

YOUR NEWS, YOUR VIEWS

WAITOMO News



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FALLEN COMRADES: Former Waitomo mayor and RAF 617 Squadron's only surviving 'Dambusters' pilot Les Munro is selling his war medals to help upkeep the Bomber Command memorial in London. PHOTO SUPPLIED

Medals' price likely to go sky high

BY **ROBBIE KAY**

WAITOMO mayor Brian Hanna is keen to see support for a Waikato-based fundraising campaign to buy the war medals and logbooks of 617 'Dambusters' Squadron

Leader and former Waitomo mayor Les Munro.

The medals, which include the Distinguished Service Order, Distinguished Flying Cross and Companion of the NZ Order of Merit, are to be auctioned by London war-

time memorabilia specialists Dix Noonan Webb on March 25 along with Mr Munro's log books.

Also up for auction is his copy of the menu of the June 22, 1943 celebration dinner at the Hungaria Restaurant in London, hosted

by AV Roe & Co - manufacturers of the Lancaster bomber flown by the 617 members.

It has 55 autographs, most of them survivors of the Dambusters' operation on Ruhr Valley dams in Germany on May 16-17, 1943. **TO P3**

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We welcome your stories and story tips. If supplying photographs we require high resolution (a minimum of 1MB) jpgs. Please note that due to occasional space constraints, sports results/draws may not be published.

Please contact the editorial team

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LETTER & THUMBS RULES

No Letters to the Editor or Thumbs Up/Down will be published unless the name of writer, full address and daytime contact phone number are included for verification. **Nom-de-plumes/pen names will not be accepted.** Letters and Thumbs Up/Down are published at the editor's discretion and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Waitomo News. In general, Thumbs Up are to acknowledge random acts of kindness by individuals while Thumbs Down generally reflect the opposite – they should be 50 words or less. Should you have a complaint regarding a business, please address that with the owner/s rather than via these columns. The editor reserves the right to abridge all contributions and letters should be no longer than 300 words. Letters and Thumbs Up/Down can be sent to The Editor, Waitomo News, PO Box 279, Te Kuiti, fax (07) 878 1187, or email editor@waitomoneews.co.nz

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New broadband options will ensure reliable access

FEBRUARY has certainly been a month of great happenings around the Taranaki-King Country electorate.

I am thrilled that work on the new fibre-fed broadband cabinets in both Benneydale, Taharoa and Ohura have been installed as part of the Government's Rural Broadband initiative.

This will allow residents in these areas a more reliable service with faster connections, clearer communication with family and friends via video link and will ensure rural businesses can connect smoothly globally.

A new rural broadband tower in Otewa has also been built. This will provide better mobile coverage and ensure reliable access to the internet.

As a farmer I appreciate the importance of having good technological infrastructure that allows me access to all the latest farming programmes and innovations.

I encourage you as residents in these areas to contact your internet service provider to discuss how you can be connected to the upgraded network.

CHARITY RIDE

I recently participated in the Central Finance South Island Charity Cycle Ride. This was a nine-day event involving a group of riders from Taranaki cycling 1125km down the West Coast.

It was a great way to see a beautiful part of the country while raising money and awareness for two local charitable

In My View



By Taranaki,
King Country MP
Barbara Kuriger

organisations.

I joined the last leg of the cycle ride and rode the final 58km from Winton to Bluff along with many supporters who joined the cyclists on this last section. I was very proud to learn we have raised more than \$150,000 for the Taranaki Rural Support Trust and the Mellowpuff Charitable Trust as well as raising awareness of rural mental health issues.

I had a wonderful evening at the 2014 Brian Perry Waikato Regional Sports Awards on January 29, where I watched some well-deserving people rewarded and recognised for the hard work and dedication that they put into their chosen field of sport.

I was delighted and wish to again congratulate Mike Barnett of Aria, who was named Referee/ Umpire of the Year.

Mike is a shearing judge and has been recognised throughout the shearing community both locally and internationally.

It is always great to see one of our own from Taranaki-King Country acknowledged in such a way and I know his wife Jo and his family are very proud of him.

It was a fun-filled family day at the 2015 National Finals Rodeo in Kihikihi on February 14, with more than 5000 people in attendance and I was honoured to be asked to open it.

Rural sporting events are an integral part of the rural community and long may they continue. I enjoyed seeing many of you and look forward to being there again next year.

THUMBS UP/DOWN



THUMBS UP – Last week on our way to New Plymouth to the 'Americarna' Festival we stopped to refuel our big red Cadillac at your local Z service station in Te Kuiti. The lovely blonde lady attendant noticed petrol running out from underneath our car which was a cause of concern for us naturally. This very kind lady phoned Dayle Whiting Motors where we went for Dayle to have a look at the problem. Unfortunately Dayle didn't have a hoist available so he jumped in his vehicle and personally escorted us around to General Automotive & Diesel Services (he didn't just give us directions to get there!). At General Auto Kerryon put the vehicle up on his hoist and fixed the problem which was very minor fortunately. All of this for NO CHARGE, which is wonderful and very much appreciated.

So **THUMBS UP** to all these people who showed concern and kindness to us.
*Lois & Graham Thrupp
Tauranga*

THUMBS UP to all the volunteers who helped in the Te Kuiti Op Shop for the 4H Trust week – it was a great effort!
*Laurie Hancock
4H Trust, Te Kuiti*

THUMBS UP – On Monday (March 2) it was nice seeing multiple tour buses in the main street with many happy tourists visiting our town, and a steady flow of tourists into our beautiful Kiwi House. **THUMBS DOWN** – On Monday (March 2) for seeing litter and leaves along and around the Hillary Walk-

way. Not a good look for our many tourists.
*Marian Numan
Otorohanga*

THUMBS DOWN to the contractors who drive their tractors through the main street of Otorohanga too fast. Slow down before you kill someone.
*Barbara McCluskie
Otorohanga*

THUMBS DOWN to the light fingered person(s) who have stolen my winter firewood from my property on SH3. Hope you are proud of yourselves and living with great mana as I am a cancer patient.
*Lisa Martin
Te Kuiti*

Somewhere in...



