

Denys Ardern Biden, 21/02/1921 – 13/02/2014

This remarkable old soldier wrote a memoir for his family, describing his experiences in the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War in training, in North Africa and in Italy. Early on in this fascinating sketch, Denys said, "...I was often to see why ordinary people, who have long since risen above such animal behaviour [of killing], were able to commit such necessary acts of self-preservation, and exhibit the endurance, courage and loyalty that are, thank God, still in the heart of the ordinary and average John Citizen." Such was the nature of this man.

As a Lieutenant in the Prince Alfred's Guard he was thrust into the second battle of El Alamein, having languished back in South Africa impatiently awaiting his call-up to North Africa. Despite the final victory, the regiment received heavy casualties, taking no further part in the operation. He was then seconded to the British Army, and immediately found himself in the Italian campaign attached to the Royal Scots Fusiliers. The courage that Denys demonstrated in both campaigns is extraordinary, yet he never received recognition, and never felt that he deserved a medal. The other remarkable thing about him was his concern for the men under his command, quite willing to stand up to senior officers on their behalf.

Denys had met the beautiful Sister Velma Visser back in South Africa. They kept contact and following the harrowing battle at Salerno he took leave and they married at Bari on the east coast. They were to enjoy 47 years of happy marriage with their two children, Clive and Colleen.

The battalion was sent to Balbek in Syria to rest, refit and train. It was there that Denys lost his right hand to a hand-grenade. His commanding officer wrote to Velma praising Denys for his philosophical spirit and courageous bearing. He spent two years in and out of Roberts Heights Military Hospital.

To return to earlier years: Denys was born into a farming family. His parents lived at 'The Fort' in the Fish River valley. They moved to a dairy farm at the edge of Grahamstown close to St. Andrew's Prep where he and his elder brother Anthony Jasper began their schooling. They were dayboys and members of the then Day House at St. Andrew's College. Denys was an all-round sportsman, playing good cricket and in his final year rugby for the 1<sup>st</sup> XV. But athletics was his particular forte: he came first in both the open 100 and the 200 yds. two years running. In his final year he gained Colours in the 220 yds., the High-jump and the Hurdles, and broke the open 100yds. record. There was time for work, too: he gained a second class matric. He was a fine draftsman, winning prizes in painting and drawing. This was a skill that would entertain him and many others for the rest of his life.

After school he worked briefly for Cadburys, but almost immediately volunteered for the army. After the War he returned to his roots, and started farming in the Transvaal. The family then moved to a farm in the Fort Beaufort District.

And eventually they retired to Kenton-on-Sea. He continued working, however, turning to Real Estate and serving the farming community, and he was heavily involved in the Carriage Cove development. He returned to painting; he enjoyed riding his horse along the beach accompanied by his dog; he returned to farming together with daughter Colleen, growing chicory above the Kariega River. He attempted to get away from it all by transferring to Greyton in the Western Cape. But they were soon back in Kenton among familiar faces.

He never forgot his old schools, and at the centenary of Prep he was glad to succeed the recently deceased Griff Mullins, his old teacher, as Patron of the Centenary Appeal Fund, a task that he fulfilled with distinction. Nor did the old soldier forget his comrades; he laboured to improve the war veterans' Pension Fund.

Denys's friend Dave Thompson (OP,OA) concludes attribute to him with, " His care for his wife Velma in her latter years when bad health overtook her was exemplary, a true reflection of a loving and honourable man who will be sorely missed by all who were lucky enough to cross his path." His family, Clive, Colleen and Ian Hendry and their sons, Keith and Wayne, may look back at Denys Biden's life with great pride.

*By Lorraine Mullins*