

In memoriam:

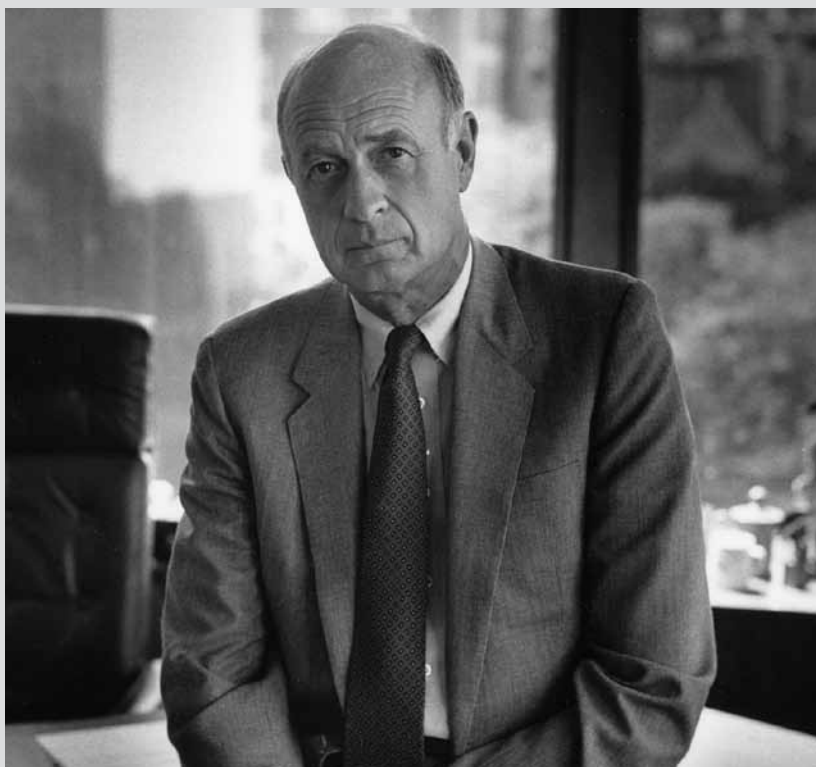
## Former ACS Director Paul A. Ebert, MD, FACS

by *Constantine Mavroudis, MD, FACS*

Paul Allen Ebert, MD, FACS, the eighth Director of the American College of Surgeons, died in the early hours of April 21, 2009, in Sacramento, CA, quite unexpectedly of an acute myocardial infarction at 76 years of age. His entire life was filled with selfless, virtuous acts, befitting the hero that he was. He was the modest athlete of fairy tales, always eschewing the limelight and giving praise to his teammates. He displayed the equanimity of the thoughtful surgeon, and he always made an effort to relate to his patients. He lived the ethical life and became a beacon of light for those who knew him. He was a towering figure of a man, a virtual giant upon whose shoulders stood a generation of trainees, colleagues, admirers, sports fans, philosophers, friends, and family members. He could have done anything, it seemed, which made his premature passing all the more poignant and stark.

### ***Academic and athletic excellence***

Dr. Ebert was born August 11, 1932, in Columbus, OH. He was one of those gifted people who excelled in everything he did. As a student at The Ohio State University, he was a forward and center on the school's basketball team and a pitcher



Dr. Ebert

on the baseball team. In basketball, he was first team All Big Ten and the team's most valuable player every year that he played at Ohio State, a feat that culminated in All-America honors as a senior (see left photo, page 55). In baseball, he had a career 21–8 record leading his team in strikeouts

and wins every year that he played, which earned him consensus All-America selection in his senior year (see center photo, page 55). Dr. Ebert was recruited by the New York Giants and Pittsburgh Pirates to play professional baseball, and for a few moments he entertained the idea, until it



COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETIC DEPARTMENT

Dr. Ebert playing basketball at OSU.



COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETIC DEPARTMENT

Dr. Ebert playing baseball at OSU.



Dr. Ebert with Dr. Dunphy (right).

became clear that he could not play professional baseball and attend medical school at the same time—although he was intrigued by the idea. Professional baseball was put aside for loftier goals.

