

## Stressful Times, Slow Healing

### *Chaplains Help Soldiers Cope at Ground Zero*

*By Spc. Diane Filak*

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**NEW YORK CITY** -- Emotions are scattered every which way here, but there are people who help when help is most needed.

Each day, concerned chaplains walk to soldiers at and around ground zero—and talk with them.

“The soldiers have been very strong,” said Maj. Donald N. Zapsic, chaplain of the 3rd Brigade Headquarters Company, Buffalo, NY.

The chaplains are there to see how each soldier is handling the reality of being so close to ground zero.

“[You] can't help but be affected,” said Major Bruce D. Morris, Chaplain of the 152nd Engineer Battalion attached to the 204th Engineer Battalion.

Standing in a lethal, unsafe environment can heighten the stress level, Morris said.

Zapsic said stress levels are still being assessed because the mission at hand is a priority.

“It will take weeks to months for the soldiers to process what they have seen,” he said.

Army National Guard soldiers stand 12 to 15 hours securing ground zero, and it is not uncommon for them to see family members mourning and crying for the loss of loved ones.

“This can be taxing for any soldier,” said Morris.

Chaplains look for specific signs of stress in soldiers—like withdrawing into themselves, acting out of character or expressing feelings abnormally, Zapsic said.

“Getting information from people is very important,” said Lt. Col. John Vigilanti, chaplain of 53rd Troop Command, Valhalla, NY.

Through idle conversation with the troops, chaplains and their assistant can hear about issues within the soldiers' units. Chaplains have been trained in critical incident issues, which better prepares them to help the soldiers in this time of need.

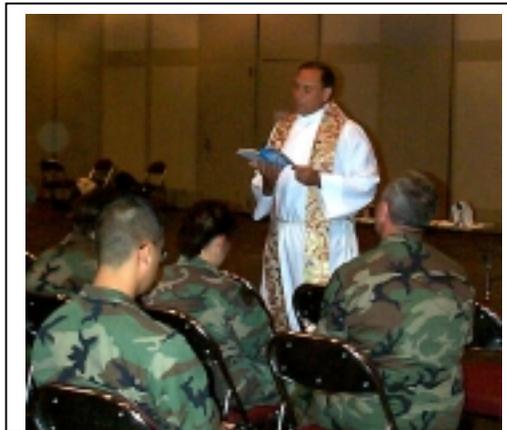
Day or night, chaplains are available to talk with soldiers, said Zapsic.

“[The soldiers] have been talking with each other and consoling each other,” said Chaplain Assistant Staff Sgt. John A. Duffy, 53rd Troop Command Headquarters Detachment.

“There is a higher concern for the soldiers when they return to home station,” said Vigilanti. “That is when they will be going through a reflecting process and remembering what they have seen.”

One way that soldiers can help themselves is to get together and talk about their feelings—and keep on talking, Zapsic said.

“The soldiers should feel proud that they were able to do what they did with the resources here,” said Vigilanti. “[It is] amazing how appreciative the people are.”



*Lt. Col. John Vigilanti, chaplain of 53rd Troop Command, gives a Roman Catholic mass for soldiers at the Jacob Javits Center.*

*Photo by Spc Diane Filak  
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