



NZ3526

*Espiritu Santo - Whenuapai*  
*24 September 1945 - 24 September 2005*

**Family tributes  
and official speeches.**

*"We will remember them."*



## NZ3526

### *Espiritu Santo - Whenuapai (Missing)*

#### CREW

Captain:	NZ401383	Jack Arthur Hoffeins	(24)
Flight Eng.:	NZ405126	John Douglas Jacobs	(26)
Navigator:	NZ425270	Kenneth McArthur	(28)
Wireless Op:	NZ412981	Clifton Charles Kennedy	(25)

#### PASSENGERS

Flight Mech:	NZ427114	Oswald Ferguson Bath	(32)
Sigs Off.:	NZ39447	Wilfred Francis Coulson	(38)
Driver (P):	NZ438348	Harry Faine	(25)
Armnt. Off.:	NZ402681	Douglas Farr	(24)
Armourer:	NZ4312786	George Firman	(22)
Firecrew:	NZ391404	Edmund Eaton Gossling	(34)
Armourer:	NZ425982	John Barnard Grenfell	(23)
CS & MW	NZ411716	Frank Graham Haldane	(35)
Aircrt Hnd.:	NZ441345	Frederick John Kearney	(22)
Intel. Off.:	NZ2323	Allan Allister MacPherson	(28)
Mechan MT.:	NZ416736	David John Reid	(26)
Disciplinarian:	NZ391186	Reginald Bernard Russell	(41)
Carpenter:	NZ4214285	Ralph Gordon Savage	(36)
Patrolman:	NZ442296	Raymond Jonathan Taylor	(22)
Wireless Mech.:	NZ436105	Douglas Stanley Thomas	(20)
Intell. Clerk:	NZ4210354	Marshall Harry Wilson	(21)

## DOUGLAS DAKOTA

### Specifications

Cruising Speed: 170 mph	Maximum Speed: 220 mph
Range: 1600 miles	Service Ceiling: 24,000 ft.
Empty Weight: 17,720 lb.	Maximum Weight: 26,000 lb.

### Engines:

Two Pratt and Whitney R-1830-92  
Type: 14 cylinder Twin Row Radial, air-cooled  
Power: 1200 hp.

The first of 49 RNZAF C - 47's arrived in New Zealand in early 1943 to equip No. 40 Sqn. During the war these sturdy, capable aircraft became a common sight both in New Zealand and wherever New Zealanders went in the Pacific. Routine supply runs were made between New Zealand, Fiji, New Caledonia, the New Hebrides, the Solomon Islands and New Guinea as well as many other destinations.

Only three were lost but one of these was the RNZAF's worst ever flying accident, when 16 passengers and 4 crew of a Dakota, NZ3526 went missing without trace on the 24 September 1945, en route from Pallikulo Airfield, Espiritu Santo to Whenuapai. They were on their way home from the Pacific. Most RNZAF Dakotas found their way to the National Airways Corporation after the war.

#### **OSWALD FERGUSON BATH**

My Dad, Ossie Bath went missing when I was 6 years old. I do not remember much about him as he went to the war in 1942. I do remember tins of peanuts, chocolate and other goodies arriving in parcels. There were perspex ornaments for my mother and sister and I can well remember the model plane painted yellow with a wooden prop and all the NZ air force markings.

I remember my Grandfather coming to our home and he was in his best suit and I thought that something important must have happened. I can remember all the people at the house after the church service and my mum introduced me to the minister. She said, "Do you know who this man is, John?" and I said, "Yes he's the man that shouts at us at church." I don't have a real recollection of Dad missing as mother always thought he would turn up. In fact I don't think she ever gave up that thought. Life has been different without a dad and I often think what it would have been like if he had been around. I am lucky that we have had 6 children of our own and that we have had the full range of life's experiences to enrich us.

*John Bath*

## **HARRY FAINE**

My name is Pat Minett and I am here to represent the late parents of Leading Aircraftsman Harry Faine of Auckland.

Harry and I were going to come engaged upon his arrival back in New Zealand, so his death was a great loss to both me and his elderly parents.

## **DOUGLAS FARR**

Flying Officer Douglas Farr A 402681 was born on the 22nd of January 1920.

He was the third son of Leonard and Beatrice May Farr, of Christchurch.

There were three Farr boys, Norman, Leonard and Douglas and a younger sister Lynda.

Prior to enlisting in the Royal New Zealand Air Force on the 23rd August 1940, Douglas worked for various engineering and metal treatment companies in Christchurch including John Burns & Co, Vale & Co and the family electroplating company Armstrong & Farr Ltd.

His Fitter Armourer and officer training took place in New Zealand and was furthered in England and Canada.

