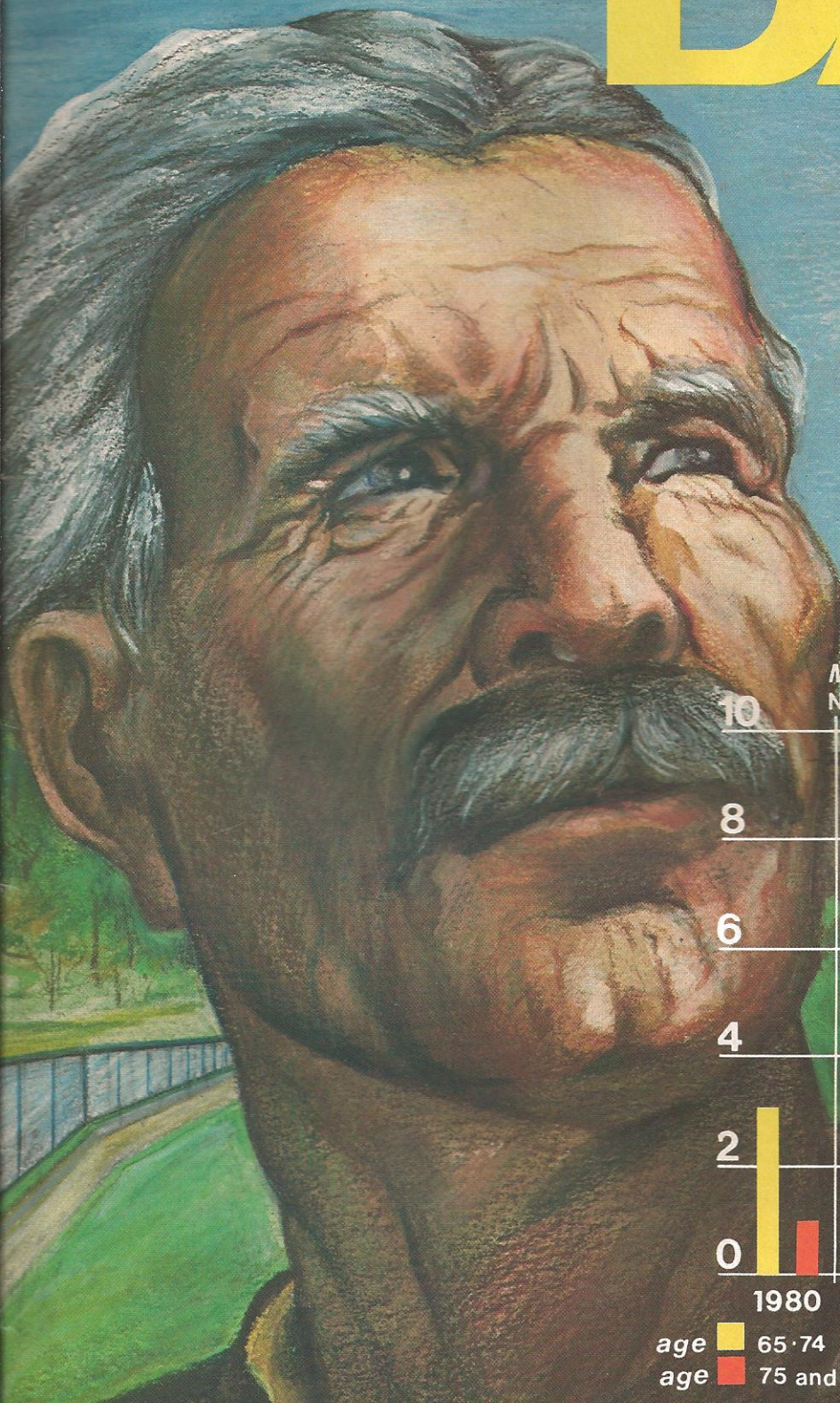
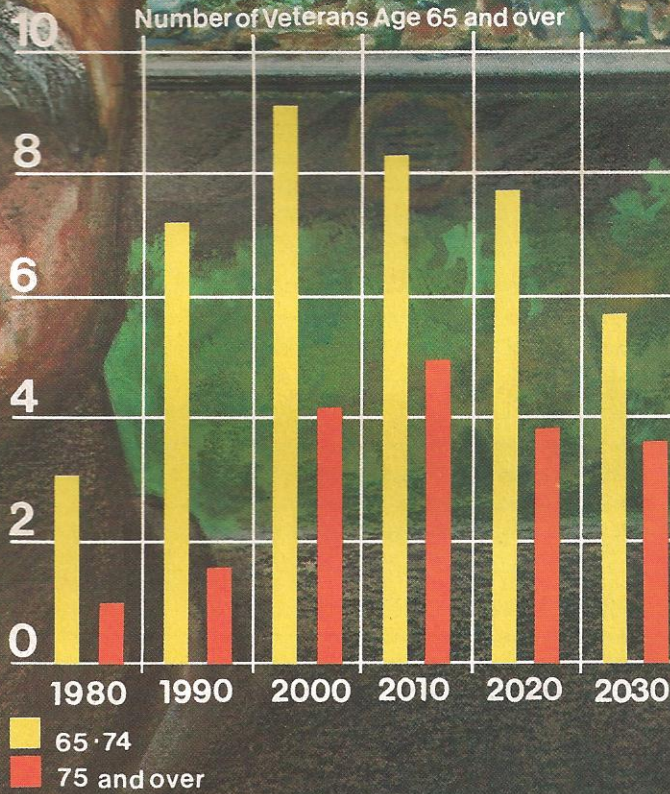


