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About VA News

VA News is published four times a year by Veterans' Affairs New Zealand—Te Tira Ahu Ika a Whiro.

Our team takes care in writing great content and—to the best of our knowledge—has sourced accurate information.

The views expressed in VA News are not necessarily those of Veterans' Affairs or the New Zealand Defence Force.

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New Zealand Government

From the Head of Veterans' Affairs

Tēnā koutou katoa

Welcome to the spring edition of VA News. Since our last communication, many of our Waikato-based veterans attended our veterans' health and well-being forum in Hamilton at the end of May. The bright sunshine belied a very frosty start, and saw close to 250 veterans and families attend the event at the Claudelands Event Centre. The forums continue to bring veterans and their families together in a safe environment where they can share their stories, catch up with old mates, enjoy the camaraderie and receive information on the support and entitlements available to those in our veteran community. We will be holding a veterans' forum in Christchurch on Monday 6 December, at the Air Force Museum of New Zealand. Keep an eye on our website and Facebook page for details regarding registration.

In June our supplier of medical alarms and monitoring services, ADT Security Services, updated their products and monitoring services. This is providing veterans with more monitoring options and the new equipment now includes a monitored smoke alarm. The roll out of new alarms and monitoring services is occurring at various times across various regions and veterans will be contacted by ADT through their First Security subsidiary. If you have a medical alarm and receive emergency services through ADT and are concerned about the changeover of equipment, or if you have any concerns at all, please contact us.

August saw us move back into an initial period of lockdown in response to Covid-19 Alert Level 4. Veterans' Affairs continued to operate with staff working from home and our focus remains on providing services and supports to you and your whānau, no matter the alert level we find ourselves in. Lockdown saw the cancellation of the annual Vietnam Veterans' Day commemorations around the country, but I know that our Vietnam veterans would have taken a moment in their own bubbles to remember their comrades, especially those no longer with us.



Bernadine Mackenzie,
Head of Veterans' Affairs

In closing I would like to acknowledge the impact that recent events in Afghanistan have had on our Afghanistan veterans. For the past 20 years, the New Zealand Defence Force worked alongside partners in Afghanistan and made a significant contribution to the lives of the people of Afghanistan. You made a difference to the lives of an entire generation of people. We know you may be feeling frustration, sadness, grief, anger or betrayal, and you may be questioning your service. Don't. This is a time to reconnect with all those who served and are still in the forces, and also with those that have left and may not have the ready support of their comrades in arms. I encourage you to visit our website. We have a dedicated page for our Afghanistan veterans and you can connect with us to learn about the support that might be available to you and your families.

Ngā mihi

Bernadine

For your health and wellbeing and for that of your whānau and community, and as a service to your country, Veterans' Affairs encourages you to get the COVID vaccination. You can find out more about the COVID vaccination here: <https://covid19.govt.nz/covid-19-vaccines/>



Twenty years in Afghanistan

NZDF's deployment in Afghanistan was one of New Zealand's longest-lasting. Over 3,500 New Zealanders took part in military operations and training of local army personnel and local police, but also rebuilt infrastructure, new schools, developed the local agriculture, contributed to renewable energy projects as well as community health projects. They enhanced the lives of many Afghani people.

The final New Zealand forces withdrew from Afghanistan earlier this year, however those personnel and many before them may not have anticipated the rapid developments that have unfolded in Afghanistan.

For veterans of Afghanistan there will be frustration and sadness about the situation in Afghanistan, many wondering about the value of their contribution. Tony Spice, an Afghanistan veteran and case manager at Veterans' Affairs remembers the people. "One memory that stands out

for me was a school teacher who was not being paid. I asked him why he works if he's not being paid, he replied, "The only way to save this country's future is to educate the children as they will one day lead us."

Tony is now concerned about his former comrades, "As an Afghanistan veteran myself, I feel for all our Afghanistan veterans who might be struggling with the recent developments in Afghanistan, especially those who lost friends and comrades on their tour, "lest we forget".





