

Origin of the Veteran Caucus Awards Plaque from Print Titled “Corpsman”¹ by Artist Henry Casselli

Exhibit authored by Ken Harbert, PhD, CHES, PA-C

Since the late 1980’s the American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA) has awarded a plaque to those outstanding physician assistants who represent the best of the men and women who have provided service to their country. The artist for the plaque’s print is Henry Casselli’s work entitled “Corpsman” which he penned during a firefight in Vietnam, May 1968.¹ This print shows the true legacy of the Veterans Caucus and their motto, “Life Savers Then... Caregivers Now”.²



The Veterans Caucus represents physician assistants (PAs) who are veterans of the Uniformed Services. Many of their members have served as medics and corpsmen since World War II and many are continuing to serve today as medical officers in active, reserve or guard military service components.

This award was given at each annual Memorial Day service to honor those who provide outstanding services to our country, our profession, and our patients. The idea of the award came about with input from Lonnie Holmes, PA-C who knew of the Southern California Trophy Company, which was established in 1927 in Los Angeles, California by Edwin Bathke. This prestigious company was home of many famous awards such as the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences’ “Oscars”, the Golden Globe Award and the Screen Actors Guild Award. The caucus worked for over twenty years with Dee Pynes, an employee from the company, who assisted in the design of a walnut perpetual plaque with a silkscreen print of “Corpsman” and the Veterans Caucus logo surrounded by blue velvet.³

Henry Casselli’s is a world-famous artist, whose life and art intersect inexorably with that of New Orleans. Born in the racially mixed Ninth Ward near the French Quarter, he has a firm grasp of the realities that permeate the daily experiences of ordinary people, particularly in that section of the city. He began his art studies in New Orleans at the McCrady School of Fine and Applied Arts in 1964.

Prior to ending his artistic studies in 1967 he joined the United States Marine Corps which to its credit recognized his artistic gifts. He was duly assigned the position of “combat artist.” He served as a Marine artist from 1967 to 1968 which formed his unique and emotional artistic vision and feeling. The degree of emotional impact generated by the Vietnam War is especially evident in his work. After fourteen months moving from one battle to the next, being a Marine first and an artist second (including the 1968 Tet Offensive), he produced 680 sketches and paintings depicting his

¹ Casselli, H. “Corpsman” sketched May 1968, permission given by United State Marine Corp Museum 1987.

² Harbert, K. “Lifesavers Then ...Caregivers Now” poem and video by Med Vets Inc. Washington, D.C. 1980.

³ Personal correspondence with Tom Skidmore, South California Trophy, Inc. June 19, 2018.

service. He stated “I learned to cry out there, how to hurt. I learned to express my feelings. I was fortunate; I had a piece of paper to put it down. Lots of guys couldn’t do that... It’s coming right from my gut and scribbled on the page”. His account simultaneously reveals the merit of painting as a documentary method, and the raw horror of being the artist who must utilize it. While his experience as a combat artist certainly shaped his artistic voice, it also cast a dark shadow over his career as a fine artist. ⁴



He does not discuss his Vietnam work in honor of the Marines he served with, his art tells his story. When invited to attend the Veterans Caucus Memorial service he said “Thank you for the invitation but I cannot attend the Memorial Service. It brings back so many of who served, both physically and emotionally. The “Corpsmen” piece shows the pain and suffering of all who have faced war, our brothers dying in their arms and our minds crying out in silent pain for the sadness, emptiness and suffering of it all.

It is truly rewarding, this many years in time, to be thanked once again for the work done so many lifetimes ago, and hear that others feel and understand what I tried to say in my art.”⁵

Following his discharge from the Marine Corps in 1970, Casselli returned to New Orleans. Casselli’s work began to appear with remarkable frequency in exhibitions from Texas to New England. In 1971 alone, there were a dozen venues, including the prestigious American Watercolor Society in New York, where his first submission won him an award. He would continue to exhibit annually at the society’s exhibitions, garnering prizes along the way, eventually winning its Silver Medal of Honor in 1986, followed by the society’s distinguished Gold Medal of Honor the next year for Echo. In that fifteen-year interval, Casselli solidified his position as a major figure in America Art. His mastery of watercolor has enabled him to advance the medium into commissioned portraits including that of President Ronald Reagan. This assignment spanned two years. He is a member of the American Watercolor Society, Watercolor USA Honor Society, and a full academician of the National Academy of Design. He won the American Watercolor Society’s Gold Medal for his work “Echo”, in 1987. ⁶



⁴ Stoler, K. Strange Weapons. A thesis submitted to the faculty of Wesleyan University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Departmental Honors from the College of Social Studies Middletown, Connecticut April, 2014

⁵ Personal Correspondence from Henry Casselli to Ken Harbert 28 September 1987

⁶ <http://www.henrycasselli.com/casselli/biography.htm> accessed April 20, 2018.

