ROYAL AERONAUTICAL SOCIETY
New Zealand Division

Group Captain Watt Award – 2025

SGT J.G.G. LUKIES H1034110 Aircraft Technician

SGT Joseph Lukies is awarded the Royal Aeronautical Society: Group Captain Watt Award for outstanding technical merit which enhances the efficiency of the Royal New Zealand Air Force. This recognition reflects SGT Lukies' unwavering dedication to continuous improvement, coupled with a deep-rooted commitment to excellence, innovation, and operational effectiveness.

Driven by an unrelenting pursuit of improvement, SGT Lukies consistently identifies opportunities for optimisation and implements solutions that deliver measurable results. He is never content with the status quo and approaches every task with meticulous attention to detail, profound technical understanding, and a determination to exceed expectations. His work is synonymous with the highest standards of professional practice in aircraft maintenance.

SGT Lukies has authored and submitted numerous publication amendments, leading to clearer, more effective maintenance practices across 6 Squadron Maintenance Flight. Each amendment reflects careful analysis of existing procedures and thoughtful application of technical expertise, resulting in enhanced safety, compliance, and operational clarity. His technical writing skills have also been instrumental in developing multiple 6 Squadron Maintenance Flight Standing Instructions, which now serve as essential references and directly contribute to an improved and efficient operating airworthiness environment.

His Lean Six Sigma Green Belt project at 6 Squadron demonstrates his ability to translate technical insight into lasting organisational efficiencies. By streamlining the authorisation process, optimising instructor utilisation, rewriting outdated standards, and introducing an improved authorisation workbook, he significantly reduced administrative delays and strengthened the integrity of the authorisation framework. These initiatives have improved maintenance turnaround times, workforce productivity, and overall squadron effectiveness, exemplifying his ability to blend technical mastery with practical process improvement.

SGT Lukies' contributions extend beyond procedural enhancements. He has fostered a culture of continuous learning and professional excellence, mentoring colleagues and promoting best practices in maintenance operations. His ability to communicate complex technical concepts clearly and persuasively has elevated the proficiency of the entire squadron, ensuring knowledge is shared effectively and embedded within the workforce.

SGT Lukies embodies the core qualities of a modern Air Force technician: technically elite, relentlessly driven, and operationally focused. His work strengthens not only 6 Squadron but also delivers enduring efficiency gains across the RNZAF.

For his exceptional service, unwavering professionalism, and significant contributions to the operational effectiveness of the Royal New Zealand Air Force, SGT Joseph Lukies is most deserving of this distinguished recognition. The combination of technical acumen, initiative, and dedication to continuous improvement exemplifies the ideals celebrated by the Group Captain Watt Award.

Presented this day in Wellington 31st October 2025

Recommended for this award by Chief Engineer, Royal New Zealand Air Force

Royal Aeronautical Society – Kestrel Trophy

The Kestrel Trophy is presented annually to the Royal New Zealand Air Force Unit adjudged the most excellent by the Chief of Air Force. The size of the unit nominated does not matter, and the trophy is able to be displayed by the winning unit.

Over the past 12 months No. 6 Squadron Royal New Zealand Air Force has experienced one of the most operational and dynamic periods in the history of unit. The squadron has embarked multiple times over the period across the fleet, on planned and unplanned deployments and activities. Ongoing support has been provided via shore based tasking to a wide range of stakeholders within the New Zealand Defence Force and to government agencies including the Ministry for Primary Industries, New Zealand Police and Department of Conservation. To meet the high operational output, the squadron (in tandem with a multitude of supporting units across RNZAF Base Auckland) has excelled at managing aircraft availability and sustainability, and the continual training battle rhythm needed to meet these outputs. This is a significant achievement for a legacy aircraft.

The operational period began 12 months ago with the successful completion of the First of Class Flight Trials on HMNZS Aotearoa, unlocking capability which was quickly put to good use through the subsequent deployment to Exercise RIMPAC and Operation Whio, the latter including a transit of the Taiwan Strait. Throughout this deployment the Seasprite provided valuable intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance support, conducted casualty evacuations and supported all other aspects of maritime effects.

With HMNZS Aotearoa still at sea, the squadron pivoted to support HMNZS Te Kaha providing a flight which supported the force generation activities in late 2024 in preparation for Operation Crucible in 2025. Operation Crucible 2025 represents the first time in many years an ANZAC class Frigate has deployed to an operational theatre, with the Seasprite being a critical force multiplier to the ANZAC combat capability. During this intense period of dual embarkation, the squadron also managed to support at 48 hours' notice a short deployment to HMNZS Canterbury for New Zealand Customs and Police tasking.

