Introduction

July 15, 2020 marks the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the U.S. Army's Office of the Chief of Chaplains (OCCH). Although the Army Chaplaincy provided religious support to Soldiers and Families since 1775, July 15, 1920 marks the beginning of the professionalization of the Army Chaplaincy. For the first time, Regular Army, Army Reserves and Army National Guard religious support duties and functions became synchronized and standardized. This contributed to overall Army readiness by providing for the free exercise of religion, and religious support leadership that enhanced morals and morale within the Army. The establishment of OCCH, unified Army Chaplains, Religious Affairs Specialists, and Directors of Religious Education in their calling as certified professionals serving in the United States Army.

Context

The first two decades of 1900 saw three significant deployments and mobilizations for the U.S. Army. The Boxer Rebellion and Protocol of 1901, General John J. Pershing's Punitive Expedition 1916-1917 were small in comparison to the U.S. involvement in World War I. In addition to these events was the 1918 pandemic where more chaplains died from the flu than those who died in combat during World War I.[1] Leaders within the U.S. reflected upon these monumental events and determined change was necessary if the United States was going to be a world leader.

In 1921, the first annual history report from OCCH begins by stating the "exigencies of the World War had developed the necessity for professional supervision and coordination of religious work in the Army."[2] There were several concerns with an established Chaplaincy. This suspicion was common between Jewish, Roman Catholic and Protestant faith traditions. During the Civil War, religious sectarianism created strife between religious communities and the Army chaplains. Army Chaplains were not immune from this conflict. Prior to World War I and even through the interwar years, many chaplains feared having one chaplain of a different faith oversee and be responsible for all faith groups within the Army. Chaplain George J. Waring, a Roman Catholic Priest and the author of the World War I manual *Chaplain's Duties and How Best to Accomplish His Work,* opposed the idea of having a Chief of Chaplains. Chaplain Cephas Bateman, the most senior chaplain; a Baptist minister; a veteran of three wars who was highly decorated; and the first Commandant of a peacetime chaplain school opposed having a Chief of Chaplains. World War I changed this. With very few exceptions, World War I saw religious communities coming together to support Army chaplains and a sincere interest in the overall religious welfare of soldiers. World War I showed the need for civilian religious communities to cooperate with the military in order to provide for their religious adherents.

Prior to World War I, denominational church leaders looked upon Army Chaplains with distrust much like how they distrusted other faith traditions in the civilian community. During World War I, the way the chaplaincy cooperated with religious groups and with one another to provide religious support was a catalyst for change. Now civilian religious groups started to cooperate with one another. Religious and military leaders influenced Congress to establish authorizations

and mechanisms that enhanced the capability and capacity of a peacetime Army and the establishment of a professional chaplaincy.

National Defense Act (NDA) 1920

The Congressman who led this effort for a professional chaplaincy was United States Representative Julius Kahn, a Republican from California and the first Jewish representative from that state. Kahn sponsored the National Defense Act of 1920. His concern was military readiness and acquisition. His legislation required the Army to conduct studies and planning for wartime mobilization. Future Army Chief of Chaplains, Chaplain Julian E. Yates served in the War Plans Division. Yates, along with Colonel Godwin Ordway, Chief of the Moral Training Section of the Education and Recreation Branch established the framework and justification for OCCH.[3]

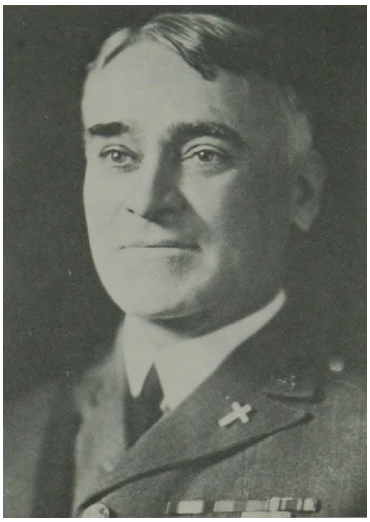
On the civilian side, civilian religious leaders thought chaplains deserved the same consideration and resources as other officers.[4] A Senate bill suggested a commission to oversee religious affairs. This commission would have comprised Jewish, Roman Catholic and Protestant representatives to oversee religious affairs in the Army. However, in a conference with the House of Representatives, a single Chief of Chaplains became law for the Army on June 4, 1920.[5] It became obvious that military religious support must remain within military channels similar to other professions within the military and not subservient to outside civilian commissions and organizations.

