

Warrior, Prophet, Priest:

THE STRATEGIC VALUE OF CHAPLAINS TO THE WAR EFFORT AND COMMUNITY

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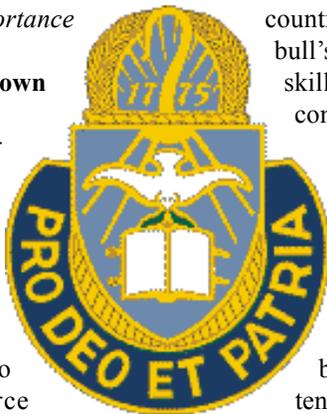
Don't confuse proximity to the target with importance to the mission.

— Unknown

The true warrior is one who is fit both for life and for war, succeeding in battle *and* after returning home from war. This is a dual mission often overlooked in terms of its strategic value to sustaining the war effort over the long haul and underestimated in its difficulty in terms of learning and managing the very different skill sets necessary to succeed in the two very different arenas, each of which is a force multiplier and protector for the other.

For example, research indicates “marriage to a stable partner” as one of the significant contributors to creating resilience in the face of adversity. This is particularly significant in light of data which shows that over the last 40 years the Army has evolved from a conscript force of primarily male Soldiers to a volunteer force in which 51 percent are married. These military couples are at a greater risk than civilians for domestic violence and that risk increases for those who are deployed, with longer deployments related to greater risk of violence. Exposure to combat further intensifies risk factors adding greater marital distress and threat of dissolution to the mix of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other combat-exacerbated vulnerabilities. Significantly, while the number of Soldiers over the past five years has remained fairly constant, a *USA Today* article dated June 7, 2005, by G. Zoroya stated, “divorce rates among officers is up 78 percent from 2003, the year of the Iraq invasion, and more than 3.5 times the number in 2000 before the Afghan operation.” What does this mean for the combat theater and support both logistically and at home in terms of morale?

It is our thesis that those men and women most likely to serve well in battle and survive it to live well in life are those who practice the way of the warrior striving to make themselves fit for both life and for war. The U.S. Army Chaplain’s task is strategic in supporting this effort. U.S. Army Chaplains and Family Life Chaplains in particular (who are trained to integrate both theological, pastoral, and clinical skills) have a vocation to support warriors in such a way that they successfully serve both God and



country. It is a task which places them squarely in the bull’s eye between two missions which involve different skill sets that are not easily mastered and can even seem contradictory:

- 1) Get the Soldier back to soldiering ASAP, and
- 2) Help the Soldier move back into family life as quickly and easily as possible after deployment.

Because the chaplain’s task is to serve on these two fronts simultaneously, when fully and authentically embraced in the depths, it is also one of the most difficult assignments in the armed forces, because the chaplain works at the very heart of the tension inherent to these very different tasks of being fit for life and fit for war. The chaplain and the Chaplain corps in general are not only force multipliers who help Soldiers get back to soldiering, but more importantly, they serve as healers, counselors and educators, to help raw recruits and battle-scarred and hardened veterans return to life at home, and once again become capable of effective interpersonal communication, vulnerability, intimacy, playfulness and joy among their loved ones and community. Many interwoven tasks are needed for effective deployment and transition as well as a depth understanding of the existential and psychological moorings for these activities, all of which the chaplain serves as both grunt and officer in charge.

A 1999 review of Army active duty psychological autopsies indicated 75 percent of all completed suicides in the Army involved the loss or dissolution of a significant relationship. Commanders and chaplains have hypothesized for years that the underlying reason for Soldiers leaving the Army is due to the loss of a marriage or significant relationship. Concerns in this area were confirmed by a recent survey of more than 1,500 respondents conducted by the Office of the Chief of Chaplains, which paralleled the findings of other agencies on overall indicators of morale that the primary fear of operations tempo (OPTEMPO) and multiple lengthy deployments was not the fear of death or serious injury, but the fear of losing a significant relationship.