Tragically ten New Zealanders died whilst on deployment in Afghanistan. For the families and former comrades of the fallen, the events and ongoing media coverage evoke strong memories and feelings of those losses.

In August 2012 three New Zealanders died while driving to the Romero base in Bamiyan province. Their vehicle was destroyed by an improvised explosive device. All three died instantly. They were deployed with the Provincial Reconstruction Team.

Wayne Nepia was the CSM of Kiwi Coy and he remembers that time well. "The tragic death of Jacinda, Luke and Richard occurred at a time when Kiwi Coy was just starting

to pick ourselves up and refocus. The battle of Baghak was just two weeks earlier. Kiwi Coy secured the site and recovered our comrades. We wanted to ensure that our fallen were recovered respectfully. It had a sombre impact on many of Kiwi Coy, the Crib 20 contingent and also our loyal Afghan contractors."

Wayne is also thinking of their service, "The service men and women in Afghanistan allowed a generation of Afghani people to live in a secure environment, with hope, opportunities and freedom. I pray and hope for the best outcome for our Afghan friends who served loyally alongside us."

Brett Te Wheoro, was also in Afghanistan (now also at Veterans'



Affairs) and shares Tony's concern for Afghanistan veterans and the Afghani people that they worked with, "We had close relationships with our interpreters and our Afghani Army colleagues. Together we trained hundreds of soldiers and were very proud of our work. It's a very sad outcome over there and we can only hope for the best for the Afghani people."

He wants to ensure that Afghanistan veterans are getting all the support that they can, "Reach out and talk about it. Unfortunately, the situation in Afghanistan isn't what we wanted to see, so connect with your comrades - they'll know where you're coming from. You can also call us at Veterans' Affairs or another support agency. Have that conversation. You are not alone."



If any veteran would like support immediately they can txt 1737 to begin a conversation with a counsellor. Other support can be provided by:

- **Veterans' Affairs**
0800 483 8372
- **NZDF4U**
0800 693 348
- **Lifeline Aotearoa**
0800 543 354
- **Samaritans**
0800 726 666
- **Contact RSA's District Support Managers.**



Tony Spice

Tony enlisted into the Army in 1990 as a Regular Force cadet (Burrows class) graduating into the Royal New Zealand Army Medical Corps (RNZAMC). Posted to a number of medical roles and units including 2/1 RNZIR Regimental Aid post (RAP), Queen Alexandra's Mounted Rifles (QAMR) RAP as well as a number of out of trade posts.

Deployed to Afghanistan on Crib 4 in 2002, Tony was there during Afghanistan's first democratic elections.

Having served for 30 years as a medic Tony took a role at Veterans' Affairs to keep serving NZDF, and to help current and former members of NZDF.



Brett Te Wheoro

Brett enlisted into the Army in 1988 on All Arms Recruit Course 248 and graduated after completion of Infantry Corps Training into 2nd/1st Battalion, Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment.

Brett deployed to Afghanistan on TG RUA in 2007, as part of the NZ two man training team attached to the UK Training Team in Kabul. However, because of the high risk of travelling into Kabul the role changed to a mobile (training) team, one that could be inserted anywhere in Afghanistan.

Having served for 30 plus years as an Infantryman, Brett took a role at Veterans' Affairs to keep serving NZDF, and help current and former members of NZDF.



Barry Rankin and the Lake Alice soldiers

In 2016, Barry Rankin received a phone call from an elderly woman asking if he could locate the grave of an uncle, a WWI serviceman, whom she believed had died while a patient at Lake Alice. As a prominent member of the Marton RSA Barry was a good starting point, but also one without the computer technology and knowhow of a modern researcher. Fortunately for the caller, she had reached a determined man.

Lake Alice Psychiatric Hospital was on the outskirts of Marton and operated from 1950 until 1999. A number of veterans who suffered from 'Shell shock' had been committed for treatment to Lake Alice sometimes without relatives knowing. A number of these veterans died while at Lake Alice, and they were usually buried in Mount View Cemetery. Unfortunately many were buried in unmarked graves usually on the day of or soon after they died.

