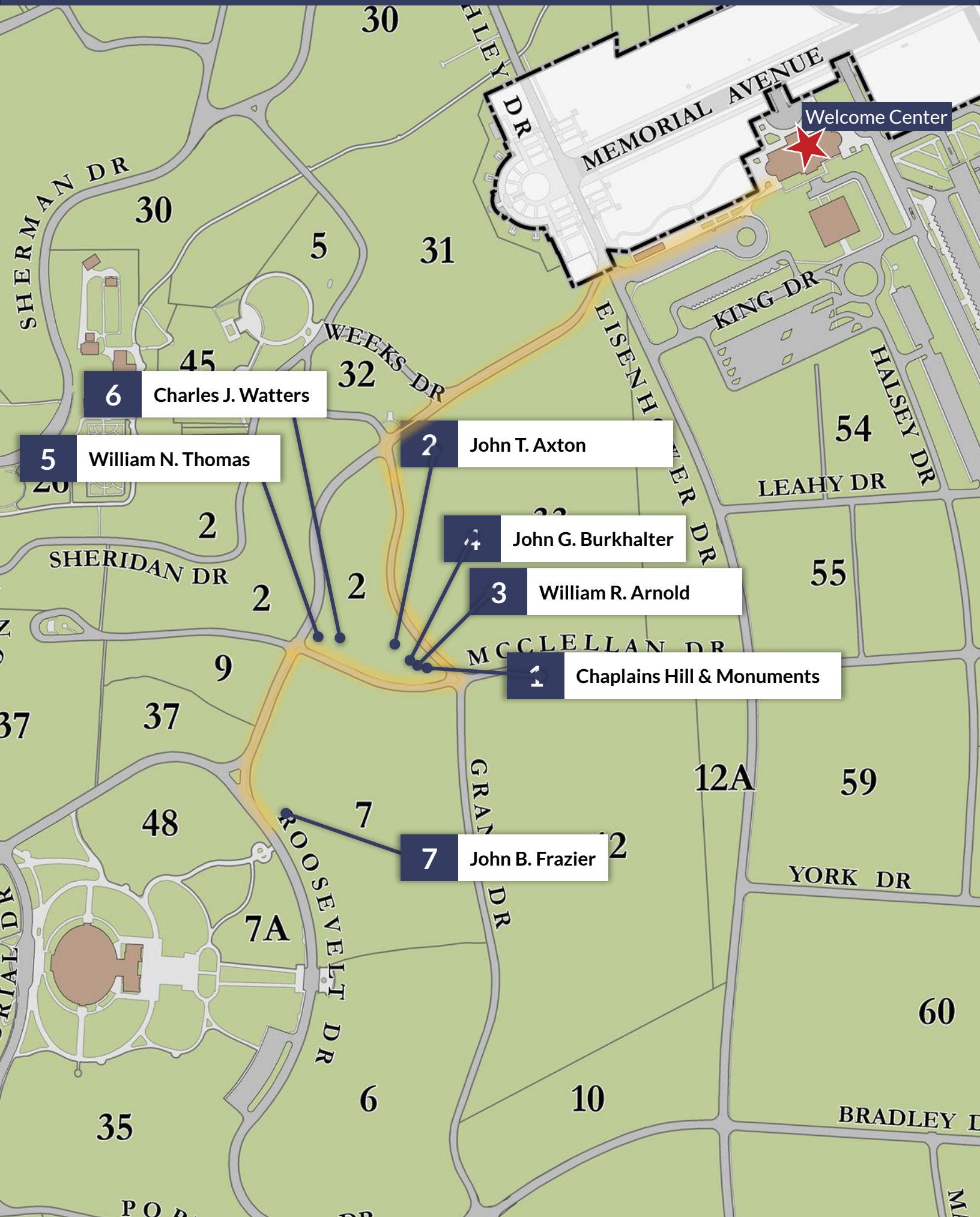


ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY WALKING TOUR

CHAPLAINS HILL



We love hearing about your visit! Share your pictures, questions, and favorite parts of the tour on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.



@ArlingtonNatl

#ANCEducation #ReligionatANC



ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY WALKING TOUR

CHAPLAINS HILL

Length: ~1 mile Starting Point: Section 2 (0.5 miles from Welcome Center) Exertion Level: Low

There are three types of stops on this walking tour:



HONOR stops mark the gravesites of specific individuals.



REMEMBER stops commemorate events, ideas or groups of people.



EXPLORE stops invite you to discover what this history means to you.

1 Chaplains Hill & Monuments

Section 2



2 John T. Axton

Section 2,
Grave E-152



3 William R. Arnold

Section 2,
Grave E-85



4 John G. Burkhalter

Section 2,
Grave E-79-1-RH



5 William N. Thomas

Section 2,
Grave E-63-LH



6 Charles J. Watters

Section 2,
Grave E-186-A



7 John Brown Frazier

Section 7, Grave
10058



Left: A chaplain leads a field service in Saipan after Super Typhoon Yutu struck the island in 2018. (DVIDS). Top right: A chaplain delivers news of a new son to an injured Marine, circa 1952. (NHHC). Bottom right: A chaplain serves communion during a field service in 2016. (DVIDS/Carlos Cruz Jr.)





