



The Chaplain Corps and the Profession of Arms

Chaplain (Major General) Douglas L. Carver, U.S. Army, Retired

What does it mean to be a professional soldier after over ten years of war?" That is a primary question in our Army's current discussion of the "Profession of Arms." As the Chief of Chaplains, I believe that self-examination, whether as individuals or as an organization, is an extremely worthy exercise. As the ancient Jewish Prophet Jeremiah said, "let us test and examine our ways." Self-reflection that facilitates a greater awareness of strengths and weakness, that then empowers excellence and success in our duties, is always a noble pursuit. I commend our Army leadership for calling all soldiers to examine our ways and grow as a profession.

The Profession of Arms is an interesting subject for a chief of chaplains to address, because chaplains—by Army Regulation 165-1, *Army Chaplain Corps Activities*—are noncombatants who "will not bear arms in combat or in unit combat skills training." Some might conclude that chaplains are not members of the Profession of Arms community, and there might be some validity to that position. Whatever position one takes on the question of noncombatant status in the Profession of Arms, I believe the Chaplain Corps plays an integral and essential part in supporting all those within the profession, by any definition. An anesthesiologist is not a surgeon, but both are doctors and both play key roles in a surgical procedure. The Profession of Arms consists of soldiers and, as not all doctors carry a knife into surgery, not all soldiers carry arms into battle. Chaplains are noncombatants by formal convention, but they provide religious and spiritual support to soldiers that helps empower the Army's spiritual center of gravity and helps maintain the inner strength of soldiers. I am confident the Chaplain Corps is composed of professional soldiers vital to the Army's Profession of Arms.

Chaplain (Major General) Douglas L. Carver was the Army's Chief of Chaplains until July 2011.

PHOTO: An Army chaplain from the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) pauses for prayer during a unit memorial ceremony in Afghanistan.

The 15th chief of staff of the Army, General of the Army George C. Marshall once delivered a speech entitled *Morale in Modern Warfare* in which he said:

The soldier's heart, the soldier's spirit, the soldier's soul are everything. Unless the soldier's soul sustains him, he cannot be relied upon, and he will fail himself, and his commander, and his country in the end.

General Marshall was the Nation's first five-star general; Winston Churchill called him "the architect of victory" for World War II. He later served as secretary of state and secretary of defense, and he received the Noble Peace Prize. Marshall was such an exceptional servant of the Nation that, on 1 September 1939, he began the day as a brigadier general and ended it as chief of staff of the Army, selected by President Franklin D. Roosevelt over scores of superior officers because of his professionalism and excellence. The Army has never possessed a greater mind than his. As chief of chaplains, I find it both encouraging and informative that the chief of staff overseeing our Army at its largest size and most critical time, was committed to the fact that the soldier's soul is what sustains him during the trials and demands of war.

As we turn now to the current discussion of our profession, we must remember as we advance forward to our future that the lesson learned by the great minds of our Army's past is that soldiers require, even by necessity demand, spiritual resilience. In that light and with that charge, the Chaplain Corps strives to serve as a mission-ready source of strength to those who former Chief of Staff of the Army General George W. Casey, Jr., calls "the strength of the nation"—our soldiers. This is not a responsibility the Chaplain Corps takes lightly, but one it embraces humbly with an earnest commitment to encourage and empower soldiers as they vigilantly support and defend the Constitution and the Nation.

The Profession of Arms is defined partly in the current discussion as a "vocation." Vocation is a word formed from the Latin word *vocatio*, which at its etymological root means "calling." The word vocation is important in many contexts, but of particular note to the Chaplain Corps, because it entered the English language by William Tyndale's use of the word in his 16th-century translation of the Bible. In the 1500s, theologians began to expand the understanding of

vocation beyond just the limits of clerical roles to a vision for vocation that embraced all occupations of virtue as a divine calling upon an individual's life. This expansion of vocation empowered individuals with higher purpose and value. Many in the Chaplain Corps (and the ministry at large) today often refer to their vocation as their "calling" into the ministry, which they believe is the divine purpose for their life. The Chaplain Corps theme for training and action in fiscal year 2011 is *Spiritual Leadership: Living our Calling, Loving our Soldiers*.

The Chaplain Corps thus seeks to affirm the Army's use of the term vocation and seeks to affirm in the hearts and souls of professional soldiers that there is great dignity in their vocation as a soldier. In affirming the soldiers' vocation, we seek to affirm the sense of purpose of their lives and to edify their souls. In affirming the calling of soldiers, the Chaplain Corps answers its own calling to serve both God and the Nation. We are soldiers serving soldiers in our respective vocations within the broader Army profession.



U.S. Army, SPC Britney Bodner

U.S. Army chaplain sergeant major at Camp Victory, Iraq, 9 August 2010.

The current institutional discussion on the Profession of Arms promotes the Army as “a vocation comprised of experts certified in the ethical application of land combat power.” Throughout its existence, the Chaplain Corps has fulfilled its mission of providing certified ethical experts in support of the Army. Field Manual 1-05, *Religious Support*, states that within the *Religious Support Mission*, “Chaplains serve as personal staff officers to commanders at all levels of the command providing essential information on troop and unit morale, quality of life matters, free exercise of religion issues, *ethical decision-making*, and the impact of religion on the operation.”

