



## THE BULLETIN, DECEMBER 2016

### Newsletter of the Wellington Returned & Services Association Inc Established 1916



#### THE PAST YEAR

Since the last Bulletin of the Wellington RSA was published 14 months ago, there have been the usual movements and World War One commemorations being happening around the capital.

Within the RSA itself, we saw both B.J. Clark and Ron Turner finish their three year terms as National and Wellington Presidents respectively. In the case of both, they knew that going into the job would require dedication, understanding and also a sense of realisation in knowing that they were serving an institution that has been big in tradition over the decades, but not necessarily fast on bringing in new innovations and changes. However, with the realisation that we are now starting to see the WWII veterans seriously dwindle off in numbers, we have examined the problem, and as a result the RSA is now starting to regain lost ground as an institution that wants to be around a lot longer than just the start of its second century.

We therefore thank both for their time and energy over the past three years as the RSA continues as a proud institution for people of any age to join. To do that however requires constant reminders that it is there to serve and therefore is there to listen to what ideas members and those wishing to join may have.

Former National RSA President B.J.



Clark (left) and Wellington President Ron Turner (left of right photo). Both came into the job in wanting to ensure that the coffers of the organization remained healthy for the over-all long term future of the RSA.

#### PRESIDENT'S WRAP



As most of you are aware I have stepped in again as your President as there were no volunteers to do the task. I will be seeking a replacement during the next 12 months!

It was great to see so many members during the Centenary lunch at the James Cook Hotel and it proved to be a most successful function. Well done to those with limited mobility who made the effort to get there.

During the period of 9-11 October, the RNZRSA commemorated the Centenary of the National Council. It started with a parade at the National War Memorial on 9 October in the late afternoon at which wreaths were laid followed by the Last Post ceremony. The next two days were taken up with a large number of change of rules because of recent modification of the structure and what to do about the Associations that decide to leave the RNZRSA or do not pay their capitation.

Many of you may not know that there have been changes to the RNZRSA's structure, which has now been designed to bring it into the 21st century. There is now a Board which is responsible for the Governance of the organization and the National Executive Committee, now called the President's Forum, which is responsible for representation.

The Board is chaired by an experienced businessman and the members applied to join, of which three women are on board from the seven selected. I am a Board member for the next three years and hope the changes will improve the performance of the organization.

We do need to get recently retired along with current servicemen and women to join as we need the RNZRSA to be around for a second century.

There has to be an organisation to force the politicians to support those who have served their country in the past and are suffering. In a nutshell, that is what the RNZRSA is all about.

Please encourage the younger people to join; it can be done on line so they do not need to attend a club with all of the 'old people'.

With best wishes towards a very Happy Christmas with loved ones as well as a safe and prosperous New Year as we head into 2017.

David Moloney

#### Wellington RSA closure times

The WRSA office will be closed between Thursday December 22 and Monday January 9 2017.

Please note that the name of the building has now been changed from Willbank to Crowe Horwath House.



**IMAGES FROM THE WELLINGTON RSA CENTENNIAL  
LUNCHEON AT THE JAMES COOK HOTEL ON  
TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 13 2016**





# LOOKING BACK

**IN THIS ISSUE WE FEATURE THREE WORLD WAR TWO VETERANS, WHO ARE ALSO THE OLDEST MEMBERS OF THE WELLINGTON AND KARORI RSA'S.**

## **HECTOR HOPKINS**

**100 years old**

**Sergeant, 19th**

**Battalion, 2nd NZEF**



**Q: When did you experience your first military training?**

**A: It was while I was at New Plymouth Boys High School when we used to change our clothes and practice on the Vickers and Lewis guns without any rounds. A cousin of mine Sydney Hartnell went on to be the CO of the 19th Battalion before later being promoted to Brigadier when he moved up into the 5th Infantry Brigade.**

**Q: How long was it before you were called up into the services?**

**A: I went from a train from**

**New Plymouth to Trentham in January 1941 and sailed away three months later.**

**Q: When you went into Maadi camp in Egypt, what sort of routines did you fall into?**

**A: We did a lot of route marches from the camp. I can always remember the locals used to bring us hot bully beef soup whenever we stopped for a break. Because it was so hot, I usually was unable to drink it until we were about to state again. We also had a lot of rice, so much so, that I have not had it since then.**

