# The Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service of the Veterans Administration

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Some members of the industry have indicated a desire for more information regarding the Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service of the Veterans Administration. This article is written in an effort to provide such information, and, we hope, to dispel some misunderstandings with regard to our activities.

The Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service is a specialized service in the Department of Medicine and Surgery, and in the present organization of that Department it functions under the direct supervision of the Assistant Chief Medical Director for Planning.

Doctor Robert E. Stewart is the Director of the Prosthetic and Surgery Aids Service. He carries full responsibility for a double-barrelled program whose functions are: (1) To plan for and provide the best possible prosthetic appliances and sensory aids for some 250,000 eligible disabled veterans; and (2) To improve existing devices and develop new ideas through a continuous program of research, development, and education in this specialized field.

### Central Office Organization

In order to accomplish the two basic functions outlined above, the Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service in Central Office is broken down into two major divisions.

Mr. William H. Talley is the Chief of the Plans and Policies Division. He and his small staff of five full-time employees are responsible to the Director of the Service for planning and conducting an over-all field service program to provide direct prosthetics services to eligible veterans—the first basic function mentioned above. This Division recommends and establishes the broad, over-all policies governing the fabrication, procurement, issuance, replacement, and repair of prosthetic appliances, sensory aids, and/or medical accessories throughout the Veterans Administration; is responsible for the development of standards and specifications for all appliances to be fabricated in VA shops or procured from commercial sources; is responsible for over-all staff supervision of all VA field activities involved in the Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Program; and recommends to the Supply Service the basis for award or rejection of contracts for all appliances. The Division does not become involved in the mechanics of negotiation and award of contracts with approved commercial vendors, except in an advisory capacity on specific problems, since that is a function of the Supply Service.

Eugene F. Murphy, Ph.D., is the Chief of the Research and Development Division. He and his staff of six full-time employees are a part of the Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service in Central Office, but are physically located in the New York Regional Office. They are responsible to the Director of the Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service, for planning and conducting a broad program of research, development, and education in the fields of prosthetic appliances and sensory aids. This is the second basic function mentioned above. This Division recommends the broad, over-all policies governing the conduct of research, development, testing, and evaluation in the fields of prosthetic appliances and sensory aids, and for the conduct of prosthetics

educational projects, conferences, or courses within the Veterans Administration. It is responsible for over-all supervision and coordination of these activities as conducted by contractors and/or the VA Prosthetics Center. It is also responsible for reviewing and recommending for approval all proposals for research or development presented to the Service, and for review and approval of all vouchers submitted by research contractors.

### Field Service Program

To carry the Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Program directly to the disabled veterans for whom it exists, some 680 full-time and part-time employees are directly involved in providing direct prosthetics services to veterans through regional offices and hospitals throughout the United States, Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico.

The majority of our full-time employees (approximately 190) are located in Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Units or Sections in regional offices and in certain hospitals having outpatient medical activities. The Chiefs of these units, who are all amputees or otherwise seriously disabled, are generally referred to as Prosthetic Representatives, and are primarily responsible for the prosthetic and sensory aids program within their areas. They are the ones who have most direct contact with individual members of the orthopedic and prosthetic appliance industry.

The next largest group of full-time field employees (approximately 160) are assigned to the 28 VA Orthopedic Shops in operation throughout the United States and Puerto Rico. These shops are all located in VA hospitals with medium to large orthopedic patient loads, and are intended primarily to provide orthopedic braces and supports, and repairs thereto, for hospital patients. It is an established policy that these VA shops are to be utilized by field stations only in those instances where local commercial sources are not available or are unable to meet the demands of the stations concerned, where the quality of appliances furnished by commercial vendors is not satisfactory to prescribing physicians, and/or where the prices charged by local vendors are excessive. *It is the prerogative of local field station Managers to determine whether these conditions exist.*

Prosthetic Clerks are assigned in each of the 176 VA hospitals in operation, but many of these employees spend only part of their time on prosthetics activities because of the small numbers of appliances required in the majority of hospitals. These clerks normally have direct contact with local members of the industry, and handle all necessary administrative paper work involved in furnishing appliances.

