

## Repatriation-Te Auraki-The Return

### Background

As a young man, Paul Thomas promised his mother he would get his brother Adrian's remains returned to New Zealand. Adrian was killed in 1956 while fighting with his NZSAS unit in Malaya, and was buried in Cheras Road Christian Ceremony in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

After years of trying with constant rejection, it finally happened at Auckland International Airport on Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> August 2018.

Not only was Adrian's remains returned but so too were 27 others.

### Preamble

This report is a compilation of events of Te Auraki and two subsequent re-interments. It is merely a view through my eyes of a significant NZ Military Historical event and hopefully closure for the families and fellow veterans.

All families have been advised of this Sitrep and images shown were provided by the families or approved by them.

They were taken from the NZDF website and at Wairoa and Waipukurau.



### The Arrival

On a cold, blustery and showery morning, the chartered Air NZ aircraft came to a halt outside the engineering hanger at 10.20am. It was then moved backwards into a position some 100 metres from where the families waited under gazebos or in the comfort of the hanger.

After about 20 minutes of aircraft preparation and unloading ramp positioning, it took around 75 minutes for the 27 serviceman and one baby to be ceremoniously unloaded with dignity and then, slow marched into position,

placed on casket stands in order, then each accompanied by a 7 person NZDF bearer party. The baby had a white casket with 2 bearers.

During this time the official party of our Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Jacinda Adern, the Minister of Defence and Minister of Veteran's Affairs the Hon Ron Mark and several other VIPs stood observing.

In passing showers, cold conditions our PM stood proud, refusing a seat, no hat, no umbrella transfixed on the ceremony braving the elements along with the 200 plus NZDF personnel who stood fast.

The procession of 28 caskets, led by a kaumatua, flanked by warriors and accompanied by the beating of the drum, moved past her and the RNZAF Honour Guard into the hanger.

The entire Air NZ crew of pilots and airline hostesses who had flown them back from Malaysia via Singapore also formed their own line of honour in their flight uniforms.

Each family were restricted to 12 family members. Each had an allocated area with 14 chairs. One for each member, the other for their Liaison Officer and Funeral director.

Wayne and Hilary Alexander and I were honoured by Colleen to be included as part of the Frith whanau 'allocation'.



As they entered, to a karanga, we all welcomed home;

Pte George Amas-RNZIR	Pte Peter Bonner-RNZIR
Pte Robert Breitmeyer-RNZIR	LCpl Teriwhero (Percy) Brown-Iwihora-RNZIR
Cpl Allister Buchanan-NZSAS	Pte Owen Dawson-RNZIR
Sgt Alister Don-RNZA	Pte Don Frith-RNZIR
Sgt Richard Fry-RNZIR	Cpl Robert Gatenby-RNZIR
Ssgt Graham Grigg-HQNZ Force	Cpl Hoani Hapeta-RNZE
Pte Bruce Hay-RNZIR	Pte Terrance Healey-RNZIR
Pte Rongomai Honatana-RNZIR	Pte Keith Hurman- RNZIR
Pte Tuterangi Kawha-RNZIR	Sgt Isaac King-RNZIR
Pte Alexander Monk-RNZIR	Sgt George Nepia-FIJI INFANTRY REGIMENT
Pte Neil Richards-RNZIR	Pte Toma Solia-RNZIR
Tpr Adrian Thomas-NZSAS	Spr Waitawhiti Toni-RNZIR
Pte Brian Tuxworth-RNZIR	Bdr Robert White-RNZA
Pte John Williams-RNZIR	

Master Desmond Rogers-3 month old son of Sergeant Desmond and Helen Rogers 7 Sept-22 Dec 1963.

NB; These details are courtesy of the NZDF official programme.

.....

Once settled in their designated location, each family were allowed a quiet reflection time with their loved one, signalled at the end by a waita from a NZ Army Band Sgt.

The very moving ceremony took place in the hanger and lasted approximately 30 minutes including The Welcome Home to Aotearoa by the PM and waiata from the NZDF contingent.

At the conclusion the 28 Bearer parties then re-entered the hanger and took the caskets to the waiting hearses positioned outside.

Each casket was loaded into the hearse, a final reflection time and then they moved off in convoy past a rousing NZDF Haka by men and women from all three services.

Outside the Air NZ Compound, Andy Peters, as President of the NZ Vietnam Veteran's Assn and other Veteran's numbering around 200 formed a Guard of Honour as the hearses departed.

Despite repeated lobbying and requests, NZDF denied Malayan, Malaysian, other Veterans and Vietnam Veterans' the opportunity to provide a Guard of Honour from the plane to the hanger for their comrades. Although there was plenty of room within the engineering area they were even denied access to view the proceedings.

TV crews and cameras took precedence.

Instead, the 200 Veterans were relegated to the roadside outside the fenced compound.

.....

Don Frith and Jack Williams (Both V4) were then taken by hearse from the Air NZ Engineering compound to the domestic terminal.

They were flown to Wellington that afternoon and then taken to Wairoa and Waipukurau by hearse by their local funeral directors.

