

IN MEMORIAM

Dr Charles Brian Speedy

A much-respected member of the Australian control engineering community, Dr C Brian Speedy (Hon FIEAust), sadly passed away on Sunday February 13, 2005.

Brian was a founding member of the National Committee on Automation, Control and Instrumentation (NCACI), and Chairman during the formative years. He continued his strong interest and association with the NCACI until very recently.

His enthusiasm for the disciplines of automation, control and instrumentation, was infectious. His enormous breadth of experience and talent in both technical and business areas was an inspiration to those who worked with him. To NCACI members, he was an endless source of a stimulation and belief in the importance of control engineering and its application across all engineering disciplines.

Of his many career accomplishments, a large number relate to our disciplines and profession. The conspicuous services he has rendered to engineering and Australia included:

- Instigating the IEAust's achievement of National Member Organisation status with IFAC (International Federation of Automatic Control) and representing the IEAust and the Nation on this body for many years;
- Initiating and chairing the organizing committee for the first IFAC Symposium in Australia, held in 1969;
- Initiating and forming the forerunner of what is now the National Committee on Automation, Control and Instrumentation which took carriage of the IFAC relationship. These initial steps laid the foundation for the highly successful IFAC Congress held in Sydney in 1993;
- Chairing NCACI from 1989 to 1996. Under his leadership, the Committee established numerous initiatives including: a Modern Industrial Control Course, an Undergraduate Thesis Prize, a National Project Excellence Award, a Congress Travel Award and a Compendium of Control Courses.

Regarded as one of the leading control engineers in Australia, Brian demonstrated a remarkable degree of innovation, leadership and farsightedness in the outstanding contributions he made to engineering in both industry and academia. His career accomplishments span research and entrepreneurial activities, the enhancement of industrial practice with advocacy of advanced control techniques plus a substantial contribution to control engineering education and scholarship.

He was honoured by the NT Division by its establishment of the "Brian Speedy Award" for the best final-year-engineering student at the Northern Territory University.

Brian will be much missed.

National Committee on Automation, Control and Instrumentation

OBITUARY

Brian was well known within the Australian Engineering fraternity. He originally came to Australia from New Zealand where he studied Electrical Engineering with support from a M.E.D. scholarship. He graduated with Honours in 1949. He then became Australia's first ever Ph.D. student in Electrical Engineering; graduating from the University of Sydney in 1953. He often joked that his research focused on special purpose valves for the emerging field of digital computers but was gazumped by the solid state age. He saw this as the inevitable march of technology. On finishing his Ph.D. he went to Imperial College London, where he worked with Professor Dennis Gabor (Nobel Laureate).

Brian joined the Gresham – Lion group in the U.K. and invented and patented a new method for precession construction of multitrack magnetic tape recording heads. This enabled the company to eventually become one of the largest manufactures of computer peripherals in Western Europe.

Brian returned to academia in 1962 at which time he became Professor and Head of the Department of Control Engineering at the University of New South Wales. Brian saw the potential for computer based control in industry and initiated a visionary programme of research in this area. This is when I first met Brian who became my Ph.D. supervisor. All of his students at that time were inspired by Brian's unbounded energy and enthusiasm. One of his former students, Stan Baker, recently said of Brian, "To say that (he) was an influence in setting the direction of my life would be an understatement. He inspired me to dream about running my own company, he introduced me to the intricacies of magnetic recording, ... , and of course, he was the driving force behind my Ph.D." Stan is now recognized as one of the world leaders in magnetic recording.

In 1971, Brian returned to industry in the U.K. as a consultant to Gresham Lion Electronics Ltd. In the 1980's he returned to Australia and became Superintendent for Control and Technical Computing with Nabalco Ltd in the Northern Territory. Here he again displayed his capacity for technical innovation and led the introduction of computer based control in the alumina refinery at Gove.

After leaving Nabalco, Brian had a brief period of retirement. However, at this time, we were trying to establish a spin-off company from the University of Newcastle. We needed somebody to guide us in this difficult start-up phase. So, who do you call? Of course, Brian soon came to mind. Perhaps it proves that Ph.D. supervisors are, indeed, a lot like fathers. We don't see them very often but sure remember their phone number when we need their help or advice. The company (CICS Automation Pty Ltd) was established and employed a group of enthusiastic young engineers. Brian's boundless energy at that time is captured in the fact that he basically commuted from Coffs Harbour to Newcastle. The company combined with Hunter Control and eventually became part of Matrikon which still runs a very successful business from Newcastle. As Stefan Graebe (one of the "young engineers") recently said, "Brian was there for our tender first business beginnings. He was there when the company needed him, namely to realign the often idealistic thoughts of enthusiastic academics (and young engineers) to the realities of commercial business." Stefan was taught well and now holds a very senior executive position with OMV in Austria.

Brian eventually retired (for a second time) to Coffs Harbour where he enjoyed a much earned rest (although rumour has it that he was still very active with many projects). Brian contributed significantly to I.E. Aust. in a number of roles including serving as Chairman of the Northern Territory Division, Member of the Electrical College Board, and member of the National Committee on Automation, Control and Instrumentation.

Brian's health failed in recent years and he passed away in the early hours of Sunday February 13, 2005. He is survived by his wife (Dorothea) and sons Paul and Chris. I will always remember him as my Ph.D. supervisor, my colleague and my friend.

Graham Goodwin
Newcastle