VETERANS FOR CHRIST, INC.
P.O. BOX 362234
DECATUR, GA. 30036

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were segregated. However, a 1946 law declared buses originating in the North did not have to follow Southern laws.

But several hours later, after pulling into Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina, the bus changed drivers. The driver ordered the young Army soldier to the back of the bus. She refused to give up her seat. The driver collected every ticket on the bus – except one.

The bus driver then ordered everyone off the bus. Keys went to the bus station to get a ticket.

"When I got to the ticket window, the lady behind the curtain in the ticket window pulled down the curtain and dimmed the lights," she said. Keys turned around to find a janitor sarcastically asking if she knew where she was – a perceived reference to being in the South.

"I said to myself, 'Oh God, Sarah, you're in trouble,'" she remembered.

Keys went back outside and asked the driver again if there was a problem with a ticket. A few feet away, police asked the driver if Keys was the unruly passenger he mentioned. He confirmed she was, so the police then took her into custody.

A night in jail

For the next 13 hours, law enforcement held Keys, placing her in a jail cell.

A dirty mattress, one she described as "dirtier than any you see discarded on the street," was in the cell. Rather than soil her neatly pressed Army dress uniform, Keys paced the floor all night long.

The jailer came the next morning to bring her in front of the chief of police. Evans received a $25 fine for disorderly conduct.

Highlighting her fight

For years, her story went under the radar even though her trip was more than three years before Rosa Parks would stage her bus boycott. In fact, Parks' boycott came six days after the Interstate Commerce Commission publicly announced the ruling in Keys' favor. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy later used the Keys case to call on the ICC to ban Jim Crow laws in interstate travel following the Freedom Rides.

"I'm a native and I didn't know," said Dr. Georgette Kimball, a retired 42-year educator who was part of a project team who brought her story to light. "She made a difference. It's a piece of history that needs to be known."

In August 2020, Keys' fight was finally brought to a tangible reminder with the "Closing the Circle" display at Sarah Keys Evans Plaza in Roanoke Rapids. The plaza uses her married name.

Over a period of several years, people dug into the story and realized the impact the Army Veteran had made on interstate travel. Dr. Charles McCollum Sr., a retired educator and pastor of two Baptist churches, said the Southern Christian Leadership Conference banquet honored Keys Evans, which helped spread the story. From there, the team worked with the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation for a public art initiative.

Eastern Carolina Christian College & Seminary received a foundation grant to bring awareness to her legacy. The plaza includes eight chronological mural panels and two bronze plaques mounted on two semi-circular brick walls. The plaza, located in Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Park, shows her struggle and tells a story in a public forum.

“Her courage was so great,” said Dr. Ervin V. Griffin Sr., president emeritus of Halifax Community College. “I don’t know if I could’ve done it. That’s why she’s a trailblazer.”

The second of two panels from the “Closing the Circle” exhibit highlighting Army Veteran Sarah Keys Evans’ struggle.

Today

Keys Evans, now 92, lives in New York. She has not returned to Roanoke Rapids in the nearly 70 years since that night, instead joining the unveiling virtually.

Despite a later ruling, she never received her money back, said Ophelia Goulz-Faison, who researched Keys Evans’ struggle. She’s still out the $25 – about $250 in today’s value.

Despite being part of a landmark decision that changed American transportation, the Army Veteran said she doesn't want the story lost.

"I'd like to be remembered as someone who helped somebody along the way," Keys Evans said.

Learn more

Take the virtual tour: https://sarahkevansproject.com/virtualtour/.

Read more Black History Month stories: https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/?s=black+history+month.

Military Pilots' DNA May Hold Key to What's Causing Their Prostate Cancers

Jeff Jones, then a Navy captain, flies at Top Knife, the Air Force's fighter doc school, during an assignment as the chief of aerospace medicine with the Air Force's 147th Medical Squadron. Jones is now the chief of urology at the VA Medical Center in Houston and leading a study into why so many military pilots get prostate cancer. COURTESY / JEFF JONES

Radars, magnetrons, and other toxic exposures may leave unique signatures on aviators' cells, giving researchers the first evidence of cause.

While military pilots are getting the first acknowledgment that they are at higher risk of certain types of cancers, they still don't know why, whether it's something in the cockpits or on the flight decks—or something completely unrelated—that they were exposed to during their flying careers.

But one study is betting the answer may be found in their cells and DNA.

Dr. Jeffrey Jones, a career flight surgeon, retired Navy captain, and current chief of urology at Houston's VA medical center, is shaping a study to look at the one of the markers that various toxic exposures leave on the cells of military pilots who have been diagnosed with prostate

cancer. This marker, called DNA methylation, often precedes a mutation that leads to cancer, Jones said.

“If we find these areas of methylation, often the cancer is very close by there,” Jones said. “In other words, there's been a field change associated with some exposure that produced methylation, and then later, the cell’s development of frank carcinoma. So there seems to be a progression from ‘normal,’ to a methylation event, that leads to a subsequent cancer.”

