

Medal of Honor awarded to Army chaplain

By Tom Conning with information from American Forces Press Service

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Being close to Washington D.C. can have its benefits. Two Army War College student chaplains found this out by receiving the chance of a life-time: an invitation to attend Chaplain (Capt.) **Emil J. Kapuan's** Medal of Honor ceremony at the White House April 11.

During the ceremony, **President Barack Obama** posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor to Chaplain Emil J. Kapaun for extraordinary courage, faith and leadership that inspired thousands of prisoners to survive capture and captivity during the Korean War.

The Army's Chief of Chaplains invited **Col. Paul Hurley** and **Lt. Col. Eric Albertson** to the ceremony.

One of the reasons the Chief of Chaplains invited Albertson was because he was a former 1st Cavalry Division chaplain, Kapuan's same unit, said Albertson.

"The whole experience was difficult to put into words," said Albertson. "It was very surreal and powerful.

Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Eric Albertson has his photo taken with Ray Kapuan, Chaplain Emil Kapaun's nephew (right), and another family member after a Medal of Honor Ceremony at the White House April 11.

"As a priest and combat chaplain, Chaplain Kapaun's story has always resonated with me and been a source of inspiration," said Albertson. "The event left me feeling close to him even though we never met."



Kapaun served with the 1st Cavalry Division's 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, during combat operations against an armed enemy at Unsan, Korea, November 1-2, 1950.

When Chinese communist forces viciously attacked friendly elements, Kapaun calmly walked through withering enemy fire to provide comfort and medical aid to his comrades. When they found themselves surrounded by the enemy, the able-bodied men were ordered to evacuate.



Chaplain Emil Kapaun (right) and a doctor carry an exhausted soldier off the battlefield in Korea, early in the war. The photo shows Kapaun to the GI's left, and Capt. Jerome A. Dolan, a medical officer with the 8th Cavalry regiment, to his right. (Photo courtesy ACME)

Kapaun, fully aware of his certain capture, elected to stay behind with the wounded. As hand-to-hand combat ensued, he continued to make rounds.

As enemy forces approached the American position, Kapaun noticed an injured Chinese officer among the wounded and convinced him to negotiate the safe surrender of the American forces. Shortly after his capture, he pushed aside an enemy soldier preparing to execute a comrade.

Kapaun, a Roman Catholic priest, died May 23, 1951, at a prison camp in Pyoktong, Korea. His nephew, **Ray Kapaun** and family members were on hand for the ceremony.

For more information about Chaplain Emil Kapaun, visit <http://www.army.mil/medalofhonor/kapaun>.

U.S. Army War College Archives - News Article - 18 April 2013