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The “Military Necessity” of Official Leader-Led Prayer to Effective Military and Combat Leadership

Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, prepared a Report in 2002 on the professional military and combat judgment of America’s military Leadership on the military necessity of leader-led public prayers. Prepared on behalf of The Naval Aviation Foundation, the Report reviewed the historic use of prayer in the American military as an essential element of preparation for combat. From 1774 to the present, more than 67 Armed Forces Prayer Books have been widely and officially distributed to our fighting forces, intended to be a source of strength and encouragement in the stresses of war, to officers and soldiers of all ranks, from the American War for Independence to the “War on Terror.”



A sampling of two Prayer Books distributed to the Armed Forces during World War II and the Korean War contain the recommended prayers and their background from: 34 senior uniformed military authorities, including, four and five-star generals from the **Army**: Bradley, Clark, Clay, Collins, Devers, Eisenhower, MacArthur, Marshall, Patton; **Navy**: Nimitz, Schonland; **Airforce**: Vandenberg; **Marines**: Cates, Holcomb, Vandergrift; **Coast Guard**: O’Neill, Waesche; 11 senior civilian military authorities, including secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air force; 11 military chaplains; and 2 Commanders-in-Chief.¹ Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Admiral Thomas H. Moorer concurs that



*Admiral Thomas H. Moorer,
Chairman of the Joint
Chiefs, 1969-1973*

“Prayer for the common good and acknowledgement of Divine Providence is a central, official and historical tenet of the combat leadership preparation of the American Military, particularly officer training and particularly in times of national peril or war.”²

General George Marshall viewed the “spiritual life of the soldier as even more important than his physical equipment,”³ and officer training which includes routine public prayer acquaints future commanders, before the crises of battle, to those crucial intangibles related to the life of the soul and the necessity of prayer to effective military leadership. America’s dependence upon leader-led prayer and Divine Providence in time of national danger debuted prior to and in the

¹ *The Armed Forces Prayer Book*. Daniel A. Poling. New York: Prentice-Hall, 1951. *Soldiers’ and sailors’ prayer book*. Gerald Mygatt. New York: A. A. Knopf, 1944.

² Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, Professional Military Judgment Concerning Crucial Importance of Official Prayer to the American Military’s Morale & Well-Being, <www.firstprinciplespress.org>.

³ Joint Pub 1-05. Religious Ministry Support for Joint Operations. Joint Chiefs of Staff. 26 Aug 1996, at II-3.

Declaration of Independence and is contained in **the inaugural addresses of every President**, also known as America's "Commander in Chief" in time of war.⁴

Ironically while nonsectarian prayer by both chaplains and officers is being challenged by the ACLU, the American Jewish Committee of B'nai B'rith, and the Anti-Defamation league, the President and Congressional leaders, (whose sessions open with prayer) officially called the entire nation to public prayer after the "9-11", 2001 attack. Public prayer is not a surprising act for a nation with the official motto "In God We Trust;" and whose citizens are openly dismayed by attempts to restrict military prayer and other public acknowledgment of God, as their children are being sent in harm's way and many have paid the ultimate price in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Beside all America's presidents, there are numerous examples of national and military leaders who petitioned Almighty God on behalf of those under their command. On June 6, 1944, President Roosevelt called upon the entire nation and led them in prayer during his radio address, praying for our assault forces and for the families of those who would give the supreme sacrifice in the D-Day invasion.⁵ During World War II, an exemplary officer, General George Patton led the famous and effective prayer for favorable weather during the crucial 1944 Battle of the Bulge. Patton's prayer was issued to 3,200 officers and chaplains in the Third Army to "**...urge, instruct, and indoctrinate every fighting man to pray as well as to fight.**"⁶

