter’s legs at the hip, which he survived. A dustoff got him to a hospital in time to save him, but Newby never did get to see him again. A close comrade was gone.⁸⁵

Likewise, Jerry Autry became close with a fellow chaplain, only to suffer his death in the field.

⁸⁴ H. William Chalsma, *The Chambers of Memory: PTSD in the Life Stories of U.S. Vietnam VETERANS* (Lanham, MD: Jason Aronson Inc., 1977), 65.

⁸⁵ Newby, *It Took Heroes, Volume I*, 350.

My best friend ever, a Priest. John was this great guy, handsome Italian. We met in the basic chaplain course. He showed me New York. We were inseparable. He was always mocking me about my Southern accent. We go to Vietnam together. He gets assigned to the field hospital at Phu Bai. I am in an infantry battalion not far away. We see each other lots. He falls in love with a nurse and gets involved with her, against my advice, I might add. The hospital commander is a Catholic and hardcore and tries to get him thrown out of the army. I talk our personnel people into getting him reassigned to the 101st. They do, and he goes to be the Artillery chaplain. On his second day, they have a sapper attack and John is killed. I was so angry and had to deal with that over the years, the “what ifs.” Even today as I write this, it is a very vivid memory and very emotional.⁸⁶

For most Vietnam veterans, loss like the ones Newby and Autry suffered was the norm rather than the exception. Loss of comrades, youth, security, family, love, reason to live, trust, self-esteem, future, faith, and God.⁸⁷ For those trained to value life above all, losing anyone was a calamity. Losing a friend was even worse, and that friend need not be a fellow chaplain. Jim Johnson noted that at the end of his tour, ninety-six troops whom he called friends had been KIA while over 900 had been wounded. Johnson would give out numerous pieces of his heart to fellow troops only to have them ripped away by death. One of those men to whom he entrusted his heart was an officer named Lt. Larry Garner, given the moniker “Bandito Charlie” for his courage and daring in the field. The lieutenant and Johnson became close after only a short time and shared many a long talk

⁸⁶ Autry, Oral Interview, May 20, 2013.

⁸⁷ Snow, *The Endless Tour*, 203-204.

at night while in the field and on base. Garner had taken in Johnson as his confidante, and the two made an excellent combination depending upon each other to fulfill their respective duties. Many of Garner's troops loved their commander and considered him "unkillable," but the VC proved that assumption wrong. On July 30, 1967, Garner led a small group to protect the pilots and crew of a shot-down medevac helicopter when an enemy bullet penetrated his heart. Johnson heard of Garner's death while ministering to troops in the 3rd Surgical Hospital. He was devastated by his loss. Johnson felt like a "part of his self" was lost with him.

And then, I'm startled nearly senseless when one of the wounded men tells me that three from C/5/60th have been killed and the bodies are still on the field. These are the first soldiers to die since my arrival. What shocks me into immobility is when he tells me that one of the three killed is Larry Garner. I don't believe it. I don't want to believe it. Then another wounded soldier says, "Yes, it's true," and goes on to add that he was with Lt. Garner when it happened. I still don't want to believe it. It can't be! The soldier then relates what happened...Even though I knew Larry for only a brief period of time, I feel devastated at his death. He's the first soldier that I've known personally in my thus far short tour who is killed. When a good soldier like Larry dies, something inside me seems to die too. I feel his loss intensely, and am surprised by this intensity. Nothing seems to ease my pain in these early morning hours.⁸⁸

And then there was Frank Pina, a company commander known for his nervous but likeable nature. Just a year older than Johnson, Pina had two young daughters. The two

⁸⁸ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 21-22, 23, 246; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

men stayed up late many a night having discussions in which each one shared their own vulnerabilities. Their openness and honesty allowed both men to rely on each other for emotional support, which soon blossomed into a great friendship. They bonded even closer on December 30, 1967, when the *papasan* brought in the young Vietnamese girl mentioned in the previous chapter. Both Johnson and Pina looked at the damage wrought by the shell and shared an unspoken moment of reflection on their respective children.⁸⁹ Thousands of miles from home, with thoughts of their own families running through their heads, warrior and minister joined their minds and hearts in grief.

On March 2, 1968, Johnson came in from yet another patrol with his troops, examined his mail, and saw to his horror a notification letter regarding the death of Captain Frank Pina. Not five minutes before he died, Johnson had listened as Pina talked to his commander, Lt. Col. Hill, on the radio in a matter-of-fact tone as he was getting his men out of the combat zone despite being wounded himself. As Johnson stared at the notice, disbelief turned to rage; and Johnson struck the locker in front of him, damaging his knuckles and shoulder and drawing the attention of nearby officers. Nearly hysterical and shouting out loud his disbelief, Johnson listened to the officers explain that Pina was shot in the chest and stopped breathing two minutes before the dustoff landed. There was nothing anyone could do.

For a moment, James D. Johnson forgot his proper Baptist upbringing, shouted a profanity, and then got into the shower and cried as the hot water flowed over him. The hot water was not the only thing that came down on him. The double burden assaulted Johnson in all its fury.

⁸⁹ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 133, 144; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

I keep thinking, Frank can't be dead. It's been over twenty-four hours now and I wonder if the army has notified his wife. Will his little daughters even remember him? How will their growing up be affected by Frank's death? I stay in the shower for fifteen minutes, then get out and get ready for sleep. I refuse to sign the notification letters tonight. It's as if I delay, I can delay Frank's death.⁹⁰

Early on the morning of March 3, Johnson wrote his wife, Barbara, about Pina's death and his own relief that he would soon be leaving the field.

Soldiers talked with chaplains in the field like no one else. If anything, death and the fear of death engendered reticence on the part of soldiers. They did not want to get close to another person lest they suffer the same heartache. Part of the double burden lay in the chaplains' same desire to build protective walls around their own psyches and protect themselves from the emotional toll of losing friends. Jim Johnson struggled to maintain his ministry despite his own reluctance to open up to others.

The emotional cost expended by the continual loss of men through death and serious injury was great and touched every soldier. After experiencing the death of many lieutenants, I attempted to shelter myself emotionally by distancing myself and after a time no longer sought to become friendly with newly assigned men.⁹¹

Nonetheless, Johnson extended the hand of friendship to whomever he met, and it did not take long for the chaplain to develop feelings for those whom he befriended. Very soon, another type of feeling—common to all soldiers—visited itself on Johnson

⁹⁰ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 229-230; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

⁹¹ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 230; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

when he unzipped the body of a KIA and discovered it to be the body of a Second Lieutenant named Stiver. Only a few weeks in country, Stiver and Johnson started speaking together on many occasions. The chaplain liked the dedication of the officer to his men. Seeing him in the body bag brought out the rage yet again as he suffered the loss of yet another man with whom he could have been a lifelong friend. But now, he felt something else as he noted that had he not been baptizing another soldier. Had he not chosen to go on another patrol, Johnson himself might have been with Stiver. Johnson thought that he might have been killed himself, but he also regretted not being with Stiver as the young man's life ebbed away.⁹²

Even when friends did not perish in combat but were wounded instead, the emotions ran high. On February 2, 1968, the Tet Offensive came to My Tho. Fighting soon engulfed the city, and Johnson's troops had to clear the city building by building—as was the case in most towns and cities during Tet that year. In the midst of the fighting, Lieutenant Dennis McDougall got hit by an AK-47 round from a VC gunner. McDougall had been in country for only a few weeks but had managed to strike up a relationship with the chaplain and shared some photos of his wife. Johnson had lost enough friends, but this one at least was not going to die alone. He and a medic made a mad dash to the downed lieutenant, dragged him to safety, and arranged a dustoff. He then turned to help the other wounded, but his thoughts kept straying back to McDougall, whose hand on his wife's picture when he last saw him made him think of his own wife Barbara.⁹³

⁹² Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 108; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

⁹³ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 189-191; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

Jack Brown's turn to suffer the loss of a friend came while ministering to soldiers at the 24th Evacuation Hospital at Long Binh. A VC ambush had claimed the life of First Lieutenant John Lattin, a man whom Brown had made friends with just days earlier. Kneeling down in prayer beside the body of the fallen officer Brown examined the body. He may have had a different external reaction from Johnson's but no less profound internally.

I remember noticing his one mortal wound to the temple, where a small caliber round had struck and killed him instantly. He was still in his jungle fatigues, and the rest of his body was unmarked. He was one of the first of my men who would pay the supreme sacrifice for America in faraway Vietnam. Needless to say, this young officer's life and death will be etched in my mind for as long as I shall live.⁹⁴

Amid his grief, Brown felt a sense of transformation in him as he gave thanks in prayer for having known Lieutenant Lattin and being a better man for it.

Although not often, soldiers and chaplains developed friendships with civilians in the war zone of Vietnam, and their deaths added to the burden they bore. Brown had made friends with Rosalyn J. Muscat, who was in Vietnam working for the USO supervising the recreation centers and entertainment for the troops. "Roz," as she was known to all, was a likeable and outgoing woman who made the lives of the soldiers with whom she into contact more bearable. When she was killed in a jeep accident on October 26, 1968, Brown and two other chaplains conducted her memorial. Brown, as a non-combatant, identified closely with Muscat. He found her representative of those like

⁹⁴ Brown, *Another Side of Combat*, 13; Oral Interview, February 20, 2014.

chaplains who served with selfless devotion in the arena of combat, and it affirmed his sense of mission.⁹⁵

With the 4th of the 47th, Bernie Windmiller met and befriended a young platoon leader named Charles “Duffy” Black. Black had been Windmiller’s confidante since their training at Fort Riley, Kansas. Black was a religious young man, attentive to his duty to protect his men, and in awe of the relationship Windmiller had to his wife Esther. The two spoke frequently about love, especially in regard to Black’s belief that he might never find true love. When Black found it, it was Windmiller to whom he ran first. The two grew even closer as the chaplain led the young couple through marriage counseling. While walking with his patrol on April 8, 1967, Black tripped a booby trap and took several hunks of shrapnel, one of which went right into his brain.⁹⁶

When he heard about Black, Windmiller rushed to the 24th Evac Hospital at Long Binh to see his friend right before the surgeons went to work on him. Then the chaplain went to the base chapel to pray. The news that came to him was not good. The surgeons operated on Black three times to no avail. They might have been able to save Black’s life with another operation, but searching for the shrapnel would have left him in a vegetative state. Consumed with his own grief, Windmiller ministered to and counseled Black’s friends and even Black’s father-in-law, who was also serving in Vietnam. Hardly able to reconcile himself to the loss, Windmiller turned to Sergeant Ben Acevedo and reassured him that all would be well and that they needed to let go of their friend.

⁹⁵ Brown, *Another Side of Combat*, 70; Oral Interview, April 20, 2014.

⁹⁶ Wiest, *The Boys of '67*, 74; Bernard Windmiller, Oral Interview, September 4, 2012.

Black died three days later. As he had done numerous times prior, Windmiller began writing to the wife of a fallen soldier. Only this time, it was Black's wife. A part of himself had died when Black died. True to his own ethic, Bernie Windmiller eschewed Cold War rhetoric and laudatory remarks about the heroism of the fallen warrior. Instead, he illuminated the love that Black had for his men and translated that into the belief that his wife would never be alone in her grief. The only victory of which he spoke was the victory of the love they possessed for each other and the life-time she had given Black in three months.⁹⁷ One can surmise that Windmiller might have been speaking of his own relationship with Black.

Another friend of Windmiller's was Denny Loftheim, a West Point graduate who had served as the Sunday School Superintendent. A rigged VC shell killed Loftheim. On May 11, 1967, the Battle of Ap Bac Province claimed the life of another friend, Private Philip Ferrell. The chaplain had developed a relationship with both Ferrell and his mother through correspondence. The effect of the friendship with both Ferrell and his mother was so strong that the chaplain kept up the correspondence with her well after the war.⁹⁸

Joseph Dulany's loss came with the death of a friend named Lieutenant Ballard. The chaplain experienced anger, outrage, and murderous fury when he learned the news. His emotions offered him an opportunity for introspection, so he reflected what the troops at My Lai must have felt without condoning their behavior. More rage followed when another friend, Captain Larry Byrd received a "Dear John" letter and then died in combat.

⁹⁷ Wiest, *The Boys of '67*, 118, 121-123.

⁹⁸ Bernard Windmiller, Oral Interview, September 4, 2012.

As he held the memorial service for Byrd, Dulany reflected on how death never took R&R nor did it even give men who had suffered emotional anguish a break.⁹⁹

In addition to the two aforementioned chaplains, Claude Newby had developed friendships of his own in the field. He had counseled and grown close to a Sp4 named Prentice Dale LeClair, an Indian from Tulsa, Oklahoma. Wounded in a previous attack, LeClair had a premonition of his own death and wanted out of the field. The chaplain respected LeClair's "Indian sense," talked long and hard with the specialist, and developed an affinity for him. LeClair was a proven and courageous soldier and no malingerer. The fear was genuine, but Newby could not justify removing him from the field based on a premonition. The corporal walked out of Newby's hooch understanding his situation. LeClair died in an attack on July 30, 1967, and the chaplain recalled that it hit him hardest. "Each death hurt sorely. My grief for LeClair was intensified because I hadn't gotten him out of the field. I didn't feel guilty, just deeply grieved, saddened, and sober."¹⁰⁰

Even though Newby ministered to all soldiers regardless of faith, he gravitated toward fellow Mormons because they were a minority in the military. Newby had developed a fondness for Ted Pierce, a radioman and a fellow Mormon like himself. Pierce and Newby shared the sacrament together and talked for a long time. On October 15, 1968, Pierce died when an NVA rocket attack caught him and his troops off guard near a tree while urinating. He lost his legs in the blast (one wound up dangling from a tree) and bled out waiting for the troops to find him. He was just hours from rotating

⁹⁹ Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 71, 103.

¹⁰⁰ Newby, *It Took Heroes, Volume I*, 223.

home. Even more painful to Newby was the news that Sp4 Eugene Naylor, another member of the LDS, was seriously wounded when a booby trap exploded. Naylor had just returned from R&R with his wife when he went back out on patrol. At first, the explosive did not detonate, so the squad leader judged it to be a dud. Naylor rose and turned around when the trap detonated. Shrapnel from the blast severed his spinal cord, and Newby and the medics rushed to stabilize him. Later, Newby visited Naylor in the hospital ward where he saw the specialist anchored to a contraption that kept him immobilized. The anguish of being in the room and seeing the man suffering was too much for Newby. As the chaplain got up to leave the room, Naylor managed to whisper, “God bless you, Chaplain Newby.” Newby remarked that no blessing had ever meant as much as did Naylor’s. Newby writes of Bill Snyder with significant emotion and describes him as one of the best men he ever met. Prior to Snyder being mortally wounded, the soldier looked at his chaplain in the midst of the attack and seemed to say “goodbye” with his eyes. It was a terrible shock to the chaplain to lose such a man for whom he had developed such affection and respect. He could only shake off the overwhelming sense of loss and guilt long enough to provide cover fire for the soldiers who were still living.¹⁰¹

Newby made other farewells to beloved comrades. Sergeant Tony Cruz, an NCO who befriended Newby, led his troops toward the perimeter and then began to withdraw. A green tracer round (the NVA used green tracers while the Americans used red) caught Cruz in the back and left a large exit wound in his upper chest. The wound was mortal, and Newby and others quickly tried to calm the man, who knew that his life was ebbing

¹⁰¹ Newby, *It Took Heroes, Volume I*, 144, 468; *It Took Heroes: Volume II*, 86.

away. The chaplain could only cradle Cruz's head in his lap and listen to the sergeant say farewell in Spanish, all the while watching Cruz's heart beat through the hole in his chest. Newby held Cruz close resolving not to let him die alone in the field.¹⁰²

Conclusion

J. Glenn Gray summarized what friendship meant to soldiers by writing that the fear of one's own death in the war zone translated into fear for the death of a friend in the same circumstances. At issue was the difference between comradeship and friendship. In comradeship, there is a suppression of the self. Both the Army and the Marines trained their men to suppress their individualism in pursuit of coming together as units designed for the purpose of engaging the enemy. The problem was that bringing so many men together, making them live in such proximity, and putting them through the ordeal of boot camp or basic training was a Petri dish for friendship. In friendship, a heightened "awareness of the self" took place. Since love between friends became magnified in the war zone, the loss of a friend magnified in intensity. Gray identified friendship as an act of love that opened the world to the friend by insulating him or her against the passions that served to narrow human sympathies. In friendship, there is no destructive dynamic in friendship or any love of death. The combat zone, though, was a harvest of death; hence, friends were exposed to an anxiety even greater than that of lovers.¹⁰³

Thus, for chaplains who ventured into the combat zone and befriended their troops, death placed upon them a double burden. Their faith and training had already instilled in them a high value for life. Their friendships with the troops made life even

¹⁰² Newby, *It Took Heroes, Volume I*, 428-429; *It Took Heroes: Volume II*, 197-199.

¹⁰³ J. Glenn Gray, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 89-90, 93.

dearer to them—and therefore more difficult to see end. They shared stories, compared family photos, talked for long hours about a wide variety of topics, and opened their hearts as friends do with each other. Despite the anguish and pain of loss, chaplains continued to embrace their role as friends and, in fulfilling the role as friends to the troops, transformed themselves further as ministers and healers.

CHAPTER VI – MORALE

'Well,' he said, 'I'm a chaplain, but, like you say, I'm also an officer. A captain in the U.S. Army. And I think you're disturbed, very disturbed. Not mental, you understand—I don't mean that. See...you've read too many books, the wrong ones, I think there's no doubt, the wrong ones. But goddamn it—pardon me—but goddamn it, you're a soldier now, and you'll sure as hell act like one! Some faith, some discipline. You know, this country is a good country. It's built on armies, just like the Romans and the Greeks and every other country. They're all built on armies. Or navies. They do what the country says. That's where faith comes in, you see? If you accept, as I do, that America is one helluva great country, well then, you follow what she tells you. She says fight, then you go out and do you damndest. You try to win.'

– from *If I Die In a Combat Zone*, by Timothy O'Brien¹⁰⁴

Tim O'Brien's novel in which the protagonist encounters a chaplain before his deployment to Vietnam illustrates how incompetent chaplains could leave many soldiers in Vietnam more disillusioned than before they even entered the cleric's office. It is telling that O'Brien relates no further encounters with chaplains throughout his novel. Incidents such as the one O'Brien encountered were far too frequent and added to the burden dedicated chaplains carried—especially those ministering to the troops in the combat zones. Chaplain William Mahedy relates the story of one Marine chaplain piously opined that “if Christ were alive today, he would be a Marine carrying a rifle.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Timothy O'Brien, *If I Die in a Combat Zone, Box Me up and Ship Me Home*, (New York: Broadway Books, 1975), 57-58.

¹⁰⁵ William Mahedy, *Out of the Night: The Spiritual Journey of Vietnam Vets* (New York: Ballantine Books, 198), 120.

Hard enough as it was to fend off fear and deal with the loss of close comrades, other aspects of the combat zone placed burdens upon the morale of combat chaplains even as they struggled to maintain the spirits of their own troops. The perils of the combat zone—bullets, shrapnel, the sight of death, and the loss of friends—eroded morale, but pressures both from within and outside the military further undercut the chaplains and their troops. Questions at home and in country, a rotation system of officers and commanders that undermined comradeship, and petty vindictiveness displayed by officers, NCO's, and even fellow chaplains taxed the morale of those assigned as “caretakers of the souls.” In encountering such problems of morale in the field, chaplains gained an even greater understanding of the problems soldiers encountered—both during and after the war—that led to their transformation as ministers.

The Problem of Morale

The combat zone did not insulate chaplains from the knowledge that they were participating within the milieu of the Cold War. Quite the opposite. Despite belonging to both the religious and the military worlds, many chaplains felt alienated. As military, they felt opprobrium from some of their fellow clergymen who were non-military and disapproved of the war. Secondly, non-combatants who protested the war and soldiers in general lumped them in as part of the “military institution.”¹⁰⁶ Those who wore the uniform of the nation's armed forces could face at least questions regarding their presence in Southeast Asia. At most, they could endure vicious and spiteful attacks from several corners of American society. Todd Gitlin's seminal examination of the era, *The Sixties*, describes an America that was “at war with itself” as much as it was with the Viet

¹⁰⁶ Whitt, “Conflict and Compromise,” 36, 142.

Cong and the NVA. Urban turmoil, race riots, cultural and social revolutions, and a backlash from the Right combined to make the homefront as hostile as any rice paddy in the Mekong might have been. It could not have helped chaplains ministering to troops in the field to know that those like leading anti-war protestor Tom Hayden had travelled to Hanoi starting in 1965, followed by an array of American personalities. Many troops and chaplains later interpreted this as “consorting with the enemy.”¹⁰⁷

It also did not help chaplains to know that sizeable segments of their own denominations opposed the war and often marched with the student protesters Gitlin and others chronicled. Among the major burdens chaplains carried with them into the field was criticism from fellow clergymen who believed that the war was immoral.¹⁰⁸ Vincent Capodanno encountered fellow Maryknolls who had turned against the war, which angered the chaplain at those whom he felt did not understand what was really happening in Southeast Asia. When asked by those at home how he could support the war, Capodanno replied that those at home had no understanding of what went on in Vietnam, and even the Church had it wrong. For Capodanno, the U.S.’s involvement in Vietnam was a justified and ethical undertaking. He firmly believed that the war was fought in order to free the Vietnamese from communist oppression. He understood the tragedy of communist rule in China and believed the freedom for which the Vietnamese people longed could be won by working with them. He also rejected the notion that his Marines

¹⁰⁷ Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), 243, 264-265.

¹⁰⁸ Whitt, “Conflict and Compromise,” 184.

and soldiers in general were acting immorally. Instead, he argued vehemently that soldiers by and large acted morally under the circumstances.¹⁰⁹

Chaplains certainly held personal views on the morality of the war, but their job was not to analyze or comment on national goals and policies. Michael J. Baxter points out that the concerns over the body of the state have little to do with the concerns over the body of the spirit. Those like the future Cardinal Archbishop of New York, John J. O'Connor, himself a Navy Chaplain, affirmed the need for military-trained ministers who could identify with soldiers and with whom soldiers themselves could identify. The chief tension lay between what Jacqueline Whitt identifies as philosophy and loyalty in that chaplains could criticize the war and express their dissent but only in a manner that maintained allegiance to the military.¹¹⁰

Thus arose again the “Two Masters” problem. Chaplains’ presence in Vietnam added to the burden of morale because their uniforms made them both symbols and participants in the debates about Vietnam in both religious and secular communities. Pressures came even from within chaplains’ own religious ranks. Chaplains viewed their roles as primarily pastoral in that their job was to minister to their troops in Vietnam regardless of their personal feelings toward the war. Some at home did not see it from such a perspective and criticized them for being too much a part of the military. Chaplains had to deal with the growing sense of distrust that infected religious denominations and turned their leadership against the war. The My Lai massacre, after which the Army court-martialed two chaplains for dereliction of duty, created a burden

¹⁰⁹ Mode, *The Grunt Padre*, 108, 109-110.

¹¹⁰ Michael J. Baxter, C.S.C., “In Place of an Afterword: My Argument with Fr. Michael Corby, C.S.C.,” *Sword of the Lord*, 260.

on other chaplains. Many ministers in the field grew resentful of the implication that the military always affected chaplains negatively and of those who questioned the effectiveness of the chaplaincy.¹¹¹

Edward Tick's study of the warrior archetype notes that a warrior fights in a noble manner and for a noble cause. The problem was that in questioning the "nobility" of the Vietnam War, the American people and numerous religious leaders questioned the nobility of American troops in Southeast Asia. In so doing, many lost sense of American soldiers as warriors. The troops were well aware of public sentiment that the war in Vietnam did not fit the model of the "noble cause." Adding fuel to the argument was James May of Vietnam Veterans against the War and his scathing article that accused the chaplaincy of being hyper-patriotic, hyper-militaristic, conductors of obscene prayers, and unwilling to take on heavy duties. As more flag-covered caskets came home and the anti-war movement erupted in 1967 on college campuses throughout the nation, chaplains felt the societal tension. Eventually, chaplains grew tired of having to justify their presence in the field. Those like Joseph Dulany lost friends over his involvement in Vietnam and had difficulty relating to those who did not serve.¹¹²

When the Vietnam War entered the drawdown phase, many chaplains grew despondent over soldier apathy toward religion and poor behavior in general while others struggled with their own problems of morale and requested transfers out of the field. Chaplain David E. Knight arrived with lofty ideals about fighting godless communism that soon shattered in the jungles and rice paddies of Southeast Asia. Joe Dulany had a

¹¹¹ Whitt, "Conflict and Compromise," 114, 124, 134, 193.

¹¹² Tick, *War and the Soul*, 252; Whitt, "Conflict and Compromise," 19, 70, 210, 217; Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 25.

difficult time stating his reasons for being in the war other than to say that he “was going along for the ride.” Jerry Autry confessed that he had given very little thought to whether the war was right or wrong. He simply wished to fulfill his duty to the troops. Jim Johnson gave no thought to the war against communism but instead to the troops who would need a minister.¹¹³

Nonetheless, encouraging people to kill in the fight against communism and the protection of freedom while staying at home did not sit well with numerous members of the clergy. As the war dragged on, mainline Protestant churches joined the list of those in the “suspicious circles;” that is, those who grew wary of the government’s ability to disseminate the truth to the American people. Catholic chaplains had the support of those like Cardinal Francis Spellman, the leading American prelate; but they also were well aware of the priest brothers Daniel and Philip Berrigan. Radical anti-war protesters, the Berrigans joined with the leading spiritualist of the twentieth century, Thomas Merton—a Trappist monk—to form an interfaith coalition against the war.¹¹⁴

Catholics in the early and mid-1960s generally favored the war in Vietnam, but the number was far less among the clergy. In one particular instance, rank and file Catholics in the city of Baltimore—home of Army Chaplain Aloysius McGonigal—diverged from Church leadership in their sentiments about the Vietnam War. Nearly half of the clergy in Baltimore opposed the war and favored withdrawal, but nearly two-thirds

¹¹³ Knight, “Supreme Six,” 43; Loveland, *Change and Conflict*, 68; Autry, *Gun Totin’ Chaplain*, 107-108; Oral Interview, May 20, 2013.

¹¹⁴ Rick Perlstein, *The Invisible Bridge: The Fall of Nixon and the Rise of Reagan* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 20; Nancy Zaroulis; Gerald Sullivan (1989), *Who Spoke Up? American Protest Against the War in Vietnam 1963-1975*, (New York: Horizon Book Promotions); Howard Zinn, *You Can’t Be Neutral on a Moving Train*; (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994; new ed. 2002), 126–138.

of the laity approved of U.S. involvement.¹¹⁵ Even though both Protestants and Catholics limited their protests for the most part against the Vietnam War rather than the troops, not all individual members of the clergy did (the Berrigans among them) and thus created conflicts for their fellow men of the cloth who wore the uniform. Such issues demoralized and dogged chaplains even before they arrived in Vietnam and would dog them throughout their service.

An Injurious System of Rotation

Among the major problems that sapped morale once chaplains reached the field was the rotation system that brought soldiers in and out of units. Called DEROS (Date Eligible for Return from Overseas Service), the system allowed soldiers to know the exact date of their return from Vietnam. In the Second World War and even Korea, whole units trained and then served together, and in between journeyed together on the ocean voyage to Europe, North Africa, or the Pacific. In Vietnam, the military shuttled soldiers in and out of units in twelve-month tours (thirteen for the Marines because they were, after all, the Marines) with just a six-month rotation for officers. Replacing the troop transport ships were commercial jet airplanes nicknamed “Freedom Birds” that had soldiers in and out of the combat zone in just twenty-four hours—hardly any time for decompression. James McDonough, about as green a young officer as one could get, assessed the rotation system in his memoir titled *Platoon Leader*:

The motive for the Army's policy that rotated leaders every six months “must have been to ensure proper exposure of all military leaders to the only war the

¹¹⁵ Kenneth Durr, *Behind the Backlash: White Working-Class Politics in Baltimore, 1940-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 181.

Americans had”...(but) the six month rotation of officers was predicated on the assumption that Vietnam would be a short war.¹¹⁶

Historians of the Vietnam War have more than documented the problem of the manner in which the Army rotated both officers and enlisted in and out of the field, but the grunts did it better in their memoirs. Frank Joliff’s account, *365 and a Wake Up*, captures the essence of DEROS as just trying to survive until the day when one received his notice to head home. Tim O’Brien echoed those same sentiments in highlighting soldiers who were “short;” that is, less than a month until DEROS. The entire system did not allow soldiers in the field to forge a sense of connectedness with their officers or even their own fellow enlisted the way those in the Second World War or Korea did. This lack of cohesion and a sense of not getting the job done combined to undermine the most basic aspects of a soldier’s morale.

In previous American Wars like World War II, soldiers who served in Europe or the Pacific had a concept of doing a “job;” that is, a task soldiers considered completed when they achieved victory. When asked to describe his fight against Nazism or imperial Japan, a soldier couched his reply in terms of “having a job to do” in unison with the rest of his mates with whom he trained and served for the duration of the war. In contrast, most troops entered Vietnam totally disconnected from their mates at first, fought for a set period of time according to the “search and destroy” doctrine employed by William Westmoreland and Creighton Abrams, and then went home with no feeling of accomplishment or victory. There were few exceptions. Chaplain Bernie Windmiller’s

¹¹⁶ Mark DePu, “The Individual Rotation Policy,” *Vietnam Magazine*, December 2006; James McDonough, *Platoon Leader: A Memoir of Command in Combat*, (New York: Presidio Press, 1985), 229.

“Charlie” Company in the 4th of the 47th, 9th Infantry Division in 1967 had a sense of unit cohesion and went into the Mekong Delta having trained together and then traveled together via ship. Lt. Colonel Hal Moore’s 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment was the first to encounter the North Vietnamese when it flew into the Ia Drang Valley. Several Marine units early in the conflict also trained and fought as a unit; however, such instances—already rare—became rarer as the war dragged on into the late 60s and early 70s. And while Bernie Windmiller and Charlie Company may have come to Vietnam together, they went home decimated, filled with replacements, and no sense of accomplishment.¹¹⁷

Jonathan Shay, hardly averse to highlighting the military’s shortcomings, wrote that DEROS destroyed unity as the 747 and the rotation system led to isolation and lack of attachment. To Shay, the rotation system betrayed a soldier’s trust on its most basic level: his trust in his officers’ experience and competence. By the time a company or battalion commander attained field experience (which took about six months), he was shipped out to a rear position for the duration of his tour having “punched his ticket.” The phrase meant that the officer gained combat experience, putting him on the fast track toward promotion. Such an arrangement placed institutional and career concerns over the lives of its soldiers and undermined the military’s own credibility.¹¹⁸

The rotation system that led to a lack of cohesion on a personal level contributed to the double burden. Soldiers refrained from making friends with too many of the troops in their units because they rotated in and out with such frequency. Combat chaplains

¹¹⁷ Andrew Wiest, *The Boys of '67: Charlie Company's War in Vietnam* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2014), 230.

¹¹⁸ Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 16, 61.

were the exception to the rule because they shared the experiences with the troops, but they shouldered a double burden in that their profession demanded that they become close with their troops and relate to them on more than just military level. A chaplain's mission mandated reaching out to all soldiers in friendship, but the "nut was sometimes difficult to crack." Amy Snow writes that Vietnam interfered with the ability of soldiers to develop intimate relationships, a situation in which most combat soldiers expressed little trust in chaplains.¹¹⁹ Thus, combat chaplains struggled against the natural urge of soldiers to guard themselves from getting too close to others and protecting their emotions. Furthermore, the constant rotation of soldiers and officers because of DEROS made a chaplain's work very much akin to a "turnstile ministry."

For their part, chaplains saw the problem with DEROS right away and had a variety of reactions. Few, if any, were positive. Even chaplains like Jack Brown, who had served in the military prior to his chaplaincy, was no apologist for the military and felt the system exhausted the cream of America's youth. Joseph Dulany's assessment differed little from Newby's or Johnson's. He noted that changing commanders kept officers fresh, but six months did not allow them enough time to gain experience. As a result, some young officers were wont to taking needless risks. He grew disgusted with the rotation system, which he believed to be a product of the political micromanagement of the war and military leaders who did not have the will to take control of their own tactics. Thomas Carter despised DEROS as well as the body count and the practice of clearing an area only to leave it and have the enemy return. Jerry Autry surveyed the situation and decried the system for command replacements and replacements in general.

¹¹⁹ Snow, *The Endless Tour*, 165.

Even though young officers learned tactics that would serve them well in the future, he saw no real cohesion among the troops.

Jim Johnson saw the rotation system as one that focused more on careerism for officers rather than winning the war.

The other reason that command is limited to six months (aside from stress) is that, career wise, combat command is a very important ticket to have punched. Junior LTCs want very badly to get a battalion command job in combat. If he does well, he increases his potential for promotion to colonel and maybe even general officer.¹²⁰

Claude Newby was not shy about expressing his contempt for the six-month rotation of officers.¹²¹

From the start of my tour in Vietnam, I considered the six-month rotation policy almost as criminal as our civilian leaders' policy of "business as usual" for American society, limited war objectives, and the strategy of gradual escalation against an Oriental foe.¹²²

Bernie Windmiller believed that the infusion program, which inserted soldiers into units piecemeal, was terrible for morale. In fact, he and many in Charlie Company called it the "confusion" program. Robert Falabella wrote that it took a year for a soldier to get to know the enemy and his tactics. However, once a soldier had achieved the proper experience, he was rotated out, sent home, and replaced with green troops who

¹²⁰ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 116; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

¹²¹ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume I*, 76.

¹²² Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 116; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

had to start from scratch and obtain on-the-job experience.¹²³ Good troops and officers went home with an overwhelming feeling that they had not completed the job and that those who replaced them had to learn anew what it took to finish the job...and in combat, “on-the-job experience” sometimes meant death for the officers or their troops.

Case in point occurred on April 24, 1969, when Claude Newby joined a company with a newly-promoted captain as its commander. After they halted, the chaplain noticed that the troops were not digging foxholes, filling sandbags, or doing anything to secure their area. Meanwhile, the captain strung up a hammock where he planned to sleep. Newby sensed the peril right away, quietly took the commander on the side, and explained that he was setting a poor example for the troops and placing them and himself in danger. The captain grew angry and told his chaplain to “mind his own business.” For the first time, Newby felt unwelcome with a commander, so he avoided the CP as much as possible. When an NVA mortar attack came the next day, the first shell hit right below the captain’s hammock and decapitated him. The ill-prepared soldiers—with few if any foxholes dug or sandbags filled—scrambled for cover amidst the attack, and several were wounded.¹²⁴

On June 19, 1967, Windmiller went with Charlie Company rather than Alpha Company that day; and the VC wiped out Alpha in an attack. Windmiller did not feel guilty about his choice because he ascribed it to God’s Providence that he be with Charlie Company that day. He felt that he would be no good to anyone if killed. He also knew that the cause of Alpha’s destruction was not his absence but the stupidity of its

¹²³ Windmiller, Oral Interview, September 4, 2012; Wiest, *The Boys of '67*, 230; Falabella, *Vietnam Memoir*, 30.

¹²⁴ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume I*, 354.

commander. The former commander, Colonel Guy Tutwiler, had been a great battalion CO; but—like all great officers—he was tagged for division headquarters. His replacement was a hard drinker and a know-it-all, did not listen to his lieutenants, circled around in a chopper, and put his men in danger. The company had gone through several villages with no men in them, indicative that the men had joined or were forced to join the VC. When all hell broke loose, the VC cut the company to ribbons because the commander was so incompetent as to ignore the warning signs. Robert Falabella also encountered the sight of a battalion commander, in clean uniform and high above in a helicopter, berating his soldiers on the ground for moving too slowly. His obvious lack of knowledge regarding the terrain did not prevent him from using profanity at his troops for their perceived slowness.¹²⁵

Chickenshit

As men of God, combat chaplains for the most part did not utter profanities themselves. Had they done so, they would have employed a particular profanity in describing their contempt for the rotation system or the incompetence of some commanders. Had they possessed saltier tongues, the chaplains would have employed the ultimate military expression used by many a soldier since the Second World War.

Chickenshit.

To use any profanity when writing about chaplains seems incongruous at best and sacrilegious at worst, but chaplains served in the military—hardly a repository of proper lexicon. The term “chickenshit” originated among the soldiers of the Second World War

¹²⁵ Windmiller, Oral Interview, September 4, 2012; Wiest. *The Boys of '67*, 230; Falabella, *Vietnam Memoir*, 6; Oral Interview, April 21, 2013.

to describe any order or action by officers and commanders that reinforced the superiority and power of the officer and the subordination of the enlisted, usually in petty and vindictive ways. According to historian Stephen Ambrose,

Chickenshit applied to officers with too much authority and too few brains, sergeants who had more than a touch of sadist in their characters, far too many quartermasters, some MPs.¹²⁶

Paul Fussell defines the term more precisely.

Chickenshit refers to behavior that makes military life worse than it need be: petty harassment of the weak by the strong; open scrimmage for power and authority and prestige... insistence on the letter rather than the spirit of ordinances.

Chickenshit is so called—instead of horse—or bull—or elephant shit—because it is small-minded and ignoble and takes the trivial seriously. Chickenshit can be recognized instantly because it never has anything to do with winning the war.¹²⁷

Chickenshit took on an especially noisome form during the Vietnam War. It manifested itself mostly in the discrepancy between those in the rear who enjoyed air conditioned quarters, tennis, poached eggs for breakfast, swimming pools and those who “humped the boonies” while eating C-rations, drinking tepid water, and being strained to the breaking point. Most unconscionable in the eyes of many was the classification of *all* Vietnam as a “combat zone,” which allowed those in the rear to draw combat pay like those who did the fighting.

¹²⁶ Stephen Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers: The U.S. Army from the Normandy Beaches, To the Bulge, To the Surrender of Germany* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 230.

¹²⁷ Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1990), 80.

In *Achilles in Vietnam*, Jonathan Shay features chickenshit as one of the primary causes of post-traumatic stress. He points not just at commanders but also at some chaplains as purveyors of chickenshit. Those who acted in such a manner undermined the basic moral order of the military by betraying “what’s right” and inflicted manifold injuries on their men.¹²⁸ Edward Tick notes in his interviews with soldiers that chickenshit dissolved the warrior ethic and left soldiers in a state that was neither reasonable nor just.

Much of the chickenshit in Vietnam originated with those whom soldiers labeled the “REMF” or the “rear echelon motherfucker.” The epitome of the REMF was what Norman Schwarzkopf and others called “Saigon generals;” that is, those like Westmoreland who enjoyed a daily hard-boiled egg and a regular tennis match at his posh headquarters in Saigon while only occasionally venturing into hot areas or to hospitals to pin medals on the wounded. The troops also affixed the epithet to commanders who stayed back at the base or flew overhead in choppers directing the battles without ever walking with them. Even some chaplains—especially those in rear areas—earned the label, and the term “chaplain bullshit” became a common term among the troops that was much akin to “chickenshit.” While on his way to Saigon to deliver food to some orphans, Robert Falabella looked with disdain on the comforts enjoyed by the REMFs—air conditioners, basketball games, immaculate conditions in the rear bases—while they still received combat pay like the men in the field. He found the system entirely unappreciative of the effort expended by combat troops.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 6.

¹²⁹ Falabella, *Vietnam Memoir*, 96; Oral Interview, April 21, 2013.

Chaplain bullshit included but was not limited to using religion and Cold War rhetoric to justify war and killing to the men when they became demoralized rather than attending to their immediate spiritual needs. Some chaplains joined commanders in barking at troops, distraught over the death of comrades, to “stuff those tears” and “don’t get sad, get even.” Others invoked the Just War Theory on numerous occasions, using the metaphor of the “sword of justice” wielded by soldiers to punish sinfulness. In other cases, soldiers recounted that some memorial services consisted of chaplains offering laudatory remarks about the “noble sacrifices” of the deceased followed by exhortations to go out and “kill more of them.” Some troops felt that some chaplains manipulated their grief in order to bear false witness that rationalized on a religious level the moral evils that the war had unleashed. No better example existed than the incident at My Lai in which Michael Calley’s soldiers, consumed by grief and despair at the loss of a beloved NCO during the Tet Offensive, heard a fiery sermon from the chaplain commanding them to “wipe out the village.” Such chaplains became “double agents” in that they supposedly represented the good inherent in all humanity while actually being no more than shells for the military machine.¹³⁰

In some Vietnam veterans’ rap groups, veterans spoke of chaplains with resentment. Many bitterly recalled chaplains blessing weapons and claiming that “God was always on our side” even when engaged in killing and committing crimes. Many

¹³⁰ Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 63; Joanna Bourke. *An Intimate History of Killing: Face to Face Killing in 20th Warfare*. (London: Basic Books, 1999), 260; The Just War Theory, as advocated by St. Thomas Aquinas, concerns the legitimacy of war, the morality of going to war, moral conduct within war, and peace as the ultimate goal of war; Robert Jay Lifton, M.D., “Advocacy and Corruption in the Healing Profession,” in Charles Figley’s *Stress Disorders among Vietnam Veterans: Theory, Research and Treatment*. (New York: Bruner/Mazell, 1978), 220.

Catholic soldiers related that chaplains admonished them in Confession because they smoked dope but never once held them to account for the killing.¹³¹ Many soldiers felt alienated from their religious leaders when chaplains endorsed the war in their sermons and memorial services. In addition, few soldiers attended CAPs (Combined Action Programs) conducted by chaplains, and those who did viewed them with bored resignation or bemused cynicism.

James May, a Vietnam veteran, remembered two chaplains during his tour.

One was a Catholic priest while the other was a “large, fat, loudmouthed everything-else,” who prated about being on a crusade against the “Chicoms” while chomping a cigar. Most of the troops hated him, and I actually saw them stuffing helmets and jackets into the loudspeaker once when the evening prayer came on. In a vain appeal to the troops his prayer was often obscene; one I remember was “Please, God, let the bombs fall straight on the little yellow motherfuckers.” His dislike for “negroes” was well known, too. That gentleman must have had a fun war, slept when he wanted, plenty of chow and no danger ever, except when four black troops beat the stuffings outta him once.¹³²

Jerry Lembcke, a sociology professor at Holy Cross College in Massachusetts was a chaplain’s assistant during the Vietnam War. He did not dispute May’s account. Of the three chaplains he assisted, one was a venal procurer of creature comforts for himself, and the second went AWOL because of the pressure. The third was a nobler figure who took his ministry seriously but thought the war an immoral and needless act and made no

¹³¹ Lifton, “Advocacy and Corruption in the Healing Profession,” 219.

¹³² James May, “Chaplains,” Vietnam Veterans Against the War, *The Veteran*, Fall/Winter 2000, <http://www.vvaw.org/veteran/article/?id=119>, accessed February 10, 2015.

attempt to hide it. In the end, Lembcke wrote to the Chief of Chaplains to register his grim assessment. The response he received was typical of “chaplain bullshit.” The Office of the Chief of Chaplains chastised him for his “dissident behavior” and invoked the mantra of “render unto Caesar.”¹³³

In addition, some chaplains failed to address moral problems soldiers had with the war. Combat chaplains felt the double burden each time one of their colleagues—safely ensconced in the rear—joined commanders in spouting Cold War rhetoric and exhorting their troops to “get some payback” for the deaths of their comrades. Dr. Charles R. Figley interviewed numerous veterans and documented lurid tales of how some chaplains gave little comfort and simply adhered to the rhetoric of the day. Raised in a “Cold War Consensus,” many chaplains harbored no doubts about warfare and killing. One soldier stopped attending services because the chaplain did not help him deal with his guilt over shooting at an old woman but instead prayed over the soldier that he would “find the strength to carry on with the mission.”¹³⁴

There was no dearth of chickenshit behavior in Vietnam. At the highest level, body counts and search and destroy directives were perhaps the best example of chickenshit in the military, but there were also plenty of individual officers interested in careerism, medals, or simply making others’ lives miserable simply because they could. Senior chaplains were not immune to being petty and vindictive toward their junior officers in the field. Jim Johnson documented more than a few encounters with petty individuals. Serving in the Mekong Delta meant that his Army troops were dependent

¹³³ Jerry Lembcke. “Recollections: ‘Render Unto Caesar...,’” *Vietnam Veterans against the War, The Veteran*, 31, no.1 (2001); <http://www.vvaw.org/veteran/article/?id=95>.

¹³⁴ Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 81; Loveland, “From Morale Builders to Moral Advocates,” 237.

upon the Navy to bring them in and out of combat zones. Inter-service rivalry and abuse from naval personnel wore thin on the chaplain. He described a hierarchy of REMF types at the top who acted arrogant and condescending toward him and his infantry troops at the bottom. In between were two sets of naval personnel: regular ship personnel and “river rats,” that is, the drivers of the boats who brought the infantry to and from LZs throughout the delta. Johnson sympathized with the “river rats” but had little regard for the regular personnel who heaped abuse on the troops, especially a naval chief who took great pleasure in spraying down the infantrymen with a fire hose to “keep them clean.”

