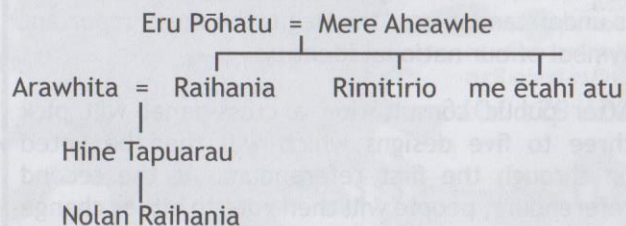


# HE TOA NĀ TŪMATAUENGA

Although Nolan Raihania was born and bred at Muriwai he has spent most of his life living between Tokomaru Bay and the South Island. He was an only child and brought up by the matriarch and oldest by whakapapa of the Pōhatu whānau, his Tipuna, Arawhita Pōhatu.



She was a beautiful lady also known affectionately as 'Tia' or 'Dear.' He and his cousin, Murray Raihania and Murray's parents, Ihi and Okeroa Raihania lived with her in Tangotete Lane, now known as Tawiri Lane. Their house was quite modern compared to other dwellings at Muriwai and, although it did not have electricity, it did have a solid woodstove. It was called 'The Palace,' Tia was called the Queen of the Palace and Nolan the Prince. Like many in the village they were fairly self-sufficient raising their own ducks and pigs, had a house cow for milking and, being close to the beach, seafood was frequently on the menu.

Nolan attended Muriwai School which was at that time located opposite Fred Bowen's on the main road. Nolan was probably the only one to walk along the road to school in boots while the others went bare footed. There were a small number of Pākehā



Nolan Raihania

school, the only boy from Muriwai to do so. After three years there and just turning 16 he matriculated and his parents and Tia wanted him to go to university but he had other ideas. He had still been at primary school in September 1939 when the Second World War broke out. The first of the 28th (Māori) Battalion to sign up in that year were called the 39'ers. Kaumātua from Marae throughout the Motu identified recruits to become NCO's and Officers and they were given four digit numbers in recognition of their leadership potential on going to Palmerston North.

While at Te Aute he and the other boys frequently heard stories of bayonet charges and other 'heroic deeds' which made the war being fought on the

medicals which they all passed. Dooley Swann from Manutuke and son of Wharengaio Swann received the call up at the same time but never returned home from overseas being killed in action at Faenza.

They were first sent to Linton out of Palmerston North to complete their basic training which was rushed as reinforcements were urgently required at the front. Before embarking overseas they were allowed two weeks final leave and at the end of it were given a big send-off by the whānau. Nolan wasn't back a week at the camp when news came through that sadly Tia had passed away. Ex World War One Captain Kahutia Te Hau managed to engineer a further week of leave for him and the other Muriwai recruits resulting in them all having yet another big send off. Nolan's mother was very upset about his decision to join up and threatened to 'pot him in' but decided better of it when he threatened to run away if she did. The reality was that he was so excited about leaving that he was oblivious to his mother's and Tia's concerns.

His next posting was Trentham where they did numerous route marches prior to heading down to the wharf where their troop ship, Highland Princess, to take them to Egypt was docked. Initially Nolan thought it was huge but they were barely out to sea before he came to realise it was hardly more than a tub. Coming from a long line of traditional fishers the majority of the Māori soldiers did not suffer from sea sickness as did their European comrades. One benefit of the situation was that there was plenty of left over kai at meal times for those still with appetites. On board with them was Pom Houkamau who had been home on leave when Nolan was in the Home Guard. He was really mischief but tragically lost a leg on his second tour of duty in Italy. Albert Wanoa, who had also been back on furlong, returned with them as well and he too was injured resulting in the loss of an eye.



pupils at the school including the principal, Mr A J Cox's children, Peter and Gwen. It was in the era when pupils were strapped for speaking Māori in the school grounds. There were only two classrooms, one for the primers and the other for the Standards 1-4 and Forms 1 and 2.

Activities at the school included spinning tops with flax whips and a large ring for marble competitions. After school it was playing at the beach and going to the movies that were shown once a week in the hall by the wharenuī and they were very popular. The truck arrived with a projector on the back which was wound up level with the front window and the images projected onto the screen on the stage at the rear of the hall. They were silent movies including the very popular Charlie Chaplin classics and entrance was sixpence.

