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Some Catholic Military Involvement Throughout the Years

Even infrequent readers of the Catholic press must by now have turned a page and been surprised by the photo of a massive aircraft carrier alone at sea, deck covered with planes, bow wave foaming along its flanks, and the caption: "Small town seeking parish priest."

The Chaplain Corps of the U.S. Navy certainly has an attention-getter for its recruitment campaign. The other services conduct similar campaigns, if not with as dramatic a photo. The advertisements remind all readers of a pastoral need that is not usually foremost in their thoughts, but to which priests and bishops have been responding at least since the Civil War.

In the early days of that conflict, Governor Charles S. Olden appointed Father George H. Doane Catholic chaplain of the New Jersey Brigade. Other priests from the fledgling diocese visited the combat areas. After the battle of Fredericksburg, Father Bernard McQuaid wrote from there to Bishop Bayley that soldiers had been dying without a priest, and that he would not return to Newark until a replacement arrived.

The method of supplying chaplains for the armed forces remained haphazard until World War I, when the sudden rapid expansion of the forces compelled the government to seek a rational system. The difficulties experienced during the war pointed to a solution that was adopted after the war. In the meantime individual clergymen volunteered, generally for a specific unit, were allowed by their bishop to go and learn the military aspects of their role via on-the-job training.



Chaplain Rush visits the annual demonstration of the Union County Federation of Holy Name Societies, October 12, 1940, at Warinanco Park. (Reverend Peter Rush Photo Collection, Archives, Seton Hall University)

At the end of World War I, 21 priests from the diocese of Newark and four from the Trenton diocese were serving as chaplains with the army and the navy. Many other priests of the two dioceses ministered to the large number of troops temporarily in the state, whether training at Fort Dix or preparing to ship overseas at Camp Merritt in Bergen County. The chaplain at the latter institution called on local priests to help with confessions, since notice about departure times was given only shortly before the actual departure, and frequently as many as 1,600 men wished to receive the sacrament in the interval.

After the Armistice, naturally, the number of chaplains declined sharply, as did the numbers in the armed

forces. One of the Newark priests, William A. Maguire, elected to remain in the U.S. Navy. Ordained in 1915, he had served for two years at St. Mary's Church in Jersey City. As soon as the country entered the war in 1917, Maguire volunteered and in July 1917 he entered the navy. He served on the battleship *U.S.S. Maine* during 1918. For the next 23 years he served on ships and at shore stations wherever the Navy went, including service on the China station.

On December 7, 1941, he was at Pearl Harbor, assigned to the *U.S.S. California* and preparing to say Mass when the Japanese bombers arrived. He had a gig and crew at his disposal and used them to patrol the harbor

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near the naval base and pick up survivors of the damaged and sunken vessels.

Very quickly a song entitled "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition" became a hit. Purportedly the title quoted an exhortation from a naval chaplain at Pearl Harbor who was helping to man the guns of his ship. Soon the rumor started that the anonymous chaplain was actually Father Maguire. The song undoubtedly helped home front morale, but not Maguire's; he vigorously denied involvement and could prove he could not have been the person involved — if, indeed, the whole incident had not been invented. But the rumor persisted. Maguire wrote two books about his naval experiences, *Rig for Church*, and *The Captain Wears a Cross*, both of which sold well during the early 1940s.

In view of the outbreak of World War II in Europe and a seriously deteriorating situation in the Far East, the United States had begun to expand its military forces in 1940. The pace of the expansion increased rapidly after Pearl Harbor, and clergymen also volunteered in growing numbers. By the last year of the war each diocese in New Jersey (there were now four, Paterson and Camden having been established in 1937) had released priests for service. Two of them became famous.

