Faith Battling Fear: U.S. Military Chaplains and the Regulation of Fear during World War II

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ABSTRACT

In the years leading up to and immediately after America's entry into the Second World War, the U.S. military was intent on finding a way to control and direct the fear that modern warfare had created. Traditional notions of fear and its regulation were not sufficient to handle soldiers' reactions to modern, long-distance, mechanized warfare. Although emerging psychological techniques initially proved promising, the realities of war negated their efficacy. In the present essay, I argue that as the war progressed, the U.S. military increasingly allocated the management of soldiers' fears to the only group that seemed capable of alleviating it: military chaplains.

Through research in military archives, soldier's oral histories, and published documents, this paper explores the nature and function of chaplains' battles with soldiers' fears. I conclude that chaplains fundamentally changed the U.S. military's definition of fear during the war and the way to control it. By conceiving of religious faith as a means of regulating rather than eliminating fear, they both elevated their own standing within the military structure and reoriented the military's feeling rules. The results not only shed light on a heretofore unexamined aspect of American religious and military history, but also challenge accepted notions of the relationship between religious belief and emotions in religious studies.

INTRODUCTION

Over 400,000 soldiers of the United States died during the Second World War. They died from starvation, dehydration, and disease. They died at the ends of bayonets, from snipers' bullets, and in the sights of machine gun emplacements. However, they also died when long, high-pitched whines turned into cacophonous explosions as artillery shells, mortars, and bombs landed on their positions. Tens of thousands of soldiers died after an enemy they had never seen fired weapons the soldiers could only hear as they peered through the thick fog of war.

This invisible enemy and the nearly constant potential for sudden and seemingly unavoidable death from above created a type of fear that the U.S. military had never encountered on such a large scale, and which they still struggled to understand more than a decade after the conflict ended. Soldiers had experienced an aspect of this fear, originally called "shell shock," during the First World War, and the military was intent on finding a way to control and direct the fear in the years leading up to and immediately after America's entry into the Second World War.[1] Fear was understandable in war, but it could not be left to run amuck. It had its time and place, and it could not be allowed to penetrate its prescribed borders. After all, as the military's interwar psychological handbook declared, "morale's natural enemy is fear."[2] In a heretofore-overlooked

development, I argue in the present essay that as the war progressed, the U.S. military abandoned previous strategies and increasingly allocated the management of soldiers' fears to the only group that seemed capable of alleviating it: military chaplains. However, the chaplains conceived of fear and its cure in entirely different ways than the military command structure, and their cure was a form of control that the military could have neither provided nor envisioned.

Acknowledging combat chaplains' regulation of fear during the war complicates and challenges accepted interpretations of both military chaplains and the relationship between religion and emotion. First, historians and theologians have long understood military chaplaincy as an inherent tension between two competing loyalties. Some identify these loyalties as patriotic service to country and religious devotion to one's faith commitments.3 Others characterize the chaplaincy as a struggle between contending institutions: the military and a chaplain's church or synagogue.4 Although historians might concede that many chaplains see serving the military as an extension of their faith, most still craft their narratives and analyses on the belief that when chaplains exercise their faith, they do so with at least the potential to undermine a soldier's efficacy as a force of violence. However, during the Second World War, many chaplains found a way to contribute directly to a soldier's efficacy in battle. The fact that they did so without merely offering divine sanction to the military's proposed schema both demonstrates that, at least for a time, chaplains found a middle ground between their two supposedly opposing allegiances and casts doubt on the legitimacy of the standard interpretation of the U.S. military chaplaincy.

Examining the manner in which American chaplains defined and regulated fear during the war also complicates and deepens the way one understands the relationship between religion and emotion. Although historians, theologians, sociologists, and psychologists have long noted the connection between religion and emotion, extensive studies of that link are relatively recent and, as John Corrigan has noted, "there is no simple way to categorize the current state of the field."5 However, several scholars, including Corrigan, have demonstrated that most studies, despite their various methodological and theoretical differences, tend to categorize emotions within a dichotomy of secular and religious in that they are used for either religious or secular purposes.6 In that regard, religious actors use emotions for religious aims, whether to whip up or subdue enthusiasm during a religious revival or enflame or quench sexual lust as a god might command. Borrowing from Emile Durkheim's distinction between the sacred and the profane, these studies distinguish religious emotions from those experienced in one's "normal" life.7 Yet during the

Second World War, chaplains employed decidedly religious language and rituals to shape soldiers' emotions toward what even the chaplains designated as non-religious objectives. Scholars have long questioned a strict dichotomy between the religious and secular, and chaplains' regulation of fear casts further doubt on that dichotomy as it relates to human emotion.

A NEW KIND OF FEAR

Senior military personnel at the turn of the century had become obsessed with the idea that emotions had physiological roots. They came to this conclusion chiefly through the work of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century psychologist and philosopher William James. James asserted that emotions are principally physiological reactions to external stimuli. He offered the example of a hiker coming upon a bear in the woods. When he sees the bear, the hiker's palms begin to sweat and his body trembles. This bodily reaction is what we call "fear."[8] However, the military establishment, while convinced of James' insistence that emotions are intensely connected to the body, generally regarded one's bodily reactions as resulting from one's emotions rather than the other way around. Since they conceived of emotion, and particularly fear, as an embodied state, military personnel believed that fear could not be simply "overcome" through a conscious action of the will. Even if a soldier told himself not to be afraid, his body would still betray his true "feelings." Subsequently, the fear itself, i.e. the instinctive reaction to dangerous stimuli, had to be removed from the soldier or channeled into other, more productive, emotional states.

