

## 1992 New York-Tidewater Chapters History of Military Medicine Essay Award Recipient

### James Claude Kimbrough: The Father of Modern U.S. Army Urology

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James Claude Kimbrough, M.D., was undisputedly the "Father of Modern U.S. Army Urology."<sup>1</sup> His presence in the Army Medical Corps, at Walter Reed General Hospital, and in the urologic profession was so esteemed that he was appointed Special Consultant in Urology to the Walter Reed Army Medical Center by an Act of Congress. On May 27, 1953, Private Law 40 of the 83rd Congress was approved by the President of the United States designating Colonel Kimbrough as Consultant, such position to carry full pay and allowances in lieu of retired pay.<sup>2</sup>

Kimbrough was born on a farm at Rural Vale in the Smokey Mountains near Madisonville, Tennessee, on November 5, 1887, the son of George W. and Minnie Williams Kimbrough. His small hometown was later made famous by his cousin, Senator Estes Kefauver. Young Claude, as he was then known, one of several children, learned the rugged philosophy of his native region, "where a little money and a little moonshine whiskey each went a long way."<sup>3</sup> Throughout his career, Kimbrough valued and relied upon this self-proclaimed "hill-billy-sense."<sup>4</sup> He received his Bachelor of Science in 1907 from Hiwassee College in Madisonville, being the only member of his graduation class.<sup>5</sup> Graduation speakers had to be borrowed from the undergraduate class. Civil War sentiment was still strong in this part of Tennessee and the graduation speech was entitled "Heroes of the Lost Cause."<sup>5</sup> Kimbrough maintained a keen interest in Civil War history for the rest of his life.<sup>6</sup>

After college graduation, he initially embarked on a career in teaching. For 1 year he taught school in Tunnel Hill, Georgia and then was principal of the Hot Springs (Virginia) High School.<sup>4</sup> After these 5 years, he decided that he had accomplished all he could in teaching and pursued a career in medicine. He matriculated to Vanderbilt University School of Medicine in 1912; however, he was superintendent of the Monroe County (Tennessee) Schools to help pay his way through school.<sup>6</sup> He was elected to Alpha Omega Alpha in 1915 and graduated with honors in 1916. He was thereafter an intern at St. Thomas Hospital in Knoxville, Tennessee.

In 1917, the United States entered World War I and Kimbrough's patriotic spirit was exemplified by the true story of his entry into the Army.<sup>7</sup> His knowledge of American history and particularly the Civil War, when the Command had less control of men and the muster rolls, shaped his idea of military



Fig. 1. Photograph of James C. Kimbrough circa 1916 at Vanderbilt University Medical School graduation.

life. He was in Chattanooga on a weekend trip with classmates who persuaded him to take the examination for the Regular Army. He complied in jest. Having not heard the results of this test, he decided to go along with the local unit, the 17th Engineer Unit, a railway unit that was assembling at Fort McPherson, Georgia. He bought a uniform and took along his prized graduation present, a cowhide bag. When the regiment was ordered from Fort McPherson to New York for embarkation to France, young Dr. Kimbrough, with commission, was along on the troop train. When boarding the steamer for France, troops were to surrender their personal luggage; however, the sight of that new cowhide bag on the luggage pile was too much for the poor Tennessean and he recovered his property at the last minute. He was the only soldier en route to France with a cowhide bag.

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Kimbrough's anxiety to get "over there" in a hurry brought other complications. After he was in the field for 3 months, he found himself without money. Up to this time, he had been able to win enough money at poker to sustain him. When many of the Regular Army sergeants and other enlisted received field commissions, they invaded the poker games and usually won. Presenting to the Paymaster when down to his last dollar, the young battle surgeon was incredulous to discover that one was paid to fight for their country.<sup>1</sup> He was then properly enrolled and soon received a field commission as First Lieutenant in the Medical Corps. From August 1917 to March 1918, he served with the 17th Engineers in St. Nazaire, France. From March 1918 to July 1919, he was Assistant Surgeon in the Office of the Base Surgeon in St. Nazaire. He was in charge of the Personnel Department and the Department of Evacuation of Sick and Wounded. In July 1919, he moved with the American Forces in Germany. He was Commanding Officer of the Medical Detachment and Chief, GU Service of the Base Hospital at Coblenz. He departed the European Theatre in December 1920.<sup>8</sup> During this first tour he was promoted to Regular Army on November 16, 1917 and promoted to Captain on March 10, 1918.<sup>8</sup> On May 17, 1919, COL Charles L. Foster, MD USA, wrote a letter urging that Kimbrough be promoted to Major:<sup>8</sup>

"Captain Kimbrough, since March 28, 1918, has been on duty in the Office of the Base Surgeon, Base Section No. 1, in charge of the Departments of Personnel, Motor Transportation, and Evacuation of Sick and Wounded. He has shown ability, loyalty, and faithfulness to duty that are a credit to the best traditions of the Medical Corps. I can say without hesitation that he is the best young Officer that I have ever known and his service has been of such high character as to cause the Base Commander to approve a recommendation of the award of the D.S.M."

