

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Vol 5

Father John E Boll, Diocesan Archivist

No 12

Monsignor Roy Victor Peters

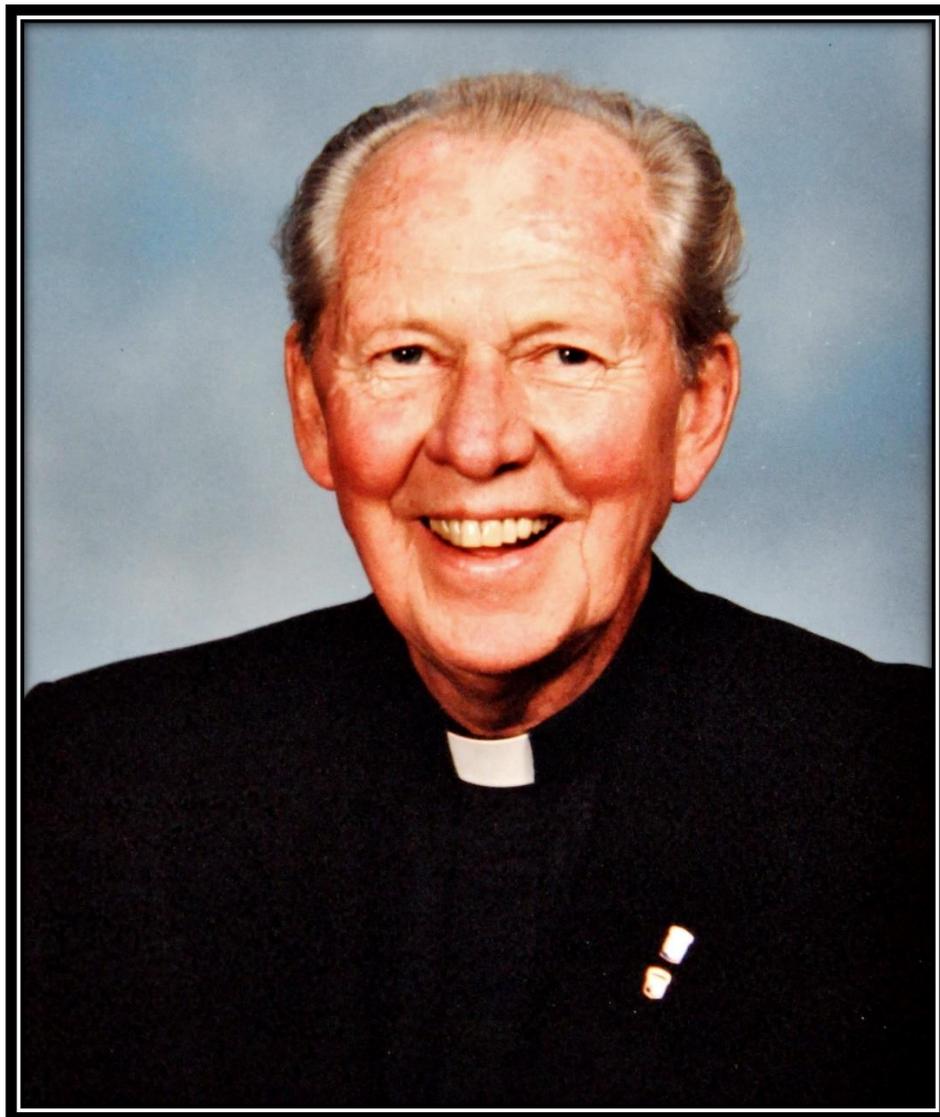
Native son of Sacramento

Priest of the Diocese of Sacramento

Chaplain and Colonel in the United States Army

Pastor Emeritus of Saint Joseph Parish, Sacramento

August 30, 1924 -- July 2, 2006



Roy Victor Peters was born in Sacramento on August 30, 1924, the firstborn of three children born to LeRoy V Peters and Ellen Nelson. He was baptized at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Sacramento. Roy's two living sisters are Marge Ellen Albouze and June Peters. The family lived on 37th and C Streets in Sacramento and were members of Sacred Heart Parish on 39th and J Streets.



ROY BEGINS HIS EDUCATION

Roy began his elementary schooling at Theodore Judah Elementary School from 1930 to 1935. He then transferred to Sacred Heart parish school in 1935 and graduated in 1938. After the eighth grade, Roy began his freshman year at Christian Brothers in 1938 until 1941. Since Roy was an excellent student on the A honor roll, he was slated to receive the Christian Brothers High School Award for Excellence in his senior year. However, he decided to transfer to Saint Joseph College in Mountain View for his senior year in the 1941-42 and was ineligible for the award.