This is not to suggest that the military considered fear to be *wholly* negative. It was widely accepted that fear was beneficial in that it kept soldiers from being overly reckless with their lives and those of their comrades. As one military study concluded: "[fear] can motivate men to learn those habits which will reduce danger in battle…"[9] It motivated soldiers to find cover while under bombardment and not to recklessly engage the enemy. Although it had often been lauded by both soldiers and the popular press, fearlessness was not truly a goal of the military establishment. As historian Joanne Burke has aptly stated, "put simply: fearlessness indicated stupidity."[10]

The benefits of fear were most prominently promoted by E.G. Boring's and Marjorie Van de Water's 1943 book, *Psychology for the Fighting Man*. The National Research Council commissioned the work as the definitive study of a soldiers' psychological state of mind. Surprisingly, *Psychology for the Fighting Man* became highly popular and sold more than 380,000 copies, making it the bestselling book of academic psychology at the time. Boring and Van de

Water state that: "Subtle changes in body chemistry, automatically effected by powerful emotion, serve to protect the soldier in action in ways he would never think of, if he had to plan for himself."[11] Speaking specifically about fear, the authors conclude that:

> fear is the body's preparation for action. The heart pounds faster, pumping blood more rapidly to the arms and legs and brain, where the oxygen is needed. Blood pressure goes up. Adrenaline, which is nature's own 'shot in the arm,' is poured liberally into the blood to act as fuel for the human fighting machine.[12]

Military officials were keenly aware of fear's negative effects in the heat of battle, though. While fear might allow soldiers to become more alert and cautious, it was far more likely to cause them to fail at their duties or even abandon their posts. When fear simply caused the heart to pound, cold sweats, or even one to urinate or defecate on himself, it was acceptable. However, the anxiety-ridden soldiers of World War II were just as likely to start trembling or weeping uncontrollably, faint, or become paralyzed with fear. These soldiers became a burden to their comrades and a danger to everyone, including themselves. Subsequently, fear was seen as a deadly enemy in the Second World War, and, if left unchecked, was projected to cause more damage than the flesh and blood enemies across the fields of Europe and seas of the Pacific.

As mentioned above, the fear of World War II was a different type of fear than that experienced in previous wars, including the First World War. Although there were certainly artillery and mortars in the Great War, the extent of their use, combined with the advances in aeronautics, made World War II a long distance war unlike any previous conflict. Soldiers were fighting an enemy that they often did not see. They simply heard the buzz of airplanes and the high-pitched whine of artillery shells overhead and felt the concussion of mortar shells being blasted into the air toward their positions. As one soldier told military historian S.L.A. Marshall after his first combat mission, "We saw no one. We were fighting phantoms."[13]

The war's invisible enemy was simply incompatible with previous notions of man's primitive, animalistic instincts toward violence. In a hand-to-hand combat situation, men naturally fight for their survival. They were thought to instinctually develop a belligerent demeanor as their fear turned to anger in the face of their aggressor. However, this was not the case in many, if not most, battles of World War II. Men were no longer allowed to relish in the defeat of their foe or to see both the fear and anger in their opponents' eyes. They simply stared into the dense fog and heard sounds of danger and death. Deprived of the options to either fight or flee, soldiers were

often overcome with an intense fear that quickly turned into an oppressive and debilitating anxiety.[14] As one military psychologist stated: "People accommodate themselves better to the more natural strain of hunting and being hunted than they do to the strain of heavy shelling and bombing."[15]

In previous conflicts, military strategy attempted to turn the soldiers' fears into anger toward an enemy presented as both malevolent and barbaric. Formal and informal propaganda related tales of the enemy's inhumane treatment of prisoners and the way they insidiously raped, tortured, and killed their own citizens. However, military leaders learned that in World War II, such tales increased soldiers' fears rather than prompting them to fight the enemy devils. In dehumanizing the enemy, they made the invisible enemy into horrifying wraiths who cared nothing for human life. When the faceless enemy became a monster hiding in the darkness and fog, soldiers' fear often turned into a debilitating anxiety. Subsequently, the military intentionally stopped its propaganda program during soldiers' training.[16]

The uncommon, and often irrational, nature of World War II soldiers' fear is best illustrated by their attitudes toward various weapons. After comparing the results of a survey on soldiers' fears of specific weapons with other data on the lethal effects of those weapons, it is clear that, as the Army finally concluded, "there was no correlation between the tendency to fear a weapon and the likelihood of being wounded by it nor, indeed, even by the fact that a person had been wounded by it."[17] This is particularly true of dive bombers and mortars, which were feared in gross disproportion to their actual lethality. Conversely, soldiers professed almost no fear of rifles and little fear of the machine gun, despite its incredibly high kill rate. Lieutenant Joseph Pohl wrote that: "A single sniper or two can make you hit the side of the road, mud or no mud, water or no water, but they don't make your heart pound or your throat dry up as does the whine of a shell coming close."[18] When asked why they feared specific weapons, "the inability to retaliate," "eliciting a feeling of vulnerability," and the "speed and surprise of the attack" were listed more often than the weapons' effectiveness or accuracy.[19]

This disproportionate fear is best explained by the soldiers' feeling of impotence against such weapons. In long-distance warfare, soldiers felt that they had no control over their own fate. All they could do was hide in a foxhole as the bombs and shells exploded around them. However, a machine gun emplacement could be stormed and the gunner killed by the soldiers themselves.

