

2019

Enlisting Faith: How the Military Chaplaincy Shaped Religion and State in Modern America

Christopher Nelson

Ronit Y. Stahl

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Nelson, Christopher and Stahl, Ronit Y. (2019) "Enlisting Faith: How the Military Chaplaincy Shaped Religion and State in Modern America," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 72 : No. 2 , Article 18.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol72/iss2/18>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

attributed Patton's results simply to "daring . . . intuition . . . determination."

Morningstar chooses to differ. He quotes Brigadier General Oscar W. Koch, USA, Patton's chief intelligence officer, on this matter: "If one can call anticipation of enemy reactions based on a lifetime of professional training and on thinking and application 'intuition,' he had it" (p. 7). Morningstar argues that "Patton was one of the Army's few deep thinkers and an astute theoretician" (p. 16). He contends that Patton's theories were the subject of careful study of military history and geography and an understanding about the logic of power—in particular, the combination of time, space, and mass.

Patton rejected the U.S. Army doctrine of the day that emphasized firepower and attrition. In a sense, he was the rebel against the system that the George C. Scott movie presents. "Patton developed a new calculus of war: fire to enable maneuver, maneuver to create shock, shock to frustrate enemy decision-making, frustrate decision-making to destroy enemy morale, and destroy morale to collapse the enemy's will" (pp. 3–4). To do these things, Patton encouraged subordinate initiative, speed, and flexibility at the tactical levels. He relied on intelligence, not only to know where the enemy was but to get a sense of how a battle would unfold, which gave him an understanding of how to beat his adversary. As in the game of chess, he wanted to cut off his opponents' options and beat them before they had a chance to take action. Many contemporaries looked at what Patton was doing and failed to understand. Subordinate initiative looked like poor command and control. Maneuver and the application of firepower against lightly held

positions often made others think his units were never battle tested, which ignored the fact that he was not trying to get into an attritional engagement.

This book is one that every serious specialist of World War II should read. More importantly, it is an account that any individual involved in developing doctrine in any professional army—be it the U.S., British, or South Korean—should read, study, and consider carefully.

NICHOLAS EVAN SARANTAKES



Enlisting Faith: How the Military Chaplaincy Shaped Religion and State in Modern America, by Ronit Y. Stahl. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2017. 384 pages. \$39.95.

Ronit Y. Stahl, a professor of history at the University of California, Berkeley, has written a detailed and fascinating book on the American military chaplaincy. Of the piles of books on military topics that authors, historians, analysts, and academics publish each year, books on emergent military technology, historical battles, and biography dominate the stacks; religion and the chaplain corps responsible for tending to servicemembers' ecumenical needs tend to get short shrift. And when religious matters—and in particular chaplains—are written about, these works often focus on larger matters of ethics or morality in military service. Thus, it is welcome to see Stahl's scholarly work on a military specialty that is one of the smallest across all military services but whose effect on servicemembers and their culture is often directly inverse to its size.

Stahl begins the story in the early twentieth century, when the modern American

military chaplaincy constituted one of the World War I-era progressive reforms of the military services. It probably is not a surprise that in 1917 the American military chaplaincy involved three major religious groups: Catholicism, Judaism, and Protestantism. Stahl notes that what the U.S. government and U.S. military needed was ministers, priests, and rabbis to perform three vital functions for the servicemembers fighting in Europe: bury the dead, perform religious services, and provide training to military members.

At the crux of Stahl's story is a military with a chaplain corps that from its creation always has lived a precarious balance: the need to minister spiritually to the men and women in uniform while refraining from making the state a proponent of any one church or moral teaching. In fact, Stahl summarizes this quite nicely, saying, "When Americans live, fight, and die together, religion does not reside on the margins or evaporate from communal compounds. Instead, the military chaplaincy tries to navigate a careful course that enables religious practice without trampling on the rights of others or establishing a state religion" (p. 264).

