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Foreword

I found Dad's diary very interesting for several reasons – firstly it was quite boring!!! It highlighted the fact the most of the time war is boring for those involved.

The work during the day and bombing (by his own side on the Germans) kept everyone awake by both day and night and it kept on going day after day, and probably week after week. Imagine the weariness that would creep into ones very bones.

Nerves going to pieces: the kindness of the commanding officers: the need to find some work to do just to break the tedium of the days: sleeping in pill boxes when they are available to sleep in. Seeing Winston Churchill – Monty – Vivian Leigh – various entertainment shows – alcohol – card games. This was, of course, near the end of Dad's war and at a time when most of the "excitement" of being under fire was over – wish we had more diaries of the earlier years!! The diary notes such things as Princess Elizabeth's birthday – our Queen Elizabeth II – and other such gems.

Carolyn sent some notes from a book about the 4th Field Ambulance that Dad served in. Some of the details in these notes coincide with some of Dad's war stories and his 1943 diary notes.

At the end are letters Dad wrote to Mum, and also we have added some of Dad's war stories. It's a pity to let them be forgotten and so while we are able, we have noted them down and hope that the generations to come can obtain a glimpse into their grandfather / great (great) grandfather's life.

Most of this was written by me using Dad's diary and with contributions from Tom Eades, Carolyn Burnet and Diane Walker. Needless to say, all errors, omissions and anything else negative, is the sole responsibility of the compiler of this edition.

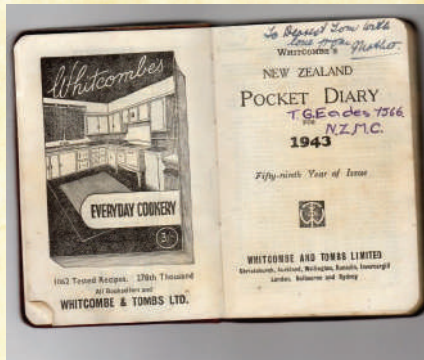
Jennifer Sheldon
The "middle" one

Notes:

1st Floor – seaman’s Block. Camp at castle (Left hand side 1st opening)
Jock or Len (QM)

Canteen Hours

Mon	1400 – 1530	/	1800 – 1930
Tue	1400 – 1530		
Thurs			1800 – 1930
Fri			1800 – 1930
Sat	1400 – 1530	/	1800 – 1930



January

Friday, 1 January 1943

On the beach – being N.Y. Day I worked and went for route march.

Saturday 2 January

On the beach. Route march.

Sunday 3 January

On the beach – thunder storm. On duty.

Frank drops in and expects to go to Maadi on 5th as Assistant Gunnery Instructor.

Monday 4 January

On the beach and on duty.

Tuesday 5 January

On the move – we go to desert position and travel about 27 miles to spot in blue and meet a sand storm.

Wednesday 6 January

Still blowing – we put up big canvas for conference – miles of red braid and pips and saluting by officers – we don't do any saluting.

Thursday 7 January

Sports Tournament.

Friday 8 January

Sports and getting ready.

Saturday 9 January

We are on the move again and are to take the desert route.

Sunday 10 January

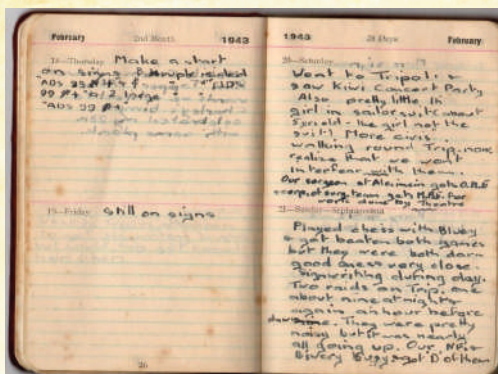
Travelling and having manoeuvres.

Monday 11 January

Travelling and waiting.

Tuesday 12 January

Reach a wadi and go along it – pretty rough and soft – get to other end by moonlight and set up. (Wadi Tamet)



Wednesday 13 January

Change our minds and stop where we are. I wander by moonlight and have to sleep in the open. $\frac{1}{4}$ moon on the up.

Col. Tells us plan of campaign – starting line and date – also probable date of arrival.

Tripoli our goal.

Thursday 14 January

We travel to starting point and set up – am on edge but sleep well – decide to take P.B.

Friday 15 January

Balloon goes up. We advance and I yarn at wireless truck – artillery in distance.

Saturday 16 January

Travelling slowly and cross ZamZam.

Sunday 17 January

Travel in own convoy and move rapidly – go down wadi – arrive at destination and set up at nine at night alongside site for drome.

Monday 18 January

Working at M.Ds.

Do signs on main track.

Several transfusions – drome occupied.

Tuesday 19 January

On the drome. Working on M.D.S.

Wednesday 20 January

On drome – working M.D.S.

Thursday 21 January

Leave drome and go through Beni Ulid. Make camp by moonlight – hear guns and aircraft busy at night.

Friday 22 January

We stand by and don't move much until night then move till 3am.

Have pain in pinny – moonlight night and plenty planes over us apparently all ours.

The Diary arrives.

Saturday 23 January

Fall of Tripoli announced over the air.
Stand to all day.

Sunday 24 January

We arrive at Azzia and have a darn good wash and did we need it.
Went through sand and ended among trees.

Saturday 30 January

I visit town of Azzia and unit moves to "M" miles from C.B.



February

Thursday 4 February 1943

Winston Churchill arrives and inspects Kiwis. Was on duty but saw him pass a few yards away and he saluted with V sign.

Friday 5 February

Went into Tripoli. Plenty of wrecked sailing ships in harbour.

Saturday 13 February

Went to Tripoli. And saw the H.D's show. "M&V" by the "Balmorals" – a good show.

Monday 15 February


Went to Trip in afternoon to get signwriting brushes but could only get camel-hair liners.


Tuesday 16 February


Mobile Cinema showed film "Topper." Afterwards we retired to Charley's bivvy and celebrated my 28th with some plonk.

Thursday 18 February

Make a start on signs.

8 double sided "ADS 89" 

and 4 double sided "MDs 99" 

and 2 large double sided "ADS 99" 

Friday 19 February

Still on signs.

Saturday 20 February

Went to Tripoli and saw Kiwi Concert Party.

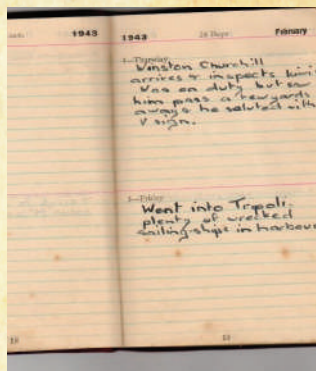
Also pretty little lti (Italian?) girl in sailor suit (about 5 years old – the girl not the suit). More civis walking round Tripoli now. Realize that we won't interfere with them.

Our surgeon at Alamein gets O.B.E. and corp. of surgical team gets M.B.E. for work done by Theatre.

Sunday 21 February

Played chess with Bluey and got beaten both games but they were both darn good ones – very close.

Signwriting during day.



Two raids on Tripoli. One about nine at night and again an hour before dawn. They were pretty noisy but it was nearly all going up. Our NF's and Bs were busy and got "D" of them.

Monday 22 February

More signs.

Tuesday 23 February

Harry beats me at chess owing to my carelessness.

Wednesday 24 February

‡ Tripoli.

Bill Smith returned to base by air. Nerves gone. Expecting him to go home.

Thursday 25 February.

‡ Tripoli.

Sam Hales returned to base – nerves gone.

Joe beats me at chess. Should have beaten him easily – had game in my hands and got too confident. Serve me right.

Friday 26 February

‡ Tripoli.

Saturday 27 February

Jim Bickerton in Hospital – think he will go home.

Choir practise.

Sunday 28 February

Pictures in evening – I got some wine.

‡ Tripoli (and how)



March

Monday 1 March 1943

Won game in Chess tournament (Sadlier)
‡ Tripoli. I finish signs.

Tuesday 2 March

At 930 were told that we move at 1600 and we did – a night move
‡ Tripoli. We saw signals – they annoyed me. Lights reminded me of Greece.

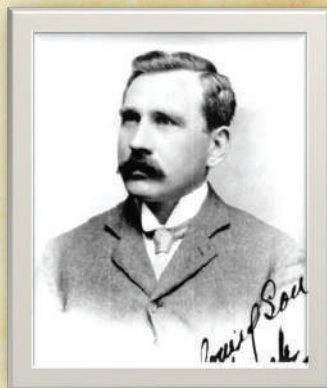
Wednesday 3 March

According to that insane scheme (??) that Harold Eaves had, he now owes me £182,570,511,890,688 +
Spent at temporary destination in blue.
Harry and I drink.

Would have been Dad's birthday – I will miss him when I return.

Thursday 4 March

We arrived at blue "CAD" miles from our last camp yesterday.
Spent time chiefly playing chess.
Am using Dad's code of figures.



Friday 5 March

We go onto African Francs currency.
Playing chess – discovered moves (and also our??) from R.S.M. Beat him but owing to false move asked him to replay tournament game.

