



VAMC Anchor

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She Joined On a Dare

101-Year Old Woman Veteran Shares Her Story

by Beth Grady, LCSW

She joined on a dare.

One ordinary day during a lunch break at her job at Providence City Hall in 1942, Charlotte Kwasha signed on the dotted line. Two weeks later—not knowing whether our country was really ready for women to serve—she found herself heading to Iowa for Army basic training. "I couldn't get out of it, so off I went...My father gave me great advice as I boarded the train: 'No matter what you do, Charlotte,' he said, 'always keep your chin up and your head held high.'"

That she did. Ms. Kwasha vividly recalls her three years as a female women's auxiliary member. "As soon as I arrived (in Iowa), I began scrubbing the dorms, pulling K.P. (kitchen police) duty, and marching in the bitter cold. Food was not very good. Field meals consisted of mostly Spam, bully beef, and canned fruit. Most everything else was powdered." One time while performing K.P. duties, she received a visitor. "This very tall lady entered the mess hall with two female officers. She asked me what I was doing, and I told her I was watching the stove...When she asked me why I was watching the stove, I replied: so it doesn't run away!" The tall lady laughed and smiled and invited Ms. Kwasha—a young Private—to sit with them for a cup of coffee. She politely declined because it was not appropriate for a Private to sit and have coffee during K.P. duty—especially with two officers. "The tall lady insisted," Ms. Kwasha continues, "and introduced herself by saying: 'I'm the President's wife... I'm Eleanor Roosevelt!' She was so gracious; it was a wonderful honor to have coffee with the First Lady...one of my best memories."

After completing basic training, Ms. Kwasha's cohort relocated to Fort Sam Houston, Texas and was the first female group at Fort Sam. Although a milestone for women, she considers it at best bittersweet. She relates how she experienced discrimination for the first time—not as a female in the military but as a Jew. Her first assignment was to a service club on post; however, she was quickly informed by the manager that "no Jew was going to serve in my club." In those days, Ms. Kwasha explains, people actually believed that Jews had horns on their heads. One person even asked her why she didn't have horns. She told them that she had surgery to remove them, and the girls actually believed her! "I didn't want to be treated differently than anyone else, and it was important to be accepted." At times, she felt alienated and looked at discharge from the service as a viable option. Her sole reason for repeatedly turning down the opportunity to become an officer was related to being Jewish. "I finally felt safe in San Antonio, and re-training as an officer meant possibly being singled out again because I was Jewish. It wasn't a risk I was ready for." By the end of 1942, the war in the Pacific was heating up, and Ms. Kwasha was sent to New Guinea and the Philippines to support the war effort. During her time overseas, she worked under the command of General Douglas MacArthur. "I actually was present on the harbor when the Japanese formally surrendered. Can you believe it? It all worked out." *(continued on page 3)*



June 2010

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Air Force Thunderbirds Visit Inpatient Veterans



Major John Baum (USAF Thunderbirds #2 Left Wing) visits with Veteran Alfred Gutierrez.

U.S. Air Force Thunderbird Major John Baum (#2 Left Wing) has never visited the Providence VAMC before, but you would never have known that. With all the attention he received, you'd think he was part of the family. Nearly everyone he met engaged him in a conversation—mostly to swap Air Force stories. Major Baum visited with hospitalized Veterans on the wards and also spent time with both dialysis patients and Primary Care outpatients.

The USAF Thunderbirds—America's Ambassadors in Blue—were in town June 26 and 27 for the annual RI Air National Guard Air Show at Quonset Point. This visit was the third visit by the Thunderbirds to the Medical Center.



