

NAVAL HISTORY DIVISION

WILLIAM R. CHARETTE SENIOR CHIEF HOSPITAL CORPSMAN, U. S. NAVY

William Richard Charette was born in Ludington, Michigan, on March 29, 1932, son of William G. and Margaret (Furlong) Charette. He graduated from high school in Ludington, and on January 11, 1951 enlisted in the U. S. Navy at Muskegon, Michigan. He was promoted to Hospital Corpsman Third Class April 16, 1952, Hospital Corpsman Second Class, November 16, 1953 and Hospital Corpsman First Class, April 16, 1956, Chief Hospital Corpsman, May 16, 1960 and Senior Chief Hospital Corpsman, November 16, 1965.

After his enlistment in 1951, he had recruit training at the Naval Training Station, Great Lakes, Illinois. Completing his instruction there, he next attended the Naval Hospital Corps School, Bainbridge, Maryland, followed by duty at the U. S. Naval Hospital, Naval Base, Charleston, South Carolina. On November 25, 1952, he reported for field training and further assignment at the Marine Barracks, Camp Pendleton, Oceanside, California. He joined the First Marine Division and on February 5, 1953, embarked for Korea. He was awarded the Medal of Honor, presented to him by President Eisenhower in ceremonies at the White House on January 12, 1954. The citation follows:

"For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty as a Medical Corpsman, serving with a Marine Rifle Company, in action against enemy aggressor forces in Korea during the early morning hours of 27 March 1953. Participating in a fierce encounter with a cleverly concealed and well-entrenched enemy force occupying positions on a vital and bitterly contested outpost far in advance of the main line of resistance, Charette repeatedly and unhesitatingly moved about through a murderous barrage of hostile small-arms and mortar fire to render assistance to his wounded comrades. When an enemy grenade landed within a few feet of a Marine he was attending, he immediately threw himself upon the stricken man and absorbed the entire concussion of the deadly missile with his own body. Although sustaining painful facial wounds, and undergoing shock from the intensity of the blast which ripped the helmet and medical aid kit from his person, Charette resourcefully improvised emergency bandages by tearing off part of his clothing, and gallantly continued to administer medical aid to the wounded in his own unit and to those in adjacent platoon areas as well. Observing a seriously wounded comrade whose armored vest had been torn from his body by the blast from an exploding shell, he selflessly removed his own battle vest and placed it upon the helpless man although fully aware of the added jeopardy to himself. Moving to the side of another casualty who was suffering excruciating pain from a serious leg wound, Charette stood upright in the trench line and exposed himself to a deadly hail of enemy fire in order to lend more effective aid to the victim and

to alleviate his anguish while being removed to a position of safety. By his indomitable courage and inspiring efforts in behalf of his wounded comrades, Charette was directly responsible for saving many lives. His great personal valor reflects the highest credit upon himself and enhances the finest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

Returning to the United States, he reported in June 1954, as an Instructor at the Naval Hospital Corps School, Naval Hospital, Great Lakes, Illinois. He remained there until January 1955, when he was transferred to the Naval Separation Activity, Naval Training Center, Great Lakes, where he was honorably discharged, January 5, 1955. On February 15, 1955 he enlisted in the U. S. Naval Reserve and from that time until March 1955 was attached to the Naval Reserve Electronics Division 9-10, Waukegan, Illinois.

Discharged from the U. S. Naval Reserve (Ready) on March 31, 1955, he reenlisted the next day in the U. S. Navy and was assigned to the Naval Hospital, Jacksonville, Florida. From January to June 1956 he had instruction at the Naval Hospital Corps School, Naval Hospital, Portsmouth, Virginia, after which he continued instruction at the Naval Submarine Base, New London, Connecticut.

In February 1957 he joined the USS QUILLBACK (SS-424) (where he qualified in submarines, October 1, 1957), and from May 19 to June 1, 1958 had detached duty in connection with the selection of the Unknown Soldier of World War II. On May 26, 1958, on board the USS CANBERRA off the Virginia Capes, he placed a wreath on one of two unidentified caskets. Thus he chose the Unknown of World War II to be buried in Arlington National Cemetery with the Unknown of the Korean hostilities, near the body of the Unknown Soldier of World War I. He then returned to duty in the QUILLBACK, in which he continued to serve until March 1961, when he transferred to the USS TRITON (SS(N)586).

Assigned in November 1962 to the Fleet Ballistic Missile Submarine Training Center, Charleston, South Carolina, he remained there until August 1964, when he joined the USS DANIEL WEBSTER (SSB(N)626).

In addition to the Medal of Honor, he has the Purple Heart Medal; National Defense Service Medal; Korean Service Medal, with two stars; the United Nations Service Medal and the Good Conduct Medal. He also has the Korean Presidential Unit Citation.