



IN MEMORIAM

H. Earl Gordon
Professor of Surgery/ VAMC, Emeritus
UC Los Angeles
1924 – 2007

H. Earl Gordon was born on July 21, 1924 in the farming community of Arbuckle, California just north of Sacramento. From this inauspicious beginning, he rose to become the most influential surgeon in the U. S. Department of Veteran Affairs and a professor at UCLA. Earl Gordon graduated from UC Berkeley and UC San Francisco Medical School while serving for three years in the U. S. Naval Service during WWII. He interned at San Francisco General Hospital, but after beginning his surgical residency, he was recalled to the U. S. Navy during the Korean Conflict, this time for another three years as a flight surgeon and obstetrician and gynecologist. After discharge from the Navy, he completed his general surgery residency at the Wadsworth VA Medical Center in 1958. He enjoyed a brief spell in private practice in Oakland until he was recruited to join the staff of the Wadsworth Veterans Affairs Medical Center and the faculty of the UCLA Department of Surgery.

The Wadsworth Department long had a distinguished record in surgical scholarship, and Dr. Gordon advanced quickly to become Chief of the Surgical Service and Director of the Residency Program. He was responsible for three remarkable achievements during his tenure as Chief of Surgery and Chief of Staff. First, after the major earthquake of 1971 he successfully relocated this largest of VA hospitals to MASH units and then expedited the building of the new, earthquake proof medical center without interruption in clinical services. Second, he joined with William P. Longmire, Jr. to integrate the UCLA and VA residencies to form the strong combined program it is today. Third, faced with an acute shortage of nurses in the mid 1970's, he enlisted congressional help to have nurses flown in from U. S. territories outside the mainland.

Dr. Gordon was a superb clinical surgeon who mastered the range of general surgery and in later life focused his operating skills on thyroid and parathyroid diseases. Earning the respect of the professional community, he was elected president of the Los Angeles Surgical Society, the Bay Surgical Society, the Southern California Chapter of the American College of Surgeons, and the Association of VA Surgeons. He received recognition for his work as a national consultant to the VA and distinguished service awards from the Association of VA Surgeons and the American Cancer Society. Dr. Gordon was an adept and canny administrator equally at home in the boardroom as the operating room. He steered the West Los Angeles VA through many crises, perhaps the most notable being the outbreak of Legionnaires' disease in 1977.

Dr. Gordon was an avid skier who knew well the challenges of Mammoth Mountain. In his retirement, he was rewarded by the knowledge that the generations of surgical residents he educated entered successful practice in West Los Angeles or embarked on careers in academia. Dr. Gordon died on April 12, 2007 after a brief illness at his home in Sherman Oaks, California.

Samuel E. Wilson