Given the fact that the Army loses an average of 14.8 percent of all enlistees between the sixth and 36th months and up to 36.8 percent for each annual enlistment cohort, stabilizing marriages becomes a critical factor in both retention and as a force multiplier of those who serve. The readiness of the Army is inseparable from

the well-being of its people and the consistency and depth of civilian support. Army well-being is defined as the “personal, physical, material, mental and spiritual state of Soldiers (Active, Guard and Reserve), retirees, veterans, civilians, and their families that contributes to their preparedness to perform and support the Army’s mission.” Providing for the well-being of Soldiers’ families is a fundamental leadership imperative that requires adequate support and resources.

The importance of addressing these issues recently gained national attention during June and July 2002, when there was an unusual clustering of four homicides of spouses of active duty Soldiers stationed at Fort Bragg, N.C. Eventually all four cases were determined to have been committed by Soldier husbands. Two of these took their own lives immediately after murdering their spouses while a third committed suicide some months later while incarcerated. A fifth homicide, perpetrated by the wife of a mobilized reservist assigned to Fort Bragg, also occurred during the same six-week period. These tragic events unfolding in the midst of a protracted Global War on

Terrorism (GWOT) became a great concern to the entire Department of Defense (DoD) and Department of the Army leadership at all levels and generated a media firestorm at the national and international levels.

Prominent among the causal factors raised by the press was the impact of separation due to deployment (since three out of the four Soldiers had been deployed to Afghanistan) and the lingering effects of traumatic stress related to combat experiences. In response, the U.S. Army Office of the Surgeon General (OTSG) established a charter for an epidemiological consultation (EPICON) team composed of Army and Centers for Disease Control subject matter experts (including chaplains) to consult with the local medical and line leadership at Fort Bragg. A central finding to the EPICON team was that severe marital discord was a major factor in all of the active duty Bragg cases including recent or threatened separation.

Contributions of the Chaplaincy

Historically Army chaplains have been and remain the critical link in assisting with

Soldiers’ morale and helping with the transition between war and civilian life. Chaplains have consistently been catalysts and innovators in addressing Soldier and family needs and initiating programs, which later became independent Army programs. Chaplains established lending closets and provided “Helping Hand” funds using offerings taken up at chapels which were the precursors to today’s Army Community Service and Army Emergency Relief. After World War II, chaplains were at the forefront of initiatives to racially integrate the force. During the Vietnam period and following, chaplains initiated and were integral to drug and alcohol treatment and “Human Relations” programs.

The chaplain remains the primary frontline professional person in whom Soldiers are likely to confide in or seek out in distress. While the stigma of the label of “mental illness” still prevents Soldiers from talking with psychiatrists and medical personnel, the American Association of Pastoral Counselors found that when “...confronted with a personal problem needing counseling, 66 percent of persons would prefer a counselor who represented spiritual values and beliefs.



Eighty-one percent prefer someone who enables them to integrate their values and belief system into the counseling process.” Results of the Sample Survey of Military Personnel (SSMP) indicate that next to a friend or close relative, Soldiers rank chaplains as the one “most likely for Army personnel to turn to for advice about confidential personal or family problems.”

Prior to the events unveiled at Fort Bragg by the EPICON team, the U.S. Army Chaplaincy had already begun piloting a proactive, unit-based prevention training program to strengthen marriages with what is known nationally as marriage education. Though not a new function, the approach is the only systemic and standardized approach in DoD.

Marriage Education Strategies to Strengthen Marriages

Marriage education focuses on empirically based strategies designed to help individuals reduce the risk factors and contributors to marital distress and increase the protective factors, skills, attitudes and confidence required to strengthen commitment and the achievement of mutual goals in marriage.

Developed in the 25th Infantry Division in 1999, the Building Strong and Ready Families (BSRF) program has become an example of how marriage education can work in the U.S. Army, how agencies can collaborate and has birthed related programs in support of GWOT. Outcome research was conducted with positive feedback from participants. These metrics supported further funding.

