

# Munro medals display opens

A TRIBUTE to aviation war hero the late Les Munro and his collection of gallantry medals, including the Distinguished Service Order and Distinguished Flying Cross, went on permanent display at the Museum of Transport and Technology (MOTAT) in Auckland last weekend.

Squadron Leader Mr Munro, a long-time Waitomo district resident, made international headlines in March last year when he generously offered to auction his collection to raise funds for the upkeep of the Bomber Command Memorial in London which honours his fallen comrades (*Waitomo News*, March 10, 2015).

British philanthropist Lord Ashcroft stepped in and offered a donation of £75,000 to the RAF Benevolent Fund in return for Mr Munro withdrawing his medals from auction and gifting them to MOTAT (*Waitomo News*, April 16, 2015).

Since gifting the medals, a special tribute section has been built and last weekend they were finally put on display in MOTAT'S Aviation Display Hall.

## HONOURED

"The museum is honoured to be the custodians of these precious items for the benefit of all New Zealanders," says MOTAT chief executive Michael Frawley. "MOTAT has a close association with NZ Bomber Command and the utmost respect for Les



**FLYING LEGEND:** British philanthropist Lord Ashcroft (left), Prime Minister John Key, the late Les Munro and MOTAT chief executive Michael Frawley at the ceremony when the former squadron leader's medals were officially gifted to MOTAT last year. Mr Munro auctioned his medals (below left) to help pay for the upkeep of the Bomber Command Memorial in London to his fallen comrades. FILE PIC



Munro and his colleagues.

"They made a huge contribution to the Second World War effort and we commemorate their courage and sacrifice."

Lord Ashcroft personally flew the medals and memorabilia to New Zealand in April where Mr Munro presented them to MOTAT at a special ceremony in front of his favourite aircraft, the Avro Lancaster.

At the time he said he was pleased that the medals could remain on home soil and at MOTAT, in close proximity to the legendary bomber in which he flew most of his operations.

Mr Munro was the last surviving pilot of the Dambusters Raid of May 16, 1943. The mission aimed to destroy dams of the highly industrialised Ruhr Valley, striking deep at Germany's industrial heart and the nation's morale.

Of the 19 Lancasters dispatched that night only 11 returned.

Mr Munro was also later involved in Operation Taxable, a mission to confuse the Germans about

the location of the D-Day landings at Normandy.

After the war, he farmed at Mapiu and spent a remarkable 30 years in public service including being chairman of the Waitomo County Council and Waitomo district mayor from 1989-1995.

He died in August aged 96.

## IN BRIEF

### Scales stolen

KAWHIA Boating and Angling Club's fish weighing scales were stolen from the weigh station inside the Omimiti St clubrooms some time between January 24-30. "It's terrible timing for our club," says secretary Linda Rowe. "We had our Auckland anniversary sweepstake competition last weekend and have the One Base tournament on February 11, so we had to immediately replace the scales." She says fortunately the club's VHS radio wasn't taken as it is a vital for ensuring anglers' safety, especially when crossing the bar. The 30kg scales are valued at \$495.

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