Historical Perspectives of The American Association for Thoracic Surgery: Emile Frederic Holman, MD (1890-1977)

Courtesy of the Stanford School of Medicine

Emile Frederic Holman, the 33rd president of The American Association for Thoracic Surgery, was born in Moberly, Missouri, on August 12, 1890, the son of a Methodist Minister. The family moved to Southern California in 1902, where young Holman had his secondary school education. He entered Stanford University in 1907, initially majoring in mathematics, but he soon changed to the Department of Education. To support himself in college, Holman dropped out for a semester in his sophomore year to learn shorthand and typing. On returning to Stanford, he applied at the President's office for stenographic work, and Dr David Starr Jordan promptly supplied him with manuscripts to copy. This led to his becoming secretary to President Jordan on graduating Phi Beta Kappa in 1911, a position he held until 1914, when he went to Oxford as Stanford's second Rhodes Scholar. Jordan was a constant inspiration to Holman and was the source of his initial interest in medicine, as well as his opposition to war. Before beginning his Rhodes scholarship, Holman spent 3 months touring the Balkans with President Jordan, who was lecturing on the need for peace and the perils of war.

Holman's first 2 years at Oxford were spent working in physiology with Sir Charles Sherrington. The third year was spent as a casualty house surgeon at the Radcliffe Infirmary. During his time at Oxford, Holman became acquainted with Sir William Osler and was a frequent guest in Osler's home. Osler encouraged Holman to apply to medical school at Johns Hopkins, saying in his letter of recommendation for Holman, "He is an A1 student and will be a great credit to the school. I do not think there is any doubt that he will have done enough work to warrant admission to the fourth year." Holman was, in due course, accepted to Johns Hopkins Medical School in 1917 and graduated AOA a year later. By this time, Holman had changed the spelling of his last name from a more Germanic Hollmann to Holman.

After graduation from medical school, Holman worked in the Hunterian laboratories under Halsted and served as Halsted's last resident in 1922, the year of Halsted's death.

In 1923, Holman went to the Peter Brigham Hospital to work with Harvey Cushing in neurosurgery but was soon directed to general surgery. The following year he went with Elliot Cutler to Western Reserve, and 1 year later, at the urging of Ray Lyman Wilbur, who had been dean of the medical school and was at that time president of the university, returned to Stanford as associate professor of surgery. A year later, in 1926, Dean Ophuls wrote to President Wilbur recommending Holman's promotion to professor and appointment to the chairmanship of the department of surgery. The dean wrote as follows: "Dr Holman is a man of good scholarship and teaching ability. He has done much credible research as shown by the attended list of publications. His personality is agreeable and at the same time he shows good qualifications for leadership. I believe his future promise is excellent." Ophuls was certainly correct in his assessment. Holman stepped down from chairmanship in 1955, when he turned 65, after 29 years of distinguished leadership, interrupted only by 3 years of service in The Pacific Theater in World War II.

From Stanford Medical Center, Stanford, Calif.

Received for publication Feb 18, 2005; accepted for publication Feb 28, 2005.

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J Thorac Cardiovasc Surg 2005;130:206-7
0022-5223/\$30.00

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doi:10.1016/j.jtcvs.2005.02.062

Despite his opposition to war, Holman volunteered for the Navy at age 51 and made important contributions to the care of wounded military personnel.

Holman was the first to bring the Halstedian tradition to the West Coast. He established not only a surgical residency program but also the Halsted Laboratory of Surgical Research, in which he and a number of his faculty carried out important experiments. Holman is best known for his work on arteriovenous fistulas. His initial publication on this subject was in 1923, and his final one was in 1971. In between, he wrote more than 40 papers reflecting both laboratory and clinical observations and experimentation in this field. His original monograph, entitled "Arteriovenous Aneurysms: Abnormal Communications Between the Arterial and Venous," published in *Circulation* in 1937, had been awarded the coveted Samuel Gross prize of the Philadelphia Academy of Surgery in 1930. He carried out meticulous investigations of the phenomenon of poststenotic dilatation and wrote on such varied topics as congenital and acquired heart disease, pericarditis and lung abscess, portal hypertension, lung cancer, head injuries, appendicitis, and war wounds. In 1924, Holman published a paper entitled "Protein Sensitization in Isoskinografting," in which he reported his observations on several patients who received skin grafts from other persons and correctly postulated that the reason for failure of such grafts was sensitization of the patient to the foreign protein of the graft. He was, in fact, a skin donor for one of these patients. This astute observation

was so important that he was honored for his contribution at the International Congress of the Transplantation Society in 1972, nearly 50 years after the article was published. Despite the monumental importance of this work, he did not continue clinical or laboratory investigation in the field of transplantation. Had he done so, he might well have added the Nobel Prize to his imposing list of honors.

Emile Holman was the 33rd president of The American Association for Thoracic Surgery during the 1953-1954 presidential year. He was the second editor of *The Journal of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery* from 1957 to 1962, succeeding Evarts Graham in that position. The name of the Journal was changed in July 1959 from *The Journal of Thoracic Surgery*, reflecting the importance of the emerging specialty of cardiovascular surgery.

Holman married Ann Purdy, herself a distinguished Hopkins-trained pediatric cardiologist. They had 3 sons, Halsted, Shawn, and David, all physicians, and 9 grandchildren. Even as his physical health deteriorated, Holman's mind remained sharp, and he continued to be interested in Stanford's department of surgery, even after the move from San Francisco to Palo Alto in 1959. The Emile F. Holman Chair in Surgery, which is held by the department chair, was established in 1972. Holman died of massive upper intestinal hemorrhage on March 19, 1977.

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