

Memorial Day 2017

Address by Jenny Rowan JP QSM

Greetings:

- Kaumatua - Taku Parai from Ngati Toa Rangatira
- Chargé d' Affairs Candy Green and representatives of the US Embassy
- Air Vice-Marshal Tony Davies, Chief of New Zealand Air Force
- Chris Laidlaw, Chair of the Greater Wellington Regional Council.
- K. Gurunthan and councillors of Kapiti Coast District Council
- Chris Turver and representatives of the RSA
- Volunteers of the Menzshed
- Friends

As Chair of the Kapiti US Marines Trust, I warmly welcome you to this our Memorial Day commemoration – when we remember the 75th Anniversary of the US Armed Services ‘friendly invasion’ of New Zealand.

Our Trust is passionate about promoting, collecting, conserving and exhibiting the history of this time when over 15,000 U.S. Marines lived in our community

Communities, like ours, remain vibrant and strong through remembering our stories, the development of the new rail-line, the new road, the time the whales were stranded on our beach. Not all our stories are positive – tragedy, illness and war have all played a part in making us who we are today.

For the Trust, the story and life events we remember today were set against the backdrop of great uncertainty and fear.

Our story begins with an urgent need to prepare for the surprise arrival of thousands of Marines. It builds to an inevitable meeting of two similar but quite different cultures in an intense short period of time. It ends abruptly and is often tragic, but is tempered with the birth of long-time friendship between the United States and New Zealand and between generations of families and friends.

The Marines arrived in our midst in 1942 catching the general population by surprise. It's hard to imagine a population of several hundred people in Paekakariki set in the midst of 15,000 marines! But, as time went on real friendships emerged as local families ‘adopted’ young Marines, as relationships formed and for many they became like family.

Children of the time, some of you here today, remember warfare in their very own backyard, waving to the Marines as they marched up the highway to the new camps, meeting Marines at the dairy, sharing Sunday church services with them and having them home for dinner.

So, what do we as kiwi's make of America's Memorial Day – when the United States honours all those who have died in time of war? It's probably too much to contemplate by a country as small as

ours but we can respect that (as with ANZAC Day) it is America's time to pause and contemplate the human cost of war.

Here in New Zealand and in Kapiti we remember that we share a piece of their story – so, when nearly 3,000 Marines were lost in the battle for Tarawa – we knew them – they were like our sons. America's loss was also our heartbreak.

Five years ago we warmly welcomed back a number of veterans, both sailors and marines who'd passed through Camps Russell, MacKay and Paekakariki. It was the 70th anniversary of the arrival of US military forces in New Zealand.

We've subsequently hosted a number of heroic and delightful veterans who've visited the Memorial sight and been hosted in and around the village.

Members of the Trust and our friends have precious memories of 'our' veterans and their families. and hold them dear in our hearts.

Dean Ladd whose recollections we heard earlier today was one of the veteran visitors and so was the late, Frank Zalot who gifted us his first-hand account of the beach-landing tragedy in 1943 - where ten of his comrades were drowned.

Frank and his two war-time buddies Ted Picard and Ray La Plant were here to lay the first wreath of remembrance on our Sailor's memorial. Earlier this year, trustees and friends gathered here to lay a wreath for Frank who died in January. We honour Frank today, also legendary photographer and film maker Norm Hatch who died recently – and the many others who died serving their country and ours.

Today we commemorate Memorial Day and the 75th anniversary with a unique project. With our partners the United States Embassy, Greater Wellington Regional Council and the Menzshed we have returned a restored US Marines Hut once used here - back into the park. I invite you all to follow me immediately following this service for the blessing and opening of our precious Hut.

We should never forget what has happened on our land and to our people. A story is only a story if it is told.

If we don't recall and respect the efforts of our forebears we are without sign posts to show us how far we have come. If we don't learn from the past sacrifices of others we misunderstand how much further we still have to go.

Today we remember with deepest gratitude and love US Armed Service men and women who protected and defended our country in the Pacific War.