INTRODUCTION



U.S. MILITARY CHAPLAINCY

Military service, especially in combat, can bring individuals to the extremes of human experience, including severe stress and danger, chaos and loss, and risk of injury or death. In such circumstances, many people seek support and comfort from their religious faith.

Because the free exercise of religion is protected by the First Amendment of the Constitution, the U.S. military employs chaplains to meet service members' spiritual needs. Chaplains are active-duty service members who are also ordained, or credentialed, by their religious organization. In times of peace, chaplains conduct religious services (including the funerals held here at Arlington) and provide spiritual counseling. In times of war, they serve as non-combatant members of military units, providing combat stress support and performing rites and rituals for the injured and dying. Each chaplain represents his or her own faith group, but also works to support all service members' right to practice, or not practice, their beliefs. Individually and through the Department of Defense Armed Force Chaplains Board, chaplains also advise military leadership on religious, ethical, and moral matters.

History of Chaplaincy in the U.S. Military

Military chaplaincy in the United States dates to the Revolutionary War. Throughout the colonial period, ministers volunteered their services and spiritual guidance to soldiers. With the outbreak of war with Britain, George Washington wanted to formalize chaplains' role in the Army and to provide compensation for their work. On July 29, 1775, the Second Continental Congress approved Washington's request and established the Army Chaplain Corps. A chaplain was assigned to each regiment of the Continental Army to aid in the spiritual, emotional, and moral well-being of the soldiers, receiving pay equivalent to the rank of captain. A few months later, the Navy established a Chaplain Corps; today, it serves the U.S. Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard. The U.S. Air Force established its own Chaplain Corps in 1949.

Increasing Religious Diversity

Over time, the military chaplaincy, like the United States itself, has evolved and diversified. While early Chaplain Corps counted only white, male, Christian chaplains among their ranks, Jewish and African American chaplains began serving during the Civil War. In the 1970s, all three service corps swore in their first female chaplains. Today, military chaplains represent five major faith groups (Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist) and over 100 denominations.

Contributions of the Chaplaincy

Since 1775, more than 25,000 chaplains have served alongside American service members in every armed conflict, as well as in times of peace. Over 400 chaplains have been killed in combat — a sacrifice embodied in the mottos of the Navy and Army Chaplain Corps, "Called to Serve" and "Pro Deo Et Patria" (For God and Country), respectively. Nine chaplains have received the Medal of Honor, and many others have received other prestigious military decorations.

On this tour, you will learn the stories of some of the chaplains buried here on "Chaplains Hill" at Arlington National Cemetery — their sacrifices and impact on those they served — as well as how the Chaplain Corps has changed over time. The chaplains featured on this tour do not reflect the current diversity of the chaplaincy or the military itself; for the most part, the stories of chaplains who are women, people of color, or representatives of lower-density faith groups are still being lived. But walk through any active burial section of the cemetery, such as Section 60, and you will see an astonishing diversity of emblems of belief, a reflection that America's military community is strengthened by members of many belief systems.

Buddhist chaplain leads a field service, 2011. (DVIDS/Sara Keller)



CHAPLAINS HILL & MONUMENTS



WALKING TOUR STOP 1 Section 2

CHAPLAINS WALKING TOUR

From the Welcome Center, walk straight down Roosevelt Dr. Turn left on Grant Dr. At the intersection of Grant and McClellan, turn right into Section 2 and walk up the hill.

In Section 2, atop a rising slope, stands Chaplains Hill, the resting place of numerous military chaplains. However, not every chaplain memorialized on Chaplains Hill is buried at the cemetery. Atop the hill stand four monuments that honor 254 chaplains, representing various faiths, who were killed in the line of duty. The monuments memorialize the chaplains' dedication to faith and the free exercise of religion in the armed forces.



The four monuments on Chaplains Hill. (ANC/Rachel Larue)

The monument to the 23 chaplains who died in World War I is the oldest of the four, dedicated on May 5, 1926. The two quotations on the cenotaph read: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (the Bible, John 15:13) and "To you from failing hands we throw the torch — be yours to hold it high" (from Canadian World War I soldier John McCrae's famous 1915 commemorative poem, "In Flanders Fields"). The top of the plaque bears a cross covered by a shield with stars and stripes. Leaves surround the shield.

The next monument added to Chaplains Hill honors 134 Protestant chaplains who died in World War I and World War II. It was dedicated on October 26, 1981. At the top of the plaque, a laurel wreath overlays a Latin cross. Laurel wreaths are often used to symbolize triumph.

On May 21, 1989, Arlington added a monument to 83 Catholic chaplains who died serving in World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. The monument features a plaque with a crucifix (a cross with the body of Christ on it) and the names of those honored, listed under the conflict in which they served. The list includes Father (Maj.) William Barragy, the first American chaplain to die in Vietnam. Barragy was killed on May 4, 1966, in a helicopter crash with 20 men on a mission for the Army's 101st Airborne Division. He posthumously received the Legion of Merit.

