

**BILL GIRLING-BUTCHER, QSM**

## Enthusiast who created a world-leading fire service

When we think of Bill Girling-Butcher we almost inevitably recall the man who toiled mightily through the 1960s and 1970s to create an effective, well resourced rural fire organisation throughout New Zealand.

His enthusiasm and encouragement led to the development of the monsoon bucket, which has become an almost standard piece of equipment for rural fire control and has since been widely utilised in many other parts of the world.

Bill was 83 when he passed away recently in Wellington. He was a Fellow and Honorary member of the Institute, and was nationally recognised for his contribution to rural fire protection with the award of the QSM.

Those who knew him would agree that his great passions outside of his family were forestry, fire and football, to which must be added his great concern for the welfare of his many friends and fellows. He was kind, even gentle, humorous but also committed. His strong self-belief is reflected in a short anecdote recounted at his funeral....."Upon arrival at St Patrick's College Silverstream he found himself placed in a B stream class. Deciding this was not the place for him, he promptly got up and moved to an A stream class, sat down and stayed there. He was awarded a prize for diligence in 1934".

The same determination and perseverance no doubt contributed to a successful sporting career which included playing rugby for the Bay of Islands, and later helped him beat polio.

His early years with the Forest Service were marked with the same character. While District Ranger at Ohakune, Bill ensured indigenous sawmillers worked to strict guidelines, and when employment became an issue he is also said to have persuaded Conservancy Office to undertake silviculture programmes involving the thinning and pruning of other pine species, including *P contorta* and *P nigra*. Although the economics of this programme may have been based more on social than commercial forestry grounds, several of these stands also produced high quality sawlogs when cut in the 1990s.

As Fire Control Officer at Kaingaroa he was responsible for organising both a systematic fire protection programme and managing a large land clearing, through burning, operation that became the standard throughout New Zealand. This programme extended onto Department of Lands and Survey administered Crown land around the Taupo Basin, and was been the basis for a further boost to the rural economy of that area.

Outside the Forest Service Bill Girling-Butcher is equally well remembered as absolutely dedicated and committed to rural fire prevention and control. His willingness and enthusiasm to support the development of volunteer rural fire forces was demonstrated through help with training and the careful formulating of appropriate legislation. Friends remember him as someone

who was ready to put pressure on public officials to act when it came to fire matters.

He was widely recognised as one of the world's leading experts on forest and rural fire management.

After his retirement as Forest Fire Control Officer for New Zealand in 1979, companies and countries throughout the world sought his expertise.

Many insurers used him to assess fire-risk in forests, estimate damage after fires and act as an expert witness in court cases.

He helped install forest fire fighting equipment and systems in several other countries, and set up a busy importing business bringing the best equipment and chemicals into New Zealand.

Bill's passion for rugby and his ability to spot individuals of particular capability was also well recognised. He coached in the King Country when some remarkable players, such as the Meads "boys" emerged. This same interest later saw him promote and develop (with strong support from the highest levels) a New Zealand Forest Service regional, inter-island and national rugby competition involving players from the rank and file playing with others with regional and even All Black experience. Later netball was introduced and these activities contributed mightily to the great *esprit de corps* within that department.

Bill was a former RNZAF officer who served in the Solomon Islands during his six years of duty in and after World War II. He was a keen supporter of events involving his old colleagues and became chairman of the RSA. He was also active in the Eastbourne community in other respects, serving as Civil Defence Co-ordinator and Chairman of the National Party.

He was also a keen supporter of the New Zealand Institute of Foresters, a particularly strong supporter of his local section and a regular at annual meetings. His recognition within the Institute reflected both his contribution at this level plus his wider contribution to the forest industry.

Bill Girling-Butcher is survived by his wife Olive and four children, to them goes our commiserations and appreciation for the time Bill was able to so successfully devote to his wider community and forestry interests.

*P Berg*

**JOHN JOHNS**

## 'JJ' made unique pictorial contribution to New Zealand forestry

The recent passing away of "JJ", as he liked to be known amongst his closer friends, marks the end of a lifetime commitment to the creation of images of our heritage of trees throughout New Zealand and a unique contribution in the history of the former New Zealand Forest Service.

John had a real passion for our trees that seems so often absent today - especially those which have been