But can the effectiveness of prayer be measured? "The Studies in Social Psychology in World War II Series," produced by the Social Science Research Council, was one of the largest social science research projects in history. Volume II, *The American Soldier, Combat and Its Aftermath*, Princeton University Press, (1949), reported data on the importance of prayer to officers and enlisted infantrymen. **Prayer was selected most frequently as the soldier's source of combat motivation.** The motivation of prayer was selected over the next highest categories of "thinking that you couldn't let the other men down," and "thinking that you had to finish the job in order to get home again." From the responses, "did not help at all," "helped some," and "helped a lot," 70% of enlisted men in the Pacific Theatre (n = 4,734), and 83% in the Mediterranean theatre (n = 1,766) responded "helped a lot," as did 60% of Infantry officers (n = 319). Prayer was the most frequently cited combat motivator "when the going was tough." The majority of over 6,400 soldiers in both the Mediterranean and Pacific theatres responded that prayer "helped them a lot." In their statistical analysis, the Social Science Research Council reports,

[T]he fact that such an overwhelming majority of combat men said that prayer helped them a lot certainly means that they almost universally had recourse to prayer and probably found relief, distraction, or consolation in the process.⁷

Prayer is the proven American mainstay for combat success and survival. Rear Admiral Jeremiah A. Denton, a graduate of the Naval Academy and POW in North Vietnam, described his years of torture and confinement:

⁴ See The Brief of Amici Coalition of American Veterans, Inc. and Naval Aviation Foundation, Inc., submitted to the Fourth Circuit Court containing excerpts of all fifty inaugural addresses which acknowledge God's providence at <www.firstprinciplespress.org>.

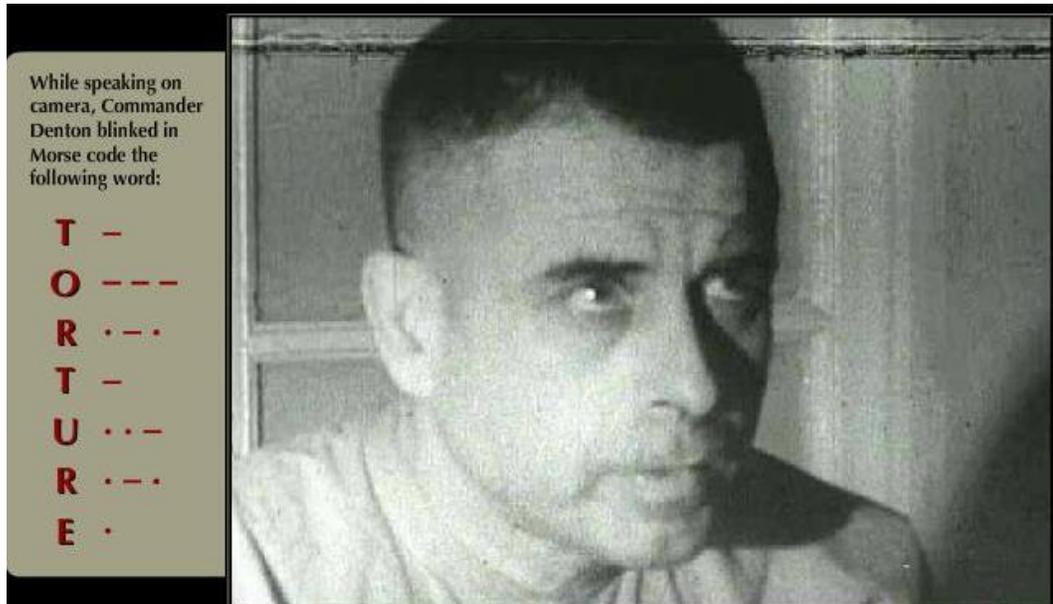
⁵ Jack Dixon, *Our Sons Will Triumph*, From the D-Day prayer of the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, June sixth, 1944. NY: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1944.

⁶ James H. O'Neill, *The True Story of the Patton Prayer*. THE MILITARY CHAPLAIN. Vol. 19, No. 2, at 3, 13 (1948).

⁷ Social Science Research Council. *THE AMERICAN SOLDIER, COMBAT AND ITS AFTERMATH*. Princeton University Press, (1949), at 185.

A man does a lot of praying in an enemy prison. Prayer, even more than sheer thought, is the firmest anchor.⁸

Denton writes that the original title he chose for his book, *When Hell Was In Session*, was *Under God, Indivisible*, because most of the prisoners when faced with desperation, rediscovered God and became indivisible in their resistance to Communist torture and extreme deprivation.



