



511th PIR "Flying Parsons"



THE FLYING PARSONS

Chaplains Jump With Paratroopers They Give Comfort To

By PAUL CRANSTON

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SOMEWHERE IN THE SOUTHWEST PACIFIC, Feb. 24.—(NANA)—

The men of the 11th airborne division call him a flying parson, and that's what he is.

His name is Capt. James O. Morman, an army chaplain who believes religion makes a better showing to paratroopers when the chaplain jumps with his men. And that's what he does.

I was visiting a rest area with a young bombardier when the chaplain came along, a tall, rangy Texan with a black striped mustache.

"Meet a flying parson," said the bombardier with a little pride in his eyes. "I was with him on Leyte."

Atheists in Foxholes

Chaplain Morman used to be pastor of the North Cleburne Baptist church down near Fort Arthur. He has been with his division since it was formed in February, 1943, a division where you will find entire regiments with an average age of 20 and one in which seven of its eight chaplains jump with their men.

"Yes," said the chaplain, "but there are still some atheists in fox-holes despite what you hear. Some men actually develop religion, and some come to it because of the great sense of dependency on the Almighty which many meet out here, but generally a man's religion is little changed by war.

"But I can tell you some examples of religion that set a lot of men to thinking. There was that time the 511th parachute infantry was lost up in the mountains of Leyte. Our supplies had to be dropped by planes flying over fog-shrouded mountains. But then came a fog so heavy that no food could be dropped for five days.

Has Leg Blown Off

"On the fifth day the chaplain asked the men to pause for one moment of meditation at noon in their foxholes. They did. Fifteen minutes later the clouds rolled away and the fog broke. Fifteen

minutes later a plane came over dropping food. And that is a verified story.

"Or perhaps I ought to tell you the story of Cpl. Peter Kut, a kid from Michigan. He was one of a group of five men hit by an artillery shell. His leg was blown off at the thigh. It was hanging there, that stump of a leg, and a doctor finished the amputation with a trench knife.

"After the leg was bound and the kid opened his eyes again he turned to the group around him. 'Say,' he said, 'let's everybody bow our heads and have a moment of prayer.' That kid, who used to be a prize fighter, led the prayer himself with a deep, strong voice. When it was finished he turned to the medics and said, 'all right, fellows, I'm ready to go to the hospital now.'"

"That night I went to the hospital to watch the operation on his leg. 'Chaplain,' he said, 'I want you to pray for my captain. Gee, he was a swell guy; help him, chaplain, all you can.'

Complains of Home Front

"Peter Kut died the next morning at 4 o'clock. But in all his agony he was interested in something else, thinking of how his captain was coming through. I've seen that happen often. A guy comes up and says take care of so-and-so. I've heard guys whose wounds hadn't been dressed in seven days, say that."

Chaplain Morman isn't a preach-

ing type of parson. He talks religion straight, often in the way a paratrooper talks. He has been soldiering for three years now but he has only one complaint to make: that's about some of the people back home.

"These boys come to us with problems," the chaplain said. "And the most distressing problem to an army chaplain out here is an evident breakdown in the American home. A soldier will come to you with a letter from his wife. She has found someone else. She wants a divorce. And what can a chaplain say? It's pretty hard to talk religion when a rugged man breaks down and cries.

Out here a chaplain looks like any other G. I. Joe. Our job is just to help the wounded and bury the dead, that's all.

But with Chaplain Jim that isn't quite all.