He takes special delight in attempting to use the water pressure to knock soldiers off their feet. He expresses special glee in going the extra mile to antagonize these returning heroes. It’s a wonder he isn’t thrown overboard on some moonless night. Fortunately, this guy is the exception.¹³⁵

Unfortunately, there were other “exceptions.” Johnson went ballistic when the ship personnel denied the “river rats” access to the deck to watch a movie and then denied him use of the mess deck for shipboard services because he had not given them forty-eight hours’ notice. That Johnson had been waist deep in Mekong Delta forty-eight hours earlier was of no consequence to those individuals. With mounting cynicism, he swallowed his gorge and decided to visit the hospital instead, knowing full well that the higher ups would be of no assistance.¹³⁶

Even worse treatment could await Johnson and the troops when they came back aboard after an exhausting patrol. A Navy chief who liked his ship spic-and-span roused

¹³⁵ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 43-44; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

¹³⁶ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 59; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

the troops, exhausted and just in off the line, to clean their area on the ship. Johnson's men pleaded for help, so the chaplain went to see the chief.

I find the navy chief who's been identified as the main perpetrator. Calmly, I state the problem. He reacts as if he is highly offended that anyone could possibly question his precious rules. I explain the necessity of these soldiers getting good rest.

"This place has to be kept clean," he tells me. "If we didn't make them clean it up, it'd be a pig pen." He says this all the while chewing on a toothpick.

"There's no problem with cleaning it up, Chief. The problem is the timing. These guys need their rest. Can an adjustment be made about the time, especially when they've just come in from an operation?"

"Hell, Chaplain, rules is rules. All bunking areas are to be cleaned before breakfast, not afterward."

Johnson made one last futile attempt at diplomacy to see if there was any flexibility, but the Navy chief stood fast. Johnson then used his clout with his commander to have the rules relaxed and the chief reprimanded.¹³⁷

Martinetts like the Navy chief could be found in a variety of places. In January 1968, three soldiers got a one-way ticket to the brig when they refused to go out on patrol, so Johnson went on board the ship to see the imprisoned men and talk to them. The chaplain encountered a guard there who played like "God's second in command" and would not let him in until after lunch. Tired after coming off patrol, Johnson pulled rank on the guard and loudly ordered him to let him see the troops. Having dispensed with

¹³⁷ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 209-210; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

that particular irritant, he then turned his attention to the men and listened sympathetically. Johnson refrained from “chaplain bullshit.” He explained military justice to the men and what the consequences of their actions would be.¹³⁸

Johnson received more lessons on how rear-echelons could act toward those to whom they should have shown the most kindness and understanding. When a soldier named Capone died in combat, somehow the Army lost his body in transport. With a family racked by grief followed by a false hope that their son might still be alive, the Army started an investigation and interviewed Johnson twice. Johnson answered some of the most obtuse questions supposedly competent investigators could ask. With growing irritation, he sensed that he and his fellow soldiers were under suspicion and that the investigators were self-important and just going through the motions. The investigators never found the whereabouts of Capone’s body, and Johnson anguished that someone’s mistake left a family without any sense of closure.¹³⁹

Johnson was not alone in encountering people who were “kings of their little hills.” The ordeal of Capone’s missing corpse was illustrative of how soldiers in rear areas, although supposed to support the men in the field, chose to make their lives miserable or exploit opportunities to do so. Supply for the troops in the field did not always meet their needs, so soldiers sometimes had to scrounge for alternative means of equipment. Claude Newby wrote that his troops had only rump packs that did not carry nearly enough gear. Meanwhile, ARVN personnel obtained large rucksacks from the U.S. military, which they then in turn sold to the American troops. In short, American

¹³⁸ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 180; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

¹³⁹ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 239-240; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

troops had to buy some of their own equipment from their allies. As if that were not bad enough, Newby and his troops found an unconscionable act of callousness on the part of soldiers in the rear. They stowed away their gear and precious possessions like mail from home, wedding photos, and personal items in tents, only to find when they returned that REMFs had rummaged through their gear, taken any valuables, and had tossed about their mail and photos.¹⁴⁰

One of the most important aspects of a soldier's life was mail from home. Mail was the soldiers' connection to "the world," and in an age prior to e-mail and Skype, each soldier craved every letter, note, and package. Unfortunately, not all in charge of distributing the mail either understood or cared for its importance to the troops in the field. One particular sergeant was consistently late in distributing the mail, so Jerry Autry handled the problem in his usual manner. Without consulting anyone, he took the mail and distributed it himself, a serious violation of the law. When the sergeant raised hell and threatened to report the chaplain, several men in the battalion quietly informed the sergeant that a grenade would find its way into his hooch if he went any further and if the mail did not start coming in a regular manner. Autry promised not to distribute the mail again. The sergeant from thenceforward was punctual with the mail.¹⁴¹

Bernie Windmiller's ire rose when he encountered a Navy bully. While resting on a ship in the Mekong with Charlie Company, he learned that a lieutenant would not allow alcohol on board—much to the resentment of the men. When the battalion commander noticed the troops' downcast mood, he questioned the chaplain about the

¹⁴⁰ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume I*, 82.

¹⁴¹ Autry, *Gun Totin' Chaplain*, 167; Oral Interview, May 20, 2013.

problem; and Windmiller told him of the lieutenant's order. The battalion commander immediately took alcohol on the ship and ended that petty display of power.¹⁴² Putting aside the irony of a chaplain endorsing alcohol for his men, such incidents indicate how chaplains took on the double burden in caring for their men.

On August 15, 1967, Joe Dulany and his assistant traveled in a jeep to conduct services for a unit patrolling south of Phu Cat Air Base. Coming over the crest of a ridge, a Korean half-track truck hit them head on, injuring both of them. Still in pain from his injuries, he returned to duty several days later only to have the HQ company commander hand him a bill of \$2,880 for the jeep! The chaplain protested the bill and later discovered that headquarters wrote off the loss. Dulany also heard rumors of war profiteering, which was bad for morale. He learned of a firm that constructed the airbases and other military facilities throughout Vietnam and wondered who benefited from the contracts. His ire rose when he heard the wife of a political figure owned a charter airline that ferried soldiers on the "Freedom Birds" to and from Vietnam.¹⁴³

The only thing a soldier craves more than sleep when he returns from a long patrol is a good, hot shower. Unfortunately, Newby's troops once again ran up against rear-echelon types willing to exploit their own comrades. The engineers responsible for delivering water for the showers began to demand that the infantry leave them a case of beer. Otherwise, they would get no shower water. As Newby groused over the system of tribute, he also learned that troops back on an LZ were eating ice cream while no ice

¹⁴² Windmiller, Oral Interview, September 4, 2012.

¹⁴³ Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 39-40, 93.

cream made it to the field. Inspired, Newby then went to his commanders, who arranged an LZ to fly ice cream to the troops.¹⁴⁴

Shower water and ice cream were minor issues compared to the more shameful burdens that REMFs placed on the troops and the chaplains. Like all soldiers, chaplains were not immune to having their hopes raised and then dashed by hopeful news of being sent home earlier. One particularly cruel and mean-spirited incident was a rumor that two REMFs concocted while on the commode. When Nixon announced the drawdown of forces in 1969, they hatched a plan to spread a tale that service time would be reduced based on the number of months served in country. After word spread, a reporter from *Stars and Stripes* burst the bubble for Newby and his troops. One can almost feel the contempt dripping from Newby's description of what had happened.

While their success surpassed their wildest expectations, it worked extreme cruelty on thousands, especially those lonely grunts in the field. As the rumor spread throughout Vietnam, it raised and then dashed the hopes of many lonely soldiers, marines, sailors, and airmen, and their loved ones. It also messed up wedding and planned conception dates and such. This was true "latrine humor" in every way, as such were known in less delicate terms.¹⁴⁵

Managers of the PXes on bases fell into the REMF category. When both Newby and Robert Falabella tried to go into the PX on their respective bases, they were both denied entry. While Falabella was at Cu Chi, all troops were required to be "spit and polish" before they could enter the PX.¹⁴⁶ The sergeant in charge of the PX at Camp

¹⁴⁴ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume I*, 431-432; Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume II*, 199-200.

¹⁴⁵ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume I*, 453; Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume II*, 223.

¹⁴⁶ Falabella, *Vietnam Memoir*, 18.

Radcliff would not allow Newby or the two grunts with him to shop there because his company did not participate in police call on the base. Fresh off the line and in no mood to take flak from a REMF, Newby controlled his ire and informed the sergeant that they had been out in the jungle on patrol and that they would shop there whether the sergeant liked it or not. A few minutes later, an MP demanded that Newby and another chaplain carry a condom with him into town. The chaplain knew that should any misfortune happen to him, he was not about to have a condom on his person; so he flatly refused and walked right past the policeman.¹⁴⁷

Stealing Valor and Belittling the Mission

Sodas, condoms, or spit-and-polish for its own sake were minor in comparison to medals. Again the classification of all of Vietnam as a “combat zone,” made it easy for soldiers to receive decorations. Gary Burkett noted in his book *Stolen Valor* that numerous soldiers in Vietnam went home with medals they did not earn.¹⁴⁸ Seeing non-combatants go home with medals seriously undermined troop morale. Newby noted that Purple Hearts went out to a number of rear-echelon types who sustained minor injuries rather than war wounds.¹⁴⁹ In addition, REMFs had a tendency to downgrade awards, and some desk officer downgraded Newby’s medal for valor because he was a chaplain.¹⁵⁰ Robert Falabella received a minor scratch for a mortar attack, which made him eligible for the Purple Heart. He declined the award because he would have felt a sense of shame when other soldiers were receiving ghastly wounds in combat. He

¹⁴⁷ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume I*, 126-127.

¹⁴⁸ Gary Burkett. *Stolen Valor: How the Vietnam Generation was Robbed of Its Heroes and Its History*. (Dallas, TX: Veracity Press, 1998), 692.

¹⁴⁹ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume II*, 238.

¹⁵⁰ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume II*, 244.

disdained those who applied for the Purple Heart for minor bumps and scratches and felt for those whose sacrifices such medal hunting belittled.¹⁵¹

Sometimes chickenshit followed the chaplains into the field. Not all commanders appreciated or even respected the presence of a chaplain with the troops. Westmoreland himself began his tenure with a healthy disdain for chaplains. Some commanders believed that the clergy and Christianity could make soldiers “soft.”¹⁵² Atheists in the officer corps also could make a chaplain’s life miserable such as with a captain who resented Newby’s presence with the men. The officer did everything he could to hinder Newby, including trying to have him bumped from chopper flights out to the field and telling him that he would do everything he could to prevent him from conducting his ministry. Newby remained calm and replied that any such behavior would result in the two of them standing before the battalion commander.¹⁵³

Jim Johnson’s confrontation happened with the battalion commander, Colonel John Hill, nicknamed “The King of the Hill” or just “The King” for short. Johnson and The King had a complex relationship throughout Johnson’s tour, and the two did not always see eye-to-eye. The King respected the chaplain’s presence as long as it did not interfere with his command. One disagreement occurred because The King thought memorial services hurt morale and wanted them ceased for a time. Johnson remained patient and explained the necessity of the services and argued that it was *death* that hurt morale rather than the services.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Falabella, *Vietnam Memoir*, 30.

¹⁵² Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, 277.

¹⁵³ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume I*, 144.

¹⁵⁴ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume II*, 205.

What hurt chaplains' morale the most were those chaplains in the rear areas who practiced their own brand of pettiness and chickenshit on their colleagues in the field. Robert Falabella encountered a senior chaplain with an immaculate uniform and absolutely no knowledge of what life was like in the field other than through quickie visits to safe areas.

None of those VIPs ever lived in the field with the troops who were doing the actual fighting. They no more knew the real situation than those pseudo-intellectuals in the States. In time I was to come to a shocking awareness of how poorly informed the decision makers really were.¹⁵⁵

For Jim Johnson, the typical REMF was personified in "Harv," a brigade chaplain, who was worried more about appearances and had a penchant for meddling in Johnson's tasks like writing letters to the next of kin in Johnson's unit or holding memorial services before he could get back.¹⁵⁶ When the Chief of Chaplains, Father Francis Sampson, visited right before Christmas 1967, Johnson was ordered to visit with him. He would have preferred to be out with the troops on patrol, but Harv demanded that he visit with Sampson. Right before the visit, Johnson grew irritated at Harv's attempts to get him to look more "presentable."

Another of my soldiers has been dusted off, shot through the arm. He and others could tell Harv and the other brass what the war is really like: the mud, booby traps, bullets, ambushes, walking point, no sleep, scared stiff with each night sound; all this while being homesick and shot at every day of your nineteen-year-

¹⁵⁵ Falabella, *Vietnam Memoir*, 5-6.

¹⁵⁶ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 155.

old life. That's what the real war is about, not spit shined boots, pressed jungle fatigues, fancy speeches and luncheons with the brass.¹⁵⁷

Sometimes, chaplains encountered chickenshit from other chaplains, either because of interdenominational rivalry or petty jealousy and resentment of the success they had in their ministry and style of worship. One of the first issues Joe Dulany encountered was interdenominational territorialism and difficulties among chaplains of different religions. He ran afoul of a commander who preferred Roman Catholics over Protestants and Jews.¹⁵⁸ Later, he began a folk-style service that gained popularity among the troops, but—as is usual in the military and other highly institutionalized organizations—Dulany “ran ahead” of his superiors and incurred their wrath for having a degree of independence and initiative. Later, he received a poor OER (Officer Efficiency Report) over an award because of a disagreement over an electric organ a commander wanted secured for a forward LZ. Evidently, the commander felt that electric organs were more important than men.¹⁵⁹

Some combat chaplains encountered senior chaplains who pursued an agenda or had an ax to grind. In Claude Newby's case, Chaplain “Frank” (an alias) was his *bête noire*. The origin of the conflict dated back to when Newby went back to Vietnam for his second tour. Prior to leaving, he had responded to survey given to him by a general asking him if he wanted to return to the cavalry. Newby said “yes,” and was granted his

¹⁵⁷ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 124; Fr. Sampson would have sided with Johnson. He landed in Carentan with the 501st PIR on D-Day, was taken prisoner by the Germans, released, and then taken captive again during the Battle of the Bulge. He was liberated in 1945 and then later served in the Korean War prior to becoming Chief of Chaplains.

¹⁵⁸ Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 19.

¹⁵⁹ Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 79-81.

assignment based on the survey. When he arrived in Vietnam, the USARV Chaplain accused Newby of “politicking” for the Air Cav assignment. Newby assured the desk chaplain that he had made no overt request but had responded to a survey given to him by a three-star general.¹⁶⁰ Once he reached the 1st Cav headquarters, he encountered Chaplain Frank, who also accused him of politicking for the position and that he would “regret returning to the Cav.”¹⁶¹

It did not take too long for Frank to strike. Apparently, the deputy chaplain nursed resentment against LDS chaplains and tried to have Newby removed by accusing him of neglecting his duties to soldiers of other denominations. Newby proved to Frank’s satisfaction that he ministered to all men regardless of faith, but Frank’s hostility remained. The accusation that he had neglected any of his beloved troops stung deeply. The pettiness of Frank left Newby hurt and disappointed that one of his fellow colleagues would intrigue against him. In the incident with Frank, Newby explained to the commander why he should remain with the battalion rather than be sent to headquarters. Command wanted him back at HQ because there were not many LDS chaplains available, but Newby explained that LDS soldiers were very well organized. He was chaplain not just to LDS troops but to *all* the men. Proving him neglectful of his duties would be difficult given the testimony of his own troops to whom he ministered. The hurt lingered, but Newby later conducted a worship service that focused on the theme of forgiveness. Frank was not the only cross Newby had to bear. On Easter Sunday, he had just come in from ministering to casualties when Chaplain Black tore into him over

¹⁶⁰ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume II*, 31.

¹⁶¹ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume II*, 33.

Bravo 2-12 going without non-Catholic Easter Services. Newby had to explain that casualties came before religious services.¹⁶²

Joe Dulany had to learn that in dealing with O-6s, the officers had “long memories and sharp knives.” He also did not understand that he had to “toot his own horn” and participate in social gatherings. That issue came back to haunt him when he heard that he was not selected for promotion. Crushed and unable to speak to anyone for a long time, Dulany internalized his emotions and resolved to carry on with his ministry. Returning to Vietnam in December of 1969 for another tour, things had changed because the war had changed as the U.S. was drawing down its forces. He requested the Air Cavalry of a senior chaplain who told him there were no open slots. However, he later learned to his ire that another chaplain got the position he requested while he went to the infantry. In the infantry unit, Dulany grew weary of the pornography and sexual license of the troops. He also grew fearful as his time shortened and asked for a transfer to a support unit. The division chaplain became angry with his request, accused the chaplain of shirking his duties, and implied that his request would stagnate his career. Dulany knew that the chaplain was more interested in his own career, so he ignored the response. The USARV Chaplain, however, was more understanding and granted Dulany his request.¹⁶³

Jerry Autry also received grief from chaplains who placed their careers ahead of their ministry. He had wanted to be a chaplain for Special Forces, but command assigned

¹⁶² Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume I*, 396-398; Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume II*, 104, 165-166; When Newby finally was able to administer Protestant services, Black made a “peace offering” in the form of complimenting Newby for his excellent job preaching.

¹⁶³ Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 15, 65, 89, 94-95, 102.

him to the 101st Airborne instead. When Autry exclaimed surprise because he had been assured of Special Forces, the battalion chaplain told him that neither assurances nor training mattered. The 101st needed him, and that was where he would go. Renowned for its famous stand at Bastogne during the Battle of the Bulge in World War II, the 101st had lost some of its luster by the time of Vietnam because it was no longer a parachute division. Another chaplain, bound for a chapel in the rear area gave Autry grief about going to the 101st, which he called the “one-oh-worst” and “the puking blizzard.” Autry had to repress the urge to strike a fellow man of the cloth.

When he got to Phu Bai in the northern part of South Vietnam, Autry took stock of the division chaplain and those like him.

I didn't have a clue as to what these people did other than the fact that they had been around a while and had rank. I had been to the Basic Chaplain's Course, designed to teach a chaplain basic soldiering skills—marching for instance. What is etched in my old gray matter is how serious many of the older chaplains took the military. Career was already a heavy issue with them—things like promotion, officer efficiency reports, and assignments. I didn't get it.

Autry wrote that the burden increased when chaplains fell short in their tasks. In some ways, the chaplain's job is to make sure that individual soldiers don't get lost in the maze. I always saw myself as a crusading advocate for the soldier—making sure the system didn't steamroll over him.

I hated it when chaplains didn't do their jobs. Many spent more time looking after their own stuff than they did taking care of the troops.

Autry actually took a liking to one particular rear-echelon chaplain, a priest whom he called “Rudy” in his memoirs. Rudy was an artillery chaplain who shared some of the items he was able to secure due to his rear position, but Rudy once added to the burden of all chaplains when he returned from R&R with a lively case of VD. The real problem arose when a brigadier general, who viewed Chaplain Rudy as his private priest, wanted him to say Mass every day for him and the troops. Autry and the doctors had to cover for the fallen priest, incurring the wrath of the general, who made it a personal mission to keep Autry out of the field.¹⁶⁴

Big Shots and Petty Agendas

High ranking chaplains often gave combat chaplains fits when it came to their own personal needs at the expense of the troops. A Division Chaplain, who was a Catholic, flew in to Claude Newby’s base one afternoon and declared that he wanted to say Mass for the whole battalion. The chaplain was former Navy and did not understand that troops out in the field could not be gathered for services as on a ship. The Division Chaplain flew away disappointed, but at least Newby and the TOC (tactical operations commander) made their point.¹⁶⁵ Such was not always the case, especially when dignitaries came to visit the soldiers in Vietnam.

Celebrities brought with them their own brand of fowl dung. No greater a Christian Cold Warrior existed at the time than the Reverend Billy Graham. Starting with his great crusade in southern California in the 1950s, Graham had become by the

¹⁶⁴ Autry, *Gun Totin’ Chaplain*, 39, 71, 110, 212-213.

¹⁶⁵ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume I*, 214.

time of the Vietnam War the foremost American evangelical preacher.¹⁶⁶ As one who made it a personal mission to equate his evangelism with the struggle against communism, Graham saw in the Vietnam War an opportunity to place his own personal stamp on the “struggle against Satanism” and appeal to the troops carrying on that struggle. Claude Newby saw the visit as a photo-op and something that distracted him from his ministry. On Christmas Eve 1967, Newby’s commander informed him that he had been chosen to accompany Graham during his visit to Vietnam. Newby’s “duties” in accompanying the preacher amounted to seeing Graham from a distance, constantly surrounded by high level brass and senior chaplains. Despite their doctrinal differences, Newby recorded Graham’s sermon and played it for the troops because he felt they would have appreciated it.¹⁶⁷

As the war entered the drawn down phase after 1968, President Nixon made the decision to visit Vietnam. What happened next would have made Pyotr Potemkin proud.

USARV pulled 1st Infantry Division company onto a firebase and issued each man a new, clean uniform and jungle boots—even new helmet camouflage, free of short-timer calendars, salutations, crosses, peace symbols and the like.

Meanwhile, other companies were shifted around in country so the president could visit the squeaky-clean companies on secure firebases...The whole Nixon visit agitated me, all the scrubbing and polishing to create a false image for him.

It would be much better, I thought, for him and all the visiting commanders and politicians to see conditions as they actually were.

¹⁶⁶ Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford Press, 1997), 237.

¹⁶⁷ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume I*, 79.

Of course, Newby surmised very quickly that Nixon was not so much on a fact-finding mission as he was there to use Vietnam as a backdrop for announcing the beginning of the withdrawal from Vietnam and “peace with honor.” Thus, the burden became heavier for chaplains like Newby because the grand announcement took the lid off of simmering resentments and racial tensions among the troops and gave rise to a lack of discipline and unit cohesion in units already holding together by only a thread. Had he possessed more of a longshoremen’s tongue, Claude Newby would have grouched that chickenshit pomp and circumstance undermined the army’s sense of mission in Vietnam and made his job of ministry that much more difficult.¹⁶⁸

Sometimes, it did not even take high-ranking visits to make chaplains wonder what the higher-ups were thinking. In a scene eerily reminiscent of the movie *Apocalypse Now*, Johnson felt a wave of confusion and anger at an NBC camera crew that was filming the actions of his company as they all waded through the muck and mire of a rice paddy.¹⁶⁹

Conclusion

Combat chaplains who carried the *capella* into the field to minister to soldiers who suffered the privations of war witnessed the demoralizing consequences of bullets, death, and the loss of friends. As difficult as the duties they took upon themselves, their jobs became more burdensome by policies and individuals whose ethics and attitudes could be as demoralizing as bullets and shrapnel. Combat chaplains went into their ministry without the unequivocal support of their coreligionists. They labored under a

¹⁶⁸ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume I*, 414-415.

¹⁶⁹ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 202.

system contributing to lack of cohesion and a sense of accomplishment by infusing and removing troops piecemeal into the battle lines. Finally, they encountered in their own military individuals who not only seemed to be indifferent to the good of the men but in fact actively conspired at times to undermine their morale and the spirit of their troops—often to their own benefit. As they walked the field with their troops and witnessed both the war and the military push their men and themselves to the breaking point, combat chaplains continued the slow process of transformation from ministers of the military to prophets and healers who bore the *capella* not as a talisman of military good fortune but as the cloak of Christ that brought healing and reconciliation to the troops.

CHAPTER VII – THE BURDEN OF MORALITY AND ETHICS

I do not approve the extermination of the enemy; the policy of exterminating or, as it is barbarously said, liquidating enemies, is one of the most alarming developments of modern war and peace, from the point of view of those who desire the survival of culture.

– T.S. Eliot¹⁷⁰

A critic of his times, T.S. Eliot understood well the destruction that war could bring, having survived the Blitz and later Hitler's rocket attacks. But he also understood that even the confrontation with Nazism did not keep soldiers from getting lost in the darkness of war. By the time of Vietnam, Eliot's warning had become prophecy as soldiers on both sides in the war fought with increasing viciousness, all the while blurring the line between civilization and barbarism. Chaplains carried the *capella* to soldiers in the field who waged a counter-insurgency method of war. Anne Loveland points out that in the combat zone, there was no moral certainty. Both the moral ambiguities of war and military ministry added to the burdens chaplains bore.¹⁷¹ Jacqueline Whitt writes that the question of whether a chaplain should act as priest or prophet became of prime concern throughout the war. That is, how did a chaplain proclaim a prophetic gospel when he was wearing the uniform of the military?¹⁷² Should a chaplain do nothing more than attend to the sacramental needs of the men and offer encouragement and exhortation on the eve of battle, or should chaplains act as moral compasses for their troops and restrain them from peering too long into the darkness?

¹⁷⁰ T.S. Eliot, *Note Toward the Definition of Culture* (New York: Faber & Faber, 1973), 59.

¹⁷¹ Loveland, *Change and Conflict*, 57.

¹⁷² Whitt, "Conflict and Compromise," 32, 176.

Chaplains' occupation of the netherworld between the military and religious communities added to their burdens as they confronted ethical, theological, and practical questions. Jonathan Shay writes that chaplains were expected to act as "the conscience of the military," and chaplains on the whole regarded such a responsibility as an enormous burden—especially in an institution where the dictates of conscience often became blurred by the fog of war. As American public dissent toward the Vietnam War grew louder, chaplains had to respond to questions of faith and war and the increased burden of dealing with moral questions about the nature of war and dealing with men; however, chaplains had to undertake the burden of commitments in providing necessities in CAPs.¹⁷³

Navy chaplain John O'Connor, the future Cardinal Archbishop of New York, frequently raised the issue of what is a "just war?" For Edward Tick, the notion of war as derived from God's Will developed into the Just War Theory. Based on the tradition and writings of the medieval scholar Thomas Aquinas, the purpose of the doctrine of a "just war" was to ensure that war is morally justifiable. Aquinas split the standards and benchmarks of a just war into two groups. One is "the right to go to war" (*jus ad bellum*) while the other is "right conduct in war" (*jus in bello*). Essentially, if war is declared by a legitimate authority, is waged for a just cause, and is guided by good and just intentions, then the war is necessary. However, once one has committed to war, then one must take special care to act properly in conducting the war.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Whitt, "Conflict and Compromise," 108; 170-171; Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 14-15.

¹⁷⁴ Guthrie, Charles; Quinlan, Michael (26 Sep 2007). "III: The Structure of the Tradition". *Just War: The Just War Tradition: Ethics in Modern Warfare*. (United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC., September 26, 2007), 11–15; John J. O'Connor, *A Chaplain Looks at Vietnam* (Cleveland, OH: The World Publishing Company, 1968), 11; Tick, *War and the Soul*, 19.

Vietnam was a great strain upon the Just War theory. Many in the United States—both in the government and at home—supported the war early in the conflict because the principles of the Cold War and the fight against communism fit their criteria. However, as the war dragged on and voices rose up in greater cacophony against U.S. involvement, the lines of Aquinas became less defined. Adding to the uncertainties was the knowledge that atrocities took place in the field. It would be in addressing the moral and ethical uncertainties about the war and dealing with the atrocities they witnessed that would transform combat chaplains from priests to prophets. They belonged to an institution (the military) that endorsed killing while at the same time their religious training taught them the dictates of peace and value for life. How combat chaplains addressed the conflicts defined them and gave them valuable tools to assist their fellow troops both during and after the Vietnam War. The greatest tool in their box was the knowledge that the men in uniform were fallible beings. By donning the uniform and admitting to the same fallacies as their troops, combat chaplains would gain the trust of their men and become more effective ministers.

Personal Behavior and Moral Development

The blurred line between war and morality placed chaplains in tenuous positions with their own troops when it came to issues of credibility. Alcohol presented a serious moral challenge for chaplains. Catholic chaplains had, for the most part, accepted drinking in their culture, but some Protestant and all Mormon chaplains avoided drinking altogether. “Having a beer with the boys” could be the key to the realm with the troops, but chaplains understood that they were not supposed to act as “just one of the boys.” They walked, then, a moral tightrope as they desired acceptance in the military

community but set themselves apart as religious and moral leaders.¹⁷⁵ Claude Newby avoided alcohol yet still commanded respect and acceptance from his troops for his devotion and courage. Profanity, prostitution, and various moral ambiguities also presented themselves as obstacles to a chaplain's ministry. Newby noted with contempt that a particular chaplain engaged in obscene language during a service, which he felt denigrated his ministry and lowered the chaplain's standing among his own troops. Jerry Autry discovered, with a mixture of humor and consternation, that one of his own colleagues came back from R&R in Thailand with a lively case of gonorrhea.¹⁷⁶

In such cases, the question arose as to whether bad chaplains placed a burden on good chaplains.¹⁷⁷ For critics, the answer lay in the institution of the chaplaincy itself, and they couched their criticisms in blanket terms, indicting all chaplains rather than the just the institutional structure of the chaplaincy for endorsing the conduct of the war.¹⁷⁸ A commission by the United Church of Christ concluded that "serving two masters" in truth meant serving only the military and led chaplains to abdicate their prophetic ministry.¹⁷⁹ Rabbi Abraham Herschel was strongly anti-military and felt chaplains legitimized the war in Vietnam with their presence. They "oiled" the military machine by sanctioning a program of dehumanization, discouraged conscientious objection, preached and taught "military religion," and failed to speak out against atrocities. Gordon Zahn, a sociologist from Catholic University and a conscientious objector during

¹⁷⁵ Whitt, "Conflict and Compromise," 128.

¹⁷⁶ Whitt, "Conflict and Compromise," 129; Autry, *Gun Totin' Chaplain*, 212-213; Oral Interview, May 20, 2013.

¹⁷⁷ Whitt, "Conflict and Compromise," 215.

¹⁷⁸ Loveland, *Change and Conflict*, 49.

¹⁷⁹ United Church of Christ, "Ministries to Military Personnel," 81-82.

World War II, castigated chaplains for failing to provide “adequate moral guidance” on issues relating to war, objectives, and means. Zahn claimed that character guidance was more about military indoctrination and condemned military clerics for their “crashing silence” when it came to atrocities.¹⁸⁰

“Serving two masters” did not only mean that chaplains had to walk a fine line between being a member of the military as well as the clergy.¹⁸¹ One of the reasons why anti-war critics looked askance at the chaplaincy was that their training did not integrate morality with the military. Chaplains arrived in Vietnam having gone through the relatively short period of chaplain school; however, none of the chaplain schools offered any courses on ethics and morality in war, just military orientation. The military assumed that priests and ministers who entered the chaplaincy already had received moral and ethical training. However, chaplains had not received any formal instruction on the morality of war and related subjects in their seminaries.¹⁸² There were no “chaplain courses” in theological seminaries, which is ironic given the heightened state of tension between capitalism and communism. In other words, both the denominations and the military let down the keepers of the *capella* with incomplete development and left it to the individual chaplains to find their own answers.

Such “on the job training” in counter-insurgency warfare—where survival depended on treating everyone as the enemy—erased the lines between combatants and

¹⁸⁰ Rabbi Abraham Herschel, “The Moral Outrage of Vietnam,” *Vietnam: Crisis of Conscience*, 57; Gordon Zahn, “The Scandal of the Military Chaplaincy,” *Judaism* 1969; “What Did You Do During the War, Father?” *Commonweal*; Gordon Zahn, “Communications: The Military Chaplaincy,” *Judaism* 18 (Fall 1969); 490; Gordon Zahn, “Sociological Impressions of the Chaplaincy,” 63.

¹⁸¹ Whitt, “Conflict and Compromise,” 127.

¹⁸² Ike C. Barnett, “The United States Air Force Chaplain School,” *Chaplain* 20 (February 1963):

civilians. The ensuing confusion could result in grief. The dichotomous argument between Reinhold Niebuhr and Billy Graham, with the former urging moral restraint while the latter preached a Manichean perspective of good and evil made for a balance that was difficult at best to maintain. To stray too far in one direction placed them in peril of their troops seeing them as nothing more than an extension of the corrupt system that sent them into the meat grinder. If they gave homage to the love of God for the troops as it inspired them to battle for the love of country, it risked their own credibility. Yet, if chaplains acted as Nestor in *The Iliad*—counselor and critic to warriors and eschewing the atrocities in which warriors sometimes engaged—inherent risks lurked there as well. Warriors expected chaplains to advise the commanders and staff on all matters of religion, mortality, and ethics in the life and work of the military. To raise the voice of prophecy by doing what Joanna Bourke describes as “going into the field in order to ‘witness the love of the Lord’ to their troops” risked their own careers. The label of “troublemaker” could lead to career stagnation as Chaplains like Norman McFarlane, who challenged the ethics and morality of his battalion, faced career stagnation.¹⁸³

Each chaplain found his own solutions to the moral questions posed by the war and the problem of wearing both the uniform and the cloth. Like others in the war, combat chaplains experienced success and failure, heroism and cowardice, faith and doubt as they confronted moral, spiritual, and physical uncertainties in Vietnam. Sometimes they spoke out in the face of moral questions. Other times they remained silent. Often, they did not even know what to do. As if answering for most chaplains

¹⁸³ Hammer, *One Morning in the War*, 65; Debs Heintz Jr., “The U.S. Fighting Man’s Dilemma: Brutality in Vietnam,” *Navy* 9 (August 1966) 15-19, 62-63; Loveland, *Change and Conflict*, 46; Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, 273; Whitt, “Conflict and Compromise,” 40-41, 178.

who ventured into the field, Robert Falabella concluded that what was *inside* the uniform meant more than the uniform itself, and—as if answering critics like Herschel and Zahn—he added that the any weakness of individual morality is reflective of societal weakness in general. Wrestling with such moral issues as to whether to carry a weapon in the field, how to answer the tortured consciences of soldiers, and how to confront war atrocities, chaplains groped slowly toward illuminating their own understanding of themselves and their role with their troops in the field.¹⁸⁴

The Burden of Carrying Weapons

The moral dilemma posed by chaplains and their decision to carry—or not to carry—weapons seemed at first to be an obvious one to those at home. Combat chaplains wore the Cross or the Star of David in Vietnam, which meant their mission was supposed to be one that advocated “beating swords into ploughshares.”¹⁸⁵ When he went to Vietnam, Robert Falabella learned that the Army regulations stated that a chaplain *should not* carry weapons, which did not square exactly with the Geneva Convention that stated that a chaplain *was not required to carry* weapons.¹⁸⁶ Chapter I, Article 4 of the Geneva Convention expressly designated chaplains as “neutrals” or non-combatants. The Army manual cited the Geneva Convention by stating that “chaplains should not bear arms; he will not be required to bear arms. He is protected by the provisions of the Geneva Convention.” Both the U.S. military and the Geneva Convention saw chaplains as assisting *in* combat but not *with* combat—a difficult distinction. They also wore fatigues, so religious insignia did not do a very good job of distinguishing them from regular

¹⁸⁴ Whitt, “Conflict and Compromise,” 123; Falabella, *Vietnam Memoir*, 99.

¹⁸⁵ NAB, Isaiah 2:4.

¹⁸⁶ Falabella, *Vietnam Memoir*, 5, 58.

infantry. Secondly, the language of Geneva was vague as to whether chaplains “could” bear weapons or not. Falabella found Army regulations, the Geneva Convention, and the morality of carrying a weapon an interesting conundrum. Finally, neither the Viet Cong nor the North Vietnamese Army ascribed to the Geneva Convention, and neither distinguished between combatants and non-combatants.¹⁸⁷

Again, with little on-the-job training, each chaplain addressed the issue differently. Some were loath to carry weapons even in combat situations because they felt it complicated and compromised their role and violated the spirit of Geneva. Others preferred a more nuanced interpretation that did not forbid them from carrying weapons. Self-defense became the foundation upon which many chaplains justified carrying—and sometimes using—weapons. Edward Tick writes that the desire to survive supersedes even that of morality. Thus, where survival was concerned, some chaplains carried at least a sidearm and even wielded them on occasion. Joanna Bourke writes that many chaplains carried revolvers for self-defense. Sometimes it was to please their commanders, who demanded that they not overburden their own troops. At other times chaplains did not wish to cause a burden for other troops who would have wanted to protect them out in the field.¹⁸⁸

Joseph O’Donnell decided not to carry a weapon. He had heard rumors about chaplains who carried weapons, but he chose against it although he went ashore daily to

¹⁸⁷Whitt, “Conflict and Compromise,” 131; *Chaplain* (FM 16-5, August 27, 1964, 40; *Chaplain* (FM16-5, December 26, 1967), 39-40; Chief of Chaplains Charles E. Brown Jr. (1966) Office of the Chief of Chaplains *Historical Review*, 1 July 1965 to 31 December 1966 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), 64-66; Venzke, *Confidence in Battle*, 149; Whitt, “*Conflict and Compromise*,” 95-96.

¹⁸⁸ Tick, *War and the Soul*, 88; Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, 269.

minister to his Marines and felt the fear of the combat zone. Another Marine who did not carry was Eli Takesian. He interpreted Geneva to mean that a chaplains' noncombatant status prohibited them from bearing arms, but Takesian saw beyond Geneva. He felt that a chaplain's hands that used deadly weapons were not free to render sacramental ministry. Carrying a weapon and all that the tool entailed interfered with his spiritual ministry. He felt that his weapon was and should only be the Word of God and that his Marines preferred it that way. In fact, when he met Fr. Aloysius McGonigal, the Army chaplain ministering to the Marines in Hue during the Tet Offensive, Takesian noticed him carrying a .45-caliber pistol. He remonstrated with McGonigal that chaplains should be noncombatants no matter what the situation. The priest, representing the other end of the argument, replied that his pistol was his friend ... and in current conditions the NVA could not tell the difference between a combatant and a chaplain. Takesian conceded the point—but also conceded what he saw was the unequivocal language of the conventions.¹⁸⁹

Takesian believed that each chaplain's decision regarding weapons was a matter of personal choice. He chose not to carry because he felt that the Marines wanted chaplains to remain unique. He did not disdain bearing weapons but believed that chaplains who desired to brandish weapons should become line officers. The Marines responded favorably to his choice to make physical vulnerability its own statement. A Marine lieutenant once expressed both concern and appreciation by saying:

¹⁸⁹ Takesian's discretion led him to omit McGonigal's name in his oral interview; O'Donnell, "Clergy in the Military, Vietnam and After," 218; Eli Takesian, Oral Interview, December 13, 2002.

Chaplain, I fear for your life because you don't carry a sidearm; but I'm glad you don't. I see peace in a chaplain's unarmed presence. When you're around, I feel more complete. Out here in this madness, you represent a side of me that cries for peace!

Takesian did not just "talk the talk." His refusal to carry a weapon in combat placed him in grave danger several times. When the Viet Cong overran the mortar platoon of 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines, he laid down next to a dead Marine. Rather than use the dead man's pistol, the chaplain feigned death as a VC soldier stood over him, kicking his body. When another Marine, nicknamed "Cajun Bob," learned many years after the war that Takesian had not been killed in a firefight, he phoned the chaplain. In an emotional conversation, "Cajun Bob" expressed amazement that Takesian remained in the open, caring for the wounded despite having no weapon of his own. The Marine infantryman expressed Takesian's ethic in an e-mail to his fellow grunts.

Chaplain Eli carried no weapons except Compassion, Courage, and Faith in God's word. We nicknamed him "The Padre with Balls of Stone." I wrote a recommendation for him for the Navy Cross on a C-rat box when we were holed up in the University in a chemistry classroom in Hue.¹⁹⁰

Another Marine chaplain, Vincent Capodanno, kept a weapon although he never used it. His Maryknoll training taught him to abhor violence, and he initially opposed possessing a sidearm. He soon changed his mind after an officer upbraided him for allowing his pistol to become rusty. When he realized that another Marine would inherit

¹⁹⁰ Takesian, Oral Interview, December 13, 2003.

it from him after his tour ended, Capodanno from thenceforward kept the cleanest pistol in the entire Marine Corps—under his bunk.¹⁹¹

On the other end of the argument stood those like Jerry Autry and Michael Ortiz, who both served with the Green Berets. When Ortiz visited a Special Forces camp in the Mekong Delta, he conducted a religious service for the troops. After the service, the camp commander asked the chaplain to carry an M-16 and check the perimeter to show his troops that their chaplain was a Green Beret. Ortiz did so with no hesitation and with the proficiency one would expect of a Green Beret. On another occasion, Ortiz's chopper had to make an emergency landing in a rice paddy after being hit by fire. The colonel in the chopper handed him a .45 pistol, but Ortiz protested the use of weapons by a chaplain. The colonel tersely told Ortiz to use the weapon if he wanted to stay alive. Ortiz complied.¹⁹²

Jerry Autry, who titled his own memoir *Gun Totin' Chaplain*, believed that the situation in Vietnam mandated that chaplains *needed* a weapon, more than anything for the comfort of the men with whom he went into the field. He understood that the troops had enough worry in the field without having to add that of protecting their chaplain to their list of duties and responsibilities. Thus, Autry earned his moniker. The photograph taken of him in 1968 brandishing an M-16 caused a stir among many on both sides of the argument, and Autry admitted he could have practiced a bit more prudence.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Mode, *The Grunt Padre*, 116.

¹⁹² Michael Ortiz, *Green Beret Chaplain* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2003), 29-30; sometime later, the colonel and a Green Beret sergeant were killed when they checked the perimeter. Ortiz notes that the colonel's son later became a Catholic priest and an Army chaplain.

¹⁹³ Autry, *Gun Totin' Chaplain*, 73, 137; Oral Interview, May 20, 2013.

Others did use more discretion. Joe Dulany kept an M-79 grenade launcher with flechette rounds in his jeep and under the seat. When he got into a dispute with a Chaplain Bill Goldie, the USARV command chaplain, over bearing arms, Dulany maintained his refusal not to be a burden to his troops. Jim Johnson's underlying principle was survival, and survival dictated his decision. He carried a firearm because the VC and NVA did not spare chaplains and because his fear of death after each attack grew greater. Once, he took a pistol from a trooper while he rode in a chopper even though he had no intention of using it—but he carried it. Robert Falabella's *raison d'être* in favor of carrying did not come about from a sense of self-protection. Talking with his troops about morality in war, one of his soldiers confronted him with the irony that it was easy for him to inveigh against killing while not carrying a sidearm himself. He reasoned that his decision to bear weapons indicated to him another kind of courage—the courage that one has by exposing oneself to death. Falabella, claimed superior knowledge and realism that he and other chaplains gained from “being on the ground with the men.” He saw the decision as a moral one not to be decided by senior chaplains in their clean uniforms and air conditioned offices safely away from the action.¹⁹⁴

Claude Newby would have seconded Falabella's assessment, but he chose more of a middle ground between the two camps. He wrote that had no need to carry a rifle—there would be plenty to use from fallen soldiers if defending himself became necessary. He had carried both rifles and sidearms both as an infantryman prior to his service in the chaplaincy and in his job as a police officer. He did keep a pistol in a secure place,

¹⁹⁴ Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 46; Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 32, 35, 154; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013; Falabella, *Vietnam Memoir*, 15, 16, 61, 72, 73-74, 82-85; Oral Interview, April 21, 2013; Loveland, *Change and Conflict*, 66-67.

jokingly referring to it as his “.45 caliber camera—for close-up shots.” On October 1, 1966, he rode a medevac chopper that had to be diverted to pick up wounded infantrymen. Realizing that they were flying into a hot zone and without a door gunner, he locked, loaded, and manned the chopper’s M-60 machine gun while the zone remained hot. In a two-day firefight on April 7 and 8, 1967, Newby took up a rifle and joined the fracas. Shaking off the shock of the death of his close friend Bill Snyder, the chaplain realized that he and just a few others were defending the flank against an NVA attack. He picked up a wounded man’s M-16 and took part in the defense of his troops. Two hours later, Newby took up another rifle and then laid down cover fire for Captain Jim Cain’s attack on an NVA machine gun nest that allowed his company to rescue its wounded. The next day, Newby, a medic, and a wounded infantryman took heavy sniper fire from a tree. He ran to try and get help from nearby soldiers, dived into a foxhole, and realized that he had grabbed the wounded man’s M-16. He fired the rifle in the direction of the sniper although he thought he did no one any harm. Looking back on his actions, he harbored no regrets and even reconciled his actions by pointing out that he saved American lives in the process.

Probably, some will criticize me for taking up arms in three instances during the engagements of April 7 and 8, but I offer no apologies or excuses. What I did was done reflexively, for what seemed very appropriate causes under the accumulated heat of those particular battle conditions. It was, perhaps, another case of former infantry training and reflexes kicking in and overcoming chaplain education. The Geneva Conventions were definitely not on my mind.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ Newby, *It Took Heroes, Volume I*, 28, 29, 339; Newby, *It Took Heroes, Volume II*, 88-89.

While there were no regrets, Newby certainly did not endorse any ostentation on the part of chaplains when they carried weapons. Discretion was the key word, and Newby cited a national magazine showing a chaplain “armed to the teeth” as he emerged from the jungle. The Army Chief of Chaplains also saw the story, and the young chaplain had a “come to Jesus” moment in the form of a written reprimand. Since communists regarded chaplains as nothing more than propaganda officers, the Chief of Chaplains wanted no grist for the communist mill that might endanger other chaplains. Furthermore, the COC reminded the young chaplain that their primary mission was not killing but saving.¹⁹⁶

The Burden of Killing

It was the problem of killing that provided some of the hardest questions for chaplains. Despite the violence of human history, killing is a difficult thing to do. Societal norms developed over thousands of years provides a thin but tough veneer against the taking of life.¹⁹⁷ Chaplain William Mahedy finished Mass for an infantry unit in the field when a young soldier approached him in a somewhat embarrassed manner to ask him a question.

‘Chaplain,’ he asked quietly, ‘how come it’s a sin to hop into bed with a *mama-san*, but it’s okay to blow away gooks out in the bush?’ The soldier was a Catholic, a former altar boy and just as horny as he could be after several months in the field with his infantry unit looking for ‘contact’ with the enemy...Consider

¹⁹⁶ Newby, *It Took Heroes, Volume I*, 28-29; the young chaplain was actually promoted in spite of the reprimand; Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 64.