Saturday 6 March

Hugh won tournament game so we have a day of ... games and I won five of them.
We got strafed and Roy Holly and Captain Isote were killed. I got bad attack of NYON and only slept for a few hours. Tanks came down from hills and GOCs order of the day.

Sunday 7 March

Frequent raids by Jerry – very "mousquise" – still NYON – artillery stops about dawn and starts again just after dusk.

Monday 8 March

A quiet day – thank God.
On guard at night 7-9 and 1-3.

Tank attack broken up by artillery and A-tank – they lost 53. Our tanks didn't even have to go in.

Tuesday 9 March

Received letters from home, Joy and Bet – answered Joy's.
A quiet day and night.

Wednesday 10 March

A quiet night and day.
Won chess with Murray. We pack.

Thursday 11 March

And start our journey and travel (by miles and CM) 1 sell Vs for 5 Francs each – hear div move up at night. We travelled without red crosses or numbers or ferns on trucks and took off our tags and badges – traffic passing nearly all night – nerves rotten.



Friday 12 March

Saw Col. re nerves and he said that I should go back to base and expect to go back tomorrow.
Card written out and looks more like a testimonial am listed as B.C. so will have to send cables at first opportunity.
Am taking 2 gms luminal tonight so should sleep well. Reinforcements arrive – got disturbed several times with patients.

Saturday 13 March

Was evacuated to 15 (UK) CC Sal-Ben Gardine and met the boys from Transfusion Unit. Capt Muir called to see me in evening.

Sunday 14 March

Reveille 530 then went to 8ccs at ZAVARA and thence to Tommy Hospital at Tripoli (16G.H.) Rode in truck in morning and rode beside driver in Ambulance in afternoon.

Met Frank Anderson and Ernie Schaab – saw Doc and am to be transferred to G. Hospital.

Night sister looks very nice.

Monday 15 March

Still in Tripoli. Went into town in afternoon and had shampoo and got all the sand out of my hair. We got some giggle soup ††.

Tuesday 16 March

Discharged from H. Thank Heavens – for breakfast 1 sausage between three - messed about all day and then sent to Tommy Transit camp but fortunately met Kiwi Sgt and got great reception even supper and we slept in the jail ‡ Tripoli. Big raid and heavy AA. Got about 45 in A.A. and 1 by N.F.

Wednesday 17 March

Waited round all day – at dusk transport took us out to NZ Advance Base at Suanni. They jacked up a meal, blankets, etc and we slept under the stars only it rained but covered ourselves with bivvy cover.

Thursday 18 March

Missed M.D. so have to wait till tomorrow – went to Tripoli and got some cognac which made us sleep well. Dug in. Bivvy pictures at night but couldn't sit it out. Saw bomb town by ?? Tripoli – plenty shipping and “B” of the Navy.

Friday 19 March

Saw M.D. and got decent reception. Everyone went on OC's Parade and got a pep talk re plonk and interfering with the natives. Due to go to con. camp in afternoon – nice place in trees – Sgt Brown from 23rd A in M.I. Got payed. Rained most of the night. 2 Luminal but no good – gunfire most of night. Probably naval. Large explosion ½ mile away. I think they got something as sky got pretty red.

Saturday 20 March

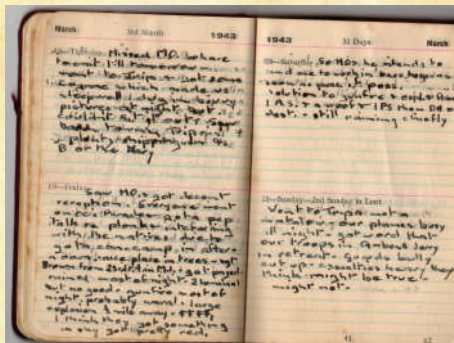
So M.O he intends to send me to work in base hospital as soon as possible if possible. Solution to gunfire and explosions are A.S. and a woof and IPs then DH on dest – still raining chiefly.

Sunday 21 March

Went to Tripoli and met a matalow – our planes lousy all night – got word that our troops in Ambes and Jerry in retreat. Guards badly cut up – casualties heavy they think – might be true – might not.

Monday 22 March

Busy assisting hygiene making seats etc – took luminal – slept a bit better. Our planes still busy.



Tuesday 23 March

Planes still active – otherwise a quiet night.

Wednesday 24 March

Saw M.O. and he advised a transfer to I.G.H. – still graded B.3.
Changed to tent 16 and became tent commander.

Thursday 25 March

Transfer sent to Col. King – will have to go from him to I.G.H. – will take about a fortnight – spent the day in digging and the night in a pillbox.

Friday 26 March

Slept in Pillbox again. Heard a rumour that Frank was at O.C.T.U.
(False)

**Saturday 27 March**

Slept in Pillbox. Mess orderly for day.

Sunday 28 March

Went to Tripoli – bought some cognac and of course slept well – thunder and rain.

Monday 29 March

Saw M.O. and am now B.1. On guard 2100-2230. Went for walk in bathing suit – bump into Bedouin tribe and dogs welcomed me – had more cognac and slept well.

Tuesday 30 March

Went round and saw line of fortifications (old Italian ones) machine gunposts and gun pits camouflaged to look like wog huts. Cognac – so slept well – did some washing.

Wednesday 31 March

More machine gun and gunpits visited about six miles of 12 ... after noon. Slept in Pillbox.

April

Thursday 1 April 1943

Went for a walk and found wog village 100 yards away.

Friday 2 April

Put up some tents. Slept in Pill Box.

Saturday 3 April

Went to Tripoli and picked up Snowy's watch (?) back shortly after lunch – pictures at Con Camp at night – aircraft (ours) kept waking me up – took 1 gm Phenobarbital.

Sunday 4 April

Did some washing so it decided to rain. Wrote to Joy – went round forts.

Monday 5 April

Walked over dunes – received letter from Khadejeh – sent cable home – slept in Pill Box – saw M.O. and still B.1. pat. issue of 20 De Reszko.



Tuesday 6 April

Went round forts and bought some eggs. Slept in Pill Box.

Wednesday 7 April

Cigarette issue – saw E.N.S.A. show in afternoon. Darn good show. 7 girls, 3 men – Benny and comedian best. Slept in Pill Box.

Thursday 8 April

Went for walk in dunes. Slept in Pill Box.

Friday 9 April

Call for a painter and I answered – went to Tripoli to Y.W.C.A. to paint furniture but it was not ready – spent most of time with woman from Y.W.C.A. running round town to get things jacked up. Will go back bardin (??). Slept in Pill Box.

Saturday 10 April

Slept in Pill Box. T Williams birthday and he had some cognac so got into some. On showers in afternoon. Saw pictures in camp in evening.

Sunday 11 April

Loafed in sand dunes in morning. Showers in afternoon. Slept in Pill Box.

Monday 12 Monday

Saw M.O. in morning and later in day sat for preliminary board. Issued with summer clothing in morning and received 2 slacks, 2 bush shirts, 1 shorts, 2 under pants, 2 singlets, hosetops and putties. Was given job as orderly room clerk and moved my things to orderly room. Plenty of aircraft about (ours). Woke finally at 5.45am.

Tuesday 13 April

‡ Tripoli. Went for work during evening – near fort when fireworks started. Eventually spent night there.

Wednesday 14 April

Went to Tripoli and got some of my summer gear altered at cost of 10/- fair amount of A.A. at shoufties – slept in Pill Box.

(Marked in diary on Wednesday 21 April – Birthday of Princess Elizabeth)

(Sunday 25 April – Easter Day)

May

Saturday 1 May 2043

Mariskino drink. Went to Tripoli and chiefly walked round. Sesh in evening. Got shirt ironed.

Monday 3 May

Con staff arrived – loafed round.
Had some plonk. Got letter from Mum and Angela.

Tuesday 4 May

Showed C. Staff our methods – Found chap tight 0330 next day and brought him home – he was looking for L.O.B.

Wednesday 5 May

Went to 3GH for board and was told I had earned a rest.
Saw Captain Sutherland and told him I wanted a job. He said OK – put in application – did so same day.
‡ Tripoli.

Thursday 13 May

Order to “Cease Fire” given in Tunisia. We now own all of Africa.
Meet Jimmy Smith and we have a good yarn. Con Staff take over orderly room and my instructions are to enjoy myself – no parades – leave pass on application.

Friday 14 May

Go to picture in Tripoli and have a bath.

Saturday 15 May

Go to Tripoli and see pictures.

Sunday 16 May

Jim and I went to Tripoli – saw a picture and had a swim.

Monday 17 May

Two letters from Mum and one from Joy – answered both.



Tuesday 18 May

Arrive at 3NZGH and make myself comfortable with bed and bedside table. Loaf for rest of day. Got good send-off from Con Camp and the glad hand from Black Tracker.

Wednesday 19 May

Start working on G.D. on trucks and collect timber. Big drums of oil etc and ½ mile heavy cable. Meet Huia Blythe (S/Sgt. G.D).

Thursday 20 May

Messing about raking leaves, papers, etc.

Friday 21 May

Still on GD and shifting tent pegs from side of Fort. Hours 8-5 – too much like chain gang and looks like invented work. See S/Sgt Chapman and say I want an inside job. Loose some kale playing poker.

