

US Marine Corps Honors Chaplain John J. O'Connor

by CDR Diana Meehan, CHC, USN

In 1953, Francis Cardinal Spellman, Archbishop of New York made a personal plea to priests to consider ministry as chaplains to the men and women in the military. A young priest by the name of John J. O'Connor responded to the call and joined the Navy. The rest is, as we say, Chaplain Corps history. During his years as a Navy chaplain, Chaplain O'Connor was a strong and faithful shepherd to chaplains and parishioners alike. By the time of his retirement, after 27 years of faithful and committed service, he had risen to the rank of Rear Admiral, and had served memorably as the 14th Chief of Chaplains.

After leaving the Navy in 1979, Chaplain O'Connor was made an auxiliary bishop and assigned to the Military Vicariate under Terence Cardinal Cooke of New York. He was appointed Bishop of Scranton, Pennsylvania, in 1983, and was elevated to the position of Cardinal Archbishop of New York in 1985. John J. O'Connor was a spiritual giant who touched the lives of all with whom he came in contact. He died on 3 May 2000, but his memory and rich legacy live on.

A year ago, supporters from New York approached the Commandant of the Marine Corps about the possibility of honoring Chaplain O'Connor for his unique accomplishments and



Bishop John Glynn (CAPT, CHC, Ret.) represents Chaplain O'Connor and is joined by Chaplain Iasiello and Colonel Richard T. Tryon, Commanding Officer, Marine Barracks Washington.

devotion to country during a Marine Corps parade. On 18 June 2002, their dream became a reality as a Sunset Parade, featuring the King's Guard from Norway, was hosted by the Chaplain of the Marine Corps, Rear Admiral Louis Iasiello.



Sunset Parades are conducted every Tuesday during the summer months at the Marine Corps War Memorial (Iwo Jima). Chaplain O'Connor's love and admiration of the Marine Corps was well-known. He was awarded the Legion of Merit with Combat "V" for service with Marines in Vietnam. In a touching memorial tribute to Rear Admiral O'Connor, the Most Reverend John Glynn, Auxiliary Bishop for the Archdiocese of the Military Services, received honors in Chaplain O'Connor's place. Bishop Glynn served in Vietnam with Chaplain O'Connor and is also a distinguished combat veteran having been awarded the Bronze Star with Combat "V." Bishop Glynn retired from the Navy Chaplain Corps with the rank of captain.





Chaplain of the Marine Corps, RDML Lou Iasiello and other VIPs.

The parade was indeed a series of “firsts” for the Chaplain Corps: the **first time** a chaplain was the reviewing officer at a Sunset Parade; the **first time** a chaplain was honored; and the **first time** the honoree was deceased.

More than 1,000 people attended, including retired and active duty chaplains, over 50 VIPs, distinguished guests and dignitaries from New York. Among them were Chaplain O’Connor’s two surviving sisters: Mrs. Mary Ward and Mrs. Dorothy Hamilton.

Chaplain O’Connor, by his dedication and service, was the epitome of the current Chaplain Corps mission statement: “Devoted to God and Country, we unite to deliver innovative, life-transforming service throughout and beyond the Sea Services.”



Chaplain Iasiello presents gifts to Mrs. Mary Ward (l) and Mrs. Dorothy Hamilton (r), sisters of Chaplain O’Connor.



Chaplain of the Marine Corps, RDML Lou Iasiello, addresses the parade viewers.



Members of the King’s Guard of Norway join U.S. Marines in the Sunset Parade in honor of Chaplain O’Connor.