

## **William M. “Bill” Beckner (1932–2015) — In Memoriam**



William McCarty Beckner, died on August 12, 2015 in Rockville, Maryland at the age of 82 y with his family by his bedside. Bill retired from the U.S. Navy (USN) in 1982 after 29 y on active duty. His second career was with the National Council on Radiation Protection and Measurements (NCRP) where he retired as Executive Director in 2004 after 22 y of service. He was a long time member of the Health Physics Society.

Bill was born November 7, 1932 in Laredo, Missouri. Laredo, named after Laredo, Texas, is more of a “tiny” town than a small town: the population was 578 in 1930 and is now just over 100. Bill learned and passed on many hometown Midwestern values to his four children including phrases such as “Pay attention to what you’re doing and protect your reputation – others will judge you on your reputation,” “It’s

cheaper to maintain a car, than to buy a new one,” and “It takes a lot of ‘atta’ boys to make up for one ‘awh #&%!’.”

CDR William Beckner served in the USN from 1953 to 1982 and distinguished himself as one of the few Naval Nuclear Medicine technicians. In 1962 Bill was commissioned as a Radiation Health Officer in the USN Medical Service Corps. One of Bill’s many accomplishments occurred at the Naval Medical Research Unit in Taipei, Taiwan, where he established a Nuclear Medicine capability used in the study and treatment of infectious diseases in DaNang Viet Nam, the Philippines, and Indonesia.

For 6 y, Bill was the advisor to the Navy Surgeon General on all radiation protection matters dealing with medical, industrial, nuclear power, and nuclear weapons circumstances. His wide range of interests while in the USN included overseeing the installation of a whole body counter, evaluating  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  turnover rate in humans of different ages, and conducting  $^{51}\text{Cr}$  studies of Wilson’ disease, a rare inherited disorder that causes too much copper to accumulate in the liver, brain and other vital organs.

At the National Naval Medical Center (now the Walter Reed National Military Center) Bill supported the Navy’s Nuclear Medicine Officers Training Course for Nuclear Medicine Officers from all three services. During his time in the military, Bill completed the requirements for his Bachelor’s Degree in Physics from George Washington University in 1965 and his Master’s Degree in Health Science (Radiation Physics) from Johns Hopkins University in 1975.

Bill’s contributions to the Navy’s Nuclear Medicine Program were recognized in 2014 when, at the Health Physics Society Annual Meeting, he received the John C. Taschner Leadership Award in Military Health Physics for outstanding professionalism and service to the United States. He was honored as “*the Radiation Health Officer who presided over the most significant changes in Navy radiation health and safety matters in the history of the Navy’s Radiation Specialist/Radiation Health Officer community.*”

Bill's professional affiliations included the Health Physics Society, the American Association of Physicists in Medicine, the American College of Radiology, the American Roentgen Ray Society, the Radiation Research Society, and the Radiological Society of North America. Bill was certified in Medical Nuclear Physics by the American Board of Radiology.

Bill was only the second Executive Director of NCRP, succeeding W. Roger Ney who had served under Lauriston S. Taylor (the first NCRP President) and then Warren K. Sinclair (the second). Bill served under Charles B. Meinhold (NCRP's third President) and then Thomas S. Tenforde (the fourth). Bill was the editor of over 20 NCRP reports, statements and commentaries and was an assisting editor for numerous other NCRP documents. A few of the most influential NCRP publications include:

- *Guidance on Radiation Received in Space Activities* (NCRP Report No 98, 1989)
- *Control of Radon in Houses* (NCRP Report No. 103, 1989)
- *Risk Estimates for Radiation Protection* (NCRP Report No. 115, 1993)
- *Limitation of Exposure to Ionizing Radiation* (NCRP Report No. 116 1993)
- *Research Needs for Radiation Protection* (NCRP Report No. 117, 1993)
- *Radiation Exposure and High-Altitude Flight* (NCRP Commentary No. 12, 1995)

After retiring from NCRP in 2004, Bill remained active in consulting, attending annual meetings, and participating in staff social activities during the holiday season (often footing the bill).

I was personally saddened to learn of Bill's death, remembering how for so many years he was encouraging, supportive and friendly to me and my wife, Jennifer. He often opened his home to colleagues and staff for pleasant gatherings and fellowship. Just this past year, Bill gave me his personal copy of Laurie Taylor's large volume history of "*The Operations of the ICRP and NCRP 1928–1974*," a treasure recounting how the radiation protection culture developed in the United States and internationally.

Bill had a fascinating journey: from the humble upbringings in the Midwest to a world stage in the USN to the lasting national influence in Bethesda at the NCRP. Bill loved his family, loved his country and loved to serve, and he will be remembered for his dedication and accomplishments at home and abroad.

A memorial service with full military honors will be held at Arlington National Cemetery followed by burial on December 28, 2015. Bill is survived by his wife of 61 y (Maycie Rayla Kuehl), four children (Christine, Katherine, Barbara and William, Jr.), seven grandchildren, and one great grandchild.

John D. Boice Jr.  
NCRP President, ICRP Main Commission, &  
UNSCEAR Delegate