

MOBILIZING DEVOTION:
JOINT CHURCH-MILITARY EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH THE MODERN US ARMY
CHAPLAIN CORPS

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

For most of American military history, military chaplains, or institutional support for them within the professional military establishment, was often an after-thought. Politicians and senior Army officials often only provided for chaplains on an ad hoc basis. Few military chaplains enjoyed permanent billets within the Army, and when war broke out, individual units were often left scrambling to recruit the local town priest, if they thought to take on a chaplain at all. However, the Spanish American War and Philippine War drew Protestant congregations' attention to the lack of, and dire need for, Army chaplains to provide spiritual care for American soldiers. This paper explores the relationship between the War Department, the United States Army, and the American Protestant Churches' Federal Council. It argues that the ultimate establishment of the modern U.S. Army Chaplain Corps came only through civil-military cooperation between these key stakeholders. This paper shows that interest in providing spiritual care for troops grew tremendously during the Preparedness Movement due to part-time military chaplains with firsthand experience of institutional shortcomings who petitioned home churches and the War Department for more support. Building on these petitions, the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America then unilaterally worked to provide the American Expeditionary Force with sufficient numbers of high-quality chaplains, whilst simultaneously lobbying the U.S. government to ensure they received proper training to minister troops across the battlefields of France. This massive undertaking on the home front, this paper argues, resulted in the creation of the modern-day U.S. Army Chaplain Corps, a permanent administrative unit within the U.S military, signaling the end of the ad hoc provision of chaplains only in times of war.

CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES

Contributors

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INTRODUCTION

“The one spiritual need of the soldiers is Christianity: and it must be brought to them by men who believe in it and are shaped by it. The American churches must send their best Christians to France. They must send them as chaplains, as officers, and as private soldiers... They are among their fellows in trench and billet, and their lives and teaching speak amid the burstings of shells and the cries of wounded. The first need of soldiers at the front is therefore Christianity in the flesh, the Gospel incarnate. Give us men!”¹

Chaplain Tiplady
May 1918

After watching the Great War unfold in Europe for three years, American Christians saw this as their opportunity to achieve peace for the world, protect democracy, and spread the message of the Gospel. But as the nation mobilized in 1917, the absence of chaplains from Army ranks became glaringly obvious to Protestants at home. While plunging into a world war, these churches rallied their efforts to supply the military with adequate clergymen to minister to soldiers in training camps and the trenches. Rather than individual denominations taking up this work alone, the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America (hereafter referred to as the Federal Council) took it upon themselves to spearhead chaplain advocacy efforts. In taking the reins on a national level, the Federal Council galvanized churches across the country and lobbied for various chaplain needs to Congress in Washington D.C. Consequently, they forged an effective relationship with the United States War Department and Army, which established a professional U.S. Army Chaplain Corps in 1920 that survived the war. Today, the corps includes

¹ Quote from Chaplain Tiplady in “New Legislation the Church’s Opportunity,” *Federal Council Bulletin: A Journal of Religious Co-Operation and Inter-Church Activities*, vol. 1 no. 5, May 1918, 7, HathiTrust Digital Library, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=wu.89065279176&view=1up&seq=87&skin=2021>.

over 1,300 active chaplains of Christianity (Protestant and Catholic), Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism, as well as 1,200 chaplains in reserve.²

In this essay, I argue that the wartime efforts of the Federal Council regarding the chaplaincy could not have been accomplished without a positive working relationship with the War Department and the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) during the First World War. This joint church-military cooperation is the reason the chaplaincy emerged as an autonomous branch of the U.S. military and survived demobilization in 1919. The church's Federal Council created numerous commissions and committees to assist in the development of a chaplain corps and to support chaplains at home and overseas from 1917-1919.³ Meanwhile, the Army, especially General John J. Pershing, recognized the importance of a strong chaplaincy corps as they struggled to mobilize an Expeditionary Force to fight in France. During the Progressive Era, Americans concerned themselves with maintaining proper morals. They saw chaplains as the perfect way to rid the army of vices like gambling, drinking, and prostitution for the sake of America's young men. The First World War found the Army in the midst of progressive military reform, demonstrating the crucial need for spiritual leaders to morally guide soldiers; a need that could not be filled without a strong church-military relationship.

In order to grasp the full picture of American chaplains, attention must be brought back to the early twentieth century. The chaplaincy wobbled on unsteady footing since the end of the

² "Anniversary of the Army Chaplain Corps," MilitaryBenefits.info (Three Creeks Media, September 20, 2021), <https://militarybenefits.info/army-chaplain-corps-anniversary/>.

³ The American Protestant church's working relationship with auxiliary welfare groups is beyond the scope of this paper. Auxiliary groups include American Red Cross, Salvation Army, American Bible Society, Young Men's Christian Association, Young Women's Christian Association, Jewish Welfare Board, and the Knights of Columbus (Catholic). These societies have a rich history, and provided essential support to the troops and chaplains. Rather, this study focuses on the official relationship between the Protestant churches themselves and the Army.

Revolutionary War, often with little to no support from the American government and churches. A brief examination of the twentieth century highlights the poor state of the chaplaincy at the outbreak of the Great War. Indeed, it wasn't until the wars of the 1890s and the rise of militant Christian nationalism that career military chaplains began advocating for a corps and soliciting the help of home churches.⁴ While the Spanish-American and Philippine Wars introduced chaplains and the military's religious needs to the churches, the First World War demonstrated to the U.S. Army and Protestant churches the crucial need for chaplains, and thus provided a catalyst for the development of the modern Chaplain Corps.

The history of the United States Army Chaplain Corps remains understudied. The most concise histories of the Chaplain Corps are the publications of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains, published in the 1950s and 1970-1980s.⁵ These works provide an in-depth study of chaplains from the American Revolution through the early twenty-first century and lend

⁴ For a discussion on American religious nationalism, see Matthew McCullough, *The Cross of War: Christian Nationalism and U.S. Expansion in the Spanish-American War* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014).

⁵ The following works have been published by the Office of the Chief of Chaplains, Department of the Army: Roy Honeywell, *Chaplains of the United States Army* (Washington D.C.: Office of the Chief of Chaplains, Department of the Army, 1958); Parker Thompson, *From Its European Antecedents to 1791: The United States Army Chaplaincy*, Vol 1, (Washington D.C.: Office of the Chief of Chaplains, Department of the Army, 1978); Herman Norton, *Struggling for Recognition: The United States Army Chaplaincy, 1791-1865*, Vol 2 (Washington D.C.: Office of the Chief of Chaplains, Department of the Army, 1977); Earl Stover, *Up from Handymen: The United States Army Chaplaincy, 1865-1920*, Vol 3 (Washington D.C.: Office of the Chief of Chaplains, Department of the Army, 1977); Robert Gushwa, *The Best and Worst of Times: The United States Army Chaplaincy, 1920-1945*, Vol 4 (Washington D.C.: Office of the Chief of Chaplains, Department of the Army, 1977); Rodger Venzke, *Confidence in Battle, Inspiration in Peace: The United States Army Chaplaincy, 1945-1975*, Vol 5 (Washington D.C.: Office of the Chief of Chaplains, Department of the Army, 1977); John Brinsfield, *Encouraging Faith, Serving Soldiers: The United States Army Chaplaincy, 1975-1995, Part 1* (Washington D.C.: Office of the Chief of Chaplains, Department of the Army, 1977); Henry Ackermann, *He Was Always There: The U.S. Army Chaplain Ministry in the Vietnam Conflict* (Washington D.C.: Office of the Chief of Chaplains, Department of the Army, 1989); *Courageous in Spirit, Compassionate in Service: The Gunhus Years, 1999-2003* (Washington D.C.: Office of the Chief of Chaplains, Department of the Army, 2003). See also *American Army Chaplaincy, A Brief History* (Washington D.C.: Office of the Chief of Chaplains, Department of the Army, 1946) and Clifford Drury, *History of the Chaplain Corps, United States Navy, 1778-1939*, Vol 1 (United States: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1948).

