Captain David Minard, PhD, MC, USN, MD

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Preparation for Mercury 7 Requires So Much!

by Lori Hahn



David Minard was born 23 May 1913 in Fargo, North Dakota, where his father was a professor at nearby North Dakota Agricultural College. Minard grew up in Fargo, then attended college at the University of Chicago (UoC) with a PhD in Physiology in 1937. He received his medical degree at UoC in 1943 and joined the US Navy (MC) as a physician. In 1954, he completed a master's in public health from Harvard University (his father's alma mater).

David served in the military from 1943 until 1963, attaining the rank of Captain (0-6). During the war, he was assigned to various command assignments such as Flagship 67/ Division 23 and Group 10 staff on temporary duty as part of medical staff.

Beginning in 1946, David headed the physiology department at the Naval Medical Research Center in Bethesda, MD. David met and married Sarah Prince "Sally" Zimmerman and their first child, a son, arrived in 1949; two more boys and a girl would follow before 1956. During the 1950s, he'd attained the rank of Captain.

In 1957, along with Constantin Yaglou, he developed a wet globe temperature index for Marines training at Parris Island, South Carolina. This had applications beyond the military - steel plants, in foot racing, and industrial environments, where humans were exposed to high temperatures.



In 1960, David used the Index to evaluate the astronauts of the Mercury 7 program, the.first manned space flights in the United States. The project was operated out of the Naval Medical Research Institute in Bethesda, MD. The program, started in 1958, ended with six manned flights between 1961 and 1963.

David's most newsworthy research occurred in 1962 when the news of the experiments hit the newspapers across the country. The research involved taking a group of 98 sailors and two officers and medical personnel into a 25x48 concrete shelter built on the grounds of the Research Center at Bethesda. They stayed in the shelter for 14 consecutive days. The purpose was to test psychological, physical, and physiological effects of long stays in such environments.

The experiment included TV cameras which could continually monitor everything that happened during the process. Two individuals would exit the shelter on a daily basis to take Geiger and other readings. And, while being equipped with electricity there was no heat other than body heat. Food was provided at 2,000 calories each day. There was no real recreation other than books and magazines.

For their part, the sailors, from the US Naval Training Center at Great Lakes, Illinois, each received a 72-hour pass after their release from the shelter and follow-on testing. David called it a "great success."

In 1963, David left the military and moved on as a Professor at the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health. He was named Professor Emeritus in 1974. David and his wife Sally divorced. Son Nicholas, aged 21 died in Pittsburgh in 1975. At about the same time, David remarried, this time to Dorotha J Rittenhouse Fallong, mother of two.

Sally went on to marry Walter Limbach. She lived to the ripe age of 90, dying in 2014. After her divorce from David, she worked as a family therapist working with women who survived domestic abuse at the Women's Center and Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh.

David went back to clinical work at US Steel and at the Easton Memorial Hospital in Easton, Maryland. He finally retired in 1980. On 09 Oct 2005 after a stroke, in Cambridge, Maryland. His wife Dorotha died in 2012.