2025 saw the squadron pick up right where it left off, with the rapid generation of three aircraft to embark HMNZS Te Kaha and HMNZS Canterbury simultaneously. HMNZS Te Kaha's deployment to Operation Crucible began with the first New Zealand Defence Force live firing of the AGM-119 Penguin missile from its embarked Seasprite. While HMNZS Te Kaha was leaving for operational service, the remainder of the squadron surged onto HMNZS Canterbury to support Operation Endurance, the standing NZDF mission to support Department of Conservation, Met Service, and Iwi aims in the Sub-Antarctic Islands. This period has been one of the most productive and dynamic in 6 SQN history, with over 300 embarked hours flown. Due to the efforts over the last year the squadron is set up for success, and the next 12 months promising similar levels of operational output and exciting activities.

For these reasons, 6 SQN was nominated for the Royal Aeronautical Society Kestrel Trophy for 2024.

Duncan Campbell Award — 2025

The Duncan Campbell Award recognises excellence in aviation journalism. There are separate awards for young journalists and writers, and for established journalists and writers who have demonstrated their ability and dedication in this specialised area of journalism.

This Duncan Campbell Award for 2025 goes to **Errol Walter Martyn QSM**.

Errol Martyn's aviation journey began with a fascination for the machines, people, and history of flight. Over the course of more than five decades, that curiosity has grown into a lifetime of scholarship, research, and writing, making him New Zealand's pre-eminent aviation historian. His work has preserved the stories of countless New Zealanders who took to the skies and those who served with courage and dedication in both military and civil aviation.

Errol's contributions include two landmark trilogies. For Your Tomorrow: A Record of New Zealanders who have died while serving with the RNZAF and Allied Air Services since 1915 was published in three volumes between 1998 and 2008 and remains the definitive record of New Zealand's fallen airmen. A Passion for Flight: New Zealand Aviation before the Great War, published between 2010 and 2013, traces the nation's early aviation history, chronicling pioneering flights, aeronautical experimentation, and the establishment of aero clubs before 1914. These works, together with numerous other books, research papers, and contributions to journals, have set the standard for the study of New Zealand aviation history.

In addition to his publications, Errol has contributed hundreds of articles to the Aviation Historical Society of New Zealand Journal, assisted with museum rolls of honour, and served as Honorary Consultant to the RNZAF Museum from 1986 to 2009. His scholarship is widely cited in the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Military History, and the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, reflecting his reputation as a trusted and authoritative historian. He has also been recognised internationally, receiving the Bob Wills Memorial Plaque from the Aviation Historical Society of Australia in 2011 for his article "Joe Hammond – The Kiwi Who Showed Australia How to Fly."

Errol began his career in aviation in the airline industry, working in Invercargill from 1963 to 1996, before moving to Christchurch to dedicate himself full-time to research. A member of the Aviation Historical Society of New Zealand since 1965, he has actively contributed to its Journal for more than fifty years, including service on the committee and assistance with publication efforts. His dedication to documenting, preserving, and sharing New Zealand aviation history has ensured that the achievements and sacrifices of aviators past and present are never forgotten.

Errol Martyn's contributions to New Zealand aviation are both extensive and enduring. Through his scholarship, mentorship of researchers, and tireless work in preserving the nation's aviation heritage, he has enriched the understanding of New Zealand's aviation past and inspired future generations of historians. His knowledge, dedication, and generosity make him a truly worthy recipient of the Duncan Campbell Award.

Presented this day in Wellington, the 31st of October 2025.

Recommended for this award by Allan Boyce, FRAeS. and Rev Dr Richard Waugh, President AHSNZ.

Henry Wigram Award – 2025

The Henry Wigram Award was established in recognition of the outstanding contribution made by Sir Henry Wigram to the development of aviation in New Zealand. The purpose of the award is to encourage the preparation and delivery of technical and other papers and is awarded for the best paper delivered to a branch of the RAeS in New Zealand. The award takes the form of a silver medal, a certificate, and a citation.

The Henry Wigram Award for 2025 is awarded to Qiuyang Zheng, “Gin,” in recognition of his exemplary presentation and technical contribution to the field of aviation. Gin presented a 40-minute summary of a concept aircraft and its development over six months to the Auckland branch of the RAeS at a seminar hosted by the University of Auckland. The presentation not only showcased technical proficiency and analytical rigor but also elicited enthusiastic questions from a highly experienced aviation audience. In doing so, Gin demonstrated professionalism and a depth of understanding that reflected credit upon himself, his team, the University of Auckland, and the Society.

