

Editorial

Auditory Research at Walter Reed Army Medical Center



I was delighted when Dr. Jerger invited me to assemble a collection of papers for a special Walter Reed issue of *JAAA*. Not only does this issue highlight the long-standing commitment by Walter Reed Army Medical Center to research in hearing, it provides me an opportunity to acknowledge publicly some of the many persons who have contributed to this program over the years. Although the papers reported in this issue focus on our hearing aid research program—because we have published many of our hearing aid papers in *JAAA* in recent years—basic and applied hearing research has been conducted at the Army Audiology and Speech Center (AASC) for more than 50 years, including extensive programs of research in amplification, psychoacoustics, auditory and auditory-visual speech perception, hearing conservation, cochlear physiology, and auditory admittance. (We have also had a research program in speech production for more than 30 years ... but that's another story!) The common thread through all of this research has been an attempt to improve the care provided to the patients of the AASC.

The Research Section of the AASC currently consists of 12 people, including senior scientists, postdoctoral fellows, and research associates. Although programs of research have existed within the AASC since World War II, the current program began in the early 1970s. In the fall of 1970, while a doctoral student at Purdue University, I received a draft notice. I was about to receive my degree, the Vietnam War was ongoing, and the Army was not a part of my long-term career plans! However, I had exhausted all of my academic and family deferrals. There was no avoiding it. I was going into the Army. I contacted Jerry Northern—then head of the Army's small audiology program—about obtaining a

commission as an Army Audiology Officer. He arranged for my commission, but before I could report to Walter Reed, Jerry left the service and was replaced by Don Worthington. At the time, there were fewer than ten active-duty audiologists in the Army. My first assignment was to conduct a study of the prevalence of hearing loss within the combat branches of the Army. Everyone believed that noise-induced hearing loss was a huge problem within the Army, but there were no hard data to substantiate that belief. At about this time, Bob Prosek—a fellow graduate student at Purdue who also had been drafted into the Army—was assigned to Walter Reed, and we began a large and logistically complicated Army-wide study that established definitively that noise-induced hearing loss was the most prevalent occupationally related health risk to soldiers. At the time, more than 50 percent of soldiers with more than ten years on active duty had significant hearing loss. As a result, Army Audiology grew from fewer than 10 officers to more than 75, and the Army's current Hearing Conservation Program was born. Don also concluded that a research program focusing on clinical issues was needed within the AASC. He reestablished the Research Section, which had been relatively inactive in recent years, and assigned Bob and me to it full time.

In 1974, we persuaded our graduate school mentor at Purdue, Al Montgomery, to join our growing research group. For more than 13 years, Bob, Al, and I formed the core of hearing research at Walter Reed. (Bob did work in speech production, as well.) During that time, Dan Schwartz, David Hawkins, and Gus Mueller were members of our research group for varying periods of time. (Actually, Gus was Chief of the Audiology Clinic but spent so much time in the Research Section



Army Audiology and Speech Center Research Section. First row (left to right): Therese Walden, Rauna Surr, Mary Cord, Brian Walden, Lina Kubli. Second row: Michelle Molis, Jennifer Tufts, Nancy Solomon, Marjorie Leek, Ken Grant. Third row: Matt Makashay, Van Summers, Dave Chandler.

that he was awarded honorary member status in our group.) It was a happy and productive period in the history of the Section, which ended in 1987 when Al “semiretired” to the University of South Carolina (where he is still an active member of the faculty.) Two years later, Bob left for Penn State University. It seemed to me that the golden years of the Research Section were coming to an end. However, this ending of an era led to an exciting new period in the life of the Research Section. It began with the hiring of Marjorie Leek from the University of Minnesota in 1988. Marjorie’s hiring coincided with a drastic reduction in intramural funding for our research program that paralleled the major downsizing of the military in the mid-to-late 1980s. Marjorie was an experienced grant writer and facilitated our transition from intramural to extramural funding. She has continued to play a vital role in the life of the Section over the past 16 years. In 1989, Van Summers joined our group from Indiana University, and in 1990 Ken Grant left MIT to become a member of the Research Section. (Dave Fabry was also a member of the Section from 1988–90, before returning to the Midwest and Mayo Clinic.) Together, Marjorie, Ken, Van, and I have enjoyed a close and productive working relationship as the senior researchers in the Section for nearly 14 years.

No account of the Research Section would be complete without acknowledging the unwavering support that it has received from the Directors of the AASC over the years, beginning with Don Worthington, followed by Colonels Roy Sedge, Rod Attack, Dick Danielson, and its current director, Colonel Dave Chandler. Each director has steadfastly held to a belief that part of the

resources of a great hearing and speech clinic must be devoted to expanding the knowledge base of the discipline and the professions. Without their support, the Research Section would not exist. Also, our research program could not have thrived over the years without the support of the clinical staff of the AASC and the countless patients who have volunteered to participate in our studies. Finally, I want to acknowledge those two persons with whom I have worked most closely conducting hearing aid studies over the past ten plus years—Rauna Surr and Mary Cord. Their names appear on two of the papers included in this issue of *JAAA*, and they have contributed immensely to all of the work that we have produced in recent years. They make it a pleasure to come to work each day.

Little did I know when I received my draft notice in 1970 that it would lead to such a rewarding career and the opportunity to work with so many talented people. The AASC has been a thoroughly nurturing environment in which to conduct clinical research. Hundreds of papers have been published from the Research Section over the past 33 years. My colleagues and I have had a good time together producing them. Hopefully they have been useful to our colleagues in the broader scientific community and have contributed to a better understanding of disorders of hearing and speech. We present three more in this issue of *JAAA*. I am confident that there will be many more to come!

Brian E. Walden
Guest Editor