

John O'Brien OBE



John Patrick O'Brien passed away suddenly and unexpectedly on 14 February 2007 aged 65. He was a respected geological consultant and a long standing member of the AUSIMM.

John trained initially as a chemist, but after obtaining a Bachelor of Science degree realised that laboratory life wasn't for him so completed a Master of Science in geology at the University of Auckland. After graduating he obtained a position as a field geologist with Central Pacific Minerals, working out of Alice Springs on uranium exploration. His clear thinking and calm demeanour was obviously recognised early in his career, as within months he was leading the exploration team. This work was followed by several years of gold exploration around the historic Thames mining district in New Zealand.

In 1974 he was a founding director in the consulting company Applied Geology Associates. This started in his mother's garage in Auckland before expanding to employ more than 20 geologists and mining engineers in the mid 1980s. During this period John became responsible for industrial mineral projects and spent considerable time in Indonesia and Malaysia. When the company closed following the 1987 share market collapse he continued as an independent industrial minerals specialist.

John led something of a professional double life. As well as becoming a respected geologist, he also had a distinguished part-time military career with the Territorial Force of the New Zealand Army. He enlisted as a medical corpsman in 1961 before being commissioned as an Administration Officer in 1966. Once again his leadership abilities were soon noticed and he rose through the ranks, becoming Commanding Officer of the battalion and then Brigadier responsible for the Territorial Force.

He was awarded the Efficiency Decoration in 1976 with clasps in 1982, 1988 and 1995. In 1994 he was honoured with the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for military services and became an Aide-de-Camp (Additional) to Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II.

John retained his military connections after retiring as Brigadier, becoming patron of the Regimental Association and Honorary Colonel of the Regiment. For many years he also served on the Trust Board responsible for the operation of the Ranfurly Veterans Home and Hospital.

As a geologist he will be remembered for his wonderfully clear and thorough reports, many of which identified prospects that were subsequently developed. He had a long standing interest in mineral economics and in recent years applied this to a study of the factors affecting aggregates supply and demand. For several years this work was referenced in numerous resource consent hearings as being "in prep" and he was greatly pleased when the paper was finally published in 2006.

Those who knew John personally will recall his devastatingly dry sense of humour. He was the personification of "an officer and a gentleman" who was happiest when pondering, cigar in hand, a new geological problem.

John's funeral was one he would have appreciated. A mixture of Catholic ritual and military ceremony, it concluded with a window-rattling three gun salute and a rendition of The Last Post. He is survived by his wife and three children.