

Hi Folks

### **THANKS**

Many thanks to Chetan Sawyer for his excellent address at our lunch at the Grey Lynn RSA last week. It was the fascinating story of four Kiwis returning to New Zealand during Covid lock-down and how they cheated MIQ..

### **NGAPONA ASSN – CHRISTMAS LUNCH**

Our Christmas lunch this year will be at the Birkenhead RSA on Friday, 16 December. This will be an excellent meal but we need to know numbers for the caterer.

Please reply to this email with numbers attending.

### **THREE NEW SHIPS FOR THE RN**

British-led Team Resolute, comprising BMT, Harland & Wolff and Navantia UK, has been appointed as the preferred bidder to deliver three crucial Fleet Solid Support (FSS) support ships to the Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA). The £1.6 billion contract (before inflation) to manufacture the vessels providing munitions, stores and provisions to the Royal Navy's aircraft carriers, destroyers and frigates deployed at sea, is subject to HM Treasury and Ministerial approval. The ships will be the second longest UK military vessels behind the two Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carriers. They will have commonality with the RFA's Tide class fleet tankers, also built to a British BMT design.

In the proposal, the majority of the three ships' build would take place in the UK, and the contract will increase industrial productivity, develop the domestic supply chain and workforce while improving the industry's environmental sustainability.



## NEW ZEALAND RECIPIENTS OF THE VICTORIA CROSS



### **James Allen Ward VC (14 June 1919 – 15 September 1941)**

James Allen Ward was born on 14 June 1919 in Wanganui, New Zealand, to English immigrants, Percy and Ada Ward. He was educated at Wanganui Technical College and after graduation, trained as a teacher in Wellington. Having qualified in 1939, he had just accepted a teaching position at Castlecliff School in Wanganui when the Second World War broke out. Ward immediately volunteered for the Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF).

Despite being quick to enlist in the RNZAF, Ward was not called up until 1 July 1940, when he reported to Levin for initial training. He then proceeded to No. 1 Elementary Flying Training School at RNZAF Taieri, followed by more advanced courses at Wigram Air Base in Christchurch. He was rated as a pilot of high average ability and of confident and reliable character. During his period of flight training, one of his classmates was Fraser Barron, who went on to become a notable bomber pilot during the war.

Ward qualified as a pilot on 18 January 1941 and was promoted to sergeant shortly thereafter. At the end of the month he departed for England aboard the troopship *Aorangi*, to commence service with the Royal Air Force (RAF). On arrival, he was selected for training on heavy bombers and posted to 20 Bomber Operational Training Unit RAF, in Scotland. Upon completion of his courses at RAF Lossiemouth in mid-1941, Ward was posted to No. 75 Squadron. According to Hugh Kimpton, a fellow New Zealander at Lossiemouth, only one place was available at the squadron at the time. Ward was selected as a result of winning a coin toss between Kimpton and him.

No. 75 Squadron was an RAF unit formed around a core of RNZAF flying personnel present in England prior to the outbreak of the Second World War to take delivery of 30 Vickers Wellington bombers purchased by the New Zealand government. These personnel had set up a unit at RAF Marham, in Norfolk, to prepare for the

transportation of the Wellingtons back to New Zealand. However, once hostilities commenced, with the permission of the New Zealand government, the fliers were transferred to the Royal Air Force. Shortly afterwards, it was arranged for the RNZAF personnel to form the cadre of 75 Squadron, the first Commonwealth squadron of Bomber Command. At the time of Ward's arrival at 75 Squadron, it was based at the Royal Air Force's base at Feltwell in Norfolk, and operating Wellington bombers. His first operational flight was made on 14 June, as a second pilot to Squadron Leader Reuben Widdowson, a Canadian, on a bombing mission to Düsseldorf in Germany. Over the next few weeks, he flew six more bombing missions accompanying Widdowson.

Widdowson and Ward flew their sixth and last mission together on 7 July during a raid on Münster. While returning home over the Zuider Zee on the Dutch coast, Ward's Wellington was attacked by a German Bf 110 night fighter. A fuel tank in the starboard wing was ruptured, causing a fire around the rear of the starboard engine. After initial attempts to put out the flames using fire extinguishers directed through a hole made in the fuselage failed, Widdowson ordered the crew to bail out. However, Ward proposed that he climb out and try and smother the fire using an engine cover. He crawled out through the astrodome on the top of the fuselage, secured by a rope. Making his way down the side and along the wing of the aircraft, he kicked or tore holes in the fuselage's covering fabric with a fire axe to give himself hand-and-foot-holes.

