

ELIJAH [ELLIE] HOTZ (1921 – 2014)
A BIOGRAPHIC NOTE RECORDING HIS MILITARY SERVICE
1939 – 1945
Ivan Kapelus



INTRODUCTION

A new museum has been established in Israel, the Chaim Herzog Museum of the Jewish Soldier in World War II. Herzog was the President of Israel from 1983 - 1993 and served in the British Army as an officer and combat intelligence officer. A talking time elevator in this Latrun museum plays a film that states "From the start of the war till its end, the Germans and their allies made a methodical effort to eliminate Jews from the face of the earth. But the Jewish people did not surrender – they fought back against those who persecuted them (and) joined the armed forces en masse."

The museum is devoted to honouring the heroism, volunteering, and contribution of about one and a half million Jews from around the world who participated in the fight against the Nazis, a quarter of a million of whom paid with their lives, including 357 South African Jews with 327 wounded.

This article is about two South African Jews who were among the Jewish soldiers who enlisted to fight Hitler, Ellie and Cecil Hotz. The writer met Ellie in 1964. He was the youngest child of the four children of David and Leah Hotz (nee Abramson), both immigrants from Lithuania, who were married in the Paarl synagogue in 1910.



David and Leah Hotz

Their daughter, Jessie was the eldest, born on 27 July 1911, followed very soon by Abraham (Abe) on 21 August 1912. The two toddlers were soon joined by their brother Cecil on 31 July 1914. After a gap of three years, on 14 November 1917, Isidore (Issy) made it four, to be joined by number five, Ellijah (Ellie) on 19 February 1921.

All five children were born in Paarl and in 1922 the family moved to Villiersdorp, a picturesque village in the heart of the Drakenstein Mountains, where David and Leah opened a general dealers store. There was no Jewish community, so the Hotz family became members of the Somerset West Hebrew Congregation, which had been established in 1903. Abe and Cecil had their bar mitzvahs in 1925 and 1927 respectively in the Somerset West synagogue, which had been built in 1923.



From left to right: Issy, Cecil, Jessie, Abe and Ellie.

In 1928, the Hotz family moved to Cape Town and settled in the midst of the Jewish community in Constitution Street, and in the mid-1930s moved to the Tamboerskloof area, where David was the co-owner and manager of a dairy. They were members of the Tikvath Israel congregation and attended the Gardens Synagogue where Issy (1930) and Ellie (1934), who sang in the shul choir, celebrated their Bar Mitzvahs. All the boys attended and matriculated from the Cape Town High School, with Ellie matriculating in 1938, just as the clouds of war were gathering.

Whether South Africa would remain neutral (as Hertzog and the Afrikaner politicians fought for) or whether South Africa would declare war on Germany as an ally of the United Kingdom and the Allies (as Jan Smuts and the United Party proposed), was a highly emotional and divisive issue.

This all came to head in a debate in the recalled parliament where Herzog's motion for South Africa to remain neutral was debated, with Smuts proposing an amendment to Hertzog's Bill, that South Africa declare war on Germany and join the Allies in the war. Hertzog's Bill was defeated, and Smut's amendment was passed by a majority of THIRTEEN votes.

Tension was running high! Herzog resigned as Prime Minister and called on the Governor General, Sir Patrick Duncan, to call a general election.

As Richard Steyn sets out in his book "SEVEN VOTES":

"Unbeknown to anyone, the prime minister had already been privately informed in writing by the Governor General that permission would not be granted for the dissolution of Parliament and the calling of an election. Duncan's reasoning for denying Hertzog's request was primarily that an election would lead to great bitterness and quite possibly violence, but also that neutrality had been an issue in the election of 1938, only 16 months earlier, when the prime minister had repeatedly declared that Parliament should make the final decision. The House had now delivered its judgement and come down in favour of Smuts's pro-war motion, and if the Deputy Prime Minister was able to form a government, he (Duncan) would not feel justified in dissolving Parliament".

As a result of the bitter divide between those who opposed entering the war and those who supported Smuts's decision, the government could not enforce conscription into the armed forces, so the Union Defence Force became a volunteer force.

Notwithstanding the, at times, violent objections of the anti-war Afrikaner Nationalists, 137,000 whites volunteered for the Army in a short time.

The Jewish community seems to have followed a special approach to volunteering for the armed forces. If there were only two sons, one would volunteer and the other would remain in South Africa to look after the parents.

If, as the case was in the Hotz family, that there were four sons, two would volunteer and two would remain in South Africa.

Ellie and his brother Cecil were among these volunteers!

Cecil was 25 years old and Ellie only 18 when they volunteered and commenced their training, Ellie in the Royal Natal Carbineers, which had been formed in January 1855 .



