

DOD, the VA, and Getting the Twain to Meet

For the third straight year, we focus an issue of *Proceedings* on Military Medicine. With the nation at war, few issues have greater resonance with warfighters, their families, and

friends than the promise that they will get the best medical treatment available if they are wounded.

So are they? The answer is yes. And no. There seems to be little question that the doctors and nurses staffing both military and VA hospitals are highly competent. That's the good news. The bad news, as chronicled by contributing editor Art Pine in "The Elusive 'Seamless Transition,'" (page 44), is that moving from the military to the VA system has been a nightmare for many Sailors, Marines, Soldiers, Airmen, and Coast Guardsmen. For some, the bureaucratic mess merits the classic World War II term "snafu" in all its profane glory.

Wars inflict collateral damage. But they also result in collateral benefits, most notably by stimulating medical breakthroughs across a range of maladies, notably in the development of new prosthetic devices and other sensory aids. It is war's bloody silver lining.

We have an authority, Frederick Downs Jr., the Department of Veterans Affairs' Chief Prosthetics Officer, to chart the evolution of the devices in the VA system starting in World War II and the current high degree of sophistication that has been achieved (page 56).

Mr. Downs (see photo) tells us that the finest prosthetics in the world are available free of charge from the VA for veterans who have lost limbs in the service. He further notes that the chief of a prosthetic service at any of the VA medical centers must be a disabled veteran in need of such a device himself or herself. The reason is to ensure that the chief is aware in a personal way of the needs of the veteran.

Mr. Downs certainly meets that standard. He lost an arm to a Bouncing Betty landmine while commanding an Army infantry platoon in South Vietnam. He also is a fine writer, authoring several books, including *The Killing Zone: My Life in the Vietnam War*.

Our most alarming story concerns a medical development that has received little coverage. "In-surgents in the Bloodstream" (page 52), by retired Marine Chas Henry, tells of a little known but pernicious and strongly drug-resistant germ that has been infecting wounded troops, initially overseas. Now, though, the infections have spread to military hospitals back in the States, and at least one civilian hospital.

Not everything this month is Military Medicine. As with most of our focus issues, we also offer a mix of stories that relate to other matters. I recommend them all to you, but suggest that those who aspire to write for *Proceedings* carefully read "Building a Small Surface Warship: Mission Impossible?" (page 14) by retired Rear Admiral and award-winning author Jerry Holland. It is the all-but-perfect *Proceedings* article.

First, the story is important, dealing as it does with something members of the Sea Services should care about. Second, Admiral Holland takes a point of view, arguing his case forcefully and in the default language of this publication, English, and not in bureaucratic gibberish. While his writing is gentlemanly, it is clean, crisp, precise, and pointed. And he is not afraid to be provocative.

Finally, there is an economy of phrasing to Admiral Holland's prose; his piece comes in at 2,400 words, well below our rarely waived 3,000-word limit for feature articles.

Here's some happy news. The Surface Navy Association presents dozens of awards annually, but its Literary Award is the most coveted by authors. The association presents this award to recognize the best professional article in any publication addressing Surface Navy or Surface Warfare issues. The winner for 2007 is Navy Captain Charles M. Gaouette for his article in the January *Proceedings*, "What I Learned in Command at Sea," lessons from the bridge for future skippers to live by. An Honorable Mention in this year's contest goes to another *Proceedings* author, Captain Stephen F. Davis Jr., for his article in the same issue, "Building the Next Nelson," recommending a change of course for the Surface Warfare Officers School.

Our congratulations to both fine officers. ✨



Robert Timberg, Editor-in-Chief



Frederick Downs Jr.

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Proceedings?
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