Roy, on his bike, with a friend at Sacred Heart Church in 1938



Photo courtesy of Fr Bill Dinelli

Saint Joseph College, Mountain View, CA

SAINT PATRICK SEMINARY, MENLO PARK

In the fall of 1941, Roy began his first year of college at Saint Joseph College in Mountain View. Then in 1943, he and his classmates transferred to Saint Patrick Seminary in Menlo Park. In 1945, he began his theological studies at Menlo Park and together with his classmate James Mulligan, Roy was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Sacramento by Bishop Robert J Armstrong on June 12, 1948 in the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament. Roy was only 23 years of age when he was ordained a priest.



The Reverend Roy Victor Peters
requests the honor of your presence at his
Ordination to the Holy Priesthood
to be conferred by His Excellency
The Most Reverend Robert J. Armstrong, D. D.
Bishop of Sacramento
Saturday morning, the twelfth of June
Nineteen hundred and forty-eight
at nine o'clock
Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament
Sacramento, California
and cordially invites you to offer with him his
First Solemn Mass
Sunday morning, the thirteenth of June
at eleven o'clock
Sacred Heart Church
Sacramento, California

Reception, Sunday afternoon
from two until five o'clock
350 Thirty-seventh Way

REMARKS MADE ABOUT ROY PETERS IN *THE PATRICIAN* MAGAZINE

Taken from *THE PATRICIAN*, Vol XVIII, June 1948, NO 3

In the June 1948 issue of *The Patrician*, a publication of Saint Patrick Seminary in Menlo Park, the following article appeared about Roy Peters as he prepared for his ordination to the priesthood:

“ROY VICTOR PETERS, fair-haired and of Swedish origin, was born in the heart of California on the 30th day of August, 1924. He began his education at Theodore Judah School, and in 1935 entered Sacred Heart Parochial School in Sacramento, where he became student body president in his last year.

After three years at Christian Brothers’ High School, he went to Saint Joseph College in 1941 where his winning smile and friendly personality impressed both student and professor alike. Coming to Saint Patrick’s, he began with us the accelerated course of studies. During his years in the seminary, he served as upstairs sacristan and as president of the Saint Joseph College Alumni Association.

He always has a song in his heart and will gladly vocalize it on the slightest provocation, a la Durante. He is a universal conversationalist and is ready to discuss anything from Thomas’ doctrine of analogy to the youngest rookie on the Sacramento Solons. He has blended a serious mind with a joyful disposition and a spirited enthusiasm, to form a warm and pleasing personality.”



Photo by John E Boll

Saint Patrick Seminary, Menlo Park, CA



Photo courtesy of June Peters

Seminarian Roy Peters with classmate Jim Mulligan on the left

FATHER ROY BEGINS MINISTRY



Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament

Father Peters was first assigned to Saint Rose parish in Roseville in 1948 where he served for one year with Father William Daley who was pastor. In 1949, he was transferred to Saint Patrick parish in Angels Camp which was part of the Diocese of Sacramento at that time. During that year, he also ministered to the California Youth Authority's Fricot Ranch School for Boys.

In 1950, Father Roy was assigned to the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Sacramento where he served until 1958 with Monsignor Raymond Renwald, rector of the Cathedral. The Cathedral assistants were Fathers Thomas Bracken, Patrick F O'Brien, and Sidney P Hall. Those living in residence at the Cathedral presbytery were Fathers William Serado, diocesan director of youth, and James D Poole, director of schools.

NAMED PASTOR OF WEAVERVILLE

After eight years working as an assistant at the Cathedral, Father Peters was named pastor of Saint Patrick Parish in Weaverville where he served three years, 1958-1961.



Photo courtesy of June Peters, sister of Fr Roy

Father Roy Peters, Pastor of Saint Patrick Parish, Weaverville

Monsignor Russell Terra recalls that when Father Peters began his pastorate in Weaverville, the income of the parish was not enough to support him so he took a part-time job pumping gasoline at a local gas station in Weaverville. When diocesan officials found out about this, they were not pleased.



Photo by John E Boll 2016

Saint Patrick Church, Weaverville

FATHER PETERS BECOMES A US ARMY CHAPLAIN



Army Chaplain Roy Peters in 1963

After fourteen years as a priest in the diocese, Father Peters left Sacramento on January 8, 1962 to become a chaplain in the United States Army for a three-year stint. That three-year stint as an Army chaplain became an exciting life-long career for him.

In a rare holiday leave in December 1981 to visit his mother Ellen and sisters Marge and June, Father Peters was interviewed by Valerie Christiansen, associate editor of the *Catholic Herald*. Valerie began her article by saying “Father Peters was an expansive, outgoing person with an easy manner and ready smile.” He quickly opened up to share his experiences as a priest in an unusual apostolate. The following section comes, in part, from that interview

THE LIFE OF AN ARMY CHAPLAIN

During his 19 years in the Army in 1981, Father Peters served draftees and conscientious objectors, qualified as a paratrooper, did two tours of combat duty in Vietnam, was decorated several times, spent 6 months with the Green Berets (Special Forces), served as pastor of the Pentagon, arranged funerals at Arlington National Cemetery, ministered in a Veterans’ Administration hospital, served as commandant of the Army’s chaplain school and held the rank of colonel since 1974.

