

Faith Behind Barbed Wire

Returned Yanks Recall Army Chaplain As Hero During Red Captivity Ordeal

By FATHER PATRICK O'CONNOR

Seoul, Korea, (NC) — A Catholic priest from Kansas farmland stands out as one of the most heroic figures in stories of Communist prison camps in North Korea.

He was Father (Capt.) Emil J. Kapaun of Wichita diocese, Catholic chaplain of the 8th Cavalry Regiment.

On the cold night of Nov. 1, 1950, the 8th Cav. was up near Unsan, in north-west Korea, about 70 miles below the Yalu river. At 10:30 p.m. the Chinese Communists hit the 3rd battalion with their first major attack of the Korean war.

Blowing bugles and whistles, firing burp guns, throwing hand-grenades, the newly arrived Chinese Reds swarmed out of the darkness of the outnumbered Americans. The fight lasted through the next day, and after.

FATHER KAPAUN had a chance to escape but he stayed with the wounded. He was captured and died in prison camp, May 23, 1951.

Two years later, released prisoners of war gave him praise such as they gave no other man. Tributes from non-Catholics were as glowing as those from Catholics.

The soft-spoken, sandy-haired priest, who went to the seminary from a farm home at Pilsen, Kansas, had aroused admiration early in the war.

Men still tell how he kept visiting the battalions and companies during the battle of the Nakdong. Jeeps were critically scarce. Father Kapaun got himself a bicycle and made his rounds on that.

The driver of a litter Jeep was killed at the wheel, one October day. Father Kapaun drove the Jeep and its load of wounded, under fire, to safety.

"He never got excited," said a fellow-chaplain, Father (Capt.) Al Krier of Green Bay. The legend persists that Father Kapaun had a pipe shot out of his mouth on two occasions, along the front.

HE REMAINS now lie, with those of the men he served, in a grave in Red-held North Korea. But he still wields a powerful spiritual influence. Men lately returned from prison camps have testified to it.

"Father Kapaun had a tremendous impact on me," said Capt. Clarence L. Anderson, army doctor from Long Beach, Calif., a non-Catholic. "To me and to other men who knew him intimately, he is more or less a saint. He was a man I cannot even think about

without a marked feeling of reverence."

This came from a man whose own record is magnificent. He, too, stayed with the wounded when he had a chance to leave.

His fellow captives have spoken of the devotion with which he and other army doctors cared for the sick in prison camps.

"Father Kapaun was a chaplain, a spiritual leader," Captain Anderson explained. "He was 100% man, with no idea of personal fear. His leadership was the hardest type, for he led strictly by example."

"THE CHINESE and North Koreans refused to allow him to attend men who were very sick. Practically everyone in our group asked for him and wanted some sort of spiritual sustenance."

"He'd volunteer for all sorts of work details that would take him out of our compound, so that he could see everyone possible. He was by far the hardest working man we had."

When the officers were separated from the enlisted men, Father Kapaun had himself assigned to carry rations. That enabled him to go to the other end of the valley, where he could slip into men's huts, hear confessions and anoint the dying.

"He had the holy oils with him, a purple stole and a small pyx or ciborium with no Hosts," said Lieut. Walter L. Mayo of Watertown, Mass. "The Chinese took his rosary away, so he made one of wire."

Every day the priest gathered the Catholics for the rosary. With the non-Catholics he recited the Lord's Prayer in each billet, every night. He held Sunday services, at which he preached, but contrary to some earlier reports, he could not celebrate Mass in the prison camp.

The Chinese Communists watched and sometimes ridiculed the priest and his congregation during the services.

At least two officers recently released received instructions and baptism from Father Kapaun in captivity.

HE HELPED THE men in every way possible. He was busy all the time, doing something for the men," said Ma-

jor George F. McDonell of Quincy, Mass. "When they were sick and helpless with dysentery, he'd take their clothing, no matter how soiled, and wash it."

"It would be hard to find anyone better," said Lieut. Walter L. Jackson, Jr., of Seattle, Wash. "He'd manage to get things for the men to eat. So that we'd get some vitamins, he'd cook some of those green weeds for us."

Warrant Officer Felix McCool of the 1st Marine Division, from Glendale, Calif., brought back a treasured relic, a piece of Father Kapaun's helmet liner, with the chaplain's white cross painted on it. He was moved into the camp about a month before the priest's death.

"He had a big black patch over one eye and he wore an old stocking on his head," said Mr. McCool. "When I met him first, he was scrounging gear to help men out."

Father Kapaun was highly successful in raiding the food supplies guarded by the Communist police. He saw the prisoners sick and dying from malnutrition. So he said a prayer to St. Dismas the penitent thief, and went out to forage. It was no theft to take food for starving men to whom it was due. But, for the technique, he felt that St. Dismas would be a good guide.

"Once he came back with a whole sack of spuds," Capt. Joseph L. O'Connor of Spring City, Pa., recalled.

"We'd all say a prayer to St. Dismas," said Lieutenant Mayo, "and then go down to the ration dump. We were getting only cracked corn and millet and not enough of either. We'd confuse the Red police and get away with about 300 lbs. extra grain. Father Kapaun did most of it. He'd fill his pockets with salt, which the men needed badly."

From the first day of Little Switch last April to the last day of Big Switch, when Capt. Ralph Nardella, Father Kapaun's right-hand man, came through, released prisoners wanted to talk about the priest they cannot forget.

"He did everything a man could and would pull rough duties," said Warrant Officer Edwin S. Smith of Sayreville, N. J. "He was a man in a million."