The NDA 1920 stated the following for chaplains:

> One chaplain, of rank not below that of major, may be appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, to be Chief of Chaplains. He shall serve as such for four years, and shall have the rank of colonel while so serving. His duties shall include investigation into the qualifications of candidates for appointment as chaplain, and general coordination and supervision of the work of chaplains.[6]

Chaplain (Major) John T. Axton, a Congregationalist minister became the first Chief of Chaplains on July 15, 1920. After four years, Axton served a second term as Chief of Chaplains. Supporting Axton were two other chaplains who were ordained with the Roman Catholic and Methodist Episcopal Churches respectfully. In addition, there were three Army field clerks, one of whom was Executive Assistant Colonel Augustus S. Goodyear. Goodyear served in the Adjutant General branch, trained as a lawyer and was instrumental in synchronizing religious support within the Army.[7] Goodyear would remain with the office until his retirement after World War II. Axton wanted to capture the context for the NDA and more importantly, the ministry chaplains provided during World War I. However, due to demobilization and lack of resources, it was not until 1925 when Chaplain Axton's son, Chaplain John T. Axton Jr. wrote a brief history of the Army chaplaincy and the contributions of the World War I generation. This work highlighted how important NDA 1920 was toward the establishment of OCCH and synchronizing religious support within the Army. More importantly, this brief history does not

end with the establishment of OCCH. Axton providentially points out that it was 11 chaplains who died in the Union Army during the Civil War and 11 chaplains who died in combat during World War I.[8] This reflection in Axton's history links the proud tradition and sacrifice Army Chaplains have in promoting freedom and equality.



Chief of Chaplains (Colonel) John T. Axton
(Source: *Up From Handyman*)[9]

Office of the Chief of Chaplains (OCCH)

The duties and functions of OCCH has changed little since its conception in 1920. Yet, each generation of religious support leaders continue in the proud tradition of religious liberty and freedom by providing and advising religious support for Army personnel. The current description of OCCH, led by the Chief of Chaplains is the "Army's proponent for religious and moral requirements in support of Title 10, United States Code, Department of Defense directives, and Department of Defense instructions."[10]

OCCH became the military representative for engagement with the civilian community. OCCH also began to professionalize and standardize religious support for the Army. Perfection and harmony did not occur overnight. However, many of the fears and suspicions between religious groups proved to be unfounded. An example how OCCH patiently and methodically created standards and unity of effort was through supervising chaplains evaluating other chaplains. Army regulations from 1920-1936 governing efficiency reports forbade any chaplain except the Chief of Chaplains or the Commandant of the Chaplain School making a report on another chaplain. Roy J. Honeywell, a chaplain and historian who served during World War I through World War II wrote "Doubtless this rule grew out of the fear that a chaplain's judgment might be warped by sectarian prejudice. It ignored the fact that a chaplain would be professionally capable of a more penetrating evaluation than would any other officer." Honeywell would also write, "There was a fear supervisor chaplains would show partiality or bias in their evaluation of other chaplains." ""Chaplains' judgment may be fallible, but it is seldom biased along sectarian lines. What a chaplain of a widely different faith said of one

administrator might have been said of most others: "He leans over backward to avoid any favoritism to his own group.""[11]

With broad guidance from NDA 1920 and from the Chief of Staff of the Army, Chaplain John Axton improved upon the initial framework submitted by Chaplain Yates. The specific function of OCCH under the supervision of the Chief of Staff is the following:

> Select, instruct, distribute, and supervise the chaplain personnel of the Army of the United States. The duty of the Chief of Chaplains to prepare and submit for approval the necessary regulations governing the examination of candidates for appointment as chaplains and to investigate the qualifications of all applicants for such appointment; to make recommendations for the assignment of chaplains to organizations and stations; to make recommendations concerning the equipment and supplies for the work of chaplains; to exercise direct supervision and control of the special service school for chaplains; to submit plans looking to a properly trained chaplain personnel by of the Chaplains' Service School, by conferences of chaplains, and by the circulation of pamphlets of instruction; and to keep in personal touch with the chaplains by correspondence and personal contact. All of this serves to promote the moral and spiritual welfare and contentment of the Army.[12]

The first Army Regulation for Chaplains from OCCH, *Army Regulation 60-5 Chaplains: General Provisions,* February 15.1924 included the above duties for the Chief of Chaplains and added the additional duty "Promotion of cooperation between the chaplains of the Army and civil religious organizations for the mutual advantage of both military and civil communities."[13] The Army Regulation also added an additional caveat regarding OCCH, "Nothing herein contained will be construed as relieving corps area and department commanders, or other commanding officers, of responsibility for the efficiency of chaplains under their command."[14] During the first four years of Chaplain Axton's tenue as Chief of Chaplains, he solidified the enduring duties and functions of OCCH. Section 127a of the National Defense Act of 1920 authorized the assignment of officers to civilian schools as students. Twenty-five chaplains studied in some civilian school during the period from 1923-41.[15]A key duty of OCCH was oversight of the Army Chaplain School.

The incorporation of the Army chaplain school with OCCH reveals the diverse opinion within the Army and the chaplaincy regarding oversight and rank. The establishment of OCCH required congressional approval. Training Soldiers and chaplains always remained with the Army and therefore became a number one priority immediately after World War I. To consolidate the defense lessons of World War I, a board of five chaplains met to provide recommendations for a peacetime chaplain school. On 28 January 1920, the Adjutant General issued the orders and in May 1920 Chaplain Cephas C. Bateman became the school's first peacetime Commandant. As mentioned earlier Bateman, did not believe there should be a Chief of Chaplains but that Army chaplains serve under the Chief of the Morale Division.[16] Bateman also advocated that chaplains should not have rank. Bateman was chosen because of his seniority and his reputation as a decorated wartime hero. Bateman also lectured and wrote extensively.

Chaplain (Lieutenant Colonel) Cephas C. Bateman
First Commandant for a peacetime Army chaplain school
(Source: *Active Service: Or Religious Work Among U.S. Soldiers*)[17]

Chaplain Bateman immediately went to work and published on September 20, 1920 *Army Regulation 350-150 Military Education: The Chaplains' School*.[18] Bateman did not reference the Chief of Chaplains and begins the regulation highlighting the War Department supervises the chaplain school. Chaplain Axton patiently waited for Bateman's mandatory retirement in 1921. He could do this because future World War II Chief of Chaplains William Arnold was very familiar with the chaplain school. Arnold served at the chaplain school during World War I. Arnold was one of three chaplains along with Bateman considered for the position as Commandant. After Bateman's selection, Arnold served briefly at the chaplain school. Finally, in 1925 Arnold became Commandant. Within one year, Arnold published and updated edition of *Military Education: The Chaplains' School*, August 16, 1926 and aligned the chaplain school with OCCH.[19]

Chaplain Axton also faced another challenge during his tenure. Some leaders within the Army felt chaplains should not have rank. General Pershing and his Army Expeditionary Force chaplain, Bishop Brent believed that chaplains should not have rank. They did modify their views when they saw the effectiveness of Axton as Chief. Axton advocated other chaplains should attain the rank of Colonel. In addition, Axton believed the Chief of Chaplains should achieve the rank of Major General. This would have placed the Chief of Chaplains on equal par with the other branch Chiefs. Civilian and some military religious leaders felt that there was a need for chaplains to be on equal par with the other officers. The logic was that rank would help with obtaining resources. [20] Rank is fundamental to the Army. However, in most situations, effects drive resources.

