



**A HISTORY OF AFSC 908X0/4EOX1
VETERINARY, ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH
AND PUBLIC HEALTH
ENLISTED PERSONNEL**

Equine Veterinary Consultant Services

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Dear Larry,

Many thanks for your thoughtful letter of March 4th. Good to hear from you and learn of your activities since Bolling, and I should add congratulations. Those were indeed exciting days.

As indicated in the USAF, VC. history a vital force was created and a critical service rendered. A major and essential part of that force was our corps of Veterinary Technicians. They were an unusual, and competent group of men largely hand picked for the job. Incidentally, the current Surgeon General thanked me for publishing the history.

I still often chuckle and marvel that we did not get caught and severely reprimanded for some of the unorthodox procedures and short cuts used in developing the service. Our first "training school" for example was never authorized. We "managed" to have a select group ordered to Bolling. Major Day and his crew including yourself did the rest. By the time Personnel got around to asking why so many at Bolling, school was over and all students back at their home Base. Most AF Pentagon staff officers were rather young and inexperienced in those days and staying one jump ahead of them was not difficult.

In the meantime funds for "special training" of Airmen at civilian institutions became available. We assumed that included Veterinary Technicians and rushed the staff work to establish a school at Colorado State University. In the meantime Major Jim Couch, VC at Lackland, with no authority to do so, quietly searched the recruit pool and named 60 top candidates that we "managed" to have ordered to CSU.

This was immediately followed by Gunter where we had a top staff waiting and you know the story from there. Couch was told he could not hand pick recruits and to

stay out of the pool. However, he seemed to have a hearing problem and the selections continued until well after we were fully mobilized. AF regulations were no hindrance in those days. Not many had yet been written and we had written our own.

It was a once in a life time experience and I was most fortunate to be in the right place at the right time and have the support of so many good men in getting the job done. My sincere appreciation to all of you who were on that team.

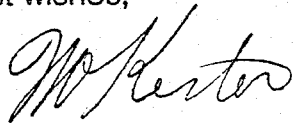
Have lived on Lookout Mountain just west of Denver since 1958. Where I have a few riding horses and have averaged 1000 miles a year on Rocky Mountain trails since that time. As I reach 88 this year the average is declining.

As you know I was President of the AVMA 1956-7 and of the American Association of Equine Practitioners 1958-9. Was Executive Director of the latter for 25 years and saw it grow from 96 to 5000 members in the US and 42 other countries. Was Director of Research for the Morris Animal Foundation for 10 years and still an equine consultant.

Have had and still have several other professional consultant arrangements including the Arabian Horse Registry of America for 35 years.

A busy world - am sure yours has been a busy and rewarding one also. Please extend my best wishes to all in attendance at the reunion. If I were not under contract here for that date I certainly would be there.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "W. Kester".

Wayne O. Kester, DVM

Special Commentary

United States Air Force Veterinary Corps: 1949 to 1980

Wayne O. Kester, DVM

The US Air Force Veterinary Corps, little known and now forgotten, is one of the brightest chapters in veterinary history. Called upon in time of national emergency to provide essential environmental health and research services, it responded with a program that safeguarded troop health worldwide, that instigated and engaged in research and plans to provide protection against atomic, biological, and chemical warfare, and that played a major role in the research efforts to allow man to function in space and on the moon. This call presented numerous new challenges and opportunities for the veterinary profession, and it responded by demonstrating what it could do for society and the country when the chips were down.

The long-accepted, limited definition and scope of veterinary medicine was gone forever. A new and vastly expanded concept emerged to become a major force in human preventive medicine and public health systems. Ironically, there is no written history of this interlude. It did not occur to us at the time that we were engaged in anything worthy of a note in history, and no historical records were made or kept. Only in retrospect did the significance of the effort and its impact on veterinary medicine begin to register.