.....

### Donald Frith's Re-interment

On Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> Aug at 10.45am, Don arrived at the Wairoa Memorial Hall on a gun carriage towed by an American WW2 Jeep, escorted by another.



He was taken off the gun carriage by members of 1 RNZIR and then taken into

the hall by whanau flanked by a Veterans Guard of Honour.

Sony Hona had positioned our V4 Flag and Portraits Roll of Honour inside the Hall.

We met Colleen, Dot (Don's twin sister), his nephews and whanau and were also welcomed by the mayor, Craig Little.

Tributes were done by the family and John Bayly followed by a waiata from the locals

Wayne Alexander who was Don and Jack's Section Commander in Malaysia and Vietnam spoke on Don's Military life.

At the conclusion, V4 carried Don outside and onto the gun carriage to the tune of Green Green Grass of Home, again flanked by a Guard of Honour.

1 RNZIR, did the final carry past his mum and dad to his final resting place in the RSA Section of the Wairoa Cemetery to the sound of a lone piper from Don's old school, Napier Boys' High.

The 1 RNZIR Bearer Party Commander presented Colleen with Don's Flag that had draped his casket since Malaysia.

The serving soldiers, family, friends and V4 personnel filled in his shellscape.





"Rest in Peace Don".

.....

### Jack William's Re-interment

Jack lay in state at the Central Hawkes Bay Funeral Home where we were able to spend a quiet time with him.



Proceedings began on Friday 24<sup>th</sup> Aug by a powhiri at the Central Hawkes Bay College and the unveiling of a plaque for past pupils, Stuart Ellwood (161 Bty) and Jack.



Again, Sony had pre-positioned our V4 Roll of Honour Memorial and a powhiri was held on Saturday at Jack's primary school. A welcoming whaikorere was done by Brian Morris, Mike Pehi replied on our behalf.

Padre Raniera Bassett, ex Navy and good friend of Wayne officiated.

Tributes were given by Jack's family, Grant, Wayne, Jill and Andrew.

Jack's son, John also introduced himself and said a few words saying among other things that Jack was a husband and a father. His mum and Jack's widow Margaret, Ginelle, Rachael, Kira and Elissa all came from Australia for Te Auraki.

The Waipukurau Mayor, Sue Chant from the school, RSA rep and Bruce Turfrey also spoke. Bruce announced that a new road, Jack Williams Lane will be part of a new Waipukurau subdivision.



The Hon Ron Mark, Minister of Defence and Veteran's Affairs also spoke and apologised to the families for taking so long to bring them home.

Gordon Benfell and Geoff Dixon covered his Military life from the beginning.....to the end.

V4 performed our 'May Ling Waiata'.

Jack passed through a guard of honour and was then was taken to the adjacent cemetery and carried to his grave by his mates from V4.



“Rest in Peace Jack”.

Thank-you

Our heartfelt thanks to the families for inviting us to be part of our mate’s return and meeting with you all.

.....

Quin Rodda, our Company 2IC was invited to Auckland Airport but was unable to attend their arrival and re-interments because of prior commitments. He sent a message to Don Frith’s and Jack William’s whanau.

Those who attended either Don Frith’s and/or Jack Williams re-interment at Wairoa and Waipukurau included;

Mayors and RSA Representatives of Wairoa and Waipukurau.

NZDF Liasion officers. 1 RNZIR bearer party, buglars and support personnel.

The communities and many others including Veterans’.

There was a very large turnout to both services.

Victor 4 Veterans included;

Harawira Gardiner, David Keay, Teao Marama, Wayne Alexander, 'General' Benfell, Len Constable, Willie Peacock, Olly Taukamo, Paul McKeany, 'Pee Jay' Clark, 'Nobby' Clarke, 'Puku' Davidson, Bob Derwin, 'Dicko' Dixon, Phil O'Connor, Grahame Alexander, Simon Dunn, Morrie Edwards, Hardie Martin, Kevin Mitchell, 'Gordy' Nairn, 'Wheels' Pearce, Mike Pehi, Allan Plaisted, 'Jeb' Rowley, 'Biggie Rat', 'Tank' Smith and 'Squirrel' Symons.

A total of 28.

Don and Jack's Platoon Commander in Malaysia and Vietnam, Harley Pope sent the families a message from the UK which was read out at each service.

Many wives and partners also attended.

Other known Veterans from Vietnam and other Conflicts included:

Martyn Dunn, Peter Grant, John Sturgess, Mike Perreau, Tig Lima, Roger Maaka, Tui Stirling, John Tairea, Frank Kotua, Frank Varga, Graham Duncan and Mike Morrison.

Final Acknowledgement

The Repatriation-The Return-Te Auraki was initiated by Paul Thomas (V4) who with the support from Andy Peters (V4), Bob Davies (V3) and Sir Harawira Gardiner (V4), he was able to fulfill his promise to his mum.

Kia ora.

Report compiled by Geoff Dixon

V4 Company-Vietnam 1969-1970

.....