



THE BULLETIN, JULY 2017



Newsletter of the Wellington Returned
& Services Association / Inc

CHANGES & RECOGNITION

As Father Time moves on, we are all witness to personal history and in this latest edition of the Bulletin, it is a good time to introduce the new President and Patron of the Wellington RSA.

I am also pleased to bring forward the story of one of the real stalwarts of our area in K-Force veteran, Phil Wallace. His face will be recognisable to many, but at the same time has an unknown side. Like all those that did time in the services, his unassuming modesty has meant few know about either his background service or what he has contributed for the past 20 years to our organisation. It is people like him however that has kept our organisation going, even when he has never been one to either seek recognition or until now some publicity. Enjoy the read!

Carey Clements, Bulletin Editor

INTRODUCING THE NEW WRSA PRESIDENT



Hello there. For those of you who do not recognise the photo or know me, I am Theo Kuper, who was recently appointed the new Wellington RSA President at the AGM in May, 2017.

In doing so I replaced David Moloney, who had done two non consecutive terms in this role. I thank him for all of his work as well as giving me some great advice that will help me serve you in the best possible way.

My own background in the services started more 40 years ago when I joined the New Zealand Army in 1975, before being commissioned into the Royal Regiment of New Zealand Artillery. I served a total of 32 years in uniform in a wide range of appointments, with a career highlight being on a 12 month operational tour to the former Yugoslavia in 1996-97.

I left the NZDF in 2007 to take up a management position in Immigration New Zealand for seven years. I then took up a short contract with the New Zealand Police before coming back to the NZDF, this time as a civilian in 2015.

My involvement with the RSA began ten years when I joined my father's RSA, Te Aroha, before then transferring my membership to Wellington in 2011 after being asked to join the Executive as Vice President. I have remained on the Executive since then and in that capacity I have been responsible for the annual Poppy Day appeal.

I come into the leadership position at a time when we are in good shape financially. This allows us to focus on welfare support. In particular, we have the ability to fund a generous medical scheme for our members.

I see my priorities as your President being:

- Welfare support to our members as mentioned above.
- Poppy Day collection, as this provides us with the Lion's share of what we need to fund our welfare activities.
- Farewelling our comrades in the appropriate manner
- Grow our membership, with particular emphasis being around attracting the 'younger' post-Vietnam veterans as well as those that are currently serving in uniform.

I seek your help to achieve these priorities. I encourage articles and comments to this bulletin, so invite you to contact or email the Bulletin editor Carey Clements directly (cnathanclements@hotmail.com), or put pen to paper for those that are non tech savvy. I also invite you to make suggestions as to how you think we can grow our numbers and what future you would like to see for the WRSA. I look forward to serving as your President.

Colonel (Retired) Theo Kuper

ENTITLED FOR OFFICE

At a time when all RSA's are seeking to improve membership the word "Associate" can be seen as a disincentive to Joining.

At the executive meeting of June 19, the WRSA has agreed to support a Wellington – West Coast – Taranaki District proposed remit to the 2017 National RSA conference

PROPOSED REMIT

To change the RNZRSA Model Rules to remove the membership category “Associate Member” and replace with “Member.”

Explanation: The word “Associate” suggests a second-tier type of membership rather than recognise the reality of a full Member who pays full membership fees and is entitled for office.

INTRODUCING THE NEW WRSA PATRON



Former Deputy Chief of Defence Staff, Air Vice Marshal (Retired) Robin Klitscher, CBE, DFC, AFC, spent nearly 40 years in the service, before later becoming the National President of the RSA. he spent time with the Bulletin editor Carey Clements to recall his many years in the Air Force as well as huge contribution to the RSA decades later.

Q: Growing up as a young boy in Central Otago during World War II, what are your earliest memories around the military?

A: My father was by profession a school teacher and as a result we moved around quite a bit. It was also not easy on account of having a German surname and as a result my father was known in disparaging terms as ‘the German’. When I look back now I have to laugh as two of our great soldiers in Freyberg and Kippenberger also had German surnames, but at the time it was hard to be accepted.