On the 26 of May 1944 he married Margaret Mary Dunning, a Canadian, in Wellington, New Zealand.

Flying Officer Douglas Farr served in the Pacific and with my late father Leading Aircraftsman Leonard Farr, together they travelled overseas on the American Liberty Ship K114. They landed on Green Island, where they served together on Raubal and at Jacquinot Bay in New Britain.

I am Peter Douglas Farr, named after Doug and one of Doug's four surviving nephews.



## GEORGE FIRMAN

LAC George Firman 9th June 1923 - 24th September 1945 was a passenger on NZ3526 on that fateful Monday in 1945. Like probably most on the flight he was a young man, not yet in the prime of life, who was taken from us in a most cruel way. One could understand "killed in action" but this was so hard to understand, especially for me, a 9 year old, who thought he was the best uncle in the world, one who let me win at cards, but made me watch as HE played with MY Hornby train. Like so many of his era, George joined the Army first, but was caught out when they found out his true age. Then when old enough it was the Air Force that beckoned and since he was an apprentice fitter he became an armourer. The loss hit my Grandfather very hard, as George being the youngest of the family was really the favourite. Granddad said that he would never fly, but quite ironically he flew to see our first child, his great granddaughter, in Wellington in 1958 in a DC3 (Dakota). Like so many family and friends of these men, and particularly those who remember them, I hope this memorial Service, so long in coming, will bring a sense of closure to a sad chapter in our lives.

*Bill Lowe*



EDMUND EATON GOSSLING

Two little girls lying in bed,  
The strong bond between them -  
That their father was dead.  
Life goes on,  
It was said.

They thought that missing!  
Might mean he'd come home,  
and they planned what would happen.  
Funny little girls,  
In bed.

Their Mother carried her grief,  
With a silence so proud.  
Showing your pain was not allowed.  
So the little girls  
Kept quiet.

But funny things happen,  
One, has his eyes.  
And the other his paddy.  
Now that's a surprise.  
Little girls!

So left behind was a part of himself.  
A warm presence that you can't quite hold.  
You partly remember, or was it just -  
You were told.  
Big! little girls.

*(from Edmund's daughters).*



## **JOHN BARNARD GRENFELL**

It is my privilege to speak on behalf of the Columbus family at this 60th Anniversary Commemorative Service, about our loved uncle John Barnard Grenfell who at the age of 23 lost his life when NZ Flight 3526 vanished on this day 60 years ago.

John was the youngest brother of our mother, Millie Columbus. John's parents died when he was only 4 months old. After the death of his parents, John's grandmother cared for him until her death in 1936. After her death, John came to live with us. We were family of nine children and tho' John was our uncle, we regarded him as our elder brother and we all looked up to him.

He was an achiever academically in his chosen working career and he was a good sportsman. He commenced his military service in the Army in 1941, transferring to the RNZAF in May 1942, stationed at Woodburn and Ohakea prior to his service overseas in the Solomon's. He was a great letter writer and his regular letters home were something we all looked forward to receiving.

We were eagerly awaiting his return home after the war ended in the Pacific, but sadly this was not to be.

*Doug Columbus*

## **JACK ARTHUR HOFFEINS**

Jack Hoffeins was born in Wellington on 4 September 1921, the only son of Charles and Irene, loved brother of Val who is here today, Uncle of Jan.

Jack was educated at Brooklyn Primary and Wellington Technical. As a small boy his interest was model planes. After leaving school he worked at Land and Income Tax, but this wasn't for him, so he joined the air force in 1940 at the age of 19 years. His records show that he was with the Wellington Ferry Flights, 300 hours target time. One hundred hours with Hurricanes, 213 Squadron - 'Hurricanes', Libya; 17 operations, 217 Squadron, Dakotas, Bari, Southern Italy - 8 operations; 40 Squadron - quite a few missions. He was awarded the Africa, Italy and Pacific Star

Jack was my only uncle and I am enormously proud of him and feel privileged to be his niece

As a result of his death I inherited his savings which were held in trust until I was 21. This enabled me to purchase my first home which was a wonderful legacy. So to acknowledge this 60th anniversary will give my family further insight into this remarkable 23 year old, who has never been forgotten by his living family.

On behalf of the Hoffein family we would like to thank all those who have made this 60th anniversary possible. It is truly amazing to finally have some closure.

### **JOHN DOUGLAS JACOBS**

Jack Jacobs was my cousin. His father and my mother were brother and sister. I was the last relative to see and talk with Jack at Laucala Bay, Fiji where I was stationed with the RNZAF. He was in Fiji for a short time before going further north.

He was a flight mechanic fitter, who changed to Flight Engineer whilst in the islands and in that capacity, perished in the crash.

*Keith Wright*

## FREDERICK JOHN KEARNEY

'Brother Fred.'

