



THE BULLETIN, OCTOBER 2015

Newsletter of the Wellington Returned
& Services Association Inc /
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COMMEMORATIONS GALORE!

By Carey Clements

Since the last Bulletin was published in April, there have been many services held to mark different commemorations. The major one of course was the centenary of the Gallipoli landing. Since then we have marked the centenary of the short, but successful capture of Chunuk Bair, 75 years since some of 'the few' New Zealanders took to the skies in the Battle of Britain, 70 years since New Zealand ended its involvement in the Pacific, and 60 years since our Government decided to contribute forces to the British Commonwealth Far East Strategic Reserve in what became the Malayan Emergency. This year also marks 50 years since 161 Battery reported 'ready' in Vietnam.

Although I can only claim to have served after all of these events, I have nevertheless made the effort to get along to these services and to see and meet the veterans who took part. Of course with no surviving WWI veterans left, the next group on the ground that is thinning are our own WWII veterans. It is important that while they are still around that we get to know them, question them and gain an understanding from them of what they experienced. Every generation has experienced difficulties, but it is important to learn first hand while we have the chance to use our oldest veterans for they helped to shape the sort of character our country has got these days. They are tough, yet modest people who can recall a time in our country's history when things could easily have been flipped over and surrendered to nations that had very different views of how they saw the world. I therefore invite you the next time you are in a rest home or seeing an elderly friend or relation to stop and talk to them, but let them do the talking. Part of the art of conversation is listening and we will be surprised to learn once that happens, how much pride their efforts mean to them.

Lest we forget.

LOOKING BACK

The feature person in this issue is 93 year-old WWII veteran, John Thomas. He is a foundation and Life Member of the Porirua RSA as well as being a member of the Tawa and Titahi Bay RSA's.

Q: Where were you born, raised and educated?

A: I grew up just outside Waimate in South Canterbury and attended the local school before finishing before I attended secondary school. As I was a child of the Depression and had five sisters and two other brothers, there was not much money to go around.

Q: When were you called up?

A: I was called up on the 1st of October 1941 into the Maori Battalion with the 10th Reinforcements and soon went on a camp at the Wingatui race-course where I was made a Section Commander.

Q: Did anything memorable happen during that camp?

A: On one occasion I was given a task to take my section and perform a silent night attack. We got on top of a hill and with the moon being out, I ordered my section to attack only to forget we were supposed to advance quietly. As a result it blew my chances of ever gaining promotion.

Q: How long were you with the Maori Battalion for?

A: Around nine months before my older brother Charlie gains rights of being able to claim me and take me out of it, into the Armoured Division,



where he was a Sergeant.

Q: As a result did you see any conflict action with the Maori Battalion?

A: No, it was not until I was with the Armoured Division that I witnessed from about a mile away the bombing of the abbey at Cassino. I remember the sky that day was bright blue and when the American bombers came over they left a vapor trail that remained in the sky all day. It was amazing to watch as the bombing went on for something like five hours.

Q: Did you have any idea of what was going on at the time when you were back in side the division headquarters?

A: All the tanks had radios, so we had some idea. However as a result of the intense bombing, it meant that the roads were blocked and made our job of trying to get through even harder. Given hindsight it would have been better if they had directed artillery to the hill, instead of sending up bull dozers to try and clear the way. Even though Freyberg was good to his New Zealand troops, many of us felt he made some wrong and costly decisions at the time, which could have been avoided.

Daily Last Post Volunteers Wanted

As part of the WWI centennial commemorations, the NZ Defence Force in partnership with the Ministry for Culture and Heritage is conducting a daily Last Post ceremony at Pukeahu National War Memorial Park in Wellington.

The ceremony begins at 5pm every night with the lowering of the NZ flag as the Last Post is sounded by a bugler. This is followed by the reading of the Ode to the Fallen in both Te Reo and English before the seven minute ceremony concludes with the observation of a minute's silence.

As valued partners of the NZDF, members of the Wellington Branch of the RNZRSA are invited to participate in this significant national event and volunteers are sought to read The Ode to the Fallen in either English, Te Reo or both at every service.

All other roles in the ceremony are performed by members of the NZDF. All volunteers should visit www.mch.govt.nz/last-post where they can find details of the service and register their interest.

WRSa Medical Scheme

The Wellington RSA has reinstated a medical cost reimbursement scheme for the benefit of its members. The benefit is available, within the rules, for Returned and Service members, their partners and widows or widowers.

The medical categories that might attract reimbursement are:

- * Dental
- * Optometrist
- * Audiologist
- * Specialist
- * X-Rays and other imaging procedures

Each calendar year, up to 50% of each procedure may be claimed up to a limit of \$200.00 per category. The maximum claimable per person per year is \$1,000.00.

Treatments and items such as podiatry, physiotherapy, GP visits and medications are not included as these may be claimed under a Disability Allowance from Work and Income as long as you qualify on income and have medical conditions lasting six months or more. If you want more information on Work and Income allowances please contact Charlotte, our Support Advisor, or Work and Income NZ.

