

Navy Medicine Oral History Project
Oral History Interview Synopsis, and Key Word List
Vice Admiral Michael L. Cowan, M.D., VADM, MC, USN, Ret.
34th Surgeon General, U.S. Navy
Executive Director, AMSUS

Date and Location of Interview: 12 September, 2013; AMSUS, Bethesda, Maryland

Interviewers: Mr. André Sobocinski and Colonel Richard Ginn, Ret., USA, Office of Medical History, BUMED

Vice Admiral Michael L. Cowan was born on 22 December 1944 in Hays, Indiana, and grew up in Fort Morgan, Kansas. Early on he decided he wanted to be a physician, or as he puts it, "my earliest memory from grade school was I was a physician, but I just hadn't gone to medical school yet." He completed pre-med at the University of Colorado, and skipped his senior year in 1965 to enroll in the medical school of Washington University, St. Louis. Graduating in 1969, he began an internal medicine residency at Temple University, but this was interrupted by being one of the last physicians called up before the end of the draft. He entered active duty as an ensign, USNR, in July 1991, beginning a variegated career spanning patient care, medical research and training, field medicine, executive medicine, deployment to a critical hot spot, Pentagon staff, and Navy Surgeon General. His post-Navy career has centered on health care consulting, and at the time of this interview he was executive director of AMSUS, the national association for Federal health professionals. He is board certified as an internist and physician executive.

Although Admiral Cowan's father had been a WWII submariner, he had absolutely no desire to be in the military. "I was very much against it, and came in kicking and screaming. In fact I joined the Navy to delay going into the Army, because the Army goes out into muddy fields and lives in tents." As luck would have it, his first assignment was with the Marines at Camp Lejeune, NC. However, after months of "grumbling and popping a bad attitude", he concluded he really liked it and never looked back. He completed his residency at the Naval National Medical Center, Bethesda, followed by assignments as chief of outpatient services at the Naval Hospital, Rota, Spain, and Director of Clinical Research at the Naval Medical Research Institute in Bethesda. This led to war college at the National Defense University and appointment in 1982-5 as Vice Chair of the Department of Military Medicine, USUHS,

His assignment in 1991 as Surgeon, U.S. Fleet Forces Command, marked his entry into senior levels of executive medicine, a tour that included deployment in 1992-3 as Task Force Surgeon for Operation Restore Hope in Somalia. This experience cemented his concern for force protection, and his pride in a humanitarian mission that saved thousands of lives. This was followed by command of the Naval Hospital, Camp Lejeune, where he was promoted to rear admiral in 1996, and then assignments as the first commander of the Defense Military Readiness Training Institute, at Fort Sam Houston, TX; Surgeon for the Office of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff; Chief of Staff for the ASD (HA), and Deputy Executive Director of the Tricare Management Activity. In 2001 he was selected in 2001 as the Navy Surgeon General, a tumultuous period that began with the attack on the World Trade Center, followed by the entry of the U.S. into the war in Afghanistan and Iraq. He retired in 2004, and for eight years was a health care consultant with Deloitte. In 2012 he was selected as the AMSUS executive director. He and his wife, Linda, have three sons, Matt, Mark and Ben; a daughter, Michelle; and seven grandchildren.

KEY WORDS

9-11 attack on the World Trade Center, 9 September 2011
Anthrax vaccine DOD
Army field medical support
Association of Military Surgeons of the United States (AMSUS)
Branch immaterial command of medical units
Defense Medical Readiness Training Institute (DMRTI)
Doctor Draft
Force health protection
Malaria research
Medical officer field medical training
National Disaster Medical System (NDMS)
Navy Medicine
Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), War in Afghanistan
Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), War in Iraq
Operation Provide Comfort, Humanitarian Intervention in Somalia
Operation Whitecoat, Army volunteers in Malaria research
Uniformed Services University

KEY FIGURES

Acosta, Jose A., M.D., CAPT, MC, USN, currently Commander and Deputy Director, Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Center, North Chicago, Ill.
Bennett, David M., VADM, Commander Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet, December 1990 to November 1992
Clark, Vern, Admiral, Chief of Naval Operations 2000-2005

Faison, Forrest, M.D., RADM, MC, USN. At the time of this interview RADM Faison was serving as the Commander, Naval Medical Center San Diego, CA

Hagen, Donald F., M.D., VADM, MC, USN, Surgeon General of the Navy 1991-1995.

