



"Excellent Care – Earned by Veterans – Delivered Here"

Voices of VISN 6

Official news from around *your* VISN

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Renovated Interventional Radiology Suite Reopens

By Yanitz Irizarry
Richmond VAMC
Public Affairs

A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held Nov. 18 to commemorate the newly renovated Interventional Radiology (IR) suite at Richmond VAMC. The IR suite provides minimally invasive treatment to Veterans, enabling accelerated recovery time.

Excitement filled the air as guests were eager to see the redesigned space. What was once a room filled with filing cabinets and X-ray films had been

transformed into a state-of-the-art space dedicated to serve Veterans.

Once a Richmond VAMC medical resident, Dr. Jonathan Ha said he saw a need for the use of interventional care, and he knew it would be great to come back to help Veterans. Ha returned with aspirations to grow the IR program to be the best it could be.

"We've had a steady increase of patients, and the complexity of patients is growing," Ha said. "We

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David Hodge

The newly renovated Interventional Radiology (IR) suite at McGuire VAMC will help Veterans by offering less invasive operations and decreasing recovery time, getting them home sooner.

Durham Doc Devoted To Veteran Health Care

By Jennifer Askey
VISN 6 Public Affairs

Making a difference in the world of medicine has been a life-long passion for Dr. Hilliard Seigler, who has been walking through the doors of the Durham VA Health Care System (VAHCS) to his research laboratory and surgical clinic since 1967.

The retired Army Colonel has been recognized as VA's oldest Veteran employee and, although quietly modest about his civilian and military successes, is not shy about his commitment to serving Veterans; the VA's strong relationship with its Duke University affiliate; and



Linnie Skidmore

Dr. Hilliard Seigler, assisting (right) with a surgical procedure in 2008, has been making a difference in the world of medicine since 1967.

teaching medical students and residents on surgical rounds how to best care

for the nation's heroes.

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From The Director

A little over a year ago, Dr. David Shulkin introduced himself to our team as VHA's Under Secretary for Health. In his address, he urged VHA staff to act in Veterans' best interests. I can assure you that in this VISN, working in the best interest of Veterans has always been our charge.

For years I have said that Veterans vote with their feet. In VISN 6, Veterans have registered their vote for VA Health Care by walking through our facility doors to receive the best care America can offer. We have welcomed those Veterans by building some of the most modern facilities, equipped with sophisticated technology, and run by talented skilled experts that are devoted 100 percent to our Veterans.

Veterans receiving care in this network are fortunate to receive that care from national leaders in mental health, telehealth, geriatric care, Polytrauma, cardiology and epilepsy, just to name a few on a very extensive list.

Many of our nurses, physicians, researchers and analysts are also affiliated with some of the greatest medical institutions of learning in the world. Over the years, our nurses have been recognized as the "best in VA," and I'm proud to share that two more have received that honor this year (See the photo on this page). In addition, one of our medical center directors was recently recognized nationally for her support of nursing (See the photo on this page).

The philosophy all of us embrace in VISN 6 of continuous quality improvement and the pursuit of excellence has been the reason why two of our medical centers have been selected to participate in VA's national Innovators Program. This program is an opportunity for VA staff to demonstrate how one person can make a difference by sharing their talents and ideas to further health care systems and processes. These are people committed to doing their best because they are devoted, not only to the services they offer, but to those for whom that service is directed.

In the coming months, I would like to introduce some of these innovators in our health care system to you in the pages of our newsletter. I want to share with you exactly who they are and why they have earned and deserve your



trust. They come from such areas as research, administration, patient care, logistics support and rehabilitation, and work as one team to ensure Veterans are getting the best care possible, when and where they need it.

In this issue we feature innovations in programs and treatments, such as the opening of Richmond's Interventional Radiology Suite (Page 1). We also share the story of a Veteran cardiac patient whose life has been extended through his VA care (Page 5) and spotlight how VA is embracing and incorporating acupuncture as a treatment that is helping individuals gain relief from debilitating conditions (Page 4).

As Dr. Shulkin leads the VHA charge toward a more efficient, patient-centric, Veteran-driven experience, you should feel confident that our VISN 6 employees are already in place to make that charge a reality.

Sincerely,
Dan Hoffmann



Luke Thompson

Two VISN 6 Staff Recognized

Two VISN 6 staff were nationally recognized this year for their exemplary service and dedication to Veteran health care. Salisbury VAMC Licensed Practical Nurse Arlene Imes (right), a certified Clinical Video Technician Preceptor received the Secretary of Veterans Affairs Award for Excellence in Nursing and Salisbury VAMC Director Kaye Green was awarded the Secretary's Award for Advancement of Nursing Programs by a Medical Center or Health Systems Director during a V-Tel presentation in October. Green was recognized for facilitating development of a nursing model encompassing ICARE values, nursing-driven shared governance and evidence-based practice.

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Wilmington Unveils Permanent Missing Man Table Display

As part of its Veterans' Day observance, Fayetteville VAMC's Wilmington Health Care Center (WHCC) unveiled a "Missing Man Remembrance Table" that will remain on permanent display in the front lobby entrance of the center.

