

BEALS HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



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BHS PROGRAM TO FEATURE “VOICES FROM THE PAST”

BHS upcoming program meeting will be held at the Heritage Center on Friday, June 14th at 6:30PM. The program will consist of listening to interviews of local people from bygone days, conducted by former BHS President Velton Peabody. Thanks to BHS

member Peggy Hughes, the original cassette tapes have been transferred to cd's and are now ready to present to those interested in hearing firsthand accounts of life in the Moosabec area. We hope you can join us!

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

June 14, 6:30PM @ Beals Heritage Center

Listen to interview cd's recorded in the late 70's and beyond

June 29, 1-4PM @ Beals Heritage Center

Tours, singing and food

September 20, 6:30PM TBA

**PLEASE MARK YOUR
CALENDARS. WE GREATLY
APPRECIATE YOUR
ATTENDANCE!**

NEW BHS EXHIBIT FEATURING BOATBUILDER, HAROLD GOWER

The new exhibit consists of 19 poster-size photos of Harold, working on one of his cedar-planked boats. Each photo shows him using tools of the trade with a description of the building process by his nephew, Douglas Dodge. This is a remarkable collection depicting how wooden boats were once fashioned by one of Beal's Islands very own boatbuilders.

The posters were donated by Paula Lord-Wilson to BHS in memory of her father, Lester John Faulkingham, who was the proud owner of two of Harold's wooden boats. The expense account for each boat can be found in a copy of Harold's records, which are also on display as a reference in BHS "Boats and Fisheries" exhibit.

A CHANGE IN NEWSLETTER DELIVERY

Due to the high costs of printing and snail mailing the newsletter, BHS will be sending it by email only. But we will continue to print and snail mail to our elderly members who do not have email capability. We are

very sorry to reach this point but do feel it is necessary. If you have email and would like to continue to receive the newsletter, please send your address to: cfDavis44@yahoo.com. Thank you!

BHS MEMORIAL DAY CEREMONY

Due to inclement weather, BHS held its Memorial Day program of remembrance indoors at the Heritage Center on Monday, May 27 at 10:00 a.m. Once again, Daniel F. Davis, Chairman of the Beals Board of Selectmen and BHS historian, was master of ceremonies.

After a brief welcome and prayer of invocation, the audience joined in the flag salute using the pre-1980 flag from the old Beals Elementary School that stood on the site now occupied by the Heritage Center and Town Office. Vocalist Debbie Kelley then sang, "God Bless the U.S.A.", a song made famous by national singing star Lee Greenwood.

A poem entitled, "As We Stand Here Looking" was then shared calling to remembrance that the flags on soldiers' graves represent many of America's best and brave. A moment of silent reflection for each fallen soldier, deceased veteran and loved one was observed, followed by "Taps", played by Erin Crowley.

Davis chose to share with the audience the story of the Four Chaplains of WW II, an inspiring story of military heroism that has been told and retold in classrooms and from pulpits across the country. In 1948, a postage stamp was issued to commemorate the heroes of

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JULY 4TH FESTIVITIES

This years Moosabec 4th festivities will be held on Saturday, June 29th. Following the World's Fastest Boat Races, BHS will open the Heritage Center, from 1-4PM, for tours of the exhibits and collections, live music, and a food sale which will consist of crabmeat rolls for \$5, grilled hot dogs and goodies.





this event, but over the years, the story has faded into the past, kept alive by a few veterans' groups, history buffs, and family members of the 672 men who died in the making of that great story. The last of the 230 survivors died on January 12 of this year at the age of 91.

THE STORY IS AS FOLLOWS:

It was the evening of February 2, 1943, and the U.S.A.T. Dorchester was crowded to capacity, carrying 902 service men, merchant seamen, and civilian workers.

Once a luxury coastal liner, the 5,649-ton vessel had been converted into an Army transport ship. The Dorchester, one of three ships in the SG-19 convoy, was moving steadily across the icy waters from Newfoundland toward an American base in Greenland. SG-19 was escorted by Coast Guard Cutters Tampa, Escanaba and Comanche.

Hans J. Danielsen, the ship's captain, was concerned and cautious. Earlier the Tampa had detected a submarine with its sonar. Danielsen knew he was in dangerous waters even before he got the alarming information. German U-boats were constantly prowling these vital sea-lanes, and several ships had already been torpedoed and sunk.

The Dorchester was now only 150 miles from its destination, but the captain ordered the men to sleep in their clothing and keep life jackets on. Many soldiers sleeping deep in the ship's hold disregarded the order because of the engine's heat. Others ignored it because the life jackets were uncomfortable.

On February 3, at 12:55 a.m., a periscope broke the chilly Atlantic waters. Through the crosshairs, an officer aboard the German submarine U-223 spotted the Dorchester.

The U-223 approached the convoy on the surface, and after identifying and targeting the ship, he gave orders to fire the torpedoes and a fan of three were fired. The one that hit was decisive---and deadly---striking the starboard side, amid ship, far below the water line.

Danielsen, alerted that the Dorchester was taking water rapidly and sinking, gave the order to abandon ship. In less than 20 minutes, the Dorchester would slip beneath the Atlantic's icy waters.

Tragically, the hit had knocked out power and radio contact with the three escort ships. The CGC Comanche, however, saw the flash of the explosion. It responded and then rescued 97 survivors. The CGC Escanaba circled the Dorchester, rescuing an additional 132 survivors. The third cutter, CGC Tampa, continued on, escorting the remaining two ships. .

Aboard the Dorchester, panic and chaos had set in. The blast had killed scores of men, and many more were seriously

wounded. Others, stunned by the explosion were groping in the darkness. Those sleeping without clothing rushed topside where they were confronted first by a blast of icy Arctic air and then by the knowledge that death awaited.