Admiral Jeremiah Denton, POW in North Vietnam, where he blinked "T-O-R-T-U-R-E" in Morse Code on camera while in captivity

Since the attacks on prayer at Virginia Military Institute and Admiral Moorer and The Naval Aviation Foundation's historic response thereto, the U.S. Senate has voted unanimously three times to affirm public prayers by American Statesmen, in their official public capacities. Those votes were based on detailed discussions of American history and precedent, which discussions are recorded in the *Congressional Record*, and are supported by an overwhelming majority of voters.⁹

In 2006, 74 Congressmen signed a letter asking President Bush for an Executive Order allowing chaplains to pray freely according to their faith. After President Bush's failure to respond, an Amendment was proposed in the 2007 National Defense Authorization Act which would have given chaplains the prerogative to pray according to the dictates of the chaplain's own conscience. This was strongly opposed by the Secretary of Defense, as well as the National Association of Evangelicals' now disgraced leader, Ted Haggard.

The Secretaries of the Navy and Air Force were, however, instructed by Congressional action to rescind their restrictive and hostile policies toward prayer that were issued in 2006. In spite of the fact that more than 98% of those serving in the Armed Forces state a specific religious preference identify Christianity as their choice, the Executive branch, DoD and the Courts continue the battle to make our Armed Forces a Christian free zone by censoring American history, organic utterances of

⁸ Quoting Jeremiah Denton, Jr. (1983). *The EYEWITNESS HISTORY OF THE VIETNAM WAR 1961-75*. Ballantine Books. See also, Jeremiah A. Denton, Jr. *When Hell Was In Session: A Personal Story of Survival as a P.O.W. in North Vietnam*. NY: Readers Digest Press, 1976.

⁹ See *Congressional Record* for the 109th Congress, at page S12561 through S12570, on the unanimous vote in favor of Amendment 2440, which by law ensures the ability of military service academies to offer leader-led voluntary nondenominational prayer.

America's military statesmen, and by denying the aid and comfort of prayer to those willing to serve the nation in time of war.

In conclusion, it remains the duty of all public officials to ensure that American Military Forces, including Service Academies, both state and federal, fully prepare future officers for the rigor and peril of combat which must always include frequent leader-led unit prayer. The nations' Declaration of Independence recognizes the "Creator" as the source of law and liberty as "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God" established a fixed standard, a higher discipline – a battle-tested standard – to restore and uphold against years of disturbing reports of multiple military crises arising from moral relativism and undemocratic changes contrary to America's first military principles of virtue, honor, patriotism and subordination, called "Exemplary Conduct."

Daily prayer recalls to all military and civilian leaders that, as John Adams said, "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other." This is not the time to leave the field to "domestic enemies" who would have the temerity to urge Congress to force our soldiers to fight "**without a prayer.**" Leader-led military unit prayer remains an unbroken historic military necessity throughout American history and continues as essential to combat effectiveness and training of future military leaders for the 21st century.

Colonel Ronald D. Ray



Colonel Ray is a practicing attorney in Kentucky and a highly decorated combat veteran of the Vietnam War (two Silver Stars, a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart). He served as a Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense during the Reagan Administration and was appointed by President Bush to serve on the American Battle Monuments Commission (1991-1994), and on the 1992 Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces. From 1990 through 1994, he served as Military Historian and Deputy Director of Field Operations for the U.S. Marine Corps Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

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Dr. Jeffrey is the Director of Research for First Principles, Inc. Since April, 2000, she has coordinated the RSVP America campaign's data collection and analysis efforts regarding the Kinsey Reports impact on state criminal codes in thirty states, a summary of which was published by the American Legislative Exchange Council in 2004. Dr. Jeffrey continues her research, writing and consultation for First Principles projects providing educational materials for the restoration of American History in law and public policy.

The briefs filed on behalf of Virginia Military Institute with the Fourth Circuit and the supreme Court are posted at www.firstprinciplespress.org. Also on the website is a summary of military prayer research. Contact info: P. O. Box 1136, Crestwood, KY 40014, email: colray@aye.net