Personally, for Chaplain Axton, it was not about rank. Axton during World War I served briefly at the chaplain school and then the Port of Embarkation, Hoboken, New Jersey. During this assignment, at the direction of the War Department, Axton attended several religious conferences that assisted with governmental and denominational relations that included

significant recruiting efforts, and recommendations for chaplain involvement for moral training. Axton received the Distinguished Service Medal for his "provision … for the comfort and pleasure of the enlisted men." One General Officer wrote about Axton "As an organizer and administrator he is the peer to any officer known to me."[21] Following the war, Axton had "no choice" on his assignment card. Regardless of the rank he had, he nurtured relationships as he cared for Soldiers. Axton got results regardless of his rank.

However, after serving almost seven and half years as Chief of Chaplains, and within six months of his retirement as Chief, Time magazine reported strife within the Army leadership. ""Infantry and artillery officers resent the idea of the chief of 125 "sky pilots" being ranked equally with the few U.S. soldiers who rise to command 10,000 to 12,000 (a peacetime Army division)."" The week of October 10, 1927 Axton was "ordered to Walter Reed Hospital for physical observation, preliminary to appearing before an Army retiring board."[22] Time magazine reported that Axton "felt quite well, thank you" and that he went "unwillingly" to Walter Reed. Also, the Secretary of War Dwight F. Davis wrote a letter "expressing regret that he had been found physically in capacitated for active duty.""[23] Officially, Axton retired for "health" reasons[24] and was grant leave of absence for four months preliminary to his retirement.[25] Chaplain Axton was 57 years old at the time of his retirement. Chaplain Edmund P. Easterbrook, 62 year-old Methodist Episcopalian became the next Chief of Chaplains. Axton served as chaplain at Rutgers University for the next six years.[26]

Ceremony at the Chaplains' Cenotaph
Chaplains Hill, Arlington Cemetery, November 11, 1927
Chaplain Axton standing at extreme left.
(Source: *Chaplains: And Religious Work in the Army and Navy*)[27]

Professionalism And Conclusion

Wilbert Moore lists six attributes that represents the professional status of an occupation. "Fulltime occupation, a lifelong calling, organization to control accession and performance, formal education in esoteric but societally useful knowledge, a service orientation in which the public benefit supersedes personal gain, and authority within a specialized sphere granted by society in return for self-restraint by the professionals."[28] Although Army Reserve and National Guard Chaplains and Religious Affairs Specialist do not meet the "Fulltime occupation", they do commit themselves to the ideals and standards even in their civilian capacity as a citizen Soldier.

Chaplains, Religious Affairs Specialist, and Directors of Religious Education are religious support professionals who serve alongside other professionals within the Army. What makes religious support professionals unique is the diversity within the Chaplaincy that serve together to support the First Amendment of the Constitution. The ways and the means may differ between religious support professional, but their heart and soul has not waivered. Both Chaplain Axton and Chaplain Bateman believed in the ideals of free expression of religious practice and its impact upon the Army. Chaplain Bateman would have certainly agreed with Chaplain Axton and what other officers who wrote:

> The effect of religion cannot be tested or its worth measured by statistics nor can the service rendered by chaplains be recorded in figures or incorporated in tabulated reports or statements. From commanding officers have come most encouraging accounts of the wholesome influence the activities directed by chaplains have had upon officers and men.[29]

Likewise, Chaplain Axton would have echoed Chaplain Bateman's concern and love of the Chaplaincy "We are still on trial and we are judged often by standards not applied to any other class of men who wear the uniform.[30]

Fourteen years after the establishment of OCCH, in July 1934, Chaplain Bateman and Chaplain Axton finished their earthly service just two days apart and rested from their labors. On August 1, 1934, Chief of Chaplains (Colonel) Alva Brasted wrote in his monthly circular letter:[31]

> Cephas C, Bateman, Chaplain (Lt.Col.) USA, retired, died at his home in San Antonio, Texas, on July 18th, in his 78th year. His was a most useful and virile service. He was active as a speaker and writer almost to the day of his death. His valiant soul goes marching on.
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> John T. Axton, Chaplain (Col.) USA, retired, former and first Chief of Chaplains died at his home, ... July 20th. Chaplain Julian E. Yates read the funeral service. Chaplains were honorary pall bearers. Chaplain Axton made a great contribution during his life to the Chaplains' Corps and to the United States Army. His death is mourned by a host of military and civilian friends.

