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## BEYOND THE BATTLE: RELIGION AND AMERICAN TROOPS IN WORLD WAR II

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BEYOND THE BATTLE:  
RELIGION AND AMERICAN TROOPS IN WORLD WAR II

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DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
College of Arts and Sciences  
at the University of Kentucky

By  
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Lexington, Kentucky

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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### BEYOND THE BATTLE: RELIGION AND AMERICAN TROOPS IN WORLD WAR II

This dissertation examines the ways in which military personnel interacted with religion during World War II. It argues that the challenges of wartime service provided the impetus and the opportunity to improvise religious practices, refine religious beliefs amid new challenges, and broaden religious understanding through interaction with those from other traditions. Methodologically, this dissertation moves beyond existing analyses that focus primarily on institutions and their representatives such as military chaplains. Instead, it explores first-person accounts left by men and women who were not part of the chaplain corps and analyzes ways in which non-chaplains engaged religion. The exigencies of war contributed to religious innovation as soldiers and sailors improvised religious practices. Lay leaders sometimes filled in to lead services as chaplains were often not available. Soldiers and sailors also modified individual religious practices such as diet, fasting, and prayer to fit the context of military service. The challenges of wartime service also led troops to refine previously held religious beliefs as well as to adopt new interpretations based on personal experiences. Soldiers and sailors often clung to whatever religious beliefs or practices they saw as potentially beneficial. Finally, religious mixing combined with social dislocation and stress to create an atmosphere in which troops questioned and reformulated their religious identities. As soldiers and sailors formed bonds with those from other traditions, it became more difficult to maintain previous assumptions rooted in suspicion and rumor about other faiths. Understanding how soldiers and sailors interacted with religion in World War II anticipates significant aspects of what many scholars have described as a religious revival in the two decades following the war. It suggests that many veterans returned to civilian life with more confidence in their own religious agency and with sharpened conceptions of what they considered religious essentials.

**KEYWORDS:** World War II, Religion, Civil-Military Relations,  
Religious Cooperation, Religious Conflict

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BEYOND THE BATTLE:  
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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

After surrendering to German forces, Pfc. Clarence Swope spent Christmas of 1944 in Stalag 4c. About a dozen imprisoned soldiers decided to gather in an empty tent for an impromptu prayer service on Christmas Eve. Though he had never been outwardly religious, Swope decided to participate. A young soldier volunteered to lead since there were no chaplains housed with the enlisted men. Swope recalled that as they prayed together, “It seemed as though we all knew we had nothing to fear; and we had an extreme feeling of security and well-being.”<sup>1</sup> Years later in a recording he made for his son, Swope reflected, “It was such a moving experience that I’ll never—I doubt whether I’ll ever experience it again.”<sup>2</sup> Swope continued by explaining that he seldom went to church after the war because he never found that same feeling in civilian congregations. For troops such as Swope, the war often challenged existing religious beliefs and practices. As they sought to reconcile their experiences, many Americans reshaped their religious worldviews in ways that sometimes had lasting legacies long after they returned home.

Over sixteen-million Americans served in the US armed forces during World War II. These soldiers, sailors, and marines brought with them a spectrum of religious beliefs and practices. For some, religion was likely an important part of their lives and culture. Others probably spurned most forms of religion. Most, perhaps, were indifferent.

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<sup>1</sup> Clarence O. Swope, “World War II Diary,” 1986, 25, Clarence O. Swope Collection (AFC/2001/001/145), Veterans History Project Collection, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<sup>2</sup> Clarence O. Swope, interview by Tom Swope, unpublished transcript, ca 1977, Clarence O. Swope Collection (AFC/2001/001/145), Veterans History Project Collection, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.



Existing analyses of the significance of religion for Americans in World War II have focused almost exclusively on institutional forms of religion such as military chaplaincy and the outreach of civilian religious bodies. Though this remains an important angle, such focus obscures important aspects of the ways in which the vast majority of US troops interacted with religion. Understanding how soldiers and sailors experienced religion in wartime will help scholars interpret the significance of religion in America in the decades following the war. This dissertation argues that the challenges of wartime service provided the impetus and the opportunity to improvise religious practices, refine religious beliefs amid new challenges, and broaden religious understanding through interaction with those from other traditions.

In the years leading up to World War II, the American religious landscape was becoming increasingly diverse but a Protestant hegemony still dominated public life. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, unparalleled numbers of Catholics and Jews immigrated to the US, but their arrival sparked concerns among those who feared their potential influence on American culture. Even within Protestantism, divisions emerged between those who embraced Biblical criticism and those sought to maintain traditional interpretations of Biblical revelation. Though prominent voices and organizations labored to promote interreligious understanding, the American public remained significantly divided. Interreligious marriage, for example, remained quite rare.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Erika B. Seamon, *Interfaith Marriage in America: The Transformation of Religion and Christianity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 71–78. One can measure interreligious marriage on different levels, which complicates comparing interpretations. For example, marriages between adherents to different denominations within Protestantism were relatively common. Marriages between Protestants and Roman Catholics were rarer. Before the war, marriages between religiously devoted Christians and Jews were rather uncommon.

Scholars have long identified the social significance of World War II in US history. Mass mobilization resulted in not only large numbers of people entering military service but also significant migrations of people seeking jobs in the rapidly expanding industrial sector. Because of the need for labor, traditional barriers to minorities and women taking such jobs temporarily softened. For many Americans, the war opened new opportunities, but many others were troubled by these trends. Women working in jobs traditionally held by men challenged reigning conceptions of gender roles. Some Americans lamented the encroachment of African Americans and other minority groups on predominantly white neighborhoods. Suspicion of Japanese Americans led the federal government to relocate those on the West Coast into fenced internment camps in the nation's interior. Such cultural churning also affected religious groups and their members as they sought to acclimate to the challenges of wartime. Religious effects were perhaps most profound on the men and women who served in the US military as they sought to reconcile their experiences.

The existing work on religion in World War II focuses primarily on military chaplaincy. This focus is understandable and remains significant though this dissertation considers religion more broadly. Nearly 10,000 men served as chaplains in the US military during the war.<sup>4</sup> Dozens of religious groups endorsed and supported leaders from their ranks. The federal government invested a great deal of funds in salaries, facilities, and supplies. In some sense, military chaplains embodied the intersection of war and religion. Chaplains remained ordained clergy of civilian religious bodies, but

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<sup>4</sup> No women were appointed as chaplains in the US military during the war. Some proposed assigning female chaplains to serve women in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC), but the idea gained little traction. See: Mattie E Treadwell, *The Women's Army Corps*, United States Army in World War II (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1954), 337.

they were also commissioned officers in the US military. Because of these dual institutional roles, scholars have explored the chaplaincy from both military perspectives and denominational perspectives.

From the military perspective, the US military sponsored several histories of chaplaincy as an institution.<sup>5</sup> The author of each study had himself served as a chaplain during the war. As a group, these scholars drew from extensive military records, interviews with former chaplains, as well as their own personal experiences. These military-sponsored institutional histories of chaplaincy remain rich sources for the study of religious aspects of World War II. The authors' personal experiences as chaplains as well as their access to important primary records enrich their interpretations. At the same time, these personal connections and chaplain-centric sources limit the scope of their interpretations. Consequently, this dissertation draws heavily from sources outside the institution to situate military chaplaincy's significance within the wider religious world inhabited by other soldiers and sailors. For example, how did other soldiers and sailors perceive military chaplaincy as an institution as well as the work of individual chaplains? In the end, these military-sponsored histories of chaplaincy offer an important perspective on the military roles of chaplains, but it remains incomplete.

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<sup>5</sup> Clifford Merrill Drury and United States, Bureau of Naval Personnel, Chaplains Division., *The History of the Chaplain Corps, United States Navy, 1939-1949*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1950); Roy J Honeywell and United States, Dept. of the Army, Office of the Chief of Chaplains, *Chaplains of the United States Army* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1958); Daniel Jorgensen and United States, Office of the Chief of Air Force Chaplains, *The Service of Chaplains to Army Air Units, 1917-1946*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1961); Robert L Gushwa and United States, Dept. of the Army, Office of the Chief of Chaplains, *The Best and Worst of Times: The United States Army Chaplaincy, 1920-1945*, vol. 4, United States Army Chaplaincy (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1977).

Also in the institutional mode, scholars have explored the religious aspects of World War II in terms of the formal involvement of particular denominations.<sup>6</sup> These histories also focus a great deal on chaplaincy because the endorsement of clergy for military service, as well as their support, often constituted the major contribution of a particular religious group to the war effort. These scholars, however, also looked beyond chaplaincy to see other ways in which particular religious groups sought to support soldiers and sailors. Some denominations, for example, established networks that helped their members maintain connections with their civilian religious communities. In addition, many civilian religious groups distributed religious literature among soldiers and sailors or supported parachurch organizations that did so. As a group, these histories provide helpful information, but the tone of many of these works tends toward description rather than analysis.

In his 2012 book, *Serving God and Country*, historian Lyle Dorsett provided the most direct analysis of the work and significance of chaplains in World War II by a scholar not affiliated with the military. He argued, “Chaplains were absolutely essential to America's victory” because they cultivated courage and morale among US troops that allowed them to make needed sacrifices.<sup>7</sup> For Dorsett, chaplains filled a very practical

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<sup>6</sup> Harold Franklin Hafer, “The Evangelical and Reformed Churches and World War II” (PhD Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1947); Methodist Church (US), *Chaplains of the Methodist Church in World War II: A Pictorial Record of Their Work* (Washington, DC: Methodist Commission on Chaplains, 1948); Benjamin L. Bowman and Daniel Caldwell, *They Answered the Call* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1952); Philip Bernstein, *Rabbis at War: The CANRA Story* (Waltham, MA: American Jewish Historical Society, 1971); Donald F Crosby, *Battlefield Chaplains: Catholic Priests in World War II* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994); Gerald Lawson Sittser, *A Cautious Patriotism: The American Churches and the Second World War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Albert Isaac Slomovitz, *The Fighting Rabbis: Jewish Military Chaplains and American History* (New York: New York University Press, 1999); Robert C. Freeman and Dennis A. Wright, *Saints at War: Experiences of Latter-Day Saints in World War II* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Lyle W. Dorsett, *Serving God and Country: United States Military Chaplains in World War II* (New York: Berkley Caliber, 2012), 6.

role for the US military. They helped develop more effective soldiers and built support at home. For example, Dorsett explained that during training, chaplains functioned to “help civilians become combatants, adjust spiritually and psychologically to a radically different way of life, and at the same time assure families and communities back home that military life would not destroy the moral values and souls of their loved ones in uniform.”<sup>8</sup> Though overshadowed by his focus on chaplains, Dorsett also noted that many soldiers and sailors did not have regular access to chaplains, especially chaplains from specific traditions. Thus, non-chaplains also played a significant role in religious leadership during the conflict. Complementing Dorsett’s analysis of chaplaincy, this dissertation focuses on ways in which soldiers and sailors supplemented the religious leadership of chaplains. At the same time, it considers the significance of those who challenged or even rejected the ministrations of military chaplains.

While not focusing on World War II, some scholars have explored military chaplaincy in other conflicts that offer useful interpretive frameworks for analyzing religion in the military. Most helpfully, Richard Budd has traced the institutional development of US military chaplaincy from the Civil War to World War I. He argued that military chaplaincy reached its current professional status in the early 1920s only after decades of organizational conflict within the US military.<sup>9</sup> In his 2004 dissertation, Bradley Carter analyzed chaplain memoirs as a distinct literary subgenre.<sup>10</sup> In so doing, Carter identified tension between institutional religion and popular religiosity in combat,

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>9</sup> Richard M Budd, *Serving Two Masters: The Development of American Military Chaplaincy, 1860-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Bradley L Carter, “‘Reverence Helmeted and Armored’: A Study of Twentieth-Century United States Military Chaplain Memoirs” (PhD Dissertation, University of Kansas, 2004).

but he was only able to explore it diffusely. In her analysis of military chaplaincy in the Vietnam War, Jacqueline Whitt characterized chaplains as both official and unofficial cultural mediators who served as bridges between enlisted soldiers and officers.<sup>11</sup> This dissertation draws from these interpretations and tests their theories in the context of World War II.

Some scholars have moved beyond the framework of chaplaincy to analyze the broader cultural significance of religion among US troops during wartime. In his analysis of World War I, Jonathan Ebel argued that many American soldiers found their faith bolstered, though altered, through participation in the war because they believed that death and suffering in this particular conflict had redemptive qualities for both individuals and the nation.<sup>12</sup> Challenging conventional interpretations of widespread religious disillusionment among veterans, Ebel asserted that the redemptive lens influenced how veterans sought to shape America into a nation worthy of redemption after the war. Focusing on World War II, Deborah Dash Moore argued that military policies played an important role in elevating Judaism to its post-war position alongside Protestantism and Catholicism in defining American cultural identity.<sup>13</sup> Serving in the military encouraged some Jewish soldiers to embrace their religious identity as Jews. At the same time, military policy and necessity legitimized Jewish religious practice by considering it on equal terms with Protestant and Catholic expressions thus contributing to the rise of the Judeo-Christian interpretation of shared American identity in the

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<sup>11</sup> Jacqueline Earline Whitt, "Conflict and Compromise: American Military Chaplains and the Vietnam War" (PhD Dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Ebel, *Faith in the Fight: Religion and the American Soldier in the Great War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Deborah Dash Moore, *GI Jews: How World War II Changed a Generation* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2004).

following decades. Also exploring the intersection of religion and cultural identity, Matthew Hedstrom considered the ways in which book publishers during World War II helped shape an interfaith ideal that gained traction both during and after the war.<sup>14</sup> Finally, such scholarship has not been limited to the American context. Michael Snape contributed to the ongoing debate regarding secularization and British society by arguing that British soldiers still demonstrated diffuse forms of Christianity during both the First and Second World Wars.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to historians, sociologists have also sought to understand religion in wartime. Most significantly, Samuel Stouffer led a team of sociologists who conducted broad studies for the Army Research Branch during World War II.<sup>16</sup> Surveying thousands of active-duty soldiers, the team provided information to assist the War Department in making policy decisions. Among other topics, survey questions inquired about the role of prayer in sustaining those in combat as well as the effects of military service on personal religiosity. In the decades following World War II, other sociologists explored military chaplaincy as they attempted to test general theories of role tension because chaplains were accountable to two rather different institutions.<sup>17</sup> While Burchard, Zahn, and Vickers found evidence of role tension or conflict in chaplains,

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<sup>14</sup> Matthew Hedstrom, *The Rise of Liberal Religion: Book Culture and American Spirituality in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> Michael F. Snape, *God and the British Soldier: Religion and the British Army in the First and Second World Wars* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>16</sup> Samuel A. Stouffer et al., *Studies in Social Psychology in World War II: The American Soldier*, 4 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949).

<sup>17</sup> Waldo Burchard, "The Role of the Military Chaplain" (PhD Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1953); Waldo Burchard, "Role Conflicts of Military Chaplains," *American Sociological Review* 19, no. 5 (October 1954): 528–535; Gordon Charles Zahn, *Chaplains in the RAF: A Study in Role Tension* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1969); Clarence L Abercrombie, *The Military Chaplain*, Sage Library of Social Research v. 37 (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1977); Robert C. Vickers, "The Military Chaplaincy: A Study in Role Conflict" (George Peabody College for Teachers of Vanderbilt University, 1984).

Abercrombie disagreed claiming that Burchard and Zahn mistakenly presupposed that Christianity was inherently pacifist and therefore in natural conflict with the military. The wider concept of role tension, however, remains relevant as an interpretive framework for the experiences of soldiers and sailors whose salient religious beliefs conflicted with their assigned military duties. This dissertation considers, in part, how prevalent such tension may have been and explores how soldiers and sailors resolved this tension.

Existing scholarship has revealed important aspects of religion during wartime, but the predominant focus on institutional religious forms has left significant gaps. Most obviously, one must consider to what extent the religious offerings of chaplains and civilian groups matched the religious demands of individual soldiers. At the same time, wartime presented the fundamental challenge of distribution of religious leadership. Most soldiers and sailors had only limited access to chaplains of any affiliation, and finding a chaplain from a minority tradition was particularly difficult. Consequently, soldiers and sailors exercised a great deal of agency as they shaped their own religious worlds by selectively appropriating religious beliefs and practices that made sense according to their own experiences and contexts. Some filled rather traditional roles as lay leaders while others kept their distance from any sort of religious community or affiliation.

In order to move beyond institutional analysis, this dissertation builds upon a body of scholarship centered on the concept of popular or lived religion. Rather than a distinct set of beliefs or practices, popular religion is best described as a way of being religious that integrates aspects of formal religious traditions as well as informal beliefs



and practices. In his definition of what he labeled “popular religiosity,” Charles Lippy posited that people draw from a “central zone of religious symbols, values, and beliefs.”<sup>18</sup> In so doing, he continued, “They erect for themselves worlds of meaning, they create identities for themselves, they engage in the age-old task of religion by finding a way to make sense out of their lives.” Thus, popular religiosity is a creative act rather than passive accedence to an established set of religious norms. In the context of World War II, soldiers and sailors drew from a particularly wide set of beliefs and practices as they interacted with those from diverse faiths and encountered military folk traditions. In addition, the deprivations of military life and stress of combat led some troops to engage with religion in a more immediate fashion as they sought to make sense out of their experiences. In his analysis of chaplains in World War II, Bradley Carter offered “combat religiosity” as a phrase to describe a particular combination of popular religion and combat.<sup>19</sup> He noted that under the stress of combat, soldiers drew from a wide set of religious symbols in order to give meaning to their experiences. Whereas Carter focused on the way in which chaplains both critiqued and participated in such practices, this dissertation emphasizes the ways in which non-chaplains lived out popular religiosity. In addition, this dissertation moves beyond Carter’s emphasis on combat to demonstrate that popular religiosity was also at work in the more mundane experiences of soldiers and sailors.

Understanding how soldiers and sailors interacted with religion in World War II anticipates significant aspects of what many scholars have described as a religious revival

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<sup>18</sup> Charles H. Lippy, *Being Religious, American Style: A History of Popular Religiosity in the United States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 10.

<sup>19</sup> Carter, “‘Reverence Helmeted and Armored’: A Study of Twentieth-Century United States Military Chaplain Memoirs,” 183.

in the two decades following the war. The experience of military service shaped a generation. For example, approximately three-quarters of males age twenty through twenty-nine living in the US in 1947 were veterans of the war.<sup>20</sup> In addition, in the wake of the war, record numbers claimed affiliation with religious groups, attendance at religious services increased, congregations built new facilities, and some groups expanded foreign missionary efforts. The number of Americans that broadly identified with religious groups reached 98 percent in 1952 where it roughly hovered until the late 1960s.<sup>21</sup> More narrowly, the number of Americans claiming membership in a church or synagogue peaked at 76 percent in 1947 and held steady around 73 percent until about 1970.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, financial donations to religious institutions increased, and churches and synagogues embarked on ambitious building campaigns in American suburbs.<sup>23</sup> Finally, Americans went abroad as missionaries in increasing record numbers as conservative organizations eclipsed the established missionary agencies associated with the Christian mainline.<sup>24</sup>

While scholars have rightly noted the effects of suburbanization, education, economic prosperity, and the fear of communism on religion in America during this period, few have considered the significance of military service itself had on the post-war

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<sup>20</sup> US Census Bureau and US Department of Commerce, *Current Population Reports, Population Characteristics*, P-20, No. 9 (Washington, DC, January 19, 1948), 9.

<sup>21</sup> George Gallup and Princeton Religion Research Center, *Religion in America 1990* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Religion Research Center, 1990), 29; Gallup, "Religion: Gallup Historical Trends," accessed April 15, 2013.

<sup>22</sup> Gallup and Princeton Religion Research Center, *Religion in America 1990*, 43; Frank Newport, *This Christmas, 78% of Americans Identify as Christian* (Gallup, December 24, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> Jackson W. Carroll, Douglas W. Johnson, and Martin E. Marty, *Religion in America, 1950 to the Present* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), 22–23; Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 26–27.

<sup>24</sup> Patricia R. Hill, "The Missionary Enterprise," in *Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience*, ed. Charles H. Lippy and Peter W. Williams, vol. 3 (New York: Scribner, 1988), 1694.

religious landscape. In part, this dissertation argues that many veterans returned to civilian life with more confidence in their own religious agency and with sharpened conceptions of what they considered to be religious essentials. During the war, many religious soldiers and sailors did without formal religious leadership. Some filled this void as lay leaders, and their successes convinced others that ordained leadership was perhaps not as sacrosanct as they had previously believed. The necessity of religious compromise during the war also forced troops to define religious essentials more clearly. Significantly, however, veterans as a whole did not share a single vision of religious essentials, but many found affinity with those from other religious groups who seemed to share similar beliefs. Consequently, boundaries between religious groups became increasingly porous though other conceptual divisions emerged. This trend explains, in part, what sociologist Robert Wuthnow described as the restructuring of American religion in the mid-twentieth century where a liberal/conservative divide transcended traditional denominational or sectarian boundaries.<sup>25</sup> However, this dissertation suggests that this division has roots extending into veterans' experiences in World War II whereas Wuthnow focused on the significance of social unrest of the 1960s through the lens of increased levels of education.

Military service during the Second World War both challenged and enabled American soldiers and sailors to interact with religion in new ways and, consequently, to reformulate their conceptions of religion. First, many soldiers and sailors needed to improvise the ways in which they practiced religion. Even when not in combat, military life differed a great deal from civilian life. Strenuous and seemingly perpetual training

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<sup>25</sup> Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*.

and work combined with physical separation from civilian congregations compelled those who sought organized religious worship to depend on military chaplains. However, chaplains were not always available and fluidity of assignments largely precluded establishing an individual relationship with one. In addition, finding a chaplain from a particular tradition was difficult for most and nearly impossible for adherents of minority religious traditions such as Judaism or even certain Lutheran groups. Consequently, some soldiers and sailors stood in as religious leaders to fill the voids or sometimes even to challenge the leadership of particular chaplains. Soldiers and sailors also modified individual religious practices such as diet, fasting, and prayer to fit the context of military service. For example, it was nearly impossible to keep kosher as a Jew and challenging to fast before Mass as a Catholic. Some troops reconciled this as a time of regrettable but necessary compromise while others enjoyed increased flexibility of what they may have considered to be rigid expectations.

The challenges of wartime service also led soldiers and sailors to refine previously held religious beliefs as well as to adopt new interpretations based on personal experiences. The truism, “There are no atheists in foxholes,” rocketed to prominence during World War II as an explanation for the significance of religious faith to those who feared for their lives. However, the theism of those under such circumstances often differed significantly from traditional religious forms. In short, soldiers and sailors often clung to whatever religious beliefs or practices they saw as potentially beneficial. Some appealed for protection based on past spiritual allegiance while others made promises of future spiritual fidelity if allowed to survive. Some sought to manipulate chance by holding fast to objects they considered to be talismans or amulets such as lucky coins or

even traditional religious objects. Most significantly, US troops often embraced various religious beliefs that would seem contradictory in other contexts.

In addition, simply interacting with those from other backgrounds often challenged religious assumptions. Military life mixed soldiers and sailors from different religious backgrounds, from numerous ethnic identities, and from various regions.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, the military expected soldiers and sailors to depend on one another and work together to accomplish immediate tasks that would contribute to the overarching goal of victory against a common enemy. Thus, prejudice was not merely regrettable or distasteful; it threatened military success. Consequently, men and women in the military often formed work-related and even social bonds with people they would have likely had little interaction with in civilian life. As soldiers and sailors grew to know each other, it also became increasingly difficult to maintain previous assumptions based on suspicion and rumor about other religions. While some troops certainly found evidence to confirm negative assumptions, interpersonal connections forged as fellow soldiers and sailors more often resulted in increased sympathy and understanding.

The experience of wartime service also provided Americans with a unique opportunity to recreate or reestablish their own personal identities in ways that would have been difficult in civilian life. For many young men and women, entering the military loosened previous social connections of family and local community and placed them in a context where their peers knew little about their background. Even in peacetime, the social transition from youth to adulthood provided some opportunity for

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<sup>26</sup> The division between white and black troops remained the clear exception to this trend of mixing. Racial prejudice ran deep in American culture, and military leaders either shared these prejudices or were mostly unwilling to challenge them on a large scale.

self-determination. Wartime military service, however, weakened traditional mitigating factors such as family and community expectations while at the same time raising doubts that one might not even survive the conflict. As one might expect, many soldiers and sailors took liberties with sexual behavior, the consumption of alcohol, and gambling. At the same time, however, some soldiers and sailors also experimented with religious practices and beliefs as they sought to form or take ownership of their own religious identities. For example, a Protestant might attend Mass with a Catholic friend without having to defend himself against the anti-Catholic sentiments of his parents or grandparents. The transitory nature of military service also enabled men and women to explore religious options with less pressure to commit. They could browse with no obligation to buy. In addition, the discontinuity between civilian and military life provided a natural break where a young person could redirect his or her life, values, and commitments. After all, few truly expected soldiers or sailors to return from war unchanged.

Because this dissertation analyzes the experiences and reflections of everyday soldiers and sailors from a major military conflict, it draws from a rich collection of first-hand accounts. Recognizing the significance of World War II, veterans, their families, and archivists have preserved numerous and wide-ranging materials relating to soldiers' and sailors' experiences of the war. Many libraries and archives hold collections of correspondence as well as robust collections of later oral histories. In addition, veterans have written thousands of personal memoirs both published and unpublished. In short, the volume of potential source material is overwhelming. Fortunately, advances in digitization have made it possible to identify specific information within large data sets.

This greatly benefits those who seek to move beyond top-down approaches to history that depend on sources generated by institutions and leaders. Because this project explores the ways in which non-chaplains experienced or thought about religion, it draws heavily from accounts where the creator likely focused on other matters. Relatively few non-chaplains composed sustained in-depth reflections on religious matters, and those who did were not necessarily representative of the thoughts and attitudes of those for whom religion was less important. However, many soldiers and sailors mentioned aspects of religious practice or belief in passing in their letters home or in post-war memoirs or interviews. Such snippets are valuable because they reveal how non-elite or everyday people interacted with religion.<sup>27</sup> The predominant scholarly focus on sources created by chaplains or other religious leaders obscures such voices just as the light of the sun overwhelms the light of more distant stars. One shortcoming of drawing from sources generated by non-elites is that individual remarks about religion tend to be brief and often leave many questions unanswered. To the fullest extent possible, this dissertation contextualizes accounts within a particular person's experiences revealed in a source or collection. When known, associations with a particular military unit, station, or ship can also reveal significant aspects of context. In the end, however, the full experiences of the individual men and women who appear in this dissertation remain shrouded, but the collective whole still contributes greatly to how one understands religion in war. Without such voices, scholars risk obscuring the ways in which most soldiers and sailors interacted with religion.

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<sup>27</sup> The terms 'non-elite' or 'everyday' refer simply to one's lack of status as a religious leader. Thus, high-ranking military leaders would still be considered to be non-elites in terms of religious leadership even though they are certainly elites in their role as military leaders.

This dissertation is organized thematically in order to demonstrate the diversity of ways in which troops made sense of their experiences and shaped their religious worlds. The second chapter considers the nature of religious leadership in the military. It argues that non-professional lay leaders filled a vacuum of religious leadership in the absence of appropriate chaplains. To some extent, military policy embraced lay leadership as a solution to the challenge of religious coverage, especially for religious minorities. At the same time, however, lay leadership sometimes challenged the legitimacy of chaplains as soldiers and sailors demonstrated their own agency and independence.

The third chapter explores the ways in which soldiers and sailors worshiped together in order to demonstrate how some soldiers actively shaped their religious worlds. Many found great value in chaplain-led services, but they were not simply passive consumers. Wartime service provided numerous challenges to traditional forms of worship, but this also compelled men and women to reconsider what they felt was essential to worship. Soldiers and sailors worshiped at creative times, in creative places, and in creative ways. Some troops found new avenues of religious expression as they constructed spaces and objects for worship out of necessity. In addition, wartime relaxation of religious policies such as pre-worship fasting or bans on worshipping with other faiths led some to question the necessity or relevance of such policies in peacetime.

In addition to worship, some soldiers and sailors actively attended to their religious development through both personal and corporate forms of religious study. Chapter 4 examines the ways in which troops interacted with scripture as well as with other religious reading. Both the chaplain corps and civilian religious groups exerted themselves to produce and distribute testaments, prayer books, and other devotional



readings. However, these groups could not control how and if such materials were used. Soldiers and sailors selectively appropriated whatever materials they found inspiring or useful often with minimal attention to doctrinal purity. In addition, troops sometimes sought the support, wisdom, and accountability of others as they formed groups devoted to studying the Bible or other religious scriptures.

The act of selecting also emerged as soldiers and sailors dealt with fear both before and during battle. The fifth chapter describes how some troops sought supernatural intervention through religious practices such as prayer and through attempting to manipulate chance such as by carrying lucky objects. The chapter argues that many soldiers participated in religious mixing as they held beliefs and engaged in practices that some would find contradictory. In the end, the fear of not being able to influence one's future pushed troops to draw from whatever beliefs and practices they felt might benefit them regardless of theological consistency.

Chapter 6 analyzes the ways in which soldiers and sailors interpreted events through a religious lens as they sought to make meaning of their experiences in war. On a broad scale, some troops explained their initial participation in the conflict in terms of the United States being a divine instrument used to restrain evil in the world. Interpreting events became more immediate for those who experienced combat first-hand. They grappled with the religious significance of their own survival especially when contrasted with the loss of close friends. For some, survival seemed to provide evidence of God's protection or a divine plan, but others struggled to reconcile their conceptions of God and humanity when faced with seemingly random death and suffering in war. As a form of healing, many soldiers and sailors returned to the interpretation of the US as a divine

instrument as they sought to bring meaning to their own suffering and the losses of those around them.

Through the lens of religious holidays, Chapter 7 looks more specifically at another way in which troops reflected on their experiences of wartime in religious terms. Because religious holidays marked special times rather than everyday devotion, they provided an opportunity for even the marginally religious to interact with matters of faith. If a soldier and sailor only participated in one or two worship services per year, it was most likely on a holiday such as Christmas or Yom Kippur. Consequently, accounts of religious holidays uniquely give voice to the religious reflections of those holding only tenuous religious commitments. In addition, holidays also brought to the fore religious differences between Christians and Jews. Despite some friction, however, holidays often provided an opportunity for interfaith interaction and understanding.

Chapter 8 analyzes more broadly the ways in which soldiers and sailors responded to religious difference they encountered in the military. Some reacted by solidifying their commitment to a faith they had previously held loosely or taken for granted. This was particularly relevant for those who had grown up in communities with strong religious identities such as Mormons, urban Jews, and small-town evangelicals. Others became increasingly convinced of basic similarities between certain religious groups such as between Christian denominations or even between broad traditions such as between Christianity and Judaism. This likely influenced broader attitudes toward ecumenism following the war. The social interactions of military life also provided soldiers and sailors with unique opportunities to explore religious options and to interact with those from other religious traditions. Some found new religious homes while others reduced

their personal identification with a particular religious group. At the same time, service in the US military during a time of war provided an additional locus of religious commonality. As with many in the American public, soldiers and sailors often resonated with the ‘American Way of Life’ as an object of common religious devotion that transcended religious particularity.

In the end, it is difficult to overstate the significance of World War II as a transformative period for both individual Americans and the nation as a whole. For veterans, experiences both fearsome and mundane in the context of social dislocation challenged previously held religious assumptions and provided impetus and opportunities for religious change. As this generation of veterans dispersed back into civilian society, their war-forged attitudes toward religion shaped the American religious landscape.

## Chapter 2

### Exigencies of War: Lay Leadership

Serving aboard the USS *Howard W. Gilmore*, Quartermaster Henry Hiddinga filled a multiplicity of roles. Aside from his official duties on the submarine tender, Hiddinga also led a Bible study and provided spiritual counsel to his fellow enlisted sailors. Though his ship did have a navy chaplain, Hiddinga recalled that sailors would sometimes come to him instead of the chaplain. “The chaplain was a good guy, but they felt freer with me because I was not an officer,” he explained.<sup>1</sup> “If they got a ‘Dear John’ letter or if they were homesick, or lonely, I would talk to them and counsel them.” Sometimes, such meetings were opportunities for personal evangelism. In one case, Hiddinga encouraged a sailor to accept Christ as his savior before they prayed together regarding difficulties with his wife. The sailor did so and later reported that he and his wife had reconciled after she apologized for “getting involved” with another soldier. In addition to counseling individual shipmates, Hiddinga served as a Bible teacher. He recalled leading a Bible study in which about fifty men participated, and he reported that men would approach him individually with interpretive questions. For some soldiers and sailors, turning to a peer for religious guidance was more appealing than approaching a professional chaplain.

During World War II, US military leadership recognized the potential benefits of cultivating religion among the ranks and collaborated with various religious groups to provide leadership in the form of military chaplaincy. Historian Lyle Dorsett has argued

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<sup>1</sup> Henry J. Hiddinga, interview by Barbara A. Belt, transcript, May 1, 2003, Henry John Hiddinga Collection (AFC/2001/001/56304), Veterans History Project Collection, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

that chaplains contributed to military efficiency by helping soldiers and sailors bear the sacrifices that victory required.<sup>2</sup> The sheer number of US troops and the nature of military deployment, however, made formal religious leadership challenging though more than 9000 chaplains served in the US Army and over 3000 served in the US Navy during the course of World War II.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, military chaplains sought to encourage lay leadership to expand religious coverage for smaller religious traditions as well as those located in remote locations. Some US troops, however, found the religious leadership of chaplains dissatisfying for reasons including animosity toward a chaplain's particular religious tradition or personal differences with the chaplain himself. This chapter argues that lay leadership was a primary means by which soldiers and sailors actively shaped their religious world. Though non-chaplain religious leaders were often in harmony with military chaplains, the phenomenon of lay leadership represented an avenue by which some could challenge formal religious programs and express their own conceptions of religion.

The phenomenon of lay leadership has a long history among American religious groups. Sociologist of religion Karl H. Hertz argued that the impulse of common people to act as religious leaders is central to American religious identity.<sup>4</sup> According to Hertz, this impulse is evident from colonists who feared the imposition of an Anglican bishop before the revolution to the prohibitionist and women's suffragist movements in the early twentieth century. At the same time, American lay people have often been at the

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<sup>2</sup> Dorsett, *Serving God and Country*, 6.

<sup>3</sup> Honeywell and United States, Dept. of the Army, Office of the Chief of Chaplains, *Chaplains of the United States Army*, 214, 217; Drury and United States, Bureau of Naval Personnel, Chaplains Division., *The History of the Chaplain Corps, United States Navy, 1939-1949*, 2:311.

<sup>4</sup>Karl H. Hertz, "The Role of the Laity in American Christianity," *Mid-Stream* 22, no. 3-4 (1983): 326-341.

forefront of religious reforms that sought to restore vitality to denominations where professionalization seemed to smother enthusiasm. In the context of World War II, the impulse toward lay leadership further demonstrates this trend. As historian Richard Budd has argued, World War II was the first real test of the chaplain corps following its professionalization in the 1920s.<sup>5</sup> Professionalized military chaplains likely benefited US troops because of better training and structures of accountability. However, chaplains were not always available, and enlisted troops sometimes perceived them merely as officers. Thus, lay leadership proved to be a viable alternative or supplement to chaplains and a means by which soldiers and sailors could express their own religious impulses.

To some extent, the diversity of religious traditions and expressions complicates the application of lay leadership as a descriptive concept. For example, some traditions including various Baptist groups as well as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) did not have professional religious leaders though certain people were ordained or set-apart as officially recognized leaders.<sup>6</sup> In addition, some groups did not require specific academic training for ordination. Consequently, many religious leaders in civilian life did not meet the qualifications set by the US military to receive a commission in the chaplain corps. Also, some younger men intended to be formally ordained as religious leaders but had not yet met the educational requirements of their particular traditions. Finally, most who acted as lay leaders sought simply to fill a perceived need for religious leadership among their fellow troops. For simplicity, this study will define a lay leader as any individual who provided religious leadership in the

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<sup>5</sup> Budd, *Serving Two Masters*.

<sup>6</sup> For conciseness, "LDS Church" will be used for future references to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as an organization. The term "Mormons" refers to members of the LDS Church.

military but who was not a military chaplain. Thus, lay leadership is defined in terms of military role rather than religious ordination.

### **Composition: Official Propagation of Lay Leadership**

Recognizing the challenge of providing religious coverage, the US military cautiously encouraged lay leadership as an extension of the religious work of chaplains. Summarizing his assessment of chaplains in World War II, Dorsett emphasized that—despite the work of chaplains—lay leaders were essential to sustaining US troops spiritually.<sup>7</sup> Both the army and the navy oversaw their own distinct chaplain programs, but many parallels existed. In the army, chaplains retained their status as leaders from their particular tradition, but the army directed them to ensure that appropriate religious services were available for men and women from other traditions. When possible, chaplains were to seek out appropriate assistance from other chaplains or civilian religious leaders. Only when such arrangements were impossible did the army direct chaplains to recruit leaders from among the soldiers themselves. For example, chaplains assigned to troop transports were to arrange Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish services drawing from suitable lay leaders to cover traditions other than the chaplain's own.<sup>8</sup>

Official navy regulations did not mention lay leadership, but chaplains did encourage it on ships that were too small to warrant an assigned chaplain. As the war progressed, navy chaplains sought to provide resources to allow sailors to lead their own services when no chaplain was available. For example, chaplains at the Norfolk Navy

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<sup>7</sup> Dorsett, *Serving God and Country*, 211.

<sup>8</sup> US War Department and Roy J. Honeywell, *TM 16-205: The Chaplain* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1944), 61.

Yard published and distributed a small booklet that contained suggested religious services for each of the three dominant religious groups—Protestants, Catholics, and Jews.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, some naval chaplains assembled kits that included materials designed to enable lay people to conduct religious services in the absence of a chaplain. Chaplain R. W. Truitt described one such kit that contained various prayers, readings, and sermons as well as special services for religious holidays.<sup>10</sup>

Both the army and navy also included basic worship aids for lay leaders in their official songbooks. While the army and navy each maintained its own chaplain corps, the branches worked together to develop two songbooks designed for use in worship. In 1941, the US military printed a revised edition of the *Hymnal—Army and Navy*, first published in 1920.<sup>11</sup> Designed for use in chapels, this hymnbook included distinct sections devoted to Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish worship, but it was too bulky for common use when deployed overseas. Consequently, the US military developed a second, shorter songbook in 1941 titled *Song and Service for Ship and Field*.<sup>12</sup> This book contained worship services with responsive readings divided among the three dominant traditions followed by a selection of popular hymns. The preface made clear that the military intended this resource to be helpful to lay leaders as well as chaplains. “The orders of service are intended not only as a ready aid to the younger chaplains, but also as a guide to the faithful helpers who carry on divine worship in the absence of a

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<sup>9</sup> Norfolk Navy Yard (US), *A Chartered Course for the Religious Life of a United States Ship at Sea with No Chaplain on Board* (Portsmouth, VA: Norfolk Navy Yard, 1944); Drury and United States, Bureau of Naval Personnel, Chaplains Division., *The History of the Chaplain Corps, United States Navy, 1939-1949*, 2:278.

<sup>10</sup> Religious News Service, “Sans Chaplains, Ship Given Kits,” *Protestant Voice*, March 30, 1945, 3.

<sup>11</sup> Ivan L. Bennett, ed., *The Hymnal, Army and Navy* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1941).

<sup>12</sup> Ivan L. Bennett, ed., *Song and Service Book for Ship and Field* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1941).



chaplain.”<sup>13</sup> Though the army and navy favored the religious leadership of chaplains, both branches provided resources to equip lay people to lead services in the absence of chaplains.

In addition to materials produced by the military, civilian organizations provided resources designed to equip soldiers and sailors for lay leadership. For example, four cooperating Protestant agencies launched the Service Men’s Christian League (SMCL) in November 1942.<sup>14</sup> Designed to supplement and support the work of chaplains, the SMCL published the *Link*, a monthly periodical for soldiers and sailors that included daily devotional Bible readings as well as plans for weekly discussion meetings intended for use by self-organized lay people.<sup>15</sup> Chaplains distributed the *Link* widely with over 2.6 million copies printed during the first year alone.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the Jewish Welfare Board distributed over 1 million copies of an abridged prayer book that included dozens of services and prayers. The preface explained that the book was “designed to be used where the exigencies of life in the army or the navy do not permit attendance at regular synagogue services.”<sup>17</sup>

The provision of religious services for Jewish soldiers and sailors demonstrates how the US military encouraged lay leadership. A report to the army Chief of Chaplains from Chaplain William Veazie of the 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division illustrates how the army

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>14</sup> The SMCL was established through a partnership between The General Commission on Army and Navy Chaplains, The Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, The International Council of Religious Education, and The World’s Christian Endeavor Union.

<sup>15</sup> “Bible Bits and Topic Talks,” *Link*, February 1943, 37.

<sup>16</sup> Office of Chief of Chaplains, Army, “Circular Letter No. 282,” March 1, 1944, 300.5 Circular Letters V. 3, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>17</sup> Jewish Welfare Board, *Prayer Book: Abridged for Jews in the Armed Forces of the United States*, Revised (New York, NY: Press of the Jewish Publication Society, 1943), iv.

depended on lay leaders to provide coverage for Jewish soldiers even while still in the US. In the absence of a Jewish chaplain, the division relied on a civilian Jewish Welfare Board Worker as well as a rabbinical student to provide weekly services for its approximately 500 Jewish soldiers.<sup>18</sup> When the division was on maneuvers in Tennessee and separated from these civilian leaders, chaplains distributed materials from the Jewish Welfare Board to soldiers so that Jewish lay people could conduct their own services. Likewise, in a letter to his home rabbi, Sgt. Alfred Lustberg described arrangements made by a post chaplain in India.<sup>19</sup> Though some soldiers had been visiting a synagogue in Kolkata, Lustberg explained that the post chaplain had now arranged a rotation of Jewish soldiers who would lead Friday services. Lustberg was likely among these lay leaders because he asked his rabbi from home to send ideas for discussion topics. Similarly, Sgt. Alfred Sloan recalled that the Second Air Division's Jewish chaplain recruited him and six other laymen to lead Friday services for his group while deployed in England.<sup>20</sup> Though Sloan resisted, claiming that he could not remember enough Hebrew, Chaplain Klausner assured him that God understood English, too. Sloan reflected, "So, I was one of the guys that focused predominantly on English, because I had long since forgotten the little Hebrew that I had picked up for my *bar mitzvah*." He explained, "[I] did it in English and felt good about it, and [it] was a rather very positive experience." A little encouragement and flexibility seemed to embolden even reluctant lay leaders such as Sloan.

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<sup>18</sup> William D. Veazie, "Reply To SPCHG 211 Ch J (16 May 44), Jewish Personnel," May 26, 1944, Record Group 247, Entry 1, Box 5, National Archives at College Park, MD.

<sup>19</sup> Alfred G. Lustberg to Stanley R. Brav, December 12, 1943, Small Collections, SC 7552, Jacob Marcus Rader Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.

<sup>20</sup> Alfred V. Sloan Jr., interview by Shaun Illingworth and Peter Asch, July 6, 2005, 12, Rutgers Oral History Archives, New Brunswick, NJ.

## **Improvisation: Grassroots Expansion**

While military chaplains and civilian organizations sought to encourage and equip lay leaders, some soldiers and sailors took initiative to fill what they perceived as a vacuum of religious leadership. Often, these men served in areas isolated from the service of chaplains. At an army training base in China, Col. Harry Arthur, the commanding officer, initiated lay-led services of an interdenominational flavor. He explained, "I tell the men to come to worship God in the way they want. If they're 'shouting Baptists,' I want them to go ahead and shout. If they're 'holy rollers,' let them roll. It's their church."<sup>21</sup> Lt. (jg) Carroll Arnold reported that he tried to hold services regularly on the fantail of his destroyer escort. He claimed that a man newly come aboard wrote home, "I don't know what to make of them. They ain't catholic; they ain't protestant; they're sort of in-between."<sup>22</sup> Likewise, Lt. Carey Womble took pride in leading Sunday services on the ship upon which he served as a doctor. He wrote to the headquarters of the Episcopal Church that "the medical officer is in such an enviable position to do spiritual work of that sort on a destroyer."<sup>23</sup>

Though officers often filled in as religious leaders, enlisted men took on the task, as well. In a letter submitted to the *Link*, Chief Boatswain's Mate, Harry Jones reported, "If there are no chaplains, we hold meetings with anyone who cares to lead us."<sup>24</sup> He continued, "On my ship we had no chaplain, but there was a machinist's mate who had

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<sup>21</sup> Qtd. in Richard T. Baker, "U.S. Army Church, 'Laymen's Affair,' Claims Perfect Record," *Protestant Voice*, September 1, 1944, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Qtd. in "Wheaton at War," *Wheaton Alumni*, April 1945, 4.

<sup>23</sup> "War & Peace," *Living Church*, August 12, 1945, 10.

<sup>24</sup> "Batting the Breeze," *Link*, December 1943, 43.

been active in church circles at home; he made a splendid leader.”<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Sgt. Frank Baum organized religious services in several places including on a troop transport, in a theater in India, and at a base in Kunming, China.<sup>26</sup> When he arrived in China, Baum discovered that there was not yet a chaplain available, so he established a church that included a board of elders and a board of deacons. A chaplain eventually took over leadership of the group when he arrived a month later.

Struggling with isolation and despair on a life raft, some aviators and sailors responded by organizing corporate prayer and worship among the men. In January 1942, a small bomber ran out of fuel over the Pacific stranding Harold Dixon, Tony Pastula, and Gene Aldrich in a small rubber raft for thirty-four days. Dixon reported that the men prayed together each evening following Aldrich’s suggestion. Dixon reflected, “There was a comfort in passing our burden to Someone bigger than we in this empty vastness.”<sup>27</sup> Later that year, a group of eight aviators, including the world-famous Eddie Rickenbacker, found themselves in a similar predicament. According to accounts shared by several of the men, the group pulled their three small rafts together each night for an improvised worship service that included scripture reading, prayer, singing, and eventually even public confession. Most of their accounts emphasized that the men were ill prepared to provide spiritual leadership because they were all either unreligious or only marginally so.<sup>28</sup> One of the men, Pvt. James Bartek, however, had with him a

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Richard T. Baker, “From G.I. to ‘Bishop’ -- in 24 Hours!,” *Protestant Voice*, September 29, 1944, 1.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Trumbull, *The Raft* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1942), 82. See also “World Battlefronts: At Sea: They Shot an Albatross,” *Time*, March 23, 1942; Harold F. Dixon, “Three Men on a Raft,” *Life*, April 6, 1942.

<sup>28</sup> Edward V. Rickenbacker, *Seven Came Through: Rickenbacker’s Full Story* (Doubleday, Doran, 1943); James C Whittaker, *We Thought We Heard the Angels Sing: The Complete Epic Story of the Ordeal and Rescue of Those Who Were with Eddie Rickenbacker on the Plane Lost in the Pacific* (Dutton, 1943); John F. Bartek, *Life Out There: A Story of Faith and Courage* (C. Scribner’s Sons, 1943). See also:

pocket-testament from which they took turns reading both silently and out-loud. Lt. James Whittaker had previously been unreligious, but he reflected, “It was my newly found faith in God that sustained me.” Considering twenty days at sea, he wrote, “Had it not been for the fortitude built up in hours of prayer, I think we all would have abandoned hope.”<sup>29</sup> In another incident, SN2C Basil Izzi spent eighty-four days in a raft after a German submarine sunk a Dutch merchant ship he was securing near Brazil. He recalled that Ens. Maddox led prayer for the group each night for several weeks until he grew too weary. He eventually died on the seventy-sixth night.<sup>30</sup> Finally, in May 1943, Lt. Louis Zamperini found himself stranded with two others in a raft after his B-24 malfunctioned and crashed in the Pacific. Zamperini recalled praying a great deal and that he inspired the other two men to pray with him.<sup>31</sup>

Religious leadership was perhaps the most challenging for those held in prisoner of war camps. Officers, including chaplains, were typically separated from enlisted personnel, and captors often restricted religious activity. Pvt. Albert Senna recalled gathering in secret with a small group of men to pray in a Japanese prison camp. “Being

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“Rickenbacker Rescue: Captain and Crew Recuperate on South Pacific Island,” *Life*, December 7, 1942; Edward V. Rickenbacker, “Pacific Mission Part II: In Which the Navy Rescues Seven Castaways after 21 Days’ Drifting,” *Life*, February 1, 1943; Edward V. Rickenbacker, “Pacific Mission Part III: In Which ‘Rick’ Resumes His Trip and Visits the Fighting Fronts,” *Life*, February 8, 1943; Edward V. Rickenbacker, “When a Man Faces Death,” *American Magazine*, 1943; Hans Christian Adamson, *Eddie Rickenbacker* (New York: Macmillan, 1946); “Love and Faith Saved Him, Says Adamson,” *Washington Post*, November 25, 1942, sec. B; John F. Bartek, interview by David Lewis and Duane Cox, November 20, 1998, John Bartek Papers, RG 528, Special Collections and Archives, Auburn University, AL.

<sup>29</sup> Whittaker, *We Thought We Heard the Angels Sing*, 99.

<sup>30</sup> Basil D. Izzi, Oral History - Battle of the Atlantic, 1941-1945, Box 15, World War II Interviews, Operational Archives Branch, Naval Historical Center, Washington, DC, accessed August 17, 2012.; Mark Murphy, *83 Days: The Survival of Seaman Izzi* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1943), 86.

<sup>31</sup> Louis S. Zamperini, interview by George A. Hodak, June 1988, 59, LA84 Foundation. See also: Louis Zamperini and Helen Itria, *Devil at My Heels: The Story of Louis Zamperini* (New York: Dutton, 1956); Louis Zamperini and David Rensin, *Devil at My Heels* (New York: Morrow, 2003); Laura Hillenbrand, *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption* (New York: Random House, 2010).

a Catholic, we used to say the Rosary, a couple of guys, and we'd hide behind the barracks."<sup>32</sup> If discovered, the guards would force them to disperse. In a diary he kept while a prisoner in Stalag IV-B, Sgt. William Rucker mentioned attending Protestant worship services that he and his fellow prisoners "held among ourselves." Rucker wrote that he found the services "very comforting" and that he intended to attend services regularly back in the US.<sup>33</sup> The possession of religious literature sometimes also presented a challenge. When captured by German forces, T/Sgt. Aben Caplan debated what to do with his Jewish prayer book. He feared to be identified as a Jew, but he wanted to remain faithful since he believed that God had saved his life in the preceding battle. Caplan kept his prayer book, but his German-speaking skills were helpful and made his captors willing to overlook his Jewish identity. When he finally arrived at Stalag VII-A, Caplan found some other Jewish soldiers who invited him to participate in services they were holding in a washroom. In his diary, Caplan wrote, "I was glad I had my prayer book as it was from such a book that another more learned fellow P.W. conducted the services."<sup>34</sup> For Caplan and his fellow prisoners, it seems that the Jewish Welfare Board's publication equipped them to minister to one another in a very dark place.

While some sought to provide religious leadership to those with previous religious commitments, other soldiers and sailors tried to reach out to those with tenuous or no religious connections. Especially among conservative Protestants, evangelism

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<sup>32</sup> Albert J. Senna, interview by Shaun Illingworth and James Herrera, October 18, 2005, 23, Rutgers Oral History Archives, New Brunswick, NJ.

<sup>33</sup> William B Rucker, "Prisoner of War Diaries of William B. Rucker," n.d., Small Collections, SC 15389, Jacob Marcus Rader Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.

<sup>34</sup> Aben S. Caplan, "Typed Copy of Original POW Diary in Letter Form," March 19, 1945, 12, AFC/2001/001/5190, Veterans History Project Collection, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

often became a key focus for lay leaders. Upon arriving in Washington DC, Chief Gunner's Mate James Downing noted hundreds of military personnel awaiting movement to other areas and concluded that they needed "an aggressive evangelistic effort to reach them with the Gospel."<sup>35</sup> Downing soon established a servicemen's center where those who spent the night were invited to a Gospel service the next morning. Similar evangelistic outreaches continued overseas. Marine Cpl. Warren Brenner reported that he and seven other marines organized nightly prayer meetings on their landing ship in the weeks preceding their landing in the Marshall Islands. In the last three or four nights, the group had swelled to 200-300 men. Brenner reported that seventy-eight men "confessed Christ." According to Brenner, 400 men had also attended the chaplain's last Sunday service, but only thirty "accepted the Lord publicly."<sup>36</sup> Marine Lt. Jim Lucas recounted that Harris Shuman, a fellow marine, led weeknight revival services in a civilian Baptist church in New Zealand. Lucas described the services as "a taste of 'old-time religion' with camp-meeting fervor" attended by marines, soldiers, sailors, and locals.<sup>37</sup> For some troops, similar meetings proved to be life-changing experiences. A cryptographer with the Women's Army Corps, Cpl. Mary Johnston recalled how she became a "born again-Christian" through the ministry of a group of enlisted personnel who were holding tent meetings in the southwest Pacific.<sup>38</sup> She had volunteered to play the organ for them, but she explained that she "got much, much more" from the experience. Significantly,

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<sup>35</sup> James W. Downing, "My Story," Chap. 10.

