

# Medal man is always busy

Awaiting collection is a glass case containing a photo of a World War One Special Constable flanked by a silver vesta case, his police whistle, and his medals along with service details.

His family will now preserve this box of wartime memorabilia and, in time, hand it on to future generations. Today it sits in the office-workshop of Alan Polaschek, the man who framed the collection.

Alan, 80, is to medals what Ray Columbus is to music. The framed cases are a popular service. However, perhaps more popular is the mounting of service medals.

At this time of the year (from February to Anzac Day) he has never been so busy. In that time this year he mounted more than 100 sets of medals ready for Anzac Day. His job is to buff up the medals, put on new ribbons, and a backing so that they are ready for wearing on parades.

He has provided the service for 50 years and has had generals to privates through his hands, including VC holders, Charles Upham and Jack Hinton.

Alan says that there has been, in recent years, an upsurge in interest in everything associated with Anzac Day. "It's very much so among young people. Children of vets and their children are wearing their medals."

He remembers Captain Upham visiting his Linwood home. "He was a quiet man, but with decided views. He seemed very hard to get to talk, but he had a presence about him."

There is more to Alan Polaschek



*Alan Polaschek amidst his impressive collection of military books*

than the display cases and rows of medals. He is also the author of four books on, of course, medals.

His first was the Complete NZ Distinguished Conduct Medal then followed the Complete George Cross (25 copies in 1984, the only one now gone). Then he produced the NZ and Distinguished Services Order and by the end of the year his fourth book, *Crimson to Khaki*, military Long Service Awards of NZ 1886-1933 (with John D Wills).

These types of books (crammed with names and service records) take time and care. *Crimson to Khaki*, for instance, took 10-15 years of research. Alan says the compiling of the books has mostly been a hobby.

The collecting of medals is another bow to his medal interest. His collection, started in 1959, is very

representative and is matched by his impressive collection of military books.

The early life of Alan is just as varied and interesting as his medal interests. He was born in Waimate but was raised and schooled in Nightcaps where his father was the boot maker. At 15 Alan was working at the Ohai coalmines and by 16 was working underground. At 19 he entered the army under the Compulsory Military Training scheme.

This became his life and his career was to span more than 30 years before he was discharged at 50.

His career ranged from an infantry instructor, to an administrator, then to Malaya as a medical records clerk, a lecturer in the Army School of Administration and a chief clerk for three years in Singapore.

He was also an international rugby referee and took charge of games as his postings moved him around the country.

He finished his career with five years with the Canterbury Regiment in Christchurch as a Warrant Officer. "I didn't want a commission - I didn't want to be found out as an officer," he says.

As a civilian, Alan became a warden for periodic detention offenders before retirement.

But what prompted his interest in medals? "I wanted to know about the ribbons on men's chests. I had to know what they had to do to get them. So my collection and interest began in 1959," he says.

"Medals are a history of a man's involvement in military forces. It's as simple as that."

He is Marshal for the Order of St Lazarus in the South Island. He is a Knight of the order that is well known for its skin clinics around the country. He is a freemason and patron (used to be chairman) of the Christchurch Antiques and Bottle and Collectables Club, the largest in the country. "That club has several New Zealand experts in branches of antiques and collectables," Alan says.

Further he is consultant to the Canterbury Museum for awards, medals and accoutrements.

For all this work Alan perhaps deserves a medal.

But which one? He has them all.