

Memorandum

To: Board of Supervisors
From: Charles Culley, County Administrator
Date: February 2, 2021
Re: Proposed Adoption of Four Chaplains Proclamation at February 3 Board
Worksession

Attached is a proclamation declaring Sunday, February 7, 2021 as Four Chaplains Sunday in Caroline County prepared at the request of Supervisor Sili and Caroline County American Legion Memorial Post 221 Commander William Rooney. The proclamation honors four chaplains who sacrificed their lives for others by giving their life jackets to four soldiers as the troopship DORCHESTER went down after being hit by a German torpedo during World War II.

The proclamation is proposed for addition to the February 3rd Board worksession agenda so that the Board can consider it prior to Four Chaplains Sunday on February 7th. Additional information on the story of the four chaplains is attached.

**CAROLINE COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
PROCLAMATION**

WHEREAS, February 3, 2021 will mark the seventy-eighth anniversary of the sinking of the troopship DORCHESTER, which carried to their deaths four Chaplains of three faiths who stood united in prayer as the ship went down; and

WHEREAS, these four Chaplains, Roman Catholic, Jewish and Protestant gave their own life-jackets to four soldiers and thus sacrificed their own lives to save the lives of others; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting at a time when the freedom of the world is imperiled that the County of Caroline, Virginia should give special recognition to the memory of those who sacrificed their lives for the cause of freedom; and

WHEREAS, the heroic deed of the four Chaplains and their combined act of supreme devotion and sacrifice for American liberty and human freedom will be an inspiring and ever shining example of real brotherhood for all time to the people of the world; and

WHEREAS, we must all see to it that their supreme sacrifice to the cause of human freedom and justice for all shall not have been made in vain.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Caroline County Board of Supervisors does hereby designate February 7, 2021 to be observed as Four Chaplains Sunday in Caroline County and calls upon all citizens to commemorate the day with appropriate observances in public places and by prayers in their homes and house of worship.

Adopted this 3rd day of February 2021.

Chairman
Reginald L. Underwood

Clerk
Charles M. Culley, Jr.

STORY OF THE FOUR CHAPLAINS

... a rendezvous with destiny, February 3, 1943

The freighter rose and fell sluggishly at her pier, with the dark waves slapping at her sides. The garish New England night was full of shadows and the sound of winches, screeching cranes, and the shuffling cadence of weary troops. One of the black shadows hung over the stern of the freighter almost obliterating her name ... the DORCHESTER.

The vessel was old and small, and only the exigencies of total war had forced her transformation into the troopship. On this night in mid-January, 1943 she was being loaded with troops at the Massachusetts port; her destination hidden in an envelope of secret orders.

Soldiers, 904 men in all, tramped through the companion-way down into the bowels of the ship. Naked light bulbs showed them their quarters -- bunks hastily built into the hold, four tiers high, six meager feet of space per man. Among their number walked four chaplains. Their names - Fox, Goode, Poling, and Washington - told nothing.

At 0600 the next morning the DORCHESTER cast off her lines and headed out to sea. The men grew tense with fear of the unknown moments ahead, and rumors as to their destination flew across the ship. Only the sky pilot knew they were headed for Greenland.

At this period of World War II, allied shipping, under constant attack by wolf packs of Nazi U-boats, were being sunk almost as fast as it could be built. All available destroyers were sent to guard the carriers and battlewagons pounding the Japanese Islands in the far Pacific and the vital convoys to the United Kingdom. For such as the lumbering DORCHESTER, there were only a few Coast Guard cutters and make-do craft for escort.

Day became night and night became day as the little convoy followed the course to Greenland. As the month of January ran out, the four chaplains bunked, talked, and worked together, comforting the sick, reassuring the troubled ones, and joined in the singing and daily banter. All admired them, because, while they were men of GOD, they were first of all real men.

A mysterious sense of danger was prevalent throughout the ship. On the evening of the second day of the new month one of the three escort's Coast Guard cutters blinked a message across the water:

"WE ARE BEING FOLLOWED BY A SUBMARINE."

The P.A. System crackled with orders, and the crew jumped to their guns! The DORCHESTER'S engine whined and labored to gain speed but could push the ungainly freighter along at only ten knots. The convoy stopped briefly at St. John's, Newfoundland and then moved on northeastward through the strange whiteness of an Arctic night.

On the next morning, February third, the ship's bells sounded one o'clock. They never sounded again. A minute later a torpedo smashed into the DORCHESTER well below the water line amid ship.

The torpedo exploded with all its terrific fury in the engine room! Bursting steam lines fatally scalded the engineers and oilers with cruel abandon. The sea rushed into the hole like a tidal wave, drowning a hundred men like rats in a trap.

Stark panic whipped across the ship, blotting out in an instant the so-newly acquired training in discipline and survival. Men cursed bitterly and others wept -- as they struggled feverishly with boats and lines. Others rushed below deck in search of forgotten life belts - never to return.

Through this scene of terror moved a few strong men, purposeful, calm, and seemingly unafraid. Among these were the four chaplains, rushing everywhere about the ship, in the terror-ridden interior and on the crazily tilted deck, giving some men the strength to live and others the courage to die.

Suddenly, the ship shivered and men everywhere cried out - "She's going down! We'll be sucked under!"

The chaplains sensed the threat. "Over the side men, make it fast," they cried. The wind tore the words from their lips. "Get away from the ship before it pulls you down!"

Men looked at the four chaplains with new wonder, seeking a sign, some symbol to carry with them into the valley of death.

One man, more boy than man, made his way to the group at the rail. "Padre, I've lost my life-jacket. I can't swim. I'll..." One of the chaplains tore off his own and put it about the boy's shoulders. "take this. I'm staying. I won't need it." The soldier tied the jacket's strings, mounted the rail, and dipped into the sea - now almost level with the deck.

The other chaplains followed without hesitation, with the full realization that there could be no survival in the icy sea without their life jackets.

During the last dying moments of the freighter, four chaplains, their crosses on their collars and one with the Tablets of the Law on his, stood with arms linked in devoted prayer as the vessel's bow came up and then slid under the raging surface.

Somewhere off in the seething seas four other men escaped the jaws of death, supported by the chaplains' lifejackets.

Of the 904 men aboard the DORCHESTER, only 209 survived.

Many of these survivors owe their lives to the spiritual courage and supreme sacrifice of the FOUR CHAPLAINS who have passed on a legacy of Brotherhood to all men.

Aboard the DORCHESTER were four U.S. Chaplains - Protestant, Catholic, Jewish - who each in his own way answered the call to serve GOD and man. With arms linked, symbolic of their common bond, the FOUR CHAPLAINS remained praying on the deck until it sank into the black waters of everlasting glory.

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| Rev. George L. Fox | - Methodist |
| Dr. Alexander Goode | - Rabbi (Jewish) |
| Rev. Clark V. Poling | - Reformed (Dutch) |
| Father John P. Washington | - Catholic |

"Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends."