

THE MARYLAND DEFENSE FORCE DISCOVERS ANOTHER WAY TO SERVE THE MARYLAND NATIONAL GUARD AND THE STATE DEFENSE FORCE

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At present, the United State Military is experiencing a shortage of chaplains in both its active and reserve components (Altamirano, 2007; Groening, 2007; Syeed, 2007; News as History, 2006). The shortage in this critical Military Occupation Specialty is even greater in the Reserve and National Guard (The Associated Press, 2007), particularly for units in home quarters. The reason for this seems to be based on the urgent need for chaplains in units mobilized for combat, UN Police Action or homeland defense so that the unit's chaplains are being mobilized leaving few behind to minister to the remaining troops at home. The rationale for this is apparently that, while in home quarters, the soldiers and their families have civilian Ministers to provide them with spiritual and social support and guidance.

The rationale for mobilizing the chaplains leaves one possible problem, very few civilian religious leaders who have never served in the military fully understand the problems faced by soldiers and their families who are regularly separated from each other for significant periods of time; where military mothers must leave their children behind, sometime with their father and sometime with others if the father is also a mobilized soldier; who depend on the vagaries of the military with regard to finance and law. Because of this level of understanding, some soldiers prefer military Chaplains to service their needs. Even "freshmen" chaplains quickly learn about these problems and how to assist their "congregation" to cope with them.

The shortage of chaplains is critical for Jewish Chaplains (Temple Emanuel, Beaumont, TX., 2005). For some reason there seem to be less of them available than for other religious groups. Actually, there is a group of Rabbis who are committed to providing spiritual and social guidance for individuals who live in isolation from family and friends. The group, known as the Aleph Institute, is composed of Rabbis and other members of the Chasidic (Pious) group known as the Lubavitch community, who volunteer their time and service to these isolated groups, and has also been recognized as an official Ecclesiastical Endorsing Agency by the U.S. Department of Defense to endorse Jewish Chaplains for the military (The Aleph Report, n.d.; Popper, 2006). They have often volunteered for service as chaplains in the military and just as often been rejected for the single reason, "facial hair," beards, which they are forbidden by religious law to shave. Thus, for their need to have all soldiers appear with a "clean" face, in accordance with provisions of Army Regulation 600-20 (*Army Study Guide*, 2005), the military has deprived itself of a ready resource of Jewish Chaplains.

At present there is one Chasidic Rabbi serving in the military, Chaplain (Colonel) Jacob Goldstein. He served in the New York Air National Guard under a special waiver for his beard until their mandatory retirement age caused him to look elsewhere. The U.S. Army Reserve wanted him, retained his waiver and assigned him to the staff of the Chief Chaplain of the U.S. Army. More recently, he has been reassigned as Command Chaplain of the Puerto Rico Army Reserve. Chaplain Goldstein stated that he has been trying unsuccessfully to correct this situation for several decades (Goldstein, 2007).

Herein lies the "situation report" that describes how the Maryland Defense Force (the United States Code Title 32 authorized State Guard of Maryland) addressed the question of facial hair while

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in military uniform through a request for a modified grooming standard and commissioned the first Chasidic Rabbi into the State Defense Force. According to MDDF Chief Chaplain Charles Nalls the modified grooming standard is not ordinary, but not unique (Nalls, 2007).

In May 2006 a MDDF soldier of the Jewish faith fell, broke his neck and injured his spinal cord. Within days of the corrective neurosurgery it was discovered that he need a pacemaker to be inserted as well. Shortly after the surgeries he was transferred to the Shady Grove Adventist Rehabilitation Hospital of Rockville, Maryland for extensive rehabilitation. While undergoing extensive and exhaustive rehabilitation, the Hospital Chaplain asked its Jewish Chaplain to visit him and offer him spiritual and social comfort. The Jewish Chaplain, Rabbi Chesky Tenenbaum, Assistant Rabbi of the Chabad Lubavitch of Upper Montgomery County, met with the soldier, conducted services with him and then sat and discussed the soldier's lifestyle and his future plans.

The soldier told the Rabbi that after his family and his consulting on security and homeland security projects, the most desirable and demanding effort was his commitment to the State Defense Force (SDF) movement and writing on the subject; however, he was worried about the fact that he was wheelchair bound (at the time), heavily drugged (prescription) and had limited use of his hands for typing. While exploring ways to compensate for those limitations, Rabbi Tenenbaum mentioned that Chaplain (Colonel) Jacob Goldstein, USAR, was his uncle and that, if it wasn't for his beard, he was also like to serve as a military chaplain (Goldstein, 2007; Popper, 2005). In addition to his work at the Chabad, a Hebrew acronym for "Wisdom, Understanding, Knowledge," he is also a Chaplain for the Rehabilitation Hospital and the Rockville Volunteer Fire Department.