**Q: What was your role within the 19th Battalion?**

**A: They gave me a clerical job in Maadi and when I went over to Italy, I was in charge of the medical records. We recorded all the movements of personnel to and from the hospitals, although we had no typewriters and therefore only used pen and ink.**

**Q: Did the Army change you at all?**

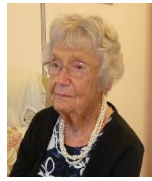
**A: Yes. I used to write with my right arm, but when I got back home I found I could not write properly. I changed hands and has since have only written with my left hand. It was wonderful to get back home and can remember meeting my mother, father and future wife at the New Plymouth railway station.**

## **NOELINE RITSON**

**99 years old**

**LAC and Nurse,**

**Women's Auxilliary Air Force**



**Q: Did you come from a family which had done military service?**

**A: I had three uncles serve in World War One, but none of them ever spoke of their experiences to me.**

**Q: At the outbreak of WWII, what were you doing?**

**A: I was a volunteer with the Voluntary Aid Division in Auckland. I had always wanted to be a nurse but my mother was against the idea. She told me I would be at everyone's beck and call and will have to cut old people's toe nails and do all sorts of horrible things. The first lot of WAAF's that went away were nurses from Auckland Hospital, who in time became known as Tuis. Mum was in tears when she had learnt that I wanted to go away, while Dad was grumpy. In the end I never took the application in.**

**Q: How did change come about?**

**A: About two months later the air force sent out similar forms and this time I filled them out and told my parents I was off. This was in early 1942.**

**Q: Was it a tough introduction?**

**A: Not really because I was used to working shift hours at the hospital. We only had two or three goes at marching and because I was usually on the night shift, I managed to avoid that.**

**Q: What were the conditions like?**

**A: Our hospital in Auckland was small and sometimes we had to deal with some horrible burn cases of seeling poor chaps with skins hanging down over them. We also had a lot of minor accidents, but the biggest came in August 1943 when a Liberator aircraft blew up in an explosion which killed three of the five crew members and eleven of the 25 passengers. When we were not doing nursing duties we used to do drills such as evacuating patients on stretchers through the windows. After being at the hospital I was then stationed at Seagrove airbase for the remainder of the war. It was all very hush, hush and few New Zealanders even knew of its existence.**

## **BRUCE CUNNINGHAM**

**97 years old**

**Pilot Officer, Bomber Command, POW, Wellington RSA Treasurer, 1959-80, Wellington RSA Life Member, RSA Gold Star badge & RNZRSA Certificate, 1981**



**Q: How did you come to serve in the military?**

**A: I left school when I was nearly 14 and later when I went back to Wairarapa College I was later placed in a TF ballot and within a few months was in the Army. It did not suit me at all and thought I had better go somewhere else. I decided to go into the Air Force and everything seemed so simple as I had always been good at maths.**

**Q: How different were the two types of service Basic training?**

**A: In the Army I dug holes all over Waiouru, whereas the Air Force was more about mental exercises. My basic AF training began in Rotorua and I started to fly in New Plymouth. I went solo on Tiger Moths before going to Wigram and getting my wings on Oxfords. I then went to England.**

**Q: How stressful was it for you as one that was barely 20 years old and was in charge of a crew of 7 to 8 men?**

**A: We had a different attitude in those days. When I think back now, I think 'good gracious, did I really do that?'. When you went on ops you did not think about casualties, but rather than on the objective.**

**Q: How tiring was it flying at night?**

**A: I did not find it tiring at all, although my first trip was 7 and a half hours, which was a long time. When we left New Zealand we were asked if we wanted to fly fighters or bombers. Because so many had put their name down for fighters, I was selected as a Bomber pilot. In Rotorua I had experienced a decompression chamber and later when we got to England we had to undertake another one.**

## BRUCE CUNNINGHAM'S STORY (CONTINUED)

As I was the boss of my crew and had seen that the chamber could only hold six instead of seven, I waited outside, while the while the rest of the crew felt the affect.

