

# A Surplus of Serendipity

## After 36 Years, a “Temp” Career Concludes

Editorial, by Jon L. Jordan, MD, JD

This is my last message to you as Federal Air Surgeon. Effective January 3 of this year, I will retire from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and take up life again as a private citizen.

Largely by happenstance, I began my career in aerospace medicine almost 38 years ago. Shortly after finishing law school at the University of Virginia and during the time our country was engaged in conflict in Viet Nam, I was invited to join the United States Army. Just by chance, while undergoing basic medical officer orientation at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, I was offered the opportunity to travel to Fort Rucker, Ala., and take flight surgeon training. Although aviation medicine was something I had not before considered, the invitation was too interesting and challenging to pass up.

The conflict in Viet Nam was beginning to wind down at the time and rather than being posted overseas, I was assigned to the 6th Army Medical Command at Fort Lewis, Wash. I spent almost two years at Fort Lewis, serving as a flight surgeon at Gray Army Airfield and Madigan General Hospital.

Upon discharge from the army in October 1969, I elected to accept a job with the Office of Aviation Medicine in a capacity that allowed me to use my training in both law and medicine. My thinking was that I would likely stay with the FAA for two-three years and then move on to employment in the private sector. You know the rest. Thirty-six years later, I am retiring from my “temporary” job.

I have stayed with the FAA for a variety of reasons. I like and respect the people I work with, not only in the Office of Aerospace Medicine (OAM), but in the whole of the FAA as well. One could not hope to find a more dedicated, competent, and professional bunch of people. I also stayed because of the fascinating and diverse issues I have had to deal with and the opportunity to use my training in two professional disciplines. This does not mean that my 36 years have been without ups and downs. There have been good times and not-so-good times, but the good times far outweighed the bad ones.

I leave the FAA with a sense of accomplishment. Looking at the folks who make up the OAM, we have the strongest and most competent staff ever. We have efficiently and effectively managed multiple complex programs and dealt with difficult issues. We adopted a philosophy of medical oversight that prolongs and promotes the careers of airmen and air traffic controllers and, at the same time, contributes to the remarkable aviation safety record in the United States. We have developed new systems for data management that improved our

effectiveness in all program areas. We have contributed to aviation safety through a variety of important research initiatives, and we have met new challenges and program responsibilities with enthusiasm and effectiveness. To leverage our resources and promote safety, we have built a system of aviation medical examiners that serves as a model for the world.

In spite of our many achievements, I foresee significant new challenges in the future. I believe that the world of aviation will undergo dramatic changes that will have to be met and accommodated by the aerospace medical community. Just to mention a few, these include commercial space operations, use of unmanned aerial vehicles, larger capacity commercial airplanes, longer distance flights, and the ever-evolving medical diagnostics and treatments that make medical certification decision-making more complex.

I am confident that to meet these challenges, those of you who have assisted and supported me as Federal Air Surgeon will lend that same assistance and support to the one who follows me and to the OAM of the present and the future.

Thanks for your help. I'll miss working with you as Federal Air Surgeon. I think, however, I'm going to enjoy my role as a private citizen.