Saturday 22 May

Start off on needless shifting of gear and then am told to report to Ward XI – 3 sisters and they seem OK – only 12 patients – none bad. 3 VDs – sister on afternoon shift suggests that I have 40 winks – good idea.

Wednesday 26 May

Half day – did some washing in afternoon.

Thursday 27 May

Had day off so went for walk in morning and mended socks, etc. Met some Tommy's and had a party at night. Got rid of about 12 gallons of plonk.

Friday 28 May

Worked through day – Tangi in tent at night – pretty noisy.

Saturday 29 May

Tangi on in tent and they got rid of 12 gallons plonk – worked through day.

Sunday 30 May

Tangi on tent so clear off till 0130 hours but party still in progress. Ended ½ hour after. Worked divided day.

Monday 31 May

Fred goes on to outside work and that leaves only me – makes things pretty busy. Seven bed patients and nearly all have to be washed – work through day – patients and chaps going home had to come to back as Hospital ship late.



June

Tuesday 1 June 1943

Am to go on night duty at Ward 6 on the 4th at 2030 hours to 0700. Worked all through day – pretty busy – patients and APR's get away safely.

Wednesday 2 June

Procured Mosquito net and washed and fixed same. Worked divided day and met S Chaveaux.

Thursday 3 June

Day off. Went to Tripoli and saw a show by the "Globe Trotters" Quite good, specially comedienne – got shoes fixed for Sister Maister.

Friday 4 June

Went on night shift at 2030 at Ward 6. Light copper at 0800 hours at 3-6-4-7. Supper 12-1am. See that lights are fill – 0100 – 0200 – cut bread, cut own bread about 0500 app. 21 loaves.

Saturday 5 June

Pte Hogg breaks 530 to toast. 3 Suph tabs 0600. 31 Dunbarton study chart and fluid chart.

Monday 21 June

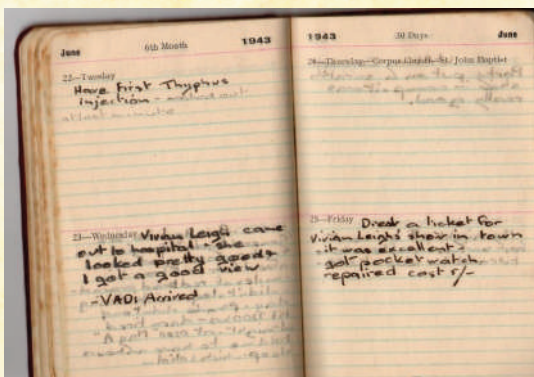
Paraded to see (General Lyon Gorgie) and got a darn good view – about four feet from him. Miles of red braid around. Didn't sleep much during day. Parade didn't end till 1300 hours. Darn tired at night – at 0300 "May A" told me to have an hours sleep which I did.

Tuesday 22 June

Have first Thypus injection – washed out at last minute.

Wednesday 23 June

Vivian Leigh came out to hospital. She looked pretty good and I got a good view. VAD's arrived.



Friday 25 June

(Unreadable) a ticket for Vivian Leigh's show in town – it was excellent. Got pocket watch repaired. Cost 5/-.

Saturday 26 June

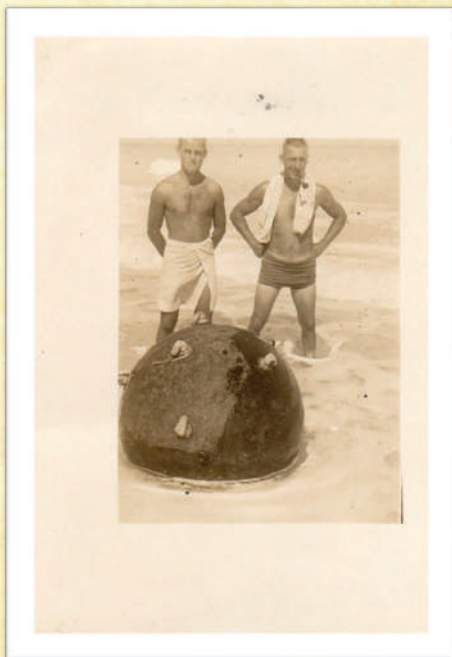
1st Army Concert Party put on a scratch show in camp. It was really good.

Sunday 27 June

My night off so went for swim in afternoon. Turned in about 2130.

Wednesday 30 June

Had 1st Typhus injection.



July

Friday 2 July 1943

Weather starts to get hot – in M.I. Room 113° in shade before lunch – probably went up as high as 119° in shade in pack store. Reported higher actually.

Saturday 3 July

Still hot but slept in pill box where it was pretty cool.

Thursday 8 July

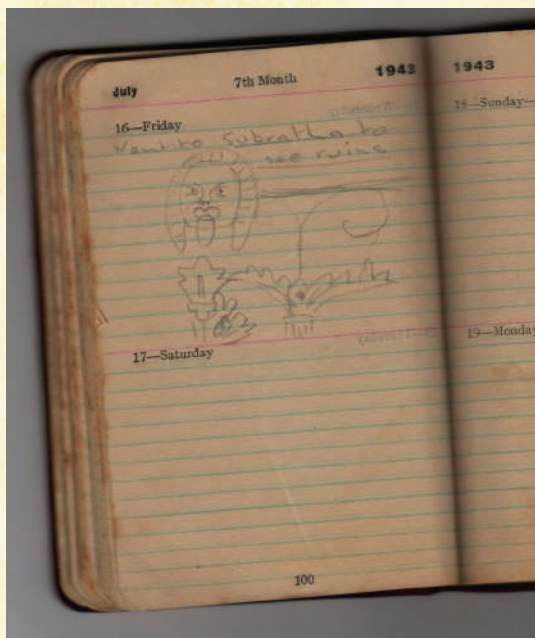
Last night of night duty.

Sunday 3 July

Start day duty at 6.

Friday 17 July

Went to Subratha to see ruins.



August

Wednesday 4 August 1943

(Noted in diary – Birthday of Queen Elizabeth)

On the male op again.

Monday 9 August

Read confirmation that Frank was in New Zealand.

Wednesday 11 August

Day off.

Thursday 26 August

Day off (I hope).

Saturday 28 August

I receive news that I am going home. Due to go to Cairo by air on 2nd September.

Sunday 29 August

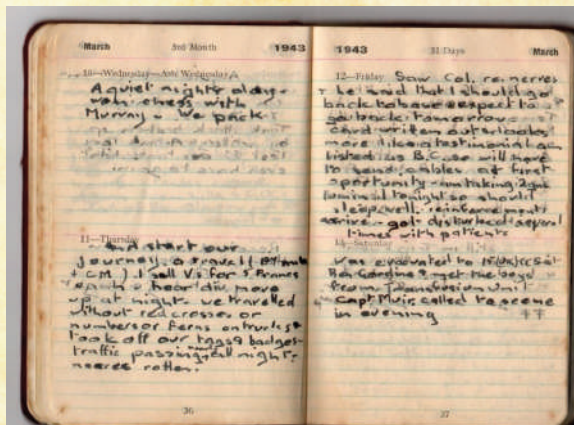
"May A" invites me to tea in Sister's Mess and produces a bottle.

Monday 30 August

Got excited and worked wrong shift.

Tuesday 31 August

Last day of work. Morrie produces a half bottle of gin.



September

Wednesday 1 September 1943

I leave and go to Tripoli to see Movement Officer (bags of headaches at Tripoli being got ready – map (DY) ships).
Get Priority Pass – slept at drome in good transit camp.

Thursday 2 September

Reveille at 0525. Report for truck 0650 – plane leaves.



FINAL NOTE

At the outbreak of the Second World War Tom enlisted in the 1st Echelon, which he did on the first day of the war (which was declared in September 1939). He started with the 1st Field Ambulance which would explain that while the 4th Field Ambulance left on a ship from Dunedin, Tom's ship left from Wellington in January 1940 and sailed (with a couple of stops) to Egypt. He had been a member of St John's Ambulance, but later he completed a blood transfusion course and concluded the war doing blood transfusions. During the war Tom served in Syria, Egypt, Greece and other parts of the Middle East.

Tom, like Frank, fought in Greece. He was captured by the Germans and held as a POW in Sidi Rezegh. Later they were all turned over to the Italians who were at that time pulling out of the war.

The Italians just up and left so the POWs were able to walk away and reach freedom. Tom's aversion to milk came about because the enemy troops laced it with salt, hence he always drank his tea black.

He was almost captured again but escaped on the last official boat load out of Greece. If he had not made that he probably would have become a prisoner of war again. He eventually returned to New Zealand in 1944 with the second furlough draft, having missed the boat with the first draft.



At end of Diary

Washing

Phone number 26504

Mrs H W Sims

131 Williamson Ave

Grey Lynn

Various cash accounts recorded. He was paid 3/- a day while on active service.

