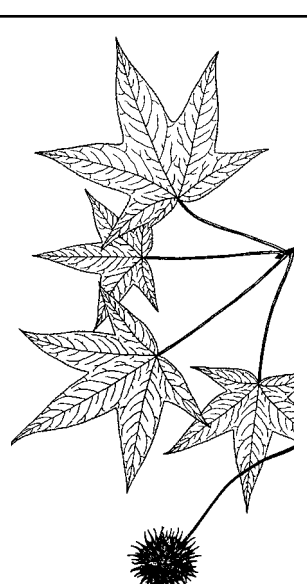


The Four Chaplains of the Dorchester



to the tragedy that was brought about in the North Atlantic Ocean in 1943. While the tragedy did not directly involve any of the folks in Choctaw County, its results affected all of us as a people. At that time, World War II had been raging for over a year, and very few things were going in America's favor. German u-boats, operating off the east coast of the United States had claimed 87 U.S. ships, mostly tankers that carried oil from Gulf Coast refineries to cities along the east coast.

From the time that the United State entered the war, its primary objective was to launch a land invasion of Germany, and many extreme cold caused the military to reconsider that effort.

The island, while the biggest in the world in area, become one of the smallest in habitable regions because eighty per cent of it is covered by an icecap whose average thickness is 5,000 feet. Scientists believe the ice is two miles thick in some areas. To encourage migration to the island, Leif Ericson, the Viking explorer who discovered it in 982, named it Greenland, and that part of its illusionary history still remains. The island has been a part of Denmark since Ericson, discovered it, but because Denmark was unable to guarantee its security during the war, the county made the United States a protectorate of it. This worked to America's advantage, and several Army bases were established in southeastern Greenland, which is the only populated region.

The war effort was going very badly in the winter of 1942, and a depressive gloom hung over the country. Fortunately, a way out of the gloom was taking shape, and ironically, it was

coming about without any planning. It was coming together at Harvard University and would give this country one of its finest moments, but at a very high cost.

Because of the large number of young men who entering the armed forces, the government established a Chaplain College at Harvard. It was actually a part of the Harvard Divinity School. The student chaplains were taught the value of first listening to the troops. Even if the chaplain could render no service, much was achieved by just listening. That is pretty good advice, even outside the armed services.

There has been a chaplain corps within the armed services since the first days of the Revolutionary War. When the war started, the chaplains were merely volunteer ministers, but before the war ended, they were commission officers. They were added to the other branches of the services a little later, but chaplains have been a part of the fabric of military life since the United States has been a country.

Four of the students at the Chaplain College at Harvard quickly bonded together in November 1942. They had very much in common, and one of them, Rev. George Fox, even had some prior military service. He enlisted in the Army on the same day that his 18 year old son joined the Marines Corps. But this was not his first experience, for he did a little manipulating with his age in World War I and somehow turned a 17 year old boy into an 18 year old man.

His manipulating fooled the army, and Fox served as a medic with distinction in France. He was decorated by the French Government with the Croix De Guerra Medal, and also received the American Silver Star

and the Purple Heart. When World War II began, he wanted to heal the wounds of the soul. It was proper that he enlisted in the Chaplain Corps.

Rev. Clark Poling was reared in Ohio and a few other places, because he was a minister's son, and not just any minister, either. His father was Rev. Daniel Poling, the syndicated columnist and radio commentator who was read and heard throughout the duration of the war. He enlisted in the Chaplain Corp upon the advice of his father who convinced him that wounds of the spirit also needed healing.

Rabbi Alexander Goode's father was a rabbi, and "Alex" followed in his footsteps by studying to be a rabbi while serving in the National Guard. When the war started, he joined the regular Army and asked for the Chaplain Corp.

Perhaps the most unlikely person in the group was Father John Washington, for he certainly did not resemble a warrior. He loved music, especially classical, and was a good interpreter of Beethoven on the piano and Bach on the organ. He was reared in Newark, New Jersey and led a street gang while still a teenager. After being called into the ministry, he returned to Newark and tried to lead stay kids in the right path. It was his ambition to do the same with lost kids who were in the armed services, and that was why he joined the Chaplain Corp.

America was really in a bind when the war began, for armed forces were very thin indeed. There was a vast shortage of men, ships, planes, guns, ammunition, and most of the other assets that contributed to sustaining a group of men on a battlefield and winning a war. However, the country had no choice but

to go to war with what it had. War is seldom convenient.