There is an income limit for claiming on the medical scheme. The basic limits are:

* \$616.71 gross per week single living alone, or sharing (\$32,068.92 g.p.a)

* \$914.71 gross per week married or de facto couple (\$47,564.92 g.p.a)

These rates include all income such as income from a Family Trust. However Surviving Spouse and War Disablement Pension payments (the amount above NZ Super or Vets

Pension) are excluded

If making a claim under the WRSa Medical Scheme you will be required to declare on the application form that your income is not above the rates indicated above. Proof such as receipts will be required. The income cut-off rates are aligned to the Disability Allowance rates from Work and Income and they are adjusted at the end of March each year by any cost of living increase.

For your information, NZ Super and Veterans Pension current payments are as follows:

- * \$431.10 gross per week, single living alone (M tax code net \$374.53 p.w)
- * \$396.17 gross per week, single sharing accommodation (M tax code net \$345.72 p.w)
- * \$326.30 gross per week, married person, or partner in a civil union or de facto relationship, one partner qualifies (M tax code net \$288.10 p.w)
- * \$652.60 gross per week total, both qualify, married, civil union or de facto (M tax code net \$576.20 p.w. combined)
- * \$618.08 gross per week total, married, civil union or de facto, with non-qualified partner included on or after 1 October 1991. (M tax code net \$547.64 p.w. combined)

Claims must be made within six months from the date of treatment. Brooklyn members can claim on the Brooklyn medical scheme as before, as well as the WRSa medical scheme. Associate members are not eligible to claim on either scheme. Please contact Zenetta at the WRSa office for a claim form.

RSA CLUB CARD

On behalf of the RNZRSA, we are delighted to announce the launch of a free benefits programme for RSA members across New Zealand. With their personalised RSA Club Card, our members can now receive a range of exclusive discounts with brands they know and trust like Noel Leeming, Repco Placemakers and more.

RSA Club holders have access to the below discounts, but will be adding all the time, so watch this space!

- Insurance (VERO): discount package up to 40%
- Mondo Travel—discount on hotels, vehicle rentals, duty free and holiday deals.
- Resene Paint—Up to 15% cash discount on paint and on wallpaper
- Noel Leeming—cost + 10% - sale prices all the time!
- Repco—10% cash discount
- VTNZ—15% cash discount
- Beaurepaires—15% cash discount on tyres
- Craft Beer Online—10% cash discount
- Trooper wines—20% cash discount
- Placemakers—up to 25% cash discount
- Carters—15% cash discount
- Public Trust—\$50 off per will and EPA

If anyone is interested in obtaining the Club Card they are to contact Zenetta Ganic on her email—zenetta@wrsa.org.nz or on (04) 385 1191



VIETNAM DAY ADDRESS MANUREWA RSA

By former NZ Sergeant Major of the Army

Bob Davies

After World War One, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission was formed to establish an appropriate way to discharge the debt of honour each country owed to its Fallen. By the end of World War Two and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's mandate, 1.7 million Fallen were commemorated in 23,000 cemeteries and memorials across 157 countries. Those who have had the privilege to visit any of these sites cannot but be overawed, not just by the scale of the casualties – for there is surely that, but by the overwhelming dignity and solemnity of the environment that enfolds the earthly remains of those who sacrificed all so that the rest of us may have a future. While nothing can compensate for such sacrifice, at least their remains are protected in perpetuity as they lay alongside their comrades in peace. They are our Glorious Dead.

Since New Zealand first sent troops overseas in 1899 to assist the British Empire in its fight against the South African Boers we have lost 28,923 servicemen and women who were Killed in action, died of wounds or who died of a result of illness or accident due to their operational service; service, I shouldn't need to remind you, which was in pursuit of the government of the day's international priorities. It is very difficult to get one's head around such a statistic so let me help you. If we laid each of the 28,923 Fallen head to foot beginning at the Bombay BP Station on State Highway 1 they would extend to somewhere around the Northcote off-ramp on the other side of the harbour bridge. I'll just let you ponder that for a moment.

Almost, but not quite at the end of that line, you'll find 32 men, they are our Forgotten Fallen. These are men who were killed since World War Two. They served in South East Asia, in Malaya and in Vietnam. No longer under the auspices of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, some of these lie in obscure cemeteries, some in graves which are overgrown or in graves that are very difficult to access. And because they are not subject to the same rules as those who lie in a Commonwealth War Grave their resting places are not protected. And they lie there because their families could not afford to have their bodies returned to New Zealand. If you visit the National War Memorial at Pukeahu, the Army Memorial Museum in Waiouru, or the Auckland War Memorial Museum, their sacrifice is acknowledged alongside the rest of our Fallen, except in their case their resting place is not so glorious. Their next of kin have grieved no less than any other of the families from other conflicts but to these families their treatment demonstrates that the country considers theirs' to be of a lesser sacrifice as, unlike their forefathers and their sons, successive governments have failed to discharge the debt of honour that the country owes to them.

