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The Chaplain Who Went Over-the-Top Father George Raphael Carpentier, O.P.

by J. Michael Finn

When you are about to go into battle, the priest shall come forward and say to the soldiers: *'Hear, O Israel! Today you are going into battle against your enemies. Be not weak-hearted or afraid; be neither alarmed nor frightened by them. For it is the Lord, your God, who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies and give you victory.'*

Deuteronomy, 20: 2-4

With the above words the Book of *Deuteronomy* provided instructions to priests on how to prepare troops before going into battle. From the time of ancient Israel to the present day, military chaplains of all faiths have followed these guidelines. U.S. Military chaplains have had a long and remarkable history. This article will look at how Catholic chaplains began in the U.S. Military and will focus on the life of one prominent military chaplain, Dominican Father George Raphael Carpentier, O.P., one-time teacher of Catholic boys in Columbus.



Rev. George Carpentier,
from the *Aquinian*

cloak, divided it in two with his sword and gave half of his cloak to the beggar. Later, Martin had a vision of Jesus surrounded by a group of angels. Jesus was wearing half of a soldier's cloak. One of the angels asked Jesus, "Master, where did you get that old dirty and torn cloak?" Jesus replied, "My good servant Martin gave it to me."

After leaving the Roman military, Martin became a monk, then later Bishop of Tours. After his death in 397, Martin became a patron saint of

France. Martin's half of his old Roman military cloak was preserved as a holy relic and it was carried into battle by the Frankish kings. The kings entrusted the cloak to priests who were called *cappellani* in Latin or "keepers of the cape." In French the word became "chapelains" and came to signify those who tended to the spiritual well being of military personnel. From this word we derive the English word chaplains.

St. Martin of Tours

As a young man St. Martin of Tours (316-397) was a Roman soldier. While serving in Gaul, he encountered a beggar at the gates of the city of Amiens. It was a cold day and Martin felt sorry for the poor man. Having no provisions to share with the man, Martin removed his military

Chaplains and the U.S. Military

Although many Catholics served in the U.S. military prior to the 1800s, it was not until then that the need for Catholic chaplains became evident. The man credited with being the first Catholic priest commissioned as a chaplain and officer in the U.S. Armed Forces was Father Adam Marshall, S.J. He served aboard the *USS North Carolina* from December 22, 1824 until his death on board ship, September 20, 1825.

In the 1846 war with Mexico, the number of Catholic soldiers in the U.S. military had dramatically increased. The largely Protestant officer corps had little use for their German and Irish Catholic soldiers, who they singled out for cruel and often unjust punishments. As a result of this abuse, hundreds of Catholic soldiers deserted

to Mexico and joined the Mexican army. Catholic bishops formally complained to President James K. Polk about the unjust treatment. Polk met secretly in Washington with Bishop John Hughes of New York, Bishop Michael Portier of Mobile and Bishop Peter Kenrick of St. Louis. He requested that the Bishops assign two Catholic priests to the Army to serve as chaplains. They assigned two Jesuits, Father John McElroy and Father Anthony Rey. Father Rey was killed during the war. Father McElroy survived and later founded Boston College.

During the U.S. Civil War about forty Catholic priests served the Union Army and about twenty-eight served the Confederacy. Many chaplains, particularly in the Confederacy, served without any official recognition or commission.

The First World War

On April 6, 1917 the United States declared war on Germany. Recognizing the need for more chaplains, the U.S. Catholic bishops formed the National Catholic War Council. The bishops assigned quotas to each diocese based on the number of priests in the jurisdiction. They also appealed directly to religious orders to contribute what personnel they could. The

Diocese of Columbus had a quota of five chaplains; however, only three diocesan priests had responded for service by end of the war. The Military Ordinariate records that these diocesan volunteers were Father James T. Banahan of Tiltonville St. Joseph, Jefferson County, Ohio; Fr. Cornelius Joseph Norris of Chillicothe, Ohio; and Fr. James Michael Ryan of Columbus. Father

Ryan became pastor at Sacred Heart Church in Columbus after the war.

According to the U.S. Military Archdiocese, at the end of the war a total of 1,026 priests were serving as chaplains with the armed forces. In addition, there were 165 priests serving without commission as civilians paid directly by the Knights of Columbus. About 30% of all chaplains in the First World War were Catholic priests. Seventeen Catholic chaplains died in service during the war. The National Catholic War Council went through a couple of name changes after the war and eventually evolved into the present United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The most famous, and most decorated, Catholic chaplain of the Great War was "Fighting" Father



This photo illustrates the various medals awarded to Father Carpentier

Francis Patrick Duffy. Father Duffy, Senior Chaplain of the 42nd Division was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the Distinguished Service Medal and the French Croix de Guerre for his heroic actions in France.

