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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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Please note our Hamilton PO Box is now closed.

Cover image: Deputy Chief of Navy Commodore Melissa Ross with David Fenton, President of the New Zealand Malaya Veterans' Association.



New Zealand Government

From the Head of Veterans' Affairs

Tēnā koutou katoa

Welcome to the summer edition of VA News. It is that time of year where we traditionally gather with our families to reflect on the year that has been and to remember loved ones serving away from home, or no longer with us.

2020 has certainly been one of mixed events and emotions. COVID-19 has seen the world around us change – and it continues to change. It hasn't been easy for our veterans and their whānau during what has been a very tough year. VA remains committed to ensuring that you are all well supported through these changing times.

This year has also been a time for remembrance, commemoration and celebration of service. In early February VA hosted the Korean Vision Camp which brought together descendants of Korean War veterans both from South Korea and New Zealand, as well as some of our Korean War veterans. Our veterans gathered again at Pukeahu National War Memorial Park in early July to commemorate the 70th Anniversary of the Outbreak of the Korean War. Though their ranks are thinning, the sense of comradeship remains.

We prepared in August to welcome a number of our Second World War veterans to Wellington to mark the 75th Anniversary of the End of the Second World War. Unfortunately a change in Alert Levels under COVID-19 meant a change of plan and, while



Bernadine Mackenzie,
Head of Veterans' Affairs

disappointed, our veterans remained stoic and remembered the service and sacrifice of all those who served.

Further on in this edition I talk about the changes to the Veterans' Support Act 2014 that came into effect on 1 October. As a result of the changes we are able to offer more flexible support to veterans and their whānau. We are also excited to be looking at new initiatives for veterans affected by COVID-19. A pilot course specifically for veterans will be underway at the Taratahi Agricultural Training Centre in early December. We will have more on this in the next edition of VA News.

My staff and I are looking forward to serving you again in 2021. Meri Kirihimete ki a koe me te whānau, we wish you and your loved ones a safe and happy Christmas season.



Veterans' Affairs festive period hours

We will be closed over the Christmas and New Year period. We wish all veterans and their whānau a happy festive period and we look forward to seeing you all next year.

DEC We close on
23 Wednesday 23 December

JAN We reopen on
05 Tuesday 5 January



Malaya service honoured in Act of Remembrance

The service and sacrifice of veterans who served in Malaya and Borneo was marked at Pukeahu National War Memorial on 16 September, Malaya Veterans' Day. The ceremony honoured all who served in both the Malayan Emergency and Indonesian Confrontation.

This year marks 60 years since the end of the Malayan Emergency. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the planned National Commemoration was cancelled and instead an Act of Remembrance was held.

In attendance were members of the New Zealand Malaya Veterans' Association, representatives of the Government of New Zealand, members of the Diplomatic Corps, and representatives of the Malaysian High Commission. Chief of Defence Force Air Marshal Kevin Short and Deputy Chief of Navy Commodore Melissa Ross represented the New Zealand Defence Force.

Around 4,000 New Zealanders served in operations in Malaya and Borneo between 1949 and 1966, 20 New Zealanders made the ultimate sacrifice across both the Malayan Emergency and the Indonesian Confrontation. Many of the fallen were repatriated to New Zealand in 2018.



Top: Bill Russell, National Vice President of the New Zealand Malaya Veterans' Association, and Warrant Officer Class 2 Beharuddin Rezuan from the Malaysian High Commission.

Above: The Malaya Veterans' Association flag was flown in front of the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior.

Changes to the Veterans' Support Act 2014

VA News sat down with Head of Veterans' Affairs, Bernadine Mackenzie, to talk about what's changed in the Veterans' Support Act 2014.

Bernadine: A number of the recommendations made by Professor Ron Paterson needed legislative change, some of which has been addressed by the Veterans' Support Amendment Bill No. 2. This came into effect on 1 October and we can now offer more flexible support to veterans and their whānau.

VA News: What's changed with mental health support?

Bernadine: We're now able to support veterans with urgent mental health needs to access help before their eligibility for coverage has been established.

Previously, veterans were excluded from coverage if their service-related condition occurred while they were briefly AWOL or committing a minor offence. We are now able to provide support to these veterans.

Where there is evidence of a link between service-related trauma and criminal or self-destructive behaviours, such as a veteran injuring themselves during a mental health episode triggered by post-traumatic stress, we can recognise that in decision-making.

Also, we can now fund counselling for whānau, support people, and caregivers in order to support a veteran's wellbeing.



