

## Photographs from Unveiling of Gilbert Islands Coastwatchers Memorial at New Zealand Post House, Wellington - 7 October 2014 (Photographer – Brady Dyer)



**John Jones. Last surviving Coastwatcher.**

In 1941, John Jones, then a radio operator with Post & Telegraph, was posted to the Gilbert Islands. His role, as a Coastwatcher, was to keep a 24-hour look out for enemy ships and aircraft and report on local meteorological conditions.

The day after the bombing of Pearl Harbour in December 1941, John along with a number of his fellow Coastwatchers, was captured by the Japanese. John was sent to a prisoner of war camp where he was held for almost four years until he was released at the end of World War II.

John's best friend and many of his comrades were not so lucky. On 15 October 1942, 17 New Zealand Coastwatchers (seven Post & Telegraph staffers and ten soldiers), along with five Australian and British civilians were rounded up by their Japanese captors and executed at Tarawa. Another Coastwatcher died in captivity on a nearby Island around the same time.

John says he is relieved to see his fellow Coastwatchers being publicly recognised at long last. "To see the names of my friends engraved in stone - for young people to ask questions about who they were and the role they played." John's wish were finally realised when the names were unveiled on 7 October 2014.



**Governor-General Sir Jerry Mateparae greeting John Jones on 7 October 2014.**

The memorial wall was unveiled at New Zealand Post House by 94-year-old John Jones, the last surviving Gilbert Islands Coast Watcher, and Governor-General Sir Jerry Mateparae.

New Zealand Post chief executive Brian Roche said New Zealand Post, as well as Spark and Chorus, are linked to some of the Coast Watchers who died.

The wall honours a commitment made at a special service that was held at the National War Memorial in 2012 to coincide with the 70th anniversary of the deaths, Mr Roche said.

“The memorial will stand to honour the eternal memory of all the brave Pacific Coast Watchers – particularly those who served on the Gilbert Islands – and as a testament to those who sought to keep their memory alive.”

Whitmore Street was full of people which included families of those who died and family members of other Pacific Island Coast Watchers; representatives from the New Zealand Government; the Mayor of Wellington; diplomats from Australia, the United States, Britain, Japan and Kiribati; members of the New Zealand Defence Force and representatives from the Returned Services Association.

