

War hero honoured

Finally a memorial for top secret 'Z Force' commandos

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FOR 30 years after the end of World War II, New Norfolk's Ken O'Brien was forbidden by law to reveal his service in the top-secret Z Special Unit.

Seven decades on, the unit also known as Z Force has this week been publicly commemorated at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

Mr O'Brien was among a group of about 20 former Z Special Unit members, their wives and widows when the role of the special operations group was recognised at a ceremony in Canberra on Monday.

The former New Norfolk shopkeeper, who turned 93 last week, was a specialist coder with the unit and was involved in providing communication to those working behind Japanese lines in the Pacific.

The unit conducted more than 80 missions into enemy-occupied territory in the Pacific and South-East Asia.

"When there was going to

be a landing they would send people in to work out where the gun placements were, where the Japanese camps were," Mr O'Brien said.

Z Special Unit members were also involved in rescuing airmen who were shot down.

Mr O'Brien was based for a time in Japanese-occupied Borneo. He said he did a "couple of jobs" on his own, but mostly he worked with a signaller and four soldiers.

Mr O'Brien rose to the rank of sergeant during the war. Afterwards, he ran O'Brien's general store in High St and later built a draper's shop next door.

The new plaque at the Australian War Memorial recognises the service and sacrifice of the unit which is regarded as the forerunner of today's SAS and commando units.

Mr O'Brien said while he was appreciative of the honour, many others who served in the infantry were equally deserving.

Mr O'Brien's father was a sergeant in World War I and fought in the battle of Pozieres 100 years ago.



HUMBLED: Magma's Ken O'Brien, who turned 93 on Saturday, is one of the few surviving veterans of World War II Z Special Unit who along with his fellow veterans from the secret commando unit, was recognised at a dedication ceremony, inset, at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, on Monday.

Main Picture: MATT THOMPSON

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