Father George Raphael Carpentier, O.P.

One of the many Catholic priests from religious orders that served as a military chaplain in the First World War was Dominican Father George Raphael Carpentier, O.P., a professor at Aquinas College High School in Columbus, Ohio.

Father Carpentier was born in Rennes, France on March 28, 1887. He came to this country at a very young age with his father, who was a French Naval architect. His father was on loan to the U.S. Navy and reportedly served with it during World War I. The senior Carpentier was regarded as “one of the foremost ordinance experts in the world.” Father Carpentier’s mother had died in France. His two sisters were left behind in France, one of them becoming a nun. The young Carpentier was sent to boarding school in Quebec, Canada. As a young man he worked on the railroad in Louisville, Kentucky. Father Carpentier reported that his father became a naturalized U.S. citizen in Virginia. Other than these meager details, little is known about Father Carpentier’s family or if any are still living.

Father Carpentier was educated at the College of St. Louis de Gonzague, Quebec; Loyola College, Baltimore; and St. Charles College, Endicott City, Maryland. On November 20, 1907, at the age of 20, he applied to enter the Dominican Order at St. Rose’s Priory in Springfield, Kentucky.

He entered the Dominican Order at St. Joseph’s Priory, Somerset, Ohio, where he made his profession on December 3, 1908. He was sent to the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, D.C. and attended the Catholic University of America where he earned two master’s degrees. Bishop Owen B. Corrigan, auxiliary

of Baltimore, ordained Father Carpentier in the chapel of Caldwell Hall on the Catholic University campus, on June 25, 1913. His first assignment came in 1914 when he was assigned as a professor at Aquinas College High School in Columbus.

Chaplain in the Great War

While assigned at Aquinas and likely in response to the Bishop’s call, Father Carpentier volunteered for service in the war and was commissioned a First Lieutenant in the U.S. Army on February 15, 1918. He completed the five-week chaplain’s training course at Fort Monroe, Virginia in April 1918. He was a member of the very first U.S. chaplain’s training class and the only class to graduate at that location. By his own account, he was sent to France with the U.S. 6th Division arriving there in early June 1918. It is unclear from the records whether he was ever officially assigned to the 6th Division or was merely traveling with them to France. After arriving in France he was assigned to the 83rd Brigade, 42nd Rainbow Division.

The 42nd Rainbow Division was composed of 26 state National Guard units that had been called up for Federal service. To facilitate command of these diverse units, they were consolidated into one division. After Division Chief of Staff Major Douglas MacArthur remarked that the Division “would stretch over the whole county like a rainbow,” the combined National Guard units were christened the Rainbow Division.

The 83rd Brigade was composed of several units. The most notable were: the 165th Infantry Regiment composed of members of the famed Irish “Fighting 69th” from the New York National Guard; the 166th Infantry Regiment composed of the 4th Ohio National Guard; and the 117th Sanitary Train which comprised the ambulance companies and field hospitals for the 42nd Division. Father Carpentier joined the 42nd Division in late June 1918 near Baccarat,

France. His first assignment was to serve with the 117th Sanitary Train.

The fighting in the Great War was particularly gruesome. Chemical gas, machine guns, tanks, and long-range artillery were all introduced in this war and with devastating results. Much of the war in France was fought from trenches where opponents looked at each other across open fields of tangled barbed wire, mud and shell holes called “no man’s land.” To leave the trench as a unit and charge the enemy position was called “going over-the-top.” For thousands of allied soldiers who faced the enemy’s guns in this fashion it meant certain death. As a chaplain initially assigned to the 42nd Division’s medical unit, Father Carpentier would have seen first hand the high human cost of early 20th Century warfare.

It should be noted that assignments of army chaplains were not as strictly controlled as they were for regular soldiers. Although the chaplains had

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specific unit assignments, they often went where they were needed most. This need could be dictated by the Division’s Senior Chaplain or by battlefield circumstances. For this reason chaplains, like Father Carpentier, may often appear in the histories of several regiments within a division. It also was not uncommon for chaplains to be assigned duties not related to their religious function. Because he was fluent in the French language and because the 42nd often worked closely with French military units, Father Carpenter often served the division as an interpreter.

