

Finding Faith in the Battlefield

United States military chaplains hold positions in the Armed Forces of the United States and are charged with conducting religious services and providing counseling for their adherents. The Chaplain Corps dates back to July 1775, when the Continental Congress authorized one chaplain for each regiment of the Continental Army, with pay equaling that of a captain. Since 1789, the U.S. government has required chaplains to hold positions in the army, federal prisons, and the Veterans Administration. Chaplains are commissioned officers stationed wherever there are military members, including combat environments. They are non-combatants and do not bear arms. Each denomination provides their Chaplains with a Chaplain Kit to offer Baptism, Communion and Blessing to the dying. Chaplains are charged to nurture the living, care for the wounded and honor the fallen. A chaplain's mission is to bring soldiers to God and God to soldiers, of any faith tradition.

After the surprise attack on the United States Naval Base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on December 7, 1941, thousands of men and women enlisted to serve in the Army and Navy. Before December 7, 1941, the Army had only 137 Chaplains on active duty and the Navy had 105. Recruiting additional Chaplains for the US Armed Forces was one way to sustain the morale of the military personnel. However, recruitment of Chaplains was difficult since clergy could not be drafted, and the military (by law) had to rely on the various religious denominations and their ordination and licensing councils to do the recruiting for them. by the end of World War II, 8,896 chaplains had served in the U.S. Army.

Among them was the Rev. Morris F. Arnold, ordained as an Episcopal priest in 1940, enlisted in the Army Chaplain School in March 1943, commissioned as 1st. Lieutenant and served in the European Theater, landing on Utah Beach, Normandy, France on D-Day, June 6, 1944. Utah Beach was one of the five landing areas along the Normandy Coast of France. Utah was chosen because of the shallow waters and low-lying dunes, which were not heavily defended. D-Day was the start of the campaign to liberate Europe and defeat Germany.

Chaplain Captain Arnold arrived on Utah beach, initially riding a Jeep off the Landing Ship Tank (LST). But the Jeep rolled over in the surf and Lt. Arnold fell into the sea and swam to retrieve his Chaplain Kit. (on display) He succeeded in climbing up the low-lying dunes to safety. He was promoted to Captain

Chaplain on 1/20/1944. Captain Chaplain continue to minister to soldiers in Normandy France until he was seriously injured and shipped back to the US in April 1945. He continued to celebrate Communion with the soldiers on the troop train en route to California. Upon his recovery and discharge from the Army, Rev. Arnold returned to active parish ministry for 27 years. He was a leader in the national Episcopal Church and in 1972 he was elected Suffragan Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, titled, The Right Reverend Morris F. Arnold, known as "Gentle Ben" to his friends.

In his retirement Bishop Arnold became a Mentor to the Rev. Carol Flett after she was ordained in 1988. They became close colleagues and Bishop Arnold gave Rev. Flett his WWII Chaplain Kit, which she used to bring Communion to the sick in hospitals and residents of Nursing Homes for years. She was with Ben when he died in 1992.

Description of the Chaplain Kit

This Chaplain Kit was designed and issued by the Episcopal Church and given to Episcopal priests who were serving as Chaplains in WWII. It was designed to fit on the hood of an Army Jeep, and the Christian flag and the Jewish flag would be attached to the Jeep's antennae. The kit weighs 17 pounds and is a bit awkward to carry while walking. (21st c. Chaplain Kits are much smaller and lighter.) The kit appears as an ordinary suitcase of its day. When this kit was opened up and set up as an Altar on a tabletop or Jeep hood, it provided sanctified time and space for prayer on the battlefield or at a Base.

The Chaplain Kit includes the linens, elements and Vestments to celebrate Holy Communion or Holy Baptism: a Cross; a Chalice; a Ciborium - covered round container to hold the consecrated Eucharistic bread; a Lavabo bowl - for washing the priest's hands prior to consecrating the bread and wine, and possibly for Baptism; a Paten - small plate used for holding the bread during the consecration and as a cover for the Chalice; two candlesticks; two flagons - bottles for wine and water.

It was issued to the Rev. Morris F. Arnold, Army Chaplain, the Rev. Morris F. Arnold, an Episcopal priest, who enlisted in the Army in March 1943, commissioned as 1st. Lieutenant and served in the European Theater, landing on Utah Beach, Normandy, France on D-Day, June 6, 1944. Utah Beach was one of the five landing areas along the Normandy Coast of France. Utah was chosen because of the shallow waters and low-lying dunes, which were not heavily defended. D-Day was the start of the campaign to liberate Europe and defeat Germany. He was injured in 1945 and shipped back to the US for medical care.

Dimensions when closed: 24" long; 13" wide; and 8" tall.

When set up as an Altar it becomes 19" tall.

It weighs 17 lbs.