

## 'FATHER TOM,' AN OLD SALT

## Seagoing padre anchors in E. Orange

By EDWARD WALSH

Rev. Thomas H. Reilly, after 20 years as a seagoing chaplain, has again dropped anchor in the Newark Archdiocese and is rapidly readjusting to life as pastor of Holy Name Church in East Orange.

"Father Tom," as he is affectionately called by his many friends, was one of the first archdiocesan priests to volunteer his services as a Navy chaplain in 1942. At that time, he was a popular assistant pastor of Sacred Heart Church in Vailsburg.

Twenty years later he retired from the Navy — after serving in many parts of the world — and returned to the active life of a parish priest. He was a full commander at the time he discarded his blues.

"My biggest adjustment," he confessed, "was getting used to sleeping on land again. I did so much sea duty I guess I missed the roll of the ship when I turn in."

FATHER REILLY is the son

of the late William B. Reilly, who served 36 years as Federal Court clerk in Newark. He also is the nephew of the late Rt. Rev. Msgr. Michael F. McGuinness, former pastor of St. Mary's Church in Paterson and the founder of the Holy Name Society in New Jersey.

He also is a brother of Michael Reilly, Hudson County surrogate and former Jersey City magistrate.

Although a native of Jersey City and a graduate of St. Peter's Prep there, Father Reilly grew up in Essex County. He attended Seton Hall University and Immaculate Conception Seminary, after which he was ordained in St. Patrick's Pro-Cathedral in Newark on May 25, 1929.

The first two years after ordination, he was assigned to St. Mary's in Paterson, where he was an assistant to his uncle. He was then transferred to Sacred Heart, one of Newark's largest parishes. He remained there until he entered the Navy. During World War II, Father

Tom served in the Pacific as chaplain at the submarine base at Pearl Harbor and on the battleship USS South Dakota.

WHEN THE WAR ended he was in Tokyo harbor with the fleet and witnessed the signing of the Japanese surrender documents aboard the USS Missouri. He considers this the crowning event of his Naval career.

"Although it's not officially known," he disclosed, "I was one of the first Americans ashore after the surrender. With several buddies, we went into Tokyo and took a subway ride, and it was so crowded no one even noticed us."

While at the sub base in Hawaii, Father Reilly took a trip on an undersea craft to Midway Island to say Mass. He also vividly recalls blessing the submarine Sailfish in late 1943 when it left Pearl Harbor on one of the most successful missions of the war.

Formerly the ill-fated Squalus, which had sunk off New England in 1939, the submarine had

been recommissioned the Sailfish. Its skipper had requested the blessing, although not a Catholic.

When the Sailfish returned to Pearl Harbor after sinking several major Jap warships and many commercial ships, admirals and other dignitaries were waiting on the dock for a big welcome.

THE SKIPPER of the submarine was on deck directing its docking with a megaphone when he spotted Father Tom in the crowd.

In a booming voice that echoed across the docks he shouted:

"That was a damned good blessing, Father Tom!"

Another event stands out in his Navy career. That was one of the six times he led delegations of sailors in an audience with Pope Pius XII in Rome. This was in 1950 when he was chaplain on the carrier USS Midway, then in the Mediterranean.

"One of the sailors was an

Irishman from Boston," Father Tom recalled with a smile, "and when he met the Pope, the Holy Pontiff asked where he was from."

"When the sailor told him, the Pope mentioned Archbishop Cushing of Boston."

"And why haven't you promoted him to Cardinal?" asked the sailor in a loud voice.

"Frankly, we were more than embarrassed until the Holy Father smiled and said:

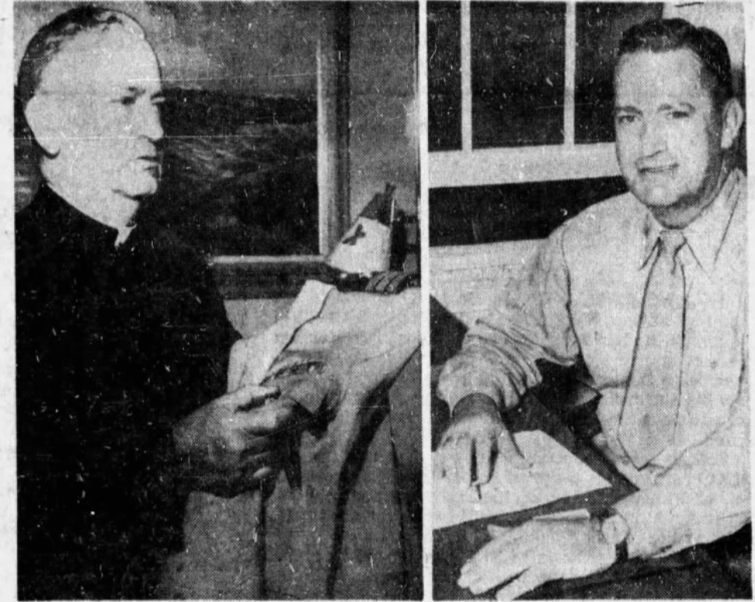
"We have so many good men that we can't make them all cardinals."

NO ONE KNOWS whether the outspoken sailor had an effect, but a short time later Archbishop Cushing became a cardinal.

During his tour with the Navy, Father Tom built six different chapels for servicemen. In all cases, he had no funds and no materials but received help from volunteers who "relocated government property."

Among the chapels are those still in use at Pearl Harbor, Brooklyn Naval Base, Philadelphia Naval Base, Corpus Christi, Tex., and aboard the carriers Antietam and Midway.

In his years as a chaplain, he converted thousands of servicemen to Catholicism, and on one arctic cruise aboard the Midway, he converted a majority of enlisted men and officers. His feat was so outstanding that it



Father Thomas Reilly (left) reads his World War II Navy commander uniform for Memorial Day parade. (Right) serving as a Marine chaplain in Parris Island

was mentioned in many national Catholic papers.

Father Reilly also built two chapels while serving with the Marine Corps at Cherry Point, N.C., early in World War II. He also served as chaplain at Parris Island in 1946 and 1947.

FATHER TOM also was stationed at San Juan, Puerto Rico, Charleston, S.C., Newport, R.I., and Great Lakes Naval Training Station. He admits, however, that he is tired of traveling and is happy with his new assignment in East Orange.

"I'm delighted with my new parish," he declared. "They have been loyal and faithful and have made the transition back to civilian life enjoyable."

Already he has made many new friends, and has been named by Mayor James Kelly to say prayers at the East Orange Memorial Day services. For this occasion, he will return to uniform.

Father Tom also is interested in the Holy Name organization. When he was at Sacred Heart in Vailsburg, he headed a Holy

Name rally in 1936 when 1,800 turned out to march. This is believed to be the largest turnout in Newark history.

While at Sacred Heart, he also started the Loyalty Legion, a group of Holy Name men with outstanding records for receiving communion. The organization spread to other parishes throughout the country.

When he has a few days off from his many duties, Father Tom likes to relax at a small family bungalow in Sea Girt.

"There's nothing as relaxing as fishing," he contends.