



NCO Called Upon to Intensify Curriculum, Training For Chaplain Assistants

By Pablo Villa — NCO Journal

Staff Sgt. Donovan Eaddy knows how vital religious support can be for Soldiers. That's why he approaches his job with a solemn seriousness.

Eaddy is a 56M — a chaplain assistant. Like all chaplain assistants — a sizable amount of who are NCOs — he is charged with providing force protection for his unit's chaplain to ensure fellow fighters have an outlet for religious support. Eaddy was doing just that on Aug. 7, 2010, when he was injured in an improvised explosive device blast in the Khost-Gardez Pass in Afghanistan's Paktika Province.

"I was out going to get religious supplies so my guys could worship freely," Eaddy said of the mission he was conducting that day as part of the famed Rakkasans — the 3rd Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division. "Do I regret it? I regret the pain. But will I stop going to get my guys supplies so they can practice and pray? No."

That gritty resolve helped Eaddy get through the ordeal and return to duty in order to continue helping his fellow Soldiers engage in religious activities. It also put him in high demand to pass on the lessons forged in

combat to new chaplain assistants in a recently revamped course at the U.S. Army Medical Department Center and School at Joint Base San Antonio-Fort Sam Houston, Texas.

The course conducted by the Department of Pastoral Ministry Education, or DPMT, has existed in some iteration at Fort Sam Houston since the late 1990s. But in its infancy, the course existed solely to train Army chaplains. Today, it still conducts training for chaplains through the combat medical ministry course, but now it also integrates training for chaplain assistants through its emergency medical ministry course. The courses run concurrently to allow a chaplain and his or her chaplain assistant — what's known as a Unit Ministry Team, or UMT — to practice their new skills together. The change in scope of education for chaplain assistants was long overdue, said Chaplain (Maj.) Robert Miller, a lead instructor for the DPMT.

"A chaplain assistant, by regulation AR-165, they're force protection," Miller said. "That's their primary mission. One of the things we struggle the most with



Chaplain (Maj.) Robert Miller, left, and Staff Sgt. Donovan Eaddy are lead instructors of the Combat and Emergency Medical Ministry courses for the Department of Pastoral Ministry Education at the U.S. Army Medical Department Center and School. (Photo by Pablo Villa)

is getting word out on what chaplain assistants provide for both the Chaplain Corps and the Army. Chaplain assistants aren't drivers. They're not administrative personnel. They're primary mission is as a part of a team with a chaplain. They provide the force protection so the chaplain can provide the religious support. But they do that collaboratively. Each piece needs the other."

Improving the program

Miller took the reins of the DMPT's instruction in 2012. This was after completing the chaplain's course in 2010. When he arrived, he said the program was in good shape but had some limitations. With the urging and support of Chaplain (Col.) Brent Causey, the AMED-DC&S command chaplain, Miller began an overhaul of the curriculum.

"When I took the course in 2010, one of the things I noticed was that it was more hospital focused," Miller said. "It was a good course, but I also was concerned that we weren't really focusing on what chaplain assistants needed. The course was dealing with trauma ministry, with hospital ministry, which was kind of an offshoot of what the clinical pastor education program was designed for. Well, chaplain assistants don't really function well there. So, the question was, 'What can we do for them?'"

Miller said the first thing senior leadership desired was a senior NCO to be an instructor.

"Chaplain Causey said, 'I have to have a senior NCO with a level of experience that he can bring to

the table to be one of my instructors,'" Miller said.

That's when Eaddy came into the picture.

"The reason we brought him here is more than his rank," Miller said. "What Staff Sgt. Eaddy brings to the table is he is a 56M who has deployed and who has worked with an infantry unit so he understands the infantry school concept. He was deployed as a chaplain assistant. He's also a wounded warrior. So not only does he bring the intellect, the competency and the skills of a Soldier, but he brings experience in the understanding and requirements of the 56M."

With instructions to take a critical look at the two-week course, Miller and Eaddy worked together

over several months to improve it. The pair looked at ways to move curriculum away from being based largely in the classroom and also keep the focus from centering on the chaplains.

"Staff Sgt. Eaddy and I worked very closely to make the course more UMT- focused," Miller said.

That means, among other things, that in addition to the classroom learning, students spend approximately 25 hours in a Trauma 1 facility responding to trauma alerts and interacting with wounded warriors. The lessons prepare UMT members to address the trauma, crisis, grief, death, spiritual health, and other ministerial concerns that arise in a Combat Support Hospital (CSH) or Combat and Operational Stress Control (COSC) Detachment, and is designed to prepare UMTs for medical ministry associated with deployments.

Intensifying training

The revamped courses for chaplains and chaplain assistants began in January 2013. Miller said the DPMT expects to conduct up to seven concurrent courses a year.

The approximately 210 Soldiers who take part each year experience an arduous 14 days. Eaddy says the training is demanding in order to prepare students for potentially difficult times. The suggestions Eaddy made that have been added to the curriculum reflect that.