I started school at Purakanui north of Dunedin. We lived in a schoolhouse and I can remember being told to draw the curtains as a blackout because there were German submarines nearby. I can also recall being held up by army convoys as we travelled into Dunedin.

Q: What about your first memories involving the Air Force?

A: In 1947 when I was 11 years old and living in Central Otago, the then Squadron Leader Bob McKay flew a Gloster Meteor Mark III around New Zealand. It was on loan to New Zealand from the UK for 12 months and was the first jet aircraft in New Zealand. At the time I had the mumps and was at home in Naseby. I got out of bed and went outside to see the jet fly over and thought to myself that one day I would like to be the man the flies those jets. The strange thing is that when I eventually joined up, the Air Force thought I would make a better maritime patrol pilot, so I didn’t get around to flying jets until mid-career.

Q: After doing 14 weeks of CMT, you then volunteered to join the Territorial Force Air Force, which had a base at Taieri. What happened at this point?

A: At the time 4 Squadron was based at Taieri and flew Mustangs. However Arnold Nordmeyer’s 1958 Black Budget disbanded the TF Air Force and I missed out on flying the Mustangs by six months. It meant that I had to travel back and forth to Wigram for the next two years before I finally got my wings. The first aircraft I learnt to fly were Harvards, which were a handful and had the kind of vices that no longer exist. On the ground they were highly unstable because the undercarriage on them, meant you could end up in a heap. I would say they were quite clunky compared to the modern aircraft we have today.

Q: Were your instructors at the time World War Two pilots?

A: By this stage in the late 1950’s, those that were in the war had moved on or were in senior roles. Very few therefore were active instructors. At the time there was the NAC scheme where the Air Force were training pilots from the start. The pilots would only serve four years before going onto work for NAC as a civilian pilot. It did not give them enough time for career progression, so many of them were re-trained as flying instructors straight after their Wings course.

Q: Besides gaining fame later on as a helicopter pilot during the Vietnam War, what other memorable aircraft did you fly?

A: Flying boats for one. They were also difficult to land, especially at night when it was hard to see how high you were above the water in glassy calm conditions. You would need to set a steady rate of descent of about 500 feet a minute and keep going through the water. The second time you would bounce out, which then required you to close the throttles and then land on the water without actually seeing it. While this was happening you had to gauge your distance as the flare path was very different to the ones you would see on fixed airfields with lights on. Most of the time there were only a handful of lights to work around.

Q: As all those that were fulltime in the services, you would have led a nomadic lifestyle. How did you cope?

A: In the course of nearly 40 years in the Air Force, my family and I lived in 27 different houses and that includes two years in Fiji, three years in England, six months in Canberra and 12 months in Vietnam. That is why in 1972 we decided to purchase a house in Karori knowing we needed a permanent place for our kids to live in when I eventually finished.

Q: Was Vietnam the hardest time for you as a pilot?

A: It is not a word I would use, but it was undoubtedly challenging. There were multitudes of things I encountered over there that I had never encountered elsewhere. However, the training I'd been given by the Air Force helped to overcome the difficulties, even the unexpected ones.

Q: After Vietnam did you carry on as a pilot?

A: No because I went to a staff job before then being sent on a long aero systems course in 1974. I then became the CO of No 3 (helicopter) Squadron for four years, which was very enjoyable. However once you stop flying aircraft, you start flying desks, and that's what happened after my tour as the CO of 3 Squadron.

Q: You rose to become an Air Vice Marshal, which I suppose would not have been a rank you would have dreamed of when you first set out flying?

A: I was just fortunate that it worked out for me.

Q: How then would you describe your style of leadership?

A: Bugged if I know (laughs). I guess an intelligent understanding of people. One thing I learnt in Vietnam was never underestimate the ability of many of the young and inexperienced to cope in difficult situations and never to over-estimate the abilities of the old and bold in similar situations.

Q: Let's move on to your involvement with the RSA. How did you first get involved?