<sup>36</sup> Warren Brenner, "Churches Half-Way Around the World," in *Religion in the Ranks*, ed. Martin Leuschner, Charles F Zummach, and Walter E. Kohrs (Cleveland, OH: Roger Williams Press, 1946), 91–92.

<sup>37</sup> Jim Lucas, *Combat Correspondent* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1944), 163–5.

<sup>38</sup> Mary B. Johnston, interview by Philip N. Hunter, December 3, 2009, 7, AFC/2001/001/79070, Veterans History Project Collection, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

Johnston specifically noted that her conversion had not come because of her experiences in chaplain-led services where she had also volunteered her musical talents.

### **Dissonance**

Though the US military promoted lay leadership in order to extend religious coverage, some lay leaders and chaplains experienced conflict. Certain lay leaders were openly critical of chaplains. Conversely, as the established religious leadership, chaplains occasionally sought to regulate the leadership of those who seemed too extreme.

Some soldiers and sailors stepped in as religious leaders because their experiences with chaplains dissatisfied them. For example, Marine Lt. Cornelius Vanderbreggen openly criticized chaplains who he considered to be deficient. After his first eight months in the marines, he wrote, “I have yet to hear a chaplain present the Lord Jesus Christ as the divine Saviour who came to die for the sins of the world.”<sup>39</sup> He worried that religiously uncommitted troops would turn away from Christianity if they were to “go to chapel and hear some moral essay on courage, or some modernistic sermon that tells them to have faith in themselves, or faith in mankind, or faith in democracy.”<sup>40</sup> Consequently, Vanderbreggen led his own Bible studies and prayer meetings wherever the marines sent him. In California at Camp Pendleton, he started a daily Bible study that met for two to four hours in the company storeroom.<sup>41</sup> Stationed in Guam, Vanderbreggen organized weekly Bible classes for the Fourteenth Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion to which he had been assigned. Each meeting consisted of singing, testimonies,

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<sup>39</sup> Cornelius Vanderbreggen, *Letters of a Leatherneck* (privately printed, 1948), 34.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.



and Bible study. He also reported that the group celebrated the Lord's Supper together recalling, "Some twenty of us knelt together there in the chemical warfare hut around a long table made of packing crates."<sup>42</sup> Writing from Burma to his alma mater, Ed Bundy criticized chaplains in a similar manner. He reported that he and several other men had organized a weekly Bible class because they were dissatisfied with their "ritualistic, yet worldly chaplain."<sup>43</sup> In an unidentified soldier's letter from Europe, a corporal complained that their chaplain wanted to go home and took little interest in leading daily services. When the chaplain was on leave, the corporal started reading aloud from the New Testament to a small group of men each evening as suggested by a sergeant. The corporal tried to involve the chaplain when he returned. The chaplain, however, was not interested, and the daily readings ceased.<sup>44</sup> For men such as these, lay leadership seemed necessary to supplement or even replace what they considered to be the failed leadership of military chaplains.

While less critical of chaplains, some US troops from minority religious groups reported that chaplains were occasionally barriers to their lay leadership. A returned missionary of the LDS Church, Marine private first class J. Murray Rawson asked the division chaplain to announce the time and location of a LDS service that Rawson hoped to lead for the men of the Fourth Marine Division stationed on Maui.<sup>45</sup> The Catholic chaplain refused, suggesting instead that Rawson participate in Catholic services.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>43</sup> "Wheaton at War," *Wheaton Alumni*, May 1945, 2.

<sup>44</sup> United States, *Report on the Army Chaplain in the European Theater*, Report of the General Board, United States Forces, European Theater Study No. 68 (Bad Nauheim, Germany: The General Board, U.S.F.E.T, 1945), sec. Appendix 16, 42. This formerly classified report included comments copied from soldiers' letters by officers who censored their mail. Soldiers were identified only by rank.

<sup>45</sup> J. Murray Rawson, interview by Albert Winkler, October 14, 1999, 29, Manuscript Collection 2779, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

Rawson then wrote a letter explaining the situation to John Boud, an LDS chaplain stationed in Honolulu. Soon after, the division chaplain called Rawson back to his office and disparaged him for going over his head. The division chaplain had received a letter from the supervising navy chaplain of the area directing him to make the arrangements. Another returned LDS missionary, Army Air Corps private Ross Christensen, reported a similar conflict with a chaplain in a letter to his parents from England. Christensen had been leading Tuesday night meetings for LDS personnel, but he claimed that Chaplain Lewandowski had scheduled Catholic meetings at the same time and location as the LDS meetings on two occasions.<sup>46</sup> Christensen complained to Chaplain Knies who supported the LDS meetings. Soon after, Chaplain Lewandowski pulled Christensen aside and “trimmed” him down for going over his head. After expressing his frustration, however, Chaplain Lewandowski apologized for scheduling the conflicting meeting claiming that he had simply forgotten about the LDS group. In both Rawson’s and Christensen’s cases, the structure of the respective chaplain corps seems to have worked. Supervising chaplains intervened to mitigate the bias or failure of individual chaplains.

Though military chaplains encouraged lay leadership, some chaplains attempted to regulate the leadership of those soldiers and sailors who they considered over-zealous or even disruptive. For example, Marine Lt. Vanderbreggen criticized certain chaplains, but some chaplains and commanding officers censured him, as well. First, a regimental chaplain confronted Vanderbreggen regarding his daily storeroom Bible study at Camp Pendleton, California, and requested that he terminate it because another chaplain had

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<sup>46</sup> Ross T. Christensen to His Parents, August 14, 1944, 5–6, Ross T. Christensen Papers, 1939-1989, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

complained about the content.<sup>47</sup> Vanderbreggen asked for a few days to consider and remarked that the request seemed to violate the principle of religious freedom. Soon after, however, the commanding officer of the battalion notified Vanderbreggen that an order had come down from the regiment directing the termination of the Bible class. In addition, the battalion commander asked him to cease all religious work in the unit because they had chaplains for that purpose. Vanderbreggen reluctantly agreed after clarifying that he could still talk to men personally if they inquired. Two weeks later, however, the battalion adjutant presented him with a formal statement from the battalion commander accusing him of violating an order and that Vanderbreggen's religious influence was reducing the effectiveness of some enlisted men in their duties. Soon after, the regimental commander, the battalion commander, and the two chaplains met with Vanderbreggen to discuss the matter. The battalion commander stated that he no longer wanted Vanderbreggen under his command. Consequently, Vanderbreggen was soon transferred to another unit at another camp with a negative report added to his file.

Vanderbreggen reported another conflict with a chaplain that occurred more than a year later on the island of Guam. When his official workload slackened, Vanderbreggen began visiting wounded troops in a nearby hospital for evangelistic purposes along with several other men.<sup>48</sup> In addition to talking with men individually, Vanderbreggen's group led singing and solicited public testimony at least two nights per week. The group also led services in the hospital chapel, which drew people from all over the island. After several months, however, hospital authorities banned the men from

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<sup>47</sup> Vanderbreggen, *Letters of a Leatherneck*, 59–69.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 187, 205.

ministering in the wards accusing them of staying too late and being disruptive.<sup>49</sup> The hospital chaplain also denied them further use of the chapel because participants were not limited to those in the facility. Notably, Vanderbreggen attributed the opposition from chaplains at Camp Pendleton and Guam as being from Satan. In short, he believed that Satan was using misguided chaplains and other military leaders to suppress his evangelistic work.<sup>50</sup> Though the chaplains' perspectives are unknown in these cases, it seems likely that Vanderbreggen's aggressive evangelism and the particularity of his faith challenged the ecumenical religious vision promoted by the navy chaplain corps.

Army chaplains in the Pacific also perceived a need to regulate the work of certain lay leaders. Following an inspection of bases in the Pacific in late spring 1944, Chaplain Hunter submitted a report to the general headquarters of US Army Forces in the Pacific. He recommended that chaplains should continue to encourage lay leadership but that a chaplain should supervise lay leaders in their work. At one base, he noted, "A group of enlisted men were holding pentecostal services that were causing some disturbance in the area."<sup>51</sup> The situation was remedied, however, when several chaplains took over leadership of the meetings. Hunter reported that the services were now "serving a very constructive purpose."<sup>52</sup> Though he believed that chaplains should support such groups through active involvement, Hunter also cautioned that attempting to balance the demands of diverse groups could overwhelm a chaplain. "There are a large number of representatives of these small 'off color' groups which consider themselves 'separate and distinct' and it is an impossibility to give each the representation it feels it

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 209–10.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 65, 69, 209–10.

<sup>51</sup> United States Army, Pacific Forces, *History of the Chaplains' Activities in the Pacific*, 1946, 107.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

rightly deserves.”<sup>53</sup> In Europe, the Army Chaplain Corps noted that “members of the more zealous fundamentalist denominations” often met together for fellowship.<sup>54</sup> The report concluded, “Wise chaplains recognized the fact that these informal organizations met a definite need in the religious life and experience of the participants, and by intelligent guidance they frequently were able to use them as a lever to promote the more formal types of religious observance in the unit.”<sup>55</sup> Thus, these supervisory chaplains noted the benefit of lay groups, but they sought to direct this religious energy into the formal religious program favored by most chaplains. In this way, military leaders sought to preserve the benefits of religion for military effectiveness by attempting to mitigate potential divisions along religious lines.

### **Harmony**

Friction sometimes occurred between chaplains and lay leaders, but it seems that this relationship was more often mutually supportive. Soldiers and sailors stepping in as religious leaders usually respected the chaplains they did encounter. This is especially evident in the relationship between chaplains and religious minorities such as Mormons and Jews. First, one must qualify how the concept of lay leadership applied to members of the LDS Church. In this particular religious body, most adult males had been ordained to the priesthood and were expected to exercise leadership within local groups. The LDS Church, however, did not compensate them financially, and these men had little academic training for this role. Thus, many Mormon men who served in World War II expected to continue their religious leadership in the military as they had as civilians—as part-time

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>54</sup> United States, *Report on the Army Chaplain in the European Theater*, 59.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

non-professionals. At the same time, most Mormon troops stood little chance of meeting one of the few LDS chaplains scattered across the military. Consequently, Mormon troops expected little of chaplains aside from perhaps providing a space where they could hold their own meetings. When possible, however, LDS chaplains would appoint “group leaders” from among the troops who were expected to lead regular meetings and submit records to LDS Church authorities.

In some cases, non-LDS chaplains recruited Mormon men to lead LDS services in their area. A medical officer in the Eighty-Fourth Infantry, 2Lt. Charles Henry recalled that the division chaplain recruited him to lead services for LDS men in the unit because he was the only LDS officer. He agreed, and he and the chaplain worked together to schedule services for the twenty-five known Mormons. Soon, however, these men invited non-Mormon friends and attendance swelled to over one-hundred. Henry recalled, “The Division Chaplain commented if he could get that large of an attendance he would think the world would be ending.”<sup>56</sup> Chaplains were often supportive of such work even if men organized it themselves. In a letter to his home church, Rodney McCoy related how he and a couple other men organized weekly LDS services on the USS *Hornet* where the ship’s chaplain even lent them his communion cups.<sup>57</sup> In other cases, non-LDS officers recruited Mormon men to fill in as chaplains for their entire unit. Cpl. Royal Meservy reported that his commanding officer in the 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry asked him to fill in if his group was ever without a chaplain. Eventually captured during the Battle of the Bulge, Meservy led evening prayers and songs for the POWs in his barracks at

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<sup>56</sup> Charles H. Henry, “Military Service of Charles H. Henry,” unpublished manuscript, n. d., 15, MSS 2350 no. 310, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

<sup>57</sup> Rodney A. McCoy, “Book of Mormon Class Held on S.S. Hornet,” *Church News (Salt Lake City, UT)*, July 17, 1943.

Stalag IX-B.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, following a lethal accident with explosives in France, Sgt. Myron Hatch's company commander asked him to act as a chaplain for the dead. Hatch recalled that he led a service for the men and oversaw their burial. He reflected, "It was difficult and lonely holding burial service in this desolate and foreign land for men who had become my friends."<sup>59</sup>

Most often, LDS soldiers and sailors took the responsibility of religious leadership upon themselves. A radar technician in the Navy, Chester Gilgen approached his chaplain about leading LDS services soon after his arrival at Port Lyautey, Morocco. Gilgen recalled that some twelve enlisted men and officers participated in "very inspirational meetings with hymns, talks, and the Sacrament."<sup>60</sup> Serving on a navy minesweeper, Radarman Grant Bitter sought and received permission to lead LDS services. Five to seven men regularly participated including a non-LDS friend who Bitter eventually baptized in Honolulu.<sup>61</sup> In the army, LDS soldiers initiated services, as well, and chaplains typically cooperated. Sgt. Richard Mills reported that he and a few other LDS priesthood holders organized regular meetings on their troop ship on the way to the Philippines. Having originally offered the ship's library for the meetings, the Catholic transport chaplain soon traded worship spaces with the group because it had grown larger

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<sup>58</sup> Royal R. Meservy, "Memoir," unpublished manuscript, 2001, 1, 4, MSS 2350 no. 287, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

<sup>59</sup> Myron Hatch, "I Am Not a Hero -- I Am an American," unpublished manuscript, 2000, 3, MSS OH 1912, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT; Myron Hatch, interview by Albert Winkler, transcript, February 9, 2000, MSS OH 1912, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

<sup>60</sup> Chester M. Gilgen, "Memoir," unpublished manuscript, n. d., MSS 2350 no. 34, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

<sup>61</sup> Grant Bunderson Bitter, "My Military Service," unpublished manuscript, 1991, 2, MSS 2350 no. 18, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

than his own had.<sup>62</sup> A Japanese-American who served in the 442<sup>nd</sup> Infantry regiment, Arthur Nishimoto described how about ten LDS men from his unit would gather for sacrament services led by Roy Tsuya. According to Nishimoto, the chaplains were rather surprised at their self-organization, but they proved to be quite cooperative.<sup>63</sup>

Like LDS troops, Jewish soldiers and sailors often filled in as religious leaders in the absence of Jewish chaplains. As with LDS lay leaders, some Jewish troops volunteered their services while non-Jewish chaplains recruited others. For example, Sgt. Gottfried Neuburger arranged a series of services during Rosh Hashanah for any Jewish troops in the part of France near his station. Though only twelve men came to the first service, two-hundred participated in Yom Kippur services soon after. In addition, Neuburger recruited the assistance of a Protestant chaplain who drove with him to Paris to borrow a *sefer Torah* from a local synagogue. The same chaplain also preached the sermon at the final services. Neuburger explained, “He may not have proclaimed any *hidushim* (novel rabbinical thoughts) but he touched everyone’s heart.”<sup>64</sup> In a letter to his parents, Sgt. Leo Spivack described how their group’s dentist, Capt. Silverstein, arranged a Passover seder in China since there was no chaplain in the area. The group used a supply of matzahs from India and even secured permission to serve wine from the local Red Cross, which provided a space for the celebration.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Richard S. Mills, “Latter-Day Saints in the Military Information Sheet,” unpublished manuscript, 2000, MSS 2350 no. 79, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

<sup>63</sup> Arthur K. Nishimoto and Roy I. Tsuya, transcript, November 2001, 4, MSS 2350 no. 771, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT; Roy I. Tsuya, “My Journal,” unpublished manuscript, n.d., MSS 2350 no. 1455, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

<sup>64</sup> Gottfried Neuburger, “An Orthodox G.I. Fights a War: Memoirs of a Stiff-Necked Jew,” *Commentary*, March 1949, 268–9.

<sup>65</sup> Leo Spivack, “Letter to Parents, April 8, 1944,” in *Jewish Youth at War: Letters from American Soldiers*, ed. Isaac E. Rontch (New York: Marstin Press, 1945), 207.



While Neuburger and Silverstein provided religious leadership of their own volition, other soldiers responded to the invitations of others. As the 346<sup>th</sup> Infantry regiment prepared to depart for Europe, a Protestant chaplain in the unit, Capt. Mouer, recruited Pfc. Victor Geller to provide religious leadership to Jewish soldiers on their transport. Geller reported that Chaplain Mouer even provided a list of over two-hundred Jewish troops in the unit. When Geller arrived on the transport, the ship's chaplain provided him with credentials that allowed him to move about the entire ship as well as the use of a stock of prayer books, prayer shawls, and other religious materials. Geller recalled that fifty to seventy men participated in daily services while more than two-hundred attended Sabbath services on the ship. Geller was nervous about these extra duties, but he grew into the role. "Nine months later," he reflected, "I was a veteran chaplain calling men to services on the forward deck of a weary Liberty ship."<sup>66</sup>

The experiences of African-American troops offer another useful glimpse into the ways in which soldiers and sailors provided religious leadership apart from chaplains. In a report to his superiors, Bertram Smith, a white chaplain, described lay leadership among the black troops to which he was assigned. "Every Colored unit, with one exception, of this Command has one or more preachers," he wrote, "They conduct Sunday and Weekday Services, an undertaking rarely found in white units."<sup>67</sup> Smith evaluated the services quite positively, "The preaching was fervent and good, the singing was excellent, the devotional element was real and deep."<sup>68</sup> Similarly, a letter of commendation praised the lay leadership of Cpl. D.C. Morton of the 923<sup>rd</sup> Air Base

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<sup>66</sup> Victor B. Geller, *Take It Like a Soldier: A Memoir* (Jerusalem: V. Geller, 2007), 243.

<sup>67</sup> United States Army, Pacific Forces, *History of the Chaplains' Activities in the Pacific*, 400.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 401.

Security Battalion. Prior to his induction, Morton had attended classes at Morehouse College's School of Religion, and his pastor had ordained him as a Baptist minister. When he arrived in the Pacific, Morton led Sunday evening services because he found that there was no chaplain available. The unknown author of the letter concluded, "The Battalion Commander and his Staff are in whole hearted accord with the work that Cpl. Morton has been doing."<sup>69</sup> A similar anonymous statement celebrated the leadership of Pfc. George W. Graham of the 992<sup>nd</sup> Air Base Security Battalion. A lay reader in the Episcopal Diocese of Georgia as a civilian, Graham continued his religious leadership in the army.<sup>70</sup> The report on chaplains' activities in the Pacific summarized the significance of lay leadership among black soldiers:

The religious work of Colored enlisted personnel should have a part in the history of this war. Quietly and unobtrusively, in spite of handicaps and circumstances, these men have been true and faithful to their God, they have been of great and useful influence in their units, they have brought many to Christ. In the damp and dark jungles, they have brought home and country to their comrades by and through worship. Their efforts are a glowing record of the power of God in the hearts of men. They are to be commended for their zeal, courage, and devotion.<sup>71</sup>

In these cases, lay leaders and chaplains seemed to have developed a harmonious relationship. Enlisted men were willing to provide religious leadership when chaplains could not.

In similar ways, soldiers and sailors from dominant religious groups also provided religious leadership that harmonized with the work of chaplains. For example, when no priest was available to lead mass, Catholic soldiers and sailors would sometimes gather for lay-led services. A former army ordnance officer, John Rosta estimated that he was

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 402.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 403.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

able to participate in chaplain-led Mass two to three times a month while overseas. Occasionally on troop ships and in the field, no chaplain was available for Mass, so he and other Catholic men would meet to read from the Gospel, pray, and sing hymns.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, Joseph McCartney recalled that Catholic chaplains were seldom available to sailors aboard smaller ships in the navy. McCartney described how a lieutenant gathered men for weekly services on the bow of their submarine chaser in the Pacific.<sup>73</sup> Serving on the USS *Guam*, Sailor Edward Grymski noted in his diary that his ship had a Protestant chaplain but no Catholic chaplain. Consequently, he gathered with other Catholics for their own lay led service. He explained, “We all said the Rosary, and prayed some, and one of the officers read the Gospel, and that was all.”<sup>74</sup> In each of these cases, Catholic troops took responsibility for their own religious leadership, but they did so in extenuating circumstances when no chaplain of their particular tradition was available.

Protestant soldiers and sailors were also willing to fill in as religious leaders in the absence of chaplains. Diversity among Protestant traditions, however, meant that such flexibility varied in significance. For example, the religious compromises made by troops who identified with groups such as the Protestant Episcopal Church or Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod roughly paralleled those of Roman Catholics. In each of these traditions, only an ordained clergyperson could properly consecrate the sacrament of Holy Communion—the focal point of most services. This resulted in two basic

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<sup>72</sup> John G. Rosta, interview by G. Kurt Piehler and Mark Rybak, transcript, October 18, 1997, 49, Rutgers Oral History Archives, New Brunswick, NJ.

<sup>73</sup> Joseph B. McCartney, interview by G. Kurt Piehler, transcript, July 7, 1994, 23, Rutgers Oral History Archives, New Brunswick, NJ.

<sup>74</sup> Edward S. Grymski, “U.S.S. Guam Diary of Guy Grimm,” unpublished manuscript, 2002, 99, Edward S. Grymski Collection (AFC/2001/001/1496), Veterans History Project Collection, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

difficulties. First, according to doctrines of these traditions, adherents were not to participate in this sacrament if a minister or priest from outside their own tradition led it because the consecration would not be valid. Second, any worship service that did not include this sacrament was of lesser status. Consequently, the absence of proper chaplains affected how Episcopalians and Lutherans worshipped more seriously than it did Protestants from traditions that interpreted religious leadership more loosely. At the same time, however, soldiers and sailors from Baptist, Methodist, or other Protestant groups could more easily fill in as valid religious leaders in the absence of chaplains or to supplement their work.

Some Protestant soldiers and sailors organized regularly occurring worship services. For example, Don Stanley described the development of a Sunday night worship service that he and a group of other men led on an island in the South Pacific. After six months, about seventy-five attended regularly. In addition, they held a ten-day series of revival meetings where several different men preached. Stanley explained, “We pray about who is to speak; and when he is chosen, we hold him up in prayer.”<sup>75</sup> Notably, Stanley mentioned that a chaplain preached one night at the revival service, but military chaplains seem mostly uninvolved. On the destroyer USS *Haggard*, Radarman Paul Marth reported that he led regular services because his ship was not large enough to warrant a chaplain. He wrote, “We started with six and ten people, and fifty come regularly now.”<sup>76</sup> From the Pacific, Ralph Christensen wrote about leading worship on his ship. “Our LST is about the only one out here that has Sunday services . . . they are

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<sup>75</sup> Don Stanley, “The Coral Church,” *Christ’s Ambassadors Herald*, December 1944, 13.

<sup>76</sup> Paul Marth, “Letter to the Editor,” *Wheaton Alumni*, October 1944, 3.

very encouraging for we have quite a nucleus.”<sup>77</sup> He also noted that they had two conversions and that one of these men had been baptized though by whom is unclear. A former engineering officer on a landing ship, William Stevenson recalled that he helped lead Sunday worship while underway on the Pacific.<sup>78</sup> To add to the service, he located recordings of church organ music that they played over the ship’s public address system. Similarly, Lt. (jg) Alan Emery led services on his coast guard frigate. According to his wife, Emery’s fellow sailors chose him “to be in charge all Protestant religious activities” and that “both crew and officers [were] responding in a remarkable way.”<sup>79</sup> While most did not pursue any official certification, Lt. (jg) A.D. Dennison, Jr. sought and received formal appointment as a lay leader from an American religious body—likely the Protestant Episcopal Church.<sup>80</sup> Such certification authorized him to lead special services for the men on his ship.

Though some Protestant soldiers and sailors led worship in the absence of chaplains, others ministered to their peers through leading Bible studies or fellowship groups. In many of these instances, the work of lay leaders often supplemented that of chaplains who led more formalized services for larger groups. Often, such fellowship groups operated under the auspices of organizations such as the Service Men’s Christian League (SMCL) or Navigators. For example, Louis Gehr reported that he actively participated in a unit of the SMCL that met on Wednesday nights at his air station in England.<sup>81</sup> In addition to weekly fellowship meetings, the group organized a “gospel

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<sup>77</sup> Ralph Christensen, “Letter to the Editor,” *Wheaton Alumni*, May 1945, 3.

<sup>78</sup> William J. Stevenson, “Ensign William J. ‘Steve’ Stevenson: Engineering Officer,” in *Lucky 17: Narratives from an LSM Crew as Part of the Amphibious Navy Fleet during WWII*, ed. William J. Stevenson, 2001, 12.

<sup>79</sup> Marian Smith Emery, “Letter to the Editor,” *Wheaton Alumni*, November 1944, 5.

<sup>80</sup> “Officer Gets Himself Named Boat Chaplain,” *Protestant Voice*, January 28, 1944, 7.

<sup>81</sup> Louis Gehr, “Letter to the Editor,” *Wheaton Alumni*, October 1944, 1.

team” that led evangelistic services in neighboring communities. While stationed at Duke University with the navy, Bob Cook described how he and a group of eight others met regularly for fellowship and support. He explained, “We call ourselves ‘The Navigators’ and are really attempting with His help to navigate for Him.”<sup>82</sup> Writing from the USS *Alaska*, Robert George reported that he and some fellow sailors had organized a Wednesday night Bible class that met in the ship’s library.<sup>83</sup> Though George did not mention a chaplain, this particular ship, a large cruiser, was large enough to warrant at least one chaplain. Stationed on an unspecified Pacific island, T/Sgt. Joseph Cassel wrote that he and several other men gathered each Sunday evening for a Bible class.<sup>84</sup> As with some other fellowship groups, these men also had an evangelistic focus. Cassel explained that some of the men were planning a series of worship services and that they had invited him to assist by preaching. In each of these cases, men actively served as religious leaders for those around them. Whether or not chaplains were nearby or involved, the work of most lay leaders largely harmonized with the religious programs favored by chaplains.

In the end, the challenges of wartime served as a formidable barrier to traditional forms of religious organization and expression. Service in the military took young men and women out of familiar communities and patterns of social relations while at the same time placing many in stressful if not terrifying situations. Some soldiers and sailors

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<sup>82</sup> Bob Cook, “Letter to the Editor,” *Wheaton Alumni*, October 1944, 4. It is unclear whether Cook’s group was formally associated with the Navigators, a Christian ministry designed as an evangelistic outreach to sailors.

<sup>83</sup> Robert George, “Letter to the Editor,” *Wheaton Alumni*, October 1944.

<sup>84</sup> Joseph Frank Cassel, “Letter to the Editor,” *Wheaton Alumni*, May 1945.

responded to these challenges as lay people, providing religious leadership such as organizing worship services and fellowship groups. At the same time, military authorities constructed a formal program of religious leadership recruiting civilian religious professionals to serve as military chaplains. Realistically, however, physical and social separation as well as the diversity of religious traditions limited the influence of chaplains. Chaplains were simply not able to be all things to all people in all places. Consequently, non-professional lay leaders played an important part in everyday religious expression among soldiers and sailors. At times, the relationship between these lay leaders and military chaplains was dissonant. Some soldiers and sailors challenged the validity and effectiveness of particular chaplains, and some chaplains sought to regulate lay leaders who seemed too extreme in belief or practice. Overall, however, the lay leadership of most soldiers and sailors harmonized well with the goals of and methods of military chaplains. Chaplains cultivated lay leadership to extend religious coverage to minority religious groups as well as to troops who found themselves in isolated places—small ships, remote islands, or prisoner of war camps. To understand religious expression during World War II, one must look beyond military chaplaincy to those who interacted with soldiers and sailors as peers.

## Chapter 3

### Expressing Worship

Not all was silent as a landing ship carrying men from the 394<sup>th</sup> Infantry regiment plowed through the English Channel to deliver its deadly cargo to France. A former army captain, Charles Roland recalled that some men were attuned to the words of their battalion chaplain, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Edwin Hampton, as he led a worship service. “The soldier audience sat in vehicles or half-sat leaning against the barrels of the cannons, which stood like silent, menacing beasts awaiting their prey,” Roland remembered.<sup>1</sup> “The chaplain spoke briefly and quietly, but with deep emotion, of the mighty crusade on which we were engaged. He called it a worthy cause, blessed by heaven. Then, elevating his right hand in a gesture of beatitude, he said, ‘The Lord be with you and keep you. The Lord give you strength in the day of battle.’” Roland found this service to be quite meaningful. Following an artillery barrage six weeks later, he mourned when he found Chaplain Hampton’s decapitated body lying next to his jeep.

For troops such as Roland, religious worship while in military service often took on new dimensions and meanings. The exigencies of war challenged traditional religious forms and expressions. This applied in settings characterized more by tedium or boredom as well as in desperate situations of life and death. Primarily through the chaplain corps, the US military sought to provide religious services for soldiers and sailors both at home and abroad. Though many men and women found great value in

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<sup>1</sup> Charles P. Roland, *My Odyssey Through History: Memoirs of War and Academe* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 46; Charles P. Roland, interview by Arthur Kelly, July 27, 1987, 1987OH131 WW 084, Colonel Arthur L. Kelly American Veterans Oral History Project, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries, Lexington, KY.



chaplain-led worship services, they also actively shaped their worship experiences by constructing improvised spaces and articles as well as by seeking out alternative worship services in nearby communities. Chaplains provided significant religious leadership, but soldiers and sailors were much more than passive participants.

This study of religious expression among soldiers and sailors fits into a larger body of scholarship known collectively as popular or lived religion.<sup>2</sup> In short, some scholars of religion have sought to consider religion in terms of how everyday people have expressed and understood it rather than in terms of institutional forms. In his analysis of chaplains' memoirs, Bradley Carter has applied this basic idea to religion in wartime and has offered the concept of "combat religiosity." He explains, "It is a particular expression of popular or vernacular religion in that it co-exists with formal, or institutional religious practices, characterized by ordinary persons adapting a range of activities to meet their immediate needs."<sup>3</sup> Whereas Carter focused on the ways in which chaplains related to combat religiosity, this chapter will consider the perspective of non-chaplains. It will argue that soldiers and sailors actively adapted traditional forms of worship to fit their particular context and their perceived needs. Chaplains were sometimes part of this process, but troops also improvised on their own.

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<sup>2</sup> David Hall articulated the idea of 'lived religion' by fusing earlier concepts popular religion with the claim that religious elites themselves shared in this popular religious world. Charles Lippy favors the term 'popular religiosity' as a means to describe how men and women interpret their own religious meanings as they draw from a central zone of religious beliefs and practices in their culture. See: David Hall, ed., *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Lippy, *Being Religious, American Style*, viii.

<sup>3</sup> Carter, "'Reverence Helmeted and Armored': A Study of Twentieth-Century United States Military Chaplain Memoirs," 180.

## Participation

Though often limited by military necessity, soldiers and sailors had the most options for religious services when stationed at large military posts within the US. The pre-Pearl Harbor buildup of military forces included the rapid expansion of the chaplain corps as well as the construction of hundreds of military chapels. In March of 1941, Congress authorized the expenditure of over twelve million dollars to build chapels for army personnel, whereas it had appropriated less than one million for chapels in the preceding twenty years.<sup>4</sup> In the case of the navy, the construction of chapels for permanent installations accelerated as well, though not as rapidly as in the army.<sup>5</sup> In areas where chapels were not available, chaplains would often arrange worship spaces in recreation halls or other facilities. In addition to services at military posts, commanding officers occasionally allowed soldiers and sailors to travel off base to attend worship services with local civilian congregations.

The use of military chapels was not limited to chaplains, but chaplains led most regular services on military posts. Under normal circumstances, the army expected chaplains to conduct at least one service each Sunday or Sabbath and suggested that each chaplain offer a daily service, as well.<sup>6</sup> In addition to their own tradition, the army expected chaplains to arrange appropriate services for the other two dominant religious traditions—Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, or Judaism. For example, a chaplain

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<sup>4</sup> *Fourth Supplemental National Defense Appropriation Act of 1941*, Public Law 13, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 55 (1941): 34. See also: Gushwa and United States, Dept. of the Army, Office of the Chief of Chaplains, *The Best and Worst of Times*, 4:113–4; Honeywell and United States, Dept. of the Army, Office of the Chief of Chaplains, *Chaplains of the United States Army*, 264–5.

<sup>5</sup> Drury and United States, Bureau of Naval Personnel, Chaplains Division., *The History of the Chaplain Corps, United States Navy, 1939-1949*, 2:8.

<sup>6</sup> US War Department, *TM 16-205: The Chaplain* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1941), para. 37, 39; US War Department and Honeywell, *TM 16-205: The Chaplain*, para. 37.

from the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod (LCMS) would often conduct a general Protestant service as well as a specifically Lutheran service at a different time. This distinction was particularly important to groups, such as the LCMS, that desired to celebrate the sacrament of communion each week but restricted participation to those affiliated with the church. Naval regulations were not nearly as specific, but the navy also expected its chaplains to arrange worship services for other religious groups.<sup>7</sup>

Finding a desired worship service often proved to be a great challenge. Soldiers and sailors from religious minorities rarely had the opportunity to attend a service led by a chaplain from their own tradition. In addition, personnel from major traditions sometimes found available chaplains dissatisfactory for religious or sometimes personal reasons. Motivated soldiers and sailors in each of these groups, however, created their own opportunities for worship. Depending on circumstances, soldiers and sailors could sometimes secure a pass to travel off base to attend worship services in neighboring communities. Occasionally, they could even get a ride on military vehicles. More rarely, soldiers and sailors could invite neighboring civilian clergy into their camps or installations, though chaplains needed to approve such services. Perhaps the most common solution, as noted in the previous chapter, was that lay leaders would conduct alternative or supplemental services.

If a soldier or sailor desired to attend a worship service, the greatest barrier was often official duties. Both the army and the navy, however, enacted policies that sought to limit unnecessary duties on days of worship. Following the recommendation of the Army Chief of Chaplains, Secretary of War Stimson directed that Army Regulation 210-10 be

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<sup>7</sup> United States, *United States Navy Regulations, 1920. Reprinted, 1941, with All Changes up to and Including No. 22.* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1941), pt. 1245.

amended in 1943 to recommend reducing duty on Sunday. In a memorandum, his representative stated, “In order that military personnel may be free to attend such services as they may desire, commanders will reduce military duty and labor on Sunday to the measure of strict necessity.”<sup>8</sup> In addition, the memo authorized commanding officers to excuse soldiers from duty on an alternative day if they came from a tradition that worshiped on a day other than Sunday, such as Judaism. The army also made provisions for religious holidays. As in the army, navy regulations stipulated that commanding officers should assign only necessary work on Sunday to allow for worship.<sup>9</sup> Though official military policies intended to provide greater freedom of worship, the realities of preparing for and fighting the war often limited the possibilities for soldiers and sailors to worship as they chose.

Both the army and navy officially sought to minimize duties that conflicted with worship, but some duties remained unavoidable. Nurses and other medical personnel, for example, often served in close proximity to chaplains, but caring for the sick and wounded respected no regular schedule of worship services. A former nurse with an army field hospital, Doris Grigg recalled that she and her fellow nurses had little time to participate in worship services in groups, but she clarified that they maintained their personal religious convictions.<sup>10</sup> During eighteen months on New Guinea, nurse Lillie Fitzsimons, a Mormon, reported that she only attended one religious service because of

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<sup>8</sup> M. G. White, “Memorandum for the Adjutant General: Sabbath Observance and Religious Services,” unpublished manuscript, March 5, 1943, 000.35 Sunday Observance, Army-AG Decimal File, 1940-45, 407.2.1 Decimal Correspondence, Records of the Adjutant General’s Office, 1917- [AGO], Record Group 407, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>9</sup> United States, *United States Navy Regulations, 1920. Reprinted, 1941, with All Changes up to and Including No. 22.*, pt. 141.

<sup>10</sup> Doris L. Grigg, “Army Service Experiences Questionnaire,” unpublished manuscript, n.d., 7, WWII Survey 2224, Army Nurse Corps, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

her heavy work schedule.<sup>11</sup> Eventually, some LDS men discovered that she was a member of their church. They invited her to a service and picked her up, but only three other people participated. As with medical services, KP duty was required seven days per week regardless of religious observances. From England, Pfc. Roger Houtz wrote to his mother that he had missed a beautiful sunrise Easter service because he had been on KP duty all night preparing for a special Easter meal.<sup>12</sup> Seeking to avoid KP duty—for religious reasons or not—some men were willing to pay others to take their place.

Writing to his parents from infantry training, Pvt. Albert Haines mentioned that he felt like a sinner because he had not been to church in three weeks.<sup>13</sup> Instead, he had been hiring himself out to serve KP for other men so that he could save money to allow him to marry his fiancé. While certain duties such as KP and medical services were typically unavoidable, some military superiors considered all duty as essential. For example, Pvt. Jacques Morris complained to his mother during basic training that he was unable to participate in Sabbath services or join in a Hebrew study group.<sup>14</sup> His first sergeant had restricted his group to their barracks on Friday nights to prepare for Saturday inspections.

For African-Americans, the practice of segregation among troops in some areas limited opportunities for religious worship. The army appointed over three-hundred African-American chaplains, but the army often tasked white chaplains with providing religious services to African-American personnel, the number of which reached over one

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<sup>11</sup> Lillie Jacobs Fitzsimons, memoir, 2001, MSS 2635, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

<sup>12</sup> Roger L. Houtz to Mabel Houtz, April 11, 1944, Personal Correspondence, Dec 1943-Jun 1948, Roger L. Houtz Papers, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>13</sup> Albert E. Haines to His Parents, January 17, 1943, MSS 1882, Albert E. Haines Correspondence, 1942-1975, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

<sup>14</sup> Jacques Charles Morris, "Letters Home from Pvt. Jacques Charles Morris, February 4, 1944 - July 5, 1945," unpublished manuscript, 2003, 21, SC-15125, Jacob Marcus Rader Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.

million by the end of the war.<sup>15</sup> Many white chaplains ministered to black troops willingly and conscientiously, but others did not. Ultimately, commanding officers bore responsibility for policies of racial segregation and the access black troops had to religious services. In 1943, an unnamed soldier wrote to the *Afro American*, a Baltimore newspaper, and protested that black troops were not allowed to attend church services held at Camp Gordon Johnston in Florida.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, in a 1944 letter, Pvt. Bert Babero complained that blacks at Camp Barkeley, Texas, had no access to a chapel or chaplain. He explained that, consequently, “We conduct our own services in one of the poorly constructed class rooms.”<sup>17</sup> At Fort Clark in Texas, a small group of black WACs challenged the “custom” of segregated seating in the post’s chapel by sitting among white soldiers. When the post commander instructed that the tradition be respected, no African-American personnel attended except for two WAC chaplain’s assistants. The commander then instructed the chaplain to hold separate services, but no blacks attended. The conflict drew the attention of higher officials and generated an intelligence report that blamed two women for being the “ring leaders” of a “conspiracy.”<sup>18</sup> For black personnel, the desire to participate in chapel services or the choice not to could both be

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<sup>15</sup> For a list of African-American chaplains in World War II, see: Jessie P. Guzman, Vera Chandler Foster, and W. Hardin Hughes, eds., *Negro Year Book: A Review of Events Affecting Negro Life, 1941-1946* (Tuskegee, AL: Dept. of Records and Research, Tuskegee Institute, 1947), 131–3.

<sup>16</sup> Phillip McGuire, ed., *Taps for a Jim Crow Army: Letters from Black Soldiers in World War II* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 19.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>18</sup> Headquarters, Army Service Forces, Eighth Service Command, “Church Attendance of Colored Personnel,” memo (Dallas, TX, May 4, 1944), 291.2, Race Relations, Security-Classified General Correspondence, 1941-48, Records of Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. See also: Martha S. Putney, *When the Nation Was in Need: Blacks in the Women’s Army Corps during World War II* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1992), 81.

construed in negative terms. Such friction provided impetus for African Americans to organize and participate in informal services apart from chaplains.

When soldiers and sailors were able to participate in religious services, they did so for various reasons. As in civilian life, some were devoted religious believers while others attended out of social habit. In the context of wartime, however, other reasons became evident, as well. For example, some who identified with minority religious groups became more observant while in the military. Even if they had been only loosely connected before, they sometimes sought out religious services that reminded them of home or to combat prejudice. As Deborah Dash Moore has argued, Jewish soldiers and sailors “achieved a group cohesiveness they never had as civilians” because of their minority status.<sup>19</sup> Captain Albert Eisen wrote to his family with a humorous tone that he had chosen to participate in a Jewish service even though he had rarely attended as a civilian. He explained that he attended “Not because I was anxious to get across safely . . . , not because I got a fit of religious fervor, but simply because, as a minority, it becomes necessary for us to declare ourselves to those who, unfortunately, are imbued with anti-Semitic sentiments.”<sup>20</sup> Surveying Jewish soldiers at Sheppard Field in Texas, Chaplain Albert Goldstein noted that most respondents claimed that they attended worship more often in the army than as civilians. He summarized their reasons as “fellowship, homesickness, and the convenient time and opportunity offered for worship.”<sup>21</sup> In a letter to his bishop, marine Cpl. Frank Burnham described how he had become more involved

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<sup>19</sup> Moore, *GI Jews*, 75.

<sup>20</sup> Albert Eisen, “Letter to His Family, N. D.,” in *Jewish Youth at War: Letters from American Soldiers*, ed. Isaac E. Rontch (New York: Marstin Press, 1945), 43.

<sup>21</sup> Albert S. Goldstein, “Faith in the Army,” *The Jewish Layman*, October 1943; Albert S. Goldstein, “Faith in the Army, Part Two,” *The Jewish Layman*, November 1943, 23.

with the LDS Church. He wrote, “I started attending at first more out of loneliness than from any inside promptings. Now I find that if I miss a meeting there seems to be something definitely lacking.”<sup>22</sup> Burnham also started studying LDS religious texts in more depth so that he could respond to questions from his fellow marines. While some soldiers merely sought something familiar, others deepened their commitments in response to their experiences of religious diversity.

Soldiers and sailors also reported attending worship services for other non-religious reasons. Kathleen Drummond recalled that, during marine officer training at Camp Lejeune, she and her friends attended church as often as permitted because it was one of the few ways that they were allowed to leave the restricted women’s area of the camp. She elaborated, “The Protestant church was outside the area, so we all became very religious so we could get out on Sunday.”<sup>23</sup> Thomas McKiernan reported that he and another flight cadet, Bud Van Houten, noticed two young women and followed them into a church.<sup>24</sup> Losing them quickly in the crowd, McKiernan and Van Houten felt obligated to stay for the service. Soon, the young women emerged as part of the choir. The next week, the two cadets joined the choir and rehearsed with them until their training was completed. Since the military allowed some reprieve from duties to attend worship, some soldiers and sailors attended services simply to avoid work. John Gausz

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<sup>22</sup> Frank H. Burnham, “Bits from Your Own Letters,” *Church News (Salt Lake City, UT)*, *L.D.S. Service Men’s Edition*, June 15, 1944, 9.

<sup>23</sup> Kathleen Drummond, interview by Jeffrey Suchanek, September 8, 1994, 1994OH157 WW 220, Colonel Arthur L. Kelly American Veterans Oral History Project, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries, Lexington, KY. See also: Jeffrey S. Suchanek and Jeanne Ontko Suchanek, eds., *“Star-Spangled Hearts”: American Women Veterans of World War II* (Frankfort, KY: Broadstone Books, 2011), 360.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas H. McKiernan, “Two Generations-4 Wars and a Skirmish: McKiernan Family War Memoirs,” unpublished manuscript, 1995, chap. 2, pages 6–7, WW2 7721, 458th Bomb Group, Bomber Groups, Army Air Corps, WWII Veterans Survey, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.



recalled that he started attending Mass again in the army. He explained, “On a Sunday morning, you had the option of either going to Mass, or, if you didn’t go to Mass, you then exposed yourself to duty.”<sup>25</sup> Regardless of his initial reason for attending, Gausz found the chaplains and worship services in the army to be more appealing than in civilian life simply because they did not collect donations. Navy cadet Keith Willison was resistant to religion when he arrived for naval training at Camp Farragut. When a fellow enlisted man invited him to chapel, Willison responded that he “had heard enough ‘hell-and-damnation’ preached” and had no desire to hear more.<sup>26</sup> His friend, however, convinced him to attend by pointing out that it was better than KP duty. Soon, Willison became quite active in religious life in the navy and reflected on his time in the service as a spiritually transformative experience. Though soldiers and sailors may have attended worship services for non-religious reasons, some found a deeper meaning that encouraged them to continue.

For many, perhaps the most compelling reason to participate in worship was the knowledge that battle was imminent. For example, combat correspondent Robert Sherrod noted worship services he witnessed as marines prepared themselves for the invasion of Tarawa in the Pacific.<sup>27</sup> According to Sherrod, the evening before the battle, five hundred men gathered for a Catholic Mass in a space on the ship designed to fit no more than two hundred. As the 291<sup>st</sup> Engineers prepared to embark for Normandy, Sgt. Henry Giles noted in his journal that he went to a worship service for the first time since

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<sup>25</sup> John A. Gausz, interview by G. Kurt Piehler and David Villalobos, unpublished transcript, April 25, 1997, 55, Rutgers Oral History Archives, New Brunswick, NJ.

<sup>26</sup> Keith R. Willison, “My Stretch in the Navy, November 1942 through October 1945,” unpublished manuscript, n.d., 1, MSS 2350 no. 434, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Lee Sherrod, *Tarawa: The Story of a Battle* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1944), 55.

arriving in England. He reflected, “Either I should be ashamed for not going earlier or for going today. I guess most of us had some notion we might feel better if we went. It didn't make me feel much better, though.”<sup>28</sup> Rather agnostic in his religious inclinations, Giles felt that it was too late to seek divine help, and he was unsure whether God intervened even for those with strong faith. In contrast, other soldiers and sailors found worship before battle to be quite reassuring. Recalling his own experience crossing the English Channel in mid-June 1944, Parley Despaigne described how men gathered for a lay-led service on his landing ship.<sup>29</sup> He explained that quite a few participated because they were unsure what awaited them onshore. For Despaigne, the most comforting aspect of the service was when he realized that the enlisted man leading it was a fellow member of the LDS Church. Finally, Leo Des Champs remembered participating in a Roman Catholic Mass in a bar before engaging German forces in the Huertgen Forest.<sup>30</sup> He believed that it bolstered their morale. Though some were skeptical of its effectiveness, participating in worship services was a common form of preparation before battle as men sought reassurance and perhaps even a level of control over their future.

## **Improvisation**

Religious worship during wartime was often a creative activity. Soldiers and sailors found ways to worship at creative times, in creative places, and in creative ways.

For some, these challenges forced them to reflect on what they considered to be the

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<sup>28</sup> Henry Giles, *The G. I. Journal of Sergeant Giles*, ed. Janice Holt Giles (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 22.

<sup>29</sup> Parley W. Despaigne, unpublished memoir, n.d., MSS 2350 no. 380, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

<sup>30</sup> Leo J. Des Champs, “Army Service Experiences Questionnaire,” unpublished manuscript, n.d., 7, WWII Survey 52, 1st Engineer Combat Battalion, 1st Infantry Division, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

essential parts of worship. Military chaplains often led creative services in poor circumstances, but for most soldiers and sailors, chaplains were unavailable in the most challenging situations. Consequently, the challenges of wartime compelled non-chaplains to fill in as they could. Even in static situations, soldiers and sailors often actively shaped their worship experiences by constructing and decorating worship spaces as well as by crafting articles for use in worship.

The irregularities of life in a mobilized military challenged traditional rhythms of religious worship. Most soldiers and sailors were accustomed to corporate worship services being held on a particular day, but military realities made this difficult if not impossible, especially when deployed overseas. In forward areas, chaplains often traveled from group to group holding religious services on whatever day he happened to be present. Such variance in schedule also had military benefits. In a press release, the Office of War Information described how US troops in the Pacific area recognized “GI Sunday”—a day other than Sunday when religious services were held.<sup>31</sup> The release explained that this made it difficult for the Japanese to schedule an attack knowingly on a day when US troops might be less prepared—a concern cemented by the Sunday-morning attack on Pearl Harbor. Not all soldiers, however, embraced such compromise. Pfc. Harold Ribalow reported that some of his fellow Jewish airmen in India refused to participate in a Sabbath service on an alternative day.<sup>32</sup> When the nearest Jewish chaplain visited their unit on a Wednesday, he led a Sabbath service, but some men abstained because they were not willing to pretend that it was the actual Sabbath.

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<sup>31</sup> Religious News Service, “Chaplains Surmount Obstacles In Reaching Lonely Outposts,” *Protestant Voice*, January 28, 1944, 7.

<sup>32</sup> Harold U. Ribalow, “The Failure of Jewish Chaplaincy,” *Jewish Frontier*, June 1946, 11.

Ribalow's comments aside, soldiers and sailors more commonly accepted the variance in schedule given the circumstances. For some, breaking traditional patterns seemed to make attending worship even more meaningful because they purposely set aside other times rather than merely participating out of habit. In short, they concluded that corporate worship was not necessarily tied to a particular day.

In addition to scheduling, finding or creating spaces for worship was often a challenge. Especially in fluid circumstances overseas, official military chapels did not exist. Some soldiers and sailors, however, sought out alternative spaces for worship and sometimes went to great lengths to outfit them. More commonly, soldiers and sailors worshipped wherever they happened to be at the moment. An extract from an unknown chaplain's report described how a group of soldiers transformed "the most notorious canteen of the Island" into a temporary chapel.<sup>33</sup> Soldiers painted the interior and added a steeple to the roof complete with a bell. In another report extract, a chaplain described how soldiers in his battalion constructed a chapel entirely from wood salvaged from shipping crates.<sup>34</sup> Finally, at the Decimo Airfield on the island of Sardinia, a group of LDS men constructed a small brick chapel for LDS services. Ken Earl recalled that since consuming alcohol or tobacco was contrary to LDS teachings, he and the other men traded their cigarette and beer rations for building materials and labor.<sup>35</sup> As they planned

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<sup>33</sup> Office of Chief of Chaplains, Army, "Circular Letter No. 276," September 1, 1943, 2-3, 300.5 Circular Letters V. 3, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>34</sup> Office of Chief of Chaplains, Army, "Circular Letter No. 286," July 1, 1944, 4, 300.5 Circular Letters V. 3, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>35</sup> Owen Ken Earl, "For the Good Times," unpublished manuscript, n.d., 34, MSS 2350 no. 264, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

the chapel, Lt. Marvel Andersen wrote to church authorities in Salt Lake City to inquire whether they could supply large pictures of Joseph Smith and other LDS leaders with which they could decorate the worship space.<sup>36</sup>

As with these LDS soldiers, other US troops creatively outfitted worship spaces with decorations and religious articles crafted from available materials. To some extent, the military encouraged soldiers and sailors to engage in handiwork in order to increase morale by providing military personal with a creative outlet. To this end, the army even published a training manual that provided instructions for working with materials such as leather, wood, and metal.<sup>37</sup> It encouraged soldiers to be creative in using salvaged materials and provided guidance for unique problems such as softening brass from empty shell casings to increase pliability for hammering. The religious objects and decorations created by military personnel provide a unique window into their religious world. As Colleen McDannell has argued, religious objects and images not only reveal significant aspects of religion but are themselves important forms of religious expression.<sup>38</sup> For those in the military, crafting religious articles from found materials provided a means of active religious participation—an outlet especially welcomed by those whose gifts were not always recognized in traditional settings. Craftsmanship could be a form of worship for those who did not necessarily feel comfortable in a civilian pew. An excerpt from a chaplain's monthly report, for example, described how a soldier painted a triptych that he intended the chaplain to set up behind his portable altar wherever that might be.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> "12-Mormon Soldiers Build Chapel in Sardinia," *Church News (Salt Lake City, UT)*, May 20, 1944, 10.

<sup>37</sup> US War Department, *TM 28-325: Soldier Handicrafts* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1945).

<sup>38</sup> Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 2.

<sup>39</sup> Office of Chief of Chaplains, Army, "Circular Letter No. 278," November 1, 1943, 300.5 Circular Letters V. 3, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and

Similarly, another chaplain reported that a corporal crafted “a beautiful stone altar, pulpit, altar-railing, and lectern,” which they used in their tent-chapel.<sup>40</sup> Finally, from somewhere in the Pacific area, a chaplain celebrated how a group of soldiers had finished constructing an entire chapel in his absence.<sup>41</sup> He took great pleasure in describing a white cross they had erected on the chapel’s exterior, complete with electrical lighting wired by a master sergeant electrician.

Troops also took great pride in noting ways in which they repurposed implements of war for use in divine worship. As historian Bradley Carter observed, “These instances of transforming combat’s material detritus into ‘holy hardware’ illustrate[ed] a syncretic relationship between popular and institutional religion.”<sup>42</sup> Following a tour of the Pacific area, correspondent David Wittels reported that some men in New Guinea fashioned “a cross out of plastic from the nose of a crashed bomber.”<sup>43</sup> In addition, they used aluminum from the same bomber to create a three-tray communion set. In Italy, Chaplain DeLoss Marken described to a reporter how Sgt. Leo Schulz constructed an altar and accessories from salvaged war materials. The reporter explained, “The cross was made of Italian armor plate and was mounted on a base made from a German range finder. The communion chalice once was a Messerschmitt propeller shaft. Its base is an American three-inch shell.”<sup>44</sup> Similarly, on Guadalcanal, marine corporal William Cole constructed a set of chapel chimes out of anti-aircraft artillery shells complete with a hand-cranked

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Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>40</sup> Office of Chief of Chaplains, Army, “Circular Letter No. 282,” 3.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>42</sup> Carter, “‘Reverence Helmeted and Armored’: A Study of Twentieth-Century United States Military Chaplain Memoirs,” 223.