During the polio epidemic in the 1930's the young people in the village were confined to their homes but innovation kicked in with some sneaking around to the back of the hall, scaling one of the trees and viewing the movies albeit back to front through the rear windows. The school was also closed for a year with school work being taken to the pupils at home, home schooling is not as new as maybe thought. In addition to a movie theatre the hall was used for dances and sometimes weddings and birthdays as the Marae dining hall was quite small and only started to be extended towards the end of the Second World War.

Hockey was much more popular than rugby at Muriwai and the Hinenuī team was very strong and competitive, in no small way due to the commitment of the Wyllie sisters. Their brother Pong also played and could be very aggressive. During one game he whacked Nolan on the back of the head with his stick leaving him needing stitches and feeling totally 'brassed off.'

other side of the world sound glamorous and like one big adventure. They did not get to hear the horrific side of it all. By 1941 a number of soldiers had been invalided home including a Lieutenant Bill Ngata who had been a teacher at the school before signing up. He came to the school to speak to the students about his war experiences and they were enthralled despite the fact he was carrying serious injuries and all bound up.

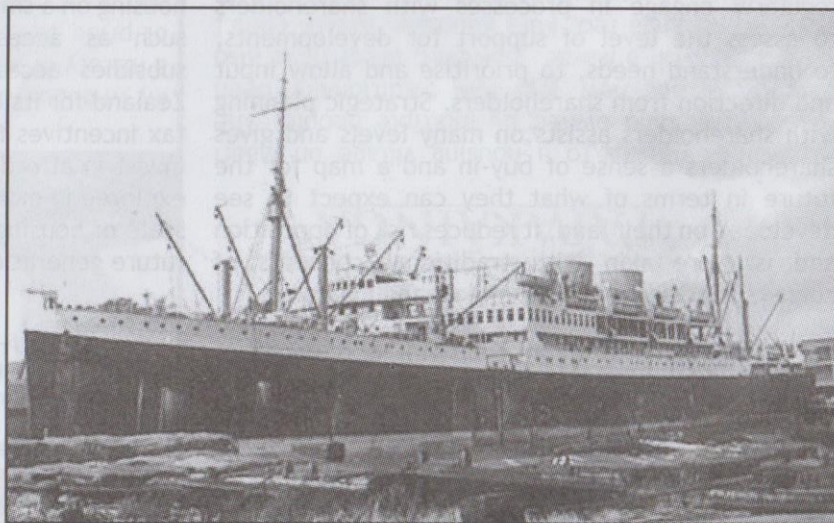
So it was in 1943 Nolan left school and joined the Home Guard seeing it as an opportunity to get overseas despite knowing of soldiers returning home badly injured. Home Guards generally had a month on and a month off but Nolan choose to stay on without a break and quickly learnt to strip down and re assemble a Bren gun with his eyes closed which was fortunate as he ended up carrying the very same type of gun when he finally made it to active service. As part of the Home Guard he attended the investiture of the VC at Ruatōria for Second Lieutenant Te Moananui ā Kiwa Ngarimu which further motivated him to enlist along with four others from Muriwai.

Captain Jim Ferris was the recruitment officer for Gisborne and had a reputation for turning the underage Coast boys away as he knew their whakapapa. However he did not have such an extensive knowledge of the boys from the Iwi of Tūranganui ā Kiwa. When it came to Nolan's turn he barked out, "You twenty one son?" In the deepest voice he could muster Nolan replied, "Twenty-two sir." He got away with it even though at that time he hadn't even shaved.

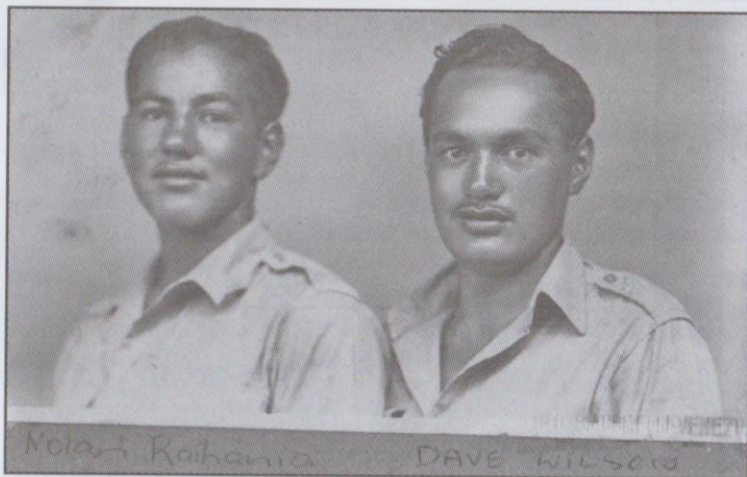
At the end of 1943 he and his mates from Muriwai, including Vivian Pōhatu, brothers Willie and Tawehi Wilson and Matenga (Sonny) Baker, received notice to report for their