Frederick John Kearney was the 3rd of 8 children born to Mary and John Kearney of Riverton, then Invercargill.

He went to Marist Brothers School in Invercargill and at age 14, left and went to work on a farm while waiting for a position on the railways.

At age 15 he got a job on the railways and at age 16 was transferred to Dunedin as a locomotive fireman.

He went to War and at age 21 died in the Dakota crash.

As far as I can remember, Fred had a normal, happy childhood.

I'm sorry I'm unable to be with you all today to share this Commemorative Service.

*Thomas M. Kearney*



My brother Fred was my older brother in a family of 5 girls and 2 boys.

I was 9 years old in 1945 and can remember the excitement because he had survived the war and was coming home. My mother had died 3 years before and I was living with my oldest married sister. We were all very excited about this brother's return - someone almost unknown to me. I can to this day recall the instant the telegram arrived to say they had been lost to all communication. Children absorb atmosphere and I can still feel it - 60 years on. That bright eyed, in photographs, young brother was not returning ever again. We all feel cheated.

How did this happen and why?

*Fay Fyffe*



### CLIFTON CHARLES KENNEDY

Cliff, being only three months old when your plane went down, you are a Dad I never knew. You are the son of Charles and Alice Kennedy, from Grovetown, Blenheim, who married Margaret Gillespie on 24 June 1944, and I was born the on the 4th June 1945. Such a brief time we all had together. I have only heard great things about you. Either from relations or in particular your friend from Collingwood - Rex Wigzell. Rex has proudly taken me into the Collingwood Post Office where you worked as a telegraphist before the war, and tells me you were very popular amongst the staff and the community. You played half back for the Collingwood Senior Rugby Team and joined the sporting life of the district, It was while you were here you met Margaret who was working on the orchards around the Motueka area. From here a great relationship was formed with Alan & Gladys Coleman, with whom you both stayed during your courting days, and where I stayed on their tobacco farm for holidays, after your death. I also spent many happy holidays in Blenheim in my younger days, with the Kennedy family, and still keep in contact with remaining family relations. Reading through your war records I see that you were the wireless operator. You enlisted in May 1941 and served New Zealand until your death in September 1945. Your records portray you as an excellent wireless operator and mention was made that you were probably the one who sent the messages on the ill fated day when we lost you all."

*Barbara Mehterns*

### **ALAN ALLISTER MACPHERSON**

Alan Allister MacPherson was born in Christchurch on 16th August 1917, the only child of Edith and Allister Ewen MacPherson. Allister never saw his son, as he died in France the same year, in World War One. Edith raised her son alone. They lived in a lovely, large house in Hereford Street in Christchurch. After leaving school around 1934, Alan worked as a clerk before joining the services.

Alan joined the Territorial Forces in October 1940 where he reached the rank of Lieutenant, and was seconded to the Royal New Zealand Air Force on 8th July 1943. He was awarded the 1939-45 star, the Pacific Star, and the New Zealand War Medal.

Flying Officer 2323 MacPherson was 28 years old, when lost returning to New Zealand on the flight from Espiritu Santos. As well as predeceasing his grieving mother, Alan also left a fiancée, Norma Allison Low, with whom he had "kept company" for ten years. He was remembered as a devoted son, and a fun-loving, handsome and intelligent young man.

*Allison Franklin (Norma Franklin [ nee Low's] daughter).*

## KENNETH MCARTHUR

Kenneth McArthur - Flying Officer and Navigator on NZ3526, previously served in No 4 Squadron.

Kenneth McArthur was the last surviving son on Arthur Flintoff and Agnes Mary McArthur of Devonport, Auckland.

I first met Uncle Ken in 1944 when I came with my mother and sister Margery to live with my Mother's parents at Cheltenham Rd, Devonport — my current address.

Uncle Ken attended Devonport Primary School and was educated at Waitaki Boys' High School, Oamaru. After completing accounting examinations he was employed in Auckland by Public Accountants, R Harrop.

He joined the NZ AF and was sent to an AF base in Central Canada. When I met him he was based at Whenuapai doing flights to the Pacific Islands. Before joining the AF he was an active member of the North Shore Cricket and Soccer Clubs, Senior Teams. It was a huge blow to all of us when his flight did not return, especially for his father who had also lost another son in WWI in 1918.

*(written by his nephew Mr Kenneth Leggett from Rome on Sept 7, 2005)*



## DAVID JOHN REID

David John Reid was my uncle. He was my father's youngest brother. He was the youngest son of his parents, Frank and Maude Reid, and he went to war and never came back. That is not so remarkable as many hundreds of service men and women did not come home, but his death had a profound effect on his mother, my nana.

