
James A. Zimble, Navy surgeon general, dies at 78

By [Emily Langer](#), (from the Washington Post, December 29, 2011)



(UNIFORMED SERVICES UNIVERSITY OF THE HEALTH SCIENCES) - Retired Vice Adm. James A. Zimble worked for more than three decades in military medicine. Zimble died Dec. 14 at a hospital in New London, Conn., at age 78.

Retired Vice Adm. James A. Zimble, who served as the Navy's surgeon general and helped lead a review of military medical preparedness after the 1983 terrorist attack on a Marine Corps barracks in Lebanon, died Dec. 14 at a hospital in New London, Conn.

He was 78 and had coronary artery disease, said his son Daniel Zimble.

Adm. Zimble worked for more than three decades in military medicine. During his tenure as the Navy's chief medical officer, from 1987 until 1991, he oversaw the deployment of hospital ships during the Persian Gulf War. He also sought to improve coordination among the surgeon general's office and naval commands around the country through an institutional reorganization.

Earlier in his career, he served as a top medical officer of the Marine Corps, a fleet surgeon and as a deputy assistant defense secretary for medical affairs.

He was one of the senior officers appointed by Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger to evaluate military medical preparedness after the Oct. 23, 1983, terrorist truck bombing that killed 241 people at the Marine barracks in Beirut. The military had been criticized for mishandling care of the wounded servicemen, with the Army and Air Force allegedly competing for attention.

The "Zimble report," as it was known, was made public in 1985. It focused on the European command and described a lack of coordinated planning for a catastrophe. The report was credited with prompting better training and other improvements in the military's medical preparedness.

James Allen Zimble was born Oct. 12, 1933, in Philadelphia. He pursued a career in medicine in part because his parents were deaf; as a boy, he hoped to become a doctor and restore their hearing.

He received a bachelor's degree in premedical studies from Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, Pa., in 1955 and a medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1959. He joined the Navy Reserve while in medical school.

Adm. Zimble trained in undersea medicine before pursuing a specialty in obstetrics and gynecology. Early in his career, he practiced at Navy hospitals in Pennsylvania, California and Florida.

After his military retirement, Adm. Zimble became president of the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences in Bethesda, where he established a nursing school. He retired in 2004.

His honors included the Defense Distinguished Service Medal, the Navy Distinguished Service Medal and several awards of the Legion of Merit.

His first marriage, to Judith Goldberg, ended in divorce. His second wife, Janet Bailey, died in 1994 after 25 years of marriage.

Survivors include his wife of 15 years, the former Mona Melton, of Salem, Conn.; two children from his first marriage, Amy Butterfield of La Jolla, Calif., and Jennifer Steffenilla of Midlothian, Va.; one son from his second marriage, Daniel Zimble of Cabin John; three stepchildren from his second marriage, David Richards of Tenafly, N.J., Jennifer Howell of Roswell, Ga., and Sue Slover of Reston; two stepchildren from his third marriage, Emily Zadjura and Rick Findley, both of Salem; and 12 grandchildren.

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