Despite these glowing accolades, records indicate that Kimbrough was not promoted to Major until July 20, 1929.<sup>8</sup> His efforts did earn him a Purple Heart although he was never wounded in battle,<sup>6</sup> and a Meritorious Service Award (April 19, 1919) signed by General John J. "Blackjack" Pershing himself. Interestingly, the National Archives file on Kimbrough reveals that the Purple Heart was not issued until July 13, 1933.<sup>4</sup>

A few medical officers with varying degrees of experience in the practice of urology, chose to follow a career in the Regular Army after World War I.\* Kimbrough was one of these men and from February 1921 to September 1925, he was Ward Surgeon and in the Office in Charge of the GU Clinic at the Station Hospital at Fort Sam Houston, Texas.<sup>8</sup> For the next 6 months,

until February 1926, he was a student at the Army Medical School, the forerunner of our present day Walter Reed Army Institute of Research (WRAIR).<sup>4</sup> From February 1926 to July 1926, Kimbrough was a student at the Field Service School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. This was the field training for Medical Corps Officers. He then went on to Letterman General Hospital in San Francisco, California, where he served as Chief, Urology Section, from July 1926 to September 1930. It was during this time that he completed his only formal training in urology: a rotation from September 1927 to January 1928 at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. He became a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons in 1926 and a member of the American Urological Association in 1931.<sup>8</sup> Despite this short formal training by today's standards, while in his early assignments in Washington he visited the Brady Clinic at Johns Hopkins at every opportunity, where such stalwarts as Hugh Hampton Young, Cap Colston, and Lloyd Lewis took great interest in him and gave him the opportunity to train himself. Later at Letterman, he did the same thing and became life-long friends with men such as Miley Wesson and Frank Hinman, Sr.<sup>10</sup>

In September 1930, MAJ Kimbrough began his illustrious service to Walter Reed Hospital as Chief, Genito-Urinary Section. As described in *Borden's Dream*, the early history of Walter Reed Hospital:<sup>3</sup> "After arrival of the tall Lincolnesque Tennessean, the Urology Section pre-empted first place in the Walter Reed 'Hall of Fame' reserved for surgical prima donas. It was a poor day when he failed to toss at least two sounds back into the instrument tray or ramble and grumble in well-feigned rage that he could never get his personnel trained to suit him. Amazingly, he could enter the cystoscopy room like March's proverbial roaring lion and leave it as meek as an ewe lamb."

During this first tour of duty at Walter Reed, he was able to distance urology from venereal disease to some extent by his surgical skills. During these early years, he became expert on the surgical correction of hydronephrosis and was the first to report successful correction of retrocaval ureter via ureteroureterostomy.<sup>11</sup> In the medical library at Walter Reed Hospital, the Ainsworth Historical Collection contains a bound volume of Kimbrough's 60 publications.<sup>12</sup> This 1935 report on hydronephrosis appears to be Kimbrough's first scientific publication.

In October 1934, Kimbrough was assigned to the Station Hospital, Fort Sam Houston, Texas. During this time he was a Major and Head of the Urology Section of the Surgical Service. He published five papers while assigned there: "The Treatment of Nephroptosis,"<sup>13</sup> two manuscripts on stones,<sup>14,15</sup> a paper on the treatment of bladder outlet obstruction,<sup>16</sup> and a report on renal hypoplasia.<sup>17</sup>

Kimbrough moved on to Sternberg General Hospital in Manila, Philippine Islands, in February 1937. As urologist in the Surgical Service, he continued to write prolifically, authoring four scientific manuscripts on surgery for ureteral stricture,<sup>18</sup> nephroureterectomy,<sup>19</sup> sulfanilamide in gonorrhea,<sup>20</sup> and nephrostomy drainage.<sup>21</sup> He was promoted to Lieutenant Colo-

\*Aside from Kimbrough, these pioneers in military urology included: Henry S. Blesse, Roy E. Fox, Victor N. Meddis, and Harold V. Raycroft.<sup>9</sup> Doctor Kimbrough and his colleagues in the 1920s and 1930s rotated through the Army's general hospitals as Chiefs of the Urological Sections in the General Surgical Service. During this era, urology clinics were devoted mainly to the treatment of venereal disease. Many junior officers assigned as assistants to Kimbrough and others developed an interest in urology, and later became Army hospital urologists. Among these younger men who continued their interest in urology were Charles H. Beasley, Claude C. Dodson, Clinton S. Lyter, Louis K. Mantell, Earl C. Lowry, Sam F. Seeley, and Jack W. Schwartz.<sup>9</sup> Some of these men were responsible for the establishment of Army Urology Residency Programs after World War II. Formal postgraduate specialty training was not available in Army hospitals prior to World War II, but interested officers were able to attend short courses or to take observer training at civilian institutions.