Due to restricted travel during the COVID-19 pandemic and the closing of national archives, research for this article was limited to digitized material.

themselves strongly to this essay, along with Richard Budd's account of the chaplaincy's journey of professionalization from 1775 through the First World War.⁶ Most other books focus primarily on the Civil War or cover chaplains from and since the Second World War. Additionally, there are several books that offer autobiographies and biographies of specific chaplains from all these conflicts, which are integral to understanding the chaplain's experience in war. This work will take a close look at the institutions that played crucial roles in the development of the modern chaplaincy corps. An examination of these relationships allows for further insight into the intricacies of church-military relationships in a time of war, and how these organizations impact individual's lives.

An Unsteady Beginning

On the eve of war in 1775, American colonists turned to their local clergymen for comfort, guidance, and assurance of victory in battle. Connecticut preacher Samuel Sherwood utilized the vivid imagery of the Book of Revelation to inspire his congregation: "God Almighty, with all the powers of heaven, are on our side... Great numbers of angels, no doubt, are encamping round our coast, for our defense and protection." Sherwood continued, "Michael [a mighty angel of heaven] stands ready; with all the artillery of heaven, to encounter the dragon, and to vanquish this black host."⁷ Ministers like Sherwood espoused blatant rhetoric such as this all throughout the Revolutionary War, confirming the tradition of relating scripture to patriotism.⁸ But, given the infancy of the Continental Army, no professional enlisted chaplains

⁶ Richard Budd, *Serving Two Masters: The Development of American Military Chaplaincy, 1860-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).

⁷ James Byrd, *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War: The Bible and the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1.

⁸ Byrd, *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War*, 1, 171-172 n3.

existed within the ranks. Spiritual care of the troops was taken on by civilian clergymen of established colonial churches during the war against the British. Upon the establishment of the Concord Minutemen in Massachusetts, Reverend William Emerson preached to the men and held extra meetings to encourage them in their duties. When British Regulars marched onto Concord, he was the first man onto the field to defend the town, patrolling the lines of minutemen providing reassurance and inspiration.⁹ Despite the hard work of Emerson and other civilian clergymen throughout the war, no organizational structure existed for their endeavors, creating difficulties and a lack of continuity throughout the colonies, as providing spiritual care was an ad hoc job.

Upon victory in 1783, chaplains disbanded with the rest of the Continental Army. The American distrust of standing armies rendered chaplains obsolete, and all returned to their pastoral responsibilities at home. However, the lack of official chaplains prompted President George Washington to establish one official chaplain position within the ranks of the Army's General Staff. Episcopalian Reverend John Hurt received the very first commission of Chaplain of the US Army in 1791. After Hurt's retirement in 1794, Baptist preacher David Jones took up his mantle and helped establish various chaplain duties such as "visiting the sick, burying the dead, performing marriages, and preaching in civilian churches."¹⁰ By 1803, chaplains received Congressional approval and support; new legislation passed in March of that year allowed chaplains to "establish a uniform militia throughout the United States."¹¹ As a result, the number

⁹ *American Army Chaplaincy*, 2. For a detailed account of Emerson's role with the Concord militia, as well as other Revolutionary War chaplains, see *American Army Chaplaincy* 2-8.

¹⁰ Norton, *Struggling for Recognition*, 5.

¹¹ Norton, *Struggling for Recognition*, 7.

of chaplains slowly but steadily increased. Fifteen years later, however, Congress reduced the size of the Army to keep with its promise to avoid standing armies, and abolished the chaplaincy altogether.¹² This was not done out of hostility towards chaplains; in times of peace, the nation did not see the point of a permanent army, therefore chaplains, surgeons, judge advocates, barrack masters, and other officers became obsolete.¹³ Yet, this did not stop civilian clergy from once again ministering to individual militias on their own time, demonstrating pastor's historic determination for caring for U.S. troops.

Christianity continued to flourish throughout the country, and in 1860, the Civil War ushered in a new era of American Christianity. Still feeling the effects of the Second Great Awakening (1790's-1840's), "the United States was the world's most Christian nation in 1861 and became even more so by the end of the war."¹⁴ Churches grew exponentially, and the Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches became the three largest denominations throughout the country by the outbreak of the war. Catholicism increased slightly in popularity as more Irish immigrants came to America, but membership in Protestant churches increased across the nation as millions of previous nonbelievers converted to Christianity and millions more rededicated their lives to faith. As the seams of the nation began to tear over the question of

¹² Norton, *Struggling for Recognition*, 18.

¹³ "Statute 1, Chapter LXI, An Act Regulating the Staff of the Army," Fifteenth Congress, Session 1, April 14, 1818, *Acts of the Fifteenth Congress of the United States*, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., <https://www.loc.gov/item/l1sl-v3/>.

¹⁴ Randall Miller, Harry Stout, and Charles Wilson, eds., *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 4. Miller, Stout, and Wilson assert that *Religion and the American Civil War* was inspired by the undeniable lack of scholarly research and publications concerning Christianity and the Civil War. Noticing this gap, they commissioned essays from seventeen military, Civil War, and religious historians to produce the first book that solely examines the correlation between religion, faith, and the war.

slavery, Christians turned to their Bibles for answers.¹⁵ In both the North and South, Christians “saw the hand of God wielding the sword on their behalf, and chaplains were identified, by the public and by themselves, as having an obligation to provide religious underpinning to the political contest.”¹⁶ Since Christianity had such a powerful hold on the nation, many flocked to the Bible and ministers to make sense of the catastrophic Civil War and to justify their convictions on slavery, thus dramatically increasing church membership throughout the war years.

Upon the outbreak of the Civil War, federal law only allotted thirty chaplain positions within the Union Army. President Lincoln pushed Congress to expand these limitations, and Congress hesitantly complied. In the meantime, the law did require one chaplain per regiment, and as with previous wars, civilian pastors and reverends shouldered the responsibility of spiritual care in the fields and camps.¹⁷ Their work remained invaluable, as quick battles turned into lengthy, depressing campaigns. Whenever morale sagged, “chaplains’ sermons responded to

¹⁵ For an in-depth discussion on the Biblical theology of the Civil War, see Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

¹⁶ Budd, *Serving Two Masters*, 30.

