



September 19, 2019

## John C. Villforth, December 28, 1930 – September 14, 2019 In Memoriam



John C. Villforth of Rockville, Maryland passed away on September 14, 2019 at the age of 88 y. Before retiring from government service in 1981, he was Assistant Surgeon General and Chief Engineer of the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS). He was also Director of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) Center for Devices and Radiological Health (CDRH) and was responsible for approving new medical technologies. After three decades of federal service, he became Executive Director of The Food Drug and Law Institute.

He began federal service in 1954 as a 2nd Lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force (USAF), Medical Service Corps, served as Secretary of the USAF Radioisotopes Committee, and directed their radiological laboratory. He joined the PHS in 1961. During his service at PHS and FDA, he was the "point man" for emergency response activities during the Three Mile Island Nuclear Power Plant accident. Seven years later, he also provided technical advice and support to aid the Russian government during the Chernobyl nuclear accident.

Rear Admiral Villforth was a Council member from 1971 to 1982, elected to NCRP Consociate membership in 1982, and played an important role in the 2013 "Where are the Radiation Professionals (WARP) Workshop." He took great personal interest in the careers of others. As Director during the formative years of the Bureau of Radiological Health (BRH), he heavily recruited young people from academia through fellowships and other programs, and in so doing, personally nurtured the public health careers of countless numbers of young commissioned officers and civilians. Past NCRP President John Boice was one of these young officers at BRH. By some estimates, BRH programs reduced the number of unnecessary medical x-ray procedures performed in the United States by at least one-third. Bureau-sponsored mentoring and foreign exchange programs for scientists around the world were initiated under Rear Admiral Villforth's leadership. As Chief Engineer of the PHS, he pioneered the Engineer Career Development Seminar Series.

Rear Admiral Villforth held bachelor's and master's degrees in sanitary engineering from Penn State University (PSU), and a master's degree in physics from Vanderbilt University. He received many honors, including two Distinguished Service Medals, a Surgeon General's Exemplary Service Medal, an Outstanding Commendation Medal, a National Emergency Preparedness Award, the FDA Distinguished Alumni Award, the Health Physics Society Elda E. Anderson Award, and the John C. Villforth Founders Award of the FDA Alumni Association. He was the 2005 PSU Distinguished Alumnus.

Rear Admiral Villforth served on numerous boards relating to public health, including serving as president of the CDRH alumni association. The association enables Center employees and alumni to stay connected and to learn from each other about how best to serve the public health. The Conference of Radiological Control Program Directors established the John C Villforth Lecture Series to honor his steadfast support of state radiation control agencies.

Photography was a lifelong passion. Friends and family always knew him to be on the other side of a camera. He was active in several local photography clubs.

Born in Reading, Pennsylvania to Grace and Carl Villforth. Beloved husband of 66 y to Joanne H. Villforth. Loving father to Mary Jane Villforth-Smith, Elaine Villforth, and Jenna Villforth Veazey. He is survived by six grandchildren. John was an extraordinary leader and an extraordinary person. He will be missed.