Gin’s journey began as the leader of a 2024 Computer-Aided Design “hackathon” team, which initially won a two-day competition by designing a concept aircraft intended for disaster relief with short-field STOL capabilities. This success inspired Gin to undertake an extensive six-month development of the concept. His work involved redesigning the vehicle, rigorously testing the team’s assumptions, and evaluating the aircraft’s use cases and operational limitations. The resulting design reflected thoughtful iteration and innovation, with detailed consideration of aerofoil selection, load management, and powerplant integration.

While the concept was initially a team effort, the majority of the detailed design work was undertaken by Gin. He clearly articulated the design rationale, technical challenges, and iterative improvements during his presentation, demonstrating the ability to translate complex engineering decisions into accessible insights for a professional audience. His presentation was recognised by attendees as exceptionally well-considered, highlighting his strategic approach to defining the problem, exploring potential solutions, and progressing a coherent development strategy. Members of the Society praised the depth of his work, noting the clear alignment of technical analysis with practical market, regulatory, and operational considerations, underscoring the value and originality of his contribution.

Gin’s academic background, professional experience as a flight instructor, and involvement in the University of Auckland Aeronautics Club further underscore his dedication to aviation. His work exemplifies the spirit of innovation, technical rigor, and leadership that the Henry Wigram Award seeks to recognise.

Presented this day in Wellington, 31 October 2025.

Recommended for this award by Roger Warren, Lead Design Eng (HPA), University of Auckland.

Sir Geoffrey Roberts Award — 2025

This award is open to any young person, a New Zealand citizen, who has the firm intention of following a career in civil aviation in New Zealand. At the time of selection, the candidate could be in training in preparation for taking up such a career or could be gaining experience in civil aviation overseas. The award consists of a silver medal, a certificate and a monetary amount.

This award goes to **André Bajić Williams**.

Born and raised in Auckland, André has demonstrated a singular focus on pursuing an ambitious career in aviation. He has consistently sought opportunities to broaden his knowledge and experience across multiple aspects of the aviation sector. He is currently undertaking his Private Pilot Licence training at the North Shore Aero Club while simultaneously studying for a Mechanical Engineering degree at the University of Auckland. Alongside these demanding commitments, André serves as Vice-Chair of the UoA Aeronautics Club, student liaison for the Royal Aeronautical Society, and actively contributes to STEM outreach through the One Foot in the Clouds programme, inspiring secondary school students to engage with aviation.

André is deeply committed to advancing aviation in New Zealand and has expressed a strong intention to remain within the country's aviation sector. In his own words, he aspires to work with Air New Zealand's Engineering Department, having already applied for their internship programme, or to return to Altitude Aerospace Interiors, where he previously completed a rewarding internship. His experience there was highly regarded, with his supervisor noting his maturity, curiosity, and ability to deliver exceptional results as part of an engineering team.

In addition to his engineering studies, André has embraced flying with passion and determination. He has self-funded his lessons through part-time work, learned to fly gliders at the Aviation Sports Club, Whenuapai, and is steadily progressing toward his goal of obtaining a Private Pilot Licence by the end of 2025. Having completed most of his theory examinations, André demonstrates a disciplined, safety-conscious approach to training, and is preparing for his cross-country flights.

Beyond his personal development, André is focused on giving back to the aviation community. He is currently working on creating a website to collate aviation and aerospace opportunities across the Auckland region, helping others to discover pathways into the industry. In 2024, he and his team won first place in the Dassault Systèmes CAD Design Competition, presenting an innovative STOL cargo aircraft concept for disaster relief. He later co-presented this concept at a Royal Aeronautical Society/UoA seminar in 2025, further demonstrating his initiative and commitment to advancing aeronautical design and thought leadership.

André's dedication to aviation is underscored by his resilience, maturity, and drive to be the first in his family to graduate from university. He has played a central role in the newly formed UoA Aeronautics Club, supporting the club's vision to achieve New Zealand's first Human Powered Aircraft, with hopes of becoming its first pilot.

For his consistent commitment to aviation training, his outstanding academic and extracurricular achievements, and his dedication to promoting aviation opportunities in New Zealand, André Bajić Williams is a worthy recipient of the Sir Geoffrey Roberts Award for 2025.

Presented this day in Wellington on the 31st of October 2025.

Recommended for this award by Roger Warren, Lead Design Eng (HPA), University of Auckland

Meritorious Service Gold Award – 2025

This Meritorious Service Gold Award is made by the Council of the Society and recognises long-term contributions and practical achievements in all sections of aerospace in New Zealand. The Award takes the form of a medal, a certificate, and a citation.

