

A Hero Priest's Return to Kansas

How a *Columbia* article contributed to the discovery of
Servant of God Father Emil Kapaun's remains

By Tom Hoopes

Ray Kapaun remembers lifting the remains of his uncle, Father Emil Kapaun, for the first time after his skeleton was positively identified in a laboratory in Honolulu, Hawaii, in 2021.

"I know he held a lot of soldiers as they died in his arms when they were on the battlefield. But here I could actually pick him up and hold him and carry him and lay him onto the gurney where he was going to go out. I never thought I would have that moment," he told reporters.

"He has carried me for a lot of my life," he said, "and it was the greatest honor in the world for me to be able to pick him up and carry him once."

Father Emil Joseph Kapaun, a chaplain of the U.S. Army, died in a North Korean prisoner-of-war camp in 1951. For his valor on the battlefield and as a POW during the Korean War, he posthumously received the Medal of Honor in April 2013, making him one of only five 20th-century chaplains to be given the military's highest award for valor.

In 1993, Father Kapaun was named a Servant of God, and his cause for canonization opened in 2008. The Church is now investigating miracles attributed to his intercession to determine whether he may be canonized a saint. But his family and friends feel as if they have already witnessed one miracle: the return of his remains to his home state of Kansas in September 2021, 70 years after his death.

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Minutes of the April Business Meeting

The meeting was called to order at 6:37 PM on April 11, 2023 by Deputy Grand Knight (DGK) Matt Waverly. Guest DD Morris was present at the meeting. The Grand Knight, Inside Guard, Trustee one year were excused and recorder was absent. Roll call followed our Chancellor leading us in prayer. The Warden led us in the Pledge of Allegiance. Minutes from April were approved as amended. A lecturer report was given but not included in the minutes.

Grand Knight Report

A budget meeting shall be held soon for the next Columbian year

Officers will need to be chosen for the next Columbian year.

A volunteer was needed to send birthday cards. Brother Phil will take over for Brother Waverly.

Chaplain's Report

No report

Treasurer Report

CD account balance \$1,149.07

Checking account balance - \$14,370.70

Financial Secretary Report

Income – \$95 Dinner

Dues - \$79.55

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April Meeting Minutes**Continued from page 1:**

Bills—Brother Strazzo –hospitality Sunday - \$83.98

Communications

none

Membership Report

One candidate in the hopper

Programs Director Report

Every second Sunday the Council sponsors donuts after the 10:00 mass. Volunteers are needed to help set up, serve and clean up. Wine and cheese after the vigil mass will resume on May 6. First Tuesday night of the month 5:30 Rosary. May host to be determined. Operation Care – there was a brief discussion. May 13 – Rib dinner, ticket sales to begin this weekend. Brother Phil will lead the raffle. May family BBQ is on hold. Fifth Sunday Rosary before the 10 AM mass will be led by Br. Strazzo on April 29. Family fishing day July 1. Location TBD

Unfinished Business

It was M/S/A to pay the bills. There is a sign up sheet circulating to donate blood in the spring. Fr. Colin celebrates a 10 year anniversary and suggested a blood drive in lieu of a party.

New Business

None

Advocate Report

No report

Chancellor Report

No report

Insurance Agent Report

Brother Greg Bronson is no longer our field agent. The new agent is Dave Muller. Contact information is forthcoming.

District Deputy Report

DD Morris congratulated the council on their works.

Vocations Report

No report

Good of the Order

Please pray for the repose of the souls of Cindy Aguilar, Dennis Chavez, Father Arrough
Cindy Curtin and Beverly Woodard. Pray also for Karen Rich, Joe Diaz, PDK Patrick Marr, Connor Curtin, Mark Koenig, Steve Oneto, Deacon Ed, and Fr. Relihan.

If anyone wishes to car pool to Fourth Degree meetings from Plymouth to Placerville, contact JD

A good read - 70 Years of Service, is being passed along to fellow Knights.

Another good book – The Bible in Stone – look it up and read.

Lecturer Report

Guests were invited into the chamber. Jan Nunes and Shelby Armondi from Operation Care provided an overview of services provided.

Chaplain's Summation

The meeting was closed in prayer by the Chancellor.

DGK Waverly closed the meeting at 7:36

Respectfully submitted by David Sanders

Fr. Kapaun

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The chances of his return home increased dramatically when a certain magazine — most likely a copy of *Columbia* — found its way into a medical clinic waiting room in 2003.

