

THREE HEROES OF ASSISI IN WORLD WAR II: Bishop Giuseppe Nicolini, Colonel Valentin Müller, Don Aldo Brunacci, edited and written by Josef Raischl OFS, and André Cirino OFM, 148 pp.

*Reviewed by BARBARA BECKWITH, book review editor of St. Anthony Messenger publication. She has been to Assisi three times, including a Franciscan Pilgrimage conducted by Father André Cirino.*

THE HOMETOWN of Sts. Francis and Clare, Assisi holds a special place in the world's heart. Its saints continue to inspire every generation.

The book, *Three Heroes of Assisi in World War II*, grew from interviews with Don Aldo Brunacci, who was a diocesan priest serving with Bishop Nicolini's during the war years. It focuses on telling two stories: First, the bishop enlisted the help of a German officer, Colonel Valentin Müller, to help preserve the city. The devout Catholic colonel was a medical doctor and got the city declared a hospital city, thereby saving it from the fate of the Benedictine Abbey of Monte Cassino, which was destroyed by Allied bombs in minutes in 1944.

Second, Bishop Nicolini played a pivotal role in the effort to shelter more than 200 Jews during the Nazi occupation of Italy. This was an effort kept secret from Colonel Müller, but requested by the Vatican. This book corrects some of the misinformation in Alexander Ramati's book *The Assisi Underground*, later made into a movie.

Brunacci's documentation proves "only a Bishop—not the Padre Rufino of the romanticized book-turned-film...could hoodwink the Nazis and pull off such a complicated, covert operation. In the film, the Franciscan friars are given far more credit for the safety of the Jews in Assisi than they were in a position to provide. It's a laughable fiction, really, since even St. Francis put himself under the local Bishop. Nothing of such magnitude could have occurred in Assisi without the Bishop spearheading it."

Don Aldo was arrested in May 1944 for hiding a Jewish couple and slated for a concentration camp.

The book also includes a number of interviews Don Aldo has given through the years, such as his 2004 National Public Radio conversation with Bob Edwards, and different sidelights on the story, like details about Colonel Müller's life after the war offered by his son. It even offers *St. Anthony Messenger's* 1999 story about Don Aldo.

Such stories need to be gathered now because Don Aldo is the only survivor of the *Three Heroes*, and he's 93.