

In the Fire

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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The notes (Presentation Page xx) are a reference to the Presentation version of this sermon.

You may download the presentation version of the sermon (also in PDF) and view the visual aids that go along with this written sermon.

(Presentation slide 1) On March 26, 1942, the *Dixie Arrow*, an oil tanker carrying 96,000 barrels of crude oil, was traveling near Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. She was one of several tankers, including the *China Arrow*, the *India Arrow*, the *Yankee Arrow* and others, built for the Socony-Vacuum Oil Company, also known as Mobil Oil.

Our country had just declared war against Japan, having been attacked a few months before this, December 7, 1941, at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Germany declared war against us and so America found itself engulfed in what became known as World War II. While the Pearl Harbor raid in the Pacific is known by almost all Americans, what is not as well known is the threat to American sea vessels that lurked off the coast of the Atlantic in those years posed by German U-Boats, or submarines. The sinking of supply ships traveling off the Atlantic was colossal. Virtually all of the *Arrow* tankers belonging to Mobil Oil were sunk or crippled by German submarines.

(Presentation slide 2) On that morning of March 26, 1942, the *Dixie Arrow* was traveling along the coast of North Carolina. She had left Texas City, Texas and was in route to Paulsboro, New Jersey with her precious cargo of fuel. The German submarine *U-71* had been lurking near Diamond Shoals, off Cape Hatteras, hoping to encounter American ships. As the light of day approached, Captain KK Walter Flascheenberg was about to give the order for his ship to go to the bottom when he spied the masts of the *Dixie Arrow*. He skillfully guided his U-Boat into position and at 8:58 a.m. fired three torpedoes into the starboard side of the *Dixie Arrow*. It took only a minute, with her cargo of volatile crude oil, for the ship to be mortally wounded and wrapped in flames.

(Presentation slide 3) The first torpedo hit at the midship deckhouse, killing most of the deck officers. (Presentation slide 4) Then about a minute later torpedoes two and three struck, resulting in the tanker being cut in two. You can only imagine the scene as the oil poured from the ruptured vaults and ignited, turning the deck of the ship as well as the surrounding waters into an inferno. Because of the direction of the wind, the flames whipped from the bridge to the bow, trapping a group of men who now faced the terrible choice of remaining on board and being burned to death, or jumping into the sea, now a lake of fire.

(Presentation slide 5) At that moment, seaman Oscar G. Chappell made a decision. Though he was injured, he remained at his post in the wheelhouse. Chappell banked the ship hard to the right

and held the *Dixie Arrow* into the wind, which drove the waterborne flames away from the men who were trapped on deck and allowed them the life-giving opportunity to jump into the sea clear of burning oil. However, by turning the ship in that direction, it drove the flames directly toward his station at the wheelhouse, and he soon perished. His conscious choice and sacrificial action resulted in the saving of his shipmates, who were rescued by the Destroyer USS Tarbell.

After his death, Chappell was awarded the Merchant Marine Distinguished Service Medal and a ship was later named in his honor. Today the Navy League annually awards the "Able Seaman Oscar Chappell Award For Outstanding Maritime Stewardship" to recognize "selfless dedication to shipmates." See <http://www.nc-wreckdiving.com/WRECKS/DIXIE/DIXIE.HTML>

(Presentation slide 6) As amazing and inspiring as this story is, it doesn't come close to what Jesus did for us. His sacrifice goes far beyond what any human has done. Seeing this world in a desperate situation, He voluntarily put His life in danger, knowing that the "flames" would be brought against Him by so doing. Leaving His throne of exquisite glory and honor, He stepped onto the deck of this dying ship and into the fire.

(Presentation slide 7) This decision was made before the event that made it necessary, for He was the "Lamb slain before the foundation of the world." Revelation 13:8. This means that the sacrifice of Jesus was an accomplishment in God's mind even before creation. Paul tells us that He "calls those things which do not exist as though they did." Romans 4:17. (Presentation slide 8) Before the sin of eating the forbidden fruit; before the tree of knowledge; before Eve was brought from Adam's rib; before Adam was formed from the dust of the ground; before God spoke this world into existence, the sacrifice of Jesus was already a finished achievement in the mind of God. It would be centuries later that Jesus would hang upon the cross, but in God's mind the sacrifice was already a reality; the Gift of redemption had already been given.

(Presentation slide 9) Because of this "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world." Ephesians 1:4. Even before creation and before sin, God designed that we should be the heirs of salvation in and through Christ. The 22 shipmates of Oscar Chappell who were rescued appreciated his self-less act and their new lease on life, but it was only a temporary stay on a verdict on mortality. These 22 have already died, or given the fact that this event transpired nearly 70 years ago, will soon perish. However, the rescue mission of our dear Lord Jesus, performed at such a great cost, will result in a life that never ends, saving us from the flames whose destruction is everlasting. Praise God for His "unspeakable Gift"!

Today we are reminded of this great sacrifice by our participation in the Lord's Supper, an event which recalls His death by the tokens of bread symbolizing His broken body and juice which reminds of His spilled blood. Let us give careful thought to the "great salvation" He has given us. Let us surrender our wills to Him each day as we begin this New Year. Let us pray for His kingdom to come.