First stop was Freemantle in Australia where they had leave for just the afternoon. Some of them took the opportunity to take the train to Perth and back in time for their ship to depart for the next league of their journey. Previously the stopover had been for two days but reduced to prevent any further tragedy after one of the men in the 11th Reinforcements was fatally knifed during a fight with an American serviceman who was later tried for murder, found guilty and executed by firing squad. Four of the men from the 11th Reinforcements including Petuere Raroa from Rangitukia and Darcy Nepia from Manutuke joined them at this stage of the journey having previously been sent back from Egypt to testify at the American's trial.

Leaving Freemantle their ship was initially escorted by a cruiser, HMS Sydney but they woke up in the morning to find they had parted company. To add to an already lengthy voyage their ship had to zig zag across the ocean to avoid being struck by a Japanese torpedo and rubbish was only emptied at night time to avoid detection by the enemy.







Nolan Raihania and Dave Wilson

The next stop, this time for a few days to refuel and replenish supplies, was at Madagascar off the coast of Africa. However they were not allowed shore leave to mix with the locals but did manage to buy produce from them by lowering their money in baskets down to the docks in exchange for fruit. Then it was off to the Suez Canal through to Egypt where they disembarked at Port Said to finally make their way to the Allied Army Camp Mardi. There they received further training until they were called up in batches and posted as reinforcements as required for the troops on the front line in Italy. At the camp Nolan caught up with his whanaunga from home, Mars Pohatu who was serving as a sergeant in the 28th (Māori) Battalion Orderly Office, he had not been allowed to progress to the front as he had two children and another on the way.

Captain Bill Ngata, who was also heading back to the front with them, reckoned by the time they got there the war would be over and they were just

The Battalion was charged with 'holding the line' before a planned attack on Faenza. Waiting for the winter to pass meant there was plenty of down time and several spontaneous parties to pass the time. The main source of alcohol was a horrible red wine affectionately known as 'Purple Death' and sourced from the local cellars. Sometimes the boys used petrol cans to store their bounty; they just tipped out the petrol then rinsed the containers out before filling them up with their favourite blend. On one occasion Darky Tamati and Nolan came across a good supply of wine from a farm house which they poured into a five gallon wooden keg then carried it behind a large haystack to have a party of two.

What they hadn't realised was that 'Jerry' could see them and started to shell the stack but this proved ineffective so they sent incendiary bullets to set the hay on fire.

Their plight was spotted by headquarters and Bill Ngata was despatched on his jeep to come down and demand to know what they thought they were up to. He did not appreciate Darky's rather incoherent but colourful response and, telling them they could be shot for what they were doing, emptied his gun into the barrel. However the 22 bullets were very narrow and the wood just closed over the entry points without a drop of wine being lost. On Ngata's orders they made their way onto his jeep to be taken back to Major Wi Pewhairangi (Bill Pewh) Reedy to receive another blasting.

Generally misdemeanours of any kind were dealt with by Lieutenant Colonel Arapeta Awatere who gave the offenders the option of having their pay docked or a

swimmer he had to keep jumping up and down with his borrowed tommy gun above his head to avoid drowning. On returning to the bank to a waiting jeep he and the other volunteers wrapped themselves in blankets and were taken back to camp. He could not help but notice, however, that some other members of the party were still dry and knew immediately that they had cheated, they not even been in the water no matter what they claimed. When it came time to cross over the foot soldiers went first and were followed later on by the tanks and army lorries that were driven over on ramps slung from one side of the river to the other.

Prior to the commencement of the massive offensive to capture Faenza the Battalion and other allied troops were withdrawn five miles back from the front line before the Yanks commenced their bombing raids on the Germans. Such a wide distance was needed as the Americans had the reputation of dropping their bombs anywhere and everywhere. The Germans too, aware of the impending bombardment, had pulled back but returned to maintain a strong opposition from their dug outs once the Allied bombing ceased.

Despite the 'Jerries' continually being on the defensive it was a further year of pursuing them before they retreated as far north as Trieste where they finally capitulated. Nolan and his comrades had spent half of their war years travelling on trucks to reach the next German defensive position, it was virtually a run to the top of Italy.

