Today I would like to celebrate the life of and pay our respects 27788 L/Sgt Trevor Vivian **Carpenter BEM.**

He was born around 1917, and was residing at 10 Percival St, Wellington. Trevor was engaged as a railway porter prior to his enlistment into the 17th (NZ) Railway Operating Group.

The specialist Railway Group was formed at the behest of the British Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, Anthony Eden, on 19 November 1939 following New Zealand's offer of assistance to Britain after the declaration of war against Nazi Germany on 3 September 1939.

The New Zealand Government responded positively, but only promised one railway construction com pany, and not four, as asked. Eventually, however, New Zealand provided seven railway companies for military service. The first three were the 9th Railway Survey Company, the 10th Railway Construction and Maintenance Company and the Headquarters, Railway Construction and Maintenance Group.

Upon the arrival of the first group of railway men, again the British Government requested that New Zealand form two Railway Operating Companies and a Headquarters Railway Operating Group along with another Construction and Maintenance Company. On 14 June 1940, the Minister of Railways, Daniel Sullivan, issued a nationwide appeal to railway depots calling for further volunteers to join their colleagues in the companies formed a few months previously. The request was for railwaymen who were actually involved in train operations: locomotive crews, guards, signalmen and so on.

As a consequence of this appeal, two operating companies were formed: generally, men from the South Island formed the 17th Railway Operating Company and trained at Burnham whilst men from the North Island formed the 16th Railway Operating Company and trained at Hopu Hopu.

Prior to Trevor’s departure for the war, he announced his engaged to Joyce Mary, eldest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. F. C. Tustin, Karori. Their notice of engagement was published in the Evening Post dated 28th Jun 1940, page 11.

Finally on 26 August 1940, after two months of preparation, the Railway Group bade farewell and sincerely thanked the respective Camp Commandants and their staff for their efforts in turning the railway volunteers into an efficient military unit. The departure from camp was supposedly 'hush-hush' but the attendance of huge crowds at every station en-route to Wellington throughout the night, and in Wellington itself the following morning, might be attributed to telegraphic transmission; more likely it was a result of the notorious 'bush telegraph'.

During that same morning several trainloads of troops from Papakura, Hopu Hopu, and Trentham arrived at the Wellington wharf. By noon the whole North Island contribution to the Third Echelon was aboard the two conscripted troopships -the Empress of Japan and the Mauritania. Immediately after embarkation, the ships pulled out into the stream and lay at anchor until the following morning.

The troopships carrying the North Island railwaymen moved quietly out of Wellington Harbour before breakfast on 28 August 1940. Somewhere beyond the Wellington Heads the Mauritania and Empress of Japan (later changed to the Empress of Scotland) were joined by the Orcades carrying troops from camps in the South Island.

Despite the potential hazards of sailing through Fremantle and Bombay the convoy reached Tewfik, a port on the Suez Canal, on 29 September with the troops disembarking the following day and quickly herded onto waiting trains to be transported to the main New Zealand camp at Maadi.

Troops including Spr Carpenter, of the 17th ROC, began rail operations at Burg el Arab, a Bedouin village about 40 miles west of Alexandria. This involved ensuring trains ran as smooth as possible, often in very trying conditions, ferrying supplies and men forward and sometimes returning wounded back to a safe echelon at the rear.

It was not only the possibility of being killed by shrapnel or bullets that was a concern, but railway yards were often filled to capacity with wagon loads of ammunition, petrol and aviation fuels.

Being caught among such volatile substances was a horrifying prospect. This did not deter Lance Sergeant Carpenter from risking serious injury when he detached and removed a burning petrol wagon from a train during an air raid at Gerawala on the night of25 November 1941. The station had come under attack resulting in the wagons catching fire. Having moved the wagon a safe distance from the remainder of the train, he then proceeded to unload the tins of petrol that had not caught fire, and then extinguished the fire. His actions prevented a major conflagration that could have consumed the train and its valuable supplies. For his courage and devotion to duty, Lance Sergeant Carpenter was awarded the British Empire Medal.

The official citation for Trevor Vivian Carpenter BEM reads:

*“For devotion to duty over a period of six weeks during which he set an example to his comrades worthy of emulation. One of these instances was a follows: - This NCO was in charge of the 17th Railway Operating Coy Detachment at GERAWALA station on the 25/11/41 when the station was subjected to machine gunning from the air resulting in a wagon on a petrol train in the yard catching fire. With assistance of the other two members of the detachment L/Sgt (then Cpl), at considerable personal risk, removed the burning wagon clear of the train, unloaded the petrol, and extinguished the fire. By his prompt and resourceful action, a valuable train load of petrol and supplies was saved and possible damage to the railway services averted”.*

The pressure finally came off the desert railway with the occupation of the port of Tripoli in Libya on 23 January 1943. Men from 17th ROC and Headquarters, Railway Operating Group, remained for the duration of the desert winter, finally relinquishing their train-running duties to 193rd ROC, Royal Engineers, on 14 March 1943.

On 15 June 1943 Trevor Carpenter along with men from the illustrious New Zealand Railway Group and 5500 other New Zealand soldiers boarded the *Niew Amsterdam*, under cover of darkness, at Port Tewfik, where they had originally disembarked in 1940 and set sail for home.

The *Niew Amsterdam* sailed down the Red Sea and, three days after leaving Port Tewfik, briefly docked at Aden. The men were not permitted to go ashore and suffered the intense heat as best they could. The ship also called at Fremantle where the troops were allowed to disembark. Once again the New Zealanders headed for Perth, where their Australian hosts welcomed them as tl1ey had three years previously.

The whole voyage home was uneventful until the ship arrived off the Tasmanian port of Hobart on 8 July. One railwayman, Ernie George, was standing at the ship's rail watching the land come in to view when he saw a torpedo, fired from a Japanese submarine, miss the bow by approximately 20 feet. The escorting corvette, committed to protecting the troopships, quickly moved in and circled the convoy like a speedboat, all the while dropping depth charges.

On 11 July, the convoy sailed up the east coast of New Zealand to berth at Wellington on the 12th at 9 am. After an absence of over three years emotions would have been twofold: happy to be home, mixed with the realisation that some of their mates and comrades would never be returning.

Trevor returned to civilian life after serving his country with honour during the war.

His journey came to an end on December 13, 1982, at the age of 65.

He has been laid to rest at Makara Cemetery in Wellington, where his memory is preserved in Soldiers Plaques 81A.

RIP Trevor

Thank for your service

E kore e warewaretia

Will never forget

In compiling this biography, I would to thank Brendon Judd for his contribution and acknowledge his publication Desert Railway - The New Zealand Railway Group in North Africa and the Middle East during the Second World War.