Shared Tears:
Navy Chaplains with Marines in Vietnam, 1962-1972

by

Joan Marie Miller

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James Rush, Chair
John Carlson
J. Christopher Soper

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ABSTRACT

Over 700 Navy Chaplains served with Marine Corps units in Vietnam between 1962 and 1972. With an average age of 37, these chaplains were often twice the age of the young men with whom they served. More than half were veterans of World War II and/or the Korean Conflict. All were volunteers. The pathways these clergymen took to Vietnam varied dramatically not only with the Marines they served, but with one another. Once in Vietnam their experiences depended largely upon when, where, and with whom they served. When the last among them returned home in 1972 the Corps they represented and the American religious landscape of which they were a part had changed.

This study examines the experiences of Navy chaplains in three phases of the American conflict in Vietnam: the assisting and defending phase, 1962-1965; the intense combat phase, 1966-1968; and the post-Tet drawdown phase, 1969-1972. Through glimpses of the experiences of multiple chaplains and in-depth biographical sketches of six in particular the study elucidates their experiences, their understandings of chaplaincy, and the impact of their service in Vietnam on the rest of their lives.

This work argues that the motto the Chaplains School adopted in 1943, “Cooperation without Compromise,” proved relevant for clergy in a time when Protestant-Catholic-Jew were the defining categories of American religious experience. By the early 1970s, however, many Navy chaplains could no longer cooperate with one another without compromising their theological perspective. This reality reflected America’s shifting religious landscape and changes within the Chaplains Corps. Thus, many chaplains who served in Vietnam may well have viewed that time as bringing to a close a golden age of service within the Navy’s Chaplains Corps.
To Daniel and Jeremiah
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My cousin, Patricia Petitt, is an avid collector of art and objects. I have long admired her talent for assessing both beauty and value and wished I had her knack for collecting things. In completing this project I have come to the pleasant realization that although I am unlikely to become a skilled art collector, I am the beneficiary of an amazing collection of people whose scholarship, grace, and good will has made this effort possible.

In letting me shape this project my advisor James Rush has encouraged me to stretch my mind and trust my instincts. Through patient and gracious support he embodies the very best in academic mentorship. His keen eye for dangling modifiers and poor parallelism has made me a better writer. Although daunting to have a Naval officer and religious studies scholar read a paper about Naval chaplains, I am grateful for John Carlson’s willingness to comment on my work. I am humbled that Chris Soper, who seemed to me the brightest student at Yale Divinity School when we were both students there so many years ago, has taken time to guide me now.

Chaplain Tierian “Randy” Cash, Captain, United States Navy, Retired, made this work possible. The part-time indefatigable keeper of the Naval Chaplaincy School and Center’s archive opened its treasures to me shortly after it moved to its present location at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. At a time when it would have been easier not to have someone there Randy not only gave me free reign to explore, but he also patiently answered questions and talked for hours about chaplaincy and chaplains. In the years since he has continued to respond patiently to phone calls and questions. I count it one of life’s great blessings that a load of laundry in Cuba in 1992 led to this partnership.
I owe the 102 chaplains who participated in this project a debt of gratitude. With few exceptions they have enthusiastically supported me in telling their stories. The books, boxes of unpublished memoirs and papers, DVDs of pictures, and hundreds of pages of responses to questions in my study testify to their desire to be remembered for their service in Vietnam. I now understand the historian’s burden of trying to accurately reflect their experiences. In particular, I must thank those men still living whose stories are told in moderate detail here including Sam Baez, Eldon Luffman, James Pfannenstiel, Lester Westling and Len Ahrmsbrak. Two of my primary subjects, Bill Thompson and Vic Smith, earned my respect through their honest and passionate sharing about their experiences as chaplains. I am sorry that I am unable to share this work with George Evans, who died in 2014. I will treasure my conversation with him and his note of encouragement. Through Carl Auel’s daughter Julianna the Auel family has given me great insight to a man universally respected by his colleagues. I hope Stan and Ellen Beach will not be embarrassed that I think of them as friends. There are good reasons Stan is considered a “living legend” within the Navy’s Chaplain Corps. I intend that this text clarify those reasons. If it fails to do so, the failure is mine alone.

The most welcome outcome of this academic exercise has been personal in nature. The ruthless editing and tough talks with Kate Kiefer, recently retired University Distinguished Teaching Scholar of English composition at Colorado State University, have seen this project, and me, through to an end. This process has also enriched and deepened our relationship. I am grateful my brother Tim Tillson had the good sense in 1979 to marry Kate. I look forward to continuing our conversation as we hike somewhere beautiful in days to come.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

Military chaplaincy in America has received scant attention either from historians of religion or the military except in times of war. In 1969 The General Commission on Chaplains and Armed Forces Personnel published *Church, State and Chaplaincy*, a collection of essays and position papers issued by various religious agencies regarding chaplaincy in light of the war in Vietnam. Karl Olsson, the Chairman of the Commission, said that the controversial nature of the war had “activated fresh concern about the constitutional and religious validity of the service chaplaincies.”¹ A reading list in the volume identified thirty-one books and papers providing critical commentary on military chaplaincy. Most of the books cited had been published in the prior decade. The introduction to the list noted that additional commentary on the topic could be found in the major Christian periodicals of the time including *The Christian Century, Christianity Today* and *Christianity and Crisis*.²

A. Ray Appelquist, the editor of the collection, noted the lack of extant literature on chaplaincy, stating that there were fewer than a thousand English language books on the subject, most of which were memoirs and biographies.³ The General Commission’s library included some 400 texts, many of which included barely a chapter on chaplaincy.

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² Appelquist, *Church, State and Chaplaincy*, 120.

³ Appelquist, *Church, State and Chaplaincy*, 4.
Historian Jacqueline Whitt argued in her 2014 text *Bringing God to Men: American Military Chaplains and the Vietnam War* that this gap has its root in the predilection of military historians to record the details of combat and the “generally liberal, antiwar roots of religious studies programs founded in the post-Vietnam period.” As a result, the experiences of chaplains are seldom included in either historical accounts of the nation’s military conflicts or in discussions of American religious history.

Despite the overall paucity of literature concerning chaplaincy, the texts that dealt with the subject matter during the 1960s and 1970s reflected the contentious nature of the times. In his 1975 book *The Churches and the Chaplaincy* Navy chaplain Richard G. Hutcheson argued that sociologist Gordon Zahn’s 1969 *The Military Chaplaincy* and theologian Harvey Cox’s 1972 edited work *Military Chaplains* were biased. Hutcheson described Zahn’s work as reflecting the author’s pacifist position and seeking to demonstrate conflicts within chaplains’ institutional roles. Hutcheson noted that Clergy and Laymen Concerned about Vietnam, an anti-war organization, published Cox’s volume. Even though Cox’s volume contained, in Hutcheson’s opinion, two excellent essays – one on the history of military chaplaincy by George H. Williams and one on the ministry of military chaplaincy by Robert McAfee Brown – it remained “clearly polemical in purpose and anti-chaplaincy in tone.” Hutcheson saw his work as a corrective to both of these texts. He argued that the chaplain functioned within two “total

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institutions” – the military and the church.⁷ Understanding the duality of existing fully in these two worlds was essential to discussing military chaplaincy. Even though Hutcheson wanted to be objective and balanced in his approach, he allowed that his work might be viewed as pro-chaplaincy.

In the absence of an unpopular war, the pace of scholarly reflection on military chaplaincy slowed by the 1980s. Scholars including Anne C. Loveland, Professor Emerita at Louisiana State University, explored the rise of evangelicals in the American military generally rather than focusing specifically on chaplains and chaplaincy. Her groundbreaking 1996 book *American Evangelicals and the U.S. Military, 1942-1993* documented the variety of ways in which evangelical Christians exerted increasing influence in America’s military in the decades following World War II.

Professor of History and specialist in Holocaust studies at the University of Toronto, Doris Bergen has studied chaplaincy in World War II Germany as well as in a larger historical context. In her 2004 collection of essays on military chaplaincy *The Sword of the Lord: Military Chaplains from the First to the Twenty-First Century*, Bergen identifies three themes of the extant scholarship: the relationships between chaplains and the personnel they serve, the relationships between chaplains and the religious organizations they represent, and the moral dilemmas raised by the chaplaincy itself.⁸ By sharing the individual experiences of men who became chaplains and served in Southeast Asia during the American conflict in Vietnam, this study explores issues

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⁷ Hutcheson, *The Churches and the Chaplaincy*, 7. Hutcheson clearly mentions churches in this portion of the text. It is not clear if he is overlooking Jewish rabbis, or intentionally excluding them.

relating to the first two of these themes both directly and tangentially. While numerous morally ambiguous situations are identified and described in what follows, this study does not attempt to enter the conversation regarding the morality of the chaplaincy itself. Although the reader may draw his or her own conclusion regarding the morality of military chaplaincy, one underlying presumption of this work is that the chaplains whose stories are told here understood chaplaincy as at least morally permissible and constitutionally legal at the time they served.\(^9\)

The inescapable ambiguity of chaplaincy invites questions like one Bergen raises, “How have chaplains understood their tasks and carried them out in deeply troubled and brutal times?”\(^{10}\) What follows is one narrowly focused and modest attempt to answer that question. This dissertation focuses solely on those Navy chaplains who served in Southeast Asia with Marine units from 1962 to 1972. While not rising to the level of

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\(^9\) Just war language and theory, in part, provides some context for this presumption. Many throughout the spectrum of ethical thought would find the thought of prohibiting the medical treatment of either non-combatants or combatants injured in the context of war morally repugnant. Thus, it seems reasonable to describe the presence of medical personnel, even those sanctioned by military forces, on the field of battle as morally obligatory.

Contrast that with the presence of clergy on the field of battle, particularly those sanctioned by a military organization. Their presence and ministrations to other persons is not necessarily physical and is, therefore, intangible. Although chaplains do not “patch” warriors up so that they may return to the field of battle, their presence may serve as a morale builder to those who may have, or may then, engage in immoral acts. For reasons that may be as much cultural and social, their presence is morally objectionable to some, and therefore may more appropriately be spoken of as morally permissible. This designation, then, begs parameters and conditions of service by chaplains and does indeed inevitably move conversation regarding chaplaincy into ambiguity.

To raise questions of the morality of chaplaincy is to differentiate those questions regarding its legality. Because the free exercise of religion is Constitutionally protected in the United States, military chaplaincy exists and has never faced a fundamental challenge to its right to exist. The legality of chaplaincy may, or may not, influence discussions regarding its morality.

\(^{10}\) Bergen, *Sword of the Lord*, 3.
Clifford Geertz’s “thick description,” this work rests on the idea that the historical record is strengthened by the particular and is built upon the stories of individual chaplains.\textsuperscript{11}

In one sense this work may be seen as written to complement works like Professor Whitt’s 2014 book \textit{Bringing God to Men} that frame military chaplains as “cultural mediators” who inhabit a “liminal” space.\textsuperscript{12} Appropriating the concept of liminality from anthropology and religious studies, Professor Whitt uses the term to describe chaplains’ positions within the military and their religious institutions.\textsuperscript{13} Describing their position as chaplains as “neither ‘here nor there,’” she argues that their liminal position enabled chaplains to “find middle ground between divergent perspectives.”\textsuperscript{14}

While such language makes sense to scholars and those observing chaplaincy from the outside, it provides an incomplete description of the fundamental work of chaplaincy as chaplains themselves understand it and highlights one of chaplaincy’s key challenges. As staff officers – like physicians and lawyers - chaplains provide a particular function to the military institution. Unlike physicians who can count lives saved or lawyers who can count cases litigated, chaplains cannot necessarily quantify the impact of their service. The very nature of their service presents a constant challenge to

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{11} Clifford Geertz, \textit{The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays} (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 6-7. Geertz credits Gilbert Ryle with defining the notion of thick description.
  \item \textsuperscript{12} Whitt, \textit{Bringing God to Men}, 1. Whitt’s book was based on her 2008 dissertation “Conflict and Compromise: American Military Chaplains and the Vietnam War.” She explores the concept of chaplains as “cultural mediators” in her introduction, pages 9 through 14. Her book begins with the concept of liminality.
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Jacqueline E. Whitt, “Conflict and Compromise: American Military Chaplains and the Vietnam War” (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, 2008), 9-14.
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Whitt, “Conflict and Compromise,” 14.
\end{itemize}
chaplains to prove their worth to the commands they serve. Given this reality, any chaplain perceived as “liminal” is inevitably ineffective. Highlighting the role of the chaplain as liminal underscores this struggle for relevancy within the military and, perhaps unintentionally, subtly undermines arguments for the validity of military chaplaincy. Concepts other than liminality cast discussions regarding chaplaincy in a different light.

Writing in the 1970s, Richard Hutcheson, Jr. identified the challenge of chaplaincy not as moving between two worlds, but rather as being wholly in “two total institutions.”\(^{15}\) As total institutions, both religious groups and the military make claims upon the whole person, controlling all the essentials of life. In the case of the military, this means what one will wear and eat, where one will live, and even, for sailors at sea in particular, what time of day it is. Religious bodies, particularly for those identified as clergy, aim to make such claims upon persons as well. Because it is impossible to bifurcate one’s self, the essential challenge for the chaplain is to be fully in two institutions at once.\(^{16}\) John Carlson, a contemporary religious studies scholar, echoes Hutcheson’s characterization of chaplains as existing within two total institutions when he describes chaplains as having a “‘dual status’ as military officers and men and women


\(^{16}\) Much of the literature about chaplaincy in the 1960s utilized the “two masters” theme. Referring specifically to wealth and God, Luke 16:13 says, “No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” This teaching is often interpreted to mean that it is not possible for humans to serve both God and a human construction.
of the cloth. Characterizing chaplains as being in two total institutions or possessing a dual status captures more fully how chaplains who served in Vietnam understood their role than does a characterization of liminality.

Professor Whitt also argues that their “liminal position is precisely what produced chaplains’ diverse range of experiences in the war.” I argue that the stories of chaplains demonstrate that contextual variables such as rank and time and place of service in Vietnam shaped their experiences far more than did their position as chaplain. The contextualization of their experience within the changing environment of the war and the dynamic needs of the military itself is consistent with a characterization offered by Anne Loveland. Loveland observes that chaplains responded to the needs of the post-Vietnam military by ministering to the institution as well as individuals within the institution. The experiences of chaplains detailed here evidences this shifting focus during and beyond the Vietnam war.

Also, while acknowledging that there are similarities among the duties of chaplains who serve in the various armed services of the United States, this work demonstrates that chaplaincy is best understood within its own unique institutional setting. Each military service has its own culture and its own “way of doing things.” By its very nature, institutional chaplaincy adapts to the organization it serves. In an era


when joint operations are the focus of U.S. military efforts and of scholarly conversation concerning military chaplaincy, understanding the historical distinctiveness of each service’s Chaplain Corps provides the necessary background to identify particularities and bridge gaps between the Chaplain Corps of the Army, Navy, and Air Force. Particularity enriches scholarship by deepening the conversation regarding chaplaincy, where generalization necessarily incorporates inaccuracy that can lead to misrepresentation. This study fills a gap in scholarship by focusing exclusively on Navy chaplains.

For reasons that seem to have as much to do with institutional culture (reflected in how money is allocated) and sheer size, the United States Navy has not committed the resources to preserving the history of its Chaplain Corps to the same degree as has the United States Army. The Army’s Chaplain Corps is twice the size of the Navy’s and three times that of the Air Force. The resultant commitment of resources to preserve its history is confirmed by walking through the Army’s chaplaincy museum at the Armed Forces Chaplaincy Center at Fort Jackson. While the Army has a staff dedicated to the chaplaincy museum, a library, and an organized archive, the Navy has a room of artifacts and an archive managed by the indefatigable, albeit part-time, archivist and retired chaplain, Captain Tierian “Randy” Cash. Historically speaking, the preservation of the Navy’s Chaplain Corps’ past has been placed in the hands of a succession of individuals.

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20 Whitt, “Conflict and Compromise,” 72. For example, Jacqueline Whitt states on page 72 of her dissertation that chaplains served in stateside billets for at least a year before being assigned to Vietnam. That may have been true for chaplains serving in the Army, but was not true for all Navy chaplains who served with Marines in Vietnam. Vince Capodanno’s, William Thompson’s and Victor Smith’s stories confirm this point.
Clifford Drury Merrill was the first chaplain formally tasked with writing the history of the Navy’s Chaplain Corps.\footnote{Ross Trower, Foreword to Clifford Merrill Drury, Interviews by H. Lawrence Martin beginning 15 November 1980, \url{http://digitalcollections.uncw.edu/cdm/ref/collection/hoc/id/653}} Assigned to the Chief of Chaplains office in August 1945, Drury had access to materials informally collected by previous chaplains. Prior to World War II, Drury received a PhD in church history and taught at San Francisco Theological Seminary. The author of three biographies, Drury wrote the first two official volumes of the Chaplains Corps history.\footnote{Clifford Merrill Drury, \textit{The History of the Chaplain Corps, United States Navy, 1778-1939, Volume 1} (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Naval Personnel, 1984). Clifford Merrill Drury, \textit{The History of the Chaplain Corps, United States Navy, 1939-1949, Volume 2} (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1984).} These volumes covered the Corps’ history through 1949. Drury then oversaw compilation of the third volume that included biographical sketches of chaplains who had served from the inception of the Corps through World War II. Volumes four and five included more biographical sketches of chaplains serving through 1957. Drury wrote a portion of the history of the Corps during the Korean War before his retirement. Comprising volume six of the historical series, Chaplains Paul Sanders and Ivan Hoy finished the text.

Since Clifford Drury’s retirement in 1963 no one Navy chaplain has matched the volume of his addition to the historical record of the Chaplain Corps. Herbert Bergsma served as Head of the Chaplain Corps History Project from 1978 to 1980 and drafted the text \textit{Chaplains with Marines in Vietnam}. Chaplains H. Lawrence Martin, Withers Moore, and Timothy Demy all contributed to various volumes involving Navy chaplains who served in Vietnam. Over the course of the last two decades, however, no one has
contributed more to the preservation of the Navy Chaplains Corps’ history than Randy Cash.

Despite the efforts of this succession of Navy chaplains, scholarly work on American military chaplaincy and chaplains relies heavily on Army sources. By focusing solely on the experiences of Navy chaplains in Vietnam this work tells a story that has not been told and means to encourage other scholars to utilize additional materials in their future work. The experiences of chaplains who served with Marines recount some of the earliest involvements of chaplains in counter-insurgency efforts. The work of chaplains serving with Marines in People-to-People efforts, in civic action programs, and in the Personal Response Program provide historical context for understanding the role of chaplains in counter-insurgency operations today.

Tens of thousands of books have been published on the American conflict in Vietnam, with some focusing on how young enlisted men made their way to this war. No text explores the pathways by which chaplains, who were often significantly older than the “grunts” they served, came to be in Vietnam. What emerges here is a portrait of expressions of Christianity in mid-twentieth century America as well as a glimpse of the faith influences, educational journeys and decision-making processes that led these men to Southeast Asia. These particular pathways to Vietnam provide a new and different understanding of the reach of this conflict into different segments of American society.

Organization

The life stories of six Christian clergymen who served as Navy chaplains assigned to elements of the Marine Corps serving in the Vietnam theater of operations from 1962 to 1972 form the core of the text. Explored in less detail, the experiences of a number of additional chaplains elucidate other significant aspects of chaplaincy within the naval service and chaplains’ service in Vietnam.

Chapter 2 describes the landscapes in which chaplains operated in the 1960s. It begins with a geographical description and historical contextualization of Vietnam. The broader landscape of American religious expression from which these men came and which they represented is elucidated briefly. It then explores the history of chaplaincy generally, as well as the specific development of the Navy’s Chaplain Corps.

Chapter 3 shares stories of several chaplains who served with the first Marine units that reported to Vietnam and concludes with the massive influx of American troops in the spring and summer of 1965. The first Marine units assigned in country were aviation units. In these early years of the conflict, American military personnel understood their role to be advisory and supportive in nature. In addition to meeting the religious needs of American service personnel, their chaplains sought to establish relationships with local religious figures and missionaries. Programs were created or implemented that chaplains perceived to be essential to fulfilling the overall objectives of the American presence in Vietnam. Also discussed in this chapter are some of the common challenges that most chaplains experienced in fulfilling their duties.

As the nature of the American military involvement changed over time, so too did the emphasis of the work of many chaplains assigned with Marines. Although those
chaplains assigned to aviation units or in areas of little conflict continued to develop and maintain relationships with local Vietnamese, greater numbers of chaplains were assigned to combat units. Chapter 4 shares the experiences of two men, Stanley, “Stan,” Beach and Vincent, “Vince,” Capodanno, both assigned to infantry battalions in April 1966. Beach and Capodanno met while training to deploy with Marines. They were from extremely different backgrounds and religious traditions and their lives took dramatically different trajectories while in Vietnam. In profound ways each man continues to wield influence within the Navy’s Chaplain Corps and beyond.

Chapter 5 explores the experiences of two men assigned to combat units later in the war. Carl Auel, a more senior and experienced chaplain, was assigned to the First Marine Regiment in September 1967. In addition to acting in a supervisory capacity over those chaplains serving in the regiment’s battalions, he served alongside Marines during the Tet Offensive in the Battle of Hue City, one of the bloodiest and longest of the war. Universally and deeply respected, Auel wrote eloquently of his service and his understanding of ministry. His life conveys both the complexity and the psychic cost of war.

While Auel was one of the senior chaplains who served in country with Marines, William, “Bill,” Thompson was one of the most junior. Arriving in Vietnam in July of 1968, Thompson had been in the military just a few months. Assigned to a battalion near the demilitarized zone, his experience typifies that of those junior chaplains who served

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24 A Marine infantry battalion is usually organized into three rifle companies, a weapons company, and a headquarters and service company. There are generally just under a thousand Marines in a battalion, and there are typically five battalions in a regiment. The battalion was the lowest level to which a chaplain would be assigned. Technically assigned to the headquarters and service company for administrative purposes, the chaplain was to serve all of the personnel attached to the battalion.
with units engaged in intense combat throughout the war. Thompson’s humble and honest recollection of his experiences reveals much about the day-to-day reality of military chaplaincy.

Chapter 6 shares the experiences of two men who served in the later years of the war with non-infantry units. By the time they reported to the region, the United States was scaling back combat operations and the focus of ministry for some chaplains was shifting. If early in the war chaplains focused on creating relationships with Vietnamese citizens, and during the years of heavy combat chaplains focused on caring for Marines, during this last phase of the war some chaplains turned their efforts toward the military institution itself. George Evans reported to Vietnam in September 1970 and was assigned to an artillery battalion. Although stationed in Thailand with an air unit, Victor, “Vic,” Smith was among the last chaplains to serve with Marines who saw action in Vietnam. Smith joined the unit in August 1972.

Chapter 7 tells “the rest of the story.” It follows each of the six men profiled in the previous three chapters in the years since Vietnam. It also suggests how the American religious landscape and the Navy’s Chaplain Corps changed in the ten years chaplains served with Marines in Vietnam.

Chapter 8 argues that the golden age of the Navy’s Chaplain Corps may be said to be coming to a close even as the last chaplains were leaving the theater of war. The evangelical rise, the admission of women into the corps, and the retirement of the last chaplains to have served in World War II marked the end of an age where chaplains represented three ways of being both chaplains and Americans – Protestant, Catholic and
Jew. The increasing secularism and growing pluralism of American society shifted the emphasis of military chaplaincy from the provision of religious services to the protection of service members’ rights to freely exercise their religious faith.

Sources and Methodology

In an effort to add to the historical record rather than theorize, this dissertation relies almost exclusively on primary sources. Randy Cash, retired chaplain and present curator of the Naval Chaplaincy School and Center’s archive at the Armed Forces Chaplaincy Center, made all of the records held at the archive available for this work. Most of the records at the archive are neither systematically catalogued nor digitized, in part because of the relocation of the Chaplains’ School and archive from Newport, Rhode Island to Fort Jackson, South Carolina in 2009. Among the records at the archive are many of the end-of-tour reports chaplains submitted upon departing the region, as well as reports concerning conditions and experiences in Vietnam specifically requested by the Chief of Chaplains. Withers Moore collected these reports and Herb Bergsma used them in composing the Chaplains Corps’ official history, *Chaplains with Marines in Vietnam 1962-1971*. In some instances, comments written on these and other reports by staffers in the Chief of Chaplains’ office proved as revelatory as the reports themselves. As with all historical writing, what Bergsma chose to leave out of his text proved perhaps more interesting than what he included. The opportunity to use these reports confirms the necessity of the ongoing nature of the historical task. Our understanding of the past changes as we ourselves change.
These reports, as well as official publications of the Chaplain Corps, speeches, articles and other writings of chaplains profiled here underlie this document. In addition to these written sources from the period studied, an essential component of this work is the body of responses received from a survey sent out to over two hundred chaplains in late 2010 and early 2011. Over one hundred chaplains responded to the survey, with many providing detailed answers to an additional questionnaire. Some forty chaplains agreed to record an oral history. To date, thirteen formal oral histories have been recorded, some spanning multiple conversations over days. Many others have met with me personally or spoken on the phone, and still others remain in touch through email and letters. Some have sent memoirs--both published and unpublished--books of poetry, photographs, videos, and letters. Families of some of those chaplains who died before the project began have also participated by sharing what they recall of their loved one’s experience. More than half a dozen men who participated in the early stages of this project have died subsequently. One, Father Richard Beck, eagerly and openly responded to the initial survey, acknowledging that he was receiving hospice care and would die within weeks. He did, leaving this life on April 23, 2011. One of the primary subjects of this study, George Evans, died suddenly in 2014. All of the men who have participated in this project have done so with the understanding that the materials contributed would be forwarded to the archive at Fort Jackson, and, in some cases, their oral histories would be sent to the Library of Congress.

The Chaplain Corps records that over seven hundred chaplains served with Marines in Vietnam. Herb Bergsma identifies over five hundred of these men in an
appendix in the official history.\textsuperscript{25} Using that appendix I constructed a spreadsheet identifying these men and then began the process of determining who had died, and, if still alive, where they lived. Those churches that are hierarchical in structure, particularly the Roman Catholic Church, keep and make available death records and known addresses. Less hierarchical churches make it more difficult to locate their leadership. Randy Cash assisted immeasurably by connecting me with Michael Halley, a retired chaplain who maintains an informal email network of retired chaplains.\textsuperscript{26} This group connected me with dozens of chaplains.

The spreadsheet not only helped me identify who had died and where they lived, but enabled me to organize a tremendous amount of data regarding these men. Using biographical sketchbooks that used to be created and disseminated by the Chaplain Corps, I was able to identify when and where chaplains were born and educated.\textsuperscript{27} Additionally, I identified those who had prior military service, and if they received either the Purple Heart or Bronze Star in Vietnam. The spreadsheet proved invaluable in making generalizations regarding the whole group based on documented evidence rather than anecdotal suggestion.

\textsuperscript{25} The presumption would be that Bergsma lists 500 rather than 700 because 500 chaplains sent in the requested reports. The reports inform the overarching “who went where when” narrative of the official history.

\textsuperscript{26} The spreadsheet itself will be given to the Naval Chaplaincy School and Center Archive and made available to others upon request. Randy Cash requested that certain information like the awarding of various medals be documented and given to the Archive.

The survey itself revealed my inexperience as an academic researcher. While I intended for two questions on the survey to reveal how chaplains’ perceptions of the war changed as a result of their experience, they revealed instead an understanding of their ministry. The questions asked them to respond to one of six options concerning their “feelings regarding U.S. involvement there” before and after their service.28 The options read as follows:

- Strongly supportive of U.S. intervention
- Moderately supportive of U.S. intervention
- Somewhat supportive of U.S. intervention
- Somewhat opposed to U.S. intervention
- Moderately opposed to U.S. intervention
- Strongly opposed to U.S. intervention

Although a few chaplains interpreted the question as a political one, the overwhelming majority interpreted the question in light of how they understood their ministry with Marines and sailors. These responses must be seen to some degree in light of the recent U.S. involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, but the comments and subsequent conversations reveal a particular, and surprisingly consistent, understanding of their role as chaplains. In short, most responders indicated that they strongly supported U.S. intervention before and after their service in Vietnam.29 When asked what they meant by that, almost all referred to the fact that they were there for the Marines and sailors when they went to Vietnam, and they felt the same way upon their return. Those that reflected

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29 While there was great consistency among the responses, it is also true that there was a slightly greater change in feeling regarding the conflict for those chaplains who served after 1968 than for those who served before.
a change, and almost all became less supportive, interpreted the question as I intended – as a reflection of their feeling toward the policy of American intervention in Vietnam.

The overwhelming response and participation of these chaplains in this study primarily results from the fact that the author is a retired Navy reserve chaplain who served on active duty from 1989 to mid-1993. At that time, there were still some chaplains on active duty who had served in Vietnam. As is often the case in a corps of roughly one thousand people, our paths crossed. Several were senior chaplains serving in supervisory capacities. Others were chaplains endorsed by the same agent.

Some ten chaplains who participated in this project and I have some vague recollection of one another. Two, Blant Ferguson and Kevin Anderson, have figured significantly in my life. Chaplain Ferguson had retired from the Navy and was serving as a representative of my endorsing agent, the Presbyterian Council for Chaplains and Military Personnel. I remain grateful for his kindness in visiting me when I was in the midst of a medical crisis. Although Blant served with Seabees, not Marines, in Vietnam he spoke with me at length and provided me contact information and updates concerning many of his colleagues.

Chaplain Anderson was the senior chaplain at Kingsville Naval Air Station and acted as my supervisor during the summer of 1987, when I was a chaplain candidate undergoing OJT, “on the job training.” His good humor and joy in his work inspired me then and now. I do not recall being aware at the time that either Blant or Kevin had served in Vietnam. Perhaps due to my naiveté, or a present-minded focus, their past
service did not enter our time together in any memorable way. It has been a pleasant outcome of this project to reconnect with them.

While I have some personal acquaintance with ten or so people who have supported this work, none of them are among the six primary subjects of this study. Rather, they have directed me to the men who comprise the core focus of this dissertation.

Each of the men profiled at length in this study was selected intentionally. While choosing a perfectly representative cross-section of chaplains would not be possible in a study of this length, an attempt has been made to achieve broad representation of both religious and personal backgrounds. Vincent Capodanno was a Roman Catholic priest affiliated with the Maryknoll Order. Carl Auel and George Evans were Lutheran pastors and, as such, were considered liturgical Protestants. Stan Beach, Bill Thompson, and Victor Smith represented different non-liturgical Protestant traditions. Beach’s endorsement came from the General Association of Regular Baptists, while Thompson was affiliated with the larger Southern Baptist Convention. As a Christian Scientist, Victor Smith represented those chaplains from non-mainline traditions.

Not only do these men span the three categories of Christian chaplains serving the Navy in the 1960s, they also represent different geographical areas of the United States. Even though Auel and Beach were both Midwesterners born in Michigan, Auel grew up in metropolitan Detroit, whereas Beach spent his childhood in the more rural community of Gagetown, located outside Saginaw. Bill Thompson spent his childhood in the Tidewater region southeast of Norfolk, Virginia. George Evans grew up in the
agricultural region of central Pennsylvania. Vic Smith and Vince Capodanno represent true urbanites. Capodanno was born and raised in the borough of Staten Island on the east coast, and Vic Smith was born in Santa Cruz, California and raised in metropolitan Washington, D.C.

Jacqueline Whitt identifies “three persistent and predictable archetypes of military chaplains in the twentieth century: the saint, the militarist, and the incompetent.”30 While these caricatures exist in media representations of chaplains, the men whose stories are shared here would depict themselves in a more measured and modest way. Despite the fact that one of the subjects of this study is, in fact, on the path to sainthood within the Roman Catholic Church, these chaplains might identify themselves as men and pastors who chose to serve as chaplains.

Working with, in some cases, living, breathing, and emotive human beings in an historical endeavor presents obvious, not so obvious, and sometimes humorous challenges. One man, apparently presuming some nefarious intent on my part, threatened to sue me if I mentioned his name in the project. Another, who resides in Florida, commended me for living in a county with such a marvelous sheriff, to whose political campaign he has contributed. A third presumed a “liberal” bias on my part and that of my advisor and chastised us both for such.

While such responses perhaps provoke a wry smile, there are other real challenges in dealing with living subjects. Several men have sent me hundreds of pages of material and unpublished manuscripts, presumably with the expectation that their stories would form the core of the project. They do not. The harder aspect of working with living

30 Whitt, Bringing God to Men, 3-4.
subjects who, in some cases, knew one another well, is that they often formed opinions regarding one another. In speaking with so many who served in Vietnam, I am now aware of some of their perceptions of one another and of those who served as their superiors. Some speak freely of those who proved “cowards,” or those who “never came home,” in an emotional sense, were “drunks,” or proved to have some personality flaw that prevented them from advancing to the highest ranks of the Chaplain Corps. In some cases, these perceptions appear to be so widespread that it would seem plausible to mention them. However, in general, I have not shared these perceptions unless I possess some kind of written documentation confirming the observations because to do so could well be harmful to those concerned, particularly those still living, and would add little value to the particular conversation I hope this study will elicit.

I have, however, acted upon general perceptions in choosing two of the primary subjects. Numerous people encouraged me to include Stan Beach and Carl Auel in this study because they were both so well respected by their peers. In other significant ways, perception remains central to this study. The primary subjects’ perceptions of their service and understanding of ministry is the core of this work.

While this study is perhaps best understood as a cultural study, it informs other historical approaches. Because it focuses on the lives of six men, in particular, it is intensely biographical. It is by its subject matter, a gendered study. While no theoretical claims are made regarding gender identity, it is an inescapable and relevant fact that there were no female chaplains serving in the Navy until 1973. Several chaplains commented that they enjoyed working in the predominantly male world that comprised the American
military at the time.\textsuperscript{31} This reality is one of the reasons I argue that this period represents for the chaplains of that time something of a “golden age” for their corps.

This study also intends to suggest, without fully exploring, the institutional structure of the Chaplains Corps. Since the 1990s there have been a series of lawsuits against the Navy’s Chaplain Corps dealing with issues relating to the representation and service of evangelical Christians.\textsuperscript{32} To the extent it clarifies the organizational structure of the Navy’s Chaplain Corps this work provides relevant background for those scholars exploring legal issues relating to chaplaincy, those interested in institutional history, or those exploring military chaplaincy.

\textsuperscript{31} There were female Navy nurses serving in Vietnam, so chaplains did encounter female military personnel.

\textsuperscript{32} For example, Chaplain D. Philip Veitch sued the Navy and several of its officers in 2000. In November 2006 the United States Court of Appeals, District of Columbia Circuit ruled in favor of the Navy, citing that Veitch had not proved his claim of discrimination. In August 2008 the same Appeals Court again ruled in favor of the Navy in a suit filed by a group of non-liturgical Protestant chaplains associated with the Chaplaincy of Full Gospel Churches.
Chapter 2

Landscapes

“Sow the wind, reap the whirlwind”
- Vietnamese Expression

Just as landscape painters give us a sense of a particular time and space, this chapter describes three inter-related backdrops that set the framework for the Navy chaplains’ work in Vietnam. The geographical but primarily political landscape of Vietnam itself situates the work in the larger context of the geographical and historical space. To understand the chaplains who supported Marines in Vietnam, however, we also have to understand the religious backdrop of mid-20th century America. Then we
turn to the institution of naval chaplaincy as it evolved up to 1962 to propose that the decade which followed presented the close of the “golden age” of Navy chaplaincy.

Vietnam

Southeast Asia encompasses that region located east of India, south of China, and north of Australia. Initially identified as such for military purposes during World War II, the regional name is now commonly accepted as its peoples share characteristics and customs. The Indochinese peninsula refers more particularly to the region known as Mainland Southeast Asia. The area incorporates the present day countries of Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. Vietnam incorporates three distinct geographic regions: the mountainous northern region encompassing the Red River delta known as “Tonkin” by the French, the central highland region referred to as “Annam,” and the southern region including the Mekong River delta known by the French appellation “Cochinchina.” Most of the country’s rubber plantations lie in the north, while rice production occurs predominantly in the south. Hanoi is the major metropolitan center in the north, Saigon - now known as Ho Chi Minh City - is the major metropolitan area in the south. Hue, the historic imperial city, and Da Nang, which boasts a natural port, are located along the coastline of the South China Sea in the central region.

With a population of over 27 million in 1950, Vietnam had a long history of resistance to colonial incursion. In the year 40 C.E. sisters Trung Trac and Trung Nhi raised an army to resist long Chinese imperialism. According to Vietnamese accounts of

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2 Owen, *The Emergence of Modern Southeast Asia*, 225.
their exploits, the sisters chose to commit suicide rather than be taken captive when a massive army led by Ma Yuan moved to extinguish the uprising three years later. Celebrated each February, the fighting sisters remain revered for their refusal to accept foreign domination.

Compared to the thousand-year history of Chinese imperialism in Vietnam, the French colonial enterprise appears short-lived. Although Roman Catholic priests began missionary efforts on the Indochinese peninsula in the early seventeenth century, French colonial efforts did not assume military overtones until the mid-nineteenth century. Between 1859 and 1867 the French Navy colonized six provinces of the far south.³ Capitalizing upon the weak leadership of Emperor Tu-duc, the French established the central and northern regions as protectorates by 1885. The French colonial effort in Vietnam succeeded because of superior military capability and the exploitation of divisions within the society reflected in peasant rebellions and the conversions of hundreds of thousands of impoverished people, primarily in the north, to Catholicism.⁴

With only a few thousand bureaucrats in the country, the French initially depended upon the support of the monarchy and the maintenance of the Confucian mandarate system for social control.⁵ Thus, despite occasional armed uprisings like the Ham-nghi, or “Aid the King,” revolt in the 1880s, anticolonial efforts began most clearly as reforms initiated by educated Vietnamese in the early 1900s. Characterizing

³ Owen, *The Emergence of Modern Southeast Asia*, 115.

⁴ Owen, *The Emergence of Modern Southeast Asia*, 115.

⁵ Owen, *The Emergence of Modern Southeast Asia*, 336.
Vietnamese society as static and Western civilization as dynamic, the anonymous 1904 tract *The Civilization of New Learning* used Social Darwinian themes to suggest that by emulating Western achievements the Vietnamese could overcome French colonialism and revitalize the nation. Led by the radical Phan Boi Chau and the gradualist Phan Chu Trinh, reformers borrowed heavily from mid-nineteenth century Chinese writings about America, in particular incorporating Hsu Chi-yu’s utopian narratives of the life of George Washington and the American Revolution.\(^6\) The leadership within the Vietnamese anticolonial movement radicalized in the mid-1920s after the imprisonment of Phan Boi Chau and the death of Phan Chu Trinh.

Nguyen Ai Quoc’s 1925 founding of the Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth League was one expression of this radicalization.\(^7\) Nguyen, better known as Ho Chi Minh, left Vietnam in 1911 to study in France and ended up travelling the world first as a laborer on steamships and then later as a “communist missionary.”\(^8\) When his 1919 appeal for Vietnamese autonomy at the Versailles peace conference went unheard by the Allied powers, he welcomed Lenin’s offer of support. By 1925 Ho was living as an exile in Guangzhou, China, and committed to Vietnamese independence.

Although the youth league proved ineffective and local officials drove Ho out of the city, it served as the precursor to the Vietnamese communist movement. The league

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\(^7\) Ho left Vietnam in 1911 and travelled extensively to include time in France, the United States, England, the Soviet Union and China. William J. Duiker’s 2000 book, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*, provides the most in depth biography of Ho available in English.

\(^8\) Owen, *The Emergence of Modern Southeast Asia*, 340.
also served as the training ground for several key leaders in Ho’s inner circle, notably Pham Van Dong and Truong Chinh. Relocating to Hong Kong, Ho created the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) in October 1930.

The Japanese occupation of Vietnam in September 1940 undermined French authority in the minds of many Vietnamese, providing the communists an opportunity to mix their ideology with the cause of overthrowing foreign domination. In February 1941 Ho returned to the homeland he had left thirty years before. Serving as the ICP’s ideological guide, Ho presciently observed at the Party’s plenum in May 1941 that Germany would turn on the Soviet Union, thus forcing the Soviet Union to join the allied powers. This observation persuaded the Party’s Central Committee to support Allied forces. Leaders at the 1941 plenum also identified the Vietnam Independence League, commonly known as the Viet Minh, as the primary vehicle for advancing the party’s objective of violent overthrow of colonialism. Ho spent the next 14 months organizing training events for Vietminh recruits and overseeing propaganda efforts.

In August 1942 Ho entered China where he was arrested as a potential French or Japanese spy. During Ho’s absence the ICP helped regional groups work through issues between ethnic Vietnamese (Kinh) and Tay, Nung, Yao, and Meo minorities, struggled to ensure that followers had sufficient food supplies, and continued to seek and train recruits, experiencing surprising success among imprisoned Vietnamese.

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9 Owen, *The Emergence of Modern Southeast Asia*, 343.

Communication between northern leaders and regional cells in the south proved extraordinarily difficult, however, thus making the Viet Minh a loosely controlled entity at best. Nonetheless, by July 1945, groups identifying as Viet Minh had emerged throughout Vietnam, with the strongest units operating in the north and groups in the central highlands experiencing rapid growth.

The Allied effort to defeat Japanese forces throughout Asia meant that U.S. and ICP interests aligned during the war. American Office of Strategic Services (OSS) agents exchanged materiel with the Viet Minh for assistance in returning downed allied pilots. During the critical months of April to late September 1945, the chief of OSS operations in Indochina, Archimedes L.A. Patti, developed a close working relationship with Ho and his inner circle.\textsuperscript{11} Their relationship provided Ho not only with tangible goods but also with some cachet among other Vietnamese nationalists. It also fostered Ho’s hope that the United States might prove an ally after the war.

The formal Japanese surrender to French and British troops in Vietnam in August created a power vacuum that the Viet Minh sought to fill. Meeting in mid-August, the ICP issued a resolution noting the necessity of Soviet and U.S. support in order for the Viet Minh to oppose any French efforts to retake Vietnam. The resolution also made clear the belief that international concerns might lead the United States and Great Britain to concede to the French. The National People’s Congress began on August 16, with the purpose of electing a National Liberation Committee to act as a provisional government. Ho was elected chairman of the committee. The Congress rapidly disbanded so leaders

could disperse and begin seizing power throughout the country. The Vietminh quickly commandeered government buildings in Hanoi.

On September 2, 1945 Ho Chi Minh stepped to a microphone on a platform erected in Hanoi’s Ba Dinh Square. Wearing what became his trademark faded high collared khaki jacket and white rubber sandals Ho read these words:

All men are created equal; they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights; among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. This immortal statement was made in the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America in 1776. In a broader sense, this means: All the peoples on the earth are equal from birth, all the peoples have a right to live, to be happy and free…

After reading a few sentences of his text Ho paused and asked those listening,

“’Countrymen, can you hear me clearly?’ With a loud roar the crowd replied,

‘Clearly!’”

This brief exchange between speaker and audience moved some to tears, and at that moment “’Uncle (Ho) and the sea of people became one.’”

As the war drew to a close Ho repeatedly expressed to Archimedes Patti his desire for American support. Convinced that Ho was an intelligent and capable nationalist first and communist second, Archimedes Patti lobbied his superiors in Washington on behalf of the Viet Minh. The U.S. government denied Ho’s requests stating that it did not formally recognize the Viet Minh. Patti met with Ho for the last time on September 30,


13 A full description of the day’s events can be found in Marr, Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 532.

14 Vo Nguyen Giap as quoted in Marr, Vietnam 1945, 532.

15 Patti, Why Viet Nam?, 86, 125, 392.
1945. As they spoke, Ho indicated to Patti that he understood that American officials perceived him to be a “‘Moscow puppet,’ an ‘international communist’” because of the many years he had worked in Moscow. Ho made clear to Patti, however, that he considered himself a free agent and that the Americans had given him more support than had the Soviets. Nevertheless, Ho indicated that out of necessity the new Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) would have to ally itself with any nation willing to be its ally.

Confident that the Vietnamese would ferociously pursue their independence, Patti watched from a desk in Washington as events unfolded in Vietnam. Abandoned by the United States, ignored by the Soviet Union, and pillaged by the Chinese, Ho entered into an ill-fated agreement with the French. Ignoring the basic tenants of the agreement, the French occupied Hanoi in March 1946, and open conflict between the French and the Viet Minh began in November. The American government’s desire to support its war ravaged European allies took precedence over Vietnamese desires for independence. Afraid to weaken France’s political or economic position in Western Europe any further, the United States provided military assistance to the French and began to frame its support in anticommunist terms. By January 1954, U.S. aid “accounted for almost 80 percent of France’s military expenditures in Southeast Asia.”

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After nine years of hostilities and a brutal seven-week battle and siege at Dien Bien Phu, French troops surrendered to Ho Chi Minh’s Viet Minh guerillas on May 7, 1954. While news of the victory splashed across newspaper Ho Chi Minh entered negotiations with a French delegation in Geneva. On July 20th, Ho and other revolutionaries representing the Democratic Republic of Vietnam signed a cease-fire agreement with the French. Perhaps unsure of U.S. military intentions or confident of their own ability to reconcile the country politically, DRV representatives also signed a more general Final Declaration incorporating “stunning diplomatic concessions” by the Viet Minh.19

Signed by the DRV, France, Britain, China, and the Soviet Union, the Final Declaration created a temporary demarcation line at the seventeenth parallel, dividing Vietnam into two military zones of control. Viet Minh forces would regroup north of the line, while French forces and their allies would move south of the parallel. During a three hundred day period of military regroupment, civilians were free to relocate to whichever side of the line they chose. The Final Declaration also stipulated that the line of demarcation was provisional pending a general election to reunify the country slated for 1956. Neither the government of the territory south of the seventeenth parallel, led by Emperor Bao Dai, nor representatives of the United States signed the Final Declaration. The United States did, however, pledge not to disturb the agreement with bellicose

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threats. The 1954 Geneva Accords began a period known simply in South Vietnam as “Six Years of Peace.”

During the three hundred days of free passage, which ended May 18, 1955, some 600,000 to one million Vietnamese north of the seventeenth parallel moved south, and up to 150,000 civilians and Vietminh forces moved north. Facilitated by French and American military forces--funded primarily by the U.S. government--and promoted by America’s Central Intelligence Agency, the southern migrants included many of Vietnam’s Roman Catholic minority. They believed they would find refuge in the south, particularly since Bao Dai’s appointment of the Roman Catholic Ngo Dinh Diem as Prime Minister in the summer of 1954. Peace and refuge, however, proved increasingly hard to come by as Diem wrested control of the government from Bao Dai and cancelled the 1956 reunification election.

Immediately following the 1954 Geneva Accords, the administration of U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower prioritized the containment of communism in Southeast

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21 Born in 1901 near the imperial capital of Hue, Diem was one of nine children in a wealthy family that had practiced the Roman Catholic faith since the seventeenth century. After dropping out of seminary, Diem attended Hanoi’s School of Public Administration rather than accept a French scholarship to study in Paris. Following government service as a provincial chief, Diem was appointed Minister of the Interior by Emperor Bao Dai in 1933. Refusing to serve an emperor he quickly concluded was a puppet of the French, Diem resigned his position and returned to the family home in Hue. Although Diem remained officially unemployed for the next twenty-one years, he maintained a written correspondence with the reformer Phan Boi Chau. Both the Japanese and French unsuccessfully ordered Diem’s arrest for subversive activities at the end of World War II. Ho Chi Minh arrested the ardent anticommunist Diem, but rather than executing him offered Diem a position in his cabinet, hoping to garner Catholic support. Diem refused the offer, in part because of his anti-communist beliefs and in part because a Viet Minh cell had buried his brother, Ngo Dinh Khoi, and nephew alive. Miraculously, for reasons that remain unclear, Ho released Diem. Diem fled Vietnam in 1950 when Ho Chi Minh ordered his execution in absentia. Seeking refuge outside the country Diem applied for a visa to Rome but changed his destination en route, entering the United States instead.
Asia. At a press conference on April 7, 1954 Eisenhower famously expressed his “domino theory” regarding the consequences of the fall of any further nations to communist control.\textsuperscript{22} Eisenhower believed the “possible consequences of the loss” of any of the nations of mainland Southeast Asia “incalculable to the free world.”\textsuperscript{23}

In a multilateral offensive, the U.S. worked with its allies to create the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and dispatched a special mission headed by General J. Lawton Collins to Vietnam to continue U.S. and French programs there. By the spring of 1955, however, the U.S. abandoned its multilateral efforts in favor of a unilateral approach entailing unqualified support for the government of Ngo Dinh Diem. Despite General Collins’s judgment that Diem was incapable of leading Vietnam, the Eisenhower administration steadfastly supported the autocratic ruler. The Eisenhower government’s refusal to acknowledge the reality of DRV success or to use force to break its power “only deepened the U.S. commitment in Southeast Asia with no realistic prospect for resolving the dilemma of how to protect U.S. interests without war.”\textsuperscript{24}

After five years of relatively little open conflict south of the seventeenth parallel, Ho and the DRV leadership in Hanoi authorized renewed struggle in January 1959. Diem furthered their cause in May 1959 through the issuance of Decree 10/59. The decree identified any political opposition as treason, broadly defined any past Viet Minh


association as a political crime and enabled speedy trials through military tribunals for those accused. With life imprisonment or a death sentence the likely outcome of a conviction, Decree 10/59 dramatically raised the stakes of opposition to the Diem regime. Empowered by the decree, some local officials extorted terrified villagers. Historian David Elliott contends that the decree negated any claim Diem could make for legitimate rule, demonstrating that he intended to rule by coercion and power alone.\textsuperscript{25} The decree increased tensions in the South and hastened violent conflict. The National Liberation Front (NLF), the southern branch of the Viet Minh, was given life again in December 1960.\textsuperscript{26} Diem’s proclamation effectively “sowed the wind” in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{27} The ensuing whirlwind would embrace both Vietnam and America.\textsuperscript{28}

Shortly after taking office in January, 1961, President John F. Kennedy began an incremental escalation of forces in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{29} The escalation resulted when several factors coalesced. In May, 1961, Kennedy supported a cease-fire and negotiated settlement that ended conflict between a pro-American faction and a pro-communist faction supported by the Soviet Union in Laos. While the agreement kept U.S. forces out

\textsuperscript{25} Elliott, \textit{The Vietnam War}, 103.

\textsuperscript{26} Owen, \textit{The Emergence of Southeast Asia}, 346. The National Liberation Front would be known as the Viet Cong (VC), meaning “Vietnamese Communists” by U.S. forces.

\textsuperscript{27} Elliott, \textit{The Vietnam War}, 103-4. Using data from the Dinh Tuong province in the South, Elliott argues that relatively few people in the province died as a result of 10/59. However, the decree greatly exacerbated corruption and created an atmosphere of terror. The Party, on the other hand, claims that 469 South Vietnamese persons were executed from January to October 1959.

\textsuperscript{28} Elliott, \textit{The Vietnam War}, 102.

of the country, the settlement included communist participation in the government. Coupled with the Cuban Bay of Pigs fiasco in April, the President did not want the U.S. to appear any weaker than it already did.

Nor did the U.S. want to disappoint its ally Diem by abandoning its nation building effort in South Vietnam. By U.S. estimates, the National Liberation Front controlled or influenced two-thirds of the villages in the south by 1962.\textsuperscript{30} In response to his country’s deteriorating situation, Diem began a counter-insurgency effort. President Kennedy pledged support for its ally by more than doubling American military assistance in 1962.\textsuperscript{31} By the end of the year, American assistance included heavy equipment such as armored personnel carriers and more than 300 aircraft, as well as chemical defoliants. The number of American advisors in Vietnam would increase from 3,205 in December 1961 to more than 9,000 by the end of 1962.\textsuperscript{32} To increase coordination of U.S. assets President Kennedy established the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) in February 1962 to oversee all U.S. operations in the country. The first U.S. Marines unit, along with their Navy chaplain, arrived in Vietnam in April.

America’s Religious Landscape Post World War II

The religious landscape of the United States at the end of World War II consisted of what Will Herberg described as “the three great branches or divisions of ‘American

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{30} Owen, \textit{The Emergence of Southeast Asia}, 346.
  \item \textsuperscript{31} George C. Herring, \textit{America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975} 4\textsuperscript{th} ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 104.
  \item \textsuperscript{32} Herring, \textit{America’s Longest War}, 104.
\end{itemize}
religion” – Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism. Some 25 million Americans represented the largest six Protestant denominations, with nearly a third identifying as Methodists. Joining the Methodists in the liturgical Protestant fold were 2.7 million Presbyterians, 2.1 million Episcopalians, and some 2.8 million Lutherans representing both the United Lutheran Church in America and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. The Southern Baptist Convention represented the largest non-liturgical protestant tradition in the country with over six million members. Roman Catholics equaled Protestants in total membership, with 25 million adherents. Jews rounded out the portrait, with some 5 million identifying as Reform, Orthodox, or Conservative.

In contrast to declining religious identification after World War I, Cold War anxieties precipitated a surge in religious association and attendance among Americans well after World War II. Historian Seth Jacobs identifies this surge as America’s “Third Great Awakening” and suggests that the 1950s were “the most ‘religious’ decade of the twentieth century.” The postwar surge in religious identification proved most dramatic within the Roman Catholic Church. By 1965 the number of Roman Catholics in America nearly doubled, growing to almost 46 million.


Indicative of this growing religious and associated political power was the key figure of Francis Cardinal Spellman. Dubbed the “American Pope” by biographer John Cooney, Francis Cardinal Spellman was the most visible and powerful Catholic in America throughout the 1940s and 1950s.\textsuperscript{39} Gracing the February 25, 1946 cover of \textit{Time}, by the late 1950s Cardinal Spellman was at the apex of his political influence. The 1950 best-selling novel \textit{The Cardinal} was based on Spellman’s life.\textsuperscript{40}

Born in Massachusetts in 1889, Spellman left America in 1911 to study for the priesthood at the North American College in Rome. A poor student, Spellman made up for his lack of academic acumen through the careful cultivation of relationships with those in power. Giuseppe Ceppetelli, the patriarch of Constantinople, ordained Spellman to the priesthood on May 14, 1916, in the Church of the Apollinaire in Rome.\textsuperscript{41} Following ordination, Spellman returned home to Boston where Archbishop O’Connell immediately expressed antipathy toward the young priest. After nine difficult years in Boston, Spellman’s friends in Rome engineered his appointment to the Vatican’s state department. Back in Rome, Spellman quickly earned a reputation as “‘the American back-door to the Vatican,’” by enabling access to church leaders and papal


\textsuperscript{41} Cooney, \textit{The American Pope}, 17.
audiences for wealthy Americans.\textsuperscript{42} Pope Pius XI himself came to rely on Spellman’s ability to get things done, particularly after the American obtained three limousines and a train car for the pontiff’s use. Pope Pius relied most directly on Spellman’s gifts in June 1931 when he asked the American to smuggle an encyclical condemning Benito Mussolini from Rome to Paris and deliver it to the press.\textsuperscript{43} By then a trusted Vatican insider, Spellman’s success in the mission guaranteed his future appointment to an influential position in the United States.