Barry's first challenge was that he had no idea how to go about such research. Working with the soldier's name and an approximation of the date of death, he found a record of his burial on the Rangitikei District Council's Cemeteries website.

The council provided Barry with a map of the section of the cemetery in which the burial was recorded, but there was no headstone, or plaque, just a grass covered plot. Further research in the New Zealand Archives' 'Archway Records' where he discovered the man's military record, confirmed his death in Marton and recorded his religion. This extra bit of information led the intrepid Barry to a church record of his subject's funeral details. All confirming that he had the correct man.



Barry was able show the soldier's niece where her uncle rested. A few weeks later the soldier's son called and on Anzac Day 2018, they were all able to stand at his Father's grave. By then, a headstone and bronze service plaque had been placed.

The emotional reaction and appreciation shown by the soldier's niece and son, beside the graveside, remained with Barry and the persuasive nature of the soldier's niece convinced him to find more servicemen buried at Mt View Cemetery.

Barry discovered the names of 257 patients who had died between 1954 and 1994. He is working his way through this list looking for Returned Servicemen and then for their graves. Many of the Returned Servicemen were buried in unmarked graves, and from the mid 1980's their graves were only a basic headstone with no reference to any military service.

Barry has discovered the final resting place of 31 servicemen.

Veterans' Affairs have been working with Barry to establish the service or otherwise of some of the names that he has discovered. We're also funding headstones and we will support a commemoration (the date is still to be confirmed) of the servicemen buried at Mt View Cemetery.

Veterans' Affairs, the families of those servicemen, and all of Aotearoa/New Zealand owe our gratitude and a debt to a resourceful and determined man who is giving dignity and honour to our past servicemen. Thank you Barry.

If you know of or were related to any servicemen who were in Lake Alice, and would like to attend the proposed commemoration at Mt View Cemetery, please email Veterans' Affairs at veterans.projects@nzdf.mil.nz.



Message from the Minister

Tēnā koe

It is a difficult time, but as we have done before, together we will get through this. I would like to encourage you to get vaccinated. COVID-19 is with us now and for always.

Lockdowns are a crucial component of the COVID elimination strategy, but it is the vaccine that will do most to return us to our normal lives. If you are vaccinated I congratulate you, and if I can ask of you one more favour, it is to encourage your comrades to get vaccinated as well.

Yes lockdown can feel very drawn-out and it can pose some unexpected difficulties. Please call Veterans' Affairs or reach out to other community organisations if you

need support for anything. In recent days the Student Volunteer Army has been helping veterans receive their groceries. There are other organisations offering these small but important services. They want to help and it's OK to ask them for it. We want to overcome COVID and we want to keep you healthy.

To all veterans of Afghanistan – you are not alone. We are thinking of you and as we always were, we are very proud of you. The events in Afghanistan are far from what we had hoped for, but your service meant a great deal to us and the Afghani communities in which you worked. Please seek support if you require it,



and please remember that you are not alone. He waka eke noa.

Ngā mihi

Hon Meka Whaitiri
Minister for Veterans

Fantastic turnout at the Waikato Forum

On a sunny late autumn day close to 300 veterans and their whānau joined Veterans' Affairs and a number of other veteran agencies at the Claudelands Event Centre in Hamilton.

Claudelands has been the biggest event space we have used so far for our forums, but it soon filled up with veterans talking with exhibitors, reminiscing with mates and lining up for a scone.

These forums are designed with veterans and their whānau in mind. It's an opportunity for them to meet with a case manager in person, connect with local service providers, attend presentations from veterans' support organisations and to catch up with their friends.

For veteran Corey, "attending events like this is a great way to see what else I can gain or add for me and my family." While for Rick, "It's better when it's face-to-face as there's more of a connection" and they both agreed

that it's also a good to catch up with mates they haven't seen in a while.

Head of Veterans' Affairs Bernadine Mackenzie feels that value of meeting face to face can't be overstated, "Veterans feel more comfortable discussing issues, asking questions, learning about entitlements and giving appreciation in person and we're here to listen."