On the way through they slept in bombed out houses that the Italian civilians had vacated. Everywhere they went they were welcomed by the Italians as liberators and fully supported by the Italian Partisans (Italian Resistenza movement) who were



embarking on one big holiday. As it turned out they saw plenty of action and only half of them returned which, in real numbers, was huge as they were the biggest reinforcement to be sent to support the 28th Battalion.

From Egypt, Nolan and the reinforcements were mobilised to Italy just missing the massive Battle of Monte Cassino but managed to catch up to those who were ahead pursuing the Germans. The Germans, however, were well prepared having strategically constructed fortified places as their fall back positions. They had arrived at Faenza just as the winter was starting to set in and a decision from both sides was to hold up for the winter. The 28th Battalion was on one side of the Senio River which, for most of the year, was just a large ditch and the Germans were consolidated on the other. Although many of the houses had been badly damaged by mortar fire and constant bombing, enough of the structures remained to give the men some form of shelter.

boxing match with him. Most chose the latter as to have their pay docked meant less in their pockets to fund their recreational activities and there was always the chance they could win the tussle. Lieutenant Colonel Awatere was a pretty competent boxer having fought in preliminary rounds before professional bouts prior to the war. He would strip off his jacket thus taking his rank out of the equation and if his opponent won he was let off 'scott - free.' Fortunately for Nolan and Darkey their case did not go before him but they were sent to a listening post on the front line to keep a watch on 'Jerry' activity as the enemy had an annoying habit of crossing the river and digging shelters on the banks of the Battalion's side.

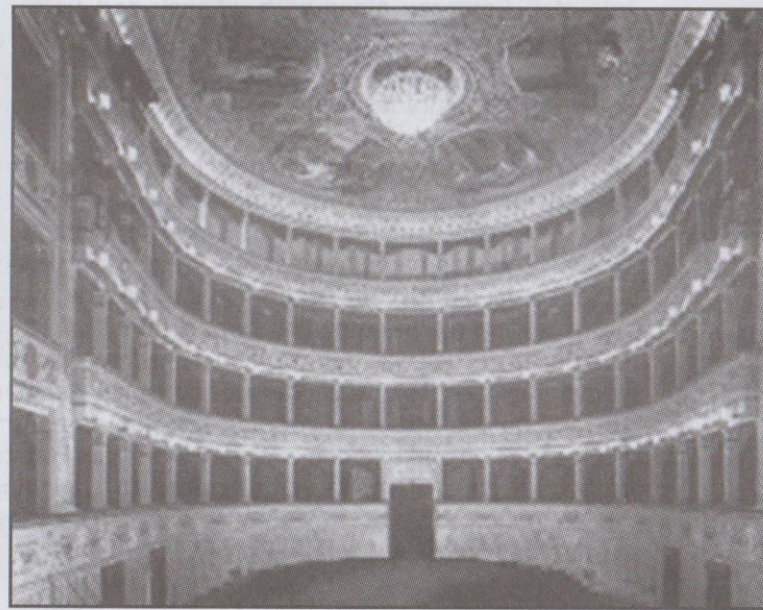
While there the call went out for volunteers to undertake a reconnaissance or exploration of the Senio River with the objective of finding a safe place for the foot soldiers to cross over as the river was starting to dry out in places. Nolan, with a reputation for volunteering for everything, once again put his hand up and tried wading across but soon found himself out of his depth. Not being a particularly competent

still around when Nolan and the other C Company members undertook a return trip to Italy in 1999. The majority of the Italian people were not fighters, they had not supported Mussolini but had been dragged into the war by the dictator. Obviously being on the front line was a very dangerous place to be however Nolan also acknowledges how much more dangerous it was for the men from the cookhouse who brought two meals up to them daily. They were real targets on the roads for the 'Jerry' artillery, not only did they have to take evasive action for the barrage of mortar shells but manoeuvre themselves around the numerous potholes that the exploded shells created.

Many of the Māori Battalion were used to living off the land and were adept at capturing and cooking the local's fowls (Galena) and pork (Maiale) all of which became the Battalion's property. They also made fried bread using the flour they found in the abandoned houses or bartered for from the locals who relied on it as part of their staple diet. In this they found their rations of liver salts were a great substitute for baking powder. Local Pūha was also easily found and ended up in succulent boil ups.