¹⁹⁷ Wiest, Root, and Scurfield, “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: The Legacy of War,” *War in the Age of Technology*, 295-296.

the question that he and I were forced to confront on that day in a jungle clearing. How is it that a Christian can, with a clear conscience, spend a year in a war zone killing people and yet place his soul in jeopardy by spending a few minutes with a prostitute?

Another soldier named Bob came to Mahedy with a similar issue. “I’m afraid of taking someone’s life in front of my eyes,” he said. “It went against my upbringing as a Catholic. I believed strongly in the fifth commandment.” Mahedy’s horny young altar boy, Bob, and the soldier who challenged Robert Falabella over carrying a weapon were but two of many who went to their chaplains wracked with guilt and asking tough questions after killing enemy soldiers. The questions that haunted them were: Can I be a Christian and still kill others? What is the difference between murder and killing? *Is there any difference between murder and killing?*¹⁹⁸

For even the most mature people, such questions would be difficult, but these men experienced crises at their moment of moral awakening. Not wanting to die while killing others at the same time wrought grievous changes on the minds, emotions, and souls of the troops, and chaplains were often the first to whom these boys brought questions regarding killing others. Combat chaplains understood better than their colleagues in the rear that the nature of the conflict in Vietnam eroded any notions of a “clean war.” The warrior archetype advocates “killing, but doing so without emotion.” Yet, how could a war marked by counter-insurgency and an unseen enemy allow young soldiers to uphold such an ideal? Frustration with and terror of a vicious enemy made it difficult for

¹⁹⁸ Mahedy, *Out of the Night*, 6, 133; Curt Bowers with Glenn Van Dyne, *Forward Edge of the Battle Area: A Chaplain’s Story* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1987), 36; Chalsma, *The Chambers of Memory*, 97.

soldiers to remember the words spoken by those such as Fr. William Grayson, an Army chaplain with D Company of the 2/5th, First Cavalry Division: “kill, but kill without hatred in one’s heart.”¹⁹⁹

The effort to instill such a counter-intuitive message in their troops proved a major burden because combat chaplains did not deal with theories but instead with realities as they counseled soldiers about the problem of killing. As with bearing arms, combat chaplains understood that survival was a very black and white matter and had little room for academic arguments about morality until one was out of the combat zones.²⁰⁰ However, their arguments once again contributed to their greater understanding of what their troops endured and helped them transform their fundamental mission after the war.

Not all chaplains bore the burden well. The “Cold War Consensus” rendered some chaplains immune to doubts about warfare and killing. Chaplain William Mahedy notes that war as a human enterprise is a matter of sin—a form of hatred for one’s fellow human beings, a spiritual darkness that serves as the overpowering awareness of the extent of that sin. A chaplain whose training was insufficient or who saw the war as a holy crusade failed to address the moral problems soldiers had with the war. They failed to anchor troops to the reality that war in general is a collective sin. One soldier stopped attending services after he went to the chaplain for help after he shot at an old woman. The chaplain’s version of “help” included praying over the soldier that he would “find the strength to carry on with the mission.” Mike Pearson was a soldier profoundly disturbed

¹⁹⁹ Slomovitz, *The Fighting Rabbis*, 117; Tick, *War and the Soul*, 112; Tick, *War and the Soul*, 260; Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, 262.

²⁰⁰ Whitt, “Conflict and Compromise,” 130.

by killing an eight-year-old boy armed with only a penknife, but the Catholic chaplain told him not to worry and that he was only doing his duty. On the eve of battle, another chaplain exhorted Sp4 Haywood “The Kid” Kirkland. Kirkland listened as the chaplain reminded him and his mates of Christ’s triumph over the world and the scattering of all enemies. Concerned over the state of his soul, Kirkland did not buy the Cold War rhetoric that nuanced “thou shalt not kill” with an exception for “killing commies.” “As long as we didn’t murder, it was like the chaplain would give you his blessing. But you knew all of that was murder anyway.”²⁰¹

Trying to justify killing beyond self-defense smacked of more “chaplain bullshit.” Throughout Vietnam, some chaplains reminded soldiers that their enemies were not “fully human.”²⁰² Prior to My Lai, treated later in this chapter, Lieutenant William Calley’s troops, consumed by grief and despair at the loss of a beloved NCO during the Tet Offensive, listened to a fiery sermon from the chaplain commanding them to “wipe the village out.” To many disillusioned soldiers, some chaplains acted as “double agents” who supposedly represented the good inherent in all humanity while being no more than shells for a military machine whose chief goal was body counts.²⁰³

They talked about chaplains with great anger and resentment as having blessed the troops, their mission, their guns, and their killing: ‘Whatever we were doing—murder atrocities—God was always on our side.’... The men also pointed to the

²⁰¹ Mahedy, *Out of the Night*, 98; Loveland. “From Morale Builders to Moral Advocates,” 237; Joanna Bourke. *An Intimate History of Killing*, 292; A. Ray Applequist, Editor’s Notes: Dissent over Vietnam,” *Chaplain* 25 (May-June 1968):1; Wallace Terry, ed. Haywood T. Kirkland, *Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War*, (New York: Presidio Press, 1984), 91.

²⁰² Joanna Bourke. *An Intimate History of Killing*, 281.

²⁰³ Mahedy, *Out of the Night*, 114; Joanna Bourke. *An Intimate History of Killing*, 280; Robert Jay Lifton, M.D. “Advocacy and Corruption in the Healing Profession,” in Charles Figley’s *Stress Disorders among Vietnam Veterans: Theory, Research and Treatment*. (New York: Bruner/Mazell, 1978), 220.

chaplain's even more direct role in promoting false witness. One man spoke especially bitterly of 'chaplains' bullshit.' He illustrated what he meant by recalling the death of a close buddy—probably the most overwhelming experience one can have in combat—followed by a funeral ceremony pep-talk at which the chaplain urged the men to 'kill more of them.' Another who carried the corpse of his closest buddy on his back after his company had been annihilated described a similar ceremony at which the chaplain spoke of 'the noble sacrifice for the sake of their country' made by the dead.

Despite being young and often undereducated, soldiers in the field possessed enough awareness and common sense to know when chaplains "fed them a line." Robert Jay Lifton pointed out how troops felt when chaplains let them down in their time of crisis.

The men felt that it was one thing to be ordered by command to commit atrocities on an everyday basis in Vietnam but another to have the spiritual authorities of one's society rationalize and attempt to justify and legitimize that process. They felt it to be a kind of ultimate corruption of spirit.²⁰⁴

As they tended to refrain from "chaplain bullshit," combat chaplains on the whole also abjured such exhortations and characterizations and focused instead on their troops' physical and spiritual well-being. Imparting a credible message to their troops regarding killing was an incredible burden on combat chaplains, and they approached the problem

²⁰⁴ Robert Jay Lifton, M.D. "Advocacy and Corruption in the Healing Profession," *The Social Psychology of Military Service*, N.L. Goldman and D.R. Segal (Eds.) (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1976, 45-64), as reprinted by Charles Figley. *Stress Disorders among Vietnam Veterans: Theory, Research, and Development*. (New York, Bruner-Mazell, 1978), 216.

from a variety of perspectives. Sharing the burdens their troops carried offered far better training than any chaplain school or theological seminary. One of the reasons why chaplains endured military training and walked with combat troops was because they believed this would draw them closer to the men and they would be in a better position to give spiritual advice.

Chaplains who admitted that they did not have all the answers and that they could experience the “near occasion of sin” did not lose credibility with their troops. Presenting themselves as fellow travelers through the “desert experience” of combat and moral unrest put the troops more at ease. Chaplain Russel Carver explained that being a chaplain meant more than just taking on the burden of troops struggling with the death of their buddies and fellow soldiers. It also meant walking with them through the wilderness of their internal struggles with conscience. Men raised to adhere to the Fifth Commandment also served in the military, whose business it is to kill. It was an internal conflict that encompassed faith but also a human and social perspective that condemns the act of killing, the act of murder.²⁰⁵

Nietzsche’s dictum was that what is done out of love always takes place beyond good and evil, but the love of the Lord did not always come easily to combat chaplains. In addition, they could stare into the abyss a little too long. Jack Brown treated the enemy wounded and had difficulty remembering their humanity; yet, he continued—even if he did not minister to those men as regularly as he did his own.²⁰⁶ Jim Johnson’s decision “to play offense, defense, and special teams” favored the offense in that he saw

²⁰⁵ Chaplain Russel Carver, Oral Interview by Steve Maxner, Transcribed by Tammi Mikel Lyon. April 20, 2001, (The Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University).

²⁰⁶ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 29; Oral Interview, February 2, 2013.

his troops as the offense. Looking at a burned out hooch, he saw the corpses of two Vietnamese civilians whom the VC had executed and then burned. Johnson hugged the survivors who had lost their parents and was consumed with grief, but soon he sensed another emotion rising within him.

As I walk away from the murder scene, I find myself feeling an inner rage unlike any I have felt before. It's as if a reservoir is full after a huge rain and the pressure on the dam is building. I'd like to find a VC and beat him senseless.²⁰⁷ As he left the scene and walked down the road, he saw dead a VC in the water. I admit I am glad to see these dead VC, but as a Christian, I'm not proud of my feelings. These guys all have mothers and wives and girlfriends, but after what they did to the civilians, I don't have positive feelings for any of them...After what we have been through the past several days, it's hard to see these dead VC as human beings; we see them as good riddance. I'm stunned and sorry about the feeling.²⁰⁸

As with his other feelings, Johnson did not avoid them. He did not let them rule his actions but instead embraced them and gained the insights that would help his troops.

Chaplain Samuel Hopkins noticed that his acclimation to Vietnam included a similar, unnerving discovery.

My partisanship grew rapidly in the midst of trying to stay alive while supporting the people around me. You quickly lose objectivity in battle, and it took a great deal of self-restraint to remain a non-combatant as my chaplain's role required. If

²⁰⁷ Brown, *Another Side of Combat*, 21; Oral Interview, April 20, 2013; Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 198; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

²⁰⁸ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 198, 199; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

I had been authorized to bear arms in a different capacity, I came to realize how enthusiastically the guns would have been put to active use.²⁰⁹

Joe Dulany was unprepared for the feelings of rage and frustration that welled up in him after the death of an admired officer, but he realized that his troops felt the same and that the soldiers at My Lai probably felt the same thing. When Marine Chaplain John J. O'Connor, the future Cardinal Archbishop of New York, learned of the loss of twenty-one Marines on Hill 327 in October 1967, he understood how his surviving Marines struggled to refrain from engaging in retaliation against the village from where the fire came.²¹⁰

Such empathy served chaplains well and helped them interpret combat and killing in a way that upheld the warrior archetype. With more credibility, they could explain that one does not kill from emotion but in protection and defense of self and others. Curt Bowers had few answers, and the Scriptures offered only some help. He invoked Romans 12:18 to encourage his troops in right thinking and “live at peace with all.” He also pointed out that the call of Christ in Matthew 5:44 to “love one’s enemies” did not preclude one from defending one’s self and one’s loved ones. Bowers interpreted combat as turning the other cheek in that the soldier places his body and life in the line of fire in order to protect those whom he loves.²¹¹

When Jack Brown spoke to his troops, he pointed out that the Christian soldier is not a “trained killer” but a defender of lives and liberties. Rather than endorse war, he

²⁰⁹ Samuel Hopkins, *A Chaplain Remembers Vietnam*, (Kansas City, MO: Truman, 2002), 261.

²¹⁰ Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 54, 73, 7; O'Connor, *A Chaplain Looks at Vietnam*, 52.

²¹¹ Joanna Bourke. *An Intimate History of Killing*, 273; Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 135, 198; James Johnson, *Oral Interview*, February 2014; Bowers, *Forward Edge of the Battle Area*, 34-38, 77; NAB, Romans 12:18: “If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.”

upheld the duty of the individual soldier and the Christian faith to answer the call to help. Soldiers must fight to protect against those who would invoke the “iron rule” of taking from others through strength and to maintain the hope and expectation that swords will one day become ploughshares. He noted that he saw a soldier give a drink of water to a blindfolded VC prisoner—an act of kindness, compassion, and unselfishness that upheld the best tenets of the warrior tradition—a tradition that upheld the soldier as a man of Christ.²¹²

Robert Falabella approached the problem by distinguishing the difference between killing in defense and murder—the wanton taking of another’s life. While the former is allowable in certain circumstances, the laws of God and humanity prohibit the latter. He also explained that feelings such as pleasure or guilt were only feelings and had little to do with the intrinsic good or evil of an act. The Fifth Commandment referred to unjust killings, and made no reference to the emotions involved. Eli Takesian’s own moral questions during his time as an infantryman during the Korean War led him directly to the chaplaincy. When he approached the battalion chaplain and began asking earnest questions about God, justice, war, and killing, he received nothing more than a litany of pat answers and an invitation to join the chaplain’s denomination. Dejected but not defeated, Takesian transformed his experience into being honest and open with his troops in Vietnam when they came to him with the very same questions.

What I knew, I shared. When uncertain, I would say something like, “I don’t know the answer; but let’s talk about the question.” It helped them. It helped me.

²¹² Brown, *Another Side of Combat*, 3, 6-8, 58; Jack Brown, Oral Interview, April 2014; Tick, *War and the Soul*, 260.

To be receptive to, and honest with, the young Marine who shares from the depths is basic ministry.²¹³

The Burden of War Atrocities

Being receptive to and sharing the burdens with their troops in the combat zone exposed chaplains to some of the uglier sides of human behavior. Among the chief moral issues that confronted not just combat chaplains but *all* chaplains was the problem of war atrocities. The fog of war can often lead to numerous regrettable acts, but soldiers in war also perpetrate at times grievous crimes against enemy soldiers and citizens. Jonathan Shay writes that American culture held that good character stood reliably between the good person and the possibility of horrible acts.²¹⁴ The Manichean atmosphere of the Cold War upheld the “nobility” of the western world against the “barbarism” of the communist sphere.

Vietnam shattered that dogma. Edward Tick writes that the warrior archetype accepts killing as a necessity but never killing from emotion. Yet, young men, barely out of adolescence, many poorly educated, and fighting a war that rendered them despised and ignored by their own people found themselves overwhelmed by the most base emotions possible. Abject fear and despair punctuated by feelings of frustration and violence assaulted men barely out of pubescence and still in their moral formation. A number of soldiers snapped while others embraced the darkness of their souls and became depraved killers. How then did chaplains in the field attempt to prevent the

²¹³ Falabella, *Vietnam Memoirs*, 38, 72, 73; Oral Interview, April 21, 2013; Takesian, Oral Interview, December 13, 2003.

²¹⁴ Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 31.

moral ruin of their troops' character? How did chaplains respond to the knowledge of atrocities? Finally, where did chaplains stand in relation to *themselves* when it came to hearing of or even witnessing atrocities?²¹⁵ The double burden for chaplains was facing a Catch-22 of either reporting crimes and maintaining their credibility as prophets or remaining within the security of military and taking the chance that crimes might go unpunished.

As with “chaplain bullshit,” not all chaplains lived up to the Cross or Star of David that their faiths represented when they weighed the burden of military duty over religious duty when it came to responding to atrocities.²¹⁶ In a place where the enemy went largely unseen except through their own brutality, observing the niceties of prisoner interrogation was among the first casualties during the Vietnam War. In addition, mutual respect for the dead was optional at best because neither side allowed funerary truces for the other to bury or memorialize their dead in peace. As Jim Johnson’s troops marched down a trail in the Mekong Delta, they passed the corpse of a VC soldier of the side of the road. The smell of death was in the air, and the troops were exhausted to the point of breaking. As they passed the bullet-riddled corpse, Johnson noticed that many of the men took the plastic spoons from C-ration containers and stuck them in the bullet holes. Johnson said nothing to the troops about such a morbid and ghoulish thing, but he did say later that he understood such behavior as coping with death. “There was no shouting or

²¹⁵ Tick, *War and the Soul*, 260; Whitt, “Conflict and Compromise,” 132-133.

²¹⁶ Whitt, “Conflict and Compromise,” 135.

cheering,” he wrote, “but a tired, defiant ‘sticking it to them’ represented by the spoons. A way of emotionally coping with this god-awful war.”²¹⁷

He did express his disapproval with troops who saw killing as a game. After a harrowing chopper ride over a rice paddy and through fire, Johnson’s battalion commander, “the King,” seemed proud of the body count. Johnson felt revulsion.

Proud of killing? This isn’t rabbit hunting. It seems almost as trivial as that. Higher command continuously makes the body counts important. I don’t feel good that some human beings were killed today before my eyes, even though they would have surely killed us without blinking.

I guess it’s okay emotionally not to see the VC as people because to do so might drive us crazy. In later years, it does drive some crazy. It’s easier to see this as a game with points scored, not people killed.²¹⁸

Later, Johnson watched the interrogation of a Vietnamese suspected of being a VC by a Kit Carson scout. The scout held a knife to the throat of his suspect and threatened to decapitate him, which was a violation of the Geneva Convention’s strictures against torture. The suspect then ended his silence with a vigor.²¹⁹ On another occasion, Johnson’s troops took a torch to a Vietnamese family’s hooch, and his conscience began to bother him because he knew that despite the family’s association with the VC, someone’s home was being destroyed. Johnson identified the Vietnamese hooch with his own house back at home in North Carolina.

²¹⁷ Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 57; Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 216; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013; Whitt, “Conflict and Compromise,” 118.

²¹⁸ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 157, 216.

²¹⁹ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 65; Oral Interview, February 2, 2013.

...I'm wondering if I should speak to the battalion commander about hooch burning. If I did, would the command [*sic*] see me as a rabble rouser? But where's the morality of actions like this? Is this just a part of war? Do I just minister to soldiers, or should I have a say in events such as this? In this war, morality has a way of becoming blurred in the quest to survive.

Johnson concluded that the situation was hardly a college course on ethics and kept his silence.²²⁰

At other times Johnson spoke as when he encountered a soldier named Jenkins who posed for a photo taken next to the body of a dead VC. The chaplain grew angry and disgusted at the blatant violation of the Geneva Convention. He spoke to "The King" who reported it to his superiors. Both command and the U.S. Embassy in Saigon reprimanded the man who posed for the photo and the man who took it and then issued stern warnings against the desecration of corpses.²²¹

As Joe Dulany traveled along Highway One, he saw a bulldozer pushing the corpses of NVA soldiers into a common grave. He wondered about the families of soldiers for whom there would be no accounting and noted that Americans took care to tag and identify their own corpses.²²² Later, he struggled with the memory of times when he had knowledge of behavior considered morally questionable in the combat zone and pondered the lessons that future chaplains might use. For instance, he saw South Vietnamese National Police—a.k.a. "white rats" to U.S. servicemen—dragging away

²²⁰ "South Vietnam: After Crossing Over," *Time*, August 23, 1968; Hartle, *Moral Issues in Military Decision Making*, 2nd ed., rev. (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2004), 62; Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 134.

²²¹ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 118; Oral Interview, February 2, 2013.

²²² Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 54.

women behind a hooch for what he thought was interrogation. He then heard piercing cries and screams and could only imagine what was taking place. He turned away without saying a word to anyone. Sometime later, he saw several ARVN officers brutally interrogate a VC soldier by breaking his fingers and then his arm. Then he witnessed the driver of a two-and-a-half-ton run over an old woman intentionally. In all instances, he remained silent but later ruminated whether he should have investigated or done something or at a minimum raised the issue with the commander. Dulany leaves the answer to his readers.²²³

Other times, the chaplain raised his voice. When he noticed a soldier wearing a sun-dried human ear on a necklace, he used his “bully pulpit” and raised the voice of prophecy against desecrating human bodies.

In my service that day and for many days afterwards, I talked about the value of life and questioned how a person could mutilate another human being’s body and feel good about it. Was I laying a guilt trip on the men? Yes, I was. I suggested further that actions such as these made one less than human and that once a soldier took an enemy’s life he had taken all that he needed to take. I maintained that mutilation of a body was a sacrilege.²²⁴

In a similar incident, a chaplain in the First Cavalry Division learned that soldiers were cutting off the ears of enemy dead and wearing them as necklaces. He went to the division chaplain, who in turn brought it immediately to the division commander. The commander then held an officer’s call and proceeded to tell his men in no uncertain terms

²²³ Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 73, 74.

²²⁴ Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 74.

that what constituted a crime in the U.S. was a crime in the First Cavalry, and that they would be prosecuted for it.²²⁵

Chaplain Arnold Resnicoff—a Jewish chaplain—participated in Operation GAME WARDEN, which attempted to drive the Viet Cong out of the Mekong Delta. Resnicoff observed that those in the small boats placed themselves in the gravest peril of ambushes and firefights. On one occasion, a boat returned from a patrol, and the chaplain saw something in the water behind the boat. The boat was towing the corpse of a Viet Cong soldier with a rope tied around its neck. The boat sounded its siren and did what seemed like a war dance, as if the body were a war trophy. Resnicoff stared silently, wondering if what he was witnessing was an atrocity and wondering if he should say something. His commander had no doubts.

He (the commander) grabbed the men off the boat, stood them on the ship next to the wall, and said, ‘I want you to listen carefully. Every time we put on a uniform, every time we are involved in a war, we face two enemies, not one.’ He said, ‘There is always the external enemy, and here it is the Viet Cong. We are going to fight them hard, fight them strong, and fight them smart. But there is an internal enemy, as well—the animal within you that likes what it’s doing, that wants to kill more, and that wants to take control.’

He said, ‘As long as you work for me, you are going to fight both enemies, because if you don’t, then you will remember how to fight, but you will forget what it was that we ever thought was worth fighting for. You are going to fight

²²⁵ Ackerman, *He Was Always There*, 182.

both enemies, or we are going to get to the point where you can't tell the players without a scorecard.'²²⁶

Jerry Autry witnessed his share of questionable deeds by soldiers. When one soldier killed an entire family and another raped a Vietnamese woman, the commander brought Autry in to read the "riot act" to the men. Rather than charge the soldier, though, his commanders wound up paying off the woman's family. Autry forever wondered if they did the right thing in not bringing the soldier to justice, and he wondered how much more of a moral force he could have been. He did step up when he saw an ARVN lieutenant torturing VC prisoners. The officer had stripped the VC (just young kids) naked, was beating the soles of their feet, and had already drawn blood. Autry stopped it.

The lieutenant didn't look pleased. I pulled him aside and reamed him out a little. I told him that it was not right, not good for our soldiers to see, that and if these VC knew something, which I doubted, we could get it another way. Americans, I said, didn't do things this way. He grinned like I was his dad scolding him.²²⁷

The problem of whether to speak up or even out against atrocities could bring down chaplains. No better example existed than the massive cover up that followed in the wake of the My Lai Massacre, which showed how chaplains could be lax in condemning the killing of prisoners and non-combatants.²²⁸ On March 16, 1969, in what became the most notorious moment of the Vietnam War, Charlie Company, Task Force Baker, Eleventh Brigade, Americal Division, under the command of Lieutenant William

²²⁶ Resnicoff, "Three Pillars of Leadership," *The Reporter: Judge Advocate General's Corps*, Vol.35, No.4, 2008, 163.

²²⁷ Autry, *Gun Totin' Chaplain*, 188; Oral Interview, May 20, 2013

²²⁸ Bourke. *An Intimate History of Killing*, 280, 283.

Calley assaulted two hamlets of Son Mỹ village in Quảng Ngãi Province. The U.S. Army called the villages My Lai 4 and My Khe, and the code word for the alleged Viet Cong stronghold in that area was Pinkville. Calley's soldiers—exhausted and on edge from the recent Tet Offensive—massacred more than 500 villagers, including women and children, until three U.S. servicemen halted the killing and protected the remaining villagers. The Army commanders covered up the truth of what happened at My Lai until Seymour Hersch's exposé in *The New York Times* more than eighteen months later brought the house crashing down on the Army and the war in Vietnam.

According to the Peers Report, which investigated the massacre, two chaplains, Carl Creswell and his superior Francis Lewis, were involved in the cover-up of the incident.

Having received from WO1 Thompson serious allegations of improper conduct by elements of TF Barker, he [Creswell] failed to report the matter to his commanding officer (Division Artillery Commander) or to the SJA, or the IG. After he reported the matter to CH Lewis and received no satisfactory response, he took no effective action to insure that a proper investigation would be conducted.²²⁹

A commission established by the United Church of Christ (UCC) some time later concluded a report of its own on My Lai in faulting the chaplains for not acting as restraints and then not following up their objections in light of My Lai. Creswell had gone through official channels when he learned of the massacre. He did not follow-up

²²⁹ W.R. Peers, *The My Lai Inquiry* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1979); Peers Report; 333 (10-39, 40; 11-13; 12-23, 27).

through command channels, choosing instead to work through the more informal “chaplain channels.” For his part, Lewis conducted his own private inquiry, but then ceased probing when he got nowhere. The UCC task force also criticized the Character Guidance and Code of Conduct training by chaplains in that such programs sought to underpin patriotism with religion rather than instill morality during war. The commission concluded that the Army denigrated the chaplain’s role as a moral force and relegated him to being a mere house priest. Reflective of the new and secular theology of the 1960s. The task force also said with conviction that “we reserve his (the chaplain’s) right to speak for God against the nation and its policies under the gospel.”²³⁰

The Peers Commission’s summary of the role of the two chaplains was equally harsh.

It is clear from the actions—and the acts of omission—of Chaplains Lewis and Creswell, that while both were aware of the serious nature of the charges alleged by WO1 (Hugh) Thompson, neither took adequate or timely steps to bring these charges to the attention of his commander. It should have been evident to both of these chaplains that the idea of conducting an investigation of a war crime through chaplain channels was preposterous.²³¹

Creswell felt betrayed by the Army, but his assessment of his own conduct amounted to prophecy. He regretted not having done more to stop the atrocities,

²³⁰ Robert McAfee Brown, “Military Chaplaincy as Ministry,” in Cox, *Military Chaplains*, 144-145; Loveland, *Change and Conflict*, 47; Loveland. “From Morale Builders to Moral Advocates,” 237-238; Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 72; United Church of Christ, “Ministries to Military Personnel,” 81, 82, 86; Loveland, *Change and Conflict*, 45.

²³¹ Peers Commission, 10-40; Hugh Thompson was the warrant officer who landed his helicopter between Calley and the Vietnamese civilians and threatened to shoot Calley unless he ordered his men to cease fire. In this way, Thompson saved scores of civilian lives although he was at first branded a “traitor” by several U.S. Congressmen.

especially after the war. “In hindsight, I feel I should have done more...,” he said. “God forbid that in a similar situation, any chaplain should ever be content with the actions I took.”²³²

The massacre at My Lai damaged the credibility of chaplains as much as it did the entire Army, but the Office of the Chief of Chaplains and numerous individual chaplains defended chaplains and the institution of the chaplaincy. They made no excuses for My Lai or the cover up, but they pointed out that the massacre was an aberration because their religious and military training instilled in them two basic principles: on the military level, CAPs were effective in inoculating soldiers from brutality, and chaplains’ theological training led them to believe that American soldiers were basically good. Secondly, several chaplains pointed out that there was no chaplain present with Calley’s troops when they assaulted My Lai. The chronic shortage of chaplains meant that there was no respected voice that might have halted the indiscriminate killing.²³³

When chaplains did protest, they did it through channels rather than in a public way that would smack of grandstanding. They accepted that serving two masters did present limitations on their prophetic voices, but they were emphatic that limitations did not constitute erasure. Chaplain Clarence Reaser stated that chaplains did not make public policy or exert sufficient influence to change it; thus the role of chaplains was “neither to alter administration policy nor to defend it.” In short, it did no good

²³² Erik Blaine Riker-Coleman, “Reflection and Reform: Professionalism and Ethics in the U.S. Army Officer Corps, 1968-1974,” 3nl, 20, Chapel Hill, NC, 1997; Seymour Hersch, *Cover-Up*, 138, 177; Goldstein, Marshall, and Schwartz, *My Lai Massacre and Its Cover-up*, 267-268, 312, 334, 337-338; Cresswell quote in Venzke, *Confidence in Battle*, 159; and in Earl F. Stover, “Army Sponsors Ethics Workshop,” *CC* 93 (October 20, 1976): 904; and see also Newby, *It Took Heroes*, 52, 62.

²³³ OCCH, *Historical Review*, 1965-66, 149-50; OCCH, *Historical Review*, 1969-70, 45-46; OCCH, *Historical Review*, 1969-70, 47.

criticizing the President and Congress while serving the troops. To those who claimed that fear of reprisal silenced many a chaplain, Chief of Chaplains Gerhard W. Hyatt categorically denied any evidence of commanders imposing undue influence on chaplains. Chaplain John Himes noted that institutional structures existed in both official channels and chaplains channels that favored the prophetic voice.²³⁴

My Lai nonetheless placed an onerous burden on the chaplaincy even though chaplains like Claude Newby possessed the rectitude to speak up and out against atrocities such as the one perpetrated against a young Vietnamese woman named “Mao.” In what became known as “The Incident on Hill 192,” later reported in an article in *The New Yorker*, four U.S. soldiers in a five-man recon team abducted a Vietnamese girl named Mao, whom they then raped and later murdered. The fifth man, code-named “Sven Ericson,” refused to participate and reported it to his commanders. When he felt that they were not pursuing the matter, “Sven” went to Newby.²³⁵

A veteran of the field, Newby saw in “Sven” the remorse of someone who felt he had not done enough to save Mao’s life. He shouldered the moral burden with the anguished infantryman and contacted the CID (Criminal Investigation Division) and then his Mormon elders. An issue arose when Newby later served “Sven’s” infantry battalion. He had requested an infantry assignment, but the knowledge of the crime placed him on a tightrope because the four accused soldiers were now under his ministerial care. The

²³⁴ Hughes, “Chaplain’s Dilemma about Viet Nam,” iv; Austill and Wells, “More on the Military Chaplaincy,” 467; Reaser, “Military Chaplain,” 73; Clarence L. Reaser, “Why This Ministry?” *Chaplain* 29 (Winter Quarter 1972): 42; Loveland, *Change and Conflict*, 54; “Why the Chaplaincy?” *Lutheran Witness* (May 1971): 9.

²³⁵ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume I*, 62-63; the 1969 *New Yorker* article by Daniel Lang was titled “Casualties of War” and later became the subject of a major motion picture in 1989 under the same title starring Michael J. Fox, Sean Penn, John C. Reilly, and John Leguizamo and directed by Brian de Palma.

chaplain had to counsel the four without giving away what he knew or hearing privileged information that he already knew and to which he would testify. Newby had to put aside his feelings of contempt for the men in order to minister to them effectively. Yet another problem was the fear that Captain Vorst, his battalion commander, might find out that it was he who had sent “Sven” to the CID. Vorst, however, had reported the incident himself only to have the battalion commander quash it.²³⁶

Newby was courageous in the stand he took to help “Sven,” but even he admitted to some failings. He acted the prophet when he was in the field—but not at first. In the case of Mao, Newby spoke up after the fact and after he had been in country for some time and was more comfortable with the military system. During his tour Newby took a souvenir, an NVA helmet from a dead soldier. The taking of souvenirs was problematic for soldiers as some “souvenirs” involved the desecration of the dead. When he saw two ARVN officers torturing a VC soldier with electrodes attached to the man’s genitals, he was at a loss as to what to do, reflecting the lack of training in chaplain school for addressing atrocities. However, he later put his foot down with his own troops who had captured a VC and were walking the prisoner along the edge of a cliff by the sea. It was dark, so the soldiers were not aware that a chaplain overheard them predicting that the prisoner would have an “accident” and fall off the cliff. A sharp word from Newby quashed the talk and committed the prisoner to the chaplain’s care. Newby’s presence on another occasion saved two more VC prisoners—a male and a female—from an “accidental” death.²³⁷

²³⁶ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume I*, 59, 60, 99.

²³⁷ Newby, *It Took Heroes, Volume I*, 35-36, 138, 236; Newby, *It Took Heroes, Volume II*, 58; Whitt, “Conflict and Compromise,” 137-138.

Conclusion

Confronting the moral ambiguities and outrages of Vietnam was perhaps the hardest burden borne by combat chaplains during the war in the Vietnam. A. Ray Applequist writes that the existence of the military chaplaincy does not constitute an endorsement of war and killing. Wearing the uniform of the military does not exclude one from the human race and that those who wear it are owed the same Christian concern for their spiritual well-being as civilians. Chaplains suffered (and thus identified) with their troops in order to be effective ministers. The problem arose because chaplains occupied that liminal space between war and morality. Evading the questions of the troops about morality or providing pat answers rife with jingoism undermined their credibility.²³⁸ Between a rock and a hard place was pleasant ground compared to the moral conundrum faced by chaplains who wanted to be with their troops. The double burden of combat chaplains came because they shared the burdens with their troops and ventured close to the darkness. As a result, combat chaplains had a more difficult time answering the moral questions posed by their troops. They overcame the complexity of their situation by admitting that they did not know the answers, avoiding doctrinal and patriotic pronouncements, and carrying themselves as moral men amidst the immorality of war. In speaking up for morality and walking through the “dark night of the soul,” chaplains not only earned the respect of their troops. They admitted to themselves the burdens they carried as prophets and healers.

Burdens they would work diligently to put aside.

²³⁸ A. Ray Applequist, “Editor’s Notes: Dissent over Vietnam,” *Chaplain: Volume 25* (May-June 1968),1.

SECTION II – RELIEVING THE BURDEN
CHAPTER VIII – MINISTRY TO THE TROOPS

“He just wanted to be with the Grunts. He was more Marine than anything else.”

– Chaplain Eli Takesian, on the ministry of Fr. Vincent Capodanno²³⁹

Chaplains who carried the *capella* into the combat zone believed that their first and foremost duty lay in ministry to their troops. They also believed that the *capella* offered peace and relief when it was closest to those whom they served; thus, bringing it to the troops what chaplains called “ministry.” Ministry carries a number of connotations, but Jacqueline Whitt and other historians call military ministry “occupying liminal space” because chaplains in combat zones anchored soldiers to their humanity by conveying the presence of God in their lives. Jonathan Shay describes chaplains’ ministry as part of what he called a “fiduciary assumption” by the military; that is, the military and civilian structure that provides for and supports the soldier is a *moral* (my italics) structure. The military thus becomes a trustee in that it holds the life and safety of the soldier as tantamount, and chaplains became the “front line soldiers” in that task. Edward Tick writes that proper care and respect for warriors illuminates the “fiduciary responsibility” of the both the military and the civilian worlds.²⁴⁰

Among those who assumed the “fiduciary responsibility” were combat chaplains. Even when they went into combat with their troops, combat chaplains could not protect soldiers from bullets and shrapnel. Nevertheless, they saw their presence as reinforcing that fiduciary responsibility because they held soldiers’ spirits in their care, and the most

²³⁹ Mode, *The Grunt Padre*, 128-130.

²⁴⁰ Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 14-15; Tick, *War and the Soul*, 77.

important aspect of a soldier's spirit was his connection to humanity. This was no easy task for chaplains, who served two masters, balanced the tenets of their faith with what the military expected of them, and worked in the most inhumane of conditions. In bearing this aspect of the double burden, combat chaplains saw their ministry in terms of presence—with the soldiers in the field and on base, to the families through correspondence, counseling the troops, and by advocating for them whenever possible. Their ministry conveyed to the troops and their families a sense of hope: for their safety, in making it through the carnage with their humanity intact, and that their sacrifices would not be in vain. In so doing, chaplains reinforced their own sense of mission, relieved the burdens they and their soldiers carried, and gave them hope that transformed them both during and after the war. Relieving such burdens transformed them mere attendees to soldiers' immediate needs to carriers of hope that soldiers would reach peace and healing.

Ministry of Presence

Relieving such burdens required—more than anything else—being present with their troops. Anne C. Loveland writes that the most important contribution chaplains made to morale during the Vietnam War was “ministry of presence.” When John XXIII became Pope and convened the Second Vatican Council, one of the major platforms in his program to update the Church was to encourage priests and religious to “reengage the faithful” through a vibrant, missionary-style of ministry.

Missionary activity is nothing else and nothing less than an epiphany, or a manifesting of God's decree, and its fulfillment in the world and in world history, in the

course of which God, by means of mission, manifestly works out the history of salvation.²⁴¹

Catholic chaplains in the Vietnam War heeded the Pontiff's call. Loveland writes that the stated goal of the chaplaincy was to create better soldiers, but chaplains like Ed Wallin looked to help create better men. He decided that his best course of action was to make himself fit enough to "go where the soldiers go." Like Colonel Kurtz in *Apocalypse Now*, the thirty-nine-year-old chaplain went to jump school and in just three months got himself better shape than many soldiers half his age. His efforts earned him a promotion to Major and Senior Catholic Chaplain, and he used his physical fitness to his advantage as he ministered to men in the field.²⁴²

Likewise, Protestant chaplains heard the calls of national evangelists like Billy Graham and their own denominational leaders and saw in the military an opportunity to convey more than just the Word of God. They drew upon a long-standing tradition that dated back to the days of the Apostles. The name of God, according to the Hebraic tradition, is "Yahweh," which means "presence." Chaplains sought to convey the presence of God to the troops and heeded the mandate of Christ because they saw themselves as going out "as lambs among the wolves," with the wolf being death itself—something their troops faced on every patrol. Catholic and Protestant, as well as Jewish, embraced the idea of God as presence and themselves as God's representatives.

²⁴¹ *Ad Gentes*, "On the Mission Activity of the Church," Chapter I, Section 9; http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html.

²⁴² Wallin, Oral Interview, July 15, 2014.

Enduring combat would earn the respect and trust of soldiers far more than they ever did through conducting religious services.²⁴³

Despite positive results, ministry presented obstacles and required extraordinary efforts from chaplains, who possessed the same fears and anxieties inherent to any soldier. Heading into a situation that might mean injury or death was hardly a natural desire. Furthermore, commanders were none too sanguine about “their Padres” humping the boonies with their men on patrol. They felt chaplains could be as “present” as they wanted—as long as they were present on base, in the hospitals, or at the battalion aid stations. Chaplains overcame such obstacles by accepting the very thing they offered to soldiers—hope. Henri Nouwen writes that the foundation of a chaplain’s ministry was hope.

Hope prevents us from staying in the safe place and moving into unknown and fearful territory. That hope allows the minister to enter into with fellow man the fear of death. The minister shows personal concern, express deep faith in the value and meaning of life, and strong hope that confronts death.²⁴⁴

In the combat zone, hope was in short supply; so a chaplain’s ministry tried to convey hope to soldiers dealing with the loss of friends, constant fear of death, and the growing frustration many felt in fighting for a futile cause in a military that did not always have their best interests in mind. Despite the obstacles, all the chaplains interviewed were eager to go out into the field because—despite the fear of death and the

²⁴³ Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 37; Exodus 3:13-14; The name “Jehovah,” often used in reference to God, arose from a false reading of this name as it is written in the current Hebrew text; Matthew 10:16a; Luke 10:3; Loveland, “From Morale Builders to Moral Advocates,” 236.

²⁴⁴ Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, 77.

hideous nature of combat—they knew their place was with the troops. They convinced their commanders that their job was to bring hope to the troops when and where it was needed the most. Their presence—in an arena where death and fear held high carnival—demanded of them sacrifices and efforts that would forever change them and the nature of their vocation.

When considering ministry of presence, two questions surface: first, what constituted “ministry?” Secondly, why did some chaplains go out into the field when they could have stayed behind in the rear? In answering the first question, Jack Brown got to the heart of the matter and wrote that outside of performing religious services for the troops, a chaplain’s ministry in combat consisted of presence with the troops, visiting the wounded, spirituality in the face of death, corresponding with the next of kin, and disseminating religious literature. Robert Falabella explained his philosophy of ministry when he said that it was in essence “service to others rather than self” by providing for the spiritual and moral needs of troops.²⁴⁵

Bernie Windmiller also summed up his reasons for being in the field.

The most important symbol of the presence of God in a combat zone is the Chaplain himself. He is there to be a visible presence of God. I have had several soldiers, as we were on combat operations, say to me, “Chaplain, why are you here, you don’t have to be here?” I always responded by saying I was there because they were there, I was there to let them know God had not forsaken them, and that God loved them. I had many opportunities to counsel with soldiers while on combat operations. Some were fearful, some lonely, some wanting prayer. On

²⁴⁵ Falabella, *Vietnam Memoir*, 11; Oral Interview, April 21, 2013.

one occasion a soldier was brought to me by the car because he had broken down crying. He didn't want to kill anyone. I counseled the commander to get him to the rear since he was not useful as a combatant and was a distraction and could endanger the lives of other soldiers. When soldiers were wounded, when possible, I would offer a pray for them as they waited for the medevac chopper. I along with others gave words of hope and encouragement. During the biggest fight we were in, 19 June 1967 I was able minister to several wounded soldiers and as darkness fell was able to go from fox hole to fox hole and pray for the soldiers. I also visited dozens of soldiers in hospitals praying for healing and the hospital staff.²⁴⁶

Jerry Autry, in his usual manner summed up his presence in the field more succinctly: Vietnam brought out in him “ministry of presence.” A chaplain was present with his troops in the face of danger because *he wanted to be there*. In looking back at his experience, he felt that he was “a man of peace who tried to remind brave warriors about the Prince of Peace.”²⁴⁷

The very definition of ministry explains why some chaplains conducted it in the combat zone. Ministry of presence allowed chaplains to develop relationships of trust and mutual respect between themselves and their troops. Chaplains went where they could when they could, expanding their duties above and beyond what the military expected of them. They went on patrols, but they also served at battalion aid stations to assist the wounded and then visited them in the hospitals. Presence to the wounded gave

²⁴⁶ Windmiller, Oral Interview, September 4, 2012.

²⁴⁷ Autry, *Gun Totin' Chaplain*, 251; Oral Interview, May 20, 2013.

them the first opportunity to be with their troops on the next stage of their odyssey and exhibit to their men an example of faith and courage.²⁴⁸

Ministry of presence thus rendered chaplains both relevant and necessary. As the war progressed and spirits eroded, soldiers expressed their hopelessness with such mantras as “Fuck it” or “It don’t mean nothing.” Such statements were barriers against the carnage and the growing frustration with the military system, but they also contributed to the numbing of soldiers’ souls.²⁴⁹ Many chaplains no doubt felt the same on numerous occasions; nonetheless, their role was to maintain the soldiers’ connection to humanity and give meaning to their experiences. In cases where a soldier’s loss of humanity posed dangers to their fellow troops or themselves, the presence of chaplains became a different kind of lifeline, talking soldiers off the ledge of madness and offering comfort to soldiers suffering the deepest despair.

Each chaplain justified his presence with the troops in various ways. Jerry Autry went out because he chafed at staying on base while the men slogged it in the field, enduring the horrors of combat. Marginalization was the concern of every chaplain, and Autry felt the sting when a brigadier general told him that he needed to stay behind because he did not want his soldiers having to look after him. He described himself as “ticked-off” by being sidelined to the point where he felt inadequate to his tasks. However, after a mortar attack in which he went about blessing the wounded, a sergeant advised Autry to ignore the general. His place was in the field with the men. From that

²⁴⁸ Whitt, “Conflict and Compromise,” 72; Brown, *Another Side of Combat*, 71; Oral Interview, April 20, 2013; Falabella, *Vietnam Memoir*, 11; Robert Falabella, Oral Interview, April 21, 2013; Whitt, “Conflict and Compromise,” 162-163.

²⁴⁹ Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 38.

point, the “gun toting chaplain” shouldered his pack and went out on patrol. In the thick of combat, he made himself as visible as possible for the troops. When there was no fighting, Autry visited as many troops as possible, talking with them and—most importantly—listening to them.²⁵⁰

Jim Johnson couched his decision to go out with his troops in terms of his collegiate football days at Wake Forest. Johnson would “play offense, defense, and special teams.” By that, he meant that he would go everywhere with the soldiers, swim across rivers with them, sleep on the ground with them, eat C-rations with them, and make sure that they saw him throughout their missions. Although he did not couch his ministry in football terms, Vincent Capodanno followed the same ethic. The Marines called Capodanno “the Grunt Padre” and spoke of him with reverence because he went everywhere with his Marines. When he wrote to his sister, he explained his manner of ministry in terms of his Maryknoll charism: to be “needed where he was not wanted and wanted where he was not needed.” Many called Capodanno’s work a “twenty-four-hour ministry” as he donned several hats: information officer, writer of letters, and even cigarette holder for the wounded who could not use their hands. When wounded came into the hospital, Capodanno became a corpsman. He helped doctors and nurses cut clothing off the wounded and then anointing them with minimal interference. His herculean work ethic led many to remark on the gaunt but energetic appearance he possessed that resembled El Greco’s *St. Martin Dividing the Cloak*.²⁵¹

²⁵⁰ Autry, *Gun Totin’ Chaplain*, 86, 115, 117, 165.

²⁵¹ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 29; Mode, *The Grunt Padre*, 56, 100-102.

