

CAPTAIN JOSEPH T. O'CALLAHAN, CHAPLAIN CORPS,
UNITED STATES NAVAL RESERVE, DECEASED

Joseph Timothy O'Callahan was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on May 14, 1905, son of Cornelius J. and Alice E. (Casey) O'Callahan. Graduating from Boston (Massachusetts) College Preparatory School in 1922, he then joined the Jesuit Order. He began the usual thirteen years of training, that are required for the making of a Jesuit, at St. Andrews College, Poughkeepsie, New York, from which he received the degree of Bachelor of Arts in 1926. He next attended Western (Massachusetts) Philosophical School (1926-1929) and Jesuit Seminary (1931-1935), both in Weston, Massachusetts, and received the degrees of Master of Arts in 1929 and Bachelor of Sacred Theology in 1935. He studied further at St. Robert's Seminary, Pomfret, Connecticut and Georgetown University, Washington, D. C. He also held the degree of Sacred Theology Licentiate.

Specializing in mathematics and physics, he was Professor of Mathematics, Philosophy and Physics at Boston College from 1929 to 1937, then for a year was Professor Philosophy at the Jesuit Seminary of Weston College. He was ordained in the Jesuit Order on June 20, 1934. In 1938 he became Director of the Mathematics Department at Holy Cross College, Worcester, Massachusetts, where he served for two years, prior to being appointed on August 7, 1940, Lieutenant (junior grade) in the Chaplain Corps of the U. S. Naval Reserve. Advancing progressively in rank, he subsequently attained that of Commander, to date from July 20, 1945. On November 1, 1953 he was transferred to the Retired List and was advanced to the rank of Captain, on the basis of a combat award.

Ordered into active naval service, he was assigned in November 1940 to the Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida. In April 1942 he joined the USS RANGER and was on board that aircraft carrier during the amphibious conquest of French Morocco and in the October 1943 raid on German shipping in Norwegian waters. Detached from the RANGER in December 1944, he next had duty at the Naval Air Stations, Alameda, California and Pearl Harbor, Territory of Hawaii.

On March 2, 1945, he reported on board the USS FRANKLIN, just seventeen days before she was severely damaged while operating with the Fast Carrier Task Force in the air strike against remnants of the Japanese Fleet sighted in the Inland Sea. When the carrier was struck and set afire, he felt his customary battle station on the island bridge and although wounded, rushed about the exposed slanting flight deck administering last rites to the dying, comforting the wounded, then led officers and men into the flames, carrying hot bombs and shells to the edge of the deck for jettisoning. He personally recruited a damage control party and led it into one of the main ammunition magazines to wet it down and prevented its exploding. For his actions during this emergency he was characterized by the Commanding Officer of the carrier, Captain Leslie E. Gehes, USN, as "the bravest man I even saw." Modestly, Chaplain O'Callahan later stated that the publicity he received for his part in saving the aircraft carrier was "exaggerated." Any priest in like circumstances, should do and would do what I did."

For his exemplary conduct on the occasion of the attack on the FRANKLIN, he was awarded the Medal of Honor, which was presented to him by President Harry S. Truman in ceremonies at the White House on January 23, 1946. The citation follows:

"For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as Chaplain on board the USS FRANKLIN when that vessel was fiercely attacked by enemy Japanese aircraft during offensive operations near Kobe, Japan, on March 19, 1945. A valiant and forceful leader, calmly braving the perilous barriers of flame and twisted metal to aid his men and his ship, Lieutenant Commander O'Callahan grouped his way through smoke-filled corridors to the open flight deck and into the midst of violently exploding bombs, shells, rockets and other armament. With the ship rocked by incessant explosions, with debris and fragments raining down and fires raging in ever increasing fury, he ministered to the wounded and dying, comforting and encouraging men of all faiths; he organized and led fire-fighting crews into the blazing inferno on the flight deck; he directed the jettisoning of live ammunition and the flooding of the magazine; he manned a hose to cool hot, armed bombs rolling dangerously on the listing deck, continuing his efforts despite searing, suffocating smoke which forced men to fall back gasping and imperiled others who replaced them. Serving with courage, fortitude and deep spiritual strength, Lieutenant Commander O'Callahan inspired the gallant officers and men of the FRANKLIN to fight heroically and with profound faith in the face of almost certain death and to return their stricken ship to port."

He was also awarded the Purple Heart Medal for wounds received in enemy action on March 19, 1945. Following the return of the FRANKLIN to the United States for repairs, he had temporary duty from June 16 to August 18, 1945 in the Office of Public Information, Navy Department, Washington, D. C. He was next assigned briefly to the Naval Training Station, Newport, Rhode Island and in October 1945 reported for pre-commissioning duty in the USS FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT (CVB-42). He joined that aircraft carrier as Chaplain upon her commissioning, October 27, 1945. In June 1946 he was appointed Escort Chaplain to the body of the late Manuel Quezon, first President of the Philippines, and accompanied the body aboard the USS PRINCETON to Manila. Detached from the PRINCETON in September 1946, he was ordered to the Officer Personnel Separation Center, Boston, Massachusetts, and on November 12, that year, was released from active duty.

In addition to the Medal of Honor and Purple Heart Medal, Chaplain O'Callahan had the American Defense Service Medal; European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal; Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal; American Campaign Medal; and the World War II Victory Medal.

Returning to Holy Cross College, he was Professor of Philosophy there until an illness made him an invalid. He died on March 18, 1964 at St. Vincent's Hospital, Worcester, Massachusetts. He is survived by his mother, Mrs. Alice O'Callahan,

three brothers, John T., Edward J. and Cornelius J.; and two sisters, Mrs. Rose O'Brien and Sister Rose Marie of Maryknoll College, Manila, Philippine Islands.

Chaplain O'Callahan was a member of many leading scientific societies, among them the American Physical Society; the American Mathematical Society; the Mathematical Association; the American Statistical Society; the Association of Mathematical Statistics; the Association of Jesuit Scientists; and the Jesuit Philosophical Association. His book, "I Was Chaplain on the Franklin," was published by Mac Millan in 1956.