

History of the Chaplaincy Clergy in Uniform



Declared non-combatants in the Spanish-American war (1898), chaplains have relied on chaplains' assistants for protection in war zones since 1909. Chaplains wear the same uniform as the branch in which they serve, undergo officer training upon entering the chaplaincy, and rise through ranks upon the recommendation of their military superiors. In addition, chaplains are always subject to having their endorsements revoked should they breach the mandates of their endorsing church or religious institutions. This, in effect, would end their career as a chaplain unless they find another endorsing agent.

While conducting services and facilitating the practice of religion are central to their duties, these are only a part of the many duties chaplains perform. They alone can guarantee confidentiality – the general rule most chaplains seem to adhere to is that they will report what they are told in confidence only if a life is at stake. They are therefore the “first responders” when a soldier, airman, marine or sailor needs counseling. Stateside, their counseling duties extend to organizing couples retreats and providing marriage and family counseling. At home or in deployment, they boost morale by their “ministry of presence” and their commitment to listen to the everyday concerns of those around them. As moral guides, they teach ethics to combatants and act as the commanders' conscience. They also advise commanders on religious issues both to sensitize them to religious concerns within their units and to educate them on the religious dimension of a given conflict or military action. In Bosnia, Iraq and

Afghanistan, this understanding has led to unofficial peace-building efforts headed by chaplains who reach out to local religious and community leaders.

See also:

[Challenges Past and Future](#)

[Growing Pluralism](#)

[History: Some Resources](#)

PBS's *Religion & Ethics Weekly* did a report in 2008 on the training of Army chaplains at the US Army Chaplain School at Ft. Jackson. You can watch the report on-line:

[“Army Chaplain Boot Camp”](#)