

The Story of the Four Immortal Chaplains

A convoy of three ships and three escorting Coast Guard cutters passed through "torpedo alley" some 100 miles off the coast of Greenland at about 1 a.m. on February 3, 1943. The submarine U-223 fired three torpedoes, one of which hit the midsection of the *Dorchester*, a U.S. Army troopship with more than 900 men on board. Ammonia and oil were everywhere in the fast-sinking vessel and upon the freezing sea.

The four Chaplains on board, two Protestant pastors, a Catholic priest and a Jewish rabbi, were among the first on deck, calming the men and handing out life jackets. When they ran out, they took off their own and placed them on waiting soldiers without regard to faith or race.

Approximately 18 minutes from the explosion, the ship went down. They were the last to be seen by witnesses; they were standing arm-in-arm on the hull of the ship, each praying in his own way for the care of the men.

"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

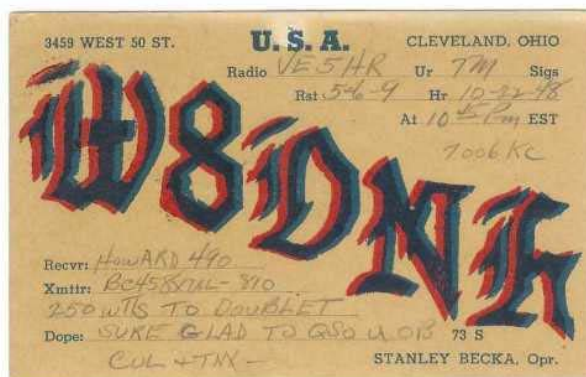
Almost 700 died, making it the third largest loss at sea of its kind for the United States during World War II. The Coast Guard Cutter Tampa was

able to escort the other freighters to Greenland. Meanwhile the cutters Comanche and Escanaba, disobeying orders to continue the search for the German U-Boat, stopped to rescue 230 men from the frigid waters that night.

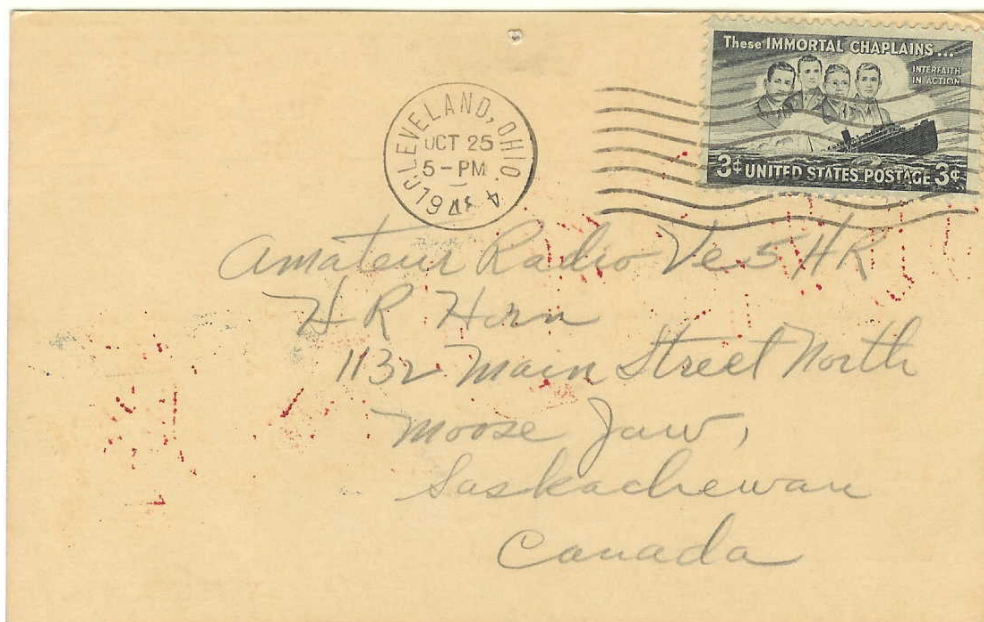
The four Chaplains were **Father John Washington** (Catholic), **Reverend Clark Poling** (Dutch Reformed), **Rabbi Alexander Goode** (Jewish) and **Rev. George Fox** (Methodist). These four Chaplains were later honored by the Congress and Presidents. They were recognized for their selfless acts of courage, compassion and faith. According to the First Sergeant on the ship, "They were always together, they carried their faith together." They demonstrated throughout the voyage and in their last moments, interfaith compassion in their relationship with the men and with each other. In 1960 Congress created a special Congressional Medal of Valor, never to be repeated again, and gave it to the next of kin of the "Immortal Chaplains."

On December 19, 1944, all four chaplains were posthumously awarded the Purple Heart and the Distinguished Service Cross. The Four Chaplains' Medal was established by act of Congress on July 14, 1960, and was presented posthumously to their next of kin by Secretary of the Army Wilber M. Brucker at Ft. Myer, Virginia on January 18, 1961 ^[4].

The chaplains were also honored with a stamp, issued in 1948 and by an act of Congress designating February 3 as "Four Chaplains Day."



This W8DNH old QSL Card from Oct 22, 1948 was mailed using the Four Immortal Chaplains 3 cent stamp.



W8DNH OLD QSL Card from the Collection

“QSL Cards from the Past”

Scripted by Wikipedia and Immortal Chaplains Foundation website.