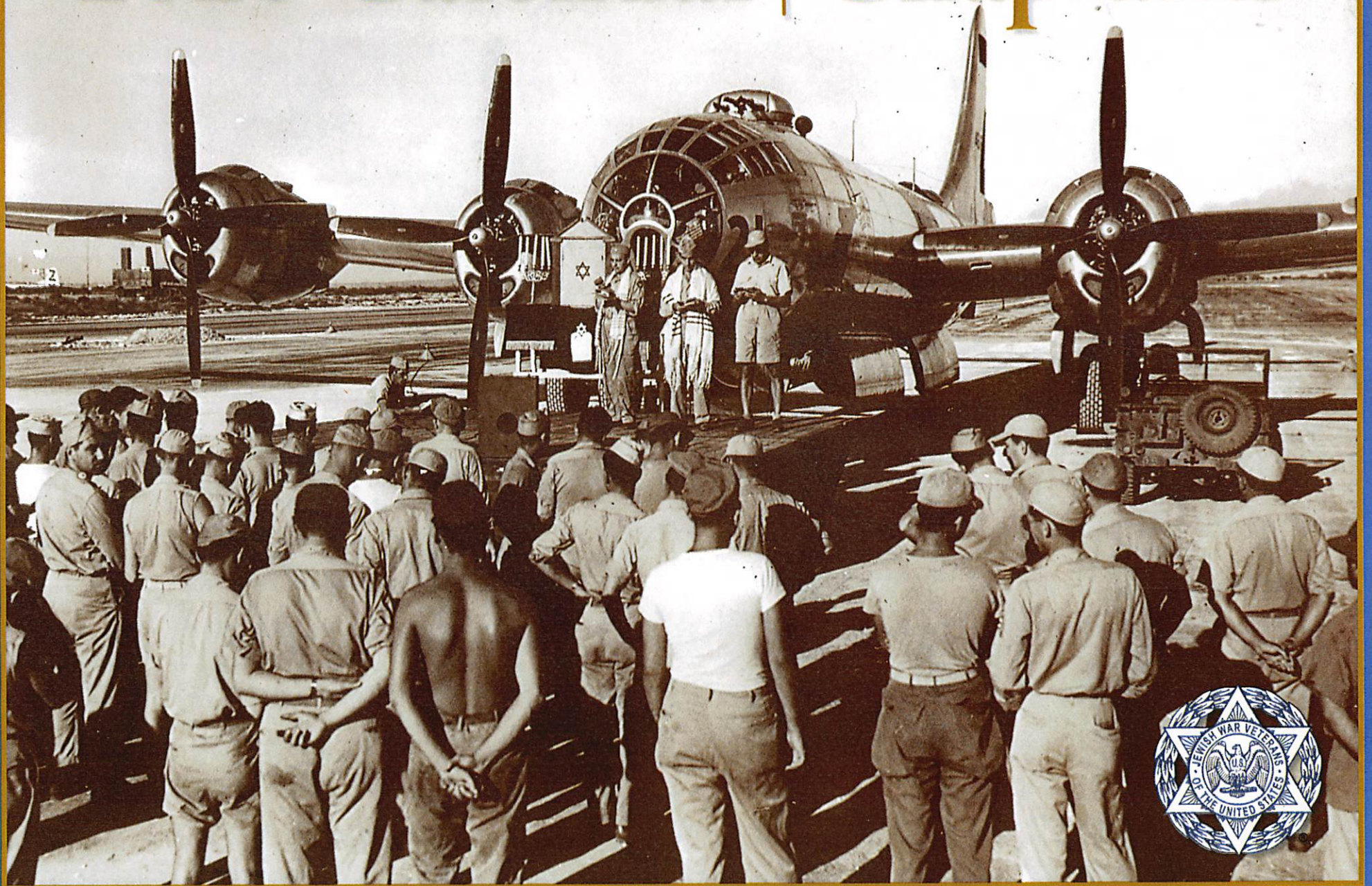


2026 Calendar | Chaplains



Civil War

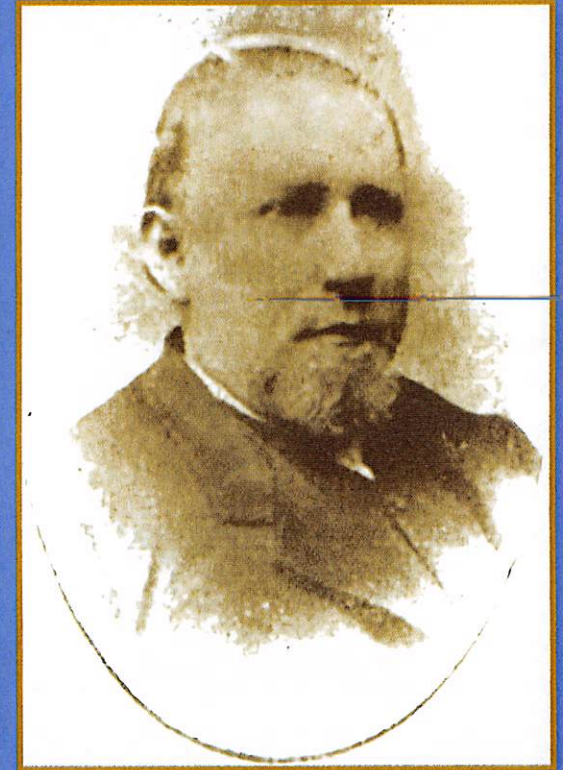
The first three Jewish American chaplains to serve officially in the U.S. military were appointed during the Civil War. **Jacob Frankel**, **Ferdinand Sarner**, and **Bernhard Gotthelf** brought in a new era of Jewish representation in the U.S. Army. Their appointments followed Congress's 1862 revision of the chaplaincy law, which had required that military chaplains be Christian. Now, the law allowed "a regular ordained minister of some religious denomination."



Jacob Frankel was born in Grünstadt, Bavaria. He served as hospital chaplain in Philadelphia, ministering to wounded soldiers.



Prussian-born **Ferdinand Sarner** served with the largely German-speaking 54th New York Infantry.



Bernhard Henry Gotthelf was born at Kleinerdingen, Bavaria before settling in Louisville where he served as a chaplain serving multiple hospitals around the city.

World War I

The Jewish chaplaincy was institutionalized into the military in World War I with rabbis serving in uniform. The Jewish Welfare Board (JWB) was formed in 1917 as the morale organization for Jews in the military and to recruit, train and support chaplains. Around two dozen rabbis would serve.

Rabbi Elkan Voorsanger of St. Louis was the first chaplain overseas. Voorsanger had enlisted in the Army in 1917 and gone to France with the AEF as a private in the medical corps. When Congress allotted positions for chaplains, Voorsanger was already in the fight and ready to serve. He was commissioned and eventually became the senior chaplain for the 77th division. Known as "The Fighting Rabbi," he set the example for many Jewish chaplains who followed him.



World War II

More than 300 Jewish chaplains served across the world in World War II providing support both for the more than half a million American Jews in service and those of all other religions.



Rabbi Roland B. Gittlesohn delivered one of the most powerful sermons of World War II on Iwo Jima in March 1945 at the dedication of the Fifth Marine Division Cemetery. After Christian chaplains objected to his participation in the main interfaith cemetery dedication, he spoke instead at a smaller service for the fallen. His words honored the shared sacrifice of Americans of every background and condemned the prejudices they died to defeat. This sermon came to be known as "The Purest Democracy" and was printed in newspapers and magazines across the country.



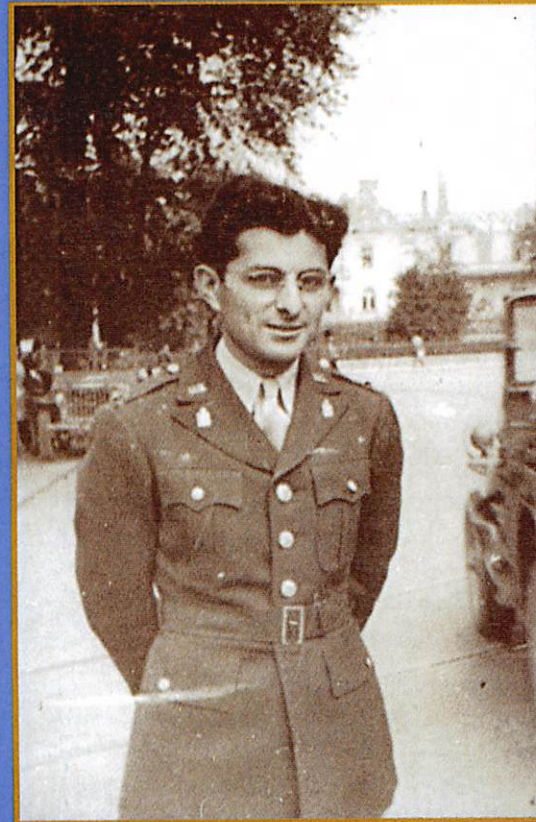
Rabbi Alexander Goode was one of the famed "Four Chaplains" who gave their lives when the USAT Dorchester was

torpedoed in the North Atlantic on February 3, 1943. After organizing evacuation efforts amid the chaos, Goode gave up his own life jacket to save another soldier. Survivors reported seeing him, together with Chaplains George Fox, Clark Poling, and John Washington, standing arm-in-arm in prayer as the ship went down. His sacrifice made him a lasting symbol of interfaith unity and selflessness in the U.S. military.

