

# Memories of Crete still strong for veteran

**HANNAH LEE**

Battle of Crete veteran Ralph Ward remembers his time at war vividly. Wednesday marked 74 years since the Battle of Crete and Ward recounted stories, with a whisky in hand, about the campaign which was, in his opinion, "poorly managed." Ward also discussed a less well-known campaign at Minqar Qaim, Egypt, which followed his time in Crete.

"We were lucky we didn't lose the whole division there. We were stuck in the desert with tanks all around us."

The desert sand meant trucks sent to extract the troops could not stop, so they drove through a 1000 metre stretch and soldiers grabbed ropes attached to the vehicles and hoisted themselves up, Ward said.

Ward will celebrate his 97th birthday next month, but said it is still very easy to recall that day in Minqar Qaim, as it happened to be his 21st birthday – June 27, 1942.

On Wednesday more than 50 people gathered underneath the Crete olive tree outside the New Plymouth Courthouse, which was presented to veterans by the people of Galatas in 1971.

Mel Askew, the only other living Taranaki veteran from the Battle of Crete, said he enjoyed the commemoration each year but did not like to dwell on the past.

Askew was wounded in Crete and was sent to Poland as a prisoner of war.

"When you get to this age you need three things really. Good family ties, good friends – and a good doctor."



Battle of Crete veterans Mel Askew, centre left, and Ralph Ward, centre right, and attended the 74th commemoration. Photo: ROBERT CHARLES/FAIRFAX NZ

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