CORPSMEN UP
Navy Corpsmen... Navy Physician Assistants
Our Beginning and Our Future
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Yell CORPSMEN UP .at any Physician Assistant conference in the United States and watch as men and women raise to see if help is needed. CORPSMEN UP are the watch words of every Marine, every Sailor who needs immediate and lifesaving care, right now. It doesn't matter if there are overwhelming odds against the corpsmen, nor if it's a immediate action drill or the real deal, they will answer the call. It's the same with the men and women who are the backbone of our profession. The legacy of caring, commitment, dedication to the patient, serve above self even if it means sacrificing your life, these traits are all found in those simple but complex words CORPSMEN UP. This seamless connection between Navy Corpsmen and Navy Physician Assistants, began with the creation of the Navy Hospital Corps. The Hospital Corps came into existent as an organized unit of the Medical Department under the provision of an act of Congress approved 17 June 1898. this act provided for appointment to the warrant rank of pharmacist and established the following ratings:

- Hospital Steward (chief petty officer)
- Hospital Apprentice First Class (third class petty officer)
- Hospital Apprentice

Why corpsmen, why Navy Physician Assistants, well read on.
Our profession began with a vision of Dr Eugene Stead, who had the revolutionary idea to start a new profession and a new program. The concept and establishment of the educational program grew out of a committee chaired by Dr. Andrew Wallace. Dr. Wallace had worked with Navy Corpsmen at Bethesda Naval Hospital and knew the value that Navy Hospital Corpsmen had in regards to " intelligence and motivation". .(Condit, D. Our Military Heritage, Physician Assistant, November 1993)
Many of the physicians had Duke University had first hand knowledge of the outstanding combat performance of corpsmen at sea, on submarines, in fighting holes next to their Marines, and on the front lines. This history was evident during World War II in the Pacific, during D-Day, in Korean at the Chosin Resuvior,and then later in Vietnam at Da Nang, Saigon, and Dong Ha. The combat history continued in Panama, Grenada, Lebanon, Southwest Asia and throughout the world, day or night. Dr. Stead saw these elements of commitment, courage, honor, integrity, and caring as necessary components for this new profession. So was the birth of "Lifesavers Then... Caregivers Now" which began in 1965 at Duke University with Vic Germino, Ken Ferrell, and **Rich Scheele** they lead the way for others to follow as the first class of Physician Assistants.

The linkage between Navy Corpsmen and our profession began much earlier with a young pharmacist mate .(precursor of the modern day navy corpsmen) by the name of Edward Williams. He lied about his age and joined the Navy during World War II, served in the South Pacific on New Hebrides during the Asian Pacific campaign. He went to serve in Korea and during the Berlin airlift. This young sailor's intense interest in caring for others became a life long passion. He was in the first class of Physician Assistants at Howard University in Washington, DC. He went on to work at the District of Columbia's General Hospital for 25 years in a variety of roles as a Physician Assistant. He never stopped working on behalf of his profession and became President of the District of Columbia Academy of Physician Assistants. This commitment to the DC Academy extended over fifteen years.

Few Americans understand or remember the Korean Conflict which once again saw a need for the Navy Corpsmen to assist with care of wounded in battle with the Marines, on hospital ships, in airplanes, and in pharmacies, dispensaries, and battalion aid stations. One of the Navy Corpsmen that made a difference for his patients was a young HM3 **Robert Norton**. Bob was one of the "Chosin Few" as a member of the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines he survived the battle know as the Chosin Reservoir. Here Bob and 15,000 Marines

humped the hills, braved the fierce cold and winds of the north (often at 34 degrees below zero). He like other corpsmen often kept the syringes under their armpits to keep the liquid from freezing. The Chinese infiltrators would often seek out medical disabled patients and especially corpsmen to lower the Marines morale.

Over six Chinese divisions surrounded the Marines and over 7,000 Marines lost their lives at the Reservoir. Bob survived. Bob continued his service with the Navy and almost ten years later found himself back in the thick of combat this time in a warmer climate in a place called Vietnam. As a Chief Petty Officer, Bob was part of a surgical shock trauma team that focused on frozen blood research, which offered the wounded vital blood components before they were MEDEVAC. After the Vietnam war, Bob went to school at the Medex program at Dartmouth to become a Physician Assistant. He began the first year of a 26 year long career as a Physician Assistant in New Mexico.

As one of the first PA's in New Mexico he rode circuit to rural clinics, became an advocate for PA legislation and fought a long 10 year battle for legislation. He achieved much in his lifetime, Inner City PA of the Year, he was the Veterans Caucus Outstanding Civilian PA of the Year in 1986, and New Mexico's PA of the Year in 1993. His concern about veteran Physician Assistant never ended, he served the Veterans Caucus as President and then as board member for four years. He first visited the Vietnam Memorial in 1988 with members of the Veterans Caucus, but had a special spot in his heart for the Angel Fire Vietnam Memorial in New Mexico. He talked often of the special spirit it had for him.

