

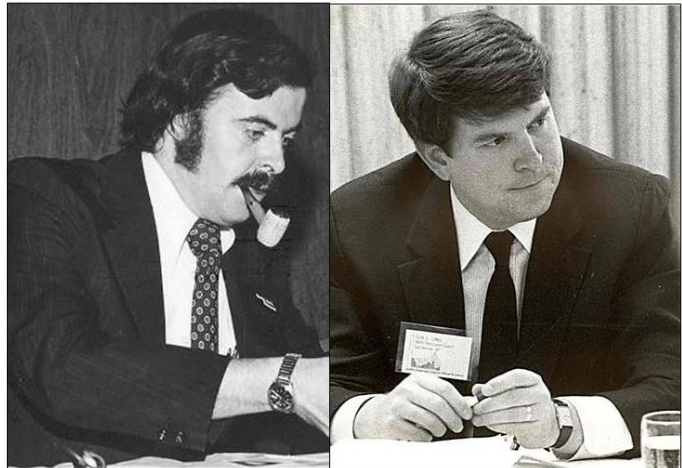
Remembering Philippi, West Virginia, Alderson-Broaddus College and Dr. Hu Myers

by William (Bill) Stanhope and Glen E. Combs with Reginald Carter

This shared memoir is based on an oral history interview conducted with Mr. Stanhope and Mr. Combs on October 8, 2020 by Dr. Carter. An edited version of the interview and transcript can be accessed at: <https://pahx.pastperfectonline.com/archive/824308D3-661B-42E2-A022-627339197755>. Stanhope was a PA teaching fellow at Alderson-Broaddus (AB) College from 1969 to 1970 while Combs was a PA student and later a house officer at AB College and the Myers Clinic/Broaddus Hospital from 1971 to 1975. Dr. Myers established the first PA baccalaureate program at AB College in 1968. With Dr. Myers support and mentorship, the learning opportunities afforded Stanhope and Combs were unparalleled, given them confidence and experiences that would later shape their academic and clinical careers as PAs.

Destination - Philippi, WV and Alderson-Broaddus College

While a PA student at Duke University, Stanhope met often with the program's medical director, Dr. Harvey Estes, Jr. to discuss academic and professional issues. Ideas about how to improve the curriculum sparked Stanhope's interest in education. Concurrently, Dr. Hu Myers, a highly respected surgeon from West Virginia, was seeking advice from Estes about the new PA program that he was starting at Alderson-Broaddus (AB) College in Philippi, WV. Unlike Duke's certificate program, Myers program was designed to award a bachelor's degree to graduates. Myers expressed interest in



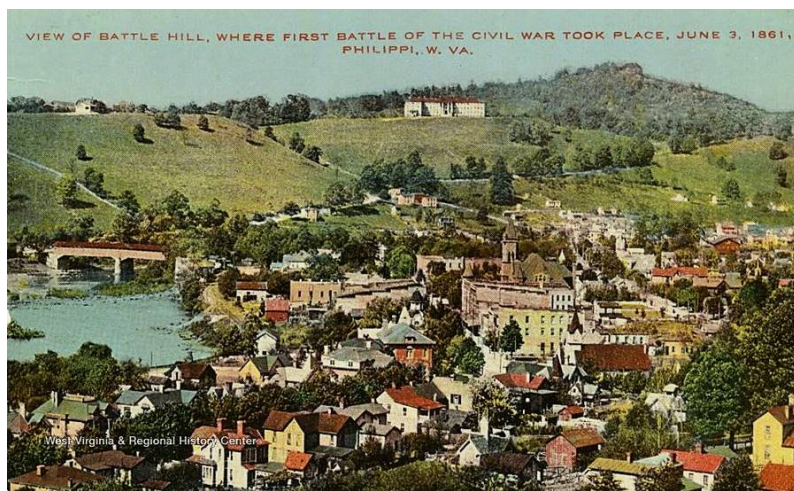
**William Stanhope and Glen Combs
Pioneering PA Educators and Leaders**

