



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
2000 NAVY PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20350-2000

IN REPLY REFER TO

APR 15 1999

Building Our Future Together
Occasional Thoughts: Innovative Use of Technology

Dear Chaplain:

If I mentioned the term "channel surfing," I'm willing to venture that most of you could identify. How could we ever live without those remote control units that afford us the luxury of reclining in our La-Z-Boy while making our selections for the type of entertainment we choose for the evening? I've grown so accustomed to flicking the button, that it would be a major irritation to have to actually get up and manually change the channel! Who of us hasn't clicked the remote only to discover the batteries were dead? What a major disappointment! It is an understatement to point out that we have come a long way from the 13-station dial-up.

A couple of weeks ago, I was channel surfing through the myriad of cable choices when I landed on the American Movie Classics channel. There, on my screen, was one of my all time favorite feature films: "Sergeant York." As this WWI classic was just beginning, I was once again captured for the next two hours. I had seen this movie more times than I could count. I know the plot and characters all too well, and each time I find I'm irresistibly drawn to this magnificent story. What a great way to spend an evening, watching Medal of Honor recipient Alvin York (played by Gary Cooper) struggle with some of life's more difficult decisions, and being gently guided and counseled by his pastor (played by Walter Brennan). York agonized over his decision to accept his draft notice, knowing this would send him overseas and into harm's way all too soon where he might have to kill another human being. It would be a test of his recent religious conversion, a conversion in which he was unwillingly ushered down the aisle of a Tennessee backwoods church, while the congregation sang, "Give Me That Old Time Religion." As I watched the drama unfold, I was once again reminded that "That Old Time Religion," which was good enough for the likes of Alvin York, is still relevant and good enough for those we serve today.

York discovered a whole new circle of folks when he left his mountain hide-away. The same holds true for us with each and every assignment. Indeed, we are a diverse group of clergy, representing many faith traditions, yet we share a common vision. That vision is a "future in which the lives of men and women will be strengthened and their spirits soar in the knowledge that there is a God who loves them and who ensures their worth and

value." That means hope within the reach of everyone in the Sea Services family. A sense of worth and value is a force multiplier to the command. Instrumental in instilling that sense of self-worth for Alvin York was his pastor, as was York's commanding officer at Fort Gordon, Georgia.

As force multipliers today, the requirements for that old time religion are just as relevant. We stand at the threshold of new forms of providing ministry. A crucial and vital means is to capitalize on the innovative use of personal computers (PCs) and the absolutely staggering amount of material available through information technology (IT). In fact, these acronyms have become part of our everyday speech. I shared in a previous letter that technology is shifting the way we conduct business and the way we perform ministry. Technology is transforming everything from how, when and where we shop, to the communication and reception of information. Technology has made our world a smaller place. It is literally at our fingertips. Through our Chaplain Resource Board (CRB) we have the ability to communicate with the entire Chaplain Corps by use of e-mail. Furthermore, the CRB can provide the Chaplain Corps' resources for most any religious ministry program need. Today, through the Internet, distance learning, off-site training, and non-resident courses are as close as your PC keyboard.

Technology further enables us to expand our ministry of hope to the men and women we serve in the Sea Services. I can envision a day in the near future when our chaplains will be able to quickly and clearly communicate with the front lines at home. The Logistics Advisory Group (LAG) of the Armed Forces Chaplains Board (AFCB) is presently overseeing the testing of a lap-top sight/audio/video telecommunications unit we may one day be using in the field. In addition, most of you are aware that LAG (in cooperation with the Defense Supply Center Philadelphia (DSCP), and the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA)), in January, brought on-line a new "Ecclesiastical Electronic E-mail Supply Ordering System" that has been two years in the making. This electronic "e-mail" system will revolutionize the way you procure your supplies. Think of it! From any worldwide ashore or afloat location, you can order your religious materials via DSCP, electronically procuring commercial items at significant discount right off the web. And not only purchase these items, you will also be able to download a picture of the product, a description of its use, and other elective choices. But wait, there's more! When your order is received via DSCP and passed on electronically to the prime vendor contractor at day's end, the prime vendor then has 14 days to have the materials in your hands! No more waiting 60 to 90 days for turn around on supplies. Giving you what you need to support "that old time religion" has been streamlined. Investigate <http://ct.dscp.dla.mil/ctinfo/mig49/>.

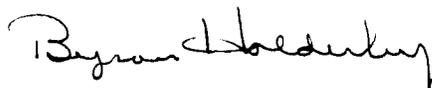
So what has that "old time religion" come to? As the world shrinks through technological advancement, the availability of religious ministry resources will enrich us all as we care for our Sea Services men and women. I see the day when an Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) sets sail from the East Coast enroute to an emergent MOOTW (military operation other-than-war) assignment in the European theater. In this scenario, what is clearly needed is specialized ministry resources and information for the chaplain in support of the operation. Within hours the CRB would pull together a Crisis Action Team (CAT) composed of chaplains and RPs who link, download, and ship a ministry support package that will await the command chaplain as they "chop" into the Mediterranean. Are we really able to do this, you ask? Yes! Technology gives us the ability to put a "word of hope" within reach of almost 400,000 Sea Services people.

Some of you may remain skeptical. I can appreciate that. We've seen programs come and programs go. However, I believe this is truly different. The changes we are experiencing in the technological world are redefining the way we not only conduct ministry today, but it is the means by which we will remain effective in the future. Not everyone has a PC. Consider the fact that only a handful of people had a telephone one hundred years ago. Few people had television sets fifty years ago. Those few people today who do not have these basic items choose not to have them. They're certainly available! And they are tools we all use in our personal and professional lives. The personal computer, I believe, is in the same category.

Have you thought about the way telephones have stayed the same, yet changed? We no longer pick up the receiver and ring for the operator to connect our call. With the advent of cell phones, satellites, fiber optics, one-touch calling, voice-activation and so on, we can now send or receive calls from anywhere, anytime. But even with all the advances, it still functions as a phone.

Where technology will take us in the future I cannot profess to know. The future is bright with possibilities for the Chaplain Corps and its use of information technology systems. We are a people of hope. We have the message of hope. And we need to use every available means to get this message of hope to our shipmates. So, let's give them "that old time religion" just like we always have - only now we can do it smarter and quicker!

God bless you all in your service for God and country.



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