Other corpsmen served in Korea and later went on to become Physician Assistants and leaders of their profession. One of these other Korean/Vietnam veterans was **Vance Ponton.** Vance worked in Alabama, Saudi Arabia, Greece and finally in Wyoming. Vance taught corpsmen during the Vietnam Era and Physician Assistants later on at the Stony Brook PA program. He was one of three ex-Navy Corpsmen to develop the Alaskan pipeline medical program, employing large numbers of Physician Assistants in new remote roles. He life ended on thanksgiving day as he left the Buffalo Community Health Center where he worked caring for a few last patients before he headed home, only to be killed by a drunk driver. He died as he lived caring for others, in his trunk were presents from patients and for town members who needed alittle extra on thanksgiving day.

The Vietnam war once again asked young men and women to serve their country and the sixties became the focal point for many future Physician Assistants to begin a life long service of caring for others. As has been said before " some gave all.. all gave some" These years gave birth to thousands of our membership. Over 30,000 medics and corpsmen were released from active duty each of the years of America's longest war. Corpsmen were in the war as early as 1959 and as late as 1975. Future Physician Assistants supported the Navy Hospital Saigon from 1957-1962, worked in the largest hospital in Vietnam at Naval Support Activity Da Nang from 1965-1974, assisted in the operating rooms on the Repose (AH-16) and the Sancturary (AH-17), floated down the Bassac and Perfume Rivers with the Mobile Riverine Forces, provided vital care at battalion and regimental aid stations, over 2,700 corpsmen supported and humped the bush with the 1st and 3rd Marine Divisions, set up underground surgical operating rooms lite with Coleman lanterns with 1st and 3rd Medical Battalions, cared for thousands of refugees with MEDCAPs, served on floating mobile clinics with Dr. Tom Doley, flew MEDEVACs with the 1st and 3rd Marine Airwing and learned the importance of life in terms of seconds, not years, in places like Phu Bai, Dong Ha, Quang Tri, The Rockpile, Qui Nhon, Can Tho, FSB Ross, Que son, Khe Sanh, Hue, and on and on and on. There are too many to mention, one of the most honored was Gerald Strode who was presented with a Navy Cross for "gallant service above and beyond the call of duty, with disregard for his own safety, provided vital lifesaving support for his Marines" Roger Demers was presented with a Silver Star for " service above and beyond the call of duty" for his duty with the 3rd Marine Division, some of the other corpsman who were presented with awards for valor include Jeff Heinrich (first student president of the SAAAPA) Jerry Wise (past president of the AAPA and past APAP program director) Tony Skrapits, Doug Condit (editor for Surgical Physician Assistant served with the 27th Marines and 7th Marine Engineers) , Alan Sams, Dave Marie (Veterans Caucus Outstanding PA of the Year),Bill Feyh, Jack Richards, and Norm Fertig (who also served in the Gulf War), to name a small few out of many. Many of these veterans stayed in the Navy as Physician Assistants.

Some like Ken Harbert never thought that the Navy would start him on a path of a life long career. In 1966 he was assigned as a seamen on the USS Gunston Hall LSD 5 anchored at Qui Nhon Vietnam and while assisting in off loading wounded on the helio deck during Game Warden Operations he used his old boy scout first aid skills and was noticed by a young corpsmen who unknown to him at the time would change his life forever simply by asking if he would like to become a corpsmen striker which he did. After serving for one year aboard the USS Gunston Hall I Southeast Asia he was recommended for Navy Hospital Corpsmen School at San Diego, California and then went on to Camp Pendleton, California for Field Medical Service School. He was stationed as a Navy Corpsmen first at Camp Pendleton, then Naval Hospital Oak Knoll, then Naval Weapons Station Concord, then the USS Samuel B. Roberts (DD823) and the Naval Hospital at Newport Rhode Island. Finally, he finished his tour of service as a Naval Corpsmen with the USMC Marine reserve unit in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania. This experience offered him the opportunity that was to become a life time career as a Physician Assistant.

Some of these Vietnam veterans included special operations corspmen like Larry Bell, Shorty Long, Tony Skrapits, Richard Currey (who became an internationally known poet and PA educator), Steve Galeski, Ron Hopkins, Steve Parrish, John Tissot, Stan Chapman, Jim Grabowski and others.

