

Obituary

Dr Harry Jacks 1908-1994

Dr Harry Jacks is best known in New Zealand forestry circles for his work for FRI in the Nelson area between 1969 and 1974 on problems associated with the health and productivity of second and third rotation stands in Nelson. He took up this position after retiring from the position of Senior Lecturer in Soil Science at Massey University. He was very much a hands on researcher and set up a substantial number of trials throughout the area to examine the response of trees to superphosphate, nitrogen and boron. Staff working with him recall his energy, enthusiasm, strength and stamina in carrying heavy bags of fertiliser up steep Nelson hillsides and distributing it around the plots. He repeatedly emphasised the importance of early thinning to maintain tree health and vigour on the weathered Nelson soils.

He retired to Havelock North in 1975 but continued his association with forestry through his consulting work with Tasman Forestry in forest nutrition, forest health and soil management until 1986. He initiated a forest enrichment programme in the Taupo forests involving fertilising with nitrogen and phosphate. He was involved in the early identification of the effects of acute magnesium deficiency in forests on pumice soils and developed an alleviation programme in 1981. He worked with the same enthusiasm and vigour that he had exhibited in Nelson, digging soil profiles and laying out fertiliser trials. He also worked overseas in Borneo, Canada and Chile. He was recognised as a specialist consultant in forest nutrition and stand health by the NZ Institute of Forestry from 1974 until his retirement in 1986.

Those close to him became aware of an individual with a fascinating background and an intriguing life. He was born in eastern Europe – in Transylvania, a province of western Romania – into a wealthy family. The family holdings included farmland and forest. Invasion of his homeland by the German Army during World War I resulted in the death of his mother and a brother, with the estate being covered by trenches and barbed wire. At nine years of age, he carried food to the local resistance fighters. He was captured by the Germans who imprisoned him in Austria before he was eventually traded for a massive silver jewelled figure of an elephant. For his efforts, he



Dr Harry Jacks

was awarded a World War I Victory Medal.

Harry's education continued after his release at schools in Switzerland and then Romania. He later volunteered for military service in place of his older brother to allow him to continue to run the estate. Harry served in the Romanian Army, studying at military college before attending St Cyr to be commissioned. He recommenced his academic studies at Nancy, France completing a doctorate in soil science and a diploma in colonial administration. He then moved to Britain where he completed a diploma in philosophy and education at Cambridge, before returning to Bucharest to complete a certificate of forestry. He continued to serve in the Romanian army; his responsibilities included being an equestrian instructor to Prince Michael, the son of King Carol, and serving as a military diplomat in Morocco, Germany, Spain, and Czechoslovakia.

He represented Romania at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin where he met Pat Boot and a number of other New Zealand athletes who encouraged him to come to New Zealand. The German invasion into central Europe hastened his departure to New Zealand where he worked initially as a farm labourer and then as a technician for the DSIR. When war broke out, he enlisted with the NZ Army and joined the Engineers before serving in Libya, Greece Crete and with the Second NZ Expeditionary Force at El Alamein. He was seconded for special missions in Crete, Scarpanto, Syria, Kurdistan, Montenegro, Serbia, Italy and France where he was

able to use his extensive knowledge of Europe and European languages. He was given the name of Toi Te Tuatahi by members of the Maori Battalion with whom he fought on Crete. By the end of the war, he had reached the rank of major.

After being wounded near the end of the war, he returned to New Zealand and served as chief instructor at the Trentham Army School. After demobilisation, he joined the DSIR as a plant pathologist and completed a doctorate at the Imperial College of London. He remained with the DSIR as the Senior Plant Pathologist and worked on the control of diseases and pests in soil and on seeds, and crop protection on farms, orchards and under glass. In 1956, he moved to Massey University to the position of Senior Lecturer in Soil Science. His work was later recognised by a Fellowship in the Institute of Agricultural Science. He was a prolific author and produced over 80 scientific papers, 171 popular articles on crop protection and soil science, and one book on plant protection.

Membership of scientific organisations included the NZ Grasslands Association, the NZ Institute of Agricultural Science, the NZ Association of Scientists, the NZ Institute of Forestry, and Secretary of the Soil Science Congress. He served on many civic organisations and these included the RSA, Scouts, Rotary, and the Prisoner of War Association. In 1962, he was appointed a JP.

Harry had an amazing memory, a sharp intellect, and a fund of anecdotes and stories that he often used to illustrate particular views. He had a delightful sense of humour, a wonderful command of the English language, a commitment to honesty and integrity, a total abhorrence of hypocrisy, pomposity and bureaucracy. He was a sensitive and sometimes troubled philosopher and this found an outlet in his writings and poetry. He appreciated many things that New Zealanders take for granted.

His close friends saw Harry as a gentleman, scholar, scientist, philosopher, soldier, and friend. He contributed much to New Zealand, his adopted country. His scientific work, his ideas and his philosophy will live on in his writings and in the memories of his colleagues, friends and family. Haere ra, ma te Atua koe e tiaki.

Lindsay Vaughan