

Richard Duane Brasfield

October 13, 1919 — May 3, 1970

Richard Duane Brasfield, born October 13, 1919, and reared in Eastern Tennessee, carried with him through life the industry and perseverance characteristic of this former frontier country, mellowed by the friendliness and charm of his southern heritage. While an undergraduate at Vanderbilt University he was awarded the General John J. Pershing Medal, and from Vanderbilt University he received both an A.B. and an M.D. degree. His internship and residency in surgery in Nashville Hospital was interrupted by a two-year tour of duty as a medical officer in the U.S. Navy.

His long association with Cornell University began with his acceptance of a fellowship and residency at Memorial Hospital in New York City, with which institution he remained throughout the rest of his life, holding the position of associate attending surgeon on the gastric and mixed tumor services, as well as that of clinical assistant professor of surgery, Cornell University Medical College, at the time of his death.

He was the author of more than sixty scientific articles having to do with various aspects of the diagnosis and treatment of cancer. He investigated the possibilities of thermography in the differential diagnosis of cancer. He devised an ingenious method of irradiation of the internal mammary lymphnodes to extend the scope of surgery in patients with cancer of the breast. He was the first surgeon ever to perform elective right hepatic lobectomy for cancer of the gall bladder, his patient surviving for seventeen years and actually outliving her benefactor by several months. His interest in major hepatic resection, not only for tumors of the gall bladder but for tumors of the liver as well, continued and gained him widespread recognition for skill and competence in this taxing area of surgical endeavor.

He was engaged at the time of his death in a systematic review of the diagnosis, treatment, and prognosis of sarcomas of soft-tissue origin.

His interests and activities were not restricted to medicine: Dick Brasfield liked nothing better than to hike into uncharted wilderness with a gun in his band, a pack on his back, and a friend at his side. His devotion to nature, to the great out-of-doors, to hunting, to fishing, was life-long and led him to productive membership in nonprofessional societies concerned with nature and wildlife, and in particular to affiliation with the Boy Scouts of America, in which he was scoutmaster of Pelham Manor Troop 5.

He was active in organized medicine and served as treasurer of the Medical Society of the County of New York for the two years before his death. Never sparing himself in rendering expert and devoted care to patients, he had little time for purveyors of medical care subsidized by disinterested third-party agencies, and was an articulate spokesman for the ideals of medical care based on individual doctor-patient relationship.

Afflicted with the disease against which he had directed his lifelong efforts, he courageously continued all his activities, fully aware of his limited time, until a few weeks before the end and, with Christian fortitude and confidence and without rancor, accepted death when it came on May 3, 1970.

Lemuel Bowden, M.D.