Spellman returned to the United States in late 1932 as an auxiliary bishop in Boston, slated to succeed his nemesis, Archbishop O’Connell. With the balance of power in their relationship favoring Spellman, the newly consecrated bishop patiently endured O’Connell’s insults, fulfilled his assigned tasks, and cultivated political connections. Among the many significant relationships Spellman developed after his return from Rome was that with the politically like-minded Joseph P. Kennedy.\textsuperscript{44} Spellman’s patience and political prowess, coupled with an unusual circumstance of luck or perhaps grace, paid off when Cardinal Hayes, the Archbishop of New York, died in September 1938.

During final deliberations in Rome to determine Hayes’s successor, for which Spellman was at best a long shot, Pope Pius XI died. Having been warned to stay away from Rome during the selection of the new Archbishop of New York so as not to inflame

\textsuperscript{42} Cooney, \textit{The American Pope}, 38.

\textsuperscript{43} Cooney, \textit{The American Pope}, 43.

\textsuperscript{44} Spellman, who officiated at the weddings of Kennedy’s sons Robert and Ted, enjoyed a close personal relationship with the Kennedys, America’s political “royal family,” for almost three decades.
his enemies, Spellman relied on Joseph Kennedy, now serving as Ambassador to Great Britain, to keep him up-to-date on developments at the Vatican. Kennedy, having attended Pius XI’s funeral as the official U.S. representative, stayed on in Rome through the selection of Pius’s successor. However, when Spellman’s longtime friend, Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli, was elected Pope Pius XII, Spellman heard the news not from Kennedy but by telegram from Pacelli himself.45

After a month of anxious waiting, Spellman received word by way of courier that he was to be appointed archbishop of New York.46 On May 23, 1939, Amelto Gicognani, the apostolic delegate, officiated at Spellman’s three-hour investiture.47 By the end of the year, Pius XII appointed Spellman Apostolic Vicar for the U.S. Armed Forces, a diocese the Pope created for America’s military. As Vicar, Spellman would appoint and oversee priests as chaplains.

The Archbishop wasted no time in consolidating his authority within the diocese and expanding his political power nationally. Spellman kept his priests on guard by dropping in at rectories unannounced or by appearing in the confessional booth to make his confession. At the same time, Spellman exercised his larger political inclinations, becoming particularly close to President Franklin Roosevelt after Spellman negotiated the appointment of Myron Taylor as America’s representative to the Vatican in December


46 Cooney records that Archbishop O’Connell, upon hearing of Spellman’s appointment, remarked, “‘Francis is an example of what happens when you teach a bookkeeper how to read.’” Cooney, *The American Pope*, 75.

During World War II Spellman acted as Roosevelt’s personal envoy to leaders around the world, thus confirming the politically unprecedented nature of Spellman’s episcopacy.49

In the early 1950s Spellman offered Vietnamese exile Ngo Dinh Diem guest residence at the Maryknoll seminaries in Lakewood, New Jersey and Ossining New York. Spellman had studied in Rome with Diem’s late brother Ngo Dinh Thuc in the 1930s. In addition to their Roman Catholic faith, the two shared a deep anticommunist sentiment. Renowned refugee worker Joseph Buttinger stated that it was Cardinal Spellman who first suggested to influential American politicians the idea that Diem might return to South Vietnam as a political leader.50 After Diem’s appointment as Prime Minister of South Vietnam in 1954 Cardinal Spellman and Joseph Kennedy tirelessly lobbied politicians in an effort to sustain U.S. support for the autocratic, unpopular Diem.51


49 Cooney, The American Pope, 124. Spellman was welcomed to the College of Cardinals in 1946.

50 Joseph Buttinger, Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled (New York: Praeger, 1967), 486-7. Historian Seth Jacobs argues that Cardinal Spellman played an integral role in helping Diem cultivate relationships with powerful religious and political leaders. Spellman was a guest at a luncheon hosted for Diem by Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas on May 7, 1953. They were joined by several of the most powerful practicing Catholics in America including John F. Kennedy, Gene Gregory of the State Department, Representative Clement Zablocki of Wisconsin, and Senator Mike Mansfield of Montana. Mansfield remarked that it was coincidental that all of Diem’s initial contacts shared his Roman Catholic faith.50

51 In both a companion article in Major Problems and his book America’s Miracle Man in Vietnam, Seth Jacobs argues that U.S. support of Diem rested on the ideological tripod of racism, religion, and anticommunism. Once Diem was in power, American leaders filtered his autocratic, repressive rule through a racist lens which viewed Asians as incapable of democratic self-governance and believed that minority repressive rule, like that of Chiang Kai-shek in China, prevented anarchy. Jacobs argues that when Eisenhower greeted Diem as a foreign head-of-state during Diem’s visit to Washington in May 1957, the U.S. government thought that Diem, “America’s Miracle Man,” would lead Vietnam indefinitely.
Cardinal Spellman’s unusual political power, particularly in regard to the rise of Ngo Dinh Diem, and the growing number of Roman Catholics in the country signaled the movement of Roman Catholicism from the background of the American religious landscape to the fore in the 1950s. As it moved forward, it joined a mainline Protestantism that had occupied the foreground since the colonial era. President Dwight D. Eisenhower acknowledged the centrality of mainline Protestantism when he was baptized in the National Presbyterian Church within weeks of his inauguration. Eisenhower understood that “he was obliged to serve ‘not only as the political leader, but as the spiritual leader of our times.’”

Raised in the tradition of the WatchTower Society, the precursor of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, Eisenhower largely abandoned the society as an adult. Upon assuming the Presidency, however, Eisenhower became one of the most religiously active and vocal presidents in American history. In a first, Eisenhower wrote and delivered the prayer at his inauguration. He encouraged Congress to add the phrase “under God” to the pledge of allegiance and frequented prayer breakfasts. In a televised speech in 1955 he asserted, “‘Recognition of a Supreme Being is the first, the most basic expression of Americanism.’”

While the vocal religiosity of the President, a surge in church construction, and poll numbers indicating that the vast majority of Americans believed in God lend credence to the idea that the 1950s was the most religious decade of the 20th century, Eisenhower’s language suggests that the religious landscape was more complicated that it

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appeared. As early as 1955 scholar Will Herberg suggested that the true religions of mid-century America were not Christianity and Judaism, but the “‘spiritual values’” American democracy is presumed to stand for (the fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man, the dignity of the individual human being, etc.).”\textsuperscript{54} Herberg concluded that identification, as Protestant, Catholic, or Jew, did not imply membership in one of those organizations rather it implied social location and simply different ways of being American.\textsuperscript{55} The President’s ease in associating belief in God with national identity reflected the conflation of religious belief and nationalism.

Other religious lines were blurring during the 1950s. Even though Eisenhower was affiliated with a mainline liturgical tradition, he was perceived as supportive of the growing evangelical protestant movement. Although Southern Baptist evangelical Billy Graham had not formally endorsed Eisenhower for President, he depicted the President as someone sympathetic to evangelical concerns.\textsuperscript{56} Graham told his “Hour of Decision” radio audience that he had met with Eisenhower twice before his election and found him a Godly man, encouraged him to run for office, to write his own inaugural prayer, and to join a church.\textsuperscript{57}

The President’s pastor, Edward L.R. Elson, also identified with “‘evangelical Christians.’”\textsuperscript{58} Although a clergyman within a mainline denomination and affiliated with


\textsuperscript{55} Herberg, \textit{Protestant-Catholic-Jew}, 39.

\textsuperscript{56} Anne C. Loveland, \textit{American Evangelicals and the U.S. Military, 1942-1993} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1996), 34.

\textsuperscript{57} Loveland, \textit{American Evangelicals and the U.S. Military, 1942-1993}, 34.
the National Council of Churches, Elson was a founder and contributing editor of the new evangelical magazine *Christianity Today*.

In his best-selling book *America’s Spiritual Recovery* Elson praised the President for his role in the religious awakening sweeping the country.

By 1962, America’s religious landscape portrayed the first hints of the restructuring Robert Wuthnow suggests occurred by the 1980s. Roman Catholicism had become mainstream, as evidenced by the election of John Kennedy as President in 1960. Evangelical Protestant denominations were growing numerically and in influence. Although a leveling off in numerical growth of mainline Protestant churches occurred by 1960, the Judeo-Christian tradition and the spiritual values of “American” religion were still enjoying the afterglow of the postwar boom when the United States first sent Marines to Vietnam in 1962. The Navy chaplains who served with them reflected their times and the religious communities they served. The religious landscape that seemed realistic in 1962, seemed impressionistic by 1972.

**Chaplaincy**

According to historian Doris Bergen, military chaplaincy began to emerge in a recognizable form in the 5th century Roman army. Only then did chaplains begin to care for the “well-being of individual soldiers,” which Bergen identifies as a hallmark of the

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modern institution. Chaplains themselves often locate their heritage in much earlier antecedents. Based on a reference dated to 7 B.C.E., Canadian Forces chaplains trace their genesis to the Assyrian army. Chaplains of Scottish heritage look to Celtic priests as their forebears. In identifying their antecedents, Navy chaplains point to the practices and superstitions of ancient mariners. Pre-Christian sailors in the Latin world placed images of their gods, known as pupi, on their ship’s after-deck. This often-elevated deck became known as the “poop-deck,” a phrase that remains in the modern naval lexicon. After the emergence of Christianity, the practice of affixing figures of patron saints to the ship’s prow became widespread, only to disappear with the advent of steam powered ships. More commonly, however, Navy chaplains from Christian traditions trace their heritage to the person of Jesus and his disciples. They note that several of Jesus’ disciples were fisherman and that on occasion Jesus himself spoke to the crowds from a boat. Christian chaplains also identify with one of their faith’s earliest symbols – the fish, the Greek word whose letters formed an anagram for the early Christian creed, “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior.”

Along with these ancient antecedents, Navy chaplains look to colonial Europe for their historical roots. Chaplain Francis Fletcher, a Church of England clergyman, accompanied Francis Drake’s 1578-80 expedition around the globe. Fletcher conducted the first English language Protestant worship service in what is now the continental United States in 1579 when the fleet entered Drake’s Bay in Marin County, California.

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64 Drury, *The History of the Chaplain Corps, Volume 1*, 2.
After Queen Elizabeth began the practice, British monarchs routinely appointed chaplains to serve aboard larger British vessels. Seemingly, the practice transferred easily to colonial America’s emerging naval service.

The United States Navy’s Chaplain Corps traces its specific origin to actions of the Continental Congress in fall 1775. On October 13, the Congress, by a margin of one vote, authorized the construction of two sailing ships, one with fourteen guns, the other with ten. Six weeks later, on November 28, 1775, Congress adopted the “Rules for the Regulation of the Navy of the United Colonies,” the second article of which stated, in part:

> The Commanders of the ships of the thirteen United Colonies, are to take care that divine service be performed twice a day on board, and a sermon preached on Sundays, unless bad weather or other extraordinary accidents prevent.

Although the article does not specifically mention the presence of chaplains, it implied that Congress expected an ordained clergyman to be on board its warships. Benjamin Balch became the first chaplain known to have served in the Continental Navy when he reported aboard the frigate *Boston* on October 28, 1778.

Balch, a Harvard graduate ordained in the Congregational Church, was no stranger to combat when he joined the crew of the *Boston*. Before offering his pastoral services to the Navy, Balch fought at the Battle of Lexington as a Minute Man and served as an Army chaplain during the British siege of Boston. After the British captured the *Boston* in Charleston in 1780, Balch transferred to the *Alliance*. By that time Balch had

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acquired the nickname “the fighting parson” for his participation in battle. In keeping with British maritime tradition, two of Balch’s young sons accompanied him on the _Alliance_ and were paid a salary equal to one man. Balch’s son William, one of the fighting parson’s twelve children, became the first chaplain known to have received a commission in the United States Navy after the establishment of the Navy Department in 1798.

The only other man known to have served as a chaplain in the Continental Navy was James Geagan. After Balch left the _Alliance_ in October, 1781, the ship’s commanding officer, Captain Barry, appointed Geagan to serve as chaplain. Seven months later Geagan, who may have been an Irish Catholic priest, accepted an appointment as the ship’s surgeon. However, he and a number of the ship’s officers left the vessel in a French port in late 1782 because their salaries had not been paid.

Although only two men served as Navy chaplains during the Revolutionary War, the adoption of Navy Regulations calling for the provision of chaplains aboard ships and the documentation of their service established the precedent of chaplains serving aboard United States naval ships. During the eighteenth and early years of the nineteenth century, commanding officers generally appointed a chaplain for their ship. In some cases the chaplain was an ordained clergyman. In other instances, the commanding officer selected a man from his crew that he thought might perform the functions of a chaplain. While some men performed these functions to the satisfaction of their commanding officer, others did not. In 1808 Captain Stephen Decatur complained to the Secretary of the Navy that his chaplain, William Petty, was often intoxicated and prone to

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67 Drury, _The History of the Chaplain Corps, Volume 1_, 5.
fisticuffs. Chaplain Petty’s naval commission was ultimately revoked.Over time, the inconsistent service records of the Navy’s early chaplains led to the desire for a more systematic means of ascertaining the suitability and credentials of men selected to serve as chaplains.

Ordained or not, chaplains during the early decades of the U.S. Navy were expected to serve a dual role. In Chaplain Geagan’s case, he acted as ship’s doctor. Chaplain Balch proved himself as a war fighter. Some chaplains, like William Petty, served as the captain’s private secretary. Most chaplains doubled as schoolmasters.

Notwithstanding his antipathy for a standing military, in January 1802 President Thomas Jefferson approved a new set of Naval Regulations that codified the dual function of the chaplain:

1. He is to read prayers at stated periods; perform all funeral ceremonies over such persons as may die in the service,…
2. He shall perform the duty of a school-master; and to that end he shall instruct the midshipmen and volunteers, in writing, arithmetic and navigation, and in whatsoever may contribute to render them proficients. He is likewise to teach the other youths of the ship, according to such orders as he shall receive from the captain. He is to be diligent in his office, and such as are idle must be represented to the captain, who shall take due notice thereof.

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the most highly regarded chaplains, and those most likely to be retained in service, were those who proved to be the ablest teachers.

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Steps toward uniformity among Navy chaplains began to occur in the mid-nineteenth century. On January 1, 1842, the Navy established a quota of twenty-four chaplains. Moreover, the Regulations adopted that same year required that all chaplains be ordained. The regulations also stipulated that chaplains wear a uniform similar to that of other officers, including the sword. Coincident with these changes, the Secretary of the Navy, rather than commanding officers, began to appoint men for service as chaplains. In 1860 Congress stipulated that chaplains make an annual report directly to the Secretary of the Navy, thus establishing a direct link between chaplains and the civilian overseers of the service rather than to their military supervisors. In 1863, chaplains were authorized to wear a cross on both their caps and shoulder straps, along with other insignia of rank. When performing services, vestments appropriate to their church or the uniform could be worn.

Despite these steps toward uniformity, the Navy’s Chaplain Corps could not be described as an institutional entity during the century, as each chaplain worked independently where assigned and chaplains had little oversight for, or responsibility to, one another. Despite their small numbers and lack of organizational unity, chaplains played a role in two major changes within the nineteenth century Navy. Consistent with the reform minded age in which they lived, some chaplains, supported occasionally by line officers, worked to eliminate flogging and minimize the prevalence of alcohol aboard naval vessels. Congress outlawed flogging in 1850 and banned alcohol on Navy ships in 1862.
The professionalization of many aspects of American life that occurred during the early twentieth century also impacted the Navy and its chaplains. In 1906 the Secretary of the Navy tasked a group of chaplains with making recommendations for the improvement of their corps. The group recommended that the Secretary appoint a Chief of Chaplains; increase the size of the corps to forty; commission only chaplains holding degrees from both a college and a seminary in addition to being endorsed by a religious body, and screen all candidates by using a board of Navy chaplains to ascertain their overall qualifications. Congress and the Department of the Navy enacted many of these changes over the next decade, when the exigencies of World War I necessitated even further change.

For the first time, *Navy Regulations* stipulated in 1909 that a board of chaplains screen all applicants for the chaplaincy. Rather than increase the size of the corps by simply fixing a higher set number, the Naval Appropriations Act passed by Congress in 1914 authorized that one chaplain be appointed for every 1,250 naval personnel. Recognizing that a numerical correlation between chaplains and personnel would result in the growth of the corps, because of the United States’ entry into World War I, in November Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels appointed John Brown Frazier, a fellow Southern Methodist, the first Chief of Chaplains. Although Secretary Daniels attempted to create a separate Chaplains Bureau within the Department of the Navy (similar to that within the Army) with a Chief holding flag rank, Naval line officers resisted his efforts and Frazier ultimately held the rank of Captain and served as “Director” of the “Chaplain’s Division” within the Bureau of Navigation. Thus, while
Frazier and subsequent chiefs had responsibility for assigning chaplains to billets and for requiring communications, the Chief had neither funding authority nor the capacity to institute Navy-wide programs. Despite being bureaucratically buried within the Bureau of Navigation, chaplains still reported annually to the Secretary of the Navy and thus retained a certain degree of power within the Navy’s institutional structure.

With the Navy expansion during World War I the Chaplain’s Division grew from 40 to 203 chaplains in two years. Chief Frazier, acting with the paternalistic authority of a Methodist bishop, personally screened and recommended for accession every one of these new chaplains. He also wrote The Navy Chaplain’s Manual providing practical advice to new chaplains and encouraging the “manly” practice of Christianity.

Numerous other significant firsts impacted Navy chaplaincy early in the twentieth century. At a meeting of the Federal Council of Churches in 1913, Protestants formed what would later be known as the General Commission on Army and Navy Chaplains. In 1917, the Pope appointed the Most Reverend Patrick J. Hayes the first Episcopus Castrensis, or Chaplain Bishop, in the United States. Hayes organized the Military Ordinariate and located its headquarters in New York City. These two institutions became the first agencies formally tasked with endorsing clergy for military chaplaincy.

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70 Steven C. Gilchrist, “Tides of Change: An Administrative History of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains, 1917-1992,” (Fort Jackson, SC: Naval Chaplaincy School and Center Archive, 1993), Chapter III, Part 1, Section A. This is an unpublished typewritten text. There are several copies at the Navy Chaplaincy School and Center Archive. The text is not paginated.

With the creation of endorsing agencies, various religious groups were represented among the corps for the first time. Herbert Dumstrey became the first Reformed Church chaplain in 1915. In 1916 Paul E. Seidler became the first chaplain to represent the Lutheran Church. Rabbi David Goldberg, a native of Texas, became the first Jewish chaplain commissioned and was the only rabbi to serve during World War I. Although not ordained, and against the wishes of Chief Frazier, Bostonian Richard Joseph Davis became the first Christian Science chaplain in 1918.

Although the Chaplain Corps reached a numerical high of 203 chaplains serving during World War I, by 1920 only 99 remained on active duty. During the next two decades an average of 80 chaplains served on active duty at any one time, a figure significantly higher than the 24 mandated throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.

Two Congressional actions during the interwar period significantly impacted the Chaplain Corps. First, the Staff Equalization Bill of 1926 set in place a “running-mate” system that facilitated balance between ranks and, therefore, a measure of equality in promotions between officers of the line and staff officers, including chaplains.\(^\text{72}\) When enacted, this bill ensured that in each officer rank the numbers of line officers and staff officers proved comparable, thus placing chaplains on a more equal systemic footing with other Naval officers. This normalization process encouraged more chaplains to remain on active duty as the potential for career service proved more material than it had previously. It also provided more senior chaplains from which a Chief could be selected, as well as a pool of experienced chaplains to fill the newly created “second echelon”

\(^{72}\) Gilchrist, “Tides of Change,” Chapter II, Part B.
positions of Fleet and District chaplains.\textsuperscript{73} A second piece of legislation enacted in February 1925 reorganized the Naval Reserve and facilitated the growth of a pool of reserve chaplains.

In the interwar years debates concerning appropriate Christian responses to war occurred within many religious bodies and also within the religious press. A strong pacifist movement swept through a number of Protestant denominations, including the Congregationalist-Christian, the Disciples of Christ, northern Methodist Church, Presbyterian (USA), and Baptist (North) churches. In 1924 a series of articles appeared in the \textit{Christian Century} attacking military chaplaincy. When one article suggested that a Navy chaplain attending post-graduate school committed “espionage” when he attended a religious seminar, the Chief of Chaplains at the time, Evan Scott, responded with a letter to the editor defending chaplaincy in the military. The rhetorical furor paused for almost a decade after the Congregationalist pastor Scott’s letter appeared in the periodical.

When another flurry of articles decrying military chaplaincy appeared in the pages of the \textit{Christian Century} in 1935 and 1936, the Chief of Chaplains at that time, the Episcopalian Sidney Evans, felt no need to enter the verbal fray. Evans’s refusal to participate in the discussion may have reflected his denomination’s stance that no conflict existed between faithfulness as an Episcopalian and service as a military chaplain.

The United States’ entry into World War II necessitated profound changes within the Chaplain Corps. From an active duty strength of roughly 80 in the interwar period, the corps grew to over 2900 active duty chaplains at the height of World War II.\textsuperscript{74} The

\textsuperscript{73} Gilchrist, “Tides of Change,” Chapter II, Part B.
sheer size of the corps meant that it could no longer function as a sort of extended family, with the Chief of Chaplains serving as a paternal figure personally interviewing and shepherding the careers of the pastors who served under his direction.

Robert D. Workman, a Presbyterian (U.S.A.) clergyman and former Marine, served as Chief of Chaplains from 1937 to 1945. As Chief, Workman oversaw the explosive growth of the corps after Pearl Harbor and set in place many institutional structures deemed necessary to manage a larger corps. The need to recruit new chaplains to maintain a 1:1250 ratio of chaplains to personnel drove the creation of several programs. An Ensign Probationary Program was created to allow seminarians to complete seminary and gain some exposure to chaplaincy before ordination. The V-12 program provided government subsidies for education, including seminary studies, but was not continued after the war as it failed to generate an acceptable number of pastoral candidates willing to serve in the military. Chaplain Workman directed District Chaplains to visit seminaries and actively recruit soon-to-be eligible seminarians for service as chaplains. Although this practice continued into the 1950s, it ultimately was discontinued as the relationship between the Chief’s office and endorsing agencies became more formalized.

Chaplain Workman also delegated greater authority to Fleet, Force, and District Chaplains. Whereas many of these senior chaplains previously had supervised two or three other chaplains, by the end of the war many managed several hundred junior chaplains. To keep up with managing these growing numbers, Chief Workman enlarged his staff from six to thirty-seven and identified particular areas of concentration for staff

74 Gilchrist, “Tides of Change,” Chapter II, Part C.
members. Workman tasked one chaplain with day-to-day management of the office, another with assigning chaplains to billets (a process known as “detailing”), a third with recruitment, and a fourth with corresponding with the religious press and producing the *Navy Chaplains News Letter*, a publication for the corps. Although not published and distributed until after Workman left office, the first official *Chaplains Manual* was compiled by his staff. Workman also appointed Clifford Drury, a former professor of religious history at San Francisco Theological Seminary, as Chaplain Corps historian.

Throughout his tenure, Chaplain Workman seemed to enjoy a positive relationship with Congress. In 1943 he successfully lobbied the legislative branch to appropriate funds for religious supplies and equipment for Navy chaplains. In December 1944 Congress officially acknowledged the title “Chief of Chaplains” and authorized that the Chief hold the temporary rank of Rear Admiral. Although the Chief technically remained the director of the Chaplains Division, these changes elevated the status of the Chief and the corps within the military institution.

The pattern of wartime growth followed by a significant reduction in force after hostilities ceased continued after World War II. By 1950, 436 chaplains remained on active duty, down from roughly 2,800 at the end of the war. Despite the expected drawdown, the real challenge confronted by the corps after World War II resulted from the failure of Workman’s successor, Methodist pastor William N. Thomas, to maintain many of the institutional structures Workman put in place.\(^75\)

\(^{75}\) Gilchrist, “Tides of Change,” Chapter III, Part A. Gilchrist proves deeply critical of Thomas’s tenure as Chief of Chaplains.
Before transferring to Washington to assume duties as Chief, Thomas had served the previous twelve years at the Naval Academy. Known and beloved by thousands of Naval officers, Thomas was regarded by many as a highly influential man. In fact, President Truman invited Thomas to the White House on victory day in 1945 to offer a service of Thanksgiving.\(^{76}\) Although many within the Navy and government held Thomas in high regard, he cared little for administration and did not use his personal influence to preserve the institutional gains made during the war. Notably, the Chaplains School was decommissioned in November 1945 and his office ceased publishing the *Navy Chaplains News Letter* in June 1946. The greatest change to the corps, however, occurred as a result of the Officer Personnel Act of 1947.

Portions of the Officer Personnel Act proved beneficial to the Chaplain Corps. The Act made the Chief of Chaplain’s temporary rank of Rear Admiral permanent and provided for a second active duty Rear Admiral. The Act also changed the quota for chaplains established in 1914 from a 1:1250 ratio of chaplains to personnel to 1 chaplain for every 800 active duty personnel. The Act also stated that the Bureau of Naval Personnel (formerly known as the Bureau of Navigation) had administrative responsibility for the office of Chief of Chaplains and that the Chief of Naval Personnel would appoint the Chief of Chaplains.\(^{77}\)

The passage of this act officially severed the link between Navy chaplains and the civilian Secretary of the Navy, moving the Chaplain Corps into the military chain of command. Moreover, the Act situated the corps not on the second level of administration

\(^{76}\) Gilchrist, “Tides of Change,” Chapter III, Part A.

\(^{77}\) Gilchrist, “Tides of Change,” Chapter III, Part A.
directly under the control of the Chief of Naval Operations, but two full levels lower under the Chief of Naval Personnel. Thus, instead of working directly for the Secretary of the Navy, the Chief of Chaplains now had to work through four layers of military leadership in order to effect change within the corps, request appropriations, or appeal to speak with the Secretary of the Navy. Although afforded the opportunity to testify, Chief Thomas chose not to speak before either the Naval Affairs or Military Affairs committees of Congress, suggesting that he either did not comprehend the implications of the Act for the corps or that he did not oppose its implementation.78

Following Thomas’s retirement, Presbyterian (U.S.A.) Stanton W. Salisbury assumed the helm of the Chaplain Corps. Unlike Thomas, Salisbury was a combat veteran and had served in a wide variety of billets, including several administrative positions. An Army chaplain during World War I, Salisbury transferred to the Navy in 1921. Stationed aboard the USS Pennsylvania, he survived the December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor. Salisbury served on the faculty of the Chaplains School from 1942-44, and finished out the war in the Chief’s office. Before becoming Chief himself he served as both a District Chaplain and as Atlantic Fleet Chaplain. Salisbury’s career path, with service in the Chief’s office and in supervisory billets, became the norm for every subsequent Chief of Chaplains. In this respect and in the way he chose to exercise his office Chaplain Salisbury as Chief permanently transformed the Navy’s Chaplain Corps from a collegial fraternity that served at the pleasure of the Secretary of the Navy to an institutionalized corps within a military service.

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78 In 1980 the Office of the Chief of Chaplains was moved up two echelons, such that the Chief now reports to the Chief of Naval Operations.
Chaplain Salisbury worked to decentralize the functioning of the Chaplain Corps by clearly defining the responsibilities between the Chaplains Division and the Fleet, Division, and ultimately, Force chaplains. During his tenure, Salisbury reopened the Chaplain’s School, published a new Chaplains Manual, and established a quarterly publication for the corps known as the Navy Chaplains Bulletin. Chaplain Harris Howe, who worked under Salisbury in the Chief’s Office, later said that a supervisory conference called by Salisbury in January 1950 represented the beginning “of the concept of the Corps” as something other than simply a branch of the Bureau of Naval Personnel. For Howe, and other chaplains who had served since the 1930s, 1950 marked a time of new beginnings for the corps.

The Korean Conflict swelled the numbers in the corps from 436 in 1950 to 892 in 1953, and, as after both World Wars I or II, the number of chaplains on active duty decreased after hostilities ceased but remained at a higher set point than previously. Unlike after World War II, however, the changes that Chaplain Salisbury initiated outlasted his tenure as Chief and remained key components of the corps through the conflict in Vietnam.

Chaplain Edward B. Harp succeeded Stanton Salisbury as Chief of Chaplains, serving in the office from 1953 to 1958. Like Chaplain Salisbury, Harp, a pastor from the Evangelical and Reformed Church, had served in combat during World War II. Harp achieved some level of public acclaim when his account of surviving the USS Hornet’s

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79 Gilchrist, “Tides of Change,” Chapter III, Part A.

80 Unlike after World War II, the decrease in numbers was far smaller. The numbers of Navy chaplains remained near 800 throughout the 1950s.
sinking off the Santa Cruz islands in 1942 was published in a book of war stories entitled *This is It!* Like Salisbury, Chaplain Harp ushered in key programs and oversaw significant institutional change within the corps. During his tenure, chaplains in the Navy Reserve were afforded pay billets, a unified Protestant Sunday School curriculum emerged, and the Chief began participating in NATO Naval Chaplains Conferences. The signature program of Harp’s tenure, however, was the Moral Character Guidance Program.

Initiated by the Secretary of Defense in May 1951, the Moral Character Guidance Program sought to “protect and develop the ‘moral, spiritual, and religious values’ of the service members in their commands.” Following the Secretary’s lead, the Chief of Naval Personnel and the Commandant of the Marine Corps issued a joint directive in April 1953 entitled the “‘Protection of Moral Standards.’” These directives precipitated group-training sessions in which sailors and Marines were briefed on minimum moral standards and encouraged to develop their personal moral character. Given funding and authority to support the initiatives, the Chaplain Corps produced morality films on marriage and abstinence, published guidebooks for group discussions, and circulated posters championing such virtues as prudence, honor, temperance, loyalty, and patriotism. Reflective of the concern that some had concerning the military’s corrupting influence on the nation’s young, perhaps especially the Navy, and despite increasing

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81 Gilchrist, “Tides of Change,” Chapter III, Part B. Chief of Chaplains Harp switched denominations after he retired from the Navy, becoming an Episcopalian priest.

82 Gilchrist, “Tides of Change,” Chapter III, Part B.

83 Gilchrist, “Tides of Change,” Chapter III, Part B.
public criticism of the program, Chaplain Harp championed chaplain involvement in the
effort as the program was “neither Protestant, Catholic, nor Jewish.” Rather, it dealt with
“the basic moral and natural laws which are common to all religions.”

Chaplain George Rosso succeeded Harp as Chief of Chaplains on June 10, 1958.
Rosso, the first Roman Catholic Chief, would serve for five years, overseeing the
deployment of the first chaplains to serve in the conflict in Southeast Asia. Rosso’s
personal experience reflected both the nature of Roman Catholicism in mid-twentieth
century America and the changes that took place within naval chaplaincy leading up to
the deployment of U.S. forces to Vietnam.

George Rosso was born on September 7, 1906, in New York, New York. He
graduated from New York’s Cathedral College in 1927 and from St. Joseph’s Seminary
in 1933. Ordained by Patrick Cardinal Hayes on June 10, 1933, Rosso first served as an
Assistant Pastor at Our Lady of Peace Church in Manhattan. Having dreamed of joining
the Navy since childhood, the young priest became even more committed to the idea in
1935 when he became convinced that another war in Europe was likely.84 He wanted to
serve American sailors involved in that conflict. With Cardinal Hayes’s permission,
Rosso initiated entry into the Chaplain Corps in late 1936.

On February 3, 1937, like every other chaplain of his era, Rosso went before a
board of senior chaplains to be examined in three areas – religion, politics, and
economics. The board began by asking Rosso to name the ten great religions of the

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world and describe the origins of the creeds of the early church. After identifying the apostles, Rosso then discussed the origins of the Roman Catholic Church and its principle dogmas. Rosso received his highest score on the final portion of the religious exam when asked to “Write a short sermon on the first article of the Apostles Creed, ‘I believe in God.’”

Rosso scored higher on the political/economic portion of the exam, receiving his highest score of the day when asked to identify the members of the President’s Cabinet. Less articulate regarding the manner of election of the president and the workings of the Electoral College, Rosso nonetheless received satisfactory marks. This portion of the exam also required that he explain the Social Security Act define communism, fascism, and socialism and discuss the political and economic conditions in Spain, Germany, Russia, and Japan. The three board members--Chief of Chaplains Edward A. Duff, and Commanders John M. Moore and William N. Thomas--concluded that Rosso earned an 87 percent on the exam and deemed him “mentally, morally and professionally qualified for admission to the United States Navy as an Acting Chaplain” and recommended him for appointment.

The very personal, paternalistic entry into the Chaplain Corps would no longer exist by the end of Rosso’s tenure as Chief.

Commissioned on March 10, 1937, Rosso served in Washington, D.C. and aboard the USS New York before the United States entered World War II. At the time of the

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85 Record of Proceedings of a Naval Examining Board Convened at The Navy Department, Washington, D.C. In the Case of The Rev. George Aloysius Rosso, New York, N.Y. Candidate for Admission to the Chaplain Corps, U.S. Navy 3 February 1937, Rosso File, Naval Chaplaincy School and Center Archive, Fort Jackson, South Carolina. (Hereafter referred to as NCSCA.)

86 Ibid.
attack on Pearl Harbor, Rosso was serving at the Naval Training Station in Great Lakes, Illinois. Transferred to the USS *Iowa* in February 1943, Rosso was aboard *Iowa* when she carried President Roosevelt to Casablanca to attend a summit in Teheran with Joseph Stalin and Winston Churchill. The following year *Iowa* steamed to the Pacific Ocean and supported operations on Tinian Island, Mille Atoll, and Palau and Woleai Islands. After the end of his roughly two-year tour aboard *Iowa*, Rosso served out the rest of the war on the now greatly expanded staff in the Chief’s office.

After World War II Rosso served in a number of senior staff posts, which by the early 1950s clearly were becoming essential to potential selection as Chief of Chaplains. Rosso enjoyed a particular distinction when he was elevated to the rank of Monsignor in the Roman Catholic Church.\(^87\) Recommended by Francis Cardinal Spellman of New York in December 1954, Pope Pius XII appointed him Private Chamberlain in the Papal Household. At a special ceremony in the Naval Security Station Chapel in Washington, D.C. on June 16, 1957 Rosso, now the Director of the Chaplains Division, put on the robes of his new office.

Remembered by others for his “’concise logic, decisiveness, and dedication to principles,’” Rosso valued tradition, patriotism, and authority.\(^88\) A highly energetic man who had enjoyed an almost meteoric rise within both his church and also the corps, Rosso proved deeply troubled by what he perceived to be the growth of moral relativism in America and the advance of atheistic communism. Like his colleague in ministry, Cardinal Spellman of New York, Rosso spoke often and strongly against communism.

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\(^87\) Rosso was the second active duty chaplain to be designated Monsignor.

\(^88\) Gilchrist, “Tides of Change,” Chapter III, Part B.
June 1960, at St. Rita’s Catholic Church in Alexandria, Viriginia, Rosso offered a speech entitled, “The Conflict of Communism with the Churches.” Rosso ended his talk with this apocalyptic analysis:

Failing the cause of morality that the churches traditionally teach, men are in danger of satisfying their deep inherent needs by taking to their hearts any cause which promises achievement. Communism is one of the causes that promises achievement. I firmly believe that never in the history of the world has a dual threat to the sanctities of religion and patriotism been so real and so enormous. The Red Rage which endangers us is wiser in its generation than the children of light. If the democratic freedoms of the world fall in the conflict it will not be until the forces of communism first pass the barrier of the churches…That is precisely why the subject of this talk is titled, ‘The Conflict with the Churches.’ When that conflict ceases there will either be a world of renewed and vitalized churches or a world of satellite Kremlins. There is no alternative.

Rosso’s tenure as Chief spanned critical episodes of the Cold War, including the 1961 debacle at the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. Throughout his years in office Rosso repeatedly exhorted chaplains to be spiritual leaders who maintained spiritual strength through disciplines of work, reflection, study and prayer. Their moral integrity as leaders would form the basis of their authority.

Rosso’s anticommunism grew out of his associations within his religious community and his experiences in the Navy. Rosso sailed on ships throughout the Pacific Ocean and served on the staff of the commander of the Pacific Fleet. More than many Americans, he had a closer view of the growth of communism in China. As both a Roman Catholic and Naval officer, he was acutely aware of the Navy’s participation in

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89 George A. Rosso, “The Conflict of Communism with the Churches,” address given for the Annual Communion Breakfast at St. Rita’s Catholic Church, Alexandria, VA on 12 June 1960. Rosso File, NCSCA.

90 Ibid.
the “Passage to Freedom” as Vietnamese Roman Catholics moved from the northern regions of Vietnam to the south in 1954.

Rosso, as did more American Roman Catholics during the mid-twentieth century than had any of their forebears in this country, graduated from college and experienced the strong upward mobility that generally followed the attainment of a college degree. By 1965, two years after Rosso’s retirement from the Navy, Roman Catholics were more likely than their Protestant neighbors to have attended college and generally earned a higher average income. From his position as the Navy’s first Roman Catholic Chief of Chaplains Rosso must have seen the 1960 election of John Kennedy, the country’s first Roman Catholic President, with a certain sense of satisfaction.

Navy’s Chaplain Corps 1962

In 1962 the pressing concern felt by the leadership of the Navy’s Chaplain Corps was the accession of sufficient numbers of chaplains to meet the ongoing crises of the Cold War, including the conflict in Vietnam. In April, 1961, there were seven hundred eighty-five clergymen serving on active duty. By July of 1962 nine hundred twenty-five men comprised the corps. The nearly eighteen percent growth over a fifteen-month period occurred entirely within the three lowest ranks held by chaplains, with nearly thirty percent increases among chaplains holding the ranks of Lieutenant (junior grade), Lieutenant, and Lieutenant Commander. The 1961 Berlin Crisis, and later, the Vietnam

91 Ibid.

92 These numbers were obtained from the Navy Department, Bureau of Naval Personnel, Roster of Chaplain Corps, USN-USNR dated 01 April 1961 and 01 July 1962. NCSCA.

93 The corps went from 52 to 74 Lieutenant(jg)s, 266 to 322 Lieutenants, and from 223 to 313 Lieutenant Commanders.
conflict, placed enormous stress on the normal processes of what, in Navy parlance was known as chaplain “procurement,” as both the Chaplain’s Division and America’s religious bodies worked to meet the Navy’s needs.\textsuperscript{94}

By the early 1960s, the Navy and the country’s various religious organizations had established clear requirements for service as a chaplain. The Navy required that potential chaplains meet age and physical standards for induction, possess an undergraduate degree, have completed ninety semester hours of graduate studies in theology or a related field, and have “practical experience” and “proper ecclesiastical endorsement.”\textsuperscript{95} Navy Regulations promulgated during World War II specified that chaplains seeking appointment in the Regular Navy must be at least 21 years of age but not over 35 at the time of appointment.\textsuperscript{96} The upper age limit for Reserve chaplains was raised from 44 to 50 following the attack on Pearl Harbor, but the next year, after officials determined that many of these older men couldn’t meet the physical demands of military life, the upper age restriction for Reserve chaplains was lowered back to 45.

Nevertheless, the Navy proved willing to waive age and physical requirements (usually related to vision) for chaplains, particularly during times of national crisis. Moreover, due to the general difficulty in recruiting and retaining Roman Catholic priests and

\textsuperscript{94} The expression “needs of the Navy” is commonly used within the service to describe any manner of policies or decisions made by anyone above one’s own pay grade.


\textsuperscript{96} Drury, \textit{The History of the Chaplains Corps, Volume 2}, 42.
Jewish rabbis even in peacetime, chaplains representing these groups were the recipients of most such waivers, particularly age related requirements.

Although willing to be flexible regarding age and physical requirements, the Navy consistently has required that chaplains hold endorsement from an ecclesiastical agency representing one or more religious groups. These bodies, commonly known as endorsing agents, establish their own requirements for religious officials wishing to serve as chaplains in consultation with the groups they represent. When the military has entered a period of buildup, endorsing agents have circumvented their normal procedures in order to meet the increased demand for chaplains.

For example, although he had completed the paperwork and physical exam for accession into the Navy early in his seminary career, James Pfannenstiel was ideally six years away from meeting the Methodist Church’s requirements to enter the chaplaincy in fall, 1961. Nevertheless, he received a phone call from Fred Heather, a retired military chaplain who served on the Commission on Chaplains, the Methodist Church’s endorsing agent, asking if he could be available to go on active duty in early 1962. Heather indicated that the Navy had contacted the commission seeking several chaplains for immediate accession. Heather knew that Pfannenstiel had completed the Navy’s paperwork and committed to guiding him through the denomination’s endorsement process.

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97 This specific account of Pfannenstiel’s entry into the Navy serves as one example of an exception to the rule. It is taken from pages 1-5 of Pfannenstiel’s 2004 unpublished memoir, entitled “Always Under Orders.” James D. Pfannenstiel, “Always Under Orders,” (hard copy from Pfannenstiel to author, Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, 2004), 1-5.
At the time of Heather’s call, Pfannenstiel had neither completed his seminary coursework nor had he begun the formal process for endorsement. However, as an undergraduate student at Grinnell College in Iowa, Pfannenstiel participated actively in the life of Grinnell Methodist Church and had been designated a local pastor, the first step toward ordination as a full Elder. After his first year of study at Garrett Theological Seminary in Chicago the Iowa Conference ordained him a deacon, the second step on the path to ordination. Having served as part-time youth minister at the Norwood Park Methodist Church in northwest Chicago since shortly after beginning seminary in 1958, Pfannenstiel was not entirely without experience. Set to complete his seminary coursework and graduate from Garrett in December, Pfannenstiel flew to Washington, D.C., in November 1961 to be interviewed by a committee representing the Commission on Chaplains. The committee recommended that Pfannenstiel be endorsed. However, endorsement required the Commission to waive the requirement that chaplaincy candidates have three years of pastoral experience after ordination as an Elder before they could be appointed to the military. Most significantly, however, Pfannenstiel had not yet been ordained an Elder, and in the Methodist Church, three years of service in a probationary status typically preceded full ordination.

In an effort to expedite Pfannenstiel’s ordination, Fred Heather successfully worked with the Bishops of the Iowa and Rock River Conferences, of which Norwood Park Church was a part, to have Pfannenstiel transferred from the Iowa Conference to the Rock River Conference. Heather then arranged for Pfannenstiel to meet with the presiding Bishop of the Rock River Conference, Charles Wesley Brashares, and plead his
case. Not pleased with the Commission’s overt manipulation, Bishop Brashares asked Pfannenstiel to meet with the pastor of a large suburban Chicago church where the services of an additional pastor could be used. According to Pfannenstiel, the Bishop believed that the salary of the open position, more than twice that of a junior chaplain in the Navy, coupled with the comforts of a manse, would convince him to stay within the conference rather than continue to pursue chaplaincy within the Navy. When, after meeting with the church’s pastor, Pfannenstiel expressed his continued desire to join the Navy the Bishop relented and, citing the “Chaplain Rule” specified in the Book of Discipline, ordained Pfannenstiel in a special ceremony at the Norwood Park Church on February 4, 1962. 98 Several weeks later Pfannenstiel reported to the Navy’s Chaplain School in Newport, Rhode Island.

The Chaplain’s School in Newport to which James Pfannenstiel reported in early 1962 had been open since 1951. 99 In addition to undergoing the rites of passage for everyone entering the Navy-- namely, innumerable immunizations, demonstrating the ability to swim 100 yards, and learning when and how to salute--Pfannenstiel and the fifteen other members of his chaplains school class were inundated with information. The curriculum included lectures to familiarize students with the command structure of the Navy and Marine Corps, as well as basic shipboard organization, including fire and abandon ship procedures. Other military topics of instruction included the Navy’s pay schedule and leave policies, the military judicial system, to include the Uniform Code of

98 Pfannenstiel, “Always Under Orders,” 4-5. Ordination within the Methodist Church typically occurs during sessions of Annual Conferences, usually held in late spring.

99 Gilchrist, “Tides of Change,” Chapter III, Part 1, Section A.
Military justice, and basic naval correspondence, especially the drafting of official messages. Although he would never again utilize the skill, Pfannenstiel and his classmates were taught to march by one of their own, Roy Wood, who had been a Marine sergeant before entering the ministry.\footnote{Pfannenstiel, “Always Under Orders,” 6.}

Students were also instructed in how they as chaplains fit into the command structure, as well as the organization of Chaplain Corps billets and duty stations, officer fitness reports, selection boards, and preference cards, known commonly as “dream sheets.” The class role-played a variety of counseling situations and individual chaplains were critiqued on how they handled each scenario. Staff introduced services provided by Navy Relief and the Red Cross, which chaplains regularly administered. Navy policy and procedures regarding alcohol and drug abuse, as well as treatment options, were explained.

Occasional field trips broke up the classroom routine. The new chaplains toured the Naval Shipyard, submarine facilities, and Disciplinary Command at Portsmouth, New Hampshire. They took a daylong ride on a submarine out of New London, Connecticut and a similar excursion on a destroyer out of Newport. They toured the USS Constitution and Naval Shipyard, both located in Boston. Each weekend students provided worship services on board ships berthed in Newport or at nearby installations.

Several experiences from his months in Newport made a particular impression on Pfannenstiel. Each morning one member of the class led the group in devotions. In addition to Pfannenstiel and at least one other Methodist, the class included two Roman Catholics, an Episcopalian, several Lutherans, and an assortment of non-liturgical
protestant pastors. Pfannenstiel indicated that this was the first time he had ever really been exposed to clergy of other Christian persuasions and that it was enlightening to experience how each chaplain constructed and led the devotional time. Although morning devotions proved enriching, a dispute over alcohol challenged each class member to grapple seriously with the school’s motto: “cooperation without compromise.”

Tradition dictated that as each class neared the end of its training in Newport it host a formal reception for the commanding officers of attached units, area chaplains, and local citizens who supported the work of the Chaplains School. Inevitably, whether or not to serve alcohol at the reception became a divisive question for the group. A majority of the pastors, including Pfannenstiel, abstained entirely from alcohol and represented denominations that denounced its use. However, others of the clergy, including the Lutherans, Episcopalian, and Catholics, had no theological or personal objections to its use, nor did their religious bodies prohibit it. The compromise of offering two punchbowls, one with fruit juice and one “spiked,” appeared obvious until one of the chaplains indicated that he objected to having his money go toward an event where alcohol was served at all. To the dismay of his fellow abstainers, Pfannenstiel expressed the opinion that while he would not be consuming alcohol at the event, he did not believe that the presence of alcohol would preclude his attendance. Cooperation with

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101 Chaplain John E. Knox is credited with proposing this phrase as the Chaplain School slogan in 1943. “Cooperation without compromise” reflected the ecumenical spirit of Protestant, Catholic and Jewish chaplains working with one another without negating their individual faith traditions. This motto was most often put to the test around issues relating to the Christian liturgical practice known as communion or the Eucharist. Drury, The History of the Chaplain Corps, United States Navy, Volume Two, 1939-1949, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, year unknown), 59.
compromise apparently prevailed in this instance as two punchbowls were served at the reception. Pfannenstiel came to the conclusion “that (he) had joined the Navy and that the Navy was not about to join (him) in (his) decision not to drink.”

While completing the basic indoctrination course each chaplain had been afforded the opportunity to complete a preference card. Anxious to continue a relationship with a young woman living in Chicago, Pfannenstiel requested orders to an installation near the Windy City. Although delighted that he received orders to the Great Lakes Naval Hospital forty miles north of Chicago, Pfannenstiel was anxious because of his inexperience; he had never conducted a wedding or a funeral, nor had he called on someone in the hospital. Nevertheless, as he left Newport in April, 1962, Pfannenstiel was excited and confident that “the Navy was (his) niche,” as it was “a masculine world, a world of ships, sailors, Marines.”

As Pfannenstiel began his first tour of duty at Great Lakes Chief Rosso made final preparations to host a “Supervisory Chaplains Conference” at the Marine Corps Schools in Quantico, Virginia. Held May 1-3, 1962, the conference included thirty-two senior chaplains representing many of the Navy’s and Marine Corps’s largest commands and was the first such event held in three years. The business of the conference included working groups that considered the responsibilities of District Chaplains, “Authority and Responsibility,” and relationships between junior and senior chaplains, with a focus on


training. On the second day of the event representatives from twelve religious entities that provided chaplains to the Navy joined the conferees to hear an address by Dr. Marion J. Creeger, the head of the General Commission on Chaplains. Dr. Creeger entitled his speech, “What the Churches Expect of Their Chaplains in the Navy.” Creeger closed his remarks by saying that churches expected of their chaplains

…just what they expect of all their ministers wherever they may serve: (1) always to remember that they are charged with a sacred stewardship, a stewardship of the mysteries of God; (2) to accept and discharge faithfully their responsibilities as shepherds and evangelists; and (3) to keep the solemn vows by which they obligated themselves at the time when their churches set them apart by ordination for office of a minister or priest – the vows of loyalty, spiritual discipline, cooperation without compromise in the spirit of Christ, and obedience.

That evening, Chaplain Rosso hosted a formal dinner dress banquet attended by Creeger and the other faith group representatives there that day, including the Right Reverend Monsignor Joseph F. Marbach, J.C.D. of the Military Ordinariate. The guest of honor was the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral George W. Anderson, Jr. Anderson spoke at the banquet, encouraging Navy chaplains to “speak with authority and inspire spiritual leadership” among the sailors and Marines with whom they served.

The surprise highlight of the evening, however, was the unveiling of a new Chaplains Corps emblem. Apparently commissioned by Rosso several months before,


107 Ibid.

108 J.C.D. means “Juris Canonici Doctor,” and refers to the terminal degree in canonical law within the Roman Catholic Church.

the emblem featured a red compass rose with gold points set on a white disc with a gold edge. Above the compass rose on the white disc the words “Chaplain Corps” were inscribed in gold. Below the compass rose appeared the words “U.S. Navy,” also in gold. A gray anchor was superimposed on the compass rose. The anchor rested on a dark blue shield with a gold cross to the left of the shield and a gold Tablets of Moses surmounted by the Star of David to the right. The cross and tablets symbolized the Christian and Jewish faiths then represented in the Chaplain Corps. The anchor represented the Navy and embraced both faiths on a shield “signifying the unity of men of all faiths in defense of a common cause.”110 The compass, “a guiding instrument for all seafaring men,” appeared in red to acknowledge the Chaplain Corps’s service to Marines.111

The adoption of an emblem unique to the Chaplain Corps reflected both the confidence of the men who led the organization at that time, as well as the institutionalization of the corps within the Navy itself in 1962. Led by men wise in the ways of war and confident in the value of their ministry, the Chaplain Corps of the 1960s was, in retrospect, arguably in the closing years of its “golden age.”


111 Ibid.
2. May 2, 1962 Supervisory Chaplains Conference Presentation of the New Chaplain Corps Emblem
Pictured left to right: Walter A. Mahler, J. Floyd Dreith, George A. Rosso, and Paul W. Dickman

*Photo courtesy of Naval Chaplaincy School and Center Archive*
Chapter 3
The Early Years: Supporting and Defending the Vietnamese

“Your feet will get wet; your pay will get screwed up, and your fellow Marines will always take care of you.”
- Lester Westling on serving with Marines

Ernest Stanio Lemieux arrived in the Mekong delta region of the Republic of Vietnam on April 12, 1962. After eating a meal of c-rations, he spent his first night “in country” on a cot in what appeared to be some type of headquarters area for the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN).1 Capable of only intermittent sleep in the filthy facility, Lemieux and the Marines with whom he served were made uneasy not only by the holes in the walls of the building, but also by the fact that the airfield where they were located was protected by some twelve hundred Vietnamese ARVN soldiers whose loyalties they questioned.2 Thirty-two days shy of his thirty-seventh birthday, Lemieux, the first United States Navy chaplain sent with Marines to Vietnam, was an ordained Elder in the Methodist Church serving in his fourth assignment as an active-duty chaplain. No stranger to uneasy situations, Lemieux had been awarded a Purple Heart for wounds he received while serving as an enlisted man in the Navy’s Supply Corps during World War II.3

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2 Ibid.

While Lemieux and “his” Marines were eating c-rations in Vietnam, President John F. Kennedy and his wife Jacqueline were dining on “guinea hen Santa Clara with wild rice” at a State Dinner honoring the Shah of Iran, Mohammed Riza Pahlavi, and his wife, the Empress Farah.\(^4\) Originally scheduled for later in the year, the Shah’s visit had been rescheduled when he made plain his lack of confidence in ongoing U.S. aid. Despite the diplomatic tensions that hastened the State Visit, in his opening remarks at the official welcoming ceremony the Shah grandly offered that “today the name of America has a magic meaning for the most distant communities of the world’ because ‘it is associated with freedom, progress, love of humanity and justice.’”\(^5\)

Although Chaplain Lemieux may have doubted that the name of America held any magic meaning for either those Vietnamese threatening his security or those protecting him that first night in Vietnam, he and other American military personnel understood their presence in this distant community to be one of “assistance and defense” of the people of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN).\(^6\) However, as American involvement deepened and changed in ensuing years, American opinion divided, often bitterly and violently, over how the nation could best serve the ideals the Shah associated with America in his speech - freedom, progress, the love of humanity, and justice. These conflicts played out in virtually every realm of American life, including within America’s religious communities. Those Navy chaplains who served on the ground in Vietnam after

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\(^5\) Ibid.