DAV

MAGAZINE



MILLIONS OF VETERANS
Number of Veterans Age 65 and over



OLDER VETERANS

the **DAV** launches major, **NEW INITIATIVE**

SEE STORY, PAGE 15

Exploring Inner Space

Corded muscles in powerful arms and shoulders guide the wheelchair through the loose sand to the hard-packed sand at the surf's edge. The man in the wheelchair looks out over the calm Pacific and watches the early morning surf roll toward the shoreline, then calmly lowers himself from the wheelchair into the briny foam, pulls himself toward the oncoming waves and disappears into the ocean.

In a matter of seconds, the gravity that had bound him to the wheelchair eases its grip, and he glides through the depths into the beauty known only to scuba divers.

The beauty and freedom of scuba diving is now open to many handicapped people, thanks to the Handicapped Scuba Association (HSA). The HSA is a non-profit organization that specializes in teaching scuba diving to people with physical disabilities. Founded by DAV member Jim Gatacre in mid-1981 and incorporated in January 1983, the HSA rapidly gained worldwide recognition for its unique program.

A resident of San Clemente, Calif., Jim has built the association from an idea to an international organization. In the process he has helped to erase many of the stereotypical attitudes faced by the disabled in this sport.

Though the HSA enjoys a worldwide reputation today, it had a more humble beginning. In 1975, a staff member at the University of California Irvine campus got Jim involved in teaching scuba diving to the handicapped. A second class was offered in 1977, then came a four-year break before Jim started a teaching program of his own. Over a decade later, Jim Gatacre is the HSA's only diving instructor. He is also the organization's chief promoter and record keeper, though wife Patricia, former students, and a small group of interested community members help out on occasion.

Working with disabled people became Jim's major concern after he suffered an accident in 1972 which temporarily paralyzed his right arm. The accident made him feel "very alienated in terms of physical things," and he worried about how people would respond to him. Being a "very physical person," he was afraid he wouldn't be able to do the things he'd previously enjoyed. Eventually, Jim regained most of the use of his arm, but he had glimpsed the al-

ienation many disabled people feel, and was determined to help other disabled people do things they hadn't thought possible or hadn't been given the opportunity to do.

