



Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service

January 6, 2020

Dr. J.D. Crouch II
President, United Services Organization
P.O. Box 96860
Washington, DC 20077-7677

Dear Dr. Crouch:

I'm afraid that I have not done a very good job of letting you know the history of the Commissioned Corps of officers of the US Public Health Service and why they deserve to be supported by the USO. I am a historian by education and profession, so I decided to research the wartime history of the PHS.

President Woodrow Wilson's Executive Order on 3 April 1917 made the USPHS a part of the military forces of the United States during World War I, and USPHS officers were detailed to the Army, Navy, and Coast Guard.

Beginning on 23 December 1941—less than three weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor—officers of the USPHS serving on Coast Guard ships and with other Coast Guard units were incorporated into the Naval forces of the United States. During World War II, 663 USPHS officers served as part of the Coast Guard, including serving on four cutters that were lost to enemy action. USPHS doctors were assigned to each of the Army's Service Commands. Fifteen USPHS officers were assigned to the China-Burma-India theater of war. Others supported the Normandy landings on D-Day in 1944; still others were directly involved in the amphibious landings on Japanese-defended islands in the Pacific theater of war, including Iwo Jima, Saipan, and the Philippines.

A USPHS officer served on the G-5 staff at Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, in Europe with the rank of major general. A PHS officer served on General MacArthur's staff as an aide-de-camp, while another PHS officer served on the personal staff of Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz. Five USPHS medical officers serving in the Philippines were taken prisoner by the Japanese, and two of them died in captivity. A total of fourteen USPHS officers died on active duty during WW II, including six who were killed in enemy action. Three USPHS officers were awarded Distinguished Service Medals for their wartime service; seven received Purple Heart Medals; ten received Legions of Merit; and nine were awarded Bronze Star Medals.

On 21 June 1945, President Harry S. Truman issued Executive Order 9575, which declared the "Commissioned Corps of the Public Health Service to be a military service and branch of the land and naval forces of the United States during the period of the present war."

Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service

At least 171 USPHS officers served in Vietnam on surgical teams and in groups controlling malaria and infectious diseases.

Almost 900 USPHS officers have served with U.S. Military forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. Some 450 PHS officers are assigned to provide medical care for Coast Guard personnel, wearing Coast Guard uniforms and serving on Coast Guard cutters and at Coast Guard bases. USPHS officers have provided medical care to the Coast Guard for more than 200 years. A USPHS rear admiral serves as Surgeon General of the Coast Guard.

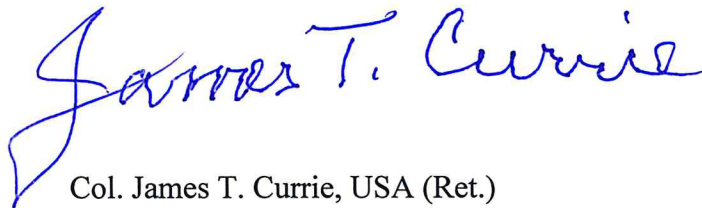
The Defense Department regularly awards its own medals to members of the USPHS, as it did on 15 November 2018, when it awarded the Humanitarian Service Medal to 1400 officers of the Public Health Service in recognition of their work during hurricane relief efforts.

USPHS officers are veterans under federal law (42 U.S. Code 213d), entitled to all rights and privileges thereof, including the right to burial in a Veterans Affairs cemetery. They participate fully in the Memorial Day and Veterans Day events at Arlington National Cemetery and regularly march in veterans' parades.

Further, they are classified as members of the military services under two different provisions of federal law: 50 U.S. Code § 511 and 5 U.S. Code § 8331.

We know that the USO has not traditionally included the USPHS in its scope of service, though I am confident that it did not turn away PHS officers during WW II when they were serving with the Coast Guard, Army, and Navy as outlined above. We think it is time for the USO to come around to the idea that members of the Commissioned Corps of the US Public Health Service are equal in all respects to members of the defined "armed forces" and are worthy of being included in USO activities.

Sincerely,



Col. James T. Currie, USA (Ret.)
Executive Director