Because of those critical shortages, every available ship and plane that could be used was pressed into service. One ship, the U.S.A.T. Dorchester, was an aging coastal luxury liner that was no longer beautiful. When the government learned that it was available, it was pressed into service to transport servicemen.

Since it would carry nothing but men, all non-essential pieces of furniture were removed from the ship, and cots were crammed into every available space. The aim was to transport as many fighting men as possible on each voyage. While the ship waited a few days to be replenished, and for the men to board, Hans Danielson, a merchant mariner who was the Dorchester's Captain, studied his voyage plans.

The ship was to depart for an Army base in Greenland. It was late January, and the Atlantic is always filled with ice floes at that time of year. Winds often reach gale force in the winter, and there were many other natural dangers.

But Hans knew that the greatest danger was the presence of German submarines in the area. The Germans had recently been sinking allied ships at the rate of 100 every month, and there was nothing that an unarmed troop ship could do against a submarine.

The ship would sail through a very dangerous part of the ocean where subs had claimed so many ships that it was called "Torpedo Junction." Well, the captain had sailed through those waters on previous trips, and orders were orders that had to be obeyed, for even though he was a Merchant Mariner, it was wartime and his orders came directly from Naval head-

quarters.

On the night of January 23, 1943, the Dorchester had its full complement of men on board. Since time was of the essence, the captain ordered his men to cut loose from the berth and set sail. As the giant propeller of the engine gradually picked up speed, the giant ship slipped almost silently away into the vast and icy Atlantic. Everyone knew that the voyage would take about eleven days, if the weather was good, and even longer in bad weather.

None of the men had ever been to sea before, so most of them suffered for the first few days from seasickness. All that was also mingled with the fear and loneliness that comes from being away from home. As they struggled with their fear and insecurities, the four chaplains moved among the men and offered whatever comfort they could give. It was easy to see that the trip would be a long and tiresome ordeal.

It seemed that somehow the days and nights slipped by, and the tenth day, almost until sunset, passed without incident. Shortly before nightfall on February 2, the ship received a radio message from its Coast Guard escort that had picked up sonar readings during the day that indicated the presence of enemy submarines in the area. The Captain checked his charts and realized that the ship was in Torpedo Junction.

The ship was only 150 miles from Greenland, but the captain ordered the men, who seemed unafraid, to sleep in their clothing and life jackets. A German Submarine captain monitored the ship through his scope. Just before one in the morning, he gave his order --

"Fire."

The weather in February seems to have a mind of its own. It fools us every year with its ground hog, and some folks maintain that it even fools the hog. Even so, the weather in the period follows a distinct pattern, for February is a winter month and holds with that tradition, even while flirting with spring in its last days. About the best thing about the month is its closing.

One has to be careful in February because the long hours of darkness and cold can bring on depression. However, that feeling can be lifted by remembering times that were worse and seeing the shafts of inspiration and light that came about in spite of the gloom. While we hope to never see such gloom again, a memorable view of it will present a moment of inspiration that will never be exceeded.

This week and next, consideration will be given



Honeysuckle Garden Club purchases tables for town

GILBERTOWN -- The Honeysuckle Garden met at the Gilbertown Senior Citizens Nutrition Center building for the February meeting.

President Lavon Bonner called the meeting to order and Mary Coody led in prayer.

Roll call was answered with "something sweet". Answers given were from candy to grandchildren. After a lengthy business meeting, club members got into the pro-

gram for the day. They made Valentine bags for each senior who had a meal there the next day.

Plans were made to take a trip to Bellengrath Gardens in March. This will be the butterfly program for the club along with the enjoyment of the trip.

Thanks to program chairperson Christine Nickell, many good and fun programs have been planned for the club this

year. After refreshments, club members went across Ala. 17 to gather around one of the new picnic tables for a picture. The club purchased these sets of tables for the town of Gilbertown a few months back and we feel that they are an asset to the town and hope all will enjoy them.

The Honeysuckle Garden Club is a member of The Garden Clubs of Alabama, Inc.

Choctaw Sun photo by Tommy Campbell
AT LEFT: Honeysuckle members gather on one of the picnic tables that they recently purchased for the town of Gilbertown.



Submitted photo

Honeysuckle Garden Club members recently made Valentine bags for seniors at the Gilbertown Nutrition Center.

**A benefit for Ronnie Mosley
will be held at
Needham/Land Fire
Department
Saturday, February 24.
Grilled chicken and fried fish
plates will be sold beginning
at 11 a.m.
Please come out support this
fund-raising effort**