Obituary

HOWARD CHRISTIAN NAFFZIGER
1884-1961

In the rough and stimulating gold mining atmosphere of Nevada City, California, Howard Naffziger was born of hardy family, educated during a colorful early period of his native state, and grew into an international figure of prominence in surgery in our more complex society without losing the common touch of his heritage.

A lean and lanky youth when he entered the halls of the University of California, he earned there, in Berkeley and San Francisco, his bachelor, master and doctoral degrees. From that time in 1909 to the time of his death in March 1961, his life’s enthusiastic pursuit of excellence in medical training was persistent and fruitful.

His interest stimulated by Dr. Camillus Bush, Dr. Naffziger pressed the advantage of his own educational background by entering the unique surgical program of William Halsted and his brilliant associate, Harvey Cushing. The splendid teaching tradition at the Johns Hopkins Hospital catalyzed not only a devotion to surgery of the nervous system but also a dedication to improving surgical instruction in the western United States. His single-mindedness of purpose in this regard led to his being called to the Professorship and Chairmanship of the Department of Surgery in his own institution in 1929, a position from which he resigned in 1947 to head the first separate department of Neurological Surgery in the University of California.

In the period before and after World War I, several thousand miles from the nearest eastern neurosurgical centers, his own specialty of interest, neurological surgery, was born and flourished under his guidance; yet all the while he possessed a probing cognizance of the general field of surgery. An index of the catholicity of his interest in surgery and its teaching is the fact that as Professor of Surgery he implemented the first program of formal surgical residency training west of the
papers on the cerebrospinal-fluid circulation, neurophysiology and produced investigations and expression was emphasized by his writings such that injuries of the jugular foramen. The role of the paralyzed swallowing mechanism after the syndrome now carries his name. Stimulus from World War I onward and he contributed to the treatment of the devastating effects of the successful treatment of subdural collections, among which was The Pacific Coast Surgical Association. Also it will be noted as a tribute to the value of jugular compression in eliciting spinal nerve-root syndromes. His writings on the subjects of tumors of the spine and brain, surgery for pain, and inflammation of the central nervous system as well as the numerous reviews, editorials, letters, war-time bulletins, biographical sketches, and dissertations on medical education were direct and lucid products of an active intellect.

One of Dr. Naffziger's guiding sentiments was expressed when he would ask of a colleague who was slowing his pace, "What are you saving yourself for?" In this spirit service was part of his life. Not only did he serve with the Allied Expeditionary Forces as a surgeon in France in World War I, but he responded in the second war as a member of the Office of Scientific Research and Development and a member of the National Research Council, traveling among the allied armies to teach the surgical lessons learned early in the war. Many will remember his participation in the war surgery handbook on neurosurgical matters, a guide which was reminiscent of the splendid manual of neurosurgery to which he gave so much effort in World War I.

Although he was a man to work in his own country, he also was chairman of the Unitarian Service Committee's Medical Mission to post-war Poland in 1946 and to the Philippine Republic two years later. He rendered further aid as a surgical consultant in the Korean conflict. His world travels gave opportunities to advise and teach, opportunities which he rarely lost.

As a distinguished academic surgeon Howard Naffziger was honored at home and abroad where his Master-Surgeon status devolved in some measure from such writings as his elegant descriptions of exposure of the posterior cranial fossa and techniques of pituitary-fossa operations. His imaginative, effective, and enduring contributions to the treatment of the devastating effects of progressive exophthalmos of endocrine origin was born of a surgeon's enlightened, dedicated quest to use all his skills to relieve a suffering patient. The broad effect of these contributions on orbital surgery has been a memorial to him.

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