



TRIBUTE: (L-R) Napier's Ron Rowe and Paddy Mahony joined Bill Ryan from Havelock North and Hastings' Tony Fraser in laying a commemorative wreath to the Irish soldiers who served with the British forces during WWII.

PHOTO/GLENN TAYLOR HBT131661-02

Hawkes Bay Today New Zealand 17 June 2013 Napier ceremony for Irish soldiers who fought in WWII

By Roger Moroney
roger.moroney@hbtoday.co.nz

A unique ceremony staged at the RSA in Napier on Saturday has left Irish military eyes smiling.

The only one of its kind staged in the country, it was a wreath-laying remembrance of all the Irishmen who left their neutral army at the outbreak of WWII and joined the British Army.

"Their consciences told them to leave Ireland to fight with the British," Havelock North veteran, and former navy man Bill Ryan said.

But, as he explained, that decision effectively split families apart, and meant they could not return to their homeland after the war as their actions left them blacklisted and deemed to be deserters.

At the outbreak of WWII the then Prime Minister of Ireland, Eamon de Valera, and his government had instigated a state of Irish neutrality.

But not all in his army embraced it and about 5000 Irish soldiers, wanting to do their bit, left their army and joined the

British one. In their absence they were found guilty of desertion which meant they effectively could not return home.

"So those who survived the war had to find new homes and went off to Canada and the US, Australia and here to New Zealand."

While not one of the "deserters" Irish-born Mr ~~Mulvaney~~ wanted to do his bit in setting things right after more than 70 years.

Now 79, he served the Royal Navy for 22 years having joined up while he was in London where he had gone to find work as a builder.

Two years ago he settled in Hawke's Bay having fallen in love with New Zealand during holidays with family who had settled here six years earlier.

"My wife and I came out here to get away from the terrible Irish winters."

He had long been aware of the stories surrounding the blacklisting of Irish troops.

After many years of appeals to successive Irish governments, in May 14 this year it was finally

decreed that an amnesty be signed — declaring that all the Irish soldiers who went to war were no longer deserters or blacklisted.

They became veterans who served the allied forces and served them well.

It was through a long-standing link with Ireland-based friend Peter Mulvany that ~~Mulvaney~~ got to work with the local RSAs, and in particular Tony Fraser, to ensure the event was noted and commemorated.

Mr Mulvany had been a leading force in getting the amnesty signed and sealed.

"As far as I'm aware this was the only service like this in the country," Mr ~~Hall~~ said, adding that similar "Irish Soldiers Pardon Campaign" services were being held in other parts of the world.

He was unsure if there were any Irish/British Army veterans in Hawke's Bay, or New Zealand.

He said if there were then for most it was almost too late, as their numbers had dwindled but said it was important, and special, for the families.