

# Chaplains: A Light on the Battlefield



A U.S. Army soldier, part of 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, patrols in Iraq's Diyala River Valley. Military chaplains minister to soldiers who face hidden threats daily—not only in combat, but also in their personal lives.

Photo by MC2 Walter J. Pels

## Chaplain Steve Taylor Brings Hope and Comfort to U.S. Soldiers and Families



Chaplain Capt. Steve Taylor, U.S. Army, shares with soldiers.

Photo courtesy of U.S. Army

Story by Debra Smith

In 2003, Steve Taylor was a successful businessman who had been part of CC Spring Valley in Las Vegas, NV, for three years. Sensing that the Lord was calling him and his family into full-time ministry, Steve formulated a plan: *Since I'm making so much money, he thought, I'll just retire early and be a self-funded missionary.* One day, though, he felt God prompt him to consider, "Where's the risk in that?"

While pondering the fateful question, Steve realized that his plan kept him inside his comfort zone—instead of relying on God. "We had seen the Lord's faithfulness over the six years we had known Him," Steve said of himself and his wife Shannon. When their twin boys were born in 1999, "We went from a double-income family of two to a single-income family of four," he recalled. Having experienced God's provision for them then, the couple decided to trust Him again. Steve resigned from his job and enrolled as an Army chaplain candidate. He spent the next five years teaching at a university, which allowed him flexibility to study for the requisite seminary degree, and became a chaplain in April 2008.

### Storms in Iraq

With his family safely in Las Vegas, NV, Steve left for his first deployment in September 2008. He was sent to Camp Cropper, one of several bases then clustered in and around Baghdad, Iraq. On Easter 2009, Steve and four other chaplains planned a joint resurrection service. Expecting a larger turnout than their facilities would allow, the chaplains opted to hold the service outside. However, "Dust storms were common," said Steve. "The day prior, Easter was marked as a 'red day,' meaning there was a high chance of storms."

By 5 a.m., "We were outside, putting finishing touches on the 7 a.m. service," recalled

Steve. "But we could see dark clouds rolling in." A half-hour later, the chaplains surrendered the remaining tasks to their assistants and rallied together to pray. "We huddled and asked the Lord for opportunity to minister that morning," said Steve. "About 45 minutes later, the wind shifted—carrying away a huge, dark cloud of dust and rain." Soon nearly 400 gathered, under a strange-colored grayish sky, for the service. "We could see dust swirls in the distance," Steve said. "Behind us, to the left and right—the storm encircled but wasn't exactly over us. God gave us that window of time, without interruption. ... That did not go unnoticed by the attendees."

According to Steve, literal physical storms are not the only type faced by soldiers at war. Deployments, he said, often strain families and intensify temptations toward adultery and pornography. Desiring to "help soldiers find strength in Christ to resist these things," Steve began a small group at Camp Cropper called Men of Integrity. He said one particular man found the study "instrumental in

helping him understand his wife's needs and what his priorities should be."

Tyson Kartler met Steve through their weekly Mexican dinner group. To remind them of home, Tyson said, "A few of us had beans and tortillas shipped in." One evening over their burritos, Steve shared his vision for Men of Integrity. Though Tyson knew the Lord, "Over the last few years, I had stiff-armed God," he commented. "I kept Him at a distance." However, Tyson decided to join the group. "It was a big turning point for me," he recalled. Through the study, Tyson said he vividly realized, "God doesn't ask things of me—He commands things." Due to the Army's intensely hierarchical structure, Tyson was impacted strongly by the insight. "In the military, when you want to question things, you don't," he said. "You do exactly as you're told. God sees things from a different perspective and really knows what's best," he continued. "If we see something we think is better than God's way, it's not really. That has stuck with me."



Photo courtesy of U.S. Army

Steve is one of several Calvary Chapel-endorsed pastors serving as a military chaplain. After a brief first assignment at Fort Lewis, WA, Steve deployed to Camp Cropper, one of several former U.S. Army bases near Baghdad, Iraq.

Soon after Tyson returned from Iraq, his wife left him and filed divorce papers. Tyson is currently fighting for his marriage and holding onto hope—"I'm expecting and praying she will come back," he said. "I don't

think I would be able to do that if I hadn't been in that group," he added. "I think I would have gotten angry and given up. I have a lot more patience than before. I still need more, but that study helped me grow."

## Becoming a Chaplain

**CC Costa Mesa, CA, became an endorsing organization for chaplains in 2007, which opened a new area of ministry to the U.S. Military.**

"We saw this as a great opportunity to provide pastors dedicated to teaching God's Word to those defending our country, who are putting their lives on the line to protect our freedom," stated Roger Wing, director of Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowships (CCOF).



