

## RSA MODERNISATION

### TOWARD 2030

#### REFLECTIONS

- Thomas Hobbes described life in a state of nature as “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short” he penned one of the most celebrated sentences in the English Language.
- The 17<sup>th</sup> Century philosopher asserted that without “a common power to keep them all in awe”, human beings fall into a state of nature – a condition of anarchical warfare.
- This might appear pessimistic but paradoxically Hobbes was an optimist. Using their reason he believed, human beings could lift themselves out of conflict. Humankind could in his view enjoy a civilised life of peace, prosperity, and culture through a **social contract**.
- That last statement in my view epitomises the requirement to examine where it is possible the direction, focus and strategy of the RNZRSA/RSA.
- In addition: After many years of internally examining their culture the Canadian Defence Force settled on Trust that must be at their centre-the components of which are;
- **Benevolence** = I trust you care.
- **Competence** = I trust you can do it right.
- **Predictability** = I trust you’ll stick it out.
- **Integrity** = I trust you will do the right thing.
  
- From my experiences delivering RSA2030 (Now RNZRSA Modernisation) there were a range of reactions. Some didn’t understand it and were unable to see that the future is potentially finite for the RSA movement without significant reorientation.
- While there were many often silent who privately and individually agreed that something needed to be done and quickly, to reverse the situation or ‘issues’ faced by many.
- Above all there is a profound need to refresh the original core purpose of the RNZRSA/RSA. Perception internally is always different to those outside any organisation.
- For us that purpose is the prosperity, care and welfare of Veterans and their families. There are now clear options of how that might be achieved. Whether conducted through e.g. a Veteran Support Centre, a Hub or as part of existing RSA configurations.
- Despite some misleading hyperbole in some quarters, this does not signal the end of hospitality or community venues. There are successful examples where both energetic initiatives that match contemporary veterans’ interests combine with community and hospitality-based locations. Many of you come from such locations. We saw some of them in our travels. Attracting them more assuredly to our purpose and where necessary, to assist their needs, is the challenge.
- **Following media-initiated interviews focused on the plight of recent veterans, use of the term ‘Booze barns’ and its association with the RSA was unfortunate. While trying to colloquially describe an issue, we inadvertently offended a large segment of our community. For that we apologise.**
- The purpose had been to call for modernisation of the RSA movement and the recent presentations highlight the fragile state of many associations.
- The loss of equity through lack of support from others, seeking solutions that divest or dilute that equity, which once surrendered, is forever lost.
  
- **To sustain relevance and reputation will require innovative and yet prescriptive solutions.**

- Hyperbole and critical, almost acerbic use of language and **personalised criticism** is evidently against the values of the RSA. If so, don't do it. Recovering reputation is a challenge. Airing views, strongly held, is always best left to internal dialogue.
- For some of our locations, circumstances have changed because, for a variety of reasons - **'times have changed'**.
- Since the RSA2030 presentations that gave an assessment of **only** 53 Associations, there are subsequently now more added almost weekly that require help to survive or redirect their effort. Regardless of the numbers, where we can, we need to assist.
- Failure to preserve equity is a great risk to the cause and RSA movement. Where that is imminent, we collectively should help. Not to take it away from communities but to preserve its value for the use it was intended.
- I'm **now** aware that threats, derision, and varying levels of strife that accompany change are not new. Where change has been attempted there has been all too often, muted reaction. Yet at times there has been a range of acceptance and sadly more often than is necessary, the avoidance of reality. We all can do better.
- As we've said during the RSA2030 there have been thousands who have contributed. Often unnoticed sometimes less focused but nevertheless well intentioned. This grand effort is often by former ex serving and non-serving personnel who have given their time and energy unsolicited and often unrewarded.
- There is a misconception of how reputation and therefore relevance is earned. Much of it is carried over from long years of individual and joint effort and all too often focused on **remembrance**. Essential yes, but in 2024 **support** and **advocacy** must also be our champions. We must always remember those who served. It is 25 years this September that we deployed into East Timor of which there are 5665 WHO DID, and 24 years since we landed in Afghanistan for our longest commitment to a war bar none. Many chapters have and will be written on both. The efforts of the RNZAF and NZSAS at the death throes of our commitment in Afghanistan create yet more recognition of service.
- There are 62,000 veterans since 1990 and over 12,000 have seen operational service whether at sea, on land or in the air.
- If you haven't looked at the recording of the recent Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Select committee hearing held last week, the Minister of Veterans Affairs summarised in it several of the issues we discussed with him. The need to review VSA14 and the associated entitlements, the inability of the NZDF and VANZ systems to connect to one another and pass the details of Veterans from one to the other is unfortunate in the digital age that is 2024. He obviously agrees.
- **Let me also explain**, Ministers and all Governments need to be reminded that there is a contract like no other employment, between it and its Service personnel. Our recent meeting with the new Minister of Veterans Affairs was an opportunity to do just that. But we need to do so from a position of strength.
- Continued meetings with Service Chiefs have been beneficial to us both as we express concerns for their conditions. Better conditions result in better transition into civilian life coupled with agreed and suitable entitlements.
- The NZDF has embraced the concept of an Armed Forces Day. It will be for them to action, it is not a holiday. It will though, if it becomes a reality, act as recognition for serving and non-serving in the communities in which we live. And also, potentially, for the RSA to support. My recent attendance at the Remembrance service in Warkworth were insightful. A massive turn out from the community, a parade passing the dais with the soon to be Minister of Veterans

reviewing the parade. Then being surrounded by the community who were keen to ask questions from decorations to current circumstances.

