

# Man, 22, Immolates Himself In Antiwar Protest at U.N.

By THOMAS BUCKLEY

A 21-year-old former seminarian soaked himself with gasoline and then set himself aflame in front of the United Nations at dawn yesterday, as a protest against "war, all war."

Guards from the world organization and city patrolmen beat out the flames that enveloped him as he sat cross-legged on First Avenue and then rushed him to Bellevue Hospital.

He was drifting near death in the emergency ward last night, with second and third-degree burns covering 95 per cent of his body. The hospital staff said he had almost no chance of surviving.

The youth, Roger Allen LaPorte, was a member of the Catholic Worker movement, a charitable and pacifist organization with headquarters at 175 Chrystie Street on the Lower East Side. He lived in a tenement apartment leased by the

organization at 58 Kenmare Street, a few blocks away.

Mr. LaPorte's self-immolation was the second in seven days attributable, at least in part, to continued United States' involvement in the war in Vietnam. Last Monday, Norman R. Morrison, a 32-year-old Quaker from Baltimore, burned himself to death in front of the Pentagon in Washington.

U Thant, the Secretary General of the United Nations, which has been seeking a solution to the Asian conflict, and Arthur Goldberg, the chief United States delegate to the world body, reacted with shock and horror to Mr. LaPorte's action.

Questioned at a city reception, Mr. Goldberg said that while the youth had undoubtedly been impelled by "the highest principles and motives," his action was "terribly unfortunate and terribly unnecessary."

"Perhaps there has been a

failure on our part," he went on. "Perhaps we are not sufficiently communicating to the people of the world our dedication, our attachment and complete commitment to the idea that peace is the only way for mankind in the nuclear age."

A spokesman said that Mr. Thant was "deeply grieved over this human tragedy, whatever the motivation might be. U Thant regards human life as very sacred."

## Attended Union Sq. Protest

Friends of Mr. LaPorte said that he had been melancholy but not obviously emotionally disturbed since Saturday, when he attended the demonstration at Union Square at which five other youths burned their draft cards.

Robert Steed, a fellow member of the Catholic Workers, said that Mr. LaPorte had been unable to make up his mind to

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The New York Times

Published: November 10, 1965  
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# Man, 22, Sets Himself Afire

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take part. However, he spoke little of politics and hardly mentioned Vietnam, Mr. Steed said.

On Monday night he helped to serve a simple meal to the members of the Catholic Worker's staff and several persons receiving assistance there, but after that his movements were unknown.

"He may have spent some time with a girl he knew," said Mr. Steed, "but I think he probably walked the streets all night coming to a decision."

Then, at about 5 A.M. the tall, slender blond youth, who looked nothing like the stereotype of the longhaired "Vietnik," or peace demonstrator, stepped onto the wide avenue in front of the Hammarskjold Memorial Library, at 42d Street.

He had a gallon can of gasoline, and now he stepped off the curb and knelt crosslegged on the asphalt in the posture of the Buddhist monks who set themselves on fire to protest the policies of the Diem regime in Vietnam.

Then he struck the light and blue and yellow flames enveloped his body.

## Guard Hears Scream

Henri Okai, a Ghanaian guard at the United Nations, saw the sudden flash and heard the seated figure scream. He called the Police and Fire Departments and then rushed to the burning man's side, trying to beat out the flames. He himself was sickened and treated for smoke inhalation.

A passing gasoline truck driver, who asked that his name not be used, call The New York Times a few minutes later, and in a shaking voice told what he had seen.

"Just as I stopped, three police cars screamed around the corner," he said. "The cops got out and beat with their hands. Then one of them got a fire extinguisher and squirted him with that. The flames weren't too high but they were coming from all over his body."

"While they were hitting at him, the guy sort of raised his head a little bit, then fell down onto the street. I couldn't look no more. I drove on."

"I only got a few blocks, though, when I stopped and called you. I don't know why I called a paper this time of except that I had to tell someone, except that I had to tell someone."

The Times was open later than usual because of former President Eisenhower's sudden illness.

## Conscious in Ambulance

In the ambulance that raced against the light traffic down to the Bellevue emergency room at 26th Street, the youth called repeatedly for water. He was conscious, the police said, and spoke coherently.

One of them asked why he had done it. They said he replied, "I'm a Catholic Worker. I'm against war, all wars. I did this as a religious action."

Why had he chosen the early morning hours?

"So no one could stop me," he said.

The police identified him from the contents of his wallet, including his draft card, which was undamaged. It put him in group 2-S, which is reserved for seminarians, but he was subject to reclassification.

At Bellevue, Dr. Jay Grosfeld, the 30-year-old chief resident physician of the New York University Medical School surgical service, had just arrived for his morning rounds. He was summoned to the emergency room to take charge of the fight to save the youth's life.

"He was conscious throughout," Dr. Grosfeld said, "and so badly burned that the nerve ends were destroyed and he was feeling almost no pain. He was in shock, however."

## Last Rites Administered

The Rev. Alexander Busutil, a Carmelite who is one of the hospital's four Roman Catholic chaplains, gave the youth the last rites of the church.

"He made the most devout act of contrition I have ever heard," the priest, who is a Maltese and has been in this country for only seven months, said. "His voice was strong and he meant every word."

Two hospital psychiatrists visited his cubicle, which was guarded from intruders by hospital and city policemen. They were quoted as saying that Mr. LaPorte, who was unable to speak because of tube that had been in his throat, had nodded when asked if he wanted to live.

In late afternoon, his parents, who are separated, arrived from Utica. They stayed with him briefly and then left without making any comment. Mr. LaPorte's older brother, Gary, first agreed to speak to reporters, then declined, saying, "Every one knows what happened. I don't want to make a soap opera out of it."

Mr. LaPorte was enrolled as a philosophy student at the Bronx branch of Hunter College. He formerly attended the Columbia University School of General Studies and worked as a Xerox operator in Butler Library on the campus.

He was born in Rome, N.Y., and was an honors graduate of Holy Ghost Academy in Tupper Lake, where he was a class officer and head of the debating society. The youth's original ambition was to be a Trappist monk and for a year, beginning in 1963, he attended the St. John Vianney Seminary in Barre, Vt. His friends said he never gave any reason for withdrawing.

## Members of Group Shocked

A spokesman for the Catholic Worker movement, James H. Forest, said that its members were "deeply shocked, perplexed and grieved by the immolation of Roger LaPorte."

"He never told us what he planned," Mr. Forest said. "If he had we would have discouraged him."

**The New York Times**

Published: November 10, 1965  
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