†During this time, Medical Corps Officers had a course in Preventive Medicine at this school since no such training was given in this area at civilian medical schools.



"And now, let us examine what type of man we honor. First

Fig. 2. Photograph of original Public Relations Office form completed by Kimbrough upon his reassignment to Walter Reed on June 16, 1946. This original document was still on file at Walter Reed in 1992.

"And, finally, we've travelled far with Colonel Kimbrough, sometimes actually in trains and cars, but often, in his stories, to the afterdecks of steamers in the China Sea, to many strange places. It is then that Jim often reaches his greatest heights. In the warm evening with dusk shutting out the greater world, men and women are driven to a closer communion, life is freely discussed with individuals and, untrammelled by too much sunlight, takes on an added significance. Thus are friends born. They cannot be won by money. Life without them is an empty shell. And always, in his perception of the important, the amusing has cropped up, for he has an uncanny flair for



judging the meat and truth of any matter. He has always said it was hillbilly common sense, but many of us who played at the game of life and success for years know that such intuition is not confined to Tennessee, and we have learned that Jim's prognostications and judgments are usually confirmed by subsequent happenings.

"Our feelings of Jim have fortunately already been inscribed in the annals for posterity by Sir Henry Tidy, President of the Royal Society of Medicine. In conferring an honorary fellowship on Colonel Kimbrough, he spoke of one who has a suitable and kindly disposition proven by the fact that he directed a diversified and motley group of independent scholars who peculiarly, from the British point of view, spoke of him as 'Uncle Jim'—Thus was his fellowship conferred!

"Jim Kimbrough, we who are your friends wish that happiness may dog your footsteps and "Lady Luck" always sit on your shoulder and kiss your cheek. I give you Uncle Jim!"

Kimbrough departed the European theater for the United States on February 11, 1945 and penned the following thank you note to his fellow consultants:

"My duties with the Professional Services Division are terminated. I take this opportunity to convey my deep appreciation to each of the Consultant Group for your hearty cooperation during these many months. A more proficient and splendid group of physicians has never been on duty in any echelon with the United States Army. It has been a great privilege and pleasure to have had the opportunity to be associated with you in a personal and professional capacity.

"Your efforts have assured the American soldier the best medical care that has ever been given to any army at any time. Whatever recognition may be given you for your great work, I am sure the greatest reward each of you has is the consciousness of having given the best of your efforts and talents to the care of the U.S. Army personnel in this emergency. Best wishes."

From an academic urologic standpoint, Kimbrough documented the urological injuries encountered in the European theater in a scholarly manuscript<sup>26</sup> and authored other articles on war wounds and trauma which stemmed from his wartime assignment.<sup>27-30</sup> This European wartime position also led to honorary memberships in the Royal Society of Medicine of London and of the Academy of Surgery, Paris.<sup>2</sup> Kimbrough was also awarded the Bronze Star Medal for this World War II duty.<sup>2</sup>

In March and April of 1945, Kimbrough was Commanding Officer of the Convalescent Hospital at Camp Union, New York.<sup>8</sup> He then served as Commanding Officer of Percy Jones Convalescent Hospital at Fort Custer, Michigan, from April 1945 until June 1946.<sup>8</sup> He excelled in his role as Commander of Percy Jones to such a degree that this facility was considered the model post-war convalescent hospital. He was awarded the Legion of Merit for this assignment.<sup>2</sup>

On June 12, 1946, COL Kimbrough returned to full-time urology and Walter Reed as Chief of Service. During the war, Lloyd Lewis, a graduate of the Johns Hopkins Urology Program, had been Chief of the Urology Service at Walter Reed and made a name for himself and the hospital in the treatment of testicular cancer patients by retroperitoneal lymphadenectomy.<sup>31</sup> When Kimbrough returned to Walter Reed, he continued the interest in testicular cancer, contributing nine articles



Fig. 3. Photograph of James C. Kimbrough, COL, MC, USA, Chief, Urology Service, Walter Reed Army Medical Center, circa 1948 addressing seminar at Walter Reed Hospital.

to the literature between 1949 and 1954.<sup>32-40</sup> He may have been one of the first to recognize and tout the importance of early diagnosis, and he was a strong advocate for retroperitoneal lymphadenectomy. Evan L. Lewis, one of Kimbrough's early residents (1952), recounted a story from 1949.<sup>9</sup> At the Annual AUA Meeting in Los Angeles, Colonel Kimbrough and Colonel Jack Schwartz were sitting on a bus going to one of the evening functions. The conversation turned to testis tumors, Colonel Kimbrough asked Jack when he was going to start doing node dissections. Schwartz persisted that he didn't believe in them, at which point Colonel Kimbrough became livid, got up and changed seats, saying he wouldn't sit with anyone who was so stubborn.

