The profession of medicine and in particular the field of cardiology lost a gifted physician, medical educator, researcher, and author on February 12, 1999, with the death of Thomas William Mattingly at the age of 92. He died in Davidson, NC, where he had lived for the last 10 years.

His career was a multifaceted one, marked by outstanding service in cardiology in both the military and civilian communities. His low-keyed, unassuming demeanor belied a talent that led him to treat heads of state, to receive honors, and to serve in several high-profile positions. As one of the founders of the cardiology training programs of the United States Army Medical Corps, Dr Mattingly was a mentor to many young physicians and cardiologists in those programs. It was in that capacity that I first came to know him. Although he had a reputation as a disciplinarian with his trainees, he had a gentle manner with patients and colleagues and was possessed of a genuine sense of humor.

Dr Mattingly is probably best known to the public as the chief consulting cardiologist for President Eisenhower from 1953 until the president’s death in 1969. When Eisenhower had his first heart attack in 1955, Dr Mattingly led the medical team that provided day-to-day care for the president and also counseled his patient and, via news conferences, the nation as to their leader’s condition and prognosis. This information proved key in allowing the president to assess his own ability to run for a second term. Dr Mattingly treated Eisenhower during all 3 of his acute illnesses during the latter’s White House tenure and continued participating in the president’s care afterward. In his retirement, Dr Mattingly compiled a detailed medical history of President Eisenhower for the National Archives at the Eisenhower Library in Abilene, Kansas. This document has been a major resource for scholarly examinations of policy as to medical disclosures concerning the health of presidents and other elected officials.

Thomas Mattingly was born in Marbury, Md, the son of a civilian employee of the US Navy. In 1928, he graduated from Georgetown University in Washington, DC, with a BS degree, and 2 years later he received his MD degree from the same university. He joined the US Army Reserves while in medical training. After serving as an extern, intern, and resident at the Central Dispensary and Emergency Hospital (1929–1932) and completing fellowships in medicine (1932–1933) and pathology (1933–1934) at Georgetown University Hospital, he began a distinguished 24-year career in the US Army Medical Corps. From 1934 to 1942, he served at various US Army hospitals, including Walter Reed General Hospital in Washington, DC. During World War II, he served in New Guinea and the Philippines as a commander of field hospitals and as executive officer for the chief surgeon of the Armed Forces in the Southwest Pacific theater.

After the war, Dr Mattingly pursued graduate work in internal medicine at Washington University in St. Louis, Mo (1946–1947), and advanced cardiology training under the legendary Dr Paul Dudley White at Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital (1946–1947). Dr Mattingly served as Chief of Cardiology at Brooke General Hospital in San Antonio, Tex (1947–1949), and then as Chief of the Cardiovascular Disease Division (1950–1958) and Chief of the Department of Medicine (1956–1958) at Walter Reed General Hospital. Many of his major contributions to the field of cardiology were made during this period. The innovative teaching program and cardiology service that he organized and led at Walter Reed and later at the Washington Hospital Center gained worldwide recognition and graduated many distinguished physicians. I was privileged to serve my medical residency and cardiology fellowship under Dr Mattingly at Walter Reed; all who were trained by him remember him as an exceptional clinician and teacher.

In 1958, Dr Mattingly retired from the US Army as a Brigadier General. His military decorations included the Legion of Merit and the Bronze Star.

After leaving the military, Dr Mattingly served in several medical staff leadership roles, notably as Director of Education and Chairman of the Department of Medicine at Washington Hospital Center in Washington, DC (1958–1967), where he again developed outstanding teaching programs. He also served as a consultant to the US Surgeon General, the White House, and the State Department, caring for prominent US officials and foreign dignitaries around the world; in
addition, he maintained a private practice as a cardiology consultant in Washington until 1973.

In addition to his aforementioned dedication to medical education, Dr Mattingly maintained a particular interest in medical research. His pioneering work in the development of exercise testing to detect ischemic heart disease received international recognition, and in 1980, St. Luke’s Episcopal Hospital in Houston, Tex, dedicated its new Cardiac Exercise Test Facility to him. Many of his publications and teachings have influenced the field of cardiology. An erudite student of disease, he contributed a definitive review of primary diseases of the myocardium and popularized the concept of primary myocardial disease (now idiopathic cardiomyopathy) in the 1950s and 1960s, when it was poorly understood. Other important observations focused on the topics of functioning carcinoid tumor, electrocardiography to study angina, blunt and penetrating trauma to the heart and great vessels, and the natural history of coronary heart disease and its outcomes.

Dr Mattingly is also recognized as a leader affiliated with numerous professional medical and academic organizations. Most notably, he was a founding member of the Association of University Cardiologists. He was active in many other organizations, including the American Heart Association, the National Heart Institute, and the American Clinical and Climatological Society.

He was married to the former Frances E. Wannamaker, now deceased. He is survived by a daughter, Marie Weingartner; sons Thomas, Patrick, Michael, and Francis; and 7 grandchildren.

Perhaps a fitting way in which to remember Thomas Mattingly can be found in his own sentiments expressed about teaching. He commented that “I enjoyed teaching more than anything—teaching those young residents who are now running big cardiology services of their own. These things live on after you.” (Georgetown Today. September 1974).

Indeed they do. And we are the richer for it.

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