### New York Prosthetics Center

The newly organized VA Prosthetics Center in New York City, headed by Mr. Anthony Staros, has a total of 68 employees. The Limb and Brace Section of that Center (formerly the Orthopedic Shop) has now been reduced to 35 employees. As the industry is aware, this is the only VA shop where artificial limbs are fabricated (except for the shop in Puerto Rico, which is a special situation). The primary functions of the Limb and Brace Section under the VA Prosthetics Center, as now established, are:

(1) To fabricate and repair experimental artificial limbs and/or other appliances required in shakedown or service testing under the VA Prosthetics Research and Development Program;

(2) To fabricate and repair artificial limbs and/or other appliances for problem cases referred to the shop by the New York Regional Office or by other VA field stations throughout the United States and Puerto Rico;

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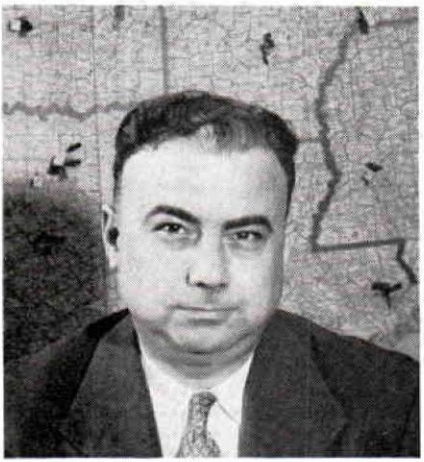

**A disabled veteran of World War II, William H. (Bill) Talley has been in the VA Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Program since his retirement from the Army in October, 1946, when he was assigned to the Richmond, Virginia, Branch Office. In July of 1947, he was transferred to Washington, and in December of 1953 assumed his present duties as Chief, Plans and Policies Division, Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service.**

**Mr. Talley was born in Malden, Missouri, in 1917, but spent most of his life in Paducah, Kentucky, which is still considered "home". Prior to his entry into military service, Mr. Talley was a Construction Estimator and Salesman for a building construction company in Paducah. He volunteered for military service in the Army as a Private, was sent to the European Theater as a Captain assigned to the 3rd Armored Division, and was retired for disability as a Lieutenant Colonel after losing both legs below the knees in combat during the ill-famous "Battle of the Bulge."**

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(3) To conduct pilot studies, as requested, on the use of materials or fabrication techniques for use in developing standards or specifications, to determine whether prices charged by the industry for specific appliances or repair operations are within reason;

(4) To fabricate and repair artificial limbs and/or other appliances for veterans residing within the New York metropolitan area who refuse to utilize local commercial sources of supply;

(5) To constantly train technicians in the latest approved techniques of limb and brace fabrication so as to provide a nucleus for immediate, temporary expansion of the Veterans Administration shop program in the event of war or national disaster.

### Other Special Field Activities

A total of 13 Plastic Eye and Restorations Clinics, employing a total of 37 technicians, are operated by the Veterans Administration in selected field stations throughout the United States. These clinics fabricate plastic artificial eyes, eye implants, plastic cosmetic restorations of all kinds (including *partial* cosmetic hands, but *not* including complete cosmetic hands except in unusual cases), metal or plastic skull plates, plastic ear inserts for fitting of hearing aids, and other special plastic appliances.

Orthopedic or general surgeons are employed on a Consultant basis to head each of the 30 Orthopedic and Prosthetic Appliance Clinic Teams located in selected field stations throughout the United States. As the industry well knows through its valued participation in these Clinic Teams, they were established for the primary purpose of providing proper appliances for problem cases where previous difficulty has been encountered, and to assist in field evaluation projects conducted under the Prosthetics Research and Development Program.

The reorganized Prosthetic Distribution Center, located at the Denver Federal Center, Denver, Colorado, and headed by Mr. Clarence O. Cherry, will employ approximately 15 people. The two Prosthetic Distribution Centers previously operating were consolidated at the one Center in Denver effective June 1, 1956. This one Center will handle the procurment and distribution of stump socks and hearing aid batteries for all disabled veterans throughout the United States and its territories or possessions, as well as for eligible veterans residing or traveling in foreign countries.

Last, but certainly not least among the field employees in the Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Programs, are the seven Area Chiefs, Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service, employed in the seven Area Medical Offices supervising all VA field activities. These Area Chiefs, who are all amputees, are directly responsible for prosthetics field activities within their respective areas, and report through their Area Medical Directors to the Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service in Central Office. One of their primary responsibilities is to maintain good relations between the VA field stations and members of the orthopedic and prosthetic appliance industry located within their areas. They are responsible for inspecting artificial limb and brace shops in their areas, and their reports have great influence upon the rating of such shops in Central Office. They supervise the work of all Prosthetic Representatives within their areas, and have administrative control over the activities of Orthopedic Shop Supervisors and Chiefs of Plastic Eye and Restorations Clinics. These men are the "eyes and ears" of the Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service, and are among our most important employees.

