UCF Veterans Legacy Program

William R. Charette (1932-2012)
Louise R. Charette (1934-2016)

https://vlp.cah.ucf.edu/biographies/fnc/B104-0-173-F.html

William R. Charette, born on March 29, 1932, grew up in the town of Ludington, MI, located on Lake Michigan. William's parents died when he was five years old, after which his great uncle Charlie took care of William until World War II.Charlie raised William on a dairy farm in rural Ludington. Living on the Great Lakes, Charette worked on ferry boats and merchant marine vessels as a summer job, becoming familiar with sailing and shipping. Although Charette had a job after high school, Charette's experiences aboard ships of the Great Lakes may have inspired him to become a sailor.

Charette enlisted in the Navy on January 10, 1951, and began basic training at the Naval Station Great Lakes, just north of Chicago on Lake Michigan, later that same month. Charette attended the Hospital Corps School in Bainbridge, MA, and volunteered for duty with the US Marine Corps as a part of the Fleet Marine Force. After completing Field Medical School, Charette served as a Navy corpsman in the 7th Marine Infantry Regiment at Camp Pendleton, CA. Charette became part of the rapid growth of the US Armed Forces between 1950 and 1953 due to the Cold War.

Two months after arriving in Korea in January 1953, the men Corpsman Charette served with came under fire, resulting in many casualties. While providing medical assistance to wounded Marines, Charette received multiple injuries from enemy fire. At one point, Charette protected a Marine from a grenade, using his body to absorb the blast. Despite his medical equipment being destroyed by the blast, Charette continued to provide aid by tearing off pieces of his uniform to use as bandages. Putting himself in danger again, Charette gave his battle vest to another wounded Marine, exposing himself to gunfire, while he helped the Marine evacuate. Many men directly credited Charette with saving their lives and inspiring others to continue the fight against North Korean and Chinese forces. For his actions that day, Charette's commander notified him that he had been recommended to receive the Navy Cross, which got upgraded to the Medal of Honor. President Eisenhower presented Charette the US military's highest honor on January 12, 1954.

After Charette's service in the Korean War he spent a short time as a civilian before re-entering the Navy and to continue his career. Due to receiving the Medal of Honor in 1958, the Navy gave Charette the honor of selecting the Unknown Soldier from World War II for interment at Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C.

Charette spent his career in Submarine and Hospital Services, serving aboard the USS *Quillback*, a submarine, and later on nuclear submarines USS *Triton*, USS *Daniel Webster*, and USS *Simon Bolivar*. Charette helped develop nuclear missile systems. Charette's military career led him to Florida where he served in the Orlando Naval Hospital and Orlando Recruit Dispensary. While working at the hospital, Charette helped sailors with their health. When he worked at the recruit dispensary, he prepared future sailors for service. He retired to the nearby town of Lake Wales, FL on April 1, 1977 after twenty-six years of service.

During retirement, Charette was involved in national Veterans organizations such as The Elks Lodge Chapter 158, the Congressional Medal of Honor Society, the Korean War Veterans Association,the Lake Wales Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), and others. In April of 1999, the Navy named a medical facility in Portsmouth, VA the Charette Health Care Center, in his honor.

Charette passed away on March 18, 2012. On March 22, 2012, William R. Charette was buried in Florida National Cemetery, Bushnell, FL. His wife of fifty-eight years, Louise Fraiser Charette, passed away on March 26, 2016 at the age of eighty-one and joined William at his burial site in Bushnell. His legacy continues through his extended family, organizations, and the medical center named after him, as well as well as through the many Marines he aided and the sailors who received their training under his supervision.

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