When commanders demanded that he stay in the rear, Capodanno pointed out that the dearth of chaplains serving in Vietnam made his ministry in the field even more important. According to standards, each company should have had a chaplain, but a chronic shortage of chaplains plagued all branches of the military. With religious denominations divided over the question of involvement in the Vietnam War, not all who might have entered the military chaplaincy did so. Critical shortages, especially in regard to denominational staffing, meant that there were too many of some denominations and not enough of others. For instance, there were less than ten rabbis in Vietnam at one time throughout the entire period of U.S. involvement. During Claude Newby's two tours in Vietnam, he was but one of only a handful of LDS chaplains in Vietnam. The shortage created a strain on the chaplains already in Vietnam, but at the same time made them in even more demand out in the field.²⁵²

Scarcity contributed to the relevance of chaplains like Capodanno. Commanders may have demanded that chaplains remain in the rear, but chaplains willing to slog through the jungle and mud with the soldiers were even more of a premium. When the Marines moved into an area around in Duc Tho, considered a "hot area," Capodanno was the only chaplain to go into the area with the troops. Corporal John Scaffidi related the essence of Capodanno's philosophy and manner of living:

He willingly shared the hardships of his men. He carried a forty pound pack, marched in the wet, cold and hot. The task he performed when in the field in a combat situation was to assist the wounded, but more important, would assist the dying. Our

²⁵² Whitt, "Conflict and Compromise," 7, 76; Slomovitz. *The Fighting Rabbis*, 117.

chaplain was with the grunts, closest to the fighting. Closest to where he would be needed the most.²⁵³

Robert Falabella echoed the same sentiments. The troops were in the field; therefore, he belonged in the field even if not all chaplains sought such jobs. Jack Brown understood that the key to a successful ministry in the field was to be *in the field* with his men. He believed that he needed “walk where they walked” in order to become a better minister to his troops. He had to put aside fear.²⁵⁴

Joseph Dulany tried as often as possible to go into the field and then counsel, visit with, and conduct services for the men after the mission. He would then go to the aid stations and the hospitals to comfort the wounded and pray for the dead. He also forayed into areas not often frequented by chaplains. He sat with the troops in the OC as they drank beer or wherever they gathered, putting them at ease and letting them know he was one of them.

“I struggled at times with my faith as they did. I invited them to join the journey together as we looked to God for faith and assurance. I shared from my heart and conviction with the men. I wept with them at memorial services. I prayed, as best as I could, in the worst situations at hospital bedsides and after enemy contacts. Sometimes, the only thing I could do was to sit with a person.”²⁵⁵

Ministry of presence could also mean the greatest heartache as well as the greatest relief. After an attack, Joseph O’Donnell met with a group of Marines who had lost

²⁵³ Mode, *The Grunt Padre*, 102, 112.

²⁵⁴ Falabella, *Vietnam Memories*, 48; Oral Interview, April 21, 2013; Brown, *Another Side of Combat*, 24; April 20, 2013.

²⁵⁵ Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 41-42, 51.

twenty of their buddies. The bodies had been left for two days before they had been recovered, and both the sight and smell was horrific. O'Donnell put aside the doctrine that the sacrament was for the living rather than the dead, and he did not ascertain whether the dead Marines were Protestant or Catholic. He saw a group of grieving Marines who needed to see that their deceased buddies would be commended to God. He opened each body bag in front of all the men, anointed each corpse, and then joined the Marines in weeping for their lost comrades.²⁵⁶

Sometimes the demand for a chaplain's presence originated from superstition. Troops who equated a chaplain's presence as "going with God" often interpreted it as a shield against danger or even a "good luck charm." As with O'Donnell's administration of the sacrament, most combat chaplains understood the precarious condition of their troops' psyches and refrained from any theological didactic or cold counsel about reality. They allowed their presence to function as a talisman when necessary. When he reached Vietnam, O'Donnell met a young and frightened ensign with whom he became close. He realized his presence with the young officer calmed the young man. When a pilot allowed the chaplain to board and the ensign to wait for the next chopper, O'Donnell saw the fear and isolation in the officer's eyes. He informed the pilot that he would not board the chopper unless the pilot took along the young officer as well.²⁵⁷

Claude Newby played the rabbit's foot on several occasions. A LOH pilot named Hodson had been asking the chaplain to ride along as a "good luck charm." Hodson had flown several missions for a number of months without taking a hit and felt that he was

²⁵⁶ O'Donnell, "Clergy in the Military, Vietnam and After," 220.

²⁵⁷ Whitt, "*Conflict and Compromise*," 153; O'Donnell, "Clergy in the Military, Vietnam and After," 218.

no longer playing with the house's money. So on the day before Thanksgiving, 1969, Newby rode in the co-pilot's seat as the chopper scanned the countryside for VC positions and called in fire. For the first time, Hodson's aircraft took two rounds from a 30-caliber machine gun, but they made it back in one piece. Hodson credited Newby with protecting him from death. The chaplain credited a higher power.²⁵⁸

Higher powers were sometimes necessary for the effort ministry required, especially when it came to travel. They had to shuttle from unit to unit as well as going out into the field with their men whenever possible. Some used jeeps while others had their own helicopters at their disposal to visit their troops in remote jungle outposts and FSBs.²⁵⁹ Most of the time, though, chaplains were somewhat of an afterthought when it came to providing transport. Joe Dulany and Chaplain Haas, a Catholic priest, requested an expanded assignment in their area. They would fly via helicopter to the forward LZs and fire support bases to conduct religious services and counsel soldiers. When he joined the 1st Air Cavalry—where he knew the action was, his logistical plan was to keep in close contact with the supply choppers and hitch rides on them in order to cover the most ground and minister to the largest number of men.²⁶⁰ Food and mail deliveries meant delivery of the chaplain as well.

Presence was so important to the chaplains that they sometimes gave little heed to the chain of command and even chose ministry over their military careers. Vincent Capodanno applied for an extension of his tour, which was rare for chaplains but totally

²⁵⁸ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume I*, 502; *Volume II*, 271.

²⁵⁹ Ackermann, *He Was Always There: The U.S. Army Chaplain Ministry in the Vietnam Conflict*, (Washington, D.C. Office of the Chief of Chaplains, Dept. of the Army; First Edition, 1989), v.

²⁶⁰ Slomovitz, *The Fighting Rabbis*, 116; Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 34, 41, 50.

in character for the Maryknoll. His end run around the chain of command to secure that extension was also typical. He sent his application directly to the commanding general of the First Marine Division rather than the chaplain commander. Capodanno's circumvention continued until midmorning on September 4, 1967. He once again bucked the chain of command in order to be with Mike Company of the 3rd Battalion/5th Marines at their aid station during what was known as Operation SWIFT. The chaplain had a premonition that what the Marines considered a routine search-and-destroy operation around the hamlet of Dong San would require his presence. Capodanno approached Richard Kline, First Sergeant of Company M, one of the two units sent into Dong Tam to assist at an LZ and aid station. He requested that he join the two companies, but Kline would not even bring the request to his commander. Capodanno brought it up with the commander himself, who let him go despite his reservations. Eli Takesian had also requested and received permission directly from his regimental commander, so the two chaplains followed each other on choppers into the heart of hell with their Marines.²⁶¹

Sometimes ministry of presence collided directly with the chickenshit of officers and even senior chaplains. When he had to defend his ministry, Claude Newby could circumvent the chain of command and even exercise open defiance at times. The chief problem Newby had with Captain Root, mentioned in Chapter 4, was that an atheistic officer not only resented his ministry but also hindered it. Only Newby's threatening the officer with a report to command got him to relent. Newby even had to defend himself against those like Chaplain Frank, whose inherent dislike of Mormons led him to charge Newby with not being an attentive enough minister. Newby was hurt that a colleague

²⁶¹ Mode, *The Grunt Padre*, 106-107, 126-127; Takesian, Oral Interview, December 13, 2002.

and fellow man of God acted in such a way; but he was also hurt because someone had challenged the very foundation of why he had gone to Vietnam.²⁶²

On the other end, Newby's ministry caught the attention of a colonel from Fort Bragg, who expressed a desire to promote him to brigade chaplain. Newby prayed that it would not happen because a promotion would have removed him from the very thing that had made him stand out to the brass. Though, he found out later that it would have been a fantastic career move, he remained firm in his conviction that his place with his soldiers in the field. He would not have employed the appellation, but Newby had no desire to join the ranks of REMFs like Chaplain Frank at division headquarters or stateside and preferred to minister to his troops in the Air Cavalry.²⁶³

As combat chaplains defined their ministry as presence and then defended it, so also did they define how they would be present to their troops. To "be there" was not enough. Presence also demanded function, and function included acting as "ministers of information" to both soldiers and their families. Combat soldiers treated information of any sort as gold and wanted to learn of what went on with their fellow comrades in other battle zones. Families of both wounded and dead soldiers often learned of what had happened to their sons from their chaplains. Carrying and finding out information may have been a heavy task, but chaplains embraced such ministry with the knowledge that they served the soldiers and families and made themselves relevant. Jim Johnson served as chief carrier of information about the battle to the wounded. His rationale for doing so was that it allowed him to cope with the horror of battle. He explained that a unit's

²⁶² Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume I*, 396-398; Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume II*, 141, 165.

²⁶³ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume I*, 410; Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume II*, 178.

chaplain had access to tactical and hospital sources that regular soldiers did not have. Their mobility and access to sensitive areas created pressure on them to gather and report, but they took upon themselves gathering information from wounded and informing commanders. Few commanders or doctors ever chased away a chaplain querying about his troops. They then passed along information to soldiers and families that either gave them comfort or closure regarding their comrades and/or their sons. On New Year's Day 1968, Johnson declined an invitation to go out on a short patrol with a platoon, believing his place to be with the majority of the company. Only three minutes into the patrol, the VC hit the patrol hard, so the commander called in artillery fire as a New Year's present to the VC. Johnson became a one-man news network as he moved from company to company, telling all about the patrol and assuring the commander about evacuating the wounded.²⁶⁴

Information conveyed presence to the troops, but that also extended to their families. Although not an official duty, combat chaplains took it upon themselves to write letters to the parents of the wounded and deceased. Again, very Cold War rhetoric or laudatory remarks about the "great sacrifices" of the soldiers stained the pages of condolence letters. Rather, chaplains like Joseph O'Donnell wrote that passing on personal information eased the pain of bereaved parents and let them know that their sons died in the presence of those who loved and cared for them.

²⁶⁴ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 60, 105, 140-141; Whitt, "Conflict and Compromise," 111.

Just about every minister knows that the most difficult part of dealing with grief and loss is notifying the next of kin. In the military, sadly, those calls came frequently during the Vietnam War, as in every other conflict.²⁶⁵

Jerry Autry found writing letters of condolence tough because he took each one personally. In fact, he agonized so much over what to say in each that he created a backlog of letters. The better he knew the soldier, the longer it took to write them because he became wracked with grief and regret. He eased his burden when he developed a form letter into which he could insert a personal line or two for the families. Joseph Dulany struggled as well when he wrote letters of condolence. He also personalized each one of the letters so that the families would know that he was not just sending a form letter.²⁶⁶

Vincent Capodanno wrote letters to which many families later paid tribute for the kindness and consideration contained within them.²⁶⁷ When Lieutenant Massa died from a VC mortar, his death profoundly moved Jack Brown. Massa had been such an example as a soldier that he saw it as his sacred responsibility to write Massa's wife. He expressed to her what her husband meant to him and the troops. In so doing, he offered relief not only to Massa's bereaved wife but also himself.²⁶⁸ On the whole, troop morale improved when they knew that even if they perished in combat, there was someone who could convey the news to their loved ones in an appropriate manner.

Letters of condolence were not the only means by which chaplains conveyed presence. Each soldier carried with him his own personal *capella* in the form of

²⁶⁵ O'Donnell. "Clergy in the Military, Vietnam and After," 224.

²⁶⁶ Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 49.

²⁶⁷ . Mode, *The Grunt Padre*, 78-79

²⁶⁸ Autry, *Gun Totin' Chaplain*, 90; Oral Interview, May 20, 2013; Brown, *Another Side of Combat*, 26; Oral Interview, April 20, 2013.

keepsakes. Photographs of loved ones, various medallions, and the occasional good luck charm gave soldiers contact with the world. Many asked their chaplains to hold such treasures for safekeeping. Conversely, chaplains gathered items from home to give comfort to the men and help them feel closer to their families. Holidays were the best times, and Vincent Capodanno offered comfort to the men in the field in the form of Christmas gifts from home.²⁶⁹ If a soldier died in combat, chaplains like Jerry Autry sent home the personal items of the troops as mementos for their families. Sometimes, the families in gratitude sent back a variety of goodies to the chaplain to share with their loved ones' comrades.²⁷⁰ A chaplains' presence meant that troops and families, coping with the deaths of comrades and loved ones, could develop closeness with each other and maintain a human connection amidst the overwhelming grief.

Ministry of presence did not even have to carry with religious connotations. Serving two masters worked to a chaplain's advantage when they set an example of military professionalism or offered a simple word of advice. Leading by example became a hallmark of Claude Newby, who himself had served prior to his chaplaincy. Near the end of a patrol, he noticed that his troops were languid and exhausted, the best recipe for disaster in the field. Fighting off his own fatigue, he began digging in for the night in view of his troops. The simple act of doing a soldier's job broke the men out of their weariness from the day's patrol, and they dug in and secured their position.

Newby did not claim any inherent toughness. His training and experience led him to focus on the job as a means of rallying his troops from depression and ennui. Presence

²⁶⁹ Mode, *The Grunt Padre*, 94-95.

²⁷⁰ Autry, *Gun Totin' Chaplain*, 237; Oral Interview, May 20, 2013.

thus could be complex as advising a green commander or as simple as stacking rucksacks around a wounded trooper in anticipation of an airstrike. Having just joined a company that had come in from patrol, Newby noticed that the new company commander had placed his FOB in an open (and therefore unsafe area) and that the troops were doing everything but digging in for the night. He tried to take the commander on the side to admonish him to improve perimeter security and FOB preparation. After some resistance and harsh words, the contrite commander solicited Newby's advice and then improved security the next day.²⁷¹

As much as such actions helped the men, few things exhibited ministry of presence more than courage in the face of fire. On March 12, 1968, Newby had hardly returned to the field for his second assignment with the 1/5 before his "spider sense" started tingling. He felt that Charlie Company would be needing his ministry on that day. He hopped a chopper to the Bon Son Plain, which he claimed a wise choice when he saw the drawn and haggard faces of the young soldiers. Not more than twenty minutes into his second tour, Newby heard the familiar sounds of sniper fire coming from NVA positions in the trees. Sp4 John Bezdan was shot in the thigh and collapsed on the field. Closest to Bezdan, Newby made a slow crawl toward the wounded trooper despite withering fire. A more nimble medic then joined him, and both carried the wounded trooper back to the perimeter. Newby had barely introduced himself to the company commander; but everyone in the battalion knew of the chaplain who displayed no compunction about going out into fire.²⁷²

²⁷¹ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume II*, 91, 106-107, 141.

²⁷² Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume II*, 38-41.

Vincent Capodanno's presence during the battle of Dong Tam on September 4, 1967, seemed to give evidence of bilocation as he ministered to the Marines. Corporal Thomas Forgas, a twenty-year-old Marine, recalled that Capodanno walked everywhere and spoke soft but firm words to everyone that eased the fears of the men. He encouraged the Marines not to panic and do their jobs. When his platoon took refuge in a bomb crater, the chaplain heard a radio message that another platoon was pinned down and on the verge of collapse. Capodanno leapt out of the crater and carried PFC Stephen Lovejoy and his bulky but all-important radio to the perimeter. Running back down the hill again, the chaplain gave his gas mask to a Marine choking on tear gas. He carried out the wounded men, getting some to the aid station and giving Last Rites to others. Even after he was wounded, Capodanno's calmness so impressed Chaplain John D. Keeley, the Division Chaplain, that he summed up the actions of his junior officer.

Chaplain Capodanno's action on that day symbolized an idea of the ministry to men in combat that transcended the immediacy of personal sacrifices and illuminated a concept of ministry which became unique to Vietnam, the ministry of adaptation that enabled a chaplain to be present as much as possible when needed.²⁷³

Counseling

Capodanno offered courage as a sign of God's presence to the men on the battlefield. However, he added to his ministry with calm words in the midst of the attack. As if the bullets and mortars did not exist, combat chaplains counseled soldiers in the

²⁷³ Mode, *The Grunt Padre*, 128-130.

midst of battle. Rather than distracting them from their mission or endangering them, the words of a chaplain could steady and focus young men filled with overwhelming fear. Of course, counseling took place in other places, and both chaplains and troops preferred the “quiet” of a base.

After sacramental duties, counseling the troops in the field comprised the most important official duty of a chaplain. Many chaplains’ training after their theological studies was in counseling and social work, and a number of combat chaplains went to Graduate School in counseling after the war. Their position as religious men and their presence to the troops in the field facilitated the ease with which many soldiers approached them as they sought advice and assistance with both the mundane and the profound. Since the military did not shelter psychiatrists with the rules of privilege, soldiers did not always open up to them. As a result, the few available chaplains—one for every 1,400 men—were called upon to shoulder the responsibility of counseling. They were needed by soldiers who were grieving, guilt-ridden, or wanted to confess to atrocities. Chaplains helped young troops deal with the emotions of battle, addressing questions of death and guilt in the arena of war. As the war progressed and grew increasingly unpopular, though, they also dealt with drugs, racism, and distrust of the military as well. Chaplains were not unlike other soldiers in that they developed closeness with those whom they counseled. The spiritual and moral nature of their position as chaplain also magnified the connection they had with their men. The burden that chaplains faced when it came to counseling was that they needed to balance human

care and compassion for the men without showing *too* much humanity or they ran the peril of being rejected by their own troops.²⁷⁴

Soldiers in need of the most counseling were those whom Jonathan Shay describes as in the “berserk state.” A psychiatrist who examined combat trauma and its effects on the human psyche, Shay defines the term from old Norse etymology. A soldier so enraged or despairing as to lose all sense of himself will fight in an uncontrollable, trance-like fury. Shay draws an effective parallel between the “berserk state” of Vietnam Veterans and that of the hero of Homer’s epic poem *The Iliad*, Achilles. The injustice of his overall commander Agamemnon, the futile and destructive war before the gates of Troy, and the sudden loss of his best friend Patroclus leads Achilles to such fury that he has commits horrible acts on field, culminating in the death and desecration of the Trojan hero Hector.

Shay points out that the several millennia have not erased the parallels between Achilles and soldiers in Vietnam. As Achilles’s berserk state began with the pettiness of Agamemnon, so Vietnam soldiers withdrew emotionally in the face of chickenshit. There might have been no equivalent in Homeric Greek, but Achilles certainly thought along the lines of “Fuck it. It don’t mean nothing.” Only in the heat of battle and devastated by the loss of his friend Patroclus did Achilles rise with a fury, kill Hector, and then desecrate his corpse. In Vietnam, soldiers awakened from their own despondency only to reach down into the darkest corners of their souls and destroy

²⁷⁴ Joel Osler Brende and Erwin Randolph Parson, *Vietnam Veterans: The Road to Recovery*, (New York: Plenum Press, 1985), 71; Slomovitz. *The Fighting Rabbis*, 117; Whitt, “Conflict and Compromise,” 142.

(rather than just kill) the enemy. Like Achilles, when confronted with their own actions, they looked for help to make sense of what they had done and seek forgiveness.

Achilles had his Nestor. The grunts and officers in Vietnam turned to their chaplains. Soldiers who went berserk became disconnected from the living. Through counseling, chaplains ushered soldiers across the bridge of forgiveness and peace to reunite them with temperance and the living. Combat chaplains had more credibility with soldiers and could bring them back to their humanity because they walked the same path of frustration, grief, rage, and desire for vengeance. Jack Brown, despite his own shock and horror at the dismemberment of Lt. Massa, had to put his grief aside to help the troops struggling with Massa's death.²⁷⁵ Robert Falabella thought he might be able to enjoy a good morning when he heard the brief sound of firing and then the report that the VC had ambushed a patrol.

Two of our men were killed just a little way from the perimeter. Their bodies are brought in. I see them. One had talked to me the night before. He had only a few weeks before returning to the States. Neither of us realized he would be returning home before then. The bodies are covered and a helicopter is called to remove them to graves registration. Mercifully for the living the copter is there quickly and the bodies are placed inside. As the copter goes off, a GI comes over to me with tears in his eyes. "We were like brothers, chaplain. Now I'm all alone." He walked away. Another GI came up a little later. "Please pray for me, chaplain. Please pray for me."²⁷⁶

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²⁷⁶ Brown, *Another Side of Combat*, 24; Oral Interview, April 20, 2013; Falabella, *Vietnam Memoir*, 107; Oral Interview, April 21, 2013.

Any time that troops died needlessly or died under any circumstances, comrades looked to assign blame—generals, politicians, even themselves, and sometimes God. In such cases the task and even the presence of the chaplain became more problematic, but presence through counseling relived both soldiers and chaplains soldiers lost in the fog of war. Doing “the job” was relief in and of itself, but counseling soldiers in the field was difficult. The knowledge they could assist their troops led chaplains to accept the burden. Jim Johnson faced the double exhaustion of slogging it out in the field followed by hours of counseling of soldiers once they had returned to base. After a soldier named “Bad Luck” Tony was wounded, Johnson needed to deal with feelings of rage at the VC. However, he had to listen to Lt. “Capable” and then another soldier named “Ben” kvetch about how miserable they were. In another instance, he counseled three troopers named Jose, Chuck, and Richard, who were all slackers and whined about how they did not want to work. The strain led him to consider asking out of the field, but he accepted his role and took solace in knowing he was helping even the most undesirable of soldiers. Jack Brown had to suppress his contempt for men reluctant to return to the field for a variety of reasons. He still had to minister to them.²⁷⁷

What constituted counseling, and what made it effective? Joseph O’Donnell, who counseled Marines in the field and on the hospital ships, identified an effective counselor as one with the ability “to listen with an open heart and soul as well as ears.” A good chaplain also knew when to speak up when necessary but also when to be silent and allow the troops to work their issues through a sympathetic listener. Credibility as a

²⁷⁷ Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 83, 86, 145; Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 99, 112, 117, 137; Brown, *Another Side of Combat*, 65-66.

counselor rested in living what one believed and preaching as a person of faith, hope, and love in the midst of war. When a trooper asked William Mahedy the penultimate question of how God could allow such suffering and death, Mahedy answered with bare honesty. He did not know, but he assured the soldier that he possessed faith and would work the question out together with the soldier. The foundations of counseling, then, laid in truthfulness, willingness to search for the answer together, and maintaining that the love of God existed in the darkest of circumstances. Admitting that one was as human and frail as the soldiers on the ground brought more comfort than pontificating how they were “wiping out godless communism.” Counseling became a method by which chaplains restored both their troops’ and their own morale, such as when Claude Newby visited with small groups of men in Alpha 1-5 after Easter services, counseling and restoring their individual and collective resources.²⁷⁸

Managing time for counseling also was an acquired skill. Claude Newby found it difficult to visit the trainees in their billets, work, or training areas. He realized that his time would be at a premium, so he made it a point to be on hand when stress was at its greatest. Vincent Capodanno had counseled during his missionary work in Taiwan, so he understood counseling in the field better than most. Stanley Beach, a Marine private serving in Capodanno’s battalion, wrote that the Maryknoll’s ministry involved listening and asking questions in such a manner as to allow the men to pour out their hearts to him. He gladly took upon himself being there for his Marines as they spoke of their troubles with wives, girlfriends, or not receiving mail from home. He understood that all Marines

²⁷⁸ O’Donnell, “Clergy in the Military, Vietnam and After,” 221-222; Mahedy, *Out of the Night*, 110; Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume II*, 79.

accepted war as a necessary evil, but he did his best to alleviate the problems war caused for them. Like with all soldiers, the Marines confronted Capodanno with the conundrum inherent to war: why did my buddy die? How could a God who loves allow such suffering and death? Capodanno refrained from dogmatic answers but affirmed that Christ had suffered and that Christ was present with them as they suffered.²⁷⁹

Chaplains may have served two masters, but those like Jerry Autry treated confidentiality as sacred so that soldiers in the field could come to him. Alcoholism, drug use, and venereal disease in Vietnam demanded counseling, and those with substance abuse problems or needing that shot of penicillin often found themselves visiting the chaplain as the first line of defense. How chaplains reacted often made the difference in their effectiveness. Autry had to convince soldiers rotating into the field for the first time that he could be trusted as a source of comfort and would get command involved only when absolutely necessary—such as in the case of alcoholism or drug abuse. Effectiveness could be a relative thing. Joe Dulany doubted his efficacy in counseling three troops who had contracted venereal disease when he entered to find them laughing at the fact that their escapades had only cost them one dollar each. The age of the soldiers—usually the sexual peak for a man—combined with the “near occasion of sin” could be too overwhelming a force for chaplains to overcome.²⁸⁰

While the libido combined with loneliness to create an irresistible force, it paled in comparison to the specter of suicide. Dealing with suicidal troops required presence

²⁷⁹ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume II*, 4; Mode, *The Grunt Padre*, 84; Mode, *The Grunt Padre*, 103.

²⁸⁰ Autry, *Gun Totin' Chaplain*, 204-205; Oral Interview, May 20, 2013; Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 49-50.

through counseling that sometimes placed the chaplain in danger. When a medic holed himself up in a lightless bunker and threatened suicide, Robert Falabella went in alone, blind, and unarmed. Prior to going inside, the priest found out the name of the medic's wife. The two talked quietly, and the medic revealed his fear of combat and shame in believing he was letting his fellow troops down. The chaplain convinced the distraught man to take the rifle from under his chin and then brought in the Battalion Executive Officer, who agreed to have the man moved to a rear post where he could function with dignity. Claude Newby's turn came when a trooper became intoxicated and threatened to shoot "anyone who messed with him." The chaplain approached the man, identified himself, and stood calm while he told the soldier that he would not allow him to hurt anyone—including himself. The soldier blustered for a few more moments and then handed over the weapon.²⁸¹

What often made soldiers drunk and disorderly—and suicidal—was the "Dear John" letter. Written by wives or girlfriends who could not cope with the separation or who found another love interest while the soldier was away, the "Dear John" letter often landed the *coup de grace* to the fragile if not already fractured psyches of combat troops. When any of Robert Falabella's troops came to him after receiving the dreaded missive, he helped them understand that love was no game and could not be forced on others. He wrote in his memoir that love for another person—no matter how intense—cannot create love in the person to whom it is directed, and he shared that belief with his troops. He explained that love for another contains a certain amount of selfishness, but too much

²⁸¹ Falabella, *Vietnam Memoir*, 86-87; Oral Interview, April 21, 2013; Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume II*, 61.

selfishness makes love suspect. Falabella's advice and counseling helped some—although not all—the troops. His willingness to listen to them and share the burden of their pain enabled them to carry on for one more day. As a Catholic priest, Falabella did not have a significant other “keeping the home fires burning,” but many chaplains were married men. Those like Jim Johnson felt the anguish—and suspicion—of soldiers who came in to speak with him because their wives wanted to separate or their girlfriends left them.²⁸²

Another problem that could require a chaplain was when racial relations frayed at the edges. Coming as it did in the 1960s, the Vietnam War featured a military that had been integrated for little more than a decade. The military in Vietnam saw the wholesale integration of black, white, and Hispanic troops. The early years of the war did not feature many racial problems, but the drawdown phase of the war saw suppressed issues bubble to the surface. Chaplains did not have to deal with too many problems, but the occasional flare up did occur. Jim Johnson had to intervene between a black soldier and a white supremacist. When the white soldier's actions and statements got to be too much, Johnson had to take the black soldier aside and talk down the black soldier from enacting fatal reprisals.²⁸³

“Dear John” letters, race relations, and advice on sex, drugs, and alcohol taxed the counseling duties of chaplains; but counseling men wracked with grief over their dead comrades or having caused those deaths themselves was the largest cross they bore. How did chaplains face the problem of explaining the death of some and not others? Jim

²⁸² Falabella, *Vietnam Memoir*, 89; Oral Interview, April 21, 2013; Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 243.

²⁸³ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 108.

Johnson rejected notions of “divine fatalism” or hiding behind “the will of God” and instead spoke in terms of how “God helped those who helped themselves.” He told his troops to adhere to professional standards, do their duties to the best of their abilities, and be ever alert in the field. Such actions did not remove the threat of injury or death, but they reduced the risk. Despite the sage counsel, soldiers died—sometimes because of needless accidents. A soldier dropped his M-16 that discharged and shot his buddy in the face, killing him. Johnson saw the dead soldier and smelled the blood and gore and then saw the grieving soldier. He felt inadequate to the task and regretted not having the proper rituals in the field to help a soldier cope. He discovered, though, that his presence with the soldier and listening to him was enough for the moment.²⁸⁴

Johnson was not alone in feeling inadequate. Joe Dulany counseled a sniper, who shot to death a fellow soldier by accident. All he could do was sit there, listen to the soldier ventiliate, and then offer prayers for his comfort. On July 9, 1967, Claude Newby had just conducted the third of three LDS services and six interfaith services when he met a soldier who had accidentally killed one of his own. Pfc. George Potter had wandered off in the dark, ostensibly to relieve himself. The soldier heard noises from the perimeter and shot Potter. Newby noted that he had almost caused his own chopper to crash and kill his own men, so he was able to empathize with the soldier. In June of 1968, Newby sat with a soldier who had killed two of his buddies, one of whom was his best friend. In a rare twist, the grieving soldier provided his own insights. He pointed out that his leaders had caused the deaths by giving him bad intel.²⁸⁵

²⁸⁴ Whitt, “Conflict and Compromise,” 159; Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 183.

²⁸⁵ Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 103; Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume I*, 201, 392.

Newby did not always reach those whom he tried to console. A company commander, who displayed a flashy but shallow faith, was dejected that his prayers had not protected his men. Newby could not reassure and console the man and never saw the officer again. When a chopper exploded that killed Captain Daniel, Newby tried to minister to LTC Boon and his staff who were disconsolate over the loss, but Newby could barely find solace for himself. In late November or early December, Newby met with Apache Blues leader Lieutenant Gary Qualley. The war became too much for Qualley, and he lost his faith in God. Newby refrained from condemning the man and even sympathized with him. God seemed very absent in the combat zone. Chaplain and officer spoke together for some time. Their conversation was marked by speaking with each other rather than at each other although the officer went away unconvinced.²⁸⁶

Counseling also involved lending an ear to officers cashiered by battalion commanders or generals looking for a scalp, and sometimes it meant talking men into following orders even if meant putting their lives at risk. Jim Johnson had to counsel an officer named “Chip,” who had been relieved by The King (Colonel Hill) for calling in artillery without orders. Chip was angry at The King and thought him an REMF. Johnson saw Chip as an emotional casualty who simply did what he thought best under the circumstances and was victimized for it. All Johnson could do was sit with the weeping officer.²⁸⁷ Claude Newby visited three troopers who refused to go an ambush because they felt it was a suicide mission. Newby listened to each of the men state his respective point and did not reply with any homage to duty or the need for obedience. He

²⁸⁶ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume I*, 347, 398, 505; Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume II*, 108.

²⁸⁷ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 204; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

laid out the facts and explained the consequences of their refusal to go (their certain imprisonment). Then he offered to accompany the men on the ambush. The men declined Newby's offer and went out on the ambush. All three died, and Newby grieved; but he felt no self-recriminations. He understood the nature of war and that the officers who gave the order for the patrol shared the burden with him.²⁸⁸

The death of comrades was not the only time that soldiers needed a chaplain's counsel. The number of civilians killed in the Vietnam War dwarfed American, allied, and enemy dead. Most heartbreaking was the death of children. Jim Johnson watched as medics tried to save a little girl brought to the troops by her grandfather. The little girl had been hit by an American mortar round in her village. (Soldiers mortared villages when they received fire from VC positions within them.) Half of the child's head was gone, and the medics and soldiers all broke down and sobbed along with the *papasan*. Johnson struggled to find the words necessary to console the men because he was also grief-stricken over the death of a young child. Like with Mahedy, Johnson's best counseling involved suffering with them.²⁸⁹

Advocacy

In suffering with their troops, chaplains displayed a willingness to minister to them on the most basic level. Showing care and concern for the spiritual well-being of their troops was effective ministry, but soldiers also looked to chaplains for support that offered them tangible results that would boost their morale or see to their more immediate needs. Combat chaplains responded with a ministry that used the *capella* as a means of

²⁸⁸ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume I*, 96-97, 400-401; Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume II*, 168-169.

²⁸⁹ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 136.

advocacy for the troops. Jerry Autry believed that chaplains' role as intermediaries required them to get the military to do the most it can for the soldiers and to make sure that the needs of the soldiers did not get lost in the maze of bureaucracy.²⁹⁰ Because of their position, chaplains occupied "liminal space" and acted as mediators between officers and the enlisted. They were able to bridge the gap between classes and often races such as when Jim Johnson talked down his black soldier from fragging a white racist soldier.²⁹¹ Advocacy thus meant being a peacemaker in the arena of war. He was not there to fight but to empathize with the men and be there for their day-to-day problems.

Combat chaplains defined advocacy as ministering to soldiers by showing them that "they had their back" such as when Newby recommended that Lt. Col. Peterson visit wounded. It could be as complex as getting command to send a soldier home or to a rear position. Autry went to bat for a sergeant named Henry, an exceptional soldier who snapped and could no longer function in combat. Even with only weeks left in his tour, such an issue could have ruined Henry's career; but Autry knew his qualities and that he had a daughter with spina bifida. The chaplain worked tirelessly for the next several weeks to keep the sergeant out of the fray and finish his tour with dignity and a clean record.²⁹²

Joe Dulany helped relieve the burden of a young lieutenant, emotionally broken over sending his men out on a patrol he knew might mean their deaths.

Approaching the chaplain, the young officer in tears explained his issue. Dulany then

²⁹⁰ Autry. *Gun Totin' Chaplain*, 110

²⁹¹ Whitt, "Conflict and Compromise," 10-11.

²⁹² Newby, *It Took Heroes, Volume II*, 72; Autry. *Gun Totin' Chaplain*, 160-164.

painted the full picture for the lieutenant regarding the consequences to his career but also the regard he had for the officer's convictions. Dulany surmised that the officer had a deep-seated problem and could no longer function in combat. He went to command and helped the young man get transferred to desk duty for the remainder of the war.²⁹³

At times, chaplains had to help soldiers get home to handle family problems. A competent and respected sergeant approached Robert Falabella because his wife had been raped by her landlord, who continued to threaten her and their children. The commander, the executive officer, the company commander, and even the Red Cross signed statements in support of the sergeant. An insensitive REMF at headquarters arbitrarily decided to override the recommendations because he smelled a ruse. Falabella then threatened to hold the officer at HQ responsible should anything befall the sergeant or his family. The man went home. Falabella also helped send home another man whose wife's mental and emotional stability was disintegrating in his absence. Joe Dulany wrote that one of his most difficult tasks was to judge the legitimacy of men who came to him with request for leave because of family issues.²⁹⁴ In all instances, the two masters issue worked to the chaplain's benefit. Aside from the moral issue of compassion for men whose wives were in respective states of peril, both Falabella and Dulany knew that both soldiers would be a danger to themselves and others if left out in the field. He advocated for the men, but in so doing advocated for the military as well.

Despite his counsel to the three men who went out on patrol, Claude Newby could advocate for his troops when he thought patrols were pointless or the strain became too

²⁹³ Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 92-93.

²⁹⁴ Falabella, *Vietnam Memoir*, 91-93; Oral Interview, April 21, 2013; Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 49.

much for them. When several troops suddenly came down with a “malaria infection” in protest of a glory-seeking battalion commander, Newby acted as a go-between. The chaplain explained to the commander that the troops felt put-upon for being “volunteered” for another month’s duty in a hostile AO. In another episode, a company commander named Captain Cain had led his troops well and with courage. However, Cain reached the limit of his endurance and expressed his need to get out of the field. Acting as intermediary, Newby talked to Cain’s commander, LTC Peterson, about the captain’s issues. Newby used the force of his position and ministry to convince Peterson that Cain was a courageous officer, who needed to go to the rear. Peterson approved a transfer the next day.²⁹⁵

Chaplains often had to evaluate soldiers who claimed conscientious objector status. According to the Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, a conscientious objector is an “individual who has claimed the right to refuse to perform military service” on the grounds of freedom of thought, conscience, and/or religion. If draftees or soldiers expressed their objections toward war in general, the military considered it legitimate. If toward the Vietnam War, then the military did not recognize it. Thus, it was the chaplain’s duty to evaluate and comment on conscientious objectors and their veracity in the midst of an unpopular war. Again, combat chaplains found themselves in the best positions to advocate for their troops. Claude Newby had to ascertain the sincerity of the claim of a soldier named Fontana and whether to pull a man out of combat. The soldier’s commander presented Newby with the situation. For his part, Newby recommended that the commander remove Fontana from combat, and he

²⁹⁵ Newby, *It Took Heroes, Volume II*, 41,110.

would interview the soldier. When he talked to Fontana, Newby believed the man's claim and gave him some literature on some LDS conscientious objectors.²⁹⁶

As profound as advocating for transfers, compassionate discharges, and conscientious-objector status were, chaplains also exercised their presence in helping their troops obtain the mundane but necessary items all soldiers needed. Despite William Westmoreland's goal to have the military in Vietnam the best equipped in the world, soldiers consistently suffered from a dearth of equipment. Claude Newby resented the fact that REMFs were well-equipped while his troops in the AirCav went without basic necessities. He did not refrain from complaining when he went to command to help soldiers get basic items like jungle boots, fatigues, poncho liners, and air mattresses. Often the troops financed the war effort by purchasing necessary items. He also decried the lack of respect REMFs gave the personal possessions of his troops, who were fighting to protect those same individuals. Robert Falabella also felt his gorge rise when field troops seemed to get the "leftovers" when it came to boots, fatigues, food and other equipment while rear-echelons got the top-of-the-line equipment. Robert Falabella noted that soldiers had to purchase their own cold beers and sodas, so he (and others) used their own funds or wrote home for funds to secure as much soda as they could get for the troops. Exercising Christian charity, Falabella gave a cigarette lighter to a one-armed infantryman who had lost his lighter earlier. The lighter had been a gift from a grateful lieutenant, but the chaplain figured that the serviceman needed it more than him. Vincent Capodanno was not above using his connections to secure items for his Marines. A

²⁹⁶ Ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16 December 1966 entry into force 23 March 1976, in accordance with Article 49; Whitt, "Conflict and Compromise," 100, 101; Newby, *It Took Heroes, Volume I*, 203.

rather large Marine found himself unable to find any boots large enough to fit his feet, which prevented him from going out into the field with his buddies. Capodanno employed his Maryknoll connections in Hong Kong to have a pair of boots custom made for the Marine. Boots were one thing, gas masks and the like were another story; but Capodanno did not differentiate. During the attack that took his life, the VC and NVA used tear gas. Capodanno realized that a Marine had left his mask behind, so the chaplain immediately handed his over to the infantryman and refused offers from other Marines.²⁹⁷

At times, the greatest service chaplains did was advocate for the safety and dignity of their troops—both in life and death. One of the soldiers to whom Newby ministered was a hapless private named Ronaldo Rodriguez whom the officers derisively nicknamed “Sad Sack.” Common during World War II “Sad Sack” was a euphemistic shortening of the military slang “sad sack of shit” and meant “an inept person” or “inept soldier.” Rodriguez labored under his nickname as the commander gave him busy work to do, which he saw right through and became even more depressed. Newby noted of Rodriguez’s demeanor, so he challenged the company leaders to call him by his real name and assign him tasks other than the most menial. Almost immediately, Rodriguez reacted more positively and showed better morale while the fellow enlisted also reacted positively to this example.²⁹⁸

Robert Falabella raised objections to the Army showing “B movies” to the troops, not so much on moral grounds but because it hyper-stimulated the men without allowing them any outlet for their emotions and feelings. Thus deprived, the soldiers fell into

²⁹⁷ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume I*, 81; Falabella, *Vietnam Memoir*, 25, 26, 130; Oral Interview, April 21, 2013; Mode, *The Grunt Padre*, 78, 129.

²⁹⁸ Newby, *It Took Heroes, Volume I*, 298-299.

depression at the thought that any legitimate sexual outlet they had was on the other side of the globe. Chaplains like Falabella may have been celibate or devoted family men like Windmiller and Johnson, but they were not bereft of physical urges and knew their effects. When a soldier was killed, Jim Johnson went through his effects to send them home to the family. He decided against sending home some nude photos he found in the trooper's foot locker. Even though regulations mandated that all personal effects be sent home to the family of the deceased, Johnson surmised that upholding regulations in this case would only cause more grief for the bereaved.²⁹⁹

Conclusion

Chaplains who ventured into the field with their fellow troops brought a number of skills and gifts with them as they conducted ministry. As trained religious, they specialized in being able to listen to the troops and offer them counsel. However, the greatest gift a chaplain brought to the troops was himself. By nature of just being present to the soldiers in the field, combat chaplains placed themselves at the service of troops in the moments when they needed to know and even feel that a friend was in the vicinity. By placing themselves at risk of injury or death to reassure the troops of their humanity—and sometimes keep safe that humanity in various forms—chaplains found that their ministry took on new dimensions beyond that of just being a “preacher” or a “padre.” It gave chaplains a sense of fulfillment when they proved to their troops that they “had their back.” Dealing with the vagaries and injustices of the military and acting as advocates helped chaplains affirm their soldiers as warriors as well as themselves in the eyes of the military. Their willingness to share their vulnerabilities, to admit that they did not have

²⁹⁹ Falabella, *Vietnam Memoir*, 25; Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 145.

all the answers, and to accompany the troops on the violent and lonely road of war did not just ease the pain and suffering soldiers felt. It relieved themselves of the burdens they carried and gave them further insights into what both they and their troops experienced. Combat chaplains took that acquired knowledge and in turn used it to affect their own transformation both during and after the war.

CHAPTER IX – SACRAMENTAL

“For where two or three have gathered together in my name, there I am in their midst.” – St. Matthew 18:20³⁰⁰

On Sunday, December 24, 1967, James Johnson walked among Alpha Company as they camped near the village of Ben Tre in the Mekong Delta. He spoke of Christmas with the men, asked them about their traditions, and shared his own. The troops were happy to speak of home and take their minds off the incongruent heat of late December, but Johnson worried whether the VC would observe the truce. After Alpha had a brief skirmish with the VC, all went quiet; so Johnson turned his attention to the first of what would be many Christmas services over the next two days. It was not like any Christmas service he had attended or conducted prior to his tour.

We’re muddy. No white shirts, ties, high heels, or stained glass windows in church today. I hope there will be no blood stains either. It’s a warm feeling reflecting on God’s intervention in life through Jesus Christ. Sometimes, though, it’s hard to see or evaluate how or when his intervention comes to this god-forsaken place.³⁰¹

Johnson’s testimony first illustrated how the *capella* took many forms. Secondly, wherever chaplains may have carried the *capella*, it anchored soldiers to the presence of God. The ministry of presence covered in the previous chapter gave young men still in the earliest stage of their lives hope that they would survive and grow beyond their current circumstances. By creating sacred space in which to worship and remember,

³⁰⁰ NAB, 1039.

³⁰¹ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 125; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

chaplains helped soldiers remember that God was present with them—even in places where God seemed anything but present. Conducting worship services in the field, offering sacraments and sacramentals appropriate to each soldier’s religion, and holding memorial services for the fallen—often the most powerful function of a chaplain—served as powerful reminders of hope for the troops and anchored them to the living.³⁰²

In the process, combat chaplains brought about their own transformation because the sacramental aspect of their ministry allowed them to move beyond their roles as priests. They saw the sacraments as a stark contrast to the horror of war and saw their sacramental ministry as an ongoing process in which they linked their troops and themselves to the healing power of the Divine—both during and after the war. Their transformation meant acknowledging that they were not just there to dispense religion to the troops. They also conveyed a message of hope and healing that they accomplished through creating sacred space and honoring the dead in a proper manner.

Worship Services in Vietnam

The primary job of a chaplain was to provide support for all soldiers in the form of worship service—whether they be general worship services or denominational-specific services like Catholic Mass or Jewish Sabbath services. Among the first buildings soldiers constructed at base camps throughout Vietnam were chapels. While some chapels were nothing more than a tent with boxes used as benches and altars, some camps in Vietnam possessed well-constructed, wooden structures with corrugated-tin roofs. Acknowledging that all of Vietnam was a combat zone and that the VC and NVA were notorious for infiltration, soldiers fortified many chapels with sandbags.

³⁰² Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 126-128.

Eli Takesian employed the typical Marine mindset toward such amenities as chapels.

Logistically, chaplains serving with infantry units should travel light. Whether living a bare field existence, or ensconced in a comfortable base camp, maintain a lean inventory, relative to conditions, keeping always in mind the possibility of moving out. Be aware of logistical realities when determining supply needs, and do not be selfish at the expense of others. For example, during my first tour in Vietnam, my unit (3rd Battalion, 5th Marines) we built a primitive base camp on Hill 63. There were not enough tents to go around. Consequently, troops were stacked like cordwood. When the battalion commander offered a large tent to serve as our chapel, I refused it, placing higher priority on habitability. We worshipped [*sic*] in the mess tent, or under a particular tree, which we affectionately called The Chapel Tree. During my second tour (3rd Battalion, 1st Marines), on Hill 37, I inherited a well-constructed chapel in a nicely developed base camp. Whenever other units were passing through the area, and space was tight, I opened the chapel for temporary lodging.³⁰³

Other chaplains became creative with the materials they had on hand. Jack Brown described three types of chapels in Vietnam.