Ernest Lemieux were both at the center of this religious debate and at the same time, removed from it. When the last of the more than seven hundred Navy chaplains who served on the ground in Vietnam left the country almost ten years later, they, the Corps they represented, and the American religious landscape of which they were a part, had changed.\footnote{The exact number of Navy chaplains who served in country in Vietnam is not identified in official Chaplain Corps materials. While Bergsma indicates on page 4 of his text that “more than 700” chaplains served with Marines in Vietnam, his appendix identifies just over 500. These 500 appear to include those who sent the Chief of Chaplain’s office a requested end-of-tour report. Other publications, including \textit{A Brief Chronology of the Chaplain Corps United States Navy}, indicate more generally that over 1,100 chaplains served in the Vietnam conflict (page 35). This larger number includes those chaplains serving aboard ships, while this study focuses more narrowly on those men assigned to Marine units.}

In several significant ways, Ernest Lemieux represented the “average” Navy chaplain who served with Marines in Vietnam. Lemieux celebrated his thirty-seventh birthday shortly after his arrival in country. The average age of those Navy chaplains who followed him over the course of the next decade was thirty-seven. With many approaching middle age and some well into it, the Navy chaplain who served with Marines in Vietnam was often nearly twice the age of the nineteen year-old “grunt” he served.\footnote{Longley, \textit{Grunts: The American Combat Soldier in Vietnam}, Location 469. Longley identifies the median age of the “grunt” in Vietnam as 19. The data concerning chaplains has been compiled from \textit{Chaplains with Marines in Vietnam 1962-1971}. The author made a spreadsheet using the data Bergsma included in Appendix B of this work. The spreadsheet identifies 511 chaplains who served with Marines in Vietnam. All data has been entered and verified by the author. The author is solely responsible for the calculations and information shared here.} This discrepancy in age was apparent to the chaplains. For example, Chaplain Lester Westling, a thirty-six year old Episcopalian priest, reported to Vietnam in late 1966. He wrote in his memoir that he “was duly aware that I was probably twice as old as the average Marine” in the infantry battalion to which he was assigned.\footnote{The exact number of Navy chaplains who served in country in Vietnam is not identified in official Chaplain Corps materials. While Bergsma indicates on page 4 of his text that “more than 700” chaplains served with Marines in Vietnam, his appendix identifies just over 500. These 500 appear to include those who sent the Chief of Chaplain’s office a requested end-of-tour report. Other publications, including \textit{A Brief Chronology of the Chaplain Corps United States Navy}, indicate more generally that over 1,100 chaplains served in the Vietnam conflict (page 35). This larger number includes those chaplains serving aboard ships, while this study focuses more narrowly on those men assigned to Marine units.}
Although the average chaplain was aged thirty-seven, there were those who were considerably younger and older. Chaplain Gerald Richards, a Southern Baptist pastor, was a twenty-five year old recent graduate of Chaplains School when he reported to a Marine helicopter squadron in Vietnam in 1965. Not only was he among the youngest chaplains to serve in Vietnam, but he was also about as young as one could be and still meet the requirements for entry into the service as a chaplain. On the other end of the age spectrum, Chaplain Robert Brengartner, a Roman Catholic priest, first set foot on Vietnamese soil in 1969 at the age of fifty-three. Assigned as the senior chaplain with the Third Marine Division, Brengartner retired in August 1970.

Brengartner was among the roughly ten percent of chaplains who served with Marines in Vietnam who had entered the chaplaincy well before the Vietnam era. He became a Navy Chaplain toward the end of World War II and was released from active duty in 1946. He entered the corps again during the Korean Conflict, serving with the First Marine Division in Korea. He remained on active duty thereafter, thus placing him in the small group of chaplains authorized to wear service medals from the three mid-twentieth century conflicts in which the United States engaged. Because of their age and seniority, these chaplains comprised much of the senior leadership in supervisory capacities in Vietnam.

While much of the Corps’ senior leadership had served as chaplains in earlier war zones, half of the chaplains who served under them, like Ernest Lemieux, had prior military service in some capacity other than chaplaincy. Lemieux joined the Navy just

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before his eighteenth birthday in 1943. He served in the Supply Corps for two years, and sustained an injury for which he received a Purple Heart. After World War II Lemieux returned to his native Massachusetts and attended Eastern Nazarene College graduating in 1952. He then received his Masters in Theology from Iliff School of Theology in Denver and was ordained in the Methodist Church. He served Central Methodist Church in North Easton, Massachusetts for two years before joining the Navy’s Chaplain Corps in 1957.

Other chaplains of Lemieux’s era had similar life trajectories. Walt Hiskett, for example, enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1947. After serving with a Marine unit aboard a Navy vessel, he was assigned to a unit that was sent into combat in Korea. He received a Purple Heart for injuries he incurred during the Chosin Reservoir Campaign. Hiskett was discharged in October 1951 and worked construction in Chicago, his hometown. Two years later he enrolled at Wittenberg College, graduating in 1958. He then earned a Masters of Divinity from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and was ordained in the Lutheran Church in 1961. He entered the Chaplain Corps in 1962 and served with the First Marine Division in Vietnam in 1965. Hiskett would remain on active duty, serving in his final tour as Chaplain of the Marine Corps, the senior chaplain among those serving with Marines. Hiskett loved serving with Marines, and came to be known among his chaplain colleagues as “Mr. Marine Corps.”

Lemieux and Hiskett’s prior enlisted service represented a typical pattern of life events for American men who came of age during the 1940s and 1950s. The path followed by some Navy chaplains who served in Vietnam and had prior military service
was less typical. Salvatore Rubino, a Southern Baptist pastor who served as a chaplain with the Third Marine Division in Vietnam in 1968, was a private in the Italian Army in the early 1950s. Presbyterian Lowell Van Tassel also followed an unusual path to chaplaincy. After serving thirteen years as a regular naval officer, Van Tassel left his military career to become a pastor before returning to active military service as a chaplain.

Other men joined the Chaplain Corps precisely because their life trajectories had not included prior service in the military. Some felt a degree of guilt that in an era of compulsory military registration they had not been drafted. Jim Pfannenstiel felt an obligation to serve because his stepfather Ed made no complaint when he was drafted into the Navy in 1942 at the age of forty-one. Registering for the draft in 1953, Pfannestiel received first a 2S deferment when he enrolled in college, followed by a 4D deferment when he entered seminary. He entered chaplaincy almost immediately upon completing seminary.

Whether or not they had been drafted into military service as young men, the chaplains who served in Vietnam are best understood as volunteers. Unlike the 88 percent of infantry draftees in Vietnam by 1969, the chaplains who served them, were there because of the choices they had made.\textsuperscript{10} Although they may not have requested orders to Vietnam, they had placed themselves voluntarily such that the possibility existed.

\textsuperscript{10} Longley, \textit{Grunts}, Location 320.
Between 1957 and 1972, 1057 pastors volunteered to serve as chaplains on active duty and joined the corps. They represented some forty-five different religious bodies.\textsuperscript{11} The Navy maintained a loose “thirds” practice in choosing which chaplains to bring into active service. Roughly one-third of its chaplains represented the Roman Catholic Church, one-third represented non-liturgical Protestant groups, and one-third represented liturgical Protestant denominations.

As a Methodist, Ernest Lemieux represented a “liturgical” tradition because his faith group permitted infant baptism. Those Protestant traditions that baptized infants included the Episcopalian, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Congregational, and Methodist denominations. Roughly thirty-seven percent of the of sea service chaplains who served in Southeast Asia from 1962 to 1972 represented liturgical Christian traditions. Non-liturgical Protestants came from traditions that baptized only those persons capable of making a profession of faith. Non-liturgical Protestants accounted for approximately thirty-two percent of those who served in the region. Roman Catholic priests represented some thirty percent of the chaplains assigned with Marines in the area. Three Jewish chaplains served with Marine units in Vietnam during the decade.\textsuperscript{12} The fact that appreciably more liturgical Protestant clergymen, like Ernest Lemieux, served in Vietnam

\textsuperscript{11} Bergsma, \textit{Chaplains with Marines in Vietnam}, 211-212.

\textsuperscript{12} Sheldon Kirsch, Robert Reiner, and David Saltzman were the Rabbis identified by Bergsma as having served with Marine units in Vietnam. All three were released from active duty before 1970. Their service is not addressed in this study as Albert Slomovitz offered a comprehensive study of the service of Rabbis in the military in his 1999 book, \textit{The Fighting Rabbis: Jewish Military Chaplains and American History}. 80
reflected the cultural predominance of the mainline Protestant churches in the early 1960s.\textsuperscript{13}

Commander Elihu Rickel, the senior chaplain at the First Marine Aircraft Wing (1\textsuperscript{st} MAW), was responsible for sending chaplains to Vietnam in support of Operation Shufly during the early months of American intervention in Vietnam. Rickel, one of the most senior-ranking Jewish chaplains in the Corps at that time and a veteran of both World War II and Korea, determined that due to the intense demands placed upon them, chaplains would serve three- to four-month tours of duty in country. Rickel made one official visit to Vietnam to assess the work being done by his chaplains. Official Chaplain Corps historian Herbert Bergsma noted that permission to visit Vietnam proved difficult for Rickel to obtain, in part, because Japanese-American agreements prohibited U.S. forces stationed on Japanese soil from engaging in any military activity against Asian nations.\textsuperscript{14} These agreements impacted Marine units deployed in Vietnam because the air wing that supported them was stationed in Iwakuni, Japan.

Precisely three months after sending Lemieux to Vietnam, Rickel sent Lieutenant Samuel Baez, a United Presbyterian pastor, in relief. Baez, a native of El Paso, Texas and the proud son of a United Presbyterian minister who served Spanish-speaking congregations throughout the American southwest, had enlisted in the Marine Corps during the Korean war. After boot camp he had been assigned to the Marine Barracks at

\textsuperscript{13} Anne C. Loveland explores the relationship of evangelicals to the military in her 1996 text \textit{American Evangelicals and the U.S. Military 1942-1993}. She argues that evangelical influence in the military increased during the 1960s.

\textsuperscript{14} Bergsma, \textit{Chaplains with Marines in Vietnam}, 7.
Treasure Island in San Francisco, transferred to the First Marine Division at Camp Pendleton in southern California, and then sent as staff to the Naval Academy in Maryland. Discharged from active duty in June of 1953, Baez remained in the inactive component of the Marine Corps Reserve throughout subsequent years of study at Macalester College and Princeton Theological Seminary. Baez began the process of applying for ministry within the military during his middler year at Princeton after Richard G. Hutcheson, Jr., an active duty Navy chaplain, made a recruiting visit to the campus.\textsuperscript{15} After graduating from seminary and working in a local church for nine months, Baez entered active duty, completed Chaplains School, and was assigned to the naval station in San Diego, California. Shortly thereafter, he was reassigned to the 1\textsuperscript{st} Marine Aircraft Wing in Iwakuni.

Despite the fact that he had just over a year of service as a Navy Chaplain, Baez had almost a decade of association with the Marine Corps and, arguably, by virtue of a childhood spent traversing the southwest with his family, decades of cross-cultural exchange by the time he arrived at the Soc Trang airfield in July 1962.\textsuperscript{16} As superiors like Rickel perhaps realized, Baez seemed well suited not only to serve Marines, but also to interact with local Vietnamese. Before the turnover between the two chaplains was complete and Lemieux returned to Iwakuni, Lemieux and Baez participated in a pulpit exchange with the Reverend Mr. Nguyen Dang, the pastor of the Tin Lanh Evangelical

\textsuperscript{15} Hutcheson, author of \textit{The Churches and the Chaplaincy}, was a Presbyterian Church, U.S. pastor. He later became a Rear Admiral and Deputy Chief of Chaplains.

\textsuperscript{16} Soc Trang is in the very southern part of the Republic of Vietnam.
Church, and his son Nguyen Quang Thuy, also a pastor.\textsuperscript{17} One of the Nguyens and a Navy chaplain jointly led worship at both the Navy chapel and Pastor Nguyen’s church. Each pastor shared in aspects of worship most linguistically accessible to him.

As a result of this pastoral exchange, Baez became aware of the need for a new ceiling in the Tin Lanh Church. At Baez’s invitation, Marines contributed $318.46 to more than fully fund the $306.41 cost of construction.\textsuperscript{18} In addition to the necessary funds, over fifty Marines supplied labor to build the overhang. The Executive Committee of Tin Lanh-Soc Trang forwarded a letter under its official seal to the Commanding Officer of the Task Unit thanking Baez and the Marines for the construction of the roof and the gift of a communion set.\textsuperscript{19} The committee closed their letter with the words, “Longlive friendship AMERICAN and VIETNAMESE CHRISTIANS. The grace of our LORD JESUS CHRIST be with you. Amen.”\textsuperscript{20}

Baez also invited the Marines to contribute funds to support the Sisters of Providence Orphanage. Along with the leftover money from the construction project at Tin Lanh, the Marines from one of the helicopter squadrons offered over $450 for the orphanage. Baez used these monies to purchase three months worth of milk, some 500

\textsuperscript{17} Bergsma, \textit{Chaplains with Marines in Vietnam}, 7-8. Nguyen Quang Thuy, Letter to Samuel Baez, 01 January 1964, NCSCA.

\textsuperscript{18} Samuel Baez, Memo to personnel in Soc Trang, 16 August 1962, NCSCA.

\textsuperscript{19} The Executive Committee of TIN-LAHN-SOCTRANG, Letter to Commanding Officer, 26 August 1962, NCSCA.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
diapers, six-dozen bottles of vitamins, and other baby supplies for the children under the sisters’ care.  

While in Soc Trang, Baez also participated in an effort to teach English to local women. Invited by Lieutenant Colonel Nguyen Chiu, the Baxuyen Province Chief, to hold the classes, a group of Navy and Marine officers offered sessions three nights a week for two months. The American instructors included Baez, two Navy doctors, a Navy dentist, and First Lieutenant David Marr, a Marine interpreter. Some 150 women attended the courses.

With Lemieux’s return to Iwakuni, a Roman Catholic priest was no longer available to the Marines in Soc Trang, so Baez arranged for Roman Catholic Marines to attend mass at a local parish. Baez also visited local schools and accompanied one of the senior American officers as he visited with local officials and business operators. A passionate tennis player, Baez found that playing the game he loved with local citizens proved an effective way to establish rapport. Despite the challenges of not sharing a common language, Baez established relationships though the enjoyment of sport. Baez also joined medical personnel when they were flown to remote areas to offer basic health care to the Vietnamese. While the medical personnel tended to the physical needs of villagers, Baez enjoyed interacting with the people waiting and others who gathered because the Americans were there. Baez viewed these times of playing volleyball, joining in simple children’s games, and interacting with locals as opportunities to

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21 Samuel Baez, Letter to Commander W.M. Moore, 11 April 1967, NCSCA.

22 David G. Marr went on to become one of the most influential historians of modern Vietnam and Vietnamese anticolonialism.
minister “quietly through presence showing the love of God.” Baez understood these encounters as consistent with the ministry of presence.

Baez recalled several instances of being deeply touched by encounters with Vietnamese children while on these medical missions. On one occasion in Xan-To province a uniformed band comprised of twelve children greeted the crew with music from drums and homemade instruments. On another occasion at an isolated helicopter landing strip children ran to greet the crew in order to sell them bottles of soda. One attractive girl about eight years of age had an armful of bottles and called out, “’Buy, buy – Me, Number One.’” Baez recalled that the crew was particularly touched by these children and bought everything they were selling that day.

Baez understood these interactions with local Vietnamese on several levels. He certainly saw them as expressions of his Christian faith and part of his work as a pastor. He viewed his presence with American military personnel as they engaged in humanitarian work as part of his duty as a chaplain. He thought of himself and those with whom he served as “a Peace Corps in uniform.” As an American citizen and military officer he also understood these activities as part of his duty that fell under the rubric of the larger “People-to-People” effort.

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24 Baez essay, 4.


President Eisenhower initiated his ambitious “Program for People-to-People Partnership” on September 11, 1956 at a White House Conference. Eisenhower’s intent for the program was to promote world peace by encouraging individuals to “leap” or “evade” governments “to work out not one method but thousands of methods by which people can gradually learn a little bit more of each other.” Eisenhower encouraged all Americans to share their way of life with others around the world. In the midst of the Cold War, Eisenhower hoped that personal exchanges like these would make the contrast between life behind the Iron Curtain and life in the free world apparent to those living in communist societies.

With the weight of the White House undergirding the program, People-to-People initiatives multiplied rapidly. The second official bulletin of People-to-People, published in October 1956, noted that over 200 newspapers across the United States had already carried stories about the program. The program maintained momentum throughout the rest of Eisenhower’s presidency, bolstered by summits he convened at the White House and championed by enthusiastic journalists like David Lawrence at *U.S. News & World Report*. Lawrence labeled an Eisenhower speech in January 1958 that appealed to the goodwill of people around the globe as “one of the most constructive peace efforts of current history.” In the summer of 1959, the editors of *Life* magazine endorsed an

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28 Ibid.


initiative suggesting that the United States create “A New ‘Great White Fleet’” of ships, carrying not guns, but food and medical supplies for those in need around the globe.\textsuperscript{31} The editors encouraged their readers to write the four sponsors of Congressional resolutions asking the President to authorize turning over unused government vessels be turned over to private organizations committed to operating the flotilla of goodwill.\textsuperscript{32} One Navy hospital ship, the USS \textit{Consolation}, was converted into a civilian vessel, the SS \textit{Hope}. The \textit{Hope} made eleven voyages around the world before its retirement in 1974.

The United States’ military leadership fell in line with the President’s initiative and issued directives to military personnel to support People-to-People programs. In 1957 Secretary of the Navy Thomas S. Gates instructed all Navy personnel to support People-to-People not only through exceptional conduct and military bearing, but also through active participation in programs that would further world peace.\textsuperscript{33} In keeping with his commander’s order, Chief of Naval Operations Arleigh Burke wrote Navy personnel reminding them not only to pay attention to their conduct in ports around the globe, but also to maximize their time abroad by developing contacts, participating in local cultural events and working with religious communities and civic agencies.\textsuperscript{34} The summer 1958 issue of the \textit{Navy Chaplains Bulletin} reprinted all of these messages from the Navy’s most senior leaders. In subsequent years, at least one issue of the Bulletin


\textsuperscript{32} Senators George Aiken and Hubert Humphrey and Representatives William Bates and Ed Edmondson.

\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Navy Chaplains Bulletin}, Summer 1958, Volume 6, 3.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
featured multi-page spreads of photographs highlighting the participation of Navy chaplains in a variety of projects undertaken by Navy commands as part of their participation in People-to-People.

By late 1962, People-to-People was a well-established part of American military life. The early efforts of Chaplain Baez and the personnel of Shufly on behalf of the Tin Lanh church, the orphanage, the language instruction program, and medical missions were elements of the People-to-People component of the Shufly operation. Although the official Marine Corps history of the era noted none of the specific efforts in which Baez participated by name, it noted that the objective of the overall program was “to assist the Government of Vietnam in winning the allegiance of the Vietnamese people.”35 In summarizing the impact of Operation Shufly on the Soc Trang area, the official historian noted that the People-to-People efforts provided a foundation for future doctrine concerning the relationships between Marines and the Vietnamese people.

People-to-People efforts remained part of some chaplains’ activities during these early years of the American presence in Vietnam. Chaplain Edwin Bohula, a Roman Catholic priest, served with an infantry battalion arriving on station in February 1965. People-to-People was “an important phase of (his) life out here.”36 Serving near Da Nang, he went with a group of Marines into the village of Le My in order to share small gifts as signs of friendship. A sniper killed one of the Marines, the unit’s first casualty in Vietnam. On their second trip into the village they asked for a spokesman so that some


36 Edwin Bohula, Additional Materials to End of Tour Report, undated, 6, NCSCA.
attempt to convey their purpose could be made. The villagers, obviously afraid of the Marines, appointed an older man to communicate on their behalf. Villagers came and the corpsmen and doctor began treating small wounds as Bohula gave out small cans of tomato juice, sugar cubes, and cigarettes. Bohula found that the residents particularly appreciated receiving rosaries and other religious medallions. Meanwhile, Marines were scouting the area for weapons caches, punji traps, and caves. Returning every few days, villagers soon voluntarily showed the Marines the things that posed threats. The program expanded from these early days, with the Marines becoming actively involved with an orphanage in the Village of Phu Thuong. Eventually, Bohula began to receive supplies from several international relief organizations. By the time he left Vietnam, Bohula had coordinated the receipt of tons of clothing and equipment from the United States.

Bohula wrote that during the last few days he was in country he assured “all the People-to-People gear friends from the U.S. were sending arrived.”

People from Chicago, where he had served parishes, as well as from Milwaukee, Norfolk and elsewhere donated goods. The orphanage in Phu Thuong received a typewriter with Vietnamese script, a part for a well, and vestments for their priest. A church bell was received for a mission of the Phu Thuong church. Bohula noted that “Two planeloads of clothes, medicine, etc. came from Rockford, Ill.; several truckloads from one of my former parishes in Chicago; and toys and clothes galore through an appeal over a TV station in Chicago.” He concluded by saying there was too much matériel sent to

37 Edwin Bohula, Material written for Frank Garrett III MAF, undated, 4, NCSCA.

38 Edwin Bohula, Additional Material for Frank Garrett III MAF, undated, 4, NCSCA.
mention, but it was important to him to verify that everything had been received so that when he got back to the States he could appropriately report to the donors.

Baez’s ministry in Soc Trang consisted of more than establishing connections with local Vietnamese in the furtherance of world peace as envisioned by President Eisenhower. Living in a six-man tent, struggling to sleep within netting designed to keep out the malaria-bearing mosquitoes, enduring the seemingly random nature of mortar attacks upon their camp, and realizing that many of the ARVN troops among whom he worked would never return from the missions on which they embarked, brought home the temporal nature of human life. His experience deeply influenced his understanding of ministry.

Baez recalled in detail one incident that brought life’s fragility to the forefront of his thinking. Upon approaching the airfield, an American plane crashed short of the runway, hitting three helicopters before breaking through the surrounding fence and plunging into a rice paddy where local farmers were working. The plane’s propeller nearly severed a woman’s leg. An American physician and several corpsmen worked to save her leg, but while in a helicopter on the way to a hospital it became necessary to amputate the limb in order to preserve her life. Having someone with whom military personnel could safely share their reactions to horrific events like this accident became an essential part of chaplain’s role as Baez understood it.39 His presence with troops as they struggled with “the reply of man to the call of the eternal” was an essential component of his ministry of presence.

Operation Shufly moved from Soc Trang north to Da Nang in mid-September 1962. Situated eighty-four miles south of the demilitarized zone between the white sandy beaches of coastal Vietnam and the rugged mountain interior, the airstrip at Da Nang was significantly longer than the one in Soc Trang. While monsoons drenched the Mekong delta region of Soc Trang in the summer, they soaked Da Nang in the September to March winter months. The conditions were the exact opposite of those at Soc Trang and presented operational difficulties the unit did not experience in Soc Trang.

The change in location and climate affected all personnel. Baez began to experience the problems that would be experienced by many chaplains who followed – that of transportation. If the chaplain was to be present with the troops, he had to be able to get to them. With the move to Da Nang, Baez spent more time arranging transportation and flying to remote areas where he visited with and led worship for small groups of Special Forces units as well as Marines.

The Americans were reminded of the inherently dangerous nature of helicopter operations in a war zone when, on October 6, one of twenty helicopters participating in the movement of ARVN units crashed. Five Marines, a Navy corpsmen, and Navy physician Gerald Griffin died.40 In an emotional conversation after he returned from the effort to rescue the victims, Navy dentist Angelo Chiarenza told Baez that all seven were alive when the rescue party reached the scene. When Chiarenza offered Dr. Griffin a blanket and water, he refused, saying, “‘Take care of the others first.’”41 After tending to

40 Their names appear on the first panel of the East Wall of the Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C.
the wounds of the others, Chiarenza returned to Dr. Griffin, who had died in the interim. Baez interpreted Griffin’s concern for others as the spiritual fulfillment of the Biblical expression, “‘Greater love has no man than this, but that he lay down his life for his friends.’”

Four of those who died in the crash were Roman Catholic, three Protestant. Father Peloquin returned to Vietnam to join Chaplain Baez in leading religious services to commemorate the dead. Held on October 9, the services were attended by over three hundred people. Several Vietnamese participated in preparing and leading the services, including the Sisters of the Order of St. Paul of Chartres and a woman Baez referred to as “Miss Nam.” At this difficult time for the American personnel in Da Nang, Baez felt supported by the presence of these Vietnamese Christians and several expatriates with whom he had developed relationships. Among the expatriates at the service was Gordon Hedderly Smith, a Canadian missionary who, along with his wife Laura, had been in and out of French-Indochina since 1929.

The Smiths began their work in Vietnam as representatives of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (CM&A), an organization that had been active in the country since 1911. After parting ways with the C&MA, the Smiths returned to Vietnam in 1956 under the auspices of the World Evangelization Crusade. The Smiths befriended the succession of military chaplains who came into the region. Their knowledge of Vietnam, the Vietnamese people, and their command of the language proved useful to the Americans. During the early years of the U.S. presence in Da Nang, Smith spoke regularly to arriving

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42 John 15:13 (King James Version).
Marines about the people and religions of Vietnam. His familiarization lecture included the presentation of the film “Beachhead,” which explored cultural difference.\textsuperscript{44} The Smiths’ relationship with American troops proved salutary to the Smiths as well because it gave them an opportunity to speak English and be among people with whom they shared a common cultural background. Although not unique, the Smiths’ relationship with American military personnel reflected the urban environment in which they lived and worked. Missionaries in more rural areas were not always in a situation where they could be seen with Americans and maintain their relationships with the people in their villages.\textsuperscript{45}

While some missionaries like the Smiths were pleased to develop relationships with American forces, others were not, particularly as the conflict intensified and dragged on. Chaplain Ronald Hedwall noted that not all missionaries wanted to develop such relationships.\textsuperscript{46} Hedwall was assigned to an infantry battalion scattered throughout the area surrounding Dong Ha, to include Cam Lo and the region near the mouth of the Qua Viet River. Occasionally these Marines encountered the Montagnard people. A missionary near Cam Lo advised the battalion through the American advisor to the local district chief that his position in the community was tenuous. Coupled with a high level

\textsuperscript{44} There is not a copy of this film in the Naval Chaplaincy School and Center Archive. Baez indicated by way of email that the film was the 1954 commercially produced film “Beachhead” starring Tony Curtis.

\textsuperscript{45} Ronald L. Hedwall, Report of Chaplains’ Experiences and Observations in Vietnam, 22 August 1967, 4, NCSCA.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
of Viet Cong activity in the area, his preference was to be left alone and not interact with American personnel so that they might remain as neutral as possible in the conflict.\footnote{Hedwall, Report of Chaplains’ Experiences and Observations in Vietnam, 22 August 1967, 5, NCSCA.}

Hedwall did not often have opportunity to interact with local clergy when assigned to the infantry battalion because the unit moved frequently. However, when in one place long enough, he found the American advisor to the local officials to be helpful because that person not only knew who the local clergy were but how to contact them. When interacting with local clergy, Hedwall sometimes found them to be suspicious of his intentions. Moreover, he believed that they felt slighted if he attempted to interact with them without the services of an interpreter available. In some cases, he sensed that the Vietnamese with whom he and others interacted suspected them of soliciting information, which was, in some cases, true.

Hedwall recalled one instance in which his commanding officer obtained important information from a French nun who served in an outlying orphanage. Marines from the battalion had been through the area regularly and had been able to establish a relationship with her using fragmented French. The commanding officer shared food with her one evening, and in exchange for the “adoption” of a child in the nun’s care, she had provided vital information to the Americans. Although the officer did not adopt the child, he did provide financial support sufficient to meet the child’s needs and the nun’s expectations. Both the nun and the officer seemed satisfied with the arrangement.\footnote{Ibid.}

Sam Baez left Vietnam shortly after the memorial service for the victims of the October helicopter crash. Richard P. Vinson, a Methodist elder, replaced him. Vinson
built upon the People-to-People activities that Baez had begun, expanding them in part because the growing relationship with bilingual missionaries made it easier to form connections with local Vietnamese. He was also able to expand these People-to-People efforts because the Marines had more leisure time during the fall when bad weather curtailed flight operations.

When missionaries Gordon and Laura Smith desired to build a new orphanage, Marines came to their aid. A Marine engineer assisted them by surveying the site for the proposed building. Marines also supported another orphanage in the area run by an American missionary and his family. The highlight of the holiday season for some of the Marines in Da Nang was their participation in a Christmas day program called “Father-For-A-Day.” Each participating Marine was paired with a child with whom to spend the day. The pair had dinner in the mess hall together, and each Marine gave a gift to their child. At the day’s conclusion Vinson gave the director of the orphanage a check in excess of 800 dollars, all donations from the Marines.

As 1962 drew to a close, Vinson’s supervisory chaplain Lieutenant Commander George D. Lindemann came from Iwakuni to assess the situation in Vietnam. Lindemann, a Lutheran clergyman, spent nineteen days with Vinson. In an effort to discern the emerging needs of Marine and Navy personnel in Da Nang, Lindemann accompanied Vinson in his daily tasks, including meeting with local officials and clergy. Presciently, Lindemann observed that on the one hand the chaplains’ role was much the same as it had been in the past, “to bring men to God and God to men”: to be by their

49 Bergsma, Chaplains with Marines in Vietnam, 10.
Lindemann also noted that this conflict proved essentially different than previous wars because “guerilla warfare” made it impossible for the chaplain to be by the side of every Marine or sailor. Lindemann thus determined that the individual sailors and Marines had to be trained not only militarily, but also spiritually and morally to withstand the isolation of this type of engagement. The nature of this operation forced the chaplain to be constantly on the move from one small group to another. Moreover in a collateral capacity, the chaplain’s task was to help personnel understand the “rationale and the responsibilities of their involvement.”

Lindemann believed that the role of chaplain was a dynamic one devoted to inculcating values worth not only dying for, but living for as well. Lindemann determined that the chaplain’s role in this particular conflict would need to be different.

Upon his return to Iwakuni, Lindemann began a training course concerning the religious climate, social norms and customs of the Vietnamese. Intended for chaplains who would be deployed to Vietnam, this course was also opened to other interested personnel. The Chaplain Corps historian noted that Lindemann’s program formed the conceptual foundation for a broader program of instruction in Vietnamese culture.

Within a month of Chaplain Lindemann’s inspection of the religious program in Vietnam Chaplain Vinson completed his rotation and was replaced by Lieutenant Hugh D. Smith, a Southern Baptist pastor. The work of Smith and the chaplains who followed

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51 Ibid.

52 It is not clear if Lindemann met the Smiths during his visit, and if he did and learned of their orientation program, to what degree he based his on what they had developed.
him began to evidence commonalities over the next few years. Although each chaplain’s experience reflected particularities relating to the type of unit with which he served as well as the time and place in which he served, many dealt with similar issues not only in the early advisory period, but also throughout the conflict. These issues included such diverse things as constructing chapels, arranging transportation, implementing mandated programs, and relating to local Vietnamese.

Chapel Construction

Chaplain Smith was among the first chaplains to write about the experience of overseeing a chapel construction project. The desire to have a defined worship space grew among personnel such that by late March 1963 Smith presided over the dedication of a remodeled building designated as a “permanent” chapel. The building provided Smith, and those chaplains who followed him in that area, a space in which to lead Bible studies, to conduct religious services, and a private place to speak with individual Marines and sailors. For many chaplains the construction or allocation of a particular space for worship comprised a major accomplishment and took much of their time and effort.

Leonard Ahrnsbrak, an Assemblies of God pastor who reported to Vietnam on December 23, 1965, participated in the improvement or construction of three chapels during his tour. During his first months in country Ahrnsbrak served with a medical

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53 Hugh D. Smith, Letter to W.M. Moore, 12 April 1967, NCSCA.

54 Leonard Laverne Ahrnsbrak was born in Roxanna, Oklahoma on May 16, 1933. He was raised in the Assemblies of God church and at the age of nineteen made a commitment to serve Christ. He graduated from Northwest College, a denominationally affiliated Bible College, in 1957. He then migrated west to California. He attended Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, graduating in 1961. Although he later didn’t recall any specific reasons why he entered the Navy, he was commissioned into the Chaplain Corps
battalion in Chu Lai. The chaplains who preceded him, Philip Kahal and Patrick Dowd, had plans to contract with local Vietnamese to build a thatched chapel. By the time Ahrnsbrak arrived, poles had been placed in the ground and construction started. Protestant and Roman Catholic personnel equally contributed the funds required to complete construction. Ahrnsbrak felt the chapel unique as it was “built by Buddhist Indigini of thatched construction with lighting systems from American suppliers, and a Japanese PA system.”\textsuperscript{55} Ahrnsbrak led a service of dedication in the chapel on the same day he detached from the medical battalion. He noted in his report that when it came to chapel construction “‘One sows, another reaps.'”\textsuperscript{56}

Ahrnsbrak next reported for duty with an infantry battalion. The battalion’s Marines used an existing tin-roofed hut as their chapel. Ahrnsbrak used whatever materials he could find to improve its functionality and appearance. The unit then moved to an area new to American personnel. Living quarters, offices, and a chapel were all “primitive” at first. The unit’s men expended much effort developing a facility plan.\textsuperscript{57} Ahrnsbrak submitted a formal request that a chapel be included in the construction proposal. Initially approved by the executive and commanding officers, the proposal to include spaces designated for use as a chapel entered an administrative vortex. This frustrated Ahrnsbrak. He described the experience in his end-of-tour narrative report

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{55} Leonard Ahrnsbrak, Narrative Report, undated, NCSCA.
\textsuperscript{56} Ahrnsbrak, Narrative Report, undated, NCSCA.
\textsuperscript{57} Ahrnsbrak, Narrative Report, undated, NSCSA.
\end{footnotes}
critically enough that his superiors recommended he change his comments.\textsuperscript{58} He observed that after initial approval of the plan to construct the chapel, a new interim commanding officer arrived to whom he again had to submit the request. Through a third and fourth commanding officers in as many weeks, Ahrnsbrak repeatedly had to convince his new superior “that his (two) predecessors (sic) were indeed wise gentlemen to have planned well for the spiritual welfare of the battalion.”\textsuperscript{59} Ultimately, two 16x32 foot structures were designated, and personnel outfitted the interiors as suitable worship spaces. The unit moved on to Dong Ha three weeks after the facility’s dedication on October 23, and then two weeks later on to Camp Carroll, where Ahrnsbrak completed his tour.

Robert Weeks, a Lutheran pastor from South Carolina who reported to Vietnam in September 1966, wrote that the construction of a new chapel proved to be the “highlight” of his tour in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{60} Weeks, for whom his tour in Vietnam was his first as a Navy chaplain, was delighted when his Marines scrounged material sufficient to construct a frame building capable of seating roughly one hundred fifty. A free-standing lumber structure served as an altar, while an upturned helmet mounted on a wooden stand served as a baptismal font. Weeks utilized a mounted bell to call Marines to worship. The building included an office and a living space for Weeks, such that Marines knew where

\textsuperscript{58} Ahrnsbrak, Narrative Report, undated, NCSCA. Although not clear who, a reviewing superior wrote in the margin next to this paragraph, “Recommend change. VR/Bill.”

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{60} Robert M. Weeks, End of Tour Narrative Report: A First, 12 September 1967, 4, NCSCA.
to find their chaplain. Named Redeemer Memorial Chapel, the chapel was dedicated in memory of the battalion’s dead.

Those chaplains who were in country earliest in the conflict, moved with a unit to a new area, or served with a unit in the rear were most likely to oversee the construction of a chapel during their time in Vietnam. It often was a case of a series of chaplains enjoying the fruits of the labors of earlier chaplains. Despite difficulties in obtaining permission and supplies, the chaplains who engaged in constructing a facility felt that doing so met the spiritual needs of the Marines they served by providing them a place to gather for worship, study, and conversation.

Transportation

Although not every chaplain had occasion to participate in the planning or construction of a worship space during his tour, at one time or another every chaplain who served in Vietnam had to figure out how to get from where they were to where they felt they were needed. The more junior the chaplain, the more of a challenge obtaining transportation generally proved. Their end-of-tour reports and other correspondence reflected this universal reality and the frustration it often created.

Chaplain Ed Bohula, a Roman Catholic priest, was among the wave of troops that entered Vietnam as the intense troop buildup began in the early months of 1965.\(^6\)

Initially assigned to an infantry battalion, Lieutenant Bohula wrote of his transportation woes in a series of reports he submitted following his tour. Underscored for emphasis,

\(^6\) Edwin Victor Bohula was born in Chicago, Illinois on August 29, 1930. He was commissioned in the chaplaincy in late 1963 and attended Chaplains School in 1964. After a tour at Naval Air Station Oceana in Virginia, he reported to the Third Marine Division in Vietnam.
Bohula noted that it seemed to him of “prime importance” to mention that acquiring transportation would be one of the greatest challenges to those chaplains who followed him.62

Obtaining transportation to conduct worship or visit with Marines in various units proved difficult at best for Bohula. When his unit first arrived in country, no vehicle was designated for the chaplain’s use. Rather, he “had to beg for a vehicle or a ride.”63 Bohula felt getting transportation “almost required an order from the General.”64 Initially he only needed transportation on Sundays in order to say mass for an outlying group and on Thursdays to attend a meeting. However, as he began to set a regular schedule of visitation to elements of the battalion, he needed access to a vehicle more frequently, sometimes as many as four days a week. Initially ordered not to go anywhere without three armed Marines with him, eventually Bohula made his rounds accompanied only by his clerk. At times he would “hop a ride” on a truck, or catch rides as he could to move from unit to unit, sometimes waiting as much as five hours to obtain a ride. After four months in Vietnam, Bohula was issued a vehicle, with the proviso that it be shared with the battalion doctor.

Transportation issues remained throughout the war. Chaplain Eldon Luffman arrived at a facility near the Cua Viet River north of Quang Tri in central Vietnam in September 1967. He identified amphibious vehicles and skimmer boats as the primary

62 Edwin V. Bohula, End of Tour Report, 1965, NCSCA.

63 Edwin V. Bohula, Additional Document to Chaplain Garrett, undated, NCSCA.

64 Ibid.
means of transportation in that area.\textsuperscript{65} Noting that it would be much easier to get around by way of helicopter, Luffman acknowledged their scarcity. Hitching rides on anything available and waiting for the next ride to come generally necessitated spending the night with outlying units, regardless of their size. Luffman continued, “The chaplain must be with the men, and spend some time with them, regardless of the size of the unit.”\textsuperscript{66}

Later in his tour, Luffman would move to regimental headquarters in the city of Quang Tri. His transportation needs then focused on obtaining space on a helicopter that was taking personnel or supplies to outlying areas. Noting that the Marine Corps simply didn’t have enough helicopters, he argued that the chaplain’s time was valuable enough that it shouldn’t be spent “sitting not-so-patiently on a chopper pad.”\textsuperscript{67} In an effort to rectify the problem he had directed his complaint through the chain-of-command and a directive had been issued to provide transportation for chaplains. Luffman observed, however, the directive couldn’t make new helicopters appear for the Marine Corps.\textsuperscript{68}

Chaplain Victor H. Krulak, Jr., an Episcopal priest, wrote about the transportation challenges with great clarity in a letter addressed to Captain Robert Coe, the Director of the Chaplains School.\textsuperscript{69} Written on September 29, 1966, two months after he arrived in country, Krulak argued that Vietnam represented “a completely different situation” than

\textsuperscript{65} Elden H. Luffman, End of Tour Report, 15 August 1968, 8, NCSCA.
\textsuperscript{66} Luffman, End of Tour Report, 8.
\textsuperscript{67} Luffman, End of Tour Report, 8.
\textsuperscript{68} Luffman, End of Tour Report, 9.
\textsuperscript{69} Chaplain Krulak was the son of Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak, Commanding General of the Fleet Marine Force Pacific from March 1, 1964 to June 1, 1968.
that described in the volumes of the *Chaplain Corps History*. Suggesting that the guerilla warfare nature of the conflict in Vietnam necessitated small unit, versus large unit, operations, Krulak noted that this difference begged the question of where the chaplain located himself. Wherever the chaplain chose to be he would invariably have to move somewhere else if he was going to provide for the spiritual needs of all the men in the battalion. Furthermore, as the only Episcopal priest in the division, Krulak wanted to offer worship to Episcopalian throughout the division. Inevitably this meant movement either by motor vehicle or helicopter.

Krulak described for Coe a typical Sunday in the field. He first offered worship at 9:00 a.m. for the Command Group and surrounding company. He then flew by helicopter to the location of another company, offering worship at 11:30 a.m. Flying to a third location, he offered worship for those Marines at 3:00 p.m. and then flew to a new location where the Command Group had moved while he had been away. Krulak noted that none of the distances he flew that day were great – no more than 1000 to 1500 meters – “but to walk down the road with less than a platoon would be foolhardy.” He continued, “Helicopters are hard to come by so that to get a ride from one place to another is a great difficulty. Unless you have the Battalion Commander to get transportation you are pretty much out of luck. I am fortunate in this regard.”

Sometimes the difficulty was not simply getting around in Vietnam but getting to Vietnam. In June of 1966 Chaplain Wayne Stewart addressed a letter to his supervisory

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70 Victor H. Krulak, Jr., Letter to Captain Robert W. Coe, 29 September 1966, 1-2, NCSCA.

71 Krulak, Jr., Letter, 2.

72 Ibid. Krulak’s fortune may well have been aided by his familial relations.
chaplain sharing his particular transportation saga. Stewart, a Southern Baptist pastor, first reported to Vietnam in October 1964, and was on his second tour in country when he required medical evacuation to Okinawa in mid-1966. When he was released from the hospital on June 3, Stewart faced what turned out to be the almost insurmountable obstacle of returning to his unit in Vietnam. In his lengthy letter to his superior, Stewart sarcastically pointed out that it seemed as if no one knew quite what to do with a Naval officer trying to return to a Marine unit in Vietnam. As he recounted being shuffled from one office to another, Stewart adopted as his refrain the words that were spoken to him, “‘Lord, Chaplain, no body has transportation,’ he replied, shocked that I should ask such a stupid question.”

73 Stupid or not, transportation was a constant problem for chaplains.

Personal Response Project (PRP) Program

Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak, the Commanding General of Fleet Marine Force Pacific was concerned how to best communicate to the Marines under his command. On March 23, 1966, General Krulak issued a memorandum to his subordinate commanders stating that in order to achieve their objective in Vietnam it would be necessary to “understand” the people of Vietnam “as persons.”

74 Six months earlier Krulak had requested that Chief of Chaplains James Kelley provide a chaplain to research the “indigenous religions, customs and traditions” of the people of Vietnam. Kelley ordered Chaplain Robert Mole, a Seventh Day Adventist, to General Krulak’s staff for a period of one year to conduct the requested research. In addition to reporting his progress

73 Wayne A. Stewart, Memorandum to Division Chaplain, First Marine Division, 23 June 1966, 1, NCSCA.

74 Victor H. Krulak, Memorandum, Headquarters FMF, 23 March 1966, 1, NCSCA.

75 Krulak, Memorandum, 2, NCSCA.
on the task to the Fleet Marine Force Chaplain, John Craven, Mole also reported to the Chaplain Corps Planning Group in the Chief’s office in Washington.

In his memorandum, Krulak reiterated that this program was not a “chaplain’s program,” but a command responsibility, yet chaplains proved ideally suited to participating in this endeavor because of their theological training. Citing both a February 1966 memorandum from his Administrative Officer and paragraph 1730.2a of the Marine Corps Manual, Krulak identified Chaplains’ participation in this effort as “second only” to their primary work of providing “liturgical, sacramental, pastoral (crisis and counselling (sic)) ministry to personnel.” The General also identified civic action as an appropriate activity for chaplains, but instructed that chaplains serve as the “conscience” and encourager of such efforts, not the “arms and legs” of civic action. Krulak clearly indicated that he wanted chaplains serving his Marines to act as “specialists in spiritual matters and indigenous religions.”

Kruplak informed his commanders that the materials generated by Chaplain Mole were to be used to facilitate small-group discussions, first with chaplains, local Vietnamese leaders, and officers and senior enlisted personnel. These conversations were to feed others within the command, reaching every Marine. Chaplains were also to identify and train others to serve as discussion leaders. However, chaplains retained authority over the content of the material presented and the manner of presentation.

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76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.

78 The Navy’s approach to this kind of training differed substantially from that in the Army. Initially, in some places the Marine Corps used the Army’s 1960’s revised Country Report on Vietnam to introduce Vietnamese culture to Marines. In May 1966 the Army placed two chaplains who had just graduated from
Mole began his research in June 1965 by gathering information from academic and governmental sources in Washington, DC. July found him attending portions of the Counter Insurgency School in Coronado, California and then meeting with Krulak’s staff in Hawaii. Mole moved on to Okinawa and then made repeated trips to Vietnam. When in Vietnam Mole met with chaplains affiliated with all branches of the service, missionaries working in northern regions of the Republic, and various government officials from a number of agencies to include the Embassy. With the assistance of Dr. Gerald Hickey of the Rand Corporation and Dr. William Smallley of the American Bible Society, Mole created a questionnaire soliciting information that Embassy personnel did not want distributed among the Vietnamese. In conducting his research, Mole indicated that he interacted with some 350 missionaries, some 225 Naval advisors, and over 1000 Special Forces Team A members. Among those Vietnamese leaders who assisted Mole was the Venerable Thich-Tam-Chau, President of Van Han University and Executive Secretary of the Vien Hoa Dao -- a conglomeration of 16 Vietnamese Buddhist bodies. Thich-Tam-Chau agreed to edit drafts of Mole’s work on Vietnamese Buddhism. By the end of October, Mole had made presentations to various chaplains and groups, mostly in Okinawa.

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79 Robert L. Mole, Memorandum to Chief of Chaplains, 30 September 1965, NCSCA.
80 Robert L. Mole, Letter to Captain John Crave (sic), 29 September 1965, NCSCA.
Mole’s ambitious program of study was not met with universal acclaim within the Chief of Chaplain’s office. As his third progress report in November 1965 circulated through the office, one reader recommended, “that this project be stopped immediately. Reasons are felt to be self-evident.” Two others within the Chief’s office concurred with this recommendation, while a fourth simply noted “Hmmmmmm!!” The locus of concern appears to have been Mole’s exhaustive research efforts. In mid-May 1966 Chief Kelly addressed some of these apparent concerns in a memo to Mole. Kelly denied Mole’s request that his named successor, United Presbyterian Richard McGonigal, receive training in French. He also directed that the word “research” be eliminated from the title of the project and that it henceforth be known as the “Southeast Asia Religious Project.” He asked Mole for how these materials were being interpreted and applied, as well as what training procedures had been created for Marines. The Director of the Chaplain Corps Planning Group, M. J. MacInnes, stated that the group found Mole’s materials “formal and academic” and was concerned that they would have little appeal to the average Marine. The Group questioned Mole’s approach and technique. Specifically, the group questioned how understanding among Marines was to be gauged and how changed attitudes and behaviors would be noted. MacInnes noted that while it was, of course, necessary to have accurate data, data itself should be a stepping stone to fostering understanding. In the end, the primary fruit of Mole’s labor was two lectures:

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81 Staff Chaplain Secretary, Memo Routing Slip Attached to Third Progress Report on Religious Research, Southeast Asia, 07 December (presumably 19650, NCSCA.
82 James W. Kelly, Memorandum to Commander Robert L. Mole, 17 May 1966, NCSCA.
83 Ibid.
“Religions in Vietnam” and “Religious Customs in Vietnam.” His successor, Chaplain McGonigal, seems to have focused more on implementation of the program rather than producing new materials.

McGonigal directed his energy toward using Mole’s materials effectively. He prepared a “III MAF Personal Response Notebook for Platoon Leaders.” In March 1966 the III MAF commander issued an order mandating training on the religions in Vietnam. The implementation of the Personal Response Program seemed spotty at best. It was used extensively where commanders, like III MAF, followed through on General Krulak’s order, and less so in those areas where the commanders did not embrace the dictate.

Chaplains’ responses to the program varied as widely as did that of their commanders. Many embraced Mole’s work and found ways to share the information with Marines. Chaplains like Lester Westling, Vince Capodanno, and Victor Krulak, who had all lived in Asia prior to reporting to Vietnam, were perhaps ideally suited to educate Marines on rudimentary aspects of Vietnamese culture. Victor Krulak wrote, “Chaplain Mole’s lectures on the religion and culture of Viet Nam are quite good, and as the Battalion works out a training schedule for replacements these lectures are going to be my part in getting these Marines ready for the job that is facing them…”

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84 MAF stands for Marine Amphibious Force.

85 Chaplain James Seim noted in his Initial Survey Response that the III Marine Amphibious Force Chaplain, who he does not identify by name, opposed chaplains being assigned to do the research General Krulak requested for the Personal Response Program. Seim addressed a memorandum to the Chief expressing that insofar as PRP promoted reconciliation it achieved a “goal in all circumstances.”

86 Krulak, Jr., Letter to Captain Robert W. Coe, 4, NCSCA.
concurred with his father that “This war is going to be won by winning the people away from the Viet-cong.”

In some cases it didn’t matter how the command or chaplain felt about the Personal Response Program itself because the materials simply were not available. Chaplain Ronald Hedwall, a Lutheran pastor who reported to an infantry battalion in May 1966, wrote that although his command introduced a battalion order outlining implementation of the program, the resource materials for the discussion leaders “were not available in Vietnam.” When his unit rotated to Okinawa and then aboard ship, Hedwall, thinking that conditions were optimal for the unit to undergo the training, tried again to obtain the materials. He wrote, “no resource was available to us, nor could we discover how to obtain it.” Someone in the chain of senior officers who read Hedwall’s narrative highlighted both paragraphs in which he referenced the program and wrote, “Great! Just Great!!” These comments may well have echoed what Hedwall himself felt when after facilitating the drafting of the command order and guiding his superiors in implementing the program chaplains in the field couldn’t obtain the resources.

Civic Action

In contrast to the People-to-People program, which was a broad movement initiated by the President and picked up by the military as a sort of world-wide diplomatic effort, civic action was the military’s own programmatic effort to establish personal relationships with local people to achieve military objectives. Theoretically speaking,
any member of the military could initiate a People-to-People project and every military member was, as President Eisenhower conceived it, a People-to-People ambassador. Particularly during the early years of American involvement in Vietnam chaplains were natural People-to-People initiators and coordinators. Civic action, however, was a function of the command to which a chaplain was assigned, with chaplains serving in an advisory capacity to the Marines appointed as civic action officers. In Vietnam civic action became an important part of the overall effort to win the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people.

Chaplain Hedwall argued that the newly arrived chaplain needed to have an overall understanding of the civic action program. He also suggested that each chaplain have in mind some examples of what constituted civic action. Hedwall argued that the Marine civic action officer had little knowledge of the people, poor access to materials that could facilitate specific projects, and not enough time to devote to civic action. For these reasons Hedwall thought the chaplain should be an active advisor to the civic action officer.

Hedwall also noted that the most successful civic action programs were the result of the “spontaneous” efforts of a few Marines rather than directed from above. He cited as one example a farm program that had been established in one of the villages. Inspired by one Marine who grew up on a farm, the Marines imported pigs and chickens to provide better stock to the village. The Marines then educated villagers on how to better

90 Hedwall, End of Tour Report, NCSCA.
91 Ibid.
care for the animals and thus protect their assets. Although the command strongly supported the program, it originated with one Marine.

Chaplain Hedwall envisioned civic action as the best implementation of the Personal Response Program. He argued that the appropriate role for the chaplain was not limited to clarifying “religious do’s and don’ts of dealing with the people” but also included identifying ways in which American forces could help the Vietnamese. He offered as one example a local Roman Catholic Church that thousands of Americans passed regularly. The front of the church was boarded up. Near the end of his tour Hedwall asked an interpreter why the entrance was closed off in what was a relatively safe area. The interpreter said that the street entrance had been boarded up because they had no doors. The building was used as a school and passing traffic disrupted classes, so they choose to board up the entrance. Hedwall concluded that putting doors on the church’s entrance constituted an appropriate civic action project.

Many chaplains in Vietnam during the early years of American involvement had the opportunity to organize People-to-People projects, to construct a chapel, and to advise and support a civic action program. After 1965 many also had the opportunity to implement the Personal Response Program. These activities complemented their primary pastoral duties. By 1966, however the war had entered a new phase and more chaplains were assigned to medical units and infantry battalions.
The shift in the war’s nature occurred following the August 1964 Gulf of Tonkin crisis when American officials alleged that North Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked the USS Maddox. The ensuing Congressional resolution gave President Johnson authority to commit combat troops to Vietnam. The massive buildup of combat troops that began in 1965 precipitated a corresponding rise in the number of chaplains assigned to Marine
As this buildup occurred in 1965 and 1966 chaplains’ tours lengthened and became standardized. Junior chaplains assigned to Marine units in Vietnam generally followed a fixed rotational pattern during their now thirteen-month tour. While a month of their time was spent processing in and out of the country, roughly six months of their tour was spent with either a support or medical battalion. The other “half” of their tour would be spent with an infantry battalion. In addition to when he served, the day-to-day routines of the chaplain depended primarily upon the type of unit to which he was assigned.

Before reporting to an infantry battalion, Leonard Ahrnsbrak served with “B” Medical Company of the 3rd Medical Battalion in Chu Lai. Arriving there at the end of 1965, he relieved Philip Kahal, a Yale Divinity School graduate and United Church of Christ pastor who would be released from active duty in 1967. Ahrnsbrak noted that in addition to the thorough turnover he received from Kahal, he benefitted a great deal from an article Kahal wrote, “Comforting the Wounded.” Published in the Fall 1966 edition of The Navy Chaplains Bulletin, Kahal seems to have made its contents available to Ahrnsbrak during their weeks together in late 1965 and early 1966. Ahrnsbrak expressed abiding gratitude for Kahal’s introduction to chaplaincy in a medical battalion.

92 In 1966 the Marine Corps divided its Tactical Area of Responsibility (TAOR) in South Vietnam, known as the I (“eye”) Corps, into two zones. The First Marine Division (1st MarDiv) was assigned the area south of Da Nang to the border of II Corps. The staff of the First Marine Division made its headquarters at Chu Lai. The Third Marine Division (3rd MarDiv) was assigned the northern section of I Corps extending north to the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). Initially headquartered in Da Nang, the Third Marine Division ultimately moved its headquarters to Phu Bai. J. “Doc” McNiff offers this succinct descriptor on page 33 of Hell Looks Different Now (Protea Publishing, 2003), 33.
In his article Kahal focused on describing the tasks of a field hospital chaplain and provided numerous tips on how to perform the job well. In his initial remarks he noted how profoundly the helicopter was shaping survival rates of those wounded in battle, as well as combat ministry. He encouraged the chaplain to join the physician in meeting incoming helicopters as they brought in the wounded, and to expect not to be informed that casualties had been received.