The only published records on the Corps are scattered notations in the *Annual Reports of the USAF Medical Service 1949-1980*, where due credit is given. However, these in no way portray the history of the Corps. A detailed history would be humorous and fascinating, but is beyond my capability at this time. Hence, the following dissertation is a brief overview of the Corps from where I saw it as AVMA president in 1956 and 1957, and as its first chief from inception in 1949 until my retirement in 1957. By that time, it had grown from a fledgling to a large, stabilized, essential force that, to the credit of those who followed, firmly carried on another 23 years, with little change in size, scope, or mission.

Why the Air Force Veterinary Corps was formed in 1949 as a component of the newly established Air Force Medical Department—There were two over-

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powering reasons. First, our country was facing a war-time mobilization that would include a vast and immediate expansion of the fledgling two-year-old Air Force. The Veterinary Corps was the only possible force capable of providing an environmental health and preventive medicine service for Air Force troops dispersed in many (26) countries. No alternate personnel or service existed in the Air Force, and none would be available for many years.

Second, the Air Force was faced with an urgent and massive research effort involving nuclear energy, biological warfare, environmental and industrial health hazards, arctic survival, space medicine and flight safety for airplane crews, astronauts, and other special missions personnel, and many more developing areas. Many research teams were to be formed. Veterinary expertise was vital to those who were in any way related to the use of the laboratory animals or to foods and the feeding of personnel. The only consistent and reliable source would be the Veterinary Corps, and one or more veterinary officers were included in each such team.

*How the Air Force Veterinary Corps was formed—*In 1947, in forming the Department of Defense, the old Army Air Corps was removed from the Army and established as the new US Air Force. Support services and personnel, including medical, remained an army responsibility—an impractical arrangement. Two years later, the Army discontinued all support services and new ones were formed in the Air Force. Thus, on July 1, 1949, the US Air Force Medical Department, including the Veterinary Corps, was born. These services were manned by volunteers transferring from the Army. Not many chose to transfer, resulting in a severe shortage in all categories of medical personnel for several years, except in the veterinary service, where ample reserve officers volunteered for duty.

*The founding concept of the Veterinary Corps—*In June 1949, I was summoned for an interview by General Harry Armstrong, who on July 1 was to become the first Surgeon General of the Air Force and who was responsible for building a medical service for it. Faced with a severe shortage in med-

in medical personnel, he wanted to know the maximal role the Veterinary Corps might play. My opinion, from World War II as builder and chief of veterinary services for all US forces in the Pacific Ocean Area Theater, was that we could, with a little medical staff backup, provide a complete preventive medicine environmental health program for Air Force troops. We also could play a major role in many vital research efforts planned for immediate action. General Armstrong agreed; however, anticipating a never-ending problem of explaining and defending the existence of a veterinary service in the Air Force, he questioned whether it be better to operate under another name such as Environmental Medical Corps and include other ancillary medical personnel if and when they became available. I agreed with his concept. I also believed that formation of such a corps was inevitable as soon as sufficient trained ancillary personnel became available. But for now the answer was "No"—for three reasons. First, the work performance had to be done by veterinary personnel. There was no alternative. Second, if we retained the name Veterinary Corps and it was known as a veterinary organization, the veterinary profession, in case of war mobilization, would support us and supply the manpower (which they soon did in large numbers). Third, we were already established in name. Early Air Corps manning tables were patterned after Army and included veterinary officers. Fortunately, these carried over into Air Force tables authorizing veterinary officers in wing, base, and other unit headquarters. Thus, the manning authorization problem was solved and we had significant force in place. All we needed was headquarters and staff in the office of the Surgeon General USAF.

General Armstrong agreed and stated that he anticipated continuing shortages in all categories of medical personnel. One result would be a disastrous gap in preventive medicine programs and, as he saw it, a gap that could be closed only by the Veterinary Corps.

His final observation was, "You have the manpower, they have the know-how—so write the book and get the show on the road. Plan on an officer for each Air Force base who, in addition to his usual duties, will be designated environmental health officer. He and the senior surgeon must, in effect, be the total public health department for that base." He also admonished, "Gear up for research because we have a massive effort confronting us."

