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## **Weekly Newsgram - September 5th 2018**

### **African and American military chaplains exchange ideas and experiences during four-day workshop**



Story by Maj. Al Phillips New York National Guard

GARMISCH-PARTENKIRCHEN, Germany.- National Guard Chaplains from states partnered with African militaries, met with their African counterparts here August 23-26 as U.S. Africa Command hosted a meeting for chaplains as part of the National Guard State Partnership Program.

The American chaplains and their counterparts exchanged ideas and best practices during the four day workshop.

"As chaplains we must be committed to the service and needs of the service members and that is why I am here," said New York National Guard State chaplain Lt. Col Scott Elher. "Here today, New York tomorrow and South Africa later, I go where I am needed."

New York has a State Partnership Program with South Africa. The South African National Defense Force has 180 chaplains, the largest chaplain's corps on the continent.

The National Guard State Partnership Program links a unique component of the Department of Defense - a state's National Guard - with the armed forces or equivalent of a partner country in a cooperative, mutually beneficial relationship.

State Partnership program states conduct joint training and conduct officer and NCO exchange visits. The chaplains meeting is part of that effort.

Chaplains from Nigeria, partnered with California; Botswana, partnered with North Carolina; , Djibouti, partnered with Kentucky; Ghana, partnered with North Dakota; and Kenya, which is partnered with Massachusetts; attended the workshop.

The four day workshop was designed as a professional and spiritual workshop to build upon evidence-based expertise, studies of experienced chaplains who relayed what works well, what

can be improved and how to ultimately succeed in the role as chaplain in Africa, Ehler said.

Information exchange and the need for dialogue is critical to chaplains, Ehler said.

Americans may not understand how things work in Africa, the African chaplains emphasized.

"If there is an issue with a neighboring African country-the US should not go in ill-advised but should seek the advice of another African country first because we see our elves as brothers," said Botswana Defense Force Chaplain David Taote Mapiitse.

The AFRICOM Command Chaplain emphasized the importance of an African proverb in Working on the continent: "If you want to go fast-go alone. However, if you want to go far-go with partners"

for the full article go [here](#)



## In Memoriam

### Chaplain Homer Thomas "Tom" Hiers, II

Captain, US Navy, Retired  
born April 17, 1936  
deceased August 27, 2018  
Southern Baptist  
MCA Member 1991  
Brunson, South Carolina

### Chaplain Keneth J. Knutson

Lieutenant Colonel, US Army, Retired  
born July 15, 1944  
deceased August 28, 2018  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
MCA Member 1993  
Union, Missouri

### Chaplain Robert L. Herring

Colonel, US Army, Retired  
born August 18, 1921  
deceased August 25, 2018  
Baptist  
MCA Member 1986  
San Antonio, Texas

# Executive Director Notes

This has been an absolutely great week. It started with a great learning opportunity for me and ended the same way. Wish we could all have such weeks on a regular basis.

Like many of you I spent the past few days following the funeral events of Senator John McCain, Captain, US Navy (Retired). I was struck through the interviews and retrospective film clips with the consistent theme that he was not perfect, he stumbled, apologized, and then tried again. And again. And again.



That said, by Wednesday evening of last week many of us were aware that he had turned down the opportunity to be released when his captors learned that his Dad had been named as the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Command. Another piece of the story was told by Secretary Henry Kissinger's on Friday at the Capitol. It seems that when Kissinger was in Vietnam working on ending the war he was told that he could take then LCDR McCain home with him. Secretary Kissinger declined that offer thinking - but not knowing - LCDR McCain would want to stay. When they met later, Secretary Kissinger mentioned this to LCDR McCain, and the response was "Thank you. You did the right thing." In his 5.5 years of captivity LCDR McCain was offered the option to go home twice, once directly (which he refused) and then indirectly (through Secretary Kissinger). At one point he also signed a doctored confession when he felt that he was at the point of death. He later said that was one of the biggest mistakes of his life and he always regretted it. Clearly truly human, and at the same time truly seeking to do right.

In many ways I know that I identify with Sen. McCain as he as he was human and making mistakes. He also has my highest respect as he would claim the mistakes he made, and then go on to do - and almost always by enlisting the aid of others - remarkable things and ensure that the others received the credit as well.

One story about his humility in taking care of Wounded Warriors was that he would make personal visits to troops at Walter Reed and Bethesda. Only he and his driver would go - no press or photographers. When he was there, he was there to visit the injured troops and any family present - it was all about the ones he was visiting.

As the events of last week fade, I would like to think that I could do what the Senator has done as far as his moral courage. I have no idea if that is even possible; however, I certainly think that his ability to own up to his mistakes is an example that I could follow as I have yet to find the key to perfection. Making mistakes does seem to be a truly human trait.

May God grant Sen. McCain the wholeness and peace of a faithful servant, peace to his family and friends, and us the courage to do the harder right than the easier wrong in the choices we face as chaplains.

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Of Note - MCA Life Member and recently retired Navy Chief of Chaplains Margaret Kibben officiated at Senator McCain's funeral service at the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, MD - Image - Rear Admiral Margaret G. Kibben and Secretary of Defense James Mattis walk in the funeral procession from the US Naval Academy Chapel to the USNA cemetery (USNA Photo)



## **Fargo VA Chaplain brings faith-based suicide prevention approach to Washington**



WASHINGTON (Gray DC) - A Fargo VA leader is in our nation's capital this week sharing her work on suicide prevention. Her faith-based approach to prevention is peaking the interest of folks from around the country.

Julia Shreve, the Chief Chaplain for the Fargo VA Health Care System is bringing her big ideas to the Veterans Health Administration Innovation Experience event in Washington, D.C.

Shreve is turning to faith-based organizations to help with the tragedy that is veteran suicide. She says training these organizations in suicide prevention creates a communal atmosphere for helping veterans in need.

"We maybe reach one at the training but then they can go and reach maybe 10 more or 20 more so that people will be looking for the signs of risk and know that it's okay to ask, 'Are you thinking of harming yourself?'" said Shreve.

Shreve says in addition to training, they give out gunlocks to veterans in North Dakota. She says that extra hurdle in accessing a firearm can give the individual a moment of clarity to opt out of suicide.

"We need to get them past that rough spot and back into a frame of mind where they can proceed ahead," said Shreve.

VA leaders tell us it is full speed ahead with this kind of innovation. They say these gatherings allow for face to face collaboration that lead to smarter care for veterans. "We're here because we want to ensure that the veteran experience is the best possible that we can deliver," said John D'Adamo Jr., the acting director of the Veterans Health Administration Innovators Network.

D'Adamo says bringing folks together from around the country allows them to bounce ideas off each other. He stresses that one-size-fits-all innovation is not effective when the focus should be on each individual veteran.

"Working with individuals and being understanding of their unique needs. So we really want to encourage that with all of our projects," said D'Adamo. Shreve says they are planning another mass training in Fargo later in September.

## **Congratulations**

### **Chaplain Michael L. McCoy is 2018 recipient of the Four Chaplains Golden Medallion Award**

MCA Life Member and past National President. Award Citation [here](#)



### **Chaplain (Colonel) Ronald M. Harvell confirmed by Senate to serve as 26th Deputy**

## Chief of Chaplains of the Air Force

The U.S. Senate confirmed the promotion of U.S. Air Force Chaplain Colonel Ronald M. Harvell to the rank of Brigadier General on Aug. 20. With the promotion, Harvell, a Southern Baptist, becomes the Air Force's 26th Deputy Chief of Chaplains. Full story [here](#)



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Articles to be submitted by November 30  
Publication December 21

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