Another example is the fact that crews of medium bombers consistently displayed more fear than fighter pilots, even though it was well known that fighter pilots were twice more likely to die on missions than medium bomber crews. However, medium bombers were forced to keep to their course regardless of the danger around them, while fighter pilots could actively engage the enemy. The feeling of some sense of control made fighter pilots less afraid than their statistically safer comrades. It was the seemingly total loss of control over their own lives that overwhelmed so many World War II soldiers and airmen with fear at the beginning of the war.

TO CONQUER FEAR

The military's strategies for combating soldiers' fear were varied. The primary method was inculcating a permissive attitude toward fear. After the war, psychologist Irving L. Janis discovered that "men were taught, from basic training on, that they need not be ashamed of feeling afraid in danger situations, that fear reactions are normal and are shared by everyone exposed to combat conditions."[20] Alternatively, as Lieutenant Commander Roy B. Anderson more succinctly put it, "one cannot help being afraid in battle."[21] Yet the permissive attitude toward fear did not truly include fear *in* combat; it only included fear *before* combat. "In combat many officers and men were relatively intolerant of signs of fear in others."[22] The Army explicitly expressed this attitude in *Army Life*, the official handbook given to all trainees.

> You'll be scared. Sure you'll be scared. Before you go into battle, you'll be frightened at the uncertainty, at the thought of being killed….If you say you're not scared, you'll be a cocky fool. Don't let anyone tell you you're a coward if you admit being scared. Fear before you're actually in the battle is a normal emotional reaction. It's the last step of preparation, the not-knowing, in spite of all that you've learned. After you've become used to the picture and the sensations of the battlefield, you will change. All the things you were taught in training will come back to you. This is the answer. This is where you will prove that you are a good soldier. That first fight – that fight with yourself – will have gone. Then you will be ready to fight the enemy.[23]

There was also an understood rule that even if soldiers felt fear before battle, they were required to at least fight or control that fear so that they could still effectively complete their duties. This convention was later extended to fear in combat situations. The results of studies interviewing a combined pool of almost 10,000 veterans shows that combat soldiers did make a distinction between cowards and those they felt were legitimately suffering from a psychiatric illness, even though both groups might exhibit the same fear symptoms. The key factor stressed by the interviewees was how much effort the soldier exerted to overcome his fear-induced reactions. "The

man who was visibly shaken by exposure to danger, who trembled violently and who burst out weeping like a baby, was not regarded coward unless he made no apparent effort to stick to his job."[24] These two conventions – that soldiers are allowed to show fear before combat but not during and that they must show visible signs of fighting their fear – constitute the military's "feeling rules" in regard to fear in World War II.[25]

The military sought to enforce its feeling rules in four chief ways. The first method involved training soldiers in fear before they ever saw actual combat. This fear training, much like a physical training regimen, both accustomed soldiers to the situations they would face in combat and served as a test to weed out any deficient men. One method was having trainees complete an obstacle course in which they crawled through mud underneath barbed wire, while having live ammunition fired over their heads and explosives detonated near their positions. Another method, called the "lunk trainer," exposed men to piercing screams from a phonograph recording, wind and noise from an airplane motor, and the smell of a rotting carcass as they were quizzed on various military maneuvers and trivia.[26] Both methods attempted to expose the men to the noises and stresses of combat in a relatively safe environment so that when they actually entered a combat scenario their fears would be alleviated by the assurance that they had already experienced similar conditions and succeeded. The men might still be afraid of the unknown before they entered the fight, but the hope was that once they entered the fray they would recognize that it was not entirely unknown to them. On the other hand, if the trainees did not succeed in these trials and were overtaken by their fear, the army would be able to either dismiss the men or assign them to non-combat duties where their paralyzing fear could not endanger others. This process did succeed in weeding out those highly prone to anxiety and extreme fear reactions, but the military soon learned that no amount of training or testing could successfully deter the fear produced by combat.

Therefore, the second method of "manipulative activity" was devised to counteract the inevitable fear that soldiers suffered during both combat and the lull between attacks. This method was essentially an attempt at diversion. For example, when under artillery fire or subject to intensive dive-bombing, soldiers had to wait for long periods before they even had the opportunity to repel the attack. Subsequently, officers were instructed to find some task to keep the men busy. "Messages can be passed up and down the line, rounds of ammunition can be polished and counted, there can be a little more digging in, rifles can be sighted at 800 yards, 200 yards, 500 yards –

anything, indeed, that will help men to forget their fear."[27] The hope was that as long as the men were not concentrating on the enemy and the danger they were in, their fear could be contained and redirected. This method worked fairly well, but it required a specific situation of relative safety, or at least inactivity, to even be possible. Therefore, it became more valuable as a check against fear before battles than during them, the very time that the military was attempting to regulate.

The third method involved direct coercion from superior officers in the field. There were numerous reports of officers threatening to shoot soldiers in the First World War if they did not "go over the top" when the assault was ordered. Such instances were rarer during World War II, but they were still prevalent. Men were most often verbally maligned if they showed noticeable signs of fear during combat. Soldiers were also threatened with increased duties, being shamed by their families and friends, or direct physical violence if they did not control their fear and, more importantly, do their jobs. These coercive measures were employed to restrain the entire group's fear as much as they checked that of the specific fear-stricken soldier.