Father Peters was also one of two official Army representatives – together with two representatives each from the Navy, Air Force, and Veterans’ Administration – to the Military Ordinariate, the non-territorial diocese which embraces Catholics in all branches of the armed services, and chairman of the military priests’ senate, the Advisory Council to Cardinal Terence Cooke of New York who was bishop of the Military Ordinariate of the United States.

A PRIEST LIKE ALL OTHER PRIESTS

And always, Father Peters said, he is a priest doing “exactly the same as any other priest in any other parish” -- celebrating Mass, administering the sacraments, providing counseling and other forms of priestly assistance. To those who would find something contradictory, or at least inconsistent, in the voluntary service of a priest – whom many would categorize as a “man of peace” – in an organization whose primary preoccupation is with war or potential war, he says, “A lot of people don’t understand what a military priest is – simply a priest with a military parish.” “That’s where the people are,” he says. “There are priests in jails, in the ghetto of leper colonies – because there are people who need them. There’s nobody who hates war more than someone

who's seen it – and I hate war intensely.” He stresses that military actions are determined by a civilian command – the Secretary of Defense and the secretaries of the various services, in compliance with the will of the Congress and orders from the President as commander-in-chief.

IN THE MILITARY, THERE IS NO WAY TO GET IN A RUT

Father Peters describes his life as a military chaplain as “a very interesting experience,” offering great variety and great opportunity “to be what I want to be.” Chaplain personnel are reassigned every three years and hold during their careers a number of different kinds of jobs in the field, in hospitals, and at various bases and installations in the US and around the world. There's no way you can get in a rut,” he says, flashing a warm grin. No “ruts” – just all the responsibility and challenge that a man can handle, right from the start.

FATHER PETERS' MILITARY ASSIGNMENTS

Father Peters' first assignment as an Army chaplain was to Fort Ord, near Monterey, where he ministered to the needs of the Catholics among the three to four thousand men going through basic training there, many of whom were draftees. He celebrated Mass, heard confessions, gave marriage preparation instruction, and met with conscientious objectors.

In 1964, at the age of 39, he was sent through paratrooper training at Fort Benning, Georgia and then assigned as chaplain to the 101st Airborne Division, the famous “Screaming Eagles” of D-Day, at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. His work at Fort Campbell entailed providing Catholic coverage for three to four thousand Catholic military personnel and their families, plus organizing Protestant and Jewish services by bringing in chaplains of those faiths assigned to other units – “pluralism in action,” he calls it. “Ecumenism, as sanctioned by Vatican II, is not anything new for us.”



Photo from the “101st Airborne Division Website

101st Airborne Division Parachute Jump

It took him seven weeks, slightly over the usual four, to become qualified “to jump out of airplanes” as a paratrooper together with young soldiers half his age. “Finally I made it,” he said, again with a smile. Father Peters made 120 parachute jumps during his decorated career, but he broke his neck in his final jump while training in Kentucky.

OKINAWA AND THAILAND

From 1965 to 1967, Father Peters was stationed in Okinawa and Thailand, spending six months as chaplain to the Special Forces (Green Beret) unit there. As the only chaplain at this location, his duties included getting missionary Protestant clergy to provide services for the Protestants under his jurisdiction and even Buddhist priests for the indigenous people. Arrangements relating to marriages and family problems were also part of his responsibility.

CHAPLAIN IN VIETNAM



Photo from the US Army Website

A Scene during the Vietnam War

There followed a year (1967-68) with the 173rd Airborne Brigade, a combat unit in Vietnam’s Central Highlands, celebrating Masses, anointing the wounded, sick, and dying, hearing confessions, writing letters to parents, and helping men cope with “Dear John” letters from fickle sweethearts. That was the year of the Tet Offensive. “I thought the war had come to its end,” Father Peters reflects. “We really mopped up.”

He returned to Fort Ord in 1968 and spent the next year in charge of young Catholics being drafted to go to Vietnam.



Photo courtesy of June Peters

Father Roy Celebrates Mass at Dakto in the jungle battlefield of Vietnam

SECOND TOUR IN VIETNAM

For his second tour in the combat zone (1969-70), Father Peters was divisional chaplain to the 22,000 men of the 25th Division, with 21 other chaplains – two Catholics and 19 Protestants – under him and access to a Jewish rabbi in Saigon. With these assistants, he was pastor over a 40-mile-long corridor along the Cambodian border.

