

# National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces

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## **NCMAF Marks 78th Anniversary of the Four Chaplains Heroism by Renewing Call to Update Protestant & Catholic Chaplains Monuments at Arlington National**

New York, February 5, 2021 – The National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces (NCMAF), on the 78<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the heroic efforts of four U.S. Army chaplains aboard the doomed American troop ship *Dorchester*, is renewing its call to update both the existing Protestant and Catholic Chaplains Monuments at Arlington National Cemetery. Many veterans and civic organizations commemorate the heroism of the "Four Chaplains" on the first weekend of February.

NCMAF is again asking Arlington officials, the Department of the Army, and Congress to update the existing Protestant Chaplains Monument with a new plaque that will honor the service of 25 Chaplains affiliated with Protestant denominations, who died in service during the Korean War, Vietnam War, the Cold War Period, and in post 9-11 Conflicts.

The Archdiocese for the Military Services (AMS) has proposed, along with NCMAF, to add to the existing Catholic Chaplains Memorial the name of Major Henry Timothy "Tim" Vakoc, a Roman Catholic priest and a United States Army chaplain during the Iraq War, who died in 2009 from catastrophic injuries he suffered there in 2004.

NCMAF has the funding and material to update the monument at no cost to the Government or Arlington Cemetery. It would replace the aging concrete Protestant Chaplains Monument with a new granite piece in the same shape and size as the current one. Dignity Memorial Company will donate the new granite monument and provide installation.

"The selfless example of the Four Chaplains provided a lasting image of interfaith cooperation and courage," said John H. Lea III, Executive Director of NCMAF. "It is only fitting that we honor these chaplains who, on their first tour of duty, willingly gave their lives so others could live."

"Their enduring legacy is a constant reminder of the dangers in military service and of the important role faith and hope play in the hearts and minds of those who willingly go in harm's way," stated Dr. Klon Kitchen, Chair of NCMAF's Executive Committee. "We want to ensure their courage and contributions will be remembered for generations by adding them to the Chaplains Monument at Arlington National Cemetery."

NCMAF is the successor to the General Commission on Chaplains and Armed Forces Personnel, the group which placed the existing Protestant monument. NCMAF member organizations represent a cross-section of religious life in America. Each one recruits and certifies chaplains for service in the Armed Forces.

NCMAF has partnered for six years with several veterans and civic organizations to update the Protestant Chaplains Monument to add the names of 25 chaplains who died in service during the Korean War, Vietnam, the Cold War, and post 9-11 Conflicts, submitting a formal proposal in July 2019. Two of the chaplains who died in Korean War remain "Missing in Action:" Major Wayne H. Burdue of Sandusky, OH and Captain James W. Connor of Greenville, SC.

The poignant tale of the four U.S. Army chaplains dates to February 3, 1943 when the American troop ship Dorchester sank after being torpedoed by a German U-boat in the icy waters of the North Atlantic. The former commercial ocean liner was carrying more than 900 soldiers and civilians to England from New York City when it was attacked off the coast of Newfoundland.

Four U.S. Army chaplains on board representing different faith groups immediately took action to help soldiers and passengers leave the doomed ship. Survivors told accounts of the "Four Chaplains" giving up their life preservers and gloves as they did all they could to help the soldiers and passengers. 230 people were able to survive the wartime attack while nearly 700 perished, including the "Four Chaplains," who were last seen huddled together praying.

The Four Chaplains were Methodist Minister George L. Fox, Reform Rabbi Alexander Goode, Catholic Priest Fr. John P. Washington, and Reformed Church in America Reverend Clark V. Poling. They became a symbol of selfless service and interfaith cooperation. Many veterans and civic organizations across the country commemorate them annually in early February. The NCMAF is joining them to remember the chaplains with its renewed call to update the Chaplains Monuments at Arlington.

The NCMAF has a track record of working successfully with other veterans' organizations to update Chaplains Hill. In 2011, NCMAF combined efforts with the Jewish War Veterans and other organizations to generate legislation unanimously approved by Congress to add the name of Rabbi Goode, who was the only one of the four "Immortal Chaplains" who had not been so honored there, along with 13 other Jewish chaplains who had died in service.

The NCMAF continues to collaborate with other veterans and civic groups to update the Chaplains Monuments, as the 78<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the iconic story of the Four Chaplains reminds us of their service and the rallying cry that unified America during the dark, challenging times of World War II.

**The National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces (NCMAF)** is a professional organization comprised of over 100 religious organizations that seeks to individually sponsor the very best chaplains for service in the military, VA hospitals, and prisons. Our commitment to the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment, and the "free exercise of religion" is our hallmark and our unifying theme. We are the successors of the organization which first placed monuments on Chaplains Hill at Arlington National Cemetery and remain committed to honoring chaplains of all faiths who died in service to our Nation. We welcome your assistance and participation in this uniquely American endeavor. Please contact us through our website: [www.ncmaf.net](http://www.ncmaf.net); or emailing us at [information@ncmaf.com](mailto:information@ncmaf.com)