

# Four Chaplain Sunday



Former Ohio Veterans Home Superintendent George Kinney of American Legion Post 180 and his wife Elfi of the Post Auxiliary take part in the annual Four Chaplains ceremony.

## Service held at the Ohio Veterans Home

The Ohio Veterans Home and the Georgetown American Legion Post 180 celebrated Four Chaplain Sunday on Feb. 3. The event, which commemorates the bravery of four World War II chaplains during the sinking of the USAT Dorchester in January 1943.

Bravery in battle is a human trait that at times results in soldiers receiving medals. But in the heat of battle a soldier may carry out a heroic act without thinking. Innately reacting. Not considering the gravity of the situation.

Bravery in wartime, when the soldier has a prior moment to reflect on the consequences of his actions, both to himself and to others, is far less common.

Arguably, it is also more courageous.

So it was with four Army chaplains in the icy north Atlantic during World War II, 70 years ago this week.

The Ohio Veterans Home and Georgetown American Legion Post 180 celebrate the Four Chaplains each February. Participating in the ceremony this year were Post Chaplain Bill Graybill, Commander Joe Farrell, Mike Baker, George Kinney, Dick Courts, Jim Beckly, Butch Davis, Al Spiller, and Jack Ormes.

From the Post Auxiliary Kathy Farrell, Elfi Kinney, Vicky Colburn and Pam Gossett lit a candle for each of the Four Chaplains.

Although general awareness of the Four Chaplain story has faded a bit over time, the ceremony at the Veterans Home is not unique.

At VA Hospitals, churches, American Legion Posts, Jewish Community Centers, and hundreds of other locations around the country, thousands of veterans, religious leaders, community volunteers and families gather during the first few days of February to celebrate the heroism and faith of four special men.

The chaplains, John P. Washington, a Catholic priest; Protestant ministers Clark V. Poling and George L. Fox; and Jewish Rabbi Alexander D. Goode; had met at the Army Chaplains School at Harvard University in

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1942.

There is an Ohio connection with two of the chaplains. Poling was born in Columbus. Goode graduated from Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati.

After completing Army Chaplains School the four were assigned to units that would fight in Europe.

They shipped out of New York Harbor late in January 1943 on a former civilian cruise ship. The Dorchester had been converted as a troop transport and renamed the United States Army Transport Dorchester.

The first leg of the journey was to take them to Greenland. But, in the early morning hours of Feb. 3, 1943 the ship was struck by torpedoes from a German U-boat. It sank in less than a half-hour.

As the ship was taking on water the Four Chaplains spread out among the men offering prayers and encouragement.

The chaplains opened a storage locker on deck and began handing out life jackets. When there

were no more life jackets, the chaplains removed their own and gave them to four frightened young men.

The act was completely void of selfishness. Rabbi Goode did not seek a Jew to hand his life jacket to; Father Washington did not look for a Catholic; Chaplains Poling and Fox probably didn't even know the religion the men who received their life jackets. Those young men were simply the next four soldiers in line.

The Four Chaplains then stood together on the deck, locked arms and prayed for the safety of the men as the Dorchester slowly slid beneath the waves. Only 230 of the 902 men on board survived but they told the story of the Four Chaplains.

In 1944, the Four Chaplains were posthumously awarded the Purple Heart and the Distinguished Service Cross.

Congress attempted to confer the Medal of Honor on each chaplain but astonishingly their acts did



The Four Chaplains Medal.

not qualify. The Medal of Honor is awarded for acts of heroism "under fire." The Four Chaplains acts of heroism took place after the torpedo attack and the ship was technically no longer under fire.

Periodically veterans' organizations such as the American Legion have asked Congress to revisit the Medal of Honor question to no avail.

Congress did authorize the Four Chaplains' Medal in 1960.

In 1988 Congress established Feb. 3 as "Four Chaplains Day" each year.