World War II



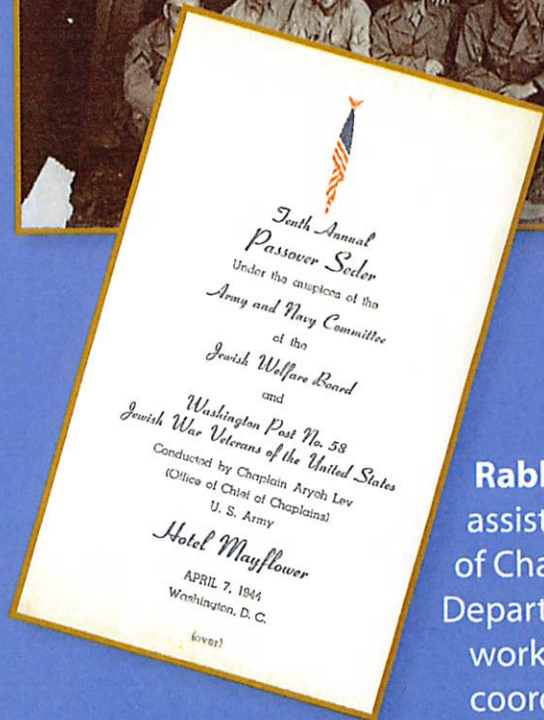
Rabbi Joshua Goldberg began his military career serving with the Russian Army in 1914. He left Russia and eventually came to the U.S. where he finished World War I as an American soldier. Following the war, Goldberg became a rabbi and went on to a career as a Jewish chaplain in the Navy. He ministered to sailors all over the world and served as a senior chaplain at major naval installations, helping shape chaplaincy policy and training. His long career made him a respected pioneer of Jewish religious leadership in the Navy



Rabbi Abraham Klausner, an Army chaplain with the 116th Evacuation Hospital, became one of the most important advocates for Jewish survivors in the immediate aftermath of World War II. Arriving at Dachau shortly after its liberation, he organized lists of survivors,

created communication networks for families searching for loved ones, and pressed military authorities to improve conditions in the Displaced Persons camps. Klausner's tireless efforts helped shape early U.S. policy toward Jewish DPs and laid essential groundwork for their rehabilitation, self-organization, and eventual resettlement.

World War II



Jewish service
Lev's work helped standardize chaplain training, improve access to Jewish religious materials, and strengthen communal backing for Jewish personnel until his death in 1975.

Rabbi Aryeh Lev was assistant to the Chief of Chaplains in the War Department. After the war he worked for JWB where he coordinated support for members around the world.

Rabbi Judah Nadich served as the senior Jewish chaplain of the European Theater during World War II. In addition to serving the soldiers of the U.S. Army, he became one of the earliest American officers to

advocate for Jewish survivors after liberation. In 1945, General Eisenhower appointed him as his Adviser on Jewish Affairs. Nadich worked to improve conditions in the Displaced Persons camps and pressed for policies that recognized the distinct needs of Jewish survivors. His leadership and advocacy helped transform Allied responses to Jewish DPs in the first months after the Holocaust.



World War II



Rabbi Philip S. Bernstein served as the official adviser on Jewish affairs to United States Army commanders during World War II. He continued after the war as Adviser on Jewish Affairs to the U.S. Army in Europe from 1946 to 1947, succeeding Rabbi Judah Nadich. In this position, he became the principal advocate for Jewish Displaced Persons during the crucial early postwar period. He pushed the Army and Allied authorities to improve camp conditions, recognize Jewish self-governance, and support emigration efforts to the U.S. and Palestine. Bernstein helped shape U.S. policy toward surviving European Jewry and helped find homes for many survivors.



Jewish services are held in Aachen, Germany on October 29, 1944 in the middle of the concrete "Dragon Teeth" tank barriers of the Siegfried Line. **Chaplain Sidney Lefkowitz** conducted this service which was broadcast on NBC radio.

