

SLIDE 1

Hi, I'm Jessie. I'm in Year 8.

This story is about my Great Grandfather, Cedric Sprott, who fought in the 2nd World War, for the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force, known as the 2NZEF. This was a team of NZ men, both voluntary and conscripted, that were sent to fight in the Second World War.

War was declared against Germany on 3 September 1939, after Hitler invaded Poland. Several days later, the NZ Govt agreed to form a special force of 6,600 men, aged between 21-35, all enlisting voluntarily.

The following phrase, made by the Prime Minister at the time, Michael Joseph Savage, echoed the sentiment of the NZ people:

"It is with gratitude in the past, and with confidence in the future, that we range ourselves without fear beside Britain, where she goes, we go! Where she stands, we stand!"

Within 10 months, 59,644 men had enlisted, over 9 times the initial number agreed. Most of them knowing nothing of life in the army.

SLIDE 2

Cedric, along with his brother Brian, joined the 2NZEF in December 1940, at the ripe old age of 25.

NZ fought under the British Eighth Army, alongside units from Australia, British India, Canada, Greece, Poland, Rhodesia, South Africa and the United Kingdom.

Cedric entered Papakura Training Camp in Auckland, in July 1941.

It was a bitterly cold and difficult winter, with many men hospitalised for influenza. Their fitness was tested with daily route marches, cross country marches and games, like rugby.

Here's an excerpt from a letter written by a NZ soldier, Cliff Barkle, back to his Mum, while he was training in Auckland.

"I had my first game of Rugby a week ago. A team selected from the 40 in our Hut played Hut 21. We won 6-3, after a very hard and enjoyable game. At first I was not too keen on playing Rugby, but now I am looking forward eagerly to playing as often as I can. It will get us all into tip-top condition, and will be invaluable as training for hand to hand fighting. With the New Zealand and Australian troops so keen on Rugby, the Italians are in for something when they face the new Anzacs."

So, as you can see, while today the Kiwis and Aussies are great rivals in rugby, they'd certainly have been a formidable force together!

Training in old WWI uniforms, they hiked in the country, dug trenches, put up barbed wire fences, practised destroying enemy gunposts, and attacked and defended different positions.

SLIDE 3

After undertaking 2 months of training, on 13 Sept 1941, Cedric embarked on the RMS Aquitania, as part of the 31st Battalion. He had attained the rank of Lance Corporal. The men were each sent off with a parcel from the National Patriotic Association, containing shaving soap, cigarettes, toothpaste and toothbrush, a pair of bright blue socks, a cardigan and a book.

SLIDE 4

After 36 days at sea, he disembarked in Egypt and transferred to the Maadi garrison. Maadi is a suburb of Cairo, and was leased to the NZ Military, to serve as the Middle Eastern base for the 2NZEF.

On arriving in Egypt, further training was undertaken, in an environment similar to where they would be fighting in the Western Desert. A temporary training camp was set up just outside of Maadi. Tents were dug into the sand, 1 metre below ground level, so they had protection from bombs.

The Western Desert is approximately 270kms north west of Cairo, between Alexandria and Tobruk. It is made up of a great expanse of sand hills, shallow depressions and rocky cliffs. It offers long, clear fields of fire and it was pretty easy going for a mobile army, consisting of tanks, armoured cars, troop carriers and supply trucks. The landscape was fairly featureless, which meant that it was easy for troops on both sides to get lost, which happened often.

SLIDE 5

Over the next few months Cedric found himself placed in the 21st Battalion. The 21st battalion was known for their great fighting spirit. When their commanders fell, it was said that rather than take cover, they'd take over! Their battalion would work with the 25th Battalion, each covering for the other while they were on furlough, which is a leave of absence.

While waiting for their turn on the battlefield, days were filled with parades, drill marching, and weapon & physical training. Wills were also made out at this time.

Troop behaviour was expected to be faultless. They had to understand their orders, and carry them out without error. Errors meant **many** people would lose their lives, and you could lose any advantage you may have gained in the battle field.

Should you lose any of your army kit, you were held personally responsible, and would forfeit your pay. We're not sure exactly what it was that Cedric lost, but he paid dearly for it, by losing 7 days pay!!!

Cedric never spoke much about his actual combat. We have put bits and pieces together through his war records, photos, published books, and online resources, but it's patchy.

We know that he led a group of men in the mortar division, who would fight on the front line. Sneaking close to the enemy line, setting up the mortar guns, and hopefully taking out the enemy. This picture of him made the paper in NZ.

SLIDE 6

He fought in the Battle of Alamein, alongside Australian troops. He held them in very high esteem. They fought hard, did what they said they would, and were great company. He also fought in the Battle of Cassino.

Cedric was well respected by his fellow military men, both those who reported to him, and those above him. He was promoted several times, but he also turned down a few promotions, as he didn't want to leave his men. He served as Lance Corporal, Corporal, Lieutenant Sergeant, and finally Sergeant.

SLIDE 7

His service took him from Egypt, to Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Greece, Italy, Austria and Germany.

Germany unconditionally surrendered on May 8, 1945. Cedric's battalion returned to NZ, landing in September, later that year. Despite the army's desire to keep him, he had had enough of army life, and was discharged from the military on 9th January 1946.

SLIDE 8

He was awarded:

- The 1939-45 Star
- The Africa Star
- The 8th Army Clasp
- The Italy Star
- The Defence Medal
- The War Medal 1939-45
- And the NZ War Service Medal

He met my great grandmother soon after. She already had a daughter, to her first husband, who had lost his life battling alongside the Poles and Americans in Faenza. Cedric and Jessie Spratt married, and had 2 more children.

Cedric was very well known in our town. He helped to build the local Services Club. He looked after the local widows when their husbands died, mowing their lawns, and fixing their gardens. His Sunday sessions in the garage, with his friends, were famous! Mostly, it was a place for the men to sit and talk, and process what they had been through.

The war shaped many of the men's lives. We were fortunate that Cedric's experiences never had too much of a negative impact on his life (apart from wanting to throw himself on the ground, and take cover when a plane flew over, while he was gardening). He loved the travel, the new experiences, and the mateship of the men around him.

In a time and place where life was so easily lost, mateship and service to your country were often what kept you going. Oh, and the thought of coming home.

END

Resources

<http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-WH2-21Ba-c6.html>

Cliff's letter to his Mum

<https://artillery24419.wordpress.com/papakura-army-training-facility/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_history_of_New_Zealand_during_World_War_II

Eddie Norman and the 25 Battalion, by Elizabeth Kay