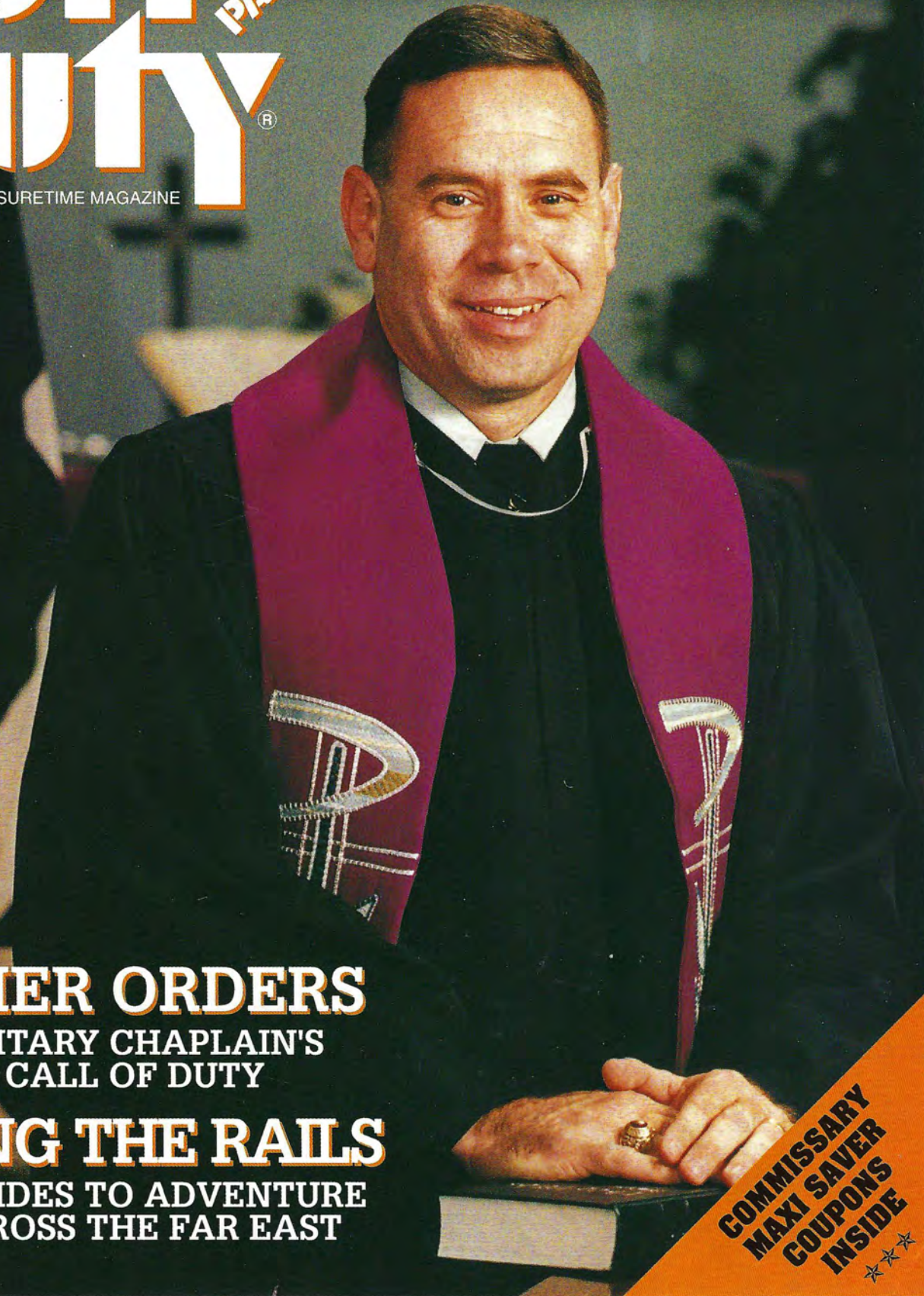


JUNE 93

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PACIFIC

THE MILITARY LEISURETIME MAGAZINE



## HIGHER ORDERS

THE MILITARY CHAPLAIN'S  
SPECIAL CALL OF DUTY

## RIDING THE RAILS

TRAIN RIDES TO ADVENTURE  
CRISS-CROSS THE FAR EAST

COMMISSARY  
MAXI SAVER  
COUPONS  
INSIDE  
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# Higher Orders

BY ERIC MINTON

*He was Baptist, she was Jewish. They wanted to wed in a joint Baptist-Jewish ceremony. His minister refused them. Her rabbi refused them.*

Since the groom was in the Air Force, they went to nearby McGuire AFB, New Jersey. The Southern Baptist chaplain serving there at the time was my father, Lt. Col. Dean L. Minton, now retired.

