Obituaries

**Horace MacVaugh III, prolific heart surgeon and rear admiral in the Naval Reserve, dies at 91**

Few doctors can match his achievements in heart surgery, and none had his larger-than-life personality. "He lived in the fast lane," a colleague said. "He was wonderful and brilliant."

Dr. MacVaugh and his wife, Carol, enjoyed spending time together at home and at social events.Courtesy of the family

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Horace MacVaugh III, 91, formerly of Philadelphia, the onetime chief of cardiac surgery and chairman of the department of surgery at Lankenau Hospital, a prolific pioneering heart surgeon and mentor, and a retired two-star rear admiral in the Naval Reserve, died Monday, Jan. 24, of Parkinson’s disease at his home in Wayne.

Over his long medical career, Dr. MacVaugh worked at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania; Lankenau Hospital, now Lankenau Medical Center; Graduate Hospital; and elsewhere. Graduate closed in 2006.

By some estimations, he performed 800 heart surgeries a year for at least eight years while many surgeons averaged no more than 300. He completed one of the first coronary artery bypass operations at the University of Pennsylvania Hospital, served as chief of cardiothoracic surgery at Graduate Hospital, and set the foundation for the present success of the Lankenau Heart Institute.

“He was bigger than life and ahead of his time,” said Francis Sutter, the current chief of cardiac surgery at Lankenau. “He had great hands and total command of the operating room. Nobody could compete with what he did. It was an end of an era when he retired.”

Dr. MacVaugh was a heart surgeon in great demand.Courtesy of the family

Dr. MacVaugh, also a professor of surgery at the University of Pennsylvania and Thomas Jefferson University,was nearly as active in the community and on the social circuit as he was in the hospital. He flew his private jet to Europe, and took friends to New Orleans in 1981 to watch the Eagles play the Oakland Raiders in Super Bowl XV.

He traveled to Switzerland for toboggan rides and Nepal for climbs in the Himalayas, and his name was mentioned often in The Inquirer society pages in the 1980s. Other doctors still chuckle about the nights he showed up in the OR in a tuxedo or his admiral’s uniform after being summoned from an event.

Before he retired in 2006, Dr. MacVaugh was known for connecting with patients, their families, and other doctors. Colleagues said he was calm under pressure, commanding during surgery, and compassionate with those who were suffering.

“He showed me how to act,” said Philip Deibert, a longtime friend and fellow heart specialist. “He was the kind of doctor you hope you will get.”

His wife, Carol, said: “He lived life to the fullest. He was interested in people and was forever learning. He had a quiet confidence.”

Born Aug. 26, 1930, in Philadelphia, Dr. MacVaugh graduated from Cheltenham High School in 1948, Yale University in 1952, and Penn medical school in 1955. He did his internship at Abington Memorial Hospital and his residency at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania.

“I was fortunate to complete [medical] training toward the end of the pioneering era of cardiac surgery and then enjoyed the rapid acceptance of the new field in clinical medicine,” Dr. MacVaugh said in 1999 when he was inducted into the Cheltenham High School [hall of fame](https://www.classcreator.com/Wyncote-Pennsylvania-Cheltenham-High-School-1931-2017/Hall-of-Fame-Biographies.htm).

Dr. MacVaugh smiles with his sister, Jan Kopple.Courtesy of the family

He joined the Naval Reserve medical corps and rose from lieutenant junior grade in 1955 to retired two-star rear admiral in 1989. He served two years as a flight surgeon for a transport squadron in Hawaii, and later traveled to Japan, Thailand, India, Pakistan, and the Philippines.

Dr. MacVaugh married Suzanne Lapp, and they had daughters Leslie, Anne, and Hollis, and son Horace IV. Anne and Hollis died earlier. After a divorce, he married Gwendolyn Worthington. After their divorce, he married Carol Burns in 2017. His second wife died in 2010.

A pilot, Dr. MacVaugh qualified as a young man for NASA’s astronaut training program. But a heart irregularity kept him in medicine.

He belonged to many professional societies and social clubs. He liked falconry, golf, skiing, ice skating, and the Philadelphia Orchestra. He captained sailboats in the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea.

“Whether you were a patient, friend, or his family, you felt like you were in good hands with him,” his wife said.

In addition to his wife, children, and former wife, Dr. MacVaugh is survived by seven grandchildren, four great-grandchildren, a sister, and other relatives

Services were private.

Donations in his name may be made to the [Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson’s Research,](https://www.michaeljfox.org/donate/help-us-find-parkinsons-cure?smcid=ap-a1b1R0000086fJ2&gclid=Cj0KCQiAjJOQBhCkARIsAEKMtO3P7JwZmK7ASIqLdgLQywoXfkZf7gRw4CNmV-GS6MxPNiyPVxYmbxsaAqoSEALw_wcB&gclsrc=aw.ds) Donation Processing, P.O. Box 5014, Hagerstown, Md. 21741, and the [Church of the Holy Trinity](https://onrealm.org/CHT/-/form/give/now), 1904 Walnut St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19103.

Dr. MacVaugh was an avid outdoorsman who liked falconry, sailing, and flying.Courtesy of the family

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