



Armed Forces Institute of Pathology

THE transfer of the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology in early autumn to its new home on the grounds of Walter Reed Army Medical Center marks the end of an era and the beginning of a new one. The Army Medical Museum, from which today's Armed Forces Institute of Pathology has evolved, was founded in 1862 as a center for medical officers seeking information on diseases of military importance. As modern pathology developed, its function gradually changed, until in World War I it became the central laboratory, in World War II, the Army Institute of Pathology. To fill the needs of a greatly augmented Army, the personnel was multiplied. The professional staff was supported by a visiting staff of leaders in pathology. Publications from the Institute are evidence of the research on medico-military problems that flourished despite the great volume of diagnostic work. In this period the pattern of the organization was set, and its three chief functions—consultation, training, and research—were defined. With inclusion of service to the Veterans Administration, and again with unification of the Armed Forces, its responsibilities were enlarged, and now the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology is the central laboratory of pathology for Army, Navy, and Air Force and provides consultation service to the Veterans Administration and Public Health Service.

During this period of expansion, civilian participation in its activities became increasingly significant. Although the bulk of material comes from the Services, about 10,000 cases are contributed annually by civilian physicians to the American Registry of Pathology, one of its departments. Composed of 22 registries of special pathology, sponsored by 17 national medical associations, it functions in cooperation with National Research Council. Intensive research on a specific disease or the pathology of particular anatomic regions is conducted in each registry, headed by the chief of the corresponding section in the Department of Pathology.

The consultation service furnished the Armed Services insures rapid and expert pathologic diagnosis wherever our soldiers, sailors, and airmen are stationed. It is accomplished by expeditious handling within the AFIP, aided by modern air transportation and communication. Microscopic slides and records, identified by a number for each case, become part of the permanent collection; material

acquired subsequently and autopsy specimens in event of death are added to the numbered unit file.

Interesting specimens are displayed in the Medical Museum, which is open to the public and attracts many visitors. The chief mission of the Museum is education, but research is served by the collection it maintains for investigative studies.

Another department that performs public service is the Medical Illustration Service. It maintains an extensive loan library of medical films for the Services and civilian medical groups. From its print collection, many authors select illustrations for medical articles. Development of visual aids for teaching medical sciences and preparation of exhibits for national and international meetings are other educational functions.

With the conveniences of a larger, modern building, the best in laboratory equipment, an enthusiastic professional staff, supported by expert technical, clerical, and other workers, the future of the Institute should be increasingly productive. Laboratories for tissue culture, cytophysics, histochemistry, radiobiology, microbiology, and other special techniques that extend the horizons of pathology, will provide enlarged opportunities for post-graduate training and permit more scientists to carry on research.

Research has been dominant at the AFIP, and the names of Woodward, Reed, Callendar, Lucké, Ash, and Wilder recall some of its significant contributions. Its traditions encourage industry, assure freedom in research, and support the principle that administration exists to aid scientific progress. Under the management of the Surgeon General of the Army, with the Surgeons General of the three services composing the board of governors, a Department of Defense directive assures a true academic environment for the future. The staff now can investigate the physico-chemical machinery of the cell as well as its form, and the intricate processes through which various agents affect that machinery. Although the scope of research will be broadened, its purpose will remain constant: to improve, by study of causes and effects of disease, the health of our fighting men and the people they defend.

ELBERT DECOURSEY

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