BEGINNINGS

Chaplains have been around for more than 3,000 years.

Who was the first military chaplain? Many say Phinehas. This man was the son of Eleazar and the grandson of Aaron (Exodus 6:25). He went as priest with the army on a punitive expedition against the Midianites (Numbers 31:6).

The Lord said to Moses, "Avenge the people of Israel on the Midianites; afterward you shall be gathered to your people. And Moses said to the people, "Arm men from among you for the war, that they may go against Midian, to execute the Lord's vengeance on Midian. You shall send a thousand from each of the tribes of Israel to the war." So there were provided, out of the thousands of Israel, a thousand from each tribe, twelve thousand armed for war. And Moses sent them to the war, a thousand from each tribe, together with Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, with the vessels of the sanctuary and the trumpets for the alarm in his hand (Numbers 31:1-6).

Canadian Chaplain Rand calls attention to Alfred Vagts' A HISTORY OF MILITARISM, where the author says:

The ancient Assyrians had the earliest fighting organization of great efficiency, complete from the emperor's life guards and baggage trains to army chaplains.I.

Across the centuries chaplains have encouraged their men. In Deuteronomy we find the law of the chaplaincy in the Hebrew army:

"When you go forth to war against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and an army larger than your own, you shall not be afraid of them; for the Lord your God is with you, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. And when you draw near to the battle, the priest shall come forward and speak to the people, and shall say to them, 'Hear, O Israel, you draw near this day to battle against your enemies; let not your heart be faint; do not fear, or tremble, or be in dread of them; for the Lord your God is he that goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to give you the victory (Deuteronomy 20:1-4).

From the earliest times, prayers have been offered for God's people as well as against God's enemies. Among the Yale Biographies there is a prayer attributed to Samuel Dunbar, a chaplain in the French and
Indian War. When it was reported that a hostile fleet was about to attack Boston, he prayed that the Lord would "put a bit in their mouths and jerk them about, send a strong northeast gale and dash him in pieces on Cohasset Rock."  

Rameses II of Egypt in 1296 B.C. lost the battle of Kadesh to the Hittites, but nonetheless he laid claim to victory, which, he said, was due to the war-god Menthu.  

Chaplains have been an integral part of the Roman military establishment since the fifth century.  

Chaplains were a significant part of the huge military forces making up the Crusades. During the Battle of Antioch (1097 A.D.) the Turks were routed and their camp plundered. One of the leaders of the Crusader forces was Peter Bartholomew. He appeared before the people with a strange story: that Saint Andrew had revealed in a dream the hiding place of the very lance wherewith the Roman soldier pierced had pierced the side of Christ.  

The Bishop thought it empty words; but the Count believed and entrusted Peter to the care of his Chaplain Raymond.  

The vision of Peter Bartholomew and others, which had not abated, were again turned to ridicule, the chief among the scoffers being Robert of Normandy's Chaplain Arnulf. He was a sub-deacon, the subject of many popular songs, a tutor of the conqueror's daughter; and he eventually became king of Jerusalem.  

In The History of the Chaplains Corps, United States Navy, Volume 1, Chaplain Clifford Drury points out:

Chaplains accompanied most of the exploring expeditions sent to the new world. When Francis Drake sailed around the world in his Golden Hinde in 1578-1580, Chaplain Francis Fletcher, a clergyman of the Church of England, was aboard. Chaplain Fletcher conducted the first Protestant service in the English language in what is now continental United States. The service
was held in June 1579 on a beach located in what is known today as Drake's Bay, Marin County, California, about fifty miles north of San Francisco.

Other English sovereigns, following the precedent set by Queen Elizabeth, appointed chaplains to serve on the larger vessels of the British Navy. By the time of Charles I the custom seems to have been well established. Samuel Pepys, of diary fame, occupying a position in the British Government equivalent to the First Lord of the British Admiralty, was active in 1676 urging captains of His Majesty’s ships to take a 'godly divine' with them. His diary shows his concern about the type of men selected.

A recent authority of Pepys writes: "It was laid down that henceforth the Secretary of the Admiralty Office was to notify the Church authorities of every ship ordered to sea that there might be a chaplain appointed to each, properly equipped with the King's warrant." 6

Major General J. F. C. Fuller, in A Military History of the Western World, Volume 1, comments:

A fact that cannot be questioned is that, from the earliest records of man to the present age, war has been man's dominant preoccupation. 7

If the clergy is to go with its people in the time of its dominant engagement, the chaplain must be there.

Herman Norton in Rebel Religion sums all this up by saying that the military minister is essential:

While no specific date marks the beginning of the tradition of the military chaplaincy, religious needs of soldiers have been met by dedicated men for a very long time, even before our country became a nation. Early chaplains--Franciscan friars, Jesuit priests, Anglican clerics, Puritan divines--served colonizing groups. And some, ironically, were missionaries to the very Indians whom their soldier-parishioners fought. 8

Another hundred years have passed since the rise of the chaplaincy tradition in America. Times have changed; methods of warfare have changed; but the tradition is more firmly established than ever. The verdict of the past hundred years is that the function of the military minister is essential and that the chaplain is here to stay. 9

Here is a brief story about a word. That word is chaplain. Where does the word chaplain come from? The answer to this question is woven around an old legend of Saint Martin of Tours (b.316-400).
Martin, a soldier, was traveling one night with a group of well-dressed companions, when they came upon an importunate beggar near a city gate at Amiens. It was a cold winter night and the poor man shivered in rags.

Others passed by the beggar as he cried out for alms. But Martin was touched with compassion. He opened his purse but found it empty. Then it was he drew his sword and with it divided his cloak. One half he gave to the beggar and the other half he kept himself.

That night Martin had a vision in which he saw Christ clothed in a half cloak. And he was so moved by the vision that he asked for baptism in the church.

The story goes that soon after this Martin of Tours gave up his military career and became a devotee of the church. In time he became a patron saint of France. Martin's cloak was kept as a sacred relic by French kings and was often carried by them into battle.

The word "chaplain" is derived from the word "chaplain." He was the officer appointed to watch over the sacred cloak (cappa or capella). The person who watched over it, the custodian, came to be called cappellanus, which became chapellain in old French and chaplain in English. The place where the relic was kept was known as the chapel. In France the military chaplain is known as the aumenier.

As we look up this word in the large dictionary, we find three meanings:
1. An ecclesiastic attached to a chapel; especially one officiating in the private chapel of a king or nobleman, or other person of wealth or distinction.
2. There are 48 clergymen of England who hold office as chaplains of the sovereigns.
3. A clergyman who occupies an official position, and performs certain religious functions, in the army or navy, in a legislative or other
body, in a charitable institution, or the like: as, the chaplains in the House of Representatives.