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Dart: Scientist and Man of Grit¹

by

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One of Australia's doctor-soldiers from World War One, Dart went on to become one of the greatest of all Australian scientists. As Captain Raymond Dart, and as a skilled German Linguist, he was posted to the Internment Camp at Bourke, in the north-west of New South Wales; and subsequently as a Medical Officer to Army Administration Headquarters in London from September 1918. He served subsequently as the Regimental Medical Officer of the 14th Engineers Battalion, in France, in 1919.

Dart went on to discover and name *Australopithecus africanus*, the first fossil hominid, which was identified in 1924. This discovery initially greeted with disbelief by the scientific world, went on to be the foundation of the great interest in hominid evolution. In tum, it gave humankind another four million years or so of its protohominid origins.

This fine biography is the definitive story of Dart's life, from the time of his birth (during the devastating Brisbane floods of February 1893). In the work, the authors trace his early life on a Queensland farm, through his schooling at Ipswich Grammar School and his subsequent graduation from the University of Queensland and the University of Sydney, where he graduated in medicine. The great events of 1924, when he identified as a hominid, rather than simian, the fossilised skulls from the quarries in South Africa, forms the stuff of legend.

I was privileged to meet with Raymond Dart in 1982, and the vaults of the Transvaal Museum (in Pretoria) were opened such that I could hold the original Taung Skull, which again formed the basis to change so much of humankind's understanding of its origins. This book will hold great appeal for those with pride in the history of Australian military medicine, the doctor- soldiers who have gone before, and the history of science.