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PHIL REMEMBERS ROMMEL

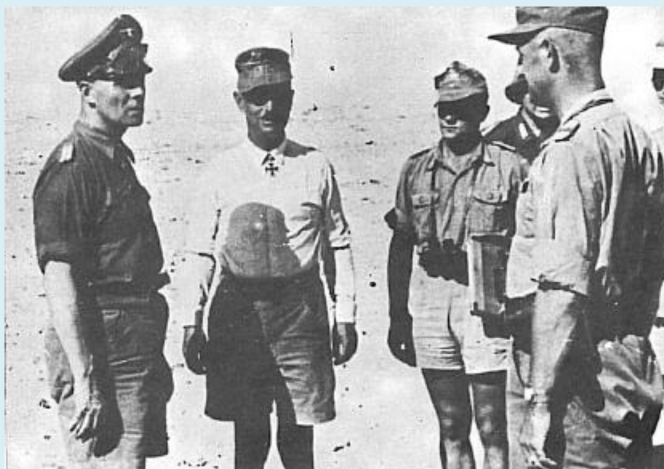
A man who I am pleased to call a friend is Philip Giblin, who I first met in my Federated Farmers days when he was the CEO of that great old Hawke's Bay stock and station company, ***Williams and Kettle***. Phil is now a resident of the Summerset Retirement Villas in Taradale.

A couple of times Phil has related this fascinating story to me. In the Crusader Battle of November 1941 the great 2nd New Zealand Division first came across the Axis forces under the brilliant and thrusting generalship of Erwin Rommel in Libya. Actually, Crusader was a series of battles from which no side obtained a decisive advantage. Nevertheless, it was a costly fight for the Kiwis and many of our best fell.

(One, as an aside, was Willie Goring-Johnston, who not long before the war had acquired part of Tamumu Station from his father. After the War the government purchased his block from his estate and, after adding a bit to it, settled eight returned servicemen, of which my father was one. So this adds to my consciousness of the loss to New Zealand of those who fell in WW2, but especially the Crusader Battle of November 1941.)

Anyway, Phil was captured and, being wounded in the foot, was hospitalised in a German field hospital, along with other wounded from various nationalities on both sides. Rommel entered the hospital with his doctors and gave them instructions. Although it was in German, Phil said it was obvious that he was telling them to deal with the most severely wounded first, regardless of nationality. Rommel was a formidable foe, but an honourable one. Is there another Kiwi left with a first-hand experience with this general? Almost certainly not.

Philip Giblin in about 1965.



German photograph of General Rommel (left) in the desert.

Soon the area in which the hospital was sited came under counter-attack from the 2nd NZ Division and all walking wounded were hastily evacuated. One was Frank Collin, who many of my generation will remember as a

respected farm adviser, faithful supporter of the Young Farmers movement, as well as a long-serving member of the HB Catchment Board. Those that were left, including the lame Phil, were liberated. I recall Phil and Frank discussing their respective fates – Phil to return to the Division, but unfit for further active service, while Frank was to spend nearly all of the next four years behind the wire.

HAVELOCK NORTH GERMAN FIELD PIECE

The 77mm gun resting in Havelock North.

At the end of World War One, troops brought back with them on troop ships some German field guns as prizes of war. Most were subsequently lost but I know of three that remain. One, a 77mm howitzer, is on the Waipawa War Memorial in restored condition with of course replica wooden wheels; the originals long since rotted. Another is in the South Island, I believe at Temuka. And the third? It is languishing under some trees at the end of Blind Road, which extends westward off Middle Road a few kilometres south of Havelock North.

Also 77mm, but with a longer barrel than the Waipawa piece, this is a gun, not a howitzer, and was on the Havelock North War Memorial, so I understand, but was removed in the 1920s. For decades it was kicked around the borough and was destined for scrap about 1970. Fortuitously, the Black Powder Club saved it and took it to their range at the end of Blind Road.

Full marks to the club, now called the Hawke's Bay Shooters and Firearms Club. While recognising that the gun belongs to the club I have pleaded with folk to return it, either as a gift or on permanent loan, to the people of Havelock North and Hawke's Bay generally. Although forged from Krupp steel it is not in good condition – the wheels have long gone and it is now on makeshift steel wheels – but it is our heritage. For reasons that are utterly incomprehensible they remain intransigent.

THE UNKNOWN WARRIOR

In ancient times, kings, chiefs and the famous were often buried in magnificent tombs, which stand as their memorials. After a great battle the victors would set up a trophy of arms, helmets and armour and even a cenotaph or empty tomb, but the idea of an unknown man being buried with honour is a comparatively recent one.

