

White, Kevin Joseph (from The Forester March 2013)

Vale Kevin Joseph White

By Bob Thistlethwaite

Kevin Joseph White (Kev or just K.J. to many) passed away on 28 Jun 2012 at Pinjarra Hills, Brisbane. He was born in 15 April 1924 in Marrickville, Sydney. His family home was at Wyong (north of Sydney) where his father had a dairy and mixed grain farm. By 1930 the family had moved to North Queensland where his father pioneered a tobacco farm (on Tinaroo Creek, some 13 km from Mareeba) and subsequently grew sugar cane on the Upper Mulgrave Valley (about 11 km by road from Gordonvale).

He completed first stage of secondary education in 1941 and then worked for a spell in the Queensland Public Service in Brisbane, enlisting in the AIF in 1942 (QX57633/Q144919). He shipped out to New Guinea where he was taken on by 39 Light Wireless Air Warning Section as an electrician and later returned to Australia for radio technician training. Back in New Guinea he was attached to the 2nd Australian Corps Signals at the transmitter centre on the Sattelburg trail above Finschhafen, and later at Torokina on Bougainville. There at Torokina Kevin celebrated his 21st birthday and the end of the Pacific war.

After his discharge (26 Sep 1946), he rejoined the Queensland Public Service but opted for retraining under the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme. He firstly completed his secondary schooling and then became a Cadet Forest Officer of the Queensland Department of Forestry. His four-year degree entailed two years at the University of Queensland followed by two years at the Australian Forestry School in Canberra, graduating with Dip. For. in 1951 and B.Sc.(For.) in 1952.

The next five years were largely spent on rainforest management research in North Queensland, partly at the Forest Research Station at Atherton, where he became familiar with many of the species of the rainforest flora, established a large botanical collection, and discovered new species. He, along with his boss Eddie Volck, were honoured by Dr Lindsay Smith, Queensland Government Botanist, by naming one of the tree species from the vicinity of Kuranda as *Neorites kevediana* (Fishtail silky oak) (Proteaceae).

Kevin transferred to the Forest Department of the Territory of Papua & New Guinea in 1957 as Assistant Botanist and Plant Ecologist at the Botany Division of the Department in Lae, and in 1958 was in charge of the Lae Botanic Gardens. He continued to work with the Department of Forests for 20 years in various capacities as a Silvicultural Research officer, Assistant Director (Research & Development) and, prior to his departure in 1977, as Acting Director of the Department.

Kevin was responsible for establishing the Bulolo Forestry School (now the Bulolo Campus of the University of Technology) and was closely involved in the development of the Degree course in Forestry at the University of Technology at Lae. He was awarded the Imperial Service Order on 11 June 1977 "For Faithful Service", and in 2000 was honoured by the Governor-General of Papua New Guinea "For contribution in services to the development of Papua New Guinea" commemorating 25 years of PNG Independence.

Kevin made a major contribution to forestry development in PNG, especially through the training of local forestry personnel, a process he commenced long before self-government's drive for localisation of government administration. It was that core of well qualified staff who became the backbone of forestry administration post-independence and the later National Forest Service. The Managing Director of the PNG Forest Authority, Kanawi Pouru, wrote "The late Kevin White was a professional colleague who had dedicated a good part of his life in Papua New Guinea to help build and establish a strong foundation for a future National Forest Service as part of the national preparedness program leading towards Independence in the mid seventies. He was a great forester and an administrator that made a huge contribution to shaping the future direction of PNG's Forest Management and Development.

In 1977 Kevin left PNG and commenced work on international projects, firstly on an FAO project in Bangladesh to rehabilitate the Forest Research Centre at Chittagong. This was followed by a six-year Asian Development Bank-funded eucalypt plantation project in Nepal at Sagarnath in the Terai where he trained 80 forestry technicians. The plantations supplied thinnings for electric light poles and for scaffolding, and were also a necessary and valued firewood resource. He maintained contact over the next 20 years regularly visiting Sagarnath

and other areas of Nepal, a country he had come to love. After the close of the ADB project he became an independent consultant providing services to China, Cambodia, Bhutan, Indonesia and Brazil and maintained forest interests in many Asian countries. During the 1990-1991 period while working in Cambodia, he lectured in Forest Ecology at Champadong University in Phnom Penh.

Kevin undertook considerable research into teak silviculture in Asia and contributed widely to the development of teak plantations there and in Brazil. He maintained a keen interest in Eucalyptus silviculture and was also a staunch advocate for *Dalbergia sisoo* and *Pterocarpus indicus* which he championed as species that are readily propagated and appropriate for village production systems, and with a wide range of end uses from furniture to firewood.

Kevin was well known throughout South East Asia as a Forestry Adviser and earned a high level of respect for the work that he accomplished.