UC's 25th General Hospital made important contributions in WWII

During the summer of 1941, the US Army invited the University of Cincinnati to organize the 25th General Hospital to serve as a major medical facility in the European war theater. More than 600 physicians, surgeons, nurses and enlisted men served the 25th with distinction in England, France and Belgium until the end of the war.

An exhibit, which is on display through June in the Henry R. Winkler Center for the History of the Health Professions on the first floor of UC's medical school, depicts the 25th General Hospital in WWII.

A. Ashley Wuech, MD, became the third BK Rachford professor of pediatrics on December 7, 1941 (Pearl Harbor Day). On June 4, 1942, he addressed his first graduating class when there was suspense in the air and many newly minted doctors were destined to hear the rumble of guns in zones remote from home. Four years later, he addressed the graduating class of the College of Medicine at UC on February 23, 1946, in his speech, “Our Medical School Answered the Call to War.” The following is an abstract from that speech to the first graduating medical class after V-J Day:

Most of you will have to serve in the military forces of peace. The wonders of penicillin and DDT are now a heritage which the medical science of war has given to a peaceful world. My address this evening will honor the contributions which your Cincinnati College of Medicine rendered toward the nation’s effort to maintain health and relieve pain and prevent deformities and casualties.

First of all, it is fitting to pay tribute to the medical students who, by serving as expert guinea pigs able to describe their symptoms and sensations, played an important role in the success of investigation on medical problems of the war. Students at UC experienced and described the discomforts of high altitude flying; they endured tender arms in the quest for effective clostridial immunization; voluntarily, they accepted injections of a mouse-brain vaccine in order that the protective response to encephalitis vaccine could be charted. They offered themselves as experimental subjects in the quest for an effective vaccine against dengue fever, and because one of the vaccines missed the target, a few contracted a disease which torments the body with aches but, fortunately, never kills. The science of preventive medicine deserved first attention here, and your College of Medicine made noteworthy contributions during the war.

Your college was asked to try to find a way of rendering men immune to bacillary dysentery. The germ of dysentery is not only the scourge of army camps in the warmer regions of the world, but it is also the chief cause of summer complaint in infants in Cincinnati. Merlin Cooper and Fred Barnes of the Department of Pediatrics responded to the call of the army in the fight against dysentery. Hundreds of experiments were conducted in which homologous and heterologous immune response to antigens of a long list of shigella strains were studied both in humans and in animals.
By chemical methods, the somatic antigen of the dysentery bacillus was isolated in relatively pure form. New antigens were synthesized, and preparations of a vaccine, combined with information from other institutions, is still undergoing field trials in the Pacific theater now.

Prior to the outbreak of war, Albert Sabin and his group in the Department of Pediatrics were striving to solve the problems of infantile paralysis. Early in 1942, his specialized skill was diverted to a study of Japanese B encephalitis because of a premonition that it would become a danger to the American soldiers. It was pursued with tireless diligence and untrammeled imagination, which led to the discovery of a vaccine and a large-scale commercial production. Early in the summer of 1945, cases of encephalitis had begun to appear in the US Army, and the hour of need had arrived. Dr. Sabin, now Lt. Colonel Sabin, was flown in haste to Okinawa to superintend the vaccination of more than 65,000 American soldiers, and an epidemic was averted.

In March 1943, the Army sent Dr. Sabin to Africa and Sicily to start investigating another disease of great military importance — sandfly fever. He returned to Cincinnati to complete studies, and that knowledge paved the way for studies of another disease of sudden military importance. Dengue fever had become a threat as our troops fought northward toward Japan. The scientific attack on dengue fever was started in Cincinnati, continued for a time in Princeton, New Jersey, and then completed in Cincinnati, with a vaccine against dengue fever. The brilliant accomplishments of Jap B encephalitis, with sandfly fever and with dengue fever, performed under pressure of desperate need, will forever stand to the credit of Dr. Sabin. It is gratifying to know that the War Department recognized his achievements by conferring on him the Legion of Merit. Your college and research foundation of the Children’s Hospital, which provided a laboratory home for much of the work, are entitled to a share of reflected glory.

A. Ashley Weech, MD, had a lot more to say about the college’s contribution to the war effort. I included above the details about the contributions of Children’s Hospital faculty. The following are brief inclusions of other University Hospital (Cincinnati General Hospital then) and College of Medicine contributions:

Milan Logan of the Department of Biochemistry and William Altemeier of the Department of Surgery developed immunizing agents against the major germs that lead to gas gangrene in penetrating wounds. William Altemeier, MD, was the first to show that, in most cases, acute osteomyelitis is best treated with penicillin without surgery.

