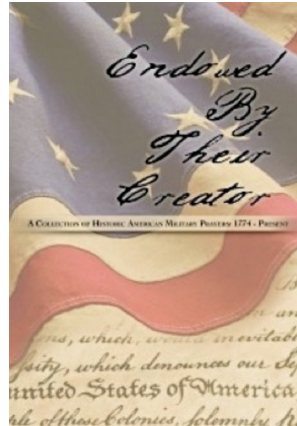




Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on May 25, 2012

Prayer Compilation by Marine Col. Shows “Military Necessity” of Faith in God

When Col. Ron Ray, USMC (Ret.), was a newly commissioned Marine officer on the eve of deployment to the jungles of Vietnam in 1967, his father’s oldest brother, retired U.S. Army Captain Manuel Ray, gave him a small gift to accompany Ron in his service to his country: *The American Armed Forces Prayer Book*, a collection of prayers offered through the years by a broad range of spiritual, military, and government leaders. While Col. Ray indicates that the simple devotional saw little use during his tour in Southeast Asia, it did make it back home with him, and 35 years later, as his own son was preparing to enter the prestigious Virginia Military Institute (VMI), the retired Marine officer rediscovered the book. “By that time,” recalled Ray, “I had become acquainted with prayer and knew of God’s higher purpose for it to glorify Himself as it provided great aid and comfort to man’s soul.”



A short time later in 2002, Ray, a constitutional scholar and public policy attorney (as well as former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense during the Reagan administration), had the opportunity to help defend VMI against a lawsuit by the ACLU and other secular groups attempting to force the Institute to drop its nearly 165-year tradition of mealtime prayers. As he used the book given to him by his uncle in preparing a brief in the case, reviewing the collection of prayers “prayed by fighting men of all ranks” through the America’s rich history, Ray discovered that a majority of the prayers were offered in the name of Jesus, and all reflected the humble and worshipful spirit unique to the true seeker after God.

From that moment, Ray realized the crucial importance of prayer to the life of the well-equipped soldier — that it is more than just a touching gesture, a sentimental impulse, or a mere hope offered in times of desperation. Prayer is, as he explained in his legal brief on behalf of VMI, a “military necessity” as crucial to success on the field of battle as weapons, ammunition, food, water, good order, and discipline.

As one renowned VMI graduate, General George C. Marshall, once observed, “the soldier’s heart, the soldier’s spirit, the soldier’s soul are everything. Unless the soldier’s soul sustains him, he cannot be relied on and will fail himself and his commander and his country in the end.”

With this realization of the power and necessity of prayer to the success of the soldier, and with secular and godless forces such as the ACLU aggressively attempting to deny military personnel the God-given right to pray, Col. Ray set about to produce an updated and expanded version of the modest collection



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of prayers his uncle gave him. The result is the 240-page volume [Endowed by Their Creator: A Collection of Historic American Military Prayers: 1774 - Present](#). Published by [First Principles Press](#), which is dedicated to producing works that reinforce America's godly heritage, *Endowed by Their Creator* offers a powerfully compelling case for the importance of prayer to America's past, present, and future military defense.

Noting that in 70 short years the U.S. government has gone from printing, at taxpayer expense, an edition of the New Testament and Psalms for Protestant soldiers serving in World War II, to attempting to silence the prayers of Christian chaplains and military leaders, Ray writes that through the 230 years' worth of military prayers sampled in *Endowed by Their Creator* runs a thread that "demonstrates the 'military necessity' of earnestly seeking, through Christian prayers, the favor of almighty God over the United States Armed Forces...."

Of necessity, *Endowed by their Creator* begins with an overview of how prayer and spiritual oversight have been at the foundation of effective combat and military leadership from the early days of the Republic and well into the 20th century. "The Commanders of the ships of the Thirteen United Colonies are to take care that divine service be performed twice a day on board, and a sermon preached on Sundays ..." read one of the early principles of the Continental Navy approved by the Continental Congress in November 1775.

On July 9, 1776 General George Washington noted in his Orderly Book that the Continental Congress had voted to allow each regiment in the newly formed nation's army a chaplain, and expressed his hope that "every officer and man will endeavor to live and act as becomes a Christian soldier, defending the dearest rights and liberties of his country."

From the American Revolution through the War of 1812, the War Between the States, World Wars I and II, and beyond, the American soldier — and their families, communities, and citizens back home — have turned to prayer at crucial moments, Col. Ray demonstrates. Among the Presidents he quotes is George W. Bush, who declared at a National Day of Prayer gathering in 2001: "Our country was founded by great and wise people who were fluent in the language of humility, praise, and petition. Throughout our history, in danger and division, we have always turned to prayer. And our country has been delivered from many serious evils and wrongs because of that prayer."

While it is true that Americans in all walks of life have turned to prayer over the centuries, *Endowed by Their Creator* is an inspirational demonstration of its special importance to the American fighting man. Selected from a total of 74 military prayer books and hymnals, the over 280 prayers form a chronology of divine petitions made by all ranks of soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen from our nation's earliest days right up until 2011.

Here is a small sampling, chosen among this body of profoundly moving and spiritually challenging prayers:

- "Great Father, we bow before Thee. We invoke thy blessing, we deprecate thy wrath, we return Thee thanks for the past, we ask thy aid for the future. O God of mercy, we pray thy blessing upon the American arms. God prosper the cause. Amen." (1777, by Joab Prout, Chaplain of the Continental Army before the Battle of Brandywine. Prout did not survive the battle.)
- "Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings, with thy most gracious favour, and further us with thy continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in thee, we may glorify thy holy Name, and finally, by thy mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."



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(*Soldier's Prayer Book*, 1861)

- "Almighty and Merciful God and Father, we humbly beseech Thee to visit all those who have forsaken the Christian faith and to reveal unto them their error, so that they may receive the Truth of Thy Holy Word, and walk in the Way that leadeth unto eternal life; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen." (*Army and Navy Service Book*, 1917)
- "We beseech Thee, O God, for all prisoners and captives, and all who suffer from oppression, that Thou will manifest thy mercy toward them, and make the heart of man merciful as thine own; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen." (1948)
- "O God, who knowest the duties that be ahead of us, and the weaknesses that easily beset us, prepare us for the unknown immediately before us. We do not pray for immunity from risks; we pray for courage to face risks. We do not ask to be spared from danger; we ask for strength to face danger resolutely. Grant that we may be able to finish that which Thou hast granted us the wish to begin; through Jesus Christ, our Lord." (General Mark W. Clark, Allied Commander in Italy during WWII)

As this small handful of representative prayers demonstrates, throughout most of our nation's history America's military personnel have been encouraged to embrace faith in God and to petition Him in time of need. *Endowed by Their Creator* offers the historical proof of this, bringing to print a compilation of the petitions they have offered in a variety of circumstances, along with the hymns they have sung and the inspirational poems they have contemplated during their time of service to their country.

Just as retired Army Captain Manuel Ray no doubt hoped as he offered the little book of prayers to a fresh young officer on his way to Vietnam so many years ago, Col. Ray offers his hope that the "battle-tested" prayers collected in *Endowed by Their Creator* "will provide guidance, comfort, and confidence through Jesus Christ for all who serve to protect America as One Nation Under God."

[Click here for more information and to order *Endowed by Their Creator*.](#)

Graphic: "Endowed by Their Creator: A Collection of Historic American Military Prayers: 1774 - Present"; U.S. Army Chaplains insignia; U.S. Navy Chaplains insignia; stained glass window,

Pentagon, honoring the Four Chaplains, USAT Dorchester, 1943



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