



Major General Sir William Dudley Refshauge, FRSH, AC, CBE, ED



Major General **Sir William Dudley Refshauge, FRSH, AC, CBE, ED** (3 April 1913 – 27 May 2009) was an Australian soldier and public health administrator. He was Honorary Physician to Queen Elizabeth II (1955-64), Director-General of the Commonwealth Department of Health (1960-73), and Secretary-General of the World Medical Association (1973-76).

Biography

Early years

William Dudley "W.D." Refshauge was born in Wangaratta, Victoria on 3 April 1913, where his father was headmaster of the Wangaratta High School. One of his four siblings was Dr Joan Refshauge, OBE (1906-1979), a medical practitioner and administrator who did significant work in Papua New Guinea. The family was of Danish extraction and are descendants of Peder Pedersen Refshauge. The family moved to Hampton, Melbourne when his father became ill. He was involved in the Boy Scouts movement, and later with the sport of rowing.

Education

He attended Scotch College, Melbourne and was selected in the First Eight for the Melbourne Head of the River while still aged only 15, and rowed in three subsequent years. He studied medicine at the University of Melbourne, was awarded a University Blue for Rowing, and graduated in 1938. He became Resident Medical Officer at The Alfred Hospital the following year.

World War II

In 1939, when World War II started, he joined the Australian Imperial Force as a medical officer with the rank of Captain in the 2nd Field Ambulance. He saw service in the Middle East, the Battle of Bardia, the capture of Tobruk, the Greek campaign, the Battle of Crete, New Guinea and Borneo. He was promoted to Major in 1942 and later to Lieutenant-Colonel. He was mentioned in dispatches four times and was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire in 1944. In Syria, he took charge of a hospital where he treated the local sex workers for sexually transmitted diseases, which caused the incidence of disease amongst the local soldiers to drop.

Post-WWII

After the war, Refshauge decided to specialise in obstetrics and gynaecology and became a member of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. He was appointed the first permanent Medical Superintendent of the Women's Hospital (now Royal Women's Hospital, Melbourne) in 1948.

In 1951, during the Korean War, he rejoined the Australian Army and was appointed Deputy Director-General of Army Medical Services and promoted to Major-General. In 1955, at the age of 42, he was appointed Director-General with the rank of Major-General. He assisted in the establishment of the Army School of Health at Healesville, Victoria, and adopted a system of training and recruiting medical officers. He attended the nuclear testing sites of Bikini Atoll and Enewetak. He was not consulted during the British nuclear tests at Maralinga, where he would have insisted on greater protective measures.

Affiliations

From 1955 to 1964 he was Honorary Physician to Queen Elizabeth II. In 1960, he was appointed Director-General of the Commonwealth Department of Health, serving until 1973. He was also Chairman of the National Health and Medical Research Council, the Commonwealth Council for National Fitness, the National Tuberculosis Council and various other advisory bodies. From 1961 to 1966, he was also Joint Services Medical Adviser in the Department of Defence and Chairman of the Defence Forces Medical Services Rationalization Committee. From 1962 to 1973 he was Deputy National Coordinator for the The Duke of Edinburgh's Award. He maintained his interest in rowing, and was a member of the Organising Committee for the 1964 Australian Rowing Championship and Olympic Trials on Lake Burley Griffin, Canberra.

In the international field, he attended many meetings of the World Health Organization as Chief Australian Delegate. He was chairman of the two main Committees of the World Health Assembly, Chairman of the Executive Board of WHO, and President of the 24th World Health Assembly in 1971.

In 1973 Sir William Refshauge became Secretary-General of the World Medical Association, near Geneva, a post he held until 1976. He instigated the move of the Secretariat from Paris to Geneva to work more closely with the office of the WHO. He rewrote the Helsinki Declaration of Ethics for the WHO but eventually resigned because of a lack support from his board.

He was a National Trustee of the Returned and Services League (RSL) 1962-1973 and again from 1977. He led the RSL Tour of the Battlefields of Europe to commemorate the 60th Anniversary of Remembrance Day on 11 November 1978.

He was a Member of the National Committee of the Menzies Foundation 1979-1983, and was Deputy Chairman of its Research Advisory Committee. From 1979 to 1988

he was Honorary Consultant to the Australian Foundation on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence. He was also a Fellow of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Royal Australasian College of Physicians, the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, the Royal Australian College of Medical Administrators (he was Censor-in-Chief 1968-1973) and a Foundation Fellow of the Royal Australian College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. He was an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Society of Health and a Life Member of the Australian Dental Association. He was a member of the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research.

In 1983 he was Chairman of the Interim Board to develop and establish the Menzies School of Health Research in Darwin, Northern Territory, and became Chairman of the Board of Governors 1985-87. In 1987 he was appointed Chairman of a Planning Committee to develop a Menzies Centre for Population Health Research within the University of Tasmania. From 1986-1988 he was Chairman of the Research Into Drug Abuse Advisory Committee for the Commonwealth Government's Drug Offensive.

Awards

In 1959, he was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) for his services to the Army and in 1965 was awarded the Efficiency Decoration (ED). In 1966 he was knighted. In 1980 he was appointed a Companion of the Order of Australia (AC) and in 1988 he was awarded the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Medicine by the University of Sydney. In 1990 he was awarded the RSL's ANZAC Peace Prize for his contribution to world health and world peace. This was presented by the then Governor-General, Bill Hayden. In 1991 he was awarded the RSL's highest award, the Meritorious Medal.

Legacy

In 1999 the annual **Sir William Refshauge Lecture** was inaugurated. In 2001 he was one of 43 prominent Australians who were co-signatories of a letter to the Prime Minister, John Howard, calling for the lifting of economic sanctions against Iraq. He was a member of the Honour Roll in the 2007 National Drug and Alcohol Awards of the Australian Drug Foundation.

Family

In 1942 he married Helen Elizabeth Allwright, a senior nursing sister at the Alfred Hospital, and they had four sons and a daughter. Two of their sons are Andrew Refshauge, a former Deputy Premier of New South Wales, and Richard Refshauge, a judge of the Supreme Court of the Australian Capital Territory.

Death

Sir William Refshauge died on 27 May 2009, aged 96.

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