### Prosthetics Research, Development, and Education Program

The Prosthetics Research, Development, and Education Program is conducted primarily through selected universities, and other non-profit organizations under contract to the Veterans Administration. For that reason, there is only one specific VA field activity, the Testing and Development Laboratory of the VA Prosthetics Center, primarily involved in the program. *All* the field activities outlined above, however, are involved to some extent in the program, primarily in the testing and/or field evaluation phases.

The Prosthetics Research Board of the National Research Council operates under contract to the Veterans Administration, and is primarily responsible for coordinating the work of VA contractors and the laboratories of the Army, Navy, and Veterans Administration engaged in research and development of artificial limbs. The Board also serves as an advisory body to the Veterans Administration on all matters pertaining to research, development, and education in the field of artificial limbs, and recommends the acceptance or rejection of all experimental limbs, terminal devices, or components developed and/or evaluated under the prosthetics research program.

The Prosthetic Education phase of the program is the primary responsibility of Mr. William M. Bernstock, under the direct supervision of Doctor Murphy in New York. Prosthetics education is considered to be an integral part of the over-all Prosthetics Research and Development Program, since it is of little value to develop improved devices or new techniques unless people can be trained in their fabrication or use. For that reason, much effort and money has been expended under this program, not only for training of our own Veterans Administration personnel, but also for training of members of the industry, private physicians and therapists, and employees in other Government agencies. Although members of the industry have been required

to pay small tuition charges for attendance at certain courses conducted at New York University and the University of California, these fees cover only a very small percentage of the total cost of establishing and operating such courses. The major portion of the costs, in all such courses, has been paid for by the Veterans Administration. Such education and training will be continued as long as the need exists and money is available.

### Statistics

In order for the industry to have a better understanding of the scope of the over-all Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Program, a few statistics might be helpful.

The total over-all cost of the Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Program, including research and education, the salaries of all Central Office and field personnel, the cost of travel for employees and beneficiaries, the cost of appliances and repairs fabricated and procured, etc., is approximately $9,500,000 annually. At first thought, this may seem a little high, but when you consider that we are serving approximately 250,000 veterans, most of whom are seriously disabled, it can be seen that the average cost per veteran served is only about $38.00 per year—and we consider this extremely low for the type of service rendered.

Of the above amount, the Veterans Administration has expended an average of about $900,000 per year for research, development, and education during the past ten years. Practically all this money has been spent under research contracts with universities and/or non-profit organizations or institutions, and for operation of the former Prosthetic Testing and Development Laboratory in New York (now a part of the VA Prosthetics Center).

The following statistics on the numbers and costs of those appliances and repairs procured by the Veterans Administration from members of the orthopedic and prosthetic appliance industry should be of interest. Figures on other items, such as hearing aids, batteries, equipment for blind, wheelchairs, and miscellaneous appliances are not included. Such figures are available, however, to anyone who may be interested. Since Fiscal Year 1956 does not end until June 30, 1956, figures for that year are not yet available.

### ORTHOPEDIC AND PROSTHETIC APPLIANCES AND REPAIRS THERETO PROCURED FROM THE COMMERCIAL INDUSTRY

**Fiscal Years 1947 through 1955**

1. *NEW ARTIFICIAL LIMBS*

| Fiscal Year | Number Furnished | Average Cost | Total Cost |
|---|---|---|---|
| 47 | 9,724 | $166.91 | $ 1,623,000 |
| 48 | 10,455 | 176.47 | 1,845,000 |
| 49 | 8,555 | 196.96 | 1,685,000 |
| 50 | 7,565 | 200.92 | 1,520,000 |
| 51 | 6,520 | 207.82 | 1,355,000 |
| 52 | 5,935 | 218.20 | 1,295,000 |
| 53 | 5,940 | 232.32 | 1,380,000 |
| 54 | 6,404 | 241.41 | 1,546,000 |
| 55 | 6,169 | 256.44 | 1,582,000 |
| | 67,267 | $205.61 | $13,831,000 |

