

Dr. Rocke Robertson

Chair of the Department of Surgery – 1959-1962



Dr. Rocke Robertson, MD

A native of British Columbia, Robertson first came to McGill in 1929 to begin studies in science. After completing his bachelor's degree, he went on to medical school, graduating at the top of his class. He did a series of medical internships, at the Montreal General Hospital and abroad, before enlisting in the army in 1940. Robertson became the commanding officer of a field surgical unit in Italy during World War II, and achieved the rank of lieutenant colonel before he returned to civilian life in 1945.

"If you look at the pattern of his career, he was a man who would come into a new job, size the place up, make the drastic changes that had to be made, and then move on to the next challenge," says Dr David Mulder, the chair of McGill's Department of Surgery, who knew Robertson as a student, a colleague and a friend.

Robertson was the founding chair of the University of British Columbia's department of surgery and later became its acting dean of medicine. "UBC had no medical school when he arrived there. He was one of the people who built UBC's faculty of medicine," says Mulder. Robertson even helped design some of UBC's medical buildings.

Robertson returned to McGill in 1959 to chair the University's Department of Surgery and became the Montreal General Hospital's chief of surgery. Among the students Robertson recruited to his department was Mulder. "He taught at the bedside, perhaps better than anyone else I've ever seen."

Mulder also credits Robertson with having a wide influence in the areas of trauma care and emergency medicine.

"His military experience in treating injured patients and in trauma procedures stayed with him. He really laid the foundation for trauma care. His writings had a major impact

throughout North America."

Robertson told his friends that he was looking for new challenges when he agreed to become McGill's principal in 1962.

Source: Daniel McCabe, McGill Reporter 1998,
<http://www.reporter-archive.mcgill.ca/Rep/r3010/rocke.html>