

VALE

Klaus Leppert, MAIC

The ACT Division of the Institute regrets to report the passing of Klaus Leppert on 2 April 1995.

Klaus was born in Waldenburg, Silesia, then part of Germany, on 29 August 1925. At the age of 17, his secondary education was interrupted by his conscription for military service. He achieved the rank of lieutenant and saw service in France and the Balkans and was in Dresden when that city was obliterated in the dying stages of the war. These experiences left an indelible mark on him.

At war's end he was taken prisoner by the Americans but was released almost immediately. He met his future wife Bridgitte and resumed his interrupted secondary studies which would enable him to matriculate. On matriculation, Klaus commenced four years study at the University of Technology in Munich, gaining a Diploma of Engineer in Surveying and Geodesy in 1950.

After serving six months with the Lands Department of Bavaria, Klaus secured a position with the Snowy Mountains Authority and migrated to Australia in May 1951. He served as a surveyor with the Authority for ten years, a position that demanded extensive field work but which enabled Klaus to satisfy his love of nature and the outdoors. He developed an extensive, detailed and intimate knowledge of the Snowy Mountains area. Concern for his children's higher education persuaded Klaus to leave the Snowy Mountains Authority on 31 January 1962 and move to Canberra to take up a position with the Division of National Mapping (NATMAP).

Klaus' many talents, particularly in geodesy, were immediately utilised by NATMAP in an R&D capacity. He was soon promoted to the position of Supervising Surveyor, Geodetic Branch, where he managed the activities of the Geodetic Traversing, Geodetic Astronomy, Geodetic Levelling and Computation sections.

The period of Klaus' stewardship of the Geodetic Branch coincided with a number of milestones in the history of geodesy in Australia. This period included the completion of the national third order levelling survey which resulted in the Australian Height Datum (AHD). It also included the application of high precision geodetic techniques to tectonic plate surveys in the Papua New Guinea region. Klaus was instrumental in the introduction of satellite geodetic techniques to Australia and managed the Australian Doppler Satellite Survey during the period 1975-77. This survey resulted in the first set of transformation parameters enabling AGD coordinates to be converted to earth-centred reference system coordinates and vice versa. He was also involved in the early stages of

the introduction of GPS technology to Australia. Klaus eventually rose to the position of Acting Assistant Director of NATMAP, a position he held until his retirement on 5 September 1985. Throughout his career, he was always open to the economic advantages of using new technology and his pioneering work on the use of satellite techniques for geodetic applications stands as a testament to his forward thinking.

For all his accomplishments, Klaus remained a very modest, private person. He displayed a rare tolerance and openness to other peoples and their cultures, an absence of prejudice, a thorough objectivity in his assessments, not allowing personal factors to colour his judgement. These are undoubtedly the factors which account for his finding such ready acceptance and quick rapport with people wherever he went, and for the ease with which he embraced everything worthwhile in Australian culture and the Australian ethos.

On moving to Canberra, Klaus became involved with the Lutheran church of St Peters and served several times as chairman of the congregation, elder, layreader and synodical representative. At church fetes he took pleasure in presiding over the hamburger stall. His enthusiasm for youth was revealed in his unstinting support for the Warrambui Youth Camp and its activities.

The last years of Klaus' life were extremely difficult. Diabetes, diagnosed many years earlier, became difficult to control and stabilise. After returning from a trip around Australia with Bridgitte in 1986, he was hospitalised and suffered an infection which led to the amputation of his leg. But even this handicap did not prevent him from undertaking further trips in Australia and even overseas. However, diabetes continued to ravage him and reduced him to virtual blindness.

A review of Klaus' life would be unbalanced without mention of his insuppressible sense of humour. In situations which gave others cause for concern for his well-being, his sense of humour would suddenly break through.

Klaus passed away on 2 April 1995, survived by his wife, Brigitte, their children and grandchildren. He will be sadly missed.

Col Fuller, FAIC

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