A LETTER SENT HOME TO BISHOP BELL

Bishop Alden Bell of Sacramento had served as a chaplain in the US Army during World War II and knew from personal experience what it was like to be a military chaplain. Father Roy sent a letter to Bishop Bell dated March 7, 1970 from Vietnam. In part, this is what he wrote:

March 7, 1970

Your Excellency:

Once again we're moving all over Vietnam. Last month we sent a brigade south of Saigon and immediately they spread out northward. So we are covering the whole area

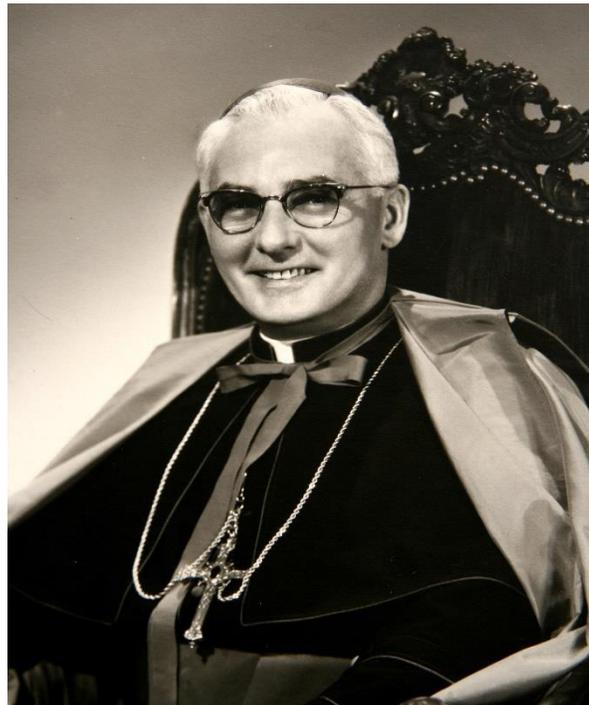
from the Cambodian border to Saigon and then some. This is certainly turning out to be a fascinating tour, even though discouraging. We are spread so thin, it is almost impossible to cover our troops, in spite of the fact that we now have eight priests for the job. Maybe we'll solve the whole problem by bringing the 25th Infantry home soon.

I enjoy following the activities of the Diocese in the Catholic Herald weekly. I don't know how Eymard (Gallagher) does it, but my copy comes through regularly. Mail here is awful, especially religious literature and supplies, but the Catholic Herald seems to get top priority.

I certainly will remember you during the Holy Week services. I remember the headaches Bishop McGucken had at the Cathedral each year. Let's hope the new liturgy makes this year a more pleasant experience for you.

May God bless and give you the joy of a happy Easter.

Roy Peters



Bishop Alden John Bell

A HIGHLY DECORATED ARMY CHAPLAIN

“It was my job to make sure all the units were covered, to provide transportation for all the chaplains, and to care for the Catholic troops in one-third of this area,” he related. During these combat tours, Father Peters became the recipient of many military decorations for valorous duty, including the Legion of Merit, the Bronze Star with five Oak Leaf Clusters and 3V awards, the Meritorious Service Medal with two Oak Leaf Clusters, an Air Medal with First Oak Leaf Cluster, the Army Commendation Medal, the Purple Heart, the Vietnamese Medal of Gallantry with Palm, the Presidential Unit Citation, and the Distinguished Unit Citation.



Photo courtesy of June Peters

Father Roy in Pleiku

CHAPLAIN AT FORT MYERS AND ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY



Photo from Arlington National Cemetery Website

The Vietnam Memorial Wall, Arlington National Cemetery, Washington, DC

Father Peters describes himself as a “marryin’ and buryin’ Sam” in his next assignment, Fort Myers, Virginia, and Arlington National Cemetery. In addition to a full Saturday and Sunday parish program, he says there were four or five Catholic weddings every Saturday at the fort. At Arlington he was responsible for all Catholic funerals that took place there between 1970 and 1973, of which there were “seven or eight a day,” some with Masses, some graveside services only. Civilian priests would be called in to assist with two or three funerals daily. “People from all over the world want to be buried at Arlington,” observed Father Peters.

FATHER PETERS MINISTERS TO THE PENTAGON

Also within Father Peter’s jurisdiction while he was stationed at Fort Myers was the Pentagon, with its 18,000 employees, where Mass was offered in the concourse each holy day for some 2,000 persons. “We’d have huge Masses,” he said, almost an understatement. “There were a lot of people there.”

In 1973, Father Peters was assigned to Tripler Medical Center, a Veterans’ Administration hospital in Hawaii where again he was the sole chaplain, ministering to 500 patients, most of whom were military victims of accidents and cancer. He remained there four years.



Photo from the Pentagon Website

The Pentagon, Washington, DC

NAMED COMMANDANT OF ARMY CHAPLAIN SCHOOL

Father Peters was named assistant commandant of the US Army Chaplain Center & School, Fort Wadsworth, Staten Island, NY, in 1977, becoming commandant in November 1978.

The Center is the site for the training and education of all Army chaplains worldwide, about 1,500 clergymen and lay chaplain assistants each year. Father Peters oversaw a staff and faculty of 147 which offered 46 different basic and advanced classes, supplemented by educational videotapes and audio-visual cassettes to representatives of 124 different religious denominations represented in the Army. In addition to the training instruction, the Center was responsible for providing all materials needed for its programs.

