Introduction to a History of Nutrition Symposium Concerning the Interdepartmental Committee on Nutrition for National Defense

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The symposium reviewed the history of the Interdepartmental Committee for Nutrition for National Defense (ICNND), later the Interdepartmental Committee for National Development, from its conception in 1955 to its end, under another name, in 1972. The ICNND was established to conduct nutrition surveys of military personnel of countries that were allied with the United States in the containment of the Soviet Union. Soon, the mission evolved to include civilian populations. Located on the campus of the NIH, the ICNND conducted surveys in >30 foreign countries and conducted 4 surveys in the United States, the last being the Ten State Nutrition Survey, which was reported in 1972. This achievement was accomplished by a secretariat that involved a total of 10 persons throughout its history and a host of scientists from universities, the U.S. government, the private sector and international agencies, and cooperating scientists from the respective countries surveyed.

Building on experience from World War II and the Korean conflict, and on the expertise of consultants, the ICNND developed methods for nutrition surveys and published a manual (1), which 40 y later is still a valuable resource for scientists planning nutrition surveys.

The ICNND accomplished its original purpose of improving the nutrition status of troops of Allies who formed part of the bulwark of containment of the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The ICNND’s mission was expanded soon after its inception to include the nutrition of civilian populations. Countries surveyed established counterpart nutrition committees, and some established nutrition institutes that focused on improving the nutrition of their population and on research. Some of these organizations continue to serve, and scientists developed under their aegis provide leadership, contributing nationally and internationally. The ICNND’s final activity, the U.S. Ten State Nutrition Survey, identified nutrition problems among groups at risk in the United States. These politically charged findings ultimately led to the demise of the organization. Legislation, in part based on findings of the Ten State Nutrition Survey, resulted in the USDA school breakfast program, nutrition programs for the elderly, the Women, Infants and Children program, the USDA Agricultural Research Service Clinical Nutrition Research Centers, the NIH-sponsored university-based Nutrition Research Centers, the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey surveys, and the Department of Health and Human Services/USDA National Nutrition Guidelines.

This symposium reviewed this history and reminds readers that there are untold stories of the dedication of some nutrition scientists to the betterment of mankind through their contributions to ICNND activities. It is our hope that this story will inspire new generations of nutrition scientists to contribute their expertise as selflessly, to the solution of international and domestic nutrition problems of today.

LITERATURE CITED