How the Corps operated—There was much to be done, with no time to spare (We were at war in Korea less than a year later). "Writing the book" meant drafting regulations, gaining their approval by 11 other staff offices, and then publishing—regulations that would officially establish veterinary service and define its duties at all levels of command. All of the new services had the same

problem in "writing their book" and spent months in doing so. We knew time was of the essence in our interest and within two weeks we had a finalized draft.

To expedite, we drafted one large all-inclusive general regulation rather than several small special ones, as was customary. The complete operational program, as envisioned and directed by Gen Armstrong, was spelled out in detail in the first section. In the second section, without precedent or authority, we set forth items and services that would be provided for us: transportation, housing, office space, maintenance, and supplies. It even specified the number and rank of veterinary personnel to be assigned in all levels of command, all of which should have been (and later was) published in the regulations of the providing services and not in medical regulations.

General Armstrong, in approving the draft, indicated the first section was excellent, but was amused at the second section and doubted that we could get approval for publication because it was so unorthodox and impinged on the prerogatives of other services. However, it was our opinion that we could whiz our oddball package by the new and inexperienced staff and have it in the field as "the bible" long ahead of other related regulations. Our gamble paid off and was the key to our early success. It was two years before our "misdeeds" caught up with us and the regulation was rescinded. By then, however, our personnel and program had long been operating in place and we had appropriate replacement regulations ready for issue.

One veterinary officer and two technicians were authorized for each base of 1,000 in strength, with more at larger bases. Smaller bases had one technician and were serviced by an attending veterinary officer stationed elsewhere.

The job at base level was to continue the traditional veterinary service role of inspecting meat, poultry, seafood, and dairy products for soundness, safety, and quality. Procurement inspection at point of origin for the Department of Defense continued to be an Army responsibility. Base veterinary officers performed this inspection for the Army at procurement centers located near Air Force bases.

In addition, the base veterinarian was responsible for the inspection of all other foods from time of receipt until consumed. This included the sanitary inspection of all facilities where food was procured, received, handled, prepared, and served to troops. It also included inspection of all local sources for dairy and bakery products, in fact, all locally procured food of any type. This was a significant and vital chore, especially at overseas bases.

In addition to the foregoing, the base veterinarian, in his role as environmental health officer, had surveillance inspection over water supplies, housing, rodent and pest control, environmental

sanitation, waste management, toxic fuels and substances, zoonotic diseases, occupational health and safety programs, biological and chemical warfare defense, and other related programs. He was not an expert in any of these areas; however, his broad education and adaptability made it possible for him to satisfactorily cope with the problems. This was fortunate, because he was the only person available who could do the job, which made him the "expert."

The senior staff surgeon in each of the major command headquarters was responsible for administering the preventive medicine program in his command. He was assisted by his staff veterinarian. In addition, a medical officer MPH was available in two headquarters, and sanitary engineers were available in two others. Formulation and direction of the program came from a team in the Surgeon General's office headquarters USAF, consisting of a colonel MC, MPH, a major MSC sanitary engineer, and the chief of the Veterinary Corps. All work in the field was performed by veterinary officers and enlisted technicians. This arrangement was perpetuated with modification to accommodate ancillary personnel in related disciplines as they became available following the Korean War.

Animal care was a small but critical part of the work load. The primary objective was protecting the health of personnel by detecting, preventing, and controlling animal diseases transmissible to human beings. This was a major problem in more than a 100 bases in foreign countries. A small veterinary facility was maintained on all bases for the surveillance and required rabies vaccination of all pets of Air Force personnel.

The other objective was maintenance of a healthy, working force of war dogs—another difficult problem because of prevalent diseases and feeding problems, especially in foreign lands where most were used. The average number of dogs in use in Europe and Africa was 400. These were trained and issued by the Army. In the Far East, around 450 dogs were in service. These were procured and trained by the Air Force.

Following the Korean War, in an "economy measure," the Army was directed to discontinue training and close its center in Colorado where it had trained and issued dogs to all four Services for many years. This caused the Air Force to establish a new training center at Lackland AFB. This was soon expanded to replace the Army program and to issue dogs to the other three services.