What's happening at VA

VA News: Are there other changes for whānau?

Bernadine: The definition of the term 'child' has changed and now covers all circumstances where a veteran becomes a guardian or acts as a parent to a child. This includes whāngai children, grandchildren, and children of former spouses and partners.

Home services previously stopped for a spouse or partner as soon as a veteran went into long-term residential care. These services will now continue for 12 months so there's time to sort out other arrangements.

It is now easier for surviving spouses or partners to access pensions and be reimbursed for funeral expenses when a veteran dies. They now only need to show that the veteran had Qualifying Operational Service.

A standard grace period of 28 days following the death of a veteran now applies to all pensions to minimise the chances of their whānau going into debt.

VA News: What are the changes for veterans who are imprisoned?

Bernadine: In the past, when a veteran was imprisoned any entitlements received by their whānau, such as a Children's Bursary, would stop. Now, whānau will now continue to receive these payments.

Rehabilitation support or treatment would stop as soon as a veteran was imprisoned. Veterans who are imprisoned can now continue to receive these services so that they do not miss out while other arrangements are being put into place.

VA News: Why has the 30-day time frame for decisions been removed?

Bernadine: Professor Ron Paterson pointed out that it's not easy to have a set time for complex cases and that 30 days is short compared to other jurisdictions. Australia has five months to make decisions and in Canada decisions must be made as quickly as possible.

We now have to make decisions as quickly as possible and keep applicants informed so that they know how their claims are progressing. This change takes into consideration situations such as waiting times for specialists, the complexities of a case, and delays in seeking and receiving records.


We have a veterans' reference group working with us to make sure that the changes benefit veterans and whānau.

VA News: What changes are there about Qualifying Operational Service declarations?

Bernadine: The declarations are still made in the same way but what has changed is how they are communicated. We can now publish announcements on our website instead of in the New Zealand Gazette.

Deployments that cannot be made public for national or operational security reasons will now have coverage as they can be declared Qualifying Operational Service without being made public.

- We've made it easier and quicker for veterans to claim entitlements – we're doing this by phoning them instead of writing letters. We are also getting most of the medical information we need from GPs securely and electronically. We are also simplifying some of our forms based on what veterans have told us would make it easier for them to make their claims.
- We care for the needs of some 12,000 veterans, which involves keeping in regular touch with them and making sure that they receive the support and services they are entitled to.
- This year our enquiry line has answered close to 30,000 phone calls from veterans living in New Zealand and all over the world. Don't hesitate to give our team a call.
- So far this year we have processed over 2,700 applications which is an average of 62 per week. This year we have been able to allocate claims to a decision officer a few days after applications have been lodged. This means faster decisions for our veterans.

 0800 483 8372

 www.veteransaffairs.mil.nz

 Find Veterans' Affairs New Zealand on www.youtube.com

Left: Veteran Darren Hunter and Sergeant Terraine Hollis.

In her own words: Warrant Officer Class 2 Kirsty Meynell

“As a female service person the struggle is real. I am a veteran, I am female, I’ve seen the horror, yet I am still reprimanded by people for wearing my father’s medals on the wrong side of my chest. They are mine, I’ve earned them and I have the scars to prove it. Let me be proud.”

Before joining the New Zealand Army, Warrant Officer Class 2 Kirsty Meynell had her civilian boss tell her that she would never succeed “I’m a pretty stubborn person, so that was almost enough for me to push through and prove her wrong.”

Prove her wrong she did. Kirsty first joined the New Zealand Army in 2000 and deployed to Timor-Leste 18 months later. She has served on multiple deployments during her time with the Army, including in the Solomon Islands and on two tours in Afghanistan.

Kirsty came out as gay while serving and her unit “didn’t even bat an eyelid,” which she says is a testament to their professionalism. When Prince Harry met New Zealand veterans and their spouses, Kirsty’s Commanding Officer asked her to attend with her wife Rachel.

Her first deployment to Afghanistan in 2011 coincided with the repeal of the United States’ ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ policy which prevented gay, lesbian, and bisexual personnel from serving openly in the military. Working with Americans during this deployment was the first time that Kirsty felt like she was different to other soldiers.

“I always had the mind-set that when I’m on deployment I’m there to do a job and I want to be known for my performance, my ability, what I achieve, not anything else. So I never outwardly advertised, especially in Middle Eastern countries, that I’m gay.”

On her second tour to Afghanistan Kirsty held three leadership positions, including as a force protection driver, and closed two missions. The pressure of being a female leader meant that she pushed herself to prove that she was more than capable, that she was the best.