Dr. Ebert enrolled at The Ohio State University Medical School, during which time he married his high school sweetheart, Louise Joyce Parks, on September 4, 1954. Together they were to share the next 55 years in constant companionship as parents, grandparents, and adopted family to their numerous trainees. Dr. Ebert graduated from The Ohio State University Medical School in 1958.

Robert Zollinger, MD, FACS, the chair of surgery at Ohio State and 42nd President of the American College of Surgeons,

recommended Dr. Ebert to Alfred Blalock, MD, FACS, the 35th President of the American College of Surgeons, of Johns Hopkins University, where he excelled in a program that was to foster some of the great surgeons and educators of the twentieth century. After two years as a senior assistant surgeon at the National Heart Institute, he became associate professor of surgery at Duke University where David Sabiston, MD, FACS, the 66th President of the American College of Surgeons, was establishing his now-famous residency training program.

Dr. Ebert's stature as a surgeon and virtuous individual grew rapidly. From 1971 to 1975, he served as chairman of the department of surgery at Cornell University Medical

Center, New York, NY. He was 39 years old at the time; some of his residents were older than he was. Yet he was able to form a stellar training program, due in large part to his leadership qualities and his commitment to surgical education.

In 1975, Dr. Ebert was named chairman at the University of California–San Francisco, where he succeeded J. Englebert Dunphy, MD, FACS, the 44th President of the American College of Surgeons (see right photo, this page).

### ***Service to the College***

In November 1986, he assumed the Directorship of the American College of Surgeons and served in that role until his retirement at the end of June 1998. During his tenure as Director of the College, Dr.

Ebert oversaw an explosion of expanded member services, which served the growing interests of ACS members in education, new technology, and governance. New challenges in health care delivery necessitated greater representation in Washington, DC, and interaction with the U.S. Congress (see photo, this page). As a spokesman for the College, Dr. Ebert effectively advocated for our patients and our profession.

His vision for the future resulted in a new home for the American College of Surgeons. He led a team that negotiated the terms of a new building, which ensured a permanent home for the College and made possible the administrative offices for The Society of Thoracic Surgeons, The American Board of Thoracic Surgery, the Southern Thoracic Surgical Association, the Society for Vascular Surgery, the American Association for the Surgery of Trauma, the Thoracic Surgery Directors Association, and the Eastern Association for the Surgery of Trauma. His monthly "As I see it" columns for the *Bulletin of the American College of Surgeons* were, and continue to be, thoughtful analyses of current events and College activities, as well as models for future directions.

### ***A teacher and leader***

Dr. Ebert established surgical laboratories wherever he went. Some of his most important contributions to surgery include the initial experiments that introduced cardioplegia



W. Gerald Austen, MD, FACS (left), and Dr. Ebert testifying before Congress in 1991.

to clinical cardiothoracic surgery, neonatal and infant open heart surgery, development of clinical techniques that dramatically improved survival for patients with truncus arteriosus, and establishing the pioneering techniques that led to neonatal application of the arterial switch operation for transposition of the great arteries. He authored or co-authored 198 manuscripts in peer-reviewed journals, which are a record of achievement that speak for his genius and innovative talents.

He was a popular visiting professor, mostly for his modest style and the perspicacious manner in which he solved clinical problems. Everyone wanted to know how Paul would approach this clinical dilemma or that complex sur-

gical challenge. He could give advice without criticism, he could understand the conditions underlying the patient's problem, and he could express a solution in simple terms with clear goals. He was a masterful teacher whose efforts in the operating room were aimed at ensuring that the trainee could perform the operation without his help. The success of this teaching style has been demonstrated by the success of his trainees and subsequently by their trainees. There can be no greater testimony to his memory than the living manifestation of his teaching methods learned by present and future generations (see photo, page 57).