Cash Account—February 1943				1943 Cash Account—March			
DATE	RECEIVED	PAID		DATE	RECEIVED	PAID	
Sep/26 @ 3/-	3 15 11	11 11 11		1-2-43	11 3 11	10 12 11	
Oct/3 @ 3/-	2 12 -	11 11 11		1-3-43	11 3 11	11 12 11	
Nov/30 @ 3/-	2 10 -	5 1 11		1-4-43	11 3 11	12 12 11	
Dec/3 @ 3/-	2 12 -	16 14 11		1-5-43	11 3 11	12 12 11	
Jan/3 @ 3/-	2 12 -			1-6-43	11 3 11	12 12 11	
Feb/14 @ 3/-	2 12 -			1-7-43	11 3 11	12 12 11	
	25 12 -						
Cred. K. to bank							
19-2-43	25 9 10						
	1 1 0	10					
22-2-43	2 1 10						
	1 1 0						
	10 2 10						

Information taken from <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/war/second-world-war/timeline>

12 September:

Enlistment for 2 New Zealand Expeditionary Force (2 NZEF) begins

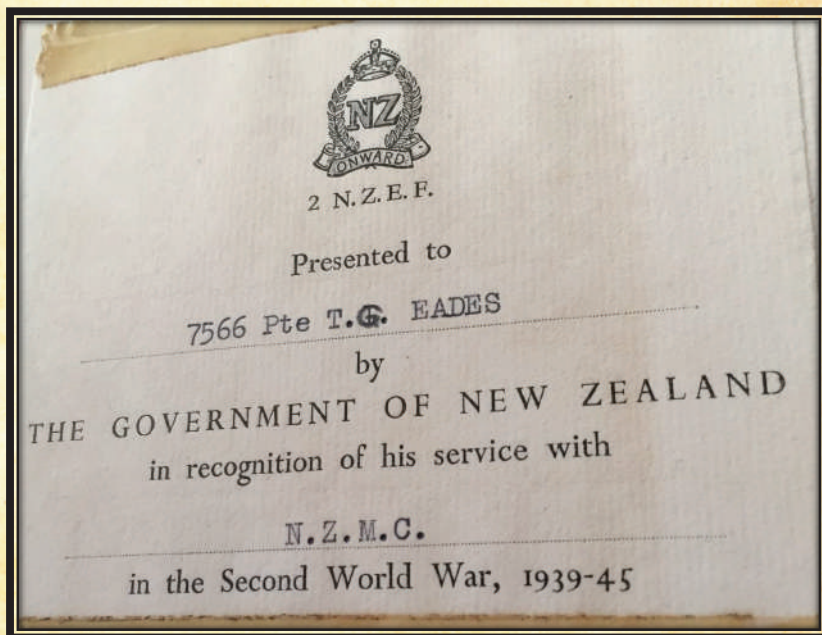
3 October:

First Echelon, 2 NZEF training begins at Burnham, Trentham, Hopuhopu and Papakura

11 December:

First Echelon advance party sails from Wellington

Notes taken by Carolyn from “Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939 – 45. Medical Units. War History Branch, New Zealand. By J. B. McKinney. War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1952.”



It is interesting to be able to time some of Dad's stories to the places mentioned below.

1940

5 January 1940. Left from Lyttelton on HMT Dunera. (We know Dad left from Wellington on the first ship out of New Zealand.)

Egypt

13 February 1940. Docked at Port Tewfik and then move on to Maadi Camp (just 8 miles from Cairo). Overlooking the Nile Valley with, in the hazy distance, the Pyramids. (Dad mentioned going to see the pyramids. He said the locals would claim to climb one in a ridiculously short amount of time, and would take bets on meeting that time or shorter. The soldiers couldn't believe it could be done and the local climber/s would make a very nice income.)

August/September 1940. First action in the Western Desert. Perhaps at Mersa Batruh but pretty certain at Maaten Burbeita.

1941

January 1941. On to Helwan Camp (Cairo still less than an hour away).

Early in 1941, leave given with many soldiers heading for Cairo, Alexandria and Palestine.

Greece

March 1941. On to Amiriya Transit camp en route to Greece. Left Maadi Camp at 3am for a march and then train to Alexandria. 4 days on Greek steamer Ionia landing in Piraeus (Athens) and then on to Hymettus.

17 March. On to Katerina (below northern slopes of Mt Olympus).

23 March. Camped just north of Katerina in village of Paleonellene or Kalokouri..

10 April withdrawal.

This time in Greece sounded pretty bad as the allies were retreating soon after arriving. Weather conditions were always cold and with either

snow or rain, usually over appalling roads perched around steep cliffs and being pursued by the Germans.

Action at Servia – with medical stations set up near Ag Demetrios and Dolikhe.

14 April. Speedy, dangerous withdrawal while being bombed and machine-gunned by the Germans. Through Larissa, Pharsala to Lamia.

20 April. A couple of days at Lamia (18 miles south of Molos) still being bombed and strafed.

22 April. Evacuating Greece – forced to jettison large quantities of medical equipment and person kit.

24 April. More action at Thermopylae.

25/26 April. Withdrew over the Corinth Canal where the bridge was blown up soon after they had vacated it.

28 April. Finally on board the Ajax leaving at 4am. This was a very worrying time as the initial destroyer sent to collect them was unable to load the patients.

So while all the other units evacuating were able to get on to their ships, 4th Field Ambulance were sitting on the beach waiting for a ship that could take them and their patients. The Ajax finally arrived and stayed to board them all long after the time passed that they should have left. I think then transferred to the Thurland Castle and returned to Egypt in a convoy of 27 ships.

Egypt

May 1941. At Helwan Camp in Egypt and granted one week leave with three weeks being very light, negligible duties or training.

September 1941. Into the Western Desert.

Libya

November 1941. To Libya to help in relieving Tobruk. Stayed 8 miles south of Sidi Azeiz.

25 November. Captured?? During this campaign all field medical units (except 4ADS) were at some time in the enemy hands with some being taken prisoner.

General Rommel visited the 4th Field Ambulance Mobile Unit and told the Germans that they were to leave the men alone so that they could continue their work. Apparently the Italians were being a little forceful until hearing that Rommel had given orders. I think the Germans then retreated. Before being taken capture conditions in the operating theatre were very poor due to a limited amount of water. The entire Mobile Surgical Unit staff could have been safely moved from the area but this idea was abandoned due to the plight of the patients. Father Forsman conducted Mass while later Padre Underhill held a song service. A humorous (?) episode is recorded: "One of the staff-sergeants, who had dared to argue with an Italian officer, was on his way to the shooting gallery when, seeing Lt-Col Speight, he yelled loudly to attract the Colonel's attention, "He's going to shoot me, sir!" said the staff-sergeant. "That's tough luck," said the Colonel. "I wonder if we can talk him out of it." Whereupon Father Forsman was called on to reason with the Italian and save a delicate situation."

1942

Egypt

January 1942. Back to Maadi Camp with generous leave given with men going to Luxor, Thebes and Aswan.

End February. Moved 20 miles north of Suez for a couple of weeks with just sickness to take care of.

Syria

5 March. Arrived in Baalbak in Syria having travelled through the Sinai Desert – snow!

25 June. Back to the Western Desert to Mersa Matruh.

28 June. Went to support the holding of the Alamein Line. 4th Field Ambulance in the Kapona Box. This was an important point in the Battle for Egypt. During fighting General Freyburg was injured, some intense fighting. In the Kaponga Box once again there were heavy water restrictions with some amazing trips to collect water while heavily attacked.

2 July. 4th Field Ambulance caring for 215 cases "In its tribulations the MDG (Mobile Dressing Station) was cheered by the congratulations of the CO on the excellent condition of the wounded on arrival at his unit".

In the 10 days to 6 July, 4th Field Ambulance had treated 612 battle casualties and 314 sick.

21 July. El Mreir Depression “almost overwhelming amount of work” necessary for operating theatres to keep going all night until about 3am, when the staff snatched a brief rest and started back again about three hours later. “Staff of MDS were pleased to hear that their patients arrived in Cairo in excellent condition an hour after leaving their dressing station: (evacuated by air)”.

By the end of July it was clear that Egypt had been saved from the Germans. Allies continued to chase the Germans north.

30/31 August. Battle of Alam Haifa. 4th Field Ambulance in support. First casualties back to 4 MDS on 3 September – by midnight 561 patients.

“All departments of the MDS worked continuously all night and well into the following morning. In the operating theatres there was a thick atmosphere of blood, ether, and steam from the sterilisers”.

“In a remarkable period of work from 27 June, 4th Field Ambulance had borne the brunt of the work of the field medical units and had admitted 5,026 patients”.

10 September. Back to Maadi Camp.

23 October. Battle of El Alamein. 4th Field Ambulance east of El Alamain to run a divisional rest station.

18 November. Moved north to Bardia.

4th December. In three days had moved 356 miles through desert to El Haseiat and then to Nofilia where they set up near Marble Arch acting as an air evacuation centre. (Perhaps this was the time Dad worked out how the army was to move through the desert and Monty agreed with him?)

Rest of December at Nofilia then relaxation and Christmas.

1943 (the year of Dad's diary)

Tunisia

January 1943. Advance to Tripoli.

18-21 January. At Bir Dufan doing air evacuations.

After three years of fighting over 1,000 miles of desert the enemy had been driven back to Tunisia. The NZ Division based outside Tripoli.

6 March. Battle of Medenine.

18 March. The "Mareth Line" being fought for with the 34th Field Ambulance established on the Ben Gardane-Foum Road. First frontal attack on Mareth Line did not succeed.

