



*The late Judge Denis Fannin*

**T**HE Judge President of the Natal Provincial Division, Judge George Howard, paid tribute to the late Judge Fannin, who died on 9 March 1997. The following is an edited version of his tribute:

“Mr Gordon, Mr Attorney, Mr Von Klemperer

We have gathered here to pay tribute to our friend and colleague Denis Gower Fannin who died on Sunday in his ninetyeth year. He was appointed a judge of the Natal Provincial Division of the Supreme Court in March 1959 and retired as first puisne judge at the end of July 1977.

Everything that Denis Fannin did in his life was well done. After matriculating at Hilton College he qualified in law with BA and LLB degrees at Natal University College in Pietermaritzburg. At university he was a member of the SRC and also of the university's first rugby team and the debating team. Later he was a member of the Council of the Natal University College for five years, and for two years was the first President of Convocation of the new University of Natal. He served articles in Pietermaritzburg and first practised as an attorney in Durban. He was admitted as an advocate in 1930 and practised at the Bar until the outbreak of World War II

**I**N his tribute DA Gordon SC, chairman of the Society of Advocates of KwaZulu-Natal, extended his condolences and concluded:

# We remember them...

## *Judge Denis Gower Fannin*

when he joined his father's old regiment, the Umvoti Mounted Rifles.

He was commissioned as intelligence officer of the UMR and the Fourth South African Brigade before leaving for North Africa. He was mentioned in despatches for his part in the campaign which resulted in the capture of Bardia by the Second SA Division and was later awarded the Military Cross. He was captured at Tobruk and spent the rest of the War in prison camps in Italy and Germany, during which time he did much to bolster the morale of his fellow prisoners, who included Neville Holmes and Taffy Harcourt who also survived to serve on this Bench.

After his return to Durban Denis went back to the Bar and soon built up a busy and successful practice. He took silk in 1950 and held office as chairman of the South of Advocates of Natal and then of General Council of the Bar of South Africa before his elevation to the Bench. He also found time during that period to contest and win for the United Party the Durban Point seat in the Natal Provincial Council. He was a provincial councillor from 1949 to 1954, and he had several spells as an acting judge.

Denis's interests were not confined to law and politics. After 1945 he resumed his involvement in education, becoming a member of the board of governors of Adams College at Amanzimtoti and its chairman for four years. At the same time he was associated with the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Until the time of his death he was a member of the board of governors of Hilton College, having retired as chair-

man in 1979 when he was appointed an honorary life governor. He was also the chairman of the education specialist working group of the Buthelezi Commission appointed by the Chief Minister of KwaZulu to enquire into and report on various matters concerning the constitutional future of this province.

Denis was also vitally concerned with the needs of returned servicemen, and he served as chairman of the Durban education committee of an organisation caring for their needs. He was later chairman of the National War Fund, a member of its Natal executive and an honorary national vice-president. He was a former chairman of the Pietermaritzburg and Natal Midlands committee of the Simon van der Stel Foundation, and was the president of the Heart Foundation in 1981. His abiding interest in wild life conservation led to many years' service as a member of the Natal Parks Board, and he was its deputy chairman until November 1980.

Denis Fannin led a truly full and rich life in the service of his fellowman. His accomplishments were many and varied but our purpose today is to pay tribute to his achievements as a judge of this court: In his nineteen years on this Bench he displayed great wisdom, unflinching courtesy and a 'compassion for the underdog'. He was one of the finest judges ever to grace the Bench of the Natal Provincial Division of the Supreme Court.

We extend our deepest sympathy to his wife Helen to whom he was married for 66 years, and to his son and daughter and their families.”

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“He was a connoisseur of life and living and a superb advocate and kindly judge. The law reports abound with illustrations of his concern for the un-

derdog, his humanity, his commitment to deal with every argument raised, his considerable legal ability and his clarity of style.” 