

Private John Gowans Port, No.9 Commando 5 Troop.
Letter home about an action in February 1944



John Gowans Port, known as Jock, enlisted on the 16th November 1940. He volunteered for the Commandos and joined No.9 Commando on the 28th April 1942. Private Port, 5 Troop, was wounded 3 February 1944 during operations at Monte Ornitio, Italy.

9/4/64.

57th 9 Commando.
C.M.F.

My dear Mum + Dad,

I'm writing this because I think you'd both like to know a little of what happened that night when Len Wade got killed + I got my little present... There isn't much to give by the time I cut out military information, but anyway, here it is.

"We had been resting for three days and Eddie and I were considerably going out on the ropes for we ~~smelt~~ trouble brewing, when suddenly we got the order to pack our kit, clean our weapons and load up with ammo... All the usual "scoops" started, everyone trying to guess where we were going, but the amount of work we had to do soon killed the gossip. When we were ready, Eddie + I got together and promised each other that if one of us was killed, the survivor would:

- (1) Keep all the personal kit of the "departed"
- (2) Write to certain people + break the news
- (3) Destroy all "Love letters" (I'd already burnt mine!!).

If one of us was wounded the other would:

- (1) Write + break the news
- (2) Look after the others kit till he returned..

So you see we had a neat and well tried little system..

I sat for a while just smoking and looking at different faces and wondering what they were thinking.. It's at a time like this that one really gets to know people.. I tried to define how I felt, you can laugh if you like, but I was keen to get

started and at the same time I was wishing it was all over. I thought of you all at home, of my friends, broff, May, Mrs Bager, Mrs Harrison, Mike (my pal in India has an officer now, of his mother Mrs Birrell and wondered how you would all feel if I didn't come back. I thought "What a shame it would be if I got killed now," then I started to laugh at myself and lit a cigarette.

We got the order "get dressed" so I got my "Battle Order" on, grabbed my gun, and "fell in". It was as black as sin outside but we all scrambled into trucks and were off. At first we were all singing & smoking but one of one we dozed off. We continued like that throughout the night and the early part of the next morning. We stopped for dinner at a small camp, and then, worst of all, started marching. How far we went I don't know, just after mile hot tired and thirsty, and just when I thought we were going to stop, the column left the road and started climbing a huge hill. We climbed for about three hours, up hill down dale, and it was quite dark when we reached our destination, a little valley behind the front line. We just ate some biscuits and cheese, had a drink from our water bottles and lay down on the grass and slept. Of course, we had to take turns at sentry throughout the night, but nobody grudged that, for it doesn't pay to let a Jerry patrol catch you all.

asleep

We spent a few days there, just routine stuff, cook, eat, drink, wash, guard and an occasional sleep thrown in.

Have you ever tried sleeping with one blanket between two? It's an art!! Just keep awake until the other fellow falls asleep and then pinch the whole blanket!! When he wakes up, feeling cold and you are asleep, he pinches it off you, and so on till it's time to cook breakfast.

When it rains you just throw a gun-cape over the blanket and hid yourself that the trick of water that you feel going down your neck isn't water but just your imagination. In the end you get ~~so~~ browned off that you just say ~~and~~ and wish it was time to get up.

The only excitement in that spot was when Jerry shelled it, which he did quite often...

We got briefed and told how lucky we were to have the honour of etc. etc... and then we started off on business.

We scattered out on a hill to wait for Z.E.R. hour, we had a last drink of tea while waiting, and it was just my turn to drink when Jerry started shelling us. I gulped, some down & dived for cover like a rabbit. He got fed up pasting us, so he stopped shelling & we had a quick smoke and started off.

It was pretty dark by this time but we

have our own ways of keeping together, so we got along pretty quick. We captured a few of the enemy and sent them back under escort, we got fired at a few times and mortared quite a bit. That was when Len got killed. We were going down the side of a steep little gully (our Troop in front) when all of a sudden Whoosh! Broom!! I got blown straight through a clump of bushes, I was only bruised but I lost a little St. Christopher good luck charm which May had given me, and so I was mad!! It was too dark to find it so I went down to where the mortar bomber had landed. When I got there Len was dead but he hadn't a mark on him, it was blast that had done it. It was quick anyway, I knew he didn't suffer.

We bashed on and came upon a German platoon in a farmhouse & it was an answer to our prayers. We gave them hell!! Unfortunately their pals on the mortar caught on to what we were doing and started lobbing bombs over and that was where your son, John, caught his little packet. I felt a smack on the foot and when I pulled my leg up I discovered the instep of my boot was blown away & blood was oozing on a lovely little mess!! All to myself too!! Anyway I shouted to one of my mates "I've been hit Jimmie" Better take my Bren Gun. He took it, gave me his rifle and told me to crawl to the top of the hill where I'd

get bandaged up. ⁵ I started off and there
some more mortar bombs came over and
rifle was blown out of my hand. I don't know
where it went to. I only got a little cut on
my leg, from shrapnel so it wasn't too bad.

