

## Women in the U.S. Army Chaplain Corps

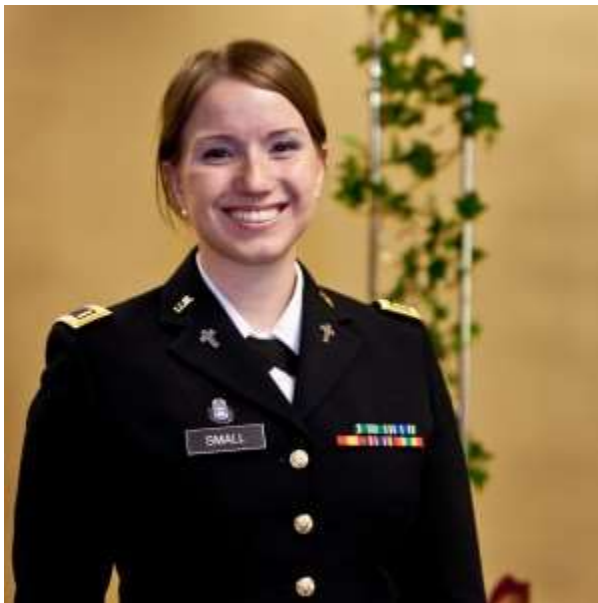
By Ms. Megan Doyle (Chaplain Corps), March 25, 2014

Chaplain (Capt.) Mel O'Malley



1 / 15 Show Caption + Chaplain (Capt.) Mel O'Malley delivers an invocation at a 2013 ceremony. "You do have to be prepared for some to question your presence or who are looking to see if you will be the weak link," O'Malley said. "It has been an adjustment to get used to ... (Photo Credit: U.S. Army) [VIEW ORIGINAL](#)

First female chaplain in a combat arms unit



2 / 15 Show Caption + In 2012, Chaplain (Capt.) Delana Small, became the first female Chaplain assigned to a combat arms battalion unit - the 101st Airborne Division. Chaplain (Capt.) Vivian Keady Yanquoi-West is another of the first females ?" assigned the 1st Cavalry Di... (Photo Credit: U.S. Army) [VIEW ORIGINAL](#)

First Female Rabbi in the Military



3 / 15 Show Caption + In 1981, Chaplain (Col.) Bonnie Koppell became the first female Rabbi to serve in the U.S. military. "I was leading a Passover Seder at FOB Taji [Iraq] in 2005 and a Soldier told me, 'It's almost like being home,'" Chaplain (Col.) Bonnie Koppell said.... (Photo Credit: U.S. Army) VIEW ORIGINAL

Ribbon Cutting - 40 Years of Women in the Military Chaplaincy



4 / 15 Show Caption + Women of the U.S. Army Chaplain Corps came together in March 2013 to celebrate 40 Years of Women in the Military Chaplaincy. This observation included the ribbon cutting at an exhibit at Arlington National Cemetery's Women in Military Service for Amer... (Photo Credit: U.S. Army) VIEW ORIGINAL

First Hindu Chaplain in the U.S. Military



5 / 15 Show Caption + In 2011, Chaplain (Capt.) Pratima Dharm became the first Hindu chaplain in the U.S. military. She is pictured here with a copy of her uniform, which is on display at the 40 Years of Women in the Military Chaplaincy exhibit at Arlington National Cemet... (Photo Credit: U.S. Army) [VIEW ORIGINAL](#)

Sergeant Maj. Pamela Wilson



6 / 15 Show Caption + Sergeant Maj. Pamela Wilson: "My most memorable experience as a Soldier was deploying to Baghdad, Iraq as the senior chaplain assistant. This experience was invigorating in that, the care and concern that my chaplain and I provided for religious supp... (Photo Credit: U.S. Army) [VIEW ORIGINAL](#)

Forty Years of Women in the Military Chaplaincy



7 / 15 Show Caption + Women of the U.S. Army Chaplain Corps came together in March 2013 to celebrate 40 Years of Women in the Military Chaplaincy. This observation included the ribbon cutting at an exhibit at Arlington National Cemetery's Women in Military Service for America Memorial. (Photo Credit: U.S. Army) [VIEW ORIGINAL](#)