For some years now, there have been efforts to have these men returned to New Zealand but without success. The Minister of Veteran's Affairs just in May this year stated the Government had no intention to change its policy and repatriate these forgotten Fallen, this during the 100th

commemorative year and despite a cabinet paper that concedes the unfairness of their treatment. He also gave a further reason that historically soldiers were buried where they fell. Clearly he is misinformed as none of the Fallen lie in Vietnam – and more tellingly – nor do they lie in East Timor, Iraq or in Afghanistan.

With an ironic - and questionable – sense of timing, the Prime Minister decided this was the year to run a campaign to change the flag, the flag under which these men fell. Whether this is a good idea or not is not only irrelevant but extraordinarily insensitive and thoughtless if most returned servicemen, those we are supposedly commemorating this year and next, object to it as the RSA informs us they do.

The 2007 cabinet paper estimated the cost of repatriation of the 32 South East Asian Forgotten Fallen to be considerably less than \$500k. That may have increased somewhat in the years since but whatever it's cost today, it will be miniscule in comparison to the \$24m being dedicated to changing the flag.

The Prime Minister has made much recently of the importance of New Zealand contributing to 'The Club' when once again the Government has sent our young men and women in harms way to demonstrate our solidarity with it. On 20 May this year our closest ally in 'The Club', Australia, announced in Parliament that they were repatriating their war dead from Malaysia. Can we expect the New Zealand Government to again show solidarity by similarly repatriating our Forgotten Fallen? Apparently not.

Fellow Vietnam veterans join me today in challenging this Government to return our Forgotten Fallen to the country for which they have sacrificed all and before the flag is changed. Let the National Government, the Government that sent us off to our war and that has ignored us since, now finally make amends.

LEST WE FORGET

(the comments expressed here are not necessarily agreed by the Wellington RSA)



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NEWS BRIEFS

3777 people looked through the Wellington cenotaph over its 150th birthday weekend of 25-26 July. During the weekend, Conrad Flinkenberg, Theo Kuper, Keith Mitchell, Major Wendy Wright, Cam McIver, Rob Munro and Neal Schofield (all veterans), looked after the cenotaph and answered questions to the public. One common question to our veterans was, "whose medals are you wearing?". All answered "my own!".

The Karori RSA has now exceeded more than a hundred members for the first time in many years. Club President, Bruce Johnston (who was re-elected President for the 17th successive year at its recent AGM) said the closure of other city based RSAs and renewed interest in the services through the WWI centennial commemorations, was a contributing factor for the increase. During the AGM, the Karori RSA elected WWII WAAF, Pat Tie, as a Life Member for her long involvement with the club.

Former NZ Army Officer, Colonel (Retired) John McLeod ONZM, has recently published a book, *Elusive Peace*, on his peacekeeping experience in Angola. As a returned member of the Wellington RSA, he is offering members the opportunity to purchase the book at \$30 rather than the retail price of \$40. To order a copy of this very frank self examination account of a nearly forgotten conflict, please email him at tekopuru55@gmail.com

The Executive committee of the Wellington RSA has decided to negotiate the location of the 2016 ANZAC Day dawn service with both the Ministry of Culture and Heritage and Wellington City Council. It is proposed that the dawn service be held at the Pukeahu National War Memorial Park. The Executive is concerned that the Cenotaph would be overwhelmed if even a crowd of half that attended this year turned out. Regardless, the Executive will keep you informed.

Buy a limited edition RSA Heart Pin from your local RSA and be in to win one of three Overseas Experiences! 18,000 RSA Heart Pins have been produced to represent each one of the

18,000 lives lost during WWI, with every pin featuring an individual number to represent a Kiwi soldier who fell during the WWI campaign from 1914 - 1918. Each pin is accompanied by a "scratch and win" card that gives you the chance to win one of three "Overseas Experiences" worth \$10,000, \$5,000 and \$3,000 from Mondo Travel. And with only 18,000 pins and

scratch cards available, you have a great chance of heading off on your first O.E or next one! You can buy a pin for \$10 from your local RSA. To find out which RSA is closest to you, head to www.rsa.org.nz/find-an-rsa. If they don't have them, let the National RSA know! Full terms and conditions are available on the RSA website.

The Wellington RSA sends out its sincere condolences to its Support Advisor, Charlotte Bergman at the passing of her husband Dennis on July 21.

OUT AND ABOUT



Clockwise from top right: Maj Gen (Retired) Ken Gordon at the national commemoration of the Vietnam War along with the British Airborne Forces (NZ) President Frank Clark (left), national secretary-treasurer Roy Tilley and Vice President John Watson. The Karori RSA WWII Club. (Clockwise top left), Harry Lavington (Royal Navy), Gerard Lowe (Grenadier Guards), Noeline Ritson and Pat Tie (both WAAF). Members of the Karori RSA pose after having a luncheon at the Butcher and Brewer Pub in Petone. A WWII veteran smiles after the 70th anniversary to mark the end of the war was held in the Hall of Memories at Pukeahu National War Memorial Park, while members of various RSA's show delight during the midday Anzac Day parade in Wellington. The long and the short. 4'11 WWII WAAF, Pat Tie and 6'5 Maj Tony Williams of the NZ Army embrace after the Karori RSA Anzac Day service.