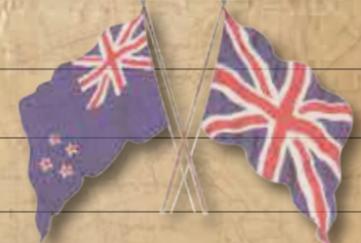
In 2015 – the year we will mark the 100th anniversary of Gallipoli – we are seeking letters, postcards, diaries and journals from those men and women who served New Zealand in all wars overseas.

Thanks to the censors, particularly in World War I & II, those here at home often received letters from loved ones labelled. . . *Somewhere in . . .*

Just where that was . . . was never said.

Regardless of where your loved ones served or for how long, we'd like to include their words, experiences and thoughts in our 2015 *In Our Defence ANZAC* feature.

To contribute please contact the editor via email editor@waitomoneews.co.nz, phone 07 878 1188 or call into our Te Kuiti office.



YOUR NEWS, YOUR VIEWS

WAITOMONews 2015 Anzac Feature

Medals' price likely to go sky high

FROM P1

The 95-year-old veteran is auctioning his military memorabilia to raise money towards the upkeep of the World War II Bomber Command Memorial erected in Green Park, London as a tribute to sacrifice of the 55,573 dead of Bomber Command, including 1679 New Zealanders.

WAIKATO CAMPAIGN

In recent weeks a Hamilton-based group has started its own campaign to secure the medals, which would be displayed at Waikato Museum.

Waikato councils are being asked to contribute to the fund and a 'Give-a-little' page has been setup online asking for public pledges.

Mr Hanna says he is sympathetic to the idea of the region bidding for the medals and he supports Mr Munro's decision to auction his medals.

However, the council "would struggle to make a direct contribution as it is not our role to spend public money in this way.

"I do support the online page because it's up to individual ratepayers to contribute if they wish," says Mr Hanna.

"But I certainly don't want to give ratepayers the impression council is writing out a cheque."

Mr Munro says his priority is to

raise as much money as he can for the memorial's upkeep and any New Zealanders like the Waikato group, will need to compete at the auction the same as anybody else.

"The information I'm getting from London auction house Dix Noonan Webb is the medals will go for very much more than the £50,000 (NZ\$102,000) they had expected," he says.

"I am very happy about that and I hope, for the memorial's sake, the price goes sky high.

"And while I appreciate the effort Brian and the others are making, I think the possibility of raising enough money locally is far beyond them."

He says the thought had crossed his mind a New Zealander might purchase the medals and he hoped that would happen, but at this point it's not looking likely.

"In England there are a number of very wealthy individuals who collect wartime memorabilia, which is why I put the medals in the hands of Dix Noonan Webb who are experts in that field."

DECISION

Mr Munro decided to donate his medals and log books to the RAF Benevolent Fund and in particular, the Bomber Command Memorial

Maintenance Fund, when he visited the memorial in May 2013 with his family.

During that visit he learned the British Government was not prepared to contribute to the memorial's maintenance and became concerned it would be allowed to deteriorate.

A discussion with the RAF Benevolent Fund (BF) centred around the establishment of a capital maintenance fund to help ongoing maintenance.

"When I saw the magnificent memorial I couldn't help thinking how important it is to maintain it in first-class condition for future generations and I gave some thought as to how I could personally assist in achieving that objective," he says.

"When I made the decision that year to auction my war medals and log books I did think I might be criticised for not making sure this memorabilia stayed in New Zealand and I took that into consideration when I made my decision.

"However, I will not be changing my mind about supporting the memorial fund to the best of my ability."

LONE SURVIVOR

Mr Munro is the only surviving 'Dambuster' pilot.

He says the Bomber Command memorial is a magnificent tribute but believes it's a travesty and "tragedy" that it took so long to erect.

"It was 67 years before the loss of 55,573 lives of those serving on Bomber Command were finally recognised.



MUNRO MEDALS: Les Munro's medals along with his logbooks are to be auctioned on March 25 in London to raise funds for a memorial honouring Bomber Command members.

"Because of that long delay a large percentage of the aircrew that survived the war have passed on and didn't live to see the day when the sacrifice of their comrades was finally recognised in a tangible form."

He says he has discussed his decision with his immediate family – four surviving children – who are all very supportive of the action he has taken.

Copies of the logbooks and medals have been made for them.

Mr Munro moved from Te Kuiti to Tauranga in 2001.

THE DAMBUSTERS

LOW flying high speed Lancaster bombers from the Royal Air Force 617 Squadron dropped bouncing bombs on the surface of water storage lakes in Germany's industrial heartland – the Rhur Valley – in May 1943.

Two of three dams were breached below water level causing massive flooding and crippling arms factories.

The success of the raid was a huge boost to British morale.

Eight of the 19 Lancaster bombers were shot down or crashed and 53 of the 133 aircrew on the mission were killed.

Les Munro's plane was hit by flak before he could drop his bomb.

With no communications system, he turned back to England, saving the life of his crew.

He became a key figure in the history of 617 Squadron taking part in precision raids on the eve of D-Day which fooled the Germans into thinking the invasion fleet was sailing to Calais, instead of Normandy.

During World War II, 55,573 Bomber Command airmen died, including 1679 Kiwis.

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