

## VETERINARY CORPS

Veterinary activities in the Air Force began in July 1949, with the transfer of 78 veterinary officers from the U.S. Army to the newly formed Air Force Medical Service. Over the next 30-years, the size and mission of the Veterinary Service expanded greatly until Congress voted to disestablish the Veterinary Corps effective 31 March 1980. During that 30-year period, Air Force veterinarians made numerous contributions in the areas of public health, preventive medicine, zoonotic diseases, food handling, sanitation, epidemiology, comparative medicine, animal diseases, and biomedical research. When the Veterinary Corps was disestablished, the Air Force had 291 veterinarians, about 75 whom were involved in research and development.

Upon disestablishment of the Veterinary Corps, Air Force veterinarians had three options: (1) transfer to the Army Veterinary Corps, (2) separate/retire, or (3) remain in the Air Force. About 50 elected to transfer to the Army. Those who remained in the Air Force were transferred to the Biomedical Sciences Corps and fell in one of two categories: (1) Veterinarians (AFSC 99XX) or (2) Environmental Health Officer (AFSC 9296). The Environmental Health Officer (EHO) specialty was, in effect, created to enable the Air Force to utilize the large number of highly trained veterinarians that had been serving as base veterinarians and in staff/command positions. In essence, EHO duties represented a combination of the "basic" veterinary functions (minus the military working dog and the "pet" clinic duties which became Army responsibilities) and the Environmental Health Nurse functions. As EHOs, veterinarians were not permitted to work with animals and, thus, lost their professional pay (\$1,200/year).

The other group of veterinarians in the Air Force were those working as veterinary scientists and clinicians with either a 993X or 994X AFSC. The vast majority of these positions were in research and development (R&D) and encompassed the following specialties: physiology, toxicology, microbiology, surgery, pathology and laboratory animal medicine. Veterinarians in these specialties continue to receive professional pay. When the Veterinary Corps was dissolved, the Air Force was filling 32 positions in Air Force R&D and another 27 positions in Navy, tri-service, or federal agency programs. Contributions of these veterinarians have been numerous and significant.

Veterinary Physiologists were responsible for much of the early information related to the effects on flight crews of weightlessness, positive gravitational forces, and vibration. This information was utilized in the design of flight and space gear as well as cockpit design. Physiologists also established the baseline radiobiological data that was needed for space flight.

Veterinary Toxicologists did much of the work assessing the hazards and toxic properties of rocket propellants, space age materials, jet fuels, and environmental pollutants.

In the field of Microbiology, AF veterinarians discovered the feline rhinotracheitis virus and the San Miguel sea lion virus.

Veterinary Surgeons designed and first used the prosthetic hip in animals which led to advances in human orthopedic surgery. A heart pump invented by another AF veterinary surgeon was responsible for significantly increasing our understanding and successful application of cardiopulmonary resuscitation techniques.

Veterinary Pathologists are integrally involved with all animal research. Indeed, they played an important role in most of the contributions mentioned above. Pathologists were responsible for most of our early understanding of diseases of laboratory animals.

Diseases from around the world were studied by veterinary researchers assigned to Navy research units in Taiwan, Indonesia, Egypt, Ethiopia, and to the Pan American Health Organization in Brazil.

Laboratory Animal Medicine veterinarians were among the founding fathers of the American College of Laboratory Animal Medicine and were integrally involved in the founding of what today is the American Association for Laboratory Animal Science and the American Association for Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care. They developed the implementation standards for the "Animal Welfare Act" and were responsible for many of the early advances in that specialty. Monumental contributions were also made from their important role in early nonhuman primate space flights, orbital flights, in the design and operation of the lunar receiving laboratory, and the lunar quarantine program. AF veterinarians were also involved in space feeding research.

Today, the Air Force veterinarian is indeed an endangered species. By the start of FY 90, we will have only two physiologists, three surgeons, six Laboratory Animal Medicine veterinarians, and three pathologists remaining. Congressional direction precludes the Air Force from recruiting veterinarians; therefore, the U.S. Army, as executive agent for veterinary services, is tasked with meeting the Air Force's veterinary requirements as the "Blue Suit" veterinarians retire/separate.