“The Army’s tremendous on school,” he said. The formidable USACH-CS program, he explained, is threefold: 1) training of chaplains in military customs and regulations, and how to work in the military environment; 2) training in pluralism, or how to be mutually supportive of members of other denominations; 3) opportunities for on-going personal assessment and professional training, including continuing theological education in conjunction with neighboring Catholic and Protestant seminaries, and career updates bringing chaplains back to the Center at periodic intervals for courses varying from 2 weeks to 6 months. Homiletics, pastoral counseling, clinical pastoral hospital work, and the doctorate in divinity (currently being pursued by 11 Protestant

chaplains) are examples of the continuing education courses offered at USACHCS. The lay chaplain assistants also receive professional updates every five years.

“I’m also in the process of building three new chapels – Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish – a library, 21 new offices, and getting an exterior modernization of the School,” Father Peters said. “I’ve been working on that for three years.” The signing of the \$2 million contract last week was going to cut short his visit home.

BACK IN THE FIELD WITH THE TROOPS

Father Peters looked forward to his next assignment. He reported in May to become first command chaplain at Fort Irwin, the Army’s major base with the Air Force, for desert warfare training. The installation, located in California’s Mojave Desert, acquired new importance, as it became fully activated. Father Peters expected to become the “parish priest” to 5,000 people, back in the field celebrating Mass for troops on maneuvers.

