



The story

Early on Feb. 3, 1943, an enemy torpedo struck the Army transport *Dorchester* as it carried 902 officers and enlisted men, Navy armed guard, merchant seamen and civilian workers in the North Atlantic. The Coast Guard cutter escorts *Comanche* and *Escanaba* rescued 230 men.

As *Dorchester* took on water, four Army chaplains – Lt. George L. Fox (Methodist), Lt. Alexander D. Goode (Jewish), Lt. John P. Washington (Roman Catholic), and Lt. Clark V. Poling (Dutch Reformed) – calmed frightened soldiers, aided the wounded and guided the disoriented toward safety.

On deck, they opened a storage locker and began distributing life jackets. When there were no more available, the chaplains removed their life jackets and gave them to four young men. “It was the finest thing I have seen or hope to see this side of heaven,” said John Ladd, a survivor.

As the ship went down, men in rafts saw the four chaplains, arms linked and braced against the slanting deck, singing hymns and praying.

Congress attempted to confer the Medal of Honor on the chaplains but was prevented by strict requirements of heroism under fire. It authorized a one-time posthumous Special Medal for Heroism, awarded by President Eisenhower in 1961; it was intended to have the same weight and importance as the Medal of Honor.



Lt. George L. Fox

As a medical corps assistant during World War I, Fox was highly decorated for bravery and awarded the Silver Star, Purple Heart and the French Croix de Guerre.

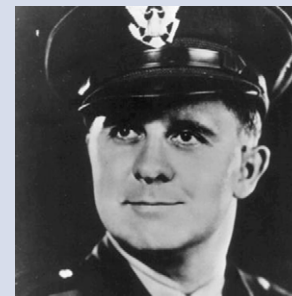
Fox studied at Moody Institute, Illinois Wesleyan and Boston University School of Theology. He and his wife, Isadore, had two children. While serving as a pastor in Gilman, Vt., he joined Walter G. Moore American Legion Post 41. He also served as the Legion's state chaplain and historian.

Fox went on active duty Aug. 8, 1942, the same day his son Wyatt enlisted in the Marine Corps. He was assigned to the Chaplains School at Harvard and reported to the 411th Coast Artillery Battalion at Camp Davis in Holly Ridge, N.C.



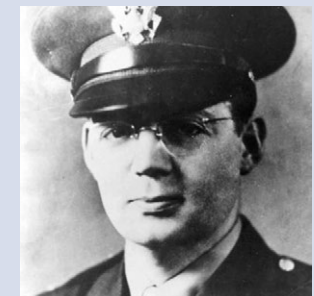
Lt. Alexander D. Goode

Born in Brooklyn, N.Y., in 1911, Goode became a rabbi like his father. He applied to become a Navy chaplain in early 1941, but was not accepted. After Pearl Harbor, he tried again, this time with the Army, and received an appointment on July 21, 1942. He went on active duty on Aug. 9, 1942, and was selected for the Chaplains School at Harvard. He was assigned to the 333rd Airbase Squadron in Goldsboro, N.C. In October 1942, he was transferred to Camp Myles Standish in Taunton, Mass. He and his wife, Theresa, had one daughter.



Lt. Clark V. Poling

Clark attended high school in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., where he was student body president and a football halfback. He was ordained in the Reformed Church in America and served as pastor of First Reformed Church in Schenectady, N.Y. He and his wife, Betty, had a son, Clark Jr. When America entered World War II, he decided to become a chaplain. Talking with his father, who served as a chaplain in World War I, he learned that chaplains in that war had the highest mortality rate of all military personnel. On June 10, 1942, Poling was appointed a chaplain with the 131st Quartermaster Truck Regiment and reported to Camp Shelby in Mississippi. Two months after *Dorchester's* sinking, Betty gave birth to their daughter.



Lt. John P. Washington

Born into a poor immigrant family, Washington took a newspaper route to help support his family. He loved music and sang in the church choir. In seventh grade, he sensed a call to the priesthood.

Washington attended Immaculate Conception Seminary in Darlington, N.J., where he was ordained a priest in 1935. Shortly after the Pearl Harbor attack, he received his appointment as an Army chaplain. In June 1942, he was assigned to the 76th Infantry Division at Fort Meade, Md. In November 1942, he reported to Camp Myles Standish in Taunton, Mass., where he was reunited with Fox, Goode and Poling – his classmates at Chaplains School at Harvard.

How we remember them

Every year, American Legion posts nationwide commemorate the selfless acts of the Four Chaplains on or near Feb. 3, designated Four Chaplains Day by Congress in 1948. Through interfaith services, memorial ceremonies and other solemn events, members of the American Legion Family lead their communities in honoring the

chaplains and 668 other men who died when *Dorchester* sank.

Founded in 1951, the Chapel of Four Chaplains in Philadelphia encourages and supports these observances, and recognizes selfless service to community, nation and humanity through its Legion of Honor award program.



Four Chaplains

The Power of Truth

A German torpedo found its target.

In the early morning of February 3, 1943, the *Dorchester*, a transport for the United States Army, was struck by a German torpedo as she neared Greenland. The ship capsized and sank in less than 20 minutes. Of the 900 passengers, only 229 survived.

Four chaplains were aboard the *Dorchester*.

Each were of a different faith: Lt. Clark V. Poling, Dutch Reformed, Lt. George L. Fox, Methodist, Lt. John P. Washington, Catholic, and Lt. Alexander D. Goode, Jewish. Motivated by love of God, country, and neighbor, all four had volunteered and trained at the Army Chaplains School at Harvard University. They were journeying to their first assignment during World War II.

They preached courage during the chaos.

As the ship took on water, pandemonium broke out among the service men, merchant seaman, and civilians. The Army chaplains spread out among them, preaching courage and giving comfort. Where was their strength coming from, in the midst of fear and terror?

They gave their lives so that others may live.

Most astounding in the bedlam enveloping the *Dorchester* was the act Engineer Grady Clark witnessed. When all of the life jackets had been distributed, the four chaplains removed theirs and gave them to four frightened men. John Ladd, another survivor, testified, "It was the finest thing I have seen or hope to see this side of heaven."

Survivors were moved by their heroic example.

In nearby rafts, survivors recall seeing the four chaplains as the ship slanted, sank, and disappeared. They were arm in arm offering prayer, four faiths uniting in petition to one God. Some say they heard singing. Every witness was struck by the selflessness, fierce faith, and heroism of these brave men.

This shows us how truth can transform our lives.

The chaplains gave their lives because they were convinced of the goodness of God. They were certain that death would not have the final say; they would soon be with God in heaven. Their love of God gave them courage to lay down their lives for their brothers. Truth helped these four men become the heroes God needed them to be.