Herman, Jan K., from 1979-1995 Historian of the 2012 Navy Medical Department and Curator of the Old U.S. Naval Observatory, Washington, D.C.

Johnston, Robert B., LtGen, USMC; in 1992, as Commanding General of I MEF, led U.S. and allied troops in Operation Restore Hope

Joy, Robert JT, M.D., COL, MC, USA, Ret., served as a professor of medical history at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USUHS) and was the founding chair of the Department of Military Medicine and later, the Department of Medical History.

Lipes, Wheeler (1920-2005), LCDR, MSC, USN, Ret., in 1942 during WWII as a Pharmacists Mate First Class, Lipes performed an emergency appendectomy aboard the submarine USS *Seadragon* in 1942. Seeing that Lipes needed to be recognized for his achievement, the BUMED History Office put him in for a Navy Commendation Medal in 2004. The medal was awarded to Lipes in 2005 at the Naval Hospital Camp Lejeune, NC in a ceremony presided over by VADM Michael Cowan.

Mayer, William E., M.D., Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs 1983-1989.

McDaniel, William J., M.D., RADM, MC, USN, Ret.; commissioned in 1969; orthopedic surgeon and flight surgeon; assignments included Surgeon, PACOM and at the time of his retirement in 1995, Commander of the Naval Medical Center, Portsmouth, VA. An athlete, he was the Navy wrestling champion 1973-1977, Silver Medalist in the 1974 CISM games, and a U.S. Olympic Team physician in 1984. His post-retirement activities have included starring in the TV series, *The Mole* in 2002, writing a book on that experience, and in 2005 serving aboard the USNS *Mercy* for the Indonesia tsunami relief effort.

Natkin, Ian L. "Red", COL, MSC, USA, in 1992 Commander, 62d Medical Group, Fort Lewis, WA.

Nelson, Richard A., M.D., VADM MC, USN served as the Navy Surgeon General from 1997-2001.

Potter, Bonnie B., M.D., RADM, MC, USN, was serving as the Commander, National Naval Medical Center in 2001; first female Navy physician selected for flag rank.

Rowley, William R., M.D., RADM MC, USN, Ret., served as the BUMED Deputy Assistant Chief for Health Care Operations

(1993-1994) and later the Assistant Chief for Plans, Analysis, and Evaluation, BUMED (1994-1995).

Sanford, Jay P., M.D., COL, MC, USAR, Ret., 1928-1996: founding dean and later president, 1975-1990, of the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USUHS), Bethesda, MD. His final USAR assignment was with the 11th Special Forces Group, Fort Meade, MD.

Sears, H. James T., RADM, MC, Ret., in 2003 appointed Director, TRICARE Management Activity

Shalikashvili, John M., (1936-1997), GEN, USA, Ret., Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff 1993- 1997

Sharp, Trueman W. MD., CAPT MC, USN, board certified in preventive medicine, served as the Chair of the Department of Military and Emergency Medicine at USUHS.

Shelton, Henry H., GEN, USA, Ret, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff 1997-2001

Sherry, Sol, M.D. (1907-1983); Distinguished Emeritus Professor in Medicine, Temple University, was an academic physician, teacher and researcher whose work led to the development of clot-dissolving drugs to treat heart attacks. In 1968 he left Washington University in St. Louis School of Medicine to join the staff of the Temple University School of Medicine, which he would later serve as Dean.

Zimble, James A., M.D., VADM MC, USN, Navy Surgeon General 1987-1991

R.Ginn 5/12/14