A: In early 1995 the Minister of Defence Warren Cooper rang me not so long after I had become a civilian within defence. He told me the Government had a problem in that in May and August that year, the 50th anniversary of WWII was coming up and he had heard that Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, South Africa and the United States had all been planning for the past two years for it. We had done nothing. I asked him how could we cope given such a short time span, whereas he replied by saying we are a small society and we can do it quickly. The RSA was of course involved in this project and that is where it all began. Up to that time I believed it was an Old Boys Club and felt I was not quite an Old Boy ready to join it. There was even a lesson when I joined. Pat Herbert, the Chief Executive at the time, told me that I needed to join at local level, after I expected him to say, here's your badge, and thank you for your money. As a result I signed up with the Wellington RSA in 1995.

Q: Given that for many years those that served in Vietnam were never recognised and accepted by the RSA, did you have any problems trying to join?

A: Well I never encountered that myself, but I believe it did happen with some. It was the same for WW2 veterans who were not accepted by those from WW1, those that went to Korea were not accepted by WW2 veterans and so on.

Q: Nevertheless you went on to become the National President, which must have been a huge honour for you?

A : Absolutely. In 1996 one of my colleagues David Crooks asked me to take over the National Presidency of the Royal NZ Air Force Association. At the time, this also gave me a seat on the National Executive Committee of the RNZRSA. Just over ten years later I was the first airman to be elected as National President of the RNZRSA.

Q: What was your greatest achievement as national President?

A: Without question it was seeing the Veterans Support Act being passed by Parliament in 2014. It fundamentally changed the approach to Veteran Affairs in New Zealand from a discretionary one into a prescriptive one. A lot of credit in the lead up to this was through the hard work set down by the late John Campbell, who had been President before me.

Q: Where are we now with the RSA?

A: It is a very difficult question to answer. Veterans' organisations like the Air Force Association and the RSA have had dwindling member numbers for years now. The results of attempts at mass recruiting have not been particularly successful. And so the generation gap between older members and those still serving grows wider and progressively more difficult to bridge. But it must be bridged before it becomes completely unmanageable. That said, we have recently been creating veterans of overseas operational service at a greater rate than at most times since World War 2. It is of course necessary to ensure we are in touch with them, including younger people still serving. And the RNZRSA is working hard at renewing the links with the serving NZDF.

But we also need to be healthily aware that the serving military does not understand veteran politics particularly well. Nor should we forget that when we were young ourselves, we thought we were invulnerable. So it is today. Many of the younger set acknowledge the RSA and what it does with their minds but not their hearts, and so they do not yet accept that they are likely later in life to need what we offer. For these reasons, therefore, my own view is that rather than direct the greater part of our energies at recruiting from the serving military, at least as much effort should go into bridging the generation gap by trying to attract those veterans who are a little older than the young thrusters of today.

Q: What unfinished business is there left for you now?

A. For reasons of record, I was asked in 2014 to chair an independent task force charged with making recommendations for significant change in how the RNZRSA runs its business. Those changes are still settling in, and could lead to further change. But whatever shape we take, we should not lose sight of two things. We are the guardians of remembrance of those who are no longer with us; and we are guardians over the well being of veterans still living; and their families. This is not a choice, but a duty, since if the RSA movement does not do it nobody else will—or even can.

We must also keep pace with the rest of society. For much of its hundred years, the RSA movement could assume a naturally sympathetic ear on the part of governments and the public. A great many citizens had served in the military, or were closely related to someone who had. Most Members of Parliament including Ministers were themselves veterans of combat. But such assumptions of influence can no longer be counted upon. Nowadays it is rare to find any Member of Parliament, let alone a Minister, who has done any military service at all. And so, although it remains a greatly respected organisation, the RSA movement is now obliged to explain itself much more thoroughly than before.

Even so, I remain convinced that the RSA movement retain an electoral power, provided we use it. This involves ensuring that Parliamentary representatives and other community leaders receive firm, consistent and complete messages about veterans' affairs at grass-roots electoral level. Many disparate voices saying different things will not deliver consistent messages—and may even damage the case being made. But improving our performance in this regard will require us to rethink how we approach the organisational model of a national collective made up of autonomous local entities. It seems to me that we cannot continue to think and act in silos, and that much more in the way of lateral dialogue between and among RSAs will be needed if we are to continue to be effective in the welfare portfolio that our predecessors worked so hard to establish.”