Where the personnel came from and how qualified—It was a force of creative, versatile, energetic young veterinarians with the audacity to do things the quick and practical way, unfettered by hide-bound military custom and tradition. They fit and operated well in a young inventive Air Force, which was not yet custom-bound in administrative procedures.

During the first eight years (my tour as chief) with an average active strength approaching 300, approximately 1,000 veterinarians reported to serve two or more years as veterinary officers. Ninety percent of these had been graduated from college less than three years, and a majority less than one year. Most served only the then mandatory two-year tour. This resulted in a 30% turnover rate each year and a major continuing-training program.

Only 78 transferred from the Army, three of whom were senior officers due for retirement, leaving 75 to serve with the Air Force. Forty-two were regular Army officers, and only three were pre-World War II officers. The remainder were reserve officers who intended to continue on duty. All had WW II experience and were public health oriented. In rank, there were one colonel, 19 majors, and 55 captains. Lack of seniority and rank posed a decided operational handicap. Education was used to counter this problem. Eight majors were promptly assigned to universities to obtain masters degrees in public health. Others soon followed. They were then assigned as command veterinarians on the staff of the surgeon in each Air Force command.

Within 24 months, there were more than 200 bases worldwide demanding veterinary services. These were organized into 15 commands ranging in size from one to 25 bases. The headquarters staff veterinarian was responsible for all services in his command. Bases were manned largely by newly commissioned reserve officers. Originally, new officers reported to the command veterinarians for a few days of on-job-training before reporting to their assigned base. Within a few months, a medical and veterinary school was established at Gunter AFB, where new officers received indoctrination and technical training prior to reporting to their home base for duty.

Shortage of trained enlisted technicians was another serious problem. Only about two dozen had transferred from the Army. At least 100 were needed at once. A stopgap, a one-time 15-week training school for 60 veterinary technicians, was established under contract with Colorado State University. We managed to handpick all students from a large recruit pool at Lackland AFB. They were a superb class, many were college students and graduates, and they got us off to a good start. Several later earned DVM degrees. Subsequently, all enlisted technicians were trained at the Gunter AFB school. By the end of its second year, the school had graduated 379 apprentice and 40 advanced veterinary technicians.

The Corps rapidly grew in size and scope. By 1956, there were 327 officers on duty, including 113 overseas and 800 enlisted technicians. There was a continuous turnover totaling about one third each year. An extensive training program was required for recruit technicians and officers. In addi-

tion, a program of short courses on pertinent subjects was maintained as continuing education for all those on duty. Although programs expanded, there was little change in average strength during the next 20 years (1959 to 1979). There was an average of 325 officers on duty, with a turnover average of 70 per year. There were 85 officers on overseas assignment, and 100 officers in research and special assignments.

The research effort—Originally we did not know how the effort would shape up, but we expected it to be enormous because there was so much that needed to be known and known immediately. We knew the Air Force must do the research and we knew that veterinary science would be a basic requirement in much of it, because there would be extensive use of laboratory animals. Also, a major research effort in the development of special foods and feeding methods for flying personnel would be a veterinary responsibility.

Space exploration and space medicine—Could man exist in space? Could he survive penetrating the radiation belt that lay some 30 miles overhead? Could he survive the g forces of rocket blast-off and the effects of confinement, isolation, and weightlessness, and still function in space? Could astronauts returning from the moon bring diseases, toxic substances, or other threats to life on earth? (Nine veterinary officers were directly involved in the astronauts first trip).

Research teams used mice, monkeys, chimpanzees, and human beings on rockets, jet-propelled sleds, huge centrifuges, and other devices, which established that man could operate in space. At the same time, they developed procedures, techniques, materials, and safety measures for doing so. Veterinary officers were key and major components of these teams and were the men who rode the centrifuge and jet-propelled sled in final testing.

