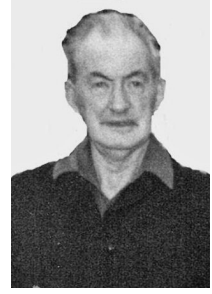


A SOLDIER'S STORY



Service No.: SX11230
Name: Nicol Alexander LAWRIE
Nickname: Nick



Medals and Decorations

1939 - 45 Star
Africa Star
Defence Medal
War Medal 1939 - 45
Australian Service Medal 1939 - 45
Tobruk Medal (Unofficial)

Rank: Private
Service: Army
Enlisted: 5 Feb 41
Discharged: 30 Jul 45

Nick was born at Darvel , Scotland , on 29 Sep 1919 to Jack Lawrie and Martha Lawrie (nee Aird). He was the eldest of 6 children , 4 boys and 2 girls . His father was a local Tumby Bay man who served in WW1 and whilst on leave in Scotland had met and married Nick 's mother . The family was not reunited until after the end of WW 1 , when Nick and his mother made the 6 week sea voyage to Australia to meet up with his dad . Nick went to school at Ungarra and later at Tumby Bay , leaving at 15 years of age . He then worked on local farms ; his first job being with Alf Prisk , where he received the princely sum of 7/6 (75 cents) a week , plus keep . He then went to work at Rudi Fuss 's farm at Cummins ; he remained there until he enlisted . He and a friend , Kelvin Carr , enlisted in the Army on 5 Feb 41 . They travelled to Adelaide together , trained together at Woodside (SA) and were both posted to 2/43rd Battalion and embarked on the "*Isle de France* " in Sydney bound for the Middle East . They both became members of the legendary "Rats of Trobruk", with Nick fighting throughout the campaign , but Kelvin was wounded and evacuated .

At El Alamein on 1 Nov 42 he was captured and taken to an Italian camp at Mursa Matruk , then transferred by truck to Tripoli , a journey of 4 days . The PoWs were then loaded onto a ship for a 3 day ocean crossing to Sicily , before being barged to Italy to then be loaded onto rail carriages and sent to Udine Prisoner of War (PoW) camp , where he spent the next 12 months . There were 1000 men at this camp on arrival , but this number increased to 5-6000 men after 12 months .

In Nov 43, Nick and 3 friends escaped from the camp and with the help of an

Italian Priest, his family and many residents of the village of Brusachetto, were able to hide from the searching forces and contact an escape guide. The group then walked over the Alps in 3 days. No mean feat for men who had been PoW and underfed for the past 12 months, who were not dressed for the cold of high altitudes and who had no experience of, or equipment for, mountain climbing.

During this crossing the group met up with 2 other escapees (South African) and the groups combined for a successful escape.

On arrival in Switzerland they were escorted down the mountains to the village of Brisoace, then taken by motor vehicle to a large town to be medically examined, bathed, had their heads shaved and deloused. Nick returned to Adelaide and took his discharge on 30 Jul 45. He took employ at Grenfell St Post Office whilst completing his repatriation medical checks. When these were complete he returned to the Tumby area to work on his uncle's farm at Ungarra and then joined the PMG line staff.

Nick had always been a keen sportsman and in 1947 he received an offer to play football for North Adelaide league side with a job supplied, but he wanted to remain among his friends at Tumby so he rejected it. That evening whilst returning from football training, Nick had a serious accident on his motorbike and was unconscious for about 3 weeks. When he regained consciousness he was paralysed and had no memory. Nick improved and after 9 months rehabilitation he began work at the Tumby Bay Post Office where he commenced the home delivery of mail. His gait was unsure and many of his disabilities were permanent in that he could not play any sport or read music, but once again this mans perseverance saw him overcome great obstacles.

It was whilst he was in Tumby hospital that he met Beatrice Pride, a nursing sister on temporary duty there. Theirs is a true love story; despite great adversity they were married on 22 Jul 48. They built their war service home in the scrub behind the hospital (now Octoman Street). They were blessed with 2 children, a girl (Kathleen) and a boy (Robert – who lives in Tumby).

Nick passed away on 1 Aug 84. He is buried in the Tumby bay cemetery.

Nick was a stalwart member of the RSL

