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**The Voice for Chaplaincy - Chartered by Congress - Serving Since 1925**

## **Weekly Newsgram - January 9th 2019**

### **Happy 40th Birthday Navy Religious Program Specialists**



The religious program specialist (RP) rating officially celebrates its 40th birthday Jan. 15.

The concept of a chaplain's assistant dates back to 1878, when a committee of chaplains recommended to the Navy Department that a chaplain's assistant be assigned to each ship wherever a chaplain was aboard. This assistant would have been a schoolmaster who could play organ music and lead singing.

Although the recommendation was not adopted, the idea was given support by successive generations of chaplains.

In 1942, the Navy Department established the specialist (W) rating to assist Navy chaplains. (W) referred to welfare and was intended only to last for the duration of World War II.

Specialist (W) qualifications included the ability to play the piano and organ for religious services and other gatherings, and to be a competent choir director. Specialists (W) did not exercise any of the ministerial functions of the clergy, and were not expected to serve as religious leaders.

Before RP's, chaplains assigned with Marines only had temporary support, typically only in wartime. However, the Marine Corps understood the need to create and retain these Specialists. In February 1942, before the Navy established the RP rating, the Marine Corps created the specialty known as the chaplain's assistant (ssn 534). The first Marine to receive the new classification was Gilbert Dean Arnold, who was made a master technical sergeant.

The quest for a permanent rating for all naval services was finally approved on 15 January 1979, when the Secretary of the Navy established the Religious Program

Specialist (RP) rating. Since 1979, RPs have served with Chaplains and fought alongside Marines through all major conflicts. They play a vital role in supporting the Navy and Marine Corps Team in combat and in garrison. RPs have a strong commitment to excellence and dedicated service.

Today, religious program specialists are afforded a greater variety of duty assignments, including serving aboard numerous types of naval vessels and tours of duty with the Navy Seabee, Fleet Marine Force units and Coast Guard.

Religious Program Specialist is one of the smallest ratings in the Navy, consisting of fewer than 700 Sailors. Though the RP rating was created to support clergy of all faiths in the facilitation of religious activities, today RP duties include providing physical security to chaplains in the field, publicizing their command's religious activities, maintaining religious facilities, and operating and maintaining libraries.

Congratulations Religious Program Specialists and thank you for your commitment to professional service for all.

## In Memoriam



### **Chaplain John McNeil**

Captain, United States Navy, Retired

born 1935

deceased December 31, 2018

Roman Catholic

Waltham, Massachusetts

### **Chaplain Joseph Radvansky**

United States Navy, Retired

born February 28, 1933

deceased December 25, 2018

Roman Catholic

Parma, Ohio

### **Chaplain Milton Trawick**

United States Navy, Retired

born January 8, 1932

deceased November 7, 2018

Baptist

Summerdale, Alabama

## Director of Religious Education Rad Elwyn Reavis

DOD Civilian, Retired  
born August 31, 1935  
deceased January 3, 2019  
Madison, Alabama

### Executive Director Notes



This will be a short "time travel" column: To go back to last week's column, our sharp-eyed Vice President, Chaplain Dave DeDonato, caught a small but significant slip-up in the column when I noted that our Board of Directors meeting would be 5 to 7 March in Denver. The city is correct, however **the actual dates are 5 to 7 May**, with the specific location to be determined, just in case anyone was setting up travel plans already. With that mea culpa out there for all to see, let's move forward in time to next week.

Next week will take me to the annual endorser's conferences for the **National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces (NCMAF)**, the meeting of the Endorser's Conference for Veterans Affairs Chaplaincy (ECVAC) and the **Armed Forces Chaplains Board (AFCB)**.

While I have been endorsed, and certainly know a good bit about endorsement, this will be my first time to attend this gathering. I know I will learn a thing or two, and will be sharing those insights with you over the next two columns.

As we return to our regular patterns of life after the holiday season, in which many of the Orthodox traditions celebrated Christmas on Monday, I trust that you have had the opportunity to refresh ties with families and friends in the religious traditions that continue to nurture and shape you.