When possible, Kahal encouraged the chaplain to introduce himself, discern the injured’s religious affiliation, and provide comfort to the individual with an eye toward diminishing fear. Kahal suggested words for an initial prayer:

“Eternal Father, we thank Thee that Thou hast spared the life of this Thy son. Look mercifully and compassionately upon him and restore Him to the fullness of health so that he may serve Thee in the newness of life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”  

Kahal noted that chaplains needed to be careful to allay fear, not instill it, when praying with those wounded who were conscious. Some perceived the presence of the chaplain to be a harbinger of death, and the chaplain should be careful to note that he offered a prayer of thanksgiving for life. Kahal’s experience indicated that if the chaplain communicated effectively, the injured welcomed prayer and often sought forgiveness for past failures and prayers for their comrades still in the field. Kahal encouraged chaplains to carry a Jewish Prayer Book and a small edition of the *The Book of Common Prayer*, published by the Episcopal Church.  

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94 Although he was from a Free Church tradition not known for its liturgy, Chaplain Ahrnsbrak developed an appreciation for the prayers from *The Book of Common Prayer*. It became his companion throughout the rest of his ministry.
Kahal reminded chaplains that their task was to be an asset to the medical team. He cautioned that they be conscious of not getting in the way of medical treatment and that they endeavor to assist. He said that often the most effective way to help was to stand near the patient’s head and talk to him, making eye contact, with the purpose of distracting him from the pain of the urgent work the medical staff was performing. The care of the dying and dead also proved an important element of the chaplain’s work. Kahal argued that in the face of purposeful killing it was necessary to respect the bodies of the dead and thus affirm life. Moreover, he felt that acknowledging the dead strengthened the living. The fact that the chaplain spent a few seconds with the bodies of those killed accomplished both objectives.

Kahal also noted those duties assumed of every chaplain with a medical unit—namely daily visitation of the hospital ward and the leadership of Sabbath worship. Additionally, he encouraged Protestant chaplains to hold a daily evening vespers service, noting that the number of personnel who would avail themselves of such an opportunity might surprise them.

No matter how helpful written instruction might prove, a colleague in ministry proved most helpful to many chaplains who served in field medical hospitals. Kahal noted how the team, generally one Protestant and one Roman Catholic chaplain, not only served the needs of greater numbers of Marines, but also proved a source of mutual

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95 Contrary to what many chaplains expressed about medical personnel, Ron Hedwall noted that the corpsmen he met at the Dong Ha medical facility possessed an extremely negative attitude toward the Vietnamese they treated, perceiving that they were the enemy and had gotten what they deserved. Hedwall understood this attitude to derive from the fact that the corpsmen witnessed most closely the physical cost of the war to U.S. personnel. This attitude changed, however, when American forces mistakenly bombed a “friendly” village killing and injuring many Vietnamese. The medical staff knew that these people were injured through no fault of their own, and knowing this, Hedwall observed that they treated them with greater care.
support. Len Ahrnsbrak was grateful not only for Kahal’s thorough turnover and
guidance, but also for the presence of Chaplain Patrick Dowd, an “old salt” with the
medical company, having already been in country about six months. A thirty-seven year
old Roman Catholic priest from Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, Dowd had served as an
enlisted man in the Navy in the late 1940s before entering the seminary. Dowd’s
collegiality and support made his younger colleague’s transition to service with the
medical company less difficult than it otherwise might have been.

Even so, the first several weeks with Bravo Company proved among the most
demanding of Ahrnsbrak’s career. Ahrnsbrak said that his seminary training regarding
pastoral care of hospitalized persons included such counsel as to avoid touching the
patient, refrain from sitting on the bed, and to be “circumspect” in conversation.96 The
chaos and filth of a field medical hospital immediately proved such counsel irrelevant for
his own experience as a chaplain.

Ahrnsbrak’s first experience with a mass casualty situation taught him new
lessons in pastoral care. He wrote, “In that situation, one is face to face with the meaning
of life and death. No evasions are possible, ‘book answers’ are not sufficient, all pretense
is gone – there I stood with my faith, no more, no less.”97 He concluded that such
situations, particularly the process of triage--the identification of those wounded expected
to live and those expected to die--could only be experienced, not explained, and were
enough to break one’s heart.

96 Leonard Ahrnsbrak, Conversation with author, 28 April 2011.
97 Ahrnsbrak, Narrative Report, NCSCA.
Ahrnsbrak learned from his colleague Chaplain Dowd how to navigate his own emotions such that he could continue to be present with both the patients and the medical staff with whom he served. He observed that it would be easy to “grieve” oneself into “uselessness, or become hardened to the conditions of the patients.”98 The challenge of serving with the medical unit was always navigating the fine line between compassion and detachment.

Like many of his colleagues, Ahrnsbrak developed a deep respect for the medical personnel with whom he worked, both at the field hospital, as well as in the field. He felt that he learned more in observing the behavior of a single corpsman than he had learned in his seminary training. When a young Marine nearing death asked, “Will somebody please hold my hand?” Ahrnsbrak saw a corpsman walk silently over to him, sit, and hold his hand until he died.99

Like Ahrnsbrak, Chaplain Lester Westling also heeded Kahal’s advice. Westling, a first tour chaplain and Episcopal priest, moved among several medical units from October 1966 to April 1967. Westling observed that hours of silence would be broken by the sound of rotor blades announcing the arrival of “chaotic waves” of helicopters.100 Their arrival meant that an operation had commenced, a unit had been overrun, or an ambush encountered. The aircraft would disgorge their occupants – sometimes as many

98 Ahrnsbrak, Narrative Report, NCSCA.
99 Ahrnsbrak, Conversation with author, 28 April 2011.
as 65 in a twenty-minute span - all muddy and bloody, some ambulatory, others on stretchers, and body bags with the dead.

As corpsmen removed stretchers from helicopters and placed them on sawhorses in the triage area, Westling moved among them, wiping mud from their faces and anointing those being moved into surgery. He worked quickly so as not to get in the way of the medical staff, always striving to lower the anxiety level of those injured.

Westling identified his first major task with the medical company as earning their trust. They needed to know that he was “on the team” and “not an obstacle” to their work. Occasionally, upon request of the injured or when the triage area was cleared, the chaplain accompanied patients into surgery. Chaplain Westling, who had completed a hospital internship in California, endeavored to assist in surgery. He believed the staff felt his silent prayers, and that his presence served “as a reminder of God’s Presence and His compassion that embraced us all in the midst of constant tragedy, trauma, and pain.” On one occasion the power failed in the midst of an operation, sending the operating room into darkness. The surgeon knicked the patient’s aorta. Westling, who always carried a penlight in his pocket, provided light sufficient for the aorta to be clamped and the operation completed. He felt that this experience made his presence a welcome one among the medical staff, both in the operating room and in the “Recovery Room,” a tent that doubled as the bar and Officer’s Club.

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102 Westling, *All the Glitters*, 338.

103 Westling, *All that Glitters*, 336.
When there was a break in the arrival of casualties, Westling would go to the area where the body bags were placed, open each, record the names and serial numbers of the dead, and pray for them and their loved ones. He also took it upon himself, when he felt it necessary, to relieve the service member of anything that might be hurtful to their loved ones, such as photographs from R&R. One evening when Westling was making his rounds unzipping body bags, a young Marine who had been unconscious rather than dead as presumed, sat up and asked, “Where am I?”

After a tour with a medical unit or other rear element, a junior chaplain was often assigned to serve with an infantry battalion. Many of these chaplains looked forward to this experience because the infantry battalion formed the backbone of the Marine Corps and proved the adage “every Marine is a rifleman.” It was with the infantry where chaplains were most likely to fulfill the expectations Les Westling learned about serving with Marines: “Your feet will get wet; your pay will get screwed up, and your fellow Marines will always take care of you.

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Westling, *All that Glitters*, 338.
Chapter 4

Combat Ministry 1966-1967

*The Chaplain as “Celestial Rabbit’s Foot”*
- *Stan Beach*

One evening in March 1966, three Navy chaplains temporarily assigned to Camp Pendleton, the Marine Corps’ sprawling base in southern California, enjoyed an evening of dinner and conversation. Stanley “Stan” Beach recalls that they lightheartedly referred
to this meal as their “Last Supper” before each made their way toward Vietnam. Beach’s companions that evening were Vincent “Vince” Capodanno and William Garrity, both Roman Catholic priests. A thirty-nine year-old native Montanan, Garrity had served in the Navy as an enlisted man during World War II and possessed a keen sense of humor. The comparatively serious Capodanno, a thirty-seven year-old chain smoker from Staten Island, had just completed Chaplains’ School. Enjoying both laughter and thoughtful conversation about the difference between solitude and loneliness, the three clergymen engaged in an otherwise unlikely fellowship made possible by their military connection. Their fellowship would be brief. By the fall of 1967, Beach would be gravely wounded, and both Capodanno and Garrity would be dead.¹

Beach and Capodanno met shortly before their “Last Supper” when they reported to Camp Pendleton for an informal Marine Corps indoctrination before being assigned to Marine units in Vietnam. The two men shared lodging while at Pendleton, and both requested more training than was typically offered to chaplains. Standard training for chaplains included additional physical conditioning and instruction in the rank structure and uniforms of the Marine Corps, which Navy chaplains wear when assigned with Marines. Beach and Capodanno requested, and were granted, permission to attend portions of the Field Medical Service School where Navy corpsmen received instruction in survival and combat first aid. The two chaplains also took the opportunity to join Marines at the rifle range, experimenting with shooting M-60s and other weapons. When

¹ Chaplain Garrity did not serve with Marines in Vietnam, but was assigned to the USS Oriskany and died with 43 others on October 26, 1966 when a flare ignited and a major fire ensued aboard the ship.
the Command Chaplain at Pendleton learned of their extracurricular activity, he confronted them and reminded them that as chaplains they were not combatants and should not be handling weapons. Beach and Capodanno insisted that there was a profound difference between being a non-combatant and a pacifist. Both were committed non-combatants – neither carried a loaded weapon with intent to shoot while in country – but neither took on the mantle of pacifism. They believed that familiarity with everything Marines experienced, including firing weapons, would enable them to better serve them in combat. Soon enough both men had opportunity to test their theory alongside Marines.

Beach arrived in Vietnam on April 3, 1966 - Palm Sunday in the Christian liturgical year. Capodanno arrived several days later. Both were temporarily attached to Third Division’s headquarters in Da Nang, pending assignment. In the midst of several weeks of acclimatization and waiting, Beach and Capodanno were given opportunity to hold religious services for groups of Marines returning from an operation named “Nevada.” Beach recalls being flown by helicopter from a field medical hospital before dawn on Easter Sunday morning to a dry riverbed south of the city. Sharing in worship on this Christian holy day and looking into the eyes of Marines “experienced with death” made a deep impression on both men, giving them “a greater appreciation of the hope of the Resurrection in Jesus Christ.”

Beach realized then how much “spiritual ministry meant to guys in a critical time like that.” He remembers Capodanno having tears in his

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3 Stan Beach, Interview by author, 04 May 2011, Hampton, Virginia, transcript in possession of author.
eyes as they discussed that Easter morning. For Beach, every Easter sunrise service since then has been infused with the memory and emotion of that Easter riverbed service in Vietnam.

After the emotional high of Easter, Beach and Capodanno continued waiting at headquarters in Da Nang. The Division Chaplain, Captain Frank R. Morton, a Lutheran pastor, had the newly arrived chaplains reading turnover files in a cramped, hot tent. Beach recalls that Chaplain Morton didn’t particularly care for Baptists like himself and also took a particular dislike to the confident Capodanno, often directing “snide remarks” at both of them. One day when Morton directed a biting comment toward Capodanno, Capodanno determined he would fight the superior officer. Other chaplains intervened and Capodanno was quietly reassigned. Capodanno reported to the First Division’s First Battalion, Seventh Marines, stationed near Chu Lai, roughly fifty miles south of Da Nang, on April 30. Morton soon assigned Beach to the Third Battalion, Fourth Marines (a unit within the Third Division) near Phu Bai, north of Da Nang. Although they would exchange letters, Beach and Capodanno never saw one another again. They enjoyed a brief, intense friendship – two men from different backgrounds unlikely to have met otherwise, brought together by their journey to Vietnam.

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4 Beach, Interview by author.

5 Beach credits the Assistant Division Chaplain Paul Lionberger and Connell Maguire, whom he deemed a “saint,” with preventing fisticuffs.

6 Beach, Interview by author. Marine infantry battalions are identified by their battalion and regiment. For example, the First Battalion, Seventh Regiment is known as the 1/7.
Unlike Capodanno, who had just entered the Navy, Stan Beach had accrued years of naval service by the time he went to Vietnam. His commitment to ministry among sailors and Marines led him to Southeast Asia. By 1964 Beach was in his third active duty tour, stationed at Naval Air Station (NAS) Twin Cities in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

As the American combat operation grew and intensified throughout Vietnam after 1962, so too, did the number of American casualties. The task of notifying the next-of-kin of those wounded and killed in action belonged to officers and senior non-commissioned officers known as Casualty Assistance Calls Officers (CACOs). When CACOs made the required formal notification chaplains like Beach often accompanied them. In addition to providing emotional and spiritual support to the family at the time of notification, chaplains often conducted or assisted in the funerals and remembrances of the dead.

Throughout 1964 and 1965 Chaplain Beach accompanied CACO officers in making notifications and conducted military funerals at nearby Fort Snelling National Cemetery. Due to the increasing demand for his ministerial services in burying the dead, Beach became aware of the growing cost of the conflict perhaps sooner than many stateside Americans. By November 1965, Beach felt compelled to request orders to Southeast Asia. Although Admiral James Kelly, then Chief of Chaplains, was in Vietnam at the time Beach’s request was received, his staff summarily denied his appeal as he had already been “penciled in” for orders to the South Pole the following June. Being chosen for the wintering over at the Pole represented something of an honor for a chaplain, if for no other reason than so few people were ever afforded the experience.
Things changed, however, upon Chief Kelly’s return from his four-day Christmas and Hanukkah tour of Vietnam. Kelly and his guest, the now aged and frail Francis Cardinal Spellman, participated in more than a dozen worship services and visited troops throughout the country. The trip convinced Kelly that the situation demanded more chaplain support. On January 6, 1966 Beach received message orders to Vietnam. Instead of beginning the trek to the polar ice cap, Beach began his journey to the jungle.

In keeping with standard permanent-change-of-station (PCS) orders, the Navy afforded Beach thirty days to settle his affairs and report to his new duty station. Given that his next tour was “unaccompanied,” Beach and his wife Ellen decided that she and their two young children, Laurie and Randal, would be best served by returning home to Michigan. Ellen had been diagnosed with ovarian cancer several months before and was still recovering from surgery. By early February, Ellen and their children had relocated to Caro and were near family and long-time friends. Their children had cousins to play with and Ellen had comfort; help, if needed, was near.

Ellen had first seen Stan, a Bob Hope look-like with gentle brown eyes, her sophomore year of high school. She spotted the freshman in blue jeans and green corduroy shirt, and was immediately attracted to the football player. They shared in common a love of sports. Voted “Most Athletic” her senior year, Ellen played basketball, enjoyed figure skating, and participated in cheerleading. Although she and

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8 Bergsma, Chaplains with Marines in Vietnam, 60. Bergsma cites Chaplain Connell Maguire’s report that Spellman’s “clear, happy countenance so belied his age and feeble physique.” Chaplain John Glynn reported that after praying in the rain with 1,000 Marines Spellman got into a waiting jeep and “said with a triumphant twinkle eye…I did it.”
Stan dated after meeting, Ellen accepted another young man’s wedding proposal. When he wanted to postpone their wedding a year because of a poor cherry harvest on his family’s farm, Ellen decided to make the postponement permanent. Shortly thereafter she and Stan knew they wanted to marry one another. They did so on December 30, 1955, while Stan was in college.

Born on June 15, 1935, Stan was the descendant of English and Scottish immigrants who migrated to the American Midwest by way of New Haven, Connecticut and upstate New York. The Beach family prided itself on its work ethic. His father and grandfather were farmers who spent their lives working the land. After long days spent working the farm, Stan and his brother, under the guidance of their mother, spent their evenings sketching and reading. Discerning that their evenings involved far less labor than their days, Stan decided he wanted to work as an artist, designing cars. When he graduated high school in 1953 Stan enrolled at the General Motors School of Technology with the intention of working as an automobile designer.

Two decisions in Stan’s life caused him to abandon his dream of designing cars. In December 1953, Stan enlisted in the Naval Reserve. About this time Stan became intrigued by the Christian faith. Although his family had not participated regularly in a faith community when he was young, his mother began attending a United Methodist church during Stan’s senior year of high school. Eventually, Stan’s younger brother began attending church with their mother.

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9 Stan’s brother would earn a Master’s degree in agricultural engineering and become a missionary in Korea and then Chad.
About two years after his mother’s religious awakening, Stan began driving his landlady to her church, North Baptist Church in Flint, Michigan. He acquired this task, as he was the only one of her renters who did not participate in a worshiping community. Stan would often wait for her in the car, but one cold winter morning he went in for a cup of coffee. That morning he heard what he found to be a “credible message of the truth of Scripture” that led him to an experience of conversion.\textsuperscript{10} One of the statements in the talk he heard was the oft-repeated “trilemma” popularized by C.S. Lewis; “Either Jesus was a lunatic a liar, or Lord.”\textsuperscript{11}

By the mid-1950s when Stan began to embrace Christianity, C.S. Lewis had been an international superstar for almost a decade. An article in the September 8, 1947 issue of \textit{Time} magazine declared the Oxford academic and best-selling author, “one of the most influential spokesmen for Christianity in the English-speaking world.”\textsuperscript{12} Lewis’s 1952 book containing his version of the trilemma, \textit{Mere Christianity}, is now considered the “most influential religious work of the twentieth century.”\textsuperscript{13} Beach was one of many young American Protestants who were moved by Lewis’s apologia.

Within a year of his conversion experience, Beach began considering the ministry and researching seminaries. His change in career focus prompted his transfer from the School of Technology to Taylor University; thus Stan became the first in his nuclear

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\textsuperscript{10} Stan Beach, Interview with Paul Zarbock, 27 March 2008, Leesburg, Florida, transcript held in Special Collections Randall Library University of North Carolina, Wilmington.


\textsuperscript{13} McGrath, \textit{C.S. Lewis}, location 126.
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family to attend college. Beach dropped the engineering curriculum in favor of sociology, with minor degrees in psychology and religion. During his last two years of college, Beach served as a student pastor of a local church.

Beach’s ongoing association with the Naval Reserves facilitated his acquaintance with Navy Chaplain John Zoller, a Taylor University alum. Encouraged by Zoller, Beach enrolled in the Ensign Probationary Chaplain program while he was a student at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis. The person-centered nature of Navy chaplaincy particularly appealed to him. He had a clear sense that reaching one sailor could have a ripple effect in reaching others’ lives. Although two of his seminary professors had served as Army chaplains during World War II and Korea and worked hard to convince Beach to pursue Army chaplaincy, Beach committed himself to the Navy. He graduated with a Masters of Divinity degree from Covenant in the spring of 1961.

Beach had attended Chaplain’s School in Newport, Rhode Island during the summer of 1960, just prior to his final year of seminary. He recalls that there were about thirty students in his class, with three rabbis and no priests. The most stimulating aspect of the program for him was the discussion after daily devotions. For the first time he engaged in theological conversation with persons from other faith backgrounds. Although challenging to hear dramatically different viewpoints, Beach found it to be a helpful exercise. He found himself, as a conservative evangelical endorsed by the General Association of Regular Baptists, to be in the minority in the class. He recalls that there were perhaps no more than five of the roughly thirty students from an evangelical
Although the Roman Catholic Rosso led the Corps in 1960, mainline Protestants continued to hold the majority of most senior leadership positions. Even as Beach recognized that he represented a theological minority within the Corps, he always felt that the mainline Protestant leadership of the Corps treated chaplains from every background and theological perspective fairly.\footnote{Stan Beach, Interview with Paul Zarbock.}

Beach’s first assignment out of chaplains’ school was with the Marine Corps at Camp LeJeune, North Carolina. There he was assigned to the chapel at Momford Point, where he served for six months. During this first brief tour, Beach had an experience that shaped his understanding of how chaplains were to fulfill the motto of “cooperation without compromise.” The first week Beach was tasked with holding a communion service with a Unitarian chaplain, something his GARB affiliation would not permit. Beach approached the Unitarian chaplain, who was senior in rank, and indicated that it was a great honor for him to be asked to serve with him. Beach indicated that he would need his church’s permission to co-celebrate with him, which Beach (and, presumably, the other chaplain) knew it wouldn’t grant. So Beach offered to open doors, pass out bulletins, clean up after the service and take the other chaplain’s duty for a week. The other chaplain asked him if he enjoyed serving communion and Beach indicated that he did. The Unitarian said that he didn’t enjoy leading the sacrament, so why didn’t Beach take it by himself? In recounting this story, Beach stated that Richard Mouw’s 2010 text *Uncommon Decency* encapsulated his understanding of the Unitarian chaplain’s behavior. Mouw articulated that Christian leadership must lead the way through demonstrations of tact, grace, and decency. The grace and decency modeled by this Unitarian chaplain
became essential elements of Beach’s understanding of how he was to function as a chaplain.

In January of 1962 Beach began his second tour of duty with Destroyer Squadron 10 in Newport, Rhode Island. Duty with a destroyer squadron involved spending short periods of time on a variety of ships. The chaplain transferred from one ship to another by way of a line strung between the two ships, known within the service as highlining. As a transient rider, the chaplain proved something of a guest aboard each ship. He would conduct services, get acquainted with a few people, and then move on to the next ship. Developing relationships under these circumstances proved hard. One was always an outsider in the wardroom, and it was difficult to remember sailors’ names from visit to visit. Beach struggled with the idea of chaplaincy during this tour. He knew that he wanted “results” from ministry, and there were few tangible results from ministry under these circumstances.\(^{15}\) For Beach, results meant seeing sailors’ lives changed positively to include professing faith in Jesus Christ. Chaplaincy with the Destroyer Squadron felt like a Sisyphean effort—constantly rolling the stone up the hill, only to have it roll back down again as he moved on to another ship. Beach often felt while riding ships that he should just give it up and go into parish ministry.

And yet it was during this tour that Beach knew for certain that chaplaincy would, in fact, be his career. While he didn’t always sense the internal validation of the work of chaplaincy he craved, he did receive external validation from the Commodore of the Squadron. The Commodore encouraged Beach to put in the paperwork necessary for transfer from the Navy’s Reserve component to the Regular component, required in order

\(^{15}\) Stan Beach, Interview by author, 28 August 2013, Reston, Virginia, transcript in possession of author.
to remain in the Navy. Although he had only completed two years of active service and three were required, Beach was selected for transfer to the Regular roll. He felt that this proved providential, and therefore committed himself emotionally and spiritually to a career as a Navy chaplain.

By the time Beach and Vince Capodanno met in early 1966, Beach was already an experienced Navy chaplain. Although six years older and a more experienced clergyman, Capodanno was new to military chaplaincy. What Capodanno lacked in familiarity with the military, he more than made up for in knowledge of Asia.

Vincent Robert Capodanno, Jr. was born on February 13, 1929, in his family’s home in Elm Park, Staten Island, New York. He was the tenth child born to Vincent Capodanno, Sr. and Rachel Basile Capodanno. Vincent Sr. left Gaeta, Italy in 1901 at the age of sixteen, eager to begin a new life in America. The elder Capodanno represented one among a wave of 13.5 million Italians who came to North and South America between 1880 and the beginning of World War I. Unlike many of his fellow immigrants, however, Vincent possessed a marketable skill. Having grown up in the port city of Gaeta, Vincent knew ships and the sea and parlayed this knowledge into work as a

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17 One of the Capodanno’s children died shortly after birth and was not named.

ship caulker upon his arrival in New York. The elder Capodanno worked in the shipbuilding industry on the docks of New York until his death.

Vincent Sr. married eighteen-year-old Rachel Basile in 1907 at Sacred Heart Church. Rachel, a third generation American whose family traced their roots to Sorrento, Italy, continued the family’s pattern of marrying Italian immigrants who shared their Roman Catholic faith. In 1908 the young couple moved from Brooklyn to Mariners Harbor, Staten Island. In addition to working on the docks, Vincent and Rachel operated a small vegetable store to support their growing family. Family and church, first St. Clement’s and then St. Michael’s, shaped the lives of the Capodanno children.

Vincent Jr., known as “Junior” to his family, was baptized in St. Michael’s on April 28, 1929. It was there that eight-year-old Junior made his first Confession, participated in Holy Communion, and received Confirmation – "the sacrament that made him a witness and a soldier for Christ."19 Each week the Capodanno family filled an entire pew as they participated in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in the Tridentine Rite.20 Junior and the other children read the English translation of the Latin prayers in the Missal. Unlike his brother Philip who served as an altar boy and talked of entering the priesthood, Junior gave no indication of an interest in a priestly vocation. Only after high school did Junior acknowledge to a friend that while in grade school he had thought about, and quickly dismissed, the idea of entering the priesthood.

The Capodanno children attended Public School 44 through the eighth grade. An average student, Junior struggled with math and penmanship. Tall and slender, Junior

dressed well and kept a neat appearance, even as a child. He enjoyed swimming and riding his scooter, even after being hit by a car and suffering a broken arm when he was nine. Junior enjoyed the attentions of his older siblings, particularly his sister Pauline, who would occasionally take him and his brother Albert into the city.

The Capodanno family’s world changed dramatically on February 13, 1939, Junior’s tenth birthday. While working on the docks, Vincent Sr. suffered a cerebral hemorrhage. By the time the family arrived at St. Vincent’s hospital in the city late that evening, the elder Capodanno had died. In the ensuing years Rachel successfully held the family together financially with the help of her older children, then in their twenties and thirties. When the United States entered World War II in 1941, three of the Capodanno young men joined the military--two entered the Army, and James, the Marine Corps.

Junior graduated from Public School 44 in January 1943. Not surprisingly, his forty-student class voted him their best-looking boy and best dresser. In his autograph book, Vincent wrote that he most admired General Douglas MacArthur, that he wanted to be a doctor, and that his personal motto was “Do a Good Turn Daily.” The young Capodanno entered Curtis Public High School in February 1943. His best subject in high school proved to be Latin, although his academic record remained average. Junior’s extracurricular activities included serving in student government, participating in the Biology Honor Society, and acting as a counselor for the Catholic Youth Organization. Church remained a vital part of Capodanno’s life as he often attended Mass at Our Lady of Good Counsel Church before school.

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Capodanno graduated from Curtis Public High School in February 1947. Upon graduation he continued working as an underwriting clerk at Pearl Assurance Ltd., a job that he held during high school in order to help his mother make financial ends meet. Junior also enrolled in evening classes at Fordham University’s School of Education in Manhattan. During this time Vincent met William Richter, who became his closest friend. He and Richter began a pattern of attending daily Mass at Our Lady of Victory Church, eating breakfast, and then meeting again after work for benediction and often, Confession. They would then ride the Staten Island ferry back to their homes.

In the spring of 1949 the two friends made a religious retreat together at a church in Manhattan. During the retreat Capodanno confided to Richter that he had a strong desire to become a priest, a desire that he most often dismissed. Capodanno also encouraged Richter to consider a religious vocation. Shortly thereafter, both young men acted on these desires and applied for admission to The Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America, commonly known as the Maryknoll. On the application, in response to the question, “Why do you want to become a Maryknoll Missioner?” Capodanno wrote:

“I first heard of the Maryknolls through ‘Field Afar.’ I became acquainted with the kind of work they do and the lives they lead. I admired them for it but never though (sic) too much about it. When I decided to go into the foreign mission field I remembered all I had read about the Maryknolls and decided that that was what I wanted to do.”

Vincent Capodanno, Jr., Application for Admittance as a Maryknoll Student, Spring 1949. Mrs. Mary Preece, Vice-Postulator for the Cause, forwarded copies of several of Capodanno’s personal papers for use by the author. An essential aspect of the canonization process is the collection of all papers by and about the Servant of God. The Archdiocese of the Military now holds many of Capodanno’s papers and all of the materials collected by Daniel Mode in his work for The Grunt Padre.
Largely the brainchild of Father James A. Walsh, the Catholic Foreign Mission Board released the first issue of *The Field Afar* on January 1, 1907.\(^{23}\) Published twice monthly and priced at fifty cents per year, *The Field Afar* aimed “‘to deepen and widen in its readers the missionary spirit,’” and “make known conditions and opportunities existing in the foreign missions.’”\(^{24}\) Journalistically savvy, Father Walsh used pictures on the cover and half-tone images throughout the magazine. In a concerted effort to appeal to an American audience, Walsh focused on the work of English-speaking missioners, thus setting the magazine apart from its French-produced competition, the *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith*.\(^{25}\) Whenever possible, the magazine carried material emphasizing the link between the work of the Archdiocese of Boston and the larger mission world, as the magazine emanated from Boston. Praised by the Boston press, subscriptions flooded in and by the end of its first decade, *The Field Afar* boasted roughly 35,000 subscribers in all forty-eight states.\(^{26}\) By 1951, the Catholic Foreign Mission Society distributed over 600,000 copies of the renamed *Maryknoll – The Field Afar* monthly.\(^{27}\)

Targeting particular audiences, including schoolchildren, *The Field Afar* reflected Father Walsh’s passion for the Far East. Many of the stories focused on the activities of Maryknoll missioners in China and the ongoing need for such missioners. One *Field


The Field Afar story, “The Needs of the Diocese,” tells the tale of the cheerful and energetic Father Ryan. Father Ryan is thrown into a spiritual crisis when John, a young man in his parish, tells him:

“...God is making it so easy for me to on for the priesthood that I feel I ought to do more for Him. I would like to offer myself for a more difficult mission, and work for Him where men are needed most. If I went to China even, as a missioner, it would be making but a little sacrifice in return for the graces He has heaped on me. The diocese doesn’t need me as much as China does, and besides my going will surely stir others to take my place here. What do you think, Father, of my going to Maryknoll?”

After being called away on a pastoral visit, Father Ryan meets with John the next day. After a sleepless night of prayer and discernment, Father Ryan tells John that not only has he written to the Bishop in support of his request, but that “...I too, like you, am asking to go the whole way – to China.”

Nurtured by the exotic tales of The Field Afar, and devout in the practice of his faith, Vincent Capodanno began his own Maryknoll journey toward China by making up credits he lacked in Latin. Having formally been accepted into The Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America on May 17, 1949 and despite the objections of his mother, Capodanno arrived at the Maryknoll Junior Seminary, known as “The Vernard,” in Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania on June 25, 1949. Before leaving for his first extended

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31 Capodanno’s Maryknoll application indicates that he had studied Latin for 3 years.

32 Capodanno replies “No” to the question, “Are your parents willing to have you take up foreign mission work?” in his Maryknoll application. Also see Daniel Mode, The Grunt Padre, 15. Mode details that the
period away from home, Vincent asked his family that they not refer to him as “Junior” when visiting at the seminary. While at The Vernard Capodanno not only wrestled with Latin conjugations, but also must have heard the inspiring story of the school’s namesake, the Blessed Theophane Venard (1829-1861). Born in France, Vernard went to northern Vietnam shortly before the Emperor issued an edict against Christians. In poor health, Venard was quickly captured and condemned to death. When his executioner asked him what he would give to be killed quickly, Vernard, “seeing in his death an act of prayer and praise, responded, ‘The longer it lasts, the better!’” Although Capodanno seemed to struggle in his study of Latin that summer, receiving a grade of seventy-seven in the course, he continued imbibing the spirit and mission of Maryknoll.

Capodanno continued his studies at the Maryknoll College in Glenn Ellyn, Illinois in October 1949. Located about an hour outside of Chicago, the college had been renovated after World War II and was at its three hundred-student capacity throughout Capodanno’s tenure there. First year courses included European History, Chemistry, English Literature, Latin, and “The Life of Christ: The Mass.” Capodanno spent his sophomore year at Maryknoll Junior College in Lakewood, New Jersey, returning to Illinois in the fall of 1951 for his junior year. At that time Capodanno and his friend family priest determined that Mrs. Capodanno was simply fearful for her son’s safety and felt that Vincent was behaving selfishly to leave her. Dependent to a large degree upon her children for her financial security, any feeling of pride Mrs. Capodanno may have had in Vincent’s choice must have been tempered by the reality that priests frequently represent a financial drain, rather than source of support, for their families. Vincent was giving up a steady job at Pearl Assurance and had to come up with the $250 required tuition for each academic year.


34 Mode, The Grunt Padre, 23.

William Richter, whose training paths reconnected, began a two-year program of study in philosophy. Taking such courses as Ancient and Medieval Philosophy, Metaphysics, and Logic, the seminarians laid the academic foundation for their future study of theology. They also participated in activities such as daily Mass, periods of prayer, and long sessions of silence that provided the spiritual foundation for their future work as priests.

In the spring of 1953, Capodanno, along with thirty-eight of his initial eighty-four classmates received a Bachelor of Arts degree in philosophy.36

Following graduation, Vince, as he was now known, began a one-year novitiate in Bedford, Massachusetts.37 Designed as a time for seminarians to test their call to the priesthood, novitiates take a year off from academic pursuits and focus on their inner lives. Additionally, they work on behalf of the Maryknoll Society, speaking in churches and raising funds for the organization. At the end of their novitiate, William Richter chose to leave Maryknoll and become a diocesan priest, eventually serving parishes in Toledo, Ohio. In August of 1953, Vincent declared that he freely chose to continue his studies with Maryknoll, thus making the first of three oaths on his path to priesthood.

Vincent began his seminary studies at Maryknoll’s major seminary in Ossining, New York in the fall of 1953. Seminarians followed a regimented schedule of study, work, and prayer. Arising at 5:30 a.m. seminarians prayed, meditated, and then attended Mass. During breakfast, the community listened to the reading of diaries written by missioners working in the field. After breakfast, each seminarian performed a job or task on behalf of the community, which also doubled as training for maintenance.

37 Ibid.
construction, or farming tasks they might need to perform in their later work. Classes followed work, and prayer followed classes. After lunch and another hour of manual labor, everyone enjoyed an hour of recreation, usually involving some sort of competitive sport. Study and class followed, and then the Rosary at 5:30 p.m., followed by a conference with the spiritual director. After dinner and a thirty minute break, students participated in the final study period of the day. Each day concluded with prayer and lights out at 9:00 p.m.

Each summer during his seminary training, Vincent enjoyed a month of vacation at home on Staten Island. Although he used these breaks to continue part-time work for Pearl Assurance, his family, especially his mother and his sister Pauline’s family, provided generous financial support for his continued training. When their mother’s health began to fail after a broken hip, Vincent took out a $1000 loan from the society in order to help pay for her medical expenses. Given the family’s struggles since Vincent Sr.’s death, it was with great joy that all of his family joined together for Vincent’s long-anticipated Ordination on Saturday, June 14, 1958 at the Maryknoll chapel. The Archbishop of New York, Francis Cardinal Spellman ordained Capodanno and forty-seven other men.

Although Vincent Capodanno could not have known the full extent of Spellman’s influence in June 1958 when the Cardinal prayed over him, “’Receive the Holy Ghost, whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained,’” the newly ordained priest like any observant Roman Catholic in the diocese must have been in awe of Cardinal Spellman, who had graced the cover of Life.

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38 Mode, The Grunt Padre, 32.
Capodanno’s mother was afraid she would not be able to greet the Cardinal personally because she was confined to a wheelchair. Mrs. Capodanno’s fears proved unwarranted as the Archbishop approached and greeted her at the reception following the service. Nor could Father Vincent have known that the Archbishop’s ongoing efforts on behalf of a reclusive Vietnamese guest, now the President of South Vietnam, of the seminaries where Capodanno had been a student would prove a part of events that would bring about his own death. Indeed, what many Americans came to perceive as Cardinal Spellman’s “sins” must have been far from Father Vincent’s mind on the day of his Ordination. The new priest must have been focused on the American Foreign Mission Society’s forty-first annual departure ceremony, scheduled for the next day.

Father James Anthony Walsh, an urbane Boston priest, and the zealous Father Thomas Price of North Carolina, founded the Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America, later known as the American Foreign Mission Society and commonly known as the Maryknoll. Blessed by Pope Pius X’s representative on June 29, 1911, the “Maryknoll” became the first fully American Roman Catholic missionary society, as the United States remained an official missionary country until 1908, and as such existed


40 Mode, *The Grunt Padre*, 34.

41 Cooney, *The American Pope*, 110. Author Gore Vidal once said, “‘the serious crimes of Spellman were not sexual,’” in reference to another’s comment regarding the Cardinal’s sexuality. Vidal viewed Spellman’s conservative politics as the genuine crime.

under the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome. Shortly after sanctioning, the ambitious priests purchased property outside of Ossining, New York and opened their seminary on a hill they dedicated to Mary, the mother of Jesus. In 1917 Father Walsh went to China in search of a mission field for the first group of Maryknoll priests. The French missionary bishop of Canton expressed interest in having the assistance of the Maryknolls. Thus, in 1918 Father Walsh accompanied the first three Maryknoll missioners to Kwangtung Province along the coast of the South China Sea. By the time Vincent Capodanno received his formal mission assignment in 1958, thousands of Maryknolls had served, and were serving, missions spanning the globe.

When the bell rang at Maryknoll on June 15, 1958, as it did once each year to mark the assignment of another group of missioners on their way to do God’s work in the world, Father Vincent knew he would be leaving in just over a month for a six-year assignment, with no scheduled vacations, in Formosa (Taiwan). After spending the intervening time with family and friends, Capodanno painfully said goodbye to them, particularly his ailing mother, and left for the west coast where he boarded a steamship for Asia. Some privately worried that the fastidious priest would have trouble adapting to life in a different culture. However, in his application to the Maryknolls nine years earlier, Capodanno had characterized his idea of the life and work of a foreign missioner with these words:

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“It will mean hard physical labor with and for a group of people I may never have even heard of before. I’ll be separated from my family and friends, and all the things I’m now accustomed to, for indefinite lengths of time, during which all my efforts will be devoted to the people I’m serving. Their lives, both troubles and joys will be my life. Any personal sacrifice I may have to make will be compensated for by the fact that I’m serving God.”

The troubles and joys of the people of the Hakka-Chinese people living in Miaoli, Taiwan, approximately seventy miles south of Taipei, became Father Vincent’s life.

Bishop Frederick A. Donaghy, Dean of Miaoli and the Regional Superior for Maryknoll, initially assigned Capodanno and Father Don Sheehan to the language school in Miaoli. Father Charles Hilbert, an older Maryknoll who had been expelled from Mainland China when the communists prevailed in 1949, spent ten months instructing the new priests in the Hakka dialect. Sheehan more easily appropriated the aspirate sounds necessary to speaking the dialect than did Capodanno. Nevertheless, with his formal training complete, Donaghy assigned Capodanno to a parish in the village of Tunglo. There Capodanno served alongside Father Maynard Murphy distributing relief foodstuffs and medicine, instructing catechists, and performing the functions of his priestly office. In late 1960, Father Vincent moved to a residential school for young men in the mountain village of Ching An in the township of Tai An. Typically at the school for one year, the students engaged in study for the difficult national college entrance exams.

During his six years in Taiwan, Bishop Donaghy moved Capodanno roughly every year. After serving the boy’s school, Capodanno became acting rector of a parish in North Miaoli. In 1962, Capodanno returned to Tunglo, where he served as an

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47 Vincent Capodanno, Jr., Application for Admittance as a Maryknoll Student, Spring 1949.

associate pastor in Father Maynard’s parish. In his last placement during this six-year assignment, Father Vincent served as pastor of a church in Ch’ng An. 49 Although Capodanno continued to struggle with the Hakka dialect, he expected to return to Taiwan following his customary six-month furlough. 50

When Father Vincent returned to Taiwan in March 1965, Bishop Donaghy’s office notified him that he would be placed at the Maryknoll Father’s School in Hong Kong. Although technically part of the Taiwan region of Maryknoll, the placement involved not only the physical relocation from Taiwan to the mainland, but also necessitated learning the Cantonese dialect, surely a difficult task for Father Vincent. 51 Officially reassigned to address a shortage in manpower, Capodanno’s struggle with the Hakka dialect, his personal fastidiousness, and an apparent personality clash with Bishop Donaghy surely factored into his reassignment. 52

The first sign of difficulty with the bishop appeared in a six-page single spaced letter to Maryknoll superiors Capodanno had written on August 23, 1963. 53 Capodanno wrote the letter after Bishop Donaghy failed, in a personal conference, to satisfy Father Vincent’s concerns regarding who would possess authority for work in Miaoli when

49 Mode, The Grunt Padre, 49.

50 Typically, a Maryknoll missioner stays in the same regional area for life. Capodanno toured the Holy Land with another priest and then spent the rest of his furlough at his sister Pauline’s home in New Jersey.

51 Miller, Maryknoll, 53. Ed Mack Miller indicates that Hong Kong remained part of the Taiwan region until 1968.

52 Mode, The Grunt Padre, 51.

53 Vincent Capodanno, Jr., Letter to V. Rev. John F. Donovan, M.M., 23 August 1963. On a sticky note attached to this letter, an addendum Capodanno wrote, and Superior General John Comber’s response, Ms. Preece states that the letter represents “the beginning of questioning” for Capodanno. This was in response to my request for documents regarding the thought process that lead Capodanno into the Navy.
Bishop Donaghy went to Rome to attend the Second Session of Vatican Council II. In his letter Capodanno dissected minutiae within the Maryknoll constitution in an effort elucidate the role of authorities in and out of Maryknoll when the Regional Superior, in this case Donaghy, was absent “or otherwise impeded.” Capodanno received a short reply from the Superior General of Maryknoll, John W. Comber, indicating that Bishop Donaghy had, and was, acting within the purview of his authority. Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising then that shortly after his move to Hong Kong, Capodanno began another letter writing campaign, this time requesting reassignment from the Taiwan region, and Bishop Donaghy’s authority, of Maryknoll.

Superior General John Comber refused Capodanno’s initial requests to be removed from the Taiwan region, asserting that Bishop Donaghy was pleased with Father Vincent’s work in Hong Kong and that work as a missioner involved learning “to live with some disappointments.” Thwarted again, Capodanno changed his strategy.

With the rapidly rising commitment of American combat forces in Vietnam, on July 14, 1965 Capodanno wrote a letter to the “Chief of Chaplains Corps” at the Pentagon requesting information on how to join the Navy in order that he might serve with Marines.

in Vietnam. Capodanno then immediately sent this cablegram to Superior General Comber in New York: “As fulfillment of personal desire and help fill dire need respectfully request permission to join Navy Chaplains hopefully waiting permission and your good wishes.”

Father Comber responded promptly, indicating that he was “not particularly adverse” to Father Vincent’s request, but encouraging Capodanno to take his time in making such a decision, noting, “You first wanted to go back to Taiwan and secondly to be transferred to another Region, and now you want to go to the Navy.” In their continuing series of correspondence, Capodanno affirmed his desire to remain within the Society, but that he needed a change, and he felt that entering the Navy would provide the “most personally desirable work and arrangement.”

Comber approved his request and reassigned Father Vincent to Hawaii where he could complete the enlistment process. Formally inducted into the Navy on December 28, 1965, Lieutenant (LT) Vincent Capodanno reported to the Naval Chaplains School in Newport, Rhode Island on January 3, 1966.

After eight weeks of training in Rhode Island and brief visits with his family in New Jersey and New York, Capodanno reported to Camp Pendleton where he and Chaplain Beach met and began their journey to Vietnam.

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59 Vincent Capodanno, Jr., Letter to the Chief of Chaplains Corps, 14 July 1965. Although Capodanno doesn’t realize that each branch of the service has its own Chaplain Corps, the letter apparently found its way to the Navy.

60 Vincent Capodanno Jr., Western Union Telegram, 14 July 1965.


63 Vincent Capodanno, Jr., Letter to James W. Kelly, Rear Admiral, CHC, USN, 09 December 1965. His official date of rank is November 4, 1965. Capodanno officially reported on January 2, 1966; the class appears to have begun on January 3rd.
Shortly after Beach and Capodanno reported to Vietnam in spring 1966, a North Vietnamese Army (NVA) division crossed the demilitarized zone, encountering one Marine battalion. An intense battle ensued near Dong Ha, and nearly 5,000 Marines in five battalions of the Third Marine Division were ordered north to engage. Stan Beach joined one of these battalions shortly after the Marines returned from Operation Hastings, the three-week effort that drove North Vietnamese Army elements back across the demilitarized zone. The unit had experienced a very high number of casualties and Beach remembered talking with Richard Burgess, a young Marine deeply shaken by his recent experience. Given that there were no psychiatrists assigned with combat units in the field, the chaplain was a primary point-of-contact in considering who was psychologically fit for battle and who was not. Beach made the case with Burgess’s chain-of-command that he should be taken out of the field, but his superior officers did not agree. So Beach spent a lot of time with Burgess, talking and praying with him, trying to help him discover ways to control his anxiety.

From August through October, Beach’s unit participated in the effort known as Operation Prairie to find and destroy the elements of the NVA that remained south of the demilitarized zone. During these months of combat operations, Beach moved among the battalion’s companies. Comprised of approximately 250 Marines, a company became the smallest practical unit with which a chaplain could prove, in common parlance among chaplains, “an asset” rather than “a liability.” If a chaplain’s presence, as a noncombatant, aided the Marines through the ways in which he interacted with them or

64 Beach, Interview by author, 04 May 2011.
assisted in caring for the wounded, he would be perceived as an asset to the unit. If, however, a chaplain’s presence hindered an operation, or caused more labor for Marines, or threatened their safety, such a chaplain would be considered a liability. Through these largely intangible factors a chaplain developed a reputation among Marines, and that reputation often determined the core of a chaplain’s perceived value to a combat unit.

Beach developed a positive reputation among his Marines through a conscious effort to know and be known by them. Later, he crystallized this philosophy into an aphorism, “If you’re not visible, you don’t have to be available.” Beach made a practice of greeting the Marines when a company was moving in a columnar, as opposed to a sweeping, movement. He would stay in one place, greeting each of the men as they went by, sometimes high-fiving them, and then double-timing back to the front of the column after he had greeted the last man. Beach would often see each man several times as the column moved forward. He was visible to every man in the company. Once known and regarded as trustworthy, Marines would seek him out in order to share their fears of the present and future, as well as their regrets of the past.

Particularly in combat, Beach felt the chaplain functioned as something of a “celestial rabbit’s foot.” This notion of bringing “blessed” luck had much more to do with the perception of the chaplain by the Marines themselves, and very little to do with what the chaplain himself may, or may not, have done. Will Herberg in Protestant-

65 Stan Beach, Interview by author, 04 May 2011.

66 Stan Beach, Interview by author, 04 May 2011.
Catholic-Jew describes this phenomenon as the American’s “faith in faith.”67 While individual Marines may not have professed or practiced a particular religious faith, Americans loved the idea, according to Herberg, of being religious. The presence of a chaplain in combat seemed to give the Marines a certain confidence – that is, of course, until the chaplain becomes a casualty.

Beach worked assiduously to be a visible asset to the Marines in his unit. When on patrol he would carry the weapons of those who had been injured or killed so that an able-bodied Marine would not be given the task. Although he never fired a weapon, neither would he leave one such that it might fall into the hands of the enemy. Beach also went through the packs of incapacitated Marines and took out anything of value to others, to include grenades, food, and cigarettes. The word spread among the men that the chaplain had cigarettes and they would seek him out. A cigarette would entail an interaction with the chaplain. Beach also utilized the training he had received at the Field Medical Service School by helping with wounded Marines. A photograph in Newsweek magazine in the fall of 1966 has the caption “A Marine helping a fellow Marine.”68 The photograph was of Beach helping a Marine who had broken his leg. The chaplain’s desire and ability to endure what Marines endured greatly influenced how much they trusted him, and, consequently, his ability to engage with them.

By mid-September Beach was a seasoned combat chaplain who was part of the lives of the Marines with whom he served. On the 25th, Beach went with Lima Company on a search and destroy mission near the Con Tien mountain range in Quang Tri

67 Herberg, Protestant-Catholic-Jew, 89.

province. Richard Burgess was walking point, in part because the Sergeant Major and others were angry with him as they perceived him a “whiner” because he had gone to Beach with his anxieties. Carl Schmitt, a twenty-one year old disaffected Southern Baptist from Orlando, Florida was in the column behind Burgess. Schmitt was a close friend of Beach’s clerk, the Marine tasked with providing for his safety. Schmitt made a special point of showing Beach the picture of the baby his wife had delivered two weeks before and asking for Beach’s prayers.

The company, with Burgess in the lead, walked into an ambush. Burgess was cut off from the group, and Schmitt the closest squad leader, was cut down by machine gun fire attempting to reach the stranded Burgess.69 Beach and his clerk worked feverishly with the corpsman to stop Schmitt’s bleeding. Schmitt died telling the corpsman what a great thing it was to be a father, and what a great thing it was to be a Christian father.70 Another Marine, Keith Hale, was shot through the leg. Beach helped drag him to a tree where they propped him up, waiting for evacuation. Beach asked Hale if he would like to pray, and Hale replied, “Yes.” Hale then prayed for Beach saying, “Take care of the chaplain, we need him.”71 Beach was struck by the importance this young man placed on his presence with them.

69 Stan Beach, Interview by author, 04 May 2011. Burgess was taken captive. He survived the war and was released on March 5, 1973. He and Beach remain in contact. Burgess shared with Beach that when imprisoned he said in his mind, “When I had nothing to drink, I had the wine. When I had nothing to eat and thought I was starving, I had the bread.” This reflection on the Christian practice of communion gave him strength.

70 Stan Beach, Interview by author, 04 May 2011.

71 Stan Beach, Interview by author, 04 May 2011.
Beach recalled being very angry at the loss of these men that night as the forward platoon made its way down a narrow ridgeline trail in an effort to rejoin the battalion. He challenged any Marine who wanted to light a cigarette saying, “You light the next cigarette and you don’t have to worry about the enemy, I’m going to shoot.” Although Beach knew he must have slept, morning came quickly.

The next day when Beach moved out with another company things got, in his words, “a little bad.” He remained close to the Company Commander as fighting intensified. Beach worked pulling the wounded into a large bomb crater as it provided some protection. Beach and his clerk spent that night sheltering the body of a young Marine who had been horribly disfigured, losing half his head to a machine gun burst. Beach was intent on keeping his Marines from seeing the carnage. The fighting proved intense enough that no helicopter support was possible for the next two and a half days. Most personnel surrendered their canteens to the injured so that they would have something to drink. Beach remembered opening a can from the c-rations offering and being surprised that it was peaches rather than the ham and lima beans he typically got. Beach gave the peaches to a reporter because he had no sensation of hunger.

In the midst of intense fighting a bleeding, badly wounded Marine attempted to get out of the bomb crater to rescue a friend he thought injured. Beach knew the friend was dead and had already grabbed his rifle. Beach stood up so that he could wrestle the injured Marine back into the crater. When he looked beyond the crater Beach saw NVA

72 Stan Beach, Interview by author, 04 May 2011.

73 Ibid.
soldiers close by and about to surround them. Instead of using the rifle at his disposal, Beach yelled out and company commander J.J. Carroll threw a grenade toward the NVA. Beach remembers a slow motion sensation of watching an NVA soldier’s body fly through the air and off the side of the hill known as Mutter’s Ridge. Beach knew in that moment that he truly was a noncombatant.

Beach spent much of the next two days and nights helping move men to the relative safety of the crater and tending to their injuries with the corpsmen. Of great comfort to the injured were the cigarettes Beach lit and put in their mouths. Beach moved from man to man, talking and offering prayers.

On the morning of the third day, September 28, 1966, Beach remembers going to get some water. Cans of water had been dropped from a helicopter the previous night. Although many cans proved inaccessible having fallen outside the area the Marines controlled, Marines were able to retrieve some cans. Beach remembers starting to feel lightheaded and weak in his legs from lack of food, water and rest. As he was talking to Gunnery Sergeant England, a mortar fell short and hit him directly. He remembers no sound and a strange smell – gunpowder. He knew he had to get to his foxhole, but then he realized that his boot was up by his belt and knew he was in trouble. Gunny England applied a tourniquet to his leg, saving his life.

Other Marines came to care for their wounded chaplain. One of the photographers captured one Marine praying over Stan. He took Stan’s blood stained shrapnel filled Bible so that he could make sure it got put with his things. A Marine

74 Stan Beach, Interview by author, 04 May 2011.
named Hutton came and told the chaplain that he used to wear a cross like the one he had one his collar because it made him feel good. Beach encouraged him to take it. Beach remembered Hutton fondly because he once asked Beach if he had been drafted. Beach told him all chaplains were volunteers. Hutton told him “You’re nuts” and walked away.

As they continued taking intense fire, two other Marines crawled over to Beach. Eighteen year-old Jim Riley put a helmet on Beach’s head, covered his torso with a flak jacket, and covered Beach’s body with his. One of these Marines took a piece of shrapnel in the back of the head.

When a general’s Huey came several Marines placed Beach in a wire basket so that he could be lifted into the helicopter. The word was passed that “the chaplain won’t make it,” leading one of the Stars and Stripes reporters to report Beach’s death. Inside the cramped helicopter a “good Catholic kid” had his feet on Beach’s chest, feeling guilty for having no alternative.75

After being triaged at a field medical hospital Beach was airlifted to the hospital ship USS Repose. Beach recalls General Lew Walt visiting and emotionally awarding him the Purple Heart. The two had met years before at Camp LeJeune when Walt sought Beach’s counsel and prayers. Beach was transferred from the hospital ship to a facility in the Philippines and then to the Army’s Tripler Hospital in Hawaii. Reunited briefly with Ellen, he spent nearly four months in the Hawaiian facility, undergoing frequent surgeries in an effort to save his leg. Having spent as much time in hospitals on his way back to

75 Stan Beach, Interview by author, 04 May 2011, Hampton, Virginia, transcript in possession of author, 7. The Marine who had his feet on Beach’s chest thought Beach had died. When he learned around 2010 that Beach was still alive he traveled to Beach’s home so that they could see one another again. It was then he expressed the guilt he had carried for putting his feet on Stan’s chest.
the States as he did in Vietnam, Stan was transferred to the hospital at Naval Base Great Lakes where he spent most of the next year.

