

GEYSER, John

Johnny GEYSER | 20 September 1919

JOHN¹ GEYSER was born on 20 September 1919 in Middelburg, Cape, South Africa. He married JOAN OLIVE⁸ FLEMMER (JOHN SWEET DISTIN JACK⁷, JOHN DISTIN⁶, CHRISTIAN LUDVIG⁵) was born on 28 March 1928 in Johannesburg, South Africa.

John's parents divorced when he was four years old. His Dad, employed in the Police Force, got custody of the two older boys. Johnny and Johannes found life difficult without a mother's love and help, and boarded with various uncaring families.

When John was about 15 years old his father married Nancy (Naomi) in 1935. Born of this second marriage: a son Eddie b. 1936/05/16 in Jhb and Naomi b. 1940/09/09 in Jhb.

John attended Forest High School in Forest Hill, Jhb. He left during the great Depression so, as work unobtainable, joined the SSB in Pretoria and became an Instructor in drilling and gymnastics.

WWar 2 broke out a couple of years later and John was transferred to Barberton as an Instructor. While there 50 soldiers were sent to Pietersburg to march and recruit men. He then decided to join the 2nd Botha Regt. About six months later he was sent 'up north' with the 5th Brigade who fought in Kenya, Libya and Abyssinia - shipped via Mombasa to Egypt.

SIDI REZEGH started the worst period in his life:

Rommel's Afrika Korps started destroying the South African 5th Brigade. Many South Africans will spare a thought for the 2nd Botha, 3rd Tvl Scottish and the 1st S.A. Irish, who earned immortality in the two-day Battle which ranked in intensity with Delville Wood and El Alamein... For, on November 21st, 22nd & 23rd, 1941, the Battle of Sidi Rezegh, fought on an arid sunscorched strip of Libya's Western Desert, against overwhelming odds, lost 4,000 out of 5,000 men, killed or captured. Burnt out trucks and shattered weaponry, just so much litter, a desolate sight. There was the fantastic heroism of the unarmed stretcher-bearers who crawled through artillery, mortar and machine gun fire to drag wounded back to the relative safety of advance first-aid posts. Wadi's exposed ridge claimed many lives.

Johnny was taken prisoner on the 23rd November, 1941 and after marching a great distance, travelling in open cattle trucks, wounded and hungry, they were shipped to Italy and eventually ended up in POW Camp 52.

Bitterly cold weather with little clothing and food was the order of the day until the Red Cross started sending shoebox size food parcels once a week. The men worked, first of all gathering small stones to pave the muddy lanes in the Camp. Then they built walls around the rice fields. In the autumn of the second year as POW, while building in the rice fields, John and his friend Tuinsman managed to escape. They wandered round the countryside, in bitterly cold weather, asking farmers for food and shelter in their barns for a night, until they were befriended by a very kind Italian family (whose son was a POW in S.Africa). A small tunnel in a hill close to the farmhouse was their day shelter. And at night they slept in the house upstairs. After about 3 months, when heads of families in the village were being shot for sheltering POW's, they decided to leave.

They were recaptured by the SS about 4 months later while sleeping in an abandoned House. Being escapees, they were kicked and threatened and eventually sent to Munich, Germany. Life became a nightmare as besides having to work in the snow chipping streets free of ice, Munich was being bombed - 1,000 raid bombers - by the RAF at nights and the Americans during the day. The POW's had to clear that rubble too! John's knee was by this time badly swollen and extremely painful.

A year later, in June 1945, the POW's were freed by the 7th American Army and the South Africans were shipped home via Liverpool, UK.

Johnny's homecoming turned out a disaster:....Girlfriend about to marry another guy, father had spent all his money and sold his clothes and motorbike as John was reported 'missing - presumed dead'. John recovered from a nervous breakdown and the good news was that he heard that his biological mother lived in Boksburg. He went looking for her and miraculously bumped into her in the main street near where he had parked his car. Ma invited him to leave the boarding house and live with them - he was delighted to meet up with his younger brother Bert again and came to love his stepfather who was very kind to John and gave him a job in his business, which ended a few years later when they moved to Belfast, Tvl.

Johnny met his future wife Joan at a mutual friend's house in Jhb. They got married on New Year's Day 1st January 1949.

Son Bruce was born 5th April 1955 in Jhb. Daughter Lindi was born 16th October, 1963 in Jhb. (m and div)
Granddaughters Kylie Etsebeth b. 1989.01.25 & Talia Etsebeth b. 1990.10.30.

John worked at Nampak (API) Industria, Jhb, from 1956 for 27 years, eventually becoming chief storekeeper of 20 stores and Transport Manager. He retired in 1983 at the age of 63 to enable him to spend more time playing golf at Crown Mines Golf Course.

They moved to Renaissance Retirement Village, Glenvista, Jhb in 1989 after living in Robertsham for 25 years.