

# Retired chaplains: A-bombs spared more bloodshed

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

After several months of front-line combat and administering the anointing of the sick — formally known as last rites — to young Allied soldiers in the Philippines, Father Elmer W. Heindl had but one thought.

End the Pacific War as quickly as possible, regardless of the tactics used.

Fifty years later, Father Heindl still adamantly supports the United States' decision to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Not surprisingly, the retired military chaplain is also perplexed by those who currently question the morality of those nuclear attacks.

"They should not try to be Monday-morning quarterbacks. We had another set of circumstances," said Father Heindl, 85, who resides at St. Charles Borromeo Church, in the Rochester suburb of Greece.

The bombing, Father Heindl maintains, "saved millions of lives, both for the enemy and ourselves. Most of us hated the concept of war, so I can't understand why people are against the atom bomb when it brought the war to an end."

Unless something drastic was done, he explained, the stubborn Japanese military may have continued its stand against the Allies for several months even though Japan had virtually no hope of winning the war by the summer of 1945.

"They were developing the atom bomb, too. Would they have held back?" asked Father Heindl, a chaplain in the Army's 37th Division.

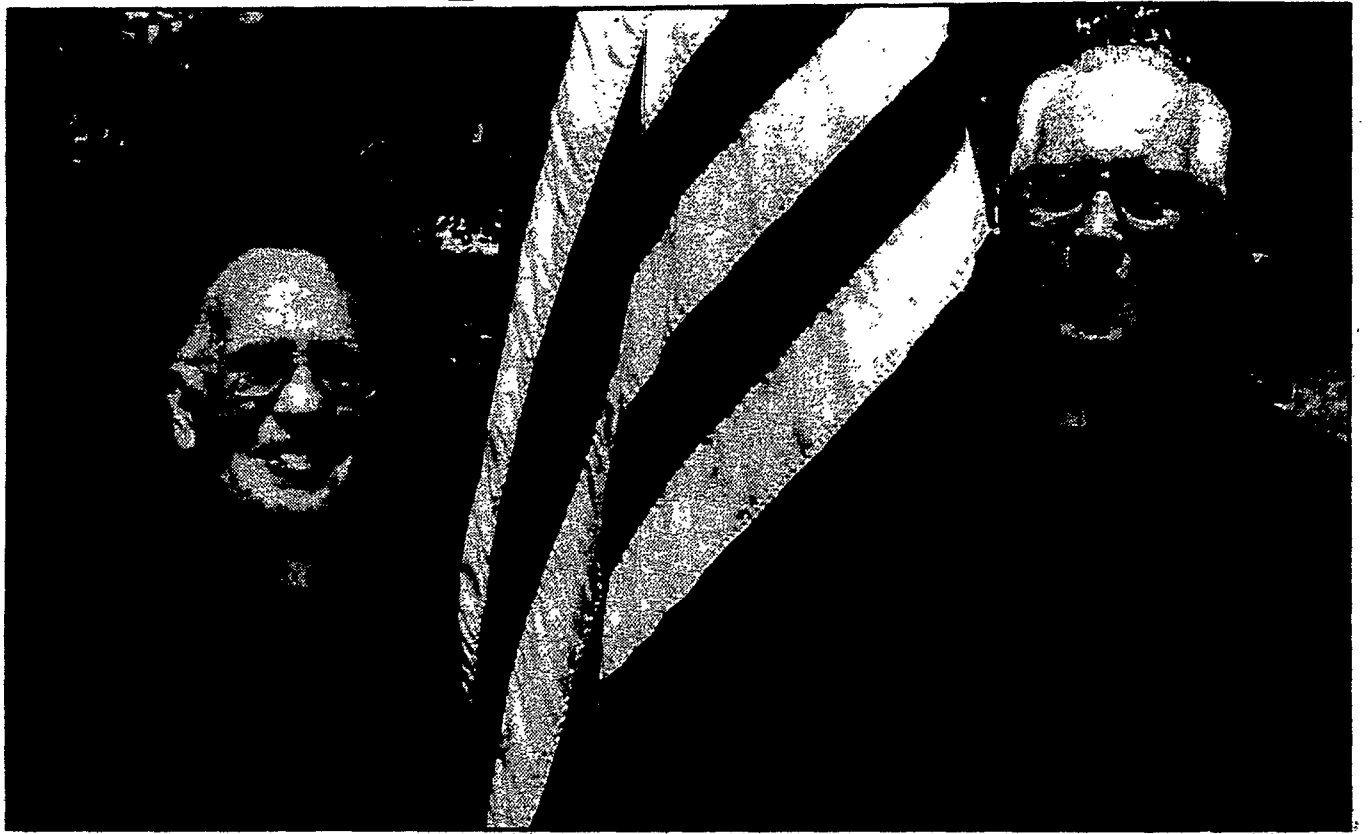
"I don't know of one (Japanese) person who ever gave up. I actually admired their determination; we all did," added Father Heindl. "Surrender wasn't in their concept whatsoever."

Another retired military chaplain from the war in the Pacific, Father Raymond G. Heisel of Greece's Our Mother of Sorrows Church, also observed that the bloodshed may have been even greater without nuclear warfare.

