

PALMERSTON NORTH RSA MINIATURE RIFLE CLUB

1920 - 2015

A meeting of those interested in the formation of a Returned Soldiers Rifle Club was held in the Anzac Club on October 27th, 1920 with Mr H N Cook presiding. A proposal had been put forward by Hugh Akers, the President of the Linton Rifle Club to allow the RSA Club the use of their range, and to provide the sum of £10 (\$20) towards the cost of rifles and associated equipment. He stated that his club was the only club functioning in the Manawatu and his members were anxious to obtain competition within the area. His members would also be available to give their time and expertise towards the establishment of the club.

Offers of assistance and numerous donations had been promised from members of the public. The chairman thought it would be advisable to form a club and moved in that direction, the motion being carried unanimously. The following office bearers were elected. Patron: Mr H Akers, Representative to the entertainment committee: Mr W Hughes, and the Committee comprising C Bridle, A Butcher, R Bryant, and W Hughes. Half yearly subscriptions were fixed at 5/- (50c).

A further meeting was held on November 16 to confirm the forming of a miniature rifle club in connection with the Palmerston North Returned Soldiers Association, when Mr J Linklater was elected President and Mr J Latta as Secretary/Treasurer. Three Winchester rifles, ammunition and associated gear were placed on order.

The first match by the club was fired on May 26, 1921 with Les Hastings being top score with 65 (possible 70). Scoring slowly improved and the season finished in December, when a friendly match was fired with the newly formed Rongotea Club. Supper was provided for the visitors at the Anzac Club and the evening proved an enjoyable conclusion to a successful season.

In 1923, the club decided to replace the Winchester rifles, which had not proved satisfactory, with the new pattern Vickers rifles. The previous year the RSA Club, with only Winchester rifles, had put up a good fight for the McKelvie Cup, and were only defeated by a narrow margin.

Mr Fred Nathan, the Mayor of Palmerston North at the time, donated a cup which was to be awarded to the member with the highest aggregate score for the season. Mr Nathan was also a Director in the firm Joseph Nathan and Sons, which owned the Glaxo factory, where the Bunnythorpe Miniature Rifle Club established their range in late 1921.

Mr R A Jones and Mr E Berry were elected as club representatives to attend a meeting at Rongotea in 1924, for the purpose of forming a Miniature Rifle Association. The motion was put forward by the Linton Club and carried unanimously.

The new Association was to be known as the Manawatu Miniature Rifle Association with its headquarters in Palmerston North. Among the trophies donated to the new association was the Cliffe and Remington Cup. An excerpt from the 'Manawatu Standard' stated that Messrs Cliffe and Remington had generously donated, through the RSA Club, a cup for competition open to all clubs in the Association. However, an examination of club records showed no trace of a Mr Remington so one can only presume that Mr C Cliffe was the local ammunition agent.

The club had high hopes of winning this trophy when they put up a top score of 1358 points, but were surpassed by the Linton Club who shot a record score of 1366, which enabled them to maintain an unbeaten record for the season.

Late in 1924, five members of the club travelled to the Wellington Championships where there were 144 entries, with no fewer than 49 lady enthusiasts taking part. Mr R Jones, L Jones, D Eustace, T Madge and J Tantrum represented the club. The trip was made by motor car and a series of mishaps resulted in the team reaching Wellington at 2pm after being on the road since 5am. Despite this, the performance of the men was surprisingly good. R Jones tied with 4 others in the invitation 'A' match and, in the shoot-off, won Mr W H Tisdall's trophy. The teams match resulted in RSA finishing in fifth place out of sixteen teams.

Towards the latter part of the year, the Jones brothers donated a fine shield to the Association for a 5 man team competition. This match was shot at the first Manawatu Championships held in October 1924 when, after a close battle, the Linton and RSA clubs tied for first place. The trophy was handed to the RSA club as it was felt that having donated the trophy in the first place, it would be apt and fitting that they should be the first holders. At these Championships, Rube Jones and Les Hastings (both RSA) and Les Shailer of Oroua Downs tied for third place in the A Grade and each received a silver medal. A Gilmore won the gold medal in the B grade.

The Linton and RSA clubs joined forces at an end of year 'smoke concert' to mark the termination of the season's activities. After a series of speeches the following people contributed items. Mr Pickering and Mr Farmer (banjo duet), F Lewis (Hawaiian guitar solo), E Jensen (Solo), and H Jones (recitation) while various members added to the entertainment by recounting incidents in connection with the sport.

