

Determined effort identifies Lake Alice hospital veterans' graves

Plans are underway for a ceremony in the Rangitikei town of Marton to bless a number of previously unmarked graves of First and Second World War veterans who died while in the care of the old Lake Alice Psychiatric Hospital.

The 31 graves have been discovered by Marton RSA life member Barry Rankin, who started the task with no experience of tracking down any kind of records.

In 2016, a member of the public approached Barry to see if he could find the grave of her uncle, a returned serviceman who had died while a patient at Lake Alice. This project was to take Barry much further than he had anticipated.

Lake Alice Psychiatric Hospital was on the outskirts of Marton and operated from 1950 until 1999. Some veterans who suffered from 'shell shock' had been admitted for treatment to Lake Alice, sometimes without relatives knowing. A number of them died while at Lake Alice and they were usually buried in Mount View Cemetery.

Unfortunately, as Barry was to discover, many were buried in unmarked graves.

Barry found a record of the first serviceman's burial on the Rangitikei District Council's cemeteries website. The council provided a map of the cemetery's graves, but for this serviceman there was no headstone or plaque.



After being asked to track down one serviceman's grave five years ago, Marton's Barry Rankin has now discovered the final resting places of more than 30 servicemen who died while at the old Lake Alice Psychiatric Hospital

“Archives New Zealand service records confirmed he died in Marton and also his religion. With that bit of extra

information I found the church record of his funeral details, which confirmed we had the right person,” Barry said.

The family was deeply grateful to Barry for finding the plot. He has since organised a gravestone and service plaque.

Barry decided to investigate further. He discovered the names of all the patients who had died at Lake Alice and began working through that list looking for returned servicemen and their graves. He has since discovered the final resting place of 31 servicemen.

Marti Eller, Deputy Head of Veterans’ Affairs, said Veterans’ Affairs was very pleased to be able to support Barry and acknowledged the hard work and care he had put in to locate the last resting places of veterans in Mt View Cemetery.

“It’s important for the families of those veterans and for us. This work honours their service to our country,” she said.

Veterans’ Affairs had helped with determining service records of the deceased veterans and may potentially fund gravestones and plaques.


The Marton RSA, in association with the Rangitikei District Council and subject to COVID-19 restrictions, is now planning to hold a commemoration and blessing of the graves at Mt View Cemetery, State Highway 1 (500m north of the Calico Line intersection), on Saturday 5 March.

The Marton RSA would like to hear from anyone who may have had a relative or knows of a serviceman who was at Lake Alice Hospital, as they would like to invite those people to the commemoration and blessing.

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