

CILENTO Sir Raphael West
MD BS. DTM&H. LLB
1893 – 1985



Sir Raphael West (Ray) Cilento, a second generation South Australian, was born on 2nd December 1893 at Jamestown, the second of five children of parents Raphael Ambrose Cilento (1865-1945), a railways stationmaster, and his wife Frances Ellen Elizabeth West. The family origin is from the Cilento Coast, part of the Campania region just south of Naples; where they owned a shipping business.

His paternal grandfather, Salvatore (1831- 1914) who in 1848, aged 17, with 2 brothers joined the 1st Italian War of Independence; they were defeated by Austria at Custoza. A death penalty was applied to the conspirators and the family smuggled the 3 boys to England in a family ship. He became a crew member of an English trader to Adelaide; on arrival in 1855 he was put ashore with typhoid and was classed as an absconder after the ship sailed. He became an Italian migrant who established a successful lightering business in St Vincent Gulf.

Raphael Cilento attended Jamestown Public School with his secondary education at Adelaide High School and then Prince Alfred College. He studied medicine at the University of Adelaide and graduated in 1918, in the same class of his wife to be Phyllis McGlew. He was awarded his MD 1922.

Cilento, after graduation, as Captain AAMC served in the AN&MEF at Rabaul where he studied and reported on Tropical Medicine. He returned to Australia with his appointment terminated on the 18th October 1919. He was deemed not eligible for War Medals even though the AN&MEF were in New Guinea as the British military occupation force until 1921.

Post war, he and his wife took a short British Colonial Service post as Consultant Physician to the Sultan of Parak in the Federated Malay State. The family returned to Queensland where he took the post of Director of the Australian Institute in Tropical Medicine at Townsville, and over the next near twenty years filled posts as Director of Public Health for the Mandated Territory of New Guinea, Director of Tropical Hygiene, Chief Quarantine Officer in Brisbane and State Director-General of

Health and Medical Services and Home Affairs. He also played a major role in the establishment of a faculty of medicine within the University of Queensland. Cilento studied Law at University of Queensland, entered the Bar and used this knowledge to bring about change as Director General of Health and Medical Services.

Cilento, aged 42 years in 1935, was awarded a Knighthood for his services to Medicine.

He advised the Commonwealth government and produced an administrative structure for one of the earliest attempts to introduce national sickness insurance into Australia. He was believed by the organised medical profession to be involved in the destruction of the powers of the honorary doctors in the public hospital system. The profession's resentment of the government's intrusion into this area was directed at Cilento personally. From 1937 to 1945 he was Hon. Professor Social and Tropical Medicine, University of Queensland.

With advent of World War II Cilento attempted to re-join the Army but was rejected by the Commonwealth Security Services because of rumours about his associations with the Italian government (the Italian government offered him the post of Director General of Health in Ethiopia in 1936 and again in 1938) and with organisations such as the Dante Alighieri Society. He was named for internment and possible for treason, however, the Commonwealth Attorney General, Dr H V Evatt, would not sign the papers. He was also not permitted to have any contact with the Australian defence forces. He was appointed as Medical Liaison Officer to US HQ Queensland and their consultant and lecturer on malaria and tropical medicine to the American Army stationed at Townsville.

Realising the need for control of control post war epidemics in Europe he was delighted to receive and accept an invitation from the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) to become, under its aegis, Lt. Colonel AAMC, malariologist in chief to the Balkans. He left Australia on 4th May 1945 and then returned to London. Commander Robert Jackson RAN, Director General UNRRA of the European Regional Office (ERO) sent him to see Montgomery's Chief of Staff, Lt General Sir Gerald Templer who arranged a meeting. Montgomery recognised in Cilento qualities indispensable to the task in hand. Cilento entered Montgomery's office on 29th August 1945 a Lieutenant Colonel and emerged, slightly dazed, with the (assimilated) rank of Major General in the British Army and Chief of Operations, United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, British Zone of Occupation. Whilst based in London he took the opportunity to visit his fellow Adelaide medical graduates; (Sir) Hugh Cairns at Oxford, (Lord) Howard Florey at Cambridge and Sir Harold Leslie Boyce, Adelaide medical student in 1915, politician, businessman and the first Dominion lord mayor of London, an old Cilento family friend. Cilento decided to resign as zone director in May 1946, and resign from UNRRA itself., He was named director of the Division of Refugees within the key UN Department of Social Affairs on 31st July 1946. He also resigned from the position of

Director General of Health and Medical Services in Queensland, on 12th August 1946, after twelve years' service.

Early in 1947 Britain, signalled to the UN its intention to withdraw from Palestine in May 1948 at the conclusion of its League of Nations mandate. In April the General Assembly set up the UN Special Commission on Palestine (UNSCOP) which recommended the partition of Palestine into Arab and Jewish states (with a separate identity for Jerusalem because it was holy to Muslims, Christians and Jews. Cilento was involved from August 1948 until December 1950 as Director of Disaster Relief and Principal Medical Officer, seconded to the UN Palestine Truce Commission. Count Bernadotte was assassinated by the Israelis' on 17th September 1948. In February 1950 Cilento resigned from UN, he wrote to the Prime Minister of Australia, R.G. Menzies, in May 1950, informing him of his resignation and giving a detailed account of his disillusionment with the UN.

Cilento was an active historical researcher, he was president of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland (1933-34, 1943-45, and 1953-68) and of the National Trust of Queensland (1966-71).

Sir Raphael West Cilento died on 15th April 1985 at Oxley, Brisbane aged 92. He was survived by his wife, and their three sons and three daughters.

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