

OBITUARIES

James Mills Adam

Military medicine researcher, adventurer, and general practitioner

Ned Stafford *freelance journalist, Hamburg*

James Mills Adam (b 1920, q Glasgow 1945), died from a chest infection on 20 December 2012.



After James (“Jim”) Adam was accepted to study medicine at Glasgow University, a family friend, a surgeon, advised him to join the officer’s training corps. Not only would he receive “cheap mutton pie,” but, after serving five years in the army, he would receive a £5000 grant to establish his medical practice.



After earning his degrees in medicine, surgery, and science in 1945, Adam duly enlisted in the Royal Army Medical Corps. But he would never need the grant to set up his private practice. Rising to the rank of colonel and specialising in physiology, he served in the army for 31 years in a variety of capacities, but focusing on research in military medicine.

His most important research projects entailed travelling around the world, investigating the effect of climate extremes on soldiers, but he also studied soldier nutrition, hot and cold injury, and battlefield resuscitation. One of his many journeys was as a participant in the Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition, during which he stood on the South Pole on 10 January 1958 and met the great explorers Sir Vivian Fuchs and Sir Edmund Hillary.

“Jim was a type A personality, and globe trotting and going to exotic locations fit into that mould,” says John Masterton, a close friend in the 1950s who also worked with Adam at the Medical Research Council’s division of human physiology at the National Institute for Medical Research, Hampstead Laboratories, London.

As a medical researcher, Adam approached his work with “enthusiasm,” using a “rational physiological approach” to study troops working in tropical conditions, Masterton says. He notes that Adam also contributed to the “evolution of vacuum packing and drying of food and the development of army clothing.”

Iain Levack, a retired consultant anaesthetist, first met Adam in the early 1970s when Adam was commander of the Royal

Herbert Hospital on Shooter's Hill in London. Levack says that a large portion of Adam's work could not be published as "open literature" because of UK Ministry of Defence policy and other military restrictions. In addition to his published papers,^{1 2} which were still being cited decades later, Adam contributed to important military pamphlets, handbooks, and other guides.

"Much of his work was under-recognised, both outside and even within the armed forces," says Levack.

James Mills Adam was born on 31 May 1920 in the Ayrshire coastal town of Ardrossan. His father was a head teacher, and young James was a good student. At the age of 16 he had already passed his Scottish higher leaving certificate and, determined to study medicine, he boldly applied to Glasgow University, but was turned down for being too young. After attending a course in pathological methods, with an emphasis on physiology, he applied again and was accepted.

Adam's first army posting was to Germany, but he was summoned back to the UK in 1947 by the War Office to study the inadequate jungle clothing used by soldiers in Asia during the second world war. In subsequent years he travelled to dozens of locations around the world, including Singapore with the Royal Naval Tropical Research Unit, Korea to investigate cold injury and frostbite, and Kuwait and Bahrain to study the effect of heat on soldiers in tanks and armoured vehicles. He lectured at US military research facilities and in Japan, Hong Kong, and elsewhere.

In 1966 he earned his doctorate in medicine from the University of London and his book, *A Traveller's Guide to Health*, was published, later winning a Royal Geographical Society award.³ In 1968 he was awarded the military OBE by the Queen.

After retiring as colonel from the army in 1976, Adam joined the newly founded Institute of Environmental and Offshore

Medicine at Aberdeen University. Nelson Norman, who helped establish the institute and had met Adam on the Antarctica expedition, says that Adam's contributions included developing training courses needed to provide medical support for the North Sea offshore oil and gas industry.

Adam was also involved in accidental hypothermia research and in the establishment of a laboratory used for fieldwork in support of industrial, community, equipment, and military research, says Nelson, now president of the Institute of Remote Healthcare in Aberdeen. "The basic educational and research and development concepts contributed to by James Adam did much to ensure the development of this important new area of medicine."

Adam retired in 1982, after a heart attack, and "moved as far as possible from the cold of Aberdeen to Sandwich," says his son, Ian Adam, now retired as the radiation safety officer at the Institute of Cancer Research. But he adds of his father: "He wasn't quite ready for the idle life yet, so he spent about eight years as a locum and night-time GP. Even in my limited way, I have bumped into several people who were treated by him as he did these rounds and who clearly remembered him with fondness."

In addition to his son, Adam leaves his second wife, Lucie Adam, whom he married in 1965; a daughter; and three grandchildren.

- 1 Adam JM, Ferres HM. Observation on oral and rectal temperature in humid tropics and in a temperate climate. *J Physiol Lond* 1954;125:21.
- 2 Adam JM, Ellis FP, Ferres HM, Jack JW, John RT, Lee DE, et al. Physiological responses to hot environments. *Memo Med Res Counc* 1960;298:180-201.
- 3 Adam JM. *A traveller's guide to health*. Hodder, for the Royal Geographical Society, 1966.

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2013;346:f1166

© BMJ Publishing Group Ltd 2013