My only memories of Uncle Dave are as a child when he came to visit our home, I suppose it was just before he went away, with his young lady, who may have been his fiancée, or his wife, at the time. I know she did become Auntie Vereen. Both of these visiting adults were very "big". Uncle Dave was a big tall man in a uniform and Auntie Vereen was a tall lady in a red dress and had black hair. They seemed to tower over me, but then I was only 3 years old. In later years I met Vereen when she was an elderly lady about 5 foot nothing tall!

My Grandmother was greatly affected by David's death. After that she was never seen to dress in any colour other than black. Although in later years she suffered from "Senile Decay", as it was then called, my Dad always said it stemmed from the death of her beloved youngest son, David.

David was very proud of his service for his country. Of four brothers he was the only one who served in the forces because the other three men were in "essential industry" and precluded from service. In letters home he spoke of being able to hold his head high as an ex-serviceman when he returned to civilian life.

David Reid was not scheduled to come home on that aeroplane but because Vereen had become very ill following a miscarriage another serviceman stepped aside and let him have the seat. The plane never got back to NZ.

The Memorial Service today remembers those unfortunate passengers who would have boarded that aeroplane full of hope, excitement and relief to be returning home to families and friends. With dreams that were never realised and sadness for those who waited in vain.

## **REGINALD BERNARD RUSSELL**

My name is Joan Olsen, the daughter of Reginald Bernard Russell. He married my mother Margaretta Hitchings and I am the only child.

I'm here today with my daughter Karen and son Russell. They never met their Grandfather though we have photos and they know who he is and what he looked like.

I'm hoping this Service will put closure on many things about my Dad, as Mum never really accepted it and thought he may knock on the door one day and be home.

## **RALPH GORDON SAVAGE**

Ralph Gordon Savage was born at Pleasant Point on the 22 December 1908. He was the eldest and only son of Emily Elizabeth and George Savage. Ralph left behind his Mother ( a widow), his only sister, Bernice, and brother-in-law Henry Hamilton. Bernice was my mother, I was told that the loss of her precious and dearly loved brother was an especially difficult period of her life.

Before the war, Ralph was a carpenter in Christchurch, and had served with Chas Luney. He was later self-employed. When driving to the West Coast as a child, I remember being told that Uncle Ralph built "that bridge", and much later "Uncle Ralph's bridge has been replaced". Those who now remember him for me described him as 'shy, always smiling — your mother's smile'. Ralph was a committed Christian who lived and wrote of his faith.

His records show that Ralph spent 8 months in the 3 Field ambulance, and 2 years in the Territorials before transferring to the RNZAF as a Leading Aircraftsman on the 4 November 1942.

## **RAYMOND JONATHAN TAYLOR**

Ray Taylor was an 18-year old farm-hand when his call-up came in 1941. He was a bit of a tearaway — the sort who likes to push boundaries and sometimes get himself into trouble. Army life would have come as quite a shock.

He started with the army as an ambulance driver then transferred to the air force ground staff and volunteered for service in the Pacific. He spent the rest of the war loading and unloading bombers at jungle airstrips.

His plan at the end of the war was to buy a farm where his aging parents could retire and a younger brother could be employed. His parents actually signed the purchase documents for him while he was waiting to come home. Then came the news that he wasn't coming home.

Ray's older brother, Roy, was an air-gunner. He joined the search, quite unaware that Ray was on the missing plane. On returning to base Roy saw his brother's name and immediately went back out on the search - until exhaustion eventually took over.

Although Uncle Ray died 60 years ago, his story and his memory are still very much alive in our family. I would like to thank Yolande and Jane for giving us the opportunity to share that story with you today.

## DOUGLAS STANLEY THOMAS

My name is Michael Hancox: speaking for the Thomas Family.

Leading Aircraftman 436105 Douglas Stanley Thomas was my grandmother's cousin. He was coming home on Flight NZ3526 on September 24th 1945.

Present here today are Doug's nephew Bruce Thomas, cousins Valerie Walker, Myrtle and Vern Seal, Myrtle Mead, Ian and Debbie Hancox and Barbara Lorgelly.

Doug was the third son of Stanley and Cecilia Thomas, their eldest son Mervin passed away aged fourteen years. His brother Raymond and Douglas both served in the Royal New Zealand Air Force. Doug served as a wireless mechanic 40 Squadron (Whenuapai).

There was four Thomas cousins on Espiritu Santo: Albert Ian Thomas, William Cook, Clifford Gray. Bill Cook was the last person Doug shook hands with as he boarded flight 3526. Albie Thomas was to be on the flight - he changed places with another airman.

Doug and Albie were looking forward to coming home to celebrate their 21st birthdays. Sadly Doug never arrived home.

