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6 May 2009

Religion and War : A Story of Three Army Chaplains

The Geneva Convention states that military chaplains are to be non-combatants. That is to say, they cannot carry a weapon on their person. Some might argue this makes them dead weight; a type of third wheel hindering the functionality of an army unit. Many believe that religious representatives should not be allowed on government payroll, and that the U.S should stop assigning chaplains to regiments in order to more strictly follow the separation of church and state. In spite of these naysayers, the emotional and spiritual guidance offered by chaplains should not be viewed as a detriment to the army, but rather a helping hand. For thousands of years, chaplains have been an inspiration to the soldiers to whom they minister and have played an important role in American military history. This report aims to highlight the stories of three individuals whose stories have not yet been told: Samuel B. Rosboro, William L. Hyde, and Peter C. Schroder. All were chaplains in U.S history and each left behind documents of their experiences that add to their legacies.

Only two letters written by Chaplain Hyde have survived to today. His notes to his wife do not tell much about Hyde himself, but rather his experiences during the American Civil War. Instead of discussing his chaplaincy, he recounts his time with Illinois' 112th infantry as if he were serving as a soldier. In his first letter, dated August 1st 1864, he gives his perspective on a skirmish with Confederate forces outside Petersburg, Virginia. His friend, known only as Kimberly, sustained injury to his foot during the cannonade, and Hyde had to console him as he went in to have it amputated. Hyde expressed his relief that the regiment doctor, Dr. Clarke, did an excellent job removing the foot. Hyde himself had to hold the leg in place during the procedure. This was the second time he assisted in an amputation; the chaplain had also held a certain Major Ludwick's arm in place as it was removed from the elbow down. Hyde admits that he shed a tear reflecting on the horror of the situation later on, but

that overall he was happy the surgeries went well and both men lived. Hyde seemed to function more as an army nurse than a chaplain. He never once speaks of his work as a chaplain, but talks often of his time spent on the front lines dressing the wounds of injured soldiers. Despite his traumatic situation, Hyde maintains a very positive outlook throughout his letter. He speaks fondly of the weather, compliments the regiment on how it was “fighting splendidly,” and reflects proudly on the regiment’s capture of 300 enemy troops. The idea of further amputations is not met with remorse, but rather with gratefulness that there are doctors capable of doing the job.

In the second letter, addressed October 1st of the same year, he describes the destruction of an enemy fort. The attack was “a complete success.” However, after an enemy surge repulsed the thus far successful advance of the 112th, Hyde’s unit returned to the trenches, glad that they had destroyed the base and inflicted serious damage. They were then informed they might have to march to Washington, and despite the awful conditions of the prospective six-day march, Hyde expressed his pleasure with being able to sleep “in an open canopy of Heaven,” which the reader can assume means in open air. The march to Washington was later halted because six men were sun-struck from the heat, and even this did not depress Hyde, because he helped treat these men and they recovered. According to “The Chaplain,” an Army Technical Manual published nearly eighty years later in 1944, “A unit chaplain, whether or not in a combat unit, [serves] as an immediate and confidential member of the staff of his commanding officer, ... in matters involving public religious observances, morality, and character building (Skelly, 2007).” If boosting morale is considered a part of a chaplain’s work, Hyde’s positive attitude must have done the job brilliantly.

Despite that during the Civil War Army Chaplains had virtually no supervision or official standing, Hyde seems to have adhered to a same code of conduct as did the chaplains of World War II and today. For a salary of \$100 on the Union side and \$50-80 for the Confederates, Chaplains received little more

than what their regiment shared with them; the Union Chaplains received tenting and a uniform while the Confederate chaplains received only their pay (NCWCM, 2009). The post of Chaplain was much less regulated prior to World War II, and had no official responsibilities aside from those normally expected of a minister, as is affirmed in "The Chaplain," wherein it is stated that "the ministerial functions of a chaplain, in large measure, [are] centered around the usual and special services of worship (Skelly, 2007)." During the Civil War, Chaplains had "no training, no supervision, and no ecclesiastical supplies (NCWCM, 2009)." Indeed it was only their desire to minister that drove their service, and as can be seen in the next series of letters to be examined, it was not always easy.

