

Richard P. Demers

Richard Demers was born in Taunton, MA, October 18, 1936, the son of Hector and Yvette (Yelle) Demers.

A graduate of Msgr. Coyle High School in Taunton, he entered Cardinal O'Connell Seminary in 1955 after one year at the University of Notre Dame and continued his studies at St. John's Seminary in Brighton, MA where he received undergraduate and graduate degrees. He was ordained on February 2, 1962 by Bishop James L. Connolly at St. Mary's Cathedral in Fall River.

Following his ordination, Father Demers was assigned to St. Michael's Parish, Ocean Grove, MA from 1962 to 1967. In 1967 he decided that he wanted to do service as a Navy chaplain with the Marine Corps. Lieutenant Demers deployed to Vietnam first with a MASH unit and then with the 2nd Battalion, 5th Regiment, 1st Division of the Marines where he was providing aid and comfort to his Marines in the Battle for Hue City, one of the bloodiest and longest battles of the Vietnam War.

Retired Navy Chaplain Captain Eli Takesian who was interviewed many years after the war, said this of Chaplain Demers during the conflict: "2nd Battalion, 5th Marines was ordered to Hue, to help recapture the city. Their chaplain was Dick Demers, a Roman Catholic priest from Fall River, Massachusetts. Tall and brawny, he looked like a Notre Dame linebacker ... a damned good chaplain ... admired by all! **The troops called him Super Cross.**"

A Silver Star recipient of that battle, Joe Tiscia, said this of Chaplain Demers: "A big strong man with a desire to take care of his marines. I do not believe he had been in Vietnam very long when TET began. He was pretty brave going from Hue and back to Phu Bai to take care of his Marines. I was in the back of a Deuce and Half with wounded from a battle in the suburbs of Hue. It is referred to as the "Road to the Graveyard". We had 21 dead and the rest of us were wounded. He gave us all the Last Rites of the Catholic Church. I just remembered he took care of us seeing about our wounds and helping the medical personnel at Phu Bai. It was good to see him there; and gave us peace of mind. That is about all I know of the "Good Chaplain at Hue".

Upon completion of his Vietnam deployment, he returned to Parris Island, NC, where in February 1969 he was awarded the **Bronze Star Medal** for heroic and meritorious service.

He was cited for "displaying superb resourcefulness and resolute determination while serving with the 2nd Marine Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division". His **citation** read in part: "He maintained a rigorous schedule of religious services and frequently travelled over hazardous routes to visit widely dispersed and isolated units. During Operations Hue City, Houston, Baxter Gardens, and Mameluke Thrust, he not only brought cheerful hope to the injured, but also assisted medical personnel in rendering first aid to casualties. Actively participating in his unit's Civic Action Program, he was instrumental in establishing harmonious relations between Marines and the local populace, thereby contributing significantly to the accomplishment of his battalion's mission."

Dick was released from his vows as a priest in 1970 and married Sarah Bible of Morristown, Tennessee. They had two children: Christopher, now a neurosurgeon in Reno, NV and Justin, now a Director with Accretive Health, Inc. in Chicago, IL.

After receiving his MBA from the University of Chicago in 1976, he, his wife, and two children spent two years in Ghana, West Africa helping local populations to organize small-scale sugar cane factories.

In 1978, Dick returned to Manchester, NH, a resident since 1977, and took a leadership role in the Manchester community, serving at various times on the boards of Centerpoint Bank, Chamber of Commerce, Palace Theater, Catholic Medical Center and Energy North. He was a member of the Air Resources Council Gas Managers Guild and was active in Rotary. After his retirement from Energy North in 1999, he spent his time traveling and leading tours throughout Asia.

Dick died August 26, 2002, at Brigham & Women's Hospital in Boston due to complications from leukemia.

A mass of Christian burial was celebrated Thursday August 29, 2002 in St. Catherine Church, Manchester, NH. Burial was at the Massachusetts National Cemetery, Bourne, MA.

May he rest in peace.