Our Waikato Forum followed two successful forums in Whangārei and Tairāwhiti/Gisborne. Veterans' Affairs is in Christchurch on 6 December at the Air Force Museum of New Zealand, and Auckland in the New Year. Keep an eye out for more details of both on our Facebook page and website.



Free emergency call outs

As we mentioned in our last newsletter our supplier for medical alarms and monitoring services, ADT Security Services have updated their products and monitoring services. They are continuing to roll-out the new medical alarms across the country. You will be contacted once the rollout reaches your region but until then your existing alarm continues to be monitored. **As part of the upgrade, all emergency response callouts are now paid by ADT.** To ensure that your callout is paid by ADT, they will send out a self-addressed envelope within three working days of the ambulance callout for you to send your invoice to, or you can email your invoice to akadt.keyaccts.nz@tycoint.com.

SureMed cuts processing times

We are continually working to improve the application experience for our veterans. One area that sometimes holds up a veteran's application is when we require information from their health practitioner. Previously we would email a request to them, and if there wasn't a response, we would follow-up in the same manner. On average it was taking 74 days to request and receive information from health practitioners.

Last year, Veterans' Affairs trialled an electronic service called SureMed (by Konnect NET | Clanwilliam Health). It's a secure system (a portal) for requesting and receiving medical information from New Zealand-based health practitioners. It means that Veterans' Affairs can ensure medical information is even more securely handled, and it makes it easier for medical practices to respond.

Overall, the use of SureMed has reduced the time to request and receive medical information from an average of 74 days to an average of 6 days. Not surprisingly we have made the trial system a permanent part of how we do things. Veterans should see a quicker response to their applications when information from their health practitioner is required.

Auckland case management clinics

Case management clinics at Ranfurly Veterans' Centre are cancelled while Auckland is at Alert Level 4 (Lockdown) and will not resume until Auckland is back at Alert Level 1.

Your thoughts about Veterans' Affairs

Earlier in the year we let our clients know that through our partner Public Voice, we would be running our annual independent client satisfaction survey by telephone, throughout the year, to ensure clients have the opportunity to provide feedback on a variety of topics.

The survey measures our performance and veterans' satisfaction and helps us to report on whether we are meeting our target of 90 percent satisfaction with case management and Veteran Independence Programme services. It also measures veterans' awareness and knowledge of the Code of Veterans' and Other Claimants' Rights and their general satisfaction overall with Veterans' Affairs.

The results of the client satisfaction survey conducted over the period 1 February to 1 May 2021, show that our clients in the main are very positive, with 97 percent of veterans who were contacted satisfied with the services they receive from Veterans' Affairs and 94 percent satisfied with their case managers ability to listen to and address their concerns.

The survey shows that we do need to work on and improve some areas of our communication to ensure that our clients fully understand the services and supports that are available to them. You can read the results of the client satisfaction survey on our website.

Additional surveys

We have also taken the opportunity to conduct two additional surveys. One on the application process, to help Veterans' Affairs set a benchmark for the improvements we are making in terms of our Better Services for Veterans project. The other for our Australia-based veterans, to check on whether there are any issues that are different about the general satisfaction with Veterans' Affairs services based on their location.

The applications survey was conducted from 28 April to 25 June 2021. The results showed that 87 percent of respondents were satisfied with how Veterans' Affairs kept them up to date with the status of their application but we have noted in the feedback from respondents that we do need to improve how we communicate about the application process.

The survey of New Zealand veterans living in Australia was conducted from 26 May to 16 June 2021. Results confirmed that 90 percent of respondents were satisfied with the services they receive from Veterans' Affairs.

The results of the two additional surveys are also available on our website.

More benefits available to Veterans

Do you have investments and are concerned at the low returns you are currently receiving from the banks?

Then have a look at the NZDF FlexiSaver Scheme. This is a managed fund with a range of investment options which was launched in 2015 for members of the Defence community, including Veterans and their families. There are now 2,224 members and \$38m invested. The fund manager is Mercer, a reputable company with many years of experience investing funds both in NZ and internationally.

