

Casualty Ministry in the Joint Wartime Environment

from a chronicle of Chaplain Captain "David," USAF



Sea Service chaplains are increasingly finding themselves called to minister in a Joint environment. On 9 January, a Marine KC-130 Hercules crashed in the mountains of Pakistan, killing all seven Marines aboard. The following account of ministry is from Chaplain "David," an Air Force captain serving in an undisclosed location in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. After the crash of "Raider 0-4," the Marine Commander requested that Chaplain "David" be part of the 14-member Search and Recovery Team. The following chronology illustrates ministry in a Joint wartime environment.

9 January: Marine C-130 "Raider 0-4" Crash

- Primary chaplain responding to the actuation of the Joint Recovery Center. I provided advice and support to the base leadership
- Assisted with service and planning and gathering material in preparation if a Search and Recovery Team was sent from our base
- Coordinated with other chaplains (Army and Air Force) in providing immediate spiritual and pastoral care / counseling
- Provided immediate spiritual and pastoral support to the Marines and troops
- Assigned as part of a 14 member Search and Recovery Team

10 January: Arrived at the Marine C-130 "Raider 0-4" Crash Site

We arrived at the crash site, made a fly-by observation and landed at the base of the mountain. Half of the team stayed at the base of the mountain to set up camp, while the other half was airlifted to the crash site to make an initial "walk-through" assessment. The team found five of the seven crewmembers and identified some of the sought-after personal and aircraft items. They hiked down the mountain and rejoined the rest of the team. We had a debrief to share the results of the walk-through. We made a plan of action for tomorrow. I provided spiritual guidance, support and counseling. I also gave them suggestions: what we could do for their families, for us and for a memorial service at the crash site.

11 January: Returned to crash site

Half of the team returned to the site to begin the process of retrieving the deceased crewmembers, to lay out a grid and to identify personal and aircraft material. The other half went to Shamsi airstrip with the team's gear to begin working on a memorial marker for the site. We recovered five of the seven crew members. The Flight Doctor and I worked with the Army Mortuary Team in the recovery. I said a prayer for each member recovered and blessed the ground. Before being airlifted off the mountain, the rest of the team returned from Shamsi with the memorial markers for a memorial service. Earlier that morning, we went over our options for a memorial service. We decided to mark the site with two memorial markers, collect seven bottles of dirt from the site for the crew's families, and have a memorial service at the end of day. The Senior Team Leader requested that the memorial service be written in order that the family would know what was done for their loved ones. At the memorial service, I opened with a prayer, had a team member read Psalm 23, gave a reflection on the Psalm, life, death, eternal life, the tragic crash of "Raider 0-4" and our experiences. After the services, a Marine H-46 came to transport us and the five deceased crewmembers. I was one of four to escort the bodies back to

Shamsi. Prior to our departure, I conducted a CISM Defusing for the Search and Recovery Team, Army Mortuary Team (3) and four members of the Marine Mountain Rigger Team. As we were in flight, we noticed that the escort team was comprised of a member from the Marine Corps, Navy, Army and Air Force. Unplanned on our part, perhaps God's intervention: a joint operation working together for our fallen comrades.

The team arrived at Shamsi Airstrip. We set up an honor guard to stand watch over the recovered Marines. We went to the Marine compound for a debriefing and for planning the next phase. A C-130 was locked on to arrive that night to take ten of the team back to Shabaz AB, Jacobabad, escorting the five Marines we recovered. The Flight Doctor would be the senior officer for this tasking. I was instructed to return to the crash site the next day, Saturday, 12 January. There had not been a chaplain at this location (Shabaz AB) for over a month. It had been over two months since Mass had been conducted for the Marines. So I spent a day providing spiritual support and counseling for the Marines stationed there. After we loaded the five transfer cases into the C-130, the four of us remaining behind gathered to share our experiences.

12 January: Returned to Crash Site

We were once again airlifted by a Marine H-46 helicopter to the crash site. A Joint Forensic Team joined us. The search resumed for the two missing crewmembers. We found one of the missing crewmembers in the wreck's main point of impact. The melted debris made retrieving the sixth crewmember a slow process. There was an unspoken urgent need to recover the seventh. It was the team's intent to have all seven crew members of "Raider 0-4" return to the U.S. as a unit. The day ended with only one more. I provided spiritual guidance and support throughout the entire day. At the end of day we were airlifted off the mountain and returned to Shamsi.

Upon returning to Shamsi, we had a debriefing and developed a plan of action for the continuation of the Search and Recovery efforts. Since I needed to be back at Jacobabad for Sunday services, I was directed to go out on a C-130 and escort the remains of the sixth recovered crewmember.

15 January: Joint Force Memorial Service

A Joint Military Force Memorial Service was conducted with about 600 in attendance. The chapel staff remained after the service to provide spiritual comfort and support.

16 January: Return to Shamsi Airstrip

I returned to Shamsi to say Mass and escort the remains of the seventh crewmember. I brought with me religious material for the troops. I also collected and took a "morale box" full of candy, fresh fruit and treats; the Marines stationed there have only MREs and no BX. After Mass, I returned to Jacobabad.



Critical Incident Stress Management

13 January: I spoke with Dr. Alexander (Mental Health Professional) and Dr. Healey (9AEG Medical CC) about the results of the Search and Recovery Efforts and the status of the team. We made arrangements for a CISM Debriefing to be held shortly after the recovery of the seventh crewmember.

17 January: A CISM Debriefing was conducted by a team of five for ten of the Search and Recover Team members. One of the team members was selected to escort the seven deceased crewmember back to the States, and three of the others stated they were not ready to process their experience. Support arrangements have been made for those who were not in attendance.