Nuclear radiation and the bomb—The physical effect of an atomic bomb blast was well understood. The implications of radiation were not. What would be the effects of radiation from a bomb blast and fallout on human and animal life and their food chains? What health hazards were generated in working with nuclear-propelled machines, the bomb, and other nuclear materials? How could exposure dosage be determined and safety tolerances established? What protective devices and techniques might be developed, especially for flying personnel? Might exposure prior to take off, or from a bomb blast in air, impair a pilot's judgment and ability to fly safely without his awareness of incapacity? Research done with monkeys determined that the answer was "yes" and that bombers should not fly in close formation if nuclear air bursts were a threat.

Biological warfare—Were agents developed, provided, and advocated by the Army Chemical

Corps viable as Air Force offensive weapons? Conclusive field tests conducted by the Chemical Corps but instigated and closely monitored by Air Force research veterinarians proved they were not. This promptly led to rescinding of an order to convert one bomber wing to deliver bacterial rather than conventional bombs. Thus, a very costly and dangerous mistake in armament was avoided.

The biggest unknown demanding immediate attention was how might the use of biological warfare affect Air Force troops. What preventive and protection measures should be developed?

Toxicology—Another emerging problem was toxic substances used or generated in servicing and maintaining airplanes and repair shops. Toxic fuels, solvents, detergents, lubricants, fumes, gases, aerosols, even noise, at what levels of exposure were they toxic? What effects would these substances have on human health and the environment? What protective equipment and measures need be developed? How do we detoxify or otherwise dispose of such substances?

While the answers to the foregoing questions were not known in 1949, they are known now, and Air Force veterinarians played a major role in finding those answers.

Graduate training in selected disciplines—It was obvious from the beginning that many veterinarians with advanced postgraduate training in several disciplines would be required. It also was obvious that the Air Force must recruit and train such personnel. There was, and would be, no other source.

The first thrust of the graduate training program was to create a large cadre of veterinary officers trained in military public health. This was done by assigning officers to university schools of public health to obtain an MPH or by assigning them to the Army School of Military Preventive Medicine.

The next thrust was to develop a large number of veterinary officers trained in specialties peculiar to and required in AF research programs. Areas of immediate concern included nuclear energy, pathology, physiology, bacteriology, virology, toxicology, laboratory animal medicine, human nutrition, food technology, selective surgery, and public health. This training was accomplished by assigning motivated officers to universities to obtain masters degrees in their area of interest.

Some were assigned to research institutions for on-job-training, because training in the subjects desired was not available at universities. For example, laboratory animal medicine was practically unknown and being taught nowhere. For a starter, three young graduates were assigned to Angell Memorial Animal Hospital in Boston for on-job-training in small animal practice that would be applicable in laboratory animals. Shortly thereafter, The Ohio State University, soon followed by others,

expanded veterinary curricula to include laboratory animal medicine and public health.

During the first eight years, approximately 100 officers, including all career officers, had received masters degrees or equivalent. On completion of training, those in public health were given key assignments in the medical service preventive medicine program. All others were assigned to research efforts requiring their special expertise—mostly in the rapidly expanding Air Force program. A few were requested by, and assigned to, other agencies to assist or collaborate in research. Included were assignments to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration; the Atomic Energy Commission; the National Research Council; the Defense Support Agency; and the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps. Veterinarians with research training were always in demand.

Influences on the veterinary profession and on society—There were many of note. It allowed some 2,500 graduates to further their professional careers by serving as veterinary officers rather than being sidetracked and drafted to serve in the Army enlisted ranks. At the same time, it provided employment for over 1% of the profession. Some 300 received masters degrees or comparable graduate training, thus enlarging the overall pool of veterinary scientists.

Those in research were pressed to get on with finding answers. Publishing was secondary and not required, yet many scientific papers were published. One partial list included 239 such papers, most of them in new and unexplored areas. Thus, the overall pool of knowledge was greatly expanded.

In 1948, specialty organizations were not encouraged by the AVMA. Only two such associations existed, the well-established American Animal Hospital Association and the newly formed Conference of Public Health Veterinarians. The wide range of Air Force activities and research endeavors soon generated several new groups with special interests, which, in effect, were the genesis of many of the numerous, allied, and specialty veterinary organizations recognized by the AVMA today. The American Association of Laboratory Animal Science, the American Association of Industrial Veterinarians, the American Board of Veterinary Toxicology, the American College of Laboratory Animal Medicine, the American College of Veterinary Pathologists, the American College of Veterinary Preventive Medicine, and the Conference of Public Health Veterinarians, or their predecessors, were the principal ones involving Air Force veterinarians.