The idea is that each different type of exposure, whether to solvents, fumes or the electromagnetic radiation emitted from radars and magnetrons, will produce a distinguishable methylation pattern, whether it’s found on a DNA strand or another of the microscopic components of a cell.

“We don't think it's going to be exactly the same, but we think it's going to be a similar pattern so that hopefully we could recognize it,” Jones said.

Related articles

Cancers Strike US Fighter Pilots, Crews at Higher Rates, Air Force Finds

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Looking at methylation patterns has also been used to show links between cigarette smoking and cancer.

Jones said his researchers would also be looking for other signatures that toxic exposure can leave on DNA or elsewhere in a cell. He said these might include specific types of chromosomal aberrations; copy number alterations, which occur when the numbers of copies of a specific gene that get replicated change; and other mutations of either the nuclear or mitochondrial DNA.

Mike Crosby, a retired Navy commander who served as an F-14 radar intercept officer and now leads the non-profit group Veterans Prostate Cancer Awareness, has also been pressing industry to study the levels and types of radiation that each piece of equipment emitted.

Pilots spent hundreds, and sometimes thousands of hours sitting just behind powerful avionics equipment that was placed in the Tomcat’s nose cone. He questions whether there was adequate shielding in those older jets.

“It’s long overdue that the services conduct an in-cockpit test to measure the radiation effects they are being exposed to,” Crosby said.

It’s hardly just a problem for military aviators. For years, service members who have suspected their cancers or other illnesses were caused by toxic exposure—for example breathing in particulate matter from massive burn pits or getting exposed to radiation or chemical weapons hazards—have struggled to get the Department of Veterans Affairs to recognize their claims.

That has begun to change. A flurry of legislation and momentum generated by private veterans organizations and within the VA has begun to take the onus off the veteran to prove a link.

"It's very hard to determine if a specific exposure causes a particular effect in retrospect," Jones said. "That's why we need to look for patterns of change that are similar in these individuals, which can define a molecular signature, and begin to make an attribution of different types of exposure."

The study will be limited to prostate cancers to further reduce variables. Prostate cancer manifests in a similar way in about 85 percent of men, Jones said.

But it's also personal for Jones; as a Navy flight surgeon assigned to the U.S. Marine Corps, he flew hundreds of hours on a variety of aircraft, including the EA-6B Prowler, the F-18 Hornet, AH-1s, C-40s, and C-130s.

In 2019, at 59, he was also diagnosed with prostate cancer.

An Air Force study released earlier this year found that pilots were 23 percent more likely to develop prostate cancer than non-flying service members and 19 percent more likely to develop prostate cancer than the U.S. general population.

Jones said about 1,000 military aviation veterans have signed up to be part of the study, which is being supported by Veterans Prostate Cancer Awareness. The study would examine the service histories of those veterans—where they served, what they flew, what ordnance and equipment was on board, and other health factors to begin to isolate causes.

The study has not yet begun, Jones and others are still working to secure funding for it and hosting a fundraiser with Veterans Prostate Cancer Awareness aboard the retired aircraft carrier USS Midway in San Diego this month

Verse of the Day

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Matthew 5:4 KJV

YOU TOO CAN BE A MEMBER OF THE VETERANS FOR CHRIST, INC.

Sign up online to become an associate member. The annual associate membership of $120.00 which can be used as a tax deduction for supporters. Registration fees can be paid online hrough our PayPal account. You will get a free VFC T-shirt with your associate membership. Your tax deductible membership fee will support the VFC mission.

All Honorably Discharged Veterans are welcome to come and observe the VFC; feel free to ask questions and learn more. If we don't know the answer we know someone who does. Please browse our web site www.veteransforchristinc.org. There you'll find information on many subjects of interest to veterans. You'll also find a Newsletter for your branch of service and links to Social Security and many other links with an abundance of information.

Our monthly meetings are on hold until the pandemic is cleared and a vaccine is developed. No meetings are being held at the Wesley Chapel Library at 2861 Wesley Chapel Rd., Decatur, Ga. Our meetings are the fourth Wednesday of every month and start at 6:30 (PM) for approximately one hour and a half, unless otherwise advertised. We will be respectful of your time.

Thank you for your interest in the VFC. We look forward to communicating and fellowshipping with you soon. We are looking for a corporate sponsor for our VFC Gerald Prince College Scholarship which is donated each September at our Anniversary Luncheon

"Be on your guard, stand firm in the faith, being men of courage, be strong." 1Cor 16:13

Sincerely,

William A. Harris, Jr.

William A. Harris, Jr., USAF Retired
President, Veterans for Christ, Inc.
www.veteransforchristinc.org

Need to contact VA?

Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255 and press 1, Chat, or Text 838255
Homeless Veteran Resources: 1-877-424-3838 or Chat
White House VA Hotline: 1-855-948-2311

Don't know what number to call?

1-800-MyVA411 (800-698-2411) is never the wrong number