The 2025 Meritorious Service Gold Award goes to **Captain David Morgan ONZM**, celebrating his sustained excellence in advancing New Zealand aviation through leadership, operational safety, and mentoring across both civil and military sectors.

Over a career spanning more than four decades with Air New Zealand, Captain Morgan has consistently demonstrated professional distinction. Joining the airline in the early 1980s, he progressed through the pilot ranks to become Chief Pilot in 2003 and subsequently held senior executive roles with responsibility for Flight Operations, Safety, and Operational Integrity until 2024. During this time, he guided the airline through some of the most challenging periods in its history, including the Global Financial Crisis, the Perpignan tragedy, and the COVID-19 pandemic. His leadership brought confidence and assurance to regulators, government, the airline board, shareholders, and the travelling public.

Operational safety has been central to Captain Morgan's contribution. He developed robust risk management frameworks, ensuring excellence across Air New Zealand's operations. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he generously shared these frameworks with other organisations, with aspects of the national aviation response modelled on his team's work. The airline's consistent recognition among the world's safest carriers reflects his influence and dedication.

Internationally, Captain Morgan has been a trusted voice for New Zealand aviation, serving on multiple International Air Transport Association (IATA) committees and contributing to global standards for airline operations and safety. His counsel is widely respected among airline leaders, regulators, and aviation professionals around the world.

Closer to home, he has been tireless in fostering capability and passion within the aviation community. Since 2016, he has served as a Director of New Zealand Aeronautical Trusts Ltd (NZATL), helping to administer awards recognising professional excellence in the sector. He has also been a long-standing supporter of the Walsh Memorial Scout Flying School at Matamata, where his personal encouragement and Air New Zealand sponsorship have enabled generations of young New Zealanders to gain their first exposure to professional aviation.

Captain Morgan has been a passionate mentor, nurturing pilots both within and beyond the airline, promoting diversity, skill development, and a culture of operational integrity. His contributions to the Royal Aeronautical Society in New Zealand, including speaking at national symposia and championing professional standards, have further strengthened the sector.

Although he stepped down from executive responsibilities in 2024, Captain Morgan continues to fly the Airbus A320 line, retaining hands-on engagement with operational aviation. His appointment as an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit in the 2025 King's Birthday Honours formally recognised his extraordinary service.

Captain David Morgan's enduring contributions have advanced operational safety, developed the next generation of aviators, and elevated New Zealand's international aviation reputation. His leadership, mentorship, and practical achievements make him a most worthy recipient of the Meritorious Service Gold Award.

Presented this day in Wellington, the 31st of October 2025.

Recommended for this award by Peter Johnson, Chair NZATL, and Shaun Johnson, FRAeS.

Meritorious Service Award — 2025

This Meritorious Service Award is made by the Council of the Society and recognises long-term contributions and practical achievements in all sections of aerospace in New Zealand. The Award takes the form of a medal, a certificate, and a citation.

This Meritorious Service Award for 2025 goes to **Frank Parker**.

Frank Parker's career in aviation is a remarkable story of skill, service, leadership, and dedication spanning more than five decades. He joined the Royal New Zealand Air Force in January 1970 on No. 170 Pilots Course, training on the Harvard and Devon before graduating in March 1971. Shortly afterwards he transitioned to rotary flight, completing conversions to the Sioux and Iroquois helicopters, and was posted to No. 3 Squadron at Hobsonville. This began a 16-year Air Force career that took him across NZ and to postings overseas, including Singapore, Antarctica on exchange with the United States Navy, the Sinai with the United Nations Peacekeeping Force, and numerous deployments throughout the Pacific and Australia.

A significant portion of his RNZAF service was spent on the UH-1 Iroquois, both operationally and in command positions. In 1979 he graduated from the Flying Instructors Course at Wigram, commencing a long and influential pathway in pilot training and flight examination. He instructed on both fixed-wing and rotary types, served on the Central Flying School, contributed to the Red Checkers display team, and later returned to No. 3 Squadron as Iroquois Flight Commander. By the conclusion of his military service in 1986, Frank had established himself as an outstanding operator, mentor, and instructor.

That same year, Frank commenced a distinguished 34-year career with Air New Zealand. Initially serving as First Officer on the Fokker F27 and Boeing 737, he progressed to command on the 737 before moving through a succession of long-haul fleets including the Boeing 747-400, 767, and 787 Dreamliner, and later the Airbus A320. He retired in 2020, leaving behind a legacy of professionalism and respect as one of the airline's most trusted senior captains.