26 March. Main attack. 4th Field Ambulance doing surgical work. Wounded started arriving at 6pm. Had four operating teams who worked until 3am. Couldn't stop working as more wounded came in. By nightfall had 400 patients.

Mareth Line was taken.

Movement from Medenine to Enfidaville while continuing to chase Germans north.

23-31 March. Matmata.

10-11 April. Triaga.

13 April. Left surgical team to support attack on Takrouna.

14 April – 5 May. Sidi bou Ali.

13 May. Germans surrendered with more than 31,000 prisoners taken.

Leave was given with men visiting Takrouna, Kairouan, Tunis and Carthage.

15-17 May. Began 2000 mile journey back to Egypt via Nofilia, Benghazi, Tobruk, Baria, Mersa Matruh, El Alamain ... in a 300 mile column back to Maadi Camp. Arrived 31 May-1 June.

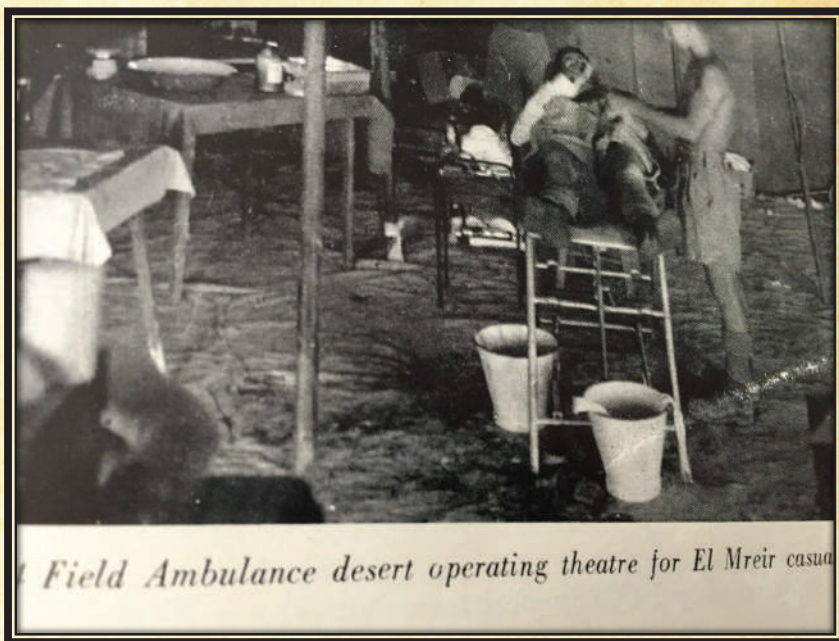
Egypt

North African Campaign over. 14 Days special leave.

“The nominal roles of those returning to NZ on furlough under the Ruapehu Scheme were received. When the men affected were advised a series of congratulatory and farewell carousels began.”

June 1943. At Maadi Camp. “Those due to return to NZ on furlough, married men and some of the single men of the first three echelons, were sent to another section of Maadi. Though it was unknown to them at the time, for many it was a final goodbye to the units in in which they had served for so long”.

(Dad had notice in August that he was coming home. His brother, Frank, had already returned.)



Tom commented that this photo was included in the book of the official history of the medical units. I found Dad looking at the photo one day, and he said that he was certain that the guy on the bed with his arm in plaster was him. Remember that I'm going back to the 1960's, so I might be slightly in error. However, it seems there was a photographer around and so Dad was put onto the bed and a plaster cast put on him for effect, with which a photo was taken and found its way into the book as "the real thing"!



This photo has a note on the back - in Dad's handwriting- which reads 'Taken at first M.D.S. in Lybia - sending wounded patients back to Egypt. I seem to be bashful & am hiding my face'.

It's dated November 1941.

Diane confirms that Dad told her he was in both photos – and he was the “patient” in both photos.

War Stories – as we remember them

Following are stories Diane and Jennifer remember Dad telling us. This all happened before 1974 when Dad died – 46 years ago. We can't guarantee the total accuracy of them, but we're only writing down what we believe is true.

Dad didn't talk much about the war, but he did sometimes, and how much I wished later that I had encouraged him to talk more and to have taken notes. Dad's nickname overseas was "Kiwi".

Dad told Tom a number of tales after Tom's national service at Waiouru, over a couple of beers. Some these stories add to the memories Diane and I remembered, plus some extra beauties!! There are times when the narrative is in the words of the person telling the story and other times it is told in the third person.



Sundry comments

- Dad spoke about drinking with mates, or cobbers, during the war – in Egypt I think – and blaming their illness the next day on the nuts they had eaten.
- The terrible wounds of some people who had the most incredible will to live.
- The kindness of some of the local people.

Dad said the ANZACS were the most welcome troops, after the Gurkas. They fought very hard. He said the Gurkas were amazing, though – they could cut a man's throat before the person had any idea there was anyone else there. Sentries hated their duties when the Gurkas were around. But if there were no Gurkas – then the next best thing were the ANZACS – more prized than more than double the number of troops of any other nationality (so said Dad, and I see no reason to disbelieve him)!

At one stage Dad was with his group and there was some bombing on the horizon.

A woman unwisely told Dad how lovely the lights were – such a pretty sight. Dad told her brusquely that men were being blown to bits by those bright lights. She didn't talk to him again.

Greece

While he was in Greece, Dad was walking through/across a clearing that had a grove of trees at one end. While he was still well in the open, a German plane suddenly came into sight and headed for him. He was running as fast as he could for the safety of the grove of trees when he saw a woman with her small child hiding there. Instinctively he changed direction, running away from that spot. Listening to the plane and how close it would be, he waited till the last possible moment, then flung himself forward. It was at that time that the machine gun bullet took off the heel of his boot.

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A story you (Jennifer) will be well aware of is when he and friend were hiding in a cave while in Greece. The battle for Greece was obviously lost, and troops were making their way to beaches (or a particular beach) to be taken by the navy to safety. Some of the local people were obviously aware that a couple of soldiers were hiding in the cave and a young woman brought the food. She begged them to take her with them but they were unable to do so as no civilians were being allowed on the ships.

This incident affected him very deeply; so much so that as you know, he named you after her – a very beautiful thing to do. Her name was obviously in the Greek and unfortunately, I am not sure of the exact spelling, but it was either Genifer or Genevefio. (Tom used to call me Jenny-heifer – a little prophetic in that I married a farmer.)

.....

On the way to the beach, Dad came across a guy he knew, who had, I suppose through fear, got well and truly drunk, so much so that Dad actually carried him a lot of the way to the beach. A superior – either NCO or officer – ordered him to leave the guy. Dad's reply was very short and to the point!

When the guy sobered up, he was, as you can imagine, incredibly grateful. He several times told Dad that when they got back to New Zealand, he was going to introduce him to his wife. Unfortunately, the guy received a "Dear John" letter while overseas.

Dad said that he was in Wellington one day after the war and heard his name called out. There was his friend, hanging out of a tram, waving to him. But, try as he might, they did not find each other.

.....

Having got to the beach, the soldiers knew that the next day would either see them dead or prisoners of war. Suddenly, out of the darkness, they heard a voice say "Aye, Aye, Sir" and the sound of oars. The Navy had arrived. The sailors had also been at Dunkirk. One of them commented that the British all left belongings e.g. weapons, etc behind. In contrast, just about every New Zealander was carrying something that could still be used. The sailors, it seems, were quite impressed by the contrast between the two groups.

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It was possibly on this journey that on board ship there was a rather uppity English officer who became a little stropky about the slovenly antipodean soldiers. A more experienced officer took him aside and advised him to tread warily or else he would find himself overboard. These men didn't accept or respect those rules after what they had been through.

Two short stories about being evacuated.

On the ship, a sailor told Dad that if they were attacked, they had nothing to worry about. It seems that the magazine was directly beneath them and in an explosion, they wouldn't know anything about it!!

He was once on a plane and made the comment that if they were attacked, they would have to find out quickly about parachutes! There was a shrug as he was told there were none on the plane!

Taken Prisoner

Dad was taken as a prisoner of war. He had no hard feelings towards the Germans, although he felt a bit different towards Douglas Bader and others like him who took to "Goon baiting" in POW camps. This made life considerably harder for all other POWs as a consequence of their misbehaviour.

When Dad was taken by the Germans he was in a group of men, and the German said “Give me click-click, binocs and boom-boom, or I will rifle you.” They immediately gave him their camera/s, binocular/s and rifle/s, so they were not shot.

.....

He was in a truck, being taken off with other captured men, and one of the men in the truck reached into his pocket to take out a cigarette. There was a sudden loud click of a rifle being prepared for instant use. The man froze. The German guard said in imperfect English “It is war.” Dad said the man could have easily been shot, but the German preferred to warn him instead.

.....

Dad woke in the morning and a German soldier was standing over him, pointing his rifle at him. Dad said that he looked a really nice man and had a gentle and kind smile on his face. His words to Dad were the classic “For you, my friend, the war is over.”

The Germans were being overtaken by the Allies, and they had to either shoot the POWs or leave them to be collected by the Italians. Before the Germans moved out, leaving them to the Italians, Field Marshall Rommel came in specially to see the medical team, in order to thank them personally for the care they had taken of any wounded or sick Germans who had fallen into their hands.