William Hansen was one of the prisoners Father Kapaun served in Camp 5 in North Korea, in conditions so horrific that he suffered from nightmares for decades afterward. Hansen, who worked as a bus driver in New York City before his retirement in Naples, Florida, sought relief at a Veterans Affairs medical clinic in Naples in 2003. It was in the waiting room that he saw a picture of Father Kapaun in what he later described as “a Knights of Columbus magazine” — probably the March 2003 issue of *Columbia*, which featured an article titled “A ‘Saint’ Among Soldiers.” It told the story of the heroic chaplain and his potential cause for canonization in the Diocese of Wichita. All of a sudden, something clicked.

“I know this man,” he told the doctor. “I buried him.”

Hansen added that he had signed an Army nondisclosure agreement never to talk about his POW experience. The doctor replied, “That was 50 years ago,” and recommended that he get in touch with the diocese.

In late November 2003, Hansen did so, making contact with Father John Hotze, who had been assigned to investigate Father Kapaun’s possible cause for canonization in 2001. The priest listened to Hansen’s story with incredulity.

“I thought, ‘This can’t be true,’” recalled Father Hotze, the current vice postulator of the cause and a longtime member of the Knights. He remembers thinking that even if Hansen believed that he recog-

nized Father Kapaun from the magazine, likely left at the VA clinic by a local Knight, there was no way that he could have buried the chaplain. Most of the approximately 1,600 men who died in Camp 5 were buried in mass graves along the Yalu River.

Despite his doubts, Father Hotze decided to call Philip O’Brien, a senior analyst at the Defense Prisoner of War Missing Personnel Office, one of whose many tasks was to try to identify everyone who had died in Camp 5. If anyone could gauge the veracity of this tale, it was likely O’Brien, who had conducted hundreds of interviews with POWs.

After interviewing Hansen, O’Brien stunned Father Hotze by telling him, “All of this rings true.”

Hansen shared previously unknown details about how Father Kapaun died and, crucially, what happened next: In May 1951, after a brutal winter in Camp 5, the 35-year-old chaplain was taken to the camp’s dreaded “death house,” a pagoda where ill soldiers were brought and from which they almost never returned alive. Hansen was also a patient there, but he could walk and thus offer limited care for others.

Father Kapaun’s slim food ration was placed at the doorway of his sick bay, and Hansen would help the priest by bringing it to him until guards ordered him to stop.

Knowing that death was near, Father Kapaun asked to be buried away from the mass graves near the river. “Try to bury me on higher ground,” he told Hansen, “where I can still look over things.”

When Father Kapaun died, Hansen and two other prisoners were ordered to dispose of his body, supervised by a guard. Prior to the spring thaw, a dead prisoner would have been buried in a mass grave and covered with a minimal amount of dirt.

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Fr. Kapaun

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By May, the ground was no longer frozen, and though the guard did not like the idea of burying Father Kapaun near the pagoda, he relented.

Father Hotze recalled Hansen telling him that “they dug down about a foot and a half, then pushed the dirt over the body and put whatever they could find on top of it to keep it safe from animals.”

Several years later, when hostilities ended and the United States arranged for the return of soldiers’ remains, the rocks and debris Hansen left alerted the Chinese to the presence of the body, which was buried well above the river’s flood plain.

Father Kapaun was one of approximately 560 Americans whose relatively intact remains were returned from Camp 5 in 1954 and brought to the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu’s Punchbowl Crater. About 70 of these soldiers, including Father Kapaun, were not identified at the time, and his remains lay there for years beneath a plaque marked “Unknown.”

For decades after his death May 23, 1951, Father Kapaun’s mother, Elizabeth, longed for her son’s body to return home. Late in life, she suffered from dementia and forgot family members’ names — but she never forgot her son, repeatedly asking if Emil was returning home until the day she died in 1986.

“No man left behind” is a sacred promise the U.S. military works tirelessly to keep. But the return of remains from North Korea has been particularly complicated, and the best efforts to retrieve and identify U.S. service members sometimes fail. Hansen helped to change that for Father Kapaun. His account of the chaplain’s burial, shared after seeing

the *Columbia* article, confirmed what O’Brien suspected: that Father Kapaun’s body was probably in Hawaii, not among the commingled, fragmented remains that North Korea had begun returning from mass graves in 1990. It gave renewed impetus and focus to the effort to identify Father Kapaun among the interred unknowns.

This the military laboratory did March 4, 2021 — with “100% certainty,” matching not only the skeleton’s DNA, but also its teeth, height and age.