In late July 1918 the 42nd Division was assigned to the area around Chateau-Thierry where they relieved the U.S. 26th Division. The Americans were assisting the French army in repelling the last major German offensive of the war as part of the Aisne-Marne Counteroffensive. It was

during this campaign that Father Carpentier was awarded a Silver Star for gallantry in action. The action took place on July 26, 1918. His Silver Star citation reads as follows:

George R. Carpentier, first lieutenant, chaplain, 117th Sanitary Train, 42nd Division, American Expeditionary Forces. For gallantry in action near Chateau-Thierry, France, July 26, 1918. Chaplain Carpentier worked his way along our front lines under terrific enemy artillery and machine-gun fire and in addition to administering to the wounded, located our own and the enemy lines and conveyed this important information to the Battalion Commander (G.O. No. 71, April 21, 1919 by order Commanding General, AEF).

It was during this same action, four days later that the famous Catholic poet of the 165th Regiment, Sergeant Joyce Kilmer, was killed in action.

While serving with the 42nd Division, Father Carpentier became friends with Major William “Wild Bill”

Donovan, Commander of the 1st Battalion, 165th Regiment. Donovan was a Medal of Honor recipient and a future Chief of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) during World War II. His brother, Father Vincent Clement Donovan, O.P. served at Aquinas College in Columbus from 1923 until 1925. Major Donovan reportedly named Father Carpentier “historian” for the division; however there has been no evidence found of any published regimental or division histories written by Father Carpentier.

Father Carpentier also reportedly developed a close friendship with Colonel Douglas MacArthur, Chief of Staff and later Brigadier General of the 84th Brigade. He was also a Medal of Honor recipient and the most decorated soldier in World War I. Colonel MacArthur would later distinguish himself as a General in both World War II and the Korean conflict.

He was absolutely fearless

In mid-August 1918 Father Carpentier was temporarily assigned to the 165th Infantry Regiment to replace Father Francis Patrick Duffy, Senior Chaplain of the Division, who was recuperating from exhaustion and fatigue. In turning over his assignment, Father Duffy told Father Carpentier, “Your name is French, but it has the advantage of being the one French name that is best known and most admired by our bunch of pugilists.” Georges Carpentier (no known relation) was a French boxer, who, in 1918, would have been well known to the men as the Heavy Weight Champion of Europe.

In September 1918, Father Duffy reassigned Father Carpentier to the 166th (Ohio) Infantry Regiment. Father Duffy called the assignment, “... a task for which his zeal and endurance especially qualified him.” The 166th regimental history noted that the regiment contained a number of Catholics and Father Duffy thought that Father Carpentier would suit the Ohio boys “because he was a Columbus product, a member of the faculty of Aquinas College.” According to the history, Father Carpentier reported to his new regiment near the St. Mihiel sector. The history described Father Carpentier as, “Quiet, soft-spoken, this scholarly man moved about his business in a manner that brought him instant respect, which later deepened into love from Protestant and Catholic alike. He was absolutely fearless.”

When he arrived at his new assignment, on the evening of September 26, 1918, Father Carpentier reported to Lieutenant A. B. Rankin. He found Lt. Rankin about to embark on a patrol to enter the city of Haumont-les-Lachaussee. Without any hesitation Father Carpentier asked

permission to go with the patrol, indicating that the men might need spiritual aid. “I let him go because he wanted to go and I liked his nerve,” said Lt. Rankin, “Of course, he knew I wasn’t responsible for his safety, he just went because he felt he should go.”

Father Carpentier spent considerable time with the leading battalions of the 166th. He helped cheer the men, telling stories and bringing to the forward area all the chocolate and cigarettes he could secure. His “Ohio boys” had many good things to say about their chaplain. They called him “the chaplain who went over-the-top” and “the fighting chaplain.” They spoke of the chaplain’s bravery and service at the front lines. They told of the good chaplain risking his

own life to provide physical and spiritual aid to the wounded and dying.

In October 1918 the 166th Regiment participated in the hard-fought and bloody Meuse-Argonne Offensive.

American troops fought their way through the dense Argonne forest. By early November 1918, American forces had pushed the German Army out of the Argonne and toward positions east of the Meuse River. The U.S. objective was to cross the river and capture the occupied French city of Sedan, cutting the German supply lines.

On November 7, 1918 Father Carpentier volunteered to participate in an advanced patrol near the village of Cheveuges about 3 miles southwest of Sedan. The patrol ran into heavy enemy resistance. As a result of his actions on this patrol, Father Carpentier was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, this nation’s second highest military award for extraordinary heroism. His official medal citation reads as follows:

He helped cheer the men, telling stories and bringing to the forward area all the chocolate and cigarettes he could secure. His “Ohio boys” had many good things to say about their chaplain. They called him “the chaplain who went over-the-top” and “the fighting chaplain.”