After the majority of the Germans moved out, a German doctor who was still there, went to a nearby river in order to get water for the prisoners. An Italian guard shot him dead.

The POWs had their Padre with them – Father Forsman, who was later Parish Priest at Remuera. Dad said Father Forsman spoke to the officer and asked that the men be released. The answer was negative. Father Forsman was somewhat more outspoken on the subject, according to Dad, threatening the officer with eternal hellfire and damnation if he ordered the men to be shot. As they were being lined up, the guy next to him said to Dad “My mother isn’t going to be pleased about this!” The final thing that persuaded the soldiers not to shoot them was that Father Forsman told the officer in charge – I expect in front of his firing party – that if they did shoot them, that he (Father Forsman) was going to get the Pope to excommunicate them. It obviously worked. Dad always had tremendous respect for Father Forsman, saying he had saved many lives.

After about a week, the New Zealand prisoners got up one morning and found that overnight the Italians had quietly packed up and moved out.

Light hearted moments

Dad said he was sitting on a beach with many others. One soldier yawned widely, and those sitting near him also yawned. Very quickly, the whole beach was full of yawning soldiers, because of one man.

.....

Being in the 4th Field Ambulance, there were times when the soldiers came in for injections (what they were for, I don't know). Dad was always amazed how these men who frequently faced bombs and artillery from the enemy, were so frightened of an injection. They would queue up for their turn, and some would pass out shortly before arriving for their jab. When this happened, one of the medics would quickly give him his injection, and then would bring him round and stand him up in the queue again. When he approached, white-faced and shaken, they would wave him on – “did you when you were out cold.”

.....

Dad said a favourite trick was to target some of the men who had become drunk. They would be on their bed in the tent, and some clever person would take a container with water in it, and an empty container. In the early hours of the morning – not too early – they would go close to the man's ear and tip the water from one container into the other, and back again, several times. Sure enough, the suggestion would take root, and the man would invariably wet himself. The fun bit was watching the lengths he would go to the next morning, once he discovered his problem, to ensure no-one else in the tent discovered his dreadful secret!

.....

When they went on leave, as one would expect, heavy drinking was on the agenda. I believe that among other places, they got to know Cairo rather well.

On one occasion, Dad had stayed the night in a hotel, and woke up feeling – shall we say – slightly hung over. As he opened one eye, he saw by the bed a whisky bottle with some liquid still in it. The problem was, the bottle was “not staying still” but was “swimming” round in a big circle! Very carefully, so that his head did not fall off, he put an arm out and waited for the bottle “to come into range.” Fortunately for him, it did! He then set about restoring his system with “a hair of the dog.”

.....

It was during an air raid. Dad said that you could tell from the sound as the bombs descended whether or not you were in danger. He could tell from the sound of one that if he did not take cover, that he was gone – no doubts at all. Fortunately for him (or that’s what he thought at the time!) there was a thick concrete wall running alongside the road beside. He automatically dived over the wall, heading head first into the “canal” on the other side, and became totally – and I mean totally – submerged. It was a sewer!! Raw sewage!! He climbed out, and over the wall. As he trudged back to barracks, the bombs were falling all around him, but miraculously he walked through unscathed. He told me that he couldn’t have cared less about his safety!!

I’m guessing that he was given a very wide berth until after he had several showers and even then, maybe avoided when-ever possible for a day or two!!

.....

But to return to lighter moments, a captured German was brought in. He was in need of a blood transfusion and Dad had been trained to give them. The German – unlike the vast majority that they met – was a most obnoxious Nazi.

So, Dad scouted round and got the required amount of suitable blood. But our “naughty” Dad only took blood from Jewish soldiers who were only too happy to donate. Once the transfusion was completed, Dad told said Nazi of the blood that was in him. You can imagine, can’t you!

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One day the men were digging fox holes and Dad’s superior officer berated him for digging his too deep. Later on enemy aircraft came overhead and used them for target practice. Dad dived into his fox hole, followed by the irate officer and then several others.

.....

One of the duties Dad had (alongside all in the medical unit) was to take details about men who frequented the brothels. Among the checklist was (obviously) name and regimental number, who they went with, what precautions (for their sake, not the girls, I presume!) they took. Dad recalls one time asking a guy what it was like, and he had noticed how many clients that girl had received that evening. “Beautiful,” replied the guy. Dad didn’t have to heart to inform him that well over 30 guys had already seen her that evening!

.....

One evening, the Madam offered Dad a “free” interlude with her. He declined. She assured him that she “would do all the work” ! He continued to decline. Seeing that he was not going to “partake” she then invited him to share the chicken supper that she was about to enjoy. This offer, he did accept.

He said that she was a well-known “lady” and was actually very nice. People generally really liked her. Unfortunately, she came to a sad end. One evening, a drunken American threw her off a balcony – an action that resulted in her death.

Dad actually was very sympathetic towards the prostitutes. He said they were nice girls who were trying, in the only way they were able, to take care of family – whether it be siblings, parents or their own children.

.....

There is, however, one (to me anyway) amusing tale. A guy came to Dad one day. He had a “date” with a prostitute who was quite sought after. The guy had a hangover and asked for a “medication” to help his unwell feelings, which he duly received. It was only after he set off on his assignation that Dad realised that one of the ingredients of “the cure” would ensure that the guy was – shall we say – headed for an unsuccessful rendezvous! On his getting back to barracks, Dad enquired as to his visit, to which he said that no matter how hard he tried, he was unable to “come up with the goods”. On being told why, he was not pleased!!

One final bit on this topic. On my first day in Waiouru, we were being given an introductory talk at the end of which we were asked if there were any questions. One guy piped up “Hey, sergeant – is it true that they put kill cock in the mashed potatoes?” To which the sergeant replied, “Don’t worry lad – they stop doing it a couple of days before you go on leave!”

I mention this for the simple reason that Dad told me that exactly the same question was asked when he was overseas.

Operating Theatre

We need to remember as we look at some of the more light-hearted incidents, that war is brutal. There were times when Dad was part of non-stop operating, as he assisted the surgeons – I suppose the equivalent of an operating theatre nurse.

One time, a man was brought in: he was a petrol tanker driver, whose tanker had been hit by a bomb. He was still alive but totally burnt and in extreme agony. He was dying and didn't have long to live, but as mentioned, the shock and agony was terrible. The doctor ordered Dad to give him a dose of a certain medication. Dad looked at him as he knew it was 4-5 times the strength of a fatal dose. The surgeon looked back and said "Your heard what I said." I must say, I'm glad that both the surgeon and Dad acted in that way.

.....

During the war a man was brought into the tent bleeding profusely. He had been hit by a shell and one look at him made Dad and his 'cobbers' think it was unsurvivable. They were told to "clean him up and we will see what we can do". So Dad and another person started to clean him up. They were amazed to find that all that blood came from what appeared to be the smallest scratch, which was able to be controlled. As a result he was up and about in no time. Dad was amazed as he really thought the man was a goner.

.....

I don't know if you recall, but Dad would have the window of the car by him open for hand signals, but he would not let any of us kids have our windows open. The reason is that while in the Middle East, a man was brought into them while Dad was on duty. The man was a driver and had been driving with his arm on the window when the car/truck was side-swiped. Dad took a pair of scissors and finished cutting his arm off.

.....

Another time, a wounded man was brought into them. As they were about to put him "under", he held up his wounded hand and said "Well, as a kid I always did want a hook!"

MIDDLE EAST

Dad spent some time in Israel. As they came in sight of Jerusalem, one of the soldiers stood and played (I think on a trumpet) "The Holy City" ("Jerusalem" to those of us who get confused). As the man sang, tears were pouring down his cheeks. To this day, I cannot hear this hymn without thinking of this story and am always moved.

.....

There were problems in moving the army over the desert and Dad considered the situation. The way Dad decided would be the best way to move across the desert, was the same solution that Monty came to and acted on. Shame Dad (who wouldn't have been able to come near the General) didn't share his solution with Monty or he may have been able to take the credit!

.....

Dad spoke about some new, larger tent hospitals that the "superior officers" rejected as taking far too long to erect. Dad said there was a discussion with one of these officers and a hospital surgeon (I think). It occurred outside and as soon as the visiting officer's back turned a little, the men leapt into action and within a very few minutes, the tent was up. At this point the surgeon suggested the officer turn round. The larger tents were adopted.



.....

Dad dug a fox hole one day, but having a really bad feeling about it, dug another. The next morning he discovered that there were shells in the one he originally dug, which would have killed him had he remained in it.

.....

At one time their unit came into contact with soldiers from another country – am sorry I can't remember which one. The guys were very taken with the painting of the Silver Fern on so many of the New Zealand vehicles.

One of Dad's friends was telling them about the person, i.e. Dad, who was able to paint the fern with just a few strokes of the paint brush. It seems that the foreign soldiers left with all their vehicles carrying Dad's artistry on them.

.....

At one time, I was with Dad in the Auckland War Memorial Museum. We were looking at the names of men who had died and Dad pointed to an incredible number of them, saying that he had seen to their crosses. I asked him what he put on them and his answer was "The Fern."