"One of the changes that we made was our students took a tour of the morgue," Eaddy said. "You would

be amazed at the number of chaplains and chaplain assistants that haven't been exposed to that. So, if you're trying to make a chaplain or chaplain assistant who will be effective in combat but hasn't been exposed to death, that's a major detriment. It's something they might face downrange."

Beyond the classroom portion of the training, students also face stern tests in the field. They are exposed to such things as CSH procedures, mass-casualty training and memorial ceremony procedures. All of these are faced by the UMTs with an eye toward ensuring enrichment for both parties. That's training that chaplain assistants didn't have previously.

"We keep in mind and we teach, 'What can the chaplain assistant do?'" Eaddy said. "Where can the chaplain assistant be that can help the mission out more? We teach some of the things that aren't taught in school, like memorial ceremonies. That's not very harped on in school. One of the things that's not even taught at AIT (Advanced Individual Training) are ramp ceremonies. We teach chaplain assistants what the regulations say on a ramp ceremony. Not only do we show them how to conduct a ramp ceremony, we show them where you can find the field manuals and regulations on a ramp ceremony so that they can go back and stage it in their unit correctly."

One of the last endeavors the UMTs undergo during the course is a trip through the simulated training exercise, or STX, lanes. It is a harsh exercise meant to teach the UMT how to maneuver through treacherous conditions but also to highlight the importance of the chaplain assistant.

"We throw at them a very high-intensity exercise," Miller said. "We allow the chaplain assistants to fully

voice what they like and what they didn't like at the same time we're doing the officers. Nobody else does this. And they're finally here in this course getting to see how integral a chaplain assistant is to that team, because without him, I'm just a preacher. That's all I can bring to the table. With him, I'm a fully functional chaplain. With me, he's a fully functional 56M and that's what we're trying to get them to realize, whether you're a private or whether you're a sergeant major, as a chaplain assistant you have the responsibilities of force protection and ensuring that your unit ministry team can function.

"When we get done we ask the chaplains, 'So how did it feel?' Almost to a man, they say, 'For the first time in my career, I felt helpless and dependent upon somebody to get me out of harm's way.' Because many of the chaplains we have come down here may be on a FOB (forward operating base) or may have gone downrange. Not all chaplains have actually been involved in a fire-fight. We want to get them ready so that doesn't surprise them. But, more importantly, we don't want our chaplain assistants with their heads in the sand. We want them to be that force protection element that every command sergeant major wishes he or she had."

Building on success

While Miller says one of the long-term goals of the courses is to make them mandatory elements of being in the Chaplain Corps, he says recent gains have reinforced the notion that the work he and Eaddy are doing is valuable.

"For the first time, we've been authorized to issue a DA Form 1059 (an academic evaluation report)," he said. "This used to be a gentleman's course, where even if you fail the final exam, you still were given credit and re-

ceived a certificate. Chaplain Causey says that's gone. If students are going to come here, and commanders are paying for it — both in the officer and enlisted side — they're going to have to go back and say, 'Either we are or we are not competent in nine different skill levels,' and that's going to be reflected in their ERB (Enlisted Record Brief) and ORB (Officer Record Brief)."

Miller also says he will continue to improve upon the training offered for both chaplains and chaplain assistants in order to build UMTs that will be able to offer comfort and solace to Soldiers during the direst of times.

"Combat will always be a part of the Army," Miller said. "If we don't intensify the training, then what



A chaplain assistant leads a chaplain through a situational training exercise, or STX, lane at Joint Base San Antonio-Fort Sam Houston, Texas. (Photo courtesy of Department of Pastoral Ministry Education)

will be presented will intensify the loss. We use videos of hard war movie videos that make them think about what they may one day end up facing. So when they face it, it doesn't shock them. They can look at that and say, 'OK, I've seen this before, emotionally. I can act on this right now.' Because whereas most Soldiers are trained to either give orders or take orders, we want to have a Unit Ministry Team that is trained to go in and function as an independent element that you don't really know is there.

"They're like shadow warriors. Most commanders don't really need a chaplain or chaplain assistant. But when they need one — when there's a suicide, when there's a death of a soldier, when there's a Soldier who just doesn't know what to do — they want to know where the chaplain and chaplain assistant are because they expect that those are the professionals who will go in and make a situation better, never make it worse. That's the intensity that we give them in those two weeks."

Eaddy hopes to expand upon the field training exercises the students face. His most recent effort is the installation of a defensive driving element to training, which may be implemented by the latter half of 2015. But he says the biggest skill he can help hone for his fellow chaplain assistants — particularly those who are NCOs — is being keenly aware of regulations, as they will save lives, lift spirits and embolden the next chaplain assistants in line.

"That's what I'm instilling in them because that is one of the main things the NCO Corps was originally brought up on," Eaddy said. "Take this training very seriously because you don't know where you're going to be tomorrow.

"That NCO is actually able to take this training and train their Soldiers. It will continue to keep the training going even after the war is stopped. If you fail to continue to do these steps, you will lose these steps. So, it's very important for these chaplain assistants to stay fresh with their skills." ■



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