The fourth and newest monument, dedicated on October 24, 2011, honors 14 Jewish chaplains who died on active duty in the U.S. armed forces. Its inscriptions include a Biblical quotation: "They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions" (Samuel II, 1:22). The top of the plaque features the Jewish chaplain insignia: two stone tablets with Hebrew characters and the Star of David above, flanked by two Lions of Judah.

CHAPLAINS HILL & MONUMENTS

Symbols & Insignia

In his analysis of U.S. Army insignia and uniforms, William K. Emerson observed that “[u]niforms tell of the history of the service ... and encourage pride in a soldier’s unit through identification with fellow troops.” For chaplains who represent both their faith and their military unit, religious insignia on their uniforms has special importance.

For most of the nineteenth century, chaplains did not wear specific insignia on their uniforms, and therefore had no external symbol of membership. This changed in 1880, when the Army adopted the shepherd’s crook as the chaplain insignia. In 1898, the Army replaced the shepherd’s crook with a Latin cross.

As the religious diversity of the chaplain corps and military expanded, so too did the insignia. Jewish chaplains had been able to serve in the Army since 1862, but they did not serve in large numbers until World War I. In 1918, the Army added a Jewish insignia because Jewish chaplains considered the cross an inappropriate insignia for rabbis to wear. The Jewish insignia depicts the tablets of law with a Star of David above. In 1981, the Roman numerals on the tablets were replaced with Hebrew characters.

In the 1990s, military leaders sought to further diversity the Chaplain Corps. In August 1990, the Chaplains Board approved the insignia for Buddhist chaplains: a dharmachakra (“Wheel of the Dharma”), an eight-spoked wheel which holds meaning in Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism. In 1993, the Board approved a crescent insignia for Muslim chaplains. The most recent insignia, for Hindu chaplains, is a Sanskrit syllable for the sacred sound, “Om.” The U.S. military approved it in 2012 after U.S. Army Capt. Pratima Dharm became the first Hindu chaplain in 2011.



CHRISTIAN



JEWISH



BUDDHIST



MUSLIM



HINDU



Note the insignia on each of their uniforms.

Clockwise: Muslim Chaplain Lt. Col. Ibraheem Raheem, undated. (U.S. Army); Hindu Chaplain Captain Pratima Dharm's uniform on display at the Military Women's Memorial, circa 2014. (U.S. Army Chaplain Corps); A Jewish chaplain (left), a Christian chaplain (center), and a chaplain with no insignia (right). (DVIDS/Mel Slater); Buddhist Chaplain 1st Lt. Brett Campbell, 2017.





EMBLEMS OF BELIEF



EXPLORE



As you walk through the cemetery, look for the different symbols engraved on the government-provided headstones. These symbols, called emblems of belief, are the most common image on government headstones at Arlington.

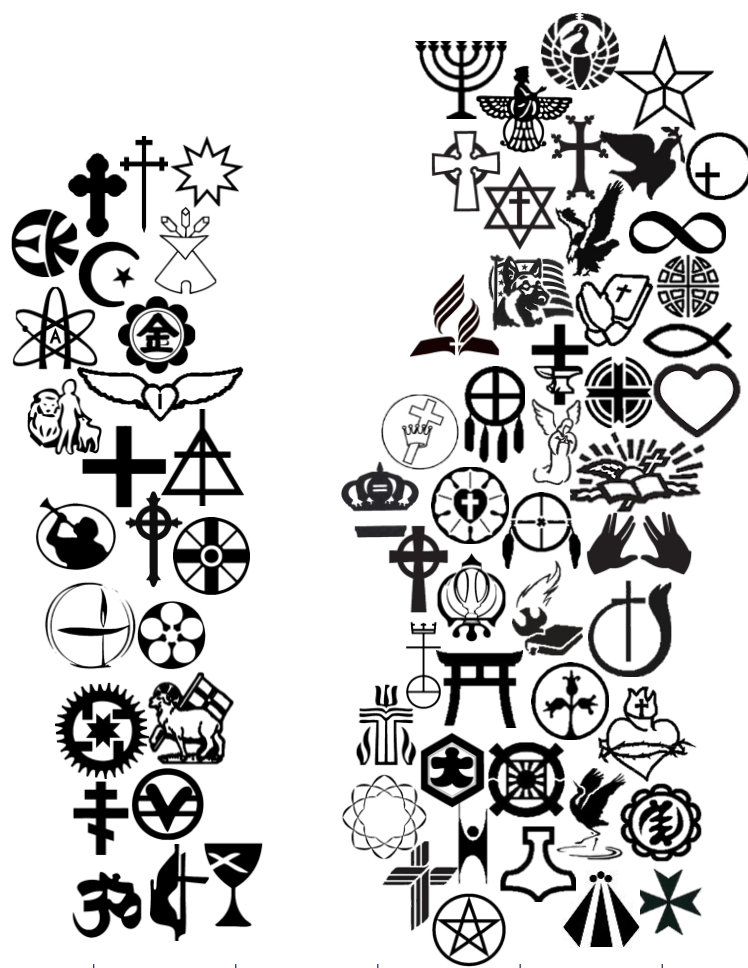
The military redesigned its headstones after World War I. The new design included space for a religious emblem. At first, only two approved emblems existed: the Latin cross to represent the Christian faith and the Star of David to represent the Jewish faith. As the military grew more diverse, the diversity of emblems also increased.

