



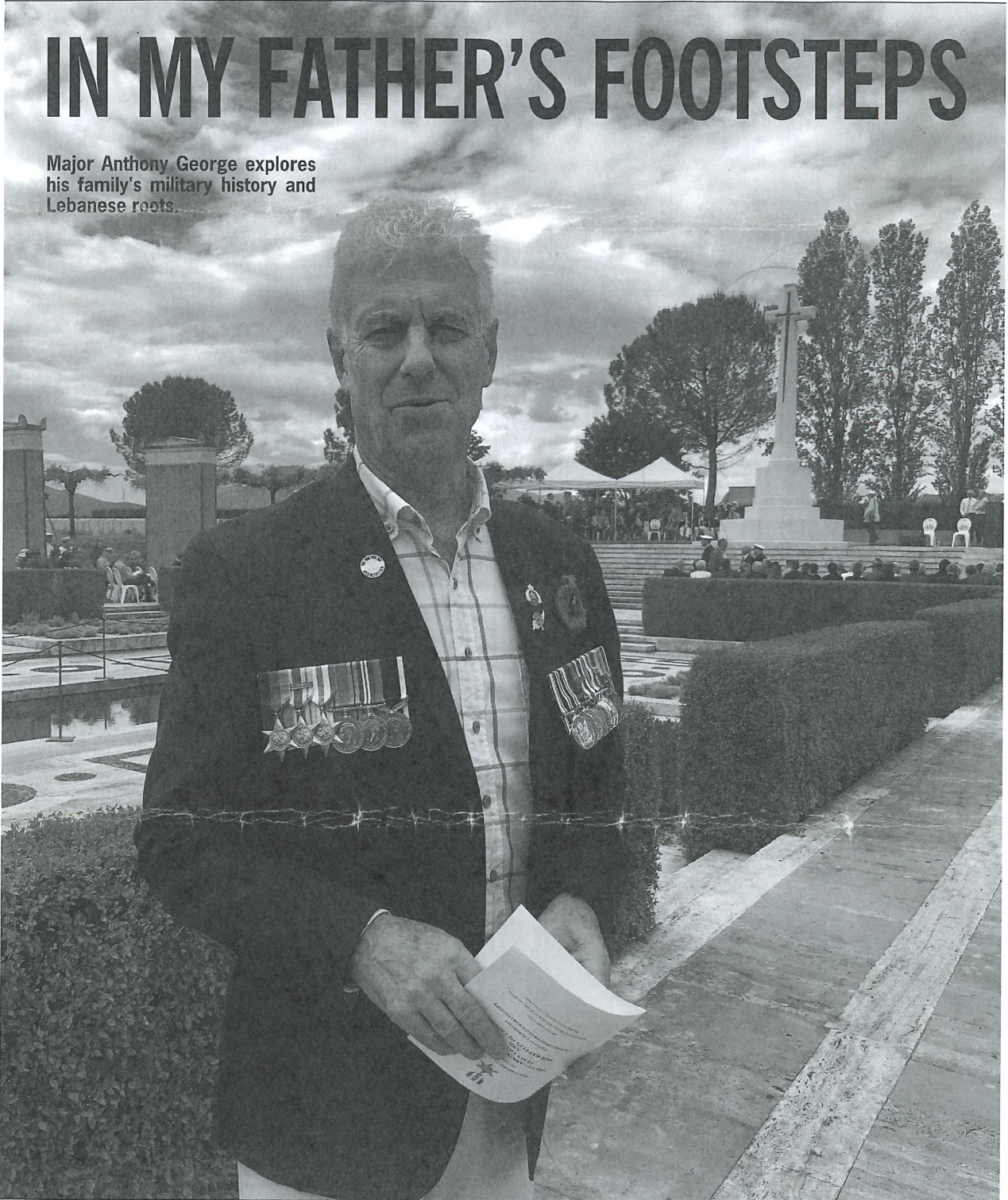
OTAGO SETTLERS NEWS

OTAGO SETTLERS ASSOCIATION *proud to be friends of* **toitū** OTAGO SETTLERS MUSEUM

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IN MY FATHER'S FOOTSTEPS

Major Anthony George explores his family's military history and Lebanese roots.



