

## **Richard “Dick” Sperling**

Colonel Richard A. Sperling, US Army (retired) passed away at John Muir Medical Center in Walnut Creek on October 6, 2022 after a short and unexpected illness. His devoted wife Marilyn and their son Crosby were by his side. He was 80 years old.

Richard was a firecracker from the moment he entered this world July 4, 1942. Welcomed by his parents Robert & Lucille, along with older siblings Patti and Bob. Just a few years later, while he and some friends were playing with their U-control toy airplanes, a neighborhood dad approached and asked “How would you boys like to go for a flight in a REAL airplane?” Young Richard said yes, and a lifelong love for aviation began.

After graduating from Seaholm High School, Richard majored in Business and Psychology at Western Michigan University, minored in Military Science, completed the ROTC program, and earned a Bachelor's degree along with Distinguished Military Graduate honors in 1965. As a 2nd Lieutenant, he completed Rotary Wing Pilot School with the 14th Class of '66 and was soon sent to fly UH-1 Huey Helicopters in Vietnam. On Richard's first day as aircraft commander, March 16, 1967, his wing-man was shot down from their formation shortly after takeoff. After landing in a small clearing, Richard set out into the jungle on foot to assist the survivors from the crash back to his aircraft before flying away to safety. For these actions, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross on July 6, 1968. While his fellow crewmen never received any formal awards for the valor they displayed during the rescue, one of Richard's undying wishes was to do so, remarking “We all worked well together to accomplish that rescue, and I am very proud to have served with each and every member of this very fine air crew.”

After Vietnam, Col. Sperling continued to fly helicopters and later became rated in fixed wing aircraft as well. During his military career of 30 years he flew almost every type of helicopter the Army operated, including multiple models of the UH-1 Huey and CH-47 Chinook. After commanding the 195th Aviation Company and 820th Engineer Battalion, he finished his career as an Aviation Branch Colonel and Principal Regional Emergency Military Coordinator for Sixth US Army Headquarters, Presidio of San Francisco. Some of his other awards include: Legion of Merit, Meritorious Service Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster, Air Medal with 22 Oak Leaf Clusters, Army Service Medal, Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal, Master Army Aviator Wings, Basic Missileman Badge, and Expert Pistol & Rifle Badges.

As a civilian, Col. Sperling was a commercial pilot with United Airlines, flying the Douglas DC-8, Boeing 727, 737, 757, 767, and finished that career on trans-pacific routes in the B747-400. His favorite destinations were Hong Kong and Sydney Australia, where he enjoyed walking in parks and learning about local history. Between his military and civilian careers, he had logged over 16,000 flying hours.

Richard was an active member of the Legion of Valor, founded in 1890, for which he served as National Commander from 1986-87 and as Historian for many years. He was also a member of Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association, Vietnam Veterans of Diablo Valley, Delta Chi Fraternity, Quiet Birdmen, and honoree on the Fort Knox ROTC Hall of Fame.

In retirement, Richard volunteered as Assistant Scoutmaster and Aviation Merit Badge Counselor for BSA Troop 221, as well as Young Eagles flight coordinator through EAA (Experimental Aircraft Association) Chapter 393 where he was also a member. His favorite hobbies included flying everything from R/C airplanes to his Piper Light Sport, and boating in the San Francisco Bay Delta with his wife aboard their SeaRay SunDancer named Valor.

Richard is survived by his beloved wife of 35 years, Marilyn; his three children, Tamara, Jeffrey, and Crosby; grandchildren Ryan, Aaron, Max, and Emily; great grandchildren; Vaeda and Remi; his big brother Bob; nephews Tim and Scott and their families. He was preceded in death by both of his parents and beloved sister Patti.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be sent to the Richard A. Sperling DSC Endowed Scholarship, College of Aviation at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo MI 49008 or a charity of your choice. Richard will be laid to rest with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.