1925 brought controversy when, in a match between RSA and Awahuri for the Cliffe and Remington Cup and the Tisdall Cup (Postal shoots), a reshoot was rendered necessary by the lodging of a protest by the country club due to the town club not having completed its shoot on the evening, because two of its members were absent. Mr B Pratt of the Linton Club was appointed umpire at the reshoot. However, RSA went on to win the match and both trophies for the season.

Mr R Jones and Mr G Findlay donated a unique trophy for competition between Oroua Downs, Rangiotu and RSA clubs in 1927. The challenge shield took the form of a framed leadlight kiwi about 18" (46cm) square, the foreground being carried out in green glass with the bird in natural brown standing out in relief against a blue sky. Herbert Bond of Rangiotu intended mounting bronze shields in the form of kiwis for inscription purposes. The shield was to form a great rivalry between the clubs in the coming years.

At this time, the finances of the rifle club were controlled by the Palmerston North Returned Soldiers Association, and several members expressed the opinion that the rifle club should control its own finances. It was decided to approach the PNRSA Treasurer to discuss the question of the club branching out on its own. The matter was finally resolved in the mid seventies, almost 50 years later, when the rifle club began functioning on its own, the only exception being that the President of the Returned Services Association was still nominated as club Patron. (Note- The name of the Palmerston North Returned Soldiers Association was changed in the late thirties to encompass the other services).

L H Jones, who was a life member and one of the founders of the club, moved to the South Island in 1929 where he formed an alliance with the Wood Club of Nelson. Several Postal matches were arranged with the scores resulting in a win to each club.

The club was unsuccessful in Manawatu Association shoots over the next few years and were finally forced to resign from competitions in 1932. This was mainly due to the death of Mr Hugh Akers who had been Patron of the club since its formation in 1920, and had also held the post of either Patron or President of the Linton Club for many years. On his death the lease of the range was inherited by the Linton Club who could no longer afford to maintain the property, so the range was dismantled and the lease reverted to the New Zealand Schools Commission. Thus the range was lost to shooting, but the RSA Club continued, only shooting away friendly matches until it was finally forced into recess. It's sad to say that most of the trophies have been lost, the only exception being the Nathan Cup which is still used for competition today. Mr Nathan was Vice President in 1926 and President in 1927.

On December 2nd 1947, a meeting of Returned Services members was held in the Anzac Club in George Street, for the purpose of forming an RSA Miniature Rifle Club. Some 21 members were present. Notable members being: Mr Every, Mr Procter, Mr Robert and Mr Check, whose names appear on the PNRSA trophies. The first President elected was Mr C E Every, with Mr L P Robert and Mrs R G Procter as Vice-presidents

The meeting was informed that the Longburn Rifle Club range in Manawatu Street was available for use and the club would start shooting on Thursday evenings at 7 o'clock, and it was decided that the first shoot would be before Christmas.

The first committee meeting was held on the 13th of April 1948 in the Returned Services Association club rooms in George Street. Mr Every was in the chair and those present were Mr Procter, Mr Hastings, Mr Stuart, Mr Mitchell, Mr Schou, Mr Rillstone and Mr Sadler. It was at this meeting that the name of the club was changed from Miniature Rifle Club to Smallbore Rifle Club. A rule was made that the first man to score a 100 was to supply supper for the following club night. Wives and fiancées could join the club at a half fee of 10/- (\$1) and the women's section of the RSA were to be invited to join as well.

At the next committee meeting on the 3rd of June, several cups were donated for competition which are still shot for today, though some are in a different format. Some of them were, the C E Every Cup, R A Check Cup, L P Robert Cup and the R G Procter Cup. In July 1948, Neilson (Tiny) Rees was co-opted onto the committee to begin an association with the club that was to last until his death in 1978.

At the end of 1948, Mr R A Jones re-donated the Nathan Cup which he had held when the club went into recess. This is the only original cup left from the earlier years. A series of grade buttons were introduced that were shot for every week. These were round coloured buttons with 3 silver circles.

