

Dale White

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Combat Action Ribbon & Bronze Star Recipient

By James G. Fausone

NAVY CHAPLAIN CAPTAIN DALE WHITE (RET.)

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Many believe chaplains show up after the fighting. That is not how it really works in a firefight. Secretary of Defense James Mattis was fond of pointing out “the enemy gets a vote” referencing Sun Tze in the Art of War. Plans do not progress as expected after the first engagement. So chaplains may have a plan for staying safe, but the enemy gets to vote.

Early Years

[Dale White](#) was born in July 1960 in Wichita, Kansas. His father's work meant Dale grew up in the New York City and Washington D.C. areas. The young man had much to admire in his father, a World War II P28 fighter pilot with missions over Italy and Germany. His dad never spoke much about his service, like many men of that generation. He did leave behind a journal and recorded his wartime experiences and resulting faith reflections. Fathers do shape sons.

Dale attended the State University of New York at Stony Brook and graduated with a BA in psychology in 1982. He then enrolled in Drew University to obtain his Master of Divinity by 1985.

Drew Theological School was founded in 1867 to provide organized theological education for Methodist Episcopal Church ministers. The Drew Theological School is proudly grounded in and seeks to embody the Wesleyan and Methodist tradition of bold ideas that impact people's lives for the good.

Drew Theological School, founded initially by Methodist Wall Street financier Daniel Drew, opened its doors in 1867 in the aftermath of the U.S. Civil War and the devastating divisions that had torn apart American Methodism. In response to such realities, Drew's faculty designed a curriculum that required ministers to understand and respond to the needs of people in and around the world.

He went on to obtain his Doctor of Ministry from Wesley Theological Seminary in 2005 during his Navy career. Wesley Theological Seminary's online Doctor of Ministry program enhanced and expanded Reverend White's ministerial views. This course of study acquainted him with current trends and issues in the theological disciplines and encouraged him to integrate these theological disciplines into his practice of ministry.

Reverend White was happy in his ministry in a small New York church. He had the opportunity for additional training for those ministering in hospitals and to those with critical health issues. This training, once completed and logged into the United Methodist Church (UMC) database, would change his life. The UMC ranks as the largest mainline Protestant denomination, and the second-largest Protestant church. The UMC traces its roots back to the revival movement of John and Charles Wesley in England, as well as the Great Awakening in the United States. The church's theological orientation is decidedly Wesleyan. It embraces liturgical worship, holiness, and evangelical elements. Methodists refer to their pastor as a "preacher", when spoken and in written form, their title is "Reverend."

Military Service

After that training and out of the blue, Dale started receiving calls from a Navy chaplain recruiter. He had no desire to join up and turned down the invitations to learn about being a military chaplain each time. Once when he was at a conference, the recruiter reached his wife, Linda, and the recruiter had a delightful conversation with this teacher of Asian studies. His wife suggested that he consider this career change and that it could be an adventure. She was intrigued by maybe living in Asia and seeing the world that she was teaching about. Dale spoke more with the recruiter changed his mind and sought endorsement by UMC.

His bishop was not thrilled with this direction and asked, "How could a United Methodist pastor be pro-war?" Dale explained a military chaplain is no more pro-war than a hospital chaplain is a pro-terminal disease or a prison chaplain is pro-crime. The bishop relented. Dale promised to return after military service to the service of a UMC organization. After 29 years of service to the Navy, Reverend Dale White kept that promise in September 2021 and returned to the service of UMC in Virginia.

Reverend White was commissioned as a US Navy chaplain in 1992. His first assignment was on a destroyer in the Mediterranean. It was a great introduction to sea service and he met many young officers that went on to positions of prominence in the Navy. Shortly thereafter, he and Linda moved to an assignment in Okinawa. Linda was able to experience Asia firsthand, not just teach about it. More importantly, this opportunity brought into their life a son adopted in Okinawa.

Dale White found himself sent to Washington, D.C. to serve in the office of the Chief of Navy Chaplains. He transitioned into that office on September 10, 2011. The next day would be seared into his memory, and that of the country as he was at the Pentagon Annex when the plane hit the Pentagon on 9/11/01. He saw the terrorists' damage at the Pentagon up close and personal. He was at one of the Ground Zeros for the start of the Global War on Terrorism. White was one of the first chaplains to make it to the lawn and to begin attending to the wounded, shocked and frightened civilians, servicemen, and women.

White completed his Pentagon assignment but he would later return back to the Chief of Navy Chaplain's office in 2016-2018. He spent fourteen months in Iraq from February 2005 to March 2006 period. He would be detailed to Marine Corps Special Operations Forces Command from 2007 -2010. Then a stint as a chaplain detailee in Memphis (2013-2016) and Navy chaplain for the Bureau of Medicine (2016-2018). He would return as chaplain to the Marine Corps Commandant from 2019 – 2021. He served as chaplain to General David H. Berger, Commandant of the Marine Corps. The two men had previously served together and had tremendous mutual respect. White retired on

September 1, 2021.

