

Community Mourns Loss of Dominican Liberator

by Erin R. King '98
News Editor

Rev. Edward Paul Doyle, O.P. Ph.D., former professor, chaplain, and one of the liberators of a World War II death camp in 1945 as a member of the U.S. Army's 104th Infantry Division died Saturday, April 12, 1997 at Miriam Hospital in Providence after an illness. He was 89.

Born June 30, 1907 in Fall River, Massachusetts, he was one of nine children. A graduate of B.M.C. Durfee High School in Fall River, he joined the Dominican Order in 1932 and was ordained in 1939. Upon receiving a Master's Degree from The Catholic University of America in 1941 he came to PC and taught philosophy and theology until 1954. He received a Doctorate from the Aquinas Institute in River Forest, Illinois in 1962.

Father Doyle's achievements include positions as the first president of the Dominican Educational Association and director of the School of Catholic Studies at the University of Virginia Catholic Center. As national chaplain for the Timberwolves, he went to West Point each year to present the 104th Infantry Division's Terry Allen award to a graduating senior.

During the three years from 1943 to 1946, Fr. Doyle was in Europe with the 104th Infantry Division, also known as the Timberwolves. At dawn on April 11, 1945, after nine solid months of fighting throughout Germany, the division took the town of Nordhausen. When they entered the town, they discovered that Nordhausen was a sub-camp of the notorious death camp Buchenwald. There they encountered an appalling sight—6000 "prisoners," only 1000 of which were still alive, although barely so.

In 1981, Fr. Doyle addressed the International Liberators Conference in Washington D.C. as an official delegate (see page 3 of the February 6, 1997 *Cowl* for the full text of Fr. Doyle's speech). He told of the horror his division encountered in the death camp, and how they valiantly worked to save some of the living, and gave decent burials to those who suffered and died.

"If I ever needed a reason for my having left the classroom at Providence College to join the combat troops as a spiritual advisor and priest it was at this scene of horror," Fr. Doyle said in his address. In April 1988, he spoke at an interfaith Holocaust memorial service in Providence. "Nordhausen gave all the meaning to my life," he remarked. "There, amid the utter, cruel, and brutal disregard for human life which the atrocities represented, he saw ever more clearly how men and women were called to be instruments of love for God and neighbor."

As a witness to history, Fr. Doyle wanted to be sure that the horrors of the Holocaust would not be forgotten. "I could tell the world that it was real, that it really happened," he said.

After spending time at the Yale Divinity School as a research fellow, Fr. Doyle returned to Providence, where he worked in parochial ministry at St. Raymond's Church before retiring in 1980. Upon retirement, however, he did not stop serving others. In 1982, *Providence Journal-Bulletin* writer Richard C. DuJardin accompanied Fr. Doyle on his weekly visit to the Summit Medical Center in Providence, where he was chaplain.

"I like walking the corridors, saying hello to people," Fr. Doyle told the reporter. "I think God has given me a gift. These people are sick and I comfort them...I'm

happy because I can do it."

As Fr. Doyle celebrated his 50-year anniversary in the priesthood in 1989, he reflected on his "happy priesthood," which combined academic and military service with the work of post-retirement years, ministry to the aged.

Members of the PC community who knew Fr. Doyle emphasized his compassionate nature. He was good, kind, sympathetic, humble, and prayerful, they recalled.

On December 2, 1996 in '64 Hall, Fr. Doyle shared his experience at Nordhausen as part of "Bearing Witness: A Day of Holocaust Awareness" sponsored by



PC Archives

Rev. Edward P. Doyle in 1943

Jane Lunin Perel's "Gender and Genocide: Studies in Literature of the Holocaust" class. The day's goal was to educate others about the Holocaust and to celebrate the coming together of both the Jewish and Christian traditions. As a "Dominican Liberator," Father Doyle's experience stands not only as a testament to one of the most horrible tragedies of the twentieth century, but also as an example of how selflessly he gave to others throughout his life.

Special thanks to the Providence College Archives.