Also, from the genesis of the chaplaincy to its current form, in each decade and during every war, there has been friction. Stahl walks the reader through these challenges, beginning in World War I with the building of a young chaplaincy in the services and simply efforts to recruit enough chaplains to administer ecumenical rites to thousands of servicemembers serving in Europe. From World War I and into the interwar years and through World War II, other issues arose. How should chaplains serve a segregated military? Which religions should the military officially

recognize, and how quickly should they do so? (Interesting fact: Stahl notes that we began with three religious groups and now the Department of Defense [DoD] recognizes 221 "faith group codes.") In World War II, questions of sex caused plenty of headaches among chaplains. With religious groups such as Catholicism advocating abstinence until marriage and prohibiting the use of prophylactics, how were Catholic chaplains to remain faithful to their church's teachings while realizing that DoD distributed condoms to servicemembers to minimize sexually transmitted diseases, with the goal of preserving an effective fighting force? These issues and others—female chaplains, homosexuality, grooming standards, food observances—have been contentious points for many religious groups.

Religious clashes were inevitable—and will continue to be. As Stahl notes, one of the long-standing points of friction is "the military's unbending insistence on the appearance of uniform bodies" (p. 252). Here, the professor, of course, is referring to years and years of prohibitive grooming standards or dress exemptions. The most well-known standards and exemptions are beards for Sikhs and yarmulkes for Jews. In 2014, DoD took additional steps to encourage commanders to give members of various religious groups the latitude to practice their beliefs and authorized beards, for instance, as long as they did not disrupt good order and discipline.

The only criticism I have about the book is that, frankly, it would have been interesting to read more about the role of the chaplaincy in the past twenty years. Stahl stays away from detailed analysis of anything after Vietnam. I suppose, however, that the Afghanistan

and Iraq wars deserve their own books on how religion and the chaplaincy shaped servicemembers who served in those conflicts. Also, as noted earlier, this is a scholarly work—it is detailed, includes extensive bibliographic notes, and, thankfully, has a fine index. Stahl's work is a great addition to any military chaplain's library and valuable to the military historian interested in understanding how sometimes the society that military members serve affects them in the most basic of human spheres—the spiritual and religious ones.

Ironically, Stahl's book shows that for religion, the military, and the men and women who are bound by a creed and worship something greater than themselves, the relationship among them is one that is always changing and evolving—sometimes contentiously. To paraphrase Stahl, the chaplaincy—a point of tension between church and state—will be a battleground in the future, as it has been in the past.

CHRISTOPHER NELSON



The 1st Infantry Division and the US Army Transformed: Road to Victory in Desert Storm, 1970–1991, by Gregory Fontenot. Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 2017. 526 pages. \$36.95.

Retired U.S. Army colonel Gregory Fontenot's excellent book details the transformation of the Army's famous 1st Infantry Division—"the Big Red One"—following the end of the Vietnam War and culminating in its combat success in the First Gulf War. Fontenot, a retired U.S. Army armor officer, is well qualified to write this book, having served in the division, including command of the 2nd Battalion, 34th Armor

before and during DESERT STORM. As the former commander of the Army's Battle Command Training Program (now called the Mission Command Training Program), he is an expert on collective military training. He is also a coauthor of the Army's initial history of the more recent Gulf War, *On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom* (Naval Institute Press, 2005).

Fontenot's latest book, *The 1st Infantry Division and the US Army Transformed*, begins with an Army racked with training and disciplinary problems at the end of the Vietnam War. Fontenot describes how senior Army leaders responded with a strategy designed to reestablish military standards by improving training programs and professional military education for officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) alike. Central to this was the development of the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, California. Located on a site larger than the state of Rhode Island, the NTC is a world-class training center with a robust opposing force, instrumented ranges, sufficient equipment, and a professional cadre of observer-controllers who watch every action throughout the training rotations. The adoption of and adherence to a rigorous and thorough after-action review process enables those participating in the training to improve on every aspect of their performance. Functioning not only as a training center that duplicates near-combat conditions for brigade-sized Army units, the NTC also integrates other service elements into its training rotations.

Fontenot then focuses his book on detailing the planning and preparation that enabled the 1st Infantry Division—as well as other combat units—to deploy successfully from the United States to