### LOST BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

They searched and searched  
With all their planes  
Looking for their mates.  
All was in vain

Their mates had gone,  
No one knew where.  
That plane was lost  
And at what a cost.  
All those aboard  
Twenty men in all,  
The pain of their families  
So hard to bear.

These men have gone,  
Forgotten to some,  
But we still care.

So as we sit here  
We'll have a thought to spare  
For those young men.  
Their spirits still fly high.

Lost but not forgotten.  
May they be at peace wherever they lie.

(Poem composed by Heather Walker,  
daughter of one of Doug's cousins.)



## MARSHALL HARRY WILSON

Loss and Frustration. This commemorative service has magnified the loss of brother Marshall as it has sadly reinforced how little I know of him. Parted by schooling at age 13, by War Service at age 18 and by death at 21. A bright, musically talented person. Where would he have gone? What was his future? Who was the girl in the photo I found?

His passing was locked away by my parents and from my return to NZ from Navy Service, to Mother's death at age 98, it was never referred to, and I kept their faith. In the year 2000 I could look for information.

War Records had no record of his War Service. (Except his death) He was not on the Official Register of Deaths. (So he had not given his life for his country.) I cannot pass on any history, except his childhood to my family which is his only family. Loss and Frustration.

*Keith Wilson*

## WELCOME

The Member of Parliament for Wigram, The Hon Jim Anderton, Chief AF, Air Vice Marshal John Hamilton, Families and friends of those missing with NZ3526.

Good Morning, Welcome, thank you for your attendance today.

Together as a group we are identified by our experience of the loss of a loved family member 60 years ago today. As Brothers, Sisters, Sons, Daughters, Nephews Nieces, cousins— and Pacific mates, we are here to name our loss, to remember our kin, our friends and to pay tribute to their sacrifice.

Many of you here today, like myself will have grown up with the knowledge of the loss of NZ3526 and the resultant loss of a relative. For some families, the pain of such a loss was experienced so deeply, it was never spoken of again. For others, it was spoken of in muted whispers, a tragedy, too difficult to speak about. Most never knew the likely cause of the disappearance, but there was much quiet speculation.

In 1991, as my personal interest in aviation and accidents developed, I requested the Court of Inquiry documents from Archives. I remember reading it from cover to cover, reading parts to my mother, who with amazement and some sadness responded "we were never told that..".

As time progressed and significant war anniversaries were noted, I came to realise that during my lifetime, I had not heard public recognition or acknowledgement of the loss of NZ3526. I sort to change that.

My quest to locate the families united by the loss of NZ3526 began one year ago. I would like to thank you all for your responses, your stories, your memories that you shared with me and that have made this service possible.

I would also like to acknowledge the support and encouragement of AVM John Hamilton, particularly in his facilitating an opportunity for me to lay a wreath on the families' behalf at the Bourail Memorial, New Caledonia. This was done in conjunction with the end of Pacific War commemorations in August. In addition, Jane



Provan, the AF Museum's Research Curator, and Myrtle and Vern Seal (from the family of Douglas Thomas), for their unfailing and unstinting support, and whose practical assistance has proved invaluable throughout the year.

Today, we will review the history of the Pacific Operation and hear how repatriation occurred. Then, we will hear firsthand from a former RNZAF Catalina Captain, just how the Search unfolded that day. Following the Search details, AF Chief AVM John Hamilton will explain the findings of the Court of Inquiry that was conducted in March 1946.

As arranged, family members will then be invited to the podium to share memories of their lost kin.

We are indeed glad to welcome The Hon Jim Anderton, MP for Wigram and representing the government to share our remembrance and to speak to us.

Chaplain Bill Dewar will conduct prayers of peace and remembrance before a final reading of the names of the 'missing' servicemen from NZ3526.

*Yolande Hamilton*

## THE HISTORY

In September 1939, when the War began, the Royal New Zealand Air Force was only a few years old. It had 1160 personnel and 93, mostly obsolete, aircraft. It was operating out of a Headquarters in Wellington and two stations, one here and one in Auckland. By the end of 1940 the RNZAF was operating from 12 locations, and training personnel for war with Germany and Italy was well underway.

The War came closer to home when in December 1941 Japan attacked British bases in the Far East and the American base at Pearl Harbor. To meet the threat, the RNZAF presence in the south-west Pacific increased in size to a peak of twenty operational squadrons. They flew from scattered islands, particularly in the New Hebrides and the Solomon Islands, with thousands more men servicing aircraft and providing support. There were fighter squadrons and bombing and reconnaissance squadrons, with back up from transport and supply aircraft and Flying Boats which carried out reconnaissance and search and rescue missions.