If the three previous methods failed, then the military relied on the expertise of its medical personnel to either alleviate the men's fears or remove the fearful men from their stations, thereby reducing the damage of their disastrous ineffectiveness. Understood to be a physical, or "psycho-biological" ailment, fear reactions were naturally assigned to the medical staff for treatment. Medics in the field were ordered to treat the symptoms of fear in three ways. First, they were to treat the fear as close to both the location and time of the soldier's trauma as possible. Second, they were instructed to assure the patient that a cure for their troubles was both inevitable and imminent. The change from language of "shell shock" to that of "combat fatigue" was a deliberate attempt to accommodate this tactic. If one suffered from combat fatigue, it was rational to infer that one's symptoms were transient and easily cured by physical and/or mental rest. Finally, medical personnel were instructed to create a cure that was as simple as possible. Rest, food, shelter, and company were the usual methods. However, despite the initial requirements of immediate treatment, soldiers could often only be treated by being pulled from the front lines to military hospitals in the rear.[28]

Although medical personnel were initially thought to be the most capable and qualified for the regulation of fear in combat, they proved to cause as much harm as good. First, medics had an incredibly difficult time managing soldiers' fear reactions during combat. The medical personnel

trained in such measures were rarely on the front lines, and those who were there were far too busy to console soldiers and prompt them to keep fighting.[29] However, the chief problem was that the medical personnel continued to judge soldiers' psychological states based on civilian, peacetime criteria. They failed to recognize that in combat, normal fear reactions would always seem pathological by civilian standards. As Lieutenant-Colonel Stephen Ranson stated after the war:

The untried soldier has never experienced repeated fear-producing stimuli of such intensity as he will endure in combat….Both he and the inexperienced medical officer whom he has asked to review his case are often quite unprepared to recognize his symptoms as lying within the range of the normal reaction to combat fear and fatigue.[30]

Consequently, the military command felt that far too many soldiers were being sent away from their badly needed positions on the front lines to hospitals and medical clinics at the rear. Although fear-ridden soldiers were not to be allowed to remain in combat situations, the removal of all soldiers who exhibited acute fear reactions was thinning the lines to dangerous levels. This failure, or at least extreme inadequacy, of both medical personnel and previous tactics for the regulation of fear thus gave way to a new, and somewhat unexpected, warrior in the struggle against rogue fear: the military chaplain.

CHAPLAINS

When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, there were only 140 chaplains in the regular Army. There were almost one thousand additional chaplains in the reserve corps, but about a quarter of these men were ineligible for active duty.[31] Despite numerous religious institutions' previous reluctance or outright opposition to the war, after the attack on Pearl Harbor, America's religious bodies almost unanimously supported the war effort. Protestant organizations offered their brightest and most resilient ministers for active duty. Although American Catholics were already struggling with a deficient number of priests for the growing American Catholic population, by the end of the war almost six percent of American priests were serving as chaplains. The response of the American Jewish community was overwhelming. More than half of the Jewish rabbis in America offered their services as chaplains.[32] By the time Japan surrendered in 1945, there were 8,141 chaplains on active duty, with 8,896 chaplains on duty at some time during the war.[33] During the course of the war, 76 chaplains were killed in battle, 67 died of disease, 233 were wounded, and 1,783 chaplains received a total of 2,453 decorations for distinguished service.[34]

Just before the United Sates entered the war, the newly appointed Chief of Chaplains decided a school for the military training of chaplains was necessary. The school opened in February, 1942 at Fort Benjamin Harrison in Indiana. However, with the massive influx of ministers, priests, and rabbis volunteering, the school soon outgrew the fort, and a new location was chosen on the grounds of Harvard University. The new school at Harvard opened in August and remained there until space became available at military installations in Massachusetts and Georgia in 1944.

Men volunteering to serve as chaplains were required to have a four-year college degree, three years of advanced religious education, and have served in a religious capacity for at least two years to qualify for service. Once admitted to the chaplain school, the men were taught military routine and law, drilled in basic survival techniques, and underwent physical conditioning. The purpose of the school was not to instruct the men in theology or religious practice, but to teach the men to apply their previous studies to military life and give them the tools to both flourish in a military environment and survive in combat scenarios.

Before World War II, chaplains served in numerous capacities in the military, including overseeing the mess, athletics, and the mail, and even serving as defense counsel in courts martial. After a long struggle for both integration into the regular command and specific religious professionalization during the interwar period, chaplains were designated primarily as religious representatives during the Second World War and were instructed and only officially required to provide opportunities for religious instruction and participation.[35] However, the military also explicitly stated that chaplains were employed to support the men's spiritual health and bolster their overall morale. This last provision led to chaplains serving in many of the same capacities as they had in previous wars, particularly as organizers of recreation activities and as a link between soldiers and their families. It also opened the door for chaplains' emerging role as counselors to the troops and as the primary deterrents against the men's fears.[36]

Yet neither the chaplains' counseling nor their regulation of fear followed the therapeutic model advocated by the military command and practiced by the medical personnel. The therapeutic paradigm was so ingrained in the medical personnel that even religion became a mode of therapy and Jesus became the great psychologist. For example, Lieutenant Alice V. Schmidt, a nurse in a hospital at the rear of the European combat zone, wrote that Christians should "study the doctrine

and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ on this earth with an eye on His psychological approach to man. You'll be amazed with his psycho-therapy. Jesus never fails. He knows our frame and is capable of meeting all our needs."[37]