| Fiscal Year | Number Furnished | Average Cost | Total Cost |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 2. *STUMP SOCKS* | | |
| 47 | 157,521 | $ 1.10 | $ 173,000 |
| 48 | 172,401 | 1.25 | 215,000 |
| 49 | 206,771 | 1.44 | 298,000 |
| 50 | 218,695 | 1.43 | 312,000 |
| 51 | 163,534 | 1.56 | 255,000 |
| 52 | 132,816 | 1.84 | 245,000 |
| 53 | 114,968 | 1.89 | 217,000 |
| 54 | 115,741 | 1.79 | 207,000 |
| 55 | 120,850 | 1.64 | 198,000 |
| | 1,403,297 | $ 1.51 | $ 2,120,000 |
| | 3. *NEW ORTHOPEDIC BRACES* | | |
| 47 | 11,981 | $ 19.11 | $ 229,000 |
| 48 | 21,600 | 19.44 | 420,000 |
| 49 | 23,900 | 16.32 | 390,000 |
| 50 | 24,600 | 13.66 | 336,000 |
| 51 | 19,923 | 16.21 | 323,000 |
| 52 | 19,657 | 16.38 | 322,000 |
| 53 | 18,822 | 16.90 | 318,000 |
| 54 | 18,293 | 18.09 | 331,000 |
| 55 | 17,782 | 17.55 | 312,000 |
| | 176,558 | $ 16.88 | $ 2,981,000 |
| | 4. *NEW ORTHOPEDIC SHOES (Pairs)* | | |
| 47 | 3,413 | $ 43.07 | $ 147,000 |
| 48 | 6,393 | 41.45 | 265,000 |
| 49 | 8,525 | 45.75 | 390,000 |
| 50 | 9,166 | 50.07 | 459,000 |
| 51 | 9,041 | 49.55 | 448,000 |
| 52 | 8,594 | 52.83 | 454,000 |
| 53 | 8,399 | 48.22 | 405,000 |
| 54 | 8,341 | 48.63 | 410,000 |
| 55 | 8,512 | 43.23 | 368,000 |
| | 70,474 | $ 47.48 | $ 3,346,000 |
| | 5. *MISCELLANEOUS NEW ITEMS* (Arch Supports, Belts, Elastic Hose, special minor appliances) | | |
| 47 | 95,103 | $ 7.24 | $ 689,000 |
| 48 | 94,428 | 6.87 | 649,000 |
| 49 | 139,239 | 4.68 | 652,000 |
| 50 | 111,406 | 6.24 | 695,000 |
| 51 | 76,401 | 7.12 | 544,000 |
| 52 | 112,420 | 6.13 | 689,000 |
| 53 | 124,232 | 5.96 | 741,000 |
| 54 | 110,510 | 6.48 | 716,000 |
| 55 | 112,276 | 6.86 | 770,000 |
| | 976,015 | $ 6.30 | $ 6,145,000 |

| Fiscal Year | Number Furnished | Average Cost | Total Cost |
|---|---|---|---|
| | *6. REPAIRS TO ARTIFICIAL LIMBS* | | |
| 47 | 7,432 | $ 13.07 | $ 97,108 |
| 48 | 17,032 | 13.28 | 226,206 |
| 49 | 19,942 | 15.33 | 305,638 |
| 50 | 20,952 | 16.38 | 343,206 |
| 51 | 24,354 | 16.50 | 401,892 |
| 52 | 26,611 | 18.88 | 502,324 |
| 53 | 28,324 | 18.45 | 522,665 |
| 54 | 29,293 | 18.22 | 533,378 |
| 55 | 29,027 | 18.53 | 537,911 |
| | 202,967 | $ 17.10 | $ 3,470,328 |
| | *7. REPAIRS TO BRACES* | | |
| 47 | 2,196 | $ 7.48 | $ 16,437 |
| 48 | 2,283 | 7.98 | 18,232 |
| 49 | 3,298 | 8.16 | 26,926 |
| 50 | 3,243 | 8.22 | 26,658 |
| 51 | 3,606 | 9.13 | 32,915 |
| 52 | 4,268 | 9.33 | 39,821 |
| 53 | 5,345 | 9.14 | 48,862 |
| 54 | 5,325 | 9.02 | 48,027 |
| 55 | 5,654 | 9.36 | 52,926 |
| | 35,218 | $ 8.82 | $ 310,804 |
| | *8. REPAIRS TO WHEELCHAIRS* | | |
| 47 | 45 | $ 14.11 | $ 635 |
| 48 | 462 | 14.39 | 6,647 |
| 49 | 533 | 8.71 | 4,645 |
| 50 | 550 | 12.93 | 7,113 |
| 51 | 646 | 14.14 | 9,136 |
| 52 | 862 | 14.55 | 12,542 |
| 53 | 1,125 | 13.77 | 15,487 |
| 54 | 1,275 | 14.09 | 17,962 |
| 55 | 1,625 | 13.69 | 22,247 |
| | 7,123 | $ 13.53 | $ 96,414 |
| | *9. MISCELLANEOUS REPAIRS TO APPLIANCES* | | |
| 47 | 2,899 | $ 4.86 | $ 14,093 |
| 48 | 11,083 | 3.29 | 36,513 |
| 49 | 13,497 | 3.41 | 46,024 |
| 50 | 16,803 | 3.48 | 58,441 |
| 51 | 11,259 | 4.66 | 52,450 |
| 52 | 12,432 | 5.16 | 64,113 |
| 53 | 13,123 | 5.24 | 68,759 |
| 54 | 17,284 | 4.72 | 81,626 |
| 55 | 19,304 | 4.82 | 93,080 |
| | 117,684 | $ 4.38 | $ 515,099 |