In December 1948 a letter was received from the Palmerston North Smallbore Club inviting the PNRSA Club to use the proposed new range in Albert Street at a fee to be agreed. The first year's trading saw an income of £94/13/8 (\$189.37) and an expenditure of £163/12/2 (\$327.22) with the shortfall being made up from the Returned Services Association. £35 (\$70) was spent on the purchase of rifles.

It was noted that the club was to inform the Manawatu Smallbore Rifle Association of the desirability of adequate lighting in the tunnel (some things never change).

The club nights were Wednesday and interclub nights were on Thursday. The club's nightly fees were set at 3/- (30c) and 1/- (10c) mound fees, 3d (2c) for supper, 3d (2c) for 2 cards and 1/6 (15c) for 16 rounds of ammunition. An extra round of 8 shots and 1 card was to cost 1/- (10c). In the 1949 season the introduction of the Roberts targets was endorsed by the club. The club sold 2 of its old rifles to members, one for £5/18 (\$11.80) and the other for £7/- (\$14).

The name of Richard Weston first appeared in the AGM minutes of 1950, but he started shooting in 1948. Apart from a small time spent in the South Island, Richard has spent his time with PNRSA Club and he is still an active member in 1999.

A remit was sent to MSRA in 1951 asking that challengers for the McKelvie Cup and similar challenge cups pay 10/- (\$1) to the host club to defray supper expenses. (Was it passed?)

At the 1952 AGM, subscriptions for seniors were raised to £1/10/- (\$3), ladies 10/- (\$2) and juniors 15/- (\$1.50). When the club was organising its final night shooting entertainment, it was left to the 'well known organising ability of Tiny Rees.'

In 1953 the club held an open championship in four grades, Master, A, B, and C. The entry fee was 5/- (50c) for Master and A grade and 4/- (40c) for B and C, with the Final 10 shooters paying an extra 10/- (\$1) with a 50% - 30% - 20% payout. There was also a 4 man team's match with PNRSA being so confident that they gave a point per man to any other 4 man teams. Unfortunately we don't have any record of how they went.

It was mentioned several times in the records around this time, of the problems in obtaining good quality ammunition and letters were sent to NZSRA requesting that efforts be made to obtain good American match ammunition. Brands around at that time included Valmet, Palma, and Super-clean. In 1954 the club was going through 2,500 targets in a season (a fair number compared with today).

The 1954 final night celebration must have been one to remember as the Minutes of September 1954 gave a list of purchases to be made for the occasion - 2 dozen large lemonade, 1 x 10 gallon keg, 1 x 5 gallon keg, 2 dozen lager, 2 bottles O.P. Rum, 4 crayfish, lettuce and mayonnaise, 4 dozen saveloys, 10/- (\$1) chipped potatoes, 4 loaves buttered bread, brown pickled onions, 2lb Four Square cheese, 3 dozen mixed cakes and a bottle each of Whiskey and Gin to be raffled.

It was around this time that the club was at its strongest with a record number of wins in the Cliffe and Remington series that did not end until the mid sixties.

Late in 1956 the range in Albert Street, rented by PNRSA and owned by the Palmerston North Smallbore Rifle Club, burnt down and the minutes showed that the club booked the range at Awahuri.

At the 1957 AGM it was decided that the club would build its own clubroom and investigations followed into fundraising etc. Mid 1957 saw negotiations between the club and Earnie Strong for a block of land in Monrad Street. Part of the land was also to be sold to the Rifle, Rod and Gun Club for the same purpose. One of the fundraising efforts was the buying and selling of scrap metal. But it became obvious by 1959 that there were too many problems in getting the project off the ground and a decision was made to return the land to the vendor.

During the fifties and sixties every effort was made to encourage the members by subsidising the ammunition and a great deal of time was spent in fundraising to sustain this. Letters always seemed to be flowing backward and forward between the Palmerston North Club as the landlord, and RSA and RR&G as the hirers. The way that the Palmerston North Club controlled the conditions of hire at times made for strained relations.

In 1976, the raising of funds for building the new Manawatu Smallbore Rifle Association range proceeded in earnest with Tiny Rees being involved in the planning of the complex. PNRSA can be proud of the commitment that they put into the new range. Sadly Tiny never got to see his vision as he passed away in August, 1978. His commitment to smallbore shooting extended throughout New Zealand and beyond.