This therapeutic model of Christianity was certainly prominent in American churches and seminaries, especially among mainline Protestants. Perhaps the most popular proponent of the therapeutic mode was Harry Emerson Fosdick, who was best known for his weekly radio shows on "National Vespers" and his numerous popular devotional/self-help books. Fosdick is generally linked into the lineage of Norman Vincent Peale's "positive thinking" philosophy. For instance, his incredibly popular 1943 work, *On Being a Real Person,* offers various advice for the anxious, neurotic, and depressed without meaningfully invoking God or religion until the final chapter.[38]

However, World War II chaplains do not seem to have adopted the therapeutic model in their wartime service. In their letters, journals, and memoirs, God is not merely a smiling, benign father; he is the Lord of all creation who both cares for his people and is in control of history. For Christian chaplains, Jesus is not presented as the great psychologist; he is the savior of mankind who suffers and bleeds for humanity so that they might endure, and overcome, their own suffering. Chaplain Alvin Carlson wrote that: "Since the First World War our Government has made amazing progress in preventing and treating nervous disorders among men in the armed forces, but there are many in this war who are suffering from a far more serious malady – men who have lost their bearings and face the future without God and without hope."[39] Similarly, Rabbi Max Eichhorn wrote that he "exhorted fighting men to courage and sought to provide comfort and meaning in the midst of fear and danger through the maintenance of religious tradition."[40]

FAITH AND FEAR

From their particular religious perspective, the chaplains principally conceived of the soldiers' combat experience as a "struggle between faith and fear."[41] Constructed in explicitly religious terms, the war was not simply a physical, or even ideological, battle between opposing forces. It was a conflict between man's two halves, one spiritual and the other sinful. Although Jewish chaplains did not put the matter in such explicitly Pauline terms, they consistently wrote of an internal battle within the soldiers, with fear and faith as the two opposing sides. Courage was, therefore, a victory of the spiritual over the sinful, rather than a mere triumph of the will. For instance, Alvin Carlson, a combat chaplain with the U.S. infantry in Europe, titled his collection

of soldiers' essays and letters from the war, *He is Able: Faith Overcomes Fear in a Foxhole*. This concept is most evident in Father Gehring's declaration after the end of fighting on Guadalcanal that "courage is fear that has said its prayers."[42] The saying became a popular adage among the chaplains during the war. Anthony Conway, a young chaplain killed during the invasion of Guam, unintentionally transported the saying to the American home front. He wrote a heartfelt, "pre-invasion" letter to his family, telling them that although he would certainly be scared when the fighting began, he knew that he was doing God's good work and then quoted the popular saying. His family subsequently published the letter to give others comfort in the time of their own loss and courage in the face of their own fear. [43]

Seeing war as a struggle between faith and fear, the counsel and encouragement chaplains gave the men to overcome their fear did not conform to the military's assumptions or desires. First, chaplains extended the permissive attitude toward fear into the heat of battle. In their letters, journals, and memoirs, chaplains repeatedly mentioned the absurdity of expecting men to somehow shut off their fear when they entered combat or that the soldiers were merely afraid of the "unknown," a fear that would naturally subside once they entered the fray. Chaplain Joseph Hogan explicitly wrote that: "flattened in a foxhole under heavy enemy barrage with death buzzing in every flying fragment, men are afraid."[44] After his perilous time on Iwo Jima, Chaplain James Deasy wrote that for the first time in 34 days he and his men finally felt safe. "Everybody was afraid," Deasy wrote. "If they were not, there was something radically wrong with them."[45] Rabbi Max B. Wall, referring to his time on the front lines, wrote that: "Everyone was scared. Everyone was doing what he had to do to push ahead in the process of ultimate destruction."[46] Neither hopeful naiveté nor strict discipline could adequately overcome the men's fears in combat. The chaplains believed that when the bombs begin falling, "only God can help."[47]

The number of examples of this attitude are too numerous to list here, but a few will suffice. One chaplain wrote that "men in foxholes, on rubber rafts, on the ships that sail through dangerous waters, and in the cockpits of our planes, learn this truth: only that which gives hope for the future avails in the face of death."[48] Another chaplain wrote any soldier who feels death about to overtake him should "overcome fear by full assurance of faith that God would deliver him."[49] Yet another combat chaplain wrote of the scores of men who became "completely overcome by emotion." However, it was his "duty as a chaplain," he wrote, "to speak to these soldiers and attempt to calm

them. Sometimes I had to lie on the ground and hold them as I spoke to them of God's great power."[50] The most poignant example of the chaplains' insistence that God was the only one who could alleviate their fears comes from a veteran chaplain from the European campaign. He wrote:

> Suddenly, out of the adjacent foxhole came a cry – a cry in the night – a cry of fear. I crept quietly to the edge of the hole and discovered that one of our young medics had been overcome by fear. After he had been removed to my foxhole, I held him close to me, and quoted the Word of God to him. Soon he became resigned and calm. This young man had conquered fear through the power of Christ, and from that moment he became one of the best litterbearers in the unit.[51]

This power of God and/or Christ that saved so many soldiers from their fears was not merely a suggestion that God would save them. Most of the chaplains were neither so naïve nor manipulative to tell the soldiers that God would definitely save them from harm. Too many had perished for any soldier or chaplain to believe such a thing. However, they assured the soldiers that in spite of the immense chaos and death surrounding them all, God was with them. God might not save their lives, it could be their "time to go," but God both wanted them and empowered them to be strong and brave in the face of danger. God gave them God's own spirit, and it was not a spirit of fear or weakness.