“As a leader, you’ve got troops under you, you’ve gotta portray a certain image that you’ve got it together. But at times you don’t.” Not long after returning from her deployment Kirsty was diagnosed with an autoimmune disease that is triggered by trauma and stress.

During her career Kirsty has transitioned to civilian life and returned to the Army three times. Despite her service and the toll that it has taken on her, Kirsty feels that her service is not seen in the same light as other veterans. “On Anzac Day every second word is ‘he’ and ‘him’. There’s still this belief that women aren’t put in risky positions, that we get our medals for serving in an office.”

“People probably don’t understand veterans as complete people. Respect to me as a leader is getting the stories out there and voicing these things so that the next generation isn’t as affected.”

Kirsty’s focus now is on the next generation of soldiers coming up through the New Zealand Defence Force. “It’s not about us anymore, it’s about these other guys and girls coming through. It’s still important to tell your story and feel proud of what we’ve achieved, because we don’t do that enough.”



Right: Warrant Officer Class 2 Kirsty Meynell. Photograph courtesy of Russ Flat, taken as part of the Pride 25 Rainbow Warrior portrait series.

Message from the Minister

Kia Ora

This is my first message for VA News since having had the honour of being sworn in as your Minister.

I consider this position to be a privilege and will look to embrace the opportunity to represent the individuals who have sought to serve and protect our country.



This has been an unprecedented year for New Zealand. The COVID-19 pandemic has spread across the world and had a massive impact on our island nation. We are unfortunately not out of the woods yet, but I have little doubt that this challenge and any others that may present, will be overcome with teamwork and a forward-focused approach. As veterans I know that you are familiar with challenge, the strength of a unified front, and the necessity to both look and move forward.

In the coming year, it is a focus of mine to meet and talk with the veteran community. I consider it of utmost importance to both recognize and honour your contributions to this country. New legislation was passed earlier this year with provisions to help improve the lives of veterans and their whānau. Following along with this work I will look for more opportunities to provide support and assistance and am happy to hear your suggestions to that point.

As we gather over the festive season, it is important that we remember those serving overseas and those who are no longer with us. I wish you and your loved ones a relaxing, safe Christmas, and hope that your new year is a happy one.

Nga Mihi Aroha

Meka Whitiri
Minister for Veterans

Boost to RNZRSA for welfare grants

The RNZRSA has received \$2 million from the Government's COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund, this means that they can continue to provide welfare grants to veterans and their whānau who are in need.

They are now accepting applications for financial assistance. To find out if you or someone you know is eligible for support, visit the RNZRSA website.

 www.rsa.org.nz


Calling all Jayforce veterans

A National Commemoration to mark the 75th anniversary of Jayforce will be held in Wellington on 19 March 2021. We are accepting expressions of interest from New Zealand Jayforce veterans to attend the commemoration. Veterans' Affairs will cover travel and accommodation costs for Jayforce veterans to attend with a support person.

To be eligible, veterans must:

- have served for New Zealand as part of Jayforce
- be living in New Zealand
- have a support person who can travel with them
- provide a medical certificate stating that they are fit to travel.

To apply or find out more, get in touch with us.

 **0800 483 8372**

 **veterans.projects@nzdf.mil.nz**

Calling all 41 and 141 Squadron veterans



The 41 Squadron RNZAF Association is holding a reunion for all 41 and 141 Squadron veterans in Auckland in March 2021.

MAR
28 28–30 March 2021



Swanson RSA,
663 Swanson Road,
Swanson, Auckland


To register, get in touch with the organisers:

Bryan Franklin

 **027 477 6612**


 **bryan.s@franklins.net.nz**

Des Budd

 **027 404 4656**

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Alan Chung

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Veterans honoured despite commemoration cancellation



Gift boxes for the Second World War commemoration veteran delegates.

Veterans who were meant to attend the cancelled National Commemoration Marking the 75th Anniversary of the End of the Second World War still received mementoes for the event with gift boxes from Veterans' Affairs.

Through a public call for submissions of interest, Veterans' Affairs had organised a delegation of 23 New Zealand Second World War veterans and their support people to attend the commemoration. Three days before the event was to go ahead at Pukeahu National War Memorial in Wellington, it was cancelled because of the increase in COVID-19 alert levels.

The delegation included New Zealand Navy, Army, Air Force, and Women's Auxiliary Army Corps veterans who had served in Europe, North Africa, the Pacific, Japan, and New Zealand.