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Director's Spotlight

Unsung Heroes

Several of you have thanked me personally for this past week's "All Employee Picnic." While I'm glad to receive the positive feedback, I certainly can't take any of the credit. The event was a remarkable team event, with many, many people contributing in a variety of ways. The Events Committee (Janel Souza, Christine Fitzgerald, Heather Oberg, Erin Clare Sears, Bonnie Wheeler, Michele Martin, Regina Correa-Murphy, Ann Thomas-Gueye, Steve Fage, Terry Gengenbach, Bob Caizzi, John Miller, Steve Moss, and Don Ferrante) was instrumental—from a meticulous six months of planning to a flawless execution. The "Grillers" (Steve Fage, Craig Polucha, and David Dosreis), flipped an unending supply of hamburgers, hot dogs, and chicken. The likes of the "Traveling Vets," the "Fonseca Brothers," and "DJ-Dream Stage Productions" provided spectacular musical entertainment; while three of our ever loyal and dedicated housekeepers, John Miller, Karl Mann, and Dee Brown, coordinated the logistics—from set up to break down, to everything in between. I know that many, many others volunteered and contributed their time and efforts. It was, as I said, a remarkable team effort.

I would also like to also take this opportunity to shine a spotlight on a group of unsung heroes--our Canteen Staff. The Veterans Canteen Service (VCS) proudly sponsored this annual picnic, feeding about 1200 employees, including the three CBOCs and box lunches for night shift personnel. Funding for the food, drinks, and other supplies is provided through income received from daily Canteen operations. You may also like to know that VCS sponsors/funds several other initiatives and events—the National Veterans Wheelchair games, the Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, the Summer Sports Clinic, the Golden Age games, the Training-Exposure-Experience Tournament, and the Creative Arts Festival. They are truly among the unsung heroes here at our Medical Center.

WILLIAM BURNEY
Acting Medical Center Director

Outreach Event at McCoy Stadium a Big Hit



PVAMC employees Roger Fonseca and Manny Sequeira support the outreach effort during this year's OEF/OIF Homecoming Event at McCoy Stadium

Take me out to the ball game; take me out to the crowd...and what a crowd there was joining representatives from the Providence VAMC, the Providence VA Regional Office, and the Warwick Vet Center as they teamed up with the PAWSOX for the 31st annual Armed Service Night at McCoy Stadium on June 17. The annual event recognizes the contributions and sacrifices of the men and women of the United States Armed Forces, past and present, and is traditionally standing-room only. "This is the second year in a row that we have teamed up with the PAWSOX to welcome home returning OEF/OIF Veterans," says Rochelle Fortin, OEF/OIF Program Manager—an event which included 150 free tickets for the Veterans.

Are You A Veteran Age 18-59?

You may be eligible to participate in a new phase of the Community Reintegration Research Study being conducted at the Providence VAMC. For more information, please contact Pam Steager at (401) 273-7100, ext. 6286.

*A Research Study conducted
By Dr. Linda Resnik at the Providence VA Medical Center*



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Pre-Anesthesia Clinic

Specialty Clinic Corner

1. Overview: Anesthesia has traditionally meant the condition of having sensation (including the feeling of pain) blocked or temporarily taken away. This allows patients to undergo surgery and other procedures without the distress and pain they would otherwise experience. Anesthesia is a pharmacologically-induced reversible state of amnesia, analgesia, loss of responsiveness, loss of skeletal muscle reflexes, and decreased stress response.

2. Treatment Services:

a. The Outpatient Pre-Anesthesia Clinic at the Providence VA Medical Center serves Veterans every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday afternoons. This clinic is staffed by two Anesthesiologists, four Nurse Anesthetists, and the support staff from B Clinic.

b. The Provider evaluates and plans the appropriate approach to anesthesia for patients. This is accomplished after the patients' medical issues are addressed, and the patients' pre-operative testing, which includes blood work, ECG's, and chest X-Rays, are reviewed. If there is any abnormality or concern with any of the test results or medical issues, the Provider may have some of this testing repeated and/or cancel/delay the surgery in order to ensure the patients' safety. In addition, the patients are made fully aware of the risks and benefits of the anesthesia they are to receive.

