



Sir Bom Gillies: The last surviving member of the 28 Maori Battalion

Sir Robert Nairn Gillies KNZM, affectionately known as Bom Gillies, served with B Company, 28th (Maori) Battalion, during the Second World War. He is the last surviving member of the 28 Maori Battalion.

Born on 14 February 1925 in Rotorua, he is of Ngāti Whakaue and Ngāti Kahungunu.

He attempted to enlist in the Maori Battalion twice but failed. He succeeded on his third attempt at just 17 years old, after lying about his age, as many others did.

Sir Bom served in B Company during the Second World War from 1942–1945. He saw action across Africa, Europe and the Middle East. He fought in the Italian campaign, and sustained injuries at Orsogna but continued serving with the 28 Maori Bn until the end of the war, including at the Battle of Monte Cassino.

Sir Bom has represented the Maori Battalion at many local, national and international commemorations. He attended the ceremonies in Italy marking the 70th and 75th anniversaries of the Battle of Monte Cassino in 2014 and 2019. He also led the celebration on the 75th anniversary of the return of B Company to Rotorua in 2021.

He had previously declined the New Zealand honour, but accepted it on behalf of all those who had served, saying:

“There are many soldiers who did more and who have never been recognised. I accept on behalf of all the boys, all my mates who served in the Maori Battalion.”





Sir Robert Nairn Gillies KNZM receiving his knighthood

In the 2022 New Year Honours, Sir Bom was appointed a Knight Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit, for services to Māori and war commemoration. His investiture was at Government House in Wellington, on 4 May 2022.

You can read more stories and updates in the Winter 2022 edition of the Veterans' Affairs Magazine



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Date

05 July 2022

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Last Modified: 7 July 2022