

KNIGHTS WITHOUT ARMOR:  
UNION ARMY CHAPLAINS

AN ABSTRACT OF  
A THESIS  
PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY  
OF DANBURY STATE COLLEGE

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
MASTER OF SCIENCE

by  
Robert S. Hall  
May 1965

Knights Without Armor is an account of the formation and accomplishments of Union Army Chaplains. It explains how clergymen were called to duty for the North in the Civil War, and the difficulties under which they labored. From a handful at the beginning of the war, the corps grew to over two thousand before the conflict ended. However many of this number resigned long before the end was in sight. The duties were so varied and vagaries of military life so rigorous that only a few clergymen made good chaplains. Church services were held in barns, in the fields, often before battles and frequently not at all depending on the circumstances.

At first there were only white Christian clergymen who acted as chaplains. However by the second year of the war rabbis were included, and toward the close of the war nearly all chaplains appointed to Negro regiments were Negroes.

Early in the war Congress enacted a law approving one chaplain to each regiment. It failed at that time to see the need for hospital chaplains. However, when public opinion demanded action, it did pass a bill approving appointment of hospital chaplains in 1862. Hospital chaplains, on the whole, did a better job than regimental chaplains because the duties were better defined. Chaplain William Young Brown wrote a hospital chaplain's manual, The Army Chaplain, in which he carefully described the duties as both sacred and

secular. Unlike regimental chaplains, hospital chaplains were required by the Surgeon General to make periodic reports. This method, which was later adopted by the Army, proved to be a good source of information and discipline.

Congress attempted to provide the necessary legislation to make for suitable chaplains in the Union Army, defining position with regard to uniform, rank, pay and station. The adequate filling of the position of chaplain was left, largely, to the religious denominations and to unit commanders. Because this action was often unsatisfactory, public opinion demanded that volunteers, provided by the executive order of the Christian Commission, supplement the work of the army chaplains in the hospitals and on the field.

From May 14, 1862, when the first group of delegates left the central office in Philadelphia until the end of the war, the United States Christian Commission won wide approval. The objective of this civilian organization was "to promote the spiritual and temporal welfare of the soldiers in the Army--in cooperation with chaplains and others." This may well be said to be the forerunner of the United Service Organizations.

Clergymen, who acted as religious counsellors and spiritual guides to soldiers in the Civil War, were as unprepared as church and government to see the basic needs of the situation and to meet them properly. It took a great deal of maturing during the war for this nation to begin to see its place as a union with the rights of all men properly respected. Knights Without Armor is one segment of this story.