

Army War College helps Chaplain ‘maintain effective and relevant religious support’

By Staff Sgt. Shawn Morris, 99th Readiness Division 02 April 2024



Chap. (Lt. Col.) Raymond Leach, deputy command chaplain and regional chaplain personnel manager for the U.S. Army Reserve's 99th Readiness Division, receives his diploma from Maj. Gen. David Hill Commandant U.S. Army War College during his graduation

JOINT BASE MCGUIRE-DIX-LAKEHURST, N.J. – At first glance, sending an Army Chaplain to the U.S. Army War College may seem counter-intuitive.

After all, Chaplains are often viewed as purveyors of peace; men (and women) of the cloth who are restricted from carrying a weapon, even in a warzone.

But for Chap. (Lt. Col.) Raymond Leach, pairing decades of service in the Chaplaincy with his recent attendance at the Army War College was a match made in heaven.

“While ‘War’ is in the title of the Army War College, it certainly doesn’t limit the scope of development of each student’s critical, creative, and strategic

thinking to those topics related only to war,” said Leach, who serves as the deputy command chaplain and regional chaplain personnel manager for the U.S. Army Reserve’s 99th Readiness Division. “It is often said that the mission of the U.S. Army is to defeat our nation’s enemies in battle, which makes winning war the Army’s primary purpose; winning war, however, is more than just dominating in battle.

“Peace is protected through deterrence, which comes from a solid base of power,” Leach continued. “War is entered to attain political objectives and to return to stability and peace. Through all this cyclical struggle from peace to war and back, Soldiers and their Families bear the stress personally.

“Chaplains have to be fully integrated at every echelon to understand the struggle, be proximate to their Soldiers in order to journey with them and remain accessible, and ensure that Unit Ministry Teams and Chaplain Sections in the force structure below them have the resources, support, and top cover they need to provide direct religious support to their Soldiers and effective, meaningful advisement to commanders and unit leadership,” he added.

According to the Army War College website, “The purpose of U.S. Army War College at this time in our nation's history is to produce graduates from all our courses who are skilled critical thinkers and complex problem solvers in the global application of Landpower.”

“As Chaplains rise through the echelons from entry-level service at the battalion to service at division, corps, and even at the Pentagon, it is essential that they know how the Department of Defense and Army leadership operates at each level,” Leach explained. “The Army War College Master of Strategic Studies prepares the senior Chaplain to be an asset at the highest levels, ensuring the Army maintains strong, effective, and relevant religious support and religious advisement throughout the formation.

“Throughout the Master of Strategic Studies program, there is ongoing discussion not only about the future but about the threat to our nation that currently exists,” Leach continued. “We are already in the gray zone of war with peer and near-peer competitors as well as with other state and non-state actors; attacks on our economy, political system, power infrastructure, and the day-to-day tools and systems to which we have grown accustomed and rely upon in our pursuit of the American way of life

are many.

“While the consequences of these attacks may not feel like acts of war, they are aimed not only at absconding with our resources but also at destroying our unity and weakening our resilience and resolve; the threat is real, pervasive, and effective,” he added.

The War College website also indicates that, “It is our duty to the Army to also act as a ‘Think Factory’ for commanders and civilian leaders at the strategic level worldwide and routinely engage in discourse and debate on ground forces’ role in achieving national security objectives.”

“While Chaplains are not required to attend the Army War College in order to promote into positions below general officer, it is important for those Chaplains serving at the highest echelons to understand the culture and mindset at those levels in order to work effectively and to prepare for strategic shifts and requirements far into the future,” Leach said.

“Being selected as a student in the Army War College is an honor and a gift I never would have imagined receiving,” Leach continued. “I am truly grateful for the opportunity, the challenge, the personal growth, and the comradery along the way. I am hopeful that the investment in my development will reap a robust return on behalf of the American taxpayers and our great nation.

“What will leave a lasting impression more than anything else in my experience in this course of study are the many highly intelligent, personally sacrificial, and enormously committed individuals with whom I have been surrounded, to include classmates, course facilitators, and guest instructors,” he added. “As a Department of Defense and Department of the Army, we have called our military leadership to very high standards and we are in great hands as we move into the future.