These corpsmen were called on to do the impossible but somehow made it happen and rarely ever talk about it, for they are well aware that the true heroes never came home. Many of these corpsmen made a life long career of caring for military and civilian patients one of the many is **Bill Feyh** who served with UDT-22, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Force Reconnaissance Companies, not only serving as a corpsmen but also as a force recon team leader of Marines adding scouting and recon skills always knowing when and where the point and rear end charlies were during "over the fence" operations in Vietnam. Bill left the Navy after 34 years of service, to join a family practice in Florida. As he departed from Naval Special Warfare Center Medical Department in San Diego, California, his spot did not remain empty, but was filled by other SEAL PA's including Norm Moser (SEAL Teams 1 and 2) and nine other SEAL PA's.

Other Navy Physician Assistants that spent a lot of time underwater in submariners as independent corpsmen like Mike Benjamin, Pat Ivory, John Leffert, Dan Allen, and Navy Physician assistants have gone on to train Hospital Corpsman in their desire to become independent duty Hospital Corpsman on ships, submarines, diving billets and other IDC billets throughout the world.

In 1984, Pat Ivory was assigned to the Naval Undersea Medical Institute at the Naval Submarine base in Groton, Ct. He was the first of many PA's that had previously served in the submarine force and then helped the senior corpsman to make the transition to the submarine force. Others that served in this capacity were Pete Davis, Frank Mackey (a prior surface IDC that truly understood bubble heads), Bill Lussier, Don Harris and others. Several PA's have also been assigned to both the Naval School of Health Sciences in San Diego and Portsmouth to train surface IDC their trade. Many of those submarine and surface IDC's went on to become PA's. Pat Ivory John Leffert, Dan Allen, Gene Jones, Tom Powell and, many others retired from Navy and surfaced as civilian family practice Physician Assistants.

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Navy corpsmen and operating room technician **Roger Whittaker** lead the way for all surgical Physician Assistants in the landmark case when he was accused of " practicing medicine without a license in 1966" for first assisting a neurosurgeon in Redding, California. Roger was in reality the first surgical Physician Assistant before he attended the third class at Duke University Physician Assistant program.

Later he become the ninth president of the AAPA and continued to be active in PA politics until his death of cancer in 1990. Other navy corpsmen such as Ed Walker, Joe Allison, George White, Doug Condit, Steve Negel, Roger Demers, and others followed in his wake.

The first Navy Physician Assistant class graduated in August 1974 and included Warrant Officers Jose Rodrigeuz, Richard Clark, John Boothe, Pedro Colon, Charles McMillian, Ron Cope, Robert Dunlap, Don Hahn, **Stan Rundall,** Guy Eastman, Greg Monroe, Philip Contino, and Dan Hutchinson. The Naval Association of Physician Assistants was started in 1976 by the "West Coast Seven" a few of whom included: Judy Robertson, Mike McGrath, Thomas Clayton, **John Mott**, and Jim Acoba. The first NAPA president was Mike McGrath. Others that followed included Thom Clayton, Bill Lussier, John Mott, Jim Acoba, Ron Pace, Bill Burton, Leo Cleveland, Pat Ivory, Gary Evans, Bruce Ross, Earl Meiter, Rich Mondak, Judy Robertson, Bill Feyh, Ron Woodruff, Don Harris and currently Patty Miller.

Greg Bennett, was one of the first corpsmen assigned to the Naval Hospital in Charleston, South Carolina until as a HM2 (E-5) he got to go to PA school in Sheppard Air Force Base. As a graduate he was one of the first Warrant Officers in the Navy Physician Assistant community. Today he is the director of urgent care for Spectrum Health Care the largest employer of PA's in Michigan. Mike Warren graduated from the first Portsmith Navy PA program, the sister program of the Navy PA program in San Diego, which was then part of George Washington University. He also works for Spectrum Health in Michigan.

The Navy designated a specialty advisor to work directly with the Surgeon General of the Navy, the first was John Tissot in 1978 followed by Bob Stevenson (who held the position the longest), Gene Jones, Ron Woodruff (who fought the final fight for commissioning) Mike Loe, Bill Meeker, John Leroy, and the current specialty advisor Commander Charles Brakhage. Gene Jones was the first and perhaps only PA warrant officer to have a subspecialty code as a Health Care Administrator. After Navy PA's became commissioned it became standard. CWO4 Gene Jones also got to enjoy short vists to Ensenada, Mexico as the unofficial Mexico Prison Watch PA. His job in assessing and providing medical care to American military personnel in Mexico is still talked about with wonder.

Navy Physician Assistants have served in the White House Medical Unit including Mike Grant, Mike Davis, Casey Brennan, and Craig Ashby. Two Navy Physician Assistants were part of the US Fleet Hospital Six's deployment to Zagreb, Croatia. LTs William Lussier and Chris Polkoski provided primary care in the emergency room while being the first PA's to wear the United Nations blue berets. Chris Polkoski supported MEDEVAC missions to the city of Zadar. Before leaving ex-submariner corpsman William Lussier was the first US Fleet Hospital Zagreb to be promoted to Lieutenant Commander.