For instance, Chaplain Herbert Rieke heard that a flight crew was having a hard time locating their targets when they flew supply runs through local mountain valleys. Rieke decided to accompany the men on their next flight, even though he was not trained to perform any of their duties. He simply hoped he might offer some kind of assistance or support. On the flight, he quickly realized that the crew was overwhelmed by the inherent dangers of flying so close to the ground and between mountain passes. Rieke was able to calm their fears, not by promising them that God was looking out for them, but by insisting that God was with them and had instilled them with His own peace and courage. "All the way to the target," he later wrote, "I held to the truth that God had 'not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.' I reminded all the crew of this fact."[52]

The chaplains, though they later admitted their immense fear in combat, tried to never show this fear to the men during battle. As one soldier pointedly wrote home about his chaplain in a letter to his family, "the men came to Chaplain Abbott's services because they had seen how his faith had made him fearless."[53] Russell Stroup wrote to a fellow minster back home: "Of course

we are all afraid, but some of us don't let it get us down or prevent us from doing our work." Speaking specifically of his fellow chaplains, he wrote, "the chaplain is the last man who should show fear…"[54] In this way, Stroup and his fellow chaplains held to the military's prescribed feeling rules that one can be afraid before combat but not during, yet this was only so that they could circumvent these same rules for the soldiers by telling them it was okay to be afraid during combat because God's spirit of strength and courage would allow them to overcome their fear and do their jobs.

However, it should not be thought that the chaplains, at least the vast majority of them, used the soldiers' fears to manipulate them into religious conversions. Russell Stroup, a Catholic priest, wrote an article titled "Fear in the Shadows" for the *Presbyterian Outlook* in which he addresses this very subject. Stroup, while admitting that there are some chaplains who attempt to scare soldiers into becoming Christians – this was more an old-fashioned fear of Hell than existing fears of death or maiming in combat – extols his readers to focus on the power and love that God gives the men. This love, he contends, will see the men through their fear and onward to victory. For those who do try to frighten the men into Heaven and for those who believe that is what all chaplains are attempting to do, Stroup writes the following:

> Fear is an evil thing. You do not inspire that which is high and holy by appealing to that which is low and base. Solders know that, for they have been afraid. Facing agony and death, they have met the coward that lies hidden in the heart of every man and have hated him. Their one noble fear is that they may be afraid. How, then, can they have patience with preaching that is based on an emotion they loathe for its shameful power to degrade a man?[55]

Stroup insists that the soldiers cannot stand such preaching and every chaplain that has seen combat himself understands why this is so. Fear is what they are constantly fighting. As such, they cannot, and most would never dare, use it even for "noble" purposes.

Stroup was equally opposed to the idea that "there are no atheists in foxholes." He called this a "damnable lie."[56] Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic chaplains repeatedly denied this idea, insisting that men were just as likely to curse as pray while under fire. Their duty, they believed, was to strongly encourage the latter. Two of the more striking examples of soldiers' resistance to religion will support the chaplains' opinions. After the war, when Private Lewis Millet was interviewed about his faith during combat by a Christian publication, he replied: "I don't remember actually praying during combat. You're too busy doing your job and listening to all the people

shooting at you."[57] Army Captain Marvin Smith, who never considered himself a religious man, remembered praying only once during his nearly four years of service in the war. "I had not prayed to God before because I felt that it wasn't right to have nothing to do with God previously and then suddenly in battle start calling on Him," Smith stated. The one and only time he did pray came when his company was tasked to assault a strategic and heavily fortified German position. Smith remembered praying, "Oh, God, if there is a God, please protect us now as we go into the enemy area in this darkness. Help us now, oh, God!" Smith later recalled that he did not really feel that God had protected him, so he never bothered with prayer again.[58]

From their journals and letters, it seems that very few chaplains would have tried to convince Captain Smith that he was, in fact, under Divine protection. As warriors fighting in a battle between faith and fear, the chaplains did not attempt to assure the soldiers that God would protect them. However, they spent a great deal of time and energy, convincing the men that God was with them. Although chaplains regularly selected those Scriptural passages that employed martial language, one of the more favored passages comes from the first chapter of the book of Joshua. "Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest."[59] One chaplain wrote in regard to his repeated use of the passage: "It's a good text. It demands something of us and expects something of God. I like the picture of a man in the might of his own manhood, sustained as he must by the unfailing power of God—an undefeatable combination."[60] For the chaplains, soldiers exhibited the very nature of a man of God when they relied on God's power and overcame their fear. "We can only say," one chaplain wrote in regard to the advice he gave to soldiers about to enter combat, "God give us the courage of strong men – men of God."[61]

CONCLUSION

As noted above, military chaplains received nearly 2,500 decorations for their service during the war. They were highly praised by Dwight Eisenhower, George Patton, Douglas MacArthur, and Henry Arnold, along with the vast majority of commanding officers. These leaders recognized that "soldiers who overcame excess fear became more confident, more courageous, and caring of one another would form a safer unit as well as a more effective one," and they credited the chaplains with this important boost in morale.[62] After the war, General George C. Marshall said that he looked "upon the spiritual life of the soldier as even more important than his physical equipment,"

which is why he held such high regard for the chaplains under his command. "Unless the soldier's soul sustains him, he cannot be relied upon and will fail himself, his commander, and his country in the end," Marshall declared. "It's morale – and I mean spiritual morale – which wins the victory…"[63]

Chaplains were integral in achieving this victory through their management of the soldiers' fears. The military command had originally intended this task to fall to the medical personnel and the officers directly over the soldiers. Yet no amount of coercion could remove the men's fears, and the medical corps seemed incapable of alleviating those fears without wholly removing the men from their essential positions on the front lines. Military leaders also assumed that soldiers were principally afraid of the unknown. Men were allowed to be afraid, they thought, but only before battles. When the shooting began, fear had to be removed, and it would not, could not, be tolerated. They thought that exposing soldiers to the sometimes horrifying sights, sounds, and even smells of war early in their training would allow the men to find peace and courage when they finally entered real combat. Yet the men did not only fear the unknown; they also feared their own impotence. Their seemingly total lack of control over their lives and deaths created a fear and subsequent anxiety that too often crippled them or at least hampered their effectiveness in the field.

