

History of the
RESEARCH DIVISION
Bureau of Medicine and Surgery
U. S. Department of the Navy

by

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Particularly pleasing to a research minded individual was the spirited endorsement of the request for a research laboratory at the new Naval Medical School prepared by CDR C. S. Stephenson, MC, USN:⁹ "No record has been found of an institution, anywhere, in the million dollar class which does not have a well organized program of research. Yet the Medical Department of the Navy spends over four million dollars a year for supplies and equipment and has no functioning research program. True, we have had sporadic fits of research, but none have fulfilled the meaning of the word, and in the main have died of nonsupport, lack of appreciation of the value of the research, or purely to carry out the habit spasm policy of rotating personnel. Compared with industrial research as it is conducted by the great electrical and chemical foundations, all medical research is most haphazard, individualistic, and, hence, not highly efficient". BUMED needs many more Stephenson!

Experimentation with human subjects, and the question of informed consent was much in the medical and lay press in 1974, but nine years before the Research Division was formed, such experimentation was agreed upon for physiological research with the submarine escape device, the "lung", and in deepsea diving activity conducted at the EDU at the Navy Yard, Washington, D.C. In 1932 BUMED wrote to the SecNav, giving in detail the protocol for the planned experiments and requesting approval.¹⁰ SecNav approved the request for the work, with the understanding that all subjects should be informed volunteers; that the detailed protocol be approved in advance, and that every precaution be taken to prevent accidents. It should be noted that the work was entirely supported by the Bureau of Construction and Repair (BuC&R) but that BUMED had at least one medical officer assigned with appropriate assistants, and that there was an advisory committee with a BUMED representative on it, in the early days, CAPT E. W. Brown, MC, USN.

But permission for animal experimentation was not so easy. The author will be forgiven, I trust, for augmenting the formal history gleaned from the cold official letters and formal reports by adding a personal experience. We had been doing an extensive biochemical experiment on dogs breathing oxygen under pressure in the chamber at EDU, attended by air breathing medical personnel, and were quite well along when Irene Castle came to Washington and made an emotional plea before a committee of Congress to stop all animal experimentation in the U. S. This antivivisectionist tirade frightened the Chief, BuC&R, who ordered our work discontinued. Knowing that the months of hard and dangerous work under high pressure were about to be lost, and

⁹Memorandum NC43/S-E(25)CO/elh dated 9 December 1939 to Chief, BUMED.
Subject: Research laboratory for the new NMS, signed by W. Chambers and enclosing a statement by LT A. R. Behnke, Jr., MC, USN, proposing the laboratory.

¹⁰BUM&S letter of 5 April 1932, S92(041) to SecNav via BuNav with CNO,
Subject: Hazards to personnel in physiological research with submarine "lung" and in deepsea diving at EDU.