Alongside his airline career, Frank developed an enduring influence in general aviation. In 1987 he began instructing at Ardmore, and in 1996 founded Ardmore Helicopters, today a respected training institution. He remains active as an A-category helicopter instructor, GA flight examiner, and test pilot. His experience and leadership have been pivotal in developing the next generation of aviators, with many current industry professionals counting him as a mentor.

Frank has also provided decades of service to aviation organisations. He is President of the New Zealand Warbirds Association, a position he has held since 2011, and Chief Executive of Warbirds Limited, a Part 115 operator. He serves as Trustee of the New Zealand Aviation Heritage Trust, is a board member of the New Zealand Airshow Association and the international Formation and Safety Training organisation and contributes to the Ardmore Airport Flight Operations and Risk Committees.

Throughout his career Frank Parker has demonstrated not only exceptional flying skill but also a unique ability to inspire, develop, and lead others. His contributions span military, commercial, general, and heritage aviation, and his influence has shaped generations of New Zealand pilots. His passion and commitment mark him as a worthy recipient of the Meritorious Service Award.

Presented this day in Wellington, the 31st of October 2025

Recommended for this award by Kim Parker, General Manager New Zealand Warbirds Association Incorporated.

Meritorious Service Award - 2025

This Meritorious Service Award is made by the Council of the Society and recognises long-term contributions and practical achievements in all sections of aerospace in New Zealand. The Award takes the form of a medal, a certificate, and a citation.

The 2025 Meritorious Service Award goes to **Trevor Hughes**, celebrating his sustained contributions to New Zealand's aviation sector through financial leadership, strategic guidance, and long-term service to the Christchurch Engine Centre and Air New Zealand.

Trevor Hughes began his aviation career in 1993 as Manager Finance – Engineering at Air New Zealand, bringing a structured, analytical approach to complex engineering projects. Over more than three decades, he demonstrated unwavering commitment to operational excellence and financial leadership across multiple senior roles, including Head of Finance, Vice President of Finance Systems and IT-Ops Tech, and General Manager roles within Commercial and Tech Operations. His contributions modernised core finance and technology functions, enabling Air New Zealand to remain competitive and resilient during periods of industry transformation.

In 2001, Trevor became a founding board member of the Christchurch Engine Centre, a joint venture that has been critical in establishing New Zealand's capability to service narrow-body jet engines. Over the 24 years of operations, CHC Engine Centre has generated $14.3 billion in revenue and is widely recognised as one of the best engine centres in the Pratt & Whitney network and globally across all OEMs. Trevor's financial and strategic guidance has been instrumental in maintaining the Centre's commercial viability, steering it through both industry upturns and global challenges. Notably, he played a key role in developing the business case for the Pratt & Whitney PW1100 GTF engine introduction—a NZD $300 million investment creating approximately 200 additional jobs and bringing the workforce to around 600 employees.

Trevor's leadership extended beyond governance. His concurrent appointment as General Manager of Air New Zealand Engineering Services in 2003 allowed him to influence the strategic direction of both the airline's commercial and engineering arms. In successive roles overseeing Commercial and Business Development and Tech Operations, he guided operational transformation, championed innovation, and strengthened long-term partnerships. Between 2013 and 2021, he implemented systems and processes that enhanced global competitiveness and operational resilience.

Throughout his career, Trevor has been widely respected for his ability to bridge technical, financial, and strategic domains. A quiet achiever, he builds effective cross-functional teams, resolves complex commercial challenges, and mentors emerging leaders, enhancing careers and business outcomes across the organization. His focus on relationship-building with partners, customers, and suppliers has fostered collaboration and driven sustained success.

Trevor's enduring commitment to the Christchurch Engine Centre, Air New Zealand, and the wider aviation industry exemplifies long-term service, visionary leadership, and practical achievement. His contributions have strengthened New Zealand's position in the global aviation sector and created a lasting legacy of capability, excellence, and mentorship, which make him a worthy recipient of this Meritorious Service Award.

Presented this day in Wellington, the 31st of October 2025.

Recommended for this award by Brendon McWilliam, GM Aircraft Maintenance & Delivery, Air New Zealand

Meritorious Service Award – 2025

This Meritorious Service Award is made by the Council of the Society and recognises long-term contributions and practical achievements in all sections of aerospace in New Zealand. The Award takes the form of a medal, a certificate, and a citation.