The Distinguished Service Cross is presented to George R. Carpentier, First Lieutenant (Chaplain), U.S. Army, for extraordinary heroism in action near Cheveuges, France, November 7, 1918. Volunteering for service, Chaplain Carpentier accompanied a patrol as interpreter, and later, when our troops encountered stubborn resistance and sustained heavy casualties, he established a dressing station, and, under heavy shell fire, administered to the wounded and dying, continuing this service after he had been wounded twice (General Orders No. 126, W.D., 1919).

At Cheveuges, Father Carpentier had refused medical attention for his wounds until he had finished bandaging and anointing the wounded. He later described his own wounds, one of which was a head wound, as not being very serious. The wounds were serious enough to earn him a wound stripe for his sleeve, which was the 1918 equivalent of the Purple Heart. When the medal of the Purple Heart was authorized in 1932 he, and other wounded World War veterans, were awarded the medal retroactively.

Later that same week, Father Carpentier witnessed the final advance on Sedan by the U.S. 1st Division. He referred to it as the most thrilling thing he had seen during the war. The 42nd Division had captured and held the heights above Sedan. When the 1st Division advanced against concentrated enemy fire, the 42nd Division could see the entire operation. "We could see the whole panorama of battle," said Father Carpentier, "The men advancing in waves, the bursting of shells, the men falling and their comrades still advancing. Such a scene few soldiers have seen."

On November 11, 1918 (the feast of St. Martin of Tours) the Armistice was signed and the "War to End All Wars" was over. The 42nd Division, and Father Carpentier, remained in Europe almost six months after the Armistice participating in the "Watch on the Rhine" as the military occupation of Germany was called by the press or the "Defensive Sector" as it was referred to by the military.

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(To be concluded)

Distant Birthplaces Recorded at Marion, 1890-1897

by Father James A. J. Burns

(Continued from Vol. XXX, No. 9)

- Hoster, Henry Joseph (husband of Martha Elizabeth Doherty), Madison Twp., Jackson Co., O., Aug. 24, 1890; Bloomington Twp., Jackson Co., O., Mar. 5, 1893; Henry Joseph Hocter, Cross Roads, Jackson Co., O., June 2, 1895
- Hoy, David Vincent (husband of Mary Hillan), New York, N.Y., Nov. 20, 1891; July 1, 1894
- Irwin, Felix Albert (husband of Mary C. Stubbs), Farmersville, Montgomery Co., O., Dec. 15, 1895
- Jenkins, David T. (non-Catholic), St. Mary's, Wales (father of William G. Jenkins, born 1870), Apr. 16, 1892
- Jenkins, Margaret Ann (baptized herself, daughter of William and Lucy), Brookfield, Trumbull Co., O., Apr. 1, 1893
- Jenkins, William A. (non-Catholic) (husband of Lucy Rosser, father of Margaret A.), Merthyr (vil. Tydfil), Glamorganshire, So. Wales
- Jenkins, William George (husband of Mary A. Moran), Brookfield, Trumbull Co., O., Sept. 2, 1894
- Jennings, Ann (wife of Theodore Deal), Little Washington, Pa., Oct. 15, 1890
- Jordan, Mary Elizabeth (wife of Marion O. Redd), Scranton, Pa., July 16, 1893; Aug. 20, 1895
- Kane, Helen (wife of John Minoughan), Ballycroy, Co. Mayo, Ireland, Feb. 23, 1890; Kaine at July 5, 1891; Sept. 25, 1892
- Keating, Honora (wife of Timothy D. Kelly), Canandaga near Rochester, N.Y., Jan. 18, 1891; Mar. 5, 1893
- Kelly, Anthony (husband of Helen McMahan), Parish of Kilmore, near Bellmullett, Co. Mayo, Jan. 24, 1892
- Kelly, David (husband of Sarah Carroll), Loughran, Co. Mayo, Ireland, Feb. 16, 1890
- Kelly, Timothy D. (husband of Honora Keating), Charliffe, County Cork or Limerick, Jan. 18, 1891; Charliffe, Co. Cork, Mar. 5, 1893
- Kelly, William Francis (husband of Elizabeth E. McGrath), Manchester, Britain, Jan. 17, 1897
- Kime, Catharine (non-Catholic) (wife of Stephen Dalton), Harrisburg, Pa., May 30, 1894
- Kinney, William James (himself baptized), born at St. Joseph Orphanage, Cumminsville, O., Nov. 17, 1892
- Kirchner, Martin Henry, Delaware, O., Aug. 2, 1891
- Klingelsmith, Helen (non-baptized) (wife of Francis Benedict), Westmoreland Co., Pa., Sept. 10, 1894
- Kruskamp, Joseph Bernard (husband of Catharine Cecilia Ring), Wilkesville, Vinton Co., O.; July 13, 1890; May 13, 1894; Sept. 19, 1897
- Lannan, Mary Ann (wife of Ebers A. Gurley), Syracuse, N.Y., Aug. 28, 1892
- Lawrence -- see Coyle, Ann C.
- Lawrence, John Henry (husband of Henrietta Frasso), Hannibal, Mo., Apr. 1, 1894; Dec. 29, 1895
- Lawrence, Michael (husband of Margaret Prendergast), Mullinaglagh, Co. Tipperary, Ireland, Apr. 13, 1890; Nov. 11, 1894; Parish of Mullinaglagh, June 20, 1897
- Lawrence, Nicholas J. (husband of Joanna Peters), Parish of Mullinaglagh, Co. Tipperary, May 31, 1891
- Ledazzari, Anselmo (husband of Rosa Pruzzo), Rome, Italy, Apr. 16, 1896