Due to the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Father Heisel said, his Army First Cavalry Division was spared from engaging in planned warfare on Japanese soil.

"If we had invaded, you know what kind of a reception we would have gotten. I don't think I'd be here now," said Father Heisel, 85.

Instead, Father Heisel spent the next several months assisting in Japan's democratization during an occupa-



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer  
Fathers Elmer W. Heindl (left), who resides at Greece's St. Charles Borromeo Church, and Raymond G. Heisel of Our Mother of Sorrows Church, agreed with the decision to drop A-bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Both are retired military chaplains.

tion led by U.S. Gen. Douglas MacArthur.

Despite believing the nuclear bomb was a timely option in 1945, both priests are thankful no atomic warfare has occurred since that time.

"It's such a terrible weapon, but it's helped keep us at peace," Father Heindl noted.

"Our biggest fear now is if gets into the hands of a terrorist," Father Heisel said.

Both retired military chaplains have retained long-lasting ties with the areas in which they served. Father Heisel, for instance, said he has corresponded frequently with some Japanese families he came to know during the occupation.

His experiences in Japan, Father Heisel said, "promoted and developed ecumenism" in his life.

"I wasn't so narrow anymore. I was more broad-mind-

ed, especially with people of other faiths. Before that, we were all in our own little cells here (in the United States)," said Father Heisel, who also served in the Army from 1950-53 as a chaplain in the north Atlantic.

Meanwhile, Father Heindl is preparing to travel later this month to the northern Philippines, where he will celebrate a Mass of Thanksgiving at the site of a monument to the 37th Division.

It was his efforts with the 37th that earned Father Heindl the Distinguished Service Cross as well as a Bronze Star and Silver Star for courage and bravery. He assisted countless injured and dying soldiers over a two-and-a-half-year period, frequently putting his own life at risk in the face of heavy enemy fire.

"I'm very humbled to be able to be a survivor," Father Heindl commented.

## A-bomb

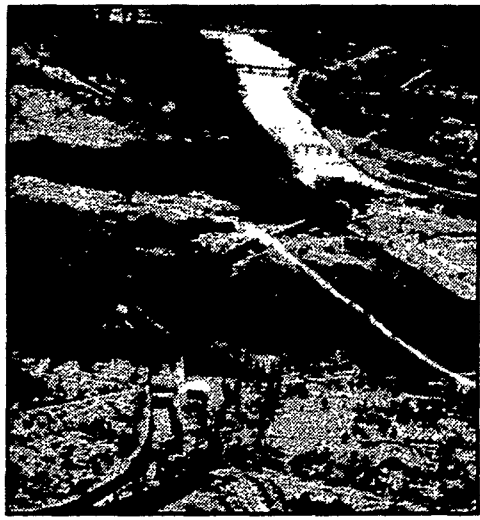
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America, said initial information from military authorities was too scant to make a definitive judgment yet — at that time the second bomb had been dropped only a few hours earlier.

But he opined that from early accounts "there are grave reasons to fear that it (the atomic bomb) lends itself to methods of warfare contrary to the law of God."

Fathers Ford and Connell were among the leading figures in U.S. moral theology at the time.

The article quoted a third theologian, Jesuit Father Joseph A. Vaughan, head of



Nagasaki following the U.S. nuclear attack of Aug. 9, 1945.

the ethics department of Loyola University of Los Angeles, saying: "A good end never justifies the use of evil means."

In the same report, Jesuit geophysicist Father James B. Macelwane of St. Louis University defended the bomb's use on the basis of a "total war" theory.

"War is no longer simply a struggle between armed men, it is primarily a clash of mechanism," he said. "Therefore, to win the war the enemy's production must be stopped and his ability to wage a mechanized warfare thereby must be destroyed. The atomic bomb is a means to that end."

But the report quoted another Jesuit physicist, Father John T. Delaney of Loyola College in Baltimore, calling the bomb "a sacrilege" that "has perverted

science to the cause of slaughter and destruction."

In the Rochester diocesan newspaper, then known as the *Courier Journal*, former editor Father Patrick J. Flynn pleaded against future use of nuclear warfare in a column he wrote Aug. 15, 1945 — the same day Japanese Emperor Hirohito issued his country's surrender. Father Flynn's column appeared the next day.

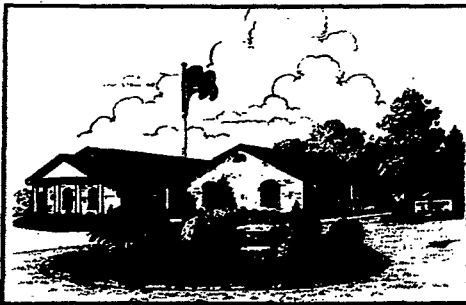
"The discovery of the atomic bomb in the last hours of the war adds a sobering feature to our victory," he wrote. "This almost fabulous power in the hands of men frightens us."

"We must seek God and His justice or perish in a catastrophic disaster of atomic death and spiritual chaos," Father Flynn concluded.



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