Reverend John P. Washington was ordained in 1935 and served at Saint Stephen's Parish in Arlington before

becoming an Army chaplain. In February 1943, he was on the USAT *Dorchester* in the North Atlantic with troops headed for England, when a submarine torpedoed the vessel. Washington and three Protestant chaplains stood on the deck handing out life vests to soldiers without them, then gave away their own, linked arms and, praying together, the four were seen by many survivors to go down with the ship. Their courage and self-sacrifice were widely noted. Chapels have been dedicated in their honor, a commemorative stamp featured the Four Chaplains, and in 1961 Congress awarded them a Special Medal of Heroism.

Father Thomas M. Reardon, a native of Jersey City, was ordained in 1934 and served as a curate in two parishes before he became a chaplain in the Marine Corps. In August 1942, he was in the third wave of Marines to land on Guadalcanal, and for the next four months he was the only chaplain on the island. He figured prominently in "Guadalcanal Diary," an account of the campaign by Richard Tregaskis, a correspondent with the Marines. Father Reardon survived the war, returned to parish work and subsequently became Regent of Seton Hall University Law School, and thereafter pastor of St. James, Newark.

Most chaplains, of course, did not gain national fame. Reverend Peter S. Rush, a native of Newark and a classmate of Father Reardon, became an Army chaplain in September 1940. He was already on active duty in the first days of the draft and observed the growing pains of the services at



Preparing for a formal review in training camp, probably Camp Carson, Colorado. (Reverend Peter Rush Photo Collection, Archives, Seton Hall University)

that time. Among his papers at Seton Hall University is a collection of photos from his military service. They focus not on combat activity, although he would see a lot of that, but on the rest of the time — training, formations, parades, recreation and religious services.

Early in his service Rush apparently spent some time at Fort Dix, since a good number of the early photos bear the address of a Trenton photography shop on their back. Rush then went to Fort Carson, Colorado, in the shadow of the



Mass in the field, probably during training at Camp Carson. (Reverend Peter Rush Photo Collection, Archives, Seton Hall University)



Reverend Rush outside the Benedictine monastery at St. Florian, Austria, June 30, 1945. (Reverend Peter Rush Photo Collection, Archives, Seton Hall University)

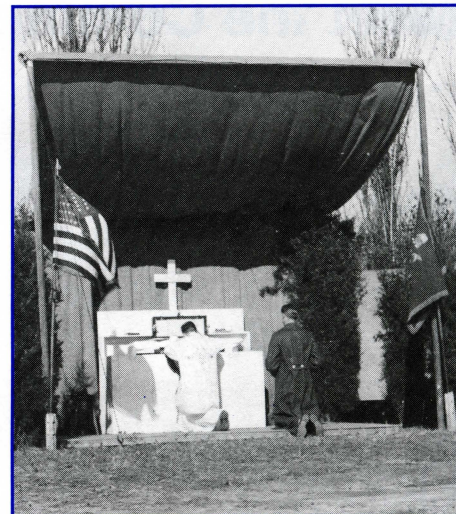
Rockies, and his photos show some of that activity. He went to England with the 71st Infantry Division, and then across France and into Germany with Patton's Third Army.

After hostilities ceased, Father Rush became staff chaplain to General Mark Clark and General Lucius Clay when they, in succession, headed the American forces in Austria. Although the United States reduced its armed forces to a mere shadow of their wartime strength, Rush remained on active duty, and saw combat service again with the Third Infantry Division in Korea. The "police action" there saw an expanded demand for chaplains and in 1953, 28 priests from New Jersey served in the armed forces as chaplains. Father Rush retired from the Army in 1961 after 21 years of service.

Again after Korea the nation reduced the strength of its armed forces, with a proportionate decline in the corps of chaplains. In the mid-

1960s, the Cold War heated up in southeast Asia and American forces were soon committed in Vietnam. The demand for chaplains surged again and in 1972, 34 chaplains from New Jersey served on active duty. One of the early volunteers was Reverend Charles J. Watters, who was killed in action in Vietnam on November 19, 1967. His unit was under heavy fire, and a number of wounded were lying defenseless, more or less in the open. Reverend Watters managed to rescue some, and lost his life while doing so. He was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Since the end of Vietnam, the armed forces have not sustained a continued demand for heavy increases in personnel and thus not for sustained increases in the numbers of chaplains. According to the *Official Catholic Directory* for 1999, there were then 23 chaplains from New Jersey on active duty. A substantial number, but the ads are asking for more.



