

**Father Frederic Gehring**

**Guadalcanal Padre Is Still Full of Miracles**

By CHARLES RANDISI

"Old soldiers never die; they only fade away." So goes an old British war song, always associated with Gen. Douglas MacArthur and his 1951 address to Congress, upon his return from Korea.

Old chaplains fare a little better. At 70 years, Father Frederic Gehring, CM, "the Padre of Guadalcanal," looks a chipper 50, and shows some of that immortality attributed to his kind.

But he hasn't let himself disappear. In Rochester last week "to visit some old friends," retired Bishop James E. Kearney among them, Father Gehring recalled to the Courier-Journal some of his memories of World War II.

His association with Rochesterians goes back to 1943, when he was the senior Catholic chaplain at the now inoperative Sampson Naval Base in Geneva. He especially remembers a field Mass there attended by 25,000 to 30,000, "the largest gathering of Navy men" he ever saw.

When he visited Bishop Kearney last week, Father



FATHER GEHRING

Gehring found him "the same wonderful character as always." Bishop Kearney, he said "loves to reminisce . . . and tell stories."

Before his 27-month stay at Sampson, Father Gehring had volunteered for duty in Guadalcanal, a South Pacific island a few degrees east of New

Guinea. It was there that the first American offensive of the war was launched.

It was in the aftermath of one battle, "when we were down to the last of the Spam," that Father Gehring found Patsy Li, a six-year-old Chinese girl, wounded, unconscious and abandoned by the Japanese.

With a few days of medical attention, she came to, and became his unofficial protegee. The name Patsy Li, which very loosely translates from Chinese to "Father Gehring's Little Treasure," was given her.

(The long story behind Patsy's naming has to do with a Lee hat that Father Gehring once wore and an evening of song by the American troops on Guadalcanal.)

Patsy was later shipped off to the island of Espirito Santo, where she was taken care of by Marist missionaries, and, says Father Gehring, "I forgot all about it."

When the war ended, and he debarked from the USS Kenton in San Francisco, there was a message for him to contact Cardinal Francis Spellman in New York. What followed was the eventual reuniting of Patsy Li to her real mother. Miraculously, he said, the girl's real name turned out to be Pa-Tzi Li, meaning "little white palm blossom."

Father Gehring wrote a book on Patsy, *A Child of Miracles* (Funk and Wagnalls, 1962). Larry Harmon, a filmmaker, was impressed enough by the story to buy the screen rights of it; the movie will be made over the coming year.

Another of the stories Father Gehring likes to tell is that of the prizefighter Barney Ross, world welterweight champion in 1934 and 1935-38, and lightweight title holder in 1933-35.

Ross served on Guadalcanal, where he was hit with shrapnel and malaria. The doctors gave him morphine to ease the pain, and he became addicted.

Father Gehring befriended Ross, and remembers him fondly. "He played the organ at my midnight Mass in 1942 . . . I've accompanied him on the fiddle and we've done 'My Yiddish Momme' as a duet."

Ross eventually beat his addiction, and went on to become an anti-drug lecturer. "He died in Chicago about five years ago," Father Gehring recalls, "and was buried with full military honor."

Father Gehring is now pastor of a church in Germantown, Pa., and travels the country preaching *Miraculous Medal* novenas. He visits friends, makes arrangements for the movie, and still corresponds with Patsy, who is now married, an American citizen, and living in Albuquerque. He proudly waves snapshots of Patsy, her husband, and her home.

He plans to come back to Rochester next year. He has a couple of novenas lined up. He shall return.

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**New VP Named At Nazareth**

Robert H. McCambridge, assistant commissioner for higher education planning in the New York State Education Department, has been appointed vice president for planning and development of Nazareth College. He will be responsible for the supervision of all development, public relations and alumni relations activities of the college.

Dr. McCambridge, chief architect of the Board of regents Statewide Plan for Higher Education and a former administrative secretary of the University of Rochester, will assume his new duties Sept. 1, according to Dr. Alice L. Foley, Nazareth president.

Dr. Foley said the new vice president's expertise would be "invaluable in assisting Nazareth in furthering one of its major objectives: the development of cooperative programs with other area colleges."

Charles Settlement House. Funding for the loans has been received from two local non-profit organizations: the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Fund and the Bishop Sheen Housing Foundation which have granted \$5,000 and \$10,000 respectively.

Any owner, regardless of his income level, of a single family dwelling in which he lives is eligible for a loan up to \$1,000. Thomas Baker, a community organizer at the Settlement House, explained that this stipulation would "promote single family occupancy in the neighborhood." He added that it would also "discourage 'speculative purchasing' and the breaking up of houses into double and triple occupancies.

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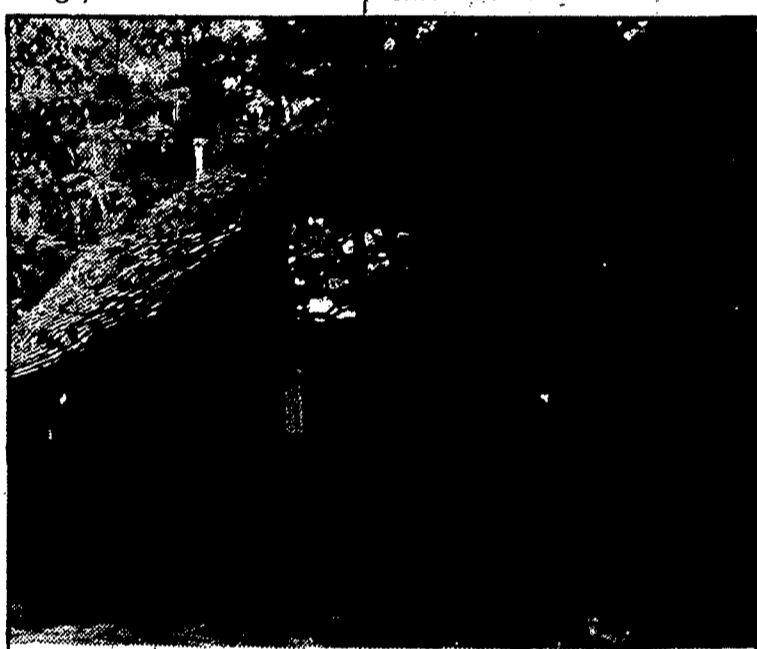
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