

Slit Trenches

On a small farm on the outskirts of Wellington in March 1942, Anne (the mother of four) was just going about her day as she usually would. She would wake up to see the wonderful view of their dairy farm and the slit trench her eldest son Walter made outside her bedroom window. Then she'd get dressed, have breakfast (usually marmalade on toast) then do all of the housekeeping like cleaning, cooking, gardening and washing. But her most important job was taking care of her wonderful kids, Walter (21, who wasn't at war because of his weak heart), Elizabeth (12), Thomas (7) and Judy (5). Another very important member of the Johnson family was Daisy, their pet cow.

Anne was outside in their small rugged garden planting some radishes and swedes with Elizabeth, her eldest daughter, when Walter and Thomas came running round from behind the house.

"What's the matter boys? I thought you were checking the cows," Anne questioned with a very anxious look on her face.

"It's Daisy. There's something wrong with her and she won't get up!" Walter puffed as the jumbled words fell out of his mouth.

"Ok I'll come and have a look. Elizabeth can you look after Judy, she is upstairs playing with her dolls?" Anne explained to Elizabeth.

Walter escorted Anne towards the paddock at the back of the farm where Daisy was grazing. There Anne found Daisy upon her back not showing any interest in getting up.

"Oh you poor old girl, how did you manage this?" muttered Anne.

"What is wrong with her?" moaned Thomas with a very scared look on his face.

"She is cast Thomas. Which is when she lays down on a mound then topples over and can't get up." exclaimed Anne.

"Come on Thomas give me a hand, we can push her over," Walter insisted.

After getting Daisy back on her feet Anne, Walter and Thomas started to make their way back to the house when they heard a loud siren begin to sound.

"That's the air raid siren. Walter get Thomas to the slit trench and I will go inside and get Elizabeth and Judy!" screamed Anne over the obnoxious siren. When Anne reached the house she ran up the stairs into the bedroom, she then grabbed Judy in one arm and ordered Elizabeth to follow behind her. When the three of them reached the slit trench, they saw Walter crouching down over Thomas who was now looking very shocked. Walter, who was holding the families 303 Lenfield rose to his feet to help the others down into the slit trench.

Huddling together the family started to gossip about whether a plane would fly over them or not. But then they heard the exact sound that they didn't want to hear. It was the rumble of a plane's engine and it seemed to be getting closer and closer by the second. The family bunched closer together and held each other close as the reverberation of the plane got louder.

As the plane seemed to be almost right above their house, Walter promptly jumped out of the trench to see the plane about two hundred metres away. Then without hesitation he began to fire at the brown plane. It was now obvious that it

was a Japanese Recce plane because Walter could see the red circle about half a metre before the rear of the plane.

Diving back into the trench Walter realised that he had just made a horrible mistake because the plane was falling through the misty sky directly above them. Then in the blink of an eye the slit trench was in flames and the family of five was fleeing from the trench. They continued running till they reached the paddock at the far end of their dairy farm. It was only then that they realised that Anne was no longer with the four of them.

Walter started sprinting back towards the slit trench and there he could see his mum with both of her legs wedged under the hull of the plane. He then began the struggle of trying to heave Anne's legs free of the plane. Although Walter didn't like the sound of it he knew that at any moment the plane could blow up. Walter managed to drag Anne from under the plane. He then hoisted her over his shoulder and daringly began trudging back towards where the three terrified children were standing.

As Walter and Anne reached the spot where the three children were standing, they heard a clamorous explosion followed by a blood curdling scream. Wondering who the scream came from Walter quickly looked round to make sure his siblings were all ok. He then noticed that the whole time none of them had thought about the pilot of the plane. But now Walter was contemplating whether or not to go back because there was still a slight chance of the pilot being alive.

After a very long five minutes Elizabeth persuaded Walter not to go back and help the Japanese pilot as he probably would've regretted it later. Instead he took Anne to the hospital to get her legs tended to as they were now doused in blood. Unfortunately when they got to the hospital the doctors told Anne that her wounds were worse than they thought. They had to resort to Anne having both of her legs amputated at the thigh which left her in a wheelchair for the rest of her life. It wasn't all bad though because fortunately Henry (Anne's husband) returned from the war three years later. He was a massive help as Walter was old enough to run the farm by himself. This meant Henry could stay home and do all of the housekeeping Anne used to do.

By Isla Miers



Walter feeding hay to the cows.