Nolan (centre) with C Taingahue and Hikitapua in Italy



The old Opera house where the soldiers performed the haka for the Italians

After being on the front line for differing periods of time the 28th Battalion was relieved by the Pommy, Polish, Indian, Gurkha and other troops and given three to four weeks leave in Rome, Florence and Venice. A great time was had and Nolan still marvels at the city of canals. They stayed in hotels that had been commandeered by the Allies but the Italian shop keepers were left to get on with their businesses and their lives. It was at the town of Camerino where Lieutenant Colonel Peta Awatere formed them into a haka concert party to perform for the locals in the fantastic old Opera House, who had been so good



to them. The Italians were overwhelmed and, on their return visit in 1999, the memories of those remaining from the war years were still strong. They pressured the C Company veterans for a repeat performance and were deeply moved by the impromptu concert. Nolan vividly remembers the tears rolling down the cheeks of the old people as the memories flowed back of the earlier concert and times. Some of them actually decided to accompany the tour party to their next destination and easily kept up on their bicycles despite most being older or the same age as the C Company vets travelling in style and comfort on their bus, must be all those olives in their diet.

Living conditions were pretty primitive and the only physical thing the soldiers had was their kit bags. At the end of an offensive, not everyone returned to uplift their kits as those who had been badly wounded were sent home to recuperate thus the reason for them being called 'homers.' On uplifting his kit at one of their numerous stops Nolan also claimed the one belonging to his great friend Na Rongowhakaata Halbert believing he was a 'homer' and immediately hocked off the boots and blankets for the infamous local red wine. Unfortunately he had got it wrong and Na re-joined his platoons to find himself minus his kit. On owning up to his misdeed Na reckoned "What a mate you are" and insisted on sharing Nolan's blanket until his replacement kit arrived.

Nolan notes that he was lucky to not have been wounded in action but did suffer a head injury just prior to being due to be sent back to the front line. He had been at a party partaking of the local wine when he fell on the stone steps and cracked his head. Lieutenant Sam Paniora was his commanding officer at the time. As a result of his fall his bandaged

in time but who cared. Eventually they were delivered back to Italy to await their return to New Zealand.

Lieutenant Colonel Peta Awatere had already been sent home with the earlier reinforcements and Colonel James (Hemi) Hēnare was in command. He wanted all of the 28th (Māori) Battalion to travel home together but they had a long wait for a troop ship of sufficient size to take all of the soldiers so they ended up staying for another Christmas Day. Eventually the Dominion Monarch arrived and they left on Boxing Day. On the way through the Suez Canal they picked up the rest of the Māori Battalion soldiers including Mars Pohatu from Camp Mardi. Within three weeks they had docked in Wellington on the 23rd of January 1946 taking much less time than their trip over not having to zig zag all the way.

Prior to the war Māori had not been allowed to buy beer to take outside of the hotel but the law was relaxed for a short period of time so many of the Māori soldiers took the opportunity to buy their dozens and have celebratory drinks on the side of the street enjoying themselves for the last time as the Māori Battalion even though it meant missing the formal powhiri for them on Aotea Quay. After being formally dismissed, along with their comrades of the Battalion, by Lieutenant Colonel James Hēnare it was time and they were called up to board their train home for Gisborne via Palmerston North which left at the same time as the Auckland trains taking their boys home. They had their dozens and managed to get more on their way. Even though the war was over, orders were that the men of C Company were to go straight through to Gisborne then march from the station to Te Poho o Rawiri Marae for a mass powhiri



Nolan and his wife Ana (Gin) at Te Waipounamu, 1976

and being the master of volunteering, Nolan once again put his hand up. He had spent most of his time overseas with the 14th Platoon which was comprised mainly of Māori servicemen from Te Puia to Tikitiki and he loved being back with his old mates. He also had affiliations to Ngāti Porou through his maternal tipuna, Emma Nohopari whose daughter Mereawheawhe was wooed by and married Eru Pohatu and taken back to live at Tāmanuhiri.

In 1948 Nolan married Ana (Gin) Kaua, daughter of Kopua Kaua from Ruatoria and Roha Te Rure at Tokomaru Bay. After six years of carpentry on the Coast he decided for a change of career and found work at the local freezing works. However he didn't manage to get away from carpentry altogether as



head was too large to fit his combat helmet and consequently he was deemed LOB (Left out of Battle).

