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## Robinson: Freedom is not free

It's the Fourth of July weekend and once again we celebrate the birth of our nation, the United States of America. Although lately, we haven't been looking or sounding very united.

But, that is a part of what makes this country what it is. We can all agree to disagree. That is the beauty of a democracy.

Our government isn't perfect, but we work with what we have.

We are the freest nation on earth, but we must all remember that this freedom comes with a heavy price.

Our military men and women have put their lives on the line around the world so we can enjoy all the fun we are having this holiday.

When you see a veteran, thank them and shake their hand. Show them the respect they deserve. They have earned it.

Remember to say a prayer for those who have lost their lives in defense of our freedom. They and their families should be honored for such a sacrifice.

So, while you are all enjoying the holiday, try to remember this one important thing: Freedom is not free. We have paid a high price for it – with our dearest blood.

May they rest in peace.

LeCrete Robinson is Features Editor at The Town Talk.

# 'How I became a Muslim chaplain'

## Long journey led Alexandria native to become Army imam

By Spc. Adam P. Garlington

USAREUR Public Affairs Office  
Special to The Town Talk

**HEIDELBERG, Germany** — Chaplain (Maj.) Khallid Shabazz, one of the only five imam chaplains in the Army, is an Alexandria native who wasn't always a chaplain, a Muslim or even named Khallid Shabazz.

An imam is a leader of prayer or Muslim congregation. Shabazz is an imam chaplain for the U.S. Army in Europe.

Shabazz used to be known as Michael Barnes, a 23-year-old Jarvis Christian College graduate working at a major department store chain in Baton Rouge making \$67 a week before he decided to enlist in the Army.

"At the time, my wife was having our second child," the former Lutheran said. "I needed to do something with my life. I went down to see a recruiter and joined the Army. I entered field artillery. It was the best thing that ever happened to me."

Shabazz said he was a pampered athlete growing up, and the life of a field artilleryman, sleeping in adverse conditions and being hollered and cursed at, helped him mature as a person.

"It actually motivated me after my second Article 15. I got two Article 15s for disrespect. It actually motivated me to be a man and stand on my own two feet."

During Shabazz's stint in field artillery, he began to reassess his religious beliefs.

One day, he challenged a Muslim soldier on the concepts of Islam, the chaplain said. He was fascinated by the responses of the Muslim soldier and began a two-year journey of studying Islam, which eventually led to his conversion.

He decided to become an officer while on that two-year spiritual journey.

"I decided I wanted to go to officer school, because I wanted to get out of field artillery," Shabazz said with a laugh.

The imam said he had a 92 general technology score, so he had to increase his GT score by 18 points to be eligible for Officer Candidate School.



Alexandria native Chaplain (Maj.) Khallid Shabazz leads prayer during a Jumah service in Heidelberg, Germany. The imam chaplain said he ministers to non-Muslims as well as Muslims in the Army. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SGT. JOEL A. SALGADO

While trying to increase his GT score, he faced opposition about going to Jumah service on Fridays, Shabazz said, so he desperately sought help and went to the chaplain.

"The chaplain said, 'Why don't you become a Muslim chaplain so you can help people like yourself that are in trouble?'" Shabazz said. "If I had the GT score at the time, it never would have

happened. I think life is amazing that things like this happen. That is how I became a Muslim

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## LC professor's book tells story of modern Baptists' frontrunner