¹⁷ *American Army Chaplaincy*, 25, 28. For more on the religious nature of the Civil War and Civil War chaplains, see Randall Miller, Harry Stout, and Charles Wilson, eds., *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Robert Miller, *Both Prayed to the Same God: Religion and Faith in the American Civil War* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007); April Holm, *A Kingdom Divided: Evangelicals, Loyalty, and Sectionalism in the Civil War Era* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017); Steven E. Woodworth, *While God is Marching On: The Religious World of Civil War Soldiers* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001); Mark Schantz, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country: The Civil War and America’s Culture of Death* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).

the trials... [of war] by compounding strong mixtures of patriotism and piety as an antidote to despair.”¹⁸

The Civil War provided slow but steady improvements for serving chaplains. On July 17, 1862, the Senate officially assigned one Union Army chaplain to every permanent military hospital, a precedent that continued through to the Great War.¹⁹ The rank of chaplain was finally recognized in 1864; regular and volunteer clergymen could now wear the rank insignia of captain.²⁰ Nonetheless, the chaplaincy remained rather unorganized. No head chaplain existed, so chaplains reported to the Adjutant General, the Army’s chief administrative officer, and would until the First World War. Furthermore, because their job remained relatively undefined, clergymen were given numerous secular jobs that detracted from their spiritual obligations. Besides a pastor, a chaplain could be the regimental historian, “a common-carrier, an express-man, a post-boy, a claim-agent, a pay-master, a commissary, a quartermaster, an undertaker, a banker, a ward-master, a hospital-steward, or a surgeon.”²¹ Despite widespread discontent at being pulled away from spiritual duties, many chaplains gladly took on these roles to make themselves useful.²² Just like hospital assignments, this tradition of placing chaplains in additional roles would continue into the twentieth century.

¹⁸ Norton, *Struggling for Recognition*, 99.

¹⁹ *American Army Chaplaincy*, 30.

²⁰ *American Army Chaplaincy*, 31.

²¹ *American Army Chaplaincy*, 31-32. Quote from Chaplain Brown.

²² Budd, *Serving Two Masters*, 62.

From Utter Indifference to the Beginning of Change

Upon the conclusion of the Civil War in 1865, both the Union and Confederate Armies quickly disbanded, once again rendering chaplains unnecessary. By 1867, the few chaplains that remained were granted the rank of captain, but many in the Army viewed the chaplaincy as impractical and useless, a “political sinecure.”²³ Up until this point, chaplain selection did not consider clergymen’s training, personal character, or ability to preach to men in a military context. Rather, their appointment almost always involved political advancement. As a result, many were too old, ill-trained, physically unfit, and outright unqualified to provide troops with proper spiritual leadership, and army officers and enlisted men tended to disregard chaplains as not truly a part of the military. Indeed, General William Tecumseh Sherman and other prominent Civil War veterans called for the abolishment of the chaplaincy altogether, deeming the entire system “a farce.”²⁴ Historian Richard Budd concludes that the lack of discussion on chaplains in official Army and Navy records indicates that the military viewed chaplains as unnecessary: “If religion and chaplaincy were a significant concern in the military, these official reports... give no evidence of the fact.”²⁵ This lack of attention might mean the military blatantly ignored chaplains, or could simply indicate that other, more pressing issues took precedence. Regardless of the reason, scholars can deduce that religion among the soldiers was not an urgent matter.

Civilian churches did not concern themselves with chaplain welfare either. Their concern lay mostly with sending missionaries to foreign countries instead of chaplains to the armed

²³ Budd, *Serving Two Masters*, 79.

²⁴ Budd, *Serving Two Masters*, 76.

²⁵ Budd, *Serving Two Masters*, 73-74.

forces.²⁶ No system of accountability or support existed in the years after the Civil War, and chaplains worked in relative isolation. One chaplain complained to his family back home, “...very little attention has been paid by the churches and religious public to the matter of religion in the army since the war of the Rebellion... there seems to be a spirit of utter indifference.”²⁷

In the face of all this indifference, chaplains began fervently advocating for themselves and the legitimacy of their job. Civil War veteran and ordained Methodist Episcopal preacher Orville J. Nave joined the United States Regular Army in 1882 in an official chaplain capacity. During the Civil War, he had served with the 111th Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiment as a private, not as a chaplain. Despite being a civilian pastor, he often substituted for his regimental chaplain as needed. Understanding the importance of the official military chaplain, Nave became a staunch advocate for military clergy upon his appointment in the Regular Army in 1882 as a chaplain. He executed the standard chaplain jobs of supervising his post and holding revival meetings, Sunday services, and weekly prayer meetings.²⁸ Nave, a strong moral reformer, advocated for temperance and the prohibition of alcohol on the premises of military installations along with the suppression of gambling. Following these convictions unfortunately caused his men to dislike him. Despite his unpopularity, Nave’s behavior embodied the ideas of the

²⁶ Budd, *Serving Two Masters*, 24.

²⁷ Budd, *Serving Two Masters*, 77.

²⁸ Orville J. Nave, *Nave’s Handbook on the Army Chaplaincy: With a Supplement on the Duty of the Churches to Aid the Chaplains by Follow-up Work in Conserving the Moral and Religious Welfare of the Men Under the Colors* (Los Angeles, n.p., 1917), 47-65, HathiTrust Digital Library, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nnc1.cr61123897&view=1up&seq=5&skin=2021>. U.S. military posts typically had schools on the property for soldiers and their families. It was up to the chaplain or local civilian clergymen to maintain these schools and serve as instructors. This became a chaplain’s primary role during peacetime.

Progressive Era, a time in which the nation became obsessed with removing vices from everyday life. These attitudes were common amongst chaplains and demonstrates the manifestation of these ideals into the armed forces.

Army chaplains at this time expressed interest in forming a chaplain's organization to call church's attention to chaplains' work. Elected as the organization's corresponding secretary, Nave "hastened to memorialize the large denominations to cooperate in an effort to improve the moral and religious condition of the army."²⁹ According to Nave, American churches had never before expressed an interest in helping soldiers, nor was the Army equipped to provide these young men with proper religious instruction.³⁰ By 1888, he met and coordinated efforts with the Methodist Episcopal Church, including providing the military with quality chaplains, removing unfit chaplains from office. On this, Nave later expressed that "any chaplain, who does not put a high estimate on the services he can render to the distressed and suffering, should be gotten rid of, and an efficient, zealous minister be put in his place."³¹ Efforts also included outfitting chaplains with proper equipment, and fostering an environment in which chaplains could advance the military ranks and receive the appropriate pay.³² Most importantly, Nave advocated for a body of chaplains that could institutionally organize chaplain work throughout the military branches. Meanwhile, other churches were making similar proposals, and Nave took it upon himself to collect, organize, and present these resolutions to President Benjamin Harrison and the

²⁹ Stover, *Up from Handymen*, 72.

³⁰ Nave, *Nave's Handbook on the Army Chaplains*, 111-112.

³¹ Nave, *Nave's Handbook on the Army Chaplains*, 69.

³² Stover, *Up from Handymen*, 72-73.

War Department.³³ These resolutions evolved into House Bill 3868, which Congress ultimately rejected.³⁴ This bill would have made chaplains responsible for troop entertainment and recreation, along with supplying the men with enough reading material. They also had to report any complaints the enlisted men had, with suggestions for how to solve them.

