

THE IMMORTAL CHAPLAINS

Feb. 3 is Four Chaplains Day. Established by Congress in 1988, the day honors the selfless sacrifice of four Army chaplains who gave their lives to save others during World War II. In 2019, a minimum of 1,663 American Legion posts nationwide observed Four Chaplains Day by conducting interfaith services, ceremonies or other solemn events. Four Chaplains Day kicks off Religious Emphasis Week, a key part of the Legion's "Service to God and Country" program.

THE STORY

On Feb. 2, 1943, the crowded Army transport *Dorchester* made its way across the North Atlantic toward Greenland, carrying 902 servicemen, merchant seamen and civilian workers. At 12:55 a.m. Feb. 3, a German periscope broke the icy waters. An officer aboard U-223 spotted *Dorchester* and gave orders to fire torpedoes. The blast killed scores of men, and many more were seriously wounded; only 230 were rescued. According to survivors, four Army chaplains brought hope in despair and light in darkness: Lt. George L. Fox (Methodist), Lt. Alexander D. Goode (Jewish), Lt. John P. Washington (Roman Catholic) and Lt. Clark V. Poling (Dutch Reformed). As the ship sank and lifejackets ran out, the chaplains removed theirs and gave them to four frightened young men. Men in nearby rafts saw the chaplains, arms linked and braced against the slanting deck, praying aloud. That night, they became an enduring example of extraordinary faith, courage and selflessness.



THE FOUNDATION

The mission of the Four Chaplains Memorial Foundation (FCMF) is to tell the story of the Immortal Chaplains to promote interfaith cooperation and selfless service among individuals and organizations. Each year, donations collected by American Legion departments and posts through Four Chaplains ceremonies and other events support FCMF programs, including the Legion of Honor awards, youth scholarships and veterans outreach. The foundation also sponsors Emergency Chaplain & First Responder Chaplain programs, which assist American Legion chaplains nationwide in responding to natural disasters and emergencies, as well as training for first responder chaplains and mental health professionals.

THE CHAPEL

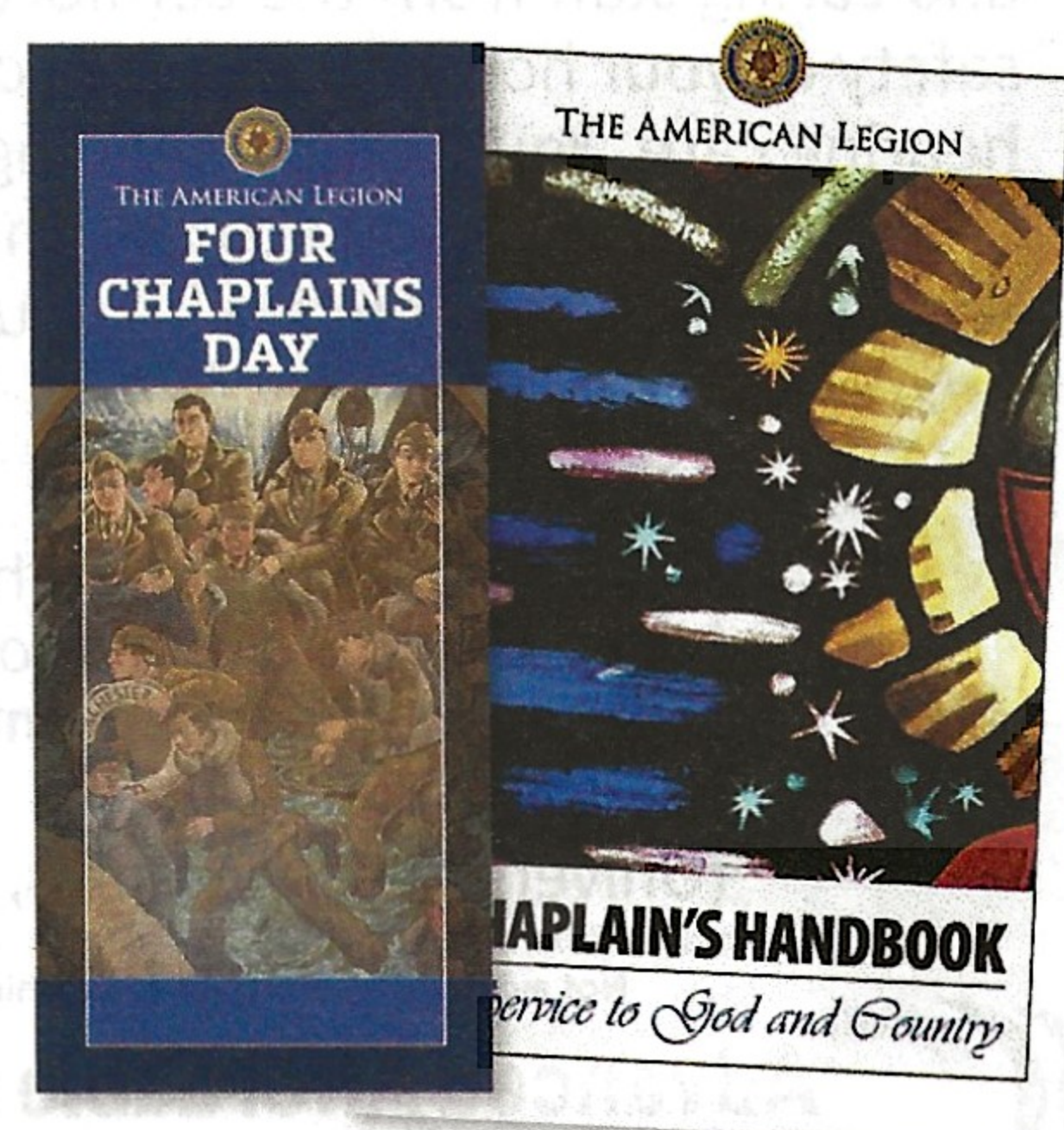
The Chapel of the Four Chaplains opened on the campus of Temple University in Philadelphia on Feb. 3, 1951. President Harry Truman dedicated the interfaith chapel and unveiled a large, 20-foot mural depicting the Four Chaplains during their final moments aboard *Dorchester*. The chapel remained on campus for three decades before renovations forced it to relocate. In 2000, it moved to a decommissioned World War II Navy chapel in Philadelphia, where visitors can view the historic mural, five bronze plaques bearing the names of those who died in *Dorchester's* sinking, and four large portraits of the Four Chaplains.



Photo by Bryan Woolston

Learn more about the Four Chaplains and how to conduct a Four Chaplains Day program by downloading *The American Legion Chaplain's Handbook* and Four Chaplains Day brochure.

legion.org/publications



– Tierian "Randy" Cash, American Legion Department of North Carolina adjutant and past national chaplain