The intended target population for BSRF is first term or newly married couples. BSRF is intended to be offered at least three times per year to accommodate newly arrived or newly married couples in brigades. The marriage education component of the training is taught by members of the brigade Unit Ministry Teams (UMT), community health nursing, or health promotion staff members and others. BSRF is a three-level training event consisting of two daylong workshops and culminating with an overnight retreat.

Due to the success of several Chief of Chaplains-sponsored Reserve Component BSRF pilot programs and the legislative changes beginning in fiscal year 2003 which allowed the use of appropriated funds for “chaplain led programs to strengthen the family structure,” the U.S. Army Reserve Command proposed a weekend event for couples. Beginning in late 2003, the 81st Regional Readiness Command sponsored the first of many couples and single Soldier post-deployment weekends. These weekend readiness events have multiplied significantly in the USARC and State Joint Force (National Guard) Units.

The costs of marriage education are small compared to the costs of not providing it. For example, the average outlay for recruiting (\$15,000) and training a Soldier in One Station Unit Training (\$28,000 average) is estimated to be somewhere between

The conclusions are clear: commanders who take the time and make the investments up front by preventing relationship problems before they escalate, will ultimately spend less time and funds than they would if the problem evolves to the point that it requires intervention from successively higher leaders and support agencies.

\$43,000-50,000 per Soldier. Attrition rates for Soldier cohorts who leave the Army before completing their first term average 36.8 percent for 0-36 months and 14.8 percent from months 6-36. If marriage education reduces the attrition a mere one or two percent after month six, savings would be \$43-86 million in recruitment and training costs alone, and double that if an additional \$50,000 is included for having to train another Soldier as a replacement, along with the 6-7 month time lag before he or she is ready for deployment. This more than covers the costs associated with systematic marriage

education conducted by chaplains for all the components.

The Army Family Advocacy program spent \$17 million to treat approximately 3,000 substantiated cases of spouse abuse in FY 04 at an estimated cost of \$5,500 per intervention. In contrast, the active component chaplaincy spent roughly \$1.5 million for approximately 4,000 couples on marriage education for approximately \$375 per couple. The active component chaplaincy could train all newly accessioned junior enlisted Soldiers and their spouses, reducing potential spouse abuse cases, for significantly less than the FY 04 cost of spouse abuse intervention and treatment, an important consideration in light of the fact that the causes of domestic violence are deeper than the substance abuse that often accompanies it.

The conclusions are clear: commanders who take the time and make the investments up front by preventing relationship problems before they escalate, will ultimately spend less time and funds than they would if the problem evolves to the point that it requires intervention from successively higher leaders and support agencies. Multiply this by thousands of Army couples and the impact on readiness, sustainment, and later, healthy reintegration to society, is evident and especially significant, since multiple deployments appear to be the immediate future, requiring stabilization and harmony for couples in the interims between combat rotations.

Equipping Warriors for Life and for War

In Stephen Pressfield’s historical novel *Gates of Fire*, King Leonidas, who narrates the events of the Spartan defense of Thermopylae against the Persian army, describes a ritual event that holds in it a key to the dual skill sets and orientations of the warrior, who must be one way in battle and another at home. The warrior moves between these two worlds most easily when there is 1) conscious intention and 2) the necessary communal acceptance, forgiveness, permission and empowerment that are part and parcel of such drastically different arenas as marriage, family and community life and the arena of battle.

“When a man sets before his eyes the bronze face of his helmet and steps off from the line of departure, he divides himself, as he divides his ‘ticket,’ in two parts. One part he leaves behind. That part which takes delight in his children, which lifts his voice in the chorus, which clasps his wife to him in the sweet darkness of their bed.

“That half of him, the best part, a man sets aside and leaves behind. He banishes from his heart all feelings of tenderness and mercy, all compassion and kindness, all thought or concept of the enemy as a man, a human being like himself. He marches into battle bearing only the second portion of himself, the baser measure, that half which knows slaughter and butchery and turns a blind eye to quarter. He could not fight if he did not do this.”