In imagining fear as a spiritual threat as well as a weakness of character, the chaplains were able to integrate it into the domain of God. As such, God supplied the means to fight soldiers' fears. They alleviated the soldiers' fears by denying the idea that the men should not be afraid in combat. All men were afraid, and should be afraid, during such situations, they reasoned. The key was to overcome that fear by the power of God. The men were chiefly afraid because they could not control their environment or sometimes even fight for their own survival against an invisible enemy. The chaplains counteracted this lack of control through the concept of God's abiding spirit. They did not simply preach that God was in control and would protect the men from harm, though they certainly prayed that God would do so. Their "cure for fear" was the teaching that although the men might not be able to control the chaotic environment surrounding them, they could control how they reacted to that environment. It was fine for them to feel fear, but they could not let that fear control them or dictate their actions. Through the power of God's spirit, they could control themselves. In turn, this renewed sense of control allowed the men to perform their duties, which is all that the military desired from the very beginning. Therefore, they substituted the men's

impotence in the physical battle with power and control in the inward battle of faith versus fear. They gave the men a different kind of control, one that allowed the men to do their jobs and, ultimately, achieve victory in both realms.

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[1] In the present essay, I will often employ the term "military." I use this term to refer to all aspects of the U.S. armed forces at the time, including the Navy, Marine Corps, Army, and Army Air Force. However, the regulation and control of fear was chiefly directed toward U.S. ground and air forces. Therefore, the navy, though also following similar "feeling rules" and emotional controls, is often concerned with a different context in regard to combat situations. When specific strategies or actions of only one particular branch of the armed forces are being considered, the name of that branch will be used rather than the general term "military."
[2] Norman Copeland, *Psychology and the Soldier*, Reprint., (1942; repr. Harrisburg, PA: The Telegraph Press, 2007), 21.
[3] See, for example, Tennant McWilliams, *The Chaplains Conflict: Good and Evil in a War Hospital, 1943-1945* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2012); Clarence L. Abercrombie III, *The Military Chaplin* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1977); and Anne C. Loveland, "From Morale Builders to Moral Advocates: U.S. Army Chaplains in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century" in *The Sword of the Lord: Military Chaplains from the First to the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Doris L. Bergen (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 233-250.
[4] Richard M. Budd, *Serving Two Masters: The Development of American Military Chaplaincy, 1860-1920* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2002); Max B. Wall, "We Will Be: Experiences of an American Jewish Chaplain in the Second World War," in *The Sword of the Lord: Military Chaplains from the First to the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Doris L. Bergen (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 187-214; and Anne C. Loveland, *Change and Conflict in U.S. Army Chaplain Corps since 1945* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2014).
[5] John Corrigan, "Religion and Emotions" in *Doing Emotions History*, eds. Susan J. Matt and Peter N. Stearns (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 144.
[6] Corrigan has provided the best overviews of the historiography of religion and emotions in "Introduction: Emotions Research and the Academic Study of Religion" in his edited volume *Emotions and Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 3-31 and his appendix "History, Religion, and Emotion: A Historical Survey," in his *Business of the Heart: Religion and Emotion in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). See also Robert Fuller, "Wonder and the Religious Sensibility: A Study in Religion and Emotion," *The Journal of Religion*, 86, no. 3 (July 2006), 364-384.
[7] For the best examination of Durkheim's influence over the study of religion and emotion, see Jonathan S. Fish, *Defending the Durkheimian Tradition: Religion, Emotion and Morality* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2005).
[8] William James, "The Physical Basis of Emotion," in James, *Essays in Psychology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983). For a complete examination of James' concept of emotion, see Jeremy Carrette, "William James," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, ed. John Corrigan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
[9] John Dollard, *Fear in Battle* (New Haven: Institute For Human Relations, Yale University, 1943), 14.
[10] Joanna Bourke, "The Emotions in War: Fear and the British and American Military, 1914-1945," *Historical Research* 74, no. 185 (2001), 316.
[11] E.G. Boring and Marjorie Van de Water, *Psychology for the Fighting Man* (New York: Penguin Books, 1943), 299.
[12] Ibid, 298.
[13] S.L.A. Marshall, *Men against Fire: the Problem of Battle Command in Future War* (New York: William