While there is no guarantee, funds are invested across a broad range of investments to mitigate risk and maximise returns. There are a range of investment options and a discounted financial advice service is available to help people with investment decisions.

This scheme is one of a number of benefits available through the Force Financial Hub to Veterans and other former members of Defence, and families. These benefits include a discounted financial advice and mortgage broker service, funeral plan, Wills and power of attorney service;

and comprehensive insurances for life and property and vehicles.

According to NZDF Benefits Manager, Mark Williamson, the Force Financial Hub has been set up to raise the financial security and capability of Defence community households. "We want to make sure the Veterans community is aware of the benefits available to them through the Force Financial Hub. These benefits are another tangible way of recognising the contribution made by Veterans and their families".

To find out more about the NZDF FlexiSaver Scheme and other benefits available go to the internet and google Force Financial Hub or email benefits@nzdf.mil.nz for a booklet.

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FORCE 4 FAMILIES



By the numbers

2020/21

(to 30 June 2021)

 Number of Veterans' Affairs clients (veterans and their whānau):
13,000+

Total financial entitlements paid: **\$113.2m**

 Number of veterans and surviving spouses/partners receiving services from the Veteran Independence Programme
6,500+

 Number of calls from 1 July 2020, to 30 June 2021:
33,417

 Client satisfaction rating for 2020/21: **97%**

 Total number of decisions made:
2,598

Number of veterans on a rehabilitation programme (as at 30 June 2021): **91**

Statements of Principle (SOPs) adopted: **139**

Commemorative Fund Update

Did you know that if you have Qualifying Operational Service (QOS), you can now apply for a commemorative travel contribution to attend a New Zealand-based event that commemorates your service? Each veteran who has QOS is entitled to a life time maximum of \$2,500 for those who have not yet reached the maximum before 1 June 2021 (some conditions apply). This contribution

can be used for attending reunions and commemorations that commemorate your service. From the fund we can help with the costs of travel such as flights and ferries and two nights' accommodation. The application form can be found on our website and once we receive your application we'll be in touch and guide you through the next stages. Visit our website to find out more.

The RNZRSA are looking at ways to help Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland veterans get a COVID-19 vaccination. Email dsm.auckland@rsa.org.nz to see if they can help you.



Vietnam Veterans' Day

The 18th August marked Vietnam Veterans' Day. Unfortunately, with Covid-19 Alert Level 4 in place, the Act of Remembrance at Pukeahu National War Memorial Park was cancelled, as were many services at local RSAs that had been arranged throughout the country. While public events could not be held, the day remained an important one for our many Vietnam veterans and their families.

Between 1963 and 1975 over 3,500 New Zealanders served in Vietnam. They included more than 3,000 military personnel and 300 civilian medical and aid workers. Although most New Zealand personnel withdrew from Vietnam in 1973, the Civilian Surgical Team and RNZAF's 41 Squadron served there until 1975.

Vietnam Veterans' Day is a time to remember the service and sacrifice of those who died, and to acknowledge the service of those who returned home to Aotearoa. We thank all our Vietnam veterans for their service. Lest we forget.

Korean War anniversary

This year marks the 68th anniversary of the Korean War armistice. It was agreed at 10am on 27 July 1953, three years and one month after hostilities began. To mark the anniversary, a

small ceremony was held at Ōtaki Primary School which was attended by New Zealand Korean War veterans and serving members of Royal Regiment of New Zealand Artillery.



New Zealand was one of the first countries to respond to the United Nations Security Council's call for assistance, in what would become a seven year commitment. Decades on, the truce is still all that technically prevents North Korea and South Korea resuming war, as no peace treaty has ever been signed. The armistice is still the only safeguard for peace on the Korean peninsula.

New Zealand's involvement

- 4,700 New Zealanders served as part of the New Zealand contingent – Kayforce – under UN command.
- 1,300 served on Royal New Zealand Navy frigates during the war and for a period after the armistice.
- 45 men lost their lives serving in NZ forces – 33 of them during the war.