3. Workload: Pre-Anesthesia had 1124 patient visits for Fiscal Year 2009.

4. Patient Education: The Provider educates patients about the type of anesthesia that will be used for their particular procedure. Patients are informed as to how the process works and exactly what they should expect/feel in receiving anesthesia. This information generally helps allay patients' fears and anxieties related to undergoing anesthesia. It also affords them the opportunity to ask questions, and address issues or concerns they have about their upcoming procedure.

4. Did you know? There are generally five accepted anesthetic techniques—General which requires intubation, Sedation (either alone or in conjunction with another type of anesthesia), Regional such as spinal or epidural nerve blocks, Monitored Anesthesia Care (MAC) which can vary from mild to deep and does not require intubation, and Local used in a small area of the body with such procedures as biopsies and therapeutic injections.

Article by Elise Chapman, MA, RN, WCC; reviewed by Dr. Frederick Burgess, Chief of Anesthesia.

"Dare"

(continued from page 1)

In 1946, Ms. Kwasha—now a civilian—became the first female service officer accredited to work here in Providence. She worked hundreds of claims cases until she officially retired at the age of 72. "That's just an age," she says. "I didn't get paid after that, but I continued to volunteer until I was 83." One case in which she worked on for over 8 years resulted in a Veteran receiving a lump sum of \$40,000 in 1990. "I received a gift of dried apricots as a thank you, and I was so proud because justice had been served."

Ms. Kwasha was one of the first Veterans treated when the Providence VAMC first opened its doors. She recalls being treated very well, with a private room and a private bathroom. "All the veterans would come and visit me, and I believe I was the first female patient at this facility." She has fond memories of the VA and during the recent "Tents to Tea" event, everyone in attendance expressed gratitude to her for helping pave the way for all women Veterans. She has indeed held her head high—not bad for a woman who joined on a dare.

(Beth Grady is Women Veterans Program Manager at PVAMC)



The Case of the Pudgy Playboy

Due to the large number of correct submissions, winners of June's **Intrepid Detective** were selected via a drawing. This month's winners are: Prudence Venner, Carol Maynard, Frances Woods, Jennifer Robitaille, Elsie Angell, Debra-Lynn Bouffard, Jerry DiDonato, and Mary Jane Lopes. Each will receive 2 free movie passes.



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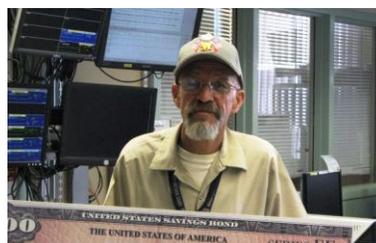


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Staff in the News

EMPLOYEE OF THE QUARTER

Rafael Montanez, a member of the *Environmental Management Service team*, has been selected as **Employee of the Quarter** for the quarter July 1, 2010 through September 30, 2010. Rafael is responsible for all custodial duties on the Telemetry Stepdown Unit (6A).



...Around the PVAMC...

Clockwise from top left: *Leadership, Effectiveness, Accountability, Development (LEAD) Graduates-Class of 2010*; PVAMC's "Certified Nurses" pose at the front entrance of the Medical Center; group photo of participants at the Women Veterans Program-sponsored "Tents to Tea" event here at the Medical Center; **Dr. Stephen Mernoff**, Chief of Neurology, demonstrates a lumbar puncture to incoming Residents during Residents Skills Fair; a group shot from last Thursday's *picnic*; finally, the Rhode Island Lions Sight Foundation's 3rd Annual VIP Fishing Tournament for the blind and visually-impaired was held on June 27 in Galilee. **Walter Judd** took home first place with six fish caught; **Michael Graichen** finished third with three fish caught; and the largest Fluke was won by **Bill Byrnes**. Walter, Michael, and Bill are Blind Veterans and patients of the VIST Program here at our Medical Center. To see photos of the event, please click [here](#).



Got Story Ideas?

Please submit your ideas to
Thomas.Antonaccio@va.gov.

Director's Blog



Need Enrollment Info?

Please call (401) 273-7100, ext. 3300