



A Christian broadcaster makes a worldwide impact despite his profound disability

BY PHIL HOPERSBERGER

Most Americans are familiar with Gen. George Patton, the hero of WW II's Battle of the Bulge, but unaware that this illustrious soldier's career ended tragically — the victim of a freak car accident that broke his neck and left him a quadriplegic.

Fewer still know of another soldier — a soldier in the faith — who today deals with his own physical paralysis. His name is Dick Woodward, pastor/founder of the *Mini Bible College* radio program, a survey of the Bible now translated into 15 languages.

Pastor Woodward, crippled by a spinal cord disease since 1982, is confined to his bed for 20 hours a day and moved only by the help of a hoist operated by his wife, Virginia. Unlike Patton, however, it has not stopped him from doing more than most men hope to do in a lifetime.



WARRIOR'S WORK

But don't brand him disabled, handicapped or an invalid. This soldier is on active duty. "It just seems like the less I can do, the more the Lord does," Woodward confesses, awed by the divine equation that is his reality each day. "I can't move at all. And to see all this happen — it's just amazing! His ability seems to increase with my disability. It's truly a wonder, but my quality of life has never been better."

Even from his bed, where he's vulnerable to a single mosquito, this pastor with 40 years in the pulpit is more than ready to follow his Commander-in-Chief's order and accomplish everything He has for him to do. Armed with a voice-activated computer that allows him to work eight hours a day, Woodward is busy writing literature, booklets and commentaries to augment his broadcasts.

"To me, I'm just limited," Woodward explains with levity. "Some of the labels people use for my condition are amusing. Like 'invalid' means not valid. Or 'handicapped' means your cap in your hand sitting by the side of the road. 'Disabled' means without ability. You know, Olympic athletes have limits too — we call them records!"

WARFARE SECRETS AND STRATEGIES

Each daily, 13-minute *Mini Bible College* radio program radiates his Christ-like spirit, warmth, optimism and humor. Woodward's life is permeated by what he calls the "Four Spiritual Secrets" (see page 36).

Discipled and befriended by the late J. Vernon McGee, internationally famous for his *Thru the Bible* five-year, Bible survey radio program, Woodward followed his mentor's lead. While pastoring the Virginia Beach (VA) Community Chapel, Woodward got the idea for a shorter survey of the entire Bible for lay people in his church.

In January 2000, after years of broadcasting overseas (from which the *Mini Bible College* receives an average of 5,000 letters per month), the program launched a new national U.S. strategy. Thirty-nine U.S. stations have picked up the program and more are climbing on board each month. Yet despite its worldwide focus, the ministry had an inauspicious start.

CHANGE IN BATTLE PLANS

In 1974, as his influence grew within the Virginia Tidewater area, Woodward appeared on a local television show that eventually led to the



host's salvation and later became a Sunday morning forum for his Mini Bible College survey. Eight years later, while receiving a standing ovation after speaking at a luncheon for civic leaders, Woodward found himself on the floor, unable to stand.

It was an ominous sign that something was terribly wrong. After a barrage of tests and examinations, it became clear that whatever this soldier of Christ had been dealt would be irreversible. As his physical condition worsened, Woodward's continued teaching of the survey, by then a popular course with several hundred students, became impossible.

But God had another battle plan for this gifted teacher, a maneuver that appeared to be a setback was actually a cutback — a pruning of sorts — meant to produce global-sized fruit.

HEARING GOD'S REVELLE

A local businessman attended a Mini Bible College course, recognized the value of Woodward's devotionally practical overview of the Old and New Testaments and offered to professionally tape Woodward's teaching on audio and video. Little did he know the impact it would generate overseas. His foresight transformed the survey from a local phenomenon into an international radio program — one that has generated close to 600,000 letters over the last 10 years, from grateful converts as far away as Ho Chi Minh City and Kathmandu.

The businessman who heard God's reveille was Dois Rosser, now president/founder of International Cooperating Ministries (ICM), a ministry that incorporates its broadcasting outreach into an integrated model that includes literature, follow-up, church-building and pastoral training.

"Early on, our idea was to combine the power of radio with our work in building churches around the world," Rosser says, "and the *Mini Bible College* of Dick's was the best Bible study teaching programs and scripts I had ever heard. It was a match made in heaven."

As a result of this partnership with the *Mini Bible College* broadcasts, ICM has built or has under construction a staggering number of churches — at press time in late September, the number exceeds 900, with a goal to surpass 1000 by year's end. This divine combination of radio teaching and church construction, targeted to places such as Vietnam, Ukraine, Central America, Cuba, Nepal, China, Africa and India, has led to the conversion of thousands each year.

But it doesn't stop there.



RECRUITING NATIONALS

When a congregation of new believers reaches 100 baptized members, ICM helps them to construct a much-needed church building. Each new church congregation is then encouraged to start five more sister churches, and judging by the colored pins shot-gunned across the maps in Rosser's office, this is happening faster than anyone dreamed. But Rosser wants no personal credit for the miracle of ICM.

"This has taken on a life of its own," he admits. "As a businessman, I could never have developed a five-year plan for something like this. It's the Holy Spirit. God keeps opening doors and we don't know enough not to walk through," he jokes. "With a paid staff of only 16 people, all the construction work is done by nationals who put sweat equity into the churches we help them build. Right now, we're on target to have another 350 new churches next year. It's really a wonder!"

When asked about his fellow soldier Woodward, Rosser becomes sober.



"We've been friends for over 20 years, and to see him today and the joy he has is so ... inspiring. Imagine not being able to move at all. And he's in constant pain, but refuses any narcotic medication. He wants to write without any impairment. What a man! And his wife? The closest thing to an angel as you'll ever see. They're both very special."

ICM donors, volunteers and staff have charged the gates of Hell with a passion that would awe even "Old Blood and Guts" Patton, who once said, "Success is not getting on top; it's how you bounce on the bottom." For Woodward, his bounce echoes another warrior who also knew affliction — the Apostle Paul:

"And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."

Phil Hoppersberger writes for Great Commission Ministries and lives with his wife and two children in Laingsburg, Michigan. The Mini Bible College, a ministry of International Cooperating Ministries, is located at 606 Aberdeen Road, Hampton, VA 23661 or www.icmmbc.org. Placement information: Walter Bennett Company, 215-591-9400.

WOODWARD'S FOUR SPIRITUAL SECRETS

1. I'm not, but He is. And I am in Him, and He is in me.
2. I can't, but He can. And I am in Him, and He is in me.
3. I don't want to, but He wants to. And I am in Him, and He is in me.
4. I didn't, but He did, because I was in Him and He was in me.