<sup>43</sup> David G. Wittels, “Are the Chaplains Doing a Job?,” *Saturday Evening Post*, December 16, 1944, 92.

<sup>44</sup> “Chaplain in Italy Gets 13 Converts,” *New York Times*, February 3, 1944, 9.

clapper.<sup>45</sup> To fashion such religious articles out of the tools of war has many layers of potential meaning. For some, repurposing war materials may have symbolized cleansing or a hopeful vision of peace where swords would be beaten into plowshares. Other interpreters would perhaps conclude that these men sacralized war by uniting implements of destruction and the act of worship. While not excluding such layers, in a basic sense, these men likely chose such materials primarily because they had access to them. In difficult situations, soldiers and sailors used what was available to shape their worship experiences.

Through fashioning objects used in worship, soldiers and sailors became active participants in worship, but such expressions occasionally conflicted with the ecumenical vision encouraged by military policy. Though official military chapels were to be non-sectarian and available for the use of any religious groups, the use of religious symbols and imagery in chapels constructed overseas often violated this policy. In a newsletter distributed to army chaplains, Army Chief of Chaplains William Arnold reiterated War Department guidelines and explained that chaplains should remove or hide any paintings, fixtures, or statues in chapels when not in use so as not to offend other groups.<sup>46</sup> The difficulty was that non-chaplain soldiers and sailors often constructed and decorated their own worship spaces when the military provided no official chapel. When they did so, they created worship spaces that reflected their own personal religious beliefs rather than

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<sup>45</sup> "Shells Do Double Duty," *Protestant Voice*, January 21, 1944; "Portable Chapel Chimes Built from Old Shells," *Marine Corps Chevron*, January 29, 1944; William D. Cleary, "The Ministry of the Chaplain," in *Religion of Soldier and Sailor*, ed. Willard Sperry, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1945), 83.

<sup>46</sup> Office of Chief of Chaplains, Army, "Addenda to Circular Letter No. 272," May 1, 1943, 1, 300.5 Circular Letters V. 3, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

the non-sectarian ideals celebrated by some higher-ranking military officials and projected to the American people. Following his observation trip in the Pacific Theater as the executive director of the Jewish Welfare Board, Rabbi Philip Bernstein submitted a report to the office of the Army Chief of Chaplains. Among other concerns, Bernstein recommended that “the War Department reaffirm its policies concerning the interdenominational character of its chapels in order that certain fixed Christian symbols may not be used.”<sup>47</sup> Though Bernstein gave no specific examples, even a cursory survey of photos from the area demonstrates that island chapels were often adorned with a cross on the exterior.<sup>48</sup> Notably, Chaplain Arnold argued against Bernstein’s recommendation in an internal War Department memorandum. He claimed that a reaffirmation of the non-sectarian chapel policy was not warranted. Instead, they would address violations on a case-by-case basis. He explained that the problem chapels were likely “constructed by American soldiers on their free time and according to their ideas of what would be proper and suitable for a House of Worship.”<sup>49</sup> Arnold continued, “To remove anything from such a construction would gravely hurt the susceptibilities and morale of the soldiers involved.” Whereas official military policy limited the construction of worship spaces for the exclusive use of a particular religious group, non-chaplains were granted greater

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<sup>47</sup> Philip Bernstein, “Report on Pacific Theater Observation Trip,” unpublished manuscript, 1945, 2, 000.3 AC, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>48</sup> For examples, see: US Coast Guard and AP Photo, [*The Church in the Wildwood*], Photograph, October 1, 1944, 4410010401, AP Images.; AP Photo, [*Chapel, New Guinea*], Photograph, January 14, 1944, 440114092, AP Images.; AP Photo, [*Tent Chapel, Majuro Atoll*], Photograph, May 3, 1944, 4405031263, AP Images.; US Navy and AP Photo, [*Navy Chapel, Admiralty Islands*], Photograph, April 1, 1945, 4504010846, AP Images.

<sup>49</sup> Joe N. Dalton, “Memorandum for the Chief of Staff,” unpublished manuscript, July 5, 1945, 000.3 AC, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.



flexibility. In the case of overseas chapels, it seems that chaplains themselves participated in their construction or at least chose to ignore any potential conflicts. By nature of their unofficial role, it seems that non-chaplains had more freedom in creating spaces for worship.

The exigencies of war led not only to the creative construction of worship spaces and articles but also to altered forms of worship. Traditional worship services of any religious group were often impossible in a mobilized military. Troops often lacked the proper leaders, spaces, and time to conduct worship services that they would have recognized as civilians. This challenge, however, led some to reconfigure their assumptions about the essentials of worship. Many soldiers and sailors reflected on odd places in which they worshipped. Army nurse Annie Pozyck wrote to her parents from the Philippines, “I guess it doesn’t matter where you worship as long as you do worship. So I’ve been to church on the open decks of the ships, sitting right on the deck, to tents, & hospital wards.”<sup>50</sup> Lt. Chalmers Alexander wrote to his mother about attending a worship service “on the line” at Mabry Field near Tallahassee, Florida.<sup>51</sup> Designed for mechanics who worked all day on Sunday, they gathered for worship in the open air among the planes. Paul Casey related a harrowing worship experience in a partially destroyed building in Europe where he served with the 119<sup>th</sup> Infantry regiment.<sup>52</sup> As artillery explosions crept ever closer, a Protestant chaplain simply preached louder and louder to the nervous congregants. Finally, when a shell exploded just outside and rained

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<sup>50</sup> Annie Pozyck to her parents, March 29, 1945, 1, Annie Pozyck Papers, Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Jackson Library, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, NC.

<sup>51</sup> Chalmers W. Alexander, Jr. to Marina Alexander, September 6, 1943, Alexander-Whitfield Family Papers, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>52</sup> Roger Paul Casey, unpublished memoir, n.d., 28, Roger Paul Casey, Sr. Collection (AFC/2001/001/54460), Veterans History Project Collection, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

dust and debris on the worshippers, the chaplain halted his sermon by yelling, “Dismissed!” as the men scattered. In a letter to his mother, Cpl. Roger Houtz described how he and a few other soldiers walked a mile while watching for snipers in order to participate in a communion service led by a chaplain in a French orchard.<sup>53</sup> He questioned how many civilians would put themselves at such risk to go to church.

In that many soldiers and sailors experienced more tedium than terror, some reported humorous incidents related to participating in worship while in the military. Mary McManus recalled the challenge of making it to Mass at six thirty in the morning after the weekly Saturday night dance when she served with the WAVES in Hawaii. She explained, “You got up and you put your slacks on over your pajamas. Nobody talked.”<sup>54</sup> Following the service, she would go back to bed since Sunday was their only opportunity to sleep later. Second Lt. Charles Bennett reported an incident where a soldier passed out from the heat in an army chapel in Louisiana. “His companions carried him to the rear of the chapel and took off one of his shoes and held it over his nose,” wrote Bennett. “Sure enough he came to in a jiffy.”<sup>55</sup> Sometimes, shared worship spaces created scheduling problems. From Page Field in Florida, Chalmers Alexander wrote to his mother that he entered a chapel seeking a Protestant service only to walk in on a Jewish service in progress because he had mistaken the time.<sup>56</sup> Chaplain John Boud recalled being

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<sup>53</sup> Roger L. Houtz to Mabel Houtz, August 5, 1944, Personal Correspondence, Dec 1943-Jun 1948, Roger L. Houtz Papers, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>54</sup> WAVES stands for “Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service,” a temporary navy program for enlisted women. Mary McManus, interview by Jeffrey Suchanek, March 3, 1995, 1995OH036 WW 254, Colonel Arthur L. Kelly American Veterans Oral History Project, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries, Lexington, KY.

<sup>55</sup> Charles E. Bennett, “Coconuts and Combat Too,” unpublished manuscript, n.d., 12, Charles E. Bennett Papers, 1941-1992, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>56</sup> Chalmers W. Alexander, Jr. to Marina Alexander, September 14, 1942, Alexander-Whitfield Family Papers, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

pleasantly surprised at the large number of people at his service one Sunday. “I thought the Millennium was here,” he recalled, “They had certainly found out about Mormonism and want to know more.”<sup>57</sup> Afterwards, he discovered that most of the men had come early to get good seats for the movie that was to follow.

Challenging wartime conditions compelled chaplains and others to compromise on some traditional worship practices. The Jewish Welfare Board appointed a special committee of rabbis to address questions regarding religious practice in wartime.<sup>58</sup> The committee concluded, for example, that dietary laws may be violated in extenuating circumstances, but they encouraged troops to obey them whenever possible.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, the Roman Catholic Church reduced and eventually omitted the required time of fasting before one could participate in the Eucharist under pressing conditions.<sup>60</sup> The church also traditionally expected people to confess their sins to a priest for absolution before partaking of the Eucharist. Because of the limited number of priests and the very real potential for death, however, Catholic chaplains occasionally practiced general absolution where they would absolve entire group from their sins.<sup>61</sup> For example, marine sergeant James Hague reported that Chaplain Kamler offered a sort of perpetual absolution to

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<sup>57</sup> John W. Boud, “The Autobiography of John W. Boud, Volume 3,” unpublished manuscript, n.d., 26–27, MSS 2350 no. 891, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

<sup>58</sup> The “Responsa Committee” consisted of representatives of each of the three major bodies of Judaism in the US. See: Slomovitz, *The Fighting Rabbis*, 92–97.

<sup>59</sup> Solomon B. Freehof, Leo Jung, and Milton Steinberg, *Responsa in War Time*, reprint (New York, NY: Division of Religious Activities, National Jewish Welfare Board, 1961), 7.

<sup>60</sup> United States, *Report on the Army Chaplain in the European Theater*, 41.

<sup>61</sup> The Roman Catholic Church explained this exception as temporary and must be followed by confession when practical, see Sacra Paenitentiarum Apostolica and Nicola Canali, “INSTKTJCTIO: Circa Sacramentalem Absolutionem Generali Modo Pluribus Impertiendam,” *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 36, no. 5 (May 20, 1944): 155–6; Scott M. P Reid, *General Sacramental Absolution: An Historical, Canonical and Pastoral Perspective* (London: Saint Austin Press, 1998), 18–19.

those who sought it during attack.<sup>62</sup> Hague explained that Chaplain Kamler directed them to say an act of contrition on their way to their foxholes when the raid alarm sounded. Leonard Clarkson recalled that a priest offered general absolution as his unit prepared to land in France, but he clarified, “I was never one to have faith in it.”<sup>63</sup> For some, such absolution seemed too easy. Capt. William Carr wrote to his brother-in-law about an Easter service in which he participated in North Africa. Though Carr had waited in line for an hour to confess his sins the night before, the chaplain ended up offering a general absolution because he did not have enough time to hear all the confessions before the service. Considering his own effort to have his confession heard, Carr protested light-heartedly, “I felt cheated to get another painless one.”<sup>64</sup>

In addition, it was often difficult to get the proper supplies required by some groups for certain religious rites such as Holy Communion or Passover Seders. Chaplain Rual Perkins complained of the difficulty of obtaining grape juice for his communion services in the Pacific area.<sup>65</sup> Instead, he was encouraged to use “grapeade” mixed from a synthetic powder. For others with looser restrictions regarding acceptable supplies, these challenges provided an opportunity for creative substitution. For example, Lt. Bill Henderson recounted an experience where he and a British officer shared communion together using lemon juice and bread in Italy.<sup>66</sup> A member of the LDS Church, Calvin Rynearson recalled conducting the sacrament for himself while in Europe with the Forty-

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<sup>62</sup> James E. Hague, “Sunday Mass on Bougainville,” in *Faith of Our Fighters*, ed. Ellwood C. Nance (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1944), 66–70.

<sup>63</sup> Leonard A. Clarkson, interview by Arthur L. Kelly, July 22, 1983, 1989OH031 WW 111, Colonel Arthur L. Kelly American Veterans Oral History Project, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries, Lexington, KY.

<sup>64</sup> Harry E. Maule, ed., “William J. Carr to George A. Carlin, April 28, 1943,” in *A Book of War Letters* (New York: Random House, 1943), 108.

<sup>65</sup> Rual T. Perkins, “Beer for Soldiers,” *Christian Beacon*, November 9, 1944.

<sup>66</sup> “G.I. Variety,” *Wheaton Alumni*, November 1945.

Fourth Field Artillery.<sup>67</sup> Following LDS practices, he used water, but he substituted biscuits from his K-rations for the bread. Jewish seders typically consisted of several elements that were even more difficult to acquire when deployed. Victor Geller described an improvised seder that he celebrated along with fifty others from the 346<sup>th</sup> Infantry regiment as they rushed across Germany. Lacking the other elements, the men simply shared a plentiful supply of British *matzah*. As they read and sung, Geller noted that the others were circulating “recently liberated bottles of wine which, though lacking rabbinic certification for Passover, did add to the holiday feeling.”<sup>68</sup> Chaplain Earl Stone described a seder in Tunisia that lacked all the typical supplies.<sup>69</sup> Stone gathered the men around him for a virtual seder where he asked them to remember a seder they had previously experienced at home. He prayed over an imaginary cup of wine and directed the men to break imaginary *matzah*. Similarly, 2d Lt. John Morrett described a virtual communion service he led while held as a POW in the Davao Penal Colony in the Philippines. Following the death of the Episcopal chaplain, Morrett continued to lead Episcopal prayer services though not Holy Communion since he was not a priest. One Sunday he decided to read the communion service to the men. He reflected, “Even though there wasn't any consecrated bread and wine, we all felt we had received the elements spiritually.”<sup>70</sup> For many, such experiences challenged previous assumptions about the nature and meaning of certain religious rituals. Creative substitution provided an avenue by which soldiers and sailors could reinterpret ritual to fit their context.

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<sup>67</sup> Calvin A. Ryneason, unpublished memoir, 2001, 3, MSS 2350 no. 204, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

<sup>68</sup> Geller, *Take It Like a Soldier*, 287.

<sup>69</sup> Slomovitz, *The Fighting Rabbis*, 87–88; Louis Barish, ed., *Rabbis in Uniform: The Story of the American Jewish Military Chaplain* (New York: Jonathan David, 1962), 157–8.

<sup>70</sup> John J Morrett, *Soldier Priest* (Roswell, GA: Old Rugged Cross Press, 1993), 100.

The nature of military service also provided increased opportunities for soldiers and sailors to shape their religious experiences by choosing to worship with other faiths. Military personnel often established close friendships with those from other traditions. Consequently, some choose to attend each other's services. For example, Ann Goldberg recalled forming close relationships with her peers serving in the Women's Army Corps. Goldberg described how she would attend Christian services with her friends, and they would attend synagogue with her in Asheville, North Carolina. When she attended her first Catholic mass, however, Goldberg did not feel welcomed by the army chaplain who led it. She reflected, "I was upset because he said that nobody should be there that's not of the faith, and those that are of the faith shouldn't go to any other house of worship."<sup>71</sup> Notably, this was an exception to her typical experiences. She continued, "I went to Methodist, Baptist, Episcopalian. I never heard anything like."<sup>72</sup> Recalling his time in Italy, Clinton Riddle described how he and a close Catholic friend agreed while sharing a foxhole to go to each other's churches.<sup>73</sup> Eventually a Baptist minister, Riddle related fondly his experience of attending Mass with his friend in Naples.

Though some soldiers and sailors attended services with friends, others seem to have ventured into services from unfamiliar traditions for other reasons. While temporarily in Hawaii, infantryman John Hogan, a devoted Episcopalian, wrote home one Sunday and mentioned that he had gone to a Catholic Mass led by his unit's chaplain. In part, he blamed laziness because the Episcopal service was on a different part of the post,

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<sup>71</sup> Ann Kaplowitz Goldberg, interview by Hermann Trojanowski, unpublished transcript, November 16, 2000, Ann Kaplowitz Goldberg Papers, Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Jackson Library, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, NC.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Clinton E. Riddle, interview by G. Kurt Piehler and Seth M. Womack, unpublished transcript, March 19, 2002, 47, Veteran's Oral History Project, Center for the Study of War and Society, Department of History, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

but he also appreciated the Catholic chaplain. “I like to hear Father Vogel give everybody 'merry hell' in a nice way, week in, week out,” he explained.<sup>74</sup> A Lutheran from Wisconsin, Wilbur Berget frequently mentioned worshipping with other faiths in letters home to his parents. While at Camp Lockett in California, he noted attending a service led by a local priest and commented, “He was an impressive speaker, even though he was catholic.”<sup>75</sup> Soon after his unit moved to Camp Campbell, Kentucky, Berget mentioned attending services at three different local churches—Episcopalian, Baptist, and Methodist—on three consecutive Sundays.<sup>76</sup> When need arose, some were even willing to lead services honoring other traditions. In a letter to his parents, Sgt. Sanford Cohen, a Jew, described how he led a simple Christmas Eve service for the men in his tent in North Africa.<sup>77</sup> Because he was older, Cohen felt that it was his responsibility to provide religious leadership for the other soldiers.

## Significance

As they actively shaped their worship experiences, soldiers and sailors often reflected on the significance of religious worship in relation to their participation in the war effort. For those who faced potential death in battle, worship sometimes allayed fear by reassuring those who hoped for eternal life. In other cases, worship before battle seemed to sacralize the mission as they interpreted the impending earthly battle in spiritual terms. As they prepared for battle and even in its midst, soldiers and sailors

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<sup>74</sup> John Hogan, *I Am Not Alone: From the Letters of Combat Infantryman John J. Hogan, Killed at Okinawa*. (Washington: Mackinac Press, 1947), 62.

<sup>75</sup> Wilbur C. Berget, *The Daily Life of an Ordinary American Soldier during World War II: The Letters of Wilbur C. Berget*, ed. Mark D. Van Ells (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), 155.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 223, 225, 226.

<sup>77</sup> Harry E Maule, ed., “Sanford Cohen to His Parents, December 26, 1942,” in *A Book of War Letters* (New York: Random House, 1943), 141–143.

described how they would gather to worship. Though not all troops sought such solace, those who reflected on the role of worship often recalled its significance in dire situations. For those who battled more with tedium than with the enemy, worship often took on other meanings as it served to remind them of home and to assure them of their future.

On air bases, chaplains played an important role in the pre-mission preparations of some aviators. In this unique context, pilots and crewmembers regularly ferried between relative safety and extreme danger. Because they were non-combatants, the army strongly discouraged chaplains from flying along on missions. However, chaplains at airfields provided religious leadership for the flyers on the ground as well as other non-flying personnel. Before missions, members of aircrews would sometimes seek out chaplains for brief services of scripture, prayer, and perhaps a sacrament. In his official history of air chaplains, Daniel Jorgensen emphasized the importance chaplains placed on these services.<sup>78</sup> In their monthly reports, chaplains described memorable traditions before flights, and commanding officers sometimes heralded the military benefits of pre-mission worship in that it calmed nervous crews. The view from non-chaplains, however, seems rather mixed. Donald Lundberg, a former navigator, recalled that after their pre-mission briefings, everyone went to church—even the atheists.<sup>79</sup> Notably, he explained this in terms of a superstition. Crews sometimes felt that they needed to repeat their pre-mission routine in the exact same way each time they flew or else they risked being shot down. Not everyone welcomed chaplains' efforts. Former pilot, Edmund

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<sup>78</sup> Jorgensen and United States, Office of the Chief of Air Force Chaplains, *The Service of Chaplains to Army Air Units, 1917-1946*, 1:168–71.

<sup>79</sup> Donald E. Lundberg, interview by Sandra Stewart Holyoak and David Fulvio, unpublished transcript, April 23, 2008, 40, Rutgers Oral History Archives, New Brunswick, NJ.



Wanner reported that a Catholic chaplain came to his bomber before a mission, but Wanner asked him not to come back.<sup>80</sup> While some likely welcomed the ministrations of chaplains, aviators more commonly mentioned traditions of pre-mission prayer led by members of their crews. Former bombardier Arnold Mitchell described how his pilot, Edward Johnson, would gather their crew before each mission to recite the Lord's Prayer—a practice that Mitchell found quite comforting.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, Richard Veach recalled that his crew, which included at least one Jewish member, recited the Lord's Prayer over their intercom system at the beginning of each mission.<sup>82</sup> In these cases, it seems that the bonds formed within crews provided more fertile ground for religious expression than the ministrations of an unfamiliar chaplain.

As part of their pre-battle preparations, some earthbound soldiers and sailors reported participating in worship, as well. For example, Edward Alff noted how the men around him thought of God, confessed their sins, and sang as they prepared for the invasion of North Africa.<sup>83</sup> As marines prepared to invade Guadalcanal, combat correspondent Richard Tregaskis described how men jammed into a ship's mess hall for a Catholic Mass and again for a Protestant communion service immediately following.<sup>84</sup> As he waited for the invasion of Normandy, Cpl. William Kiessel wrote to two college friends and excitedly described the religious atmosphere among the troops. "Fellows are

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<sup>80</sup> Edmund A. Wanner, "Army Service Experiences Questionnaire," unpublished manuscript, n.d., 7, WWII Survey 5778, 445th Bomb Group, Eighth Air Force, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>81</sup> Arnold L. Mitchell, interview by Arthur L. Kelly, September 4, 1986, 1986OH280 WW 065, Colonel Arthur L. Kelly American Veterans Oral History Project, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries, Lexington, KY.

<sup>82</sup> Richard A. Veach, "Army Service Experiences Questionnaire," unpublished manuscript, n.d., 7, WWII Survey 8029, 40th Bomb Group, 20th Air Force, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>83</sup> Edward P. Alff, "Army Service Experiences Questionnaire," unpublished manuscript, n.d., 7, WWII Survey 66, 18th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>84</sup> Richard William Tregaskis, *Guadalcanal Diary* (New York: Random House, 1943), 21–22.

trying to catch up on years of neglected religion in a few days,” he explained. “The Catholics have Mass, Communion and Confessions while the Protestants preach little, pray much, and sing the favorite hymns of the Church. And then there are Jewish services for members of that faith.”<sup>85</sup> Other soldiers were not nearly as moved religiously. When asked about worship services before the invasion, former army doctor Willis McKee responded curtly, “They had services. . . I didn’t attend them.”<sup>86</sup>

For other soldiers and sailors, religious worship in the context of wartime was a meaningful experience. In a newsletter circulated to chaplains, the Army Chief of Chaplains quoted from a letter sent by an unnamed soldier to his home pastor in Chicago in which he described entering a worship service at Camp Roberts in California.

After a day’s training in war and sudden death, it was like entering a different world as I stepped across the threshold. The lights were dim; an invisible organ was playing softly from the balcony overhead. The change was so sudden it had the force of a physical blow, but instead of pain it brought peace and contentment. The sheer beauty of that brief moment will be remembered by me the rest of my life.<sup>87</sup>

When soldiers and sailors deployed, the stakes and challenges increased. In a letter to his mother, Pvt. Elroy Rigby wrote that he struggled to find an opportunity to worship. When he did, however, he reflected on the different atmosphere. “You would see men with dirty clothes but the best of spirits—clean of body and mind.”<sup>88</sup> Other soldiers reflected on the significance of worshipping in humble places. Lt. Edward Hitchen

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<sup>85</sup> Andrew Carroll, ed., “William Kiessel to Florence and Jerry,” in *Grace under Fire: Letters of Faith in Times of War* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 45–46.

<sup>86</sup> Willis P. McKee, interview by Arthur L. Kelly, April 12, 1986, 1986OH123 WW 045, Colonel Arthur L. Kelly American Veterans Oral History Project, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries, Lexington, KY.

<sup>87</sup> Office of Chief of Chaplains, Army, “Circular Letter No. 248,” April 1, 1942, 1, 300.5 Circular Letters V. 2, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>88</sup> “Mormon Servicemen Write of Experiences,” *Church News (Salt Lake City, UT)*, February 3, 1945, 8.

described a worship service he participated in during a lull in the fighting in Europe. Rotated back from the frontlines, a group of soldiers gathered with a chaplain in the hayloft of a rustic barn. As he settled in for the service, Hitchen felt an “inspiration of good feeling.”<sup>89</sup> Noting the rough surroundings, he reflected on Jesus’s own humble origins, and he questioned why his congregation in the US felt the need to spend large sums of money on church facilities. For Hitchen, a barn filled with battle-worn soldiers in worship seemed quite fulfilling. In his diary, Pfc. Victor Cline described a similar—if not the same—service in a hayloft after weeks of hard fighting. He noted, “We humbly prayed in the hay—it was a good inspirational service—I came away refreshed and stronger—with the cobwebs cleared from my mind.”<sup>90</sup>

Some soldiers and sailors described worship services through which they reported experiencing a deeper spiritual connection or through which they came to understand an aspect of faith in a new way. In a letter to his mother excerpted in an army chaplain newsletter, an unnamed lieutenant described a moving experience during a small outdoor worship service. “I felt the presence of Almighty God like I never have before,” he wrote. “I could feel myself being cleansed of all impurities.”<sup>91</sup> For former army nurse, Helen Tarr, worship while in the military was a broadening experience. Though not Jewish, she recalled a particularly significant service led by a Jewish chaplain along the tracks when the train moving her evacuation hospital unit paused. Questioning the

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<sup>89</sup> Edward Hitchen, “Letter to His Mother, January 27, 1945,” in *Lines of Battle: Letters from American Servicemen 1941-1945*, ed. Annette Tapert (New York: Times Books, 1987), 224.

<sup>90</sup> Victor B. Cline, “War Diary: Personal Diary of Victor Bailey Cline,” unpublished manuscript, n.d., MSS 2350 no. 550, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

<sup>91</sup> Office of Chief of Chaplains, Army, “Circular Letter No. 274,” July 1, 1943, 2, 300.5 Circular Letters V. 3, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

importance of religious difference, she complimented the rabbi and reflected, “It was just a wonderful, wonderful religious feeling. You were actually in worship.”<sup>92</sup> Fighter pilot Lt. Tom Harmon described a powerful worship experience when he made it back to base after his P-38 was shot down over China. Chaplain Cosgrove led a thanksgiving Mass in honor of his safe return in which Catholics and non-Catholics participated. Harmon reflected soon after, “Nothing, absolutely nothing in my life has ever equaled that moment.”<sup>93</sup> For some, worship simply meant a temporary respite from their fearsome duties. A former infantryman, Edward Feagins described his feelings on the eve of a particularly hazardous night patrol in Germany. He joined a worship service some of the men in his unit were leading. As they were singing hymns, Feagins had to leave with a small group of men for the patrol. He recalled lamenting, “This one time I wanted to stay for the entire service.”<sup>94</sup>

Amid the challenges of military life, some soldiers and sailors found solace and support through communal acts of worship. Some sought out religious services conducted by military chaplains. When possible, others participated in services at nearby civilian churches both at home and abroad. Still others worshipped with groups organized by those for whom religious leadership was not their official military function. For many, the act of choosing or not choosing to participate in certain services was itself a means by which they expressed themselves religiously. In addition, when soldiers and

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<sup>92</sup> Helen Tarr, interview by G. Kurt Piehler and Denise Kosak, unpublished transcript, July 2, 2003, 74, Veteran’s Oral History Project, Center for the Study of War and Society, Department of History, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

<sup>93</sup> Tom Harmon, *Pilots Also Pray* (New York: Crowell, 1944), 167.

<sup>94</sup> Edward R. Feagins, “A Country Boy in World War II,” unpublished memoir, 1993, 84, Edward R. Feagins Collection (AFC/2001/001/11524), Veterans History Project Collection, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

sailors did worship, they were often more than passive participants. Instead, soldiers and sailors often assisted chaplains or led their own services. At the same time, men and women in the military creatively constructed improvised spaces for worship as well as articles for use in worship such as altars, sacramental serving sets, and decorations. As they struggled to adapt traditional forms or religious worship to the context of wartime, soldiers and sailors attempted to reconcile that which they believed to be essential with what was possible in their current circumstances. For many, this exercise broadened their religious sympathies as they worshipped alongside those with differing beliefs and practices. For others, the evidence of religious difference solidified their opposition to compromise in worship. In the end, soldiers and sailors worshiped communally for a variety of reasons in a diversity of ways. Through worship, soldiers and sailors sought to interpret their wartime experiences in a much larger context.

## Chapter 4

### Testament: Religious Reading in Wartime

When serving watch, sailor John Kempton relished being posted in his ship's crow's nest. "No one could see you," he recalled. "You could sneak some reading, contemplating, or whatever." A couple times, he even fell asleep, but the sounds from his headset woke him in time to report. One night, however, the reality of the war in the Pacific area became distressingly evident as Japanese "Betty Bombers" attacked his ship's convoy. "After that," he reflected. "I only read my little blue testament on watch." Kempton mentioned that the war led him to become a "fox-hole Christian," and he began attending worship services possible. Notably, it seems that Kempton possessed the testament for some time before he seriously invested himself in reading it. Though contemporary critics often decried the temporary nature of foxhole faith, Kempton's experiences had lasting effects. For the rest of his life, he kept that testament, and he became a life-long member of the Gideons—the civilian organization that provided his testament and millions of others to US military personnel.<sup>1</sup> For some like Kempton, religious reading became an important avenue for religious reflection as they sought to understand their experiences.

Because of the scarcity of chaplains, soldiers and sailors took increased responsibility for their own religious development. To a certain extent, both military and civilian leaders encouraged this. The chaplain corps provided pocket testaments for

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<sup>1</sup> John D. Kempton, unpublished memoir, 2007, 7–8, (AFC/2001/001/50235), Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

devotional use. Civilian groups provided books, pamphlets, tracts, and religious periodicals. Independent of the hopes of the leaders who provided religious literature, soldiers and sailors used these materials but sometimes in surprising ways as they sought to make sense of their experiences. Some met together in groups for mutual support as well as devoting time to individual study. Both the military and civilian groups provided a large supply of religious literature, but the demand from soldiers and sailors remained uneven. Many remained indifferent, but even so, they sometimes still carried a testament. Others used the materials more or less as intended as they sought a means of religious reflection. By selecting, collecting, interpreting, and sharing such literature, troops discovered a unique outlet for religious expression.

### **Creating a Demand**

As millions entered the US military, civilian and military leaders sought to ensure that troops' religious needs were being met. To a certain extent, Americans were concerned that military service, especially during war, would be a corrupting influence on the young people of the nation. Believing that victory required public support, the military embraced religious policies designed, in part, to convince Americans that their sons and daughters would be in good hands. As noted earlier, the military rapidly expanded its chaplain corps during the war to provide professional religious leadership within the ranks. Despite these efforts, military leaders understood that chaplains alone would not be able to provide religious coverage for all troops in all places. Religious diversity and isolation remained significant barriers. Consequently, the military sought to equip soldiers and sailors with basic tools such as scriptures and other religious literature

to care for their own religious needs. Though a certain level of demand for such materials existed among troops, the dominant forces driving the supply came from the civilian public as well as the military leadership. Before the war, relatively few Americans even claimed to read the Bible regularly. A 1939 poll found that only thirty-five percent of Americans had read any part of the Bible in the previous month.<sup>2</sup> American leaders hoped to change these habits. By ensuring an adequate supply, they hoped that demand among troops would follow.

The Christian Bible dominated early efforts to provide printed religious literature for consumption by soldiers and sailors. American Protestants had long celebrated the Bible as the bedrock of Christian identity, a development predicated upon the assumption that properly interpreting the Bible was simply a matter of reason and common sense.<sup>3</sup> As Mark Noll has noted, many Catholics and Jews also echoed this trend toward a definitive religious text as they sought inclusion in America's religious mainstream.<sup>4</sup> Existing civilian organizations first provided Bibles to troops—typically in the form of the New Testament supplemented by Psalms to save space. By December 1943, the American Bible Society was producing 12,000 New Testaments per day for US troops.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Mildred Strunk, *Public Opinion, 1935-1946*, ed. Hadley Cantril (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951), 39.

<sup>3</sup> Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 162–3. See also: George M. Marsden, "Everyone One's Own Interpreter?: The Bible, Science, and Authority in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America," in *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 79–100.

<sup>4</sup> Mark A. Noll, "The Bible, Minority Faiths and the American Protestant Mainstream, 1860-1925," in *Minority Faiths and the American Protestant Mainstream*, ed. Jonathan D. Sarna (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 204.

<sup>5</sup> Francis C. Stifler, "The Scriptures Go on the Assembly Line," *Protestant Voice*, December 10, 1943. By 1948, the ABS had produced nearly eight million texts for US military personnel. Marjorie L. Miller and American Bible Society, *War Service of the ABS, 1940-1948*, ABS Historical Essay #15, 7-B (New York: American Bible Society, 1969), 10; Ivan H. Nothdurft and American Bible Society, *Distribution in the U.S.A., 1931-66*, ABS Historical Essay #14, part 8 (New York: American Bible Society, 1973), 160–161.



Gideons International made a similar effort distributing 8.4 million New Testaments by March 1945.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to civilian efforts, the federal government eventually began printing and distributing pocket-sized scriptures, moving beyond Protestant editions to offer Catholic and Jewish editions, as well.<sup>7</sup> In an October 1940 letter to President Roosevelt, Evelyn Kohlstedt, a young mother from Iowa, recommended that the military give a Bible to each of the soldiers conscripted under the recently enacted Selective Service Act.<sup>8</sup> Within six months, Congress approved 140,000 dollars for an initial purchase of 1.4 million “pocket testaments.”<sup>9</sup> By the end of the war, the US government had published more than 11 million.<sup>10</sup> Each testament included a foreword from President Roosevelt commending Bible reading—terminology used even in the Jewish edition. “It is a fountain of strength and now, as always, an aid in attaining the highest aspirations of

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<sup>6</sup> Religious News Service, “Gideons Distribute Testaments at Rate of 200,000 a Month,” *Protestant Voice*, March 30, 1945.

<sup>7</sup> For simplicity, these various editions will be referred to collectively as “testaments.”

<sup>8</sup> Letter reprinted in: Jorgensen and United States, Office of the Chief of Air Force Chaplains, *The Service of Chaplains to Army Air Units, 1917-1946*, 1:256. US Department of Commerce--Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940*, Line 6, Page 2A, Enumeration District 74-21, Silver Lake Township, Palo Alto County, Iowa, NARA Microfilm Roll 1189, 1940 U.S. Federal Population Census, National Archives at College Park, MD.

<sup>9</sup> Aryeh Lev to Adjutant General, “Purchase of Testaments,” memorandum, August 1, 1941, 461 Special Testament File, V. 1, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. The cost of each testament procured by the Government Printing Office from American Book-Stratford Press eventually rose to 15.5 cents because of changes related, in part, to unavailability of latex for the original cover design. See: William R. Arnold to Chief of the Special Services Branch, “Pocket Testaments,” memorandum, March 9, 1942, 461 Special Testament File, V. 1, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>10</sup> Jorgensen and United States, Office of the Chief of Air Force Chaplains, *The Service of Chaplains to Army Air Units, 1917-1946*, 1:256. The government only supplied testaments to those in the army. Sailors and marines depended on supplies donated by civilian organizations. Gideons International and the American Bible Society reported supplying about 5 million testaments those in the navy by the end of the war. Drury and United States, Bureau of Naval Personnel, Chaplains Division., *The History of the Chaplain Corps, United States Navy, 1939-1949*, 2:9, 290.

the human soul,” he concluded. The chiefs of chaplains of the army and navy, sent six foreword suggestions to the president upon which they agreed.<sup>11</sup> Several emphasized connections between American and scriptural principles, noting a contrast with other ideologies that offered “solutions for the world’s troubles.” The final version, however, avoided language of ideologies or principles and favored words of individual comfort and growth.

Nonetheless, William Arnold, the Army Chief of Chaplains, rearticulated a spiritual interpretation of the war as he presented the first testaments to soldiers representing each of the major faith traditions in a ceremony on May 17, 1942. “We are at war against men who are determined to change our form of Government and to destroy its spirit of freedom,” he declared. “Day by day we see more clearly that we shall need more than physical strength and military power to win this war. It’s a war of spiritual forces, and victory will come to the nation whose spirit is the stronger.” Emphasizing the role of scripture in revealing the nature of the conflict, Chaplain Arnold exhorted Americans to “turn to Almighty God” because “he has never yet lost a battle or a war, nor have they who were faithful to Him ever been conquered.”<sup>12</sup> For Arnold, providing testaments at government expense to all soldiers who desired them was justified because he felt that it would improve the effectiveness of the army. Others, however, were skeptical. In February 1942, a Virginia businessman had written to Arnold expressing his

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<sup>11</sup> George F. Rixey to Robert W. Berry, memorandum, February 3, 1941, 461 Special Testament File, V. 1, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in: Office of Chief of Chaplains, Army, “Circular Letter No. 252,” June 1, 1942, 1, 300.5 Circular Letters V. 2, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

dissatisfaction with the pocket testament program. “If you and Mr. Roosevelt think that you are going to stop the enemy with books, just get this out of your heads: they can be stopped only with bullets not books,” he proclaimed. “If you men in Washington don’t get some common sense in your heads pretty soon Mr. Togo’s boast that he will make peace in Washington may prove to be no idle jest.”<sup>13</sup>

Military efforts to provide scriptures acceptable to most Protestants, Catholics, and Jews aside, civilian religious groups developed resources that catered to their own members. In 1943, the LDS Church published pocket editions of both the Book of Mormon and the “Principles of the Gospel.”<sup>14</sup> The church sent copies of both books to all registered LDS military personnel. Aside from scriptures, religious groups produced prayer books to aid troops in private devotions as well as in leading public prayers. Numerous Roman Catholic organizations published devotional guides that often included passages of scripture, prayers, and songs. For Jewish troops, the Jewish Welfare Board produced an abridged prayer book that sought to represent the Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox subgroups alike—a level of religious cooperation Rabbi Philip Bernstein declared to be a “remarkable achievement.”<sup>15</sup> Though chaplains used it in their services, the JWB intended troops to use the book “where the exigencies of life in the army or the navy do not permit attendance at regular synagogue services.”<sup>16</sup> During the war, the

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<sup>13</sup> N. B. Hafleigh to William R. Arnold, February 16, 1942, 461 Special Testament File, V. 1, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>14</sup> “Pocket Size Book of Mormon Issued for L.D.S. Servicemen,” *Church News (Salt Lake City, UT)*, March 13, 1943.

<sup>15</sup> During World War II, Bernstein had been executive director of the Jewish Welfare Board’s Committee on Army and Navy Religious Activities. Bernstein, *Rabbis at War*, 18.

<sup>16</sup> Jewish Welfare Board, *Prayer Book: Abridged for Jews in the Armed Forces of the United States*, iv.

JWB distributed over one million copies.<sup>17</sup> In addition to books, many organizations also produced and distributed brief religious tracts often designed specifically for soldiers and sailors. By early 1944, the Christian Laymen's Tract League reported sending over two million "Gospel tracts" to chaplains for distribution to military personnel.<sup>18</sup>

The military and civilian groups understood that simply providing religious literature was not adequate. They desired to encourage and equip soldiers and sailors to use it. As historian Matthew Hedstrom has argued, political and religious leaders united to cultivate religious reading during the war in order to promote religious solidarity among Americans.<sup>19</sup> Building on programs of secular reading, trained professionals collaborated to create suggested reading lists for those who aspired to the middle class. In the realm of religion, the largest and most widely publicized effort was the annual Religious Book Week spearheaded by the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ) in partnership with the Council on Books in Wartime, an association of publishers, authors, and booksellers. To mark the week each year, the NCCJ published a booklet containing lists of recommended books under the categories of Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, and Good-Will.<sup>20</sup> While publishers certainly participated in order to create a larger demand for books, the lists also benefited the war effort by combating religious divisions by promoting a shared American religious identity under the Judeo-Christian tradition.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., iii.

<sup>18</sup> H. D. Millke, "Letter to the Editor," *Protestant Voice*, January 21, 1944.

<sup>19</sup> Hedstrom, *The Rise of Liberal Religion*, 120.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, the 1943 list: "Works of Permanent Value Selected for Religious Book Week," *New York Times*, March 28, 1943, sec. Book Review.

<sup>21</sup> See also: Hedstrom, *The Rise of Liberal Religion*, 145–6.

Beyond general reading of books about religion, Protestant organizations sought to encourage soldiers and sailors to study the Bible and provided guidance and resources to make it easier. For example, the Service Men's Christian League included Bible study guides in each issue of the *Link*, a monthly Protestant magazine published under the auspices of the Federal Council of Churches. Initially, the editors included materials for weekly group sessions as well as daily reading suggestions with focusing questions.<sup>22</sup> Edited by army chaplain Norman Nygaard, the popular book, *Strength for Service to God and Country*, followed a common format for a devotional guide for personal reading.<sup>23</sup> For each day of the year, the book provided a suggested scripture text followed by a paragraph-long reflection. In addition to resources designed specifically for military personnel, general devotional guides circulated widely among troops. For example, 250,000 copies of each issue of *The Upper Room* were distributed to soldiers and sailors in 1943.<sup>24</sup>

The matter of religious literature also exposed significant rifts between religious groups. The army testament for Roman Catholic personnel used a new translation that included anti-Semitic editorial material.<sup>25</sup> For example, in a clarification of Apocalypse (Revelation) 2:9, a note in the army testament stated, "The Jews are the synagogue of

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<sup>22</sup> By the end of 1943, the first year of publication, the editors stopped including reading suggestions for daily individual study, but the group materials endured until the end of the war.

<sup>23</sup> Norman Nygaard, ed., *Strength for Service to God and Country: Daily Devotional Messages for Men in the Services* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1942).

<sup>24</sup> Jorgensen and United States, Office of the Chief of Air Force Chaplains, *The Service of Chaplains to Army Air Units, 1917-1946*, 1:259.

<sup>25</sup> Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, ed., *The New Testament of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* (Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1941). On this particular translation see also: Timothy Michael Dolan, *Some Seed Fell on Good Ground: The Life of Edwin V. O'Hara*, Reprint (Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 168–9. The army testament was essentially a reprint of a collection of readings edited by Stedman: Joseph F. Stedman, *My Daily Reading from the New Testament: Gospels Unified, Epistles Unified: Using the New Translation* (Brooklyn, NY: Confraternity of the Precious Blood, 1941).

Satan. The True Synagogue is the Christian Church.”<sup>26</sup> William Arnold, the Chief of Army Chaplains, claimed that he acted quickly to correct the problem in future printings when a rabbi friend privately brought it to his attention rather than as a response to public pressure.<sup>27</sup> In addition, Roman Catholic Bishop Edwin O’Hara directed church officials to revise the text from which the military version drew.<sup>28</sup>

The distribution of religious tracts by chaplains and the endorsement implied by doing so also generated controversy. Military chapels often contained racks of free religious literature for military personnel. An October 1943 policy directive circulated to army chaplains noted that the Office of the Chief of Chaplains had received numerous complaints from both military and civilian sources regarding tracts “which attack some religious group, religious custom, or religious teaching.”<sup>29</sup> Consequently, chaplains were directed to “carefully examine all pamphlets placed in chapels for general distribution” to eliminate that which is “offensive to any race or creed.” Eight months later in another circular letter, the Office of the Chief of Chaplains reiterated its concerns amid

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<sup>26</sup> *My Daily Reading from the Four Gospels and the New Testament: Gospels Unified, Epistles Unified* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1942).

<sup>27</sup> A representative of the Protestant Textbook Commission, Kenneth Leslie had publicized the issue, but Arnold claimed that they were already working to resolve the issue before it became public. William R. Arnold to Kenneth Leslie, April 23, 1943, 000.3 Jewish Denomination, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. Leslie and the Protestant Textbook Commission took most of the credit for the change. For example, see: Phineas J. Biron, “Strictly Confidential,” *Ohio Jewish Chronicle (Columbus, OH)*, April 30, 1943. On this issue, see also: Slomovitz, *The Fighting Rabbis*, 89. The newsletter, *In Fact* edited by George Seldes, published numerous articles over several issues regarding the testament claiming that the mainstream press was ignoring the story. Though interpretively slanted, the publication offers a useful summary of the concerns as well as an interview with Chaplain Arnold. See: “U. S. Government Stops Printing Anti-Labor, Anti-Semitic Bible Challenged by ‘In Fact,’” *In Fact* 7, no. 3 (April 26, 1943): 1-4; “Interview with Chief Chaplain General Mons. Arnold,” *In Fact* 7, no. 4 (May 3, 1943): 4.

<sup>28</sup> Dolan, *Some Seed Fell on Good Ground*, 168.

<sup>29</sup> Office of Chief of Chaplains, Army, “Addenda to Circular Letter No. 277,” October 1, 1943, 300.5 Circular Letters V. 3, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

continuing complaints about “accusatory and inflammatory pamphlets.”<sup>30</sup> “In the Army where men must live shoulder to shoulder and where a fraternal spirit is so vitally important,” it explained, “A gratuitous attack on the good will or good faith of another person never promotes the cause of truth or charity.”<sup>31</sup> It seems that some chaplains took these instructions to heart, though sometimes applying them broadly. In December 1945, Sgt. Walton Unander wrote a letter complaining that a Catholic chaplain had confiscated the supply of religious tracts that he and other soldiers had been distributing.<sup>32</sup> In addition, he alleged that the chaplain said that he intended to burn the materials. On behalf of the Chief of Army Chaplains, Roy Honeywell responded apologetically explaining that the chaplain may have interpreted army policy on religious publications too zealously. Honeywell attributed the conflict to a misunderstanding “among sincere workers in the field of religion” and suggested that “a frank and friendly talk with him would be apt to clear up the whole matter.”<sup>33</sup> That military culture discouraged enlisted men from challenging the judgment of officers remained unaddressed; this conflict was not between equals. The Army Chaplain Corps desired to make religious materials widely available to military personnel, but it understood and sought to mitigate potentially divisive conflict that could result from unregulated religious expression.

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<sup>30</sup> Office of Chief of Chaplains, Army, “Addenda to Circular Letter No. 285,” June 1, 1944, 300.5 Circular Letters V. 3, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Walton Unander, December 16, 1945, 000.3 Religious Ministrations in the Army, V. 7, , Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>33</sup> Roy J Honeywell to Walton Unander, January 9, 1946, 000.3 Religious Ministrations in the Army, V. 7, , Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Though civilian and military leaders ensured a great supply of printed religious matter, the demand for such materials among troops remains difficult to assess. In his analysis of book culture during the war, for example, Hedstrom convincingly articulates the war-driven vision of religious unity that dominated religious publishing as well as its postwar legacy. However, one must also attend to the ways in which the intended readers interacted with and interpreted the materials.<sup>34</sup> Most scholars lean heavily on the nature of supply. As Hedstrom and contemporary observers noted, religious publishing greatly accelerated during the war.<sup>35</sup> Certainly, some soldiers and sailors secured and used religious books and periodicals, but demand does not necessarily follow supply. In addition, one must attend to the ways people engaged with the materials. Did they read uncritically? Considering questions such as these reveals significant aspects of the ways troops both resonated with and called into question reigning cultural values as they interacted with printed religious materials.

### **Selective Engagement**

Soldiers and sailors engaged with religious materials in both ways intended and sometimes unintended by those who provided them. This active practice of selecting, collecting, interpreting, and sharing demonstrated that troops were not merely passive participants in religious programs crafted by professionals. Rather, soldiers and sailors crafted their own religious worlds, a process often inseparable from their experiences of the war. Some with preexisting religious commitments actively sought out familiar

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<sup>34</sup> Audience reception theory presumes that readers are not simply passive recipients who absorb written material at face-value. On both the suitability and challenge of historical reception studies, see: Amy L. Blair, "Jo's Women," *Reviews in American History* 40, no. 2 (2012): 277–8.

<sup>35</sup> Hedstrom, *The Rise of Liberal Religion*, 115.



materials for their own edification as well as to minister to fellow troops. Others interacted with materials in a more happenstance fashion. For those who had grown up in the grips of the Depression, the simple fact that such materials were provided free of charge was likely appealing. Similarly, boredom led some to pursue stimulation through reading whatever materials were available. Finally, the challenges of wartime service led others to actively engage with religion more deeply, and religious reading provided an important connection for those seeking out meaning.

For various reasons, some soldiers and sailors sought to read scriptures or other materials by themselves on a regular basis—often daily. Amid the bustle and close quarters of military life, such personal times could provide a respite, so long as one could actually get away. In reality, however, privacy remained rare for enlisted personnel, even in matters of personal hygiene or toilet habits. Consequently, personal religious reading often became a public event and signaled the religiosity of the reader whether or not he or she wished to communicate such a message. For those with confidence and firm religious commitments, public displays of personal religiosity could provide an opportunity to set an example or even passively evangelize. Others likely shied away from reading in public, fearing ostracism by their new peers. As bonds grew with time and experience, such fears sometimes subsided.

For those belonging to religious minorities, the issue of religious identification through reading was potentially more significant. A former enlisted musician in the navy, Jay Slaughter recalled his reading choices sometimes raised the attention of his bandmates. A member of the LDS Church, Slaughter occasionally had the opportunity to go ashore and meet with other Mormons, but he often read scripture when he could not

meet with others. When he read the Book of Mormon in the open, some of the band members made fun of him, a development he saw as an invigorating challenge. Consequently, he kept reading openly and included other LDS texts such as the Doctrine and the Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price. Reflecting on the experience of opposition, Slaughter observed, “That’s where I gained my testimony.”<sup>36</sup> The experience of being in a religious minority likely made some more sympathetic to others. LDS Church member and former army nurse, Lillie Fitzsimons, described an incident in an army hospital in New Guinea where she witnessed a soldier being mocked by others for reading a Bible. As an officer, Fitzsimons called these enlisted men together and suggested that everyone might be better off if people spent more time reading scriptures.<sup>37</sup>

Aside from spiritual edification, some soldiers and sailors turned to religious readings to remain connected to familiar aspects of home. In letters to his mother, Pvt. Roger Houtz, a committed Presbyterian, often mentioned reading his Bible regularly while in the army. The act of reading seemed to comfort him both spiritually and emotionally in that it sustained a connection with his mother. From training at Fort Bragg, he sent home a pocket testament exactly like his own as a Mother’s Day gift, hoping that it would make up for his inability to get anything else.<sup>38</sup> Five months later, he reflected on the significance of he and his mother reading from duplicate testaments; “God joins us together tho we are miles apart.”<sup>39</sup> As he made final preparations to depart

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<sup>36</sup> Jay Slaughter, interview by Robert Freeman, unpublished transcript, May 2000, 7, MSS 2350 no. 734, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

<sup>37</sup> Fitzsimons, memoir.

<sup>38</sup> Roger L. Houtz to Mabel Houtz, May 11, 1943, Personal Correspondence, Dec 1942-Nov 1943, Roger L. Houtz Papers, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>39</sup> Roger L. Houtz to Mabel Houtz, October 3, 1943, Personal Correspondence, Dec 1942-Nov 1943, Roger L. Houtz Papers, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

overseas with the 203<sup>rd</sup> Field Artillery Battalion, Houtz mentioned in a letter home that he particularly related to the ninety-first Psalm, referring to it as the “Soldier’s Psalm.”<sup>40</sup> In response, his mother mailed to him, now in England, the Psalm written out in her own hand, a gift that he treasured and kept in his wallet. “I have read that 91<sup>st</sup> Psalm several times and it always helps immense,” he reported.<sup>41</sup> Within several months, however, Houtz lost his wallet and the handwritten Psalm. Soon after landing in France in late June 1944, he wrote to his mother asking her to send another copy.<sup>42</sup> He still read his testament, but he wanted to read the Psalm again in her own hand.

Though some troops read religious texts as a continuation of their habits in civilian life, the particularity of military service in war contributed new factors. At least back to World War I, troops have described war as “months of boredom punctuated by moments of terror.”<sup>43</sup> Boredom provided both impetus and opportunity for reading, and religious texts were widely available. Pfc. Wilfred Cormier, for example, mentioned to a journalist that he read the Bible more in the army than he had as a civilian. “I never had time on the farm. Too busy,” he explained.<sup>44</sup> Soldiers and sailors also turned to religious reading in response to terror, or the likelihood of imminent danger. Aboard a transport carrying men from the segregated Ninety-Third Infantry Division to overseas duty, Nelson Peery came across some friends sitting on a bunk, but he noticed something was

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<sup>40</sup> Roger L. Houtz to Mabel Houtz, January 15, 1944, Personal Correspondence, Dec 1943-Jun 1948, Roger L. Houtz Papers, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>41</sup> Roger L. Houtz to Mabel Houtz, April 27, 1944, Personal Correspondence, Dec 1943-Jun 1948, Roger L. Houtz Papers, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>42</sup> Roger L. Houtz to Mabel Houtz, July 3, 1944, Personal Correspondence, Dec 1943-Jun 1948, Roger L. Houtz Papers, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>43</sup> Quotation reprinted from the letter of a British officer. “The Baptism of Fire,” *Times*, November 4, 1914, 5.

<sup>44</sup> “Servicemen Among First to Answer Call For Nation-Wide Bible Reading Crusade,” *Protestant Voice*, December 10, 1943, 5.

different. “I was surprised to see that instead of a bottle between them, there was a Bible,” he wrote to his mother. “They were reading about Job and his suffering and comparing it to our own.”<sup>45</sup> After advancing to clear a German observation point, Pvt. Ross Poole found himself isolated from his group behind enemy lines in Italy. He spent the night and most of the next day evading Germans by crawling through muddy ditches as he sought to find the line. Nearing exhaustion, Poole took out his Bible and read it “for a couple of hours.”<sup>46</sup> Soon, he realized he was only about 800 yards from the line but a mine field obstructed his path. Desperate, he stood up and walked across the field reaching the line safely. When an officer questioned him regarding his actions, Poole explained, “I just took out my Bible and read a prayer and come on in.”<sup>47</sup> That Poole took a Bible with him on such a mission shows the significance it held for some soldiers. Regardless of previous habit, some such as Poole turned to religious reading in desperate times and found confidence and comfort.

