

## THE CRITICAL SHORTAGE OF MILITARY CHAPLAINS: ONE POSSIBLE SOLUTION<sup>4, 5</sup>

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### THE CHAPLAIN

The Office of the Chief Chaplain of the U.S. Army has published the mission of the military chaplain to be:

*Provide Religious support to America's Army across the full spectrum of operations. We do this by assisting the Commander in ensuring the right to free exercise of religion and by providing spiritual, moral, and ethical leadership for the Army*

Requirements to become a Chaplain are not complex for a minister of a recognized denomination or faith group (ULC Seminary, 2005):

1. *You must obtain an ecclesiastical endorsement from your faith group. This endorsement should certify that you are:*
  - a. *A clergy person in your denomination or faith group.*
  - b. *Qualified spiritually, morally, intellectually and emotionally to serve as a Chaplain in the Army.*
  - c. *Sensitive to religious pluralism and able to provide for the free exercise of religion by all military personnel, their family members and civilians who work for the Army.*
2. *Educationally, you must:*
  - a. *Possess a baccalaureate degree of not less than 120 semester hours.*
  - b. *Possess a master's degree in divinity or a graduate degree in theological studies, which includes at least 72 hours.*
3. *Be a U.S. citizen or permanent resident.*
4. *Be able to receive a favorable background check.*
5. *Pass a physical exam.*

In addition to conducting services, they provide personal counseling, lead suicide prevention and post-traumatic stress group seminars and take the lead as cultural educator (The Associated Press, 2007). Chaplain (Captain) Paul Douglas said that even non-religious soldiers sought him out for counseling and to serve as their advocate in dealing with superiors.

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## THE CHAPLAIN SHORTAGE

The military is currently experiencing a critical shortage of Chaplains both in deployed units and in the Reserve Forces at home. According to Chaplain (Lieutenant Colonel) Randall Dolinger, spokesman for the Office of the Army Chief of Chaplains, the military is short by about 520 chaplains, with 80 Regular Army vacancies and 440 openings in the National Guard (NG) and Reserves (Altamirano, 2007; Groening, 2007). He further states that the Army NG shortage is at 40-percent of their manning requirements (Syed, 2007; News as History, 2006). With more NG units being deployed, the shortage of NG Chaplains will become more critical (The Associated Press, 2007).

Further complicating matters, when a minister contemplates becoming a NG or Reserve chaplain, a different form of problem exists. This minister becomes a part time chaplain while remaining a full time civilian minister. In effect, the chaplain now has two congregations. Chaplain Dolinger points out that NG Chaplain candidates are told that they only need to serve one weekend a month, but "...ministers are usually pretty busy then — that's prime time. You can guarantee if a person comes into the reserves, in time they're going to be deployed" (Altamirano, 2007).

Although there is nothing in the literature to substantiate this, when a NG unit is deployed their command activates as many chaplains as they can to ensure that most units in the field have access to a chaplain. According to Lieutenant Colonel Maginnis "When we send a unit to Iraq or Afghanistan or elsewhere in the world, we like to have at the battalion level ... at least one chaplain." (Groening, 2007). In effect, this further reduces the number of chaplains remaining to minister to nondeployed units and family members. Maginnis further notes that to compensate for this "... we have local pastors that are serving as chaplains for units that are National Guard or Reserves from their local area..."

## THE JEWISH CHAPLAIN SHORTAGE

The Jewish Chaplain shortage in the military seems to be at least as severe as that for the general military chaplain force, perhaps greater (Temple Emanuel, Beaumont, TX., 2005).<sup>6</sup> One group of rabbis who would be willing to serve are from the Chassidic (i.e., Pious) Jewish community; however, they cannot due to U.S. Army grooming regulations prohibiting facial hair (*Army Study Guide*, 2005).

The only known exceptions to this grooming standard are Chaplain (Colonel) Jacob Goldstein (Goldstein, 2007; Popper, 2005) and Colonel Gopal Khalsa (Khalsa, 2007), both in the U.S. Army Reserve. Under provisions of Army Regulation 600-20 (*Army Study Guide*, 2005) exceptions based on religious practices that were given to soldiers in or prior to 1 January 1986 remain in effect as long as the soldier remains otherwise qualified for retention.

### The Chabad-Lubavitch Rabbi

Can the Chabad-Lubavitch Rabbi function as a Jewish Chaplain?

The Chabad-Lubavitch is a philosophy, a movement and an organization.

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<sup>6</sup> One of the authors remembers that in North Africa a Jewish Chaplain had to be flown in from Germany to conduct High Holy Day services (one for the New Year service and another for the Day of Atonement service). Although a local rabbi was authorized, few were competent in conversational English and their prayer books were in Hebrew, with French and Arabic translation.