Life in the Barracks

At one stage, Dad was "confined to barracks." What that meant was that he had done something against regulations but not bad – he never did say what! I can sympathise as on several occasions Tom was given "extra duties" because of minor misdemeanours.

Anyway, if you were confined to barracks it meant that if you were not on duty, then you could not leave barracks – maybe in this case, the tent! One evening, the duty officer came up to him and said "Eades, you've been in the army long enough to know what I'm telling you. I am going into town tonight and won't be back until 10.00pm." All of which meant that Dad enjoyed a few beers in the mess and made sure that he was back where he was meant to be in plenty of time.

.....

Dad said there was a man in his tent who used to read his Bible every day. No-one bothered him for quite some time, then a new person came in and started to ridicule him for his Bible reading. He stopped his verbal nonsense when a very large man stood over him and told him to stop, or to take himself off, but there would be none of that sort of talk in their tent.

.....

Among the men, there was a respect for girlfriends/wives at home. One night when Dad was having a few beers, a photo of Mum fell out of his wallet. A stranger picked it up, looked at it then made an "obscene" gesture. The next thing he knew was that he was lying on the floor from a blow that Dad had landed on him. The guy very quickly realised how out of line he was, got to his feet and said "I'm sorry! I deserved that!"

We think of the gentle father we knew, but he also knew how to defend “his own”. Am guessing that in all probability, Mum never knew about that incident.

AT HOME

Dad’s father saw him off at the train when he left for war. Shortly before the train was due to pull out, his father was totally silent, and unable to talk. Without warning, he put his hand out and shook hands, then turned and walked away, still unable to speak.

Dad was, I believe, the first to go. I know that Harold was in the navy as a full-time career during and later after the war, but don’t know when he joined up as navy personnel could join at an earlier age.

Anyway, the 1st Echelon, as we know, was the first group to go. They left by ship from Wellington and Dad was on the first ship that set sail. There was another ship that was to be the official first ship out of New Zealand, but there was a problem and they couldn’t sail, so Dad signed up the day war was declared and was on the first ship out of New Zealand. He didn’t return until the end of 1943.

Dad spoke about the last words his father saying to him being a lie – he said “Son, I’ll be at the wharf/station to welcome you home when you come.” His father died before Dad came home from the war.

.....

One night when he was serving overseas, Dad was very restless. He got up and spent quite a bit of the night wandering aimlessly about. The uneasy feeling did not leave him.

A day or two later, he met up with his brother, Frank, and learnt that he too had the same uneasiness and wandering about on exactly the same night.

About a week later, he received a letter from his Mum (our Grandmother) who informed him that his father had died. It was the same night that Dad and Frank were so restless. Grandma explained that she had not sent a telegram as there was nothing that they could have done about coming home.

.....

Dad should actually have come home much earlier than he did. For some reason, men who had come over later than Dad, went home

before them. He said that it caused some element of discontent in those who were overlooked – totally reasonable, I reckon. He said to me that he once thought that if he had been a law breaker in prison, at least he would have known the date of his release. As it was, they had no idea. Towards the end, he was required to give his regimental number for some reason. He did so – 7566 – and the guy who was taking it waited for the rest, and then he looked up and said “There aren’t many of you guys left.”

.....

Dad’s health was not good when he went home. At one time when overseas, he had been in hospital with dysentery – it must have been really bad to merit that. While there, an orderly rather noisily “passed wind” and that was all he passed – Dad said he was “green with envy!”

.....

Dad got home and went to buy a couple of bottles of beer. To his anger and shock, orders were that men in uniform were not to be sold alcohol. It beggars belief that after putting their lives on the line, that they were treated in that fashion.

A man in civvies heard the refusal to serve him and expressed his disapproval. He then said “What do you want, Digger? I’ll meet you outside.” So, Dad got his beer.

.....

Another time he went to a film. As it happened, it was a war film – possibly the newsreel - and as he entered the theatre, there was the sound of an artillery shell on its way. Instinctively, Dad threw himself full length on the floor of the aisle. Feeling very stupid, he started getting to his feet and to his relief saw several other men doing exactly the same thing – all with very sheepish looks on their faces.

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He had basically been invalided home suffering from sand on his stomach from all those years, as well as shell shocked. He was waiting to see if he had to set off to fight in Japan, but was in civilian clothing. He was out with Mum, when some ***** of a woman handed him a white feather – the sign of cowardice, because he was not in uniform!! Mum let them have it!!

The war with Japan ended September 1945, and a week or so later, Tom was born.

From letters:

Pte Tom G Eades 7566
H.Q. Company
4th (NZ) Field Ambulance
2nd N Z E F
M E F
2 August 1942

“.. but as we have now been in action for quite a few weeks and so far the enemy line has not broken and I presume that we will continue to take part in things until he cracks under the strain, ..

“At the present time we are back from the front line a few miles, in reserve. We have been extremely busy lately and have been doing a very good job of work fixing not only our own chaps, Tommies and Indians etc. but Jerries and it is as well. This is actually the first time that I have written to you (or anyone) during active, active service. Back in Syria things were going along peacefully and we were enjoying life taking things quietly, but it was very nice. Then came news that there was scrapping in Libya and we thought of the heat etc and said ‘The poor ... I’m b.. glad that I’m not there.’ Then we heard that things were getting pretty sticky and that our forces were having to withdraw. Overnight our position in Syria changed and the rest was over. We packed in a hurry and were away.

“We travelled hard and we travelled fast and far. Through Lebanon, Syria, Palestine then the famous Sinai Desert (and wasn’t it hot) and so into Egypt and the Western Desert. As I said, we travelled fast and the going was hard, but the NZ digger arrived in time. A force of fit and hardened desert rats. We had come quietly and by back roads and very few people knew that we were the NZ’s.

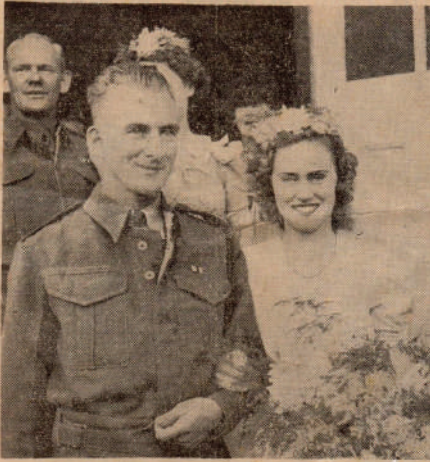
The first indication that Jerry had that the NZ were in action was when they were charging some artillery of ours when out of the ground (apparently) rose the Maori Btn with fixed bayonets and the results were disastrous for Jerry. We, of course with other British forces, fought a delaying action slowly returning until we had fallen back onto the line that we had decided to Hold Jerry.

There we stood and despite Jerry, and he has done his best, we the British, have held the line and when our heads see fit we will see what we can do about starting him on the run back again. We are all definitely very confident and, I think, not without cause. The present place we are in has its full quota of flies and they do their best to lift you up and carry you for about half a mile and a chap gets tired of walking back to his truck again. ...

“Last night I was sleeping soundly in my slip trench and I was dreaming ... suddenly “boom-boom-boom” and my dreams were sadly shattered. It was those ... Jerry bombers laying eggs. They were falling about a couple of miles away but they certainly disturbed my slumber and although, despite their droning overhead, I dozed off, I could not recapture the dream and cursed those bombers.

“Damn. Those blasted bombers are over again and it spoils your concentration – I’ll have a smoke and then carry on. Good – they have gone – I hope.”

Yesterday's Mt. Eden Wedding



SERVICE WEDDING

EADES—COLLINS

CREAM SATIN BROCADE WORN

The marriage of Miss Joy Collins, youngest daughter of Mrs. S. Collins, of Balmoral, to Tom G. Eades, Second N.Z.E.F. on furlough, second son of Mrs. E. Eades, of Whangarei, took place at the Church of the Good Shepherd, Mount Eden, yesterday. The Rev. Father Leahan officiated.

The bride, who was given away by her brother-in-law, Signalman R. E. Brennan, wore a frock of deep cream satin brocade, fashioned on classical lines, with a slight train. Her tulle veil, which was worn over the face when entering the church, was caught with a topknot of cream-chrysanthemums and she carried a bouquet of the same flowers.

Attending as matron of honour was her sister, Mrs. Robert Brennan, who wore a draped gown of heavy daffodil crepe. She carried a bouquet of tawny chrysanthemums with flowers to match, in her hair. The bridegroom was attended by Sergeant F. G. Eades, also returned from the Middle East.

The reception was held at the Domain Kiack, where Mrs. Collins received her guests wearing a navy frock beaded in blue, with a shoulder spray of blue delphiniums. The bridegroom's mother wore a black silk frock and furs with a spray of tawny chrysanthemums.



Photo was taken on their Wedding Day.

"Going Away" - Not sure about the hat ..