It was the beginning of an era of specialization. Curricula at veterinary colleges were, for the first time, expanded to include teaching subjects in public health and laboratory animal medicine. Veterinary officers were enrolled in practically all of the country's graduate schools of public health.

They were fine representatives of the profession, and they disseminated a wealth of information in those schools that left a new and broader concept of veterinary medicine with a host of students and faculty members—a concept that soon permeated the entire public health field.

Laboratory animal management and medicine advanced markedly. The Surgeon General had a group of consultants consisting of the deans or other key staff members of all the major medical schools. Those consultants inspected and critiqued facilities at AF bases, including the six with laboratory animal colonies. There they saw model programs in operation, directed by veterinarians trained in laboratory animal medicine. As a result, most medical schools modernized their programs to emulate, thus creating a demand for many veterinarians trained in laboratory animal medicine.

Fallout from some of the Corps activities had far-reaching effects on the civilian economy and in civilian life. One effect, certainly appreciated by the American housewife and all cooks, was causing the poultry industry to convert from producing "New York dressed"-type poultry to dressed, drawn, and packaged, ready-to-cook poultry as now seen in supermarkets. The antiquated "New York dressed" system meant only the feathers were removed in the packing plant. Internal organs were left in to be removed from the bird in the kitchen where cooked, often resulting in an unwholesome, unpalatable end product. At that time (1948), some producers had modernized. However, the major Army suppliers who dominated the market opposed. Their premise, believed by the Army purchasing office charged with procuring all subsistence for all four services in the Department of Defense, was that undrawn poultry would withstand storage and shipment better than drawn; that it would cost less; and that the supply of dressed poultry was insufficient. From my position as director of the Army meat inspection service for the Department of Defense, I knew these premises to be false, but met no success in convincing the Army procurement office. My first act as chief of the AFVC was to explain the situation to the AF subsistence officer, who promptly called the Army office and said, "Don't buy any more of those chickens with the guts in for the Air Force." We then called on the Navy and Marine supply officers with the same results. The Army then followed suit. Within a few months, the remainder of the industry had modernized. They had to, in order to bid on Army contracts. And the American housewife could now buy chicken cleanly packaged and ready to cook.

There was other unlikely fallout from AF research. Frozen meals developed for in-flight feeding of long-distance aircrews were forerunners of the TV dinner. Dehydrated and specially prepared foods and drinks, developed for feeding as-

astronauts in space, are now found on grocery shelves and in survival packs.

The prosthetic hip joint, now implanted in thousands of people annually, was an important development by Col Harry Gorman. In 1952, Col Gorman, on his own initiative, had developed such a hip joint for use in dogs with hip dysplasia. At that time, he was destined to implant devices in mice and primates that would monitor their physiologic reaction in space. To further his surgical skills, he was assigned to The Ohio State University for special training. While there working with the medical school, the hip joint was adapted to human beings. Numerous other achievements are recounted by Major G. W. Irving.¹

Assessment of performance—Many accomplishments by the Corps of benefit to the Air Force, the veterinary profession, and society, are related above. However, any true assessment must be based on performance, stature, and contributions in Air Force objectives. And to that, only the record can speak. Hurriedly assembled as a temporary measure to avoid a crisis in medical services for the Korean War, it continued for 31 years before it was integrated into the more recently formed "Biomedical Sciences Corps." Even then the mission and personnel continued to serve.

The stature and essentiality of the Corps in the eyes of the Air Force medical and general staff was amply recorded in 1956, when Charles Wilson, then Secretary of Defense, issued an ill-advised (and soon rescinded) edict to eliminate the veterinary corps. Reaction was prompt and definite. The commander in chief of USAF Europe immediately (May 28, 1956) messaged the chief of staff USAF that he had two alternatives, "abandon most sanitary programs and expect higher disease rates or replace the 50 authorized veterinary officers in his command with 50 medical officers." (The latter was impossible because of the drastic shortage in medical officers). A similar message was promptly dispatched by the commander in chief Far East command requesting 22 medical officers to replace the 22 veterinary officers he expected to lose.