In addition to his work on testis cancer, he continued to write diligently and loved library work and books. As recounted in *Borden's Dream*, Kimbrough was also an avid history scholar and general reader.<sup>3</sup> He was a favorite of the senior librarian in the 40s and 50s and would have the most recent accessions saved for his perusal. He was sure to make at least one daily visit to the library, especially after relocation of the Urology Clinic to the section adjoining the library. He commented that he didn't know who he needed most, his wife Pauline, or his daughter Jane, or his favorite librarian, Miss Mar E. Schick.<sup>3</sup> Kimbrough's personal library collection was extensive and, after his death, his collection was donated to the Walter Reed Library. In the old Walter Reed Hospital, the library had a "Kimbrough Room" devoted to this collection.



Dr. Kimbrough's later professional writings aside from testis cancer<sup>32-40</sup> include a diverse variety of manuscripts ranging from urinary calculi to urologic cancers.<sup>41-66</sup> An article on recurrent renal calculi by Kimbrough and his first resident, John N. Furst, was the lead article for an issue of *The Journal of the American Medical Association* in 1948.<sup>41</sup> A study of urinary calculi in recumbent patients by Kimbrough and his second resident, Joseph C. Denslow, was reported by the *Journal of Urology* as well as the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.<sup>43,45</sup> Other notable contributions to the literature include the first reported case of bilateral renal carcinoma associated with polycystic renal disease<sup>62</sup> and one of the earliest successful continent urinary diversions using a catheterizable ileo-cecal segment.<sup>65</sup>

One of Kimbrough's articles on bladder cancer raised quite a stir when it was presented at a Mid-Atlantic AUA Meeting in the early 1950s.<sup>61</sup> Robert B. Rowe, Kimbrough's fifth resident, recounts the following story (personal communication, letter dated August 26, 1991): Rowe was called up to read their paper on transitional cell carcinoma of the bladder. Although at the time young Rowe did not know it, this was an intentional affront to Dr. Hugh Jewett, the Johns Hopkins bladder cancer authority. Rowe states, "... at the end of my reading, Dr. Jewett rushed to the podium and tore us apart, citing his statistics (which were no better than ours), and his review of the world's literature (which he stated proved our method of treatment unjustified). Colonel Kimbrough would not let me rebut this tirade, instead he marched to the podium and after acknowledging Dr. Jewett, proceeded to recite, verbatim, from Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, the entire passage which states: The quality of mercy is not strained. ... For this he received a standing ovation and several days later, Dr. Jewett mailed him an apology."

Kimbrough is perhaps best remembered for his contributions in the area of prostate cancer. In 1951, he and Rowe reported all cases of prostate cancer seen as Walter Reed between 1940 and 1949.<sup>52</sup> In this article, he emphasizes the importance of the digital rectal examination as part of every physical examination in males over 40 years of age. He was responsible for this being instituted in Army physicals after the war and noted that a higher percentage of cases were clinically localized and amenable to radical extirpation as a result. In the *Transactions of the American Society of Genitourinary Surgeons*, Kimbrough was lauded for his efforts in early detection and enhanced survival rates for radical prostatectomy.<sup>67</sup> In April 1956, 4 months before his death, he presented a five-year follow-up on his radical prostatectomy cases at the Mid-Atlantic AUA Sectional Meeting in Hot Springs, Virginia. The month after his death, his final paper reported these findings in the *Journal of Urology*.<sup>66</sup> Of 56 radical prostatectomies performed at Walter Reed between 1940 and 1950, only four patients (7.1%) were known to have died of prostate cancer after 5 years. In contrast, of the 44 patients with more advanced disease not suitable for radical surgery, approximately 70% died of cancer. Kimbrough also noted in this article that men are reluctant to be checked for prostate cancer and that the American medical and lay community had not put enough emphasis on early detection of prostate cancer. That this was echoed 35 years ago is interesting in the current era when screening for prostate cancer and early detection methods are hotly debated. Kimbrough's zeal for prostate cancer detection apparently also



Fig. 4. Photograph of Service Stripe, Volume 12, number 34, August 24, 1956, Walter Reed Army Medical Center, announcing Kimbrough's death.

transcended to his personal life. He used to comment that "50% of his golf partners had no balls" (Harry Spence, M.D., personal communication via telephone, August 21, 1991).

Kimbrough was a proponent of perineal radical prostatectomy and, as recounted by John Furst, his first resident, when the retropubic approach was introduced and he tried it, he commented, "that's a hell of a way to ruin a good operation." He was a stickler for proper positioning and used a Palmer Perineal Board to get the perineum parallel to the floor (John N. Furst, M.D., personal communication, letter dated August 21, 1991). He was able to teach this operation effectively. Robert E. Johnston, M.D. (personal communication, letter dated October 28, 1991) remembers: "One day I was doing a perineal prostatectomy and somehow got anterior to the triangular ligament. Of course, I got into a lot of bleeding and reached the point where I did not know where I was. I hollered for the Chief, who was doing a case in the next room, to come help. In no time he came in and straightened me out and then said to me, 'See, you weren't lost after all.' ... he had a favorite high stool he always sat on when he did a perineal prostatectomy and more than once at the end of the procedure he would sit back and say words to the effect, 'Damm, I love that operation.'"