In Harm's Way

The Country had been in a state of ongoing war in multiple theatres and the need for chaplains had never been greater. In early 2005, it was Pastor White's time to go into harm's way.

In the [Iraq War](#), the city of Fallujah became known as a perennial hotspot. If you were assigned to Fallujah or the Al Anbar Province you were in the heat and hurt. Chaplains were always in these hotspots.

Fallujah is in the Al Anbar Province and the region has been inhabited for millennia. There is evidence that the area surrounding Fallujah was inhabited in Babylonian times. The current name of the city is thought to be derived from a Syriac name for "canal regulator" since it was the location where the water of the Euphrates River was divided into a canal. Within Iraq, it is known as the "City of Mosques" for the more than 200 mosques found in the city and the surrounding villages. As of 2004, the city was largely ruined, with 60% of buildings damaged or destroyed, and the population at 30%-50% of pre-war levels. The population was estimated at 275,000 in 2011.

Under Saddam Hussein's rule from 1979 to 2003, Fallujah came to be an important area of support for the regime, along with the rest of the region labeled by the US military as the "Sunni Triangle". Many residents of the primarily Sunni city were employees and supporters of Saddam's government, and many senior Ba'ath Party officials were natives of the city. Fallujah was also heavily industrialized during the Saddam era.

In 2003 when the Iraq war started, the US Military was moving into Fallujah knowing its religious history and support of the existing regime.



The First Battle of Fallujah, code-named Operation Vigilant Resolve, was an operation against militants in Fallujah as well as an attempt to apprehend or kill the perpetrators of the killing of four U.S. contractors in March 2004. The chief catalyst for the operation was the highly publicized killing and mutilation of four

Blackwater, USA, private military contractors, and the killings of five American soldiers in Habbaniyah. The Second Battle of Fallujah was a joint American, the Iraqi government, and British offensive in November and December 2004.

Tour to Iraq

After 14 years of service, it was time for White to be assigned to Iraq in 2005. Sadaam Hussein was executed in December 2006, but the region was still extremely dangerous. Indeed, the US response was to surge troops into Iraq in early 2007.

Capt. Dale White was in Iraq as the skirmishes heated up again in 2005 and 2006. Many times the convoy he was riding in was attacked, a risk every time a chaplain was outside the wire. He watched as IEDs exploded on roads up ahead and on bridge pinch points. Once while looking at an innocent flour sack on a bridge, his Marines told him to get back in the Humvee and shut the door. Within moments of closing the door, the sack exploded sending shrapnel into the area of the Humvee. But for the grace of God and good advice from Marines, he would have been in harm's way.

White recalls just another day heading to the city of Karma, or "Bad Karma" as the troops called it, that turned chaotic. For most of 2005 to 2007, Al-Karmah was considered the most violent city in Iraq. Unlike neighboring Fallujah, it has no surrounding wall, so anti-American insurgents could move freely in and out of it. Attacks by mortar and small arms occurred almost daily on coalition patrols, convoys, and the FOBs (Forward Operating Bases). The list of dead or wounded Americans at Karma is long and troublesome.

On this day, White was in a Humvee traveling in a convoy. The vehicle in front was struck by an IED. The insurgents then peppered the remaining convoy with small-arms fire. He recalls seeing wounded Marines outside his Humvee and upon opening the door to assist hearing bullets zipping by, explosions and general chaos reigned. He rendered aid and "was just doing my job" according to Chaplain White.

Reverend White viewed his role as Regimental Chaplain as taking (i) care of his chaplains and religious affairs assistants, (ii) providing a distraction from combat for the troops through ministry and morale, and (iii) counseling. He also provided quiet, maybe unintended, leadership to the younger troops. As a man of 45 years, with a family, he was old enough to be their father and knew people would be watching him. One evening while smoking a cigar with a fellow officer the insurgents fired misguided mortars into Camp Fallujah. The calm of the cigar-smoking officers impacted the younger Marines. Thereafter, it was not unusual for dozens of Marines to show up, ask for a cigar donated by folks back home, and just sit around smoking and talking to provide a distraction from the war.

Counseling and leading also took on many shapes. It was not just men in harm's way. The military press release captured it this way, "Female Marines play a vital role in providing security at the entry control points in the city. They search for female Iraqi citizens moving through the checkpoints. Female Marines are employed in this role in order to be respectful of Iraqi cultural sensitivities."