This Meritorious Service Award for 2025 goes to **Mark Rocket**

Mark Rocket is a visionary leader and entrepreneur whose impact on New Zealand's aerospace sector has been transformative. As the founding President of Aerospace New Zealand, Mark has been instrumental in uniting industry, academia, and government to create a thriving aerospace ecosystem in Aotearoa. His leadership has been the driving force behind the annual New Zealand Aerospace Summit, which has rapidly grown into the country's premier event for aerospace innovation, collaboration, and investment.

Mark's commitment to advancing New Zealand's aerospace industry is evident in his hands-on approach to community building. He has tirelessly advocated for the sector, fostering relationships across the public and private spheres, and championing the vision of New Zealand as a world leader in aerospace technology, research, and sustainability. Under his stewardship, the New Zealand Aerospace Summit has attracted international attention, bringing together key stakeholders, investors, and innovators, and providing a platform for showcasing local talent and groundbreaking projects.

Beyond his organisational leadership, Mark Rocket is a serial entrepreneur and a passionate advocate for space exploration. He was an early investor and director at Rocket Lab, supporting the company in its formative years and helping to lay the groundwork for New Zealand's emergence as a launch nation. Mark's own company, Kea Aerospace, is developing solar-powered, high-altitude aircraft designed for persistent environmental monitoring—a project that exemplifies his commitment to sustainability and technological advancement.

Mark is also dedicated to inspiring the next generation of aerospace professionals. He regularly engages with students, educators, and young entrepreneurs, encouraging them to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). His outreach efforts have included speaking at schools, mentoring startups, and supporting educational initiatives that promote aerospace and aviation.

His influence extends to policy and regulatory development, where he has worked collaboratively with government agencies to ensure New Zealand's aerospace sector remains innovative, safe, and globally competitive. Mark's advocacy has contributed to the creation of a supportive regulatory environment that enables rapid prototyping, testing, and commercialisation of aerospace technologies.

Mark Rocket's leadership, vision, and sustained commitment have been pivotal in elevating New Zealand's profile in the global aerospace community. His ability to bring people together, inspire innovation, and drive practical outcomes has left an indelible mark on the industry. Through his work with Aerospace New Zealand, the New Zealand Aerospace Summit, Kea Aerospace, and his broader advocacy, Mark has demonstrated the highest levels of service, leadership, and achievement.

For his outstanding contributions to the advancement of aerospace in New Zealand, Mark Rocket is a truly deserving recipient of the Meritorious Service Award.

Presented this day in Wellington, the 31st of October 2025.

Recommended for this award by Peter Johnson, Chair, NZ Aeronautical Trust Limited

Meritorious Service Award — 2025

This Meritorious Service Award is made by the Council of the Society and recognises long-term contributions and practical achievements in all sections of aerospace in New Zealand. The Award takes the form of a medal, a certificate, and a citation.

This Meritorious Service Award for 2025 goes to **Captain Rod Milne**.

Rod Milne's aviation journey began like that of many enthusiasts: with model aircraft, box kits, and long afternoons watching light planes fly overhead. His interest was cemented when a cousin with a Private Pilot Licence took him for a flight from the airfield that would later become Auckland International Airport. From those early days, Rod's fascination grew into a lifetime career that has combined airline service, flying instruction, gliding, and above all, a commitment to mentoring the next generation of aviators.

After returning from overseas in the mid-1960s, Rod gained his Private Pilot Licence and began accumulating flying hours, both recreational and practical. Recognising his aptitude, senior aviation authorities encouraged him to obtain his Commercial Pilot Licence and Instructor Rating. He soon found himself entrusted with the management of four to five aero clubs, an early indication of his leadership skills and capacity to guide young pilots.

It was during this period that George Arkley, founder of the Walsh Memorial Scout Flying School, invited him to join the instructional staff. Although club responsibilities initially prevented his participation, Rod joined the National Airways Corporation in the late 1960s and soon after accepted the offer. In 1972 he began instructing at the annual Walsh school, a commitment that he has honoured every year since—apart from 2005—contributing nearly half a century of continuous service to one of New Zealand's most significant youth aviation initiatives. His instruction, guidance, and enthusiasm have benefitted thousands of young New Zealanders, many of whom have gone on to successful aviation careers.

Rod's career with Air New Zealand paralleled his work at Walsh. Rising through the ranks, he flew a variety of aircraft before retiring in the early 2000s as a Boeing 747-400 Captain. His airline career is remembered for its professionalism, steady leadership, and the respect he earned from colleagues and students alike.

