



A digital space to share memories, celebrate lives and acknowledge loss

Tāmaki Paenga Hira Auckland War Memorial Museum's Online Cenotaph turns 25

The Online Cenotaph is a resource of more than 255,000 records spanning 40 conflicts. The public can contribute their own stories and images which are all then melded with the official records to form a rich history of the people and actions.

The Online Cenotaph is a biographical database that allows researchers, enthusiasts, veterans and their families to explore, contribute to, and share the records and stories of those who served for Aotearoa New Zealand.

“The Online Cenotaph has become New Zealand’s most trusted resource for stories of our service personnel, and we cannot be prouder,” says Victoria Passau, Collection Manager, Online Cenotaph.

The team at Auckland War Memorial Museum gather and share the stories of veterans and interview a small number of veterans each year.

“We find that many veterans and their families are looking for recognition of their service and wanting to share their experiences. Their stories are taonga and I’m proud that we can do this for them and Aotearoa New Zealand.”

The Online Cenotaph owes much to a group of volunteers who research veteran stories and records to be added into the Online Cenotaph database.

In the last two years those volunteers, alongside the Museum’s Visitor Hosts (available due to lockdown), have helped to transcribe more than 18,000 pages of archival records provided by Archives New Zealand Te Rua Mahara o te Kāwanatanga.

In 2021 alone, more than 11,000 new records were created. Included in those records are 4,900 from World War II Navy Records, 3,700 Korean War Army records and 800 Korean War Navy records and that team was able to enrich the database with records from World War II prisoners of war and the Malayan conflicts.

In addition to the significant mahi undertaken by Museum staff and volunteers, the Online Cenotaph has collaborated with researchers and veterans. Victoria is thrilled with the contribution that the veterans are making.

“The Malayan Veterans’ Association have generously shared their knowledge enabling the cenotaph to collate lists of service personnel who served during the Malayan Emergency in Malaya and Borneo. And a big thank you to Bill Russell.

service personnel who were taking the many an emergency in many a home and home and they thank you to the museum, Carol Foster and Dave Fenton for their ongoing support.”



The online cenotaph has come a long way in 25 years. This is an example of how it looked in 1998.

The Auckland Memorial Museum’s own rangatira Matua ‘Bobby’ Newson served in the Vietnam War and features in the online cenotaph. They also worked with Vietnam Veteran, Douglas ‘Scotty’ Wingfield, who has been researching the Ground Crew of the 41 Squadron.

There’s also veterans John ‘Trees’ Forrest and Brian Meyer who (almost) provide daily updates to the cenotaph team about the lives of their comrades. Recently Gerry Wright provided a list of naval personnel involved in Operation Grapple.

The Auckland Memorial Museum and the Online Cenotaph are grateful for the generosity of the contributing veterans, and Victoria believes that they are, once again, serving the nation.

“It’s amazing what they do. They believe that they are giving back, acknowledging Aotearoa New Zealand’s service personnel, and they are, but their work also gives us the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of our nation’s role in international conflict.”

The Online Cenotaph is about honouring service and sharing these stories.

“We find that many veterans and their families are looking for recognition of their service and wanting to share their experiences. Their stories are taonga and I’m proud that we can do this for them and Aotearoa New Zealand.”

“We will continue to search and record voices from our service people. Those voices will be there forever. These voices are taonga.”

Kei Wareware Tātou. Lest We Forget.

If you would be interested in being interviewed please get in touch.

www.aucklandmuseum.com/your-museum/contact-us (<https://www.aucklandmuseum.com/your-museum/contact-us>)

Visit the Online Cenotaph website (<https://www.aucklandmuseum.com/war-memorial/online-cenotaph>)

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 Read the full edition of Veterans' Affairs Magazine Autumn 2022 [PDF, 13 MB]
(<https://www.veteransaffairs.mil.nz/assets/VA-News/VA-News-2022-Edition-1-Autumn.pdf>)

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