It sprang from the imagination of a British Army Chaplain, the Reverend David Railton, MC (1884-1955). During World War I, near Armentieres, he saw a grave bearing a pencilled inscription 'An Unknown Soldier of the Black Watch'. It gave him an idea that later became a national memorial. It was not until 1920, the year that the Cenotaph in London was unveiled, that he was able to put forward his plan. He approached the Dean of Westminster, the Right Reverend Herbert Ryle, and suggested that an unknown soldier be brought from the battlefields of France and buried among the nation's illustrious dead in Westminster Abbey. The Dean was able to persuade the Government of the day to accept this innovative idea.

A committee, headed by Lord Curzon, recommended that the foreign minister should arrange for an unknown soldier to be disinterred in France and brought to the Abbey. It further recommended that the burial should be on Armistice Day and that King George V should be asked if, after he had unveiled the new Cenotaph in Whitehall, he would follow the gun-carriage bearing the body to Westminster Abbey. The British authorities gave very little information about the selection of the Unknown Warrior, and it was not until Armistice Day 1939 that Brigadier-General L J Wyatt DSO made the facts public.

The Brigadier-General, as general officer in charge of troops in France and Flanders and director of the Imperial War Graves Commission, was given instructions that the body of a British soldier, whom it would be impossible to

identify, should be brought in from each of the four battle areas – the Aisne, the Somme, Arras and Ypres – on the night of 7 November and placed in the chapel at St. Pol. The party bringing each body was to return at once to its area, so that there should be no chance of anyone knowing the choice. The bodies, carried in ambulances, were received by the Reverend George Kendall OBE at the chapel, and a guard set at the door. In front of the altar was the shell of the coffin which had been sent out from Britain to receive the remains.

The bodies, each covered with a Union Jack, were placed in a row on stretchers. At midnight on 7 November the Brigadier, accompanied by Colonel Gell, entered the chapel. He selected a body, and with the Colonel's help placed it in the shell and screwed down the lid. As Brigadier-General Wyatt said, "I had no idea even of the area from which the body I selected had come, and no one else can know it." The other bodies were re-buried in the military cemetery at St. Pol.

The following morning, chaplains of the Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church and non-conformist churches held a service in the Chapel. At noon the body was sent, under escort, to Boulogne.

At 3.30pm, after passing through troops lining the outskirts of the city, the ambulance drew up at an old castle, the local headquarters of the French Army. Eight soldiers stepped forward as bearers. The castle library had been turned into a chapel of rest. The body was taken in through corridors lined by French soldiers. A French company furnished the guard throughout the last night on French soil. No British troops were present.

At noon the next day, the rough wooden shell was placed in a plain oak coffin sent from Britain the previous night. This had wrought-iron bands through one of which was passed a 16th century Crusader's sword from the Tower of London's collection. The coffin, of Hampton Court oak, presented by the British Undertakers Association, and bearing the inscription ***A British Warrior who fell in the Great War 1914-18 for King and Country*** was placed on a French military wagon drawn by six horses and escorted by French troops. It was taken into Boulogne, where the destroyer HMS Verdun was waiting, sent by the Admiralty as a special tribute to the French nation and the gallant defence of that city. The cortege was a mile long.

The French Government sent a division of all arms to pay their last tribute. Marshal Ferdinand Foch, representing the French nation spoke, and Lieutenant General Sir George Macdonagh replied on behalf of King George. General Weygand, together with many other distinguished high-ranking French and British officers was present. Aboard the destroyer, the bearer party laid the coffin on the deck.

Six barrels of soil from the Ypres salient were put aboard to be placed in the tomb in Westminster Abbey, so that the body should rest in soil on which so many troops had given up their lives. As HMS Verdun moved off, a guard of Bluejackets and guns on shore fired a salute. An escort of six destroyers joined the ship and, later, as she steamed into Dover Harbour, a 19-gun salute was fired from the castle. [There it was placed on a railway carriage.]

[At London] the coffin remained on the train overnight, after it was put on to a gun carriage drawn by six horses and slowly made its way to the Cenotaph, led by the firing party and the bands of the Coldstream, Scots, Irish and Welsh Guards. Troops from all services followed. The pall bearers were Sir Hedworth Meux, Earl Beatty, Sir Charles Madden, General Gatliff, Sir Henry Jackson, Lord Byng, Lord Home, Sir Henry Wilson, Earl Haig, Lord French, Lord Methuen and Sir Hugh Trenchard. As the gun-carriage drew up at the Cenotaph, King George stepped forward and placed a wreath of red roses and bay leaves on the coffin. After the Silence, the gun-carriage moved off with King George, as chief mourner, taking his place behind it, followed by the Prince of Wales, the Duke of York, Prince Henry, the Duke of Connaught, the Marquis of Milford Haven, the Prime Minister and ministers of State. 100 Victoria Crosses at the door of the Abbey, the coffin was met by the clergy, and borne by NCOs of the Guards, passed through two lines of 100 holders of the Victoria Cross, some in uniform, some in plain clothes, under the command of **Colonel Bernard Freyberg VC**. Behind these were the widows and mothers of the fallen. The service was conducted by the Dean of Westminster with music by English composers

including Kipling's Recessional. During the singing of Lead Kindly Light, the bearers removed the helmet and side arms from the coffin and lowered it into the tomb.