Outside the airline, Rod's aviation interests have remained wide-ranging. He has been deeply involved in the Taupo Gliding Club, both instructing and flying the tow plane, and continues to enjoy flying his SuperSTOL aircraft. Ever willing to share the thrill of flight, he demonstrates its short take-off and landing capabilities and frequently takes interested students aloft. His contribution has always extended beyond the cockpit: he provides mentorship, practical support, and often direct assistance to young pilots navigating the technical and financial challenges of building a career in aviation.

Rod Milne's contributions to aviation in New Zealand are both extensive and enduring. Through his airline service, volunteer instruction, and passionate support for youth aviation, he has shaped generations of pilots. His dedication, knowledge, and willingness to give back mark him as a truly worthy recipient of the Meritorious Service Award.

Presented this day in Wellington, the 31st of October 2025.

Recommended for this award by David Jupp, RAeS and Phil Craig, Airways Corporation of New Zealand Ltd.

Meritorious Service Award - 2025

This Meritorious Service Award is made by the Council of the Society and recognises long-term contributions and practical achievements in all sections of aerospace in New Zealand. The Award takes the form of a medal, a certificate, and a citation.

This 2025 Meritorious Service Award goes to **Don McCracken**, celebrating his sustained excellence in advancing New Zealand's aviation sector through engineering leadership, professional mentorship, and voluntary contributions to industry organisations.

Don McCracken's career in aviation spans over 35 years, during which he has contributed extensively to both commercial aviation businesses and industry-wide governance. Beginning in 1995, Don spent nearly eleven years at Flightline Aviation Limited, where he held successive senior roles including Overhaul Section Manager, Business Development Manager, Engineering Manager, and General Manager Operations. During this period, he was recognised for maintaining exceptionally high engineering standards and for mentoring staff, fostering a culture of professionalism and operational excellence.

In October 2005, Don joined The Vintage Aviator Limited as General Manager, applying his experience and knowledge to strengthen the company's operational and engineering capabilities over the following four years. In June 2012, he moved to Oceania Aviation Limited as General Manager MRO and shortly thereafter became Chief Executive Officer, guiding the MRO Group through strategic and operational challenges until December 2017.

Since 2009, Don also managed his own company, Aerosafe Engineering Ltd, providing specialist services in non-destructive testing, quality assurance, regulatory compliance, and aircraft maintenance programmes. Under his leadership, Aerosafe has become a critical supplier providing trusted, high-quality services across the New Zealand aviation engineering sector.

Alongside his professional roles, Don has made substantial voluntary contributions to the aviation sector. He has served as Chairman of the Aircraft Engineering Association of New Zealand and has held numerous executive positions with the Aviation Industry Association of New Zealand, including Chair of the Supply, Services and Engineering Division, President, and Immediate Past President. His nearly two decades of continuous service on the AIA Council have delivered invaluable guidance, particularly during periods of industry challenge.

Don's career exemplifies dedication, integrity, and technical excellence. Through his leadership, mentorship, and professional service, he has enhanced New Zealand's aviation engineering capabilities, nurtured talent, and strengthened the wider industry.

By maintaining high standards across multiple organisations, advancing engineering practice, and providing long-term voluntary service to the aviation community. His sustained contributions to both professional and voluntary sectors represent a lifetime of achievement, leadership, and inspiration. Don McCracken exemplifies the criteria of the Meritorious Service Award.

Presented this day in Wellington, the 31st of October 2025.

Recommended for this award by Mike Lynskey, President, NZ Division RAeS

Meritorious Service Award - 2025

This Meritorious Service Award is made by the Council of the Society and recognises long-term contributions and practical achievements in all sections of aerospace in New Zealand. The Award takes the form of a medal, a certificate, and a citation.

The 2025 Meritorious Service Award goes to **Dawn Aerospace**, celebrating its sustained excellence in advancing New Zealand's aerospace sector through pioneering innovations in both reusable space access and eco-friendly satellite propulsion.

Since its founding in 2017, Dawn Aerospace has demonstrated a steadfast commitment to engineering excellence and environmental stewardship. Spearheaded by the Mk-II Aurora spaceplane, the company is redefining suborbital access with a reusable, rocket-powered aircraft capable of runway take-offs and landings. In November 2024, Aurora achieved supersonic speeds (Mach 1.12) and an altitude of 82,500 ft, making it the first civil aircraft to fly supersonic since Concorde. In the same flight, it set a new world record by climbing to 20 km faster than the F15's 1975 benchmark performance, unmatched in nearly 50 years.

Aurora's rapid turnaround capability—less than four hours between flights—demonstrates Dawn's vision of fleet-style, cost-effective spaceflight that reduces environmental impact and operational barriers.

