



## **DR. HERBERT RIDYARD, 2009 CHA HEALTHCARE HERO**

Dr. Herbert Ridyard didn't need to do anything extra. There was no requirement...no demand that he contribute something above and beyond his daily care for the patients he has served for so many years. He had a bustling practice with his partners, many loyal patients, his sons were grown and his wife busy with her own career. In November 2007, Dr. Ridyard had been named "Physician of the Year" at the Hospital Auxiliary's Gala in Hartford—an honor accorded each year to one physician nominated by his peers and patients as "the best of the best." Herbert Ridyard seemed to have it all—success, accolades, and a good life.

So in December 2007, when he announced that he would be taking a leave of absence from his busy surgical practice, his colleagues at Windham Surgical and Windham Hospital were stunned. They had some questions—and first and foremost was the question: are you really joining the Army??

Most were astounded to learn that he had been a Lieutenant Colonel in the United States Army Reserve Medical Corps for some time--so he wasn't exactly joining, but yes, he was planning to do some active duty! And he was, in fact, going to attend basic training at Fort Sam in Houston, Texas in January 2008. All proceeded according to plan.

He completed his "boot camp" stint mid-February and returned home to await his deployment orders; while waiting, he continued to serve patients in the Windham area, as usual. In a February interview, he commented that he had "wanted to volunteer for some time," and that he felt his service would be important. "There simply aren't enough surgeons for our soldiers, and the physicians who are serving over there now are overburdened and need a break. I'm glad to do what I can to help."

Months passed.

Dr. Ridyard received his call at the end of 2008, journeying to Tikrit, Iraq, to serve there as Chief of Surgery for a Combat Support Hospital. He left his surgical practice in Windham in the able hands of his partners, Dr. David Kloss and Dr. Leszek Kolodziejczak, saying that, "although this involves some sacrifice, my partners will serve our patients while I'm away." He added that the Army limits the "boots on the ground" time to about 3 months, in an effort to entice more doctors into service, so he would be "back soon."

Dr. Ridyard is a quiet, modest man—the kind of man who seeks no personal glory, and who shies away from the spotlight. He declined a "going away party" at the Hospital, but the colleagues in Windham found other ways to wish him a safe journey. His co-workers sent mail, email, and notes supporting his decision to serve. Nurses in the 4Shea unit tied an

enormous yellow ribbon to a support post in the nurses' station, and posted his photo next to it. During the holidays, an oversized greeting card—bearing the best wishes of many members of the Hospital community—made its way to Iraq, and although internet and telephone access was “poor at best” he stayed in constant touch with his family and friends.

In a 2009 New Year's “letter from the front,” Dr. Ridyard reported that the CSH was one of the last units still partially located in tents and trailers. He said they had a total of 10 physicians, who treated both military personnel and Iraqi civilians in a very busy clinic, and that a part of their mission included the training of Iraqi physicians. Dr. Ridyard's first patient was a soldier with appendicitis, and one of his more memorable patients was a young Iraqi girl with extensive burns who required daily surgeries.

More months passed. He served with the Combat Support Hospital for three months. Then, as spring began to blossom forth in Connecticut, Dr. Ridyard returned safe and sound to his family, his practice, and Windham Hospital. His time in Iraq is now just a memory; new Reservists have begun to serve patients in the clinic, and Tikrit remains very much in the news. Would he do it again? Comes the resounding reply, “Definitely!”

Dr. Herbert Ridyard is much more than a Connecticut Healthcare Hero—he is an international practitioner and a caregiver extraordinaire!

Dr. Ridyard was among the 10 Healthcare Heroes honored during the CHA Annual Meeting on June 23, 2009, in Southington. The annual event solicits nominations for healthcare workers who exemplify “all that's right in healthcare,” and Dr. Ridyard was nominated by Sharyn Mathews, Director of Marketing at Windham Hospital. Congrats to Dr. Ridyard!