On June 23, 2005, three female Marines who were on guard duty, and male Marines were killed by a suicide bomber. The bomber exploded his vehicle as a cargo truck, used to transport female Marines from downtown back to base, passed by the vehicle IED on a road outside Fallujah, Iraq. The military confirmed it would be the largest one-day casualty count for women serving in the military since the start of the war in Iraq. Cpl. Ramona M. Valdez, 20; Petty Officer First Class Regina R. Clark, 43 and Lance Cpl. Holly A. Charette, 21 perished in the attack. The driver, Cpl. Chad W. Powell and Pfc. Veashna Muy, 20, was also instantly killed in the explosion.

The attack horrified the base and drove home that dangerous assignments included simple security and transport missions. Immediately, other female Marines talked to White about being uncomfortable checking the Iraqi women for bombs as part of the guard duty. They knew it was their duty but still, friends had just died. White went to the guard station to stand with the women as these Marines did their job. The Chaplain knew the Marines had his back and he made sure they knew he had their backs.

Reverend White's time in Fallujah is captured in the book, "Fallujah Redux" by Daniel Green and Major General William F. Mullin, III (ret.) USMC. Capt. White has told others that "part of our role as chaplains was to pick up the Marines who were injured and to provide pastoral care to them...our instinct is to reach out and help others – that's our calling from God. But in a war zone, we constantly have to balance that with our own safety. "

Reverend White's approach to being a chaplain was a missionary who brings the church's perspective and assurances of God's grace to military personnel. "We have a unique way of presenting God to an audience of 18-to-22-year-olds," he said. "We bring them God, many of them for the first time." He did not expect the troops to come to him but for him to bring God to them.

White's actions under enemy fire also resulted in him being awarded a Combat Action Ribbon (CAR). The CAR is awarded to United States service members who have



actively participated in ground combat. Evidence

must show a service member was engaged in direct combat, not indirect or present in an area where combat is occurring; mere presence in a combat zone does not qualify a

servicemember for the award. The CAR is awarded only to individual service members. The CAR cannot be awarded to a military unit, station, or group. A CAR is not automatically received; only after consideration of specified criteria, the member's service command may award the CAR. Not many chaplains receive such an award.

Even fewer receive the Bronze Star Medal for meritorious achievement in connection with operations against an opposing armed force. Authorized on February 4, 1944, the [Bronze Star Medal](#) is awarded to members of all branches of military service and may be awarded either for combat heroism or for meritorious service. The Bronze Star Medal was designed by Rudolf Freund of Bailey, Banks, and Biddle who also designed the Silver Star.

White's citation for the Bronze Star stated:

"The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting the BRONZE STAR MEDAL to

*COMMANDER DALE C. WHITE
UNITED STATES NAVY*

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION:

For meritorious achievement in connection with combat operations as Chaplain, Regimental Combat Team 8, 2d Marine Division, II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward) in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM 03-05 and 04-06 from February 2005 to February 2006 in Fallujah, Iraq. Commander White provided spiritual guidance and counseling to Regimental Combat Team 8 units across Area of Operations Raleigh. To reach these units, he routinely traveled across the battle space undeterred by the inherent risks of convoy travel. He conducted 80 worship services aboard Camp Fallujah and went forward to smaller operating bases to conduct 35 services.

He received and distributed over 3,000 care packages, coordinated the delivery of 4,500 holiday gifts, thereby enabling each Soldier, Sailor, and Marine to be remembered. Commander White provided comfort and counsel to those who experienced the daily trials of combat and ensured more than 60 memorial services for fallen warriors were well planned and executed. Commander White also provided sage counsel and personal assistance in the proper handling of more than 700 messages from the American Red Cross.

His inspired efforts to provide reassurance during the most trying of times showed him to be a man of action as well as resolute faith. His personal conduct, stamina, and spiritual leadership were evident to all and an inspiration to the unit. Commander White's effectiveness, forceful leadership, and loyal devotion to duty reflected great credit upon him and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

For the President,

*J.F. SALTER
LIEUTENANT GENERAL, U. S. MARINE CORPS
COMMANDER, U. S. MARINE CORPS FORCES, CENTRAL COMMAND"*



He also knew that part of his job was to protect the Constitutional

right to freedom of religion. Chaplain White viewed it as fundamental to keep religious freedom and worship available to the troops. He was not pro-war, but pro-service man and woman.

United Methodists teach that war is “incompatible with the teachings of Christ” and professes respect for “those who support the use of force”



under limiting conditions. Chaplains of the United

Methodist faith, like all chaplains, must balance religious faith and civic duty. “United Methodist chaplains bring a unique balance of grace and faith to the military. We have deep ecumenical and interfaith traditions, perfect for the pluralistic military environment. I truly believe we are extremely well suited for this chaplaincy setting and have a tremendous influence on those we serve” according to Chaplain White.

Dale White was tested in battle. His faith in Christ and trust in his Marines never wavered. He has stated, “We all long for the day of peace and none more than the person who has to pull the trigger.”

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