

# Basic Detail Report

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**00044466**

**Title**

Presentation box for the Surgeon General John White Medal for Service to Health in its Many Forms.

**Date**

2007

**Medium**

Metal, leather, plastic, fabric

**Dimensions**

Overall: 28 x 110 x 92 mm, 129.95 g

**Name**

Presentation box

**History**

This medal is in recognition of the work carried out by the Australian Defence Force Health Services throughout their histories in commemoration of the first Surgeon-General to Australia, Surgeon John White RN. Air Vice-Marshal

Bruce Short AM RFD (Rtd) presented ANMM this medal to mark his retirement from the Royal Australian Air Force on 1 November 2007 and to acknowledge the services of individuals within the ADF. This particular medal was originally produced in July 2007, designed by Major General John Pearn (Rtd). The genesis of the medal is that the first Surgeon General, John White, has not been, until now, suitably recognised following his short stay in Australia. The reverse side is styled by "The Surgeon-General John White Medal, For Service to Health in its Many Forms". On the obverse, in relief sculpturing are reproductions of the five examples of nature, which were identified by John White. In the centre is the Red-bellied Black Snake, which is a stylised Aesculapian Serpent of Healing, the universal symbol of medicine and health. Above the snake is the Waratah, the Telopea, which is the State floral emblem of NSW. Below the snake is a Blue-bellied Parrot, first described by White in 1790. To the right of the snake is White's seahorse which colonises Sydney Harbour. To the left of the snake is a leaf-tailed gecko, also first described by White in 1790 but was later named in 1804 *Egernia whitii* to honour White. Within the national and international spheres, this medal is used to recognise exceptional individuals who have contributed outstanding service to health so that health and healing might flourish in its many forms. The medal is not a service or Government sponsored medal, in this respect, it is a medallion of excellence within the sphere of health services to the nation. Other recipients of the medal include: Chiefs of the ADF, Australian Museum, Australian War Memorial, Royal Australasian College of Physicians, Macleay Museum and Fisher Library at University of Sydney, National Museum of Australia, the editorial board of The Journal of the Defence

Health Service, the RAAF Museum (Point Cook) and the Head of Defence Health Service (Department of Defence). Surgeon-General John White John White was born about 1756 and trained at a time of improving ethical and clinical standards in medicine. He entered the Royal Navy on 26 June 1778 as third surgeon's mate in HMS WASP. He received his diploma of the Company of Surgeons on 2 August 1781 and in the next five years his naval service took him as far as the West Indies and India. On 26 June 1786 he became surgeon of the IRRESISTIBLE and four months later, he was appointed chief surgeon of the expedition on CHARLOTTE to establish a convict settlement at Botany Bay. Thanks largely to White and the other nine surgeons who accompanied the fleet, only forty out of over 1,300 people died on the voyage. White set up his portable canvas hospital at Sydney Cove and dealt with many outbreaks of scurvy and dysentery because of the lack of fresh provisions. White accompanied Governor Phillip on several expeditions and kept a journal in which he noted the many activities in the colony and its natural history. White's greatest crisis came in June 1790 with the arrival of the Second Fleet, when 500 people were landed sick and dying. In spite of insurmountable problems such as the lack of medicine and accommodation, he and his assistants managed to nurse over half of them back to health. An almost identical crisis came with the arrival of over 600 suffering convicts in the Third Fleet in September 1791. By the end of 1792, 436 had died. White recommended the use of good wine mixed with essence of malt as a source of Vitamin C. White, like most doctors of the day, was a keen naturalist and was Australia's first Doctor to direct the search for plants which would protect the new colonists against scurvy. In December 1792, White applied for leave. In the meantime he pursued his interest in natural history. In October 1792, the convict artist Thomas Watling had been assigned to him, and provided him with many excellent drawings over the next two years. White was granted 100 acres, which he named Hamond Hill Farm, near the present suburb of Leichhardt and thirty acres at White Bay. His leave was granted and he sailed for England in December 1794, leaving a son, Andrew, by Rachael Turner and an adopted Aboriginal boy, Nanbaree. In August, White resigned rather than return to NSW, and served on various ships from 1796 to 1799. He married in 1800 and reared with the children of this union his son, Andrew from New South Wales. He was surgeon at Sheerness dockyard and later at Chatham dockyard from September 1803 to January 1820. He then retired on half-pay. He died at Worthing on 20 February 1832 aged 75 leaving an estate valued at £12,000. The medal has been designed by medallist, numismatist, historian and the first Reserve Surgeon-General of the Australian Defence Force, Major General John Hemsley Pearn, AM, RFD (Rtd). Major John General Pearn was born in Brisbane in 1940 and was educated at Brisbane Grammar School and the University of Queensland. At the age of 25, he enlisted as a Captain (Regimental Medical Officer) in No. 1 Casualty Clearing Station in Brisbane during which he saw active service on three occasions, firstly as Resident Medical Officer to the Pacific Island Regiments (2nd Battalion) in 1966, during the Confrontation. He subsequently served in Vietnam as the Consultant Physician to the Australian and New Zealand Force, based at 1st Australian Field Hospital in Vung Tau. His Army Reserve career has included command of No. 2 Field Hospital (1979-1982) in Brisbane as well as numerous other senior military staff and training postings. Major General Pearn also served as the Resuscitator and Consultant Physician as part of the Forward Surgical Team of the Australian Medical Support Force, during the Rwandan emergency. He has also studied, worked and served in the United Kingdom with the British parachute regiment and worked with the World Health Organisation and UNESCO. In civilian life, Professor Pearn recently retired as Deputy Head within the Graduate School of Medicine, University of Queensland and Consultant Physician to the

Royal Women's Hospital in Brisbane and Professor of Paediatrics and Child Health based at the Royal Children's Hospital in Brisbane. He established the first hospital genetics clinics in Queensland at the Royal Children's Hospital and the Royal Women's Hospital in 1974. Pearn holds double doctorates in medicine and philosophy and has published prolifically. Pearn boasts more than 40 awards, academic medals, campaign medals and service decorations, including Member of the Order of Australia (1979), Knight of the Order of St John and a Centenary Medal for services to the nation. Major General Pearn retired as the Surgeon general in early 2001.