

# Sir Edward “Weary” Dunlop

12/7/1907 - 2/7/1993

## *‘Lest we forget’*

Recent local and international events have placed the world in relative turmoil, and it is refreshing to read the trials and tribulations of Sir Edward “Weary” Dunlop. He lived an inspirational life and made a significant contribution toward peace and better health, both locally and overseas. He was a highly respected and revered surgeon, soldier, scholar, sportsman, and humanitarian.

Dunlop is perhaps best known for his commitment to his comrades during and post-World War II. As a prisoner of war, his selfless struggle to improve the health and wellbeing of fellow prisoners saved countless lives. Captured by the Japanese, Dunlop spent more than four years providing medical assistance; leading and motivating his men; and risking his own life by defying captors in the face of brutality, starvation and death. His compassion and endurance extended beyond the war years and for 46 years, Dunlop constantly fought for the fair treatment of former prisoners of war. He never stopped campaigning for the rights of the returned soldiers and his efforts made a huge difference in the lives of the diggers and their families. Some of the major achievements of his work in this area were:

- A full medical survey of former prisoners of war
- The establishment of the Prisoners of War Trust Fund (a fund of 250,000 pounds to help former prisoners of war experiencing special hardship)
- Government agreement for free medical care to all former prisoners of war for any disability, whether or not caused by war
- The establishment of the Sir Edward Dunlop Medical Research Foundation (an organisation developed to carry out research into the ageing and health problems of war veterans) (Higgins:36).

Dunlop was a remarkable human being and was instrumental in bridging the gap between Australia and Asia. His capacity to forgive his Japanese captors was amazing and Dunlop’s philosophy regarding this reconciliation was ‘you are better to offer friendship and

understanding' (Geddes:284). This philosophy highlighted and promoted acceptance to all people irrespective of race, class or creed.

Post-war, Dunlop continued to help and assist people through the establishment of a surgical practice and his selfless service to the community involved him in over forty community organisations and never as 'a mere figurehead' (Ebury:617). He was passionate and had an enormous capacity and willingness to serve others. His community service incorporated a broad collection of interests including the Anti-Cancer Council of Victoria and The Colombo Plan. His service to others continues to live on in a number of charitable activities including the Sir Edward Dunlop Medical Research Foundation and the Weary Dunlop-Boonpong Exchange Fellowship, which provides study scholarships for trainee Thai surgeons to obtain specialist training in Australia. Dunlop was acknowledged for his service to the community in 1977, when he was knighted and named Australian of the Year. In 1987, Dunlop was awarded the Order of Australia for his services to the Australian prisoners of war.

Dunlop touched the lives of many. He had a natural ability to connect with people and a willingness to take people as they were. The extent of Dunlop's impact was evident at his state funeral attended by over 10,000 people. We can reflect on the achievements of Sir Edward "Weary" Dunlop and realise the difference that one person can make within and beyond their community.

### **References:**

Ebury, Sue (1994) *Weary: The life of Sir Edward Dunlop*. Australia: Penguin Books

Geddes, Margaret (1996) *Remembering Weary, Sir Edward Dunlop as recalled by those whose lives he touched*. Australia: Penguin Books

Higgins, Denise (1996) *Edward "Weary" Dunlop*. Australia: Reed Library