We thank all our New Zealand Korean War veterans for their service. Lest we forget.

Personal Profile:

Marty Donoghue, CE – RNZRSA

Ko Te Arawa tōku waka
 Ko Ngāti Whakaue tōku hapu
 Ko Tapihana tōku whanau
 Ko Marty Donoghue tōku ingoa

As a veteran, with 25 years spent in the New Zealand Army, taking on the role of Chief Executive of the RNZRSA was hugely significant for many reasons. I went into the Army straight out of high-school. I had operational roles in Angola, Bosnia, Bougainville and Iraq. I then moved into command roles which saw me working here and overseas. During all those years I was mostly unaware of the significant support the RSA had to offer both during and after my long journey in the army. Maybe it could have been different if I did know? I'm committed to changing that for our veterans and their families.

Just like all organisations, the RSA movement needs to change and evolve to ensure we can achieve our promise to connect with veterans and their families and to be prepared to respond to the needs of the next generation. We also need to deliver on our mission to support all those impacted by their military service.

At the moment, our focus is on delivering support to our veterans and ensuring we're a coherent organisation underpinned by a well-trained support staff, we have a strong voice that gets heard, and we have the financial strength required to support our future.

Our strength rests largely on our proud 105 year history and having a well-recognised identity. This is a great foundation to build on, but not one without challenges. Our financial sustainability is a challenge, and we are at our strongest when we operate as one – and that means we are all united in our focus and commitment to supporting veterans and their families, not just now but into the future. We need to enter a period of transformation to make greater progress.

The RNZRSA National President, our Forum and our Board, and the

staff within the National Office are committed to helping our organisation through this transformational period. Our strategic focus for the next few years will be to refocus our mission. The good news is, we have already made progress, including:

The delivery of the Government COVID-19 Grant, to over 600 individual applicants, impacting directly on over 3,000 whānau. They improved mental health and wellbeing, housing, mobility, medical, education and supporting transition from the military. The Grant highlighted significant veteran need and confirmed that when we all work collectively, we can deliver significant support.

The transformation of the support services network, where we are developing a comprehensive support network for veterans right across the country. We have already noticed how this refocused network is better coordinated and able to deliver support that our veterans need right now as they grapple with our current COVID-19 lockdown.

The development of an enhanced digital capability, that will vastly improve RSA case management, giving veterans and their families a much better experience.

The development of a refreshed national strategy, that will be shared across the movement to help clarify and establish future direction and activity.

I've thoroughly enjoyed the nine months I have spent in the role so far, and I've had the opportunity to visit many clubs and meet many people right across the motu. I've observed a few things I want to share with you:

I think there is a general perception in the community that being a veteran finished post Vietnam. Since 1990, we now have approximately 40,000 new veterans living in our communities with no real central government thought to how we provide the often-comprehensive support these people need now, and in the future.



There are many NGOs operating in the country, supporting veterans and their families. Together, we can be strong and do more. We need to collaborate better, be a "team of teams" and collectively do more for our veteran community

I don't believe our voice is as loud, or at times as angry, as it should be at a national level. I want people to hear us. While we will have constructive relationships with both the NZDF and Veterans' Affairs, there are times when we will disagree with their approach, particularly on matters that impact on the health of veterans. I want to ensure we take a much stronger approach to our advocacy role.

We have challenges, and we cannot ignore them. If we do not confront some of the more difficult and uncomfortable issues in our path, we cannot get past them to our future. We have to live our values, not just talk about them. We must live up to the expectations of the veteran community.

The support provided to me, and to all our veterans by the National Office staff, other veteran NGOs, and all of our volunteers has been overwhelming. The mahi they do is awesome. I want to do all I can to ensure they get the support, tools and resources they need to keep doing their good work.

I am very encouraged by the possibilities we have to do even more for our current veterans and their families, and to the future generation. I look forward delivering on our strategy over the next few years.

Farewell from the Governor-General

Kia ora koutou

As Governor-General, and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, I send warm greetings to New Zealand's military veterans.

