



Military chaplains have been an integral part of the United States military since its founding. Despite their great importance in serving the spiritual, moral, and physical needs of their units, it might surprise



many to learn that nine different chaplains have received the Medal of Honor for going “above and beyond the call of duty.”



John Whitehead – “The Angel of Stones River”

Awarded the Medal of Honor: April 4, 1898

John Milton Whitehead enlisted in the 15th Indiana Regiment as a 39-year-old preacher from Westville, Indiana. Whitehead and his regiment were at the center of the heavy fighting at the Battle of Stones River near Murfreesboro, Tennessee, towards the end of 1862. Whitehead wrote of his experiences on the battlefield that fateful day, “Three times we charged Jackson’s Brigade and three times we put the enemy to flight... But this was accomplished only with a fearful loss of life. Of my own regiment, every other man was killed or wounded; that is, half were gone...” Following his battle-scarred unit, Whitehead disregarded the shot and shell flying all about and worked to evacuate the wounded and dying to the rear. After bringing the mortally wounded Calvin Zenner, commander of Company G, back to the Union lines



he “offered a prayer for him” and sang “O Sing to Me of Heaven.” For his life-saving actions on the battlefield, Whitehead became known as “The Angel of Stones River” and would receive the Medal of Honor for his actions on December 31, 1862. Whitehead travelled to Topeka, Kansas, after the war and continued to be a Baptist minister until his death in 1909. The U.S. Army Chaplain Center and School presents the John M. Whitehead Award to the student earning the top score on the Army Physical Fitness Test and demonstrating mental and physical toughness throughout the course.

Francis B. Hall, 16th New York Regiment



Awarded the Medal of Honor: February 16, 1897

On the morning of May 3, 1863, the 16th New York Regiment found itself amidst the intense shot and shellfire of the Battle of Salem Church. This intense battle, part of the larger Chancellorsville Campaign, was fought in and around the Salem Church, a rural chapel outside of Fredericksburg, Virginia. For Reverend Hall, this would be his first taste of combat, and he did not shirk from aiding his fellow soldiers of which 154 would become casualties this day. As reported by Maj. John C. Gilmore of the 16th in his letter recommending Hall for the Medal of Honor, “Chaplain Hall did voluntarily come, during the hardest fighting with his horse....and carried wounded men upon his horse to the rear for proper



care and attendance. I saw him do this several times during the engagement.... I have never mentioned this matter to chaplain Hall in any way whatsoever, and knowing him as I do, he is the last man in the world who would ever think of being rewarded for his actions." Reverend Francis Hall would survive the Civil War and died at the age of 75 in Plattsburgh, New York.

1st Lieutenant James Hill, 21st Iowa Regiment



Awarded the Medal of Honor: March 15, 1893

1st Lieutenant James Hill was serving in the 21st Iowa Regiment during the Battle of Champion Hill – the largest and bloodiest battle of Ulysses S. Grant’s campaign to encircle Vicksburg, Mississippi in May of 1863. During some of the heaviest fighting during the battle, Hill, who was alone, stumbled upon three Confederate pickets in the dense woods. Outnumbered 3-to-1, Hill recognized that he was in “a nasty position.” Thinking quickly, Hill ordered the three Confederates to “ground arms” and issued loud orders to an imaginary Union detail in the woods. Fooled by Hill’s ruse, the Confederates became prisoners and were marched to the rear while Hill continued to issue commands to his phantom guard. For this action and his quick thinking at Champion Hill, 1st LT Hill would earn the Medal of Honor. It was only afterward that Hill would become the regiment’s chaplain. Born in England, Hill had



become a farmer and Baptist minister in the Cascade region of Iowa. Hill lived until 1899 and is buried in the Cascade Protestant Cemetery in Cascade, Iowa.

Milton Lorenzo Haney – “The Fighting Chaplain”



Awarded Medal of Honor: November 3, 1896

Chaplain Milton Haney was with the 55th Illinois Regiment during the Battle of Atlanta (Peachtree Creek), on July 22, 1864. During one of the critical times of the battle, Haney picked up a musket and joined the ranks of the regiment, fighting to retake a Union breastwork that had recently fallen to the Confederate forces. Haney’s actions this day led to his being called “The Fighting Chaplain” by the Illinois men. The records state that he was renowned for his “great personal bravery” and “his zealous performance of professional duties.” Haney would survive the war and later live in California, until his death in 1922. Haney is buried in Altadena, California.