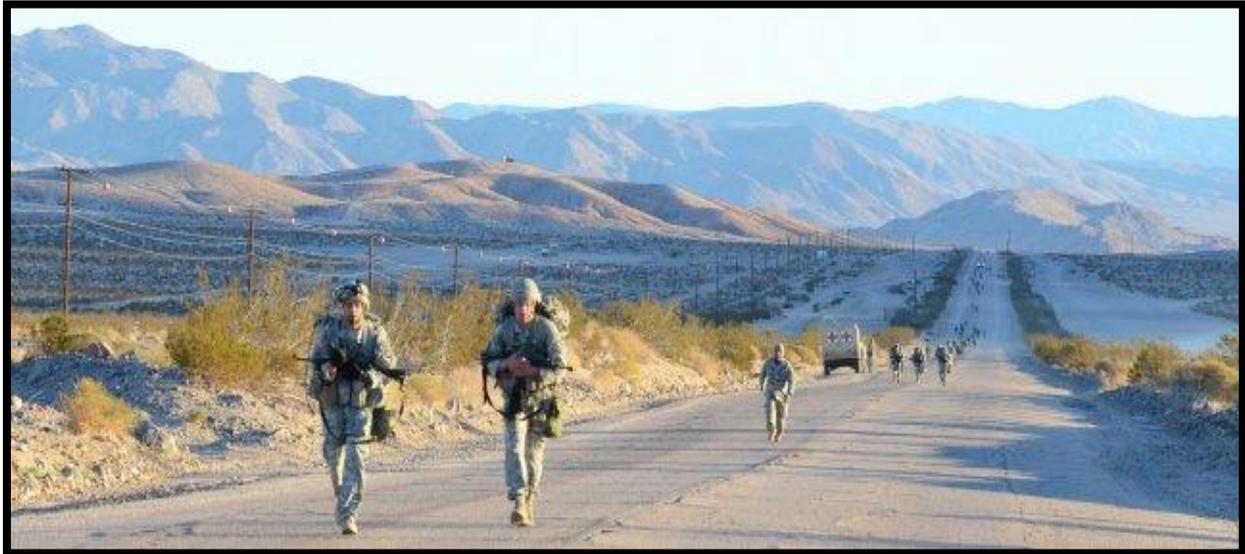


Photo from Fort Irwin Website

FORT IRWIN, MOJAVE DESERT, CA

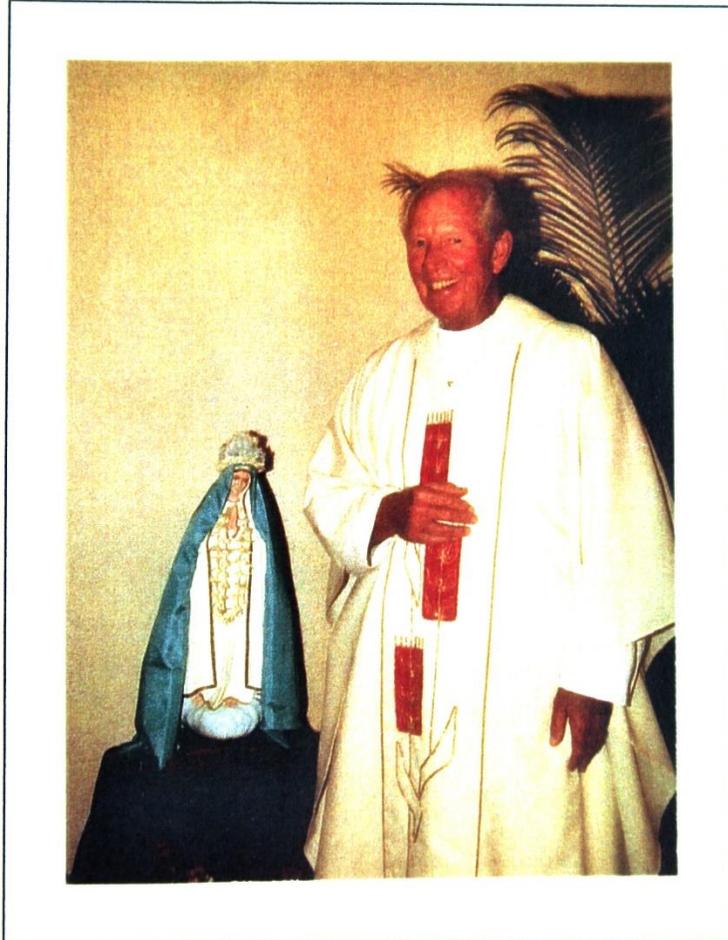
“I volunteered for this,” he said, “to get out of the bureaucratic system and get back to being a parish priest. Units will be coming in from all over the US; every combat unit in the US will have to train there at least two weeks. My job will be to bring in the Protestant and other Catholic chaplains and set up chaplain services at the base.”

Father Peters’ entire career as chaplain has been on “reserve” status as distinguished from the “regular Army.” According to Father Peters, there are about 800 priest on active duty in the Army, with 700 in the Reserves and National Guard, and 300 in the Veterans’ Administration. “But we could use twice that number, especially in active duty,”

“I can stay in as long as I enjoy it, because I can always come back to Sacramento,” he said. “But each assignment becomes more interesting.”

Satisfaction with the choices he has made in his priestly vocation beams from Father Peters' engaging features. "I think in the military it's easier being a priest. Also, I have more independence because it's my parish and I can run it"

FATHER PETERS NAMED A MONSIGNOR



Father Peters was named a prelate of honor by Pope John Paul II on May 4, 1979 to honor this amazing chaplain for his outstanding service to the soldiers of the US Army serving in the military and on the battle fields, bringing the sacramental presence of Jesus to them through the sacraments of the church.

MONSIGNOR PETERS RETIRES FROM THE US ARMY

After twenty-five years as chaplain in the United States Army, Monsignor Peters retired from the Army in 1986 at the age of 62. He returned to Sacramento and reported to Bishop Quinn to discuss his future ministry. Bishop Quinn assigned him to Saint Charles Borromeo parish to work with Monsignor James Poole who was a friend and contemporary of Monsignor Peters. Monsignor Peters

served the Saint Charles community from 1986 to 1989 and then was appointed pastor of Saint Joseph Parish in North Sacramento from 1989 to 1990.

RETURN TO HAWAII

In 1990, Monsignor Peters decided to return to Honolulu, a place he loved, where he lived in his own apartment. He assisted at the parish of Saints Peter and Paul as well as Tripler Army Medical Center. With help of Father McNeely, he initiated a Beach Mass on Saturday evenings, Memorial Day to Labor Day, held on the lawn next to the Hale Koa Hotel on Fort DeRussy property. He said the place was God's cathedral, more beautiful than anything man had made.

The Catholic Youth Organization did a hula dance on the beach and a collection was taken up to support the CYO Summer Camp.

Hawaiian Folk Mass

FORT DERUSSY BEACH
1830 Hours, Saturdays
WAIKIKI, HAWAII

PRESENTED BY: *Chaplain Section, United States
Army, Hawaii*

HULA & HYMNS: *Hui-O-Hawaii of the Catholic Youth
Organization of Hawaii*

"OFFERTORY COLLECTION"

*All money received at the offertory by the
Catholic Youth Organization will be used to send
underprivileged children of Hawaii to summer camp.*

Folk Mass Booklet used at the Fort DeRussy Beach Mass on Saturday Nights

DEATH COME TO MONSIGNOR PETERS

Monsignor Roy became ill and was confined at Queen's Hospital, Sparks Matsunga Center for the Aging, at Tripler Army Medical Center in Honolulu. On Sunday, July 2, 2006, shortly before 4 pm, Monsignor Peters slowly and silently slipped away and returned to God. His two sisters from Sacramento, Marge and June, were by Roy's side when he breathed his last breath.

A TRIBUTE FROM THE PASTOR OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL CHURCH

Father Dave Travers, SJ, the pastor of Saints Peter and Paul Parish on Oahu where Father Roy helped for 24 years, wrote the following about Monsignor Peters in the July 9, 2006 parish bulletin:

For us here at Saints Peter and Paul, we lost a hard working priest who was beloved by all the parishioners. Monsignor Roy was a kind and considerate man whose first duty was to those in need. He was generous with his time and loyal to his people. He was honored for being the clergyman who buried the dead when no relatives were found to put them in their final resting place with a prayer.