- Lenahan, Margaret (wife of Jeremiah F. Darmody), Corning, N.Y., Apr. 13, 1890; Lenihan, May 15, 1892
- Like, Ann (wife of Frederick W. Reiber), Liberty, Crawford Co., O., Mar. 14, 1896
- Lynch, Helen (wife of Herman Feedner), Kenton, O., Jan. 22, 1894
- Lynch, Thomas John (husband of Ann McCarthy), New Port, Co. Mayo, July 1, 1894
- McAndrew, Anthony Francis (husband of Mary A. O'Hara), Owen Dugh, Co. Mayo, Dec. 20, 1891; Anthony J. McAndrew, Tavanaugh, Co. Mayo, Oct. 30, 1893; Black River, Co. Mayo, Mar. 7, 1897
- McAndrew, John Joseph, Glennomoy, Co. Mayo, June 24, 1894
- McCarthy, Ann (wife of Thomas J. Lynch), Kildimo, Co. Limerick, July 1, 1894
- McDonough, John Francis (husband of Mary Clarke), Ironton, O., May 13, 1894; May 11, 1895
- McFarland, Mary (wife of Michael Joseph Ryan), Chorley, Lancashire, England, Apr. 6, 1890; Ryn at Oct. 27, 1891
- McGinity, Dorothy Mary (wife of William H. Plunkett), Cataba, Ky., Sept. 21, 1895; Dorothy Mary McGinety, Butler, Kenton Co., Ky., Aug. 8, 1897
- McGrath -- see Cusic, Mary
- McGrath, Thomas James (husband of Catherine C. Madden), Richwood, O., May 23, 1897
- McMahon, Catharine (wife of Cornelius Ryan), Bristol, Stark Co., O., Apr. 22, 1894
- McMahon, Helen (wife of Anthony Kelly), Loudenville, Ashland Co., O., Jan. 24, 1892
- Mackey, Mary (non-Catholic) (wife of Erastus Reed Cameron), Lewistown, Fulton Co., Ill., June 20, 1891
- Maconi, Anastasius (husband of Polonia Marzatti), Tuscany, Italy, Aug. 11, 1896
- Madden, Catharine Cecilia (wife of Thomas J. McGrath), Cleveland, O., May 23, 1897
- Mahaffey, William J. (husband of Helen M. Ring), Jackson Co., O., Dec. 1, 1895
- Maher, Catharine Louise (wife of Michael Henry Murphy), Bellefontaine, O., Oct. 18, 1891, Jan. 8, 1893; Apr. 8, 1894
- Maher, Mary Elizabeth (wife of Richard Francis Norris), Rochale, Lancastershire, Britain, Apr. 2, 1893; Rochdale, Lancastershire, July 21, 1895
- Maloney, Andrew (husband of Agnes Murphy), Delaware, O., July 3, 1892; Andrew Moloney, Aug. 78, 1893; Maloney, Mar. 15, 1896; Moloney, July 25, 1897
- Martin -- see Burke, Mary A.
- Marzatti, Polonia (wife of Anastasius Maconi), Tuscany, Italy, Aug. 11, 1896
- Masterson -- see O'Donnell, Margaret
- Maurer, Catharine (wife of Patrick Carpenter), near Ironton, O., Apr. 5, 1897
- Mernaghan, Ann Catharine (wife of Michael Patrick Shea), Bellmullett, Co. Mayo, Ireland, Dec. 28, 1890; Ann Catharine Meenaghan, Carn, Co. Mayo, Jan. 29, 1893
- Metzger, John William (husband of Mary T. Dwyer), Johnstown, Pa., June 24, 1894; Aug. 2, 1896

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