

Four Chaplains Day 3-FEB 1943

The Four Chaplains, also referred to as the "Immortal Chaplains" or the "Dorchester Chaplains", were four World War II chaplains who died rescuing civilian and military personnel as the troop ship SS Dorchester sank on February 3, 1943. The Dorchester was a civilian liner converted for military service in World War II as a War Shipping Administration troop transport. She was able to carry slightly more than 900 military passengers and crew.

The ship left New York on 23-JAN 1943 en route to Greenland, carrying approximately 900 others, as part of a convoy of three ships escorted by Coast Guard Cutters; Tampa, Escanaba, and Comanche. During the early morning hours 3-FEB 1943 the vessel was torpedoed by the German submarine U-223 off Newfoundland in the North Atlantic. The chaplains helped the other soldiers board lifeboats and gave up their own life jackets when the supply ran out. The chaplains joined arms, said prayers, and sang hymns as they went down with the ship.

The impact of the chaplain's story was deep, with many memorials and coverage in the media. Each of the four chaplains was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and the Purple Heart. The chaplains were nominated for the Medal of Honor but were found ineligible as they had not engaged in combat with the enemy. Instead, Congress created a medal for them, with the same weight and importance as the Medal of Honor.

- George Lansing Fox, Lewistown Pennsylvania
- Alexander David Goode, Brooklyn New York
- Clark Vandersall Poling, Columbus Ohio
- John Patrick Washington, Newark New Jersey

The ship's captain, Hans J. Danielsen, had been alerted that Coast Guard sonar had detected a submarine. Because German U-boats were monitoring sea lanes and had attacked and sunk ships earlier during the war, Captain Danielsen had the ship's crew on a state of high alert even before he received that information, ordering the men to sleep in their clothing and keep their life jackets on. "Many soldiers sleeping deep in the ship's hold disregarded the order because of the engine's heat. Others ignored it because the life jackets were uncomfortable."

During the early morning hours of February 3, 1943, at 12:55 am, the vessel was torpedoed by the German submarine U-223 off Newfoundland in the North Atlantic. The torpedo knocked out the Dorchester's electrical system, leaving the ship dark. Panic set in among the men on board, many of them trapped below decks. The chaplains sought to calm the men and organize an orderly evacuation of the ship and helped guide wounded men to safety. As life jackets were passed out to the men, the supply ran out before each man had one. The chaplains removed their own life jackets and gave them to others. They helped as many men as they could into lifeboats, and then linked arms and, saying prayers and singing hymns, went down with the ship.

As I swam away from the ship, I looked back. The flares had lighted everything. The bow came up high and she slid under. The last thing I saw, the Four Chaplains were up there praying for the safety of the men. They had done everything they could. I did not see them again. They themselves did not have a chance without their life jackets. - Grady Clark, survivor

According to some reports, survivors could hear different languages mixed in the prayers of the chaplains, including Jewish prayers in Hebrew and Catholic prayers in Latin. Only 230 of the 904 men aboard the ship were rescued. Life jackets offered little protection from hypothermia, which killed most men in the water. The water temperature was 34 °F (1 °C) and the air temperature was 36 °F (2 °C). By the time additional rescue ships arrived, "hundreds of dead bodies were seen floating on the water, kept up by their life jackets."

George Lansing Fox, Lewistown Pennsylvania



George L. Fox was born March 15, 1900, in Lewistown, Pennsylvania, the eldest of eight children. When he was 17, he left school and lied about his age in order to join the Army to serve in World War I. He joined the ambulance corps in 1917, assigned to Camp Newton D. Baker in Texas. On December 3, 1917, George embarked from Camp Merritt, New Jersey, and boarded the USS Huron en route to France. As a medical corps assistant, he was highly decorated for bravery and was awarded the Silver Star, Purple Heart and the French Croix de Guerre.

Upon his discharge, he returned home to Altoona, where he completed high school. He entered Moody Bible Institute in Illinois in 1923. He and Isadora G. Hurlbut of Vermont were married in 1923, when he began his religious career as an itinerant preacher in the Methodist faith. He later graduated from Illinois Wesleyan University in Bloomington, served as a student pupil in Rye, New Hampshire, and then studied at the Boston University School of Theology, where he was ordained a Methodist minister on June 10, 1934. He served parishes in Thetford, Union Village, and Gilman, Vermont, and was appointed state chaplain and historian for the American Legion in Vermont.