At the committal, the King scattered earth from the battlefields from a silver shell. After a roll of drums, the poignant notes of the Last Post rang out, followed by Reveille. Finally the two lines of VC holders filed past. The honours paid were those due to a Field Marshal. By 27 November 1920, it was estimated that 1.5 million people had passed slowly in homage to what is perhaps the best known and most visited war grave in the world. In 1923, the then Duchess of York, later Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother placed her wedding bouquet on the tomb. It was an appropriate gesture as her brother, Captain the Honourable Fergus Bowes-Lyon, Black Watch, had been killed at Loos on 27 September 1915 and had no known grave. Who is to know she was not laying the flowers on his grave? The new black marble stone from Belgium was laid on the Tomb in 1921. The inscription was provided by Dean Herbert Ryle.

The famous text, ***They buried him among the Kings, because he had done good toward God and toward His House****, is more than 500 years old and is as King Richard II had inscribed on the tomb of his friend the Bishop of Salisbury, also buried in Westminster Abbey*.

The above was written by Colin MacMillan, Military Historical Research, Battlefield Tours Limited, and sent to me by Guy Wellwood.

APPLES – where's the ANZAC spirit here?

Australians, at least in food retailing, are far more nationalistic than Kiwis. All items have their country of origin stated, almost always "Product of Australia", although I did see when recently there some rather puny kiwifruit marked 'Product of France'. Composite items indicate the main source.

Indications are the World Trade Organisation has found in favour of New Zealand's objection to the exclusion of apples from the Australian market, done on the spurious grounds that fruit will carry the fungal disease of fireblight. This has been a tool that the Aussie apple grower has successfully used for a decade short of a century to exclude competition. It's fine for us to import Aussie fruit, even those types that we can successfully grow here where their grower competes with his Kiwi counterpart. But play by the same rules when the reverse is the case? No way.

Kiwis eat on average 18 kilograms of apples a year; Aussie a little over a third of that, and when you see the locally grown apples you can see why. They would be more suited being grist to the cider press. If true, the Australians could still appeal, which would be nothing more than a delaying tactic as they haven't a case, and never have had. Let's hope within a season or two the Australian consumer can munch into a crisp Hawke's Bay apple. Our producers will then be able to drink to a victory for commercial fairness, and it won't be apple cider.

And here's another trade discrimination against New Zealand. Thirty US senators – that's 30% of the Senate no less – have expressed concern over NZ competition to US Trade Commissioner Ron Kirk that the Trade Pacific Partnership could disadvantage their dairy farming constituents. Their gripe is that Fonterra is a monopoly. And here's an example of hypocrisy if you ever want one. It has been revealed that several prominent members of the 'Tea Party' political movement have large dairy farming holdings and accordingly cream substantial government subsidies. And what's the main beef of the Tea Party? That Obama is a socialist – some say a communist (no kidding) and is bent on socialising America, and government should stay out of the lives of people.

TREES OF HAWKE'S BAY

Anzac Pine

A few years ago I headed out to western CHB to photograph some trees. This included a visit to Oruawharo, with its magnificent homestead and surrounding parkland. I asked Peter Harris, the owner who is protecting this historic asset if I could record some of the trees. He said, "By all means, but I hope you don't want to photograph the ANZAC Pine". ANZAC Pine? I had never heard of one there. "Why?" "It was blown over in the storm last night!" he replied. So I was literally less than 24 hours too late to photograph this tree, planted by Lady Jellicoe in the early 1920s from a seed from ***the Lone Pine***! *Pinus halepensis* (Governor General Lord and Lady Jellicoe used to use Oruawharo as a semi-official residence of the Governor in the early 1920s.) Well, actually I did photograph it. See picture.

This property was an important military camp – a canvas one – during World War One, and it was here that some soldiers damped their felt hats and reshaped them into the characteristic 'lemon squeezer' that was to identify our troops in both world wars and beyond.

A more obvious ANZAC Pine is the one atop Te Mata Peak. This is a different species to the Lone Pine; indeed it looks a bit like a radiata, but not big enough, and was planted in 1950 in the presence of Gallipolli veterans. There's another 'Lone Pine' at a high point at the Taradale cemetery, but not actually 'lone' because for some reason it is crowded by other trees. It is a different species again.

Fallen Gallipoli Pine, Oruawharo.

Plaque under Te Mata Peak Lone Pine.

ANZAC Pine, Te Mata Peak.

WELL SAID

German 14 Panzer Corps report extract:

The NZ soldier is physically fit and strong. He is well trained and formidable in close range fighting, and steadier than the Englishman. In many cases strong points had to be wiped out to the last man, as they refused to surrender.

LAST WORD

You can find previous issues of Over the Fence with plenty of other information on the new website: **www.overthefence.org.nz**

Cheers, Ewan Mac