**Q:** How many flying hours did you do before you went on operations?

**A:** I am not sure, but it must have been several hundred.

**Q:** Did you ever come close to running out of fuel on your return flights?

**A:** It was never a problem. Only once did I have to a diversion and that was during a training flight.

**Q:** How did you become a POW?

**A:** It was in 1944 and even to this day, I have never fully established what shot me down, despite five different explanations. At the time our Lancaster bomber was on fire, forcing all of the crew to bail out at about 7000 feet over a university town in Belgium. It did not long for the Germans to capture me after I landed on the roof of a two story café. This they did by using a trap door in the roof. I never saw the rest of my crew again. One landed on some rail tracks and was shot, although fortunately survived.

**Q:** Did you ever try to escape?

**A:** There was one time when we were forced to walk in the snow during the worst winter in 80 years. We finished in a camp 30 miles south west of Berlin. After a while I told my friend I was going home and tried to escape that night, but got caught.

**Q:** How did you get on with clothing, money and food?

**A:** I have only thought about this recently. It did not bother me where I slept. I soon got hungry and can remember when I needed to eat I saw a queue of Germans lining up to get bread. I managed to get to the top of the queue and got a loaf.

**Q:** When did you join the RSA?

**A:** Not long after returning home. I went to work for a man who was Treasurer of my local RSA and he persuaded me that I should join up.

**Q:** What does it mean to you to belong to the RSA?

**A:** I have done 100 collections, which broken down is 64 poppy days and 36 rose days, in the days when we used to have two collections a year. I was once told that this money does not go to welfare, which prompted me to answer 'of all the people in Wellington you have picked the wrong person to question as I am the RSA Treasurer.

**Q:** If you had one wish for the RSA, what would it be?

**A:** I just wish that it carries on and continues to do a wonderful job for returned servicemen and women as we owe it to them for serving our country.



## NEXT RSA LUNCHEON

**Where:** Hotel Bristol, 131-133 Upper Cuba St, Wellington

**Date:** Tuesday January 24 2016

**Time:** 11.30am

If you are able to come, please phone/email the office by Monday January 23 2017. The office phone number is 385-1191.

Correspondence to the Wgtn RSA can also be done through P O Box 27-052, Wellington 6141 or through the email address: [zenetta@wrsa.org.nz](mailto:zenetta@wrsa.org.nz)



A long standing tradition of the Karori RSA is going to the Time Cinema as part of their pre-Xmas outing. Here the members get ready to watch the film, while Karori RSA Life Member Pat Tie (below left) and Nancy McDonald both enjoy a complimentary glass of wine before the show.



## POPPY DAY 2017 ANNOUNCED!

Get your poppy day pinnars and street collectors ready. Poppy Day in 2017 will take place on Friday April 21. Place your poppy order through the Christchurch Memorial RSA either by ringing them on 03 379 9724 or on email: [office@christchurchrsa.org.nz](mailto:office@christchurchrsa.org.nz)

Last year \$1,900,952 was raised nationally. Let's try and beat this in 2017.



## INTRODUCING THE NEW NATIONAL RSA CEO, REAR ADMIRAL (RTD) JACK STEER



Before he became the new RSA CEO, Jack had a wide and distinguished career with the Royal New Zealand Navy for almost 43 years, including being Commander of Joint Forces NZ, Vice Chief of the Defence Force latterly Chief of Navy.

One of the first areas he is working on at National Office will be increase its efforts in providing support and improving communication throughout the RNZRSA organization. He has encouraged for keep an eye out on more social media and information, including the RNZRSA website and Basecamp. There will also be a regular email update from his office to as many of the RNZRSA members throughout



New Zealand as possible.

The National RSA Centennial Parade saw representatives from throughout New Zealand parade at the National War Memorial in Wellington.

## WELLINGTON RSA KEY CONTACT TELEPHONE NUMBERS

**President:** David Moloney, 973 6239

**Deputy President:** Matt Beattie, 476 590

**Vice President,** Theo Kuper, 476 9777

**Treasurer,** Phil Bolton, 389 9206

**Support Advisor,** Charlotte Bergman, 385 1191