During the War 15,000 men served with the RNZAF in the Pacific while 11,000 were attached to the Royal Air Force. Since the middle of 1944 a steady stream of servicemen and women had been released from the RNZAF as the need for personnel reduced. With the end of the European War on May 1945, and with the Japanese surrender in sight, the RNZAF moved into top gear to release as many non-essential personnel as quickly as possible.

By the end of July 1945, the Japanese mainland had been pounded by Allied bombs. More than 100 square miles of Japanese cities had been laid waste by firestorms. And yet, still, the Japanese did not surrender. On August 6th, an American bomber dropped the world's first atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Four square miles of city were destroyed and more than 80,000 civilians were killed or mortally wounded. After a second bomb was dropped, this time on Nagasaki on August 9 the Japanese had little choice but to surrender. The war was over.

In preparation for the impending surrender of the Japanese forces in the Pacific, all RNZAF air strikes were cancelled from August 12th. Leaflets were dropped telling Japanese officers to instruct

their men to cease fire. New Zealanders at home knew surrender was imminent and plans for celebrations were well in hand when at 11am on Wednesday 15th August the Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Peter Fraser, announced the end of the war. Sirens blew, whistles sounded and street parties began. However, the celebrations were more subdued than for the end of the war in Europe only three months previously. This time the mood was one of relief that finally the country could resume a normal way of life. 58,000 men and women had served with the RNZAF both overseas and at over 50 New Zealand establishments. The cost to New Zealand had been 4,149 Air Force personnel killed.

For the 7000 men still serving in the Pacific, thanksgiving services and sports events were held to mark the occasion. There were few major celebrations — the men were just impatient to come home. Preparations were made to repatriate men as quickly as possible. To set priorities, personnel were allocated points based on factors such as length of service overseas, marital status and number of children. The Union Steam Ship Company's Wahine was chartered and made three trips, bringing home 2000 men. Most of the work however fell to the two New Zealand transport squadrons, No.s 40 and 41 Squadrons, with their Dakota aircraft, assisted by the Catalinas of No 5 Squadron and the four aircraft of the Sunderland Transport Flight.

Special units were set up in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch to process a hundred releases from the RNZAF a day. Smaller release units were also set up on many of the stations to try to speed up the release of men and women serving in New Zealand. From a strength of 31,578 in August 1945, the RNZAF had dwindled to 12,228 by the end of the year. In the Pacific the RNZAF reduced from 7000 personnel to 700 only four months later.

The Missing Persons Investigation Unit was set up in September 1945 to try and locate New Zealanders who were still missing believed killed or prisoner of war in the Pacific theatre. The RNZAF also mounted their own special mission to bring home 156 prisoners of the Japanese in Malaya. Dakota aircraft were fitted up as air ambulances and dispatched with medical staff, food, clothing

and other comforts. The first two aircraft arrived in Malaya on September 12th.

It was against this background that one of No. 40 Squadron's Dakotas, NZ3526, took off from Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu) on the morning of 24 September 1945 with twenty on board. As well as a crew of four, one a replacement after the original crew member became ill, there were sixteen passengers. The men had come from a variety of sites throughout the Pacific, they ranged in age from 20 to 41, and between them they had carried out many different jobs. They really were a cross-section of the RNZAF in the Pacific.

Three and a half hours after the Dakota took off a hurried 'Standby, standby' message was broadcast from the aircraft, ominously nothing further was received.

*Sqn Ldr Clive Ellis*

## **THE SEARCH**

On September 24 1945 word was received that an R.N.Z.A.F. C 47 was missing en route to Auckland. To lose a transport aircraft was a rare event and at that late stage of the war with personnel being repatriated an especially distressing one. As a Catalina captain of 5 Squadron based at Second Channel in Espiritu Santos I and my crew were assigned the duty of conducting a search.

At first light next morning we took off for the search area. The information used to decide the starting point would necessarily have been limited as navigation and other aids were a far cry from what they are today but nevertheless the experience of those involved in the decision would have made it the best possible.

Once reaching the designated spot we began a square search which involves flying as accurately as possible a series of ever expanding squares, rather like building a spider's web. Little spare time for the navigator who had to rely on his dead reckoning skills alone. Nor for the pilots as a height of just 500 feet, the standard search height, had to be maintained which meant flying using manual control - and one of the few shortcomings of the Catalina was its having a very heavy control system. Searching had to be by purely visual means. Although we carried radar it was so rudimentary as to be of no use whatever under such circumstances. The lookout was maintained by the two pilots, the engineer in his tower, and other crew members stationed in the two blisters at the rear of the aircraft. Conditions that day were reasonable with moderate wind and sea which gave us a good chance to spot anything on the surface. In all probability the first day gives the best chance of a positive result but that was not to be. At the end of the day we flew to New Caledonia, which was to be our search base, having spent 11 hours 20 minutes in the air.