Vietnam War



Rabbi Meir Engel was born on September 12, 1914 in Jerusalem. He was ordained as a rabbi at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in 1942 and entered the U.S. Army in November 1943. He served as a chaplain in the Pacific Theater during World War II. From 1954 to 1957 he served as Jewish Affairs Advisor to the U.S. Army Europe in Heidelberg, Germany; later he had postings at Fort Dix, New Jersey and Fort Ord, California.

In August 1964 he became the first Jewish chaplain assigned to the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) in Vietnam. On December 16, 1964, Lt. Col. Engel died of a heart attack while on duty in Saigon.

His decorations included two Bronze Stars, two Army Commendation Medals, and the B'nai B'rith Four Chaplains Award for his service in three wars

Vietnam War



Rabbi Morton H. Singer served during the Vietnam War, remembered for his energetic leadership and his deep commitment to Jewish soldiers in the field. A gifted athlete as well as a rabbi, Singer traveled widely to bring holiday observances, counseling, and a sense of community to troops scattered across Vietnam. On December 17, 1968, while en route to conduct Hanukkah services, he was killed when his aircraft exploded shortly after takeoff. Only thirty-two years old, Rabbi Singer is memorialized among the Jewish chaplains who gave their lives in service to the nation.

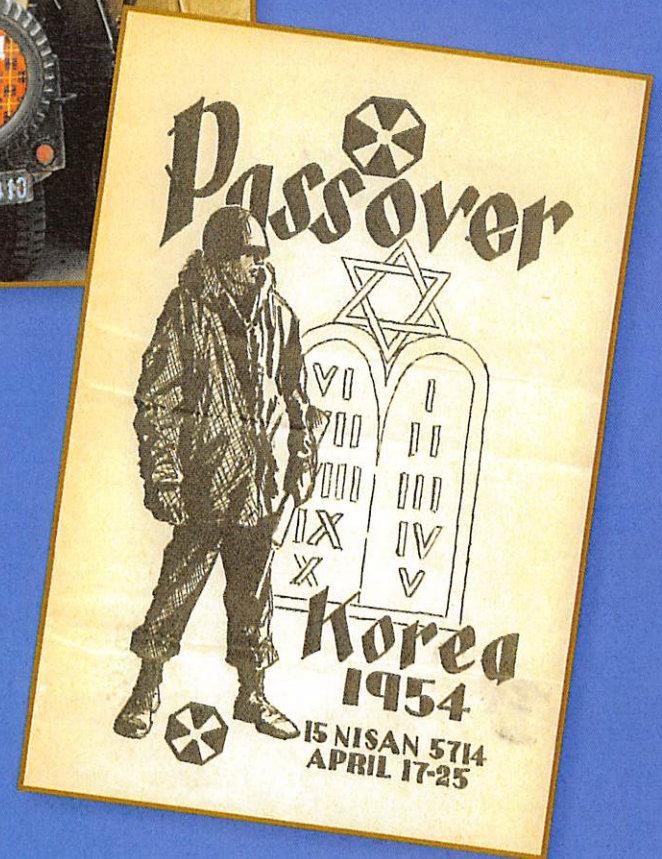


Rabbi David Lapp served as a U.S. Army chaplain for more than two decades, including a tour in Vietnam, and later became one of the most influential leaders in Jewish military chaplaincy. After retiring as a colonel, he directed the JWB Jewish Chaplains Council, guiding the recruitment, training, and support of Jewish chaplains across all branches of the armed forces. Known for his wisdom, warmth, and tireless advocacy for Jewish service members and their families, Rabbi Lapp helped strengthen and modernize the Jewish chaplaincy.

Korean War



Chaplain Teitelbaum presenting Haggadah to Major General James Fry at 2nd Infantry Division seder.