In 1942, Fox volunteered to serve as an Army chaplain, accepting his appointment July 24, 1942. He began active duty on August 8, 1942, the same day his son Wyatt enlisted in the Marine Corps. After Army Chaplains school at Harvard, he reported to the 411th Coast Artillery Battalion at Camp Davis. He was then reunited with Chaplains Goode, Poling and Washington at Camp Myles Standish in Taunton, Massachusetts, where they prepared to depart for Europe on board the Dorchester.

Alexander David Goode, Brooklyn New York



Reform Rabbi Alexander D. Goode (PhD) was born in Brooklyn, New York on May 10, 1911, the son of Rabbi Hyman Goodekowitz. He was raised in Washington, D.C., attending Eastern High School, eventually deciding to follow his father's footsteps by studying for the rabbinate himself, at Hebrew Union College (HUC), where he graduated with a B.H. degree in 1937. He later received his PhD from Johns Hopkins University in 1940. While studying for the rabbinate at HUC, he worked at the Washington Hebrew Congregation during summer breaks.

He originally applied to become a Navy chaplain in January 1941 but was not accepted. After the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, he applied to the Army, receiving his appointment as a chaplain on July 21, 1942. Chaplain Goode went on active duty on August 9, 1942 and was selected for the Chaplains School at Harvard. Chaplain Goode was then assigned to the 333rd Fighter Squadron in Goldsboro, North Carolina. In October 1942, he was transferred to Camp Myles Standish in Taunton, Massachusetts, and reunited with chaplains Fox, Poling and Washington, who had been among his classmates at Harvard.

Clark Vandersall Poling, Columbus Ohio

Clark V. Poling was born August 7, 1910, in Columbus, Ohio, the son of evangelical minister Daniel A. Poling, who was rebaptized in 1936 as a Baptist minister. Clark Poling studied



at Yale University's Divinity School in New Haven, Connecticut and graduated with his B.D. degree in 1936. He was ordained in the Reformed Church in America, and served first in the First Church of Christ, New London, Connecticut, and then as Pastor of the First Reformed Church, in Schenectady, New York. He married Betty Jung.

With the outbreak of World War II, Poling decided to enter the Army, wanting to face the same danger as others. His father, who had served as a World War I chaplain, told him chaplains' risk and give their lives, too—and with that knowledge, he applied to serve as an Army chaplain, accepting an appointment on June 10, 1942 as a chaplain with the 131st Quartermaster Truck Regiment, reporting to Camp Shelby, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, on June 25. Later he reported to Army Chaplains School at Harvard, where he would meet Chaplains Fox, Goode, and Washington.

John Patrick Washington, Newark New Jersey



John P. Washington was born in Newark, New Jersey on July 18, 1908. He studied at Seton Hall, in South Orange, New Jersey, to complete his high school and college courses in preparation for the Catholic priesthood. He graduated in 1931 with an A.B. Degree, entering Immaculate Conception Seminary in Darlington, New Jersey, where he received his minor orders on May 26, 1933. He served as a subdeacon at all the solemn masses and later became a deacon on December 25, 1934. He was elected prefect of his class and was ordained a priest on June 15, 1935. Father Washington's first parish was at St. Genevieve's, in Elizabeth, New Jersey. He later served at St. Venantius for a year. In 1938, he was assigned to St. Stephen's in Kearny, New Jersey. Shortly after the Pearl Harbor attack of December 7, 1941, he received his appointment as a chaplain in the United States Army, reporting for active duty on May 9, 1942. He was named Chief of the Chaplains Reserve Pool, in Ft. Benjamin Harrison, Indiana, and in June 1942, he was assigned to the 76th Infantry Division in Ft. George Meade, Maryland. In November 1942, he reported to Camp Myles Standish in Taunton, Massachusetts, and met Chaplains Fox, Goode and Poling at Chaplains School at Harvard.

For more information visit: <http://fourchaplains.org>