A public ceremony marking the occasion took place Nov. 8, featuring presentation of the colors by an all-service color guard from Eugene Ashley High School; singing of the National Anthem; guest remarks from retired Army Sgt. 1st Class Larry Farmer, vice president of Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 885 of Wilmington; and a moment of silence to pay tribute to POW/MIAs.

The 80,742 sq. ft. Wilmington Health Care Center opened in March of 2013 to provide exceptional health care to Veterans in the Wilmington and Brunswick communities and throughout coastal Carolina.

The display is part of a concerted effort by Fayetteville VAMC staff to honor our missing Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines by placing similar permanent presentations in two other clinical facilities.

A ceremony marking the opening of the display occurred Nov. 9 at the Fayetteville Health Care Center, located on 7300 South Raeford Road in Fayetteville.

Earlier this year, in conjunction with POW/MIA Recognition Day activities across the country, a "Missing Man Remembrance Table" was unveiled and will remain on permanent display in the Fayetteville Medical Center's front lobby entrance at 2300 Ramsey Street. A ceremony marking the occasion took place on POW MIA Recognition Day Sept. 16. National POW/MIA Recognition Day events honor our missing service members and their families, and highlight our government's commitment to account for them.

Missing Man Remembrance Tables are round to show everlasting concern, covered by a white table cloth, symbolizing the purity of motives when answering the call to serve. A single red rose is displayed in a vase to remind us of friends and loved ones of the missing Americans keeping the faith and waiting for answers. The vase is tied with a red ribbon, a symbol of continued determination to account for our missing troops. A candle sits on the table, reminiscent of the light of hope living in our hearts to illuminate their way home. A slice of lemon is placed on a bread plate to remind us of the bitter fate of all those captured and missing in a foreign land; and a pinch of salt sits on the table, characterizing the tears endured by those missing and their families who seek answers. An inverted glass stands on the table for those who cannot toast with us when we lift our glasses; and a book of faith is present to remind us of the comfort faith has offered to those who face seemingly insurmountable challenges. A black napkin is included in the ensemble to represent



Brad Garner

Retired Army Sgt. 1st Class Larry H. Farmer, a former combat medic and now Vice President of Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 885 of Wilmington N.C., addresses the audience during a ceremony unveiling a missing man remembrance table at the Wilmington VA Health Care Center Nov. 8.

the emptiness these warriors have left in the hearts of their families and friends; and an empty chair depicts an unknown face, representing no specific Soldier, Sailor, Airman, Marine or guardian, but all who are not here with us.



Steve Wilkins

Veterans Advisory Council Meets

Veterans Experience Field Officer Cajun Comeau shares information with regional stakeholders during the VISN 6 North Carolina Veterans Advisory Council meeting Dec. 6, at the Durham Chamber of Commerce. See full story on page 7.



VA Program Helps Veterans Manage Tinnitus

By Scott Pittillo
Asheville VAMC Public Affairs

Over 1.1 million Veterans have service-connected tinnitus, around 25 percent of the total number of Veterans with service connected disabilities. Tinnitus is a constant perceptible ringing in the ears that affects about one in five people. Doctors say many things can cause or aggravate tinnitus including hearing damage, heredity, stress, fatigue and medications. With Veterans being commonly exposed to many environments where hearing damage can occur, it's easy to see why it's such a common service connection.

Asheville VAMC Audiologist Jenifer Beck says that many Veterans are at first disappointed to learn that there is no cure for tinnitus but many are also relieved to learn that it is a common problem that can be managed.

Beck heard about a program called Progressive Tinnitus Management (PMT), developed at the VA National Center for Rehabilitative Auditory Research in Portland, Ore. It is an interdisciplinary, evidence based program teaching Veterans with disabling tinnitus how to self-manage their tinnitus so that it no longer disrupts their daily lives.

Working with Asheville VAMC Psychologist Eliza-



Rod Doty

Audiologist Jenifer Beck with Psychologist Elizabeth Lima together in Beck's office at CGVAMC Aug. 29.

beth Lima, Beck began a PMT group for Veterans in Asheville about two years ago. The two bring a multi-disciplinary approach to the class, teaching the use of therapeutic sound and cognitive behavioral modification. It is Asheville's first comprehensive plan for help-

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Veteran Finds Relief From Chronic Pain With Acupuncture

By Paul V. Brown Jr.
Veteran Experience Coordinator

America is in a troubling era of opioid use. For decades, Peter Johnson, a U.S. Navy Veteran from Edenton, N.C., was caught up in the middle of that trouble. No more, he said, thanks to an effort by the Durham VA Health Care System.

Hit by a Rocket Propelled Grenade while serving on a riverboat on the Cua Viet River in 1968, Johnson sustained what he described as massive head and eye injuries that in turn produced terrible headaches. "On a scale of one to 10, I know what a level 10 headache is like," Johnson said.

