

**DAWICK: Kenneth NZ 391828**

**Known as: Ken or 'Grubber'**

**Born: 21 August 1916, Palmerston North, New Zealand**

**Married: August 1944**

**To: Noeline Lewison (d. 21 September 1998)**

**Died: 22 March 2005, Levin, New Zealand**

**Buried: The Avenue cemetery, Levin**

***Ken's parents were:***

William Thomas Dawick (1863 – 1917) b. Wellington, New Zealand  
and

Edith, nee Hoddinott (1876 – 1966) b. Somerset, England

***Ken was the youngest of 6 children, his siblings being:***

Elizabeth Mary: (1904 – 1984) (married name Wilcock)

William Harold: (1907 – 1963)

Edith Muriel: (1908 – 1967) (m. Inglis)

Ralph Thomas: (1911 – 1991)

Stanley Hoddinott: (1914 – 1980)

***Ken also had 4 older half siblings:***

Samuel Dawick: (1895 – 1895)

Frank Paget Dawick (1897 – 1961)

Leslie David Dawick: (1899 – 1968)

Rebecca Boyd Dawick: (1901 - )

***Ken and Noeline had 2 children:***

John Kenneth: (b. 1948)

Helen Marion (b. 1951, d. 13 December 1996)

## **Family Background**

Ken was born in Palmerston North, during the First World War.

His father, William Thomas Dawick, had 10 children with Ken being the youngest. The first four children were with William's first wife Mary Letitia Black, followed by six with Ken's mother Edith (nee Hoddinott).

Ken attended primary and secondary school in Palmerston North and was nicknamed "Grubber", which well described his character and tenacity.

He began a printing apprenticeship in 1933 at Spooner's Ltd in Palmerston North, a job he enjoyed for the next five years.

During these years, Ken developed his interests in recreational sports, - skiing and his love for tramping in the Ruahine and Tararua Ranges, maintaining current tracks and forging new ones.

It was in 1938 that he first met his future partner in life, Noeline Lewison. Also in this year he followed his passion for flying, learning to fly Tiger Moths at the Middle Districts Aero Club.



## **War Years in New Zealand and Britain**

In 1939. Ken joined the Civil Reserve of Pilots - 6 Operation Training Unit. He was called for full-time service in November 1939 and reported to the ground training school at Weraroa - often called Kimberley - on the 18th December 1939. He flew "Wilderbeasts, Gordons and Tigers".

### **Members of Tramping Club clearing bush track**

Ken Dawick front left

Photo: October 1936 Ted Chamberlain

Ken furthered his elementary flying at Number 1FTS Taieri, then moved to Number 1FTS Wigram in March 1940. After completing this course, as a sergeant, he sailed for the United Kingdom on the RMS Rangitane in July 1940, arriving in Liverpool on his 24<sup>th</sup> birthday, 21<sup>st</sup> August 1940. Fatefully, the Rangitane was sunk on its next voyage to the UK, only 550km off East Cape, just 3 days short of Auckland. It was the longest allied merchant ship to be sunk by German surface vessels (the auxiliary

cruisers "Orion" and "Komet") during World War II, although German submarines and aircraft sank many larger ships.

On arrival in England, Ken had a short spell at Number 1 RAF Depot Uxbridge, then was posted to 6 OUT Sutton Bridge, on 11 September for conversion to Hurricanes. He joined Trevor 111 squadron (which was originally established in 1917) at Drem on 30 September, 1940. This squadron is still in existence today. The motto of the RAF is Per Ardua Ad Astera, which translates as: "*Through adversity to the stars*".

It was then that Ken flew Hurricanes 14 times during September, the last month of the Battle of Britain, one of the most decisive battles of World War II, fought entirely in the air. Hurricanes were a machine Ken loved to fly.

129 New Zealand pilots and aircrew took part, exceeding that of any other Commonwealth country – apart from the UK. Only one third survived. All participating New Zealanders were made life members of the British Battle of Britain Association. Only 12 – 14 members were still alive at the time of Ken's death in 2005.

The sirens would sound, the pilots running from the mess towards their planes that were repaired around the clock by maintenance crews. As the German bombers were targeting the runways, and the British anti-aircraft guns were firing, these heroic pilots were taking off to do battle in the skies – exploding bombs, trying to avoid craters in the runways on takeoff and landings. They were heavily out-numbered, and the German pilots were very experienced.