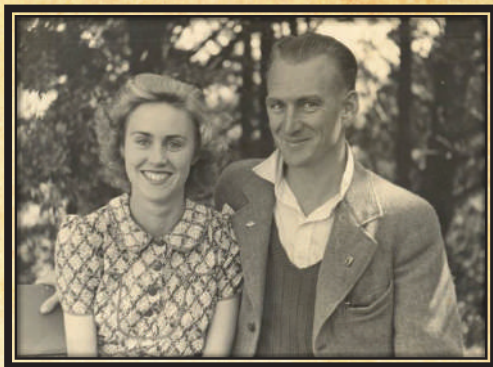
The following two letters are shown in full from Tom to Joy Collins, who he married on 27 April 1944. While engaged, Tom was expecting a recall to head back on active service so they married with one week's notice. Tom received his notice to report to Papakura Military Base on such a date and the same or following day received his final discharge from the army.

Dad told us that Mum said she couldn't get any stockings for the wedding – there was strict rationing. Dad told Mum to leave it to him. He went into the appropriate shop and asked for stockings. The lady asked for the coupons to purchase them and of course Dad didn't have any. He pulled out the wedding ring and showed her, and asked if that was sufficient. Mum wore new stockings to her wedding.

Again, Dad gave notice to Mum's employer. At that time all civilians were "man-powered" to their work and couldn't resign. Dad went to Mum's employer and said that Mum would not be back to work. When asked what possible reason Mum had for leaving, Dad told them she was marrying him on Saturday. Mum did not go back.

He married Joy and had 7 children, raising them in the newly developed area (at the time) of Mt. Roskill. He died at home suddenly of a heart attack on the 9 November 1974 at the age of 59. In recognition of his active service, the Returned Services Association actively participated with the funeral arrangements, including paying for all funeral costs. His coffin was draped in the New Zealand flag and was buried as a soldier, having been assigned a military grave.

Pte Tom G. Eades 7566
H.Q Company
4th (N.Z.) Field Ambulance
2nd N.Z.E.F.
M.E.F. 25.5.42



My Dear Joy

I was ever so glad to get your letter of the 9th April yesterday especially as I had not heard from you since you wrote in January. I suppose though that some of your other letters went astray and perhaps I will receive them some time. That is unless the fishes have them. I am so glad that some of my letters have got through and that you liked the photos. I had them taken when I was on leave at Xmas. I am pleased that you don't think I have changed very much. I sometimes am not certain whether I have actually changed much in myself or not. I suppose that in some ways I have but after 2²/₃ years in the army I expect that that is only natural. Still the war surely can't last much longer and then I will come home and you will be able to see for yourself exactly how much I have changed.

We don't usually talk about the war much but Hitler must be just about at the end of his rope and I think that shortly the Navy will smash Japan and give her a bit of a lesson. The sooner this is done the sooner I can get home and be with you once again. It seems more like centuries than years since I last saw you and I miss you more than words can express. So you think that I am taking a mean advantage finishing my letters in Arabic. Well Joy I admit that it is rather mean but it was something that I wanted to tell you and yet was too scared to do so in English. Fancy me being bashful. I can't believe it myself. What are you like at guessing? The words ANNA HABRIC' translated into English makes three words with a grand total of eight letters. It is a very old expression yet is ever new. Now can you puzzle that out? Sorry for making you guess but again my courage fails. I will however definitely tell you when I return.

So Joy, you had to enrol for service the other day. What sort of work were they wishing you to do? I sincerely hope that you don't have to join the VAD's or any organization that might have to come overseas or be mixed too much with the soldiers. Not that I am running down those services as they do very good and excellent work but I would very much

rather that you didn't. I am sorry that Bob had an accident and was, apparently, boarded out. Does his accident trouble him at all or was it just severe enough to render it unwise to put him in the firing line? As long as it is nothing serious it is not so bad and at any rate he has the satisfaction of having tried. Bob Jnr also seems to be getting on OK and I certainly would like a photo of the little chap whenever one is available. How are Sadie and your mother keeping? I haven't heard much about them lately. Frank is camped about 30 miles from us so of course I see him fairly often. He gashed his leg about three weeks ago and had to have ten stitches put in but is OK now and as good as ever.

Last week the Duke of Gloucester visited the hospital and at night the Kiwi Concert Party put on a command performance. They excelled themselves and I enjoyed the best 2½ hours entertainment that I have had for some considerable time.

It happens to be my day off today so I have wandered up town and out into the outskirts and taken pen and paper with me. I am in an ideal place. There is a stream handy with cold crystal clear water running and plenty of trees and grass. As a background are the mountains still capped with snow. There are chairs and tables here from a nearby café and they make writing much easier. To stimulate my, shall we say, brain, there is a cup of Turkish coffee beside me. You just clap your hands and a native appears who takes your order. I had quite an interesting evening last night. Pat (my cobber) and I, as you know, treat quite a few natives that come to the hospital. There was one girl that spoke excellent English that often used to come down and help interpret for us. One day, about three weeks ago her mother fell off a ladder and badly cut her leg. Her mother could not come down to the hospital and the doctors, by reason of red tape, are not allowed to treat them privately, so Pat looked at me and I looked at Pat and we decided to break the law. We took up some local anaesthetic, scalpels, forceps, needles, gut, etc. etc. and promptly cut away all the dead flesh and sewed the wound up and they were no end grateful. We have visited the house several times since. Last night we went there and there was a cousin (male) of hers there also. We all sat round on divans and spent the time talking and eating many sorts of native dishes and quite good they are too. A couple of times that I have been there I have smoked a hubbly-bubbly or "hooker". You know one of those pipes with a glass bowl and a long tube with a mouth-piece attached. You draw and the

smoke comes through scented water. Her cousin prepared it for me and without saying anything the devil put some hashish in it. My gosh, it was potent but fortunately my constitution is pretty tough and I was able to withstand the effects of it but it was a bit of a job. He said that he wondered how I would like it.

One of the natives is starting to sing and isn't it a row, but still you get used to it.

Well, Joy, this seems to be about all my news for the present, so I will say cheerio and much love to Sadie and your mother, not forgetting some special love for your dear self.

Love

Tom



Pte Tom G. Eades 7566

H.Q. Company

4th (N.Z) Field Ambulance

2nd N.Z.E.F.

M.E.F.

2.8.42

My Dear Joy,

I had intended not writing until this present action was successfully over and I was once more safely back in base or some such place as that but as we have now been in action for quite a few weeks and so far the enemy line has not broken and I presume that we will continue to take part in things until he cracks under the strain, I have decided to break this idea and here I am writing to you. At the present time we are back from the front line a few miles, in reserve.

We have been extremely busy lately and have been doing a very good job of work fixing not only our own chaps, Tommies and Indians etc but Jerries and Itis as well. This is actually the first time that I have written to you (or anyone) during active, active service. Back in Syria things were going along peacefully and we were enjoying life, taking things quietly but it was very nice. Then came news that there was scrapping in Libya and we thought of the heat etc and said "The poor (censored) I'm b... glad that I'm not there." Then we heard that things were getting pretty sticky and that our forces were having to withdraw. Overnight our position in Syria changed and our rest was over. We packed in a hurry and were away. We travelled hard and we travelled fast and far. Through Lebanon, Syria, Palestine then the famous Sinai Desert (and wasn't it hot) and so into Egypt and the Western Desert. As I said we travelled fast and the going was hard, but the NZ digger arrived in time. A force of fit and hardened desert rats. We had come quietly and by back roads and very few people knew that we were the NZ's. The first indication that Jerry had that the NZ were in action was when they were charging some artillery of ours when out of the ground (apparently) rose the Maori Btn with fixed bayonets and the results were disastrous for Jerry. We, of course with other British forces, fought a delaying action slowly returning until we had fallen back onto the line that we had decided to hold Jerry. There we stood and despite Jerry, and he has done his best, we the British, have held the line and when our heads see fit we will see what we can do about starting him on the run back again. We are all definitely very confident and, I think, not without cause.

The present place we are in has its full quota of flies and they do their best to lift you up and carry you for about half a mile and a chap gets tired of walking back to his truck again. Frank went back to base sick a couple of weeks ago but I understand that he is now out of hospital and doing pretty well. We received some mail a couple of days ago and to my great joy I received a couple of letters from you. I was ever so pleased to receive them and they mean a terrible lot to me. Last night I was sleeping soundly in my slip trench and I was dreaming of you. Sadie was delivering a message to me from you when suddenly "boom-boom-boom" and my dreams were sadly shattered. It was those (censored) Jerry bombers laying eggs. They were falling about a couple of miles away but they certainly disturbed my slumber and although, despite their droning overhead, I dozed off, I could not recapture the dream and cursed those bombers for more reasons than one. It would not have been so bad had I been dreaming of anything else but as it was it was unforgivable.

(Excerpt removed) ... Damn those blasted bombers are over again and it spoils your concentration - I'll have a smoke and then carry on - Good, they have gone - I hope. (Excerpt removed)

Well Dear, I think that I will let this do for the meantime so until next letter cheerio - Anna Habric'.

With all my love

Tom



Tom and Joy had seven children – Tom (1945), Ken (1947), Mary-Ann (1951), Jennifer (1953), Veronica (1956), Carolyn (1958), and Diane (1960). Photo taken at cousin Penny and John Miller's wedding, November 1968.



Tom and Joy Eades at the wedding of Jennifer and Doug Sheldon. 30 March 1974. "Another daughter off our hands."
Tom died on 9 November 1974.