

Rhodes Memorial

Vale

Denis Bazeley Gordon McLean CMG (VUW and Univ 1954)

18 August 1930—30 March 2011

My dear friend and contemporary Denis McLean died on 30 March 2011. Born on 18 August 1930, this Leo was an energetic 80. “If energy is eternal life” as William Blake claimed, Denis had drawn his full store. At his death, he was writing a biography of our leading Rhodes Scholar of the 1930s, Sir Geoffrey Cox (OU & Oriel 1930), whom he greatly admired for his role as a journalist and an intelligence officer in the world’s fight in ‘the days of the cannibals’. It was Geoff who had recommended that Denis consider diplomacy, viewing it as a career in which an able New Zealander could make an important contribution.

For Denis himself the proudest boast of a 20th century New Zealander might well have been to have served as a Citizen Soldier in our greatest construct, the 2 NZEF. As a child of the Depression and scholar of Milner’s Nelson College, Rhodes Scholar might have been a good second best, and to many of us, Denis embodied the ideal Rhodes Scholar. Indeed our legendary Warden of Rhodes House, Bill Williams of the 8th Army, called him ‘the perfect Rhodes Scholar’. Denis more than fulfilled Rhodes’ vision of the scholar/athlete who would leave Oxford to serve, sustain and enrich the community in which he lived.

Rhodes’ Will called for an all rounder for “the worlds fight”. Where then did Denis engage in the World’s Fight? Denis got a first in geology with a wide ranging and insightful thesis in the geology of his beloved country . He was one of the legendary Victoria First XV of the 1950s playing with All Blacks like Jarden and Clark. He began his career in that unique New Zealand

institution, the Department of External Affairs established by Carl Berendsen, Alister McIntosh, George Laking and Frank Corner. Like Othello, Denis did great “ service to the State”, as his close friend and colleague Gerald Hensley sets out brilliantly in the attached valedictory, including serving as Secretary of Defence and Ambassador in Washington.

Denis was a thinker and teacher, a maker of speeches and author of fine books and a great walker. His book *The Long Pathway Te Ara Roa* about a family trek down the east coast of the North Island tells us much about our country and ourselves and it seems fitting that the New Zealand walkway which will cross the country and with which Denis was much involved has been called Te Araroa. His book *The Prickly Pair* makes real the Anzac relationship which every intelligent Kiwi diplomat quickly discovers is a family relationship critical to our wellbeing.

"In word and speech, in repose and in action, Denis McLean was highly intelligent and eloquent. He was witty, but there was not, as his daughter Margot noted, a mean atom in his body. Warm and charming, always committed and when committed charismatic, Denis had the quality attributed to Lincoln, the gift of the true leader -- "the gift of compassion."

“Will ye no come back again? Better loved ye canna be! Will ye no come back again?” Out among the brilliant galaxies of our universe, look backyour footprint is cast firmer than any fairy giant on our hills and valleys and beaches and pathways. Neither Clan McLean nor its pibroch will fail on the pathways of our beloved aotean sealand.

Hon. Hugh Templeton (Otago & Balliol 1952)

7 April 2011