having two Duke PA graduates join him in this effort at AB College. As an incentive the PAs could enroll in AB College and earn a baccalaureate degree. Estes suggested Stanhope contact and take advantage of Myers' offer. Stanhope interviewed with Myers and sealed the deal. He received a \$3,500 annual salary and was given free tuition, basically to be a "teaching fellow" in the PA program and to work at the Myers Clinic/Broaddus hospital. The other teaching fellowship was divided between two of his classmates, Roger Whittaker and Ron Peterson, who also wanted the chance to earn baccalaureate degrees. All three moved to Philippi prior to graduating in October 1969 and did their final clinical rotation there; Whittaker with a surgeon, Peterson with an internist and Stanhope with Dr. Myers. Myer's wanted them to serve as role models not only for PA students but also for the clinical staff to introduce them to the PA concept.

Combs applied to the Duke University PA Program after reading a 1966 Look Magazine article sent to him by his aunt. In 1970, he joined 200 other candidates to interview at Duke; taking a "six-stop" jet

plane trip from California to North Carolina. The interviewees were still mostly military-trained healthcare personnel. At the time, Combs had an associate's degree and was working as a registered nurse while attending San Diego State University full-time to become a clinical psychologist. After returning home, he received a call telling him that he was accepted, but would have to wait another year before enrolling. The Vietnam conflict was ramping up, anti-war protests were intensifying at San Diego State University and Combs did not want to delay becoming a PA. So he contacted a person he met during interviews at Duke University whose mother had information about the new PA program being established at Alderson-Broaddus (AB) College in Philippi, WV. Combs followed up with the mother who, in turn, connected him with the Dean of Admissions at AB College. They talked an hour and at the end of the phone call, the Dean accepted him as a candidate for the baccalaureate PA program. Combs packed his bags and immediately set out for "western Virginia" – having no idea that he was actually going to West Virginia.

First impressions of Philippi, WV, AB College and Dr. Hu Myers



**Postcard Photograph of Philippi WV with AB College
on Hill overlooking Town and River**

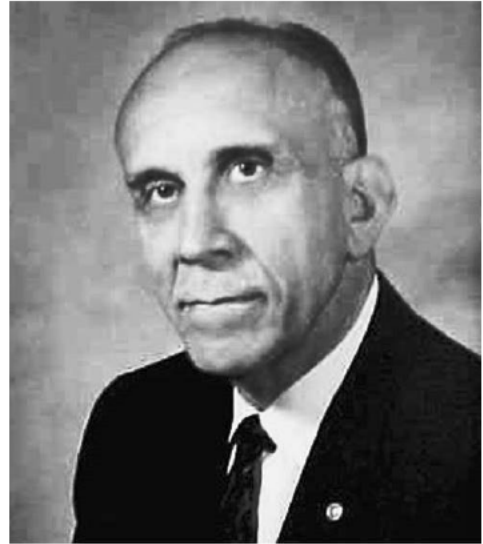
Stanhope grew up in rural Maine, so except for the geography and topography, the community did not seem all that different. Because of his influence in the community, Dr. Myers was able to get them a nice house to share. Overall, the community was a good place to live. Stanhope quickly settled in and began taking liberal arts courses necessary to obtain a baccalaureate degree. He was given credit for the course he took at Duke. The hospital was a

relatively new, moderately progressive offering the first radiotherapy for cancer in the region. It was the dire poverty associated with the region that made the place different clinically. Many people who came to the emergency room did not have electricity, running water or other modern conveniences.

When Combs arrived at his destination, he thought he was "entering a new world." He was in cultural shock, but soon learned to love the coal mining community and unique college campus located on top of a hill where the first amputation of the Civil War occurred. Dr. Hu (as he was affectionately called) greeted the students during orientation, told them about the curriculum and dress code that included blue pants, light blue skirts, blue ties and three-quarter length white coats. Combs' first impression of Dr. Hu was that he was soft-spoken, articulate and a southern gentleman with a lot of wisdom. Myers was very involved with the curriculum, promoting the concept throughout the state and was interested in students doing their best. Along with humanity and liberal art courses, PA students also took clinical science courses during the didactic phase of the program. These courses were taught primarily by physicians from the community.

