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Ode to History and Celebration of Space Medicine: 50 Years of Vision from the AsMA Space Medicine Branch

Some of our members may not be aware that the Space Medicine Branch is celebrating a half century of existence. At the 1950 meeting of the Aero Medical Association (AsMA) in Chicago several visionaries formed an ad hoc committee to explore the possibilities of forming a section or group specifically to address medical issues of a palpably emerging space frontier—the tacit acknowledgment of a new discipline called Space Medicine. Though the real world at that time placed little thought, credence, or emphasis on a coming space age, these savants foresaw the inevitable and founded the organization which would become a major voice of advocacy and advice for space medical interests in the succeeding decades.

These movers moved quickly. They assessed the validity and extent of interest in and support for such a group, evaluated the political sensitivity and risk in pursuing this notion, drafted the requisite constitution and bylaws, submitted a request to the parent organization for constituent membership, and received approval to become the Space Medicine Branch at the 1951 annual meeting in Denver. Achieving full acceptance, however, was not quite that easy. They met some resistance from a mind set carried over from the great war which considered this new venture rather far-fetched, futuristic, and untimely. Another form of difficulty also arose when the new organization grew so rapidly and was, for several years, referred to as the Space Medicine Association, holding its own scientific sessions. Perceived rivalry and competition with the parent organization, the Aero Medical Association, prevailed for several years before all finally agreed that this new specialty would function best within the structure and as an affiliate (or constituent) of the Aero (later “space”) Medical Association. That was the intent of the founders of the Space Medicine Branch (earlier named made official 1957) and is the thrust of its existence and function today.

Growing pains and mundane debates notwithstanding, these pioneers persevered, and well before the end of the decade, events proved their original discernment. The Soviet Union ushered in the space age with the orbiting of Sputnik I on 4 October 1957. A wary United States, caught, off guard as it were, hastened to get an Earth orbiting satellite in place early in 1958 and enacted legislation which created the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) later that year. Its text clearly acknowledges the intent to develop human-carrying spacecraft, and to explore space beyond near Earth orbit. Obviously those who had perceived the need for the specialty of space medicine were vindicated. They came from many disciplines other than medicine. Listing some of their names (I hesitate to start listing, because one never has

the complete HISTORY) sounds like Who’s Who of the Aerospace Hall of Fame: H.G. Armstrong, E. J. Baldes, L. H. Bauer, A. Behnke, C. C. Behrens, D. E. Beischer, R. J. Benford, O. O. Benson, K. Buettner, P. A. Campbell, L. D. Carson, H.-G. Clamann, B. Dill, H. A. Dishongh, W. O. Fenn, Flanagan, P. Gage, O. Gauer, S. J. Gerathewohl, C. F. Gell, M. Goodwin, A. Graybiel, V. Guillemen, F. Haber, H. Haber, F. G. Hall, J. P. Henry, V. K. Henschke, F. A. Hitchcock, A. C. Ivy, J. Kaplan, W. E. Kellum, G. J. Kidera, W. R. Lovelace II, U. Luft, J. P. Marbarger, J. R. Poppen, H. P. Roth, H. J. Schaefer, K. S. Scott, B. J. Strickland, H. Strughold, H. M. Sweeney, J. M. Talbot, A. D. Tuttle, C. S. White, F. S. Wolf.

Most of us, even those younger than the U. S. Apollo Lunar missions (1969-72), have a fairly decent concept of the big picture of space exploration. However, many details of those early years reside in little known resources, and often only in the memory of those who participated intimately in the development and expansion of space flight as we know it today. NASA has its own department for historical records (apart from documentation of the science and engineering of spaceflight), as does the National Air and Space Museum, elements of the Department of Defense, and many academic and private organizations, not the least of which is the Aerospace Medical Association. Within the latter, we, the Space Medicine Branch, hold a major position for contribution to and archiving of historical materials. We also exercise other prerogatives, such as promoting policy, advocacy, education, and training beneficial to space medicine.

Referring to the title of this writing returns us to consideration of historical things. In 1979, on the occasion of the Aerospace Medical Association’s 50th anniversary, Dr. Paul Campbell wrote a well researched treatise, *The History of the Space Medicine Branch of the Aerospace Medical Association*. It was labeled as Section I, *From Concept to Sputnik I, 1950-1957*. It should have been the beginning for other following sections, but basically is the only formalized documentation of our history, and does not even cover our first full decade. However, its content and style are intriguing and served recently to whet the interest of others among us. A shorter article covering the same time period was prepared by and given as a presentation by Dr. John Marbarger in 1992 in celebration of the Branch’s 40th anniversary and subsequently published in the November, 1992, *AsMA Journal* on pg. 1038.