The two discussed over a period of several weeks the Rabbi's desire to serve as his uncle does and the possible problems associated with Rabbis with a beard as their faith requires. After eight weeks, the soldier was finally released for home therapy; however, he and Rabbi Tenenbaum continued to talk, developing a lasting friendship.

The soldier contacted Chaplain [Lieutenant Colonel (MD)] Charles Nalls, Chief Chaplain for the MDDF and discussed the possibility of commissioning a Chasidic Rabbi (Nalls, 2007). Clearly, the problem was two-fold: (1) will the Rabbi perform well as a military chaplain; and (2) the issue of the existing military grooming standard. Following personal interviews where Chaplain Nalls determined that Rabbi Tenenbaum would indeed serve the military well as a chaplain and recognizing the need for Jewish Chaplains, he decided to pursue the issue further. In turn, he contacted Chaplain (Colonel) William Lee, Chief Chaplain of the Maryland National Guard Joint Force Headquarters, and together they explored ways to commission a Chasidic Chaplain. One important issue was the fact that MDDF Chaplains often serve on Temporary Assigned Duty as chaplains to the Maryland National Guard (MDNG) when in home quarters. Since there are Jewish soldiers and airmen in the MDNG, a Jewish chaplain would be a benefit to both the MDNG and the MDDF. Finally, a decision was made that Rabbi Tenenbaum would most likely succeed as a military chaplain and that the need of the airmen and soldiers was greater than the restrictions placed on grooming. The request for commissioning was moved up the chain of command, a revision to the grooming standard was made and approved, and the vetting process proceeded.

Brigadier General (MD) Courtney Wilson, Commanding General, MDDF was briefed on the subject, agreed that the idea was worthy to pursue and approved the approach to modifying the grooming standards.

Following this decision, the vetting process was initiated. In September 2007 the soldier was notified by Chaplain Nalls that Rabbi Tenenbaum had been approved and a Commissioning Ceremony was planned for November 2007. The MDDF had officially waived the grooming standards for this purpose and has pointed the way for all the remaining SDF units across the country.

The Commissioning Ceremony took place on 26 November 2007 at 1730 at the Chabad Lubavitch of Upper Montgomery County, Maryland (Greenberg, 2007; Kresge, 2007; Montes, 2007; Zaklikowski, 2007). Attending the ceremony were Brigadier General (MD) Courtney Wilson, Chaplain William Lee, Chaplain Jacob Goldstein, Chaplain Charles Nalls, newly commissioned Chaplain [Captain (MD)] Chesky Tenenbaum, his wife and son.¹

Following are photographs taken during the Commissioning Ceremony.² In Photo 1 Chaplain Nalls, Chief Chaplain of Maryland Defense Force swears Rabbi Tenenbaum into the MDDF as a Chaplain, the first Chasidic Chaplain in any SDF in the Country. Photo 2 displays the Pinning Ceremony performed by Brigadier General (MD) Wilson, Commanding General, MDDF and Chaplain Tenenbaum's Uncle, Chaplain Goldstein, Command Chaplain of Puerto Rico USAR



Photo 1: Chaplain Nalls swearing in Rabbi Tenenbaum as Chaplain Tenenbaum, the first Chasidic Chaplain in the SDF country wide



Photo 2: General Wilson and Chaplain Goldstein perform the Pinning Ceremony

Photo 3 displays the Commissioning Party standing in front of the Holy Ark at the Chabad where the ceremony took place. Photo 4 displays Chaplain Tenenbaum sharing his special moment with his wife and son.



Photo 3: The Commissioning Ceremony party: (r-to-l) General Wilson, Chaplain Nalls, Chaplain Tenenbaum, Chaplain Goldstein and Chaplain Lee



Photo 4: Mrs. Tenenbaum and Master Tenenbaum enjoy Chaplain Tenenbaum's entry into his new career

Photo 5 (next page) presents Chaplain Tenenbaum, the man who, with his new military organization, the MDDF, points the way for the remaining 21 authorized and approved State Defense Force units.

¹ The soldier who recruited CH (CPT) C. Tenebaum was unable to attend due to his limited mobility during the heavy rain. The author is that MDDF soldier.

² Photographs are courtesy of LTC Robert Hastings, MDDF Public Affairs Officer.

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Photo 5: Presenting
CH (CPT) Chesky
Tenenbaum, MDDF

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