

A MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF OF ARMY



Above: The Chief of Army Major General Ryce Jones.

The playing of team sports has a long history in our Army. The objective is to enhance morale and physical fitness by spirited competition and a willingness to support soldiers in activities other than those of a precisely military nature.

By providing an opportunity for individuals to achieve and maintain the highest possible standards of physical fitness, it also promotes the development of Unit morale and esprit de corps in the Army; the development of teamwork, skills, and dexterity relating directly or indirectly to Army tasks; comradeship and understanding among Army personnel; the development of desirable personal qualities

and character; and the enhancement of the image of the Army in the community.

The playing of spirited competition displays a practical application of our Army's Ethos and Values and as well as being a mechanism for the development of desirable traits that we seek from our leaders at all levels under our Army Leadership Framework.

Softball in the New Zealand Army has had many notable achievements during the 60 years of your existence. Collectively, you have performed extremely well at not only NZ Combined Services (now NZDF) level but also on the national stage over many years. There are individuals amongst you who, through their personal commitment, have gone on to wear the Silver Fern and achieve world class recognition as part of a NZ team.

To all of you attending this 60th Anniversary of the New Zealand Army Softball Code I offer my congratulations. I offer a hearty 'welcome back' to all those past members of the Army Softball fraternity who are attending this anniversary weekend and a warm welcome to those who are still serving. I hope that you will enjoy the activities that have been planned and will take the time to reminisce of past glories.

Well done Army Softball.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'R.R. Jones'.

R.R. JONES
Major General
Chief of Army

PATRON OF ARMY SOFTBALL



Above: Patron of Army Softball, John Eagar.

An interview with John Eagar

Written by Dean Groves

Hector Joseph Eagar hails from the capital, Wellington. Following his schooling, he worked in the city up a small alley in Tory Street where during his lunch breaks, he would frequently walk down to a nearby milk bar for a milk shake. It was there that he was given his nickname "Johnny" by the girls who worked there because he wouldn't tell them his real name Hector. He didn't like using Hector as there was a saying at the time "Hector the homeless hun", which was German and meant something about a dog. When the girls found out his last name was Eagar, they named him

"Johnny" after the movie actor Johnny Egar. So, he decided to keep it.

John enlisted into the Army in 1946 as an infantryman and was sent to Papakura Camp for basic training. On day one, the instructors announced that they were looking for Lance Corporals, so after letting on that he had two years experience with the Air Training Corps and demonstrating good squad handling, he was promoted straight away to Lance Corporal.

Following basic training, John hopped on-board the troop ship HMS Chitral on 18 August 1946 and set sail for Japan as part of 22 Battalion J Force.

During his one year tour of duty in Japan, John happened to rupture his knee ligaments during a recreational cricket game. With no hospital in the area that could care for this injury, John was loaded onto the back of a truck for a 200 kilometre drive to the nearest hospital. Unfortunately, John's treatment was rest, until he got home for further treatment (the knife).

"John recalls his first Inter-Districts Summer Sports Tournament was at Papakura Camp in 1958."

In August 1947, John returned to Wellington where he got married and later had two children. In between children and working on Saturdays, John played for the Marist Brothers Old Boys Team. It was during this time that he

met Maurice Bull and his father, who was a top umpire in the region.

John re-enlisted back into the Army in the Royal New Zealand Armoured Corps as a storeman on 31 May 1957. He spent 8 years in the city working in the clothing store in Buckle Street.

John recalls his first Inter-Districts Summer Sports Tournament was at Papakura Camp in 1958. He was also selected into the Army Team that year and continued playing for 14 consecutive seasons.

When asked what sort of things they all got up to at the tournaments in the early days. He said “if there were any trouble makers, we would take them out the back of the building and sort them out, if you know what I mean. But this rarely happened.”



In 1971, John was appointed the Army Men’s Team coach, a position he held until 1973. During this time he was also the Code Chairman and the Combined Services coach.

“In 1975, John was presented the Army Colour (known also as “the Army Blue”) for his outstanding service to Army Softball and Soccer”

In 1974, John turned to the dark side and became an umpire. Over the years, he regularly offered his services to Inter-Regional and Inter-Service Tournaments.

In 1975, John was presented the Army Colour (known also as “the Army Blue”) for his outstanding service to Army Softball and Soccer.

In 1976, John and his family moved to Christchurch where they would become permanent residents in the garden city. It was not long before John and his wife Peg, offered their services to the local softball association as an umpire and committee member respectively.

In 1983, John was an umpire at the Men’s Invitation Mini World Series held in New Zealand.

In 1986, John was assigned as an umpire to the 11th Junior Men’s World Championships in the USA. His son Dale was also at this tournament as the coach of the New Zealand Team. The following year in 1987, John was an umpire at the Women’s World Championships in Auckland. In 1989, John was awarded Life Membership of the Canterbury Softball Umpires Association in recognition of his services to softball.

In 2000, John was an umpire for the Millennium Series in Christchurch.

In 2001, the New Zealand Softball Association awarded John with the Umpires Distinguished Service Award.

On 2 December 2004, at the Inter-Services Tournament prize giving at Waiouru Camp, John was appointed Patron of New Zealand Army Softball, a position he holds to this day.

His son Dale has followed in his father’s softball footsteps as a player, coach, official and as the CEO of Softball New Zealand from 2005 - 2008.

In 2007, John was invited to tour Australia with the Army teams who were competing in the Australian Defence Force Softball Association Softball tournament at Randwick barracks in Sydney. John accepted the invitation and was a key member of the touring party both on and off the diamond. He underestimated the power of the sun on the first day of tournament play and got his legs sunburnt, but other than that, he fully supported all activities.

Below: John watching the Army play at Randwick barracks, Sydney 2007



Above: The Patron with his Army softball coin.

In 2007, John kindly donated “The Patron’s Trophy” to Army softball for the most outstanding player (male or female) in the Army. John is particularly proud of being the Patron of Army Softball and rates this appointment as one of the highlights of his softball career.

John is highly regarded by all Army softballers and is known by most today as “The Don.”

“His son Dale has followed in his father’s softball footsteps as a player, coach, official and as the CEO of Softball New Zealand ...”

John has spent an unprecedented amount of time involved with softball (at all levels) in the Army from 1958 to 2008 (50 years). Had his health been a little better, you could bet that John would be officiating in some form at this year’s tournaments.

It was an absolute honour and privilege to visit and interview our Patron for this journal – he is a true legend and treasure of Army Softball.