

Five Years of Space Medicine

By JOHN R. POPPEN, M.D.

THE ANNUAL Convention of the Aero Medical Association this year is centered about the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Association. By coincidence it is also the fifth anniversary of the Space Medicine Association. In the atmosphere of appropriately recognizing these temporal landmarks it is well to recount certain highlights in this brief history. The fifth birthday of a youngster is marked by recognition that he is now walking and running. He is about to enter school and begin expanding his knowledge by direct exposure to the world. He has an indistinct, yet real, appreciation of the fact that he is now an entity and must begin to take care of himself. He must begin to make personal contributions to the family integration. For the parent, the time has come to bring to the youngsters attention certain admonitions and counsel.

During the annual convention of the parent association, on May 31, 1950, in Chicago, an informal group of about fifteen members met for luncheon at the invitation of Dr. A. C. Ivy. The minutes of this meeting do not indicate precisely how the meeting came about nor what the agenda were to be. A roster of those attending might have furnished a cue to this precise motivation. In any event, it was manifest that one strong element was the desire for gregariousness on the basis of common, mutual interest in some specific subject.

Chairman's Address presented at the 25th Annual Meeting of the Aero Medical Association, Washington, D. C., March 29-31, 1954.

Dr. Ivy's introductory remarks quickly clarified this point. The subject of common interest was the biological aspects of travel in space. Dr. Strughold presented a prepared paper in which he reviewed the international status of the field. He was followed by Dr. Heinz Haber who outlined certain medical problems peculiar to rocket flying. When Dr. Campbell called attention to the fact that no group existed which applied itself directly to this new scientific frontier, general discussion quickly convinced everyone present that an organization was in order. To have substance, to delineate objectives and goals and to be functional there should be formal organization to implement unified and concerted efforts. To profit by the support and aegis of a well established agency it was desirable to affiliate with an older organization which had the breadth and scope to comprehend and absorb the new group.

By correct parliamentary procedure it was unanimously agreed to petition the Aero Medical Association to approve the establishment of a branch membership and a committee was appointed to prepare the petition. This informal meeting provided the assignment for the conception of the "Space Medicine Branch." General Armstrong had sent his regrets at not being able to attend but indicated that he would give his blessings in advance on everything decided upon.

The gestation was very short and the Executive Council of the parent association attended the accouchment during that same convention. The

FIVE YEARS OF SPACE MEDICINE—POPPE

records of the meeting of the Executive Council contain a minute to the effect that General Benson requested the Council to consider the petition for recognition of a "Space Medicine Branch" and another minute that "The Space Medicine Group was then accepted." The "Branch" was born.

The first birthday party was celebrated during the Denver convention. The single candle on the cake illuminated the formal affiliation with the Aero Medical Association. This was also a christening ceremony. The organization was baptized under the title, proposed by Captain Kellum, as "The Space Medicine Association of the Aero Medical Association." Perhaps we should recognize Captain Kellum as our godfather.

Intervening birthdays have shown growth. Growth in stature has been shown by increase in membership. Growth in performance has been shown in a steady increase in the size and calibre of scientific programs. Dr. Schaefer's present to the first birthday celebration was the introduction, to many of us, of the significance of cosmic radiations. To the second birthday party we welcomed Dr. Tobias with his present of "Radiobiology" and Dr. Henry brought the promise of experimental approach using rockets. It is not necessary to recount all the contributions during the intervening anniversaries. A glance at our program for today shows that Dr. Strughold has assembled a splendid list of contributions for this anniversary meeting.

I think that we may feel justifiable pride in our short history. We are young but healthy. We know we can

run in the race of science. We can defend ourselves and we have an unlimited frontier for exploration. We have the strength of organization and the motivation of complete assurance of continuing success and growth.

Now for the parental admonition.

During recent months we have become aware of a few defects. As Dr. Haber has pointed out there are a few organizational uncertainties which need consideration. I am referring these to my successor, Dr. Gagge, for his contemplation and capable solution.

I want strongly to support Dr. Haber's proposal that our biographer establish the abstracting service. There is no doubt of his capabilities and there can be no doubt of its value. Our treasurer assures me that we can afford to support it. The periodic receipt of abstracts of what is being done in the field of space medicine will keep us all alert and should prevent the bad habit of thinking about the subject only on the occasion of our annual meeting. It will provide recurrent stimulus to exchange of information and co-operative effort. This family integration is vital to our existence and progress.

There is room for further growth in stature by expanding membership. We should keep our portals open and welcome new members as they qualify.

Above all, I admonish you all in your several capacities, to sponsor, initiate and prosecute the necessary research into essential areas. If we do not keep ahead of technological advancement we may find ourselves in the intolerable situation of being faced with biological questions before we are prepared to answer them.