Tony George at the Cassino War Cemetery, 2019.

John Edward George — Dad to me; Johnny to his family; Jack to his Army mates; 46499 Driver JE George to the army authorities — was born in Dunedin on 23 June 1910 to Lebanese immigrant parents, Michael and Josephine George. The surname 'George' was bestowed on the family by the immigration authorities, who struggled with foreign names and spelling. My grandfather's surname was originally Zirius, and my grandmother's Luddis. As Maronite Christians, they were part of the diaspora that fled prosecution in Lebanon. Some of my grandmother's family however still farm land in Becharre, about 60km north-east of Beirut. My father came from a large family born in New Zealand: five sisters and eight brothers, five of whom served in the Second World War, a significant contribution to the war effort. The strain of having so many sons away at war at the same time — and with one of his sons, Tom, at one point posted missing in action, believed dead — contributed to the premature death of my grandfather. All the men served in the army in the Middle East, except for Eric, who served with the RNZAF in the Pacific. All the brothers survived the war and all but two lived out their lives back in Dunedin.

My father was attested at Dunedin on 21 November 1940 and discharged on 11 December 1945, an incredibly long period of service without a furlough back home. Thanks, however, to New Zealand's military supply chain, my father was able on more than one occasion to take leave, often in the company of his brother Tom and several cousins, and spend time in Becharre, his family's home village in the northern Lebanese mountains, just below the famous Cedars of Lebanon. Family ties to the 'old country' remain to this day. Except for a period during the civil war of 1975–90, members of the family have frequently visited on one form of pilgrimage or another.

Units my father served in included 2 Battalion NZ Scottish Infantry, 2 NZ Expeditionary Force, NZ Army Service Corps and 1 Supply Company. The NZ Scottish was based in Dunedin and was originally a Territorial Force Infantry Battalion — you didn't have to be a Scot to join. Driver George was awarded the following medals for his service: 1939–45 Star; Africa Star with Eighth Army Clasp; Italy Star; Defence Medal; War Medal 1939–45; NZ War Medal.



My father, his brother Tom and their cousins grew up speaking Arabic and this proved to be especially useful to commanders when training in base camps in Egypt, namely Maadi and Helwan Camps near Cairo. Local traders were often caught off-guard by this unexpected knowledge of their language and customs, the New Zealanders having established a reputation for being at times 'difficult' to manage, and initially assessed as being a soft touch when it came to commercial transactions. This situation was quickly terminated, with the locals being particularly fearful of my cousin Albert (Farr), who was a skilful negotiator when it came to bargaining for transport and supplies.

I have had the privilege of working with or reading about my father and his cousins in campaign military histories. Joseph Bacos' wartime history is recorded in Megan Hutching's *A Fair Sort of Battering: New Zealanders Remember the Italian Campaign*, published in 2004. Joe fought in Africa and Italy with Divisional Ordnance and 20 Armoured Regiment as a tank gunner. I grew up with Albert Farr in Dunedin and worked briefly with him for Arthur Barnett whilst waiting for enlistment in the late 1960s. Wilfred Mansoor lived in Auckland in his later years. He was a medic in 2 NZ Expeditionary Force. In 2012, Wilfred, then well into his late eighties, was selected to attend the seventieth anniversary of El Alamein in Egypt representing New Zealand veterans. I was still serving at the time and volunteered to accompany him, but this request was declined, an arrangement much changed in the modern era.