Lubavitch means the "city of brotherly love." The word "Chabad" is a Hebrew acronym for the three intellectual faculties of: Chachmah - Wisdom; Binah - Comprehension; and Da'at - Knowledge. The movement's system of Jewish religious philosophy teaches understanding and recognition of the Creator, the role and purpose of Creation, and the importance and unique mission of each Creature. This philosophy guides its members to refine and govern his and her every act and feeling through wisdom, comprehension and knowledge derived from the study of Torah.

Within the Lubavitch community the Rabbi of a Chabad Center and his wife hold the titles of "Shliach" and "Shlucha." Where they serve, they bring with them certain qualities vitally essential to the mission: friendliness, affection, compassion, tolerance, self-sacrifice, utter devotion and selfless dedication. The Shliach of Chabad does not insist, he suggests; he does not criticize, he encourages; he does not preach down at people, he acts as a genuine equal and friend. Armed with these, as a Jewish Chaplain, he can immediately begin the work of providing spiritual and social support to the soldiers in his charge and, if needed, their families.

As a Jewish Chaplain the Chassidic Rabbi is prepared to:

- Conduct services for all Jewish military personnel assigned to his unit.
- Facilitate denominational and area religious services.
- Provide pastoral care and counseling for all soldiers and their families, if requested; such support is not based on religious dogma, it is driven by the heart.
- Perform hospital and home visits, as needed, for both the soldiers and their families.
- Serve as an advisor to the Commander on religious issues, morale and welfare, moral and ethical issues, and indigenous religions.
- Perform memorial services for all soldiers.
- Provide religious instruction for Jewish soldiers, each according to his or her need.

## **A POTENTIAL SOLUTION FOR THE JEWISH CHAPLAIN SHORTAGE**

The goal is to convince the U.S. Army to provide waivers for beards worn by clergy who are required by religious law and custom to retain their beards. This is not likely to happen simply by urging it on Army Command. What is needed is an approach within the military that demonstrates the value of a Chassidic Rabbi being commissioned and serving as a Chaplain. This approach should be applied in both directions, "bottom-up" as well as "top-down." How then to maximize awareness of this potential in order to enhance the ranks of the military chaplaincy?

### **An Experiment**

At the lowest level of the military echelon is the State Defense Force<sup>7</sup> (SDF), a volunteer, unpaid military unit reporting to the Governor. The SDF reports to its Governor through the state Adjutant General and is authorized under United States Code Title 32 (32 U.S.C., § 109., 1955). The Governor may mobilize the SDF; however, it cannot be federalized, as occurs regularly with the NG. In most states that have a SDF unit (typically a brigade or division) it is a member of the State Military Department. The principal mission of the SDF is to support its NG and, when the NG is deployed, to assist in performing the NG's homeland security mission, which includes mitigation of natural and manmade disasters. At present there are 22 SDF units (SGAUS, n.d.) plus three states that are in the process of seeking authorization to establish a SDF.

Although the SDF follows military rules and guidance, the leadership of many SDF units realize that it may necessary to provide an occasional waiver to those rules and guidance in order to accomplish their mission(s). The SDF also suffers from the shortage of Chaplains and to further complicate the situation they are often asked to provide temporary additional duty (TAD) to a SDF Chaplain in support of a NG unit in home quarters that no longer has one available due to a transfer of their chaplain to a deploying unit (Groening, 2007).

These conditions led to an experiment, an example of the "bottom-up" approach, wherein the Maryland SDF (MDDF) was asked to consider commissioning as a chaplain Rabbi Chesky Tenenbaum, a Rabbi of the Chabad Lubavitch of Upper Montgomery County, Maryland. Chaplain [(Lieutenant Colonel (MD)] Charles Nalls, Command Chaplain of the MDDF expressed an interest in the possibility (Nalls, 2007). He consulted with Chaplain (Colonel) William Lee, Command Chaplain of the Maryland National Guard Joint Force Headquarters who agreed that a Jewish Chaplain would be desirable and that the MDNG could benefit by the chaplain being placed on TAD with some of its units. A decision was made to proceed and the interviewing and vetting process was initiated. The result was positive and Chaplain Nalls requested a waiver to the grooming standards to permit Rabbi Tenenbaum to be commissioned with his beard.

On 26 November 2007, Rabbi Tenenbaum was commissioned as Chaplain [(Captain (MD)] Chesky Tenenbaum into the MDDF (Hershkowitz, 2007; Greenberg, 2007; Kresge, 2007; Montes, 2007; Zaklikowski, 2007). This appointment is unique as it is the very first throughout the SDF. The experiment was a success.

