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Walter Babington Thomas

Major-General **Walter Babington 'Sandy' Thomas** CB DSO MC (29 June 1919 – 22 October 2017) was a Commander of British Far East Land Forces.^[1]

Military career

Brought up in New Zealand, Sandy Thomas was commissioned into the New Zealand Military Forces at the outbreak of World War II,^[2] He was wounded, became a prisoner of war in Crete, escaped from a prison hospital and then fled to Syria,^[3] eventually becoming commander of 23 Battalion in Italy.^[4] After the War he obtained a commission in the Royal Hampshire Regiment^[2] and, in 1955, he was mentioned in dispatches while dealing with the Mau Mau Uprising in Kenya.^[5] He was appointed General Officer Commanding 5th Division in 1968^[6] and Chief of Staff at Headquarters Far East Land Forces in April 1970^[7] before being elevated to be General Officer Commanding Far East Land Forces in October 1970.^[8]

He was awarded the CB in 1971^[9] and retired in 1972.^[10]

Thomas died at his home in Beaudesert, Queensland on 22 October 2017 at the age of 98.^[11]

References

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Sandy Thomas



Lt W. B. 'Sandy' Thomas

Born	29 June 1919 Motueka, New Zealand
Died	22 October 2017 (aged 98) Beaudesert, Queensland, Australia
Allegiance	 United Kingdom
Service/branch	 British Army
Rank	Major-General

Freedom the focus for prisoner of war survivors on Anzac Day

2 - BEAUDESERT TIMES, Wednesday, April 23, 2014

By Susie Cunningham

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MEMORIES of the infamous Salonika prison camp will haunt former prisoners of war Major General Sandy Thomas and Ron O'Sullivan as the Scenic Rim observes Anzac Day on Friday.

Beaudesert's Major General Thomas, 94, and Rathdowney man Mr O'Sullivan, 91, were both captured and sent to the Salonika prisoner of war camp in 1941.

The two diggers, then the tender age of 20 and 17, did not know one another in Salonika but they now share a strong sense of connection through its haunting memories.

The men discovered their connection 20 years ago when Mr O'Sullivan first saw a copy of Major General Thomas' book, "Dare to be Free", about his experiences of Salonika.

They had headed into the war from different countries, with Major General Thomas commissioned into the New Zealand Military Forces and Mr O'Sullivan first enlisting in Victoria as a 15-year-old.



Major General Sandy Thomas and Ron O'Sullivan, who both survived Salonika prison camp, say freedom is everything.

Now they share a bond like no other and they get together as often as possible, usually over a bottle of brandy.

An unspoken treasure the two men hold is that of deeply knowing the meaning of freedom.

Mr O'Sullivan, who escaped prisoner of war camps eight times and endured beatings in Salonika so fierce that he lost his hearing,

said freedom was everything.

Major General Thomas said it was difficult for those who had not endured the horrors of war to completely grasp the meaning of freedom.

"We talk lightly about freedom but it was born into us in Australia and New Zealand and it's something terribly terribly precious which I think only people

like Sully (Mr O'Sullivan) and I can fully understand," he said.

"People just take it for granted but we fought for it.

"Soldiers' loyalty is to their mates and it's something we all find precious.

"It is why Sully and I enjoy meeting.

"It is why we all have these bloody parades on Anzac Day."



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