JBLM Unit Ministry Team



8 / 15 Show Caption + Unit Ministry Team SSG Latonia Harris & Chaplain (Major) Susan Caswell of the 201st Battlefield Surveillance Brigade at Joint Base Lewis-McChord. This UMT is pictured in the field in support of the Tomahawk MRE, to certify two BN UMTs for upcoming deployment. (Photo Credit: U.S. Army) [VIEW ORIGINAL](#)

Women in the 2012 CH-BOLC Class



9 / 15 Show Caption + (Photo Credit: U.S. Army)

Women of the U.S. Army Chaplain Corps



10 / 15 Show Caption + Women of the U.S. Army Chaplain Corps came together in March 2013 to celebrate 40 Years of Women in the Military Chaplaincy. This observation included the ribbon cutting at an exhibit at Arlington National Cemetery's Women in Military Service for Amer... (Photo Credit: U.S. Army) [VIEW ORIGINAL](#)

First Women in the Military Chaplaincy



11 / 15 Show Caption + Dianna Pohlman Bell, right, was the first female chaplain in the military - she joined the Navy in 1973. Lorraine K. Potter, left, was the first female chaplain in the U.S. Air Force and later became Chief of Chaplains of the U.S. Air Force. Janet Ho... (Photo Credit: U.S. Army) [VIEW ORIGINAL](#)

Master Sgt. Annie Jackson



12 / 15 Show Caption + Master Sgt. Annie Jackson, 1st Armored Division Master Chaplain Assistant: "My most memorable experience as a Soldier happened very early on in my career while at my first duty station. I was able to put my skills, training, and talents to use when I... (Photo Credit: U.S. Army) [VIEW ORIGINAL](#)

Master Sgt. Evelin Montealegre,



13 / 15 Show Caption + Master Sgt. Evelin Montealegre, 25th ID Chaplain NCOIC Schofield Barracks HI: "I had the chance to be Drill Sergeant for our MOS, so my most memorable experience is when one of my Soldiers comes back after graduation to say thank you for helping him/... (Photo Credit: U.S. Army) [VIEW ORIGINAL](#)

Chaplain Assistant Sgt. Laura Champagne,



14 / 15 Show Caption + Chaplain Assistant Sgt. Laura Champagne, HHBN HSC 25 ID, Schofield Barracks, HI said, "I love to serve others and I find it very rewarding to make a difference in others. A simple greeting with a smile on my face can change an environment for the goo... (Photo Credit: U.S. Army) [VIEW ORIGINAL](#)

Sgt. Danita Austin and Chaplain Bernans during Desert Shield Desert Storm

15 / 15 Show Caption + (Photo Credit: U.S. Army) [VIEW ORIGINAL](#)



During the Civil War, Ella E. Gibson Hobart served as the chaplain of the 1st Wisconsin Regiment of Heavy Artillery, but Secretary of War Edwin Stanton refused to recognize her status. It would be more than 100 years before the first female chaplain was officially commissioned into the military, when Reverend Dianna Pohlman Bell became a Navy chaplain in 1973.

"This was the time of early feminism, a time to create new roles for women," Bell said about becoming the first official female military chaplain in a 2013 Orange County Register article. "I was attracted because I'm a creative, strong woman who believes women are partners with men and bring fresh gifts. I felt we could be equal with men during those very specific cultural times."

Reverend Alice M. Henderson, a minister in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, became the first woman to officially serve in the U.S. Army Chaplain Corps in July 1974. She was sworn in at a ceremony at U.S. Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) at Fort McPherson, GA and served for 13 years.

In 2014, 448 female chaplain assistants make up almost a third of the total force within the Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) of 56M. There are also 69 active duty female chaplains, 82 Guard and Reserve female chaplains, and approximately 50 female chaplain candidates. Chaplain and chaplain assistant Unit Ministry Teams (UMTs) provide religious support to units all over the globe -- and the roles of women in the Chaplain Corps have expanded to match the changing diversity of the U.S. Army.

## DIVERSE FAITHS

Female Army chaplains are endorsed by a variety of faith groups including Christian, Jewish, and Hindu traditions. Women of the Chaplain Corps achieved many firsts not only in the Army but across the military -- to include the first female Rabbi and first Hindu chaplain in the military. Chaplain (Col.) Bonnie

Koppell became the first female rabbi officially endorsed as a military chaplain in 1981. In May 2011, Chaplain (Capt.) Pratima Dharm became the military's first Hindu chaplain.

