



A World War II Navy Chaplain: Francis J. McManus, S.J.

by

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Seventy Catholic priests lost their lives in World War Two. Of the 37 Chaplains captured, 21 were Catholic. In the Pacific, most were serving with Philippine Scouts or the regular Army. One was a Cleveland native, Francis J. McManus, S.J.

Born to Bernard and Anna McManus, he was baptized at Immaculate Conception on Superior Avenue. In all probability he began his grade school education there and later transferred to Saint Agnes. A graduate from Cathedral Latin, he was later ordained in 1930 at the College Chapel, Canisianum, Innsbruck, Austria. In Cleveland he served as Assistant Pastor at St. Ignatius and St. Malachi. His last

assignment before enlisting in the Navy in 1936 was at St. Mary, Lorain.

His original assignment was in the Pacific as Chaplain on the submarine tender Caponus, formerly the Santa Leonora. It had been taken over by the Navy in 1921. When the war began in December, 1941, the ship was attacked by Japanese forces while anchored in Maravales Bay on Bataan. Her ammunition magazine exploded causing many casualties. Fr. McManus "rushed to the blazing compartments, helped drag the living to safety, and administered Last Rites to the dying." [i][ii] For his actions he was awarded the Silver Star, America's third highest military decoration.

Prior to World War Two, the Philippines were a mission of the Society of Jesus' New York Province. During the war, the capture of Corregidor, an island in the entrance of Manila Bay, was the culmination of Japanese campaign for conquest of the Philippines. When it fell in April, 1942, about 20,000 American servicemen were captured. One of those was Fr. McManus.

Fr. McManus was sent to a Japanese P.O.W. camp at Cabantuan, where it was estimated that 40 – 50 men died daily from torture, abuse, starvation and disease. While there Fr. McManus often offered to work in place of sick men. Cabantuan would be memorialized later in the war when liberated in an operation by U.S. Army Rangers.

Another Ohio Chaplain, Celina native Fr. John A. Wilson, described McManus as "never down-hearted. He never complained. He had a keen sense of humor and was always good for a laugh. Both of us being from Ohio we spent a lot of time together."

During the autumn of 1944 the Japanese, anticipating their loss of the Philippines, began shipping prisoners in unmarked "Hell ships" to Japan. Jammed into the holds, prisoners were deliberately killed through lack of water. These ships were regularly attacked and strafed by American combat aircraft or submarines. It was during such an attack in January, 1945, while the ship was anchored in Taco Bay, Formosa (now Taiwan), that Father McManus was wounded. As reported in the Catholic Universe Bulletin in 1946, another Ohio Chaplain, Fr. John E. Duffy, wrote to Toledo Bishop Karl Alter and described Fr. McManus' last days.

"On the death ride from Manila many strange things happened. When three bombs hit us in the forward hold while in Taco Bay, officers on all sides of me were killed. For three days none of us could get out of

this hold and the Japs would give us no medical aid, but that's too gruesome a story. Fr. Frank McManus was serious wounded at this time and died January 22, 1945 enroute to Maji." Fr. Duffy administered the last Sacraments. The Japanese immediately buried him at sea.

Fr. McManus was posthumously awarded a Purple Heart, Legion of Merit and Silver Star in recognition of "heroism and intrepidity" in combat and distinguished service during the December 29th attack., the latter being America's third highest award for valor.

Besides his parents, Fr. McManus was survived by a sister, Alice McManus Lane, and brothers Richard J. and Edward J.

[i] "Blackrobe in Blue, the Naval Chaplaincy of John P. Foley, S.J.

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