

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### ON THE OCCASION OF THE 75<sup>th</sup> BIRTHDAY OF MAJOR GENERAL (RET.) ROGER VAN HOOFF, MD



At the beginning of January this year, we celebrated a significant milestone in the life of Major General (ret.) Roger Van Hoof, MD, a distinguished personality and international authority on military medicine. He is a former Surgeon General of the Belgian Army, long-time Secretary-General and current Honorary Secretary-General of the International Committee of Military Medicine (ICMM). On this occasion, we would like to recall at least some of his life and career highlights.

Roger Van Hoof was born on January 9<sup>th</sup>, 1947, in Schriek in the Flemish part of Belgium. He grew up and graduated from high school in Brussels. In 1964, he joined the Belgian Royal School of Military Health Service and started his medical studies at the Catholic University of Leuven, where he gained his degree of Doctor of General Medicine in 1971. Dr Van Hoof was assigned as the Medical Officer to the 1<sup>st</sup> Belgian Infantry Brigade in Siegen, Germany, from 1971 to 1973 and consequently started working as a resident in the internal medicine and cardiology at the University of Leuven till 1978. From 1978 to 1981, he worked as a cardiologist in the Belgian Military Hospital in Cologne, Germany. From 1981 to 1995, he worked as a cardiologist and head of the Department of epidemiology and medical research at the Queen Astrid Military Hospital in Brussels. He also completed two international study stays: in 1976 at the Royal Postgraduate Medical School in London, UK, in Advanced General Medicine and in 1982 at the University of Massachusetts in Boston, USA, in Epidemiology and Biostatistics. He worked as a Research Fellow at the Hypertension and Cardiac Rehabilitation Laboratory at the University of Leuven and as a consultant in sports cardiology and cardiac rehabilitation at the University Clinic from 1983 to 1997. In 1997, he became the Director of the Queen Astrid Military Hospital in Brussels. He worked there until 1999, when he was promoted Major General and was appointed the Surgeon General and Chief of Staff of the Belgian Military Health Service. He also served as Chairman of COMEDS (Committee of the Chiefs of Military Medical Services in NATO) between 1999 and 2005 and as Aid of the Belgian King from 2001 to 2006. He retired from active service in the Belgian Armed Forces in 2006. Nevertheless, he continued to work actively in military medicine and successively served as Secretary-General of the ICMM from 2011 to 2019. Currently, he still acts on this committee as Honorary Secretary-General. Dr Van Hoof is a member of several professional societies; for example, an Honorary Member of the Académie Royale de Belge Medicine, Associate Member of the Belgian Society of Cardiology, and the Belgian Committee for hypertension. He has received many distinctions, both at home and abroad, such as Grand Officer of the Order of Leopold II, Commander of the Order of the Crown, Commander of the Order of Leopold, Commander of the Order of Merit of Luxemburg, Grand Officer of the Portuguese Ordem do Mérito, Chevalier de l'Ordre National du Benin etc.

*Klein: On the occasion of the 75<sup>th</sup> birthday of Major General (ret.) Roger Van Hoof, MD*

I have had the privilege to work with General Van Hoof since September 1999 and become personally acquainted with him during my tenure as Medical Advisor and Chief of Medical Department of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) in Belgium. At that time, Major General Van Hoof was the Surgeon General of the host country's Army Medical Service and Chairman of COMEDS. Even in many complicated issues we always co-operated factually, constructively and in a friendly atmosphere at both of these levels. Roger Van Hoof has also established a warm relationship with the Medical Service of the Czech Armed Forces that had started since the accession negotiations of the Czech Republic to join NATO under the Partnership for Peace programme. He had visited the Czech Republic several times, for example, in May 2004, when COMEDS held its first meeting in Prague, or in 2006, when he gave two lectures at the 6<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the Czech Society of Military Physicians, Pharmacists and Veterinarians in Hradec Králové. Later on he was an invited speaker at the CBRN and Medical Congress during the Future Forces Forum convention (CEBIRAM) in Prague, in 2016. Our co-operation had become even more intense since January 2016, when I was nominated and honoured to serve as Assistant Secretary-General at the General Secretariat of the ICMC. Working there, I had the opportunity to experience his excellent management and diplomatic skills in leading a global military medicine organisation that has existed for 100 years, counting around 120 member states over all continents. Roger Van Hoof's personality traits predestined him for the prestigious position of Secretary-General, namely his profound knowledge of professional matters, grounded in a lifetime of experience, his ability to interact with people, to be demanding of others and himself, his aptitude for diplomacy in challenging situations, and his mastery of five languages (Dutch, French, English, German, Spanish). In his capacity as Secretary-General, he has been instrumental in raising the ICMC's prestige and broadening and deepening co-operation with international organisations, both medical and otherwise. He has continuously emphasised and promoted the humanitarian character of medicine, even within the framework of the activities of the military medical services.

Major General (ret.) Dr Roger Van Hoof is a professional military physician par excellence, a recognised expert and a well-respected national and international figure in military medicine. He, undoubtedly, could accomplish his highest level of professional commitment also thanks to support of his stable and happy family environment. He and his wife Maries, also a physician, raised three children and now enjoy the time with their beloved grandchildren. General Van Hoof celebrates his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday in full mental and physical health, in the midst of active pursuits.

Dear General, dear Roger, allow us to convey on behalf of all members of the Medical Service of the Czech Armed Forces our heartfelt congratulations on your 75<sup>th</sup> birthday and our wishes for continued good health, happiness and contentment in the years ahead.

Brig. Gen. (ret.) Assoc. Prof. Leo Klein, MD, CSc.  
former Surgeon General of the Czech Armed Forces

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Leo Klein  
Dept. of Military Surgery  
Faculty of Military Health Sciences  
University of Defence  
Třebešská 1575  
500 01 Hradec Králové  
Czech Republic  
e-mail: leo.klein@fnhk.cz

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