

"Nearer my God to Thee ..."

# These immortal Chaplains

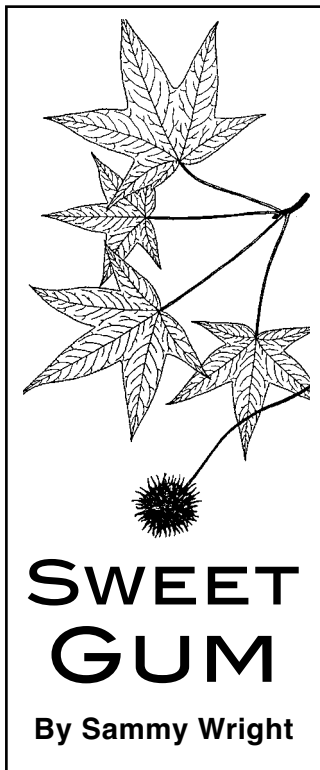
## PART TWO

After Hans Danielson, the Dorchester's Captain, was alerted about the presence of enemy submarines in Torpedo Junction, he fully appreciated the precarious position of his ship. If he could make it through the hours of approaching darkness, air cover would arrive at day-break to accompany the ship to Greenland. In that area of the sea, however, the nights were extremely long and very dark.

Fully aware of the potential for disaster, the Captain asked the soldiers to sleep in their clothing and life jackets. However, while the outer surface of the ship was covered with several inches of ice, it was hot and sweaty in the sleeping quarters because too many bodies were closely packed together in the cramped spaces. Clothing and life jackets were hot and bulky, so many of the soldiers set them aside.

The first torpedo scored a direct hit, and the quietness and darkness of the early morning were shattered by the blinding explosion. A second torpedo instantly followed the first. Power in the engine room was knocked out, and water rushed through the gaping holes in the ship's hull. The ship tilted at an angle and began to sink rapidly. The clothing and life jackets were thrown about in the darkness as the terrified soldiers screamed in agony.

As the men groped in the darkness, trying to find their way to the deck, the four chaplains spoke words of comfort in calm voices as they moved



through the darkness and tried to bring order to the chaos. Many of the soldiers made it to the deck while still dressed in only their underwear, and faced the cold arctic wind. The chaplains tried to put aside their own fears while ministering to the men.

Maybe Chaplain Fox thought of his own son in the Marines, or his seven-year-old daughter at home. Was there any comparison, other than their ages, between his own son and the men on the Dorchester? Most of them were from the fields and small towns of America. Even though they were just teens, or slightly beyond those years, their memories were filled with bitter experiences from the Great Depression. It

seemed to some of the young soldiers that life was one unbroken series of bitter experiences.

Chaplain Poling left an infant at home, and within a few months his wife would be giving birth to their second child. Chaplain Goode had a wife and three year old daughter at home, and he often looked at the pictures of them that he carried in the wallet. He must have wondered, in that hour of fitful darkness, if he would ever see them again. There was one thing for sure, the terms rabbi, reverend, and father were meaningless in that hour of peril, for all the soldiers wanted was a little comfort a man of the cloth.

Before boarding the ship in January, Rev. Poling asked his father to pray for him, "not for my return, for that wouldn't be fair. Just pray that I will do my duty and not be a coward." He probably never expected that his request would be granted so soon. All the men on the Dorchester that night were filled with courage, and the four chaplains became heroes as they spoke comforting words to the wounded and dying soldiers and somehow, helped usher them out into eternity.

As a Catholic Priest, Father Washington was unmarried, but he had eight brothers and sisters at home who were worried and concerned about his welfare. He confidently told them before leaving that he expected to be okay, and his assurance seemed to comfort them.

The men on the Dorchester were young,



The bravery, courage and faith of Chaplains Fox, Poling, Washington and Goode was commemorated in 198 on a three-cent U.S. Postage Stamp. For more on these men of faith and their ultimate sacrifice -- "so that others might live" -- readers may log on to [www.fourchaplains.org](http://www.fourchaplains.org), or [www.immortalchaplains.org](http://www.immortalchaplains.org).

inexperienced soldiers, not sailors with sea experiences in their past. In the darkness and chaos, they knew nothing about boats. Some of the empty lifeboats floated out to sea before men could board them, and others capsized as panicking men overloaded them. Everything was mass confusion and fear.

The four chaplains tried to organize the men on the deck, but most of their efforts were wasted. Twenty minutes after the first torpedo hit, the ship was almost gone. Icy waves swept over the deck and tossed men into the sea, many of them without life jackets. In the last minutes, the chaplains opened lockers and passed out life vests to the men in line, even while ignoring threats to their own safety.

Water began to flow in an unbroken steam across the deck of the ship. Working against the odds,

the chaplains continued to pass out life jackets from the lockers, but only until the lockers were empty. The men still in line realized that their lives were over. There remained no more hope.