by Jodi Belgard

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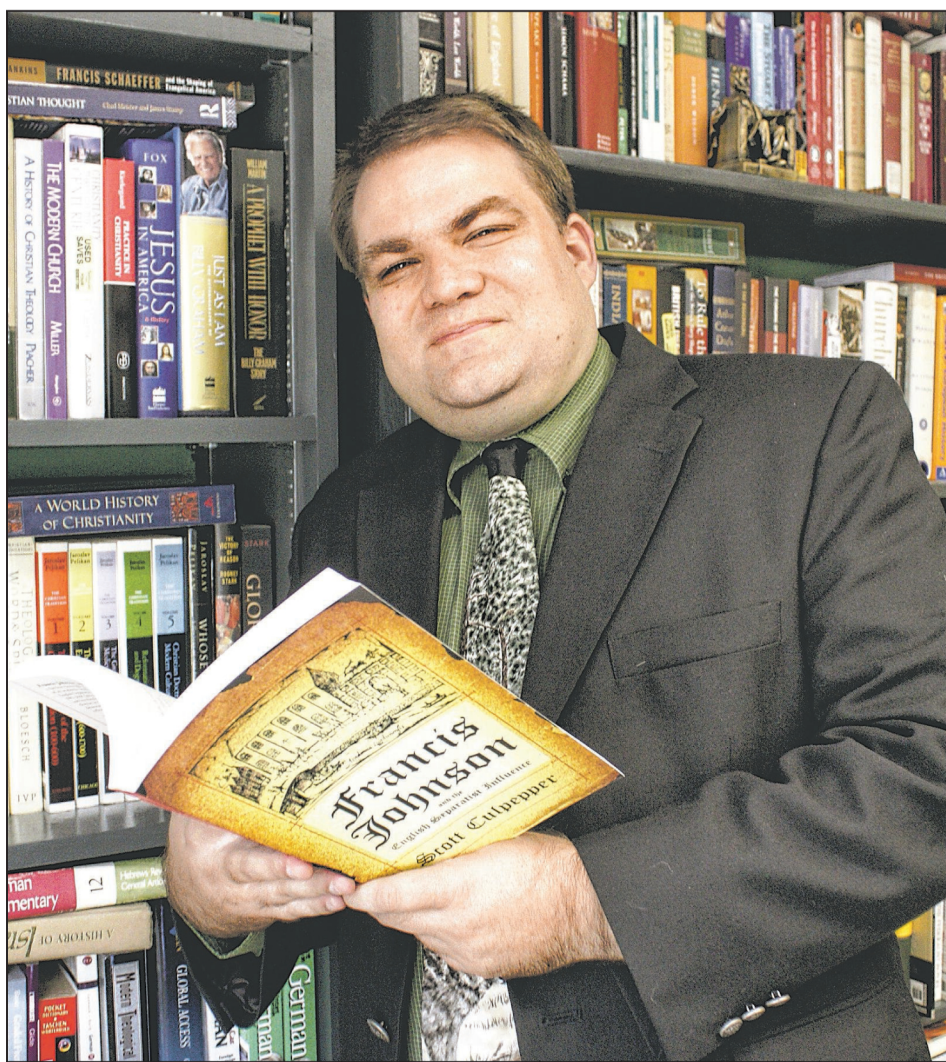
What began as a graduate school dissertation grew into a fascination with a relative unknown theologian and history professor Scott Culpepper. Francis Johnson was an English separatist who was largely responsible for a religion movement that eventually came to be modern Baptists.

Once referred to as the "Bishop of Brownism" by one of his contemporaries, Johnson's theological and practical influence on Christian traditions as diverse as the Baptists, Congregationalists, and English Independents demonstrated the wide reach of English Separatism's influence.

Johnson's desire to create a perfectly ordered, scriptural, Christian congregation led him to fiery debates with the most influential leaders of his day. Culpepper's work gives a glimpse into understanding the passion and uncompromising faith of a man of contradictions.

Culpepper was familiar with Johnson, but only in name, until his dissertation director at Baylor University suggested the religious leader as a dissertation topic.

In May, Culpepper



Louisiana College history professor Scott Culpepper has written a book about Francis Johnson and the influence of the English Separatists on religious movements at the time. LEANDRO HUEBNER/LHUEBNER@THETOWNTALK.COM

published his first book, the English Separatist and the only biography of Johnson to date.

"Francis Johnson and

Influence" is available through Amazon.com, as well as national retailers.

**The Town Talk:** How much did you know about Francis Johnson prior to beginning your disserta-

tion?

**Culpepper:** "I knew very little about his life. He was always in the background of so many important groups, but it was a topic that was wide open. No one had written a biography about him."