5. Chaplain Beach at Tripler Army Hospital being visited by LtGen Krulak

*Photo used courtesy of Naval Chaplains School Archive*

Assigned to an infantry battalion, Vince Capodanno found his true vocation as a Chaplain among Marines. Able to speak with his congregation in his native tongue, encouraged by military stricture to maintain as fastidious a personal appearance as possible, and relieved of whatever personal conflicts he experienced with his superiors
and fellow Maryknolls in Taiwan, Capodanno thrived in his role as Chaplain. Familiar with life in Asia but now among Americans, Capodanno became a valuable resource in instructing Marines on Asian culture. Chaplain Capodanno enjoyed the fact that this ministry asked him to be with and among Marines, listening to their troubles and joys as he had envisioned when he first applied to be a Maryknoll. The regimental chaplain, Roy A. Baxter, said of Capodanno:

“He was accessible and he was approachable. The men felt comfortable around him and free to approach him for good conversation and with their needs. He lived day-to-day as they did, a Marine. This identity enhanced the genuineness of his loving concern and care for their spiritual and other needs. He was one of them, he was truly their Padre.”

During his time with the battalion Capodanno participated in six combat operations, receiving the Bronze Star and the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Silver Star for his unfailing support of his Marines when under fire.

After eight months of service, two months longer than normal with a combat unit, Chaplain Capodanno reported to the 1st Medical Battalion near Chu Lai. Realizing that the end of his yearlong tour in Vietnam was approaching quickly, Capodanno requested a six-month tour extension. After his extension was approved, Capodanno took leave, went on a short retreat in Manila, had a reunion with his fellow missioners in Taiwan, and spent some time with his family in New Jersey. His sister Pauline noted, “When he came back in June (from Vietnam) he was a changed person; he was not Vin any more.” Chaplain Capodanno’s mind and heart were with his Marines. At the one party his family had for him while he was in the states, Capodanno became upset when some of

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76 Mode, The Grunt Padre, 77.

the guests, fellow priests, expressed their opposition to the war. He told his brother that they didn’t know what was happening in Vietnam. Thus, when Capodanno received a telegram on June 6 requesting his early return to Vietnam, the “Grunt Padre” complied. Upon his return, Chaplain Capodanno reported to another infantry battalion in the Que Son Valley. Vincent Capodanno was home.

On Monday September 4, 1967, celebrated as “Labor Day” in his native United States, Lieutenant Capodanno boarded a helicopter with combat troops moving in support of Marines who found themselves in heavy fighting near Dong Son, Vietnam. The Regimental Chaplain, Eli Takesian, thought that Capodanno was in Da Nang, where he usually flew after services on Sunday. Around ten o’clock that morning Takesian learned that Capodanno, anticipating the intensity of the operation just beginning, codenamed Swift, had not gone to Da Nang as usual but had stayed with his Marines.

On the morning of the 4th, Capodanno, hoping to make his way to the battlefield medical aid unit, made the decision to move forward with a company-sized unit. Due to heavy fire, the helicopters carrying the Marines were forced to land four kilometers short of the designated landing zone. After being forced down and just before they began “humping” toward the intended landing zone, Chaplain Capodanno offered communion and General Absolution to the Marines.

At approximately 2:45 p.m. Company Mike’s 1st Platoon traversed the slope of one hill and was beginning to ascend another hill when they came under sniper fire.

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Second Platoon immediately established a blocking position on the hilltop behind 1st Platoon. Chaplain Capodanno, along with the company’s command component, positioned themselves in a crater just below the crest of the hill behind 2nd Platoon. Rather than the clearing operation the Marines expected Company Mike found itself in a full-scale engagement with elements of the North Vietnamese Army. After hearing a distressed radio call that the most forward Marines were about to be overrun, Capodanno left the relative safety of the command post and ran down the hill toward the distressed Marines.

Amidst a hail of fire, Capodanno grabbed the strap of a heavy radio and helped the radio operator, Lance Corporal Stephen A. Lovejoy, drag this essential piece of equipment to the crest of the hill. Upon reaching the crest of the hill, Capodanno proceeded to assist in caring for the wounded and dying. Lovejoy later recounted that he never would have made it to the top of the hill alive without the Chaplain’s help.

Shortly thereafter, Capodanno administered Last Rites to Corporal Stephen Connell. While doing so, tear gas was employed directly on the troops in the hope that the gas would force the NVA soldiers to move away from the Marines. Capodanno gave his gas mask to a Marine who had left his at the bottom of the hill when the engagement began, saying, “You need this more than I do.” Several other Marines recall

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80 Bergsma, Chaplains with Marines in Vietnam, 150.

81 Bergsma identifies Lovejoy as a Lance Corporal (LCPL), while Mode identifies him as a Private First Class (PFC). PFC equates to an E-2 for pay purposes in the United States Marine Corps (USMC), LCPL to an E-3, meaning that LCPL is the higher rank. It is most likely that Lovejoy was a LCPL at the time of this engagement as most Marines achieve the rank of LCPL early in their initial assignment. In either case, Lovejoy was a junior Marine on September 4, 1967.
Capodanno calmly giving aid to approximately seven wounded or dying Marines despite the presence of the irritating gas.

According to Corporal David Brooks, Capodanno was hit in the shoulder by shrapnel from a mortar round that landed about twenty yards from Capodanno as he ran toward Sergeant Lawrence Peters, who lay mortally wounded in the chest. Capodanno made it to Sergeant Peters, a practitioner of the Russian Orthodox faith, administered Last Rites using one arm to support his other injured limb, and prayed with Peters until Peters died approximately five minutes later.

At some point that bloody afternoon a Corpsman may have bandaged Capodanno’s wounds: Capodanno, refusing to leave the scene in order to receive further medical assistance, tended to other men in the squad who had fallen nearby. One man Capodanno assisted was the severely injured Sergeant Howard Manfra. Capodanno dragged Manfra into a depression in the ground, thereby saving his life. Capodanno then ran, while under fire, apparently taking Manfra’s rifle to another Marine whose weapon had jammed.

Corporal Ray Haraton, in an interview with Daniel Mode, relates that Sergeant Peters, before his death, ordered him to eliminate a machine gun nest immediately in

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82 Bergsma, Chaplains with Marines in Vietnam, 1962-1971, 150. Mode quotes Capodanno as saying, “‘you need it for fighting, I’m all right.’”

83 Mode, The Grunt Padre, 130. Mode attributes this recollection to CPL Brooks. Although Bergsma corroborates the account, he does not identify his source.

84 Miller, Maryknoll – At Work in the World, 45. Miller includes an account of Capodanno’s actions that day by Dr. Joseph Pilon. Pilon, a medical officer who contends he was approximately one hundred yards away from Capodanno, suggests that by the time the mortar landed near Capodanno a bullet already had shattered Capodanno’s right hand. Capodanno, after having his hand treated by a Corpsman, refused medical evacuation. Mode interviewed Pilon, and uses his account in his introduction, rather than in the account of the battle. Bergsma does not include this information at all.
front of the company’s position. Harton grabbed a grenade pouch and attempted to move forward. Shot through the elbow, Harton went down and yelled for a medic. Harton recalls that he closed his eyes, only to open them and see Chaplain Capodanno looking directly at him. Harton recalls Capodanno saying, “Stay quiet, Marine. You will be OK. Someone will be here to help you soon. God is with us all this day.”

Capodanno then began to move toward Corpsman Armando Leal, who had been shot in the groin while attempting to reach Harton. Another Marine, Lance Corporal Tancke, had been assisting Leal but dove into a nearby hole in order to return fire toward a NVA machine gunner who had moved into close range. According to Tancke, Capodanno, certainly aware of the machine gunner’s position, ran to Leal, and placing his body between Leal and the enemy, attempted to stop the arterial blood flow. According to Capodanno’s Medal of Honor citation, “Upon encountering a wounded corpsman in the direct line of fire of an enemy machine gunner positioned approximately fifteen yards away, Lieutenant Capodanno rushed forward in a daring attempt to aid and assist the mortally wounded corpsman. At that instant, only inches from his goal, he was struck down by a burst of machine-gun fire.”

In an article in the New York Times two days after Capodanno’s death, Bernard Weinraub quoted a Marine, “The last time he was

85 Mode, The Grunt Padre, 132-134.
86 Mode, The Grunt Padre, 133.
87 Bergsma includes this account, but spells the LCPL’s name “Tanke” instead of Mode’s “Tancke.”
seen alive, he was saying a prayer over a dead man.”^89 Capodanno and Leal, the two non-combatants on the battlefield, died together.

Word spread quickly of Capodanno’s death. Some Marines wept, shaken by the death of a man they called, “the enlisted man’s chaplain.”^90 Corporal Tim Hanley observed, “It was like playing chess and you lost your queen – morale-wise it was devastating.”^91 Chaplain Takesian, who had flown into the area with another unit shortly after Capodanno, remarked, “It was as if a shroud had covered us all.”^92

Capodanno’s brother Philip, an architect working in Saigon at the time, attended the formal memorial service for his younger brother held several days later at the 1st Marine Division Headquarters in Da Nang.^93 Chaplain Takesian, a close friend of Capodanno’s, left Operation Swift to deliver the eulogy. Upon arriving in Da Nang, and at his own request, Takesian identified Chaplain Capodanno’s remains. Greeted at the morgue by a Roman Catholic Army Master Sergeant who tearfully told Takesian he personally prepared Capodanno’s body after hearing of the Chaplain’s efforts on behalf of his Marines, Takesian inspected his friend’s body. Takesian noted, “Three fingers were missing….shrapnel had blown away part of his left shoulder. There were exactly 27

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^92 Eli Takesian, Interview by Paul Zarbock, 13 December 2002, Special Collections William Madison Randall Library, University of North Carolina, Wilmington.

gunshot wounds in his back. The one that killed him had entered the back of his head."94 Thirteen Marines died and thirty-one were injured in the same engagement in which Leal and Capodanno died. 127 Americans died and 362 were wounded in Operation Swift between 4 and 15 September, including Leal and Capodanno.95

Philip accompanied his brother’s body from Da Nang to their childhood home of Staten Island, New York. Capodanno’s Requiem Mass was held at Queen of Peace Church in North Arlington, New Jersey on September 19, 1967.96 The Navy’s Chief of Chaplains, Rear Admiral James W. Kelley, attended, along with nearly eighty-five chaplains of all three services and many different denominations.

Approximately forty-seven of Capodanno’s brother Maryknoll priests gathered for the funeral mass. Father John J. McCormack, Superior General of Maryknoll, and Bishop John M. Comber, former Superior of the Society, concelebrated the Mass. Archbishop Thomas A. Boland of the Newark Diocese and Bishop William J. Moran of the Military Ordinariate attended along with Francis Cardinal Spellman. Although the Maryknoll Order requested that Capodanno be buried at the Society’s cemetery in Ossining, New York, and the Navy requested that Capodanno be buried in Arlington National Cemetery, Capodanno’s family buried his body next to their parents’ at Saint Peter’s cemetery on Staten Island.

94 Eli Takesian, Interview by Paul Zarbock.


96 I have followed Mode’s description of the Requiem Mass that he records in *The Grunt Padre*, 151-152.
When Chief Kelly made his third Christmas and Hanukkah visit to Vietnam in December 1967 there were 485,600 American military personnel in country. Some 110 Navy Chaplains were serving in Vietnam, most with Marine units. 19,562 Americans had died and over 100,000 had been wounded. As Stan Beach’s and Vince Capodanno’s


experiences demonstrated, chaplains were not spared from suffering, indeed, shared suffering and tears defined their understanding of chaplaincy.
On December 23, 1967, Chaplain Carl Alfred Auel, along with Marines and corpsmen from the 1st Marine Regiment, held a Christmas program for children enrolled in the Catholic and Buddhist schools located on either side of the Marine’s Command Post at Quang Tri City, along the central coast north of Hue. The senior corpsman donned a Santa Claus suit and distributed a gift to each child. The gifts had been donated by the unit’s Marines and Americans through stateside churches and schools. Later that day Auel donned the Santa suit himself and with his clerk took gifts given by elementary school children in Tom’s River, New Jersey to the Marines in the Command Post and in listening posts outside the perimeter.

On Christmas Eve, Auel and Nguyen Tu, a Chaplain for the Vietnamese Army and priest serving the Roman Catholic Church near the Command Post, co-led a Catholic-Protestant Christmas Eve service in Nguyen’s church. Soldiers from the 1st ARVN Regiment, US Marines, and children from both the Catholic and Buddhist schools participated in worship. As part of the service, the school children sang Christmas carols they had learned in English. Decades later Auel reflected on that worship service:

“It was a most moving experience and, in the reality of the situation in which we were, touched each of us with a moment of peace and with the awareness of God’s presence in our lives. Without question, that service remains the most significant for me in forty one years, now, of pastoral ministry.”

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1 Carl Auel, PTSD Journal, 25-26, NCSCA.
Carl Auel did not have to go to Vietnam. Since mid-1964 he had been serving as Head of Chaplain Procurement in the Personnel Branch of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains in Washington, D.C. As part of the Chief of Chaplain’s staff, Auel oversaw the accession of civilian clergy into the Chaplain Corps and recommended their initial orders. On Auel’s watch, the Chaplain Corps grew from 929 active duty officers in June 1965, to 1013 in June of 1966. The Corps would continue to grow until reaching a peak of 1102 in June of 1969.\(^2\) As the number of American forces in Vietnam increased, so too did the number of chaplains serving with Marines there. Comprising what some were calling “the ‘new’ corps,” 70 percent of the 50 chaplains serving in Vietnam at the end of 1965 were in the grades of lieutenant and lieutenant (junior grade). As the conflict continued and the number of chaplains serving there rose, Auel felt the weight of his role in bringing many of these young clergymen into the Chaplain Corps. Auel expressed to his family the guilt he felt in sending others into combat zones when he had not gone himself.\(^3\) Despite the fact that no one in his extended family perceived him as a “warrior,” his guilt and exigent circumstances led the thirty-seven year old husband and father of then five children to request orders to Vietnam.

Auel was born in Detroit, Michigan on June 14, 1930. The oldest of three children born to German immigrants, Auel showed an early inclination toward a religious life. The Auel family participated in the life of a congregation and read the Bible and prayed as a family unit. Auel’s younger sister recalled that the pastor of their family’s church was “an amazing man” and most likely a primary influence in her brother’s


\(^3\) Julianna Auel, Letter to author, undated.
decision to enter the ministry. As a young child Carl would conduct elaborate funeral services for deceased pets. The fact that Auel’s father desired to be a minister but could not afford the education necessary to be ordained probably also factored into Carl’s vocational decision.

By the time Auel was of high school age, it was clear that he was moving toward ministry. Faced with the choice between a high school that offered a scientific and mathematics curriculum and one that offered a religious and theological core, Auel chose the latter. He quickly became involved in many of the extracurricular activities the school offered – choirs, theater, and sports, particularly football and basketball. Following graduation, Auel enrolled at Capital University, a school affiliated with the American Lutheran Church, in Columbus, Ohio. Auel then enrolled at Luther Seminary, whose campus adjoined Capital’s. There he met Marian Benkert, whom he married in June 1953.

Although no one in Auel’s family was surprised by his decision to enter the ministry, all were baffled by his decision to serve as a Navy chaplain. Auel enrolled in the Chaplain Corps’ probationary program while a student in seminary, receiving his commission as an Ensign on September 15, 1952. He completed Chaplains’ School in June of 1954 and was assigned to serve with the Third Marine Division. In rapid succession he served a series of tours acquiring tactical experience with Marine units and ministering to recruits at the Naval Training Center in San Diego. Intelligent, thoughtful,

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4 Julianna Auel, Letter to author, undated.
a gifted speaker and eloquent writer, Auel became a “rising star” in the Chaplains Corps.\footnote{Elden H. Luffman, \textit{Bringing God to War: Glimpses of a Chaplain’s Ministry with U.S. Marines in Vietnam} (Williamstown, NJ: Phillips Publications, 2006), 158. In a letter to his wife, Chaplain Elden Luffman wrote, “I surely like Carl. He’s down to earth, brilliant, yet a very devout man. He is real Chief of Chaplains material.” Luffman followed Auel as the Regimental Chaplain.} He was among the select group of chaplains chosen annually to attend postgraduate training. Selected for “PG School”, he enrolled at Union Seminary in New York City for the 1961-62 academic year. Following his year of study, Auel was assigned to the Naval Air Facility in Naples, Italy. By now a Lieutenant Commander, Auel had checked all the major “boxes” one needed to have a successful career as a Navy chaplain-- experience with Marines, time at sea, and an overseas tour. Having the added bonus of postgraduate school, it was no surprise that Auel was assigned to the Chief’s office in 1964.

One of the clergymen Auel assigned to Vietnam was his personal friend Clark McPhail. Like Auel, McPhail had been born and raised in Detroit and graduated from Capital University and Luther Seminary. While in college and seminary McPhail hitched rides home with Auel for school breaks. McPhail may well have influenced Auel’s decision to enter the Chaplain Corps as he served in the Marine Corps Reserve in the early 1950s. Their paths also crossed after each entered active service in the Chaplain Corps. On one occasion Auel’s Marine unit passed through Japan where McPhail was stationed at the time.

McPhail reported for duty in Vietnam in the summer of 1967. Shortly after arriving in country McPhail was riding in a “Mite” with a representative of the Red Cross. An explosive device detonated as they were driving across a bridge, killing the driver and the Red Cross Representative. McPhail suffered severe injuries to his face,
particularly his eyes and ears. Carl Auel requested that he be permitted to assign himself as McPhail’s replacement. Despite the fact that Auel’s position would have precluded service in Vietnam and his rank would have dictated service at the division level, his superiors in the Chief of Chaplains office honored his request. Auel received orders to serve as the regimental chaplain.

Auel arrived in Vietnam in September of 1967 and joined the 1st Marines who were at that time operating near Hoi An, a city about 25 miles southeast of South Vietnam’s second largest city, Da Nang. Situated on the coast of the South China Sea, Da Nang featured a broad, safe harbor. Da Nang also had an airbase capable of supporting large-scale air operations against North Vietnam. For these reasons the area proved of great strategic interest in the military conflict, and the Marines positioned themselves in a protective barrier around the three landed sides of the city.

As regimental chaplain, Auel had administrative responsibility for those chaplains serving with the regiment’s battalions. While he could have focused primarily on his administrative functions and ministering to the regimental staff, he felt his position required that he engage with troops in combat actions.\(^6\) The first operation Auel participated in was directed to the protection of a bridge that enabled troops to cross the Song Thu Bon River. Auel worked in a forward aid station, praying over those killed in action and with those wounded. These first experiences in combat would remain with Auel. Years later he would vividly recall praying over and burying a young Marine’s

\(^6\) Luffman, *Bringing God to War*, 176.
amputated leg.\(^7\) Like many other chaplains, Auel’s work alongside medical personnel engendered in him a profound respect for the dedicated service of medical personnel.

Within weeks of reporting to the unit, the regiment moved from Hoi An to the city of Quang Tri where the Command Post was established in a former French compound that had been overrun at the time of the fall of Dien Bien Phu in 1954. While at Quang Tri, Colonel Ing and his staff kept unusual working hours. In order to be awake at night when enemy attacks were most likely to occur, the staff generally slept from 4 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. The first meal of the day began at 9:30, with a mid-day meal served at 3:00 p.m., and the last meal at 9:00 p.m. If needed, the staff would again try to rest in the late afternoon and early evening. This schedule suited Auel, who seemed to need little more than four hours of rest a day to function.

As regimental chaplain, Auel received some advantages of rank. As a Commander, Auel was among the more senior officers in the regiment. He had two assistants. One served as a clerk, typist, while the other was his driver and “bodyguard.” Due to his rank alone, Auel most certainly experienced less frustration when it came to acquiring transportation when he wished to visit outlying units than did more junior chaplains serving the regiment’s battalions. Auel also had access to a tent equipped with a field desk, typewriter, and a bunk. Elden Luffman, the chaplain who followed Auel, noted that Auel devised an unusual filing system in the tent. He strung telephone wire around the outside wall of the tent and then hung a series of clipboards on the wire.\(^8\) Auel used this system to ensure chaplain coverage for all of the regiment’s personnel.

\(^7\) Auel, PTSD Journal, 8, NCSCA.

\(^8\) Luffman, *Bringing God to War*, 63.
Luffman respected Auel deeply because he used every available resource, including the privileges of his rank, to serve Marines.

While in Quang Tri, Auel developed meaningful relationships with local citizens built upon mutual trust. He occasionally assisted both Christian and Buddhist clergy in conducting funerals for deceased residents and felt quite close to these colleagues in ministry. The minimal Vietnamese language training he had received in San Diego prior to reporting to Vietnam surely fostered these relationships.

Auel also established a relationship with a Protestant missionary who ran an orphanage several miles from the Command Post. He solicited material support for the Quang Tri community not only from the Marines within the regiment, but also from some forty-one stateside churches, schools, and individuals. When it appeared that a Marine from another unit had stolen a statue of the Buddha from a local War Memorial, the officers of the regiment contributed funds to purchase a new statue for the memorial. The regiment’s translator was dispatched to Saigon to purchase a new statue and when he returned from Saigon a formal presentation ceremony including local officials, clergy, and officers from both militaries was held. Auel viewed all of this work as consistent with the objectives of the Personal Response Program and understood his role and the role of the Marines with whom he served as assisting and defending the Vietnamese people.

Although Auel gave much time and energy to cultivating relationships within the local community, his responsibilities lay primarily with the Marines of the regiment.

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9 Auel, PTSD Journal, 11-13, NCSCA.
10 Auel, PTSD Journal, 11, NCSCA.
Auel felt that one of the most significant aspects of his ministry occurred among black Marines. Writing about his experience years later, Auel reflected that the structure of the draft in the 1960s and the policies and practices associated with granting exemptions favored Caucasians. As a result he believed that minorities not only served disproportionately to their numbers but also were injured and killed at a rate “disproportionate to the population statistics in our country.” Moreover, Auel believed that the state of race relations stateside during the conflict affected Marines in Vietnam. Thus, it was a matter of some pride when he and one of his assistants were invited to become members of “The Soul Brothers’ Platoon,” an informal association of black Marines who gathered on a semi-regular basis to support one another.

Their induction into this informal platoon resulted from a particular incident. Late one evening a black Marine approached Auel and his assistant indicating that he needed to speak with them because he was not going to be able to stand his midnight watch. Failure to stand watch is a major offense as understood by the Uniform Code of Military Justice and generally punished severely. When Auel inquired as to why, the Marine explained that he had been visited by a “haint” while standing watch at this station previously. The haint presented itself to him as the ghost of a French soldier.

After speaking with the young man, Auel approached the Medical Officer thinking that the young man’s distress might be of a psychiatric nature. The Medical Officer, whose mother was from the same region of the country as the Marine and often spoke of haints, directed the issue back to Auel, insisting that the Marine’s concern was theological, not

11 Auel, PTSD Journal, 15, NCSCA.
12 Ibid.
psychological. Auel then spoke with the Marine again, devising a plan to deal with the haint. They agreed that when the Marine had duty at this particular post Auel and his assistant would position themselves on the ground on either side of the post, about ten yards away. Whenever the Marine saw the haint he was to raise his rifle into the air and Auel and his assistant would run to his aid. This pattern continued for several weeks until the haint no longer disturbed the Marine while on watch. Shortly thereafter, Auel and his assistant were approached by a black Gunnery Sergeant who invited them to join the Soul Brothers. Thereafter black Marines always greeted Auel and his assistant as brothers, and the relationships formed became profoundly important to Auel. Seeing these black Marines killed and injured in combat tormented Auel.

Auel also made it his practice to make periodic visits to outlying units. A battalion of the 1st Marines had been tasked with support for Con Thien, the beleaguered facility at the eastern end of the demilitarized zone. Under daily attack, the base consisted of a series of bunkers dug deep into the ground, covered with large timbers secured by layers of sandbags. Because of the constant threat of incoming rounds Auel held no formal services at Con Thien. Rather, Auel and his assistant made their way from bunker to bunker and then from hole to hole, offering a service of meditation and prayer along with the sacrament of communion. Regardless of their individual religious belief, Auel said no Marine ever refused his offer of communion.

On one of his visits to Con Thien Auel had just left one perimeter hole and moved to the next when a mortar landed directly on the position he had just vacated. The Marine
in the hole, a young draftee, died. He had only been in country a few days. Auel and his assistant helped the corpsmen remove his body and offered a brief prayer service.

Auel also periodically made visits to the Combined Action Platoons (CAP). Stationed along Highway 1, these platoons were situated around villages from the Hai Van Pass near Da Nang nearly to Hue City. Each platoon consisted of twelve Marines and one Navy corpsman. Their primary mission was to defend the people in the village and to provide villagers with training so that they could defend themselves. They were also directed to further the objectives of the Personal Response Program by assisting villagers as they could. One of the significant ways they did this was through making medical services available to villagers once a week. When making visits to these CAP units, regimental visitors like Auel and his team generally delivered medical supplies and other needed items.

In making visits to these units Auel observed that the Marines in these isolated platoons were not only insufficiently trained to instruct others in self-defense but also poorly equipped. Many of these Marines had just graduated from boot camp and needed more assistance than was available in order to establish an adequate perimeter. Auel also noted that they often didn’t have adequate equipment for self-defense and occasionally resorted to making their own weapons. Auel related his observations to his Commanding Officer, Colonel Ing, who concurred with Auel’s assessment after joining him on a visit to several of the platoons.

The Colonel ordered that a team of more senior Marines be formed to provide further instruction and training for the CAP units. Ing also created a reaction team that
could deploy quickly to assist these isolated Marines in event of a serious attack. However, although these units were within the tactical area of operations assigned to Colonel Ing, they fell under the auspices of a different military authority. According to Auel, Ing was reprimanded for his efforts to support the CAP units. Auel’s own efforts on behalf of the CAP Marines reflected his understanding of the chaplain’s role as advisor to the Commanding Officer. The reality of administrative overlap and what may well have been a “turf battle” among senior officers did not dissuade Auel from doing what he perceived to be in the best interest of Marines.

In October 1967 elements of the regiment were tasked with participating in an operation named “Medina.” The purpose of the campaign was the pacification of an enemy staging area in the Hai Lang Forest Reserve south of Quang Tri. The well provisioned and highly trained Fifth and Sixth North Vietnamese Army Regiments launched operations from the forest. Years later, Auel wrote he felt a horrible beginning to Operation Medina was a “portend of things to come” for the whole operation.13 As he and the Marines assembled to depart, helicopters came in and hovered near them. Rather than landing and taking on Marines, the helicopter crews began to throw off bodies and body parts of deceased Marines who had been tasked with leading the way into the deep jungle of the forest. Horrified, Auel and the Medical Officer went to the Operations Officer asking that some other way be found to deal with the dead. The Operations Officer concurred that bodies should not simply be thrown off the choppers, and he permitted them to recruit volunteers to remove the dead from the helicopters.

13 Auel, PTSD Journal, 23, NCSCA.
As the operation was a large one involving multiple elements from both the battalion and other units, Auel was airlifted with the headquarters element to the edge of the forest. Once there, a senior non-commissioned officer asked Auel if he would conduct a prayer service for those Marines about to move into the forest. Auel did so, noting that he used a prayer card that he had helped create when he was stationed in Washington. One of the company commanders also asked if he would hold a service for his men, which Auel did. Unbeknownst to the chaplain, an Associate Press photographer was assigned to photograph the mission. The photographer shot a photo of the chaplain sharing a service with a group of Marines. Decades later Auel shared how deeply the photograph troubled him, as many of the Marines pictured died within the next few days.

7. Carl Auel, Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A370462
   Photo Courtesy of the Naval Chaplaincy School and Center Archive
From a strategic military perspective, Operation Medina proved unsuccessful for the American forces, despite the fact that they inflicted heavy losses on the North Vietnamese Army. The original objective of destroying an important staging area was abandoned after First Battalion’s Charlie Company was ambushed two days into the mission. The attack was so fierce that Marines involved recalled grenades and gunfire raining down from the trees above them. Eleven of them were killed with another seventy-five wounded, sixty to sixty-five of whom required medical evacuation.

Roughly 100 of the company’s 187 men who entered the forest were able to walk out under their own power. Although other units experienced losses, none were as catastrophic as Charlie Company’s. When this phase of the operation was abandoned and the Marines from the battalion returned to their initial insertion point, Chaplain Auel chose to walk out with the troops, rather than being airlifted out on a helicopter with others from the Headquarters Company.

Shortly after the abbreviated operation in the Hai Lang National Reserve, First Battalion’s Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Al Belbusti ordered two companies to provide security for Vietnamese elections, set for October 22. As part of this overall effort, small patrols were sent out to destroy a mortar position near the village of Thon Nai Cuu. Within several days of returning from one of these patrols, Lance Corporal Olaf Skibsrud visited the battalion chaplain, Lieutenant Richard “Dick” Lyons,

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apparently confiding to him troubling things he witnessed during the operation. Skibsrud recalled Lyons, a Roman Catholic priest, stating, “‘this can’t happen.’”

While there is no written documentation regarding the content of their conversation, Lyons relayed at least pertinent elements of Skibsrud’s account of the patrol to Lieutenant Colonel Belbusti on October 27. Skibsrud may have asked Lyons to share the information he presented to Belbusti, knowing that the chaplain, unlike others within the military system, always has direct access to the commanding officer. Or, conversely, Lyons may have requested permission to take details of his account to Belbusti. It is also possible that Lyons determined what Skibsrud shared revealed that a crime had been committed and he was not bound to keep their conversation confidential. Whatever the particular nature of Skibsrud’s and Lyons’ conversation, after relaying whatever elements of it he chose to Lieutenant Colonel Belbusti, the commanding officer immediately ordered an investigation.

Legal officers completed their investigation on November 1st and forwarded their findings to Belbusti. The following week Belbusti recommended to Colonel Ing, the regimental commander, that three Marines from Bravo Company - Captain Robert Maynard, Second Lieutenant John Bailey, and Lance Corporal Rudolph Deiner - be charged with the premeditated murder of a Vietnamese woman. Ing ordered an Article 32 hearing, the military equivalent of a grand jury, in mid-November.

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17 Kulik, “War Stories,” 209. Charges against a fourth Marine, Private First Class John Heald, were later dropped as he had not been properly informed of his rights prior to his providing a statement.
Both Lance Corporal Skibsrud, a key witness in the Article 32 hearing, and Lance Corporal Deiner, one of the Marines under investigation, were transferred out of their unit almost immediately after the investigation began. Skibsrud was transferred to the Headquarters & Supply Company where he was assigned the task of inventorying items of deceased Marines. Some Marines considered Skibsrud weak, claiming that he went to the chaplain in order to get out of combat operations. For the remainder of his time in Vietnam Skibsrud feared that his fellow Marines would take his life.

Deiner, meanwhile, was moved from the battalion to the regiment in Quang Tri. At some point, Deiner wandered in to see Chaplain Auel. Although neither Deiner nor Auel ever disclosed full details of their conversation, Deiner later indicated that he conveyed to Auel that he was being treated harshly by a medical officer on the staff and by the sergeant to whom he was directly responsible. He also shared that at some point Auel asked him if he “‘was a good shot?’” \(^{18}\) “‘Probably too good,’” Deiner recalled responding with some irony.\(^{19}\) Following their conversation Auel went to Colonel Ing, his regular cribbage partner, and asked that Deiner report to him and serve as his driver. Ing ordered the transfer. Deiner later said that Auel took him “‘under his wing’” such that “‘no one could mess with me again.’”\(^{20}\)

On January 21, 1968, the charge against the Marines was changed from premeditated murder to “attempted premeditated murder,” primarily because the

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\(^{19}\) Ibid.

\(^{20}\) Ibid.
woman’s body was never found. 21 Deiner’s case went to trial on March 18. The trial lasted three days, ending with his acquittal.

Many of the details of what happened in Thon Nai Cuu during those October patrols remain contested. Among the uncontested facts of that operation, however, is that radioman Ronald B. Pearson, a beloved Marine and Deiner’s “best friend,” triggered a booby trap killing himself and seriously injuring two other men. Deiner, who had been with the company since December 1966, replaced one of the injured men as a squad leader. Also uncontested is that Deiner shot a twenty-five to thirty-five year old mother six times in the back as her children looked on. At issue in the trial was whether or not Maynard and Bailey, Deiner’s superior officers, issued illegal orders concerning the treatment of persons found in the village, and whether or not Deiner understood the necessity of defying an illegal order.

Ultimately, the officers serving as the jury chose not to imprison a teenager for thirty years for an illegal act that an officer may have ordered him to commit. 22 Given the conflicting nature of much of the testimony, the defense team chose to call upon numerous character references for Deiner. Among these witnesses were two sergeants, two medical officers, including the one whose treatment led Deiner to seek out the chaplain, and Chaplains Auel and Luffman. One of the attorneys at the courts martial identified Chaplain Auel as a critical character reference for Deiner at the trial. The

21 Kulik, “War Stories,” 231.

22 Gary Kulik and Peter Zinoman, “Misrepresenting Atrocities: Kill Anything that Moves and the Continuing Distortions of the War in Vietnam,” Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review, E-Journal No. 12 (September 2014) http://cross-currents.berkeley.edu/e-journal/issue-12, 175. Captain Maynard was also acquitted of the charge of pre-meditated murder. However, he was convicted of a failure to report, ending his career in the Marine Corps.
attorney noted that Auel was the second in seniority only to the convening officer, and that although he was a naval officer, he carried himself like a Marine. Auel’s support of Deiner at courts martial may well have proved the critical element in his acquittal.

Deiner returned to duty, and for the remainder of his time in Vietnam he functioned as the chaplain’s driver. By the time of the trial in March, however, Deiner was driving for Chaplain Auel’s successor, Lieutenant Commander Elden Luffman. Shortly after the first of the year, Auel had been transferred from the regiment to Task Force X-Ray. Auel later wrote that he received this change of orders because he had previously served with the Commanding General of the division, and it was the General’s desire to build his staff with officers with whom he was acquainted. However, given the impending courts martial and Auel’s intimate knowledge and involvement with those involved, it seems reasonable that the regimental and division commanders may have felt it prudent to move Auel. The controversial nature of the courts martial and Auel’s service as a character witness may have convinced the Commanding Officer that it was best for everyone’s morale for Auel to serve elsewhere.

Stationed along Highway 1 some thirty miles north of Hue City, Task Force X-Ray was created to extend the First Marine Division’s operating area to include the Phu Bai combat base. While assigned to the Task Force, Auel continued some of the same tasks that he had engaged in while assigned to the regiment, including visiting Combined Action Platoons and assisting the local population in ways consistent with his understanding of the Personal Response Program. Auel partnered with a group of
American Roman Catholic Sisters representing the Civilian Organization of
Redevelopment Support, headquartered in Saigon. These women religious cared for
adults and children in need. Auel developed a strong respect for these women, noting
that they were extremely courageous during the Tet offensive.23

Hue City fell within Task Force X-Ray’s area of operation and was the site of
twenty-six days of intense conflict. During this time, Auel assisted in the movement of
dead and wounded from a forward aid station in Hue City to a hastily erected inflatable
mobile army surgical unit at Phu Bai, where Auel assisted in the triage process. Auel
asserted that the tireless devotion of the medical personnel, particularly in this time of
intense conflict, personified everything that he held most dear in his faith.

Some of the Marine units being moved into the fighting in Hue City passed
through Phu Bai. One such unit and their chaplain, Eli Takesian, moved into Phu Bai on
Sunday, February 4, 1968.24 They expected to spend the night and move into the fighting
the next day. That evening Chaplain Auel asked Chaplain Takesian to join him in
leading a “free service” for those Marines who wished to participate.25 Auel offered this
weekly event in the barn-like chapel in Phu Bai and conducted it in the style of a Baptist
Sunday evening service where congregants sang hymns and read Scriptures of their
choosing, and all were invited to offer prayers aloud as they wished. Auel invited
Takesian to preach. Auel told Takesian that he expected less than one hundred personnel

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23 Auel, PTSD Journal, 27, NCSCA. The Tet offensive began at the end of January 1968 and continued
through the month of February.

24 While Takesian indicates that his unit was in Phu Bai on Sunday, February 4, 1968, Auel later recalled
the night they shared in worship being “mid-week.”

and that the service would need to be less than forty-five minutes in length as they were vulnerable to rocket attack.26

   It was raining and cold as some forty personnel gathered in the chapel. Auel left the double doors of the facility open as the service began, permitting those inside to hear the rain and the clanging of entrenchment tools as Marines dug holes in which to sleep. They began the service with a period of hymn singing with Marines calling out the page number of the hymns they wanted to sing.

   The request came for the group to sing a gospel hymn unfamiliar to the Lutheran Auel, “Leaning on the Everlasting Arms.” As the group sang, more Marines began to trickle into the chapel. When they finished the song, one Marine quietly asked if they might sing it again. They did. Then a Marine began leading the group in singing the song antiphonally, as there were now people in the room from other faith traditions and those who professed no faith, but were drawn by the singing or the respite from the rain. Auel and Takesian were so moved by the emotionally charged atmosphere that they stopped singing. By the time those assembled stopped singing some two hours later, Takesian estimated there were nearly a thousand Marines in the chapel. They filled the pews, stood along the walls and kept coming in until they stood shoulder-to-shoulder in the chancel.

   Given their vulnerability and the length of the service already, Takesian expected that Auel would simply close the gathering with prayer. Instead, Auel announced that Takesian would read the Scripture and offer the message. Using religious language that
he acknowledged foreign to him, the Presbyterian Takesian later recalled “‘something’ possess(ing) him.”27 He dispensed with the text he had chosen and discarded his prepared sermon, instead turning to the third chapter of John. From there he read of Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus, focusing on the words of the eighth verse: “The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit.”28 Takesian recalled telling Marines that he could feel God’s spirit passing through them, “touching each of (them) in an urgent way.”29

When he finished the message Takesian took his seat, expecting Auel to offer the benediction. Instead Auel asked for a show of hands of those who wanted to receive communion. Hundreds of hands went up in the air and Auel invited them to sing while he went and prepared the elements. When Auel returned he and Takesian celebrated the sacrament together. After receiving the elements, the congregants began filing out, silently returning to dig their foxholes and wait for morning. The service concluded some three and a half hours after it began.

Auel and Takesian commented to one another that time seemed suspended that evening. The next morning most of the congregation joined the fight to retake the Citadel in Hue City. Over one hundred of these Marines were killed in the days to come, with some three hundred fifty wounded. Takesian later wrote that these Marines,


29 Eli Takesian, Interview by Paul Zarbock and David White.
“participated in a special act of ‘communion.’ Ours was a common lot, a common adversity, and a common union (communion). The wounds of many were the wounds of all. The elements present were not bread and wine but, rather, broken bodies and shed blood. Many who survived will never again be the same, for they have come to know the bitterness of mankind's alienation … the enormous cost of sacrifice … the futility of war … and the absolute need for reconciliation.”

While Takesian moved into Hue City with his battalion, Auel continued assisting the movement of dead and wounded from the city to the hospital unit in Phu Bai. Auel later recalled one particularly harrowing run in a truck filled with severely wounded personnel and a small contingent of armed sailors and Marines. Forced to make a detour because of the destruction of a bridge on their route, they headed through a Buddhist cemetery where they confronted a much larger force of North Vietnamese soldiers. Unable to continue, Auel and the corpsmen moved the wounded to cover behind a large burial mound and continued treatment. The able-bodied among their group did their best to form a defensive perimeter. They were ultimately aided when a group of American soldiers in a large “6x6” truck with a top-mounted .50 caliber machine gun made the same detour and pushed back the North Vietnamese forces.

Shortly after the intense fighting of the Tet offensive ceased, Auel responded to a request from the Chief of Chaplains’ office to report on those chaplains who had been wounded or killed in action in and around Hue City. Auel indicated in his report that two chaplains, including Father Lyons, had been injured, and one killed. The injured chaplains received treatment and returned to duty within a matter of weeks. Likely of particular interest to the Chief’s office, however, was Auel’s analysis of the circumstances that led to the death of Army Chaplain Art McGonigal. Officially

30 Eli Takesian, End of Two Tours Report, undated, NCSCA.
assigned to the Military Advisory Command, McGonigal was operating with a Marine battalion in Hue City on the day of his death.

After addressing McGonigal’s death, Auel commented clearly on the work of those chaplains in the area who were not harmed. He expressed: “Every chaplain in Hue was for many days in the midst of heavy fighting. Each, daily, ministered to men in situations in which he was under small arms or mortar attack. And each gave of himself selflessly, along with the combat troops whom they served. Each was, indeed, a ‘faithful steward.’”

To some degree, Auel argued, the laws of chance dictated who was wounded and was not. No one chaplain was more exposed to danger than another, with, however, the exception of Chaplain McGonigal.

In discussing the death of Chaplain McGonigal, Auel diplomatically sidestepped one of the essential issues facing chaplains. There is a fine line between being where one should be and where one should not. As noncombatants, chaplains must decide how and where to put those who are tasked with protection in additional danger when serving with small units in combat situations. Eli Takiesian, one of the chaplains who was uninjured at Hue City later wrote that as a general “rule of thumb” during the most intense combat situations chaplains should enter “combat on battalion-sized operations only, with the Alpha Command Group.”

He noted that while appropriate to spend time moving among rifle companies, he generally returned at night to the Alpha Command Group sleeping near the Command Post or Battalion Aid Station. Although there can be no hard

31 Carl Auel, Chaplains – WIA & KIA, 01 March 1968, 2, NCSCA.
and fast answer because of the dynamic nature of combat, there is a certain sense that some chaplains proved prudent, and others did not. McGonigal did not.

Aloysius McGonigal was a Roman Catholic Jesuit who was working on a PhD in physics when he entered the Army’s chaplain corps for a second time in 1966. McGonigal was known to roam throughout the I Corps area, embracing the “area coverage” model of chaplaincy. His practice was to visit troops in the field, particularly those in combat. One reporter noted that on the day he died, McGonigal “had no business being there. But the infantrymen he loved were being killed before the battlements of Hue’s imperial Citadel and the Rev. Aloysius P. McGonigal wanted to go… He practically fought his way to the battlefield.” In an article on McGonigal’s death, Associated Press reporter George McArthur quoted a sergeant who knew the chaplain well, “‘He wanted to be in the field; that was all he wanted… Saying Mass at headquarters wasn't his idea of his job.’”

The official Army history noted that at the time of his death on February 17, 1968 McGonigal was “‘with a unit that was not his own in a battle he could have missed.’”

The deaths of chaplains like Capodanno and McGonigal often engendered a sense of reverence and respect from the troops, perhaps because of the fearlessness and selflessness displayed by these chaplains. For some, the fact that they were Christian clergyman layered their deaths with a religious interpretation of the sacrificial nature of

33 McGonigal had served in Korea from 1961 to 1963.
34 Bergsma, Chaplains with Marines in Vietnam, 161.
36 Bergsma, Chaplains with Marines in Vietnam, 161.
their deaths as Christ-like in nature. There is also a sense of the confirmation of their masculinity in their willingness to die. And yet, their deaths placed greater responsibilities on their fellow clergy and were not universally respected. In his comments on McGonigal’s death, Auel seemed acutely aware of this tension and wrote with his characteristic grace. Although Auel supported McGonigal’s receiving a posthumous Silver Star, he was critical of McGonigal’s choices the day of his death. In fact, Auel believed that McGonigal acted “contrary” to how an experienced combat chaplain should have behaved. Auel concluded that whatever may have been said about McGonigal’s lack of “good judgment” regarding his movements the day of his death, “the fact remains that he was true to himself.” And that, Auel concluded, was “sufficient.”

Other chaplains were far less gracious toward McGonigal. In a letter that Chaplain Takiesian wrote to the Chief, he acknowledged that McGonigal was admired by the troops and was a “‘terrific guy.’” He was also, Takiesian noted, “stubborn and careless, exercising poor judgment at times.” Perhaps in an effort to cover himself, as he was the Regimental Chaplain to whom McGonigal would have some collegial responsibility, Takiesian informed the Chief that he had instructed McGonigal to not “go looking for trouble,” to refrain from carrying a sidearm, to make sure that the officers in command of the units he was going to visit were aware of his movements, to travel with

37 Auel, Chaplains – WIA & KIA, NCSCA.
39 Ibid.
someone, and in the heat of battle to position himself in the forward Battalion Aid Station, where casualties would be brought.\textsuperscript{40}

In describing the circumstances of McGonigal’s death, Takiesan noted that he left the battalion command post alone, armed with a pistol and without informing anyone where he was headed. Several hours later, the command post moved forward. Troops were sent out to look for McGonigal to let him know of the movement. Takiesian described that night as particularly difficult as the left flank of the battalion was exposed and NVA troops were breaching the walls of the Citadel. In order to sustain the Marines, Navy gunships were firing shells all around their positions throughout the night. The next morning, McGonigal’s body was found near the previous location of the command post. He was killed when shrapnel entered his body through the back of his neck and lodged in his brain. A Navy doctor determined McGonigal was killed as a result of naval gunfire.

Precipitated by the intense fighting of the Tet offensive and the number of injuries sustained by chaplains early 1968, the Chief of Chaplains requested that chaplains report on morale.\textsuperscript{41} In his response to the Chief, Auel said that he thought questioning the troops’ morale following Tet was tantamount to asking what the individual chaplains’ morale was after the offensive. Each chaplain had exposure to only a few men, and those men were generally in some state of personal crisis. Auel argued that a “relatively complex socio-psychological study” would be required to answer the question as posed,

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{41} Bergsma, \textit{Chaplains with Marines in Vietnam}, 161. Bergsma reports that by April 1968, 27 chaplains had been wounded and by the end of the war 35 would wear the Purple Heart, as compared to 15 in the Korean conflict.
thus he offered only his “impression” regarding morale.\textsuperscript{42} His impression was “that Marines in general came away from Hue City with the obvious belief that the people of the city had aided the enemy either actively or passively during what was a major preparatory period. If this is an accurate reflection, the effects of this, if any, are yet to be seen.”\textsuperscript{43} He concluded that morale is as varied as there are individuals.

Carl Auel left Vietnam in September 1968 with a “broken heart” acknowledging that part of him would always remain there, leaving him empty.\textsuperscript{44} He hoped, however, “somehow those whose husbands, whose fathers, whose sons died here—that somehow—they might know that there were many of us who shared their tears.”\textsuperscript{45}

Although he and Auel were both born in 1930, William E. “Bill” Thompson, Jr. represented one of the “new” chaplains in the Corps when he entered the Navy. Designated a Lieutenant Junior Grade, the lowest rank for a chaplain, Thompson had no prior military service or experience as a chaplain, nor had he traveled abroad before he reported to Chaplains School in April 1967. Having lived most of his life in southern Virginia, Thompson’s image of Navy life was shaped by the Navy’s sprawling port in Norfolk. Assuming assignment in Norfolk, Thompson had little framework within which to process what RLT 26 meant when Carl Auel issued him orders there in summer 1967.

\textsuperscript{42} Auel, Chaplains – WIA & KIA, NCSCA.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{44} Carl Auel, PTSD Journal, Appendix B, End of Tour Report, NCSCA.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
Bill was born on December 22, 1930 in Norfolk, Virginia. He lived with his father’s family in Suffolk, Virginia after his parent’s divorce when he was about five years old. He grew up surrounded by doting adults—his paternal grandparents, two aunts, and later, an uncle. His grandfather, a retired Baptist pastor, delivered the local newspaper. Bill spent childhood afternoons folding newspapers and accompanying him on the route. The reward for his efforts was a ritual stop at Jimmy’s Place for a hot dog at the end of the route.

His grandfather died when Bill was 11. By the time of his grandfather’s death, however, one of his aunts had married and her husband became the predominant father figure in his life. Their family life revolved around First Baptist Church and school activities. Bill made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ and was baptized into the church around the age of 12. As a high school junior he attended a local religious revival and committed in his heart to pursuing full-time Christian ministry.

Bill credited the childhood experience of moving from the poorer side of town to a more affluent area for giving him the skills, perspective and confidence to lead others. This strength enabled him to participate in numerous extracurricular activities. He particularly enjoyed playing baseball and serving as president of Suffolk High School’s three hundred-member student body. Bill also held several after school jobs including working at his uncle’s gas station. Involved in so many activities that he was in danger of

46 William E. Thompson, Jr., Interviews by author, 04 and 05 May 2011, Hampton, Virginia, transcripts in possession of author. Transcripts were submitted to the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress as part of the Veterans History Project. These transcripts and his responses to the surveys are the sources used in relating his life history. Other than verifying Thompson’s birth, educational, and service history in Vol. VII of the History of the Chaplains Corps no other sources were used in relating his life history.
failing English, Bill heeded his teacher’s advice to pay attention to his schoolwork and graduated in 1948.

Not thinking he had the funds to attend college, Bill took a job in a peanut factory immediately after graduation. After one season there he was able to land a job at the post office, which, in his grandmother’s eyes, was a highly coveted position. After two and a half years as a postal worker he realized that he was not fulfilling the commitment he had made to full-time Christian service. Not having an entirely clear direction in mind, Bill resigned from the post office and started school at Chowan junior college. He was then able to move on to Wake Forest University, where he graduated with a degree in English and minors in philosophy and math. Two weeks after graduating he married his girlfriend Betty and they moved to Louisville, Kentucky where Bill enrolled at Southern Baptist Seminary. Both Bill and Betty sought employment, with Betty experiencing better success when the school’s employment office learned she had a degree in sociology. They referred her to the local hospital where she obtained a job as a social worker. Bill spent the summer shining floors at the school.

During the last two of four years at the seminary, Thompson served as pastor of a mission church. An outgrowth of Broadway Baptist Church, an all-white congregation, the mission, Sunshine Chapel, was integrated. Thompson learned to navigate issues of race and poverty when working at Sunshine Chapel. Thompson recalled working with one white volunteer who initially refused to drive black children in her car to a sporting event. However, several days later but before the event, she came back to Thompson and
said she had worked it out, and was now able to drive all the children, regardless of race, to the activity.

Located near an area of Louisville known as Grady’s Dump, the mission served a predominantly poor community. When Thompson observed members of the chapel picking through the dump for scraps of food, he didn’t know whether to protect their pride by pretending he didn’t see or helping them in their search. Choosing to protect their pride, he developed a deep respect for those on society’s margins.

After receiving both a Bachelor of Divinity degree in 1957 and a Master’s degree in 1958, Thompson accepted a call to serve as the first full-time pastor of Spout Springs Baptist Church in a rural community of the same name near Lynchburg. Two and a half years later he and his family moved on to Zoar Baptist Church, in Deltaville, Virginia. Located in an idyllic area at the mouth of the Rappahannock River near the Chesapeake Bay, the church grew under Thompson’s leadership. Although the language may not have been used at that time, Thompson was becoming something of a new church start pastor. Two years later he accepted the challenge of serving as the founding pastor of Memorial Baptist Church in Staunton, Virginia. An outgrowth of Staunton’s First Baptist Church, Memorial Church started with eighty-five people. Within a year Thompson oversaw construction of the community’s first building. He described the experience as one of constantly reining in a strong team of horses who wanted to run so fast they were bound to stumble. As he did at all the churches he served, Thompson enjoyed his ministry at Staunton, serving over five years.
Two factors drove Thompson to consider military chaplaincy. First, he and his wife Betty observed that many of the young people in their community fell away from the church as they matured into adulthood. In part because it was hard to find work in Staunton, a community of some 40,000 people at the time, many young people joined the military or went away to college after they graduated from high school. Losing connection with these young people frustrated the Thompsons leading them to discuss how they might help maintain a connection.

With that mindset, Thompson attended the May 1966 Southern Baptist Convention in Detroit where Chief of Chaplains James Kelly was a guest speaker. Kelly spoke of the Navy’s need for chaplains to minister to the nation’s young sailors. Kelly’s appeal spoke to Thompson and he applied to enter active duty, believing that he lost nothing if his application was denied.

Even though he had never regularly attended drill, to fulfill his military obligation Thompson had joined the naval reserve after he graduated high school. In addition to growing up in a naval community, Thompson’s father, a cab driver in Norfolk, influenced his choice of military service. Occasionally riding with his father when he picked up fares, Thompson observed that his father always treated enlisted men, particularly Chief Petty Officers, better than he treated officers, telling his son that it was the Chiefs who ran the Navy. About to experience the truth or falsity of naval maxims for himself, Thompson’s application for active duty chaplaincy was approved.

When he arrived at the Chaplains School in April 1967 no one on the staff could identify where RLT 26 was stationed. Told that RLT was an acronym for a Marine
Corps Regimental Landing Team and eventually informed that the unit was overseas, Thompson broke the news to his wife and three small children that he was headed for a thirteen month unaccompanied tour in Vietnam. Admittedly not well versed in the political aspects of the war, Thompson was ready to minister to the troops. He reflected that if someone had asked him at the time how he felt about the war he wouldn’t have had a good answer although he generally would have supported the war because he wanted to be supportive of the government. Regardless of whatever feelings he developed about the war and learned of the political situation in Vietnam, everything proved secondary to his commitment to the young people in uniform.

After completing Chaplains School Thompson and four others from his class also assigned to Marine units reported to Camp Pendleton for pre-embarkation training. He recalled the training being led by a Marine Sergeant who didn’t always quite know what to do with a group of chaplains. One day, for example, the sergeant invited the chaplains to join Marines and corpsmen in crawling under barbed wire as machine gun fire was directed over their heads. The chaplains declined. Thompson also remembered a survival skills lecture in which a old Marine held a live rabbit he called “Molly” in front of the assembled group. Saying that Molly would be one of their best friends in the jungle, he broke its neck and skinned it with his bare hands in a matter of seconds. Several in the audience passed out. Although Thompson never crawled under barbed wire or skinned a rabbit, he was grateful for much of the training at Camp Pendleton because it gave him some familiarity with the Marine Corps and Marines.

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47 William E. Thompson, Jr., Interview by author, 04 May 2011.

48 Ibid.
Thompson and his classmates were sent from California to Okinawa before proceeding to their units in Vietnam. Upon arriving in Okinawa Thompson learned that his orders had been changed. Instead of serving with RLT 26, Thompson was assigned to the Ninth Motor Transport battalion in Dong Ha, about ten miles south of the demilitarized zone (DMZ). Thompson quickly learned some of the challenges of his role.

Within weeks of arriving in Dong Ha, the Executive Officer (XO) of the battalion approached Thompson and asked him to intervene with the verbally abusive Commanding Officer (CO) on behalf of the staff. Thompson believed that he was beginning to form a strong relationship with his senior as they shared the Baptist faith and the commander had asked him to visit with him regularly for prayer. Thompson also knew that relationships among the staff were difficult, and that the source of the difficulty was the CO. Conscious of his inexperience but wanting to help the situation Thompson met with the commander and expressed that his staff was near mutiny. Hopeful that there might be a positive resolution because of the commander’s willingness to confess his bad behavior to Thompson and the staff, all were disappointed when he resumed his verbal abuse within a couple of weeks. Thompson counted this interaction as a painful but significant learning experience.