You were never surprised when your request for help was answered with a firm yes! He believed that he was ordained to the priesthood for the good of his flock. He served the Church into his early 80s. I know that I could count on him morning, noon or night; he was at the beck and call to those in need.

Monsignor Roy was a retired Army chaplain associated with Paratroopers. He had many jumps, was injured a number of times but never complained. A diehard Raiders fan and a rooter for Notre Dame Football; in later life he rooted for the Sacramento Kings. You could hear him cry "Airborne" and knew all was well.

We shall miss his priesthood, his humor and his loyalty, but we do not begrudge him to God whom he served for fifty-eight years as a Roman Catholic priest. As pastor of Saints Peter and Paul Church, I thank his sisters, Marge and June, for sharing him with us and I promise them that we at Saints Peter and Paul will not forget him. We will cherish what he meant to us and to those he met during his lifetime. Rest well old friend.

Father Dave Travers, SJ

FINAL RETURN HOME TO SACRAMENTO

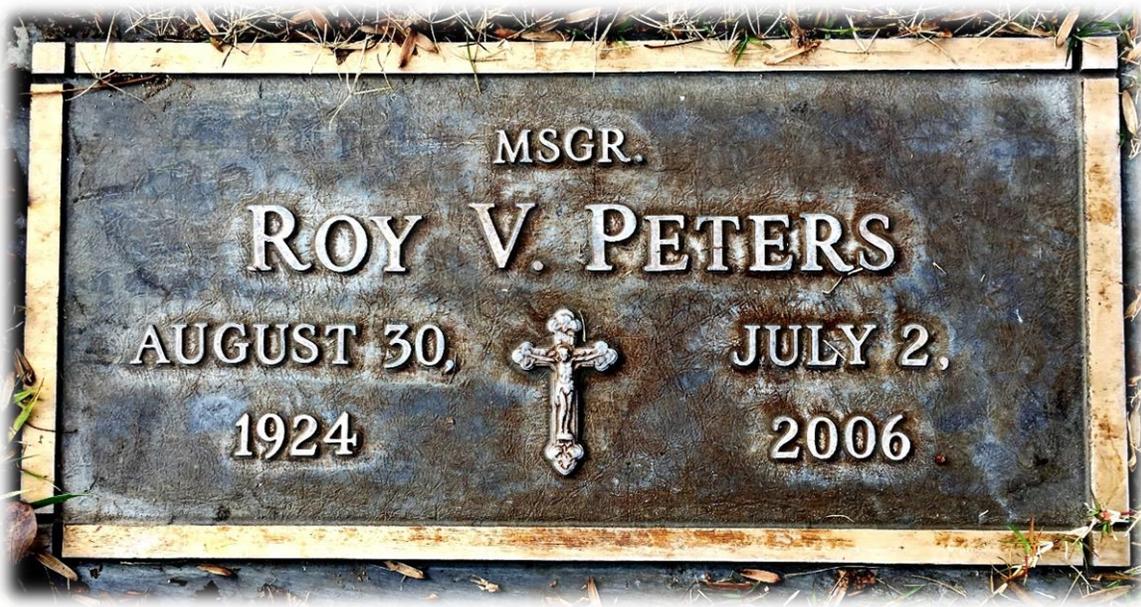


Photo by John E Boll

Monsignor Roy Peters' Grave Marker, Saint Mary Cemetery, Sacramento

After a Funeral Mass for Monsignor Peters in Hawaii, his ashes were brought back to Sacramento where a Memorial Mass was celebrated for him on July 14, 2006 at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament. Monsignor James Kidder presided at that Mass together with Bishop Richard Garcia and the priests of the diocese. At his request, Monsignor Peters was laid to rest in the Saint Joseph section of Saint Mary Cemetery, Sacramento, next to his parents, LeRoy V Peters and Ellen M Peters.

ARCHIVIST'S COMMENT

Roy Peters was a special man, the likes of which we may never see again in our lifetime. He had God-given charisms that enabled him to give to everyone he met a joyful word of encouragement delivered with a smile and a great sense of humor. He touched the lives of thousands of young soldiers who faced the terror of battle during his twenty-five years as an Army chaplain. With every fiber of his being, he responded to the needs of those in his care. Father Roy was ***a man for all seasons.***

Roy relished his ministry and embraced each day as a new opportunity to spread the Good News of God's infinite love. He did this with a smile on his face, a twinkle in his eye and a song in his heart. His life of ministry is an example for us all. He truly put on the mind, heart and attitude of Christ, the Good Shepherd, as he ministered to those God had placed in his care.