The men listened, silent and solemn. Leonidas at that time was fifty-five years old. He had fought in more than two score battles, since he was twenty; wounds as ancient as thirty years stood forth, lurid upon his shoulders and calves, on his neck and across his steel colored beard.

“Then this man returns, alive, out of the slaughter. He hears his name called and comes forward to take his ticket. He reclaims that part of himself which he had earlier set aside.

“This is a holy moment. A sacramental moment. A moment in which a man feels the gods as close as his own breath.”

“What unknowable mercy has spared us this day? What clemency of the divine has turned the enemy’s spear one handbreadth from our throat and driven it fatally into the breast of the beloved comrade at our side? Why are we still here above the earth, we who are no better, no braver, who revered heaven no more than these, our brothers whom the gods have dispatched to hell?”

“When a man joins the two pieces of his ticket and sees them weld in union together, he feels that part of him, the part that knows love and mercy and compassion, come flooding back over him. This is what unstrings his knees.”

The intent of this passage reminds us that it is not enough to be committed to “leaving no Soldier behind” on the battlefield dead or alive. A different war is waged upon return home unless “the ticket” symbolizing the inner being of each warrior is “reconnected.” Along with the

recognition that “war is hell” comes the understanding that no one goes to hell and comes back unscathed. It is a community betrayal to send men and women to war without a plan for on-going and follow-up pastoral care and counseling to support the soul-searching confrontations of heart and grief work that are necessary to sustain the effort and work through the effects of combat upon their return. The U.S. Army chaplaincy exists precisely because of the recognition that spiritual logistics and support are strategically important for the on-going war effort and morale in theater, as well as critical for combat veterans transitioning back home psychologically, emotionally and socially after they have arrived home physically. Miscalculation of the cost to families and communities from ignoring this essential link results in unhealed moral, spiritual, emotional and psychological damage, and decline occurring to combat veterans that wreaks interpersonal havoc for one and two generations or more after they return which serves to weaken the morale of the people who indirectly sustain the army by honoring its purpose, thus undercutting the war at its root. Both senior Army civilian and military leadership agree that “People are the heart and soul of the Army — Soldiers, civilians, family members and retirees. Our readiness is inextricably linked to the well-being of our people. The Army Family, both the Active and Reserve Component, is a force multiplier and provides the foundation to sustain our warrior culture.”

What must be clearly understood is that the Soldier has a mission in war as well as in peace. This is why the warrior’s way cannot be divorced from commitment to both God and Country, (*Pro Deo et Patri*, as the motto of the U.S. Army Chaplaincy states). Different skill sets and emphases are needed to be able to intentionally shift between protecting the Sacred Origins (battle) and enjoying them (marriage, family and community life.) Not all combat veterans achieve this; perhaps not even the majority. Family Life Chaplains, due to their special education and training, as well as the fact that they

are the persons most likely chosen as confidants by Soldiers both in theatre and at home, are strategically positioned and trained to support Soldiers in learning and living this difference. Of course, this means that the Family Life Chaplains themselves must be familiar with both worlds and able to move fluidly between them.

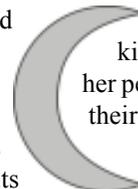
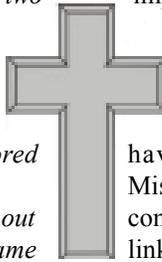
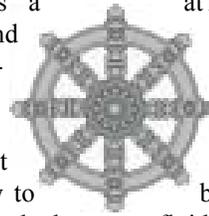
Existential and Spiritual context for FLC’s special mission

The chaplain who has walked among the troops on the field of battle earns the Soldier’s trust and it is easier for veterans to open up to them after they return as well. While the chaplain may not carry a gun, it must be remembered that neither did Christ fight with a sword, while some of his disciples or “chaplain’s assistants” on his Unit Ministry Team, certainly did as Peter demonstrated when he pulled out his sword to attack the guard seeking to arrest Jesus.