The first (type of chapel) was a general purpose tent with a table for the altar and folding chairs. The second was outside under a large parachute with a sandbag altar and sandbag seats. The third was of wood construction by engineers and a

³⁰³ Takesian, Oral Interview, December 13, 2003.

bell tower. Most of my services were in the open with men either standing or sitting on the ground...with possibly c-ration boxes as a makeshift altar.³⁰⁴

Bernie Windmiller, serving with Charlie Company in the Delta, did his best to make his chapels most inviting, enlisted the help of his troops, and even engaged in a bit of “material reallocation.”

My first chapel in RVN was a squad tent. It did have a wooden floor. I found some 4x6 boards, painted them white and obtained spent casings of 155 artillery shells (brass), polished them and made the most striking lantern you could imagine. I painted a ‘red carpet’ down the middle of the tent. I ‘obtained’ a parachute and hung it in the ceiling to buffer heat. When I was relocated farther south in the Mekong delta the engineers had constructed a permanent chapel used by several chaplains. When on combat missions with my soldiers the canopy of the skies was my cathedral.³⁰⁵

Chaplain Russel Carver also found peace as well as a measure of pride in the chapel that served his troops.

One of the nice things for me was that the chapel at Red Beach where I conducted services, it was assigned to our unit, was a grass chapel and it had been built by the Vietnamese and was very characteristic, and I loved being there. Of course we were right on the edge of the beach and in the helicopter flight zone and I almost always had to stop two or three times during every sermon to let the helicopters go by because they made such noise and there was no insulation, no acoustical

³⁰⁴ Brown, Oral Interview, April 20, 2014.

³⁰⁵ Windmiller, Oral Interview, September 4, 2012.

insulation to keep that sound out. But, it was a very nice memory to have that and it was the only grass chapel that I saw while I was there. Had a monsoon or a windstorm come through and collapsed it, well, I felt real disappointed about that; but engineers came in and American style, they took four by fours and lifted the thing back up. It didn't ever have quite the same original character, but it was a nice experience. When it fell down I brought a couple of pieces of the bamboo, which are about four or five inches across and about eight inches high. They fit on my desk. To this day it's one of the few mementos that I have kept but that's kind of nice reminder of what that was.³⁰⁶

Curt Bowers, who described his rationale for going out into the field as an “honor to serve the soldiers in the worst conditions,” created sacred space while leading his troops in worship and did not regard a base chapel as the only place where God was present. He learned to set up an altar in any condition imaginable. “More often than not the chapel consisted of a field altar on the front end of a jeep and the men sitting around in relaxed positions. It might be the deck of a ship, a steamy tarmac on an airfield, or somewhere else. The setting varies, but the ministry does not.”³⁰⁷

Tom Carter followed the same template.

My experience with services in Vietnam is that some were in the field, and I always offered communion. So I set up the chalice on an ammo box or jeep hood.

³⁰⁶ Russel J. Carver, Oral Interview by Steve Maxner, Transcribed by Tammi Mikel Lyon (Lubbock, TX: The Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University, April 20, 2001).

³⁰⁷ Bowers, *Forward Edge of the Battle Area*, 49, 78.

Some of the units in relatively fixed areas built crude outdoor chapels. In base camp we used a large tent for a chapel. Someone in the unit built an altar.³⁰⁸

When Joe Dulany joined the 1/50th, he had neither a chaplain's assistant nor any equipment set aside for him; so he scrounged a tent for himself as well as for a makeshift chapel. Both tents had several rips in them—a negative in monsoon season—but Dulany comforted himself with the knowledge that he had the two “holiest” tents in the camp.

Creating sacred space could mean constructing a chapel and holding services in it, but chaplains carried the *capella* with them into the field. At the beginning of the Vietnam War, some commanders tacitly implied that chaplains should remain on base and provide religious services for soldiers when they came in from the field.³⁰⁹ Combat chaplains did not get the memo. They went out into the field because they felt soldiers needed them there. The chaplain's weekly status reports for the 11th infantry brigade of the Americal Division indicated that chaplains conducted 235 religious services, with a majority of them conducted in the field. As an example, the report listed that Chaplain John Truer went on a flight to conduct services on February 13, 1966, at Song Mao, Bac Loc, and Phan Thiet.³¹⁰

As stated in the previous chapter, the lack of chaplains in Vietnam mandated that chaplains could not be present to every soldier for Sunday services (or Saturday in the case of Jewish soldiers). Noting the dictum that “the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath,” combat chaplains decided treat whatever day they met with soldiers as

³⁰⁸ Thomas Carter, Oral Interview, July 10, 2013.

³⁰⁹ Autry, *Gun Totin' Chaplain*, 123, Oral Interview, May 20, 2013.

³¹⁰ Chaplain's Status Reports, January 12-July 11, 19676, 11th INFANTRY BRIGADE – “AMERICAL” DIVISION, U.S. Archives, College Park, Maryland.

“Sunday.” Curt Bowers writes that for his ministry in Vietnam, “Sunday was not Sunday.” He held services any day of the week, any time there was a lull in the action, and he often gave communion because he knew that it would mean everything to those who did not make it home.³¹¹

Treating every day as Sunday was more than just for the purpose of expediency. Jerry Autry described his need to conduct field ministry in terms of maintaining the sanity of his troops.

At war, there’s no such things as Sundays, but one of the things I tried to do was to have as many services as I could on a Sunday. It gave the soldiers a semblance of normalcy and also kept them slightly centered, I felt. And in war, whenever given the opportunity, soldiers will go to services.³¹²

Autry conducted six to eight services on Sundays, but he also held more than a dozen throughout the week. He chose slow times to have his services; and if the troops did not like them, they never disclosed it to him. When he arrived at an encampment, he would go to the tents, kicking the men out of their tents and telling them that the chaplain was here and he was holding services. If any groused, he kicked them again and said, “This is what your mom expects of me.” In the end, they were glad for the opportunity to worship in the war zone. Jim Peterman, a priest from the Pacific Northwest serving the 101st Airborne, decided that when he went out into the field to conduct services, he would leave his Chaplain’s Assistant back at the base to attend to the wounded and

³¹¹ NAB, St. Mark 2:23-28, 1068; in response to the Pharisees’ anger that the Apostles were eating raw grain on the Sabbath—a violation of Mosaic law, Christ answers them by citing the example of David and his men eating the temple bread to satiate their hunger. The purpose of his reply is to explain that Christ comes before the Sabbath; Bowers, *Forward Edge of the Battle Area*, 68.

³¹² Autry, *Gun Totin’ Chaplain*, 113; Oral Interview, May 20, 2013.

administrative tasks. When he reached an FSB (fire support base) or wherever he could say Mass, he talked with the soldiers while preparing his altar of C-ration boxes. He spoke with them about their families and how they were holding up in the war zone. His services were never interrupted by anything other than weather. The monsoon did its fair share of interrupting, though, drenching the altar and rendering the sacramental hosts soggy.³¹³

Bernie Windmiller had services interrupted because he also treated every day as Sunday and sometimes the vagaries of combat operations did not check for service times. Services in combat zones usually took place after we stopped for the night and set up the perimeter defense. The unit was usually a company size. The commander would release half of the defense at a time, so I held two services. These were services of Holy Communion, the Eucharist. Since we were on a combat mission where life is vulnerable this was well attended. I was once conducting a service at an artillery fire base. As the service progressed we became aware of an approaching U.S. helicopter. As it came closer, I realized it was going to set down with a few yards of me. As the wind began swirling around me I had to almost throw myself across the altar of empty ammo cases to keep the Communion elements from blowing away. After I gave the pilots a piece of my mind, they apologized and promised to give me a ride wherever I wanted to go.³¹⁴

Where Windmiller exercised discretion—and perhaps wisdom—by not singing during his services, Curt Bowers employed music to impress even the enemy. The

³¹³ Autry, *Gun Totin' Chaplain*, 236; Jim Peterman, Oral Interview, May 26, 2015.

³¹⁴ Windmiller, Oral Interview, September 4, 2012.

chaplain had to chopper in to a hot LZ in order to conduct a worship service for a platoon that had not had a chance to worship for several weeks. The ground was so uneven that he had to jump out of the chopper where the grateful platoon awaited him. He then had the troops sing loud enough for the VC to hear them. Nary a shot was fired. Bowers surmised that either the bravado of the platoon rattled the VC, or the VC had joined the singing themselves.³¹⁵ Claude Newby conducted services as often as possible and on the platoon level. He spent three nights out of ten with each infantry company in the field, holding worship services wherever and whenever reasonable. He synchronized his itinerary with battalion mission and operations rather than setting services for any particular day of the week. He considered Sunday “just another day in the hell of war,” so he adopted the practice of the Maccabees to tailor the Sabbath to whatever day was expedient. Despite the tension he encountered with chaplains who felt that services should be on company or even battalion level, the soldiers appreciated the small gatherings—especially those who had not seen him in some time.³¹⁶

As their motto was “Bringing God to Men,” chaplains like Jack Brown believed that their sacramental ministry was much akin to Moses and the Israelites during the Exodus. As the tent that housed the Ark of the Covenant moved from place to place, so also did those who carried the *capella*. Sacred space was wherever a soldier brought God, so formality was hardly a requirement for a good service.

³¹⁵ Bowers, *Forward Edge of the Battle Area*, 43-44.

³¹⁶ Newby, *It Took Heroes, Volume I*, 68; NAB, 1 Maccabees 2:29-37, 471; in answer to the slaughter of the Jewish men, women, and children who chose not to fight on the Sabbath, Mattathias Maccabeus and his followers resolved to defend themselves even on the Sabbath and honor the holy day on those days they had peace.

Services in the field in Vietnam depended on what was going on in the area of operations where our men were. When on combat missions, sweeping through villages, sleeping on the ground, or on alert for ambushes, my services were quite informal. There was no altar set up. We would read a passage of scripture and share devotional thoughts based on the passage. Then I would have a prayer or invite the men to pray the Lord's Prayer with me. If the place were safe enough to gather men together, they would sit around me for the service. If unsafe to gather, I would go to two or three men together and share scripture, devotion, and prayer. My services ranged from quite informal to fairly organized, depending on where we were. If we were able to reach the troops by jeep, the hood of the jeep became the altar for the worship service. Many of my field services in Vietnam were informal due to the dangers of attack or ambush. When serving communion, I would walk among my men and serve them individually with bread and altar wine (grape juice would tend to mold).³¹⁷

Likewise, Joseph Dulany held worship services wherever he could. In one instance, he held services at an FSB. On another day, he took a boat to conduct services at another FSB and remembered feeling nervous and tense as they crossed the river. Jim Johnson did not conduct field services as a rule, mostly because the circumstances—and the enemy—allowed little opportunity to do so.

I seldom did field services because, if you remember, I was in the infantry. We seldom stopped until maybe a half hour prior to dark and were moving again shortly after first light. There was just not time, place, or opportunity to do field

³¹⁷ Brown, *Another Side of Combat*, 55; Oral Interview, April 20, 2014.

services. I did have services when we were in off of operations or if it was on a Saturday or Sunday. However, my time was usually spent flying to the hospitals to see the wounded leaving and there was no time for formal services. I did, however, have services when there was a cease fire such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, etc. Then, I simply would use a rice paddy dike or an empty case of C-rations as an altar. None of that mattered to the troops. They just appreciated seeing me with them.³¹⁸

What also did not seem to matter to the troops was the denomination of the chaplain or of the service. The transformation of chaplains (and many troops) was that they saw war as the great equalizer of all faiths and cults. The boundaries of denominations dissolved in the combat zone while the focus of worship services centered more on fellowship. The same could be said of how chaplains structured their own duties. Jim Peterman, serving as chaplain to the 101st Airborne, had as his close friend and assistant Protestant Chaplain Robert Anderson. The two worked well together and put together chaplains' duties with Catholics and Protestants rotating as heads and assistants.³¹⁹

Soldiers of all faiths attended Johnson's Protestant Christmas Eve service—including several Catholics and one Jew. All of them took communion, even the Jewish soldier.³²⁰ Bernie Windmiller offered his philosophy on soldiers of different faiths.

Since the soldiers were a mixture of Catholic and various shades of Protestant, I always said all were welcome. I emphasized to the Catholics I was not a priest

³¹⁸ Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 94; Johnson, Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

³¹⁹ Peterman, Oral Interview, May 20, 2015.

³²⁰ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 126.

and could not do what a priest could do for them. However, I emphasized that this was the Lord's table and all were welcome.³²¹

Russel Carver drew upon some negative experiences to tailor his sermons to a more positive, inclusive message.

If you're not on the inside, you're judged, and perhaps even, they get the feeling that they might be condemned as well as judged, if they're on the outside looking in, and you really have to agree with that kind of preaching to feel good about it at all. Well, I think I've told you about in the Church of Christ, in my early life I was aware of some rather blatant kind of things, either you're a member the Church of Christ, or you can't be saved, you're going to hell. I knew how not to say the things in the pulpit that leave people feeling like they're lost and condemned and focus on that. I think that whether you do that the congregational level, or in the VA pulpit, or whether it's the way a religious body across the board thinks, it can generate huge conflict.³²²

The work that combat chaplains did in emphasizing the brotherhood of all soldiers in their religious services and the power of their message even impressed non-believers. While some atheists attempted to undermine chaplains because of their own personal agendas or resentment, Curt Bowers related that a non-religious and skeptical lieutenant made his men attend services. The officer did not attend, but he knew that many of his soldiers were believers and that religious services done the right way were good for morale.³²³

³²¹ Windmiller, Oral Interview, September 4, 2012.

³²² Carver, Oral Interview, December 20, 2003.

³²³ Bowers, *Forward Edge of the Battle Area*, 76.

Jerry Autry practiced ecumenism for the sake of his troops and in spite of the consternation of his fellow chaplains. Catholic troops on the eve of battle desired the Sacrament of Reconciliation, often referred to as “Confession.” A Baptist and adherent to the “priesthood of believers,” Autry did not conduct confession or dispense absolution. The lack of Catholic chaplains, though, left many Catholic soldiers bereft of confessors in the field. They turned to Autry, though he tried his best to convince troops he was not a Catholic chaplain, and they confessed to him their sins. Autry did not quibble over dogma but instead listened as the men confessed their sins and then assured the troops of God’s forgiveness.³²⁴

Russel Carver recognized that the fellowship and uniform of the military made no distinctions based on religion. When he conducted his worship services, he refrained from emphasizing religious differences.

I can tell the good news that I believe I find in Jesus without being a big recruiter. A lot of evangelism, or what passes as evangelism (which by the way, that word is related to good news) a lot of that amounts to recruitment and I’ve come to decide that I don’t need to do that. That has been in [*sic*] process with me for my whole ministry career; how do you deal with people who are different and who are probably never going to commit to my way of doing? Having come to a clearer understanding of how to be of my faith without imposing or pressuring people, that’s been a major spiritual part of my spiritual pilgrimage.³²⁵

³²⁴ Autry, *Gun Totin’ Chaplain*, 123.

³²⁵ Russel Carver, Oral Interview, April 20, 2001.

Vincent Capodanno, qualified to say Mass and hear confessions as a priest, did so with his usual dogged determination—and with a sense of inclusivity. Wearing his flak jacket, the Maryknoll said at least fifteen Masses a week for the grunts and their officers. He heard confessions from the soldiers and offered them absolution, relieving men of the burdens that tormented their souls and acting as a spiritual oasis in the midst of the desert of war. With compassion, he laughed off the mindless profanity of his Marines and helped them embrace their faith. Capodanno attempted to convey, through the sacraments, Christ's presence in the soul that gave men dignity. After Capodanno perished in combat, Marine lieutenant Joseph E. Pilon, likened the chaplain's method of administering the sacraments to the Parable of the Lost Sheep.

His audience was always a small group of 20 to 40 Marines gathered together on a hillside, or behind some rocks, hearing confessions—saying Mass. It was almost as though he had decided to leave the 'other 99' in a safe area and go after the one who had gotten in trouble.³²⁶

Conducting services in the field could be stressful in and of themselves because concentrating so many men in one area invited attack from the VC and the NVA. Capodanno thus kept his sermons short and to the point. He made his words count, offering insights on suffering, the pain of losing one's friends in war, and the passage through death every person makes before being welcomed into salvation. He left Cold War rhetoric out of his sermons and conducted services that sent a message of living life

³²⁶ Mode, *The Grunt Padre*, 83, 122; NAB, Matthew 18:12, 1038; and Luke 15:4, 1119; Christ tells the Parable of the Good Shepherd who, upon learning that one sheep in a flock of a hundred has gotten lost, leaves the ninety-nine, goes off in search of the lost sheep, and rejoices when he has found it.

completely and happily. He exhorted his Marines to utilize their talents in a positive manner and to look kindly upon the Vietnamese whom they were there to help.³²⁷

Capodanno's sermons called upon the soldiers of the Vietnam War to refrain from seeing people as the enemy and instead look on them as creatures of God deserving the assistance of others. The Vietnam War was replete with contrasts, and the services of Capodanno and his fellow chaplains offered another vital element in contrast—that between the realm of the sacred and the horrors of combat. For but a brief time, soldiers who were ragged, filthy, sweating, and strung out could find a semblance of peace and calmness that worship services and the sacraments offered.

The chaplain's kit provided that contrast. Bernie Windmiller describes the kit's contents and how a chaplain could convert the atmosphere from combat operation to sacramental service.

I carried my combat chaplain's kit which had all the altar pieces although on a small scale. I used whatever was available for the altar: C-ration boxes (symbolic in themselves); empty ammo boxes. I always carried my clerical stole to add to the emphasis of worship.³²⁸

Eli Takesian also described the contents of his chaplain's kit. "In my possession were a complete chaplain combat kit: Bible, prayer book, two bottles of sacramental wine and two cans of communion hosts."³²⁹ Jim Haney, an Episcopal chaplain serving with the Americal Division in DaNang and Chu Lai, noted a more comical contrast *within* the chaplain's kit.

³²⁷ Mode, *The Grunt Padre*, 104-106.

³²⁸ Windmiller, Oral Interview, September 4, 2012.

³²⁹ Takesian, Oral Interview, December 13, 2003.

The Navy provided us with a little, a field chaplain's kit...it's just packed up like a little—a little...go bag, knap sack kind of thing, maybe, twenty inches long, soft sided and so forth, and everything fit in there very nicely. You put your communion wine. It had everything we needed including two little vases of flowers that I threw into the South China Sea one day from the helicopter. Nothing that seemed sillier to me than to be carrying two little vases with artificial flowers.³³⁰

Haney replaced the flowers with a far more attractive item designed to attract soldiers to his service—a gallon or more of ice cream wrapped in a military blanket. His base unit had a dairy operation, and the ice cream made him very popular after he conducted the services. He noted that there was “almost more communion around the ice cream than there was around the bread and wine.” In fact, he regarded the ice cream as sacramental in a way.³³¹

At times, the contrast was with more than just the items the chaplain carried. It manifested itself in a matter of moments such as on Thanksgiving Day 1967 when a sniper disrupted a service Joseph Dulany conducted for a company around their APCs. The company scattered and quickly silenced the sniper with a .50 caliber machine gun. They then gathered again to hear their chaplain offer the benediction and then eat a traditional Thanksgiving dinner. Returning yet again to Jim Johnson's Christmas Eve service in 1967, the North Carolinian noted the difference between the message of the day he tried to convey and the place in which he delivered the message. With the dikes

³³⁰ Jim Haney, Oral Interview by Laura Calkins of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University, July 11, 2006.

³³¹ Haney, Oral Interview, July 11, 2006.

of a rice paddy serving as his “pews,” Johnson stood calf-deep in water as he conducted the service. It was the same paddy water his troops waded through on patrols and the same dikes they used for cover to protect themselves from VC fire. The music and the spirit reminded the soldiers of home and took the minds of both chaplain and soldiers off the war for a time. The “Christmas feast” of C-rations after the service, though, snapped him back into the present. Claude Newby’s first field worship service of his second tour took place beneath the canopy of jungle near an FOB. Highlighting the contrast between the sacred and the profane, he conducted the service for his unit immediately after they had just departed the dreadful Michelin Rubber Plantation, passed a decomposed NVA corpse, and weathered an attack from three bicycle-riding NVA soldiers.³³²

Sometimes, bringing a sense of the sacred did more than just take the minds of troops from combat. It reminded soldiers of home and calmed nerves. Robert Falabella observed that holidays like Christmas and Thanksgiving were hardly celebrations for the troops as they endured the separation from their families. A Christmas truce did not bring security but anxiety because it meant that the VC could move about at will. A good and meaningful service had the potential to alleviate that anxiety and give troops a modicum of peace. After the battle of Hoc Mon, Robert Falabella said Mass for the troops in almost complete darkness. Despite the conditions, almost every GI came over to express his appreciation, and the company commander let the chaplain sleep in his half-track that evening.³³³

³³² Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 61; Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 128; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013; Newby, *It Took Heroes, Volume II*, 51.

³³³ Falabella, *Vietnam Memoir*, 50; Oral Interview, April 21, 2013.

During an airstrike, Claude Newby and several young recruits took shelter in an old NVA bunker. As the 500 and 1000-pound bombs hit all too closely for their nerves, Newby decided that he would hold an impromptu worship service. He gathered the men for prayer and worship. The soldiers all welcomed the opportunity, and Newby believed that his ministrations helped still more than a few trembling limbs. Sometimes, though, even a meaningful worship service failed to quell the agony of soldiers' souls. After a combined VC and NVA unit hit a company, the troops cleared the area the next day and found the disemboweled and mutilated body of Pfc. Donald Jones. Newby saw the horror register on the faces of the men. He gave a worship service later in the day and noticed that the troops were quieter than usual and more huddled together as they all ruminated on what had happened to Jones. Newby prayed that he could relieve both the soldiers' and his own burden that evening.³³⁴

There were also times when it seemed to chaplains like Eli Takesian that the Higher Power took over the spirits of the troops and protected them during worship services. When the Marines prepared to retake the city of Hue from the VC and NVA during the Tet Offensive, Chaplain Carl, the senior chaplain at Phu Bai and a Lutheran, asked Takesian to preach that evening in an informal service in the base chapel. Even though the chapel was a huge, barnlike structure, neither chaplain expected more than a hundred soldiers because vulnerability to rocket attack mandated that no one congregate for more than forty-five minutes. What Takesian experienced, though, moved him nearly to tears as 150 men showed up...followed by a steady stream of more men for the next

³³⁴ Newby, *It Took Heroes, Volume I*, 132, 147.

several minutes as the 1/5 Marines arrived. Some were looking for shelter from a steady rain. All stayed to pray and sing, with more and more hymns.

We kept singing ... and troops kept coming. A strange, but wonderful feeling overtook us. The chapel was now filled to capacity. On we sang, louder, with spiritual gusto. Attracting even more worshippers, we were packed in like sardines, almost a thousand of us, with standing room only. We sang for two hours. One gospel song stood out: 'Leaning on the Everlasting Arms,' which was requested and sung at least four times.

I thought Chaplain Auel would close the meeting with prayer. We had assembled for much too long. An enemy rocket would have done us in. You just don't pack a thousand troops in such confined space. But to my surprise, Carl announced that Chaplain Takesian would now read the lesson and preach the sermon. Once in the pulpit, 'something' possessed me (I don't normally talk like this). I had the strangest feeling I was outside my own body, seated in the congregation, looking at myself.

Everything was hushed ... and floating. A still, small voice seemed to whisper, 'John 3.' I dismissed the prepared text and sermon, turned to the third chapter of John's Gospel, and read about Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus. Then, as if clay in the hands of God, I spoke softly on the text, John 3:8. The crowd sat in awe. I remember saying, 'The Spirit of God is like the wind. You don't know where it's coming from ... you don't know where it's going; yet you can feel it passing through. God's Spirit is here, now, passing through, touching

each of us in an urgent way.’ I was mesmerized, knowing we were in the hands of the Living God! We were leaning on the Everlasting Arms!

I sat down. Surely, Chaplain Auel would give the benediction. He stood, hesitated, and asked, ‘How many would like to receive Communion?’ Hundreds of hands went up. ‘O.K. I’ll go into the vestry and prepare the elements. In the meantime, sing more hymns.’ So we sang more hymns. Carl returned, bread and wine in hand, and we celebrated the Lord’s Supper together. The congregants filed out, quietly, as soon as they received the Sacrament.

Finally, the service ended. We had worshipped for almost three-and-a-half hours! After the service, when I told Carl of my strange feelings, he said, ‘Eli, the same came over me. I had no control of time or worship. I, too, seemed possessed.’³³⁵

The next morning, Takesian and the majority of that congregation mounted up and headed for the battle in the Citadel of Hue. Several days later, the Citadel belonged to the Marines, but at a terrible cost. 1st Battalion, 5th Marines left one of the most meaningful worship services and went into Hue with less than 1000 troops. More than one hundred died and more than 350 were wounded.

Coming Forward

Meaningful worship services and the example chaplains set through ministry of presence impressed a number of soldiers to accept God in their lives while out in the field. As if to underscore the contrast between the sacred and the profane, the arena of war often served as a place of conversion. As with Paul’s experience on the road to

³³⁵ Takesian, Oral Interview, December 13, 2002.

Damascus, in which his original purpose was warlike, soldiers engaged in killing on a campaign sanctioned by numerous religious leaders saw or heard the message of faith and embraced it as a means of salvation. The concept of *metanoia* does not indicate repentance in the classical sense of the word but instead to “express that mighty change in mind, heart, and life wrought by the Spirit of God.” Soldiers, often in situations of life and death, approached chaplains because they desired spiritual fulfillment and to “get right with God.” The phrase “there are no atheists in foxholes” led many of them to approach a well-regarded chaplain about joining his faith.³³⁶

It was not just an attempt to “hedge one’s bets” that led soldiers to the chaplains for conversion, though. By the time of the Vietnam War, soldiers and chaplains of all denominations could not help but be aware of the resurgent revival movement that had begun a decade earlier and was now sweeping the nation. Led by preachers such as Billy Graham and U.S. Army Air Corps Chaplain Edwin Orr, the fundamentalist revival movement hearkened back to the days of Billy Sunday, Charles Grandison Finney, and even George Whitefield as Christians came forward to be saved. Catholics were not immune to the spirit of renewal. The elderly Angelo Roncalli came to the Papacy as John XXIII, and many considered him nothing more than a “placeholder” for the next Pope. Roncalli did not get that memo. His humor and engaging personality turned heads throughout Christendom, and he called the Second Vatican Council to breathe new life into the Roman Church.³³⁷

³³⁶ Archbishop Richard C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament: 9th edition*, (New York: Macmillan, 1880) 255-261; NAB, Acts of the Apostles 9:1-9, 1181.

³³⁷ Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 28.

The military proscribed chaplains from openly proselytizing for their particular denomination, but it did not prohibit them from instructing a soldier who approached them on a spiritual quest. Many soldiers throughout the Vietnam War approached chaplains with the desire to be accepted and saved. On February 8, 1968, Jack Brown and his troops had just left an orphanage damaged by the ravages of the Tet Offensive. On the way back, he went to visit the wounded at the 24th Evacuation Hospital and visited with a young man from Ohio, who was recuperating. The boy wanted to become a Christian, so Brown left him a copy of the book *Guideposts* and a pocket calendar with Scriptural verses for each day.³³⁸

Jim Johnson found an opportunity to offer faith to one of his troops in the person of Butch Harston. Harston's position as an FO (forward observer) for the artillery rendered him as vulnerable as most infantrymen, but the baby-faced soldier kept a pleasant disposition. He approached Johnson about baptism, and the chaplain began the process of formation. Harston decided that he wanted to have his baptism in Vietnam. Johnson planned the baptism on November 11, 1967. The site Johnson chose encapsulated how a feature of warfare could become a holy site. "Butch, three of his friends and I walk to the turning basin, and I baptize him in the same murky waters that we've sloshed through together many times. This time, however, his baptism symbolizes Butch's new life in Christ. I'm thrilled for him." The contrast between the sacred and the sacrilege of combat further implanted itself in when Johnson when he learned that a

³³⁸ Brown, *Another Side of Combat*, 18; *Guideposts: Personal Messages of Inspiration and Faith* was edited by the American minister Norman Vincent Peale.

MEDCAP team working in a village took casualties from a VC mortar attack. Johnson would have been in the village had it not been for the baptism.³³⁹

Tom Carter had several men come to him seeking baptism, and he accommodated them all, conducting confirmation classes for them and baptizing them in whatever he could find whether it be a river or a bomb crater that had filled with water during the monsoon. After some months in the field, several soldiers came to Curt Bowers and testified that they had accepted Christ and wanted to be baptized—on the “forward edge of the battle area.” Bowers took the men under his guidance—including a burly sergeant who worked in the mess. The chaplain found a river in which to conduct the service and stationed several men downstream in case the newly baptized slipped into the fast-moving stream. Bowers thought how strange it would be to have one of the men drown while being baptized in the midst of the Vietnam War. The mess sergeant was as coarse and tough as he was burly; but the emotion of the moment took him over, and he wept openly after the baptism.³⁴⁰

Having one’s emotions so moved in battle was not unusual for soldiers. The horror and intensity of combat could become a religious experience for soldiers. Stripped of all defenses and emotional control, they sometimes found God in those moments. Thus, in the midst of battle, troops came forward during services to proclaim their faith. Joe Dulany related the testimony of one young soldier who realized that bombs and bullets did not distinguish between Protestant and Catholics and that religion was nothing more than an avenue of that expression one calls faith.

³³⁹ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 107; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

³⁴⁰ Tom Carter, Oral Interview, July 10, 2013; Bowers, *Forward Edge of the Battle Area*, 66-67.

A Roman Catholic boy confided in me after last week's battle that he fell in a hole to get away from the bullets and prayed for all his buddies. He told me that he just prayed for all of them to get through the battle. A 2nd Lieutenant, who previously displayed no religious orientation, said that he prayed the Lord's Prayer over and over during the battle.³⁴¹

Eli Takesian found his creativity tested when asked to administer the sacrament of Baptism during a rocket attack at Phu Bai. "I found myself scrunched in a hole with three Marines, one of whom requested baptism on the spot. None of us had water; so I used saliva. *Improvise... improvise...improvise!*"³⁴²

Eternal Rest and Perpetual Light

The conversion of soldiers indicated to all chaplains that transformation was possible even in the worst of conditions—as the Vietnam War certainly offered; and nothing was as profound as that of death—the ultimate transformation. In dealing with death, chaplains offered to their troops a sublime but powerful sacrament in commending fallen soldiers to their Creator through the memorial service. All faiths regard death as a transformative process from one life to the next, and the memorial service embodied the recognition of the transformation—especially since combat deaths meant that part of the passage entailed the “valley of the shadow” mentioned in Psalm 23. In Catholic funeral rites, the central prayer that commends the soul of the deceased to God is called the *Requiem Aeternam*, which translates as: “Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and may

³⁴¹ Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, p.62

³⁴² Takesian, Oral Interview, December 13, 2002.

perpetual light shine upon them.”³⁴³ Many Catholic chaplains invoked the prayer during memorial services, and it had a powerful effect on those in attendance.

Chaplains held memorial services as soon as possible and followed a simple yet moving ritual. Bernie Windmiller described the process:

I tried to have memorial services as soon as I could after returning from combat operations. Since this is a function of command I worked with the company commander to set it up. They were on the deck of the ship. The set up was simple, troops in formation, the soldier's rifle with attached bayonet with his bayonet down, his helmet and boots. An opening prayer, a scripture, comments by one or two others, a First Sergeant and maybe platoon leader. I gave a brief meditation emphasizing his devotion to country and God's loving care for all our lives. I included prayer for the family. I erected a memorial board at the battalion headquarters at the base camp and had a brass plate engraved with the soldiers name, rank, and company.³⁴⁴

Jonathan Shay asks how chaplains maintained their soldiers' humanity or brought them back to it when they went mad or berserk in the combat zone. *Achilles in Vietnam* claims that “communal recognitions of death were perfunctory, delayed, and conducted by rear-echelon officers who had no emotional connection to the dead or their comrades.” Combat chaplains had an emotional connection to the fallen and gave the survivors the opportunity to express, at least in part, their emotional anguish. The memorial service

³⁴³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, March 2000), paragraphs 1030-1032.

³⁴⁴ Bernard J. Windmiller, Oral Interview, September 4, 2012.

allowed troops an opportunity for catharsis and a means for them to say farewell to their deceased comrades.³⁴⁵

As a rule, chaplains like Jim Johnson conducted as many memorial services as possible—a point of consideration for the troops, even though he wished they were not so often. Like his fellow chaplains, he conducted his services in the open where as many men as possible could attend. “I always had memorial services...I should say we always had them. The company commander, first sergeant and I usually did this with the troops in formation near the company area.”³⁴⁶

Jack Brown described his memorial services that he held at the base camp, which were secure enough that the VC or NVA did not desecrate their moment of grief.

Two combat boots were placed in front of each rifle. The number of places indicated the men who were recently killed in combat. Then the priest and I would share the service, remembering the men by name, praying for their families, reading the promises of God, reading Scripture passages. These memorial services were quietly conducted on the grounds of the base camp with the officers and men of the unit in attendance. The commanding officer would always speak to the unit gathered to remember and memorialize the ones who died in service to America. The services were solemn occasions . . . and remembered for a lifetime.³⁴⁷

On occasion, the solemnity of memorializing a soldier carried beyond the service itself and was as much a help to the chaplains as it was to the troops. When Pfc. David

³⁴⁵ Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 58-59.

³⁴⁶ Johnson, Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

³⁴⁷ Brown, Oral Interview, April 20, 2013.

Massa and Sp4 Thomas Twilford died when they stepped on a land mine in April 1968, several of Massa's limbs were scattered and found only after the helicopter lifted off with the maimed corpses. The platoon leader asked Brown to join him in committing Massa's body parts. Brown noted that he did not know Massa...until after that service. Comrades shared stories, and Brown began a correspondence with Massa's family and wife that continued to memorialize the young man and even led to Massa's high school honoring their fallen graduate with a plaque.³⁴⁸

Brown wrote that the death of Eddie Sands also impacted him, in part because the man had volunteered for a second tour out of loyalty to his comrades still in Vietnam. In the Graves Registration tent, Brown knelt in silent prayer beside Sands' corpse torn apart by a 250-pound bomb. Later, his correspondence with Sands' widow became a memorial service of a kind as both chaplain and widow learned of a man whose dedication to his comrades was matched only by his dedication to his family. He made his prayer at Eddie Sands' memorial service, but it became an anthem for all soldiers who perished in combat.

Heavenly Father, SFC Eddie Sands was a gentleman-soldier who knew You and was dedicated to his country. He is remembered before You as a leader of courage, honor, and respect. He walked with You through the dark shadow of death, and I know that I am a better man for having known him. Continue always to bless his wife and family as you have done through the years. In the name of Jesus. Amen.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁸ Brown, *Another Side of Combat*, 25-26; Oral Interview, April 20, 2013.

³⁴⁹ Brown, *Another Side of Combat*, 48-51; Oral Interview, April 20, 2013.

Such prayers made the memorial services as much a relief for chaplains as for their troops. Many soldiers asked their chaplains to explain the meaning of death and God and why death happened far too often to people whom they considered “the best.” Brown chose his responses to such queries carefully and—like his fellow chaplains—refrained from too many mentions of cause for which they fought. Rather, he explained that nothing separates the faithful from the Lord and that no sacrifice is ever done in vain. He stressed to the soldiers that they were not alone because God shared the grief all bereaved friends bear, and the example of Christ serves as the epitome. Finally, he conveyed with absolute sincerity that it was for the living to remember those who have died, and so he made it a point to list the names of all who had died as a remembrance.³⁵⁰

Such words of insight to the troops did more than just help them accept death and bereavement. Despite the intellectual acceptance of death, the emotion took longer to comprehend. As part of the double burden, chaplains who saw and experienced combat and its results also encountered troops in the berserk state at the same time dealing with their own grief and rage and a desire for vengeance—something directly contrary to their ministerial philosophy. Soldiers became disconnected from reality because of the death of their comrades, and the double burden was that the berserk state came upon chaplains even as they tried to reconnect soldiers to the living and the temperate. Memorial services allowed them the same respite and relief that they offered to their troops.³⁵¹

Jim Peterman, a priest from the Pacific Northwest serving the 101st Airborne, held a number of memorial services throughout his tour. However, before his battalion left for

³⁵⁰ Brown, *Another Side of Combat*, 31, 75; Oral Interview, April 20, 2013.

³⁵¹ Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 65, 83, 86.

home, he gathered all the men of the 101st together once more and held another memorial service to remember all those who died in Vietnam. Most of the troops there were very emotional and more than a few wept, but the service gave the troops a sense that their fallen comrades had blessed them for the return journey.³⁵²

Memorial services also could be problematic at times even for the most dedicated of chaplains. Chaplain James Juhan, a Southern Baptist who converted to Roman Catholicism, served two tours in Vietnam. He wrote that burden of memorial services transformed him from a believer in the cause of the war to the belief that the war was a colossal mistake that kept those who could have made a difference at home trapped in Southeast Asia. Each memorial service he held, he later wrote, caused him to “die a thousand deaths.”³⁵³

Claude Newby conducted more than his share of services to remember the fallen, and some of them stood out among the others—both for their positive and negative occurrences. The chaplain had gone home on emergency leave in late June 1968 because his newborn daughter, whom he named Suzanne Marie, died just a few hours after her birth. He spent nearly three weeks at home in California with his wife and children for the funeral and also visited the families of Bill Snyder and Elvin Jackson, two of his close friends killed in Vietnam. The pain of leaving his family was still fresh in him when a sniper killed Pfc. Robert F. Bacon of Alpha 1/5. Newby made a few tweaks to the commander’s letter to Bacon’s family, noting that the young man’s status as schoolteacher could have exempted him from service. Newby held Bacon’s memorial

³⁵² Jim Peterman, Oral Interview , June 2015.

³⁵³ Whitt, “Conflict and Compromise,”246.

service while Alpha 1/5 was destroying its FSB in anticipation of the drawdown in forces, and then went to watch Neil Armstrong's landing on the moon in a chaplain's office. Newby does not mention the irony in the chain of events leading up to Bacon's memorial service. His narration of the events speaks for itself, and the closure and contrast that memorial services provided do likewise.³⁵⁴

For the most part, soldiers welcomed Newby's and his fellow chaplains' memorial services with relief and even expectation. In bed and suffering from both the flu and a botched "home remedy" of trying to sweat it out of his system by jogging, Newby received word that Alpha Company needed a worship service. Still feverish, he arrived and learned that Alpha expected a memorial service instead for Sp4 Woodrow, who had perished on the Fourth of July when he stepped on a mine. Newby led the service and then returned to bed, having returned to duty sooner than he expected.³⁵⁵

Frederick Downs, a twenty-three year-old lieutenant, arrived in Vietnam on September 8, 1967. He noted that chaplains used the same creativity for memorial services as they did for worship services.

The chaplain held a memorial service for the fallen soldiers in which they took C-ration boxes with a purple cloth over it to form an altar. The chaplain prayed for the souls of those who perished and prayed for understanding in the midst of the fight. The chaplain then returned to the base camp.³⁵⁶

Sometimes, though, the reactions of the soldiers themselves at memorial services provided a contrast. Not all the emotion soldiers displayed was of the "silent weeping"

³⁵⁴ Newby, *It Took Heroes, Volume I*, 405-411.

³⁵⁵ Newby, *It Took Heroes, Volume I*, 206.

³⁵⁶ Downs. *The Killing Zone*, 182.

variety, and Newby worried about continuing memorial services for the same unit when the U.S. was in the drawdown phase. He also remembered, with typical honesty and self-effacement, that he could not recall the names of some of the fallen officers during a service. He felt a pang of guilt and disloyalty, and it would not be the first time that the horror of combat and the emotion of the moment caused lapses in memory. Kregg Jorgensen, a Ranger who had volunteered to serve with the Air-Cav, described one of Newby's services in which he mispronounced the name of one of the deceased. A sullen and angry soldier rudely corrected him while another shouted that the sacrifice of the soldier was in a "bullshit cause," reinforcing Newby's belief that too many memorial services might become counter-productive. Newby decided to shoulder the double burden and continued having the services, answering his own question as to why. They owed it—no matter how painful or frustrating—to both the fallen and their families to pay tribute to them.³⁵⁷ Anger and frustration at memorial services served as a catharsis for Newby. In addition, they became the first step the featured combat chaplains took in their transformation from priests who ministered to the spiritual needs of the troops to prophets who attempted to make the entire American people remember the troops and their sacrifices.

Jerry Autry described his memorial services as ones that he conducted for several fallen soldiers at once, usually at an FSB, and where as many soldiers as possible could attend.

³⁵⁷ Newby, *It Took Heroes, Volume I*, 403, 508-509; Kregg P. Jorgenson, *Acceptable Loss: An Infantry Soldier's Perspective*, (New York: Random House, 2010), 98-99.

I also developed a little ceremony when we were in battle and a soldier or soldiers died. Over about a nine month period we had five or so soldiers in our battalion killed every single day. They would not be removed from the field until I gave them a kind of last rites that I had developed. Think about this: here I am, a Southern Baptist giving a type of last rites. Makes me smile now as I think about it. I would stand or kneel at the head of the ‘fallen’ soldier, move to his feet as we always put them prostrate. Took a few seconds but all the soldiers present stood in a reverent moment. It was very moving and soldiers would not continue until it was done. It was a powerful closure.³⁵⁸

In referring to the Last Rites, Autry invoked the Catholic sacrament given to the dying. Called “Extreme Unction” prior to Vatican II, “Last Rites” is now called the “Sacrament of the Sick” and involved anointing the sick or injured person with oil and offering prayers over the dying person. The sacrament is intended for the living, but Joseph O’Donnell—whose ministry is mentioned in the previous chapter—did not hesitate to anoint each corpse and give solace to the living. Vincent Capodanno developed a quick method of anointing dying soldiers in field hospitals. He carried out his sacramental duty without interfering with the nurses and doctors.³⁵⁹

Capodanno himself entered the dark valley on September 4, 1967. Eli Takesian—a Presbyterian and close friend of Capodanno—learned of his colleague’s death.

As Operation SWIFT neared its end, the Regimental Commander came out to see us. He said, ‘Chaplain, hop into my chopper. They want you back at Division

³⁵⁸ Autry, Oral Interview, May 13, 2013.

³⁵⁹ O’Donnell, “Clergy in the Military, Vietnam and After,” 220; Mode, *The Grunt Padre*, 137.

Headquarters in Da Nang, to give the eulogy at a High Requiem Mass for Father Capodanno.’

I flew to Da Nang and reported to the 1st Marine Division Chaplain's Office. Cruddy from days in the field, I needed fresh clothing. After showering, I was issued new utilities. The Division Chaplain, John Keeley, offered shoe polish to shine my boots. I refused, saying, ‘Thanks, Father ... but the blood of my Marines is on my boots. I can’t cover their blood with shoe polish.’ After scrounging Chaplain Keeley's jeep, I was driven to the morgue and viewed Father Capodanno's remains. The senior man, an Army master sergeant, greeted me with tears in his eyes. He said, ‘I’m Roman Catholic. When I heard what Father Capodanno did for those kids, I insisted on preparing his remains myself.’ Upon entering a refrigerated room, the master sergeant showed me Capodanno's remains. I inspected the wounds. Three fingers were missing ... shrapnel had blown away part of his left shoulder. There were exactly 27 gunshot wounds in his back. The one that killed him had entered the back of his head. With boots stained with both mud and blood, Eli Takesian delivered the eulogy for his friend.³⁶⁰

Jim Johnson believed in the end that all those who wore the uniform and perished in combat deserved a memorial service. No exceptions. As dogs were sometimes employed in Vietnam, they received non-commissioned officer status and were protected by sandbags as all soldiers were. Vernon, a specialist in the 43rd Scout Dog Platoon, and his dog King were both killed in the field. The men had become close to the dog, so they

³⁶⁰ Mode, *The Grunt Padre*, 139; Takesian, Oral Interview, December 13, 2002.

were surprised and relieved when Johnson affirmed that “all dogs do indeed go to heaven” by having a memorial service for King. Such little details endeared chaplains to their soldiers and gave all a sense that chaplains were with them to the last man—or even dog.³⁶¹

Conclusion

In the midst of the stink of death, the profanity of destruction, and the struggle to stay alive, combat chaplains struggled to create sacred space so that their troops would have an anchor to the living and to the Divine—whom they believed loved and cared for their men. By holding worship services and utilizing what materials and area they had available, by leaving themselves open to soldiers who found and accepted faith in their lives, and by conducting services that memorialized dead comrades, combat chaplains in the Vietnam War took another step in their journey of transformation. Their ability to draw a contrast between the conflict and fear of the war zone with even a few hours (or minutes) of reverent worship and remembrance relieved soldiers toiling in the “valley of the shadow” and brought them one step closer to their own transformation as they sought to bring their soldiers at last out of the war zone raging in their souls to the peace and welcome of the Lord’s table.

³⁶¹ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 117.

SECTION III - TRANSFORMATION

CHAPTER X – A “SPIRITUAL VALLEY OF THE SHADOW”

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS

So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. – 2 Corinthians 12:7-10³⁶²

When Rabbi Mark Golub boarded the airplane colloquially known as the “Freedom Bird” that would take him home from Vietnam, he ruminated sadly on his experience as a chaplain to the soldiers fighting that war. He wondered aloud whether he had accomplished anything good or contributed something to the experiences of his fellow soldiers. The further he got from the combat zone, the more his doubts increased. “Surely, God has been in this place,” he said, “and I do not know it.”³⁶³ Golub and his Christian counterparts, whose sense of ministry and duty led them to walk alongside soldiers in the jungles and cities of Southeast Asia, carried home with them their own “thorn in the flesh” in the form of trauma and suffering that combined with the trauma and suffering of their own soldiers. They had brought God with them into the combat

³⁶² NAB,

³⁶³ Slomovitz, *The Fighting Rabbis*, 121; Leonard Winograd, *The Jungle Jews of Vietnam*. (New York: Leonard Winograd, 1995), 193.

zone in the hopes of offering their troops spirituality and comfort, but both troops and chaplains came home changed from the horrors of war.

