Clarksville deacon, World War II survivor dies at 85

Verdan "Buzz" Wiedel was serving as a radio operator on a fighter bomber during the Second World War when an otherworldly experience set him on the path to the diaconate.

It happened when Wiedel's plane went out of commission in Europe, forcing him to catch another plane back to his base. Wiedel, who flew 30 bombing missions over Europe, kept hearing an inner voice tell him to get off that plane – especially after he learned that it was the crew's first mission.

"The entire crew was listed as KIA – killed in action," said Monsignor Joseph Luca, pastor of St. Louis in Clarksville. "He was listed as KIA too because they didn't know he did get off the plane."

Having survived the tragedy, Monsignor Luca said, Wiedel pledged that he would give his all back to God. That's why he pursued the diaconate and was ordained in 1986 at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Baltimore.

Monsignor Luca offered the funeral Mass for Deacon Wiedel Nov. 23 at St. Louis, the faith community the deacon served until his retirement in 1999. Deacon Wiedel died Nov. 18. He was 85.

"He always looked back at his experience in the war as God saving him," Monsignor Luca said. "He really did give back. He was very generous with his time."

Describing Deacon Wiedel as a "generalist," the pastor noted that the clergyman was always available to help with weddings, baptisms, novenas and preaching at Mass.

"He had a very deep sense of gratitude," said Monsignor Luca, noting that Deacon Wiedel was born in a one-room sod house in Kansas and grew up in Nebraska.

Deacon Wiedel is survived by his wife, Martha, his children, Michael, Kevin, Brett,

Paul and Marya Pecukonis. He is predeceased by his children, Randy and Donna Maria.