

CAPT Earl R. Fox, USPHS

Photo Credit

USCG photo 1999

General Message:

R 032031Z OCT 12
FM COMCOGARD PSC ARLINGTON VA
TO ALCGPSC
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ALCGPSC 126/12
SUBJ: DEATH OF RETIRED CAPT USPHS



1. The Commandant reports with deepest regret the death of CAPT Earl R. Fox, USPHS (retired), on 23 Sep 2012, in Lynchburg, VA. He died on his 94th birthday. Dr. Fox was a U.S. Navy combat veteran of World War II who later joined the U.S. Public Health Service and was a Coast Guard flight surgeon from 1974 to 1999. He was the last veteran of WWII to serve on active duty.
2. Born in Fort Eustis, VA, Earl Russell Fox graduated from the University of Richmond in 1941 and was commissioned an Ensign in the U.S. Navy Reserve in January 1942. ENS Fox was assigned to the 77-foot motor torpedo boat PT-22 which was in action at the Battle of Midway in June 1942. He saw combat in the battle to recover the western Aleutian Islands from occupying Japanese forces. PT-22 was wrecked in a storm in January 1943 near Adak, AK. He was reassigned to the southwest Pacific and commanded the 80-foot PT-349. He transferred to the Submarine Service in 1943, with service in submarines R-14 and R-20 operating from Key West, FL. He then served in USS BANG (SS-385) for wartime patrols in the South China and Philippine Seas. For his wartime service LT Fox was awarded the Silver Star and two Bronze Stars.
3. Next, he attended the Medical College of Virginia. As Dr. Fox he moved to St. Petersburg, FL, where he practiced rheumatology and general medicine. At the age of 55 he retired so he could devote more time to sailing his 43-foot yacht and his duties as a yacht club commodore. He became well acquainted with Coast Guard officers locally. One day the Coast Guard was called to rescue a man suffering a heart attack aboard a pleasure boat. The normal Coast Guard doctor was away. Dr. Fox was asked to assist, which delighted him. Due to a doctor shortage in 1974 and in consideration of his considerable naval and medical experience Dr. Fox was granted an age waiver to join the U.S. Public Health Service at age 55. He had two conditions: to be always assigned to the Coast Guard, and to be sent to Flight Surgeon training that included learning to fly. Eventually he qualified as a pilot in both fixed and rotary wing. For 16 years he served as a Flight Surgeon at Coast Guard Air Stations on the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts. The Coast Guard awarded two Meritorious Service Medals.
4. One particularly notable contribution of Dr. Fox was his service as Flight Surgeon on the investigation into the crash of CG-1432. On 18 Feb 1979 the HH-3F Pelican helicopter from

CAPT Earl R. Fox, USPHS

Air Station Cape Cod was on a MEDEVAC mission 180 miles southeast of Cape Cod in deteriorating weather. The helo lost power, landed in heavy seas, and then rolled over. One aircrewman survived but four died. Three weeks earlier another Pelican, CG-1483 from Air Station San Diego, lost two of four aircrew in a similar rollover. Dr. Fox made notable contributions to reviewing human factors that interfered with successful egress from a capsized helicopter at sea. The investigation report reviewed existing training and recommended new, realistic training that is still used today. Twenty years later he felt this was one of his most significant contributions to naval aviation.

5. In 1990 Dr. Fox transferred to Coast Guard Headquarters for a variety of medical duties. He considered medical waivers for Coast Guard recruits, for Coast Guard aviators, and for Merchant Mariners. He served on Physical Evaluation Boards and advised on numerous medical matters. With his unique mix of experience and manner he was seen by many as “the Coast Guards Doctor.” He received the Legion of Merit in 1999.

6. Just prior to his retirement in November 1999, CAPT Fox was honored by President Clinton in Veterans Day ceremonies at Arlington National Cemetery. The President said, “I want to say a special welcome today to a person you may have read about in the morning papers—CAPT Earl Fox is the Senior Medical Officer at the Coast Guard Personnel Command in Washington. He also happens to be the last World War II veteran still on active military duty. Now, next week he will retire at the tender young age of 80. I think he has earned his retirement. But, Captain, on behalf of a grateful nation, we say thank you for your service.”

7. In speaking at another appearance that day, Dr. Fox said, “One generation forms the backbone for the next to build on. As my generation fades into the mist of collective memory called tradition, you will continue the process for the next generation of your sons and daughters. In this way those who have given the last full measure of devotion will live forever.”

8. CAPT Fox was buried with military honors at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Naruna, VA, on Friday 28 Sep 2012.

9. The Fox family requested those wishing to make a memorial contribution consider the Ebenezer Cemetery Fund, 2818 Railview Rd, Gladys, VA 24544.

10. RDML Dave Callahan, Commander, CG Personnel Service Center, sends.

11. Internet release authorized.

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