"Sure," Dad said. "Find me a rabbi. We'll do it here." They did, and in McGuire's Chapel No. 2, the two clergymen performed a wedding of love and faiths: a Baptist ceremony with a Jewish canopy, Christian vows, Hebrew prayers. The Baptist groom stomped on a crystal goblet, Dad pronounced them husband and wife, the rabbi shouted "Mazel tov!" and the chapel erupted in celebration.

To some Southern Baptist ministers, this story might seem blasphemous. Many would say Dad should have led the girl to Christ, not to the altar of matrimony alongside a rabbi. But as an Air Force chaplain, Dad was doing his mission: providing the opportunity for the free exercise of religion to military men and women. It is but one of many unique duties of the military chaplain, who must minister to a mobile, non-homogeneous congregation, work alongside colleagues

of diverse religious denominations, and answer to two authorities.

The Army currently has 1,350 active-duty chaplains representing 142

denominations and faith groups, says Chaplain Maj. Gen. Matthew A. Zimmerman, Army Chief of Chaplains. "That amazes chiefs of chaplains from other nations," Zimmerman says. "They usually have three, four, maybe five denominations. They are absolutely awed by the fact we not only have that number, but we're able to do ministry together. Being in an outfit that has this many denominations, where we can't even agree on which day is the Sabbath, we do all right."

To be a chaplain, ministers must be endorsed by a recognized religious body. This endorsement "is the strongest element of the chaplain's life," says Zimmerman, a National Baptist. "If at any point the church deems that a chaplain is not meeting his or her obligations with respect to beliefs and practices of that particular body, all they've got to do is write a letter saying we no longer endorse this person for duty in the military, and out we go."

The legally binding reality of the chapel corps' motto is "Cooperation without compromise." This means that Navy Chaplain Cmdr. Dennis A. Rusnak, according to his Eastern Orthodox church's doctrine, can refuse to celebrate Mass with a priest or join in a Protestant service. "My church says no, and (the senior chaplain) has to respect that," says Rusnak, who is sta-



Army Chaplain Capt. Thomas McElhaney counsils a young couple. McElhaney was a Southern Baptist minister for seven years before joining the Army seven years ago at age 36. He is stationed at Fort Gordon, Georgia.



**Throughout U.S. military history, chaplains have been there, performing services in the field (Korea, 1952; left) and baptizing troops wherever it was convenient (An Tan Bridge, Chu Lai, Vietnam, 1965; right).**



tioned at Parris Island Marine Corps Recruit Depot, South Carolina.

The other half of the motto, "cooperation," meant that Rusnak served as project officer for Passover services in April, coordinating with a local rabbi for Parris Island's Jewish recruits to celebrate the event. "I have no qualms with that," Rusnak says. "It doesn't mean I'm going to convert to Judaism. It means I'm supporting the command religious program."

Some chaplains call it ecumenism, the term for church unity. Others prefer to call it pluralism, stressing cooperation rather than unity. But all chaplains agree they can't be denominational hard-liners when serving in the military, not only because of the need for teamwork, but also because the congregation itself is pluralistic.

Army Chaplain Capt. Thomas McElhaney had been a Southern Baptist minister for seven years in western Tennessee and South Carolina when he joined the Army at age thirty-six. He was drawn to the military by the variety of its ministry. Few of his civilian counterparts bivouac with a tank unit, as McElhaney did while stationed in Germany. Few encounter war, as he did in the Persian Gulf. And few have congregations with the dynamics McElhaney has preached to through his seven-year Army career.