Joseph O'Callahan, USS Franklin



Awarded Medal of Honor: January 23, 1946

Chaplain O'Callahan was serving aboard the USS Franklin near Kobe, Japan on March 19, 1945, when the ship was attacked by Imperial Japanese forces. A twin-engine bomber struck the Franklin with two 550-pound, semi-armor piercing bombs. The damage done to the Franklin left her badly damaged and the crew fighting valiantly to keep her afloat. O'Callahan moved through darkened and smoke-filled corridors to an open flight deck only to find the ship being rocked by secondary explosions as fires burned uncontrolled. He ministered to the wounded and dying, he organized and led firefighting crews into the blazing inferno on the flight deck, he directed the jettisoning of live ammunition and the flooding of the magazine. Inspiring the men around him, O'Callahan fought heroically with the crew of the Franklin to save the ship and get her back to port. After World War II, O'Callahan returned to Holy Cross in the fall of 1948 as the head of the Mathematics Department. He died on March 16, 1964, at the age of 59. The destroyer USS O'Callahan bore his name for nearly thirty years. Click [here](#) to learn more about the bombing of the USS Franklin.



Emil Kapaun, 1st Cavalry Division



Awarded the Medal of Honor: April 11, 2013

Kapaun served as an Army Chaplain in both World War II and Korea. It was his time in Korea that would earn him the Medal of Honor. The 1st Cavalry Division had pushed deep into North Korea, and Chinese forces were determined to drive the allied armies back. The ensuing fight is now known as the Battle of Unsan, and it resulted in thousands of American and South Korean casualties. It was during this battle that Captain Kapaun calmly walked through withering enemy fire to provide comfort and medical aid to his comrades and rescue friendly wounded from no man's land. His regiment found itself surrounded and began to evacuate, but Kapaun decided to stay with the wounded. The next day, Kapaun pushed aside an enemy soldier preparing to execute an American sergeant, Herbert A. Miller. Saving Miller's life inspired the remaining soldiers to fight until they were captured. Sadly, the chaplain died in a prison camp in 1951. His heroism and selflessness inspired people for decades, and in the 2000's U.S. Representative Todd Tiahrt successfully campaigned to have Kapaun awarded the Medal of Honor.



Vincent Capodanno – The “Grunt Padre”



Awarded the Medal of Honor: January 7, 1969

Lieutenant Vincent Capodanno, a US Navy Chaplain, was in Vietnam on the morning of September 4, 1967. His Marine battalion was part of Operation Swift, a mission to rescue two Marine companies which had been ambushed in the Que Son Valley. During the operation, Capodanno's battalion was ambushed by a large North Vietnamese Army. When he heard that two platoons in a company of his battalion were under attack and in danger of being overrun, Capodanno rushed to assist them. He ran through intense enemy fire so that he could administer last rites and give medical aid. As he aided the Marines, Capodanno was wounded repeatedly by enemy fire, yet still he continued with his duty. It was when he was moving to aid another wounded Marine the chaplain was cut down by machine gunfire. In addition to recognizing Capodanno with a Medal of Honor, the USS Capodanno bore his namesake for over twenty years.



Charles Watters, 173rd Support Battalion



Awarded the Medal of Honor: November 4, 1969

During the Battle of Dak To, on November 19, 1967, Chaplain Watters was moving with one of the battalion's companies when he was attacked by an enemy battalion. 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. Seeing a shocked paratrooper, Watters picked the man upon his shoulders and carried him to safety. Watters exposed himself to both friendly and enemy fire between the two forces to recover two wounded soldiers. He went so far as to leave a perimeter established after a retreat to rescue wounded men despite the danger from enemy fire. There were even efforts to try to restrain Chaplain Watters from his heroic and courageous deeds because of his vulnerability to fire. It was only once he was sure that all the wounded were inside the perimeter that he started aiding the medics applying field bandages to open wounds, obtaining and serving food and water, giving spiritual and mental strength and comfort. Watters was giving aid to the wounded when he himself was mortally wounded. He now rests in Arlington National Cemetery.



Charles Liteky, 199th Infantry Brigade



Awarded the Medal of Honor: November 19, 1968

Charles Liteky was in Vietnam on December 6, 1967, near Phuoc-Lac, when his company came under heavy attack from a battalion-sized enemy force. Liteky saw wounded men close to an enemy machine gun and moved to place himself between the gun and the men. He then managed to drag them to safety. Chaplain Liteky then began moving upright through the enemy fire, administering last rites to the dying and evacuating the wounded as his company rallied. Throughout the fighting, he repeatedly exposed himself to danger to rescue wounded and trapped men. It was not until the next morning that Liteky was found to have been wounded in the neck and the foot. Despite these injuries, Liteky had personally carried over 20 men to safety. On July 29, 1986, Liteky renounced his Medal of Honor in protest over U.S. policies in Central America. Liteky's is the only known case in which a Medal of Honor has been renounced. Liteky passed in California on January 20, 2017, at the age of 85; he spent the rest of his life fighting for peace.

— National Medal of Honor Museum

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