Ellie Hotz in training

At that time Libya was an Italian colony while Britain maintained troops in Egypt to defend the Suez Canal. When Italy declared war in June 1940 and attacked the British forces in Egypt, the British crossed into Libya from Egypt, destroying the Italian army. As the control of the Suez Canal and the access to middle east oil and raw materials from Asia, was of vital importance to both Germany and the Allies, Germany then invaded North Africa in February 1941 to reinforce the Italians and prevent an Axis defeat. It made sense to send the South African forces up to North Africa to join the Allied armies fighting Germany there and her forces played a significant role in halting the Axis advance including the Battle of El Alamein.

The North African Campaign took place from June 10, 1940, to May 13, 1943. Ellie served there from 1941 to 1943.

Below are photographs of Ellie in North Africa.



Ellie on the right with two colleagues taken in July 1942. From the painted backdrop, they must have gone to a professional photographer to take this photos to send to their folks back home.

The Carbineers played a small but eventful part in the huge and decisive Second Battle of El Alamein in October–November 1942 and Ellie was promoted to be a corporal in the Royal Natal Carbineers. It was a difficult campaign with the thirsty men often fighting in the desert heat among minefields and blinding sandstorms. On 21 June 1942 10,722 South African soldiers who were part of the 2nd South African Infantry Division were captured in Tobruk. Fortunately Ellie was not fighting in that division.



Alexandria, Egypt, May 1944, Ellie, standing in the middle.

The 1st Infantry Division was then re-organized, to form the 6th South African Armoured Division, a strongly reinforced division, with the 1st Royal Natal Carabineers incorporated in it and it was then sent to Italy to participate in the Italian campaign from 1944 to 1945.

Some photographs of Cecil in North Africa!



The Italian Campaign from July 1943 to May 1945, was a major Allied military effort to liberate Italy from Axis control with the active participation of the South African Army. The 6th South African Division, which included Ellie, fought in Italy from 1944 to 1945. The 1st Royal Natal Carbineers landed at Taranto, Italy, and took part in the battle of Cassino (acknowledged as the bloodiest battle in the war). From there they fought their way up the Italian boot through Rome.



Ellie walking in Rome with a fellow soldier.

After the fall of Rome on 5 June 1944, German resistance stiffened and the 6th South African Division was a major fighting force, as the Allied armies moved northwards in mid to late 1944 to push the German army out of Italy. The Royal Natal Carbineers took part in several engagements, including the attempt to break Germany's defensive Gothic Line in 1944. They fought at the Greve river north of Rome, at Monte Vigese, Monte Stanco and Monte Pessa until the final victory in May 1945.



C.C.P/RAP Attached Royal Natal Carbineers, 6TH SA Division
ITALIAN Campaign 1944 - 45

Corp. Elly Hotz, Pvt. Willie Summers, Corp. Bill Solzwiedel,
 Pvt. Jack Arnoot, Pvt. Louis Robert.

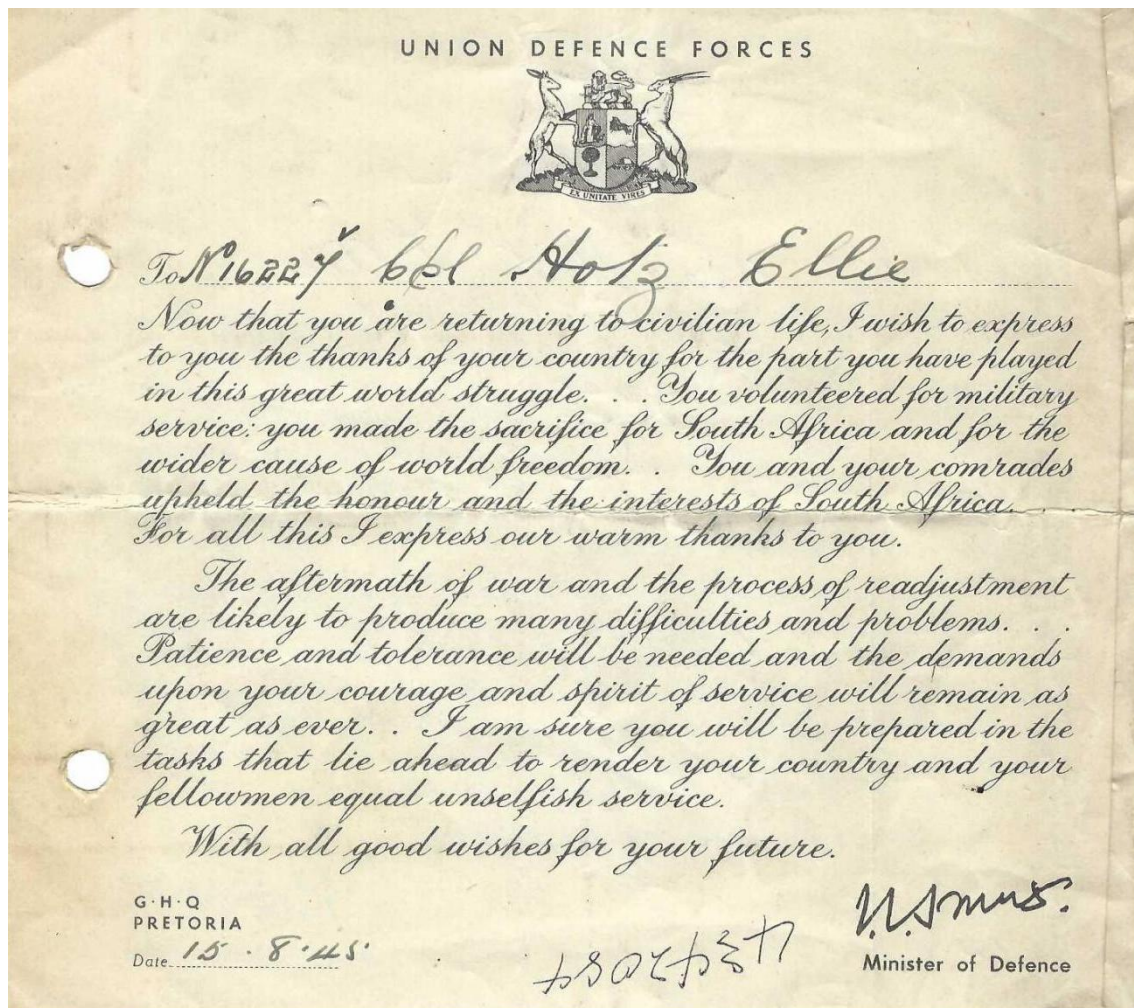
L/cpl. E. Stewart, Sgt. R. Townley Johnson, Capt. Sammy Sacks.