**TT:** Who is Francis Johnson?

**Culpepper:** "He was an English Puritan leader who actually chose to separate from the Church of England. He was exiled from England and forced to go to Amsterdam. He (denounced) the Church of England to the point of saying they weren't Christians. He was close to many groups, including the Pilgrims, and he influenced what is now modern Baptists. One of the great opportunities regarding the book is that he's an important, a pivotal figure, but not many people know him, and I'm able to educate them in regards to who Francis Johnson is and what he did."

**TT:** Johnson lived from 1562 to 1618, and you say there has never been a biography written about him. How did you do your research?

**Culpepper:** "There were a lot of allusions to him on broader topics. A lot of people have done biographies on the other (Separatists). I did have some secondary resour-

ces. I started with those secondary sources – the writings he did and the writings of his opponents. I did most of my research the last two years I was at Baylor, and then I finished when I came to Louisiana College."

**TT:** Did you find yourself quickly enthralled in the story of Francis Johnson?

**Culpepper:** "It's interesting – I'm very fascinated with him as a person. Enthralled is an interesting word. He's a very interesting character, but at times he was not very likeable."

**TT:** How did you write the book in a way that maintained the integrity of the subject, but made religious history palatable to the average reader?

**Culpepper:** "When I converted it from dissertation to book manuscript – it's definitely written in a style that's (palatable to the average reader). And, the story itself – there are some scandals, there's raw human passion. He's got some tremendous battles with his brother. It's a story about how we need to be diplomatic. It gives the context of the rise of the early Baptist movement and the origins of the movement of the Pilgrims. My hope is that clergy, lay people and even non-Christians read the book."

### GOOD MORNING, CENLA, FROM



**Ka'tra Winchester** was at Antioch Baptist Church's Health & Wellness workshop. She was interviewed for this "Good Morning" by Ka'tyra Young.

**What are your summer plans?:** "Reading books, drawing, swimming, go to Sea World, being on the praise team at my church."

**What are your hobbies?:** "Drawing and painting."



### TODAY'S BIRTHDAY

**Those celebrating a birthday July 3:**

You'll have great powers of tenacity this year. You'll make a statement about your intentions and follow through until that statement comes true. This month brings helpful teachers and new resources. A love relationship inspires you in July. August brings domestic improvements at a discount. Capricorn and Taurus people adore you. Your lucky numbers are: 6, 8, 14, 36 and 42. See Horoscopes, **Page D2**.

### CAN YOU HELP?



Do you have a story to tell? Let us know. Call Features Editor LeCrete Robinson at (318) 487-6419 or email us at [features@thetowntalk.com](mailto:features@thetowntalk.com).

# Shabazz

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chaplain.” Shabazz studied Quranic methodology, the hadith (the Prophet’s sayings) and comparative religion for 2 ½ years to become an imam at the Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences in Ashburn, Va.

He also studied Arabic for two years at the University of Jordan in Amman, Jordan.

When he arrived at the University of Jordan, Shabazz told the enrollment official that he wanted to learn how to recite the Quran in Arabic, but the official told him he should already know how to speak the language and wouldn’t let him register for classes.

“I told the enrollment official, ‘I don’t know the language, because I’m from America.’ He said, ‘There are no Muslims in America.’ He didn’t believe me, and I couldn’t enroll into the school until I brought my passport. It was really funny. After I brought my passport, he was my best friend.”

After becoming an Army chaplain in 1999, Shabazz deployed numerous times to minister to soldiers in places such as Africa, Bosnia, Kosovo, Poland and the Middle East, and he was an advisor of religious affairs for detainees at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

The chaplain traveled back and forth to the Middle East to ensure soldiers were taken care of during Ramadan, the Islamic month of fasting, and he also deployed to Iraq for 15 months.

During his Iraq deployment, Shabazz traveled the entire theater to minister to soldiers and to teach commanders about Islamic faith and cultural aspects of the religion.

“I went to wherever there was a base camp. If I had one soldier at a base camp in Q-West, I flew there to minister to him and provide whatever I could to him. If they had to put me in a Humvee at 3 in the morning, I went at 3 in the morning. I told commanders what they could and couldn’t do based on the religion.”