Later that year, Father Kapaun’s nephew, Ray, traveled to Honolulu to reclaim his remains. As a teenager in the 1970s, Ray hadn’t appreciated his uncle’s story until he read [the 1954 account of Mike Dowe — a former POW who served with Father Kapaun — in *The Saturday Evening Post*](#).

“It just amazed me,” Ray recalled. “I saw what he did. What he was. How they felt about him.”

In Hawaii, he visited the Punchbowl Crater where his uncle had lain for more than 60 years.

“Someone asked me if I was upset, because he was out here all this time,” Ray Kapaun said while interviewed at the cemetery. “And I said, ‘Just look at where we’re standing. He was out here with all his buddies.’”

But he could also imagine the priest saying, “Take me back to Kansas.”

The whole return trip was an epic homecoming.

Everywhere, from the laboratory in Hawaii to the streets and Catholic church in Father Kapaun’s hometown of Pilsen, people paid their respects as his body made its way to a final resting place in Wichita’s cathedral.

Dinner Hosts for Next Business Meetings
May 9, 2023—Bob Strazzo



Prayer for the Canonization of Blessed Michael McGivney
 Founder of the Knights of Columbus God, our Father,
 protector of the poor and defender of the widow and
 orphan, you called your priest, Blessed Michael
 McGivney, to be an apostle of Christian family life and to
 lead the young to the generous service of their neighbor.
 Through the example of his life and virtue, may we follow
 your Son, Jesus Christ, more closely, fulfilling his com-
 mandment of charity and building up his Body which is
 the Church. Let the inspiration of your servant prompt us
 to greater confidence in your love so that we may contin-
 ue his work of caring for the needy and the outcast. We
 humbly ask that you glorify Blessed Michael McGivney on
 earth according to the design of your holy will. Through
 his intercession, grant the favor I now present (here
 make your request). Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Officers of Council
1849

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 Spiritual Advisor Deacon Jaime Garcia

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All Council Officers (except Br. Charlie Esola) can be reached by email. Use the first letter of their first name, the entire last name, followed by: @kofc-1849.org

Sample: mkoenig@kofc-1849.org

Knights of Columbus Council 1849

Events Calendar 2022—2023

Events Calendar 2022-2023 Officer meetings at Saint Patrick's Hall, first Wednesday at 5:30 PM of every month, starting July 2022 until June 2022 Monthly Business meetings at Saint Katharine Drexel on 2nd Tuesday at 6:30 PM

Installation Mass and Picnic, SKD 10 AM August 21, 2022 (2nd Sunday)

Summer Dinner (Tri-tip), at SKD after 5PM Mass September 24, 2022 (4th Saturday)

Clergy Appreciation Dinner, Sacred Heart Hall 6 PM October 7, 2022 (1st Friday)

Tootsie Roll Drive, weekend of October 14, 15, 16, 2022

Mass for Departed Knights, SKD 10 AM November 13, 2022 (2nd Sunday)

Christmas Party, 3 PM – 9 PM, December 9, 2022 (2nd Friday)

Winter Dinner (Fish), SKD Noon to 9 PM February 11, 2023 (2nd Saturday)

Family Potluck, SKD 3 PM – 9 PM March 28, 2023 (4th Tuesday)

Spring Dinner (Ribs), SKD Noon to 9 PM May 13, 2023 (2nd Saturday)

Family Potluck, SKD 3 PM – 9 PM May 23, 2023 (4th Tuesday) On hold

Hospitality Donuts every 2nd Sunday at SKD

Hospitality Wine and Cheese every 1st weekend Vigil Mass at SKD

Rosary before 10 AM Mass, SKD every 5th Sunday of months with 5 Sunday

KVGC Rosary Tuesday before the first Wednesday of each month at 5:30 at SKD – St. Maximillian Kolbe Rm

May Calendar of Events

Tuesday, May 2: KVGC Rosary at Saint Katharine Drexel, in the Saint Maximilian Kolbe Room at 5:30 PM.

Wednesday, May 3: Officer Meeting at St. Patrick's Hall at 6:00 PM.

Tuesday, May 9: Business Meeting at Saint Katharine Drexel at 6:30 PM. Dinner at 5:30 PM.

Saturday, May 13: Knights Rib Dinner at Saint Katharine Drexel after the 5 PM Vigil Mass.

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Published Monthly. All news items may be emailed to news@kofc-1849.org. Photos need to be jpeg, set at no less than 150 dpi, and no larger than 800kb; send photo files to mews@kofc-1849.org. @Amador County Council 1849 Knights of Columbus, May 2023, P.O. Box 1436, Sutter Creek, Ca 95685

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