When the manufacture of great quantities of high octane gasoline became necessary, Robert Keohoe of the Department of Industrial Physiology developed field methods for removing gasoline and lead compounds from drinking water and methods for measuring in air the oxides of nitrogen, a hazard from gunfire.

Mont Reid, William Altemeier and Max Zinninger of the Department of Surgery showed the futility of sprinkling infected wounds with sulfa drugs and the importance of sound surgical principles. Their methods reduced case fatality rates for penetrating abdominal wounds from 40-60 percent to eight or nine percent.

Samuel Rapoport (of Children’s Research Foundation) and Paul Hoxworth of the Blood Bank devised new methods for the preservation of blood, allowing it to be shipped to any region of the world.

In June 1943, the 25th General Hospital was ordered into active military duty and transferred to Nichols General Hospital in Louisville, KY, learning to set up and operate a general hospital under field conditions. On December 19, 1943, the unit transferred to Camp Kilmer, NJ, and on December 23, embarked for the European theater of operations from Scotland to Stockbridge, England, then Cirencester, before departing for the continent in July 1944. They traveled subsequently to Belgium (Liege, Molandwez and finally Tongres in February 1945, before deactivation from Rouen, France, in August 1945). Veterans of the 25th wore three battle stars on their European theater service ribbon for the campaigns of northern France, Rhineland and the Battle of the Bulge.

William Gerhardt, MD
Staff Historian
A. Ashley Weech, M.D.
1895-1977

b. 1895, Baltimore, MD
M.D. Johns Hopkins, 1921
Internship and residency, Johns Hopkins, 1924
O.P.D. Director, Harriet Lane Home 1924-1926
Pediatrician-in-Chief, Peaking Union Medical College,
China, 1926-1930
Pediatric faculty, Columbia University with Rustin
McIntosh, Director, 1930-42
Third B. K. Rachford Professor of Pediatrics, 1942-63

His research at Columbia was in jaundice of the newborn,
nutrition, metabolism, membrane permeability, and nutritional
edema with low levels of blood protein.

Dr. Weech accepted the position at Cincinnati on December 7,
1941 (Pearl Harbor Day), and began the longest term of Chief
of Staff (21 years) in July, 1942 "with energy and
determination".

The Procter Wing and the remodelling of The Research Building
for more laboratory space were accomplished under Dr. Weech.
During the war years his first appointment to the staff was
Katherine Dodd, and during the post war decade he established
six new divisions: Cardiology (Sam Kaplan), Hematology (Gene
Lahey), Pathology (Ben Landay), Psychiatry (Richard Wolf),
Radiology (Fred Silverman), and Physiological Chemistry (Clark
West).

He contributed eighty articles to the literature and wrote the
section on Rickets in seven successive volumes of Cecil's
Textbook of Medicine. His "Signposts on the Highway of
Growth" appeared in AJCD, 1954.

He was President of The Society of Pediatric Research (1940),
The American Pediatric Society (1957), and The American
Board of Pediatrics (1953). He was Editor-in-Chief, AJD.C.,
1963-73. He was a Harvey Lecturer, and received The Borden
Award (1956) when his address was "Nutritional Value of Milk",
and he received the coveted John Howland Award from the APS

He retired in 1973 to Gainesville Florida, associating with the
University of Florida as Professor of Pediatrics.

A. Ashley Weech was an outstanding teacher and lecturer. He
had an excellent mathematical mind and an exceptional memory,
and he paid careful attention to accuracy of details. He
enjoyed music, singing, and piano, and he often recited poetry
and quoted scripture. He had a good sense of humor, an
entertaining bedside manner, and was the most enthusiastic of
our chiefs.
A. Ashley Weech  
1895 - 1977

A native of Baltimore, Ashley Weech obtained his M.D. at Johns Hopkins in 1921. He remained in the prolonged Hopkins system until 1928 and then served for the next two years as Chief Pediatrician at the Peking (China) Union Medical College. Upon his return to the U.S. he attained professorial status at Babies Hospital (N.Y.C.), Columbia University, where his investigative pursuits embraced membrane permeability, jaundice in the newborn, and the many aspects of nutritional deficiency. He became Professor and Chairman of the Department of Pediatrics at Cincinnati in 1941. On December 7, the day W.W. II began, he took over direction of one of the largest university pediatric operations in the nation; there could scarcely have been a less appropriate moment. Undaunted, however, Dr. Weech moved apace with wartime depleted staff and the well-nigh impossible burden of shortages to build in new directions, while maintaining the high standards attained by his predecessors. He recruited and set his faculty and researchers to work at a host of war-related projects, at the same time insuring the continuation of the routine service and educational responsibilities at their customary high levels. Special and unusual advances were made in hematology, cardiology, radiology, pathology, biochemistry, teratology and child psychiatry. The people whom he selected to head these ventures came to be considered prime workers in their respective fields. The names of Sabin, Warkany, Rappaport, Silverman, Guest, and Dodd comprise only a partial listing of these luminaries. Kaplan, Landis, Lachey