Emblems of belief have historically represented religious affiliations, but today, the National Cemetery Administration accepts any symbol that “represents the sincerely held belief of the decedent.” Below is a timeline that shows when different emblems of belief were approved.

- **1918:** The Latin Cross for Christianity and the Star of David for Judaism were authorized as permitted symbols on government-issued headstones.
- **1951:** The Secretary of the Army approved the Buddhist emblem as the third authorized emblem.
- **1980s:** 25 additional emblems were approved.
- **2000s:** 10 new emblems were approved.
- **2010s:** 34 new emblems were approved.

See the full list of approved emblems [here](#).

Note: The graph shows an approximation of when Congress approved each emblem. The placement is not exact but instead indicates the general order of approval.



1920

1940

1960

1980

2000

2020

REFLECT

Do you have a strongly held belief?

How would you represent that belief with a symbol?

CHAPLAIN JOHN T. AXTON



WALKING TOUR STOP 2

Section 2, Grave E-152

BIRTH: July 28, 1870, Salt Lake City, UT

DEATH: July 23, 1934, Washington, D.C.

BACKGROUND: John Thomas Axton was the first Army Chief of Chaplains. Axton entered the ministry of the Congregational Church in 1901 and, in 1919, received an honorary doctorate in Divinity from Middlebury College. Axton married Jane Bean in 1891 and they had four children. One of his sons, John T. Axton Jr., also served in the U.S. Army Chaplain Corps and is buried nearby (Section 2, Grave E-378-1-RH).

CAREER: In 1912, Axton joined the Army as a chaplain. During World War I, Axton was assigned to the Port of Embarkation, Hoboken, New Jersey, where he directed 32 welfare organizations. He also oversaw the activities of the 166 chaplains who worked there; the officers regarded him as both an organizer and a peer. He received the Distinguished Service Medal in 1919 “for exceptional ... service in the organizing and administering of numerous welfare activities ... for the comfort and pleasure of enlisted men.”

In 1920, President Woodrow Wilson appointed Chaplain Axton as the first chief of chaplains of the United States Army and promoted him to the rank of colonel. At this time, the Army chaplaincy was

often the subject of religious divides both within the Army and religious communities at large. Many chaplains opposed the idea of a single chaplain overseeing the practices of all faiths. However, World War I demonstrated the need for cooperation and unity across all faith groups. The establishment of the Office of the Chief of Chaplains in 1920 marked the professionalization of the Chaplain Corps and the standardization of religious duties across all branches of the U.S. Army. Axton later stated that “Army chaplains have been at work quietly demonstrating that men of all denominations may unitedly work in the field of religion.”

On November 11, 1921, Axton presided over the funeral of the Unknown Soldier of World War I, along with American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) senior chaplain Charles H. Brent, Navy Chief Chaplain John B. Frazier (Stop 8), and chaplain Rabbi Morris S. Lazaron. As Frank M. Brien of the New York Herald described the funeral: “It is a great religious ceremony, this burial today. The exaltation of the nameless bones would not be possible except for Belief.” During the service, Axton read the 23rd Psalm and an invocation. Read part of his invocation below:

“Almighty God our Gracious Father, in simple faith and trust we seek Thy blessing. Help us fittingly to honor our unknown soldiers who gave their all in laying sure foundations of international commonwealth. Help us to keep clear the obligation we have toward all worthy soldiers, living and dead, that their sacrifices and their valor fade not from our memory. Temper our sorrow, we pray Thee, through the assurance, which came from the sweetest lips that ever uttered words, ‘Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted.’ Be Thou our Comforter.”

After serving as chief of chaplains for eight years, Axton retired in April 1928. He then served as chaplain at Rutgers University until his death in 1934.

LEGACY: As the first chief of Chaplains of the U.S. Army, Axton solidified the responsibilities and functions of his position and of chaplains across the Army, establishing a new legitimacy for their role. Throughout his career — and against the sentiments of many in the War Department — Axton remained steadfast in his belief that the chief of chaplains should receive the rank of major general and chaplains the rank of colonel. As of 2022, all but four of the Army chiefs of chaplains have held the rank of major general.



Col. John T. Axton, circa 1915-1920. (LOC)

CHAPLAINS WALKING TOUR



Axton's headstone is eight rows back from the monuments, near the middle of the row.



RELIGION & THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER



After World War I, the remains of thousands of service members from the various combatant nations could not be identified. To honor their unknown soldiers, in 1920, Great Britain and France each selected one set of unidentified remains to be buried in a tomb of honor. The British and French staged elaborate funerals for their newly selected unknown soldiers and used the funeral as a way to honor all of their nation's war dead.

