

A Kiwi veteran: Warrant Officer Class 2 Jamie ‘Taff’ Tawhara

Warrant Officer Class 2 Jamie ‘Taff’ Tawhara (Ngāti Porou) has military service in his blood.

Born in Christchurch and raised in and around Burnham and Linton Military Camps, both his parents served in the New Zealand Army. Taff has both Māori and European ancestry and recognises all of what makes him who he is.

On his mum’s side, he can trace his family’s military service back to the Peninsula War and the Battle of Waterloo. Members of his family have also served in the First World War and Second World War.

His dad was a veteran of the Malayan Emergency, the confrontation over Borneo, and Vietnam.

As a young boy, Taff’s dad would take him to Anzac Day parades and even into camp to meet the men that his dad served with.



Headshot of Warrant Officer Class 2 Jamie ‘Taff’ Tawhara

Taff joined the Army in 1991, left in 2011, and then re-joined in 2015.

“I will take part in a haka and give it my all because there is something deep down inside of me that is Māori and that needs to come forth,” Taff says.

“But I’m also of European descent and very proud of my family history on my mum’s side as well.

“They both heavily influence me, but they are not what I solely am. I’m not solely a Māori veteran, I’m not solely a European veteran. I’m a Kiwi veteran.”

When Taff’s dad left the Army the family moved to the West Coast of the South Island. The area had limited prospects for a young man fresh out of high school, so Taff joined the Army.

He initially wanted to get out of small-town New Zealand, but looking back he agrees that it was also a calling.

“I really wanted to be part of something with a bit of purpose, rather than just the run-of-the-mill making money for someone else. It’s never been about the money, it’s been about the service and serving my country.”

Taff deployed to Timor-Leste in 2007. New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) personnel had been stationed in Timor-Leste since 1999 as part of international efforts to help stabilise the country following unrest after it gained independence from Indonesia.

During his time there several crises erupted, including failed assassination attempts on the President and Prime Minister and riots broke out on the streets of Dili. In addition, a grenade was thrown into the Australian Defence Force compound and a foreign sailor detonated an improvised explosive device near the NZDF compound.

“There’s a lot more pressure on you because you don’t know where the next crisis is coming from. You don’t know if anything’s going to happen one day or if something’s going to go down the next.

“The country was in quite a bad way and we were there to make things better. To stabilise the government, to stabilise everyday living so that average Timorese didn’t have to beg, borrow, and steal what they needed to live. If what I did over there helped them towards that, then I’m really proud to be part of that team.”

Taff is grateful to his whānau for their sacrifices and continuing support so that he is able to serve.

“I’ve been away a lot, I’ve missed many weekend and afterschool activities, along with some birthdays. It is beyond doubt the hardest part of being a service person.”

Even with the sacrifices that he and his family have made, Taff is proud to continue his family legacy in the military.

“I think it ties in with my family history as well and maintaining that tradition. I look on my service and I look on the service of my family, and I realise that I’ve had the easiest time out of all of them. That makes me even more determined to serve well. I’m determined that what service I do give to my country, it’s done well and it’s heartfelt.”

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