At the end of September, my term of office will come to an end. There are so many memorable experiences to look back on, and my association with Defence Force personnel – past and present – will be high on that list.

Before I became Governor-General, I knew very little about our Defence Force. After five years in the role, I have become an ardent supporter. I have had many engagements with serving and former members of our Defence Force and I am grateful for the kindness and respect shown to me on every occasion.

Representing New Zealanders at significant commemorations, here and overseas, has given me insight into the extent of our nation's commitment to theatres of war around the world – and the impact of that commitment on our citizens.

When I first came into office, the First World War centennial commemorations were in full swing. My husband David and I joined other New Zealanders in retracing the voyages of our forebears to the battlefields of Europe and the Middle East. It was an honour to represent New Zealand at the commemorations of the Battles of Messines in Belgium, Be'er Sheeba in Israel and Le Quesnoy in France.

All the commemorations were extraordinarily emotional and unforgettable occasions. We thought of the many thousands of young men who fought and died so far from home, and the devastating loss suffered by their families back in New Zealand. We thought about what it must have been like for returning soldiers, trying to pick up the threads of their lives after the trauma they had suffered.

It is hard to single out any of them, but I think the commemoration at Le Quesnoy was a particularly proud experience. Battles in WWI that can be celebrated as a success are rare.

The story of the liberation of the town Le Quesnoy by New Zealand troops, with no loss of civilian life, is truly remarkable and continues to be honoured by the descendants in the town. It was wonderful to experience it with hundreds of New Zealand descendants of those troops.

On each occasion, David and I also visited vast Commonwealth War Cemeteries close to the battlefields. It was deeply affecting to see the lines of crosses receding into the distance and to reflect on the sheer scale of our nation's loss. Especially poignant was the peace and beauty of those beautifully tended graveyards marking the tragedy of the thousands who were slaughtered there, so far away from home.

There was a moment of personal connection for me when I found the grave of my Great Uncle, Thomas Reddy, in Berks Cemetery Extension, just outside Ypres. He was killed by a sniper's bullet just a few months before the battle of Messines.

The Anzac Commemorations in Gallipoli in 2018 were an equally momentous experience. The combined Australia and New Zealand Dawn service at Anzac Cove was extraordinary, but our New Zealand commemoration at Chunuk Bair was the highlight for me. That memorial, on the crest of the inhospitable cliffs that our troops had fought for but were unable to hold, is testament to the bravery of those young men and the futility of that war. The commemoration led by our military contingent was spine tingling.

I recall the Australian Minister, Peter Dutton, leaning across and offering a rather begrudging compliment that we New Zealanders always managed to outdo the Aussies in our military commemorations. He was right.

Over the past five years, I have met veterans from diverse theatres of war – from the remarkable Bom Gillies, the last surviving member of the Māori Battalion, who opened Te Rau Aroha Museum at Waitangi with me in 2020, to the Jay Force veterans who we celebrated at Pukeahu and



Government House earlier this year, to the Vietnam veterans mentioned in despatches who received their citations at Government House in Auckland and Wellington in 2019, and of course the veterans from the Second World War, Korea and Malaya who attend our ANZAC services each year.

During my term, twelve young officers from the Army, Air Force and Navy have served as my Aides de Camp. They are all remarkable young New Zealanders and they have become like family to David and me, and when they return to active duty, I follow their progress with close interest.

I've conferred royal honours on a number of former and serving personnel who have served our country with distinction both at home and abroad. Their citations can only hint at the dangers that they have faced in the course of their duties, and I am in awe of their courage and commitment.

As veterans know only too well, active service takes its toll – mentally, physically and spiritually. I imagine that the dislocation from loved ones is hard to bear, and when military service ends, that the transition to civilian life can be challenging.

My message to veterans, on behalf of all New Zealanders, is one of sincere thanks and gratitude for your service. I have the deepest respect for the sense of duty that inspires men and women to serve their country in this way. I wish you and your families everything good that life can offer in the years remaining to you.