

Taranaki Daily News 16 Sept 2018

Hundreds turn out to remember war heroes

Tara Shaskey 14:15, Sep 16 2018

"Dad would be especially proud," said Peter Laurent, admiring a freshly unveiled statue honouring his late father, Victoria Cross recipient Harry John Laurent.

"I'm always proud of my father...he gave us a great life, he was a great person."

Alongside the granite monument of Laurent at Hāwera's new Victoria Cross Garden is also a statue of John Gildroy Grant.

For their brave acts during WWI, the men were both awarded the VC in 1918 and quickly became South Taranaki's most famous war heroes.

Now, a memorial garden has been built in the shape of a VC for the veterans, next to King Edward Park and close to the streets named after the two men.



GRANT MATTHEW/STUFF

Peter Laurent, son of Harry John, Laurent, said his father would be immensely proud of the statue erected in his honour.

On Saturday, hundreds gathered at an official ceremony to open the space, a centennial project for the South Taranaki RSA, which celebrates its 100th birthday this year.

Among the crowd were family members of the two men, along with MP Andrew Little, representatives from the Australian and French Embassy, NZ Chief of Defence Colonel James Kaio, and RSA leaders, veterans and South Taranaki community leaders.

The festivities kicked off with a parade led by the pipes and drums of the Wellington, West Coast and Taranaki Regiment of the New Zealand Army.

South Taranaki mayor Ross Dunlop said it was incredible that of the 11 VC, the highest award of the British honours system, awarded to New Zealand soldiers in WWI, two of them were won by Hāwera men.

"They won their VCs in two separate engagements within 12 days while fighting in Northern France," he said.

"This would have been an astonishing event for the town at that time. So it's very fitting that we acknowledge this 100 years later."



GRANT MATTHEW/STUFF

Statues of the men were erected at the site - featured is the statue of Harry John Laurent.

Grant won the VC on Bancourt Ridge, France, on September 1, 1918, when he and Lance Corporal C T Hill attacked and took a German machine-gun position that was holding up the advance.

Laurent also received his in September, 1918, for conspicuous bravery, skill and enterprise during the Kiwi assault on Trescault Spur.

Little said the men's actions were nothing short of heroic.

"It is right that we should remember and celebrate the character of these two men and the qualities that they brought to their role.

"They were professional soldiers who were called to service, or volunteered for service, but like many at that time and like many soldiers since they saw cause that was bigger than themselves, bigger than their communities, and bigger than their country.

"It was about the cause of freedom, and of justice, and of human rights and of a better world."

Stuff