Then came the timely invention of radar, the early warning system that allowed the British to surprise the enemy. Sir Keith Park, another New Zealander, was directing the fighter squadron. He was to be remembered as the 'Defender of London'.



Hitler suddenly turned his attention away from targeting the airfields to bombing London. It was like a bonfire, burning day and night. The bomb shelters and the underground served as the saviour to many of the population. Hitler had realized that the Luftwaffe had lost twice as many planes as the RAF, hence his tactical move away from the air bases.

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill's legendary citation in the House of Commons was to honour these men - *"Never before in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few"*.

On 23 December 1940, Ken was transferred to 605 Squadron at Croydon, during which time he was flight testing Merlin engines. Jim Hayter was his commanding officer.

He remained here until 19 August 1941, when he was posted to 550 OUT, Unsworth, as an instructor. It was here that commanding officer Hayter advised him to get out of England *"if you have a chance"*. Soon after this there was a request by the RAF for pilots to travel overseas. Ken was the only volunteer, not knowing where he was to be placed.

### **War Years in the Middle East**

On 12 November 1941 he sailed on the 'Cape Town Castle' to Durban, then on the 'New Amsterdam' to his commission in Aden in the Middle East, arriving on 4<sup>th</sup> January 1942. The next month he joined 073 Aden, whose commanding officer was Jerry Edge, and participated in the Battle of Alamein in Egypt.

He instructed until the OUT was disbanded in October 1942, and went on to join 238 Squadron at Burg-el-Arab, flying in support of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army. It was here that Ken was involved with attacking and strafing the retreating German forces. He found this rather distasteful – he did his job but did not enjoy it. At one stage, while flying in the desert, Ken and a colleague's plane ran short of fuel. They subsequently landed. Ken transferred the remaining fuel in his Hurricane to the plane of his flying partner which would allow it to hopefully get back to base. Ken camped out under a wing until some days later he and his aircraft were rescued by a very large truck and taken back to base.

After this Ken was promoted to Flight Lieutenant in May 1943. The following month he was commissioned to flying the Spitfire, which was a very memorable experience, but he found the Hurricanes to be more maneuverable.

## **The End of War**

On November 19 1943, Ken sailed for New Zealand, arriving in January 1944 where he was met by his nephew, Brian, in Wellington. He went on a CFS course on Harvards in Tauranga. After this he was posted to 2F FTS Woodburn. He moved to Number 1 FTS Wigram in October 1944, training new pilots to fly Harvards. He said this was just as dangerous as his war experience.

In August 1944, Ken married Noeline Lewison in Palmerston North. They set up home there and he was released from the RNZAF on 14 November 1945 whereupon he transferred to the reserves.

This is a list of his wartime promotions:

Sergeant	on leaving NZ
Pilot Officer	07/02/42, RNZAF
Flight Officer	07/11/42, RNZAF
Flight Lieutenant	17/12/43, RNZAF

He joined the Returned and Services' Association, the RSA, and remained a member throughout his life. A modest man, he spoke little of his war experiences.

## **The Move to Levin**

In 1945, Ken and Noeline purchased two and a half acres of land in McArthur Street, Levin. Ken started a floriculture operation, which he greatly enjoyed, but as with any crop there is no constant income stream. These were tough years, and in 1950 Ken decided to change his occupational direction completely, and he started work at Kimberley Hospital.

## **The Years at Kimberley Psychopaedic Institution**

Ken joined the staff as a trainee psychopaedic nurse. On 16 December 1952, he passed his final exam to become registered, and ten years later, in 1962 he qualified on a more formal register as a psychopaedic nurse.

In 1963 he attended an advanced course with doctors and nurses from the main psychopaedic institutions in the country.





**Photo taken at the end of the course - Ken sitting first on the right.**

He was later appointed administration officer, a position he held until his retirement from Kimberley in December 1977.

### **Family Life**

Ken and Noeline's son John was born in 1948 and their daughter Helen in 1951. John can recall many happy times living in Levin, and the surrounding countryside, the rivers and the beaches.

Helen was very attractive. She entered and won the title of Miss Horowhenua, and went on to win a place in the Miss New Zealand Pageant, earning a family trip overseas.