- As we've travelled throughout the country to 8 venues and delivered 9 presentations the enthusiasm and variety of understanding of our core purpose ranges from strong to mixed. We have much to do. Amongst the criticism has been the accusation that we have neglected to mention non-service personnel. I disagree and it was refreshing to observe how the prime purpose of the RSA can invigorate communities throughout NZ and consequently the involvement of many. Gore & Milton are such great examples of this. There are many others we didn't see.
- You will hear during the day, as part of discussion, and you will know, of the effort being expended by our Support infrastructure, by the many volunteers and appointed staff. The latter includes the efforts of our MSD sponsored Veteran Employment Service trial and the successes achieved which as an initiative, sadly, is likely to become a casualty of the Government's need to find funding for a range of causes. Nevertheless, we have 300+ former Veterans registered, assisted 54 into full-time employment and registered 100+ employers and their intermediaries including the likes of Fonterra, Air NZ, The Warehouse, Fletcher Group and Deloitte. While 20 Veterans are receiving return to work assistance.
- In the margins of today you will hear about the 116 veterans who turned up to an RSA support session in Northland seeking advice and assistance, not a show bag but genuinely looking for help.
- I can't help thinking about the former Infantry Private who recently died jumping off the crane into Wellington Harbour, who had served time in prison, used drugs, was homeless, and left three children. And there are evidently 4% of the prison population who are Veterans.
- While we are **not** able to replace government services **and nor should we**, we can navigate for those Veterans in need without creating our own bureaucracy. We can advocate for their welfare. In the first instance they do not need to be members of the RSA.
- To that end we will, at their request and agreement, shortly qualify how we will work with ACC, Corrections and eventually TPK, while they remain willing to collaborate. We should also be able to have similar arrangements with VANZ in a collegial business-like manner with our and their reputation intact.
- Can you visualise a Veteran Support Centre that operates for all. Maybe located in bases or existing RSA's. Staffed in part by Veterans but including the large nonveteran membership with other skills.
- **Equally important, we do not only have to look out for those who need help, we should champion those who can achieve, by awarding scholarships, opportunities, and nurturing excellence. They could be role models for other citizens. Helped by the RSA. The effect on our reputation for such action would be palpable.**
- Providing new facilities as part of current structures and activities that encourage participation. As I said to some during the RSA2030 roadshow... Do you have a gym, a creche, a learning centre?
- Rejuvenating the former Online RSA as a strong and necessary National RSA alternative for veterans and supporters **will** with change, become a reality.
- **We can also focus more directly on service women who not just because there are now more of them, but who bring a richness to our cause.**
- Combining community groups and veterans is a rich legacy of commitment and success. Especially in small and interdependent communities.

- All of this is possible, but it will not endure, if as Hobbs ably described, the lessons of the past are avoided and where they are allowed to become divisive and inwardly focused – then eventually self-destructive.
- For those of you who have studied the classics you will recall that **Alexander the Great** to undo the Gordian knot, solved it, not by untying it, but by striking his sword through it. That is the outcome the RNZRSA has been looking for and urgently needs to achieve.
- Today I hope you will enthusiastically embrace options for collective discussion and action that strengthen the RNZRSA/RSA pre-eminent position as the GUARDIANS for Veterans while remaining relevant to the community and champion their involvement.
- To also examine what it means to be called an RSA? What principals do we accept as membership. What if you don't embrace such expectations? What are the consequences of upholding these principals? How do we strengthen the structure while encouraging and preserving participation.
- It is then the challenge to imbue your colleagues to step up. They did in part in 2022. We need to do so again in 2024 but this time map the future, agree on it, and actively participate in it.
- Despite some acerbic rhetoric over the past few days there has been an often silent but increasingly large number who seek change and if we're open to it we will meet the expectations of those who currently might look forlornly on the RSA. Misinformation causes angst and division. Valid informed debate is the foundation for advancing change where it is necessary. The RNZRSA is open to dialogue and a contest of ideas.
- On recently hearing the Ode recited, I reflected on those who have gone before us and what they would think of the RSA in 2024? They, veterans and non-veterans served for a clear purpose and so, such sentiment must remain.
- My past twelve months have been insightful and like all initiations impressionable, but my previous experiences in uniform and out of it, can best be useful for several **binding lessons**. Often hard won and **if ignored**, then a salutary lesson. These include; **Unity of Purpose, Unity of Effort combined with a sense of duty and service. At its core for us all is the ambition to exercise sound leadership at all levels**
- I simply ask that you participate today with an open mind, looking for the chance to set us on a path that uses the past that is the RSA/RNZRSA and **where necessary** reshape the organisation to demonstrate an open minded innovative and resolute champion that is focused on its core purpose and above all can achieve its full potential, sustain its reputation and relevance within the communities in which we live.
- For those that can't, we will need to embrace, explain and assist in closing the gap to a better future. Joined in a common purpose with trust and commitment.
- Finally, May I conclude by thanking the **Board** and staff of RNZRSA.
- To the **staff**, I do not know how you manage the extraordinary workload and demands with our limited services. We owe it to you to improve our systems, communication, and funding. This challenge we accept in kind and reality. Without an active arrowhead driven by its shaft, advised by its legions makes it difficult to achieve purpose, relevance and then reputation.

Nga Mihi

Kia ora Tatou...