

NDW chaplain promoted to Lt. Cmdr. second time during third Navy stint

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WASHINGTON NAVY YARD — In the military, the importance of Chaplains cannot be overstated: Navy chaplains serve the spiritual needs of Sailors and Marines, provide a listening ear, and someone to talk to in confidence.

Naval District Washington (NDW) Religious Services ministers the spiritual needs of the community with a dedicated staff of chaplains, but few provide this service with the experience of NDW's Roman Catholic Chaplain, Lt. Comdr. William Dorwart.

Dorwart's service is somewhat unique. His naval career has been split between three periods and he has actually attained the rank of Lieutenant Commander...twice.

Dorwart originally entered the Navy in 1967; he served as an Aviation Electronics Technician 3rd Class with "The Bats" of Reconnaissance Attack Squadron 13 (RVAH-13) aboard USS Forrestal (CV 59) and USS America (CV 66). When his first enlistment ended, he looked for a new path.

"I loved being a technician. As an 'East Coast' sailor I deployed to the Mediterranean where, just two decades after World War II, they loved the United States," said Dorwart. "We pulled into Italy, France, Spain, and in some places people would invite us into their homes for a meal. It was a wonderful and rich cross-cultural experience for a young sailor."

After four years on active duty, Dorwart left the Navy to attend the University of Notre Dame where he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree and a Master of Divinity degree. With his degrees, he sought to make a "greater difference" thanks to the inspiration of those he served with.

"I grew up in a small farming town in the 50's and 60's where the center of life was the church and school," said Dorwart. "When I enlisted in the Navy, culture shock inspired a lot of soul-searching and challenged me to make choices. Life in the Navy was nothing like it was in rural America. However, all along the way there were dedicated Chaplains who patiently listened offering encouragement and support. Some life choices I made during those days then led me to the University of Notre Dame, the Congregation of Holy Cross and the priesthood."

Ordained in 1980, Dorwart returned to the Navy in 1985.

"I wanted to payback and thank those Chaplains and the Navy for helping me during those youthful years of discovery and discernment. And I hoped I might be able to provide that same support for a few along the way," said the 15-year veteran.

Over the course of the next six years, he worked with the Marine Corps in Okinawa, and the Navy in Subic Bay and later aboard the USS Midway (NUMBER), forward deployed to Japan. His experience ushered him through field exercises in Korea, relief operations in the Philippines, and extended Pacific deployments including Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

In 1991, Dorwart was recalled by his religious congregation to serve as the director of education and training for candidates studying for the priesthood. He left active duty and transferred to the Reserve component, but later resigned his commission at the rank of lieutenant commander because his civilian obligations prevented him from completing his



Lt. Cmdr. William Dorwart, Naval District Washington Catholic priest and a native of Siney, Neb., talks during a Catholic Mass at the Washington Navy Yard Chapel. Dorwart has been promoted to the rank of lieutenant commander for the second time after having to split his career three times, dating back to the Vietnam War era. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Pedro A. Rodriguez/Released)

Reserve duties. Father Dorwart then took a break from military service for 17 years while fulfilling commitments to his religious order.

To fulfill a need for Catholic chaplains in the Navy, Dorwart returned again in November 2008. Commissioned once more as a lieutenant, he went on to serve aboard Naval Support Facility Diego Garcia, USS Ronald Reagan (CVN 76), USS Makin Island (LHD 8) and ultimately NDW.

While assigned to the religious services program at NDW and, serving NDW at Arlington Cemetery, was recently promoted (again) to the rank of Lieutenant Commander.

Dorwart is hoping to receive news that an age waiver request has been approved affording him the opportunity to continue serving Sailors and Marines in the fleet for a few more years. He is dedicated to those who serve and hopes to make an impact in their lives by helping them achieve their spiritual and career goals through counseling and extending a helping hand as only a Navy chaplain can.