Inspired by these events, in 1921 the U.S. Congress approved a joint resolution that provided for a single unidentified American service member to be brought back to the United States and buried at a tomb constructed in Arlington National Cemetery. The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier would represent all missing and unknown service members who sacrificed their lives for the United States in World War I. It would also function as a central place for Americans to mourn all of the war dead.

The funeral service for America's World War I Unknown Soldier took place on the third anniversary of the armistice: November 11, 1921. Thousands of people attended the ceremony or listened to it at several venues where it was transmitted. Four chaplains participated in the service in an attempt to include some religious diversity in the event: Army Chief of Chaplains John T. Axton (Congregational), Navy Chief of Chaplains John B. Frazier (Southern Methodist), and Army chaplains Charles H. Brent (Episcopal) and Morris S. Lazaron (Jewish).

During the burial service, President Warren G. Harding addressed the nation. Speaking of the Unknown Soldier, Harding said, "We know not whence he came... He might have come from any one of millions of American homes.... He may have been a native or an adopted son... We do not know the eminence of his birth, but we do know the glory of his death.... As a typical soldier of this representative democracy, he fought and died, believing in the indisputable justice of his country's cause."

Harding emphasized that the Unknown Soldier represented the diversity of the nation. The men who served in World War I represented a cross section of American society, and the Unknown Soldier could have been any of these men. Historical records about the composition of the American Expeditionary Forces (the armed forces that served in Europe during the war) demonstrate the diversity of religious denominations within the ranks. Moreover, the religious diversity of the military likely went beyond the records of the time and did not document the full scope of the religious affiliations and beliefs of the men. However, some concrete figures are available:

- 35% of service members identified as Catholic.
- 250,000 Jewish men served. Jewish service members participated in greater numbers than their proportion of the population at the time.
- 22,000 members of the Church of Latter-Day Saints served.
- Muslims, Sikhs, American Indians, and individuals with no formal faith also served.

The Unknown Soldier represents the religious diversity of the military during World War I, and more broadly, of the nation in the early 20th century — a diversity that has since only expanded.

REFLECT

- Does the religious diversity of the A.E.F. affect your understanding of the Unknown Soldier? If so, how?
- Why does acknowledging the varied potential backgrounds of the Unknown Soldier matter?
- Why might publicly acknowledging the potential religious diversity of the Unknown Soldier have been important for the War Department as they planned and prepared for the funeral? Who might have this have mattered to and why?
- Take a moment to analyze the funeral program: <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015031929279>. How did the military represent the religious diversity of the AEF through the Unknown Soldier's burial service?

CHAPLAIN WILLIAM R. ARNOLD



WALKING TOUR STOP 3 Section 2, Grave E-85

BIRTH: June 10, 1881, Wooster, OH

DEATH: January 7, 1965, New York, NY

BACKGROUND: William R. Arnold was the first Roman Catholic priest appointed as Army Chief of Chaplains. Before he attended St. Bernard's Seminary in Rochester, New York, Arnold learned his father's cigarmaking trade and worked in a steel mill in Indiana. He also clowned with the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus during the summer after his ordination.

CAREER: Arnold was ordained in the Catholic Church in June 1908. He enlisted in the Army Chaplain Corps five years later. Throughout his career, Arnold served at a variety of Army posts, including in the Philippines, in the American West overseeing Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) chaplains, and at Army Chaplain schools.

On December 23, 1937, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed Arnold as chief of the Army Chaplain Corps. Four years later, when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Arnold faced a daunting task: raising and preparing the Chaplain Corps for war.

In one of his first wartime actions, Arnold reinstated the Chaplain School to ensure that chaplains received training before being stationed overseas and in combat zones. He appointed Chaplain William D. Cleary to lead this reactivation effort. When selecting a location for the school, Chaplain William D. Cleary narrowed the search to Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Duke University in North Carolina. Arnold and Cleary ultimately chose Harvard because it allowed integrated training — North Carolina's segregation laws forbade Black and white students from dining and living together. The Army Chaplain School was the first military school to integrate its training. Arnold believed it important for chaplains of different races and faiths to work together and respect each other.

In addition to the basic task of filling the ranks of the Chaplain Corps, Arnold's tenure as chief of chaplains included protecting the free exercise of religion, building camaraderie within the Corps, and defining the role of an Army chaplain. Arnold protected the free exercise of religion by publicly supporting all faith groups. In 1942, the Chaplain Corps distributed new Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant prayer books to soldiers, along with guidance that chaplains should not favor one faith group over another, regardless of their own faith.

CONTINUE TO NEXT PAGE



CHAPLAINS WALKING TOUR

Arnold's headstone is six rows in front of Axton's headstone.



Above: Col. William R. Arnold at his desk in Washington, D.C., May 3, 1941. (TCK Archives)

Below: Arnold (center) takes the Chief of Chaplain oath of office on December 22, 1937, as the first Catholic chief of chaplains. Maj. Gen. Allen W. Gullion administers the oath and outgoing chief of chaplains Alva J. Brasted stands beside Arnold. (LOC)

CHAPLAIN WILLIAM R. ARNOLD

Prior to World War II, chaplains served in a variety of secular roles — as mess hall officers, trial counselors, recreation officers, etc. — which sometimes conflicted with their religious duties and personal faiths (for example, showing movies on the Sabbath). When Arnold became chief chaplain, he revised the chaplain's manual to remove recreational activities and any other secular duties that prohibited chaplains from performing their professional, religious duties. However, Arnold also counseled chaplains to still support and attend recreational activities so that they would better know, and therefore serve, the men under their spiritual care.

