NZ Memorial in London

We will remember them

The New Zealand Memorial in London’s Hyde Park was officially dedicated by Her Majesty the Queen on what was a bitterly cold Remembrance Day afternoon.

The Queen was greeted at the ceremony by a 120-strong tri-service NZDF Royal Guard of Honour, line up against the memorial’s 16 towering bronze standards.

Her Majesty inspected the guard of honour accompanied by the Chief of Defence Force, Lieutenant General Jerry Mateparae and Guard Commander Squadron Leader Nick Olney.

The Queen told the audience that New Zealanders had written themselves into a special place in history books. “Many of them for deeds of exceptional bravery and sacrifice, but most of them for simply giving their all in duty, in courage, and in dogged determination to fight for peace and freedom from tyranny.”

Her Majesty said the “Southern Stand” memorial – which she described as “striking” – was built to remember men and women of New Zealand and Britain who shared the hardships of war, and those who had died.

Her Majesty spoke of the strong and enduring bonds between New Zealand and Britain, and said it was a privilege to be among so many New Zealand veterans, whom she called friends.

The Prime Minister of New Zealand, the Right Honourable Helen Clark, also spoke at the ceremony. She said the memorial project began with a desire to commemorate the shared sacrifice of New Zealanders and British people during war.

However, the project acquired a deeper meaning, she said, as New Zealand’s historical ties to Britain – stretching back almost two-and-a-half centuries to Captain James Cook’s first voyage of discovery, and resulting in large migration between Britain and New Zealand – explained why New Zealand had made such great efforts during the two world wars.

The memorial had become a “vehicle through which to express, in this ancient land of Britain with which we have so many ties, the unique national identity of New Zealand”, Ms Clark said. “The memorial is about what New Zealand has become in the 21st century, so it’s past, present and future.”

British Prime Minister Tony Blair said the link between the two nations was not just historic. “The bonds of friendship between our two countries remain as strong as ever. Our peoples are close, they come and go between our two countries as much as ever, we invest in each others’ economies; we share culture and sport – where friends become rivals.”

The $3m memorial was designed by architect John Hardwick-Smith and sculptor Paul Dibble, and was funded by the New Zealand Government. It will share its site at the north-east corner of Hyde Park Corner with the Australian War Memorial, which was dedicated in 2003.

Each of the 16 bronze standards is adorned with text, patterns and small sculptures, which reflect the military, historical, social, cultural and economic ties between the two countries. “Through the words and images, any New Zealander visiting the memorial will recognise home, and British people may learn something of the relationship between our two countries”, explains Paul Dibble.

Over 250 New Zealand Defence Force personnel joined veterans, members of the Royal Family, dignitaries, and hundreds of expatriate Kiwis for the 1½-hour autumn event at Hyde Park Corner. This was the largest group of Defence Force personnel to deploy to the United Kingdom since the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

The ceremony commenced in the early afternoon of 11 November, Armistice Day, when the Guard of Honour marched out of Wellington Barracks. Over 60 New Zealand and UK veterans joined the march as it left Constitution Hill for Hyde Park Corner. Flanked by the NZDF Maori Culture Group, the marchers entered the Hyde Park to the sound of “Maori Battalion”, played by the tri-service band.

Three Typhoon aircraft from RAF Base Coningsby joined one of the two RNZAF Boeing 757 aircraft that brought the contingent from New Zealand in a spectacular flypast at 1,500ft above Hyde Park.

The moving kairanga and haka performances from the London-based Ngati Kanara and the NZDF Maori Culture Group, and performances by Kiwi musicians Hayley Westenra and Taniaa Williams who sang both countries’ national anthems and Dave Dobbyn who performed a guitar solo of “Welcome Home” giving the ceremony a distinctly New Zealand flavour.

Wearing warrior traditional dress and carrying taiaha, the NZDF Maori Culture Group performed a stirring yet chilling version of Te Rauparaha’s most well-known haka, made famous by the All Blacks.

“The Last Post” was played by the NZ Army Band’s Lance Corporal Colin Clark.

The New Zealand flag and the Union Jack flag were hung at half mast when Chief of Defence Force Lieutenant General Jerry Mateparae cited the Ode to the Fallen in Maori, then Royal New Zealand Returned and Services Association (RNZRSA) President John Campbell cited the Ode in English.

Among their audience was what was described as an “exceptional turnout” from the Royal Family, including His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh, their Royal Highnesses the Prince of Wales and Duchess of Cornwall; HRH Prince William; HRH the Duke of York; HRH the Princess Royal and HRH the Duke of Kent.

The event was also attended by well-known New Zealanders such as Andrew Menzies, Sean Fitzpatrick, Kerry Fox, David Bedingfield and Lady Pippa Blake.

Security was tight at the ceremony, which closed the busy central London intersection to the public. The ceremony was encircled by black-clad security guards, and anti-sniper units could be seen on the roofs of nearby buildings.

One-and-a-half thousand expatriate New Zealanders turned up to the event wrapped in their winter woollies – some bearing Anzac biscuits – for the Saturday afternoon ceremony, which ran from 3.00am until 4.15am on Sunday morning New Zealand time. The expatriates present said the ceremony was moving, and something to be proud of.

One 26-year-old man described the memorial as “our little
piece of London," and said he was there to pay respects to all New Zealanders who had seen war in their lifetime. More than 230,000 New Zealanders served with British forces during the wars of the 20th Century. Thirty-two veterans of joint New Zealand and British campaigns, including World War Two, K Force, K Force, Malaya and Borneo, were flown to London as part of the official NZDF contingent.

The oldest veteran, 90-year-old Mr Ron Gravens, saw lengthy sadness when you considered the number of Kiwis whose lives would be lost in the coming conflict. "We know the memorial will provide a wonderful focal point for the nation and the families of all those who served," said Mr Gravens. "I'm very lucky to be here to pay my respects to all who gave their lives for our country."

Despite the cold, the memorial was well attended, with a large crowd of dignitaries and veterans gathered to pay their respects. "The presence of so many members of the Royal family, the presence of so many New Zealanders who had seen war in their lifetime, and the presence of so many New Zealanders who had lost their lives in war, made this a very emotional day," said Mr Gravens.

The official NZDF contingent, led by Colonel Kevin Burnett, were fantastic ambassadors for New Zealand. "The other six standards are positioned to form the shape of the Southern Cross. At night their tops will be illuminated so that the crosses look like the southern stars indicating the compass direction south – pointing the way home for wandering Kiwis."

After the ceremony, invited guests went to a function at the RAF Club. The contingent went to a function at Wellington Barracks in London. Dave Dobbs picked up his guitar and sang to the troops, who then watched the All Blacks defeat France.

Contingent Commander Colonel Kevin Burnett congratulated the contingent on their efforts. "You can all be both collectively and individually proud of what you've achieved. Your performance in the ceremony was outstanding." The Guard Commander, Squadron Leader Nick Olney, said that due to the Guard's many hours of practice, two previous occasions had encountered "absolutely no hiccups." The overall event also went very smoothly.

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