Shabazz still ministers

*“If the U.S. Army is to reach a global audience, diversity must be our mindset. We must be resilient in maintaining the different cultures, experiences and immeasurable talent that we all possess.”*

## MASTER SGT. MARK

### JORDAN

USAREUR equal opportunity senior enlisted adviser

to soldiers, but has a new role as the USAREUR imam chaplain.

“My job is to go to each chapel and make sure I commission distinctive faith group leaders, a person who serves in the absence of the chaplain to conduct service. Everywhere in Europe they have chaplains to do the services. They don’t have imams to do the service, so I have to go in and train a guy. I send in an endorsement for him, and he gets to be the distinctive faith group leader for one year. Then, we retrain him every year.”

Shabazz said being able to train and commission faith group leaders throughout USAREUR is an example of how the Army provides the necessary support and resources to meet the spiritual needs of Muslim soldiers.

“Religious diversity is the recognition of differences in the way that soldiers in our ranks worship, think, believe and connect to someone or something greater than themselves,” said Master Sgt. Mark Jordan, the USAREUR equal opportunity senior enlisted adviser. “If the U.S. Army is to reach a global audience, diversity must be our mindset. We must be resilient in maintaining the different cultures, experiences and immeasurable talent that we all possess.”

Shabazz said Muslims may worship differently than other religious groups in the Army, but all of the religious groups in the Army share commonalities.

“The Islamic commu-



Chaplain (Maj.) Khallid Shabazz, an imam chaplain in the U.S. Army, preaches during a Jummah service at the Patrick Henry Village Chapel in Heidelberg, Germany. Shabazz, a former Lutheran whose original name was Michael Barnes, is an Alexandria native. U.S.

ARMY PHOTO BY JOEL A. SALGADO

nity is no different than any other community. The main objective is to worship. We want great families. We want our children to grow up and be successful. We want to be part of the community as opposed to being on the outside of the community.

“Every Friday we come here (the Patrick Henry Village Chapel) like any other service. We get together to garner support and be a backdrop of stability for each other. Like any church organization, we want to provide comfort for the people in the mosque and make sure they know that when they’re in times of trouble and difficulty, we’re here for them.”

The refuge of the mosque isn’t limited to only Muslim soldiers, and Shabazz is eager to offer guidance and support to all soldiers.

“I spend 99.9 percent of my time ministering

to non-Muslim soldiers,” Shabazz said. “I play basketball and lift weights with them. Most of them don’t come to me for spiritual guidance, but they come to me for mentorship. I’ve put 24 soldiers in officer school by helping with their packets.”

“It’s like offering fatherly or brotherly advice which is spiritual to me. In the chaplain corps, we either perform or provide. If I can’t direct them spiritually, I provide another chaplain for their spiritual needs.”

“I’m a chaplain first and imam second. When people call me the Muslim chaplain, I’m almost offended, because that is categorizing me to be only for Muslim soldiers, and that isn’t who I am. I have a moon on my chest. They are going to know that I’m a Muslim. My job, the job of the chaplain, is to take care of soldiers. I’m Chaplain Shabazz who happens to be one of our Muslim chaplains. It’s a play on words to some people, but not to me.”

## JUMMAH SERVICE

»Jummah in Arabic means a gathering. The four components of Jummah service are:

1. Athan calls the faithful to prayer and sets the foundation for service
2. The Imam speaks for 15 to 20 minutes about the importance of community, family, life and how to worship correctly
3. Prayer begins with the community standing shoulder to shoulder in rows with males in the front and females and children in the back. Then, the community bows and prostrates together to show they are all equals
4. The Imam turns and prays for the community to have courage and strength and to be better Muslims

»After Jummah service, the Muslims go back to work

»Imam means the one out front in Arabic

»The Imam doesn’t have assistants and leads the service by himself

»The Imam and the rostrum (the speaker’s podium) are positioned in the eastern direction, so all Muslims are facing the same direction in prayer on Fridays

»A traditional mosque may have separate doors for the females and males, so the females can enter with children and not disturb the service

»The mosque is carpeted because Muslims sit on the floor when listening to the sermon and pray in prostration

»Islam has the highest respect for females and their chastity. Females can’t be Imams and stand behind the males in service, because it’s inappropriate for a male to pray behind a prostrated female