Doctors treated his pain with opioid, mainly Percocet, or Oxycodone, a powerful narcotic that healthcare officials say is abused on an epidemic scale in the U.S. For years, Johnson mixed the drug with alcohol abuse, which in 1981 resulted in his heart stopping. Doctors revived him, and he has been a member of Alcoholics Anonymous ever since.

Yet the Percocet use continued and the toll on his mind and body kept rising. He would lose consciousness, could no longer drive a car, and was eventually



Brandon Furlough

U.S. Navy Veteran Peter Johnson receives acupuncture to help relieve chronic headaches caused by massive head and eye injuries he received while serving in Vietnam.

admitted to a VA hospital. This time, Johnson said, he

[Continued on Pg 11](#)



McGuire VAMC Transplant Patient Is Walking ‘Miracle’

By Yanitz Irizarry
Richmond VAMC Public Affairs

During a local comedy club performance, Norris McMiller entertained the audience with jokes about his past—particularly an event from exactly one year earlier. Comedians often use life experiences as material and for McMiller that experience came from his heart – a transplant performed at McGuire VAMC in Richmond.

Even McMiller will tell you it’s a miracle he is alive.

“My wife and I made the best choice coming here, without a doubt,” said McMiller. “This is our family. We think this is the most wonderful place. My care was phenomenal here. It was just phenomenal. You can see the passion in the way they cared for me.”

McMiller learned about VA transplant options for his oversized heart by a newly-assigned primary care doctor in Florida - where he resides.

He sought treatment at the Richmond VAMC and first received insertion of a left ventricular assist device (LVAD). The LVAD is a battery-operated device that, when attached to the heart creates a continuous flow of blood throughout the circulatory system—ensuring oxygen-rich blood reaches vital organs. LVADs are often used as a bridge in treatment while awaiting a donor heart.

After the LVAD operation, McMiller returned home to resume routine check-ups. Being a jokester at heart, Norris said he loved to visit the doctor back home be-



Mary Beatty-Brooks

Veteran Norris “Miracle” McMiller received his heart transplant at Richmond VAMC, Nov. 16, 2015. Exactly one year after getting his new heart, McMiller performed at a local comedy club in Richmond. McMiller uses the stage name Miracle the Comedian.

cause the LVAD’s continuous flow eliminates a pulse in him.

“I would love to see the nurses check for a pulse,” McMiller said with a grin. “I would let them try to feel for a pulse with their finger. After a while I’d say, I

[Continued on Pg 8](#)

Pig Kissing Benefits Charity

Salisbury VAMC Assistant Director Stephanie Triplett poses with her smooching mate after laying a big kiss on the pig’s nose. Triplett kissed the pig as part of Salisbury VA’s Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) fund raising drive, after losing a friendly “Kiss the Pig” competition. Salisbury VA’s CFC drive raised over \$105,000 this year. The pig was not harmed during the fund raiser.



Bart Major



Salisbury Doc Prepared To Walk Into A Late Sunset

By Steve Wilkins
VISN 6 Public Affairs

A nationwide search for elder Veteran doctors in VA conducted during the fall of 2016 uncovered some very committed, passionate octogenarian providers in VISN 6 who are dedicated to caring for Veterans, including a dashing, yet humble, practitioner at the Salisbury VAMC.

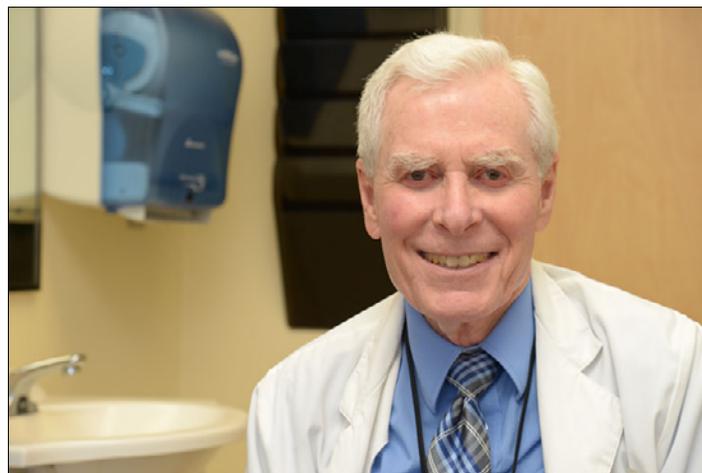
At 87 years, Dr. Glenn Lubash is one of two of the oldest Veteran doctors in the VISN and VA. Due to retire in December, Lubash has interspersed a 50-plus-year medical career with more than 11 years dedicated to Veterans.

“I worked at the Albuquerque, N.M., VA from July 1, 1971, through June 30, 1973, doing nephrology; at the Myrtle Beach Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) under Charleston from Sept 6, 2007, through March 14, 2009, in primary care; and then here (Salisbury) from March 15, 2009, until the end of this month alternating between nephrology and primary care,” Lubash shared.

According to Salisbury VAMC’s Associate Chief of Staff for Primary Care Dr. Parag Dalsania, the doctor’s reputation is well known and experience treasured.