In 1976, when John was living in England, Ken and Helen went to visit him. They were moored on a canal boat, having cruised the upper reaches of the River Thames, close to Oxford, when Ken told of his experiences there in 1940-41. He remembered as if it was the day before.

He was flying a Hurricane over countryside near Oxford when he experienced engine failure at an altitude of 10,000 feet. The plane did not glide – it plummeted towards the ground but he finally managed to bring it under control. Levelling it out, he was able to land 'wheels up' in a large field of wheat that was sloping slightly upwards away from him. He

leapt out, running from the plane in case of fire. The farmer met him with great displeasure at the damage the plane had done to his crop.

### **Later Years**

In 1990, Ken was flown to a Battle of Britain Commemoration organized by the RNZAF in the UK. Earlier, he had trips to USA while John was living there, and visited the Wright Brothers' memorial.

In 1996, Ken returned again to England with John and on this occasion met up with Jim Hayter, his old commanding officer whom he had not seen since 1941.

Later that year, on 13 December 1996, Helen was killed in Auckland, aged 45. Ken phoned John to deliver the sad news. *"It was the saddest day of his life to lose his only daughter."*

Meanwhile, Ken's wife Noeline had developed severe Alzheimers and Ken gave her full-time professional-quality care until she died on 21 September 1998. She had lost all memory of her family. They had been married for 54 years.

Ken went on to fight cancer, and undergo knee surgery as well as cataract surgery.

When he turned 88, he failed his driver's licence but, determined not to give up driving, he spent a week upskilling himself, re-sat the test and passed. He had enjoyed cars throughout his life, starting with an Austin 1928 12-4 in the early years, then a 1947 Citroen Light 15 which served as a good family car for sixteen years. His last vehicle was an Austin Atlantic, a sports sedan manufactured from 1949-52.

He also loved his home, his books and his garden, and phoned John, living in the USA, on a weekly basis.

In his 89<sup>th</sup> year, Ken died on 22 March 2005. His funeral was held on 30 March 2005 at St Mary's Anglican Church, Cambridge Street, Levin.

John flew home from Willmington, North Carolina, and gave the eulogy for Ken. He made special mention of their trips to Ohakea Airbase, and the family trips away from Levin to hot pools and interesting places around the North Island. Locally they picnicked at the Ohau River and at Hokio and Waitarere beaches.

Ian Walker, Battle of Britain veteran, spoke of his time with Ken in the RAF. "He was a good friend."

Hori Gleeson, President of the RSA in Levin, spoke of Ken's work as a historian for the RSA. "He spent a lot of time in the local library, he was a wonderful mentor – often giving advice to younger students, and there were some who described him as a bookworm."

Reverend Philip Gibbs officiated at the service and summed up by saying "Thank God for the courage of these many men and women, who fought what they recognized as an evil adversary, that we may inherit a world at peace."

Both Noeline and Ken rest at The Avenue cemetery in Levin.

As we commemorate the life and war effort of Kenneth Dawick, we acknowledge that he represents all those who served to preserve the freedom and democracy enjoyed by all New Zealanders to the present day.

### **Freemasons NZ**

Ken was a Freemason for nearly 65 years, having joined on 9<sup>th</sup> May 1940 while completing his training in the RNZAF prior to being dispatched to the UK. He received his 50 Year Service Badge, 60 Year Service Bar, plus a Roll of Honour Award from The Grand Lodge of New Zealand.

He was initiated in The Manawatu Kilwinning Lodge No 47 in Palmerston North but finished his other two degrees in Christchurch with the Ionic Lodge No 212 (perhaps during his time stationed at Wigram Airbase).

He resigned from Manawatu Kilwinning in 1947, joined Lodge Horowhenua No 135 in 1947 and then United Horowhenua Lodge No 464 in 1999 when it merged with another Lodge in Levin. United Horowhenua Lodge No 464 still operates in Levin.



Masonic Lodge,  
Horowhenua 135  
Bristol Street, Levin  
This is the site now  
occupied by The  
Warehouse  
Photographer -  
unknown



## **NZ Returned Soldiers' Association (RSA)**

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### **Source documents:**

Battle of Britain Archives (RAF)

RNZAF archives

I C Marks Funeral Service records

Manawatu Times Vol 68, issue 130, 3 June 1943

Duane Williams, Grand Secretary, Freemasons, NZ