

“The Human Face of Warfare “

by

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Effective ministry depends, in part, on a knowledgeable understanding of the audience. Effective chaplain ministry then depends, at least in part, upon the chaplains' knowledge of their warrior audience. How do we minister to the Sailor/Marine of the twenty-first century? For that matter, how will chaplains minister in general in the military of the twenty-first century? Where will chaplains be located on the battlefield? What role will they play in the training of that Sailor or Marine? Evans and Ryan's volume, a compilation of essays submitted for the inaugural international conference of the Australian Army's Land Warfare Studies Centre held in March 1999, suggests some possible answers. Focused on the human dimension of the profession of arms, these essays provide a rich forum for discussion by chaplains of many subjects that are of importance to relevant ministry programs for our next generation of combatants.

The introduction sets the tone for the entire collection of essays. It disputes the widely held belief that wars will soon be fought mainly with technological means and limited human involvement. In spite of a nation's best intentions to limit its military's human involvement, the essays contend there will always be a human face of warfare. From this foundational premise, chaplains can build the case for the necessity of a vibrant, relevant Command Religious Program. If there will always be a human dimension involved in twenty-first century warfare, then there will always be a need of chaplains to minister to those humans faced with warfare.

The first chapter is entitled, "Human Factors in War: The Psychology and Physiology of Close Combat." Since only a handful of today's chaplains can claim any "combat ministry experience," this chapter is a must read for the rest of us who need to understand the horror of actual combat. Twenty-first century conflict, as well as peacekeeping missions, will affect the individual combatant, as well as the society to which that combatant returns, in more negative ways than the combat of any previous generation. Consider this statistic, because of intentional conditioning in our combat training, the rate of fire per combatant has risen from 15-20 percent in WW II to 95% in Vietnam. The implication of that statistic means almost everyone will fire his or her weapon at the enemy with the intent to kill during twenty-first century combat. However, research also suggests that the psychological damage done to the Sailor/Marine will also increase proportionately. The essay's author connects much of that psychological damage to the phenomenon of "blood guilt" which refers to a soldier's vague, but deep sense of responsibility and regret after taking a life whether "the kill" was from 30,000 feet or 3 feet. It's a deeper issue than a question of "just war." It's the feeling that most emotionally, spiritually healthy humans acquire when they kill someone no matter what the reason.

How do chaplains respond to “blood guilt” amongst their personnel? Will a Sunday morning Confession and Absolution during the liturgy be sufficient to assuage it? WWII and Vietnam have taught us that the intensity of the guilt must be at least matched by the intensity of the forgiveness. This essay leads us to reflect on how we put that kind of axiom to work in an effective, practical way – both for the individual Sailor/Marine and for the affected command.

In another chapter, entitled “Public Perception of Bearable Cost in a Democracy,” the authors examine the power of media, especially its ability to influence public opinion on the question of the validity of a particular conflict. Specifically, twenty-first century public opinion will ascertain the “justness” of a military cause utilizing criteria such as anticipated length and the likelihood of success. Defense of the homeland will almost always garner support for public approval. However, a humanitarian relief effort in an obscure country will be a hard sell unless leveraged by the weight of well-placed “video-bytes” in the evening news. An even more troubling trend for the future is suggested by a statistic in this chapter, which reveals that private security personnel outnumber military, and police personnel combined in the United States. It would seem the public is more interested in personal security than national security.

How does the chaplain help a Lance Corporal affirm the need for honor, courage and commitment when that Lance Corporal’s family is vocally critical of the President’s decision to send him or her in harm’s way? How does the chaplain assist the command with unit cohesion when public opinion is actively opposed to the command’s upcoming mission? Of course, these questions are somewhat theoretical and may have been encountered before. But, there’s more. The chapter raises other twenty-first century issues that will affect public opinion, as well as the chaplain’s role in the unit. For example, the chapter raises the question of growing public and military distrust of the government’s management of the military. Are there other defense secretaries who will come forward later to apologize for mismanagement of the military in combat? What will be the public reaction to body bags containing female casualties? How much weight should be assigned, if any, to public opinion in the military mission decision-making process?

The chapter on peacekeeping missions and post-traumatic stress disorder is brief, but its lesson should not be neglected. Critical Incident Stress Management will play an increasingly important role in chaplain ministry. Our own personnel who see themselves from the outset of such a mission as rescuers will suddenly find themselves victimized by the horrors of man’s inhumanity. Who will be there to rescue them when they return to the command? Many chaplains have received a two-day CISM basic course, but which of us have taken the time to further equip ourselves to minister effectively in a peacekeeping mission gone awry? CISM teaches that training for disaster effectively enables crisis workers to counteract at least some of the effects of the crisis. Yet, many chaplains sadly share the challenges they have faced in selling the command on the importance of such training.

Chapters with titles like “Women as Killers and Killing Women,” “Stress on Higher Commanders in Future Warfare,” and “Human factors in Field Training for Battle: Realistically Reproducing Chaos” are rich with ethical implications for chaplain ministry in the 21st century. If you don’t have time to read the entire book, the final chapter summarizes each of the essays succinctly. Consider this book a must read if

you're a command chaplain tasked with seasoning young chaplains. If you're a young chaplain newly assigned to an operational unit, consider this book an essential start in your effort to understand what one essayist has coined as the study of "killology." Remember the book's premise. There will always be a human face of warfare. So there must always be a chaplain prepared to minister to the humans faced with warfare.