Kimbrough was confident in his surgical abilities, as recounted by Evan Lewis (personal communication, letter of October 1991): "Jim's dad come up from Tennessee for a prostatectomy. He said to his son, 'I want the best surgeon available



for this operation.' Jim replied, 'You have him! It is I.'—and did the operation."

When Kimbrough resumed as the Chief of the Urology Service at Walter Reed in 1946, he initiated the Urology residency program. Kimbrough's first resident was John N. Furst, who began in 1946 and completed training in 1949. Furst recalled that all he did upon hearing that residencies were starting was to write to the Surgeon General requesting assignment to Walter Reed (personal communication, letter dated August 21, 1991). Within 2 weeks he had orders to Walter Reed. This was a far cry from the competitive application process of today. Furst recalled that he ran the enlisted ward and Kimbrough ran the officer's ward. For the initial 6 months, Furst was Kimbrough's assistant in surgery. Thereafter, Furst continued to assist Kimbrough on the Chief's private cases. Furst recounts their relationship (personal communication, letter dated August 21, 1991): "Often, however, he would come into surgery when I was doing a case—I would know he was there when I heard someone chewing saltine crackers over my shoulder—he crammed them in the pocket of his white hospital coat and would come into surgery despite the nurses protests with his white coat on—a scrub hat perched on his head and his mask tied over his nose, but strings dangling below so he could pop the crackers into his mouth. He would watch for a bit—say 'nice job Furst' and leave."

According to Furst, Kimbrough set up the usual things common to training programs. Grand rounds were held on Saturday mornings after a weekly staff meeting. A weekly pathology slide review conference was held and a pyelogram conference was held every afternoon in the Radiology Department. Once a month on a Saturday morning the entire Service, except for the Duty Officer, went to Baltimore to make rounds with Professor Colston or Jewett. Robert E. Johnston, M.D., remembers "We always enjoyed our outings with him when he would load us into his Packard and take us to Hopkins for a day at the Brady Clinic to watch them work" (personal communication, letter dated October 28, 1991). Kimbrough also set up a program of animal surgery for the residents to learn ureterosigmoidostomies.

In setting up the residency, Kimbrough was told by the American Board of Urology that he would have to become board-certified in order to have his residency program approved.<sup>9</sup> Unlike today's rigorous board-certification process, these older established urologists, such as Kimbrough, were able to write up 50 cases and make a personal appearance to the Board at the Drake Hotel in Chicago.<sup>9</sup> Table I shows the 14 residents that Kimbrough trained between 1946 and his death in 1956.

Kimbrough was the senior urologist in the Army after World War II and assumed a paternal attitude over all of Army Urology and, particularly, of his residents. He took pride in the papers he wrote with his residents and generally insisted on being first author (Kryder E. Van Buskirk, M.D., personal communication via telephone, August 21, 1991). He felt a personal hurt if any scientific paper was submitted for publication by any Army urologist, regardless of duty station, unless it was first sent to him for criticism.<sup>1</sup> He also insisted that all Army urologists be in uniform at National meetings. If a colleague was seen by Colonel Jim out of uniform, he would surely hear about it.<sup>4</sup>

TABLE I  
RESIDENTS OF JAMES C. KIMBROUGH

Name	Year of Graduation
John N. Furst	1949
David K. Worgan	1950
Joseph C. Denslow	1950
Robert E. Crompton	1951
Robert B. Rowe	1951
Evan L. Lewis	1952
Robert E. Johnston	1952
William H. Morse	1952
Ferris E. Cook	1953
Anthony A. Borski	1954
Kryder E. Vanbuskirk	1954
Samuel Rodriguez	1955
William J. Toland	1955
Josiah F. Reed, Jr.	1956

At urologic meetings, he would be seen on the front row taking copious notes so that he could provide a thorough report to his residents when he returned.<sup>1</sup> To Kimbrough, the training of residents was of utmost importance and he devoted much time and energy to surgical teaching.<sup>1</sup> The personal and professional needs of his residents were always of concern and he was especially mindful that cases were not usurped from them by senior staff.<sup>1</sup> Kimbrough's residents have related a number of amusing anecdotes about the "old Colonel." John Furst (personal communication, letter dated August 21, 1991) writes:

"Colonel Kimbrough was a tall, husky, vigorous man in his sixties—with a deep, gravelly voice—not handsome, but with an engaging smile. First impression was that he was gruff and fierce—but underneath was that he was a pussycat. In deference to my position as Chief Resident, he never criticized me in the presence of others—but he didn't hesitate to let me know when he thought I had made a bad decision or overlooked something. Almost invariably when I asked him a question about something I wasn't sure of—he would reply 'so and so described that in the J.U. or S.G.&O. in . . .—Why don't you look it up and talk to me about it.' So I soon learned not to ask him a question when I wanted to do something that evening. He had large hands and disliked doing what he termed 'piddling surgery.' After we had done several hypospadias repairs together, he said, 'Furst—from now on, you do these cases—you need to learn to do them well'—the truth was he hated doing them. He often got impatient in surgery and when he had to wait for a suture or tie he would say, 'oh, give me something—anything—give me a piece of rope.' I talked the nurses into sterilizing a length of 1/2 inch rope and one day we handed him that. He looked at it a moment, looked at me and said, 'well—that's what I asked for' and patiently waited for his suture. He loved to play golf and did every Saturday at the Soldier's Home course. As we finished grand rounds he would go faster and faster, looking at his watch now and then. Finally, when we were done we would go back to the GU Clinic and his office. As we turned from the main hall, he could see into his waiting room. Often, there would be someone (one of his special patients) waiting and he would grumble, 'Oh God dammit, what the hell does he want—I wish he'd die.' Then he'd walk up to the patient smiling with his hand out and say sweetly, 'Good





Fig. 5. Photograph of James C. Kimbrough, COL, MC, USA, Commander of Percy Jones Convalescent Hospital, Fort Custer, Michigan, April 1945.

morning. General, its so nice to see you, what can we do for you?' This would happen so often that we would all mouth the words along with him."

Evan L. Lewis, one of Kimbrough's later residents, writes:<sup>10</sup> Colonel Jim was a big man, he was gruff, threw instruments and could really raise the roof when he thought he had to. When called to the phone in his office, he would answer, 'What the hell you want?' One such answer was 'This is Vice President Barkley calling,' his voice turned sugary sweet and I never heard him answer gruffly again. One night about 2 a.m., I had to call Colonel Jim about a patient that was really hemorrhaging. Mrs. Kimbrough always answered the phone at night. She went to get him and I could hear him grovel as he came to the phone, 'God dammit, can't they let an old man sleep! Col Jim always started the day by making rounds early in the morning. We all had to be there. He always said that you didn't necessarily have to see the patient every day but the patient had to see you. One day I asked him why so early. His answer was that he had to get up at 5 to go to the bathroom and that since it was too late to go back to bed he might as well come to the hospital. At one staff meeting which was held at night, a paper was presented by the Medical Service on Reiter's syndrome. After the paper, Colonel Kimbrough was asked to start the discussion. He got up and said, 'Hell, its just the clap,' and sat down."

On April 22, 1947, Kimbrough was appointed Consultant in Urology to The Surgeon General, U.S. Army, for liaison between the Army and the American Board of Urology. He was also one of the first medical corps officers and the first urologist to be awarded the specialty "A" rating by the Army Surgeon General's Office, indicating outstanding accomplishment in his profession.<sup>4</sup>

On August 31, 1948, COL Kimbrough reached the statutory retirement age; however, he remained on active duty through a yearly contract arrangement with the Surgeon General's Office until August 31, 1952.

During this era, Kimbrough was well known about the halls of Walter Reed and the following excerpts from *Borden's Dream* provide some insight:

"A tall man, with a jointed-doll gait, 'Big Jim' had a habit of rocking back and forth on the balls of his feet as he talked. He often peered at his listeners over the top of his bifocal glasses or head back and chest out, squinted at them owlishly through the lower half. Noted for his good stories and a book shelf collection of trinkets erotica, contributed by amused patients, his habit of unhesitatingly voicing his opinion earned for him the reputation for being severe. Slow-footed interns faced their three month rotating service in the Genito-Urinary Clinic with apprehension, for even the most agile had difficulty in meeting the pace set by 'the old man.'

"More often than not, patients were well indoctrinated with Kimbrough-lore before arriving at the Genito-Urinary Clinic. As they were unaware of his gentle and skillful technique some faced the urological examination with fear and trembling, only to learn that his gruffness was a shield for hiding his immense sympathy for human suffering. Perhaps the only time in his life that he was ever completely nonplused was when a frail and trembling little old lady of seventy, scheduled for a cystoscopy, faced him like an infuriated bantam hen, and before he could say a word, announced in quavering voice, 'I'm not scared of you, I'm not scared of you a bit!'

"Many distinguished men were his patients, and regardless of the difference in accommodations provided by bed assignments for general officer or soldier, each case received the same degree of unpretentious but thorough professional attention. The Medical Department was employing an uncommonly large number of civilian doctors as consultants in 1948, when General George Catlett Marshall, one-time Chief of Staff of the Army, Secretary of State, and later Secretary of Defense, was admitted to Walter Reed for a kidney operation. Strictly ethical in all his relationships, 'Big Jim' advised his patient that he could have any consultant, or all of the consultants, to attend him. Interested eye witnesses reported that the astute General merely smiled and said quietly, 'What's wrong with the Army?' What was good enough for his men was good enough for him.