One of the early women Navy PA's was WO1 Judy Robertson , USN, who lead the way for future Navy female Physician Assistants. She graduated from the program in the early 1970's. She was active in the creation of the Naval Association of Physician Assistants, also became the first woman president in 1992 working hard for her profession and the future of Navy Physician Assistants. She was followed by many other outstanding female Navy PA's including, but not certainly limited to: Chris Polkoski, Patty Miller, Antonia Lopez, Pam Childers, and Nora Perez.

The first Navy Physician Assistant assigned to a ship was Tom Powell. The second Navy Physician Assistant to serve on a ship, **John Mott,** went on to form the Caduceus Caucus offering caring and support of impaired practitioners.

John died as he lived working on his computer helping others to help themselves. **Jim Bogstad** another ex-navy corpsmen and Navy Physician Assistant assisted those impaired practitioners that needed guidance. **Howard Herrindine** died on active duty after 32 years of naval service as a Navy corpsmen and Navy Physician Assistant. Ory Marrioneaux was the first Navy Physician Assistant to be a squadron Medical Officer. Mike Shaffer, Vic Germino, Rick Hillegas and a few others served as Navy corpsmen then went on be Coast Guard Physician Assistant Medical Officers and served on icebreakers. Antonia Lopez, a Navy Physician Assistant earned the Antarctica Service Medal as a Chief Navy Corpsmen.

The men and women who are and were Navy Corpsmen/Navy Physician Assistants laid the groundwork for the profession, they married and got divorced, gained ground as professionals, lost ground and fought, bleed, and got up and did it again and again. They refused to be forgotten by the military and/or the civilian community, during the worst of times they even wore "dinosaur" buttons to show they might be considered history, but they were never going to go slowly or without a fight.

Who are other Navy Corpmen/Navy Physician Assistants whom made a difference in our lives today? A few of the many are: AAPA leaders: **Roger Whittaker**, Carl Toney, Jeff Heinrich, Bill Dillard ; APAP leaders: Dr. Gene Jones, Walter Stein, Research Fellowship Winners: Rod Hooker, Outstanding PA's of the Year like Dr. George White, AAPA Health Policy Fellow and congressional ground pounders like Rick Hillegas, and many others.

Navy Physician Assistant educators beginning with Bob Stevenson, Jerry Vance, Bill Meeker, Charlie Brakhage, Bob France, Bob O'Mara, Chris Polkoski, Ron Woodruff, Bert Coombs, Patty Miller, and Mike Davis, Chuck Harris, Joe Murphy, Steve Galeski carried on the tradition of "see one, do one, teach one"

Hard working Navy PA's like John Leffert, Charlie Stainaker, Roger Ware, Joel Peveler, Todd Burson, Ray Cast, Bill Bies, Al Bedashi, Wally Stratton, Conrad Kress, Doug Doughty, Mike Champine, Chris Handy, Tony Cafferelli, Don Harris, Ken Ehlers, Ken Vining, Saja Burgess, George Rabey, Bob Douglas, John Castle, Rich Childs, Alex Lyle, Keith Hutchins, Joe Herre Jermey Bell, Rich Bedore, Rich Curran, Frank Kolosky, Danny Hook, Don Ervin, Dean Teegarden, Rick Lacour, Bruce Ferguson, Glenn Williams, Wes Comer, Pete Colon, made a difference as Warrant Officers and Navy Medical Service Corps Officers everywhere they served. Remote and rural civilian Physician Assistants that make a difference every day like Jerry Van Ben Coten in remote Alaska, and Mike Doyle in Idaho, Dave Albright, Pennsylvania, and others.

Many have been mentioned, many have not been, yet they all have given their all and much more for a profession that began with three and today numbers more than 37,000 Physician Assistants. Today its hard to imagine the challenges the early Navy PA's faced, not knowing if the PA profession would continue in the Navy, not knowing if the Navy PA program would continue, not knowing if the needs of the service would dedicate a future for their valuable skills.

Once in a time and place long forgotten a piece of charcoal graffiti was written on a bunker in Khe Shan, Republic of South Vietnam, with the simple words "**For those who have fought for it, freedom has a flavor the protected will never know**"

But as William Ward once said " If you imagine it, you can achieve it, if you can dream it, you can become it" This simple saying fits the beginning and the future of the Physician Assistant profession. **The names above that are typed in bold face print are gone but certainly have not faded away, for they were the beginning, the leaders for others to follow and improve on , to improvise needed and to continue the mission at the ready, day or night anywhere in the world.**