Yet there is an important similarity between the chaplain and the civilian preacher: both must be attuned to his or her congregation. Just as a civilian Southern Baptist minister with liberal leanings wouldn't suit a conservative congregation, a doctrinaire chaplain will not suit the widely diverse military congregation. This is especially so in the General Protestant Service,

the multi-denominational Sunday worship conducted in base chapels. The chaplains in the pulpit, be they Presbyterian, Lutheran or Christian Scientist, may conduct a service and preach a sermon based on their denominational teachings, but they also are sensitive to a congregation drawn from many other backgrounds. "We preach to the needs of our parishioners," says McElhaney, who is now stationed at Fort Gordon, Georgia.

"The people want to be comfortable in their worship experience," says Army Chaplain Lt. Col. James S. Cooper, an African Methodist Episcopal (AME) at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. "I pride myself in that I can preach to any congregation the Army has. And I know the Gospel is going to be exciting to them, just like it would be to any other congregation. I think all chaplains ought to be able to preach to any congregation they encounter."

Religious tolerance becomes even more pertinent for chaplains to be effective in their daily work, not only in getting along with fellow chaplains, but in serving their military constituency. That means chaplains are not sent by their endorsing churches to recruit members. "We cannot force our

personal values or beliefs on other people because the system is very pluralistic," says Navy Chaplain Lt. Cmdr. Marc A. Mintegui, a Catholic at Charleston. "If we do that, we are not made for such an environment." Mintegui, in his sixth year with the Navy after serving seven years as an Air Force chaplain, says he has encountered staunchly doctrinaire chaplains, "but they usually don't last."

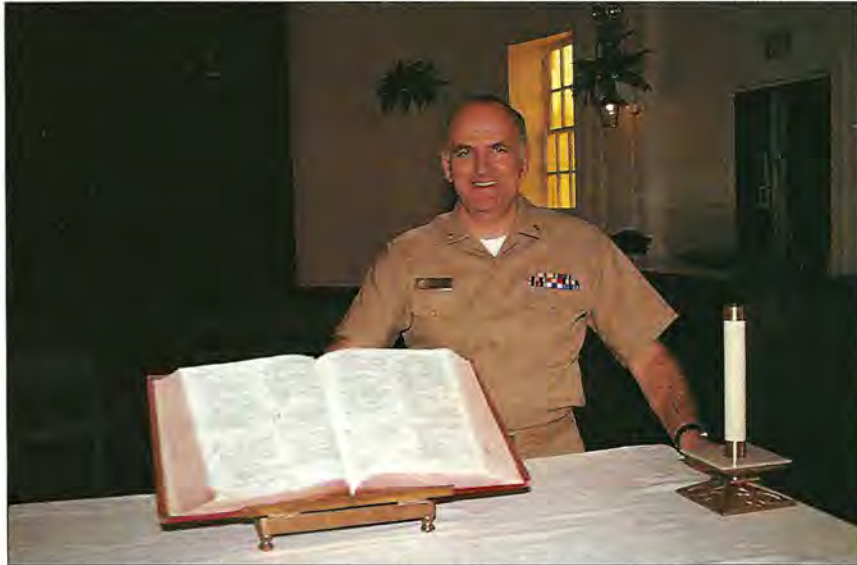
In few settings apart from the military can a rabbi walk to the office next door and ask a priest what Catholicism says about a particular issue. Likewise, Christian chaplains have asked rabbis to help stage seders, which celebrate the Jewish Passover and was the Last Supper of Jesus. "It's a natural linkage," says Navy Chaplain Cmdr. Albert I. Slomovitz,

a rabbi stationed at Charleston. "For Christians, it enhances their sense of Christianity by getting this broader, wider historical overview. We in the Navy can do that."

"In many ways, the ecumenism the civilian world is looking for, we've got it," says Air Force Chaplain Lt. Col. Sharon M. Freeto, a United Methodist with Command Chaplain Staff at Air Training Command at Randolph AFB, Texas. "We know how to work together. It's not perfect. It's not the Kingdom of God yet, but I think there is a respect for one another that spills over in the people we serve."

The military even downplays denomination when assigning chaplains to new duty stations. Zimmerman says the only instance in which the Army considers a chaplain's denomination is in making sure every post has at least one "baby baptizer." "Certain doctrines do not allow for baby baptism, so we want to try our darnedest to ensure we've got at least one of those folks around," he says.

The clearest evidence of how chaplains put aside their doctrinaire differences is in the growing number of female chaplains, since many



Navy Chaplain Lt. Cmdr. Marc A. Mintegui stands at the altar of his chapel in Charleston, South Carolina.