For those held as prisoners of war, the experience often intensified feelings of both boredom and terror. When possible, prisoners sometimes found respite in reading.<sup>48</sup> After his capture in Tunisia, former sergeant Davis Shouse was held in a prison camp in Italy. He recalled, “I read the New Testament more when I was in camp than I ever read

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<sup>45</sup> Quoted in: Robert F. Jefferson, *Fighting for Hope: African American Troops of the 93rd Infantry Division in World War II and Postwar America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 153.

<sup>46</sup> George Tucker, “Yank Yields Bazooka for Bible, Saves Life by Trek to U. S. Lines,” *Morning Herald* (Gloversville, NY), April 5, 1944, 5.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Though lacking a focus on religious reading, for a broader analysis of reading in POW camps in Europe, see: David Shavit, “‘The Greatest Morale Factor Next to the Red Army’: Books and Libraries in American and British Prisoners of War Camps in Germany during World War II,” *Libraries & Culture* 34, no. 2 (April 1, 1999): 113–134.

it before.”<sup>49</sup> Even the non-religious sometimes explored religious texts as a way to pass the time. Harry Glixon reported reading the New Testament as a POW in Germany and took special interest in the “Sermon on the Mount.” Culturally Jewish but an avowed atheist, he concluded that “Christ” was a great teacher, but he remained unconvinced of Christ’s divinity.<sup>50</sup> In some camps, captors restricted access to religious texts, but troops often found ways to hide books. In such situations, possessing and using contraband texts functioned as a means of resistance. Symbolically, the free use of religious texts contrasted American ideals with those of malevolent governments that intended to usurp religion. For others, religious reading helped them deal with their experiences. As a prisoner of the Japanese, Jesse Miller had little access to religious texts, but a fellow prisoner had hidden a testament in the camp. When possible, Miller borrowed and read the book. One day, however, a guard saw him reading and beat Miller severely until he lost consciousness.<sup>51</sup> Even so, Miller remained unrepentant.

Drawing on long traditions of religious practice, soldiers and sailors sometimes memorized scriptures and prayers. Some entered the military having already memorized prayers and passages, and others expanded on the practice as a constructive way to pass time. Former army scout Chuck Holsinger reported that he would work on memorizing Bible verses and chapters during night watches in the Philippines. Holsinger sometimes connected his reading to his experiences. One evening after a delay spared him from a fierce battle, Holsinger continued memorizing Psalm 91 noting the significance of the

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<sup>49</sup> Davis Shouse, interview by Arthur L. Kelly, June 23, 1986, 1986OH182 WW 056, Colonel Arthur L. Kelly American Veterans Oral History Project, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries, Lexington, KY.

<sup>50</sup> Harry R Glixon, “My Story: Book II, the War Years, 1943-1945,” 1997, 63, SC-15238, Jacob Marcus Rader Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.

<sup>51</sup> Jesse L. Miller, *Prisoner of Hope* (Englewood, CO: privately printed, 1989), 95–98.

second verse, "I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress."<sup>52</sup> For those facing dire circumstances, recalling memorized passages could provide comfort. As a prisoner of war in Germany, Wilbur Horn drew upon his memory of scripture and hymns. "They gave me the strength I needed to make it through my imprisonment," he reflected. "Every day I repeated all the Bible verses I could recall, and then I turned to all the old hymns I could remember."<sup>53</sup> Perhaps the scripture most commonly memorized, Psalm 23 held special significance for troops. Marine Eugene Sledge recalled reciting the passage repeatedly as his unit advanced across an exposed area under heavy fire during the Battle of Peleliu.<sup>54</sup> A former infantry squad leader, Elbert Gourley recited the psalm as a religious exercise but also with an additional purpose. Explaining that fear hampered the rational decision making expected of a squad leader, Gourley reported that he would recite Psalm 23 while under fire to check whether his mind was clear. If he was unable to complete it, he would stay put and settle himself before deciding how to proceed with his men.<sup>55</sup>

As soldiers and sailors engaged with religious reading, some reported intensification of religious commitment or even conversion. For those seeking to explore, reading provided a relatively non-threatening way to approach religion. The presence of religious literature alone did not likely inspire spiritual renewal. Those who were not interested in religion probably did not read religious books. Instead, religious

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<sup>52</sup> Chuck Holsinger, *Above the Cry of Battle* (Phoenix, AZ: ACW Press, 2001), 145, 209.

<sup>53</sup> Wilbur L. Horn, unpublished memoir, n.d., 3, 18, (AFC/2001/001/69695), Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<sup>54</sup> E. B. Sledge, *With the Old Breed, at Peleliu and Okinawa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 79.

<sup>55</sup> Elbert C. Gourley, interview by Arthur L. Kelly, March 17, 1989, 1989OH053 WW 121, Colonel Arthur L. Kelly American Veterans Oral History Project, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries, Lexington, KY.

reading provided a path and guidance for those who were already seeking spiritually. Former marine tank driver Bob Boardman related the significant role reading the Bible played as he committed himself to Christianity. In 1943 at the age of nineteen, Boardman arrived in Australia as a replacement in the First Marine Division. While drunk, he and a friend picked a fight with some Australian soldiers, and Boardman accidentally punched through a shop window, severely damaging his hand. Recuperating in a hospital among battle-wounded soldiers, Boardman felt guilty for his foolishness and began serious reflection on his life. Previously agnostic, he began reading daily from a Gideon New Testament provided to him in San Francisco. Though somewhat self-conscious when reading in public, he read anyway, later reflecting that he “was a hungry searcher for God.” Three months later, he formally committed to Christianity as his unit prepared to rejoin the battle in the southwest Pacific.<sup>56</sup> Though less dramatic, Pvt. Donald Breazile reported a similar experience in a letter to the editors of the *Link*. When he left for the Army, Breazile’s sister gave him a New Testament though he had never taken much interest in religious matters. She asked him to read it, and he began doing so to honor his sister. After several months, he concluded that he wanted to commit himself to Christianity and sought baptism from a chaplain. “It took that crisis to make me stop and think seriously about how I was living my life, and what death might mean to me and to those I love,” he explained. Eventually stationed at an isolated Alaskan post, he noted that he still found “a great deal of comfort in reading and studying God’s word.”<sup>57</sup> Some men became interested in religious reading for rather non-religious reasons. During final

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<sup>56</sup> Robert Boardman, *Unforgettable Men in Unforgettable Times* (Mukilteo, WA: Winepress Publishing, 1998), 61–65.

<sup>57</sup> Donald F. Breazile, “Testimony from the Northern Front,” *Link*, December 1943, 44.

preparation for deployment overseas, Robert von Bose met Patricia Williams, a nurse cadet, at a dance in Salt Lake City, Utah. They began dating. One night, while waiting to pick Williams up at her uncle's house where she was staying, von Bose picked up a copy of *The Doctrine and the Covenants*, an LDS text. Her uncle noticed and gave him a copy of *The Book of Mormon* suggesting he start there. Williams wrote her name and address in the front. An avid reader and keenly interested in Williams, Von Bose kept the book and began reading it on a transport bound for New Guinea. Upon arrival, he sought out an LDS meeting, but it took him five months to find any Mormons. When he did, he asked some doctrinal questions and then felt convinced of the path. He joined the LDS Church, eventually marrying Williams after the war.<sup>58</sup> For each of these men, religious reading provided an avenue for spiritual exploration as the war spurred them to deeper reflection. The availability of texts did not drive demand, but the accessibility of religious texts allowed troops to delve more deeply if they desired to do so.

The accessibility of religious texts also led some soldiers and sailors to collect unique mixes of religious reading materials. During the war, Sam J. Agent travelled widely across the United States as a military policeman in the army. While doing so, he assembled a diverse collection of religious literature. It included a Pentecostal periodical titled "The Army Cry," a Christian Science booklet titled "Spiritual Protection," a directory of Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod "key pastors" for military personnel, and a Roman Catholic booklet titled "Half the Young Men."<sup>59</sup> Though Agent left no evidence

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<sup>58</sup> Robert J. Von Bose to Robert Freeman and Dennis Wright, May 28, 2000, MSS 2350 no. 1058, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

<sup>59</sup> "Sam J. Agent Collection," n.d., US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA. The preferred spelling of the family name is likely 'Adgent.' See: "Adgent Family Papers," n.d., Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, TN.



of how he used such materials, the way he collected and preserved these documents demonstrates the breadth of available literature and suggests a willingness to read widely across denominational lines. Assembling a collection is itself a creative activity and an avenue of personal expression.<sup>60</sup>

Though the military and civilian organizations sought to make religious texts accessible, neither could exert control over the ways in which soldiers and sailors used them. In the context of POW camps, desperation led to the abandonment of many of the niceties of civilian life. Jesse Miller lamented that the Bible he borrowed in a Japanese camp withered ever more thin as men tore out its pages to roll cigarettes. Prisoners collected discarded stubs from guards until they had enough to roll their own cigarette.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, former POW Forrest Knox reported that fellow prisoners stole New Testaments “like crazy” from each other because the pages “made the best cigarette paper.”<sup>62</sup> One night on a prisoner transport, or “hell ship,” a dying friend entrusted Knox with a testament with his wedding ring hidden inside to return to his wife. By morning, the testament had disappeared. Though some men considered rolling cigarettes from the pages of a Bible to be a desecration, others rationalized the practice given the context. A Dutch chaplain allegedly consented, offering that the message itself was holy rather than the paper upon which it was printed.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, former POW Walter Regehr reported that chaplain Joseph Vanderheiden responded to such concerns with pragmatic levity while held in the Philippines. According to Regehr, Vanderheiden quipped that at least

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<sup>60</sup> Shirley T. Wajda, “Collecting and Collections,” in *Material Culture in America: Understanding Everyday Life*, ed. Helen Sheumaker and Shirley T. Wajda (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2008), 103.

<sup>61</sup> Miller, *Prisoner of Hope*, 95.

<sup>62</sup> In: Donald Knox, ed., *Death March: The Survivors of Bataan* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), 340.

<sup>63</sup> Gavan Daws, *Prisoners of the Japanese: POWs of World War II in the Pacific* (New York: W. Morrow, 1994), 116.

men were “breathing in the Word of God.”<sup>64</sup> To be fair, POWs used other sources of paper for cigarettes including other books, letters, and currency, but it seems that thin testament paper worked better.<sup>65</sup> Prisoners put testaments to other practical uses, as well. A former POW held in China, John Young recalled that the Gideons had supplied Bibles but “most were used as toilet paper as diarrhea swept through the camp.”<sup>66</sup> In each of these cases, the supply of religious texts sometimes fulfilled a demand entirely different from that which was originally intended.

The cultural ubiquity of biblical language also inspired creative writing that, often humorously, sought to express everyday realities in the military. In a 1944 piece published in *Yank*, Pfc. Harold Fleming drafted a list of suggestions for new recruits as they sought to adapt to the military. Though labeled an ‘epistle,’ the piece mixed biblical forms ranging from Gospel to letter to proverb—all in an exaggerated “King James Version” voice.

<sup>11</sup>Know thou that the Sergeant of the Mess is a man of many moods: when *he* looketh pleased and his words are like honey, the wise KP seeketh him out and praiseth his chow and laugheth much at his jests:

<sup>12</sup>But when he moveth with great haste and the sweat standeth on his brow and he *curseth* under his breath, make thyself scarce; for he will fall like a whirlwind upon the idle and the goldbrick shall know his wrath.<sup>67</sup>

Parodies of everyday experiences in biblical language also circulated among airmen. As historian of the Thirteenth Air Force in the Pacific Theater, Austin Fife collected several examples. Written in New Guinea, “The Strafer” mocked a new policy that directed

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<sup>64</sup> Quoted in: Leslie F Zimmerman, *Chaplain Prisoners of War in the Pacific, 1941-1945* (Maxwell AFB, Alabama: USAF Chaplain Service Institute, 1993), 85.

<sup>65</sup> On the issue of smoking culture in POW camps, see: Daws, *Prisoners of the Japanese*, 114–118.

<sup>66</sup> Young noted that he did not use his own for this purpose, but he also admitted that he did not read it much either. John O. Young, “WWII Japanese POW,” unpublished memoir, 1996, 7, MSS 2350 no. 108, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

<sup>67</sup> Harold Fleming, “First Epistle to the Selectees,” *Yank*, March 3, 1944, European edition. Also reprinted in: *The Best from Yank, the Army Weekly* (New York: World Publishing Co, 1945), 104.

medium bombers to strike from low altitude thus subjecting themselves to increased risk from anti-aircraft weapons.

And it came to pass in those days that an edict came down from the seat of the brass that many men would be called out into the dawn to pour death and destruction upon their enemies from a low altitude. And the men went forth among themselves and bolstered up their courage by saying, 'Am I listed among those who go?' and 'Holy Smoke!' and divers other phrases. For there were those among them who liketh it not to get below half a score of thousands of feet when over the territory of the Rising Sun.<sup>68</sup>

Though these parodies contained little overt religious content, that men chose a form modeled after the Bible shows the creativity with which some men interacted with religious literature. By explaining aspects of military life in biblical language, soldiers and sailors redeployed a familiar form within a new context.

Beyond personal reading, soldiers and sailors also gathered together for religious study. Though many chaplains organized study groups, those outside the chaplaincy also arranged and led groups. For those from minority religious groups, such gatherings often provided their main opportunity for religious community since chaplains from smaller traditions were often unavailable. Raised as a Christian Scientist, Frank Wiswall recalled that he occasionally met with another soldier between tents to study a Christian Science lesson while at Fort Jackson, South Carolina.<sup>69</sup> Even at the end of the war, only twenty four of the more than 8000 army chaplains on duty were Christian Scientists.<sup>70</sup> Mormons

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<sup>68</sup> Norman Wachs, "The Strafer," 1944, 86, AFC 1947/002: Austin E. Fife Anthology of Folk Literature of Soldiers of the Pacific Theater, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress. The notation on the manuscript attributes the piece to "Norman Wachs," it seems likely that it was written by Captain Marvin C. Wachs of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Bomb Group. See: R. H. Cohn and Marvin C. Wachs, eds., "The Strafer," in *The Crusaders: A History of the 42nd Bombardment Group (M)* (Baton Rouge, LA: Army and Navy Pictorial Publishers, 1946), 150, 154–5.

<sup>69</sup> Frank A. Wiswall, interview by Sandra Stewart Holyoak and Roger Zepeda, unpublished transcript, April 25, 2008, 6, Rutgers Oral History Archives, New Brunswick, NJ.

<sup>70</sup> Honeywell and United States, Dept. of the Army, Office of the Chief of Chaplains, *Chaplains of the United States Army*, 216–7.

faced similar challenges, but their tradition of non-professional church leadership equipped them particularly well for self-organization. Soon after induction, Calvin Rynearson located a small group of fellow Mormons at Fort Sill in Oklahoma. They gathered weekly for Sunday school and occasionally met with a civilian ward in town. After leaving Fort Sill, however, Rynearson had no other contact with Mormon soldiers, but he continued to study scripture on his own.<sup>71</sup> Some Mormons were able to maintain closer ties with others. Even while held prisoner in Stalag Luft I, Lt. David Ririe and about four other Mormons were able to meet weekly. They had access to a New Testament but not a Book of Mormon. A Protestant chaplain succeeded in securing one for their use from Switzerland, but it was in French. Fortunately, one man knew the language, and he translated their readings each week.<sup>72</sup> The group even kept minutes of their meetings in a journal that they intended to submit to church authorities upon their release.<sup>73</sup>

Soldiers and sailors also participated in organized programs for religious study typically led by a non-chaplain. As discussed previously, the Service Men's Christian League provided material for weekly Bible lessons in the *Link*, its monthly periodical. While the SMCL was essentially a product of the Protestant establishment, other organizations emerged more organically. Most significantly, the Navigators provided templates and resources to equip soldiers and sailors to study the Bible both alone and with others. Though organized by a civilian, Dawson Trotman, in the mid-1930s,

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<sup>71</sup> Rynearson, unpublished memoir, 1–3.

<sup>72</sup> David Ririe, "Army Days," unpublished memoir, n.d., 23, MSS 2350 no. 197, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

<sup>73</sup> David Ririe, "LDS Sunday School Minutes," unpublished manuscript, 1945, MSS 2350 no. 197, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

Navigators focused on military personnel, initially as an outreach to sailors.<sup>74</sup>

Evangelistic in nature, the organization sought to help new Christians grow through intensive Bible study. An early participant in the organization, Jim Downing recalled meeting regularly for Bible study with other sailors as a gunner's mate on the USS *West Virginia*. While most personnel watched a movie, Downing and the others studied the Bible using what they called the "ABC" method—an approach that the organization recommended to new groups as it expanded.<sup>75</sup> In addition, Navigators promoted scripture memorization and developed techniques to make it easier.<sup>76</sup>

The centrality of the Bible apart from mediating interpretive tradition defined how an important minority of Protestants in the military understood religion and the nature of religious authority. For some, their understanding of scripture demanded an outward focus. When fresh naval recruit Clyde Narramore arrived for training, he wasted little time before organizing his own evangelistic Bible study. He and a fellow sailor posted signs around the training-center barracks. Of the twenty men who participated in the first meeting, he recalled that eleven "gave their hearts to Jesus Christ."<sup>77</sup> After training, the navy assigned Narramore to a station on Long Island, New York where neighboring civilians invited him to teach a Bible class, which continued for two years. Narramore made his own contribution to religious literature, composing two religious tracts for navy

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<sup>74</sup> For an overview of Dawson Trotman and the early years of Navigators, see: David B Hunsicker, "The Rise of the Parachurch Movement in American Protestant Christianity during the 1930s and 1940s: A Detailed Study of the Beginnings of the Navigators, Young Life, and Youth for Christ International" (PhD Dissertation, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1998). And Betty Lee Skinner, *Daws: The Story of Dawson Trotman, Founder of the Navigators* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1974).

<sup>75</sup> Downing, "My Story."

<sup>76</sup> The "Topical Memory System." See: Hunsicker, "The Rise of the Parachurch Movement," 240.

Downing also mentions a system of cards he called "Navigator 'B' Rations." See: Downing, "My Story."

<sup>77</sup> Clyde M. Narramore, *Every Person Is Worth Understanding* (Bloomington, IN: CrossBooks, 2011), 48–49.

personnel, which Moody Press printed and distributed. While Narramore's attitude toward chaplains is unclear, others explained their efforts toward organizing Bible studies as a contrast to the work of chaplains. While training in the field, Lt. Cornelius Vanderbreggen purposely began evangelistic conversations by openly reading a testament.<sup>78</sup> Upon returning to their regimental area at Camp Pendleton, he organized a daily Bible study to support those who had made new religious commitments through these evangelistic efforts. Explaining the need for this lay-led program, he observed, "The Protestant chaplain conducted no Bible class, moreover does not believe the Bible anyway."<sup>79</sup> Most of Vanderbreggen's religious efforts in the marines centered on the Bible. He distributed hundreds of testaments through marine company storerooms, and he encouraged men to base religious judgments solely on what they read in scripture.<sup>80</sup> For men such as Vanderbreggen, their understanding of the Bible both enabled and equipped them to challenge the legitimacy of military chaplains—a tendency rooted in a long tradition that presumed average people could accurately interpret the Bible apart from the guidance of recognized religious leaders. Thus, chaplains' efforts to secure and distribute testaments to soldiers and sailors occasionally undermined their own spiritual authority among troops.

As they interacted with religious literature, soldiers and sailors actively shaped their religious worlds. The boredom and terror of military life provided both opportunity and impetus for religious reading. At the same time, the military and civilian groups

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<sup>78</sup> Vanderbreggen, *Letters of a Leatherneck*, 41.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 47–48.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 48, 126.

exerted great effort to produce and distribute religious literature to military personnel. Civilians feared that wartime service would corrupt a generation of Americans, and the military sought to alleviate these concerns, in part, through well-publicized efforts to provide religious texts to troops. Providing testaments also solved part of the problem of chaplain coverage for those at isolated posts or from minority groups. Soldiers and sailors could simply read on their own if they desired to do so. For those in the ranks, religious literature provided avenues of religious exploration as some collected and shared materials generated by diverse groups. Some found new inspiration from this mixing. Some rejected religious teaching when they were unable to reconcile what they read with what they had experienced. Others used religious scriptures as a way to measure doctrinal orthodoxy, and they sometimes challenged the authority of those who deviated from their interpretations. In each of these cases, religious reading was not a passive activity but provided paths for religious self-expression.

## Chapter 5

### Help from Beyond: Seeking Supernatural Intervention

Receiving treatment for a minor shrapnel wound, Sergeant Marcell Swank conversed with war correspondent Quentin Reynolds on a British destroyer following the failed raid on the French port city of Dieppe. Despite his injury, Swank seemed buoyant and confident. Reynolds reported that Swank pulled a small Bible from his pocket and said that it assured him of his survival because his father had carried the same Bible during World War I without being hurt. According to Reynolds, Swank explained, “I knew nothing could happen to me.”<sup>1</sup> Swank eventually carried the same Bible through North Africa and into Italy.<sup>2</sup> For Swank, the significance of the Bible seemed ambiguous. A Bible was a rather traditional religious object carried by many, but Swank seemed to attribute protective properties to this particular book because of its link to his father. Swank reveals little regarding any personal connection to Christianity, and it remains unclear whether Swank read the Bible or used it for any sort of devotional exercises. Regardless, Swank attributed his survival to the protection afforded to him by his father’s Bible. So long as he carried the Bible, Swank was confident that he would remain safe.<sup>3</sup>

Facing the brutal realities of combat often led soldiers and sailors to question why some survived while others did not. Did some transcendent force govern their future? If

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<sup>1</sup> Quentin James Reynolds, *Dress Rehearsal: The Story of Dieppe* (New York: Random House, 1943), 184–5.

<sup>2</sup> Wide World from Signal Corps, “Two Sergeants and a Bible,” *Protestant Voice*, September 29, 1944; “Bible Goes through Battles in Two Wars,” *Mooresville (NC) Enterprise*, November 2, 1944.

<sup>3</sup> Swank survived the war, eventually retiring from the army as a colonel. See: Robert W. Black, *Rangers in World War II* (New York: Ivy Books, 1992), 42–43, 414.



so, could this force be swayed? This chapter will argue that some soldiers and sailors sought supernatural intervention when they realized how little they could do to ensure their own survival. Some sought divine intervention through prayer or other mainstream practices. Others sought to manipulate chance by carrying lucky objects or by avoiding situations associated with bad luck. For many, desperate circumstances warranted both—most had few qualms about appealing to both God and lady luck.

During the war, troops drew from a variety of sources and influences to sculpt their religious world.<sup>4</sup> As Catherine Albanese has argued, religion among Americans has always been combinative and changing rather than pure and static.<sup>5</sup> As adherents of various traditions and beliefs have encountered one another over time, they have adopted aspects of other faiths while often maintaining their previous religious commitments. Consequently, Americans entering the military brought with them variegated religious forms that sometimes included seemingly contradictory elements. In addition, religious mixing in the military itself combined with unique wartime stresses to contribute to further innovation of religious expression. In his analysis of World War II combat soldiers, Gerald Linderman noted that soldiers who prayed for God's protection often appealed to luck, as well.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the US military during World War II proved to be fertile ground for religious combination. Some soldiers and sailors leaned on culturally

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<sup>4</sup> This phenomenon was not limited to US troops. Michael Snape reached similar conclusions regarding the religious beliefs and practices among British soldiers during World War I and World War II. Arguing against interpretations of religious declension in British society, however, Snape emphasized that such belief and practice demonstrated the continuing influence of “diffusive” Christianity rather than a move away from mainstream religious forms. See: Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, 19–58.

<sup>5</sup> Catherine Albanese, “Exchanging Selves, Exchanging Souls: Contact, Combination, and American Religious History,” in *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, ed. Thomas Tweed (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 224.

<sup>6</sup> Gerald F Linderman, *The World within War: America's Combat Experience in World War II* (New York: Free Press, 1997), 66.

dominant beliefs and practices considered orthodox by most. Others, such as Swank, infused traditional religious objects with additional significance or meaning.

The seemingly random nature of industrialized combat contributed to soldiers and sailors reaching beyond themselves to seek supernatural intervention on their behalf. Though the majority of US troops did not experience heavy combat directly, the real potential for combat also caused anxiety.<sup>7</sup> In an attempt to improve military effectiveness, the Army Research Branch (ARB) surveyed soldiers regarding aspects of combat that caused the most fear. Overall, they concluded that attack by German artillery provoked the most fear because of its accuracy and destructiveness.<sup>8</sup> In addition, once an artillery barrage commenced, individual soldiers were powerless to stop the attack and could only seek shelter as best they could. The ARB also noted that soldiers turned to prayer, magic (cultivating luck), and fatalism as “psychological self-defense” against fear caused by unpredictable situations and perceived lack of control.<sup>9</sup> Prayer and magic provided soldiers with a feeling that they had some potential control over events while fatalism assuaged worry by convincing soldiers that future events were inevitable and beyond anyone’s control.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Estimates for the number of US troops who actively engaged in combat during World War II are tenuous and depend largely on how one defines combat. The Army Research Branch provided the most thorough analysis of this question based on surveys of veterans both during and immediately following the war. Published as the multi-volume *American Soldier* series, the analysts remained ambiguous regarding relative percentages of combat v. non-combat participants, but concluded that the majority of US troops in Europe were in a supporting role. See: Samuel A. Stouffer et al., *The American Soldier: Combat and Its Aftermath*, vol. 2, Studies in Social Psychology in World War II (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949), 290. See also: Lee B Kennett, *G.I.: The American Soldier in World War II* (New York: Scribner, 1987), 129.

<sup>8</sup> Stouffer et al., *The American Soldier: Combat and Its Aftermath*, 2:232–4.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:190.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:188.

Scholars have noted how feelings of powerlessness against an anonymous adversary motivated some to interpret their experiences in spiritual terms. In his work on World War II, Linderman argued that soldiers appealed to both God and luck when they lost confidence in their own ability to determine their future. Significantly, Linderman noted that soldiers approached God and luck differently. While they envisioned God as a benevolent male force who would protect those he deemed worthy, they viewed luck as a malevolent female force who might turn against them if they did not woo her.<sup>11</sup> Linderman emphasized that soldiers attempted to manipulate supernatural forces with little comment about perceived effectiveness. In contrast, Jonathan Ebel argued that soldiers in World War I largely concluded that such appeals were ineffective based on their experiences of combat, but that interpreting their experiences in terms of supernatural control or omnipotence comforted them nonetheless.<sup>12</sup> Though many identified this supernatural controlling force with the Christian God, Ebel claimed that many interpreted their experiences in terms of what they considered to be the equally omnipotent forces of luck, chance, and fate. Even if these forces remained beyond human influence, Ebel argued that attributing outcomes to some outside force made otherwise random death more meaningful. In his broader analysis of religion and coping, psychologist Kenneth Pargament suggested that seeking divine intervention in uncontrollable crises could help people by providing an avenue by which they could express agency.<sup>13</sup> In short, pleading to God provided a sense of power in an otherwise tenuous situation.

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<sup>11</sup> Linderman, *The World within War*, 66.

<sup>12</sup> Ebel, *Faith in the Fight*, 57.

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth I Pargament, *The Psychology of Religion and Coping: Theory, Research, Practice* (New York: Guilford Press, 1997), 293–5. See also: Kenneth I. Pargament et al., “Methods of Religious Coping with

Regardless of perceived effectiveness, some soldiers and sailors sought supernatural intervention in order to preserve their lives and the lives of those around them. Many made such appeals out of desperation or as something they could do when nothing else could be done. Men and women drew from mainstream religious practices such as petitioning God for protection as well as folk traditions for cultivating good luck. In so doing, they constructed a diverse framework of religious meaning based upon their experiences in combat.

### **Wooing Lady Luck**

During World War II, many soldiers and sailors sought to cultivate luck through an assortment of actions and rituals. Some attempted to propitiate good luck through practices such as carrying a talisman or good luck charm. In addition, men and women attempted to avoid behaviors and situations that they associated with bad luck. While many were skeptical regarding the effectiveness of such practices, few seemed to note any potential harm from participating.

One of the primary means of pursuing good luck was carrying lucky objects such as coins or four-leaf clovers. For example, Edward Elburn carried a silver dollar for luck as a medic in Europe. He felt this particular coin was lucky because he was holding it when he last saw his wife before deployment.<sup>14</sup> After his capture by Germans, T/Sgt. Aben Caplan recorded in a diary, “It pained me deeply to find out that Jerry had taken my

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the Gulf War: Cross-Sectional and Longitudinal Analyses,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 33, no. 4 (December 1, 1994): 347–361.

<sup>14</sup> Joan Elizabeth Elburn Farley, “Edward Ringgold Elburn: World War II Veteran and Career Army National Guardsman,” unpublished biography, 2006, 36–37, Edward Ringgold Elburn Collection (AFC/2001/001/54580), Veterans History Project Collection, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

good luck silver dollar given to me by Uncle Brilliant.”<sup>15</sup> Even General Eisenhower carried special coins for luck. Sgt. Michael McKeogh, his personal assistant, reported that Eisenhower often carried a zippered pouch containing a variety of coins sent to him for luck.<sup>16</sup> In his diary, Capt. Harry Butcher, Eisenhower’s naval aide, also mentioned the coin pouch and noted that Eisenhower “rubbed his lucky coins before retiring” the night before the invasion of Sicily in 1943.<sup>17</sup> Other high-ranking officers carried lucky objects, as well. Lt. Commander Joseph Bryan reported that Admiral William Halsey carried a pouch containing a lucky silver dollar and a coin from New Zealand.<sup>18</sup> In addition, he carried a four-leaf clover preserved in isinglass and a strip of white linen attached to a straw—a Hawaiian symbol of good luck.

Lucky objects were popular enough that even commercial enterprises sought to capitalize on the phenomenon. For example, during his service as an army MP, Sam Agent collected several examples of commercially produced talismans marketed to those with loved ones in the military. A greeting card produced by the J.B. Publishing Corporation included a small cardboard disk with the image of an elf who wore numerous good luck tokens. The included text heralded, “Superstitious Al-o-ysius is the guy to take along. For with all the good luck doodads, you just simply can’t go wrong.”<sup>19</sup> Designed to be sent to a brother in the military, another card included a plastic case containing a

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<sup>15</sup> Caplan, “POW Diary,” 6.

<sup>16</sup> Michael James McKeogh and Richard Lockridge, *Sgt. Mickey and General Ike*, (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1946), 85.

<sup>17</sup> Harry C Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower; the Personal Diary of Captain Harry C. Butcher, USNR, Naval Aide to General Eisenhower, 1942 to 1945* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), 352. See also: Associated Press, “Eisenhower’s Lucky Coins Get Work Out,” *Sarasota (FL) Herald-Tribune*, July 11, 1943, 4; “Decision,” *Time* 43, no. 24 (June 12, 1944): 20.

<sup>18</sup> William Frederick Halsey, *Admiral Halsey’s Story* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1947), xi.

<sup>19</sup> “Good Luck to You in the Service!,” greeting card, n.d., Sam J. Agent Collection, Box 2, Folder 16, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

four-leaf clover that the recipient was to keep in his pocket.<sup>20</sup> Finally, the Sorin Bible and Card Company produced a greeting card with a miniature Bible attached. The card included a brief poem: “As you march along in line your rifle by your side, your bayonet protects you, your officer’s your guide. These things are all assurance but in moments of alarm, the word of Him is in this book, ‘twill keep you safe from harm.”<sup>21</sup> In each of these instances, the greeting cards contained a small object designed to be carried by a soldier or sailor for luck. Whether or not Sam Agent actually carried any of these objects is unclear. Both the miniature Bible and the four-leaf clover are missing from the cards while Superstitious Al-o-ysius remains.

Lucky objects sometimes included articles of clothing that had become associated with success in the past. A former B-17 tail gunner, Joe Nivison recalled that he typically flew on the same crew as his older brother Ted, a flight engineer who had carried the same lucky cap since training. For their twenty-second mission, however, Joe was bumped to another crew to make room for an intelligence officer assigned to observe the effects of their attack. The brothers waited for their mission together until the order came to start the engines. Joe explained, “To my surprise, Ted took off his cap, tore the bill off and handed it to me. He stuck his half in his back pocket and I put my half in mine. Nothing was said, and nothing needed to be said.”<sup>22</sup> Both brothers made it back home safely and carried their lucky cap fragments for the rest of their thirty missions. Cleaning up following the Battle of Peleliu, marine Eugene Sledge noticed that his dungaree jacket

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<sup>20</sup> “Good Luck to My Brother in the Service,” greeting card, n.d., Sam J. Agent Collection, Box 2, Folder 16, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>21</sup> “For God and Country,” greeting card, n.d., Sam J. Agent Collection, Box 2, Folder 16, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>22</sup> Joe E. Nivison, “Two Brothers’ Lucky Charm,” unpublished memoir, n.d., 2, Joe E. Nivison Collection (AFC/2001/001/54147), Veterans History Project Collection, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

had not torn despite the heavy fighting, so he concluded that he must keep it for good luck.<sup>23</sup> He noted that he wore it all through his terrible experiences on Okinawa and kept it long after the war. Some airmen included lucky clothing as part of rituals designed to assure safe return. Former B-25 pilot, John Boggs recalled that one crewmember wore the same flight suit on fifty missions without ever washing it.<sup>24</sup> By repeating actions from previously successful missions, fliers hoped to propitiate their good fortune.

While soldiers and sailors carried objects in order to cultivate good luck, they also avoided situations associated with bad luck. For example, air crews shunned certain numerical mission designations. Alexander Nazemetz recalled that he and his fellow B-17 bomber crews would refer to their thirteenth mission as 12-B.<sup>25</sup> Ironically, Nazemetz claimed that his crew's mission 12-B proved to be a "milk run" while the twelfth was the worst. Nazemetz also noted how his fellow fliers feared bad omens. He explained, "There were guys in the barracks who, when they heard an owl cry, would go out and shoot it, because they just figured that meant disaster, the next day."<sup>26</sup> A former B-25 pilot in the Pacific, Charles Seay recalled that he and the other members of the Seventieth Bomb Squadron considered the seventieth mission to be unlucky because another pilot from the squadron had gone down on his. Though Seay's own seventieth mission proved successful, he mentioned that another pilot "managed to be sick" for his and never flew

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<sup>23</sup> Sledge, *With the Old Breed, at Peleliu and Okinawa*, 153.

<sup>24</sup> John C. Boggs, interview by David Quick, unpublished transcript, February 8, 2004, 5, John C. Boggs Collection (AFC/2001/001/12844), Veterans History Project Collection, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<sup>25</sup> Alexander Nazemetz, interview by G. Kurt Piehler and Kevin McGuire, transcript, April 6, 1995, 32, Rutgers Oral History Archives, New Brunswick, NJ.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

another mission before being rotated back home.<sup>27</sup> Such numerological concerns also existed in the navy. As a young officer on the USS *Missouri* decades earlier, Halsey witnessed a fiery accident that took the lives of thirty-one sailors on April 13, 1904. Explaining that the incident “cast a shadow over the rest of [his] life,” Halsey reflected, “I dread the thirteenth of every month, and if it falls on Friday, my apprehension almost paralyzes me.”<sup>28</sup> During World War II, he was assigned to lead Task Force 13 on an operation departing on Friday, February 13, 1942, but Halsey protested to headquarters.<sup>29</sup> Redesignated as Task Force 16, the group of ships departed on the fourteenth.

The significance that some soldiers and sailors placed in talismans is evident in how they responded to misplaced tokens of good luck. As a war correspondent, John Steinbeck related an incident in a barracks where soldiers aided a tail gunner who could not find his medallion the night before a mission. The men pulled bunks from the wall and rifled through shoes pursuing the token as “uneasiness creeps all through the room.”<sup>30</sup> Eventually, the men gave up and shut off the lights for the night, but the gunner continued to feel through his pockets. Bomber pilot Russell Phillips carried a bracelet from his fiancé and a silver dollar for luck.<sup>31</sup> Fellow crewmember Louis Zamperini recalled that Phillips did not have these tokens after a mechanical failure caused their B-24 to crash in the Pacific. Zamperini was unsure if he had forgotten them or if they had been lost in the crash. Aboard an old battleship steaming for Tarawa, correspondent

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<sup>27</sup> Charles L. Seay, interview by G. Kurt Piehler and Cynthia Tinker, transcript, March 24, 2000, 65, Veteran’s Oral History Project, Center for the Study of War and Society, Department of History, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

<sup>28</sup> Halsey, *Admiral Halsey’s Story*, 9.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>30</sup> John Steinbeck, “Airmen Not Superstitious, but Avoid Omens of Death,” *Milwaukee Journal*, July 1, 1943; John Steinbeck, *Once There Was a War* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 30.

<sup>31</sup> Hillenbrand, *Unbroken*, 90, 127.



Robert Sherrod reported that sailors attributed the accidental deaths of two men on the same day to the loss of a lucky dollar by an officer on the ship.<sup>32</sup> It had been fourteen years since the previous fatal accident.

### **Petitioning the Benevolent Father**

In addition to those who sought to manipulate luck or chance, some soldiers and sailors under duress appealed to the protection of God as a benevolent father. Even the marginally or even non-religious sometimes sought God's protection when they felt that they could do nothing else. Though the idea was not new, the axiom, "There are no atheists in foxholes," originated in World War II.<sup>33</sup> The basic idea that desperation and suffering led many to God was a common trope during the war though even contemporary critics questioned the depth of such faith.<sup>34</sup> Regardless of critiques of depth, many soldiers and sailors did report praying for divine intervention while under fire. In their study of fear among soldiers, the Army Research Branch concluded that "an overwhelming majority of combat men" who they surveyed in both the Pacific and Italy

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<sup>32</sup> Sherrod, *Tarawa: The Story of a Battle*, 7–8.

<sup>33</sup> The earliest sources associate the phrase with the failed defense of the Philippines in 1941–42, but differ on the originator of the phrase. Some attribute it to an anonymous sergeant overheard by Lt. Col. William Clear (United Press and National Broadcasting Company, "Bataan Defenders' Suffering Related," *Los Angeles Times*, April 13, 1942; Associated Press, "Wornout Yanks Ate Pack Mules but Fought On," *Chicago Tribune*, April 13, 1942; Office of Chief of Chaplains, Army, "Circular Letter No. 250," May 1, 1942, 1–2, 300.5 Circular Letters V. 2, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.). Others attribute the phrase to Father William T. Cummings, a civilian priest in the Philippines who received a battlefield army commission as a chaplain (Carlos P. Romulo, *I Saw the Fall of the Philippines* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran, 1943), 263; Sidney Stewart, *Give Us This Day* (New York: Norton, 1957), 85; Crosby, *Battlefield Chaplains*, 26–27.). See also: Bonnie Taylor-Blake, "There Are No Atheists in [the] Foxholes," *Linguistlist.org*, September 24, 2006.

<sup>34</sup> "Foxhole Religion," *Christianity and Crisis*, March 6, 1944; Religious News Service, "Dr. Pugh Raps 'Foxhole' Slogans, Punctures Current Illusion That Front Line Service Will Leave Thousands 'Incurably Religious,'" *Protestant Voice*, March 24, 1944.

“said that prayer helped a lot” when “the going was tough.”<sup>35</sup> The ARB noted that those who had experienced the worst combat and those who were fresh replacements were the most likely to agree with the statement.

Some soldiers and sailors turned to prayer out of a sense of powerlessness as they faced their own potential death. For example, former corporal Doan Helms recalled that feelings of helplessness led him and his fellow marines to pray frequently amid artillery fire on Bougainville. Such fire was particularly harrowing if it caught them as they advanced beyond their foxholes. Helms explained, “You clutched the ground and tried to work your way downward, feeling helpless and totally vulnerable. Then Marines began yelling and screaming as they were hit. Would you be next? You found yourself praying, over and over. You felt like your brain was congealed. Who were you? Why were you here?”<sup>36</sup> Edward Feagins recalled his own feelings of mortality after first facing battle near Anzio, Italy with the 143<sup>rd</sup> Infantry regiment. As his group crossed a potato patch, German artillery shells began exploding around them. Feagins dropped flat and attempted to dig a hole with his helmet because he had mistakenly lashed his entrenching tool out of reach on his pack. “I was doing a lot of praying that day,” he explained. “I realized I was in war and people were trying to kill me. After this first battle I felt like my chances of going home were very slim.”<sup>37</sup>

Though many men reported that they prayed to God in battle, they prayed for different things. Understandably, many prayed for protection. Jimmy Gentry

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<sup>35</sup> Stouffer et al., *The American Soldier: Combat and Its Aftermath*, 2:184–5.

<sup>36</sup> Doan Helms, “Goodbye Guadalcanal,” unpublished memoir, n.d., 9, Doan Helms Collection (AFC/2001/001/11641), Veterans History Project Collection, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<sup>37</sup> Feagins, “A Country Boy in World War II,” 39.

remembered that the fear of the unknown led him and his fellow infantrymen to pray for protection as they crowded into a truck in France heading into battle for the first time. He elaborated, “I started praying, and I prayed that God take care of me. And I just kept repeating it over and over again.”<sup>38</sup> Former marine Floyd Sykes remembered praying for safety during battle in the Marianas. Alluding to a darker theological interpretation of human agency in salvation, Sykes facetiously recalled thinking as he faced combat, “You can get killed, and I’m Lutheran.”<sup>39</sup> Other soldiers consciously prayed for other things besides protection. Sgt. Henry Giles reported that he could only pray for courage the morning his unit boarded a landing ship bound for France. In a journal entry, he reflected, “I don’t believe one man is saved in answer to prayer & another man who may have prayed just as hard & deserved to live perhaps better, gets killed. I don’t believe God operates that way.” Exhibiting a fatalistic worldview, he continued, “I have never seen any evidence that God interferes at all. If you’re in the right place at the right time & a bullet or shell comes your way, you’re going to get it.”<sup>40</sup> In a letter home to his father, Cpl. Vernon Sonnier reported that he did not pray on the night of a Japanese torpedo attack on his transport because he felt that it would be merely “last minute begging” because of his previous sins. However, he eventually concluded that he could ask for strength and courage. He explained, “I was smart enough to know that in the light of my past life, perhaps I could not ask for life.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Jimmy Gentry, interview by G. Kurt Piehler and Kelly Hammond, transcript, July 22, 2000, 31, Veteran’s Oral History Project, Center for the Study of War and Society, Department of History, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

<sup>39</sup> Floyd Sykes, interview by Shaun Illingworth, Laurie D’Amico, and Glen Wyrovsky, April 9, 2005, 19, Rutgers Oral History Archives, New Brunswick, NJ.

<sup>40</sup> Giles, *The G. I. Journal of Sergeant Giles*, 28–29.

<sup>41</sup> Mina Curtiss, ed., “Vernon H. Sonnier to ‘Pop’, August 27, 1943,” in *Letters Home* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1944), 239–40.

When faced dire circumstances, some soldiers and sailors concluded that it was too late to pray. Former mortar gunner, James Alspaugh recalled that he did not pray for protection when a glider transporting him into Germany crash-landed under heavy fire. Though he described himself as a Christian, he mentioned that he and the other men were not “prayer-saying guys.” He reflected, “I sure felt like it, but I never prayed before, and I didn’t think that was any type time for me to be praying.”<sup>42</sup> German troops soon captured Alspaugh, and he spent the next seven months as a POW. Men such as Alspaugh concluded that praying under duress was futile because they felt prayer needed to be based on deeper faith than their own in order to elicit a supernatural response. Others, however, also did not rush to pray in desperate situations because of the confidence of their faith. Recovering from minor surgery, Cpl. Franklin East spent a couple weeks in an army hospital at Fort Stotsenburg in the Philippines in December 1941. One day as the air raid siren wailed, East took the book he was reading and joined the other patients and staff as they sought refuge in the basement. “There were people praying and crying all around me and I kept on reading,” East explained. “One woman got after me for reading instead of praying. Well, I had prayed that morning and I figured it was too late to pray then.”<sup>43</sup> A returned LDS missionary, East felt little need to appeal for divine protection through last-minute petitions. However, he did trust that God would take care of him.

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<sup>42</sup> James W. Alspaugh, interview by Arthur L. Kelly, June 30, 1987, 1987OH113 WW 081, Colonel Arthur L. Kelly American Veterans Oral History Project, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries, Lexington, KY.

<sup>43</sup> Franklin T. East, “Army Life of Franklin T. East,” unpublished memoir, 1977, 8, MSS 2350 no. 147, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

Some troops found themselves in situations so dire that asking for God's protection seemed foolish. Consequently, some men asked God to intervene in the way in which they were to be killed or wounded. As his unit fought to retake the Philippines, former infantry scout Chuck Holsinger experienced fierce combat, but he reported that his faith in God granted him some peace. Nevertheless, Holsinger reported that the idea of dying without a fight—such as by ambush or trap—made him feel sick. He recalled praying, "Lord, it's OK if I die—so long as my rifle is blazing. Yes, and I am content to die so long as the enemy is in my sights when I fire my last shot."<sup>44</sup> For Holsinger, it seems that the feeling of powerlessness was worse than the fear of death itself. Ruesaw Skimerhorn remembered fearing maiming wounds when Germans attacked his combat engineer unit at the Rapido River crossing in Italy. As men fell around him, he recalled, "I just prayed that I would either be killed outright or wouldn't be wounded too serious."<sup>45</sup> Within ten minutes, shrapnel tore through his wrist and knee. Despite thinking that one of his limbs may need to be amputated, Skimerhorn thanked God that he was alive. Though he eventually regained his ability to walk, his leg still hurt forty-five years later. He never regained use of his hand. Others recalled their experiences with prayers under duress more lightheartedly. Preston Foose remembered sheltering under a truck with two other soldiers in Italy as an enemy plane circled. One of the other men began praying that if he were hit, that it would be in the leg. Foose recalled chastising his friend, "As long as you're praying, pray he don't hit us a damn at all!"<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Holsinger, *Above the Cry of Battle*, 81–83.

<sup>45</sup> Ruesaw Skimerhorn, interview by Arthur L. Kelly, July 19, 1989, 1989OH156 WW 128, Colonel Arthur L. Kelly American Veterans Oral History Project, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries, Lexington, KY.

<sup>46</sup> Preston C. Foose, interview by Peter J. Constant, March 25, 1992, (1993OH041 WW 178), Colonel Arthur L. Kelly American Veterans Oral History Project, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries, Lexington, KY.

Though many petitions for protection seemed like desperate appeals for mercy, other soldiers rooted their pursuit of protection in long-term devotional practices—some distinctly connected to material objects. As Colleen McDannell has argued, analyzing the ways in which people interact with religious objects reveals important aspects of religious expression that merely focusing on religious ideas can obscure.<sup>47</sup> Most importantly for this study, carrying religious objects served as a part of a larger devotional act that connected the spiritual with the physical for some soldiers and sailors. For example, some Roman Catholic soldiers and sailors participated in the devotion to the sacred heart of Jesus, which consisted of regular prayers and wearing or carrying a symbol of the devotion.<sup>48</sup> Though official interpretations emphasized spiritual rather than physical protection through the devotion, some devotees took comfort that faithfully participating might afford physical protection, as well. For example, Pfc. Morris Redmann increasingly participated in the devotion as his infantry unit entered combat in France. In a letter to his parents, Redmann described how he became convinced of the miraculous power of the devotion while sheltering from an artillery barrage. As he fumbled through his pockets searching for an object with which to pray, he found a cloth badge of the Sacred Heart in the pocket of a case in which he carried three religious medals. He explained, “It was the first time I had ever taken it out to look at it, and I read this sentence over the picture of the Sacred Heart: ‘Cease! The Sacred Heart is with me.’ Of that instance of which I read, the barrage ceased.”<sup>49</sup> Following this experience,

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<sup>47</sup> McDannell, *Material Christianity*, 4.

<sup>48</sup> Joseph Schaefer, *Little Manual of the Sacred Heart*, Enlarged Edition (J. Schaefer, 1887).

<sup>49</sup> Morris B. Redmann, “Letter to Parents, October 14, 1944,” in *Unfinished Journey: A World War II Remembrance*, ed. Kerry P. Redmann (Guilford, CT: Lyon’s Press, 2006), 207.

Redmann developed “a fervent devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus,” in addition to his previous habit of attending Mass as regularly as possible.<sup>50</sup>

Another common devotional object among US military personnel was the “Miraculous Medal”. Imprinted with an image of Mary the mother of Jesus, the medal included the petition, “O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.”<sup>51</sup> According to Roman Catholic authorities, simply carrying such medals would not offer any intrinsic divine protection.<sup>52</sup> Instead, medals and other objects were devotional objects that served as a reminder of one’s spiritual commitments. Those devoted to the church, however, believed that carrying the miraculous medal combined with their devotional commitment might provide protective properties. During training to be part of a bomber crew, Leo Lovasik wrote home that he had consecrated himself to “the Blessed Mother” during a Mass and that he asked her to “guide me safely through the dangers of warfare.”<sup>53</sup> As a sign of his commitment, he wore a miraculous medal. When assigned to a crew and a plane, Lovasik convinced the other airmen to name their B-24 the *Valiant Virgin* though he was the only Catholic among them.<sup>54</sup> He also attached a miraculous medal above his station at the bomber’s radio table. As they flew across the Atlantic to England, the *Valiant Virgin* experienced an unspecified but life-threatening emergency. Lovasik elaborated, “Had it not been for my sudden imploring of Our Lady,

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Joseph Glass, “Miraculous Medal,” ed. Charles G. Herbermann, *Catholic Encyclopedia* (Encyclopedia Press, Inc., 1913), 115.

<sup>52</sup> Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines*, 2001.; Pope Paul VI, *Marialis Cultis: Apostolic Exhortation of His Holiness Paul VI for the Right Ordering and Development of Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary*, 1974.

<sup>53</sup> Leo E. Lovasik, “Letter, December 9, 1942,” in *Knight of Our Lady, Queen of the Skies*, ed. Lawrence G. Lovasik (Tarentum, PA: Marian Action, 1944), 13.

<sup>54</sup> Leo E. Lovasik, “Letter, May 1943,” in *Knight of Our Lady, Queen of the Skies*, ed. Lawrence G. Lovasik (Tarentum, PA: Marian Action, 1944), 53.

Queen of the Skies, for aid, and my holding the medal caressingly in my right hand while we contested in the turmoil, it is hard telling what would have happened to us.”<sup>55</sup>

Whatever the nature of the crisis, Lovasik attributed their survival to the intervention of Mary through his acts of devotion and the miraculous medal.<sup>56</sup>

Other soldiers believed that God would protect them because of previous personal revelation. This is perhaps most clearly evident in patriarchal blessings received by members of LDS Church. Imparted by a senior priesthood holder, a patriarchal blessing often includes promises, advice, and warnings as a prophetic message unique to each individual.<sup>57</sup> Many Mormon men in World War II had received their patriarchal blessing before they entered the military. Some blessings included statements regarding future marriage and children. Consequently, some men concluded that God would protect them in battle because their blessings had not yet been fulfilled. For example, Reid Ellsworth reported receiving a patriarchal blessing in 1924 at the age of fifteen. He summarized, “I was promised that I would stand . . . , while many around me would die, and that in my travels I would be preserved and that the waves would not swallow me up.”<sup>58</sup> Though he recalled feeling some stress on his first mission as a bomber navigator, Ellsworth reflected that his blessing comforted him and gave him confidence even after being shot down over Italy and becoming a POW.<sup>59</sup> Former B-17 bombardier, David Ririe reported

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<sup>55</sup> Leo E. Lovasik, “Letter, June 9, 1943,” in *Knight of Our Lady, Queen of the Skies*, ed. Lawrence G. Lovasik (Tarentum, PA: Marian Action, 1944), 57.

<sup>56</sup> Unfortunately, Lovasik was killed when his plane crashed on August 30, 1943. See: Leo E. Lovasik, *Knight of Our Lady, Queen of the Skies* (Tarentum, PA: Marian Action, 1944), 83.

<sup>57</sup> “Patriarchal Blessings,” accessed November 23, 2012; James E. Faust, “Patriarchal Blessings,” *New Era*, November 1982.