American chaplains entered the Spanish-American War with the resolve to unify and better the military chaplaincy. Clergymen's status and daily responsibilities remained relatively the same as previous wars, although for the first time since the Civil War, chaplains could be present in combat, despite not carrying weapons. This shocked chaplains. Ministering during a battle is significantly different than instructing Sunday school classes at a military fort in peacetime. A handful of clergymen did make it to the Philippines, where they helped create an educational system on the islands, distributed medicine, and worked towards pacification of the archipelago.³⁵

The Spanish-American and Philippine Wars introduced Chaplain Aldred A. Pruden to the struggles of the American chaplaincy. Pruden joined the Army as a chaplain in 1898 at the outbreak of the Spanish-American War, and while he never saw combat, served with the First North Carolina Infantry until mid-1899. Like Nave, Pruden took it upon himself to organize chaplain efforts at home and provide them with proper equipment and funding to carry out their work. Over the course of the Spanish-American War, through private efforts, Pruden managed to

³³ These denominations included the "Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., the Congregational churches, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the U.S.A., the United Presbyterian Church ... and the Baptist Home Missionary Society." Stover, *Up from Handymen*, 72-73.

³⁴ Stover, *Up from Handymen*, 75-76.

³⁵ Stover, *Up from Handymen*, 121-125. American servicemen and chaplains worked to reopen the Manila public schools in an attempt to win over the Filipino civilian population. These efforts opened 32 schools and provided for 4,800 students.

collect the necessary funds for the construction of spiritual meeting halls and recreational buildings in domestic training camps.³⁶ This accomplishment helped establish chaplains as a legitimate part of camp life, providing them with an official setting to minister to troops, rather than in tents or wherever else they could manage. Additionally, Pruden advocated the Army to establish a training school to equip ministers with the knowledge, abilities, and confidence to participate in combat situations with their men. The outbreak of the First World War found him at Fort Zachary Taylor, where, like Chaplain Nave, he helped Protestant churches and the Army select more qualified chaplains to remove those unfit for duty.³⁷

The Spanish-American and Philippine Wars forced American churches to pay attention to chaplains and the significance of their role within military institutions. Chaplains themselves recognized the lack of organization for their work and began advocating for themselves even as these wars came to an end. Meanwhile, the nation, in the midst of the reforms of the Progressive Era, became focused on building up soldiers' virtues. Thus, churches began promoting the spiritual care of American soldiers. This is mostly due to Chaplains Nave and Pruden in the 1880's chaplain movement. Woefully unprepared for combat, they recognized the need for a training school and the proper equipment and funds. Overall, through the efforts of chaplains such as Nave and Pruden, the Spanish-American War established a relationship with chaplains and their home churches, a relationship that would prove invaluable in the coming decades.

³⁶ "Memorandum Concerning Chaplain A.A. Pruden, U.S. Army. Statement of Service," n.d., A.A. Pruden Papers, 1898-1931, Military Papers folder 2, University of North Carolina Libraries, (hereafter UNC Libraries), Chapel Hill <https://finding-aids.lib.unc.edu/04997/>.

³⁷ William J. Hourihan, "Chaplain Alfred A. Pruden and the Professionalization of the United States Army Chaplaincy, 1899-1920," *Military Chaplains' Review* (Fall 1988), 13.

Church leaders also learned the vital lesson of wartime cooperation, just in time for the even bigger war they would soon find themselves in.

The Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America

Fueled by evangelism and reform of the Progressive Era, Protestant churches created the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America in 1908.³⁸ The council defined themselves “not an individual or voluntary agency, or simply an interdenominational fellowship,” but rather as “an officially and ecclesiastically constituted body.”³⁹ Theological differences over how to properly worship and interpret the scriptures riddled the Protestant denominations of America, causing division and disagreement. The Federal Council, though, did not set out to rectify these differences, rather their goal was to unify churches despite incongruities, promoting “the spirit of fellowship, service and co-operation” among denominations.⁴⁰ Council members had no authority over specific denominational activities, leaving churches completely autonomous, but unity allowed the Protestant churches more leverage in church causes such as temperance, missions, and the promotion of nationwide reform. Along with the Executive Committee and the Administrative Committee, the Federal Council headed several commissions for foreign and home missions, Christian education, social work, temperance, interdenominational cooperation,

³⁸ At the turn of the century, American Protestant churches concerned themselves with expansion: “Through the efforts of home mission boards, church extension officers, and revivalist movements, the number of churches burgeoned, and a majority of the populace became church members.” Stover, *Up from Handymen*, 145-146.

³⁹ *Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America: A Statement of its Plan, Purpose and Work*, (New York: Federal Council of the Churches in America, National Office, New York City 1913), 1, HathiTrust Digital Library, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nnc2.ark:/13960/t4tj3sn01&view=1up&seq=1&skin=2021>.

⁴⁰ *Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America: A Statement of its Plan, Purpose and Work*, 2.

and international church relations.⁴¹ The council operated at both state and federal levels, giving the churches more agency and access to government resources.

Once the United States officially declared war on Germany in April of 1917, the Federal Council created the General War-Time Commission of the Churches.⁴² This Commission provided the Federal Council with a group dedicated to organizing denominational war-time efforts, ranging from chaplain work to advocating for nationwide temperance. Various Protestant denominations made up the membership of the Commission's executive board.⁴³ To effectively secure interfaith chaplains for the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) and improve morale both at home and abroad, the Commission coordinated closely with welfare groups such as the Jewish Welfare Board and the Catholic Knights of Columbus. By uniting Protestant denominations and coordinating Jewish and Catholic efforts, this became a unique attempt at interdenominational and interfaith communication in a time of war.⁴⁴ Doing so eliminated redundant work done by individual churches and streamlined church-military activities. It also meant a new, revived religious approach to the war. Commission Secretary William Adams Brown called upon both the General War-Time Commission and the national body of Protestant

⁴¹ *Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America: A Statement of its Plan, Purpose and Work*, 2-3. The Federal Council as a whole met quadrennially (every four years), the Executive Committee, made up of 90 church delegates, met annually, while the Administrative Committee, a branch of the Executive Committee, met monthly.

⁴² Referred to as the General War-Time Commission.

⁴³ William Adams Brown, *Report of the General War-Time Commission of the Churches* (New York: Federal Council of the Churches in America, National Office, 1917), 223-224, HathiTrust Digital Library, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uiug.30112054790388&view=lup&seq=7&skin=2021>. Robert E. Speer sat as Chairman, Reverend William Lawrence as Vice-Chairman, Reverend William Adams Brown as Secretary, Reverend Gaylord S. White as Associate Secretary, and Harold H. Tryon, Reverend Samuel McCrea Cavert, and Eric M. North as Assistant Secretaries.

⁴⁴ For a comprehensive (but not quite exhaustive) list of churches involved with the Federal Council and General War-Time Commission, see: Margaret Renton, ed., *War-Time Agencies of the Churches: Directory and Handbook* (New York: Federal Council of the Churches in America, National Office, 1919), HathiTrust Digital Library, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=cool.ark:/13960/t7br9bk4h&view=lup&seq=1&skin=2021>.

churches to the following mission: to present a unified church body to the men and women in the camps and abroad, all “while loyally supporting our own government in the righteous war to which we have laid our hands, [and] to keep alive the international consciousness to which religion in its higher aspects is committed.”⁴⁵

In order to provide for the spiritual care of Americans suddenly plucked from their homes and thrust into a European war, the General War-Time Commission set up the General Committee on Army and Navy Chaplains.⁴⁶ This Committee remained a permanent establishment of the Federal Council, selecting and recommending competent chaplains to the War Department, as “no Protestant chaplains [were] appointed in the Regular Army, the National Army or the Navy without the approval of the General Committee.”⁴⁷ Other significant boards included the Commission on the Church and Social Service, the Committee on Camp Neighborhoods, and the Committee on War-Time Work in the Local Church.