When the war finished at Trieste and the Germans had finally surrendered the 28th Battalion was stationed under canvas on the outskirts of the town and continued with their route marches, the 15th Reinforcements had caught up with them by then. President Tito of Yugoslavia, who had led his own group of partisans, continued to ensure a presence in the area with his troops toting their guns around the place and later tried to lay claim to Trieste as in earlier times it had been taken off his country by the Italians. He ordered the Kiwis out but they made it clear they were not shifting for anyone and went on standby ready to go into battle against him. Lieutenant General Bernard Freyburg was flown to Trieste and keep Tito out. The forces dug in with all the artillery and tanks ordered up to support the Kiwi troops. Tito eventually withdrew finally accepting that 'discretion is the better part of valour.'

Shortly after, and in readiness to returning home, the New Zealanders were transported to Bari which is at the bottom of Italy. Most of the top Māori Battalion officers had gone ahead leaving those behind to be promoted in recognition of their services to their country. At this time and being noted for their excellence at drill performance, the 28th Battalion received a request to send a platoon to take part in the consecration of the Allied Forces Cemetery at Suda Bay in Crete. Nolan was among those who were ferried across to Crete on the Ajax, one of the three navy cruisers involved in the demise of the German Pocket Battleship Graf Spee which had played havoc with the convoys of food and goods to Britain during the early stages of the war. Being too large to tie up at the wharf, the Ajax was anchored mid stream and Nolan and his comrades were granted three days shore leave with orders to be back on board via the last ferry leaving at 10pm. After much sampling of the Cretan beverages some did not make it back

to welcome them home.

However, somehow, Mars Pohatu had been in contact with the people back home at Muriwai and been told that the elders had instructed that the boys were to disembark at the Muriwai Station as tikanga prevailed, they could not go past Tāmanuhiri. He went from one end of the train to the other relaying the message that as soon as the train stopped at Muriwai they were to throw their kits off and immediately follow them. Arriving at home there were the old people with their flag standing on the line. Once their boys had disembarked they stood back and let the train continue its journey to Gisborne.

From the station Nolan and his comrades walked down to the Marae for the powhiri. Once it was over they were champing at the bit to get down to the pub but were not allowed and had to stay for the hakari and to sleep at the Marae for the night. Nolan had to wait until the launch of the C Company Book, The Price of Citizenship and the 28th (Māori) Battalion reunion in 2008 to complete that final trip when he, with those left of C Company along with whānau and friends, took a special train trip from Muriwai to town before marching from the railway station to Te Poho o Rawiri Marae as his comrades had done 62 years previously.

Nolan was glad to return home but certainly missed the companionship of his comrades. He had been back less than a month when his mother died; she was only in her early forties. His great mate Darky Tamati stayed with him at the 'Palace' and he had a bit of savings as the army had put aside half a crown each payday that was paid to him on his repatriation home. However that soon ran out so Nolan decided to take up the option of a trade training carpentry course in town and biked in each day with Mars Pohatu to attend class. They later graduated to travelling on their motorbike and eventually a car once their savings built up.

After only a year of the three year course, volunteers were called for to go up the coast to build houses

he was kept on over the off season to undertake maintenance on the buildings. He also learnt to shear being shown the techniques by well-known composer Tuini Ngawai when he worked for the shearing gang owned by Tai Pewhairangi, he also took on other farm work including scrub cutting and fencing.

In 1956 he travelled south to check out shearing in the South Island and in 1958 decided to pack up and shift his wife and three children to Mātaura where he went out shearing on his own as a shearing contractor. He and his whānau spent 30 years down south where they had the rest of their children to make a total of nine. To maintain their links with the Coast they came back every year for the holidays but it was not until he retired at 60 that Nolan returned to Tokomaru Bay for good.

Since being home Nolan has become actively involved in looking after his wife's whānau land. Following Bola the people who had been leasing it took the relief money and ran. It was then taken over by a local incorporation however the owners approached Nolan to get the land back into their control and once he achieved that they insisted he manage it for them which he has done, since with it producing the first organic sweetcorn and squash on the Coast. It is now planted out in maize. In 2008 Nolan became the last president of the 28th (Māori) Battalion Association and even though it has ceased to formally exist he is still considered to be the president. In the Queen's Birthday Honours List 2011 he was awarded Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit (ONZM) for services to Māori. He continues to live at Tokomaru Bay, is active in the community and also maintains his connection with Ngāi Tāmanuhiri and Muriwai and enjoys time with his whānau and his mokopuna tuatahi, tuarua and tuatoru.

*Kia ora Nolan for sharing such wonderful memories with us in our special ANZAC 2015 Edition*