LOOKING BACK

The person in this Looking Back issue is a contrast for many in having a well known face on Anzac Day services and being an RSA representative at funerals, but at the same time being an unknown name. K-Force veteran and Wellington RSA member PHIL WALLACE reflects on his time with both.

Q: What was your first association into the military?

A: It was in 1953 when I did CMT on what turned out to be the 10th intake.

Q: Did CMT change you as a person?

A: Not really as I was a product of a Catholic education, which resulted in me getting discipline from a young age.

Q: Did you have a choice of corps when you joined up?

A: At the time I was working in the post office and can remember a recruiting Officer telling me that because of my work background, I would be going into the signals. So I soon learned how to use Morse code with the emphasis of having to do 22 words per minute. It took a while to get used to and there many times when I misheard and subsequently miswrote a word. I only just missed out on being there when the Waitangi disaster occurred in Christmas, 1953. Our OC Major Tony Fitchett was there and we heard stories from him about it.

Q: Did part of your CMT also include bayonet training?

A: Yes. We used run up to sticks on posts while instructors would encourage us to go hard into them and try to rip the object that was on them.

Q: After CMT, you went into the Territorials. What was your role there?

A: I remained in signals, only this time in Headquarters Company in Stout Street in Wellington. I used to catch the train that went over the old Rimutaka incline and would think what an adventure it was to go into the city each time. Even in those days I thought that was Featherston was the big smoke. I remember seeing a steam train in the 1940's and stood there gob smacked when looking at it as I had never seen one before.

Q: What intake to Korea did you go on?

A: The 19th. There were a total of 21 intakes I believe that went. We flew over from the Whenuapai Air Force base on an old Hastings aircraft, which was really just a cargo plane. We flew to Sydney and from there went onto fly to Darwin, Manus Island, and the United States Air Force base Guam, where we were parked up against a B-57 Canberra Bomber. Kunsan at the time was the home of the American strategic air command and the Americans treated us like royalty. We were billeted there for two nights before we went onto fly to Kure, Japan and finally Korea via troopship.

Q: After you finally arrived in Korea, what were the conditions like?

A: After a week in Korea, we were issued winter uniforms as it was so cold. We had come from summer in New Zealand and of course were not prepared for the change in season of the northern hemisphere.



Q: What sort of vehicles did you drive in Korea?

A: Bedford trucks. I had learnt to drive them in Burnham with the Royal New Zealand Army Service Corps before going over. As a result I had to change badges on my beret. There were no such things as concrete or gravel roads in Korea at the time. We had bulldozers make roads from paddocks. Sometimes they were even paddy fields. It seemed like the whole country was devastated and you felt so sorry for the locals, for there were beggars everywhere, that were virtually living in holes in the ground with tarpaulins over them as roofs. There was no running water and just old wells. We were never able to stay in any of the villages for fear that the North Koreans would infiltrate us there.

Q: What other memories do you have at this time?

A: Many. In the winter time we had to turn on the truck engines every hour otherwise they would cease up. We did have anti freeze, but as it was so thin, it was considered useless. We couriered both troops and supplies. Sometimes we took the British elements such as the Green Howards. I can also remember taking the Cameron Highlanders one time and noticed they were all wearing kilts. The British only did one year of active service whereas we did 18 months. I went further than that however and did a total of 22 months.

Q: How dangerous were your driving missions?

A: On more than one occasion I took ammunition up to the Demilitarised Zone on the border between South and North Korea. It was there you had to have your wits about you, as it was never certain when things would really heat up.

Q: You have described the conditions. What about the food you received?

A: Everything was tinned from margarine to potatoes. All of it was supplied by the British Army. The Americans on the other hand were extremely well looked after. They even had refrigerated ice cream trucks like the Mr Whippy we have today. They also had fresh vegetables, although the eggs were powdered. All of their food tins had dates on them. I recall seeing some ration tins, that were dated 1941, 1942 and 1943. Once you added water to say their potato ration tin, it would come up mashed. Overall though the food we had was awful.