"I was leading a Passover Seder at FOB Taji [Iraq] in 2005 and a Soldier told me, 'It's almost like being home,'" Chaplain (Col.) Bonnie Koppell said. "It is especially meaningful when you are so far from home to be able to participate in the rituals and traditions that connect you to your faith. At Bagram Air Field for Chanukkah, another Soldier confided, 'I didn't know how much I longed to connect to my people.' Religion provides depth and meaning in our everyday lives and these qualities are magnified exponentially in remote and sometimes frightening locations. How amazing it is to be the rabbi who gets to bring Jewish tradition to our brave service members. What an honor and a blessing!"

## UNIQUE PERSPECTIVES

Chaplain (Lieut. Col.) Julie Rowan is the first female Deputy Personnel Manager at the Office of the Chief of Chaplains, but early on in her career she received some pushback for her role as a minister. During her first overseas assignment in the late 1990s, a male chaplain approached her with materials outlining why he didn't agree with women serving in the pulpit.

"I never dreamed it would be an issue, being a female chaplain. I didn't know what to do with that," Rowan said, recalling this confrontation. "I kept it to myself, actually, trying to figure out my place in the Corps if there were other chaplains that disagreed with my stand or what I bring to the table. I'm not here to try to change anybody's theology along the lines of what they believe. But I have been called by God and I have seen how God has used me as a female chaplain."

Like all women in the Corps, Rowan brings perspectives and skills that allow her to provide religious support in areas where men may be more limited. Rowan's ministry has included being present during the birth of a child and counseling female prison officers who were victims of sexual harassment and assault. Women chaplains bring a unique perspective to counseling Soldiers -- male or female -- and may be specifically able to support female Soldiers through relationship and marital topics, women's health issues, pregnancy, and sexual assault or harassment.

Chaplain (Capt.) Mel O'Malley, regularly shares her unique experience as a female in ministry with potential future chaplains in her position with the South Central Chaplain Recruiting Team.

"You do have to be prepared for some to question your presence or who are looking to see if you will be the weak link," O'Malley said. "It has been an adjustment to get used to being the only female Chaplain in the room and even to work with colleagues who don't affirm women in ministry. But if I do my job well and I make a difference in my unit, those same doubters may have a change of heart. In the military, maybe more than anywhere else in the world, we are all thrown together and have to find a way forward."

"I had service members come to talk to me in Afghanistan because I was the female chaplain," she said. "Whether it is a young husband who has come to me for a female perspective or a female Soldier who is dealing with the aftermath of sexual assault, I discovered that being a woman doesn't bar me from

ministry, it actually helps. Female Soldiers have confided in me and said they would have never felt comfortable going to a male chaplain."

## DIVERSE ROLES

Though women serve in leadership positions at all levels of the Corps today, now-retired Chaplain (Col.) Janet Horton was the first woman promoted to Colonel in the Army Chaplain Corps. She entered the U.S. Army in June 1976 and served for 28 years as chaplain, endorsed by the Church of Christ, Scientist. She became the first female chaplain to serve as a division chaplain (1st Armored Division). Horton and her non-commissioned officer in charge (NCOIC), Iraida Velazquez, were the first Division-level all-female Unit Ministry Team.

Among the most recent milestones, women of the Chaplain Corps reflect the expanded roles of women in the Army, to include serving in combat units. In 2012, Chaplain (Capt.) Delana Small, became the first female Chaplain assigned to a combat arms battalion unit - the 101st Airborne Division. Chaplain (Capt.) Vivian Keady Yanquoi-West is another of the first females -- assigned the 1st Cavalry Division.

"Yes, sometimes I feel like all eyes are on me but I am just the right person at the right time, I was placed here," Small said in a 2012 Army news article. "This opportunity is something God has done and been in his making. I just said 'Yes.' It doesn't matter if I am a male or a female, I will be out on the gun-line counseling and providing Soldiers with religious support."

Female Chaplain assistants have broken new ground within their MOS and continue to serve as leaders and unique resources in their unit at all levels of the Corps and Army today. Sgt. Maj. Pamela Wilson became the first female to win the Military History Award at the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy in 2002. She was also the first African American female to serve as proponent Sergeant Major and later as the 56M Sergeant Major for Multi-National Forces Iraq. In 2010, she became the 1st 56M to serve as faculty advisor at the U.S. Army SGM Academy. In 2004, Master Sgt. Deitra A. Alam became the first Chaplain assistant to graduate as the Distinguished Honor Graduate of the U.S. Army Drill Sergeant School and first to serve as a drill sergeant leader there. Sgt. Maj. Monica Dixon became the first female chaplain assistant to achieve jumpmaster status in 2008, and in 2011, Sgt. Kelly Velasco became the first female chaplain assistant to join the USASOC Parachute Team ("Black Daggers").

