



NAVIGATOR

The U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Magazine | 2022 Annual



**Feature: The Auxiliary's
Response to Hurricane Ian**



VATICAN CITY – Pope Francis greeting and blessing Sergeant Chris Clemens in Vatican City as then-Flotilla Commander Scott Sigman explains to His Holiness that Sergeant Clemens has Stage IV GI Cancer that has metastasized to his lungs.

Photo by Vatican Media Photography.

An Act of Faith and Generosity by an Auxiliarist

By Scott Sigman, Flotilla Staff Officer – Public Affairs (Flotilla 4-76, Philadelphia)

When people think of a “hero in the sky,” most people might think of a comic book hero. However, in reality, there are heroes in the sky that serve aboard aviation units of local and state police departments, emergency services, and the U.S. Coast Guard.

In Philadelphia, one of those heroes is Sergeant Chris Clemens, a 35-year veteran of the Philadelphia Police Department, who rose through the ranks with assignments in the Patrol Bureau, SWAT, and the Aviation Unit. Once assigned to the Aviation Unit, Sgt. Clemens

was designated the Chief Pilot and responsible for the safe operation of four police helicopters that routinely fly over the Philadelphia metropolitan area.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Sgt. Clemens developed a cough and went to see his flight physician. After ruling out COVID and conducting a chest x-ray, the doctor realized that there was another serious issue to address. After further testing, it was discovered that Sgt. Clemens, a non-smoker who is routinely evaluated pursuant to FAA regulations, had cancer throughout his lungs. Once

they tested his lungs, the doctors realized it was a GI cancer that had metastasized from a small tumor in the duodenum to infect both lungs.

Unfortunately, the prognosis is not good. This type of cancer is stage IV, incurable, and is very difficult to treat. They gave Sgt. Clemens about a year to live. So far, the first two chemotherapy treatments were ineffective and the third (and final available chemotherapy) is having little to no impact on the cancer in his lungs.

After receiving this diagnosis, Sgt. Clemens, a devout Catholic,

Photo by Lt. Dave Bonk, Philadelphia Police Aviation Unit.



PHILADELPHIA – Sergeant Chris Clemens, Chief Philadelphia Police helicopter pilot, and then-Flotilla Commander Scott Sigman at the Philadelphia Police Aviation Unit at Northeast Philadelphia Airport.

had a wish to visit with the Holy Father in Vatican City and receive his blessings. In fact, Sgt. Clemens was on police duty when Pope Francis arrived in Philadelphia in September of 2015. During the Papal visit to Philadelphia, Sgt. Clemens was responsible for all motorcade and helicopter aerial security for the Holy Father. He personally mapped out all egress landing zones to facilitate the evacuation of the Holy Father if called upon to do so.

Ever since the Pope was in Philadelphia, Sgt. Clemens had discussed traveling to Italy with his friend Scott Sigman, the then-Flotilla Commander, Flotilla 4-76, Philadelphia for a vacation. Sigman, who actually grew up in the same neighborhood as Sgt. Clemens in Northeast Philadelphia, became a close friend of Sgt. Clemens after Sigman was assigned to the East Police Division as an Assistant District Attorney over 20 years ago.

When Sigman heard his friend had cancer and wanted to get blessed by the Pope, he knew he had to make it happen. Sigman started the

process by reaching out to a core group of mutual friends from the Union League, the Union League’s American Legion Post 405, and members of his Auxiliary Flotilla. The planning for this pilgrimage began in November 2021.

In December 2021, Sigman and Clemens were both supposed to be at the Army Navy Game at MetLife Stadium, but Clemens was not able to make it. As if by some divine intervention, Sigman went to the game and was introduced to Cass Forkin, who runs the Twilight Wish Foundation. Once Forkin heard the story of Sgt. Clemens and his wish for the blessings of the Holy Father, she told Sigman to apply for this wish which she called the “Vatican Wish”.

Through the generosity of members of United States Coast Guard Auxiliary Flotilla 4-76, Philadelphia, LCDR John DiLeonardo (USCG), the Honorable Amato Berardi (former member of the Italian Parliament - Deputato della Repubblica Italia), the Philadelphia Police Department, and many more, the wish was able to be granted.



Photo by AUX Scott Sigman, FSO-PA (4-76).

SICILY – Then-Flotilla Commander Scott Sigman taking a quick selfie as Sergeant Chris Clemens receiving prayer for healing from a Capuchin friar at the Capuchin Catacombs in Palermo, Sicily (the friar was from the same order at Saint “Padre” Pio).

