

Repatriation begins



Three New Zealand military personnel repatriated from Fiji and American Samoa were returned to their families at a ramp ceremony at Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) Base Ohakea in May.

An RNZAF C-130H(NZ) Hercules returned RNZAF Flight Lieutenant George Beban and Leading Aircraftman Ralph Scott from Fiji and Royal New Zealand Navy Engineering Mechanic 1st Class Russell Moore from American Samoa.

This is the first tranche of repatriations as part of the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) Te Auraki project. Te Auraki—meaning “The Return” in English—will see the families of New Zealand military personnel, and their dependants, buried overseas after 1 January 1955 offered the opportunity to repatriate their loved ones.

This decision came as the result of recommendations made by the Veterans’ Advisory Board.

The ramp ceremony was attended by relatives of those being repatriated, Minister for Veterans Hon Ron Mark, the Head of Veterans’ Affairs and senior NZDF officers. Senior representatives from Fiji and the United States were also invited to the event, as well as members of the veteran communities.

The repatriated personnel were received with a traditional Māori welcome, before being carried past a guard of honour and handed back to their families. A short private family service was held, followed by the NZDF haka.

RNZAF Group Captain Carl Nixon said the ceremony marked a big milestone in the mission to bring home 37 NZDF personnel buried around the world. “This is a significant moment in New Zealand’s military history, as we honour the lives of three NZDF personnel who died serving their country in foreign lands and more importantly bring them home to their families, who have waited more than 60 years to be re-united,” Group Captain Nixon said.

“This is a time when the inequalities and inconsistencies of the past are put right and everyone is treated the same, regardless of wealth, rank or cause of death.”

Families will reinter their relative at a place and time of their choosing in New Zealand. The NZDF will not conduct military funerals because all of the deceased had military funerals before their interment. Families will be offered some NZDF support, such as chaplains, buglers and pall-bearers as required.

Remains will be reinterred at Service, public, or private cemeteries depending on family preferences and the Service person’s qualifying service. Memorials—headstones or plaques—will be provided and \$1 000 will be given towards a

persons qualifying service memorials, headstones or plaques will be provided and \$1,000 will be given towards a headstone for those who wish for their relative to be interred in a public/private cemetery.

The NZDF deployed an expert disinterment team of bioarchaeologists, forensic anthropologists from Otago University and NZDF odontologists (dentists) to carry out the repatriation process. The team is led by an NZDF doctor.

Planning is already under way for the next tranche of repatriations from Malaysia and Singapore. The NZDF anticipates repatriating 29 Service personnel and one child from Malaysia, and one from Singapore. They are due to arrive in New Zealand in August.

Date

04 June 2018

Tags

Veterans' Advisory Board (<https://www.veteransaffairs.mil.nz/news-events/articles/?tag=4>)

Last Modified: 13 June 2019