Our Medical Orderly caught me by the scruff
of the neck and dragged me between two
huge rocks. There was a fellow called Doc
there already, he'd got it in the legs too.
The orderly dressed both our wounds and
said to me "Don't worry your foot's still the
I won't tell you what I said."

Jerry was still fasting us so I told him
to beat it and if he got a chance to come
back when things quieted down and help
get back. I thought we were generals and
was no use him getting killed too.

Away he went and Todd & I were alone.....
We lay for quite a long time, then I heard
noise behind a rock. I thought it might
be Jerry so I grabbed my Colt automatic and
waited. I saw someone move, so I shouted
"Hände Hoche" Then a voice came "Don't sh
fuck, it's me, Scotty" — It was another of our
troop who'd been knocked out by blast.
He crawled in beside us, so we were now
three in numbers again.

We were still being mortared all this time,
as you can see we were in a mess
I got fed up waiting and decided to

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crawl down to the farmhouse for help. I took off all my equipment except what I needed for food, water & pistol ammunition and set off at one mile per week.

When I got to the house (a distance of 20 yards) it was as quiet as a grave. I shot — no answer — Then whoosh! whoosh! whoosh! Over came some more mortar bombs and was in the open. I cursed myself for leaving the shelter of our rock, finally I stopped swearing and started back as fast as I could go, for it was obvious that the place was deserted. I managed to find the other two & we huddled together for the rest of the night. Boy!! It was cold too.

Gradually it began to get light, a beautiful dawn too, but "bad medicine" for us if there were any snipers around. However we had to chance that. The mortaring stopped, they must have thought we were dead (but we weren't!!)

We knew the "boys" would be back for us but anyway we decided to make for the shelter of the house, so Scotty ran down & Todd & I started crawling. Half way down, Todd gave in so I kept on on my own with the intention of sending Scotty back to help Todd.

I just got to the house when a Jerry Corporal came round the corner. He got

shock when I stuck my pistol under his nose. Up went his hands; down went his rifle "Kamerad". He didn't want to fight so I got him to help me into the house. Then I got a shock for there were eight jerries sitting inside and Scotty was standing there (unarmed) smoking. I showed them my pistol but only answer was "Kamerad". So all was well. I sent Scotty to help Todd and these made the jerries put all their weapons in a corner where I could watch them.

Scotty came back. He couldn't find Todd. I cursed him & then hobbled outside & showed him where to go. Off he went again & I was just going inside again when I ~~noticed~~ British ~~army~~ in a hill. I shouted & they came down towards us.

Scotty came back with Todd, and one of the jerries came in carrying a fellow from 6 Troop. I noticed a First Aid Kit lying on a chair so I got the Jerry Corporal to dress all our wounds. The British Troops arrived, an officer & three men. I gave them all the particulars, got some morphia for the 6 Troop fellow & refused to hand over our prisoners. They promised to unbind N29 but made me accept responsibility for the prisoners, which I did. Away they went.

Our prisoners gave us rum, fresh water, cigarettes, blankets. In return I gave them all my food & chocolate.

I couldn't eat as ⁸ my foot was beginning to ache. I just drank + drank + smoked!

We sat talking, then put the other wounded blokes to bed & kept talking. All they wanted to know was whether they'd go to Leno or America...!!

After a few hours I heard familiar voices, - was two of our boys... They asked if we was anything. All I wanted was a shot of morphine I got my jag & the pain soon died away. I felt numb all over.

The wounded, two of our lads and one Jerry were put on stretchers, the prisoners carried them back. An Italian farmer who'd just "dropped in" offered me his mule, so I went back "in style". I rode the mule about two miles back till I came upon all "our boys" (I got a nice little cheer for my cowboy act). All my officers and all my pals came over to tell me how glad they were to see me again and I felt glad that I was in such a grand lot of lads... The Medical Officer asked me if I was fit to ride the rest of the way back. I was enjoying the ride so I said "yes" and old Hermann, the mule I started off again. (I arranged with the Adjutant to see that the prisoners got well treated for being so helpful)

I passed lots of other troops on my way back and they all gave me cigs & tea, - as you see, it was fun.

I came upon a Field Dressing Station

and I parted with my "faithful steed"
The rest was uneventful, just getting carried
over the hills on a stretcher till we came
to the road, transferred to a jeep and
so to a hospital behind the lines... where
I met my Col. (R.T.F. TODD)

The doctor who operated on me worked for
twelve years in the Bellshill Maternity (he
told me not to worry, I wouldn't have a
baby, even though he had worked there)

When I recovered consciousness I was in
a train, with my foot and leg in plaster.
Then I was bunged into an ambulance and
finally arrived here. That is the lot!

Well folks, that's my little story, I hope
you like it. At present I'm feeling O.K.
& looking forward to getting out & rejoining
the boys again.

Cheerio & All my love
Your Loving Son,
John. XXX

