

Testimony of Congressman Mike Pompeo (KS-04)  
Time Waiver for Medal of Honor award to Father Emil Kapaun  
House Armed Services Committee  
April 14, 2011

Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Smith,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

Father Emil Kapaun, a decorated Army Chaplain and a future candidate for Sainthood by the Catholic Church, is an inspiration to many around the world and a true example of heroism. I respectfully request the Committee to include the text of H.R. 437, which waives the time limitation for the issuance of the Medal of Honor to Father Kapaun, in the National Defense Authorization Act.

Born in Pilsen, Kansas, Father Kapaun graduated from Pilsen High School, and then attended both the Conception Abbey Seminary and Kenrick Theological Seminary in Missouri. In 1940, Kapaun became an ordained priest in Wichita, Kansas. Originally an auxiliary chaplain at Herington Army Airfield at the beginning of World War II, Father Kapaun began serving full-time in the military chaplaincy in 1944, and was stationed in India until the close of the war. After returning to the United States, he was discharged and returned to his religious studies.

In September 1948, Father Kapaun re-enlisted in the Army. Shortly after the 1950 invasion by North Korea into South Korea, Father Kapaun entered the Korean battlefield with his unit, the 3<sup>d</sup> Battalion of the 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment, of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division.

Following the Regiment's withdrawal at the Battle of Unsan on November 1-2, 1950, the Chinese Army encircled the battalion.

According to the official report, the Americans "successfully repelled the enemy assault, but found themselves defending a small perimeter, entirely surrounded by enemy troops. Despite continuing enemy fire, Chaplain Kapaun spent the day rescuing friendly wounded from the no-man's land outside the battalion perimeter.

"As the day wore on, it became apparent that the battalion's position was hopeless. Though the able-bodied men were ordered to escape, Chaplain Kapaun elected to stay behind with the wounded. As he cared for his men, he noticed a wounded Chinese officer among the group. As Chinese infantry approached the American position, Chaplain Kapaun convinced the officer to negotiate the safe surrender of the American forces.

"After being captured, Chaplain Kapaun continued to stoically encourage and support his men. As they marched to a prison camp, he noticed a Chinese officer preparing to execute a wounded American Staff Sergeant. Chaplain Kapaun bravely pushed the Chinese soldier aside and hoisted the American to his feet, assisting him for the next several days as the prisoners marched North to Pyoktong.

“The prisoners were severely weak from extreme exertion and malnutrition. They were forced to march from camp to camp. Many suffered from dysentery due to dirty, brackish water. Nonetheless, Chaplain Kapaun continued to lead by example, constantly encouraging his men and refusing to take a break from carrying stretchers for the wounded. He further risked his life by sneaking out after dark in order to forage for food and steal rations from guards, which he distributed evenly among the prisoners.

“As time wore on and winter set in, the weak, malnourished prisoners began to die by the hundreds. Chaplain Kapaun nonetheless retained hope and continued to care for his men and sneak out at night in order to gather any supplies he could to alleviate his men’s plight. On at least one occasion, he was caught on one of his excursions and forced to sit outside in subzero weather with no outer garments.

“Eventually, captivity began to take its toll on Chaplain Kapaun. A large blood clot formed on his leg. The Chinese, wary of Chaplain Kapaun’s influence over the other prisoners, refused to provide medical aid. Though Chaplain Kapaun recovered from the blood clot, he caught pneumonia shortly thereafter. Over the protests of his fellow captives, the Chinese transferred Chaplain Kapaun to their filthy, unheated hospital, where he died alone.

“Chaplain Kapaun repeatedly risked his own life to save hundreds of fellow Americans. His extraordinary courage and leadership inspired thousands of prisoners to survive hellish conditions and resist Chinese indoctrination. His actions reflect great credit upon himself, the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division, and the United States Army.”

Due to Father Kapaun’s extraordinary efforts, the Army posthumously awarded him the Distinguished Service Cross on August 18<sup>th</sup>, 1951. In 1993, Kapaun was named Servant of God by the Catholic Church, which is the first step toward canonization.

For decades, Kapaun admirers have advocated awarding him the Medal of Honor. In 2009, in a letter to then-Congressman Todd Tiahrt, the Secretary of the Army agreed with this proposal and formally recommended that Chaplain Father Emil Kapaun be awarded the Medal of Honor.

As the Committee knows, a Medal of Honor recommendation must to be submitted within two years of the action. Therefore, in order for Father Kapaun to receive the Medal of Honor, Congress must waive the time limitation. I have introduced H.R. 437 to do just that. In a letter from the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Department of Defense officially supports this effort. I ask unanimous consent for this letter from OSD to be included in the record.

I appreciate the committee’s time and attention to the matter. I stand ready to help move this matter forward.