Corp. Charles Greig, Corp. Les Oates, Pvt. P. Julies - Batman -.

Absent. L/cpl. Phil Greeff

Ellie's behaviour during the Italian campaign resulted in him being mentioned in despatches for his bravery. As a result, his defence medal was awarded with silver leaves, signifying "Mention in Despatches," which marks a formal recognition of bravery with the King's commendation.

Luckily both Cecil and Ellie returned home unscathed and were discharged from the Army in August 1945. Ellie received his formal discharge certificate from the South African Minister of Defence on 15 August 1945.



And so home, to South Africa and civilian life. In the photograph below Ellie can be seen fourth from the front, seemingly dancing his way past the City Hall, Cape Town!



For his service, bravery and loyalty, Ellie received the medals indicated on the awards document seen below!



UNION DEFENCE FORCES.

The Chief of the General Staff has the honour to transmit, with his compliments, the enclosed award(s) for service during the war of 1939-1945.

Order in which the Awards should be set up, e.g., for framing.	Description of Ribbon.	Clasp or Emblem (if awarded)
1 1939-45 Star X	Dark blue, red and light blue in three equal vertical stripes. This ribbon is worn with the dark blue stripe furthest from the left shoulder.	Battle of Britain
2 Atlantic Star	Blue, white and sea green shaded and watered. This ribbon is worn with the blue edge furthest from the left shoulder..	Air Crew Europe or France and Germany
3 Air Crew Europe Star	Light blue with black edges and in addition a narrow yellow stripe on either side.	Atlantic or France and Germany
4 Africa Star X	Pale buff, with a central vertical red stripe and two narrower stripes, one dark blue, and the other light blue. This ribbon is worn with the dark blue stripe furthest from the left shoulder.	8th Army or 1st Army or North Africa 1942-43
5 Pacific Star	Dark green with red edges, a central yellow stripe, and two narrow stripes, one dark blue and the other light blue. This ribbon is worn with the dark blue stripe furthest from the left shoulder.	Burma
6 Burma Star	Dark blue with a central red stripe and in addition two orange stripes.	Pacific
7 Italy Star X	Five vertical stripes of equal width, one in red at either edge and one in green at the centre, the two intervening stripes being in white.	
8 France and Germany Star	Five vertical stripes of equal width, one in blue at either edge and one in red at the centre, the two intervening stripes being in white.	Atlantic
9 Defence Medal X	Flame coloured with green edges, upon each of which is narrow black stripe.	Silver laurel leaves (King's Commenda- tion for brave conduct. Civil)
10 War Medal, 1939-45 X	A narrow central red stripe with a narrow white stripe on either side. A broad red stripe at either edge, and two intervening stripes in blue.	Oak leaf
11 Africa Service Medal X	Orange in colour with green and gold of the Springbok Colours in vertical stripes on either side. The green stripes being on the outside.	Protea

NUMBER OF STARS, MEDALS,
CLASPS or EMBLEMS ENCLOSED. 6

After he was discharged, he and a fellow serviceman worked together as commercial travelers for specific wholesalers. Happiness was soon followed as Ellie met the love of his life Bella Muller, and they married in the Gardens Shul in 1949. Sadly, they had no children.



He later worked as a junior partner in a business selling crockery imported from Japan. In 1967, Ellie joined his brothers Cecil and Issy in a clothing store in Wynberg, M Siegel and Co, which specialised in school uniforms. They sold the business as they reached retirement age. Ellie passed away on 16 November 2014, Bella died the following year on 26 July.