**Veteran Caucus of the American Academy of Physician Assistants
Annual Award Winners**

By Ken Harbert

Year	Military	Civilian	Lifetime Achievement	Special Award
2018		Rubina DaSilva – Veterans Association of PA's		
2017	Major Chris Cordoba, USA	Kurtis Manley		
2016	Lieutenant Colonel M. Millis, USAF			
2015	Commander Norm Moser,USN			
2014	Major B. Ritter, USAF	Dixie Patterson		
2013	Lieutenant Colonel Pamela. Lucas, USAF	Don Pederson		
2012	Colonel Ken Wade, USA,			
2011	Captain Richard Waggoner	Amiel Narcelle Redfish		
2010	Lieutenant Commander John Conza, USN			
2009	Captain Timothy Harelson, USA	Earl Morse		
2008	Captain Patrick Williams,USA	Michael Goodwin	David Gwinn	
2007	Lieutenant Colonel Chery Gregorio, USAF	Tim Egan		
2006	CWO 4 P. Ivory, USA	Ruth Ballweg. University of Washington		
2005	Major John Nelson	Denni Woodmansee, Veterans Administration	Thomas Zampieri, Blind Veterans of American	
2004	Captain Robert Heath	Major John Padgett, USA		
2003	Lieutenant Colonel Randy Danielsen, USAF	Colonel William Tozier, USA	Jesse Edwards, University of Nebraska	
2002	Mary Ann Ramos, Pentagon	Gordon Huie		Shiya Ribowski
2001	Major Kathleen Adamsom, USAF	Kathy Fennell		Frank Corcoran, Wyeth- Ayerst Labs
2000	Major Mike Doyle, USAF	Tom Lemley, American Academy of Physician Assistants	-Ken Harbert, Veterans Caucus	-Richard Weidman, Vietnam Veterans of American

2000			-Rear Admiral Ken Moritsugu, USPHS	-Terry Anderson, Hostage Victim of Lebanon
1999	Lieutenant Antonia Lopez, USN	Jim Long		
1998	Captain Tim Alspach, USA, KIA Gulf War	Murl Dotson	Richard Smith, MD, University of Washington	
1997	Captain Greg Reisz, USA	Doug Condit		
1996	Major Shep Stone, USA	Jean Thompson		-Jeff Heinrich, Yale University -Robert Muller, Vietnam Veterans of America
1995	Captain Scott Buralli	Richard Davis		
1994	Captain Richard Vause, USPHS	Bruce Fichlander		
1993	Major Jim Parrish, USA	William Stanhope		
1992		Tom Zampieri		
1991	Major Jimmie Keller, USA	William Marquardt		-CWO4 Richard Rocco --Major General Pat Brady -Dave Gorman, Disabled Veterans
1990	Captain John Neese	Robert Intress		
1989	Lieutenant Ron Woodruff, USN	David Marie		-Rose Sandecki, Veterans Administration On Women Veterans -Brigadier General George Price, Vietnam Memorial Fund -Congressman John Murtha -James Holsinger, Veterans Administration
1988	CWO 3 Ron Lott, USA	Kevin Walsh		- Mary Stout, Vietnam Veterans of America -Henry Casselli, Artist of "Corpsman"
1987	Captain Mike Gallagher, USAF	Edward Sorace	-Lieutenant General Murphy Chesney, Surgeon of the Air Force -Rear Admiral James Zimble, Surgeon General of the Navy	-Jack Smith, Team Leader Veteran Center -Keith Gustin, Disabled Veterans
1986	CWO3 David Jenkins, USA	Robert Norton		-Congressman Thomas Vallely -Keith Bauer, Disabled American Veterans