The voices and memoirs of combat chaplains in the Vietnam War illuminate how they identified post-traumatic stress in themselves even before they came home and then dealt with the effects of combat stress after their war experience. The “double burden” of combat hardships combined with concern over the physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being of their men strained their psyches and souls and transformed them both in the field and at home.

Post-Traumatic Stress

Understanding the nature and definition of post-traumatic stress for the soldiers who “humped the boonies” in Vietnam is crucial to understanding how it both afflicted and affected the chaplains and how chaplains in turn defined it, embraced it, and used it. What is post-traumatic stress, and how did it change troops and chaplains forever?

Jonathan Shay describes the symptoms of post-traumatic stress as:

1. a loss of authority over mental function, especially memory and perception;
2. persistent mobilization of the body and mind for lethal danger, which leads to a potential for violence;
3. persistence and activation of combat survival skills in civilian life;
4. chronic health problems that stem from being constantly alert;
5. destruction of social trust;
6. preoccupation with the enemy’s and one’s own governmental authorities;
7. alcohol and drug abuse; and
8. suicidality, despair, isolation, and meaninglessness.

Another therapist who worked closely with veterans, Herbert Chalsma, notes that soldiers displayed three clusters of symptoms that centered on re-experiencing phenomena, avoidance behaviors, and “hyper-arousal” or the startle response.³⁶⁴

Readers will note that in reference to post-traumatic stress, the word “disorder” does not appear at the end of the nomenclature throughout this paper. Such an omission is in itself a sign of how chaplains changed after Vietnam and defined the issue. Jerry Autry writes that post-traumatic stress is not a disorder but rather a *highly ordered* response to an irrational and disordered set of circumstances and conditions surrounding war. He identified in himself what William Nash defined as the result of the “perfect storm” of extreme temperatures, exhaustion, filth, noise, light, and wounds. Amy Snow adds cognitive stressors like limited objectives and ambiguous missions, information barrages, difficulty in distinguishing the enemy, the death of friends for no apparent purpose, and the simple act of killing. Finally, social and spiritual stressors such as a lack of privacy or personal space, the media and public opinion, loss of faith in God, and an inability to forgive or feel forgiven left troops bewildered and bitter.³⁶⁵

Karl Menninger labeled post-traumatic stress as “combat exhaustion” after World War II, but Vietnam was not WWII. War had changed in just twenty years. Trauma did not. Unlike World War II, the method of individual rotation for most soldiers in Vietnam did not lead them to bond with fresh soldiers. Instead, they referred to them as “fucking new guys.” Also in contrast to WWII, soldiers went home with profound feelings of frustration at not having “finished the job.” They carried home the sights and sounds of

³⁶⁴ Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 72; Chalsma, *The Chambers of Memory*, ix.

³⁶⁵ Figley and William Nash, *Combat Stress Injury*, 312; Snow, *The Endless Tour*, 113-114.

women and children being killed or used as human shields fresh in their minds. They took part in a war whose focus was on killing as a tactical goal in itself. They had little if any time to grieve the loss of friends; and for most Vietnam veterans, loss was the norm rather than the exception. Veterans suffered the loss of comrades, youth, security, family, love, reason to live, trust, self-esteem, future, faith, and God.³⁶⁶ When they came home, Vietnam veterans had no chance to have the “decompression” of WWII troop ships that took weeks to return and gave them an opportunity to talk about their experiences. Instead, they were home within only a day and no time at all to reorient themselves to home and civilian life. Finally, the WWII troop ships pulled up to the docks where throngs of people and military bands stood ready to give them a heroes’ welcome. Vietnam soldiers came home as individuals, arrived in civilian airports, had no welcome, and might even encounter hostility—or worse, apathy—because of their uniforms.³⁶⁷

It was no wonder that soldiers in Vietnam became emotional casualties, suffering what Wilbur Scott defines as a condition where one re-experiences traumatic events, loses responsiveness or reduces involvement in the external world, and suffers from a variety of autonomic, dysphoric, and/or cognitive symptoms. J. Glenn Gray, who writes about WWII veterans in *The Warriors*, writes that post-traumatic stress is the mind’s inability to integrate horror of unspeakable magnitude and “place it in its proper file.” “I am afraid to forget,” his veteran confides. “I fear we human creatures do not forget

³⁶⁶ Jensen, Geoffrey and Andrew Wiest, eds., *War in the Age of Technology: Myriad Faces of Modern Armed Conflict* (New York: New York University Press), 2001, 300, 304-305; Snow, *The Endless Tour*, 203-204.

³⁶⁷ Wilbur Scott, *Vietnam Veterans since the War: The Politics of PTSD, Agent Orange, and the National Memorial* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press), 1993, 43; Figley and Nash, *Combat Stress Injury*, 19-22, 25, 27-28; Snow, *The Endless Tour*, 113-114.

cleanly, as criminals presumably do. What protrudes and does not fit into our pasts rises to haunt us and make us spiritually unwell in the present.”³⁶⁸ Put another way, Edward Tick likens it to someone who has “witnessed seventy near-fatal car accidents while between the ages of eighteen and nineteen.” The human consciousness becomes frozen in those moments, and the survivor of the combat zone cannot leave war’s expectations, values, and losses.³⁶⁹

The nature and causes of post-traumatic stress lead some who write on the subject to identify it as a “wound of the soul.” Edward Tick writes that the injustice of combat and those who placed soldiers in it distorted the identity of soldiers. Rev. Amy Snow describes it as a “spiritual wound of the worst kind” in which one’s actions conflict with faith and ethics, calls values into question, and cripples the ability to find meaning in life. The hallmark of such pathos was found in the classic refrain uttered by many a Vietnam soldier and later veteran: “Fuck it, it don’t mean nothin.” When veterans later opened up about their experiences, one of their first cries was: “Where was God in Vietnam?”³⁷⁰ God could not have possibly allowed the hellish conditions, murder, chickenshit, and despair. In the depths of the “valley of the shadow,” troops looked for God but found only the shadow.

Jacqueline Whitt points out that chaplains endured the same combat trauma and then the same abuse as their troops when they came home from the war. It was the same abuse and unwelcome that Curt Bowers and his fellow returning soldiers encountered. In light of such a perspective, chaplains in the field became integral to their own

³⁶⁸ Gray, *The Warriors*, 24.

³⁶⁹ Scott, *Vietnam Veterans since the War*, 27; Tick, *War and the Soul*, 99, 101, 192.

³⁷⁰ Snow, *The Endless Tour*, 54, 56, 75

transformation and the healing of soldiers. Chaplains who ministered in combat zones displayed the many of the same symptoms as their spiritual wards—both during and after the war—because the same death, destruction, and injustices imprinted themselves on the souls of the chaplains. Veterans and combat chaplains alike, victims of terrible battles and bombardments, demonized by anti-war demonstrators, and even marginalized by WWII veterans as having “lost” their war came home and then meandered through the wasteland of post-traumatic stress.³⁷¹

Stress in the Field

Jonathan Shay writes that many soldiers claimed that they “died” in Vietnam; that is, they lost all fear of death and cared very little for their own safety, especially after they lost a close friend or went through a particularly vicious firefight.³⁷² Charles Figley and William Nash illustrate that military commanders may have seen themselves as to blame when combat stress arose in individuals or whole units.³⁷³ In their role as advocates, chaplains could intervene on behalf of the troops but they also could help their commanders understand that the nature of war mandated psychological wounds, no matter how competent and caring the commander might have been. Combat chaplains intervened because they saw the pathos in themselves, identified with many who dealt with death on a daily basis, and faced the possibility of their own deaths. As their comrades died or were wounded and flown away for good, chaplains became more like their fellow soldiers. They preoccupied themselves with the mechanics of action, endured

³⁷¹ Whitt, “Conflict and Compromise,” 228-229, 231; Bowers, *Forward Edge of the Battle Area*, 81.

³⁷² Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 50-51.

³⁷³ Figley and Nash, *Combat Stress Injury*, 16.

such weariness where even death was a relief, and experienced the stupefaction of consciousness epitomized by the “thousand-yard stare.”³⁷⁴

Returning from such a state of mind and state of soul was not an easy task even for men who had received training in repairing minds and souls. Both chaplains and veterans displayed the symptoms Jonathan Shay documents—hostility and mistrust of the world around them, social withdrawal, feelings of emptiness or hopelessness punctuated by concomitant feelings of being “on edge” or under constant threat, and general estrangement from a world that moved on without them.³⁷⁵ Combat chaplains had come home from a war Joanna Burke described as “fraught with moral ambiguities, presenting new challenges to their ministry and even their institution.” Many felt that religious sanction of killing was an ultimate corruption of the spirit.³⁷⁶ Mindful of such issues, combat chaplains believed that walking with their men would draw them closer to each other and put them in a better position to give spiritual advice and offer healing. Chaplain David Knight justified his own presence as a counter-balance to the carnage and horror. “The job of the soldier was to kill or capture the enemy” he said. “Because of this, I went in with the men while on these missions...I was...able to witness the love of the Lord.”³⁷⁷ Knight was not alone, as numerous chaplains—sometimes even in defiance of commanders—shouldered their packs and walked with their troops “through the valley of the shadow” to remind their troops that God was present even in the worst conditions and that human beings, rather than God, made those conditions.

³⁷⁴ Chalsma, *The Chambers of Memory*, 65; Gray, *The Warriors*, 103-104.

³⁷⁵ Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 169.

³⁷⁶ Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, 291, 293.

³⁷⁷ Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, 273.

Those combat chaplains who provided interviews and memoirs endured suffering and understood how the young men in uniform moved from days of late adolescent innocence and enthusiasm to shocking and traumatic events in combat. They could understand how those same veterans underwent years of disorganization and distress accompanied by broken relationships and addictions. When Vincent Capodanno went home to visit, his family remarked on the gaunt, haggard look of their brother and the “thousand-yard stare” even the redoubtable priest possessed. While he enjoyed visiting his family and loved them very much, Capodanno’s mind and heart were back in Vietnam with his grunts.³⁷⁸ His death at Que Son released him from the world in which he would have had to reintegrate himself, but his appearance and demeanor gave evidence of what his colleagues who did return endured.

The wounds Jim Johnson received in Vietnam were more than just physical, highlighting the holistic aspects of post-traumatic stress and how physical wounds triggered emotional reactions after the war. For Joe Dulany, the explosion that blew him off the back of the truck in 1968 left him with chronic back and spine problems. Hearing loss from the incessant pounding of artillery and persistent hypertension from combat experience made him, in his own estimate, a 50-year-old with a 60-year-old’s body.³⁷⁹ Claude Newby suffered the same privation, ambushes, mortar attacks, and loss of comrades as did his men. Unaware at first of any problems and unwilling to leave the field, his startle response had deteriorated to the point where a crashing kneeler in a chapel during a meeting caused him to “hit the deck.” Newby’s commander overrode his

³⁷⁸ Chalsma, *The Chambers of Memory*, 197; Mode, *The Grunt Padre*, 109.

³⁷⁹ Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 57-58, 182.

protests and sent him away from the action.³⁸⁰ Curt Bowers' lasting wound to his soul came during a vicious firefight in which soldiers stacked the corpses of their buddies next to him. The next day he walked amidst more corpses and saw the body of a young soldier who died a painful death. He wept openly over the soldier and for his family. While in Korea in 1975, Bowers learned the news that Saigon had fallen. A sense of defeat and demoralization overwhelmed him as it did many troops who had served there. Jack Brown did not note any signs of stress in himself, but he found that his ministry in Graves Registration changed him forever. The sight of dead corpses in aircraft hangars moved him deeply. He used each occasion of viewing a corpse in a body bag to remember each face, each name, the extent of the soldier's injuries, and to pray for the not-yet-notified family. Once he had emblazoned the soul of the soldier in his consciousness, he then prayed for an end to the war.³⁸¹

Counseling also strained many of the combat chaplains. Military psychiatrists were not sheltered by the rules of privilege, so soldiers tended not to open up to them, but many of the chaplains also had difficulties. The military's method of cycling soldiers in and out of units interfered with the ability to develop intimate relationships, and many soldiers saw chaplains as an extension of the military institution and expressed little trust in them. Combat chaplains could be an exception to the rule because they shared the experiences, but the burden remained as chaplains labored to win credibility in the eyes of the soldiers. Many of their colleagues in the ministry had placed them in untenable situations because they seemed to be part and parcel of the same immoral combine.

³⁸⁰ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume I*, 434; *Volume II*, 203-204.

³⁸¹ Bowers, *Forward Edge of the Battle Area*, 57, 88; Brown, *Another Side of Combat*, 73.

“They came to mistrust the official representatives of religion (chaplains) and of mental health (psychiatrists) whom they saw as only interested in supplying bodies to fight with. The hazy moral and political reasons for the war created doubts for almost everyone.”³⁸²

Despite only one chaplain for every 1,400 men, chaplains shouldered counseling duties. Many handled the problems such as issues at home or desire to get out of the field for a variety of reasons. Many also ministered to men grieving over the deaths of their friends, guilt-ridden because they felt that they had caused the deaths of their buddies, or wanted to confess to atrocities such as the killing of civilians.³⁸³ Those who did not measure up to the task furthered undermined the credibility of chaplains. Not all spiritual advisors were comforting, and chaplains had to contend with colleagues who failed their counseling duties when it mattered most. Trite chaplain-speak such as, “You did the best you could under terrible circumstances,” was not what young troops anguishing over killing civilians needed to hear. Joanna Bourke relates the story of a soldier who killed an eight-year-old boy trying to find answers for what he had done. When he approached the chaplain, the cleric merely towed the military line and assured the soldier he was only doing his duty. Larry Gwin had to handle a drunk and grieving comrade asking why a friend died instead of him. Unable to find the right words, Gwin handed the question off to a passing chaplain. The cleric quoted a few Bible verses and claimed that Providence was on their side in the war. Gwin walked away in disgust. The Cold War rhetoric that had infused the chaplaincy led many supposed to preach the “brotherhood of man” to

³⁸² Snow, *The Endless Tour*, 165; Victor DeFazio. “Dynamic Perspectives on the Nature and Effects of Combat Stress,” in Charles Figley’s *Stress Disorders among Vietnam Veterans: Theory, Research and Treatment*. (New York: Bruner/Mazell, 1978), 31.

³⁸³ Brende and Parson, *Vietnam Veterans: The Road to Recovery*, 71.

drawing an image of the enemy as animal, without even the protection of God. In the abstract manner, Gwin's chaplain went even further—making the enemy a demon above the human level.³⁸⁴ One could hardly describe combat chaplains as “bleeding hearts,” but they did their best to anchor their troops to the Divine by their presence and by the fact that they could rightly state that they, too, had encountered the enemy and experienced the true demon—combat and its consequences—and those demons would dog both chaplains and soldiers when they returned home.

Post-Traumatic Stress

In *The Warriors*, J. Glenn Gray writes that joy and beauty have many different faces while brutality and hatred have very few. Yet, brutality and hatred dominated the combat zone and laid a wide road with the smooth stones of combat trauma on which marched the minds and souls of young men and many of the chaplains who ministered to them. They dealt with stress in the field, but it was when they returned home that the demons created by the constant exposure to combat conditions were unleashed. The aforementioned average age of Vietnam infantrymen left them open to impression; thus, the Vietnam War, according to Amy Snow, fostered negative identity development and role confusion at a crucial formative period in a young man's life.³⁸⁵ Recovery and reformation of that identity would be at best problematical for the troops. In some cases, only the dreamless sleep of death released Vietnam veterans from the prison of combat.

³⁸⁴ Mahedy, *Out of the Night*, 22; Robert Jay Lifton, M.D. “Advocacy and Corruption in the Healing Profession,” in Charles Figley's *Stress Disorders among Vietnam Veterans: Theory, Research and Treatment*. (New York: Bruner/Mazell, 1978), 219; Snow, *The Endless Tour*, 122; Joanna Bourke. *An Intimate History of Killing*, 292; Gwin, *Baptism: A Vietnam Memoir* (New York: Ivy Books, 1999), 163-164; Gray, *The Warriors*, 153.

³⁸⁵ Gray, *The Warriors*, 3; Snow, *The Endless Tour*, 116.

Some who returned from Vietnam often encountered a society that had gone on without them, did not know what to do with them, and even preferred that they never have to deal with them. The toxic combination of killing and deplorable conditions in the field often paled in comparison to the ambivalence and even antagonism Vietnam veterans experienced upon their return. Charles Figley writes that the personal transformation veterans experienced had both introspective and extrospective elements. Some of veterans looked inward, but they also looked outward at their society. They had been drawn into a war not of their own making and received at best a dubious welcome upon their return.³⁸⁶ Beset by the unresolved issues of Vietnam, veterans now “humped the boonies” of the home front where they could at times see former friends and even family as the enemy.

The biggest problem with which both veterans and chaplains had to contend was talking about their experience in Vietnam. How did one talk about Vietnam? The American public exhibited little interest in hearing what soldiers had to say, and those who did often used that to vilify the war rather than connect and sympathize with their warriors. Amy Snow writes that the younger a soldier was, the greater his post-traumatic stress.³⁸⁷ The problem amplified because young men, still in the formative years of their lives, had not developed the skills necessary to express themselves to the fullest. Even after four decades, Jerry Autry—hardly a model of reticence—struggles to place his experience into words, but he has achieved some clarity of his own situation and those of his fellow troops. “If someone like me,” he writes, “who has attempted to tenaciously

³⁸⁶ Figley and Nash, *Combat Stress Injury*, 218.

³⁸⁷ Snow, *The Endless Tour*, 104.

understand himself and has the help of education and experience—has difficulties, what can we say for those who try to continue their lives without this help?³⁸⁸

What was most difficult was putting into words the emotions soldiers felt for each other. Soldiers had developed bonds among each other of a nature that went beyond simple brotherhood. The relationship comrades had of mutual dependence possessed a second layer in that soldiers adopted the role of protector toward their closest buddies much the way a parent cares for a child...or more accurately, the way a *mother* cares for a child. Breaking the kin relationship among soldiers that was both a filial relationship but also a maternal relationship had profound effects on soldiers who came home from the Vietnam.³⁸⁹ Being unable to express the nature of a homosocial relationship in a society still struggling to accept such attitudes made the task even more difficult.

The struggle beset combat chaplains, whose training and ministry mandated that they take on a parental relationship with their troops. Despite their education and training, witnessing death was still witnessing death, and seeing friends die meant losing someone for whom one cared. Ordination did nothing to ameliorate the transformation wrought by the stress of the combat zone. Jerry Autry writes in his memoir that “being in Vietnam was a surreal experience no matter how you looked at it.”³⁹⁰ As a chaplain, even he did not know what to make of his experiences much less speak or write of them. The soldiers under their care had it worse when it came to understanding the trauma they suffered. Being apart from society and family and then having to reintegrate was as difficult for the clergy as it was for the laity. Joe Dulany recognized that servicemen

³⁸⁸ Autry, *Gun Totin' Chaplain*, 224-225.

³⁸⁹ Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 42.

³⁹⁰ Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 21-22; Autry, *Gun Totin' Chaplain*, 242.

could come home scarred to the point that recoupling with loved ones and spouses was not always possible. Bewilderment and bitterness worked terrible harm to those relationships.

Jim Johnson came home and found that the focus was more on the war rather than the soldiers. Claude Newby went home in 1970, having endured what he called “the slow death” of his beloved 1st Cavalry Division to the foolishness of the commanders. He felt alienated from the Army because of the six-month rotation policy that he felt did nothing to help soldiers connect with each other, alienated from civilian leaders who perpetrated the war yet were unable to understand what the soldiers needed, and alienated from the American people who chose to denigrate soldiers or—worse—ignore them as they carried on “business as usual.” Finally, he was alienated from himself over having survived when others did not. He regretted leaving his battalions as he had in 1967, but where he felt sadness at leaving his men on his first tour, now he felt a sense of futility.³⁹¹

The betrayal, disillusionment, and guilt some chaplains like Newby felt led them, like their fellow soldiers, to internalize their experiences and become reticent in speaking of them. The “double burden” emerged because clergymen are trained to bear witness to their experiences. They might have wished to remain silent, but their faith and training demanded that they speak of what beset them and why it happened. Whether minister or priest (or even rabbi), the very essence of ministry was what the early Christians termed “martyrdom.” “Martyrdom” did not mean blindly throwing away one’s life, but in carrying the narrative of their faith. Thus, when post-traumatic stress came upon him, Jim Johnson and Claude Newby would not remain silent and neither would many of their

³⁹¹ Johnson, Oral Interview, February 9, 2013; Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume II*, 212, 290.

colleagues. Their diaries and journals later became the lamentations that bridged chasm of ignorance that separated civilians from the trauma of veterans. Those combat chaplains who took to telling their stories identified the triggers of their post-traumatic stress. Pain from unhealed physical wounds, exposure to death in their ministry after the war, and the difficulty encountered when reuniting with comrades after a period of time shaped the trauma of most veterans, and many combat chaplains made sure to illuminate them in their narratives.

Physical wounds could take almost as long to heal, and the memory of them lingered well after the pain subsided. In some cases, physical wounds never completely healed, and any sort of pain or injury could trigger dark memories. Jim Johnson noted that little stimulated his trauma after Vietnam, but even a little was enough. A dislocated shoulder suffered in a football game with his fellow soldiers caused flashbacks to the injury he received in Vietnam. Limited arm motion from the injury served as a constant reminder to him of the wound he received. Johnson suffered nightmares and terror, which underscored the worst aspect of his wound and the wounds of all soldiers—the vulnerability that deprived soldiers of any sense of control over their circumstances. Likewise, the pain of Joe Dulany’s back led him to remember the horrors of Vietnam and wonder how it was that his fellow soldiers coped...and whether they coped at all.³⁹²

The horrors of Vietnam centered mostly on death. Encountering deaths, especially military deaths, or dealing with their consequences after the war could dredge up memories and their attendant emotions. Claude Newby served as the chaplain who brought death notifications to families. Each visit placed him “on the other side” of what

³⁹² Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 246, 248-249, 253-254, 256; Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 182.

he experienced in Vietnam. He found, upon reflection, that it was more difficult to bring death notices to families than to bid farewell to men who died in battle.³⁹³ After Vietnam, Jim Johnson served in Germany from 1970-1973. The death of his own father left him in an emotional state that he had not experienced since he viewed the body bags of the men in the Riverine Force. Each time someone died, he would struggle to push down the memories and do his job. Serving both in Germany and in the U.S., Johnson's duties took him into hospitals where a number of incidents initiated flashbacks. The attendant sights and smells of death brought back a flood of memories and emotions and "transported him back in time" to Vietnam. In Germany, five aircraft crashes involved the loss of life. An accident at an air show conducted by the 82nd Airborne brought back memories from twenty years past. The sons of his commanding officer suffered a terrible automobile accident in which one son died, and the other was badly injured. After Johnson became chaplain at the Brooke Army Medical Center, he was in the emergency room when the paramedics brought in a civilian postal adviser, who had been shot to death by a disgruntled co-worker. All too often, the rushing humanity of the emergency room brought Johnson back to Vietnam. "On another occasion," he writes, "two cars, with four soldiers each, collide head-on. Four are killed and four are seriously injured. The Emergency Room is hectic and for a short while, I'm reminded of arriving dustoffs coming into the 3rd Surg at Dong Tam."³⁹⁴

Even the thought of people hurt by the actions of another could activate post-traumatic stress. In 1990, Johnson and a colleague had to conduct an intervention on

³⁹³ Bowers, *Forward Edge of the Battle Area*, 81.

³⁹⁴ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 253-254, 256, 259, 262.

behalf of an unnamed individual whose prominence combined with his covert activities placed a number of people at risk. While Johnson states that it was not physical harm, the stress of the situation and the anxiety he felt for those in peril caused an emotional resurgence. Likewise, Claude Newby could not leave Vietnam behind him. His friend Colonel Rasmussen, who had tried to get him to join his staff several times, suffered a heart attack in 1973 and then succumbed to another one in 1974. As he delivered the eulogy for his friend, Newby went back in time to Vietnam; and the memories and emotions came on him like a flood.³⁹⁵

Not just death but even reminders of war acted on the psyches of soldiers and the chaplains. Jim Johnson's trip to the Middle East took him past the scenes of battles fought during the Six-Day War and Yom Kippur War. The bunkers and other evidence of the various wars between Israel and its neighbors again brought his demons near the surface, and again he pushed them back into their place. Reuniting with war comrades brought Johnson and his colleagues the most difficulty. When he returned to Fort Bragg in 1974, a fellow veteran of the named Henry Roland came to visit. The visit was a good one, but the memories of what he and Roland went through together drained him and left him feeling without any energy. When the Mobile Riverine Force had its reunion, Johnson attended. He felt as if it was "going home after being away for a long time." Going home, though, can have as many negative connotations as they do positive ones. Meeting with so many of his former comrades, some of them still in pain from their

³⁹⁵ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 265; Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume I*, 524; *Volume II*, 293.

wounds, reminded Johnson of his own trauma. Their presence together also reminded him of those who died in Vietnam.³⁹⁶

Memories alone could be enough to rouse the unextinguished embers of post-traumatic stress. As he began the process of transcribing his journals to his computer, Claude Newby found after each evening of transcription emotional exhaustion and depression. Trauma also meant anger as he reflected bitterly on Nixon's "peace with honor." Like many soldiers, Newby had little use for politicians, especially after the war. He felt that Nixon's description of the Paris Peace Accords in 1973 brought neither peace nor honor to the men to whom he ministered.³⁹⁷ Jerry Autry felt the echo of battle when the United States went into the First Gulf War in 1991.

The war pains me immensely and almost renders me useless at times; writing about it has been my salvation in a sense. It is not in me *not* to comment on the war. Throughout my ministry, I have been guided by the idea of comforting the afflicted, but also afflicting the comfortable, and there's not much chance that I'll change...Chaplains are great observers, and watching the Iraqi war unfold has truly been tough for me. I understand what the chaplains are going through; the parallels to Vietnam are excruciating to see. It makes me feel helpless.³⁹⁸

Joe Dulany found that the emotional distancing from his wife and family prior to and during Vietnam was not something easily reversed. His return brought on the need for readjustment and the renegotiation of boundaries. He admitted that the loneliness led

³⁹⁶ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 261.

³⁹⁷ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume I*, 458; Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume II*, 17, 227, 292; Nixon's "Peace with Honor" speech; <http://www.justice.gov/pardon/vietnam-war-era-pardon-instructions>.

³⁹⁸ Autry, *Gun Totin' Chaplain*, 254.

him to engage in self-examination. When he had nightmares, Dulany wondered at those of his fellow troops who had worse ones and how they coped. After the war, Joseph O'Donnell suffered like his fellow chaplains. However, therapy and spiritual reflection enabled him to understand that he was human, capable of mistakes and unable to ever live up to the unrealistic expectations he placed on himself or believed others placed on him.³⁹⁹

Conclusion

The arena of war is an arena of transformation. The sights, sounds, smells, and touch of death works profound changes on the mind, heart, and the soul and leaves what St. Paul would have described as “a thorn in the flesh.” Soldiers who went into the combat zone came out with a host of problems illuminated their post-traumatic stress. Like them, chaplains who accompanied their soldiers into the combat zone endured the same issues brought on by exposure to combat. Unlike their spiritual charges, combat chaplains recognized their post-traumatic stress as they dealt with the effects of combat stress both during and after their war experience. The “double burden” of combat stress and concern for the stress of their troops after the war worked a major transformation on the chaplains and would lead them to take a leading role in their own healing as well as in the healing of their fellow soldiers. Their witness to their experiences would place them positions to help their fellow soldiers find their way home.

³⁹⁹ Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 57-58, 182; O'Donnell. “Clergy in the Military, Vietnam and After,” 231.

CHAPTER XI – TAKING UP THE MAT

And they came bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. Unable to get near Jesus because of the crowd, they opened up the roof above him. After they had broken through, they let down the mat on which the paralytic was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Child, your sins are forgiven.’ Now some of the scribes were sitting there asking themselves, ‘Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming. Who but God alone can forgive sins?’ Jesus immediately knew in his mind what they were thinking to themselves, so he said, ‘Why are you thinking such things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, pick up your mat and walk?’ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins on earth,’ he said to the paralytic, ‘I say to you, rise, pick up your mat, and go home.’ He rose, picked up his mat at once, and went away in the sight of everyone. They were all astounded and glorified God, saying, ‘We have never seen anything like this.’ – St. Mark 2:1-12⁴⁰⁰

The passage from the writer of Mark’s gospel illustrates that Christ recognized the true nature of the paralytic’s illness rather than just its symptoms. The paralysis of the man was one that afflicted the man’s soul as much as it did his limbs. In the time of Christ, many believed that paralysis stemmed from the sins of parents and even ancestors. Such afflictions were thus traumas of the spirit that left no hope of a cure other than through divine means. Two millennia of medical advances have quelled such notions only in part because many believe that they have merited such conditions as post-traumatic stress from some inherent fault. Overwhelmed by grief and despair and the

⁴⁰⁰ NAB, 1067.

pain of unhealed wounds—both physical and psychological—veterans of the Vietnam War laid upon mats woven by their inability to make sense of what happened to them and the belief that they lay beyond hope of a cure and did not merit one. Beset by combat trauma and the social and emotional problems that accompanied it, they lingered on the periphery of society as the paralytic did, bereft of a welcome home from the society they served and access to the healing they needed.

J. Glenn Gray writes in *The Warriors* that “the great god Mars tries to blind us when we enter his realm, and when we leave he gives us a generous cup of the waters of Lethe to drink.” The problem for veterans, especially those of the Vietnam War, is that many never “drank at Lethe’s stream.”⁴⁰¹ They carried home with them the sights and sounds and smells of death—sensations that would remain with them throughout their lives. In an age where the technology of war increased exponentially, treatment for the psychological wounds that war causes did not keep pace. Modern surgery saves human beings injured by weapons, but cures for the wounds to the soul oft seem ignored. Only of late have psychiatrists (and clerics) begun to identify and develop a means by which veterans can seek healing. Strategies include developing a therapeutic alliance to treat cases of post-traumatic stress, education on trauma reactions and the recovery process, skills acquisition and symptom management, therapeutic re-experiencing of the trauma or some aspect of the trauma, reconstruction of the self and integrating the traumatic experience, and reconnection with others.⁴⁰²

⁴⁰¹ Gray, *The Warriors*, 21; Lethe was the Greek spirit of forgetfulness and one of the five rivers of Hades—and which bordered the Elysian Fields (the realm of the just). The souls of the just were required to drink to forget their earthly life.

⁴⁰² Jensen and Wiest, *War in the Age of Technology*, 323.

Edward Tick writes that failure to address the pain of veterans has amounted to denial on a national scale. The American nation on the whole no longer recognizes the existence of warriors as protectors. During the Vietnam War, many saw warriors as betraying truth, forsaking honor, following immoral orders, and/or propagating policies based on falsehoods or ignorance. Much of American society—even the elder warriors—saw them as failing the warrior virtues, and in so doing, pushed their warriors to the periphery.⁴⁰³

No chaplain who served in the military would ever have considered himself an equal of the Christian Savior; however, most priests and ministers (and, yes, rabbis also) would agree that their job was that of the men who carried the stretcher and broke through the roof. With more than one-third of all chaplains having served in the armed forces prior to their entry into the ministry, knowledge of war and ministerial training helped combat chaplains identify the issues they faced and take measures heal themselves and their fellow soldiers.⁴⁰⁴ In a theme that continued through the years after the war, combat chaplains saw their role as what Henri Nouwen called “wounded healers,” whose ministry included “unbinding their wounds one at a time” in order to be ministers to their men. The *capella* itself became the bandage for the wounds, and unbinding the bandages meant that combat chaplains shared the healing. They recognized in themselves and their troops the symptoms of combat trauma, reached out to their fellow troops much as Christ would have done, and transformed themselves in order to render their most important ministry. Both during after the Vietnam War, combat chaplains broke down the barriers

⁴⁰³ Tick, *War and the Soul*, 154, 252.

⁴⁰⁴ Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, 291.

of communication and long-held misunderstandings, conveyed the hope of healing and salvation, and made it possible for them and their fellow troops the opportunity to tell their stories. In so doing, they continued on their own journey of transformation. In “breaking through the roofs of the periphery,” many combat chaplains reached out and helped their fellow troops “pick up their mats,” and work to leave behind them the emotional agony and self-recrimination that dogged them for decades.

Breaking Down Barriers

In understanding the emotional journey of veterans—including combat chaplains, Jonathan Shay again offers a paradigm from mythology. *Odysseus in America*, Shay’s complimentary work to *Achilles in Vietnam*, shifts the focus from the brute hero Achilles to the more complex figure of Odysseus, Homer’s wandering and troubled King of Ithaca. Odysseus—already ten years away from home fighting the Trojan War—takes another ten years to return home to his wife and son and his island kingdom. After a decade of wandering, punctuated by harrowing experiences in which he loses all of his comrades, he returns home only to find that life has not only gone on without him but also that interlopers are threatening to take over his home and obscure his own legacy.

Claude Newby could have been channeling Odysseus when he reflected on the model of the “shattered hero.” Odysseus disguised himself as a beggar to fool and overcome his wives’ suitors, but his disguise reflected his inner soul—tortured by twenty years of war, violence, and wandering. Even after he has won back his throne and vanquished the suitors, he remains a restless soul who cannot find peace until he

shoulders his oar, heads inland, and makes the appropriate sacrifices.⁴⁰⁵ Like Odysseus, most shattered heroes are visible to all, yet few recognize them. They have left the war but cannot escape the sights and sounds of combat and death. Some have resumed life where they left off, having gone to war at the behest of others, but they suffer alone and in silence. Others were not able to resume their lives, and they languish on the streets or in prisons, waiting for the welcome long denied to them.⁴⁰⁶ While some sit within actual prisons, most live in prisons erected by barriers of communication and misunderstanding—both of their own and of the society that rejected them.

In transforming themselves, combat chaplains broke down barriers of communication and barriers of humanity in transforming themselves and their troops and helping American society welcome home their warriors. The key to transforming both soldier and society lay in understanding what it meant to be a warrior. The neo-Jungian psychotherapist Robert Moore writes that throughout history, men have embraced the archetypes of warrior, magician, lover, and king. Every major civilization celebrates the warrior and embodies its warrior myths. The problem for the Vietnam veteran is what Moore terms as a problem with society.

Modern culture is not comfortable with Warrior energy. The advent of mechanized warfare during the first half of the 20th century dampened the romantic ideal of martial courage. Since the social and cultural revolutions of the 60s and 70s, we've generally taught boys and men to avoid confrontation and

⁴⁰⁵ Homer, *The Odyssey*, Book XI.3, Odysseus is told by the ghost of the blind seer Tiresias that once he has regained his throne, he must venture inland with a ship's oar on his shoulder. When he has reached a place where the people know nothing of the life of a sailor and someone mistakes his oar for a winnowing fan, it is at that spot he must offer sacrifice to the gods to ease the chaos in his soul.

⁴⁰⁶ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume I*, 298.

conflict and to instead nurture their “feminine side.” The result is the Nice Guy; the man who will avoid confrontation and aggression even when confrontation and aggression are justified.⁴⁰⁷

In an age where people were reluctant to accept warriors, Wilbur Scott poses the question: how do veterans readapt to civilian life? How do they recover from wounds, recognize and avoid using survival strategies that are inappropriate to civilian life, and how do they reestablish their familial and occupational networks? Key to understanding how warriors return home is to acknowledge that they have come home changed by their combat experience. Edward Tick writes that misunderstanding the nature of post-traumatic stress as something to be “brought back to normalcy” denies the nature of the transformation. Combat chaplains, whose understanding of the Scriptures allowed them to see transformation as the result of a particular agony, accepted their own transformation as part of the war experience rather than shun it. Joe Dulany writes that even while in Vietnam and before his departure, he had distanced himself emotionally from his wife and family. When he came home, he understood the need for readjustment and the renegotiation of boundaries. He also acknowledged that he had changed because of his war experience, and that he would never return to “normal.”⁴⁰⁸

Dulany echoed Wilbur Scott in wondering about his troops and how one turns off a killer when he has been returned to the real world. When nightmares came to him, Dulany worried about his fellow troops with the worse ones they endured and how they

⁴⁰⁷ Tick, *War and the Soul*, 177; Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette, *King, Warrior, Magician, Lover: Rediscovering the Archetypes of the Mature Masculine* (San Francisco: Harper-Collins, 1990), 135.

⁴⁰⁸ Scott, *Vietnam Veterans since the War*, xv; Tick, *War and the Soul*, 106; Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 21-22.

coped. How did one shake the drug habits, alcoholism, ridicule for civilians, and no support from the home front? He noted that Indians “deprogrammed” their warriors through ceremonies that reinitiated them into their communities. Dulany had not killed anyone, but he lived the life of a warrior and shared their experiences. He saw the change that combat had wrought in him and recognized the blessings that his faith and training had provided to overcome it.⁴⁰⁹

Not all soldiers had the benefit of faith. Amy Snow states that those who suffer from post-traumatic stress need acceptance, healing, and prayer. Chaplains in the field were among the first to offer this healing despite the military not training them to do so. William Nash writes that professionals in the military, such as chaplains, must understand the unique military culture in which troops experience and endure stressors. The problem lay in that most military leaders did not view operational stress as a medical or spiritual problem to be solved by doctors or chaplains. They viewed operational disorders as an issue of training or even character that they could cure with greater discipline and appeals to manhood. Most chaplains and mental health professionals lay outside the sphere of leadership—other than to bolster the need to return the soldier to the field.⁴¹⁰ Combat chaplains broke barrier by identifying operational disorders as wounds to the soul, whose healing lay in communication. They then broke down the barriers of communication that existed among soldiers as well as between soldiers and the society to which they tried to return.

⁴⁰⁹ Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 56-58.

⁴¹⁰ Snow, *The Endless Tour*, 123; Figley and Nash, *Combat Stress Injury*, 15-17, 29.

How does one communicate about what happened in Vietnam? Given the conflicting emotions caused by the feelings veterans had for their comrades—both living and deceased—and their reticence to speak of them, how did combat chaplains facilitate their troops' relief and their own? When Jim Johnson came home, the focus was more on Vietnam and the war itself than the soldiers who experienced it. Like his troops, he internalized the experiences and was hesitant to speak of them; but he turned his own pathos into a means by which he developed the ministerial ability to reach out to veterans like himself and combat post-traumatic stress.⁴¹¹ In short, there was no arena in civilian life where veterans felt comfortable speaking of their combat trauma.

Among the recommended treatment for post-traumatic stress was to establish a “safety zone” for Vietnam veterans so that they can discuss their feelings and issues without fear. Jonathan Shay lambasted DEROS because it prevented the communalization of trauma, which arises from unit cohesion. That is, soldiers who served and fought together until the end developed enough of a comfort level to discuss their feelings both during and after the war. Combat chaplains compensated in part with memorial services that paid homage, but it has only been since the war that chaplains have been able to get their fellow veterans to open up and speak about the dead and traumatic events. In April 1968, Jack Brown came across three black soldiers and one white soldier sitting under a poncho in a driving rain storm, having a discussion about the death of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The discussion was deep and hard-hitting, but there was no consideration given to color as the men spoke to each other. The chaplain saw

⁴¹¹ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 246, 248-249, 253-255, 256; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

this discussion as a template for how veterans would discuss their trauma in the years to come and would also serve as an expression of his ministry to bridge race and class.⁴¹²

J. Glenn Gray writes that without communication with each other, life and death remain powers that exist side by side, unfathomed and lacking mystery.⁴¹³ Yet, Vietnam veterans returned home unable to communicate their experiences. Given their relative youth and lack of formal education, soldiers did not always possess the skills necessary to enunciate their experiences. In addition, the society to which they returned expressed little interest in listening to or comprehending the experiences of its returning soldiers. Combat chaplains, however, constituted the “socially connected other” who would not let their fellow troops go through it alone. Because of their training and ministry, they communicated their combat experiences and, in so doing, reached across the chasm to help welcome both their fellow soldiers—and themselves—home at last.

The biggest barrier to communication is trust, and Amy Snow writes that mending relationships and reestablishing communication depends largely on trust. Vietnam had interfered with the ability to develop intimate relationships, and most combat soldiers expressed little trust in chaplains because they thought them part and parcel of the military establishment. Combat chaplains were the exception to the rule because they shared the experiences. They served as facilitators of communication by helping their fellow veterans understand what C.S. Lewis meant when he wrote that “love is *not* a feeling. It is an act of will, a decision, a choice.”⁴¹⁴ To communicate the love that

⁴¹² Jensen and Wiest, *War in the Age of Technology*, 323; Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 55; Brown, *Another Side of Combat*, 45; Oral Interview, April 20, 2013.

⁴¹³ Gray, *The Warriors*, 111.

⁴¹⁴ Snow, *The Endless Tour*, 157, 165, 197.

soldiers had for each other was not an easy thing to accomplish. The American ethos of masculinity and which celebrates heterosexual love has also done grievous harm to soldiers and chaplains alike. Many cannot comprehend a love between men that is rich and passionate—but not sexual; thus, veterans have been reticent to voice their grief and love for dead comrades. Instead, intimidated by misunderstanding, both from society and within themselves, they kept quiet and delayed their healing.⁴¹⁵

Combat chaplains all knew well the dictum of St. John 15:13, “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends;”⁴¹⁶ and they strove throughout their years after the war to help Vietnam veterans couch the passion they held for their comrades in those terms. Gray writes that there are three types of love operating during war: erotic love as epitomized by the sexual but unstable relationship between Ares (Mars) and Aphrodite, preservative love, and the love called friendship.⁴¹⁷ Chaplains became the caretakers of the last two forms of love as they took guardianship of the souls of their troops and exhibited how men could exist on intimate terms. Chaplains practiced preservative love by placing their own lives as subservient to the lives of others. It was a love that cared for the whole rather than just the parts. Vincent Capodanno embodied preservative love in his ministry to his Marines, and every chaplain like him who went out into the field displayed the same kind of love.

It was a love that opened themselves and others to true friendship—a relationship that “opens the world to us by insulating us against passions that narrow one’s sympathies.” Friendship makes life doubly dear, especially in war, which is always a

⁴¹⁵ Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 43.

⁴¹⁶ NAB, 1160.

⁴¹⁷ Gray, *The Warriors*, 64.

harvest of death. Hence, friends expose themselves to an anxiety even greater than that of lovers because there is no destructive dynamic in friendship, no love of death or sacrifice. The problem for Vietnam veterans is that love as friendship, despite its insulation, must subsist haphazardly, and as best as it may in the midst of war—the war of the combat zone and the war in their souls. Its true domain is peace, only peace.⁴¹⁸

The way to peace and friendship was communication; but in breaking down the barriers to communication, combat chaplains also broke down the barriers that separated their troops from humanity. Gray writes that joy and beauty have many different faces, but brutality and hatred have very few. Yet it was brutality and hatred of the enemy that reigned supreme in the battle zones of Vietnam. “Charlie,” “gooks,” and a variety of other ethnic pejoratives reduced the Vietnamese combatants (and non-combatants) to mere animals cursed by God in the minds of soldiers while the hit-and-run tactics of the VC and NVA contributed to such notions. Added to it was the Cold War image of the enemy as a communist and therefore a vile creature. In the abstract manner, the enemy in Vietnam became a demon that operated beyond the human level.⁴¹⁹ Killing such “animals” only to find that they were human like them created unbearable grief for many soldiers that went unresolved in the years after the war.

Jonathan Shay writes that chaplains would have better served the troops under their care by reminding them that enemy soldiers are extremely dangerous *because they are human just like us* rather than God-hated vermin. Shay paints with a broad brush because not all chaplains invoked God to bring destruction down upon the enemy. In

⁴¹⁸ Gray, *The Warriors*, 95.

⁴¹⁹ Gray, *The Warriors*, 3, 64, 83, 85, 93, 153.

fact, many chaplains refused to even reference the enemy, choosing instead to focus on the sacrifices of their own soldiers. Abstract hatred is the focus on one trait of a person or group while disregarding the other features.⁴²⁰ Those combat chaplains who wrote memoirs and gave interviews served as a bulwark against such hatred and strove to remind their soldiers—both during and after the war—that the individuals whom they fought were human and God’s own creatures. The love that combat chaplains extended to their men can also be classified as “concerned love” because it helps warriors find their way back, establishes peace, and heals hatred of belligerents for each other.

Fr. Michael Quealy, a Catholic Chaplain in the 1st Division, expressed how he felt the burden of having to forgive the enemy. Jim Johnson reminded his soldiers throughout his time with them in the field that the enemy was bold and cunning, but human like them. He hated the war, not the VC. He hated the terrible price of war—killing, not the people whom his troops had to kill. Jack Brown came across a scene where a soldier gave a drink of water to a blindfolded VC prisoner. The simple act of kindness and unselfishness between two individuals, who in another setting would have been trying to kill each other, moved the chaplain. In that moment, he saw the transformation of the killer in the field to a man of Christ.⁴²¹

Both Johnson and Brown saw their troops as warriors; and, although the Christian ethic calls war a sin with confession as necessary for atonement, neither Johnson nor Brown felt their soldiers needed to atone for their presence in the field as warriors. The observations of Amy Snow confirm both chaplains because she counters those who

⁴²⁰ Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 203; Gray, *The Warriors*, 134.

