

# Soldier had integrity, compassion

**M**archers in Akaroa's 2010 Anzac Day Parade cut their pace to ensure Roddie Mackenzie could keep up.

The renowned old soldier was recovering from a hip operation. He was instructed to use a wheelchair, but insisted on marching. He was invited to lead the parade, but stayed at the rear so he wouldn't hold others up.

Afterwards, young soldiers flocked around him to talk, drawn by the Military Cross they had spotted among his service medals.

The retired lieutenant-colonel, who served in the British Army in World War II and later with the paratroopers and SAS, died recently. He was 88.

Canadian-born Mackenzie spent close to 30 years in England but never saw himself as an Englishman. He was proud to be a Canadian but became a New Zealander after moving to Mid-Canterbury in 1966. He farmed there and took leadership roles in farming and community affairs. He retired to Akaroa in 1986.

Mackenzie had an idyllic childhood in a town similar to Akaroa, on Vancouver Island.

A grandfather had worked in New Zealand and his mother was born here. His early life revolved around horses and he was an accomplished rider. He joined the British Army shortly before WWII. He was commissioned as an officer and fought in North Africa and Italy. He was Mentioned in Dispatches at Anzio and awarded the Military Cross for his courage at the River Po. By then his artillery unit had been seconded to

the elite United States 10th Mountain Division, which launched a crossing of the river using tyre tubes from their trucks. As the Americans came under German fire, Mackenzie provided an artillery barrage as cover. He often expressed his admiration for the Mountain Division.

After the war he served in India, Palestine, Singapore and Australia, and instructed at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst. His outstanding horsemanship led to involvement in ceremonial activities with the Royal Horse Artillery, with the King's Troop at St James Park and at such events as the Royal Windsor Horse Show. He played polo and rode in steeplechase races, to maintain his and his horses' fitness.

His riding days ended when he was badly injured in a crash. The army was experimenting with the dropping of artillery guns and Landrovers by parachute. Mackenzie, as an artillery officer, was transferred to the 16th Parachute Brigade to direct this initiative. He made many jumps safely but, after parachuting into the mountains of northern Greece, he was in a Landrover that ran off the road and rolled down a cliff.

He was awarded the MBE for his service with the paratroopers and given command of a British SAS unit.

Mackenzie's New Zealand connection strengthened when he married Mary Macfarlane, of North Canterbury, in 1951. They met when she was visiting England. She remained there until he retired from the army. The couple, with their three children,



**Roddie Mackenzie:** He was a renowned soldier who became a farming leader.

then moved to New Zealand, where Mackenzie took over his father-in-law's farm near Longbeach.

Close friend Roland Clark joked that no British Army officer could succeed at farming in New Zealand. Mackenzie was determined to prove him wrong. He was not only successful, but also became a farming leader. He served as president of Mid-Canterbury Federated Farmers. He was a councillor of the Royal Agricultural Society of New Zealand and represented it at overseas shows and conferences. At the Royal Highland Show, near Edinburgh, he took the salute to the Queen, with the King's Troop, from the royal box.

As president of the Canterbury A&P Association, he shared responsibility for moving the showgrounds from Addington.

As a polo umpire, he was elected patron of the Christchurch Polo Club. He was a pioneer in irrigation in his region. He commanded rescue efforts for families and stock caught in the Big Snow and co-ordinated relief for victims of the devastating 1986 floods. He was a long-time judge of

the A C Cameron Award for best young farmer of the year.

In later years Mackenzie and his wife were active in the Akaroa art gallery, information centre and heritage trust.

Son Ian says, while his father was at ease in positions of command, he was "equally at home with the shearers in the shearing shed . . . or talking farming politics in the Eiffelton Hall".

"He hated injustice. He was an egalitarian, a man of integrity and compassion towards his fellow man," Ian says.

He cites the Soviet Ambassador who, when East-West relations were still bitter, visited Christchurch as a guest at the A&P show and went missing. Unbeknown to authorities, he had struck up a friendship with Mackenzie, who had taken him home. It was the first time the ambassador had been in a New Zealand house.

MIKE CREAN

■ Roderick Stuart Mackenzie, born Canada, October 18, 1922; died June 13, 2011. Survived by wife Mary, daughter Catharine, sons Ian and Duncan and seven grandchildren.

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