“Dr. Glen Lubash has been a tremendous asset to Primary Care here,” Dalsania said. “During his tenure, he has shared his vast knowledge of nephrology and progression of dialysis research with his fellow primary care providers. Dr. Lubash has been a resource and mentor to us all! His enthusiasm, compassion, and love for the field of medicine, staff, and patients will be missed.”

Nephrology has been Dr. Lubash’s specialty throughout his extensive career that began with a 1957 Bellevue (New York) Hospital Fellowship in nephrology. A native of Hoboken, N.J., Lubash’s career actu-



Bart Major

Dr. Glenn Lubash, a primary care physician at the Salisbury VAMC and a U.S. Army Veteran, is retiring in December after working more than 50 years in medicine.

ally started with an internship at Bellevue in 1954 and subsequent residency, leading to the fellowship. After two years in the Army Reserve, Lubash established a solid career involving research and teaching at Cornell University Medical College, the University of Maryland School of Medicine, the University of New Mexico School of Medicine and Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine, on top of his clinical appointments at a variety of hospitals across the country.

A Snowbird of sorts, Lubash has worked continuously in southern VA clinical facilities (in North and South Carolina) since 2007. He said he appreciates the opportunity he has had to give back to Veteran patients with whom he shares the distinction of service to country, and has found the experience rewarding, explain-

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Tinnitus continued from Pg 4

ing Veterans with this common disability.

“It takes a village and we are just adding a variety of tools to a patient’s toolbox so they can be more active and less focused on the ringing in their ears,” said Lima about the interdisciplinary approach that seems to be the key to success. Reviews from Veterans who have completed the program have been positive.

“It was great. There were about a dozen other people in the class and it was helpful to hear how other Veterans were going through the same thing and the stories of how they were dealing with it,” said Veteran William Gagan, who went through the program in July.

Gagan would wake up in the middle of the night

with a loud hissing noise in his ears that would make it hard for him to sleep. Now he has incorporated techniques he learned in the class and uses a noise machine that makes ocean sounds.

“There are many snake oil remedies out there and a lot of misinformation about the condition,” said Beck. “So we knew there was a real need to inform Veterans and help them self-manage the condition.”

The TMP program is a month long with a two hour class every week. Patients must have a referral from Audiology before they can attend so patients who are interested should talk to their audiologist at their next visit to the medical center.



Hoffmann Hosts North Carolina Veterans Advisory Council

By Steve Wilkins
VISN 6 public affairs

VISN 6 Director Dan Hoffmann welcomed a group of nearly 30 Veterans Service Organization leaders, Congressional representatives and North Carolina state officials to his quarterly Veterans Advisory Council meeting Dec. 6 at the Durham Chamber of Commerce.

The Network Director hosted the two-hour meeting to engage regional VA partners and cover current topics of interest ranging from the VISN's strategic plan to Care in the Community. For many, it was the first time they had the opportunity to personally engage Hoffmann in frank discussions and share their concerns about Veterans Health Care.

In his opening remarks, Hoffmann touched on access to care, same day appointments and direct scheduling. He detailed programs and policies currently being implemented to address VHA's top priorities of access, employee engagement, turning VA and the VISN into a high performing network, diffusion of best practices that include telehealth and ehealth encounters, and how the VISN is trying to improve Veteran and public trust in VA care.

Deputy Network Director Joe Edger presented concepts covering expansion of Community Veteran Engagement Boards (CVEBs) and budget concerns, explaining how various budget issues affect Veteran care. He also described the effect of the Veterans Equitable Resource Allocation (VERA) on medical center budgets and explained the challenge VA medical center directors face in managing services with a continually growing population.

Edger also gave a quick, well-received summary of VA health care's response to medical needs in the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew.

Throughout their presentations, attendees asked questions and provided insight. American Veterans (AMVETS) Department of North Carolina Command-



Steve Wilkins

VISN 6 Director Dan Hoffmann hosted close to 30 regional stakeholders during the VISN 6 North Carolina Veterans Advisory Council meeting Dec. 6, at the Durham Chamber of Commerce.

er Randy Ferguson raised the issue of how Veterans located in remote locations, or near state lines, need help in identifying the most appropriate VA to get care. Hoffmann shared that there is no wrong door to receiving care. He said that with the proliferation of clinics throughout the VISN over the last 10 years, VA is working hard to make it easier for Veterans to receive their health care closer to home.

Other presenters discussed the VISN 6 strategic plan, technology, education and training and ways VA is working to enhance the Veteran's health care experience, and how the VISN measures the success of programs aimed at improving customer service and Veteran care.

The meetings are scheduled semi-annually in North Carolina and Virginia. For more information call Jennifer Askey or Steve Wilkins at the VISN 6 office, 919-956-5541.

Salisbury Doc continued from Pg 6

ing, "I consider myself lucky to have had the opportunity to try to improve patients' health."

"I have known Dr. Lubash personally and professionally for a few years and can attest with certainty that he is a true gentleman and the epitome of sophistication," said Kerry Obric, a physician assistant assigned to Salisbury's Purple Clinic Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT). "Not only does he dress the part with his crisp white coat, pressed shirts, tie and elaborate belt buckle, he is also a brilliant man with a photographic memory."

