

Chaplain's exploits preserved on video

Steve McMahon/CNS

DUBUQUE, Iowa — The exploits of Father William J. Menster, a retired Dubuque archdiocesan priest and retired Navy chaplain who served as chaplain for a 1946-47 South Pole expedition, have been preserved on video.

"South Pole Padre," features the priest's role in Operation Highjump, an expedition directed by Rear Adm. Richard Byrd, the most celebrated polar explorer in American history.

On the voyage, Father Menster oversaw religious services for 2,000 men of all faiths. He led what is believed to be the first worship service held in Antarctica, blessed the continent and dedicated it to peaceful purposes.

"One of the reasons he did so well for the morale of his shipmates was because of his ability to sing and play the accordion and the guitar," said Msgr. Francis P. Friedl, one of those interviewed in the video.

"South Pole Padre" was funded in part by the local share of the U.S. bishops' Catholic Communication Campaign collection. It was a joint project of Loras College Productions, a production company at the Catholic-run college in Dubuque, and the Dubuque Archdiocese's Education Resource Center and its Vocations Awareness Office.

Operation Highjump, which included 13 massive ships carrying 4,400 men, was designed to explore the world's last unknown coastline, to train Navy personnel in cold-climate operations and to discover the mysteries of the world's coldest continent.

"I got orders to report to the USS Mount Olympus in the Brooklyn Navy Yard," Father Menster ex-

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plained. "There was a lot of speculation, secrecy about where this ship was going."

Father Menster, whose travels have taken him to all seven continents, celebrated his 91st birthday with his twin brother Feb. 10.

In the video, Eugene Van Reeth of Hendersonville, N.C., who spent many years in Antarctica on later missions, described Father Menster's role.

"The chaplain not only provides religious services, but he's there to help and counsel," he said. "He is also usually a recreation officer. The chaplain was one of the most important people we had down there."

In the video, Father Menster credits two Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary from St. Martin School in his home town of Cascade with planting the vocations seed at the start of his freshman year of high school in 1926 that eventually led to his ordination in 1938.

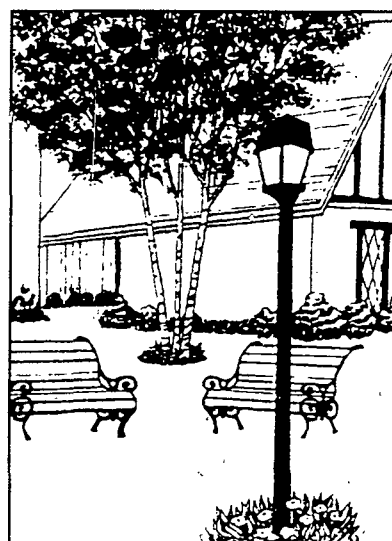
Father Phil Gibbs, director of vocations awareness for the Archdiocese of Dubuque, considers "South Pole Padre" ideal for promoting religious vocations among young people.

"Ministerial priesthood is the vocation through which Father Menster has come to his fulfillment," he told *The Witness*, Dubuque's archdiocesan newspaper. "He openly admits that he never would have entertained the notion of becoming a priest if it had not been for his teachers — the good sisters — who saw something in him that he did not see in himself."



The Witness/CNS

Father William J. Menster blesses an expedition team in the Antarctic Jan. 26, 1947. The priest, now retired and living in the Archdiocese of Dubuque, Iowa, is featured in the new video "South Pole Padre." He celebrated what is believed to be the first religious service on the polar continent.



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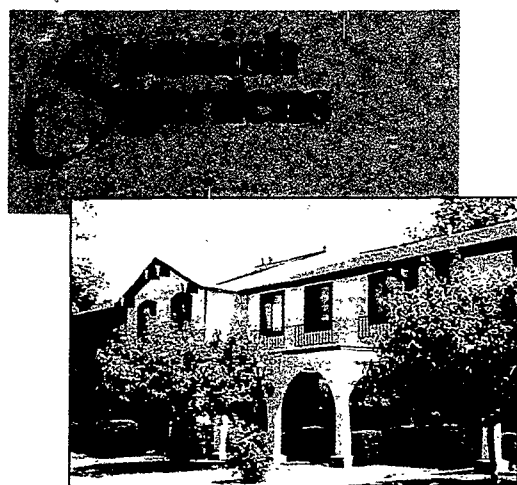
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