At the executive committee meeting in Houston this past May, Dr. Phil Scarpa, President-Elect, enjoined us to consider doing something special for next year’s meeting in Reno. Fifty years of history seem to deserve some form of categoric recognition! At that

meeting several agreed to rendezvous at the Library of Wright State University School of Medicine in July for the expressed purpose of inventorying the Space Medicine Branch archival files, as well as other historical holdings relevant to space medicine, housed there. Dr. Scarpa (KSC), Dr. Denise Baisden (JSC), Mr. Lloyd Tripp (WPAFB), and I were hosted by Dr. Robin Dodge (WSU School of Medicine faculty) and Ms. Dawne Dewey (WSU Library Archivist). In the Fordham Special Collections we saw:

The Ross McFarland Collection, an extensive compilation by one aerospace pioneer, with its own two-volume inventory catalog, documents of the Biophysics Branch of the AsMRL-WPAFB by H. T. E. Hertzberg, certain records of the AsMA from 1943, a selected grouping from the Flight Nurse Section of AsMA covering 1943-1984, astronaut-physician William Thornton’s papers from 1950-1989, and a group of files of the Space Medicine Branch. [We were also given the very special treat of a personalized tour of the Wright Brothers’ Collection, a major part of the main library at Wright State University.]

We searched through the Space Medicine Branch files, consisting of two boxes of various types of documents, with earliest dates

See SMB HISTORY, p. 157.

SPACE MEDICINE BRANCH YOUNG INVESTIGATOR AWARD

The Space Medicine Branch’s Young Investigator Award is presented to a young investigator who is the primary author of an outstanding presentation in the area of Aerospace Medicine presented at the current Annual Scientific Meeting of the Aerospace Medical Association. In addition to being the primary author, the work must be original and the young investigator must be presenting at the Annual Scientific Meeting for the first time. The Award is intended to encourage young investigators new to the field of Aerospace Medicine.

The applicant must submit a draft manuscript if their presentation to the chair of the Young Investigator Award sub-Committee. To be considered for the 2001 award, manuscripts must be submitted by the end of March, 2001 to:

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SMB HISTORY, from p. 156.
from 1963. Some were AsMA Executive Council meeting minutes with brief references to the Space Medicine Branch. Others were mailings and active member lists, a few photos (one of Dr. Strughold with Dr. Bauer), and the 1966-67 annual report to Dr. Ralph Cristy from Dr. G. B. McNeely which contained two interesting items. One recounted the completion of the Branch History by Dr. Paul Campbell who believed the "history should be a continuous project." The other mentioned briefly the death of Dr. Howard Dishongh who had been appointed Custodian of the Gavel for Life since he had had this special Arkansas potlatch gavel made and presented it to Dr. Frank Voris, outgoing President of the Branch in 1963. Custodians since then have not been "for life" and the undersigned received this honor recently from Dr. Frank Austin. But nowhere could we find the type of information chronicled by Drs. Campbell and Marbarger in the documents

referenced above. Further, we did not even have complete records of all officers, awardees, and supported activities of the Space Medicine Branch.

This caused us all to brainstorm the dilemma—fifty years of existence, but limited concrete information accessible. What kinds of information might future Branch members like to peruse? From what sources can such information be acquired? How? By whom? How should it be archived? Last November, our team also searched another potential mine, such as the AsMA Headquarters archives in Alexandria, VA, and the Wright State University Library has assisted us in cataloging and archiving our findings.

But we decided that the best answer to all the above questions is "people," those people who developed the knowledge base for, those who directly supported, those who made the critical decisions, those who have been recognized for their contributions to space programs and missions. Thus we determined that

a letter should be dispatched to all living officers of the Space Medicine Branch soliciting explicit information which they know. This has been done. But surely there are other sources—like every one of our members, active and past over the years. If you read this news note and think you may have (in your dusty files or just floating in your memory) that missing link the Space Medicine Branch needs for its archival record, please send it to one of the current officers. If you have a brilliant idea for helping us publicize and celebrate our fiftieth anniversary, do not be shy in sharing it.

History is made by everyone. It is recorded by few—usually incompletely and often inaccurately. Will you help us get our own record up to date and as complete and accurate as possible for this 50th anniversary. Thanks. See you in Reno.

G. Wyckliffe Hoffler, M.D.
Space Medicine Branch Historian