There were other important lessons during Thompson’s first weeks in Vietnam. Although situated in a rear area, the base occasionally came under mortar attack. When an attack occurred personnel were directed to seek shelter in a large bunker. Several times Thompson mistook outgoing U.S. artillery fire for incoming mortars, waking his
tent mates with shouts of “‘incoming, incoming’” only to be told “‘Ah, Chaplain, that’s not incoming, that’s outgoing.’”

Thompson also learned that Marines get things done in a variety of ways. The senior enlisted man in the unit told Thompson that the Marines were tired of having worship services in the mess hall and wanted a chapel. Thompson knew that all plywood had been designated for the remote outpost Con Thien as it was coming under regular attack. The Sergeant Major asked Thompson to collect an offering on Sunday and said if he could raise $100, the unit would have a chapel. Thompson turned over $110 to the Sergeant Major who used it to buy a case of Scotch for a Seabee unit who “found” a truck-load of plywood. The chapel was constructed by Christmas 1967.

Just as he was getting comfortable with men in the unit and knew which way to go when they came under fire, Thompson was transferred temporarily to a unit near Quang Tri. He spent Christmas Eve at the demilitarized zone. There was a twenty-four hour unofficial truce--if you don’t shoot, we won’t shoot. Much to Thompson’s delight, Marines spontaneously blacked out ammunition boxes and made life-sized silhouettes of camels and all the trappings of a manger scene. They built their own nativity scene and gathered around it as Thompson led them in worship. Because of the cease-fire, virtually everyone nearby was able to attend the service. It was for Thompson, the most moving service of his time in Vietnam. It amazed him that they could pull this off in an intensely hostile combat zone.

In early January Thompson was transferred to an infantry battalion strung along the DMZ with a central outpost identified as A-3. He would remain there for the next

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49 Thompson, Jr., Interview by author, 04 May 2011.
seven months. Consisting of a series of bunkers, the area was accessible only by
helicopter. He remembered some Marines on the helicopter laughing, and others crying,
as they were being flown in. After disembarking and asking for directions to where the
Chaplain stayed, Thompson began making his way through deep mud. Arriving at his
destination he pushed open the bunker door and asked if he was in the right place. When
someone called him in Thompson, unable to lift his boots, fell face forward into the
muck. It was an appropriate introduction to A-3.

The daily routine at A-3 included being shelled from the North Vietnamese side
of the DMZ. Typically two shots would be fired followed by silence and then the drone
of an aircraft from Da Nang heading north to bomb the suspected gun site. Patrols were
routinely sent out east and west along the line of demarcation. Frustrated that they could
not go after their attackers some one hundred feet away on the other side of the DMZ, the
Marines felt that they were fighting an unseen enemy. Thompson cheered with his
Marines on the frequent occasions when an American aircraft appeared spraying Agent
Orange hoping to expose the NVA.

At least once a month Thompson led a memorial service. Marines gathered
alongside u-shaped trenches helmets on, rifles at their sides. Thompson stood at the open
end of the trench. The first time or two he took his helmet off as a sign of respect. He
learned to keep his helmet on as each month they remembered twenty-five to thirty, and
sometimes more, Marines.

During his time along the DMZ there was no avoiding the reality of death, or each
one’s mortality. Thompson spent most of his time simply talking to Marines. Whenever

50 Thompson was assigned to the 3rd Battalion, 3rd Regiment.
possible, and almost always in small groups of ten or less, he would offer worship. One
time as Thompson was leading worship in a bunker a rocket hit nearby. He did not have
his helmet on and in the dusty aftermath of the strike he reached down to pick it up. He
felt a warm substance on the back of his head and thought to himself that he had just
earned a cheap Purple Heart. When he touched his neck he realized that the candles he
had put on ammunition boxes for their time of worship had fallen over and wax, not
blood, was on his neck. As they were close to the end what he had prepared Thompson
offered the benediction and closed the service. No one left. One Marine asked if he had
another sermon. Thompson led the group in prayer, read another Scripture, and talked a
bit about the passage. Once again he concluded the service and no one left. Finally, one
man asked if they had to leave and Thompson told him they did because if they didn’t
someone would soon come looking for them.

Occasionally Thompson was airlifted to the location of other battalion elements in
order to visit with Marines and offer worship. He found that the best location to gather
together for worship was one of the large, house-sized craters created by the 2,000 pound
bombs dropped by B-52s. The willingness of Marines to cycle through the crater, ten to
twelve at a time, relieving one another in the trenches amazed Thompson. Faced with
constant threat of death, his preaching crystallized from perhaps fifteen topics to one or
two, always focusing on life. He took two books to Vietnam – a Bible and a
concordance, but he came to a place where he only preached from the writings of Paul.
He encouraged Marines not to let their worry for tomorrow interfere with the necessity of
today. We might die tomorrow, he said, but that was beyond their control except insofar
as they could use their training to stay alive. Thompson became extremely grateful for the training of Marines as it kept him and those who survived alive.

Thompson joined a field operation usually once a month. Generally lasting ten to fourteen days the battalion patrolled a roughly ten square mile area along the DMZ stretching all the way to the coast. During the operations Thompson stayed with the doctor and corpsmen, assisting them in caring for the wounded, dying, and dead. The best day Thompson had while in Vietnam was returning from a fifteen or sixteen day operation. It was also his worst.

The unit had been promised that a truck would meet them on a road and take them to a rear area where they could have a steak dinner, a hot shower, and a fresh uniform. Walking behind the six foot five company commander, the five foot eight Thompson struggled to keep up, buoyed by the thought of all the good things that awaited them. They were picked up at the rendezvous point taken to Camp Evans, an Army encampment, where they had their steaks and showers. After dinner several of the Marines got into a verbal altercation with some soldiers about which service was better – the Army or the Marines. Too much alcohol had been consumed and one of the Marines pulled the pin on a grenade and tossed it into the soldier’s tent. Thompson never knew if anyone was killed, but there were multiple severe injuries.\footnote{Thompson shared that he saw little evidence of drug or alcohol abuse during his tour. He believed that given the constant danger their unit faced Marines understood that being impaired threatened their safety. He shared that one young man came to him concerning a drug charge, but that he was the exception rather than the rule. He believed that rear units tended to encounter such problems.} The Marine was taken into custody and Thompson never saw him again. The enraged company commander gathered his Marines and they left as quickly as possible.
On April 3, 1968 the battalion experienced a high volume of contact. Several Marines were killed including one who was walking out of the perimeter wire when one of the hand grenades attached to his belt went off, cutting his body in half. It was after this awful day that the unit received word that Martin Luther King had been assassinated. Although Thompson didn’t recall the percentage of Marines in his unit who were black, he believed that the percentage was high. He recalled emotions running very high, with many of the black Marines questioning, “What fools we are to be here defending these people, the Vietnamese people that we don’t even know. We ought to be back home defending our people from whatever might happen. Maybe if we had been home defending Martin Luther King, this would not, could not, have happened.” There was an extremely high level of frustration and anger with some willing to say, “Here, take my rifle, take my hat, take my helmet, all I want is a ticket back home.”

Thompson shared their frustration. He had a deep appreciation for King’s work and the changes that were taking place in America, particularly because of his work navigating the relationship between a white congregation and a black one in Louisville. He and the battalion commander feared that there might be some kind of hostilities between black and white Marines, but it did not materialize. The anger black Marines felt seemed to be directed toward an unidentifiable somebody back home. Thompson listened as Marines vented their anger at a devastating situation so far away.

Fear was a constant companion. One young Marine who had just arrived in the area that morning came looking for the Chaplain that night. Due to leave with two companies on a field operation the next day he was trembling badly, insisting that he

52 Thompson, Jr., Interview by author, 04 May 2011.
couldn’t go. Thompson reassured him that he would be with experienced Marines who knew what they were doing. He needed to follow their example. He continued to insist that he couldn’t go until Thompson said that he and the battalion’s physician would be going with them. The young man stood at attention and said, “Chaplain, if you can go, I can go.”

He went and lived through that operation.

Two weeks before his scheduled August 1968 departure from Vietnam Thompson was ordered to division headquarters at Phu Bai. Not sure why he had been summoned, he was relieved when he was given a set of orders indicating that he was at that moment the Assistant Division Chaplain. He gratefully spent his last days in Vietnam attending a few meetings and waiting to go home. Forty pounds lighter and combat weary he joined troops in shouting joyfully when their aircraft went wheels up leaving Da Nang.

Chief Kelly made his fourth annual Christmas and Hanukkah visit to Vietnam in December 1968. After a violent and tumultuous year both at home and in Vietnam Kelly acknowledged upon his return that more and more people, in and out of the service, were questioning the U.S. presence in Vietnam. Refusing to abandon his moral support of the war, in public statements and articles he answered the question, “Should we be there?” Unlike Kelly, for the chaplains with their Marines immersed in the daily fears and threats of the Vietnam conflict at its height, the most immediate questions focused instead on surviving each day, through finding hope and solidarity – in Buddhist children singing Christmas carols, in Marines spontaneously singing antiphonal variations of “Leaning on the Everlasting Arms,” in a Scotch-bartered plywood chapel constructed in time for

53 William E. Thompson, Jr., Interview by author, 05 May 2011.
Christmas celebrations, or in services held in house-sized craters created by 2,000 pound bombs dropped from B-52s.
Chapter 6
Ministry in the Post-Tet Era, 1969-1972

Easing Out of Vietnam and In to a New Era

Timed to begin during a truce scheduled for the Lunar New Year celebration known as Tet at the end of January 1968, the major offensive launched by the North Vietnamese Army and National Liberation Front (NLF) forces seized numerous provincial capitals and major urban areas throughout the South. Intended to rally South Vietnamese support as well as to destroy the South’s military potential, the Tet Offensive proved costly to everyone involved. Some 45,000 North Vietnamese and NLF troops were killed as American and South Vietnamese forces repelled the widespread attacks. Roughly 4,500 ARVN soldiers and American military personnel died, nearly 15,000 were injured, and almost 600 went missing. Vietnamese civilians caught up in the intense fighting lost the most. 14,000 died, some 24,000 were wounded and some 630,000 became displaced as a result of the destruction of large swaths of the South’s metropolitan centers. 2

Because of the disparity in the numbers of forces killed and the failure of the South Vietnamese public to rally behind the communist forces, the American leadership declared Tet a military victory. However, the Tet Offensive revealed, if it did not produce, a shift in American popular opinion that changed U.S. policy such that an


2 Bonds, The Vietnam War, 151.
overall military “victory” in Vietnam would no longer be the goal. For Americans, both at home and in Vietnam, Tet became a major turning point in the war.

An early sign of this turning point was a nationally televised presidential address on March 31. President Lyndon Johnson renewed his call for peace talks that he had proposed the previous summer. He announced that in an act of good faith the United States was “reducing – substantially reducing – the present level of hostilities” by stopping all bombing of North Vietnam that did not directly threaten American and allied forces near the demilitarized zone. The President called upon Ho Chi Minh to come to the bargaining table so that a negotiated peace might be achieved. Failing that, American resolve to defeat the communists on the field of battle remained firm. President Johnson announced that 11,000 additional Marines and airborne troops had been sent to Vietnam in response to Tet, and that 13,500 more support troops would follow. He also asserted that the South Vietnamese government had strengthened in the years since American involvement began and that their Army was proving increasingly capable of taking the fight to the enemy. Johnson’s speech heralded what would come to be known as the “Vietnamization” of the war.

Johnson concluded his speech by stating that U.S. strength rested not in military might or financial wealth, but in “the unity of our people.” Citing the Scriptural truth that a divided house cannot stand, the President acknowledged that the American house

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4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.
was divided. In the interests of not permitting the presidency to become mired in partisanship, he would not seek a second term in office. Johnson said:

“With America’s sons in the fields far away, with America’s future under challenge right here at home, with our hopes and the world’s hopes for peace in the balance every day, I do not believe that I should devote an hour or a day of my time to any personal partisan causes or to any duties other than the awesome duties of this office – the Presidency of your country.

Accordingly, I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President.

But let men everywhere know, however, that a strong, a confident, and a vigilant American stands ready tonight to seek an honorable peace – and stands ready tonight to defend an honored cause—whatever the price, whatever the burden, whatever the sacrifice that duty may require.”

As the President confronted divisiveness at home, Chief of Chaplains James Kelly was trying to discern the impact of the Tet Offensive on the morale of the troops in the fields far away as well as that of the chaplains who served them. Chaplain Jim Killeen, the senior Navy chaplain in Vietnam at the time, received a letter from the Chief dated March 20 requesting that he collect reports from chaplains concerning morale following Tet. Kelly wanted to draw information from these responses for use in an upcoming communication. Killeen forwarded Kelly nearly thirty pages of responses.

Several of those chaplains serving with Marines noted that they had witnessed little or no effect of Tet upon morale. David J. Williams, chaplain with a reconnaissance battalion observed, “This enemy action has not perceptibly altered the morale in our unit. More enemy has been sighted in course of past two months.”

Cecil McFarland, then

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6 Ibid.

7 David J. Williams, Memorandum from 1st Reconnaissance Battalion Chaplain to First Marine Division Chaplain, 29 March 1968, NCSCA.
serving on the staff of the First Division Chaplain, commented, “There has been no appreciable effort (sic) on the morale of our service personnel because of the Tet offensive.”

Other chaplains noted that the morale of Marines improved as a result of the offensive because of their ability to prevail against an enemy when that enemy clearly presented itself. Although he concluded that there was no appreciable impact on morale, Chaplain McFarland observed that most of the Marines were:

“heartened by the opportunity to wage a conventional type warfare. Men were strengthened by the band of common danger and the adventure of fighting recognized and well trained enemy forces. Because of the defeat of the enemy in the Da Nang area the morale has been extremely high since the Tet offensive. We all realize that the NVA could infiltrate again but the men are confident that our forces are superior in training, equipment and dedication.”

Adelberta Von Almen, chaplain with the 11th Marine Regiment, noted “morale seemed to build when it was evident that an opportunity to stand and fight was now present rather than to sweep for mines and anticipate boobytraps.” Elden Luffman, Carl Auel’s successor with the First Regiment near Hue, reported that morale was quite high due to “sustained contact” and a high kill ratio. Luffman added that many of the wounded resisted evacuation, as they wanted to remain in the fight.

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8 C.E. McFarland, Memorandum to First Marine Division Chaplain, 30 March 1968, NCSCA.
9 Ibid.
10 A.M. Von Almen, Memorandum from 11th Marines Regimental Chaplain to First Marine Division Chaplain, undated, NCSCA.
11 Elden Luffman, Memorandum from Regimental Chaplain to First Marine Division Chaplain, 27 March 1968, 1, NCSCA.
Luffman and others noted, however, that the Offensive seemed to cut both ways. On the one hand, morale was high as the Marines were able to do what they were trained to do - engage an enemy in combat. On the other hand, there was shock and dismay that the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and the Viet Cong had been able to infiltrate areas behind their lines so quickly and so thoroughly. Chaplain McFarland allowed that the troops were “surprised” by the size of the operation.\textsuperscript{12} Chaplain Von Almen shared “Initially there was a shock to know that there were so many NVA and NLF in areas to make a sweeping attack on the whole of South Vietnam.”\textsuperscript{13} Even the Division Chaplain, Captain John Keeley, acknowledged that his morale was “jolted” by the action.\textsuperscript{14} Keeley argued that, although the division staff suspected an attack in conjunction with Tet, the ability of the NLF to penetrate headquarters areas and to get behind the presumed line that Marines held, as well as that local Vietnamese who worked for American forces were now exposed as NLF partisans, surprised him. Elden Luffman wrote that one outcome of the attack was the lowering of regard for the Vietnamese people writ large in the minds of Marines. Luffman continued:

“It is difficult for the troops to comprehend why they should be fighting, undergoing hardships, giving their lives for a people who will allow the enemy into a city and never lift a hand or say a word. They see hundreds of young Vietnamese men riding around on their motorscooters and milling around the university and wonder why these Vietnamese should have privileges that the American troops have had to give up.”\textsuperscript{15}

Luffman concluded his comments on morale by observing that the question, “What are

\textsuperscript{12} McFarland, Memorandum, NCSCA.

\textsuperscript{13} Von Almen, Memorandum, NCSCA.

\textsuperscript{14} John A Keeley, Memorandum to Chief of Chaplains, 31 March 1968, NCSCA.

\textsuperscript{15} Luffman, Memorandum, NCSCA.
we doing here?” was being asked more frequently in the aftermath of Tet.16

In an April 1969 article entitled “Should We Be There?” Chief of Chaplains James Kelly argued that the ideals of unity and brotherhood required the active opposition to any “political philosophy or social system which oppresses or degrades the human spirit.”17 Kelly believed the U.S. had a moral obligation to “actively promote human value, dignity and freedom” and that the American military was doing that in Vietnam.18 Arguing that the war had limited objectives as outlined in official policy, Kelly pleaded for understanding those goals and uniting behind them. During his five years of service as Chief, Kelly never wavered in his staunch support of the American effort in Vietnam.

In the year following the President’s speech, the United States continued to commit large numbers of troops to the conflict. Although March 1969 saw the highest levels of American troops in Vietnam with some 545,000 personnel on the ground, the numbers of combat troops, including Marines, was beginning to decline.19 By August over 8,000 Marines had left the country, and by the end of the year another 18,500 had been moved elsewhere.20 A corresponding decline in the numbers of chaplains serving in Vietnam occurred as well. By January 1970, the total number of Navy chaplains in Vietnam stood at 92. The following January 33 chaplains remained in country with

16 Luffman, Memorandum, NCSCA.
17 James W. Kelly, “Should We Be There?” in Leatherneck: Magazine of the Marines, April 1969, 32.
18 Kelly, “Should We Be There?,” page not known.
19 Bergsma, Chaplains with Marines in Vietnam, 177.
20 Bergsma, Chaplains with Marines in Vietnam, 182.
Marine elements. In May 1971, the last Navy chaplain serving with a Marine infantry unit left the country. By June, chaplains serving supporting units left as well. The remaining Marine elements engaged in Vietnam were air components and were by mid-1972 located outside Vietnam.

As the numbers of chaplains with Marines in country declined, individual chaplains were more likely to be moved from unit to unit. The pattern of serving roughly six months with a medical or supporting unit, followed by six months with an infantry element changed. Father Bernard J. Grochowski, for example, arrived in Vietnam in late June 1969 and served with six different units before departing in January 1971 after an eighteen-month tour.

In the years following Tet chaplains serving with Marines would encounter direct combat situations less frequently, although the possibility of engagement with the enemy always remained and largely depended upon where, when, and with which element one served. Bryant R Nobles, Jr., a forty-two year old Southern Baptist pastor and former Army sergeant, arrived in country in August 1969. He was assigned to an infantry battalion one month before its scheduled redeployment; the unit came under attack at midnight on September 17. Nobles, who was sleeping near a foxhole he had dug that day when the attack began, immediately made use of it and was joined by the Commanding Officer and his radio operator. When the firefight ended five hours later, 25 Marines

21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
were dead and 47 wounded. Throughout the night Chaplain Nobles moved among Marines, providing first aid, speaking words of encouragement, and praying. The next evening the Commanding Officer approached Nobles and asked that he pray with him. Afterwards, the Marine grabbed his hand and said, “Chaplain, I can’t even remember your name, but I thank God you were with us last night.” Nobles received the Bronze Star with a “V” for valor for his actions that night. In his end-of-tour report Nobles wrote that his Commanding Officer’s words meant far more to him than the medal, concluding, “The rewards are many for the chaplain who will give of himself for the spiritual needs of the men.”

The day-to-day aspects of chaplaincy remained largely constant as the drawdown continued, including providing and facilitating the free exercise of worship, visiting the sick and wounded, and caring for all. But what had been built and put together now had to be taken apart. Chapels were disassembled or moved as units left or transferred elsewhere in country. Robert Coapman, who reported to an air element in November 1970, closed three chapels and gave to local Vietnamese numerous vehicles that had been turned over to him by contractors. Transportation remained a time-consuming and challenging task, sometimes more so as units moved about or withdrew, taking their equipment with them. Supplies still had to be obtained and distributed and reports completed.

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25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Robert D. Coapman, Response to Follow Up Questionnaire, 22 March 2011, Question 25.
However, the issues Marines brought with them to Vietnam changed perceptibly after Tet. As more of them asked “Why are we here?” as greater numbers of them embraced the use of recreational drugs, and as the civil rights movement played out in the public sphere, the concerns chaplains addressed changed. Whereas chaplains in the early years of American involvement in Vietnam understood their task to include the support and defense of the Vietnamese people, the chaplains who served post-Tet were often concerned with addressing issues relating to the easing out of U.S. forces and to problems within the military itself. While many still cared deeply for the welfare of the Vietnamese among whom they found themselves, the perceived social ills of American society as they presented themselves in the Marines now took precedence.

After entering active duty in 1966, George Evans had consistently requested orders to serve with Marines in Vietnam. Initially assigned to a repair ship known as a “tender” homeported in Sasebo, Japan, Evans “circuit rode” various small ships throughout the Far East, twice riding oil replenishment vessels from Subic Bay in the Philippines to Vietnam. As a chaplain, Evans felt he had “the best seat in the house” on board ship as he was not burdened with command but was privy to unfolding global events.\(^28\) Evans made this observation, in part, because he and those with whom he served aboard the USS Ajax did indeed have front-row seats when North Korean forces detained the USS Pueblo in January 1968. The Admiral administratively responsible for

the USS Pueblo and his staff operated from the Ajax. The ship spent the early months of the crisis in Subic Bay with the Admiral’s staff closely monitoring the situation.

Nearing the end of his two-year tour aboard the ship, Evans rode with the vessel into the mouth of the Mekong River in Vietnam. While anchored there the ship’s crew supplied support, repair services, and technical assistance to numerous American watercrafts involved in the conflict. The crew took notice when the North Vietnamese radio personality known to American forces as “Hanoi Hannah” announced that the ship would be blown up. Despite Hanoi Hannah’s prediction, Evan’s tour aboard ship ended without incident and he transferred to the Marine Corps Base in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, the preferred assignment on his “dream sheet” at that time.

Frank Morton, the senior chaplain then at Lejeune, assigned Evans to serve the Marines in a unit known as the Infantry Training Regiment. Upon completing basic training at Parris Island, South Carolina, new Marines were sent through the Infantry Training Regiment for thirty to sixty days to learn field infantry skills. They were then either sent for further specialized training or, in many cases, assigned to units serving in Vietnam. Anywhere from 3500 to 7000 Marines were assigned to the regiment at any given time, and in his role as chaplain Evans had the opportunity to speak to all of them, generally as part of their orientation to the unit. The knowledge that many of these young men were on their way to Vietnam confirmed his desire, born in childhood, to serve in a combat environment. He was assigned to Vietnam in July 1970.

29 This is the same person who was the Third Division Chaplain in Vietnam when Stan Beach and Vince Capodanno reported in 1966.
George Wesley Evans, Jr. was born in Columbia, Pennsylvania on January 5, 1934. Founded in 1726 by English Quakers, Columbia lay on the eastern bank of the Susquehanna River in Lancaster County not far from the Maryland border. The elder George Evans worked at the Grinnell Foundry and as a projectionist at a local movie theater. An only child, George Junior was quite close to an uncle who was about ten years his senior. As a young boy, George endured quarantine twice with his adolescent uncle, first for the measles, then for mumps. These experiences made George feel that he and his uncle were like brothers.

Coming of age during World War II, George’s uncle joined the Army Airs Corps. After completing training, he was assigned as a gunner in a B-17 squadron in the European theater, overflying Germany. George was with his grandmother at her home in February 1943 when a telegram from the War Department arrived. Suspecting the worst, George’s grandmother sent him to fetch a neighbor to read her the unwelcome news. His uncle’s death would not only profoundly impact their close-knit family but would also shape the broad contours of George’s life.

The family’s connection to the Lutheran church also proved formative for Evans. Family lore held that one of their forebears emigrated from Saxony to Pennsylvania, where he farmed and fought in the Revolutionary War. This revolutionary forebear began the family’s association with the Lutheran church in this country, as he was a member at Brodbeck Lutheran Church near Hanover. Other forebears included Methodists from Wales, as well as Roman Catholics from Germany and Ireland. Mostly through intermarriage, all became devout Lutherans.
The life of the Evans family, as did the lives of almost every family in their community, revolved around church. At First English Lutheran Church, George served as an acolyte, sang in the youth choir, acted as lector, and assisted in cleaning up after communion. As a boy George accepted the challenge to read the King James Version of the Bible cover-to-cover. When George was nearing the age of ten, the church called Bradley T. Gaver to serve as pastor. Pastor Gaver not only made a lasting impression upon George but also officiated at key events in Evans’s life as he matured into adulthood.

George recalled that when he was in the eighth grade his parents encouraged him to phone Pastor Gaver and seek his advice. George told his pastor that he wanted to pursue ministry as a vocation and needed to know which high school course of study would be most conducive to that end. Given that he was not mathematically inclined, should he pursue a general, academic, or vocational course of study? With Gaver’s assurance that he needed only general math and not algebra to pursue ministry, George pursued a general course of study, graduating from Columbia High School in 1951.

Although he didn’t particularly care for the label he received from some in high school as a “four-eyed Jesus,” the bespectacled George never seriously wavered in his desire to pursue ministry. In addition to the faithfulness of his family and the attention and support of his pastor, George identified key written works as influential in his faith development. Although he never committed the entirety of it to memory, George read Martin Luther’s Small Catechism routinely. He came to appreciate other, more modern translations of the Bible, but the words of the King James Version he read as a child

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30 Evans, Interview by Paul Zarbock.
resonated most deeply in his soul. In addition to these foundational texts, Evans found the best-selling novel *In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do?* deeply moving. Written in 1896 by Charles Sheldon, the novel followed a series of characters as they went through their daily lives seeking to follow in the way of Jesus. Despite feeling that he could never follow Jesus as well as Sheldon’s characters, he knew that he should try to do so and respected those who, in his eyes, did so. Evans aspired to live out the “simple faith” expressed in the novel.  

In order to pursue ministry in his Lutheran denomination, Evans first had to attend college. When he graduated from high school in 1951, college seemed an almost impossible dream. Despite working throughout the summer, by early autumn Evans only had only saved $150 toward the $1200 annual tuition at Gettysburg College, the school that Pastor Gaver encouraged him to attend. Evans knew that if he could come up with the tuition for the first year, he would be eligible for scholarships through his church for subsequent years.

His father encouraged him not to worry, as he would not only match his funds but also intended to mortgage the family home to make the first year’s payment. Although his father rarely expressed his love for his son verbally or actively attended events in which his son participated, George felt this gesture conveyed how deeply his father cared for him and how desperately he wanted him to go to college. In the end, mortgaging their home proved unnecessary. Upon hearing of their shortfall, George’s grandfather chose to

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31 George W. Evans, Response to Follow Up Questionnaire, 08 March 2011, Question 17.
give him his “inheritance” early, making up the $900 difference.\textsuperscript{32} George matriculated at Gettysburg in the fall of 1951.

Coincident with his exploration of college enrollment, Evans pre-registered for seminary in order that he might receive a “4D” ministerial deferment from the draft upon his eighteenth birthday. As the Evans family did not own a car, Pastor Gaver drove George to Gettysburg Seminary for a mandatory personal interview. Evans understood the interview necessary, as the Seminary did not wish to be perceived as a haven for conscientious objectors. Satisfied that he was not a pacifist, the interview committee granted Evans preliminary admission to the Seminary, pending satisfactory completion of college.

Although never a stellar student, Evans reveled in the college atmosphere and appreciated the ways in which his professors challenged him to think. He joined the Zeta chapter of Sigma Nu fraternity, eventually serving as one of the officers. During his college years, Evans regularly hitchhiked the 120 miles to State College where his high school classmate, now girlfriend, Jean Greenawalt attended Pennsylvania State University. Much to his lifelong delight, football great Rosie Greer, then playing for Penn State, once drove him all the way to Jean’s door. George graduated with a B.A. degree in the spring of 1955. Jean received her degree in Nutrition Science the same month. Pastor Gaver officiated at their marriage on June 19, 1955.

When Jean proved unable to find suitable employment in her field in Gettysburg, George made the decision to enroll at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. Jean’s income from a job nearby met their basic financial needs while George pursued his

\textsuperscript{32} Evans, Interview by Paul Zarbock.
theological education. His years at Lutheran proved the most satisfying of George’s academic career.

While at Lutheran, George made the decision to attend a recruiting visit made to the seminary by Chaplain Floyd Drieth, at that time the Atlantic Fleet Chaplain. Impressed by Drieth’s sharp uniform, and with the certain knowledge that he preferred water to the dirt and mud in which he presumed only the Army moved and lived, Evans applied to the Navy’s Theological Student Program. He was accepted and commissioned an Ensign on October 8, 1957. He received a superseding commission as a Lieutenant (Junior Grade) in the Navy Reserve’s Chaplain Corps upon his graduation from seminary and ordination in 1958.

Evans’s decision to enter the chaplaincy was driven largely by his guilt over his 4D deferment. In addition to his uncle’s World War II death, a young man who graduated from Columbia High School several years before Evans had been wounded while serving as a Marine in Korea. A close high school friend had joined the local National Guard unit and died in the early months of the Korean conflict. When Evans, at the age of 17, had asked his father to sign enlistment papers his father adamantly refused, indicating that he would never do so and that he fully expected his son to go to college. Nevertheless, Evans understood that service to country was something one did, not “in any big flag waving way, but simply what you did.”33 Virtually as soon as he was able to fulfill both his father’s wish for him to complete school and his own to obtain a place in the military, Evans did so.

33 George W. Evans, Interview by author, Spring 2011, transcript in possession of author.
The President of Evans’s Lutheran synod initially assigned him to serve three small churches near Williamsport, Pennsylvania. Evans welcomed the opportunity to begin his ministry in these parishes and discovered he loved the work. After fourteen months in Jersey Shore, Evans was invited to lead St. Stephen’s Evangelical Lutheran Church, an urban parish in downtown Lancaster. The position seemed difficult to fill, in part because a dynamic and popular pastor, Wallace Fisher, led the neighboring parish just a block and a half away. At the urging of his mentor and friend Bradley Gaver, and being “too young to be worried” about pastoral competitiveness, Evans gladly accepted the challenge.\(^{34}\) Evans and the tough, demanding, and confrontational Fisher became lifelong friends.

Glad to be in their home county, George and Jean, their growing family, and the church, flourished. Evans soon became president of the local chapter of Lutheran Social Services and participated in planning a care community for older adults that remains a vital service agency. Evans joined in local civil rights demonstrations, often led by Lancaster Theological Seminary professor Gabriel Fakre and his wife Dorothy. After attending urban ministry training, Evans served as a synod-wide consultant in urban church development.

Officially on the rolls of the 4th Naval District, Evans did little in his first years as a reservist. However, when a church member invited him to “drill” with a local unit he felt the time had come to meet the obligation he had undertaken. Evans knew the parishioner to have been a Marine Raider and veteran of Guadalcanal. The man, now the county’s prison warden, was also the commanding officer of a Marine reserve unit that

\(^{34}\) Evans, Interview by Paul Zarbock.
met for drill in Evans’s hometown of Columbia. Although he had not been aware that the Navy supplied chaplains to the Marine Corps, Evans gladly accepted his offer to serve as the unit’s chaplain. Thus began six years of regular service with reserve Marines. Evans taught moral guidance courses, offered worship on Sunday afternoons, and, as church duties permitted, joined the unit in field exercises and spent two weeks each year on active duty.

As the armed services began increasing their numbers in response to the increasing heat of the Cold War in the early 1960s, Evans received a letter from the Chief of Chaplains office asking him to come on active duty. The synod president indicated that two pastors within the synod had received requests to come on active duty, and the other man’s request had been approved. He asked that Evans remain in parish ministry. Evans wrote to the Chief, saying that unless the situation proved urgent, he could not go into active service at that time.35

After six years at St. Stephen’s, Evans was called in 1964 to serve as an associate pastor at Christ Lutheran Church in York, Pennsylvania. He welcomed the opportunity to serve with Franklin D. Fry, the son of Franklin C. Fry, known as “Mr. Lutheran” and the man featured on the cover of TIME Magazine in April 1958.36 Evans was inspired by the dedication and hard work of Fry, whom he characterized as a disciplined and ardent “churchman.”37

35 Years later when Evans worked in the Chief’s Office, he would see that the individual who had received his letter wrote a derogatory comment in the margin about his willingness to serve.


37 Evans, Response to Follow Up Questionnaire, Question 16.
Despite his love of parish life, Evans felt the pull to active military service. As the U.S. involvement in Vietnam continued to grow in the early 1960s, the sense that he needed to be there gnawed at Evans. The tipping point for him proved the Marine Corps birthday ball in November 1965. He had heard that the Fifth Marine Division was being reactivated for service in Vietnam and he volunteered to serve as chaplain with the unit. His wife Jean proved skeptical of his desire until she heard Lewis B. “Chesty” Puller speak at the annual birthday ball. Puller, the most decorated Marine in United States history, retired in 1955 as a Lieutenant General. Delighted to hear Puller speak so highly of the sacrifices of his wife and children, Jean made haste to meet Puller and get his autograph at the conclusion of the event. Later that evening she remarked to Evans, “Well, if that’s how the Marines are, you can go. We can go.”\(^{38}\) Evans enjoyed sharing with others that he went on active duty “because Chesty Puller charmed” his wife.\(^{39}\)

Evans volunteered to go on active duty and had to wait pending the outcome of a selection board. Unbeknownst to him, he was up for promotion to Lieutenant Commander. Only when it was known that he had in fact been selected was he given orders to Chaplains School. He proved the rare chaplain to attend the School at that rank. Evans insisted over and over again that he wished to serve with the 5\(^{th}\) Marines. Believing that a reservist who volunteered for active duty received the orders he requested, Evans was surprised to learn of his assignment to the Ajax. When sharing the news with his wife, she expressed the preference for the accompanied tour in Japan rather than the unaccompanied tour to Vietnam. Evans completed his first two active duty tours

\(^{38}\) Evans, Interview by author.

\(^{39}\) Evans, Interview by Paul Zarbock.
and waited four years before receiving the orders he had so long been seeking – duty with Marines in Vietnam.

Although he had served for years with both active and reserve Marines, Evans reported to the Marine Corps base at Camp Pendleton, California for the chaplain specific indoctrination and pre-embarkation training in June of 1970. By then, the training involved chaplains who had served in Vietnam. Evans later criticized their direction of the course, noting each chaplain who taught a portion of the training seemed to think their experience in the conflict proved definitive. The training also included instruction in the proper method of digging a fighting hole, without acknowledging that fighting holes only proved useful in those regions of Vietnam that were rocky or where the ground was firm. In marshy regions or during monsoon season a fighting hole would be good for nothing other than “performing baptisms,” as the experience of one of his colleagues demonstrated shortly after their arrival in country.40 Evans concluded that the experience in Vietnam “changed every six months in some way or other.”41 He was ready to have his own experience in the theater of war.

Although Evans specifically wanted to serve with an infantry unit, he was assigned, in part because of his rank, to serve as chaplain at the regimental level, with an artillery unit in July 1970. His disappointment waned quickly as he became familiar with his Marines and their work. Because each infantry battalion had an artillery battery attached, elements of the regiment were spread throughout the operating area. Some of the units proved quite small and could be overlooked easily. Evans felt it imperative to

40 Evans, Interview by Paul Zarbock.
41 Ibid.
learn quickly where all the men of the regiment served so that he and the chaplains for whom he provided supervision could provide their services. This commitment necessitated an organized approach to visitation and a clear understanding of the available means of transportation. Evans made a chart with each unit and its location listed so that he could check off every time he or another chaplain visited with each unit. It also necessitated close cooperation with chaplains assigned to the infantry battalions themselves, so that services were not duplicated.

The more Evans moved throughout the operating area, it seemed the more there was to do. He felt the strong support of his command in serving his Marines. A senior officer assigned his jeep for Evans’s use, stating that Evans “needed it more than he did.”

When air group staff twice asked why chaplains were so frequently on helicopter flight manifests, two regimental commanding officers in succession clarified that the regimental priorities included the movement of “bullets, food, and chaplains.” Evans used the high level of transportation support he received to assist both regimental and division chaplains in moving throughout the area.

Even though ease of mobility ensured chaplain coverage for elements of the regiment, it presented its own challenges. Because he and his chaplains were often in and out of a unit in a relatively short time, they could appear to a “tourist,” rather than an integral part of the unit.

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42 Evans, Response to Follow Up Questionnaire, Question 21.

43 Ibid.

44 Evans, Interview by Paul Zarbock.
Marines would sometimes encourage him to photograph this or that, he often resisted the urge believing that it presented him unfavorably. Evans understood that his credibility depended upon his ability to quickly integrate with each group of Marines he visited, demonstrating that he lived as they did. To that end he often spent the night with them, ate with them, and endured the dirt, mud, and elements with them.

Evans did not experience a sustained firefight with a Marine unit while in Vietnam. Nevertheless, he knew the sensation of being a target. While conducting worship for a squad of Marines comprising a Civil Action Patrol, he was fired upon for the first time. For Evans and the Marines with whom he served, mines, sneak attacks, random events, and their own carelessness presented the greatest threats.

Any sense of the “romance” of being in a combat environment wore off for Evans as his time in country accumulated, particularly as he observed incidents of carelessness. He noted that several young men died as a result of failing to maintain the sandbag structures in which they lived. When the poorly maintained sandbags disintegrated and collapsed they were pinned beneath the sand, suffocating to death. He also recalled an instance when three Marines, including a junior officer, mishandled unexploded ordinance. While policing the perimeter of an artillery area, they had picked up an unexploded grenade and were tossing it back and forth when it detonated in the face of the young officer, killing him.

The most personally frightening moment in Vietnam for Evans occurred when he was travelling through a small village to visit a Marine unit engaged in sweeping an

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45 Evans, Interview by author.
46 Evans, Interview by author.
outlying area for mines. Evans rode in the passenger seat next to his clerk, who was driving the jeep. Evans had the clerk’s rifle lying across his legs. As they passed between several huts, a young child came out and pointed a pistol at Evans. Evans almost shot the child. In the fraction of a moment before firing, Evans recognized that it was, in fact, a child in front of him and that the gun was not real, but a toy. He later reflected that the only reason he didn’t shoot the child was that he was in his late thirties, and life had granted him some sense and wisdom by that point. He did not believe that every eighteen-year-old Marine would have been capable of showing the same restraint. Evans remained forever grateful for what he did not do that day.

Evans reported little of other encounters with Vietnamese people. He indicated that his Marines provided substantial support for an outlying Roman Catholic parish. Meeting the nuns who served there and seeing the graves of the French priests buried in the nave of the church made a positive impression on him. However, he commented later that many Americans never understood that the National Liberation Front “were not nice to their people.”

As Evans made his way among his scattered Marines, he grew increasingly aware of recreational drug use, particularly marijuana, among Americans. The drugs were readily available and inexpensive. At times, Marines would throw marijuana cigarettes into Evans’s jeep as he and his driver went by. Not wanting to get caught with the

47 Evans, Interview by Paul Zarbock.

48 Ibid.
substance themselves, Evans and his driver would stop and clean the vehicle out before proceeding.

With the knowledge and support of their senior officers, Evans and the regimental physician developed an informal program of education and counseling intended to decrease the use of drugs. The physician, Tracy Spencer, provided medical data on usage and the effects thereof, while Evans offered “pastoral confidentiality and spiritual/life purpose counsel.” The duo often travelled together, offering classroom instruction if the situation permitted, and casual conversation and engagement if not. Although the military does not grant physicians privileged communication, the regimental commanding officer, a devout Roman Catholic, indicated to Evans and Dr. Spencer that he would never question either regarding individual Marines’ drug use. He also expressed that he would do his best to protect them from being placed in the position of being used against Marines being prosecuted. Evans moved his office to a deserted corner of the headquarters compound so that Marines could enjoy greater privacy when seeking his counsel.

Evans took seriously his supervisory role and the necessity of supporting other chaplains. His commitment to collegiality was reflected most clearly in his facilitation of the ministry of Joel Fletcher, a Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS) chaplain assigned with the regiment. Evans related, “Many Protestants would not

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49 Evans, Response to Follow Up Questionnaire, Question 21.

50 Daniel H. Ludlow, Encyclopedia of Mormonism (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992), 263, http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Chaplains. Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are commonly referred to as Mormons. Mormon chaplains served in the Navy during World War II. After the Korean conflict, however, most LDS chaplains left active service. By the early 1960s the Navy standardized requirements for entering chaplaincy. The new expectations forced lay led churches like the
Although some Marines were concerned about what Fletcher taught, most of the difficulty centered on the administration of communion. As a Latter-day Saint Chaplain Fletcher could not, in good conscience, serve communion to Marines outside his faith. And many Protestant Marines did not want to receive communion offered in the Mormon tradition, as it prescribed the use of water to represent the blood of Christ. These realities constrained Fletcher’s ability to lead a significant aspect of worship and tested the Corps’ “cooperation without compromise” motto.

Although Fletcher was assigned to a remotely located infantry battalion, Evans and other Protestant chaplains traveled to his region when possible to provide communion to Marines. Their support enabled Fletcher to go to areas where there were larger concentrations of Marines, and consequently more Mormons, in order to provide worship in his faith tradition. Evans felt that Fletcher’s effectiveness depended upon the help of all the regiment’s chaplains. They needed to do what he couldn’t do.

Working cooperatively they facilitated worship for all Marines. Doing so necessarily involved the compromise of whom to serve when.

Mormon Church to normalize their requirements for chaplains, if they had not already. By 1965 the LDS Church required applicants to attain the Melchizedek Priesthood, complete an honorable mission, have a temple wedding, and earn a master’s degree in counseling. Five LDS chaplains served with Marines in Vietnam.

51 Evans, Interview by Paul Zarbock.

52 Joel R. Fletcher, End of Tour Report, undated, NCSCA. Fletcher wrote an extremely brief End of Tour report. Uncharacteristically for most of these reports he did not mention his fellow chaplains. He did, however, specifically thank his Marines and “all the Latter-Day Saints servicemen…from Dong Ha to Duc Tho” as they had earned his respect and love. Fletcher had served as a line officer in the Navy prior to becoming a chaplain. He left active duty in 1972.

53 Evans, Interview by Paul Zarbock. Evans later wrote in an essay on “Ministry in Combat” that an LDS chaplain, presumably Fletcher, provided “an excellent ministry in the field.” It is not clear if the essay was ever published or where it might have appeared, but it is in the Vietnam File at the Naval Chaplaincy School and Center Archive.
Evans, like many chaplains, noted the centrality of communion for combat troops. He could not recall a field worship service in Vietnam at which he did not offer communion. For those chaplains whose churches practiced closed communion and did not offer communion to those outside their belief structure, meeting the religious needs of Marines meant compromising their beliefs or enlarging their perspective. Evans remarked that even though many Baptist churches permit their pastors to serve communion only within the context of their congregation, he knew many Baptist chaplains who offered communion in every service because Marines’ desire to receive it was so genuine.54

Elements of the artillery regiment to which Evans was assigned began leaving Vietnam in October 1970, with the last unit leaving in April 1971. After ten months in country, Evans reported back to Camp Lejeune, where he served with Marines another three years. In his one page end-of-tour report, dated 1 April 1971, Evans indicated he felt it “presumptuous” for him, as a “latecomer” to the conflict, to try and “speak from the overview now required.”55 He offered, however,

“Good men produce precious moments wherever these men are found. Much that I could say of the Marines I’ve known would confirm that. Likewise, I’ve encountered empty souls who’ve been beyond charity, but I pray not God’s.”56

He went on to state that his experience in Vietnam confirmed for him again that there are “many kinds of chaplains” but he would refrain from “judgments” as it would be a

54 Evans, Interview by Paul Zarbock.

55 George W. Evans, End of Tour Report, 01 April 1971, NCSCA.

56 Ibid.
“disservice to all concerned.” Nevertheless, he characterized as invaluable assets those chaplains who overcame transportation challenges to get around and see their Marines, shaping their programs from the perspective of faith. He mentioned four chaplains by name – Visocky, Dempsey, Essinger, and Grosko – and his two clerks as people who strengthened him. Perhaps with reference to the Personal Response Program Evans critically observed, “God protect us from programs that become chaplain’s messages.”

Evans understood chaplaincy to be a ministry of presence dedicated to servicemen and later, women. He argued that chaplains were not “about the validity and fine points” about what “may or may not justify a given war.” Although he could foresee a war where a chaplain should not be present, chaplains are there for the nation’s war fighters and should promote ethical behavior in the context of war. Like many, Evans closed by noting that Vietnam was part of his learning and growing process.

While George Evans’s journey toward Southeast Asia began as a ten-year-old boy during World War II, Victor Smith’s journey began in 1968 during his senior year in college. Born on May 6, 1945 in Santa Cruz, California, where his father was stationed with the U.S. Army Band, Smith enrolled at Williams College in 1964 with the intention of becoming a theoretical mathematician and math professor. Sidetracked by his love of art, Smith changed his major to art history, and by the spring of his senior year had been

57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid. It appears that one of the chaplains who received Evans’s report crossed out this sentence.
60 George W. Evans, Response to Follow Up Questionnaire, 08 March 2011, Question 26.
offered a graduate fellowship in art history at Johns Hopkins University, to begin in the fall.

Smith came by his love of the arts naturally. His father, Gordon Smith, was a professor of music at American University in Washington, D.C. from 1947 to 1982. When offered sabbaticals from teaching, Professor Smith took his family abroad to explore other cultures and artistic expressions. During one sabbatical experience Victor, the budding young mathematician, also had the opportunity to study at a Faculte de Sciences in France. Unlike many of his colleagues, by the time Victor entered the Navy as a chaplain, he had already seen the world.

As he was finishing his last semester at Williams, Victor received a call from an Army chaplain he knew from the Christian Science Church where his family belonged in their Georgetown neighborhood of Washington. The chaplain was the First Reader, or elected primary leader of worship, at the church. The chaplain invited “Vic” to go to the church’s headquarters in Boston and meet with Dick Chase, the church representative in charge of the Armed Services Department. The chaplain believed that Vic was an ideal candidate to represent the Christian Science Church as a military chaplain. Although Vic repeatedly expressed to his chaplain friend that he already had post-college plans, the chaplain continued to encourage him to consider chaplaincy.

Vic met with Dick Chase in Boston, and although he continued to insist he was not interested in chaplaincy, Smith toured Boston University’s School of Theology, meeting the Christian Science students pursuing graduate degrees there. At Chase’s invitation, Smith also filled out an application for endorsement as a chaplain. Smith
spent the following weekend in Boston as a guest of the church, interviewing with the Church’s Board of Directors. As a lifelong Christian Scientist, Smith felt honored to meet the leaders of his religious body. He believed, however, that his interview had not gone well.

During the interview one of the directors had lectured Smith, defining a vision of chaplaincy that contrasted sharply with the vision the Army chaplain had communicated to the young man. Smith understood that as a representative of a small religious organization with few adherents in the military, his primary duties as a chaplain would not be of a strictly denominational nature. In addition to providing opportunities for Christian Scientists to gather and read together or offer their testimonies, the expectation would be that he function more broadly as a non-liturgical Protestant chaplain, facilitating worship for others and caring for all.

Mary Baker Eddy founded the Christian Science Church in 1879. Following her dramatic recovery from serious injury in 1866, Eddy pursued understanding the connection between Christian spiritual practice and healing. She published her definitive explanation of spiritual healing in her 1875 work, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. Headquartered at The First Church of Christ, Scientist, also known as the “Mother Church,” in Boston, the denomination identified 1,829 churches in 1971.\(^6^1\) The denomination reached its height in the 1930s, with several hundred thousand adherents in the United States. Best known for its news outlet *The Christian Science Monitor*, the First Church of Christ, Scientist does not ordain clergy. Democratically elected “readers” lead

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\(^6^1\) Stephen Barrett, “Christian Science Statistics: Practitioners, Teachers, Nurses, and Churches in the United States,” [http://www.quackwatch.org/01QuackeryRelatedTopics/cs.html](http://www.quackwatch.org/01QuackeryRelatedTopics/cs.html). This count was made using statistics reported in the *Christian Science Journal*. 229
worship while “practitioners” and “nurses” support and guide adherents in praying for healing. The denomination has identified and selected individuals to train for chaplaincy since World War I.

Victor Smith was one of three persons offered the opportunity to pursue chaplaincy by the Christian Science Church in 1968. Still seeking direction for which path to pursue following his upcoming graduation, clarity came for Smith following Martin Luther King Jr’s assassination on April 4. When home on spring break, Smith’s mother asked him to go down to the Christian Science reading room and stay with the volunteers there as unrest spread through the city. As Smith read and prayed there it became clear to him that the frustration and anger expressed by the people in the streets was not limited to them but also must be part of the experience of those in the military. To whom could military personnel express their frustrations? Smith reasoned that the chaplain represented the only safe outlet for personnel within the military institutional structure. This recognition compelled him to complete the application for denominational endorsement and to accept his church’s invitation.

Smith’s decision led him to decline the fellowship offered by John Hopkins as well as the dissolution of a long-term relationship with a young woman who could not envision him as a chaplain. That fall, with the support of his church, Victor enrolled at Boston University’s School of Theology, aware that Martin Luther King Jr. had received his doctorate in systematic theology from the school in 1955. When Ray Kroll, an absent-without-leave Army private, took sanctuary in the seminary’s chapel in early October, Smith joined the hundreds of other students occupying the chapel. Fearing that
the ad hoc group leading the occupation threatened violence, Smith and two other first-year seminarians organized the participating students to vote out the existing leadership and vote them in. Nearly two hundred law enforcement officials entered the chapel and removed Kroll at 5:30 a.m. on Sunday, October 6.  

Students reported only minor injuries as the officers stepped over, and in some cases on, students sleeping on the chapel floor.

Although Smith never supported the policy that led to American involvement in Vietnam or that maintained it by the late 1960s, he continued on the path to chaplaincy because he believed all military personnel possessed the right to exercise their religious beliefs and that they deserved the best pastoral care and advocacy possible. Smith received his Master of Theology, formally graduating in 1971. He had, however, finished his course work a semester early so that he could join his family on a world tour.

Smith’s father, Gordon, organized the trip as part of a sabbatical he had been granted by the university during which he would interview musicians around the world. The interviews would be used on the award winning show “Musicians Face the Music” broadcast on the university’s Public Broadcasting Station WAMU. Vic particularly wanted to make the trip with his family, because he wanted to work as one of the sound technicians recording the sessions. The excursion began in Scandinavia, bypassing

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63 Victor H. Smith, Response to Follow Up Questionnaire, 06 March 2011, Question 25.

64 “WAMU Wins ‘Major’ Award for Excellence in Programming,” The American Eagle, 11 January 1966, dnc.library.illinois.edu/cgi-bin/illinois?a=d&d=AUE19660111.2.36, Known as “Musicians Face the Music” the show received a certificate of merit as part of the “Major” awards in 1965.
Western Europe where the family had already travelled extensively. They then proceeded east through the Middle East and on through India, Nepal, and Burma. After exploring the Indian subcontinent, they moved through East Asia, stopping in Thailand, Singapore, Penang, Taiwan and Japan. Making a last stop in Hawaii, the family returned to the United States in the late summer of 1971.

While overseas, Dick Crane contacted Vic letting him know that the Church desired for him to go on active duty. Expressing interest in the Navy, Vic completed the paperwork and necessary interviews with the assistance of Naval attachés in Iran, India, and Taiwan. Formally commissioned on December 15, 1971, Smith worked in the metropolitan DC area as a civilian minister of armed services personnel for the Christian Science Church until he reported to Chaplains School in April 1972.

Although thirty-six chaplains completed the Basic Course in the summer of 1972, only five proceeded to active service.\textsuperscript{65} Smith’s classmates included a Latter Day Saint and three Roman Catholic priests.\textsuperscript{66} When an official on the Chief of Chaplain’s staff indicated that upon completion of the course he expected Smith to relieve a Christian Science chaplain serving at a naval air station in Memphis, Tennessee, Smith questioned the reasoning. He suggested that the practice of assigning representatives of small denominations to succeed one another in places where it was perceived that they could serve people from their own background was perhaps not the best use of personnel, and

\textsuperscript{65} Navy Chaplains Bulletin, Vol. 14 (Summer 1972), 12.

certainly not the best use of him. Smith instead received orders to a Marine air group that had just redeployed from Vietnam to Nam Phong, Thailand.

Smith reported to the group’s headquarters area in Iwakuni, Japan before making his way to Thailand. Although no longer physically located in Vietnam, the group’s pilots continued to engage in combat operations in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, as would later be revealed. This duty qualified Smith to wear the service ribbons associated with the conflict in Vietnam.

Known sarcastically as Marine Corps Air Station Rose Garden for what the Marine Corps “didn’t promise,” Royal Thai Air Base Nam Phong was opened to American forces in June 1972 by the Thai government. As the number of U.S. forces dwindled in Vietnam in the early 1970s, the U.S. presence increased in Thailand. In addition to opening Nam Phong to U.S. Marines, nearby American units included Air Force elements some fifty miles north at Udorn Royal Thai Air Force base and a U.S. Army communications station at Ramasun.

When Smith arrived in August 1972, some three thousand Marines were still settling in. With no running water available at that time, most of the men stripped, soaped up, and stood in the rain each afternoon hoping the monsoon would last long enough to wash off the soap. The daily regulation prescribed “hot meal” consisted of heated C-rations. For his own comfort, Smith cut off all his hair leading the Commanding Officer to remark to him that he should wear the saffron robes of a Buddhist monk. Smith responded that when they became available in the Navy’s supply

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67 Smith, Interviews by Paul Zarbock.
system he’d be happy to wear them. Billeted in tents along the airstrip, Smith “thought the end of the world had come” when air operations commenced in the early hours of his first night there.

The pace of operations remained high during the early months Smith was with the air group. The number of sorties increased when peace talks between the warring parties broke down in mid-December and President Nixon initiated intense bombing of targets in North Vietnam in an effort to bring the National Liberation Front back to the negotiating table. The “Christmas bombing” was the last major American air offensive before the cease-fire took effect. Combat operations officially ceased when the Paris Peace Accords were formally signed on January 27, 1973.

Given that Smith had neither any previous military nor any appreciable pastoral experience, he underwent a profound period of on-the-job training while in Nam Phong. The Roman Catholic chaplain also assigned to the air group, Jesuit James von Meysenbug, proved collegial to the new chaplain. Von Meysenbug cared little for administration and gladly let Smith represent their office at mandated meetings, thus affording Smith the opportunity to better understand Marine Corps organization and the politics of the command. From this early experience, Smith understood what it meant for chaplains “to be at the table.” After each offered his respective Sunday morning

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid.