The understanding and appreciation of veterinary service in USAF headquarters is well demonstrated by the following excerpt from a memorandum by the chief of staff (Thomas S. White) to Donald A. Quarles, then Secretary of the Air Force.

The single greatest job of the Veterinary Corps is the protection of human health. It is an integral part of the Medical Service. Not only are veterinarians utilized to perform numerous essential functions but such utilization is a sound economic investment for the Air Force.

There are four general areas in modern military medicine as practiced in the Air Force where there is no suitable substitute for veterinary service. First in importance is preventive

medicine—environmental health or public health. Second is operation of world-wide food inspection and food security or protective system. Third is the support of research and development. Fourth, and of lesser importance, is animal service activities.

Veterinarians are eminently well qualified for performing duties in the foregoing areas and in so doing make it possible for physicians to devote far more time to the direct practice of medicine and handling of patients. In this time of shortage of medically trained personnel, this has been a major contribution.

In addition, in case of war or catastrophe, the veterinary service constitutes a standby organization in being capable of immediately taking over much of the preventive medicine program, thereby freeing many physicians for professional care. In fact we, like the Federal Civil Defense Administration, expect and plan that these professionally trained men will assist in giving medical aid to human casualties resulting from major catastrophe.

The following excerpts of a memorandum from the Surgeon General, Dan C. Ogle, to the USAF chief of staff firmly states that medical department view:

- By carrying a goodly portion of our public health workload, [veterinary officers] make it possible for our doctors [physicians] to devote far more time to the direct practice of medicine and handling of patients in the hospital.

- A tremendous on-base and overseas inspection workload remains to be performed by the Air Force. It is significant that we have had no food-borne disease problems. In addition, we rely on the veterinary service as our principal safeguard against food and feeding disasters in event of atomic or biological warfare attack.

- Veterinarians are especially well qualified to assist with our preventive medicine program. They perform the thousands of continuing sanitary inspections required to maintain proper standards of environmental health on and around Air Force bases. They also safeguard our Air Force population from diseases of animals communicable to man.

- The Air Force has research projects under way representing millions of dollars annually—the success or failure of which depends upon the efficiency and accuracy with which laboratory test animals are used. This in turn depends upon the skill of our veterinary service.

- Another task, although a lesser one for the Air Force, is that of assisting the Army in its single service responsibility for the procurement inspection of all subsistence for the Department of Defense. Directed by the Army Surgeon General, this inspection system utilizes the Department of Agriculture and Air Force veterinary services to the fullest extent possible.

Mission Accomplished—In 1980, the problem of explaining and defending a Veterinary Corps in a horseless Air Force ended. Pressure from Congress forced the Air Force to disestablish the Corps and to assign veterinary responsibility for pet and war dogs to the Army. The name was eliminated but the job was not. The 280 Veterinary Corps officers then on duty were reclassified to "public health officers" and assigned to the Biomedical Sciences Corps. This corps, formed in 1965, consisted of officers in several medical service related disciplines, including public health, which made it the logical home for veterinary services.

All veterinarians, under their new name, continued their previous mission. Those engaged in research continued. All others continued in an expanding field of public health. Most of those who

transferred in 1980 have since retired, but new ones have been recruited. Today, 145 doctors of veterinary medicine are serving as public health officers in the Air Force, one of whom is now chief of the 2,800 officer Biomedical Science Corps.

Thirty-one years and two wars later, the all-inclusive medical support corps envisioned by Gen Armstrong in 1949 came to pass and the Veterinary Corps disappeared (as we had long expected), but not without leaving its mark on the Air Force, on veterinary medicine, and on the American society.

Reference

1. Irving GW III. Veterinary service of the USAF: its contributions to comparative medical research. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 1976;169:117-119.