

# K LAUS LEPPERT



The course of Klaus' life, along with that of millions of others at the time, was largely determined by the earth-shattering events of the Second World War.

Klaus was born in Waldenburg, Silesia, then part of Germany, now belonging to Poland, on 29th August, 1925. At the age of 17 Klaus' secondary education was interrupted by his conscription for military service. His military training gave him the rank of lieutenant and he saw service in France and the Balkans, and was in Dresden when the city was obliterated in the dying stages of the war. This 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 Brigitte 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 the diploma of Engineer in Surveying and Geodesy in 1950.

Klaus then secured a position as a surveyor in the Lands Department of Bavaria. After only six months service he gained a position with the Snowy Mountains Authority in Australia which was seeking trained workers worldwide for the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Project. He migrated to Australia in May, 1951, with many other German workers, and was followed later by Brigitte and daughter Barbara. He served as surveyor in the Snowy Mountains Authority for the next ten years.

Klaus commenced with the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Authority on

19 June 1951. Initially working on topographic and engineering surveys he moved to the Control Survey Section and was engaged on general trig control for major tunnels, underground power stations, concrete and earth dams and the measurement of short base lines. Other activities included the setting out of tunnel portals and concrete dams, and survey deflections on dams and underground power stations by trigonometric means.

His position as surveyor with the Authority demanded extensive field work of him in the Snowy Mountains but it enabled Klaus to indulge himself to the full in his love of nature and the outdoor life. He developed an extensive, detailed and intimate knowledge of the area.

Klaus had been seconded to the Division of National Mapping in July-August 1960 under F L Johnston for La Place observations in western New South Wales. Concern for his children's higher education persuaded Klaus to terminate his employment with the Authority on 31 January 1962 and move to Canberra where he gained a position in the Division of National Mapping (NATMAP).

His many talents were immediately utilised by NATMAP in a R&D capacity, particularly in the field of geodesy. Klaus 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. He held a high level of expertise in geodetic astronomy and oversaw the application of the Kern DKM3A astronomical theodolite and ancilliary equipment for high precision LaPlace observations.

The period of Klaus' stewardship of the Geodetic Branch co-incided 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 co-ordinates to be converted to earth centred reference system coordinates and vice versa. He was also involved with the early stages of the introduction of GPS technology to Australia. He eventually rose to the position of Acting Assistant Director, a position which he held until his retirement on 5 September 1985. Klaus was always open to 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.

In the course of his career with NATMAP he wrote numerous scientific papers, including papers presented at the 5th United Nations Conference for Asia and the Far East, the International Symposium on Coastal Geodesy in Munich, 1970, and the 16th Australian Survey Congress in Canberra, 1973.

Klaus joined the Institution of Surveyors, Australia, as a Member on 7 August 1959. He was a Foundation Member of the Canberra Division and regularly attended Divisional meetings. Upon his retirement and in spite of his disabilities, Klaus offered his services to the Canberra Division as Secretary. Members often saw Klaus on his rounds collecting and distributing the mail and undertaking a range of tasks to "ease the burden" on the office holders.

For all his accomplishments, Klaus remained a very modest, private person. Klaus displayed what at that time must have been 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 at times as chairman of the congregation, elder, layreader and synodical representative. At church fetes he took pleasure in presiding at 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, came to be difficult to control and to stabilise. Almost immediately after returning with Brigitte from a trip around Australia 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. But diabetes continued to ravage him and reduced him to virtual blindness.

A review of Klaus' life would be unbalanced if mention of his insuppressible sense of humour was not made. 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, Klaus will be sadly missed.