



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH EX-SERVICE LEAGUE (RCEL)

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## THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH EX-SERVICES LEAGUE (RCEL)

### 11.1 Introduction

The RNZRSA as one of the five founding ex-services member organisations continues to give the RCEL active support by attendance at meetings and by making annual payments for administration and welfare purposes

For those who do not know about the League this paper answers the following questions

### 11.2 What is the RCEL?

The main purpose of the RCEL is to link together the ex-service organisation of the Commonwealth and through them the many millions of ex-servicemen and women in the Commonwealth. It is an association of Associations which is in constant touch with each other spread as they are over the whole surface of the globe and separated by thousands of miles. Where necessary to co-ordinate their activities and assists them to meet their responsibilities towards the ex-servicemen and women in all countries and territories of the Commonwealth.

The League was formed as the British Empire Service League in 1921, at the instigation of Field-Marshal Lord Haig and General Smuts, at an inaugural conference held in Cape Town. The five founding ex-services organisations represented at the conference were:

- Australia - The Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia
- Canada - The Canadian Legion
- New Zealand - The New Zealand Returned Soldiers' Association
- South Africa - The South African Legion
- The United Kingdom - The British Legion

The League's aim, as defined then is to:

**"ensure that no Commonwealth ex-serviceman or woman is without help if in need."**

This aim remains the main purpose of the League today.

In 1958 the name was changed from BESL to BCEL as the development from Empire to Commonwealth progressed. This progress inevitably enhanced the position of the member organisations in the rapidly increasing number of newly independent countries within the Commonwealth which now take their place on an equal footing alongside the organisation of the older independent countries. The name was later changed to RCEL.

From the original five founding member of the "old Commonwealth countries" the League has grown to include ex-service organisations in over 50 countries.

The policy of RCEL is decided at triennial conferences (biennial until 1960) attended by delegates from the constituent member organisations. Between conferences the activities of the League are controlled by a Commonwealth Council on which each organisation is represented by not more than two members.

As the headquarters of the League are in London, Council members are normally national of the country represented resident in the UK or people who have had a long association with the country represented.

### **11.3 What Does the RCEL Do?**

The RCEL seeks to ensure that every ex-serviceman or woman of the Commonwealth has someone to turn to for help when in trouble regardless of whether he or she is a member of any ex-services organisation or not. As a first towards this aim the League works continuously to strengthen its constituent member organisation so that they are in a position to look after the welfare of ex-servicemen and woman in their own countries.

While the ex-service organisations in leading countries are strong, well organised and well financed and are thus fully capable of looking after their own, in some of the poorer countries constituent member organisations have a continual struggle to keep going and to meet the calls that are made upon them.

The League's main concern therefore, is to give them every possible guidance, encouragement and inspiration to further their work and in the last report, material assistance to enable them to meet their responsibilities.

### **11.4 What Role Has RCEL to Play in the Future?**

The ranks of the surviving men and women of the First and Second World Wars are now rapidly diminishing and their well-being as indeed the well-being of those who have served in the subsequent conflicts will be a major commitment in the years to come.

The League has an important role to play in the relief of hardship and suffering among ex-servicemen and women and their dependants throughout the Commonwealth, particularly in developing countries.

The RCEL will do its utmost to ensure that ex-service organisations in the newer countries are able to meet their responsibilities and to set a standard that will be an example to others.

### **11.5 How Can RSA and Individuals Help?**

Since RCEL depends entirely on the ex-service organisations of the Commonwealth for both material and moral support in its efforts to look after ex-servicemen and women throughout the Commonwealth, the RSA can best help by continuing its active membership and financial support for the league. Also by keeping RSA members and where necessary the government of the day informed of the current activities of the RCEL.

Individual New Zealand ex-servicemen and women who wish to take part in the League's great endeavours can best help by belonging to and actively supporting their local RSA, which in turn provides RNZRSA with the means to continue the strong support given to RCEL since its founding over 95 years ago.

### **11.6 Contact Details**

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