

Priest who saw
Holocaust horrors
embodies peace

Face of Religion

The Providence Journal-Bulletin, Saturday, June 12, 1982

Priest turns anger of Holocaust into life of joy

By RICHARD C. DUJARDIN
Journal-Bulletin Religion Writer

PROVIDENCE — He makes the rounds at the Summit Medical Center seven days a week. And, when he does, eyes brighten.

The Rev. Edward Paul Doyle, O.P., helps people see the bright side of life. He seems to have an inner confidence, an abiding Irish faith in God's goodness.

"I like walking the corridors, saying hello to people. I think God has given me a gift. These people are sick and I comfort them. That's it. I'm happy because I can do it," he said the other day.

A former professor of theology at Providence College, Father Doyle, 74, "retired" from St. Raymond's, a Dominican parish on North Main Street, two years ago, but has never stopped working.

On a corridor walk this particular afternoon, he approaches a group of women, some in wheelchairs.

"Hello Ann, are you feeling better today? I'll give you a blessing that will fix you right up. And here is Mary Taylor. God bless you, Mary."

Father Doyle knows every resident in the building. He may not know exactly what is ailing them, but he knows a little bit about each of their lives. And, he knows how to bring a smile.

"I want you to meet Bill Pine," he tells a visitor. "He's a tremendous fan of the Celtics. Don't print this, but he and I are happy when the Red Sox win and the Yankees lose. We have to be careful because there are a lot of Yankee fans in Rhode Island, you know. You just have to say, 'May the better team win.'"

In one room, Arnold Panicucci lies flat on his back. He can't speak. But his eyes open wide when Father Doyle enters the room. "Arnold is a P.C. man. Isn't that right? Back in those days we had to juggle his marks a bit, but we don't mind that. We've got his marks locked in the archives. Top secret."

Panicucci enjoys the ribbing. The priest retrieves the patient's "communication board," a handmade board filled with words, letters and numbers. Panicucci "talks" by pointing to various words. He points to the numbers "4" and "2."

"That's right," says the priest. "You graduated in June, 1942."



—Journal-Bulletin Photo by WILLIAM L. ROONEY

BLESSING: The Rev. Edward P. Doyle blesses Argentine Carratu, 78, at the Summit Medical Center in Providence as Ann Cassie, 81, smiles.

1942. AS HE walks along the corridor, Father Doyle begins to think back. In 1942, he says, he too was at Providence College. Early that year, in the wake of Pearl Harbor, he applied for duty overseas as an Army chaplain, but the Dominicans wouldn't let him go. He had only been ordained two years.

A year later, in 1943, he got his wish. Within a matter of days, he was attending chaplaincy school at Harvard. Then he was off, with the 104th Infantry Division to France. "We floated in on barges, got organized and started right in," he says. "We went through combat many, many months."

Father Doyle, a major in the chaplaincy corps, says he still remembers the eerie sounds of bombs whistling through the night and landing nearby.

One particular memory lingers. It was April 11, 1945, and the unit had already been fighting for nine

months, mostly in Germany. After several days of shelling, they were finally able to take the town of Nordhausen, about 60 miles southwest of Berlin. It was dawn, and within an hour or two of taking the town, the unit came upon a scene of horror and tragedy.

"It was a concentration camp. A sight beyond description. Absolutely inhuman. Body after body. Bones, nothing but bones. There were women and children, piled up like cords of wood, and others who were left right where they had fallen."

Of the 6,000 prisoners in the camp, nearly 5,000 were dead. Others were dying.

Father Doyle says he had never seen such suffering and anguish. And if he ever needed a reason for having left his classroom at Providence College, he had at last found one.

"You felt an interior anger, and of course you would get perturbed.

And you would ask the question: Why? Why did this ever happen?"

On orders from the division's general, Terry Allen, the unit stayed in Nordhausen five more days, calling off its pursuit of the enemy to bury the dead and to save the savable. The young Army chaplain offered special prayers for the victims and granted general absolution.

FATHER DOYLE says people forget sometimes that 25 million people were killed by Hitler's onslaught. "There were six million Jews, but I'm sure there were a lot of Poles too. Hitler killed gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, anybody who wasn't pure German."

The priest says one cannot blame God for what happened. At bottom, he says, the killings were the "tragic consequence of man's failure, a wholesale ignoring of the Judeo-

Christian tradition and mandate to love God and to love your neighbor" — and a lesson in the meaning of Original Sin.

"Man himself will be bestial. War can bring out the worst in man. And when war breaks out, the worst in him can come out. He has to have a check on his passions. He has to have reason and thinking. "As (General Douglas) MacArthur put it once, it is really a theological problem. What it comes down to is love of God and love of neighbor. Unless you respect everybody's rights, you are going to have tyranny and a wholesale upheaval of all society."

★ ★ ★
EVERY VETERANS DAY and Memorial Day, Father Doyle goes to the Summit Medical Center wearing his old Army uniform. And when he did so again last May, he recited the old war poem, "Flanders Field."

He feels keenly, he says, for those men who died on those battlefields. He also feels keenly for all those killed by man's inhumanity.

Each year the men of the 104th Infantry Division, or as many as can make it, gather from all over the country for a reunion during which they talk about their experiences. Father Doyle, the group's national chaplain, also goes to West Point each year to present the group's General Terry Allen award to a member of the graduating class. Last year, he was an official delegate to the United State Holocaust Conference at the State Department Building in Washington D.C.

Father Doyle said his experiences have brought home to him that religion and patriotism really go hand in hand, for it is the aim of both to see that love, charity and justice prevail.

If genocide is the result of man's failure to love, he says, then it is the obligation of every individual to become willing and effective instruments of peace and love in the world. It begins, he says, by being sensitive to those who continue to suffer.

"Christ said, 'I was sick and you visited me.' And that's the point. You try to help people any way you can. There's nothing really difficult in that. It's not a hardship. It's something you do because it's what God wants of us."