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### Chaplain for U.S. House of Representative Prays for God and American People to Forgive Congress



Father Pat Conroy, the chaplain for the U.S. House of Representatives, opened the House session for Jan. 3-the last day of the 115th Congress.

Here is the transcript of Father Conroy's prayer as:

*"God of the universe, we give You thanks for giving us another day.*

*"In the final hour of the 115th Congress, we give You thanks for Your faithfulness to our nation. There have been many struggles, many sorrows, and yet we are still here and able to give You thanks that millions of our citizens live free.*

*"May the work of the new Congress issue forth with legislation to the benefit of our Nation and its citizens, and where the efforts of the 115th Congress have fallen short, we ask Your forgiveness and the forgiveness of all Americans.*

*"May all that is done this day be for Your greater honor and glory. Amen."*

Chaplain Conroy was elected to serve as the House Chaplain for the 116th Congress.

The House chaplain opens every House session with a prayer or brings in a guest chaplain to say a prayer. The chaplain also is responsible for "pastoral counseling" for the House community. That includes arranging memorial services for House members and their staff and performing marriages.

Former chaplains of the House served from two to 21 years. Conway's term as chaplain began in 2011.

related stories:

[Chaplain Patrick J. Conroy outlasts Ryan; continues his role in new Congress](#)

[Chaplain for U.S. House of Representative Prays for God and American People to Forgive Congress](#)

## **Ministry in a Pluralistic Environment**

### ***Sailors Hold Heathen Religious Services Aboard Deployed Aircraft Carrier***



3 Jan 2019 Military.com | By [Hope Hodge Seck](#)

If you're deployed aboard the carrier John C. Stennis and consider yourself a practitioner of Norse paganism, you're in luck. The carrier, now operating in the Persian Gulf, is holding lay services in the ship's chapel to serve a "small, committed" group of sailors identifying as Heathens, according to a recent news release from the carrier.

The development is the latest in a series of boosts for Heathenism in the U.S. military, a little-known religion with roots in Viking mythology that has gradually gained recognition in the services. A 2013 non-scientific "census" poll by the Norse Mythology Blog identified nearly 8,000 Heathen respondents in the U.S. and more than 16,000 worldwide. A 2018 estimate from religious author Jefferson Calico suggested there may be up to 20,000 American Heathens.

According to the Stennis release, Aviation Electrician's Mate 2nd Class Joshua Wood, a practitioner of Heathenry for more than five years, was appointed Heathen lay leader for

the carrier. This distinction allows him to facilitate sumbels, or informal Heathen religious services, within the ship's chapel.

Religious lay leaders must be appointed by commanding officers "on the basis of volunteerism, high moral character, motivation, religious interest and a letter of certification by the appointee's religious organization," according to the release, which cites the Military Personnel Manual.

While the release did not state how many sailors are regularly joining Wood for services, it includes quotes from one other Navy practitioner, Aviation Electronics Technician Airman Joshua Shaikoski.

Shaikoski was born in Norway, where Heathenism originated, but grew up Lutheran, he said. "I never felt like I connected with anything spiritual until I visited Norway and discovered a group of Heathens who opened my eyes to their religion," he said in a statement. "When I returned to [the United States], I met a kindred that aligned with my beliefs, and I've been with them ever since."

Deployed at sea since October, Heathens aboard the Stennis pray to Njord, the god of seafarers, one of many deities recognized by the religion, Shaikoski said. He added that rumors of practices such as animal sacrifice are not credible.

"Heathenry helped me connect with people on the ship that I would have just passed by," he said.

While Christianity remains the most common religious affiliation for service members, the military has taken steps to become more pluralistic in recent years. In 2017, the Pentagon more than doubled its list of recognized religions to 221, compiling faiths already recognized by various service branches into a master list.

In 2018, a soldier was granted a grooming standards waiver in order to wear a beard to symbolize his Norse Pagan faith.

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