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Priest aided Allies as spy in World War II, according to recently revealed papers

By SYLVIA HART
Press Register Reporter

"There's probably no single person, at least in the clergy, who made the contributions that this man made in World War II."

THE "SINGLE person" referred to was Monsignor Walter S. Carroll, an American Catholic priest who worked in Europe during World War II.

Saying that Carroll's "exploits until very recently were not known," George Kemon, a visiting professor of humanities at Biscayne College in Miami, talked about Carroll's wartime activities to participants in the Mobile Area Jewish-Christian Dialogue.

Host for the meeting was St. Ignatius Catholic Church.

AFTER CARROLL died in 1950 his papers were sent to his brother, Coleman Carroll, Catholic archbishop of Miami. The archbishop died in 1977.

Kemon was selected as biographer of Walter Carroll by the Most Rev. Edward A. McCarthy,

present archbishop of Miami.

In writing the biography, Kemon not only has relied on Carroll's personal papers but has interviewed numerous U.S. political and military leaders, Roman Catholic Church leaders and others.

When Walter Carroll died, "tributes poured in from all over the world," according to Kemon, who said those writing included then President Harry S. Truman; Charles De Gaulle, who led the French resistance against Germany in World War II and later was president of France; and Winston Churchill, prime minister of Great Britain during World War II and later.

KEMON SAID Carroll worked during World War II in the secretariat of state in the Vatican, particularly helping prisoners of war.

The priest "led two lives," however, according to Kemon. Carroll's second job "in simple terms was as a spy — military intelligence on behalf of the Allies."

Kemon said Carroll "was a priest 15 years only. He was made a priest in 1935, and he died in 1950.

"It seems as though he was put on this earth to do one job — World War II.... He was certainly sent by God to the Vatican at the time he was" to help humanity.

CARROLL, A native of Pittsburgh, arrived at the Vatican to work at the outset of World War II, according to Kemon.

The priest arrived "at just about the time the American embassy was closing in Rome," so he immediately began assisting Americans in getting out of Italy.

"His work with people started early."

During the war Carroll was sent to North Africa by Pope Pius XII "to try to establish some communications programs to benefit prisoners of war, Allied and Axis," according to Kemon.

THE WAR was started in 1939 by the Axis country, Nazi Germany, which later was joined by Italy and other nations. The Allies — Great Britain, the United States and other nations — were victorious in 1945, ending the war.

In North Africa Carroll "operated under a Vatican passport," which enabled him to move quite freely, Kemon said.

While the priest was in Africa he was approached by a representative of Dwight Eisenhower, supreme commander of the Allied forces during World War II and later president of the United States, asking for assistance "with the surrender of Italy."

AT THAT time, Kemon said, Benito Mussolini no longer was prime minister of Fascist Italy. He had been replaced by Marshal Pietro Badoglio.

The priest was sent in the company of U.S. and British military leaders to Rome to ask Badoglio to send a general to North Africa to negotiate.

Carroll and his companions "went into Rome under cover of darkness at 2:30 in the morning and saw Badoglio, got his promise to send a general and snuck out of Rome."

THE POPE was the only church official who knew Carroll was in Rome, according to Kemon.

A few days later Carroll went to Washington, D.C. He spent 2-1/2 hours talking with then President Franklin D. Roosevelt "about the

surrender of Italy and other matters, mainly about the feeding of the Italian people."

Carroll was promised food from U.S. Army stocks for the Italian people after the surrender.

Kemon said that Carroll was closely associated with U.S. Gen. Mark Clark, who led the Allied forces in a successful campaign in Italy against the Axis powers in World War II.

Kemon said he spent an entire morning talking with Clark last year in Charleston, S.C. Clark, 86, "is the last surviving general of World War II."

THE GENERAL, Kemon said, "remembered Walter with great fondness and tremendous respect."

Clark credited Carroll and the Vatican for assisting with intelligence in the Battles of Monte Cassino in Italy. The Allies captured Cassino.

According to Kemon, Carroll "met with Eisenhower and his staff to program the entry into Rome — programmed in that the Vatican wanted to be assured that all of the religious edifices, whether Catholic, Jewish or any faith, were spared."

THE CHURCH leader was assured that no military unit would knowingly bomb a religious edifice, although some churches were accidentally hit.

After Rome surrendered, the British and U.S. armies and the Vatican supplied food to more than 2,000 Italians because the farmers' fields had been turned into battle fields, and food was scarce, Kemon said.

Carroll was sent on trips by the pope throughout Italy to assess damage to churches and talk with church leaders.

DURING THOSE trips Carroll was responsible for having three cardinals and two monsignors "fired out of hand and replaced" because of their Nazi association, Kemon said.

Carroll "had this kind of authority from the pope."

The pope once sent Carroll to talk with U.S. Gen. George S. Patton Jr. Carroll asked for the return of a Catholic seminary that "was sorely needed" and was being used by the military in the war.

PATTON BALKED. Cursing, he told Carroll he could not have the building back.

Pressed by the priest, the general finally relented, telling one of his aides, "Turn that damn building back to the pope."

Adding to the general's discomfort, Carroll spent the night in the castle where Patton was living. "It was a beautiful castle, in southern Germany, I think it was," said Kemon.

During his service in the Vatican, Carroll "had a lot to do with the movement of refugees, both Jewish and Italian, through Rome and through Italy," said Kemon.

CARROLL AND other church leaders "sent children to England, to Denmark, to Portugal." The churchmen sent "adults anywhere out of Italy they could."

Kemon said that "upwards of 860,000 Jews were helped."

Because the operation was so large, "it's inconceivable to me that this could have been done without the knowledge of Pius," Kemon said.

The speaker said that after the Allies liberated Dachau, a Nazi concentration camp in Germany, Carroll took a convoy of physicians, nurses, food and medical supplies to the camp "and stayed there six weeks ministering to the people, Christians and Jews alike." The priest and medical personnel "went to seven other camps in subsequent convoys."

THE SPEAKER noted that U.S. news media recently have published accusations that the Vatican spirited Nazi criminals out of Europe to South America.

Kemon said the Vatican had had an emigration bureau since 1920. In cooperation with officials of the United States and 14 other countries, Carroll "set up negotiations with Argentina and several other countries in Latin America to accept refugees" through the Vatican's emigration bureau.

CARROLL WROTE at the time, "The Vatican is in a position to do a tremendous service for humanity at little or no cost to the Vatican." The funding primarily was from the supporting nations.

Kemon said, "Under the chaotic conditions that existed following the war, anyone could get papers under a phony name because no one had any records."

Thus the Vatican could have spirited Nazi war criminals out of Europe, Kemon said, adding, however, that the Vatican officials did not knowingly do so.

Kemon concluded, "I very strongly feel that Walter Carroll did a tremendous service to both Jew and Christian and we were blessed to have had him."