He soon reached the engine and attempted to smother the flames with a canvas cover. With the fire out, he stuffed the cover into the hole from which fuel from a damaged petrol line had leaked and exacerbated the fire. Ward, now exhausted, made his way back to the astrodome with the navigator, Sergeant Joe Lawton of the RNZAF, keeping tension on the rope tethered to Ward and assisting him back into the aircraft. Although the cover shortly blew away by the slipstream, the fire had burnt itself out and the plane was now safe. Instead of the crew having to bail out, the aircraft made an emergency landing, without flaps or brakes, at Newmarket. The Wellington ran into a hedge and fence at the end of the runway and was written off.

Ward described his experience out on the wing of the aircraft, exposed to the slipstream, as "...being in a terrific gale only worse than any gale I've ever known". To recognise Ward's courage, the commander of 75 Squadron, Wing Commander Cyrus Kay, recommended him for the Victoria Cross (VC). Kay also recommended Widdowson for the Distinguished Flying Cross and Sergeant Allan Box for the Distinguished Flying Medal. Box, a New Zealander, was the tail gunner of Ward's aircraft and had shot down the night fighter. The awards for Widdowson and Box were immediately approved while Ward's VC was announced on 5 August. Ward's VC was the one of three made to New Zealand airmen during the war; the others awarded were to Squadron Leader Leonard Trent, a bomber pilot, and Flying Officer Lloyd Trigg, a pilot with Coastal Command. According to Clifton Fadiman, a compiler of anecdotes, Ward was summoned to 10 Downing Street soon after the announcement of his VC, by Prime Minister Winston Churchill. The New Zealander was apparently awestruck by the experience and was unable to answer the Prime Minister's questions. Churchill regarded Ward with some compassion. "You must feel very humble and awkward in my presence," he said. "Yes, sir," managed Ward. "Then you can imagine how humble and awkward I feel in yours," said Churchill.

Ward had a period of leave after receiving his VC. Hector Bolitho, a New Zealander in the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, spent time with him and later recounted an incident when at a dinner, Ward fainted after a fuel from a cigarette lighter was accidentally spilled onto his hand and set alight. Supposedly the event had triggered memories of the flaming wing of his Wellington bomber. A doctor treated the minor burn and gave Ward a note to give to the medical officer at No. 75 Squadron. Bolitho alleged the note stated Ward was not fit to fly but it was never passed on. On returning to his squadron, Ward was given command of his own crew and aircraft. He flew his first mission as commander to Brest without incident. On his second mission, a raid on Hamburg carried out on 15 September, his Wellington encountered a night fighter shortly after releasing its bombs. Set on fire by the attacking night fighter, Ward ordered his crew to bail out and held his aircraft steady enough for two of his crew to do so; they subsequently became prisoners of war. When the Wellington crashed near Hamburg, the remaining crew and Ward were still on board. It was initially reported that the Wellington had been hit and destroyed by flak. It was not until the two surviving crew members were released from their prisoner of war camp was it determined that a night fighter was involved in the destruction of Ward's aircraft.

Unbeknown to Ward, an official at the Air Ministry had suggested to the New Zealand government that he be returned to New Zealand. It was appreciated that Ward's profile as a result of the VC award would be useful for propaganda and recruitment purposes. He could also have served as an instructor with one of the home-based RNZAF squadrons. On 15 September 1941, the day of Ward's death, Group Captain Hugh Saunders, the Chief of Air Staff of the RNZAF, approved the proposal to return him to New Zealand.

Ward's body was recovered from the wreckage of his aircraft and buried by the Germans in a civilian cemetery. Initially reported in the United Kingdom and New Zealand as missing, presumed dead, at one stage Ward was believed to be a prisoner of war in Germany. Confirmation of his death was officially reported in August 1942 by the International Red Cross. After the war and following official identification, his remains were reinterred in the Commonwealth War Grave Cemetery Ohlsdorf in Hamburg.

Ward's VC was presented to his parents by the Governor General of New Zealand at Government House in Wellington on 16 October 1942. The Ward family loaned Ward's VC and other service medals to the RNZAF for several years until 2006, when they were returned. The medals were subsequently lent to the Auckland War Memorial Museum for display.

There are a number of memorials to Ward, one being a painting by Peter McIntyre, entitled Memorial to Sergeant James Allen Ward, V.C. and depicting Ward's feat, hangs at the Sarjeant Gallery in Ward's hometown of Wanganui. There is also a plaque honouring him in Queen's Gardens in Dunedin. In November 2004, the Wellington College of Education, in preparation for merging with Victoria University, renamed one of its halls in honour of Ward. On 14 May 2011, the community centre at Feltwell, where Ward had flown from while serving with No. 75 Squadron, was dedicated in his honour. It had served as a sergeant's mess hall during the Second World War.



him climb across the wing

Shown are the holes Ward made to help

Regards

**Jerry Payne**

Editor

HMNZS Ngapona Assn

021 486 013

(To be removed from this email list please reply to this email with "Unsubscribe" in the subject line.)