⁴²¹ Whitt, “Conflict and Compromise,” 202; Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 232; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013; Brown, *Another Side of Combat*, 58, Oral Interview, April 20, 2013.

denigrate the warrior ethic with the Hindu *Bhagavad Gita*.⁴²² Written sometime during the third millennium B.C.E., the *Gita* is a dialogue between Prince Arjuna and his charioteer Krishna—one of the major Hindu gods. Krishna states that a warrior has a specific task within a society and is responsible in his own way and through his own methods for bringing about peace and justice. Likewise, Edward Tick describes the need for societies to accept their warriors and allow them reentry into their community rather than shun them for the deeds they may have committed. Johnson, Brown, Tick, and Snow all attempt to illuminate that God loves warriors as much as others. This is not to say that any of the four—or any combat chaplain for that matter—advocated war. The warrior must also remind himself that God *was* in Vietnam—longing for peace, mourning the fallen soldiers, and comforting the afflicted. Brown was no apologist for the war in Vietnam and felt it exhausted the cream of America’s youth, but he gently disagreed with Lt. Massa’s aunt during their correspondence after her nephew’s death. He clarified the mission and purpose of those like Massa and tried to help the elderly woman realize that her nephew’s sacrifice was not in vain.⁴²³

In such a realization lay one of the keys to relieving the double burden that chaplains bore—reconciliation. One veteran chaplain wrote that reconciliation was the means by which one resolved the guilt that one felt over Vietnam. Guilt can teach the soldier, as few things else are able to do, how utterly a man can be alienated from the very sources of his being. Recognition of guilt can point the way to reconciliation, and

⁴²² Snow, *The Endless Tour*, 210-211.

⁴²³ Snow, *The Endless Tour*, 210-211, 214-215, 237; Edward Tick, *Warrior’s Return: Restoring the Soul after War*, 208-209; Snow, *The Endless Tour*, 237; Brown, *Another Side of Combat*, 23, 33.

combat chaplains were among the first to extend the hope of reconciliation—by conveying hope itself.⁴²⁴

Conveying Hope

The “wounded healer” describes the transformation of combat chaplains, who bind their own wounds yet maintain their readiness to heal the wounds of their fellow soldiers. Nouwen writes that the healer articulates the wounds to bring hope to the wounded, offers compassion to free the wounded from shame and guilt, and contemplates transforming destruction into creation. J. Glenn Gray asks whether men of either East or West survive without any gods or a god, and then answers the question with a resounding “no.” The problem was that many veterans felt as if they were cut off from God or religion, either through their actions or because God, in fact, does not exist or is a distant and uninvolved deity. If God, having the power to do otherwise, is willing to tolerate all the suffering in the world, then he must be rejected as a cruel deity who delights in human suffering.⁴²⁵

Because of such perspectives, the task of conveying hope was difficult for chaplains both during and after the war. Gray writes that it is the limited time one spends on earth that mandates that all must take extra care to behave in a proper manner. The spirituality of those who carried the *capella* into the combat zone provided an anchor for both veterans and themselves. Snow writes that in war, there is no future because loss was the norm rather than the exception. Soldiers lost comrades, youth, security, family, love, reason to live, trust, self-esteem, future, faith, and God. Combat chaplains tethered

⁴²⁴ Brende and Parson, *Vietnam Veterans: The Road to Recovery*, 207; Gray, *The Warriors*, 211.

⁴²⁵ Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, 46-47, Chalsma, *The Chambers of Memory*, 152, 153.

soldiers to the future—and thus hope—through their presence and personal spirituality. Spirituality is the means by which one finds meaning in life because it is a condition in which one is aware of the holy, a spiritual-mindedness, a devotion to God and things of the spirit, or whatever gives meaning to life.⁴²⁶ This especially true in the zone of war, and many combat chaplains rose to provide soldiers with a lifeline to that hope.

Chaplains in the field affirmed the presence of the Divine for the troops because they embraced what Edward Tick pointed out that the central loss of a soldier's life—a friend, a close buddy—causes one to ease the similar burdens others carry. Throughout his many counseling sessions, Johnson felt a personal catharsis through his compassion and concern for his men and his attempts to remind his troops of God's presence. When he came home, Johnson wept long and hard after eight and a half months of combat strain and for the dead. He then turned to his spirituality for healing and later continued with it as he worked among those veterans who could not leave the field behind them. Claude Newby never hesitated about embracing his spirituality. The death of Lt. Brock moved him deeply and filled him with guilt, so he relied on prayer to help him separate grief from guilt and then commend the man's soul to the Almighty. In dealing with Brock's death, Newby equipped himself to counsel and hear other long-suffering veterans during times of grief and guide them away from guilt. For Joseph O'Donnell, the memorial service itself was the first step in recognizing Providence in the lives of his soldiers. From that point, he strove to keep alive the spirits of the dead in the minds of his men—both during and after the war. Years of therapy and spiritual reflection helped him to

⁴²⁶ Gray, *The Warriors*, xvi, xvii ; Snow, *The Endless Tour*, 18, 55, 163, 203-204.

understand that he was human, capable of mistakes and unable to live up to the unrealistic expectations he placed on himself or believed others placed on him.⁴²⁷

Hope, thus, was relieving soldiers of the awful burdens they carried because of the promises they made to their comrades in the field. Whether it was one that promised protection from harm that failed or the simple fact of not having “finished the job,” soldiers that survived came home carrying guilt both for surviving and making promises they were unable to keep. Shay notes that the gods intervene to end the conflict between Odysseus and the parents of the suitors he has killed. Both sides allowed terrible things to happen; therefore, the gods declare *tabula rasa* for both Odysseus and the people of Ithaca. For the Jews, the *Kol Nidre* is an Aramaic hymn sung on the first evening of Yom Kippur that relieves all of the vows they have made and have been unable to fulfill. Edward Tick writes that soldiers must have a process akin to the *Kol Nidre* to restore their hope and allow them to reenter the community.⁴²⁸ Combat chaplains played an integral role because they had the power to be the guides along the path toward such enlightenment and acceptance. The restoration of hope to their troops laid in the ability of combat chaplains to help the soldiers tell their story and complete their journey home.

Herbert Chalsma relates the story of a soldier named “Alan,” who struggled with the notion of God after he had gone through hell in the combat zone. Unable at first to reconcile his view of God with the evil that he had experienced in Vietnam, he derived his answer from what Alfred North Whitehead called “process theology.” In

⁴²⁷ Tick, *War and the Soul*, 138; Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 136, 222; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013; Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume II*, 125; O’Donnell. “Clergy in the Military, Vietnam and After,” 231.

⁴²⁸ Jonathan Shay, *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming* (New York: Scribner, 2002), 145-146; Tick, *War and the Soul*, 208.

Whitehead's view, change over time to a person is accidental rather than substantial; that is, in the case of Alan, his comrades, and the chaplains, the changes wrought by the sights and sounds and participation in war did not change the *essential nature* of the person. Alan realized that war had wrought changes in his body and his mind, but it had not changed who he *was*. In this realization, Alan concluded what had haunted him, which he later resolved. "I couldn't think a God like this would let this happen...I got the answer I needed. It was like God didn't make war. Man made war."⁴²⁹ Alan's lesson was one that chaplains had to learn as well as teach. Joe Dulany, despite the terrible experiences he had in combat, remarked that he continued to believe in God's presence in the valley of the shadow of death. He adopted "Amazing Grace" as his mantra, identifying with John Newton (the song's creator) and relating his own story as a testament to "being once lost and then found."⁴³⁰

Telling the Story

It was in testament or bearing witness that chaplains and the soldiers to whom they ministered continued the process of healing. Stories hold communities together, and the stories of warriors occupy a special place in the binding together of villages, of clans and tribes, and of nations. Whether the community is a small family or an entire nation, stories are integral parts of their fabrics. Herbert Chalsma writes that stories are distillations of experienced reality; that is, warriors who tell their stories are not simply "film and audio documentary" of what they experienced. Their emotions and how the story affected them and continues to affect serve as a guidepost for those in the

⁴²⁹ Chalsma, *The Chambers of Memory*, 108.

⁴³⁰ Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 41.

community who have benefited from the warrior's task and those who will someday take up the warrior mantle from them. The telling of the story contributes to the collective story in the community. To deny warriors their contribution to the community's fabric is an affront to them and the entire community.

In the warrior's healing process, there is the self and the story, the teller and the listener. Linkage in the community is through shared stories—telling the story to a compassionate listener, someone who can truly listen. Many combat chaplains, by training and ministry, were among many who often served as the receptacle for the story—the listener who serves as the *other* to whom the soldier tells his story.⁴³¹ However, combat chaplains of the Vietnam War also became the tellers of the story, and thus contributed to the community as a whole and led the way for their troops after the war to open up and tell their stories.

Victor Frankl writes that many who experience the worst conditions do their best to draw a greater moral and spiritual meaning from the experience. Chaplains who experienced combat had to do so—for themselves as well as their troops. The key to restoring hope in warriors resided first in the need for the warrior to bear witness to and speak openly of the war experience and what it meant to them. The warrior archetype allows one to understand why it was that veterans had to speak of what happened to them and how it was that chaplains again led the way.

How does one restore the warrior archetype and create mature elders so that future warriors can become integrated? Lao Tzu writes that one should “stay with the ancient but move with the present.” That is, one should not cast aside the warrior

⁴³¹ Chalsma, *The Chambers of Memory*, x, 5, 202-203.

archetype but instead integrate it into one's own traditions of self and society. The warrior must complete the process of training through proving himself to the satisfaction of the elders, with their guidance and instillation of values. Not just prior to war, the warrior must return to give an account of himself before the elders and divest himself of the war experience.⁴³² Combat chaplains thus helped veterans to the notion of that accountability and to share their stories.

Sharing stories of fear and killing was not an easy task for veterans. The aforementioned conditions of combat and loss of comrades were painful to relive in and of themselves. Speaking of them to their communities at best ambivalent about their stories often proved an impossible task, but it also is one of the few means by which veterans can at least achieve some peace.⁴³³ Chaplains fit into this process because soldiers were more inclined to share their stories with them. In his essay, "Living in Moral Pain," Peter Marin writes that "Moral trauma cannot be eased with medications but by completing the moral journey." A soldier must journey to give honor to the dead and allow the dead to confront him. Thus, one returns to the Greek wanderer and his visit to the Underworld (Hades). The Underworld is a place of fear, but Odysseus must confront that fear in order to purify himself. Veterans must also confront their problems (the dead) by asking "What do the problems want from us?"⁴³⁴ Odysseus slaughters a sheep whose blood allows the ghosts of dead—including that of his own mother and several of his former comrades—to confront him...and he them. The blood of the sheep symbolizes

⁴³² Tick, *War and the Soul*, 178, 184-185, 206.

⁴³³ Tick, *War and the Soul*, 116, 143, 205.

⁴³⁴ Shay, *Odysseus in America*, 123, 174.

the blood shed by his comrades before the walls of Troy and those of his shipmates, whom he lost to such perils as the Cyclops and Laestrygonians.⁴³⁵

For Christians, the original definition of martyrdom in the Greek meant “to bear witness,” and its meaning became associated with the shedding of blood as evidenced in the sacrifice of the Cross. Even the Jewish Passover’s “blood of the lamb” was essential to the telling the story of how the Israelites broke the chains of slavery. Combat chaplains understood that they had to bear witness and tell their stories and then help veterans tell their own by giving honor to the dead. Edward Tick treated a patient named “Ray,” who related a time when he unzipped a body bag to show two orderlies he was not afraid of death. Tick had Ray then begin a dialogue with the dead man, and the corpse spoke to Ray and “gave him permission” to continue on his life and carry on the names—and stories of the comrades lost in Vietnam. The story of Ray and “Bag Man” shows the efficacy of confronting the dead as being “one with the warrior” and then being able to leave the dead behind. Both Jack Brown and Joseph O’Donnell, two chaplains who made sure to unzip each body bag and bless the dead, made their ministrations to give them and any who might be present witness to the dead and their sacrifice.

Claude Newby could never leave Vietnam behind him, so he bore witness for his troops. When he spoke at an LDS conference after the war, memories of Vietnam came back in a flood. Rather than try and suppress the feelings and emotions, he bared his soul to the attendees and spoke about his troops and his experiences. Newby understood that he endured his share of survivor’s guilt. He understood that survival was no reason for guilt but instead was a clarion call to tell the story of his experience and give homage to

⁴³⁵ Tick, *War and the Soul*, 205;

the dead. He transformed his emotions into honor for the fallen through his memoir, and no more honor did Newby feel than in his regard for Bill Snyder. The memory became an emotional palliative because of the strong moral example Snyder had set for others. On another occasion, Newby made a speech at an LDS conference that paid tribute to Elvin Jackson and gave those listening a greater appreciation for the nature of the war and the suffering of the faceless troops. The comprehensive memoirs that Newby cobbled together in several volumes and editions may have caused him pain and anger, but they gradually eased his burden as he told the story of his comrades. Both in the midst of the trauma he endured during combat and reliving while typing his memoirs, he focused on Christ and his atonement for the sins of the world. He appreciated the life, hope, and strength to endure and regarded them as a sign of grace that called him to tell his troops' stories.⁴³⁶

Jim Johnson's years of trudging from bus to bus to attend school and then on to higher education and ministry paid off not just in his counseling abilities but in how he was able to place his thoughts into writing. He turned to journaling as a means of coping with his post-traumatic stress, and his journals and letters formed the basis for his own memoir, which bore witness to his own thirty-year odyssey as well as those of his soldiers. When Johnson attended a ministers' conference, he related stories of Vietnam. For Joseph O'Donnell, the memory of the Marine sergeant who died in his arms at DaNang haunted him. He wrote to the man's family after his death, and the widow wrote back with thanks and gratitude for his kindness. Upon his return to the States, O'Donnell then met the widow and her children at a local McDonald's to speak with them. The talk

⁴³⁶ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume I*, 93, 186-187, 240, 242, 248-249, 290-291.

was so fulfilling and cathartic for both, that he broke dinner plans and accepted the request of the widow to meet the rest of the man's family—all fifty of them. For the next several hours both chaplain and family received a measure of catharsis as he shared stories about the Marine, and the family shared stories about a beloved son.⁴³⁷ Neither could bring back the deceased, but both O'Donnell and the Marine family left with a clearer picture of the young man who had given his life—and a huge sense of comfort and relief.

Jack Brown, who claimed not to suffer from post-traumatic stress, nonetheless used memory to ease the pain of his soul. One afternoon in Vietnam, he heard the 101st Airborne Band playing, and he noted how the music raised his and his comrades' heavy hearts. Brown felt the music to be a form a remembrance in and of itself, so he began to identify his mission with that of the band. In addition to the memorial services, he made it a point to make a list of the men who died as a result of combat. Listing their names was in essence telling the story and making sure that those individuals never be forgotten.⁴³⁸ In corresponding with the families of the fallen, Brown took upon himself explaining the meaning of death to families like those of Dominic Massa. In displaying his vulnerability and inability to find all the answers, he explained the nature of the war to those grieving and told the story of the troops. Brown explained that nothing separates the faithful from the Lord, that the sacrifice of soldiers is never done in vain, and that it is for the living to remember those who have died. Finally, he wrote that God bears the grief of all who suffered the loss of family members in the war. When Massa's son was

⁴³⁷ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 248, 267; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013; O'Donnell. "Clergy in the Military, Vietnam and After," 231.

⁴³⁸ Brown, *Another Side of Combat*, 16, 20, 75; Oral Interview, April 20, 2013.

born, Brown ruminated on John 15:13 and how men such as Massa epitomized devotion, duty, love, and redemptive purpose. Brown transformed his burden by resolving never to forget Massa and his like—for the sake of his young son and all those children yet to be born.⁴³⁹

Conclusion

Amy Snow writes that God, the all-powerful, was lost in the jungles of Vietnam. veterans who returned from combat no longer saw a God who was loving and kind but one that allowed the killing of others in His name, atrocities to go unpunished, and injustices to go unresolved. Edward Tick notes that conflicting questions during the Vietnam war plunged young men into crisis at the moment of moral awakening—not wanting to die in battle, morality, and injustice. Hebert Chalsma writes that veterans in treatment shared stories that moved from the days of innocence and late adolescent enthusiasm and daring to shocking and traumatic events in Vietnam. In the wake of their war experiences came years of disorganization and distress, often involving broken relationships and addictions. Despite the despair of the stories, though, a flicker of hope remains for healing and redemption. Veterans coming home need to replace that vision of God with another: a hope-generating, forgiving, accepting God, who loves the warrior in spite of the wounds.⁴⁴⁰ Combat chaplains walked with the troops as a reminder that God is present even in the combat zone and that is it humankind that makes war. The very act of carrying the *capella* into the combat zone alongside the men was the first step

⁴³⁹ Brown, *Another Side of Combat*, 26, 31, 38, 46; Oral Interview, April 20, 2013; John 15:13 (NAB), “Greater has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.”

⁴⁴⁰ Tick, *War and the Soul*, 112; Chalsma, *The Chambers of Memory*, 197; Snow, *The Endless Tour*, 20, 123.

in conveying the hope that soldiers needed in the valley of the shadow. Combat chaplains, by their very presence, first offered a vision of God as loving caretaker, ready to forgive warriors for their actions.

Wilbur Scott points out that recovery is ongoing, but is far from complete. The personal transformation of veterans has both “introspective and extrospective” elements. The men constantly look inward, but they also look outward at their society both in relationship to having been drawn into the war and to what they perceived as a dubious welcome upon their return. At a time when the most revolutionary demands are made upon everyone for conversion to a better form of existence, many are so unprepared for any inner change. J. Glenn Gray writes that what is missing so often in modern humanity is piety for nature and a recognition of our dependence on the natural realm. There is little truly religious passion for belonging to an order infinitely transcending the human.⁴⁴¹

Vietnam veterans, by virtue of their age and development, were often too young to process opportunities for change. Instead, they saw themselves as caught up against their will in a whirlwind of death and carnage for which they had little chance to prepare. It was those carrying the *capella* who reached back and helped both the lost young men who came home as well as themselves accept change and enlightenment. In the Scriptures, Job engages in a long diatribe in which he argues his righteousness before God. His cries of lamentation are not unlike the bewildered questions veterans ask of God because of the horrors they endured—no longer able to say “blessed be the name of

⁴⁴¹ Scott, *Vietnam Veterans since the War*, 259; Robert Jay Lifton, M.D. “Advocacy and Corruption in the Healing Profession,” in Charles Figley’s *Stress Disorders among Vietnam Veterans: Theory, Research and Treatment*. (New York: Bruner/Mazell, 1978), 218; Gray, *The Warriors*, 224, 237.

the Lord.” What veterans must come to understand is that God addresses Job out of the storm and reminds him that, despite his afflictions, he is part of an infinitely larger universe and natural order. Warriors must understand that they are part of the same natural order, and those who carried the *capella* did their best both during and after the war to have their troops break down the barriers that separated them from society, gave them hope that they were deserving of love and healing, and finally tell the stories that will divest them of the burdens they carried. Just as God restored Job in the end to both health and wealth, the veterans and the chaplains who ministered to them have the opportunity to achieve peace in their minds and hearts and “pick up their mats.” Having done so, many chaplains then helped themselves and their troops go home.⁴⁴²

⁴⁴² NAB, Job 38-42, 542-546; God breaks His silence with Job and addresses him out of the cloud, pointing out the wonders of creation and Job’s place within it. However, at the end, Job is restored to his former health and is given double his previous blessings because—as God said—“he has spoken rightfully of me.”

CHAPTER XII – GOING HOME

And while he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him.

His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.’

But his father ordered his servants, ‘Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.’ – St. Luke 15: 20b-24⁴⁴³

Most, even in other faith traditions, are well-acquainted with Luke’s story of the Lost or “Prodigal” son, in which the younger of two sons believes himself irredeemable because of his life of dissolution. He believes that he merits nothing more than a place among the servants rather than in the loving embrace of his family. Many veterans of the Vietnam War identified with the Prodigal Son and his reluctance to see himself as salvageable. The years in the combat zone that included killing, possible drug and alcohol abuse, sexual licentiousness, and witnessing atrocities left many returning soldiers more than traumatized. All-consuming guilt and an inability to reconcile what they had seen and done led veterans to consider themselves unworthy of the society to which they were returning.

Chaplains endured the “double burden” because they experienced “double roles”: their ministry mandated that they play the role of the loving, welcoming father while at the same time they saw themselves as “prodigal sons.” Chaplains in combat had

⁴⁴³ NAB, 119-1120.

witnessed enough death to shatter their own souls; yet, their religious training expected them to convey a message of hope and forgiveness. In relieving the burdens they and their fellow troops also carried, combat chaplains did more than just help their troops “pick up their mats.” The *capella* that they carried into the combat zone to bring the sacred to their troops later served as encouragement to return to society. That which once reminded them of the sacred in the combat zone now served to remind them that one of the places where they could find the sacred was home. The home front could appear to be a place as hostile to returning veterans as did the jungles and rice paddies of Southeast Asia, but chaplains reminded their troops that welcome and healing awaited them. Combat chaplains adhered to the belief of Jack Brown that sacred space was wherever a soldier brought God, and they continued convincing veterans that they could find God at home.⁴⁴⁴ In bringing themselves home and reclaiming it as “sacred ground,” combat chaplains then turned and helped welcome their fellow warriors and helped them come home.

The world to which combat chaplains returned was different from the one they had left. Despite their best efforts, convincing returning veterans (as well as themselves) that home and welcome awaited them was not an easy task. In understanding the problem of return for chaplains and troops, one turns away from the evangelist Luke and his Prodigal Son to the lyre of Homer and his tortured, wandering hero Odysseus. Jonathan Shay provides yet another insight to understand the pathos inherent in coming home that many veterans endured. The whole reason for Odysseus’ travails on his quest home and his subsequent rage at the suitors is what Shay identifies as the Greek hero’s

⁴⁴⁴ Brown, *Another Side of Combat*, 55.

thumos; that is, a desire for recognition that is deep and passionate.⁴⁴⁵ The injury to Odysseus' *thumos* is the injury most, if not all, Vietnam veterans faced when they returned. Ambivalence and/or open contempt by civilians, a Cold War atmosphere that saw the soldiers of Vietnam as “losers” of their war, the bereavement of families of lost comrades, and the continued burden of trauma added to the burdens veterans carried home with them and contributed to the “double burden” their chaplains shared.

Many veterans also found themselves locked in combat mode. Edward Tick has already identified post-traumatic stress as a condition in which the human consciousness remained on the battlefield. When he finally arrived on his home island of Ithaca after ten years, Odysseus continues in his own “combat mode,” lying and testing others—even his own wife, who has remained faithful to him after two decades of waiting. From the time he was a boy and received the boar-tusk wound on his thigh, Odysseus has been a restless spirit, traumatized by injury and death, and using his natural guile to overcome where brute strength would not do.⁴⁴⁶ Just as the Greek hero, the veterans of Vietnam came home, filled with distrust of others and the situations around them, and disguised themselves as had Odysseus in order to survive. Thus, coming home from the war did not mean an end to the conflict Vietnam veterans experienced. Combat chaplains, therefore, maintained their ministry to their soldiers and expanded it to their families. Some of the interactions that chaplains had with the families of soldiers could be more perilous than the razor-sharp elephant grass of the jungles.

⁴⁴⁵ Shay, *Odysseus in America*, 156.

⁴⁴⁶ Tick, *War and the Soul*, 99; Shay, *Odysseus in America*, 3, 138-139.

The combat chaplains who have assented to interviews or have left behind memoirs and narratives are now, like their fellow troops, in their seventies and eighties. Some have passed away. Some, like Charles Liteky, have passed to a new form of ministry. Their bodies have grown old; yet, the fire of their spirit still burns bright. The demons of post-traumatic stress still lay in wait beside doors of their souls; yet, their training as ministers—especially in the concepts of love—keeps the demons at bay. They know and understand that the moment they chose to accompany their troops into the field, they had begun a personal climb to Golgotha. Not a single one would have had it otherwise, no matter what the outcomes of their lives—because their soldiers did it as well. For them, the “fight” and the “race” alluded to in Paul’s second letter to Timothy is far from complete. They still remain open to healing, illumination, and transformation. They still bring the *capella* to all those who need it. They still find ways to be advocates for their fellow veterans. They still carry the double burden because the double burden is not just an aspect of military ministry—it is simply an act of ministry.

Curt Bowers’ ministry transitioned from praying over corpses in Vietnam to informing families of the loss of their son, husband, and/or father. The appearance of three officers together, exiting an automobile—one of whom was often a chaplain—brought home the terrible reality to families before they even read the dreaded telegram. Grief took numerous forms, and none of them were pleasant. One family angrily refused the flag that Bowers offered to them as the “thanks of a grateful nation.” He understood that the venom was not personal and identified with their feelings and frustration; nonetheless, anger and insults could do as much damage as bullets did.⁴⁴⁷ Bowers turned

⁴⁴⁷ Bowers, *Forward Edge of the Battle Area*, 82.

his attention to helping those soldiers still living address their problems with alcohol—one of the major obstacles to their full return. His post-war social work consisted of conducting alcohol rehabilitation courses at Fort Carson, Colorado.

Chaplain William Maheady, who served as chaplain to the 173rd Airborne Brigade, became a social worker after the war at the VA Hospital in Brentwood, California. He observed that the staff at the hospital had no idea how to treat veterans suffering from combat-related stress, so he and another veteran, Shad Meshad, devised a treatment program. They established treatment centers in the community away from the VA Centers, staffed them with paraprofessionals rather than psychiatrists and psychologists, and set up individual counseling, rap groups, and benefits counseling.⁴⁴⁸

Joseph O'Donnell came home from the Vietnam War still determined to minister as a chaplain. He joined the staff of fellow Navy chaplain John J. O'Connor at the Naval Chaplains' School in Newport, Rhode Island. He then went with O'Connor as his executive assistant in the Military Ordinariate in Washington, D.C., making him the senior priest in the U.S. Navy. His mantra to the young chaplains coming up under him reflected his own personal ethic while out in the field.

The three important qualities of any military chaplain are: (1) the ability to win with both heart and soul; (2) the need to be credible; and (3) the capacity to understand the nature of the confidentiality of privilege.⁴⁴⁹

When terrorists bombed the U.S. embassy in Beirut in 1983, O'Donnell was working at the Ordinariate. He and several other chaplains flew immediately to Dover

⁴⁴⁸ Scott, *Vietnam veterans since the War*, 36, 70.

⁴⁴⁹ Richard Gribble, *Navy Priest: The Life of Captain Jake Laboon, SJ* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 2015), 136.

AFB, which was the receiving center for the military deceased. O'Donnell felt the hurt and grief from Vietnam resurfacing, but he managed to set up an around-the-clock chaplains' office next to the hangar to minister to the needs of the bereaved families. As a result of the Beirut attacks, O'Donnell and several other military religious leaders created a series of seminars titled "A Moral Response to Terrorism." Theologians of all faiths attended the seminars, which addressed the root causes of terrorism and the responses to it from leaders of all faiths.⁴⁵⁰

O'Donnell represents those chaplains who remained within the system and transformed themselves as well as the institution of the chaplaincy. After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Russian Army reinstated its chaplains' corps: but they had to start from scratch. O'Donnell hosted a delegation of Russian officers to teach them about chaplains.⁴⁵¹ With the military's shift toward humanitarian aid in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, chaplains like O'Donnell have struggled to redefine their role and accommodate more and more faith groups in the military.

After twenty-seven years in the Navy, O'Donnell retired to Notre Dame, got his ear pierced, and started wearing Bermuda shorts when it was warm enough. Like many combat chaplains, O'Donnell suffers the effects of post-traumatic stress. However, therapy and spiritual reflection enabled him to understand that he was human, capable of mistakes and unable to ever live up to the unrealistic expectations he placed on himself or believed others placed on him. Since his retirement to Arizona, O'Donnell works at a local VA hospital several days a week saying Mass and serving as chaplain to the

⁴⁵⁰ O'Donnell. "Clergy in the Military, Vietnam and After," p225-226

⁴⁵¹ O'Donnell. "Clergy in the Military, Vietnam and After," 226

Arizona State Highway Patrol. Still a restless spirit, O'Donnell serves on an air disaster response team for the NTSB.⁴⁵²

Thomas Carter came home from Vietnam in 1970 and—with no desire to return to Vietnam for a third tour—went on to Germany for three years and then to Fort Lewis for the Chaplain Advanced course. When Saigon fell in April of 1975, Carter was glad the entire situation was over, but now had to get on with dealing with the trauma of the war. His stress emerged while still on active duty, but he found it easier to deal with while talking with chaplain groups and other soldiers going through the same issues. When Carter went to Fort Benning for his next assignment, he started to have some dreams of combat although they did not overwhelm him.

Carter also took a lead in developing rap groups for Vietnam veterans. During his post-war assignment in Germany, Carter received veterans of Operation DESERT STORM dealing with their own post-combat stress. The lessons of his own experiences were not lost on Carter as he used his own experiences and methods of coping to develop workshops and retreats for the returning troops to help them deal with their own trauma. Working with both male and female clergy, he developed a reintegration process in which returning soldiers shared their stories. Not content just to treat soldiers, Carter and his colleagues allowed spouses of soldiers to talk in groups in order to help them cope.⁴⁵³

Carter retained more than a modicum of “fire” in his post-war career. He came home from Fort Benning and then went on yet another assignment to Germany. There, he began to receive veterans of Operation DESERT STORM who were dealing with their

⁴⁵² O'Donnell, “Clergy in the Military, Vietnam and After,” 227, 230, 231.

⁴⁵³ Carter, Oral Interview, July 10, 2013.

own post-combat stress. Carter did not forget the lessons he learned from Vietnam and used his own experiences and methods of coping to develop workshops and retreats for the returning troops to help them deal with their own post-traumatic stress. Working with both male and female clergy, he developed a reintegration process for those veterans to help them come back from the Persian Gulf and get acclimated to civilian life. The clergy encouraged the returning troops to share their stories, and they also involved the spouses of the soldiers. The process helped spouses understand what the soldiers experienced and assisted them in coping with the moments when post-traumatic stress worked its machinations. His first parade as a Vietnam Veteran took place in Branson, Missouri soon after Operation DESERT STORM concluded in 1992. The first reunion of Vietnam veterans he attended was in 2013.

Carter retired in July 1993 and started his civilian life as an associate pastor in a local United Methodist Church. Four months later, the church appointed him to conduct camping and retreat ministry for the annual conference. He then supervised the ministry of a retreat center and a camp located twenty miles from the retreat center, which provided summer camping ministry for 2,000 summer campers. He served there for six years before retiring for a second time, but that retirement lasted only eighteen months. The next job was landscaping work for several companies on his own. In the late summer of 2002, he went to Nashville to fill in for a staff member of the United Methodist Endorsing Agency who had retired. Six weeks later, the agency asked him to take the position on a part-time basis...and then it became full time. He enjoyed the work enough to remain for thirteen years until his third retirement.

Carter continued landscaping and building furniture in Nashville until he and his wife moved to a retirement home in Winter Park, Florida in October 2015. They became a part of a vibrant community, and Carter now volunteers at two botanical gardens several mornings a week. He does whatever he wants regularly, but it usually involves helping others—nothing less from a chaplain.

Joseph Dulany walked alone in a jungle of despair even before he came home. The drawdown of forces after 1968 was difficult for all the men in the field as Dulany noted that tension ran high among soldiers who felt that the United States was keeping them in a war that they no longer intended to win. When his time to go home finally arrived, he took stock of his fellow soldiers' condition as well as his own. "The young soldiers called home in the U.S. 'the world,'" he said. "In doing this... Now, worn out physically, mentally, and spiritually, I was ready to leave."⁴⁵⁴

In attempting to achieve peace in his own heart after his transition to civilian life and in dealing with the problems combat soldiers experienced in peacetime, Dulany adopted the poem "Through It All" by Andre Crouch. The poem is an invitation to all to surrender and submission to the will of God.

*Through it all, through it all
I've learned to trust in Jesus;
I've learned to trust in God.
Through it all, through it all,
I've learned to depend upon God's Word.*⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵⁴ Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 73, 81.

⁴⁵⁵ Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 191.

Joe Dulany's road home was paved with the bitterness and resentment of many returning Vietnam veterans. Lack of a proper homecoming was demoralizing in and of itself, but to see soldiers of other campaigns receive a homecoming in later years rubbed salt into the wounds. The return of the hostages from Iran in 1981 was a turning point for many Vietnam veterans. Some veterans appreciated the welcome home the embassy personnel and soldiers received and believed that sentiment at last had turned in favor of the sacrifices all veterans made. Other veterans rose up in anger and disgust. They pointed out that Americans had paid them little if any attention at their homecomings—most of which was negative. For Dulany himself, the lasting effect beyond the physical was a deep-seated distrust of professional politicians—especially those who profit monetarily from politics. In addition to politicians, he disdains the modern volunteer army, feeling that it is too “slick” and paints a rosy but unrealistic picture of military service. He also feels that the modern army has eroded the code by which he and his fellow soldiers and most good officers lived and operated while in Vietnam. He is very critical of some chaplains, but he also compliments others. All denominations contributed very competent men (he feels that Roman Catholic priests were especially adept at their jobs) who became the “cream” of their faiths when they transitioned to civilian life.⁴⁵⁶

Dulany's battle zone continued beyond Vietnam to the hospitals in which he worked. While he was posted at Walter Reed, he ministered to the first patient diagnosed with HIV. While others reacted in fear and ignorance, the chaplain's experience with death and chickenshit behavior led him to confront the new and terrifying disease that

⁴⁵⁶ Scott, *Vietnam Veterans since the War*, 137; Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 183, 184.

brought along with it prejudices and attitudes. He educated himself about HIV and led the staff in adopting a gentle and understanding attitude toward those afflicted. In addition to HIV, Dulany also focused on the issues he and his fellow troops have with post-traumatic stress. In attempting to get at the heart of combat trauma, he developed an open quiz for all veterans who have experienced war:

1. How does your experience in war define your life?
2. How did your experience in war change your life?
3. What did you lose as a result of your experience in war?
4. What did you gain as a result of your experience in war?⁴⁵⁷

Jack Brown continued helping others—sometimes when others threw obstacles in his path. He left the Army in 1973 and went on to receive his Doctorate in Education from Western Michigan. He became Dean of Students at a Virginia College where he also held classes for senior citizens and taught about the history of the Army chaplaincy. From there, he took the job as Vice-President for Student Development at Louisiana College in Pineville, Louisiana and was there in 1991 when Operation DESERT STORM began. Chickenshit behavior did not exist just in the military. Twice, he ran afoul of an anti-war administrator at the college when he advocated that seniors serving in the National Guard be allowed early graduation and when he began a “yellow ribbon” campaign to honor the troops serving in Iraq and Kuwait. Because of the conflicts, the administration did not renew his contract.

However, Jack Brown held no rancor in his heart and was the type to see such events as opportunities rather than defeats. He had been driving by a VA Medical Center

⁴⁵⁷ Dulany, *Once a Soldier*, 179, 186.

to and from work each day, so he began volunteering there in his off hours. He discovered that the VA needed a clinical pastoral education counselor in Dublin, Georgia, applied for the job, and moved there in 1991. So thankful he was for his ministry to the veterans in Dublin that Brown wrote a letter of gratitude and reconciliation to the administration at Louisiana College. He felt that their decision to let him go in 1991 was simply God's way of sending him yet another mission to "walk in the jungle" with his troops. Now, he continues to "walk in the jungle," counseling veterans suffering from substance abuse issues and holding classes in spiritual health. When he was in Europe, Brown also visited the Shrine to our Lady of Lourdes in France—a profoundly moving experience shared by many soldiers.⁴⁵⁸

If Jack Brown has been a dynamo of activity throughout his life, he would be the first to argue that it pales in comparison to his wife Jean. The bedrock in his life, Jean remained supportive during his long absences and throughout their various moves, she had helped put Jack through his college studies and the seminary. While Jack was in seminary, Jean ran a childcare service for the children of young seminarians, worked as a librarian and bookstore manager, and maintained a home in which she raised two children. A pastor's wife, a chaplain's wife, and now a "hockey-grandmom" (four of her grandchildren play collegiate hockey), Jean remains active in following her grandchildren

⁴⁵⁸ The Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes is located at the site where in 1858 a young French woman named Bernadette Soubirous received visions from an apparition she described only as "the Lady." When questioned by the Church authorities, she revealed that the Lady identified herself only as "the Immaculate Conception." Later, Bernadette dug into the earth near the site of the apparitions causing a well of water to appear, and the water caused miracle cures. The Catholic Church regards Lourdes as an authentic apparition of the Blessed Mother, canonized Bernadette soon after her untimely death at age 24, and now have a series of hospitals in Lourdes to minister to the ill.

and has become an avid “texter” of their triumphs. He has transformed his burden by resolving never to forget.⁴⁵⁹

Talking and getting others to talk also became Jack Brown’s *modus operandi*. He rotated home to Kentucky in 1968 and then went on to Fort Dix, New Jersey, and then back again to the chaplain school at Fort Hamilton in New York where he spent the next year. After that, he went back to Germany for a three-year-tour with the 1st Airborne Brigade. His experiences in Vietnam left him with many memories but no nightmares, which he did not bury but instead talked about with his fellow Vietnam veterans. He continued to “walk in the jungle” with the men, counseled veterans suffering from substance abuse issues, and held three classes in spiritual health. While in Europe, he also visited the Shrine to our Lady of Lourdes in France—a profoundly moving experience shared by many soldiers.

Robert Falabella came home from the war with a Silver Star for his actions near Hac Mon, which included rescuing a dazed and wounded lieutenant in the combat zone, firing his weapon, and collecting other weapons. He declined a Purple Heart because he would have felt a sense of shame when other soldiers had received ghastly wounds in combat. Those who applied for the Purple Heart when they had only minor bumps and scratches angered him because such medal hunting belittled the true sacrifices made by his troops and reflected the general lack of appreciation for their suffering. He also became angry when the draft dodgers were pardoned and some lauded the war protestors as heroes.

⁴⁵⁹ Brown, *Another Side of Combat*, 46.

Like Curt Bowers, Falabella had to bring news to the families of the bereaved; and like his colleague, he had to endure the pain and bitterness of the families. He chose to focus on the Blessed Mother in order to get through the pain he shared with the families. For a Jesuit, the person of the Blessed Mother is tantamount as an example to living the proper human life. Falabella dealt with the grief of seeing death by putting himself in the role of the Blessed Mother, the one who stood at the foot of the Cross and watched her son die. By taking on the burden of grief and then bearing witness to it, she alleviated the grief of the world. Falabella saw himself “at the foot of the Cross” each time he delivered the awful news.

He became more intensely focused on the grace of his relationship with God and used that grace when he dealt with veterans over the years. His basic message to suffering veterans is that humanity is called to fall in love with God, completely. Not just the soul, but the *entire person* is called upon to surrender completely to God’s love. Comprehending such a message leads one to understand why he and many chaplains volunteered to go to Vietnam. When asked, Falabella’s answer was simple yet elegant. “Free will does not force us to love. Communism does. Communism denies us the dignity of choice.”⁴⁶⁰ It may have been the utterance of a happy warrior, but he wanted to be a priest more than he wanted to be a soldier. Falabella’s Christian faith may have been “muscular” in its fervor, but it remained gentle in its application. For him, salvation remains the true goal of any priest or minister, and salvation by its very nature is a gentle thing. He may have hated war itself, but he saw in it an opportunity to bring people to salvation. He focused on Romans 8:31 by asking “What will separate me from Jesus

⁴⁶⁰ Falabella, Oral Interview, April 21, 2013.

Christ?” In his view, war did not separate one from the Savior; rather, not understanding how to embrace the war experience and derive good from an evil situation did so. He credited the grace of the relationship he possessed with God and identified the “peace of Christ” as not becoming part of the hell and letting the hell change him. The very message he brought to veterans in the years following the war reflected his overall sentiment: not just the soul, *all* aspects of one’s humanity—not just the soul—are called upon to fall in love with God. With such a perspective, he was able to eschew hate in looking at the enemy. One should disagree with the enemy rather than hate the enemy.

Falabella claims not to have suffered post-traumatic stress as much as others and credited his religious training that led him to believe that the horror which he saw was not the end of the soul. His bitterness over a number of issues was not enough to “let the hell change him.” Despite the lack of appreciation from their own country, Falabella admires the men who still served. Now in the twilight of his life, he is in a motorized wheelchair, but he remains active, attending daily Mass—sometimes celebrating it—at his retirement home. And while his body is faltering, the fire in his eyes still tells the story of his ministry and his devotion to the men in the field.

After his tour, Jerry Autry went to Germany where he learned that the military reassigned soldiers, fresh from Vietnam, to Germany. He found it despicable that the military would send troops just home from the ragged conditions of the Vietnam War on a “leave” and then send them to Germany where they were expected to “soldier,” that is, spit shined boots and pressed uniforms. Most had eight or ten months of duty remaining, so they “crashed and burned.” They refused training, used dope, and dredged up simmering racial issues. Autry castigated the military for failing to prepare for such

problems, but he complimented his fellow chaplains for their efforts and felt that they were the only redeeming aspect of the entire situation. He and his colleagues established coffee houses where soldiers could congregate and talk. They also worked closely with the German community to foster various programs and promoted in-house programs like ACS (Army Community Service). Autry felt that he and his fellow chaplains took an awful situation created by the Pentagon and turned it into an enormous ministry. Once more, the “gun-totin’ chaplain” wielded the weapons at his disposal to minister to his troops in the field even though the arena of combat had changed from Southeast Asia to the Federal Republic of Germany.

Autry received the standard tepid welcome on his return to the United States and felt bitter about his experience. He called the Vietnam War and war in general “BS” because he had grown tired from seeing his infantry battalion take a piece of ground, give it up, and allow the VC to come back and reclaim it—making the deaths and injuries of his men seem in vain. At one time, his unit, the 1/501 Infantry battalion of the 101st Airborne had over seventy percent wounded or killed. He was bitter that Vietnam suddenly seemed to have become a “bad war” in everybody's eyes and could only imagine how his fellow troops dealt with such negativity.

When he tried to show his family and friends the slides of the photos he had taken, no one wanted to see them; so he threw them all away. Yet, he did not throw away his ministry. He considered his soldiers, even after the war, his “parish.” He believes that all veterans who have seen combat suffer from post-traumatic stress, so he “walks with them through the jungle of their pathos” in his transformation from minister to healer. He began conducting rap sessions for veterans rather accidentally as just two

veterans having breakfast together each Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Since then, it grew to a large group over the course of fifteen years. The breakfasts were a combination of belligerence and catharsis for the veterans as they integrated current events into their own experiences.

When not conducting rap sessions, Autry volunteers at the University of San Francisco Medical Infusion Center. He runs eight online blogs in which he is a prolific writer. In addition to his book *Gun Totin' Chaplain*, he has written a biography of General William Lee, the “father” of the airborne that won Biography of the Year. His wife still kids him good-naturedly about Vietnam and the fact that he has ADD. In summing up his service, Autry comes right to the point on his ministry:

I am not sure that chaplains, younger ones especially think in terms of things like the ‘Cold War.’ I can only speak for myself but basically we went about doing chaplain sort of things like ministering to the troops and their families. We use to say all the time that chaplains were just ‘ministers in uniform’ and I think that it is basically true. There are a couple of things that I think distinguish chaplains from civilian clergy. One is that chaplains have a tendency to take a broad outlook as to their soldiers and make sure of religious coverage, i.e., Catholics or Episcopalians, LDS, whatever; the second thing that I think is probably vastly distinguishing is parishioners come to a pastor and they have a problem. The pastor says I will pray for you. The military chaplain says, ‘Tell me what I need to do to help you.’ In other words, the military chaplain is much more likely to be an activist.

Autry admits memory fades in some respects and is honest in pointing out that recollection sometimes is what one wants it to be rather than how it actually happened.

When he began writing *Gun Totin Chaplain*—a title he never liked but allowed himself to be talked into by one of his girlfriends—he recalled that he had buddies who looked at the same events from different perspective. All of them, however, know that they do not want to look worse than they were:

Vietnam is unlike any experience that is life-changing—you can only think about it in retrospect, and I have been thinking about it ever since I was there. At the time, I never seriously thought about whether the war was right or wrong. In the years to come, I have confronted the meaning and, in a sense, the geopolitical aspect of Nam with great regularity, through books and through documentaries like *The Fog of War*...It was only later that I came to understand a little of the politics of America and Vietnam. The corruptness of the South Vietnamese government and our decisions that were simply wrongheaded or stupid played a part.⁴⁶¹

He also did not pay much attention to medals and even once quipped to a general that “with a Purple Heart and a dollar and a half, you can get a cup of coffee in San Francisco.” The general was not impressed by his flippancy. However, he did pay attention to any veteran who served and took a dim view of how the draft functioned.