But there was hope, at least for four men. In that moment, something that can only be described as a man-made miracle happened. The four chaplain began taking off their own life jackets and fastening them around four of the men who were still waiting. In so doing, they sacrificed their own hopes for survival. In short, they gave their own lives so that others might live.

Then time ran out, and the chaplains could do no more for the men who remained or for themselves. The fortunate men in the lifeboats tried to distance their boats from the sinking ship so as not to be pulled under the waves. Twenty-seven minutes after the first torpedo

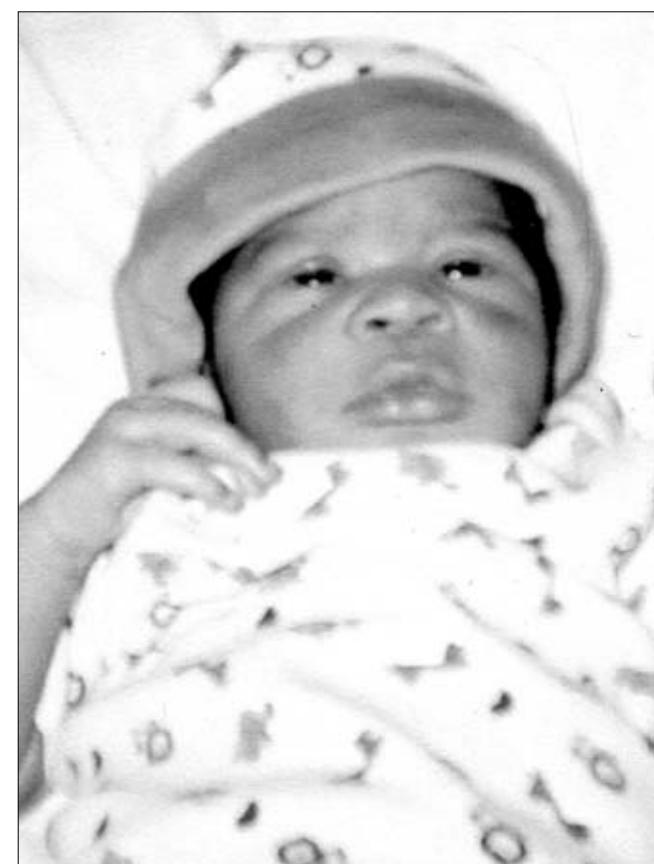
struck, the U.S.A.T. Dorchester Slipped beneath the waves of the North Atlantic.

The sinking ship carried any survivors who were in the water nearby with it, along with the four chaplains who somehow found strength in their diversity and rejoiced in their differences. They finally realized that they were not really so far apart after all. Only 230 men were rescued from the icy waters, while 668 went down with the Dorchester.

After the survivors made their reports, there was no attempt to silence or hide the facts and the news about the Dorchester and the four chaplains was released at once. The country needed the shafts of light and inspiration that came about because of the experience, and the news did cause the country to rally even more closer to our fighting men. The picture of the chaplains were passed out to all the schools, and every child in the educational system soon learned their names.

Some of the words of the survivors were almost beyond belief, for they described a scene that was so filled with strength that it was almost out of comprehension. Looking back from their boat, they saw the tilting deck of the Dorchester as it slipped beneath the waves. In the few seconds before the ship totally disappeared. The survivors saw the four chaplains, their arms linked together, and their voices rising in unison as they sang: "Nearer, my God to thee — — — Nearer to thee."

## New arrivals!



### Cedric Isaiah Thomas

Patricia Taylor would like to announce the birth of her son, Cedric Isaiah Thomas.

He was born at Grove Hill Memorial Hospital in Grove Hill on February 19, 2007 at 5:47 a.m. He weighed seven pounds and 9-1/2 ounces and was 20 inches long.

His maternal grandparents are Ella Taylor and Elijah Thomas of Coffeeville.

Cedric was welcomed home by his big sister Natasha Philon.

## Black History in Choctaw County

### By Ann H. Gay

In 1860, Choctaw County had 460 free persons of color, an unusually large number compared to some other counties in the state. Of these, the 1860 census only listed 16 by name, with no last name given, such as Aggy, Mahaley, Shadrek, Sam and Landy.

Choctaw County ranked 24th out of the state's 67 counties in the number of slaves.

The Slave Censuses of 1850 and 1860 only listed slaves by sex (male or female) and age under the name of the slave holder.

### Jack Turner and Politics

Jack Turner, charismatic ex-slave who lived at Mount Sterling, was a robust, good looking, articulate man, who engaged in politics after the Civil War and paid for it with his life. He was taken all over the state by Radical Republicans, where he spoke, encouraging ex-slaves to register and vote. The white Democrats, no longer in power, did not want the ex-slaves to vote, thus helping the Republicans control local politics.