<sup>58</sup> Reid F. Ellsworth, “Reid F. Ellsworth Story: An Account of War and Divine Interposition,” galley proof, 1997, 8, MSS 2350 no. 393, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.



that his patriarchal blessing promised that he “would return home rejoicing.”<sup>60</sup> After being shot down and captured, Ririe feared torture and execution, but the words of his blessing brought him some, though perhaps limited, assurance.<sup>61</sup>

Many Mormon men reported that their patriarchal blessings gave them confidence in God’s protection, but they were careful to qualify that such protection was contingent on their remaining faithful. As members of the LDS church, this included clear behavioral standards such as sexual abstinence outside of marriage as well as abstaining from alcohol, tobacco, and caffeine. Former marine sergeant A. Earl Catmull reported that he had been promised that he would return from the war unharmed so long as he remained true to his temple vows. He reflected, “What a comfort that was, and what an incentive to live the standards the best I could.”<sup>62</sup> Arlin Mecham recalled that his blessing stated that if he remained “humble and prayerful” and kept “the commandments of the Lord,” God would protect him.<sup>63</sup> At one point, however, Mecham unintentionally violated one of the standards. Suffering from severe trench foot in Belgium, he sought assistance from a medic who gave him a cup of “warm liquid” that “looked like milk” with a “slight brown color.” Mecham drank it, but soon realized that it was coffee. “I hoped the Lord would forgive me, this time, under these circumstances,” he explained.<sup>64</sup> Mecham eventually returned home safely. Edwin Gagon also reported that his blessing gave him confidence, but he admitted that he was somewhat confused regarding what it meant to demonstrate obedience through trust. As he was being processed to depart

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<sup>60</sup> Ririe, “Army Days,” 9.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>62</sup> A. Earl Catmull, unpublished manuscript, n.d., 4–5, MSS 2350 no. 303, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

<sup>63</sup> Arlin L. Mecham, “The History of Arlin LaGrand Mecham,” unpublished memoir, n.d., 42, MSS 2350 no. 73, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

overseas, Gagnon resisted signing up for a military life insurance policy because he thought it might be a test of his faith. He reflected that his interpretation of his blessing caused him to do “several foolish things.”<sup>65</sup> For many LDS troops, the assurance of divine protection promised through patriarchal blessings gave them confidence. The hazards of war, however, led them to work hard to honor their spiritual commitments so that God would not withdraw his protection.

### **Hedging the Bets**

For some soldiers and sailors, the target of their appeals for supernatural intervention seemed rather ambiguous. Some clearly sought to manipulate chance, and others appealed to God as conceived by dominant Judeo-Christian traditions. Many more, however, seemed to embrace multiple practices and beliefs that occasionally seemed to conflict.

For example, soldiers and sailors often attached non-standard beliefs to traditional religious objects such as Bibles and religious medals. Though religious authorities attempted to articulate how people should understand and use such objects, soldiers and sailors often attached their own meanings and interpretations to religious objects. Some interpretations were innovative, but soldiers and sailors more often drew from long traditions of alternative beliefs. During World War II, military personnel constructed their own world of religious meaning that overlapped but was not coterminous with dominant religious traditions.

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<sup>65</sup> Edwin B Gagon, “Military History of Edwin B. Gagon,” unpublished memoir, 2000, 4, MSS 2350 no. 586, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

As noted in the previous chapter, pocket testaments and similar religious texts were nearly ubiquitous among American troops during the war. The US government printed and distributed over eleven million pocket-sized scriptures in three versions—Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Jewish.<sup>66</sup> Chaplains and civilian religious authorities intended service people to use these scriptures for devotional reading, but some soldiers and sailors concluded that merely carrying the book provided some sort of divine protection. A former army nurse in England, Althea Woodland reflected that that Lord had blessed her more than she likely deserved because she carried a pocket testament. She confessed, however, “I didn’t do as much reading as I should have.”<sup>67</sup> John Falconer reported that he always carried a Bible in his tank in the Philippines because he was a Christian. He elaborated, “I feel that it gave me a great deal of protection.”<sup>68</sup> Similarly, former pilot and self-identified Christian, John Boggs recalled that he carried his army testament with him on every mission. He described it as a “security blanket” that kept him from being severely wounded.<sup>69</sup> When asked about superstitions, Boggs mentioned his own testament again in the context of four-leaf clovers and other talismans carried by his crewmates. “Whatever works for you, you would use,” he explained.<sup>70</sup> Clarifying that he was not overly religious, Roy Michie remembered that he carried a testament in his pocket as an infantryman in the Pacific theater.<sup>71</sup> He clarified that someone had said

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<sup>66</sup> Jorgensen and United States, Office of the Chief of Air Force Chaplains, *The Service of Chaplains to Army Air Units, 1917-1946*, 1:256.

<sup>67</sup> Althea Rawlins Woodland, unpublished memoir, n.d., MSS 2615, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

<sup>68</sup> Qtd. in Knox, *Death March*, 25.

<sup>69</sup> Boggs, interview, 4.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>71</sup> Roy D. Michie, interview by Carl Cox, unpublished transcript, August 2, 2005, 15, Roy Donald Michie Collection (AFC/2001/001/37331), Veterans History Project Collection, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

that it would bring him good luck. Thus, some who identified with traditional religious forms as well as those with less specific commitments believed that carrying a religious text might provoke God or even lady luck to intervene on their behalf.

Though most soldiers expressed vague ideas regarding how this might work, others built upon earlier tales of Bibles that stopped bullets. Extending back to at least the 1840s, accounts of Bibles stopping bullets have appeared in collections of sermon illustrations.<sup>72</sup> Such anecdotes continued to be reported during World War II. For example, Pvt. Franklin Barnell reported from Italy that a Bible carried in his shirt pocket slowed a piece of shrapnel enough to prevent serious injury.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, Chaplain Charlie Webb reported meeting with an infantryman in an evacuation hospital who showed him a shredded Bible that he claimed had saved his life.<sup>74</sup> For those who perhaps felt that God needed some assistance, several US companies offered pocket Bibles with supplemental ‘armored’ covers designed as gifts for those in the military. For example, the Oxford Company of New York advertised the “Protecto Shield Vest Pocket Bible” for \$1.95. The ad claimed that the twenty-gauge steel cover “may deflect bullet, shrapnel, or bayonet.”<sup>75</sup> In 1944, the US Federal Trade Commission ordered the Arthur Von Senden Company to cease and desist advertising that their similar Bible covers could protect soldiers. The FTC argued that the cover could actually cause more severe

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<sup>72</sup> For example see: Charles Buck, *Anecdotes, Religious, Moral, and Entertaining: Alphabetically Arranged and Interspersed with a Variety of Useful Observations* (New York: Dayton and Saxton, 1841), 74–75; “The Prayer Meeting,” *The National Preacher* 1, no. 11, Third Series (November 1862): 352; William Herbert Brown, *Patriotic Illustrations for Public Speakers* (Cincinnati, OH: Standard Publishing Company, 1919), 20. See also: David Emery, “Bible Stops Bullet, Saves Soldier’s Life - Urban Legends,” August 15, 2007.

<sup>73</sup> United Press, “Bible Saves Soldier,” *Protestant Voice*, February 18, 1944.

<sup>74</sup> *American Chaplains of the Fifth Army* (Milan, Italy: Pizzi and Pizio, 1945), 24.

<sup>75</sup> “[Advertisement],” *Protestant Voice*, February 11, 1944, 3. Note that twenty-gauge steel is only 0.0359 inches thick—slightly more than 1/32 inch.

injuries as it may shatter a bullet upon impact.<sup>76</sup> In addition, the War Production Board temporarily denied the Stuart Bible Company additional steel alleging that the business had already used 31,000 pounds of the war-critical material for its covers without authorization.<sup>77</sup> It seems that the soldiers would be left to depend on the truly miraculous rather than commercially produced supplemental shielding.

US troops also reported carrying religious medals and medallions for a variety of reasons. As with religious texts, soldiers and sailors constructed their own meanings of the significance and purpose of such religious objects. The majority of these medals were rooted in Roman Catholic traditions though men and women with other faith commitments carried them as well. As noted above, official Catholic teachings resisted linking such material objects with divine protection apart from a sustained relationship with the church. Thus, a non-religious soldier would garner little benefit if he carried one as merely a good luck token. Official teachings aside, however, many Americans had long embraced alternative interpretations of religious significance that granted such objects miraculous potential. As Robert Orsi has demonstrated, Catholics in America have long resisted abandoning popular religious practices even when pressured by church leadership.<sup>78</sup> In the same way, soldiers and sailors facing dire situations clung to whatever they thought might provide supernatural benefits regardless of formal religious doctrine.

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<sup>76</sup> United Press, "FTC Challenges Life-Saving Claims Made on Behalf of 'Armored' Bibles," *Protestant Voice*, September 29, 1944, 5; US Federal Trade Commission, *Annual Report of the Federal Trade Commission for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30 1945*, 1945, 42. See also Honeywell and United States, Dept. of the Army, Office of the Chief of Chaplains, *Chaplains of the United States Army*, 259.

<sup>77</sup> Religious News Service, "WPB Denies Allotment to Ohio Bible Company," *Protestant Voice*, January 5, 1945.

<sup>78</sup> Robert A Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 53–60.

Though some troops used medals in orthodox ways, other soldiers seemed more flexible regarding why they carried such objects. William Greene recalled that he carried a small religious medallion that he would pray with as a young naval officer in World War II.<sup>79</sup> At a certain point, however, Greene believed that praying with the medallion took on a different meaning. He felt that something would go wrong if he failed to do so. Thus, the same ritual took on multiple layers of meaning. Sometimes soldiers and sailors carried religious medals because they had received them from a friend. If such an object retained supernatural significance, it was more likely as a sort of talisman rather than as a devotional object. A devout Catholic, Army pilot Tom Harmon, reported that he had long carried a religious medal as a “reminder that the Lord is close by.”<sup>80</sup> As his B-25 crew prepared to depart for North Africa, Harmon hesitantly offered each of the men a similar medal though none were Catholic. He satisfyingly expounded, “The boys must have liked them, for they never took them off.”<sup>81</sup> Small religious objects also appealed to Jewish personnel. Though mostly non-observant, sailor Harry Gersh reported that he apprehensively waited in line with other men to receive a small sacred scroll on a string from a Jewish chaplain. Though he believed his grandfather would declare such scrolls idolatrous, Gersh justified taking one explaining, “I’m scared and know I’ll be more scared. If I can grab this string and get any strength out of it, I’ll be glad.”<sup>82</sup> For Gersh, practical considerations seemed to outweigh religious orthodoxy as he sought to hedge his bets.

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<sup>79</sup> William Morris Earl Greene, interview by Kelsey Decker, unpublished transcript, 2004, 9, William Morris Earl Greene Collection (AFC/2001/001/17465), Veterans History Project Collection, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<sup>80</sup> Harmon, *Pilots Also Pray*, 57.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Harry Gersh, “Chaplains on Land and Sea: A One-Man Survey,” *Commentary*, August 1948, 174.

Among those who sought supernatural protection, many soldiers and sailors embraced multiple and seemingly contradictory methods. Even those who identified strongly with the tenets of a particular tradition would occasionally mix practices and beliefs from other traditions. For example, Pvt. Roger Houtz maintained such vigorous correspondence with the minister of his hometown Presbyterian church that the pastor mentioned that he found it difficult to respond to all Houtz's letters.<sup>83</sup> In letters to his mother, Houtz mentions attending chapel services whenever possible as well as reading the Bible and praying individually. Though Houtz devoted himself to traditional forms of Christian practice, he did not limit himself. For example, in a letter home, Houtz reported that he wore an unspecified good luck charm given to him by his twenty-one year-old brother with his dog tags. Houtz asked that she tell his brother that the charm "goes everywhere I go."<sup>84</sup> Mentioned previously, Jimmy Gentry recalled not only calling on God for protection but also finding his own talisman during a desperate moment. As his unit was pinned down near Arnstein, Germany, he noticed a four-leaf clover growing nearby. Gentry picked it and placed it in the metal-covered New Testament he always carried in his pocket.<sup>85</sup> He still had both fifty-five years later.

It remains unclear how much faith soldiers such as Houtz and Gentry placed in either their lucky objects or their prayers. Both a veteran of the conflict and a historian, Paul Fussell has argued that the war was a "notably secular affair."<sup>86</sup> When soldiers and sailors did engage in superstitious behavior, he claims that they did so with a sense of

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<sup>83</sup> Warren. W. Warman to Roger L. Houtz, August 25, 1943, Wartime Documents, 1942-1946, Roger L. Houtz Papers, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>84</sup> Roger L. Houtz to Mabel Houtz, December 29, 1942, Personal Correspondence, Dec 1942-Nov 1943, Roger L. Houtz Papers, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>85</sup> Gentry, interview, 68.

<sup>86</sup> Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 51.

wariness or skepticism. Some earlier critics derided desperate appeals for divine protection as shallow and ephemeral rather than as evidence of spiritual renewal among US troops. In his early analysis of the war's religious impact on Jewish soldiers, army chaplain Albert Goldstein criticized foxhole faith as being mere hysteria rather than evidence of spiritual renewal. "Terror and desperation are not the equivalent of religious fervor," he explained. "Fright and horror are not to be confused with the awesome sense of the holy."<sup>87</sup> Others questioned the effectiveness of carrying talismans to cultivate good fortune. A former commanding officer of a marine fighter squadron, Gregory Boyington explained that he did not carry a talisman during the war unlike many of his fellow fliers. He reflected, "Today, as we know, a good many such so-called charms are on the bottom of the ocean."<sup>88</sup> After the war, however, he started wearing a religious medallion as a memento with personal significance rather than as a devotional object or talisman. For Boyington, expecting to propitiate supernatural favor through any means seemed misdirected.

Regardless of perceived effectiveness, as soldiers and sailors experienced fear, some petitioned God to intervene on their behalf while others attempted to cultivate good luck. Many did both and did not perceive any tension. In his analysis of religion in early America, historian Jon Butler has argued that most Americans saw little difference between Christian miracles and magic.<sup>89</sup> To some extent, soldiers and sailors echoed this impulse during World War II though both strands seemed rooted more in folklore than in

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<sup>87</sup> Goldstein, "Faith in the Army, Part Two," 26.

<sup>88</sup> Gregory Boyington, *Baa Baa, Black Sheep* (New York: Putnam, 1958), 235.

<sup>89</sup> Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 21. Chambers made a similar point regarding British soldiers in World War I; see: Vanessa Chambers, "A Shell with My Name on It: The Reliance on the Supernatural during the First World War," *Journal for the Academic Study of Magic* no. 2 (2004): 96.



culturally dominant religious forms. By the 1940s, most Americans had grown skeptical of supernatural intervention into the natural world. However, the experience of war led some soldiers and sailors to express themselves in religiously multilingual ways as they drew from whatever beliefs or traditions they thought might help. In so doing, they shaped their religious worlds by selectively embracing diverse beliefs and practices with minimal concern for maintaining pure religious forms. In this world, soldiers and sailors could petition for mercy from the benevolent Father while simultaneously courting the affection of lady luck. In foxholes, the religiously orthodox and atheists were perhaps equally rare.

## Chapter 6

### **For God and Country: Interpreting Events through a Religious Lens**

In late 1944, Pvt. Glenn Fischer penned a frustrated letter to the editors of the *Link*, a Protestant devotional magazine designed for US military personnel. Responding to an article written by an army chaplain, Fischer declared, “Any man with common sense is repulsed by the naïve statement by Chaplain W. E. Bishop that God saved England, Russia’s armies, and our West Coast by direct intervention.”<sup>1</sup> Instead, Fischer argued that “blood and sacrifice” led to victory and clarified that he favored a “realistic religion” rather than one of “escape” or “fancy.” In the following months, the editors published several letters critical of Fischer’s response. Lieutenant John Bennett charitably proposed that “it is only through God that we have that strength to make the required sacrifices.”<sup>2</sup> Corporal Thomas Lindsay credited Hitler’s decision to attack the USSR before Britain as a divinely inspired response to the prayers of “millions of sincere Christians” around the world.<sup>3</sup> Though this debate took place publically and through editorial oversight, similar discussions likely took place among those huddled in foxholes or in cramped quarters on ships. Why was the US engaged in this fight? Why did some survive while others died? Religious interpretation provided one avenue by which sailors and soldiers engulfed by World War II attempted to make sense of their experiences and the wider world in which they lived.

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<sup>1</sup> Glenn A. Fischer, “Pvt. Fischer Takes Exception,” *Link*, January 1945, 31. For the article to which Fischer is responding see: W. E. Bishop, “Toward a Decent World,” *Link*, September 1944.

<sup>2</sup> John H. Bennett, “God’s Part in Victory,” *Link*, August 1945, 30.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas L. Lindsay, “God’s Hand in This War,” *Link*, October 1945, 40. See also: T. Arnold Moon, “God’s Hand in This War,” *Link*, October 1945.

Military service during World War II was marked by a significant hemming in of individuals' ability for self-determination in order to organize Americans into an efficient fighting machine. Of the sixteen million who were part of the US military, over ten million men entered through the draft.<sup>4</sup> Some men and women voluntarily set aside some of their individual freedom and enlisted in the military of their own accord. Of those drafted, most submitted to the call to duty, likely as a part of their sense of shared community. Regardless of the mode by which they entered, soldiers and sailors found themselves engulfed in an organization where they could do little to determine their own future. Active combat often exacerbated this issue resulting in feelings of powerlessness. This chapter argues that, as circumstances thrust soldiers and sailors into wartime service, some made sense of their participation and experiences through a religious lens. For those considering broad issues such as US participation in the conflict, the idea that the US served as a divine instrument with which God could restrain evil resonated with many troops as well as the American public, though few justified the war in overt religious terms. On a more immediate level, soldiers and sailors interpreted their personal experiences in religious terms such as the significance of their own survival amid death and destruction.

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<sup>4</sup> US Selective Service System, "Induction Statistics," *History and Records*. By executive order in December 1942, President Roosevelt ended voluntary enlistments in order to better distribute labor between the military and industry. Thus, comparing the number of draftees and volunteers does not necessarily reflect the willingness of individuals to serve. See: Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Executive Order 9279," December 5, 1942, The American Presidency Project, University of California, Santa Barbara.

## **Fighting for God and Country**

Though the US did not formally declare war on Japan or Germany until the week after Japan's attack on the US military facilities at Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the US government had been preparing for a fight. Recalling World War I, the American people, however, proved rather reluctant to involve themselves in another armed engagement in a foreign land. Though Americans were willing to bend the terms of American neutrality by supplying allies, few were willing to send US troops overseas to intervene. In October 1940, men began entering the military through a peacetime draft—the first in American history—designed to prepare a defensive force for the US mainland but also one that might eventually be capable of responding to Germany's shocking advances in Europe as well as Japan's continued expansion in Asia. As the US rapidly expanded its military, however, many Americans remained hesitant. Some of these conscripted men threatened to desert if they were not released within one year—the original length of service dictated by the Selective Service Act.<sup>5</sup> By a slim margin, Congress voted in August 1941 to extend the term of conscripts and removed the restriction limiting their service to the western hemisphere. Mass desertions, however, never came to pass as the international situation had grown increasingly dire by the fall of 1941.

Many religious groups also hesitated to offer support to the expansion the military or the potential use of US military forces abroad. As historian Gerald Sittser has argued, American religious bodies followed a course of "cautious patriotism" as they recalled the

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<sup>5</sup> *Selective Training and Service Act of 1940*, 54 Stat. 885, 1940. For a discussion of pre-Pearl Harbor morale problems see: Stephen D. Westbrook, "The Railey Report and Army Morale, 1941: Anatomy of a Crisis," *Military Review* 60, no. 6 (June 1980): 11–24.

excesses of religious rhetoric that surrounded the First World War.<sup>6</sup> For example, in his analysis of World War I, Jonathan Ebel demonstrated that soldiers sometimes embraced the themes of religious crusading and redemption through death in battle in order to make sense of their experiences and the significance of their involvement.<sup>7</sup> Sittser noted that the interwar period saw religious bodies recoiling from what many considered to be jingoism in the earlier conflict. Along with historic peace churches such as the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), many prominent national groups passed antiwar resolutions, including the Reformed Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the Methodist Episcopal Church.<sup>8</sup> Between 1939 and 1941, interventionist voices among religious leaders, such as Reinhold Niebuhr, gained increasing traction, but most Americans still wanted to stay out of the conflict.<sup>9</sup> However, as sociologist Ray H. Abrams eloquently quipped, “Events proved much stronger than philosophical reasoning.”<sup>10</sup> Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, few Americans, religious or otherwise, actively opposed the US declaring war on Japan and Germany.

Whether they wanted to or not, vast numbers young Americans entered into military service during World War II. Some interpreted, and to a lesser extent justified, their initial involvement in the conflict in religious terms. Along with significant parts of the American public, these soldiers and sailors resonated with the idea that they were engaged in a wider battle between good and evil in the world. Historian David Zietsma

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<sup>6</sup> Sittser, *A Cautious Patriotism*, 2, 17.

<sup>7</sup> Ebel, *Faith in the Fight*, 36.

<sup>8</sup> Sittser, *A Cautious Patriotism*, 19–20; Roland H. Bainton, “The Churches and War: Historic Attitudes toward Christian Participation, a Survey from Biblical Times to the Present Day,” *Social Action* 11 (January 1945): 36.

<sup>9</sup> Strunk, *Public Opinion, 1935-1946*, 970–6.

<sup>10</sup> Ray H. Abrams, “The Churches and the Clergy in World War II,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 256 (1948): 113.

has argued that this binary represented a shift in dominant conceptions of American national identity in the early years of the war. Whereas American foreign policy before 1938 emphasized a more passive “good neighbor” approach rooted in the biblical parable of the Good Samaritan, according to Zietsma, Americans increasingly interpreted international events in terms of good and evil. Thus, Americans concluded that the US should intervene as a righteous nation.<sup>11</sup> In this sense, the US could serve as a divine instrument by which God could restrain evil. The actions of the axis powers seemed to trample the ideals of freedom and liberty as they sought to violently expand their empires. Thus, for many Americans, serving God and country became one and the same.

Political and military leaders in the US encouraged the connection between God and country as they sought to build support for US involvement in World War II. Before Germany had even invaded Poland, President Franklin Roosevelt described the international threat in terms of an attack on religious freedom in his 1939 state of the union speech before Congress. In addition, he linked the defense of religion and democracy. He explained, “There comes a time in the affairs of men when they must prepare to defend, not their homes alone, but the tenets of faith and humanity on which their churches, their governments and their very civilization are founded. The defense of religion, of democracy and of good faith among nations is all the same fight.”<sup>12</sup> Twenty-

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<sup>11</sup> David Zietsma, “‘Sin Has No History’: Religion, National Identity, and U.S. Intervention, 1937–1941,” *Diplomatic History* 31, no. 3 (2007): 531–565.

<sup>12</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Annual Message to Congress,” January 4, 1939, Public Papers & Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, The American Presidency Project, University of California, Santa Barbara. In his analysis of the role of religion in the Cold War, Jonathan Herzog has argued that the Roosevelt administration made a “calculated decision not to frame World War II in essentially religious terms” because of the necessary alliance with the Soviet Union. Herzog explained that Roosevelt did so because it would seem hypocritical to emphasize the significance of religion in a conflict when partnered with an ally that restricted the freedom of religion. While this tension certainly existed, Roosevelt maintained the rhetoric of religious freedom throughout the war. This difference in interpretation is likely rooted in relative emphasis. Roosevelt did frame the war in religious terms but not only in religious terms. He

one month later at the ceremony marking the beginning of the draft, Roosevelt read statements from three religious leaders broadly representing Protestants, Catholics, and Jews.<sup>13</sup> Each statement emphasized willingness to support the men called to service through the draft, but the notably brief comment provided by George Buttrick, President of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, offered no support for the draft as a policy.<sup>14</sup> Most famously, President Roosevelt appealed to the sensitivities of Americans as defenders of freedom. In his 1941 state of the union address before Congress, Roosevelt argued for the escalation of US involvement by supplying allies with munitions with minimal expectation of repayment—a broadened policy that shaded past neutrality. Roosevelt justified this shift claiming that such aid was necessary to defend freedom. In conclusion, he offered a hopeful vision of a future characterized by four basic freedoms—freedom of expression, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear.<sup>15</sup> By including worship, Roosevelt provided an avenue by which

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typically did so alongside other values such as democracy and liberty. See: Jonathan P Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America's Religious Battle against Communism in the Early Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 36–38.

<sup>13</sup> Roosevelt quoted from letters he received from George A. Buttrick, President of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, Edward L. Israel, President of the Synagogue Council of America, and Francis J. Spellman, a bishop of the Roman Catholic Church. See: Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Radio Address for the Drawing Under the Selective Service Act of 1940,” Transcript, October 29, 1940, Public Papers & Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, The American Presidency Project, University of California, Santa Barbara; George A. Buttrick to Franklin D. Roosevelt, October 29, 1940, President’s Personal File 1628: Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, Papers as President, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY; Edward L. Israel to Franklin D. Roosevelt, October 23, 1940, President’s Personal File 7011: Synagogue Council of America, Papers as President, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY; Francis J. Spellman to Franklin D. Roosevelt, October 1, 1940, President’s Personal File 4404: Archbishop Francis J. Spellman, Papers as President, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY.

<sup>14</sup> The way in which FDR presented Buttrick’s comments implied that Buttrick supported the idea of a draft. The *Christian Century* lauded Buttrick for not appeasing FDR with a statement that would seem to endorse conscription. Despite his friendship with Reinhold Niebuhr and other interventionists, Buttrick remained a steadfast pacifist. See: “Dr. Buttrick Speaks for Protestantism,” *Christian Century* 57, no. 45 (November 1940): 1363–4; Charles N. Davidson, “George Arthur Buttrick: Christocentric Preacher and Pacifist,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* 53 (June 1, 1975): 143–167.

<sup>15</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Annual Message to Congress,” January 6, 1941, Public Papers & Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, The American Presidency Project, University of California, Santa Barbara. In a July 1940 press conference, Roosevelt had already articulated a version of the four freedoms, including

Americans could think of the war in terms of a potential threat to religion. Such rhetoric raised the stakes of the war and offered American troops another potential justification for their participation. By defending the nation, one could also defend one's faith.

Among Christians, this conflation led some to draw favorable parallels between US intervention and a righteous crusade against evil. Such language was also adopted and deployed by military leaders. For example, General MacArthur described the war as a "crusade of personal liberty" in a speech in Australia soon after fleeing the Philippines in March 1942.<sup>16</sup> In Europe, General Eisenhower adopted similar language. On the eve of D-day into France, allied forces distributed a statement by Eisenhower in which he declared the beginning of a "Great Crusade" for which he encouraged troops to "beseech the blessing of Almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking."<sup>17</sup> In his 1948 memoir, Eisenhower reflected that the war became for him a "crusade" of "forces that stood for human good" against a "completely evil conspiracy."<sup>18</sup> While most military chaplains largely avoided language of crusading, Chaplain Raymond Musser linked the conflict to earlier religious crusades in Europe. In an article designed to encourage troops, Musser wrote, "Like knights in the Dark Ages, you crusade in faded-green armor against the modern barbarian, tipping the chalice of the Four Freedoms to the parched lips of oppressed peoples."<sup>19</sup> For Musser, participation in the war represented the active

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religion, in response to a question regarding his vision of peace. See: Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Excerpts from the Press Conference in Hyde Park, New York," July 5, 1940, Public Papers & Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, The American Presidency Project, University of California, Santa Barbara.

<sup>16</sup> Tom Yarbrough and Associated Press, "MacArthur Vows Victory or Death in Freedom Fight," *Lewiston (ME) Daily Sun*, March 27, 1942; *Reports of General MacArthur*, vol. 1, Facsimile Reprint (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1994), 29.

<sup>17</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, "D-Day Statement to the Soldiers, Sailors, and Airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force," Collection DDE-EPRE: Eisenhower, Dwight D: Papers, Pre-Presidential, 1916-1952, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library; National Archives and Records Administration, Abilene, KS.

<sup>18</sup> Dwight D Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1948), 157.

<sup>19</sup> Raymond E. Musser, "Peacemakers," *Link*, February 1944, 26.



“making” of peace through eliminating dangerous dictators abroad in order to free those whom they oppressed. By associating the Four Freedoms with a chalice, Musser drew a parallel between US war aims and the Christian sacrament of Holy Communion.

As they sought to make sense of their role in the conflict, some enlisted troops also deployed the language of crusading. In a letter to the *Link*, Henry Beckett, a fifty-four year-old army private, responded to a general claim that soldiers were not religious. Beckett allowed that troops did not necessarily attend worship or pray, but he argued that their mere participation in the conflict was a religious act. “Our men in the services are part of a great crusade,” he explained. “They oppose nations which play the bully. They fight, and many will die, to re-establish decency and at least afford a fresh opportunity for the cultivation of good will and for the spread of freedom.”<sup>20</sup> Even though a soldier may seem indifferent toward religion, Beckett claimed that he felt no need for outward sign because he “half-consciously” understood “the solemn significance of his daily life.”<sup>21</sup> Some soldiers deployed overt symbols of crusading. In the South Pacific, Marine Pfc. Raymond Hagberg displayed an image of a crusader’s shield on the turret of his tank he named Faith. According to a combat correspondent, Hagberg described the Nazis and Japanese as “persecutors of Christ’s followers” to fellow marines gathered for a Bible study that he led.<sup>22</sup> Also in a letter to the *Link*, Pvt. Robert MacDowell grappled to reconcile his understanding of Christianity and the war. MacDowell asked rhetorically whether a Christian should “temporarily submerge his Christian training, become a

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<sup>20</sup> Henry Beckett, “Batting the Breeze,” *Link*, June 1943, 40.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Religious News Service, “Marine Makes War with the Japanese a Religious Crusade,” *Protestant Voice*, February 4, 1944. A Marine Corps photo of the Hagberg and his tank was also published. See: *Protestant Voice*, March 3, 1944, 7; “Modern Crusader,” *Link*, May 1944, 21.

murdering beast, [or] participate in this carnage and destruction.”<sup>23</sup> MacDowell concluded that he and his fellow soldiers should “look upon this warfare as a crusade against the enemies of God and Christ’s way of life,” trust in the “supremacy of the Lord,” and seek also to combat evil within themselves. MacDowell interpreted the war in religious terms, but he acknowledged potential for evil on both sides.

Just as MacDowell tempered his language of righteous crusading with the recognition of American shortcomings, other soldiers and sailors also situated evil rather ambiguously. For some, the war and its associated suffering provided evidence of the universality of sin. Some also believed that the US was itself complicit in the chain of events that led to war or that it was a punishment for America because its people had not behaved righteously. In a letter home to his four-year-old son, marine sergeant Thomas Giordano sought to explain his absence for the past year. Giordano made clear that he did not want to be away from his family though he was aboard a transport bound for Peleliu. Instead, he claimed that he was drawn into a war caused by “the inability of mankind to follow the precepts of God.”<sup>24</sup> Notably, Giordano did not assign blame to any particular nation. Similarly, Stephen Coupe acknowledged that “the enemy worshipped the same God we did,” but he felt that “we were just stupid little people killing each other.”<sup>25</sup> Others echoed this assessment that the war represented human failure rather than divine will. *Saturday Evening Post* writer David G. Wittels opened an article on military chaplains with an account of an unnamed chaplain in New Guinea

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<sup>23</sup> Robert V. MacDowell, “Can Do,” *Link*, May 1945, 27.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas A. Giordano, “Letter to His Son, October 1944,” in *Lines of Battle: Letters from American Servicemen 1941-1945*, ed. Annette Tapert (New York: Times Books, 1987), 177.

<sup>25</sup> Stephen G. Coupe, “Army Service Experiences Questionnaire,” unpublished manuscript, n.d., WWII Survey 111, 7th Field Artillery Battalion, 1st Infantry Division, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

responding to a soldier who had asked why God did not stop the war. According to Wittels, the chaplain blamed the war on human sin on both sides. “We scorned God, we sinned, and we messed up the world,” the chaplain answered. “That’s what brought this war on us. God allows us free will, even to sin, but if we sin, we suffer the consequences.”<sup>26</sup>

Soldiers also struggled to square their understanding of Germany as a predominantly Christian nation with the events of the war. An infantry sergeant questioned his assumption that religion was dead in Germany when he saw crosses in practically every house. In a comment secretly extracted from a personal letter by a censor, he hypothesized, “Maybe they have been feeding us a lot of propaganda.”<sup>27</sup> In a letter to his parents, Cpl. Graff Bomberger also reflected on religious life in Germany as his unit moved across the nation in the spring of 1945. “It’s really difficult to reconcile the fact that a nation so full of churches and indications of the belief in the principles which Christ left on earth, became and still is so wicked and unChristianlike,” he wrote.<sup>28</sup> Marveling at ornate Lutheran churches, Bomberger considered the financial investment to build and maintain such edifices as a sign of religious vitality. “I can’t understand these people,” he puzzled. “Do they build these magnificent structures and then not practice what they preach?”<sup>29</sup> Even more troubling, Bomberger concluded that Germany seemed more heavily “Christianized” than the US. A former prisoner of war, C. Grant

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<sup>26</sup> Wittels, “Are the Chaplains Doing a Job?,” 12.

<sup>27</sup> United States, “Appendix 16: Soldier Comments on Chaplains and Religion in the Army from the ETOUSA G-2 Semi-Monthly Censorship Reports for the Period 16 February to 15 August 1945,” in *Report on the Army Chaplain in the European Theater*, Report of the General Board, United States Forces, European Theater Study No. 68 (Bad Nauheim, Germany: The General Board, U.S.F.E.T, 1945), 44.

<sup>28</sup> J. Graff Bomberger to Christian M. H. Bomberger and Edith M. G. Bomberger, April 13, 1945, J. Graff Bomberger Papers, 1912-1945, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

Ash also struggled to make sense of the role of Christianity in Germany. “We felt that God was on our side,” he reflected, but he noticed that the German guards wore belt buckles inscribed *Gott mit uns*.<sup>30</sup> “That kind of shook you a little,” he continued. “God’s with us and he’s with them, too?”<sup>31</sup>

Though rare, some soldiers and sailors interpreted the international conflict as a distinctly religious war. In a letter to his mother, Staff Sergeant Heber Greenhalgh, a former high school English teacher, justified this conclusion by claiming that the roots of the war originated in a conflict between Jesus Christ and the Roman emperor. Though Jesus was crucified, Greenhalgh argued, generations of his followers continued a quiet battle against terrorism and oppression through “earnest, plodding dissemination of truth.”<sup>32</sup> According to Greenhalgh, World War II represented a continuing struggle between good and evil that had manifested itself in a conflict between Christians around the world and Nazism. A former infantry scout in the Pacific, Chuck Holsinger recalled that he originally approached the conflict as a “holy war” between Japanese “Shinto worshippers” and American Christians.<sup>33</sup> As he matured, the eventual missionary and mission agency administrator softened his interpretation and forgave the Japanese for the suffering they inflicted on him and his fellow soldiers. Offering an alternative interpretation in a letter to the *Link*, sailor Horace DeMassico complained that the war would not be permanently resolved because it was *not* overtly religious. He seemed to value Roosevelt’s emphasis on religious freedom, but he felt that this aim did not go far

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<sup>30</sup> “God with us.” Denny Roy, Grant Paul Skabelund, and Ray C. Hillam, eds., *A Time to Kill: Reflections on War* (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1992), 4.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Heber J. Greenhalgh, “L.D.S. Soldier Gives View,” *Church News (Salt Lake City, UT)*, March 27, 1943, 6.

<sup>33</sup> Holsinger, *Above the Cry of Battle*, 48.

enough to warrant God's full support for the US war effort. He concluded, "We will never have a lasting peace as long as the unbelievers and heathens exist."<sup>34</sup> To be clear, the tone of the letter did not indicate that DeMassico favored religious genocide but rather emphasized the conversion of non-Christians beginning with those at home. Though reaching different conclusions, some US troops such as Greenhalgh, Holsinger, and DeMassico grappled with the question of whether the war had religious roots or transcending significance.

To understand the ways in which soldiers and sailors interpreted the wider war and their participation, it is useful to distinguish between their initial thoughts about their entry into the military and the ways they made sense of their experiences of active combat. For most Americans who served in World War II, the choice of whether or not to join the military was severely limited.<sup>35</sup> While many were entered service willingly, legal and social pressure made it quite difficult for those from certain groups to avoid conscription. During the war, Congress expanded the possibilities for conscientious objection by addressing it in terms of belief rather than institutional membership, but less than one-sixth of one percent of all registrants applied for CO status.<sup>36</sup> Regardless, those who were granted CO status were still subject to conscription but into non-combatant military roles or civilian public service camps.

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<sup>34</sup> Horace A. DeMassico, "We'll Have to Do It Again," *Link*, February 1944, 46.

<sup>35</sup> Notably, the Selective Service Act of 1940 exempted professional ministers of religion from selection. Thus, military chaplains had all volunteered for military service. See: *Selective Training and Service Act of 1940*.

<sup>36</sup> United States, Selective Service System, *Conscientious Objection*, vol. 1, Special Monograph 11 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1950), 314–5; Stephen M. Kohn, *Jailed for Peace: The History of American Draft Law Violators, 1658-1985* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986), 46. See also Lillian Schlissel, *Conscience in America: A Documentary History of Conscientious Objection in America, 1757-1967* (New York: Dutton, 1968), 214–8.

Those entering into the military sometimes reflected on their induction in religious terms, often echoing culturally dominant themes such as preserving religious freedom. In short, one could serve God by serving the United States. Former navy nurse Karla LaVore Paul Tripp recalled that she had volunteered for service because her parents had taught her to be patriotic. A member of the LDS Church, Tripp explained that she considered the US government to be formed through divine inspiration.<sup>37</sup> Thus, heeding a call to protect the nation was a way to honor God. Though some articulated a general sense of the religious worthiness of service, others felt more specific convictions. Paul Long voluntarily enlisted in the army even though he was eligible for deferment as a pre-ministerial student because he felt that God had called him to do so.<sup>38</sup> Eventually serving as a pack master with Merrill's Marauders in Burma, Long recalled that later being assigned to support Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist army against the Japanese challenged his justification for enlisting to defend God and country. "Australia, India, and even Burma all seemed somehow to be a part of our national interests," he wrote. China's battle against Japanese occupation, however, "Seemed so far away from the world I knew, the nation I enlisted to defend, and the family I loved. Is God concerned with a larger world filled with people who neither know or serve him? How much of a sacrifice does God demand from those who enlist for His service?"<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Patricia Rushton, Lynn C. Callister, and Maile K. Wilson, eds., "Karla LaVore Paul Tripp," in *Latter-Day Saint Nurses at War: A Story of Caring and Sacrifice* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2005), 106, 110. This belief is consistent with LDS church doctrine. See: Joseph Smith, "The Prophet's Epistle to the Church, Written in Liberty Prison; March 25, 1839," in *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, vol. 3, revised (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News, 1948), 304. For a period explanation by a member of the First Presidency see: J. Reuben Clark, "The Constitution Was Inspired," *Church News (Salt Lake City, UT), L.D.S. Service Men's Edition*, May 15, 1944. See also Noel B. Reynolds, "The Doctrine of an Inspired Constitution," *BYU Studies* 16, no. 3 (1976): 1–23.

<sup>38</sup> Paul B. Long, *Citizen Soldiers of World War II: Pacific Theater of Operations* (Chapel Hill, NC: Professional Press, 1994), 3, 17, 72.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

For those facing combat, the question of the morality of killing human beings sometimes rose to the foreground. It was one issue to agree with the abstract proposition of defending one's nation and quite another to make a decision to pull a trigger.<sup>40</sup> Edward Feagins recalled a serious conversation he had with his friend James Sanders while serving in Italy as part of the Thirty-Sixth Infantry Division.<sup>41</sup> Reflecting on the biblical commandment against killing, Sanders was conflicted about whether or not he should shoot first if he were to encounter a German soldier. According to Feagins, a deadly German artillery attack eventually rendered the dilemma moot for Sanders. Helen Brown related that her brother, Robert Wintermote, struggled with the same passage of scripture as he awaited combat in a foxhole in Germany. According to Brown, Wintermote reported that his unit proved quite good at killing, and he never really resolved this issue. Even long after the war, he was afflicted with guilt and plagued by nightmares. In a comment seemingly directed at the commandment or at least her brother's interpretation, Brown concluded, "He didn't need this."<sup>42</sup> Reflecting on his own experiences in Europe, Myron Hatch also noticed the friction between his ideals and his duties and concluded that his mind had compartmentalized these competing values. Having completed a mission with the LDS Church before his military service, Hatch felt torn between his desire to save people and his military duty to kill if necessary. Diagnosed with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) late in life, Hatch hypothesized

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<sup>40</sup> Though military scholars have largely rejected his assertion that fewer than twenty-five percent of men in combat fired their weapons, S.L.A. Marshall's hypotheses regarding the way in which cultural factors influence troops' willingness to kill remain compelling. See: S. L. A. Marshall, *Men against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command in Future War* (Washington, DC: Infantry Journal, 1947), 78–79. For a critical analysis of Marshall's methods and presentation, see: Roger J. Spiller, "S.L.A. Marshall and the Ratio of Fire," *The RUSI Journal* 133, no. 4 (1988): 63–71.

<sup>41</sup> Feagins, "A Country Boy in World War II," 31–32.

<sup>42</sup> Helen Wintermote Brown, 2004, Robert Eugene Wintermote Collection (AFC/2001/001/12457), Veterans History Project Collection, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

that this internal conflict led him to suppress emotion and feeling during the war, but that it emerged afterwards as nightmares and feeling panicked in crowds.<sup>43</sup>

While the question of killing clearly troubled some troops on religious grounds, others sought to alleviate such qualms publically through theological reasoning. A set of articles and responses published in the devotional magazine *Link* illustrated this debate. To open the debate, the *Link* reprinted a pre-war article written by Samuel Brengle, a high ranking official of the Salvation Army.<sup>44</sup> In short, Brengle argued that a soldier is justified to kill in battle as an agent of the government which—as an agent of God—is properly justified in protecting its citizens. In the following year, the *Link* published supporting articles written by two chaplains as well as several supporting letters submitted by enlisted men.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, Chaplain Albert Corpening provided an article in which he blamed the doctrinal disagreement on the use of the word “kill” rather than “murder” in the most dominant translations of Exodus 20:13—the sixth commandment.<sup>46</sup> According to Corpening, the translation unnecessarily troubled many troops by leading them to interpret the commandment too broadly. The lone dissenting voice published by the *Link* proved to be Pvt. W. E. Spradlin who criticized Corpening claiming that one

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<sup>43</sup> Hatch, interview; Myron Hatch, “Summary from Personal Journal,” unpublished memoir, n.d., MSS OH 1912, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

<sup>44</sup> The original date of the article is unclear, but Brengle died in 1936. See: Samuel Logan Brengle, “Killing in Battle--Is It Murder?,” *Link*, June 1943. See also: Samuel Logan Brengle, “Killing in Battle: Is It Murder?: An Answer to a Question of Conscience,” *War Cry*, January 31, 1942. Samuel Logan Brengle, “Killing in Battle; Is It Murder?,” *Sheboygan (WI) Press*, April 28, 1942.

<sup>45</sup> Lawrence D. Graves, “Killing in Battle--Is It Murder?,” *Link*, December 1943; Raymond R. Miller, “Killing in Battle--Is It Murder?,” *Link*, December 1943; Frank N. Pohorlak et al., “Killing in Battle--Is It Murder?,” *Link*, April 1944.

<sup>46</sup> The King James Version of the Bible, the American Standard Version, and the Douhey-Rheims Bible (Challoner Revision) translated the verb as kill. The first major version of the Christian Bible to incorporate the shift from ‘kill’ to ‘murder’ was the Today’s English Version published in 1966. Notably, the dominant English translation of Jewish scriptures by the Jewish Publication Society used the word ‘murder’ starting in 1917. Albert N. Corpening, “There Is No Such Commandment,” *Link*, December 1944.



could likely justify most sins using such methodology.<sup>47</sup> Instead, Spradlin invoked Jesus's reference to the commandment to love one's neighbor and argued that the lack of such love led to the war.<sup>48</sup> Though most of the material printed in the *Link* defended the propriety of killing in war, that the matter drew such attention from readers demonstrated that the question was significant to troops.

The concept of mercy also troubled some troops. In March 1944, *Yank* published a letter written by Pvt. Ralph H. Luckey that opened a spirited debate regarding taking Japanese prisoners. Responding to an earlier story of American soldiers who shot unarmed Japanese troops, Luckey called for mercy rather than unnecessary killing. "I am a servant of God," he wrote. "So when I get into battle I hope by His help to take as many Japs alive as I can."<sup>49</sup> In the following months, Luckey's letter prompted numerous responses—most of which lambasted Luckey for being naïve about conditions in the Pacific area. The editors published a dozen negative responses gleaned from "a great number" received by the newspaper and noted that only two soldiers had written in support.<sup>50</sup> Though Luckey explained his position in terms of his religious faith, none of the published responses offered a religious justification for not taking prisoners. Instead, most reasoned in terms of retribution for atrocities committed against American troops. This reflected commonly held beliefs among US troops. As historian John Dower has argued, atrocities on both sides built upon preexisting cultural assumptions and

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<sup>47</sup> W. E. Spradlin, "On 'Thou Shalt Not Kill,'" *Link*, July 1945.

<sup>48</sup> A reference to Leviticus 19:18. See: Matthew 22:39, Mark 12:31, Luke 10:27

<sup>49</sup> Ralph H. Luckey, "Letter to Editor," *Yank*, March 3, 1944, 14.

<sup>50</sup> "Mercy for Japs (Concl.)," *Yank*, June 23, 1944, 14. Responses were published on April 21, June 23, and July 7, 1944. See also: *The Best from Yank, the Army Weekly*, 211–2. *Time* published a similar exchange of letters from civilians in early 1943. J. Howard Cliffe responded to a March 15 article that reported that American pilots had strafed Japanese sailors afloat in the Bismarck Sea. Cliffe castigated this action as a "cold-blooded slaughter of the helpless." Three weeks later, *Time* published five letters in support of the practice. See: *Time*, March 15, 1943, 22; March 29, 1943, 6; April 19, 1943, 10.

contributed to a literal vicious circle in the Pacific theater.<sup>51</sup> In Luckey's case, appealing to the religious sensibilities of his fellow soldiers seemed to gain little traction against specious conclusions regarding the core nature of the enemy.

### **Interpreting Survival**

Though troops may have drawn from religion to make sense of their military induction and grappled with the justification for lethal force, battle's aftermath also provided fertile ground for religious reflection. Amid death and destruction, soldiers and sailors pondered the significance of their own survival. As noted in Chapter 5, many troops attributed their survival, at least in general terms, to divine protection. Even soldiers and sailors who experienced minimal combat or none at all sometimes interpreted their insulation from battle as evidence of divine protection. For example, though he never saw direct combat, John Giarratano attributed his coming home from the war to prayer, especially the prayers of his mother.<sup>52</sup> Former sailor Wendell Hansen reflected more deeply on surviving the war aboard the USS *Sitkoh Bay*, an escort carrier used to ferry airplanes and crews. Though any work in the Pacific was potentially hazardous, the ship's antiaircraft gunners successfully shot down the only Japanese plane that confronted the ship. An adherent to the LDS Church, Hansen credited his survival and that of his shipmates to divine protection. Hansen and several other LDS sailors met regularly on the ship to share the Holy Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Drawing a

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<sup>51</sup> John W. Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 73.

<sup>52</sup> John A. Giarratano, interview by Cecilia Smart, unpublished transcript, n.d., 10, John A. Giarratano Collection (AFC/2001/001/53007), Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

parallel with Moses and the Passover in Egypt, Hansen claimed that the ship and its crew had been spared “because of the presence of priesthood bearers and the use of the sacred symbols of the atonement when administered in our sacrament meetings aboard ship.”<sup>53</sup>

Most religious reflections on survival focused on specific instances when soldiers or sailors felt that they had made a narrow escape. In a letter to his family, Aben Caplan, a Jewish infantryman in Europe, interpreted two events as evidence that God had protected him. As his group advanced, a fellow American misidentified the soldiers and opened fire. A bullet passed through Caplan’s gas mask that was slung against his body. “Although it was another close shave,” he wrote, “It seemed to steady me as it showed me that God was still watching over me.”<sup>54</sup> The next morning, a German tank threatened to crush Caplan and two others as they lay pinned by heavy gunfire in a foxhole. Stopping just a few feet away, the tank paused, and enemy fire temporarily abated giving Caplan and the others a chance to surrender. Though he faced grim prospects as a Jewish POW, Caplan considered these events with thankfulness after he was eventually liberated. Similarly, a former Navajo code talker, Sam Smith recalled an incident on Saipan that he attributed to spiritual protection. Before he left for the marines, Smith participated in a Navajo ritual dance led by a medicine man who then became like a grandfather to him. As a part of the ceremony, the medicine man put symbolic objects on Smith’s body as a means of spiritual protection—what Smith described as armor.<sup>55</sup> On Saipan, Smith was called to go forward with an assault group. After quietly advancing,

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<sup>53</sup> Wendell L. Hansen, “Military Service of Wendell L. Hansen and the U.S.S. Sitkoh Bay,” unpublished memoir, n.d., 14, MSS 2350 no. 1061, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT; “Sitkoh Bay,” in *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*.

<sup>54</sup> Caplan, “POW Diary,” 1.

<sup>55</sup> Samuel Smith, interview by G. Kurt Piehler and Cynthia Tinker, unpublished transcript, February 12, 2004, 37, Veteran’s Oral History Project, Center for the Study of War and Society, Department of History, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

he was sheltering for the night in a foxhole when a scorpion bit him. As Smith's head and neck began to swell severely, a sergeant sent him back for treatment. The next day, Smith learned that the assault group had taken heavy casualties. Consequently, Smith concluded that the scorpion saved him by forcing him off the line. He explained, "I think of my grandpa's spiritual way of putting me in [the armor] that helped me."<sup>56</sup>

Some soldiers and sailors interpreted survival as positive evidence of divine protection, but others went further to explain injury or death as God withdrawing or withholding protection. Such interpretations often linked protection directly to faithfulness and proper behavior. Paul Millet described a troubled relationship he had with Pvt. Pittman, a fellow soldier in the Seventh Infantry Division on Okinawa. According to Millet, Pittman was a rough and immoral character who insulted Millet's faith and membership in the LDS Church. Under fire in a rice paddy beside Millet, however, Pittman promised God that he would change his ways if he survived. After the battle, they returned to the rear where Pittman resumed insulting him with foul language. Several days later, Pittman was killed when he stepped on a landmine. Millet explained, "I have often felt that he lost his protection because of his broken promise to the Lord."<sup>57</sup> In Europe, Clinton Riddle had come to a similar conclusion regarding his own experiences as a glider infantryman. When he was fifteen years old, Riddle felt called by God to be a preacher, but he did not act on it. During the war, Riddle crash landed in gliders twice and suffered wounds on other occasions. He believed that God allowed him

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<sup>56</sup> Samuel Smith, interview by G. Kurt Piehler and Cynthia Tinker, unpublished transcript, February 13, 2004, 3, Veteran's Oral History Project, Center for the Study of War and Society, Department of History, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

<sup>57</sup> Paul A. Millet, "World War II Experiences," unpublished memoir, n.d., 2-3, MSS 2350 no. 1114, L, Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

to suffer because he had refused the call to preach. In a foxhole in Holland, Riddle finally promised that he would follow the calling if he survived. After the war, he was ordained as a Baptist minister, and he served part-time in a series of churches for many years.<sup>58</sup>

Though the preceding accounts placed the teller as a passive participant, soldiers and sailors sometimes interpreted their own actions in terms of supernatural influence. Some troops credited divine revelation of special knowledge or foresight for the success of their actions. A former quartermaster lieutenant, James Moulton recalled an incident in the Philippines that he attributed to divine guidance. Moulton and a sergeant were driving along an established route that soldiers generally considered to be safer than surrounding roads when Moulton felt a sudden compulsion to turn their vehicle onto a small dirt road through some rice paddies. He ordered the sergeant to turn onto the potentially hazardous secondary road. Soon, five or six shells hit the main road. “As soon as we had made that turn and saw the shells land where we would have been, the sergeant asked me how I knew to turn,” Moulton explained. “Without preachment, I tried to let him know of the power of prayer and of spiritual guidance.”<sup>59</sup> Paul Millet recalled a similar experience of divine guidance. During a lull in fighting on Okinawa, Millet joined some fellow soldiers in playing cards near their heavy machine gun position. Millet reported hearing a “still small voice whispering to me to move and dig a deeper foxhole.”<sup>60</sup> Initially hesitant, Millet heard the voice two more times before

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<sup>58</sup> Riddle, interview, 13–14. See also: Todd South, “World War II Vet Flew ‘Canvas Coffins,’” *Chattanooga (TN) Times Free Press*, November 11, 2012.

<sup>59</sup> James Heber Moulton, “Some Memories of World War II,” unpublished memoir, 1996, 28–29, MSS 2350 no. 185, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

<sup>60</sup> Millet, “World War II Experiences,” 4.

complying. Soon after, an artillery shell exploded near the other men wounding them. Medics responded, but a second shell hit the group directly, killing everyone. “I knew my life had been spared, for a purpose known only to my Father in Heaven,” he reflected. “I was extremely thankful for his care.”<sup>61</sup>

Other soldiers reported hearing voices directing them to take a different course of action that led to their survival. John Walker recalled that he experienced such guidance soon after arriving in the Philippines with the Twenty-First Pursuit Squadron in December 1941. As he lay in his bunk, Walker heard a voice repeatedly calling his name. Assuming that his buddy outside was calling him, Walker rose and sought out his friend who explained that he had said nothing. Just then, a bomb from the Japanese attack on Nichols Field landed near his recently vacated bunk. Walker interpreted this and other experiences as evidence of divine protection.<sup>62</sup> A former corporal in the Forty-Fourth Field Artillery Battalion, Calvin Rynearson described two similar incidents. While operating a field switchboard in Belgium, Rynearson declined a fellow soldier’s offer to cover the board so that he could get lunch from a kitchen truck across the field. Soon, however, he heard an audible voice telling him twice to go to lunch. Relenting, he called his relief back and left to eat. While he was away, a shell landed near the switchboard destroying it. Fortunately, the other soldier had just ducked back into a different hole. Though knocked unconscious, the soldier was otherwise unhurt. In the second incident, Rynearson was serving as a forward artillery observer in the Huertgen Forest. He, a sergeant, and a second lieutenant had just finished digging a foxhole when

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Steve Rabey, *Faith under Fire: Stories of Hope and Courage from World War II* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002), 110–1.

the sergeant asked him to go with him to cut some logs to cover the hole. Rynearson recalled that he did not want to leave the safety of the foxhole, but he heard a “still small voice” that whispered to him to go with the sergeant.<sup>63</sup> He did so, but upon their return, they found the twisted body of the lieutenant. A mortar shell had landed directly in the foxhole. Rynearson interpreted both these “faith-promoting” incidents as evidence that the “Lord [was] watching over [him].”<sup>64</sup> He credited such evidence with giving him the strength to carry on even though the sergeant he had been with was too shaken to return immediately to battle.

