

Pte Alan Frank Bryant
Service No. 446006
7th NZ Anti Tank Battery, 15th LAD (Light Aid Depot)
Italian Campaign

Alan Bryant was a Post & Telegraph technician, when in 1941 at age 19 he was conscripted into the Army into the Signal Corps. His war service 1941-1945 included 2 years 68 days training at Palmerston North and 2 years 30 days active service, until discharge on 17 April 1946.

Bryant completed an Army Engineering Course before he was commissioned in 1943 for active service and embarked for Egypt in the 11th Reinforcement. The troop ship was escorted by two destroyers, to Freemantle, Perth with 4,000 men on board and encountered heavy storms resulting in all on board being seasick. By the time they arrived in the Middle East that campaign was ended.

For the Italian Campaign, Alan Bryant landed in Italy at the port of Bari and between 20th May and 3rd June 1944, joined the fighting between Cassino and Anzio. He was in 7th Anti Tank Regiment of 15th LAD (Light Aid Depot) providing mechanical and electrical support for vehicles, tanks, 4" mortars, 17lb Anti Tank guns, or anything. Where spares were unavailable he had to make them. He held the record, of 20 minutes, to remove a motor from a jeep and install a re-conditioned replacement. He operated a vehicle inside which was a workshop. Towards the end of the war the German Commando units were surprising NZ camps with attacks in the dead of night. Bryant slept underneath his truck between the two rear wheels for extra protection.

Alan described the members of the 15th LAD of 7th Anti Tank Battery as "very skilled guys; Fitter, Store Man, Auto Electrician, Welder, Gun Fitter. They moved mainly at night when there were no German aircraft. One time at night a whole unit moved into the area that had been mined by the Germans. No hits!" Another time they camped near a cornfield and were warned not to enter to take corn. Alan did go and returned with corn. The next night another soldier went and was blown up. The cornfield was mined.

"Tank battles were horrible affairs". The shell was encased in an aluminium collet. As the shell left the barrel the collet split in two leaving a 1" diameter pointed tungsten steel missile which would pass through a ¾ tank wall, penetrating one side of the tank but not the other, and would spin around inside creating havoc. On one occasion, a small group from the 7th Anti Tank Regiment entered an Italian village and came across a German tank with its engine running. They waited nearby and when nothing happened, they went to look and discovered the tank had been hit by a tungsten projectile and was a disaster inside. They attempted to respectfully deal with the remains of the German tank crew by covering them with lime.

Alan recalled an incident "around the time when the Italian campaign was almost over. The German Army was retreating quickly and left much equipment at the River Po where the Air Force had blown up the bridges. One day I came across a beautiful Straight 8 German engine used to power generating plant for a series of German searchlights. All the Germans had done was remove the distributor to disable the plant. Back at the Machinery Truck I converted a distributor from a Ford V8 to fit this beautiful engine and we had a power plant for a boat. We removed the lower powered engine from the craft and after the new power plant was fitted in we had a cruise craft, on which about 30 members of 15th LAD visited the magnificent Trieste beaches".

The Germans left vehicles like Mercedes Benz and threw hand grenades into the motors to disable them. Alan stripped out those motors and gearboxes and transported them to Trieste where the parts were sold to the Italians. Straight 8 cylinders are all in one row, which makes for a very long vehicle bonnet. On a Ford V8 the cylinders are configured in a "V" with four cylinders on each side to fit a smaller space.

After the War ended the New Zealanders waited many months in Italy before departure from Trieste. With time to fill, Alan spent his time constructing a Micrometer, an engineering tool to take very fine measurements. It required three components: a mortar stand, a piece of Bren gun barrel, and high quality metal from an exhaust or inlet valve from a Ford V-8 Engine, because the powerful Ford engines contained good quality steel. The Bren Gun Carriers, designed by the NZ

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Army, were fitted with two Ford V8 Motors. When the New Zealand soldiers departed they just drove their vehicles to a nearby field and abandoned them. Many Sherman tanks were left lined up on the Wharf at Trieste. (The Shermans were American tanks on loan by agreement to New Zealand). One vehicle not left behind was an Army Indian Motor Cycle with leather satchels each side to carry Army documents. The Despatch Rider was so attached to it that he disassembled the bike and small parts were given to mates to carry on board.

Two weeks after returning to New Zealand, on 9th March 1946, Pte Alan Bryant married Beverly Mailman at the Methodist Church, 53 Laings Road, Lower Hutt. They had become engaged before he departed and she waited for him through the war years providing support to his parents who had both sons overseas in service.

From 1947 Alan Bryant was in Mechanical Services of Ministry of Works, Wellington. As Mechanical Draughtsman he worked on the Wellington Water Supply Scheme at Kaitoke, Rimutaka tunnel, and lighthouse conversions. He was a specialist in heating and ventilation.

From, 1954, as Draughtsman in charge of Mechanical Design, he worked on the Scott Base design, with two trips to Antarctica; Projects included air conditioning for airport operations buildings and control tower, Paremoremo top security prison boiler house, Standard Courthouse, and The Beehive.

From 1970, as Mechanical Division Chief Draughtsman, he set up a training programme for Draughting and the New Zealand Standards for Mechanical Services contract documents. He was required to take compulsory retirement in 1979 after 40 years' government service.

From 1980 to 1990 subsequent employment was as a consulting engineer for Davies and Newson, supervision of major building services contracts, commissioning Mechanical Services systems, and preparing preventative maintenance data.

From the age of 14 in Petone Alan had embarked on a lifelong interest in yachting. With tools from his father's workshop, in 1938 he built his first "Idle Along" Class Yacht Zephyr No. 3 which had to be sold when he was called up for service. After the war in 1948 Alan built a second "Idle Along" Trailer Yacht Class Whiting 16 Zephyr. He was a member of the Evans Bay Yacht Club and sailed competitively as Tactician for Noelex 22 Class. In 1994 he joined the Wellington Radio Yacht Club for 10 years when he was a designer and measurer of AC15 One Design Class. Alan was musical and played Alto Saxophone with a band, church music group, and accompanied brother Ken with the electronic organ.

Alan's older brother, Kenneth Arthur Bryant (34376) served with 2NZEZ WWII. Their father, Frank Albert Bryant served with 1st NZEF WWI on hospital ship "Maheno".

Medals

The 1939-1945 Star

Italy Star

War Medal 1939-1945

N.Z. War Service Medal 1939-1945