Moore and Company, 1947), 45.
[14] R.A. Cohen and J.G. Delano, "Subacute Emotional Disturbances Induced by Combat," *War Medicine* 7 (1945): 285; M.A. Zeligs, "War Neurosis: Psychiatric Experiences and Management on a Pacific Island," *War Medicine* 6 (1944): 168.
[15] From P.R.O., WO 222/1571, "Psychiatry – Arakan Campaign," (undated), 6,as quoted in Rourke, "Emotions," 320.
[16] Rourke, "Emotions," 321.
[17] Ibid, 322. A similar study with almost identical results is recorded in Irving L. Janis, "Problems Related to the Control of Fear in Combat," in *Studies in Social Psychology in World War II*, volume 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), 232-233.
[18] Donald F. Crosby, *Battlefield Chaplains: Catholic Priests in World War II* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1994), 196.
[19] Rourke, "Emotions," 322.
[20] Janis, "Problems," 196.
[21] Lieutenant Commander Roy B. Anderson, "The Cross on His Collar, in *Religion in the Ranks*, eds. Martin Leuschner, Charles F. Zummach, and Walter E. Kohrs (Cleveland: Roger Williams Press, 1946), 43.
[22] Janis, 197, n.5. See also William C. Menninger, *Psychiatry in a Troubled World: Yesterday's War and Today's Challenge* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), 73.
[23] *Army Life*, War Department Pamphlet 21-13, 1944, 159 as quoted in Janis, 196.
[24] Janis, "Problems," 200.
[25] The term "feeling rules" refers to John Corrigan's concept that groups develop "specific understandings of emotional expression and control that [link] emotionality to a host of other factors." These feeling rules are then used to patrol the group's boundaries and determine who is, and is not, included within the group. However, unlike most organizations, these feeling rules served in a military context to limit the group for the sake of their physical wellbeing rather than any perceived ideological threat. See Corrigan, *Business*, 2.
[26] See J.W. Bellah and A.F. Clark, "The Lunk Trainer," *Infantry Journal* 52 (1943): 72-75.
[27] Copeland, *Psychology,* 23.
[28] The fact that soldiers were pulled for medical reasons after experiencing severe fear reactions might have added to the permissive attitude toward fear. If soldiers knew they would be treated as legitimate medical cases if they "cracked up" on the front lines, they would tend to be less nervous about the possibility. However, this might also motivate men to have more severe reactions to avoid dangerous duties rather than fight through mild or moderate fear reactions and remain at their posts. It is likely that the practice produced both results. See Janis, 196-197.
[29] Morris Janowitz, *Sociology and the Military Establishment* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1959), 75-76.
[30] Stephen Ranson, "The Normal Battle Reaction: Its Relation to the Pathological Battle Reaction," *United States Army Medical Department*, supplementary no. 9 (1949): 3-6.
[31] Roy J. Honeywell, *Chaplains of the United States Army* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Chaplains, Department of the Army, 1958), 214.
[32] Ibid, 219.
[33] Ibid, 217.
[34] Patrick Allit, *Religion in America since 1945: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 3; Honeywell, 294.
[35] Robert L. Gushwa, *The Best and Worst of Times: The United States Army Chaplaincy, 1920-1945* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Chaplains, Department of the Army, 1977), 72-81.
[36] It should be understood that I am not suggesting that chaplains' principal responsibility was the control of soldiers' fears during the war. A Presidential Committee reviewing religion in World War II concluded that chaplains served as pastors, organizers, counselors, and ambassadors. Their primary duties were to provide religious rites and worship services and comfort the sick and dying. However, their position on

the front lines and the men's trust in the chaplains put them in a position to regulate the men's fears. As this is the topic of the present essay, chaplains' many other duties and services will not be explored. For an excellent overview of their service during the war, see Ibid.
[37] Alice V. Schmidt, "A Ministry of Healing" in *Religion in the Ranks*, eds. Martin L. Leuschner, et al. (Cleveland: Roger Williams Press, 1946), 83.
[38] Harry Emerson Fosdick, *On Being a Real Person* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1943).
[39] Alvin O. Carlson, *He is Able: Faith Overcomes Fear in a Foxhole* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1945), 31.
[40] Greg Palmer and Mark S. Zaid, eds., *GI's Rabbi: World War II Letters of Max Eichhorn* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 9.
[41] Carlson, *He is Able*, 30.
[42] Crosby, *Battlefield Chaplains,* 56.
[43] Ibid, 188-189.
[44] Christopher Cross, *Soldiers of God: The True Story of the U.S. Army Chaplains* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1945), 75.
[45] Crosby, *Battlefield Chaplains*, 225.
[46] Elizabeth Haynes, ed., "'We Will Be:' Experiences of an American Jewish Chaplain in the Second World War," in *The Sword of the Lord: Military Chaplains from the First to the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Doris L. Bergen (Notre Dame, In: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004.), 191.
[47] Carlson, *He is Able*, 73.
[48] Carlson, *He is Able*, 17.
[49] Ibid, 25.
[50] Ibid, 31.
[51] Ibid, 23.
[52] Cross, *Soldiers of God*, 101.
[53] Ibid, 69.
[54] Russell Cartwright Stroup, *Letters from the Pacific: A Combat Chaplain in WWII*, ed. Richard Cartwright Austin (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 109.
[55] Ibid, 134.
[56] Ibid. The phrase "there are no atheists in foxholes" is generally thought to have been coined by the famed American journalist Ernie Pyle in one of his reports on the war effort. The adage is still repeated, especially among conservative Christian groups.
[57] As quoted in Steve Rabey, *Faith Under Fire: Stories of Hope and Courage form World War II* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002), 76.
[58] Ibid, 192. From the chaplains own reports, even soldiers who vehemently rejected the notion of God watching over them or even of God existing were still open to the idea that God had given them a spirit of courage and strength to overcome their fear. These men may have simply reinterpreted the chaplains' message as a matter of a person's natural inner fortitude rather than a specific gift from God.
[59] Josh. 1:9 King James Version.
[60] Stroup, *Letters*, 176.
[61] Carlson, *He is Able*, 71.
[62] Stroup, *Letters,* 207; Gushwa, *Best and Worst,* 186.
[63] Gushwa, *Best and Worst,* 186.