The chaplain then, represents in his/her person the type of the warrior-king — a leader who stands with his or her people sharing their struggles, knowing their pain and the realities of war in all its dimensions. Most of all the chaplain knows that the final battle is won or lost in the heart itself where meaning, worth and value are discovered and lost.

The chaplain also embodies and carries out the role of prophet — helping Soldiers wrestle with the moral decisions involved in fighting the war, and those arising among family and community in its aftermath. The chaplain is the one who is most capable of being direct and honest with command about the morale of the troops and those chaplains are most respected by command who have the courage and forthrightness to speak directly and boldly about the issues and persons for which they stand, something others in the rank and file may not feel they are able to do when outranked by their superiors.

Thirdly, there is the dimension of priest, which the chaplain incarnates — the shaman, or healer and representative of the presence of God in the midst of the conflict who is vowed to pay the price of being messenger at the intersection of the worlds of war, community and the Divine summons, embracing the tensions inherent





A Soldier talks with Landstuhl Regional Medical Center Chaplain Lieutenant Colonel Paul Williams at the hospital.

in the seemingly irreconcilable worlds of life and death, heaven and hell, war and family. One ex-Marine captured this tension in the title of his article, *Gulag and Kyrie*, which relates his experience of the chaplain walking among dead bodies intoning, “the Body of Christ... the Body of Christ...” as he handed out Holy Communion during the Vietnam conflict. That chaplain was both a symbol of unutterable grace amidst unspeakable horror, sustaining the hearts of Soldiers for continuing the battle at the time, and also offering hope to the souls of vulnerable human beings who would hopefully one day reenter the world of love and joyful community once the conflict was ended. Indeed, upon his return home, Marine Timothy Calhoun Sims went to Seminary and later became a Lutheran pastor who served as a chaplain in the U.S. Navy as a result of his experiences.

In order to fulfill these various dimensions of leadership, the chaplain must undergo extensive soul-searching and work on him or herself, integrating clinical skills, theological training and capacity for a special kind of integrative awareness and ability to remain present to pain and loss without abandoning persons and/or trying to “fix” them with easy superficial solutions. The chaplain has the special task of bearing the wisdom and the wounds incurred from moving back and forth between the two worlds of war and life, evil and good, grief and celebration, and use his/her

experiences to help others having difficulty with the transition, for as Henri Nouwen in his classic little volume, *The Wounded Healer*, has rightly observed, “You cannot expect someone to lead you out of the desert who has never been there.”

For this reason, the U.S. Army Family Life Training program offers a 15-month “spiritual ranger training” which tests the heart and soul of those who complete it in ways that changes their lives and relationships. As the wife of one chaplain volunteered at a recent graduation dinner, “This training hasn’t just made him a better chaplain; he has become a better husband and a better man.” Another nearing the end of his experience in the Family Life Training Program agreed, “This has been a life changing event for me.” It is music to the ears of those of us who serve as trainers in the program, for we know and share with the chaplains, that what they do is not a job, but a vocation, and not the work of a brief moment in time, but a lifelong campaign in the same direction. Those who understand and commit to this service deserve the highest respect.

On a societal level, the psychological, emotional and spiritual effects of war are present in some respect for all persons touched by it directly and indirectly, just as much as for those who suffer from medically diagnosed post traumatic stress disorder, and each and every person represents a communal responsibility for justice and healing. We haven’t brought our Soldiers home after they have come home physically, until they are home spiritually, psychologically and emotionally. Family life chaplains are leaders in the United States Army in helping bring awareness to this issue. They are front line Soldiers when it comes to addressing it in preparation for deployment as well as one of the most important members of the team involved in sustainment in theatre and after the men and women return from combat. In light of the intent of this article, it is our hope that chaplains in general, and family life chaplains in particular, are committed to being warriors, priests and prophets so that they may serve the rest who honorably seek to serve both God and Country, and to help sensitize and translate for the civilian sector the moral obligations we incur and the full price we must be ready to pay over generations for our nation to go to war and return not only safely, but wholly in body, mind, and spirit.

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A complete list of references for this article is on file and available with *Infantry Magazine*.
