



New Zealand Honours Belgians one hundred years on – They helped New Zealand and Allied Soldiers in enemy territory

Omapere, Hokianga, 8 January 2019

The World War II history of the **Comet Line**, a resistance movement in Belgium and France which helped allied soldiers and airmen return to Britain is well known.

However, its predecessor in the First World War is little known: The civilian resistance movement in Belgium which helped and sheltered allied soldiers in Belgium, especially those who had escaped from German captivity in enemy territory. That is until Kenneth Baker a Belgian citizen of New Zealand origin after three years of in-depth research, now reveals not only the extent of the **“Prisoner Help Network”**, but the identities of many of the over one thousand very brave people in the network. Where they lived and what they did. Dr. Baker exposes how several of the ‘soldier helpers’ had known and worked with Edith Cavell, the British nurse in Brussels, Belgium, who was active in helping allied soldiers marooned in enemy territory. Cavell was arrested and executed by the German Army in 1915. Many of the ‘helpers’ operated under cover of the **“Assistance Discrète/Omzichtige Onderstand”**, an Aid Organisation set up in Brussels by Marie Haps, to assist Belgian citizens in were hungry and destitute as a result of the German occupation. It was the work and efforts of Cavell and the World War One prisoner helpers which partly inspired the development of the Comet Line in World War Two.

Dr. Baker was also able to contact many of the present-day descendants of the “prisoner helpers”. The successors were in all cases, totally unaware of their grand-parents’ and great-grand-parents’ courageous actions. A very large proportion of those in the network were women. Many of the helpers were honoured by the British Government after the war.

The results of the research have now been published as a book, **“The Obscure Heroes of Liberty”** by Dr. Kenneth M. Baker. Dr. Baker based his research on soldier recollections and particularly that of New Zealand soldier Bert Hansen. Similar written memories from other soldiers helped, including that of an Irish soldier who knew Hansen. Sufficient vague clues allowed Dr. Baker identify and describe how the soldier helpers hid, fed, provided false identity papers, and saw their charges across the frontier into Holland to fight again. Much other previously unknown information on the resistance movements is included in the book. More detail is available at www.theobscureheroes.com which includes a link to purchase the book.

Book Presentation:

To coincide with New Zealand’s Commemorations of the Centenary of the First World War Armistice, the author, Dr. Kenneth Baker, will talk about his new book, **“The Obscure Heroes of Liberty”** at the **Hokianga Museum and Archives Centre, 14 Waianga Place Omapere**, Tel 09 405 8498, at 2.00 p.m. on Sunday the 13th January 2019. Book launches have also taken place at the Auckland War Memorial Museum on the 8th October 2018 and at the New Zealand Residence in Brussels, Belgium, on the 15th November 2018.

Contact: Rae Dellaca – Co-Secretary, Hokianga Historical Society, Tel 09 405 8498, hhs@ourhokianga.com.

Book Details:

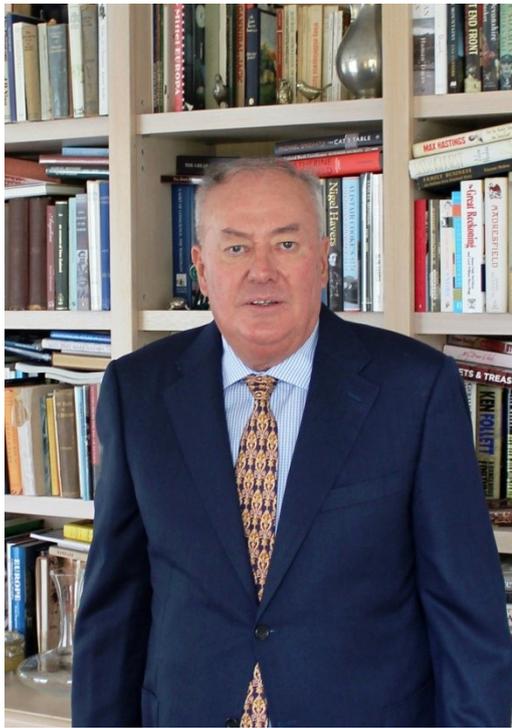
Title: **“The Obscure Heroes of Liberty - The Belgian People who Aided Escaped Allied Soldiers During the Great War 1914-1918”**

ISBN: 978-0-473-45187-5 (Soft cover); 978-0-473-45188-2 (Hard Cover)

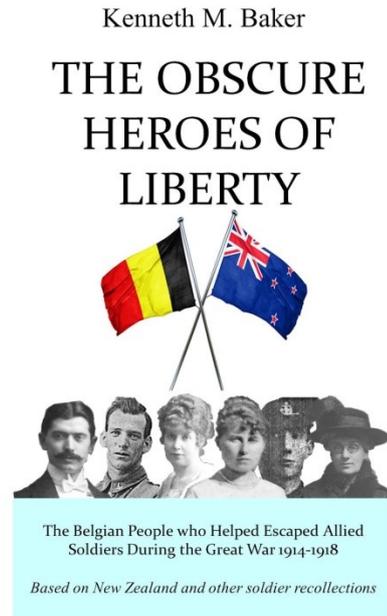
Publication date: September 2018

Available from: Lulu Press – www.lulu.com (hard cover and soft cover available)

Direct link for purchase: <http://www.lulu.com/content/paperback-book/the-obscure-heroes-of-liberty--the-belgian-people-who-aided-escaped-allied-soldiers-during-the-great-war-1914-1918/23281807>



The author: Dr. Kenneth M. Baker



The Book Cover

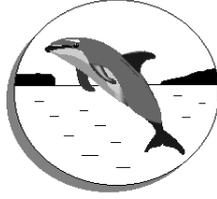
The Author: Dr. Kenneth M. Baker

Ken Baker, a chemist by training, was born in New Zealand and educated at Ellerslie School, Penrose High School (now One Tree Hill College) and Auckland University where he obtained his M.Sc (Hons) and Ph.D degrees. With several Research Fellowships in hand, he attended Cambridge University and was a member of Emmanuel College and a University Teacher in Organic Chemistry and a College Tutor in chemistry.

Dr. Baker pursued a long career in senior corporate management and is Chairman of the World Agricultural Forum. He has also acted as Chairman of many Business groups, public sector bodies and Government Committees and given evidence to various Government enquiries on the role of science in public policy.

One of his side interests has always been family history and the First World War. His interest was sparked over many years because of living in Belgium where many of his relatives fought and where so many of the New Zealand dead from the war are interred.

Dr. Baker is the author of many scientific and policy publications and has given numerous speeches and presentations on science and research, business management, public policy and New Zealand history.



**Hokianga Historical Society Inc.
invites you
to an address
by Hokianga Historical Society Member
Dr Kenneth Baker**

about his recently launched book

The Obscure Heroes of History

**The book, based on interviews with descendants,
details the Edith Cavell event
during which many Belgian citizens under German
occupation helped the allied soldiers.**

All community members are welcome.

**Sunday 13th January 2.00pm
Hokianga Museum and Archives Centre
14 Waianga Place Omapere
Tel 09 405 8498**