Jack was in trouble with the law off and on for 10 years or so, but his former owner, plantation owner B.L. Turner or one of his friends, always bailed Jack out of jail. Finally, in 1882, Jack was in a situation that neither he nor his friends could control. A notebook was found with notes about Jack and his "army" who were planning to rise up and kill all the whites. Since there had been such a slave uprising earlier in another state, whites were ready to believe this, and to put an end to the threat. Jack was arrested, taken from the jail by a mob of about 1,000

and lynched on the courthouse square in August of 1882.

He rests in peace in the cemetery at St. John C.M.E. Church in Mount Sterling. The late Anthony Butler placed a marker on his grave in 1995 which states: "Born a slave ..."

### Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. visits Choctaw

During the tumultuous Civil Rights struggles in the 1960s and 1970s, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. visited and spoke twice at the Greater First Baptist Church in Lisman. Also the world-acclaimed Dr. George Washington Carver visited Lisman and stayed overnight in the home of the late J.T. Banks.

### Gordon Parks, world acclaimed photographer

According to the internet Parks was in Choctaw County taking photographs for Life Magazine in the middle of Choctaw's 1971 civil rights demonstrations and protests, resulting in the death of 19 year-old demonstrator Margaret Ann Knott in front of the courthouse. Also here for her funeral was The Rev. Ralph Abernathy, Director of the Southern Christian Leadership Council.

### Billie Jean Young

Billie Jean Young of Pennington, a poet, writer and performer, tours with her monologue based on the life and civil rights activities of Mississippian Fannie Lou Hamer. Her performance is entitled "This Little Light". Young, who holds a Bachelor's and a law degree, won the MacArthur grant, which is given for creativity in several fields, in 1984.

### Inventor Abraham Frank Figgures

Figgures held U.S. Patent # 1,366,253 for an agricultural trench digger. His patent was dated January 18, 1921. Figgures was born at Old Samuel near Gilbertown and Bladon Springs, the son of Lively Figgures, African American, and Amanda Chaney, whose father was a Creek Indian. Figgures' seven children all went on to make successful careers and lives, although they left the area to do so.

### Armstrong Agricultural & Industrial Institute

From 1916-1919 Arthur Wergs Mitchell, a former student of Tuskegee, came to Choctaw County from Sumter County to establish an agricultural and industrial school for blacks at West Butler.

He got the college going but left the county after only a few years. The school never was a success, but Mitchell went on North, studied law, got into politics and was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from Chicago in 1935. He was most famous for his law suit against the Pullman Company seeking equal rights for blacks who rode trains, which he won in the U.S. Supreme Court.

More information on all of these people can be found in the following books:

Choctaw Names and Notes by Ann H. Gay

The Heritage of Choctaw County

August Reckoning: Jack Turner and Racism by Rogers and Ward

## March 17 is National Quilt Day

### By Lavon "Shorty" Bonner

It is about time for you to watch your P's & Q's. March 17 is National Quilt Day and the P's & Q's are planning to be at the Choctaw County Historical Museum in Gilbertown on that day to show some of the things we are working on and maybe answer questions about quilting if you have one to ask. Come by and visit with us and enjoy the things in the museum.

Quilting Tip #7 — When machine quilting, make a test sample using the fabrics and batting which you used in your quilt to check your stitch balance and adjust your upper tension if necessary before quilting on your quilt.

Quilting Tip #8 — Don't be afraid to try unusual color combinations to see how they work together. By doing this you may discover your most beautiful quilt ever!!!

Quilting Tip #9 — To keep your



### Quilting Tips

threads from jamming at the beginning of your seams, use a "starter" scrap of fabric. Start sewing on this small scrap of fabric before you begin your chain piecing. This is especially helpful if you are sewing triangles and have those little points to contend with.

Quilting Tip #10 — A design wall is very helpful for viewing your quilt. It can be as simple as a piece of flannel or fleece pinned on the wall. For a heavier duty board you can use a large piece of foam board covered with flannel or a heavier board from a builder's supply store. Just be sure you can easily stick a pin in the board before you buy.

For help, questions or comments, you can contact me by phone (251) 843-5734 or e-mail me at [jamsbonr@millry.net](mailto:jamsbonr@millry.net).

## Choctaw Community Development Center activities

LAVACA — The Choctaw Community Development Center, Inc. will sponsor a dance on Friday, Feb. 23, from 8 p.m. to 11:45 p.m. at the old East Choctaw School on Highway 10 East. Music by Leon, Admission is \$5.

In other events at the Center, Joshua Victory Assembly will take on Sweet Water R.C. Basketball on Saturday, Feb. 24.

The Center offers After School Programs on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Free tutoring for the Alabama High School Graduation Exam will be available each Tuesday and Thursday from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. beginning Feb. 27.

Adult Computer Classes will also begin February 27 and last for six weeks. The cost will be \$30 per student. Tuesdays and Thursdays from 6-9 p.m.

Every Sunday from 2:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. the center will host the Choctaw Co. and Marengo Co. Basketball Shoot Out. Admission is \$1 for all ages.