

## Kapaun Memorial Committee Testimony

for

Kansas Capitol Preservation Committee

December 19, 2024

Chairman and Committee Members, thank you for taking this testimony regarding Senate Bill 431, directing the capitol preservation committee to approve plans for a memorial honoring Emil Joseph Kapaun.

I am Michael Kelly, Vice-Chairman of the Kapaun Memorial Committee. Our committee has been planning to support the establishment and eventual dedication of the memorial for Chaplain Kapaun. We have as our Chair Senator Chase Blasi and I represent the military interest in the memorial. Scott Carter of the Catholic Diocese of Wichita represents the interests of the Catholic Church, and Ray Kapaun (with us on Webex) represents the family on our committee.

Governor Kelly signed SB 431 into law on March 22, 2024. The bill passed the Senate 40-0 and the House 121-0.

Chaplain Kapaun was a moral giant. He saved lives under the most dangerous and arduous conditions of cold, maltreatment, hunger, disease, and brutality. He gave his life to protect the soldiers under his pastoral care. Finally, he forgave his communist captors as he was being led to his deathbed in the bitter cold of the North Korean prison camp.

Chaplain Kapaun kept the faith and served his country with devotion until his dying breath. His story is a beacon of inspiration. In your handouts are his citations for the Medal of Honor, the Legion of Merit and Bronze Star Medal with "V" Device. The remarkable moral courage and unmistakable sacrifices of Chaplain Kapaun while serving his country according to his faith must never be lost to the history of this great state. I am honored to take any questions about our work to implement SB 431.

Michael Kelly is a graduate of Topeka West High School, the United States Air Force Academy, and the Air Force Institute of Technology School of Engineering. He served 34 years in active service and retired as a Colonel. He deployed to Iraq for combat in 2003 and again in 2004. Colonel (retired) Kelly lives in Lawrence where he leads the Lawrence Veterans Day Parade Association and is President-elect of the Kansas Council of Chapters of the Military Officers Association of America.

## **Chaplain Kapaun Biography**

Emil Kapaun graduated from Pilsen High School in 1930, and in 1936 he graduated from Conception Abbey seminary college in Conception, Missouri, and then from Kenrick Theological Seminary in Saint Louis, in 1940. He was ordained a Catholic priest of the Diocese of Wichita, Kansas, and returned home to Pilsen to celebrate his first Mass. In 1943, he was appointed auxiliary chaplain at the Herington Army Airfield near Herington, Kansas. In 1944 he entered the Army's Chaplain School at Fort Devens, Massachusetts, and in October he began his military chaplaincy at Camp Wheeler Georgia. In March 1945, he deployed for duty in World War II as a chaplain in the China-Burma-India Theater of Operations. After returning home he was promoted to captain in 1946, but was released from active duty later in the year. Under the G.I. Bill, he earned a Master of Arts degree at Catholic University of America in 1948, and returned to active duty in September at Fort Bliss, Texas. In December 1949, he was deployed to Japan to serve as a chaplain for U.S. troops that were part of the post-war reconstruction of Japan, and made the landing with them in South Korea at the beginning of the Korean War. In 2012 his DSC was upgraded to the Medal of Honor, and in 2021 his remains were identified and returned for burial in his home state.

## **Bronze Star Medal Citation with "V" Device**

HEADQUARTERS 1ST CAVALRY DIVISION

2 SEPTEMBER 1950

AWARD OF THE BRONZE STAR MEDAL – By direction of the President under the provisions of Executive Order 9419, and pursuant to the authority contained in AR-600-45, the Bronze Star Medal with "V" Device for heroic achievement in connection with military operations against an enemy of the United States is awarded the following named officer:

CHAPLAIN (CAPTAIN) EMIL J. KAPAUN 0558217, CHAPLAIN CORPS, UNITED STATES ARMY, a member of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Regiment, displayed heroism in action against the enemy near Kumchung, Korea on August 2, 1950. Chaplain KAPAUN received information that there was a wounded man in an exposed position on the left flank of the first battalion that could not be removed as there were no litter bearers available. Chaplain KAPAUN, together with another officer, immediately proceeded to the front lines, where he contacted the Battalion Commander in order to obtain the approximate location of the wounded man. With total disregard for personal safety, Chaplain KAPAUN and his companion went after the wounded man. The entire route to the wounded soldier was under intense enemy machinegun and small arms fire. However, Chaplain KAPAUN successfully evacuated the soldier, thereby saving the soldier. This heroic action on the part of Chaplain KAPAUN reflects great credit on himself and the military.

BY COMMAND OF MAJOR GENERAL GAY

## **Legion of Merit Citation Captain Emil Joseph Kapaun**

The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, 20 July 1942, takes pride in presenting the Legion of Merit (Posthumously) to Captain (Chaplain) Emil Joseph Kapaun (ASN: 0-558217), United States Army, for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services to the Government of the United States as a Prisoner of War from 4 November 1950 to 23 May 1951.

Chaplain (Captain) Emil J. Kapaun, Chaplain, United States Army, a member of the 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division, distinguished himself by exceptionally meritorious service while a prisoner of war at Pyoktong, Korea, from 4 November 1940 to 23 May 1951. Though seriously ill during the entire period of his internment, he continuously and unselfishly cared for fellow prisoners, sought food and clothing and daily conducted Catholic and general services under exceptionally difficult circumstances. By his material assistance to interned doctors, and through the unhesitating performance of the most menial tasks, the death rate in the camp was held at a rate far lower than another nearby camp under similar conditions. Chaplain Kapaun's spiritual guidance assisted many to defy communist instructions and maintain the hope necessary to remain alive, and physically and mentally to withstand Communists' brutalities. Chaplain Kapaun's outstanding religious and humanitarian activities and determination of purpose resulted in a marked benefit to other internees reflecting great credit upon himself and the military service.

## **Medal of Honor Citation for Chaplain (Capt.) Emil J. Kapaun**

By President Barack Obama, April 11, 2013

The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, March 3, 1863, has awarded in the name of Congress the Medal of Honor to

Chaplain (Captain) Emil J. Kapaun

United States Army

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty:

Chaplain Emil J. Kapaun distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty while serving with the 3d Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division during combat operations against an armed enemy at Unsan, Korea, from November 1-2, 1950. On November 1, as Chinese Communist Forces viciously attacked friendly elements, Chaplain Kapaun calmly walked through withering enemy fire in order to provide comfort and medical aid to his comrades and rescue friendly wounded from no-man's land. Though the Americans successfully repelled the assault, they found themselves surrounded by the enemy. Facing annihilation, the able-bodied men were ordered to evacuate. However, Chaplain Kapaun, fully aware of his certain capture, elected to stay behind with the wounded. After the enemy succeeded in breaking through the defense in the early morning hours of November 2, Chaplain Kapaun continually made rounds, as hand-to-hand combat ensued. As Chinese Communist Forces approached the American position, Chaplain Kapaun noticed an injured Chinese officer amongst the wounded and convinced him to negotiate the safe surrender of the American Forces. Shortly after his capture, Chaplain Kapaun, with complete disregard for his personal safety and unwavering resolve, bravely pushed aside an enemy soldier preparing to execute Sergeant First Class Herbert A. Miller. Not only did Chaplain Kapaun's gallantry save the life of Sergeant Miller, but also his unparalleled courage and leadership inspired all those present, including those who might have otherwise fled in panic, to remain and fight the enemy until captured. Chaplain Kapaun's extraordinary heroism and selflessness, above and beyond the call of duty, are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, the 3d Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, the 1st Cavalry Division, and the United States Army.