

## **DESMOND WILLIAM GEORGE FARIS (1901-1957). C.B.E.,**

**Hon.LL.D. (Malaya), M.B., B.S. (Lond.), M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P. (Eng.), D.P.H. (Eng.). - Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, and Vice-Principal, University of Malaya.**

*“There can be few who cannot recall to mind the picture of him, crowned with an ancient straw hat, bustling about the camp and poking into all sorts of corners at all times of the day.”*

*British Medical Journal (1957).*

Desmond William George Faris (1901-1957) [Epsom College 1914-1918] was the son of Dr George Faris of Woolwich, South London. He received his medical education at the London Hospital, graduating M.B., B.S. in 1924. Two years later he entered the Malayan Medical Service as a health officer and within a few years was appointed Chief Health Officer at Singapore. During the Second World War he was interned by the Japanese in Changi prisoner of war camp, where his efforts to maintain the health of his fellow prisoners were notably successful. “Nothing showed forth the man more than his willingness to undertake the thankless task of watching over the health of his fellow inmates at Changi Prison. Much as he hated it, he undertook duties which demanded unceasing vigilance, endless improvisation, and most distasteful of all, constant and close contact with our Japanese guards. That we eventually came through that period without experiencing any of the many epidemics which so easily could have been disastrous was in no small measure due to his work and constant endeavour.” In 1946, he was awarded the *C.B.E.*, the citation reading: “for services during internment.”

Prior to the founding of the University of Malaya in 1949, he was Principal of the King Edward VII College of Medicine at Singapore. The University came into being as a result of the merger of King Edward VII College with Raffles College, a union that was in many ways the brain child of Desmond Faris. Following its foundation, he was appointed the first Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, a position that he held until 1956. At the same time he held the position of Vice-Principal, University of Malaya, and University Lecturer in Public Health. In his obituary it was written: “he took over the duties of Dean of the Faculty of Medicine when the University of Malaya was founded, and in those early formative years gave devoted service. It was no easy task, for there was no well-drilled machinery which merely had to be kept running. Each day brought new problems, for which there were no rules or precedence. To Faris, with his scrupulous regard for detail, his ceaseless questing for the right answer, and his desire to build up an efficient administration, it was a constant source of worry and strain. His work was not in the glamorous light of the public eye, but what he did for the faculty and the university will be of lasting merit. He well deserved the award of the honorary LL.D which he received at the time of his retirement, and he was proud of such a distinction.”