

McAdam, James Bannister (from Australian Dictionary of Biography 2000)



Graduated from Australian Forestry School 1934. Awarded the Schlich medal.

James Bannister McAdam (1910-1959), forester and soldier, was born on 6 February 1910 at Preesall with Hackinsall, Lancashire, England, son of John George McAdam, railway cashier, and his wife Elizabeth Ann, née Bannister. The family emigrated to Queensland. James was sent to state schools and to Toowoomba Grammar School. In 1929 he joined the Queensland Forest Service as a cadet. He proceeded to the University of Queensland, Brisbane, and the Australian Forestry School, Canberra (Dip.For., 1934), where he was awarded the Schlich medal as the outstanding student in his final year. Athletic and of robust build, he excelled at sport, particularly Rugby Union football. From 1934 he undertook field-work in Queensland. At St Paul's Anglican Church, Maryborough, on 19 January 1938 he married Eileen Alexandra Ewing, a schoolteacher. That month he was appointed a forest officer in the public service of the Mandated Territory of New Guinea.

With the threat of war in the Pacific, McAdam enlisted in the Australian Military Forces on 19 September 1940 at Wau. He began full-time duty with the New Guinea Volunteer Rifles on 22 January 1942 and was promoted sergeant within a fortnight. After the Japanese invaded Salamaua in March, he led a party of scouts which established an observation post within a mile (1.6 km) of enemy positions. The intelligence which the team gathered was crucial to the success of the Australian raid on the town in June. McAdam acted as a guide in the foray. Transferred to the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit in September, he was awarded the Military Medal for his outstanding service at Salamaua. In April 1943 he was commissioned lieutenant.

Promoted temporary major, McAdam was appointed commander, Royal Australian Engineers (New Guinea Forests), in February 1944. His unit's task was to assess and map the forest resources of Papua, New Guinea, Bougainville and Manus Island for war needs and for future management in peacetime. He relinquished the appointment in September 1945. Following a brief attachment to Army Headquarters, Melbourne, he transferred to the Reserve of Officers on 8 February 1946 and settled in Port Moresby as acting-secretary (later director) of the Department of Forests, Territory of Papua-New Guinea. Keen and industrious, he had a 'passion for protecting the trees'. In 1949 he visited Australia to give evidence to the royal commission into timber rights. He was a member (1949-59) of the Territory's Executive Council and an official member (1951-59) of its Legislative Council.

McAdam was active in the affairs of the Papua and New Guinea Scientific Society (president 1951). His main hobby was woodcraft. While on leave, he died of hypertensive coronary vascular disease on 27 February 1959 at Margate, Queensland, and was cremated. His wife, son and two daughters survived him. In 1963 a magnificent park of some 5000 acres (2024 ha) near Wau in the Bulolo Gorge was named after him; it includes outstanding forests of hoop and klinkii pines in which he had shown particular interest.