Men jumped from the ship into lifeboats, overcrowding them to the point of capsizing, according to eyewitnesses. Other rafts, tossed into the Atlantic, drifted away before soldiers could get in them.

Through the pandemonium, according to those present, four Army chaplains brought hope in despair and light in darkness. Those chaplains were Lieutenant George L. Fox, Methodist; Lieutenant Alexander D. Goode, Jewish; Lieutenant John P. Washington, Roman Catholic; and Lieutenant Clark V. Poling, Dutch Reformed.

Quickly and quietly, the four chaplains spread out among the soldiers. There they tried to calm the frightened, tend the wounded, and guide the disoriented toward safety.

"Witnesses of that terrible night remember hearing the four men offer prayers for the dying and encouragement for those who would live," says Wyatt R. Fox, son of Reverend Fox.

One witness, Private William B. Bednar, found himself floating in oil-smeared water surrounded by dead bodies and debris. "I could hear men crying, pleading, praying," Bednar recalls. "I could also hear the chaplains preaching courage. Their voices were the only thing that kept me going."

Another sailor, Petty Officer John J. Mahoney, tried to re-enter his cabin but Rabbi Goode stopped him. Mahoney, concerned about the cold Arctic air, explained he had forgotten his gloves.

"Never mind," Goode responded. "I have two pairs." The rabbi then gave the petty officer his own gloves. In retrospect, Mahoney realized that Rabbi Goode was not conveniently carrying two pairs of gloves, and that the rabbi had decided not to leave the Dorchester.

By this time, most of the men were topside, and the chaplains opened a storage locker and began distributing life jackets. It was then that Engineer Grady Clark witnessed an astonishing sight.

When there were no more lifejackets in the storage room, the chaplains removed theirs and gave them to four frightened young men.

"It was the finest thing I have seen or hope to see this side of heaven," said John Ladd, another survivor who saw the chaplains' selfless act. Ladd's response is understandable. The altruistic action of the four chaplains constitutes one of the purest spiritual and ethical acts a person can make, an act

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that is spoken of in Scripture when Jesus said, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” When giving their life jackets, Rabbi Goode did not call out that the receiver of his sacrificial gift of life be a Jew; Father Washington did not call out for a Catholic; nor did the Reverends Fox and Poling call out for a Protestant. They simply gave their life jackets to the next man in line.

As the ship went down, survivors in nearby rafts could see the four chaplains---arms linked and braced against the slanting deck. Their voices could also be heard offering prayers.

Of the 902 men aboard the U.S.A.T. Dorchester, 672 died, leaving 230 survivors. When the news reached American shores, the nation was stunned by the magnitude of the tragedy and heroic conduct of the four chaplains.

That night Reverend Fox, Rabbi Goode, Reverend Poling and Father Washington passed life’s ultimate test. In doing so, they became an enduring example of extraordinary faith, courage, and selflessness.

The Distinguished Service Cross and Purple Heart were awarded posthumously December 19, 1944, to the next of kin by Lieutenant General Brehon B. Somervell, Commanding General of the Army Service Forces, in a ceremony at the post chapel at Fort Myer, Virginia.

A one-time only posthumous Special Medal for Heroism was authorized by Congress and awarded by the President Eisenhower on January 18, 1961. Congress attempted to confer the Medal of Honor but was blocked by the stringent requirements that required heroism performed under fire. The special medal was intended to have the same weight and importance as the Medal of Honor.

The program concluded with a tribute to Alvin “Pidge” Beal, who like the Four Chaplains of WW II, has gone down in local history as a hero, and deservedly so. “Valor is a gift,” Carl Sandburg once said. “Those having it never know for sure whether they have it until the test comes.”

That test came for Pidge, a young lobster fishermen from Alley’s Bay in Beals, on Tuesday morning of October 17, 1972 when he lost his life to the waters of the Eastern Bay off the Cape Shore on Great Wass Island. Before the waters claimed his young life, he managed to haul his 49-year-old father, John Beal, Sr. onto the bottom of their overturned outboard boat three times, thus saving his father’s life. John at that time was recovering from surgery for a back condition and was unable to save himself.

In honor of Pidge’s heroic efforts, he was posthumously awarded a certificate of valor by the United States Coast

Guard at a ceremony held March 8, 2013 at the Community of Christ Church in Jonesport. Additionally, he was recognized by Senator Susan B. Collins, among others, for his courage and strength during those tragic hours.

Alvin’s sisters, Mercy Beal and Inez Frazier, his mother, Margaret Beal, and other family members were present at the BHS Memorial Day ceremony to place on loan to the Society those items presented in Alvin’s honor at the Coast Guard presentation in March. This includes the following:

- *The United States Coast Guard Certificate of Valor*
- *A Certificate of Appreciation from Sen. Susan Collins*
- *A United States flag flown over the U.S. Capitol in Alvin’s honor*
- *A letter of greeting and commendation from Sen. Angus King*
- *A letter of greeting and commendation from Rep. Michael Michaud*
- *A CD about of the U.S.C.G. ceremony, among other items.*

These items, so graciously loaned to the care and keeping of the Society, will be on continuous display to the public, so that the memory of Alvin Pidge Beal will live on forever. As “Keepers of the Past,” Beals Historical Society is pleased to be the recipients of these items and will display them with pride for future generations.

Mercy concluded the program by reading a letter of appreciation to the Society for its efforts at preserving the memory of Alvin for future generations and its willingness to be the keepers of the cherished items to be displayed at the Heritage Center.

The program was then closed with recognition of former BHS president, Velton Peabody of Independence, Missouri, who was present for the Memorial Day program. Guests were invited to linger and view the Alvin Pidge Beal exhibit and others on display.

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