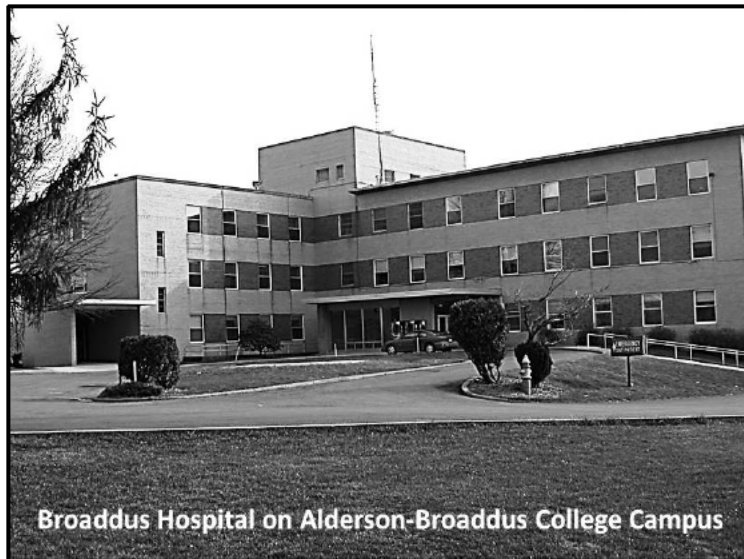
Experience working with Dr. Myers

For Stanhope, Myers was the consummate physician. Although a general surgeon, Myers treated patients with all types of general internal medicine and primary care problems. Of all the surgeons with whom he worked, Dr. Hu was among one of the best. He had an innate, incredible knowledge of anatomy and could find an anatomical plane with his eyes closed that no one else could imagine being there. He was also supportive and did not hesitate to ask Stanhope to fill a vacant residency slot for night call at the hospital. At first some nurses were reluctant to take orders from Stanhope, but one call to Dr. Hu settled the issue. Stanhope recalls another incident that occurred when he had lunch with Myers in the downtown clinic cafeteria. They had worked all morning in the operating room. Unbeknownst to Stanhope, he sat at a table that was reserved only for physicians. After lunch the clinic's administrator admonished him for doing so. Stanhope told the administrator if he had a problem with him sitting at the table to call Myers. In his own quiet way, Dr. Hu made it clear that Stanhope was to be treated with respect and from that time on there were no issues with carrying out orders or meeting other requests.



Dr. Hu Myers

Memorable clinical cases



Stanhope had just finished his first night call at the hospital, checked on patients and gone to bed when the emergency room nurse called him to come take care of a rat bite. As he entered the emergency room, he was overwhelmed by the smell of kerosene. He confronted two adolescent parents who had brought in their four-month infant daughter with incisor bites all over her hand. When asked how they knew it was a rat, one of them said that they heard the baby screaming at the foot of their bed and when they lit their

kerosene lantern saw a large rat jump off the end of the bed. Stanhope was shocked; he had never encountered anything like this at Duke, not even when he worked in the "public" clinics. Throughout the year, Stanhope saw many patients who had delayed seeking medical help until their problems became so overwhelming that they could no longer be ignored. Stanhope recalls Dr. Hu telling him about the smell of cancer as they walked into an elderly lady's hospital room. The patient had a

fumigating, cancerous lesion that had completely destroyed one of her breast. She was not atypical. Many patients put off seeking medical help simply because they could not afford it. This was Stanhope's first experience with healthcare inequities caused by abject poverty. Although distressing, the opportunities to learn medicine were unsurmountable; the responsibility given and the latitude to make judgements surpassed anything that a student would be allowed to do today.

Unlike Stanhope, Combs completed most of his clinical year assigned to various physicians and services at the Medical College of South Carolina in Charleston. This arrangement was made with one of Dr. Hu's surgical colleagues, Dr. Arthur Smith. Since no one knew what a PA was supposed to do, Combs was given a great deal of latitude and responsibility, even amputating limbs with the chief surgical resident. He was taught and did many technical procedures (e.g., central lines, paracentesis, etc.) that students would not be allowed to do today. Like Stanhope, he saw patients in the emergency room that suffered because of substandard living conditions, mental health issues and addiction. Gunshot wounds and knife stabbings were routine events. One intoxicated man brought in had a gash on his scalp from being hit by an arresting policeman. When Combs went to suture his wound the man reached into his sock, pulled out a small handgun and pulled the trigger. The bullet just missed the resident in the next room and Combs lost his hearing momentarily. Combs finished his last semester in Philippi primarily working up outpatients. Dr. Hu expected students to handwrite a thorough medical note for each patient they saw in the hospital. Sometimes this required multiple trips to the patient's bedside to gather all necessary information.

