

Ernest "Mick" Henry Evans - ANZAC

In the second of the Society's articles on ANZAC diggers, June Hall, leader of the Society's oral history group, has written about her own father, Ernie Evans. Ernie or "Mick" as he was known by his fellow ANZAC's, spent eight months in Tobruk under siege fighting as an ANZAC with the Rats of Tobruk. Although from the Port Melbourne area, Ernie later settled in Greensborough in 1947 with his wife and family and that is another story for another day.



Ernie "Mick" Evans

Ernie enlisted in 1939 at Flinders Street Railway Station, Melbourne then was sent to the Showgrounds at Flemington to a unit called 2nd 1st Army Field Workshops. At the Showgrounds he met a Colonel who asked him his name, he told him and his reply was, we've got three bloody Ernie's already, you're Mick, that will do from now on. So in the army he was known as "Mick Evans".

He left Melbourne for England aboard the Empress of Canada in convoy with the Queen Mary, Aquitania, Mauritania, Empress of Britain, Empress of Japan and the Andes, via Cape Town. He eventually arrived in Scotland, and was then transported by train to England then to Tidworth on the Salisbury Plains; he was transferred to the 2nd 1st Machine Gunners at Tidworth, one of 13 personnel in the LAD.

He was in England during "The Battle of Britain". He told a story of how "mock" tanks were built, and towed around the fields, leaving tank tracks, which would be visible from the air and make the enemy think there were far more tanks in the area than actually were.

He was stationed in a number of towns in England, he spoke of being in Colchester when the Colchester Cathedral was bombed, also mentioned a bomb that landed on the roof of Westminster Abbey, fortunately it did not explode.

A little trivia: When in England, the poms nicknamed Mick, "the Duke" because of his likeness to the Duke of Gloucester, and in fact, on more than one occasion when walking along the streets, was approached by civilians who thought he was "THE DUKE".

Oral History

From England they sailed to Durban, at this time he was told he was medically unfit for active duty, nothing was going to stop him from “going with his mates”, as on other occasions he would go AWOL until his transport home had departed. When in Durban he met Edith Campbell an Australian, who had met and welcomed the Australian troop ships in 1918, and was now welcoming the Australian troops in 1941. She gave him a book of sonnets she had written, and in 1949 she sent him another book. He treasured these.

Leaving Cape Town, via Suez, on to Cairo then Egypt, and then to Tobruk. It was thought they would be in Tobruk for about eight weeks; they were there for eight months. During the siege of Tobruk the Germans were stopped and had to retreat, the first time this had happened in WW11.

An Englishman who had “changed sides” and was now working for the Germans, the name he used was Lord Haw Haw, was broadcasting propaganda on the radio, trying to demoralise our troops, he called them the “Rats of Tobruk” because they lived in holes in the ground and at night they came out scurrying around like rats. (Those rats did a lot of damage at night) They were proud of the name “Rats of Tobruk”, and they wore that name with pride, it was an honour to be one of them.

On leaving England, after the Battle of Britain travelling via South Africa they saw service in Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Libya, El Alamein and of course the Siege of Tobruk. The whole time they were in Tobruk, there was a shortage of both food and water.

He spoke fondly of the “Salvos”, when on leave in Tobruk he told how he and his mates were walking along the street, when someone from (another organisation) invited them in for a meal, when they said they had no money, they were virtually told to keep walking. Further down the street the Salvos did the same thing, once again they said they had no money, a different response, that doesn’t matter, come in boys, we have meat pies today, how many would you like, they could not believe their ears. These “tough Aussies” stood there with tears running down their faces. They went in and were each given two pies, none of them could even eat one.

After returning home from the Middle East, he was stationed in New South Wales, and then sent to Japan with the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces. He was discharged in late 1946.

June Hall (nee Evans)

Daughter of Ernie Evans