Dr. Weech retired in 1964 having trained some 293 residents and 87 fellows. In his retirement he became Editor in Chief of the American Journal of Diseases of Children, a responsibility he continued to discharge until 1973. At this time he left Cincinnati and took up residence in Gainsville, Florida, where he became Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Florida School of Medicine; he was actively engaged in teaching until his death at age 82.
He attended Allison St. School, but his schooling was interrupted by his father’s death when he was 13. He went to work for Ted Dori, Sr. at U.S. Printing Company and learned the engraving trade, going to school at night at the Art Academy.

The 1914 depression came after he had transferred to “Ben Day” art work, and the young man was laid off. After serving in World War I, he went to East Night High School, from which he graduated as valedictorian.

The next step in Dr. Rohdenburg’s distinguished career came when he went to the University of Cincinnati for B.S. and M.D. After three years of practice, he journeyed to the University of Vienna, Austria to continue his studies, and has returned there every five years since for post-graduate work. He also studied at the University of Wurttemberg at Tubingen, Germany.

Dr. Rohdenburg interned at Deaconess Hospital where he was later president and a staff member for 50 years.

In 1931, he married Mildred Klein, daughter of “Sandy” Klein.

The doctor has been a lifelong member of Zion United Church of Christ, and has served his church as deacon and elder. He was a member of the Board of Northeastern Y.M.C.A.

Both he and Mrs. Rohdenburg were founders of Norwood Half-Century Club. He has written several “I Remember Norwood” historical columns for the Norwood Enterprise, one concerning an old railroad trestle, another remembering tramps, hobos, gypsies and “The Roadhouse Gang” in Norwood.

Another of Dr. Rohdenburg’s interests was in keeping the Victory Park Gardens in shape with his cohorts of the Retired Men’s Club of Leland Barnett American Legion Post 123. He loved antiques and often attended the Antiques Seminar in Williamsburg, Virginia.

Dr. Rohdenburg is survived by his widow; a daughter, Mrs. James (Ann) Gilchrist of Terrace Park; granddaughters Beth and Nora Gilchrist; a sister, Mrs. David (Wilhelmina) Langhout; and a brother, Carl Rohdenburg.

Necrology Committee
Margaret J. Schneider, M.D. Chairman
Norwood Enterprise — by Charlotte I. Shockley

A. Ashley Weech, M.D.

Ashley Weech came to Cincinnati in 1942 to assume the professorship of pediatrics in particularly trying times. The professor of pediatrics, Dr. Graeme Mitchell, and the director of research, Dr. Glenn Cullen, had died. Dr. Waldo Nelson had just assumed a professorship at Temple University.

Dr. Weech accepted the position, however, and on the day when he met with a Cincinnati delegation in New York to confirm the appointment, Pearl Harbor was bombed. This, of course, was Sunday, December 7, 1941 and our country was soon deep in the Second World War. The military service took faculty members, resident doctors and technicians as well as practicing pediatricians of the community. This was not the sort of academic environment that met the ideals which Dr. Weech had formulated at Johns Hopkins as a medical student and resident, nor later during his associate professorship at Babies Hospital of the Columbia Medical School.

He assumed his responsibilities here in July, 1942 with energy and determination. To bolster the teaching program, he added to his faculty Dr. Katherine Dodd who was an excellent clinician and instructor. Together they assumed many duties of ward rounds and lecturing. Dr. Weech’s contacts with students afforded him great pleasure and he was highly effective as teacher and lecturer. Such qualities made him a valuable member of the Pediatric Division of the National Board of Medical Examiners. His own research work, carried out chiefly at the Babies Hospital in New York City, had dealt chiefly with liver disorders of the newborn and certain aspects of protein metabolism but he had no time to pursue the work after he arrived here. However, he had a thorough knowledge of mathematics which he applied to the analysis of research data. He helped many members of his staff organize and analyze their work better than ever before. This ability to criticize and evaluate medical work was recognized nationally by his appointment as editor of the American Journal of Diseases of Children.

Probably the outstanding contribution of Dr. Weech to the local pediatric department and medical college was the raising of academic standards. Ward rounds were better prepared, contributions to medical journals were carefully edited and criticized. As Dr. Rustin McIntosh of Columbia once wrote, “A striking aspect of his personality is his extraordinary vitality. His instinct is to see the good in life and to find enjoyment prevalent over frustration and boredom.”

