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Very Wor. Bro. ALBERT WILLIAM JAMES (1914-2006)

One of the longest father-son records of service to the Australian Parliament was forged when Albert William (Bert) James retired as the member for Hunter in 1980. He and his father, Rowley James served a combined term of half a century in what the Former Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, recently called "a really significant Newcastle dynasty based on great family loyalty."

Whitlam worked alongside both father and son and attended the latter's funeral. He described their half-century representation as "a great achievement indeed." Their tenure has been exceeded only by the 57 years of the Watkins father and son politicians, David senior and junior, who represented Newcastle from Federation until 1958.

The son of Rowley James and Gladys (nee Davies), he was born in Collie, Western Australia, where his father pioneered the union movement in the mines, where he also worked to support his five sons and a daughter. His father returned as a coalminer to NSW in 1916 and the family lived in Pelaw Main on the northern coalfields. Bert attended Pelaw Main Primary School and Kurri Kurri Junior Technical School.

Rowley James was elected to Parliament in 1928 to represent the coalmining communities of the Hunter. In 1958 showing "true loyalty to the party leader" according to Whitlam, he stood down to provide a safe electorate for Dr H V (Bert) Evatt, the leader of the Labor Party, who was under siege in his metropolitan electorate of Barton by the French Resistance heroine, Nancy Wake. When Evatt resigned in February 1960 to accept an appointment as the Chief Justice of NSW, James was endorsed as the Labor candidate and won the by-election in April that year. Bert joined the NSW Police Force in 1935 and rose to the rank of detective sergeant. Two of his brothers also rose in the police ranks to be senior officers.

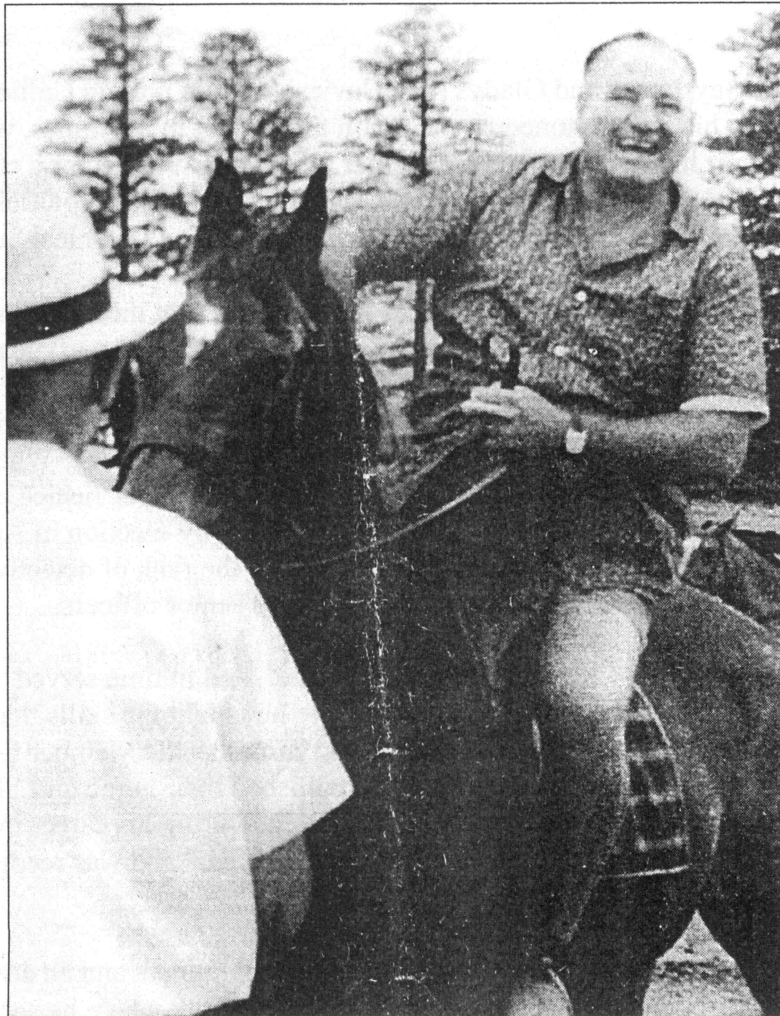
Another brother, "young" Rowley, became a teacher, and in time served as headmaster of Pelaw Main Primary School where he taught the skills that subsequently enabled Bob Brown to follow Bert James as the Member for Hunter. In 1950 Bert married Nora Bowen and they established their home on Lake Maquarie. They had three children-Rowley, Barbara and Helen. During his career in the police force, James was awarded the Police Good Conduct Medal and was recognised on three occasions for meritorious service.

Rowley James had been a powerful defender of the coalminers and an advocate of their cases. His son adopted a similar role in the Parliament, where he served on the privileges and public works committees. He was chairman of the joint committee on the Northern Territory which planned for its self-government, vigorously promoted by Whitlam, who said it was James's great service on committees for which he would be remembered. James also represented the Australian Parliament at a number of international conferences and on overseas delegations.

A visit to Cuba in 1962, four years after the Castro revolution overthrew the Batista regime and expelled the exploitative United Fruit Company, left an indelible impression on James. He was proud to declare himself a socialist and fearlessly defended the rights of people who had been cheated or marginalised. He saw his membership of the Freemasons as backing the principle of mutual support and protection.

In an adjournment debate in March 1969 James quoted from a news-sheet called *Things I Hear* which was published and distributed by the journalist Frank Browne. It drew attention to some of the indiscretions of John Gorton as prime minister which led to his downfall in March 1971 and his replacement by William McMahon who was defeated at the polls by Whitlam in December 1972.

Long before the true nature of the war in Vietnam became general knowledge and the community reacted with horror to the increasing disclosures of the brutality and the flow of body bags returning young Australians to their homeland, James courageously joined those of his colleagues, such as Jim Cairns and Tom Uren, who were demanding an end to the war.



Champion of the underdog V. Wor. Bro. Bert James

James had been inspired by a young US soldier in Bangkok who asked him to expose the "free fire zones" in Vietnam in which troops were allowed/required to shoot anything-men, women, children, livestock-that moved.

It was a source of great comfort when Whitlam, newly elected as prime minister, released draft resistors and brought the last of the Australian troops home from Vietnam.

Bert James died of Alzheimer's disease at Booragul on Lake Macquarie. He had just turned 92. The mourners at James's funeral also included the former federal Labor ministers Uren and Les Johnson, the former NSW minister Richard Face, and former parliamentarians Eric Fitzgibbon, Kelly Hoare, Bryce Gaudry and John Mills. James's wife, Nora, predeceased him. He is survived by his son and daughters, sons-in-law, Khairil Anwar and Nestor Palma, five grand-children, his brother John and sister Bonnie Humphreys.

Albert William James was initiated on 19 February 1945, passed and raised on 19 May 1945 and 23 June 1945 respectively in Lodge Kurri Kurri, No 253. He was installed as W M of that Lodge in Sept 1962. He affiliated with Lodge No 725 on 9 July 1948, called off that Lodge on 12 November 1958, joined Lodge No 441 on 27 June 1970 and Lodge Lake Macquarie No 243 on 11 July 1992. He was promoted to Past Deputy Grand Director of Ceremonies on 14 June 1978 and received a Fifty Year Service Certificate on 27 September 1995.

Ref: Bob Brown, Sydney Morning Herald 12.10.2006
Records of UGL of NSW and ACT.