Rabbi Arnold E. Resnicoff



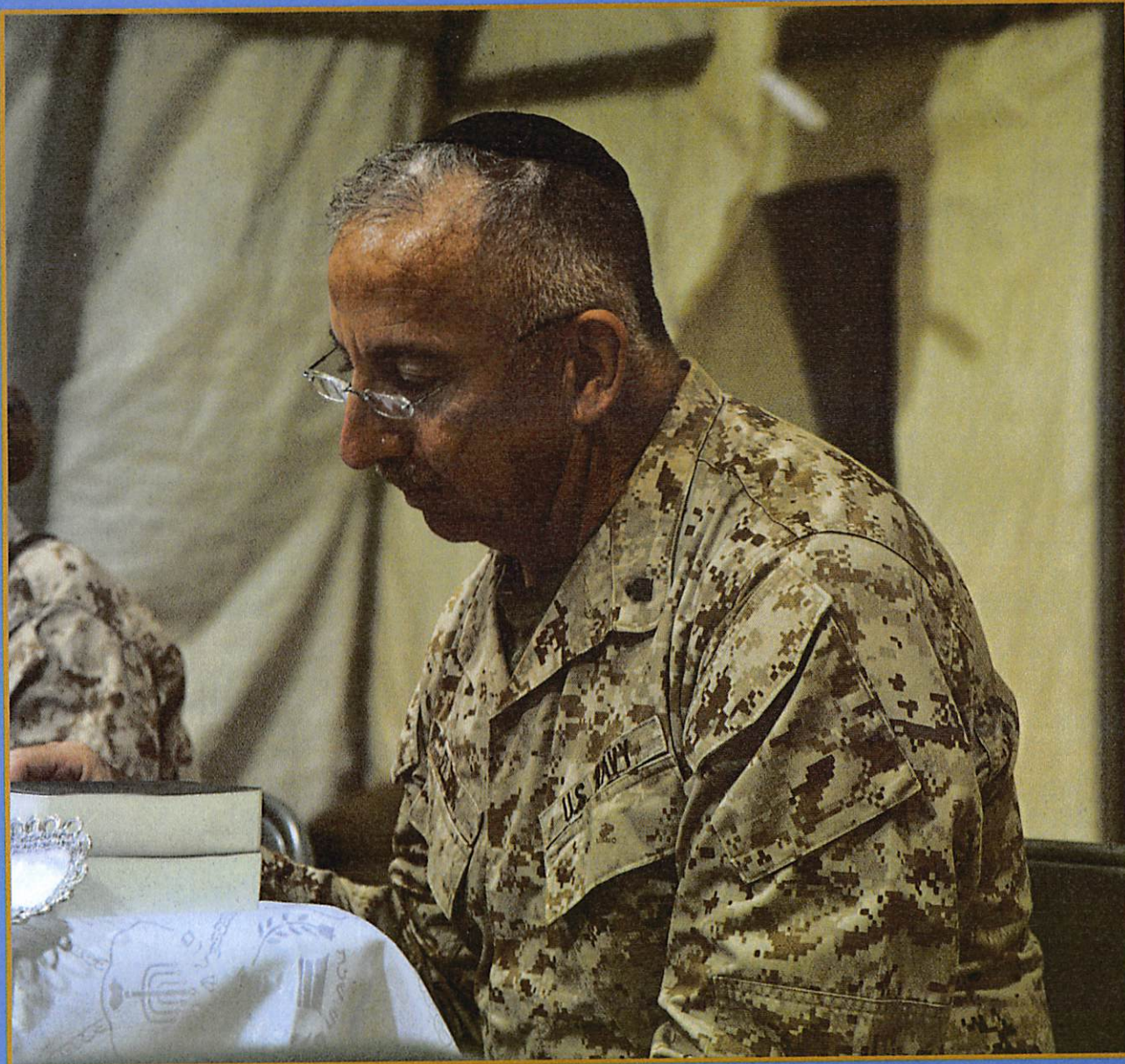
Rabbi Arnold E. Resnicoff began his Naval career in the rivers of Vietnam followed by Naval Intelligence in Europe before rabbinical school and ordination. Following the 1983 Marine barracks bombing in Beirut, he ministered to survivors and assisted in rescue efforts amid the devastation. Resnicoff became one of the Navy's leading voices for interfaith cooperation, ethical leadership, and the pastoral care of service members in war and peace. He was part of the small group of Vietnam veterans that worked to create the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and convinced the US military to participate in the US Days of Remembrance of the Victims of the Holocaust.

Rabbi Chana Timoner



Rabbi Chana Timoner was one of the first women to serve as a Jewish chaplain in the U.S. military and became the first female Jewish chaplain to hold the rank of lieutenant colonel in the Army. Serving during the 1990s and early 2000s, including tours in Korea and at major stateside installations, she provided care, Jewish programming, and spiritual leadership. Known for her advocacy for soldiers of all backgrounds, Timoner broke barriers while helping expand the presence and visibility of Jewish chaplaincy in the Army.

Rabbi Irving A. **Elson**



Rabbi Irving A. **Elson** served as a U.S. Navy chaplain for nearly three decades, ministering to Marines and sailors around the world and deploying multiple times, including to Iraq. He became one of the most senior Jewish chaplains in the Navy and a respected leader across the Fleet Marine Force. After retiring from active duty, Elson became director of the JWB Jewish Chaplains Council, where he helped guide, mentor, and support Jewish chaplains in all branches of the armed forces. His career reflects a lifetime of service to both the military and the Jewish community.