

John M Fergusson World War II

John Malcolm Fergusson was born in Gatehouse in 1916, the son of George Fergusson, builder and his wife Margaret Papple.

In 1949 John married Margaret McConnell in Kirkcudbright. The couple lived at Glenavon, Digby Street, Gatehouse of Fleet and had 4 children. John was a civil servant.

John's war time experience in his own words:

"I served in the Royal Engineers from September 1939 until 1945. I served from September 1939 until 1945, joining them at Portsmouth and doing my initial training at Colchester and Chatham. From there I was posted to Aldershot. We were then sent on an abortive campaign to Norway and returned to Britain. In May 1940 we were sent to France and eventually found ourselves retreating to Dunkirk where we were fortunate enough to get aboard a coal boat which took us safely back to Britain. A short time after arriving home, I was wounded in an air raid but when recovered I returned to Chatham where I worked on the defences of the south coast during the Battle of Britain. At the end of 1940 I was sent on a draft to the Middle East from Glasgow by convoy, round the Cape of Good Hope to Egypt.

Within a few weeks my comrades and I found ourselves in the desert, fighting our way up to Tripoli, from there onto the Sudan, making camps and airfields. We were in Eritrea for the start of that campaign and after hard fighting through the mountains captured that country (and) also Abyssinia. Afterwards we returned to the Western Desert joining the 10th then the 7th Armoured Division retreating to El Alemain. There the 8th Army reformed under General Montgomery and there were many months of fighting the Germans and the Italians. During this time I served with the Long Range Desert Group and later fought through Tripoli and Tunis to the end of the war in Africa.

We were then re-equipped and got ready for the campaign in Europe. where we landed with the Americans at Salerno, Italy. Before long we had taken Naples and beyond. This was the end of our campaign in Italy. We returned to Britain in time for Christmas 1943.

Our next phase was preparing for the invasion of France on D-Day when we landed with the allies in Normandy. Having been wounded on the 2nd day after landing, I was repatriated to Britain and hospitalised at St Bartholemew's in St Albans for the next 5 months with a leg injury. I rejoined my unit in Belgium and returned to Britain in 1945.

Although he does not say so in the above report, John's leg was saved by a fellow Gatehouse lad Dr. James Learmonth. The following story is told by John's son Richard Fergusson.



John Fergusson was born in Gatehouse in 1916. When World War 2 broke out, he joined the Royal Engineers and served in Europe and North Africa. On the second day of the D-day landings in June 1944, John was badly wounded in the leg and sent back to Britain where he was hospitalized for 5 months. There were fears that he might need a leg amputation, but one day Dr. James Learmonth visited him in hospital. Learmonth recognised John as a fellow Gatehouse lad. He suggested that he operated on John in an attempt to save his leg. The operation was a success and John was able to return to the army. Later John learned that it was only the second time that Learmonth had performed the operation and that the first attempt had been unsuccessful.

On 12th March 1949 Learmonth was called to Buckingham Palace to carry out an operation on King George VI. The King had impaired circulation in his right leg. This was the same operation that he had performed on John Fergusson. The operation was also a success and the King rewarded Learmonth by awarding him a K.C.V.O. (Knight Commander of the Royal Victorian Order). The award ceremony took place in the King's bedroom.”