

News Release

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Perfume keeps war veteran's memories alive ([+video](#))

"As long as I've got the perfume on ... he knows it's me," says Laurel Harper, wife of World War II soldier Neil Harper.

Mr Harper, a 96-year-old New Zealand war veteran who fought in Bougainville and who has dementia, has difficulty remembering his wife unless she's wearing the scent she's worn every day since she was 17 years old.

Niall Shepherd, a Dunedin-based RSA Support Advisor who has worked with the Harpers for two years, says he was talking with Laurel one day when she said she was nervous because she'd just about run out of the perfume.

"She told me the perfume – Orient - isn't made anymore and she was afraid her husband would no longer remember her when her last bottle ran out."

Mr Shepherd has learned a lot about the human condition through his work supporting veterans and their families. Most recently, he's learned that someone living with dementia may forget names and voices but it is possible for certain things to trigger memories.

In the Harpers' case it's Laurel's perfume that cuts through and reconnects the couple.

Knowing this, Mr Shepherd wanted to help. He learned Mrs Harper had always bought her perfume at the local Balmac Pharmacy so he asked them if more bottles were available.

After phoning around they eventually found that while Orient wasn't made anymore, there were several bottles available at a pharmacy in Milton. He bought the perfume and surprised Mrs Harper with the gift.

"Laurel was delighted, and she's now got enough bottles of perfume to last a while! It made a world of difference for her, we were happy to help."

Poppy Day and the RSA

The Harpers' story is just one of many ways the RSA helps New Zealand's veterans every day.

"We couldn't have done that for the Harpers, or help thousands of other veterans just like them, without support from generous New Zealanders," Mr Shepherd said.

"Poppy Day is a great opportunity to remind Kiwis of the important work our veterans have done, and continue to do, and what many have sacrificed."

One hundred per cent of all Poppy Day donations are used to support New Zealand veterans and their families.

“Sometimes the money helps in practical ways such as buying Mrs Harper’s perfume or supporting a veteran to get to the Invictus Games, other times money’s used to provide counselling to a veteran’s family.

“When people give on Poppy Day it means so much to our veteran community. We appreciate everything.”

To support the RSA’s 2019 appeal people can make a donation in any ANZ branch or donate to street collectors across New Zealand on Poppy Day, April 12, until ANZAC Day on April 25. Poppy Appeal donations go direct to the Poppy Funds within the area they were collected.

[Click here](#) to download the video.

[Click here](#) to find out more about Poppy Day and the RSA.

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