Veterans' Affairs' project manager Elaine Myers-Davies wanted to make sure the delegation still received the special commemoration items that had been gathered for them.

"Veterans are at the heart of what we do. We sourced these items especially to present to the official veteran delegates at the commemoration as a small thank you for their service.

"Though the event cancellation was crushing, we wanted to make sure that the veterans received their special items. This way, they know that their service and sacrifice continue to be honoured," she said.

Project advisor and former Regular Force Warrant Officer Brett Te Wheoro said that packing and sending the gift boxes was the least he could do to say thank you to the veterans.

"These ladies and gentlemen did their bit for New Zealand, the least we can do at Veterans' Affairs is show how much we care about what they did for us."

The gift boxes posted to the veteran delegates included a replica military wool blanket, a Veteran Lapel Pin and Certificate of Appreciation, and the official commemoration booklet.

Annual client survey results released

Annual client satisfaction survey

The results of our annual client satisfaction survey show that clients are mostly positive about their services from Veterans' Affairs. Over 90% of respondents said that they were happy with their case manager's ability to listen and address their concerns, their interactions with their case manager, and the ease of being able to contact their case managers.

"They have been very helpful and always called me back to confirm any queries that I require."

Over 85% of veterans were satisfied with VA's ability to resolve their queries and rated highly the services that they receive from the Veterans' Independence Programme. Overall, 95% of our clients are satisfied with the service that they receive from us.

"First Class service, good communication with case manager when required."

What we need to work on

The survey shows that only 35% of respondents were aware of the Code of Veterans' and Other Claimants' Rights. The Code explains people's right to complain about treatment or services that they have received from Veterans' Affairs. Our aim over the next year is to make sure clients are aware of their rights under the Code and how they can tell us if they feel that their rights have been breached.

Rehabilitation programme survey

The Veterans' Affairs rehabilitation strategy was launched in 2018 and focuses on rehabilitation that is designed to give practical support and assistance to veterans. The strategy has three guiding principles:

- The needs and views of veterans matter, and they need to be at the heart of what we do.
- The health and well-being of a veteran's immediate and wider whānau matter.
- The full range of a veteran's needs – physical, psychological, spiritual, and cultural – should be recognised.

The rehabilitation programme survey shows that most clients are happy with the support that they receive. Over 70% of respondents reported feeling like an equal partner during the rehabilitation process, felt they could rely on the rehabilitation programme as a support network, thought the programme was simple to access and navigate, and trusted their service providers.

"My case manager understands what I am going through. They are not forcing me straight back into work, but rather helping me get to a place where I am able to go back to work."

65% of respondents felt more independent because of the programme and 79% of respondents reported feeling well-supported by their case managers and rehabilitation advisors.

"I can tell them anything, whatever's happening, they help me straight away or they point me in the right direction."

What we need to work on

Just over 51% of respondents described feeling comprehensively supported by the rehabilitation programme. Our goal over the next year is to make sure that more of our programme clients feel this way.

 www.veteransaffairs.mil.nz



Update on the deployment review

Three declarations of Qualifying Operational Service have been announced. The declarations cover deployments declined before 2009 that warranted reconsideration.

Now, regardless of mission or operation, veterans are eligible for support from Veterans' Affairs if they served in:

- **Namibia** – between 1 September 1989 up to and including 31 March 1990;
- **Mozambique** – between 1 February 1994 up to and including 30 June 2005; and
- **Laos** – between 1 July 1997 up to and including 31 May 2003.

The announcement comes following the conclusion of this part of our deployment review project. As part of the project, we are reviewing deployments since 1 April 1974 to determine if they should be considered Qualifying Operational Service. This is to ensure that support is available to those who the Government intended us to support through the Veterans' Support Act 2014.

Work is continuing on the deployment review, which includes deployments to:

- Rwanda;
- the Middle East; and
- Pakistan.

New declarations

Veterans are eligible for support from Veterans' Affairs if they served in:



Personnel from the final NZDF Taji rotation depart RNZAF Base Whenuapai, April.

Corrections staff at the Post-Service Employment and Wellbeing Expo, February.

Our year in pictures



Chief of Defence Force Air Marshal Kevin Short at the Act of Remembrance Marking the 75th Anniversary of the End of the Second World War, August.



Donnie Crossland with photographs of his great-grandparents. Margaret Mason, who served in the Women's Royal New Zealand Naval Service, and James Mason, who served in the Royal New Zealand Navy in the Korean War. Korean Vision Camp, February.