

TX. 12
2/32nd Bu

Gordon
Channel
1 as.
April 18

Dear Mr Marshall

Received your welcome letter dated April 13. yesterday & as it seems you have received so many different versions of John's passing, I thought I'd write straight away & give you the correct version as I had it from the others who were there on the spot, as it were, at the time.

At dawn on the 22nd July we attacked "MAKHKAD Ridge" - the carrier platoon ~~was~~ going forward with the infantry, - getting near the top of the ridge the troops were held up by particularly heavy fire from a machine gun post, - a call came for a carrier to go forward & silence it & the carrier with John as gunner, Sgt. Jeff Nichols as commander & a West Australian chap named Alan Curtis driving, dashed out to do the job. About half way to the post they ran on to a land mine which blew up & disabled the carrier (Nichols had his arm broken in 3 or 4 places & Curtis had his ear drums injured & his back or legs jarred badly) John

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jumped out to attack the post on foot & was immediately struck in the leg above the knee with an anti-tank bullet or shell.

Not much time was lost getting him to the R.A.P. & although it was a pretty nasty wound (having broken the leg of course) he didn't seem to be suffering much & we didn't consider it to be dangerous at all. — However next day while I was at the R.A.P. for a dressing I inquired from the sergeant there as to how John was progressing & when he told me that he had died that morning at the M.D.S. I knowing the nature of the wound, refused to believe it until it was confirmed by our M.O. who came on the scene a few minutes later, he said that the wound alone didn't kill him but coupled with the shock of the land mine & loss of blood, it all seemed too much for poor old John & he passed on, but, we were glad to know painlessly, as he was unconscious when he died.

I had the regrettable job of conveying the ~~rest~~ the news to the rest of the platoon, & never have I seen ~~have~~ news received with such regret by

the boys as then, — I think he was the most popular man in the platoon, & the most respected.

He & I shared the same dugout for a long time in Tobruk & were together in every action, except one, there, & as you being an old soldier yourself will understand how chaps become as close as brothers under such circumstances, & I think I knew John better than any of the other chaps..

Our carrier company commander, Capt. Jack Fahey of Hobart was also wounded in the leg near the thigh the same morning as John, by a piece of shrapnel & he also died a day or two later under anæsthetic while they were amputating the leg because of gangrene, that also was a surprise to us because his wound was nothing very serious either.

Our unofficial opinion as to why such such wounds were proving fatal was that prior to going to Alamein we were doing a 3 weeks manouevres under battle conditions in the Syrian desert which means

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~~subsist~~ subsisting on a ration of bully
beef & biscuits & a quart of chlorinated well
water a day, in heat that rose as high
as 124° in the shade & ~~when~~ even the carrier
engines would stop & refuse to function
because the petrol would ~~at~~ vaporize
in the pipes before it could reach the
carburetor. We finished that & had 2
days back in camp near Tripoli ~~then~~ we were
pushed up to Alamien where again we
were living on bully & biscuits ~~where~~ we
weren't there a week before we broke out in
sores on our hands, faces & legs, & the
least tiny scratch would fester & spread
into a big sore, & as many as 10 a day
were being sent out with yellow jaundice
& Wog fever. It is not hard to imagine how
when even ~~the~~ the smallest scratch becomes
a big running sore, what effect it would
have on a big wound, with your blood
condition so low.

As a matter of interest perhaps, after the show
on the 22nd Col. Whitehead was awarded
the D.S.O. for the battalion's work & later he was

5.
promoted to Brigadier. ~~we~~ we got another
colonel named Balke but he was badly
wounded in the head in our last stunt
in November when we captured the coast road
& railway line, & smashed the Jerry
when we beat off counter attack after counter
attack for 4 days before he finally quit &
pulled out with the 8th Army on his heels
— incidentally Kennedy whom you spoke of &
whom I know well, was wounded then & not
at the same time as John.

The 32nd had 620 casualties through
the campaign, & earned the name of the
crack battalion of the 9th Div. — of
the 600 originals who joined the battalion in
England only 53 are left.

I knew Angus McKenzie well, but have heard
nothing at all of him since ~~the~~ he transferred
to another unit. After we came out of Tobruk,
I'd like to have his address if you'd be kind
enough to send it. I might have a chance
of looking him up one of these days.
I also knew Archie Jackson who was a
great friend of John's but have not heard of

seen anything of him for about 2 years.

Well I have just counted up the pages
& found that my pen has been running
away, hope much of this has not proved
boring to you.

Thank you for your kind wishes,
My kind regard to yourself & rest of
family

Yours sincerely
Arthur W. Webster

P.S.

Thanks for snap.

Answered 23rd April