

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.