### 10. *TOTAL NEW APPLIANCES AND REPAIRS*

(Total only of those items listed in 1 through 9—Grand total of *all* appliances and repairs procured from commercial sources during period—$46,750,000.)

| FY | Number New Items | Cost | Number Repairs | Cost | Total Cost |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 47 | 277,742 | $ 2,861,000 | 12,572 | $ 128,273 | $ 2,989,273 |
| 48 | 305,277 | 3,394,000 | 30,860 | 287,598 | 3,681,598 |
| 49 | 386,990 | 3,145,000 | 37,270 | 383,233 | 3,798,233 |
| 50 | 371,432 | 3,322,000 | 41,548 | 435,418 | 3,757,418 |
| 51 | 275,419 | 2,925,000 | 39,865 | 496,393 | 3,421,393 |
| 52 | 279,422 | 3,005,000 | 44,173 | 618,800 | 3,623,800 |
| 53 | 272,361 | 3,061,000 | 47,917 | 655,773 | 3,716,773 |
| 54 | 259,379 | 3,210,000 | 53,177 | 680,993 | 3,890,993 |
| 55 | 265,589 | 3,230,000 | 55,610 | 706,164 | 3,936,164 |
| Totals | 2,693,611 | $28,423,000 | 362,992 | $4,392,645 | $32,815,645 |

## VA TRAINING COURSE

Reviewed by Joseph H. Martino, C. P. & O., Boston

• A technical training course for *Prosthetic representatives of the VA* was held in New York City January 9 to 20, with *William M. Bernstock* serving as course coordinator.

The purpose of the course was to give prosthetic representatives technical knowledge relating to their activities. It was realized that the extent of such knowledge varies greatly. The needs of the representatives as they express them were given careful consideration in planning the curriculum for this course.

Through the courtesy of Mr. Bernstock the OALMA Headquarters Library has obtained a copy of the teaching materials used in the class. William H. Talley, Chief of the Plans and Policies Division of the Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service who was in attendance at the School, expressed satisfaction over the results obtained. It is his hope that similar schools may be held for other prosthetic representatives at other points in the country. Mr. Talley indicated that members of OALMA may be called upon to assist in giving such courses.

Students in the pilot course were: Voigt W. Baker, Area Chief, Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service, St. Paul, Minn.; William R. Bouldin, Chief, Prosthetic and Sensory Unit, Regional Office, Philadelphia, Pa.; James Cohen, Asst. Chief, Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Unit, Regional Office, New York, N. Y.; James C. Higgins, Chief, Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Unit, VA Hospital, Albany, N. Y.; Wilfred G. Holsberg, Area Chief, Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service, Area Medical Office, Boston, Mass.; James T. Kenny, Chief, Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Unit, VA Regional Office, Pittsburgh, Pa.; Harry D. MacBird, Area Chief, P&SAS, Area Medical Office, San Francisco, Calif.; Leonard J. McCarthy, Area Chief, P&SAS, Area Medical Office, Trenton, N. J.; Nelson McFarland, Area Chief, Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service, Area Medical Office, Atlanta, Ga.; Jack Miller, Chief, P&SAS Unit, VA Regional Office, Brooklyn, N. Y.; Donald W. L. Smith, Area Chief, P&SAS, Area Medical Office, St. Louis, Mo.; Albert S. Zuidema, Chief, Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Unit, VA Regional Office, Boston, Mass.