

BUMED Oral History Project
Rear Admiral Marion J. Balsam, MC, USN, Ret.
Interview Synopsis and Glossary

Date and Location of Interview: April 6, 2016, Bethesda, MD
Interviewer: Mr. André B. Sobocinski, Historian, BUMED
Transcription length: 47 pages

SYNOPSIS:

Rear Admiral Balsam was born and raised in Brooklyn, NY, to Emmanuel and Dorothy Balsam. From an early age, her close-knit family instilled in her a strong work ethic which would develop into her creed, "Why just do it when you can overdo it."

In her early years, Balsam immersed herself in books and learning. She also played the piano (which would be a lifelong hobby), but dreams of playing professionally were dashed during a public recital at Steinway Hall when she was a young teen.

Admiral Balsam would experience a pivotal life event in the fourth grade when her best friend Anita succumbed to leukemia. This tragic event planted the notion of studying medicine and dedicating her life to sparing others from the pain that her friend endured.

After graduating Samuel Tilden High School, Balsam attended Cornell University in Ithaca, NY, where she majored in Philosophy and worked as a model. She briefly considered a career in philosophy, however admits that she recognized that she was never going to be another Aristotle, Kant or Descartes. Upon achieving her Bachelor's Degree, Admiral Balsam attended the New York University School of Medicine. At the time, there were very few women studying at medical schools in America; Balsam was one of nine women in a class of 160 students.

Upon completion of an internship at Bellevue Hospital, New York, Balsam entered a residency in pediatrics and a fellowship in metabolic disease, both at Children's Hospital in Philadelphia (CHOP). She recalls many of the important medical figures at CHOP at the time and mentions the inspirational leadership of Dr. C. Everett Koop who was then surgeon-in-chief at the hospital.

Following formal medical training, Admiral Balsam worked in Guam and the Trust Territories of Micronesia as Chief of the Crippled Childrens' Services Program (Department of Public Health) and as the first Medical Director for the Head Start Programs of Guam and the Trust Territories. She joined the Navy in 1975 as a staff pediatrician assigned to the Naval Regional Medical Center (NMRC), Camp Pendleton, CA.

In 1981, Admiral Balsam was assigned as the Head, Division of Inpatient Pediatrics, National Naval Medical Center, Bethesda, MD, where in 1985 she was appointed as Chair, Pediatrics Department and as Program Director, Pediatric Residency Training Program. In the oral history she shares anecdotes about being one of very few woman doctors stationed at the hospital, recalling that at the time there were two locker rooms in the operating suite—one assigned for "Doctors" (Men) and one for "Nurses" (Women).

In 1989, Admiral Balsam assumed the position of Medical Director and Director of Graduate Medical Education, Naval Hospital San Diego. Two years later, she was selected to be Deputy Commander, National Naval Medical Center, Bethesda, MD.

From 1993 to 1995, Admiral Balsam served as the Commanding Officer, Naval Hospital Pensacola, FL; she followed this tour as the Fleet Medical Officer, United States Naval Forces Europe, (London, U.K.).

On March 13, 1998, Admiral Balsam assumed Command of Naval Medical Center, Portsmouth, VA. Balsam took command of the facility when it was under fire for inefficiencies and administrative issues. During her tenure, Balsam would change the course of the Medical Center and succeed in making it one of the most cost effective facilities in the Navy while preserving and expanding care for retirees and establishing a Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU). She also oversaw the hospital's historic move from the old facility into the new William Charette Health Center.

After two years on the job, Balsam decided on retirement from the Navy. Following her retirement, Balsam went on to work at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development in Bethesda, MD (2003-2015).

Her life was once again altered when in 2004 she lost her son Cliff in a mountain hiking accident. In his adulthood, Cliff was a dedicated supporter of animal rights. Over the last decade, Admiral Balsam began dedicating her own life to reducing animal suffering by fighting for initiatives to stop the use of live animals in medical education and for trauma training. She firmly believes that with the current sophisticated technology such as simulation mannequins, animals no longer need to suffer for the aim of clinical education. At the time of the interview, there is only one remaining medical school in the United States that still uses live animals for medical student education.

Rear Admiral Balsam is a Diplomate of the American Board of Pediatrics. She is a Fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics, where she has served on numerous committees, most notably the Committee on Pediatric Workforce, chairing the Subcommittee on Women in Pediatrics and later serving on the

Task Force on Pediatrics and Terrorism. She has an academic appointment at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences. Rear Admiral Balsam has served on the Health Professionals Advisory Committee, March of Dimes. She has authored several scientific publications, most of which pertain to metabolic disorders in children.

Rear Admiral Balsam's awards include the following: Defense Superior Service Medal, Legion of Merit (with two gold stars), Defense Meritorious Service Medal, Meritorious Service Medal, Joint Service Commendation Medal, Navy Commendation Medal, Meritorious Unit Commendation, Humanitarian Service Medal, and several awards for excellence in medical education.

KEY TERMS:

Animal Rights

Brooklyn, NY

BUMED (Bureau of Medicine and Surgery)

Bethesda, MD, National Naval Medical Center

Capstone

Camp Pendleton, CA, Naval Regional Medical Center

CHAMPUS (Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Uniformed Services)

Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, PA (CHOP)

Cornell University, Ithaca, NY

Crippled Childrens' Services Program, Department of Public Health Government of Guam

Graduate Medical Education

Guam, Marianas Islands

Medical Education

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), Bethesda, MD

New York University School of Medicine

Pediatrics

Pensacola, FL, Naval Hospital

PICU (Pediatric Intensive Care Unit)

Portsmouth, VA, Naval Medical Center

TRICARE

United States Naval Forces Europe

KEY PERSONNEL:

Arentzen, Willard, VADM MC, USN, Surgeon General of the U.S. Navy, 1976-1980.

