

The heritage of the Royal Australian Army Medical Corps in bronze

Major General John H Pearn (Rtd), AM, RFD, MD BSc, PhD, FRACP, FRCP, FACTM, FAIM

In 2003 the Royal Australian Army Medical Corps (RAAMC) celebrated its centenary. Here I present a selection of the medals, medallions and coins issued in honour of people and events that shaped the Corps.

Sir Neville Howse VC Award



This medal is awarded by the Army Logistics Training Centre (South Bandiana, Victoria), on behalf of the RAAMC, to students of the Corps adjudged most outstanding in the Logistic Officers Basic Course (for officers) and the technical health subjects for promotion to Sergeant (for NCOs). On average, four medals (two to officers and two to NCOs) are awarded each year.

Howse was awarded the VC for his gallantry in saving the life of a wounded trumpeter at Vdrefort in 1900, during the Boer War. He was then a Lieutenant in the NSW Army Medical Corps. He served with distinction during the Gallipoli campaign of World War I, subsequently rising to the rank of Major General. In 1921 he was appointed Director General of Medical Services (DGMS), Royal Australian Army. He stepped down from this position in 1922 to run for parliament, and was elected member for the seat of Calare. The Nationalist government reappointed him DGMS, a position he held until 1925, when he became Minister for Defence and Health, and Minister for

Repatriation. He served as Minister in various capacities until he lost his seat in the defeat of the government in 1929.

Harkness Memorial Medal



The senior of the three official medals awarded by the Royal Australian Army Medical Corps: “for an outstanding individual effort where the RAAMC has benefited in some way”. Instituted in 1971, it commemorates the life of Colonel Geoffrey Gossip Harkness, OBE, ED, RAAMC (1916–1971).

Harkness served as Resident Medical Officer of the 2/3 Machine Gun Battalion in New Guinea in the Second World War; and subsequently as Deputy Director-General Medical Service to three Directors-General. He was a senior pathologist and haematologist, based at the Alfred Hospital in Melbourne for 25 years (1946–1971). He was the founder of the Melbourne Diagnostic Group, later renamed Melbourne Pathology.

Sir Neville Howse VC commemorative medallion



This medallion was one of a series of three commissioned and struck by AJ Parkes, Medallists, of Brisbane, to commemorate the Centenary of the ending of the Anglo-Boer War (the South African Land Wars) of 1899–1902. Crafted by Mirek Zymowski, it portrays the frontal image of Captain Neville Howse VC, at the time of this award of the first Victoria Cross to an Australian.

Colonel John Thomson Medal



This medal, of burnished pewter, commemorates the life and works of Colonel John Thomson (1847–1909), the founder of military medicine in northern Australia. He enlisted with the military title of Surgeon in the Queensland Volunteer Force on 2 February 1877, and became, as Surgeon-Brigade-Major, the foundation Principal Medical Officer of the Queensland Defence Force in

1884. He served in the Queensland Defence Force and then (from 1901) in the Australian Army for 32 years. The Medal, first awarded in 1997, is awarded annually to the John Thomson Orator, chosen by the John Thomson Trust Committee within the office of the Triumvirate Committee of the Defence Health Reserves, Victoria Barracks, Brisbane.

Marks Memorial Medallion

Instituted in 1981, this medal is awarded annually to a serving soldier of the RAAMC “who has contributed in some way to the benefit of the Corps”. Nominations are called annually, “from all enlisted ranks [both regulars and reservists] excluding those of commissioned officers”.



Colonel Charles Ferdinand Marks (1909–1979) was a consultant obstetrician in Brisbane. He joined the Militia in 1937 as a young graduate doctor, served with distinction as Senior Medical Officer in the siege of Tobruk and commanded the 110th Casualty Clearing Station at Milne Bay. He served as Director of Medical Services, based at Victoria Barracks in Brisbane, from 1954 to 1967, and was a leader in military medicine in Australia.

Dunlop coin

A fifty-cent coin commemorating the life and work of Colonel Edward “Weary” Dunlop was issued by the Royal Australian Mint in 1995. Dunlop’s heroism as a medical officer among the prisoners of war forced to construct the Japanese army’s Burma railway is legendary. He confronted evil in the face of personal threat to life and limb, and in the face of debasement by those in positions of power. A limited edition of this coin was sold to the Corps Committee of the RAAMC, for commemorative issue as a coin and token set, on the occasion of the Centenary of the RAAMC in July 2003.



Simpson coin



The Royal Australian Mint issued a five-dollar cupro-nickel coin in 1990 to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the ANZAC Campaign at Gallipoli. The reverse portrays Private John Simpson [Kirkpatrick] AAMC of the 3rd Australian Field Ambulance, with his donkey “Duffy”, bringing in a wounded Australian soldier.

