

50th Anniversary Of End Of Compulsory Military Training Remembered

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Press Release: FIRST Union

This weekend sees the 50th anniversary celebration of the short but successful 1972 campaign to get rid of compulsory military training for 19-year-old males in Aotearoa / New Zealand.

Campaigners and military service resisters will meet in Wellington this Saturday to celebrate the year long campaign and its successful outcome.

The group behind the campaign was named the Organisation to Halt Military Service (OHMS). OHMS is also the electrical unit of resistance, the "end" letter of the Greek alphabet and a play on the initials of On Her Majesty's Service which was stamped on all official government documents of that time.

"The campaign was formed in the middle of the US war on Vietnam," said OHMS founder and National Chairman, Robert Reid.

"For young 18-year-olds such as myself, as well as protesting against the war on Vietnam, refusing to register for the increasingly unpopular compulsory military training provided a way of adding our voice to those of others calling for an end to the War on Vietnam."

"Our main strategy was one of non-compliance with many young men, on reaching the age of 19, breaking the law by refusing to register for military service."

"As the campaign continued, other young men who had already been forced into training deserted military camps to join with the new group of resisters.

"OHMS also found that filling in false compulsory military training registration forms completely disrupted the system and this provided major activity for the allies of the 19-year-old males. "

Initially, forms were filled out in the name of Micky Mouse or Keith Holyoake, but when the disruption that false forms caused became obvious, OHMS printed their own identical forms and used electoral rolls to register false identities for conscription, said Mr Reid.

By November 1972, military camp deserter Geoff Woolford had been convicted and jailed and a growing list of Court cases for those refusing to register started to hit courts in Wellington, Christchurch, Auckland and Dunedin.

P The Norm Kirk Labour Government was elected in November 1972 and began to fulfil its election promise of withdrawing New Zealand troops from Vietnam and ending compulsory military training, with the law finally being repealed at the end of 1973.

"However, the OHMS campaign had already brought the compulsory military training system to its knees with growing numbers of 19-year-old males refusing to register and facing imprisonment, and some thousand false registration forms clogging up the system," said Mr Reid.

"Many of yesterday's resisters have gone on to play major roles in New Zealand - we have teachers, professors, doctors, economists, NGO leaders, trade unionists, long term peace advocates, and lawyers (including a Kings Counsel) within our ranks," Robert Reid said.

The OHMS Reunion Day will be held at the Loaves and Fishes, Wellington Anglican Cathedral cnr Hill and Molesworth Streets, Wellington from 9:00am to 4:00 pm on Saturday 26 November 2022.

More on OHMS and the 50 th Anniversary can be found at: <https://ohmsreunion.nz/>

The OHMS Story at: <https://www.ohmsreunion.nz/the-ohms-story/>

And: <https://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PO2202/S00190/the-beginning-of-the-end-of-modern-day-conscription.htm>