Biehl, Robert F., CAPT MC, USN (1934-2011). Illinois-born pediatrician who served in the Navy from 1960-1993. Biehl served as the Navy Pediatrics Specialty Leader when Admiral Balsam entered the Navy.

Bill, David, RADM III, USN. Thirty-two year veteran of the U.S. Navy whose service included CNO staff, Deputy Commander Atlantic Fleet, Commander of Cruiser Destroyer Group Twelve, The USS *Enterprise* Battle Group, and Deputy Commander US Naval Forces Europe.

Clark, Vern, ADM, USN, Chief of Naval Operations, 2000-2005.

Curtin, Jane. American comedian best known for her appearances on TV shows *Saturday Night Live* (original cast) and *Third Rock from the Sun*.

Diehl, Glendon, CAPT, MSC, USN. Served aide to Admiral Balsam at NMC Portsmouth, VA At the time of interview, CAPT Diehl was the Director of the Center for Global Health Engagement, Uniformed Served University of the Health Sciences (USUHS).

Garretson, John, CAPT, MC, USN. Pediatrician who served in the Navy from 1975 to 1995.

Guter, Don, RADM, USN, Judge Advocate General of the U.S. Navy, 2000-2002.

Hagen, Donald, VADM, MC, USN, Surgeon General of the Navy, 1991-1995.

Halder, Robert (Bob), RADM, MC, USN. An Oneida, NY-born ophthalmologist who served in the Navy from 1969-1992.

Josephs, Steven, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs, 1994-1997.

Koenig, Harold, VADM MC, USN, Surgeon General of the U.S. Navy, 1995-1998.

Koop, C. Everett, MD (1916-2013). Koop served as the surgeon-in-chief at CHOP (1946-1981) before being appointed the 13th Surgeon General of the U.S. Navy (1982-1989).

Lichtman, David, RADM, MC, USN. Brooklyn-born orthopedic surgeon who served in the Navy from 1969 to 1994. Lichtman was the Commander of the National Naval Medical Center, Bethesda, when Balsam was Deputy.

Lockhart, Ralph, CAPT, MSC, USN. XO, NH Pensacola, 1993-1995.

Lopez, Thomas Joseph, ADM, USN. Lopez served as Commander in Chief, U.S. Naval Forces Europe/Commander, 1996-1998.

Morris, David, RADM, USN. Navy veteran whose career spanned from 1959-1996.

Nelson, Richard, VADM, MC, USN, Surgeon General of the Navy, 1997-2001.

Reason, J. Paul, USN, Commander in Chief, United States Atlantic Fleet, 1996-1999.

Sarducci, Father Guido. A character created by comedian Don Novello for the Second City Comedy Group but best known on *Saturday Night Live*. Novello's Sarducci was a heavily accented Italian priest who smokes and wears tennis shoes and has many witticisms on a wide-range of topics.

Smith, Leighton "Snuffy," ADM, USN, Commander in Chief of the U.S. Naval Forces Europe and Allied Forces Southern Europe, 1994-1996.

Wilson, Cathy, CAPT, NC, USN. Wilson would serve as an aid to

Admiral Balsam. She would later serve as the Commanding Officer of the U.S. Military Hospital Kuwait (2005-2006) and Naval Hospital Bremerton, WA (2006-2008) before retiring in 2008.

Wright, Dennis, RADM, MC, USN. Mississippi-born pediatrician/neonatologist who served in the Navy from 1971 to 2001.

Yamodis, Nick, CAPT, MC, USN, former Navy neurosurgeon.

GLOSSARY:

Capstone are joint service professional military education courses for newly promoted brigadier generals and rear admirals serving in the United States military. The National Defense University conducts the CAPSTONE course at Fort McNair in Washington, DC. The course's objective is to ensure senior military leaders understand how military forces and other elements of national power are integrated and used to support national military strategies, and how joint, interagency, and multinational operations support strategic national objectives. (Source: <http://www.ndu.edu/CAPSTONE>).

Charette Naval Health Care Center (Naval Medical Center) in Portsmouth, VA was named in honor of HMCM William Charette (1932-2011), a Hospital Corpsman who was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions in the Korean War. Dedication ceremony took place on April 30, 1999.

Fitzsimmons Army Medical Center, Aurora, Colorado—named after Lieutenant William Fitzsimmons, the first American physician killed in World War I—was in operation from 1918 until 1999.

Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO)—now known as the Joint Commission—is a United States-based nonprofit tax-exempt organization that accredits more than 20,000 health care organizations and programs in the United States. A majority of state governments recognize Joint Commission accreditation as a condition of licensure and the receipt of Medicaid reimbursement.

Private Benjamin is a 1980 film comedy starring Goldie Hawn who

enlists in the Army thinking it will serve as a needed vacation following her husband's death.

Samuel Tilden High School, Brooklyn, NY. Opened on 3 February 1929, Samuel J. Tilden High School is a New York City public high school in the East Flatbush section of Brooklyn, New York City. It was named for Samuel J. Tilden (1814-1886), the former governor of New York. Admiral Balsam graduated Tilden High School in 1958.

Steinway Hall, NY, NY—a popular concert venue and Steinway Piano showroom in existence since 1864. The second Steinway Hall was located from 109-113-West 57th Street, New York City was in operation from 1925-2014.

Stoopball—popular neighborhood city game played by throwing a ball on the stoop in front of a building.

Westinghouse Science Scholarship—a Science Talent Search open to high school students. Originally sponsored by the Westinghouse Corporation, in 1998 Intel took over the title sponsorship. Since 2016, the talent search had been sponsored by Regeneron Pharmaceuticals.

Women's Equality Day (August 26th) was selected to commemorate the 1920 passage of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, granting women the right to vote.