

## **First Veteran resident at Carl Vinson VAMC gets vaccine**

A 96-year-old World War II veteran, former local doctor and former Mayor of Dublin received the first COVID-19 vaccine on Christmas, two days shy of his 97th birthday at the Carl Vinson VA Medical Center.

Dr. Lester Porter, former soldier with the Army's 12th Armored Division, was on the front line of WWII in Germany and now he's on the frontline of new battle – the enemy is COVID-19. He and nine others volunteered to be first in line in the Community Living Centers. Hospitals across the state began administering vaccines Tuesday.

“It felt about like a flu shot,” said Porter, who was observed for 15 minutes after he received his vaccine so health care workers could watch for reactions. “I feel fine and honored to be the first Veteran in Dublin to receive the vaccine.” Dr. Porter added, “it's a wonderful Christmas present to receive this vaccine.”

David Whitmer, Medical Center Director, during regular rounds stops in on Dr. Porter to hear about his life.

Dr. Porter often talks about his time as a young Sergeant in the "Hellcats" of 12th Armored Division, who were pushing inch by inch, mile by mile across Europe. Berlin, Germany was their ultimate destination. His unit was the first to cross the Danube and Utweiler, was the first German town to fall just before Christmas of 1944, seventy-six years ago.

Dr. Porter also served two terms as Mayor of Dublin from 1970 to 1974.

“These Veterans still have incredible stories to tell,” Whitmer said. “We're going to do everything we can to keep their stories going.”

“We would not be here today if our Veterans hadn't signed a blank check, for any amount including their lives, to protect our freedoms,” Whitmer said about the Veterans. “If anyone can convince people this vaccine is safe, it's our Veterans in our Community Living Center.”

Ms. Jessica Hogan, the first permanent vaccine coordinator in Dublin, said the hospital created a plan to distribute vaccines to health care workers and Veterans.

“Our staff is going to work seven days a week to accomplish this administration of vaccines in a timely manner so we can get it administered quickly and safely,” Hogan said.

Hogan said the first day of vaccinations went smoothly and there was excellent communication between the services to vaccinate 40 direct healthcare personnel.

“We worked great as a team even when unforeseen challenges came up and other services stepped up to help,” Hogan said.

The VA has been working with the CDC and other federal partners to develop a phased plan. The goal is to have a majority of staff and Veterans interested in receiving the vaccine, vaccinated as soon as possible.

Under this plan, vaccines are offered to these 2 groups first:

- Veterans living in our long-term care facilities, and
- VA health care personnel taking care of high-risk Veterans. Vaccinating our health care personnel helps us continue providing care for Veterans and prevents any community spread of COVID-19.

After the first two groups have been vaccinated, the VA will begin to offer vaccines to more Veterans who are at high risk of severe illness from COVID-19. VA primary care teams will contact Veterans when they are eligible to get a vaccine. The Carl Vinson VAMC expects additional supply and availability after the holidays.

Veterans can speak with their primary care teams and visit the VA web page at <https://www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine/> for more information.

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