The following two days saw us repeating the same procedure in extended areas with more long searches of 11 hours 55 minutes and 10 hours 40 minutes. As I recall the sea was again such as to give a realistic opportunity of seeing anything out of the usual and although the periods of scanning the surface were very long there was plenty of incentive for us to do our utmost to ensure that nothing was missed. And of course we were all young with lots of

stamina.

On the fourth day the weather turned cyclonic with very rough air and water rendering all efforts almost futile. Whatever hope had remained was reduced to almost nil. To add to the difficulties some flight instruments became unserviceable and radio problems led to our losing contact with base for quite some time. When it was I was told to abandon the search and return to Ile Nou. Some optimism was required as the wind force had been sufficient to blow ships from their moorings and it was still far from good but fortunately by the time we arrived it had abated enough for us to land. That was a 7 hour 35 minute day which gave a total of just on 41 hours over the four day period.

On the fifth day we returned to Santos and thus ended a comprehensive search that started with hope and ended with disappointment. Would that it had been otherwise, not for our sakes but for those of the personnel that were lost and their families!

With best wishes to all at the reunion.

*Ian Macleod*



## **DAKOTA NZ3526**

### **ADDRESS BY CHIEF OF AIR FORCE**

Air Vice-Marshal J.H.S.Hamilton, ONZM, MVO, RNZAF

This morning you have heard of the circumstances leading up to the loss of Dakota NZ3526 on this day in 1945, and you have heard of the efforts that were made to search for the aircraft and its passengers. Around us are displays, which depict the route planned for the aircraft and the search patterns that were flown in an effort to find any sign of the aircraft and its passengers.

It is difficult now to understand and comprehend the circumstances of those times. Today it is too easy to climb on board a modern airliner and fly in comfort, at speed, above the weather over great distances. But back in 1945, in aircraft like the Dakota, things were different. The options for the crew were not great if anything untoward happened and the risks in flying this route were not insignificant. Navigation involved many compensations and sometimes errors. Communications were difficult and by today's standards, primitive. The experience levels of crews were not always that high and tracking and understanding tropical weather patterns were far from an exact science (even if that's what it is today). As you heard, the task for those searching for the missing aircraft was also difficult. There was no exact reference from which to start the search, and their own navigation lacked the accuracy that we take for granted today, saying nothing of the sensors available to them.

An RNZAF Court of Inquiry was assembled some 5 days later to investigate the circumstances in which the aircraft disappeared. The Terms of Reference covered not only the cause of the event, but also the weather forecast supplied to the crew, the details of the preparation and despatch of the aircraft from Santos, it sought evidence of dangerous goods or explosives on board, and what asked to look at what I consider to be the normal issues covering communications, briefings, authorisations and discipline.

The Court's report says "the cause of the accident is obscure". It concluded that evidence from the wireless operator at Norfolk Island strongly suggested an in flight emergency which must have



resulted in the destruction of the aircraft before any more transmissions could be made.

The Court believed the possible causes were limited to two scenarios. The aircraft could have suffered a mechanical or structural failure, the latter caused by turbulence, or it had an explosion following fire, possibly caused by ignition of fuel fumes. Sources of the fire could have been static discharge, short circuits, illegal smoking or ignition of inflammatory articles in the baggage. But there was no evidence pointing to a definite cause.

The Court found that the aircraft was fully equipped with the required safety equipment, and that it was deemed to be fully serviceable on departure from Santos. It was correctly refuelled and the fuel was free of contamination. The aircraft weight was appropriate and it was loaded correctly. The Court considered the crew were capable of undertaking the flight and that the route and schedule was normal and properly authorised.

The Court put a lot of effort into analysing the weather conditions. It found that the crew were issued the normal weather forecast and weather map (and a copy of that weather map is on display). It shows a cold front close to the route to be flown although evidence from another aircraft following NZ3526 indicates that the front was further east than anticipated by the Met Office. Apart from that, the met forecast was deemed to be reasonably accurate. You can see that the forecast for the front included thunderstorm type activity as you would expect for that region.

The evidence from the Dakota that followed NZ3526 along the same route 25 minutes later, enabled the Court to understand the conditions in the area from where the last transmission was made. The captain of that aircraft said that in this area, "he encountered bad flying conditions and climbed up from 8000 feet to 11000 feet. At that height he was able to dodge the cumulus tops which towered to around 14,000 feet". He said there was some layered cloud obscuring the tops of the cumulus. For those of you who are not familiar with weather phenomenon, cumulus clouds are the big thunder clouds, the ones that include the powerful updraughts, turbulence and often icing and even lightning.

