



Holy Chaplains: Faith, Sacrifice, and Brotherhood Aboard the Dorchester

In the long history of American military service, there are moments so full of courage and charity that they transcend time, rank, and creed. One such moment was on February 3, 1943, in the icy waters of the North Atlantic. It was there, aboard the U.S. Army transport Dorchester, that four chaplains gave their lives so that others might live. Their witness stands as a powerful example of Christ-like sacrifice, lived not in theory, but in the most terrible and beautiful of circumstances.

The Dorchester was carrying more than 900 soldiers, sailors, and civilian workers to a base in Greenland when a German U-boat mortally struck her with a torpedo. In the darkness and chaos that followed alarms blaring, steam hissing, men scrambling through narrow passageways, fear threatened to overwhelm discipline. Among those who moved calmly into the panic were four chaplains: Father John P. Washington (Catholic), Reverend George L. Fox (Methodist), Reverend Clark V. Poling (Dutch Reformed), and Rabbi Alexander D. Goode (Jew). These men did not seek survival for themselves. Instead, they sought souls. Eyewitnesses tell us they guided the wounded, distributed life jackets, and prayed with the dying. When the supply of life jackets ran out, each chaplain made the same unspoken decision: he removed his own and placed it on another man. In doing so, they fulfilled the words of Our Lord with astonishing clarity: “Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

As the Dorchester slipped beneath the waves, survivors later recalled seeing the four chaplains standing together on the deck, arms linked, praying aloud. Some heard the *Our Father*. Others heard *Psalms 23*. Different words, different traditions, but one unified act of faith, hope, and love. This unity is not accidental. In the face of death, charity eclipses division. The four chaplains did not debate doctrine; they lived the Gospel. Their sacrifice reminds us that authentic faith is proven not by comfort, but by courage; not by words alone, but by deeds of self-giving sacrifice.

For veterans, especially those who have faced combat or loss, the Four Chaplains stand as brothers-in-arms who never abandoned their post. For chaplains, they are a standard: shepherds who stayed when it would have been easy to flee. For all of us, they are a reminder that holiness is often forged in darkness, revealed in moments when no one expects heroism and yet heaven does.

In our prayer, we commend Chaplains Father Washington, Reverend Fox, Reverend Poling, and Rabbi Goode to the mercy of Almighty God, confident that Jesus, who said, “Blessed are the peacemakers,” and “Blessed are the merciful,” welcomed them home. Their bodies were lost to the sea, but their example endures in the soul of our nation and the conscience of every servicemember. May their memory strengthen us in our own trials, and may we, when called upon, have the grace to love as they loved, faithful unto death.

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them.
May their souls, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.

God love you!!!
Yours in Christ,
Kyle F. Moore, Th.M
MSgt, USAF Ret.
Chaplain, VFW Post 6287

Deus Vult. Pro Deo et Patria