The Federal Council and General War-Time Committee provided the United States government with a formal representative body for the American churches – rather than an ambiguous, disorganized collection of various church agencies – allowing for improved communication between these two institutions. The churches knew the importance chaplains held in armies, as did General Pershing, commander of the AEF, and Senior Chaplain Bishop Charles Henry Brent. Throughout the war, Pershing and the Federal Council assisted each other in mobilizing over 2,000 priests, reverends, and rabbis for service.

⁴⁵ Brown, *Report of the General War-Time Commission of the Churches*, 227-228.

⁴⁶ Brown, *Report of the General War-Time Commission of the Churches*, 225-226.

⁴⁷ Brown, *Report of the General War-Time Commission of the Churches*, 228.

Filling the Ranks

Despite the best efforts of Nave, Pruden, and Spanish-American War chaplains, the AEF was woefully unprepared to provide spiritual care to the burgeoning number of troops preparing to fight in Europe. As the United States mobilized, numerous concerns plagued existing chaplains and volunteer clergymen, first and foremost, the number of chaplains allotted by law. On May 12, 1917, Congress passed legislation allowing *one* chaplain to serve in each regiment.⁴⁸ This usually meant one chaplain every 1,200 soldiers; a daunting enough task. However, that same piece of legislation increased regiments threefold without adjusting the number of chaplains.⁴⁹ Chaplains now singlehandedly had to minister to 3,600 men if, by chance a regiment even had a chaplain; most chaplains had on average 5,000 men in their care.⁵⁰

Influenced by Progressive Era idealism, General Pershing regarded spiritual guidance among his men as a significant priority. In persuading the Adjutant General Peter Charles Harris and Secretary of War Newton D. Baker to allow for more chaplains, Pershing appealed to the value of a chaplains' work, stating "I regarded recognition of the value of religious influence among our troops during the war as of special importance."⁵¹ Inspired by the Progressive Era's concern for individual's moral wellbeing, Pershing wanted chaplains in the AEF who could guide enlisted men away from the secular temptations of alcohol, gambling, and prostitutes.

⁴⁸ "H.R. 13, Chapter 12, An Act Making Appropriations for the Support of the Army for the Fiscal Year Ending June Thirtieth, Nineteen Hundred and Eighteen, and for Other Purposes," Sixty-fifth Congress Session I, May 12, 1917, *Public Laws of the United States of America, Passed by the Sixty-fifth Congress, 1917-1919* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1919), 72-73, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/l1/l1sl/l1sl-c65/l1sl-c65.pdf>.

⁴⁹ Honeywell *Chaplains of the United States Army*, 170; Stover, *Up from Handymen*, 209-210.

⁵⁰ Stover, *Up from Handymen*, 211. Statistic provided in a letter from Bishop Charles H. Brent, serving in France.

⁵¹ John J. Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1931), 284.

Additionally, Pershing believed chaplains would foster AEF soldiers' boldness and courage in the field and reach for a higher calling in the war: "I believe the personnel of the army has never been equaled, and the conduct has been excellent, but to overcome entirely the conditions found here requires fortitude born of great courage and lofty spiritual ideals." To accomplish this, he appealed to Secretary Baker to increase the number of Army chaplains.⁵²

The General War-Time Commission wasted no time in finding remedies to these problems. By August, the General Committee on Army and Navy Chaplains had met and drafted a bill for the return of the 1:1,200 ratio, raising the number of chaplains per regiment to three instead of one.⁵³ Despite the bill's endorsement and promotion by 40,000,000 Protestants and Catholics, and General Pershing himself, Congress stalled the bill.⁵⁴ Federal Council leaders claimed that despite passing in the Senate, the House of Representatives' Military Committee could not come to a quorum on the bill, and implored Protestants all over the country to continue petitioning committee member's for its passage.⁵⁵ Exasperated, General War-Time Commission Chairman Robert E. Speer wrote to President Wilson's Secretary, Joseph Tumulty.⁵⁶ Speer

⁵² Shallenberger, Ashton. "Amending Act for the National Defense," Committee on Military Affairs submitted February 14, 1918 to the House of Representatives, 65th Congress Session II, Report number 313, ProQuest, Congressional, https://congressional.proquest.com/congressional/docview/t47.d48.7307_h.rp.313?accountid=7082. Includes cablegram from General Pershing to Secretary of War Newton D. Baker; Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, 284.

⁵³ William Adams Brown, *Annual Reports of the Federal Council of the Churches in America for the Year 1918* (New York: Federal Council of the Churches in America, National Office, 1918), 168, HathiTrust Digital Library, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015069286253&view=1up&seq=1&skin=2021>.

⁵⁴ David Goldman, "'Charlie' Chaplains in the Great War: Chaplains' Experience in the U.S. Army, 1917-1919," *Journal of Military History* 84, (April 2020): 400.

⁵⁵ "Washington Office of Federal Council Active in Increasing Number and Improving Quality of Army and Navy Chaplains," *Federal Council Bulletin*, vol. 1 no. 1, January, 1918, 7, HathiTrust Digital Library, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=wu.89065279176&view=1up&seq=15&skin=2021>.

⁵⁶ Robert E Speer not only sat as the Federal Council's Chairman but was also Secretary of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions. These two positions centralized him in the workings of both Presbyterian and larger Protestant movements. By the time Speer wrote to Tumulty, Protestant and Catholic churches alike had spent months

threatened the wrath of President Wilson, claiming Speer “knew the President would like to know how the chaplains were doing in France,” appealing to Tumulty to “inform the President about the need for action on the bill.”⁵⁷ Tumulty did so, and all the efforts of Speer and his 40 million were rewarded; Congress passed the bill which Wilson signed into law May 25, 1918, one full year later.⁵⁸ The bill also permitted the appointment of Jewish rabbis as chaplains, this being the first occasion rabbis could hold a chaplain position in the US Army.⁵⁹

While waiting for the passage of their bill, the General War-Time Committee worked tirelessly to fill regiments with voluntary chaplains, or “camp pastors.” These civilian clergymen primarily served in camps and military installations in the States, but many were excluded from the Army “due to their age or personal responsibilities, or because the lack of chaplain spaces before the Act of 25 May 1918.”⁶⁰ These camp pastors were supported by their denominational church and either worked alone, as a chaplain’s assistant, or in tandem with the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA). Not all camp pastors were welcomed by military authorities, and Third Assistant Secretary of War Frederick P. Kepple worked to prohibit camp pastors from entering camps once the Act of May 25th passed, convinced they ultimately undermined the work

petitioning, advocating, and lobbying for the bill. Church newspapers promoted it in their publications, imploring citizens to write their Congressman regarding this issue. Stover, *Up from Handymen*, 210-211.

⁵⁷ Stover, *Up from Handymen*, 211.

⁵⁸ “S. 4409, Chapter 85, An Act to amend section fifteen of the Act approved June third, nineteen hundred and sixteen, entitled ‘An Act for making further and more effectual provision for the national defense, and for other purposes,’ as amended by the Act approved May twelfth, nineteen hundred and seventeen, entitled ‘An Act making appropriations for the support of the Army for the fiscal year ending June thirtieth, nineteen hundred and eighteen, and for other purposes,” Sixty-fifth Congress Session II, May 25, 1918, *Public Laws of the United States of America, Passed by the Sixty-fifth Congress, 1917-1919* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1919), 561, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/l1/lsl/l1sl-c65/l1sl-c65.pdf>.