The communications log showed that NZ3526 was flying at an

altitude of 9,400 feet. It also indicates that communications were normal until that call of "stand-by, stand by". The operator at Norfolk reported that this last message was sent in a hurried fashion, and on that basis, he alerted his supervisor that he suspected something was amiss.

As I indicated earlier, the Court could not attribute the loss to a definite cause. It looked at the load carried for dangerous items. It found that the cargo had been checked and that nothing had been found. Of course it could not determine if a fire had broken out in the aircraft. While the Court could not determine a cause, the subsequent review of its work concluded it was reasonable to suggest that the probable cause of the accident was structural failure due to excessive stresses imposed on the aircraft by turbulence as the result of flying into cumulus cloud. In addition there is the suggestion that the dangers of flying into these cloud formations and the turbulence that exists within them, may not have been fully appreciated by some aircrews.

I regret that in our remembrances, we might have overlooked those that were on board NZ3526. But I know, and appreciate, that it is not the case for relatives, families and close friends. In August I had the privilege of taking part in the VJ Commemorations in Noumea and the Solomon Islands. The names of those on board this aircraft are on the memorial wall at the Commonwealth War Cemetery at Bourail in New Caledonia, alongside their fellow servicemen who also have no known grave. And here, in this Museum, their names are also recorded on the RNZAF Roll of Honour so that visitors here, might reflect on the scale of the sacrifice it depicts, as well, I hope, think about the people that lie behind the names of those who lost their lives while serving with the Royal New Zealand Air Force.

They might be gone, but they are not forgotten.

**HON JIM ANDERTON**

Minister for Economic Development  
Minister for Industry and Regional Development  
Minister of Forestry  
Associate Minister of Health  
Leader of the Progressive Party

**Commemoration of lost RNZAF personnel - crew and passengers of NZ3526**

10.30am, 24 September 2005

RNZAF Museum

Wigram

Christchurch

**SPEECH NOTES**

I feel very privileged to be with you all today.

This is indeed a special day and a special commemoration.

And I want to first acknowledge some special people.

But First - warmest regards from the Prime Minister who has asked me to represent the New Zealand Government here today.

**Acknowledgements:**

- Air Vice-Marshal John Hamilton for facilitating the use of the Air Force Museum, and encouraging Yolande Hamilton's research,
- Museum staff — Jane Provan (for the display) and David Nicolson (Audio),
- Bill Dewar (Air Force Chaplain) for advice and contribution to the service,
- A very special recognition to Yolande Hamilton for her exceptional dedication and skill in developing and organising this commemoration, I know you will want to show your appreciation to her,

- The families, friends and colleagues here today, for your loss and your support in making this ceremony possible,
- and a special recognition for those who have travelled from Auckland, Tauranga, Invercargill and around New Zealand to join this commemoration.

Along with thousands of other kiwis, these brave New Zealanders left our Pacific Islands in uniform to serve their country.

They did their duty with honour and integrity and played a key role in defending the values we treasure as a nation.

They were ordinary men, New Zealanders, involved in doing extraordinary things.

To lose those twenty men while on their way home is especially sad. And the time is well overdue to commemorate them here today.

In 1989, sixteen years ago, I first began lobbying for recognition for another gallant New Zealander, Colonel William Malone.

It struck me as a deep injustice that his heroism had gone unrecognized.

I achieved that recognition earlier this year by placing a plaque in Parliament to commemorate him.

And so in many ways I have a bond with Yolande Hamilton who has worked so hard to bring about this commemoration.

More and more New Zealanders are recognizing the importance we must place on commemorating the valour of our service men and women who have given their lives in defence of all that we hold dear.

The campaign Colonel Malone fought in was part of the newly forged steel, which gave strength to New Zealand's new identity as an independent nation- state.

It was the first time our young men fought and died as New Zealanders, rather than as members of one of Great Britain's colonies.

When New Zealanders visit Gallipoli they think of the young lives

lost so far from home.

They think of the men that died there as sons and brothers, fathers, uncles and grandfathers.

And here today we also recognize so many families who have lost relatives to war.

It is no different because they were on their way home.

They too must be celebrated for their gallantry and courage.

It has always occurred to me that there is something uniquely New Zealand about the way our servicemen and women blend toughness and deep concern for each other.

And it is heart warming to know that these are some of the very values they fought for.

Those lost on Dakota NZ3526 should have been honoured much earlier than this.

Today we're putting right that omission.

The campaign to achieve recognition has been a long one.

For their loved ones, who commemorate them today, this service has special significance.

We remember and salute the extraordinary heroism of New Zealand's unsung warriors.

To die this way, after serving their country, to be lost on their way home, is an even more poignant tragedy.

We honour them, as we honour all who serve their country in peace and war.

We invite those who remember them to demand a world where we collectively seek peace whilst also defending freedom.