The PNRSA Club has distinguished itself well over the years and in the heydays of the mid sixties, walked away with over half of the Manawatu trophies. Many Island and New Zealand representatives have been through the club. The Weston brothers, Richard and Gordon enjoyed plenty of success at the top level. Long-time life members Bob Weston and Bruce Marchant were still shooting with the club in 1999.

After the move to the new MSRA Range RSA shot with RR&G on Tuesday night although still operating as two separate Clubs.

At the 1999 AGM the fees for Seniors were set at \$100.00 including NZSRA (TSNZ) and Manawatu fees. Present at the meeting was Peter Price (President), David Green, Bruce Marchant, David Marchant, Angela Marchant, John Bramley, Bob Weston, Malcolm Squire, Dominic King & Stuart Cawood. Together with the Carlin Brothers Gary, Stephen, Robin & David would form the basis of the Club for the next few years. At the meeting the approval was given to purchase two Bolt Action Anschutz Rifles from Rotorua and one from John Bramley .

The PNRSA Smallbore Rifle Club had been operating independently from the RSA Club for several years after many years tied to the Parent Club, although the Club always appointed the President of the RSA as its Patron.

Excerpts from the 2000 AGM are as follows:

Patron Alan Rutherford spoke to the meeting about the assistance that the Palmerston north RSA Club could offer the Rifle Club. He said that there are several clubs associated with the RSA that benefit financially. The conditions that would be put on the association were that the Club would have to become an adjunct of the RSA, and all monies would have to be banked through the RSA bank account. There could be assistance for travel to National Events, a slot at the club to run raffles etc. and a chance to pick up new members. The downside would be that we would lose the independence that we have had since we gained the right to conduct our affairs and handle our own Finances but still maintain the right to call ourselves the Palmerston North RSA Rifle Club and use the monogram of the club. The offer of Membership was extended to the members at a cost of \$25.00 for service people and \$40.00 for non-service people.

Life Member Bob Weston said that this was going to be his last AGM as he was giving up shooting. Bob was thanked for the time and effort he had put into the club over his many years of shooting, and we hope that he will come along occasionally.

The Members decided that they did not want to give up their independence and carry on as that had for many years.

At the 2002 AGM the club talked about getting Kelvin Burt to put adjustable Butt Plates on the Anschutz Rifles to fit Members better, and 2005 saw the Fees for its Members rise to \$110.00 for Seniors.

In the Mid 2000s the Club did not have the same success in Association Competitions as it did in its heydays, but still managed to pick up a few Trophies at the Final Night and Individual Members were well represented in the various Rep Teams.

In 2009 with both PNRSA and RR&G low on Members it was decided to ask the Manawatu Association if the two Clubs could combine for the Interclub series. After much discussion that was approved by MSRA, and the Combined Clubs were much more competitive in the Interclub series. They still maintained their financial independence and still had their separate Club Champions.

In 2009 Long time Member Richard (Dick) Weston passed away. Although he had moved away by this time it was still a great loss to PNRSA and Manawatu. Dick had had a long and successful run in North Island and NZ Competitions along with his Brothers Gordie, Bob and Colin. Another great loss to PNRSA was when their President Malcolm Squire was killed on his farm in an accident in 2010.

By 2015 numbers had declined so they only entered two Teams in the TSNZ Interclub Postal Match after a period when at times they would enter seven Teams. Membership over the past few years was around 10-13 members.

At its AGM on the 2nd February 2015 a decision was made to put the PNRSA Club into recess and the members that remained joined the RR&G Club. So ended an era which saw the Club that had been formed in 1924 come to an end.

At the time the Club went into recess there were 7 Clubs in the Manawatu. The Club passed a resolution to grant the Manawatu Association \$12,000.00 to purchase two Electronic Targets provided MSRA would purchase eight more either with MSRA Funds or a Grant. By 2019 MSRA had made no progress towards purchasing more Targets so after discussions with MSRA Members, PNRSA wrote to the Association withdrawing the Offer and decided to purchase 5 x 1903 Anschutz Rifles at a cost of \$2,682 each and they would be the property of PNRSA but would be available to MSRA for Business House shoots and social shoots, they would also be available to RR&G for Club use.

Over the period of 1999-2015 many Members had success in Association, Island Teams TSNZ Postal Matches and International shoots. Among them were Stuart Cawood, Tama Randell, Bruce Marchant, Gary Carlin and David Green. The last three are still shooting for RR&G.