

Written PROPONENT Testimony for SB 431 directing the Capitol preservation committee to approve plans for a memorial honoring Emil Joseph Kapaun.

To: Representative Ronald Ellis, Chairman, Kansas House Committee on Veterans and Military

From Ray Michael Dowe, Jr, an Army friend of Chaplain Emil Joseph Kapaun, a beloved native of Kansas

Date: March 5, 2024

Thank you, Chairman Ellis and members of the committee, for allowing me to provide this written testimony in support of SB 431

I am Mike Dowe Jr., one of the less than a thousand who survived (around 2000 did not survive) as prisoners-of-war of the Chinese Communists during the brutal winter of '50 - '51, one of the coldest ever in North Korea. Having defeated the North Korean Army that invaded South Korea, United Nations Forces were overrun by massive Chinese forces that surprised them near the Chinese border.

Facing temperatures between 20 and 40 degrees below zero in summer clothes, with paltry rations and brutal treatment, the United Nations prisoners of the Chinese Communists existed on a thin margin between life and death. That margin depended on maintaining one's will to live under those conditions. One man contributed his own life to instilling that will to live among the survivors: Chaplain Emil Kapaun, or just "Father" to Catholics, Protestants, Jews and Muslims alike.

At the risk of his life, Father would nightly escape from the officers' compound, and make his "nightly rounds" of visits to the other prisoners. He would offer them a puff on his pipe, a prayer and a message of hope, awakening their faith in God, country and each other, thereby re-instilling their will to live. Most of those who survived that winter (including myself) owe their survival to Father. Many who died, died a happier death because of him.

In the end, the Chinese Communists became afraid of him. They could not simply murder him for fear of the reaction of the entire POW Camp. So when he was recovering from pneumonia (we all had some form of bronchial disease that winter), despite our own doctors' pleas that he was recovering, the Chinese

Communists took advantage of the situation, saying they were taking him to the hospital. My West Point classmate, Bob Wood, who was on the stretcher detail that was “taking him to the hospital”, on return related how they were not allowed to put Father in the hospital but were forced to leave him in the death house (a small structure adjacent to the treatment ward), a room from which no one survived. There the Chinese Communists placed the incontinent or others they didn’t want to treat or live – they murdered him.

I began my military career going straight to combat on graduation from West Point. I retired after reaching the rank of colonel, and earned my PhD in nuclear physics, while on active duty. I have thus been able to build companies working for our national security, which I continue to do today at 96, on a pro-bono basis as a member of the Army Science Board. I have lived to make what contributions to our nation I can, because of Father Kapaun.

Chaplain Kapaun was honored in 2013 with the presentation by President Obama of the Congressional Medal of Honor, our nation’s highest award. A memorial to this great hero in his home state will serve to keep his legacy alive and inspire future generations of the state of Kansas.

Thank you again for the opportunity to offer this testimony. Thank you for your consideration.

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