During the Iraq War, Autry’s war pains resurfaced, but he found solace and salvation in writing—writing to help make the world a better place. In addition, he has found comfort in the company and support of his fellow retired chaplains, several of whom he joined to create a program called *Room to Read* that built schools in Vietnam. He maintains a warning against engaging a local culture as opposed to just fulfilling

⁴⁶¹ Autry, *Gun Totin’ Chaplain*, 157; Oral Interview, May 13, 2013.

one's mission to protect a weaker nation from the stronger. The mission of the United States was to repel the North Vietnamese and their communist allies. When that mission went awry, the United States lost its way in Vietnam, and the idea of winning the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese was a joke. His advice to politicians and military men is to "do the job and then go on to the next world."⁴⁶²

When Ed Wallin came home from the war, he faced a moment of truth even before he got off the airplane. Throughout his two tours in Vietnam, he labored under a growing conflict in his personal life. One month prior to his departure for Vietnam, he attended a farewell party where he met a young woman named Shirley van Dresser. It was love at first sight, but Wallin remained faithful to his vows. Nonetheless, the two wrote each other every day while he was overseas, and their love blossomed. When he came home in 1969, Wallin determined to leave the priesthood, marry Shirley, and enter the field of mental health. Like the wounded healer, though, Wallin began to recognize the signs of post-traumatic stress in himself. He was drinking heavily, experienced paranoia—especially in crowds, suffered nightmares and flashbacks, and experienced survivor's guilt especially after the death of his replacement. He checked himself into the VA for malaria and received a diagnosis of partial post-traumatic stress.

Wallin enrolled at Fordham University in the Bronx to complete his Masters in social work, left the priesthood when he graduated in 1972, and went to Memphis to marry Shirley. During his last year at Fordham, he met and befriended the German theologian and Augustinian Canon Gregory Baum (a close associate of Hans K ung). A

⁴⁶² David Ian Miller. "Finding My Religion: Gerry Autry, the "Gun-Totin' Chaplain, Reflects on an Army Career," <http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/FINDING-MY-RELIGION-Jerry-Autry-the-3300407.php>, May 29, 2006; Autry, *Gun Totin' Chaplain*, 107-108, 186-187, 254.

convert from Judaism, whose mother had died at Auschwitz, Baum served as one of the leading theologians at the Second Vatican Council. Baum married Wallin and Shirley in an interdenominational chapel. For a priest to get married before being laicized (being decommissioned as a priest) was a violation of Canon Law. Even though the Bishop of Memphis was a friend of the woman who would be Wallin's second wife and had written a notable document on peace and condemnation of the Vietnam War, he excommunicated Ed and Shirley Wallin from the Catholic Church in 1972.⁴⁶³

Ed Wallin also became an advocate for peace. He shrugged off his excommunication from the Church and focused on his own physical health. He checked himself into the VA for malaria and received a diagnosis of partial post-traumatic stress. When he was receiving treatment, he noticed that his fellow veterans did not like the VA. He also saw that the GI Bill as it was written at the time treated Vietnam veterans in a shabby manner. For instance, when Wallin went to school after his tour, because he went to a private school, he had to pay half of the tuition out of his own pocket. This meant that he held down three part-time jobs during holidays and vacations. After what he had witnessed in Vietnam, he decided that he would make it his life's mission to administer to his fellow veterans.

He began a second odyssey that has lasted for more than thirty years. While at Fordham working on his Masters, he became involved with the priest brothers and anti-war protesters Philip and Daniel Berrigan and entered the anti-war movement. When Wallin went to visit Philip Berrigan, who was in federal prison for his anti-war activities, he made the mistake of leaving his own address in Greenwich Village on the prison

⁴⁶³ Wallin, Oral Interview, July 15, 2014.

ledger instead of a false one. That earned him a visit from the FBI—still under the domination of J. Edgar Hoover—who came to see him as he was getting out of the shower. Frustrated with the constant questions, Wallin asked the G-men whether there were veterans in the FBI. When the agent answered in the negative, Wallin whipped off his towel in front of the G-men and declared, *el flagrante delicto*, that the interview had concluded.

Some years later, Wallin and Shirley were readmitted to communion with the Church. He began working with the VA and decided that he would test chaplains who had served in the Vietnam War. After some resistance, the Pentagon allowed him to do it, and he sent out 1,900 questionnaires to which more than 1,000 responded. The test showed that six percent of all chaplains who had served in Vietnam had thorough post-traumatic stress while twenty-five percent showed some symptoms. While the information he gleaned from the questionnaires was very valuable, he also agonized over the 900 or so chaplains who did not respond. What had happened to them? In addition, the Pentagon had lost contact with more than one hundred chaplains after the war.

In 1987, Wallin and an African-American mother of two sons who came home from Vietnam mentally damaged co-founded the Alpha Omega Veterans Service Homeless veterans. This was the first homeless program in the United States for veterans. They began with nine beds, and now have over two hundred. He also formed a small group of veterans and non-Veterans dedicated to gathering funds to build a veterans' care home in western Tennessee. The nearest veterans' permanent care home is ninety miles away. It has been his dream, but he hopes it becomes a reality.

In January of 2005, Shirley Wallin passed away from brain cancer. Ed Wallin then went to a grief group where he met a widow named Janice van de Herr. She was active in the Catholic peace and justice movement known as Pax Christi, and the two married soon after meeting each other. He continues to reside in Memphis where he remains active with the VA, driving veterans to and from the parking lot in a golf cart and counseling them in his spare time. He also continues counseling people suffering from grief, anger management, and the stress of unemployment. “I am 86 years old, but I still have much to accomplish. Amen.”⁴⁶⁴

Soon after the battle of June 19, General William B. Fulton told Bernie Windmiller that it was time for the chaplain to go home to his family. He agreed and did not re-up for a second tour of duty. Instead, Fulton made Windmiller regular Army and sent him to Fort Campbell via Germany; Fort Hamilton, New York; and Fort Sill, Oklahoma (where he was promoted to major). He then moved his family to Durham, attended graduate school at Duke University in World Religions, and taught at the Chaplain’s School where he trained Chaplains’ assistants. Promoted again to lieutenant colonel, he went to work under General Norman Schwarzkopf. At one point, Schwarzkopf wanted to cancel Memorial Day religious services in favor of patriotic services. Windmiller refused to cancel the religious services, much to Schwarzkopf’s chagrin. The general had a reputation for bluster, but the chaplain stood his ground. “Stormin’ Norman” later appreciated the nerve and resolution of his divisional chaplain.

Windmiller and the irascible general again locked horns when the chaplain was transferred to the 8th Infantry Division, and Schwarzkopf tried to block it. He stood up to

⁴⁶⁴ Ed Wallin, Oral Interview, April 20, 2013.

the general and received a promotion to full colonel and a transfer to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri as the division chaplain. He then was promoted to corps chaplain and went to Fort Hood, Texas, where he was entrusted with the care of over 50,000. Soon after, TRADOC (U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command) General Maxwell “Mad Max” Thurmond conducted a “tooth check” (a background check) on Windmiller because he was looking for a Commandant of the Chaplain School. Thurmond wanted a “muddy boot” chaplain; i.e., a chaplain who had seen combat and trudged with the troops. Windmiller got the job and went to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, where he remained as commandant for three years until his retirement, which he took one year early.

As with most soldiers who had been in the combat zones for prolonged periods, Windmiller felt as many soldiers did. He was sensitive to noise, the sound of helicopters elicited emotional reactions, and he encountered difficulties transitioning to home life as he and Esther got used to each other again. He also encountered several instances where he relived some of the trauma of war and the death of his soldiers. He awoke at night shaking, crying, and wanting to hide; but the symptoms faded as the years passed. When flashbacks came upon him at home, his faith became the foundation on which he handled his “moments.” Belief in humanity’s sinfulness negated by the grace of God allowed him to put his experiences into perspective. Sinfulness brought about war and its consequences. God’s grace reflected in the Resurrection could wash away the stain of war as it did sin and gave him the perspective to deal with loss, death, and the future. Over time, the flashbacks receded, and he journeyed toward a life of peace and productivity. Vietnam had broadened his view of the world, enhanced his view of the

beauty of God's creation, enriched his view of the spirit of God in every soldier, and instilled in him a greater sense of tolerance.⁴⁶⁵

Bernie Windmiller also took home valuable lessons and transforming experiences from Vietnam. He possessed greater empathy for people and their everyday ordeals. He refused to glorify war in any way as evidenced by his various speeches to ministerial associations and college students. When a cynical reporter challenged the presence of religious in the military, he justified his presence and bore witness to his troops by answering: "Don't soldiers deserve religious beliefs?" He further bore witness to his loyalty to American soldiers whom he considered the most loyal of all people.⁴⁶⁶

Windmiller still attends the biennial reunions of Charlie Company. He and his wife Esther are still very active and enjoy the company of their four children: Beth Frederickson, Leslie Hodgkinson, Reverend Keith Windmiller, and Rebekah Piersol, their twelve grandchildren and their three great grandchildren. As with many of his colleagues, "retirement" for the chaplain is a term that carries different shades of meaning. He served on the committee that erected four large American flags honoring veterans at intersection of Main Street and Interstate 80 in Princeton, Illinois, and he has spoken at numerous Memorial Day events honoring those veterans who gave their lives in the service of their country. After he retired from full-time ministry twenty years ago, he served ten churches as interim minister, served on the board of directors of International Association of Evangelical Chaplains—five years as the executive director, and helped train military and hospital chaplains of other nations. He has trained

⁴⁶⁵ Windmiller, Oral Interview, September 4, 2012.

⁴⁶⁶ Bowers, *Forward Edge of the Battle Area*, 84; Windmiller, Oral Interview, September 2013.

chaplains and prospective chaplains and civilian clergy who serve the military in Peru, Chile, Thailand, Romania, Bulgaria, Zambia and Liberia (Africa).

Jim Johnson came home from Vietnam and settled in Fayetteville, North Carolina, not far from Fort Bragg. The war might have shaken his trust, but it did not shatter it. His sense of trust survived the war, helped him cast his own demons into the pit, and then enabled him to reach out to his fellow veterans. He went home after saying farewell to his commander, “the King,” Colonel John Hill. Commander and chaplain had a complex and tumultuous relationship through their respective tours, but the two men respected each other; and the King took the time to affirm Johnson as mediator between the troops and their commander. The trust affirmed in him, though, did little to ease the agony of his mind and soul, so he turned to his spirituality for healing and began to write a journal of his experience. He reflected on the price he and his troops paid for their months in the Mekong Delta, and he came to the conclusion that the hatred in his heart would not be directed at the VC nor even at the officers whose “chickenshit” made life miserable for others. Instead, he would hate war itself and its consequences. He turned his own pathos into a means by which he developed the ministerial ability to reach out to veterans like himself and combat post-traumatic stress.⁴⁶⁷

Johnson flew home to North Carolina via San Francisco and El Paso and had a joyous homecoming with his wife Barbara and their children. More than the emotion of joy was at work. “I’ve experienced far more of life in these 365 days,” he wrote, “than the first twenty-six of my life put together. My entire concept of the world and life in general have changed drastically—forever. I’m coming home whole—at least

⁴⁶⁷ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 218, 222, 232, 248, 255; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

physically.⁴⁶⁸ Even physically, though, Johnson was not completely whole. He suffered pain in his shoulder while in the car with his family. The pain caused a flashback of the death of Frank Pina. His wife Barbara knew immediately that something was wrong, but she patiently waited for the moment to pass. Her patience became one of the foundations on which Johnson would survive his post-war odyssey, especially when the dreams came upon him. The most prominent of his dreams was of being in a firefight where all the others were dead, the enemy was attacking, and he was unable to move to get a weapon to defend himself. Even when he awoke, the dream would resume when returning to sleep. Another dream that often came to him was that of being on base camp, receiving incoming mortar fire, and unable to run to the bunker for cover.⁴⁶⁹

In addition to flashbacks and dreams, Johnson struggled with isolation after the war. Many wanted to know about what happened in Vietnam; yet, few wanted to know about him or his own personal story. Reporters and admirers took interest in his combat decorations and ignored the man who wore them. Very few personnel on Army bases at which he served had seen any ground combat in Vietnam, so he did not have anyone who could identify with his emotional anguish. The lack of genuine interest was as bad as if a protester had spit on him and led him to become more reserved about his feelings.

As was the case for many Vietnam veterans, Johnson felt comfortable where others would have felt ill at ease. Johnson's assignment at Fort Bragg was the stockade where he ministered to soldiers accused of both petty and serious crimes. He took comfort in the fact that his office was "behind the wires;" that is, located within the

⁴⁶⁸ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 245; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

⁴⁶⁹ Johnson, Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

stockade itself. This time, the wounds he treated were the result of poor morals and bad choices, but he once again was bringing the *capella* to soldiers where they needed it the most.⁴⁷⁰

Johnson continues to live in Fayetteville—next to Fort Bragg—with his wife, to whom he affectionately refers as “St. Barbara.” His daughter Kellie is a clinical social worker at the Duke University Medical Center, his son Grey has an insurance business, his son Stuart works in sales, and his youngest son Eric is disabled with multiple sclerosis. He maintains a network of several hundred combat veterans for which he serves as an unofficial resource. Most have read his book *Combat Trauma* and many have used him for emotional support via phone and on line. He has given countless speeches and conducted many seminars on post-traumatic stress as a means of educating the public about the syndrome. He does not do this just for veterans but for a huge variety of interest groups. Post-traumatic stress has taken a toll on Johnson himself, but—like many of his fellow chaplains—he “keeps the demons in tow.” He still remains “on the alert” around his house, but he embraces his condition and uses it to reach out to fellow Vietnam veterans. Even though he is fully disabled, he has a “breakfast group” of Vietnam veterans who gather together to tell stories over coffee and biscuits at K&W Cafeteria in Fayetteville.

As do all grandfathers, he takes a special pride in his two grandchildren. Nicholas graduated from high school at just 14, is completing his fourth semester of college, and has a thriving on-line sales business. In 2000, his son adopted a three-year-old Mayan Indian child from Guatemala and named her Maya. The child and her adopted

⁴⁷⁰ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 246-249.

grandfather bonded at once and have remained close ever since. Together, granddaughter and grandfather spend large amounts of time together, with him talking and her listening. Almost as if the little girl has become his “familiar,” Maya serves as an innocent conduit through which Johnson divests himself of the ghosts of his past.⁴⁷¹

If ever a chaplain epitomized transformation, it was Claude Newby. Like many of his beloved soldiers, he came home alone and alienated. He felt alienated from the Army because of the six-month rotation, alienated from civilian leaders for perpetrating the war and being unable to understand what the soldiers needed, alienated from the American people who chose to denigrate soldiers or—worse—ignore them carrying on “business as usual,” and alienated from his own self for being able to go home when so many of his troops could not. The America to which he went home 1970 was a divided nation that either denigrated or ignored its returning warriors. He reflected on the model of the “shattered hero” and felt a deep regret at having to leave his battalions, but this time the feeling was different than it had been in 1967. Whereas he felt sadness at leaving his men on his first tour, he later felt a sense of futility. The futility he felt continued with him in the years after the war. When his friend Colonel Rasmussen died of heart failure in 1974, the family asked Newby to preside at the funeral service. As the services commenced, Newby began to experience a flood of memories and emotions from his days in Vietnam. His emotions flared again when Saigon fell in 1975. The U.S. government’s later pardon of draft dodgers was like a kick in the gut to him, and he walked away from Vietnam.⁴⁷²

⁴⁷¹ Jim Johnson, Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

⁴⁷² Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume I*, 523-524; Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume II*, 212, 290, 292, 293, 298.

The Army had selected him for further civilian schooling in 1979 although he had too much time in the service to qualify. Then the Army changed his assignment and gave him the opportunity to analyze how chaplains should operate in future combat. The study would examine how chaplains functioned in the high-speed world of motorized warfare, what obstacles modern warfare presented to the chaplaincy, and finally the various legal challenges to the chaplaincy itself.

In the typical Newby manner, he took on the assignment with gusto and made it his own. Colonel Gordon Schweitzer, retired director of Combat Developments at the United States Army Chaplain Center and School at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, recalled that the chaplain took a “bulldog approach” to the assignment. He trained with troops on the Army’s “electronic” battlefield in California and saw how computerized simulation techniques tested how soldiers performed under a wide variety of conditions. He studied reports well into Friday night, go home for a short weekend, and then return to work well before dawn on Monday. Despite Schweitzer’s attempts to slow Newby down, the chaplain shook him off and bulldozed his way through the assignment. He discovered that the military chaplaincy was too oriented toward peacetime ministry rather than following the Army motto; “Organize for war, modify for peace.” His impeccable credentials and combat experience gave any recommendations he made added weight and shifted the chaplaincy’s focus to ministry in combat. The Army then asked him to write the manual on how chaplains should function in the field. He described it as “Army doctrine.” His superiors described it as outstanding.

Claude Newby retired from the U.S. Army in 1993, still with a sense of alienation from his own country. He and Helga wanted to adopt a Vietnamese orphan; however,

several of their friends advised against doing this because they felt he needed to move on with his life. However, some other friends encouraged Newby to write a book as a relief from his burden. So in 1994, he began compiling his journals and beginning his memoirs. In so doing, he experienced exhaustion and depression while transcribing because it caused him to relive the events. Nonetheless, he “soldiered on,” reflecting on the model of the “shattered hero,” and managed to finish his book *It Took Heroes*. He then wrote several revisions and subsequent volumes.⁴⁷³

The book follows “Odysseus’ path to the underworld” in that he gives homage to the dead and puts Newby’s own ghosts to rest. The rest of his life has been in pursuit of that task. The transformation of his survivor’s guilt into honor for the fallen is the purpose of his memoir. He understood that his survival was not a reason for him to feel guilty but instead for him to fulfill the purpose of telling the story of his experience and doing homage to the dead. He did just that when he attended an LDS conference some years after the war and was asked to speak about his experience. It was an emotional task, but he used the occasion to pay tribute to soldiers like Elvin Jackson. The speech gave those listening a greater appreciation for the nature of the war and the suffering of the faceless troops.⁴⁷⁴

Newby and his wife, Helga, live a quiet, suburban life in Bountiful, Utah. They have more than two dozen grandkids and one great-granddaughter. Their house is on a hillside with a unique perspective of the valley below as well as a unique perspective on life in general. He is no fan of war movies because he believes that they do a disservice

⁴⁷³ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume II*, 227, 240, 294, 298.

⁴⁷⁴ Newby, *It Took Heroes: Volume II*, 186-187, 290-291.

to soldiers by magnifying the darkness of soldiers' souls rather than the better angels of their nature. In addition, he finds that films "orchestrate" warfare rather than portraying it as chaotic and with no discernable order, a la, *Saving Private Ryan*.

Three Purple Hearts, three Bronze Stars of Valor, the Vietnamese Honor Medal, and a Combat Infantry Badge (the only chaplain in Vietnam to be so awarded) makes him an authority on war. When he addresses soldiers, therefore, they do more than come to attention. They *pay* attention.

In order to talk with soldiers you need to have their respect. In war, you have to live through what they've lived through before they'll listen. And you have to live the things you preach. During a war, American soldiers must have a constant reminder of higher values and a higher purpose to stand them in good stead when they return home or when they are taken in battle.

Newby says he's gratified to learn how therapeutic *It Took Heroes* has been for many former soldiers. There is nothing orchestrated about the book. Straightforward, relentless, and an unvarnished look at the experience of one chaplain in a particular corner of hell. His plain style of writing and barebones style of presenting what war is helps more than just soldiers. He believes that it will help the public at large embrace the veterans of the Vietnam War. Claude Newby put his own ghosts to rest in bearing witness to his story, but many soldiers may find they need to read it to consign their own ghosts to the Underworld. Retired and decades removed from the combat zones of Vietnam, Claude C. Newby still ministers to his troops.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷⁵ Jerry Johnston, "Former Army Chaplain Still Tending to the Troops," *Deseret News*, January 8, 1999.

Conclusion

Convincing soldiers in the throes of post-traumatic stress and facing anti-war demonstrators that home awaited them with a welcome was not an easy sell. Jonathan Shay identifies home as a place where one's *thumos* is fulfilled to its fullest. Home for Odysseus (and thus for Vietnam veterans) had to be a place where one felt safety, encountered acceptance, received value and respect, knew one's way, invested themselves in a future, and encountered comfort.⁴⁷⁶ Amy Snow writes that who suffers from post-traumatic stress needs acceptance, healing, and prayer. Returning troops experienced very little of any, even when they returned to the place they once called home. Lack of understanding and outright fear estranged parents from sons. Wives, who were unable or unwilling to comprehend what had happened, became emotionally (and even physically) abusive to husbands too fearful of uncovering their emotions. Finally, civilians who pontificated on the meaning of their experience threw Vietnam veterans into a state of shock sometimes worse than the trauma of the combat zone.⁴⁷⁷

It would fall to many chaplains who had served the field to be among the first to offer healing and ground their troops in the stability of home and its warm embraces. Addressing the issues of their troops as well as their own in the decades following the war in Southeast Asia, combat chaplains gained illumination as to the healing that they needed because of their experiences, extended the *capella* to their fellow veterans to help them navigate the now-unfamiliar civilian world, and brought to their comrades and themselves a greater sense of peace.

⁴⁷⁶ Shay, *Odysseus in Vietnam*, 17, 65-68, 108-112, 117.

⁴⁷⁷ Snow, *The Endless Tour*, 123.

Like their fellow troops who came home from Vietnam, combat chaplains needed to cleanse themselves of the guilt and angst they felt in order to come home in as full a manner as possible. They had to renegotiate boundaries and relationships with family and friends, who did not understand their experiences. They had to navigate the strange alleyways of what were once the familiar pathways of home. Like the Prodigal Son of Luke's gospel, combat chaplains had to make the conscious effort to start on their way in order that, first, they themselves get there; and, secondly, that they could show their fellow troops the way home. Like the wandering Odysseus, combat chaplains and their fellow soldiers came home disoriented, untrusting, and numbed by the violence they had witnessed.

Once home, combat chaplains struggled to "clear the brush" of post-traumatic stress from the road home for many of their fellow troops and then—like the father in Luke 15—went out to embrace and welcome home their "prodigal sons." They continued their education in a variety of social and ministerial studies designed to help them address the moral and psychological injuries of their soldiers. They began or developed programs that enabled Vietnam veterans to talk about their experiences in a safe environment and find atonement for what they once considered unforgiveable sins or uncivilized thoughts and actions.

As they had done in the field, combat chaplains fulfilled Shay's belief that sacred space is as much an active product as it is a passive one.⁴⁷⁸ That is, one can enter into a space already made sacred either by sanctification or the familiarity of family and/or community; however, one can also *create* sacred space—sometimes in areas long-

⁴⁷⁸ Shay, *Odysseus in Vietnam*, 244.

thought to be the most unsacred. The father of the Prodigal Son held a feast for his return to hearth and home. Odysseus reclaimed his house from the predations of the suitors and then finally expiated his “war guilt” with an offering to the gods in the most unfamiliar of places. In coming home and helping to create a welcoming environment for the men with whom they humped the boonies, combat chaplains created sacred space where soldiers at least felt as if they could attempt to come home at last.

CHAPTER XIII – THE STILL SMALL VOICE

Then the Lord said (to Elijah): ‘Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord; the Lord will pass by.’

There was a strong and violent wind rending the mountains and crushing rocks before the Lord—but the Lord was not in the wind; after the wind, an earthquake—but the Lord was not in the earthquake; after the earthquake, fire—but the Lord was not in the fire; after the fire, a light, silent sound.

- 1 Kings 19: 11-12⁴⁷⁹

Thirty years after he had finished his tour in the Mekong Delta with the Mobile Riverine Force, Jim Johnson attended a ministers’ conference and had been asked to share the story of his faith. He proceeded to relate the story of his experiences with his soldiers, and as he spoke to the rapt audience, he made the decision to return to Vietnam.⁴⁸⁰ The airplane on which he flew was no longer a “Freedom Bird” and the passengers were not fellow soldiers but tourists like himself. Nonetheless, as his plane approached the Vietnamese coast, Johnson began to scan the shoreline as he had done thirty years earlier, looking for the “enemy.” During his trip, he revisited the same places where Frank Pina and other close friends had fallen, and walked much of the same ground where he had walked with his troops. When he met those formerly considered the enemy, he now looked upon them as fellow human beings—people whom he might even call friends—the hyper-alertness of his senses and the anxiety he held in his mind dissipated. The entire journey brought forth “gentle tears” that washed away his pain and

⁴⁷⁹ NAB, 315-316; the translation can also read “a still, small voice.”

⁴⁸⁰ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 267, 269; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

guilt and gave him a catharsis emptied him of the emotional agony he carried. When he finally boarded his plane for home, Johnson knew in his heart and mind that the war was over for him at last, and he had cast aside his burdens.⁴⁸¹

The last combat veterans of the Vietnam War came home to the United States at the end of March 1973. Some got on with their lives. Others had left their souls in places like the rice paddies of the Mekong Delta or the highlands around Hue and DaNang. As combat troops came home, so also did the chaplains who walked with them in the field. Most of them had come home transformed by what they had seen and experienced. All of them continued on with their lives despite the anguish they carried in their souls. Like Homer's wandering Odysseus and St. Luke's Prodigal Son, combat chaplains like Johnson went to war, experienced its worst aspects as they ministered to their men, and then came home only to find another war at home. They entered the "realm of death" and survived only to find that both they and the world they had left had changed. The world had changed because the Cold War—at its closest to becoming hot at the start of U.S. involvement in Vietnam—had, by the end of the war, stabilized into détente. On the domestic front, the American people had long-tired of Vietnam and were moving on from the war, the protests—and the soldiers.

Combat chaplains came home and confronted the issues that the next decades would throw at them. They had taken upon themselves the double burden and had done so willingly because they believed that their place was in the field. They saw themselves as contributors to the greater good in maintaining the spiritual lives of their troops. They had all come from different backgrounds and religious upbringing, from the

⁴⁸¹ Johnson, *Combat Chaplain*, 263, 276; Oral Interview, February 9, 2013.

unsophisticated but sturdy country church of Jim Johnson to the more urban yet no less devout Roman Catholicism of Vincent Capodanno to the Mormon upbringing of Claude Newby, and yet, they shared the common trait of absolute devotion to the troops and their spiritual welfare.

In choosing to show that devotion through their presence, combat chaplains “entered hell” with their troops. They placed themselves in peril of their own lives and bore witness to the sights and sounds of death. Despite their education and training, they reacted as humans are wont to do when they lost troops to incompetence or their own side’s weapons. Exhaustion, hunger, filth, and the strain of combat affected them like it did their fellow soldiers and worked harsh changes on their countenances. That they saw the changes working on their men added to the double burden combat chaplains carried, but they were able to compartmentalize their experiences and use their training and ministry to understand what it was that their soldiers suffered. Robert Falabella credited his religious training and his belief that the horror which he witnessed was not the end of the soul. His faith in God and understanding of love helped him deal with the worst of the worst and would later allow him to help his fellow soldiers realize the same.

Dealing with the worst of the worst often meant losing those to whom one had become close in the combat zone. Like their fellow soldiers, combat chaplains became more than just friends to other soldiers. The fear of death for oneself translated into fear of death for those with whom one had become close. The circumstances of combat—fear, shared suffering, and closeness—heightened soldiers’ value of life; thus, chaplains, who already had a deep respect for life, felt the effects more intensely. Combat chaplains

accepted the grief that could come from losing a close comrade and befriended their soldiers as an extension of their ministry.

The loss of friends and the conditions of combat combined to undermine the morale of combat chaplains as they sought to make sense of the hell that surrounded them. Bringing the *capella* to suffering troops meant that they too suffered. Enemy (and sometimes friendly) fire and slogging through the field were not the only demoralizers, though. Incompetent officers and petty and vindictive commanders made the jobs of troops and their chaplains more difficult. The system of rotating troops in and out of the combat zone undermined the very fabric of military spirit and comradeship. Careerism even in the chaplain ranks made many combat chaplains question the purpose and commitment of their superiors. Even at home, some combat chaplains labored under the shadow of doubt and open hostility from their own religious ranks who believed that the war in Vietnam was an immoral one and chaplains' presence in it was a sacrilege. As they encountered each and every aspect of the war in Vietnam that sapped their spirit, combat chaplains transformed because they grew closer to their men and sought means to alleviate the suffering and frustration that combat and reprehensible behavior visited upon the men. As they walked the field with their troops and witnessed both the war and certain aspects of the military command and planning structure push their men and themselves to the breaking point, combat chaplains changed from religious practitioners in a military structure to prophets and healers who saw in the *capella* a means to practice the true mandates of their faith—healing and reconciliation.

To bring such healing and reconciliation required that combat chaplains addressed those aspects of the combat zone that most directly contradicted the dictates of one's faith

and religion. Morality became a specific issue for combat chaplains as they sought to confront the issues of war and killing, sexual activity of their troops, and the moments when one's conscience overrode duty to the military institution. Best equipped to understand the tenuous boundary between the cloth of the clergy and the uniform of the military, chaplains in the field understood that humanity did not end when one donned a uniform. Straddling the line between war and morality, chaplains also at times faced difficulties in answering the moral questions their troops raised. Many of their answers were simple, but emotional, and maintained their credibility. They confessed their own inability to answer every question put to them, eschewed empty platitudes to patriotism and Cold War rhetoric, and set a moral example in the midst of the most immoral of situations. Upholding morality and sharing the journey through the "valley of the shadow" with their troops illuminated for many combat chaplains the task that awaited them throughout the rest of their tours and beyond as they continued their ministry to the troops.

Combat chaplains' greatest act of ministry to their troops—and best assurance of their credibility—was their physical presence as they walked in the field. Educated and trained in a variety of tasks specific to clergy, combat chaplains opened their ears, minds, and hearts to the soldiers seeking counsel for a variety of issues. The very act of being present when a soldier needed a sympathetic ear or a stabilizing presence in the hell of combat sometimes did more for the troops than even a weekend pass or R&R. Their presence in an area rife with destruction and death reassured their troops but also illuminated to chaplains that their ministry went further than just preaching or holding religious services. The very act of ministry relieved the double burden combat chaplains

carried and, in so doing, allowed the same chaplains to develop strategies that would help their continued transformation after the war.

The essence of a chaplain's ministry rested in the performance of his sacramental duties, and combat chaplains in the field carried out their priestly functions wherever and whenever conditions either allowed for it or mandated it. They carried their belief in the love of God to the troops by holding Masses and worship services in places where the misery of war competed for the consciousness of the troops. They created sacred space amidst the detritus of the combat zone, using even the refuse of combat, to assure their troops that hope and salvation awaited them. Combat chaplains also expressed the love of God through an ecumenical attitude to soldiers of all faiths and by honoring the dead and what they meant to their fellow soldiers in memorial services. Even one hour in the field for worship had remarkable effects on the troops and their morale because it gave them a respite from the ugliness of the Vietnam War. It also worked a significant transformation on the chaplains themselves in that they would later strive create sacred spaces for their fellow Veterans—and themselves—as they encountered the second war at home.

The war at home was one that combat chaplains not only encountered in the lukewarm to hostile receptions they received when coming home but also in the myriad of physical, emotional, and psychological problems that dogged both troops and chaplains. Jerry Autry stated his belief that all combat soldiers suffer from post-traumatic stress in some form or another, and the evidence bears witness to his statement.⁴⁸² Like their troops, combat chaplains encountered post-traumatic stress, but many of them

⁴⁸² Autry, *Gun-Totin' Chaplain*, 206; Oral Interview, May 20, 2013.

recognized it in themselves or at least saw that exposure to combat had transformed them. Concern for their fellow troops as well as for their own ability to cope with post-war issues underpinned the double burden and led them to become agents of their own healing as well as of the healing of their fellow veterans. In bearing witness to their experiences, combat chaplains paved a pathway for their fellow veterans toward the goal of peace and recovery.

Recovery rested upon a fundamental premise of rediscovering a God whom many troops believed abandoned them in the combat zones of the Vietnam War. Many troops grew disillusioned with God, and felt that many invoked religion to justify killing, tolerate heinous acts, and sanction gross injustices. At a moment when young men entered their most crucial years of formation, witnessing or perpetrating atrocities and enduring a camel's back of petty grievances against overbearing or incompetent officers and even chaplains pushed many past the point of toleration. As a result, young men who should have been developing their minds and hearts in preparation for full adulthood instead grew old before their time yet remained in the dark as to the meaning of what they had experienced. The darkness of the human soul into which they had peered wrecked their ability to form relationships compatible with the world to which they would return. Combat chaplains, who themselves were relatively young men, had also borne witness to the evil of war alongside their troops. It would be many of them who used their training and experience to keep alive the dying embers of hope within the souls of their fellow soldiers. They did so by keeping alive a vision of God who neither created war nor the evil within the human soul. They offered to the soldiers a God who suffered with them and offered hope and redemption to warriors wounded by the sights, sounds,

and objects of death. Combat chaplains had remained with their troops in the combat zone as a reminder of God's presence. After the war, they would continue that ministry to those still struggling to rediscover the sacred in their lives.

Able to see how war transformed them, chaplains in the combat zones offered their own men the opportunity to embrace their own transformation—especially as they returned home to a society unwilling to accept their transformed warriors. Despite the home front's unwillingness to receive their own warriors, combat chaplains focused their own troops' attention on accepting their own changes and seeing that their experiences are not just transforming but *transcending*. They assisted their troops in confronting and then laying down before God the horrors of their experiences and then realizing that they are part of a vast universe and natural order. Combat chaplains thus used the *capella* to assist their troops in dissolving the barriers that isolated them and kept them from telling their stories.

The barriers combat chaplains helped break down for the troops also stood in their own way. The nature of the “double burden” was that chaplains in the field suffered for their soldiers but also for themselves as they encountered the same issues that rose up both before and after the war. They also carried harsh memories and guilt at having survived the war when so many others died. Combat chaplains had to face old relationships that existed within new parameters. They dealt with war protesters and the general ambivalence many felt toward troops returning from Southeast Asia. They also found that the once-familiar territory called “home” now possessed new and dark passages that could be as intimidating and disorienting as the jungle or the brush. Many of the combat chaplains led the way home for their troops. They made the decision to go

home and face their new (and sometimes) hostile circumstances. However, they not only pointed the way home for their fellow soldiers but they also placed themselves in the forefront of those who would welcome them home. Combat chaplains went on with their education and ministerial development and placed themselves in better position to welcome home their troops. In the process of their illumination and transformation, they formulated strategies and developed programs to help Vietnam veterans address their experiences. Rather than allow medical professionals to employ the same practices and invoke the same shibboleths in labeling veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress. As they done in the field in creating sacred space for worship and remembrance of the good, so later did combat chaplains help Veterans reclaim the idea that a home and a welcome awaited them.

Edward Tick points out that war is always a sacrificial altar—as evidenced by the attempted sacrifice of Isaac by his father Abraham. Wilfred Owen likens the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22 as the result of “an inordinate love of country.” (Owen’s poem turns the story and has the old man sacrifice the young boy, who represents the youth of the age) Such is the cup that soldiers of all wars at some point must drink. For some soldiers, there is death on the battlefield; yet, for others, there is another death symbolized by pain and suffering. Not to have adequately addressed that pain amounts to denial on a national scale. The American nation has lost or refuses to recognize the existence of warriors as protectors. Instead, during the Vietnam War, they saw warriors as betraying truth, forsaking honor, following immoral orders, and/or propagating policies based on falsehoods or ignorance. In so doing, American society—even its elder

warriors—saw them as failing the virtues of what it meant to be a warrior.⁴⁸³ Only after the return of the hostages from Iran in 1981 did the turning point come for many of Vietnam veterans. Many veterans of Vietnam rose up in anger toward the American people at the heroes' welcome the hostages received on their homecoming. They pointed out the lack of attention their countrymen paid them at their own homecoming. Only then did sentiment at last turn in favor of the sacrifices veterans made.⁴⁸⁴

Into the breach of ingratitude and welcoming strode many of the combat chaplains. As they had walked alongside their troops in the field to minister to them, offered them the sacraments, and listened to their problems, now they walked alongside their fellow veterans on the home front. Transformed by the mental and emotional anguish of combat conditions, the sometimes-nonsensical culture of the military, and the strain of post-traumatic stress, combat chaplains became advocates for their dignity and right to be welcomed home as members of society. In so doing, combat chaplains took on the part of the father in St. Luke's Prodigal Son, welcomed home their warriors, and made the public understand that their homecoming required celebration and joy.

⁴⁸³ Wilfred Owen, "The Parable of the Old Man and the Young"; Tick, *War and the Soul*, 154, 252, 271.

⁴⁸⁴ Scott, *Vietnam Veterans since the War*, 137-138.

CHAPTER XIV – EPILOGUE

But you, be self-possessed in all circumstances; put up with hardship; perform the work of an evangelist; fulfill your ministry. For I am already being poured out like a libation, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith. From now on the crown of righteousness awaits me, which the Lord, the just judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but to all who have longed for his appearance.

– 2 Timothy 4:6-8⁴⁸⁵

Vincent Capodanno had “poured out his blood like a libation” in the Que Son Valley and departed from this world to the next, but his life became an example to all naval chaplains and all Marines. After he had been bestowed a posthumous Medal of Honor, his name continued to carry the *capella*. Soon after his death, the first chapel bearing his name was dedicated on Hill 51 in the Que Son Valley, Vietnam. Capodanno had helped build the structure from thatched palms and bamboo to serve as a place of prayer and peace. Within five months of his death, the Navy dedicated the chapel at the Navy Chaplains School at Newport, Rhode Island as the Capodanno Memorial Chapel. Other military chapels and commemorations are located in Oakland, California; Camp Pendleton, California; Fort Wadsworth, New York; Japan; and Taiwan.⁴⁸⁶

The San Francisco Bay Naval Shipyard dedicated Capodanno Hall on November 3, 1969, to serve as bachelor officers’ quarters. His brother Phillip helped dedicate the building. In March 1971, the Knights of Columbus, Madonna Council in Staten Island

⁴⁸⁵ NAB, 1316.

⁴⁸⁶ Archdiocese for the Military Services, “Fr. Capodanno Biography,” 2010-2015.

sought to have a permanent public memorial honoring Father Capodanno. The borough then erected a monument to the Maryknoll. The city of New York changed the name of Seaside Boulevard to Father Capodanno Boulevard in 1975 and declared July 3, 1976, “Father Capodanno Day.” The celebration featured a Mass followed by a parade that included the United States Marine Corps Color Guard, bands from the United States Navy and the United States Marine Corps, and Boy and Girl Scouts. The Navy commissioned a *Knox*-class frigate, the U.S.S. *Capodanno* (FF-1093), in honor of Capodanno on September 17, 1973. (The ship has since been decommissioned in July 1993 and sold to Turkey.) It became the first ship in the U.S. Navy to receive a Papal Blessing when Pope John Paul II blessed it in Naples, Italy, September 4, 1981.

The Capodanno family chose Taiwan as their first choice for a memorial because it was where he had served prior to Vietnam. With almost \$4,000 in donations from organizations such as The American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Knights of Columbus, and the Marine Corps League, the Maryknolls built St. Vincent’s chapel in 1993 in the small mountain town of Thiankou with the help of Father Daniel Dolan, another Maryknoll and Capodanno's former pastor when he was a missionary in Taiwan.

On May 19, 2002, the Catholic Church opened the Cause for Canonization for Vincent Capodanno. The Church now refers to the Maryknoll in terms of the first stage toward sainthood—Servant of God. In May 2004, the Archdiocese for the Military Services submitted the Initial Documentation the Congregation for the Causes of Saints and called it “Mission Capodanno.” Father Daniel Mode, author of *The Grunt Padre*, was named Postulator; that is, the person who guides the cause of canonization. On May 21, 2006, Archbishop Edwin F. O’Brien of the Archdiocese for the Military Services

issued a Public Decree of Servant of God in Washington D.C. In 2013, Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio of the Archdiocese for the Military Services presided over the formal renewal of the opening of the Cause for Beatification of Father Capodanno.⁴⁸⁷

Vincent Robert Capodanno's name is inscribed on Panel 25E - Line 95 of the Vietnam Memorial.

Chaplain Charles Watters had also given his life in Vietnam and was awarded the Medal of Honor, and—like Capodanno—created a legacy for the U.S. Army and his home state of New Jersey. While no one has yet taken up the cause for his canonization, his name adorns several places in his home state of New Jersey. The New Jersey legislature named a bridge on Route 3 across the Passaic River between Clifton and Rutherford in honor of Watters. The city of Jersey City named Public School No. 24 after Watters in the 1980s. Seton Hall University's Army ROTC Ranger Challenge team is named the Charlie Watters Ranger Company. In the late 1990s, Watters' classmate and friend, Fr. Thomas Olsen, organized and constructed a rose garden outside Epiphany Catholic Church in the town of Cliffside Park, and dedicated it in memory of Watters with a memorial plaque in the center. Fort Campbell, Kentucky, home of the 101st Airborne, has a religious center the Chaplain Charles J Watters Center.⁴⁸⁸

The name of Charles Joseph Watters is inscribed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on Panel 30E, Row 036.

⁴⁸⁷ “Archbishop Broglio Announces Establishment of Capodanno Guild for the Cause for Canonization of Vietnam War Priest Hero: Will exist as only organization authorized to serve as the petitioner for and supporter of Cause for canonization of Father Vincent R. Capodanno,” MM, Archdiocese for the Military Services, News Release, September 5, 2013; “Opening the Cause for Beatification,” Fr. Vincent Capodanno Guild, News Release, October 1, 2013.

⁴⁸⁸ <https://armyhistory.org/chaplain-maj-charles-j-watters>; <http://www.tfp.org/TFP-home/focus-on-history/the-chaplain-was-a-sky-soldier.html>;

The third combat chaplain awarded the Medal of Honor, Charles “Angelo” Liteky, survived Vietnam and then underwent the most radical of transformations. Beset by what he perceived as the injustice of the Vietnam War and the fact that he felt duped by his own government, Liteky became an outspoken critic of the U.S. government. He left the priesthood in 1975 and married a former nun named Judy Balch. Balch encouraged him to become involved in social justice movements, especially protesting what was known as the School of Americas (SOA) at Fort Benning, Georgia. He believed that the SOA trained the militaries of right-wing Central and South American dictatorships, which in turn led to horrible abuses of human rights including non-judicial executions.

On July 29, 1986, Charles Liteky became the first and only recipient to renounce his Medal of Honor by placing it in an envelope addressed to President Reagan near the Vietnam Wall. The decoration is now among many artifacts on display at the National Museum of American History. In September 1986, Liteky began a fast with fellow veterans to protest against the U.S. policies in Central America. He has been convicted for his anti-war activities and was “poured out like a libation” several times with stints in federal prison. Despite his age, he remains active. He may have renounced his medal, but he understands that it still carries a degree of responsibility as he continues to try and make sure none of his fellow soldiers need ever endure what he and his troops endured. When the U.S. went to war in Iraq in 2003, he went on the front lines again, protesting.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁹ Tony Perry, “Bravery, Then Bureaucracy: ‘Medal of Honor’ traces the sometimes ugly history of the award from the Civil War to the present,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 5, 2008, E6; Michael Taylor, “A Matter of Honor: He gave back his Medal of Honor to risk his freedom in protesting his country's policies,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 13, 2000; Matthew Soergel, “Charlie Liteky: ‘He was our quarterback, and quarterbacks save the world,’” *The Florida Times-Union*, April 19, 2009.

Martin of Tours renounced his life of chivalry and refused to kill others on the battlefield, claiming, “I am the soldier of Christ: it is not lawful for me to fight.” When the Roman general charged him with cowardice, Martin answered that he would go unarmed to the front of the troops. Before his superiors could take him up on the offer, the invaders sued for peace, making the question a moot one.⁴⁹⁰

Thus it also was for those who carried Martin’s *capella* into the field. Warriors, ministers, priests, counselors, friends, advocates, and prophets, combat chaplains went out bearing very little in the manner of war other than their uniforms and the occasional side arm. Nonetheless, they “placed themselves in the front of the battlefield” in order to be with their men. When the war came to an end, they went forward into yet another battlefield as they handled their own issues brought on by the war as well those issues of their troops. They strove to help bring their troops home in a manner befitting warriors. Now, they strive to bring their troops at last to the crown of righteousness.

⁴⁹⁰ “Sulpitius Severus on the Life of St. Martin,” with Translation and Notes by Alexander Roberts from *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series, Volume 11*. New York, 1894.

APPENDIX A – Chaplains Killed in Vietnam

The following Chaplains gave their lives in Vietnam while in the performance of their duty:

Chaplain (LTC) Meir Engel	December 16, 1964	Jewish
Chaplain (MAJ) William J. Barragy	May 4, 1966	Catholic
Chaplain (CPT) William N. Feaster	October 26, 1966	Protestant
Chaplain (CPT) Michael J. Quealy	November 8, 1966	Catholic
Chaplain (CPT) James J. L. Johnson	March 10, 1967	Protestant
Chaplain (MAJ) Ambrosio Salazar Grandea	June 13, 1967	Protestant
Chaplain (MAJ) Charles J. Watters*	November 19, 1967	Catholic
Chaplain (MAJ) Aloysius P. McGonigal	February 17, 1968	Catholic
Chaplain (CPT) Morton H. Singer	December 17, 1968	Jewish
Chaplain (LTC) Don L. Bartley	June 8, 1969	Protestant
Chaplain (MAJ) Roger W. Heinz	December 9, 1969	Protestant
Chaplain (CPT) Phillip A. Nichols	October 13, 1970	Protestant
Chaplain (CPT) Merle D. Brown	April 11, 1971	Protestant

* Recipient of the Medal of Honor

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