



History of Canadian Anaesthesia

Roderick Angus Gordon (b. 1911)

After World War II, for a whole generation of anaesthetists the name of "Rod" epitomized Canadian anaesthesia. This sketch will remind them of the great contributions to our specialty made by Dr. Roderick Angus Gordon, and it will introduce him to those who never had the good fortune to work with him.

Professor Emeritus R.A. Gordon, CD, LTCM, BSc, MD, FACA, FRCPC, FFARCS, FWACS, was born on August 2, 1911, near Watrous, in Saskatchewan. After learning the violin and completing high school locally at age 16, he enrolled in the Toronto Conservatory of Music, becoming a Licentiate in 1931. During the Depression a career as a concert violinist seemed impossible, and he chose medicine instead. Playing the violin supported him in medical school, and he duly graduated from the University of Toronto (AOA) in 1937.

At the Toronto General Hospital a one-year rotating internship (unpaid) was followed by a year as Senior Intern in Anaesthesia (at \$75 per month), one of only three such appointments in all of Toronto. He completed his anaesthesia training in June 1939 – at a time when only three anaesthetists in Toronto could intubate! Rod married Ruth Anne Breithaupt, a nurse, joined the anaesthetic staff at Christie Street Veterans' Hospital, and hoped to "live happily ever after." However, war soon loomed, and a phone call at 0200 on September 1, 1939 "invited" him to report, at 0900 the same day, to the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps to become an army anaesthetist. Overseas, he served first with the Fifteenth Canadian General Hospital and, from 1941 to 1945, with the Basingstoke Neurological and Plastic Surgery Hospital. After the war, Rod remained in the RCAMC (Reserve), becoming a full colonel in 1949.

Rod Gordon's productive medical academic career began while he was in the army, when the *British Medical Journal*, in 1941, published his description of an apparatus for the intermittent or continuous injection of thiopentone. This paper was the first of nearly 90 publications and editorials. Back in Canada, his academic career was outstanding: he was immediately appointed to the departments of anaesthesia at the Toronto General Hospital

and the University of Toronto, and, in the space of just 16 yr, he rose to become Anaesthetist-in-Chief and Chairman, respectively, at those two institutions. In that brief span, an academic revolution had begun, in which Rod Gordon played a larger part – a revolution that saw an abundance of full-time staff appointments, extended training periods, fellowships and research programmes. All this continued unabated during a second 16-yr period, in which half of all Canadian trainees had been produced at the time of Dr. Gordon's retirement in 1977 as Professor Emeritus.

Rod Gordon is most widely known for his work with the Canadian Anaesthetists' Society. He joined Council in 1944, representing service anaesthetists overseas. In due course he became Secretary-Treasurer (in 1946), Vice-President (1961) and President (1963). He held these posts in a period of rapid progress in medicine in general and in anaesthesia in particular. Progress was accompanied by problems, however – low academic standards and training, the employment of nurse anaesthetists and of salaried anaesthetists, inadequate remuneration, and the lack of specialist recognition were some of these – but mature and considered guidance was always available from the Secretary-Treasurer's office to overcome these problems and many others.

One of Rod Gordon's greatest contributions was initiated in 1954. Two years earlier, papers presented at the annual meeting were published as the Society's *Proceedings*, with Rod as editor. In 1954 the *Proceedings* were expanded into the *Canadian Anaesthetists' Society Journal*, under the same able editorship. He continued as editor until 1982, his success being obvious to all.

Two other notable contributions were his founding the Canadian Anaesthetists' Mutual Accumulating Fund in 1957, which was the second mutual fund to be launched in Canada, and his helping to found, in 1965, the Society's Anaesthesia Training and Relief Fund, a charitable organization designed to enhance anaesthesia in developing countries. To these projects Rod gave unstintingly of his time, wisdom and energy.

In view of all these achievements it was entirely ap-

propriate that Dr. Gordon, in 1969, be awarded the Society's Gold Medal for outstanding service. Equally appropriate was the recent establishment of the R.A. Gordon Career Research Award, which will rightly perpetuate the name of this outstanding Canadian anaesthetist.

Not surprisingly, Rod Gordon's administrative ability and towering status as anaesthesia representative has also been recognized by the medical profession at large. He has served on the Executive of the Ontario Medical Association (1947-1961), the Canadian Medical Association (1950-55), the Defense Medical Association (1947-62), the World Federation of Societies of Anaesthesiologists (1955-72), the Academy of Anesthesia (1957-61), and the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (1953-68).

During the year in which the Canadian Anaesthetists' Society is celebrating its 50th anniversary, it is fitting to salute a Canadian anaesthetist who has made such an immense contribution to the Society and to the success of our specialty.

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