Two of my cousins, Albert Farr and his brother Victor, who served in the Pacific with the RNZAF, were the eldest grandsons of Michael George, exemplifying how close family ties were then, as they remain to this day. I often wondered as I walked the streets of Israel's towns and cities, and especially when in Egypt, where I visited the pyramids near Cairo and attended commemorative events at El Alamein and in Italy at Cassino, and in Lebanon when I visited Beirut and Becharre, what my father and his family got up to: where they went, what they did and who they enjoyed time with. For security reasons, during the war diaries and photographs were forbidden, though most ignored the orders. Dad however did not keep a diary and was a poor letter writer. Sadly, I will never know the detail of



Left: Josephine and Michael George.
Right: John Edward George (back row, centre) and his cousins.

where he went and what he saw, but I can honestly say that I have walked in my father's footsteps throughout both Italy and Lebanon, and elsewhere in the Middle East.

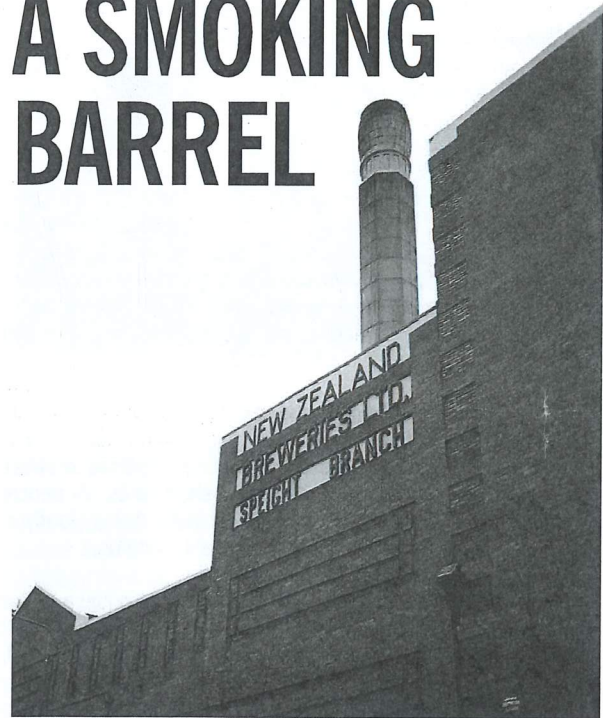
My father passed away in 1972, just on three years after I enlisted in the NZ Defence Force. I am proud of his heritage, the values practised by his large family and the Lebanese community, and remain a loyal custodian of his service medals, proudly worn every Anzac Day alongside my own.

Anthony John George



Major George is a retired professional army officer. He served in the NZ Defence Force for 33 years, living in and serving in many countries overseas. He was deployed widely in the Pacific on humanitarian tasks, and on operations three times: the Middle East (1990–91), Afghanistan (2009–10) and South Sudan (2012).

A SMOKING BARREL



In the Autumn issue our President Pete Smith's father described his part in bringing down the original Speights Brewery chimney — here he describes how its concrete replacement was constructed in 1937–38 (with the occasional builder's Anglo-Saxon expletive): The site of the new concrete chimney first had to be excavated, and this was deep, in the deepest corner of the whole job. We finally dug our way across the section until we came to the position where the present chimney now stands. In among the pile of plans I had to work to, there was a set of separate details for this, and I could see at a glance the principle of the design. Although the plan showed a tremendous mass of concrete, riddled with steel, it also showed this: the whole design seemed to be based on the principle of the pencil with the weighted bottom that you can't knock over. There was a big, deep reinforced concrete base pad, and on top of this, to boiler house floor level — I forget now exactly — but about 35 feet high, about 12 feet square, walls 12 inches thick, a hollow square filled with beach sand that had to be compacted with water until it settled, and settled until it would take no more.

Building the fire box and the structure to the roof line was easy, but above this, the eight-sided stack was not easy to handle until I learnt how to control the shuttering, preventing it from pushing out of shape as we poured in the concrete. The shutters were lined with galvanised iron to give a smooth finish, but the joints would bust on me even though bolted on — the damn thing would screw out of true shape. I found a cure for this by having steel bands made to go around the shutters, with a section where they joined that could be screwed up or loosened, as necessary. After this, the stack was built at the rate of four feet a day, the steel gang up the scaffold ahead of us, and the scaffolding going up ahead of all.

Right: Speights Brewery's distinctive barrel-topped chimney.