Arnold significantly contributed to the Army chaplaincy by professionalizing the Corps. For example, he instated monthly reports that required every chaplain to submit data on their performance. These reports allowed Arnold to monitor the character of his chaplains as well as whether they were upholding religious freedom. Arnold also greatly expanded the volume and reach of the Corps' circular letters. He used these letters to publicize the Corps' important work and reassure the public that their loved ones were getting the spiritual support they needed. He also used the circular letters to define policies and priorities, strengthen bonds within the chaplaincy, remind chaplains that they were not alone, and build a shared understanding of a chaplain's purpose and identity.

Arnold served as Army chief of chaplains until April 1, 1945. He was the first chief of chaplains to hold the rank of major general. After his Army service, Arnold served for 19 years under the Roman Catholic Archdiocese for the Military Services, providing guidance and sacraments for members of the armed services and their families throughout the world.

LEGACY: During his time as chief of chaplains, Arnold transformed the Army Chaplain Corps. He professionalized the chaplaincy and helped engender camaraderie and a shared identity among its members. Perhaps most importantly, he upheld religious freedom as a key pillar of the chaplaincy and continuously defended the right of both chaplains and service members to freely exercise their faiths, or absence thereof. At a mass for the 1939 U.S. Military Academy graduates, Arnold stated, "Military service in a just cause for a just government is a religious duty."



Left: A Holocaust survivor (right) explains to Major General William R. Arnold (left) how the Dachau concentration camp gas chambers worked, May 31, 1945. (National Archives)

Right: Col. Arnold (right) leads a meeting with the division heads of his office staff on May 3, 1941. (Author's Collection)

CHAPLAIN JOHN G. BURKHALTER



WALKING TOUR STOP 4 Section 2, Grave E-79-1-RH

BIRTH: July 23, 1909, Thomasville, GA

DEATH: September 30, 1992, Gaithersburg, MD

BACKGROUND: Army chaplain John G. Burkhalter served on the frontlines of World War II and the Korean War. Burkhalter grew up in Miami, Florida. At age 16, he started boxing professionally under the name “Jackie Mills.” In 1932, Burkhalter retired from professional athletics to pursue ministry. He was ordained as a Southern Baptist minister in 1935. A year later he married his high school sweetheart, Mabel Money. They had two children.

CAREER: In 1942, Burkhalter enlisted in the U.S. Army as a chaplain. During World War II, he served on the frontlines in Europe. He landed at Omaha Beach on D-Day and stayed on the frontlines during the Battle of the Bulge, where he was injured multiple times. He was awarded the Purple Heart, Bronze Star, and Silver Star for recovering American casualties under enemy fire.

In August 1944, the Miami Daily News printed excerpts from a letter Burkhalter wrote to his wife Mabel about his experiences on D-Day. Burkhalter served with the 1st Infantry, the “Fighting First Division,” which participated in the initial assault on Omaha Beach.

“As I stood in line waiting to get off the [landing craft infantry] to a smaller craft to go into shore, I was looking toward land and saw a large shell fall right on a landing craft full of men. I had been praying quite a bit through the night as we approached the French coast, but now I began praying more earnestly than ever. Danger was everywhere; death was not far off...

“The beach was spotted with dead and wounded men...Bodies of injured men all around. Sad and horrible sights were plentiful.

“In from the beach were high hills which we had to climb. We crawled most of the way up... Later, about ten of us were crossing along the edge of a field when we heard sniper bullets whiz by. We all fell to the ground. As we lay there hugging the earth ... the birds were singing beautifully in the trees close by. As I lay there listening I thought of the awfulness of it all; the birds were singing and we human beings were trying to kill each other...

“On the afternoon of the second day we were quite a way inland and two of my assistants and I were out trying to locate bodies of dead soldiers. We always take care of the American dead first and then the enemy dead. Since we did not have any vehicles yet to send bodies back, all we could do on the move was to put the bodies in mattress covers and leave them in a marked place to be taken care of later by the rear echelons...

“As I look back through hectic days just gone by to that hellish beach ... it was a pure miracle we even took the beach at all. Yes, there were a lot of miracles on the beach that day. God was on the beach [on] D-Day; I know He was because I was talking with Him.”

Burkhalter, undated. (Burkhalter family)



Burkhalter preaching to individuals imprisoned at the U.S. Disciplinary Barracks, undated. (Burkhalter family)



CHAPLAINS WALKING TOUR

Burkhalter's headstone is one row behind Arnold's.

CONTINUE TO NEXT PAGE



CHAPLAIN JOHN G. BURKHALTER



Burkhalter also served for 13 months during the Korean War, traveling throughout the frontlines holding services. Life Magazine published a photograph of him performing a funeral service for 21 soldiers buried in a temporary grave in Korea.

