

Sir Frank Kingsley Norris

Frank Kingsley Norris was born at Lilydale on June 25, 1893. His early education was at Melbourne Grammar School, after which he enrolled as a medical student at Melbourne University in 1910. He had completed four years of his medical course when the First World War broke out, whereupon he abandoned the course and enlisted as a trooper in the First Australian Light Horse Field Ambulance. He served initially in Egypt but later was ordered back to Australia to finish his medical education. He graduated MB BS from the University of Melbourne in 1917 but by the time he had completed his Residency year the war was over. He obtained his M.D higher degree in medicine in 1919.

He was a Resident in 1918 at the old Melbourne Hospital and subsequently at the Children's Hospital in Carlton. He was then employed as Medical Superintendent of the Children's Hospital. Between the two World Wars, he worked in Private Practice as a specialist paediatrician and as an Honorary Paediatrician to the Alfred Hospital.

In 1923 he enlisted as a junior officer in the Cavalry Field Ambulance Unit and was in charge of medical services at the official opening of the Commonwealth Parliament in Canberra in 1927. In 1935 he was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel as Officer Commanding 2nd Field Ambulance following Colonel WWS Johnston.

On the outbreak of the Second World War he was appointed Assistant Director of Medical Services of the Seventh Division, with the rank of Colonel, serving in North Africa, Palestine and Syria, until in 1941 with the advance of the Japanese through the Pacific, the Division was recalled to Australia for redeployment to New Guinea. From 1943 to 1946 Norris was Deputy Director of Medical Services, 1st Australian Corps, with the rank of Brigadier. He was decorated with the Distinguished Service Order in 1941 and the Efficiency Decoration in 1943. Near the end of the war he was hospitalized and returned to Australia. A few weeks later he was discharged from the Army as medically unfit.

Fit again at the war's end he was appointed Director of the Melbourne Permanent Postgraduate Medical Committee, and in this capacity travelled widely to investigate medical postgraduate facilities overseas as part of the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme for returned servicemen and women.

In 1948, he returned to the Army as Director-General of Medical Services with the rank of Major-General. He held this office until his retirement in 1955. He was responsible for all Australian Army medical units in Australia, Japan, and later, Korea. The Government required him to undertake a world trip to study medical services in other countries. His report made a number of recommendations, including the setting up of an Army School of Health. It was set up in a former Guest House at Healesville, Victoria, renamed "The Norris Barracks" in 1983, just a few weeks after his ninetieth birthday. A few years later the Army relocated Norris Barracks to the Portsea Quarantine Station in Victoria.

He became a member of the British Medical Association in 1917, was a member of the Victorian Branch Council from 1932 to 1954, and President of the Branch in 1948. He was a Director of the British Medical Agency from 1947, and Chairman of Directors, British Medical Insurance Company. He was Medical Adviser to the Commonwealth Department of Civil Defence from

1955 to 1961. He was a Member of the Medical Board of Victoria, President of the Medico-Legal Society of Victoria in 1938/39 and President of the Australian Post-Graduate Federation in Medicine in 1953. In 1965 he was made a Fellow of the recently formed Australian Medical Association, in recognition of his outstanding services to medicine.

He was Honorary Consulting Paediatrician, Alfred Hospital, Melbourne, from 1948 to 1955. He was appointed Honorary Physician to King George VI in 1948 and from 1952 to Queen Elizabeth II. He was an Honorary Fellow of the College of Nursing of Australia. In his time, he was President of the Royal Empire Society 1948-55; President of the Good Neighbour Council of Victoria 1958-1963; Chairman of the College of Nursing of Australia 1948-1957; President of the Alcoholic Foundation of Victoria; Vice President, Old People's Welfare Council and actively involved with the Victorian Society for Crippled Children and Adults.

From 1948 he was an ex-officio member of the National Council of the Australian Red Cross Society because of his position as DGMS until 1954, after which he was a co-opted member until 1969, thereby serving on its National Council for more than twenty years. He served on the National Blood Transfusion Committee from 1950 to 1955 and on various Victorian Red Cross Appeals committees between 1951 and 1958. He received the Long Service medal in 1969 and in the same year was made an Honorary Life Member of the Australian Red Cross Society.

He served St John Ambulance Brigade, notably as Commissioner for Victoria. He began his career in St John in 1952, directly on staff of Victoria, almost immediately appointed Deputy Commissioner. That year he was admitted as an Officer of the Order of St John. When the Commissioner, Sir William Johnston, was promoted to National Headquarters Staff as Chief Surgeon, Sir Kingsley became Commissioner of Victoria District in 1956, and that year was promoted to Commander of the Order. He served as Commissioner for three years until he, too, was promoted to National Headquarters.

Sir Kingsley was a member of St John Council for Victoria for 20 years 1949-68. He was Chairman in 1950-51 and 1963-68. He was a Vice-President from 1959-70. He was made a Knight of Grace of the Order of St John of Jerusalem in 1959. On 1 July 1959 Sir Kingsley was promoted to the post of Chief Surgeon on the Australian Headquarters Staff. He held this position until 1962 when he became Chief Commissioner on the death of Brigadier Johnston. He served in this role until his retirement in 1969.

Many honours came his way: the Distinguished Service Order in 1941; Commander in the Military Division of the Order of the British Empire in 1943; the Efficiency Decoration 1943, Companion of the Order of the Bath in 1952; and, in 1957, he was created a Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire. Sir Kingsley Norris died on May 1, 1984, and was buried at Box Hill cemetery with full military Honours on May 7, 1984.

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Main source: F K Norris, "No Memory for Pain", Heinemann, 1970.

Draft by Allan Mawdsley

