

## Sir Edward Ernest Dunlop

AC, CMG, OBE, KSJ, FRCS, FRACS, FACS, DSc (Hon. Punjab)

1907 — 1993

On July 2, 1993 one of Australia's great citizens died unexpectedly. He was honoured by the nation. Sir Edward Dunlop was beloved of thousands and respected by all. To his friends his loss was irreparable. Although we mourn his passing, we rejoice in his life and in having known him. We are aware that a particular fountain of strength and goodness has left us, but his inspiration remains.

The details of his life are well known, but I will recapitulate them briefly. He was born to an educated, sensitive mother on a farm at Sheepwash Creek near Benalla, Victoria. His older brother and he grew up together on the farm, doing the work that was needed to be done and enjoying the free life of the outback among the horses and cattle and wild things, encouraged and cared for by his gentle mother.

His strong Scottish family nurtured his early life and provided the foundation from which in later years he drew his kindness, courage and determination, his independence and his skill as a surgeon.

He was educated at Benalla High School. In later life he was grateful to his school mistress who was so impressed by his abilities and character that she made a special visit on foot over rough country roads to the farm to persuade his parents to give him a secondary education.

After qualifying with a gold medal at the Victorian School of Pharmacy, with the example of Sir Thomas Dunhill the famous surgeon before him, he decided to transfer to medicine and secured a scholarship to Ormond College at the University of Melbourne.

As an undergraduate at the College he acquired the nickname, Weary, because of the association of his name, Dunlop, with a brand of car tyres. The name stuck to him throughout his life.

In his student days he was tall and well-built with massive shoulders and was surprisingly quick on his feet for one of his build. He was a fine sportsman and



*Weary Dunlop soon after World War II.  
Photo credit: Australian War Memorial*

received a Blue in both rugby football and boxing. He also played rugby football for Australia twice against New Zealand in 1932 and 1934, and was the first Victorian to represent Australia.

After qualifying and completing house appointments at the Royal Melbourne Hospital and The Royal Children's Hospital, he set off for London in 1938, to continue his training as a surgeon. He studied for his FRCS at St Bartholomew's Hospital and eventually worked at the British Postgraduate Medical School at Hammersmith with Arnold K. Henry, Sir Thomas Dunhill and the legendary George Grey Turner. In 1939 after the outbreak of war, he was appointed surgeon of the British Emergency Medical Service at St Mary's Hospital, Paddington.

When war broke out, having been a member of Australia's part-time militia, he took up an appointment in the Australian Army Medical Corps (it was not yet "Royal"), with which he spent the next 6 years on active service, rising to the rank of Colonel. He served in Palestine, Greece, Crete and North Africa. In 1942 he was sent to Java as part of a hastily organised force in a vain attempt to stem the Japanese advance and prevent the Dutch East Indies falling into their hands. It was open to him to be evacuated, but he remained with the wounded at his hospital. He was taken prisoner and sent into forced Japanese labour camps.

As leader of a prisoner of war camp on the Burma-Thailand border, he became an inspiration for physical and spiritual survival to thousands of captives toiling in atrocious conditions during the construction of the notorious railway linking those 2 countries. He was a natural leader of men — determined, dogged and indestructible. To quote a fellow prisoner of war: "When despair and death reached for us, Dunlop stood fast, a lighthouse of sanity in a universe of madness and suffering." Through his bearing and his long and devoted service in the face of shared privations, he helped his fellow prisoners to endure their lot right up until the

Japanese surrendered on August 15, 1945. They were gaunt and spectre-thin, but unbowed by captivity. Afterwards, he played a major role in helping to repatriate ex-prisoners before returning to Australia.

Soon after coming back to Melbourne, he married Helen Ferguson, to whom he became engaged during the war and from whom he had been separated throughout 7 long and dreary years.

On returning to civilian life, he took up his surgical career, was befriended by Sir Alan Newton and Mr William Hailes, and was the first surgeon to be appointed to the Royal Melbourne Hospital after the war. Later he was appointed to the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital and the Peter MacCallum Institute. Like Ambrose Pare and Baron Larrey in earlier times, he applied himself to serve his fellow citizens. He recorded his wartime experiences and also his success in treating many gravely ill patients with ulcerative colitis in prisoner of war camps by colostomy drainage.

He developed a large consultant practice and took a special interest in patients with cancer attending the Peter MacCallum Institute. He was drawn irresistibly to the new challenges of thoraco-abdominal surgery, especially for aortic aneurysms and cancer of the larynx and pharynx. With thoracic surgeon John Hayward, also just returned from active service, he pioneered a service for the newly evolving field of resection for cancer of the oesophagus and pharynx, the results of which he later published.

Apart from his busy profession he maintained a continuing interest in many fields. He helped his fellow ex-prisoners of war to receive medical attention, justice and sympathy from the community and from the Government which they had served faithfully. He became chairman of the Prime Minister's Prisoner of War Relief Fund, and in 1986 the Australian Government established the Sir Edward Dunlop Medical Research Foundation in Melbourne to study the needs of war veterans.

He was greatly interested in his profession, especially in helping young men of merit. He was also personally interested in extending the knowledge and postgraduate facilities of our College to the developing world of Asia so that modern surgery could be provided for its people.

As a chosen leader he played a major role in developing Australia's involvement in the International Society of Surgery, assiduously attending their meetings and becoming friends with many leading surgeons in the international world of surgery. As Australian co-delegate he contributed wisely to its counsels. He was elected

Vice President of the Society. He became concerned with alcohol addiction, chaired committees dealing with this problem, and eventually became Patron of the Australian Foundation on Alcoholism and Drug Dependancy.

He took a strong interest in the International Community, particularly in Australian relations with evolving nations of the Far East. After the Colombo Plan for economic and social development in Asia and the Pacific was established, he was appointed its adviser in Thailand (1950), Ceylon (1956) and India (1960-1964). He was instrumental in launching the Weary Dunlop-Boon Pong Fellowship between Thailand and Australia, which was established in honour of those who had worked on the Thai-Burma Railway.

In recent years he spent much more of his time meeting young Australians and encouraging them to live up to high ideals, to love their country and to do their duty. He was a brave man, tested over many years and much decorated as one of the Queen's Captains and for his contributions to medicine.

Initially appointed O.B.E. for his war services, he was awarded C.M.G. in 1965 and knighted for Services to Medicine in 1965. In 1977, he was named Australian of the Year and then appointed Companion of the Order of Australia in 1987, a year after the publication of his epic book, *The War Diaries of Weary Dunlop*.

I have outlined his extraordinary career but related little of his personal life. What was he like as a man?

In later life he was a tall, impressive figure with massive shoulders surrounded by a large head, a noble brow and matching grey-blue eyes which quietly observed everything and everybody, and reflected his kindly whimsical disposition. He had an easy, charming manner which attracted him to everybody.

He was a good listener and a good talker. His ideas, modestly delivered in a soft voice, were original and worth listening to and thinking about. He had a fine sense of humour, a fund of interesting stories apposite to any occasion, and was prone to easy laughter. He was widely read, had a good memory, and loved poetry which he was prone to recite whenever the fit took him. He was a splendid actor and could sing as he acted. He was beloved of his friends and enjoyed the acclaim of the people in his later years.

We shall miss him sorely. We rejoice to have known him and will always remember him. He was a great man whose like we shall never meet again.

**Rowan Nicks**