70 Ray Bonds, ed., The Vietnam War: The Illustrated History of the Conflict in Southeast Asia (New York: Smithmark Publishers, 1996), 226. “By 31 March 1972, US troop strength was 96,000; by 31 October, it had fallen to 32,000. At the year’s end, only 24,000 US military personnel remained in country.”

71 Smith, Response to Follow Up Questionnaire, 06 March 2011, Question 21.
services, they travelled together to offer services to an attached Seabee unit. Together, Smith felt they built a “real” chapel program.  

The forty-six year old priest fascinated Smith. Born to a prominent family in New Orleans, Louisiana, von Meysenbug joined the Navy in 1944 at age eighteen and served for several years as a radio specialist with Naval intelligence. He later received graduate degrees from both Georgetown and the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. After his 1964 ordination, he taught for six years at Fordham University. An accomplished musician, von Meysenbug played the organ for Smith’s services. Smith observed that the priest would often “disappear” on Thursdays or Fridays and return on Saturday afternoons in time to offer mass. He believed that von Meysenbug traveled to Laos, where he played piano at parties hosted by a friend. Although left wondering about von Meysenbug’s life, Smith appreciated his collegial nature and support during the time they served together.

Smith also learned leadership and what it meant to be a chaplain from the Marines with whom he served. He took to heart one of the commanding officer’s initial

72 Victor H. Smith, Conversation with author, 07 April 2011.


75 Smith, Conversation with author, 07 April 2011.

76 Smith, Conversation with author, 07 April 2011. Smith believed that von Meysenbug’s friend in Laos was a Central Intelligence Operative. Von Meysenbug’s only apparent active duty tour as a Navy Chaplain was his tour with 1st Marine Air Wing. He is shown on the rolls of the Diocese of Richmond, Virginia as having died on October 14, 1987. http://www.richmonddiocese.org/deceased-priests.
instructions to him that he was not doing his job if he was in his office more than half the time. The officer, a Colonel, also expected that Smith would keep him apprised of matters affecting his Marines, although he only wanted general information so that he would not put Smith in the position of compromising any confidentialities. Smith later observed that he “learned chaplaincy” from the way in which this, and other, Marine Corps leaders knew and cared for their troops.\footnote{Smith, Interviews by Paul Zarbock.}

Smith made a place for himself with the units in Nam Phong. As a result of his previous travel in the country with his family, Smith believed it essential to convey to Marines that they were guests of the Thai King Bhumibol’s government and needed to conduct themselves as such. Before their earlier trip he had seen a master’s thesis from a student at American University that explained some Thai customs. He ordered a copy and used it to construct an orientation lecture for newly arrived Marines. He encouraged them to respect the customs and culture of the Thai people they encountered. He appreciated that the commanding officer participated in the orientation, reminding the incoming Marines that the experience in Nam Phong could be miserable, or not so miserable, depending primarily upon their attitude.

Smith noted, however, significant signs of low morale. Initially, he observed that Marines weren’t offering proper military courtesies to their superiors in the mess hall. Smith interpreted this highly unusual behavior for Marines as an indicator of a generally poor outlook at the time. Smith encouraged the Marines to offer one another the basic
courtesies of their service as it was, he argued, the primary means by which people said “Hello” to one another in the Corps.\textsuperscript{78}

In another effort to raise the general level of morale, Smith worked with the communication station at Ramasun to make Military Affiliate Radio System (MARS) calls available to Marines. Using a series of telephone and short-wave radio connections, Marines were able to speak with their loved ones at home. Smith would often stay up all night with Marines initiating MARS calls from the phone in his office.

More significantly, however, Smith concluded that many of the most junior Marines, by his estimate “80 percent of the E3’s and below,” were using illicit drugs.\textsuperscript{79} Working with a discreet physician and lawyer, Smith conducted an informal survey and determined that the substances of choice were marijuana, often laced with heroin, as well as pills offering synthetic drugs of indeterminate substances. The substances were inexpensive and easy to obtain. Abandoned as an operational airfield years before, the airstrip had become a major local thoroughfare. Although the Marines had established a perimeter around the airfield and a formal gate through which vehicles entered, that did not stop local people from using their established patterns of transit. Consequently, there were always local people about the facility. The numbers of Thais onboard the base grew when the command permitted the construction of a restaurant. Some of the local Thais found an eager and lucrative market selling drugs to the Americans.

Smith recalled one particular incident when a Marine, under the influence of drugs, entered the chapel late one night screaming and threatening violence to anyone.

\textsuperscript{78} Smith, Interviews by Paul Zarbock.

\textsuperscript{79} Smith, Interviews by Paul Zarbock.
who approached. Smith was summoned and talked with him, calming him, waiting with him until his body processed the substances. After the Marine was taken into custody and jailed overnight, Smith accompanied him to an army hospital in Bangkok for treatment the next day. Smith was also aware that occasionally maintenance personnel found marijuana roaches in the cockpits of aircraft following sorties.  

Initially, senior leadership didn’t believe Smith’s assessment of the prevalence of drug use among junior personnel. One commanding officer first remarked, “There are no Marines who take drugs.” When Smith steadfastly asserted that not only did Marines take drugs, many Marines took drugs, he responded that if Smith were correct “we’re going to have to shut this place down.” Not wanting to betray what he knew concerning specific individuals, Smith sought permission to prove his point. With the commanding officer’s consent, he entered the cantonment area and gathered drugs. Thirty minutes later Smith returned to the Colonel’s office, emptied his pockets and made his point, laying out a wide variety of illegal substances. From that point on, Smith had greater command support in addressing drug use. In addition to individual counseling, Smith began developing what he termed a toolkit for “spiritual readiness” that helped young Marines confront their problems.

While working with the command to deal with the large issues confronting personnel, Smith developed a Protestant religious program. He was perhaps particularly

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80 Smith, Conversation with author, 21 April 2011.
81 Smith, Conversation with author, 21 April 2011.
82 Smith, Interviews by Paul Zarbock.
83 Smith, Response to Follow Up Questionnaire, Question 21.
pleased because of his theological perspective as a Christian Scientist when Seabees constructed a functional chapel facility before they built a hospital. They also constructed a facility that the chaplains used for a lending library and conference rooms where groups could meet. Smith offered Protestant worship in the chapel each Sunday. In his position with the air group, Smith had followed an evangelical Lutheran chaplain who he perceived had a loyal following of fifteen or so “Jesus freaks.” Smith reflected that when he first arrived these devout young evangelicals didn’t know what to make of him as a Christian Science practitioner, but that they came to care for and respect one another. Smith felt it an affirmation of his ministry when chapel attendance for Protestant worship grew over time, as did overall participation in the religious program.

Even though Smith encouraged denominationally specific groups to meet together, he also made it a point to begin an intentionally inclusive Bible study. Although it took time for everyone present to adapt, Smith established as the basic ground rule that anyone could say anything as long as it was not critical of another’s theological perspective. Particularly as someone who represented a non-mainstream perspective, Smith impressed upon the Marines who fellowshipped together that it was important that they “agree to disagree.” Smith felt the tenor of this study appropriately challenged the Marines who participated.

Smith also provided denominationally specific support at the larger Air Force facility at Udorn. Each Thursday he flew north to Udorn, read and offered testimonies

84 Smith, Conversation with author, 21 April 2011.
85 Smith, Interviews by Paul Zarbock
with other Christian Scientists. He would spend the night and then catch a helicopter headed to Nam Phong Friday morning.

A high point occurred for Smith when he had the opportunity to lead a weekend retreat. Held at Chiang Mai, Smith felt the retreat changed attitudes and broke through prejudices held by some of the Marines participating. A young Jewish Marine proved the catalyst. He had sought Smith’s counsel earlier when he was feeling a great deal of pressure from the Marines in his work and living spaces to take drugs and wanted to participate in the retreat. His story of how his faith strengthened him began to help broaden the perspective of some of the others present. When a missionary to some of the indigenous peoples in Southeast Asia spoke to the group the next day and said that he no longer presumed to condemn people he didn’t understand, Smith felt that a moment of transformation occurred for some of the young Marines.86

In the months following the January ceasefire, elements of the group began returning to Iwakuni. Smith left Nam Phong in March 1972, grateful that their units had experienced the deaths of only three or four pilots during his time among them. He spent three months in Japan before moving on to his next duty station. In seven short months in Thailand, Smith gained a wealth of experience in pastoral counseling, survived a crash course in the Marine Corps, and left with a more refined understanding of chaplaincy. In the years to come Smith became a strong advocate with the Corps for an understanding of the chaplain as the advocate of the free exercise of religion.

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86 Smith, Interviews by Paul Zarbock. Smith, Response to Follow Up Questionnaire, Question 21.
Neither George Evans nor Vic Smith experienced the constant threats to their mortality as did those chaplains who served earlier in the war with infantry battalions, but they too labored to meet the needs of their Marines. Although many of their day-to-day activities as chaplains were similar over time, there were profound differences in the experiences of chaplains who served at different times and places. These differences reflected the types of units they served, when and where they were assigned and the changing needs of the Marines they served. What remained constant was their shared understandings of the broad contours of their ministry as chaplains.

Stan Beach understood his ministry as one of presence. He understood his effectiveness as a chaplain to correlate directly to how visible and present he was to his troops, particularly in combat. Vic Smith understood the ministry of presence as the essential aspect of chaplaincy when he related his superior officer’s advice to be sure he was out of his office. George Evans’s intricate planning of transportation so that he and other chaplains could reach isolated units evidenced a similar view of chaplains’ ministry. At the core of this understanding was the belief that knowing their Marines was the precursor to meeting their spiritual needs. The aphorism attributed to Theodore Roosevelt, “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care,” was one with which all implicitly agreed.

Although Stan Beach sensed that some Marines perceived the chaplain as some kind of “celestial rabbit’s foot,” Eldon Luffman interpreted Marines’ hunger for religious items more generously:

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87 Beach, Interview by author, 05 May 2011.
“Our men are religious men. They are constantly seeking religious symbols of sorts, grasping to ‘hold on’ to God. I feel that this accounts for the big demand for religious medals, rosaries, New Testaments, and Prayer Books. Many Marines have religious inscriptions on their flak jackets and helmets, such as: ‘Just you and me God;’ and, ‘In God we trust.’ Some may think of the men using these inscriptions and symbols as bordering on the superstitious, using them as good luck charms or fetishes. I feel that they graphically portray the hunger and seeking of these men for their God.”

Regardless of how Marines perceived the chaplain, the chaplains understood that the expression of their religious faith and their ministry among Marines was grounded in compassion. “The ministry” had given way to “ministry” which focused not on faith, but on caring, “doing instead of believing, serving in place of leading.” While “the” ministry might be concerned with sainthood, ministry focused on personhood. Ministry took seriously the words of First Corinthians 13:13, “So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love,” prioritizing love and service to others over all else.

Although chaplains were accountable to the institution they served, compassion as essential to ministry meant wrestling with the meaning of “the enemy” and how to pursue justice within war. Carl Auel accepted “the fact of enemies” while refusing to “recognize them.” He wrote of speaking to a young nameless Vietnamese girl who had been detained because she was carrying a weapon, but when bound, became a scared child with a name. The family photograph and poetic verse in the pockets of a dead North Vietnamese soldier made real to him the separation from his own family. In the

88 Luffman, End of Tour Report, 10-11, NCSCA.
89 Ibid.
90 I Corinthians 13:13 (Revised Standard Version)
91 Auel, PTSD Journal, Appendix B, End of Tour Report, NCSCA.
human faces of the enemy, ministry meant “experiencing, although not fully comprehending the structure of the disparity, how heavy is the weight of loving ones enemies.”

Compassion also meant encouraging Marines to exercise restraint amidst violence. Eli Takesian shared that among the finest compliments he received in life was offered to him by his commanding officer, Bob Bohn, upon his departure. Bob said to Carl Auel, who was accompanying Takiesian, that Takiesian’s presence had saved lives, both American and Vietnamese. By articulating their shared humanity, and the necessity of discriminating between combatants and non-combatants, he helped Marines understand the meaning of compassion. Bohn told Auel:

“I once overheard a bull session in which he told young troops, 'Remember, we're visitors in Vietnam. Imagine living in, say, Philadelphia, and being occupied by a foreign army. How would you feel if foreign soldiers entered your home … upended your furniture … raped your wife and mother and sister … and torched the house? How would you respond if they shot members of your family, or neighbors, unjustly? Put yourselves in their shoes. Create friends, not enemies. Don't alienate Vietnamese by violating their religious or social customs. If possible, show restraint. Try creating friends rather than enemies.' He held their attention. His words impacted their behavior, thereby minimizing innocent South Vietnamese and Marine casualties.”

Even though Auel’s experience confirmed that the presence of chaplains did not stop atrocities, there were Marines who believed that the chaplains’ presence made a positive difference.

Whether they supported U.S. involvement in Vietnam or not, chaplains generally differentiated between their understanding of their role and the morality of the war itself.

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92 Ibid., 3.
93 Takesian, Interview by Paul Zarbock.
Most, like Bill Thompson, argued that the time for questioning the government’s decision to intervene militarily was before or after intervention, not during. He articulated that ministering to Marines did not mean supporting the mission. With his usual grace Carl Auel wrote in his end of tour report, “There are those of us who do not understand the logic of Viet Nam, yet who accept fully its reality. There are those of us, clergymen and Christian too, who can read a book about the moral justification of this or that policy or series of event and find that we react to it in much the same way as we react to the polemics of those who would still advocate a flat earth.”

Auel’s ministry was not concerned with justifying or reasoning the presence of American troops in Vietnam. Rather, it was grounded in the fact of it. Ministry as Auel exercised it, was personal not polemical. The essence of it was working in what others might see as a non-religious capacity, for example in sharing a soda with a Marine. The Marine understood that the giver was acting in an unselfish way; therefore, he received the soda religiously. Auel perceived these exchanges as acts of communion that enlarged his own understanding of the sacramental aspect of his faith.

Auel marveled that Marines accepted his offer of communion, never asking his religious persuasion, nor he theirs. Given that offering communion to those outside his tradition was generally not permissible, he explained that he understood each sacramental offering to be “in extremis,” and therefore while not in keeping with “ecclesiastical etiquette” not in violation of his ecclesiastical orders. He reasoned that he offered the

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94 Auel, PTSD Journal, Appendix B, End of Tour Report, NCSCA.
95 Ibid.
sacrament not based on what he thought, but on what he felt. He described these encounters:

“Whatever I was, I was the only chaplain they had. Not all were church members. Not all understood communion. But they knew who they were, what they were, and they knew, so well, where they were. I think it became important to them to recognize this in a corporate act, to share through this symbol their common humanity and in the very midst of that community.”96

Ministry meant for Auel the letting go of any previously held notions of his Lutheran tradition about ministry. He participated in Requiem masses, Buddhist holiday and memorial services, ate dog meat, and learned to drink beer with ice cubes at parties. It meant “serving men in all their honor as well as in their venality, in their humanness as well as in their moments of callous disregard for others or for life itself.”97 Although he never mentioned it elsewhere, Auel shared in his report that ministry also meant taking up a weapon in defense of those who could no longer defend themselves.

Ministry in light of Vietnam meant, for Auel, giving up “theological propositions about a prime mover.”98 It forced him to become what he could only describe as a sort of Christian existentialist. No longer capable of putting experiences into neat categories, Auel contented himself with thinking situationally, attempting to live with integrity, and recognizing the fundamentally human milieu of ministry. “We want,” he wrote, “…to walk the earth for we believe, however scandalous it might appear, that it is on the earth

96 Ibid., 3.
97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
that Christ’s footsteps are to be found.” 99 Auel resolved that the effort to live authentically in the face of contrasting realities was sufficient.

Auel concluded his report by noting that he had promised himself and one of his colleagues in ministry during the battle for Hue City that he would not write the required end-of-tour report. He had come to believe ministry to be too personal to describe, let alone quantify, and too painful to recollect. He changed his mind, however, because he wanted to go on record as standing against the introductory paragraphs of Navy Chaplains in Vietnam. Auel felt “postulating of logical assertions about moral wars” to be immoral. 100 In spite of his dis-ease, he stated that it mattered not where he had served or what he thought, that he had attempted to serve his country and his commands faithfully, his men with compassion and integrity.

Auel closed his report with a personal note. Part of him, he wrote, would always remain in Vietnam, leaving him empty inside such that he would leave the country with a broken heart. Nevertheless, he dared to hope that the families and loved ones of all those who died in Vietnam somehow knew that there were many there who “shared their tears.” 101

99 Ibid.

100 Auel, PTSD Journal, Appendix B, End of Tour Report, NCSCA.

101 Ibid.
Chapter 7

Lives and Afterlife

“Together we were plunged into a suffering world...I learned to know a world which agonizes in darkness. I regret that; not the knowledge of it or the experience of it, but the fact of it.”
- Carl Auel

Leroy Muenzler wept on April 30, 1975 when American news outlets broadcasted video of the fall of Saigon, the Republic of Vietnam’s capital city. Muenzler, a Cumberland Presbyterian pastor who served in Vietnam with the first wave of infantry Marines in April 1965, cried for the terrible treatment of the South Vietnamese people he saw in 1965 and for what was unfolding on the evening news in 1975. He feared the slaughter of the South Vietnamese his Marines had protected. At the age of 76 in 2011 Muenzler insisted that given the same circumstances he would go back to Vietnam.¹ There was, however, no going back in time.

Vince Capodanno’s Afterlife

By the time Saigon fell in 1975, numerous tributes honoring Chaplain Capodanno’s September 4, 1967 death had been made.² Shortly after Capodanno died, the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines dedicated a small chapel to his memory. Made of thatched palms and bamboo, the chapel stood on Hill 51 in the Que Son Valley. In early 1968, Navy representatives requested the Capodanno family’s permission to dedicate the chapel at the Navy Chaplains School in Newport, Rhode Island to Capodanno’s memory. The

¹ Leroy Muenzler, Response to Initial Survey Questionnaire, 01 March 2011. Comments written throughout document.

² Mode, The Grunt Padre,154-172. Many of these are also identified on the official website http://www.vincentcapodanno.org.
family consented and attended the formal dedication on February 5, 1968. Military chapels in Oakland, California; Iwakuni, Japan; Camp Pendleton, California; and Staten Island, New York all bear Capodanno’s name. The Maryknoll Order and Capodanno’s family raised the necessary funds and built a chapel in Maioli, Taiwan in honor of Father Vincent. Another Maryknoll priest, Daniel Dolan, built a chapel in Capodanno’s memory in the Taiwanese mountain town of Thiankou in the Ta Hu parish. At present, seven known worship spaces exist named in honor of the late Chaplain Capodanno.

At the Washington Navy Yard Sail Loft on Tuesday, January 7, 1969, James Capodanno received the United States’ highest military award, the Medal of Honor, on behalf of his late brother Vincent. Unbeknownst to his family, Vincent already had been awarded the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Silver Star and the Navy Bronze Star for previous combat operations. Capodanno also posthumously received the Purple Heart Medal. James, along with his seven surviving siblings and their extended families, gave the Navy Memorial Museum a commissioned oil painting showing Vincent attired in a clerical suit superimposed on a scene depicting the last moments of his life. A memorial Mass attended by the Capodanno family and over ninety Navy Chaplains concluded the day’s events.

To the joy of the Capodanno family and the consternation of some seventy-three persons among the Maryknoll community who signed a formal letter to their Superior, the U.S. Navy christened and launched the USS \textit{Capodanno} (DE-1093) on October 21, 1972. Despite the fact that they believed a warship to be an inappropriate memorial to a Chaplain, none of the concerned Maryknoll family formally interfered with the ship’s
commissioning. The ship served in the fleet over twenty years, was decommissioned in
1993, and sold to the Turkish government in 2002. In 2000, then U.S. Congressman from
New York Vito Fossella requested that the Secretary of the Navy consider naming a new
ship after Capodanno.

Numerous other memorials now exist to the memory of Vincent Capodanno.
Three major works of art, including two paintings at Naval facilities and a sculpture in
Capodanno’s father’s hometown of Gaeta, Italy, depict Capodanno’s sacrifice. Various
buildings on naval installations bear Capodanno’s name, as does a stretch of Seaside
Boulevard from Lily Pond Avenue to Elm Tree Avenue on Staten Island.
In 1971, two of Capodanno’s friends, Eli Takesian and Ed Fitzgerald, initiated a college
scholarship in honor of the late priest and awarded to the children of Marines.
Capodanno’s name also appears on multiple monuments, including the Catholic
Chaplains Memorial in Arlington National Cemetery and on panel 25E, line 95 of the
Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. More than almost any of his fellow
Vietnam veterans memorialized on “the Wall,” Capodanno’s family and friends, his
pastoral colleagues, fellow veterans, and the U.S. Navy have honored his inarguably
heroic sacrifice.

After learning of Capodanno’s death one young Marine, CPL James Hamfeldt, who served in the same battalion, said,

“He gave his life. No one can do any more than that – that’s what Christ did… The only way I can justify it, is that he did it because that is what he had to do, and if he is going to be a priest and a Christian there really can’t be any other way. I know that but it still kills me… Of all the deaths I saw and did, the
greatest was his. I don’t know if he knew the tremendous impact he had on me. I came back to Church because of Father Capodanno. In my life he is a saint.³

In his book Making Saints: How the Catholic Church Determines Who Becomes a Saint, Who Doesn’t, and Why, Kenneth L. Woodward suggests that “making saints is a process whereby a life is transformed into a text,” thereby becoming a “medium for transmitting the meaning of the Christian faith.”⁴ Sometimes this making of saints occurs informally within a local community, as evidently occurred in the case of Vincent Capodanno for Corporal Hamfeldt and among some other Marines who served with the late priest. At other times, however, the Roman Catholic Church embarks on a lengthy three-step ecclesial process culminating, in a few cases, in an infallible papal declaration that a person is undeniably with God, able to intercede with God on behalf of the living, and thereby worthy of a universal public cult.⁵ These saints are made through the arduous process known as canonization. Although Vincent Capodanno made no claim to sainthood, his “life as text” is now on the path towards canonization within the Roman Catholic Church.

On May 19, 2006, Archbishop Edwin Frederick O’Brien initiated the “Cause for Beatification and Canonization of the Servant of God Vincent Robert Capodanno” by issuing a formal decree through his office, the Archdiocese for the Military Services, U.S.A.⁶ As is necessary within the Roman Catholic tradition, Archbishop O’Brien issued

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⁵ Woodward, Making Saints, 17.
this decree upon petition of a church official, known as a postulator, who believes that the individual in question is deserving of sainthood. Capodanno’s postulator is Father Daniel Mode, author of *The Grunt Padre*, the only book length biography of Capodanno. Also in keeping with church tradition, Archbishop O’Brien “consulted with the Holy See, his brother bishops and the faithful” in order to verify “the widespread reputation of sanctity enjoyed” by the late Capodanno. The Archbishop asserts that during Capodanno’s life “and growing ever stronger after his death, there has been ample evidence of the granting of graces and favors by God through his intercession.”

Archbishop O’Brien’s decree represents the first step in the formal process of making Vincent Capodanno a saint.

Begun at the local, or “ordinary” level, a bishop must do as Archbishop O’Brien has done in the case of Vincent Capodanno. That is, upon presentation of a deceased person’s life as worthy of sainthood by an individual, or postulator, a bishop must issue a decree and declare the person in question a Servant of God. The bishop’s decree formally begins the second step in the process, beatification.

Beatification encompasses an inquiry into the life of the deceased. Typically, the first step in the process of inquiry is the appointment of a Vice-Postulator to oversee all the necessary inquiries completed outside of Rome. In Vincent Capodanno’s case, Archbishop O’Brien appointed Ms. Mary Preece to serve as Vice-Postulator for the Cause. The Vice-Postulator then coordinates three specific kinds of inquiries. The first inquiry concerns the “reputation for sanctity and miracles” of the person in question,

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8 Ibid.
formally identified by the bishop as a Servant of God.\textsuperscript{9} The second line of inquiry concerns whether or not the church itself has followed Rome’s directives regarding the process of canonization, specifically whether or not local churches or people have violated the prohibition against publicly worshiping the Servant of God before beatification. The third line of inquiry requests the submission of any known writings attributed to the Servant of God for review. The information collected as a result of these inquiries is then forwarded to Rome for further investigation, public discussion on at least three occasions, and the prayerful consideration of the Pope.

Archbishop O’Brien’s decree initiated the first line of inquiry into Capodanno’s life by opening it to public scrutiny in the belief that not only could Capodanno’s life withstand such examination, but also that the priest’s witness in life and death possesses transformative power. Central to this first line of inquiry is the character of the person involved. At the present time, then, the key question regarding Vincent Capodanno’s life is simply this: “Is there evidence that (this) venerable Servant of God practiced virtues both theological and cardinal, and in an heroic degree?\textsuperscript{10} Capodanno’s virtue in death proved heroic. But did Vincent Capodanno practice the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, as well as the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, restraint, and courage, to a heroic degree in his life? Only time and the beatification will tell. However, the selection of Father Capodanno and the timing of Mode’s request and O’Brien’s decree reflect larger trends within the life and though of the Roman Catholic Church in America.


\textsuperscript{10} Beccari, “Beatification and Canonization,” 8.
Beginning in 1985 and continuing through 2002, horrific sexual abuse scandals involving priests around the country played out in the media. Lawsuits and settlements not only diminished church coffers, but also deeply demoralized the lay and clergy faithful. Previous attempts to canonize twentieth-century American men, namely Tom Dooley and Cardinal Spellman, derailed when allegations, unfounded or not, of homosexuality arose. No such allegations have arisen thus far in the case of Father Capodanno. In a sexual sense at least, Capodanno’s life may well withstand the inquiry into his virtue. And, to understate the case dramatically and colloquially, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Roman Catholic Church in America is in desperate need of a hero, or, even better, a saint.

Perhaps more revealing than the nomination of Vincent Capodanno for sainthood, however, is the timing and source of his cause. Originating within the Archdiocese of the Military while the United States engaged in two overseas conflicts, Capodanno’s cause appeals to the “best” within Roman Catholic Americans. Capodanno inarguably died heroically in a tragic war that America “lost.” Through his canonization cause, the Roman Catholic Church in America is sculpting Capodanno’s “life as text” to redeem not only the Church, but also Roman Catholics’ perception of what it means to be a Roman Catholic American.

Shaped by the time and place of his birth and childhood, Vincent Capodanno came of age during the 1950s, during what Seth Jacobs called “America’s Third Great Awakening.”¹¹ The child of an immigrant, raised within a profoundly religious family, in a diocese governed by Francis Cardinal Spellman--the most powerful Catholic in

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¹¹ Jacobs, America’s Miracle Man, 61.
America at the time—Capodanno embodied a particular variant of Roman Catholicism in mid-twentieth century America. Raised on *Field Afar* stories of self-sacrifice in disparate corners of the globe, guided by the service of his brothers during the “Good War,” and embracing the bipolar division of the Cold War world into god-fearing Christians and god-loathing communists, Capodanno walked his particular path of faithfulness.

Whether or not Capodanno’s life as text proves redemptive to either his church or the Roman Catholic memory of its golden age in America, should his path lead to canonization Vincent Robert Capodanno, Jr. will be a uniquely American saint.

Capodanno’s death set his memory on a path that few, if any, of his Chaplains Corps colleagues would have predicted. Each of the men that survived and came home from Vietnam had to find his own way forward.

Bill Thompson

After cheering when the plane went wheels up leaving Vietnam, Bill Thompson made his way by military transport to San Francisco. Booked on a commercial airliner from San Francisco to Dulles International airport outside of Washington, D.C., Thompson eagerly anticipated reuniting with this family. His wife Betty drove with their three small children from their home in Staunton, Virginia to meet him at the airport. As they were leaving the airport Betty handed him the keys to the new car she had purchased while he was away. Climbing in behind the wheel, Thompson was greeted by their Chihuahua, who jumped onto the steering wheel, and licked Thompson’s face. In her excitement the dog urinated all over Thompson’s chest. Thompson counted it a fitting
welcome and despite his drenched uniform, he and his family enjoyed lunch at a local restaurant on their way home.

Thompson received orders to serve on the staff of the Navy’s large medical facility in Portsmouth, Virginia. The hospital staff included a number of chaplains and the collegial support of these ministerial colleagues helped Thompson in his transition back to “the world.” Having lost forty pounds Thompson was physically depleted. In addition to enduring the intense stress of the combat conditions he encountered, carrying the burdens of so many young Marines exacted its psychic toll. Thompson admitted to his chaplain colleagues that he was more emotionally and spiritually exhausted than he had ever been in his life. Although an experienced Southern Baptist pastor before joining the Navy, Thompson shared that he had done more pastoral counseling in his thirteen months in Vietnam than he had done in nine previous years of ministry. Making allowance for his need for rest and time away, his colleagues at the hospital covered for him so that he could spend additional time with Betty and their children, who were eight, seven, and five years old. Always a passionate baseball fan as well as a former collegiate player, Thompson volunteered to coach his child’s Little League team. Thompson credited this time with his family and the support of his Chaplain Corps colleagues at the hospital for enabling him to process his experience in Vietnam.

Vietnam remained with him in his dreams for a time. In his most frightening nightmare Thompson was outside a wood frame structure in Phu Bai like the one he stayed in during his last two weeks in country. In his dream, however, Betty and their children were with him. Thinking the incoming mortars were firecrackers, his children
danced and cried out with glee. As they ran to find the source of the merriment, Thompson frantically grabbed for them and called out for them to “Come back” as they ran away. Laughing as they ran his children yelled to him, “Daddy, it’s okay, it’s okay” and Betty chided him “Leave them alone. They’re all right.”12 In his dream they were not all right, but as weeks of normalcy turned into months, the dreams passed.

Mostly through conversation with Betty, Thompson became aware of all that happened in the U.S. in the tumultuous year he had been away. The only stateside event Thompson recalled knowing of while in Vietnam was the April 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. Oblivious to the riots that followed or general growing unrest surrounding American involvement in Vietnam, Thompson said that when he left he had the idea that the country “was pretty much behind what was happening and I came back to a hostile environment.”13 Thompson believed he was not terribly attuned to the national sentiment, however, because he did not personally experience any hostility.

During his first year or so back from overseas several churches in the Portsmouth area invited him to come and speak about his experience. Thompson did so, in most instances sharing the spiritual high and relief of the Christmas Eve truce. The churches in which he spoke received him warmly, and he felt and appreciated their acceptance.

In early 1970 just before his three-year commitment to the Navy ended, Thompson was informed that he would not be retained because of a mandated ten percent reduction-in-force (RIF). Thompson desired to stay on active duty and did everything he

12 William E. Thompson, Jr., Interview by author, 05 May 2011, Hampton, Virginia, transcript in possession of the author.

13 Ibid.
could to remain. The Commanding Officer of Portsmouth Naval Hospital wrote a letter on his behalf to James Kelly, the Chief of Chaplains. Thompson personally carried the letter that claimed “he walked on water” to the Chief and plead his case, hoping that as one Baptist to another he could influence the outcome. Thompson noted that Chaplain Kelly was a “good listener” – politely hearing him out - but then indicated that there was nothing he could do. Thompson was released from active duty in the spring of 1970.

As Thompson searched for a new call, he briefly considered a pastoral position offered by a church. He ultimately declined the offer, as the proposed salary was half what he was making as a Lieutenant in the Navy and the church manse had two bedrooms for his family of five. Thompson enjoyed his work as a hospital chaplain and explored that as an avenue as he also considered a return to parish life. When he was offered a position in a yearlong Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) program at Saint Elizabeth Hospital in Washington, D.C., Thompson accepted. During the last week of the residency Thompson received a call from the Veterans Affairs (VA) Administration asking if he would be willing to serve as chaplain at the VA hospital in Montgomery, Alabama. He joyfully accepted and began a career within the VA.

Thompson remained in the Navy Reserve for several years after his involuntary separation. While in the metropolitan D.C. area he enjoyed “drilling” with Navy chaplains and hearing of their experiences aboard ship. Although Thompson had been in the Navy three years he had spent exactly three days on board a ship. When he joined the infantry battalion in Vietnam its headquarters were aboard the USS Iwo Jima in the South

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14 Thompson, Jr., Interview by author.
15 Ibid.
China Sea. Flown out to the ship on a windy day, Thompson arrived just in time for the mid-day meal in the clean and beautiful wardroom. Meeting the battalion’s new physician the two got acquainted over lunch. The doctor graciously and quickly told Thompson how to get to an exterior deck when it became apparent that he was going to be sick. Even though they received word that the battalion’s Executive Officer and other staff had been killed, Thompson was relieved to join the battalion at the DMZ several days later as he had been sick the entire time he had been on board the ship. Thompson found it somewhat ironic that his only experience at sea demonstrated that the Navy was perhaps not the best fit for him after all.

After relocating to Montgomery, Thompson affiliated with the local Navy Reserve center. He attended drills there in a non-pay status for about a year. When a paid opening for a chaplain with Army engineers became available, Thompson processed out of the Navy and in-to the Army. He remained in the Army reserve and retired as a Colonel.

Two years after moving to Montgomery, Thompson was offered a position at the VA hospital in Long Beach, California. With their children about ready to enter high school, the Thompsons were excited to hear good things about the Long Beach school system. Intrigued by the possibility of doing something different, the Thompsons moved west. Enamored with the beach, the Thompson children quickly adapted. The outgoing Betty also easily transitioned to the comparatively laid-back California atmosphere. By
his own tongue-in-cheek admission, it took the “old Virginia traditional” Thompson a year or more to acknowledge, “Hey, these Californians are human beings, aren’t they?”

After over forty years there, Thompson now claims that he too, is a Californian.

After eighteen years on the staff at the hospital in Long Beach, Thompson was offered the position as Chief of Service at the VA hospital in San Diego. He counted among the great successes of his career providing a chaplain to work solely and directly with homeless veterans. Enabling marginalized veterans to receive health care services, in many cases including treatment for alcoholism, provided him an enormous degree of satisfaction. Thompson served as the lead chaplain at the hospital until his 1998 retirement.

In retirement Thompson became a chaplain liaison for the California State Baptist Convention. The job entailed relating to Southern Baptist chaplains in institutional settings throughout the state. Thompson thoroughly enjoyed relating to and supporting other chaplains. However, as the Southern Baptist Convention became increasingly conservative and authoritarian in the 1990s and early 2000s, Thompson felt the gulf widening between himself and his denomination. Identifying himself as theologically conservative and socially liberal, Thompson resigned his position when it became clear that the Convention would require denominational employees to sign a loyalty statement.

The crux of the issue for Thompson was his perception that the Convention would no longer endorse military chaplains because of the military’s acceptance of female chaplains. Although individual Southern Baptist churches retained the right to ordain women as pastors, the Southern Baptist Convention did not want to put itself in the

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16 Thompson, Jr., Interview by author.
situation where it would then be called upon to endorse ordained women for military chaplaincy. Thompson moved his credentials to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Bill and Betty Thompson reside in Los Alamitos, California. Thompson has remained active in Veterans Administration related matters. He enjoys a special bond with the former Marines in his church and proudly shares that he served with Marines in Vietnam.

George Evans

Evans continued his service among Marines upon his return from Vietnam in 1971. Not yet sure whether he would make chaplaincy a career, Evans knew little of stateside Navy chaplaincy, having served overseas and then two tours with Marines. Returning to Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune in May 1971 felt, in some respects, like returning home. Assigned to serve first with the Headquarters and Support Battalion, Evans eventually served as the primary Protestant chaplain and preacher at the enormous base chapel. The Commanding General affectionately referred to him as the “Dean of the Chapel.”

Evans’s experiences as lead Protestant at the chapel resembled his work as a parish pastor more than any other he would experience again until retirement. In very real ways, his family would consider Camp Lejeune their home. His two oldest children, daughters Lisa and Karen, spent their formative school years in the area. He and his wife Jean believed that their family had a “great life” among Marines.

In May 1974, the Chaplains Corps called Evans to serve on the staff of the Bureau of Personnel in Washington, D.C. Reflective of the organizational skills he evidenced in

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17 Evans, Interview by Paul Zarbock.
18 Evans, Response to Follow Up Questionnaire, Question 29.
Vietnam as well as his experiences as a reservist, Chief of Chaplains Frank Garrett appointed Evans the Director of Naval Reserve Chaplains. The job necessitated that Evans learn the inner workings of the Navy’s reserve system and billeting processes. Perhaps the most enjoyable part of the job was the opportunity it afforded him to meet and work with many chaplains.

The position had true challenges, however. At the time it was unclear whether the office, and consequently his job, would remain in Washington or move to New Orleans, Louisiana. As a result, Evans’s family lived on the Eastern Shore of Maryland while he kept a room at the Bachelor Officers Quarters at Andrews Air Force Base. The year of commuting proved tough on him and his family.

In the mid-1970s the entire naval reserve system underwent a massive overhaul. The system had not been revamped since World War II and there were some who suggested that the reserve force be done away with altogether. Although it seemed a long way from Lutheran pastoral ministry, Evans ultimately felt that he learned how to “do paperwork in Washington” and, in the end, his work served sailors and Marines by ensuring that chaplains were available when needed.\(^{19}\)

Three years later, then Chief of Chaplains John J. O’Connor tapped Evans to serve as his Director of Plans, Programs, Budget and Procurement. Known as a brilliant thinker and demanding individual to work for, O’Connor worked assiduously to solidify the position of the Chaplain Corps within the Navy during the tumultuous period following Vietnam. Despite the fact that he and O’Connor didn’t get along initially and Evans knew that he would get the “losing end of that stick,” Evans developed a deep and

\(^{19}\) Evans, Interview by Paul Zarbock.
abiding respect for the man who eventually became Cardinal, Archbishop of New York. Evans believed that O’Connor valued the “ability to produce” above all else, and produce he did.\textsuperscript{20} Evans oversaw the Corps’ budget, developed long range plans, managed the construction of chapels, and oversaw the recruitment and procurement of chaplains. The development of the Religious Program Specialist rating as a dedicated occupational specialty was one of the highlights of his time in Washington. Another was the recruitment of African American and women chaplains. When O’Connor retired from the Navy, he recommended that Evans, the only chaplain who served on his staff the entire time he was Chief, be included on the short list of chaplains nominated to serve as Chaplain of the Marine Corps. Although Evans was the most junior Captain on the list, he was selected.

Evans served as Chaplain of the Marine Corps from 1979 to 1982. After three back-to-back tours in Washington, Evans then escaped the beltway serving as senior chaplain about the aircraft carrier Eisenhower. Having the opportunity to become backseat qualified in an F-14 and taking off from the deck of a carrier felt like “icing” on the proverbial cake for the nearly fifty year old chaplain.\textsuperscript{21} For his twilight tour, Evans returned home to Pennsylvania, serving as base chaplain at Naval Station Philadelphia. After twenty years active service, Evans retired in 1986.

Evans returned to parish ministry following retirement from the Navy. Called to serve as senior pastor at Atonement Lutheran Church in Wyomissing, Pennsylvania he once again actively pursued all the activities of church life, to include an addition to the

\textsuperscript{20} Evans, Interview by Paul Zarbock.

\textsuperscript{21} Evans, Interview by Paul Zarbock.
facility. As the Acquired Immune Deficiency (AIDs) crisis evolved, Evans worked with others in their community to establish Rainbow Home, an interfaith community dedicated to caring for persons with AIDs. And, as he had years before in Lancaster, he worked to reorganize the local chapter of Lutheran Social Services so that it more effectively served the needs of the community.

After five years in Wyomissing, Evans accepted the call to the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in McLean, Virginia. Having lived for nearly a decade in metropolitan Washington, Evans was well acquainted with the area. Once again he had the opportunity to oversee the expansion of a church facility and sought to deepen the church’s ties to the community. Continuing his work with persons affected by HIV/AIDS, Evans was deeply gratified he received an award from Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays.

Evans appreciated that many of his parishioners at Church of the Redeemer were active in government. He celebrated that the church was home to what he believed to be the largest contingent of Lutherans then serving in Congress. He was also pleased when William Rehnquist, then Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, joined the church. Evans considered it a privilege to participate in the justice’s 2005 funeral.22

In 2006, Evans and his wife Jean retired to the Eastern Shore of Maryland. After moving to the Eastern Shore he served a period as interim pastor at St. Paul’s Lutheran Church in Cordova. A rural church, Evans enjoyed serving a dramatically different type

of church than he had served previously. Nevertheless, when the church called a
permanent pastor, Evans gladly made the transition to serving as a member of the laity.

When he retired for the final time, Evans and his wife traveled and enjoyed the
activities of their three children, and now, seven grandchildren. In February 2010 George
and Jean made their way to Vietnam. Although making a point to visit the area around
Da Nang where he had been stationed some forty years earlier, George and Jean also
went to Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. Jean enjoyed their visit enough that they discussed
returning in the future.

On a 2011 trip George and Jean travelled to London with the intention of visiting
St. Paul’s Cathedral. Years before George’s grandfather had received a letter from the
English government indicating that his uncle’s name had been recorded in a book
honoring 28,000 Americans who died while stationed in the United Kingdom during
World War II. Kept in the American Memorial Chapel, the leather-bound book was
unveiled in a 1958 ceremony attended by Queen Elizabeth and American Vice President
Richard Nixon. When George and Jean indicated that they wished to see a family
member’s name in the memorial book, an attendant escorted them to the chapel. Evans
described seeing his uncle’s name as one of the most meaningful experiences of his life.

George Evans died suddenly at his home on June 10, 2014. His life was
celebrated in services at St. Paul’s in Cordova and at Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in
McLean. Evans’s body was buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

Vic Smith
Like Evans, Smith continued serving with Marines upon his return from Southeast Asia in 1972. Assigned to the First Marine Division at Camp Pendleton, California, he spent two years in his native state. Following Camp Pendleton, Smith experienced the first of three shipboard duty assignments, serving aboard the USS Jouett. Later, he would serve aboard the battleship Missouri and the carrier George Washington.

After Smith served additional tours with Marines in California and spent a year of postgraduate study at the University of California, Los Angeles, he spent over a decade in administrative capacities in Washington, D.C. When working in Washington, Neil Stevenson, one of the Chiefs of Chaplains under whom he served, nicknamed the Christian Science reader Smith “Mr. Free Exercise.” Smith, indeed, became a champion of the chaplain’s function to protect the Constitutional rights of naval personnel to the free exercise of their religion. Grounded in his experience in Nam Phong, Smith labored to ensure that personnel felt not only felt comfortable in practicing their faith, but actually grew in their faith tradition. Smith later recounted with pride that when he served aboard the carrier, there were ninety worship experiences offered to personnel every week.

He was particularly pleased when he assisted Native Americans aboard the Washington to obtain the appropriate lay leader credentials so that they could gather in celebration of their traditions. When the ship was in the Persian Gulf during the solstice one year they requested that they gather together for three ceremonies. Out of this

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23 Rear Admiral Stevenson, a United Presbyterian pastor, served as Chief of Chaplains from August 1983 to August 1985.

24 Smith, Interviews by Paul Zarbock.
experience the group decided to gather together every Saturday evening. They remarked to Smith that filling the chapel space with their blankets and robes made them feel like they were home in a kiva.

Smith argued strongly that “free exercise is not to be abridged by denominational self-righteousness.”

Although chaplains are denominational agents because the military borrows rather than creates chaplains, chaplains may not force their religious perspectives on those who do not share their views. When conflicts occur, and they inevitably will, the rights and needs of the military member “justify” the chaplain’s service and not the rights of the ecclesiastical body. Although this understanding of chaplaincy may have been implicitly understood previously, Smith’s articulation that the service person’s right necessitates chaplaincy evidenced the profound shift occurring in the Navy’s understanding of chaplaincy since Vietnam.

During his years of service in Washington, Smith developed other deeply held convictions regarding the nature and function of chaplaincy, particularly within the Navy. Smith believed that at their best chaplains provided ministry not only to individuals, but also to the system itself. He argued that if systems within the military were charged with improving military members’ lives and those systems were improved, the lives of service personnel were, in fact, made better. Fixing broken systems, Smith contended, eased the overall burden on the system and in a directly correlative way on the chaplains providing pastoral care to people within the system.

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25 Smith, Response to Follow Up Survey, Question 31.

26 Ibid.
Chaplain Smith strongly advocated that chaplains understand the military institution they serve and how chaplains fit within it.\footnote{Smith, Response to Follow Up Survey, Question 31.} Title X positions the Chief of Chaplains “at the table” at the Secretary of the Navy level, at the Chief of Naval Operations level, and at the Bureau of Personnel level.\footnote{Ibid.} He encouraged chaplains to understand that the Chief’s position as a presidential appointee and treatment as a Bureau Chief mattered more than the second star making him a Rear Admiral in pay grade.\footnote{Rear Admiral Margaret Kibben is the Navy’s current Chief of Chaplains and first female in that role.} Smith strongly encouraged chaplains to make sure that they were “at the tables” of the commands they served. If they were, he believed that far fewer abusive situations and less discrimination would occur system-wide.

Smith described himself as a “quasi-counter culturalist.”\footnote{Smith, Conversations with author, 07 April 2011 and 21 April 2011.} Having traveled extensively before entering the service and coming from a non-mainline tradition, he felt that he always brought a different perspective to the Chaplain Corps and to the naval service. While he was a full participant in the system, wearing the uniform, aligning his professional work with the command’s mission, he always retained his personal perspective regarding what was happening around him.\footnote{Ibid.} Every once in a while he would take the opportunity to advance a counter argument. He felt doing so was healthy for everyone concerned.
Smith was the first Christian Science chaplain in the Navy to be promoted beyond the rank of Lieutenant Commander while serving on active duty. He eventually rose to the rank of Captain, serving for a total of thirty years before his mandatory retirement in 2002.

Following retirement, Smith moved with his wife to Williamsburg, Virginia. There he became active in the Williamsburg Community of Faith for Peace, formed in November 2002 to protest against the impending war with Iraq. On January 18, 2003 Smith participated in a national rally against the war in Washington, D.C. Smith viewed his actions as consistent with his role as a chaplain insofar as chaplains are always called to serve people. Smith understood his participation not as a protest “against the military” but a protest “for our people in the military.”

Although there were times he considered asking for his endorsing agency to pull his endorsement because of prejudice towards him and his particular religious perspective, he did not. He believed that the clergy with whom he served now have an understanding of Christian Science because of him. By remaining in the military and proving himself in that environment, he believed he helped his denomination experience validation. Smith continues to live with his wife in Williamsburg, Virginia. They have one daughter.

Stan Beach

Continuing to recover from the life-threatening injuries he received in Vietnam, Stan Beach was ultimately moved to the hospital near the Navy’s training command at

Great Lakes, Illinois so that he might be near his family. Shortly after being moved to Great Lakes he was given leave so that he might go home and visit Ellen and their children. He recalled sitting in his home watching his six-year old son out the window as he played with friends. Beach’s son walked with a limp, copying his Dad. Beach recalled that his son and one of his friends stopped playing war games after Stan’s injury and the death of other boy’s brother, a Marine in Vietnam.

After a short time at home, Beach returned to the hospital to receive treatment on his mangled left leg. For a time his legs were sewn together so that skin might grow from his good leg and cover the exposed bone on his injured leg. Seeking to alleviate the monotony of hospital routine, Beach took full advantage when granted any small liberty. Finally permitted to get out of bed and use the toilet on this own, Beach hobbled to the elevators and found bathrooms on other floors. His bathroom privileges were revoked. Tiring of hospital food, he and another patient, who had a fused right hip, snuck out of the hospital at night and together managed to drive a car to the officer’s club for dinner. More than once, military police looked the other way after stopping them for erratic driving on their return to the hospital.

Letters and visits from chaplains and ministerial colleagues both buoyed his spirits and, at times, were a source of frustration. Beach greatly appreciated a letter from Vince Capodanno encouraging him in his recovery. Vince told Stan “I know what you’re made of and I know that you will graduate” in a sense, from this present suffering.33 Beach concurred with his friend’s philosophy and felt that there were spiritual lessons to embrace amidst the pain and suffering he was experiencing. He also appreciated visits

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33 Beach, Interviews by author.
from clergy and chaplains from other denominations. He felt that they were generally more attentive to him than clergy and leaders from his own denomination who were often closer to the hospital than those who did make the time to visit him.

Beach spoke at the national conference of the General Association of Regular Baptist’s convention in Seattle, Washington in 1967. Still an in-patient at Great Lakes Naval Hospital, Beach’s physician granted him permission and made it possible for him to attend the conference by preparing a special full leg cast for his patient. Roman Catholic priest Dan Finn drove Beach to O’Hare International Airport and assisted him in boarding the plane. During the “Chaplains Hour” at the conference Beach shared “greetings” with the assembled delegates. Beach recalled that several speakers had castigated the president, “his Commander in Chief,” and the nation he had committed to serve. They also attacked less conservative denominations, to include clergy in those bodies Beach believed were his “faithful brothers.” Beach’s “greeting” focused on sharing the courage and dedication of Marines and their “eagerness for spiritual realities and encouragement.” Two remarks made by Marines to Beach were fresh in his mind as he addressed representatives of his denomination. One young man had told him that his church always pressed the issue that if he were to die that day, was he certain of heaven? The young man told Beach, “…they never prepared me to live in this fallen, broken

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34 The account of this incident and all following quotations are taken from written correspondence from Stanley J. Beach to the author in response to the Follow Up Questionnaire. The response is undated and is in the possession of the author.

35 Stanley J. Beach, Response to Follow Up Questionnaire, undated, letter in possession of author.
world I live in here.’’\textsuperscript{36} The second felt that his church and his denomination had abandoned him, labeling him a ‘‘‘baby killer.’’\textsuperscript{37}

With these thoughts in mind Beach reminded the delegates that Scripture warned against speaking evil of authorities and that doing so was a poor testimony to “a world in pain, and had a devastating effect on the troops and chaplain ministries. Doctrinal criticism is expected, but attacks on chaplains of other faith groups without knowing their individual stand is not reflective of Scriptural and godly behavior.”\textsuperscript{38} Although the denomination’s endorser thanked Beach for his comments and others spoke positively of his contribution to the gathering, he wasn’t aware that it changed anything.

Beach returned to the hospital to continue receiving treatment. After over a year in the hospital his primary physician submitted paperwork for Beach to receive a permanent limited duty status within the Marine Corps. When Beach reminded him that he was not a Marine, the doctor told him, “‘Look, you know it. I know it. By the time those idiots figure it out in Washington, I’ll have you on limited duty.’”\textsuperscript{39} Within a matter of weeks Beach had orders to serve as the staff chaplain at Long Beach Hospital in Long Beach, California. After a brief tour there where he also received specialized hyperbaric treatment, another physician identified Beach as ready for full duty to exclude

\textsuperscript{36} Beach, Response to Follow Up Survey, undated, Letter in possession of author.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{39} Beach, Interview by author, 13. Beach, Interview by Paul Zarbock. What follows is a compilation of statements Beach made during both interviews.
“hiking, walking, or running over rough terrain.” He was assigned to the Naval Air Station at Cubi Point in the Philippines. After two years in the Philippines, Beach was selected for postgraduate work during the 1971-72 academic year. By now well acquainted with hospitals and hospital chaplaincy, he completed a year of Clinical Pastoral Education at the Bowman Gray School of Medicine affiliated with Wake Forest College in North Carolina. Expected to use the skills acquired during CPE, Beach was then assigned to the Naval Hospital in Portsmouth, Virginia where he served for four years.

In 1976, a decade after his injury, Beach reported to the Marine Corps Air Station in Iwakuni, Japan. By now Beach was fully aware of his good fortune in again being assigned overseas far from Washington officials who might discern that he needed to retire due to disability. As his tour in Japan came to an end, Beach received a phone call informing him that he had been selected for the rank of Captain. Perhaps due to his selection or to a compassionate colleague in the Chief’s office, Beach’s orders were changed and instead of moving to Cherry Point, North Carolina where his household goods and car had been shipped, the Beach family moved to Governor’s Island, New York where he served with the Coast Guard from 1979 to 1982. Again, Navy medicine did not examine his record before he reported to the Coast Guard and for those years public health service physicians monitored Beach’s health and medical records.

In 1982 Beach was selected to serve as Director of the Chaplain’s School in Newport, Rhode Island. Due to their influence in shaping incoming clergy’s understanding of chaplaincy within the Navy, the staff of the Chaplain’s School occupies

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40 Beach, Response to Follow Up Survey, undated, Letter in possession of author.
a powerful and coveted role within the Chaplain Corps. The Director was generally viewed as someone on the “short list” of potential Chiefs of Chaplains. Beach’s selection as Director was a reflection of the respect many in the Corps had for him in his perseverance and irrepressible good cheer in spite of his pain and an affirmation of his Marine-and sailor-centered vision of chaplaincy.

Beach’s first task at the school was to restore the morale of his staff. The previous Director had caved in to demands made by several students, who happened to be lawyers as well as clergy, when one of his instructors said something they didn’t like. In addition to supporting his staff, Beach also had to fend off a bureaucratic move to consolidate the Chaplains School into the Officer Indoctrination School (OIS), which prepared students for service as staff officers in the Navy. Taking the Marine Gunnery Sergeant assigned to the Chaplains School with him to a meeting with the Commodore where the consolidation was being discussed, Beach argued that the Chaplains School couldn’t afford to lower its standards to that of the Officer Indoctrination School. With the Gunny offering well timed “ooh rahs,” Beach explained that chaplains had to be ready to deploy immediately and independently with Marines. As a consequence, the Chaplains School’s physical fitness standards were higher than those of the Officer Indoctrination School. Beach concluded he would be willing to accept those OIS students who could keep up. The matter went no further.

Beach served as Director during Ronald Reagan’s presidency. Adopting a strategic plan intended to reverse the military drawdown following Vietnam, Reagan
outlined a plan to dramatically increase the Navy’s fleet of ships.\textsuperscript{41} The increase in Naval personnel included a commensurate increase in the numbers of chaplains being brought onto active duty. The Chaplains Corps was projected to grow from roughly 800 chaplains on to 1200. As a result, the smallest class of students Beach had at the school was 62, with most classes larger than 100. With increased opportunity to enter Navy chaplaincy, Beach wryly noted that “every Southern Baptist without a church was going to apply to be a chaplain.”\textsuperscript{42}

As Director, Beach consciously encouraged understanding among chaplains from very different backgrounds. For example, he would have his staff assign an evangelical pastor with a Mormon chaplain as roommates. He also replaced “morning devotions,” which he felt was almost universally despised, with something he and his Basic Course Officer George Dobes called, “SpirOps.”\textsuperscript{43} Instead of “worship” which proved offensive to evangelical Christians if led by someone from a non-traditional Christian background or Jewish background, SpirOps became a kind of laboratory learning session in order to learn about traditions different from one’s own. Following SpirOps, students broke into denominational groups for study or worship as they determined desirable.