As a teacher he stated, “Dr. Weech’s contagious verve, his carefully planned sequences and his admirable clarity of presentations marked him as a gifted teacher.” As an in-
vestigator, McIntosh continued, "Any project with which he has had some connection, however tenuous, came under his scrutiny to ensure that methods used are trustworthy, that controls are adequate, that correlations and differences are subjected to pertinent statistical analysis and that conclusions ventured are rigorously supported by data."

Dr. Weech was also concerned with the expansion of laboratories to accommodate his rapidly growing staff. He persuaded the Trustees of the hospital to build the Procter Wing and then a few years later, to remodel the research building to add laboratory space.

Among his many national honors were presidency of the American Pediatric Society, the Borden Award from the Society of Pediatric Research, the Harvey Lecturer, and just recently the Howland Award from the American Pediatric Society. He cherished the last award greatly because of its own important significance and also because he had known and admired Dr. Howland as a teacher at Johns Hopkins. It was typical of the determination and willpower of Dr. Weech that he wrote and presented the paper of acceptance although he was disabled and sick.

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Clark West, M.D., recalls early days

When Clark West was asked to share his thoughts at the Daniel Drake Award Banquet on June 1, he began by thanking many who contributed to his successful achievements — the three chairmen of the pediatrics department under whom he served, Drs. Weech, Pratt and Schubert; the Board of Trustees, "the people who really run the Children's Hospital and who have so wisely used the wonderful endowment which William Cooper Procter and the good people of Cincinnati have provided for the institution"; his faculty associates, Judy Forristal, Paul McEnery, Fred Strife, Jim McAdams, and Tom Welch "who were with me many years"; and his many fellows "who did all the work that made it possible for us to write the papers."

Clark went on to share memories of Children's Hospital as he found it when he arrived in Cincinnati, nearly 50 years ago, when Children's had only two buildings and the medical staff was a tight-knit community consisting of a handful of faculty, some residents and one administrator:

"We all ate lunch in the same room, the residents at a long table down one side and the faculty, the administrator and practicing pediatricians at another. Everyone knew everyone. Although the hospital had about as many patients as it does now, there were only one-fourth the number of residents. That doesn't mean the residents then were four times as good as those now. It only means that there were about one-fourth the number of treatable diseases. Those who couldn't be treated didn't take up space for very long. They either died or went to the Convalescent Hospital. It was critical then to have people around who could make the correct diagnosis."

"There were two people on the faculty who were highly skilled in that respect, Ashley Weech and Katie Dodd. Ashley was the chairman of the department and Katie was a professor and a super "chief resident." Ashley had an amazing grasp of most facets of pediatrics. He could attend a three-day medical meeting, listen to 40 10-minute papers, and over the next week, in sessions with the residents, flawlessly give the essence of each paper. He loved to teach, and in fact made it a point to appear at the hospital at 9:30 every Sunday morning for two hours of teaching rounds. And these were well attended by the residents, even if it was their day off. Ashley always had something of interest to say about a case."

"Katie Dodd was a very plain appearing and plain spoken lady with a deep hoarse voice, who had had a vast experience with sick children. As I picture her, she is always smiling because she loved her job. I don't think she particularly liked children, but she was intrigued by sick children. She made rounds of the entire hospital every day, and when she appeared on a ward, the residents always gathered around to catch the pearls. Her diagnostic acumen was legendary. When she was presented with a difficult case with a long differential diagnosis, her eyes would sparkle and she would say, 'There is only one thing it can be' and then proceed to give the diagnosis and how the facts supported it. When she left Cincinnati, her admirers, the residents she had taught, gave her a new car."

"She and Ashley were examples of those legendary doctors of the long ago era, an era of medicine in which wits, broad experience and common sense were the coin of the realm. Medicine by then had become a science, but still a great deal of art was involved. You didn't get the diagnosis on a print-out."

"Children's in those days didn't have to compete with other children's hospitals nationally for residents and faculty. It was the epitome. Faculty in other departments around the country called us the country club. They were impressed that the walls of the animal quarters were of glazed tile. And with our large endowment, we could afford our Sabin's and our Warkanys. Our farsighted Board of Trustees rose to that
challenge, and we now have the people and the plant to carry out research which we think surpasses that of any children's hospital in the country. I am sure Children's will be a jewel in Cincinnati's crown for a long time to come."

Thanks, Clark, for reminding us again of the solid heritage, of which you are a part, and of which we are so proud.

William Gerhardt, M.D.
Attending Staff