"The day selected for surgery found the individualistic Colonel Kimbrough in a more mellow mood than usual. His low moment came in the early morning hours, when he was shaving. As he looked at himself in the glass, meditating all the while on the surgical sequences of the next few hours, he said to himself, 'Jim, you ugly old devil, you're taking a powerful chance operating on the greatest man in history. What if he dies on you?' The so-called 'ugly old devil' made no audible reply and so, sighing a bit over his responsibility to the nation, he stalked off to the hospital at his customary hour, 7:30 a.m. In his usual modest way and without special fanfare, he discharged his simple duty, supported by his own skill and the homely philosophy of the Tennessee hill people—'The Lord de spises a coward.'"

On June 25, 1952, Kimbrough was given an award by the American Urological Association at its annual meeting in Atlantic City, New Jersey. The citation was presented by MG George E. Armstrong, Army Surgeon General, and read: "In recognition of his contributions to the advancement of the science and practice of urology, his devotion to the principles of professional excellence and for his efforts in promoting a pleasant and working relationship between civilian and military medicine."

This was the first such award bestowed upon a military uro-



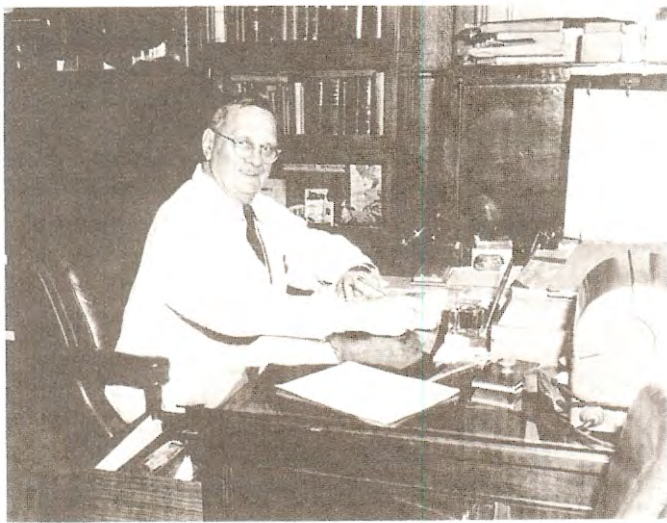


Fig. 6. Photograph of Kimbrough in his office at Walter Reed AMC sometime between 1946 and 1956.

ologist. Another first for an Army urologist came in May 1955, when he was elected President of the Mid-Atlantic Section of the American Urological Association. In Kimbrough's estimation, this honor by the civilian urologic community was one of his greatest honors (M. J. Vernon Smith, M.D., Ph.D., personal communication, letter of Archives of the Mid-Atlantic Section, AUA, dated February, 1, 1992). Kimbrough was also the first military urologist to be elected President of the Washington Urological Society in 1949 and was made an honorary member of the Western Section of the American Urological Association.<sup>4</sup>

The culmination of Kimbrough's recognition came in 1953 when on May 27, Private Law 40, Chapter 81, 1st Session, S.709 was approved by the 83rd Congress and signed by President Eisenhower making Kimbrough a permanent consultant to Walter Reed. The Bill States:

"To give proper recognition to the distinguished service Colonel Kimbrough has made to the science of medicine and surgery, and in order to provide that his mature professional judgment and long experience may continue to remain available to the public service, the President hereby authorizes designation of Colonel Kimbrough, upon his retirement from the active list, as consultant in Urology at Walter Reed Army Medical, Washington, DC.

"Such designation shall be subject to Colonel Kimbrough's acceptance and shall be terminable at his pleasure or at the pleasure of the Secretary of the Army. During the time he serves under such designation, Colonel Kimbrough shall be entitled to receive, in lieu of retired pay, the full active duty pay and allowances to which he was entitled immediately prior to his retirement."

Kimbrough was only the second medical officer to have such an honor bestowed.<sup>4</sup> In 1935, COL William I. Keller, an Army Surgeon, was retired at full pay by an act of Congress. However, he also served in a diplomatic capacity and this honor was largely related to this service.<sup>4</sup> The old Colonel remained on full-time duty to Walter Reed until shortly before his death.

After this award he received a letter from General M.B. Ridge, way, then Army Chief of Staff:

"On behalf of the United States Army, which you have served so faithfully and devotedly for more than thirty-five years, I write to express its abiding appreciation for all that you have contributed to its achievements.

"Your outstanding ability as a medical officer was recognized early in your career, when, as a surgeon with the A.E.F. in World War I, you won the admiration of patients and co-workers alike for your skill and untiring efforts. This was but the start of a period of services wherein your enthusiasm, stamina, and professional knowledge were a constant source of inspiration to your medical associates. Your achievements as a urologist, which today mark you as one of the top international authorities in this field, have contributed immeasurably to the science of medicine and surgery. The Army is indeed fortunate that Congressional action has enabled it to receive the benefits of your assistance as a consultant in the years ahead.