Obric said Lubash has regaled staff with many of his stories, using his ability to "recall events to the most minute detail." She noted that she has been most impressed, though, with Dr. Lubash's humility and kindness, explaining that every day he makes a point to greet people in the morning, and walks down the hall at the end of the day to say his goodbyes to staff.

"He has brought laughter and joy to all of us here in primary care and, without a doubt, his presence will be truly missed," Obric said.



American Legion Post 143 Crafts Pillows For Vets

Asheville VAMC Director Cynthia Breyfogle (left) greeted members of the American Legion Auxiliary Steve Youngdeer Post 143 Dec. 7. The women visited the Medical Center to present pillows that they hand crafted and donated for Veterans.



Rod Doty

Radiology continued from Pg 1

needed to invest in the department for the patient's sake and our own."

Since 2015, there has been a 300 percent increase of IR cases, and the staff works daily to keep wait times down to an average of two days.

"In the big picture overall, this space is going to continue the projector of growth to improve access to care for efficiency," Dr. Ha said.

Hospital leaders and those closely associated with the IR program officially cut the ribbon to applause from guests. The doors to the newly renovated 2,800 square-foot space were opened for tours of the control

room, patient recovery area and procedure rooms.

"Seeing the new IR labs and holding area come to fruition is going to enable us the ability to better care for our Veterans and provide exceptional care," Jennifer Farrell, IR nurse coordinator. "I am proud of this team."

Through the use of imaging-guided equipment, IR offers an option for patients who otherwise would require surgery, said Ha. With a small incision about half of one centimeter in size, patients experience less pain, faster recovery, a lower rate of complications, and better overall outcomes.

Miracle continued from Pg 5

know! I'm the best looking zombie you've ever seen." After 15 months McMiller received a call Nov. 15, advising that a donor heart was available.

"How do you prepare for that call?" McMiller asked. "No matter how much you are prepared for that phone call, you're not prepared, you're just not."

Within hours, he and his wife, Patty boarded a jet to Richmond to meet the transplant team at Richmond VAMC.

"I worked at a lot of places as a nurse," Patty said. "The care here can't be beat. They would check up on you and keep you informed. We could not ask for anything more."

His new heart beat for the very first time in the early hours of Nov. 16, 2015, melding the two individuals as one.

Adjusting to his new life, Norris said there are times

when he sees things from his donor's perspective. "At first I was scared," Norris said. "It freaked me out. Now, we've bonded, we accept each other."

Norris said he only knows the donor's age—38 years old—and the fact he was an Army Veteran. Norris and Patty hope to one day meet the family of the donor, whose heart beats on. "We are forever grateful," said Patty.

Exactly one year after his heart transplant surgery, Miracle the Comedian discussed his heart transplant experience during an on-stage comedic performance.

"I want to get up on that stage and tell what happened to me and make it fun," Norris said. "I've always been a funny man. I've always been a driven person. I have changed. There have been changes in my personality. I do feel like my donor is alive. My donor is a part of me."



Remembering Pearl Harbor: A 'Body Blow' To America

By Sean Kimmons
Air Force News Service
First Published Dec. 8, 2015

When the first bombs exploded on a nearby airfield, marking the start of the Japanese sneak attack on the morning of Dec. 7, 1941, Edward Davis and others scrambled from a chow hall.

The 94-year-old Army Veteran said he and other Soldiers were having breakfast at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, when Japanese aircraft dive-bombed the adjacent Wheeler Army Airfield.

"We all ran outside and looked up at the sky to see what was going on," the retired first sergeant said before a Pearl Harbor remembrance ceremony Dec. 7, 2015 at the World War II Memorial.

At that point, a few Mitsubishi A6M Zero fighters roared over the Army base and fired at them, killing and injuring several Soldiers from his unit.

"I couldn't believe it," he said, recalling how the attacks stoked fears of a looming Japanese invasion. "It was an unbelievable tragedy."

The attacks on the island of Oahu eventually left more than 2,400 dead and almost 1,200 wounded as it catapulted the U.S. into the war.

"It dealt us a body blow that I think was a rude awakening to Americans," said Herb Durham, a former Army Air Corps pilot. "The war had started and as a young man I was eager to get in."

During the war, Durham, one of about 20 WWII Veterans at the ceremony, said he had some scary moments in Europe where he flew Republic P-47 Thunderbolt fighters.

One time while strafing German positions, a 20-mm round hit his canopy, causing shattered glass and shrapnel from the round to cut his face.

"I was lucky I had on my oxygen mask and goggles," he said of the March 1945 mission. "The doctor said I was lucky I didn't lose my left eye."

About a month later, Durham faced his biggest test when his aircraft was shot down behind enemy lines.

"I was dive-bombing a target and when I pulled off the target I got hit in the engine," the 91-year-old Veteran recalled. "But I had a lot of air speed so I pulled up to about 6,000 feet and bailed out."