### **Expanding the Experiment into a Program**

The authors discussed the possibility of expanding the successful experiment to other SDF units around the country by capitalizing on the MDDF's move to commission the first Chassidic Rabbi as a SDF Chaplain (Tenenbaum, 2007). The decision was to contact the Aleph-Institute, a Lubavitch Chabad affiliated national 501(c)(3) organization committed to providing spiritual and social guidance for individuals who are separated from family and friends, with the following missions (Aleph Institute, n.d.):

#### *Providing critical social services to families in crisis*

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<sup>7</sup> According to the dictates of the state legislature, the State Defense Force may be otherwise named the State Guard, the State Military Reserve or the State Guard Reserve; however, all are the same although their missions may differ in accordance with the vulnerability of the state to natural or manmade disasters.

*Addressing the pressing religious, educational, humanitarian and advocacy needs of individuals in institutional environments*

*Implementing solutions to significant issues relating to our criminal justice system, with an emphasis on families, faith-based rehabilitation and preventive ethics education.*

In addition to these missions the Aleph Institute also has been recognized as an official Ecclesiastical Endorsing Agency by the U.S. Department of Defense to endorse Jewish Chaplains for the military (The Aleph Report, n.d.; Popper, 2006).

Rabbi Menachem Katz, Director of Programs for the Aleph Institute, concurred that the SDF Chaplain initiative would be of interest to the Institute and would support the effort to supply Jewish Chaplains to SDF units (Katz, 2007). Chaplain (Colonel) Sanford Dresin (USA-Ret), appointed Director of the Aleph Institute's Military Programs and Ecclesiastical Endorsing Agent in January 2006, would lead their part of the effort.

#### *NEXT STEPS*

The following SDF units were selected for the next phase: California, Georgia, New York, Texas and Washington State. Following discussions with key individuals in each SDF unit all decided to pursue obtaining a Jewish Chaplain in the same manner as the MDDF. Given how many chaplains were desired and in what cities, the Aleph Institute prepared a list of Chabad Lubavitch Rabbis interested in performing community service in a military environment and had each rabbi contact the designated SDF point of contact to initiate the process in that state. The results to this date are:

- Georgia State Defense Force (GSDF), following the MDDF decision, held a swearing-in ceremony for Rabbi S. Zalman Lipskier on 2 December 2007, to be commissioned Chaplain [(Captain (GA))] upon completion of an officer's indoctrination course, which took place on 2 March 2008 (Sherman, 2008). The GSDF Commanding General, Brigadier General (GA) Michael McGuinn, personally conducted the recruitment and the state Adjutant General, Major General William Nesbitt granted the waiver to the grooming standard. General McGuinn has requested another candidate.
- Maryland Defense Force (MDDF) is interviewing a second Chassidic Rabbi as a candidate for a Chaplain's post.
- New York Guard (NYG) has vetted one Jewish Chaplain and has requested another candidate.
- Washington State Guard (WASG) has interviewed four Chassidic Rabbi candidates thus far and plans to continue until they get at least one candidate to commission.
- Texas State Guard (TXSG) has asked for up to four candidates to begin the interview process.
- California State Military Reserve (CASMR) is looking into the potential for commissioning a Jewish Chaplain.

- Learning about Maryland's and Georgia's decision to commission a Chassidic Rabbi and that other SDF units are in the process convinced the South Carolina State Guard (SCSG) to consider following their lead and has requested at least one candidate.
- Members of the Ohio Military Reserve (OHMR), Alaska State Defense Force and Alabama State Defense Force have suggested that their Command Chaplains learn about this potential for increasing their staff of Chaplains.

Clearly, America's SDF units have a need for Jewish Chaplains. In those states where the NG seeks their SDF's support, a TAD of a SDF Chaplain to their NG helps to satisfy the non-deployed NG's shortage of chaplains. It would not be a surprise to successfully complete this Program with most of the nation's SDF units having at least one Jewish Chaplain with a beard.

## PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Assume that the success of the Program leads to many NG Brigades taking advantage of the availability of SDF bearded Jewish Chaplains to assist in resolving, at least in part, their shortage of Jewish Chaplains. The next step should be to petition the National Guard Bureau to consider a revised policy to permit a waiver of the facial hair grooming standard. Such a decision would also be welcomed by religious leaders of other groups, such as Moslems and Sikhs, who are also prevented from serving due to the facial hair grooming standard.

The U.S. Army Reserve offers another target of value, especially so since two senior officers currently serve with facial hair waivers, Chaplain (Colonel) Goldstein and Colonel Khalsa.

The SDF, in the past, had been resistant to bringing bearded Rabbis into their ranks. The need has finally overcome the concern, leading to Command waivers to permit Rabbis with beards to serve as Chaplains. There are already two such waivers in effect and seven more in some stage of the process. Likewise, some NG Brigades will now see bearded chaplains courtesy of their SDF unit. Hard work and the future will tell the story.

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