Henry Simpson Newland Prize

This medal was initially awarded by the Federal Council of the British Medical Association in Australia and since 1956, by the Australian Medical Association. It commemorates the life and service to military and civilian medicine of Sir Henry Simpson Newland (1873–1969). As Major Newland he served at Gallipoli, and as Lieutenant Colonel Newland he commanded the First Australian Casualty Clearing Station in France, operating on the wounded at both Ypres and Passchendaele. In 1918 he represented the AAMC in the Inter-Allied Surgical Conference, Paris. He wrote the section on facial and maxillary injuries in Volume 3 of the Official History of the Australian Army Medical Services. A founder of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, he was its first President (1929–1934).



RAAMC Centenary Medallion

Simpson and his donkey also feature on the commemorative medallion issued in July 2003 by the RAAMC Corps Committee, Defence Health Service, to celebrate the Centenary of the RAAMC.



The Sir Edward “Weary” Dunlop Asia Medal

After World War II, Sir Edward Dunlop did much to improve Australian relations with Asia, teaching and undertaking surgical work in Thailand, Sri Lanka and India, and this medal is awarded “For recognition of distinguished achievements and leadership in fostering sustained and harmonious Australian–Asian relations”. It is awarded by a joint committee of the University of Melbourne and the AsiaLink Association. The design is by Mr Francis Gatt, of ANPAS Group, Melbourne.



Frank Fenner Medal

This medal is awarded for the most outstanding PhD thesis submitted each year in the John Curtin School of Medical Research. It commemorates the work and achievements of one of Australia’s greatest scientists, a key figure in the eradication of smallpox. As Captain and Major AAMC, Frank Fenner served with the Corps from 1940 to 1946 in Australia, Palestine, Egypt, New Guinea and Borneo. He served as pathologist and malariologist with Field Ambulances, I Casualty Clearing Station and as adviser to the Medical Research Unit (LHQ).



Neil Hamilton Fairley Medal



In 1943 Colonel (later Brigadier) Neil Hamilton Fairley commanded the Medical Research Unit (LHQ) established by General Sir Thomas Blamey, on a recommendation of Major General Burston DGMS, at Cairns and Rocky Creek. Fairley led the team which established the prophylactic value of atebryn as an antimalarial drug; his work was a major determinant of the Allied victory in the Pacific theatre of the Second World War. This medal is awarded, in alternate years, by the Royal Australasian College of Physicians and the Royal College of Physicians of London “to any citizen

of any country of any age who has made outstanding contributions to medicine”. It was first awarded in 1968.

Major Susan Felsche Memorial Medal



This medal was struck to commemorate the life and service of Major Susan Felsche, FRACGP, RAAMC. She was killed in an aircraft accident in 1993 while serving with the United Nations peacekeeping deployment in the Western Sahara (MINURSO). She was the first female Australian soldier to be killed on operations overseas since World War II. The memorial medal was the concept of

Major Maggie Parker SMO and Major Kevin Ellis RAAMC of the First Military Hospital and later of 2 Field Hospital, Brisbane. It was struck in 1996 and presented to members of the Susan Felsche Club, a group of Defence Health Service officers who were members of the 1st Division Officers Mess, Gallipoli Barracks, Brisbane.

Gordon Young Medallion

This medallion, by Melbourne sculptor Michael Meszaros, commemorates the professional service to obstetrics and gynaecology and to the community of Brigadier Gordon Young ED. The datum medal is on permanent display at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Sydney, having been transferred there after its original display at the King George V Hospital for Women and Children, Sydney. Personal copies of this fine bronze medallion exist. Brigadier Gordon Young served as the Honorary Colonel RAAMC for Eastern Command, 1970–1974, and as the national Representative Honorary Colonel RAAMC, 1974–1977.



The RAAMC Centenary Medallion



The Royal Australian Mint issued this medal on the occasion of the national centenary celebrations of the RAAMC. It was issued as part of a limited edition coin and token set, with a reissue of the 1995 fifty-cent coin portraying Colonel “Weary” Dunlop (see above). It was launched by Major General John Pearn on 4 July 2003 in Brisbane. Of aureate bonded steel, the obverse of the medal shows the Corps badge and the reverse portrays His Majesty’s Australian Hospital Ship, Centaur, sunk by enemy action on 14 May 1943, off Brisbane.

Department of Paediatrics and Child Health, University of Queensland, Herston, Qld.

John H Pearn, AM, RFD, MD BSc, PhD, FRACP, FRCP, FACTM, FAIM, Professor of Child Health.

Correspondence: Major General John H Pearn, Department of Paediatrics and Child Health, University of Queensland, Royal Children’s Hospital, Herston, QLD 4029.