

Sergeant Frank William McCabe

*Edited Version of an Eulogy by Peter Cindall
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Frank William McCabe was born in Bootle, Liverpool on the 24th September 1920. He left school at 14 and went to work as a Telegraph Boy after passing an entry exam. At 15 he went dancing at local halls to learn basic dance steps before he could afford to take lessons. He also learned to sneak a pint of beer, smoke and chat up girls. As a Telegraph Boy he went to night school two nights a week for four years training to be a Telegraphist. However when he finally qualified there were no Telegraphist jobs available so he became a Postman.

In 1938 he joined the Territorial Army. His mother was horrified because war was in sight. In 1939 his Regiment was called up. He always remembered how his mother begged him not to go but he was too excited and couldn't wait. He thought the war would only last a few weeks. By the time he was posted overseas in 1942 he had been made a troop sergeant with three tanks, eight men and one officer to look after. He served in the 40th Royal Tank Regiment as part of the 23rd Armoured Brigade in the 8th Armoured Division.

His first action was in the Western Desert where 42 out of 50 tanks were lost. His officer was killed and Frank was made an acting troop officer until another could be found. In this role he had to attend officer briefings and met General Montgomery. He remembered that Monty had 'a funny little squeaky voice' and that he vowed to sacrifice all his tanks if necessary to get the infantry through.

Frank McCabe was wounded at El Alamein when his tank was destroyed when it struck a land mine. While recovering in hospital he learned that he was likely to be posted to another unit on his recovery. So he quietly walked out of the hospital and made his way to the depot where new trucks were being delivered to the front line. He simply joined a queue of potential drivers. No questions were asked and he was given a truck to deliver. Instead he drove it straight to his old unit in the line and was back with his mates again. Then he was given a new tank and went through the rest of bitter fighting of North African campaign against General Rommels' Afrika Corps. That lasted until the Germans surrendered in Africa in May 1943.

After training and re-equipping he took a leading part of the assault on the Italian mainland and was involved in the massive, bloody battle at Salerno beachhead. After four days Frank was once again wounded and evacuated to a hospital ship and later to a convalescent camp. Eventually he was sent to Algeria as a training instructor before returning to Italy to set up training schools at Bovina. It was there that he met the love of his life a girl from Barnsley – Sylvia Bullock.

They were engaged in December 1944 and married at Perugia in Italy in March 1945. During that period Frank was gaoled for returning late from a weekend leave to visit Sylvia who was posted about 400 miles away. Sylvia sent him a fruit cake with a nail

file inside but fortunately he was released within a few days and didn't have to resort to it. Their honeymoon was spent in Rome where they stayed at the YWCA.

The war brought about three things that influenced the rest of Frank's life:

- He met and married the love of his life.
- He formed an affection for Australians because he had served with them.
- He developed a hatred of war but strangely - a love of the army.

After the war Frank and Sylvia returned to Liverpool. Frank recommenced work for the post office and rejoined the Territorial Army. Carol was born in December 1946 followed by 5 boys in regular succession. At that time Frank realised that employment opportunities in Liverpool were limited so decided to emigrate to Australia in the hope of a better future for his family.

He arrived here in November 1959 with Sylvia about to give birth; six other children and three pounds in his pocket. He soon got a job as a driver and quickly found other work as a radio and appliance repairman using skills acquired in the army. After the birth of his son, more children followed, finally there were 12 of them - six Poms and six Aussies.

Frank took as much overtime as he could get to enable him to support his family. He started doing 'backyard' appliance repairs for extra money and still found time to join the army reserve. In fact the army had very great difficulty in getting rid of him and long after he reached the compulsory retirement age he and his great mate John Gunn decided to stay on 'just to help out'. They regularly attended camp until 1997 when Frank was 'forced to go off parade because of a spinal injury' at the age of 77.

Although Frank McCabe passed away on 22nd April 2004 he has left behind his philosophy of total honesty, courage, perseverance, an incredible loyalty; a love of people and a deep understanding of the power of a united loving family and true friendship. Frank McCabe was a working class lad born in Bootle who became a prince among men.