Durham was later caught by German soldiers who threw him in a prison camp. But a few weeks later, he said, the soldiers abandoned the camp as U.S. tanks approached it, freeing him and others.

In the Pacific Theater, former Marine Cpl. Ed Graham, who joined a dozen Veterans on an honor flight from Texas for the ceremony, was sent to the tense Battle of Iwo Jima.



Official U.S. Navy Photo
USS California (BB-44) slowly sinking alongside Ford Island as a result of bomb and torpedo damage, Dec. 7, 1941. USS Shaw (DD-373) is burning in the floating dry dock YFD-2 in the left distance. USS Nevada (BB-36) is beached in the left-center distance.

At first, Graham, 90, said he was part of a floating reserve until the battle turned fiercer than expected and ultimately had about 26,000 American casualties including 6,800 dead.

"We weren't supposed to go in but they tore them up so bad the first day," he said of how the Japanese forces pinned down his fellow Marines. "It was pretty bad for the whole crew."

Graham, assigned to the 3rd Marine Division, was later sent to the island to help purify water for combat-weary troops in the 36-day battle.

"All we had to worry about were mortars and snipers," he said.

But he and other troops received some motivation when U.S. troops raised the American flag on top of Mount Suribachi, which later became an iconic image of the war.

"I was on board the ship when they raised it and everybody clapped, yelled and screamed," he recalled. "It was quite a sight."

The attack on Pearl Harbor and the subsequent "a date which will live in infamy" speech by President Franklin D. Roosevelt inspired many young men to sign up and fight in the costly war, which left more than 400,000 American servicemen dead and forever shaped the world.



Surgeon continued from Pg 1

Regardless of whether Seigler is discussing his military, VA or Duke position, he unequivocally makes it known that interconnected relationships have been the foundation of all his careers. Volunteering for military service in 1961, Seigler served in the 3274th U.S. Army Hos-



Dr. Hilliard Seigler

pital in Durham, N.C., trained with the 5th Medical Brigade and headed to Fort Bragg's Womack Army Medical Center to treat patients each time the troops deployed. He said that serving in the military and having VA and Duke careers was ideal, helping him

to better understand both missions which have led to exceptional outcomes.

"I began as a general surgeon in the military," he said, adding he was fortunate to receive valuable training that forged a greater awareness as to the relationship between the military and industry. "I taught at a variety of DoD medical centers, to include my specialty in transplants, because the military was just getting into that and this benefitted everyone."

During his 49 years at VA's Durham Medical Center, Seigler has bridged the field of Immunogenetics between VA and Duke, exploring the relationship between the immune system and genetics for organ transplants since he graduated from the University of North Carolina as a trained surgeon. Then a science in its infancy, Seigler explained that transplants were just beginning to be performed (pointing out Duke's first in 1965), and smiled as he recalled those exciting times of discovery.

"Defining and identifying what the human response would be to 'immunogens' ~ the antigens that can trigger the immune response to organs resulting in its acceptance or rejection ~ allowed me to pursue both academic and clinical paths," Seigler said. "Research was very big, even back then, and we were very successful in getting research support and grants, which is why I began my career at the VA."

"Seig," as he is affectionately known by his friends and colleagues, praised the VA's continuous commitment to funding research, which he's been privileged to receive throughout his tenure.

He pointed out that VA's research funding is available only to VA employees, which is why many of the best researchers and clinicians in the world choose to wear the VA emblem on their lab coats. He further noted that collaboration between VA researchers and academic institutions can be a significant benefit to Veteran's

health care because it enables a direct connection from patient needs expressed in clinical visits to innovations developed in labs, which are then applied to address those needs. The VA notes that more than 60 percent of its researchers are care providers, making all of this possible, and Veterans remain central to the process throughout VA's advancement of health care.

"It's important to remember that although VA may be a research program that focuses on the needs of our Veterans, the VA's tremendous successes have both changed the lives of Veterans and had a positive impact on all mankind," Seigler said, adding he's been honored to be a part of it. He makes no bones about it that this team effort that has driven the success of, not only his long career, but also that of VA clinicians across the country.

"I have always felt that our service members deserve the best medical care they can receive," Seigler said, emphasizing that because of all of this, the Durham VAHCS meets that expectation every day. "The faculty at Duke University Medical Center is the same, residents are the same and we share these responsibilities of caring for these men and women equally, which is why we can say there is no better care in the world than here at the VA."

Seigler shared a recent story of a mentoring moment with one of those residents, who was treating a Veteran for skin cancer. During the exam he was coaching the resident about the importance of being thorough, to include recognizing signs that a patient might have received a transplant. During the discussion, the Veteran said he had indeed received a kidney 38 years earlier, was thankful to the VA, and would never forget the doctor. Seigler asked him the doctor's name, then shared that he had done the surgery. The patient exclaimed with surprise, "My gosh ~ you look older!" to which Seigler quickly replied with a chuckle, "As do you!"