⁵⁹ Honeywell, *Chaplains of the United States Army*, 171.

⁶⁰ Stover, *Up from Handymen*, 212. The General War-Time Commission’s Committee on Camp Neighborhoods headed up this project.

of the camp chaplain.⁶¹ This did not come to pass, as the General War-Time Commission intervened, convincing the War Department to approve camp pastors' presence in all camps and forts.⁶² Bishop Brent deemed these men the “‘saving element’ during the chaplain shortage.”⁶³

Back in 1915, the United States War Department yielded the chaplain candidate selection process to the American churches themselves. “In 1915, apparently convinced of the value of... [the churches], the Secretaries of War and Navy selected the Federal Council as the agency to obtain all Protestant candidates for chaplain vacancies.”⁶⁴ This foresight proved immensely beneficial America’s mobilization, as the need for chaplains had skyrocketed. The Federal Council and General War-Time Commission assigned this task to the General Committee on Army and Navy Chaplains to promote the capable and well-educated men as chaplains.⁶⁵ The chaplain was seen as the official representative of the Church and Christianity, so selecting reputable, capable, and well-liked representatives remained of utmost concern throughout the war. The General Committee on Army and Navy Chaplains worked hand in hand with the Jewish Welfare Board and Knights of Columbus to elect as even a number of chaplains from each faith as possible. Historically, the United States government held the responsibility of appointing chaplains, resulting in some rather unsavory characters or ill-equipped clergymen taking up the

⁶¹ Stover, *Up from Handymen*, 213.

⁶² In response to this resistance, many churches petitioned Kepple to discontinue discrimination against camp pastors.

⁶³ Stover, *Up from Handymen*, 213.

⁶⁴ Stover, *Up from Handymen*, 159.

⁶⁵ William Adams Brown, *Record of a Year: Progress of the Work of the General War-Time Commission of the Churches, 1917-1918*, (New York: Federal Council of the Churches in America, National Office, 1918), 8-10, HathiTrust Digital Library, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nnc2.ark:/13960/t5cc8jflb&view=1up&seq=3&skin=2021>.

responsibility of soldier's spiritual care.⁶⁶ Many chaplains had also been appointed out of political motivations, which gradually came to a stop as the General Committee on Army and Navy Chaplains took over recommending highly qualified men, forcing the government to raise their standards.⁶⁷ The Federal Council recommended that applicants had either a college or seminary degree, at least one year of pastoral experience, respectable character, and decent athletic ability.⁶⁸ A denominational committee recommended candidates to the General Committee on Army and Navy Chaplains, who reviewed applications and forwarded the best nominees on to the War Department for the final selection into the AEF. This process demonstrates the interdenominational cooperation of Protestant churches during wartime.

Chaplain selection took up more of the Federal Council's time and effort than any other task during the war, and for good reason. Not just anyone could become a chaplain, and churches now took a genuine interest in the spiritual welfare of soldiers. They recommended quality clergymen to the General War-Time Commission, allowing the General Committee on Army and Navy Chaplains to select from a pool of quality men to recommend to the War Department. Burdened with the mobilization of an entire nation, this process undoubtedly took pressure off the War Department and the Adjutant General to select qualified men. The Federal Council reported that their "co-operation with the [War] Departments has been, in the main, satisfactory.

⁶⁶ Stories of these poor-quality chaplains are mentioned in the literature, but are hardly lingered upon. Sometimes a chaplain could be overly pious, shaming the men under his care for their behavior to the point of alienating himself from them. Many simply delivered poor sermons that had no personal connection to the soldiers whatsoever. An example of this is one Civil War chaplain giving an infant baptism sermon to a room full of grown, baptized soldiers. Norton, *Struggling for Recognition*, 96. Finally, Civil War soldiers deemed some chaplains as "'one cent by God' because he collected a penny for each soldier's letter that he carried." Norton, *Struggling for Recognition*, 104. Men like these certainly still existed among First World War chaplains, but the great care the churches and AEF took in selection and training decreased these odds significantly.

⁶⁷ Stover, *Up from Handymen*, 174.

⁶⁸ Stover, *Up from Handymen*, 208-209.

No Protestant chaplains are appointed now without our approval and we first secure the endorsement of the denominational Chaplain Committee[,]” allowing the military to maintain high standards for chaplain selection.⁶⁹ Capable pastors, priests, and rabbis in the trenches and training camps ensured positive, healthy relationships with the soldiers. In turn, churches hoped troops would have a more positive view towards the church upon return from war, thus increasing post-war church attendance across the nation. This advanced the Federal Council’s original goal of providing “the ministrations of religion for the large number of persons, both men and women, suddenly taken from their accustomed surroundings and plunged into an unfamiliar life” and keeping “alive the international consciousness to which religion in its higher aspects is committed.”⁷⁰

In the grueling trenches of the Western Front, chaplains worked tirelessly to minister to their men and help in any and all capacities. Even before arriving in France, Chaplain Michael J. O’Connor proved his courage to the men of the 101st Infantry Regiment. During the voyage to France, it was discovered that a private in O’Connor’s company suffered from appendicitis and required immediate transfer to an accompanying warship for proper treatment.⁷¹ Without hesitation, Chaplain O’Connor volunteered to accompany the expedition and keep the private safe in the small boat on the open ocean waves. Through the gigantic swells they rowed as night

⁶⁹ “Washington Office of Federal Council Active in Increasing Number and Improving Quality of Army and Navy Chaplains,” *Federal Council Bulletin*, vol. 1 no. 1, January 1918, 7.

⁷⁰ Brown, *Report of the General War-Time Commission of the Churches*, 227-228.

⁷¹ Michael Shay, *Sky Pilots: The Yankee Division Chaplains in World War I* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2014), 13-15.

fell, and even almost capsized trying to return. One witness described Chaplain O'Connor's heroics "as brave an act as I saw in the war."⁷²

This spirit of compassion and courage continued once in France, where chaplains served "their comrades, working in field hospitals, ambulance squads, and stretcher-bearer teams where they provided first aid, prayers, succor, and last rites. When possible, they also conducted abridged services to small groups, often in a trench or ditch, by a tree, or in a shell-shattered building."⁷³ Chaplain John O'Leary of the 7th Infantry Regiment reported that by August, 1918, when his men were on leave from the frontlines, he preached up to twelve sermons per Sunday, each with an estimated one hundred in attendance. O'Leary also held Bible classes, communion services, and held confessional sessions.⁷⁴ Other chaplains distinguished themselves by their uplifting moods and cheery dispositions despite being surrounded by the horrors of trench warfare. When asked to describe their chaplain's efforts on the frontlines, members of the 355th Infantry Regiment wrote that Chaplain Alonzo Cagle served tirelessly and with great inspiration and courage:

"I well remember seeing Cagle making daily trips to the front lines with supplies and daily papers for the boys, riding a bicycle as far as possible, then walking through the trenches where the boys were always glad to see him. Holding services in the trenches sounds impossible, but Chaplain Cagle managed to do the same by having small groups together and even singing songs, the whistling of the shells the only music. Chaplain Cagle gave a lot of assistance in dressing wounds, *his cheerful way in doing everything was always a great stimulant to the morale of the men.*"⁷⁵

⁷² Shay, *Sky Pilots*, 15.