Mass in the field, under a rough shelter, with the United States flag and unit guidons displayed to the sides of the altar. (Reverend Peter Rush Photo Collection, Archives, Seton Hall University)

Recent Publications of Interest

Downtown Monks: Sketches of God in the City by Reverend Albert Holtz, O.S.B. Father Albert is a monk of Newark Abbey in downtown Newark and a member of the faculty at St. Benedict's Prep. His reflections take off from life in Newark, in the monastery, in the Prep and reveal to the reader how daily occurrences can be the occasions for meeting God. Ave Maria Press, \$10.95.



Headquarters Battery, 166th Field Artillery Battalion moving out for training. (Reverend Peter Rush Photo Collection, Archives, Seton Hall University)



A postcard showing Vienna's Hotel Bristol, where Reverend Rush had quarters for a time. (Reverend Peter Rush Photo Collection, Archives, Seton Hall University)

Pardon Our Red Face

The Spring 2000 issue of this newsletter announced the retirement of Monsignor Charles J. Giglio from the Commission. Unfortunately, the notice was not clear that he had retired *only* from the Commission and numbers of his friends expressed surprise that he was out to pasture. He is *not*. Monsignor is still actively engaged as rector of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Camden and as vicar for pastoral planning and budgeting for the Diocese of Camden. We apologize for the imprecise phrasing of the announcement, which led to the misconceptions.

Meet the Commission



Reverend James F. Betz

Father James Francis Betz was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on August 30, 1945, the son of Alice and George Betz. He attended Saint Martin School and Father Judge High School in his native city and then pursued his undergraduate degree at Mount Saint Paul College in Waukesha, Wisconsin. From there, he went on to theological studies at Saint Mary's Seminary in Baltimore, Maryland and was ordained a priest on May 23, 1971 in Camden, New Jersey.

For the first dozen years of his priesthood Father Betz ministered as associate pastor to a series of parishes — Saint Raymond at Villas, Saint Rose of Lima at Haddon Heights, Saint Nicholas at Egg Harbor and Saint Maria Goretti at Runnemede. From 1983 to 1990 he served as chaplain at two hospitals in succession, West Jersey Hospital in Voorhees and then

Cooper Hospital in Camden. In 1986, he completed the program of study at Saint Charles Seminary in Philadelphia and received the degree Master of Divinity. During this period he also began to serve as a chaplain in the Army Reserve.

In 1990, Father Betz entered active duty with the U.S. Army and served seven months in the Persian Gulf. In 1993, he began a three-year tour as military pastor in Panama, a position which enabled him to see much of Central America. In 1996, he was transferred to Hanau in Central Germany. In 1999, he returned to his diocese where he is pastor of Saint Joseph's Church in Swedesboro, New Jersey and chaplain to the 185th Chemical Battalion, with headquarters in Wilmington, Delaware. He enjoys bicycling, canoeing and book repairing.

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Most Reverend Dominic A. Marconi, D.D., *Chairman*; Reverend Monsignor Joseph C. Shenrock, P.A., *Vice Chairman*; Barbara Bari; Reverend James F. Betz; Reverend Christopher Ciccarino; JoAnn Cotz; Reverend Augustine Curley, O.S.B.; Reverend Daniel A. Degnan, S.J.; Reverend Monsignor William N. Field; Reverend Michael G. Krull; Reverend Monsignor Raymond J. Kupke; Joseph F. Mahoney; Sister Margherita Marchione, M.P.F.; Elizabeth Milliken; Reverend Monsignor Robert G. Moneta; Sister Irene Marie Richards, O.P.; Sister Thomas Mary Salerno, S.C.; Reverend Monsignor Francis R. Seymour; Reverend Joseph D. Wallace; Peter J. Wosh. Joseph F. Mahoney, *Newsletter Editor*

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