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## O'Callahan Science Library Narrative

College of the Holy Cross

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O'Callahan Science Library  
College of the Holy Cross

The Reverend Joseph T. O'Callahan, S.J. came to the College in 1938 to chair the mathematics department. In the summer of 1940 with war raging in Europe, he was commissioned into the Chaplain Corps of the U.S. Navy, its first Jesuit chaplain. In addition to his chaplain duties, his first Navy duties included teaching calculus to young naval aviators at Pensacola Naval Air Station. Later Father O'Callahan served on an aircraft carrier that took part in combat operations in the Atlantic and provided air support for the invasion of North Africa. In the spring of 1944, he was transferred west, eventually reporting to Pearl Harbor Naval Station in December.

On March 2, 1945, Father O'Callahan boarded the aircraft carrier USS FRANKLIN as the senior chaplain to more than 3000 Sailors, Marines, aviators and officers. A few hours later, the ship weighed anchor for the western Pacific. On March 19, he and his shipmates stepped onto the pages of history.

While conducting combat air operations against the Japanese home islands, FRANKLIN suffered a brief but devastating attack from a single enemy aircraft. Its bombs set off conflagrations and explosions fueled by the carrier's stores of gasoline and munitions. The ship was ravaged for hours, resulting in over a 1000 casualties including over 800 dead. If the fires and the continuing detonations were not controlled, FRANKLIN would sink with greater loss of life.

From the bridge, FRANKLIN's captain observed Father O'Callahan, in his helmet with its prominent white cross, moving about the chaos on the flight deck. He was not just ministering to the injured and dying; he was also organizing, leading and inspiring his dazed and disoriented shipmates to fight the fires and jettison dangerous ordnance that had not yet detonated from the heat. At one point, after receiving a thumbs up from his chaplain on the flight deck, the captain declared to his Marine orderly, "That's the bravest man I ever saw."

The captain recommended Father O'Callahan for the Medal of Honor. Eventually this would make him the first Navy chaplain to receive that honor. His medal is in the College archives.

After the war, Father O'Callahan returned to the College to teach theology and philosophy. However, in a few years, the injuries he suffered on that fateful day forced him to give up classroom teaching. Living on campus, he remained mentally active, serving as a mentor to young Jesuits and writing an account of his Navy service that was published in 1956. Father O'Callahan died in 1964 at age 58. He was buried with military honors in the Jesuit cemetery on campus. In 1965, when the Navy launched a new destroyer, it was christened USS O'CALLAHAN.

Before he died, the College honored Father O'Callahan by naming the Haberlin Hall science library for him. When in 1985 the library moved into the Swords Hall, it was dedicated to his memory.

There is a wealth of published material about Father O'Callahan and USS FRANKLIN, including audio and video. Please ask the librarian about the O'Callahan Collection.

O'Callahan Society