Q: Were there any moments that changed you as a person?

A: I think in seeing some of the sights, it just made me feel thankful of the small material possessions I owned. In contrast, many of the locals had absolutely nothing.

Q: Do certain smells take you back?

A: Yes whenever I go past a Chinese restaurant. In the summertime Korea stank to high heaven because of the paddy fields, where they were using human waste as fertiliser. Apparently it was an ancient practice, but even to this day I cannot eat rice.

Q: I now want to move forward to your time with the RSA and that began I believe in the 1970's.

A: Yes. At this stage I was still serving in the police. I served a total of 31 years with them. For the past seven or eight years I have carried the RSA banner on Anzac Day or at special commemorations as well as attending funerals. I also recite the Ode as the RSA representative at these funerals as there may not be anyone else to do it. These times at funerals can be emotional, but it is important that we recognise the contributions made by ex serving service people. K-Force veterans like me are thinning in numbers, so that is one of the motivating factors for me to carry the banner, to ensure that members of the public, also remember what has been labelled by historians as 'the forgotten war'.

Q: Finally, your thoughts on the future of the RSA?

A: There is no question we are slowly dying. We need young people to take over as they are the life blood that will make the organisation carry on. Social conditions are better today and when I look back there was not much money years ago, so we went to these clubs to buy cheaper drinks. Today they have better uniforms and food. So something really needs to be thought out if the RSA is to continue on with pride.

CELEBRATION PHOTOGRAPHS

Since the start of the year, the Karori RSA has been very active in a number of different pursuits, starting off by awarding its World War Two veteran Gerard Lowe (93) a Life Member. Club President Bruce Johnston said Mr Lowe had been a valued member of the club for many years and before leaving the suburb, he gave a 'substantial' donation to the RSA.



On the day he was made a Life Member a dozen members of the Karori RSA travelled over to Martinborough to congratulate Gerard before taking the former Grenadier Guard to lunch. Early in the New Year, the Karori RSA had a second double dose of pleasure when Bruce Johnston was awarded a Queens Service Medal in the New Year's Honour list. Although the citation said it was for scouting and the Community', anyone inside RSA circles that knows Bruce will really know that it will be just as much in our area as well, given that he has been at the helm of the Karori RSA since 1998.



OTHER PHOTOGRAPHS

Each year before Anzac Day, members of the Karori RSA, lay poppies down along with a sprig at both the Karori and Makara cemeteries. In the below photographs, K-Force veteran Robbie Robieson (left) and Chris Jasinski get stuck in at the Makara cemetery to ensure that more than 500 graves of ex servicemen and women are remembered.



Once again the Karori RSA had a mammoth turnout on Anzac Day. Victoria University Associate Professor in history, Kate Hunter gave a talk around women during Word War One, while former Army Chaplain, Father Ron Bennett helped to lead the service outside the clubrooms in the glorious April sunshine.





After many years of sad neglect, the Karori RSA received a substantial grant from the Brooklyn Community Trust several months ago, to start tidying up and in some areas rebuilding its 90 year old clubrooms. The first step was to rip up the path that lead to its two entrances followed by replacing the stairs that lead into the clubrooms. Pictured are the old and new stairs at the first entrance. The second door will include a mobility ramp.



To commemorate a century of the Wellington RSA a special coin has been minted since our organisation first began on April 23, 1916. In the above photos 90 year plus WW2 Navy veterans Harry Lavington (left) and Tom Blennerhassett display their coins....



along with (from clockwise top left), Neville Goodman, Joan Tyler, Murray Sherlock and Trevor Frederick. Murray and Trevor are both Past Presidents of the Karori RSA in 1996-97 and 1988-89 respectively.

NEXT WELLINGTON RSA LUNCHEON

Date: Tuesday July 25, 2017

Venue: Portlander Bar & Grill, corner of Featherston & Whitmore Streets.

If able to attend ring Zenetta on 385 1191 by no later than July 24.

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