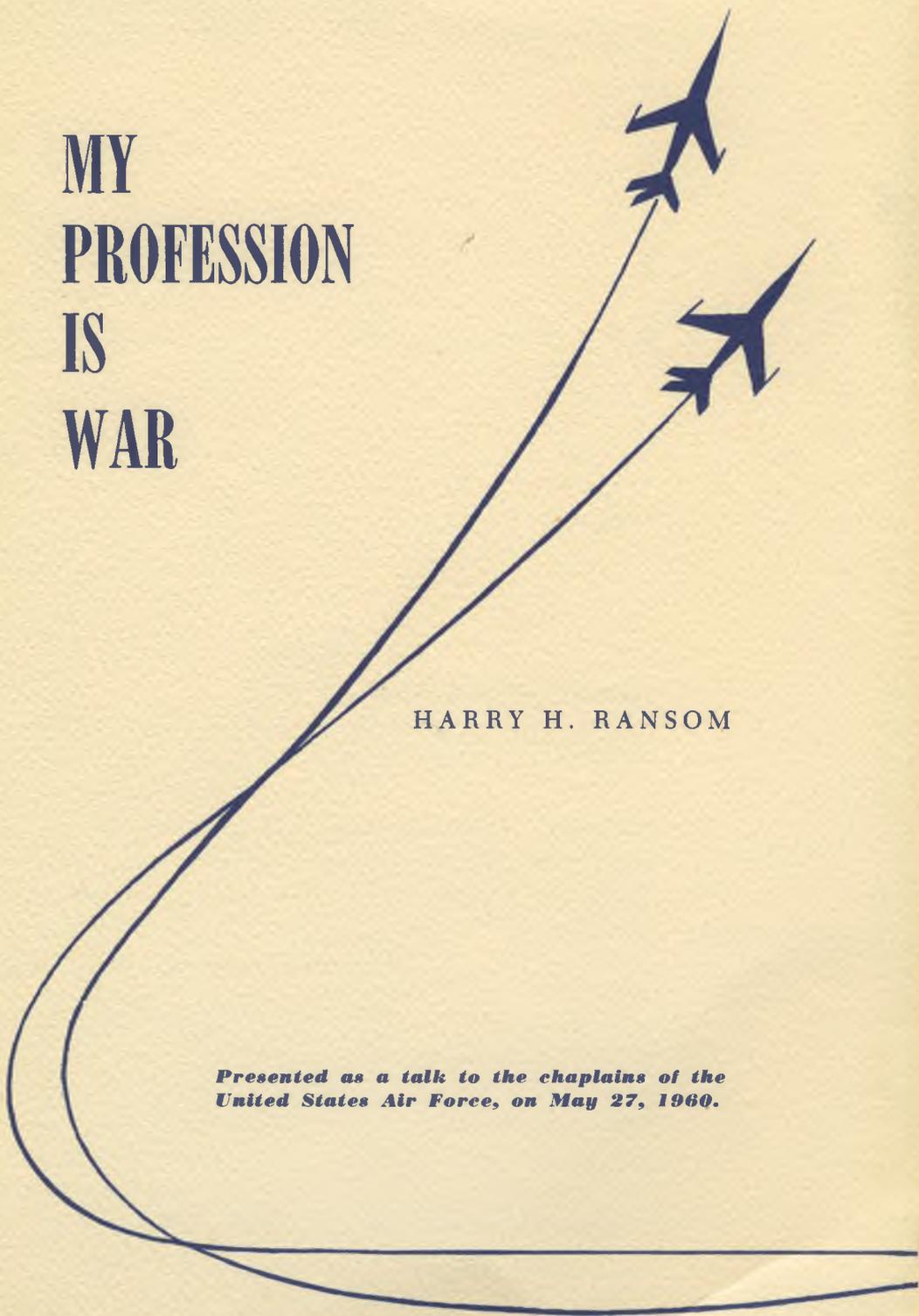


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MY  
PROFESSION  
IS  
WAR

HARRY H. RANSOM

*Presented as a talk to the chaplains of the  
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# MY PROFESSION IS WAR

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By

HARRY H. RANSOM

*As* A TRAVELER MOVES, often too fast, past certain military posts these days, his eye may be caught by a sign that reads in part "Peace Is Our Profession."