Rural Family Of The Year



Kansas City, Mo.—The Joseph J. Griesemer family of Billings, Mo., who have 13 children, received the National Catholic Rural Life Conference award for the rural family of the year from Bishop Edwin V. O'Hara of Kansas City, Mo. (right). Back row—Vincent (8 months), Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Griesemer, Lt. John Griesemer (USAF), 23, Regina, 20, (center row—Teresa, 17, Charles, 10, Paul, 9, Alice, 8. Bottom row—Bernard, 3, Anna, 7, Donna, 2, Joan, 2. Award was presented at the NCRLC's 31st annual convention. (RNS Photos).

Cardinal Stepinac's Health Reported 'Visibly Worse'

Trieste (NC) — Word has reached here through generally reliable channels that His Eminence Aloysius Cardinal Stepinac appears visibly worse under the onslaught of his blood disease.

According to this report, the Archbishop of Zagreb is not bedridden and continues his customary activities each day. But apparently his physical condition is growing slowly but definitely worse.

LAST SUMMER two American specialists flown to Yugoslavia to examine the ailing Cardinal at the request of the American hierarchy found he was suffering from a severe form of polycythemia. This is a disease marked by an abnormal increase of the red blood cells.

While the American doctors found the disease incurable even with the latest modern treatments they said that it was pos-

Reds Barred From N. Y. Schools

Albany, N. Y. (NC) — Members of the Communist Party will be barred from teaching in New York State public schools, the state's Board of Regents has ruled.

The decision was based on a finding that the party "teaches and embraces the doctrine that the Government of the United States should be overthrown by force and violence."

The board listed state and national Communist parties as subversive and thus automatically barred members from jobs in the public school system.

A special committee had previously heard 2,300 pages of testimony in 26 hearings. A court battle over the decision appeared likely after a spokesman for the Communist Party in New York said the regents' action would be appealed.

Mexican Cowboys On Pilgrimage

Mexico City (NC) — Members of the Mexican National Federation of Cowboys made their annual pilgrimage to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe here. Wearing their traditional, colorful garb the cowboys marched to the basilica from a point on the Parahillo Boulevard about two miles away.

Irish Missionaries 'VIP's To Police In Japan Town

By FATHER FREDERICK MANSON

Shingu, Japan, (NC) — Not many priests, bound on a pastoral errand, get the equivalent of a police escort with whistles screeching.

But this is a common experience here, particularly on festival days for two Irish-born Columbian Fathers, whose usual mode of transport is a beaten-up motorcycle.

The explanation is the very unusual relationship that has sprung up between the Shingu police force and the two priests—Father Alexander Eaton, who hails from County Mayo, and his assistant, Father John McGrath, all the way from County Cork.

HOW THIS relationship began is a story with a generous blend of Irish charm and Oriental hero-worship.

It all started about 18 months ago through the good offices of the police chief's daughter, nine-year-old Noriko. She was among the first to greet and welcome Father Eaton when he came to Shingu with his motor bike. Before long the two had become close friends, and Noriko was given many a free piggy-back as the priest went about his pastoral chores.

Father Eaton's wit and good humor, plus the piggy-back rides and other miscellaneous factors, combined to make him a hero in Noriko's eyes. But the whole business was a headache for her father, the police chief. He confessed later that for months after the priest's arrival in town, he and all the members of his household were subjected morning, noon and night to a steady barrage of praise for the "Shim-pusama" (priest) from the adoring Noriko.

In the circumstances, a meeting between the "fathers" was inevitable. When it did take place, Noriko's father freely gave permission for her to attend Sunday school at the church. Better still, the father himself was soon seeking to know more about the Catholic Church.

SO IMPRESSED was the police chief by what he learned that he arranged with Father Eaton for all sixty of the policemen under him to attend a weekly talk by one of the priests as part of their general educational program.

For more than two months now, Fathers Eaton and McGrath have alternated in lecturing for an hour a week to an average of 50 police officers on—believe it or not—the Catholic catechism.

Mission Role Explained By Bishop Sheen

Washington (NC) — Bishop Fulton J. Sheen told a gathering of priests and Religious connected with mission work that the main purpose of foreign missionaries "is to put ourselves out of business as soon as possible."

He noted that the goal of the Church in the mission fields is the establishment of native clergy and Sisterhoods. This, he said, would allow the foreign missionaries to pack up and go home. But he added: "It will never happen."

Asserting that foreign missionaries had cared for 60,000,000 persons last year—including schooling, and aid for the sick, aged and orphans—Bishop Sheen declared that Catholic missionaries perform "the greatest humanitarian work in the world."

He recalled that after a Red Cross official had told him of the work of the Red Cross recently, he in turn described the Church's worldwide mission activities. The Red Cross leader, he said, had to admit that the work of that organization "pales into insignificance" when confronted with the record of the Church.

Cemetery Association Emphasizes Spiritual

Cleveland (NC) — A program calling for more emphasis on the spiritual side and less on the business and industrial side of a Catholic cemetery was adopted here at the sixth annual National Catholic Cemeteries Association convention.

Auxiliary Bishop Floyd L. Be-gin of Cleveland, outlining the program, said today's Catholic cemetery should be conducted so that Catholics in cemeteries to come will be able to obtain as much knowledge as present-day Catholics have gained from the burial places of early Christians.

"Our cemeteries today, as did those of the early Christians, must reflect our belief in the immortality of the souls and of the resurrection," Bishop Be-gin said.



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