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Photo below: USS HEWITT (DDG-966) fires a NATO Sea-Sparrow missile during a training exercise. U.S. Navy photo by Journalist 2nd Class Ty Swartz

Christians and the Military

By Colonel Jeffrey C. Tuomala, U.S. Marine Corps Reserve

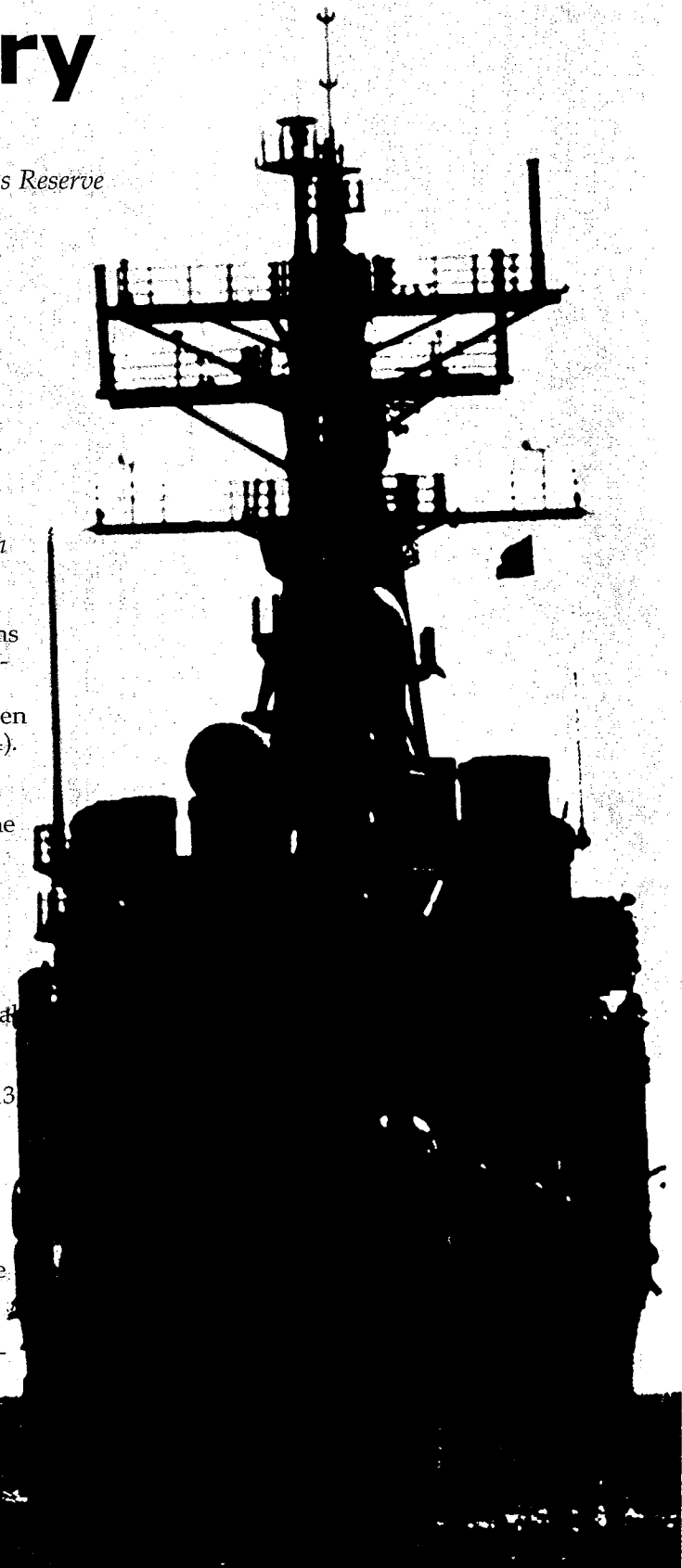
As a judge advocate in the United States Marine Corps I grew increasingly unhappy with my inability to apply my new Christian faith more directly to the legal profession. So, in 1979 I left active duty and the practice of law to attend seminary with the goal of training and equipping myself for full-time Christian ministry. Much to my surprise and delight I found that the professions of law and arms are each full-time Christian ministries.

In the book of Romans, the apostle Paul explains that God has established the office of civil authority (13:1), that civil officers are God's full-time ministers (13:6), and that they are to use force, even deadly force, when necessary to do justice (13:3-4). Soldiers, policemen, judges and lawyers are civil officers. Just as we are to honor officers in the church (I Tim. 5:17), we are to honor officers of the state (I Pet. 2:13-14).