Burkhalter retired from the military in 1969. He continued to work as a pastor until 1988.

LEGACY: Like many other chaplains, Burkhalter served on the frontlines among soldiers actively engaged in fighting. He offered spiritual support and solace to the men he served alongside and risked his life to identify and retrieve wounded and fallen soldiers under his care.



Top: Burkhalter preaches to a group of servicemembers, undated. (Burkhalter family)

Left: Burkhalter talks with a servicemember, circa 1945. (Burkhalter family)

Right: Burkhalter at a military camp, undated. (Burkhalter family)



CHAPLAINS ON THE FRONTLINES



Chaplains play unique roles within the military community. While they conduct worship services and perform religious rites, they also regularly minister to individuals outside of their own faiths. Military chaplaincy has been described as a “ministry of presence,” meaning that chaplains must be available to support service members in their time of need, regardless of their spiritual affiliations. U.S. Army Chaplain Joshua T. Morris recalls being told in his training that he would “be where the soldiers were; live as the soldiers lived; suffer as the soldiers suffered.” Chaplain Morris served in Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom.

In fulfilling this need to be present, military chaplains serve on the battlefield as noncombatants. American military chaplains do not carry weapons and cannot direct combat operations. Instead, they offer spiritual support, tend to the wounded, and administer religious rites. Yet their service often puts them in the line of fire. During World War II, for example, the Army Chaplain Corps suffered one of the highest casualty rates among all military units. Nine military chaplains (two Navy and seven Army) have earned the Medal of Honor, five of whom were recognized for tending to the wounded while under heavy fire.

REFLECT

- How do you think a military chaplain’s “ministry of presence” contributes to morale among service members?
- Chaplains are not required to serve on the frontlines of combat. They can instead wait to tend to the wounded behind the scenes. Why do you think a chaplain would choose to go to the frontlines of combat?



American Medic Cpl. Barney Morrison (right) provides medical aid to a wounded German while Burkhalter (center) performs last rites, July 1944. (Burkhalter family)

CHAPLAIN WILLIAM N. THOMAS



WALKING TOUR STOP 5 Section 2, Grave E-63-LH

BIRTH: March 21, 1892, Piney Woods, MI

DEATH: April 27, 1971, Lake Junaluska, NC

BACKGROUND: William Nathaniel Thomas was the first Navy chaplain to achieve the permanent rank of rear admiral. Thomas was ordained deacon in the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1913 and ordained as an elder in 1915. From 1910 to 1917, Thomas served as a pastor for three churches in Mississippi. He married Martha Ellen Fondren in 1913 and together they had two sons.

CAREER: When the United States entered World War I, Thomas sought an appointment as a Navy chaplain. During the war, he served aboard ships and crossed the Atlantic Ocean 28 times.

In 1933, Thomas was assigned to serve as command chaplain at the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. Though it was customary for chaplains to serve at the Naval Academy for only three years at a time, Thomas took such personal and professional fulfillment in the role that he remained at the Academy until 1945. During his time there, he oversaw the enlargement of the Naval Academy Chapel and wrote "The Midshipman Prayer" to be recited during Christian worship services at the chapel. The prayer describes values and ideals Thomas hoped midshipmen would embody:

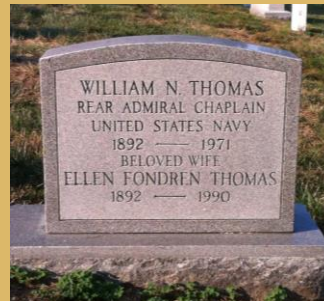
"Almighty Father, whose way is in the sea, whose paths are in the great waters, whose command is over all and whose love never faileth; let me be aware of Thy presence and obedient to Thy will. Keep me true to my best self, guarding me against dishonesty in purpose and in deed, and helping me so to live that I can stand unashamed and unafraid before my shipmates, my loved ones, and thee.

Protect those in whose love I live. Give me the will to do my best and to accept my share of responsibilities with a strong heart and a cheerful mind. Make me considerate of those entrusted to my leadership and faithful to the duties my country has entrusted in me. Let my uniform remind me daily of the traditions of the service of which I am a part.

If I am inclined to doubt, steady my faith; if I am tempted, make me strong to resist; if I should miss the mark, give me courage to try again. Guide me with the light of truth and keep before me the life of Him by whose example and help I trust to obtain the answer to my prayer, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

Thomas finally left the Naval Academy in 1945 when he was appointed as Navy chief of chaplains. Since 1920, the Navy had debated how to organize the ranks of its chaplains and whether to promote the head of the Chaplain Corps to rear admiral. In 1947, Congress passed a law allowing the Navy chief of chaplains to hold the permanent rank of rear admiral (since 1944, the rank had only been temporary), and Thomas became the first to be permanently promoted. During his time as chief of chaplains, Thomas directed the completion of the first official history of the Navy Chaplain Corps and publication of the first official Manual of the Chaplain Corps.