When the chance to teach scuba diving to the handicapped came, Jim jumped at it. Here was something he could do, and something he felt confident he could teach others. Since that time, Jim has successfully taught scuba diving to paraplegics, quadriplegics, amputees, blind people, and people with cerebral palsy.

"I like to teach other people, especially when they are able to accomplish things that other people don't think they can do," Jim said. "The ocean doesn't care if you're handicapped or not, just that you live by its rules. Diving is as much a mental challenge as it is a physical one. A person with the right attitude can accomplish almost anything with the right training.

"Even strong divers can't move through deep water very fast. You have to remember that the average diver is wearing 70 pounds of scuba gear, so the ability to move rapidly in the water isn't necessary. What is important is having the training to take care of yourself and your *dive buddy*. The two of them are a team that take care of, and depend on each other," Jim said.

Over the years the HSA has become the worldwide authority on sport diving for the

Photos Courtesy of the Handicapped Scuba Association.



Freedom—HSA diver Adolf Flores breaks the bond of his wheelchair and swims free.



Equipment Check—Brad Parks and Mike Trujillo (both paraplegics) check out their equipment before a HSA dive.



Expert Conversation—Famed oceanographer Jean-Michel Cousteau, center in white, discusses scuba diving with HSA divers. HSA divers are, clockwise from Cousteau, Kim Butler, DAV member and HSA founder Jim Gatacre, Terry Luxembourger, DAV member Ken Force, DAV member Ed Rameriz, Sr., and Norm Anderson.

handicapped.

Not limited only to handicapped students, one of the most unique concepts of the HSA is that its handicapped and able-bodied students receive the same training together from novice to advanced divers. This allows a much greater understanding to develop between them, not only from the standpoint of the sport, but on the personal level of human beings understanding and accepting each other.

According to Jim, diving is merely the beginning of a process that touches every aspect of the handicapped person's life. "Whenever you're able to accomplish something not everyone can do, you feel a

sense of pride and achievement," he said. "That's especially true of scuba diving—an action sport that demands a high degree of competence, both physically and psychologically. It's an exhilaration of personal achievement."

Among the many accomplishments the HSA has achieved is the most advanced training program for handicapped divers anywhere in the world. It includes physical performance standards in conjunction with the two major diver certifying agencies, and a multi-level certification program so sensitive and complete that it has enabled the HSA to safely certify people with many disabilities, even those who are blind.



Ocean Bound—Norm Anderson, an HSA diver, wheels himself and his diving equipment across the beach toward the ocean for a dive.

The HSA has also written and produced a dynamic 23-minute documentary film that depicts the abilities of handicapped divers, entitled *Freedom In Depth*. Hosted by famed oceanographer Jean-Michel Cousteau and starring divers of the HSA, *Freedom In Depth* is an adventure film that celebrates the human spirit as well as the beauty and majesty of the sea. The film depicts what the HSA has been accomplishing for the past 10 years. Video copies of the film may be purchased in either VHS or BETA format from the HSA.

Continuing its unique service, the HSA is now training other diving instructors to train scuba diving to handicapped persons throughout the world. Just recently the HSA became a diver's certifying agency recognized by the National Association of Underwater Instructors and the Professional Association of Diving Instructors, the two national certifying agencies, and have just certified their first diver.

Proud of HSA's work, Jim quickly adds there's a lot left to accomplish in helping handicapped divers.

That's the kind of man Jim Gatacre is—a dive buddy in and out of the water.

He's a disabled veteran dedicated to helping disabled veterans, and others with physical disabilities, to realize the beauty of, and explore the underwater world through scuba diving.

For more information about the Handicapped Scuba Association, just drop them a line at Handicapped Scuba Association, 1104 El Prado, San Clemente, Calif. 92672, or call (714) 498-6128.



Into the Depths—HSA diver Mike Trujillo makes his way into the ocean surf, leaving his wheelchair behind on the beach.