Today I would like to pause and pay our respects to:

28399 Spr Gordon Leslie James Sanders.

Gordon was born in Torquay, England on the 19th Mar 1917, an only child.

When he was 5 years old, he almost drowned in a pond that was a local fishing spot in Ellacombe, Torquay, England, the town where he was born. The other boys saw him fall in and raised the alarm. A passing sailor, Stoker William Berry Bolari, who was on leave from the HMS ***Resolution,*** dived in to save him. He pulled him out of the pond and used artificial respiration to bring him back to life. These details are from a saved newspaper clipping.

He came to NZ with his parents when 8 yrs of age, along with his parents.

He achieved a Certificate of Proficiency from Pt Chevalier School dated 9 December 1930.

He enlisted in the NZ Army on the 3rd of Oct 1940 at the age of 23.

He was posted to Fiji with B Force, 20th Field Company on the 6th Jan 1941, spending around seven months in Fiji for training. This was part of the New Zealand Army’s preparations for the Pacific area. After completing his training in Fiji, he returned to New Zealand on or around 2nd Jun 1941.

On the 27th Jun 1941 he left for Egypt, where he would be stationed for further service during the war as part of the Eighth Army which was a major British and Commonwealth formation during World War II.

He was a Sapper with 19th Army Troop. The 19th Army Troops was a unit providing various support roles (such as engineers, signals, and transport) for the army’s operations.

He was stationed at 5 NZ General, a New Zealand General Hospital located in Maadi**,** a suburb of Cairo, Egypt**.** It was part of the Army’s medical services set up to treat wounded soldiers. There were several of these hospitals in different locations, all playing a key role in caring for New Zealand troops.

His skills were as a fitter-engineer, and he was responsible for keeping the hospital machinery running. I remember one story about him having to fix equipment in the operating theatre while an operation was underway. If anything broke down, he’d fix it, and if a part was needed, he’d make it himself.

Photographs taken during World War II are now held at the Queen Elizabeth II Army Memorial Museum, Waiouru. The collection, which consists of an album and 96 loose photographs, were from Gordons time in Fiji and Egypt. They may not be on display but rather form part of the museum collection and are preserved for posterity.

While in Egypt he applied to return to New Zealand to see his mother after his father passed away, but he received a handwritten letter from **Colonel Vogel**dated 22 July 1942. The Colonel wrote, ***"To lose this war means to lose everything to your mother and to millions of others especially at the moment, every man counts, and counts in earnest."***

So that was that. By the time he finally made it back to New Zealand after the war, both his parents were gone, his house was gone, and so were all their belongings. He stayed at the YMCA until he found a job and lodgings.

Among Dad’s things, I found a beer coaster that read ***Birra Cirene Bengasi***, ([N.A.A.F.I. Breweries. Part IV – Beer Et Seq](https://www.beeretseq.com/n-a-a-f-i-breweries-part-iv/)) which was almost certainly a lager brewed in Benghazi to supply the Allied forces. I recall stories about late nights out, and I can only assume Birra Cirene was a part of those stories.

One tale I remember was about wicker furniture catching fire at some pub, which led to a hasty scramble to get out of there before the MPs arrived.

In a letter to his mother dated 7 February 1941, he mentioned he was doing okay, but the flies were annoying. He wrote, *“Of course, these flies are a damned nuisance, but still, we must growl at something.”*How strange to comment about flies, which seems to be the main content of this letter… along with giving best wishes etc.

I have thought about this, and it makes me think that during the war, these soldiers must have faced challenging and uncomfortable conditions, and the mention of the flies was probably a way to express frustration with the everyday nuisances they found around them. Here in the middle of intense situations, having something relatively small to complain about, like flies, might have been a way for him to find a bit of humour or light-heartedness, even if just to cope with the hardship and loneliness. It’s also possible he was trying to reassure his mother that, while there were tough times, he was managing, using the flies as a trivial but relatable issue to focus on.

I’ve heard him mention washing his hair with kerosene because water was so scarce. We don’t really know what else he had to go through, as talks about the war and its conditions were few and far between. They just didn’t talk about it much. After the war, their focus at home was all about family and settling into home life.

He was granted leave in Auckland on 21 April 1945, pending medical checks and an x-ray etc. His Certificate of Discharge, No. 3912, was dated 31 July 1945. His total service amounted to 4 years and 302 days.

He was an only child and didn’t seem to have many relatives. He mentioned an aunty, and there were some cousins.

He married Jean Eveline Wyatt on 6 March 1946, less than a year after coming home. They honeymooned in the South Island, making the most of the free railway pass given to returning soldiers, known as the **Soldiers' Return Rail Pass**. Their first child, Lesley, was born on 22 December 1947, followed by Catherine on 30 December 1950, and Janet on 3 June 1957.

He worked as a fitter and turner all his working life, holding a few different jobs along the way. One of them was in Morningside, and mum and I would often wave to him from the train as we headed into the city to visit places like George Courts and Farmers Department Store, among others. Later, he worked for Crown Lynn, then Ceramco and Stahlton Flooring, all based in New Lynn where he lived all of his married life in the home that he built with a government assisted loan as part of the **Soldiers Settlement Scheme.**

He loved fishing, gardening, walking outdoors, and driving. Cars and machinery were his real passions, and he’d spend countless hours in his fully equipped garage which included 2 lathes, both after work at night and during his retirement. Later in life, he developed a love for travel, especially to Fiji, where he enjoyed the hot tropical climate. When both mum and dad retired, they went on a world tour. One place he was particularly keen to visit was Egypt, and I believe they both enjoyed it. For dad, it must have been a reminder of the five years he spent there.

Gordon passed away on the 14 March 1991and is interned atWaikumete Cemetery & Crematorium Glen Eden, Auckland, **Plot** Service Persons Ash Burial Area K, Row 9A, Plot 6

RIP Gordon

Thank you for your service

E kore e warewaretia

Will never forget

In posting this tribute to Gordon, I wish to acknowledge the contribution made by his daughters Lesley and Janet. It is also a pleasure to pay my respects to Gordon who is my uncle.