Beach expressed that although he came from an evangelical background, he always felt fairly treated by the mainline Protestant senior leaders within the Chaplain Corps. Although some occasionally derided him verbally, he never felt that he was

\textsuperscript{41} Reagan’s strategy was known as the “600 Ship Navy” plan. The plan was never fully implemented and fell out of favor entirely after the 1989 collapse of the Soviet Union.

\textsuperscript{42} Beach, Interview by author.

\textsuperscript{43} Beach, Interview by author. Dobes is a Roman Catholic priest.
discriminated against in terms of promotion or assignment. However, as evangelicals became more prevalent in the Chaplains Corps and assumed more positions of leadership, he was not as sure that the reverse held true.

Beach also shared that Chief of Chaplains Neil Stevenson, for whom Beach worked when he was Director of the Chaplains School, “hated” the motto “Cooperation without Compromise” because it concerned the relationships between chaplains and how chaplains related to one another. Stevenson believed that the focus should be on the troops, on their right to practice their faith. Beach believed that shift toward the free exercise focus occurred in the early 1980s. Beach himself felt chaplains hid behind “Cooperation without Compromise” sometimes saying that their church would not permit them to do this or that. He thought speaking of accommodation rather than cooperation made better sense for understanding chaplaincy. Respecting one another’s traditions and discerning what proved of essential importance enabled chaplains to accommodate one another’s needs. To Beach’s understanding this proved more fundamental and more helpful as it encouraged chaplains to find common ground in faith, rather than in highlighting difference. In 2011 Beach said that he thought Navy chaplaincy was beginning to swing back from a period of highlighting differences and facilitating innumerable services to working more to find common ground and accommodating one another.

Beach argued that it is possible to have two things that are apparently contradictory both be true. Noting that all clergy hold the reality of sin in tension with

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44 Beach, Interview by author.
divine love, Beach contended that the truth of sin and love are even more apparent to chaplains because of their work in institutional settings. For him, the essence of faith lay in the truth that one is beloved by God. Communicating that love to those they serve is the primary task of chaplaincy. As a correlate, chaplains, Beach maintained, had to view one another as brothers and sisters in faith.

Some twenty years after his injury in Vietnam, Beach still struggled with infections and pain in his leg. He was also losing his hearing as a result of the type and combination of antibiotics he had received over the years. While serving as Director of the Chaplains School, and still wanting to remain on active duty, the Navy’s medical system caught up to Beach. When he sought treatment for a leg infection at the Naval hospital in Newport a Navy doctor determined that Beach was no longer physically able to perform his duties. Beach was medically retired with a noted disability due to hearing loss. There was no mention of his leg. He was recognized in a formal ceremony among Marines at Camp LeJeune, North Carolina on March 6, 1987.

The designation of his hearing loss as a disability has since become a point of humor for Beach’s family. Noting that VA rules stipulate that next-of-kin only receive an indemnity in the event of death from the service related disability Stan has told Ellen that when he dies she needs to put him in the car and “push it on a (sic) railroad tracks and say he didn’t hear it.”

In retirement Beach switched his ecclesiastical credentials from the General Association of Regular Baptists to the Presbyterian Church in America. He became an associate endorser for his new denomination and travelled the country for more than a

45 Beach, Interview by Paul Zarbock.
decade supporting chaplains, constantly encouraging them to view their fellow chaplains as colleagues and holding before all the sense that we are united as recipient’s of God’s common grace.

Beach also remains committed to Marines. He remains active in the Third Battalion, Fourth Marines Association and the Military Order of the Purple Heart. He serves as Chaplain for both organizations. The Internet has enabled him to reconnect with many Marines with whom he served in Vietnam. He continues to seek out ways to facilitate healing for others. Although many Marines who served in Vietnam felt either disenfranchised by their churches or felt that their faith didn’t provide them the resources to make sense of their experience in Vietnam, Beach believes that many are reflecting more now in later life. He finds that the reunions and memorial services he attends are offering veterans the opportunity to support one another and aid in mitigating their pain. He still considers it a privilege to serve.

In a formal ceremony in June 2012 led by then Navy Chief of Chaplains Mark Tidd the U.S. Naval Chaplaincy School and Center, now located at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, was renamed “Stanley J. Beach Hall.” Rare for the military to name a building after a living person, speakers identified what many who served with Beach already knew. He was “a living legend.”

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In 2006, forty years after a mortar in Vietnam injured him, a potentially life-threatening bone infection necessitated the amputation of Stan’s leg. He and Ellen live in Leesburg, Florida.

Carl Auel

Being selected as school’s Director of the Basic Course, the indoctrination course for new Navy chaplains, following his tour in Vietnam was a reflection of the respect Carl Auel had cultivated within the corps, as well as an affirmation that his understanding of the role and duties of the chaplain coincided with those of the corps’ most senior leadership. Auel also acknowledged that as Director he felt an obligation to be as encouraging about ministry in Vietnam as he was able. Many of the chaplains undergoing their initial training under his supervision would soon serve there.

Shortly after his assignment to the school, Auel delivered a “Chapel Talk” to the students of the Senior Course. Composed of more seasoned chaplains, the course brought together for reflection and advanced training those presumed soon to comprise the senior leadership of the corps. In his talk, Auel reflected on two of his experiences in Vietnam. Although he mentioned no names, Auel began his talk by speaking eloquently of the death of beloved radioman Ronald Pearson. He transitioned to speaking of all that followed by saying, “Slowly, the squad and, then, the platoon was reorganized and joined the Company to continue the mission to sweep the Ville. But a chain of events had been set in motion and, as the Company moved, it moved to more death and certain horror.”

Auel reflected that “in the framework of controlled violence, uncontrolled violence had

been loosed. Women and children had been killed and, now, young men were charged with murder.”

Auel went on to describe the revulsion, contempt, even hate, he and others who had not been there felt for the perpetrators. He spoke of the whispered conversations when he and others in the unit not involved “moralized…and legalized….and despised.” Auel then described in great detail that late night Rudy Deiner came to him and they sat by candlelight, in silence for a long time, until, through tears, Deiner said, “I am the one charged with murder.” The hours of conversation that followed humanized Deiner for Auel such that he took on the young Marine’s guilt. He said:

“Caught up in life, in its terrible swiftness and its requisite momentary and flashing decisions, in its inexorable shaping and twisting, together we shared a common humanity and that which I had not dared think or accept. Indeed, he was responsible for whatever it was that he might have done. But, so was I responsible. If, indeed, he was a murderer, so was I. Even more so.”

Auel then played for the chaplains Joan Baez’s song “Be Not Too Hard” while he read excerpts from the ninth chapter of Ecclesiastes reflecting the sense that “time and chance happen to them all.” Auel’s first illustration encouraged those present to reflect on the reality that it is easy to judge when looking at a situation from the outside. He noted that before he knew Deiner he stood ready, using the Biblical language familiar to

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49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.
them all, “with the first stone.” But, as his subsequent protection and witness on behalf of Deiner bore out, Auel never cast his stone.

Auel then went on to reflect on the worship service he and Eli Takesian led during the intense fighting for control of Hue City during the Tet Offensive. He said that they “had been ushered into a moment when these young men, themselves, expressed with specific and timeless symbols that which was most authentic in them, articulating a deep and most personal human need.” Auel said that he could still hear them singing,

“What a fellowship, what a joy divine, leaning on the everlasting arms; What a blessedness, what a peace is mine, leaning on the everlasting arms. Leaning, leaning, safe and secure from all alarms; Leaning, leaning, leaning on the everlasting arms. What have I to dread, what have I to fear, leaning on the everlasting arms? I have blessed peace with my Lord so near, leaning on the everlasting arms.”

Some eight months after that moving experience Auel said that as he looked at those young men,

“so many so young but that night old beyond their years, and thought of the morning that was to come, I wanted to stop it. They knew in general that which faced them at first light. I already knew in specifics. Together, Eli and I knew that many of those young men, who reached out to us and to whom we reached, would not live beyond the next day. And, we wanted, Eli and I, to cry out in the name of God to stop it. But, it could not be stopped. There would be no response. Only silence. That was all we had. It was silence that we heard and which we, together, shared.”

Auel closed his talk by reading from the eighth chapter of Ecclesiastes while a recording of Joan Baez singing “The Dove” played.

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54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.
In March of 1969, from the relative safety of Newport, Rhode Island, Auel wrote perhaps his most revealing words regarding his experience in Vietnam. After expressing gratitude to many, including the officers, senior enlisted, doctors, Sisters of Hue house, and most particularly the young Marines with whom he served, Auel wrote: “Together we were plunged into a suffering world. There, contending with our enemies, whatever or whoever made them that, I learned to know a world which agonizes in darkness. I regret that; not the knowledge of it or the experience of it, but the fact of it.” These words were the foreword to his end-of-tour report which he had written in September 1968, just prior to his return from Vietnam.

In 1971, toward the end of Auel’s time at the Chaplain’s School, Doubleday books published Memphis-Nam-Sweden, an account in which Marine Corps deserter Terry Whitmore detailed the October 1967 massacre of some 400 men, women, and children at Quang Tri. Whitmore, an African American Marine who served with the First Marines at the same time as Chaplain Auel, sustained injuries in Con Thien some time after the events of the fall and was medevaced to Japan. Once in Japan Whitmore made the decision to desert, eventually making his way to Moscow where he spoke at a press conference before relocating permanently to Sweden.


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58 Auel, PTSD Journal, Appendix B, End of Tour Report, Forward, March 1969, NCSCA.
is so irresponsible that it may help to provoke a responsible inquiry into the question of war crimes and atrocities in Vietnam.”\textsuperscript{59} Despite the questions surrounding Lane’s truthfulness, Doubleday books made the decision to publish Whitmore’s memoir, perpetuating the claim that an atrocity on the scale of My Lai had happened at Quang Tri. Given the visibility of Sheehan’s review of Lane’s book, it is likely that Auel was aware of the publication of both books. Although it is not known if he read either, the kernel of truth in both books was Rudy Deiner’s act of murder. Auel never revealed if his knowledge and pivotal role in the sad saga that gave rise to Whitmore’s atrocity tale proved burdensome.

Following a three-year tour at the “schoolhouse” Auel was again selected for postgraduate training, this time at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. While a student, in July of 1972, Auel put on the rank of Captain. After completing his course of study, Auel joined the staff of the Chief of Naval Education and Training (CNET) in Pensacola, Florida.

After Auel’s retirement from the Navy, the Auel family moved to Purcerville, Virginia, a community some fifty miles from Washington, D.C. Auel continued ministerial work, serving as a substitute and interim pastor. Among the congregations he served were Christ the King Lutheran Church in Great Falls, Virginia and a Methodist church in Purcerville. It was in retirement that Auel descent into his own darkness gathered speed. Herbert Ing, his former commanding officer, heard Auel preach at Christ the King and noted that the sermon was “‘incoherent,’” likely due to the fact that Auel

was drinking heavily at the time.\textsuperscript{60} Ing encouraged Auel to seek treatment, taking him to veteran’s facilities around the area. While struggling personally, Auel continued to play an active role in the Loudoun Ministerial Association and local community, one highlight of which proved to be his development of a system for distributing rape kits to victims through the area’s hospital and county law enforcement offices.\textsuperscript{61} When Hurricane Hugo hit the South Carolina coast in September 1989, Auel coordinated and delivered relief supplies to its victims. Auel also volunteered for the National Park Service at the Vietnam War Memorial.

Auel spoke little of his experiences in Vietnam with others. Later, he confessed that he kept his experiences to himself in part because of treatment he received upon his return. Like many military personnel, Auel made his way home from Vietnam on a commercial aircraft. When the plane landed in San Francisco and the passengers disembarked they were greeted by an agitated crowd. Some in the crowd cursed at the military personnel leaving the aircraft; others held signs inscribed with the words, “’Baby Killers.’”\textsuperscript{62} The reception Auel received in San Francisco proved more pleasant than the welcome he received a short time later in Newport, Rhode Island. As clergy new to the area, he was invited to participate in the leadership of a Sunday morning worship service at a local Lutheran Church. The pastor of the church had included a brief biography of Auel in the worship bulletin, indicating his service in Vietnam and the medals he had been awarded. As Auel and the church’s pastor processed up the aisle behind the choir to

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\textsuperscript{60} Kulik, “War Stories,” 241.
\textsuperscript{61} Julianna Auel, Letter to author, 2.
\textsuperscript{62} Auel, PTSD Journal, 30, NCSCA.
\end{flushright}
begin the service, three persons spit on him. Auel also acknowledged that he felt an obligation to be as encouraging about ministry in Vietnam as he was able in his role as the Director of the Basic Course. Many of the chaplains undergoing their initial training under his supervision would soon serve there.

Although Auel shared little of his experiences with anyone, he expressed his love for the country and its people to his six children. He also told them of his admiration and awe for the Marines with whom he served, making it clear that when he died he wished to be buried with them. His daughter Juliana believes that the Marines’ need for her father, and her father’s need for them, sustained him throughout his time in country.

While recognizing that their father’s service in Vietnam changed him profoundly, his children remain unsure of the precise source of the change. For many years particularly while he remained in the Navy, the “changes were subtle, (their) family life was filled with ‘normal’ happy times” and his children cherish good memories, confident of their father’s love for their mother and for them.63 As the years passed, however, Auel withdrew from his family and drank excessively. He experienced flashbacks and nightmares, and became “almost unrecognizable” to those closest to him.64 His wife Marian pinpointed her husband’s retirement from the Navy and their move to Virginia as the time when he began to experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

63 Julianna Auel, Letter to author, 2.

Auel himself, however, wrote in “A PTSD Journal” that he began experiencing severe symptoms of trauma in mid-1995. He also acknowledged that with the hope of relieving his distress at night, he self-medicated with alcohol. At some point thereafter he began attending Alcoholics Anonymous and sought treatment through a Veteran’s Administration counseling center and a mental health hospital. Auel credited Dr. Aphrodite Matsakis, author of I Can’t Get Over It: A Handbook for Trauma Survivors, with providing the suggestion that he look at pictures from his time in Vietnam and keep a journal. He did both, including pictures in a written journal. In his journal writings, Auel identified several experiences that triggered some of the debilitating flashbacks and nightmares he experienced.

Auel identified the initial trigger as the visit to his home of a heating-cooling contractor to identify and correct a problem with their air conditioning system. When Auel took the contractor into his home office in the basement, the man inquired about the photographs of Vietnam on the wall. The ensuing conversation revealed that the contractor had been the Army Sergeant in command of a 6x6 truck that defended Auel and the Marines who were moving the dead and wounded from Hue City to Phu Bai during the Tet Offensive.

This conversation proved the first in a series of events that Auel identified as initiating the downward spiral that led him to seek treatment. Auel pointed to the publication in April 1995 of Robert McNamara’s memoir, In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam as another trigger. In reading the former Secretary of Defense’s controversial text, Auel became convinced that America “had in fact abandoned the very

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65 Auel, PTSD Journal, 1.
people whom we had come to assist and defend and whose trust we had received.”

Auel believed that both he and his commanding officer, Colonel Ing, worked to fulfill the stated purpose of the Personal Response Program; namely, to assist and defend the Vietnamese people. Auel wrote in his journal, “in this process of recovery I am able, now, to see with equal clarity that in addition to our military mission we did fulfill that formally stated objective, as well.” Auel wrote that he felt it was a privilege to come to know and love the people in the communities where he was stationed. Nevertheless, the dissonance of how Auel perceived his work in Vietnam and how the conflict was interpreted and understood in the American psyche seem to have factored significantly in his personal struggle.

In the summer of 1995 Auel and his wife drove to Michigan to celebrate her parents’ seventieth wedding anniversary. They spent several days at his sister’s home in Detroit. One afternoon, while stuck in traffic on a local roadway, an African American man noticed the bumper sticker from the Viet Nam Memorial on Auel’s car. He leaned out his window and shouted to Auel, “’Nam! I was there! Welcome home!’” After Auel responded welcoming him home as well, the man leaned in even closer and in a moment of recognition shouted, “’Soul Brother!’” The man was one of the Marines from the “Soul Brothers Platoon” for whom Auel had developed such a deep affection. The encounter left Auel deeply shaken, as he experienced flashbacks and nightmares in

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66 Auel, PTSD Journal, 11-12.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid., 16.
69 Ibid.
which he saw again the young men who he “had held in my arms, prayed for, and attempted to comfort, and those whose bodies I had helped put in body bags.”

As a National Park Service volunteer at the Viet Nam Memorial, Auel often helped families trace the names of their loved ones. On one occasion Auel offered to assist a tearful couple who wanted a tracing of their son’s name. His name was located at the top of one of the panels, requiring the use of a ladder, and according to regulations, the assistance of a volunteer. The couple indicated that they had come to the “Wall” every year on the anniversary of his death. When the couple shared their son’s name, Auel realized that he was the young man who had died in a mortar attack just after Auel had left his bunker. Auel had assisted the corpsmen in placing his body in a body bag and offering a brief prayer service over him. Meeting this young man’s parents and the memory of his gruesome death triggered for Auel all the dying he witnessed.

Some twenty years after having gone out of print, the University of Mississippi Press reprinted Terry Whitmore’s memoir Memphis-Nam-Sweden in March of 1997. The reprinted edition contained an afterward in which Jeff Loeb described the text as “one of the finest memoirs of the Vietnam experience.” Once again Whitmore presented his fabrication to the public, while Auel struggled to cope with the truth.

In early August 1997 in a one-car alcohol related incident, Auel drove off a road in rural Virginia. Severely injured, he fell into a coma and died on August 15th, some two weeks after the crash. In accordance with his clearly stated wishes, his family buried his

70 Ibid.

body with his Marines at Quantico National Cemetery in Prince William County, Virginia.

Every year around Mother’s Day, Auel’s beloved former commanding officer, Herbert Ing, the chaplain who relieved him with First Marines, Elden Luffman, and Rudy Deiner, gather at the Ing’s home near Quantico, Virginia. Luffman and his wife make the drive from Florida where they have retired. The three men come together to remember the man Ing describes as “‘the finest person I’ve ever known.’”72 The three men lay a wreath at Auel’s grave where Luffman offers a prayer. They then eat lunch together at the nearby Globe and Laurel Restaurant.

Since her father’s death, Julianna Auel has worked to remember him and others who have died from noncombat causes that are now linked to the conflict, including alcoholism, drug addiction and diseases related to Agent Orange. “In Memory Day” celebrations began in 1998 and are held annually at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. As part of the ceremony the names of loved ones whose names are not included on the memorial are spoken. Carl Auel’s name is among those read.

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Because of their ministerial commitment, the afterlives of the chaplains highlighted in this work continue to reflect the emotional traumas and spiritual challenges of their ministries in Vietnam. For these men, their continued service to their beloved Marines also underscores the significant changes in the Navy’s Chaplains Corps that brought the golden age of naval chaplaincy to a close in the 1970s.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

Even as the last chaplains serving with Marines in Vietnam were coming home, three events of the 1970s highlighted the end of what may have been viewed by many of those who served at the time as the Navy’s Chaplain Corps’ golden age. In different ways each event reflected the dramatic changes occurring in American society and within the Chaplain Corps. The first event was the 1972 court martial of Chaplain Andrew Jensen, an American Baptist pastor, then stationed at the Navy’s air facility in Jacksonville, Florida.\(^1\) Accused of adultery by the wives of two naval aviators, Jensen became the

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\(^1\) Andrew F. Jensen, Jr. died January 28, 2015 in New Jersey.
second Navy chaplain tried for adultery. The trial consumed Chief of Chaplains Francis L. Garrett’s staff for months and pitted the Corps against Jensen’s endorsing agent. The story made headlines around the country, prompting near daily press inquiries to the Chief’s office.

The American Baptist Church sent representatives to Washington to meet with Chief Garrett to encourage him to use his influence to circumvent the court martial. Given that the legal process had already begun, there was nothing Garrett could do. Angered, the American Baptist Church’s endorsing agent threatened to withhold endorsement of any further chaplains to the Navy unless Jensen were acquitted, promoted from the rank of Commander to Captain, and offered a palatable assignment. All three happened. Jensen was acquitted at trial, promoted at the behest of the Secretary of the Navy, and sent to Postgraduate School at Princeton Theological Seminary. Following his acquittal, Jensen offered his side of the story in a book The Trial of Chaplain Jensen. Branded as the “first-person account of the most sensational military trial of the decade,” Bantam Books published the book in 1974 and 20th Century Fox studios quickly purchased the rights to the text. The film studio released a made-for-television movie in 1975 with James Franciscus in the leading role.

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2 Jensen’s book The Trial of Chaplain Jensen and media coverage at the time made the claim that Jensen was the first chaplain to be court martialed for adultery. A memorandum from the Judge Advocate General’s office in the Naval Chaplains School and Center Archive indicates that a Methodist chaplain was convicted of adultery at courts martial in 1948 and subsequently permitted to resign. The man switched denominations, remained in ministry for a time and took up raising sheep. He is now deceased. The author referenced this chain of events in an email conversation with James Pfannenstiel on 12 September 2011.

The media maelstrom surrounding the trial and Jensen’s published rebuttal demonstrated just how much cultural influence the media wielded post-Vietnam. The court martial garnered headlines in every major paper in the country and multiple references in *Time* magazine.\(^4\) The sensational allegations of a Baptist pastor and military officer engaging in adulterous trysts in local motels provided grist for the media mill in an era of sexual revolution. As much as the staff in the Chief’s Office may have wanted the trial to go away, the media attention made the senior leadership of the Chaplains Corps aware that the era of the Chief’s office controlling its message through routine press releases, as it had throughout the Vietnam conflict, was over.

More significantly for the Chaplains Corps itself, however, was the tension the trial generated between Jensen’s American Baptist endorsing agent and the Chief of Chaplains’ office. Although the endorsing agent ultimately backed down and continued endorsing chaplains for naval service, the incident was a portent of things to come. Evangelical chaplains and their endorsing agents, including a total of twenty-seven non-liturgical chaplains as appellants, would file four lawsuits in the 1990s and 2000s claiming bias against evangelicals both in accession into the Corps and discrimination in the promotion selection process.\(^5\) The collegiality and admiration for one another so

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\(^4\) See, for example, *Time* Magazine 03 April 1972 and *Time* Magazine 10 April 1972.

\(^5\) D. Philip Veitch vs. Gordon R. England, Secretary of the Navy, et al. (2000), Chaplaincy of Full Gospel Churches, et al. vs. United States Navy, … Each case was decided in favor of the Navy. I am using term “evangelical” loosely and consistently with how Anne Loveland does in her text *American Evangelicals and the Military*. It includes fundamentalists from the 1950s and 1960s such as Carl McIntire and John Rice, as well as evangelists of the 1980s New Christian Right such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson (x). The National Association of Evangelicals serves as the primary organizational voice for evangelicals and *Christianity Today* its publishing arm. Significant evangelical figures include Billy Graham, Harold John Ockenga, and Carl F. H. Henry. Loveland also incorporates Pentecostals and conservative Christians in mainline denominations under the Pentecostal umbrella. Loveland asserts that all evangelicals affirm three
many chaplains who served in Vietnam expressed did not last in the post-Vietnam era. Or perhaps more accurately, in the absence of combat and an enemy without, camaraderie gave way to competition, and an enemy within was revealed.

Several chaplains who served in Vietnam noted their belief that threats to the Chaplain Corps would ultimately come from within. Chaplain Robert Coapman, a career chaplain who retired in 1989 and served with Marines in Vietnam near the end of the conflict, expressed that narrow-mindedness and bigotry led some chaplains to fail in their mission to minister to the young men and women they were supposed to serve.\textsuperscript{6}

Coapman offered that he had seen a chaplain throw a Bible to a young Marine saying, “Read this, it will solve your problems.”\textsuperscript{7} Another time he recalled a senior chaplain telling his Marine Colonel, a Mormon, that he would not permit a newly assigned junior chaplain, a Mormon, to serve in his chapel. Regardless of the veracity of these anecdotal experiences, Coapman perceived at least some of his fellow chaplains as hostile to those they were called to serve as well as to one another. He strongly believed that chaplains who could not respect others should not be permitted to serve.

George Evans expressed a similar sentiment when asked if he had ever been ordered by a military superior to do “violence to (his) personal and spiritual ethic and

\textsuperscript{6} Robert D. Coapman, Response to Follow Up Questionnaire, Question 32.

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item First, evangelicals believe in biblical inerrancy, and that the Bible is the authority in life and faith. Second, all agree that salvation is through faith, and that faith is obtained only through a conversion experience in which one surrenders one’s life to Jesus, identifying him as Lord and Savior. Finally, evangelicals commit themselves to carrying out the Great Commission expressed in Matthew 28:19 to “go… and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (x). Loveland includes any Christian who affirms these three tenets, regardless of denominational affiliation, under the evangelical umbrella.

\item Robert D. Coapman, Response to Follow Up Questionnaire, Question 32.

\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
belief systems.”

Evans responded, “Absolutely not! I’ve had that suggested by Senior Chaplains. The danger there is the Chaplains Corps. The danger is not the military.”

Evans elaborated that he witnessed senior chaplains circumscribe the worship leadership and staff function of junior chaplains because they took issue with how the junior officer expressed his faith in the leadership of worship or performance of other duties.

Although an evangelical himself, Stan Beach feared that the growing numbers of non-liturgical Protestant evangelicals within the senior leadership of the Chaplain Corps would lead to unfair treatment of chaplains from other faith backgrounds. Even though he and his evangelical outlook had been the object of rude comments from some liturgical Protestant chaplains, he believed he had received fair treatment by those same liturgical Protestant chaplains throughout his career. As America’s religious landscape and the composition of the Navy’s Chaplain Corps shifted throughout his years of service, he feared that evangelical non-liturgical Protestants in leadership roles would not treat subordinates from other faith groups with the same even-handedness.

Carl Auel perhaps pierced most deeply to the root of the challenge of clergy collaboration when he sounded a cautionary note about the limits of collegiality in describing chaplaincy as the parallel existence of a number of “particularistic ministries and priesthoods.”

Auel cautioned that chaplains should not overstate the ecumenical nature of these parallel ministries as, inevitably, the particularity of these worldviews

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8 Evans, Interview by Paul Zarbock.

9 Evans, Interview by Paul Zarbock.

10 Carl Auel, PTSD, Appendix B, End of Tour Report, NCSCA.
necessarily implied that one was right and one was wrong. Inevitably this understanding of the ministry and chaplaincy proved “‘equal – but separate.’”

The growing strength of evangelicals within the Chaplain Corps was first exposed by the response of Andrew Jensen’s endorsing agent to his 1972 court martial and the Chaplain Corps’ response. This incident evidenced both what Anne Loveland described as “the spread of evangelical religion within the military during the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s” and what Martin Marty termed “‘a seismic shift’ in the American religious landscape.” Loveland argued,

“Events of the 1960s signaled the end of the Protestant Establishment in America and the beginning of what is variously referred to as a post-Puritan, post-Protestant, post-Christian, even postreligious era. The hallmarks of the new era were pluralism and secularism, both of which most evangelicals viewed with dismay.”

If liturgical Protestant hegemony of the Chaplains Corps defined its golden age for those who served in Vietnam, Jensen’s trial was one signal that the era was ending.

Also signaling the end of the era was the commissioning of Chaplain Dianna Pohlmann Bell in July 1973. The first woman chaplain within the Department of Defense, Pohlmann Bell, a Presbyterian pastor, was assigned to the Navy’s training command in Orlando, Florida. The presence of a woman signified for many within the Corps the effective end of “Cooperation without Compromise.” Since the inception of the use of the phrase in 1943 during World War II, “Cooperation without Compromise” was primarily an encouragement for male clergy supporting other male clergy in

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11 Carl Auel, PTSD, Appendix B, End of Tour Report, NCSCA.


13 Ibid.
fostering an ecumenical spirit. In the contrived setting of the Chaplains School, exercises fostering a cooperative spirit centered on such issues as whether or not to serve alcoholic beverages at social functions, and if so, how. In the crucible of combat the motto encouraged the resolution of issues relating to the celebration of the sacrament of communion. The presence of more non-traditional chaplains including Mormons and Christian Scientists began to stretch the bonds of what it meant to cooperate with one another. The presence of a woman, whose ordination many chaplains representing non-liturgical denominations did not accept, proved an unacceptable compromise for some chaplains, thus breaking the proverbial camel’s back. The issue remained relevant in 2011 for at least one chaplain who responded to a survey that “if (he) wasn’t a Baptist (he knew) what he would be -- ashamed. P.S. I don’t believe in women chaplains.”\(^\text{14}\) For some chaplains, accepting the presence of a female chaplain was a compromise they were unable to accept because of their denomination’s stance regarding the ordination of women, thereby precluding cooperation. In this respect, at least, the Chaplain Corps was a microcosm of many of the more widespread religious changes affected by and affecting women in churches and society as well.

Pauletta Otis optimistically stated that the collocation of the Army, Navy, and Air Force chaplaincy schools at Fort Jackson, South Carolina in 2010 implied cooperative or combined efforts to train chaplains to meet the “new and emerging requirements” of chaplaincy in the present age.\(^\text{15}\) Driven by the Department of Defense’s base realignment

\(^\text{14}\) Anonymous, Response to Initial Questionnaire, Comments written in margin, response in possession of author.
and closure (BRAC) plan rather than the respective service corps’ desire to function collaboratively, the collocation of the chaplaincy schools has not automatically fostered fruitful cooperation among them. Institutional loyalties and the articulation of unique differences among the various branches of the military services make “cooperation without compromise” as difficult to achieve between the various chaplains corps as it has been for chaplains within the U.S. Navy since Vietnam. Although such challenges are often overcome out of necessity in an operational environment and are not insurmountable in times of peace, these institutional challenges between the different branches of the military’s Chaplain Corps will only be overcome permanently by external pressure to change.

The final signal to the era’s end may be seen in the retirements of those chaplains who had served in the Corps since World War II, America’s “good” war. In June 1974 Captain Harold MacNeill, a United Church of Christ pastor, assumed the mantle of the Navy Chaplain Corps’s “Gray Shepherd.”\footnote{Pauletta Otis, “An Overview of the U.S. Military Chaplaincy: A Ministry of Presence and Practice,” \textit{The Review of Faith & International Affairs} 7, no. 4 (Winter 2009): 10.} The title of Gray Shepherd rests upon the chaplain, no higher than Captain in rank, serving for the longest continuous time on active duty. Born in September 1913, MacNeill entered active duty in June 1943 when he reported to the Chaplains School. MacNeill was among the last of the chaplains serving on active duty to have served as chaplains during World War II. By the mid-1970s, the senior leadership of the Corps no longer included any chaplains who had served continuously through America’s three wars of the mid-twentieth century - World

War II, Korea, and Vietnam. By the time MacNeill retired on July 1, 1975 he had seen the era of “Cooperation without Compromise” come -- and go.

America’s Religious Landscape after the War

The seismic shifts occurring within America’s religious landscape beginning in the 1960s played out differently among Roman Catholics and Protestants. Intended to help the Church meet the challenges of the modern era, the Roman Catholic Church’s 1962-65 Second Vatican Council instigated sweeping reforms. Most apparent to parishioners was the change in how priests conducted the Mass. Encouraged to adopt less ornate liturgical garb, priests were also permitted to face the congregation and use the vernacular language rather than Latin when sharing the Eucharist. Although the hierarchical nature of the Roman Catholic Church permitted rapid implementation of these profound reforms, it was not always easy for priests or the laity to accept these changes.

Due arguably in some degree to these reforms, Catholicism and Roman Catholics became mainstream in American society by the 1970s. The number of American Roman Catholics has risen steadily since 1965. 46.3 million Americans were connected to a Roman Catholic parish in 1965. In 1975, the Church identified some 48.7 million Americans as participating in parish life, with some 54.5 million self-identifying as Roman Catholic. Even as the numbers of Roman Catholics and overall percentage of

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17 It is anecdotally shared among Navy chaplains that Cardinal Spellman first said the Mass facing the congregation at the Navy’s chapel in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.


19 Ibid. By 2014, some 66.6 million American Roman Catholics were parish-connected.
Catholics in the U.S. population has grown, the numbers of priests serving parishes has declined. 59,192 priests served U.S. parishes in 1970.\textsuperscript{20} By 1975 the number had dropped to 58,909.\textsuperscript{21}

Priests left the priesthood for a variety of reasons, including the desire to marry. At least two Navy chaplains who served in Vietnam, Richard Lyons and Francis Bianchino, was among those priests who left the priesthood and married.\textsuperscript{22} The decreasing number of priests available to serve growing parishes has made priests a scarce resource within their dioceses. As a result, in the years since Vietnam it has been rare for bishops to permit their priests to serve a twenty-year career as a Navy chaplain.

The sex abuse scandals brought to light within the Roman Catholic Church during the 1980s and 1990s included at least two chaplains who served with Marines in Vietnam. Carl Emerson Drake, Jr. was convicted of indecent acts with a minor in November 1993. He had been released by the Navy and suspended by the Church in April 1993.\textsuperscript{23} A 2004 report released by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles identified George Gunst, who died in May 1995, as having been accused of molestation by at least one person in twelve different parishes beginning in 1955.\textsuperscript{24} Gunst served with Marines in Vietnam in 1967 and 1968. On February 18, 2004 Archbishop Edwin F. O’Brien of


\textsuperscript{21}Ibid. By 2014 there were 38,275 active priests in the United States.

\textsuperscript{22}Richard Albert Long may also have left the priesthood and married.


the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA released a statement noting that two active duty Navy chaplains had been “found guilty of engaging in immoral acts with minors.”

O’Brien did not name the chaplains to whom he referred but apologized to their victims.

Although changes within America’s Protestant denominations did not typically emanate from above as they did within the hierarchical Roman Catholic Church, the changes were no less dramatic. The racial divides still persisting from the nineteenth century, the awakening of the 1950s Protestantism, or efforts to find unity during the divisive 1960s prompted several mainline Protestant denominations to merge. The American Lutheran Church, for example, was created in 1961 by the merger of the American Lutheran Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church. The Lutheran Free Church joined this new body in 1963. The United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. was founded in 1958 when the United Presbyterian Church in North America merged with the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. Even as this body was joined by a smaller Presbyterian denomination in the 1980s, more conservative elements broke away. Rejecting the broadly liberal bent of northern churches, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church was formed in 1981. Merger and secession continued as a pattern within American Protestantism.

The pattern of merging and dividing has not stemmed the steady numerical decline for the mainline Protestant denominations since the early 1960s. Although some authors like Ted A. Campbell discount the characterization of the decline as a

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fundamental loss of power in American cultural life, arguing that the liturgical Protestant churches never really represented “the heart of American religion,” a shift within Protestantism occurred.26 By the 1970s the categories of identification as an American no longer conformed to Herberg’s Protestant-Catholic-Jew. Rather, as society became more pluralistic and secular, the locus of identification as an American was no longer meaningfully expressed in Judeo-Christian religious terms.

This change necessitated the re-articulation of military chaplaincy. Chaplains serving during the golden age understood their ministry as predominantly pastoral – as evidenced by their enactment of the ministry of presence and their efforts to cooperate with one another without compromising their theological integrity. In the 1970s the institutional priorities of chaplaincy evolved into something different: notably military chaplaincy became an exercise in protecting the rights of the service person to the free exercise of religion. As the last Navy chaplain left the Vietnam conflict in 1972, it may be understood that a particular conception of chaplaincy’s priorities left with him.

Pauletta Otis confirmed this shift in the opening sentence of her 2009 overview of U.S. military chaplaincy when she wrote, “The military chaplaincy serves primarily to ensure that the free exercise of religion is supported in all military settings.”27 When senior Navy chaplains unveiled the new Chaplain Corps emblem in 1962 featuring the symbols of Christianity and Judaism, they did not foresee the time when Muslim and Hindu clerics would serve alongside their successors and when Wiccan and secular


humanist chaplains would come in for consideration. By 2001, when a new religious symbol-free Chaplains Corps emblem was adopted, the primary justification of military chaplaincy as the protection of the service members’ right to free exercise of religion had supplanted the understanding of chaplaincy as provision of religious services. In the years following Vietnam Navy chaplaincy changed to reflect a transforming society and to meet the needs of a changing military institution. This shifting focus also enabled chaplains, if they wished, to sidestep the doctrinal and cultural disagreements most evident between evangelical and mainline Protestants. By focusing on the facilitation of a multitude of religious expressions rather than offering a “general Protestant” worship experience, chaplains could attract less negative attention if they politely refused to co-lead worship with one another.

Lessons from Vietnam and the Future of Chaplaincy

In 2001 the Navy initiated a new training program for its chaplains. With the objective of raising the ability of the Navy to prevent conflicts worldwide, the training emphasized the usefulness of chaplains forming positive relationships with local religious leaders and of chaplains advising the command on the religious and cultural ramifications of its decisions.28 David Johnston, President and Founder of the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy, observed in a 2009 article that the roots of this expanded role of the chaplain as religious liaison extended from the experiences of chaplains in Vietnam.29 He then argued that historical examples suggested that, “Rather than confining the


chaplain’s liaison role within rigidly circumscribed boundaries, we may do well to provide greater latitude to those chaplains who are well-educated and seasoned practitioners in this arena.”

Johnston observed that chaplains’ efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan in organizing community religious observances and in renovating mosques and forming religious councils had increased trust and reduced violence in both countries. Johnston argued that these positive outcomes warranted the intentional development of this role for chaplains.

Assuming the wisdom of George Santayana’s 1905 statement that “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it,” the historical experiences of the chaplains included in this study should serve as cautionary examples to those seeking to expand chaplains’ roles as religious liaisons. The chaplains profiled were sincere in fulfilling their duties, as they understood them, and when circumstances enabled were generally eager to establish relationships with local religious leaders and missionaries. However, few chaplains possessed deep knowledge of either Vietnam’s religions or cultural customs. Because of their prior military service in World War II and/or the Korean War, some chaplains had been to parts of Southeast Asia, but only in the context of war. A few had intimate knowledge of other Asian countries, but not Vietnam, because they had lived and worked abroad as missionaries. Fewer still had traveled in the region as civilians. Many, arguably perhaps most, had little contextual knowledge of Vietnam other than that offered in the mainstream American media or in publications like The Navy Chaplain.


This limited knowledge understandably led chaplains to more easily cultivate relationships with those religious leaders in Vietnam who were most like them—Christians including indigenous Roman Catholic priests and nuns, often affiliated with orphanages, and Christian foreign missionaries and the communities they served. Chaplains did not report that they engaged Buddhist religious leaders, who represented some ninety percent of the Vietnamese population, as easily or as frequently. Relationships with minority Roman Catholics and other Christians may simply have confirmed pre-existing perceptions of both the Viet Minh and Ngo Dinh Diem.

The relationship of chaplains with foreign missionaries in Vietnam warrants further examination if chaplains are to serve as effective religious liaisons in present and future conflicts. Missionaries like Gordon Smith assisted the Americans in the early years of the American war in Vietnam. Clearly, he did not believe that doing so compromised his position or endangered the Vietnamese he served. Other missionaries, as Ron Hedwall reported, were less desirous of engaging with military personnel. If chaplains are to serve as effective religious liaisons they must understand the complex context in which they find themselves and those they seek to engage. Understanding more thoroughly what transpired in these past relationships could help similar future relationships.

Because of their theological education and propensity toward working with people, chaplains are ideally suited to serve as liaisons with local religious leaders. If they are to do so effectively, however, they must receive adequate training in the world’s religions and cultures as well as missiology. Such training presupposes, as Doug
Johnston noted, policy and doctrine supporting the training and use of chaplains as religious liaisons.  

Pauletta Otis also identified “keeping the chaplaincy relevant in military terms in an era dominated by irregular warfare and counterinsurgency” as a contemporary challenge to chaplaincy. She articulated that whether or not chaplains should go out with small groups of military personnel and if so, under what circumstances, was an important concern of chaplaincy in the present age. The experiences of chaplains with Marines in Vietnam demonstrate that this concern was no less relevant during the 1960s. The thought processes and comments of Vietnam-era chaplains included here offer valuable insights as today’s chaplains consider where and when they might be an asset to those they serve and where and when they might become a liability.

The experiences of chaplains with Marines in Vietnam also serve as cautionary guides to those currently developing programs to educate personnel regarding religion in order to “win hearts and minds” in the present war on terror. The Vietnam-era Personal Response Program (PRP) intended to educate Marines on Vietnamese religions and cultures so that they might successfully navigate relationships with “friendly” Vietnamese. Tasked with creating and implementing a program by a Marine General, the Chaplain Corps arguably assigned the wrong person to develop the program. Concerned more with the details of the material he compiled than with disseminating information to Marines, the program took too long to evolve. Coupled with a lack of basic support from the Chief of Chaplains’ office and uneven implementation in Vietnam, the program did

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not uniformly achieve its objective. A close examination of the evolution and implementation of the Personal Response Program could aid those seeking to help today’s commanders “get religion” with the hope of winning hearts and minds in the global war on terror.34

Chaplains in Vietnam

Although the experience of each chaplain who served in Vietnam with Marines was highly contingent upon where, when, and with whom he served, there are several generalizations concerning their time in Vietnam that seem appropriate. First, for many chaplains their year in Vietnam was among the most difficult in their lives, but in terms of their ministry, it was one of the most meaningful. Harvey Cook, an Episcopal priest said simply that his time in Vietnam was the “most meaningful year of ministry in my life.”35 Paul C. Lawson, a Southern Baptist, wrote of his time, “My experience in Vietnam/Okinawa greatly enlarged the fulfillment of my vocational calling both personally and professionally.”36 He added that his understanding of the world had been greatly enlarged by the experience. Len Ahrnsbrak wrote,

“This has been a hard year. I leave Vietnam tired but somewhat content with what has been accomplished; saddened at the loss of such fine young men, but aware that those returning have greater potential for serving their country well; older, and it is hoped, wiser. I reported aboard with high expectations. I have not been disappointed, and have no regrets.”37

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35 Harvey G. Cook, Response to Follow Up Questionnaire, 24 March 2011, Question 23.

36 Paul C. Lawson, Response to Initial Questionnaire, 05 April 2011, Comments in margin.

37 Ahrnsbrak, Narrative Report, undated, NCSCA.
Many expressed a sense of satisfaction because they believed they fulfilled their role as chaplains in bringing humanity and faith amidst suffering by caring for Marines.

Second, many chaplains developed a respect for one another as colleagues. Irvin Thompson noted that he had little contact with Roman Catholic priests before the war, but was very impressed with the priests with whom he served. Mormon chaplain David E. Smith was effusive in his praise for colleagues when he wrote:

“During my tenure in Vietnam I met and worked with the chaplains of all military services and virtually all faiths. These are the greatest men I have ever met. They are truly dedicated to the ministry for the young American. If the Christian-Judeo belief is to ever bring World Brotherhood and Peace on Earth, it will be through these great men. The ecumenical movement that is the by-product of their ministry will someday save the Church.”

More constrained in his praise, Carl Auel expressed that his colleagues represented “an interesting and, at times, fascinating variety of styles of life.” Nevertheless, they exhibited a “conscientious regard for duty, and from within the confines of their own personalities and individual theological perspectives, a genuine love and concern for the men whom they served.”

Finally, if there was any one truth of their experience in Vietnam it was that the chaplains who served with Marines developed a profound perhaps paternalistic admiration, even love, for the generally much younger Marines they served. Irvin Thompson wrote that although he “‘abhored’ war and that it was ‘beneath the dignity of man to settle differences with war’” he “admired the bravery and dedication of the

38 David E. Smith, USNR, End of Tour Report, undated, 4, NCSCA.
39 Carl Auel, PTSD Journal, Appendix B, End of Tour Report, NCSCA.
40 Ibid.
majority of my Marine troops.”41 Writing specifically of his Marine clerks, Carl Auel
said, “They were not perfect, and they would be embarrassed and consider it, coming
from me at least, a reproach were I even to refer to them as good. Rather, they were men,
while they were still boys.”42 Chaplains who served with Marines in Vietnam shared the
tears of boys whose experiences made them men.

Although hindsight might make the thought of chaplains who served in Vietnam
rising above the horrors of the war and universally calling for its end appealing, the truth
that most did not transcend their time and use their position prophetically to call for the
war’s end confirms the essence of the age and their humanity. Generally twice as old as
the Marines they served, the majority of these chaplains grew up and came of age before
the social upheaval of the 1960s. Shaped by the national commitment to defeating the
Axis powers and anxiety over godless communism, these men volunteered to serve in a
time when military registration was compulsory for young men and military service was
expected and respected by many citizens. Raised in homes at least comfortable with
religious expression, these men perceived their service as chaplains as consistent with
their clerical calling. Most described their time in Vietnam as the most difficult but most
rewarding of their careers. Each processed their experience in their own way, and while
some came to disagree with U.S. involvement in Vietnam, few regretted their choice to
care for Marines.

41 Irvin H. Thompson, Response to Initial Questionnaire, 09 April 2011, Comments in margin.
42 Carl Auel, PTSD Journal, Appendix B, End of Tour Report, NCSCA.
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APPENDIX A

INITIAL CHAPLAIN QUESTIONNAIRE
Initial Chaplain Questionnaire

This initial questionnaire should take approximately ten to fifteen minutes to complete. Depending upon the years you served in Vietnam, some questions may not be directly relevant to your experience. Please respond as best you can. At the end of the questionnaire you are asked to indicate your willingness to participate more extensively in this study.

Basic Information

1. Name: _____________________________________

2. Years you served in Vietnam: ______________________________

3. Military Endorsing Agent: ________________________________

4. National religious governing body with which you were affiliated before joining the chaplaincy (for example, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America):

___________________________________________________________________

5. Regional religious governing body with which you were affiliated before joining the chaplaincy (for example, Eastminster Presbytery):

___________________________________________________________________

6. Particular local religious body you served or were affiliated with before joining the chaplaincy (for example, Temple Gan Elohim):

___________________________________________________________________

Specific Questions

For each question please check the response that best reflects your recollection regarding your life and experience.

7. The faith tradition of the family in which I was raised can best be described as:
   _____ Liturgical protestant (practices infant baptism)
   _____ Non-liturgical protestant (does not practice infant baptism)
   _____ Roman Catholic
   _____ Jewish
   _____ Secular or none
   _____ Other
8. If possible please identify this tradition more specifically:
____________________________________________________

9. My knowledge of Vietnam (the country, its history, its people) before serving there can best be described as:
   _____ Deep and extensive, I intentionally studied the area
   _____ Moderate, I read newspaper and other popular descriptions of Vietnam
   _____ Limited, I knew very little about the country itself
   _____ None

10. My knowledge of the United States’ involvement in Vietnam before serving there can best be described as:
    _____ Deep and extensive, I intentionally studied about the conflict
    _____ Moderate, I read newspaper and other popular accounts of the conflict
    _____ Limited, I was not terribly conversant about the conflict
    _____ None

11. While serving in Vietnam do you recall being aware of any official pronouncements regarding U.S. involvement in Vietnam made by your religious governing body? If no, please skip to question 16.
    _____ No
    _____ Yes

12. What was your specific recollection regarding the nature of the pronouncement made by your religious governing body?
    _____ I recall that my religious body supported the war
    _____ I recall that my religious body opposed the war

13. If you are able to recall the specific nature of your religious body’s pronouncement, please respond more fully, and, if you are able, relate how you heard about the pronouncement.

___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________

14. Given that you were aware of pronouncements concerning Vietnam made by your religious governing body while serving in country, did you personally agree or disagree with the pronouncement?
    _____ I agreed with the pronouncement
    _____ I disagreed with the pronouncement

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15. Regardless of your personal feelings regarding official pronouncements made by your religious governing body while serving in country, which statement(s) characterize(s) your response? Check all that apply.

_____ I informally considered it with family only
_____ I informally considered it with civilian clergy colleagues
_____ I informally discussed it with military colleagues
_____ I formally responded to my governing body by letter
_____ I formally responded to my governing body through a sanctioned vote
_____ I publicly responded through sermons and other public media
_____ I did not respond

16. After your service in Vietnam did you intentionally change your ecclesiastical status or affiliation?

_____ No, I remained in ministry within the same religious organization.
_____ Yes, I changed my formal ecclesiastical affiliation but remained in a clerical role.
_____ Yes, I remained affiliated with my religious organization but no longer served in a clerical role.
_____ Yes, I left ordained ministry and changed my religious affiliation.

17. If you answered “Yes” to the previous question please elaborate:

___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________

18. Before my service in Vietnam my feelings regarding U.S. involvement there can best be described as:

_____ Strongly supportive of U.S. intervention
_____ Moderately supportive of U.S. intervention
_____ Somewhat supportive of U.S. intervention
_____ Somewhat opposed to U.S. intervention
_____ Moderately opposed to U.S. intervention
_____ Strongly opposed to U.S. intervention

19. After my service in Vietnam my feelings regarding U.S. involvement there can best be described as:

_____ Strongly supportive of U.S. intervention
_____ Moderately supportive of U.S. intervention
_____ Somewhat supportive of U.S. intervention
_____ Somewhat opposed to U.S. intervention
_____ Moderately opposed to U.S. intervention
20. Do you wish for the information in this initial survey to be kept confidential? That is, do you want your name excluded from the dissertation?
   _____ Yes, I want my name to be kept confidential

Please sign your name here if you wish to be identified in the publication:
__________________________________________________________________________

Follow Up Preferences
If you wish, you may attach additional sheets detailing how your experience in Vietnam shaped your view of institutional ministry, your religious body, or your theological outlook.

21. Would you be willing to respond to additional narrative questions regarding your life and ministry?
   _____ Yes
   _____ No

22. Would you be willing share your story by recording an oral history?
   _____ Yes
   _____ No

23. If you answered “Yes” to either question above please provide your preferred contact information and the best time of day to contact you.
__________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for your participation in this project!
A Three-Fold Cord: Vietnam, Navy Chaplains, and America’s Changing Religious Landscape
Follow-Up Chaplain Questionnaire

Basic Information:

1. Name: ________________________________________________
2. Date of birth: __________________________________________
3. Place of birth: __________________________________________
4. College attended, major, degree and year of graduation if applicable:______________________________________________
5. Seminary attended and year of graduation if applicable:___________________________________________________________
6. Military Endorsing Agent:_______________________________________________________________
7. Date of affiliation with the Navy: ________________________________________________________________
8. Date of separation/retirement from the Navy: _____________________________________________________________
9. Naval Tours of Duty:______________________________________________________________
10. Other Pastoral Service:______________________________________________
11. Affiliations and Professional Organizations:____________________________________________
12. Date of Retirement from Pastoral Ministry:_____________________________________________
Narrative Questions
If you wish to answer more detailed questions regarding your faith journey please continue by responding to whichever of the following questions you wish to answer below. Please provide answers to the questions as numbered on additional sheets. Of, if you wish, I would encourage you to write and attach a narrative of your life and ministry.

13) What (and where) was the faith community in which you were raised?
14) Please describe any significant religious experiences as a child that led to your decision to enter ordained ministry.
15) Describe the religious culture/context of your family (past and present).
16) Identify and describe the influence of any particular people or religious figures – either local or national – on your religious development.
17) Describe any particular devotional materials or authors who shaped your early religious life.
18) Describe any additional that factors led to your decision to enter ordained ministry.
19) What led you to serve as a Navy Chaplain?
20) What did you know of Vietnam (the country, its history, its people) before serving there? From what sources did you learn this information?
21) Describe the most meaningful aspects of your ministry in Vietnam. 22) Describe the most challenging aspects of your ministry in Vietnam.
23) Please discuss anything further you wish to share concerning your ministry and time in Vietnam.
24) If not already discussed, what, or who, supported and sustained you, both physically and spiritually, during your tour in Vietnam?
25) Describe how your service in country affected your outlook on the conflict itself.
26) Describe if, and if so, how, your service changed your perspective on institutional religious organizations or military chaplaincy.
27) How did you view or respond to any pronouncements or declarations your religious body made about the conflict in Vietnam?
28) How did the conflict in Vietnam impact the religious body with which you were/are affiliated?
29) Please describe your life and ministry after your tour in Vietnam. Did you stay in the Navy, get out (if so, when), and what guided those decisions?
30) How would you describe that your theological perspective has changed over the course of your ministry?
31) What do you think are the major issues facing institutional religious organizations and/or the chaplaincy today?
32) How would you advise the leaders of today’s Chaplains School in training chaplains entering the Navy?

I would be most grateful for any letters, sermons, or other printed materials you wish to share. Please contact me at 602-400-5626 or Joan.Miller@asu.edu to arrange for postage. Thank you for your participation in this project.
APPENDIX C

SURVEY RESPONDENTS
Survey Respondents

33 Anonymous
Leonard Ahrensbrak
Kevin L. Anderson
William C.L. Asher
Richard Bareiss
*Richard P. Beck
Hebert L. Bergsma
Richard A. Boyer
Vincent W. Carroll
Robert D. Coapman
John Milton Collins
Harvey G. Cook
Gerald W. Cox
William C. Davis
Richard J. Dempsey
Daniel F. DePascale
Martin J. Doermann
*George W. Evans, Jr.
E. Blant Ferguson
Joel R. Fletcher
Edward Gallagher, Jr.
Fayette P. Grose
John Wesley Grove
Roy Dale Grubbs
John C. Haney, Jr.
Jack L. Heino
Ralph Hensley
Walter A. Hiskett
William J. Houston
David S. Hunsicker
Edward E. Jayne
Earl E. Keele
Alston Kirk
James Fritz Kirstein
Paul C. Lawson
Elden H. Luffman, Sr.
Harry F. MacCall
Connell J. Maguire
Lowell M. Malliott
William F. Maloney
John W. McElroy
Gerard T. McMahon
Robert Allen Moore
Leroy Muenzler
James P. O’Connor
Charles O’Gorman
Roy C. Osborn
James D. Pfannenstiel
Aldon Elwood Purdham, Sr.
James W. Robinson
James E. Seim
Joseph N. Sestito
Floyd E. Simms
Victor H. Smith
Ira C. Starling, Jr.
Ray William Stubbe
Nelson R. Sulouff
Raymond Swierenga
*Eli Takesian
Irvin Hayes Thompson
William Thompson, Jr.
Wallace B. Turner
Murray H. Voth
Robert Martin Weeks
Lester L. Westling, Jr.
Frederick R. Zobel

*Known to have died since survey participation