Indeed, historically the pivotal thinkers who laid the foundations of just war theory were the theologians Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo, and Thomas Aquinas. Corresponding works on the laws of warfare are indebted to Augustine’s and Aquinas’ works. The Chaplain Corps seeks to serve the Army by following in that rich tradition. It does so through certified experts. By virtue of the chaplain’s masters-level theological training required for accession, and by devoting members of its ranks to further masters-level studies in ethics, the Chaplain Corps provides ethics instructors to all Army service schools, the Command and General Staff College, the War College, and the Center for the Army Profession and Ethic. At tactical level units and at educationally strategic locations across the Army, the Chaplain Corps seeks to serve the Army by shaping and developing the character of its ethical core, resulting in soldiers who are ethically informed and committed to not just knowing what is right, but doing what is right.

Quality religious support for soldiers further enhances a culture committed to a strong ethic that seeks to do what is right and to pursue noble paths and worthy actions. Per Army Regulation 165-1, Chaplains are the proponent for moral leadership training for our Army. As such, the Chaplain Corps seeks to reinforce the Army Values that so deeply undergird our Army culture. We seek to ensure that soldiers are reminded that the Nation is founded on the belief “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights.” Those God-given rights belong to each citizen soldier, and a true Profession of Arms not only protects those rights for their fellow citizens,

but also for their fellow soldiers. This American understanding that it is “self-evident” that our inalienable rights are endowed by a God fortifies the Nation’s values. The chaplaincy affirms and fosters those values by religious, ethical, and moral instruction that chaplains bring to their soldiers.

All armies have values of some sort, and one could make a case that every enemy the Nation has historically faced had some respect for values such as loyalty, duty, honor, and courage. Values only hold the “value” that any culture applies to them though, thus different cultures at times apply different meanings to similar terms. What is most important then is the transcendent virtues that inform pure meaning to the values we embrace. As soldiers are informed through the religious support and instruction of chaplains, they grow in their sacred understanding of the rights endowed to them by their creator and the values we collectively share as Americans, which flow directly from those divinely appointed rights.

Not all soldiers are religious, but we as a Nation declared independence and staked (our national) foundations on the premise that our rights as individuals are God-ordained. Thus, the Chaplain Corps remains rooted in that American tradition while also conducting our constitutional mandate to ensure all soldiers have the free exercise of religion. In those efforts, the Chaplain Corps seeks to maintain and sharpen the ethical azimuth of our Army through spiritual leadership that educates soldiers and that models ethical standards to which we believe we are eternally accountable. Helping soldiers grow in faith and in spirit through religious support creates an Army culture more committed to our inalienable rights and therefore more reflective of the authentic character of the Army Values and the Army’s overall ethic. The Chaplain Corps is committed to fostering the Army culture in this manner and is extremely privileged to do so.

As the Army continues this dialogue about the Profession of Arms after over ten years of war, I am reminded of another quotation in General Marshall’s speech *Morale in Modern Warfare*. Marshall went on to say in his speech that:

Today war . . . is not a succession of mere episodes in a day or a week. It is a long drawn out and intricately planned business and the longer it continues the heavier are

the demands on the character of the men engaged in it. With each succeeding month, with each succeeding year, it makes always heavier and more terrible demands on the mental and spiritual qualities, capacities and powers of the men engaged in it.

“What does it mean to be a Professional Soldier after over ten years of war?” I believe it means that a professional American soldier is an individual with God-given rights and a vocation to serve as the “strength of the Nation,” and as the defender of those rights for their fellow citizens. It means that the finest men and women of the Nation have volunteered to join the noble and heroic pursuits of military service. It means wearing a uniform, the Nation’s sacred cloth that too often wears out an individual by the duties of war.

General Casey often spoke of our Army as being “stretched and stressed” from ten years of war, as reflected in rising suicide, divorce, addiction, and indiscipline in our ranks. The Chaplain Corps

has vigorously addressed a tired and weary Army through ministry programs, such as the highly effective Strong Bonds marriage enrichment program, as well as through consistent increase in our professional pastoral skills. That sense of wear, indeed “terrible demand,” on our Army is also felt in the numbers of fallen warriors we have lost in battle during the ongoing conflict. Thousands have departed our formations to their eternal rewards due to their selfless sacrifice for their country. Among the departed are also members of the Chaplain Corps. The scope of the profession is perhaps best defined by the scope of those who give the ultimate sacrifice as members of it. As it has for 235 years, the Chaplain Corps after these last ten remains fully committed to the “mental and spiritual qualities, capacities and powers” of these honorable and deserving national servants. We will continue to pursue this ministry by fulfilling our doctrinal imperatives that call us



(U.S. Army, Sgt. 1st Class Mark Burrell)

U.S. Army chaplains with the 101st Airborne Division kneel as they give a final prayer during a memorial service for six fallen soldiers at Forward Operating Base Joyce in eastern Afghanistan’s Kunar Province, 9 April 2011.



(U.S. Army, CPL Robert Thaler)

U.S. Army Chaplain CPT Robert Sterling, gives blessings at Police Sub Station 3, Kandahar City, Afghanistan, 25 November 2010.

to nurture the living, care for the dying, and honor our sacred dead.

As the Army discusses its profession, the Chaplain Corps remains committed as partners in the Profession of Arms, as well as servant-leader soldiers. We are dedicated by vocation to the religious and spiritual leadership required to address the “heavier and more terrible demands” embraced and endured

by our outstanding fellow soldiers. The Army will remain a vocation that draws into itself the best the Nation has to offer, and the Chaplain Corps will continue to strive to support and enhance the Army, its Ethic, and its culture through prevailing religious support that inspires the professional soldiers of our Army, that informs the character of our Army, and that sustains the souls of our soldiers. **MR**