

Chaplain John Brown Frazier Honored and Remembered as Navy's First Chief of Chaplains



“If Chaplain John Brown Frazier could tell us what he thinks of our Corps today, I believe he would be pleased that we indeed provide life-transforming service throughout and beyond the Sea Services.”

With these words, the current Chief of Chaplains, Rear Admiral Barry Black, paid homage to the groundwork laid by Frazier as the Navy's first Chief of Chaplains, charting a course the Chaplain Corps continues to follow today.

Chaplain Black made his remarks at a ceremony honoring Frazier at Arlington National Cemetery. The ceremony was held to commemorate Chaplain Frazier's service and to re-dedicate his headstone with new inscriptions that indicate the year he died (1939), and his unique position as the Navy's first Chief of Chaplains.

Deputy Chaplain of the Marine Corps Randy Cash initiated the work to have the gravestone updated, and provided a summary of Chaplain Frazier's career at the re-dedication ceremony:

“While serving as the Deputy Director for the Navy Chaplains School in 1998, I made a visit to Arlington and found Chaplain Frazier's resting place,” said Cash. “I noticed the year of his death had not been inscribed on the headstone, nor did it signify his role as the first Chief of Chaplains.

“Thanks to contributions from former Chiefs of Chaplains, we were able to have his headstone finished. It's important to the Corps that we recognize our first Chief who provided us all a sense of direction and unity.”

Captain John Brown Frazier, a Southern Methodist minister, was appointed as head of the Chaplain Corps on November 5, 1917. As early as 1871, chaplains had advocated for one of their number to represent their interests in Washington. With the coming of World War I, the appointment became a necessity due to the significant increase



in the number of chaplains and the urgency of war preparation.

Chaplain William W. Edel, who retired as a Navy chaplain in 1946 after nearly 30 years of service, wrote of Frazier, saying “He was a big, hard-muscled man, with a face that looked as if it might have been chiseled out of stone, and he was as resolute as he looked. But under that flinty exterior there was compassion and tenderness and a most amazing and unpredictable sense of humor. That sense of humor could ridicule and sting, but it was the cut of the surgeon's knife, corrective and healing. And such a man, in 1917, was ready and waiting when the call came to take the helm and steer the Corps through its most challenging days.

“When he reported for duty at the Navy Department, he found he must develop his own position, continually breaking new ground, solving new problems, laying new plans, continually meeting fresh opportunities and fresh discouragement, finding new friends. Through it all he thrust his way, carrying the Corps of Chaplains to new heights of efficiency and prestige. No man less resolute could have done it.”

The Office of Chief of Naval Chaplains was not officially created by law until December 1944,

when the rank of Rear Admiral was attached to the position. Within the Chaplain Corps, the title "Chief of Chaplains" was universally used before this date.

When the United States declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917, there were only 40 chaplains on active duty in the Navy. By the time of the signing of the Armistice on November 11, 1918, 200 chaplains were serving. Three decades later, during World War II, over 2,800 men wore the uniform of the Navy chaplain.

Rear Admiral Robert D. Workman, Chief of Chaplains during World War II (and the first to be

made Rear Admiral while still on active duty), paid tribute to Chaplain Frazier during burial services for him on November 11, 1939, at Arlington Cemetery. Workman said, "Upon the shoulders of our first Chief rested the responsibility of selecting an exceptionally large number of new chaplains, and of establishing our Corps and its responsibilities on a basis such as had never been undertaken prior to that time. The manner in which Chaplain Frazier faced his task and the degree of success which he attained have left us an example and a heritage for which we must ever be thankful."

The Military Chaplains Association 2002 Scholarship Recipients



This year, the Military Chaplains Association awarded \$2000 scholarships to five Chaplain Candidates. One scholarship in memory of Chaplain, Colonel, Christian H. Martin, USAF Retired, and another in memory of Chaplain, Colonel, James R. Barnett, USA Retired, were given by their families. Funds to support the scholarship program, as well as other MCA programs, come from individual gifts, Chapel Fund donations and designated offerings. Since beginning the Scholarship Program in 1992, MCA has awarded \$86,000 in scholarships. The 2002 recipients are:

Donetta R. Cochrane

Donetta is a first year seminarian at Assemblies of God Theological Seminary. She is endorsed by the Assemblies of God church. Donetta is a Navy Chaplain Candidate.

Kevin L. Humphrey

Kevin is endorsed by the Southern Baptist Church and attends Southwestern Baptist Seminary. He is an Air Force Chaplain Candidate and expects to graduate in May 2003.

Mark T. Winton

Mark is an Army Chaplain Candidate. He attends Covenant Theological Seminary and is endorsed by the Presbyterian Church in America.

David E. Rozanek

David is an Air Force Chaplain Candidate. He attends Memphis Theological Seminary and is endorsed by the Disciples of Christ Church.

Steven L. Survance

Steven attends Asbury Theological Seminary and is endorsed by the Church of the Nazarene. He is an Air Force Chaplain Candidate.