

MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

Gilleran supervised 42 teams as chaplain in Kuwait

Monday, May 31, 2010

By PAUL COLLINS - Bulletin Staff Writer

Chaplain (Lt. Col.) David Gilleran has returned from a year's deployment in Kuwait, where he was responsible for the day-to-day operations of 42 unit ministry teams serving about 20,000 soldiers in Kuwait, Iraq, Afghanistan and Egypt.

Gilleran, of Martinsville and the pastor of Hope Presbyterian Church, was based at Camp Arifjan, south of Kuwait City. He traveled in Kuwait; supervised ministry team personnel (chaplains and chaplain assistants) in Kuwait, Iraq, Afghanistan and

Egypt by e-mail and phone; and worked with ministry team personnel who came to Kuwait. In all, Gilleran worked with 84 personnel on ministry teams to help meet the religious needs of soldiers.



Chaplain David Gilleran recently returned home after a year in Kuwait. He was responsible for 42 unit ministry teams in Kuwait, Afghanistan, Iraq and Egypt. He is shown at Hope Presbyterian Church.

Gilleran was responsible for such things as supervision, training and pastoral care of unit ministry teams and future planning for unit ministry teams; conducting chapel worship services, including preaching and teaching; supervising chapel services conducted by others; and counseling, spiritual guidance and visitation of soldiers. The three biggest stresses soldiers face, he said, are marital/relationship and financial concerns and exhaustion. Being separated from their wives and families "takes a toll," he said. Financial pressures include concerns about debt and how to reduce it, he said. The Army provides resources such as Dave Ramsey's financial management course.

Because of the pace of military deployment, some soldiers find it difficult to rest and relax, and exhaustion may result, Gilleran said. So he counseled soldiers on taking care of themselves, time management and rest and relaxation. Most soldiers handle combat stress, Gilleran said, noting that the Army is pro-active in getting soldiers to think and talk about their combat stress and in providing behavioral health specialists if needed.

Also, Gilleran said, with Mine-Resistant Ambush-Protected vehicles (MRAPs), improvised explosive devices (IEDs) pose less danger to service members. Soldiers in combat zones generally experience a strengthening of their faith rather than a questioning of it, Gilleran said. Some soldiers' faith "was strengthened by the fact they made it back" from combat, he said. Others' faith was strengthened by the encouragement they received from chaplains, chaplain's assistants or fellow soldiers; and still others' faith was strengthened by chapel services, he said.

He said that like the soldiers, he also faced some stresses, including being on call 24 hours a day and being thousands of miles away from his family. Gilleran reduced stress through, among other things, exercising, such as “running a lot,” working out in 24-7 gyms and walking several miles a day. He also watched his diet, cutting back on fried foods and eating more fruits and vegetables. He tried to maintain as normal a sleep pattern as possible. E-mail is helping service men and women stay connected to their homes and families every day, he said, comparing that with World War II, when service members had to wait months to receive letters.

Still, being away from his wife, Kathy, and son, Sam, who just finished his junior year at Washington and Lee University, was difficult, Gilleran said — especially when Sam was suffering with a severe neck injury. “Many times you are tempted to call home and lay out (your concerns in Kuwait) on your spouse. There’s nothing she can do 8,000 miles a way,” he said. It helps to have another chaplain or chaplain assistant to talk with, he said. Gilleran was deployed to Kuwait as part of Virginia National Guard’s 134th Chaplain Support Team. The team was assigned to the U.S. Third Army, and he and a chaplain’s assistant (Bum Kim of Annandale) were attached to the First Theater Sustainment Command, said Gilleran, who was the deputy command chaplain (forward.)

The two other members from the 134th Chaplain Support Team (Chaplain Lee Hagwood, pastor of Agape Bible Christian Fellowship in Martinsville, and chaplain’s assistant Lennie Dunlop from Gate City) were attached to USFOR-A (U.S. Forces-Afghanistan), Gilleran said. Kuwait is not considered as dangerous a combat zone as Iraq or Afghanistan, but even in Kuwait, “a moderate Arab state,” some people would “do you harm,” so security measures had to be taken, Gilleran said. Chaplains are not allowed to carry weapons, but chaplain’s assistants can, said Gilleran, who added that he was neither fired upon nor injured in Kuwait. Gilleran said his first deployment overseas, in Iraq in 2004-2005, was “far more dangerous” than his recent deployment in Kuwait. In Iraq, he did such things as preaching, teaching, counseling and visitation. He had more responsibilities in Kuwait.

In Iraq, he was fired upon and faced other dangers but was not injured. He added that he heard a car bomb in Iraq when explosives in a car detonated. “If you ever hear a car bomb go off, you never forget,” he said.

Gilleran, 55, returned home to Martinsville on May 11 after completing his tour of duty in Kuwait. “It’s very good to be home,” he said, adding that he is happiest about being back with his family and his church.

The congregation of Hope Presbyterian Church, where Gilleran has been the pastor since 2006, had a welcome-home ceremony and dinner for him on May 23. Retired Chaplain (Brig. Gen.) Doug Lee preached, and Agape Bible Christian Fellowship provided the music. Gilleran, who joined the Army National Guard in 1989, said he believes his tour of duty in Kuwait will help him at Hope Presbyterian. Having more experiences and more exposure to people in different walks of life “makes you a better pastor,” he said.