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## Accusations against Priests in the Military

Associated Press  
October 8, 2003

More than 25 current or former Roman Catholic priests serving as U.S. military chaplains have been accused of sexual abuse. They include:

- **Navy Cmdr. Brian Bjorklund**, suspended in July by the Detroit archdiocese because of a credible allegation he molested a child in Michigan before he joined the Navy in 1988. Bjorklund did not return repeated telephone calls to his home.

- **Monsignor Robert Reidy**, accused in a lawsuit last year by two Youngstown, Ohio, brothers of molesting them in the 1960s before he joined the Navy. Nancy Yuhasz, chancellor of the Youngstown diocese, told reporters last year Reidy had admitted the abuse. Youngstown Bishop Thomas Tobin later said Reidy denied the allegations. Yuhasz said last month she could no longer comment on the matter because of the lawsuit. Reidy did not return repeated telephone messages left at his Niles, Ohio, home.

- **Thomas Forry**, sent to be an Army chaplain in 1988 by the Boston Archdiocese despite his beating his housekeeper and refusing some counseling. Church officials suspended Forry, who had left the Army and returned to the Boston area, last year after he was accused of molesting children.

- **Carmelo "Mel" Baltazar**, a former Navy chaplain convicted and sentenced to seven years in prison for molesting a boy in Idaho in 1985. A lawsuit filed this year accuses Baltazar of molesting another boy while he was in the Navy stationed in San Diego. Baltazar, who has been defrocked by the church, could not be located for comment.

- Four Catholic Navy chaplains disciplined for sexual misconduct from 1994 through 1999. Their cases were mentioned in an internal Navy report obtained by The Associated Press. The accusations included sodomy, downloading pornography on a computer with someone being counseled, "homosexual acts/assault," sexual assault and unspecified sexual misconduct. The report did not include the priests' names.

- **Barry E. Ryan**, a former Air Force chaplain. Church officials told an Alabama prosecutor this year that Ryan had been accused of sexual misconduct while at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery. Ryan is no longer a priest and this year left his job at a school in Stuart, Fla. He could not be reached for comment.

- An Army chaplain suspended by the diocese of Greensburg, Penn., last year. The diocese did not name the priest, who was suspended because of a credible allegation of child molestation before he joined the Army.

- **Pat Nicholson**, dismissed as a chaplain at the Air Force Academy in 2000 after a female officer accused him of having a long-term sexual relationship with her, beginning when she was a cadet. Another woman has accused Nicholson of molesting her while he was a priest near Montgomery, Ala., in the 1970s before he joined the Air Force. Nicholson has an unlisted home telephone number in Long Beach, Calif., and could not be reached for comment.

- **Robert Milewski**, a former Navy chaplain convicted in a 2001 court-martial of touching an enlisted man inappropriately during a massage. He was fined \$48,000.

- **Neal Destefano**, a former Navy chaplain who was sentenced to five years in prison in 1994 after pleading guilty to drugging and molesting two Marines. He was dismissed from the Navy and resigned from the Jesuit religious order. "It was a tremendous failure of moral responsibility on my part as an officer and a priest," he said.

- **Robert Hrdlicka**, who served nearly six years in prison after pleading guilty at a 1993 court-martial to sexually abusing four boys, ages 7 to 11, while serving as a Navy chaplain in Italy and South Carolina. Hrdlicka was dismissed from the Navy and from the priesthood. His St. Louis telephone number is unlisted.

- **Owen J. Melody**, who in 1987 pleaded guilty in Virginia to aggravated sexual battery against a 13-year-old girl while he was a Navy chaplain. A judge gave him a 20-year suspended sentence, and he was dismissed from the Navy and the priesthood. Melody now claims he is innocent. He is married to another Navy chaplain, Capt. Julia Cadenhead, who helped the Navy institute a training program called "Ethics First!"

- **Alvin Campbell**, a former Army chaplain who pleaded guilty to molesting Illinois boys in 1985. Campbell served about seven years in prison and died last year.

- **Carl Peltz**, accused in a federal lawsuit of molesting a boy while serving as a Navy chaplain at a base in Iceland in 1985. The Diocese of Steubenville, Ohio, settled the lawsuit for \$25,000. Peltz, now pastor of a church in Parchment, Mich., told his parishioners he is innocent. A review by the diocese of Kalamazoo, Mich., this year found no "credible evidence" to support the allegation.

- **Robert R. Peebles Jr.**, accused of molesting a 15-year-old boy in 1984 at Fort Benning, Ga. Peebles admitted molesting the boy, according to court documents and testimony, and was allowed to resign from the Army instead of being prosecuted. Peebles, who is now a lawyer for the Social Security Administration in New Orleans, did not return telephone messages left at his home.

- **Timothy Sugrue**, accused in a lawsuit of molesting a girl in 1978 at the now-closed Blytheville Air Force Base in Arkansas. A jury awarded the woman \$1.5 million, but she has not collected because Sugrue took a vow of poverty. Sugrue resigned from the Air Force after he learned he was being investigated, according to testimony. Sugrue declined comment.

- An unknown number of military priests who have not been named publicly. Bishop John J. Glynn, a former top official with the military archdiocese, in 1993 told lawyers for Sugrue's victim that he knew of accusations against Melody and six other Catholic military chaplains he did not name.

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