This is an engaging message. It involves a good deal more than the irony that military aviators, and all who keep them aviating, are not now, in the ancient and brutal and senseless sense, "men of war." It can be paraphrased successively in many ways.

The sentence means, doesn't it, that officially the Air Force is dedicated to perpetuating peace. This amity, however, is not to be maintained at all costs. Rather, it is to be sustained in a fashion that refutes the concept of creating a military elite, an iron-fisted and lead-headed caste before which other men in our society might be expected to pop their eyes or to gasp or to tremble a little. This proclamation also reflects a

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dead-serious realization of the fact that there are in truth men of war loose on the earth and that the Air Force professes an obligation to draw certain lines past which these mere militarists must not go.

More subtly, the statement may mean that all men in the Air Force, and that organization as an entity, undertake to relate to machines used, techniques developed, and activities pursued many of the arts and sciences of man's highest development. Individually and in teams, members of the Air Force have been responsible for communicating to others who also profess peace, many usable improvements upon life in peaceful times.

Still more subtly, the slogan "Peace Is Our Profession" might mean that farther aloft in man's unsteady attempts to get at truth, the Air Force confronts perspectives of what a new society itself must confront if men are to live together in group-calm and at the same time in the quiet of individual integrity.

Various kinds of group noises and confusion and conflict and temporary hostility are, of course, inevitably products of human existence. Certainly the Air Force—as an experience rather than as an organization—provides plenty of all of these.

My point is that if the mental health experts want to see group experience in flesh and bone, if not in the raw, they might well attend to the Air Force. And I

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doubt that many human organizations prove, day and night and year after year, the wisdom of the Psalm *Ecce Quam Bonum* any more faithfully and practically: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."

On the other hand, the Air Force—along with other armed forces—has surely been the world's widest flung laboratory in individualism. In any armed service there are experiences that are utter loneliness. I am not thinking of the dramatic or melodramatic examples of men miles up in the air or thousands of miles off on a frozen waste. I am thinking of the balder—and on the whole harder to bear—loneliness that comes of asserting conscience in the context of mutual or common welfare. I do not think that it takes war to bring on conditions that try not merely the souls of men but human patience, the individual's man-to-man tolerance, a single human being's necessity of defining who he is, what he is for, and whether or not he can or must submit these entities to the group good.

Compared with men in the Air Force, I often think that we teachers belong to a profession that quite literally is war. But the Air Force is in this war with us. Ours is the fight for ideas of men and ideals of spirit. In this larger sense of the conflict of conscience and of purpose, we share a profession which is militant.

On the other hand, in our goals and outreaches, in our

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vision and our hopes we, along with you, follow the profession of peace. No summit meeting, no Command and General Staff course, no conference of chaplains is going to change one whit the point that has endured since the Legions of Alexander: Human dignity and the essential dignity of each human being underlies whatever it is that each profession is about. I doubt that in any era our peaceful programs of military organization or research of foundations for mental health are going to change the terms of mankind's unavoidable contact with destiny. There is no way, yet, of flying an XYZ-2 over the terrains of the human heart and the human spirit. We can reconnoiter, of course; and we must build fast our camps against ignorance and fear and distrust and hopelessness. But nothing of this will avail unless we plant our main command posts on high grounds where are determined the significance of the individual, the complete freedom of the human mind, and the power of the human spirit to be exalted.

That is the area of operations for chaplains in any force. Unluckily, these chaplains do not have, even in a figurative sense, TO's of angels. They do have, I suspect, the hardest, as it is certainly the ultimate, task to be carried out by the Air Force and by our society. Unless this task is undertaken and carried out honestly and freely and fully, all the rest of our victories will be mockery. All the rest of our triumphs will be empty ones.