Though reports of a divine voice guiding actions were not limited to one particular religious group, those from Pentecostal backgrounds as well as members of the LDS Church seemed especially attuned to such phenomena. From the above accounts, John Walker, a lifelong Pentecostal, reported that he had rededicated his life to Christ at Aimee Semple McPherson’s Angelus Temple just before departing for the Philippines.<sup>65</sup> A member of the LDS Church, Calvin Rynearson had received a patriarchal blessing before leaving for Europe.<sup>66</sup> Though these religious traditions are quite distinct from one another, each emphasized the belief that God continually interacts with humanity.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Rynearson, unpublished memoir, 6. An account from Denver Sayre—another soldier in Battery C of the Forty-Fourth Field Artillery—seems quite similar to Rynearson’s though neither mentions the other. Sayre did not mention hearing a voice and did not offer a religious interpretation. See: Denver O. Sayre, “My Life in My Words,” unpublished memoir, *The World War II Experience*.

<sup>64</sup> Rynearson, unpublished memoir, 5, 6.

<sup>65</sup> Rabey, *Faith under Fire*, 109.

<sup>66</sup> Rynearson, unpublished memoir, 2.

<sup>67</sup> That certain religious traditions are more open to supernatural intervention parallels Wuthnow’s findings regarding belief in extra-sensory perception (ESP) among San Francisco Bay area residents in the early 1970s. Wuthnow found that people who stated they were confident in their belief in God and believed that God had a strong influence in their lives were more likely to be open to ESP or had experienced it in their own lives, most commonly through precognition or telepathy. See: Robert Wuthnow, *Experimentation in American Religion: The New Mysticism and Their Implications for the Churches* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 76.

Since Pentecostalism is a loose family of groups rather than a unified denomination, assessing the worldview of the LDS Church is more straightforward. Rooted in new revelation received by Joseph Smith in the early nineteenth century, LDS Church doctrine stressed the idea that the spirit of God is actively involved in the world. Consequently, the LDS Church encouraged members to listen for the “still small voice,” and considered such instances as evidence of the faithfulness of the individual as well as the truthfulness of church doctrine.<sup>68</sup> In an extensive study of personal revelation among Mormons, folklorist Tom Mould noted the ubiquity of the theme of danger. He also mapped out a specific “tale type” he labeled “a warning to move.”<sup>69</sup> Such tales typically followed a pattern where a person in an unfamiliar or dangerous setting feels a prompting to move to a different location despite no obvious threat. Often, the person hesitates but eventually relents to the prompt. Soon after, the threat manifests, and the person realizes that he or she would have been gravely injured or killed. This pattern is largely consistent with the accounts of life-saving revelation presented above. The propensity of Mormons to share accounts of immediate divine guidance is likely connected to a church culture that seeks out and celebrates such stories as evidence of God actively working in the world, especially through faithful Mormons.<sup>70</sup> Though Mormons and Pentecostals

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<sup>68</sup> The phrase ‘still small voice’ is an allusion to Elijah’s interaction with God as recorded in 1 Kings 19:12. Part of the LDS body of scripture, *The Doctrine and the Covenants* records a revelation through Joseph Smith that taught that the spirit of God would reveal knowledge in the minds and hearts of the faithful (D&C 8:1-3). Pertinent to supernatural intervention in wartime, the following verse notes that such revelation “shall deliver you out of the hands of your enemies, when, if it were not so, they would slay you and bring your soul to destruction” (D&C 8:4).

<sup>69</sup> Tom Mould, *Still, the Small Voice: Narrative, Personal Revelation, and the Mormon Folk Tradition* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2011), 244, 250.

<sup>70</sup> In a proposed “Theory of Revelations”, sociologist Rodney Stark emphasized that social support for divine revelations in a community makes assertions of revelation more likely. Conversely, if such support does not exist, then people are less likely to report instances of divine revelation. See: Rodney Stark, “A Theory of Revelations,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 38, no. 2 (June 1, 1999): 289, 296; Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Mormonism*, ed. Reid L. Neilson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 35, 45.



heralded miracle stories, those from other backgrounds may have been more hesitant to share such stories if they feared that others in their particular tradition would question their truthfulness.<sup>71</sup>

Though some troops described revelatory experiences that led to different courses of action, others reported revelations of the future that seemed to have little immediate benefit. Former marine Eugene Sledge remembered contemplating his potential for survival the night before the invasion of Peleliu. “I concluded that it was impossible for me to be killed, because God loved me. Then I told myself that God loved us all and that many would die. . . . My heart pounded, and I broke out in a cold sweat. Finally, I called myself a damned coward and eventually fell asleep saying the Lord's Prayer to myself.”<sup>72</sup> Though the eventual battle was fierce, he remained uninjured. As night fell two days later, Sledge was silently sitting in his gun pit with a small group of marines when he “heard a loud voice say clearly and distinctly, ‘You will survive the war!’”<sup>73</sup> Sledge asked if anyone else had heard a voice, but the others had not. Being skeptical about visions and disembodied voices, Sledge kept the message to himself. However, he believed that “God spoke to me that night on the Peleliu battlefield.”<sup>74</sup> For Sledge, the voice seemed to assuage his fear only minimally. In his reflections on the war, the dread

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<sup>71</sup> Among certain Protestants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, a desire for respectability and rationalism worked against interpretations of immediate revelation or involuntary religious experience. For example, as the main body of American Methodism moved in this direction, some who emphasized the continuing work of the Holy Spirit spun off in the holiness movement which itself fed into the Pentecostal movement of the early twentieth century. See: Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 229–240. Regarding shifting attitudes regarding divine intervention through miracles see: Robert Bruce Mullin, *Miracles and the Modern Religious Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996).

<sup>72</sup> Sledge, *With the Old Breed, at Peleliu and Okinawa*, 50.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

of battle remained a dominant theme. Former B-29 radio operator, Elbert Edwards described hearing the voice of God while being held as a POW by the Japanese at Camp Hoten in China in March 1945. As he was lying in his cell, Edwards asked God in his mind if he would ever be freed. He recalled that a voice as “plain as day” issued from the overhead light and assured him, “You’ll be home by Christmas.”<sup>75</sup> Edwards described it as resembling a regular male voice, but it carried the weight of authority. He recalled that he had little doubt that the message was true. The voice’s message convinced him that attempting to escape would not be worth the risk. Soon after the war’s conclusion, Soviet soldiers liberated Edwards and his fellow POWs.

In addition to reports of special knowledge gained through supernatural revelation, other troops attributed surprising physical feats to divine empowerment. Though previously unreligious, Lt. James Whittaker reported finding faith through his experiences stranded at sea with seven other aviators after their bomber ran out of fuel. After twenty days, the men split up their three rafts hoping to increase their chance of being found. The next morning, the men in Whittaker’s raft spotted palm trees in the distance. The others being too weak, Whittaker began the arduous task of rowing toward land. Several hours later, the raft neared the island only to be repelled by a current. Exhausted and facing an approaching storm, he fervently prayed out loud for help. Soon, he felt strength surge back into his shoulders and arms. “It was as though the oars were working automatically and my hands merely following their motions,” Whittaker explained. “There were other hands than mine on those oars.”<sup>76</sup> The raft made it to land,

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<sup>75</sup> Elbert L. Edwards, interview by Arthur L. Kelly, July 18, 1986, 1986OH190 WW 059, Colonel Arthur L. Kelly American Veterans Oral History Project, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries, Lexington, KY.

<sup>76</sup> Whittaker, *We Thought We Heard the Angels Sing*, 112–3.

and natives helped the men connect with naval forces in the area. In Europe, an American POW reported a similar experience of unexplained strength. After infantryman Clarence Swope's capture, Germans eventually put him to work expanding an underground factory. Exhausted by the labor alone, Swope and his fellow prisoners were also marched approximately six miles to and from the worksite each day on steep trails. Swope recalled that, at the end of one day, he felt that he could not climb the final slope back to camp. Though he was not a church-going man, he prayed, "God, . . . if you're going up that hill, . . . I wish to hell you'd take me with you."<sup>77</sup> Suddenly, Swope felt a strength surge through his body, and he walked up the hill nearly without effort. He recalled that it felt like an outside force controlled his body. For Swope, this was an answer to prayer, and he felt closer to God as a result. In both these accounts, the subject remained the person doing the action, but they attributed their success and implied survival to divine empowerment.

While some troops described events that seemed to violate natural laws, most accounts of divine protection seemed to work within the realm of nature. What some simply dismissed as chance, others interpreted as evidence of God's protection. In his memoir, Chuck Holsinger emphasized several incidents that demonstrated to him that God was watching over him. As an infantry scout in the Pacific, Holsinger experienced fearsome combat and witnessed the death of many of his fellow soldiers. Notably, Holsinger did not expect protection in battle. Instead, he described how his trust in God allowed him peace by acknowledging that Holsinger himself could do little to influence the outcome of battle.<sup>78</sup> By the end of the war, however, Holsinger interpreted his

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<sup>77</sup> Swope, interview; Swope, "World War II Diary," 26.

<sup>78</sup> Holsinger, *Above the Cry of Battle*, 66, 77.

survival as evidence that God had future plans for him. He described his first heavy combat—a four-day battle for the Philippine town of Lupao in February 1945—as a “North Star” for the rest of his life because he believed that God purposely spared him.<sup>79</sup> In particular, he stressed an incident on the last day when a dud artillery shell landed and bounced over his shallow foxhole without exploding.<sup>80</sup> As his unit advanced across Luzon over the next several weeks, Holsinger experienced several other near misses that he credited to God. He reported that God guided him to unjam his rifle in the dark, and a fellow infantryman shot a Japanese soldier just as he popped up to shoot Holsinger at close range.<sup>81</sup> For Holsinger, survival provided him with a sense of purpose after the war. He initially struggled with nightmares and a festering hatred of the Japanese, but he eventually returned to the Philippines as a missionary and began a decades-long process of forgiving the Japanese. In the end, Holsinger interpreted his experience of the war as a means by which God prepared him, as well as other Americans, for evangelistic missions.<sup>82</sup>

Another common interpretation of experiences in war is the idea of sacrifice. Compared with earlier wars, however, interpreting the war in terms of religious martyrdom was notably infrequent during World War II—at least among the enlisted ranks. In contrast, historians Harry Stout and Jonathan Ebel have emphasized this

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 80, 94. Though Holsinger did not sustain any serious physical injuries, he described the emotional toll of the war and the process of healing. “The brutal reality of the war had shut down my emotions. Because of the loss of so many comrades and the emotional strain, I was at the place where I could not cry any more! I begged the Lord to help me cry again. The emotional build-up was so great, I thought I would explode. I told the Lord that I would never be ashamed to show my emotions in public, if I could just cry once more. The next day in the middle of the night, I was on guard duty when the tears began to flow. I was healed!” (162)

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 160.

particular theme in their analyses of religion in the US Civil War and World War I respectively.<sup>83</sup> Stout noted that “the language of martyrdom and sacrificial altars” were “instinctual” by the end of the Civil War.<sup>84</sup> According to Stout, however, those who died did so for the nation rather than a traditional religious faith and created a foundation for American civil religion. In the minds of many, the war thus consecrated the nation through blood sacrifice. In his analysis of World War I, Ebel also noted the prevalence of interpreting death in war as martyrdom and even as potentially salvific.<sup>85</sup> In contrast to Stout, however, Ebel addressed these themes primarily in terms of Christianity rather than civil religion. According to Ebel, soldiers and the wider public often considered death in battle to be much more meaningful than death in other circumstances.

By World War II, the language of martyrdom in a religious sense seems to have largely dissipated. Americans still interpreted involvement in terms of varying levels of sacrifice, but such language typically emphasized self-deprivation for the larger good.<sup>86</sup> Those who died were said to have made the “ultimate” or “supreme” sacrifice. However, even this sacrifice primarily benefitted the community rather than the individual. To be sure, death in battle was certainly considered honorable in the 1940s, but few seem to have believed that it had salvific implications for the individual—a belief Ebel identified

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<sup>83</sup> More generally, Carolyn Marvin and David W. Ingle have argued that American civil religion requires the continual blood sacrifice of soldiers in order to solidify American identity. Though wars and remembrance often provide a unifying force for the US, Marvin and Ingle’s interpretation is overstated and would benefit from additional attention to historical context. See: Carolyn Marvin and David W. Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the American Flag* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>84</sup> Harry S Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the American Civil War* (New York: Viking, 2006), 341, see also 248–251.

<sup>85</sup> Ebel, *Faith in the Fight*, 76–77.

<sup>86</sup> See for example public information campaigns designed to promote the idea of shared sacrifice on the home front. One poster depicted a dead American soldier draped across a barbed wire fence with the text: “You talk of sacrifice. . . . He *knew* the meaning of sacrifice.” Winchester, *You Talk of Sacrifice... He Knew the Meaning of Sacrifice!*, poster, ca 1942, War Production Board, compiled 1942-1943, Records of the War Production Board, 1918 - 1947, Record Group 179, National Archives at College Park, MD.

in World War I.<sup>87</sup> If sacrifice had religious benefits, most interpreters saw them as indirect benefits such as preserving religious freedom so that future generations could find redemption or meaning through religion. There is little evidence that many Americans during World War II believed that death in battle was salvific or that American ideals required blood sacrifice.<sup>88</sup> In fact, the editor of the *Christian Beacon* criticized President Roosevelt's 'D-Day' prayer because he interpreted it to imply that those who died would be automatically embraced by God as "heroic servants."<sup>89</sup> Instead, the editor argued that such a belief was simply a remnant of an "old pagan notion" that fighting for one's nation had redemptive implications.<sup>90</sup> When the rhetoric of blood sacrifice does surface in the World War II era, it seems to emanate from military and religious leaders rather than from among the fighting ranks. For example, General Douglas MacArthur argued that soldiers are "required to perform the highest act of religious teaching—sacrifice."<sup>91</sup> Importantly, he emphasized that sacrifice is a divine attribute bestowed by God to humanity. The soldier who died in battle for his country recapitulated the work of Christ who died for humanity. However, even MacArthur's explanation stops short of claiming that blood sacrifice was essential for the nation or that

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<sup>87</sup> Ebel, *Faith in the Fight*, 95–104.

<sup>88</sup> The verb 'required' is an essential point. Most considered dying in battle as an honorable though unfortunate consequence of evil rooted in human shortcoming.

<sup>89</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Prayer on D-Day," June 6, 1944, Public Papers & Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, The American Presidency Project, University of California, Santa Barbara.

<sup>90</sup> "The President's Prayer," *Christian Beacon*, June 22, 1944, 1. See also a sermon with the same theme published the following week: Vernon Grounds, "Does 'Killed in Action' Mean Rewarded in Heaven?," *Christian Beacon*, June 29, 1944.

<sup>91</sup> Douglas MacArthur, *Let Us Remember* (Marysville, Ohio: Ohio Rainbow Division Veterans Association, 1942). MacArthur echoed this theme in later speeches both before and after the war—most notably in his 1962 address to the graduates of West Point. See: William L. Stidger, "A God's Book Man," *Link*, August 1943; Douglas MacArthur, "Sylvanus Thayer Award Address," *American Rhetoric: Top 100 Speeches*, May 12, 1962.

it had any eternal implications for individuals. Sacrifice remained a common theme during World War II, but its effects seemed limited to the natural world.

More than perhaps any other conflict in the twentieth century, World War II loomed large in the lives of Americans. As the war progressed, young men in particular could do little to avoid conscription. Many voluntarily sought enlistment whether from deeply felt principles or simply succumbing to social pressure. Others waited to be drafted. Whether or not they set aside their freedom voluntarily, those who served in the US military entered a system where they could do little to determine their future. Some soldiers and sailors responded to this lack of control by drawing from religious interpretations of both the larger conflict as well as of their personal experiences in battle. For those who hesitated to serve, religious interpretations of the larger war sometimes provided justification for fighting. Whereas it may seem foolish to risk one's life for a political institution created by humans, to do so to preserve divine principles seemed worthwhile. In the end, most young people could not avoid the war, so they needed to come to terms with it in one way or another. For the minority who faced fierce combat, the stakes were raised even higher. Suffering through physical privations in the field, young men struggled to make sense of the death and destruction surrounding them while knowing that they as individuals could often do little to protect themselves or their friends. Many questioned why they survived while others did not.

As Americans returned to civilian life, neither individuals nor wider society remained the same as before the war. Religious interpretations of the experience of war for both individuals and the nation influenced postwar life in the US. For those who

interpreted their personal survival in terms of divine protection, some gained a sense of purpose or perhaps a feeling of obligation to make their lives worthwhile. On the national level, religious interpretations of the war as a righteous crusade against evil encouraged continuing involvement in global affairs and animated the developing conflict with the Soviet Union. In the end, religious reflection allowed some troops a channel by which they could actively grapple with their experiences rather than passively suffer. For those recovering from combat, religious interpretation sometimes offered reconciliation of puzzling events. Though less dramatically, this applied even to those for whom the war was best characterized by tedium or boredom. By interpreting their experiences in religious terms, soldiers and sailors endowed their experiences with meaning.



## Chapter 7

### Matzahs and Mangers: Religious Holidays in Wartime

Less than three weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Christmas 1941 found Pvt. Carl Nordin at Del Monte Airfield in the Philippines. Just four days earlier, Japanese bombers had begun bombing this base, as well. A devoted Lutheran, Nordin decided to attend a midnight Mass held at a small church behind his tent. Raised in an environment suspicious of Catholics, Nordin had never before set foot in a Roman Catholic church. However, he recalled, “The importance and solemnity of the occasion overrode my bias.”<sup>1</sup> Though a rattled young lieutenant disrupted part of the service, Nordin concluded, “I found that my need really had been fully met, even though I was in a different church in a foreign land, surrounded by people whom I didn't know, in the middle of a very black night.” For some troops such as Nordin, religious holidays in the military intensified feelings, offered hope, and provided opportunities for religious mixing less common in civilian circles.

For those in the military during World War II, religious holidays such as Christmas and Passover contained multiple layers of meaning. Many men and women had never been away from home during these times. Consequently, celebrating holidays provided a sentimental connection to the familiar traditions of home and family. While many never moved beyond sentimentalism, others celebrated and experienced such holidays in explicit and sometimes newfound religious ways. For the marginally religious, holidays provided an opportunity for religious reflection that did not occupy a

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<sup>1</sup> Carl S. Nordin, *We Were Next to Nothing: An American POW's Account of Japanese Prison Camps and Deliverance in World War II* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Publishers, 1997), 28.

primary space in their everyday lives. In addition, religious holidays brought to the fore differences between religious groups—Christians and Jews in particular. Despite some friction, holidays often provided an opportunity for interfaith interaction and understanding.

### **Jewish Identity and the High Holy Days**

For Jewish soldiers and sailors, celebrating the high holy days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur involved multiple layers of meaning. Occurring in the fall, Rosh Hashanah marked the beginning of the new year as well as a ten-day period of introspection and repentance culminating in Yom Kippur, or the Day of Atonement. For those with firm religious commitments, these days included several lengthy synagogue services as well as a period of fasting. In the context of military service, these religious holidays involved other dimensions of Jewish identity and solidarity, as well. As Debra Dash Moore has argued, holiday services brought together diverse groups of US troops ranging from the traditionally observant to those holding to broader interpretations of Jewish practice.<sup>2</sup> In addition, she emphasized that the shared observance of Jewish holidays in Europe with local Jews involved a political dimension as co-religionists demonstrated solidarity and defiance against the retreating Nazi occupiers.<sup>3</sup> Thus, soldiers and sailors participated in Jewish religious holidays for many and often multiple reasons. The analysis of such participation reveals important aspects of the ways in which soldiers and sailors selectively engaged religion during the war.

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<sup>2</sup> Moore, *GI Jews*, 126.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

For some Jewish soldiers, observing religious holidays in the military proved to be somewhat disappointing. Preparing to depart for the Pacific theater, Pvt. Jacques Morris wrote to his parents describing Rosh Hashanah services at the port of embarkation. After attending a service on the first night, Morris arrived at the next morning's service more than an hour late because of a required lecture on censorship. He made it in time to hear an officer blow the shofar, but he declared the performance "lousy."<sup>4</sup> After the service, Morris spoke to the chaplain and offered to blow the shofar himself the next day. However, he was unable to do so because a required formation conflicted with the service. Victor Geller recalled similar disappointment with preparations for the high holy days while a cadet with the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) at Cornell University. A committed adherent to Orthodox Judaism, Geller found the abbreviated Rosh Hashanah services arranged by the campus Reformed rabbi to be unacceptable. When confronted by Geller, the rabbi explained that the commanding officer of the local ASTP would not allow additional or longer services because the concentrated academic schedule demanded priority. Feeling that the rabbi had compromised Jewish practice beyond recognition, Geller received permission from his amicable sergeant to be excused from class and formations on the second day of Rosh Hashanah to allow Geller to pray privately in his room. He reflected, "I prayed, but with no blowing of the *shofar*, the ram's horn, no Torah reading and no fellow worshippers. It was not a Rosh Hashanah I could recognize."<sup>5</sup> Not wanting to celebrate Yom Kippur alone, Geller met with the ASTP unit's commanding officer who gave him permission to organize and advertise a full Orthodox service in his room. "On Yom Kippur, twenty

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<sup>4</sup> Morris, "Letters Home from Pvt. Jacques Charles Morris, February 4, 1944 - July 5, 1945," 68.

<sup>5</sup> Geller, *Take It Like a Soldier*, 215.

men joined me in my room for a day of fasting and prayer,” Geller reported. “I didn’t know it, but that Yom Kippur was my debut as a chaplain.”<sup>6</sup> For men such as Morris and Geller, honoring religious holidays remained a priority while in the military, but wartime circumstances and the religious leaders available to those in the military sometimes made this difficult. However, determined soldiers such as Morris and Geller actively sought creative ways to make the best of challenging circumstances.

Despite challenges and compromise, other soldiers and sailors reported positive experiences of Jewish holidays, as well. Seaman First Class Sam Weller wrote to his father describing his experience of Yom Kippur on a Pacific island where he worshipped in a chapel under the leadership of a naval chaplain. Before the evening service, Weller and a friend swept the chapel and put away the cross that typically sat on the altar. For Weller, the services paralleled those he remembered at home and consisted of music, prayer, and readings. Weller also honored the holiday by fasting, though he had to break the fast at noon the following day in order to have the energy to complete his assigned work that afternoon. However, the holiday was not yet over for Weller. That evening, he and some other Jewish sailors who had met at the services gathered for a quiet party featuring beer, Coke, and cherry pie. Weller explained, “It was not much of a party but the idea of being with other Jewish fellows on Yom Kippur was what we wanted and liked.”<sup>7</sup> Former bombardier Lionel Greer reported a humorous incident of cultural difference at a high holy day’s service near San Antonio, Texas. Soon after the service began, a latecomer noisily walked down the aisle. Originally from New York City, Greer

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>7</sup> Sam Weller, “Letter to His Father, October 10, 1943,” in *Jewish Youth at War: Letters from American Soldiers*, ed. Isaac E. Rontch (New York: Marstin Press, 1945), 233.

assumed that it was a woman in high heels. He was pleasantly amused when he turned to see a man wearing cowboy boots who also wore a large cowboy hat rather than a yarmulke.<sup>8</sup> For some such as Greer, the experience of being in the military exposed them to diversity within their own traditions that they had never before considered.

Revisiting familiar traditions sometimes provided a means by which troops could attempt to make amends for transgressions or to seek comfort. A white officer assigned to the segregated Ninety-Sixth Engineers in New Guinea, 2d Lt. Hyman Samuelson wrote in his diary that he believed all religions were a “farce,” but he also mentioned that he continued to say a brief prayer each night.<sup>9</sup> Though he was nominally Jewish, he often attended Christian services with his men and spoke highly of Chaplain Charles Dubra. While in New Guinea, Samuelson also began an open affair with an American nurse despite being married. Soon, however, he learned that his wife, Dora, had an untreatable form of cancer. He immediately tried to make arrangements to return to the US, but the process remained slow. Samuelson found himself apart from his unit, but still on New Guinea on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Samuelson wrote in his diary the following day that he actively engaged with the holiday for the first time in his life. He fasted, abstained from all work, even writing, and spent the day in the chapel, reading Hebrew with an English translation and following the services closely. “I wanted to feel near to God,” he wrote. “I didn’t succeed.”<sup>10</sup> Dora died three months later, but Samuelson did make it home to spend several weeks with her. Though Samuelson had

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<sup>8</sup> Lionel W. Greer, interview by G. Kurt Piehler, unpublished transcript, November 13, 2003, Veteran’s Oral History Project, Center for the Study of War and Society, Department of History, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

<sup>9</sup> Hyman Samuelson, *Love, War, and the 96th Engineers (Colored): The World War II New Guinea Diaries of Captain Hyman Samuelson*, ed. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 194–5.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 290.

little confidence in formal religion, he embraced Yom Kippur in the midst of personal struggle.

As allied forces moved across Europe, the observance of Jewish holidays took on new layers of meaning as US troops encountered the suffering of local Jewish populations. Regardless of their own personal religious commitments, soldiers often participated in services to honor their cultural identity as Jews. Army captain Emanuel Asen wrote to his parents about a Rosh Hashanah service that he celebrated with his “blood brothers” in Liege, Belgium, shortly after allied forces liberated the city in 1944. Upon their arrival, US troops helped to restore the ransacked synagogue where the service was to take place. For many, the service was an emotional experience.

“Amongst the congregation that attended there were tears in many eyes,” Asen explained, “Tears of joy, and tears of sorrow in some.”<sup>11</sup> A year later, US troops and local civilians participated in a similar service in Frankfurt, Germany after the war’s conclusion. A medical secretary with the Women’s Army Corps, Mollie Schaffer wrote to her sister about the significance of the service. The previous year in England, Schaffer had chosen to work during the high holy days to support the war effort. In 1945, however, she took time to attend the Rosh Hashanah service in Frankfurt with some fellow GIs and declared to her sister that it “was a great day” and one that she would never forget.<sup>12</sup> Former master sergeant Murray Klein also participated in the same service and remembered its significance. He recalled that “there was a moistness around my eyes and a heavy lump in my throat” as he listened to the words of the German rabbi who called not for revenge

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<sup>11</sup> Emanuel M. Asen, “Letter to His Parents, September 18, 1944,” in *Jewish Youth at War: Letters from American Soldiers*, ed. Isaac E. Rontch (New York: Marstin Press, 1945), 14.

<sup>12</sup> Mollie Schaffer, *Mollie’s War: The Letters of a World War II WAC in Europe* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010), 217.

but for peace and understanding.<sup>13</sup> Thus, for some Jewish military personnel, religious holidays provided an opportunity to mourn the suffering experienced by Jews in Europe and to show solidarity with those who remained.

## **Christmas**

As with the Jewish high holy days, celebrating Christmas in the military carried multiple layers of meaning and significance. For some soldiers and sailors, Christmas maintained the religious dimension of honoring the birth of Jesus. At the same time, Christmas traditions such as decorating, gathering with family and friends, feasting, and exchanging gifts also appealed to marginal Christians, the non-religious, and even adherents of other faiths. Thus, Christmas was both a religious holiday and an American cultural tradition. As a religious holiday, Christmas encouraged even marginally committed Christians to participate. At Christmas, those who seldom participated in worship services were more likely to attend a service or otherwise engage in religious reflection. As an American cultural tradition, Christmas provided soldiers and sailors with an opportunity to reenact and create a familiar American domestic space within the US military.

For many soldiers and sailors, Christmas served to mark the time they had been away from home. In letters home to loved ones, military personnel often expressed hope, even against their better judgment, that each Christmas would be the last they would spend away from their families. A stoically devoted Lutheran from rural Wisconsin, Wilbur Berget reflected on his holiday experiences over the course of five Christmases in

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<sup>13</sup> Murray Klein, "Rosh Hashanah in Frankfurt, Germany," *Jewish Journal*, September 28, 2000.

a series of letters to his parents. Drafted in February 1941, Berget was assigned to the Eleventh Cavalry regiment because of his experience with horses. When the army wisely deactivated the regiment and reassigned the men and supplies to an armored unit, Berget eventually oversaw supply distribution as a member of the Ninety-Second Armored Reconnaissance Battalion. Berget's first Christmas in the military occurred in the wake of the Sunday morning attack at Pearl Harbor. Stationed in California, Berget wrote to his parents, "No one was allowed to leave camp because of Christmas Eve being a good time for the Japs to strike somewhere or for sabotage when we would be likely to be off guard."<sup>14</sup> Instead, they had held a Christmas service the preceding Sunday.

Christmases 1942 and 1943 found Berget still in the US, first in Kentucky and then in Texas. From Camp Campbell, Berget reported attending a Lutheran service at a camp chapel on Christmas morning, but his letter focused more on the stress of covering the responsibilities of his supervisors who were on leave.<sup>15</sup> By Christmas 1943, Berget's division had transferred to Camp Barkeley for further training. Berget wrote to his parents that he had spent most of Christmas Eve and Christmas Day at the Lutheran Service Center in nearby Abilene, Texas. A joint project between the National Lutheran Council and the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, the service center provided a space off base where military personal could eat, write letters, and relax. Though the Abilene center ranked among the busiest in the nation, Berget lamented that the local Lutheran

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<sup>14</sup> Wilbur C. Berget, "WCB to Alvin and Bessie Berget, 24 December 1941," in *The Daily Life of an Ordinary American Soldier during World War II: The Letters of Wilbur C. Berget*, ed. Mark D. Van Ells (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), 141.

<sup>15</sup> Wilbur C. Berget, "WCB to Alvin and Bessie Berget, 27 December 1942," in *The Daily Life of an Ordinary American Soldier during World War II: The Letters of Wilbur C. Berget*, ed. Mark D. Van Ells (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), 237.



church “looks to be somewhat of a losing proposition here.”<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, Berget seemed pleased to be able to participate in Lutheran Christmas services in both the service center chapel as well as the local church.

Christmas took on new significance for Berget after his unit deployed to Europe. In the fall of 1944, Berget arrived in France and his division experienced its first combat in early December. As a supply officer, Berget saw combat only intermittently as he ferried supplies to the front. However, he happened to be near the battle lines on Christmas. Sheltered in a barn on Christmas Eve, Berget wrote to his parents. Guessing that his family was preparing for their traditional Christmas Eve feast, Berget expressed hope that he would be home for the next Christmas gathering.<sup>17</sup> Berget reported that he had participated in a Christmas Eve service in a frigid barn with thirty other soldiers and a French family as artillery whistled around them. In a following letter, Berget reflected, “Attending Christmas services with a loaded carbine on my shoulder just didn’t seem to fit in with Christmas.”<sup>18</sup> By December 1945, the war had been over for several months, but Berget still awaited discharge. Amid the boredom of waiting, Berget and two other men decided to spend Christmas with friends in another unit dozens of miles away.<sup>19</sup> On December 23, he and the others signed out a jeep and headed across occupied Germany.

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<sup>16</sup> Attendance Statistics: National Lutheran Council, “Centers Which Have Closed: Total Attendance Figures,” 1946, Minutes and Agenda of the Service Commission Committee, 1941-1947, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Library, Chicago, IL. Wilbur C. Berget, “WCB to Alvin and Bessie Berget, 26 December 1943,” in *The Daily Life of an Ordinary American Soldier during World War II: The Letters of Wilbur C. Berget*, ed. Mark D. Van Ells (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), 237.

<sup>17</sup> Wilbur C. Berget, “WCB to Alvin and Bessie Berget, 24 December 1944,” in *The Daily Life of an Ordinary American Soldier during World War II: The Letters of Wilbur C. Berget*, ed. Mark D. Van Ells (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), 353–5.

<sup>18</sup> Wilbur C. Berget, “WCB to Alvin and Bessie Berget, 14 January 1945,” in *The Daily Life of an Ordinary American Soldier during World War II: The Letters of Wilbur C. Berget*, ed. Mark D. Van Ells (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), 365.

<sup>19</sup> Wilbur C. Berget, “WCB to Alvin and Bessie Berget, 22 December 1945,” in *The Daily Life of an Ordinary American Soldier during World War II: The Letters of Wilbur C. Berget*, ed. Mark D. Van Ells (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), 463–4.

Berget never celebrated Christmas that year. A truck crashed into the jeep as they drove, and Berget sustained serious injuries. He died the next morning on Christmas Eve.

As with Berget, Christmas while in the service remained a distinctly religious holiday for many US soldiers and sailors. For some, the unique circumstances of celebrating Christmas during wartime brought new meaning to the holiday. Assigned to the Thirty-Sixth Armored Infantry regiment, Ronald Onorato spent Christmas of 1944 nearly surrounded by German troops in Belgium. He recalled that their chaplain declared that they would hold a Christmas Eve mass in a nearby barn. Nearly fifty years later, Onorato reflected that the ensuing service was one of the most meaningful masses he had attended in his life. The odor of cow manure and the rugged surroundings allowed him to imagine himself present in the Bethlehem stable. “I could just visualize the birth of Christ,” he recalled. “It was a beautiful thing, and I’ll never forget that.”<sup>20</sup>

Christmas services in the military also drew the participation of those with marginal or no religious commitments. To some extent, this phenomenon paralleled patterns of worship attendance in civilian life with a few key differences. In civilian life, people often had some established connection with more devoted family members or with a local congregation. In the deployed military, however, such long-term social connections were replaced by fresh but often deep bonds with fellow soldiers. Thus, even those who had never before attended a religious service sometimes chose to attend with their newly established friends in a foreign country. In a letter to his parents republished in a local newspaper, Pfc. Russell Schow described such an occurrence of

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<sup>20</sup> Ronald E. Onorato, interview by Arthur L. Kelly, May 6, 1992, 1992OH176 WW 173, Colonel Arthur L. Kelly American Veterans Oral History Project, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries, Lexington, KY.

religious participation and as well as mixing in a Christmas service he was invited to lead in India. According to Schow, just under one hundred officers and enlisted men participated “from all forms of Christian faith, Catholics and Jews.”<sup>21</sup> Some had decorated the day room for the service and installed a seven-foot tall cross. The turnout impressed Schow since he did not consider his group to be a “church-going squadron” and could recall no other religious service held among the group in the preceding year. In addition, several invited Schow to continue offering Sunday services, but it is not evident whether Schow was able to do so in the following weeks.

For those Americans held as prisoners of war, Christmas sometimes provided a special impetus to hold worship services as well as an opportunity to recreate familiar domestic traditions that brought together captives and, occasionally, even captors. At the same time, however, spending Christmas as a POW often exacerbated feelings of homesickness. How POWs celebrated Christmas depended a great deal on the policies of their captors. When allowed, POWs organized Christmas programs, religious services, and special meals. The celebration of Christmas also reveals important dissimilarities between German camps and Japanese camps rooted in historical religious differences. In prison camps operated by Germans, guards often sympathized with those who sought to celebrate Christmas and occasionally participated themselves. In contrast, Japanese captors often sought to restrict religious gatherings though they permitted some early in the war as gestures of goodwill.

In German camps, guards did not automatically restrict Christmas services or celebrations. A former POW in Stalag Luft IV, Charles Stein recalled that the twenty

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<sup>21</sup> Russell Schow, “Mormon Sergeant Conducts Christmas Service,” *Church News (Salt Lake City, UT)*, January 29, 1944, 9.

men in his room constructed miniature Christmas trees from parts of shoe brushes decorated with yarn from socks and ornaments cut from tin cans.<sup>22</sup> On Christmas Eve, guards permitted the men a rare opportunity to circulate and visit among the barracks along with an extended curfew. Though likely for their own enjoyment, guards capped the evening with a fireworks display. In addition, Stein recalled that the men held religious services among themselves on Christmas day. Former navigator Reid Ellsworth spent Christmas 1943 on a prisoner train bound for Oflag 64 in Poland. To keep their spirits up, some of the Americans began singing Christmas carols including “Silent Night”. Soon, the guards who occupied the same car responded by singing “Silent Night” in German. The grandson of German immigrants, Ellsworth recalled joining in on the German verses—a choice, he reflected, that may not have endeared him to his fellow Americans.<sup>23</sup> Though Christmas did not obliterate the captor/captive relationship, shared religious traditions surrounding Christmas occasionally softened the relations between Americans and Germans.

In prison camps run by the Japanese, camp officials and guards often restricted public religious gatherings. Some guards proved more lenient, however, and captives sometimes improvised spontaneous expressions of public worship. Easton Brown related how he and his fellow POWs recognized Christmas mere days after Japanese pilots shot down his bomber over China in 1944. Brown claimed that one “could cut the gloom with a knife” as men contemplated spending Christmas as POWs.<sup>24</sup> One prisoner, however,

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<sup>22</sup> Charles P. Stein, “Kriege Menu,” unpublished memoir, 2002, Charles P. Stein Collection (AFC/2001/001/21208), Veterans History Project Collection, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<sup>23</sup> Ellsworth, “Reid F. Ellsworth Story: An Account of War and Divine Interposition,” 71.

<sup>24</sup> George Easton Brown, “Christmas 1944,” unpublished memoir, n.d., MSS 2350 no. 359, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

began whistling “Silent Night,” and soon the others began singing. Brown reflected, “The Japanese guards just stood and watched—the atmosphere changed—some sobbed openly but they all continued to sing.”<sup>25</sup> According to Brown, the men then stood in a circle as one prisoner led in prayer. The thought of Christmas initially troubled these POWs, but recognizing it together seemed to offer some semblance of comfort.

In the Davao Penal Colony in the Philippines, Japanese guards sometimes granted American and Filipino prisoners greater flexibility early in the war. Former 2d Lt. John Morrett described surprisingly robust religious programs facilitated in part by Japanese Lt. Kempei Yuki, a Roman Catholic.<sup>26</sup> In 1942 after a week of preparation, American and Filipino prisoners gathered in the camp chapel along with Japanese guards for a Christmas Eve program featuring dance demonstrations and song with Lt. Yuki serving as the master of ceremonies.<sup>27</sup> Though the program lacked overt religious content, an American Catholic chaplain led a midnight Mass following the show, and Morrett himself led a small Episcopal prayer service in a carpenter’s shop. By Christmas 1943, conditions in Davao had worsened, and the escape of several prisoners had soured the relationship with Japanese officials. The Americans held another Christmas Eve program, but only a few Japanese officers participated. “It did not have the peaceful spirit of the previous Christmas,” Morrett explained. Nonetheless, the attendance at Morrett’s Episcopal prayer service swelled from twenty-five to around three hundred

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> For an additional account of Yuki as a Roman Catholic see: Manny Lawton, *Some Survived* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 1984), 66.

<sup>27</sup> Morrett, *Soldier Priest*, 88–89. See also: John D Lukacs, *Escape from Davao: The Forgotten Story of the Most Daring Prison Break of the Pacific War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 141–2.

prisoners. While such freedom to conduct worship services was not typical, soldiers and sailors seemed more likely to chance communal religious observance to mark Christmas.

Though some soldiers and sailors took comfort in celebrating Christmas, many others remained overwhelmed by thoughts of home. In a diary he kept as a POW, Pvt. Joseph Denov noted that men in Stalag IIB decorated a Christmas tree and donated cigarettes, soap, and food to the French and Soviet prisoners. Denov noted a brief prisoner-led rosary service following a Christmas Eve program was the “only religious note of the holiday.” Denov himself chose not to participate explaining that he “felt somehow detached from it all” and that even Christmas could not pull him out of the shell into which he had drawn himself.<sup>28</sup> Second Lt. Eugene Halmos reflected similar thoughts in his own diary kept while held at Stalag Luft III. Halmos recorded that he and his fellow prisoners celebrated Christmas 1944 with special food and religious services. However, he explained, “For most of us it was palpably an empty show. You knew that beneath it all our thoughts were elsewhere, with other companions on other Christmases.”<sup>29</sup>

Even those who had not been captured found passing Christmas in the wartime military to be depressing. Polly Allen, a private in the Women’s Army Corps, described her experience of Christmas in New Guinea in a letter to her parents. Allen reported that she and some others decorated a Christmas tree and celebrated the holiday with a special meal. In addition, she attended a midnight mass where she and her friends had to stand

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<sup>28</sup> Joseph Denov, “Thoughts since Becoming a Prisoner of War,” unpublished memoir, n.d., 15, Joseph Denov Papers, 1944-95 (SC-15834), The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.

<sup>29</sup> Eugene E. Halmos, “The Wrong Side of the Fence: Diary of a Prisoner of War,” unpublished memoir, n.d., 85, WWII Survey 2565, 489th Bomb Group, Army Air Corps, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

because all the seats were taken. Though she enjoyed the service and assessed the day as “not bad,” she wrote, “My thoughts are far away from here.”<sup>30</sup> Rex Passey expressed similar sentiments regarding his experience of Christmas in a foxhole in Italy in 1944. He and his unit had been on the front lines since September with only K-rations to eat. On Christmas Eve, the battle was silent, and he heard church bells ringing in German-occupied Bologna. The contrast shocked him. Passey wept as memories of past Christmases and his family flooded his mind. He recalled that this was the only time he had really cried during the war.<sup>31</sup>

To some extent, American soldiers and sailors celebrated Christmas as a means of escaping from the challenges of wartime—a habit with earlier manifestations. Historian Penne Restad argued that the Civil War played an important role in elevating Christmas as national holiday in the US. According to Restad, both civilians and soldiers sought to create a sense of peace and well-being through Christmas by emphasizing its connections with home such as the desire to gather as a family for a special meal.<sup>32</sup> In short, the Civil War helped solidify the emerging domestic aspects of Christmas celebrations. By World War II, Christmas was closely associated with home and the gathering of extended family across distances. Thus, troops stationed away from home could find Christmas both distressing and soothing. Christmas reminded them of their distance from home, but it also provided an opportunity to recreate meaningful aspects of home through engaging familiar traditions.

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<sup>30</sup> Harriet A. Allen to Judd L. Allen and Hattie Allen, December 25, 1944, Harriet A. Allen Papers, 1944-45, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>31</sup> Rex W. Passey, “My Memories and Experiences of World War II,” n.d., Rex William Passey Collection (AFC/2001/001/76232), Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<sup>32</sup> Penne L. Restad, *Christmas in America: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 98, 104.

Aside from sentimentality, other soldiers and sailors reflected on how their military service in wartime connected with religious aspects of Christmas. Some were shocked by the contrast of marking the birth of the prince of peace in the context of industrial warfare. Most reconciled their role as merely helping to restrain evil in the world. In a Christmas 1942 letter to his parents, Cpl. Graff Bomberger reported attending three Christmas services in North Africa—one on Christmas Eve and two the following day. “Christmas . . . has meant more to us this year,” he reflected, “Since all that we are fighting for, more or less, are the principles that Christ made rampant o’er the world . . . peace on earth good will towards men.”<sup>33</sup> In addition, Bomberger noted that they had prayed for their enemies during the Christmas Eve service—a practice that he felt characterized the nature of the United States. For Bomberger, celebrating Christmas in wartime seemed to give him confidence in his role as a soldier. Private John Hogan expressed similar sentiments as he passed Christmas in Hawaii after having fought in the Aleutian Islands. He narrated his Christmas Eve experience in a letter home:

You can picture ten or fifteen of us 'rugged' soldiers gathered around in our tent singing “Away in a Manger.” As we sang, my eye traveled around the tent walls where our rifles hung in readiness as grim reminders of the world as it is. And I thought of how completely and infinitely greater is the power of Christ than the power of the world, and of the symbol of the manger that will endure in time long after war and destruction and material things have passed away. I know that the Cradle will outlast the cannon.<sup>34</sup>

To a certain extent, this passage seems to represent the escapist thoughts of a conscripted soldier. However, Hogan had volunteered for military service and claimed that the privations of war such as heat and danger could themselves serve as religious

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<sup>33</sup> J. Graff Bomberger to Christian M. H. Bomberger and Edith M. G. Bomberger, December 25, 1942, J. Graff Bomberger Papers, 1912-1945, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>34</sup> Hogan, *I Am Not Alone*, 38.



sacraments.<sup>35</sup> Though he believed the cradle would outlast the cannon, Hogan also felt the cannon remained a viable tool for Christians. Even General George Patton reflected on potentially ironic aspects of Christmas in wartime. Patton noted that he attended a Christmas Eve candlelight communion service in an Episcopal church in Luxembourg in 1944. The next day, he wrote in his diary, “A clear and cold Christmas, lovely weather for killing Germans, which seems a bit queer, seeing Whose birthday it is.”<sup>36</sup>

## **Easter**

Though not as culturally ubiquitous as Christmas, Easter and the weeks preceding it proved religiously significant to some soldiers and sailors. Those engaged in war likely resonated with the theme of suffering and death for the good of others. Some soldiers and sailors also found comfort through trusting in their own salvation if they were to be killed in battle. In addition, like Christmas, Easter provided marginally or even non-religious soldiers and sailors an opportunity to recreate familiar traditions from home.

For many Christians, Easter Sunday was the culmination of the season of Lent that began with Ash Wednesday forty days earlier. A devoted Roman Catholic, Sgt. Leo Lovasik noted in a letter that he had declined a pass to town in order to participate in an Ash Wednesday Mass at his camp in New Mexico.<sup>37</sup> He was pleasantly surprised at the number of both officers and enlisted men who took part. Despite the existing privations of military service, some troops also participated in the Lenten discipline of giving something up to help them identify with and honor Jesus’ self-denial. Recognizing the

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 69, 118.

<sup>36</sup> Martin Blumenson, ed., *The Patton Papers*, vol. 2 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972), 606.

<sup>37</sup> Leo E. Lovasik, “Letter, March 11, 1943,” in *Knight of Our Lady, Queen of the Skies*, ed. Lawrence G. Lovasik (Tarentum, PA: Marian Action, 1944), 35–37.

challenges of war, Roman Catholic officials put aside the traditional expectation that members of their church abstain from meat on Friday's during Lent.<sup>38</sup> Other soldiers, however, made their own commitments. For example, Robert Wolfe wrote to his parents about giving up candy for Lent while stationed at Camp White in Oregon. Two weeks later, Wolfe wavered from his pledge when a package arrived from his parents that included candy, likely mailed before they knew of his commitment. Wolfe ate the candy, thanked his parents, and absolved them of any guilt.<sup>39</sup> Mentioned above, Pvt. John Hogan wrote home that he had taken part in an Ash Wednesday service while stationed in the Philippines in 1945. He reflected, "It was a rich experience to start Lent at the altar."<sup>40</sup> Hogan also committed to giving up a critical attitude during Lent. He described this attitude as one of his "chief sins" and that he was "far from victory on this score."<sup>41</sup>

The final week before Easter, or Holy Week, represented the culmination of the Easter season. In a matter of days, Christians swung from commemorating the betrayal and crucifixion of Jesus to celebrating his resurrection. For some soldiers and sailors, serving in the Pacific area offered unique possibilities for celebrating Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Seaman James Fahey marked Palm Sunday 1945 aboard the USS *Montpelier* in the Philippines. He noted in a diary that men from nearby ships assembled on the deck of the *Montpelier* for a worship service. Each sailor received the traditional palm branch, but the palms were not imported from some exotic location.

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<sup>38</sup> Roy J Honeywell to Mrs. William George Davidson, Jr., May 16, 1945, 000.3 Catholic Denomination v. IV, January 1944-December 1945, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>39</sup> Robert Warren Wolfe, *Naked Soul: Coping with War: A Young GI's WWII Letters Detailing Constant Changes* (Lima, Ohio: Fairway Press, 1996), 207, 220.

<sup>40</sup> Hogan, *I Am Not Alone*, 99.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

Instead, Fahey mentioned that sailors had gathered them from a neighboring island the previous day.<sup>42</sup> In war-ravaged Europe, soldiers compromised. In a letter to his parents, Chaplain James May described collecting four hundred spruce boughs to stand in for palms at a 1945 service he led near Sinzig, Germany. He noted that the end of each branch sprouted in the form of a cross—a feature that he hoped would remind the soldiers of the events commemorated at the end of the week.<sup>43</sup>

On Good Friday, troops occasionally gathered for worship services remembering Jesus' crucifixion. In March of 1942, General Marshall encouraged army commanders to free soldiers from duty on the afternoon of Good Friday to allow them to attend worship services so long as it would not negatively affect preparedness.<sup>44</sup> In addition, he suggested that commanders should work with chaplains to designate nearby worship spaces to ease the need for travel. Regardless, duty prevented some who wished to do so from participating in formal services. Mentioned above, Sgt. Lovasik began to admire the sunset as he and his fellow B-24 crewmembers flew above the Gulf of Mexico when he realized that it was Good Friday. In a letter home, he explained, "I felt that I should not rejoice over the splendor of the evening sun on that day."<sup>45</sup> Instead, he retreated to the tail of the bomber to pray the rosary in private.

For many troops, the dawn of Easter Sunday provided a surreal contrast to the darkness of Good Friday as well as a bright retreat from their own potentially grim

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<sup>42</sup> James J Fahey, *Pacific War Diary, 1942-1945* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963), 301.

<sup>43</sup> James W. May, "Letter to His Parents," *Emory Magazine*, Summer 1995.

<sup>44</sup> George C. Marshall, "Copy of Furloughs and Passes for Attendance at Religious Celebrations," March 16, 1942, 300.5 Circular Letters V. 2, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>45</sup> Leo E. Lovasik, "Letter, April 24, 1943," in *Knight of Our Lady, Queen of the Skies*, ed. Lawrence G. Lovasik (Tarentum, PA: Marian Action, 1944), 43.

futures. Returned from his training flight, Sgt. Lovasik waxed exuberant about an Easter Mass at Clovis Army Air Field in New Mexico. He wrote home that the chapel had been transformed into a “heavenly paradise” with many flowers and beautiful music. Most significantly to Lovasik, however, he felt close “to the Source of All Beauty, the Risen Savior Himself.”<sup>46</sup> Former army nurse Margaret Wert also emphasized the splendor of an Easter service she experienced in the Mediterranean area. She recalled beauty of the way in which the rising sun glinted off hundreds of B-17s assembled at the airfield—a memory that returned to her mind each following Easter.<sup>47</sup> Lieutenant Elmo Walker described a sunset Easter service in which he participated on a mountain near Oran in North Africa. He and twenty other soldiers sat on rocks in a wooded grove as they sang favorite hymns accompanied by a portable organ. “The evening sun filtered through the trees and flickered on the grass and rocks on the floor of our green chapel,” reported Walker. “All this loveliness about us seemed to enhance the spirit we enjoyed during the meeting.”<sup>48</sup>

Other soldiers and sailors found themselves in more challenging circumstances as they paused to reflect on Easter. In the Davao Penal Colony in the Philippines, Japanese captors allowed prisoners to gather for a sunrise Easter service in 1944. Carl Nordin recalled that over one hundred men assembled on a hillside, some clothed only in scraps, as several imprisoned chaplains led the service. “The message of hope and promise,” Nordin reflected, “left us with a warm feeling inside, a feeling we had not experienced in

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<sup>46</sup> Leo E. Lovasik, “Letter, April 27, 1943,” in *Knight of Our Lady, Queen of the Skies*, ed. Lawrence G. Lovasik (Tarentum, PA: Marian Action, 1944), 44.

<sup>47</sup> Margaret Owen Wert, unpublished memoir, 1995, 10, WWII Survey 7848, Army Nurse Corps, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>48</sup> Elmo L Walker, “History of the Oran Branch of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints,” unpublished manuscript, n.d., MSS 2350 no. 253, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

a long, long time.”<sup>49</sup> Other POWs found the experience of Easter to be an uncomfortable reminder of what they were missing. William Schmidt recalled that as a POW of the Germans he took part in an Easter service. During a prayer, a fellow prisoner reflected on home. Schmidt concluded, “If we hadn’t been home-sick before . . . that was the nail in the coffin.”<sup>50</sup> Though Easter provided an opportunity to reenact familiar traditions from home, being reminded of a place to which they feared they might not return troubled some soldiers and sailors.

### **Passover: Sharing a Meal**

The Jewish festival of Passover provided US troops with another unique opportunity for religious worship as well as mixing between religious groups. Each spring, the eight days of Passover commemorated the exodus of Jews from slavery in Egypt. For most, the highlight of the festival was the seder, a ritual meal held on the first night. For Jewish military personnel, the seder provided a special opportunity to gather for worship. Even non-observant Jews would often participate as an expression of cultural solidarity or simply to replicate a familiar tradition from home. As Deborah Dash Moore has argued, seders in the military also challenged the traditional orientation of the meal. What had been a rather private family ritual became a “public event.”<sup>51</sup> Consequently, non-Jews also occasionally joined their Jewish friends in seders. The experience of military service sometimes created bonds between men and women from

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<sup>49</sup> Nordin, *We Were Next to Nothing*, 134.