And with this same enthusiasm, the 82-year-old doctor is not shy about debunking any misinformation on the street about the VA whenever he has an opportunity. Seigler stated with conviction that Veterans can trust the VA and be confident that it's because of these committed relationships that they are being treated by the cream of the crop, and he is always prepared to share VA successes to emphasize that point. Whether about how he and his Duke colleagues determined why a transplant was rejected, or how the team constructed a "care map" to ensure optimal care coordination following a heart or kidney in the VA operating room, Seigler is passionate about setting the record straight.

"I have enjoyed my VA career," Seigler concluded, as he paused to adjust the black and gold Army pin on his VA lab coat. "I believe in this mission and the dedicated people who are doing it."



1-844-MyVA311: One Number To Call To Reach VA

When VA Secretary Bob McDonald first started evaluating business and customer service practices across VA to improve the Veteran experience, the need for a revamped phone system was clear. Instead of navigating dozens of automated phone trees with no guarantee of success, Veterans needed one place to call to get connected to the right place quickly.

VA is introducing 1-844-MyVA311 (1-844-698-2311) as a go-to source for Veterans and their families who don't know what number to call. This new national toll-free number will help eliminate the feeling of frustration and confusion that Veterans and their families have expressed when navigating the 1000-plus phone numbers that currently exist.

With 1-844-MyVA311, Veterans, families, and caregivers can access information about VA services like disability, pension, healthcare eligibility, enrollment, and burial benefits, in addition to a self-service locator to find the nearest VA facility. And if they're looking for immediate assistance with housing or are having a mental health crisis, MyVA311 will route callers to the Homeless Veteran help line and the Veterans Crisis Line.

If you know what number you're calling – keep calling it. None of the existing VA numbers will go away. The future vision is that 1-844-MyVA311 will become a 24/7 one-stop information service platform for all VA services.

Veteran feedback has been instrumental helping us streamline the way we get callers routed to the right place at VA. VA is also making improvements to the overall Veteran experience eliminating blocked calls and hiring more people to reduce wait times. We will continue to gather feedback from our Veterans to ensure VA is meeting their needs.

The new MyVA311 phone number is just one step in a larger effort to modernize VA contact centers so Veterans have a seamless, positive experience when reaching out to VA. In the coming months, we will be sharing more on additional steps as we continue to improve the Veteran experience.



Acupuncture continued from Pg 4

was determined to end his cycle of Oxycodone use. "I told them, 'No more Percocet. I'd rather perish.' And, I was serious," he said.

Around the same time that Johnson reached his breaking point, VA physician Michael Freedman invited him to join a new program that employs a form of acupuncture to relieve pain.

Freedman, a neurologist at the Greenville Community Based Outpatient Clinic, said Johnson is one of several Veterans who have benefited from a procedure called Battlefield Acupuncture, or BFA. Freedman explained that the therapy falls under "auricular" or ear acupuncture, which makes use "of five different points on each ear, which when taken together often reduces both acute and chronic pain." The needles stay in place for several hours to several days, he explained, and fall out on their own.

For Johnson, the relief was immediate. After one session, his pain went from a level 10 to a zero, and with each session, his lack of pain lasted longer between procedures. At first, he was able to go four days between sessions. That lengthened to nine days. Then it was two weeks. "The last procedure I had was October 13," he said near the end of October. "And I have no headache. And I take no drugs."

Freedman expressed excitement about the benefits of the procedure. "For people who respond, it offers a

non-pharmaceutical, non-opiate option for pain control," he said. "It may also be used in conjunction with pharmaceutical therapy or independently depending upon the patient, situation and the response."

Training to offer BFA is substantial. Freedman finished a 300-hour program over a 6-month period in late 2015, about half studies and half hands on. He's completed written examination requirements for certification by the American Academy of Medical Acupuncture.

He is now training other VA providers in the procedure, among them Dr. Frank Lescosky. A podiatrist, Lescosky said, he "wanted another treatment option for his patients suffering from chronic pain, and acupuncture is a good and safe method."

Lescosky encourages other providers to take the training. "We are always looking for alternative treatment options, other than opioid, to help Veterans dealing with pain. And, this a great tool in the toolbox," he said. "I plan to use this for post-op pain and for some myofascial pain."

Johnson is enthusiastic, too, and in fact now publicly advocates for auricular acupuncture therapy, including a recent letter to Congress for more funding. "This man has literally saved my life," he said of Freedman. "I can function as a human being. I can drive a car again. I got my memory back."



VISN 6 Sites Of Care & VA Vet Centers

MEDICAL CENTERS

Asheville VAMC
1100 Tunnel Road
Asheville, NC 28805
828-298-7911, 800-932-6408
www.asheville.va.gov/

Durham VAMC
508 Fulton St.
Durham, NC 27705
919-286-0411, 888-878-6890
www.durham.va.gov/

Fayetteville VAMC
2300 Ramsey St.
Fayetteville, NC 28301
910-488-2120, 800-771-6106
www.fayettevillenc.va.gov/

Hampton VAMC
100 Emancipation Dr.
Hampton, VA 23667
757-722-9961, 866-544-9961
www.hampton.va.gov/