"You have to feel this MOS," Wilson said about being a chaplain assistant. "It has to challenge you and encourage you to take care of the mission of the chaplaincy and the Army. You need the willingness to work longer days and hours, to be selfless and encourage others within your sphere of influence. You have to be a role model, even as a private."

## CALLS TO SERVICE

Though they bring diversity to the Corps and the Army, women of the Chaplain Corps all have a relatively similar reason for joining -- a calling to serve.

"I became a chaplain in response to the events following 9/11," said Chaplain (Maj.) Kari Maschhoff, NETCOM Deputy Command Chaplain. "I saw Soldiers preparing to go to war and my heart said to go with them. As a Chaplain Personnel Manager (CPM) I have the opportunity to help chaplains and their Families transition between assignments and prepare for the next challenge ahead."

For the other half of the Unit Ministry Team, the call to serve others is just as strong.

"My most memorable experience as a Soldier happened very early on in my career while at my first duty station," Master Sgt. Annie J. Jackson said. "I was able to put my skills, training, and talents to use when I was able to intervene and save a Soldier from committing suicide. The Soldier entered my chapel with a knife in his possession and intentions of harming himself. I was very young at the time (18) and this particular Soldier was an NCO who outranked me, but I didn't let that deter me from doing what I had been called to do: help others."

Becoming a 56M wasn't necessarily always part of their plan for some chaplain assistants, though.

"In some cases you have no choice of the job you choose in the Army. That was the case for me," said Staff Sgt. Toya N. Alexander-Cruz, who was originally a 42A, Human Resources NCO and was chosen to reclassify to 56M to fill critical shortages during the height of the War on Terror. "Since becoming a chaplain assistant, I have grown to love what I do for our Soldiers and Families. Do not become a chaplain assistant because you think it is a easy job, because it is far from easy...do it because you care, have a love to serve and provide to our Soldiers and Families."

The same skills that make great chaplains and chaplain assistants, though, can be a threat to personal resilience. By definition of their role, chaplains and chaplain assistants are built into every unit to help Soldiers manage their burdens.

"I think my biggest challenge is finding a sense of balance," Sgt. Maj. Dianne Ellwein said. "We are nurturers by nature and have an extraordinary passion to care for others. We continually give our very best to others (it makes us feel good!), and many times neglect ourselves. It's important to monitor ourselves, otherwise we will be bankrupt emotionally and spiritually and unable to truly take care of others."

#### SISTERS IN SERVICE

Two women brought new meaning to the concept of "sisters in service" in 2010, when biological sisters Chaplain (Capt.) LeyAnne Ward and Chaplain (Capt.) Alison Ward were commissioned as chaplains. They both graduated from CH-BOLC in August 2009, were commissioned as USAR chaplains in June 2010, transitioned to Active Duty in September 2012, and began serving at Fort Bragg together in January 2013.

"God equips women in His service," Alison said. "We bring a great, yet different dynamic to the fight. My sister and I look to Deborah of the Old Testament. In many ways, she was the first female chaplain! She was an advisor to a military leader (Barack), she deployed with them into battle, and she commemorated their victory. We, too, can have a viable ministry of presence in our units and to our commanders."

#### SERVING THE DIVERSE ARMY

All chaplains and chaplain assistants must display great flexibility to serve the religious needs of all Soldiers from every background. As women, members of the Chaplain Corps bring unique skills and perspectives that meet the needs of a diverse Army where men and women serve side by side at all levels and types of positions.

"An ever diverse, transforming force demands chaplains whose arms are wide enough to reach out to its furthest bounds," said Chaplain (Capt.) Mel O'Malley. "So far in my ministry in the Army, I have been most proud of the relationships I have made with Soldiers who come from different backgrounds than me and who, very often, have no religious affiliation. My cross stays affixed to my uniform, but I never let it get in the way of connecting with a Soldier. When they trust me with their authenticity, even if it clashes with mine, I know that I have been all things to all people. This is what the chaplaincy is all about."