<sup>50</sup> William F. Schmidt, interview by G. Kurt Piehler and Jerilyn Evans, transcript, April 28, 2000, Veteran’s Oral History Project, Center for the Study of War and Society, Department of History, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

<sup>51</sup> Moore, *GI Jews*, 136. See also: Beatrice S. Weinreich, “The Americanization of Passover,” in *Studies in Biblical and Jewish Folklore*, ed. Raphael Patai, Francis Lee Utley, and Dov Noy (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1960), 353.

different religious backgrounds. Even nominal Christians were often familiar with the events of the exodus commemorated in the meal, and thus, the seder did not seem entirely foreign.

For many Jewish personnel, one of the greatest challenges in celebrating Passover was locating the proper supplies. During the eight day festival, observant Jews traditionally abstained from bread with leavening and, instead, often consumed matzah, an unleavened bread. In addition, seders typically involved specific foods of symbolic importance such as bitter herbs, eggs, roasted lamb bones, and kosher wine. In general, commanders attempted to be somewhat flexible with religious dietary choices, but the reality of military service required most personnel to make compromises. Passover, however, seemed to provide a unique opportunity for special accommodation since its duration was limited and many of the seder supplies were occasionally available or acceptably substituted. In addition, the Jewish Welfare Board (JWB) exerted itself to distribute matzah and, to a lesser extent, kosher wine to US troops stationed around the world. For example, the JWB sought to distribute over fifty tons of matzah to soldiers and sailors overseas for Passover in 1945.<sup>52</sup> Often, the JWB distributed supplies of matzah to administrative chaplains using military transportation. In addition, the Red Cross sometimes assisted in distribution. From the South Pacific, Corporal Harry Slatin wrote to the Army Chief of Chaplains thanking him for providing matzahs and kosher wine for a 1944 seder in which fifty men participated.<sup>53</sup> Slatin was particularly

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<sup>52</sup> Philip S. Bernstein to William R. Arnold, October 17, 1944, 000.3 Jewish Denomination, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>53</sup> Harry Lee Slatin to Chief of Chaplains, April 8, 1944, 000.3 Jewish Denomination, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the

impressed that the government had provided these supplies and that they arrived on time. Responding on behalf of the Chief of Chaplains, Chaplain Aryeh Lev thanked Slatin for his note, but he hesitated to explain that the US military did not likely purchase the matzahs or wine. Such a purchase of religious supplies would have violated military policy. Instead, Lev cryptically noted that the supplies were “made available” by the War Department “through the cooperation of the Jewish Welfare Board.”<sup>54</sup> At the same time, however, many of the other items needed for a seder had no specific religious connotations. Thus, soldiers and sailors could sometimes procure them from available supplies.

Perhaps one of the most notable features of seders in the military is the way in which they brought together men and women from various traditions and levels of religious commitment. Non-observant Jewish soldiers and sailors often participated in seders as a reminder of home or even as an expression of Jewish cultural solidarity in response to Nazi oppression. Rabbi Lee Levinger, a Jewish Welfare Board worker, argued that the phenomena of Jewish troops being stationed in rural America sometimes brought “village Jews” back to Jewish traditions from which they had been previously isolated.<sup>55</sup> For example, he claimed that when local Jews organized seders in cooperation with post chaplains, the excitement of observant Jewish soldiers sometimes inspired those who were less committed to rediscover and take ownership of their faith. Sometimes Jewish personnel felt pressured to participate in seders even if they were non-observant.

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Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>54</sup> Aryeh Lev to Harry Lee Slatin, May 31, 1944, 000.3 Jewish Denomination, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>55</sup> Lee J. Levinger, “Jew Meets Jew,” *Contemporary Jewish Record* 6, no. 5 (October 1943): 478.

David Jacobs recalled that his commanding officer ordered him and another Jewish soldier to arrange a seder for personnel on a troopship.<sup>56</sup> Though he described himself as being “lapsed Orthodox,” Jacobs reluctantly complied somewhat unsure of how to proceed. After improvising the preparation, Jacobs faced the unexpected challenge that most of the Jewish soldiers seemed more interested in watching a hula show on the deck rather than participating in the seder. Jacobs recalled that he was eventually able to lure some of the men after the show with promises of wine and salami.

Jewish soldiers also noted the significance of honoring Passover as a festival of Jewish freedom in locations associated with Nazi oppression. Saul Goldfarb reported attending a 1945 seder in a mansion that belonged to Joseph Goebbels, Germany’s propaganda minister. In a letter to a Jewish men’s club, Goldfarb elaborated, “Here we were, the very people whom he . . . had sworn to wipe out, celebrating Passover in his home, eating out of his crested china, beautifully turned silver and drinking a toast to his complete downfall from his own delicately etched crystal champagne glasses.”<sup>57</sup>

Similarly, in a memo to the Chief of Chaplains, Chaplain De La Vergne heralded a 1945 Passover service held in a restored synagogue in Germany.<sup>58</sup> According to De La Vergne, Nazis had taken over the building in 1939, stripped it of religious symbols, and used it to house POWs.

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<sup>56</sup> David J. Jacobs, “Seder at Sea,” *International Jewish Monthly*, December 1991.

<sup>57</sup> Saul K. Goldfarb, “Saul K. Goldfarb to Temple Beth Emeth Men’s Club of Brooklyn, New York,” *The Jewish Layman*, May 1945, 5. See also Associated Press, “Yanks Celebrate the Passover in Goebbels’ Castle,” *Milwaukee Journal*, March 31, 1945; “In Goebbels’s House,” *Newsweek*, March 26, 1945.

<sup>58</sup> James G. De La Vergne, “Passover Service,” April 12, 1945, 000.3 Jewish Denomination, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.



Passover seders also offered a unique opportunity for Jews and non-Jews to participate together in a religious ritual. As military personnel formed bonds with one another, joining a Jewish friend for a seder meal seemed quite acceptable to many non-Jews. In addition, Jewish personnel often welcomed the participation of non-Jews as it implied acceptance of their religious difference. Some Jewish observers light-heartedly hypothesized that the quality of culinary offerings explained a great deal of participation by non-Jews in seders hosted by the military. Former navy pharmacist mate Harold Ellis suspected that roughly one-third of the three-thousand seder participants at Sampson Naval Training Center were not Jewish. He recalled, “The word had gone out that there was the best meal in camp to be had at the Seder. And so it was.”<sup>59</sup> For other military personnel, interreligious participation carried deeper significance. Stationed on the USS *Beaumont*, Lt. Sydney Brisker wrote to his parents about a seder he celebrated with a small group of men on the gunboat. Though Brisker and an enlisted cook were the only Jews on board, they worked together to assemble a seder for themselves and six non-Jewish guests including two “colored Baptists.”<sup>60</sup> In his letter, Brisker made clear association between the Jewish festival of freedom, the suffering of Jews in Europe, and the larger military mission. He reflected that the allies could “make this Victory one of everlasting Peace and build a world in which Jew and Gentile, white and colored, live in peace, harmony and security—just like we of different faiths and races sat down at Seder tonight.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Harold S. Ellis, “The Navy and Me,” unpublished memoir, 1960, 5, SC-3180, Small Collections, Jacob Marcus Rader Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.

<sup>60</sup> Sydney H. Brisker, “Letter to His Parents, N.d.,” in *Grace under Fire: Letters of Faith in Times of War*, ed. Andrew Carroll (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 73.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

## **Celebrating Together: Interfaith Interaction**

Religious holidays provided a significant point of contact between various religious groups within the wartime military. In many instances, this contact resulted in deeper levels of understanding, but it also occasionally resulted in religious conflict rooted in suspicion, personal animosity, or general intolerance.

Much conflict between Christians and Jews seemed related to being excused from duty for religious holidays. Just as the army allowed Christians the possibility of furlough for Good Friday, the army specified that Jewish soldiers could be granted furlough for Passover.<sup>62</sup> This policy also extended to other religious holidays such as Christmas and Yom Kippur. No matter the tradition, however, military duty always came first. To ensure preparedness, commanding officers retained the responsibility for deciding if and when they would grant furloughs from duty. The army automatically excluded those in training, and no more than fifteen percent of personnel could be on leave at the same time. Some confusion seemed to center around whether such grants of furlough functioned as extra days off from duty. Responding on behalf of the Chief of Chaplains to a Georgia rabbi's inquiry, Chaplain Aryeh Lev explained that furlough days granted for a religious holiday simply counted against the total available for the entire year.<sup>63</sup> Thus, furlough for religious holidays did not result in extra time off duty.

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<sup>62</sup> Marshall, "Copy of Furloughs and Passes for Attendance at Religious Celebrations."

<sup>63</sup> Aryeh Lev to Herbert S. Waller, October 31, 1941, 000.3 Jewish Denomination, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Though conflicts over duty seem rather practical in nature, undercurrents of religious suspicion buoyed protests that the military was offering special treatment to certain groups. From Fort Bragg in North Carolina, Cpl. Bomberger complained in a letter to his parents that Jewish men in camp received weekend passes for Rosh Hashanah while none of the other men did. “The Jews always get a break and extra days off are allotted to them just for that occasion, whereas the Gentiles don’t get anytime off when their holidays roll around necessarily,” he wrote.<sup>64</sup> Though his inclusion of “necessarily” would seem to indicate awareness that it would not be practical to offer furloughs to all Christians for holidays such as Christmas, Bomberger linked the passes for Jewish men to some variety of unfair influence. “How and where they get the pull I don’t know but it seems that there’s some pull somewhere,” he vented. “And by the way, that’s one of the issues in this war – to free the suppression of the people of Hebrew faith. What a world, what a world!!!”<sup>65</sup> Irving Oblas, a Jewish naval recruit, wrote to his wife that his supervisor had given him the afternoon off for Yom Kippur—a privilege for which he was thankful. However, Oblas reported that the holiday also caused some friction. “As usual, religion serves as a dividing barrier [and] the holiday services bring up a lot of questions [and] discussions among all kinds,” he wrote. “Even the boys dishing up the food make a few disparaging remarks.”<sup>66</sup> It seems that the relative balance of Jews and Christians in the military contributed to the perception of special privileges. Since a given military unit likely contained only a small percentage of Jewish personnel, it was

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<sup>64</sup> J. Graff Bomberger to Christian M. H. Bomberger and Edith M. G. Bomberger, September 14, 1942, J. Graff Bomberger Papers, 1912-1945, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Irving Oblas to Lilyan Oblas, October 9, 1943, Veterans History Project Collection, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

possible to grant furlough to a significant portion of this population for a religious holiday. For Christians, granting furloughs broadly for Christmas or Easter would not be possible since it would result in the majority of personnel being off duty. Thus, Jewish personnel were more likely to receive furlough for Jewish holidays—a situation that could often result in religious resentment among those from other traditions.

Occasionally, adherents from one religious group volunteered for duty on another group's religious holidays to allow more people free time. Civilian religious groups and the chaplain corps celebrated and promoted such gestures of religious goodwill.<sup>67</sup> Because of the imbalance of religious bodies, such volunteering was rather one-sided with Jews sometimes volunteering to serve in place of Christians. On Jewish holidays, commanding officers could more easily spare Jewish personnel because they were a relatively small group. Officers could typically adjust schedules within usual parameters. Christian holidays, however, presented a greater challenge. Some Jewish personnel volunteered to cover duty for their peers on Christmas. Corporal Leon Berman wrote to his girlfriend that he and another Jewish soldier had volunteered for KP “to give the other boys a chance to go out to church and enjoy Christmas.”<sup>68</sup> That evening, he had also

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<sup>67</sup> A 1941 article in the *New York Times* covered a speech by Frank L. Weil, president of Jewish Welfare Board where he reported numerous instances of Jews volunteering for duty. In a circular letter distributed to chaplains, the Office of the Chief of Chaplains briefly summarized the article adding, “These Jewish officers and men recalled the courtesy and consideration of their Christian comrades during the recent Jewish High Holydays.” The original article did not refer to any sort of reciprocity. See: “Jews Surrender Christmas Leaves,” *New York Times*, December 22, 1941, sec. Business; Office of Chief of Chaplains, Army, “Circular Letter No. 243,” January 15, 1942, 300.5 Circular Letters V. 2, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. The Jewish Welfare Board did encourage such volunteering. See: Bernstein, *Rabbis at War*, 37. See also: Joshua Eli Plaut, *A Kosher Christmas: 'Tis the Season to Be Jewish* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 121.

<sup>68</sup> Leon L. Berman to Janet Webb, December 25, 1943, Letters, 1943, Leon L. Berman Papers, 1943-1945, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA. See also: “Jews Ask Extra Duty So Christian Buddies May Observe Christmas,” *American Israelite*, December 28, 1944.

volunteered for guard duty. Berman attempted to do what he could for his fellow soldiers, but he clarified that there were not enough Jewish personnel to cover all required details. Corporal Leon Becker reported a similar arrangement in his unit. “It’s the right thing to do,” he explained in a letter. “After all, we had our holiday in October.”<sup>69</sup> Other soldiers seemed more reluctant. In a letter to his parents, Pfc. Daniel Isaacman reported that he and the other Jewish men in his unit were debating whether to volunteer for duty on Christmas. “There is much dissension,” he explained. “The boys remember having to work on Yom Kipur and Rosh Hashana. If we do decide to make this gesture it will be without complete willingness.”<sup>70</sup>

In addition to covering one another’s duties, soldiers and sailors from various traditions sometimes used religious holidays as an opportunity to worship together. Chaplain Norman Siegel described a large Rosh Hashanah service in the Pacific area that included many Christian guests. In addition, he reported that Christian soldiers crafted many of the religious articles used in the service, including the Ark of the Covenant.<sup>71</sup> A devoted Presbyterian, Lt. Chalmers Alexander reported attending a Catholic midnight Mass on Christmas with a Jewish staff sergeant in Florida. Alexander complained about the “Latin ritual and chants,” but he declared that the priest delivered a “splendid sermon.”<sup>72</sup> Finally, Cpl. Buddy Bier, a Jewish soldier, wrote to his mother about

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<sup>69</sup> Leon H. Becker, “Letter, December 16, 1943,” in *Jewish Youth at War: Letters from American Soldiers*, ed. Isaac E. Rontch (New York: Marstin Press, 1945), 21.

<sup>70</sup> Daniel M. Isaacman to his Parents, n.d., Correspondence with Parents, 1942-1943, Daniel M. Isaacman Papers, 1942-1958, Jacob Marcus Rader Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.

<sup>71</sup> Norman Siegel to William R. Arnold, September 30, 1943, 000.3 Jewish Denomination, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>72</sup> Chalmers W. Alexander, Jr. to Marina Alexander, December 25, 1943, Alexander-Whitfield Family Papers, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

attending a Christmas Mass at a Catholic church in Baltimore. “I was terribly lonesome last night,” he explained. “And since one of the Christian fellows wanted to go to mass I thought I'd like to go along.” Justifying his participation, he continued, “It mattered very little to me whether the man at the altar stood before the Cross or the Star of David. I knew this thing was good and right.”<sup>73</sup>

In the end, religious holidays during wartime exposed issues of religious difference, but they also provided an opportunity for soldiers and sailors to cross religious boundaries. At the same time, religious holidays led some with only marginal religious commitments to deeper reflection as they sought comfort amid familiar traditions or simply fellowship with friends. Occasionally, soldiers and sailors found their religious prejudices confirmed through their perception that co-workers from other traditions received special treatment for religious holidays. Others took the opportunity to offer support to other groups as a gesture of goodwill. Finally, some celebrated alongside their friends by participating in religious services and rituals that earlier may have seemed quite foreign and perhaps even suspicious. Religious holidays represented a unique time when soldiers and sailors could cross boundaries between traditions or even levels of commitment more safely because such special days were by definition out of the ordinary. Such temporary transgressions seemed fitting among other and often more disturbing peculiarities of military service.

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<sup>73</sup> Buddy Bier, “Letter to His Mother, December 25, 1943,” in *Jewish Youth at War: Letters from American Soldiers*, ed. Isaac E. Rontch (New York: Marstin Press, 1945), 29.

## Chapter 8

### Encountering Faith: Responses to Religious Difference

The story was tragic—yet perfect. In the early hours of February 3, 1943, a German U-boat torpedoed the US Army transport SS *Dorchester* in the frigid waters of the North Atlantic. As the ship rapidly took on water, men scrambled to retrieve life belts and load available lifeboats. The personnel aboard the transport included four army chaplains: George L. Fox, Methodist; Alexander D. Goode, Jewish; Clark V. Poling, Dutch Reformed; and John P. Washington, Roman Catholic. According to survivors' accounts, these four chaplains attempted to calm the men and gave others their own lifebelts. As the ship descended beneath the dark waters, survivors witnessed the four chaplains standing with arms linked as they sang together and prayed. All four chaplains perished that night along with 668 of the 902 men on the *Dorchester*.<sup>1</sup>

For the US Army Chaplain Corps, the story of the four chaplains represented a succinct expression of its ideals and self-conception. The four chaplains demonstrated self-sacrifice and cooperation despite religious differences. Consequently, the chaplain corps promoted the account as a testament to the desired goals for religion in the military. In so doing, this story contributed to a larger narrative of religious cooperation that has come to dominate interpretations of religious life for Americans during World War II.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gushwa and United States, Dept. of the Army, Office of the Chief of Chaplains, *The Best and Worst of Times*, 4:127–30. See also: Dan Kurzman, *No Greater Glory: The Four Immortal Chaplains and the Sinking of the Dorchester in World War II* (New York: Random House, 2004). “The Story,” *The Four Chaplains Memorial Foundation*.

<sup>2</sup> This is certainly the case in official histories of the conflict that celebrated interfaith cooperation among military chaplains. See: Drury and United States, Bureau of Naval Personnel, Chaplains Division., *The History of the Chaplain Corps, United States Navy, 1939-1949*, 2:214, 307., Honeywell and United States, Dept. of the Army, Office of the Chief of Chaplains, *Chaplains of the United States Army*, 74, 169, 288, 342–3., Jorgensen and United States, Office of the Chief of Air Force Chaplains, *The Service of Chaplains*

That the story represented a desired goal rather than a widely achieved reality, however, has been largely forgotten. If such religious cooperation had been common, there would be little reason to think that the story of the four chaplains was exceptional. Though experiences in war broadened the religious horizons of some who fought, others reacted quite differently as they encountered remarkable religious diversity among their fellow soldiers and sailors.

This chapter argues that the projected ideal of religious cooperation obscured a much more complicated reality that included a great deal of religious friction. The wartime military provided soldiers and sailors with the opportunity to define themselves religiously apart from the social expectations and cultural inertia of their home communities. As men and women in the US military encountered religious difference, they responded in several different ways enabled, in part, by this freedom and intensified by the increased potential for death.<sup>3</sup> Some solidified their commitment to a faith they had previously held only loosely. Such reactions were more common among those who had grown up in communities dominated by a particular tradition such as Jewish or Catholic neighborhoods or even small towns dominated by Protestantism. In the military, some switched traditions as they were persuaded of the truthfulness of another path. Others became increasingly convinced of basic similarities between religious groups such as within Christianity or even between broad traditions such as Christianity and Judaism.

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*to Army Air Units, 1917-1946*, 1:282–4. Some more recent interpreters follow this as well. See: Dorsett, *Serving God and Country*, 237–8.

<sup>3</sup> Religious experimentation during World War II bears similarity to trends sociologist Robert Wuthnow identified in his research on religious experimentation in the San Francisco Bay area in the early 1970s. Though he focused on the appeal of Eastern religious movements, his analysis seems to apply to religious experimentation in general. Wuthnow observed that religious experimentation was “the result of a combination of social trends facilitating exposure to new ideas, legitimation of nonconventional activities, opportunities to experiment, and motivation to experiment.” For soldiers and sailors in World War II, each of these trends applied. See: Wuthnow, *Experimentation in American Religion*, 42.



This contributed to broader attitudes of religious acceptance. Finally, the military's attempt to provide religious leadership and support while also mitigating friction and respecting freedom contributed to the emergence of a new target for religious devotion. Intensified by war, men and women found common ground in their shared identity as Americans. As with many in the American public, soldiers and sailors often resonated with the "American Way of Life" as an object of common religious devotion that transcended religious particularity.

### **Welcome to Uncle Sam's Family: Context and Possibilities**

Induction into the US military during World War II represented both an expansion and a compression of avenues for religious expression. Almost immediately, soldiers and sailors were asked during processing if they desired to identify a religious preference to be entered in their official service record.<sup>4</sup> For the most part, those interpreting official regulations allowed new personnel to identify specific groups, but problems arose when these preferences were transferred to identification tags or "dog" tags. Such tags were marked with a letter indicating religious preference for the purpose of securing appropriate religious ministrations in case of serious injury or death. In order to simplify procedures, however, regulations permitted only four options: Protestant, Catholic, Jew, or no preference.

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<sup>4</sup> War Department Circular 163 (August 8, 1941) outlined this procedure, and the army eventually included it in AR 615-500. See: Office of Chief of Chaplains, Army, "Circular Letter No. 233," August 1, 1941, 2, 300.5 Circular Letters V. 2, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.; Office of Chief of Chaplains, Army, "Addenda to Circular Letter No. 266," January 15, 1943, 300.5 Circular Letters V. 3, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

This compression of religious identity proved to be a challenge for those whose preference did not fit into any of these categories. Sam Smith recalled a dilemma he faced as he went through processing to become a marine. As a Navajo, Smith adhered to the traditional beliefs of his people, but the clerk pressed him to choose from the available options for his tags. According to Smith, the clerk explained, “You gotta belong to something. We’re not going to get a medicine man to take off to the Pacific to bury you.”<sup>5</sup> Finally, Smith chose to be identified as a Protestant because he had attended a Presbyterian mission school. In reality, many religious groups did not fit into the available categories. In October 1942, A. B. McDaniel of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’i Faith appealed to the Adjutant General (AG) and asked him to allow members of his group to indicate their specific preference on their tags. In an internal memo, Army Chief of Chaplains William Arnold recommended that the AG deny the request noting “the limited space on the identification tag and the large number of denominations.”<sup>6</sup> In his response to McDaniel, the AG followed the recommendation.<sup>7</sup> In later correspondence related to this issue, the AG suggested a workaround—that soldiers could add an additional tag indicating their specific preference.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Smith, interview, February 13, 2004, 38.

<sup>6</sup> William R. Arnold, “SPCHT 080 Baha’i (10-23-42),” unpublished manuscript, November 2, 1942, 000.3 Religion, Army-AG Decimal File, 1940-45, 407.2.1 Decimal Correspondence, Records of the Adjutant General’s Office, 1917- [AGO], Record Group 407, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>7</sup> J. A. Ulio to A. B. McDaniel, November 11, 1942, 000.3 Religion, Army-AG Decimal File, 1940-45, 407.2.1 Decimal Correspondence, Records of the Adjutant General’s Office, 1917- [AGO], Record Group 407, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>8</sup> J. A. Ulio to J. Demos Kakridas, September 25, 1944, 000.3 Religion, Army-AG Decimal File, 1940-45, 407.2.1 Decimal Correspondence, Records of the Adjutant General’s Office, 1917- [AGO], Record Group 407, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

The issue of religious compression also affected members of the LDS Church who objected to being lumped together with Protestants.<sup>9</sup> Some soldiers and sailors succeeded in convincing clerks to have their tags imprinted with either “LDS” or “M,” but such allowances technically violated regulations. When denied permission to indicate their preference, some LDS troops took matters into their own hands. J. Duffy Palmer reported that he scratched out the “P” on the tag given to him in marine boot camp and carved an “M.” “I did not know if people seeing them thought I was a Methodist, Mohammed, or what,” he recalled, “But to me that ‘M’ stood for ‘MORMON’ and I felt better to wear them.”<sup>10</sup> Such difficulties were not limited to enlisted personnel. Army chaplain Howard Badger reported engraving his own tag with a dentist’s drill.<sup>11</sup>

Enacted for simplicity, the regulations governing religious preferences on identification tags had two basic, though unintended, effects. First, the task of expressing a preference—either positively or negatively—compelled new personnel to make a decision regarding their religious views regardless of importance to the individual. Second, the available options compressed religious identity. Most notably, the Protestant category became a catch-all for those from diverse traditions ranging from the expected poles of mainliners versus evangelicals but also encompassing outliers such as the LDS

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<sup>9</sup> Members of the LDS Church argued that their church originated following the direct revelation to Joseph Smith and was not an outgrowth of previously existing churches. Regardless, the military considered LDS chaplains to be Protestants and expected them to lead general services for Protestant troops. Most did so gladly considering it an opportunity to bring their tradition into the religious mainstream.

<sup>10</sup> J. Duffy Palmer, “Personal Experiences during World War II,” unpublished manuscript, n.d., 8, MSS 2350 no. 900, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

<sup>11</sup> “Questionnaire to LDS Chaplains and Assistant Coordinators,” unpublished manuscript, n.d., 82, MSS 298, LDS Chaplains Commission’s Records and Correspondence, 1941-1948, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT. On religious affiliation on identification tags, see also: Thomas A Bruscino, *A Nation Forged in War: How World War II Taught Americans to Get Along* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2010), 68.

church members and Christian Scientists. Consequently, military policy assumed religious cooperation while at the same time setting the stage for religious conflict.

Many soldiers and sailors experienced greater opportunities for religious expression after an initial experience of compression. Most notably, military service assembled men and women from diverse backgrounds and provided a fertile context for religious mixing. For some, the experience of religious difference hardened previous assumptions regarding other faiths while others became more sympathetic. Amid the boredom of military life, soldiers and sailors informally discussed many topics and ideas including religion. For example, Pvt. Roger Houtz wrote to his mother about “bull sessions” he enjoyed with others in a Fort Bragg hospital ward where he was being treated for an infection acquired during training. “We discuss women, war, politics, religion, our families, drinks and anything else from comics to the Bible,” he explained.<sup>12</sup> Pfc. Daniel Isaacman wrote a similar letter to his parents describing a three-hour discussion among the men in his barrack that revolved around perceptions of Jews. As one of only two Jews involved in the conversation, Isaacman felt somewhat intimidated. Most of the concerns revolved around Jews disproportionately holding the best jobs, a circumstance that Isaacman confided to his parents was largely true in his unit. However, he reported that the conversation ranged widely to encompass other related issues including religious belief. In the end, Isaacman considered the discussion a positive experience.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Roger L. Houtz to Mabel Houtz, January 13, 1943, 2, Personal Correspondence, Dec 1942-Nov 1943, Roger L. Houtz Papers, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>13</sup> Daniel M. Isaacman to his Parents, ca 1942, 27–29, Correspondence with Parents, 1942-0 25, 1943, Daniel M. Isaacman Papers, 1942-1958, Jacob Marcus Rader Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.

Though sometimes limited by circumstances, many troops eventually had the possibility of engaging with religion in a variety of ways both in and away from their assigned camps. After the initial surge of training slackened, troops often had additional free time and occasional opportunities to travel into neighboring communities. In the camps, informal discussions sometimes transformed into lay-led prayer groups or Bible studies, often characterized by religious mixing. When in town, some soldiers and sailors visited churches or synagogues from traditions other than their own—either purposefully or because few other options existed. Because military service was transitory, soldiers and sailors could dabble in a variety of new experiences with little expectation for long-term commitment. In addition, soldiers and sailors could reinvent their own identities because their new peers did not know anything about their civilian background.

### **Encountering Difference**

Despite the military's best efforts, however, close quarters, stress, and religious diversity did not necessarily lead toward religious understanding and cooperation among US troops during the war. This reality has been overshadowed by dominant narratives rooted in wartime goals that highlighted and celebrated religious cooperation. To be sure, Americans made real progress toward religious understanding during the war. Martin Marty has emphasized that the common threat to the nation united religious leaders or at least temporarily distracted them from their differences.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps the greatest shift happened in the image Americans as a whole had of their nation. Deborah Dash Moore has argued that military religious policy helped Jewish Americans gain

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<sup>14</sup> Martin E. Marty, *Modern American Religion*, vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 53.

acceptance into mainstream American culture.<sup>15</sup> Building on Moore, Kevin Shultz has demonstrated that World War II marked a key transition as “Tri-Faith America” supplanted “Protestant America” as the dominant image of American identity.<sup>16</sup> However, each of these scholars has focused to a varying extent on the impact of religious leaders—those from civilian groups but also military chaplains. As they encountered religious difference, however, many soldiers and sailors resisted and sometimes rejected the path toward religious cooperation favored by such leaders. Neither did all leaders embrace these ideals, even among military chaplains. When viewed through the experiences of individual soldiers and sailors, it becomes evident that a great deal of religious friction remained.

Perceptions of exclusivity contributed a great deal of friction. For example, certain traditions practiced religious rites from which they excluded non-members. Official church doctrine precluded Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Episcopalians from sharing the sacrament of Holy Communion with outsiders, but church leaders temporarily loosened such restrictions often leaving it to the discretion of the priest or pastor. Even so, military policy allowed chaplains to hold communion services for their particular tradition, and it did not force chaplains to hold open communion for all comers. Consequently, some soldiers and sailors criticized chaplains for spending disproportionate time caring for men from their own tradition—an accusation with some merit. In a letter to Paul Dannenfeldt, a denominational official of the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, the Army Chief of Chaplains diplomatically reported that LCMS

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<sup>15</sup> Moore, *GI Jews*, xi.

<sup>16</sup> Kevin Michael Schultz, *Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to Its Protestant Promise* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 7.

chaplains reached nearly sixteen percent fewer men per month than the Protestant average.<sup>17</sup> Former aircraft armorer, Edward Simpson felt ignored by his unit's chaplain, a Roman Catholic. He explained, "He had little to do with Protestants or Jews. We had little to do with him."<sup>18</sup> Even when chaplains welcomed non-members, they still combatted religious animosity and misunderstanding. Paul Long, a Presbyterian, participated in a Mass led by a Roman Catholic army chaplain in China. The odd wafer the chaplain placed on his tongue surprised Long, but he was truly puzzled when the chaplain proceeded to drink the wine by himself. Long called out, "Hey preacher, don't we get any of that?"<sup>19</sup> The chaplain hushed Long, but soon offered the wine. In response, the soldier kneeling next to Long muttered, "Dirty Protestant." Long reflected, "I don't know what the Catholic chaplain thought about our communion service, but my understanding of the book he followed included full communion for all who profess Christ."<sup>20</sup> His difficulty with the service seemed willful and was likely rooted in theological difference rather than cultural misunderstanding.

From civilian life, many soldiers and sailors brought negative assumptions about particular religious groups into the military. Somewhat ironically considering popular memory of the war, Jews likely faced the greatest challenges followed by Catholics, Mormons, and any number of minority groups. Even among Protestants, friction existed between modernist mainliners and conservative evangelicals. Jewish soldiers and sailors

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<sup>17</sup> Reverend Dannenfeldt served as the chairman of the Army and Navy Commission of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States. William R. Arnold to Paul L. Dannenfeldt, July 8, 1943, 000.3 Religious Ministrations in the Army, V. 4, , Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>18</sup> George E. Simpson, "Army Service Experiences Questionnaire," unpublished manuscript, n.d., 7, WWII Survey 2157, 404th Fighter Group, Ninth Air Force, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>19</sup> Long, *Citizen Soldiers of World War II*, 113.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

often fought against assumptions that they were weak, lazy, or dishonest in business dealings. For example, WAC private Polly Allen wrote to her parents about concerns with a new officer who took command of their unit at Rome, New York. Noting that the officer was “too darned G.I.” and a Jew, Allen elaborated, “We’ve got several here and none of them much good.”<sup>21</sup> Even some chaplains firmly held anti-Semitic views. After hearing Rabbi Joachim Prinz speak at Camp Barkley, army chaplain Arend Roskamp personally wrote to Prinz with concerns and criticisms that Roskamp was understandably not willing to share during the time allowed for public comment. Essentially, he attributed Jews’ struggles to a penchant for enriching themselves by taking advantage of Christians. According to Roskamp, the “eagle-eyed Jew. . . isn’t troubled by the high standards of Jesus Christ.”<sup>22</sup> Unless Jews were to convert to Christianity, he continued, “Their material gain will in turn become their bitterness and cause of their persecution.”<sup>23</sup>

Aside from general stereotypes of religious difference, soldiers and sailors sometimes based their criticisms on personal experience as they interacted with those from other traditions. Notably, they directed much of the criticism toward individual chaplains rather than non-chaplains. As chaplains were figureheads for particular traditions, troops held them to higher standards of personal conduct and religious expression. In particular, soldiers and sailors from conservative Protestant backgrounds sometimes chafed against chaplains from other traditions. In a letter, a naval aviation cadet complained that his chaplain’s “shallow” sermons did not address “salvation or the

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<sup>21</sup> Harriet A. Allen to Judd L. Allen and Hattie Allen, July 29, 1944, Harriet A. Allen Papers, 1944-45, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>22</sup> Arend Roskamp to Joachim Prinz, July 18, 1944, 291.2 Race, Jewish, V. 1, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.



necessity of being saved from sin.”<sup>24</sup> Another sailor protested that, despite hearing several chaplains preach, he only heard one preach the “true message of Christ.”<sup>25</sup> He also disapprovingly noted that, after a concert, he saw a chaplain smoking and dancing with the other sailors. Similarly, an army corporal in Europe lamented that his chaplain never offered an invitation to the altar during services and that, consequently, he not had any conversions. According to the corporal, he “lacked the message” though he was “very sincere, conscientious, and a hard worker.”<sup>26</sup> Sometimes criticism went the other way. Navy chaplain Frederick Volbeda reported that his ship’s captain found his sermon upsetting and “swore he would ‘have no hell-fire preaching’ on his ship.”<sup>27</sup>

### **Response: Increased Particularity**

As they experienced religious difference in the military, soldiers and sailors occasionally embraced religious particularity. Some responded by embracing inherited religious traditions more fully. Some became increasingly convinced of the deficiency of other faiths as they observed and interacted with the diversity around them.

For those who had grown up in religiously homogenous communities, allegiance to the dominant faith was often assumed, but not everyone had necessarily committed or embraced the community’s religious identity. Some had likely given little thought to their beliefs and commitments and perhaps had little understanding of other traditions.

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<sup>24</sup> “Letters from Navy Enlisted Men Concerning the Situation Among Chaplains,” *Christian Beacon*, March 9, 1944, 1.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> United States, “Appendix 16: Soldier Comments on Chaplains and Religion in the Army from the ETOUSA G-2 Semi-Monthly Censorship Reports for the Period 16 February to 15 August 1945,” 42.

<sup>27</sup> Associated Press, “Chaplain Declares There Is Little Religion in the Navy,” *Evening Independent (St. Petersburg, FL)*, May 30, 1944; “Chaplain Frets Aboard Ship As Commanding Officer Orders No Preaching on Hell Fire,” *Protestant Voice*, June 23, 1944.

Service in the military sometimes disrupted such cultural inertia as men and women encountered religious difference. This trend was especially evident among those from minority traditions such as Judaism and the LDS Church, but it also affected Roman Catholics and small-town evangelicals among others.

As with any group, Jewish soldiers and sailors entered the military from various backgrounds and with various levels of religious commitment. Uniquely, however, Jewish identity consisted of both strong cultural and religious aspects that were often difficult to differentiate. At the same time, anti-Semitic attitudes often compressed these distinctions. The experience of overt anti-Semitism challenged the self-perceptions of many Jewish soldiers and sailors. As Deborah Dash Moore has argued, service in the US military led many Jews to take a greater interest in their Jewish identity because of negative pressure as well as religious policy in the military that legitimated Judaism.<sup>28</sup> While some Jews sought to blend in, others began participating in Jewish services, even if they had previously been non-observant.<sup>29</sup> Some did so as a public response to anti-Semitism, but others found new religious meaning in the services. In a postwar essay, medic Melvin Preston described a battlefield Rosh Hashanah service in France where he “became a Jew in faith.”<sup>30</sup> The stress of persecution based on religious difference pushed some Jewish soldiers and sailors to find refuge among other Jews. As they did so, some intensified their commitment to a faith they previously held only loosely.

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<sup>28</sup> Moore, *GI Jews*, x.

<sup>29</sup> Based on his personal observations, World War II veteran, Edward Sandrow classified the responses of Jewish men into three basic categories: observant, quasi-observant, and those who sought to hide their Jewish identity. Sandrow believed the second category was the largest, but he questioned their religious commitment noting a tendency toward “gastronomic Judaism.” See: Edward T. Sandrow, “Jews in the Army--A Short Social Study,” *Reconstructionist*, March 17, 1944, 12–15.

<sup>30</sup> Qtd. in: Moore, *GI Jews*, 141.

Some men and women who had grown up in the LDS Church found their religious faith challenged in new ways as their non-Mormon peers sought to understand their tradition. Many non-Mormons were unfamiliar with the tradition or its relationship to other Christian sects. In 1936, Mormons made up just over half of one percent of the US population. In addition, nearly two-thirds of the Mormon population was concentrated in Utah and Idaho alone.<sup>31</sup> Former infantry captain William Banks recalled neglecting his faith early in the war. On the island of Fiji, he attended an Easter service after being invited by another officer. As they discussed the service afterwards, Banks mentioned that it did not feel right to him. The officer asked about his religious background, and Banks responded that he was a Mormon. The officer asked why. “All of a sudden it dawned on me I didn’t have a good reason,” explained Banks. “Finally I said, ‘I’m a Mormon because my folks are Mormon.’ He looked at me and said, ‘Well, that’s a stupid reason.’”<sup>32</sup> Embarrassed, Banks resolved to study more about the LDS Church and soon found a fellow Mormon—though only a private—with whom he could fellowship.

As soldiers and sailors interacted with those from other traditions, they sometimes needed little convincing to confirm reigning stereotypes. Even those who were more open-minded sometimes found the actions and beliefs of others to be disappointing. Either way, some troops became more convinced of the value of a particular faith because of the deficiencies they perceived in other faiths. As discussed above, certain

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<sup>31</sup> Total US population in 1936 was approximately 128,053,180. Membership in the LDS Church was approximately 678,217; 336,184 in Utah, 100,392 in Idaho. US Census Bureau and US Department of Commerce, *Religious Bodies, 1936*, ed. T. F. Murphy, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1941), 806.

<sup>32</sup> William Fred Banks, “Personal History,” unpublished memoir, n.d., 8–9, MSS 2350 no. 718, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

conservative Protestants found much to criticize about Christians of a more liberal bent. In letters to his mother, Lt. Chalmers Alexander often commented about chaplains and the content of their sermons. After a communion service at Mabry Field in Florida, Alexander wrote home about the “miserable sermon” in which the Methodist chaplain stated that what one man might consider sinful for himself might not be sinful for someone else. “That’s the kind of stuff that is called by many, a ‘Christian Sermon,’” he continued. “No wonder many persons, after hearing a lot of that, lose all fear of God, the Judgment, and Hell.”<sup>33</sup> With his letter, he enclosed an article by Dr. Harris Franklin Rall titled “About the Lord’s Return,” which Alexander had cut from a Methodist periodical he picked up in the chapel. Apparently, Alexander was not impressed. In reference to the article and the photograph published with it, he wrote at the bottom of the page, “Is this all the goat-bearded doctor can say about the Lord’s second coming?” For Mormons, honoring the LDS doctrine of abstaining from alcohol, tobacco, and coffee was often difficult and occasionally a source of ridicule.<sup>34</sup> For some, experiences in the war convinced them of the spiritual and physical value of this teaching. Following his capture, Royal Meservy spent several months as a POW in Stalag IX-B where prisoners often struggled to find enough to eat. Some prisoners, however, desired cigarettes so badly that they were willing to trade an entire day’s food ration for one. Meservy observed, “I watched men starve to death because they’d rather smoke than eat.”<sup>35</sup> He

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<sup>33</sup> Chalmers W. Alexander, Jr. to Marina Alexander, August 1, 1943, Alexander-Whitfield Family Papers, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>34</sup> This prohibition is from section 89 of *The Doctrine and the Covenants*.

<sup>35</sup> Royal R. Meservy to Robert C. Freeman and Dennis A. Wright, January 14, 2002, 4, MSS 2350 no. 287, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

concluded that even if the teaching against tobacco, alcohol and coffee had been Joseph Smith's only revelation, he would still consider him a prophet of God.

### **Response: Broadening**

Experiencing religious difference in the military challenged the way many Americans understood religion. As they became familiar with those from other faiths, even those who grew more convinced of a particular faith's validity often became more tolerant and understanding of those from other groups. Many soldiers and sailors softened prewar conceptions about other traditions. Some Christians became convinced of basic similarities between various Christian sects and even became more accepting of Judaism. Some Jews came to a greater respect of certain Christian traditions and discovered that not all Christians were anti-Semites. A strong current also emerged that emphasized a clearer sense of religious essentials and valued simplicity in doctrine.

For some soldiers and sailors, the particularity of a religious faith remained very important, but they still formed positive bonds with others from different traditions. Carl Nordin, a devoted Lutheran from Wisconsin, enlisted in the army in September 1940, deployed to the Philippines a year later, and became a prisoner of the Japanese in May 1942. As a prisoner, Nordin found great comfort in his religious faith. Over several days, Nordin and his close friend Bob Dennis discussed religion. Dennis claimed that he did not believe in God, and Nordin attempted to explain his own faith and asked Dennis to reconsider. Nordin reflected, "I was able to show him from my weather-beaten New Testament some of the promises and teachings of Jesus."<sup>36</sup> Dennis remained skeptical.

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<sup>36</sup> Nordin, *We Were Next to Nothing*, 63.

Soon after, their contact became limited as the Japanese transferred them to a new camp and assigned them to different barracks. One day, two years later, Dennis found Nordin and told him that he had become a Christian, though a Roman Catholic. Dennis feared that his choice would disappoint his friend, but Nordin assured him that he was overjoyed.<sup>37</sup> Nordin also described discussing religion for hours with a Jewish soldier named Fox with whom he shared a ledge in a prisoner transport or ‘hell ship.’ In their wide-ranging conversations, Nordin learned about Jewish history, and they discussed their respective views about the messiah. Nordin explained, “Fox respected my beliefs and even hinted that if he became as convinced on that point as I was, then he too would espouse Christianity.”<sup>38</sup> Nordin did not comment on any leanings he might have felt toward Judaism. Nordin grew to respect other faiths, yet he remained firmly a Lutheran.

Encountering religious difference in the military led some soldiers and sailors to conclude that most religions were essentially the same. From their perspective, they saw little difference, or the differences they saw seemed unimportant. A former sergeant in the Twenty-Sixth Infantry, Arthur Stewart reported that the men in his unit went to worship services whenever possible and that the tradition “made no difference.” Catholic, Protestant, or Jewish services were all “the same to us.”<sup>39</sup> Dario Antonucci recalled that he had little understanding of different faiths when he was in the army. Though a Roman Catholic, he attended whatever services were available because of his unit’s relative isolation in Burma. “I didn’t know Jewish from Protestant and Baptist,” he

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>39</sup> Arthur J. Stewart, “Army Service Experiences Questionnaire,” unpublished manuscript, September 2, 1987, 7, WWII Survey 36, Company M, 26th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

quipped.<sup>40</sup> In part, he explained his confusion in terms how he perceived the various chaplains he met and their services. He observed, “They would preach the same thing, no matter which chaplain, they would preach about God, about being good.”<sup>41</sup> For Antonucci, religious particularity seemed rather unimportant. Sometimes the experience of religious difference led people to reconsider their previous affiliations. A former army ordnance officer in Europe, Thomas Kindre grew up in a devout Roman Catholic family, but he reflected that the military had a “broadening effect.”<sup>42</sup> He elaborated, “The military certainly showed me that there were a lot of other people with different stripes around, and there were many religions and many nationalities.”<sup>43</sup> After the war, Kindre married a Presbyterian woman with whom he eventually joined the Unitarian Church.

The pressure of religious difference led many to clarify what they considered to be religious essentials. The idea that much sectarian or denominational conflict centered on non-essentials gained traction among soldiers and sailors as they sought to work together. Protestants found this idea particularly compelling because they had long criticized the Roman Catholic Church for leaning too heavily on extra-biblical traditions.<sup>44</sup> The nature of a wartime military made it exceedingly difficult to maintain all aspects of peacetime worship services, especially when attempting to provide religious

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<sup>40</sup> Dario Antonucci, interview by G. Kurt Piehler and Jamie Murray, unpublished transcript, April 16, 2004, 51, Veteran’s Oral History Project, Center for the Study of War and Society, Department of History, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas A. Kindre, interview by G. Kurt Piehler, unpublished transcript, June 28, 1994, 34, Rutgers Oral History Archives, New Brunswick, NJ.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>44</sup> One can trace this impulse at least back to the Protestant reformation in the sixteenth century, and it has remained a continuing theme. The early nineteenth-century restorationist movement influenced existing churches and birthed several denominations that sought to realign worship and beliefs as closely as possible with those evident in the New Testament. In the early twentieth century, the fundamentalist movement similarly coalesced around defending a set of religious essentials against extra-biblical innovation.

coverage for diverse groups. Some military personnel found simplified worship services quite inspiring. As a Red Cross volunteer, Jean Holdridge Reeves wrote to her parents about “excellent” worship services she experienced while on a military troop transport bound for New Guinea. “I like services on board ship—very simple and short,” she explained.<sup>45</sup> “We sing in the choir with very little practice—don’t bother the high style singing—just the song book variety.”<sup>46</sup> Such simplification was also celebrated in *Attack*, the enlisted men’s newspaper of the Ninety-Fourth Division at Camp Phillips, Kansas. Claiming that many men had found that “religion is real” in the army, it continued, “Here there are no false trimmings, no sham, no pretense, only the essence gathered in a small bundle and presented in a fashion that military men can understand and appreciate.”<sup>47</sup>

The wartime focus on religious essentials also accelerated the development of religious organizations that transcended traditional denominational boundaries. Though such organizations were not new, the war provided both the heightened stakes as well as a climate that celebrated cooperation. In particular, the peril of millions of young Americans going to battle encouraged a renewed focus on Christian growth and evangelism. Those in mainline denominations coalesced around the ideal of personal growth and favored working through organizations such as the Service Men’s Christian League.<sup>48</sup> Alarmed by the encroachment of modernism, many conservative Protestants

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<sup>45</sup> Jean Holdridge Reeves to her parents, December 21, 1944, Jean Holdridge Reeves Papers, Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Jackson Library, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, NC.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> “See the Chaplain,” *Attack: The Official 94th Division Newspaper*, April 23, 1943, 6, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>48</sup> The SMCL was established in 1942 through a partnership between The General Commission on Army and Navy Chaplains, The Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, The International Council of



advocated for a more direct focus on evangelism and favored working through organizations such as Navigators and eventually Youth for Christ.<sup>49</sup> Though these organizations provided top-down structure, they depended on the active involvement of lay leaders for their success. In addition, however, some soldiers and sailors bonded themselves together in the common mission for Christian evangelism with only local organization. Amid religious difference, their shared conception of religious essentials transcended some denominational barriers.

Especially in the Pacific theater, troops organized evangelistic meetings for other military personnel. News of the initial success of the “Youth for Christ” rallies in the Chicago area in the summer of 1944 reached US troops overseas. Army nurse Lt. Alice Schmidt described participating in the “GI Gospel Hour,” weekly evangelistic meetings in the Philippines. According to Schmidt, a “group of Christian soldiers” organized the meetings. She recalled, “The singing set the rafters ringing and many accepted Christ as their personal Savior, truly, a bit of heaven here on earth.”<sup>50</sup> In a near contemporary reflection, the leadership of the GI Gospel Hour noted that “GI’s came from all sorts of denominations—in fact, denominations were hardly mentioned.”<sup>51</sup> Instead, the group united behind “a single purpose, the salvation of souls” with which they could aim “a

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Religious Education, and The World’s Christian Endeavor Union. See: “Churches United for Action!,” *Link*, January 1943.

<sup>49</sup> Though Navigators predated the war, Dawson Trotman founded it as an outreach to sailors in San Diego. During the war, it grew rapidly as it responded to the growth of the US Navy. The history of Youth for Christ is intimately connected with the National Association of Evangelicals which was itself founded as a conservative interdenominational agency in response to the Federal Council of Churches. See: Hunsicker, “The Rise of the Parachurch Movement,” 238, 367–8.

<sup>50</sup> Alice V. Schmidt, “A Ministry of Healing,” in *Religion in the Ranks*, ed. Martin Leuschner, Charles F Zummach, and Walter E. Kohrs (Cleveland, OH: Roger Williams Press, 1946), 85–86.

<sup>51</sup> “The Story of the Far Eastern Bible Institute and Seminary,” Pamphlet, ca 1945, 16, Collection 406: Records of SEND International, Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton, IL. See also: Sam Tamashiro, “GI Missionaries in Manila,” *Sunday*, February 1946.

powerful blow” at “heathenism, error and liberalism.”<sup>52</sup> On Guam, a mixed group of sailors, marines, and soldiers organized weekly “Guam for Christ” rallies consisting of singing, preaching, and public testimony.<sup>53</sup> Marine chemical officer Cornelius Vanderbreggen, who assisted in leading the rallies, purposely deemphasized identity with particular denominations or even churches because he felt that such emphasis confused people about the path to salvation. Rather than salvation through affiliation, he stressed salvation through an individual relationship with Jesus Christ.<sup>54</sup> In both the Philippines and Guam, such evangelistic rallies transcended some sectarian boundaries for the purpose of shared mission, but they still remained distinctly in the realm of conservative Protestantism.

### **The ‘American Way of Life’: A Common Focus of Religious Devotion**

The experience of religious difference provoked a variety of responses from military personnel ranging from those who embraced a particular tradition to those who broadened their conceptions of religion. Also responding to religious difference, the federal government cultivated its own vision for the proper role religion should play in the lives of soldiers and sailors. Above all, leaders sought to mitigate religious conflict that could harm the US war effort. In short, the federal government celebrated the ideal of interfaith cooperation. As the military attempted to put this vision into practice, however, the challenges of wartime contributed to the emergence of a rival object of religious devotion—the American Way of Life.

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<sup>52</sup> “The Story of the Far Eastern Bible Institute and Seminary,” 16.

<sup>53</sup> Vanderbreggen, *Letters of a Leatherneck*, 257–261, 264, 267–276.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 270.

The ideal of interfaith cooperation perhaps faced its greatest challenge in the assembly of the chaplain corps of the army and navy. During World War II, over twelve thousand religious leaders representing at least seventy traditions were commissioned as chaplains.<sup>55</sup> To promote cooperation, those in charge of the army chaplain school housed together men from different faiths as much as possible.<sup>56</sup> In the navy, the chaplain corps adopted the slogan “cooperation without compromise” to emphasize its vision for interfaith relations.<sup>57</sup> Even so, chaplains in both branches sometimes conflicted. Former chaplain Renwick Kennedy noted deep-seated friction between Protestant and Catholic chaplains that he characterized as both “open clashes and constant undercover antagonisms.”<sup>58</sup> Former LDS chaplain Reuben Curtis reported that other chaplains derided him as an “amateur holy man” because he did not have a college degree, let alone a theological degree.<sup>59</sup> In addition, they challenged the legitimacy of his tradition. Curtis explained, however, that such criticism halted when the army promoted him to be a supervisory chaplain with authority over the others. Beyond the projected ideal of religious cooperation remained significant friction between religious leaders appointed as chaplains.

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<sup>55</sup> Honeywell and United States, Dept. of the Army, Office of the Chief of Chaplains, *Chaplains of the United States Army*, 216–217; Drury and United States, Bureau of Naval Personnel, Chaplains Division., *The History of the Chaplain Corps, United States Navy, 1939-1949*, 2:311.

<sup>56</sup> Honeywell and United States, Dept. of the Army, Office of the Chief of Chaplains, *Chaplains of the United States Army*, 247–8.

<sup>57</sup> Drury and United States, Bureau of Naval Personnel, Chaplains Division., *The History of the Chaplain Corps, United States Navy, 1939-1949*, 2:59. Founded in 1942, the National Association of Evangelicals embraced this slogan, as well.

<sup>58</sup> Renwick C. Kennedy, “How Good Were the Chaplains?,” *Christian Century*, June 5, 1946, 717. Some of this friction was rooted in the fact that the Army Chief of Chaplains, William Arnold, was a Roman Catholic priest. Some Protestants accused Arnold of making decisions that unfairly advantaged the Roman Catholic Church. See also: “The Navy Crisis,” *Christian Beacon*, November 2, 1944.