LEGACY: Thomas was one of only 39 Navy chaplains who served during both World War I and World War II. After retiring from the Navy in 1949, he was often invited to serve as interim pastor for churches of many different Christian denominations. "The Midshipman Prayer" has been enshrined as a Naval Academy tradition and a modified version for interfaith audiences is still used in Christian religious services at the Naval Academy today.



CHAPLAINS WALKING TOUR

At the intersection of Roosevelt and McClellan Drives, Thomas' headstone is two rows back from McClellan and two headstones in from Roosevelt.

CHAPLAIN CHARLES JOSEPH WATTERS



WALKING TOUR STOP 6

Section 2, Grave E-186-A

BIRTH: January 17, 1927, Jersey City, NJ

DEATH: November 19, 1967, Republic of Vietnam

BACKGROUND: During the Vietnam War, Charles Watters received the Medal of Honor for his actions tending to the wounded and dying during the Battle of Dak To.

CAREER: Watters was ordained as a Roman Catholic priest in 1953 and served in various parishes in New Jersey. He became a chaplain in the New Jersey Air National Guard in 1962 and entered the Army in 1964.

In July 1966, Watters was assigned to serve with the 173d Support Battalion, 173d Airborne Brigade in the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam). In this capacity, he often accompanied combat units onto the battlefield. In February 1967, he joined the paratroopers of the 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry, during Operation Junction City — one of the major combat jumps of the war. After completing his 12-month tour, Watters volunteered to extend his tour for another six months.

In November 1967, during the Battle of Dak To, Watters once again put himself on the frontlines to help fellow soldiers. Watters continually exposed himself to danger as he rushed to help the wounded and dying. His Medal of Honor citation describes the scene:

“Unarmed and completely exposed, he moved among, as well as in front of, the advancing troops, giving aid to the wounded, assisting in their evacuation, giving words of encouragement, and administering the last rites to the dying.”

While Watters was giving aid to the wounded, a 500-pound bomb meant for the enemy detonated near his position. This friendly fire incident killed him and many of his men.

On December 2, while his remains were being returned to the United States, 600 people attended a mass in Berkeley Heights, New Jersey, led by 20 of his fellow priests.

LEGACY: Watters is one of more than 400 American military chaplains who have died in action, and one of eight members of the Chaplain Corps who have received the Medal of Honor. His heroic actions exemplify selfless service.



CHAPLAINS WALKING TOUR

Face Section 2 from Roosevelt Drive. Watters' headstone is six rows back, the second in from McClelland of the headstones facing Roosevelt Drive.



Top: Watters, undated. (U.S. Army)

Bottom: Watters conducting a worship service in Vietnam, circa 1967. (U.S. Army Chaplain Corps)

CHAPLAIN JOHN BROWN FRAZIER



WALKING TOUR STOP 7 Section 7, Grave 10058

BIRTH: December 19, 1870, Wytheville, VA

DEATH: November 11, 1939, Keswick, VA

BACKGROUND: Captain John Brown Frazier served as the Navy's first Chief of Chaplains. Born into a family of Methodist pastors, John Brown Frazier pursued ministry. He attended Emory and Henry College in Virginia and then served as a pastor at a small church in Floyd, Virginia. Frazier married Catherine Cook. Together they had three children.

CAREER: Appointed to the Navy chaplain corps in 1895, Frazier served his first three years with the Asiatic Squadron, the group of U.S. ships based in the Pacific. When the Spanish-American War broke out in 1898, Frazier was stationed in the Philippines, then a Spanish colony. During the Battle of Manila Bay on April 27, 1898, Frazier reportedly stood beside the famed Commodore George Dewey aboard his flagship, the USS Olympia.

With the United States' entry into World War I in April 1917, the Navy needed a chief chaplain to oversee the growing Navy Chaplain Corps. On November 5, 1917, Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels appointed Frazier as the first chief of chaplains of the Navy. Frazier was tasked with appointing new chaplains and creating a cohesive corps. By the end of the war, Frazier had expanded the corps from 40 active-duty chaplains to almost 200, appointing 162 chaplains in less than two years. He also published "The Navy Chaplain's Manual" in 1917, which offered Navy chaplains advice on how to best serve aboard Navy ships.

At Arlington National Cemetery on November 11, 1921, Frazier was one of the four chaplains who participated in the burial of the Unknown Soldier of World War I. He read from the Book of Revelations 7:9-17.

LEGACY: Frazier retired from the Navy in September 1925. During his funeral service at Arlington National Cemetery, Rear Admiral Robert D. Workman, Navy chief chaplain during World War II, said:

"Upon the shoulders of our first Chief rested the responsibility 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."

Chaplain Frazier created the basis of the Navy's modern chaplain system. He instilled in the Navy Chaplain Corps a sense of cohesion, and he shaped it to meet the needs of the Navy and those the Corps served.

Frazier, circa 1917. (NHHC)



CHAPLAINS WALKING TOUR



Walk along Roosevelt Drive toward the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Veer left when the road splits. You should see a sidewalk leading up to the Tomb, walk about halfway down the road toward it. Frazier's headstone will be on your left, a few headstones in from the road.

CHAPLAINS WALKING TOUR

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