⁷³ David Goldman, "'Charlie' Chaplains in the Great War: Chaplains' Experience in the U.S. Army, 1917-1919," *Journal of Military History* 84, (April 2020): 415.

⁷⁴ Richard Faulkner, *Pershing's Crusaders: The American Soldier in World War I* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2017), 410.

⁷⁵ Goldman, "'Charlie' Chaplains in the Great War," 416. Italics added for emphasis.

Chaplains typically faced assumptions that they were not ‘one of the men,’ since civilian clergy typically filled the chaplain role. However, O’Connor, O’Leary, and Cagle and hundreds of other chaplains like them demonstrated their rightful place amongst the troops, redefining the typical soldier’s view of chaplains.

Training the Men

Now that the ranks of chaplains began to fill, these men faced the formidable task of ministering to troops in the heat of battle; something they knew nothing about. As civilians, they obviously had no knowledge of military life, but now the need for this knowledge proved crucial, raising the question of how chaplains should be trained. Chaplain Pruden’s calls to establish such a school were finally heard. The General Committee on Army and Navy Chaplains in 1917 “voted to ask the Secretary of War for authority to organize a school for chaplains,” and invited Pruden to join their January 1918 Committee meeting.⁷⁶ There, Pruden recommended potential curriculum, a daily schedule, and proposed that the school be located at Fort Monroe, Virginia. Secretary Baker and the Adjutant General approved Pruden’s proposal in February, and courses began March 1, 1918, with Pruden in charge.⁷⁷

The curriculum of the Fort Monroe school consisted of six hours of classroom lectures broken up by one hour each of drill and equitation (horsemanship), with two hours dedicated to mandatory evening study.⁷⁸ Each course lasted for five weeks and the school could accommodate

⁷⁶ Honeywell, *Chaplains of the United States Army*, 174.

⁷⁷ “Memorandum Concerning Chaplain A.A. Pruden, U.S. Army. Statement of Service,” UNC Libraries.

⁷⁸ Honeywell, *Chaplains of the United States Army*, 174-175. The General War-Time Committee compiled three publications of chaplain instruction into curriculum for the students. These publications included *Chaplains’ Duties and How Best to Accomplish his Work*, written in 1912 by George J. Waring, *Duties and Privileges of Chaplains*, written in 1914 by Joseph Clemens, and *Nave’s Handbook on the Army Chaplaincy*, written in 1917 by Orville J.

approximately seventy chaplain candidates at a time. To instruct chaplains on military life, subjects encompassed military law and organization, army regulations, customs and rank, military hygiene, and first aid.⁷⁹ The curriculum served as a weed-out process, discouraging those not up to the task and preventing ‘just anybody’ from becoming a chaplain as in previous wars.

Five weeks later, after completing just one course, the school relocated to Fort Zachary Taylor, Kentucky, where it remained until the end of the war. In total, the school graduated 1,042 students by the armistice in November, 1918.⁸⁰ Students had mixed reactions to the school. Some reported the school advanced their knowledge of the army, others said the practical applications did not work in the European theater they later experienced “and pointed out that [only a] few of the instructors were experienced in trench warfare.”⁸¹ Regardless, the school’s establishment verified the vital need of legitimate instruction.

To fill gaps in a chaplain’s training, the AEF established a second training school during the summer of 1918 in France. Initially located in Neuilly-sur-Suize near Chaumont, this school received unassigned chaplains upon arrival in Europe, chaplains needing rest and recuperation, and those wishing further education. The newly established Office of the Chief of Chaplains at the AEF headquarters supervised the school with Chaplain John A. Randolph as the onsite

Nave. These publications, along with several others, were widely distributed during the war. See Honeywell, *Chaplains of the United States Army*, 172-173 for more information.

⁷⁹ Honeywell, *Chaplains of the United States Army*, 175.

⁸⁰ Honeywell, *Chaplains of the United States Army*, 175.

⁸¹ Honeywell, *Chaplains of the United States Army*, 180.

administrator.⁸² A typical day included two and a half hours of drill with four hours of classroom instruction. Classes ranged from first aid, gas drill defense, and map reading to esprit de corps, French history and language, and devotional exercises.⁸³ This school did not emphasize instruction in theology and religious doctrine. Not only was it assumed that chaplains had this training upon selection, but denominational and interfaith differences made this impossible. What training they did not have was that of military life. The school transferred to Chateau d'Aux at Louplande near Le Mans in October of 1918, only one month before the armistice.⁸⁴ This European school saw over 600 chaplains by the time it shut down in January, 1919. Like its stateside counterpart, chaplains had mixed opinions on the school: "Some considered that it had little value for those without war experience. Others who had gone through the school in America stressed the importance of being taught by men who were acquainted with trench warfare. Some believed it the most valuable training of their whole military career."⁸⁵ Overall, these two schools remained the most significant means of training chaplains during the war.

Establishing Credibility

Aside from acquiring and training men, organizational dilemmas still afflicted the AEF chaplaincy. Serving clergymen had no structure within the army to support their efforts in Europe. To overcome this challenge, General Pershing and AEF General Headquarters staff

⁸² James W. McAndrew, "General Orders No. 189," October 28, 1918, *United States Army in the World War, 1917-1919: General Orders, GHQ, AEF*, vol. 16, (Washington D.C.: Center for Military History, United States Army, 1992.), 502, Center for Military History, https://history.army.mil/html/books/023/23-22/CMH_Pub_23-22.pdf.

⁸³ *Esprit de corps* is defined as pride, fellowship, and common loyalty shared by the members of a particular group. Honeywell, *Chaplains of the United States Army*, 180-181.

⁸⁴ McAndrew, "General Orders No. 189," *United States Army in the World War, 1917-1919*, 502.

⁸⁵ Honeywell, *Chaplains of the United States Army*, 181.

(AEF GHQ) established a Senior Chaplain's office to represent chaplains to the Adjutant General and Commander in Chief.⁸⁶ Bishop Charles Henry Brent filled this senior chaplain role, receiving the unofficial title of Chief of Chaplains from General Pershing. Delighted at the establishment of this position, Pershing highlighted that this step towards professionalization further legitimized chaplains, and later reflected that this placed "chaplains of our forces on the same footing, as regards to the performance of their duties, as other officers of the service."⁸⁷ Brent also aided in running the Chaplain School at Le Mans.⁸⁸ At long last, chaplains had proper representation within the AEF itself, and Bishop Brent demonstrated himself to be an effective and competent advocate for chaplain's welfare, able to provide solutions for problems that arose in the field.

Two of the largest army-wide problems arose over issues of insignia. The first pertained to the uniform's designation of chaplain: the cross. As of 1899, chaplains were to wear a Latin cross on the shoulder of their uniforms, and this proved useful until the integration of Jewish chaplains during the Great War.⁸⁹ When rabbis and the Jewish Welfare Board objected that this was not an appropriate declaration of their faith, Secretary Baker allowed them to change the

⁸⁶ James G. Harbord, "General Orders No. 66," May 1, 1918, *United States Army in the World War, 1917-1919: General Orders, GHQ, AEF*, vol. 16, (Washington D.C.: Center for Military History, United States Army, 1992), 300-302.

⁸⁷ John J. Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1931), 132.

⁸⁸ Brown, *Annual Reports of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America for the Year 1918*, 169.

⁸⁹ Honeywell, *Chaplains of the United States Army*, 157.

insignia to a Star of David accompanying Tablets of the Law.⁹⁰ This reform met little pushback, despite not being officialized until October, 1918.