<sup>59</sup> Reuben E. Curtis, interview by Richard T. Maher, unpublished transcript, March 1, 1974, 9, MSS OH 297, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

The challenge of providing religious services amid the diversity of US military personnel necessitated compromise. For simplicity, the military compressed the religious identities of chaplains into Protestant, Catholic, or Jew.<sup>60</sup> The military expected all chaplains to serve all personnel in general terms, but it also expected chaplains to provide more tailored services to those in their particular category. For Protestants, this often required a level of compromise that made some uncomfortable because of diversity within the category. In addition, the policy glossed over several decades of heated conflict between modernists and fundamentalists within Protestantism. The phenomenon of general Protestant services generated praise from those who celebrated religious cooperation, but it also raised the ire of those who felt that it required an unacceptable level of compromise. Chaplain Garland Hopkins, for example, wrote an article published in the *Link* encouraging service members to participate in the life of their chapel, in part because it represented interfaith cooperation. “There is nothing sectarian about either the chapel or the chaplain,” he explained.<sup>61</sup> “There is no Methodist nor Baptist nor Episcopalian. There is only Protestant!” In a letter published two months later, Episcopal layperson Cpl. Jack Dugger criticized Chaplain Hopkins’s broad statement noting that Episcopal chaplains offered a distinct service to Episcopal personnel by providing the Eucharist.<sup>62</sup> When an Episcopal priest was not available, Dugger preferred participating in Catholic Mass rather than in a general Protestant service. In turn,

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<sup>60</sup> This division was particularly grating to chaplains from faiths not included in these categories such as Eastern Orthodox bodies or the LDS Church.

<sup>61</sup> G. E. Hopkins, “The Christian Service Man and His Chapel,” *Link*, November 1944, 14.

<sup>62</sup> John S. Dugger, “An Episcopalian Demurs,” *Link*, January 1945.

Dugger's letter provoked a heated response from both chaplains and non-chaplains who criticized Dugger for contributing to the problem of narrow sectarianism.<sup>63</sup>

The issue of preaching in general Protestant services generated much debate. Chaplains came from a variety of traditions representing a multitude of religious interpretations. At the same time, the chaplain corps—seeking consistency with the stated war aim of religious freedom—fervently maintained that chaplains had the freedom to preach whatever their tradition would allow. In an internal memo, the Army Chief of Chaplains clarified, “The only limitation upon the freedom of speech in the pulpit of a chaplain in the Army is the courtesy, tact and good sense of the speaker.”<sup>64</sup> Similarly, Chaplain Aryeh Lev, an assistant to the chief, composed a booklet intended for new chaplains that addressed preaching specifically. “Every chaplain takes an oath of allegiance to the Constitution of the United States when he receives his commission,” Lev explained. “As long as he fulfills that pledge he is at perfect liberty to preach that which his religious training has taught him to say.”<sup>65</sup> In the navy, the same principle reigned but perhaps not as forcefully. In June 1944, the navy released Chaplain Laurel Gatlin from active duty involuntarily because his “extremely zealous evangelistic inclinations” rendered him “not adaptable to service as a Chaplain in the Navy.”<sup>66</sup> Among other factors, Gatlin attributed his dismissal to his refusal to preach only that

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<sup>63</sup> The *Link* published eleven responses—ten critical and one supportive. One should note that the *Link* was a publication of the Servicemen's Christian League—an organization created for the purpose of uniting Protestants across denominational lines. See: “Batting the Breeze,” *Link*, May 1945.

<sup>64</sup> George F. Rixey, “Response to Major Fitch,” November 14, 1940, 000.3 Religion, Religious Ministration in the Army, V. 1, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>65</sup> Aryeh Lev, *What Chaplains Preach* ([Washington, DC?], 1941), 10.

<sup>66</sup> M. H. Simon, “[Reprint] Memo from Commandant, Fifth Naval District to the Secretary of the Navy,” *Christian Beacon*, June 29, 1944. See also: “Religion: Gatlin Gunnery,” *Time*, July 10, 1944.

sailors “must be willing to die for their country” rather than “what the Bible taught concerning salvation.”<sup>67</sup> Following public controversy and an investigation, the navy reconsidered its actions and reactivated Gatlin two months later.<sup>68</sup>

In most cases, chaplains adapted themselves to the framework of general Protestant services though the level of adjustment was greater for some than for others. In addition to the sermon, chaplains needed to make decisions regarding the organization of the service as well as musical selections. Many chaplains enjoyed preaching to soldiers and sailors—a young, vibrant constituency less common in civilian houses of worship. At the same time, soldiers and sailors often positively characterized general Protestant services because of their interdenominational nature. Not everyone, however, was pleased by the result. In a 1943 letter, an unidentified soldier complained about an experience in an army chapel. “The Protestant service is a poor mixture of all the faiths and is worse than nothing,” he wrote. “The chaplain was terrible and he had picked such obscure hymns with such bad tunes that no one sang.”<sup>69</sup> More charitably, Pfc. Victor Cline noted in his diary that he attended a Protestant service in the chapel, but he found it “very formal, unbending, unmov[ing].”<sup>70</sup> In a letter to his wife, Cpl. Bill Cooper offered a

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<sup>67</sup> Laurel G. Gatlin, “[Reprint] Statement of Laurel Garnett Gatlin,” *Christian Beacon*, June 29, 1944, 1.

<sup>68</sup> “Gatlin Recalled to Chaplaincy by United States Navy,” *Christian Beacon*, August 3, 1944; “Religion: Gatlin Back,” *Time*, September 11, 1944. Gatlin continued as a navy chaplain until December, 1946. See: Clifford Drury and United States, Bureau of Naval Personnel, *United States Navy Chaplains, 1778-1945: Biographical and Service-Record Sketches of 3,353 Chaplains...*, vol. 3 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1948), 102.

<sup>69</sup> [Letter: author and recipient unidentified], April 25, 1943, 000.3 Religious Ministrations in the Army, V. 4, , Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. This letter reached the Office of the Army Chief of Chaplains through Mrs. Webb Vanderbilt who forwarded it to Dr. Roswell P. Barnes of the Federal Council of Churches who forwarded it to Rev. S. Arthur Devan, Director of the General Commission of Army and Navy Chaplains who forwarded it to the Army Chief of Chaplains.

<sup>70</sup> Cline, “War Diary: Personal Diary of Victor Bailey Cline.”

similar assessment lamenting a “dehydrated” sermon he heard in an army chapel. “I’ll be glad when I can hear some real preaching,” he concluded.<sup>71</sup>

As it attempted to mitigate religious friction, military leadership embraced the ideal of interfaith cooperation. Religious conflict threatened to undermine military effectiveness and to fracture the sense of shared mission needed to mobilize the home front. Consequently, the federal government partnered with the army and navy chaplain corps as well as civilian groups to project this image both within and beyond the military. In 1942, a partnership between civilian producers, the War Department, and the Army Chaplain Corps resulted in *Chaplain Jim*—a weekly radio show that followed the adventures of a fictional and religiously ambiguous chaplain. As Ronit Stahl has argued, the show served to unite Americans under an umbrella of generic monotheism.<sup>72</sup> Existing civilian organizations such as the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ) and the Anti-Defamation League also resonated with the ideal of interfaith cooperation and accelerated promotional campaigns during the war often in conjunction with government agencies. In early 1941, an official with the Jewish Welfare Board proposed that the Army Chaplain Corps should cooperate with the NCCJ to sponsor a program in army camps promoting interfaith cooperation.<sup>73</sup> As Kevin Schultz has noted, this partnership flourished during the war.<sup>74</sup> The NCCJ’s goal to suppress religious

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<sup>71</sup> Bill Cooper, *Sunshine in an Otherwise Gloomy World: A Collection of Love Letters from World War II*, ed. Linda Perkins (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corporation, 2011), 320.

<sup>72</sup> Ronit Stahl, “Chaplain Jim Wants You!: The Boundaries of Religion in the Warfare State” (presented at the World War II and Religion Conference, Paper presented at the World War II and Religion Conference, Florida State University, Tallahassee, 2012).

<sup>73</sup> Nathan C. Belth to Aryeh Lev, January 15, 1941, 000.3 Religion: Religious Ministration in the Army, v. 2, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>74</sup> Schultz, *Tri-Faith America*, 44–50.

prejudice complemented military needs. Organizations sought to project these ideals beyond camps, as well. A 1944 poster depicting three soldiers in action carried the slogan, “Fighting side by side—Protestant, Catholic, Jew—so that every person may worship God in his own way.”<sup>75</sup>

With the sinking of the SS *Dorchester*, the Army Chaplain Corps realized that the story of the four chaplains ideally demonstrated the principle of religious cooperation. A chaplain who worked in the Office of the Chief of Chaplains, Herman H. Heuer recalled that he “was instructed to ‘make a big thing’” of the story.<sup>76</sup> In December 1944, the army awarded the deceased chaplains the Distinguished Service Cross, and the tale began spreading across the nation.<sup>77</sup> Even those outside the military invoked the story to dissuade others from sectarian bickering. In a speech at a Protestant gathering in New York, John D. Rockefeller summarized the story of the four chaplains and called those present to “usher in a new era of religious cooperation.”<sup>78</sup> In the spring, a reader of *Time* invoked the story of the four chaplains as he shamed American leaders whose actions fomented religious conflict. For example, Archbishop McNicholas had recently directed Catholics to abstain from participating with non-Catholics in religious ceremonies.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> *Fighting Side By Side So That Every Person May Worship God in His Own Way!*, Offset Photolithograph, 1944, The National Air and Space Museum Poster Collection, Washington, DC. The copyright of this poster belongs to the Institute for American Democracy, Inc.—an organization closely affiliated with the Anti-Defamation League. See: Stuart Svonkin, *Jews against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 41–45.

<sup>76</sup> Gushwa and United States, Dept. of the Army, Office of the Chief of Chaplains, *The Best and Worst of Times*, 4:128.

<sup>77</sup> For example see: “Former Rabbi Listed as Missing at Sea, One of Four Chaplain Heroes of Sinking,” *New York Times*, March 27, 1943; “D.S.C. to Chaplains Giving Lives at Sea,” *New York Times*, December 3, 1944; “Four Chaplains Give Up Own Lifebelts to Save Ship’s Crew,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 3, 1944; “Four Chaplains,” *Time*, December 11, 1944; “Between the Lines,” *New York Times*, December 21, 1944.

<sup>78</sup> John D. Rockefeller, “Text of Rockefeller Speech at Protestant Dinner,” *New York Times*, February 1, 1945, 16.

<sup>79</sup> “No Common Denominator,” *Time*, March 5, 1945.



Allen declared that the actions of the four chaplains “proved the utter uselessness of all the sharp religious controversy.”<sup>80</sup> Even after the war, the legacy of the four chaplains grew. In 1948, the US postal service immortalized the chaplains on a stamp.<sup>81</sup> For the chaplain corps, the story of the four chaplains putting aside religious difference as they served others even to death clearly represented the ideal of religious cooperation that was desperately needed for the success of both the chaplaincy and the American war effort. Even if it did not reflect everyday reality, it was the goal toward which they called Americans to strive.<sup>82</sup>

To some extent, applying the ideal of religious cooperation in a wartime military resulted in the emergence of The American Way of Life as a rival object of religious devotion. In 1955, sociologist Will Herberg made the phrase famous as he used it, largely critically, to describe the nature of American religion after the war. Herberg described The American Way of Life as “an organic structure of ideas, values, and beliefs that constitutes a faith common to Americans.”<sup>83</sup> For Herberg, such faith was not simply common-denominator religion but rather a unifying structure that influenced, and was

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<sup>80</sup> David B. Allen, “Useless Controversy,” *Time* 45, no. 18 (April 30, 1945): 4.

<sup>81</sup> Sol Glass, “Four Chaplains Commemorative Stamp,” *The Bureau Specialist* 19, no. 9 (September 1948): 211–212, 224.

<sup>82</sup> A notable number of secondary texts emphasize the way in which the four chaplains represented interfaith cooperation as a wartime value. They differ, however, as to what factors contributed to the celebration of interfaith cooperation and to what extent it reflected reality. Deborah Dash Moore emphasized that the four chaplains represented the Judeo-Christian tradition as an ideal. Americans had made progress toward this ideal through the influence of military policy during the war, but it remained unrealized. Kevin Schultz situated the emergence of the tri-faith ideal in the context of the 1910s and 1920s as a response to rising nativism and the Ku Klux Klan. For Schultz, the influence of the ideal peaked in the 1940s and 1950s, but he helpfully qualifies that the image was “something of a sociological myth” given continuing religious friction. Thomas Bruscino argued that World War II represented a watershed event in ethnic and religious relations. While the war was important, Bruscino seems to take the invocations of the shared Judeo-Christian religious heritage as representing a reality achieved rather than an ideal for which some Americans hoped. See: Moore, *GI Jews*, 121, 154–5; Schultz, *Tri-Faith America*, 7; Bruscino, *A Nation Forged in War*, 9.

<sup>83</sup> Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology*, Revised (Garden City, N.Y: Anchor Books, 1960), 77.

influenced by, “the ‘official’ religions of American society.”<sup>84</sup> As expressed by soldiers and sailors, The American Way of Life meant freedom—often emphasizing the freedom of worship. The interaction between religious cooperation and freedom of worship contributed to shifting attitudes toward religious identity. For expediency, the military channeled religious identity into three basic categories: Protestant, Catholic, and Jew. Even this compression, however, remained inadequate to unify military personnel. Consequently, the military, for practical reasons, embraced the Judeo-Christian tradition as a lowest common denominator religion to address the problem of religious difference while respecting religious freedom. This simplification in the context of a wartime military increasingly led some Americans to fuse their religious and national identity.

This is perhaps best illustrated by circumstances when military personnel assembled for public ceremonies with religious or quasi-religious elements. Some commanders sought occasions where all personnel could gather in an attitude of worship to demonstrate unity. Long-standing national holidays including Thanksgiving and Memorial Day could fill this role. The army training manual for chaplains underscored the significance of Memorial Day noting that it “becomes more and more a sacred day with the American people.”<sup>85</sup> Chaplains were advised to arrange memorial services in order to instruct soldiers “in lessons of respect and honor to the heroes of America and will consequently inculcate in them patriotism and loyalty.”<sup>86</sup> A later edition of the manual noted, “Thanksgiving and Memorial Day combine religious and patriotic elements and are so free from sectarian significance that they are appropriate occasions

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<sup>84</sup> On this point, this analysis diverges somewhat from Herberg’s definition emphasizing the American Way of Life as a potentially rival religion for Americans.

<sup>85</sup> US War Department, *TM 16-205: The Chaplain*, 26.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

for exercises or services in which people of all creeds may participate with reverence.”<sup>87</sup> Encouraging sensitivity to diverse religious sensibilities, the manual advised chaplains to consult with representatives from the “three major faiths.” To avoid offense, it suggested Psalms as a source for scripture readings and songs such as “America the Beautiful.” As Deborah Dash Moore has convincingly argued, such services demonstrated the way in which the US military embraced the Judeo-Christian tradition and consequently elevated Judaism into the mainstream of American religious life.<sup>88</sup> However, the way in which the US military applied the Judeo-Christian tradition points to an even broader significance. Honoring the Judeo-Christian tradition in the context of war easily shaded toward it becoming the religious common ground that undergirded the American Way of Life. Thus, soldiers and sailors could gather together under the auspices of the Judeo-Christian tradition in order to venerate America as the sort of place that made such worship possible—a place potentially worth dying to defend.

This interpretation gained some traction among the rank and file. In an essay stating what he was fighting for, Pvt. Henry Johnson mentioned freedom of worship and freedom from fear. He concluded, “I am fighting for what I consider to be the American way of life. That great ideal is high enough and fine enough to challenge me to fight—and, if need be, to die—to guarantee its realization.”<sup>89</sup> Johnson was not alone. In a letter to his mother, infantryman Morris Redmann processed the news of his cousin’s death on Tarawa. “He died fighting for an ideal—the American Way of Living,” he reflected. “He died so that the squealing babies I saw baptized in church this afternoon may live in

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<sup>87</sup> US War Department and Honeywell, *TM 16-205: The Chaplain*, 35.

<sup>88</sup> Moore, *GI Jews*, 154–5.

<sup>89</sup> Henry Johnson, “What I Am Fighting For,” *Link*, September 1943, 27.

peace, speak their free mind, and worship God in the true religion. Not a few have died thus in the past years of confusion, hate, and intolerance. Their country was their creed, and they are their country's pride.”<sup>90</sup> One cannot assume these crafted explanations truly represented the personal views of these men, but both Johnson and Redmann brought together national and religious identity.

Neither the US government nor the military originated such ideas, but wartime policies driven by pragmatism created a fertile field in which they could grow. By articulating US war aims in terms of the Four Freedoms, President Roosevelt established a creed that defined the American Way of Life—an idea that all Americans could rally around despite religious differences. Through public information campaigns, the federal government encouraged Americans to sacrifice in order to preserve their own freedom as well as to project the ideal of freedom around the world. In the military, the desire to mitigate religious conflict, for the most part unintentionally, led to the establishment of a common object of religious devotion. The Army Chaplain Corps did not actively seek to redirect worship toward the nation, but its attempts to find a lowest common denominator religion had this effect. The Judeo-Christian ideal wielded by a wartime military shaped the worldview of Americans and prefigured the emergence of a faith in the American Way of Life commentators have long associated with post-war America.

As men and women entered the military during the war, many encountered greater religious diversity than they had ever experienced as civilians. They could not,

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<sup>90</sup> Morris B. Redmann, “Letter to His Mother, February 20, 1944,” in *Unfinished Journey: A World War II Remembrance*, ed. Kerry P. Redmann (Guilford, CT: Lyon’s Press, 2006), 117–8. Redmann died himself in the Battle of the Bulge less than one year after this letter.

however, remain mere observers of religious difference. The nature of military life compelled soldiers and sailors to work and live in close proximity while striving toward a common goal. Observers have long noted that such mixing relieved preexisting tensions between ethnic or religious groups as people grew to know and respect those from other backgrounds. Though partially true, this generalization obscures the complexity of religious interactions during the war as well as the effect the war had on religious life in post-war America. The experience of religious difference, led some soldiers and sailors to embrace religious particularity more fully—though perhaps tempered with somewhat increased tolerance. Positively, some committed themselves more deeply to a faith they had largely inherited from their families and communities. Negatively, some became more convinced of the veracity of a particular faith because of deficiencies they perceived in other traditions and their adherents. For others, the experience of religious difference broadened attitudes ranging from begrudging tolerance to concluding that most faiths were essentially the same. As they sought to reconcile religious difference, soldiers and sailors refined what they considered to be the essentials of religious belief and practice. At the same time, military policies that sought to mitigate religious friction influenced responses to difference by glorifying interfaith cooperation. Doing so in the context of war, led some to embrace the defense of freedom—equated with The American Way of Life—as a unifying object of religious devotion that transcended religious difference.

## Chapter 9

### Conclusion: Remaking America

Even before the famed D-Day landing in Normandy, Americans were considering the impact the war would have on religion in the United States following the war. In a May 1944 press release, the US Bureau of Public Relations included remarks from an unidentified chaplain recently returned from Europe. The chaplain observed that the experience of war and battle had “stripped religion of all nonessentials.”<sup>1</sup> Considering this a positive development, the chaplain warned that the religion of returning soldiers would challenge American churches. “They want the kind of religion that will refresh them, that will sustain them in their daily lives and their daily duties just as it is sustaining them today in the gunpits and fox holes.”<sup>2</sup> Though one might quibble with the details, the chaplain rightly perceived that the war would have consequences for religion in the US. As they returned home, veterans of World War II contributed to significant shifts in American culture and the American religious landscape

Scholars have long explored the legacy of World War II for Americans noting both significant changes as well as continuities with earlier eras. The war certainly benefited many Americans economically as it lifted the US from the economic doldrums of the 1930s. Yet, economic progress remained uneven leaving behind many on the margins. Because of segregation, African Americans who had served in the military, for

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<sup>1</sup> Reprinted in: Office of Chief of Chaplains, Army, “Circular Letter No. 285,” June 1, 1944, 300.5 Circular Letters V. 3, Office Management Division Decimal File 1920-45, Records Relating to Administration and Management, Records of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains 1902-75, Record Group 247, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

example, were unable to benefit fully from the GI Bill that provided college funds and federally backed home mortgages for millions of veterans.<sup>3</sup> Increasing numbers of women had entered the formal workforce during the conflict, but the war years also solidified gender roles.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the war and its aftermath altered American communities. Riding the strength of the US economy, millions of Americans relocated to new communities and rapidly growing regions as they pursued jobs both during and after the war. In government, the war had centralized a great deal of power at the federal level, and Americans increasingly looked to it to respond to challenges both domestically and abroad. Finally, in a retreat from pre-war isolationism, many Americans became convinced that the US had a continuing responsibility to actively project and protect American values abroad.

While scholars have widely considered these effects, relatively few have considered the way in which the experience of war shaped the religious sensibilities of Americans who served in the military. First, soldiers and sailors found new opportunities and reasons to actively engage religion. Wartime stresses motivated some toward religious reflection in both positive and negative terms. In addition, despite the military's efforts, chaplains—especially those representing smaller religious bodies—were often unavailable, so soldiers and sailors became more self-sustaining and even filled in as lay leaders for others. Second, religious diversity within the wartime military led many Americans to clarify religious essentials in both belief and practice. While some reveled

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<sup>3</sup> Neil A Wynn, *The Afro-American and the Second World War* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1976), 115–6. On the point of housing see also: Thomas Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008), 203–4.

<sup>4</sup> Sherna Berger Gluck, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War, and Social Change* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), 259, 269–270.

in eclectic religious mixing, others carefully articulated simplified though specific boundaries within which they often found new freedom and formed new alliances. Finally, the war provided both opportunity and justification for soldiers and sailors to transgress traditional religious lines. Separated from the governing influence of families and hometowns, troops could more easily adjust or realign their religious commitments and identities. By the time they reentered civilian society, many soldiers and sailors had refined or reconfigured their religious worlds, a process which the experience of war had both compelled and made possible.

As these veterans returned home, their religious world forged in war shaped the postwar religious landscape as well as altered wider trends in American life. In particular, this study suggests four main areas of influence. First, veterans contributed to the reconfiguration of American religious bodies as many Americans moved into the suburbs. The churches and synagogues that veterans favored in the suburbs were not the same as their urban and rural predecessors. Second, veterans contributed to the postwar explosion of parachurch organizations and ministries that emphasized unity behind common purpose such as the Youth for Christ movement. Third, this sense of purpose transcended national boundaries as returning veterans transformed the American missionary enterprise abroad. Whereas established mission organizations succumbed to critiques of cultural imperialism in the context of decolonization, conservative groups flourished by emphasizing personal transformation. Finally, some veterans continued to interpret US foreign policy in religious terms. The defense of the American Way of Life took on new meaning against the specter of godless communism.



The nature of religion in mid-century America is an area heavily trod by contemporary commentators as well as by later scholars. Few, however, have dealt in sufficient depth with the ways in which the experience of war shaped the development of religion in postwar America. In his perceptive analysis of shifting religious divisions evident by the 1970s and 1980s, Robert Wuthnow argued that many viewed the postwar years as a “clean slate” for religion. “Stripping away the peripheral creeds, doctrines, and styles of worship, replacing them with a renewed emphasis on the essence of Christianity, was seen as a way of reinvigorating American religion,” he explained. “It was as if the stormy years of war had purged the air of traditional assumptions, allowing a fresh wind to blow across the religious mindscape. Faith had formerly been weakened by differences over nonessentials; now, if only Christ could be preached, rather than denominational distinctives or ethical programs, great strength could be realized.”<sup>5</sup> Focused on later decades, Wuthnow hesitated to address factors that contributed to this mindset offering only that people desired a new beginning after years of tragic struggle. In his wide-ranging survey of American religion, Martin Marty dealt more robustly with the lingering religious effects of World War II noting tensions between factors pulling Americans together and those pushing them apart.<sup>6</sup> Marty’s emphasis on religious leadership and institutions, however, led him away from fully considering the ways in which the war shaped the attitudes of veterans toward religion—often the same people whose participation and donations breathed life into religious organizations. By articulating the ways in which the war shaped the religious worldview of those who

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<sup>5</sup> Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, 37.

<sup>6</sup> Marty, *Modern American Religion*.

fought, this study suggests significant contributing factors to the course of religion in the mid-century United States.

Popular memory of World War II often glosses over the struggles and fears regarding the reintegration of sixteen million veterans into civilian society. “Today’s comfortable assumption that ‘the boys’ returned home cheerful, contented, and well-adjusted, that no one suffered from serious emotional disorders, drank too much, or abused his wife or children, would have come as a surprise to contemporaries,” historian Thomas Childers observed.<sup>7</sup> For most Americans, the future seemed uncertain. Would the wartime economic boom shrivel in peacetime? Would there be enough jobs? How had the experience of war changed returning veterans? Though cushioned by provisions of the GI Bill, the rate of unemployment of veterans in early 1946 was triple that of civilians.<sup>8</sup> Some veterans found it difficult to return to their former lives. Some dealt with post-traumatic stress while others simply struggled to fit their changed selves back into former communities. In the two years following the war, for example, divorce rates doubled their pre-war levels before decreasing again in the late 1940s.<sup>9</sup> The experience of war affected some veterans in unexpected ways when they returned. For Daniel Turner, the memories of war prevented him from taking the sacrament of communion for years after the war.<sup>10</sup> It reminded him too much of receiving communion on a ship before battle—and the blood lingering in the water afterwards. Despite these challenges, veterans did reintegrate back into American society, but they did not leave it unchanged.

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Childers, *Soldier from the War Returning: The Greatest Generation’s Troubled Homecoming from World War II* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009), 5.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Hurd, “Bradley ‘Worried’ at GI Lack of Jobs,” *New York Times*, February 21, 1946.

<sup>9</sup> Eliza K. Pavalko and Glen H. Elder, “World War II and Divorce: A Life-Course Perspective,” *American Journal of Sociology* 95, no. 5 (March 1, 1990): 1215.

<sup>10</sup> Mark D. Van Ells, “‘To Hear Only Thunder Again’: The Readjustment of World War II Veterans to Civilian Life in Wisconsin” (PhD Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1999), 199–200.

Continuing the wartime trend of internal migration, many white veterans and their families made homes for themselves in the suburbs in the years immediately following the war. Postwar housing shortages led to increased construction on cheaper lands, often on the outskirts of established urban centers. Aided by the provisions of the GI Bill, veterans sought housing and jobs commensurate to their abilities and, for some, their government-funded college degrees. At the same time, suburban residents established new churches and synagogues. These new congregations, however, often bore features rooted, in part, in religious worldviews forged in war. Through their experiences of religious difference in the military, many veterans developed a keener sense of religious essentials though they were not of one mind as to what these essentials might be. At the same time, many veterans valued cooperation that transcended traditional denominational boundaries among those who shared similar sets of religious essentials. Consequently, veterans were more open to switching religious affiliations so long as the new group upheld desired essentials.<sup>11</sup> As veterans and their families established themselves in new communities, many sought out churches or synagogues for reasons other than denominational affiliation, such as personal connections or desirability of available programs. In addition, the cultural climate encouraged religious affiliation. Amid fears of communism, not affiliating with a religion invited suspicion.

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<sup>11</sup> Most scholarly analysis on religious switching has focused on post-1970s. Seeking to demonstrate change over time, Robert Wuthnow cited a 1955 Gallup poll that showed that only four percent of Americans had switched from their childhood faith and compared it with a 1984 poll that showed that one in three had. However, the source he cited for the 1955 poll measured ‘faith’ only in terms of the large categories of Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, or Judaism whereas the 1984 poll included smaller groupings. Wuthnow’s explanation seems to obscure this detail. See: “Conversion Poll Ends in a Dead Heat,” *Christian Century* 72, no. 14 (April 6, 1955): 411–2; Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, 88. See also: George Horace Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935-1971*, vol. 2 (New York: Random House, 1972), 1317–8.

The churches and synagogues rising up in these suburbs were more than just sanctuaries. New buildings, often in modern form, included lots of bright, open space for religious education and social gatherings.<sup>12</sup> Noting the contrast, James Hudnut-Beumler observed, “While older rural and urban churches were still debating the morality of the trend toward the ‘coffee hour,’ held for socializing between members before or after worship services, suburban congregations led the way.”<sup>13</sup> For Jews, commentators have noted that synagogues flourished in the suburbs after the war and that Jews joined local synagogues much more so than in the prewar years.<sup>14</sup> As with Christian churches, suburban synagogues increasingly emphasized social bonding but also placed a high priority on religious education. As Jews moved out of Jewish neighborhoods, the synagogue became a more important part of preserving and transmitting cultural heritage.<sup>15</sup>

Scholars have noted the erosion of denominational distinctiveness in postwar America. As Charles Lippy has observed, such switching became more common. “Denominations could no longer take for granted that those raised within the fold would retain a lifelong identification with a particular tradition and find meaning in life through its historically distinctive doctrinal and theological understanding,” he explained. “Individuals lost a sense of deep linkage to a particular heritage, identifying

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<sup>12</sup> On postwar religious architecture and its changing values see: Jay M. Price, *Temples for a Modern God: Religious Architecture in Postwar America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), chap. 2.

<sup>13</sup> James David Hudnut-Beumler, *Looking for God in the Suburbs: The Religion of the American Dream and Its Critics, 1945-1965* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 39.

<sup>14</sup> Nathan Glazer, “The Jewish Revival in America: I,” *Commentary* 20 (1955): 495. Sklare and Greenbaum noted the growth trend in facilities and affiliation but also observed low levels of participation. Marshall Sklare and Joseph Greenblum, *Jewish Identity on the Suburban Frontier: A Study of Group Survival in the Open Society*, vol. 1 (New York: Basic Books, 1967), 97.

<sup>15</sup> On how the experience of meeting Jewish chaplains changed expectations for the rabbinate, especially in the growing suburbs, see: Gilbert Kollin, “The Impact of the Military Chaplaincy,” in *The American Rabbi*, ed. Gilbert S. Rosenthal (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1977), 33–35.

only with the specific local congregation where they worshiped or held membership.”<sup>16</sup> Especially among Protestants, veterans likely crossed denominational lines more willingly to associate with congregations they valued for other reasons—a pattern consistent with compromises made in war. In addition, the religious eclecticism evident in military life likely carried over into civilian life. Some veterans became less concerned with maintaining pure religious forms, and some were willing to mix aspects of various traditions. This openness contributed to the postwar popularity of religious personalities such as Norman Vincent Peale and Robert Schuller who fused popular psychology and spirituality.<sup>17</sup>

Though perhaps atypical, the planned community of Park Forest, Illinois illustrates a way in which the war affected religious developments. In the late 1940s, developer Phil Klutznick, sought to integrate places of worship into the community by providing free land. He was unsure, however, how to account for the diversity of Protestant denominations, so he approached the Church Federation of Greater Chicago for guidance. In 1948, the organization recommended Hugo Leinberger, a former navy chaplain, to serve as a sort of community chaplain to gauge the religious interests of the new residents through personal interviews. Leinberger concluded that community members were more interested in the quality of the minister and educational programming than in denominational affiliation.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, community members organized a united Protestant church appointing Gerson Engelmann as the first pastor. In a 1980 interview, Engelmann attributed the religious attitudes to residents’ experiences in

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<sup>16</sup> Charles H. Lippy, *Pluralism Comes of Age: American Religious Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2000), 25.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 100–1.

<sup>18</sup> William H. Whyte, *The Organization Man* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957), 407.

both the war and college estimating that nine in ten men were veterans. According to Engelmann, they said, “When they were in the service they had chaplains and they didn't know whether they were Baptist or Methodist or Presbyterian, and they didn't much care; so when they were founding a new community they felt it would be a mistake to organize on the basis of denominations.”<sup>19</sup> In the case of Park Forest, the wartime experiences of Leinberger and the new residents led to a unique church configuration in a new community without previous religious institutions.

Though denominational distinctiveness weakened for some in the wake of World War II, one must be careful not to overemphasize the point. For some veterans, their concepts of religious essentials still excluded many. Even in Park Forest, some Episcopalians and Lutherans organized their own congregations apart from the trans-denominational Protestant effort as did Roman Catholics and Jews.<sup>20</sup> To some extent, trends in marriage demonstrated this continuing divide. Sociologist Allan McCutcheon analyzed marriage and religious affiliation by age cohort and found that the rate of interfaith marriage had increased but unevenly so.<sup>21</sup> From the 1930s to the 1950s, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians had high and increasing rates of intermarriage. During the same period, however, the rates of interfaith marriage for conservative Protestants, Catholics, and Jews remained stable and were the lowest of all the groups. Thus, mainline Protestants—likely those with the broadest conceptions of

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<sup>19</sup> Gerson Engelmann, interview by Judy Mathias, unpublished transcript, August 7, 1980, 1, 9, Park Forest - An Illinois Planned Community, Illinois Digital Archives.

<sup>20</sup> Whyte, *The Organization Man*, 409. Notably, Klutznick, the community developer, was Jewish, and his son's bar mitzvah luncheon was the first event held in the new Christian education building of Faith United Protestant Church. Engelmann, interview, 23. On Jews in the community, see also: Herbert J. Gans, “Park Forest: Birth of a Jewish Community,” *Commentary* 12 (January 1, 1951): 330–9.

<sup>21</sup> Allan L. McCutcheon, “Denominations and Religious Intermarriage: Trends among White Americans in the Twentieth Century,” *Review of Religious Research* 29, no. 3 (March 1, 1988): 218–20.

religious essentials—were the most willing to marry across denominational lines. Considerable barriers remained between Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, though perhaps not to the extent hypothesized by those who warned that a triple melting-pot more accurately depicted social realities than a single melting-pot model of assimilation.<sup>22</sup> With few exceptions, postwar religious leaders opposed marriage across these lines though such sentiments were significantly weaker among the larger population.<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, the available data on intermarriage do not differentiate between veterans and non-veterans, so any perceived connections remain speculative. In addition, marriage choice involved a complicated web of variables. Because veterans made up a significant proportion of the age cohort of marriages in the 1940s, however, the experience of war likely had some impact on marriage patterns. While some veterans were willing to cross religious lines for marriage, others remained much more hesitant.

A second postwar development likely affected by the wartime experiences of veterans was the rapid growth of parachurch organizations that united people behind a common goal. Though organizations such as the American Bible Society had a long history in the US, new organizations emerged that fed upon and contributed to a wave of interest in religion after the war. Evangelicals in particular found unity beyond church affiliations in the common work of Christian evangelism. Many early leaders were

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<sup>22</sup> Revising the melting-pot thesis, the triple-melting pot thesis held that Protestants, Catholics, and Jews were mixing within their groups but much less so between the groups. Jo Reeves Kennedy seems to have originated the thesis, but Will Herberg echoed and brought more attention to it. See: Ruby Jo Reeves Kennedy, "Single or Triple Melting-Pot? Intermarriage Trends in New Haven, 1870-1940," *American Journal of Sociology* 49, no. 4 (January 1, 1944): 331–339; Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955). For a contemporary critic of the thesis, see: John L. Thomas, "The Factor of Religion in the Selection of Marriage Mates," *American Sociological Review* 16, no. 4 (August 1, 1951): 487–491.

<sup>23</sup> Judson T. Landis and Mary G. Landis, *Building a Successful Marriage* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1948), 133, 138.

veterans whose experiences in war convinced them of a need for evangelism and inspired them to embrace frameworks of cooperative effort. In addition, the war had emboldened a new generation who valued lay leadership and depended less on formally trained religious leaders. Many had themselves taken on the mantle of religious leadership and had gained confidence in their abilities.

The growth and development of the Youth for Christ movement illustrated this trend. From scattered organizational beginnings, Youth for Christ rocketed to national prominence in the late 1940s, fueled in part by a charismatic young preacher, Billy Graham. The movement focused on evangelistic rallies characterized by energetic young speakers, popular music, and a fervent commitment to inspire young people to embrace Jesus Christ. As early as 1946, the organization sponsored hundreds of rallies in the US as well as numerous rallies for US military personnel still deployed abroad. As the organization grew, returning war veterans played a significant role in formal leadership as well as among those who supported rallies at the local level. Perhaps even more significantly, the experience of war had primed returning veterans to be more receptive to such programs. Like many religious programs in the military, Youth for Christ transcended many sectarian boundaries and sustained itself by minimizing denominational particularity in favor of a shared set of religious essentials—though a set certainly more Protestant than broadly Judeo-Christian. In addition, veterans had become more accustomed to participating in religious services outside the walls of churches. Finally, as Joel Carpenter has argued, Youth for Christ drew on a “civic faith” inspired by



the successful defeat of anti-democratic enemies—a faith that Americans sought to cultivate in the early cold war.<sup>24</sup>

Beyond evangelistic rallies, Americans also bonded together across denominational lines in other ways. The war accelerated an existing trend toward cooperation between religious organizations with the Federal Council of Churches (FCC) overseeing and supporting a great number of military chaplains. After the war, Protestants toyed with the idea of ecumenism by establishing associations such as the World Council of Churches in 1948 and the National Council of Churches in 1950. Beyond mere cooperation, a small minority favored the actual union of church bodies though with little success beyond the formation of the United Church of Christ in 1957. The war also spurred the creation of “anti-ecumenical ecumenical” bodies, to borrow Martin Marty’s terminology.<sup>25</sup> While the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) was formed for the broader goal of evangelical unity in 1942, its immediate task was to counter the influence of the Federal Council of Churches in the military.<sup>26</sup> The founders of the NAE considered the FCC to be irreparably tainted by modernism rendering it unable to represent religious conservatives. Not rejecting the idea of cooperation, the NAE sought to unite Protestants behind a different set of religious essentials. Even with these diverse efforts toward cooperation, certain barriers remained. Despite the celebration of Americans’ shared Judeo-Christian identity, very few managed to yoke together the religious efforts of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews in meaningful ways.

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<sup>24</sup> Joel A. Carpenter, “Youth for Christ and the New Evangelicals’ Place in the Life of the Nation,” in *Religion and the Life of the Nation: American Recoveries*, ed. Rowland A. Sherrill (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 130. On the point of infusing rallies with patriotism, see: Bruce Shelley, “The Rise of Evangelical Youth Movements,” *Fides et Historia* 18 (1986): 49–50.

<sup>25</sup> Marty, *Modern American Religion*, 3:106.

<sup>26</sup> Anne C. Loveland, *American Evangelicals and the U.S. Military, 1942-1993* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 33.

One must also note that World War II veterans likely had little influence in movements toward cooperation within established institutions in the 1940s and 1950s simply because they were not yet in positions of institutional leadership governed by thick bureaucratic layers. New institutions in the evangelical fold offered far more immediate leadership opportunities for veterans.

A third way that veterans influenced postwar religious developments was in the area of Christian foreign missionary enterprises. The war took a generation of young men, as well as a significant number of young women, far beyond their hometowns and exposed them to distant lands and foreign peoples. At the same time, the experience of war motivated some veterans to invest themselves in work that they found meaningful. For evangelical Christians, no work had more meaning than sharing the Gospel with those who seemed to live in apparent isolation of its message. In the midst of battle, no small number of men pledged their service to God in exchange for survival—some remembered their promises. Others simply sought to make their lives meaningful as they sought to reconcile their own improbable survival with the deaths of friends whom they considered to be more worthy. Historian Joel Carpenter concluded that the war “had an enormous impact on the North American missionary impulse.”<sup>27</sup>

In the mid-twentieth century, American Christian missions abroad changed significantly. Even before the war, the pressures of modernism led dominant Christian

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<sup>27</sup> Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 178. On the significance of veterans’ impact on postwar missions, see also: Richard V. Pierard, “Pax Americana and the Evangelical Missionary Advance,” in *Earthen Vessels: American Evangelicals and Foreign Missions, 1880-1980*, ed. Joel A. Carpenter and Wilbert R. Shenk (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 170–5.

denominations to begin questioning the goals and legitimacy of foreign missions.<sup>28</sup> After the war, the pressures of decolonization led many to view foreign missions as a form of cultural imperialism and support from mainline Christians continued to erode.<sup>29</sup> Overall, however, the number of American missionaries abroad continued to grow, buoyed by an influx of evangelicals. From 1925 to 1960, the number of North American Protestant missionaries more than doubled, yet the number associated with mainline bodies stagnated.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, after World War II the Roman Catholic Church and the LDS Church sent record numbers of missionaries abroad.<sup>31</sup> At Wheaton College, a bastion of evangelicalism, thirty-one percent of the class of 1950 became missionaries.<sup>32</sup> David Howard, a 1949 Wheaton graduate, recalled that returning veterans ushered in a “golden age of missions.” He lauded, “The vision originally received by these men and women while overseas in the military and then stimulated and cultivated while at Wheaton College has borne fruit for half a century in missionary outreach.”<sup>33</sup>

Even before they left the service, some soldiers and sailors set their minds toward mission work. Some formed connections with already established missions overseas. In

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<sup>28</sup> Grant Wacker, “The Waning of the Missionary Impulse: The Case of Pearl S. Buck,” in *The Foreign Missionary Enterprise at Home: Explorations in North American Cultural History*, ed. Daniel H. Bays and Grant Wacker (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 191–205.

<sup>29</sup> William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 178.

<sup>30</sup> The missionary enterprise among mainliners was dominated by the Foreign Missions of the FCC, replaced by the Division of Ministries of the NCC after 1950. See: W. Richie Hogg, “The Role of American Protestantism in World Mission,” in *American Missions in Bicentennial Perspective*, ed. R. Pierce Beaver (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1977), 354–402.

<sup>31</sup> One must note significant differences in the missionary enterprises between groups. For example, in the Roman Catholic Church missionaries are associated with religious orders. In the LDS Church, serving as a missionary is primarily a one to two year commitment rather than a career. Angelyn Dries, *The Missionary Movement in American Catholic History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 152; Gordon Shepherd and Gary Shepherd, “Membership Growth, Church Activity, and Missionary Recruitment,” *Dialogue* 29, no. 1 (1996): 35.

<sup>32</sup> Jeremy Weber and Robert C. Baptista, “A Cohort of 23,” *Wheaton*, Winter 2012, 21. Bechtel estimated more than twenty-five percent. See: Paul M Bechtel, *Wheaton College: A Heritage Remembered, 1860-1984* (Wheaton, IL: H. Shaw Publishers, 1984), 194.

<sup>33</sup> David Howard, *From Wheaton to the Nations* (Wheaton, IL: Wheaton College, 2001), 48–9.

the Philippines, US troops connected with Ed and Marion Bomm, American missionaries who had been imprisoned by the Japanese.<sup>34</sup> With the Bomms, a group of service people spearheaded evangelistic projects that eventually developed into the missionary organization Far Eastern Gospel Crusade.<sup>35</sup> In addition, military service provided some veterans with skills that proved quite valuable in mission work such as experience in aviation. In a 1944 letter, marine Lyman Mason reported that he intended to use his skills as an aviation mechanic as a missionary in South America. Similarly, Elizabeth Greene, a Women's Air Service Pilot, wrote that she was "eagerly awaiting the time when God will use my flying to take the glorious gospel to those who are 'without Christ—having no hope.'"<sup>36</sup> After the war, Greene and several other military aviators established the Christian Airmen's Missionary Fellowship for the purpose of supporting overseas missions.<sup>37</sup> Such programs also benefited from cheap surplus supplies and equipment from the military following the war.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, the experience of war led some veterans to more closely align their religious and national identities—sometimes to the point of fusion. Though a process not unique to veterans, they had the most at stake as they sought to make sense of their own experiences while also honoring the sacrifices of the more than four hundred thousand Americans who died. Increasingly, American identity was thought of in religious terms,

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<sup>34</sup> "The Story of the Far Eastern Bible Institute and Seminary."

<sup>35</sup> Far Eastern Gospel Crusade eventually changed its name to SEND International in 1981.

<sup>36</sup> "Can Good Come out of War?," *Christ's Ambassadors Herald*, June 1944. The publication misspelled Greene's name as "Green."

<sup>37</sup> Soon adopting the name Missionary Aviation Fellowship, this organization gained notoriety after the death of Nate Saint and several other men at the hands of the Auca Indians in Ecuador in 1956. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 180. See also: "'Go Ye and Preach the Gospel': Five Do and Die," *Life*, January 30, 1956; Betty Greene and Dietrich G. Buss, *Flying High: The Amazing Story of Betty Greene and the Early Years of Mission Aviation Fellowship* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 2002).

<sup>38</sup> Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 180.

and religious identity was thought of in nationalist terms. Significantly, however, veterans still differed on the positive vision of what America should be—a fact made evident by significant divisions that remained in American society. American unity after the war was defined largely in negative terms against the perceived threat of the Soviet Union leading an encroaching tide of global communism.

During the war, personal experiences as well as military policies led some soldiers and sailors toward infusing American identity with religious aspects. The war enveloped the majority of a generation of young men, whether they liked it or not. Even if motivated to volunteer by ideals of patriotism and duty, young men and women often found military service in war to be life-transforming. As they sought to make sense of their experiences, soldiers and sailors sometimes found meaning in religious interpretations. For example, one did not fight because the government conscripted him according to law but instead to protect the freedom of worship. Similarly, the sacrifice of life could infuse battle with religious meaning, especially if the one sacrificed was a friend. Long after the war's conclusion, the desire to honor wartime sacrifices renewed devotion to the nation as an ideal worthy of continued sacrifice.

Military policy toward religion during the war also contributed to the alignment of religious and national identity. One must take care, however, not to interpret this development as a sort of devious conspiracy. Instead, valuing religion amid diversity led the military in this direction for practical reasons. Above all, military leaders sought to mitigate the divisiveness of religious conflict, but they did not want to lose the benefits of religion for morale and military effectiveness. Attempting to find common religious ground while respecting the freedom of religion, military leaders compromised by

emphasizing the shared connection of Americans united to defend American values. Loosely associated with the Judeo-Christian tradition, the American Way of Life took on its own aura of significance in the context of war.

Though World War II ended in 1945, the US remained deeply embedded in international conflict as the issues of postwar reconstruction splintered the uneasy wartime alliance with the Soviet Union. Many veterans returned to civilian life, but the US never fully withdrew diplomatically or militarily. Instead, the US and the USSR became embroiled in a decades-long cold war as they jockeyed for international influence, a conflict both infused with and justified by religious significance. The connections between religion and the cold war have drawn several scholars' attention over the past several years. Acknowledging the way in which religious themes infused anti-communist rhetoric in the US, scholars differ on the reasons why. William Inboden has argued that such rhetoric reflected the "genuine convictions of many policy makers" including Truman, Kennan, and Eisenhower.<sup>39</sup> Alternatively, Jonathan Herzog emphasized the ways in which US leaders recognized the utilitarian value of religion in the conflict against the Soviet Union.<sup>40</sup> In each of these cases, scholars focused on political and religious leaders in the US rather than their constituents. Why did so many Americans resonate with and accept religious arguments against communism? This dissertation suggests that the experience of World War II influenced veterans'

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<sup>39</sup> William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 2.

<sup>40</sup> Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 5–6. Other recent monographs analyzing the role of religion in the US engagement with the cold war include: T. Jeremy Gunn, *Spiritual Weapons: The Cold War and the Forging of an American National Religion* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2009); Jason W. Stevens, *God-Fearing and Free: A Spiritual History of America's Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012).

worldviews in such a way as to make them receptive to such arguments. Many had interpreted and reconciled their experiences in religious terms. For those who justified their participation in the war as defending the freedom of worship, the Soviet Union seemed to be an even more direct threat. For those who sought to honor the sacrifices of their friends, supporting the nation against continuing outside threats remained sacrosanct. To be sure, many veterans were suspicious of instrumental appeals to religion—especially those built upon a diffusive Judeo-Christian American identity. In addition, many were genuinely interested in religion for personal reasons as they sought to reestablish themselves in American society. In the end, however, cold war religious rhetoric emphasizing shared religious values against atheistic communism would not have gained traction had Americans not been receptive. Thus scholars must keep in mind the significance of the audience to the effectiveness of cold war era political and religious rhetoric.

In addition, the pressures of the cold war did help to unite a great number of religious Americans behind the US policy of containment, but for different reasons and with different goals in mind. For religious liberals, the success of turning aside Germany and Japan in the war convinced many that the US could properly function as a tool to usher in justice around the world. To some extent, this recapitulated the earlier projection of progressive-era ideals beyond US borders perhaps best demonstrated by Woodrow Wilson's international vision in World War I. Though the US largely retreated into isolation in the 1920s, the continuing threat of the USSR encouraged Americans to remain engaged in international affairs after World War II. Drawing from their wartime experiences, some veterans favored cooperative development efforts among nations to

strengthen susceptible societies to resist the appeal of communism—a stance that meshed with US policies such as supporting the World Bank. Protestantism largely defined previous efforts, but post-war ideals of interfaith cooperation brought together a wider base aided, in part, by a shift in perceived goals and united behind a broader American identity. Whereas earlier movements worked toward establishing the kingdom of God on Earth, post-war movements emphasized a more diffusive sense of shared humanity brought together by The American Way of Life and projected into the world.

Religiously conservative veterans also found grounds for continued international engagement. Most clearly, conservatives emphasized the way in which communist advances threatened religious liberty. Skeptical of potential entanglements through international cooperation, many conservatives still advocated US engagement in the world. In addition, conservatives differed from religious liberals by emphasizing individual freedom of religion over the improvement of societies—a goal many deemed futile in a sinful world. Just as they derided some military chaplains for lacking an evangelistic message, veterans in this camp hesitated to support idealistic international programs such as the United Nations, an organization heralded by liberals. At the same time, however, they sought to ensure safe spaces of religious freedom protected from hostile persecution. For evangelicals promoting individual salvation, such spaces provided room for evangelistic efforts.<sup>41</sup> For Catholics, such spaces room for church growth. Though clear suspicions and hostilities remained, this shared goal united many evangelicals and Catholics in their views on foreign policy, whether or not they would admit it. In the postwar context, this meant national governments needed to be protected

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<sup>41</sup> For ways in which evangelicals interpreted religious freedom and its preservation in terms of evangelistic opportunity, see: Pierard, “Pax Americana and the Evangelical Missionary Advance,” 156.



from the encroachment of communism, a philosophy long associated with hostility toward religious belief. In addition, many Americans feared that religious freedom within the US would be threatened if communism were allowed to spread unchecked.

The case of China illustrates forces that united those in the conservative camp. American missionaries, both Protestant and Catholic, had been active in China since the early nineteenth century with thousands at work by the 1920s. Though the relationship with local Chinese was often fractious, Christian missionaries maintained significant influence and were allied with Chiang Kai-shek, a Christian and the leader of the Chinese nationalist government in the 1920s through the 1940s. When communist forces led by Mao Zedong prevailed in 1949, however, the new government soon expelled foreign missionaries. Though this development was the result of a tangled web of religion, imperialism, and nationalism, the matter seemed much simpler in the minds of many Americans—the USSR was attacking religion through a communist puppet government in China.<sup>42</sup> In the early 1950s, developments in Korea cemented the idea that communism would continue to spread. As American political and military leaders embraced the policy of military containment of communism outlined in NSC-68, many religiously conservative veterans concurred. Such a policy seemed consistent to those who justified their own participation in World War II as a defense of the freedom of worship.

The experience of fighting in World War II influenced the ways in which returning veterans understood America's role in the world. The specter of international

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<sup>42</sup> On Protestant missionaries and US policy toward China, see also: Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960*, 157–189. On Roman Catholic missionaries in China and popular appeals to anticommunism, see: Dries, *The Missionary Movement in American Catholic History*, 161–4.

communism threatened that for which, they concluded, they and their friends had sacrificed—a conglomeration of ideals and shared identity expressed in shorthand as the American Way of Life. At the same time, many veterans continued a wartime habit of interpreting international events through a religious lens. For religious liberals who remained optimistic about humanity’s capacity for self-improvement, resisting communism first entailed international cooperative efforts designed to inoculate weakened societies against communist appeal.<sup>43</sup> For religious conservatives convinced of humanity’s inherent sinfulness, mere international diplomacy seemed inadequate to restrain evil apart from military power. As in the war, the foe could only be defeated through industrial and military might undergirded by the religious passion of a nation united under God. As the events of the late 1940s and 1950s unfurled, the mix of US foreign policies reflected these diverse views but was united by the shared goal of containing communism to protect the American Way of Life at home and to project its values abroad.

The experience military service during World War II shaped the religious worldviews of many Americans who served—a development that continued to shape religion in America after the war. In the military, soldiers and sailors had more freedom to determine their religious identities apart from the influence of home and amid a diversity of religious possibilities they encountered among their new peers. At the same

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<sup>43</sup> To a certain extent, internationally minded religious liberals also turned toward humanitarian programs, such as aspects of the Marshall Plan, as an alternative to evangelistic mission work after the war. Thus, the US government became a tool of the liberal vision of international mission work. See: Grant Wacker, “Second Thoughts on the Great Commission: Liberal Protestants and Foreign Missions, 1890-1940,” in *Earthen Vessels: American Evangelicals and Foreign Missions, 1880-1980*, ed. Joel A. Carpenter and Wilbert R. Shenk (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 296–7.

time, military life pressured some to engage in higher levels of religious reflection as they contemplated their religious commitments and sought to make sense of their experiences of war. To be sure, the war did not, on the whole, result in any deep revival of religious fervor nor did it result in massive religious disillusionment. The experience of war did, however, contribute to several significant—and sometimes opposing—trends. Some soldiers and sailors did experience religious renewal but not necessarily in the same terms. Some became convinced of the truthfulness of a particular tradition while others found new meaning in that which transcended traditional religious boundaries. Similarly, the pressures of religious difference forced many soldiers and sailors to define more clearly what they considered to be religious essentials. In so doing, many found new opportunities for religious cooperation, but some also fenced out those with conflicting beliefs. Where suitable professional religious leadership was lacking, some discovered their own talents for religious leadership. After the war, some became religious professionals themselves, but others questioned the necessity or utility of such professionals. As these veterans returned to civilian life, their experiences in war continued to shape the ways in which they interacted with religion. Even beyond the battle, the religious effects of war remained.

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