(from page 14)

churches do not recognize women clergy. "I know there are individual chaplains who believe I do not have a right to be an Air Force chaplain," says Freeto, who has served in the Air Force 17 years. "I've had negative experiences, but I have never had a problem performing my duties because of that."

Zimmerman points out that military regulations forbid any form of sexual harassment, including any endorsed by a church's doctrine. That brings up another peculiar aspect of the chaplain's role. He or she must answer to church leaders and bishops who demand faithful adherence to church practice while also working for a military commanding officer. Thus, a chaplain too doctrinaire to work well with colleagues will get bad performance reports for lack of teamwork.

Chaplains must live by the Uniform Code of Military Justice and do duty typical of military officers: Rusnak has climbed cliffs with Marines, Cooper crossed the sands with the lead brigade of Desert Storm, Freeto is taking Air War College by correspondence. "I respect the idea that I'm an Air Force officer," she says, "and if other officers have to take Air War College, why shouldn't chaplains?"

Still, for most chaplains, God's call takes precedence over a commander's call. Notably, in all services "chaplain" is listed before rank, as in God before country. "I have never felt as if any-

body expected me to be an officer first and a chaplain second," Freeto says, "and I'm not prepared to do that." Likewise, the cross or tablet on the lapel is more important than rank when it comes to enlisted personnel or junior officers who call on the chaplain. "It's never appropriate for a chaplain to hold inspection on troops—for example, to say, 'Hey you, your uniform looks bad'—because our role is to be friendly to everyone, from the most senior person to the most junior person," says Slomovitz.

Recurring proposals to strip chap-

lains of rank or let civilian ministers do their job haven't gained much ground over the years. Chaplains function well precisely because they wear rank. They have intercessory powers in the command structure, and as officers, they carry more weight in that role.

And as insiders, they innately understand the military, the 24-hour duty, the deployments, the separations, the chain of command. "The military is a subculture with its own nomenclature," says Slomovitz. "If somebody comes in and says, 'My chief and my XO are giving me a hard time about my PRD,' we understand the lingo, we understand the environment and we may have had a similar experience."

Including combat. To many, the military chaplain is itself a dichotomy: a minister of peace working for an instrument of war. When Freeto attends the Methodist Clergywomen's Conference every four years, all the military chaplains pick a day to wear their uniforms. "Some women will not even talk to us. There's this real hostility," she says. "When we can engage some of these people in dialogue we say, 'You know, we need to take the message of peace to our warriors.' Prayer needs to happen everywhere in the world, wherever there are people. What better place to talk about, in my case, the Prince of Peace, than in the midst of warriors? I think it's really appropriate." ■

## CHAPLAINS: CONFIDENTIAL COUNSELORS

One of the military chaplain's most important roles is as a counselor. The chaplain can lend a friendly ear, give spiritual guidance, or even intercede for a troubled soldier—not just with God, but with the commanding officer.

But chaplains won't throw the book at a soldier, i.e. whatever "good book" that chaplain's faith adheres to. "It is up to the counselee to raise spiritual issues," says Army Chaplain Capt. Thomas McElhaney. Or, as put by Army Chaplain Lt. Col. James S. Cooper, "I never bring religion up unless they choose to bring it up themselves."

The majority of chaplains are trained in counseling skills. Most had training in the seminary, but many also have degrees in counseling. A lot of it, though, is experience—both spiritual and military. "Because of our confidentiality, everybody with every kind of problem imaginable, and a few unimaginable, show up at the chaplain's door,"

says Air Force Chaplain Lt. Col. Sharon M. Freeto. If a chaplain can't handle a person's needs, he or she will refer the counselee to a more suitable source, be it psychiatric, family services, or even a civilian pastor.

Everything discussed in a chaplain's office is held in strict confidentiality. "We operate under the privileged communication regulation," says the Army Chief of Chaplains, Maj. Gen. Matthew A. Zimmerman. "That means there is no law on the books in the military that requires a chaplain to break that privileged communication code." Even civilian laws can't interfere, according to Zimmerman. "In most if not all of those cases, we have preserved and maintained privileged communication," he says. Navy chaplains, however, say local laws can take precedence in certain circumstances. Those who seek counseling from a chaplain should ascertain the breadth of his or her confidentiality at the outset of their meeting.