After retirement, Monsignor Peters returned to his beloved Hawaii where he continued to serve as a military hospital chaplain and assisted at Saints Peter and Paul parish in Hawaii. He was an inspiration and an example of a happy and devoted priest and pastor. We are a better presbyterate and Church in Sacramento because Father Roy walked with us as a minister of God's love, mercy and peace.

Thank you, Monsignor Roy, for all you have given to those who came to you for help. You turned no one away but always encouraged people with a word of wisdom and a smile on your face to move forward with hope and trust in God. May you now abide in the joy and peace of God's loving presence.

ROY, REST NOW IN PEACE!

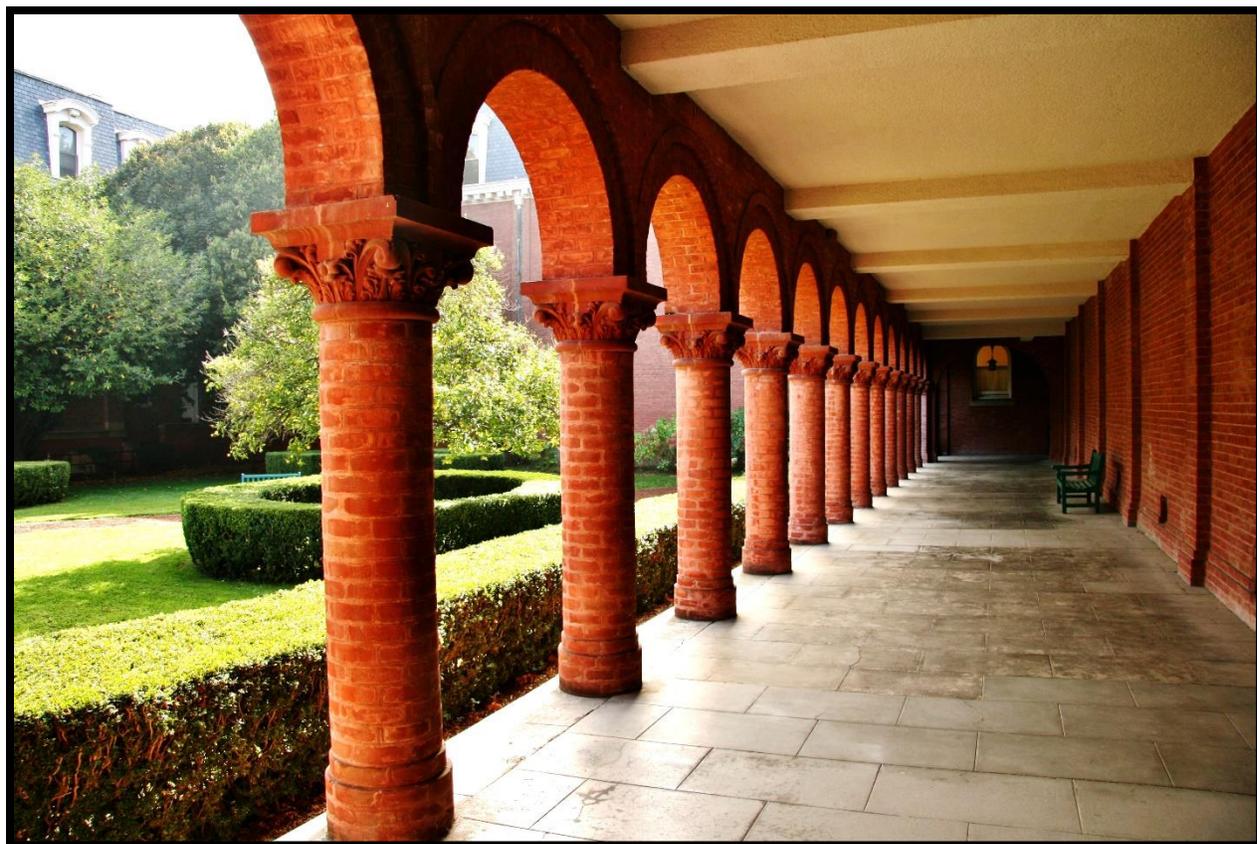


Photo by John E Boll

Saint Patrick Seminary, Menlo Park, CA, Monsignor Peters' Alma Mater



Photos by John E Boll

The Risen Christ sends his Disciples into the World

Painting above the Main Doors of Saint Patrick Seminary Chapel, Menlo Park, CA

Special thanks to Valarie Christiansen, associate editor of the *Catholic Herald*, who interviewed Father Peters in 1981 about his experience as an Army chaplain, and Ryan Illis who wrote the obituary of Monsignor Peters for the *Catholic Herald* in 2006. Both articles were helpful to the Diocesan Archivist in writing Monsignor Peters' biography for the Diocesan Archives.

Thanks also to Mary Ellen Albouze and June Peters, Monsignor Peters' two sisters in Sacramento, for photographs of Father Roy and for reading this biography of their brother to ensure it accurately tells the story of the life of their brother. JEB