Samuel Rosboro, another Union chaplain in the Civil War, was not quite as chipper as counterpart serving in Illinois. He too leaves no personal records; his age, ethnicity, and personal characteristics are not known. His letter to his wife, written on February 17th 1863, begins by apologizing for how "blue" his previous letter was. He states that he is "not enough of one to so counterfeit my feelings as to make things look bright, when I have scarcely light enough to enable me to see them at all." His dismay seems to be caused from a general disappointment by the "contemptible traitors" of the North. He seemed to believe that certain parties in the North were trying to start a treasonous "fire in the rear" to hinder the Union war effort. This "treason," according to Rosboro, had already caused desertion and "general disaffection." He goes on to express his distaste for the weather, how his back is killing him, and that a possible move to a new camp will cause him to have less comfortable living quarters. He also expresses his doubt as to his tenure as a chaplain, suggesting to his wife that he should take on a job in the "sanitary department." He finishes off his letter by inquiring about how things are going for his wife at home, but once again focuses on the negative; Rosboro asks if an aforementioned child has scarlet fever, and implores his wife to telegram him should this child die. His short brief to his mother, written the next day, is more cheerful; he actually says that he is doing well and that he looks forward to hearing about the advances of the Union army.

His next letter, addressed to his daughter on April 26th 1864, is much more lighthearted. Rosboro apologizes for not having included a violet in his last letter, and includes one in this one (a violet which survives with the letter). It is in this note that he makes his first allusion to his faith, saying that it is only through God's providence that he might ever return home. This letter is very heartfelt compared to the others; Rosboro promises to return and "love Mamma and you...more fervently than ever before." It is clear that in the year and a half Rosboro spent in the field, he had been thinking anxiously about his return home. He promises not to smoke or chew tobacco when he comes back so that the house will be more pleasant for his wife and daughter. All Rosboro wanted was "to contribute to domestic happiness," a sentiment which, although archaically phrased, reads sweetly. The letter concludes with, "Your affectionate Papa, S.B Rosboro."

The next day, Rosboro wrote yet another letter, this one addressed to his wife. The contents of this brief are far more sensitive than the last; Rosboro finishes by telling his wife that she should keep all she reads confidential. According to Rosboro, Lieutenant Colonel Beardsley, the commander of his regiment, was a "very wicked man" who will be "all against me [Rosboro]." He goes on to discuss his distress with other high-ranking officers in command, stating that he wishes to leave the service should they remain attached to his unit.

Rosboro's April 28th letter is the first to mention his chaplaincy. He mentions that his prayer meeting was one of few which was "largely attended," yet admits that he himself rarely goes to these meetings. Apparently, the troops in the regiment were intimidated and embarrassed by Rosboro's presence, and took a more active role in prayer service when led by other soldiers. This hardly bothered Rosboro, who had to hold service in the Hospitals around the same time as prayer service and would rather spend time there, where he is more needed. He speaks of his bible classes and sermons with little enthusiasm. While the reader cannot determine the tenure of Rosboro's service through his letters,

one gets the idea that for him, it was an eternity. Overall, these letters paint a picture of a man who has grown jaded in war and who wants to return to his family more than minister to his unit.

Peter C. Schroder (May 7th, 1897 – January 5th, 1977) did not leave behind letters like Rosboro or Hyde. Information gathered on Schroder comes almost exclusively from research done by his family and compiled into a veritable scrapbook of his life. Within this book were birth and death certificates written in English, a family tree written in German, pictures from his military exploits in Mexico, and an award for exceptional service from the French government. Clearly, Schroder had a larger and longer lasting military career than either of his Civil War counterparts. While these documents are far more informative as to the details of his life than those of Rosboro and Hyde, none of them give a glimpse of his personal life the same was a heartfelt letter could.

Schroder began his military career as an infantry soldier for the U.S army during the Mexican Punitive Expedition from 1916-1917. He left no record of his experiences in Mexico save for the several postcards he sent to his family and friends. None were longer than five sentences, and none made him seem overly excited or distressed. He simply detailed the weather, left perhaps one sentence describing what he did that day, and wished his family well. He also technically served in World War I, as his unit was still activated in the Southwest as war broke out in Europe. In 1917, he left active service after the tendons in one of his legs were damaged by a horse accident. From then until 1919, he held the posts of assistant to Supply Sergeant, Mess Sergeant, and army recruiter, successively. In the 1920s, Schroder was ordained in the United Lutheran Church of Ithaca, New York. He spent six years as a pastor in Flushing, New York, where his leadership helped his church grow from a congregation of 30 to 400. It was around then that Schroder was first called to service as an army chaplain. Although church leaders tried to dissuade him with a promotion, Schroder felt that the chaplaincy was his calling, and on April 8th

1930 he was officially certified as a chaplain. He then served as a chaplain on reserve until his attendance to the University of Chicago from July 1931 to July 1932.