Clemens and Sigman began their religious pilgrimage on February 22, 2022, traveling from Philadelphia to Rome, Italy. They spent their first day in Rome as a special guest of the Honorable Amato Berardi. Deputato Berardi presented Clemens and Sigman with two tickets to see the Pope. These special tickets with the Papal Seal were stamped ticket 0001 and 0002.

On Wednesday, February 23, 2022, Clemens and Sigman attended an audience with Pope Francis in Vatican City where they had approximately three minutes to talk directly with His Holiness. Sigman explained to the Pope (in Italian) that Clemens was a Philadelphia Police Officer, a helicopter pilot, helped with security during the 2015 papal visit to Philadelphia, and was dying of stage IV cancer. At this moment, the Pope moved his hands around the chest of Clemens. Then, the Pope put his hand on the head of Clemens. Finally, the Pope made a cross on the forehead of Clemens with his finger. Clemens then handed the Pope yellow (Vatican color) rosaries that he made himself.

Photo by AUX Scott Sigman, FSO-PA (4-76).



SAN GIOVANNI ROTONDO, ITALY – Sergeant Chris Clemens and then-Flotilla Commander Scott Sigman on a tour with the Chief Doctor at Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza (a private scientific research hospital in San Giovanni Rotondo, Italy, founded by Saint “Padre” Pio).

In return, His Holiness handed Clemens a set of papal rosaries. Clemens’ wish to be blessed by His Holiness Pope Francis in Vatican City had been granted and his health and life were truly in God’s hands.

After receiving the Pope’s blessing, Clemens and Sigman spent the rest of the day touring the Vatican, St. Peter’s Basilica, the Vatican Museum, and the Sistine Chapel.

On the following day, Thursday, February 24, 2022, they continued their pilgrimage, traveling from Rome to Puglia where they went to visit the City of San Giovanni Rotondo to offer prayers to Saint Padre Pio, for whom Clemens has a special devotion.

In San Giovanni Rotondo, Clemens and Sigman visited to the resting place of Saint Pio, saw the

balcony location of where Saint Pio first had the stigmata, toured the original church of Saint Pio where his body is visible in a glass casket in the crypt, and were given a special tour by the head physician of the 900-bed hospital where Saint Pio used to walk the halls and offer blessings to the sick and dying. This hospital, called the “Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza,” was founded in 1956 by Saint Pio and is still in full operation today.

The pilgrimage continued with a visit to Sicily, where Sigman and Clemens visited Greek ruins including the Temple of Segesta, the Sanctuary of Saint Calogero, which includes the Antiquarium and various natural caves which emit geothermal gas atop Monte Kronio (these geothermal/volcanic steam vapors are believed to aid healing and cure many ailments), a piazza dedicated to Saint Pio in Sciacca, numerous churches, and even a monetary in Palermo where Clemens received the blessings of a monk of the same order of Saint Pio.

The pilgrimage ended back in Rome with visits to the Spanish Steps, Trevi Fountain, Pantheon, Piazza Navona, Piazza Venezia, and Piazza Barberini. Clemens and Sigman returned home to Philadelphia on February 28, 2022.

Sgt. Clemens continues to protect and serve the Philadelphia community as a Philadelphia Police Sergeant, although he is now grounded from helicopter flight pursuant to FAA Regulations and assigned to desk duty. He continues to support his wife and three boys. He also continues to fight for his life each and every day through prayer and through the help of doctors. Chris Clemens is a true hero. 🙏

P.S. Christopher Clemens crossed the bar peacefully on June 26th, 2023. The Auxiliary extends our condolences to Mr. Clemens’ family and friends. Fair winds and following seas.

Photo by AUX Scott Sigman, FSO-PA (4-76).



PHILADELPHIA – Sergeant Chris Clemens back on duty in his Philadelphia Police Aviation Unit Patrol Car with Scott Sigman on their way to the Philadelphia Criminal Justice Center.

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U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary photo by Ellen M. DeLeo. Photo of the Month winner, May 2022.



Naples, Fla. – Terrence Schwinghammer, FC, Flotilla 96, District 7, is a Telecommunications Operator (TCO) in the Operations Program and stands radio watch for a surface patrol. The patrol and watch stander communicate at regular intervals, and as needed, using VHF radios to ensure that operations are proceeding normally. TCOs undergo training in radio operations and are required to demonstrate radio knowledge and skills-based personal qualification standards (PQS) for certification.