

There were other rules or sayings that Chris had which were not elevated to Laws, but might have progressed had he lived longer. For example, in describing his low key presentation designed to attract minimum attention to his client in multi-party litigation, he would say 'Never get out of the trench unless ordered to do so'. When advising his clients on aspects of the inescapably chancy nature of the litigation in which they were embroiled, he commonly added the advice 'No-one ever lost a settlement'. Not long before he took ill he told me that he had just finished an opinion on a difficult point. When I asked him how he resolved it, he said: 'As I normally do - I came down firmly on both sides of the fence'.

Chris had a magnificent gift with words. In a long trial about two years before he died, Chris made a mistake. The trial judge picked it up and Chris conceded the error. The judge expressed surprise - not having seen Chris make a mistake before - to which Chris replied without hesitating 'Your Honour, it is only the mediocre who are at their best at all times'. Mediocre was one thing which that truly gifted barrister, Christopher Gee QC, was not.

Sir William Thomas Prentice KtCR MBE

(1919 – 2004)

By John McCarthy QC

Bill Prentice was a fine man, an outstanding Australian and a learned and courageous judge. Few Australians have loved Papua New Guinea as deeply as Bill Prentice, His death will be mourned both in Australia and PNG.

Requiem Mass for Bill Prentice was celebrated on Saturday, 7 February 2004 at St Leonard's Catholic Church, Naremburn.

Bill had a long and distinguished legal and military career in Australia and Papua New Guinea. His legal career began when he won an exhibition from St Joseph's College to study arts and law at the Sydney University, to which he matriculated in 1936. He was active in the Campion Society at Sydney University and had joined the Sydney University regiment.

After outbreak of war in 1939, he volunteered for the AIF. He was commissioned and served in the 7th Division both in the Middle East and New Guinea; first in the 2/33 Battalion and later as a staff captain with 7th Division HQ. He was mentioned in dispatches and was awarded an MBE for his service on the Kokoda Track. Later, he was with the 7th Division at Lae and Bougainville.

Bill returned to Australia in 1946 and resumed his legal studies. He graduated from Sydney University in 1947 and was admitted to the Bar in the same year. He had an active and extensive practice from 6th Floor Wentworth Chambers.

After service there during war, Bill continued his interest in Papua New Guinea and its people when he became a member of the Council of Papua New Guinea Affairs, which was responsible for the promotion of legal education for Papua New Guineans and he was influential in the establishment of

the Faculty of Law at the University of Papua New Guinea. He was responsible for encouraging the education of many Papua New Guineans.

In 1970 Bill was appointed a justice of the Supreme Court of Papua New Guinea and served on that court for 10 years. He was appointed successively senior puisne judge in 1975 and chief justice in 1978. He was knighted in 1977. His period on the bench therefore transected the momentous years of change through self-government independence and post-independence. His Honour was responsible for many leading judgments, particularly in the area of constitutional interpretation, which have had a profound effect upon the development of the law in Papua New Guinea.

In March 1980, Sir William Prentice resigned as chief justice in controversial and unfortunate circumstances and returned to Australia where he served for some years as a senior member of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. He retired from active practice in 1987.

Throughout his life, Bill Prentice was a devout and erudite Catholic. He was a member of the St Thomas More Society for 55 years and served as councillor and honorary secretary in 1952-54. He was delighted to have been appointed as an honorary life member and was a joyous participant in the Silver Jubilee celebrations of the society in 1994-95.

In 1946 Bill married his wife Mary. They were blessed with four children - Damien, Toby, Felix and Jacinta. Bill died exactly six months to the day after the passing of his beloved wife.