Chaplains, Religious Affairs Specialists and Directors of Religious Education are professionals who serve the needs of Soldiers and their Families. As the Army transforms to meet global challenges and threats, the Army Chaplaincy continues to seek creative ways and means to meet the diverse requirements of the Army. The establishment of OCCH allows certified religious support professionals to provide efficient and effective religious support to Soldiers and Families.

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[1] Eleven Army chaplains died in combat during World War I. Twelve Army chaplains and one Navy chaplain died during the pandemic.
[2] United States of America War Office, *Report of the Secretary of War To The President 1921: Annual Reports, War Department, Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1921*, (Government Printing Office, 1921), 195.
[3] Harris E. Starr ed., *The Army Chaplain*, Vol. IV, No.4, April 1934, 7.
[4] U.S. War Department, War Department Pamphlet 16-1, *The United States Army Chaplaincy*, (War Department, August 1946). 18-20.
[5] Roy J Honeywell, *Chaplains of the United States Army*, (Washington, DC: Office, Chief of Chaplains, 1958), 201.
[6] National Defense Act of 1920 (41 Stat. 759, sec 13), June 4, 1920.
[7] United States of America War Office, *Report of the Secretary of War To The President 1921: Annual Reports, War Department, Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1921*, (Government Printing Office, 1921), 195.
[8] John T. Axton, Jr, *Brief History of Chaplains in U.S. Army*, (General Staff Schools, Fort Leavenworth, January 30, 1925), 11.
[9] Earl F. Stover, *Up From Handyman, The United States Army Chaplaincy, 1865-1920*, (Washington, DC: Office, Chief of Chaplains, 1977), 234.
[10] U.S. Department of the Army, Army Regulation 165-1, *Army Chaplain Corps Activities*, (Department of the Army, June 23, 2015), 1.
[11] Honeywell, 200.
[12] United States of America War Office, *Report of the Secretary of War To The President 1921: Annual Reports, War Department, Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1921*, (Government Printing Office, 1921), 195.
[13] U.S. War Department, Army Regulation 60-5, *Chaplains*, (U.S. Government Printing Office, February 15, 1924), 1-2.
[14] Ibid., 2.
[15] Honeywell, 205.
[16] Stover, 223.
[17] T.G. Steward ed., *Active Service: Or Religious Work Among U.S. Soldiers* (NY: U.S. Army Aid Assn, 1897), 34.
[18] War Department, *Army Regulation 350-150 Military Education: The Chaplains' School*, (September 20, 1920), 1.
[19] War Department, *Army Regulation 350-1500 Military Education: The Chaplains' School*, (August 16, 1926), 2
[20] U.S. War Department, War Department Pamphlet 16-1, *The United States Army Chaplaincy*, (War Department, August 1946). 18-20.
[21] John T. Axton, Personnel File, U.S. Army Chaplain Center and School Museum.
[22] No Author, *Religion's Ranking*, Time Magazine, Volume X, Number 16 (October 17, 1927), 11.
[23] No Author, *Chaplain Out*, Time Magazine, Volume X, Number 25, (December 19, 1927), 11.
[24] Robert L. Gushwa, *The Best of Times and the Worst of Times, The United States Chaplaincy, 1920-1945*, (Washington, DC: Office, Chief of Chaplains, 1977) 11.
[25] Headquarters Army Service Forces, Circular Letter 253, Office of the Chief of Chaplains, January 12, 1928.
[26] Gushwa, 11.
[27] No Author, *Chaplains: And Religious Work in the Army and Navy* (The General Committee on Army and Navy Chaplains, Wash D.C. 1928).
[28] Richard M. Budd, *Serving Two Masters: The Development of the American Military Chaplaincy, 1860-1920*, (University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 3, 154.
[29] United States of America War Office, *Report of the Secretary of War To The President 1921: Annual Reports, War Department, Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1921*, (Government Printing Office, 1921), 197.
[30] Cephas C. Bateman, "Evolution of the Army Chaplains' Corps" (Amy and Navy Register, June 26, 1920), 805.
[31] Headquarters Army Service Forces, Circular Letter 141, Office of the Chief of Chaplains, August 1, 1934.