Richmond VAMC
1201 Broad Rock Blvd.
Richmond, VA 23249
804-675-5000, 800-784-8381
www.richmond.va.gov/

Salem VAMC
1970 Roanoke Blvd.
Salem, VA 24153
540-982-2463, 888-982-2463
www.salem.va.gov/

Salisbury VAMC
1601 Brenner Ave.
Salisbury, NC 28144
704-638-9000, 800-469-8262
www.salisbury.va.gov/

OUTPATIENT CLINICS

Albemarle CBOC
1845 W City Drive
Elizabeth City, NC 27909
252-331-2191

Brunswick Outreach Clinic
20 Medical Campus Drive
Supply, NC 28462
910-754-6141

Charlotte CBOC
8601 University East Drive
Charlotte, NC 28213
704-597-3500

Charlotte HCC
3506 W. Tyvola Rd.
Charlotte, NC 28208
704-329-1300

Charlottesville CBOC
590 Peter Jefferson Pkwy
Charlottesville, VA 22911
434-293-3890

Chesapeake CBOC
1987 S. Military Highway
Chesapeake, Va 23320
757-722-9961

Danville CBOC
705 Piney Forest Rd.
Danville, VA 24540
434-710-4210

Emporia CBOC
1746 East Atlantic Street
Emporia, VA 23847
434-348-1500

Fayetteville HCC
7300 So. Raeford Rd
Fayetteville NC 28304
910-488-2120
800-771-6106

Franklin CBOC
647 Wayah St.
Franklin, NC 28734-3390
828-369-1781

Fredericksburg CBOC
130 Executive Center Pkwy
Fredericksburg, VA 22401
540-370-4468

Fredericksburg at Southpoint CBOC
10401 Spotsylvania Ave, Ste 300
Fredericksburg, VA 22408
540-370-4468

Goldsboro CBOC
2610 Hospital Road
Goldsboro, NC 27909
919-731-4809

Greenville HCC
401 Moye Blvd.
Greenville, NC 27834
252-830-2149

Hamlet CBOC
100 Jefferson Street
Hamlet, NC 28345
910-582-3536

Hickory CBOC
2440 Century Place, SE
Hickory, NC 28602
828-431-5600

Hillandale Rd. Annex
1824 Hillandale Road
Durham, North Carolina 27705
919-383-6107

Jacksonville CBOC
4006 Henderson Drive
Jacksonville, NC 28546
910-353-6406

Kernersville HCC
1695 Kernersville Medical Pkwy
Kernersville, NC 27284
336-515-5000

Lynchburg CBOC
1600 Lakeside Drive
Lynchburg, VA 24501
434-316-5000

Morehead City CBOC
5420 U.S. 70
Morehead City, NC 28557
252-240-2349

Raleigh CBOC
3305 Sungate Blvd.
Raleigh, NC 27610
919-212-0129

Raleigh II Annex
3040 Hammond Business Place
Raleigh, NC 27603
919-899-6259

Robeson County CBOC
139 Three Hunts Drive
Pembroke, NC 28372
910-521-8452

Rutherford County CBOC
374 Charlotte Road
Rutherfordton, NC 28139
828-288-2780

Sanford CBOC
3112 Tramway Road
Sanford, NC 27332
919-775-6160

Staunton CBOC
102 Lacy B. King Way
Staunton, VA 24401
540-886-5777

Tazewell CBOC
123 Ben Bolt Ave.
Tazewell, VA 24651
276-988-2526

Virginia Beach CBOC
244 Clearfield Avenue
Virginia Beach, VA
757-722-9961

Wilmington HCC
1705 Gardner Rd.
Wilmington, NC 28405
910-343-5300

Wytheville CBOC
165 Peppers Ferry Rd.
Wytheville, VA 24382-2363
276-223-5400

DIALYSIS CENTERS

VA Dialysis and Blind Rehabilitation Clinics at Brier Creek
8081 Arco Corporate Drive
Raleigh, NC 27617
919-286-5220

VA Dialysis Clinic Fayetteville
2301 Robeson Street, Ste. 101
Fayetteville, NC 28305
910-483-9727

VET CENTERS

Charlotte Vet Center
2114 Ben Craig Dr.
Charlotte, NC 28262
704-549-8025

Fayetteville Vet Center
2301 Robeson Street
Fayetteville, NC 28305
910-488-6252

Greensboro Vet Center
3515 W Market Street, Suite 120
Greensboro, NC 27403
336-333-5366

Greenville Vet Center
1021 W.H. Smith Blvd.
Greenville, NC 27834
252-355-7920

Jacksonville, N.C. Vet Center
110-A Branchwood Drive
Jacksonville, NC 28546
910-577-1100

Norfolk Vet Center
1711 Church Street
Norfolk, VA 23504
757-623-7584

Raleigh Vet Center
8851 Ellstree Lane
Raleigh, NC 27617
919-856-4616

Roanoke Vet Center
350 Albemarle Ave., SW
Roanoke, VA 24016
540-342-9726

Virginia Beach Vet Center
324 Southport Circle, Suite 102
Virginia Beach, VA, 23452
757-248-3665

