

New Zealand Soldiers tend lonely grave in Tonga

HIGH on a hill in Tonga overlooking the vast Pacific Ocean lies the lonely final resting place of a New Zealand soldier.

The grave is that of Lance Corporal A.E. Yealands who was a member of the New Zealand Corps of Signals.

He died nearly 43 years ago as the result of an accident on February 22, 1943.

Corporal Yealands was a member of T-Force sent to Tonga during the darkest days of the Pacific War. With other New Zealand soldiers he manned a lonely observation post only metres from where he is buried.

They were based on the sparsely-populated island of 'Eua, 40 kilometres to the east of Tonga's main island of Tongatapu.

The observation post was located on the highest point of the island, some 300 metres above sea level which even today is a 20-minute drive through a forest plantation, followed by a bit of a hike, from the nearest village of Futu.

Over the last four decades the villagers of Futu have tended Corporal Yealands' lonely grave which is graced by a pink hibiscus bush.



Army Signaller 'Junior' Rangihuna of Te Araroa, a member of the Ngaruawahia-based 5 Signals Squadron, tends the lonely grave of World War Two signaller Lance Corporal E.A. Yealands on the island of 'Eua' in Tonga.

"We've got everything in New Zealand wrapped up into a little parcel.

"Americans have to travel for days to get to the kinds of things we possess. The tourists all say that we have got a beautiful and magnificent country but it goes to sleep at 5pm. A lot of these tourists don't get up until after 10am and aren't alive until the late afternoon – just when New Zealand is readying to shut down."

Some of the more unusual assignments that Tantrum was willing to make public (in a business where discretion is a key word) have been to pick up business people and drive aimlessly around for one to two hours while they conduct a confidential business conference.

The Cads are geared to contain a fridge, TV set, intercom and cocktail cabinet. Recent changes to the licensing laws here means that the Cads cocktail cabinets are not stocked with liquor anymore.

One of Tantrum's more pleasurable passengers (apart from my wife Leigh and myself of course) was in escorting David Hasselhoff of the Knight Riders TV series fame, to the hospital to visit terminally ill children.

The Cads and the service they provide don't come cheap – but they come with style. Both monsters have been booked for a wedding in February at a cost of

\$600 for three hours.

The 25 foot Cads go a surprising 15 miles to the gallon which is pretty good for a vehicle weighing two ton. The expensive part of the operation is parts. Tantrum has to fly in parts from the USA like gasket sets, and electronic modules.

Within the next two years his programme is to add four more stretched Cadillacs to his fleet – that's an extra one and a half million dollars-plus of machinery.

Because of their length of wheel-base, the Cads are superior to the British Rolls for comfort and luxury. It's the same way a 737 airliner gives a marked smoother ride to that of a Cessna aircraft.

I had a spin in the Cad and believe me if the car suddenly veered off the Auckland harbour bridge, I probably wouldn't have noticed it until the crane hoisted the Cad from beneath the sea. There would be me, still stretched out and comfy in the air conditioned compartment listening to the taped Maori music.

Current costs to convert the Cads from left to right drive and to stretch them out is \$30,000.

Tantrum is very proud of his job and his cars, "because of their prestige. They are certainly an unusual sight in New Zealand. We certainly get the

stares from the public. Fortunately with the 'blacked' windows people can't look into the compartment but of course we look out perfectly well."

Tantrum's three cars each carry two flags – the New Zealand flag and the flag of the country whose guests he is transporting. Tantrum is deeply disappointed he can't add a telephone service to his vehicles for two years or more though they have been in operation overseas for some considerable time. He can only use a bleeper system for his own use.

"The Post Office here are so far behind in their systems. It's pretty appalling. Bearing in mind the status of the personnel I carry, a vehicle telephone service is a necessity."

Tantrum said his ambition is to run a successful, confidential and high quality tourist transportation company. He said he believes strongly in the three S's – Service, Service and Service.

Not many 42-year-olds own three of the world's most sought after cars and are looking to purchase four more in the near future.

Yes, John Tantrum of Ngati Raukawa has come a long, long way since the day he was forced to give up his apprenticeship as a jockey.