

Speech Légion d'honneur Napier
Friday 20 november 2015, 18h30
Prairial

Mr Maxwell Collett and guests

The families of Mr Eric Brunton and Mr John Caulton

The Honourable Stuart Nash, MP for Napier

His Worship the Mayor of Napier, Mr Bill Dalton

Squadron Leader, Ken Hamlin, representative of the Chief of Air Force

Commander Alexis Huberdeau

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

Bonjour, Kia Ora, Good Evening,

This evening we are here, aboard this French naval vessel the Prairial, to honour the dedication to service of three gentlemen, who fought for their country and for France, in a battle taking place far from their homes. I would like to warmly welcome veteran Mr Maxwell Collett. I would also like to make special mention of the families of both Mr Eric Brunton and Mr John Caulton. Sadly, these two gentlemen passed away before this ceremony could take place. As Mr Brunton and Mr Caulton had been awarded the nomination before their passing, it will be with deep respect that I present their medals this evening to a member of their respective families.

Before we begin the official proceedings this evening, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the horrific events which took place in Paris last weekend. They struck at the heart of Paris, and the sadness felt by France and her people has extended far beyond her borders. However, as you know, Paris has seen harrowing times before, and she has risen time and time again. United, France will stand. As with the liberation of France, we have received support from around the world. Here in New Zealand, the demonstrations of solidarity have been extraordinary. New Zealand and France have bonds that were forged on the battlefields. In times of difficulty, now as it was during the world wars, these bonds are strong. France and New Zealand stand together.

This ceremony is in honour of New Zealanders who came to the defense of France in her dark hours of the Second World War. Numerous men and woman are deserving of this medal. At the Embassy and in Paris, along with the New Zealand Defence Force, we are working hard to ensure that each deserving veteran is officially recognized. Tonight, we pay tribute to three such veterans from the beautiful Hawke's Bay, and I would like to share a little of the military history of each of them.

Mr Maxwell Collett enlisted in the Royal New Zealand Air Force on the fourth of April 1942. Six months later, he embarked for Canada to

complete his training. In May of 1943 he arrived in the United Kingdom. Mr Collett was posted for operational service with 485 Squadron RAF from the 3rd of June 1944 until the 13th of July 1945. During this time he flew at least 74 sorties with this squadron, several of which stand out in particular: On D-Day, Mr Collett was flying on offensive fighter sweeps above the invasion of the Normandy beaches. On December 26 1944 he, along with a fellow Flying officer, destroyed three midget submarines, believed to be the only midget submarines destroyed by Fighter Command.

It is lovely that your son Noel can be here with you tonight to mark this special moment. I understand that he has travelled from the United Kingdom to be here. Because you fought in Europe during the Second World War, in a way, it is as if the circle has been completed with your son returning here to see your services officially recognized by France.

Mr Eric Brunton enlisted in the Royal New Zealand Air Force on the 12th of September 1941. Having commenced training as a bomber pilot in New Zealand, he travelled to Canada in May of the following year to continue his training. Arriving in the United Kingdom in March of 1943, he undertook further training before being posted to 226 Squadron, RAF Bomber Command. From the first of September 1943 until May 1944 he

flew bombing missions over France. He was then posted to 137 Wing, 2nd tactical air Force. It was as part of this Force that he was taking part in ground attack missions in fighter aircraft on D-Day.

Mr John Caulton enlisted in the Royal New Zealand Air Force on the 27th of July 1941. Eight months after commencing pilot training, he embarked for the United Kingdom and arrived in mid-April of 1942. He completed training as a fighter pilot and was posted to No. 132 Squadron, Royal Air Force Fighter Command on February 6 1943. With this Squadron Mr Caulton was a flying offensive fighter, undertaking ground attack and shipping protection missions over France. He flew operationally until the end of April 1944, when he was shot down and crash landed in Holland. Having survived the crash, Mr Caulton was taken as a prisoner of war. It was over a year later that he was repatriated to the United Kingdom, eventually returning to New Zealand in July of 1946.

I would now like to take a moment to extend a personal merci to the veterans and their families, for the personal commitment and bravery they showed during the Second World War. Merci.

Would Mr Maxwell Collett please come forward to receive your Legion of Honour medal. « Au nom du Président de la République, nous vous remettons les insignes de chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur. »