Complementing its aircraft program, Dawn Aerospace is a global leader in non-toxic satellite propulsion. Its flagship B20 and B1 thrusters use a green bipropellant combination of nitrous oxide and propene, replacing hazardous hydrazine. These thrusters have been successfully launched on SpaceX, Vega, Soyuz and Rocket Lab missions (including the ION Satellite Carrier in January 2021) and have flown on over 35 satellites to date.

The B20 demonstrated reliable in-orbit performance—executing hundreds of firings to adjust orbits and attitude while dramatically cutting handling risk and cost.

Further affirming its leadership, Dawn was selected by France's CNES in December 2024 to develop green chemical propulsion systems for satellites, underlining its international reputation in sustainable space technology.

Dawn Aerospace's combined approach—innovating in reusable suborbital flight and green inspace propulsion—has delivered tangible results: state-of-the-art hardware, record setting flights, partnerships with global space agencies and research bodies, and a scalable ecosystem of next generation space operations.

In New Zealand, their achievements are inspiring: students, engineers, and researchers are now dreaming of aerospace careers and technological breakthroughs. The company's public facing milestones and media presence ignite interest and provide tangible role models for a future workforce.

By elevating New Zealand's international aerospace profile, cultivating high-tech talent, and pioneering environmentally responsible innovation, Dawn Aerospace exemplifies the criteria of the Meritorious Service Award. Their journey from a student led initiative to a globally respected aerospace company is a testament to long-term service, real world achievement, and inspirational leadership.

Presented this day in Wellington, the 31st of October 2025.

Recommended for this award by Peter Johnson, Chair, NZ Aeronautical Trust Limited

Special Recognition Award — 2025

Graham Christie has been awarded the Special Recognition Award – 2025 in acknowledgement of his outstanding contribution to the DYNAMIC DRAFTS II programme and his exemplary service to the Royal Aeronautical Society. Graham's initiative, technical ability, and dedication have not only advanced the wind tunnel project but have also brought lasting value to the Air Force Museum (AFM) and the wider aerospace community.

The original vision for the wind tunnel project was to break away from the traditional enclosed tunnel design and create a more interactive, hands-on device. Graham embraced this challenge with remarkable foresight and ingenuity, applying his deep knowledge of aerospace engineering and advanced manufacturing skills to deliver a unique experimental apparatus. His design successfully incorporated the fundamental aerodynamic principles of lift, drag, airflow velocity, and aerofoil shape, while at the same time making these principles accessible to a wide range of audiences.

When the AFM unexpectedly dismantled the earlier refurbished tunnel from Phase 1, Graham volunteered to lead the development of a new experimental wind tunnel for Phase 2. He invested countless hours in research, CAD modelling, and the painstaking refinement of 3D-printed components—some requiring up to three days of continuous printing to meet his high standards. His commitment ensured that every part was optimised for both durability and educational impact. Graham also designed a Human-Machine Interface that allowed users of all ages to engage meaningfully with the device, ensuring its broad appeal and effectiveness as an educational tool.

In addition to the wind tunnel, Graham also engineered a Bernoulli demonstration device for International Space Day (12 April). This centrifugal fan system, capable of suspending a beach ball in mid-air, provided a captivating illustration of fundamental aerodynamic theory. Both devices were warmly welcomed by AFM staff and demonstrated Graham's ability to transform abstract scientific concepts into tangible and inspiring experiences.

Graham's contributions extend beyond this single project. As a longstanding member of the Canterbury Branch committee, and with active involvement in the New Zealand aerospace and rocketry communities, he has consistently dedicated his time to mentoring students and fostering the next generation of engineers. Through his leadership of the Cashmere High School Satellite and Space Club, he has guided students to achieve success at both national and international levels, including the Prime Minister's Space Prize for Student Endeavour.

With over four decades of experience across aircraft engineering, aerospace education, and interactive exhibit design, Graham Christie exemplifies the highest standards of professional and voluntary service. His technical expertise, creative ingenuity, and tireless dedication have been pivotal to the success of DYNAMIC DRAFTS II. Without his commitment, the project would have faltered. Instead, it has thrived and left a meaningful legacy for the Air Force Museum and the wider community.

In recognition of his exceptional contribution to aeronautical education, engineering innovation, and service to the Royal Aeronautical Society, Graham Christie is a worthy recipient of the RAeS Special Recognition Award, 2025.

Presented this day in Wellington, the 31st of October 2025.

Recommended for this award by Phillip Harrall, Vice President RAeS NZ Division.