

June Elizabeth Dawber Bio

TLTR: Dawber (and possibly Gray) family album including WWII service auctioned April 2019. All names of WAAF buddies and family members listed. Seller mentioned Howe family but doesn't know connection.

Photo album made by Corporal Dawber in the 1940s. There was only one woman with that surname who served historically; June Elizabeth Dawber, a Private in the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps of 2NZEF, Service number 819326. Prior to enlisting she worked as a book keeper.

She was born June 1921, probably in Tauranga, to Major Roydon Robert Dawber, of Christchurch, and Elizabeth Mary Frances (Betty) née McCallum. She had one known sibling Alan Royden Dawber, born 1917.

Her father had fought in Gallipoli and following being wounded in the Dardanelles, he returned to Aotearoa and his career following was as an engineer in the government's public works department, meaning they moved relentlessly.

They were in Kohuratahi in the late 1910s. They stayed in Waihi for most of the 1920s but moved to Katikati by the end of the decade. Then Ohura in the early 1930s, and Taumaranui following that. They then spent time between Buller/Westland in the 1930s, including Hokitika, Reefton and Greymouth while moving back to live in Christchurch twice during that decade also. They settled in Westport about 1940 where June lived in Parkington Street and her family lived in Peel Street.

By 1941 June was back in Canterbury in the WAAF. She seems to have served from about 1941-1945. Her family followed her back to Christchurch about 1948 and stayed for good this time.

WAAF Contemporaries in the album are Vanda Hayter (possibly Yvonne Victorina Hayter, Westland), Janet Brown, Hanna Robinson, Margaret Loading, Barbara Bell, Mae Gundrie, Bessie Donald, Pat McGrath, Bessie Wilson, Margaret McDonald, Connie Sharpe, Rona Potter (Rona Maud Potter, Reefton), Ngaire Richards, Gabrielle Venning, Jean Dickson, Beryl Rose, Mary Cronin, and Elaine Valentine.

Trying to research this is complicated by the fact that there was more than one Miss J. Dawber (Joye Lilian Dawber) and a pilot J.E. (Jack Edwin) Dawber also in 2NZEF, both living in Christchurch in this period and then compounding this, June moved back there to train at Wigram Camp. Later she seems to have spent time in two other camps around Christchurch she refers to as 'Boom Town' I and II. They may have been close to Akaroa, where the Dawbers had history from the early 1870s and many extended family members.

Hence the album refers to time spent with a number of relatives. Name-checked are Poppy, Uncle Ken, Aunt May, Uncle Terry, Ron, Heather, Neill, Russell, a toddler Vera and a dog named Gyp, Beverley/Bev, and Jeanne/Jen both young girls likely her nieces. Photos taken are taken in Waikuku, Little Akaroa, and refers to a church and her grandmother's funeral in 1944 (possibly Gertrude Dawber).

She returned to Buller immediately on conclusion of service, appears once in the electoral roll, and then disappears, meaning she married fairly quickly. The album also contains a number of photos of 'our baby Kenneth' and another toddler named Terry so she likely had two sons in the late 1940s.

There were several 'June Elizabeths' in the West Coast in the late 1940s, but one ended up moving to Christchurch in 1946. June Elizabeth Ann Gray died in 2005 and was interred Ruru Lawn, Bromley. She was 83, the only one of them that matches Dawber's birth year. She seems to have married James Wilfred A. (Jamie) Gray, a tailor, who died in 1977; he had also served in the 2NZEF in the 23rd battalion.

The seller of the auction lot dubbed this listing Dawber-Howe however they were unable to confirm how the name 'Howe' was connected. Apparently there were two other albums acquired in a deceased estate connected to the Howe, Looker and Scott family so they assumed the Dawber album must also be related. It's a valid assumption however I was able to make no connection to that name.