"The best wishes of the Army will follow you in all your future undertakings. May you find the happiness and good fortune you so richly deserve."

As hard as Kimbrough worked and aside from his many honors, he also loved life. A number of social anecdotes deserve mention. Furst writes that, at a party, Kimbrough would initially down a three-quarter water tumbler full of bourbon carefully out of sight of his wife, Pauline. He would then pick up an ordinary drink and carry it around all evening (personal communication, letter dated August 21, 1991).

Robert Rowe similarly writes (personal communication, letter dated August 26, 1991): "I never will forget our going to our first dinner party at the Kimbrough's and being met at the door by Colonel Jim with two full glasses of Jack Daniels Black—no water, no ice. I thought my wife, Lib, would die trying to gulp this down, and she almost did when she was poured a second."

Evan Lewis also relates:<sup>10</sup> "Now Colonel Jim was always among the first to attend any party. The barman at Walter Reed Club would have the glasses lined up each with a shot of bourbon in them ready to add ice and mix. Jim would come up to the bar, combine three glasses into one and always say 'What are you trying to do? Wean me!' Drink yes, but I never saw him drunk."

Dr. Ferris Cook, one of Kimbrough's Air Force residents, recounts this story that Kimbrough loved to tell (personal communication, letter dated October, 9, 1991): "Each Saturday during the summer he would get his old clothes on and mow and edge his grass. He never paid much attention to who was going by, walking or driving, since he was always absorbed in what he was doing. On this Saturday afternoon while he was manicuring the yard, a car stopped out at the curb and a middle-aged lady rolled down the window and called to him. He came over to the car and the lady said, 'You do such a nice job on this yard each Saturday, what does the lady of the house pay you?' Colonel Kimbrough said his reply, 'She pays me nothing. She just gives me my meals and allows me to sleep with her.' With that the lady said, 'Hummm!' and rolled up the window and drove off."

On August 19, 1956, at the age of 68, lung cancer brought a close to the distinguished career of COL Kimbrough.<sup>1</sup> He died in the Eisenhower Suite at Walter Reed, the same place in which he had cared for so many distinguished patients. Three



days before he died, Evan Lewis last visited COL Kimbrough; he Lewis states:<sup>10</sup>

"He was even at that time worried about Army Urology. His question was: 'Who is going to carry on my work?' I assured him that his residents would keep up the good work that he had started and that thanks to him, Army Urology would prosper.

"Colonel Kimbrough's vitality, selflessness, abiding interest in his patients and residents, unfailing good humor and unadorned friendliness made him beloved by all who were privileged to know him and to work with him."

Kimbrough was interred at Arlington National Cemetery near the site of Walter Reed's resting place. Honorary pallbearers included GEN George C. Marshall, MGs George E. Armstrong, Silas B. Hays, Leonard D. Heaton, James P. Cooney, BGs Sam F. Seeley and Jack W. Schwartz, COLs Rufus L. Holz, Samuel D. Avery, Raymond Randall, and Francis W. Pruitt, and MSGT Ralph L. Green, who had been Kimbrough's Chief Urologic technician at Walter Reed for many years.

Even prior to Kimbrough's death, a postgraduate course in Urology was established in his honor (Tibby Stevenson, Executive Secretary, Society of Government Service Urologists, personal communication, letter of August 1991). This first meeting was in 1953; however, after Kimbrough's death, the official name of the course was changed to the James C. Kimbrough Urological Seminar. In 1957, Mrs. Kimbrough established the Kimbrough Memorial Award for the best presentation by a resident at the meeting. The meeting and the award have flourished; today this seminar is one of the premier annual urological meetings in the entire country.

Other posthumous honors followed. On November 20, 1958, a plaque was unveiled on honor COL Kimbrough at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research.<sup>68</sup> Present at the ceremony was Associate Justice of the Supreme Court William O. Douglas. MG Leonard D. Heaton, then Commander of Walter Reed, noted at the ceremony: "Colonel Kimbrough's vitality, enthusiasm, selflessness, abiding interest in his patients and residents, unfailing good humor and unadorned friendliness have made him beloved by all who were privileged to know him and to work with him."

In the United States Senate on July 3, 1957, the Honorable Senator Estes Kefauver of Tennessee honored Kimbrough with remarks proclaiming him an outstanding public servant. The obituary written by Dr. Miley Wesson, a life-long colleague and friend, was recorded that day in the Congressional Record.<sup>69</sup>

An even greater honor came on June 29, 1961, when the U.S. Army Hospital at Fort George G. Meade in Maryland was dedicated in his honor. Kimbrough's name and legend live on not only by the hospital, award, and seminar named in his honor, but by the residents and colleagues who knew him. John Furst summed him up this way (personal communication, letter dated August 21, 1991): "He was a dedicated physician, an excellent teacher, a kind and good man. I'm glad I knew him."

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