Comb recalls Myers as being very quiet, dignified and always very well-dressed and groomed. Professionally, he never called colleagues or students by their first names; it was always Mr. Combs or Doctor Smith. When Myers had a bowel obstruction needing surgery, he asked Combs, and not one of the residents, to do the nasogastric (NG) intubation. Combs did the NG intubation without any problems and at the end, Myers said "Thank you Glen." Combs was overwhelmed with emotion knowing that Dr. Myers had given him the greatest



Dr. Hu Myers in Operating Room with Surgical Team – 1970s

complement ever, calling him by his first name. After graduation, Combs and three of his classmates remained in Philippi to work as house officers. It was another great learning opportunity. The nurses were still trying to determine what PAs should be allowed to do. While in Charleston, Combs had spent time on the burn and trauma service; the only service in the hospital that he recalls having air conditioning. While there, he had learned how to do skin grafts. When a burn patient came into the emergency room at the Broadus Hospital, the attending physician asked Combs to take care of the patient who had 20% burns on his lower extremities. Combs asked the nurses to help him with a skin graft. He says "They looked at me as though I had lost my mind." The skin harvesting device they finally

located for him was outdated, but after working on it most of the night, Combs was finally able to harvest enough epidermis to do a skin graft. He says “The nurses were amazed and you would have thought I had done brain surgery.”

Dr. Myers’ impact on professional PA careers

Stanhope says while in Philippi that he learned to appreciate social medicine and the need for all Americans to have access to equitable and reasonable healthcare resources. He saw firsthand the tragic medical complications, at the time, associated with illegal or self-inflicted abortions; women who lived in poverty with too many children to have another. When he joined the Department of Community Health at Oklahoma University, Stanhope was supportive of the Department’s efforts to increase access to healthcare in underserved communities. The confidence he gained while in WV led him to become the first director of the OU PA program. He made sure that the students in his PA program had clinical experiences in medically disadvantaged communities.

Combs also found the experience at AB to develop his confidence, especially having someone of Dr. Myers’ stature as a mentor. As was the custom in those days, Myers taught at the bedside of patients, as many as sixteen times, on some rounds. He would ask the patient only a few leading questions and then let the patient do most of the talking. Outside the patient’s room, he would simply ask “what did you learn?” He once asked them what they had smelled, saying that “is the smell of pneumonia.” Myers was a keen observer and good listener. Combs tried to emulate the qualities he saw in Myers and as a PA Program Director, to instill these qualities in his students.

Both Stanhope and Combs agree that the learning experience in Philippi was unparalleled. Myers supported them, expected the best and seldom gave negative criticism. If you did well, he might say, “that a boy,” and if you did not, he might say “now, doctor I want you to think about this.” That was as close to a scolding you would get from him. He loved medicine, never seemed to leave the hospital and confided in Combs one day that he enjoyed being a surgeon and he planned to “dy with his boots on.”

Editor’s Note: Stanhope and Combs got to experience and be mentored by a pioneering teacher of the “old school of medicine.” The PA profession is fortunate to have been founded by such incredible and dedicated physicians. Many stories remain to be told and we are grateful to Stanhope and Combs for sharing a few of theirs.

Related Resources:

Biography: [William Stanhope](#)

Biography: [Glen E. Combs](#)

Biography: [Dr. Hu Myers](#)

Article: [The Day NBC Came to the Hills of West Virginia](#)

Acknowledgements: The photographs of Mr. Stanhope, Mr. Combs, Dr. Myers, Broaddus Hospital and Dr. Myers operating are courtesy of the PA History Society; the postcard of Battle Hill, Philippi, WV was published by J.K. Hall in Philippi, West Virginia. Accessed at: <https://wvhistoryonview.org/catalog/041739> on October 21, 2020.