Roger Wing

CC Costa Mesa, CA, has given CCOF the responsibility of processing applications and approving candidates for military chaplaincy. "We see these men as senior pastors with a uniquely focused congregation of men and women on military bases throughout the world," Roger continued. "CCOF helps prepare and qualify Calvary Chapel candidates for these chaplaincy assignments." CCOF also supports churches worldwide by assisting pastors and fellowships that desire to join the Calvary Chapel movement, providing resources to help CC pastors, and hosting an annual Senior Pastors Conference.

"Embracing the chaplaincy was a logical extension of what we do to support pastors," said Roger. "This opportunity provided a whole new field of ministry for Calvary Chapel, which is now a recognized ministry group for military chaplains to align with in their service," Roger added. A man from any Calvary Chapel can serve as a military chaplain after completing the CCOF application process, being officially recognized by CC Costa Mesa, and being hired by the U.S. military. Both full-time and reserve positions are available.

### The Profile: Who Can Serve?

Retired U.S. Navy Chaplain Dave Starkey helps Calvary Chapel appoint chaplains by serving as the organization's authorized endorsing agent. Both Dave and Roger agree that Calvary Chapel is looking for chaplain candidates of the highest caliber, with confidence and initiative. "You need to be secure in your calling," explained Dave, who was a chaplain for 28 years. "People will challenge your position, suggesting chaplains are not needed. Many of the locations are lonely. People may not like you, but you must be ready to minister to people in these situations. It may be their last opportunity to hear the Gospel as they head to the battlefield." As a chaplain, he added, "You'll have the opportunity to minister to a variety of personnel, from the lowest level enlisted to 4-star generals, on the fundamentals of the Gospel and the theological issues of our time. You need to be well grounded in the Word of God, have the ability to relate well to people, and be a self-starter."

### The Requirements

The government's chaplaincy requirements fall into three categories: physical, educational, and experiential. Physically, applicants must be fit and are most likely to be accepted if they are about 40 or younger—preferably in their 20s or 30s, Roger said. Educationally, a Master's of Divinity or similar master's degree is needed. The military also requires a minimum of two years of pastoral experience.

"There are no shortcuts," emphasized Dave. "The chaplaincy is not a time to learn to be a pastor. When you walk into the posi-

### Thinkers Welcome Here

Steve said that because of Camp Cropper's intelligence-gathering mission, it was a magnet base for "particularly intellectual, and sometimes skeptical, soldiers." To teach

tion, you need to have that experience preaching, teaching, doing hospital visitations, and leading memorial services. You must be able to step immediately into crisis situations as people's spiritual resource."

### The Process

If one feels called by the Lord, the first step is to email CCOF. After preliminary qualification, CCOF will send each applicant an information packet and Dave Starkey will contact him to learn about his ministry vision and level of experience. Those with or without graduate degrees or pastoral experience should contact CCOF before pursuing any training or experience specifically in preparation for chaplaincy. Establishing contact with CCOF first is important since becoming qualified often takes years, and Roger, Dave, and the applicant's church can provide vital guidance through the process. During his preparation, the candidate must maintain fellowship and be actively involved in ministry in a Calvary Chapel.

CC Costa Mesa's status as an endorsing organization also qualifies it to provide the government chaplains for other federal agencies, such as federal prisons and veteran's hospitals. While educational prerequisites vary slightly, the process and requirements are similar.

### CC Outreach Fellowships

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the Bible in a relevant way in this context, Steve used The Truth Project, a 12-session video course designed by Focus on the Family. By using a biblical lens to examine diverse topics such as economics, history, and biology, the curriculum seeks to instill what it terms a biblical worldview—an ability to look at every aspect of life with God-given insight. "People were very attentive and took lots of notes," Steve said. "I could see lights going on in people's heads. Many seemed to be realizing for the first time that it's okay to bring curiosity to God, that His Word can stand up to examination, that being a Christian doesn't entail checking your brain at the door."

### Brokers of Hope

A chaplain's role, Steve explained, is to serve both Armed Forces members and their families. "We're charged with bringing God to soldiers and soldiers to God," he said. "We

go where they are and minister to them and their families." One evening shortly after arriving at his current duty station in Fort Bragg, NC, Steve received a call from a soldier's wife. Her husband, who was stationed overseas, had stopped providing for her and their two young sons. Arriving at her home, Steve said he was distraught to find "an American soldier's family living in squalor." With chaplaincy funds, "We were able to help her put food on the table, and I got to pray with her. Later, God allowed us to help them have a Christmas celebration," he said. "That kind of thing is more the norm than the exception," he continued. "As chaplains, we're called to be brokers of hope—bridging the gap between desperation and hope." ✍

*Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.* Romans 15:13



Steve baptizes SPC Jennifer MacMillan at Camp Cropper, near Baghdad, Iraq.

Photo by Kristen Platero



The sun sets behind a C-17 as soldiers wait in line to board the aircraft, taking them from Iraq back to the United States. Chaplains like Steve help soldiers and their families handle the difficult challenges they face when they get back home.

Photo by Tech. Sgt. Erik Gudmundson/U.S. Air Force