

Dr Charles Rowland ("Rowley") B Richards

The degree of Doctor of Medicine (honoris causa) was conferred upon Dr Charles Rowland B Richards at the Medicine ceremony held at 4.00pm on 24 November 2006.



The Chancellor the Hon Justice Kim Santow conferring the honorary degree upon Dr Richards, *photo, copyright Memento Photography.*

Citation

Chancellor, I have the honour to present Charles Rowland Bromley Richards for admission to the degree of Doctor of Medicine, *honoris causa*.

Rowley Richards, was born in Sydney in 1916 and grew up in Summer Hill. Both his parents were profoundly deaf and the way they overcame daily challenges had a strong influence on their young son.

Rowley graduated MBBS from the University of Sydney in 1939. He enlisted in the AIF as a medical officer and served in the Malayan campaign of 1941-42 before being imprisoned by the Japanese following the fall of Singapore in 1942. He was a prisoner of war in Changi Prison before being sent to the infamous Burma Railway. Later he was sent to a slave labour camp in the north of Japan, surviving shipwreck on the way, a harsh winter and infection with smallpox just prior to liberation.

On return to Australia, when these things became known, he was Mentioned in Dispatches for his service as a regimental medical officer whilst a prisoner of war. In 1969 he was awarded an MBE for his services in war and peace. He also earned the Efficiency Decoration. Since his return he has supported other survivors of Japanese prisoner of war camps and their families through his role as President of the 2/15th Field Regiment Association, and his long service as president of the 8th Australian Division Association.

On his return to Australia, Rowley became a general practitioner in Seaforth in Sydney. He was one of the first members of The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners which was established 50 years ago, and he was one of the first general practitioners in Australia to attain Fellowship of the RACGP by assessment.

He later worked in occupational medicine and sports medicine and was Foundation Fellow of both the Australian College of Occupational Medicine and the Australian Sports Medicine Federation, and was awarded Fellowship of the American College of Sports Medicine. He was medical advisor to the Australian Olympic Rowing teams for the Mexico City Games in 1968 and the 1972 Munich Games.

Rowley was Honorary Medical Director of the Sydney City to Surf Fun Run between 1977 and 1998, and since 1998 has served as Honorary Medical Consultant. In 1993 he was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for his service to sports medicine and the City to Surf.

Rowley served as New South Wales Chairman and Vice President of the St John Ambulance Association

and in 1981 was made a Knight of St John in recognition of his long service. In 2003 he was awarded the Australian Centenary Medal for service to the sick and injured through the St John Ambulance Association.

Rowley now lives in Beacon Hill in Sydney. Throughout his working life Rowley has combined his work as a skilled and respected general practitioner with lifelong voluntary commitment to Australian sport, to the well being of Australian veterans and their families, and to the welfare of the whole community through his work with the St John Ambulance Association.

At the age of 89 years Rowley published his memoirs. *A Doctor's War*, published by HarperCollins, provides a graphic and very moving account of his experiences as a doctor while imprisoned in Changi, on the Burma Railway, and as a slave labourer in Japan. In his memoirs he writes about his growth as a doctor and as a human being through his terrible war time experiences.

Now in his nineties, Rowley is one of the last survivors of the 42 Australian doctor-prisoners of war from the Burma Railway in World War II. The dedication of this remarkable small group of Australian doctors is now part of our nation's proud history and this group includes Weary Dunlop, Albert Coates and others who saved the lives of many men under the most terrible circumstances. Rowley's own experiences as a prisoner of war clearly had a profound effect on his future life and his long and distinguished record of voluntary service to the people of our nation.

The conferring of this honorary degree on Rowley not only honours his personal commitment but also the memory of the medical graduates of his generation who served our nation at a time of peril with great distinction and who then went on to contribute at the highest level to the health and well being of the Australian people through professional and voluntary service.

Chancellor, I have great pleasure in presenting to you, for admission to the degree of Doctor of Medicine (honoris causa), general practitioner, sports medicine physician, community leader, humanitarian, and author, Charles Rowland Bromley Richards, and I invite you to confer the degree upon him.