Schroder's first assignment as a chaplain was to Fort Amador in Panama. There, he did nothing of note besides mentioning that the work was routine and the weather was pleasant. His first major assignment, and the longest of his career, was his stay at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. There, he formed his first church, complete with regular Sunday services, a choir of family members and soldiers, and a library. Schroder was beginning to build a reputation as a minister around whom churches flourished.

Schroder's 1939 move to the Philippines would prove his most fateful, as it would occur at the start of the Second World War. While there, Schroder and his wife visited Emilio Aquinaldo, the hero of Philippine Independence, as well as dining with the famous Mr. and Mrs. Douglas MacArthur. As military dependants, the Schroders lived with relative ease, as housework and laundry were hired out. In 1940, Schroder, his wife, and his two children left the Philippines for his new assignment in Georgia. They returned to the States just weeks before the first Japanese attack on Manila.

Schroder had his first glimpse of the American war machine in the Philippines, and saw more examples of modern military equipment at Fort Benning, Georgia. There, he accompanied divisions on exercises in the Carolinas. After a short stay in Georgia, he completed another small tour at Camp Wolters in Texas. By this time, Schroder had made a name for himself, and at the beginning of the European theater of World War II, he was promoted to Colonel and made a member of General Omar Bradley's staff. From his new rank, he oversaw the training of 500 new chaplains, helped plan for chaplain deployment on D-day, and traveled through England, Wales, and Ireland. Throughout the rest of the war, he would visit and work in France, Holland, Belgium, and Germany.

Schroder hardly did desk work while in Europe. He came under direct fire from a *Luftwaffe* aircraft, and was only saved from its strafing fire by diving behind a tree. He took several Nazi soldiers

prisoner, as they mistook him for a soldier and surrendered. On numerous occasions, his convoy came under direct fire. He spoke at the funeral of Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt, son of the late President. During the Battle of the Bulge, Schroder gave last rites to captured soldiers scheduled to be executed. His military career hardly ended there; Schroder was sent in 1948 to be senior chaplain to U.S. forces in Korea. He became president of the Army chaplain board in 1949 and kept the post until his retirement in 1950. He left the service a decorated man, having won numerous medals for his service, including the prestigious French *Croix de Guerre*. After twenty years more years of service both forming new churches and organizing mission trips, Schroder would be accorded his final honor in 1975 with an award for a lifetime of service to the Lutheran Church.

Schroder may not have left behind personal effects, but he most certainly left behind a record of exceptional performance. Although none of the files detailing his life reveal his personality in the same way the letters of Rosboro and Hyde do, it is hard to see Schroder as anything but a hard-working, dedicated man. The service records of all three men, no matter how brief, show outstanding dedication to God and country. All of them made the decision to leave their families and put themselves in danger because they believed their spiritual services would benefit the war effort. They put up with everything from military bureaucracy, to moves from camp to camp, to direct gunfire. Whether preaching from the pulpit or trudging in the trenches, these three chaplains risked their lives to minister to our troops -- and it is this spirit that maintains the integrity of the chaplaincy to this day.

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Profile of William Lyman Hyde :

William Hyde Letters, Chaplain 112th New York Infantry, Pearce Civil War Collection, Navarro College Corsicana, Texas. Retrieved by Jim Gandy on February 4th, 2009 from <http://www.112thnyvi.com/page4.html>.

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Biographical Collection of Peter Christian Schroder :

Information taken from various documents assembled by Peter C. Schroder, Jr. and kept at the New York State Military Museum's archives in Saratoga Springs, New York. These included biographical pieces written by his family, newspaper articles written about Schroder Sr. at the time, and the first-hand account of letters written by Schroder Sr. himself. Documents date from 1939, Images date from 1911. Documents accessed on March 27th, 2009.

Collected Letters of Samuel B. Rosboro

Information on Samuel B. Rosboro was taken from primary sources from the NYS Military Museum. Included were the actual letters he wrote to his family in 1863-64, along with transcripts of them. They had never been cataloged and thus cannot be formally cited. The dates of his letters are February 17th, 1863, April 26th -27th 1864, and April 29th, 1864. They were accessed on March 27, 2009.

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