The issue surrounding insignia of Jewish chaplains demonstrated a significant but easily remedied chaplain controversy during the Great War. The second controversy over rank insignia proved much more divisive. Within the AEF, until April of 1914, chaplains could wear their *military* rank alongside their chaplain insignia. Chaplains typically held the rank of lieutenant, and could advance through major. A change in Congressional law outlawed the wearing of military insignia for chaplains as of May 22, 1918.⁹¹ Two factions quickly formed. General Pershing and Bishop Brent believed a chaplain displaying his military rank to be distasteful. A chaplain displaying officer's rank might create barriers between him and the enlisted men he vowed to serve.⁹² Pershing and Brent also worried this could lead to an outright militarization of faith and the Bible, something they wanted to avoid. The Federal Council even reported some chaplains purposefully removing their rank in order to blend in with the men, "feeling that without [rank] a more effective work could be accomplished."⁹³

Chaplain Pruden led the second faction, those in favor of wearing military rank. Pruden contended that the wearing of rank would identify chaplains with their fellow officers, giving them well-earned prestige and influence. Military rank was not intended to intimidate the enlisted men from going to the chaplains; rather, it presented the chaplain as a competent,

⁹⁰ Brown, *Annual Reports of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America for the Year 1918*, 169; Stover, *Up from Handymen*, 203.

⁹¹ Stover, *Up from Handymen*, 203-204.

⁹² Brown, *Annual Reports of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America for the Year 1918*, 169; Honeywell, *Chaplains of the United States Army*, 178-179.

⁹³ Brown, *Annual Reports of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America for the Year 1918*, 169.

respectable member of the military and not a civilian or outsider. Chaplain John T. Axton, who would become the first official Chief of Chaplains in 1920 after Bishop Brent, contended that enlisted men have immediately higher respect for officers, therefore the wearing of rank insignia was beneficial. The Federal Council took a similar stance, claiming that “so long as [a chaplain] remains an officer of the Army, he ought to be put in a position where he stands on par with the men” he serves with.⁹⁴ The Council reported that “a majority of chaplains prefer the insignia of rank, [along] with the use of the cross.”⁹⁵ Pruden fought long and hard over this issue, burning bridges along the way. Along with Chaplains Robert R. Fleming and Ignatius Fealy, Pruden was relieved from his duties as the training school’s commandant for rallying students at Camp Taylor in rebellion of Pershing’s orders.⁹⁶ Ultimately, a court-martial was not recommended, as their trial would create “undesirable notoriety.”⁹⁷ Pruden’s faction finally claimed victory in March, 1926, when Pershing’s orders were overturned and chaplains could wear rank again.

The rank and insignia controversy demonstrated the church and military’s ability to arrive at decisions regarding chaplains. While church leaders and military officials did disagree, the mutual relationship allowed for productive dialogue between the two groups to arrive at verdicts

⁹⁴ Brown, *Record of a Year*, 10.

⁹⁵ “Report of Charles S. MacFarland, Commissioner to France, to the Administrative Committee of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America,” *Federal Council Bulletin* vol. 1 no. 9, September 1918, 22, HathiTrust Digital Library, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=wu.89065279176&view=1up&seq=133&skin=2021>.

⁹⁶ Stover, *Up from Handymen*, 206. Despite removal from the school, Pruden would continue chaplaincy work until his retirement in 1922. Upon retiring for health reasons, Pruden’s commanding officer Brigadier General Frank Winn wrote: “Chaplain Pruden has a long record of important services. He has performed the duties of his office at this Training Center [in Fort Monroe, Alabama] in an exceptionally able manner. I have never had under my command a more loyal, zealous and accomplished Chaplain of the Regular Service.” Brigadier General Frank L. Winn to the Adjutant General of the Army, August 30, 1922, A.A. Pruden Papers, 1898-1931, Military Papers folder 2, UNC Libraries.

⁹⁷ Stover, *Up from Handymen*, 206.

that benefited chaplains in the long run. Additionally, despite the war being over, the establishment of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains allowed John Axton to directly represent the overwhelming number of chaplains who protested the removal of rank insignia from uniforms.⁹⁸ After the reinstatement of rank, chaplains “agreed that increased rank helped them to help their men; it facilitated their functioning in the system and on that basis increased their effectiveness.”⁹⁹ The results of this controversy still influences chaplains serving today, as rank is always listed as part of their official title.

CONCLUSION

The Great War provided chaplains an excellent opportunity to demonstrate their service and discipleship. Chaplain Cephas C. Bateman later wrote that “no body of men of equal number and of equal rank [gave] ... a better account of their stewardship in any army in any war, in any age.”¹⁰⁰ Pershing echoed similar sentiments, attributing their success to “untiring zeal, marked disregard of danger and deep devotion to duty.”¹⁰¹ But this group of devoted chaplains could not have existed without the diligent efforts of both the AEF and the Federal Council and General War-Time Commission, along with numerous other church committees and individuals.

The United States entered the war with a chaplaincy made up predominately of civilian clergymen serving troops with little to no military support. Since the Revolutionary War, laws

⁹⁸ Axton surveyed the 126 active-duty chaplains in 1926, and found 116 of them to be emphatically against the insignia removal. This spurred him to take action in representing his chaplain’s wishes. Gushwa, *The Best and Worst of Times*, 28-31.

⁹⁹ Gushwa, *The Best and Worst of Times*, 31.

¹⁰⁰ Stover, *Up from Handymen*, 224. Direct quote from Chaplain Bateman.

¹⁰¹ Stover, *Up from Handymen*, 224. Direct quote from General Pershing.

had prevented a complete Chaplain Corps from developing in the American Army, and while churches demonstrated an interest in chaplain's work during wartime – as seen in the Revolutionary and Civil Wars – they hardly maintained that interest upon a war's conclusion. The Great War reversed this tradition. Whispers of reform that began during the Spanish-American and Philippine Wars piqued church's interest in military affairs as chaplains began advocating for themselves. 1917 created the perfect atmosphere for this reform to take place: mass mobilization of an unprecedented number of troops from churches enthralled with societal reform. These two elements created a catalyst for the maturation of the U.S. Army Chaplain Corps as it is recognized today.

Neither the churches nor the AEF could accomplish this momentous reform of the chaplaincy by themselves. Fervent and zealous cooperation on the part of both organizations was necessary to make these lasting, positive changes. The General War-Time Commission continued their work after the armistice in 1918, continuing with “unabated vigor, striving in every possible way not only to serve the country and the enlisted men and officers” by procuring capable chaplains and “keeping the Churches aroused to zealous interest and closest sympathy” with all those serving in the Army and Navy.¹⁰² The lasting changes that resulted from this joint church-military relationship prevented the chaplaincy from regressing after the First World War's conclusion. This pivot away from the historical tradition ensured the survival of the chaplain corps as an autonomous, professional branch into the twentieth century. The chaplaincy today, while the smallest branch of the armed forces, is a thriving, fully established corps that

¹⁰² Samuel McCrea Cavert, ed., *The Churches Allied for Common Tasks: Report of the Third Quadrennium of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, 1916-1920* (New York: Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, National Office, 1921), 245, HathiTrust Digital Library, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433068269764&view=1up&seq=7&skin=2021>.

provides religious support for soldiers of all backgrounds thanks to the church-military efforts during the Great War.

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