Ronald Rutherford Elvidge
2 March 1923–30 March 2019

Ron Elvidge, obstetrician, gynaecologist and All Black captain died recently, aged 96.

Ron attended John McGlashan College in Dunedin. There he was Head Prefect in years 1939 and 1940. He was swimming, boxing and fives champion, runner up in cross country, broke numerous athletics records and was a member of the first XV and first XI at the age of 14.

In the following years he pursued and tried to balance both rugby and medical studies, sometimes with difficulty. During the war he was a member of the Otago Medical Corps. He gained a NZ University Rugby Blue.

From 1942 to 1950 he played 30 games for Otago, for a time captaining the team that held the Ranfurly Shield for 18 games. Thus earning his god-like status as reported in the Otago Daily Times. “When Elvidge walks down the street he turns more heads than Bing Crosby would”. He also played 19 games, including nine tests for the All Blacks, as captain on seven occasions.

His most memorable game, an event that would appear to come straight from the “Boys Own” magazine, was the third test against the British Lions in 1950, an era when replacements were not allowed. The All Blacks were trailing 3-0, and were down to 14 players when Ron left the field with a serious shoulder injury and a deep cut to his head. “With his arm hanging loose and experiencing great pain” he returned to the field playing in a roving role. He received the ball, dived through a fierce tackle and scored a try that won the match and the series for New Zealand. That was his last game of rugby.

He graduated MB ChB in 1948, did his house surgeon years in Dunedin, including time in Sir Bernard Dawson’s Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, thus sparking his interest for specialisation. He enjoyed participating in the hospital culture even to the extent that in the role of Father Christmas he drove his sleigh, a baby Austin car, around the ground floor wards, but had to walk the upper floors with his bag of goodies.
In 1950 he went to England to begin specialist training in O&G, with residencies in, Shrewsbury, Edgeware General Hospitals and Oxford. There he was greatly influenced by the renowned New Zealanders, John Stallworthy and Bill Hawksworth. He passed his MRCOG in 1956.

Ron married Prue Browne and in 1956 they returned to New Zealand where Tim, James and Jo were born. He joined the oldest Auckland O&G specialist practice with Tom Plunkett, Alastair Macfarlane and Bruce Grieve. Obstetrics was Ron’s forte. Within a very short time he had the busiest practice in Auckland; every expectant father wanted his child delivered in the large, safe hands of the ex-All Black captain.

He also obtained a visiting position at St Helen’s Hospital and a short time later at National Women’s Hospital he joined the “B” team with visiting specialists, Bruce Grieve, Bernie Kyle and Ian Ronayne. He enjoyed and was proud of his team at NWH and contributed to postgraduate teaching. Ron performed his private gynaecological surgery at Rawhiti Hospital in Mt Eden where he learned laparoscopy skills in the late 1970s.

In the mid-1970s Ron gave the writer half of his obstetric practice and so started another long happy association. Many families much appreciated the care and attention the partners gave to arranging adoptions of babies born in their practice.

Ron became a Fellow of the RCOG 1972, served on the College Council 1976–79, and apart from that involvement he strenuously avoided hospital politics and committees. He had other quirks too, such as writing abbreviations in the margins of his clinical record—most not appropriate for publication. A favourite one was UTC—‘Uncle Tom Cobley and all’—referring to the growing demand for the father to be present at the delivery of his baby.

Forty years of a new happy life started in 1978 when he and Dawn Ulrich married. Three years later they moved to a lifestyle block and set up a kiwifruit orchard but Ron continued in practice in the city until retirement in 1988. Then more time was given to social golf and bridge, community activities, U3A groups studying cosmology, geology and world religions, meeting old colleagues, enjoying a Saturday rugby match and holidaying at his bach in the Bay of Islands.

His was a life to be celebrated, a life of achievement and courage, generosity and humility.

Author information:
This obituary was written by Ron Jones and Dawn Elvidge.

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