Paul Ebert touched a generation of colleagues, students, and patients from all parts



Dr. Ebert (front row, second from left) and a group of his residents in January 2007, in San Diego, CA, where they met in association with the annual meeting of the Society of Thoracic Surgeons. Dr. Ebert gave an informal talk on his recollections of “the Blalock years” at Johns Hopkins University.

of the world. One was struck immediately by his humanity, character, and stature. He was gentle, polite, and firm in his convictions. He could and did argue effectively, but in the end, no matter what the outcome, the experience was fruitful, engaging, and educational. It was amazing that one with so many strong ideas and committed visions could be loved by so many people. Perhaps his most noble of traits was that he could “get out of himself” to recognize the needs and concerns of others. He was a very unselfish man, and he led by example.

### ***Offices and awards***

Besides serving as president of the American Association for Thoracic Surgery, Dr. Ebert was elected president of the American College of Cardiology, the Association of Academic Surgery, the Society of University Surgeons, and the Western Thoracic Surgical Association.

In 1989, he was the recipient of the Theodore Roosevelt Award, the highest honor that the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) may confer on an individual, awarded to a distinguished citizen of national reputation based on outstanding life achievement.

Other awardees include Dwight Eisenhower; Jesse Owens; George H.W. Bush; Ronald Reagan; Denton Cooley, MD, FACS; and Roger Staubach. Dr. Ebert wasn't a wallflower. In his speech to the NCAA commemorating his coveted prize, he noted, “Certainly pressures today on our entire society have made many fantasize life with the use of drugs—and athletes have not been immune to these temptations. Stresses and strains on the college athlete may well be greater than on the ordinary student and the temptations greater and the feeling of indestructibility

by the athlete perpetuated. Combine this with the more recent and more common use of steroid compounds to increase performance and body size and the pressures upon this organization [NCAA] have further amplified. Yet through these unpleasant and certainly adverse types of events, the NCAA continues to strengthen the bonds between academia and athletics.” This speech took place in 1989, years before the drug problem became overt in professional and college sports.

### ***A natural***

Everyone loved to talk to Paul. It seemed like he had a solution for everything. Some people who knew him recommended that he run for the U.S. Senate or President of the U.S. These were not idle or groundless suggestions. He didn't take these comments seriously, however, and in fact spurned the ideas until someone mentioned sports. He then became animated—almost as if he were playing again. One could see the excitement, subtle as it was, in his eyes. He was concentrating on striking out the batter. He was about to drive for a lay up. It was easy to see why he was such an accomplished surgeon—he had the hand-eye coordination of a two-sport All-American. He didn't have a favorite pitch in baseball or a preferential shot in basketball. He could beat the opposing team with whatever pitch or shot that was necessary. It was like that in surgery. He was just a natural, the likes of which will not come again soon.

He is survived by Louise

Joyce Parks, his spouse of 55 years; his children, Leslie Ebert Buhlman, Michael Ebert, and Julie Ebert-McQuillan; and his grandchildren, Holly, Rudy, Claire, and Paul Buhlman, and Danyon Ebert-McQuillan.

In the end, history will remember Paul Ebert for the Renaissance man that he was: scholar, quintessential surgeon, investigator, athlete of legendary proportions, and committed teacher. His legacy will be recreated every day by the scores of “Ebertisms” that have been propagated over the years. Anecdotes like, “If you

don't get into the right atrium at least once during a redo dissection, you are moving too slow (sic)” or “You could have done that better” never die. His family will remember him for his love, affection, candor, and unconditional devotion. Those individuals who worked with him will remember his virtues, humanity, humor, and sensitivity. We will all miss him.

*Dr. Mavroudis is Ross Professor of Surgery and chairman, pediatric and congenital heart surgery, Cleveland Clinic/Lerner School of Medicine, Cleveland, OH.*

## **ACS Career Opportunities**

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An integrated network of dozens of the most prestigious health care associations.

#### **Residents:**

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- Post your resume, free of charge, where it will be visible to thousands of health care employers nationwide. You can post confidentially or openly—depending on your preference.
- Receive e-mail notification of new job postings.
- Track your current and past activity, with toll-free access to personal assistance.

Contact [phaar@facs.org](mailto:phaar@facs.org) for more information.

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