Because civil officers are God's ministers, it comes as no surprise that Christians should be uniquely qualified for military service. There are three character qualities that are particularly necessary in soldiers which all Christians are to possess and develop, not only for waging spiritual warfare (Eph. 6:10-20), but mortal combat when necessary. These traits are an understanding of justice (I Cor. 6:2; Heb. 11:33), courage (I Cor. 16:13; II Tim. 1:7), and sacrificial love (I Cor. 16:14; Eph. 5:2).

Justice

Christ's death and atonement is the supreme demonstration of God's justice, and therefore, the model for civil justice, be it domestic or international (Rom. 3:25). God's wrath is against all sin, and he could not, consistent with his own charac-



ter, forgive sin without a satisfaction of the demands of justice (Rom. 3:26). If He could have forgiven sin without satisfying justice, Christ's death would have been in vain (Gal. 2:21). Christ's death satisfied justice in that He suffered the punishment that we deserved (I Pet. 2:24) and He paid the debt that we owed (I Pet. 1:18).

In a domestic legal system, justice entails punishing criminals (Rom. 13:5), awarding compensation for injury or breach of contract (Rom. 13:4), and preserving the peace (Rom. 13:3; I Tim 2:1-2). Because the civil officer is God's minister and agent of wrath, he must model civil justice on God's eternal justice within the limits of his delegated authority. He is limited as to the types of sin he may punish, the sanctions he may impose, and the persons and territory over which he has jurisdiction.

War, on the other hand, is waged as a special kind of lawsuit between states with no common political authority to whom they can appeal for justice (Acts 17:26; Rev. 19:11). The objectives of military force, however, are the same as domestic police powers – to punish, compensate, and protect.

Courage

There are two basic circumstances that all men fear—things certain and things uncertain. As for things certain, every man knows that he deserves the death penalty, for everyone knows, without a doubt, that he deserves this punishment for his sins (Rom. 1:32). There is only one way to deal with this fear of certain punishment. One must put his faith in Christ whose death vicariously satisfied the demands of justice. Having done so, one need no longer fear death (Rom. 8:31-39).

The other fear, the one caused by the uncertainty of events which lie in the future, is experienced by all men. In many ways the future is just as uncertain for the believer as for the unbeliever. The believer, however, is able to walk by faith, as he lives in the knowledge that the world is not governed by uncertainty, chaos, and chance but rather by Divine Providence (Eph. 1:11). This is the basis for his confidence that all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28).

The circumstances of war make both of these fears especially pronounced. Death is very near. Confusion and uncertainty reign. The soldiers who overcome the fear of death and who are able to thrive in uncertainty have the decisive advantage.

The courage demanded of soldiers is not limited to a willingness to face enemy bullets. It includes

the courage to be honest and faithful in all one's dealings. This may entail refusing to act out of expediency rather than principle, enforcing unpopular standards when subordinates see only their short term interests, being merciful when the situation demands, or taking a position contrary to conventional wisdom.

A Christian soldier should not fear those who can only kill the body (Mt. 10:28) and he should count himself blessed when he suffers for doing what is right (Mt. 5:10).

Love

Lieutenant General Bernard E. Trainor (USMC Retired), maintains that it is love—not hatred, not ferocity, not the lust for violence—that sustains Marines in combat. He wrote, "Love...sustains a man in combat when every fiber in his being shrieks at him to run and hide. It is love that overcomes all other emotions and inspires a man to lay down his life for his brother."

The Apostle John wrote, "perfect love drives out fear" (I John 4:18). Jesus taught, "greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Sacrificial love, like courage, plays a critical role in combat, but it is often harder to sustain in time of peace.

God commands that we love even our enemies (Luke 6:35). But how do you go about loving someone who is at war with you and is trying to kill you? Jesus answered this question teaching, "this is love, that you keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Civil authorities are commanded to execute justice, and in so doing, they are restraining further evil that will result in even greater condemnation. Execution of civil justice points one to God's eternal justice and its satisfaction in Christ (Gal. 3:24).

If a Christian soldier ever has doubts, he or she should consider John the Baptist's counsel. "Then some soldiers asked him, 'And what should we do?' He replied, 'Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay'" (Luke 3:14).

In other words, "You are ministers of justice, be sure that you remain true to your calling."†

This is a condensation of an article previously published in the January 1995 issue of *The Forecast*, 5209 Indian River Rd., Virginia Beach, VA 23464, a newsletter devoted to presenting a Christian view of law and public policy. Used by permission.

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The Christian soldier, especially, believing all things are directed by a personal and loving Heavenly Father, wants nothing else than to act in conformity with His will.