



Edward Allen Edwards



The Wright brothers' first successful flight occurred in 1903, construction of the Panama Canal began in 1905, and the San Francisco earthquake and fire struck in 1906. In that same year, Teddy Roosevelt was midway through his final term and on July 29, Edward Allen Edwards was born in East Lyme Connecticut, the son of Max and Nellie, who owned a chicken and vegetable farm and sold its products in New London and New York City. Ed's sister, Harriet, became a schoolteacher and his brother, Jesse, became a celebrated pathologist at the Mayo Clinic. He was educated at the nearby Walnut Hill School and a technical high school in New London where the teachers were graduates of MIT. After attendance at Tufts University (1922-24) and its medical school (1924-28), he received the M.D. and trained at the Boston City Hospital,

the Boston Medical Examiners office, and the Boston Lying-In Hospital. He married Elizabeth Borwick, a psychiatric social worker in 1931. They had two children, Alicia Betsy in 1941 and Frederic Thomas in 1942. He began teaching gross and surgical anatomy at Harvard Medical School in 1934.

When aged 35, he volunteered for military service five days after the U.S. entered World War II. As he left for training in May 1942 he wrote "that this conflict is a just one and I must play a part in it." He saw continuous action as a combat surgeon in North Africa, through Sicily, Italy, and, finally, France with the 11th and 15th Evacuation Hospitals, and with the 21st General. (A collection of his wartime letters is being prepared by his daughter.) On his way to North Africa in November 1943, he wrote that the commanding officer "lectured us every day on how hazardous our landing and how only a few of us would return, but covered with medals." Later, at the Anzio beachhead (February 1944) where he was present from the third day on, his letter said he was safe, but he did not say where he was until the Boston Globe published a picture of him operating in a tent. ("I hadn't wanted to write that I am in the Anzio area, because I know the publicity given to former bombing and shelling of hospitals...") He described how the

wards, the cots, and his own tent were dug in, with a roof of planks and sandbags. He was grateful for the priceless chance to relieve suffering and was sure that this was precisely what he wanted to do. He felt “happy and proud, just at the peak of the work.”

After the war, he resumed his service in the Harvard Medical School Department of Anatomy and joined the Department of Surgery at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in 1950, where his main practice was in peripheral vascular surgery until he retired in 1973 from both departments. He also held appointments at the New England Deaconess Hospital and the Veterans’ Administration. He was a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons and a member of the two national vascular surgical societies. He served as President of the New England Society for Vascular Surgery from 1982-1983 where he had been a member since the Society’s founding in 1973. He was also a member of the New England Surgical and the Boston Surgical Societies. In keeping with his dual role as a highly skilled gross and surgical anatomist, he was a longstanding member of the American Association of Anatomists.

His abundant, meticulous publications were devoted to surgical anatomy, written with collaborators, on the thorax, breast, and abdomen and pelvis, in addition to several papers and book chapters on peripheral and mesenteric circulation, arteriosclerosis, and venous disease.

While all of the above commentary provides a rough outline of his professional career, his personal qualities of kindness, honesty, and conscience were much admired by his colleagues and the multitude of medical students and surgical residents whose lives he touched over many decades of service. He especially enjoyed collaborating with surgical residents in writing, presenting, and publishing research papers. Many of those residents rose to top levels of academic surgical departments. Not only was he a master teacher with an encyclopedic knowledge of gross and anomalous anatomy that he was always willing to share, but he also had a priceless ability to inspire good scholarly habits. This talent was tempered by a clever, but restrained, wit, an ironic humor that enabled him to enjoy small examples of human frailty, sometimes his own. Once, when operating with the help of a new surgical resident. Ed asked, “Are you the professor from Padua?” The resident replied, “No, sir, I am Gordon McLeod from Quincy”. Ed thought that was amusing and continued to work in his methodical, anatomical way.

He also had a passion quite separate from his career: hiking wilderness trails and climbing, usually in the White Mountains, which he practiced weekly and intensively over many years with his wife, Elizabeth, until poor health imposed limits on her. In later years he was accompanied by associates in the anatomy department. His knowledge of trees and other vegetation was remarkable, even to the point of knowing most of the plants’ names. He was a passionate lover of the “great outdoors”. His slim, wiry physique undoubtedly was one result of all that hiking.

Ed died on March 17, 1999, about four months before his ninety-third birthday. He will always be fondly remembered, especially by his colleagues in the two departments.

Respectfully submitted,

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