



## IN MEMORIAM

---



### **Ralph Cromwell Teall, MD, 1907-2006**

RALPH TEALL LIVED A LONG LIFE and died at the age of 98. He had a full and meaningful life. We who knew him have lost a friend.

Living for such a long time has many advantages. Just think of the changes he saw. The automobile went from a "crank to start" three-peddle Model T to hybrids and SUVs. Aviation from canvas covered, wood framed novelties to the space shuttle. Communications from the crank operated party lines to the ubiquitous cell phones. Movies from silent films projected on a sheet attached to the wall of a building to home movie theaters with surround sound.

In medicine, the development of insulin and antibiotics. Smallpox was eradicated. Polio and diphtheria controlled. Diagnoses went from trying to evaluate a coating on the tongue to the use of autoanalyzers and exotic lab tests. Xrays from low voltage machines and "wet" films to CAT Scans, MRIs and digital imaging. Ralph's was quite a century. Will the present one be as productive?

There is a downside to a long life. By the time you make your departure, most of the friends and associates who knew you during your active, productive and dynamic phase have moved away or departed themselves.

Make no mistake, Ralph's life was active, productive and dynamic.

He was born in Gardena, California, but was raised in Madera. The family home in Gardena was near the oil fields so he became interested in the oil industry. This interest stayed with him even after the move to Madera.

Ralph was very intelligent. He was valedictorian of his graduating class in 1924. He was on their very successful debating team and I suspect this had something to do with how he was able to project his voice so well when addressing an audience.

He did not recall taking any I.Q. tests, but he and a few other high school students who had been singled out for their intelligence were selected for a long range study to see what happens to gifted children. Ralph said he never heard the results of the study.

After graduation he went to U.C. at Berkeley, still interested in an engineering degree related to the oil industry. After a year he switched to pre-med. He was Phi Beta Kappa at Berkeley, graduating in 1928. He then went on to medical school at UC San Francisco, finishing in 1932. His Internship was served at Highland Hospital in Oakland.

Sacramento was his next stop and he took a two year residency program in general medicine at Sutter Hospital. A few of the doctors who were helpful to him at that time were Junius Harris, Gus Wilson and Ted Rulison, Sr..

Ralph was encouraged to go into surgery so he started a surgical residency at the Mayo Clinic. After two years he decided to return to California. When he returned he worked at various clinics before establishing his own office.

He was doing well in spite of the depression when World War II came along. Ralph wanted to participate so he joined the Army Reserves in 1940. True to form, he was called to active duty, not in the army but the Army Air Force. He was commissioned as a captain and put in charge of small hospitals scattered around the country.

On one memorable occasion a very high ranking Air Force general came in, stating it was time for his annual flight physical. Ralph recalls it was Curtis LeMay. When the general asked for the results, Ralph told him he didn't pass and that he couldn't be certified to fly. The general was not too happy and explained in no uncertain terms that Ralph's findings were being interpreted incorrectly and should be modified. Ralph must have looked at the general's shining stars and his somewhat duller captain's bars and decided - what the heck - and approved the general for flight duty!

As the war went on in the Pacific, Ralph was feeling left out, so he got himself transferred to the Guam-Saipan area. B-29s were making their runs to Tokyo so he hitched a ride on one to see what it was like. On the way back they ran low on fuel and had to land on Iwo Jima.

After the war he returned to Sacramento and set up a practice in family medicine. It was then that he started to make a name for himself in the area of medical politics. Sacramento had always been a leader and an important part of the practice of medicine in California since our medical society was formed in 1868.

He was elected to the California Medical Association (CMA) House of Delegates and later as a Councilor for the 11th District. In the 50s and 60s, our medical society meetings were held in the Sutter auditorium. As Councilor he was asked to give a report on the happenings at the CMA. Ralph would oblige and with his booming, rich baritone voice would fill us in on some background then discuss the present situation and finally speculate on what was to come.

He served on many committees and commissions locally, statewide and nationally. He was our President in 1949, CMA President in 1949 and Vice President of the AMA in 1971.

Ralph and others were very interested in serving the health care needs of the community. An insurance plan called California Physician's Service was in place. Glenn Pope, Abe Berman and Ralph spent many hours trying to improve it. One of the problems was the confusion in administering it. Claims for service were not uniform. Ralph was medical director at California Western States Life Insurance Company in 1958 and became interested in a Relative Value Study developed by Riverside physicians. Ralph took the proposal to the AMA and the RVS, though not meant to be a fee schedule, soon became one. The RVS was later scotched by the Federal Trade Commission. In the meantime he and Dan Kilroy were working on a health insurance program for the indigent. This developed into the present day Medi-Cal program.

So as you can see, Ralph was a "giant" in his chosen profession. The community and profession benefited by his being here. He has done his work and we are grateful. His last few years were in failing health but now he is at peace. It is now time to say goodbye and thank him for a job well done.

- James O. Farley, MD