

Behind the Names

Part 4

VA facilities all over the country bear the names of Americans who made significant contributions to their country. Who were they? In this feature series, we take a look at the historical figures for whom some of VA's facilities are named.

In this fourth installment of our feature series, we look at the historical figures behind the names of two VA medical centers, one a world-class physician, medical school dean and influential chief medical director; the other, a popular U.S. Congressman and veterans' advocate.



William S. Middleton

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William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital is physically connected to the University of Wisconsin Hospital in Madison, Wis. William Shainline Middleton, M.D.'s connection to both institutions goes back to at least 1955, when he left his post as dean of the university's medical school to become VA's chief medical director.

Middleton was an accomplished educator, physician and scientist. His service to medicine, veterans and country spanned more than 60 years, beginning in 1911 when he earned his medical degree from the Univ. of Pennsylvania. The following year, he began teaching at the Univ. of Wisconsin Medical School, becoming a full professor in 1933, followed by his

appointment as dean of the medical school, a seat he held for the next 20 years.

Middleton served with distinction in both world wars. As a captain with the British and American expeditionary forces in France during World War I, he was awarded the Victory Medal with seven battle clasps.

Between wars, he returned to the University of Wisconsin, where he continued to teach, as well as consult for the U.S. Public Health Service and the Veterans Bureau, which became the Veterans Administration in 1930.

In World War II, Col. Middleton was assigned to the Office of the Chief Surgeon for the European Theatre of Operations, serving as chief consultant in medicine. He taught medical officers at military field schools at various locations. For this service he was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal, the Legion of Merit with Oak Leaf Cluster, the order of the British Empire and the French Croix de Guerre with Palm.

After the Second World War, Middleton returned to his position as dean of the UW Medical School. He also acted as special advisor to the Surgeon General of the Army during the Korean Conflict.

Public service called again in 1955. Middleton took a leave of absence from academia and was sworn in as chief medical director for the Veterans Administration.

He was a member of the VA Special Medical Advisory Group, advising on the care and treatment of disabled veterans. He improved access to rehabilitation services, mental health and hypertension treatment. He also guided the development of VA research programs and he initiated the establishment of long-term patient care. He retired from VA in 1963.

His career led to many professional positions, including presidencies of the American College of Physicians, the Central Society for Clinical Research and the American Association for the History of Medicine. Dr. William S. Middleton died in 1975.

Clement J. Zablocki

The Clement J. Zablocki Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Milwaukee, Wis., honors the Democratic congressman who served his constituents for more than 40 years in the Wisconsin state house and the U.S. House of Representatives. He represented the 4th U.S. Congressional District for a record 18 consecutive terms.



Clement J. Zablocki (on left)

“Clem,” as he preferred to be called, was born into an immigrant Polish-American family on Milwaukee’s south side. Catholic and public school-educated, with a degree in philosophy and advanced training from Marquette University, he became a high school teacher. He was also an accomplished organist and choir director.

The dapper Zablocki was a short, squat man with a dark, Thomas Dewey-like mustache and a reserved demeanor. Remarkable for how unnoticeable he was, his style and physical stature endeared him all the more to the public. Above all, he was much loved in his community and a friend and advocate for veterans, though he wasn’t a veteran himself.

Defeated in his first attempt at state politics in 1939, he was elected to serve two terms as state senator for Wisconsin’s 3rd district beginning in 1942. In 1948 he began his career in the U.S. Congress, and was reelected to each succeeding

term for the remainder of his life, sometimes garnering as much as 80 percent of the vote.

His political views mirrored those of his hard-working Eastern European immigrant constituency, embodying working-class patriotism, staunch anti-communism and religious conservatism. Yet he was held in high regard by liberals on economic and foreign policy matters.

He was a frequent visitor to Milwaukee's VA hospital. In Congress, he rose through the ranks of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and ultimately became chairman, one of Congress's highest ranking posts, in 1977.

His leadership style was one of reason and persuasion. Zablocki helped guide the passage of the War Powers Act of 1973 through Congress with enough support to override a presidential veto. This law, written in response to America's Vietnam experience, requires that a President obtain the consent of Congress before sending American troops abroad for more than 60 days.

Cong. Zablocki died in his Washington, D.C., office in 1983. The VA medical center in Milwaukee was rededicated in his honor in May 1985.

By Robert Turtill, *Vanguard* staff

Note: This is the fourth in a series of features about the historical figures for whom some of VA's facilities are named. In Part 5, we will look at three veterans whose names have recently been affixed to VA facilities by an act of Congress.